

## ZONING CHANGE REVIEW SHEET

**CASE NUMBER:** C14H-2020-0113

**HLC DATE:**

November 16, 2020

**PC DATE:**

November 24, 2020

**APPLICANT:** Thomas Cooke; Casey Jordan, agent

**HISTORIC NAME:** E.A. Murchison House

**WATERSHED:** Blunn Creek

**ADDRESS OF PROPOSED ZONING CHANGE:** 1304 Alta Vista Avenue

**ZONING FROM:** SF-3-NP to SF-3-H-NP

**COUNCIL DISTRICT:** 9

**SUMMARY STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Staff recommends the proposed zoning change from single family residence, neighborhood plan (SF-3-NP) combining district to single family residence – Historic Landmark – neighborhood plan (SF-3-H-NP) combining district zoning.

**QUALIFICATIONS FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION:**

The E.A. Murchison House meets the criteria for designation for its architectural significance for its Tudor Revival architecture and its historical significance for its associations with civic leader and Austin School Board leader E.A. Murchison.

**HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION ACTION:**

**PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION:**

**DEPARTMENT COMMENTS:** The house is listed as a Priority 2 for research in the Comprehensive Cultural Resources Survey (1984).

**CITY COUNCIL DATE:** December 10, 2020

**ACTION:**

**ORDINANCE READINGS:** 1<sup>ST</sup> 2<sup>ND</sup> 3<sup>RD</sup>

**ORDINANCE NUMBER:**

**CASE MANAGER:** Steve Sadowsky

**PHONE:** 974-6454

**NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION:** South River City Citizens Association

**BASIS FOR RECOMMENDATION:**

**Architecture:**

The E.A. Murchison House is a one-and-a-half story, irregular plan, stone-clad Tudor Revival house designed by Houston architect H.L. Murchison for his parents, E.A. and Emma Murchison. The house is a relatively large example of Tudor Revival domestic architecture, occupying a large lot for an estate setting. It exhibits the hallmarks of the Tudor Revival style, including the random ashlar stone exterior, false half-timbering in the tympanae of the prominent gables, turned brackets, an asymmetrical composition, and a stone exterior chimney with clay chimney pots. The limestone on the house reputedly was salvaged when the Whitis Mansion on W. 27<sup>th</sup> Street was razed for the construction of the Scottish Rite Dormitory. The house has a primarily

side-gabled roof with two prominent front-facing gables on either side of a central block, which contains a shed-roofed dormer. Fenestration in the house consists of 6:6 wood-frame windows in single, double, and triple configurations. There have been some additions and modifications to the house, all of which are in keeping with the original Tudor Revival style and articulation of the house, including the construction of a carport (1982), a pool and pool house in the back yard (1987), enclosure of the rear porch (1992), stone hardscaping and the front wall and gates, and the installation of a slate roof in 2013. The bay window in the left front gable is not original but was installed into the existing window opening, and does not detract from the overall style and design elements of the house.



E.A. Murchison House, 1304 Alta Vista Avenue



Detail of non-historic bay window and carport

### **Historical Associations:**

Eugene A. Murchison, a native of Bastrop County, Texas, purchased this lot in the newly-developed Travis Heights subdivision in 1920. Travis Heights was designed to be a middle- to upper-middle class neighborhood in South Austin with views out over the Colorado River to downtown. The hilly terrain of the neighborhood is marked by curved streets, large, irregularly-shaped lots, and short blocks, many labeled “terraces” and “places,” all in keeping with the tenets of the City Beautiful Movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This house is the middle of three estates on Alta Vista Avenue, and represents one of the high-style architectural gems of the neighborhood.

Eugene A. Murchison was raised on a Bastrop County farm and attended Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas, where he obtained his teacher’s certificate. He went on to teach in rural schools in Bastrop County for several years before serving in the Spanish-American War. Upon his return to central Texas, he worked in a general store in Del Valle in eastern Travis County before moving into Austin around 1905. Murchison is listed for the first time in Austin city directories in the edition of 1906-07, when he is listed as living at 1303 E. 12<sup>th</sup> Street and was a partner with William F. Caldwell and H.B. Lee in Caldwell-Murchison-Lee, which sold dry goods, groceries, and feed at 600-06 E. 6<sup>th</sup> Street, and was a successor to the business of William F. Caldwell and Tom Anderson at the same location.



The building at 600-04 E. 6<sup>th</sup> Street (corner of Red River Street) where E.A. Murchison had his first grocery business with William F. Caldwell and H.B. Lee from around 1905 until the mid-1910s.

By the mid-1910s, Murchison was the president of Murchison-Lee, selling groceries, dry goods, and produce at 325 E. 6<sup>th</sup> Street. By 1920, Murchison had moved to Travis Heights, living at 1200 Travis Heights Boulevard, and operating Murchison-Lee at 222-24 E. 5<sup>th</sup> Street. Their stock was limited to groceries. Murchison-Lee remained in operation under that name until the mid-1920s, when H.B. Lee moved to New Mexico and Murchison opened Murchison's Nu-Way Grocery Store at 1011 Congress Avenue. Murchison's NuWay Grocery Store remained in business at that location and under that name until 1931, when he changed the name to the Rite-Way Grocery Store. The 1930-31 city directory also shows Murchison's Fruit Store at 1009 Congress Avenue, next door to the grocery store. Murchison's Fruit Store was managed by an Arthur Smith. Murchison remained in the grocery business on Congress Avenue until 1935, when he retired and was appointed to serve as the city and county probation officer, a post he would hold until 1948.

