

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: The Alexander Z. and Julia C. Hester House **AGENDA ITEM:** B
OWNERS: Marlene C. Weekley **HPO FILE NO.:** HP2023_0231
APPLICANTS: Marlene C. Weekley **DATE ACCEPTED:** Sep-16-2023
LOCATION: 1703 West Street, Houston, Texas 77026 - Fifth Ward **HAHC HEARING:** Oct-12-2023

SITE INFORMATION: Lot 12, Block 3, Forsgard, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a one-story wood clad raised cottage.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Protected Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Alexander Z. and Julia C. Hester House is a one-story wood-clad, raised Queen Anne cottage located at 1703 West Street in the Fifth Ward neighborhood in Houston, Texas. The dwelling was constructed circa 1903 for cotton sampler Alexander Z. Hester and his wife Julia C. Hester, teacher, and devoted community leader. The house is significant for its architectural style as well as its association with Julia C. Hester. The current property owner, Marlene C. Weekey, is seeking a City of Houston Protected Landmark designation for the property.

The Alexander Z. and Julia C. Hester House is an example of the Queen Anne style in a historically African American predominant community of the Fifth Ward. The extant style features an original front gable having a bay window with corner brackets, exterior wood cladding, and fenestration patterns. The property retains its essential form with a later addition and extension of the front porch evident on Sanborn maps. During the Hesters' more than forty years living in the Fifth Ward, Julia C. Hester served as an influential figure in the community through her service to ensure the safety, education, and development of neighborhood youth. The Alexander Z. and Julia C. Hester House at 1703 West Street meets criteria 1, 3, 4, 5, & 8 for Landmark Designation and Criteria 1 & 2 for Protected Landmark Designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE*Fifth Ward*

The Houston neighborhood known as The Fifth Ward has a rich history that dates to before the Civil War. The neighborhood is bounded by Buffalo Bayou on the south, Lockwood Drive on the east, Liberty Road on the north, and Jensen Drive on the west. The area was later settled by freedmen and became known as the Fifth Ward in 1866.¹ At the time of establishment, the population was half black and half white. In the 1880s, the Fifth Ward experienced a boom related to the newly built Southern Pacific Railroad. This productivity was interrupted by multiple fires taking place between 1891-1912.² Eventually, the Fifth Ward became predominantly occupied by African Americans with new businesses, schools, and community organizations being established by the mid-1930s contributing to the cultural fabric of the area.³

HESTER OWNERSHIP OF 1703 WEST STREET

Alexander Z. Hester (b. March 4, 1860; d. January 2, 1961)

Julia Catherine Thomas Hester (b. December 18, 1870; d. December 20, 1940)

Julia Catherine Thomas Hester was born in Dublin, Laurens County, Georgia, to James A. and Nettie (McCall) Thomas on December 18, 1870.⁴ She received a higher education at Spelman Seminary in Atlanta, Georgia (now Spellman College) and married Alexander Z. (A.Z.) Hester on December 28, 1892, in Laurens County, Georgia. They had no children.⁵ By the 1900 census, the Hesters were listed as residing in Houston, Texas. According to city directories, A.Z. is listed as a cotton sampler and Julia as a schoolteacher living at 1703 West Street as early as 1903.⁶ At the time the Hesters originally settled on West Street, it was primarily occupied by other “well-to-do” African American professionals.⁷ Their neighbors included one of the first African American doctors to settle in the Fifth Ward, as well as one who hosted tea for Mary McLeod Bethune when she visited town at the local chapter of the National Council of Negro Women.⁸

Although the Hesters had no children of their own, Julia made it a priority to offer safety from the dangers of the street and encouraged the education of young members of the community. In the early 1900s, the Hesters opened the doors of their Fifth Ward home to neighborhood youth to provide a safe and nurturing environment to keep adolescents off the street.⁹ Their home on West Street served as a central gathering place to actively engage neighborhood children and contribute to their development as community leaders and successful individuals.¹⁰ Julia C. Hester was regarded as being an influential figure in the community for generations of Houstonians through her story of community service. Hester devoted her career to teaching and helping others. During her life in Houston, Julia C. Hester served on several committees, including state leader of Heroines of Jericho, a woman’s auxiliary for the Negro Free and Accepted Masons of Texas; chairwoman of the Advisory Committee in Colored Girls’ Work during World War I; and a member of the Emancipation Park advisory committee.¹¹ Julia and A.Z. were also active members of their congregation, Payne Chapel African Methodists Episcopal Church in Houston. She remained an active community leader and volunteer until her death in 1940.

