

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT**LANDMARK NAME:** Humble-Exxon Building and Garage**AGENDA ITEM:** C&D**OWNERS:** Bell Business Investments, LLC**HPO FILE NO.:** HP2023_0155**APPLICANTS:** Martin "Motty" Spitzer, owner, and Amanda Coleman, agent**DATE ACCEPTED:** 06_29_2023**LOCATION:** 800 BELL STREET AND 1616 MILAM STREET**HAHC HEARING:** 08_03_2023**SITE INFORMATION:**

The Humble-Exxon Building and Garage are located at Lots 1-12 BLK 336 and Lots 1-12, Trs 13, 14 BLK 353 in the SSBB subdivision, City of Houston, Harris County Texas. The site includes two buildings with the primary property at 800 Bell Street and the garage at 1616 Milam Street. They are connected by a subterranean tunnel.

The 800 Bell Street address includes a 45-story International style skyscraper (or 44-story with a recessed observation level) and a front sunken courtyard-built c. 1962. The property, including the connected garage, was placed into service in 1963. Alterations were completed between 1998 to 2007 by Walter P Moore.

The primary building is approximately 1,223,585 square feet on a 63,022 square foot lot. The garage is approximately 339,527 square feet on a 62,530 square foot lot. Each building occupies an entire city block. 800 Bell's pedestrian entrance faces north¹ towards Bell Street. At the rear elevation facing Leeland Street, a vehicular entrance ramp runs through the lot from Leeland to Milam Streets. The property is bound by Milam Street to the west and Travis Street to the east. The garage at 1616 Milam does not have a primary façade and is bound by Pease Street to the south, Leeland Street to the north, Milam to the east, and Louisiana Street to the west.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Protected Landmark Designation and Significant Structure**SUMMARY**

The Humble-Exxon Building (also known as Humble Building and ExxonMobil Building) and garage are excellent examples of Houston's mid-twentieth-century corporate Modern architecture in the International style. The property was conceptualized by Welton Becket and Associates employing the principle of "total design." The primary building is a distinctive part of Houston's skyline and was the tallest building west of the Mississippi from 1962 to approximately 1965. The First National Bank Tower in Dallas became the tallest at this time. The building at 800 Bell Street was the tallest building in Houston until it was eclipsed by One-Shell Plaza in the early 1970s. The property is now approximately sixty years of age and retains a high degree of integrity in location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. At the local level, the Humble-Exxon Building and Garage are significant for commerce in relation to Humble and Exxon Oil operations, Houston's Petroleum Club, and the architecture of Welton Becket and Associates with Golemon & Rolfe and Pierce and Pierce Associates. The proposed period of significance is 1962 to 1973 based on the construction date and the 50-year mark for historic designation. The property is named the Humble-Exxon Building and Garage because the Humble Company and Standard Oil became Exxon in 1972, within the period of significance.

The Humble-Exxon Building and Garage are recommended for a Protected Landmark designation under Section 33-224: Criterion 1 as a visual reminder of development, Criterion 3 for its association with the architects and occupants, Criteria 4 and 5 as an excellent example of the style and building type important to the city, Criterion 6 as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, and Criterion 8 as a symbol of public pride. These criteria fulfill Section 33-229 for a Protected Landmark Designation.

¹ For the purpose of this report, the front elevation is referred to as facing north, although the true direction is northeast

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Humble Building was announced in a Houston Chronicle Special Supplement called *The Humble Story* on Sunday, April 14th, 1963. The following introduction to the special issue highlights the importance of this building to Houston and what it represented at the time:

“Humble and Houston are wedded: By the thousands who work in one and live in the other, by a landmark that can be seen towering into the blue from any approach to the city, and by a pride. It is the company’s pride in Houston, and the pride of Houstonians in a structure that symbolizes the dynamism of their home town, the sixth city in a great nation and the throbbing heart of the Gulf Coast. A sweeping 44 stories, a \$32 million home for one of the nation’s largest domestic oil producing firms – it’s all of this. But without the people that breathe life into the glass and steel shell, it’s nothing.”²

Today, the building is still a distinctive form in Houston’s skyline and is an icon of its era. The character-defining sunshades represent early concepts of sustainable design by accounting for sun exposure. This is just one of many details considered by the team of architects actioning Welton Becket’s concept of total design. The designation of this property will allow its walls to breathe life once again and help to reactivate this part of downtown Houston.

Humble Oil & Refining Company

The Texas oil rush in 1901 at Spindletop set the stage for the development of Humble Oil yet the company would not be officially chartered until 1917; Ross S. Sterling served as the first President. Half of Humble Oil was sold to John D. Rockefeller’s Standard Oil of New Jersey in 1919. While of combined ownership, the two brands would retain their respective names for decades. Humble Oil was the largest domestic producer from the 1940s until the 1960s. Competitors included the Texas Company (Texaco), Sun Oil (Sunoco), and Gulf Oil. When Humble and Standard were officially brought under the same name, the company became Exxon in 1972. In 1999, Exxon merged with Mobil.³ Humble Company’s use upon opening in 1963 included:⁴

Houston Area:

