

## 1190 E. M. Franklin Ave. Lot 6, Ebony Acres

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1190 E. M. Franklin Avenue, Lot 6, Ebony Acres, Scott Way current owner\*

\*house currently threatened with demolition

For more history, please see documents relating to the opposition to the application for permit to demolish the house as well as the neighborhood petition related to this house (previously submitted).

Originally the home of Titus Edgar Alexander and wife Ora Alexander, this house has been used as a rental property since its purchase by Way.

Documents in hand include water department permit 1959, release of lien from 1955 dated 1957, and the Warranty Deed conveying from Alexander to Scott Way May 29, 2008.

More information might be obtained from Mr. Alexander who is still living. Mr. and Mrs. Alexander had one child, a son, Ronnie.

## **Local Historic District**

### **Association with Individuals of Historical Importance**

#### **Ebony Acres Neighborhood Supporting Documents**

##### **Alexander's House, 1190 E. M. Franklin Avenue**

Mr. Titus Alexander was the owner of this house in the Ebony Acres neighborhood. The earliest documentation for this house is dated 1957. No building permit was found in City of Austin records for this home. A record of water service connection in 1957 was found. It was built by Clarence Flournoy, a well-known East Austin builder, who was responsible for the construction of most of the houses in the subdivision.

Mr. Alexander is a veteran. He served our country and was stationed at Tuskegee, Alabama, site of the famous Tuskegee airmen.

It is conjectured by some that the Ebony Acres subdivision was created in the late 1940s in anticipation of the post WWII housing boom, fueled by returning veterans. What occurred for African-American veterans, such as Mr. Alexander, was that they found out that the benefits of the federal GI Bill were not equally extended to all. Since the GI Bill programs were administered locally, they were subject to local prejudices and limitations of judgement with regards to race. This meant that local banks would not lend for homes in black neighborhoods. It is perhaps for this reason that veterans, such as Mr. Alexander, instead bought homes in developer financed subdivisions specifically categorized for blacks such as Ebony Acres.

In any case, Mr. Alexander was my neighbor and we became acquainted, as neighbors do, over the back fence between our yards.

Over the years, Mr. Alexander acquired other houses he used as rental properties. The house at 1190 E. M. Franklin Avenue (the Alexander house) though came to be closely associated with the Alexander name. The Alexanders are a well-known family in East Austin. Mr. Alexander's nephew, for example, is Hoover Alexander, owner of the well-known eatery, Hoover's on Manor Road.

What I learned is that Mr. Alexander was employed following his military service as a porter at a West Austin Church. After retiring from the church, he was able to dedicate himself even more fully to his hobby and passion, which was raising and training prize greyhounds. He fenced off and used the back part of the property at 1190 E. M. Franklin Avenue where he kept and trained racing dogs from the local area as well as from as far away as Florida. Some of the dogs raced at Manor Downs. Several of the dogs were champions.

Perhaps the most significant historical association of the Alexander house at 1190 E. M. Franklin Avenue is also the least known. Through my conversations with Mr. Alexander and in visiting him, I learned of the connection between the Alexanders of East Austin and the famous Bremond family of near West

Austin. The family of the Bremond Block fame and the Alexander family of Ebony Acres are related by kinship.

The story I was told is that Mr. Alexander's family lived and farmed on land between Pilot Knob and Manchaca. This was also the area in which the Bremond and associated families had extensive landholdings. At some point in time, these two families became intertwined through a secret relationship from which a child was born. I do not recall exactly, but it may have been Mr. Alexander's grandmother. Of course, under the regime of strict segregation of races, these familial ties could never be revealed and in fact were hidden for several generations. Formal recognition of ties between the two families would have to wait.

It was only much later in Mr. Alexander's life that he was acknowledged as having kinship (through his grandmother?) to the celebrated Bremond family. I have seen a photograph of Mr. Alexander standing with his fellow (white) ancestors at an intersection of either 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> St. and Congress Avenue during a commemoration of Bremond family history. I believe it to be near where the Bremond family's bank had been located. The city had done one of the typical streets renaming for a day commemorative events. I am not sure of the year, but it seems it was during the '90s.

