

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Tomlinson-Blundell House

OWNERS: Charles and Diane Ofner

APPLICANTS: Same

LOCATION: 2187 Troon Road – River Oaks

AGENDA ITEM: IIa

HPO FILE NO: 12L267

DATE ACCEPTED: Apr-9-2012

HAHC HEARING: Jul-12-2012

SITE INFORMATION: Tracts 2A and 3, Block 52, River Oaks Section 3, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic two-story, brick residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Tomlinson-Blundell House was designed by architect Richard Campbell Hoyt and built by builder and developer William Farrington in 1937. It was designed specifically for Hendley and Alma Tomlinson. Mr. Tomlinson was President of the Tomlinson-Mills Lumber Company and Mrs. Tomlinson was a descendent of, and family historian for, the pioneer von Rosenberg family of Texas. Dr. J. Reese Blundell and his wife Alice purchased the home in 1948. Dr. Blundell was a urologist, professor at Baylor College of Medicine, and a founder of the Texas Urological Society.

Architect Richard Hoyt trained as a draftsman to Albert Kahn, the foremost American industrial architect of his time. Hoyt later formed his own architectural firm in Houston, Irvine and Hoyt. In 1956, Irvine and Hoyt constructed the Educational Building and Fellowship Hall of the First United Methodist Church of Humble.

In addition to building houses, William Farrington was active in real estate subdivision development and shopping center construction. He developed the neighborhood of Tanglewood, which, in 1951, was chosen as one of the five best planned subdivisions in the United States. He also developed the Fairmont Park subdivision and the Post Oak Shopping Center.

The Tomlinson-Blundell House is an excellent example of the Colonial Revival style with Georgian emphasis. The most prominent Georgian details of the house are its heavily carved entry with an elaborate segmental pediment supported by pilasters, cornice emphasized with tooth-like dentils, pedimented dormers, five-ranked windows and symmetrically balanced with center door.

The Tomlinson-Blundell House at 2187 Troon Road meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, and 6 for Landmark designation.

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HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Hendley and Alma Tomlinson

Hendley Edgar Tomlinson was born in Bellville, Texas, on October 14, 1888. He remained in Bellville until 1923, until he sold his father's local lumber yard and moved to Houston. He eventually became the President of the Tomlinson-Mills Lumber Company, which advertised heavily in the 1930s. In his later years he worked as a salesman for other lumber companies. He died on March 12, 1969 in Houston.

Alma Julie von Rosenberg-Tomlinson was born in Hallettsville, Texas, on August 11, 1890 to William Carl von Rosenberg and Metta Brossmann. Alma was a descendent of the Texas pioneer von Rosenberg family. Her great-grandfather was Peter Carl Johann von Rosenberg who was born in Prussia and brought the von Rosenbergs to Galveston, Texas, in December 1849. Peter settled on Nassau Farm near Round Top, in Fayette County, Texas. Peter purchased the manor and 800 acres of Nassau Farm; this was the first sale to take place at the Farm.

Alma was the author and compiler of the first volume of the von Rosenberg family history. She became involved in this project through the von Rosenberg Family of Texas organization. She chaired an effort which culminated in the publication of *The von Rosenberg Family of Texas: a Record with Historical Facts and Legends of the Ancient Prussian Family* in 1949. She died on January 16, 1963.

The Tomlinsons purchased the lot at 2187 Troon Road for \$3,750 in January, 1937, and moved in later that year from 2022 West Main Street. They had two children, Metta Virginia and Hendley Jr. An article and picture in the *Houston Press* on October 30, 1937, announced their arrival, "The swanky, \$15,000 new home at 2187 Troon Road, River Oaks, has been occupied by Mr. and Mrs. H.E. Tomlinson. Mr. Tomlinson is a member of the Tomlinson-Mills Lumber Company firm. W.G. Farrington was the builder."

Dr. J. Reese and Alice Blundell

The Tomlinsons moved from the home and out of River Oaks in 1948; they sold to Dr. J. Reese Blundell, a urologist, and his wife, Alice. The Blundells previously resided at 2220 Stanmore Drive. Blundell was raised in Lockhart, Texas, and was a graduate of medical school at the University of Texas, Galveston. He was a professor at Baylor College of Medicine and a founder of the Texas Urological Society. Alice Fleming Blundell was a native of Galveston, Texas. She taught music out of their home in the early days of their marriage. They lived at 2187 Troon Road until 1975, when they sold it to Joe Stanley and moved to a home on Wickersham.

