

# CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

## LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** Baker-Jones House

**AGENDA ITEM:** I1b

**OWNERS:** Amy D. & Robert M. Taylor, Jr.

**HPO FILE NO:** 11L244

**APPLICANTS:** Same

**DATE ACCEPTED:** Feb-1-2011

**LOCATION:** 22 Courtlandt Place - Courtlandt Place Historic District

**HAHC HEARING:** Jul-14-2011

**SITE INFORMATION:** Lot 12 and Tracts B2 and C9, Courtlandt Place, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a two and half-story, stuccoed hollow tile,

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

Prominent Houston attorney James Addison Baker purchased the property at 22 Courtlandt Place in 1915. He hired noted Houston architect Birdsall P. Briscoe to design this house, which he presented as a gift to his daughter, Alice Graham Baker and her husband, Murray Brashear Jones. Murray Jones was a respected lawyer who served as assistant district attorney and Harris County judge. Alice Baker Jones was a prominent local civic leader involved in numerous church and charitable activities.

Completed in 1917, the Baker-Jones House is an excellent local example of an early-20th century Georgian Revival residence, with its refined and symmetrical proportions. The structure's architectural features include a pedimented entrance pavilion flanked by Doric pilasters with a recessed entry portico supported by fluted Doric columns. Also of note are the multi-light windows and round-headed dormers.

The house was sold out of the family in 1938. It has undergone a succession of owners since that time but remains one of the best preserved examples of Birdsall P. Briscoe's work in Houston. The Baker-Jones House is contributing to the Courtlandt Place National Register and City of Houston Historic Districts, is a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark, and meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, and 6 for Landmark designation.

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

The 1911 marriage of Miss Alice Graham Baker and attorney Murray Brashear Jones united two of the most distinguished Houston families of the day. An effusive *Houston Daily Post* article described the bride and groom as “members of two of the most prominent and influential families of the South,” and noted “the marriage of the young couple was naturally of more than usual interest here and elsewhere.”

Murray Brashear Jones was born in 1886, the son of Col. James Warren Jones (d. 1902), a Civil War veteran and Houston attorney, and his wife, the former Sarah Brashear (d. 1925). The younger Jones' birthplace was the family home, which then occupied three-quarters of a block at 1117 Main (at Dallas Street). Sarah Jones' father, Isaac W. Brashear, was a Houston pioneer who moved to the fledgling city in 1839 and became prominent as an investor and Texas State Senator. The family

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farm was sold by Isaac Brashear's widow Sarah in 1891 to the Omaha & South Texas Land Company, which developed the property as the Houston Heights neighborhood. The fine High Victorian Italianate Brashear Building (Eugene T. Heiner, 1882, City of Houston Protected Landmark), constructed for Sarah Jones' brother Henry Brashear, remains at 910 Prairie Avenue.

Murray Jones was educated at Central High School in Houston and St. Edward's College in Austin. In 1903 he entered the University of Texas, where he was on the football and baseball teams. Jones graduated from the University of Texas in 1907 and Princeton University in 1908, having taken courses at the latter institution from future U.S. President Woodrow Wilson. He then completed his law studies at the University of Texas in 1910, and was admitted to the Texas State Bar that same year.

Jones had a long and distinguished career as a lawyer in Houston. In 1914 he became an Assistant District Attorney, and the following year was appointed Judge of County Court at Law by Gov. James Ferguson in 1915. He was subsequently elected to that position, a post which he held again in the 1920s. Jones served in various law partnerships over a fifty year period, and in investment groups as well. He served as a U.S. Army captain in World War I and a major in World War II. His death in 1963 was noted in a front-page *Houston Post* obituary, and his funeral at Christ Church Cathedral was conducted by Rev. Milton Richardson, later Episcopal Bishop of Texas.

Alice Graham Baker was born in 1887, the daughter of Captain James Addison Baker and his wife, the former Alice Graham of Waco. Capt. Baker was a lawyer and banker who headed Baker & Botts, the Houston law firm founded by *his* father in 1866. Capt. Baker is best known for his role in the creation of Rice Institute (now University), whose Board of Trustees he headed from its inception until his death in 1941. In recent years, his name has regained prominence through his grandson and namesake, U.S. Secretary of State James Addison Baker III.

