DESCRIPTION

The Covington House was originally an elegant and imposing structure in a relatively affluent residential neighborhood whose residents were black. Historians describe the street where the house sits as having been "quiet, lined with lovely homes with tree-filled grounds."

Architects describe the structure as of "Greek Revival type, dominated by two Corinthian columns on its main facade.

The house, commanding well over 3,500 sq. feet of interior space, has 10 rooms not including 2 baths, one on each of its two levels. There are two working fireplaces in the house and a grand, hardwood staircase. The ceilings are approximately 12 feet tall, giving an heroic and elegant feeling to the interior. Other fine and interesting features are massive, sliding, fluted doors and a diamond-light doorway, windows and partitions. The entrance boasts tinted, patterned glass windows and door, with a pattern composed of 5 pieces of lead crystal. It is said that some of these items antedate the house.

The house had two verandas, one in front and one in back.

Both the exterior and interior details are elaborate and well articulated.

Presently the house is vacant and has been for some time. Overall, its condition can be described as moderately deteriorated. The project architectural consultants say that "the structure retains much of its original integrity despite severe deterioration in spots." Lack of maintenance, vandalism and the natural aging process are all contributing factors to the deterioration experienced by Covington House.

The dark stained walnut, quite grand stairwell suffers the indignity of a wall having been dropped from the ceiling to the tread inside the right-side-ascending railing, rendering it a mere curious ornament in the lower level.

Vandalism has resulted in removal of a nicey or useful item here and there, strewn trash and debris, a broken window or two. The major concern though is the use of the structure as a sort of "transients" shelter especially as regards the dangers posed by the deterioration.

The veranda at the rear is hardly more than a reminder of its original state. It is rotting apart, falling to the ground.

Sources:

"Notes, Unpublished papers and interviews".
Ira B. Bryant Ed.D. Houston, Texas 1975-77

Field notes, interviews. Jas. A. Marshall
A.I.A., Jas. A. Marshall Associates
Architects/Planner Houston, Texas 1975-77
No. 1. Vol. XXIV "Dr. Benjamin Jesse Covington";
Howard H. Bell, pp/5-6.
MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Ball, Howard H. "Dr. Benjamin Jesse Covington."
The Negro History Bulletin XXV (October 1961): 4-6

"Black Celebrities Slept Here," The Informer, January 1977, p.

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Nominated Property: less than 1 acre.

UTM REFERENCES

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<th>A 1</th>
<th>B 1</th>
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<td>271.7</td>
<td>321.4</td>
<td>329.2</td>
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Verbal Boundary Description

The site is approximately 5,600 square feet located at the northeastern corner of Dodds (west boundary) and Hadley (south boundary). The site is identified as part of lots 6, 7, 8 and 12 in block 445, of S.S. B.B. in the City of Houston, Harris County, Texas, according to the generally recognized plat thereof.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

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<th>STATE</th>
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FORM PREPARED BY

Robert Lee Dennis, Community Development Planner

For The City of Houston
Office of The Mayor
Community Development Div.

ORGANIZATION

For Houston Citizens Chamber of Commerce

DATE

9 Oct 1977

STREET & NUMBER

2808 Wheeler

TELEPHONE

(713) 522-9745

CITY OR TOWN

Houston

STATE

Texas 77004

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL X

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665) I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been reviewed according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

JW

TITLE

DATE

5-25-78

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ANTHROPOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DATE

DATE
SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD

- PREHISTORIC
- 1700-1799
- 1800-1899
- 1900-
- 1900-1919
- 1910-1919
- 1920-1929
- 1930-1939
- 1940-1949
- 1950-1959
- 1960-1969
- 1970-1979
- 1980-1989
- 1990-1999
- 2000-2009
- 2010-2019

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

- ARCHITECTURE
- ARCHAEOLOGY
- COMMUNITY PLANNING
- CONSERVATION
- ECONOMICS
- EDUCATION
- ENGINEERING
- EXPLORATION/SSETTLEMENT
- INDUSTRY
- INVENTION
- LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
- LAW
- LITERATURE
- MILITARY
- PHILOSOPHY
- POLITICS/GOVERNMENT
- RELIGION
- SCIENCE
- SCULPTURE
- SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
- THEATER
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER (SPECIFY)
- CIVIC

SPECIFIC DATES 1911 - 1961

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

To raise an elegant structure in most unlikely times and unfavorable circumstances is in itself a thorough statement of significance. There is, however, more of interest in the case of the B.J. Covington family and their house built around the turn of the century in Houston, Texas.

