

## PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** John C. Penn House

**OWNERS:** Dr. Natasha Afonso and Dr. Ravinder Legha

**APPLICANTS:** same

**LOCATION:** 428 Hawthorne Street, Houston, Texas 77006,  
Westmoreland Historic District

**AGENDA ITEM:** A

**HPO FILE NO.:** HP2022\_0019

**DATE ACCEPTED:** 1\_25\_2022

**HAHC HEARING:** 5\_19\_2022

**SITE INFORMATION:** Two-story single-family 3,130 square foot home built in 1906 on a 6,000 square foot lot. Lot 22, Block 1, Westmoreland Historic District.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Protected Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The John C. Penn House is a Queen Anne style, two-story clapboard home with a wrap-around porch built in 1906. It was one of the earliest homes built in Westmoreland by Russell Brown. John Penn, a prominent real estate broker, was the first owner of the house and lived there with his family until approximately 1914.

When the house was built in 1906, its address was 215 Hawthorne Street as shown on early Sanborn maps. In the early 1920s, Hawthorne Street was renumbered and the address of the Penn House became 428 Hawthorne.

The house is a contributing building in the City of Houston Westmoreland Historic District and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Westmoreland National Register Historic District.

The John C. Penn house meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6 for Landmark Designation and satisfies Criteria 1, 2 and 3 for Protected Landmark Designation.

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

#### *Montrose*

The J.C. Penn House is located in the Westmoreland Historic District, which is situated within Montrose. Montrose was conceived in 1910 and platted in September 1911 when prominent businessman and developer John Wiley Link and his Houston Land Corporation envisioned a “great residential addition” on land then occupied by dairy farms. J.W. Link named the area Montrose after the historic town in Scotland. In the original sales brochures Link advertised that, “Houston has to grow. Montrose is going to lead the procession.”

Link built his own home in the neighborhood at Montrose Boulevard and West Alabama Street. The Link-Lee Mansion, as it is known, is now part of the University of St. Thomas. It was built in a deliberately unique style, instead of one of the more commonly found styles in the neighborhood at the time: Bungalow, Prairie, Mission Revival, Colonial Revival and Queen Anne, as well as the most prevalent - Craftsman style.

One of the most prominent features of the Montrose addition was its four grand boulevards designed with esplanades - Lovett, Montrose, Yoakum and Audubon Place. J.W. Link hired the engineering and construction firm Stone & Webster, which had just completed construction of the interurban electric rail line between Houston and Galveston, to design the subdivision. Edward Teas, Sr., who later founded Teas Nursery, helped plan and landscape Montrose with thousands of shade and palm trees. Original deed restrictions required significant setbacks, limited the construction of fences and prohibited the operation of businesses within the interior of the neighborhood.

A streetcar, the Montrose Line, ran through the neighborhood and helped to shape it. An early advertisement in the *Houston Daily Post* described Montrose as “the most fashionable district of Houston...between Westmoreland and Main Street, the South End (streetcar) line passing through it. It is fifteen minutes ride from the center of the city. Cars run every seven minutes. It is convenient to two of the best schools in the city.” The intersection at Roseland and Branard (formerly West Main) was the terminus and turnaround for the Montrose Streetcar Line. On opening day, August 18, 1912, hundreds of Houstonians gathered to wait for a ride on the streetcar’s inaugural run. The car traveled north down Roseland Street, over to Hawthorne Street and then north again on Taft Street. The streetcar line was in operation for nearly twenty-five years. The last ride was on March 13, 1937. By 1940, there were no streetcars remaining in Houston.

#### *Westmoreland Historic District*

In 1900, the land that was to become the Westmoreland Addition was a forty-four acre expanse of open prairie. In August 1902, South End Land Company purchased and platted the land as a 12-block subdivision of Lot 22 of the original Obedience Smith Survey. It was planned as a “private place” neighborhood, and set the standard for many exclusive neighborhoods throughout Houston.

South End Land Company was founded in 1902 by W. W. Baldwin of Burlington, Iowa and was based in Des Moines County, Iowa. At this time, the Secretary of South End Land Company was Martin T. Baldwin and the Treasurer was J. E. Breed, both of Cook County, Illinois. In addition to being the president of South End Land Company, W. W. Baldwin was a lawyer and a railroad executive. He was president of the St. Louis, Keouk & Northwestern Railway and the Chicago, Burlington & Kansas City Railway. Under South End Land Company Mr. Baldwin later developed Westmoreland Farms on the southwest side of Houston in what is now Bellaire, Texas.

