

## PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** Braswell Building

**OWNERS:** 5613 Almeda LLC

**APPLICANTS:** SAME AS OWNER

**LOCATION:** 5613 Almeda Road, Houston, Texas 77004

**AGENDA ITEM:** D

**HPO FILE NO.:** HP2023\_0278

**DATE ACCEPTED:** 11/06/2023

**HAHC HEARING:** 12/14/2023

**SITE INFORMATION:** Lot 26, Block 29, Riverside Terrace Section 4, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas

The site includes a 1-story concrete masonry commercial building, an attached 2-story wood frame stucco-clad apartment building, and a small parking lot.

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

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

Braswell's of Houston at 5613 Almeda Road was built in 1950 as a shop for local florists B.W. and Blanch Braswell. After operating as Braswell's of Houston for more than 20 years, the building later became a community hub for arts and culture from the early 1980s to the 1990s. Occupants included non-profit gallery the Center for Art and Performance (CAP), specialty bookstore Amistad Bookplace, and non-profit music organization Community Music Center of Houston. The building is also a rare surviving example of the small commercial buildings that proliferated on Almeda Road from the late 1920s through the 1960s.

5613 Almeda Road meets Criteria 1, 3, 5, and 8 for Landmark designation and Criterion 1 for Protected Landmark designation. The nomination was prepared by Emily Ardoin with Preservation Houston.

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

#### *ALMEDA ROAD*

During the first two decades of the 20th century, "street-car suburbs" flourished in Houston and residential developments spurred the extension of streetcar lines. By the mid-1920s, the growing popularity of the automobile led to new "automobile suburbs" in Houston. Several of these residential subdivisions were platted in the vicinity of Brays Bayou and Hermann Park, where Almeda Road provided a primary route to the center of the city. Almeda Road between MacGregor Way and Holman Street, originally part of a rail line that connected downtown Houston to the Galveston, Harrisburg, and San Antonio railroad,<sup>1</sup> had existed in its current configuration since the 1880s, when the rail was rerouted away from the area and the abandoned route became a county road. Development along Almeda was sparse until the late 1920s when residential subdivisions in the area, including adjacent Riverside Terrace and Washington Terrace, were built. The street was paved below Holman beginning in 1925,<sup>2</sup> and businesses and institutions began to move in shortly after.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Forest Muir, "[Railroads Come to Houston, 1857-1861.](#)" The Southwest Historical Quarterly, Volume 64, July 1960-April 1961. P. 48.

<sup>2</sup> "[Almeda Work Begins.](#)" *Houston Post-Dispatch*, July 1, 1925, p. 3.

In its earliest years, Washington Terrace and Riverside Terrace were home to a large number of Jewish families who were excluded from other neighborhoods in Houston. The Riverside area, south of Brays Bayou and east of Almeda, included especially affluent and impressive homes that rivaled those in the River Oaks neighborhood, where they were discouraged from living. Businesses sprang up along Almeda to serve these neighborhoods and commuters from the southwest along with institutions such as the Houston Turn-Verein Clubhouse (demolished) and the Third Church of Christ, Scientist (extant). The neighborhoods' demographics began to change in 1952 when wealthy African-American cattleman Jack Caesar moved his family into Riverside Terrace. Caesar remained in his house even after a bomb was detonated on the front porch, and white families began moving to more distant suburbs. The shift was accelerated by realtors who used blockbusting tactics for profit. In the early 1960s, remaining white residents who saw the potential for an integrated neighborhood made efforts to stabilize the area; however, by 1970, few white homeowners remained.

Integration struggles came to a head in the area in 1960 when Texas Southern University students staged Houston's first sit-in at the Weingarten's lunch counter at 4110 Almeda Road (demolished). Through the 1960s, Almeda Road evolved alongside the adjacent residential area into a thriving commercial corridor with many Black-owned businesses. Alfreda's Soul Food operated at 5101 Almeda from 1964 until June 2023.<sup>3</sup> Almeda also became home to two significant institutions in Black media: KCOH Radio opened its headquarters at 5011 Almeda in 1963,<sup>4</sup> and the *Forward Times* newspaper purchased 4411 Almeda Road in 1961 to house its first printing press.<sup>5</sup> The *Forward Times* remains in operation in its Almeda location today. In 1974, a group of Black medical professionals commissioned the 5-story Almeda Medical Square building at 5445 Almeda (extant).<sup>6</sup> Construction of Highway 288 in the 1970s and early 1980s provided a faster route into downtown and divided Almeda Road from the rest of Riverside Terrace and the Third Ward. This resulted in a decline in business activity along the once-thriving commercial street.

