

SECTION 3: ABOUT THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS

This section describes the history of Houston Heights, the character of the three historic districts, and the architectural styles and significant buildings contained within them.

Houston Heights West was designated as an historic district in December 2007. Houston Heights East was designated as an historic district in February 2008. Houston Heights South is the most recent of the three districts, designated in June 2011. The designations were based on the value of the areas as part of the City of Houston Heights, from 1891–1918; its identification with Oscar M. Carter, Daniel D. Cooley, and other notable residents; its residential, commercial, religious, and governmental architecture; and its importance to the community.

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One-story buildings are common to the Houston Heights historic districts.

OBJECTIVES FOR THE HOUSTON HEIGHTS HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Houston Heights was designated as a Multiple Resource Area (MRA) in 1983 by the National Park Service. An MRA designation is used when an area contains multiple potential landmarks and historic districts which are not all contiguous. Houston Heights qualified for an MRA designation because it had been (between 1896–1918) an independent municipality of fewer than 50,000 inhabitants, it retained its own character and diversity when it was annexed by Houston, and it already contained many buildings which were individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places. During the MRA designation process, both the National Park Service and the Texas Historical Commission recommended establishing multiple historic districts within the original boundaries of Houston Heights. The three Houston Heights Historic Districts were created to recognize distinct areas within the former city and to identify the diversity of development found there.



This context area in Houston Heights contains buildings of various heights.

THE HISTORY OF HOUSTON HEIGHTS

Houston Heights was founded in 1891, incorporated as its own city in 1896, and annexed by the City of Houston in 1918. It contains a variety of architectural styles from around the turn of the 20th century.

Houston Heights was Texas' earliest planned community. It was developed by the Omaha and South Texas Land Company, which formed in 1887 as a subsidiary of the American Loan and Trust Company. Founder Oscar Martin Carter, a former bank president from Nebraska, hired one of his bank employees, Daniel Denton Cooley, to be the treasurer and general manager of the new company. In 1890, company representatives came to Houston to look for land and to start a new town. The next year, they purchased 1,756 acres of land, northwest of Houston and 23 feet higher in elevation. The elevation was important to the new development's success; because of Houston's low elevation near the coast, mosquitoes were plentiful and yellow fever, malaria, and cholera outbreaks were common, and often fatal. As the city grew and developers tried to solve this through improved sanitation and water systems, they also looked to the area north of downtown, which — at a higher elevation — seemed to have fewer mosquitoes. This area became a popular location for Houston's new suburbs.

In 1892, the Omaha and South Texas Land Company sent Cooley and other representatives to oversee the development of their land. The company built streets, sidewalks, and utility systems, and led efforts to electrify Houston's streetcar system and extend the streetcar lines to Houston Heights, allowing people to work downtown but live in the new community.

The neighborhood was laid out on a rectangular grid with a north-south emphasis, with Heights Boulevard as the central spine. The north-south streets have names; the east-west streets are numbered. Heights Boulevard also serves as the dividing line between 'East' numbered streets and 'West' numbered streets. Some streets were named for colleges and universities, such as Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and Oxford. Other streets were named for cities in New England, where the American Loan and Trust Company was founded. Heights Boulevard features a 60-foot-wide esplanade inspired by Commonwealth Avenue in Boston.



A mature tree canopy is present throughout the Houston Heights Historic Districts.

Lots were platted in a variety of sizes so that both wealthy and working-class people could afford to buy them. After the land was platted, the Omaha and South Texas Land Company needed to do something so that people would buy lots in the neighborhood. It hired the Houston Land and Trust Company to build 17 elaborate homes along Heights Boulevard and Harvard Street. One of those was Cooley's own house, at the northeast corner of 18th Street and Heights Boulevard where Marmion Park is now located. Carter also built several commercial buildings, including a hotel, on West 19th Street, near Ashland Street. The commercial area started to grow, which attracted new residents.

