

# CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

## PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** Carroll House

**AGENDA ITEM:** II

**OWNER:** Charles Piper

**HPO FILE NO:** 11PL109

**APPLICANT:** Same

**DATE ACCEPTED:** Dec-2-2011

**LOCATION:** 309 East 32<sup>nd</sup> Street – Independence Heights

**HAHC HEARING:** Dec-8-2011

### SITE INFORMATION

Lots 26, 27, and 28, Block 50, Independence Heights Annex, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a one-story wood frame single family residence with attached carport structure.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Carroll House at 309 East 32<sup>nd</sup> Street, built circa 1910, was one of the first houses in Independence Heights, one of Houston's most unique historic neighborhoods. The neighborhood is roughly bounded by 30<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> Streets and Yale and Airline Streets, and is bisected by North Main. Settled by African-American families starting around 1910, Independence Heights incorporated as an independent municipality in 1915. All of the community leaders of Independence Heights – teachers, contractors, businessmen, as well as its three mayors – were African-American. Although annexed into the City of Houston in 1929, Independence Heights, also known as Studewood, has retained its special character, as many families have lived there for decades. Independence Heights is a National Register Historic District and once had six individual listings in the National Register, of which only three are still standing.

Andrew Carroll, the original owner of the Carroll House, was a farmer and minister, and the house has remained in the hands of his descendants for one hundred years. The Carroll family contributed to the making of Independence Heights - co-founded Greater New Hope Baptist Church, ran the General Store Cooperative, worked in Burgess Hall, were long standing members of Concord Baptist Church, and owners of a barbecue stand, a beauty shop and a barbershop.

The Carroll House is a one-story L-plan cottage and an excellent example of early vernacular houses in Independence Heights. The Carroll House is listed as a contributing structure in the Independence Heights National Register Historic District, and meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, 5, and 8 for Landmark and Protected Landmark designation. If designated, the Carroll House will become the first City of Houston landmark in this historic Houston neighborhood and will help further the efforts of the community to preserve its rich cultural heritage.

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

The one-story wood cottage located at 309 East 32nd Street in the historically black community of Independence Heights originally belonged to Andrew Carroll and his wife Polly. The couple moved from Lavaca County, Texas, to Houston with their four of their twelve children after April 1910.

Carroll was enslaved at birth and taught himself to read and write before emancipation. Residing in Hallettsville, Texas, for forty years before moving to Harris County, he was a farmer and minister.

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On November 25, 1910, he and his wife purchased lots 26-30 in Block 50 of the Independence Heights Annex from the Wright Land Company. According to his granddaughter, Carroll Parrott Blue, Reverend Carroll's vision for acquiring the five lots was to secure a legacy of a permanent homestead for his family and their future generations.

Carroll's wife Polly and daughter Lena Carroll Butler were co-founders and charter members of New Hope Baptist Church, the oldest church in the community and Reverend Carroll's grandsons Victor and Willie Porter ran the Co-op Grocery Store in the Mercantile Building (aka Burgess Hall). Members of the Carroll family were long standing members of Concord Baptist Church and owners of a barbecue stand, a beauty shop and a barbershop.

After the death of Reverend Carroll in 1917 and Mrs. Carroll in 1927, two of their daughters, Emma Carroll Jones and Alberta Carroll Shackleford McGrew were among the many family members who occasionally resided in the home. In the early 1960s, Carroll's great-grandson, Charles Piper moved into the home, first with his wife and later with Carroll's granddaughter and Piper's mother, Willie Mazie Vaughn Green. In 1963, Green hired a contractor to add a 3x14 addition to the home for use as a bedroom.

The property at 309 East 32<sup>nd</sup> Street has now been in Carroll family hands for over 100 years. Mr. Piper still resides in the home, preserving his great-grandfather Carroll's vision of a home as a family legacy when Carroll purchased the property a little over a century ago.

## *Independence Heights*

Illinois native Alfred A. Wright moved to Houston with his family around 1909. He became a real estate developer and established two companies – the Wright Land Company in 1910 to serve the black community, and Wright Loan and Securities for white clients. In June 1910, Wright purchased property six miles north of downtown Houston for the purpose of establishing his first major subdivision, Independence Heights. The property was bounded on the north by 40th Avenue, on the east by McComb Street and Airline Streets, on the south by Loop 610 and on the west by Yale Street. Wright also developed the black subdivisions of Acre Homes and Highland Heights, just north of Independence Heights.

Wright began selling lots in Independence Heights in September 1910. Many blacks flocked to the Independence Heights area because Wright sold his properties at nominal prices and offered financing with low interest rates. In addition, his clients could pay as little as six dollars for a monthly mortgage note.

Most of the homes in Independence Heights were built by residents of the community who were contractors, carpenters, brick layers, and electricians. Construction dates from 1908 to 1940, with a majority of the structures built between 1910 and 1920. The homes are generally one-story wood frames. The architecture ranges from traditional to vernacular forms influenced by larger national building trends.

