

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: House at 1317 Ruthven

OWNERS: Kayley Bolden

APPLICANTS: SAME AS OWNER

LOCATION: 1317 Ruthven Street

AGENDA ITEM: [x]

HPO FILE NO.: [18L###]

DATE ACCEPTED: [Apr-05-2015]

HAHC HEARING: [Apr-05-2015]

SITE INFORMATION: Lot 4, Block 65, WR Baker, SSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. Designation is requested for single-story house. The building is 1,118 square feet on a 5,000 square foot lot.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Protected Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

1317 Ruthven is a c. 1894 one-story cottage built for Louis C. Artusy around 1894 and is listed as a contributing historic building in the Freedmen's Town National Register Historic District. The house is one of the oldest surviving structures in Freedmen's Town, a community settled after Emancipation that became a thriving center of Black social, cultural, religious, and commercial activity through the first three decades of the 20th century.

The Freedmen's Town Historic District has undergone rapid redevelopment over the past 20 years, and approximately 75% of the neighborhood's historical buildings have been lost. Since so few historical buildings remain, even modest houses such as the House at 1317 Ruthven have historical significance and serve as important connections to the story of Freedmen's Town, first to the small Italian immigrant community that settled in the area in the late 1800s and early 1900s and later as a reminder of the working class African American families who were able to buy and occupy their homes during a time when opportunities to do so were limited.

The current owner is seeking protected landmark status for 1317 Ruthven to preserve one of the last remaining historic homes on the street and to ensure it remains part of the fabric of the neighborhood. The property includes the house, a 2-story outbuilding on the southwest corner, a non-historic small shed on the east side, and a non-historic pergola structure in the backyard. Protected Landmark status would apply only to the primary house; the non-historic outbuildings and pergola are excluded. The House at 1317 Ruthven meets Criteria 1, 4, 5, and 8 for Landmark designation and Criteria 1, 2, and 3 for Protected Landmark designation. The nomination was written by David Putz and Emily Ardoin with Preservation Houston.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

FREEDMEN'S TOWN

As early as the 1880s, the area south of Buffalo Bayou west of downtown Houston was referred to as Freedmen's Town as formerly enslaved people began settling in the area after the Civil War. New subdivisions, such as the Seneschal Addition (1848) and the Justin Castanie Addition (1848), two G. S.

Hardcastle Additions, and three other real estate developments undertaken by William R. Baker, were intended to accommodate this population growth. By the early 1900s, Freedmen's Town encompassed an area bounded by Buffalo Bayou to the north, Sutton Street to the south, Taft Street to the west, and Prairie Street to the east. The construction of San Felipe Courts/Allen Parkway Village in the early 1940s, construction of the Pierce Elevated in the 1960s, and the realignment of West Gray reduced the footprint of the neighborhood considerably. All that remains of the historical boundaries of Freedmen's Town today are the few blocks between Taft, Heiner, West Dallas, and West Gray Streets, representing less than half of the neighborhood's original blocks.

As Freedmen's Town saw its historical boundary shrink, so, too, has the neighborhood lost most of its original housing stock. Over 75% of the historical buildings in the area have been lost. The historic homes that remain standing reflect styles that were popular in working class communities of the time, including small vernacular Victorian cottages from the late 1800s and early 1900s and Craftsman bungalows from the 1920s and 1930s. The majority of the three room, side hall cottages that were once predominant in the neighborhood have been lost as well.

In 1985, Freedmen's Town was listed on the National Register of Historic Places to recognize the neighborhood's cultural significance; however, this does not provide any protection to historic structures in the district. In 2021, Freedmen's Town received additional recognition as a City of Houston Heritage District. Intended to highlight the significant achievements and contributions of the community and promote neighborhood stability, Heritage District recognition, like the National Register of Historic Places, does not protect historic structures from demolition. A few historic properties in the district, such as the Tomasino House at 1514 Willson (c. 1910) and the J. Vance Lewis House at 1218 Wilson (1907) are City of Houston protected landmarks, but the majority of historical buildings in the area lack such designation and protection.

HISTORY AND OWNERSHIP OF 1317 RUTHVEN

1317 Ruthven was built around 1894 for Louis C. Artusy,¹ making it one of the oldest remaining historic structures in the neighborhood. Even though it is a modest home, its history and ownership make a significant contribution to the broader Freedmen's Town story over the past 130 years.

