

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Della Phillips House
Other name/site number: NA
Name of related multiple property listing: NA

2. Location

Street & number: 2310 E. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.
City or town: Austin State: Texas County: Travis
Not for publication: [] Vicinity: []

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this
[] nomination [] request for determination of eligibility) meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the
National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my
opinion, the property [] meets [] does not meet) the National Register criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following levels of significance:
[] national [] statewide [x] local

Applicable National Register Criteria: [] A [] B [x] C [] D

[Signature] Chief Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer
Signature of certifying official / Title Date 4/29/25
Texas Historical Commission
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property [] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria.
Signature of commenting or other official Date
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:
[] entered in the National Register
[] determined eligible for the National Register
[] determined not eligible for the National Register.
[] removed from the National Register
[] other, explain: _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Della Phillips House, Austin, Travis County, Texas

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Federal

Category of Property

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: NA

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions: Domestic/single dwelling

Current Functions: Domestic/single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification: Mid-Century Modern Residential: Contemporary

Principal Exterior Materials: Wood, stone, glass

Narrative Description (see continuation sheets 7-6 through 7-9)

Della Phillips House, Austin, Travis County, Texas

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

<input type="checkbox"/>	A	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
<input type="checkbox"/>	B	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	C	Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
<input type="checkbox"/>	D	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations: NA

Areas of Significance: Architecture (*local level*)

Period of Significance: 1965

Significant Dates: 1965

Significant Person (only if criterion b is marked): NA

Cultural Affiliation (only if criterion d is marked): NA

Architect/Builder: Chase, John Saunders, FAIA

Narrative Statement of Significance (see continuation sheets 8-10 through 8-15)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography (see continuation sheet 9-16 through 9-19)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office (*Texas Historical Commission, Austin*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): NA

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than 1 acre

Coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: NA

1. Latitude: 30.280751° Longitude: -97.716587°

Verbal Boundary Description: The boundary is the legal parcel described by Travis CAD as: Property ID #2014128 LOT 7 WASHINGTON SUBD and shown on MAP 2.

Boundary Justification: The nominated boundary includes all the property historically associated with the building.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Kathleen Conti and Laura Caffrey (University of Texas) with assistance from Bonnie Tipton (National Register Coordinator)

Organization: Texas Historical Commission

Street & number: P.O. Box 12276

City or Town: Austin State: TX Zip Code: 78711

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Date: April 11, 2025

Additional Documentation

Maps (see continuation sheets MAP-20 through MAP-22)

Additional items (see continuation sheets FIGURE-23 through FIGURE-31)

Photographs (see continuation sheets PHOTO-32 through PHOTO-42)

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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Photograph Log

Property: Della Phillips House
Location: Austin, Travis County, Texas
Photographer: Penny Moore, Tara Dudley, PhD; and Bonnie Tipton
Date: February 16 & 20, 2025; April 25, 2025, and November 1, 2020

Two photographs from 2020 accurately depict the property's current appearance and were chosen because each depict significant exterior features of the home's design.

Photo 1: E. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. View west. Chase-designed David's Chapel in back left. (4/25/25)

Photo 2: South (front) façade, view north. (4/25/25)

Photo 3: Southeast oblique, view northwest. (4/25/25)

Photo 4: South façade with original fountain and planters. (4/25/25)

Photo 5: Soffitt detail. View east. (11/1/2020)

Photo 6: East elevation. View west. (4/25/25)

Photo 7: Northeast oblique. View southwest. (11/1/2020)

Photo 8: North elevation. View south. (4/25/25)

Photo 9: Southwest oblique. View northeast. (4/25/25)

Photo 10: Upon entering, the partition (with original built-in closet) directs movement east and west. Original floors shown. View east. (2/20/2025)

Photo 11: North side of interior partition showing original grasscloth and African mahogany. (2/16/2025)

Photo 12: An open plan and abundance of natural light characterize the interior. The elevator is enclosed within the mahogany closet (at left). View east. (2/16/2025)

Photo 13: Family room on west side of home with original bookshelves and Chase-designed pendant lights. View west. (2/16/2025)

Photo 14: Bathroom with original pink tile, lighting, and cabinetry. View west. (2/20/25)

Della Phillips House, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Narrative Description

The 1965 Phillips House is a 1 ½ story Mid-Century Contemporary style residence with a T-shaped plan and cantilevered folded plate roof in Austin, Travis County, Texas. Designed by architect John S. Chase, it shows the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian houses and contemporary residential design by architects like Michigan-based William H. Kessler. Located in a post-World War II middle-class subdivision in East Austin, the house is on a prominent corner lot at E. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and Maple Street. Chase integrated the Phillips House into its steeply sloped site by tucking the two-car drive-through garage under the east side of the building's main level. The house is asymmetrically composed of green painted wood siding, expanses of wood framed floor-height windows, and river rock walls. Exterior piers and the chimney are clad in smooth marble panels. Its most distinguishing exterior feature is the linear folded plate roofline with repeating green diamonds on the north and south elevations. Designed for entertainment, the interior plan is large, open, and full of natural light. The architect also designed pendant lamps that hung throughout the house and used African Mahogany for the dwelling's wood panel walls, exposed ceiling beams, and interior dividing wall frames. An elevator from the lower-level garage to the main level is original to the house. A private garden on the west elevation is terraced with a river rock walls, rock barbeque pit, and an original fountain is extant near the entrance. The Phillips House has few alterations and retains integrity to communicate its architectural and historical significance.

Setting

The 1965 Phillips House is at 2310 E. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. (previously E. 19th Street) in East Austin, less than one mile from the University of Texas. It is in the Washington Subdivision, one of three post-World War II neighborhoods developed by and for black professionals in the immediate area. In 2021, the neighborhood was designated a local historic district (the Rogers-Washington-Holy Cross Historic District) as a remarkably intact postwar suburban neighborhood and for its association with the cultural, economic, and political history of Black Austinites. Contributing residences, built between 1952 and 1972, reflect popular mid-20th century architectural styles— Ranch, Minimal Traditional, and Split Level. John S. Chase, who designed the nominated building, was also the architect for 1906 Maple Ave. **(Figure 8)** and David Chapel Missionary Baptist Church at E. MLK and Chestnut Ave., one block west of the nominated property.

The Phillips House is at the northwest corner of E. MLK and Maple St. **(Photo 1)** on a 0.25-acre rectangular lot. Rolling hills characterize the area's topography, and the nominated property is steeply graded with an elevation that decreases to the east by approximately 10 feet. The Phillips House is a 1½ story, T-shaped residence built into the hillside site and faces south. The main level is rectilinear with a small, perpendicular wing on the west side. Floor-height concrete retaining walls north and south of the building enabled the construction of a drive-thru garage under the home's east side. Garage doors are on the north and south elevations with two driveways off Maple St. that serve each door. A 13-stair concrete staircase off the south elevation driveway leads to a non-historic wooden gate that opens to the residence's front walkway. Tall boxwood hedges and a non-historic wood privacy fence obscure the once-open front (south) façade. **(Photo 2)**

Landscape features reflect how the architect's incorporated the outdoors in the house's design. Original planter boxes line large windows on the south elevation, and a water fountain **(Photo 4)** is centered on the small front lawn. The east side of the property is graded to drain water. It is grassy with small shrubs below the river rock wall. On the west elevation is a private yard enclosed by a concrete block wall. Initially, these walls stood only 4-feet-tall. A river rock retaining wall, divided by concrete stairs, terraces the backyard with an original rock barbeque pit on the upper portion. Below, the house's cantilevered roof shades a concrete patio. **(Figures 11-12)**