In an era, where some may have considered it to be a crime for an African American to have an education, Julia defied these mindsets by opening her home to community youth to ensure they were properly educated.¹² In 1941, “Hester House” was established at 3605 Lyons Avenue by a diverse committee led by attorney William M. Ryan, the first president of the Board of Directors, to honor Julia Hester’s contributions and dedication to youth.¹³ By 1943, the State of Texas assisted in the efforts that the group had established and the “Julia C. Hester House” was created as a community center and nonprofit to promote the health, education, and welfare of African American residents in the Fifth Ward.¹⁴ After a city-wide campaign to construct new facilities, a new building opened in 1949 at the present location, 2020 Solo Street.¹⁵ The community center celebrated its 80th anniversary of providing programs and social services to Fifth Ward residents in April 2023. The legacy left by Julia C. Hester on the welfare of her community, which is rooted in her residence 1703 West Street, has had a significant lasting impact on the history of the Fifth Ward and that is continuously emphasized through programs at “Hester House”.

¹ Kleiner, Diana J, “Fifth Ward, Houston”, Texas State Historical Association, January, 1995, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/fifth-ward-houston>.

² Kleiner, Diana J, “Fifth Ward, Houston”.

³ Kleiner, Diana J, “Fifth Ward, Houston”.

⁴ Tower, Stephanie Spacek, “Hester, Julia Catherine Thomas”, Texas State Historical Association, November, 2016, [Hester, Julia Catherine Thomas \(tshaonline.org\)](https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/hester-julia-catherine-thomas).

⁵ Tower, Stephanie Spacek, “Hester, Julia Catherine Thomas”.

⁶ *U.S. City Directories, 1903-1924*. Accessed September 2023.

⁷ “Texas Trailblazer – Julia C. Hester.” Julia C. Hester Community Center. Accessed September 2023.

⁸ “Texas Trailblazer – Julia C. Hester.”

⁹ Boney, Jeffrey L, “Julia C. Hester House – 75 Years of Empowering the Fifth Ward Community”, Forward Times, March, 2019, [Julia C. Hester House - 75 Years of Empowering the Fifth Ward Community - Forward Times](https://www.forwardtimes.com/news/2019/03/20/julia-c-hester-house-75-years-of-empowering-the-fifth-ward-community/).

¹⁰ Boney, Jeffrey L, “Julia C. Hester House – 75 Years of Empowering the Fifth Ward Community”.

¹¹ Tower, Stephanie Spacek, “Hester, Julia Catherine Thomas”.

¹² “Hester House Opens The Wellness Center”, aframnews, November, 2014, [Hester House Opens The Wellness Center - African American News and Issues \(aframnews.com\)](https://www.aframnews.com/news/2014/11/14/hester-house-opens-the-wellness-center/).

¹³ Boney, Jeffrey L, “Julia C. Hester House – 75 Years of Empowering the Fifth Ward Community”.

¹⁴ “Commissioner Ellis, Julia C. Hester House Officials Celebrate Historic Community Center’s 80th Anniversary of Providing Programs and Social Services to Fifth Ward Area”, Style Magazine Newswire, April, 2023, [Commissioner Ellis, Julia C. Hester House Officials Celebrate Historic Community Center’s 80th Anniversary of Providing Programs and Social Services to Fifth Ward Area | Houston Style Magazine | Urban Weekly Newspaper Publication Website](https://www.stylemagazine.com/news/2023/04/20/commissioner-ellis-julia-c-hester-house-officials-celebrate-historic-community-center-s-80th-anniversary-of-providing-programs-and-social-services-to-fifth-ward-area/).

