

The boundaries of the South Highlands Historic District encompass 460 buildings in a historic twentieth century neighborhood in southern Shreveport. All of the buildings are domestic except for a 1920s Gothic Revival school, a 1920s German-looking fire station (NR) and two non-contributing office buildings. Most houses are two stories and were built for the upper- middle or upper classes. However, there is a significant scattering (perhaps about twenty-five percent) of smaller, one story, middle class homes. The South Highlands district illustrates quite well the eclecticism of the period, with houses in the Craftsman taste and a wide variety of historic revival styles. The non-contributing rate is a low 15%, and alterations to contributing elements have been very minimal.

METHODOLOGY

The staff of the Division of Historic Preservation had known for some time that there was a Register-eligible district in the South Highlands area of Shreveport. With that in mind, the Division commissioned local historian Eric Brock to conduct a survey of that portion of the neighborhood with the most impressive housing stock (the former Town of South Highlands -- see below). Brock's survey produced a several page survey form, with photo, on each 50+ year old building, a map, and a brief historical overview. These records are now part of the Division's permanent historic structures survey files.

With Brock's survey as background and with the endorsement of the local neighborhood association, the Division's National Register Coordinator conducted the necessary fieldwork to prepare this nomination form. Each building in the neighborhood was again examined individually -- largely to be certain on contributing/non-contributing status, to refine the boundaries, and to obtain a better understanding of the buildings than survey photos can provide. This fieldwork, along with the survey, enabled the staff to produce a breakdown of buildings by style (see below).

SETTING/GENERAL BACKGROUND

Shreveport in the early twentieth century was Louisiana's second largest city, due largely to explosive growth brought by a phenomenal oil boom. The city was literally awash in money, and development proceeded at a dizzying pace. A daily feature in the local paper was "Shreveport: See it Grow Day by Day!" And the direction it grew was southward from the downtown.

The irregularly shaped district being nominated is part of a larger area known loosely today as South Highlands. Most of the district historically was part of a separate community called the Town of South Highlands. Founded in 1912 by a land development company, the town was incorporated into the City of Shreveport in 1927. In 1929 the city built a medieval German-looking fire station on the edge of the former town (Line Avenue).

Construction during the historic period was confined largely to the area west of Line Avenue (i.e., the Town of South Highlands). Two streets, however, to the east of Line (Oneonta and Unadilla) clearly developed at the same time, and are being included in this submission (see map). It is not known for certain if they were ever part of the Town of South Highlands.

While the history of the Town of South Highlands has not been documented completely, certain facts are known. The land in question was purchased by real estate developer A. C. Steere over a several year period, with the first part of the neighborhood platted in 1912. At the time it was rural acreage located about a mile south of the Shreveport city limits. Transportation to the city was via streetcar and automobile. (Once almost every house had a garage; many of these survive.)

The Town of South Highlands, as annexed to Shreveport in 1927, had developed in phases. The initial 1912 plat (labeled "South Highlands Subdivision") was rectangular in shape with a standard grid. Located in the northern portion of the nominated district, it was bounded by Trabue Street, Fairfield

Avenue, Delaware Street and Line Avenue. (Some of its unusual street names --Unadilla, Monrovia, Ontario, Oneonta – reflect the developer's New York origins.)

By 1927, the community had grown to include other areas, some of which had an irregular layout with curving streets (for example, Thora Boulevard and Glen Iris, both of which are particularly up-market). The northwest corner of the townsite, which did not develop in earnest until the late 1940s, is being excluded from this nomination, per a consultation with the National Park Service. (With modest, unstyled post-war houses, it is completely different in character from the rest of the neighborhood.)

The land upon which the town of South Highlands was built is some of the highest ground in the city, averaging 200 feet above sea level. Within the context of Louisiana (where New Orleans is below sea level), this is indeed hilly terrain. While some parts of the district have a fairly even slope as one walks down the street, others have a gentle to moderate slope. Because of these natural features, many of the district's houses are several feet above street level. Indeed, some rest on hillocks of as much as ten to twelve feet.

The district varies in the amount of land per residence. The 1912 original plat is fairly tightly packed (although not by New Orleans standards). Here each house occupies perhaps a half acre, with perhaps twenty feet between houses. Along streets platted later (most notably, Thora and Glen Iris), the lots tend to be larger and the houses further apart. Most of the houses on these streets are set back at the head of spacious lawns. Prestigious Thora Boulevard, which sweeps in a curving fashion from Line Avenue to Fairfield, retains its historic gateposts at both ends. There are also period lampposts throughout the district.

