LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Peacock and Plaza Court Apartments
OWNERS: FVMHP, LP Peacock and Plaza Court Apartments
APPLICANT: Delaney Harris-Finch, Stern and Bucek Architects
LOCATION: 1414-1416 Austin Street

AGENDA ITEM: C.1
HPO FILE NO: 16L316
DATE ACCEPTED: 06/13/2016
HAHC HEARING: 06/16/2016

SITE INFORMATION: Lots 1 and 2, Tracts 3A, 13 and 14, Block 314, SSBB in Houston, Harris County, Texas. The 13,160 square foot rectangular site contains two historic two-story, U-shaped brick Mission style apartment buildings constructed in 1924-1925.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Peacock and Plaza Court Apartments are located in southeast downtown Houston at the corner of Bell and Austin Street. The two buildings, the Peacock (northern building) and Plaza Court (southern building) are two-story, U-shaped structures with narrow courtyards opening to the south. Many apartment buildings were constructed during Houston's building boom in the 1920s, however few remain today. The Peacock and Plaza Court buildings are traditionally eclectic, primarily influenced by the Mission style. The architect of the buildings, Lenard Gabert, was a student in the first entering class of Rice University and had a long career designing both residential and commercial buildings in Houston from the 1920s to 1970s. Gabert's most celebrated work in Houston includes the 1939 Eldorado Ballroom on Elgin Avenue; the 1940 Brochstein's Inc. building (with I. S. Brochstein); the 1949 Temple Emanu El (with MacKie & Kamrath); and the 1958 Julian Hurwitz House (with W. Jackson Wisdom).

The Peacock and Plaza Court Apartments at 1414-1416 Austin Street meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 for Landmark Designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Peacock and Plaza Court Apartments

After the turn of the 20th century, Houston experienced an episode of intensive growth and development, with expansion of the railroads, discovery of oil, and the completion of the Houston Ship Channel. Architecturally, this growth was reflected in a new surge of construction in the southern 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.

The Peacock and Plaza Court Apartments are located in southeast downtown Houston, Texas at the corner of Bell and Austin Street. At the time of their construction the area was primarily made up of residential units, but over time, the downtown commercial core continued to grow and replaced the residential areas to the south as the core expanded from its northern origin at the bank of the Buffalo Bayou. Many apartment buildings, or "flats," were constructed during Houston's building boom in the

1920s, however few remain today. Only a few historic apartment buildings have received recognition of their significant architectural or cultural contribution through historic designation by the City of Houston. Locally landmarked apartments include the Sheridan Apartments at 802 McGowen Street built in 1922 by R.C Duff (1998 Landmark designation); the Benjamin Apartments at 1218 Webster Street, built 1923-24 by architect Alfred C. Finn and Louis C. Perry (2002 Landmark designation); and the Paramount Apartment Building at 3015 Chenevert Street built in 1926 (1999 Landmark designation).

In The Houston Post on January 31, 1924, an announcement for recent building permits notes a "permit granted during the day calls for the expenditure of $25,000 on a two-story stucco apartment house of brick veneer construction. It will contain 16 apartments of three rooms each. L. Gabert is owner". In 1923, only seven years after graduating from Rice University, Lenard Gabert purchased the land for the Peacock and Plaza Court apartment buildings from J. E.C. Schmidt. The Peacock apartment building was completed in 1924 and the Plaza Court apartment building was completed the following year in 1925. The apartments front Austin Street and are directly across from Root Memorial Square, a park donated to the City of Houston in 1923 by descendants of Alexander Porter Root and his wife, Laura Shepherd Root (renovated 2005 by Kirksey Architects).

Lenard Gabert eventually lost the buildings in 1931 during the Great Depression due to foreclosure after taking out a loan and using the properties as collateral. The Peacock and Plaza Court Apartments are the first commonly recorded buildings designed by Gabert and represent an earlier period in his career of traditionally influenced architectural design prior to the mid-century modern style architecture of his more celebrated works from later in his career.

Lenard Gabert

Lenard Gabert was born in 1894 in Navasota, Texas. He attended college at Texas A&M University and Rice University, where he received a Bachelor of Science in Architecture in 1917. Lenard Gabert was in the first entering class of Rice University and amongst the first to graduate from the institution with a Bachelor of Science in Architecture along with Wallace Perrin Clyce and Rollin Montfort Rolfe. Lenard was married to Gladys Thelma Rotholz and they had a son, Lenard Morris Gabert, and daughter Rilda Gabert. Rilda married TV announcer and City Councilman Richard Gottlieb. Lenard Morris Gabert was a civil engineer in Houston who worked for Tellepsen Construction Company, Giffels & Vallet, Bovay Engineers, and finally Gabert-Abuzalaf. Lenard Gabert was a veteran of World War I and World War II.[1]

Gabert was the principal at the architectural firm of Lenard Gabert & Associates. The firm's office was located at 1315 Bell Avenue, on the same block as, and around the corner from the Peacock and Plaza Court apartment buildings. Little has been recorded about the life and architectural practice of Lenard Gabert, however, he designed many significant Houston commercial and residential buildings (particularly of houses in the suburbs along Brays Bayou during the 1930s).[2] Works of note include the 1930 Congregation K'Nesseth Israel Synagogue in Baytown (recorded Texas Landmark 1991); the 1939 Eldorado Ballroom on Elgin Avenue; the 1940 Brochstein's Inc. building (with I. S. Brochstein); the 1949 Temple Emanu El (with MacKie & Kamrath); and the 1958 Julian Hurwitz House (with W. JacksonWisdom). Gabert continued to practice architecture until his death in September 1976. Below is

