

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Klunkert Farmhouse
OWNER: Robert Mott
APPLICANT: Same
LOCATION: 2911 Julian Street - Woodland Heights

AGENDA ITEM: III
HPO FILE NO: 12PL110
DATE ACCEPTED: Feb-2-2012
HAHC HEARING: Mar-22-2012

SITE INFORMATION: Tract 11, Abstract 1, J. Austin Survey, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a two-story wood-frame house built circa 1875 and a 600 sq ft garage apt built circa 1920.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Klunkert Farmhouse at 2911 Julian in the Woodland Heights neighborhood was built circa 1875, long before the subdivisions that now surround it. Ernst and Wilhelmina Klunkert built the farmhouse for their family on their 11.73 acre homestead outside the city limits, north of White Oak Bayou, in an area popular with other German immigrants. In the early 20th century, the farmhouse was quickly surrounded by the burgeoning 'suburban' development in Houston Heights and Woodland Heights, but the homestead itself resisted development until 1924, when a portion was subdivided into the Ridgemont Addition. Unlike its later neighbors in the Woodland Heights, the house is set back 53 ft from the street, its front is oriented toward the east and its fireplace is on the north, a typical orientation for farm residences of the period. The two-story house has the rigid plan organization characteristic of a simple Greek Revival style. The central stairway flanked by two rooms in the front of the house and two rooms in the back would have been typical in rural Texas following the Civil War. Although the house has seen some alterations over the years, it has been well maintained and retains its historic farmhouse character.

The Klunkert House, because of its age, style, and siting is a unique representation of the early German settlers and the agrarian culture which dominated the area north of White Oak Bayou in the latter half of the 19th Century. The Klunkert Farmhouse was built before 1905 and meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, and 5, qualifying it for Landmark and Protected Landmark designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

A unique combination of circumstances resulted in the preservation of the 1875 Ernst Klunkert House, the only farmhouse known to be remaining on its original site in the area encompassing the Woodland Heights development. It has survived the rapid growth and prosperity of Houston in what has been considered a close-in neighborhood for at least the past 70 years.

Ernst Klunkert's name first appears in the Harris County records on June 20, 1867 when he paid \$1750.00 for the 11.73 acre homestead which Florence McCarty had purchased from Charlotte Allen five years earlier. The farm was located outside the city limits, north of White Oak Bayou in the region generally referred to as Germantown. On the same day he also borrowed \$300 for the purchase of two lots located within the city, completing this purchase on June 27. Although

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Klunkert had purchased McCarty's farm, under the terms of the agreement, the former owner retained his right to the 1867 crop, and it is clear that Mr. Klunkert did not receive any substantial farming revenue until mid-1868. However, it appears that Klunkert prospered quickly. By 1873 and 1874, he loaned a total of \$450 to two individuals for land purchases. When the loans were repaid in 1875 at 12% interest, Klunkert would have had the surplus cash needed for the construction of his farmhouse. This fact when coupled with the physical evidence, including the design and building materials used in the house itself, establishes the circa 1875 designation for its construction.

Though the name Germantown has appeared in other parts of the Houston area, it is most readily associated today with the community that sat along Old Montgomery Road (now North Main) and Little White Oak Bayou. In 1838, Elizabeth Austin Parrott, widow of the original patentee, John Austin, sold the large rectangular tract of land which would become home to various German immigrants, many of them Prussians like Ernst and Wilhelmina Klunkert, whose property was located on the western boundary of Germantown proper. It was obviously a neighborhood which the Klunkerts found comfortable. Their daughters married into the Wendt family whose farm was just to the southeast of theirs.

By 1880, Ernst Klunkert (sic) is listed as having a vegetable stall in the Houston City Market while residing north of the city limits. That he remained a prosperous produce farmer is indicated by his purchase in 1883 of 3 city lots adjacent to his original two. The 1884 City Directory lists his occupation simply as a "gardener" with his residence remaining north of White Oak Bayou, but it no longer mentions any ownership of a market stall. Just two years later, there are clear indications that Klunkert had suffered a financial setback, perhaps as a result of the drought of 1886-87. Taxes on Mr. Klunkert's homestead were delinquent between 1886 and 1893.

