

SAM HOUSTON PARK, YATES HOUSE
1100 Bagby Street
Houston
Harris County
Texas

HABS No. TX-3542-C

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS
FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
Intermountain Regional Office
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, CO 80225-0287

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SAM HOUSTON PARK, YATES HOUSE

HABS NO. TX-3452-C

Location: Sam Houston Park
1100 Bagby Street
Houston, TX

Present Owner: The City of Houston

Present Occupant: The Heritage Society

Present Use: Yates House was moved to Sam Houston Park in 1994 and restored by The Heritage Society. The house now operates as one of The Heritage Society's nine historic structures in Houston's only outdoor museum. The house is open for tours Tuesday-Sunday.

Significance: In 1870, five short years after emancipation, Reverend John Henry "Jack" Yates, a freed slave, began construction of his home. The Jack Yates House reflects the opportunity for growth and prosperity which existed for the black population in Houston. Reverend Yates was one of the most prominent religious leaders in Houston and a true advocate of education for his race in the post-Civil War period.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Construction of Yates House began in 1870. Completion of the house took many years, as Yates firmly believed in pay-as-you-go economics. He would buy materials as he was able, and complete portions of the house as his funds allowed.
2. Architect: Revered Jack Yates constructed the home himself with help from his brother George Yates and his brother-in-law Cue Willis.
3. Original and subsequent owners, occupants, uses:
Reverend John Henry "Jack" Yates
Jack Yates was born on July 11, 1828, the second child born to slave parents Robert and Rachel Yates. The Yates family lived and worked on a plantation owned by Mr. George Fields in Gloucester County, Virginia. When Mr. Fields' wife passed away, Yates' mother became the nursemaid of her infant son, George

Fields Jr., who was roughly the age of Jack Yates.¹ Due to the arrangement, Jack became close to George Jr., and through their friendship learned reading, writing, and arithmetic.² Yates used his skills to study the Bible. His education afforded him opportunities that other blacks of his time were unable to achieve.³ In addition to earning an education, Yates' master, Mr. George Fields, allowed him to earn wages running a small shipping company a day and a half each week.⁴ Through the company, Yates learned the principles of business. Yates developed a personal mantra, "Do well whatever is to be done; then be ready to do whatever else may follow."⁵ With this attitude, Yates was equipped to handle challenges and recognize opportunities.

When Yates was a young man, Mr. Fields granted him oversight authority over a family farm. With the promotion, Yates was free to visit neighboring plantations without restriction. It was during this time that Yates became a Christian and began to spread the Gospel to other slaves. His efforts to spread the word of God led him to his future wife, Harriett Willis, a slave living and working on one of the plantations he visited.⁶

In 1863, things changed for the Yates family. Although emancipation was granted to slaves through the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, slavery continued to be enforced in Texas and other southern states for two more years. Harriet's owner sold her, along with the Yates children, to a plantation in Matagorda, TX. According to slave laws, children of slaves belonged to the mother's owner. George Fields, who opposed the separation of slave families, granted Yates his freedom so he could remain with his family.⁷ Once in Matagorda County, Yates returned to life as a slave without privileges under his wife's master. This new life lasted only until 1865, when emancipation was granted to slaves in Texas by Major General George Gordon Granger, who arrived in Galveston on June 19 and declared all slaves in Texas free. The Yates family remained in Matagorda County, where Yates sought work immediately. Unable to find work, the Yates family relocated to Houston, a city which promised more jobs and a population more willing to offer jobs to blacks. Yates found work in Houston as a drayman, hauling goods for various manufacturing companies.⁸ The work did not satisfy Yates, as he sought to actively improve the lives of newly freed blacks, and did not feel he was fulfilling his purpose.⁹

¹ Rutherford B.H. Yates, Sr. and Paul L. Yates, *The Life and Efforts of Jack Yates* (Houston: Texas Southern University Press, 1985), 5.

² Martha Whiting, interview conducted by Katherine Lopez, Houston, Texas, 8 March 1994.

³ Yates, 6.

⁴ Yates, 8.

⁵ Yates, 7.

⁶ Yates, 9.

⁷ Martha Whiting, interview compiled by Melissa Varner, Houston, Texas, 12 September 1994.

⁸ Whiting, interview conducted by Katherine Lopez.

