

**LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT**

**LANDMARK NAME:** Frank H. Roberts House  
**OWNERS:** Michael A. and Rose Swain  
**APPLICANT:** David Bush, Preservation Houston  
**LOCATION:** 3308 Parkwood Dr – Riverside Terrace

**AGENDA ITEM:** D.2  
**HPO FILE NO.:** 16L314  
**DATE ACCEPTED:** Mar-11-2016  
**HAHC HEARING DATE:** Mar-24-2016

**SITE INFORMATION**

Lot 4 and Tract 5, Block 51, Riverside Terrace Section 8, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site contains a historic two-story Tudor style home on 11,700 square feet of land with a total living area of 2,863 square feet. The residence is on the south side of Parkwood Drive, which is on the south side of Brays Bayou.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark Designation

**HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY**

The Frank H. Roberts House, designed and built for Frank H. Roberts at 3308 Parkwood in Riverside Terrace, was constructed in 1936. The house exemplifies the Tudor Revival style, a popular national architectural style of the time, found throughout the Boulevard Oaks Historic District and River Oaks. The Roberts House was built by contractor/developer Ivan H. Greer; two Greer homes in River Oaks have been designated City of Houston historic landmarks.

Frank H. Roberts served as the President of the Gulf Brewing Company, which was founded and owned by renowned Houstonian, Howard Hughes. Hughes' brewery created the most popular beer in Texas, Grand Prize Beer, and was a Houston landmark from 1933-1963.

In 1992, after the house had stood vacant and deteriorating for ten years, the South MacGregor Civic Club requested a dangerous building decree and subsequent demolition order from the City of Houston. The condemned house was scheduled to be demolished when the current owners purchased it in June 1993 and began rehabilitating the structure.

The Frank H. Roberts House meets Criteria 1, 3, 4 and 6 for Landmark Designation.

**HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE***Architectural Style*

The Frank H. Roberts House was built in the Tudor Revival style, a style of architecture popular nationally in the 1920s and 1930s. Significant concentrations of the style are found in Houston in the Boulevard Oaks Historic District and River Oaks neighborhoods. Approximately one third of the homes in Boulevard Oaks were designed in the Tudor Revival style. Houston's first female builder, Katharine Mott, designed several Tudor Revival style homes.

The style is characterized by prominent front gables, steeply pitched roofs and massive chimneys. The decorative details found on Tudor Revival houses are inspired by English architecture of the late

Medieval period. These include decorative brickwork, stone accents and half-timbering, a type of wall surface that appears to be massive beams with brick or stucco filling the spaces between the wood. The Frank H. Roberts House includes some of these details, specifically the massive chimney on the home's façade, half-timbering, and a steeply pitched roof.

The Roberts House was designed and built in 1936 by Ivan H. Greer. Father and son contractors Alfred W. and Ivan H. Greer built many homes in Houston during the 1930s, primarily in the River Oaks neighborhood. Two Greer houses in River Oaks, the D.W. Hovey House at 3395 Del Monte Drive and the Strickland-Lasater-Thomas House at 2184 Troon Road, have been designated City of Houston historic landmarks.

### *Ivan H. Greer*

Ivan H. Greer (1897-1963) was the designer and builder of the Frank H. Roberts House. He was born in Poplar Bluff, Missouri, and spent his adult years as a contractor building homes in and around Houston. Ivan and his father, Alfred W. Greer, often worked in partnership on Houston projects. Ivan H. Greer developed one of the first private subdivisions in Lake Jackson, Texas, and was elected mayor of the town in 1944.

Among the Houston houses constructed by the Greers are:

- 2128 Brentwood
- 3754 Chevy Chase (demolished)
- 3801 Chevy Chase
- 3459 Ella Lee
- 3635 Ella Lee
- 1944 Larchmont
- 3412 Meadow Lake
- 3755 Olympia
- 3655 Piping Rock
- 2184 Troon (City of Houston Landmark)
- 3395 Del Monte (City of Houston Landmark)

### *Frank H. Roberts*

Frank H. Roberts (1898-1975) served as president of the Gulf Brewing Company from 1935 to 1939. Howard Hughes started Gulf Brewing in 1933 at the end of Prohibition. The company built a \$1,250,000 plant adjacent to the Hughes Tool Company on Polk Avenue and made its first deliveries of Grand Prize Beer in January 1934. The Louisiana-born Roberts had worked at Hughes Tool before his tenure with the brewery. Under his leadership, Gulf Brewing expanded its plant in 1937 and increased its capacity to 32,000 bottles per hour. Roberts was hired as president of the Champion Brewing Company of San Antonio in May 1939.