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Della Phillips House

Built in 1965, the Phillips House is a 1½ story residence with a T-shaped plan and features a cantilevered folded plate roof. This one-story, 2,700 square foot house is set into the steep hill at the corner of E. MLK and Maple Street. The architect-designed home falls under the category of Mid-Century "contemporary style" but demonstrates the Usonian design tenants of Frank Lloyd Wright, whom Chase cited as a professional influence, and which inspired Contemporary style in the 1950s-1970s. Chase's talent shows in the Phillips House rectilinear plan, economic construction, horizontal emphasis, windows walls and clerestories, contrasting wall treatments, an integral relationship between indoors and outdoors, and open interior. The Della Phillips House features a cantilevered folded plate roof— influenced by contemporary examples, like those of Michigan architect William H. Kessler—built of wood with perforated hardboard (pegboard/Masonite) soffits. **(Photo 4-5)** Its construction created a repeating pattern of lime-green painted diamonds on the south and north elevations. The roof significantly extends over the house to create an intermediate space between interior and exterior.

Exterior

The **primary (south) elevation** faces south to E. MLK. The angular roof extends across the width of the main section of the rectangular building. **(Photos 2-3)** However, the one-room-wide projecting wing on the building's west end has a flat roof and a river rock south wall that extends past the wall plane of the west elevation. The wing's east wall is clad in horizontal wood siding with a small aluminum frame window. Window walls characterize three-quarters of the south-facing façade and unite the interior with the outdoors. Substantial marble veneer piers create three bays and support a structural beam under clerestories that infill the folded plate roof. Each bay is functionally different—two have entryways and one is fully-glazed—but present as an integral pattern of repeating quadripartite window walls interrupted only by the front doors. Horizontal and vertical wood mullions articulate individual sets of windows and divide each in three parts: a large fixed pane window centered between a fixed transom and a vent window below. Centered in each bay are structural posts painted and framed to resemble vertical mullions, maintaining the visual pattern. The easternmost bay is above the garage and features a narrow balcony clad in wood siding with iron railing. Four narrow fixed pane transoms are above two aluminum frame sliding glass doors separated by a structural post. The center bay has four fixed pane transoms above four large, fixed pane windows and four vent windows below. The residence's primary entrance is in the third bay that abuts the projecting wing. Narrow sidelights, with the same three-part framing as other windows on this façade, border paneled African Mahogany double-doors.

The ground level two-car garage is one-bay wide on the eastern side of the south elevation. The two rolling doors are painted white with beige highlights, framed by river-rock encrusted walls that extend all the way up the 1-story garage walls until meeting the primary floor of the house. Utilitarian in function, its interior contains a small elevator that is original to the nominated building.

On the **east elevation (Photo 6)**, the cantilevered roof broadly extends over the house. Below, a wide marble veneer chimney symmetrically divides the 2nd floor façade. The chimney flue is visible between the chimney and soffit. Corner marble piers anchor the façade and windows walls on either side of the chimney. The first floor is a massive wall clad in round river rock that extends out from the east elevation and is wider than primary wall plane above it. Its dimensional, textural, and natural qualities compliment the linear character of the residence and the wall's substantial size balances the cantilevered roof.

Fenestration of the **north elevation's** easternmost bays **(Photo 8)** are symmetrical with the south (front) elevation. Two projections—one central and one on the building's westernmost end—represent interior locations of the kitchen and a bedroom; a flat roof covers these extensions. A steep stairway leads from the north driveway to a single doorway on the east façade of the projecting kitchen. A narrow window is to the right of the kitchen door. An offset single

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window fenestrates the kitchen's north elevation, and the west elevation has a single entry. A sliding glass door on the north elevation, between the kitchen and bedroom, opens to an interior study. The westernmost end of the north elevation is a one-room-wide projection. Like that of the kitchen, its east elevation has lime green-painted wood siding and a single window, and its north elevation is clad in river rock.

The **west elevation** opens to the backyard (**Photo 9, Figures 11-12**). Unlike other facades with large expanses of windows, the west elevation is primarily wood siding reflecting the private function of interior bedrooms at the home's west end. A sliding glass door and 1/1 aluminum frame high-set window demarcate one of two interior bedrooms and bathrooms at the north end. The center bay corresponds to the interior den. Sliding glass doors are on either side of, what is thought to have originally been, a chimney clad in siding. Like the chimney on the east elevation, it stops short of the roofline. Six total transom windows are above the sliding glass doors and chimney. Above this bay, two orb pendant lights hang from the roof's wide eaves. The southern end of the western elevation extends from the main portion of the building and has a flat room. A pair of high set rectangular 1/1 aluminum frame windows light an interior bedroom. The battered end of the south elevation river rock wall extends past the west elevation wall plane.

Interior (Figure 4)

A large, open floor plan characterizes the Della Phillips House interior. Original materials—dark wood paneling and ceiling joists, cream-colored terrazzo floors, marble veneer piers and fireplace—are warm accents in the light-filled house. The ceiling reflects the angular folded roof design. Upon entering, an African Mahogany partition (**Photo 10**) wall creates an entry hall that circulates visitors to the right (east) or left. The partition has a half-circle built-in closet, which is almost indistinguishable from the south side. The closet, covered in grasscloth and framed in mahogany, juts into the kitchen area. (**Photo 11**) The partition runs east-west, and its curved ends partially encloses the informal dining room, kitchen, and study. Frosted fixed glass panels, framed similarly to the exterior window walls, are inset in the partition wall's east end to filter natural light to the informal dining room.

The formal living room (**Photo 12**) is the easternmost interior room, and it is anchored by a wide, smooth marble gas fireplace on the east wall. The fireplace's non-historic safety glass covers its opening without detracting from its historic craftsmanship. The rear side of the exterior river wall is visible at floor level on the east window wall. Non-historic carpeting covers, but does not damage, the historic stone floors in the room. A wood-paneled closet that encloses an elevator is on the north wall between the formal living and dining room. The partition frames the central portion of the house, and within it is a large, open kitchen with dark wood cabinetry and counters with room for guests to sit.

The west end of the Phillips House is less open with walls that divide the perpendicular wing into three spaces: a central family room (**Photo 13**) flanked by bedrooms. Mahogany panels and a floor-height built-in bookshelf characterize the den. Seating faces the west wall, which has a central nook flanked by sliding glass doors. The north and south bedrooms each have ensuite bathrooms with double-sinks and multiple closets. Original materials in the south bathroom (**Photo 14**), intended for guests, reflects 1960s tastes with bright pink tile with gold details and Hawaiian-themed wallpaper.

Integrity

The Della Phillips House has integrity to convey its historical and architectural significance. It retains integrity of setting and location in a remarkably intact postwar suburban neighborhood. A thoughtful restoration, which began in 2004, preserved and repaired the home's character-defining features and design. Chase's deliberate choices of historic exterior and interior materials—African Mahogany, marble, river rock, pegboard soffits—are in excellent condition and intact throughout the house. The well-engineered and expressive cantilevered folded plate roof remains the focal

Della Phillips House, Austin, Travis County, Texas

point of the home's exterior design, and while it needed some repairs, the river rock walls are intact as a weighty and textural counterbalance that give the building its proportion. The interior, with its character-defining open floor plan, original functional arrangement, window walls, and curved wood partition, also shows integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. With a preponderance of integrity of location, setting, design, materials, and workmanship intact, the Della Phillips House retains integrity of feeling and association as one of John S. Chase's best residential architectural designs in Austin.