Seeing Mr. Alexander surrounded by his smiling white relatives, was a poignant reminder of that very different time in our history when mixing of the races was not only completely taboo, but likely illegal. It was also simultaneously widely practiced and hidden.

It is this history that lays hidden, waiting to be fully explored in the houses of Ebony Acres. These same houses now threatened with demolition.

These houses stand as material embodiments of the ineffable. The history that has yet to be spoken out loud is waiting to be recorded. It is present in their beams and timbers. These houses stand as monuments to the indefatigable spirit that animated Mr. Alexander towards his more rightful place in his family history. With historic preservation, that same spirit can elevate his family name in the history of our city.

This brief essay is meant to be suggestive only. Consider it as bits and scraps of memories shared by neighbors in an evolving community. Yet it also represents the underlying, unwritten history of a place called Ebony Acres. It is impossible to record the history of a neighborhood in this small space. I offer these ends of threads of stories so that they may be grasped. From these few threads I hope a more complete fabric of history may be woven.

While visiting Mr. Alexander one day, he showed me a copy of a book about the Bremond family history (the title escapes me). Maybe his picture was in the book, I don't remember. What I do remember is the manner in which he wryly suggested that the previously hidden and tardily acknowledged link between the two families afforded little material benefit at this stage in his life beyond the book itself.

I did catch a glimmer in his tone, of a different benefit, perhaps – more restorative, one might say even therapeutic– of this history revealed. Perhaps a slight balm to the indignities suffered by so many in our society on account of their race.

My neighbor, Mr. Alexander, was forced to give up his greyhounds. He did so very unwillingly. I lost my neighbor. It was a heavy blow for him to see his dogs taken away from the property at 1190 E. M. Franklin Avenue. After that, he rarely came by. Later that year, Alexander sold the house to the current owner – the owner who now seeks to have it demolished.

Mr. Alexander’s house is identical in many aspects to my own home at 1192 E. M. Franklin Avenue. The same builder, the same floorplan - the design and construction are the same. For this reason I know that with a modicum of care, Alexander’s house can continue to serve as shelter for future inhabitants of this neighborhood.

With historic preservation it can continue to serve as a monument in the history of Ebony Acres.

By its association with the Alexander family and their connection to the Bremond family it deserves to be protected from demolition so that the full history of Ebony Acres might be recorded for future generations.

Respectfully submitted,

Danny Fowler, 1192 E. M. Franklin Avenue, Austin TX 78721

## 1192 E. M. Franklin Ave. Lot 5, Ebony Acres

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1192 E. M. Franklin Avenue, Lot 5, Ebony Acres, Danny Fowler current owner

This house was constructed in 1953 by Clarence Flournoy and purchased in 1954 by Mr. and Mrs. Cedell Sorrells. The Sorrells lived here with their two nieces. Bessie Sorrells inherited the house from her aunt upon her passing and had extensive reconstruction including leveling the house and putting it on new piers. As frequently occurred in the Ebony Acres neighborhood, Mrs. Sorrells died intestate and heirship had to be established from secondary documents and affidavits of heirship.

Ms. Bessie Sorrells sold the house to Danny Fowler in August 2003. Following extensive clean-up of the large (.43 acre) lot, Mr. Fowler used the property to grow flowering bulbs especially tulips.



Spring 2004, back yard 1192 E. M. Franklin Ave.

## 1192 E. M. Franklin Ave. Lot 5, Ebony Acres

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Selling tulips as cut flowers and tulip bulbs for planting, the business, Texas Tulips, provided an opportunity for further clean up and modifications to the sloping back yard. Use of temporary terracing and construction of flower beds helped control run-off of rainfall and prevent further erosion of top soil.

After closing the Texas Tulips business due to health concerns, Mr. Fowler participated in the Texas Flower Bulb Society as its coordinator. The back of the property at 1192 E. M. Franklin currently is home to an extensive collection of heirloom flowering bulbs including many 'rescue' bulbs saved from encroaching development from old farms and homesteads. In addition to study and research on these 'pass along' flowering bulbs, the Society offers opportunities for school age children to learn more about the growing process through the EAGER Program.



