

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME: Magnolia Brewery Café Taproom

Building (aka Magnolia Ballroom)

OWNER: Bart Truxillo

APPLICANT: Bart Truxillo

LOCATION: 715 Franklin Avenue – Main Street/Market Square Historic District (aka 120 Milam Street –HCAD)

HEARING NOTICE: 12-15-03

AGENDA ITEM: I

P.C.MEETING DATE: 02-05-04

HPO FILE NO.: 04L112

DATE ACCEPTED: 12-14-03

HAHC HEARING DATE:01-15-04

SITE INFORMATION

Lot 1, Tracts 2A and 12A, Block 17, SSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The commercial building on the site is a two-story, reinforced concrete commercial building with stucco veneer.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The Magnolia Brewery Café Taproom Building at 715 Franklin Avenue, constructed by the Houston Ice and Brewing Company in 1912, is the second oldest of only two remaining buildings once part of the extensive complex of the Magnolia Brewery. Constructed as a café taproom, it survives as the one of the oldest remaining examples of the brewery buildings designed by Cooke & Company, a prominent Houston architectural firm. Their “new” design for the brewery complex buildings, which had previously been ornately Victorian in nature, now featured Italianate detailing. The building at 715 Franklin is the only remaining example of the brewery complex that exemplified the grandiose, Italianate style design of Cooke & Company. Their design, more in character with Eugene T. Heiner’s other Brewery buildings, included pairs of deep-set, cypress windows with original leaded glass of the magnolia motif, the trademark of the brewery, and the distinctive, rhythmically bracketed cornices and capped pedestals rising above the flat roof. The Magnolia Brewery, founded by Hugh Hamilton, was “one of Houston’s largest industries at the turn of the century” and by 1910 encompassed over twenty acres north and south of Buffalo Bayou.” The building at 715 Franklin remains as a unique example of “architecture of Houston’s early industrial structures.”

The building is located in the Main Street/Market Square Historic District that is both a City of Houston and National Register Historic District. The building at 715 Franklin Avenue in the City of Houston Historic District was classified as “contributing” when the historic district was designated by City Council on March 5, 1997. The Main Street/Market Square Historic District was previously listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district on July 18, 1983. The boundary of that historic district was increased subsequently on February 23, 1984. The Magnolia Brewery Café Taproom Building at 715 Franklin Avenue and The Magnolia Brewery Building at 110 Milam Street (City of Houston Landmark – November 25, 2003), which were both once part of the Magnolia Brewery complex as well as some adjacent buildings, were included in the expanded National Register Historic District. The Magnolia Brewery Café Taproom Building at 715 Franklin Avenue is also individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places and has also been designated as a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark.

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The architectural firm Cooke & Company designed the rectangular plan, two-story reinforced concrete commercial building at 715 Franklin in 1912 for the Houston Ice and Brewing Company, also known as the Magnolia Brewery. This building was part of the early twentieth century expansion of the company's ice and beer making complex that began on the north side of the bayou in 1887 and grew to include over 20 contiguous acres and over ten buildings.

The Houston Ice and Brewing Company, whose owners dubbed it the Magnolia Brewery, was founded in 1893 and had its factory and ice-making plant at Fourth and Washington streets on the north side of Buffalo Bayou. The company manufactured ice but was largely recognized for its lager beer that sold under the names "Standard," "Richelieu", "Magnolia Pale," and "Southern Select." The beer sold at five cents a bottle. The *Brewers Journal* of February 1893, as noted in *The Encyclopedia of Texas Breweries*, reports that "the Houston Brewing Company, Houston, Texas, of which Hugh Hamilton is president, Bertrand Adoue [of Galveston], vice-president, and H. Prince, secretary and treasurer, have completed the building of their extensive establishment and commenced brewing" (Hennech, page 84). The brewery had the top of the line machinery, producing 100 tons of ice and 60,000 barrels of beer per year, all produced with artesian well water. "In 1897 the company announced an addition to the brewery and in 1898 a storage building was constructed and a new bottling house followed in 1901" (Hennech, pages 84-85).

