

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT
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LANDMARK NAME: Phyllis Palmer and William T. Price House**OWNER:** Phyllis Marie Price**APPLICANT:** Same as owner**LOCATION:** 1611 Bass Street**AGENDA ITEM:** C.2**HPO FILE NO.:** 16PL128**DATE ACCEPTED:** Dec-29-2015**HAHC HEARING:** May-19-2016**SITE INFORMATION**

Tract 9, Sessums Tract, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site contains a historic one-story, gable roofed, wood framed house in the Craftsman Bungalow style, on a 5,000 square foot lot.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Protected Landmark Designation**HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY**

The Phyllis Palmer and William T. Price House at 1611 Bass Street (previously known as Jackson or Leverkusuh Street) is a late example of a Craftsman Bungalow. The Price House was designed and built c. 1947-1951 by Mr. Price for his wife and their 15 children. Mrs. Palmer is a native of Houston and the late William Price was from Beaumont, Texas. Phyllis Palmer and her three sisters performed as the Palmer Sisters Quartette, a musical group that sang at various community and church functions around the city as well as in the home of Joseph and Abraham Weingarten of the Weingarten's grocery store chain.

The Price House is located in the Sessums Tract, a historic enclave of African-American residents north of Washington Ave and west of Yale Street, which developed as a residential neighborhood between 1892 and 1960, with most of the homes in this section constructed in the decade immediately following WWII. The Sessums Tract has undergone significant redevelopment in recent years, including the construction of Interstate 10 in the 1960s, new apartments, townhouses, and most recently, a shopping complex directly across the street to the east. The Price House is now one of the last remaining historic homes in the Sessums Tract.

The Phyllis Palmer and William Price House at 1611 Bass Street meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, and 5 for Protected Landmark designation of Section 33-224 of the City of Houston Code of Ordinances.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE*Phyllis Palmer Price and William T. Price*

Phyllis Marie (Palmer) Price was born October 10, 1922, in Houston, Texas, and is the oldest of five children. Her father, William Alfred Palmer, worked as a truck driver for a bakery and a laundry, and also as a chauffeur; her mother, Richard Estelle ("Aura") (Somerville) Palmer, was a stay at home mother. William and Estelle owned their home at 3507 Cobb Street, near Jack Yates High School and Texas Southern University. In 1929, the Palmer family lived in the Third Ward at the Cobb Street home (in 1929 Cobb Street was identified as Sampson Street).¹ In 1937, the Palmer family moved to

¹ Houston City Directory, 1929, page 1395.

Beaumont, Texas, for a short time, but moved back to the Houston house on Cobb Street in time for Phyllis to graduate from Jack Yates High School on June 4, 1942.^{3,4}

Phyllis had a colorful background in the realm of music, through her career as a singer. Her mother loved music and gave her daughters piano and voice lessons. Phyllis and her three sisters, Ruth Virginia, Willie Beatrice, and Ellen Alfreda, performed as the Palmer Sisters Quartette. The sisters soon gained recognition and started to perform at local functions. Every Sunday, the Palmer Sisters Quartette devoted their talented voices to St. John Baptist Church at 2222 Gray Street.⁶ Ellen was lead (soprano), Phyllis sang alto, Willie sang tenor, and Ruth sang bass while accompanying them on the piano.

The Palmer Sisters Quartette performed at numerous engagements such as the Tejan Choral Club in Tyler, Texas, and the Third Ward Civic Club. Joseph and Abraham Weingarten would frequently invite the Palmer Sisters Quartette to dine with them before performances at their home. The two brothers were heirs of the Weingarten's grocery store chain in Houston, Texas. It became a tradition that the Palmer sisters would entertain the Weingarten brothers. The quartette would also sing at the Weingarten's Annual Picnic.

Phyllis attended Texas College, where she sang as a soloist and with the Texas College Choir. She made local appearances at different church and civic organizations that served whites and African Americans in Tyler, Texas.⁸ Phyllis Palmer auditioned for the Marian Anderson Scholarship Program in Washington, DC, three times, including in the program's inaugural year in 1943.⁹ In December 1946, she sang at the Mile O'Dimes Program on Main Street in Houston at the request of Edna W. Saunders, who at the time was a promoter of World Renowned Music Artists Programs. Phyllis married William Price in 1947 and became a stay at home mother.