- First Floor/Mezzanine: Lobby, Touring Service, and Mechanical
- Second Floor: Administration, Touring Service, Area Production
- Third Floor: Law, Administration, Employee Relations, Marketing, Exploration
- Fourth Floor: Houston Area Exploration

Humble Pipe Line Company:

- Fifth Floor: Communication, Engineering, Planning & Economics
- Sixth Floor: Treasury, Tax, Controller’s, Aviation
- Seventh Floor: Management Humble Pipe Line Company

Southwest Region:

- Eighth Floor: Message Center, Traffic, Telephone Communications, Computing
- Ninth Floor: Mechanical (note metal louvers on exterior)
- Tenth Floor: Computing Center, Marketing, Accounting
- Eleventh Floor: Controller’s, Treasury
- Twelfth Floor: Exploration and Production Accounting
- Thirteenth Floor: Supply Accounting and Division Order
- Fourteenth Floor: Systems Controller’s Marketing
- Fifteenth Floor: Marketing, Accounting, Credit
- Sixteenth Floor: Marketing

² *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, Texas), April 14, 1963: 180. *NewsBank: America’s News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A14DB39C1C40322B4%40EANX-NB-14DCA001B5CD79B1%402438134-14DC5BDC717A88AA%40179>.

³ Blum, Jordan. “The March from Humble Oil to Exxon Dates Back More than a Century.” *Chron*, May 25, 2016. <https://www.chron.com/local/history/economy-business/article/The-march-from-Humble-Oil-to-Exxon-dates-back-7943392.php>.

⁴ Extracted from Humble Building Space Allocation Brochure, courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

- Seventeenth Floor: Law, Ad Valorem Tax Purchasing
- Eighteenth Floor: Exploration, Employee relations
- Nineteenth Floor: Management, Public Relations, Controller's, Law, Production
- Twentieth Floor: Engineering

Tenants:

- Twenty-First Floor: Mechanical (note metal louvers on exterior) and Snack Bar
- Twenty-Second through Thirtieth Floors for Tenants

Corporate Headquarters:

- Thirty-First Floor: Aviation, Medical, General Services, Employee Services
- Thirty-Second Floor: Research, Tax, Exploration
- Thirty-Third Floor: Mechanical (note metal louvers on exterior) and Snack Bar
- Thirty-Fourth Floor: Marine
- Thirty-Fifth Floor: Supply and Transportation
- Thirty-Sixth Floor: Manufacturing and Treasury
- Thirty-Seventh Floor: Marketing
- Thirty-Eighth Floor: Marketing, Law
- Thirty-Ninth Floor: Exploration, Production, Economics and Planning
- Fortieth Floor: Controllers, Natural Gas
- Forty-First Floor: Public Relations, Employee Relations, Secretary's
- Forty-Second Floor: Directors and Officers

Petroleum Club:

- Forty-Third and Forty-Fourth Floors

Observatory and Mechanical: recessed 45th level

Architects: Welton Becket and Associates

The namesake of the company, Welton Becket, founded the company after the death of his colleague Walt Wurdemen in 1949. The firm's primary offices were in Los Angeles with multiple offices throughout the country.⁵ Becket studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Fontainebleau and in his early years designed in this style, however, he is known as a modernist. Notable California buildings include General Petroleum (1946), Prudential Insurance (1947), The Music Center for the Performing Arts (1964), all in Los Angeles, and the Beverly Hilton in Beverly Hills. (1952). Other notable commissions include the Ford Division Offices in Dearborn, Michigan (1957), and the Southland Center in Dallas (1960).⁶⁷ Iconic Becket buildings include Capitol (EMI) Records (1956) in Hollywood and the Contemporary (1971) and Polynesian (1971) resorts in Walt Disney World.⁸

The Humble building at 800 Bell Street and the garage at 1602 Milam Street are used as the primary case study in Hunt's book *Total Design on Welton Becket and Associates*. The building is used as an excellent early example of the "total design" ethos of the firm. This concept is described in the book as follows:

"..the phrase connotes both architectural philosophy and practice that embrace all of the services required to analyze any architectural problem, perform the necessary studies and research to solve the problem, and translate the solution into a building or group of Buildings complete down to the last detail of furniture, sculpture and other art, landscaping, and furnishings, even to ashtrays, menus, and matchboxes."⁹

⁵ Washington State Department of Archaeology & Historic Preservation (DAHP). "Welton D. Becket." Accessed May 23, 2023. <https://dahp.wa.gov/historic-preservation/research-and-technical-preservation-guidance/architect-biographies/bio-for-welton-d-becket>.

⁶ Hunt, William Dudley. *Total Design; Architecture of Welton Becket and Associates*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971. Pg10-15

⁷ "Music Center | Our History." Accessed May 23, 2023. <https://www.musiccenter.org/about/about-us/our-story/our-history/>.

⁸ goofyaboutdisney@aol.com, Chuck Schmidt |. "The Disney-Welton Becket Connection." silive, January 11, 2012. https://www.silive.com/goofy_about_disney/2012/01/post_17.html.

