

# LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK/SITE NAME:** The Christ Church Cathedral Complex  
**OWNER:** Christ Church Cathedral  
**APPLICANT:** Christ Church Cathedral  
**LOCATION:** 1117 Texas Avenue  
**30-DAY HEARING NOTICE:** 02/11/97

**AGENDA ITEM:** IIc  
**PC MEETING DATE:** 04/03/97  
**HPO FILE NO.:** 97LD19  
**DATE ACCEPTED:** 01/16/97  
**HAHC HEARING DATE:** 03/13/97

**SITE INFORMATION:**

Lots 1, 2, 3, 4, 11, 12 and parts of Lots 9 and 10, being the western portion of Block 55, SSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The buildings on the site consist of a dark, red brick Cathedral and Guild Hall and two compatible auxiliary, administration and educational buildings.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark Designation

**HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:**

The Christ Church Cathedral was individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places on June 15, 1979 under criterion "A" and "C" (Reference No. 79002957). Previously, it was designated a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark by the Texas Historical Commission in 1972.

Christ Church is the oldest Episcopal parish in Houston and now cathedral church of the Diocese of Texas. It has occupied this site since 1843. Silas McBee, a commissioner of endowments at the University of the South, an ecclesiologist and amateur architect was assisted by J. Arthur Tempest, in designing the new cathedral in 1893. McBee was an Episcopal layman from Sewanee, Tennessee, with strong religious convictions. He concerned himself with all facets of his religion, ranging from Christian philosophy to architecture. Gothic Revival, McBee believed, most adequately expressed the composition, tone, and proportions for religious architecture, and he incorporated this style into the design of Christ Church. The new cathedral replaced the earlier one (built 1859) which needed to be demolished due to structural defects. The east wall of the older cathedral collapsed while the Guild Hall was being constructed (1892) of which Tempest was the designer. Tempest, who came to Houston from Toronto, Canada in 1891, became a prominent Houston architect who designed many important buildings in Houston, including the High School on Caroline and Sweeney & Coombs Opera House. He later married the daughter of Benjamin Andrew Rogers, who was rector of the cathedral during the construction period. Tempest, an accomplished vocalist, was a member of the church choir.

According to Stephen Fox's "Houston Architectural Guide," "the cathedral and adjoining guild hall possesses neither the intensity of High Victorian Gothic architecture nor the archeological precision of the emerging neo-Gothic movement. Yet the building's exceptional molded brickwork, its heavy, stepped, sandstone-capped parapets, and the firmly planted corner tower possess a compelling materiality that compensates for any deficiencies of composition or proportion. The nave is quite broad; consequently, the side-span, darkly-stained timber trusses dominate the interior. The art glass windows are characteristic of the turn of the century. The Jeanette I. Ennis memorial window (1898), on the Fannin Street side of the nave next to the transept bay, is the one authenticated installation by Tiffany Studios in Houston."

The guild hall, behind the arched cloister bays, contains the austere, exquisitely finished Golding Memorial Chapel (1939, William War Watkin). At the corner of Texas and San Jacinto is the Latham Memorial Hall (1952, Maurice J. Sullivan). The cathedral close, which opens onto Texas Avenue behind a traditional iron fence

and fringe of palm trees (a landscape feature essential to English-inspired Victorian buildings in hot, humid climates), is one of the most delightful outdoor spaces downtown.

**RESTORATION HISTORY/CURRENT CONDITION:**

A fire in 1938 destroyed much of the east wing of the cathedral and chancel. William Ward Watkin was selected as the architect to restore the damaged portion including the ornate rood screen and new altar. Watkin's work was not limited to rebuilding that section of the church. He also designed the Golding Chapel, located in a separate, but connected, building between the church and guild hall. This chapel displays undecorated and pilastered walls. The chapel has considerable height (31 feet) in proportion to its relatively small width (22 feet). The cathedral has remained virtually unaltered since its completion. In 1952, Maurice J. Sullivan designed Latham Memorial Hall and in 1962 John H. Freeman, Jr., designed Cleveland Hall, which extends south from the south end of the adjacent Guild Hall and as a result, completes the "U" shape of the buildings around the close. These buildings, at the corner of Texas and San Jacinto, are brown-red brick buildings, similar in color to the Cathedral and Guild Hall. They are exceptionally compatible to the architectural composition of the complex. The cathedral, guild hall, Golding Chapel, Latham Memorial Building and Cleveland Hall are listed in the National Register of Historic Places and are included in the landmark designation application.

In 1990, Ray Bailey Architects were hired to replace a parking garage when purchased by the church with the Jones Hall Building, an administration/educational improvement which is located on the northwest corner of the block. Although it is compatible with the other historic buildings, it is not part of the landmark application due to its recent construction date. At that time, the Guild Hall was enlarged to become the Great Hall and the adjacent commercial kitchen was remodeled. A Gallery (passageway) was created to move from the Bishop's courtyard to the new Jones Hall Building and in it has been created a columbarium. The east wall of the Gallery is the west wall of Golding Chapel. Structural support was added to the wall to meet specifications during the remodeling of the Guild Hall. In addition, the floor of the chapel was re-laid. There have been no structural changes to the historic Cathedral which underwent a complete restoration in 1995. Clovis Heimsath and V Associates of Austin, Texas were the restoration architects and Tellepsen Corporation was the contractor. Christ Church Cathedral owns the entire block, including a building located on the northeast corner of the block. While it is not compatible with the architectural composition of the other buildings, it is under long term lease and therefore, there are no immediate plans for remodeling the exterior.

**APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION.....:**

**Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation of a Landmark.**

(a) The HAHC and the commission, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider one or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the type of designation:

- |          |                      |           |                             |
|----------|----------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|
| <b>S</b> | <b>D</b>             | <b>NA</b> |                             |
| <b>S</b> | <b>S - satisfies</b> |           | <b>D - does not satisfy</b> |
|          |                      |           | <b>NA - not applicable</b>  |
- (1) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area possesses character, interest or value as a visible reminder of the development, heritage, and cultural and ethnic diversity of the city, state, or nation;
- (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;

- (3) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is identified with a person who, or group or event that, contributed significantly to the cultural or historical development of the city, state, or nation;
- (4) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area exemplify a particular architectural style or building type important to the city;
- (5) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area are the best remaining examples of an architectural style or building type in a neighborhood;
- (6) Whether the building, structure, object or site or the buildings, structures, objects or sites within the area are identified as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, state, or nation;
- (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present;
- (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride.

**HAHC RECOMMENDATION:**

At a public hearing on March 13, 1997, the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission determined that the application complied with criteria found in the Historic Preservation Ordinance, and recommended that the Planning Commission accepts the recommendation of the HAHC and forward it to City Council for the designation of the Christ Church Cathedral Complex as a landmark to the Planning Commission.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:** None

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** That the Planning Commission accepts the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and forward it to City Council for designation of the Christ Church Cathedral Complex as a Landmark of the City of Houston.

Site Location Map  
The Christ Church Cathedral Complex  
1117 Texas Avenue  
Not to scale