On May 3, 1950, Phyllis gave a recital of classical and liturgical music at the Holman Street Baptist Church, accompanied on piano by Moses Flood. The printed program for the event included a short biography of Mrs. Price and indicated that she planned to resume her study of music and voice in the fall of that year. According to Phyllis' daughter, Laureetha Price, she never went back and graduated from college.

William Tevis Price was born on August 22, 1908, in Beaumont, Texas, to Jack and Augusta (Bell) Price; both were from San Augustine, Texas.¹⁰ William Price was the youngest of eleven children. William Price left Beaumont with his sister when he was 19 years old, after his father had passed away in 1927. When he arrived in Houston, William Price found work as a landscaper.

Mr. and Mrs. Price purchased the property at 1611 Bass Street in 1947 from Tony and Josephine Civello (Sirvello).¹¹ Mr. Price's children state that he designed and built the house from the ground up, with some assistance from others in the neighborhood. William and Phyllis raised their 15 children in the 908

³ Beaumont City Directory, 1937, page 308

⁴ Information provided by Price Family.

⁶ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ancestry.com. U.S., Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936-2007 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2015.

¹¹ Harris County Deed Records, Volume 1594, Page 67, File Number 419448, 1947.

square foot 3 bedroom, 1 bath home. On August 21, 1999, Mr. Price, at the age of 90, passed away in Houston.¹² Phyllis Palmer still resides at the house.

Sessums Tract and Property History

The first recorded ownership of the land on which the neighborhood was developed was a Mexican land grant to John Austin recorded on July 20th, 1824. He had come to Texas in 1819 from Connecticut when the area was a northern province of Mexico, ruled by Spain. Mexico declared independence from Spain on August 24, 1821 and by 1822 John Austin had journeyed to Mexico City to petition the new government for the right to settle in Texas. While in Mexico City, John Austin met the newly arrived Stephen F. Austin. The two men began a friendship that lasted the rest of John Austin's brief life. The men received permission to claim land in Texas, provided that they established homes there. In April, 1823, they traveled together to Texas where they settled. By 1824, John Austin had settled and claimed his "two league grant," an area of approximately 36 square miles that included what would become downtown Houston and the greater Heights area. Over the years, this Two League Grant was divided and sold, with that same parcel of land becoming first part of the Hollingsworth Survey, and then later part of the Bingham Tract. In 1892, John and Annie Sessums bought 14 acres of land which is now known as the Sessums Tract. John Sessums was a skilled carpenter and also a founding member and leader of Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church, one of the earliest African-American churches and congregations in Houston.¹³ In 1892, John and Annie sold two acres in the southwest corner of the tract to their son, Alexander Sessums.¹⁴

The Sessums family retained the entire 14 acres until 1906, when Alexander Sessums sold two lots in the north corner of the two acres to John and Katy Koontz.¹⁶ John Koontz, an African American who worked as a depot porter for Wells Fargo & Company,¹⁷ and later as a teamster (wagon driver),¹⁸ lived elsewhere;¹⁹ how he used the two-acre parcel is unknown. A widower by 1910, Koontz sold the Sessums Tract lot to Tom and Jane Williams on April 18, 1910,²⁰ and bought his own home at 2905 Tennyson Street in the Third Ward.²¹

By 1922, the Williamses had sold the lot to the William A. Wilson Realty Company. Offering "Homes on Easy Payments," the Wilson Realty Co. is probably best known for developing the Houston subdivisions of Woodland Heights in 1910 and Eastwood in 1911. In 1922, the Wilson Realty Co. sold one of those properties to Dan Jones,²⁴ but Jones lost the property due to unpaid taxes and the Wilson Realty Co. bought it back at a sheriff's sale. Jones recovered the property by 1926, when he sold it to Tony and Josephine Civello (Sirvello). The Houston City Directory in 1937 showed only two houses at 1607 and 1609 on Bass Street.²⁵ Civello was a local grocer²⁶ and may have used the lot to grow produce

¹² Ibid Ancestry.com

¹³ John Sessums House, National Register

¹⁴ Harris County Deed Records, Volume 68, Page 179, File Number 32538, 1892.

