

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Ernest L. Shult-John B. Connally Jr. House

AGENDA ITEM: III.b

OWNERS: Stephen and Kaye Horn

HPO FILE NO: 11L248

APPLICANTS: Same

DATE ACCEPTED: Dec-22-2010

LOCATION: 2411 River Oak Boulevard - River Oaks

HAHC HEARING: Jul-14-2011

SITE INFORMATION: Tract 32, Block 23, River Oaks Section Four, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a two-story, stucco clad single family residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The modern Ernest L. Shult-John B. Connally Jr. House was built in 1959 by Houston architect Ernest L. Shult as his own residence. Shult was born in Wharton County in 1901 and graduated from Rice University in 1923. By 1930, he was practicing as an architect in Houston, and during the 1940s and 50s, had his own architectural office on Fannin Street. Shult was also a longtime associate of Alfred C. Finn, a major Houston architect.

Texas Governor John Connally Jr. and Nellie Connally moved into 2411 River Oaks Boulevard in January 1969 as their first private home after living in the Governor's Mansion in Austin. Connally rose from humble farm boy roots to become a major figure in business, politics and government for half a century, during which time he served four U. S. Presidents. He was a lifelong friend and public servant with President Lyndon B. Johnson. He won the Bronze Star and the Legion of Merit after service in the U.S. Navy during WWII, where he rose in rank from ensign to lieutenant commander. From 1952 until 1960, he was attorney for Texas millionaire Sid W. Richardson and his nephew, Perry R. Bass in Fort Worth, and acted as executor for the Sid Richardson estate after the oil man's death. Connally was appointed Secretary of the Navy by President John F. Kennedy in 1961 and resigned that post for a successful run for governor of Texas in 1963. Connally was a passenger in the car when President Kennedy was assassinated, and was himself seriously wounded during the attack. Connally went on to serve three consecutive terms as Texas governor before leaving office in 1969.

Connally joined the law firm of Vinson, Elkins, Searls and Connally as senior partner in February 1969. While living in the home at 2411 River Oaks Boulevard, John Connally was appointed and served as Secretary of the Treasury in the Nixon Administration from February 1971 until June 1972 and was a major contender for the Republican Presidential nomination in the 1980 election. He and Mrs. Connally moved to the Huntingdon High Rise in about 1981. Connally died in 1993.

The Ernest L. Shult-John B. Connally Jr. House meets Criteria 1 and 3 for Landmark designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Ernest L Shult

Ernest L. Shult was born in El Campo in Wharton County in 1901 to Oscar and Anna Shult, the children of Swedish immigrants. Ernest Shult graduated from El Campo High School in 1919 and from Rice University in 1923. In 1925, he married his wife, Cathrine. In the 1930 Census, Ernest and Cathrine were living near Rice University with their two-year old daughter Anna. Ernest was listed as an architect, and had an architecture office at 5009 Fannin for awhile in the 1940s and early 50s. According to the Handbook of Texas, Shult was also a longtime associate of prominent Houston architect, Alfred C. Finn. Shult presumably designed the modern house at 2411 River Oaks Boulevard for himself, as he and Cathrine were the original residents and lived there through the 1960s. Found in the River Oaks Property Owners files for the property is a letter of recommendation of the plans and design by Karl Kamrath, of MacKie and Kamrath Architects.

The house at 2411 River Oaks Boulevard was sold to John and Nellie Connally in 1969, and the Shults were later listed as living at 2004 Persa Street. Cathrine died on April 17, 1981 and Ernest died on March 16, 1992. The memorial service for Ernest L. Shult took place at St John the Divine Episcopal Church at 2450 River Oaks Boulevard, located just one block away from his former home.

John B. Connally, Jr.

John Bowden Connally, Jr., thirty-eighth governor of the state of Texas, was born on a farm near Floresville, Texas, on February 27, 1917, one of eight children of John Bowden and Lela (Wright) Connally, Sr. Connally, Sr., had been a cowboy, a barber and a grocer before turning to dairy farming and finally tenant farming. The family's circumstances were always quite modest; there often were debts and struggles to pay them.

Connally, Jr., attended Harlandale High School in San Antonio, graduated from Floresville High School, and entered the University of Texas in 1933. In college he was interested in campus politics, oratory and acting, and was elected president of the UT Students Association for 1938–39. He received his law degree from the UT law school in 1941. Connally met Idanell (Nellie) Brill of Austin at UT and they were married on December 21, 1940. They had four children. Connally developed a desire to amass land and money, and never return to the poverty he knew as a boy.