⁹ Yates, 11.

Yates began speaking publically in his community, spreading the gospel and communicating the importance of five central themes: faith, education, land acquisition, home ownership, and the importance of hard work.¹⁰ These themes outlined the contributions Yates made to his community over his lifetime.

In 1866, Yates was ordained as the minister of the newly formed Antioch Baptist Church, Houston's first African-American church.¹¹ At the time of his ordination, no structure for the church existed. Yates spearheaded plans for the development of a permanent building and purchased land for the church in 1874.¹² In 1888, Yates left Antioch and founded Bethel Baptist in 1890. It was through these two congregations that Yates spread the principles of the Christian faith to the black community.¹³ In addition to communicating the importance of a relationship with God, Yates also communicated the importance of education to the black community.

In 1885, Yates, in cooperation with white missionaries Jennie Peck and Florence Dysart, founded the Houston Academy, where both young and old blacks could gain an education.¹⁴ The school succeeded and underwent several improvements as it expanded to Houston College, then to Houston College for Negroes, and eventually to the state school Texas Southern University in 1951.¹⁵ Due to his tireless efforts to educate the African-American community, a Houston Independent School District high school, built in 1928, is named in his honor. In addition to faith and education, Yates recognized the importance of land purchase and home ownership.

In 1869, Yates led by example and purchased four lots in block 22 of the Castanie Addition on what became known as Andrews Street in the 4th Ward of Houston. He also purchased land off of San Felipe Road and Shepherd Drive in Houston. Yates would parcel the land and sell tracts to other members of the black community who were unable to complete transactions of their own.¹⁶ The area of Houston in which Yates purchased land was once known as Freedman's Town, a hub of activity in the African-American community of Houston. In 1870, Yates assumed the task of building a home for his family on lot 7. With the help of his brother George and brother-in-law Cue Willis, Yates constructed a two-story Greek Revival home using materials that he could afford.¹⁷ Construction of the house took many years, as Yates firmly believed in pay-as-you-go economics. He would buy materials as he was able, and complete portions of the house as his funds allowed. When the house was completed, Yates became the first black

¹⁰ Whiting, interview conducted by Katherine Lopez.

¹¹ Norma Martin, "Yates' Historic Home Dedicated Downtown," *Houston Chronicle*, 19 February 1995, Section A.

¹² Yates, 15.

¹³ Yates, 51.

¹⁴ Yates, 44.

¹⁵ Martin.

¹⁶ Yates, 19.

¹⁷ Whiting, interview conducted by Katherine Lopez.

Houstonian property owner.¹⁸ As evidenced by the construction of his home, Yates believed in hard work and financial responsibility. He communicated these beliefs to others in his community.

Yates firmly believed and taught that succumbing to debt would place recently freed blacks under another system of bondage.¹⁹ Under Yates' leadership, Antioch Baptist Church was built without borrowing any funds. Instead, the congregation traded construction labor for food. Yates' concept of pay-as-you-go economics proved instrumental in the development of the black community in Houston as it introduced blacks to principles of responsible spending and demonstrated to them ways to remain out of the bondages of debt.

On December 22, 1897, Yates passed away in his home following a bout with illness. His last words, "The angels in glory welcome me home!" supplied a fitting conclusion to a life spent serving and educating others.²⁰ Through his faith, actions, and teachings, Yates contributed significantly to the black community and the history of the city of Houston.

Ownership by the Yates Family

Following Yates' death, ownership of the house was passed to his second wife, Annie, and her son Paul. Another of Yates' sons, Rutherford B.H., occupied the house with his family after Annie and Paul relocated. His sister Pinky Yates assumed ownership of the house after he relocated. Pinky bought out many of the Yates heirs of the property. In 1918, Pinky's niece Martha Whiting came to live with her and remained there throughout her childhood. Pinky and Martha often rented an upstairs room of the house to a family member. In 1961, Martha Whiting, who had received control of the house following her aunt's death, moved out of the house and rented the property to tenants.²¹ In 1994, after she bought out the remaining heirs and acquired sole ownership of the house, Whiting sold Yates House to The Heritage Society for one dollar.