Julius Pitzman, an engineer from St. Louis, Missouri, was hired by W.W. Baldwin to plan Westmoreland. Pitzman was experienced in developing private neighborhoods in St. Louis. In order to represent the neighborhoods status, he planned a wide central street (Westmoreland Avenue) with an entrance of stone piers and street gates, and surfaced the streets with crushed oyster shells.

Many of the lots in Westmoreland were developed between 1903 and 1913. This initial wave of building saw many houses built in the late Victorian style, with Queen Anne styles dominating. There were also a number of houses built in the Craftsman and Prairie style. A second wave of development occurred after World War I, and many were built in the “Revival” styles – Colonial Revival, Classic Revival and Italian Renaissance.

Westmoreland became a historic district in 1997 and was recognized for its importance in the development of Houston between 1902 and 1943. Its innovative approach to community planning,

through the “private place” model, was applied to many subsequent subdivisions throughout the city. The neighborhood is also significant for its architecture and many notable residents, such as Walter J. Fondren (co-founder of the Humble Oil and Refining Company), Lyndon Baines Johnson (the 36<sup>th</sup> President of the United States) and Houston Mayor Annise Parker. The historic district includes most of the original Westmoreland Addition. It consists of six full blocks, two partial blocks and two partial long blocks including four streets that run east-west (Hawthorne, Emerson, Westmoreland and Marshall) and three streets north-south (Garrott, Flora and Burlington). The district’s boundaries are the north side of Hawthorne Street, south of Marshall street and west of Garrott street. The eastern boundary is the Spur 527.

The district still contains a mixture of historic late Victorian and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century houses, including Queen Anne, American Four Square, Craftsman and Colonial Revival styles, in addition to some apartment complexes and townhomes. Westmoreland Street contains the largest concentration of grand houses on large lots, and is also the broadest street. The neighborhood was the first in Houston to have deed restrictions, which specified that the properties could only be used for residential purposes, and also outlined setbacks, or how far back houses had to be built from the street.

Still, the neighborhood experienced a loss of historic properties. From the 1950s through the 1980s, the historic character of the neighborhood was impacted by the demolition of forty-two single family homes in the district. The multi-family housing built in its place did not take into account the neighborhood’s historic character. Large apartment complexes were built on lots where historic homes had been. With the construction of the US 59 Spur, additional historic houses were demolished along with the original street gates.

The early residents of the Westmoreland Historic District included individuals who contributed to the history of Houston in the fields of commerce, community planning and development, engineering, architecture, education, the performing arts and politics. The planning of the neighborhood – as well as the design and scale of its houses – reflects trends in the development of residential real estate and domestic architecture in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Houston. By virtue of its community planning features, its contributions to the evolution of suburban real estate development practices in Houston, its breadth of house types and its association with individuals who were active in the city’s business and cultural life, the Westmoreland Historic District is an excellent representation of early twentieth-century Houston.

### *Russell Brown Company*

The Penn House was one of the first homes built by the Russell Brown Company in Houston. According to architectural historian Stephen Fox, the Russell Brown Company was a Houston-based architectural design and construction company. Russell Brown was born on December 12, 1875, in Taylor, Texas, and came to Houston in 1902. The company was chartered in 1906 and specialized in residential design for upper- and middle- class homebuyers. After becoming successfully established in Houston, the company opened branch offices in Dallas by 1916, San Antonio by 1922 and Los Angeles in 1923. Architects who worked for the company included Alonzo N. Dawson, Charles W. Oliver, Mike Mebane and Gonzalo Ancira.

The firm designed and built several homes in Avondale between 1908 and 1925. The company built numerous houses in the Westmoreland, Montrose, Boulevard Oaks and River Oaks neighborhoods and in the Dallas subdivision of Munger Place, and was the general contractor of such notable Houston

houses as the William S. Farish House (1925) in Shadyside and the Cleveland Sewall House (1926) in River Oaks. In the early 1940s, Russell Brown retired to his ranch in Juliff, Texas, and the company ceased operations. Brown died in 1963.