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Statement of Significance

The 1965 Della Phillips House in Austin, Travis County is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places as an outstanding local example of the work of John S. Chase, FAIA, the state's first African American licensed architect. Completed at the beginning of his prolific career, it reflects Chase's architectural philosophy that embraced Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian ideals in a clean, minimalist design that respected and celebrated his client, Della Phillips. Phillips, a public-school teacher and co-owner of Phillips-Upshaw Funeral Home, commissioned the house following her husband's death. The house represents midcentury Usonian aesthetic with a low horizontal profile, window walls that integrate the outdoors and open-plan interior, and contrasting exterior materials of round river rock, smooth marble, and wood siding. Although not characteristic of Usonian design, the expressive folded plate roof is evidence of Chase's mastery of engineering as a modern, gregarious adaptation on Wright's signature low-slung cantilevered roofs. It is nominated for listing under Criterion C in the area of Architecture at the local level of significance. The period of significance is 1965, the year it was built.

The Della Phillips House is in the Rogers-Washington-Holy Cross Heights local historic district in East Austin, three postwar suburbs developed by, and for, African Americans. In the 1950s and 1960s, Austin underwent economic and demographic growth following a concerted effort by city leaders and planners to remake the city into a hub for scientific and technological research development. As its population increased, the city limits expanded to include new subdivisions in north, northwest, and west Austin to benefit an already robust local real estate market. Architecturally, homes in the new (mostly white) suburbs reflected the city's progressive makeover. State and national architecture publications recognized outstanding local examples of modern residential design by white, Austin-based architects—A.D. Stenger, Arthur Fehr and Charles Granger, Roland Roessner, Harwell Hamilton Harris, and Seymour Fogel—in the high-end neighborhoods of Barton Hills, Tarrytown, Highland Park West, and Far West. Middle-class Austinites, too, enjoyed modern split-level contemporary and rambling ranch-style homes constructed by builders, like Nash Phillips, in smaller, adjacent suburbs and emerging developments along the new Interstate 35 corridor.

Suburban development for Austin's racial minority population "reflected segregated patterns rather than an erosion of them."¹ In the early 20th century, city planning deliberately segregated African Americans and Mexican Americans to Central East Austin, an area that by 1950 was roughly bounded by East Avenue/I-35 (west), the Colorado River (south), Manor Road (north), and Springdale Road (east). Most Black Austinites lived within a four-square-mile area north of E. 7th Street. Culturally rich and economically vibrant, this area occasionally benefitted from city services and public amenities meant to maintain the segregated status quo. By the mid-century, systemic racism imbued all aspects of residential development, both the government and private sectors. East Austin suffered from disinvestment, poor infrastructure, and housing shortage. Simultaneously, the city's Black population increased by 68.7% from 17,667 in 1950 to 29,816 in 1970.² Like other cities across the South, segregationist attitudes (under the guise of "property rights,") inequitable lending practices, and race restrictive covenants largely prevented African Americans from buying property and integrating Austin's new suburbs. Instead, Black Austinites developed their own suburban neighborhoods in a contiguous pattern adjacent to existing neighborhoods.³

The Rogers, Washington, and Holy Cross Heights suburbs were platted on E. 19th Street on undeveloped land north of an existing African American neighborhood. In 1950, Dr. Everett H. Givens secured the city's first FHA-approved Black subdivision. Sited next to the new Holy Cross Hospital and working with Austin architect A.D. Stenger, the small subdivision had a minimum housing cost set at \$6,500. Stenger designed and built several Minimal Traditional

¹ Andrew Busch, "Building 'A City of Upper-Middle-Class Citizens,': Labor Markets, Segregation, and Growth in Austin, 1950-1973," *Journal of Urban History* 39 (no. 5): 989.

² HHM, *East Austin Historic Context*, Vol. I-95.

³ Socio-Economic...134.

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style homes, but it took a decade longer for lots to sell. Dr. M.J. and Hazel Washington owned a small plot next to Holy Cross Heights, which they subdivided in the late 1950s. Della and Gene Phillips were among the first families to buy a lot.

The neighborhoods resembled middle-class suburbs in white areas of the city with contemporary, ranch, and split-level homes. John S. Chase, FAIA, designed at least two homes in the new neighborhood: the Della Phillips House (1965) and Irene Thompson's 1962 split-level home at 1904 Maple Street. Unlike white suburbs with Colonial Ranch style homes, historian Margaret Ruth Little observed Black homebuyers preferred contemporary architectural styles; they connotated with progress and democratic ideals that reflected the Civil Rights Movement's attitude. It seemed white builders in Austin observed this trend. In 1964, Nash Phillips advertised a "lovely Abraham Lincoln Colonial" in the "Colored Housing" section of the *Austin American Statesman*, using the Great Emancipator as a means to offset the subjugating connotations associated with the term "colonial."⁴ The Rogers-Washington-Holy Cross Heights local historic district is a remarkable and intact example of postwar suburbs that uniquely reflect the social and architectural history of African American suburbanization in East Austin. While the Della Phillips House derives its significance within that context as a local example of John S. Chase's residential architecture, today's larger architectural community recognizes the nominated building as one of the city's finest midcentury modern homes.

Della Josephine Williams Phillips (1908-1988)

In 1984, local historian Ada Simond affectionately described Della Josephine Williams's entrance into life as "in a manner born"—Della was endowed with a determined spirit. Born on January 5, 1908, to Thomas S. and Bessie (nee Singleton) Williams, Della grew up the middle child of six siblings at the western edge of East Austin's Robertson Hill neighborhood. The family's frame house, with a clear view of the Capitol, was in close walking distance to three institutions that profoundly shaped Della's life: her family's church, Ebenezer Baptist; Olive Street Elementary School, and Samuel Huston College. Although Della attributed her "determined personality" to "the usual plight of the middle child," she was, nevertheless, surrounded by hardworking and resilient individuals that doubtless encouraged her strong will and sense of service. Their neighbors included Dr. Everett H. Givens, a universally respected and influential leader in the African American community, and J. Mason Brewer, African American scholar and folklorist. Childhood teachers—Tennie A. Hardwell, Cora Woodard, Effie Yerwood, and Mattie Durden—who lived nearby instilled in Della a love for education.

From her parents, Della learned the value of hard work and responsibility. Before his passing in 1930, Thomas worked as a hotel porter. Bessie was a longtime domestic servant for a prominent Austin printer, E.L. Steck, north of the University of Texas campus. Bessie and Thomas encouraged their children to pursue careers and planned for Della to become a nurse. After graduating from Anderson High School, Della enrolled in a nursing program in Nashville (likely at Meharry Medical College) but quickly returned to Austin after finding she was unhappy. At Samuel Huston College, Della found her lifelong calling, earning a B.A. in education and a teaching certificate. The collegiate experience also forged Della lifelong friendships through Zeta Phi Beta, a sorority chapter she helped charter. Della remained an active alumna in the decades after the college merged with Tillotson College.

Upon graduation, Della embarked on a 30-year teaching career at Gregorytown School, then Olive Street Elementary, Fiskville/St. John's School, and Sims Elementary; she also taught Sunday School at Ebenezer Baptist Church. During summers, Della pursued advanced training at Prairie View A&M College and the University of Southern California. As a result, she became a headteacher and one-time principal at St. John's Elementary, where she worked through the 1960s. Della led teacher training and held leadership positions in organizations like Travis County Negro Teachers Association, and was well-respected by prominent colleagues, like Friendly Rice.