⁹ Hunt, William Dudley. *Total Design; Architecture of Welton Becket and Associates*. pg 4

Welton Becket and the firm would go on to design multiple buildings throughout the 1960s, until his death in January of 1969. His son, MacDonald, would take over the firm at this time. The company would continue to operate under his family name until 1987 when Ellerbe Associates merged with the firm and changed the name to Ellerbe Becket Inc.¹⁰ Ellerbe Becket joined AECOM in 2009 and since 2011 has been operating under their name.¹¹

Architect Louis Naidorf of Welton Becket and Associates was the design lead for the Humble Building at 800 Bell from beginning to end.¹² He was also responsible for the Capitol Records building in Los Angeles, which employs similarly distinctive sunshades.

Architects: Golemon & Rolfe

The firm of Golemon and Rolfe was established by Walter Thomas Rolfe and Albert S. Golemon in 1946 in Houston. It was one of the largest architectural firms operating in the Southwest in the mid-twentieth century. Rolfe and Golemon studied at Kansas State College and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology at different times in the 1920s. Golemon also studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Fontainebleau, France. He met Golemon while teaching at Auburn University in Alabama. Both architects were very active in American and International architectural organizations, taking on various roles with the AIA, UNESCO, TSA, and the Texas Architectural Foundation. Rolfe also taught at the University of Texas in Austin in the 1930s and 40s. Golemon went on to work at Lloyd, Morgan & Jones, Harry Golemon Architects, Inc., and STOA/Golemon/Bolullo Architects.¹³ Golemon and Rolfe partnered with Skidmore Owings and Merrill (SOM) in 1956 to design the Medical Towers at 1709 Dryden Road in Houston (NRHP 2016). A sampling of the firm's buildings includes:¹⁴

- 1950 – St. Frances Cabrini Hospital, Alexandria, Louisiana
- 1955 – Bellaire Senior High School, Houston, Texas
- 1957 – Medical Towers, Houston, Texas; Skidmore, Owings and Merrell (SOM), design architects • 1957 – Jack Tar, Orange House Hotel, Orange, Texas; Holabird, Root & Bergee, design architects
- 1958 – Federal Reserve Branch Bank, Houston, Texas; Phelps, DeWees & Simmons, design architects
- 1958 – Union Carbide Office Building, Houston, Texas
- 1960 – Houston Public Library, Oak Forest Branch, Houston, Texas
- 1963 – Reagan State Office Building, Austin, Texas; with Brooks, Barr, Graeber & White
- 1969 – George Bush Intercontinental Airport Terminal A, Houston, Texas; with George Pierce-Abel B. Pierce
- 1972 – Houston International Hospital (Kindred Hospital Houston), Houston, Texas
- 1976 – University of Houston Clear Lake Campus Bayou Building, Houston, Texas; with S.I. Morris Associates and Pitts, Phelps & White
- 1978 – Mabee Teaching Center, University of Houston, Houston, Texas
- 1978 – Cullen Science Center, Houston Baptist University, Houston, Texas
- 1982 – George Bush Intercontinental Airport Terminal C, Houston, Texas; with Pierce Goodwin Alexander
- 1983 – Cullen College of Engineering North Annex, University of Houston, Houston, Texas
- 1983 – Warwick Towers, Houston, Texas; with Werlin, Deane & Associates
- 1987 – George R. Brown Convention Center, Houston, Texas; with John S. Chase, Molina & Associates, Haywood Jordan McCowan and Moseley Associates
- 1979-1983 – Ashford Place Office Park, Houston, Texas

Architects: Pierce and Pierce Associates

George F. Pierce and Abel B. Pierce (of no relation) were exclusively responsible for designing the interior architecture of the humble-Exxon building's Petroleum Club on the 43rd and 44th floors with Neal Lacy, Jr as the project architect from Becket & Associates. They collaborated with William Parker McFadden of William Parker McFadden Associates for

¹⁰ Washington State Department of Archaeology & Historic Preservation (DAHP). "Welton D. Becket." Accessed May 23, 2023.

<https://dahp.wa.gov/historic-preservation/research-and-technical-preservation-guidance/architect-biographies/bio-for-welton-d-becket>.

¹¹ The Journal of the American Institute of Architects. "Ellerbe Becket." Accessed May 30, 2023. <https://www.architectmagazine.com/firms/ellerbe-becket>.

¹² Hunt, William Dudley. *Total Design; Architecture of Welton Becket and Associates*. pg 183

¹³ Medical Towers National Register Nomination Report (1709 Dryden Road) by Delaney Harris-Finch, Anna Mod, Hannah Curry-Shearouse 2016

¹⁴ Quoted from Appendix B of the Medical Towers National Register Nomination Report (1709 Dryden Road) by Delaney Harris-Finch, Anna Mod, Hannah Curry-Shearouse 2016

interior furnishings and decoration.¹⁵ George F. Pierce, originally from Dallas, studied at Southern Methodist University and Rice in the 1940s. He was also a professor of architecture at Rice. Abel B. Pierce from St. Paul, Minnesota, and Blessing, Texas was also a graduate of Rice in 1930 and two years later received a degree in architecture from the University of Pennsylvania.¹⁶ Before World War II, Abel worked for Nunn and McGinty Architects in Houston (River Oaks Shopping Center) and was a naval architect with Brown Ship Building Co. in Houston. After the war, they founded Pierce and Pierce in 1946; the legacy firm, PGAL, is one of the city's largest architectural firms.¹⁷