The City of Houston Heights was incorporated in 1896. W.G. Love served as its first mayor. He was followed in that office by John A. Milroy, David Barker, and Robert F. Isbell. J.B. Marmion was the last mayor of Houston Heights before it was annexed by the City of Houston. Two parks in the Heights are named for former mayors: Marmion Park and Milroy Park at Yale and 12th Streets, near the former fire station.

Houston Heights had its own schools, city hall, jail, fire department, and hospital. In 1918, residents of Houston Heights agreed to be annexed to the City of Houston, in order to access a broader tax base for school funding. As part of the annexation agreement, the Heights kept its "dry ordinance," which banned the sale of alcoholic beverages in large portions of the neighborhood. The dry ordinance was passed in 1912, eight years before Prohibition became law across the United States. Even after the end of Prohibition in 1933, the Heights remained dry. The ordinance was upheld by the Texas Supreme Court in 1937 and remained in place until 2016.

Houston Heights' original development included deed restrictions that controlled setback, use, quality, and size of construction in the city. The deed restrictions created a consistent look and feel for Houston Heights. After it was annexed to the City of Houston in 1918, the deed restrictions were no longer enforced and properties began to change; small houses were built in the spaces between large houses, and some large homes were replaced by apartment buildings. The neighborhood began to decline.

In recent years, the neighborhood has been revitalized. Modern buildings are being built on vacant lots, using traditional details in order to blend in with the rest of the neighborhood. The Houston Heights Association was organized in 1973 to promote revitalization. That organization currently has about 1,000 members and manages new deed restrictions adopted in various sections of the neighborhood.



One-story buildings align within this Houston Heights context.

CHARACTER AND SETTING

Houston Heights currently contains three City of Houston-designated Historic Districts. They are named for their location within the original city: West, East and South. The boundaries of the three Houston Heights Historic Districts mark areas that are still largely intact.

Houston Heights East

Houston Heights Historic District East is roughly bounded by Heights Boulevard to the west, Oxford Street to the east, West 20th street to the north, and West 11th Street to the south. The 1200 block of Yale and two lots at Yale and 17th are also included. The district contains 34 full blocks and nine partial blocks of residential, commercial, and institutional buildings.



Contributing buildings in Houston Heights Historic District East

Houston Heights West

Houston Heights Historic District West is roughly bounded by West 16th Street to the north, Yale Street to the east, West 11th Street to the south, and Ashland Street to the west. It includes 13 full blocks and 14 partial blocks of mostly residential buildings. Smaller lots (33 feet in width) were platted along Ashland, Rutland and Tulane Streets, although two or more lots were often combined to make a larger lot.



Contributing buildings in Houston Heights Historic District West

Houston Heights South

Houston Heights Historic District South is roughly bounded by Heights Boulevard to the west, Oxford Street to the east, West 11th street to the north, and West 4th Street to the south. The district contains 26 full blocks and 16 partial blocks of residential, commercial, and institutional buildings. It is directly south of, and contiguous to, Houston Height Historic District East.



