

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Seth S. Lamb House

OWNERS: Lisanne and James Rogers

APPLICANTS: Courtney Tardy – GHPA

LOCATION: 2421 Brentwood Drive – River Oaks

AGENDA ITEM: II.A

HPO FILE NO: 11L241

DATE ACCEPTED: Jan-20-11

HAHC HEARING: Jun-16-11

SITE INFORMATION: Lot 8, Block 37, River Oaks Section 1, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic two-story brick veneered residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The home at 2421 Brentwood Drive was constructed by Katharine Mott as her first speculative home in River Oaks in 1928-29. Before the home was completed, it was purchased by Seth S. Lamb of Seth Lamb & Company brokerage firm. According to the *Houston Architectural Survey*, the construction of 2421 Brentwood Drive started a building program in River Oaks by the Motts that would include at least ten homes. Mrs. Mott's body of work includes over 20 homes built in River Oaks, Riverside Terrace, Edgemont and Devonshire Place. Her contribution to Houston was recognized in 1998 with Rice Design Alliance Tour, and the Lamb home is referenced in the 1980 *Houston Architectural Survey* prepared by Rice University.

The Seth S. Lamb House meets Criteria 1, 4, and 6 for Landmark designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Upon its building, the house at 2421 Brentwood Drive attracted notice with the following mention in the *Houston Post* on February 3, 1929:

“Seth Lamb buys River Oaks Home on Brentwood Drive – Seth S. Lamb has purchased the two story brick veneer, modified French design home now nearing completion at 2421 Brentwood Drive, River Oaks. The home was designed and built by Mrs. Katharine B. Mott who since she came to Houston about a year ago has constructed some of the most distinctive homes in the city...”

Exactly a week following, the *Houston Post* ran a story entitled “Mrs. Katharine B. Mott Extends Her Building Operations Here.” The story profiled Mrs. Mott and her start in the construction business, and was accompanied by a glamorous profile photograph of her. The article also referred to the home on Brentwood:

“Last week her two story home of modified French design ... was sold to Mr. and Mrs. Seth Lamb. The home is not yet fully completed but Mrs. Mott has already prepared plans for another home and will begin its construction shortly.”

Seth Lamb was a stockbroker with offices at the State National Bank Building; his firm lists “stock, bonds, cotton members New Orleans Cotton Exchange” in the 1929 City Directory. Seth and Pauline Lamb owned the home at 2421 Brentwood Drive for five years; and the following years would bring a succession of owners, including: Wallace A. Belstrom, Vice President Mills Bennett Production Co.

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(1935); Joseph D. Beasley, Resident Manager Arthur Anderson (1939); Hayden H. Cutler, physician (1942); Fred L. Dahlstrom, President Texas Railway Equipment Company (1952); Robert C. Lanier, President Texas Gulf Industries (1961); Pat L. Jones (1975); William Cole, physician (1981) and William Caudell (2001). The current owners, Lisanne and James Rogers, purchased from William Caudell in 2002.

Katharine Mott

Notable Houston builder, Katharine Mott, designed the home at 2421 Brentwood Drive with Indianapolis architects Burns and James in 1928-29. As mentioned above, this was the Motts first foray into River Oaks. The *Houston Architectural Survey* contains a comprehensive biography of Mrs. Mott as follows:

“Katharine B. Mott and her husband, Harry L. Mott moved to Houston from Indianapolis in 1930. After visits to the west coast and Texas in search of a warmer climate in which to live, the Motts settled on Houston as the friendliest place with the greatest business potential. In Indianapolis, Mrs. Mott had begun designing houses after the last of her three daughters started school. The first three houses she designed were all for her own family, but each was subsequently sold to an admirer. Mr. Mott, a real estate developer, realized his wife’s talent and commissioned her to design houses for an entire block in one of his Indianapolis developments. In 12 months, Mrs. Mott saw twelve of her designs constructed. She completed 18 more before leaving Indianapolis.”

