

# CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

## PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** Henry Brashear Building

**OWNERS:** FKM Partnership, Ltd., Kenneth B. Meyer

**APPLICANTS:** Same as above

**LOCATION:** 910 Prairie Avenue – Main Street Market Square  
Historic District

**30-DAY HEARING NOTICE:** N/A

**AGENDA ITEM:** IV.a

**HPO FILE NO:** 09PL76

**DATE ACCEPTED:** Jan-22-09

**HAHC HEARING:** Feb-12-09

**PC HEARING:** Feb-19-09

### SITE INFORMATION

The west 25 feet of Lot 11, Block 57, SSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is a three-story commercial building.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Henry Brashear Building, located at 910 Prairie Avenue, is contained within the boundary of the Main Street Market Square National Register and City of Houston Historic District. The historic district of commercial buildings and sites constitutes Houston's largest, most nearly intact accumulation of physical resources representing the city's civic and commercial past. The surviving architecture documents the episodes of development which occurred between 1859 and the building and real estate boom of the 1920s, the half century when Houston emerged from relative obscurity to become the largest city in the southern United States.

The Henry Brashear Building was built in 1882 and was designed by Eugene T. Heiner, one of Houston's leading architects of the late nineteenth century. He took his early training in Chicago from William LeBaron Jenney, the father of the American skyscraper. Although Heiner designed numerous buildings in Texas, including almost 40 courthouses and jails, few of his buildings survive in Houston. A few important Houston buildings designed by Heiner include: the Houston Cotton Exchange Building, the W. L. Foley Dry Goods Building, and the Sweeney and Coombs Building, all of which, including the Henry Brashear Building, are located within the Main Street Market Square Historic District and are "contributing" to the historic district. The Henry Brashear Building was built for Henry Brashear, judge of the District Criminal Court and vice-president of the Texas National Bank. Henry was the son of Isaac Wright Brashear and Sarah Brashear, who as a widow, sold the 1,765 acres to the Omaha and South Texas Land Company in 1891 which developed Houston Heights, the first planned industrial suburb of Houston.

The Henry Brashear building is one of Houston's best examples of a Victorian commercial building and one of few surviving examples of Eugene Heiner. The building has been featured in *The Last of the Past: Houston Architecture 1847-1915* (1981); *Houston Architectural Survey* (1980); and *Houston Architectural Guide* (1990). The Henry Brashear Building meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6, is a contributing structure to the Main Street Market Square National Register Historic District, and was built before 1905 - all considerations for Protected Landmark designation.

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## HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

### *Houston*

The town of Houston was platted in the fall of 1836 by the surveyors: Gail Borden (1801-1874), Thomas H. Borden (1804-1877), and Moses Lapham (1808-1838). This work was done for two investors who came to Texas from upstate New York in 1832—the brothers, Augustus C. (1806-1864) and John K. Allen (1819-1838). The town consisted of sixty-two numbered blocks, most of them two-hundred fifty square feet, located near the southeast corner of the John Austin league which the Allen brothers had acquired in August 1836. The town site was wedged into a shallow bend on the south bank of Buffalo Bayou opposite its confluence with White Oak Bayou, which the Allen brothers had determined was the head of tidewater and navigation on Buffalo Bayou. Consequently, they promoted their new town, named after General Sam Houston who had recently won the Battle of San Jacinto nearby, as the logical point of transshipment between the coast and the vast interior of the new Republic of Texas.

The Allen brothers were successful in persuading the Texas Congress to name Houston as the provisional seat of government in November 1836. One year after the Allen brothers had acquired their league, the town of Houston was chartered. Between 1836 and 1838, the Allen brothers considerably expanded the limits of the town site to the south, the east, and across Buffalo Bayou to the north. During the ensuing two decades, Houston would continue to expand as a market town and as the state's first railroad center. A wave of prosperity in the late 1850s was attended by the construction of the Houston and Texas Central Railway, as well as the Galveston, Houston and Henderson Railway. Houston's situation was enhanced as a point of transshipment between the coast and the interior lands of the Brazos and Colorado River valleys. This prosperity encouraged the replacement of wooden commercial buildings in Houston with more substantial masonry ones.