George and Abel B. Pierce were also involved in designing the Houston State Psychiatric Institute at 1300 Moursund Avenue (1962) in the Texas Medical Center and the Keith-Weiss Geology Laboratory Building at Rice University (1959) and the Anderson Biological Laboratories (1958).¹⁸ ¹⁹ Abel B. Pierce, also known as Abel "John Henry" Brown Pierce retired in the early 1970s and passed away in 2003 at the age of 93.²⁰ The local consulting architects Golemon & Rolfe, Pierce, and Pierce Associates would team up with each other again to design the Continental Airlines Terminal C in 1982 at the George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston.²¹

Petroleum Club

Texas' first Petroleum Club was established in Dallas in 1934 with the intent of providing a lunch venue for deal-making oil executives. Houston established their own club in 1946 at the top of the Rice Hotel downtown. The club was known to have the best food and possibly the best social scene.²² Increased membership and the need for additional space and parking precipitated the move to the 43rd and 44th floors of the Humble building in 1963.

Houston's Petroleum Club has a namesake book, *The Finest in the Land*, by Jack Donahue which highlights the prominence and importance of this Houston club and the essential forum it provided for international decision-making in the oil industry. As early as 1959, the club's representatives including Lynton Upshaw (manager of the club) and Donald L. Connelly (director), were in talks with then Humble President Morgan Davis and Executive Vice-president Carl Reistle, Jr. about the 40,000 square feet space on the upper floors of their new skyscraper. A twenty-year lease was negotiated at \$165,000 a year. Humble would have 1,800 square feet of exclusive space and be required to have at least 50 company memberships.²³ The club occupied the 43rd and 44th floors until 2015. Currently, they are located at 1201 Louisiana on the penthouse level (35th floor) of Total Plaza.²⁴

¹⁵ Pierce, George F. and William Parker McFadden. *Interiors*; 1963. Pgs 88-95.

¹⁶ HoustonMod. "Pierce, George S." Accessed May 26, 2023. <https://www.houstonmod.org/architect/pierce-george-s/>.

¹⁷ PGAL. "The Firm," January 13, 2016. <https://www.pgal.com/about-pgal>.

¹⁸ Houston Mod. "Keith-Wiess Geology Laboratory Building." Accessed May 23, 2023. <https://www.houstonmod.org/home/keith-wiess-geology-laboratory-building/>.

¹⁹ Facilities | Rice University. "Construction at Rice: The First 100 Years." Accessed May 30, 2023. <https://facilities.rice.edu/construction/the-first-100-years>.

²⁰ Freemantle, Tony. "Deaths: Abel 'John Henry' Brown Pierce, Architect of Houston Landmarks." Chron, July 7, 2003. <https://www.chron.com/news/houston-deaths/article/deaths-abel-john-henry-brown-pierce-architect-2128525.php>.

²¹ Gerald Moorhead et al., "George Bush Intercontinental Airport (Houston Intercontinental Airport)", [Houston, Texas], SAH Archipedia, eds. Gabrielle Esperdy and Karen Kingsley, Charlottesville: UVaP, 2012—, <http://sah-archipedia.org/buildings/TX-01-HN127>.

²² Nocera, Joseph. "Texas Primer: The Petroleum Club." Texas Monthly, November 1, 1985. <https://www.texasmonthly.com/being-texas/texas-primer-the-petroleum-club/>.

²³ Donahue, Jack. *The Finest in the Land: The Story of the Petroleum Club of Houston*. Houston: Gulf Publishing Co, 1984. Pgs 129-137.

²⁴ "History - Petroleum Club of Houston." Accessed May 23, 2023. <https://www.pcoh.com/history>.

Houston's Pre-Modern Skyscrapers

This section is extracted from the National Register nomination forms for 500 Jefferson Building, Houston, Harris County, also designed by Welton Becket and Associates.²⁵

“Although there is no single, accepted definition of the term ‘skyscraper,’ the type can generally be described as a building of exceptional height with a steel-frame structure.²⁶ High-rise construction in Houston began in the last decade of the nineteenth century with the construction of the 1894-1895 Binz Building (demolished 1950-1951) at the intersection of Main Street and Texas Avenue.²⁷ Not technically a skyscraper due to its interior cast iron and steel frame with load-bearing brick walls, the 6-story building marked the city’s first attempts to build upward. The architect, Olle J. Lohren, ornamented the building with Italian Renaissance styled elements. The first completely steel-framed skyscraper in Houston was the 8-story First National Bank Building (Sanguinet & Staats, 1903-1905).²⁸ As with the Binz Building, the architects utilized traditional Renaissance Revival ornamentation and organized the building into three parts, a base, a shaft, and a cornice.

Between 1908 and 1913, the City of Houston saw a boom in skyscraper construction with buildings ranging from seven to seventeen stories in height.²⁹ These new buildings followed the same composition and ornamentation established by the Binz Building and First National Bank Buildings; traditional revival styles, such as the Renaissance or Gothic Revival styles, characterized the exteriors. The skyscrapers were either ‘U’ or L-shaped in plan to bring natural light and ventilation to the center of the building. Additionally, the buildings were flat-sided, rising directly from the sidewalk in the tripartite, base, shaft, and cornice formation. Only those elevations that faced streets were ornamented while the secondary or tertiary elevations were left undecorated.³⁰ These new skyscrapers did vary from the earlier office use examples in their use and included hotels, apartments, retail space, and hospitals. The Rice Hotel (Mauran, Russell & Crowell, 1913) and an apartment building, the Beaconsfield (A. C. Pigg, 1911), exemplify Houston skyscrapers built at this time.

