

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME: The Bill Mraz Dance Hall

OWNER: Betty Mraz, Stephanie Janda, Julie Davis,

Elizabeth Mraz, Eugene H. Mraz, II

APPLICANT: Owner

LOCATION: 835 West 34th Street

HEARING NOTICE: Jan-15-98

AGENDA ITEM: IIb

P.C. MEETING DATE: Mar-05-98

HPO FILE NO.: 98L043

DATE ACCEPTED: Jan-02-98

HAHC HEARING DATE: 02-12-98

SITE INFORMATION

Part of a certain tract of land described in Volume 1724, Page 389 of the Deed Records of Harris County, Texas, including only Lot 2, Acre Square Addition, a subdivision in the W. P. Morton Survey, and Tract 21, being part of a 25 acre tract of land in the W. P. Morton Survey, described as the 1st Tract in Volume Z, Page 403 of the Deed Records of Harris County, Texas, being in the City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a large dance hall building and other adjacent, auxiliary buildings.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation for Bill Mraz Dance Hall, including buildings and structures (shown as numbers 1 through 6 on attached plan)

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The site of the Bill Mraz Dance Hall is pending being listed in the National Register of Historic Places (January 1998). The dance hall, dance hall additions and adjacent buildings, which include a brick garage-apartment and a Bar-B-Q pit building, were constructed by Bill Mraz from 1948 to 1954. Not only did the site serve as a popular place for large numbers of people to gather and be entertained, but the site was created by Mraz as an institution which became a center to which the people of Czech and German heritage congregated. Here, these two groups of people were able to gather and socialize and keep their heritage, culture and traditions alive and pass them on to future, younger generations who also accompanied their parents to the site. Moreover, other people who came to the dance hall were introduced to the Czech and German culture and came away more knowledgeable about these people and their way of life. The most significant buildings on the site are the large dance hall building with additions and the buildings which housed the Bar-B-Q pit and living quarters of Mr. Mraz, which include the proposed landmarks (shown on the attached site plan as 1-6). All other buildings on the site are directly related to the development of the site as an entertainment hub as well as business and residential compound of the Mraz family, but are not part of the landmark designation application.

Originally Bill Mraz came from Moulton, a Czech farming community in South Central Texas. He came to Houston looking for business opportunities and a better way of life. He found work in Houston Heights as a brick layer and worked at that trade during the day. Many of the homes he constructed in Houston Heights and elsewhere are still standing today. At an early age, he discovered his talent for playing the accordion. He started his musical career in the evenings playing the accordion with his brother, Mills Mraz, at various private parties and at people's homes. In 1945 he was able to purchase an existing dance hall, known as Miller's Hall, which was located across 34th Street from the existing hall today. He acquired the present site of the dance hall in 1947 and constructed a larger facility to accommodate the ever-growing larger crowds that gathered to hear Bill's own house band as well as guest bands that came from all over the United States to entertain the crowds. The new dance hall was adjacent to a building that housed the Bar-B-Q pit and catering facility. It was constructed shortly after the dance hall and opened in 1948.

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Because Mraz was so successful at the old Miller's Hall, he named the new dance hall after himself. The dance hall became the social hub not only for the large number of Czech families in the Houston area but also for all people who came for the special, family oriented style entertainment. The dance hall was also used for many political as well as corporate gatherings in addition to numerous private family events. Political figures such as Mayor Fred Hofheinz and Mayor Louie Welch held their campaign fund raisers at the dance hall. The dance hall also hosted different types of entertainment such as square dancing, radio shows and polka jamborees.