⁴ *Austin American Statesman*, February 6, 1964.

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She firmly believed that education, "more than any single factor," was the foundation for ending racial discrimination.⁵ As one of the first Black teachers to integrate Sims Elementary, Della's classroom became a common ground for different races of children to learn understanding and tolerance that, she hoped, might one-day "close the gap between people."⁶ As a member of the Teachers State Association of Texas and Austin Colored Teachers Association, Della supported the organizations' Civil Rights initiatives, like desegregating the University of Texas and promoting equal teacher pay. She had lifetime associations with local civil rights leaders, like schoolmates and fellow Ebenezer congregation members, Arthur DeWitty, who shared her belief in the role education played in improving the social, economic, and political plight of African Americans.

In 1931, Della married fellow Austinite Willie Eugene "Gene" Phillips (1908-1960). Gene pursued a successful career as a mortician working at King Tears before partnering with George Upshaw in 1954.⁷ The Phillips-Upshaw Funeral Home, which remains in business today, was a reputable business that provided Gene and Della a comfortable lifestyle. According to Irene Thompson, a neighbor and family friend, Della "was always impeccably dressed...and always drove fine cars."⁸

Shortly after they married, the couple purchased their first home at 1190 Navasota, where they raised Della's nephew, Joe Williams, Jr. It seems they had plans to relocate from Navasota Street to one of the city's new Black suburbs. Records show as early as 1940, they bought two lots in the St. John's College subdivision near St. John's Elementary School in northeast Austin. Protests by white Austinites against the Black subdivision delayed its development, and it appears the Phillips's reconsidered the move. Instead, the couple bought a lot from Mrs. Hazel Evelyn Washington in 1958.⁹ The small subdivision, off E. 19th Street, neighbored the new Holy Cross Hospital and Holy Cross Heights suburb developed by Dr. Everett H. Givens and Austin architect A.D. Stenger. On September 10, 1960, Gene suffered a heart attack and passed away. Della retained her deceased husband's stake in the funeral home, which she ran with Ruth C. Upshaw, sister to then-deceased George Upshaw.

Della's strength of spirit and faith carried her into a new life chapter. Perhaps encouraged by her friends Irene Thompson and Betty Washington, the teacher and business owner hired John S. Chase to design a new home on the Phillips's Washington Subdivision lot. After Thompson's own husband's untimely death, Chase asked her, "Are you ready for a house? Let me get you ready."¹⁰ In 1962, Chase built Thompson a split-level home on Maple Street with an open floor plan and exterior façade covered in rustic stone and wood paneling. Doubtless, Della was familiar with Chase's work. Not only was he notable as the first African American to enroll at the University of Texas, Chase also designed the modern headquarters for the Austin Colored Teachers Association building, an organization Della joined, and which was built across from her previous home on Navasota Street.

Although Della gave Chase complete artistic freedom, he designed a home that fit her needs and personality. Della, a member of various professional, religious, and social groups, stipulated her desire for a house built for entertainment.¹¹ Friends remembered Della was also an excellent cook with a great sense of humor. Chase's expressive exterior design and the open floor plan was well-suited to the outgoing woman. Furthermore, Della, a short, heavy-set woman who had

⁵ Ada Simond, "Teacher Led to Success by Determination, Stable Upbringing," *Austin American-Statesman*, March 25, 1988.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "New Home Opening Set on Sunday," *Austin American*, December 19, 1954.

⁸ By the mid-1950s, the Phillips opened a convenience store on Chicon Street and E. 12th. Interview between Irene Thompson and Kathleen Conti, 2009.

⁹ *Austin American Statesman*, October 10, 1959.

¹⁰ *Austin American Statesman*, December 8, 2016.

¹¹ Candy Lowry, "Despite Discrimination Black Women Achieve Success," *Austin American-Statesman*, January 30, 1972.

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difficulty walking,¹² needed a home where she could easily get around. Chase designed a one-story house with a below-grade garage in the hillside site and fitted it with an elevator that delivered Della from her "lovely cars" to her new living room.

Della Phillips lived in the house until her death on November 8, 1988. After a life dedicated to education and service, the City of Austin's Art in Public Places program recognized Della Phillips in the "Reflections: Portraits of African Americans Who Made A Difference." Fittingly, Della's portrait is alongside many of the individuals who shaped her early life and those she considered friends and colleagues: Arthur and Virgie DeWitty, Dr. E.H. Givens, Willa Mae Kirk, John S. Chase, Ada Simond, and Dr. Connie Yerwood.¹³

John Saunders Chase, FAIA (1925-2012)¹⁴

Born in 1925 in Annapolis, MD, Chase received a B.S. in Architectural Engineering from Hampton Institute (now Hampton University) in 1948. After graduation, Chase relocated to Austin, seeing an opportunity for architects in a city with an expanding building industry. Chase's first job in Austin was as a teacher at the Crescent Institute, but wanting to develop his professional architectural practice, Chase knew he would have to seek a higher degree. In 1950, Chase met and befriended Hugh McMath, then the Chair of the School of Architecture at the University of Texas, who encouraged him to apply even though the university barred African American students from enrolling. When the Supreme Court decided the landmark desegregation case *Sweatt v. Painter* later that year, Chase applied and was accepted into the School of Architecture. At that time, he was the first African American student to register to attend the University of Texas.

Upon graduation from UT in 1952, Chase applied to several architectural firms. As a person of color, many professional opportunities were closed to him. Never intimidated, Chase simply obtained his architect's license—he was the first African American in Texas to do so—and opened his own office, "John S. Chase, Architect." In Austin, Chase is responsible for the design of several modern structures. Chase's early work reflects his modern design sensibility and his long-term admiration for the work of Frank Lloyd Wright. In addition to the David Chapel and the Phillips House, Chase's work in Austin includes the 1962 Irene Thompson residence and the 1952 Teachers State Association of Texas Building (now the House of Elegance), which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2005.

Shortly after graduating from UT, Chase moved his practice to Houston and accepted an appointment as an assistant professor of architectural drafting at Texas Southern University (TSU). By the 1960s, John Chase had a remarkable reputation in the Texas architectural profession and many influential connections within the African American community. In this period, his firm designed churches, residences, libraries, schools, and institutional buildings, such as the Port of Houston International Longshoreman's Association Hall for Local 872, the first African American Longshoreman's union. Texas Southern University also chose Chase to develop its campus master plan. Throughout the 1970s, Chase designed a number of buildings for the TSU campus, including the Education Building, Martin Luther King School of Communication, TSU Student Center, the Thurgood Marshall School of Law, and most of the student dormitories. Chase's master plan and buildings contribute to TSU's reputations as one of Texas's most prominent African American universities.

¹² Interview between Bonnie Tipton and Connie Jo Kirk, 2020.

¹³ https://austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Housing/AACHF/AACHF_Portrait_Guide_FINAL__5_3_13_-reduced.pdf.

¹⁴ Section adapted from draft nominations by Kathleen Conti, Laura Caffrey, Adrienne Vaughan Campbell; and an article by Gregory Smith.

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Chase's architectural practice eventually expanded into four cities. The firm's commissions grew to include large federal government and municipal projects, which included: the George R. Brown Convention Center, Houston International Airport's Crash, Fire, and Rescue Station, the Harris County Jail Facility; and the U.S. embassy in Tunis, Tunisia, which was designed in 1995, but never built.