During the early years of Houston skyscrapers, most developers hired architects from out-of-town for both high-rise and low-level construction. Sanguinet & Staats of Fort Worth, Texas and Mauran, Russell & Garden of St. Louis, Missouri were the most prolific. D. H. Burnham & Co. of Chicago (1909, Scanlan Building, 405 Main Street), Jarvis Hunt of Chicago (1911, Southern Pacific Building/ Bayou Lofts, 915 Franklin Avenue), and Warren & Wetmore of New York (1915, Texas Company Building, 720 San Jacinto Street) each designed a tall building in Houston as well.³¹ Sanguinet & Staats’ C. F. Carter Building (1919) was the tallest building in Texas for a few months after its construction and the tallest building in Houston until 1926.³²

From 1913-1917 tall building in Houston slowed as World War I (WWI) began and construction stopped altogether from 1917-1918 after the United States (U.S.) joined the war.³³ When it began again in the early 1920s, Houston joined the rest of the U.S. and the world in the effort to identify a modern style to accompany the many advancements of the twentieth century.”

²⁵ Barry, Amanda, Hannah Curry-Shearouse, and Anna Mod, MacRostie Historic Advisors ,LLC, “500 Jefferson Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas,” National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, 2019

²⁶ Francis D.K. Ching, *A Visual Dictionary of Architecture* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1995), 22.

²⁷ Stephen Fox, “Scraping the Houston Sky 1894-1976,” in *Ephemeral City: Cite Looks at Houston*, ed. Barrie Scardino, William F. Stern, and Bruce C. Webb (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 193.

²⁸ Fox, “Scraping the Houston Sky,” 193.

²⁹ Fox, “Scraping the Houston Sky,” 193.

³⁰ Fox, “Scraping the Houston Sky,” 197.

³¹ Fox, “Scraping the Houston Sky,” 197; Stephen Fox, *AIA Architectural Guide Third Edition* (Houston: American Institute of Architects, Houston Chapter, 2012), 64, 73, and 81.

³² Fox, “Scraping the Houston Sky,” 196.

³³ Fox, “Scraping the Houston Sky,” 197.

Houston's Modern Skyscrapers

*This section is extracted from the National Register nomination forms for 500 Jefferson Building, Houston, Harris County, also designed by Welton Becket and Associates.*³⁴

"Houston participated in both waves of Modernism and produced Art Deco, Streamlined Moderne, and eventually Modern skyscraper design. The first building to attempt to break with traditional, architectural ornamentation was the 1929 Gulf Building (NRHP 1983) developed by Jesse Jones and designed by Alfred C. Finn. Built with Art Deco and Gothic Revival influences, the building retains the traditional tripartite arrangement of base, shaft, and cornice, but has very little ornament. Here, the Neo-Classical features seen on earlier skyscrapers have been streamlined into linear suggestions of the earlier detailed ornamentation."³⁵

Skyscraper construction in Houston slowed during the Great Depression of the early 1930s but resumed by 1939 with the construction of Houston City Hall (NRHP 1990) designed by Joseph Finger. Ornamentation on this building is even more restrained and streamlined than the Gulf Building. Cornices are marked by simple banding or recessing the roofline back from the elevation. Simple, bas-relief friezes provide the most intricate decoration and sit atop each window column and over the main entrance. The building does retain the 3-fold formation; however, the base is articulated with two smaller towers placed in front of and on either side of the taller, central shaft with minimal cornice above.³⁶

The 1940 St. Joseph's Infirmary Maternity and Children's Building was designed by I. E. Loveless and shows the continued streamlining of ornament typical of Art Moderne. This building is one of the last Houston Art Moderne skyscrapers to be built during the first wave of Modernism. It retains the 3-part formation and exemplifies the streamlined ornament of the new style with its horizontal banding and vertical emphasis on the central tower."³⁷

Houston Skyscraper Development After WWII

*This section is extracted from the National Register nomination forms for 500 Jefferson Building, Houston, Harris County, also designed by Welton Becket and Associates.*³⁸

"The First City National Bank Building of 1949 was the skyscraper to be built following WWII. Although the first wave of Modernism ended before the war, the design of this building clearly shows lingering popularity of Art Deco/Art Moderne styles. This is due to its pre-war design. It was shelved, and then erected quickly once the war was over. Its ornamentation is more restrained than its pre-war predecessors and it clearly illustrates the turning point from the more streamlined, cut-back ornament of the first Modernist wave in Houston to the full expulsion of ornament in the second wave.³⁹ Almost all exterior ornament has been removed. The tripartite formation is still discernible but has lost much of the emphasis seen in earlier buildings like City Hall and the Gulf Building.

