

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Birdsall P. Briscoe House
OWNER: Gaile Proler
APPLICANT: Same
LOCATION: 1829 Sharp Place – River Oaks

AGENDA ITEM: IIB
HPO FILE NO: 12L260
DATE ACCEPTED: Jan-10-2012
HAHC HEARING: Mar-22-2012

SITE INFORMATION: Lot 11, Block 54, River Oaks Section One, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic two-story, shingle-clad residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Birdsall P. Briscoe House was designed by Birdsall P. Briscoe in 1936 for his own family. The house was later owned by prominent attorney Joseph C. Hutcheson, III. The Briscoe House sits on the 1800 block of Sharp Place, on one of the two courtyards designed to avoid home frontage on the higher volume of traffic on San Felipe Street and South Shepherd Drive. The two-story shingle-clad house is sited on the south side of the northern of the two courtyards.

Birdsall P. Briscoe, one of Houston's most important architects, worked extensively in the Houston neighborhoods of Courtlandt Place, Shadyside, Broadacres, and River Oaks. His finest houses, designed between 1926 and 1940, exhibit the array of historical architectural styles characteristic of American eclectic architecture and are distinguished by the architect's gift for harmonious proportion and full-bodied ornamental detail.

The Birdsall P. Briscoe House at 1829 Sharp Place meets Criteria 1, 3, and 6 for Landmark designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Birdsall P. Briscoe House

The Birdsall P. Briscoe House displays a simple, yet delicate design, with a symmetrical three-bay front façade with a central chimney punctuating the side gabled roof. The two-story shingle clad house features well-appointed minimal ornamentation including an under-roof entablature, molding treatment above the windows, thin Doric front portico columns, and two wood-sash windows topped with gabled dormers on the second story.

1829 Sharp Place subsequently had a long list of occupants, including A.B. Kelly, Daniel Lynch, William H. Francis, Robert Eikel, and S. Field Emerson. This list is just the occupants from 1945-1961.

Birdsall P. Briscoe

Birdsall P. Briscoe was born in Harrisburg, Texas on June 10, 1876. He was the son of Andrew Birdsall and Annie Frances (Paine) Briscoe, the grandson of Andrew Briscoe and the great-grandson of John R. Harris, founder of Harrisburg, Texas. During the Spanish-American War,

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Briscoe served in the United States Army Infantry as a sergeant and subsequently as a major in the army during World War I. He was educated at Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College (now Texas A&M University), and the University of Texas, where he was a classmate of Will Hogg. He began his architectural career in 1904 in Houston as an apprentice with architects Lewis Wilson and Lewis Sterling Green. During this time, the firm designed the original Blessed Sacrament Church (circa 1910), an East End landmark demolished in 2005. After a brief partnership with Green (1909-11), Briscoe started his own firm in 1912. He designed the W. L. Clayton house on Caroline Street in 1916 in the Georgian Revival style and construction was completed in 1917. The house is now open to the public as the Clayton Genealogical Library and is a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark. From 1922 until 1926, he was in partnership with Sam H. Dixon, Jr. From 1919 until his retirement in 1955, Briscoe shared an office with Maurice J. Sullivan. Although from time to time he collaborated with both Dixon and Sullivan on nonresidential commissions, Briscoe was best known for his elegantly composed and detailed houses.

Briscoe established his reputation as an exceptional designer at the outset of his career. His aptitude for disciplined formal composition and correct, scholarly rendition of historic detail placed him at the forefront of the eclectic trend in Houston architecture during the second decade of the twentieth century. Briscoe's finest houses, designed between 1926 and 1940, exhibit the array of historical architectural styles characteristic of American eclectic architecture and are distinguished by the architect's gift for harmonious proportion and full-bodied ornamental detail.

Briscoe worked extensively in the Houston neighborhoods of Courtlandt Place, Shadyside, Broadacres, and River Oaks. Among his clients for houses were: William Lockhart Clayton (1917), W. T. Carter (1920), R. Lee Blaffer (1920), Walter H. Walne (1925), Burdine Clayton Anderson (1928), Robert W. Wier (1928), Milton R. Underwood (1934), Wirt A. Paddock (1936), I. H. Kempner, Jr. (1936), and Dillon Anderson (1938). Outside Houston, Briscoe's best-known project was the remodeling of the Patton-Varner House near West Columbia (see Varner-Hogg Plantation State Historic Park) for Ima and William Clifford Hogg in 1920.