¹⁵ Boney, Jeffrey L, “Julia C. Hester House – 75 Years of Empowering the Fifth Ward Community”.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY*Architectural Description*

The house at 1703 West Street is a one-story wood frame raised Queen Anne cottage on a concealed pier and beam foundation, constructed circa 1903. The house sits on the corner of Harrington and West Streets in the Fifth Ward residential neighborhood. The property does not have a driveway or garage structure included on the site. The house, built by the Hesters, is distinct from the surrounding residences in the context area with its extant Queen Anne features, a common construction style at the turn of the century.¹⁶ The raised profile of the cottage sets the Alexander Z. and Julia C. Hester House apart from its neighbors as a unique expression of elevated construction methods in the neighborhood.

The house has a hipped roof with lower projecting cross gables and is covered with asphalt composition shingles. The gables are clad in wood and feature decorative metal work as well as a rectangular leaded stained-glass window at the center of each gable opening. The asymmetrical front (east) elevation is seven bays across with a non-original straight staircase with a central landing leading up to an “L-shaped” wrap-around porch that is supported by simple wood post columns and topped by a corrugated metal roof. The corners of the porch include Doric columns rather than the simple wood posts. The elevation includes two one-over-one wood-framed windows, a primary front door with an overhead transom, a diamond shaped single pane decorative window, and three one-over-one wood-framed windows in a cutaway Bay window configuration under the front gable. Decorative scalloped brackets appear at the corners of the cutaway Bay window boxed eave overhang. The central most window of the three features a bottom single pane of glass with the upper sash being multi-paned leaded glass in an elaborate geometric pattern, typical of the Queen Anne style.¹⁷

The side south elevation fronting Harrington Street is five bays across with a projecting side gable and a continuation of the “L-shaped” wrap-around porch. The side gabled portion includes the same details as the front gabled portion, except for the bay window. In its place are two one-over-one wood-framed windows. Two additional one-over-one wood-framed windows appear on the south elevation as well as a side door attached to the master bedroom providing further access to the wrapped porch.

Restoration History

The house remains significantly unchanged from its original construction footprint. Based on early Sanborn maps and tax assessment records identifying the house as a single story, the front porch was extended between 1907 and 1924. The gabled rear portion on the south elevation of the house with a porch accessible door was also added during this time frame. According to a newspaper posting from *The Houston Post* in August of 1913 reading, “Building permits: A.Z. Hester, alterations and repairs, West Street, \$1,800”, it is likely this could have been the time of these alterations.¹⁸ When the current owner

¹⁶ McAlester, Virginia Savage. *A Field Guide to American Houses: Revised and Expanded*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013.

¹⁷ McAlester, Virginia Savage. *A Field Guide to American Houses*.

¹⁸ The Houston Post. (Houston, Tex.), Vol. 28, Ed. 1 Thursday, August 21, 1913, newspaper, August 21, 1913; Houston, Texas. (<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph604068/>; accessed September 27, 2023), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <https://texashistory.unt.edu>.

purchased the property in 2011, the porch had plywood floors, no railings, and the stairs and columns were in poor condition. The house underwent renovation in 2021 to address the concerns on the porch, the front stairs, and the section of roof above the porch due to substantial water damage. Additionally, the chain link fence surrounding the property was replaced with a wooden privacy fence in 2022.

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Portrait of Julia C. Hester, Find A Grave Memorial. Accessed September 2023. [Julia Catherine Thomas Hester \(1870-1940\) - Find a Grave Memorial](#).

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The Houston Post. (Houston, Tex.), Vol. 28, Ed. 1 Thursday, August 21, 1913, newspaper, August 21, 1913; Houston, Texas. (<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph604068/>: accessed September 27, 2023), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <https://texashistory.unt.edu>.

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U.S. City Directories, 1903-1924. Accessed September 2023.

The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Cara Quigley, 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 |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
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AND

**EXHIBIT A
PHOTOS**

THE ALEXANDER Z. AND JULIA C. HESTER HOUSE
1703 WEST STREET, HOUSTON, TEXAS, 77026

Photo 1: Primary east elevation of the Alexander Z. and Julia C. Hester House. Photo by HOP staff member, Cara Quigley, October 6, 2023.



Photo 2: Side south elevation of the Alexander Z. and Julia C. Hester House fronting Harrington Street.

Source: Google Streetview, March 2022.



Photo 3: Oblique view of the southeast corner of the Alexander Z. and Julia C. Hester House. Photo by property owner, Marlene Weekley, September 2023.