Independence Heights became a self-contained community as more blacks continued to move the area. Residents purchased products and services among themselves so there was no need to travel outside of the neighborhood.

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The General Mercantile Corporation managed a general store on North Main Street. The Independence Heights School opened in 1911 and there were at least eight churches in the community.

On November 27, 1914, residents filed a petition with the Harris County judge to incorporate. An election was held in the community on January 17, 1915 and a majority of residents unanimously voted for incorporation. Independence Heights, with a population of nearly 600 residents, became Texas' first black incorporated city according to newspaper accounts. Residents elected Attorney George O. Burgess as first mayor with S. C. Lamothe and Arthur McCullough as Commissioners. The City Hall-Courthouse was temporarily located in a "shotgun" house on 701 E. 34th Street until 1919. Two additional mayors served the Independence Heights community between 1919 and 1928.

In November 1928, residents voted to dissolve its incorporation and become a part of Houston to receive better city services. The City of Houston annexed Independence Heights on December 26, 1929. After annexation, the community continued to flourish, though the City of Houston did not provide all of the services expected.

There were forty black-owned businesses along Houston Avenue (later renamed North Main Street): grocery stores, restaurants, lumber company, watch repair shop, ice cream parlors, cleaning and pressing shop, drug store, blacksmith shop, law offices and an electrical shop. Additional businesses developed such as beauty shops, barbershops, cleaners, service stations, auto mechanics, cafes, shoe repair shops, electrical repairs, fish markets, and other businesses.

Integration brought a change to the community as most residents moved to affluent or diverse neighborhoods and some of the remaining residents sought products and services elsewhere.

In 1989, an Official Texas Historical marker for the Independence Heights community was placed on the campus of Greater New Hope Missionary Baptist Church. The community was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1997 with 125 commercial, religious and residential structures which qualified as "historically significant" and six properties were individually listed in the National Register.

In recent years the Independence Heights community has become diverse though it is still predominately African American. Currently, several groups and organizations formed to revitalize the community with goals of restoring significant homes and other structures to preserve the community's rich cultural and historical heritage.

## **ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY**

According to architectural historian Stephen Fox, Reverend Carroll's one-story wood cottage was built in the 1910s. "The style is an excellent example of vernacular architecture typically constructed by local builders. The domestic buildings of Independence Heights are part of the broad pattern of development in the community in the early 20th century."

Based on deed records, the one-story wood-frame, L-shaped cottage was likely built circa 1910-11 and is one of the oldest homes in Independence Heights. The builder is unknown but a footprint of the home appears in the 1924-1951 Sanborn Fire Insurance maps.

The style is an L-shaped design with a hipped roof with inset and shed-roofed porch. Paired two-over-two-pane sash windows exist on three sides of the home. Porch piers have been replaced with concrete blocks and the supports replaced with iron stanchions.

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The cottage is 834 square feet which includes a living room, dining room, kitchen, bathroom and two bedrooms. Except for the porch alterations, the construction of a carport on the west side of the home, and the 3x14 room addition in 1966, the home is in good condition and has maintained its integrity.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Ancestry.com

Bracey's Block Book Maps

FamilySearch.org

Handbook of Texas Online, "Independence Heights."

Harris County Assessors Block Books

Harris County Deed Records

"Independence Heights National Register Application."

"Independence Heights: Portrait of a Historic Neighborhood,"

<http://indepheights.rice.edu/index.htm>, accessed November 8, 2011.

Interview with Charles Piper, November 9, 2011.

Interview with Carroll Parrott Blue, December 1-4, 2011.

Interview with Dr. Hugh Dell Barnett Gatewood, December 4, 2011.

Sanborn Map, Volume 7, 1924-1951, page 772.

*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, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.*

## **APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION**

The HAHC shall review each application for designation of a protected landmark that is included in an application for designation of a landmark at the same time and in the same manner as it reviews and considers the application for a landmark. The HAHC and the Planning Commission, in making recommendations with respect to a protected landmark designation, and the City Council, in making a designation, shall consider whether the building, structure, site, or area meets at least three of the criteria in Section 33-224, or one of the criteria in Section 33-229, as follows:

S	NA	S - satisfies	NA - not applicable
Meets at least three of the following (Sec. 33-229(a)(1)):			
<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;	

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- (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;
- (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;
- (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;
- (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;
- (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present;
- (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride.

**AND**

- (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)).

**OR**

- The property was constructed before 1905 (Sec. 33-229(a)(2));

**OR**

- The property is listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places or designated as a “contributing structure” in an historic district listed in the National Register of Historic Places (Sec. 33-229(a)(3));

**OR**

- The property is recognized by the State of Texas as a Recorded State Historical Landmark (Sec. 33-229(a)(4)).

## STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of the Carroll House at 309 East 32<sup>nd</sup> Street.

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## **EXHIBIT A**



## **EXHIBIT B - SITE LOCATION MAP**