Murchison's first wife, Emma was the proprietor of a boarding house while E.A. Murchison was in the grocery business. Emma Murchison first had a boarding house at 307 W. 19<sup>th</sup> Street (now Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard) in the mid-1920s. Around 1928, the E.A. and Emma Murchison moved to 1010 Lavaca Street, where Mrs. Murchison operated the Murchison House, a boarding house, until her death in 1932. E.A. Murchison retained ownership of the Lavaca Street property after Emma's death, and lived there off-and-on during the next few years, even after the house on Alta Vista was completed. City directories of the period also show their son, Herman L. Murchison, living with them at the Lavaca Street house; Herman L. Murchison was a draftsman for prominent local architect Roy L. Thomas, and designed the house for his parents on Alta Vista Avenue.



The Travis County Domestic Relations Office building now occupies the site of the Murchison Boarding House at 1010 Lavaca Street, just west of the Governor's Mansion.

The house at 1304 Alta Vista Avenue was completed in 1931; city directories indicate that E.A. and Emma Murchison moved from their boarding house at 1010 Lavaca into their Travis Heights estate, but family history has it that Emma Murchison did not live long enough to move into the Alta Vista house, and a heartbroken E.A. Murchison remained in the Lavaca Street boarding house. He rented out the house for a short period of time, before marrying his second wife, Maggie, a school teacher. They lived on Hillside Avenue in South Austin for a short period of time just after their marriage, then moved into the Alta Vista Avenue house, where they lived until 1959, when they sold the property and moved to a house on West Avenue.

E.A. Murchison was a very active civic leader throughout his life, especially in Austin schools, where he served on the Austin School Board from 1919 until the mid-1940s, and was the longest-serving president of the school board. During his tenure, the city of Austin grew tremendously, and with it, its school population. Murchison was instrumental with school superintendent A.N. McCallum in getting bonds passed that would allow the school board to build more school buildings, gymnasiums, and playgrounds, and repair many others. Murchison advocated tax increases in order to pay Austin teachers higher wages, oversaw the creation of the first Parent-Teacher Association in Austin, and advocated for the creation of a ROTC program in the early 1940s, as well as for industrial education during the Second World War. Murchison appears to have cared equally for Austin's white and non-white students, even at a time when Austin schools were completely segregated. While Murchison served, the school board built several new schools, including Becker, Zavala, Govalle, Travis Heights, Brykerwoods, Lee, and Ridgetop Elementary and Austin High School (now ACC Rio Grande). The board opened an experimental Opportunity School at Bickler School, allowing students to progress at their own pace, and helped institute district-wide testing to ensure that all students were receiving a good education. More striking, however, was Murchison's compassion for the students. In a story in the Austin newspaper from 1939, Murchison was noted for providing for students too impoverished to buy their own school supplies, books, and in some instances, even their clothing and shoes.

His great humanitarianism moved him into other important areas of civic life. After retiring from the grocery business in 1935, he devoted the rest of his life to serving as a mentor to boys and young men in various capacities, as the city and county juvenile probation officer, as an early Boy Scout leader, and as the young men's Sunday School leader at the First Methodist Church.

As probation officer, Murchison viewed his position as an opportunity to help reform troubled youth in the city. Austin newspapers detail a "reign of terror" by juvenile delinquents in Austin in the late 1940s, many of whom ended up reporting to Murchison as a condition of their freedom from jail. Murchison's approach was to encourage young men to return to a lawful life.

His service to this community was recognized with the naming of Murchison Middle School on North Hills Drive after him in 1967, and several distinguished service awards from various organizations in the city, including the Texas Heritage Foundation and the Rotary Club.

## Why I Am A Scoutmaster

By E. A. Murchison, Murchison Lee Company, Scoutmaster, Troop Two.

I am a scoutmaster because I like boys and boys' work. It is a great thing to be the pal and leader of a troop of Boy Scouts, and it is also a great honor to have a part in the character building of the future citizens of our republic.

The big idea in scouting is to make good citizens. Upon his honor the boy promises: "To do his duty to God and his country, and to obey the scout law; to help people at all times; and to keep himself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight." As a scoutmaster it is my pleasure and privilege to help my scouts do these things.

The church and school recognize the value and importance of scouting, and these three agencies work hand in hand in developing the boys' character.

Scouting recognizes the boy's desire for physical action and his longing for the hills and woods and streams. The scoutmaster can get nearer to the boy on the hike or around the campfire than can ever his teacher or pastor.

The boy of today is the man of tomorrow and any agency or individual that strives to make the boy a good man is worthy of the support of every good citizen. Boys are the greatest asset of our nation. Scouting deals with boys and as a scoutmaster I am glad to have a small part in this great work.

E.A. Murchison, "Why I am a Scoutmaster"  
Austin Statesman, May 2, 1922

# MRS. MURCHISON

## rites set today

Funeral services will be held at 3 p. m. Sunday for Mrs. Emma Murchison, 67, wife of E. A. Murchison, Sr., Austin grocer and chairman of the Austin school board.

Rites will be held from the Cook funeral home chapel, followed by interment in Oakwood cemetery.

While her husband lay ill in one hospital room, recovering from a recent operation for appendicitis, Mrs. Murchison succumbed in another part of the same hospital Friday afternoon following an attack of pneumonia. Her husband has been confined to the hospital for the past several weeks.

Survivors besides her husband are two sons, E. A. Murchison, Jr., and H. L. H. Murchison; two grandchildren, E. A. Murchison, III, and Mary Jane Murchison; five sisters, Mrs. Joe Prewer of Austin, Mrs. Paul Matthews of Hutto, Mrs. Al Young of Cypress Mills, Mrs. Charles West of El Dorado and Mrs. Erick Matthews of Lampasas, and two brothers, Harvey Hensel of Travis Peak and Herman Hensel of Tulsa, Okla.

