

## PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**PROTECTED LANDMARK NAME:** Concord Missionary Baptist Church **AGENDA ITEM:** B

**OWNERS:** Gary Drabek

**HPO FILE NO.:** HP2023\_0282

**APPLICANTS:** Charles Stava

**DATE SUBMITTED:** 11/09/2023

**LOCATION:** 7506 North Main Street

**HAHC HEARING:** 03/14/2024

**SITE INFORMATION:** RES A BLK 1 CONCORD CHURCH, Independence Heights of Crosstimbers. 28,793 SF land, 14,257 SF Building

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

### SUMMARY

Concord Missionary Baptist Church was founded in Houston's Independence Heights in 1917 by Rev. L. G. Alexander. Concord Church is one of very few surviving church structures that served the Independence Heights community, and the current structure was built in 1951 to replace the original structure to serve a growing congregation. A protected landmark designation is requested for the Concord Missionary Baptist Church so it can be preserved as one of the very few surviving church buildings of Independence Heights.

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

#### *INDEPENDENCE HEIGHTS*

Independence Heights was incorporated in 1915 with 600 residents and was the first incorporated African American city in Texas. The land where Independence Heights stands today was purchased piecemeal by A.A. Wright Land Company who sold the lots to mostly African Americans at very attractive prices. By the mid-20th century, the city became a self-sustaining community with its own churches, school district, infrastructure, corner stores and several businesses. By the 21st century the population of Independence Heights had dwindled as most of its homeowners moved to other neighborhoods, and the Concord Church suffered a drastic decline in its congregation. By 2011 the congregation decided to stop using the church and it became vacant.

Independence Heights is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation form as of March 11, 2024 may be accessed here: <https://atlas.thc.texas.gov/NR/pdfs/64500641/64500641.pdf> That form was prepared in April of 1997 by Mrs. Vivian Hubbard Seals and Dwayne Jones, who was with the Texas Historical Commission at that time. Today he serves as the Executive Director of the Galveston Historical Foundation.

The above referenced document states the following about the neighborhood.

#### *Geographical Background*

*Independence Heights lies approximately six miles from downtown Houston along a major north thoroughfare of Houston Boulevard, now North Main Street. The community as originally platted covers approximately 329.41 acres with lots divided in a north-south and east-west alignment. North Main Street bisects the subdivision in a northwest-southeast direction and is met almost in its center by another diagonal street, Link Road. The Houston Belt and Terminal Railroad further divides the subdivision in a straight east-west direction. Loop 610 separates Independence Heights on the south from Sunset Heights and the Studewood area, both developed in the early decades of the 20th century. Yale Boulevard separates it from Garden Oaks on the west which was developed in the 1940s. The east-west streets of Independence Heights do not connect directly with those of Garden Oaks.*

### ***Houston Area Development***

*Houston's political districting was done prior to 1900, when the population was nearing two thousand. First Ward, Second Ward, Third Ward, and Fourth Ward were established in 1840. The Fifth Ward was added in 1867 and Sixth Ward in 1897. By the turn of the century, African Americans mostly lived in Fourth Ward or Freedmen's Town (NR 1985), Third Ward, and Fifth Ward. These neighborhoods developed around the central business district with each functioning as a separate small community. Each Ward also had a variety of shops and businesses. For example, Jackson Funeral Home, now known as Jackson Mortuary, Inc., was established in Fourth Ward in 1906.*

*The commercial center was in town with the city hall occupying a block square, bounded by Travis, Congress, Milam, and Preston Streets. The lower floor had markets and city business was on the upper floor. Farmers would bring their produce and park all the way around the City Market to sell their wares from the sidewalk. Other businesses were operating within a few miles from this block. African Americans owned three buildings in this area, U.B.F. Building, Odd Fellows Building, Lincoln Theater, and Taborian Building, where black professionals had offices, barber shops, restaurants, hat shops, and other businesses.*

*Since residential segregation was a matter of custom rather than law, there was never absolute separation of the races. Usually, the whites who lived in these areas were either poor or immigrants or had a business in the black neighborhoods. Many Germans, Jews, Greeks, and Italians owned shops or stores in these older neighborhoods and often lived next door to or above their stores. As the black population grew, new enclaves developed in the Wards and beyond their boundaries.*

*During the period in which Houston rose from a muddy town to a city of national importance, the streetcar was the dominant form of transportation. From the mid-1870s to the late 1920s, Houston had streetcars. Virtually every significant land development was located on or*

*near an existing or proposed streetcar line. The early streetcars were mule drawn. Prior to 1883 two companies, the Houston City Railway and the Bayou City Street Railway serviced Houston with streetcars. These two companies were purchased and consolidated by William Sinclair and H.F. MacGregor of Galveston.*

*By 1890 Houston had become an important commercial center built on cotton, lumber, and railroad. Realizing the potential value of this transit system, a group of investors began to rebuild the system for electric operation. By 1900 the new electric streetcars had routes to meet the needs of the fast-growing real estate developments. The Houston Electric Company was the operator of the streetcar system.*