During his illustrious career, Chase received many prestigious awards. The American Institute of Architects (AIA) elected Chase to the College of Fellows, and President Carter in 1980 appointed him to the Commission of Fine Arts. By the time of his death in 2010, Chase had made a most definite and important contribution not to just Texas architecture but to the architectural practice nationally. He was truly instrumental in the advancement of African Americans in architecture in Texas and the nation.

Architectural Significance of the Della Phillips House

The Della Phillips House is an outstanding example of John S. Chase's architectural philosophy that embraced Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian ideals in a clean, minimalist design that respected and celebrated his client, Della Phillips. Wright's Usonian houses, the first of which he built in 1937, emphasized economy of construction in a straightforward plan and prioritizing natural construction materials. Other Usonian tenants included open plans, strong horizontal emphasis with broad roof eaves, and continuity between the outdoors and indoors. From 1945-1965, Contemporary style residential design employed by architects in suburban developments across the United States popularized Usonian ideals and offered homebuyers an alternative to the rambling Ranch style. Phillips's Houston contemporaries that designed buildings based on Usonian precepts included Herb Greene, Arthur Moss, W. Jackson Wisdom, Lenard Gabert.¹⁵

In the nominated building, Chase applied the economy and humanism of Usonian design to a rectangular building with a small, perpendicular wing. Natural materials on the interior and exterior are stone, glass, and wood. Textured river rock walls not only contrast against the wood siding and smooth stone piers but are a weighty counterpoint to the broadly cantilevered roof. An open-plan with a broad central fireplace, integration of the outdoors, and abundance of natural light—the result of window walls and clerestories—characterize the interior. The folded plate roof, while not characteristic of Usonian design, nevertheless reflects Wright's influence. The shallow, repeating diamonds—made from wood and pegboard—created broad eaves that accentuate the building's horizontality.

The folded plate roof has precedents in Chase's architectural career and contemporary professional architecture. Two years before he designed the nominated building, Chase completed the Riverside National Bank and Cullen Clinic in Houston. The bank (Figure 9) also features a distinct folded plate roof and a repeating diamond pattern. Cullen Clinic has a small, narrow folded plate as a decorative roof awning over the central entrance. In 1963, architect Clovis Heimsath described the rising popularity of folded plates as a form of "structural exhibitionism" prone to misuse under the untrained hand. More often applied to commercial buildings, some architects used it in residential design. In Austin, A.D. Stenger's "Butterfly House" floated a diamond-shaped sculptural folded plate over the entrance garden. Fehr and Granger employed a cantilevered folded plate roof on the Austin Municipal Airport terminal. Nationally, William H. Kessler's design for his Grosse Point, Michigan house in 1961, had an open, V-shaped folded plate roof that *Architectural Record* lauded.

Importantly, Chase's design honored the needs and values of Della Phillips. The open-plan supported Phillips' lifelong commitment to service and education by giving her a venue to host gatherings. Its communal function is similar to Chase's own Houston house, in which he and Drucie entertained friends, colleagues, and local leaders in business and politics. Chase built the nominated house into a hillside with a garage for Phillips' cars below the house. He installed an

¹⁵ Ibid., 12.

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elevator, an unusual feature for a private residence of that era, to better accommodate Phillips, who walked with difficulty. Its progressive style and personal details, like the choice of African Mahogany, can be interpreted as architectural expressions of identity during a critical period in the Civil Rights Movement and which represented pride in the African American community and democratic values.

Conclusion

The Della Phillips House is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C in the area of Architecture at the local level of significance as an outstanding local example of the work of John S. Chase, FAIA. Completed at the beginning of his prolific career, it showcased Chase's architectural philosophy that embraced Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian ideals. The building's clean, minimalist design also respected and celebrated his client, Della Phillips. The period of significance is 1965, the year of its construction.

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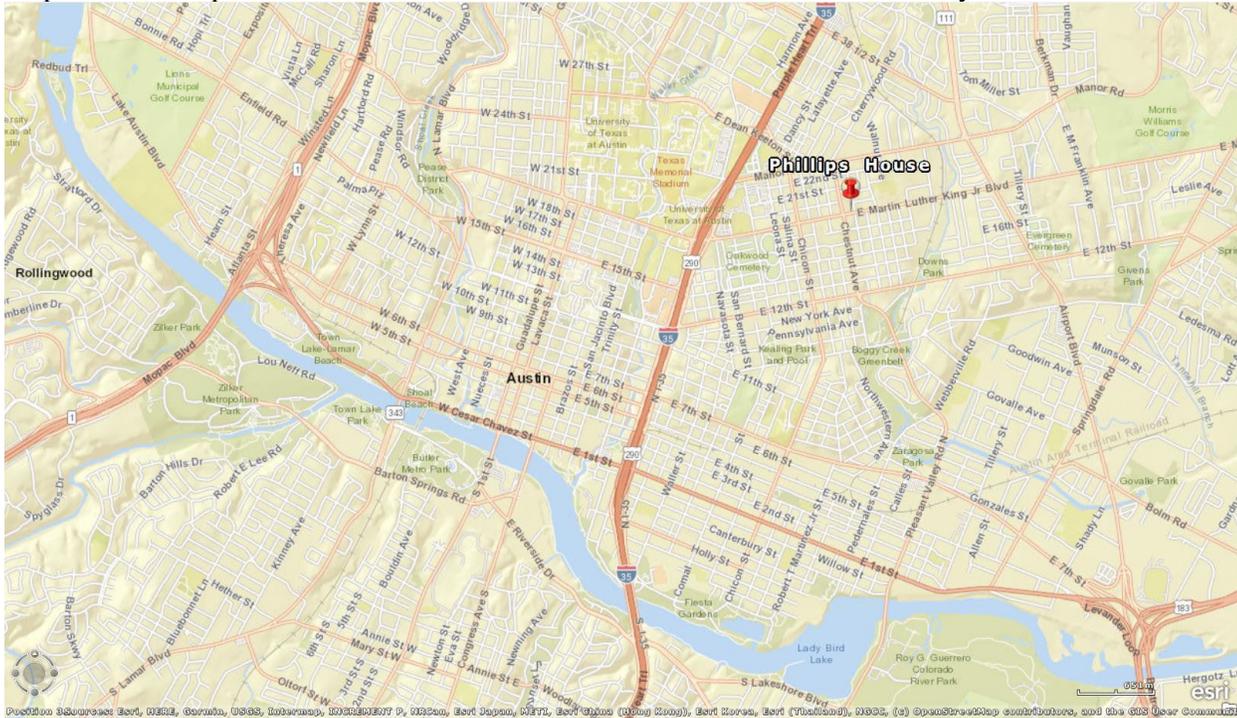
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Maps

Map 1: The Phillips House is in East Austin less than one mile from the University of Texas in Central Austin.