Photo 4: Oblique view of the front east elevation of The Alexander Z. and Julia C. Hester House fronting West Street. Photo by HOP staff member, Cara Quigley, October 6, 2023.



Photo 5: North elevation of the Alexander Z. and Julia C. Hester House. Photo by HOP staff member, Cara Quigley, October 6, 2023.



Photo 6: Original Queen Anne window detail on the primary east elevation. Photo by HOP staff member, Cara Quigley, October 6, 2023.



Photo 7: Close-up detail view of original Queen Anne window on the primary east elevation. Photo by HOP staff member, Cara Quigley, October 6, 2023.



Photo 8: Interior view of original Queen Anne window detail which appears on the front east elevation. Photo by property owner, Marlene Weekley, September 2023.



Photo 9: East elevation portion of the wrap around porch with non-original columns fronting West Street. Photo by HOP staff member, Cara Quigley, October 6, 2023.



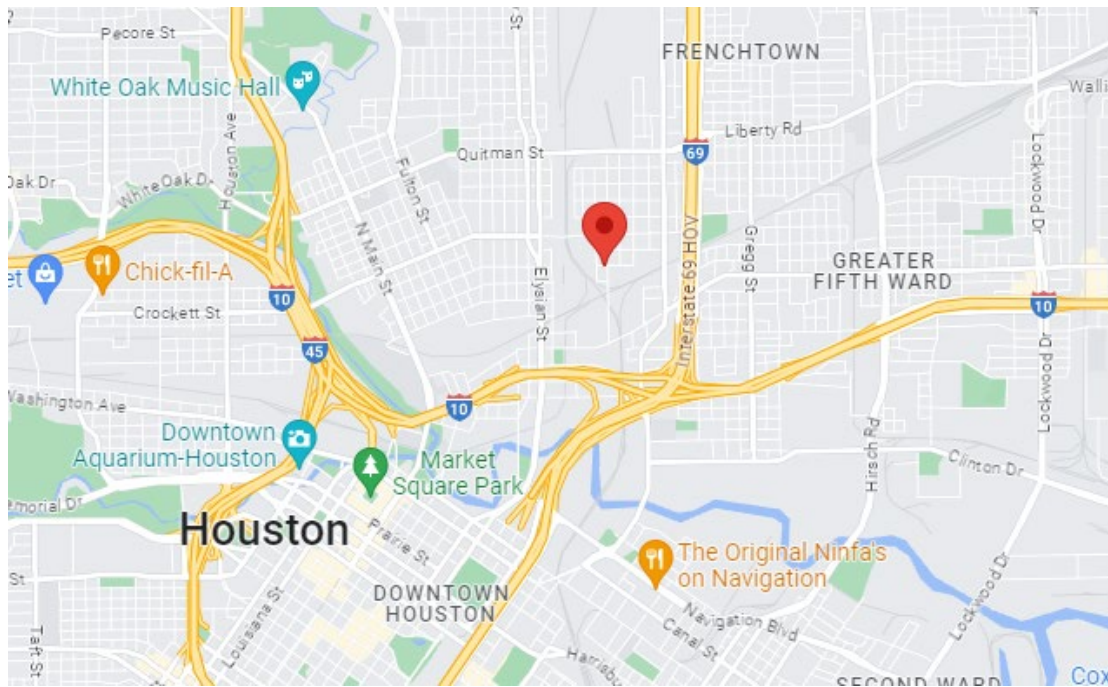
EXHIBIT B MAPS

THE ALEXANDER Z. AND JULIA C. HESTER HOUSE
1703 WEST STREET, HOUSTON, TEXAS, 77026

Map 1: Harris County, Texas.



Map 2: Google Maps, Location of The Alexander Z. and Julia C. Hester House, accessed September 2023.



Map 3: Google Maps, Location of The Alexander Z. and Julia C. Hester House, accessed September 2023.