Connally began his career in government and politics in 1939 as secretary (legislative assistant) to Representative Lyndon B. Johnson, Connally's "mentor, friend and benefactor." Connally met Lyndon Johnson when Johnson was a young Congressman from Texas in the late 1930s, and Connally was a campaign worker for him. It was the beginning of a close personal relationship that lasted until Johnson's death in 1973.

Connally was commissioned in the United States Naval Reserve in 1941. As a fighter director aboard aircraft carriers, he went through nine major air-sea battles in the Pacific Theater for which he won the Bronze Star for valor. Aboard the USS *Essex* he endured fifty-two consecutive hours of Japanese kamikaze attacks in April 1945. He attained the rank of lieutenant commander and came home a hero. After returning to civilian life, Connally headed an investors' group of war veterans that owned and operated Austin radio station KVET (1946–49). He also joined an influential Austin law firm and during this period served as campaign manager in Lyndon Johnson's 1946 reelection

CITY OF HOUSTON

to Congress and successful 1948 Senate race. He then served as LBJ's aide until 1951. Connally also managed Johnson's unsuccessful bid for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1960, and the election to the presidency in 1964. Connally earned a reputation both as "Lyndon's boy" and as a "political mastermind" and expert strategist. His political credo was "Fight hard and rough, but when the battle is over, forget and dismiss."

In the early 1950s, Connally had become a lawyer for millionaire Texas oilman Sid Richardson, who ultimately put him in charge of running his business ventures in Texas and Jamaica. The association proved most lucrative to Connally, who eventually became one of the executors of Richardson's estate.

Connally served as Secretary of the Navy in 1961 in the Cabinet of Democrat President John F. Kennedy. He won his first political race as a candidate for governor the next year. Connally was also well-schooled in politics and government and had profited from his experience as Sid Richardson's legal counsel. Connally entered the race against a large field of candidates, including Governor Price Daniel, Sr., who was seeking a fourth term. A poll showed that Connally had only 4 percent of the votes at the outset. But in addition to wealthy backers such as the oilman Richardson, he had a strong grass-roots network of politically astute supporters. Connally won a 1962 runoff by 26,000 votes. He was reelected by a 3-to-1 vote margin in 1964 and won a third term in 1966 with 72 percent of the vote.

On Nov. 22, 1963, while serving his first term as Governor, Connally was riding in Kennedy's open-topped limousine through the streets of Dallas and was wounded when Kennedy was shot and killed. A bullet passed through his body, leaving Connally with scars on his back, chest, wrist and thigh. Later, he would recall drifting in and out of consciousness for four days. He said the first sustained consciousness he had was of watching television coverage of Kennedy's body being carried to Arlington National Cemetery.

Connally also said he thought that the shot that killed the President had been meant for him. He said this was because the accused assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, had written a letter asking Connally, as Navy Secretary, to upgrade his undesirable discharge from the Marines, and that no action had been taken on the request.

After leaving the Governor's office in 1969, Connally joined Vinson and Elkins, a large law firm in Houston named for William Ashton Vinson and James A. Elkins, both early principals in the firm. The same year, he was named a member of President Richard M. Nixon's foreign-intelligence advisory board and assumed a favored position among Nixon's advisors; it was said that "If Connally is not for a matter, the President won't do it". In 1971, he became Nixon's Secretary of the Treasury and earned a reputation as "a tough American statesman." He sought to address the nation's growing trade deficit and inflation by such mechanisms as currency devaluation and a price freeze. As Secretary until 1972, Mr. Connally was largely responsible for the federal guarantee of some \$250 million in loans to the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation, then the nation's largest major military contractor but near collapse because of major cutbacks in military spending and other setbacks in its civilian projects. In 1972, he spearheaded a *Democrats for Nixon* organization that helped the Republican president carry Texas.

Part of Connally's success as a politician derived from his impressive appearance. In 1970, after he was named Treasury Secretary, he was described in an article in The New York Times: "Mr.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Connally is tall, gray-haired, handsome, personable and articulate, and his manners and bearing recall those of President Johnson. Yet he is suave and has a touch of the Eastern establishment."