"Hugh Hamilton, founder of the Houston Ice and Brewing Company, began his career as vice-president and manager of the Central Ice Factory, located on the corner of Washington Avenue and Sixth Street in the First Ward industrial area on the north side of Buffalo Bayou. By 1886 Hamilton had become proprietor of the Crystal Ice Works located about one block east of the Central Ice Factory" (Houston Architectural Survey, page 61) and in 1887 he chartered the Houston Ice Company with the same officers as the Central Ice Factory. "In addition to ice manufacturing and packing, the company became coal dealers and agents for Christian Moerlein Brewing Company of Cincinnati" (Houston Architectural Survey, page 61). Hamilton incorporated the company as the Houston Ice and Brewing Company in March 1892 with a capital stock of \$250,000. By June of that year, he hired architect, Eugene T. Heiner (1852-1901), to design a new building at Fourth and Washington (demolished in 2002). The four-story main building was completed in the Spring of 1893 and Hamilton located his business here after construction.

Eugene Heiner was an important Houston architect in the late nineteenth century and is well known for his use of a very Victorian influenced Italianate style. He was also noted for his Texas courthouse designs, houses, commercial and civic buildings in Houston and throughout the state. Among Heiner's well-known Houston buildings are the Houston Cotton Exchange (1884) and the Brashear Building (1882), both located in the Main Street/Market Square Historic District.

Future additions to Magnolia Brewery, including an unusual crescent shaped stable, followed in the Victorian Italianate style of the original building even after Heiner's death in 1901. Perhaps it was that influence that guided H. C. Cook & Company to utilize that style for the building at 715 Franklin Avenue in 1912. In the beginning, the brewery consisted of four buildings occupying both sides of Fourth and Washington Avenues and continuing to the north bank of Buffalo Bayou. By 1915, the company had expanded to more than "ten buildings joined together physically and stylistically".

By 1903 the company had a capacity of 500,000 pounds of ice per day and 200,000 barrels of beer per year. A pipeline was installed between the brewery and bottling house in 1905. In 1906, the *Brewer's Journal* announced that the "Houston Ice and Brewing Co., Houston, Texas, has commenced operating two powerboats between Houston and Key West, transporting beer in casks to Cuba. The boats are equipped with modern cold storage" (Henneck, page 86).

By 1910, the company had achieved much success and continued to expand not only in Houston, but also with various production, storage, and distribution agencies throughout the southwest (Hennech). Beer production had expanded to 200,000 barrels per year (*Souvenir Anniversary Edition, Houston Chronicle*). Also by this time, property in fractional block 17 was acquired on the south bank of the bayou (Redford). In 1911, Hamilton hired the architectural and engineering company of H.C. Cooke and Company to begin construction of a new 250' concrete and heavy timber bridge stretching from the east side of Franklin Avenue Bridge east of the bayou toward the Milam St. Bridge. This was to give the company easy access to the new buildings located on block 17 and serve as a public thoroughfare. Mayor Rice hailed the bridge “a new beauty spot for Houston” because it masked the unsightly banks of the bayou, improving Houston’s image (*Progressive Houston*).

The Magnolia Brewery Café Taproom Building, located at 915 Franklin Avenue at Milam, was designed and built in 1912 by the H.C. Cooke and Company architecture firm. The building was constructed in the footprint of a former structure known as the Franklin Building. At the time of construction, it was known as the Magnolia Café (*Houston Architectural Survey*). Built for a taproom and executive offices, the building featured the first refrigerator type air-conditioning in Houston (Field). Politicians and businessmen gathered in the hospitality suite on the second floor of the building to enjoy free food and five cent beers (*Houston Downtown*).