## **OWNERSHIP HISTORY**

*John Christopher Penn (b. 10/25/1862 - d.2/10/1937)*

John C. Penn was born in Austin, Texas in 1862. His father, Robert R. Penn was from Virginia and his mother Sarah Allen was born in Texas. John Penn was one of five children. Penn owned and operated a successful real estate investment company, John C. Penn Land Company. City directories indicate that the company handled “real estate, loans and investments” and that Penn’s partner was M. Lerew. Penn’s oldest son, Robert worked as a salesman at the company.

Mr. and Mrs. Penn lived at 215 Hawthorne (later 428) with their four children, sons Robert and John, Jr., and daughters Sidney and Bessie. They subsequently lived at other addresses in the Montrose neighborhood, including 516 Colquitt and 1210 Welch.

*Frankie White Penn (b. 3/14/1868 - d. 12/29/1940)*

Frankie Anna White was born in Texas in 1868 to parents who were native Texans. She married John Penn on December 27, 1887, in Ellis, Texas. She was the mother of four and a homemaker.

Following the Penn family, Mr. & Mrs. Hugh Cornelius Gibbs occupied the house. The Gibbises raised three children in the home: Ray, Hugh Jr. and Mary. They lived there for approximately twenty years. H.C. Gibbs was born in Texas; his parents emigrated from Ireland and Germany. Gibbs began his career as a waiter at the Interurban Buffet and later became the restaurant manager.

Subsequent owners included Raymond Butts and Robert Turner, W.J. Schliemann and A. Smith. Mr. Butts and Mr. Turner constructed an addition at the rear of the home in the 1970s.

## **ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION**

*Queen Anne/late Victorian Style*

The John C. Penn house is a Queen Anne style house of wood construction on a pier and beam foundation, with a prominent two-tiered wrap-around porch. The clapboard house includes design elements that are typical of Victorian style residential architecture. The asymmetrical footprint, front-gabled roofs, central hipped roof and large porch exemplify the Queen Anne style, which was popular during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The asymmetrical, two-story house faces north on Hawthorne Street and consists of two bays on the first floor and three bays on the second floor.

The front entry is positioned on the far left side of the home. Three brick steps lead to the wooden front door which has sidelights and a transom window above. Stretching the entire length of the first story is a shingled shed roof supported by five slender wooden Doric columns that create a large porch. A railing of simple wooden slats wraps around the porch.

Also on the first floor, within the home's second bay, there is an oversized window with a decorative glass transom above it.

In the first bay of the second floor, a front-facing gable roof sits above two side-by-side double-hung windows. The pair of windows is positioned above the front entry. The second bay on floor two consists of another front-gabled roof. The roof is positioned above a pair of French doors that open onto the second floor porch. There is a decorative arched roof vent centered within each of the gables. The hipped roof with front-facing gables are a typical feature of Victorian style homes.

The third bay includes an oversized one-over-one window. Three classical columns, matching the ones below, support the second story porch. The large two-tiered porch curves around the right edge of the house and continues along its east side. The railing on the second floor matches the one below.

The house is a contributing building in the City of Houston Westmoreland Historic District and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Westmoreland National Register Historic District.

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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 \_\_\_\_\_ 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:

- | <b>S</b>                            | <b>NA</b>                           | <b>S - satisfies</b> | <b>D - does not satisfy</b> | <b>NA - not applicable</b> |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
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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**

# CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

- (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)).

## Sec. 33-229. Criteria for protected landmark designation

S NA

S - satisfies D - does not satisfy NA - not applicable

- (1) Meets at least three of the criteria for designation in section 33-224 of this Code;
- (2) Was constructed more than 100 years before application for designation was received by the director;
- (3) Is listed individually or as a contributing structure in an historic district on the National Register of Historic Places; or
- (4) Is recognized by the State of Texas as a Recorded State Historical Landmark.

### STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Landmark Designation of the [Full Name of Landmark Name] at [Address].

### HAHC RECOMMENDATION

The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends to City Council the Landmark Designation of the [John C. Penn House](#) at [428 Hawthorne Street](#).

