



NATIONAL REGISTER EVALUATION  
OF  
THE MAY HOUSE

By  
Kate Singleton

Prepared for:  
Texas Utilities Services, Inc.  
Dallas, Texas

Prepared by:  
ENVIRONMENT CONSULTANTS, INC.,  
14325 Proton Road  
Dallas, Texas 75234

September 3, 1981



The May House is a two story limestone "I" house that was built in 1882 by Benjamin May. The original floor plan of the house was typical of the most common of the southern two story "I" houses which was influenced by the Georgian style that was characterized by a broad central hall.<sup>1</sup> The May house originally consisted of two rooms downstairs, each with a fireplace, and a central hall in the middle with stairs leading up to the second story. The front door and back door were symmetrically placed in the middle of the house. The second story consisted of one large room used for sleeping quarters with access from the interior stairway and exterior stairway. When Benjamin May died, the house was passed on to family members and remained in the family until 1937 when the house was sold to Dallas Parnell.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Parnell extensively remodelled the house into a "Southern Colonial," a style favored for large houses during this period of Gone With the Wind nostalgia.<sup>3</sup>

In determining whether this house is eligible for the National Register, it is important to look at the guidelines under which this house will be evaluated. The National Register criteria for evaluation which apply to this property states that it "... embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master or possess high artistic values or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction."<sup>4</sup> In other words, this house would be under consideration for listing on the National Register for architectural value. However, alterations were made to the house in the late 1930s which were drastic and have destroyed the architectural integrity. The most damaging and drastic change made was the alteration of the roof

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1. Glassie, Henry: Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States (University of Pennsylvania 1968), p. 67.

2. Skinner, S. Alan and Gerald K. Humphreys: The Historic and Prehistoric Archaeological Resources of the Squaw Creek Reservoir (Southern Methodist University 1973), pp. 14-17.

3. Alexander, Drury Blake: Texas Homes of the Nineteenth Century (University of Texas Press 1977), p. 90.

4. National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service: How to Complete National Register Inventory Nomination Forms (Washington, D.C. 1976), pp. 3-4.



line (Figures 1 and 2). Across the front of the house (west), a "Southern Colonial" two story front porch was added. Four windows were added across the front as well as Doric columns (Figure 3). Also, several rooms were added on the back of the house to double the size. The exterior stone wall became the interior living room wall (which can be found by chipping off the plaster). The same holds true for the upstairs: the exterior wall is now a dividing wall between the original room and the addition. The second story exterior access is now a door from the old (original) part of the house into the addition. There also has been an addition on to the south end of the house in the form of a stone garage. The north end of the house has had rather drastic remodelling in that a screened-in porch (Figure 4) was added and this end of the house was apparently jacked up and a rather extensive "cellar" consisting of three rooms was added. The original house probably had some sort of root cellar or basement, but it was not as extensive as the one described above.

In considering alterations that have been made to a building and the effect these alterations have on the building's eligibility for the National Register, one must ask whether these alterations can be easily removed without further damage to the structure. Unfortunately, the removal of these alterations might cause structural problems for the house. The architectural style of this house has been completely changed through the remodelling that was done by Dallas Parnell in the late 1930s. Although the house still shows some fine detailing around the windows, the drastic changes that have been made render it ineligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places for the reasons stated previously. Although this house does not meet the criteria for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places, efforts should be made to maintain it as a useful structure.

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TRUETT LATIMER  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

F.O. BOX 12276  
AUSTIN TEXAS 78711

September 14, 1981

Mr. Richard A. Werner  
Nuclear licensing  
Texas Utilities Services, Inc.  
2001 Bryan Tower  
Dallas, Texas 75201

Re: May House, Comanche Peak Steam  
Electric Station, NRC

Dear Mr. Werner:

Thank you for forwarding information concerning the evaluation of the May House for the National Register of Historic Places. We request addition information on the interior and exterior modifications to the house before we reach a decision on the eligibility of the property. Please have Kate Singleton forward photos and field notes that she made during the recent inspection of the property.

Please accept our apologies for the confusion on this property. This is the only property still to be evaluated in the project area, the archeological sites having been evaluated earlier. With the possible exception of the May House, no National Register or eligible properties will be adversely affected by the project. We will continue to work with you on the May property to complete the compliance procedure.

Sincerely,

Truett Latimer  
State Historic Preservation Officer

by

LaVerne Herrington, Ph.D.  
Director  
Resource Conservation

LH/lft

cc: B.J. Youndblood  
Louis ByKosk  
Alan Skinner

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TRUETT LATIMER  
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P.O. BOX 12276  
AUSTIN TEXAS 78711  
(512) 475-3094

September 25, 1981

Dear Kate:

I was talking with Joe Oppermann when you called again about the May House in Somervell County, and went ahead and borrowed the copy of your report from Patience Patterson of our Resource Conservation office. I did not, however, see her letter to you.

After looking over the material I cannot categorically say that the May House is ineligible for the National Register. My parents' ranch is ten miles away in Johnson County, and I have visited the area with some regularity over the years and lived there twice. The Courthouse is the only structure in Somervell County now listed on the National Register, although Barnard's Mill in Glen Rose has passed the State Board of Review. From my own observations, even altered 99 year old Italianate stone farmhouses are pretty few and far between in the area. Changes to the roofline are certainly unfortunate but perhaps not irreversible, and the stonework and lentils still display a certain quality craftsmanship.