Contributing buildings in Houston Heights Historic District South

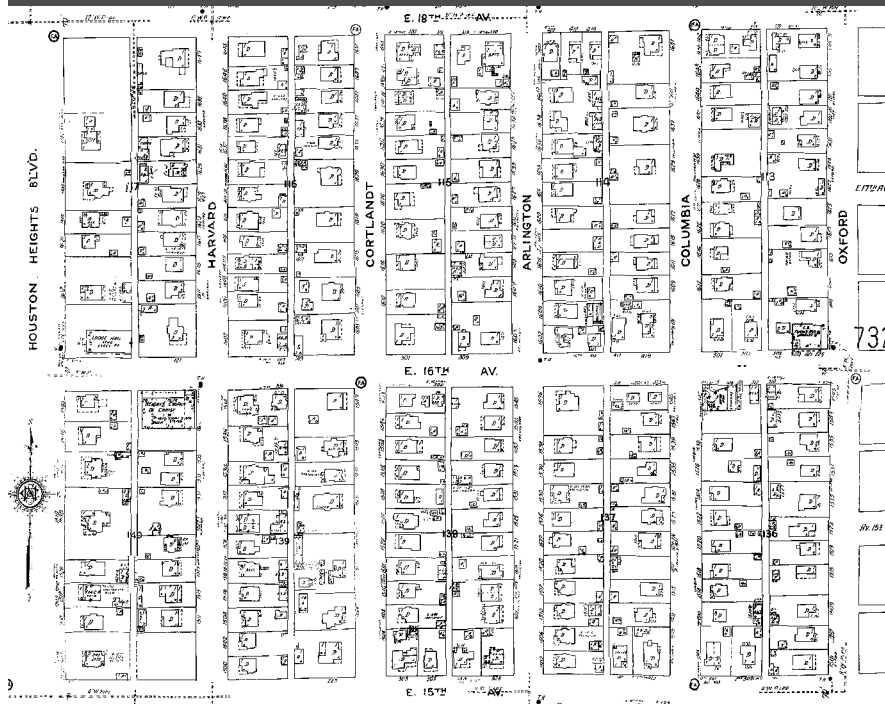
Original Character and Changes Over Time

The typical residential block contains 24 residential lots, each 50 feet wide by 132 feet deep. Corner lots and lots allocated for churches, schools, or important houses on or near Heights Boulevard, were often larger in size. The residential lots were oriented so that most buildings face east or west, which helped counter Houston's hot humid summers and subtropical climate. Exceptions to this grid pattern were the areas west of Yale and north of 16th Street, which had a north-south orientation. Retail was mainly located on 19th Street west of Heights Boulevard, but also developed along 11th and 20th Streets.



The town plan also included industrial and commercial areas, to create a complete city where people could live, work, and shop. (Those areas have undergone significant changes and, therefore, are not included in any of the Houston Heights Historic Districts.) Many changes in Houston Heights have also taken place along Yale Street, East and West 11th Street, East 19th Street and East 20th Street, and the frontage road of Interstate 10 (just south of 4th Street). In those areas, many historic buildings have been demolished to make way for commercial development. Historic buildings have been demolished west of Ashland Street, as well. The neighborhoods east of Oxford Street were not part of the original Houston Heights plats; the block sizes and shapes are varied, and the lots are oriented north and south. The original Heights commercial district was located north of West 16th Street and west of Yale Street, and the lots there are configured differently.

SANBORN MAP FROM 1925 AND UPDATED 1950



Sanborn maps illustrate the relative consistency in development patterns that existed in Houston Heights. Houses were placed in the front half of their lots, with relatively similar front setbacks. Secondary structures were placed along alleys. Larger buildings tended to be on larger lots, often on corners.

ARCHITECTURAL STYLES IN THE DISTRICTS



The Houston Heights Historic Districts contain both one- and two-story houses in a variety of styles. The houses in the districts were mostly built with wood siding, on pier-and-beam foundations, and featured a prominent front porch. The architectural styles found in the districts reflect the changing tastes and trends around the turn of the 20th century, as the exuberant Queen Anne style gave way to the more subdued Craftsman bungalow.



The most common architectural styles in the Houston Heights Historic Districts are Craftsman, Queen Anne, Folk National, and Folk Victorian.

Craftsman

One-story Craftsman bungalows were very popular in Houston between 1905-1925. Characteristic Craftsman details include prominent front porches, low-pitched roofs, wide bracketed eaves, and groups (or "ribbons") of windows. Roofs may be gabled or hipped.



Craftsman bungalows in the Heights

Queen Anne

The Queen Anne style was popular during the Victorian era, particularly at the end of the 19th century. These houses typically have a front-facing gable and an asymmetrical facade. They feature tall, narrow, two-over-two paned windows; large, sometimes wraparound porches; and decorative siding and ornamentation. Some Queen Anne homes are decorated with spindlework trim (also known as “gingerbread”). In this neighborhood, they tend to instead have more classical porch columns and railings.



