

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: The Fifth Ward Hotel Building
OWNER: Blumenthal, Inc.
APPLICANT: Same
LOCATION: 1206 Nance Street – Warehouse District
30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: Nov-3-2000

AGENDA ITEM: I.b
HPO FILE NO: 00L090
DATE ACCEPTED: Oct-15-2000
HAHC HEARING: Dec-07-2000
PC HEARING: Jan-11-2001

SITE INFORMATION: Tracts 6A and 7A, Block 11, Richey’s Addition, NSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The structure on the site is a rectangular, 1-story masonry brick building with a flat roof.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Fifth Ward Hotel Building was built circa 1880 as a hotel. Although the brick building was constructed more for utilitarian purposes, it still exhibits distinctive architectural detailing with its series of arched openings and brick corbelling. More importantly, the hotel was the only one constructed north of Buffalo Bayou and the only one ranked in comparison to the finer ones south of the Bayou from this very early period in Houston’s history. It is also one of the few surviving buildings of the late 19th century in the warehouse area where literally the “railroad met the sea.” The hotel was strategically located adjacent to the large railroad centers that connected directly to Buffalo Bayou where goods of every kind, businessmen and travelers convened to conduct business that made Houston the world city it is today. Virtually every ethnic group, with perhaps German immigrants making up the largest numbers, worked for the railroad industry. Therefore, the hotel served as lodging for people of different national origins and would also have been a center of other activities for them as well.

City streets in the area have changed names several times since the 19th century. In order to trace the history of the building, it is necessary to understand the change in street names during its history. The Fifth Ward Grocery was located in the Richey Addition, which was named after Benjamin Richey. Richey Addition was flanked by Richey, William and John Streets, also the names of two sons of Benjamin. Third Street was known interchangeably as Liberty Street in the 19th and early 20th centuries. An 1860 map shows John Street which later became Walnut, then Hickory, and then Walnut again. By the 1950s, the street was known by its present name, Nance. Liberty was also known in the 1920s as N. San Jacinto. In 1935 the street name was changed to Rothwell, also known as N. San Jacinto in the 1920s. The current address of the building is 1206 Nance, although this short stretch of Nance is also known as Rothwell.

The Fifth Ward Hotel was first mentioned in 1884 in the Houston City Directory. In the Historical Business Review section under ‘Hotels,’ it states that “Houston can point to her hotels with pride. The Capital Hotel at the corner of Main Street and Texas Avenue, on the site of the old Statehouse, is a building that would ornament any city. Its accessibility, its commodious structure and admirable appointments make it a great favorite with the traveling public. The Hutchins House, on Franklin Street, is known throughout the State as a first-class hotel. The Tremont House, the Germania House, the Dissen House, and on the north side of the bayou McCarty’s Fifth Ward Hotel, are respectable candidates for public patronage.” An early advertisement for the Fifth Ward Hotel named B. W. McCarty as the proprietor. It also advertised that it was “conducted on the American and European

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plans” (meaning private baths as well as shared ones) and affording “first-class accommodations to the traveling public.” It also stated that it was centrally located and convenient to the Principal Railroad Depots and “having been enlarged and thoroughly renovated.” Furthermore, it reported that a fine billiard hall and saloon was attached and was located on the corner of Liberty and Walnut (now Nance) Streets. The hotel as well as these amenities would have attracted large numbers of the railroad workers. While most railroad workers were German immigrants, other workers came from many other different nations, especially since Houston was a port city and had an extensive railroad system to other parts of the country.

By 1886-1887 Zachariah T. Hogan, a wholesale grocer and commission merchant of the firm Johnson, Hogan & Co., either operated the hotel on his own or with his business partner, J. W. Johnson. This same year, the city directory has a listing for Hogan’s Fifth Ward Hotel. Operation of the hotel changed again and from 1887 until 1889, James Adams and Nellie (Mrs. Edward) Shampaign were the proprietors. The Shampaigns lived at the hotel and Mr. Edward Shampaign was a passenger conductor for the nearby Southern Pacific Railroad.

In 1889, Homer L. Branham, a dry goods merchant, sold notions, hats, boots, shoes, gents furnishing goods, crockery, glassware, hardware, stoves, tinware, school books, stationery, cigars and tobaccos at the site, known then as 13-15 Liberty. It is presumed Mr. Branham’s business operated in the entire ground floor of the hotel or on a portion of it. He continued his dry goods business there until 1895.

The hotel continued operations and changed management often. In 1889 Mary J. Harville, a widow, lived at the hotel and was proprietress with her daughter, Maud, serving as bookkeeper. Thomas Harville, presumably a son of Mary, also boarded at the hotel and worked as a bartender down the street at Sip La Cours (23 Liberty), a saloon owned by Siprien La Cour. From 1892–95 Claude H. Consterdine served as proprietor and also lived at the hotel.

The property later became under the ownership of Henry Henke, a prominent grocer merchant, who also owned the building next door at 1200 Nance. Henke continued to lease the space for a hotel and later sold the property to Frank C. Colby in 1895. The hotel continued its operation and the name remained unchanged until 1900 when it became known as the Hotel Belknap. The ground floor continued to be leased over the years to various merchants including a furniture merchant, wholesale confectioners and candy manufacturers. In 1920 it was leased to Southwestern Bag Company, a manufacturer and dealer in new and second hand burlap and cotton bags. The hotel was known as the Belknap from 1900 to 1907 when it was changed to Brooklyn Hotel, a name it kept until 1913. It later became the Phoenix (1913-1926), then briefly the Liberty (1926-27), and shortly thereafter the property stood vacant. A listing in the 1930s shows Mrs. Margie Daughtertry residing there and providing furnished rooms at 1210 Nance.

The area around the Fifth Ward Hotel was an industrial and working class neighborhood made up of different nationalities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Typical of regional trends of the periods, a larger percentage of the Fifth Ward Hotel’s operators were women, either widowed or married. Many of the merchants that had businesses in the building also lived in one of the rooms above. While the hotel was also occupied by locals, it was primarily used by the railroad workers after shifts and by the business men who traveled to the warehouse area of Houston, just north of the downtown business center.

The building is located in the warehouse area, which grew up along Buffalo Bayou between the 1880s and the 1920s. According to Stephen Fox, “the area developed in response to the overlap of major transportation arteries - the bayou itself, navigable by barge, and a series of railroad lines. It was railroad

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expansion after the turn-of-the-century that made the lightly settled working-class neighborhood on the north bank of Buffalo Bayou and the somewhat denser middle-class residential district on the south bank attractive locales for commercial development. The north side (today’s NoHo), in Fifth Ward, became the ‘factory district.’ The south bank, in Second Ward, became the ‘wholesale district,’ reflecting Commerce Street’s long-standing identification as Produce Row where wholesale grocery, meat, produce and baking establishments were concentrated until 1950. Much of the original character of the warehouse area remains with many industrial vernacular buildings, rail trackage and brick-paved streets still surviving.

RESTORATION HISTORY AND CURRENT CONDITION

Originally a 3-story building, the upper two floors were removed circa 1950s. Thereafter, a sheet metal covering was placed over the first floor façade, masking the late 19th century façade. The metal façade covering was removed by the current owner.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION

Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation

(a) The HAHC and the commission, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider one or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the type of designation:

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

- (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;

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- (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 Planning Commission accepts the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommends designation of the Fifth Ward Hotel Building as a landmark to City Council since the application complies with the criteria in the Historic Preservation Ordinance.

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FIFTH WARD HOTEL BUILDING
SITE LOCATION MAP
1206 NANCE STREET
NOT TO SCALE

