

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: River Oaks Corporation House
OWNERS: Anne and Joseph Romano
APPLICANTS: Courtney Tardy – GHPA
LOCATION: 2164 Troon Road – River Oaks

AGENDA ITEM: II.C
HPO FILE NO: 11L240
DATE ACCEPTED: Feb-18-2011
HAHC HEARING: Jun-16-2011

SITE INFORMATION

Lot 16, Block 53, River Oaks Section 3, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is a two-story wood frame with brick veneer residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The River Oaks Corporation House at 2164 Troon Road is situated on a block of Troon Road that remains one of the most architecturally intact areas in River Oaks; three houses on the block are City of Houston Landmarks. The River Oaks Corporation House was designed by Charles Oliver in the Colonial Revival style and built in 1929-30 for the River Oaks Corporation as a speculative house. Oliver worked for the Russell Brown Company and later as the in-house architect for the River Oaks Corporation. Charles Oliver designed over 75 houses in River Oaks in a variety of architectural styles. Previous owners of the house include E. A. Showers, President of Showers and Moncrief, and Paul Benedum, manager of Benedum Trees Oil Company.

The River Oaks Corporation House meets Criteria 1, 4, and 6 for Landmark designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

At the time of the house's construction in 1929, Troon Road was occupied by only three homeowners: the Hanszens (2191), the Burkharts (2203) and J. R. Neal (2217) were the only residents on the block. The City Directory indicates that 2169 and 2247 Troon were either under construction or newly completed. The house at 2164 Troon Road appears in a March 30, 1930 advertisement placed by River Oaks Corporation. The advertisement listed houses in three price ranges, attempting to appeal to buyers of varying incomes. The house appears in the \$25,000 to \$60,000 range; the highest of the three ranges presented. The houses at 2132, 2175, and 2184 Troon are designated city landmarks today.

Around October 1930, the house was featured in the third issue of "Homes for All Times" with a photograph.

"The attractiveness of the smaller colonial home is nowhere better exemplified than in some of the residences that have been constructed in River Oaks in recent months. The photograph at right shows the home at 2164 Troon Road designed by Charles W. Oliver and constructed by River Oaks Building Department."

The 1930-31 City Directory shows that the house was vacant. However, the 1932-33 City Directory shows the house had been purchased by E. A. Showers, President of Showers and Moncrief. The firm listed itself as "oil producers and drilling contractors" with offices in the Second National Bank

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Building. By 1936, the house had been sold to Paul Benedum, manager of Benedum Trees Oil Company, also in the Second National Bank Building. The house then went through a series of owners including: Noah Dietrich, President HTC Co. (1940); Robert H. Ray, “geophysical exploration, contracting, consulting” (1948); J. Nye and Sunshine Ryman (1952); and William F. Burge and his son William F. Burge, III (1976 through 1997). The Romanos purchased the house in 1997 from the Burge family. They were attracted by the house’s timeless curbside appeal and its traditional floor plan.

Charles Oliver

Charles Wesley Oliver was born in 1893 in Arkansas. By the age of three, his family moved to Dallas where he attended school. He graduated c 1916 with an architectural degree from the University of Texas where he also played on the varsity baseball team that won the Southwest championship. During WW I he was a captain in the 58th field artillery regular army and served at Ft. Stanley in San Antonio and later Camp Jackson. At Camp Jackson he met Louise Hampton and they married. The couple had three children, Charles W. Oliver, Jr., Wade Hampton Oliver and Eloise Oliver.

In 1916 Oliver joined the Russell Brown Company, a home building and contracting enterprise, and worked there for seven years before moving to Houston to manage the office here. After three years in Houston, he changed jobs and on May 1, 1926, Oliver became the chief architect and head of the department of architecture and building for County Club Estates, the first subdivision in the newly created River Oaks neighborhood. His consulting services were free of charge for any River Oaks property owner. Prior to Oliver, this complimentary consulting service was limited to gardening. Once a property owner was ready to move forward with architectural plans and construction supervision, a fee was charged.

Oliver designed over 75 River Oaks houses and was a master at early twentieth-century eclectic styles including Louisiana plantation, French, Tudor Revival and English Manorial and Spanish Colonial. He was widely published in architectural magazines including *The Architect*, *Western Architect*, and the *Houston Gargoyle*.