*In 1912 the Houston Electric Company encountered legal problems with real estate developers concerning streetcar service. As a result, the company made major track constructions creating new routes, among which were Third Ward, Fifth Ward, Harrisburg, and Studewood. In 1914 the Studewood route opened to serve a largely undeveloped district lying between Woodland Heights and Houston Heights. This included the section originally known as Stude's Woods, then in the process of being subdivided by the Stude family, and a residential development called Sunset Heights. Independence Heights was accessed on the streetcar on the Studewood line which came to 30th Street and turned around.*

*In November of 1914 a jitney service began—a ride in a private car for the same price as a streetcar, a nickel. By early 1915 there were hundreds of cars serving as jitneys darting among the streetcars to pick up waiting passengers. This was blow to the streetcar industry, so the Houston Electric Company persuaded the City to regulate the jitneys and confine them to certain routes. On April 1, 1924, the Houston voters approved the banning of jitneys from the Houston streets. Then the Houston Electric Company began operating motor bus service.*

### ***Establishment of Independence Heights***

*A. A. Wright and his wife came to Houston from Ohio about 1905. They acquired land north of Houston for the purpose of establishing subdivisions. The Wright Land Company, founded by A. A. Wright, was incorporated on August 11, 1910, to offer lots and low interest loans to blacks. The Wrights formed the Wright Loan and Security Company as a parallel business to sell to whites. A. A. Wright was joined in the company by his only son, Raymond L. Wright. The company was originally housed in the Houston Chronicle Building downtown but is now in operation at another Houston location. Independence Heights was the first major addition developed by the Wright Land Company, who named the area and laid out all the dirt streets. It was bound on the south by 30th Avenue, on the north by 40th Avenue, on the west by Yale Street, on the east by McComb Street and Airline Street. It was adjacent to Sunset Heights, Texas. The Wright company later subdivided land farther north of*

*Independence Heights for blacks called Acres Home and Highland Heights.*

*African Americans were attracted to Independence Heights because the Wright Land Company offered them property at reasonable prices and financed almost all of the sales at a time when it was almost impossible for blacks to obtain conventional loans. The interest was lower than going commercial rates and they dealt fairly with people. Some paid \$6 down and \$6 a month for the land and had their homes built. Before the company was incorporated, the Wrights sold property for a house (that) still stands on 32nd that was built in 1908.*

*Independence Heights offered better living conditions and environment than the typical Ward neighborhoods. Many residents were well educated and in good jobs. This created a middle-class suburban community typical of early 20th century suburbs.*

*The community grew at a rapid rate. Most of the houses were built by residents of Independence Heights who were contractors, carpenters, brick layers, and electricians.(see attached list) A number of residents moved from Houston to Independence Heights and others came from various places in Texas. It was a progressive community that took pride in home ownership. The federal Census Bureau gave the 1920 population as 720. This was the only census year that the city existed, since it was incorporated in 1915 and dissolved in 1928.*

*On November 27, 1914, a petition was filed with Harris County Judge W. E. Ward by W. R. Knox and other residents of Independence Heights asking for incorporation into a city. The Judge set the election for January 16, 1915, and appointed O. L. Hubbard Election Judge. The election was held and George O. Burgess, an attorney, was elected Mayor with S. C. Lamothe and Arthur McCullough as Commissioners. According to the Houston Post newspaper this was the first incorporated city in Texas with all black officials, dated January 17, 1915. The City Hall was located in a "shotgun" house at 701 E. 34th.*

*About 1925 the Phelps Real Estate Company laid out a short street, 31 1/2, that extended from Yale Street to Courtlandt between 30th and 31st Streets. Houses were built and sold. The street was shelled and two blocks long, so it was nicknamed "Short Shell." The city also passed a bond for \$20,000 to pave streets and provide other basic city services.*

## **ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY**

### *ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION*

The 1951 church building was designed and built by James M. Thomas, a black contractor who specialized in designing and building churches for the local African American congregations.

Thomas began building churches in 1937, at a time when Houston had no black architects, and designed over 55 churches in his lifetime. He got his start as a designer while attending Prairie View College. In



- (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**

(a) An application for designation of a protected landmark may only be submitted by the property owner. The HAHC shall review each application and shall recommend a property to be designated as a protected landmark if the property:

- | S   | NA                                  |   |
|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| <b>S - satisfies    D - does not satisfy    NA - not applicable</b> |                                     |   |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>                                 | <input type="checkbox"/>            | (1) Meets at least three of the criteria for designation in section 33-224 of this Code;  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (2) Was constructed more than 100 years before application for designation was received by the director;                          |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>                                 | <input type="checkbox"/>            | (3) Is listed individually or as a contributing structure in an historic district on the National Register of Historic Places; or |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (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 Protected Landmark Designation of the Concord Missionary Baptist Church.

**HAHC RECOMMENDATION :**

**EXHIBIT A  
CURRENT PHOTOS**

**CONCORD MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH**



**EXHIBIT B  
SITE MAP**





# CITY OF HOUSTON

Houston Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

7506 NORTH MAIN ST.



EXHIBIT C  
FROM THE INFORMER NEWSPAPER  
(UNT PORTAL TO TEXAS HISTORY)