Burns and James, architects

Because Mrs. Mott had no formal training in architecture, she worked with Edward James of the Indianapolis architectural firm, Burns and James. The partners, Lee Burns (1872-1957) and Edward D. James (1897-c. 1965) worked together from 1926 to 1949. Edward James, F.A.I.A. was an Indianapolis native who received his architecture training at Cornell University after attending classes at Butler University in his home state. James worked with firms in New York, Philadelphia and Orlando from 1923 until 1926 when he returned to Indianapolis as a partner of Lee James who had been in practice then with William Osler for several years. In 1949, the partnership was dissolved when Burns took his son and formed Burns & Burns. Edward James organized his own firm in 1949 in which he practiced until his death in the 1960s. His most notable works were modern institutional projects including several buildings for Indiana University (1947-1953) and the Indianapolis Airport (1955).

Burns & James’ published houses were generally in the Colonial style rather than in the Old English styles preferred by the Motts. This stylistic difference reinforces reports that Mrs. Mott herself was primarily responsible for the designs. Between 1928 and 1932, Katharine and Harry Mott built over 20 houses in the Houston subdivisions of Riverside Terrace, Edgemont, Devonshire Place and River Oaks. These houses were formularized to a certain extent, although each was unique in elevation and plan. They are all of tapestry brick with casement windows; their plans are asymmetrical with the main entrance off center, and their scale is large. Some are Tudor in character, some contain half timbering in the Elizabethan tradition, and others have more Norman elements such as a round tower with a conical roof. Mrs. Mott brought with her from Indianapolis her carpenter and brick mason, both of whom were very skilled craftsmen. The unusual brickwork, although it is never the same, is a recognizable feature of the Mott houses.

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Katharine Mott developed cancer which brought her involvement in speculative real estate to an abrupt halt. The economic depression of the 1930s slowed all building in Houston and Mr. Mott, in 1932, became a sales representative of the River Oaks Corporation which did manage to continue its aggressive sales campaign throughout the 1930s. He remained in this capacity until 1950 when he opened his own real estate office where he worked until his death in 1958. The Motts did build their own home at 11527 Memorial Drive in Piney Point Village in the 1950s and Katharine Mott continued to live there until her death in 1979.

It should be noted that Mrs. Mott, a builder, received notice early on from Hugh Potter, one of the developers of River Oaks. The Houston Business Journal quotes Mr. Potter as saying to Will C. Hogg, “the houses built by Mrs. Mott and her husband in Riverside Terrace and Edgemont have done more to attract prospects than any other one thing. They are, by all odds, the most attractive structures in those additions.” Her contribution to architecture in Houston was recognized in later years by a 1998 Rice Design Alliance Architectural Tour and Lecture “Modern Homecraft: the Houses of Katharine B. Mott and Harry L. Mott.”

According to various sources including the Rice Design Alliance, the Houston Survey and Stephen Fox’s *Houston Architectural Guide*, Katharine Mott was responsible for the following homes in Houston:

- 1635 South Boulevard, with Burns and James, 1928
- 1659 South Boulevard, with Burns and James, 1928
- 2612 Riverside Drive, 1928
- 2620 Riverside Drive, 1928
- 2627 Riverside Drive, 1928 (demolished)
- 1660 South Boulevard, with Burns and James, 1929
- 2421 Brentwood Drive, with Burns and James, 1929
- 2513 MacGregor, 1929 (demolished)
- 2555 North MacGregor Way, with Burns and James, 1929
- 2591 MacGregor, 1929
- 2413 Brentwood Drive, 1929 (demolished)
- 3335 Del Monte Drive, 1929 (demolished)
- 3263 Del Monte Drive, with Burns and James, 1930 (demolished)
- 3325 Inwood, with Burns and James, 1930 (City of Houston Landmark)
- 1920 Woodbury, with Burns and James, 1930
- 2947 Inwood, with Burns and James, 1930 (City of Houston Landmark)
- 3027 Inwood, with Burns and James, 1930
- 3196 Del Monte Drive, with Birdsall Briscoe, 1931
- 1419 Kirby Drive, with Burns and James, 1931