The following are Oliver houses:

- 2203 Brentwood, 1925
- 1059 Kirby Drive, 1928, City of Houston Landmark
- 1903 Bellmeade, 1926
- 2508 Pelham Drive, 1927 (Charles Oliver’s family home)
- 1528 Kirby Drive, 1927-28
- 1827 Kirby Drive, 1927-28
- 3394 Chevy Chase, c. 1928
- 1925 Bellmeade, 1928, City of Houston Landmark
- 2007 River Oaks Boulevard, 1929 (home of Mike Hogg, developer of River Oaks)
- 3015 Del Monte, c. 1929
- 2504 Pelham Drive, c. 1929
- 2141 Pine Valley, c. 1930
- 3358 Inwood Drive, 1930

- 1407 Kirby Drive, 1930
- 2970 Lazy Lane, 1934 (as consulting architect to James C. Mackenzie with Birdsall Briscoe)

River Oaks

When Will C. Hogg, Mike Hogg, and Hugh Potter began the development of River Oaks in 1923, they intended to create a community demonstrating the highest standards of modern community planning, a role model for the rest of Houston to follow. Will Hogg's ambition and Hugh Potter's skillful management of River Oaks during its first thirty years made the community known nation-wide as a symbol of Houston. Since its creation, River Oaks has been published in national news, real estate, and design media, and has been the focus of scholarly analysis, in recognition of its significant contributions to the history of Houston and twentieth-century American elite suburban community development.

The creation of this type of subdivision was unique for Houston in many respects. The subdivision was laid out at what was then the far western edge of Houston. Prior to 1923, the majority of Houston's residential developments had occurred in a tight girdle around the downtown business district, such as Westmoreland (1902), Avondale (1907), Montrose (1911), Audubon Place (1906), Cherryhurst (1908), Binz, Southmore (1914), and Courtland Place (1906). River Oaks, however, was situated at the western city limits far away from other developments.

In addition, the developers broke with convention by laying out an organic pattern of roadways which lent a sense of spaciousness to the neighborhood, which was very different from the traditional Houston neighborhoods that followed a more rigid approach to development. These traditional neighborhoods used street grids which carved the land up into predictable square or rectangular blocks.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The house 2164 Troon Road is a two-story Colonial Revival house, a style popular in the United States between 1890 and 1935. The Colonial Revival style resulted from a rejection of the Queen Anne Revival style, and a desire to return to a more "traditional" American building type. The style took on added popularity with the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg in the 1920s. This style draws from the simple building forms typical of early American colonial structures, and elements of classical or Georgian architecture. It is closely related to the Neoclassical Revival and Georgian Revival styles. Colonial Revival residential structures are typically one or two stories, with hipped or gabled roofs and symmetrical facades. The entryway or porch is the primary focus, often highlighted with a decorative crown or pediment. Other areas of elaboration are the cornice and windows.

Sited in the middle of a 14,130 square foot lot and facing south, the 4,791 square foot house has a five-part façade. The house features brick veneer that has been painted. The central entrance bay, which is capped with a front facing gable that pierces the side gabled roof, features a triangular pediment with a cornice return. The central bay is anchored by two full-height pilasters. The front door is a wooden six-paneled door with fanlight above. A portico is attached to the front entrance; it is supported with pairs of thin Doric columns and an arched entablature. An iron railing with a Chippendale pattern is atop the portico. On the second floor, a 6-over-6 wood sash window is surrounded by a thick molding and supplanted by a broken pediment. An additional fan light is above this second story window in the center of the front facing gabled projection.

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The parts of the house on the main façade, to the east and west of the central bay, feature pairs of 6-over-9 wood sash windows on the first floor and 6-over-6 wood sash windows on the second floor. These windows have working shutters. A wide entablature encompasses the entirety of the house under the roof line. Two small gabled dormer windows featuring arched 6-light fixed windows and constructed of wood siding project from the side gabled roof. Two chimneys are centered in the middle of each side facade.

To the east, and setback from the main part of the house, is a one-story flat roofed enclosed porch. The porch features two 15-light fixed wood windows. Pairs of thin Doric pilasters are on either end of the front façade and an entablature wraps around the porch under the roofline. These details have been painted the same color as the main house and are barely noticeable from the street. To the west, and setback from the main part of the house, is a two story wing also under a side gabled roof. The front façade of this wing features a 6-over-6 wood sash window on the second floor and a 6-over-6 wood sash window on the first floor. The same wide entablature runs around this wing under the roofline; this has been painted to match the entablature on the main house.

The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Courtney Spillane, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

City Directories, 1928 through current.

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Johnston, Marguerite, *Houston: The Unknown City 1836-1946*, Texas A&M University Press, College Station, 1991.

McAlester, Virginia and Lee, *Field Guide to American Houses*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1984.

Sanborn Fire Insurance map for Houston, 1924-February 1951, volume 11, sheet 1127.

River Oaks Property Owners, card file.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION

Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation

(a) The HAHC, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider one or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the type of designation:

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EXHIBIT A
River Oaks Corporation House
2164 Troon Road



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EXHIBIT B

SITE LOCATION MAP

River Oaks Corporation House
2164 Troon Road

NOT TO SCALE