[1] "Lenard Gabert." *Jewish Herald-Voice*.
[2] Fox, Stephen. "Braeswood: An Architectural Tour."

a list of known buildings designed by Lenard Gabert, assembled with the assistance of Houston historian, Stephen Fox:

- 1924 Peacock and Plaza Court Apartments, 1414-1416 Austin Street, Houston, TX
- 1930 Congregation K'Nesseth Israel Synagogue, Commerce Street and Sterling Avenue, Baytown, TX
- 1936 Dannenbaum House, Sunset Boulevard, Houston, TX
  1936 Leon Abovitz House, Wharton, TX
  1936 Leon Lewis Building, Main Street and Wentworth Street, Houston, TX
  1936 Morris Rouch House, 2334 Underwood Boulevard, Houston, TX
- 1937 D. Schwartz House, Braeswood Boulevard
  1937 Nathan's, Main St.
- 1938 Jakie Friedman's Domain Privée, S. Main Street
  1938 Monarch Laundry (Triniti Restaurant), 2815 S Shepherd Drive, Houston, TX
- 1939 Alaskan Fur Co. (demolished), 606 Main Street, Houston, TX
  1939 Mose Feld House, S. MacGregor Way, Houston, TX
  1939 R. J. Levy House (demolished), N. MacGregor Way, Houston, TX
  1939 Eldorado Ballroom, 2312 Elgin Avenue, Houston, TX
- 1940 Brochstein's Inc. (with I. S, Brochstein), 11530 S. Main Street, Houston, TX
- 1942 Pulaski House, 3430 South Parkwood Drive, Houston, TX
- 1949 Temple Emanu El (with MacKie & Kamrath), 1500 Sunset Boulevard, Houston, TX
- 1950 J. E. Leicher Shopping Center, Old Spanish Trail and Holmes Road, Houston, TX
  1950 Jewish Community Center, 2020 Herman Park Drive, Houston, TX
  1950 Meyer Brothers, White House Store, 2537 University Boulevard, Houston, TX
- 1951 F. T. Topek House, 3344 Prospect Avenue, Houston, TX
  1951 Triangle Refineries, Inc. Building, Kirby Drive, Houston, TX
  1951 Turboff Clinic, Houston, TX
- 1953 T. L. Walker Co. Warehouse, 1905-1907 Hutchins Street, Houston, TX
- 1954 Kuykendall House, Sugar Land, TX
- 1955 John Roscoe Butler House, Houston, TX
  1955 Store Building, 2815-19 Laura Koppe Road, Houston, TX
- 1956 Congregation Shearith Israel Synagogue, Wharton, TX
  1956 Jewish Home for the Aged (with Joseph Krakower), Houston, TX
  1956 Leff Bros. Dry Goods and Notions Co. Building, 2505 Texas Avenue, Houston, TX
  1956 Office Building, 3033 Fannin Street, Houston, TX
  1956 Silverman Brothers Warehouse, 3715 Blodgett Avenue, Houston, TX
  1956 Southern Warehouse Corp. Building, 4410 Clinton Drive, Houston, TX
  1956 Wayne A. Gray House, 5510 Avalon Place, Houston, TX
  1956 Hunt House (with W. Jackson Wisdom), 3401 N. MacGregor Way, Houston, TX
- 1957 2003 Clay Avenue, Houston, TX
  1957 American Lutheran Church, E. Houston Road, Houston, TX
  1957 B'nai Brith Hillel Foundation, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX
- 1958 Julian Hurwitz House (with W. JacksonWisdom), 3007 S. Braeswood Boulevard, Houston, TX
- 1960 United Hebrew Congregation Synagogue, 9001 Greenwillow Street, Houston, TX
- 1961 Chief Motel, 9000 S Main Street, Houston, TX
  1961 Congregation Beth Jacob Synagogue, 5847 Turnberry Circle, Houston, TX

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The two apartment buildings, located at 1414 and 1416 Austin Street, (the Peacock (northern building) and Plaza Court (southern building)) are almost identical in design, with only slight variations in roof and façade details. Both buildings are two-story, U-shaped structures with narrow courtyards opening toward the south. The Plaza Court courtyard opens to Bell Street and the Peacock opens to the closed U side of the Plaza Court building. As true to many of the residential buildings designed in Houston between the two World Wars, the Peacock and Plaza Court buildings are traditionally eclectic and primarily influenced by the Mission style.

The Peacock

The Peacock apartment building was completed in 1924. The front entrance is centered on the Austin Street elevation. The orientation of the U-shape plan is uncommon, with the primary entrance located at the side of the 'U' instead of at the bottom of the 'U' either inside or opposite of the courtyard. The front (east) façade of two-story building is flat and clad in red-brick veneer with a white stucco base. The facade is symmetrical in composition with five windows at the second level and four windows at the first level with a central entry. The arched entry has a simple two-stair concrete and clay tile stoop with flanking low brick pedestals. A later metal mesh door and sidelights has been installed at the entry. The roof is flat with an abstracted Mission style parapet. The base of the parapet is announced by a double-brick band across the entire front façade. The top of the parapet wall is clad in ceramic coping tiles.