LOUIS C. AND ELIZABETH ARTUSY 1895-1897

Louis C. Artusy moved to Houston from Louisiana with his parents Charles and Angelina Artusy around 1867 where they settled in the city's Third Ward.² Artusy's father, Charles Artusy, was born in Italy in 1816 and married Louisiana native Angelina Angeletti in 1851.³ By the time the couple arrived in

¹ Houston City Directory, 1895. This is the first listing of LC Artusy at 1317 Ruthven.

² United States Census, 1870 and 1880.

³ Findagrave.com, US Census 1870 and 1880.

Houston, they had seven children,⁴ including Louis (b. 1855),⁵ and two of his younger brothers, Eugene (b. 1859)⁶ and Anton (b. 1861).⁷ Once in Houston, the couple had four more children.^{8,9}

Tax records show Louis Artusy purchased the property at 1317 Ruthven around 1893, and most likely built a house on the lot the following year.^{10, 11} Brothers Eugene and Anton purchased lots in the same block and later built homes on them, Anton at 1318 Cleveland (1894),¹² the property immediately behind 1317 Ruthven, and Eugene at 1319 Ruthven (1895, demolished).¹³ Two of the brothers, Eugene and Louis, worked together with a third brother, Dominic, harvesting and selling oysters. Eugene and Dominic ran an oyster stand at the Houston City Market, and Louis was employed as one of their Gulf boatmen.¹⁴

About the same time the Artusy brothers were building homes in Freedmen's Town, Louis Artusy married Elizabeth Shaw.¹⁵ Elizabeth "Libby" Shaw Artusy was born in 1860 in New York¹⁶ and was living on Cleveland Street in Freedmen's Town at the time of her marriage to Louis Artusy.¹⁷ Very little is known about her other than the year and place of her birth and subsequent marriage to Artusy.

The Artusy brothers are a reminder of the small number of first-generation Italian immigrants who built homes in Freedmen's Town in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Although none of the brothers remained in the neighborhood long,¹⁸ 1317 Ruthven serves as a connection to this early part of the Freedmen's Town story.

*JOHN G. AND FRANCES MCPEAK
1897-1915*

In 1897, Louis Artusy sold 1317 Ruthven to realtor John G. McPeak¹⁹ and wife Frances who had moved to Houston from Illinois about the same time.²⁰ A daughter, son-in-law, and grandchildren lived within a

⁴ United States Census 1870 and 1880.

⁵ Findagrave.com

⁶ Findagrave.com

⁷ Findagrave.com

⁸ United States Census, 1880.

⁹ Many of the Artusy siblings and descendants are buried in Washington Cemetery. Louis is buried in Rosewood Cemetery in Pasadena, per his death certificate.

¹⁰ Artusy most likely purchased the lot from George Hermann. Hermann sold Anton Artusy his Freedmen's Town lot in 1893 as well. "Real Estate Transfers." *Houston Post*. September 1, 1893. Hermann sold and donated other lots in the same block between 1897 and 1902, including lots 6 and 8 in the same block.

¹¹ Louis Artusy first appears in the Houston City Directory at the Ruthven address in 1895.

¹² Houston City Directory, 1894. This is the first listing of AB Artusy at 1318 Cleveland.

¹³ Houston City Directory, 1895. This is the first listing of Angeline Artusy, the widowed mother of the three brothers, at 1319 Ruthven. Eugene Artusy lived at 1311 Crockett.

¹⁴ Houston City Directory, various.

¹⁵ "Artusy-Shaw." *Houston Post*. June 24, 1895.

¹⁶ US Census, 1930.

¹⁷ "Artusy-Shaw." *Houston Post*. June 24, 1895.

¹⁸ Houston City Directory, various.

¹⁹ "Real Estate Transfers." *Houston Post*. March 26, 1897.

block or two of the Ruthven house, first at 1405 Andrews, then at 1316 Cleveland and later at 1107 Wilson before moving to Woodland Heights in 1910.²¹ Even in the early 1900s, it was not unusual in Freedmen's Town for extended families such as the McPeaks to live within a few blocks of one another, similar to other working and middle class neighborhoods in Houston. Since the Andrews, Cleveland, and Wilson houses have all been lost, 1317 Ruthven preserves the story of multi-generational families like the McPeaks who lived in Freedmen's Town.

*CYNTHIA BRADLEY MARSHALL AND JOHN MARSHALL
1915-1934*

Shortly after the death of his wife in 1913, John McPeak moved to Woodland Heights and sold 1317 Ruthven to Cynthia Bradley Marshall, beginning a long period of African American ownership of the home.²² The sale of the home to Bradley Marshall also mirrors changes happening throughout Freedmen's Town at the time, as many of the remaining white families in the neighborhood began moving elsewhere in the city, transitioning Freedmen's Town to a predominantly African American neighborhood. 1317 Ruthven is one of the few remaining structures in Freedmen's Town that captures the evolving character and shifting demographics of home ownership in the neighborhood during this time.

