

## PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** Mayor Otis Massey House

**AGENDA ITEM:** B.2

**OWNERS:** Michael Cooney

**HPO FILE NO.:** 16PL131

**APPLICANTS:** Rachel Paxton

**DATE ACCEPTED:** 5/27/2016

**LOCATION:** 2622 Riverside Drive – Riverside Terrace

**HAHC HEARING:** 6/16/2016

**SITE INFORMATION:** Lot 11, Block 32, Riverside Terrace Section 5, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a two-story brick residence.

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

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Mayor Otis Massey House at 2622 Riverside Drive in Riverside Terrace was designed by J. E. Herbert and built by H.H. Yates in 1927-1928 for Otis Massey, then President of Massey Roofing and Insulation Company, and Mayme Massey. The house is an example of the Tudor Revival style and the only home designed by J.E. Herbert remaining in Riverside Terrace Section 5.

Otis Massey served two terms as the Mayor of Houston from 1943-1946. He was the first Houston mayor to serve under the city manager style of leadership. In addition to his service to the city as mayor, Massey served on a multitude of boards for charitable and civic causes. Massey was also integral in the creation of what is today known as the Texas Medical Center.

The Mayor Otis Massey House at 2622 Riverside Drive meets Criteria 1, 3, 5, and 6 for Protected Landmark Designation.

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

#### *Otis Massey*

Born in May 26, 1891 in Drexel, Missouri, Otis Massey received a degree in Business Administration from Center College in Sedalia, MO in 1911. Upon graduation, Massey began work for the Johns-Mansville Company. In 1920 he started his own roofing and supply company in Missouri. In 1921 he and his wife, Mayme Kiser Massey, relocated to Houston and he proceeded to expand his company's interests to Texas and rename it the Otis Massey Roofing and Insulation Company.

While Massey is best known for his tenure as mayor, he was actively involved with the Kiwanis, Chamber of Commerce, Faith Home, Holly Hall, the United Fund, and the Community Chest. He also served as the chairman for the Houston Boy Scouts council and the chairman of the YMCA.

At 51, the 1942 mayoral election was Massey's first experience running for public office. He was Houston's first mayor to run the city under the city manager form of leadership; a platform he championed during his campaign, ultimately resulting in his victory over Neal Pickett. He easily won his second term with a staggering 4,189 votes to 106. Despite his success with his two terms, Massey turned down the offer to run for a third term.

One of Massey's major mayoral legacies was the support of the 1943 referendum to confirm city council's agreement to sell 133½ acres of the Hogg Tract to the M. D. Anderson Foundation for \$400,000. This land was slated to be developed into a cancer research institute and dental school. The foundation also persuaded Baylor to move its College of Medicine from Dallas to the new institute in Houston. These deals resulted in the creation of what is now known as the Texas Medical Center. Initial planning for the campus was completed by H. A. Kipp in 1944 – 1945. Between 1945 and 1955 six new hospitals and two medical schools were constructed on the Hogg Tract.

After his tenure as Mayor, Massey returned to business with the creation of the Asbestos Company of Texas. Massey also had business interests in the Mustang Tractor and Equipment Company, Eureka Credit Corporation and Eureka Investment Corporation. He also served as a director of the South Main Bank. While Massey returned to the private sector he continued to serve the city as a member of the Civil Service Commission as well as the Planning Commission.

The Massey's resided at 2622 Riverside until 1949 when they moved to 1604 South Post Oak Lane.

### *J.E. Herbert*

J.E. Herbert was born on December 3, 1870 in Louisiana; he married Celeste Cropper in 1893 and the couple had three daughters. During the Herbert's early years of marriage, the young family relocated to Biloxi, Mississippi. The family left Biloxi circa 1909 to relocate once again, this time to New Orleans. 1927 brought relocation to the family once again, this time to Houston. While in Houston, Herbert designed multiple custom homes. The family moved again to California in 1940. Herbert died in San Mateo County, California on April 28, 1966 at the age of 95.