For many years Mrs. Murchison operated a downtown boarding house known as the Murchison House, at 1010 Lavaca, opposite the governor's mansion. She had been ill only about five days.

The Rev. Virgil Fisher of the First Methodist church will conduct funeral services, and pallbearers will be O. L. Koeck, Tom Walling, Paul Matthews, George Dowell, W. W. Carson and J. T. Brown.

Front-page news of the death and funeral of Emma Murchison  
Austin Statesman, November 26, 1932

## **Murchison Assumes Probation Office Duties**

E. A. Murchison, 61-year-old retail grocer, assumed his new duties as Travis county probation officer Saturday after taking the oath of office administered by Stuart Harris, deputy county clerk, in the presence of members of the commissioners court.

Mr. Murchison in a brief speech expressed appreciation for the appointment and pledged his fullest cooperation with the county officers in serving the county's interests, particularly to the youth.

Mr. Murchison is the father of two sons, E. A. Murchison, Jr., of Tyler and Herman L. Murchison of Austin. His wife, the former Miss Emma Hensel of Travis Peak,

whom he married more than 30 years ago, died in Austin on Nov. 25, 1932.

E.A. Murchison becomes the Travis County Probation officer  
Austin American-Statesman, May 19, 1935

# School Opening Brings Joy To Murchison on One Hand But on Other It's Sadness

Opening of the public schools here is a pleasure to E. A. Murchison on the one hand, but on the other it has brought him tales of woe.

As chairman of the Austin school board, Mr. Murchison is delighted to see 15,000 Austin pupils getting the benefit of an education.

But as county probation officer he is seeing the parade of underprivileged children coming into his office at the courthouse, begging for money to buy necessary school supplies such as pencils, composition books, spelling tablets, ink and such things that the state educational system does not furnish.

♦ ♦ ♦

## In Dire Distress

In some instances, the boys and girls from underprivileged homes need clothes, shoes and stockings in order to attend school.

Some parents in dire distress send notes to him by the children, asking him to help the children get clothes for school wear.

Mr. Murchison furnished one note as an example of the appeals that he has received during the last two days.

"WPA will not give me work card on account of bad eyesight and I am unable to buy school supplies for my four children. Will you please see that they get what they need from somewhere. Thanks."

That was the note received Tuesday from a resident of Comal street,

and is but one typical example of the requests that he gets.

Mr. Murchison declared he knows where to obtain the supplies, but his big worry is where the money is coming from to pay for the school children's needs.

A 16-year-old girl accompanied by two brothers, one 11, the other about a year or two older, walked into his office Tuesday afternoon, all three with notes appealing for help to get pencils, composition books, copy tablets and other such supplies that the teacher said they had to have.

The three children came from a family housed in a shack on the east side of town, and there were six other children in the home. The father has a WPA job clearing brush out of the lake basin west of Austin, and the mother is at home taking care of the children as best she can, Mr. Murchison said.

The 16-year-old girl had been provided with a 98-cent cotton print dress the day before and the older boy had on a pair of 98-cent shoes which Mr. Murchison had secured for him. The younger boy was barefooted.

Wistfully he watched Mr. Murchison pen a note to the principal of Bickler school to supply the three children with the needed school supplies, and that he would pay for them later.

♦ ♦ ♦

#### Scores Given Aid

"Mr. Murchison," softly spoke the little fellow, "can you get me a pair of shoes?"

Then a note to a local department store was penned by Mr. Murchison and given to the boy.

The three children left appreciatively and all said "Thank you" as they turned toward the door of the office.

"It takes anywhere from 75 cents to \$1 to get each child the supplies that he needs in school," Mr. Murchison related.

Then he turned to his record book and counted 24 boys and girls that he had helped during the last two days.

Mr. Murchison did not say just how he can be helped financially with the problem he now faces, but he displayed a \$4 check sent him by an Austin business man, which will help four to five school children get started in school. And that business man send the \$4 check every month, he added.

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News story of the humanitarian efforts of E.A. Murchison to provide necessary supplies for

Austin schoolchildren

Austin Statesman, September 20, 1939

# Murchison Hands in Resignation After 13 Years as Probation Head

County Probation Officer E. A. Murchison has tendered his resignation after 13 years in that capacity, to the Travis County Juvenile Board. County Judge George S. Matthews, who recommended Murchison's appointment, said the

board would meet sometime in the near future to consider the probation officer's resignation. Murchison asked that his resignation be accepted to take effect on June 1, thus completing 13 years of service as the county probation of-

fice on May 18, 1935.

"No definite date has been set as yet for considering the resignation," Matthews said, "and there is no particular hurry since Murchison's resignation would not take place until the first of June."

Murchison's resignation followed a series of grand jury reports criticizing juvenile delinquency's rise in Travis County and reporting "a shocking indifference" to lack of facilities needed in the care, teaching and handling of juvenile delinquents.

The grand jury for the January term of the 53rd District Court, in its final report Feb. 25, stated that "county officials in position to take remedial steps have, apparently done nothing to correct the gross failures of this community to meet its responsibilities in a problem affecting hundreds of families."

The grand jury report also said that "... in several instances, it was our feeling that it is the people and those charged with setting up adequate facilities for juvenile care who should be called before the grand jury and told of the failures, rather than the victims of their neglect."

If Murchison's resignation is accepted, it was felt that B. L. Bellamy, present assistant probation officer, would be promoted to the vacancy. Bellamy has recently been appointed by the court to confer with the Community Council in a coordination of plans to better handle juvenile delinquency cases in the county.