### *Howard Hughes*

Howard Robard Hughes, Jr. (1905-1976) was born in Houston and became a world famous business tycoon, entrepreneur, investor, aviator, aerospace engineer, inventor and filmmaker. Howard Hughes, Jr. had a diverse range of personal and business interests including the Gulf Brewing Company where Frank H. Roberts served as president. During his lifetime, Hughes was known as the wealthiest self-made man in the world, although he inherited much of his wealth from the successful family business founded by his father, Howard R. Hughes, Sr. (1869-1924).

Hughes, Sr. patented the two-cone roller bit, which revolutionized rotary drilling for petroleum. The drill bit pulverized hard rock allowing drilling in previously inaccessible terrain. Hughes, Sr. made the shrewd and lucrative decision to commercialize the invention by leasing the bits instead of selling them and founded the Hughes Tool Company in 1909.

Despite Howard Hughes, Jr.'s accomplishments, including his design of the famous "Spruce Goose" flying boat, later in life he was best known as an eccentric recluse. Hughes died on an airplane en route from Acapulco, Mexico to a Houston hospital. He is buried in Houston's historic Glenwood Cemetery.

### *Gulf Brewing Company*

The Gulf Brewing Company, sometimes known as the Grand Prize Brewing Company after its best-selling beer, was located at 5301-5303 Polk Avenue in Houston. Howard R. Hughes, Jr. opened the brewery on the grounds of the Hughes Tool Company at the end of Prohibition in 1933. Profits from the brewery helped the Hughes Tool Company survive the lean years of the Depression. The Theodore Hamm Brewing Company of St. Paul, Minnesota purchased Gulf Brewing Company in 1963 and operated it as the Houston division of Hamm's until 1967, when the Texas facility was shuttered. The brewery was later demolished.

### *Riverside Terrace*

The first section of Riverside Terrace was platted in 1924. Development of the area was started by Henry Frederick MacGregor, who came to Houston in 1883 and began investing in real estate. By 1900, MacGregor had extended Houston's residential area southward by building several subdivisions in the South Main area. During the first two decades of the 20th century, "street-car suburbs" flourished in Houston and residential developments spurred the extension of streetcar lines.

By the mid-1920s, the growing popularity of the automobile led to new "automobile suburbs" in Houston. Several of these residential subdivisions were platted out on either side of Brays Bayou in the vicinity of Hermann Park. One such suburb was Riverside Terrace.

When Riverside Terrace opened early sales brochures stressed its premier location. The subdivision was promoted as being near South Main's cultural, medical, educational, and social facilities. The first section of the project – an area bounded by Almeda, Blodgett, Live Oak and Oakdale streets – was financed by the Guardian Trust Company. The developer, using the same sales language as the River Oaks Corporation, noted that there would be "rigid building restrictions...so that each purchaser is assured beforehand of the exact character of the improvements with which he will be surrounded."

The success of Riverside Terrace attracted other developers and the subdivisions of Washington Terrace and Riverside were platted in the vicinity. Today, the entire area is known as Riverside Terrace.

The area was once home to a large number of Jewish families, including such prominent names as Weingarten, Finger, Sakowitz and Battlestein, who were excluded from River Oaks. From the 1930s until the post-war era, the neighborhood was unofficially known as the "Jewish River Oaks," for its affluent residents and impressive homes, particularly those on MacGregor Drive overlooking Brays Bayou.

Architects who designed some of the first homes in the neighborhood include John Chase, John Staub, Birdsall Briscoe, Bolton & Barnstone and Joseph Finger. Several distinctive modern houses were designed by the office of Bailey A. Swenson. The architectural firm of MacKie and Kamrath also produced homes of modern design. One house, featured in Architectural Record in 1942, was described as having excited neighborhood controversy for being so modern. Today the neighborhood contains numerous outstanding examples of residential architecture ranging from traditional revival styles to late Art Deco and mid-century modern, interspersed with small motels and apartments.

The neighborhood's demographics began to change in 1952 when wealthy African-American cattleman Jack Caesar moved his family into Riverside Terrace. Caesar remained in his house even after a bomb was detonated on the front porch. In the mid-1950s, white families began moving to more distant suburbs. In the early 1960s, white residents who saw the potential for an integrated neighborhood tried to stabilize the area by posting signs that read, "This Is Our Home, It Is Not For Sale," which became the title of a 1985 documentary by Jon Schwartz that gives a 60-year overview of the community and its struggle to integrate.

Eventually, all but a few white homeowners left Riverside Terrace, but the neighborhood once again became home to prominent, professionals – this time African-American college professors, doctors, lawyers, and politicians.

Home construction and commercial development have recently revived, especially on the southern edge of the neighborhood. The neighborhood's proximity to the Museum District, Texas Medical Center and Hermann Park are again making the area attractive to homeowners. Houses in Riverside Terrace are as diverse as the characters that shaped its history. Homes range from 2,000 to 6,000 square feet and lots can be as large as two acres. Prices range from \$300,000 to \$1 million.