“The building program of the Houston Ice and Brewing Company lasted from 1892 until about 1915 and encompassed more than ten buildings joined together physically and stylistically” (Houston Architectural Survey, page 59). The designs of Heiner were Italianate in style and highly ornamented as was typical of buildings of the Victorian era. Cooke & Company continued the building campaign after 1905 and while their structures do show an influence of the Victorian era, they are less ornate – a stylistic trend that was common in the first decades of the twentieth century. “The complex spanned Buffalo Bayou in the 1915 during the peak years of the company. The Magnolia Brewery was located on the north side in an industrial area and administrative offices of Houston Ice and Brewing Company were south of the bayou [715 Franklin] near the downtown commercial center” (Houston Architectural Survey, page 59). In 1980, only three of the buildings remained from this once extensive industrial and commercial complex: part of the original building built in 1893 and later expanded on Washington Avenue [known as 404 Washington]; the Magnolia Brewery Building at 110 Milam Street (ornate section fronting Milam), built in 1906 south of the bayou, and 715 Franklin Avenue, the Magnolia Brewery Café Taproom Building built in 1912, which is located one lot away from 110 Milam.

Henry C. Cooke (1852-1920) founded Cooke and Company, and the firm designed all the buildings for the Houston Ice and Brewing Company after Heiner’s death in 1901. Cooke was a native of England where he studied architecture and upon moving to Italy, studied classical architecture. This training is very evident in the neo-classical style of some of his buildings. He came to Texas in 1893 (*Houston Chronicle*) and opened an architectural firm in Galveston but retreated to Houston after the storm of 1900. W. A. Cooke, his architect son, began managing the firm that “was responsible for the additions of the Houston Ice and Brewing Company after 1905” (Houston Architectural Survey, page 62). Cooke also designed such buildings as the Macatee Hotel and the Prince William Theatre Company building.

“By 1906 the company [Houston Ice and Brewing Company] had acquired the property on the south side of bayou [Buffalo] and begun to locate certain facilities there. The section at 110 Milam is thought to have been the first constructed on this side. It apparently housed a cold storage facility and packing plant” (Houston Architectural Survey, page 62). The original building was an L-shaped, *one-story* structure with frontage on Milam and Franklin. In addition to cold storage and packing division, the machine shop was located at 615

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Franklin, a large office building was located at 707-717 Franklin and the Magnolia Café (taproom for the brewery), at 719-721 Franklin and Milam (now known as 715 Franklin).

The Magnolia Brewery Café Taproom Building at 715 Franklin Avenue is a two-story, neo-classical style structure with Italianate influences. It lacks much of the Victorian influence seen in the previous buildings of the company. The walls are reinforced concrete covered with stucco, and it also features a full basement. Although the ground floor has been refaced, the second floor facades display many of the original features such as “deeply recessed lead-glass windows” and “a heavy, dark iron cornice supported by oversized scroll brackets” (*Houston Architectural Survey*). At one point in time, a metal hood projected from the main entrance façade and around the side facade for protection from weather, but has since been removed (Redford). “On Franklin, the principal elevation, there are four bays and a narrow bay which is duplicated in the first bay on Milam. At the corner a tower image is produced by the narrow bays and a capped parapet which rises above the roofline. Piers, set below the cornice, divide each bay and extend beyond the flat roof line producing capped pedestals between which run a parapet.” Below, pairs of deep-set original cypress windows feature original leaded glass magnolia images, the trademark of the brewery, in the frames above each pair. The interior contains many original features including plaster Corinthian columns that feature a marbled effect, wooden trim of the office suite’s doorways and windows, two rotunda ceilings, and pale lavender-colored glazed glass brick tiles (*Houston Architectural Survey*). According to Bart Truxillo, owner of the building, these glass brick tiles, which are unique to Houston, were used as both interior and exterior surfaces, proving to be very durable (*Houston Post*).

After construction and prior to prohibition, the company experienced tremendous growth and prosperity. In 1913, Frantz Brogniez, the brew master for the brewery, was awarded Grand Prize at the last International Conference of Breweries. He received first place over 4,096 competing brewers (*Unidentified Newspaper clipping*). Also within this time various other expansions were made to the brewery. It is believed that around 1915 the brewery was at its largest when the building program had been completed.