#### *BRASWELL'S OF HOUSTON (1950 – c. 1973)*

Blake William Braswell was born in 1903 in Mansfield, Louisiana. After moving to Houston c. 1928, he worked briefly as an ambulance driver before opening a floral shop, The Flower Garden, at 2013 Main Street with E. P. Cabeen c. 1932.<sup>7</sup> Blanche Feux was born on April 14, 1907 in Opelousas, Louisiana and attended Southwest Louisiana Institute (now University of Louisiana at Lafayette). She moved to Houston in 1930. In 1937 she married B.W. Braswell and left a job at the Houston Gas and Fuel Company to work with her husband at The Flower Garden.<sup>8</sup>

The Braswells operated four flower shops in the 1940s before constructing their own building at 5613 Almeda Road. In September 1940, they relocated The Flower Garden to a new air-conditioned shop at

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<sup>3</sup> Alfreda's Dining Catering: About Us. <https://alfredassoulfood.com/about/>

<sup>4</sup> KCOH Global Studios: What's Our Story? <https://www.kcohradio.com/about-us>

<sup>5</sup> "The Houston Forward Times." <https://forwardtimes.com/houston-forward-times/>

<sup>6</sup> "[Medical Building Planned.](#)" *Houston Chronicle*, January 20, 1974, psec. 3. P. 18.

<sup>7</sup> *Houston City Directory*, 1932

<sup>8</sup> *Houston Chronicle*, April 15, 1938, sec. D p. 7.

"[Flowers, Organizations Fill Busy Woman's Day.](#)" *Houston Chronicle*, March 17, 1957, p. 110.

3221 Main Street.<sup>9</sup> By 1946, they operated a second shop location at 5611 Almeda Road.<sup>10</sup> A “court order restricting business in the area” forced the closure of the Almeda location in 1947, but the shop at 3221 Main remained open.<sup>11</sup> A few months later in August 1947, the Braswells had plans to open a shop in a new \$250,000 shopping center built primarily for an A&P supermarket in the 5600 block of Almeda (demolished).<sup>12</sup> In 1950, the Braswells hired B.W. Holtz to build a new stand-alone shop and greenhouse at 5613 Almeda Road, next to the A&P building.<sup>13</sup> The new shop was called Braswell’s of Houston.<sup>14</sup> By the late 1950s, the Braswells had two active shops. B.W. Braswell managed the Almeda location, and Blanche Braswell managed another shop in the Houston Club Building downtown.<sup>15</sup> The shop at 5613 Almeda remained open through at least 1972; its exact closing date is unclear.

Through their floral business and in their personal lives, the Braswells were active community members in Houston. In 1941 and 1942, B.W. Braswell served as president of the Houston Flower Association.<sup>16</sup> He resigned from the association in 1942 to enlist in the United States Air Force,<sup>17</sup> and Blanche Braswell was elected president in 1943.<sup>18</sup> Beginning in August 1944, their shops sponsored “An Orchid to You,” a weekly local radio broadcast during which orchids were awarded to outstanding community members.<sup>19</sup> In the late 1950s, Blanche spent some of her free time working at the Cerebral Palsy Treatment Center in her role as president of the Soroptimist Club of Houston.<sup>20</sup> B. W. Braswell served as president of the Calf Scramble Committee and a director for the Houston Fat Stock Show, and both Braswells were involved in the organization’s floral competitions. B. W. Braswell died in 1976, and Blanche Braswell died in 2005 at age 98.

#### *CENTER FOR ART AND PERFORMANCE (1982-1984) AND AMISTAD BOOKPLACE (1982 – 1987)*

Between c. 1972 and 1982, 5613 Almeda housed a bar and then was vacant for a period of time. Beginning in 1982, the building entered a new era of significance in arts and culture. Michael Peranteau, a Houston native with degrees in art history and journalism who worked in catering, leased the space in partnership with Max Pruneda, a painter from Laredo who worked as a chef. Peranteau and Pruneda opened the Center for Art and Performance (CAP) after renovating the interior for galleries, painting the exterior red, and covering the storefronts with corrugated metal. They founded a nonprofit organization, The Almeda Project for the Arts Inc., to manage programming in the building.<sup>21</sup> CAP functioned as an alternative gallery space similar to others such as Lawndale Art Center and featured artists who were not yet well established. The first artists and performers who exhibited in the space included Susan Hanft,

<sup>9</sup> *Houston Chronicle*, September 15, 1940, p. 36.

<sup>10</sup> “[Flower Shop Windows In Contest.](#)” *Houston Chronicle*, November 6, 1946, sec. B p. 23.

<sup>11</sup> “[Important Announcement From Braswell’s Flower Gardens.](#)” *Houston Chronicle*, April 28, 1947, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> “[Supermarket on Almeda to Cost \\$250,000 Is Begun.](#)” *Houston Chronicle*, August 7, 1947, sec. C p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> Holtz also built the nearby Patio Shops at 5302-5314 Almeda (1931, extant) almost 20 years earlier with H. M. Sanford. Stephen Fox, *AIA Houston Architectural Guide*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, p. 156.