Cynthia Bradley Marshall took ownership of 1317 Ruthven at a time when home ownership among Black women was rare, and home ownership for Black men was around 20% nationwide.²³ The house is a reminder of this significant accomplishment. Under Cynthia Bradley Marshall's ownership, 1317 Ruthven also serves as an important reminder of the work many Freedmen's Town residents did for families other than their own.

Cynthia Bradley first appears in the Houston City Directory in 1895 as a cook for Owen L. Cochran, the longtime president of First National Bank. She continued to work and live with the Cochran family until Owen Cochran's death in 1913.²⁴ In 1915, she is listed in the Houston City Directory as living at 1317 Ruthven, and in September of that year, she married John Marshall. According to the Houston City Directory, the Marshalls remained at 1317 Ruthven until the mid-1920s. Around that time, Cynthia and John Marshall moved to Los Angeles, where they next appear in the 1930 US Census. Cynthia Marshall continued to own and rent 1317 Ruthven until it was sold to longtime Freedmen's Town resident Harry Simon and his wife Jane.²⁵ This was the only time that the house was used as rental property during its early years.

The home's tenants during this period also reflect the rich history of Freedmen's Town. In 1917, Bessie A. Neal, a second-grade teacher at the Gregory Institute, and Lee Brooks, a peddler, are listed in the Houston City Directory as boarders at 1317 Ruthven. In 1920, Erma Bradley, also a teacher, lived in the

²⁰ US Census, 1900.

²¹ Houston City Directory, various. United States Census, 1910.

²² No records were located to document Marshall's purchase of the house; however, she was documented as the property owner when she sold the house in 1934.

²³ Collins, William J. and Robert A. Margo. 2010. Race and Home Ownership from the End of the Civil War to the Present.

²⁴ Houston City Directory. Various.

²⁵ "Real Estate Transfers." *Houston Chronicle*. December 27, 1934.

house. In 1922, tenants included Freda and Guy Sparks (Freda worked as a presser at Burkhardt's Laundry & Dye Works) and Gertrude Watts, a teacher at Franklin Beauty Parlor. In 1926, Timothy Metts, who worked as a porter at Wilson Stationery and Printing Company, is listed at the address.

Harry and Jane Grimes Simon

1934-1974

Harry Simon

1974-1980

Harry and Claudia Foster Simon

1980-1985

*Claudia Foster Simon*²⁶

1985-2000

Harry Simon was born in Jennings, Louisiana around 1891,²⁷ and except for his year of service as a private in the US Army during World War I,²⁸ lived in Freedmen's Town from his arrival in Houston in 1917 until his death in 1985.²⁹ He purchased 1317 Ruthven from Cynthia Bradley Marshall in 1934 and lived there for the next 50 years.

Harry Simon married his first wife, Jane Grimes, in the early 1920s, most likely around 1922 when the two first appear in the Houston City Directory at the same address.³⁰ Jane Grimes was born in Fort Bend County, Texas in 1903³¹ and is listed for the first time at a Houston and Freedmen's Town address in 1919.³² After their marriage, Harry and Jane Simon continued living in Freedmen's Town, including addresses on Ruthven, first at 1320 Ruthven, then at 1314 Ruthven, before purchasing 1317 Ruthven in 1934.³³ For most of their time together, Harry worked for various laundry services while Jane worked in other people's homes.³⁴ 1317 Ruthven stands as a reminder of those working class African American couples who spent the majority of their lives in Freedmen's Town, first as renters, and then eventually achieving homeownership.

Harry and Jane Simon remained at 1317 Ruthven until Jane's death in 1974 at the age of 71.³⁵ Harry continued to live in the house, and in 1980, married his second wife, Ella (Claudia) Foster,³⁶ when he

²⁶ Her name was most likely Ella Claudia Simon. The only record found was her 1985 marriage certificate to Harr Simon.

²⁷ FamilySearch.org; findagrave.com. Simon's World War I draft card indicates he was born in Jennings, LA in 1894.

²⁸ He served from 1918 to 1919.

²⁹ Houston City Directory, 1917-1935. Death Notices. "Simon" *Houston Post*. February 19, 1985.

³⁰ The first time the couple appears at the same address is in 1926, at 1110 George.

³¹ Death certificate. Her father is listed on the 1900 US Census as living in Fort Bend County.