Houston's first Modern style skyscraper, the Melrose Building (NRHP 2014), was designed in the International Style and opened in 1952 as a 21-story office tower. The local Houston architectural firm Lloyd & Morgan designed the building which was the first skyscraper downtown to incorporate modern materials such as cast concrete and turquoise-colored concrete spandrel panels. The building marked a new design direction in its

³⁴ Barry, Amanda, Hannah Curry-Shearouse, and Anna Mod, MacRostie Historic Advisors ,LLC, "500 Jefferson Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas," National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, 2019

³⁵ "Gulf Building: National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form," Texas Historical Commission's Texas Historic Sites atlas, <https://atlas.thc.state.tx.us/NR/pdfs/83004436/83004436.pdf> (accessed July 3, 2018).

³⁶ Houston City Hall: National Register of Historic Places Registration Form," Texas Historical Commission's Texas Historic Sites atlas, <https://atlas.thc.state.tx.us/NR/pdfs/90001471/90001471.pdf> (accessed July 3, 2018).

³⁷ Anna Mod, *Building Modern Houston* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2011), 20.

³⁸ Barry, Amanda, Hannah Curry-Shearouse, and Anna Mod, MacRostie Historic Advisors ,LLC, "500 Jefferson Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas," National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, 2019

³⁹ Mod, *Building Modern Houston*, 20.

asymmetrical composition and use of cantilevered sunshades and grouped aluminum framed windows.⁴⁰ Concurrent skyscraper development included a suburban example of early modern skyscraper design that incorporated perpendicular rectangular forms of different heights in the Prudential Building (demolished 2012).

The rest of the 1950s saw several forays into modern skyscraper design with a root in Classicism as seen in Kenneth Franzheim's South Texas National Bank from 1955 (extant; heavily altered) that fused the symmetrical tower-with-flanking-wings format with small, aluminum framed windows, and a smooth stucco skin devoid of ornament. A similar example of this Stripped Classicism is The Houston Club building (demolished 2015) that was clad in brick with minimal ornamentation. Another suburban example of an early curtain wall is the 1956 Central Square (extant; reclad 2014) by Houston architects Lars Bang and Lucian Hood.

The upper tower of the 1956 Bank of the Southwest designed by Kenneth Franzheim faces Houston's City Hall and mirrors its central-tower-with-flanking-wings composition only executed with an aluminum curtain wall, the city's first, instead of fossilized limestone. The lower pavilion base housed the banking lobby with a mural by the Mexican artist Rufino Tamayo since moved to the Dallas Museum of Art. The Medical Towers (NRHP 2016) building opened in 1956 approximately 3.4 miles to the southwest of the 500 Jefferson Building also in the Texas Medical Center. Medical Towers was designed by Skidmore Owings Merrill (SOM) with Houston architects Golemon & Rolfe Associates and is stylistically inspired by Lever House in New York with a broad multistory pavilion base with a recessed office tower above 16. Both Lever House and Medical Towers are early curtain wall construction with different colors of glass and spandrel panels.

SOM in collaboration with Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson designed the First City National Bank and boldly signaled the adoption of purely Modernist architectural vocabulary in the 1960s. Originally clad in white marble (reclad with white granite in the early 2000s), the building's exoskeleton shaded a recessed curtain wall providing comfort for office workers. The practicality of the exoskeletal form was repeated on several Houston skyscrapers such as SOM's 1963 Tennessee Gas Building (Tenneco, now known as Kinder Morgan), the International Style skyscraper American General Building on Allen Parkway just west of downtown, and on low- and mid-rise buildings in suburban locations. Welton Becket & Associates with Golemon & Rolfe and George Pierce-Abel B. Pierce designed the 1963 Humble Building (now ExxonMobil; recently vacated), another International Style skyscraper with extended "fins" or sunshades shielding an aluminum framed glass curtain wall with aggregate spandrel panels below the glass."

⁴⁰ "Melrose Building: National Register of Historic Places Registration Form," Texas Historical Commission's Texas Historic Sites atlas, <https://atlas.thc.state.tx.us/NR/pdfs/14000627/14000627.pdf> (accessed July 3, 2018).

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION, REHABILITATION, AND ALTERATION HISTORY

The Humble-Exxon Building and Garage were conceptualized by Welton Becket and Associates under the ideal of “Total Design.” The buildings are on separate lots connected by a common design language focused on the primary building. The garage is designed to be more recessive but complementary. A sub-grade tunnel connects the two, it is a pedestrian travel way and houses air conditioning infrastructure. The impressive air conditioning units for the primary building at 800 Bell Street are located on the roof of the garage at 116 Milam Street. The primary building is approximately 1,223,585 square feet on a 63,022 square foot lot. The garage is approximately 339,527 square feet on a 62,530 square foot lot. Each building occupies an entire city block.

800 Bell Street– Primary Building

The Humble-Exxon Building at 800 Bell Street is a 44-story, rectangular plan International style skyscraper with a recessed observation level completed in 1962. The footprint is approximately 250 feet by 115 feet and rises about 600 feet. The primary building at 800 Bell’s principal pedestrian entrance faces north⁴¹ towards Bell Street. The front building wall is set back approximately 80 feet from the public right of way. A terrazzo courtyard area precedes the building leading to the central pedestrian entrance. Stairs with original “H” metal handrails lead up to a podium walkway and lightwell/sunken garden; there once was a pool with fountain sculpture but has been filled in. The rear elevation facing Leeland Street provides a vehicular entrance with ramps running through the lot from Travis to Milam Streets (one sloped up toward entrance and another down to sub-grade loading area). The property is bound on the sides by Milam Street to the west and Travis Street to the east.