Fowler initiated contact with the City of Austin and registered Ebony Acres as a recognized neighborhood. The current neighborhood contact person is Mr. Pinaki Ghosh.

The history of this house in terms of real estate transactions is relatively straightforward.

Documentation available includes the original contract for purchase from 1954 and Affidavits of Heirship from 2003.

Further history could be obtained through interviews with Bessie Sorrells who grew up in the house and who has indicated a willingness to participate.

## 1192 E. M. Franklin Ave. Lot 5, Ebony Acres

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Anecdotally, this house was known by the neighborhood children as the 'ghost house' because of the lack of activity observed there. Following the death of her husband and the departure of her nieces, Mrs. Sorrells was rarely seen. Mrs. Hancock recalls seeing her peer around the house from the back porch, leaning on the rail to gain a view of the street. The Sorrells had an extensive system of burglar bars installed, a common fixture in the area at the time due to numerous break-ins, particularly during the crack epidemic of the '80s.

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## 1193 E. M. Franklin Ave. Lot 15, Ebony Acres

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1193 E. M. Franklin Avenue, Lot 15, Ebony Acres, Annie Mae Hancock current owner

This is believed to be one of the first houses built in the Ebony Acres subdivision. Its current owner, Mrs. Ann Hancock, has lived here since purchasing the house from Clarence Flournoy on June 30, 1959.

She and her then husband, Lewis E. Washington moved into the house with their five children. Mrs. Hancock is the last remaining of the original Ebony Acres residents.

The house had been previously occupied prior to her arrival. She was told at the time that there had been three other Washingtons in the house when she moved in.

She eventually paid off her note in full in 1977.

She and her husband ran a successful business, Washington Landscaping, from their home. Ann answered the phone and took the orders while husband Lewis drove the dump trucks and delivered gravel and soil.

Mrs. Hancock is an invaluable source of information regarding life in the early days of Ebony Acres.

Prior to moving to Ebony Acres, the Washington family had built a home in another outlying African-American enclave called Kincheonville, located near the current intersection of Brodie Lane and William Cannon. In a tragic fire, their four bedroom home they had built there was completely destroyed. Sadly, two of her children were burned to death in the fire. Mrs. Hancock describes her state as being totally in shock from the death of her children when she first came to the house at Ebony Acres.

Documents on hand include original contract for purchase and release of lien following payment.

## 1193 E. M. Franklin Ave. Lot 15, Ebony Acres

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Mrs. Hancock later divorced her husband and father of her children and married Mr. Willie Hancock of Grant Street following the death of his wife.

There is much more history to be learned from Mrs. Hancock and her children who grew up in the Ebony Acres neighborhood. They describe an area with many children in the street playing and the women of the households caring for them all while working at their own jobs.

Mrs. Hancock is truly a neighborhood treasure who has much information to give regarding the early residents of Ebony Acres.

## 1194 E. M. Franklin Ave. Lot 4, Ebony Acres

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1194 E. M. Franklin Avenue, Lot 4, Ebony Acres current owner Enid Woodward

This house was built by Clarence Flournoy in 1953. It was purchased by Doris White in 1954.

Mrs. White lived in the house with her husband and five children. Mrs. White, it is said, always had the nicest yard in Ebony Acres, taking great pride in her lawn and flowers. It is said that her mother, who was white, lived just on the other side of Boggy Creek, across East 12<sup>th</sup> Street. She was an old fashioned lady who wore long to the ankle skirts and carried a small gun. When there was trouble at the house the children would run over to fetch grandmother who would set things straight.

Mrs. White had separated from Mr. White and raised the children by herself. Mr. White predeceased her. Following her death, the children had disagreements regarding the management of the estate and the probate judge appointed an attorney, Karl Johnson, to dispose of the remaining assets including the house.

The house was sold to Enid Woodward. She immediately began an intense program of rehabilitation on the house and property. Mrs. White had allowed for a fee dumping into a creek bed at the back of her property. At the time, it was a way to fill in the land and to earn some much needed cash. It is also reported that the Whites raised chickens and sold them and their eggs from the Ebony Acres house.

