

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME: Phillip M. Helfrich House

Owner: Harry and Diane Gendel

APPLICANT: Harry and Diane Gendel

LOCATION: 1807 Decatur Street – Old Sixth Ward Historic District

30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: Sept-6-99

AGENDA ITEM: IIIc

P.C. MEETING DATE:

HPO FILE NO.: 99L81

DATE ACCEPTED: Sept-01-99

HAHC HEARING DATE: 10-7-99

SITE INFORMATION

Lot 12 and the east 47' of Lot 13, Block 443, W. R. Baker Addition, NSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The structure on the site is a one-story building with a wraparound porch.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The Philip M. Helfrich House (originally located at 1812 State Street) exemplifies a type of house that is both historically and architecturally significant to the Old Sixth Ward Historic District, and the building reflects the culture and social standing of the people who settled in the area. While the house is characteristic of the type of houses found in the district, being similar in scale and materials, the Helfrich House is a unique and unusual example of a large, Bungalow style building for the neighborhood. The style resulted in efforts in 1924 to modify the house to reflect the current styling trends popular in the early twentieth-century while retaining some of its earlier elements of the Victorian-era. Those elements, some of which date to 1907 when the house was originally constructed, include paired or single, narrow windows with 2/2 lights, transom window above the front door, Victorian-era screen door ornamented with spindle work of the ball and stick type, and prominent, large wraparound porch. Elements exhibited of the bungalow style include a wide eave overhang, exposed rafter ends and wooden knee braces. The wraparound porch which is incorporated under the main roof, is the most distinguishable and unique feature of the house.

The house is within the Old Sixth Ward Historic District (National Register of Historic Places - January 23, 1978 and Historic District of the City of Houston - June 25, 1998). Originally part of the Fourth Ward until 1876, the district today contains the highest concentration of Victorian-era buildings in Houston and together with its early 20th century architecture, represents the oldest intact neighborhood in the city. The area maintains the feeling of a modest, self-contained neighborhood with its predominantly small 19th-century, one-story Victorian-era homes, and some early 20th-century bungalow houses. The neighborhood also contains fire stations, churches, small neighborhood businesses, corner stores, and a school.

Philip Matthew Helfrich was born in Spring Creek, Texas on May 24, 1862. He was the eighth child born to John Helfrich and Susan Maria Schwinn. On May 6, 1889, Philip married Margaret Mary Hock at St. Joseph's Church in Galveston, Texas. He had previously married Mollie Maria Busch in 1887. However, she died in 1888 in childbirth.

At the turn of the century, Phillip M. and Margaret Helfrich purchased "Lots Nos. Four (4) and Five (5), Block No. (441) Four hundred and forty one in the W.R. Baker Addition in the City of Houston." According to records, prior to buying the land and building their new home at 1812 State Street, the Helfrich family lived

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elsewhere in the same neighborhood. The family, including six of their nine surviving children (Joseph, Frederick, Bernard, Rosa, Philip Augustine, and Margaret), lived at 2118 Lubbock from 1897-1906. While living at the Lubbock Street address, Philip worked as a molder helper at the H & T C Railroad yards. The Helfrich family was a member of St. Joseph Church in the neighborhood.

By 1907, Philip M. Helfrich and his family resided at 1812 State Street. Benedict, Carl Joseph, and Louise Mary Helfrich were born in the house. At that time, he was assistant engineer at the City Water Works. He was also an avid gardener and was known in the neighborhood for his beautiful rose garden which included multiple varieties of antique roses. Apparently Margaret sold some of Philip's beautiful cut roses for extra money since the 1915-1917 City Directories listed her with a profession of florist or "cut flowers."

The home did not originally include indoor plumbing. Therefore, the bathroom facilities were outdoors in a "three-seat" shed. Since the original ell-shaped house was very small, the nine children shared a bedroom. Later in 1924 when the home was remodeled into the "new" stylish Bungalow style, an indoor bathroom was an important component of the addition. A city ordinance passed in the early 1920's required that all homes have indoor facilities. The shed was then converted into a storage facility. The family originally had running water in the home for cooking. There was a gas meter in the back of the house too. Family members have related that when they ran out of gas for heating or cooking, they just inserted a quarter in the meter at the back of the house.