The area north of White Oak Bayou underwent some significant changes in the late 19th century. Thanks to Beauchamp Springs, the area had always gotten road traffic, but as Houston grew, the inevitable development followed. The 1887 re-location of the Bayland Orphan's Home from Baytown to a 36 acre tract adjoining Klunkert's north property line, helped preserve, or at least prolong, the rural character of the immediate neighborhood. To the west, however, the region's largest planned community arose in Houston Heights.

During these same years Ernst Klunkert Jr. joined his father in managing the family farm, and they raised the funds to pay the delinquent taxes by selling the Klunkert House and one acre of land to business and newspaper man, Gottfried Lemmel, for \$200, plus the back taxes due on all 11.73 acres. This financial strategy was successful, and the Klunkert family continued to farm their remaining 10.73 acres until Ernst's death in 1901. The character of the area was becoming increasingly suburban, with the biggest changes coming when developers platted the Woodland Heights area immediately east of the Klunkert/Lemmel properties. Between 1895 and 1902, the Klunkerts purchased 105 acres further west in a rural area along White Oak Bayou, and by 1902 the family appears to have moved off its homestead.

Although the Woodland Heights development was underway by 1907 and the Bayland Orphan's Home had moved to Bellaire after it was destroyed by fire in 1914, Houston city maps dated as late as 1920 indicate that the original Klunkert homestead area remained largely unchanged. Substantial development of the 10.73 acre homestead did not begin until about 1924 when the Klunkert property, sold two decades before by Ernst's widow, Wilhelmina, was subdivided into the

Ridgmont Addition. Even that development appears not to have been done all at once. A decade or more after that, directory listings suggest that Julian Street still did not have the number of residences located there today.

Various records indicate that the house and its outbuildings served time as both single family and multi-family residences, sometimes owned, and sometimes rented. For a period in the late 1930s, the house was owned by the Woodland Christian Church and its pastor's family until the church purchased a substantial building on Houston Avenue from another neighborhood congregation. With the gradual gentrification of the neighborhood, the home returned to life as a single family dwelling.

Despite the urbanization of its area in the middle 20th century, the siting of the Klunkert House retained some of its rural character. The houses of the surrounding development are built in Victorian or Bungalow/Cottage styles, generally on 75' or 50' x 100' lots on north/south axes, with a regular pattern of 20' setbacks from the street. In contrast, the Klunkert House is built in the Greek Revival style, and is on a 1/3 acre tract with an east/west axis. Its setback is 53' from Julian Street, and while many of the houses in the surrounding development have garage/apartment, in no instance are they situated 165' from the street. The additional outbuilding/shed is also unique. Thus, the Klunkert House, because of its age, style, and siting is a unique representation of the early German settlers and the agrarian culture which dominated the area north of White Oak Bayou in the latter half of the 19th Century.

From the record of deed transactions and county and city maps it can be ascertained that the Klunkert House is standing on its original site. Unlike its later neighbors in the Woodland Heights, its front is oriented toward the east and its fireplace is on the north, a typical orientation for farm residences of the period. A large sycamore shade tree may have been planted by the original owner.

The two-story house has the rigid plan organization characteristic of a simple Greek Revival style. The central stairway flanked by two rooms in the front of the house and two rooms in the back would have been typical in rural Texas following the Civil War. The plan on the second floor was identical to that on the first floor even to the repetition of the entry door as a gallery access door on the second floor. While there have been significant alterations to the interior, the original plan organization is still readily perceived. One departure from the usual rigid symmetry is the enlarged size of the north front room on both floors. This creates an offset that projects 6 feet out from the front face of the house and unbalances the elevation. There is one fireplace located in the north wall of this room on the ground floor, although second story window placement indicated that the original was undoubtedly a two-story fireplace. Ceiling heights on both floors are approximately 8 feet and there is no tendency toward the tall proportions prevalent in contemporaneous Victorian houses.