Thursday, Sherwood Norman of New York, an outstanding national juvenile delinquency authority, had proposed a strengthening of the county probational setup, as well as establishment of a separate juvenile court and judge, and a study and treatment home to handle juveniles, rather than placing them in jail or in state institutions at Gatesville and Gainesville.

At this meeting, Murchison's letter of resignation was received, but no action was taken pending another board session at which County Judge Matthews would be present.

The Austin Junior Chamber of Commerce has passed a unanimous resolution of congratulations to Murchison for his long years of service to the youth of Travis County.

E.A. Murchison tenders his letter of resignation as the Travis County Probation Officer  
Austin Statesman, April 9, 1948

## **'SALT OF EARTH'**

# **Murchison Nominated No. 1 Citizen**

F. A. Murchison, 1304 Alta Vista Avenue, retired Austin merchant, who served for many years as member and chairman of the Austin School Board, is among the nominees for consideration of Austin's Most Worthy Citizen for 1953.

The identity of Austin's Most Worthy Citizen for the year will be announced at the annual dinner of the Austin Real Estate Board where the worthy citizen will be presented a plaque and publicly honored.

MURCHISON was reared on Cedar Creek and taught school as a young man. He served during the Spanish-American War and for many years operated a retail grocery store in Austin. When he left the grocery business, he was appointed as Travis County probation officer, serving in that post until his retirement a few years ago.

For many years Murchison was active in Boy Scout work and has taught a boys' class in Sunday School for more than 40 years. He is a member of the First Methodist Church. Besides teaching a Sunday School class, he serves that church as a steward. He is a member of the Austin Rotary Club and of the Spanish-American War Veterans. He served on the Austin School Board longer than any other member and for many years served as chairman of the board.

In nominating Murchison, his nominator said of him, "He has lived longer than most of us and he has lived well. He never seeks the limelight, so you never hear of the many good deeds that he is responsible for. His kind are few. He is the salt of the earth. He is the father of two sons. One is a geologist and the other an architect.

"HE IS YOUNG in spirit and has a wonderful sense of humor. All ages love and respect him. He is quite interested in all phases of life.

"Many people do good deeds and are paid a salary for their work, but my candidate does these things because it is a part of him. There may be others as good, but none are better. He truly goes about doing good."

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E.A. Murchison is nominated as Austin's Most Worthy Citizen  
Austin Statesman, December 17, 1953

# **Murchison's Final Rites Set Thursday**

Final tributes will be paid to Eugene A. Murchison, 90, Austin civic leader, welfare worker and pioneer merchant, who died Tuesday in a local hospital, in funeral services set for Thursday at 3:30 p.m. at the Cook Funeral Home.

Revs. B. C. Schmidt and Carroll Weedon will officiate. Burial will be in Austin Memorial Park.

Murchison is survived by his widow, Mrs. Maggie Murchison of Austin; two sons, E. A. Murchison Jr. of New Orleans and H. L. Murchison of Houston; a brother, Homer Murchison of Bastrop and by two grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

A member of the First Methodist Church of Austin, he served as an honorary steward and was teacher of seventh grade boys in the First Methodist Sunday School for 45 years until illness slowed him down in 1959. He was also a member of the Austin Rotary Club for many years and at his death was an honorary lifetime member.

Murchison was a 23 - year member and for a period of 10 years chairman of the Austin School Board and helped plan a number of the school buildings constructed at the start of the period of rapid growth of the Austin public school system.

For many years he served as a scoutmaster of Troop Two and for 13 years handled the duties of a probation officer with offices in the Travis County Courthouse.

Murchison was reared on a farm in Bastrop County. After finishing rural schools, he gained a teacher's certificate and taught for three years.

He left his school job and moved to Del Valle where he was engaged in the mercantile business until he entered the Spanish - American war service for a year where he advanced from private to sergeant.

After the conflict, he returned to Austin and entered the grocery business which he served patrons at his stores on Congress Avenue and East Sixth Street for 30 years before retiring from active business in the mid-1930's.

Murchison was stricken by an attack of arthritis at the age of 85 and after weeks of hospitalization, he gave up all outside activities, including the Rotary club of which he had been a member since 1919.



SAM MARTIN



E. A. MURCHISON

## Murchison, Martin Dedications Near

Texas Public Schools Week, March 4-8, will get a double-barreled send-off in Austin with the dedication Sunday afternoon of two new junior high schools: Sam L. Martin at 1601 Haskell St. and E. A. Murchison, 3700 North Hills Drive.

The Murchison dedication program will begin at 2 p.m., with the ceremonies at Martin following at 4 p.m.

For both programs, School Board President Clint Small Jr. will make brief remarks of dedication, and Supt. Irby B. Carruth will introduce special guests.

For the 2 p.m. program at Murchison, Dr. Lee Wilborn, assistant commissioner for instruction, Texas Education Agency, will give the main address in appreciation of the late E. A. Murchison. Dr. Glen E. Journeay, president of the Murchison PTA, will bring greetings.

Special music will be by the Murchison Band, directed by Dr. Frank Phillips, and by the Murchison Choir, directed by

Russell Sayers. Keith Miller will give the invocation.

E. A. Murchison served on the Austin School Board for 24 years, from 1919 to 1943, including six years as vice president and 17 years as president. He taught a Sunday School class of seventh-grade boys at First Methodist Church for about 45 years; he was Scoutmaster of Boy Scout Troop 2 for 14 years; and he was Travis county probation officer for 13 years.