“When the prohibition amendment took effect in 1920, the Houston Ice and Brewing Company began its decline. Ice manufacturing and packing became the dominant services rendered by the company, but its financial success had depended on manufacturing beer. The company began leasing or selling its buildings, including 110 Milam, which was sold to Dixon Packing Company who had been located next door [to the north] before they began to lease 110 Milam in 1921. In 1922, Hugh Hamilton passed away before witnessing the full demise of the company. Following Hamilton’s death two devastating floods hit downtown Houston in 1929 and 1935, the latter flood destroying huge portions of the company’s buildings. In the flood of 1935, the more devastating flood, \$2,528,000 in property damage to the city occurred and 8 lives were lost. The flood destroyed 707-717 Franklin and severely damaged all but a few of the buildings. The Harris County Flood Control Authority was formed in 1937 as a result of the floods, and they concluded that the bridge built by the Houston Ice and Brewing Company in 1912 was partly to blame for the flooding. Apparently, the constricted water of Buffalo Bayou became tunneled by the bridge and was forced like a shoot toward downtown. It was condemned for its threat and removed in 1937 along with a large portion of the brewery that had been reduced to ruins. The Houston Ice and Brewing Company struggled to survive, but was finally shut down in 1950. This was the end of what had been a cornerstone in Houston’s industrial success. After 1950 the remaining section of the building on Washington Avenue was used for several successive industrial and storage purposes, including a ships chandlery and finally a moving and storage facility. Freeway construction in the 1960s obliterated 410-426 Washington, leaving the building at 404 Washington as a unoccupied ruin” (*Houston Architectural Survey*, page 63). The building at 404 Washington was eventually demolished in 2002.

Despite all of its dramatic history, the Magnolia Brewery Café Taproom Building, also known as the Magnolia Ballroom, has survived as a small souvenir of the company that had helped make Houston the financial and

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industrial center of Texas at that time (*Houston City Directory*). Following the shut down of the company, the building housed many different businesses such as a meat packing company, a printing company, and a bicycle shop. In 1969, a high end restaurant named “The Bismark” was located in the second floor of the building and the Buffalo Bayou Flea Market was located in the basement level. The basement went on to house the Reunion Theatre and then the original Stages Theatrical Company, as well as numerous clubs and restaurants over the recent years (*Houston Post*). Today, the second floor, which was the original Magnolia Café Taproom, is the Magnolia Ballroom, and is currently a venue for special events.

RESTORATION HISTORY/CURRENT CONDITION:

The building has changed little since its original construction.

OTHER SOURCES

Field, William Scott. *The Last of the Past: Houston Architecture 1847-1915*

Fox, Stephen, Houston Architectural Guide, 1990

Harris County Deed Records (various)

Hennech, Mike. Encyclopedia of Texas Breweries: Pre-Prohibition (1836 – 1918). Texas: Albe Publishing Co., Irving

Houston Architectural Survey, 1980, Vol. 1, pages 59-62, “Houston Ice and Brewing Company/Magnolia Brewery”

Houston Business Journal (various)

Houston City Directory, various years and advertisement inside back cover

Houston Chronicle

Houston Downtown. September 17, 1984

Houston Port Book, May 1937

Houston Post

Industrial Advantages of Houston, TX and Environs, Houston, TX: The Akehurst Pub. Co. 1894

Magnolia Brewery Building – 110 Milam Street – Landmark Application Research – Anna Mod

Progressive Houston. December 1911

Redford, George. Magnolia Brewery. Compiled history.

Souvenir Anniversary Edition, Houston Chronicle. October, 1905.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION...:

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

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

S	NA		S - satisfies	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;			

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- (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:

Recommends that the Houston Planning Commission accepts the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommends to City Council the Landmark designation of the Magnolia Brewery Café Taproom Building at 715 Franklin Avenue.

SITE LOCATION MAP
MAGNOLIA BREWERY CAFÉ TAPROOM BUILDING
715 FRANKLIN AVENUE (AKA 120 MILAM STREET)
NOT TO SCALE