

Pecan Orchard Survey Project

Blocks H-N

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Total number of contributing structures: 62

Non-contributing structures: 4

Overall integrity: The integrity of this area reflects a significant retention of location, design, setting, feel and association, with major threats coming from the commercial development on its western border and widespread changes in exterior structural changes.

Median age of construction: Although the exact construction date for each building is unavailable, based on the style and materials used, the median age of construction is approximately 55 years.

Five most common architectural styles:

Modern-- Minimal Traditional

Modern—Other

Modern—Ranch

Revival—Colonial

Revival—Neo Classical

Five most common structural changes:

Windows

Roof Material

Garage/Room additions

Metal Car Ports

Siding material

Five best preserved structures:

2601 Pecan

2607 Pecan

2715 Pecan

2815 Pecan

216 Pine

Five most altered structures:

Blount, House on lots 10a, 10, 11 (No discernible address)

315 California

301 Nelson

2719 Raguette

126 Davis

Nacogdoches historic resources represent many individuals and events significant to specific events in American history. However, many resources, such as the Pecan Orchard district of Nacogdoches represent the broader patterns of American development. Criterion A of the National Register states that these resources are significant when they are “associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.”¹ This applies to a broad range of residential neighborhoods that illustrate significant aspects of America’s suburbanization. In the case of the Pecan Orchard district, it applies to the specific years between 1945-1960, a period recognized by the National Register as one of the most significant periods of suburbanization in America.

American Suburbanization of 1945-1960

In 1934, the National Housing Act created the Federal Housing Administration in order to restructure the private home financing system and to encourage private investing. It allowed a comprehensive program of review for approving subdivisions for mortgage insurance, development of housing standards, and a process for real estate appraisal. Between 1936 and 1940, the FHA distributed a series of circulars to inform of these new standards and recommended designs.

The FHA created seven minimum requirements for new subdivisions:

1. Location exhibiting a healthy and active demand for homes.
2. Location possessing a suitable site in terms of topography, soil condition, tree cover, and absence of hazards such as flood, fog, smoke, obnoxious odors, etc.
3. Accessibility by means of public transportation (streetcars and buses) and adequate highways to schools, employment, and shopping centers.

4. Installation of appropriate utilities and street improvements (meeting city or county specifications), and carefully related to needs of the development.
5. Compliance with city, county or regional plans and regulations, particularly local zoning and subdivision regulations to ensure that the neighborhood will become stable (and real estate values as well.)
6. Protection of values through “appropriate” deed restrictions (including setbacks, lot sizes, minimum costs of construction).
7. Guarantee of a sound financial set up, whereby subdividers were financially able to carry through their sales and development program, and where taxes and assessments were in line with the type of development contemplated and likely to remain stable.²

The creation of the FHA and its requirements set the stage for America’s most dramatic historic suburbanization following World War II. Several elements contributed to this postwar housing boom represented by the Pecan Orchard community, including increased automobile ownership, advances in building technology, and the Baby Boom. A severe shortage of housing and acceptable mortgaging options, coupled with the large number of returning veterans eager to start families greatly impacted the rapid development of suburban communities. Highway construction authorized under the 1944 act and the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 created thousands of miles of highways throughout the country that opened new land for residential development. During the 1940’s, the average population of suburbs increased at nearly triple the rate of population in major cities, a trend that continued through the fifties, and by 1960, a greater number of people lived in suburban areas than in central cities. By the end of the 1940s, home

building grew on an unprecedented scale, and by 1950, the construction of 1,692,000 new single-family houses marked a record high.²

The wartime industry of World War II developed large-scale production techniques, prefabrication methods and materials, and streamlined assembly methods. Neighborhoods filled with similar houses built quickly, efficiently and inexpensively represented the organized effort of many groups, including the Federal government, to “create a single-family house that a majority of Americans could afford.”² Also factoring into the postwar economy was the heightened cost of materials, making it necessary for developers to design smaller homes with streamlined costs. This included the elimination of superfluous design details, fireplaces, and interior hallways, and encouraged the use of prefabricated components and other inexpensive materials.²

The FHA encouraged standard, basic floorplans that could be built efficiently, such as the highly praised one-story “minimum”. This plan could be altered to create an L-shape for additional space, or by adding basements, second stories and garages. While these basic designs were promoted, the FHA also encouraged exterior variation to avoid monotony. This variation was achieved by the combination of gables, porches, materials, windows (both wood and metal casings), and roof types, as well as the addition of chimneys and fireplaces.² Throughout the 1950’s, the west coast Ranch style increased in popularity, some examples of which are visible in the Pecan Orchard district, including basic FHA-approved design houses that incorporate exterior elements to resemble the Ranch style.

Landscapes and yards were also affected by the rise of suburban building, and many of these elements are still visible in the Pecan Orchard district. The high number of

houses being built called for wider and shallower lots to accommodate the popular single-story, rectangular and L-shaped houses. These often included garages, carports and driveways, considerations that represented the widespread ownership of automobiles. The minimal landscaping in many of these yards is an example of the newly streamlined lifestyle that the homes conveyed.