## **ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY**

The Roberts House is situated on the south side of Parkwood Drive, a winding street which roughly follows the course nearby of Brays Bayou. The house faces north-northeast. The home is on 11,700 square feet of land and had an original living area of 2,863 square feet.

The two-story brick house was constructed in the Tudor Revival style. The house is built on a concrete slab and has an asymmetrical façade. The house is three bays wide.

The first bay on the left (east) side of the house features a centered set of three six-over-six double hung windows on the first floor beneath a shed-roofed overhang. The second floor includes a centered pair of six-over-six double hung windows. The first bay has a side gabled roof.

The central bay features a massive corbelled brick chimney that is slightly off-center in the main façade. On the first floor on the right side of the chimney is a single six-over-six double hung window. There are windows on the second floor of the central bay. The pyramidal roof of the central bay includes a cross-gabled section where the roof of the first bay meets the roof of the second bay.

The gable front third bay on the right (west) side of the house features a slightly recessed central entry porch with a single wooden door. The second floor projects slightly over the first and features a half-timbered façade with stucco between the wooden beams. There are two small six-over-six double hung

windows symmetrically spaced on the second floor. The stucco-covered front gable features a central wooden vent. The roof on this section of the house is front gabled with a cross gable where the roof over the first bay meets the pyramidal section of the roof.

## DEED HISTORY

Deed No. 493321 dated January 23, 1931-Lot 4 on the south side of Buffalo Bayou was sold by Guardian Trust, on behalf of MacGregor Drive Realty Company, to W.E. Carpenter. The note was \$510.84 bearing an interest rate of 7%. Principal & interest were payable in monthly installments of \$15.77.

Deed No. 493473 dated January 23, 1931-Lot 5 was sold by Guardian Trust, on behalf of MacGregor Drive Realty Company, to W.E. Carpenter & J.A. Carpenter. The note was \$633.22 bearing an interest rate of 7%. Principal & interest were payable in monthly installments of \$19.55.

Deed No. 73918 dated August 12, 1936-Lot 4 was sold by W.E. & wife Ottillie M. Carpenter to Frank H. & wife Susie Gary Roberts for \$1,600 paid in cash.

Deed No. 73919 dated August 12, 1936-The western half of Lot 5 was sold by W.E. & wife Ottillie M. Carpenter & J.A. Carpenter to Frank H. & wife Susie Gary Roberts for \$800 paid in cash.

The home at 3308 Parkwood was built for Frank H. Roberts by developer/builder Ivan H. Greer according to the August 1936 issue of the Texas General Contractors Association Monthly Bulletin. The three story Tudor style home is on 11,700 sf of land with a total living area of 2,863 sf. There is a separate garage with a 399 sf studio apartment above. Two 1938 Texas newspapers have pictures that reference Frank H. Roberts as the president of Gulf Brewing Company. Gulf Brewing Company was a Houston company that manufactured Grand Prize Beer and was owned by Howard Hughes.

\*Lot 6 & the eastern half of Lot 5 was sold to Frank Roberts by C.Y. Bradshaw & wife on March 4, 1938.

Deed No. 172596 dated February 1, 1944-Lots 4, 5, & 6 were sold by Frank & Susie Roberts to R.A. Fenzl for \$20,000 paid in cash.

General Warranty Deed C220300 dated December 9, 1965-Lot 4 & the western half of lot 5 were sold by R.A. & wife Adella B. Fenzl to William A. Samuel for \$15,000 payable to Standard Savings Association with the grantee (Samuel) executing a deed of trust to Mack H. Hannah, Jr., with monthly payments of \$134.83.

Deed C761708 dated March 22, 1968~Lot 4 and the western 30 feet of Lot 5 were sold to T.L. & wife Laura S. Phoenix. Mr. Phoenix moved out of the home in 1982. The home was unoccupied for approximately 12 years. His sons, Larry Don Phoenix and brother, inherited the home in 1992. The South MacGregor Civic Club requested a dangerous building decree and subsequent demolition order from the City of Houston. The condemned house was scheduled to be demolished when the current owners purchased it in June 1993.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY:

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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 the Historic Preservation Department, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.*



**EXHIBIT A**  
**CURRENT PHOTO**  
THE FRANK H. ROBERTS HOUSE  
3308 PARKWOOD DRIVE





**EXHIBIT B**  
**1993 PHOTO**

THE FRANK H. ROBERTS HOUSE  
3308 PARKWOOD DRIVE



## EXHIBIT C SITE MAP

THE FRANK H. ROBERTS HOUSE  
3308 PARKWOOD DRIVE