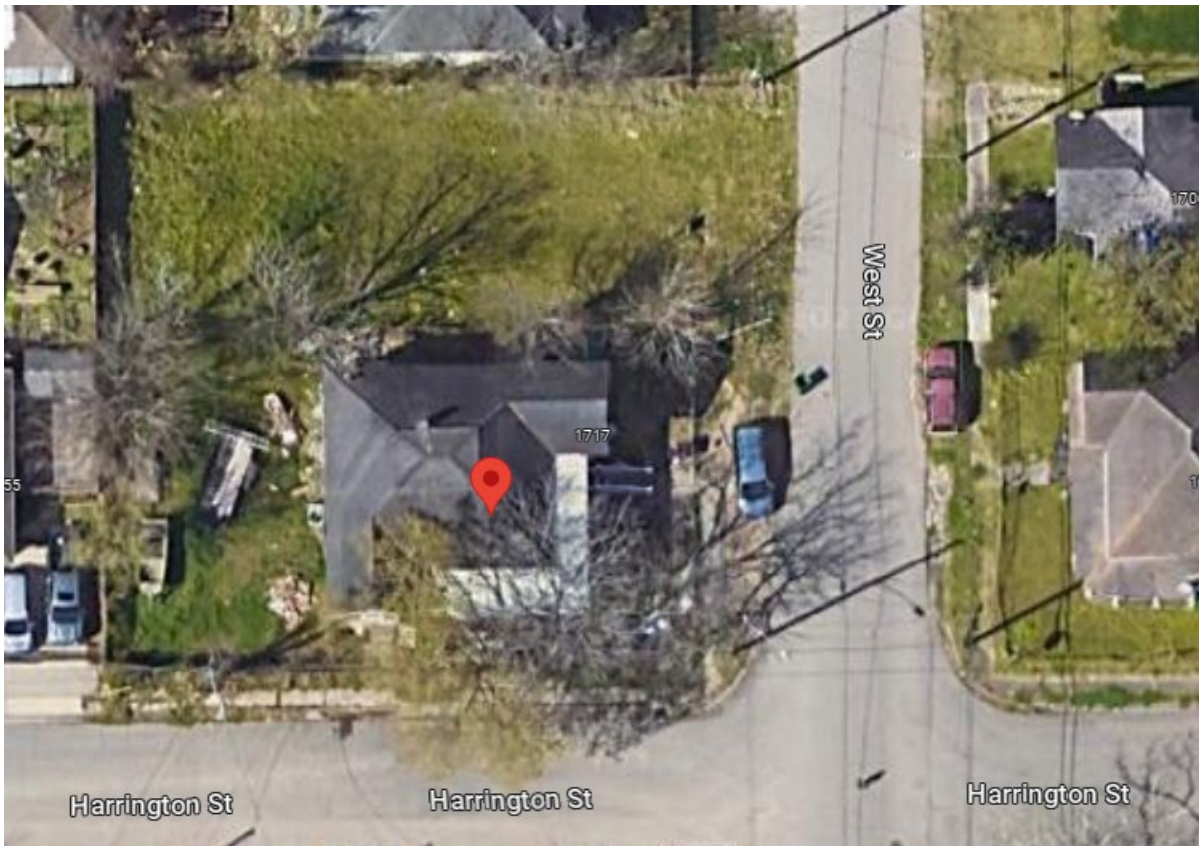