The Covingtons were central figures in the civic activity of black Houston for more than fifty years and their home was the setting for the founding of several institutions still viable and vital to the functioning of their community, witnesses this from the writings and notes of a prominent historian:

Dr. Covington was active in the Young Men's Christian Association, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity and the Business and Professional Men's Club. He helped to organize the Lone Star Medical Association and was an officer for more than 10 years. He was one of the founders of the Houston Negro Hospital (now Riverside General Hospital) and was a trustee of Bethel Baptist Church. He was also a member of the G.U.O.P. Masons, U.B.P.K. of P. and A.O.O.F. Mrs. Covington was one of the founders of the Blue Triangle Branch of the Young Women's Christian Association and served as the chairman of its Board of Management. In this capacity she spoke out for -- among other things -- better educational facilities for black school children. The senior Covingtons were both musicians. Mrs. Covington played the piano and Dr. Covington was self-taught in piano, violin, mandolin and cornet. They transferred this love of music to their daughter.

Jessie Covington manifested unusual musical ability as a child. She also excelled in other academic endeavors and graduated with honors from Houston's Colored High School. Her talent and training in piano were sufficient to gain her admission to the school of music at Oberlin College (now Oberlin University). Miss Covington graduated from Oberlin in 1924 and received a scholarship to the Juilliard School of Music where she studied for four years. She gave up a promising concert career to marry Albert W. Dent (now retired from the presidency of Dillard University, New Orleans, Louisiana).

Further:

The Covington home was indeed a citadel of culture. In this home Negro
community leaders gathered and formulated plans for encouraging and developing an appreciation for arts in Houston and from this house, better race relations were disseminated throughout the community during Houston’s darkest racial days.

In the years preceding the integration of Houston's hotels, the Covington home became a "beacon light” to out-of-town guests needing lodging. The list of visitors to the home reads like a directory of famous black Americans.

The Covingtons entertained the distinguished educator, Booker T. Washington, founder of Tuskegee Institute, Tuskegee, Alabama. Other guests included Roland Hayes, internationally known baritone; opera star, Madam Lillian Evanti; Roscoe Conklin Simmons, lecturer of the Supreme Lodge, Knights of Pythias; orator and organizer William Pickens; and the great contralto, Marian Anderson, and the concert artist, Dorothy Maynor.

Of note as regards Dr. Covington's activity in his profession, the following is of interest:

Dr. Covington's medical practice in Houston grew rapidly. He was interested in pulmonary ailments and came early to the conclusion that tuberculosis need not result in an early death. He was proud of his record in having lost very few patients from pneumonia. He reported successful treatment of patients during the influenza epidemic of the World War I period. In this he was an advocate of the theory that influenza is a mild form of yellow fever. His treatment proved to be so successful that the local United States Army medical officer became interested and secured his formula.

Despite a busy practice, Dr. Covington never allowed himself to drop behind in the constant effort to improve medical knowledge and treatment. On 42 different occasions he attended refresher and modernization courses at Prairie View or Tuskegee or Flint-Goodridge (New Orleans) or Mayo Clinic. And as he returned each year to Houston he brought with him the newer knowledge and the newer techniques so vital to the health and welfare of the community.

Dr. Covington was always a strong believer in organized effort. Shortly after his graduation from Meharry Medical College he helped in the organization of the Lone Star Medical Association, now Houston Medical Forum. He served as secretary-treasurer for ten years, and took his turn as president in 1920. His interests, however, were not confined to the medical profession. He has given
support and leadership to the Omega Fraternity, the Baptist Church,
the YMCA, the Masonic Lodge, and the Business and Professional Men's
Club. In this organization he has associated himself with coun-
seling, advising, lending a helping hand where needed with the younger
men. Through this association he retained an understanding and res-
pect for the outlook of the younger generation. From these
organizations in later years he received tributes, citations, honors,
and awards. He was particularly pleased that a college scholarship
had been established in his honor.

But Dr. Covington did not stand alone. Throughout fifty-eight years
Mrs. Covington shared the spotlight of leadership. She was one of
the founders of the Blue Triangle Branch of the YMCA; she had been
effective in church, hospital, and garden club work; she has served
in responsible positions with the city and state efforts of interracial
understanding.

Again, the time of and circumstances surrounding the above noted activity and
events give special importance to the works of this family and their home
stands as the symbol of their community's contribution to the whole of the
Houston community.

Dr. and Mrs. Covington, born during the reconstruction period following the
Civil War to parents who were formerly slaves, raised what was held by
their contemporaries and all of us who share and enjoy this legacy, a fine
and elegant edifice which can be preserved for this whole community.

The cost of this activity is estimated at around $200,000.