After the Civil War ended in 1865, Houston renewed its role as a growing regional center of trade and finance. Continuing railroad construction permitted its wholesale merchants to expand into new territories. Shallow-draft boat traffic on Buffalo Bayou allowed Houston to represent itself as a port, although this claim often provoked the amusement of visitors. In the postwar boom, which markedly influenced most Southern cities, long overdue public improvements were commenced in Houston. A brick courthouse for Harris County, begun in 1860, was completed after the war. T. H. Scanlan, the controversial Reconstruction Mayor of Houston between 1870 and 1873, built a permanent City Hall and Market House in Market Square in 1873, which far surpassed any municipal building in the state. During the late 1860s and early 1870s, the wooden buildings on the block fronts surrounding Market Square were replaced by two-story masonry buildings housing the establishments of grocers, bakers, butchers, confectioners, liquor dealers, and other businesses who would derive advantage from their proximity to the public market.

After the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Houston experienced another episode of intensive growth and development. Continuing expansion of railroad connections, the discovery of oil, and the construction of a deep-draught ship channel were factors in this development. Architecturally, this growth was reflected in a new surge of construction in the lower downtown area. Following World War I, the building boom of the 1920s eclipsed all previous episodes of growth and expansion in Houston. During that decade Houston moved from the position of third largest city in Texas to that of the largest city in the South as its population more than doubled in size. Houston had developed an economic maturity that had no rival in the South. It had developed a superior transportation system that became a pipeline to the world and

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thus to its vast resources. Houston's leaders had learned early on that its success would depend on transportation, and they focused on the development of a vast network of railroads and the Port of Houston. Although the city had always prospered and grown, it was on the verge of experiencing phenomenal growth in population and a real estate boom the likes of which it had never seen before. The real estate boom applied not only to Houston's business houses but to its neighborhoods and residential housing.

### *Main Street/Market Square*

The Henry Brashear Building is located within the boundaries of the Main Street Market Square Historic District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places in July 1983, as well as the City of Houston Main Street Market Square Historic District designated by City Council on March 5, 1997. The building is classified as "contributing" to both historic districts. These historic districts of commercial buildings and sites constitute Houston's largest, most nearly intact accumulation of physical resources representing the City's civic and commercial past. The surviving architecture documents the episodes of development which occurred between 1859, and the building and real estate boom of the 1920's, the half century when Houston emerged from relative obscurity to become the largest city in the southern United States.

The Main Street Market Square Historic District is located on the south bank of Buffalo Bayou between Milam and San Jacinto streets. The buildings within this district range from modest, mid-nineteenth-century brick commercial buildings to a number of small but ornately detailed High Victorian commercial buildings, and include a fine selection of multistory public, bank, and office buildings inspired by the Ecole des Beaux Arts, dating from the first three decades of the twentieth century. Completing this architectural array are several modernistically detailed commercial buildings of the early 1930s. Most of these buildings continue in use as either office or retail establishments. The district represents one of the state's best concentrations of late nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial and public structures.

Fifty-two buildings and one structure (Main Street Viaduct) contribute to the architectural and historical significance of this district. Allen's Landing and Market Square (both public parks) are two of the most historic sites in Houston. Twenty-four of the fifty-two buildings were constructed between 1858 and 1900. The remaining buildings date from 1901 to 1935. Thirty-two buildings were constructed to serve primarily as stores, eleven to serve primarily as office buildings, four to serve as warehouses or large wholesale stores, and two each to serve as banks and motion picture theaters.

### *910 Prairie Avenue*

The Henry Brashear Building at 910 Prairie Avenue was built in 1882 and was designed by architect, Eugene T. Heiner. It is considered one of Houston's best examples of a Victorian commercial building. The building once housed a druggist, a pharmacy, jewelers, and residential tenants. Erwin Erlenmeyer, druggist, was an early, and perhaps first tenant. When Brashear sold the building in 1890 to Charles Bente, club rooms occupied the upper floors. Following its sale to Joseph Meyer in 1905, the building was leased to Gorman and McAughan, jewelers. The ground floor was occupied by the jewelers for 45 years between 1905 and 1950. After Gorman's moved out, a children's clothing store occupied the same space for about five years, to be followed by Swift One Hour Dry Cleaning. In 1946, it was sub-leased to the Columbia Dry Goods Company, whose main store occupied the Travis-Prairie corner where the two-story 1879 building of Reichardt had stood for many years. The two upper floors were used for an

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extended period of time for storage. The two floors above the commercial space on the street level were leased for many years as furnished rooms. In the past decade, the building has been occupied by restaurants.