After complaints from the adjoining church about chickens running on their property, the egg farm was shut down.

Mrs. White simply fenced off the back part of her lot where the dumping had filled in the creek and created a pleasant lawn with playground equipment for her grandchildren. She once told me that there

## 1194 E. M. Franklin Ave. Lot 4, Ebony Acres

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was a “spring” or wet seep in the back corner of her lot. She had it filled it, she said because she was afraid it would draw snakes and she was terrified of snakes.

One of the tasks Ms. Woodward set herself to, was removing the debris that had been used to fill in the back. The company involved, Dirty Work, gave a rough estimate of removal of 12 tons of garbage including the chassis of a large truck which had been buried.

Woodward then engaged the services of a restoration landscape company who began the long and ongoing process of prairie land restoration.

The house was completely redone with removal of all drywall, repair to a cracked main beam in the roof and replacement of hot water heaters and plumbing fixtures.

Finally a stone retaining wall was built between the adjoining properties at 1192 to stop the erosion of the bank of soil which had been a source of friction between neighbors for years.

The house at 1193 is currently used as a rental property.

Documents on hand are the warranty deed from August 8, 2006 from Administrator of the Estate to Enid Woodward.

## 1196 E. M. Franklin Ave. Lot 3, Ebony Acres

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1196 E. M. Franklin Avenue, Lot 3, Ebony Acres Marcus Rice current owner

This house was built by Clarence Flournoy. The original owners were Jim and Mary Louise Houston. They lived in the home with their 9 children. Jim worked for Frostex Foods.

Following the deaths of the parents, the house was occupied by various members of the Houston family.

Following a long period of decay and general instability in the domestic situation at the house, it was subjected to the city nuisance abatement program and boarded up.

Though there were still skirmishes with the prostitutes and drug dealers/users who tried to crawl through the plywood, and many calls to the police, things slowly began to change. One of the difficulties when buying and selling property in the neighborhood was the number of people without a will. In that case, Affidavits of Heirship must be obtained from each relative. If the immediate relative has died, then all their heirs must be contacted and taken for notarized signatures. The Houston house was a real challenge in that regard.

It was purchased by a very persistent house 'flipper' and completely remodeled by Tiffany Russell. It was sold to the current owner Marcus Rice in December of 2006.

The Houston house was a sad example of the destructive influence of addiction and its attendant problems. Long a source of irritation to the neighbors, it was finally a coalition of local residents headed by Mrs. Hancock who were able to effect a meaningful change. From a crack house to a very lovely example of small house urban living, the Houston house epitomizes in some ways the transformation that can take place when positive actions outweigh negative behavior.

## 1196 E. M. Franklin Ave. Lot 3, Ebony Acres

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Documents available are the general warranty deed from Russell to Rice.

Since Jim and Mary Louise Houston both were intestate on their death there are numerous Affidavits of Heirship on file, giving a good picture of the genealogy of the family. There are still members of the family living on East 12<sup>th</sup> Street who could be available to provide more information on the history of the house and the family who grew up there.

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## 3602 Grant St. Lot 16, Ebony Acres

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3602 Grant St. Lot 16, Jamie Olson and Jason Elliott current owners

This house was built by Clarence Flournoy and is one of the original Ebony Acres dwellings.

The Moore family originally occupied this house. Mrs. Moore and her ten children lived in this two bedroom space. This house on Lot 16 has been connected in the past with the adjoining Lot 17, which was known as the Haynes lot.

Mrs. Moore and Mr. Haynes were married and combined their families. Mrs. Moore was an avid bingo player and used her winnings to eke out a living for the family. Mr. Haynes who owned the lot next door was a mechanic.

These two lots with the house on Lot 16 were sold on the courthouse steps together to satisfy a debt owed to Chase Bank. The deed of trust securing the indebtedness was held by Leslie Leonard Moore and L. E. Haynes Moore, descendants of the Haynes/Moore family. The principal sum of the debt was \$12,900.

Documents on hand include Substitute Trustee Deed from Chase Bank and Warranty Deed for Lot 16 to Jan Wilson and spouse Michael Wilson. Most recent sale was from Adam Charles Wilson and wife Bridget to Olson/Elliott dated November 30, 2016.

