

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. The first pastor was Reverend Louis Green Alexander. Initially the church met in the home of Independence Heights resident, Mr. Arthur McCullough, who later served as Mayor of Independence Heights. The Church built a building at the corner of North Main and East 35th; the contractor being Purdy Lumber Company. The current structure was built in 1951 to replace the original structure to serve a growing congregation. Concord Church is one of very few surviving church structures that served the Independence Heights community, and a protected landmark designation is requested so it can be preserved in perpetuity.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

INDEPENDENCE HEIGHTS

Independence Heights was incorporated in 1915 with 600 residents and was the first incorporated city completely owned and operated by African Americans 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 a 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 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.

...Churches of Independence Heights

The Wright Land Company granted land for three churches: Green Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church, St. Paul Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, and New Hope Missionary Baptist Church. Green Chapel was organized in 1911 and built its first building on granted land at 618 E. 35th. New Hope was organized in 1911 and received its land

grant in December 1919 at 600 E. 37th where the first building was erected. St. Paul was organized in 1916 and was granted land to build at 700 E. 37th.

Three other churches were organized during this period. They purchased their own property. Ebenezer Methodist Episcopal Church had its beginning in 1916 and held services in Allen's Hall until the property was purchased on Houston Avenue at the corner of 33rd. Concord Baptist Church was organized 1917, and services were held in the Independence Heights City Hall until the church purchased property on Houston Avenue (North Main) near 35th, where the building was erected. The North Main Church of God in Christ began in 1926 and shortly afterwards bought property and erected a building at 7206 North Main. All of the churches are still in existence but have built new buildings.

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 1930, he began teaching mechanical drawing at Phillis Wheatley High School in Houston, where he taught for 42 years before retiring in 1972. Thomas died in 1994, leaving an important architectural legacy in the city. Most of Thomas's churches share two prominent corner towers with pyramidal or hipped roofs and large gable roofs over the primary sanctuary. In many examples, wide steps lead up to an entrance above a raised first floor. Another notable and unusual feature of many Thomas designs is the use of glass block as a decorative feature, often used in place of brick between window openings. Thomas's design for Concord Church incorporates many of the stylistic characteristics for which he is noted.

ALTERATION HISTORY

In 2013, two local historic preservationists, Gary Drabek and Ava Angle, purchased the church building with the intent to restore it to a different use but maintain its original appearance and preserve the historic importance of the building. As the building was vacant for several years, it fell victim to vandalism and theft. All electrical wiring, metal pipes and fixtures were stolen, and the building became a virtual empty shell. Water was leaking into the building from holes in the roof, causing major structural damage. The second floor, where the sanctuary was located, was falling onto the ground floor and water intrusion into the building was causing the interior plaster to crumble and causing structural damage to the bricks. The building was on the verge of collapse and the property was listed as "land value" only and there existed the possibility the building could have been torn down.

Gary and Ava considered various options for the building and decided to turn it into residential multifamily use. They modified the interior of the building to make 2 units on the 2nd and 3rd floors to be their primary residences and created 4 apartments at the ground level. They wanted to preserve the original appearance of the exterior knowing that they would want to get a historic designation in the future to ensure the building and its historic importance would remain intact for future generations. Even though the building use changed they were careful not to change the exterior appearance and to use important elements such as the stained-glass windows and original light fixtures in the interior renovation. The goal was also to include a gallery space that could be used to portray the history of the church and its importance to the community over the years. It is also their goal to be able to use the building and gallery space to help local students and community groups.

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 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event; |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present; |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride. |