¹⁶ Harris County Deed Records, Volume 522, Page 134, File Number 38870, July 9, 1906

¹⁷ 1903-1904 Houston City Directory(Houston: Morrison & Fourmy Directory Co., 1903), page 269

¹⁸ 1905-1906 Houston City Directory(Houston: Morrison & Fourmy Directory Co., 1903), page 249

¹⁹ According to city directories, John Koontz lived in the home of William Koontz at 1404 Crosby Street from 1900-1905

²⁰ Harris County Deed Records, Volume 280, Page 146, File Number 92417, 1910.

²¹ 1910 U.S. Census, Houston, Harris County, Texas, enumeration district 97, sheet 8.

²⁴ Harris County Deed Records, Volume 501, Page 183, File Number 84401, 1922.

²⁵ Houston City Directory, 1937-38

²⁶ Houston City Directory, 1929

for his grocery store. Mrs. Civello died in 1930 and after Tony Civello's death in 1947, Mike Catrone, the husband of their daughter Rose, filed an affidavit of heirship of the land. In 1947, the Civello children and their spouses sold the lot to William and Phyllis Price.²⁷ By this time there were five addresses on Bass Street, one was vacant and the other four had homes built on their lots.²⁸ According to the 1951 Houston City Directory, William and Phyllis lived at 3503-1/2 Holman Street for some period of time; it was not until 1952 that they appeared in the Houston City Directory living at 1611 Bass Street. At this time Bass Street had seven homes on the street, including the Price House.

The Sessums Tract remained an African American neighborhood as new families moved in and new homes were built. Over the years new construction has encroached into the Sessums Tract. The construction of Interstate 10 in the 1960s, ripped through Sessums Tract and Alexander's two-acres, eliminating lots 12, 13, 14, 15 and part of 16 (Refer to Exhibit D). In the past five years, new apartment complexes, townhouses, and a shopping center have been built around the Price House. The building of the shopping center ended in the result of two National Register properties being demolished; the Sessums-James House at 3802 Spencer and the Morris and Mary Johnson House at 3818 Spencer Street. Of the original two-acres that Alexander Sessums purchased, there are only four historic homes left, they were built ranging from the 1930s-1960s. The Price house is the only historic home left on Bass Street as it sits between a three-story townhouse complex to its south and Interstate 10 to its north.

Craftsman Bungalow

The Craftsman Bungalow style was the dominant style for smaller houses built throughout the country during the early 1900s as the United States was starting to abandon the Queen Anne and other architectural styles of the Victorian era. Between 1905 and 1925, the bungalow became one of the predominant house forms in Houston's suburban neighborhoods. The rise in popularity of this style in Houston actually reflected a nationwide movement, which started in the Western United States and moved to the East. The bungalow became the perfect speculative house for the nation's new suburban cities. Well-suited for warm climate, practical and economical, the bungalow met the needs of young families and first-time home buyers.

Two California architects, Charles Sumner Greene and Henry Mather Greene, are often credited with inspiring America to build Craftsman Bungalows. The style quickly spread due to the widespread publication of house plans in pattern books and popular magazines. The plan became one of the most popular in American building history. It was promoted by such popular companies as Montgomery Ward and the Sears Roebuck and Co. Catalog. At the time, these companies were only selling house plans which could be purchased from \$8 to \$12. It was not until 1906, when the Aladdin Company of Bay City, Michigan, started to offer complete kits. All the building components (pre-cut lumber, nails, doors, and plumbing) were delivered to the construction site, where builders erected the homes according to the kit instructions. This practice quickly made the bungalow style universal.

