

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Fire Station No. 2

OWNER: Michael Skelly

APPLICANT: Peter Muessig, Metalab Studio

LOCATION: 317 Sampson Street – Second Ward

AGENDA ITEM: IV

HPO FILE NO.: 14L290

DATE ACCEPTED: Dec-26-2013

HAHC HEARING DATE: Jan-16-2013

SITE INFORMATION

Lots 6 and 7, Block 605, Ranger SSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic two-story, brick fire station.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

Built in 1910, Fire Station No. 2 is a brick, two-story structure on a corner lot bordered by Sampson and Preston Streets. At 5,300 square feet, Fire Station No. 2 is similar in size to the other fire stations that were built in Houston in the early 1900s. There is evidence that this structure may have been designed by Houston architect Olle J. Lorehn (1864-1939). Lorehn designed several other fire stations circa 1900, as well as a number of other prominent Houston buildings from the early 1900s, including the Dakota Lofts and the former Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral. The cast-concrete rustication, the proportions of the brick arched openings, and the layout of the symmetrical facade of Fire Station No. 2 are all characteristic of Olle Lorehn's other work of the period.

The building at 317 Sampson was used as a fire station until 1983, when it was sold by the city to a private owner. The building has been vacant for the last 30 years but is now being renovated by a new owner as a single residence. Fire Station No. 2 meets criteria 1, 4, 5, and 8 for Landmark Designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Company No. 2 was one of the three original, volunteer fire companies in Houston during the late 1800s. The company was first organized in 1852 as Liberty No. 2, an all-volunteer company. In 1856, Liberty No. 2 became the first fire company to have a steam engine, purchased by a group of businessmen and stored on Franklin Street between Travis and Milam.¹ The construction of Engine House No. 2 marks the transition of Houston's fire department from a loosely structured volunteer effort, housed primarily in converted private residences, into a salaried organization that was trained, equipped, and maintained by the City of Houston through taxes and private funding.

Company No. 2 had its first engine house built in 1910 at 317 Sampson Street. The Report of the Fire Committee in the *Illustrated City Book of Houston* [1909] states “the contract has been let

¹ Information synthesized from both the houstofiremuseum.org and [http://www.houston.tx.gov/fire/history/#THE ORIGINAL STATIONS](http://www.houston.tx.gov/fire/history/#THE_ORIGINAL_STATIONS) 1 – 28

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and work begun on the engine house at the corner of Sampson Street and Preston Avenue, to be known as Engine House No. 2. This will be a very handsome structure and when completed and fully equipped will prove of great value to that fast growing portion of our city.”² The Chief of the Fire Department noted the new addition "with much interest that the new fire station for the lower part of the Second and Third Wards is now under construction, and when this house is completed and equipped it will be of great benefit to the people in that locality in the increased efficiency of the department."³ The City Engineer noted the original construction cost of the Station as \$8,000.⁴

Upon completion, the Report of the Fire Committee, dated March 1, 1911, cites the station as a noteworthy contribution to the City of Houston. It reads "Engine House No. 2, at the corner of Preston and Sampson Streets, has been completed and fully equipped with apparatus and men. This is a handsome structure, up-to-date in every respect, and is of great value to that portion of the city." By 1914, the Report of the Fire Commissioner detailed that Engine House No. 2 was equipped with [1] house and lot, [1] fourth size Metropolitan Steamer and equipment, [1] combination hose wagon and equipment, [4] first class horses, [4] sets of harness, [2050 feet] of cotton, rubber-lined fire hose, [150 feet] of chemical hose, house furnishings and furniture, a heater stove for the house, as well as coal, feed, and other miscellaneous supplies and tools. A six-man crew managed the hose wagon; a three man crew managed the steamer. All men ranged in age from 21–56 and were American, German, and Irish.⁵

Company No. 2 remained at 317 Sampson Street until moving to Bagby and Capital in 1926. After Company No. 2's departure, Company No.17 took residence at 317 Sampson, remaining at this location until 1983. At this point, the Company moved to a new facility that could accommodate the growing size and service requirements of the current firefighting equipment, primarily the new engines and ladder trucks.