A. Begin at stake in east/west dividing line of Austin and Smith surveys in upper 1846 (western) part of City south of old sunken grave; then 40 rods south; then due west for quantity to contain 50 acres except so much as may be in space now enclosed as City graveyard near Hopson & Cane's tallow factory and same land deeded me by O. smith 12-17-42 and which I or tenant, James Cocks, has occupied since February 1841.

Deed July 3, 1846, recorded in Harris County Deed Records, Vol. K, p. 431

Robert C. Campbell

To

Justin Castanie

¹⁸ Martin.

¹⁹ Yates, 48.

²⁰ Yates, 58.

²¹ Whiting, interview conducted by Katherine Lopez.

B. Twenty blocks of lots (12 to 31, inclusive), Castanie Survey

1865 Deed August 31, 1865, recorded in Harris County Deed Records, Vol. 2.,
p. 42
Justin Castanie
To
Philip Lawrence

C. Blocks 12-31, inclusive, Justin Castanie Survey

1866 Deed February 24, 1866, recorded in Harris County Deed Records, Vol. 2,
p. 369
J.W. Oliver, attorney for Philip Lawrence
To
Will Powars

D. Blocks 14, 16, 18, 20, 21, 22 and east ½ block 12, Castanie Survey

1866 Deed June 28, 1866, recorded in Harris County Deed Records, Vol. 3, p.
205
Will Powars
To
William P. Hamblin

E. Lot 7, Block 22, Castanie Survey

1869 Deed August 7, 1869, recorded in Harris County Deed Records, Vol. 8, p.
1
W.P. Hamblin
To
Jack Yates

F. Inventory of Lots 7 & 8, Blk. 22, Castanie Survey

1897 Inventory #1982, April 1898, recorded in Harris County Probate Case
Records
Judge sets aside lots 7 & 8, block 22 of Castanie as homestead of
surviving widow (Annie Yates). Property exempt from all claims.

G. Lots 7 & 8, Block 22, Castanie Addition

1902 Deed September 3, 1902, recorded in Harris County Deed Records, Vol.
199, p. 398
Willis Yates, et al
To
Pinkie V. Yates, et al

H. Estate of Pinkie V. Yates

1985 Probate Court Number One, Harris County, Estate of Pinkie V. Yates,
Deceased. Probate Case Number 196081

On December 11, 1985, Jacqueline Edwina Whiting Bostic applied to probate the last will and testament of Pinkie V. Yates, deceased. By that will, dated September 24, 1947, she left to her niece, Martha Countee Whiting, a life estate in her home place known as 1318 Andrews, being Lot 7, Block 22, of Castanie Addition to City of Houston. After Martha's death the remainder in fee is to go to her children who survive her and to share alike between them.

4. Original plans and construction:

The two-story Greek Revival house was built on 1318 Andrews Street utilizing balloon frame construction. The original house had seven rooms: three bedrooms upstairs, and a living room, dining room, and bedroom downstairs. Although the rooms are small and the stairway is steep and narrow, the house's twelve foot ceilings make it seem larger. A two story gallery supported by eight Doric columns spans the front façade of the house. The walls of the house were originally constructed using cypress wood.

5. Alterations and additions:

After the hurricane of 1900 destroyed the separate kitchen of the house, an attached kitchen was added to the rear of the house.²² When the house was moved to Sam Houston Park in 1994, the structure was in disrepair. The restoration process brought the house back to its original appearance. Squared columns supported the front porches of the house when it was moved to the park. Historic photographs revealed the porch was originally supported by round, elongated Doric columns. The squared porch supports were replaced by round columns made of cedar. The chimney tops of the house were reconstructed, and failing materials such as bead board, flooring, and interior and exterior siding was replaced. New interior window casings, sills, and aprons were added to the kitchen window and the first story front (south) windows. A partition wall was removed from the parlor, and a new partition creating a foyer and separation of the parlor and dining room was constructed. The handrail and balusters of the stairway were replaced with materials matching the handrail and baluster of the second floor landing.²³

B. Historical Context:

1. Freedman's Town Historic District: Houston's Freedmen's Town Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on January 17, 1985 and is located in Houston's 4th Ward. The district is roughly bounded by Genesse, West Dallas, Arthur and West Gray Streets. Freedmen's Town has been a major hub for black education, business and culture from emancipation until the present day.

²² Whiting, interview conducted by Katherine Lopez.

