

**PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT****LANDMARK NAME:** Smith-Maxie House**OWNERS:** Sammie L. Maxie and Brandy Black**APPLICANTS:** Sammie L. Maxie and Brandy Black**LOCATION:** 1428 E 34<sup>th</sup> Street, Independence Heights Annex,  
Bella Vista Addition, City of Houston**AGENDA ITEM:** A**HPO FILE NO.:****DATE ACCEPTED:** 7/26/2021**HAHC HEARING:** 10/21/2021

**SITE INFORMATION:** Lot 15, Block 10, Independence Heights Annex, Bella Vista Addition, City of Houston. Designation is requested for the one-story wood frame single family residence. The building is 864 square feet with a 72 square feet projecting front gabled porch on a 5,000 square foot lot.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Protected Landmark Designation

**HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:**

The Smith-Maxie House at 1428 E 34th Street, built in the late 1920s, was one of the first houses built in the Bella Vista Addition to the Independence Heights neighborhood. Settled by African Americans as early as 1910, the Independence Heights incorporated becoming the first Black municipality in Texas from 1915 to 1929. The Bella Vista area was the last addition to the community in 1926. Sam B. Smith Jr. the original owner of the Smith-Maxie House created an established construction business from his home and raised his family. Today, the home remains owned by his daughter, Sammie Lee Maxie. The Smith family has contributed to the Independence Heights community for over ninety years.

The Smith-Maxie House is an 864 square foot single-story front-gable bungalow home. It is currently one of the last remaining structures and examples of the historic homes constructed in the Bella Vista Addition during the late 1920s. The home meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, 5, and 8 for Landmark and Protected Landmark designation. The Independence Heights is a National Register Historical District yet nearly 30% of all contributing structures to this designated district have been demolished in the past several years due to development and the impact of gentrification. If designated, the Smith-Maxie House will become the second City of Houston landmark in the historical Independence Heights helping to preserve the community's history and cultural heritage.

**HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE**

In 1931, Sam B. Smith Jr. purchased three lots in the Bella Vista Addition of the historically African American community of Independence Heights. On one of these lots was a one-story wood frame house that would come to be a family home for over ninety years. Sam B. Smith Jr. was born in Bryan, Texas in 1895. He was the fourth of nine children to Sam Smith Sr. and Lucinda "Lula" Stewart. Sam Jr.'s father

was born enslaved around 1860 in Louisiana, and as a young adult moved to Bryan, Texas as a sharecropper. While there Sam Sr. met Lula Stewart and the two married around 1891.

In 1910, Sam Jr.'s father purchased a farm in Burleson County, Texas. Sam Jr. along with his siblings worked the farm with their parents. In 1915, at the age of 20, Sam Jr. married his first wife and they had a son, Lloyd Smith in 1917. Unable to read or write, Sam began working in construction for the Austin Brothers Bridge Company. The Austin Brother's Bridge Company (1918-current) built bridges and highways throughout the state of Texas. During this time Sam married and they had a son named Lloyd Smith in 1917. Sam traveled the state for work and began purchasing property in Dallas and surrounding areas. After the death of his first wife, Sam met and married Viola Jones in 1925, and the couple welcomed a daughter Sammie Lee Smith that same year. However, Sam would become a widow for the second time when Viola passed away in 1928.

After Viola's death, Sam moved to Houston with his two children. He later remarried and in 1931, he purchased three lots located at 246 King Street in the newly developed neighborhood of Bella Vista in the Independence Heights community. The Bella Vista Addition was developed in 1926 by Prudential Realty Company under company president J. A. Thompson. The thirty five and one half acre neighborhood was divided into the new streets named Prince Avenue, Queen Avenue and King Avenue. The development was situated just south of the railway between Airline Drive (then called Highway 75) and Little White Oak Bayou. Bella Vista was the last addition to the Independence Heights community. Independence Heights was developed by Alfred A. Wright and the Wright Land Company in 1910. Wright purchased the property for the purpose of establishing the first major subdivision for Black Houstonians called the Independence Heights. As the community began to grow, Wright developed more nearby areas. In 1911, the Independence Heights School Addition was developed. In, 1912 Lincoln Heights and the East Independence Heights neighborhoods were added, followed by Independence Heights Park Addition, Laurel Heights and the McComb Addition.