The Henry Brashear Building is one of Houston's best examples of a Victorian-era commercial building, and one of the few surviving examples designed by Eugene T. Heiner. The building has been identified as significant in several authoritative surveys, including: *The Last of the Past: Houston Architecture 1847-1915* (1981); *Houston Architectural Survey* (1980); and *AIA Houston Architectural Guide* (1990/1999).

### *Eugene Thomas Heiner*

The architect of the Henry Brashear Building, Eugene T. Heiner, was born in New York City on August 20, 1852. According to research conducted by Randy Pace in Chicago, Illinois, including the Chicago Census Report, 1871, Eugene T. Heiner apprenticed as a draughtsman in the Chicago architectural firm of William LeBaron Jenney. Heiner was living with his father, Nicholas Heiner, at 179 N. Wells in the Twentieth Ward. The firm of Jenney, Schermerhorn and Bogart was located at 73 Clark Street, Chicago. They were listed as architects and civil engineers. Heiner gained valuable training as did many other architects – all of whom would become noteworthy architects later in life, as they had all been trained under Louis Y. Schermerhorn and John Bogart, both very prominent civil engineers, as well as Jenney, who as an architect is recognized as the father of the American skyscraper. At that time, Chicago was booming with construction as it had just recovered from the great fire of 1871. The city included 54 architects and superintendents as well as 10 Civil Engineers. Chicago was the fourth largest city with a population of 334,270 compared to Galveston and San Antonio with a population of 13, 818 and 12, 256 respectively.

Heiner then relocated to Terre Haute, Indiana with a population of 16,103 where he took further training from Josse A. Vrydagh (1833-1895), whose offices were located at 925 South Seventh Street, Terre Haute. Vrydagh, a native of Belgium, was one of the most notable architects in the Mid-West had studied at the Belgium Louvain School of Arts for seven years. He originally immigrated to Dallas, Texas with the Phalansterian Colony, and then to New Orleans, Decatur (Illinois) and Cincinnati, but then returned to Europe. He came back to the United States in 1866 where he settled in Terre Haute to practice architecture. In 1870 Vrydagh was elected a fellow of the American Institute of Architects. In 1874, with fifty architects, including his associate, Eugene T. Heiner, they submitted competition drawings for the Centennial buildings in Philadelphia, for which Vrydagh and Heiner were awarded one of the ten premiums for the 1876 Philadelphia Exposition.

Eugene T. Heiner left Terre Haute and moved to Dallas, Texas in 1877. He was probably encouraged by Vrydagh to move there, as Vrydagh had lived there where he designed and built the St. Nicholas Hotel, the “finest structure in the city.” Heiner met his wife, Viola Isenhour, while living in Dallas in 1878. Heiner’s first known Texas commission was for the jail in Galveston, Texas in 1877. He would eventually move to Houston in 1878, where he established his practice. Heiner advertised his practice, and according to a full page advertisement in the 1884 Houston City Directory, he had expertise in “large and difficult building construction,” the old Houston Cotton Exchange being a notable, surviving example (City of Houston Landmark; National Register of Historic Places).

Heiner became known as a Texas architect of note, and was one of the nationally recognized architects who was hired as a consultant for the evaluation of the dome being constructed at the Texas State

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Capitol in Austin. According to the New York Times of December 10, 1887, R. M. Harrod of New Orleans, Nicholas Clayton of Galveston and Eugene Heiner of Houston were selected as expert architects to investigate the construction. Upon their report to the Texas Governor and Capitol Board, they concluded that the charges of defective construction and use of improper materials were false, and that the building was being constructed in accordance with the plans and specifications. However, they recommended a discontinuance of the brick material and the substitution of iron braces for the dome. They also stated that they were “satisfied with everything and with the few changes they suggested, they think the building will be one of the most substantial and beautiful on the continent.”