²³ Gensler, *The Jack Yates House in Sam Houston Park Architectural Demolition and Renovation Plan*, 26 July 1996.

2. The Heritage Society: The Heritage Society formed in 1954 as a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of Houston's built heritage. The organization formed to save Kellum-Noble House, which was constructed in 1847. Kellum-Noble House is in its original location and is part of what is now known as Sam Houston Park. Over the years, The Heritage Society has moved eight structures to the park: Nichols Rice Cherry House, constructed in 1850 and moved to the park in 1959; San Felipe House, constructed in 1868 and moved to the park in 1962; Pillot House, constructed in 1868 and moved to the park in 1965; St. John Church, constructed in 1891 and moved to the park in 1968; Old Place, constructed in 1823 and moved to the park in 1973; Staiti House, constructed in 1915 and moved to the park in 1986; Yates House, constructed in 1870 and moved to the park in 1994; and 4th Ward Cottage, constructed as early as 1866 and moved to the park in 2002. The Heritage Society manages these nine historic structures, which are open to the public for tours Tuesday through Sunday.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General statement:

1. Architectural character: Yates House is a two story, seven room wooden house which was built utilizing balloon frame construction and easy to find materials. It is a typical late 19th century working man's house from Houston's 4th Ward. The house reflects a simplified Greek Revival style, with a symmetrical façade and a two story gallery supported by eight Doric columns.
2. Condition of fabric: The current condition of Yates House is good. The house underwent major restoration when it was acquired by The Heritage Society and moved to Sam Houston Park in 1994. It has been properly maintained since.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The main, two-story portion of the house is 32 feet by 24 feet and is roughly 30 feet high. The one-story kitchen addition centered on the back (north) of the house is 16 by 10 feet. These dimensions include both the front and back porches.
2. Foundations: The house is supported by a brick pier foundation.
3. Walls: The exterior walls are covered in horizontal clapboard siding with 3 to 4 inch reveals.
4. Structural system, framing: The house was built utilizing balloon frame construction.
5. Porches, stoops: On the front (south) façade of the house, a two-story gallery is

supported by eight Doric columns, four on each story. On the back (south) of the house, the attached kitchen has a covered side porch along the east side. This porch offers access to the kitchen from the back door of the house.

6. Chimneys: The house has one non functional brick chimney.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The typical door is a four paneled, 3 foot by 8 foot door. Substitutions for the upper two wooden panels, such as glass lites, can be seen on the first and second story front (south) doors and the back (north) door of the house.

b. Windows and shutters: The typical window is a six over six single hung window with simple trim. The windows are simply framed by a flat 1/2"x4" trim board along the sides and 1/2"x4" flat lintels. The sills protrude slightly and have a 1/2"x4" apron beneath. There are four of these windows on the east façade, four on the south façade, and three on the west façade. On the south façade, the windows and their surrounds are almost the same size as the front doors and their surrounds, emphasizing the symmetry of the front (south) façade. These windows are four over four single hung windows, and are simply framed by a flat 1/2"x4" trim board along the sides and 1/2"x4" flat lintels. The sills protrude slightly and have a 1/2"x4" apron beneath. None of the windows have shutters.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering:

The main two story portion of the house has a hipped, metal roof molded to look like shingles. The one-story kitchen has a hipped metal roof of the same material which meets the north façade of the house.

b. Cornice, eaves: The house has a simple box cornice and the eaves of the roof protrude slightly (six inches) on all sides of the house.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. First Floor: The first floor of the house has an entry foyer, a dining room, a bedroom, and an attached kitchen that is accessed through the back door, which leads to the kitchen's covered side porch.

b. Second Floor: The second floor of the house has three bedrooms and a small landing at the top of the stairs.

c. Attic: The house has an unfinished attic.

2. Stairways: The house has one stairway that is very steep. The newel post is squared. Two turned balusters occupy each stair tread. The top of the handrail is curved. The stairway, balusters, and handrail are all painted the same rust red color of the floors of the house.

3. Flooring: The flooring is tongue and groove 4 inch pine planks, laid north to south and painted rust red.

4. Wall and ceiling finish:

Entry foyer, parlor, and kitchen: The walls and ceilings are covered in bead board and are painted white. The trim of these rooms is the same rust red color of the floors.

Dining room: The walls and ceiling of the dining room are four inch horizontal pine boards and are painted green. The trim of the room is painted green as well.