South Highlands was and is a fashionable, affluent neighborhood. However, it was by no means an enclave for only the well-to-do. Essentially houses range from middle class, to upper- middle class, to upper class (although there are more in the last two categories). Many of the houses are architect-designed and several would be regarded as mansions. A handful of the latter are gated estates, including the home of one of the developers of the neighborhood, Elias Goldstein.

South Highlands' fine collection of historic twentieth century houses is set in a lush forested landscape. However, an early photo of the section first developed shows a largely tree-less landscape. Developers had the streets lined with oaks, magnolias and pines, which are now mature and give the impression of having been there forever. Much of the original landscaping for the subdivision as well as individual landowners was done by Lambert Landscape Company, which was just south of the town.

Today only two non-residential buildings survive in the nominated district from the time when South Highlands was a separate town -- a 1922 brick school and an altered commercial building. (However, it seems clear that there were never many commercial buildings. In short, from looking at the neighborhood today, there is no obvious place where they would have been.) A waterworks plant referenced in the 1927 annexation is no longer extant.

BUILDING MATERIALS

Buildings in the South Highland district are sheathed in one of three materials: 1) wood (weatherboards and in some instances, shingles); 2) brick veneer; 3) stucco. Numerous houses have cast concrete accents; a few have stone accents. Roofs are generally covered in asbestos shingles; however, there are various tile roofed houses.

STYLISTIC OVERVIEW

The following will provide a brief overview of each stylistic category as found in the South Highlands district. Particularly important landmarks within each category will be described in a "landmarks sampling" section of the narrative.

Craftsman/Bungalow (12%)

Given the fact that South Highlands developed in the teens and '20s, one would expect more than 12% of the houses to be in the Craftsman/Bungalow taste. However, the Colonial Revival/Classical Revival in its various permutations was more popular (33%, see below).

Almost all of the Craftsman/Bungalow houses in the district can be divided into two categories: (1) classic bungalows -- i.e., one story residences with Craftsman details; and (2) so-called "four-square" houses (two story, box-like) with Craftsman-influenced porches. Then there are three or four two-story Craftsman houses that do not fit into the "four-square" category.

On the whole houses in the Craftsman/Bungalow category look like those found elsewhere in the country. A few things, however, distinguish them from what is typically found in Louisiana. Firstly, "four-square" houses are not common in the state, except for Shreveport. Secondly, several of the examples in the South Highlands district feature a considerable amount of textured wall surfaces (shingles). In some cases, the entire house is sheathed in shingles. Thirdly, numerous Craftsman houses in the district feature a distinctive front door treatment -- a frame with prominent splayed side members (sometimes with a shoulder molded top). Undoubtedly, this was a favorite of a local carpenter.

Colonial Revival (34%)

One-third of the district's buildings are in some form of the Colonial Revival. This term is being used in its broadest sense to cover a wide range of Colonial Revival permutations found from the teens through the mid-1940s (although most are from the teens and twenties). Examples include about twenty houses with colossal columns; houses with pedimented porticoes (both colossal and one story); "four-squares" with Colonial Revival porches; houses inspired by Mount Vernon; a few houses with pronounced gambrel roofs; and two story, red brick and wood frame houses with "colonial" entrances (broken pediment doorways, fanlights over doors, pedimented entrance porches, etc.). This category also includes three or four houses which would have been termed "Southern Colonial" in their day -- i.e., taking their cue from the Greek Revival South.

On the whole, houses in the Colonial Revival category make a strong stylistic statement (whether in the one or two story version, although there are more of the latter). But as would be true of any historic neighborhood, some are more consummate than others. For example, some of even the architect-designed houses don't have the proportions quite right.

Columns in the South Highlands district are typically Tuscan, although there are a few Ionic and Corinthian examples. At least three houses display "faux" Greek Revival details such as triglyphs and metopes and anthemion designs. Other typical details include fanlights, Palladian window motifs, dentils, and wooden fan forms above the door or in a front gable.

The English Look (10%)

South Highlands also reflects the popularity of the picturesque "English look" in 1920s America. Many Americans became enamored with the style via mail order house catalogs and magazines, with specific models being advertised with evocative names such as "The Devonshire," "The Sussex," and "The Dover."