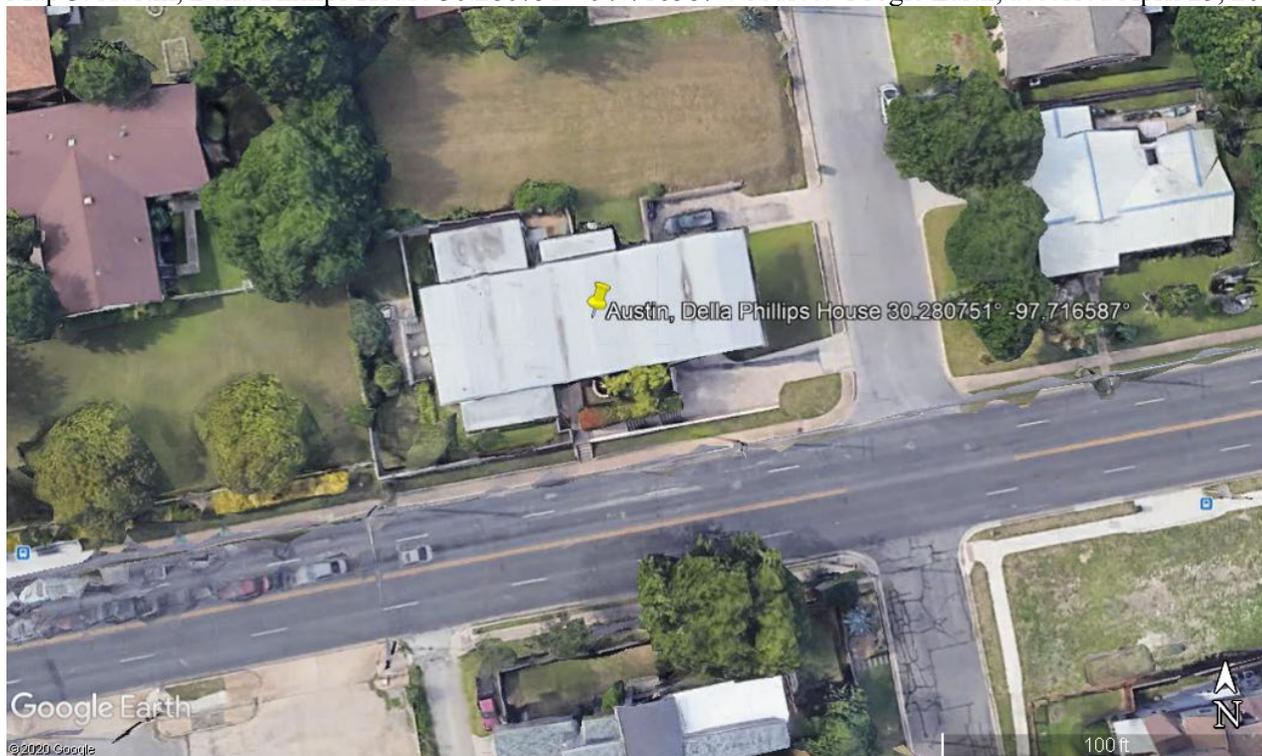


Map 2: The boundary is the legal parcel as recorded by Travis CAD: (Property ID# 204128) LOT 7 WASHINGTON SUBD. Source: Travis County Central Appraisal District, accessed July 21, 2020.

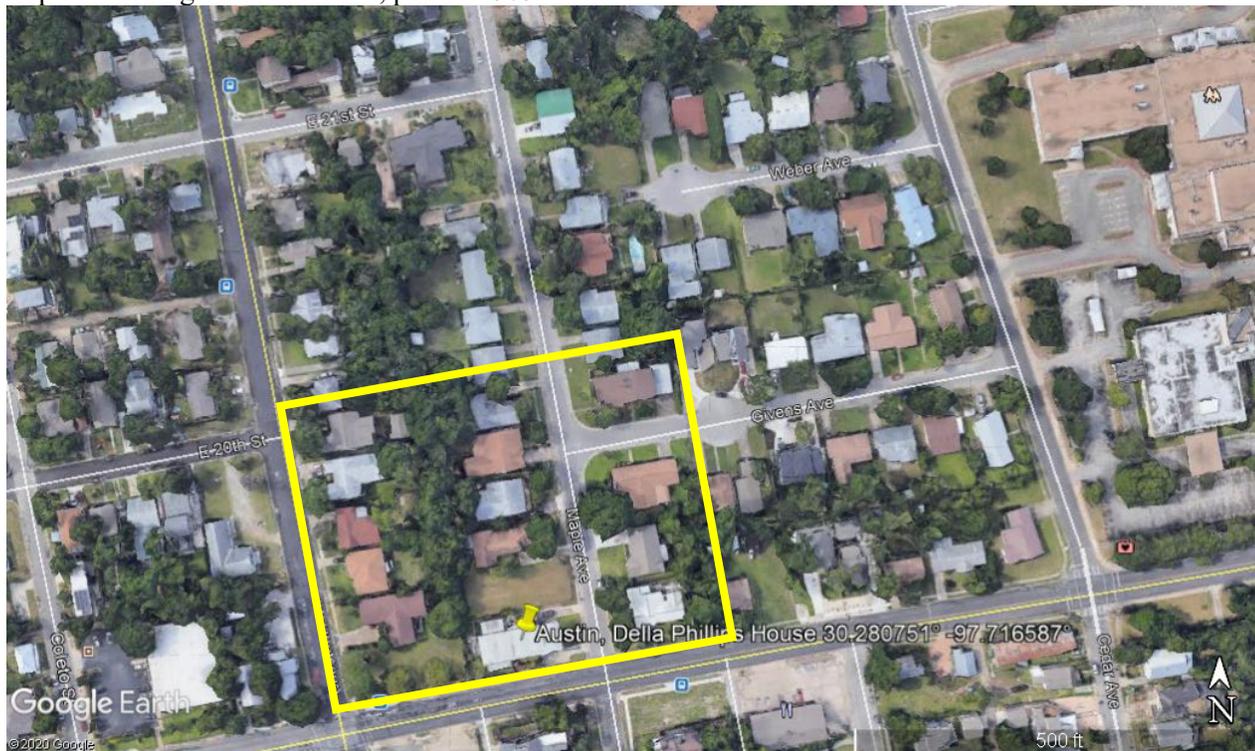


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Map 3: Austin, Della Phillips House 30.280751° -97.716587°. Source: Google Earth, accessed April 25, 2025.