Queen Anne houses in the Heights



Transitional Architecture

During the early 20th century, builders often combined the Queen Anne style, which was beginning to go out of fashion, with the newly popular Craftsman style. This was not uncommon, and the practice continued through the 20th century. As a result, it is not unusual to see buildings that historically combined details from different architectural styles.



An example of transitional architecture



Folk Victorian



Folk Victorian



Folk National

Folk National and Folk Victorian

Sometimes described as cottages, these relatively small, modest houses are common in the Houston Heights Historic Districts. Many of the examples in this neighborhood have a front gabled roof or hipped roof with an inset porch. Full-width porches are also common.

Folk National houses were constructed from the mid-1850s through the 1920s. As a result, they may include or combine architectural details typical of other styles that were popular at the time, such as Craftsman-style bracketed eaves or Queen Anne-style turned porch supports.

When these simple houses are ornamented with spindlework and patterned siding, that architectural style is called Folk Victorian. Some Folk Victorian houses in Houston Heights are two stories tall, with two-tier front porches.

Pattern-Book Houses

Some houses in Houston Heights were built from designs published in pattern books. George Barber, an architect from Knoxville, Tennessee, was one of the most famous pattern-book publishers in the United States. Several dozen homes in Houston Heights were built from Barber's designs or adapted by local builders from his patterns. Those still standing include the Mansfield House (1802 Harvard) and the Milroy House and carriage house (1102 Heights Boulevard).



Mansfield House (Pattern-Book)



Milroy House (Pattern-Book)

Commercial and Institutional Buildings

The Houston Heights Historic Districts contain a small number of historic commercial buildings, as well as churches, schools, a fire station, the former Masonic Lodge, and the Heights Library. Most of these buildings are constructed with brick or stone masonry. They vary widely in style, design, and construction.



Heights Public Library

SIGNIFICANT BUILDINGS AND SITES

Many properties within Houston Heights are individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NR). Some of those are also Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks (RTHL), City Landmarks (CL), or City Protected Landmarks (CPL). Below is a small sample of individually significant institutional and religious buildings, residences, and sites located within the Houston Heights Historic Districts.
West

Burnett House (NR, CL), located at 219 W. 11th Street, is a well-preserved example of the ornate, Queen Anne cottages built in the Heights. It remains in the family of the original owner, George Burnett, who built it around 1904.

Jones House (NR), located at 1117 Allston Street, was built in 1905. It is an excellent example of one of the most common house types in the district: a bungalow with a hipped roof.

Lula J. Doughty House (NR, CL), located at 1233 Yale Street, is an elaborate, one-story Queen Anne home built in 1909.

Miller House (NR), located at 1245 Yale Street, was built in 1913 in the Classical Revival style. Its two-story columns support a front gable roof. On the second floor, the original porch has been enclosed between the columns to create an additional room.

Wilkins House (NR), located at 1541 Ashland Street, was built in 1894. It was designed by architect Silas D. Wilkins in the Colonial Revival style.

East Heights Christian Church (original) (NR), 1703 Heights Boulevard, was built in 1927. Architect C. N. Nelson designed it in the Classical Revival style. Today, it is used by Opera in the Heights. The congregation now meets at 1745 Heights Boulevard, built in 1965 in a Neo-Gothic style.

Heights Church of Christ (RTHL, CPL), 1548 Heights Boulevard (aka 120 E. 16th Street), was designed by architect Alfred C. Finn in the Neoclassical style and built in 1924.

Heights Methodist Episcopal Church, was renamed Grace United Methodist Church in the 1950s. The church originally met in a red brick building that faced Yale at 13th Street. The congregation built a Craftsman style church hall at 1240 Yale (aka 116 West 13th Street), built in 1926. The original sanctuary was demolished in 1970. A new sanctuary was built in 1971 directly in front of the original one, at 1245 Heights Boulevard. Iron rings for hitching horses are still present in the curb in front of the church hall. They probably were installed when the 1912 church was built.