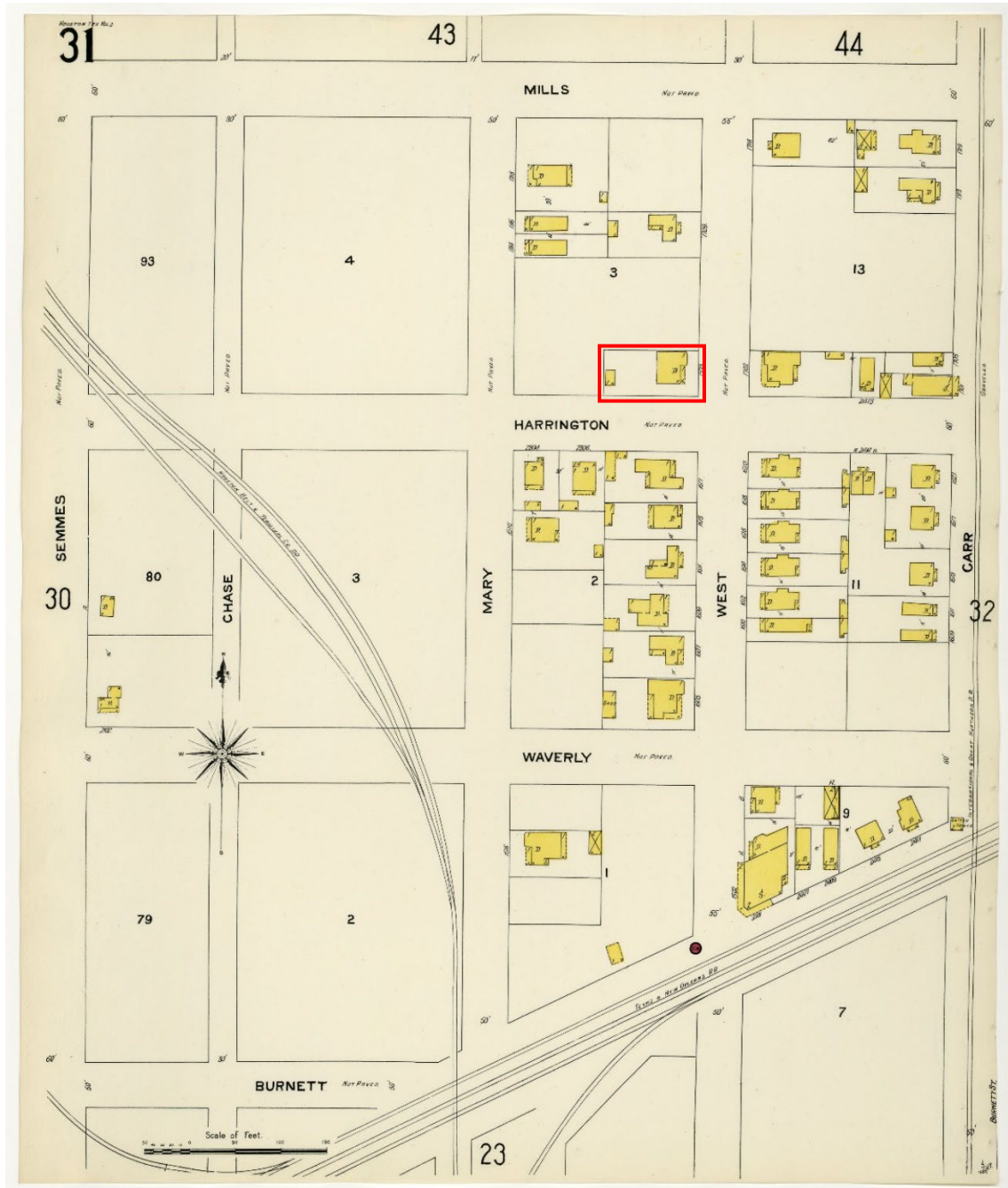