Olle J. Lorehn

There is evidence that Fire Station No. 2 was a design of Houston architect Olle J. Lorehn (1864-1939). Olle Lorehn is known to have been commissioned to design several other fire stations including Fire Station No. 7 (1899), Fire Station No. 9 (1899) (demolished) and the old Central Fire Station (1903) (demolished). In addition to these fire stations, Olle Lorehn is responsible for the design of a number of Houston's other prominent civic buildings from the early 1900s, including the 1903 Palace Hotel at 216 LaBranch Street (aka 1417 Congress Street), the 1911 James Bute Paint Factory Warehouse (aka Dakota Lofts) at 711 William Street, and the former Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral at 1111 Pierce Street built in 1912. No original drawings or documents have been found that attribute Engine House No. 2 to Olle Lorehn, but there is a remarkable similarity in the design of the station's facade with that of other fire stations know to be the work of Olle Lorhen. While there are slight variations in the styling, the cast-concrete rustication, the proportions of the brick arched openings and the layout of the symmetrical facade are all characteristic of Olle Lorhen's other work of the period.

² Illustrated City Book of Houston: 1909, page 51.

³ Ibid, page 55.

⁴ Ibid, page 115.

⁵ Illustrated City Book of Houston: 1914, page 139.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

On the exterior of Fire Station No. 2, the base of the load-bearing masonry wall is faced in three foot high, rusticated cast-concrete, wrapping the entire perimeter. The dominate brick color is a light orange-red, with the brick arches consisting of a yellow brick, which has been painted white since the stations original construction. The main elevation is sited on Sampson Street, facing south west. The lower story of the Sampson elevation is punctuated by two wagon/garage entries with smaller, arched windows to either side. The upper story has three large arched windows, bookended by two smaller, arched windows that maintain the symmetry of the openings on the lower floor.

The Preston Street elevation is a narrower, secondary facade, situated on a side street. It lacks the grand archways of the wagon doors or large windows, but maintains the ornament, detail, and symmetry of the Sampson elevation. A parapet wraps three sides of the fire station. Decorative corbelling traces the profile of the parapet around its entire perimeter. The Sampson Street facade has a tall brick pediment centered above the wagon doors, reinforcing the symmetry of the elevation. The parapet at the Preston Street facade is plain and maintains a consistent height, concealing the minimal slope of the roof behind it. At the short, north facing facade the parapet steps with the roof slope, maintaining a the visual cues as to which are the prominent and more formal facades and are of less importance.

The other two facades face the station yard and are more modest in their styling and construction. There is more variety in the window sizes and placement, as they accommodate the interior program, rather than maintaining the formal street presence of the Sampson or Preston facades. Bathrooms, bunk rooms, and stair landings drive the layout and sizes of these openings. Two more wagon doors, on the rear facade, open out into the yard, aligning with those on the Sampson facade. These doors open up onto a brick court in the rear yard. Paving brick extends from the base of the rear facade, across the entire yard. This brick has been covered with a thin layer of asphalt at a later point, but appears to be in good shape where it is showing through. At the north east corner of the station, an eight foot square, concrete pad was built to support a radio tower. The tower has been removed, but the concrete base remains intact.

The ground floor housed the wagons, horses, pump equipment, hoses, and other major firefighting equipment. The height of this open ground floor (just over fourteen feet tall) was used to hang much of the hose lengths and other equipment overhead, for maintenance and storage. A central column line carries a deep wooden beam, creating long clear spans and an open floor plan that could accommodate the coming and going of large equipment and facilitate the rapid organization and response to local emergency calls. The upper level housed the station crew's quarters. Offices, a bunk room, showers, a kitchen, and common living space provided generous accommodations to the new salaried, on-duty fire fighters that was unheard of in the smaller converted residential facilities of the volunteer forces. Throughout the interior, the outer walls were finished in a thick painted plaster and partition walls and ceilings were finished with painted bead-board.

The city sold the property to a private owner in 1983, and the building has sat vacant and unused since then. Its condition has deteriorated, but overall the building remains sound. Of note are the major cracks forming in the building's short facades, which lack any tie back or tensioning system. The original window frames and casings have either been removed, or have been

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damaged beyond repair, but are intact enough to suggest their original detailing. The wagon doors have all been replaced with no evidence of their original design. The roof has failed in several locations due to normal weathering, causing localized water damage in the roof structure and can be repaired. Overall, the condition of Fire Station No. 2 is sound and can reasonably be restored to near original condition.