Heiner designed many of the most important buildings in Houston at the time, including the 1881 Henry Brashear Building. Although Heiner designed numerous buildings in Texas, including almost 40 courthouses and jails, few of his buildings survive in Houston. Heiner's major commercial buildings include the Leon and H. Blum Building (1879) and the Kauffman and Runge Building (1882), both in Galveston. His surviving works in Houston include the Cotton Exchange Building (1884), the W. L. Foley Dry Goods Building (1889; City Landmark; National Register), and the Sweeney & Coombs Building (1890; City Landmark; National Register), which is the most similar in design to the Brashear Building. Heiner also designed large private houses in Houston for the banker Charles S. House and the investor Thomas H. Scanlan. Many of Heiner's designs, including the Lavaca County Courthouse (1897) and the Gonzales County Jail (1878), have been listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Heiner's buildings of the 1870s and 1880s often employed detail typical of American High Victorian-era architecture. In the late 1880s he occasionally employed the Richardsonian Romanesque style without abandoning certain strong High Victorian inclinations. Heiner was a founding member of the Texas State Association of Architects, organized in 1886. Heiner and his wife, Viola Isenhour had four daughters. His wife, Viola died in Houston in 1889 from complications in childbirth. Heiner died in Houston on April 26, 1901 and was buried in Glenwood Cemetery on Washington Avenue. Eugene Thomas Heiner's obituary probably best described the man and his work:

“Mr. Heiner was a man of a bright, sunny temperament and by his congenial nature he made friends of all with whom he came in contact. He was shrewd and energetic in business and in his calling as an architect, he leaves probably more public buildings in Texas as monuments to his memory than any other architect in the State.”

### *Henry Brashear*

Henry Brashear invested \$8,500 for the construction of the building at 910 Prairie Avenue.<sup>1</sup> At the time, the Brashear estate had recently been settled, giving Henry the capital to invest in the building. Henry Brashear was a son of Isaac Wright Brashear and Sarah Brashear, who as a widow, sold the 1,765 acres to the Omaha and South Texas Land Company (OSTL) in 1891. The OSTL developed Houston Heights, the first planned industrial suburb of Houston in 1891. Henry Brashear was a judge of the District Criminal Court and later became the vice-president of the Texas National Bank.<sup>2</sup> His brother, William, was commander in the Texas Navy and presided over the dismantling of the first navy of the Republic

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<sup>1</sup> William Scott Field, *The Last of the Past: Houston Architecture 1847-1915*. Report prepared for The Greater Houston Preservation Alliance and The Harris County Heritage Society, 1981.

<sup>2</sup> Southwest Center for Urban Research, *Houston Architectural Survey*, 1980.

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of Texas.<sup>3</sup> Another brother, Sam Brashear, was mayor of Houston (1898-1900), who first launched Houston in creating a substantial park system in 1899 by purchasing sixteen acres on either side of Buffalo Bayou for a municipal park. The three tracts included the old Samuel W. Young brickyard on the north bank; the Kellum-Noble House and grounds and the adjoining nursery of Mrs. Sarah Byers on the south bank, which became known as Sam Houston Park (City of Houston Protected Landmark).

### ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The Henry Brashear building is one of Houston's best examples of a Victorian-era commercial building. It is a three-story masonry brick building containing about 2,500 square feet per floor. The east, west and south walls are brick construction supported by spread brick footings. The north elevation features an ornate sheet metal cornice and cast stone and stucco façade. It is very ornate in its facade decoration and is heavily plastered. A sheet metal entablature and cornice, accentuated by a central broken pediment and urn, reach above the roofline. The structure has a pitched roof over a portion of it which is hidden behind the ornate pediment. The third floor is heavily decorated over the entire surface with subtle pattern changes such as segmental-arch bays over windows with flattened arches. On the second floor are reticulated and smooth grids between three round-arch windows and fluted Corinthian pilasters upholding heavily molded voussiors and prominent keystones. The ground floor has three ornate archways supported by four cast iron columns with double doors tucked in a small covered area at each archway. Each floor has heart pine joists supporting the floor above. Located at the rear of the building is the original water closet tower, most likely the oldest and last remaining one of its kind in Houston.<sup>4</sup> The building is referred to by Stephen Fox as “a ‘constructive’ deconstruction of Renaissance classicism.”<sup>5</sup>

The Brashear Building was fully restored in 1990 by owner, Kenny Meyer and tenant, Carter and Cooley Company Deli. The principals of the deli were Neil M. Sackheim and Randy Pace, who managed the entire restoration project. Architect, Guy Hagstette, completed the documentation required for the Federal Tax Credit Project.