Houston Heights City Hall and Fire Station (NR, CL 2001, CPL 2005), located at 107 West 12th Street, was designed by architect Alonzo C. Pigg. It was built in the Jacobean Revival style, which combined Gothic and Classical elements. The two-story red brick building was built in 1914. It also served as the fire station and jail. After Houston Heights was annexed in 1918, the City of Houston used it as Fire Station No. 14.

Houston Heights Woman's Club Building (NR, CPL), 1846 Harvard Street. The Woman's Club combined several earlier ladies' clubs that focused on arts and crafts, music, and literary pursuits. Daniel D. Cooley, who managed the Omaha and South Texas Land Company, owned many lots in Houston Heights. He often gave his wife land for her birthday or their anniversary. She donated one of her lots to the Woman's Club for its clubhouse. The members raised \$1,500 to construct the building in 1912.

Houston Public Library, Heights Branch (NR, CPL), was the first branch library constructed in the City of Houston. It was designed by J. M. Glover and built in 1925, just one year after the main library in downtown Houston was constructed. The Heights Branch Library was built in the Italian Renaissance Revival style. This library's importance was recognized in 2005 when it was one of the first Protected Landmarks designated by the City of Houston.

Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church (original) (NR), is located at 1448 Cortlandt Street (aka 306 E. 15th Street). It was built in 1932 in the Gothic Revival style. The church's gymnasium/parish hall, also at 1448 Cortlandt Street, was built in 1949 with a barrel-vaulted roof. The parish built a new church in 1961 at 1447 Arlington Street. Although this building was threatened with demolition, community support encouraged the congregation to save and renovate it.

Masonic Lodge Buildings, both of which housed Reagan Lodge No. 1037. The first lodge was built in 1918 at 1100 Harvard Street. It and was an elaborate Classical Revival style building (now converted to condominiums). In 1948, the lodge built a new hall at 1606 Heights Boulevard in the Neoclassical style.

Second Church of Christ, Scientist, 1402 Harvard, is a Craftsman-style building constructed in 1922. It is now a residence. When it was restored in 1997, a wing on the north side of the church was detached and moved to 1416 Harvard and was converted to a single-family home.

South Donovan Park, located on Heights Boulevard at 7th Street, was named for James G. Donovan, the last city attorney of Houston Heights. The park is owned by the Houston Heights Association, not the City of Houston. Donovan drafted the ordinance in 1912 prohibiting the sale of alcohol within the city.

Former All Saints Catholic Church Rectory (NR), built in 1912, was sold to a private owner and moved from its original location at 1002 Harvard Street in 1927. The original 1909 church building was demolished that year to make way for a larger church. Several other buildings are located on the church campus at 201 East 10th Street, which is just outside the boundaries of this district. These include a school constructed in 1913 for children of parishioners and a newer school building. The church's administration building and grotto are also historic.

Harvard Elementary School, located at the corner of 8th and Harvard. The original one-room school was constructed in 1898. It was expanded, and then replaced in 1911 by a two-story brick schoolhouse. The current school was built in 1923 and expanded in 1979.

Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Church was located at 945 Oxford Street. It was built in 1930. Although the sanctuary was demolished, the educational hall remains and has been turned into a residence.

Southwestern Bell Telephone Company Building (NR) is located at 743 Harvard Street. It was built in 1926–1927 in the Renaissance Revival style. This building was designed to complement the Harvard School on the opposite corner.

Heights Boulevard Esplanade (NR). When Houston Heights was developed, the Boulevard was the first street constructed. A boulevard is a strip of land in the middle of a street, also called a median or an esplanade. Heights Boulevard has a wide landscaped esplanade between the northbound and southbound lanes of the street. It was patterned after Commonwealth Avenue in Boston, Massachusetts. Today, the esplanade contains a walking path, gazebos, benches, street lamps, and monuments.