

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: William H. and Florence Skipwith House
OWNERS: Eric and Kerry Sandberg
APPLICANTS: Same
LOCATION: 2155 Chilton Road – River Oaks

AGENDA ITEM: III.A
HPO FILE NO: 13L281
DATE ACCEPTED: 06/19/2013
HAHC HEARING: 07/17/2013

SITE INFORMATION

Lot 2, Block 51, River Oaks Section 3, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic two-story, brick single family residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The William H. and Florence Skipwith House was built by residential contractor T.J. Portele in 1941 for the Skipwith family. Skipwith was associated with the South Texas Lumber Company, West Mortgage Co., and West Securities Co. The house is located at 2155 Chilton Road in River Oaks and is designed in a simple Colonial style.

The William H. and Florence Skipwith House meets criteria 1, 4, and 6 for Landmark Designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

William H. Skipwith

William Harvey Skipwith was born on September 9, 1895, in Texas, and he grew up in Houston. His father was a switchman at the railroad for many years before opening a grocery store on Summer Street in 1911. His mother and father ran the store until their deaths in the early 1920s. Skipwith went to work at age 17; he is listed in the 1912 Houston City Directory as a carrier for the Houston Chronicle. The next year he was a delivery clerk for the Houston Post. By 1917, he had joined the South Texas Lumber Company as a clerk. By the time the house was built in 1941, he was the Secretary of the South Texas Lumber Company, West Mortgage Co., and West Securities Co. He stayed at West until his death on March 6, 1955.

Florence Worley Skipwith

Florence Worley Skipwith was born March 16, 1896, in Connecticut, but she spent her early years in Houston. She was a Rice Institute graduate from the Class of 1918. Her father was a foreman at a plate glass company. Her sister Margaret also graduated from Rice Institute. After graduation, Florence went to work as a stenographer at the South Texas Lumber Company. She and William must have met there, and they were married in 1922 or 1923. She died June 27, 1977.

The Skipwiths' planning of their new home in River Oaks was profiled by the Houston Post on February 2, 1941, in an article titled "Home Begun for W.H. Skipworth (sic)":

A two-story eight-room brick veneer home is being built at 2143 (sic) Chilton road in River Oaks by Mr. and Mrs. W.H. Skipworth (sic) which is to cost

approximately \$9500. Mr. Skipworth (sic) is connected with the West Securities company.

The downstairs floor plan will include a living room, dining room, powder room, kitchen and screened porch. A huge fireplace will be centered in the living room. Sheetrock is to be used in wall construction throughout the house.

Entrance to three large bedrooms and two baths upstairs will be by a circle staircase leading from the central hallway below. The roof will be of wood shingles.

A one and one-half story frame two-car garage will be built in back of the residence. The contractor is T.J. Portele.

The Skipwiths' arrival in River Oaks was also listed in the River Oaks Magazine:

Mr. and Mrs. W.H. Skipwith have built their new home at 2153 (sic) Chilton Road in Colonial style. It is of sparkling white brick and has elaborately beautiful iron grille work at the entrance stoop. Dark red roof and shutters, and awning to the spacious screened living porch, add dignity and color. An open deck over the living porch is a nice feature. William H. Skipwith, Jr., known more familiarly as "Billy", is a sophomore at Rice Institute. Marilyn, age 12, is a student at Lanier. Mr. Skipwith is Secretary-Treasurer of the West Securities Company.

The Skipwith family stayed in the home for a few years after Mr. Skipwith's death in 1955.

Subsequent Owners

Subsequent owners of 2155 Chilton include Edwin D. and Mary Adams, who purchased the house in 1959 and owned it until 1988. Edwin was an attorney at Vinson, Elkins, Weems and Searles. He died December 8, 1969. Mary Adams remained in the house until 1988. The house has since been owned by Robert Skinner (1988-2002), Jeffrey Thompson (2002-2003), Robert Shelton and John Brothers (2003-2005), and David and Paige Rockecharlie. The current owners purchased the home in 2009.

T.J. Portele

Theodore John Portele was born in Marlin, Texas, in 1897. He was the son of Austrian immigrants. His father worked in construction and co-owned Portele Bros. construction with his brother. They were active in the German-American social community in Marlin. Portele, according to Census Records, stopped school after the eighth grade. By 1918, he was working for his father in construction. By 1920, he had moved to Houston where he is listed as a contractor. He continued in the contracting business for the entirety of his working career. He died August 23, 1981.

In River Oaks, Portele was the contractor for 2112 Brentwood (Nov 1934), 3209 Ella Lee Lane (Apr 1936), and 2212 Looscan Lane (May 1936). Cameron Fairchild was the architect for all three of these projects. Of these, only 3209 Ella Lee Lane has been demolished. 2112 Brentwood is a City of Houston Historic Landmark.

Among the other Portele projects listed in the Texas General Contractors Bulletin from the 1930s are:

- Dr. B.F. Smith residence on S. Chelsea, July 1930, unknown
- Dr. H.I. Bartlett residence at 1602 Waugh, October 1932, *demolished*
- Dr. A. Mitchell office and residence addition, 3820 Fannin Drive, July 1933, *demolished*
- Dr. Byron P. York residence, 2501 N. MacGregor, June 1934, *demolished for freeway*
- Apartments, 2504 St. Emanuel, November 1936, *extant*.

In addition, Mr. Portele constructed yet another project for Cameron Fairchild, a duplex at 2201 Welch for Mrs. Jeff Farish in 1938. This building is still standing and is eligible for listing as a city historic landmark.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The house at 2155 Chilton faces northwest on a 10,987 square foot lot. The 3-bay wide, two-story, brick faced, Colonial style house with 1940s elements is rectangular in shape and contains 3,843 square feet. The structure is topped by a side facing gable roof.

The entry is located in the central bay of the façade and features a glass and wood framed door flanked by sidelites. Several brick steps lead to the front entry door which is topped by a metal canopy supported by decorative iron columns. Centered on the second floor, above the metal canopy, is an 8-over-8 wood sash window.

The first floor of the flanking bays are symmetric and each features a large 12-over-12 wood sash window with a shallow arched top. These windows feature arched shutters. The second floor of the flanking bays are also symmetric and feature 8-over-8 wood sash windows centered over the first floor windows. These windows also have shutters. The windows on the second floor abut an entablature that runs around the house below the roof. The roofline slightly overhangs the front façade. Two brick chimney frame each end of the house.

The house has been extensively remodeled, including the restoration of the lime wash brick covering, which had been removed by previous owners.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

City Directories
River Oaks Magazine
Various resources from Ancestry.com

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

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:

EXHIBIT A

PHOTO

William H. and Florence Skipwith House
2155 Chilton Road



CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

EXHIBIT B

SITE LOCATION MAP

William H. and Florence Skipwith House

2155 Chilton Road