The most elaborate detail of the building is found in the arch above the entry in painted Spanish tiles depicting a colorful peacock. The raised plumage of the peacock is blue, orange, and green over a yellow background, filling the semi-circular arch. A patterned Spanish tile of the same colors frames the entry, starting at the top of the stoop pedestals and arching over the entry (Exhibit 16). Painted tiles with the words 'The Peacock' written in yellow on a blue background with a brick frame are centered in the parapet above.

Double-hung wood window repeat the same rhythm at the first and second floors at both the front and side elevations. The window above the entry, at the second level, consists of three parts; a central double-hung 1-over-1 window fronted by a wood-frame screen with a 3-over-3 decorative upper panel; and two, 2-over-5 sidelight windows. A brick lintel and arch, with a single ceramic diamond tile in the center of the arch, tops this center window group. Directly flanking the entry at the first level and central upper window grouping at the second level are single 1-over-1 windows on either side, followed by a pair of 1-over-1 windows. The majority of the 1-over-one windows are fronted by a wood-frame screen with a decorative 3-over-3 upper panel and topped with a brick soldier lintel course. Between the lower and upper floor windows, is a rectangular shaped brick detail with a herringbone pattern. This brick detail at the windows directly flanking the entrance has a centered single square ceramic tile. All windows on the front façade, other than the upper center window group, have a green and white aluminum striped awning – a feature not original to the structure, yet that most likely dates back to the 1950s or 60s.

Plaza Court

The Plaza Court apartment building was completed in 1925. The composition of the building is almost identical to the Peacock building with a U-shaped plan and Austin Street entrance. The Plaza Court

building is located at the corner of Bell Street and Austin Street, allowing the courtyard of the 'U' to open to Bell Street. The building is also clad in red-brick veneer with a white stucco base. On the Austin Street (east) elevation, the entry, window, and stoop conditions (minus the pedestals) mimic that of the Peacock building as described above.

The center bay of the Plaza Court is slightly recessed from the two flanking side bays – a departure from the flat front brick façade of the Peacock building. The parapet roof condition is also more refined, with a more traditional Mission style curving shape. Unlike the Peacock, the flat parapet wall does not continue around the entire building; the sides of the building have a short, cantilevered low-slope roof supported by wood brackets and clad in ceramic Spanish tiles.

The arch above the entry has a decorative stone infill with a carved floral detail. The building name plate above in at the parapet wall is also of stone, with the words "Plaza Court" carved in the face. These are not original, as the absence of any detail at the entry arch or parapet name plate can be seen in a 2007 photograph. It is believed that the arch and plate details were originally had Spanish tile similar to that at the Peacock building, however at the time of this report no photos had been located of the façade prior to 2007. It is unknown if the original arch and name plate details were removed or remain under the current stone infill.

At the Bell Street elevation, the narrow courtyard opens to expose an open covered walkway arcade at both the first and second level. The central arch at the first level is fronted by six ceramic tile clad stairs flanked by double brick pedestals and leads to a path through the building accessing the courtyard of the Peacock. The central arch at both levels is larger than the two side arches; the upper arches and flanking lower arches have an iron balustrade. The top of the central courtyard façade is completed with a parapet of similar, condensed curved shape as the front façade. The side courtyard walls are symmetrical with cantilevering low-slope roofs clad in ceramic Spanish tiles, and 1-over-1 windows with wood-frame screens with a decorative upper panel. All but the smallest of windows have a green and white striped aluminum awning.

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Downtown Houston aerial view, Image 5. 1927. Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries. University of Houston Digital Library. Web. June 2, 2016. (http://digital.lib.uh.edu/collection/p15195coll2/item/208).

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Fox, Stephen. Houston Architectural Guide. 3rd ed. Houston: American Institute of Architects, Houston Chapter and Minor Design, 2012.

"Lenard Gabert." Jewish Herald-Voice [Houston], September 16, 1976, Obituaries. Via email from Jeanne F. Samuels, Editor, June 2016.

The Peacock and Plaza Court Apartments landmark application and designation report were prepared by Delaney Harris-Finch. The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by the Historic Preservation Office, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION

Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation

(a) The HAHC, 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 - satisfies D - does not satisfy NA - not applicable

S	NA	
☒	☐	(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.

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).

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Peacock and Plaza Court Apartments at 1414-1416 Austin Street.

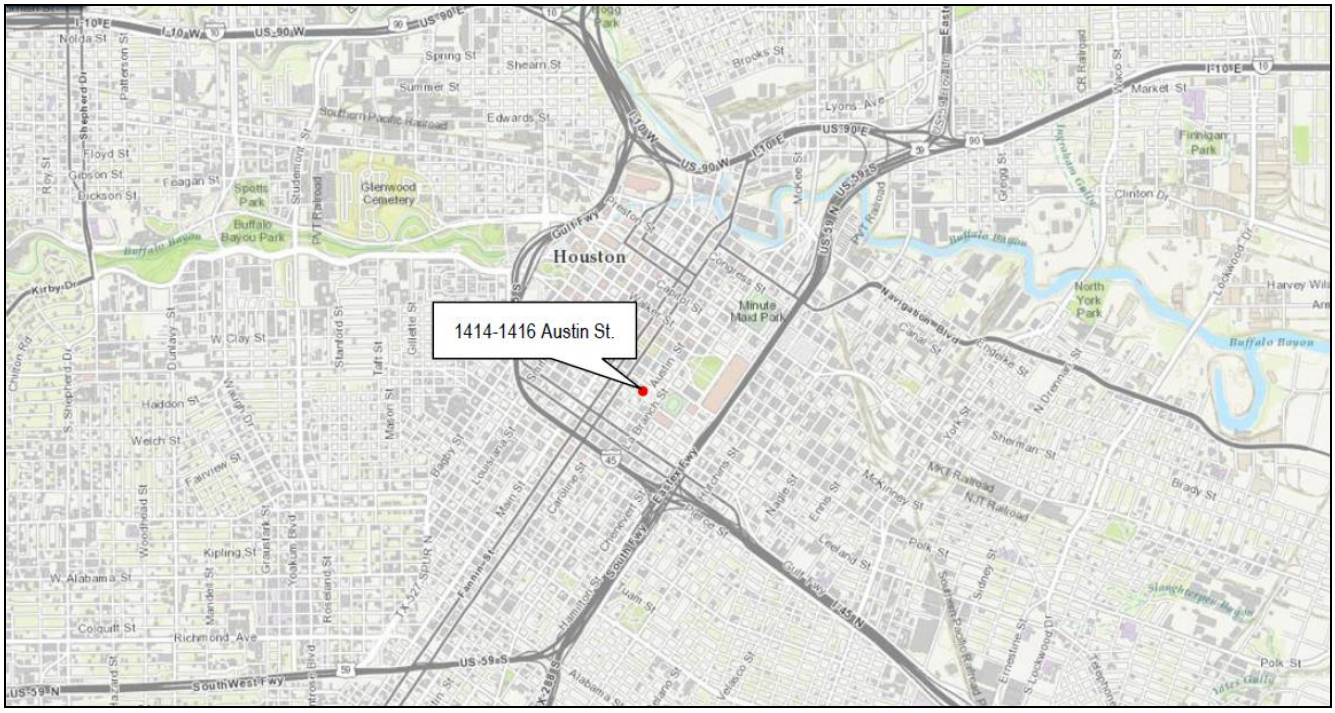
HAHC RECOMMENDATION

EXHIBIT A
PHOTO
THE PEACOCK AND PLAZA COURT APARTMENTS
1414-1416 AUSTIN STREET

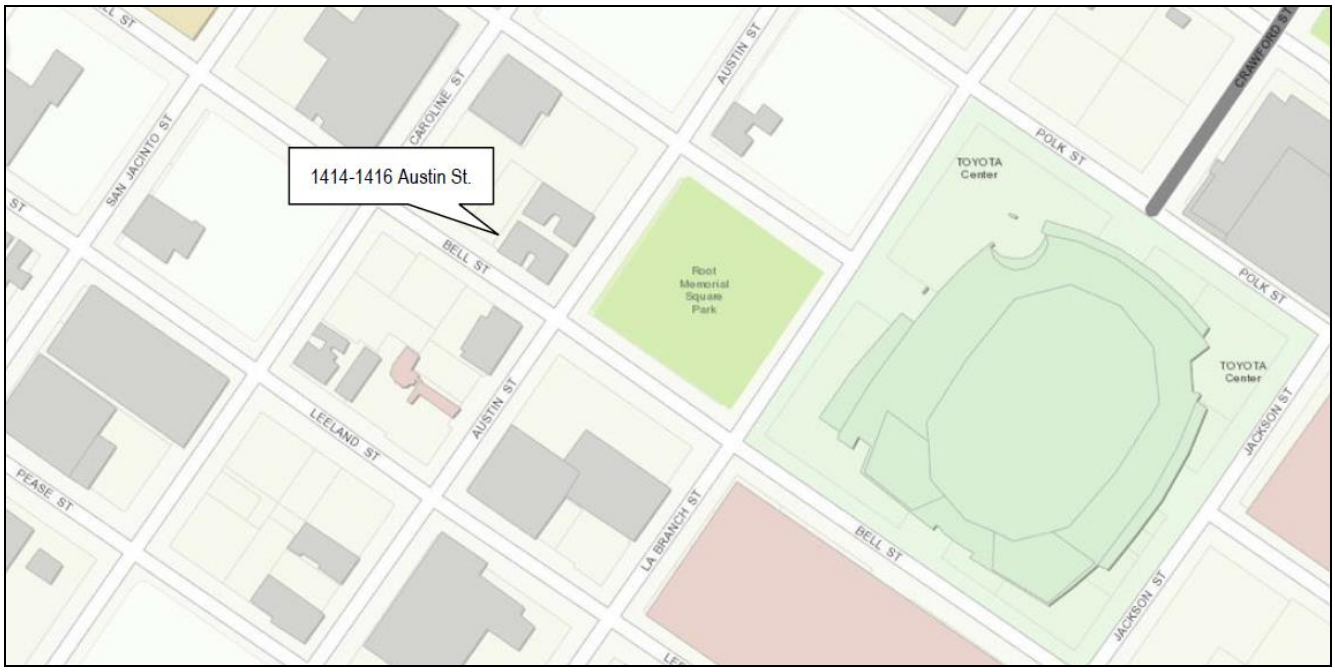
1414 Austin Street – The Peacock Apartments, east (front) elevation, June 2016. Photo: Delaney Harris-Finch

