

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Sterling-Hamman House

OWNER: Wayne Paul Theriot

APPLICANT: Same as Owner

LOCATION: 401 Emerson Street – Westmoreland Historic District

30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: IV.b

HPO FILE NO.: 08PL61

DATE ACCEPTED: Mar-21-08

HAHC HEARING: May-15-08

PC HEARING: May-22-08

SITE INFORMATION:

Lots 11 and 12, Block 2, Westmoreland Addition, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a two-story, wood frame residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The Sterling-Hamman House at 401 Emerson Street was built circa 1903 in the Westmoreland neighborhood by the Russell Brown Company. Russell Brown adapted the house's design from a George Barber mail-order floor plan. The house exhibits characteristics of the American Four-Square, Colonial Revival, and Queen Anne styles. Its most prominent features include paired hip roof dormers, paired second-floor bay windows, and a full-length porch with round, classical columns mounted on stone pedestals. Around 1910, the original owners, E. A. and Mary Sterling, sold the house to attorney and independent oil man, John Hamman, founder of Hamman Exploration Co, which is still in operation today as Hamman Oil and Refining Company. Hamman was also a lawyer specializing in land and corporation law, and a pioneer in the development of mineral resources in Texas. The Hamman family lived in the house until 1925, and later rented the home to architect R. D. Steele.

The Sterling-Hamman House is a contributing structure in the Westmoreland National Register and City of Houston Historic Districts. The Sterling-Hamman House meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, and 5, is a contributing structure to the Westmoreland National Historic District, and was built before 1905 - all considerations for Protected Landmark designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

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The home was built circa 1903 as a speculation house by the Russell Brown Company, which adapted its design from a house plan originally designed by George F. Barber, a Knoxville, Tennessee architect. Barber was one of this country's most successful, late nineteenth-century domestic architects. By publishing his designs in inexpensive illustrated mail-order catalogues, complete with price lists for his drawings and order forms, Barber reached thousands of potential clients throughout the United States and abroad. As an additional service, Barber would customize his plans to suit client needs or adapt the design to meet any special requirements of the proposed construction site.

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There are several other variations of Barber plans in Westmoreland in addition to 401 Emerson, including 219 Hawthorne, 303 Hawthorne, and 304 Hawthorne. Barber's designs were also used by the Omaha and South Texas Land Company when it constructed 17 homes in Houston Heights in 1892.

Russell Brown Company was a prolific builder not only in Westmoreland (at least 12 houses) but elsewhere in Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, and Los Angeles. Russell Brown apparently adapted George F. Barber's Design No. 772 from "Modern American Homes" for the house at 401 Emerson. Barber had published the design in a catalogue in 1903. Since the house was built for speculation, Brown did not go to the extremes of copying all the finely detailed and elaborate features of the original Barber design. Nonetheless, the house at 401 Emerson is an important example of the architecture in Westmoreland from that period. The house is a contributing building to both the National Register and City of Houston Historic Districts.

The first owner of the home seems to have been E. A. Sterling, General Manager of Sterling Oil Company, and his wife, Mary. The next owner was attorney and independent oil man, John Hamman (1879-1966), founder of Hamman Exploration Co, which is still in operation today as Hamman Oil and Refining Company. Hamman was also a lawyer specializing in land and corporation law and a pioneer in the development of mineral resources in Texas. The Hamman family lived in this house until 1925. After 1925, the house was rented from Hamman by Houston architect, R. D. Steele. Steele designed the Henke-Pillot South End Store at 2800-2816 Travis (1923); the Star Engraving Company at 3201 Allen Parkway (1930); and the grandiose St. Paul's Methodist Church at 2422 Milam (1909, demolished 1969).

The Westmoreland Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1994. The Sterling-Hamman House was classified as "contributing" when the Westmoreland Historic District was designated as a Historic District of the City of Houston on July 23, 1997. The Westmoreland district encompasses Houston's first planned, elite residential neighborhood. Platted in August 1902 as a 44-acre subdivision of the Obedience Smith Survey, the 12-block addition was located in open countryside at the southwest corner of the city of Houston. The planning of the addition and the design and scale of its houses reflect trends in the development of residential real estate and domestic architecture in early 20th-century Houston.

The residents of the Westmoreland Historic District during its period of primary significance included individuals who contributed to the history of Houston in the fields of commerce; community planning and development, engineering and architecture; education and the performing arts; and politics and government. By virtue of its community planning features, its contributions to the evolution of suburban real estate development practices in Houston, its breadth of house types reflecting the transition from late 19th to 20th-century images of domestic style, and its association with persons active in the city's business and cultural life, the Westmoreland Historic District remains a spatially evocative preserve of early twentieth-century Houston.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY:

The two-story frame house located at 401 Emerson exhibits characteristics of the American Four-Square, Colonial Revival, and Queen Anne styles. Its most prominent features include paired hip roof dormers, paired bay windows on the second floor, and a three-bay full-length front porch with round, classical columns mounted on stone pedestals. The two center pedestals feature paired columns. The house was adapted by the builder Russell Brown Company from a George Barber design.

On May 22, 1997, the HAHC approved a Certificate of Appropriateness to restore and reconfigure several window and door openings on all sides of the house, and to replace the flat roof of a later side

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- (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride (Sec. 33-224(a)(8)).

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 Planning Commission accept the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommend to City Council the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of the Sterling-Hamman House at 401 Emerson Street.

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SITE LOCATION MAP
STERLING-HAMMAN HOUSE
401 EMERSON STREET
NOT TO SCALE