International style elements include the regular austere structural composition, entry-level columns, flat roof, corner windows/details, and Modern materials such as the Mo-Sai pre-cast concrete panels. While being a skyscraper, the building impresses a sense of horizontality on the viewer due to prominent cantilevered sunshades on each floor, also called a brise soleil. Sunshades were designed to provide an energy-saving cover for curtain window walls. The north and south elevations have ten bays with six windows and nine structural columns reclad in U-shaped white coated metal panels; corner bay windows run to the very edge. Side elevations consist of four full structural bays but appear as one continuous bay on the exterior.

The building has a solid concrete beam and slab foundation with a structural steel frame. Roof is flat, originally with tar and gravel, supported by steel trusses. The ten-bay building has a Classical three-part composition representing a corporate hierarchy with base, shaft, and cornice. These could also be described as a public area, repetitive corporate offices, and an executive gallery at the top. The recessed base or first floor and mezzanine act as the public plaza and lobby. It once housed a public touring service office for Humble Oil. There are three subfloors including a concourse that housed the cafeteria, auditorium, and sub-surface passage/tunnel to the garage building. Other two sub-floors were used for storage and mechanical infrastructure.

Exterior walls are multi-composition curtain with quartz aggregate pre-cast concrete panels with spandrel and plate glass windows. Originally, the steel column structure was clad with white marble veneer (with quirk-mitered corners) at the first floor/mezzanine level and has since been reclad in white coated metal panels to mimic the same appearance.⁴² Vertical aluminum mullions are recessed from structural columns and are dispersed between windows and on corners. Character-defining sunshades are supported by cantilevered aluminum and made of an aluminum honeycomb core, clad on top with white 14-gauge porcelain steel panels and additional porcelain panels on the underside.⁴³

⁴¹ For the purpose of this report, the front elevation is referred to as facing north, although the true direction is northeast

⁴² Historic architectural drawings c. 1960 Courtesy CMI Developers, from Welton Beckett and Associates

⁴³ ⁴³ Conversation with Daron Hester, P.E (TX)/Managing Principal, Director of Operations, Diagnostics group at Waler P Moore, 7/18/23 and historic architectural drawings c. 1960 Courtesy CMI Developers, from Welton Beckett and Associates

1616 Milam Street– Garage

Connected to the primary building through a subterranean tunnel on the concourse level, the Humble Exxon Garage at 1616 Milam is a six-story rectangular plan parking garage designed for approximately 1,200 cars. The garage at 1616 Milam does not have a primary façade and is bound by Pease Street to the south, Leeland Street to the north, Milam to the east, and Louisiana Street to the west. The building consists of ten bays on Leeland and Pease Streets and four bays on Milam and Louisiana Streets.

It is clad in tan travertine panels and glazed curtain walls with entry doors at the street level. The upper floors have geometric metal screens. The garage was originally designed with a service station corner of Milam and Pease Streets, and a Fidelity Bank and Trust Co. location facing Leeland Street. Several entrances/curb cuts remain that represent these changes. Air conditioning units for 800 Bell are extant on the roof of the garage at 1616 Milam.

Alterations**Primary Building Alterations:**

Alteration dates unknown, probably in the 1990s:

- Leeland Street triangular canopy over vehicular entrance and first floor/mezzanine columns
- The landscaping and front courtyard has been altered: water feature/fountain sculpture removed
- Sunken/recessed garden altered

Known work and major alterations were completed between 1998 to 2007 by Walter P Moore.^{44 45}

Scope of work included:

- Periodic condition assessments of the façade.
- Recladding of the exterior perimeter marble-faced columns due to cracking of original material that was creating corrosion of steel columns (2004-2007). Replacement material consists of lightweight, white-coated metal panels for easy maintenance and strength (that also allows flexibility/movement of the building). They mimic the original white marble.
- Lifeline on each level for cleaning and inspection of exterior.
- Other Services:
 - Structural, waterproofing, and restoration consultation
 - Construction administration

Garage Alterations:

Total extent of alterations is unknown currently, but the building is in good condition and retains a high degree of original material within its essential form. Most of the original tan travertine panels on the first floor remain, and some have been replaced. The original Humble service station has been removed at the corner of Milam and Pease Streets, curb cuts and interior structural remains reflect this change. Some of the glazed and aluminum curtain walls are boarded, probably missing glass. Some of the clear glass has been replaced with tinted plate glass.

⁴⁴ Walter P Moore. "800 Bell," June 15, 2015. <https://www.walterpmoore.com/800-bell>.

⁴⁵ Conversation with Daron Hester, P.E (TX)/Managing Principal, Director of Operations, Diagnostics group at Waler P Moore, 7/18/23

Other Information:*Significant Dates:***1917**

Formulation of Humble Oil & Refining Company.

1919

Fifty percent of Humble was bought out by Standard Oil.

1921

Humble Building was constructed at 1212 Main Street in Houston.