First story bedroom: The walls and ceiling of the room are four inch horizontal pine boards and are painted blue. The trim of the room is painted light blue.

Second story landing: The ceiling, the east wall and half of the north wall of the landing are covered in bead board. The remaining walls are covered in four inch horizontal boards. The walls and ceiling are painted the same white as the entry foyer, parlor, and kitchen. The trim of the landing is painted the same rust red color of floors.

Second story northeast bedroom: The walls and ceiling of the room are four inch horizontal pine boards which are painted light blue. The trim of the room is also painted light blue.

Second story northwest bedroom: The walls and ceiling of the room are four inch horizontal pine boards which are painted the same rust red color as the floors. The trim of the room is also painted rust red.

Second story southwest bedroom: The walls and ceiling of the room are four inch horizontal pine boards which are painted the same green color as the dining room. The trim of the room is also painted green.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The doorways of the first and second story are simply trimmed by 1/2"x4" trim boards along the sides and top. Doors separate the bedrooms from public areas. These doors are the same four paneled doors found on the exterior. In the first story bedroom, a smaller, 2 1/2'x6' door leads to a closet. In the dining room, a four paneled door leads to a closet underneath the stairs. The bottom two panels of this door are replaced by louvers that allow for ventilation.

b. Windows: The windows are simply framed, with 1/2"x4" trim boards along the sides and 1/2"x4" lintels. The sills protrude slightly and have a 1/2"x4" apron.

6. Hardware: The house retains some of its original hardware, including nails and some doorknobs and hinges. All others have been replaced with historic replicas. Deadbolts were added to all exterior doors by The Heritage Society.

7. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: The house is climate controlled through central air and heat. A ductwork system below the house and in the attic supplies conditioned air through minimally invasive floor and ceiling grills. The system has been utilized since the house's move to Sam Houston Park.

b. Lighting: Historic kerosene and gas fixtures retrofitted for electricity light the house.

c. Plumbing: None

10. Site:

a. Historic landscape design: Unknown

b. Outbuildings: None

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural drawings:

Gensler. *The Jack Yates House in Sam Houston Park Architectural Demolition and Renovation Plan*. 26 July 1996.

B. Early views: From The Heritage Society Photograph Collection

*Photograph of the house in its original location at 1318 Andrews Street, c. 1900

*Photographs of the house in its original location at 1318 Andrews Street, c. 1990

*Photographs of the house being moved to Sam Houston Park, 1994

*Photographs of the house during restoration, c. 1995

C. Interviews:

Whiting, Martha. Interview conducted by Katherine Lopez, Houston, Texas, 8 March 1994.

Whiting, Martha. Interview compiled by Melissa Varner, Houston, Texas, 12 September 1994.

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary Sources:

Harris County Deed Records, Vol. K, p. 431. Recorded July 3, 1846

Harris County Deed Records, Vol. 2, p. 42. Recorded August 31, 1865

Harris County Deed Records, Vol. 2, p. 369. Recorded February 24, 1866

Harris County Deed Records, Vol. 3, p. 205. Recorded June 28, 1866

Harris County Deed Records, Vol. 8, p. 1. Recorded August 7, 1869

Harris County Probate Court Records, Inventory # 1982. Recorded April 1898
Harris County Deed Records, Vol. 199, p. 398. Recorded September 3, 1902
Harris County Probate Court Records, Case Number 196081. Recorded December 11, 1985.

2. Secondary Sources:

Martin, Norma. "Yates' Historic Home Dedicated Downtown," *Houston Chronicle*, 19 February 1995, Section A.

Yates, Rutherford B.H., Sr. and Paul L. *The Life and Efforts of Jack Yates*. Houston: Texas Southern University Press, 1985.

The Heritage Society Docent Training Materials

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was funded by a grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The project was initiated by Kimberly Wolfe, Buildings Curator for The Heritage Society. Tina Munoz, preservation consultant, provided the field measurements, and Paul Homeyer of Gensler provided the final measured drawings. Photography was done by Michael Fry, photographer. The project historian and coordinator was Kimberly Wolfe, who conducted research necessary for completing the historical narrative portion of the project and oversaw the entirety of the project. The project began in October of 2009 and was completed in the fall of 2010.