1416 Austin – Plaza Court, east elevation, June 2016. Current entry and parapet stone work. Photo: Delaney Harris-Finch

EXHIBIT B
SITE MAPS
THE PEACOCK AND PLAZA COURT APARTMENTS
1414-1416 AUSTIN STREET



Location Map – Downtwon Houston, Texas
Map: My City Houston Map Viewer, Version 2, Enterprise GIS, City of Houston



Location Map – Downtwon Houston, Texas, corner of Austin Street and Bell Street
Map: My City Houston Map Viewer, Version 2, Enterprise GIS, City of Houston

EXHIBIT C
HISTORIC AERIAL PHOTOS
THE PEACOCK AND PLAZA COURT APARTMENTS
1414-1416 AUSTIN STREET

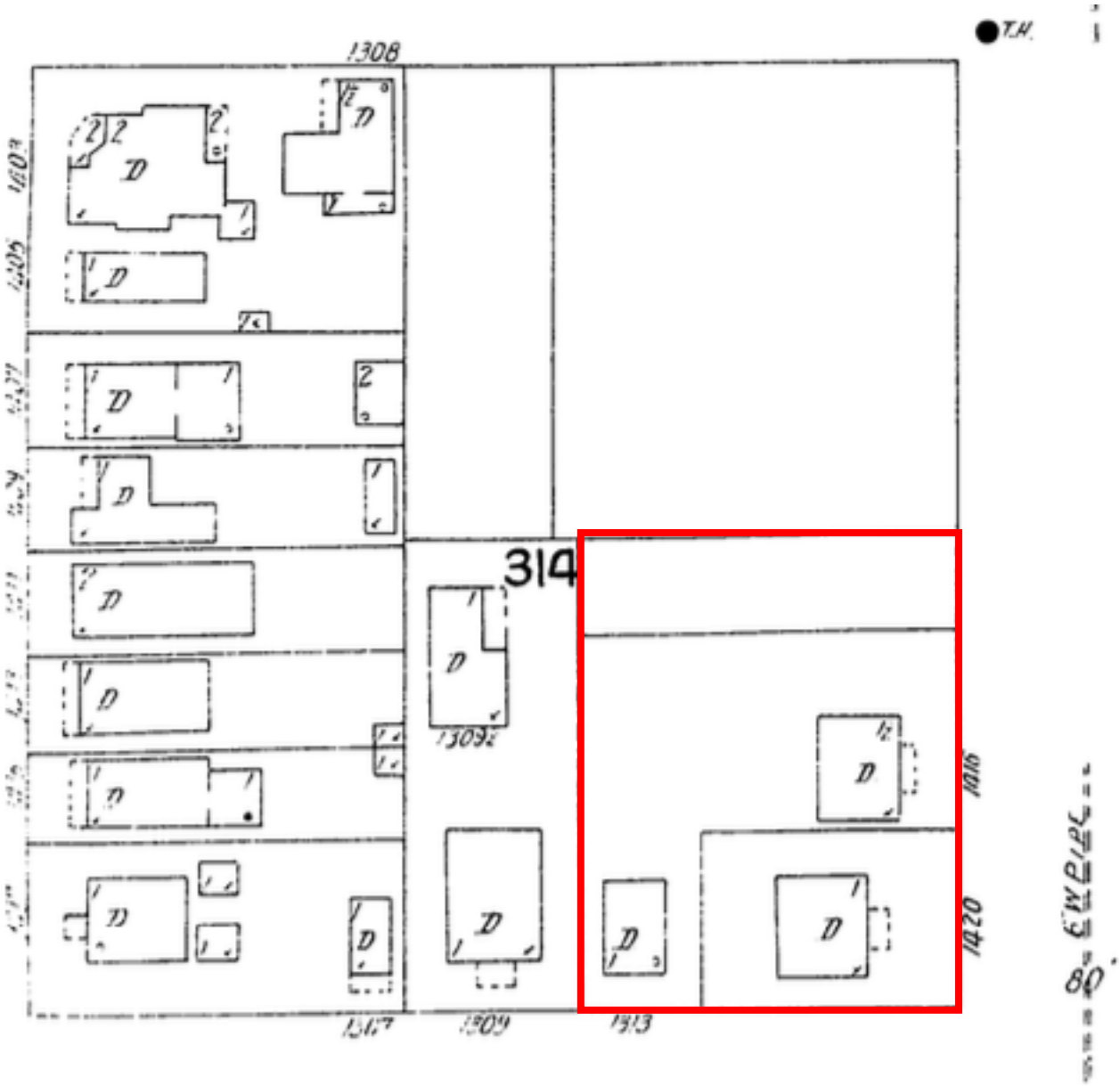
Downtown Houston Aerial, December 1944. Photo: Google Earth, Texas General Land Office

Downtown Houston Aerial, March 2016. Photo: Google Earh, DigitalGlobe

EXHIBIT D
HISTORIC PHOTO
THE PEACOCK AND PLAZA COURT APARTMENTS
1414-1416 AUSTIN STREET

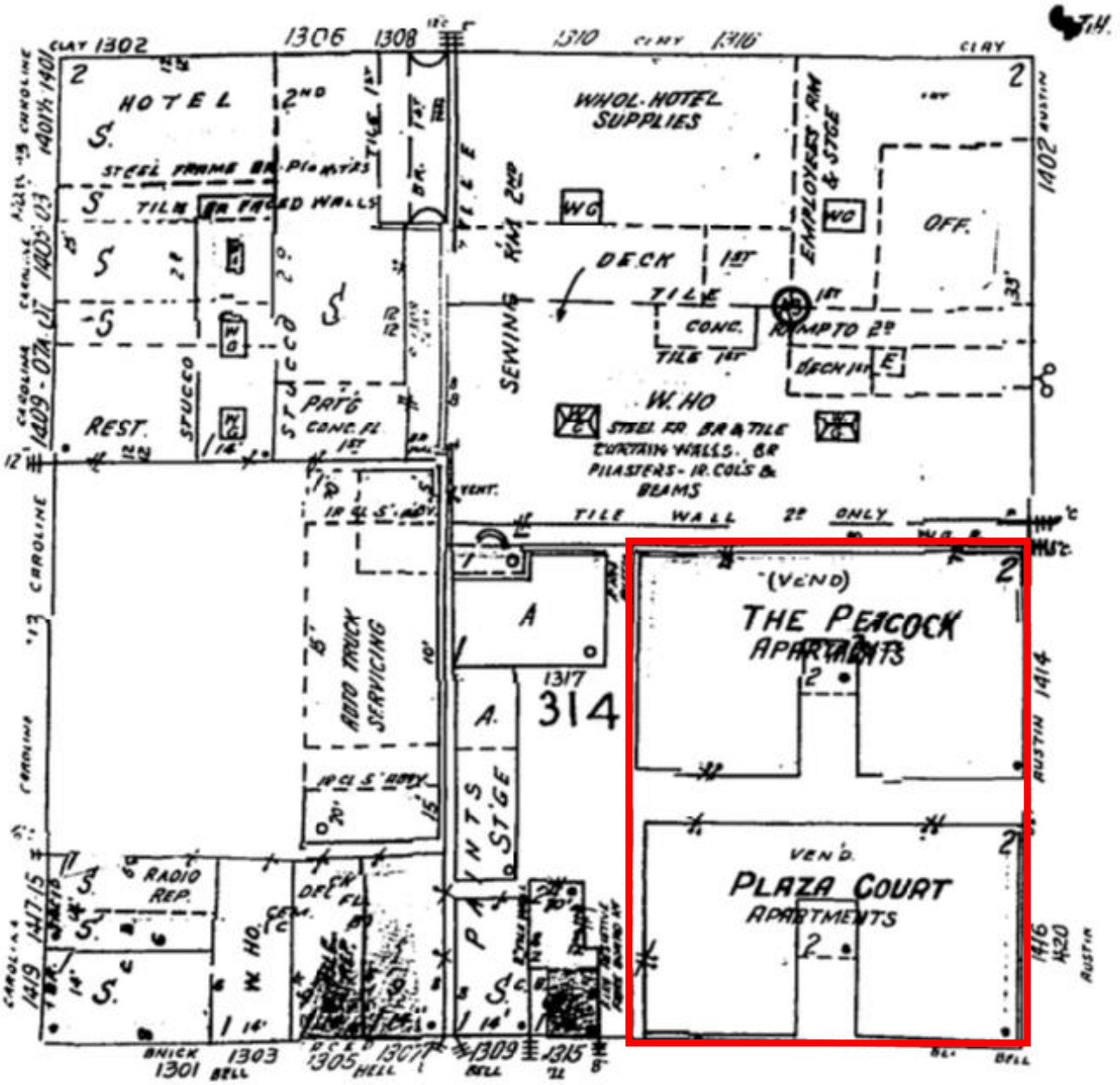
Downtown Houston Aerial, 1927
Photo: Special Collections, University of Houston Digital Library

EXHIBIT E
SANBORN MAPS
THE PEACOCK AND PLAZA COURT APARTMENTS
1414-1416 AUSTIN STREET



Houston Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1924-1950. Vol.1, Sheet 42, Block 314
Showing buildings at the corner of Austin and Bell Street (lower right) prior to the Peacock and Plaza Court Apartments.

EXHIBIT E
SANBORN MAPS
THE PEACOCK AND PLAZA COURT APARTMENTS
1414-1416 AUSTIN STREET



Houston Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1924- Feb.1951. Vol.1, Sheet 42, Block 314
Showing the Peacock and Plaza Court Apartment buildings at the corner of Austin and Bell Street (lower right).