The Murchison building has been planned to accommodate approximately 1,000 students in 39 teaching stations. Basic facilities, such as cafeteria, library, gymnasium and offices are designed to accommodate an ultimate capacity of 1,500 students with the later addition of more classrooms.

In addition to the academic classrooms, there are special rooms for speech, art, band and choral music, physical education, science and business instruction. One entire unit of the building is zoned to provide complete facilities for the industrial education program, and another zone houses facilities for homemaking.

The contract construction cost was \$1,423,566. J. C. Evans Construction Co. was the general contractor.

Portion of the news article for the upcoming dedication of Murchison and Martin Junior High Schools

Austin Statesman, February 28, 1968

**MRS. MAGGIE MURCHISON**

Funeral services for Mrs. Maggie Gillespie Murchison, of 1007 West Ave., were held Wednesday at Cook Funeral Home with Rev. John Smith officiating. Burial was in Austin Memorial Park.

Survivors include one sister, Mrs. Albert C. Denmark of Austin, and several nieces and nephews.

Pallbearers were Floyd Scull, Edward Scull, K. L. Murchison, Arthur Cunningham, Ike Mayfield and Billy J. Gillespie.

Funeral for Maggie Murchison  
Austin Statesman, August 5, 1970

No. 751 132

# PERMIT FOR WATER SERVICE

AUSTIN, TEXAS

M. *W. L. Buggs* Address *1304 Alta Vista Ave.*

Plumber *Mc Alpine* Size of Tap *1/2* Date *12/5/31*

Date of Connection *12/5/31* Foreman's Report

Size of Tap Made *3/4*

Size Service Made *2"*

Size Main Tapped *2"*

From Front Prop. Line to Curb Cock *12'*

From Prop. Line to Curb Cock *N 6'*

Location of Meter *at curb*

Type of Box *load*

Depth of Main in St. *18"*

Depth of Service Line *10"*

From Curb Cock to Tap on Main *6"*

Checked by Engr. Dept. *1-7-32*

No.	Findings	Size
1	Curb Cock	3/4"
1	Elbow	3/4"
1	St. Elbow	3/4"
1	Bushing	3/4" x 1/2"
1	Reducer	3/4" x 1/2"
1	Pipe	3/4"
1	Stand Comp.	3/4" x 1/2"
1	Washers	3/4"
1	Union	3/4"
1	Plug	3/4"
1	Tap	3/4"
1	Stop	3/4"
1	Box	3/4"
1	Lid	3/4"
1	Valves	3/4"
1	Reg. No.	3/4"

Foreman's Signature *Berman*

**INDEXED**

Water service permit for this address (1931)

**PARCEL NO:** 0301020303**LEGAL DESCRIPTION:** LOT 11&12 \*ADJ ALLEY & E25' LOT 23&24 BLK 3 TRAVIS HEIGHTS**ESTIMATED ANNUAL TAX ABATEMENT:** \$8,500 (owner-occupied); city portion: \$2,500 (capped).

**APPRAISED VALUE:** \$1,052,200

**PRESENT USE:** Residence

**CONDITION:** Excellent

**PRESENT OWNERS:**

Thomas F. and Beverly J. Cooke  
1304 Alta Vista Avenue  
Austin, Texas 78704

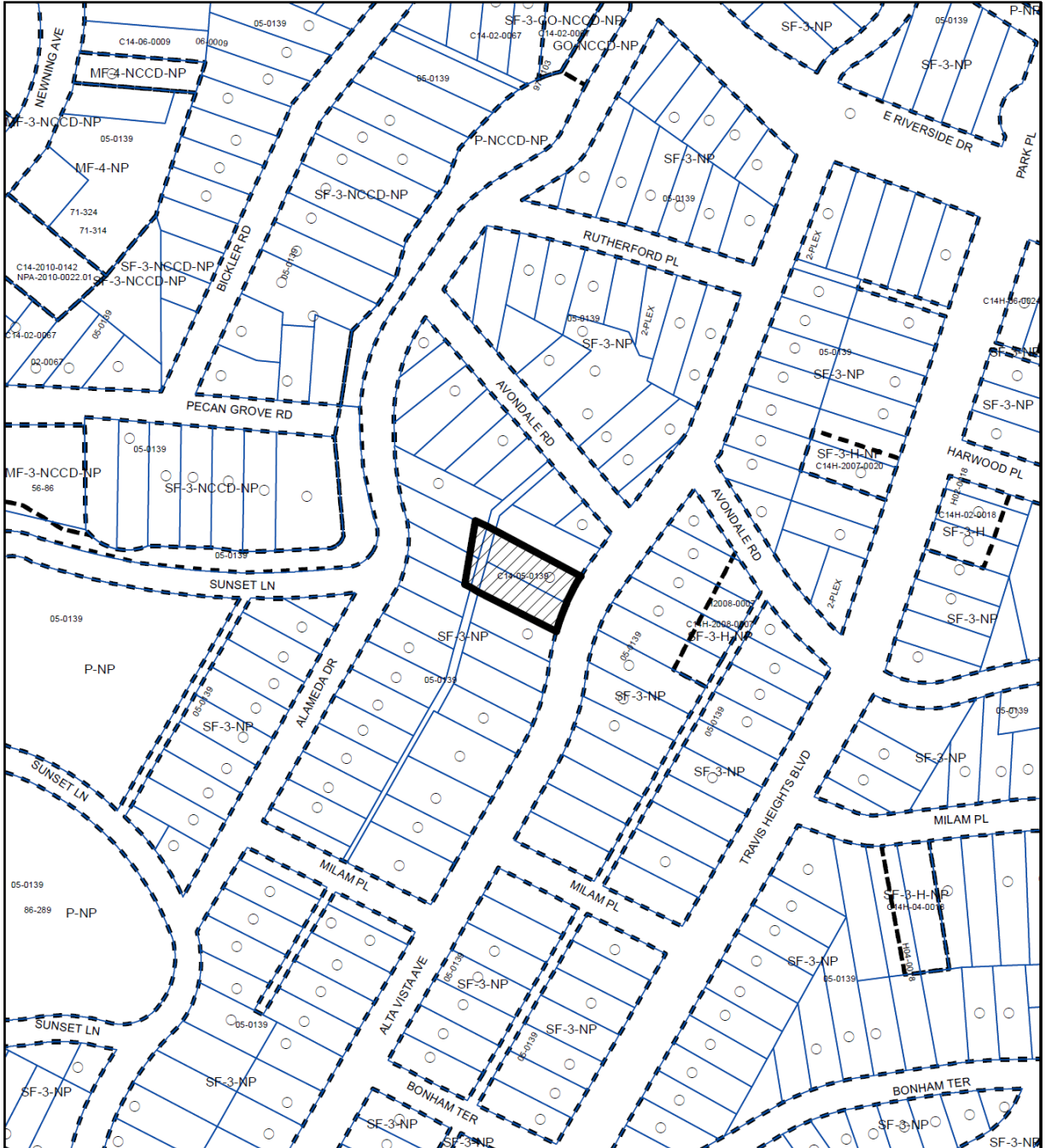
**DATE BUILT:** ca. 1931

**ALTERATIONS/ADDITIONS:** See narrative; includes bay window, carport, pool and pool house in back yard, stone wall in front.




**ORIGINAL OWNER(S):** E.A. and Emma Murchison (1931)

**OTHER HISTORICAL DESIGNATIONS:** None.

# LOCATION MAP



1" = 200'

-  SUBJECT TRACT
-  PENDING CASE
-  ZONING BOUNDARY

## HISTORIC ZONING

ZONING CASE#: C14H-2020-0113

This product is for informational purposes and may not have been prepared for or be suitable for legal, engineering, or surveying purposes. It does not represent an on-the-ground survey and represents only the approximate relative location of property boundaries.

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### **“EA MURCHISON HOUSE” – Historical Narrative.**

The Tudor Revival Style home at 1304 Alta Vista in the Travis Heights neighborhood of Austin, Texas is known as the Murchison House after its most well-known resident, Eugene Murchison, who built and lived in the house for over 25 years.

#### **Justification for Historic designation:**

The neighborhood of Travis Heights has seen a remarkable rate of development, and as such has lost much of its historic fabric. The Murchison House stands as one of the early homes in the neighborhood, and is deserving of Historic Landmark status under the following criteria:

- **Architecture:**

The home is a charming example of Tudor Revival architecture, a style that is not prominent in the neighborhood, with a large expansive lot. The home is remarkably in-tact and well preserved, looking much like it did at its construction. Designed by H. Murchison, a Houston architect, the home has a traditional design.

- **Association with Eugene Murchison:**

The connection to Eugene Murchison makes this home a strong candidate for landmark designation. Mr. Murchison had an indelible impact on Austin in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, shaping the education of generations of young Austinites and working to support and guide countless young men into adulthood through his work as a probation officer and Sunday school teacher. His service on the school board is unmatched, and during his life he was recognized many times over for his dedication to the community of Austin. Murchison Middle School stands as a testament to his contribution and dedication to education. Mr. Murchison lived in this home for over 30 years, making it his home for the bulk of his time in Austin.

#### **Travis Heights History: (From [www.historictravisheights.com](http://www.historictravisheights.com))**

“In 1913, General William Harwood Stacy and his sons began development of Travis Heights. Travis Heights was designed with a range of lot sizes, a street system of both grid and curvy streets, and deed restrictions that prohibit multifamily and commercial uses. Travis Heights was the most heavily promoted subdivision of its time. Stacy provided streetcar service from Travis Heights Boulevard to the Capitol for prospective buyers to see the area before the homes were even built. He also gave away Ford Touring cars as part of a promotional campaign.

The Stacys equipped the Heights with a few small lots to accommodate selected members of the working class, along with some of Austin’s first deed restrictions.

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"Travis Heights is restricted to good homes, good people, and strictly residence purposes," read one 1917 prospectus. "You are guaranteed against the encroachment of undesirable buildings, or disagreeable business or manufacturing enterprises. ... If you value your children's well being, get them a home of your own and get it quick ... as far away from business and the fever and sham of transient life as possible. Make it the center of their interests and pleasures, and the downtown attractions will never lay a strong hold upon them."

**EA Murchison** – (Resident from 1932-1934, then again from 1939 – 1959.)

Born in 1873 on a farm in Bastrop, Eugene Alexander Murchison lived a long and distinguished life, substantially contributing to the Austin community before his death at age 90. A rural school teacher, Spanish American War Vet, prominent grocer, church and civic leader, longest serving member of the Austin ISD school board, and Travis County Probation Officer, Mr. Murchison made an indelible mark on the Austin of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Murchison began his life of service early in Bastrop, when at the age of nineteen he took the job as school teacher in rural schools in Bastrop County for four years. The Spanish American War, where he served with the First Texas Volunteer Infantry.<sup>1</sup> In the army he began as a private and worked his way up to Sergeant. Upon returning, he worked in a general merchandise store in Del Valle, before moving to Austin in 1905 to become a partner in the grocery firm of Caldwell-Murchison-Lee. He managed the Murchison Rite Way grocery store at 1009 Congress until his retirement in 1935.