The restoration project was also the recipient of a Community Development Block Grant from the City of Houston in 1990, since the use of the building as a restaurant created needed jobs in the Downtown Historic District. Minnette Boesel, who was the Main Street Market Square Historic District director for the National Trust Historic District Main Street program of the Texas Historical Commission, helped to facilitate the acquisition of the grant. The building had sat vacant for many years, and the roof had been leaking for many years as well. The interior, with its 14 foot ceilings, was fully restored for use as a restaurant and to meet fire and safety codes accordingly. The original wood floors were restored as well. The interior staircase had been removed, which was reconstructed using an 1882 Victorian-era newel post and wood railing that had been salvaged from a demolished historic house in Galveston. The first floor exterior façade had been drastically altered when the transoms and storefront had been removed. The façade had been clad with black carrara glass, and a metal fire escape was applied to the upper two floors. The storefront was restored including the three arched openings. Walls were reconstructed with plywood/wood framing and clad with metal lath to which stucco was applied to match the existing

<sup>3</sup> Handbook of Texas Online, *William C. Brashear*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/BB/fbr24.html>, accessed February 2, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Downtown Historic District, *Report on Buildings within the Historic District*. 1996.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Fox, *Houston Architectural Guide* (Houston: The American Institute of Architects/Houston Chapter and Herring Press, 1990), p.57.

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stucco on the building. Stucco hoods, keystones, and quoins were fabricated to match existing stucco on the building where damaged or missing. Three inoperable arched transom windows were installed, as were three sets of wood, storefront doors consisting of a wood panel below an elongated glass light. The sheet metal cornice was repaired to match the existing cornice.

The restoration project was the recipient of the Texas Downtown Association Award for Best Texas Store Interior in 1990 as well as a Good Brick Award from the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance in 1992.

An historic drawing of the building at 912 Prairie, the building to the east, was later discovered which showed the original canopy configuration for that building which has been subsequently restored in accordance with the archival documentation. The drawing also showed part of the building at 910 Prairie, which also showed its original canopy configuration. The drawing was published in Morrison's *Houston* in 1891. The original canopy of the building at 910 Prairie Avenue, which shaded the sidewalk, was supported by four, round metal posts spaced evenly across the facade. The canopy roof was not constructed for public access and was not skirted with any type of balustrade railing. The canopy was only constructed to shade the building entry. In 1997, a certificate of appropriateness application was submitted by Solero Restaurant, the tenant at the time, to install the canopy but with a metal stick railing. It was also proposed that the original second floor windows be removed and replaced with paired doors, hinged on each side, that would resemble the original windows. However, since it was inappropriate to remove the original windows and to construct a canopy with a railing, when none had existed before, the COA was denied by the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission (HAHC). Furthermore, any COA denied by the HAHC would have prevented the tenant from obtaining an encroachment agreement over the public sidewalk from Finance and Administration Department, City of Houston.

*The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Randy Pace and Courtney Spillane, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.*

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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Houston Post, various years including 1901.

Southwest Center for Urban Research, *Houston Architectural Survey*, 1980, Vol VI, p. 1246-1247.



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**AND**

- (9) If less than 50 years old, or proposed historic district containing a majority of buildings, structures, or objects that are less than 50 years old, whether the building, structure, object, site, or area is of extraordinary importance to the city, state or nation for reasons not based on age (Sec. 33-224(b).

**OR**

- The property was constructed before 1905 (Sec. 33-229(a)(2);

**OR**

- The property is listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places or designated as a “contributing structure” in an historic district listed in the National Register of Historic Places (Sec. 33-229(a)(3);

**OR**

- The property is recognized by the State of Texas as a Recorded State Historical Landmark (Sec. 33-229(a)(4).

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Houston Planning Commission accept the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommend to City Council the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of the Henry Brashear Building at 910 Prairie Avenue.

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EXHIBIT A  
HENRY BRASHEAR BUILDING  
910 PRAIRIE AVENUE



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## EXHIBIT B SITE LOCATION MAP

HENRY BRASHEAR BUILDING  
910 PRAIRIE AVENUE  
NOT TO SCALE