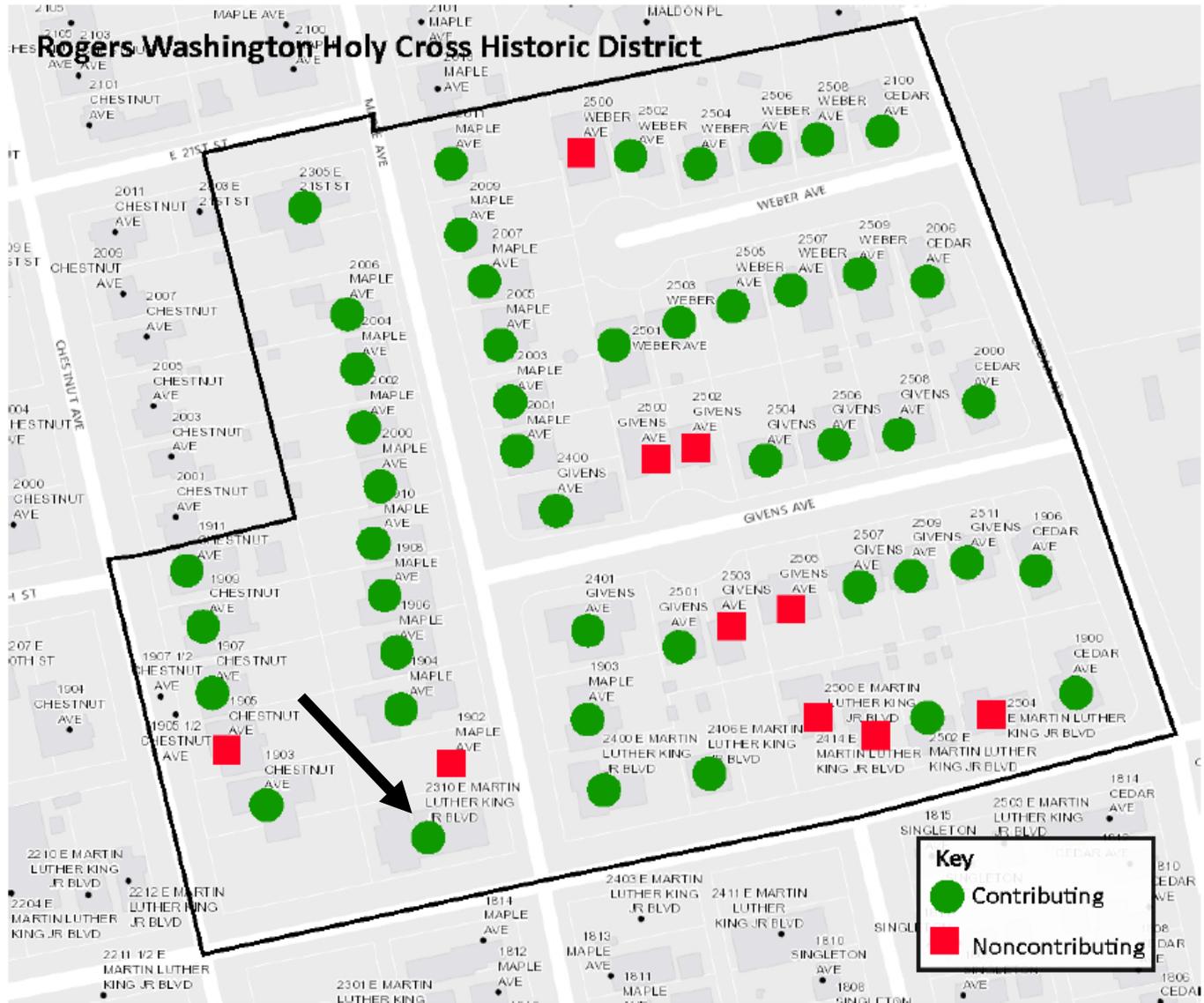


Map 4: Washington Subdivision, platted 1959.



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Map 5: Rogers-Washington-Holy Cross Local Historic District showing Phillips House.

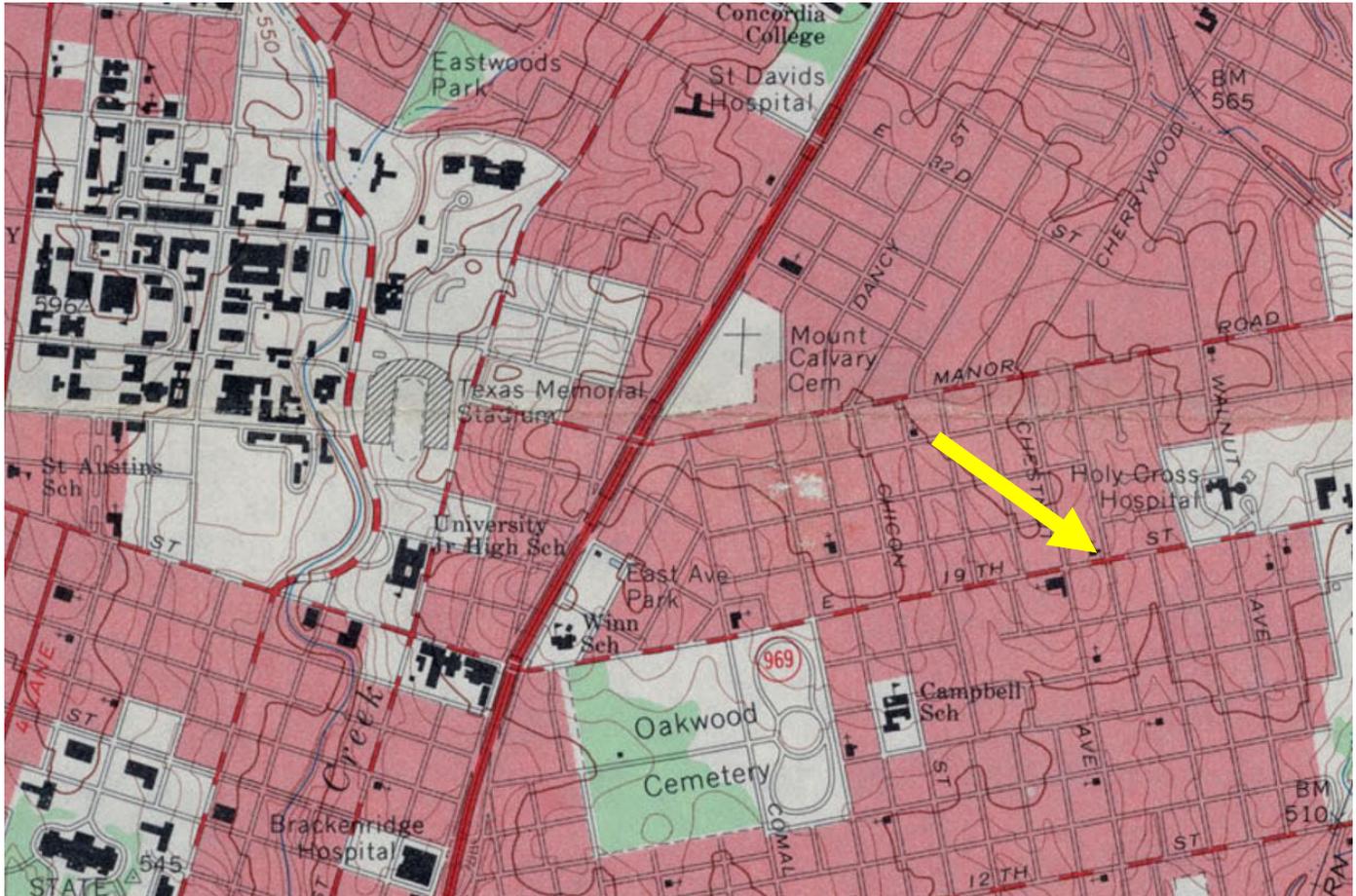


Map showing the Rogers Washington Holy Cross Historic District, with contributing resources shown in green and non-contributing resources shown in red.* Map identifies IDs, subdivision names, and boundaries of proposed NR/local district. Source: HMM survey data with Google base map, 2016.

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Figures

Figure 1: 1966 Topo Source: University of Texas, PCL Library Map Collection.



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Figure 2a: 1965 aerial showing Phillips House under construction. Source: City of Austin.



Figure 2b: Detail.



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Figure 3:1976 Aerial. Source: University of Texas, PCL Map Collection.



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Figure 4: Floor Plan. Source: Crede Fitch, 2014.



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Figure 5: Della J. (nee Williams) Phillips. Source: "Despite Discrimination Black Women Achieve Success," *Austin American Statesman*, January 30, 1972.



Figure 6: Photographers captured John S. Chase, the first African American to enroll at U.T., as he signed up for classes in 1950.



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Figure 7: John S. Chase with his sons, Anthony and John, Jr., (1959) in front their Houston home that he designed.



Figure 8: John S. Chase designed a residence at 1906 Maple St. for the Thompson Family in 1963. Source: East Austin Resource Survey, Hardy Heck Moore, 2016.



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Figure 9: Chase's Riverside National Bank has the same roofline. Source: *Houston Chronicle*, January 13, 1963.