AND

EXHIBIT A
CURRENT PHOTOS

CONCORD MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

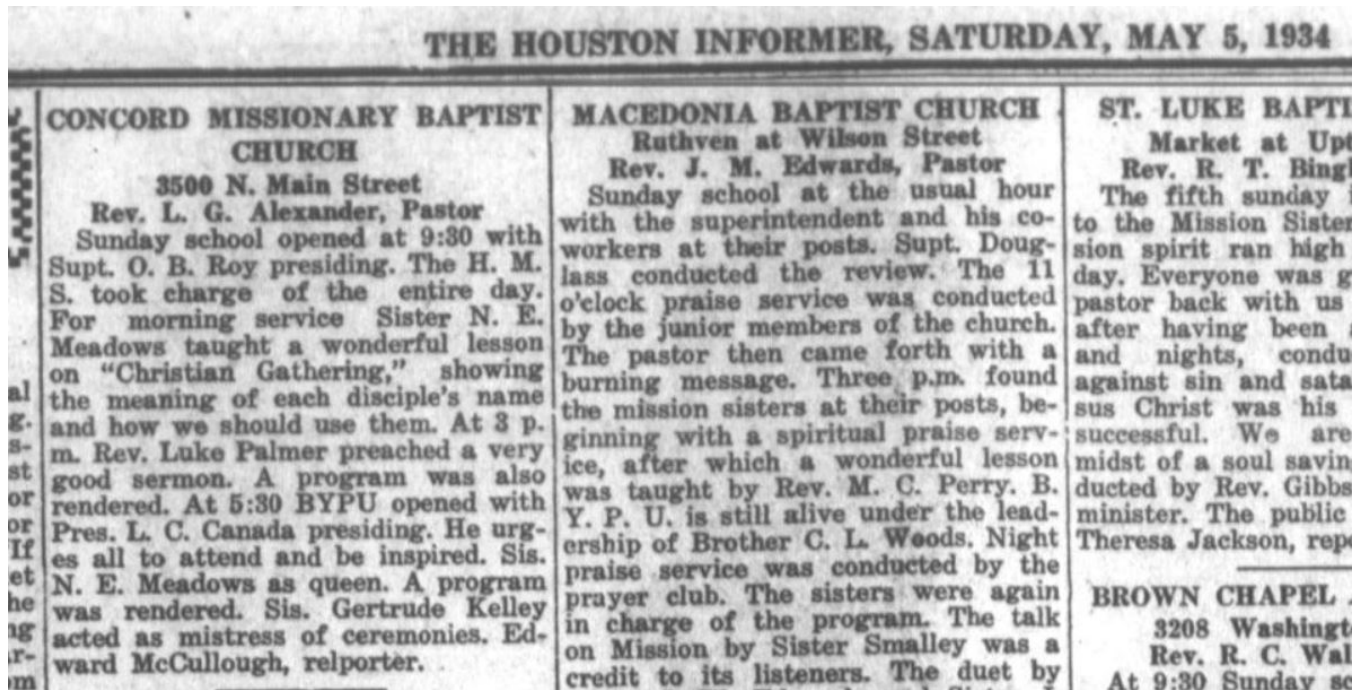


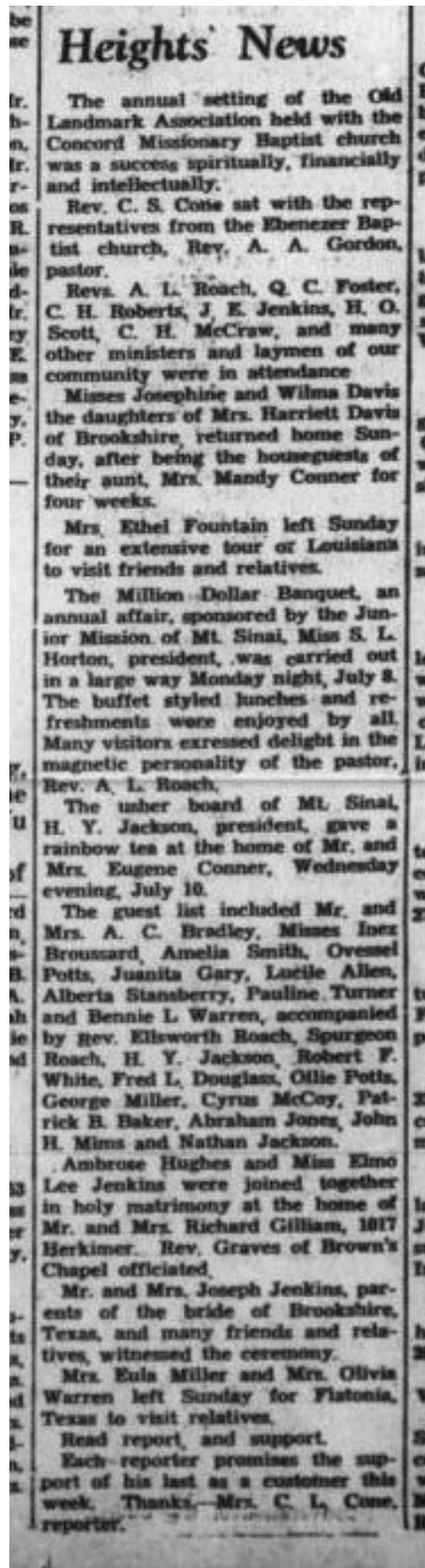


EXHIBIT B
SITE MAP- 7506 NORTH MAIN ST.



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





PLEASE ALSO SEE APPENDIX A

- NATIONAL REGISTER DOCUMENT -HISTORIC AND ARCHITECTURAL RESOURCES OF INDEPENDENCE HEIGHTS, HOUSTON, TEXAS

RICE UNIVERSITY ALSO HAS A WEBSITE REFERENCING CONCORD MISSIONARY BAPTIST LOCATED HERE:
[HTTPS://INDEPHEIGHTS.RICE.EDU/SPIRITUAL.HTM](https://indepheights.rice.edu/spiritual.htm)