The bungalow fit neatly on the standard 50-foot by 100-foot lots found in neighborhoods throughout Houston. More importantly, the bungalow floor plan accommodated Houston's hot humid climate by providing natural ventilation with air freely circulating from one room to another. Typically the homes were built on a 2-3 foot high raised-pier foundation, which allowed air to circulate underneath the house

²⁷ Harris County Deed Records, Volume 1594, Page 67, File Number 41998, 1947.

²⁸ Houston City Directory, 1948

as well. Attics provided insulation between the interior and the roof. In addition, the wide overhanging eaves shaded rooms from the sun, while the covered front porch served as additional outdoor living space.²⁹ By the mid-1920s, the bungalow style had declined in popularity and relatively few were built after 1930. Built c. 1947-1951, the Price House is a late example of a Craftsman Bungalow.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The modest one-story wood framed Craftsman Bungalow is situated on the corner of Bass Street and Katy Freeway Service Road. The house is two rooms deep, with 908 square feet of living space, 3 bedrooms, and 1 bathroom. The house has a gabled jerkinhead roof on the front, with board and batten detailing, a front porch and a hipped roof on the rear, with exposed rafter tails throughout the entire roof. The house appears to have a later addition at the rear; it is unclear when this addition was added. The house has all original features such as windows, floor plan, and 105 wood siding.

East Elevation

The front elevation faces east on Bass Street. The façade has a wooden porch that spans almost the entire width of the house and is topped with a gabled jerkinhead roof. The porch roof is supported by two square, nearly full-height, concrete-capped brick pillars topped with short ornamental metal supports. Typically, the ornamental metal supports might have been added to a craftsman porch as a later alteration to replace original materials, however, due to the later construction date of this house, the ornamental metal could be an original feature. The porch steps are flanked by two concrete capped square brick pillars which are approximately two to three feet in height.

The façade features a gabled jerkinhead roof, and is sided with white painted wood clapboard and consists of two bays. The south bay has two 1-over-1 single hung wood framed windows, with awning weather screens. The north bay has one door opening with a metal non-historic door. Directly next to the main entrance door is one window opening with a 1-over-1 wood framed window.

North Elevation

The north elevation is parallel to the Katy Freeway Service Road, along Interstate Highway 10 and consists of three bays. This elevation is sided with white painted wood clapboard. The east bay has two window openings with two 1-over-1 single hung wood framed windows. The middle bay has a bay window with two 1-over-1 single hung wood framed windows. Directly above the window openings on the bay is a louvered attic vent screen. The bay window is topped with a jerkinhead style roof. The west bay has one window opening with a 1-over-1 single hung wood framed window.

South Elevation

The south elevation consists of three bays. The west and east bays are identical, both have two window openings with two 1-over-1 single hung wood framed windows. The center bay has one window opening with a fixed window.

²⁹ Stern, William F, *The Lure of the Bungalow*, Houston. Rice Design Alliance, 1986.

Renovations

It appears that a later addition has been added to the rear of the residence at an unknown date. The lower pitch of that section of the roof may indicate that it was tied into the original roof at a later date and is part of an addition.

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

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Information provided by Catherine (Price) Gentry, daughter of William and Phyllis Price.

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 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. 33-224(a)(1):

- (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.
- (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 Protected Landmark Designation of the Phyllis Palmer and William T. Price House at 1611 Bass Street.

HAHC RECOMMENDATION

The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends to City Council the Protected Landmark Designation of the Phyllis Palmer and William T. Price House at 1611 Bass Street.