Briscoe married Ruth Dillman in 1927. He joined the American Institute of Architects in 1921 and was elected a fellow of the institute in 1949. From 1934 until 1941, he served as district officer for South Texas of the Historic American Buildings Survey. He was the author of two western adventure novels, *In the Face of the Sun* (1934) and *Spurs from San Isidro* (1951). He was a parishioner of Christ Church. He died in Houston on September 18, 1971, and is buried at Oak Hill Cemetery in Goliad, Texas.

According to Stephen Fox, the Briscoe houses in River Oaks include:

<u>ADDRESS</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>	<u>YEAR</u>	<u>DESIGNATIONS</u>
3376 Inwood Drive	Clayton Summer House	1924	<i>National Register of Historic Places, 1984; City of Houston Landmark, 2006</i>
3237 Inwood Drive	William T. Campbell House	1925	<i>City of Houston Landmark, 2009</i>
2950 Lazy Lane	Dogwoods (demolished)	1928	
3015 Chevy Chase Drive	River Oaks Corp. speculative house	1930	
2113 Bellmeade Road	River Oaks Corp. speculative house	1931	
2920 San Felipe Road	River Oaks Corp. speculative house	1931	
2929 Chevy Chase Drive,	River Oaks Corp. speculative house	1931	

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2938 San Felipe Road	River Oaks Corp. speculative house	1931	
3127 Avalon Place	River Oaks Corp. speculative house	1931	
3196 Del Monte Drive	Harry L. Mott speculative house	1931	
2923 Del Monte Drive	Underwood House	1934	
1829 Sharp Place	Briscoe House #1	1936	
3229 Chevy Chase Drive (3229 Groveland)	Paddock House	1936	<i>City of Houston Landmark, 2007</i>
3401 Sleepyhollow Court	Johnson House	1936	
2227 Chilton Road	Kempner House	1937	
3023 Del Monte Drive	Bullington House	1937	
3249 Chevy Chase Drive	Frost House	1937	
3439 Del Monte Drive	Pinckney House	1937	
2308 River Oaks Blvd	Fountain House	1938	
3334 Chevy Chase Drive	Wilson House	1938	
3414 Del Monte Drive	Anderson House	1938	<i>City of Houston Landmark, 2008</i>
3425 Sleepyhollow Court	McKallip House	1938	
2317 Claremont Lane	Briscoe House #	1939	
3707 Knollwood Drive	White House (with George W. Rustay)	1940	
3820 Willowick Road	Davis House	1940	
3434 Del Monte Drive	Schneider House	1941	
3880 Willowick Road	Schuhmacher House	1941	
3606 Knollwood Drive	Britton House (demolished)	1942	
3601 Inverness Drive	Hutcheson House	1948	
3707 Inwood Drive	Vaughan House	1949	
3606 Chevy Chase Drive	Austin House	1951	
4019 Inverness Drive	Dupree House "Legend"	1959	

Joseph Chappell Hutcheson, III

Joseph Chappell Hutcheson, III, was a prominent Houston attorney whose father had been a Houston mayor (1917-1918) and a United States federal judge. He grew up in his parents' home at 501 Lovett Boulevard in Montrose and lived there as a young married couple prior to moving to the house on Sharp Place. Joseph III died of natural causes at the age of 90 in 1997. He graduated from the Phillips Academy, attended Princeton University and graduated from the University of Virginia. He was first in his class at the University of Texas Law School in 1931. He joined Baker & Botts and worked there for over 60 years. He was a veteran of World War II and was a former director of Schlumberger, Inc., and the Duchesne Academy.

Hutcheson ceased living at 1829 Sharp Place permanently in 1945. City Directories show that he moved back to his parents' home on Lovett and then to 3601 Inverness in River Oaks. 3601 Inverness is listed as having been built in 1943, and Hutcheson owned this home until his death.

Sharp Place Courts, or "Block 54"

The courts along Sharp Place and Stanmore Drive were platted in 1935, as a way to keep houses from having to front the busy streets of San Felipe and Shepherd Drive. By placing the homes in a horseshoe pattern with a large common area in the front of the homes, all homes were thus allowed to face Sharp and Stanmore. Service areas and automobile access came from the busy streets to the rear of these houses.

Stanmore Drive has six courtyards; Sharp Place, being a shorter street, contains only two courtyards. The River Oaks Corporation engineer, H.A. Kipp, laid out the site plan for the courtyards. The lots in the Sharp Place courtyards range from 6,120 to 10,080 square feet.