### *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**

### *Architectural Description*

The Otis Massey House at 2622 Riverside Drive was designed by J.E. Herbert and built by local contractor H.H. Yates for \$8,500. The home is located in Riverside Terrace Section 5. Construction began in the fall of 1927 and was completed in January, 1928. Massey would later become the Mayor of Houston, serving two terms from 1943 to 1946. Massey resided at 2622 Riverside for his tenure as mayor. The Massey's lived in the residence with their two daughters, Marian and Dorothy until 1949. The Otis Massey House at 2622 Riverside Drive is the only remaining home in the neighborhood designed by J.E. Herbert that is left.

The building is a two story, five by three bay, side-gabled Tudor Revival style with a central mid-façade forward facing gable containing the recessed entry and a bay window. The fenestration is not symmetrical, which is a characteristic of the Tudor Revival Style. The exterior of the frame house is clad in red brick veneer and features a slate roof.

The house is sited so the front elevation faces north on Riverside Drive; the house is five bays wide and three bays deep. The house is clad in a running bond brick veneer that features random protruding bricks, lending a dimensional element to the elevations, which is another common characteristic of Tudor Revival.

The first (east) bay contains a porch; a pair of windows are located directly above the porch on the second story. The second and third bays are located on a protruding mid-façade gable that contains a bay window topped by a pair of windows and recessed, single door entry. The roof of this front facing gable terminates into the side of the one-shouldered chimney. The fourth bay contains a single window, while the fifth bay features three windows at heights that correspond with an interior staircase.

### *Restoration History*

The current owners purchased the property in February, 2016. Unfortunately, the residence at 2622 has suffered from decades of neglect. In order to restore the structure to its former glory, the new owners are completely replacing the HVAC, electrical and plumbing. They are also stabilizing the foundation and installing a new driveway. Further renovations to the interior include the installation of new sheetrock and cabinetry along with exposing the original wood floors. A previous owner had boarded up a side porch and removed an original window on the east bay of the front elevation. The porch has been uncovered and the window opening has been repaired with the original window re-installed in the opening. The owners intend to restore all of the original windows if salvageable, if not, they will be replaced with appropriate substitutes.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

“Payroll Tax Need Foreseen For Houston,” *Houston Post*, June 21, 1960.

“Ex-Mayor Massey Could Have ‘Two-Job’ Man Title,” *Houston Chronicle*, February 10, 1951.

“Farnsworth Wins Fight In Stock Suit,” *Houston Post*, January 8, 1968.

Fox, Stephen. “Big Park, Little Plans: A History of Hermann Park,” <http://www.georgekessler.org>, accessed June 7, 2016.

*McAlester, Virginia. “A Field Guide to American Houses.” New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014.*

“Otis Massey, former mayor,” *Houston Chronicle*, September 7, 1968.

“Otis Massey, 77, Former Mayor Of City, Dies in Local Hospital,” *Houston Post*, September 6, 1968.

“Otis Massey Topes Charter Group Ticket” *Houston Post*, September 26, 1942.

*The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Historic Preservation Office, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.*

## APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION

The HAHC shall review each application for designation of a protected landmark that is included in an application for designation of a landmark at the same time and in the same manner as it reviews and considers the application for a landmark. The HAHC in making recommendations with respect to a protected landmark designation, and the City Council, in making a designation, shall consider whether the building, structure, site, or area meets at least three of the criteria in Section 33-224, or one of the criteria in Section 33-229, as follows:

**S**    **NA**

**S - satisfies**    **NA - not applicable**

Meets at least three of the following (Sec. 33-224(a)(1):

- (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.
- (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)).

**OR**

- The property was constructed before 1905 (Sec. 33-229(a)(2));

**OR**

- The property is listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places or designated as a “contributing structure” in an historic district listed in the National Register of Historic Places (Sec. 33-229(a)(3));

**OR**

- The property is recognized by the State of Texas as a Recorded State Historical Landmark (Sec. 33-229(a)(4)).

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Protected Landmark Designation of the Mayor Otis Massey House at 2622 Riverside Drive.

**HAHC RECOMMENDATION**

The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends to City Council the Protected Landmark Designation of the Mayor Otis Massey House at 2622 Riverside Drive.

**EXHIBIT A**

**PHOTO**

MAYOR OTIS MASSEY HOUSE  
2622 RIVERSIDE DRIVE



**EXHIBIT B**  
**SITE MAP**  
MAYOR OTIS MASSEY HOUSE  
2622 RIVERSIDE DRIVE