Connally had grown up on his family's South Texas cotton farm in the hard-scrabble status of "a barefoot boy of mule-plowed furrows." His accomplishments as governor "epitomized the big man of Texas" and "personified the Texas establishment as the Texas establishment wanted to see itself." He considered himself "a conservative who believed in active government." He had a vision of moving Texas into a dynamic era and entered the governorship saying that his administration should emphasize one of three crucial issues of the day: education, race relations, or poverty. He chose to be "an education governor" both because he believed that the most enduring way to address social problems was through education and because he "had a farm boy's dream to become the governor of the intellectuals and of the cultivated." Connally effectively used his political skills to increase taxes substantially in order to finance higher teachers' salaries, better libraries, research, and new doctoral programs. He considered this the crowning achievement of his administration. He promoted programs to reshape and reform state government, to develop the state's tourism industry (including his endorsement of liquor by the drink and pari-mutuel betting), to establish the Texas Commission on the Arts and the Texas Historical Commission, and to establish the University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures, which was initiated as part of HemisFair '68, a state-supported World's Fair at San Antonio.

Connally switched parties from Democrat to Republican in 1973, three months after LBJ's death. He said that party was his "true philosophical home" because it "it best expressed the broad view of most Americans, whatever their party affiliation."

In the wake of the bribery-related resignation of Vice President Spiro Agnew in October 1973, Nixon passed word that he would name Connally to fill the vacancy. This would have put Connally in a strong position to run for president in 1976. Nixon and Connally had privately mused about starting a new Whig-type party in the tradition of Henry Clay and Daniel Webster. But Democrats and Republicans alike in the Senate erupted in a "firestorm of protest." Warnings went up that if Nixon pursued the appointment, some powerful Senate Democrats "would be determined to destroy Connally." This was during the height of the Watergate scandal, which ultimately forced Nixon to resign.

In 1974, Connally was indicted by a Federal grand jury on charges of perjury and conspiracy to obstruct justice. Prosecutors said he had taken \$10,000 from the American Milk Producers Inc. after persuading President Nixon to back a controversial increase in price supports for milk in 1971. Connally was exonerated by a Federal jury in Washington in 1975. He continued to be active in politics even after this incident. In the late 1970s, he unsuccessfully opposed Ronald Reagan's drive to control the Republican Party, and in 1980 he made a costly but losing campaign for the Republican Presidential nomination.

In February 1982, Connally, now a man of some wealth, took mandatory retirement from Vinson and Elkins. In 1981 he went into the business of real estate development with his political protégé, former Lieutenant Governor Ben Barnes. After that, he abandoned whatever aspirations he had for public office and concentrated on making money, which led to a partnership with Barnes. In the partnership Connally was the "intimidating Olympian eminence," and Barnes was the "sometimes overpowering salesman and legman." Both had superb business and political contacts in the state and nation "and saw no reason why the values of their political life could not work equally well in

CITY OF HOUSTON

their business life." The partners "conducted business," however, "as if they were campaigning for higher office." They signed personal notes on loans bearing short-term interest at 18 percent and by June 1983 had sixteen major projects under way totaling \$231 million. It was a boom time in the Texas petroleum industry, with world oil prices ranging up to thirty-seven dollars a barrel. When the oil price collapsed, the state's economy collapsed. Connally and Barnes were out on a limb that broke and took them with it, along with many other wealthy Texans and most of the state's major financial institutions. The fiasco led Connally to acknowledge that "we were moving too far too fast and paying dearly for it." But in 1988, Connally declared bankruptcy, placing the blame for his \$93 million personal debt mostly on bad real estate, oil and gas investments he made in Texas as the state's economy began to worsen. He was forced to sell most of his 2,674-acre ranch near Floresville, along with his horses, Chippendale and Louis XIV furniture, fine china, rifle collection and ceremonial saddles inlaid with his initials in gold in a globally publicized auction. Left with his ranch house and a mere 200 acres, Mr. Connally said, "I know what it is to be poor." To the surprise of nobody who knew him, he emerged from bankruptcy within a year.

The positions Connally held in law and business had taken him to the high echelons of corporate America. He was a director of the Coastal Corporation, Kaiser Tech, Kaiser Aluminum, Methodist Hospital of Houston, and Maxxam, Incorporated. He had earlier served on the boards of the New York Central Railroad, U.S. Trust, Pan American Airways, the Andrew Mellon Foundation, Greyhound Corporation, Ford Motor Company, Signal Companies, First City Bank Corporation, Superior Oil Company, Falkenbridge Nickel, and American General Insurance. He was a member of the State Bar of Texas, and the American, Houston, and District of Columbia Bar associations. Connally died on June 15, 1993, at the Methodist Hospital of Houston, where he was being treated for pulmonary fibrosis. He was 76. He was buried in the State Cemetery in Austin. He was survived by his wife, a daughter, Sharon C. Ammann, and two sons, John Bowden III and Mark.