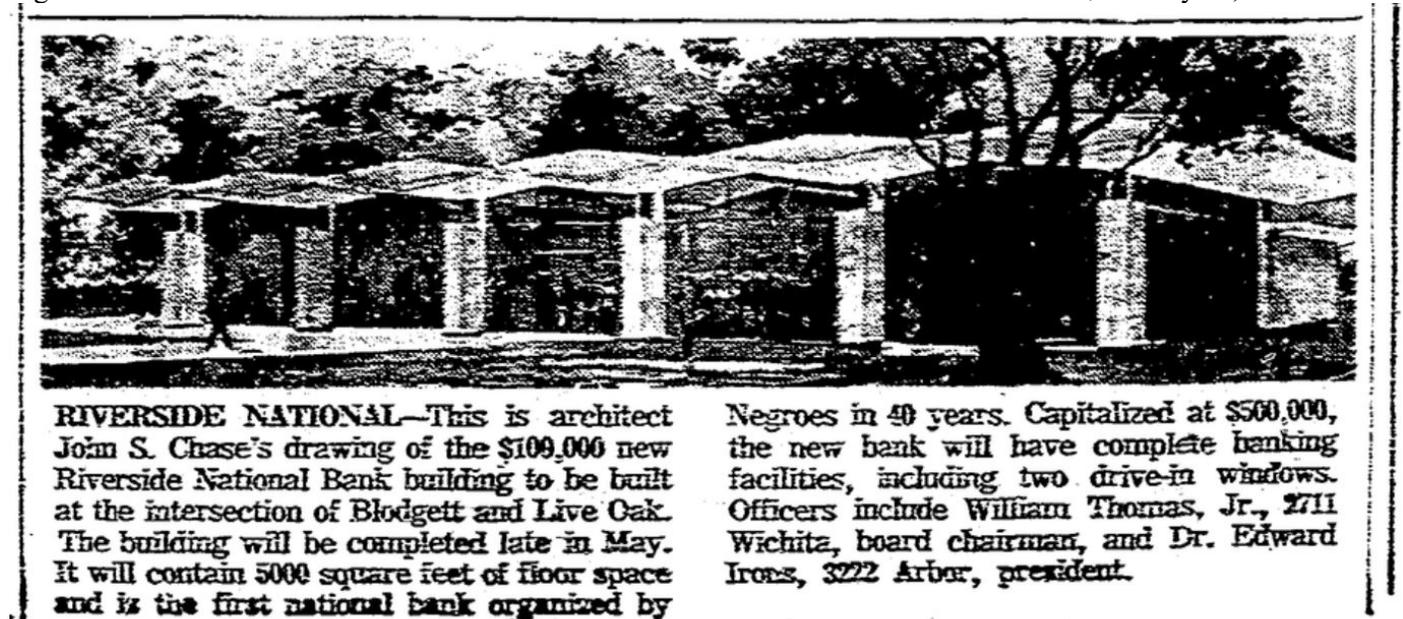


Figure 10: 1965 Cullen Clinic, 7703 Cullen Blvd., Houston.

Source: <https://preservationhouston.org/news/2015/9/24/cullen-clinic-named-protected-landmark-with-ph-assistance>.



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Figure 11: This 2009 photo accurately depicts the current appearance of the backyard with original retaining wall and barbeque pit. Looking northwest.



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Figure 12: This 2009 photo accurately depicts the current appearance of the west (rear) elevation that faces the backyard. It is a supplement to **Photo 9**, taken 4/25/25.



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Photographs

Property: Della Phillips House
Location: Austin, Travis County, Texas
Photographer: Penny Moore, Tara Dudley, PhD; and Bonnie Tipton
Date: February 16 & 20, 2025; April 25, 2025, and November 1, 2020

Two photographs from 2020 accurately represent the property's current appearance and were chosen because each depict significant exterior features of the home's design.

Photo 1: E. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. View west. Chase-designed David's Chapel in back left. (4/25/25)



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Photo 2: South (front) façade, view north. (4/25/25)



Della Phillips House, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Photo 3: Southeast oblique, view northwest. (4/25/25)

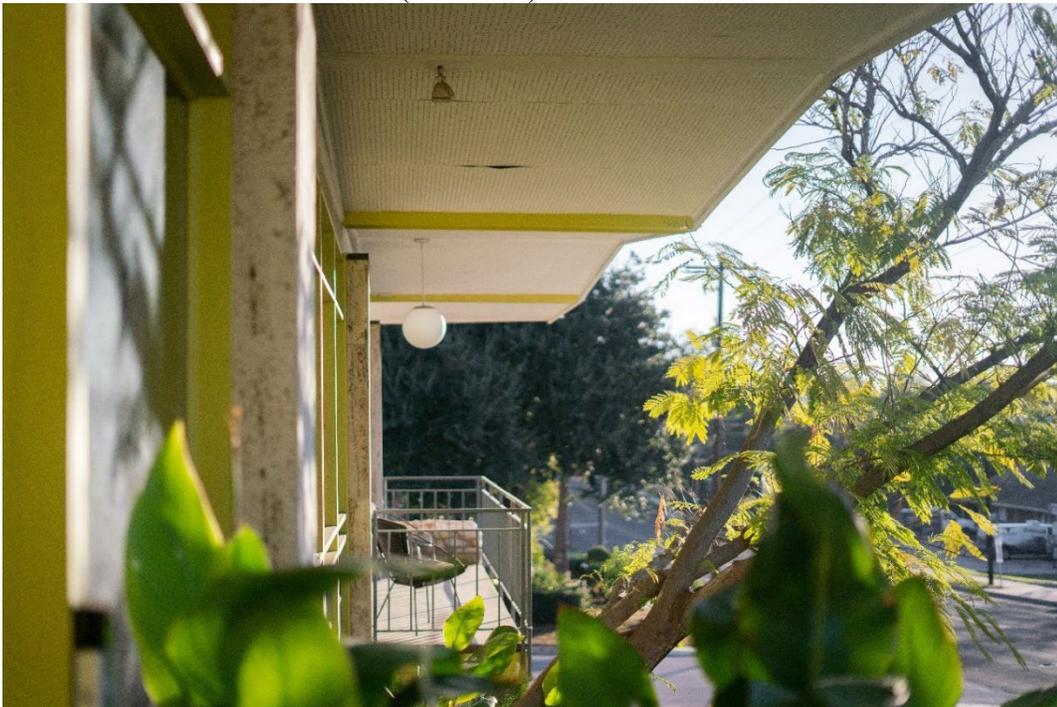


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Photo 4: South façade with original fountain and planters. (4/25/25)



Photo 5: Soffitt detail. View east. (11/1/2020)



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Photo 6: East elevation. View west. (4/25/25)



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Photo 7: Northeast oblique. View southwest. (11/1/2020)



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Photo 8: North elevation. View south. (4/25/25)



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Photo 9: Southwest oblique. View northeast. (4/25/25) See **Figures 11-12** for clearer photos of rear elevation and backyard taken in 2009.



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Photo 10: Upon entering, the partition (with original built-in closet) directs movement east and west. Original floors shown. View east. (2/20/2025)



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Photo 11: North side of interior partition showing original grasscloth and African mahogany. (2/16/2025)



Photo 12: An open plan and abundance of natural light characterize the interior. The elevator is enclosed within the mahogany closet (at left). View east. (2/16/2025)



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Photo 13: Family room on west side of home with original bookshelves and Chase-designed pendant lights. View west. (2/16/2025)



Photo 14: Bathroom with original pink tile, lighting, and cabinetry. View west. (2/20/25)