Alice Baker was educated in Houston and at the Spence School in New York City. She made her debut in Houston, and after her marriage was involved in various church and civic activities, including Palmer Memorial Episcopal Church, the Tuesday Musical Club, the Garden Club of Houston, the Junior League and the Assembly. Alice Baker Jones died on Easter Sunday, 1978, and was survived by her daughter Alice, Mrs. John Harris Meyers of Houston.

## **ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY**

In 1915, Capt. Baker acquired property on which to build a suitable home for his daughter in the then-remote Courtlandt Place subdivision. Courtlandt Place is an extraordinary one-block boulevard lined with large early 20<sup>th</sup> century residences in Houston's Montrose neighborhood. Reminiscent of the contemporaneous 'private streets' of St. Louis, Courtlandt Place is perhaps the most distinctive development of its sort remaining in Texas.

The architect chosen for the Jones' home was Birdsall Parmenas Briscoe, one of the most talented Texas architects of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and responsible for the design of some of the most significant residential and commercial architecture in Houston.

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The Jones House, built by contractor Frank A. Heidelberg, was completed in 1917. The 2½ story, stuccoed hollow tile structure is a fine example of the Georgian Revival style. Classical stylistic influences are exhibited in its refined and symmetrical proportions. The structure's prominent architectural features include a pedimented entrance pavilion flanked by Doric pilasters, with a recessed entry portico supported by fluted Doric columns. Triple multi-light over single light windows popular at the time are found above and at each side of the main entry. Paired six-over-one windows surmounted by round-headed dormers complete the fenestration of the entrance front.

In plan, the Jones House consists of the rectangular main block, flanking porches to the east and west and a service ell to the rear. While the entrance front generally adheres to rigid Georgian symmetry, the massing and fenestration of other facades tends to be less regular. The only visible exterior change occurred at a very early date, when sale of the vacant lot to the west by Capt. Baker to Sarah Brashear Jones necessitated converting the side breakfast room into a porte-cochere. (Mrs. Jones subsequently constructed a house next door designed by architect Alfred Finn and incorporating architectural elements of Mrs. Jones' old home downtown.)

The center main hall is flanked by the large living room to the east and handsome dining room to the west. A three-run staircase ascends to the five bedrooms upstairs. The house features very well-crafted interior detailing, including beamed ceilings in the living and dining rooms and large, Prairie School-inspired fireplaces in those rooms and high living room wainscoting.

The Baker-Jones House was doubtless considered very modern and efficient when constructed. The hollow tile masonry construction was (and is) unusual for a single family residence, and the styling, while essentially Georgian Revival, was not without Prairie School influence. The tripartite windows, for instance, may have both Palladian and American Foursquare stylistic ancestry. The fully equipped kitchen with its substantial Jewett Ice Box (later electrified and still in place) and bathrooms were supplemented by such features as a walk-in safe, electric intercom system and central vacuum system. The house has an unusual full basement.

The size of the Baker-Jones House is deceiving. While the plan is relatively conventional and can be found in Colonial Revival houses across the nation, the scale of the Jones House is much larger than most. The living room, for instance, measures 30' x 17'6", and the dining room 23' x 17'6". The total living area is over 7000 square feet, and includes the two-story garage/servants quarters constructed the same time as the main house.

The last *Houston City Directory* listing for Murray and Alice Baker Jones at 22 Courtlandt Place was 1930-31, and the couple was apparently divorced shortly thereafter. Alice Baker Jones sold the property in 1938 to Baker Botts attorney Ralph Feagin, and the house changed hands six times during the next 45 years. The property was owned from 1968 until 1983 by Henry C. Grover, erstwhile Republican candidate for Governor of Texas.

While the surrounding neighborhood experienced a state of flux for many decades, the overall integrity of both Courtlandt Place and the Baker-Jones House remained remarkably intact. Rehabilitation of many Courtlandt Place houses in the 1970s led to designation of the street as a National Register Historic District in 1980 and as a City of Houston Historic District in 1996. The

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Baker-Jones House is a contributing structure to the National Register and City of Houston historic districts, and became a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark in 1991.

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*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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**EXHIBIT A**  
BAKER-JONES HOUSE  
22 COURTLANDT PLACE



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## EXHIBIT B SITE LOCATION MAP BAKER-JONES HOUSE 22 COURTLANDT PLACE NOT TO SCALE

