

## LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK/SITE NAME:** Third Church of Christ, Scientist Building

**Owner:** Deborah Keyser & Strohecker Interests Ltd.

**APPLICANT:** Deborah Keyser & Strohecker Interests

**LOCATION:** 5516 Almeda Road

**30-DAY HEARING NOTICE:** Oct-15-99

**AGENDA ITEM:** II

**P. C. MEETING DATE:** Dec-9-99

**HPO FILE NO.:** 99L082

**DATE ACCEPTED:** Sep-15-99

**HAHC HEARING:** Nov-18-99

### SITE INFORMATION

Northwest corner of Almeda and Binz on a parcel of land out of the Joseph Christy Survey, A212, and including a portion of Lots 4 and 5 of Calumet Lawn Addition, Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is a former Christian Science Church, which will now be used for commercial purposes.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The Third Church of Christ, Scientist Building is a superbly maintained Mediterranean style building which displays a distinctly California amalgamation of North Italian and Byzantine detail. This unique building, the only one of its kind in Houston, is the last surviving example of the Mediterranean style in the South Main Street area. Finished in 1928, it was one of a number of Mediterranean style buildings that were constructed along South Main Street and Almeda Road, the principal routes south from downtown. The elaborate Mediterranean styles were used to lend importance and civic character to the newer Almeda Road corridor. The Third Church of Christ, Scientist Building is the only Mediterranean style building in the area that has survived without disfiguring alterations.

The Third Church of Christ, Scientist, was organized in May of 1922 by a small group of members from the First Church of Christ, Scientist. The new church building was needed to relieve the crowded conditions at First Church. The land for the new church was purchased on February 16, 1928, and construction began on April 13 of that year.

The church members selected the architectural firm of Jonas and Tabor to design the new church building. Jonas and Tabor had formed their partnership in 1923. J. Rodney Tabor, a graduate of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was the firm's designer. Tabor designed the Sidney J. Lanier Junior High School, which has become a landmark on Westheimer Road. The church was constructed by the Thomas T. Hopper Company at a cost of \$50,000.00.

A lengthy article in the Houston Post in September of 1928, described the church in great detail. The new church building contained unusual for the period features such as an electric refrigerating machine to furnish cool drinking water from saffron colored drinking fountains. The article also described the landscaping that featured desert plants emphasizing cactus, yucca, and sago palms. While none of the unusual furnishings described in the article have survived, the sago palms have thrived and today are over eight feet tall.

The Mediterranean-Byzantine style building has masonry bearing walls surfaced with stucco and painted a soft pink. The wide overhanging open eaves have exposed decorative rough-hewn rafter tails. All wood trim is

# CITY OF HOUSTON

## Archaeological & Historical Commission

## Planning and Development Department

painted dark brown. The variegated red clay tile roof covering, manufactured by Ludowici, is of the straight barrel mission style and regularly laid. The five sided building has the primary façade facing diagonally to the oblique angular intersection of Almeda Road and Binz Street. The large octagonal tower, topped with a small octagonal cupola, houses the 35-foot high dome ceiling of the main auditorium. Two perpendicular (single-story) wings embrace a curving five bay entry arcade with low-pitched tile roof and half-round copper gutters. The wings also have low-pitched hipped tile roofs. Windows used in the wings are narrow steel and beveled clear glass with arched transoms. Each side of the octagonal tower has a clearstory triple window with a Byzantine stilted arch motif glazed with pale amber lights. Each side of the small octagonal cupola has one small arched wooden louver, which originally facilitated in venting the auditorium.

The one-story Sunday School wing extends to the west of the octagonal tower facing Binz Street, breaking the symmetry of the building. The stucco finish is heavier than the original, indicating that the Sunday School section of the building was a later addition. Additionally, in 1953, an addition to the Sunday school room doubled its size. The roof of the Sunday school is flat behind steeply pitched clay tile parapets sandwiched between solid vertical stucco-clad parapet corners. A secondary entry porch faces south to Binz Street. The arcade of the porch is composed of one larger central arch flanked by two smaller arches and shelters a single pair of entry doors flanked by multi-light beveled glass windows.

The rear façade includes an arcade extending along the north wall of the auditorium that leads to two small sunrooms (former reading rooms). The arcade bays have been glazed with a modern aluminum storefront system. The stucco finished sunrooms have wood and beveled glass windows and doors on three sides and were designed to feel like residential sun parlors of the period. The larger of the two sunrooms features built-in wooden bookcases with leaded glass doors.

At the main entrance, three pairs of wood planked doors beneath arched glass fanlights lead from the front porch to the Indian tile-floored vestibule. The vestibule has three pairs of leather covered metal-studded doors that lead directly into the vast domed auditorium. The dome is lighted by recessed lighting housed in a decorative large-scale cove that wraps the interior of the dome. Walls are plaster above a continuous stained oak wainscot, which is detailed with recessed arched plaster panels. From the vestibule, the floor sweeps down to the orator's platform. The focal wall behind the platform is detailed with a large triple arch with decorative wood panel inserts surrounding a door leading to the reading rooms. An oversized casing surrounds the triple arch and is bordered with a continuous blue stencil design. Above the arch, decorative cast tile vents separate the auditorium from the organ loft. The auditorium wings, which extend from either side of the domed room, have ceilings of multiple oak-hewn beams.

The decorative bronze hardware and large strapped hinges on the entry doors exhibit Mission-style influence as does the hardware throughout the building. The custom designed iron light fixtures include a large lantern with mission bells, imported iron pendant lanterns in the entry, elaborately detailed sconces in the auditorium, and amber glazed reading light fixtures in the sunrooms. All of the original light fixtures and hardware remain in the building.

Two small outbuildings are located in the northwest corner of the property. The smaller of the two was built at the time of the church and has a small addition built at the same time as the Sunday school expansion. The stucco finish on the small addition and the larger outbuilding matches the stucco on the Sunday school addition. The roof of the larger outbuilding matches the roof design of the later Sunday school addition.

The Third Church of Christ, Scientist Building is a superb example of ecclesiastical architecture and one of the last remaining examples of the Mediterranean style which was popular in Houston during the late 1920's.

# CITY OF HOUSTON

## Archaeological & Historical Commission

## Planning and Development Department

Inside and out, this building has been well maintained and contains most of the building's original architectural detailing.

### RESTORATION HISTORY/CURRENT CONDITION:

The Church has had only one owner, and until placed on the market three years ago, was continuously used for church services. The front façade today looks virtually unchanged except for the expansion of the Sunday school room, which is compatible to the original structure through the use of similar materials and architectural style. The arcade on the rear (north) façade has been glazed with a modern storefront system. However, this modification can easily be reversed. The building retains its original lighting fixtures and hardware. Air Conditioning was installed in an unobtrusive way. Both the interior and exterior are in excellent condition.

### 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:

S NA

S - satisfies NA - not applicable

- 
- (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.

# CITY OF HOUSTON

**Archaeological & Historical Commission**

**Planning and Development Department**

---

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

That the Houston Planning Commission accepts the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommends landmark designation of the Third Church of Christ, Scientist Building to City Council since the application complies with the applicable criteria.

SITE LOCATION MAP  
THIRD CHURCH OF CHRIST, SCIENTIST BUILDING  
5516 ALMEDA ROAD  
NOT TO SCALE