In 2013 the station and its property were purchased by a new private owner with the intention of restoring the exterior of the building to its original design and condition. The interior will be converted into a residence and will maintain the structure's original character.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Information synthesized from both the [houstonfiremuseum.org](http://www.houstonfiremuseum.org) and [http://www.houstontx.gov/fire/history/#THE ORIGINAL STATIONS](http://www.houstontx.gov/fire/history/#THE_ORIGINAL_STATIONS) 1 – 28
- Illustrated City Book of Houston: 1909.
- Illustrated City Book of Houston: 1914.

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

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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 |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| <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; | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (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; | | | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; | | | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (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; | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present; | | | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (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 Fire Station No. 2 at 317 Sampson Street.

HAHC RECOMMENDATION

The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends to City Council the Landmark Designation of Fire Station No. 2 at 317 Sampson Street.

EXHIBIT A
CURRENT PHOTOS
FIRE STATION NO. 2
317 SAMPSON STREET



West (front) and North Elevations

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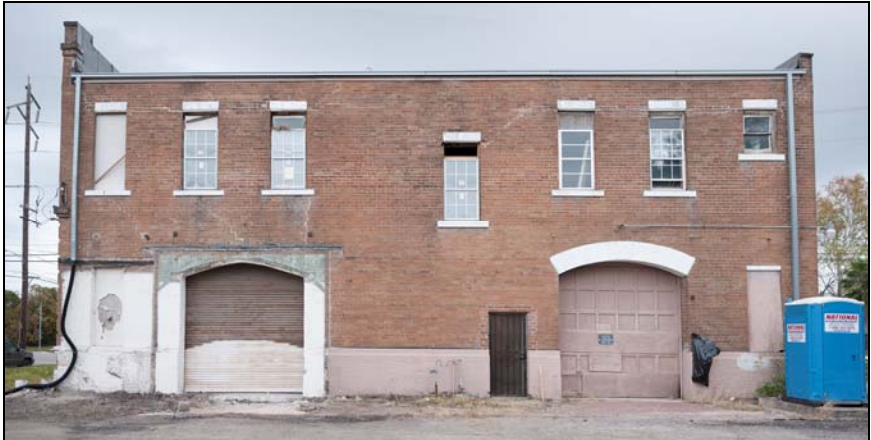
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South Elevation



North Elevation



East (rear) Elevation

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EXHIBIT B
HISTORIC PHOTOS
FIRE STATION No. 2
317 SAMPSON STREET



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Station 2 Crew — 1910



Station 17 Crew — 1928



Station 17 Crew — before 1923

Scott Mellott Houston Fire Department Collection
Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries



Station 17 Crew — 1942

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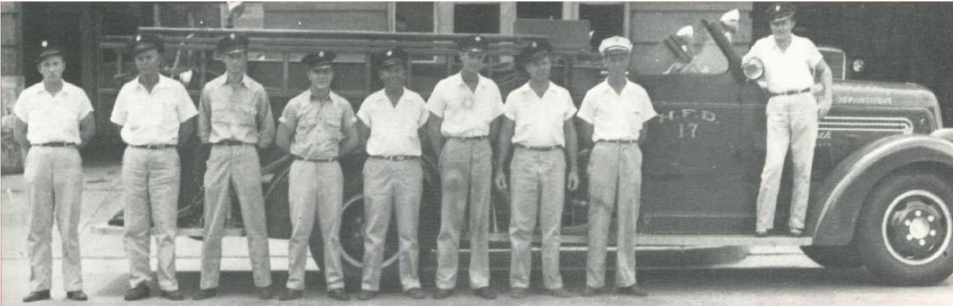
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Station 17 Pumper — 1944

Photograph taken in 1944 of Fire Station 17, located at 319 Sampson. The fire fighter on the far right is Buster Green very early in his career when he was 17 years old. The man to the left of Buster Green is C.K. Richmond.
Scott Mellott Houston Fire Department Collection
Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries



Station 17 Crew — 1949



Station 17 — 1955

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Station 17 — 1970

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Station 17 — early 1970s



Station 17 — 1976

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EXHIBIT C
SITE MAP
FIRE STATION No. 2
317 SAMPSON STREET

