

History of the Valentine House

1908 Decatur Street

Mrs. Angeline Valentine built the two-story Queen Anne Victorian house in 1890 following the death of her husband, Peter. Peter was the chauffeur of Mr. William Marsh Rice for many years. Upon his retirement Mr. Valentine received a large sum of money as a token gift from Mr. Rice, which he used to purchase several tenant properties in First and Sixth Wards. Peter and Angeline Valentine reared eight children, Urban, Peter Jr., William, Naomi, Teenie, John, Frances, and Thomas. All were baptized at St. Joseph's Catholic Church. After Peter's death in 1897, his widow sold all of his tenant properties and hired a contractor to build a new house for herself at 1908 Decatur Street. She greatly admired a wrap-around porch at a friend's house so she chose to have an identical porch built on the new house. The Valentines lived at 1317 Washington Street for many years before moving into the new house on Decatur. Mrs. Valentine lived at 1908 Decatur Street for 9 years before selling it to First Baptist Tabernacle in 1907. She was well into her 60's with a bad hip which prevented her from going up and down the stairs so she moved into a one-story house at 2309 Center Street (The Andrew and Josephine Kuhn House), whose wrap-around porch she had been admiring for years. Almost all of the Valentine children settled down in Sixth Ward to raise their own families. The eldest daughter, Naomi, married Peter Faure who was the manager of the elite Brazos Hotel. The second daughter, Teenie, married John Luckie, a city electrical engineer responsible for bringing electricity to Sixth Ward prior to 1910. The Luckies built the first all-electric house in Sixth Ward at 2012 Lubbock Street in 1910. Mrs. Valentine passed away in 1921 and many of her children had already relocated to Woodland Heights. For many years the Valentine House was used as a parsonage for the First Baptist Tabernacle. Afterwards it was used as a rooming house.

This information was provided during a telephone call in 1997 from a granddaughter (name unknown) of Angeline Valentine, and from research at Clayton Library.

The Valentine house has been registered in the National Registry of Historic Places in 2002.

History of Historic Sixth Ward

Introduction taken from the 1993 Sixth Ward Home Tour

Welcome to the Old Sixth Ward Neighborhood Association's Second Annual Victorian Houston Tour. This Tour Booklet gives you a brief history of the area known as the Old Sixth Ward. You will also find information on each of the tour sites and a map showing the suggested tour route. The trolley will make a stop at each site, or you may choose to walk, giving yourself time to enjoy the many varied architectural styles and decorative characteristics of other Old Sixth Ward homes. All of the buildings on the tour, along with almost 300 other properties in the district, have been listed on the National Register of Historic Places by the United States Department of the Interior.

We hope you enjoy your visit to our community and that you will depart with a new appreciation for Houston's heritage and the need for preservation of our city's few remaining historic resources. Please feel free to use these materials for self guided tours. Contact the Old Sixth Ward Neighborhood Association for information on becoming involved in our efforts to preserve these historic

The Old Sixth Ward, home to approximately 2,000 Houstonians, is an important historic resource for the City of Houston as evidenced by City Council's designation of the area in 1991 as the Old Sixth Ward Historic District of the City of Houston. It is a neighborhood of houses, businesses, schools and churches like many other inner city Houston neighborhoods. What sets it apart is the existence of historic structures, many of which retain much of their original fabric dating from the nineteenth century.

The Old Sixth Ward, the first National Register Historic District in Houston, is recognized by the United States Department of the Interior as having the highest concentration of Victorian Era buildings in Houston, as well as being the city's oldest intact neighborhood.

The area now called the Old Sixth Ward was originally part of a two league Mexican grant made to John Austin in 1824. On July 6, 1838, two years after John K., Augustus C. and Charlotte Baldwin Allen founded the town of Houston, S.P. Hollingsworth filed a survey of this area in which he divided the land into large, narrow tracts that ran northward from Buffalo Bayou. By January 1839, portions of the Hollingsworth survey that lay in the future Old Sixth Ward had been conveyed to several prominent Houstonians: James, S. Holman, William R. Baker, Nathan Kempton and Henry Allen. By 1858, W.R. Baker and his friends owned or held mortgages on most of the land in this area.

Baker engaged Samuel West, the County Surveyor, to restructure his holdings, converting the whole area into a lot and block system. The new survey was laid out to true north, varying from downtown Houston which lay on the opposite side of Buffalo Bayou. Downtown Houston was platted at a 45-degree angle to true north. The first sale after re platting took place on January 31, 1859, when Baker transferred several blocks to W.W. Leeland. This plat was followed in subsequent lot and block sales and is essentially the same today. The only deviation is in the northeast corner of the district, where a dispute led to a protracted court case. This section was eventually re platted in 1881 to accommodate both Baker and his opposition.