The Lots 16 and 17 were connected by ownership until default on loan. A release of lien in the amount of \$8,975.49 both lots from the American National Bank of Austin dated May 23, 1972 marks the separation of the two properties.

## 3602 Grant St. Lot 16, Ebony Acres

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Anecdotal history sources include Mrs. Ann Hancock and her daughter Beverly Washington-Polk who were neighbors to the Moore family and knew Mr. Haynes as well.

## 3603 Grant Street Lot 8, Ebony Acres

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3603 Grant Street, Lot 8, Ebony Acres, Tim Pribyl current owner

The house at 3603 has been substantially modified from its original configuration while retaining the outline of the primary construction.

This house at 3603 Grant was next door to the L. D. and Pearl Davis residence and was home to Mrs. Davis' grandmother, who was known as Mama Lula.

The home was purchased on December 17, 2004 by Timothy Pribyl from Dwane Ideker.

Documents on hand include the General Warranty Deed from Ideker to Pribyl.

Extensive cleanup of the property along with additions of front steps and porch along with pavers for the drive have been undertaken by Mr. Pribyl resulting in much improvement to the property.

In the above photo, you can see there is a significant drop in the terrain from the house at 3601 to 3603 as Grant Street slopes down toward the cul-de-sac end into the greenbelt.

In the back of the property, the land rises sharply upwards to the property line in the rear which abuts Pennsylvania Avenue properties.

Further information on the history of the house could be obtained by members of the Davis and Carrington families.

## 3604 Grant Street Lot 18, Ebony Acres

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3604 Grant Street, Lot 18, Ebony Acres, Pinaki Ghosh current owner

This house was built by Clarence Flournoy and is one of the Ebony Acres homes that were slightly larger than the earlier models. This style of house had an additional room off the living area and was approximately 800 square feet as compared to the earlier homes which were 724 square feet in size.

The original owner was Mr. Willie Lee Hancock and his first wife, also named Willie. They purchased the house from Mr. Flournoy on May 2, 1962. Mr. Hancock was a disabled WWII veteran who had served in Germany during the final months of the conflict. According to his widow, his disability stemmed from frostbite suffered on his hands and feet.

Mr. Hancock was sometimes employed at Shaw's Garage on East 12<sup>th</sup> Street. Following the death of his wife, Mr. Hancock was remarried to the then Annie Mae Washington. According to Mrs. Hancock, Willie was part Blackfoot Indian and grew up on his grandfather's farm in what is now Jollyville.

Following his death, Mrs. Hancock sold the house to its current owner, Mr. Pinaki Ghosh in June of 2011.

Documents on hand include Affidavits of Heirship for both Mr. and Mrs. Willie Hancock as both had died intestate. Also we have a copy of the general warranty deed of the sale from Mrs. Hancock to Mr. Ghosh.

Being the last house at the end of the cul-de-sac formed by Grant St. where it adjoins the greenbelt area, the property was prone to being used for illegal dumping. Mr. Ghosh removed and disposed of an estimated 100 old tires along with several tons of garbage left by illegal dumping. He also undertook soil analysis to determine the make-up of the subsoil in the area and found it to be fifteen feet of fill. In addition to debris removal, Mr. Ghosh has planted many trees and plants on the land. Mr. Ghosh

## 3604 Grant Street Lot 18, Ebony Acres

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currently serves the neighborhood as primary liaison with the City of Austin and has also served in the past as a commissioner for the city in the communications area. Mr. Ghosh lives at 3604 with his wife, Victoire van der Pas and their daughter.

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## 3605 Grant Street Lot 9, Ebony Acres

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3605 Grant Street, Lot 9, Ebony Acres, Bau Phan current owner

This house was built by Clarence Flournoy. It was occupied at various times by members of the extended L. D. and Pearlie Davis family.

Pearlie Davis' mother, Miss Annie lived at one time in this residence.

Documents on hand include a partial release of lien by Maker Dwane Ideker to Payee Kenneth Meiske for \$53,500 origination date of March 1, 1996.