EXHIBIT A
CURRENT PHOTOS
THE WILLIAM AND PHYLLIS PRICE HOUSE
1611 BASS STREET



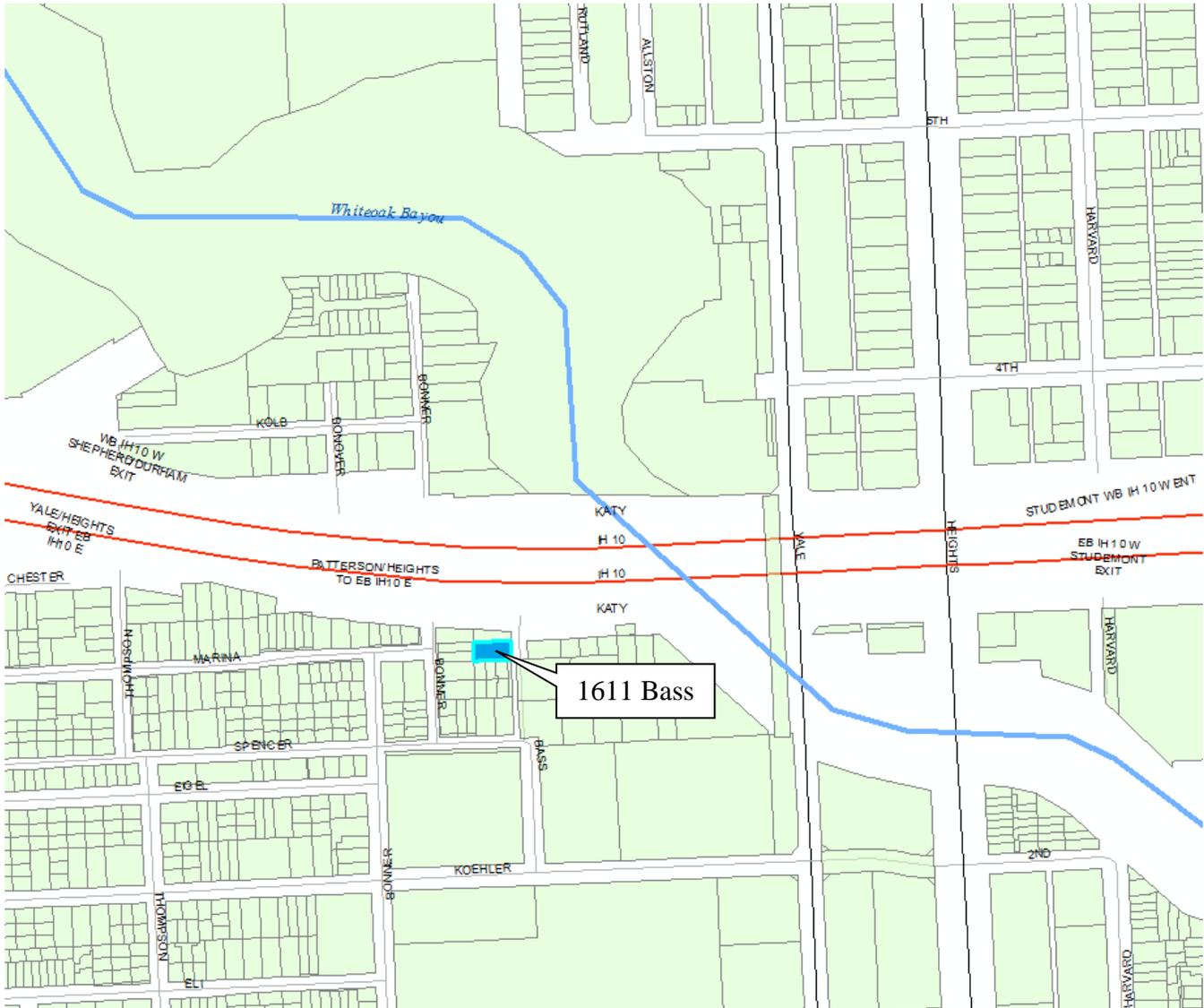
East façade facing west on Bass St.
Photos by Cory Johnson, City of Houston.

EXHIBIT A
CURRENT PHOTOS
THE WILLIAM AND PHYLLIS PRICE HOUSE
1611 BASS STREET



North façade facing south on Katy Freeway Service Road.
Photos by Cory Johnson, City of Houston.

EXHIBIT B
SITE MAP
THE WILLIAM AND PHYLLIS PRICE HOUSE
1611 BASS STREET



CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

EXHIBIT C SANBORN FIRE INSURANCE MAPS 1951 THE WILLIAM AND PHYLLIS PRICE HOUSE 1611 BASS STREET