The foundation consists of brick piers spanned with heavy timber cypress beams. The wood frame structure built upon these beams is neither conventional balloon nor western framing and incorporates some heavy timber members in the second floor framing. Some of these timbers were discovered during siding repairs and others can be seen covered with finish boards as dropped beams in the living room ceiling. During restoration of the kitchen in 2005, it was discovered that the fasteners used were square hand-wrought spikes and nails. This is taken as further evidence that the building was constructed before about 1880.

The exterior surfaces were finished with wood siding, much of which is original cypress wood until Hardiplank was used to replace rotting siding on the south and east sides of the structure in the 1990s. The north and west sides of the house still have the wood siding. All windows are double hung 6/6 or 8/8 and are original to the building. The front or east elevation consists of two stories with identically placed doors and windows. A portion of the right side of the elevation projects forward and is capped with a pediment of classical detailing. This projecting portion has a single 8/8 window centered in each story. The remainder of the east elevation has two 6/6 windows and a door on each story and is fronted by two story porch. Each story of the porch is supported by four square columns with flat plate capitals and bases and is framed with heavy timbers. While the porch has been rebuilt at least twice, the architectural details appear to have been reproduced with each rebuilding. The lintel over the main entrance is detailed with classical moldings and a series of details. The remaining elevations are largely flat with symmetrical 6/6 lite window placement and Greek Revival pediments at gable ends of the roof. On the rear (west) elevation is a one story projection which once was a sleeping porch but has since been enclosed and converted into a kitchen.

The great majority of the alterations are interior, and some modifications date back around one hundred years. The original plan consisted of nothing more than four rooms grouped around a central stair and hallway on each floor with porches in front and back. Subsequently, the building was electrified, plumbing and bathrooms were added, the sleeping porch was enclosed and converted to a kitchen, closets were constructed in bedrooms, cabinets and bookshelves were built, central heating and air conditioning was installed, the interior stair was rebuilt as a switchback stair (although the original oak baluster and pickets were retained), and ceiling heights were raised in two areas on the second floor. Exterior alterations that affect the general appearance consist only of the enclosure of the sleeping porch and addition of a covered stoop (in detailing consistent with the period) over the kitchen door. Other less obvious changes are the reinforcement of the chimney with three concrete piers in 1994, and the concreting of the foundation of the front porch. The superstructure of the front porch has been restored to a state as close as possible to the original appearance and detailing.

Two outbuildings of uncertain age existed on the site until the 1990s. They appear to date from the period of the original owners. There is no apparent evidence of a kitchen fireplace within the main house. Therefore, it is likely that originally an outdoor kitchen existed for cooking and laundry. The remains of a masonry lined cistern has been discovered beneath an extension of the original sleeping porch, and it is likely that the original kitchen was once located near this cistern in an arrangement typical of the period. The smaller outbuilding, a 12' x 24' single-story frame structure once located toward the back of the property, may have once been this kitchen building. If so, it has probably been moved from a location closer to the main house. The smaller outbuilding was removed in the 1990s but a bathtub from that structure was reinstalled in the main house. The other outbuilding was probably originally a carriage house, but is now a garage with an apartment on top.

With almost all other remnants of the German immigrant community on the north side of White Oak Bayou long since lost to time, the Klunkert Farmhouse, with its expansive front lawn, remains largely unaltered, an important testament to what this part of Houston held 150 years ago.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Houston City Directories, various years.

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Porter, Pollard & Ruby, 1890 (HMRC)

P. Whitty, 1900 (HMRC)

P. Whitty, 1906 (HMRC)

J.M. Kelsen, Houston Street Map, 1913

Information provided by Ginger Daily, Klunkert descendant

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps,

US Census Records, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930

Woodland Heights ME church, online history

The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Diana DuCroz, 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 and the Planning Commission, 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. 33-229(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;

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- (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)).

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 Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of the Klunkert Farmhouse at 2911 Julian Street.

HAHC ACTION

Recommended that City Council approve the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of the Klunkert Farmhouse at 2911 Julian Street.

EXHIBIT A
KLUNKERT FARMHOUSE
2911 JULIAN STREET



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Planning and Development Department

EXHIBIT B
SITE LOCATION MAP
KLUNKERT FARMHOUSE
2911 JULIAN STREET
NOT TO SCALE