<sup>14</sup> “[Contractor Begins Work on Greenhouse And Flower Shop.](#)” *Houston Chronicle*, March 5, 1950, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> “[Flowers, Organizations Fill Busy Woman’s Day.](#)” *Houston Chronicle*, March 17, 1957, p. 110.

<sup>16</sup> “[Flower Association Will Install Officers Here Thursday Night.](#)” *Houston Chronicle*, August 13, 1941, p. 30.

<sup>17</sup> “[Flower Association Chief Resigns to Enter Air Force.](#)” *Houston Chronicle*, October 9, 1942, p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> “[Flower Association Elects New Officers.](#)” *Houston Post*, July 25, 1943. Sec. 3, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> “[Here And There.](#)” *Houston Chronicle*, June 1, 1952, p. 23.

<sup>20</sup> “[Flowers, Organizations Fill Busy Woman’s Day.](#)” *Houston Chronicle*, March 17, 1957, p. 110.

<sup>21</sup> Gershon, Pete. *Collision: The Contemporary Art Scene in Houston, 1972-1985*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2018. p. 319.

Suzanne Paul, Fletcher Mackey, Terry Elkins, Terrell James, and Kathleen Packlick.<sup>22</sup> Later in 1982, the center hosted *Tejano Sculptors*, featuring the work of Luis Jimenez, Jesus Morales, Guillermo Pulido, and Joe Rodriguz.<sup>23</sup> Gallery shows were advertised at the address under the name Center for Art and Performance and later Almeda Center for the Arts until April 1984.<sup>24</sup>

Later in 1982, Amistad Bookplace relocated to 5613 Almeda from its first location, which had opened the previous year at 5003 San Jacinto in a space shared with Sutton's Black Heritage Gallery. Shirlene Evans Bridgewater and Denise Carreathers Armstrong founded the bookstore with a specific focus on Black literature and books about the Black experience. The two friends had no previous experience – Bridgewater worked for the City of Houston and Armstrong worked as a researcher for Business Week – were inspired to open a bookstore because they often were unable to find books they were seeking on local shelves. Denied a Small Business Association loan, Bridgewater and Armstrong opened the store with their own savings and contributions from friends and other contacts.<sup>25</sup> In addition to book sales, the store hosted readings and signings by Black authors and other events, including workshops for writing, African dance, chess, and other activities. The store operated alongside CAP and then Community Music Center of Houston in the 2-story attached building until it moved to 1413 Holman c. 1987.

#### *COMMUNITY MUSIC CENTER OF HOUSTON (1984 – 1996)*

Community Music Center of Houston began as the Society for the Preservation of Spirituals, founded by Patricia Johnson and Ron Scales in 1979 to preserve the musical traditions of enslaved Africans. The organization soon expanded to include other neglected musical forms, and Johnson and Scales renamed it the Community Music Center of Houston (CMCH) in 1981. CMCH initially provided low-cost musical instruction at the Blue Triangle branch of the YWCA in the Third Ward neighborhood with HISD music teacher Charles Russ as a volunteer instructor. Beginning in 1983, when Anne Lundy joined the organization as music director, CMCH also organized performing groups for Black artists. These included the Intermezzo Singers, an eight-piece vocal group, and Ebony Brass, a five-piece brass group. Also included was the Scott Joplin Chamber Orchestra, which Lundy had organized before she joined CMCH. Much of the organization's early support came from Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church and other Black churches in surrounding neighborhoods.<sup>26</sup>

In 1984, CMCH partnered with Sutton's Black Heritage Gallery to move into 5613 Almeda alongside Amistad Bookplace. It was the organization's first location. CMCH established three music classrooms and a performance space with a stage in the former Center for Art and Performance space. Anne Lundy used the former floral vault as an additional studio. When Amistad Bookplace moved out in 1987, CMCH leased the remainder of the building and added an opening between the one-story and two-story portions. The ground floor became offices, and the second floor served as an office and apartment for Ron Scales.<sup>27</sup> During its time at 5613 Almeda, CMCH experienced significant growth and established several long-running programs including the Music of Motown series (now Dancing in the Streets) and

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<sup>22</sup> "A feather in their CAP." *Houston Chronicle*, May 16, 1982, p. 20-21.

<sup>23</sup> Gershon, 320.

<sup>24</sup> *Houston Chronicle*, April 26, 1984, p. 120.

<sup>25</sup> "Why Business Partnerships Succeed...Or Fail." *Black Enterprise*, December 1984, p. 76.

<sup>26</sup> "Our Story." Community Music Center of Houston, <https://cmchouston.org/about/>.