There are multiple buildings and structures included on the site which are shown as buildings and structures (1 through 14). However, only the following buildings are proposed for landmark designation: The Bill Mraz Dance Hall (1), constructed in 1948, is located on Lot 2 and Tract 21 which is part of a larger tract. The foundation is comprised of 260, 8" x 16" cinder blocks. The framing for the building is composed of steel I-beams in the walls and a steel truss to support the gable on hip roof. Steel I-beams are set in concrete piers. The building itself rests on a foundation of 4" x 6" timbers joists. The main entrance is comprised of double 6-panel, wood doors. A gable-front porch is constructed at the east facade and is supported by three, square wood posts. A side door (south elevation) composed of a pair of slab wood doors, was constructed as a band entrance. The hall originally exhibited windows (openings originally covered with wire screening) whose wood awnings tilted-up and were hinged at the top (to be opened up and restored). Awnings are made of the same material as siding. The original exterior colors consisted of mint green and white. Over time the color has been changed to white with red trim and now all white. A second ballroom (3) was constructed of cinder block in two phases which is attached to the dance hall (1). Another ballroom extension (4) was attached on the south elevation and was constructed circa 1950 of cinder block with a flat roof and metal 3-light casement windows with transom. These two, smaller facilities were rented for private social events.

Located to the south of the dance hall and additions is a building (2) constructed circa 1948, and it housed the Bar-B-Q pit. It is a combination of cinder block (wall below wire screen windows) and corrugated tin. The building consists of a corrugated tin gable roof on which is a monitor (clear-story) roof. The building houses the 6' x 40' brick Bar-B-Q pit and cooking area used for catering. In the parking lot, on the north side of the dance hall, is a rectangular-shaped sign with white neon lettering, indicating "Bill Mraz Dance Hall" (5), which is included as a proposed landmark. It was constructed circa 1950. Also adjacent to the dance hall, the dance hall additions and the sign is a two-story, brick garage apartment building (6) with a hip roof and wood-sash, double-hung windows with 1/1 lights. It was constructed in 1954 and was used as a residence (upstairs) and storage below. This building, which was the family residence of Bill Mraz and his wife, Anna, is also included as a proposed landmark.

Other buildings (7 through 14) located on the northwest corner of the property include several auxiliary buildings, but they are not part of the landmark designation application (less than 50 years of age). One of the buildings, constructed circa 1953, is currently being used as a Barber Shop (7). It is a frame building with wood siding on a pier and beam foundation. The other building (8) constructed circa 1953 fronts 34th Street and exhibits cedar shake exterior siding and concrete foundation. Directly behind these structures are two metal frame buildings (9 and 10) constructed circa 1958 with concrete foundations.

Two additional residential buildings were constructed as housing for the families of the two sons of Mill Mraz. Both houses are of brick construction: one house (11) constructed circa 1961 exhibits a gable-on-hip roof and the other house (12) constructed circa 1966 exhibits a side gable roof with large shed dormer. A two-car garage is located behind each house (13 and 14). They are constructed when the houses were constructed and exhibit the same wood siding as the dance hall and gable-front roofs.

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RESTORATION HISTORY/CURRENT CONDITION:

The original dance hall, when constructed in 1948, comprised 9,000 square feet and included a stage, bar, and restroom area. In 1965 the north side of the building was enlarged by 2,000 square feet to accommodate the growing crowds who frequented the hall. The addition was made to the original configuration of the existing building and the original front wall was dismantled and moved to the far north end. This provided additional square footage for the construction of a another bar area and stage.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION:

Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation of a Site

(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:

S D NA

S - satisfies D - does not satisfy NA - not applicable

- | S | D | NA | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event; |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (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; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (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; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (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; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (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 February 12, 1998, the Houston Archaeological and Historic 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 Bill Mraz Dance Hall as a Historic Landmark of the City of Houston.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: NONE

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STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Recommends that the Planning Commission accept the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and forward their recommendation to City Council that the Bill Mraz Dance Hall be designated as a historic landmark of the City of Houston.

SITE PLAN (LANDMARKS 1-6)
BILL MRAZ DANCE HALL
835 WEST 34TH STREET
NOT TO SCALE

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SITE LOCATION MAP
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