

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME: The Scanlan Building

Owner: 405 Main Land, Ltd.

APPLICANT: 405 Main Land, Ltd., Tony Abyad

LOCATION: 405 Main Street, Houston

30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: Mar-12-2000

AGENDA ITEM: Id

HPO FILE NO.: 00L089

DATE ACCEPTED: Mar-03-2000

HAHC HEARING: Apr-13-2000

P. C. MEETING: May-04-2000

SITE INFORMATION

Lot 10 and Tract 9, Block 45, SSBB, Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is an eleven-story neo-classical commercial building.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

Completed in 1909 on the site of the first official "President's House" of the Republic of Texas, the Scanlan Building achieves prominent status in Houston because of its association with the colorful Scanlan family, whose involvement in local politics and industry was noteworthy and often controversial. Construction of the 11-story Scanlan building was orchestrated by estate executor Kate Scanlan as a monument to her father, a two term mayor of Houston. Additionally, the building is significant as the only known office building in Texas designed by the notable architect and city planner, Daniel H. Burnham of Chicago. As the first building of its size and style to be designed in Houston by a major national architect, it set a trend, which still prevails. The Scanlan Building was listed in the National Register of Places on May 23, 1980 (Reference No. 80004132).

Thomas Howe Scanlan was born in Ireland, November 10, 1832, and immigrated to New York with his family in 1839, and to Houston in 1853. His political career, which extended from 1867 through 1879, included service as Alderman of the Third Ward, Postmaster of the City, and three-term Mayor of Houston (Republican). As a representative of the Radical Reconstruction Government of Texas, Scanlan was not a popular mayor. However, while he was mayor of Houston, Scanlan promoted the cause of freedmen by appointing blacks to the police force and supporting the election of black councilmen in 1872. During his mayoralty for the first time, four out of the ten appointed aldermen were black. Additionally, later historians have noted the many civic improvements made by his administration during a difficult period in Houston's history. As Mayor, Scanlan is credited with straightening out the city treasury which was in disarray when he took office in 1870. Additionally, he enacted city fire service, installed street lighting, and constructed a new City Hall. Perhaps his greatest accomplishment was the city sewer system. The city promotional magazine regularly published photos of Mayor Scanlan standing at the mouth of new sewer spots all over town.

Though the citizens of Houston wanted all the civic improvements initiated by Scanlan, they disliked the tax burden to pay for them. The Democrats seized the opportunity to accuse Scanlan of graft and wasting city revenues. In large part these accusations stemmed from the cost of constructing the

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market house. After Scanlan's election to a second term, construction began in 1872 at a proposed cost of \$228,000. The building's plans were altered to make it a civic monument. The city hall and market house, completed during Scanlan's third term in 1873, included a 1,000 seat theater, retail shops, and professional offices. Houstonians now had an elaborately appointed building costing over \$400,000 to construct. On July 8, 1876, however, the market house was destroyed by fire, and when rebuilding cost less than \$100,000, and charges of waste and corruption abounded. Although the accusers overlooked the fact that the replacement building was constructed on the old foundation, omitted the Italianate elegance, and lacked the theater. As a result, Scanlan and the Republicans lost control of the city to the Democrats.

As early as 1903, Scanlan planned a large modern office building on property at Main and Preston, which he had owned since 1865. The property was first purchased from the Allen Brothers, founders of Houston, in January of 1837, by Francis Richard Lubbock who built a frame storehouse there. In 1838, the property and building were sold to the Republic of Texas for use as the official home for Presidents Sam Houston and Mirabeau B. Lamar, before the government was moved to Austin in 1839. A plaque commemorating the site of the first President's House of the Republic of Texas was placed on the entrance of the present building by the state in 1936.

The architect for this building was Daniel H. Burnham, one of the most prestigious architects in the United States during this time period. As an architect and city planner, Burnham gained fame as the designer and promoter of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, which showcased the use of neo-classical architecture. Burnham's "city beautiful" movement took root in every major city in the United States. Additionally, Burnham was the father of the "Chicago Plan", the first truly comprehensive plan. A member of the American Institute of Architects since 1884, Burnham was named a fellow in 1887, and elected president of the Association in 1894.

The Scanlan Building is the only office building and one of only two commissions to be completed by Burnham in Texas, the other being the 1904 Union Station in El Paso. At its opening, August 1, 1909, the Scanlan Building was hailed as the largest building in the largest city in the largest state. As the first of its type and size to be completed by a nationally acclaimed architectural firm, it set precedents which other property owners raced to out-do, thus breaking the ten-story barrier which leading developer Jesse Jones had set as his personal ideal for the city. The building's modern design and amenities, as well as its desirable location made it attractive to prominent lawyers, physicians, and a host of other professionals, thus enhancing the economic base of Houston's central business district. The building's design and quality of construction have enabled the building to survive with reasonable care and without major alteration.

RESTORATION HISTORY/CURRENT CONDITION:

Consisting of eleven-stories and basement, the Scanlan Building occupies an area covering approximately 85' x 101' at the southeast corner of Main and Preston. From the intersection the building appears to be a rectangular mass. However, the building is actually L-shaped allowing light and air to penetrate the ten floors of offices. The ground floor retail space extends to the rear property line, forming a rectangle, which fills the entire site. The two major elevations along Main and Preston are sheathed in light gray terra cotta and matching glazed brick. In contemplation of adjoining buildings of equal height, the south and east ends of the building are finished in common brown brick.

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The original projecting terra cotta cornice has been removed for safety reasons. Other terra cotta details such as the main entrance door-surround and pilaster columns remain in good condition. The main entrance doors and glass show-windows have been replaced. Additional doors have been added to the ground floor façade to accommodate retail shops. Unadorned stucco panels now fill the space above the storefront, which was originally lighted with multi-paned glass. Several of the storefront bays have green canvas awnings above the storefront. On the north façade of the building (facing Preston) a one-story glass enclosure providing access to the basement has been constructed. The staircase enclosure is approximately twenty feet long and protrudes from the building by about six feet. The staircase enclosure is reversible, but it is not likely that it will be removed. The interior of the building was completely remodeled in 1982 and again in 1989. However, the lobby retains its original finishes. The lobby contains a large historic photograph of the building, which can be used for reference if the storefront is restored or the cornice is recreated in the future.

THE FOLLOWING SOURCES WERE USED BY PLANNING STAFF TO SUPPLEMENT THE LANDMARK APPLICATION SUBMITTED BY THE APPLICANT:

Field, William Scott, *The Last of the Past, Houston Architecture: 1847 to 1915*, The Cultural Arts Council of Houston, 1981

Fox, Stephen, *Houston Architectural Guide*, Houston: American Institute of Architects, Houston Chapter and Herring Press, 1990

National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form, *The Scanlan Building*, May 23, 1980, (Reference No. 80004132)

Southwest Center for Urban Research and the School of Architecture, Rice University, et al., *Houston Architectural Survey, Volume I, Downtown Houston*, 1980

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION:

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

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(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.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

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

**SITE LOCATION MAP
THE SCANLAN BUILDING**

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405 MAIN STREET
NOT TO SCALE