W.R. Baker, who was one of the main promoters responsible for the development of the railway system in Houston, served as President of the Houston and Texas Central Railroad for many years. The development of Baker's addition coincided closely with the development of the Houston and Texas Central, whose route approached Houston from the northwest. This area was intended to attract the immigrant families working on the railroad and in related services. The success of the Houston and Texas Central greatly influenced the growth of the neighborhood. Although the financial panic of 1857 and the Civil War slowed settlement in the area, the 1860 census shows that the nature of the district was changing. Land that had been farm land a few

years before was being transformed into a populated neighborhood. The men who came to work in the nearby machine shops first lived in boarding houses along Washington Avenue and many later bought land in the neighborhood.

Pre 1900 Census records of the area do not list addresses or even streets. With some city directory cross-checking it is possible to establish the general character of the neighborhood, but it is difficult to document construction dates on individual houses. A bird's eye view of 1873 does indicate the level of development in this area. Likewise, another such view drawn in 1891 shows that most of the houses standing today were probably built before that date. The 1870 Census indicates that everyone who lived in this area either worked for the railroad, in related construction, or in service capacities such as grocers, bakers, tailors, druggists, etc.

In 1871, Glenwood Cemetery opened and provided a natural, protective barrier and continues to function as such today. Washington Street was graded in 1872, and more businesses began to locate along this thoroughfare. Several private schools opened in this area and in 1876 the city school system bought block 428 (present site of Dow Elementary School, built in 1912). This increase in the population led the municipal government to subdivide the Fourth Ward, in which the neighborhood was located, creating a new Sixth Ward on January 1, 1876. By 1878, the Houston Street Railway (trolley) extended along Washington Avenue.

During the 1880's the settlement of the Sixth Ward continued and businesses increased in the area. Among commercial establishments were blacksmith shops and two saloons on Washington, three boarding houses, the Houston Brickworks at the south end of Sabine near the bayou, and six grocery stores in the area. During this time the business district along Washington Avenue was known as the "Uptown" business community, as opposed to the Market Square area, which was known as "Downtown".

The majority of the houses that stand today were built in the 1870's, 80's, and 90's as modest, one story frame cottages occupied by a single family. During the late 19th Century about half were owner occupied. The distinctive "Victorian" character of these dwellings was enhanced by decorative millwork in various patterns applied most often to the front porches. It is doubtful that these houses were designed by professional architects, but the fact that so many skilled craftsmen lived in the area and likely designed and built their own homes has given a distinctive character and high quality of construction to many of the houses. Long noted for its ethnic diversity, the neighborhood has at various times been home to Swedish, German, English, Irish, Jewish, French, Swiss, Italian, Polish, African, Chinese, Vietnamese, Mexican, Latin American and Scottish immigrants.

There are three main architectural styles in the Old Sixth Ward. Although variations and exceptions exist, walking through the neighborhood one can date most of the houses according to their architectural style and the period to which it belongs.

The oldest houses are Greek Revival cottages displaying symmetrical compositions and simple galleries. Some are antebellum and most were built prior to 1880. Some of these houses reflect a late adaptation of the style, as evidenced by Victorian elements, such as a narrow two over-two and four over four light windows. Occasionally Victorian trim was incorporated into the overall Greek Revival plan.

Victorian Era architecture is the predominant style in the district. The one story, ell shaped cottages and the asymmetrical Victorian houses are the most frequently used plans. Most of these structures, regardless of plan, display a Victorian gallery elaborated by turned posts, balustrades, brackets and jigsaw detailing.

As the Twentieth Century emerged, new housing reflected the changes in architectural fashion. Bungalows were built among the Victorian cottages, but the essential character of the neighborhood did not change. Since World War 11 many of the houses have not been owner-occupied and in many cases absentee landlords have not maintained their property. The current

high density has resulted from single-family dwellings being converted for occupancy by more than one family. Some apartment buildings have been built, but the major threat to the residential character of this area is from haphazard commercial development.

Until recently the lack of any legal protection for historic structures has hampered efforts to preserve the Old Sixth Ward neighborhood. Although it is widely assumed that designation as a National Register of Historic Places property provides legal protection, this was not the case in Houston until the enactment in December 1991, of a temporary moratorium on demolition permits for historic structures. Through the efforts of a growing population of new owner occupants, the Old Sixth Ward is enjoying a renaissance of rebuilding not unlike that under which the neighborhood was originally created, at the hands of its inhabitants.