The Helfrich family lived at 1812 State Street for over 45 years from 1907 to 1952. In 1942, Margaret took in boarders to make ends meet. Later she moved to the homes of her children where she lived until her death.

In 1952, the home at 1812 State Street was occupied by Calvin J. Langford, a construction worker, and his wife, Ruth. In the following years, there were many families (often multiple families) who resided at 1812 State Street. In the 1972 City Directory, the house was listed as 1812 and 1812 ½ State Street for the first time, indicating a duplex or multi-family residential building.

Members of the Helfrich family have made their mark in the city of Houston and in the nation.

- Joseph Helfrich was a violinist and also played the French horn. He was a musician in the Houston Symphony Orchestra in the early 1920's.
- Margaret Helfrich Westerman was the City Secretary for fifty years and assisted nine mayors at City Hall. There is a plaque which honors her in City Hall Annex Building. Also a street in Houston was named in her honor. In addition, the City Hall Annex Building at 900 Bagby Street was renamed the Westerman Building in her honor. She was featured in *Tempo Magazine* in the August 24, 1969 issue to celebrate her accomplishments for the city at the time of her retirement.
- Ella Rita Helfrich, wife of Carl, was the creator of the Tunnel of Fudge Cake, the most requested Pillsbury BAKE-OFF recipe in history. She also is credited with putting the Bundt pan on the map and inspiring a best selling cake mix. Helfrich was one of ten winners throughout the nation who were inducted into the Pillsbury BAKE-OFF Hall of Fame as a part of its 50th Anniversary. According to a prominent historian, The Tunnel of Fudge Cake has become "American folklore".

RESTORATION HISTORY/CURRENT CONDITION:

The Phillip M. Helfrich House is a large, one-story, wood frame cottage with a prominent front facing gable. First constructed in 1907, the house was remodeled in 1924 in the 20th-century Bungalow Style. Important exterior features include a large wraparound porch, tapered Craftsman style columns mounted on piers, and a

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wide, open eave overhang supported by wood knee braces. The front and side elevations feature large 2-over-2 double-hung windows. The middle room on the left side features a grouping of three 2-over-2 double-hung windows.

At the public hearing of the HAHC on May 14, 1999 the applicant requested and was granted approval of a certificate of appropriateness to relocate the building to its current site and to restore said building which included the placement of the house on pier and beam foundation of concrete block; restoring the original porch and windows; removal of the synthetic asbestos siding and restore the original clapboard wood siding; replacing an existing door at the rear of the wrapped porch with a window to match existing; install wheelchair access ramp to connect to existing porch at the rear (south elevation); ramp will feature a 1 ¼" tube railing attached to wall of house; construct steps to access porch from the west parking lot; new construction of an addition on the rear the same width as the historic building (south elevation) measuring 62' wide and 16' 6" in depth; the addition will be setback from the rear (south property line) 24' 2"; addition will be clad with siding to match existing; removing existing windows on the rear of the building and re-using them on the addition; new windows will match existing; construct a gable end roof with 5/12 pitch on the addition to the same pitch as the main building; soffit and fascia, exposed rafter ends, knee braces, trim and watertable to match original; painting the building; construction of cement sidewalk to main entry and along right-of-way; construct a concrete approach for drive 20' in width; construct gravel parking lot to west of building (approximately 43' 8" in width and same depth as lot (100'); existing trees in parking lot area will be preserved and appropriate apron area will be maintained around tree trunks.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION:

Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation of a Landmark.

(a) The HAHC and the commission, 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 D 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.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends landmark designation of the Phillip M. Helfrich House to the Houston Planning Commission as a landmark since the application complies with the applicable criteria.

SITE LOCATION MAP
PHILLIP M. HELFRICH HOUSE
1807 DECATUR STREET
NOT TO SCALE