Robert S. Strauss, the former Democratic national chairman, who was one of Connally's oldest friends, described him as "one of the ablest men I ever knew, a man who had an uncanny ability to forget the transitory stuff and retain all the vital information in his head, year after year...He was a pioneer," Mr. Strauss said. "He was a different kind of governor than Texas had ever had. He spent a lot of money on mental health and education and other things that were verboten at the time. One time he even put a liberal rabbi on the Board of Regents at the University of Texas, with all those businessmen...But after the assassination, he moved right and kind of lost his way."

In his 1989 book "Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician," Stephen E. Ambrose wrote that Nixon's "admiration for Connally grew to the point of adulation after Mr. Connally advised him to go ahead with the bombing of Hanoi and the mining of Haiphong." By 1972, Nixon says in his memoirs, he believed that Connally "was the only man in either party who clearly had the potential to be a great President."

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The Ernest L. Shult-John B. Connally House was designed in the Contemporary style, a variation of the modern styles which became popular in the post-war years. The Contemporary style completely eschews traditional form and detail, and was particularly favored in architect-designed houses for the 1950-1970 period. These homes generally have wide eave overhangs and either flat roof or low-pitched roofs with broad, low, front-facing gables. Exposed supporting beams and other structural

CITY OF HOUSTON

members are common. Contrasting wall materials and textures, and unusual window shapes and placement are also typical features.

The Contemporary style occurs in two distinctive subtypes based on roof shapes: flat or gabled. The flat-roofed subtype is a derivation of the earlier International Style and houses of this subtype are sometimes referred to as American International.

The most prominent Contemporary features on the Ernest L. Shult-John B. Connally Jr. House include:

- Asymmetrical façade
- Stark white stucco exterior walls
- Smooth, unornamented exterior wall surface
- Multiple roof sections
- Portions of the front façade extend forward and vary in height
- Large expanse of windowless walls.

The Ernest L. Shult-John B. Connally Jr. House is sited on a triangular shaped lot, and faces west on River Oaks Boulevard. The house is situated on a corner but is surrounded on the south by a tall stucco wall, obscuring the house from Locke Lane.

The house has a flat roof and is clad in white stucco, which is believed to be a later alteration. There is minimal applied decoration on the house. A cornice runs around the first and second stories of the façade.

The main façade is three bays wide. The first bay projects forward the farthest and features a centered wood paneled entry door on the first story surrounded by a plain band of stucco which projects slightly from the facade. Above the door are two sets of paired 6-light fixed pane windows surrounded by bands of stucco which project slightly from the facade.

The second and central bay is set back from the north bay and features a fixed light metal bay window on the first story. There are no windows above on the second story.

To the south of this projects a front entry bay. This bay contains an elaborate main entry door composed of glass and metal which is a recent alteration. On the north wall of this bay is another fixed light metal bay window on the first story. A flat roof projects three feet from the entryway creating a covered entry. A one-story stucco wall runs at a curve around the front façade of the house to the south façade.

Found in the River Oaks Property Owners files for the property is a letter of recommendation of the plans and design by Karl Kamrath, of MacKie and Kamrath Architects. The letter indicates that the exterior walls of the house were to be clad in brick with wood shingles or redwood siding. It is unknown when the façade of the house was changed to stucco. The house has had some other alterations, including a two-story addition on the north side where a garage used to stand, over the years but it is unknown when they occurred or under whose ownership. When the current owners purchased the house in 2010, it had been vacant since the previous owner died in 2007, and had suffered roof damage in Hurricane Ike in 2008. The current owners did a substantial amount of repair work to the house, including replacing all exterior doors and some rotted windows.

CITY OF HOUSTON

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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 Courtney Spillane, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

CITY OF HOUSTON

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EXHIBIT A

ERNEST L. SHULT-JOHN B. CONNALLY JR. HOUSE
2411 RIVER OAK BOULEVARD



CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

EXHIBIT B SITE LOCATION MAP JOHN B. CONNALLY HOUSE 2411 RIVER OAK BOULEVARD NOT TO SCALE