Sharp Place was marketed and developed in early 1936, before the Stanmore Drive courtyards, which were first introduced to the public in June 1936. The River Oaks Corporation heavily marketed the Sharp Place courtyards, which they termed "Block 54." In the spring of 1936, they ran numerous ads in the *Houston Post* and the *Houston Chronicle* announcing the platting of the blocks. One two-page spread touted "Private Parks," "Prices are Attractive," "You get River Oaks Advantages," and "Now is the Time to Buy." The Sharp Place lots were less expensive than other River Oaks lots because of the variation in lot size and shape, the smaller lot sizes and the courtyard setting. At the same time, the River Oaks Corporation marketed the courtyards as "private parks for the exclusive use of Block 54 home owners, with maintenance provided by the River Oaks maintenance fund." Everything about the advertisements spoke to the economy and sensibility of purchasing in Block 54.

The first home planned in Sharp Place, 1801 Sharp, was designed as a "modern Colonial" by Lloyd & Moore for Henry Goss, computer for the Humble Oil and Refining Company. The "English Regency" 1805 Sharp Place quickly followed, developed by the River Oaks Corporation in collaboration with McCall Magazine, their design being revised for the site by H. Edward Maddox and built by William Farrington. 1805 Sharp Place was the Houston version of *McCall's* "June Home of the Month." (RO Scrapbook, Volume 14, page 179). 1805 Sharp Place was described in marketing materials as:

"McCall's June Home of the Month is a distinguished small home in a distinguished environment. Located in River Oaks, it has, in addition to its attraction as an eminently livable home, all the advantages that go with living in River Oaks- such things as permanent values, proven restrictions, good neighbors, convenience to all parts of town, natural beauty . . . The home opens on a grassy private court, the use of which is exclusive with the home-owners whose property faces on it." (RO Scrapbook, Volume 14, Page 183).

In Block 54, seven of the 18 houses were developed as speculative homes by either the River Oaks Corporation or Carl Knapp (the sales manager of River Oaks Corporation), using (among others) active River Oaks architects Robroy Carroll and R.C. Hoyt, and builder William Farrington. Farrington would go on to develop Tanglewood. The "New England" style 1817 Sharp Place was developed as an August 1936 "Home of the Month." (RO Scrapbook, Volume 14, Page 203 and 209). Briscoe designed 1829 Sharp Place for himself.

River Oaks

When Will C. Hogg, Mike Hogg, and Hugh Potter began the development of River Oaks in 1923, it was with the intention of making it into a demonstration of the highest standards of modern community planning, a role model for the rest of Houston to follow. Will Hogg's ambitiousness 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 Birdsall P. Briscoe House is 3,464 square feet in size, sited on a 6,120 square foot lot on a court in the 1800 block of Sharp Place. It is sited on the southern side of the court, facing north.

The house is a simple, 3-bay, 2-story shingle clad house. The ornament on the house comes from the molding treatment above the windows and an entablature that runs around the top of the facade, under the roof. In addition, two-story pilasters are placed at the ends of the front facade, and are topped with a circular cornice design detail that reads as an American folk design.

On the first floor facade, a center entrance of a (more-recent) wood and glass door is topped with a copper-roofed portico. Two thin Doric columns extend in the front of the portico; the porch columns are a new addition has been rebuilt as the originals were iron. Two wood sash, floor-length windows are on either side of the front entrance. These windows have a 6-over-12 light pattern. Wood trim surrounds the window.

Above the sash windows on the second floor facade are two wood-sash windows topped with gabled dormers; both the windows and the gable extend above the roof line. These windows have a 6-over-6 light pattern. Above the center entrance are paired wood casement windows of 6-panes each, surrounded by wood trim.

The roof is a side gabled roof topped with asphalt shingles that extends slightly over the facade. A chimney is the center of the house punctuates the roof.

The Birdsall P. Briscoe House was remodeled in 2000 but retains its early character. It is in excellent condition and has had only minor changes made to the front facade of the house. The

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current owner has owned the house since 2002. She retains Briscoe's architectural plans for the home in her possession.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

City of Houston City Directories, various dates.

Fox, Stephen. "Briscoe, Birdsall Parmenas." Handbook of Texas Online.

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

Obituary for Joseph C. Hutcheson, III, Houston Chronicle, December 18, 1997.

River Oaks Scrapbook, Volume 14, various pages.

Sanborn Fire Insurance map for Houston, 1924-51, Volume 11, Sheet 1105.

T.G.C.A. Monthly Bulletin, April 1936.

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

EXHIBIT A

BIRDSALL P. BRISCOE HOUSE
1829 SHARP PLACE



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EXHIBIT B

SITE LOCATION MAP

BIRDSALL P. BRISCOE HOUSE

1829 SHARP PLACE

NOT TO SCALE