The house was sold to its current owner, Bau A. Phan, by Dwane Ideker, Mary 19, 2004.

Mr. Phan has done extensive clean up of the grounds and remodeled the interior of the house. Additions to the outside include pavers for drive way, hog wire fencing and a new wood deck for the front door.

More information could be obtained from members of the Carrington family including Reverend Dwight Carrington of Elgin.

## 3606 Grant Street Lot 17, Ebony Acres

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3606 Grant Street, Lot 17, Ebony Acres, Victoire van der Pas current owner

This lot was never built upon during the original development of the Ebony Acres subdivision.

It was purchased by Mr. Haynes who was married to the owner of the property next door, but he never built a house on the land. Locally it was known as the Haynes lot. There were some urban legends of a house that was on the property that had burnt down, but this has no basis in fact.

Mr. Haynes and Mrs. Haynes-Moore had ten children when the families were combined. Mr. Haynes travelled extensively to Corpus Christi where he had a family.

This lot in combination with Lot 16 was sold on the courthouse steps to satisfy a debt incurred by the Moore/Haynes heirs.

Following various foreclosure and transfer to community development agencies, the lot was purchased by Christine Murray and Tracy Smith. They had a modular home installed on the lot in October of 2002.

I recall being surprised to learn that this was the most valuable property according to tax appraisals when I first moved into the neighborhood.

Ms. Smith was a school teacher and she and her mother had five foster children in the home at most times.

## 3606 Grant Street Lot 17, Ebony Acres

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The property was sold on the courthouse steps on July 7, 2009 to Scott Way after being foreclosed. Way moved the modular home off the lot to a property on Pennsylvania Avenue. The lot was vacant until being sold to Victoire van der Pas in 2014.

There is currently a mobile home on the lot.

This is the only lot in Ebony Acres that has never had a home constructed on the land itself. Ms. Van der Pas and her husband, Mr. Pinaki Ghosh undertook extensive cleanup of the site following the removal of the modular home. Testing through drilling to the subsoil was conducted to determine the feasibility of home construction.

The story of the Haynes lot and the Moore family next door are inextricably linked in Ebony Acres history, though now they are separate and distinct from each other.

Documents on hand include the mobile home contract of Tracy Smith, the Haynes/Moore documents relating to foreclosure by Chase Bank and transfer of property to Van der Pas/Ghosh.

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## 3601 Grant St. Lot 7, Ebony Acres

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3601 Grant Street, Lot 7, Ebony Acres, Scott Way current owner\*

\*house currently threatened with demolition

For more history, please see documents relating to the opposition to the application for permit to demolish the house as well as the neighborhood petition related to this house.

Originally the home of L. D. and Pearlie Davis, this house has been used as a rental property since its purchase by Way.

Documents in hand include original building permit and original deed from July 1961. Also Warranty Deed conveying property to Scott Way dated April 2006.

More information could possibly be obtained by interviews with the Davis children, including Stella Davis and the Carrington family.

## 3607 Grant Street Lot 10, Ebony Acres

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3607 Grant Street, Lot 10, Ebony Acres, Scott Way current owner\*

\*house currently threatened with demolition

For more history, please see documents relating the opposition to the applicaton for permit to demolish the house as well as the neighborhood petition related to this house (previously submitted).

This house was built by Clarence Flournoy. The original owners were Floyd Carrington, Sr. and his wife Harmain Carrington. They were kin to Pearlie Davis. Mr. Carrington died at the age of 71 on Oct 28, 1997. His wife, Harmain, predeceased him. She died June 29, 1978.

They had three children, Floyd Carrington, Jr. who died in 2004. They were survived by Dwight Carrington and daughter Valerie Dean Shaw.

In 2005, Pearlie Davis and other family members, representing the estate of Floyd Carrington Sr. transferred the property to Monte Davis and his wife, Dena M. Davis.

In February of 2007, the Davises sold the house to the current owner, Scott Way.

Way has used the house as rental property since that time.

The Carrington house at 3607 Grant and the L. D. Davis house at 3601 Grant anchored the side of the street made up of members of a single family. They were well known members of the Ebony Acres neighborhood representing as they did 5 generations of one family living on the same block.