In 1919 he returned to his educator roots by joining the Austin School Board. This signified the start of the longest running tenure of any School Board member: a twenty-four year commitment to the education of Austin's youth. He served as Vice President for six years and president for seventeen years.<sup>2</sup> In this role he helped oversee the construction of several school buildings during a period of rapid growth in the Austin area. <sup>3</sup> These schools included: Becker, Zavala, Govalle, Travis Heights, Brykerwoods, Lee and Ridgetop Elementary, and Austin High School (now ACC Rio Grande). In addition, several additions and improvements were made to existing buildings.

During Murchison's tenure, many changes occurred in the school board. In 1919, Austin teachers met and formed the first union, which demanded higher pay. This necessitated a tax increase to cover the wages.<sup>4</sup> Also in 1919, diagnostic and achievement testing was started for

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<sup>1</sup> AF Biography, Austin History Center.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> "Murchison's Final Rites Set Thursday". Austin Statesman, October 7, 1964.

<sup>4</sup> Seventy Three Vital Years: Public Education in Austin. Austin Public Schools Publications, 1954, p. 30

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the district. In 1923, a \$500,000 bond was introduced to build a new junior high school, and the first PTA was started in the city<sup>5</sup>. In 1925, Austin High school (Now ACC Rio Grande) was dedicated. In 1926, Austin High School was granted five new affiliated credits, making that the highest number in the state. In 1930, the school board proposed a \$300,000 bond for new gymnasiums, playgrounds, two new buildings and additions on six buildings.<sup>6</sup> In 1930-31, the Great Depression began to impact the district, with the board imposing large budget cuts to the entire district. Kindergarten was eliminated and class sizes were increased.<sup>7</sup> In 1933 another \$300,000 bond passed and the Opportunity School was opened in Bickler Elementary, patterned after the Edison School in Cleveland, where students could learn at their own pace. In 1938, the Austin School district had by far the most funds available to it at one time, with the combination of a \$750,000 bond and a \$613,000 WPA grant.<sup>8</sup> In 1940, the board faced pressure to organize an independent school district. Also in this year, heated debates were waged on whether girls should be allowed to participate in band activities. This measure ultimately passed.<sup>9</sup> Late in the summer of 1940, the board authorized the superintendent to “throw the full resources of the school behind the war effort”, establishing ROTC, organizing scrap metal drives, and training young people for industrial jobs.<sup>10</sup>

In 1920, (the year he bought the lot in Travis Heights on which he would build his home) he took on the role of community mentor in the Boy Scouts as well, serving as the leader of Troop 2 (one of Austin's original Scout Troops) for 14 years. At the age of 40, he also began teaching Sunday School to a group of seventh grade boys at First Methodist Church. This tradition continued for almost 45 years. In his community work, Mr. Murchison strove to act as a strong and stable mentor to countless boys, resulting in a generation of young men counting him as a father figure.

His first wife Emma, the mother of his two sons, also contributed to the community by running a prominent boarding house called Murchison House located at 1010 Lavaca, before her death at age 57 in 1932.<sup>11</sup> It is rumored that Eugene built the home on Alta Vista for Emma, who died before she was able to live in it. Heartbroken, Eugene only lived in the home for two years, returning with his second wife Maggie, in 1939.

When he retired from the Grocery business in 1935, the drive to continue his community contributions stayed with Eugene. Transitioning professionally, he took up the position as Travis County Juvenile Probation officer, focusing in helping troubled young men get their lives back

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pg 32

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pg 33.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, pg 34.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid,pg 35.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pg. 35

<sup>10</sup> Ibid pg. 35

<sup>11</sup> The Austin American. Austin, TX, 27 Nov, 1932. Page 2.

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on track. He was charged with taking care of “so called bad boys”, and served in that position for 13 years.<sup>12</sup>

In 1963, Mr. Murchison received the Texas Heritage Foundation’s Distinguished Service Medal for his “distinguished and meritorious service in preserving the Texas Heritage”.<sup>13</sup> In 1962 he was presented with the Rotary Club’s Community Service Award, an organization he served in since 1919. He also received a Citation for Service from the Austin Public School System. In 1967, Murchison Middle School opened its doors, named for EA Murchison in honor of his significant contribution to the education of Austin’s youth.

EA Murchison died on October 6, 1964. At Murchison’s Funeral, Dr. Irby Carruth, superintendent of Austin Schools said Murchison “has helped raise the citizenship level of the city through the work he has done.”<sup>14</sup>

#### **Earl Boyd:**

Resident, 1935-1938

During the brief period after the death of Murchison’s first wife, Earl Boyd lived in the house on Alta Vista. Earl was a prominent local businessman, serving as the then President, and later manager of the French Boot Shop, a popular women’s shoe store on Congress Avenue.

#### **Thomas Fielding Cooke Biography:**

(Resident from 1984- present)

Thomas Cooke is Chairman, Chief Executive Officer, and Founder of Saratoga Resources, Inc. Mr. Cooke has 30 years executive experience as an Independent Oil and Gas Producer. His many accomplishments include the founding of a wholly owned company, Texas Petrochem, Inc. (TPI) in 1987.

In 1967, Mr. Cooke entered Texas Tech University on an athletic scholarship. While attending the university, he started a retail boutique in 1969. That business grew to four different retail businesses within the first 18 months and was sold in 1971. He has started or acquired over 25 companies in various industries in his career. He was credited in swinging several key votes that contributed to the ultimate ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Mr. Cooke chaired the Committee on North American Energy Issues for the Texas Independent Producers and Royalty Owners Association and Chaired the Energy Advisory Board on Legal Reform to the Governor of Louisiana.

