

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME: S. F. Carter–Second National Bank Building – 806 Main Street
Owner: Azita Management, Inc.
APPLICANT: Anna Mod
LOCATION: 806 Main Street, Houston, Harris County, Texas
30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: Feb-23-2006

AGENDA ITEM: II
HPO FILE No.: 06L125
DATE ACCEPTED: Feb-23-2006
HAHC HEARING: Mar-23-2006
PC HEARING: APR-27-2006

SITE INFORMATION

Lots 4, 5, Tract 11A, Block 92, SSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site includes a 22-story, commercial office building at Main and Rusk.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The Texas architectural firm of Sanguinet and Staats designed the 1910 S.F. Carter Building, also known as the Second National Bank of Houston. At the time of construction, the sixteen-story steel framed building was the tallest in the Houston and in Texas. The firm rapidly expanded into one of the state's largest architectural practices and specialized in the design of early 20th-century steel framed skyscrapers.

The Carter Building was nicknamed locally, "Carter's Folly," as the general public did not believe a building that tall could remain standing and its location, just south of the commercial core, was thought to be too far away from the bustle of city business. The building was named for its owner and developer, Samuel Fain Carter, a Texas lumberman and banker. In 1923, Second National Bank of Houston purchased the building and added six additional floors for a total of twenty-two. Architect for the addition was the Thomas M. James Company of Boston, Massachusetts. Associate architects were Sanguinet, Staats, Hedrick and Gottlieb of Houston, the original design firm of the 1910 building.

A year after Carter's death in 1928, John William Neal became chairman of the board of Second National Bank (Carter Building), and in 1929 had Hedrick and Gottlieb design the ornate boardroom on the second floor, one of the most ornate of such rooms in downtown Houston, which remains unaltered today. Mr. Carter and Mr. Neal were two of Houston's leading business men. Carter was a member of the Methodist Church and involved with the YMCA, and was one of Houston's most prominent lumber merchant and banker.

John William Neal was a prominent Houston philanthropist and businessman. Neal was co-founder of the Nashville, Tennessee based Cheek-Neal Coffee Company, the distributor of Maxwell House Coffee, and he operated one of the six coffee plants in Houston until 1928 when the company was sold, at which time he became Chairman of the Board of Second National Bank.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The Texas architectural firm of Sanguinet and Staats designed the 1910 S.F. Carter Building, also known as the Second National Bank of Houston, located on Block 92, SSBB, on the southwest corner of Main Street and Rusk in downtown Houston. The structural steel design, engineering, and fabrication was done by American Bridge Company of Ambridge, Pennsylvania, a company that was instrumental in the engineering of many early skyscrapers including the Woolworth (1913), Chrysler (1931) and Empire State (1932) buildings in New York City. At the time of construction, the sixteen-story steel framed building was the tallest in the city and state and was nicknamed locally "Carter's Folly" as the general public did not believe a building that tall could remain standing and its location, just south of the commercial core, was thought to be too far away from the bustle of city business. The building was named for its owner and developer, Samuel Fain Carter, a Texas lumberman and banker. In 1923, Second National Bank of Houston purchased the building and added six additional floors for a total of twenty-two. Architect for the addition was the Thomas M. James Company of Boston, Massachusetts. Associate architects were Sanguinet, Staats, Hedrick and Gottlieb of Houston. Professional tenants in the building included oil and gas concerns, physicians, real estate professionals and architects among others. A year after Carter's death in 1928, John William Neal became chairman of the board of Second National Bank (Carter Building), and had Hedrick and Gottlieb design the ornate boardroom on the second floor, one of the most ornate of such rooms in downtown Houston. In 1930, architect Maurice J. Sullivan remodeled the ground floor and added offices for the bond, trust, and accounting departments in the southern most two bays along Main Street. These alterations were done to match the design and Classical decorative elements of the original adjacent banking hall. In 1955, the South Coast Life Insurance Company bought the building and by the end of the decade the bank had vacated. An addition was added along the Rusk facade in 1956. In 1969 the first National Life Insurance Company purchased the building and clad the exterior with Georgian marble and glass. This glass and marble slipcover remains today.

Lumberman's National Bank/Second National Bank

Founded on May 1, 1907 by Samuel Fain Carter, the Lumberman's National Bank opened in a small building at 1020 Franklin in downtown Houston with

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capital and surplus of \$500,000.00. The bank grew and moved to a new location, a three-story building on the northwest corner of Main and Prairie. In 1910, the bank's president, S. F. Carter, completed the eponymous sixteen-story building at the southwest corner of Main and Rusk yet the bank remained at its Main and Prairie location until January 15, 1923 when it bought, moved into and renamed the building The Second National Bank Building. The banks founding capital and surplus had increased from its original sum to \$11.5 million by the time of the move. S. F. Carter remained president with Guy M. Bryan and C. S. E. Holland as active vice-presidents. There was little change in personnel or policies during the transition and move. By 1925, the Second National Bank building had six additional floors. The bank continued to operate at this location until the early 1950s when the South Coast Life Insurance Company purchased the building.

Samuel Fain Carter (1857-1928)

Samuel Fain Carter was born near Huntsville, Alabama on September 14, 1857 to John Quincy Adams and Mildred Ann (Richards) Carter. The family moved to Sherman, Texas a year later.¹ The young Carter left school at thirteen and became a printer's devil (apprentice), compositor and typesetter for the *Sherman Courier* where he excelled. His next position was with the *Galveston News*, the oldest newspaper in the state. He left the printing business in 1881 and joined the shingle mill of Long & Company in Beaumont as a bookkeeper. Two years later, Carter was sold a working interest in Village Mills of the Texas Tram and Lumber Company in Hardin County and over the next two decades became one of the state's prominent lumbermen. In 1892, Carter formed the Emporia Lumber Company with M. T. Jones in Angelina County yet kept the corporate office in Houston. In 1906, Mr. Carter divested himself from the lumber business and focused on banking. On May 1, 1907, he was one of the organizers of Lumberman's National Bank of Houston and remained the bank president until 1927 when he became chairman of the board.² The bank started in a small one-story building on Franklin, and after a few years, it moved to the northwest corner of Main and Prairie, which was known as the Prince Building (demolished). In 1934 the Byrd Department Store was built on the site in the Moderne style. It was

¹ Baker, Eugene C., ed. *History of Texas and Texans*, Vol. 3. Chicago and New York: The American Historical Society, 1914.

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designed by noted Houston architect, Joseph Finger. The building is contributing to the City of Houston Historic District and the National Register Historic District. In 1910, Carter erected the sixteen-story Carter building, at the time the tallest building in the city and state.

Mr. Carter was a member of the Methodist church and involved with the YMCA. On January 23, 1882 he married Carrie E. Banks of Galveston. The couple had four children, Clara, Florence (Mrs. Guy M. Bryan), Samuel Fain Carter, Jr. and Annie Vive Carter. The Carter's lived at 1804 Crawford Street in Houston. Carter died in Houston on March 1, 1928 and is buried in Glenwood Cemetery.³

John William Neal (1906 - 1940)

John William Neal was a prominent Houston philanthropist and businessman. He came to Houston in 1903, opening a branch of the Cheek-Neal Coffee Company, a distributor of Maxwell House Coffee. In 1928 the Cheek-Neal Coffee Company was sold to General Foods and J. W. Neal became chairman of the board of the Second National Bank, a position he held until his death in 1940. He supported various philanthropic organizations, including the Memorial Hospital Children's Fund. Neal's son, J. Robert Neal, served as vice-president of the bank at the same time his father served as chairman.⁴

J. W. Neal was born on January 12, 1865 in Fountain Run, Monroe County, Kentucky, the son of James Martin Neal (1827-1906) and Margaret Dunn. On August 27, 1901 Joel Owsley Cheek and his partner, John W. Neal, formed the Nashville Coffee and Manufacturing Company on Market Street in Nashville, which was later renamed the Cheek-Neal Coffee Company. That same year they began to produce Maxwell House Coffee for mass consumption. In 1903, Joel O. Cheek sent his son, Robert Stanley Cheek (1877-1967) to Houston to supervise the construction and opening of a second company coffee plant. The office and factory was located at 1121 Carr Street at Conti in the Fifth Ward (demolished). By 1905, Robert S. Cheek had returned to Nashville and J. W. Neal, Joel Cheek's Nashville partner, relocated to Houston and assumed the management of the Houston Branch as vice-president. Coffee

² Handbook of Texas Online, s.v. "Carter, Samuel Fain," <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/CC/fca73.html> (accessed January 13, 2006).