³² She is listed as a witness on her brother's death certificate living at 1110 George Street. She is also listed as Mrs. Janie Jones. Harry Simon is listed at the same George Street address in the 1920 and 1922 Houston City Directories.

³³ Houston City Directories.

³⁴ Houston City Directories.

³⁵ Ancestry.com Death certificate.

³⁶ Records list her as Ella C. Foster. That C is important because she most likely went by the name of Claudia and not Ella. A 1998 *Houston Chronicle* article mentions an 84-year-old Freedmen's Town resident by the name of Claudia Simon.

was 89 and she was 66.³⁷ After his death in 1985, Claudia Simon remained at 1317 Ruthven until 2000, when, according to Harris County Appraisal District records, the house was sold.^{38 39}

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

Architectural Description

The House at 1317 Ruthven is a 1-story Folk Victorian gable-ell cottage with a cross-gable roof on a pier and beam foundation. The front (north) elevation is asymmetrical and features a semi-octagonal bay on the west side and a shed-roof porch across the east side. The front door and transom are located on the porch on the west end of the front elevation. Below the porch roof are two full-height triple-sash wood windows with louvered wood shutters on the front (north) elevation and an additional full-height double-hung wood window with shutters on the east side of the bay. The north (front) wall of the bay includes a pair of 2/2 wood sash windows and a wood louvered vent in the gable. The west side of the house includes three 2/2 wood sash windows, one near the north side and two near the middle. On the south side of the west elevation is a small 1/1 wood window; evidence of replacement siding indicates that this might have originally been a full-size window matching the others on the elevation.

The east elevation is divided into three sections: the original side-gable front wing, a pre-1924 hipped-roof addition, and a shed-roof addition of unknown age. The pre-1924 addition is set in (west) from the front wing approximately 10 inches, and the two additions are separated with a vertical strip of wood siding. The side of the wing includes a single 2/2 wood sash window in the center and a wood louvered vent in the gable. The hipped-roof addition also has a single 2/2 wood sash window approximately centered. On the east side of the shed-roof addition includes a fixed wood-frame window infilled with glass blocks. The shed-roof addition spans most of the rear elevation and includes a rear door accessed by wood steps and double 1/1 aluminum windows toward the west side. An approximately 5-foot span of the original rear elevation remains exposed on the west side of the shed-roof addition. This span includes a single 2/2 wood sash window abutting the west wall of the addition. The west wall of the addition is clad in wood shingle siding.

Restoration History

The house remains largely intact and retains many of its historic features, including wood siding, windows, shutters, and transoms. A 1-story hipped-roof addition on the southeast corner was present by 1924, and a small 1-story shed roof addition across the rear of the house was added at an unknown time. A 2-story outbuilding was built on the southwest corner of the property c. 2018, and a small freestanding shed is present on the east edge of the property behind the house. A wood pergola structure covered with corrugated metal shades a portion of the backyard between the house and the 2-story outbuilding.

The 1950 Sanborn map and a 1984 photo of the building show that the house was clad in asbestos siding at one time; this has since been removed. The front door was replaced at an unknown date; however, the frame and transom remain. The only other visible alterations of note are the porch columns and jigsaw trim. Based on available images, these historic features were replaced between 1984 and 2007. The

³⁷ Ancestry.com Marriage records.

³⁸ www.hcad.org

³⁹ A 1998 *Houston Chronicle* article mentions an 83-year-old Freedmen's Town resident by the name of Claudia Simpson.

existing columns and trim are similar in shape to the original features but are simplified. The front porch likely originally had a wood balustrade that was removed at an unknown date prior to 1984.

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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 [Planner Name], 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:

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Protected Landmark Designation of the [Full Name of Landmark Name] at [Address].

HAHC RECOMMENDATION [LEAVE BLANK FOR HAHC REPORT – INCLUDE FOR ACTION REPORT]

The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends to City Council the Protected Landmark Designation of the [Full Name of Landmark] at [Address].

EXHIBIT A
PHOTOS
HOUSE AT 1317 RUTHVEN
1317 RUTHVEN



FRONT ELEVATION, FACING SOUTH



NORTHWEST CORNER, FACING SOUTHEAST



SOUTHWEST CORNER, FACING NORTHEAST



NORTHEAST CORNER, FACING SOUTHWEST



SOUTHEAST CORNER, FACING NORTHWEST

EXHIBIT B

SITE MAP

[LANDMARK NAME]

[LANDMARK ADDRESS]

EXHIBIT C
[LANDMARK NAME]
[LANDMARK ADDRESS]

Additional Exhibits may include:

- Historic Photographs
- Architectural Drawings
- Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps
- Publications