EXHIBIT C FIGURES

THE ALEXANDER Z. AND JULIA C. HESTER HOUSE
1703 WEST STREET, HOUSTON, TEXAS, 77026

Figure 1: Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1907. Vol. 2, Sheet 31. Houston, Harris County, Texas. Perry-Castaneda Library Map Collection, The University of Texas at Austin. Accessed September 2023.



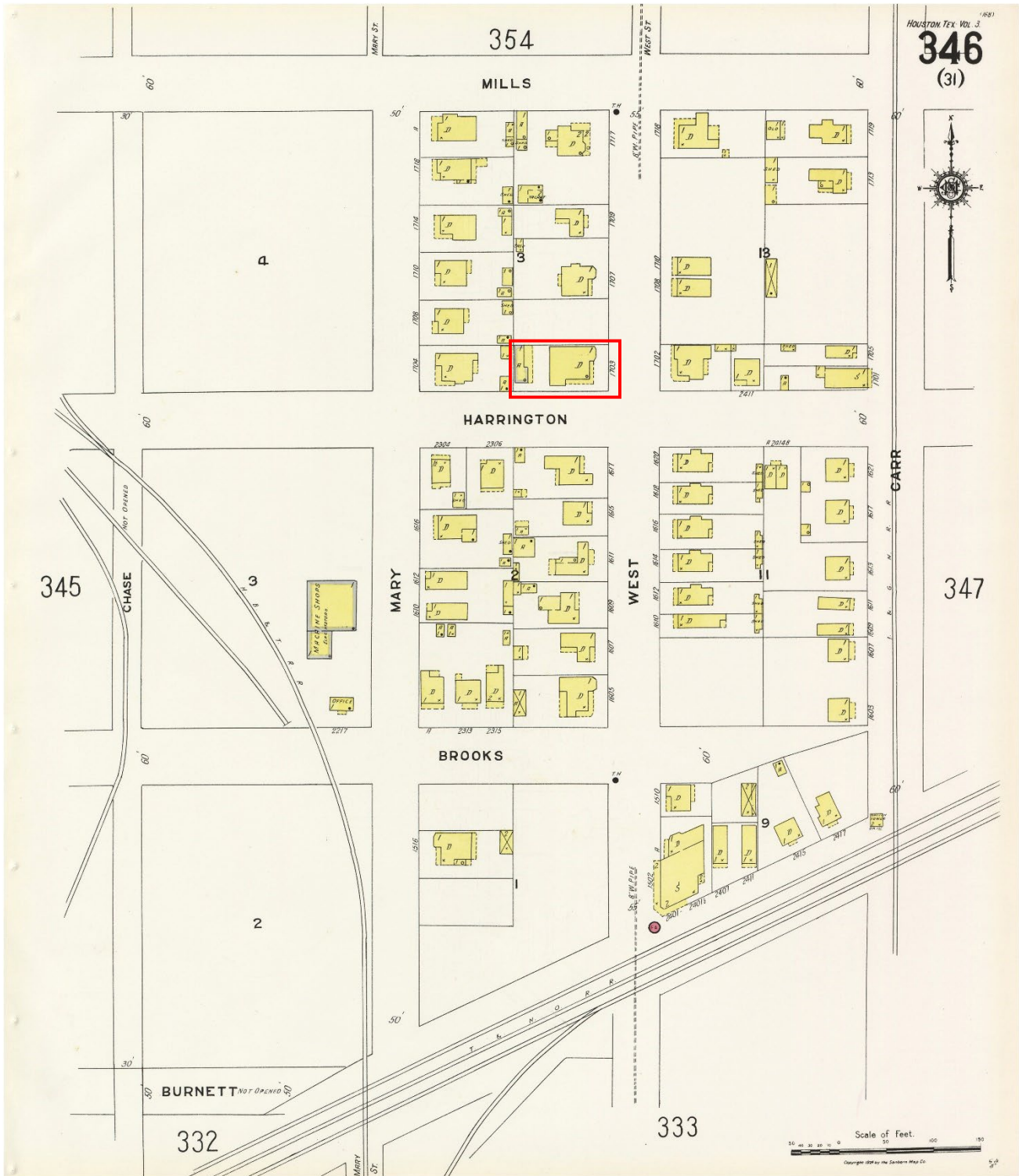
Original located at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

Figure 2: Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1924. Vol. 3, Sheet 346. Houston, Harris County, Texas. Perry-Castaneda Library Map Collection, The University of Texas at Austin. Accessed September 2023.



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

Figure 3: Photo of 1703 West Street from the corner of West and Harrington Streets facing northwest circa 1914. Courtesy of Calvin Williams, Shared Services Facility Director at Julia C. Hester House.



CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

Figure 5: Harris County Tax Appraisal and Building Assessment Records for 1703 West Street, Houston, Texas, 77026. September 1968. Harris County Archives. Accessed September 2023.

Sub 11

HARRIS COUNTY BUILDING ASSESSMENT

(77)
INVESTIGATE

B Acct. No. 016-221-00-012

Map No. 189-1

9-27 1968

Martin M. E. Owner

Lot 12 Blk. 3

Foregard Addition

Remarks: Please check supts
see attached files -
make drawing for
1969

Their Value \$ 1,720 for 1969

Our Value \$ 1,690 see over 10-18-69

No. 1703 WEST Street

COUNTY ACCOUNT NO.				
SEQUENCE NO.	VOL.	PG.	SUB.	ITEM
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				<u>+120</u>
				<u>69</u>
<u>1969 New Val</u>		VALUE <u>860</u>		
10% II. DATE		<u>+80</u>		
NEW OWNER		1969 TOTAL <u>940</u>		
<u>Martin M. E.</u>				

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Figure 6: Harris County Tax Appraisal and Building Assessment Records for 1703 West Street, Houston, Texas, 77026. September 1968. Harris County Archives. Accessed September 2023.