EXHIBIT F
ADDITIONAL PHOTOS
THE PEACOCK AND PLAZA COURT APARTMENTS
1414-1416 AUSTIN STREET

1416 Austin Street – Plaza Court Apartments and 1414 Austin Street – The Peacock Apartments
East (front) elevations, looking northwest, June 2016. Photo: Delaney Harris-Finch

1414 Austin Street – The Peacock Apartments and 1416 Austin Street – Plaza Court Apartments
East (front) and north elevations, looking southwest, June 2016. Photo: Delaney Harris-Finch

EXHIBIT F (CONTINUED)
ADDITIONAL PHOTOS
THE PEACOCK AND PLAZA COURT APARTMENTS
1414-1416 AUSTIN STREET

1416 Austin Street – Plaza Court, south elevation (Bell Strreet), June 2016. Photo: Delaney Harris-Finch

1414 Austin Street – The Peacock Apartments, east (front) elevation, June 2016. Photo: Delaney Harris-Finch

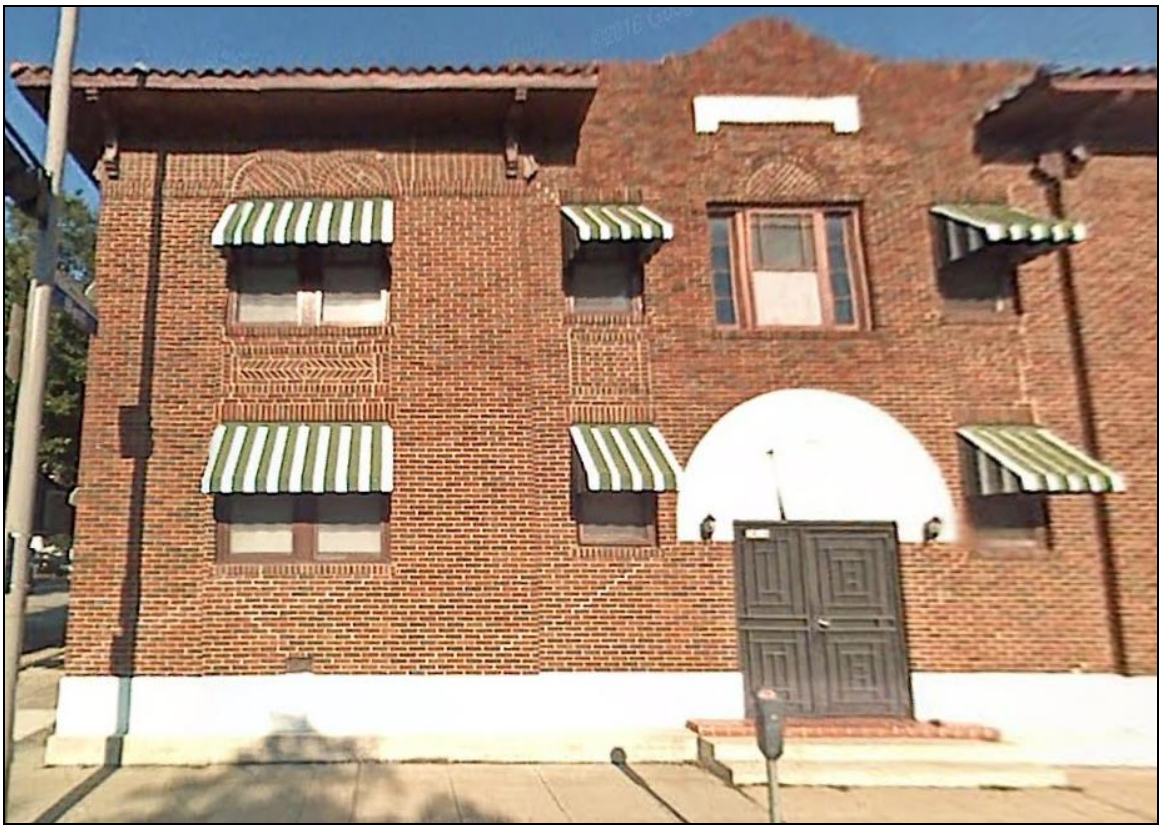
EXHIBIT F (CONTINUED)
ADDITIONAL PHOTOS
THE PEACOCK AND PLAZA COURT APARTMENTS
1414-1416 AUSTIN STREET

1416 Austin Street – Plaza Court Apartments, south elevation (Bell Street) June 2016.
Detail of courtyard entry and pass through to courtyard of The Peacock apartments. Photo: Delaney Harris-Finch