**EXHIBIT A**  
**PHOTO**  
JOHN C. PENN HOUSE  
428 HAWTHORNE STREET





**EXHIBIT B**  
**PHOTO, SIDE**  
JOHN C. PENN HOUSE  
428 HAWTHORNE STREET

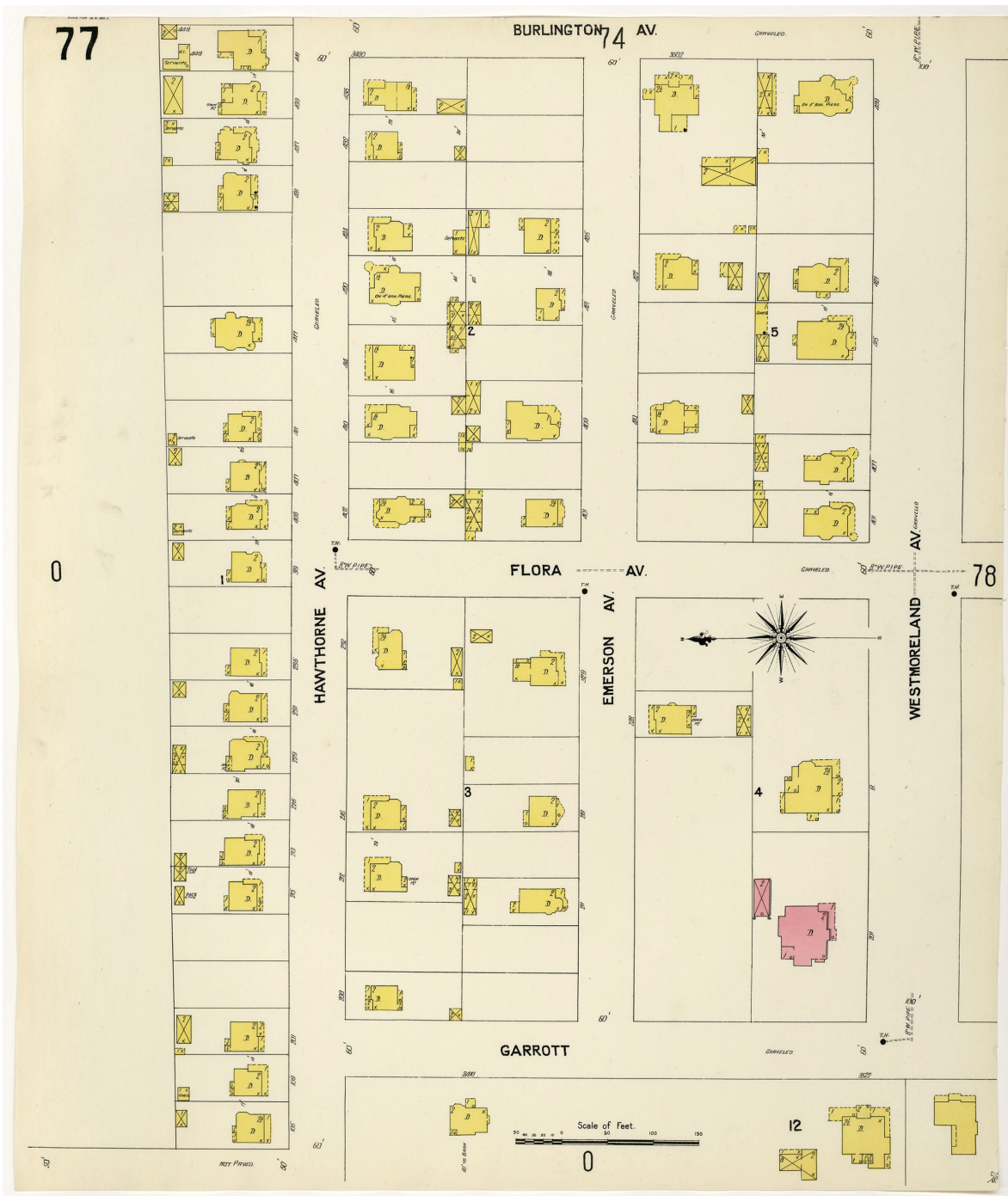


## EXHIBIT C

JOHN C. PENN HOUSE, SANBORN MAP, 1924, VOL.5

428 HAWTHORNE STREET

(Shows 428 was originally 215)



Original located at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin