

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Thompson-Brown House

OWNERS: Debra Brown

APPLICANTS: Brandy Black

LOCATION: 215 E 30th Street- Independence Heights

AGENDA ITEM:

HPO FILE NO.:

DATE ACCEPTED:

HAHC HEARING:

SITE INFORMATION: Lots 15, 16 and 17, Block 80, Independence Heights, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a one-story wood frame single family residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The Thompson-Brown House at 215 E 30th Street, built in the late 1920s, represents the historic architecture and construction built by brothers Richard and Archie Thompson. Settled by African Americans as early as 1910, the Independence Heights incorporated became the first Black municipality in Texas from 1915 to 1929. Ethel Thompson, the original owner of the Thompson-Brown House, was the sister of Richard and Archie Thompson, significant carpenters and builders of the community. Today, the home remains owned by Richard Thompson's granddaughter, Debra Brown. The Thompson family which settled on E 30th street in 1915, has contributed to the Independence Heights community for over a hundred years.

The Thompson-Brown House is an 1140 square foot single-story hipped roof bungalow home. It is currently one of the last remaining structures and examples of the historic homes constructed in the Independence Heights by community builders Richard and Archie Thompson. The Thompson brothers along with their father Henry Thompson, were carpenters and builders in the Independence Heights community from 1915 to the 1950s. As a designated structure within a National Register Historical District, this home meets Criteria 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 8 for Landmark and Protected Landmark designation. The Independence Heights is a National Register Historical District yet nearly 30% of all contributing structures to this designated district have been demolished in the past several years due to development and the impact of gentrification. If designated, the Thompson-Brown House will become the third City of Houston landmark in the historic Independence Heights helping to preserve the community's history and cultural heritage.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

In 1928, Ethel and Charles White purchased two lots in the historically African American community of Independence Heights. However, the story and significance of this home begins in 1915 when Ethel's parents Henry and Ellen Thompson built their home on the lot just next door and raised their family. Henry Thompson was born in Texas around 1849 during enslavement. In 1870, Henry was living in Lynchburg, Texas working at the sawmill. The city of Lynchburg founded on the ferry service started by Nathaniel Lynch during the 1830's was experiencing some prosperity during the 1870s with the establishment of this sawmill. In 1873, Henry married Ellen Preston and the couple welcomed their first child by 1882. After a hurricane and a few major storms, the sawmill was destroyed and left the city of

Lynchburg under great damage. During this time, the Thompson's purchased a farm in the Channelview area to raise their children Margaret (1882), Clara (1883), Ethel (1892), Richard (1895), and Archie (1897).

By 1915, the Thompson family had moved to the Independence Heights where Henry was working as a carpenter, alongside his two sons Richard and Archie. The father-sons began building homes in the community. The Thompson family became founding members of the Greater New Hope Baptist Church and in 1919, Richard and Archie constructed the first church building on North Main Street. By 1920, Henry had passed away. His wife Ellen remained living in their home at 217 E 30th Street with Ethel and her new husband Charlie White. By this time, many of the Thompson children and grandchildren had moved out and purchased homes of their own in the Independence Heights community.

Ethel and Charles White purchased land next door to Henry and Ellen's home in 1928 from the Wright Land Company. Ethel's brothers Richard and Archie built the White's first home at 215 E 30th Street. When Ellen passed away in 1942, Richard and his family moved in her home and became neighbors to Ethel and Charles. Richard Thompson's daughter, Debra Brown grew up in her grandmother's home next door to her Aunt Ethel. After Ethel and Charles passed away, Debra moved into their home with her family. There she raised her children and today, over a hundred years after the Thompson's helped establish and build the community, the Thompson family descendants remain established members of the Independence Heights and the Greater New Hope Baptist Church.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

Many of the houses in the Independence Heights reflect typical middle-class housing patterns of the early 20th century. Traditional house forms include the shotgun (hipped roof and gable-front), L-plan, modified L plan, pyramidal roofed, and center-passage. Residences in the community are largely one-story wood frame buildings less than 1,000 square feet. The major house form, however, is the side-gable or front-gable bungalow. The large number of bungalows is distinct from neighborhoods of Third, Fourth, and Fifth Wards that are contemporary developments in Houston.

The Thompson-Brown House is an 1140 square foot single-story wood frame dwelling with a hipped roof and front porch. It includes a living room, dining room, kitchen, bathroom and three bedrooms. All original wood flooring, windows, doors, brick chimney and porch components are intact (Although vinyl tile was put in within the past five years over the wood flooring in the kitchen/bath). The only alteration made to the home was the conversion of the chimney to a gas burning instead of wood burning fireplace. The exterior of the home was painted white, as was the original color, within the past five years. The unfenced lot includes a large Magnolia tree in the front yard, and large Pecan tree in the back yard, both planted by the Thompson family in the 1930s.

The Thompson-Brown House represents today, one of the last remaining structures originally built by Richard and Archie Thompson during the late 1920s in Independence Heights. Although the exact construction date is unknown, a property deed dated December 20, 1928 was obtained between The Wright Land Co. and Charles and Ethel White. In addition, a 1930 Harris County Building Assessment report exists for the property with a completed home built (Lot 15 & 16, Block 80). Based on deed,

census and city directory records Charles and Ethel White were the first and original owners of the property and home after it was built.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ancestry.com

City of Houston City Directories; 1917-1955

FamilySearch.org

Harris County Assessors Block Books

Harris County Deed Records

Harris County Subdivision Maps

Independence Heights National Register Application

Interview with Debra Brown, December 2021 to June 2022.

McCullough Family Collection. Box 1. MSS 0016. The African American Library at Gregory School. Houston, TX

The Smith-Maxie House City of Houston Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation Application

The Carroll House City of Houston Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation Application

Town of Independence Heights Collection. RG M 0004. The African American Library at Gregory School. Houston, TX

The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Taylor Valley 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:

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

- (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**
- (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

APPROVAL

HAHC RECOMMENDATION

**EXHIBIT A
CURRENT PHOTOS**





Front elevations



Side elevation (West)

CITY OF HOUSTON

Houston Archaeological & Historical Commission
Department

Planning and Development

EXHIBIT B CONTRIBUTING STRUCTURES MAP