Residential Development in Nacogdoches during 20th Century

During the late 1800's and early 1900's, an influx of residents spurred economic activity and residential construction, filling the area north of the historic downtown with domestic structures (and area known as the Washington Square District). The city economy was primarily sustained through industrial trade and the cotton and timber industries, but received a boost in 1919 when the Texas State Legislature chose Nacogdoches as the home of a new teacher's college honoring Stephen F. Austin, the "Founder of Texas." The area between Washington Square and the college to the north was slated for residential construction during the 1920's and 1930's. Like the rest of the country, very little construction was seen in Nacogdoches during the War period.³ However, after World War II, college towns like Nacogdoches held appeal for veterans returning to college through the G.I. Bill. The Pecan Orchard district is an example of the kinds of residential developments that grew out of this need for affordable housing close to universities. Between 1940 and 1950, changes in the economic structure of the town saw a dramatic population decline, making the Pecan Orchard community unique and the best example of the postwar housing boom in Nacogdoches.

Pecan Orchard District Homes

The houses in Pecan Orchard are primarily wood frame, single-story, single-family domestic dwellings. The styles are predominantly variations of Post-war Modern and Ranch, with a few examples of Classical and Colonial Revivals. Rectangular, L-shape and bungalow plans are prevalent, as well as a characteristic simplicity in design details. Many have attached garages or carports, driveways, with minimal landscaping.

Significance

The Pecan Orchard historic district yields historic and architectural significance, as an example of both a broad pattern of American history, and as a collection of structures that embody the architectural characteristics of a specific period. Therefore, this district can be eligible for listing in the National Register under both Criterion A and C, however, the stronger nomination is most likely to be Criterion A.

Registration Requirements

The accompanying narrative above is a historic context that has been developed to allow for the nomination of the Pecan Orchard district. To be included, a historic district comprised mostly of domestic buildings must be strongly linked with and related to the historic context. The buildings must be at least 50 years old and retain sufficient integrity to be recognizable to its period of significance.

Historic Integrity

Historic Integrity refers to the overall ability of the community to demonstrate, in its original form, the broader pattern of American history. It encompasses seven elements including location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. Fortunately, because this district is one of the most recently built districts

now eligible for historic status, very few major changes have occurred in since its inception.²

Location

Location requires defining boundaries of the suburb remain intact, as well as location of streets and the size and shape of the house lots.² The Pecan Orchard district has retained those elements from its inception. The greatest change in location is it's relation to a major thoroughfare that creates this districts western boundary. The increased traffic on the more heavily traveled North street makes it the largest threat to Pecan Orchard's location integrity. However, a major element in location is the area's physical relation to the University, which remains the same.

Design

Design refers not only to the design of individual structures, but to a neighborhoods spatial organization, including arrangement of streets, division of blocks into house lots and arrangement of yards.² The spatial organization of Pecan Orchard remains significantly intact and very few large scale additions—such as doubling the elevation—have occurred. Unfortunately, replacement of window types, roofing and siding materials and small additions to many of the homes are a threat to the integrity of design.

Setting

The setting of the Pecan Orchard District is originally that of wooded, residential community, close to a college campus and business areas. The interior areas of the district greatly retain that setting. The eastern boundary is marked by a small elementary school among single-family dwellings. Interestingly, the *National Register of Historic*

Places Multiple Property Documentation Form explains that many of these postwar neighborhoods were characterized by the embedding of small suburban schools into the neighborhoods. Raguet Elementary School was built in 1955 and is an excellent example of this broader national pattern. Unfortunately, the western boundary of the district is marred by a heavily traveled commercial district, thinly buffered by trees and shrubs. This change of setting is one of the largest threats to the community's historic integrity.

Materials and Workmanship

Material refers to the construction materials of dwellings, garages, roadways, walkways, fences, curbing, and other structures, as well as vegetation, while workmanship refers to the ways materials have been fashioned for functional and decorative purposes, also including vegetation.² Fortunately, there are many examples of original material and workmanship in the Pecan Orchard district. However, the natural progression of change, replacement and repair has left few exteriors untouched.

Feeling

Feeling is the reflection of a past time and place evoked by physical characteristics of a district.² The Pecan Orchard district retains much of its feeling, preserving the cumulative effect of its design, setting, and overall appearance. Walking or driving through the area yields the same feel of a vibrant neighborhood close to town, yet secluded and park-like in its appearance.

Association

Association is the link between a historic suburb and the events and purposes that shaped it,² and in the case of Pecan Orchard, its usage is an extremely important factor in retaining its association integrity. The broad pattern of American history represented is

that of the suburbanization movement of the postwar period. The important factor is that of domestic, residential usage. Pecan Orchard has maintained that usage in an extremely high percentage of its structures, housing families and university students through the latter half of the 20th century and into the 21st. Despite changes in ownership and economy, this neighborhood is still fulfilling its original function and design.

Non-contributing Structures

The total number of non-contributing structures is less than two percent, and consists primarily of commercial buildings along the western boundary of the district.

Criterion applications

Historic districts are generally nominated to the National Register under criterion A and C, and the Pecan Orchard district can be nominated under both. Criterion A of the National Register states that historic resources must be associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.¹ The Pecan Orchard District fulfills this requirement by representing the American suburbanization movement from 1945-1960. The structures represent the common styles, plans and construction methods and suburban planning methods of that movement.

Criterion C on the National Register states that districts are eligible if they embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction.¹ The Pecan Orchard district embodies the distinctive characteristics of the postwar suburbanization through its design, its houses and its location, that work together to tell the American story of residential development in the local setting of Nacogdoches.

Resources

- 1) *National Register Bulletin: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*; U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service National Register, History and Education; 1991, 2002.
- 2) *National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form*; United States Department of the Interior; National Park Service; Sept, 2002.
3. *Nacogdoches Multiple Property Documentation Form*; City of Nacogdoches; 1991.