## 3607 Grant Street Lot 10, Ebony Acres

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Documents on hand are the Affidavits of Heirship (both Floyd, Sr. and Harmain died intestate), and Warranty Deeds from Pearlie to Monte Davis and then from Monte Davis to the current owner Scott Way.

Much more information could be gained from interviews with the members of the Carrington and Davis families. It is said that for many years there was an annual picnic gathering of the original Ebony Acres neighbors and their children in Rosewood Park.

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## **Local Historic District**

### **Association with Individuals of Historical Importance**

#### **Ebony Acres Neighborhood Supporting Documents**

##### **L. D. Davis Home 3601 Grant St. and the Carrington House 3607 Grant St.**

Mr. and Mrs. L. D. Davis were the owners of the house at 3601 Grant St. in the Ebony Acres neighborhood. The building permit on file with the City of Austin shows that it was built in 1961 by Clarence Flournoy, a well-known East Austin builder. Mr. Flournoy was responsible for building most of the houses in Ebony Acres. City records further show that in 1970 the Davis house had an addition built on and a detached garage.

I got to know Mr. and Mrs. Davis when I bought my home in Ebony Acres and moved into 1192 E. M. Franklin Avenue. The way the neighborhood is laid out, the Davises were the second house down from me – E. M. Franklin ends next door to me with Alexanders house at 1190 E. M. Franklin and then Grant St. begins with the next residence. The Davis house is the first street on Grant Street and sits at the top of the hill we all live on. I can easily see the front of the Davis home from my front porch.

Of course, everyone called him L. D. Mrs. Davis was known by all as Pearlie, her given name. The first time I remember meeting them was one day when I was working in my front yard. I had grown a bunch of tulips in the yard that spring. L. D. and Pearlie drove by in their big cream, yellow Continental. They stopped in the street and called out hello. They welcomed me to the neighborhood. L. D. asked why my soil was so dark and rich while his was so rocky. They admired the flowers.

Later on, I found out that when talking to people on the East Side, I could easily let them know where I lived by mentioning L. D. Davis. It seemed like everyone knew who he was. They would say, "Oh, you live down the street from L. D. Davis? I know where that is." I quickly learned I was neighbors with a local "celebrity".

L. D. Davis is best known as the owner and proprietor of the White Swan Lounge on East 12<sup>th</sup> Street. L. D. achieved a remarkable level of success in the business world, both in the entertainment and real estate fields. What I later learned was that this was not due merely to good fortune, but rather to very determined effort on his part in overcoming extreme barriers of racial prejudice and personal circumstances of childhood poverty and lack of education.

Mr. Davis was reputed to have only gone as far as the third grade. In conversation with Mrs. Davis she remarked that he had come a very far way from Pflugerville with his third grade education. I'm not sure if she meant he was from Pflugerville or if she was, but I understood how much that underscored the magnitude of his achievements. By some he was given the title of "the King of East 12<sup>th</sup> Street" for his ownership of the White Swan Lounge and other ventures along that principal East Austin corridor.

Sadly, L. D. died shortly after we became neighbors in 2003. Mrs. Davis (Pearlie) and I became better acquainted as the years passed. She recounted to me the stories of struggle and success in their lives on Grant Street in Ebony Acres.

One would be forced to acknowledge that it is a remarkable feat for a man of L. D. Davis' humble background to arrive at a position to be the owner of a well-known entertainment venue like the White Swan Lounge on East 12<sup>th</sup> St. Even more amazing is that through his determination and effort, Mr. Davis was able to purchase the home at 3601 Grant in 1961.

Homeownership is one of the foremost mechanisms for acquiring and maintaining wealth in the US. It was out of reach for many of L. D. Davis' generation, yet he went far beyond that. He later expanded on the family home at 3601 Grant to accommodate his large family. Mrs. Davis had children from a previous marriage who also lived in family home.