Houses in this category in South Highlands range from cozy, one story "English cottages" to larger architect-designed "manor" houses. Roughly a third are in the latter "Stockbroker Tudor" category, reflecting the two story, affluent scale of much of the neighborhood. Whether small or large, they are characterized by picturesque massing -- prominent, steeply pitched front gables (often superimposed) and prominent front chimneys. The smaller one story examples tend to be of frame construction, while the more "up-market" examples are of brick or stucco over brick. One frame two-story example is

completely sheathed in shingles. Three or four feature decorative half-timbering; one has an oriel window.

French Eclectic (1%)

While there are only seven houses in this category, they make a strong architectural statement. All have very distinctive features, and perhaps they are so noticeable because French-influenced early twentieth century houses are not common in Louisiana (despite the state's French provenance).

Referred to as "French Eclectic" by some architectural historians, the style is just one of several historic revival styles popular in 1920s America. Like other period looks of the time, French Eclectic or French Revival houses borrow loosely from the "mother country." They are generally evocative, rather than being precise references. The seven South Highlands examples (four two-story, and three one-story) exhibit character-defining traits such as steep roofs, hoods over the front door, towers and wall dormers (second floor windows that extend above the cornice line to enliven the roofline). The three one-story examples feature diminutive entrance towers, while the district's finest example has a prominent off-center square tower with a steep hip roof.

Italian/Mediterranean (2%)

The ten houses in this category are all major two story examples, two of which are mansions with estate-like settings. Both "Italian" and "Mediterranean" are being used because while some houses look very Italian, others look more loosely Mediterranean. Typical characteristics include broad, spreading hip roofs (usually of tile) and an abundance of round arches (as windows, doors and arcades). Two of the houses have pronounced "tear drop" door surrounds of the type seen in Italian Renaissance architecture (so termed because of the shape of the top of the surround).

Other Revival Styles (2%)

This category includes miscellaneous historic revival styles where there are less than one percent of each. Almost all of these buildings are major landmarks and will be discussed in the landmarks section below. Examples include four Spanish Eclectic houses, a Gothic Revival school, a medieval German-looking fire station (NR), and a very distinctive house which might best be termed "Islamic Revival."

Eclectic (4%)

This category is used to denote houses featuring a mix of stylistic motifs -- i.e., where no one style is clearly dominant. The most typical combination in South Highlands is Colonial Revival and Craftsman.

No Style (20%)

This category has a somewhat misleading title; it does not necessarily mean devoid of details. It has been used by the Division of Historic Preservation in recent twentieth century district nominations to encompass houses that cannot be "pushed" into a stylistic category. They may have various details that contribute to the neighborhood's historic look; however, the styling is not pervasive enough and/or emphatic enough to warrant a stylistic label. Examples include an otherwise plain cottage that has a prominent front chimney in the "English Cottage" manner; a large two-story brick house with a prominent round arch entrance outlined in stone; various houses whose only stylistic influence is an arcaded porch; houses with only a very slight Colonial Revival touch; etc. The "no style" category also includes legitimate historic houses that are indeed quite plain, although even they support the overall character of the district in areas such as massing, fenestration pattern, systems of porches, etc. (

Non-contributing (15%)

This category includes buildings which are less than 50 years old and seriously altered historic houses (although there are very few of the latter). Almost all non-contributing elements are one story. Virtually all are traditional-looking residences (for example, galleried cottages) or brick ranch houses. There are four exceptions to the foregoing general statements: an altered historic commercial building (one story -- the only commercial building surviving from the town of South Highlands); a sprawling one-story house that resembles an office building; a two-story traditionally styled office building on Line Avenue near the South Highlands Fire Station; and a 1920s English manor house that has received a very large addition.

LANDMARKS SAMPLING

The following is a sampling of architectural landmarks in the South Highlands Historic District within various stylistic categories:

(1) 4001 Fairfield (Wray Mansion, 1930, Ed Neild and Clarence Olschner, architects). The "villa" of this gated estate crowns a hillock on Fairfield Avenue, with the side of the house facing the street and a broad sweeping lawn in front. The stucco, tile roof house is loosely Mediterranean in character. Sprawling and asymmetrical, it features a bulbous rounded tower adjacent to the entrance, a small ecclesiastical-looking dome, and an arcaded indoor swimming pool.

(2) 935 Thora Boulevard (Auguste Goldstein House, 1926, Seymour Van Os, architect). This elegant, well-proportioned, two-story house has an overall Italian character. Segmental head dormers punctuate the spreading hip roof. French doors with round arch transoms appear on the facade at the first story level. At the center of the composition is a well-detailed door surround of cast stone with a bracket on each side. Above is a very shallow cast iron balcony framed by large bas relief scroll volutes.