<sup>27</sup> Telephone interview with Ron Scales, June 16, 2023.

joint performances with the Houston Symphony under conductor Anne Lundy at Miller Outdoor Theatre. Through these concerts, Dr. Lundy became the first Black woman to conduct the Houston Symphony.<sup>28</sup> At 5613 Almeda, CMCH hosted music and theatre performances in addition to music classes. Performers included Jewel Brown and Wayne Dehart. Samuel Dinkins, III, founder of the Dinky Drum Company School of Drums and Percussion, performed with the Scott Joplin Chamber Orchestra before teaching his first percussion class at CMCH in 1990.<sup>29</sup> CMCH remained at 5613 Almeda until the building was sold in 1996. The organization remains active today.

## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

### *ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION*

5613 Almeda Road includes two attached buildings with a low shed-roof addition extending across the entire east (rear) side. The property also includes two small parking lots on the north and south sides of the buildings.

The primary building is a 1-story commercial building of concrete masonry construction on a concrete slab foundation. The roof is flat with a low flat parapet on the street-facing (west) side, and the exterior is clad in stucco. An angled flat metal canopy on the front shades an asymmetrical storefront divided into two bays. The north bay angles inward and contains the main entry door and two original low brick planters. The former glass and metal storefront has been mostly infilled with vertical siding and plywood. The south bay is clad in stucco and includes paired fixed windows with metal frames and an original integrated planter below. A distinctive angled wing wall clad in simulated stone veneer divides the two bays. The north (side) elevation of the building includes an infilled window with a shallow flat canopy toward the front and a metal garage door at the rear.

A two-story building set back from the street is attached to the primary building's south side. The two-story building is clad in stucco and has a shallow-pitched front gable roof with a wide gable vent. The west (front) elevation has a central entry door on the first floor covered by a curved metal awning with scalloped trim. Two wood 1/1 windows are placed asymmetrically, one on each floor, with stucco trim and false keystones. The south (side) elevation includes a single 1/1 wood window on the first floor near the front of the building and 5 windows in varying sizes and configurations on the second floor; these windows are obscured by screens. A metal garage door is present on the low shed-roof addition at the rear.

### *ALTERATION HISTORY*

The property retains its overall original appearance. The most notable renovation occurred during the 1982 conversion to the Center for Art and Performance when corrugated metal was installed to cover the entire storefront. The corrugated metal has since been removed, and the original storefront elements are visible again. The metal-framed greenhouse originally located on the north side of the one-story building and a prominent vent shaft on the roof were removed by the 1990s. The windows in the storefront north bay have been covered or removed, and the stucco cladding in the storefront south bay has replaced or

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<sup>28</sup> "Our Story." <https://cmchouston.org/about/>.

<sup>29</sup> "About." <https://www.dinkydrum.com/about>

covered the original exposed brick. The paired window in the south bay replaced the original single plate glass window before 1965. A window or open breeze block screen on the south side of the building near the storefront has been removed or covered; the shallow canopy remains. On the two-story building, the original asbestos cladding has been replaced or covered with stucco, and a side door and two garage doors have been removed from its south side. Otherwise, the original or early door and window configurations on the two buildings remain intact.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Gershon, Pete. *Collision: The Contemporary Art Scene in Houston, 1972-1985*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2018.

*The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Yasmin Arslan, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.*

**APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION**

**Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation**

(a) The HAHC, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider one or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the type of designation:

S	NA	S - satisfies	D - does not satisfy	NA - not applicable
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**EXHIBIT A  
CURRENT PHOTOS**

BRASWELL BUILDING  
5613 ALMEDA ROAD





# CITY OF HOUSTON

Houston Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department



# CITY OF HOUSTON

Houston Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department



## EXHIBIT B SITE MAP

BRASWELL BUILDING  
5613 ALMEDA ROAD



**Harris  
Central  
Appraisal  
District**

DETAIL MAP OF ACCOUNT NUMBER  
0611230290026



Date: 10/31/2023

Geospatial or map data maintained by the Harris Central Appraisal District is for informational purposes and may not have been prepared for or be suitable for legal, engineering, or surveying purposes. It does not represent an on-the-ground survey and only represents the approximate location of property boundaries.



**EXHIBIT C  
HISTORIC PHOTOS**

BRASWELL BUILDING  
5613 ALMEDA ROAD



Braswell's of Houston c. 1950. MSS1459-EG28, Woodson Photo Collection, Houston History Research Center, Houston Public Library



Amistad Bookplace, 1983. RGD0006N-1983-1899-21A, Houston Post Photo Collection, Houston History Research Center, Houston Public Library

# CITY OF HOUSTON

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Planning and Development Department

## EXHIBIT D SANBORN FIRE INSURANCE MAP - 1951