The home at 2421 Brentwood Drive was constructed in 1928-29 and designed by Burns & James. Its style is described by the *Houston Architectural Survey* as “an eclectic mixture of Old English, Italianate and French elements.” The survey describes the home as having a “unique combination of elements including the brick banded stone window and Italianate door frames, both suggestive of Italianate style. Other brickwork on this structure includes the laying of clinker bricks in diamond patters between some of the second floor windows. The entrance bay is especially well designed with a lower roof line in a

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hipped configuration, an unusual keystone shaped dormer window over the entry porch defined by a stone column between two round arches.”

The plan of the two-story home is “additively massed rectangular, stepped back three times from the last bay.” Also, the home contains four bays on the principal elevation; each “stepped back” with different detailing. The windows of the home are casement; some with iron grills over them and some with stone trim. The first floor windows have “sill level at the floor level.”

The house faces north, a common attribute of many Katharine Mott’s River Oaks homes.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

According to William Caudell, the house was expanded and remodeled in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. During these remodels the screened porch on the ground floor and the sleeping porch off the original master bedroom were enclosed as living space. In 2001, William Caudell and Randy Powers completed an extensive restoration and remodeling following research into exterior and interior features of Katherine Mott’s residential projects. Rooflines and brickwork resulting from previous remodels that were unsympathetic to the original design were corrected. Interior enhancements of casement windows, block paneling, highly fossilized stone flooring, and vaulted and coffered ceilings found in Mrs. Mott’s larger houses were added.

The 1929 garage and servants’ quarters were removed in 2001, and a new carriage/guesthouse structure was constructed in the patterned-brick work and half-timbered style consistent with other Mott projects. None of these remodels impacted the façade of this historic home.

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Houston Architectural Survey, Volume 3, Southwest Center for Urban Research and the School of Architecture, Rice University, 1980.

Houston Post, “Seth Lamb Buys in River Oaks,” February 3, 1929.

Houston Post, “Katharine B. Mott Extends Her Building Operations,” February 10, 1929.

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.

Rice Design Alliance, “Modern Homecraft: The Houses of Katharine B. Mott and Harry L. Mott,” April 1998.

Sabota, Danni, Houston Business Journal, “Houses by Katharine Mott,” February 24, 1992.

Sanborn Fire Insurance map for Houston, 1924-February 1951, Volume 11, Sheet 1105.

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

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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:

- | S | NA | | S - satisfies | D - does not satisfy | NA - not applicable |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (1) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area possesses character, interest or value as a visible reminder of the development, heritage, and cultural and ethnic diversity of the city, state, or nation; | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event; | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (3) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is identified with a person who, or group or event that, contributed significantly to the cultural or historical development of the city, state, or nation; | | | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (4) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area exemplify a particular architectural style or building type important to the city; | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (5) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area are the best remaining examples of an architectural style or building type in a neighborhood; | | | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (6) Whether the building, structure, object or site or the buildings, structures, objects or sites within the area are identified as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, state, or nation; | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present; | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride. | | | |

AND

- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (9) If less than 50 years old, or proposed historic district containing a majority of buildings, structures, or objects that are less than 50 years old, whether the building, structure, object, site, or area is of extraordinary importance to the city, state or nation for reasons not based on age (Sec. 33-224(b)). | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Seth S. Lamb House at 2421 Brentwood Drive.

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EXHIBIT A
SETH S. LAMB HOUSE
2421 BRENTWOOD DRIVE



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EXHIBIT B
SITE LOCATION MAP
SETH S. LAMB HOUSE
2421 BRENTWOOD DRIVE
NOT TO SCALE