³ Handbook of Texas Online, s.v. "Carter, Samuel Fain," <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/CC/fca73.html> (accessed January 13, 2006).

⁴ Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Biographical note from the J. W. and J. R. Neal Collection 1906-1940.

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could be shipped directly to Houston's port from growers in South America and the company was strategically located once Houston opened its enlarged ship channel in 1913. In 1909 John W. Neal built the first house in the up-and-coming new Avondale Addition at 301 Avondale Boulevard. A *Houston Chronicle* article dated March 25, 1917, mentions a new, enlarged building at 2017 Preston (City of Houston Landmark, 2005) was designed by architects Finger and Bailey for the Cheek-Neal Coffee Company under the direction of John William Neal.⁵

Due to their savvy business acumen, the Postum Company of Battle Creek, Michigan, paid a record sum for the right and title to Maxwell House Coffee on August 1, 1929 when it acquired the Cheek-Neal Coffee Company and the company name was changed to Maxwell House Products Company. After this sale, J. W. Neal directed his efforts to banking and other activities in Houston.

Sanguinet and Staats

Marshall R. Sanguinet and Carl G. Staats founded Sanguinet and Staats in 1903 in Fort Worth, Texas. The firm rapidly expanded into one of the state's largest architectural practices and specialized in the design of early 20th-century steel framed skyscrapers. The firm designed many of Texas' early skyscrapers and among them the tallest buildings in Fort Worth, Beaumont, Houston, Midland and San Antonio until their work was eclipsed by still taller structures. The firm had branch offices in Dallas, Wichita Falls, San Antonio, Waco and Houston and was among the first Texas architectural enterprises to have a statewide practice. In 1922 Wyatt C. Hedrick bought a partial interest in the firm and the name was changed to Sanguinet, Staats and Hedrick with the Houston branch known as Sanguinet, Staats, Hedrick and Gottlieb, under the direction of R. D. Gottlieb, a limited partner. In 1926, the two founding partners retired and sold their share of the firm to Hedrick who continued to practice in Ft. Worth and in limited partnerships in Houston and later in Dallas.⁶

⁵ Pace, Randy. City of Houston Landmark application for Cheek-Neal Coffee Company, Houston, 2004.

⁶ Handbook of Texas Online, s.v. "SANGUINET AND STAATS,"

<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/SS/cms1.html> (accessed February 28, 2006).

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Architectural Description and Architectural History

The Carter/Second National Bank Building is a 22-story, slipcovered marble and glass clad skyscraper with a striped vertical emphasis alternating between the two materials. Originally constructed in 1910 as the Carter Building, the structure was design by the Texas architectural firm Sanguinet and Staats. Engineer for the structural steel framework was F. A. Sherrill. The structural steel system was engineered, designed and fabricated by American Bridge Company of Ambridge, Pennsylvania.

The current eight-by-eight bay ground floor openings and alternating vertical stripes of marble and glass, follow the rhythm of the original building yet on the Main and Rusk facades there is no remaining evidence of any historic material. On the two secondary facades, the west and south, the original brick and terra cotta quoins are visible as well as some of the original 3/3 metal windows.

The interior has similarly been covered with drop ceilings and gypsum board. The original second floor boardroom, added by bank president J. W. Neal in 1929, remains unaltered and is one of the most elaborate rooms of this type in downtown Houston.

The Carter/Second National Bank building is nominated as a City of Houston Landmark under Criterion 3 for its association with Samuel Fain Carter and John William Neal, two noted Houston businessmen and bankers. It is nominated under Criterion 4, significance at the local level, as the first steel-framed skyscraper in Houston. And finally, the building is nominated under Criterion 6 as an example of the work of Sanguinet, Staats and their successor firm and partnership Sanguniet, Staats, Hedrick and Gottlieb, as an example of their architectural practice in Houston and the construction of the early skyscrapers in Texas.

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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 N S - satisfies N - 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;

Currently the building is altered with the installation of a slipcover cladding which masks the original historic facade of the building. There are plans by the new owner to remove the slipcover and restore the facade and storefront. Should this activity occur and be approved by the HAHC, then the building would meet this particular criteria as well.

- (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 to City Council the landmark designation of the S. F. Carter - Second National Bank Building at 806 Main Street.

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SITE LOCATION MAP

S. F. CARTER - SECOND NATIONAL BANK BUILDING

806 MAIN STREET

NOT TO SCALE