By 1914, there were nearly 600 residents, over 30 Black-owned businesses, seven churches and two schools in the community. On November 27, 1914, residents filed a petition with the Harris County judge to incorporate. With an almost unanimous vote on January 17, 1915, the Independence Heights became the first Black incorporated city in the state of Texas. Residents elected attorney George O. Burgess as the first mayor. Two additional mayors served the city before residents voted to dissolve its incorporation and became a part of Houston in 1929.

In 1931, when Sam Smith Jr. purchased his home the Independence Heights was no longer an incorporated city. However, it maintained the same community driven development through educational, political and religious efforts. Sam Smith and his family attended Ebenezer Church, founded in 1916. The Smith children attended the Independence Heights School, founded in 1911, and renamed James D. Burrus Elementary in 1927. Shortly after moving to the Independence Heights, Sam Jr. retired from the Austin Brother's Bridge Company and became an entrepreneur. He began a construction and demolition business out of his home. Sam built a barn on the lot next to his house for the horses and mules he used and rented out for these services. His company flourished with contracts for local community road construction such as the Airline Drive overpass, and as far as Sweeny, Texas with oil and gas company contracts. Sam offered employment opportunities to local youth and men from the neighborhood becoming a mentor for many.

By this time, around twenty families were living in the Bella Vista area. This section of Independence Heights was heavily wooded with pine and oak trees. Much like most of the Independence Heights at this time, the roads were paved with shell and water was sourced from the local Textile Mill a few blocks away. The Bella Vista area became known as the farming or agriculture district by the Independence Heights residents due to the wooded lands and large gardens located at each home. A neighbor of Sam Smith, Washington Stokes owned a farm in the Bella Vista area (purchased in 1911) prior to the development by Prudential Realty. Stokes was known for riding his carriage through the streets selling fruit and vegetables to neighbors.

Sam's daughter Sammie Lee Smith left the Independence Heights in the 1940s and attended Hudson College in Austin, Texas. She returned with her husband, Tommie Maxie in 1946. By this time, the street names in Bella Vista had changed and her father's address was now 1428 E 34th Street. In 1950, Sam Smith Jr. passed away and Sammie and her husband moved into her childhood home. Here she raised her two daughters until the early 1960s when she built a new home on the same property. Today, at the age of 96, Mrs. Sammie Smith-Maxie still resides on the land her father purchased in 1931. His home still remains next door to hers, nearly unchanged or altered over ninety years, since her childhood.

#### **ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY**

Many of the houses in the Independence Heights reflect typical middle-class housing patterns of the early 20th century. Traditional house forms include the shotgun (hipped roof and gablefront), L-plan, modified L plan, pyramidal roofed, and center-passage. Residences in the community are largely one-story wood frame buildings less than 1,000 square feet. The major house form, however, is the side-gable or front-gable bungalow. The large number of bungalows is distinct from neighborhoods of Third, Fourth, and Fifth Wards that are contemporary developments in Houston.

The Smith-Maxie House is an 864 square foot single-story wood frame dwelling with a front gable orientation and a 72 square foot projecting front gabled porch supported by brick piers. It includes a living room, dining room, kitchen, bathroom and two bedrooms. All original wood flooring, windows and porch components are intact. The only alterations made to the home were the removal of the wood burning brick chimney during the 1990s. The outside of the home was also painted gray during this time from the original white. The unfenced lot includes two large pecan trees planted by Sam Smith Jr. in 1935.

The Smith-Maxie House represents today, one of the last remaining structures originally built in the Bella Vista Addition during the late 1920s. Although the exact construction date is unknown a 1928 Harris County Building Assessment report exists for the property (Lot 15, Block 10) with J. A. Thompson of Prudential Realty Company listed. It is likely that Prudential Realty Company was building houses and selling the lots with homes on them. This could be true of the Sam B Smith Jr. house as well as other likely houses in the Bella Vista development. Based on deed, census and city directory records Sam B. Smith Jr. was the first and original owner of the property and home after Prudential Realty developed and built it. A neighbor on 35th Street, Nick White, also purchased his lot with an existing home in the same architecture by 1930. However, like many of the similar historically built homes of this area, it was demolished. Most other original deeds from the period (1928-1934)







**EXHIBIT A**  
**CURRENT PHOTO**  
SMITH-MAXIE HOUSE  
1428 E 34TH ST  
HOUSTON TX 77022







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