While I am involved in the project only at your request, I would be interested in seeing other photographs (including other elevations, the old part of the interior and any early outbuildings) and learning more of its history. Your report contained very little information about Benjamin May and his family or about Dallas Parnell. We would need more information to make any pronouncements about its historical significance (or lack of significance). Any help that you could provide would be appreciated, and I may have research staff here do preliminary work at the Barker Texas History Center at the University of Texas. Sorry to complicate the issue for you, but a more complete history and photographic report would help us more objectively evaluate the May House.

Anyway, hope all is well there. Hope to see you in Dallas at some point. Or, if you're headed in this direction, give me a call.

Take care,

Peter Flagg Maxson  
Director of Survey and Registration

PFM/mc

Kate Singleton  
Environment Consultants, Inc  
14325 Proton Road  
Dallas, TX 75234

*The State Agency for Historic Preservation*



environment consultants, inc.

January 6, 1982

Dr. LaVerne Herrington, Director  
Resource Conservation  
Texas Historical Commission  
P.O. Box 12276  
Capital Station  
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear LaVerne:

Texas Utilities called the other day to ask if we had been able to resolve the National Register eligibility question for the May House near the Comanche Peak power plant. I advised them that we had not heard but would write to you to reiterate our position.

First, we have been unable to determine that the house has any particular historic or cultural significance that would make it eligible. This is based on interviews with local historians and Mrs. Swain, whose father was Mr. May, as well as inspection of tax and other records in Glen Rose, Texas.

Second, the house has been significantly modified over the past 40 years. This modification has removed the original roof and elevated it and moved the roofline to a different position. It has totally incased the back wall of the original house. We do not know how the back wall was modified. The upper half of the front wall was torn apart and then rebuilt in order to add four new windows; a front porch was also added to "improve", the Southern Colonial revival appearance of this house which once was a good example of an I house. The first floor has been removed and replaced and the southern chimney has been boarded up. We do not know how the second floor itself has been modified. No windows in the house are original and those windows in the original part of the house have been replaced with recent sliding windows; this was probably in the past 15 years based on their construction. The floor plan of the house was increased by adding a kitchen, pantry, bathroom, dining room and family room on the back of the house on the first floor. On the second floor, two large bedrooms with closets and a bathroom were added. A concrete porch is attached to the north end of the house and a 4 car garage is attached to the south end. All in all, the house is no longer a house of historic architectural integrity.

Third, we do not believe that Texas Utilities should be expected to further pursue a National Register determination because the house is outside of the property for which they are responsible under the terms of their operating permit from NRC. Nor do we believe that they should be responsible to further record a house which has been so significantly modified that its potential might only be revealed if someone were to strip away all the cement, columns, wood and wall coverings that have been added in the



Dr. LaVerne Herrington  
January 6, 1982  
Page 2

recent past. We recommend that you determine the house in its present condition to be ineligible for inclusion on the National Register.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

ENVIRONMENT CONSULTANTS, INC.

S. Alan Skinner, Ph.D.  
Vice President and General Manager

SAS/lew

cc R. Weres, TUSI

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TELEPHONE  
(512) 475-3092

February 8, 1982

S. Alan Skinner, Ph.D.  
Vice President and General  
Manager  
Environment Consultants, Inc.  
4951 Airport Parkway, Suite 500  
Dallas, Texas 75248

Re: The May House, Comanche Peak  
Steam Electric Station, NRC

Dear Alan:

Thank you for your letter of January 6, 1982. Today we talked again about the May House and concluded we still need more documentation to make a determination of eligibility. We are enclosing a copy of an earlier letter from Peter Maxon which states the general feeling of the architects. Our office would find additional information on all owners, photos of exterior and interior of the house, and exterior photos of any outbuildings helpful in making a determination of eligibility. The structure was obviously of some substance when it was built, and more information on the history of the home and its occupants is critical.

Sincerely,

Curtis Tunnell  
Acting State Historic Preservation  
Officer

by

*LaVerne Herrington*  
LaVerne Herrington, Ph.D.  
Director  
Resource Conservation

LH/lft

cc: Richard Werner

Encl.

*The State Agency for Historic Preservation*





environment consultants, inc.

February 10, 1982

Dr. LaVerne Herrington, Director  
Resource Conservation  
Texas Historical Commission  
P.O. Box 12276  
Capital Station  
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Dr. Herrington:

Ms. Singleton and I have reviewed our records on the May House and the information submitted to you during our meeting last fall and in our previous correspondence. As we have stated before, we have been unable to find any additional information about the history of the house or its owners which might make it culturally or historically significant. This includes interviews referred to in my 1973 report as well as the work and records checks we made last fall.

We have submitted exterior views of the house where original construction is apparent and we reviewed with you the interior shots at our meeting last fall. The interior pictures show virtually no original features so we can see little value in sending them to you again. There are no original outbuildings that we can show date to the age of the house and in fact, the extensive additions and modifications have created a mid-1900s house.

We concur with you that the house was of some substance and in fact may continue to hold much of that substance although the front elevation has been irretrievably altered. We believe that, like an aged person who has massive plastic surgery, the house might be restorable to a semblance of its original condition. I must, however, emphasize the might. There currently are no plans for such a stripping away and reconstruction program.

We have provided all the information that we have available. If you feel that it is necessary to further evaluate this property which is no longer under the responsibility of NRC, we recommend that you contact Richard Werner at Texas Utilities and arrange for an on-site visit. By copy of this letter I am advising Mr. Werner of this recommendation.

Thank you for your help with this matter.

Sincerely,

ENVIRONMENT CONSULTANTS, INC.

S. Alan Skinner, Ph.D.  
Vice President and General Manager

SAS/lew

cc: Richard Werner