1958-1960

In the 1950s, the Humble Oil & Refining Company was a Standard Oil Company of New Jersey subsidiary. Their combined operation consisted of about 41,000 employees nationwide with 17,000 specifically for Humble.

1958

Talks were underway to provide a headquarters in Houston to consolidate scattered sites in the city. At this time, Humble Oil's Houston employees were greater than 3,000⁴⁶

By late 1958, Welton Becket & Associates were hired for the project with Golemon & Rolfe and George Pierce-Abel B. Pierce as the local consulting architect and interior. The preliminary estimated cost of the office building was \$32 million with a net usable area of about 1 million square feet and a 530,000 square foot coordinating garage with space for about 1,300 cars accessed by an underground tunnel.⁴⁷

1962

The Humble building was completed in 1963 and was the tallest building in Houston and west of the Mississippi at the time. It was a focus of the Houston skyline. The building was completed at a cost of \$39 million (slightly over budget) with an additional \$4 million for the parking structure.⁴⁸ The company president, C.E. Reistle, said that the new building "serves as a focal point for company progress and reflects our confidence in the future of the petroleum industry and in the city of Houston."⁴⁹ Typical of the corporate architecture of the time, the building included retail, a 500-seat auditorium, a private club, a barber, and a drugstore.⁵⁰

1972

Humble Oil and Standard Oil consolidated the name to Exxon.⁵¹

1999

Exxon (Humble Oil) Building was renamed "ExxonMobil" after a merger.

2015

ExxonMobil and Petroleum Club vacate the building.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(see footnotes)

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

⁴⁶ Hunt, William Dudley. *Total Design; Architecture of Welton Becket and Associates*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971. Pg167

⁴⁷ Ibid, pg 169

⁴⁸ Ibid, pg 210

⁴⁹ Ibid, pg 210

⁵⁰ Ibid, pg 173

⁵¹ Blum, Jordan. "The March from Humble Oil to Exxon Dates Back More than a Century." *Chron*, May 25, 2016.

<https://www.chron.com/local/history/economy-business/article/The-march-from-Humble-Oil-to-Exxon-dates-back-7943392.php>.

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 | NA | | S - satisfies | D - does not satisfy | NA - not applicable |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <input checked="" 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 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"/> | (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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present; | | | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride. | | | |

AND

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (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)). |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Sec. 33-229. Criteria for protected landmark designation

- | S | NA | | S - satisfies | D - does not satisfy | NA - not applicable |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (1) Meets at least three of the criteria for designation in section 33-224 of this Code; | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (2) Was constructed more than 100 years before application for designation was received by the director; | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (3) Is listed individually or as a contributing structure in an historic district on the National Register of Historic Places; or | | | |

- (2) The owner or, in the case of multiple owners, any of the multiple owners is delinquent on city taxes on any other property;
- (3) The significant historic structure has deteriorated, has been relocated, demolished or destroyed; or
- (4) The site no longer meets the requirements of section (a) of this ordinance; then the changed condition shall constitute grounds for revocation of the exemption.

The director of finance shall give a 90-day notice to the owner of a significant historic structure prior to any revocation of the exemption granted pursuant to this section. The purpose of such notice shall be to allow the owner an opportunity to correct the changed condition.

(f) Tax certificates issued for any significant historic structure receiving tax relief pursuant to this section shall be clearly marked: Significant Historic Structure—Subject to recapture of taxes under Code of Ordinances. (Each year during which the property is granted tax relief, the director of finance shall note on his or her records the valuation that would have been made and the taxes that would have been due had the significant historic structure not qualified for tax relief under this section. If the property has a changed condition described under subsection (e) of this section or no longer meets the requirements of subsection (a) of this section, then the property shall be subject to a recapture of taxes and subject to penalties and interest calculated under pertinent provisions of the Texas Tax Code. The additional tax shall be equal to the amount of the tax payable for the preceding fifteen years had the property not been granted tax relief. Such additional taxes shall be deposited in a segregated account, the use of which shall be established by city council by a subsequent ordinance. Until paid, there shall be a lien for additional taxes, penalty, and interest on the property granted tax relief under the provisions of this section. An obligation to pay recaptured taxes is extinguished by operation of force majeure. Force Majeure means: fires, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, ice storms and other natural disasters, explosions, war, terrorist acts, riots, and the acts of superior governmental or military authority, and which the affected party is unable to prevent by the exercise of reasonable diligence. The term does not include any changes in general economic conditions such as inflation, interest rates, economic downturn or other factors of general application, bankruptcy or an event that merely makes performance more difficult, expensive or impractical.

(g) This exemption is not available to any qualifying significant historic structure that has been acquired or improved in whole or in part by a city funded economic development grant or loan, tax increment reinvestment zone financing or funding, tax abatement agreement, or acquired or improved as the subrecipient of a federally funded economic development grant or loan agreement.

(h) The owner of a historic site that receives an exemption under [section 44-5](#) of this code may apply for and receive an exemption as a significant historic structure if it meets the requirements under this section.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Protected Landmark Designation and Significant Structure designation of the Humble Exxon Building and Garage at 800 Bell and 1616 Milam Streets.

HAHC RECOMMENDATION