Richard Campbell Hoyt, Architect

The Tomlinson-Blundell House was designed by architect Richard Campbell Hoyt. Richard Hoyt was born in Buffalo, New York, on September 29, 1903. He graduated from the University of Michigan's College of Architecture. His first position out of architecture school was as a draftsman to Albert Kahn, the foremost American industrial architect of his time. Hoyt later joined the building and design firm of William Farrington with whom he designed many houses

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in Houston. Hoyt left Harrington's firm to start his own architectural practice in Houston, Irvine and Hoyt. The firm mainly designed corporate architecture. In 1956 Irvine and Hoyt constructed the Educational Building and Fellowship Hall of the First United Methodist Church of Humble. He lived and kept an office in the Memorial area. Hoyt died March 26, 1957. He was a member of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and St. Francis Episcopal Church.

William G. Farrington, Builder

The Tomlinson-Blundell House was built by the William Farrington design and build firm. Farrington was born in Kingfisher County, Oklahoma, on September 10, 1901. In 1926, he arrived in Houston with \$40 in his pocket. He settled in the Southampton neighborhood and worked as a contractor and builder. His firm flourished, building homes in the best developing neighborhoods in Houston.

Farrington was also active in real estate subdivision development and shopping center construction. He developed the neighborhood of Tanglewood, which opened in 1949 with 32 lots and seven completed homes. In 1951, it was chosen as one of the five best planned subdivisions in the United States. Today Tanglewood boasts over 1,220 residential lots. He also was known for developing the Fairmont Park subdivisions and the Post Oak Shopping Center.

Farrington was a member of St. John the Divine Episcopal Church. He was an affiliate of many Houston area organizations including the Institute of Religion in the Texas Medical Center, St. Luke's Hospital, Rice University, University of Houston, the Houston Symphony Society, Houston Grand Opera Association, and the Kiwanis Club of Houston. He served as a director of several Houston area banks and savings and loan associations. He was also active in civic affairs, serving on the Houston School Board.

Farrington was married to Bernice Brunson of Anadarko, Oklahoma. He had one daughter, Mary Catherine, and four grandchildren. He died in Houston on November 30, 1967.

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

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(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 Tomlinson House contains 4,555 square feet of living space and is sited facing west on 12,378 square foot lot. The Georgian style home is faced with red whitewashed brick, under a side facing gable roof of composite shingles. The front façade of the house contains a large entry in the center of the house and windows to either side. The identifying detail of the house is its heavily carved entry, uniquely suited to the owner of a lumber company. To the north of the house, an addition has been placed to the rear of the north (side) façade. There is no ornament on this addition that faces the street.

The central entry consists of a large, segmental pediment and pilasters framing a recessed doorway with a double door. The door is glass and wood paneled. The interior of the recessed entry is framed with wood paneled molding. Heavily ornamented pilasters frame the entry. The pediment has an arched top with a broken pediment detail. A wooden relief of a basket of flowers decorates the pediment. Directly above the pediment is a second story, fixed-pane, 12 light wood window with elaborate wood molding. Carved, scrolled detailing connects the window framing to the pediment below. To either side of the front entrance are two, 6-over 9 wood sash windows with working shutters.

On the second story front façade, to either side of the central window are two 6-over-6 wood sash windows with working shutters. The windows extend to the roofline of the house. The roof slightly overhangs the front facade, and a wooden pediment with dentil molding details is placed under the overhanging roof. The roof is punctuated with three dormers of 6-over-6 wood sash windows with front gabled roofs, clad in wood siding. A tall brick chimney is placed in the center of the north façade.

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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.

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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 |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|----------------------|---------------------|
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- (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;
- (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;
- (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)).

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Tomlinson-Blundell House at 2187 Troon Road.

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EXHIBIT A

Tomlinson-Blundell House

2187 Troon Road



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EXHIBIT B

SITE LOCATION MAP

Tomlinson-Blundell House

2187 Troon Road

NOT TO SCALE