(3) 818 Unadilla Street (Elias Goldstein Mansion, 1916). The home of one of South Highlands' developers, this Italian-looking mansion occupies a fenced parcel of several acres which extends through the block. To the rear of the house are three contemporaneous dependencies: a garage, a gazebo, and a half-timbered playhouse with a prominent side chimney. Of beige stucco, the house has main and secondary hipped roofs of tile with decorative chimneys. The roofs spread well beyond the walls and feature a flare at the end. Large brackets ornament the eaves. The ground level of the house is distinguished by a seven bay arcade with round arch windows and doors behind.

(4) 935 Unadilla Street. This two-story, strikingly asymmetrical brick house is the district's most impressive example of the French Eclectic style. Important features include a square tower with a steep hipped roof, wall dormers, a slender prominent front chimney with brick laid in a manner to resemble basket weave, and a strongly articulated door surround of varying patterns of brick.

(5) South Highlands School, 801 Erie Street (1922, Edward F. Neild, architect). Built by the Town of South Highlands to replace an earlier school, this two story brick building is accented with Gothic Revival motifs (particularly on the entrance pavilion). Alterations include window replacement and the construction of a low brick wall in front of the entrance.

(6) 985 Thora (George Haddad House, 1929). The district's most unusual house was built for Syrian immigrant George Haddad, a prominent dealer in oriental rugs in the 1920s. A curving brick wall which extends from the house bears the address and an Arabic inscription, both in blue and white tiles. The beige brick, tile roofed, asymmetrical house is anything but ordinary because of its numerous second floor multi-foil windows of the type seen in Islamic architecture and the massive arches ornamenting a front porch which extends across most of the facade. The arches are visually dominant because of their size and decorative brickwork emphasizing their shape.

(7) 900 Oneonta Street. This 1919 two story stucco house has an overall Craftsman character. Distinguishing features include its broad, spreading roofs (main and porch), large brackets accenting the main roof, multiple gables with a low pitch, and the thick piers of the entrance porch.

(8) South Highlands Fire Station (National Register, 1929, Henry Schwartz, architect). This striking stucco fire station is strongly evocative of medieval Germany. Its massing is that of a picturesque medieval structure with an off-center tower and various prominent gables. Below several windows are horizontal bands of decorative half-timbered panels.

(9) 1055 Erie Street. This two-story brick house is distinguished by a fairly well-proportioned colossal pedimented portico. An oval design (in glass) is at the center of the tympanum.

(10) 1100 Erie Street (Haynes Mansion, 1939, Dewey Somdal, architect). A colossal Ionic gallery and an unusual footprint (similar to a V) distinguish this "Southern Colonial" mansion.

(11) 948 Trabue (Gilmer House, 1932, Dewey Somdal, architect). The inspiration for this faux Greek Revival house must have been Shadows-on-the-Teche (NHL, 1830s) in New Iberia, Louisiana. A Doric gallery sweeps across the front of the house, complete with triglyphs and metopes.

(12) 4226 Fairfield (1927, Edward F. Neild, architect). Large brick two story house with a tile roof and a five-bay colossal Corinthian gallery spanning most of the facade.

(13) 831 Monrovia Street. Although the fluted colossal Corinthian columns are overscaled, this flamboyant house is nonetheless a major landmark. The facade features a prominent pedimented portico with the aforementioned colossal columns and matching pilasters. The pediment and the house's entablature sport large modillions and a denticular band.

(14) 936 Thora Blvd. This two-story brick house's prominent, steeply pitched gables and its distinctive oriel window make it an important example of the English look so popular in the 1920s.

(15) 944 Oneonta. This two-story frame house's picturesque massing place it in the English category (numerous prominent, steeply pitched, forward-facing gables); however, perhaps more interesting is the fact that it is clad entirely in shingles.

(16) 4512 Fairfield. The architect of this two story frame house combined Colonial Revival and Craftsman features to create a most interesting design. The principal Colonial Revival motifs are Tuscan porch columns and a large, handsome fanlight opening on the side elevation. Craftsman inspired features are the oriental-looking wooden designs found on the front and side porches and the rich textured effect created by decorative woodwork on the broad overhanging eaves.

(17) 4500 Glen Iris Blvd. (1924, Clarence King, architect). Although not as picturesque and "flashy" as some of its counterparts, this rambling, two story, stucco house is strongly evocative of an English manor house. Its hipped roof has a forward-facing gabled section with a chimney at the center. Various other elements enliven the roofline (small gables and "eyebrow" vents).