Additionally, in 1961, L. D. Davis facilitated the purchase of the house at 3607 Grant, the Carrington House, which is at the end of the cul-de-sac at the base of the hill. In an example of extended family neighborhood building, this house was owned by Mr. Floyd Carrington, the brother of Mrs. Davis. In her later years, Pearlie Davis would go to live with her nephew, Reverend Dwight Carrington of Elgin, Texas who grew up in the house at 3607 Grant. He was Pearlie's nephew and helped care for her at the end of her life after she had left the Ebony Acre neighborhood.

Between the Davis home at 3601 Grant and the Carrington house at 3607 are two more dwellings which were both occupied by extended family members. The house at 3603 Grant was home to Pearlie's grandmother. She was affectionately called Mama Lula. Next door, going down the hill, was 3605 Grant St. which was home to Pearlie's mother. She was known as Annie. In the neighborhood she is still remembered by some for her striking appearance and solid white head of hair.

Mrs. Davis sold the house at 3601 Grant to the current owner who now seeks to demolish it. The Davis house has survived many storms and trials. We hope that it can survive the onslaught of predatory development. I would ask that any permit to demolish this house be denied.

The historic significance of the L. D. Davis home and the Carrington house is best appreciated when placed in the context of the life and circumstances of Mr. Davis and the time in which he lived. The fact of achieving homeownership, not only for himself but for his extended family, is an accomplishment of great importance.

He succeeded in acquiring wealth, in the form of homeownership, and through his business ventures. This was accomplished during a time when African-Americans were prohibited by law and by private covenants from owning property or residing in many areas of Austin. The fact that Ebony Acres was established as a subdivision; was developed and built as place specifically to attract African-Americans coincided remarkably with Mr. Davis' ability to rise above the limitations of birth and circumstance. Ebony Acres provided Mr. Davis a venue where he could use his unique talents to create wealth in homeownership for himself and his descendants.

There is much more to be learned about the story of L. D. and Pearlie Davis and their extended family. I know only the little I share here with you. For example, one of the daughters married the brother of football great Earl Campbell. They live in East Austin to this day.

The developer financing method used in Ebony Acres represented a work around solution to the housing crisis experienced by many, both black and white in post-WWII America. Like most problems, this was experienced most acutely by those at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. The benefits afforded by bank loans, mortgages and other more traditional types of home financing were not available to most African-Americans, either because of their income, neighborhood location or simply because of their race.

The promise of the federal GI Bill, offering benefits for education and housing, were administered at the local level. This meant that they were subject to the same local barriers of racial discrimination and laws of segregation that hindered most black citizens at every step of their lives. The developer/financing/sales contract model as shown in the contracts of sale for homes in Ebony Acres, offered a means of financing to achieve homeownership. These contract sales often came at heightened risk of foreclosure and eviction. They also often carried higher rates of interest, penalties and fewer buyer protections.

When Ebony Acres was first opened for building there was a big sign over the street entrance. It was Redwood Street at that time. The sign had two words "EBONY ACRES" thus proclaiming to the world that African-American people were welcome down that dirt road. It mattered little that the road led into what was once a dump. African-American people were welcome to enter and if they could somehow manage, they were welcome to build a home and raise a family.

African-Americans at this time in American history could be characterized as a marginalized group. They were prohibited from living in many parts of Austin. Others were forced by changing times from smaller towns towards the big cities. They were told they were not welcome in many places. But in Ebony Acres they were welcome. Ebony Acres was a place where a marginalized group of people were offered a piece of marginal land. It was in fact a flood-prone, former dump. They were challenged to make this their home. And they succeeded remarkably well.

Men and women like Mr. and Mrs. Davis, Mr. Alexander or disabled veteran, Mr. Bill Hancock at 3605 Grant – they all met the challenge and overcame it. They succeeded. They seized the opportunity of dubious quality offered to them. They took the chance given. They struggled and they created homes for themselves and their families in a place called Ebony Acres.

L. D. Davis' home at 3601 Grant and the Carrington House at 3607 Grant represent the victory these people achieved. The homes they made represent the history and are their legacy. The victory they won is what endures in these houses now being threatened with demolition. They deserve to be preserved. I ask that you not allow these houses and the dream they memorialize to be destroyed.

Respectfully submitted by Danny Fowler 1192 E. M. Franklin Ave. Austin TX 78721