

West Oak Area Historic District Application

The West Oak Area neighborhood is an important architectural and cultural cross-section of the city of Denton, revealing the history of the city as it grew and developed. As the population of the city increases and the boundaries expand, it's more than ever crucial to preserve this living record of the city's past.

At one time this area was just outside the western extreme of the city, containing small farms and ranches. When what is now the University of North Texas moved from the Square in 1891, the Eugene Puchalski Survey was divided into ten acres for the university and the rest annexed as the College Addition. Built in 1892, 2212 West Oak is the oldest house in the proposed historic district. It is an original farmhouse sitting on a 3-acre section of the original 12-acre farmstead. Listed as high priority for preservation on the 1995 Historic Resources Inventory, it is an elegant L-plan with wood siding and a wrap-around front porch. Like many other properties in the district, it had a barn in the back. All the parcels of land on the north side of West Oak appear on the Eugene Puchalski to have been between 8 and 15 acres in size. They were parceled beginning in the mid-1920s by the second generation of the original families, the Craddocks and the Ballards.

The area changed with the city from rural to urban residential at the turn of the last century. Reflecting the population growth of Denton and its increased wealth, several lovely Classical or Colonial Revival homes were constructed in the early 1900s. 1708 West Oak was built by one of the original

faculty members of what is now the University of North Texas, W. N. Masters, in 1914. Masters Hall (the Chemistry Building) was named after him. Shortly after 1708 was constructed, in 1920, a bungalow with detached garage/apartment was built across the street. The outbuilding still stands, while the home was replaced by a ranch-style home. Also built in 1914 was 2003 West Oak, a modified L-Plan. Like the Silk Stocking Row homes a few blocks east on West Oak, these homes were built for show, not the functionality of a farmhouse. Other Revival homes are at 1820, 2021, 2041, and 1914 West Oak. 2021 and 2041 West Oak are listed as high priority for historic preservation. Many of these properties have been lovingly maintained and in some cases restored. The owners of 2021 West Oak, Fred and Lareen Hamilton, plan to apply for a historic plaque.

The Revival styles continued to be popular even after the less-showy bungalows came into style in the late 1930s. Marietta began to be developed in the late 1930s, although there is a 1925 bungalow on the street, at 403. Some beautiful bungalows in very good shape lie within the proposed district on Marietta: 209, 309, and 403. All are listed as high priority on the HRI. Other homes on Marietta that are high priority are 308 and 314. These are described as Asymmetrical on the HRI.

Other bungalows in the district include 2033 West Oak, a Colonial Revival Bungalow. While it is listed as only low for historic preservation, the current owner, Lynne Cagle Cox, purchased it from the daughter of the original builders, who lived in the house her entire life. 2101 (built 1923, second story

added 1937) and 2205 West Oak are other bungalows. Built in 1937, 2107 is a lovely Tudor Revival Bungalow and is listed as high priority for historic preservation. A Craftsman Bungalow is at 2211. This is closer to the typical bungalow style.

Denton's cultural maturity was demonstrated by the success of its homegrown architect, O'Neil Ford. He designed two homes in the proposed district: 220 Marietta and 2280 West Oak. The home on Marietta was designed for Annie Alford in 1939 and that on West Oak for Jack Johnson in 1938. You can see the influence of his ideas in the asymmetrical homes on Marietta, amidst more traditional bungalows. One of the most striking homes in the district is 2230 West Oak, a Moderne-style home built in 1945. It is still unusual for Denton and is listed as high priority on the HRI.

The youngest homes in the proposed district are the Ranch-style homes at 1717, 1800, 1823, 1905, 1907, and 1919. These reflect national trends after the war, when increased prosperity allowed more people to own cars, and created a demand for attached garages.

In all, 20 existing homes in the proposed district are high priority on the HRI. It is hoped that becoming a historic district will encourage the type of investment in the neighborhood that will lead to restoration of some of the medium-priority homes to their original condition. Also, the ranch houses have become historic since the original inventory was done. Perhaps an updated inventory would increase this number.

The area's architectural importance was confirmed by the awarding of a city historical plaque for 2044 West Oak in 2007. This home was built between 1895 and 1900. It was remodeled in 1924 and 1950 into its current appearance by two generations of the Craddock family. They owned Craddock's Saloon and the livery on the square and later Craddock's Grocery in the 1920s.

Not only is the area important for the architecture it preserves, but also for the historical importance of its original inhabitants. Miller Street, running between Hickory and West Oak, was named after the original inhabitant of 1920 West Oak, L. L. Miller. W. M. Jagoe built the Colonial Revival home at 1801 West Oak in 1925, as he developed many properties in the area. Of course Jagoe Street is named after him.

As suggested by W. N. Masters' home at 1708 West Oak, the proximity to UNT bound the area's fate to that of the university. Numerous important university figures built houses in order to be close to the campus: longtime president J. C. Mathews lived at 305 Marietta from its construction in 1937 until 1952. The university built a home on campus for its presidents in 1956. The founding dean of the world-famous College of Music, Wilfred Bain, owned 2227 Houston Place. This house lies next to 2223 Houston Place, home of Florence Scoular, founding dean of the School of Home Economics, now Merchandising and Hospitality Management. T. J. Fouts, football coach, built 2101 West Oak (and a detached "servant house"!) in 1924, and lived there until 1958. Stovall Hall was named after Floyd Stovall, founding dean of the College

of Arts and Sciences, who built 2021 West Oak, also listed as high priority on the Historic Resources Inventory (HRI). Other faculty built related houses, including 2205 West Oak, built by Victor Craig in 1926, and 1819 West Oak, built by J. P. Magee. The area continues to attract university faculty and administrators too numerous to mention, as well as prominent citizens of every occupation.

Whatever their profession, these homeowners are anxious to preserve and restore the buildings as well as the history that their houses represent. A historic district here would also be a template for the future. This is one of the fastest growing areas in the city, and several multi-acre lots are still “vacant,” except for the past that they represent. They are the remnants of the 12-acre rural plots that supported families in the early days of Denton. It is hoped that a historic district will help shape the inevitable build-up on these lots in order to preserve the traces of the past and continue to create a livable future for the children of Denton. This neighborhood is the heart of Denton and deserves the encouragement that a historic district represents.