(18) 4624 Fairfield Avenue. One of four Spanish influenced houses in the district, 4624 Fairfield resembles a hacienda, with its tile roof, rough patterned stucco, arcaded porch and Spanish-looking iron shutters.

CONTRIBUTING ELEMENTS

The South Highlands Historic District represents an important collection of historic twentieth century residences and two historic support buildings (fire station and school). Taken together, these buildings are a significant expression of an historic twentieth century suburb. Any 50+ year old structure which retains sufficient integrity is considered a contributing element for purposes of this application.

NON-CONTRIBUTING ELEMENT COUNT

The four objects noted in Item 5 are the gateposts at each end of Thora Boulevard (a pair at each end).

Historic lampposts are found throughout the district. They were too numerous to count.

Many of the houses retain historic garages (usually just to the rear). They were too numerous and/or inaccessible to count accurately. The only dependencies included in the count are those located on the Elias Goldstein estate (landmark #3). Except for the Goldstein dependencies, garages are not coded on the attached district map.

INFORMATION COMMON TO ALL PHOTOS

Photographer: Donna Fricker
Date Taken: October 1998
Location of Negatives: LA SHPO

Significant Date: 1912-1949
Architect/Builder: Various
Criterion C

The South Highlands Historic District is of state architectural significance as an outstanding example of an historic twentieth century suburb. With its low non-contributing rate and the wide range of styles represented, it is in effect a window into the past to show someone the look of a suburb developed between the world wars. It is one of six major urban residential landscapes from the period in Louisiana (two in Shreveport, one in Monroe, one in Alexandria, one in Baton Rouge and one in New Orleans). And of these, it is among the three most impressive because of its size, integrity, variety and the quality of its landmarks. (The "top three" in the opinion of the State Historic Preservation Office are South Highlands; Fairfield Avenue, also in Shreveport; and Uptown New Orleans.)

By way of background, it must be remembered that Louisiana was and is a predominantly rural state dotted with small towns and hamlets. There were only a limited number of cities of the size to support an urban residential landscape such as South Highlands. And the neighborhoods in some of these had experienced their peak prosperity at an earlier period (for example, Lake Charles, where there is an impressive Queen Anne/Colonial Revival district, and sections of New Orleans). By contrast, in cities like Shreveport, the greatest period of growth was between the wars -- due mainly to the phenomenal oil boom previously mentioned. And, in fact, because there was so much money in Shreveport at the time, the city on the whole has some of the state's very best historic twentieth century architecture. Its only serious competition is a huge residential neighborhood in New Orleans known as Uptown.

Stylistically, the South Highlands district illustrates very well the prevailing eclecticism of the period when a typical suburb was replete with all manner of houses, including Craftsman, Colonial Revival, the English cottage look, etc. Like the rest of the country, people who bought land in the new development looked largely to the past for architectural inspiration -- whether it be the American colonial past (or what they perceived to be "colonial") or the exotic and faraway past of French chateaux, Mediterranean villas and "olde English" cottages. And, of course, "designing in the period" was assisted greatly by a rising generation of architects who could produce a design in just about any style from any period, whatever the client wanted.

South Highlands has a particularly large and varied collection of impressive historic residences reflecting the general eclecticism of the era, many of which were architect designed. The Colonial Revival in its numerous and varied forms accounts for the largest number of houses (one-third). Add to this Craftsman houses, the popular English look (in both its upmarket "Stockbroker Tudor" and middle class

form), and a handful of Italian-Mediterranean villas, French Eclectic houses, and Spanish looking residences -- not to mention a Gothic Revival school, a picturesque, strongly Germanic fire station, and a one-of-a-kind Islamic house. Almost any street has a fascinating variety of residences (a Mount Vernon here, a French chateau there, an elegant classical house, etc.) -- all of which is in sharp contrast to the monotonous suburbs which developed in post-World War II America. Finally, it should be noted that the district is able to convey its historic identity so well because of the low number of non-contributing elements (15%), their overall non-intrusive character and contributing buildings which are well preserved and well maintained.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Brock, Eric. Survey of South Highlands commissioned by the Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation. Survey forms, map and brief historical overview can be found in the division's survey files.

Chain-of-title for original (1912) South Highlands Subdivision (including the plat), copy obtained from LSU, Shreveport Department of Archives.

Shreveport City Council minutes, April 12, May 18, 1927. Copy in National Register file.

Shreveport Times, "City Approves Annexation of Two Suburbs." March 30, 1927.