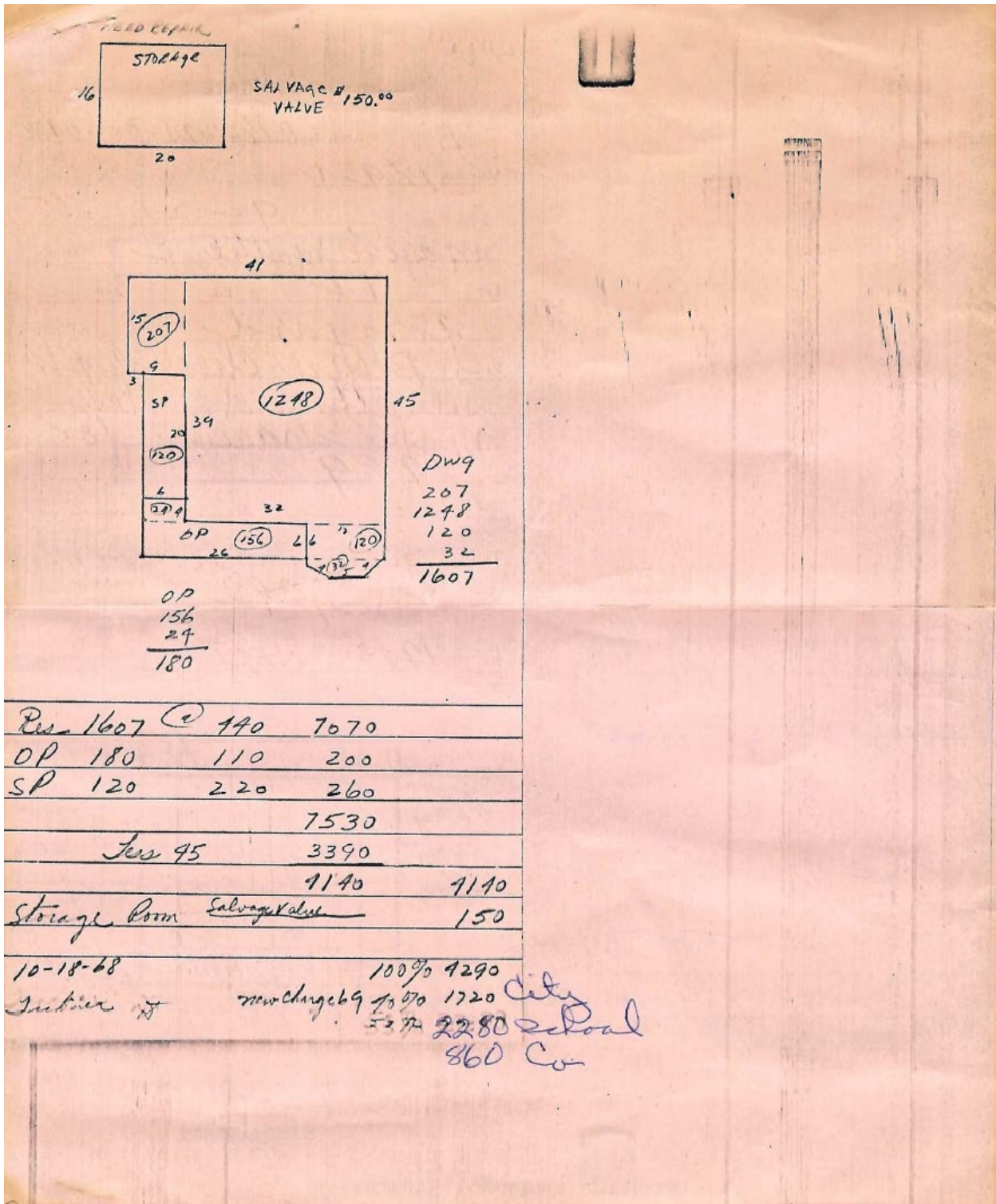


Figure 7: Portrait of Julia C. Hester. Source: Find A Grave Memorial. Accessed September 2023.



Mrs. A. Z. Hester

Figure 8: Portrait of Alexander Z. Hester. Source: Find A Grave Memorial. Accessed September 2023.