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<sup>12</sup> “Boys Given Old Lesson”, Anita Brewer, Austin Statesman, 3/4/58

<sup>13</sup> Austin Statesman, 7/25/63

<sup>14</sup> Austin Statesman, July 1963.

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Mr. Cooke is a direct descendant of Robert Fielding Cooke, a revolutionary war officer who was with General Washington at Valley Forge. After the Civil War, James Burch Cooke, a Colonel in the Confederate army and Justice on the Supreme Court of Tennessee, moved the Cooke family to Texas.

Mr. Cooke has been active in the Austin Community, and was a founding member and chairman of the board of Save Town Lake in 2007, an organization dedicated to the preservation of Lady Bird Lake, formerly known as Town Lake.

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**Architectural Description:**

Murchison house is a 2,800 square foot, two story Tudor Revival house with a steeply pitched cross gable roof featuring a central shed dormer. The roof material is slate. The exterior features half-timber details on the second story gables, with natural ashler limestone cladding the first story. It features an asymmetrical façade, with a slightly off-center front porch, flanked by timber columns. Three sets of asymmetrical windows punctuate the front elevation, with a large bay window (not original) on the southern bay, triple large six over six double hung windows in the central bay, and a smaller set of double hung six over six windows on the northern bay.

Set back from the main façade on the north side is a gabled wing. On the south side is the current carport, an addition from 1982.

The large .42 acre sloping site features a pool and pool house in the backyard, and several heritage oaks in the back and front yard. The front yard features flag stone steps and driveways, and a stone wall.

Sited north east of the house is the original two car garage, slightly below the grade of the house. Originally this garage was topped with a greenhouse, but a large storm in 1990 felled a tree onto it, and it was removed.

Like many houses constructed in Travis Heights at that time, this house features materials salvaged from another historic building, the limestone used to construct the house came from the Whitis Mansion, located on West 27<sup>th</sup> street, which served as a girls school until it was demolished to make way for the Scottish Rite Dormitory. Designed by his son, H.L. Murchison, a Houston architect, the house is a fine example of Tudor Revival.

**Changes to the home include:**

The large bay window on the front elevation is not original, but was replaced most likely in the 1950's/1960's.

Carport on south elevation added in 1982.

Pool and Pool House added in 1987.

Rear porch fully enclosed in 1992. Original stone exterior wall is visible on the interior.

French doors added as exit to second floor roof above rear porch addition in 1992.

Original wood windows throughout, with a possible historic era replacement of the large bay window on the front elevation.

Current slate roof was installed in 2013. Original roof was cedar shake.

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*List Deeds chronologically, beginning with earliest transaction first and proceeding through present ownership. The first transaction listed should date at least back to when the original builder of any historic structures on the site first acquired the property (i.e., should pre-date the construction of any buildings/structures on the site). Please use the format delineated below.*

*For each transaction please include: name of Grantor/Grantee, date of transaction, legal description involved, price, and volume/page number of deed records. If there is a mechanic's lien please copy the entire document.*

Grantor: Citizens Loan and Investment Company  
Grantee: Eugene Murchison  
April 3, 1920

Vol. 322, pp. 22

Amount: \$307, Two notes for the sum of Two Hundred and eighty-six 50/100 (\$286.50) Dollars each, payable respectively one and two years after date.  
Description: Lots Number Eleven (11) and Twelve (12) in Block Number Three(3). \* It is agreed that minimum cost of residence to be erected on lot herein is \$6000.00.

Vol. 2107, pp. 504-505

Grantor: Eugene A. Murchison, Maggie A Murchison, Herman L. Murchison, Rachel Murchison, Eugene A. Murchison Jr., Jewel Murchison  
Grantee: Roy E. Seekatz  
September 10, 1959  
Amount: \$18,000  
Description: "Lots Nos. Eleven (11) and Twelve (12) in Block No. Three (3) in Travis Heights Addition, in said City of Austin, Travis County, Texas according to the map of plat or said addition recorded in Vol. 3, Page 15, of the Travis County Plat Records."

Vol. 2371, pp. 419-420

Grantor: Elizabeth Seekatz

Grantee: VJ Boutrou

Date: October 4, 1961

Amount: \$30,000

Desc: Lots Nos. Eleven (11) and Twelve (12) in Block No. Three (3) in Travis Heights, the E-25' of lot 23 and 24.

Grantor: V. J. Boutroue

Vol. 8688, pp. 624-625

Grantee: Thomas Cooke, June Cooke

Date: June 29, 1984

Amount: \$315,000

Desc: Lots 11 and 12, the East twenty-five feet (25') of Lots 23 and 24 and common adjacent 15 foot (15') alley vacated by a resolution recorded in Volume 509, Page 612 of the Deed records of Travis County, Texas. All situated within Block 3, Travis Heights Subdivision, a Subdivision of record in Plat Book 3, Page 15 of the Plat Records of Travis County

1932-1934	Murchison EA (Emma) Rite-Way Food Stores	City Directories
1935-1938	Boyd E.M. (Mazie) President, French Boot Shop	City Directories
1939-1959	Murchison EA (Maggie) County and City Probation Officer	City Directories
1960-1961	Seekatz, Eliza, Mrs. (Secretary: Medical Dental Hospital, Burhl	City Directories
1962- 1982	Boutrove, Vic J. Jr (Frances) Security Life National Insurance	City Directories
1983 - 1986	Vacant	City Directories
1987	Springer, Gary (Counselor)	City Directories
1988 - Present	Cooke, Thomas (June)	City Directories