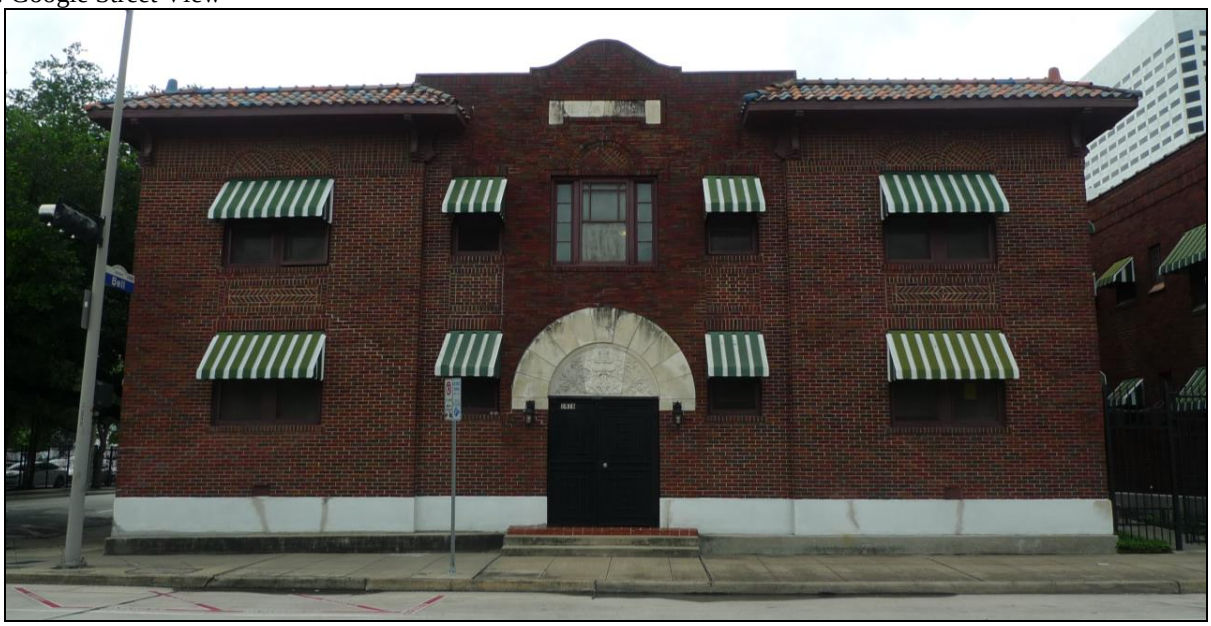
EXHIBIT F (CONTINUED)
ADDITIONAL PHOTOS
THE PEACOCK AND PLAZA COURT APARTMENTS
1414-1416 AUSTIN STREET

1416 Austin Street – Plaza Court Apartments, northeast corner, June 2016.
Pedestrian alley between the two apartment buildings and detail of bracketed awnings at 1416 Austin.
Photo: Delaney Harris-Finch

EXHIBIT F (CONTINUED)
ADDITIONAL PHOTOS
THE PEACOCK AND PLAZA COURT APARTMENTS
1414-1416 AUSTIN STREET

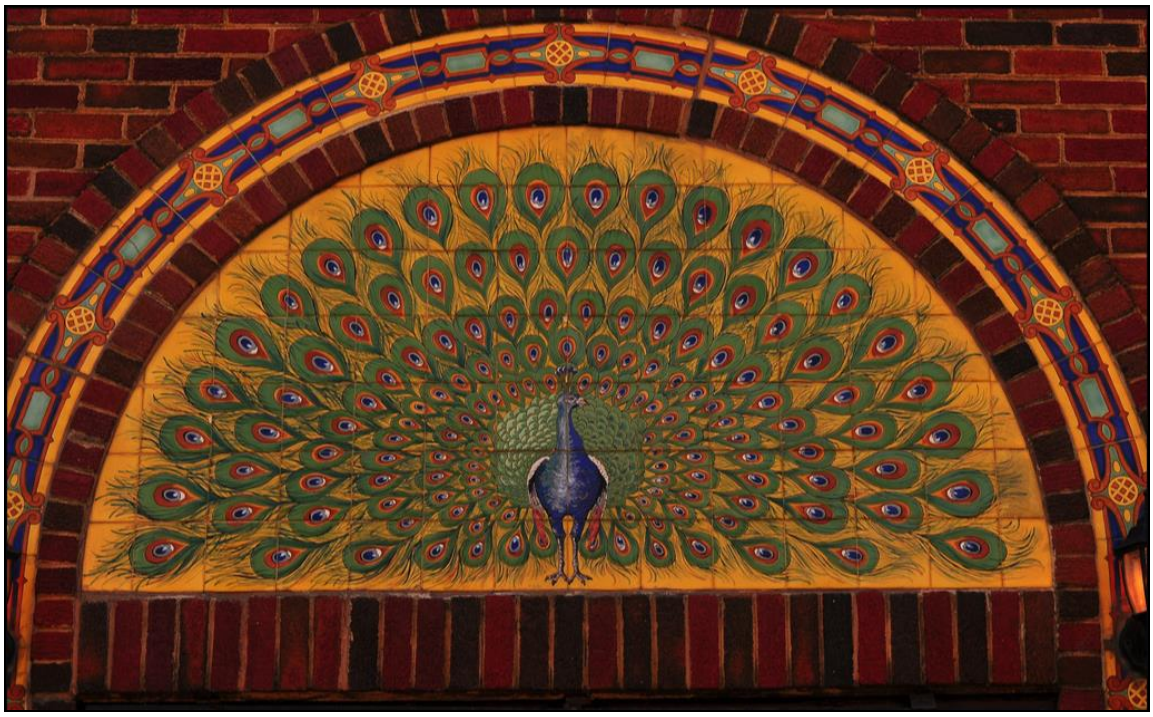


1416 Austin – Plaza Court, east elevation, Oct. 2007. Showing removed or covered entry arch and parapet nameplate details. Photo: Google Street View



1416 Austin – Plaza Court, east elevation, June 2016. Current entry and parapet stone work. Photo: Delaney Harris-Finch

EXHIBIT F (CONTINUED)
ADDITIONAL PHOTOS
THE PEACOCK AND PLAZA COURT APARTMENTS
1414-1416 AUSTIN STREET



1414 Austin The Peacock, east elevation, 2011. Detail of peacock tile work above entry.
Photo: Flickr member S.J. www.flickr.com/photos/estrato/5960120460

1416 Austin – Plaza Court, east elevation, June 2016. Detail of current entry stone work. Photo: Delaney Harris-Finch