

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME: Gift Raps, Inc. Warehouse

AGENDA ITEM: II

HPO FILE No.: 06L126

Owner: Stephen M. Bingham

APPLICANT: Anna Mod

LOCATION: 2422 Bartlett Street, Houston, Harris
County, Texas

DATE ACCEPTED: Apr-14-2006

HAHC HEARING: May-18-2006

30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: April 14-2006

SITE INFORMATION

Lots 17 and 18, Block 4, Mellon Subdivision, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site includes a 2-story, commercial warehouse building.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation**SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE:**

Benton F. "Ben" and his wife, Margaret Love, arrived in Houston in 1947, where Ben went to work for a wholesale paper company. Within a year, he came up with an innovative idea to sell wrapping paper in rolls (instead of folded), and he then founded Gift Raps, Inc.¹ In 1949, the business was located at 905 Hyde Park Boulevard in the Montrose neighborhood, and by 1952 it had moved into a rented, one-story warehouse space at 2445 Bartlett. The Loves constructed the modern warehouse building at 2422 Bartlett for their business, Gift Raps, Inc., a wrapping paper wholesaler in 1955. The 1956 city telephone directory entry confirms Gift Raps, Inc. was in operation at 2418-20 Bartlett.

The mid-century modern warehouse at 2422 Bartlett is nominated as a City of Houston Landmark under Criterion 3 for its association with Ben F. Love, a prominent Houston banker, business leader and corporate board member. The building is also nominated under Criteria 4 and 5 as an example of a mid-century modern, vernacular warehouse building and part of the commercial and light industrial area north of the Rice Village.

¹ Bankers' Hours, Volume 27, Number 6, 1989.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

2422 Bartlett and Gift Raps, Inc.

Benton F. and Margaret Love moved to Houston in 1947 after they married.² The couple first appear in the city directory in 1949: Benton F. Love is listed as the vice-president of Gift Raps, Inc. and he and his wife Margaret lived at 4132 Anita. Gift Raps, Inc. was located at 905 Hyde Park Blvd.; Harold Lawrence is listed as the president; Benton F. Love, as vice-president; Mrs. Margaret Lawrence, secretary; and Mrs. Margaret Lowe [sic], treasurer.

By 1952, the Loves had moved their residence to 914 S. Shepherd and the business had moved to 2445 Bartlett, across the street from the proposed landmark building. The surrounding area on Bartlett, the two blocks east of Kirby Drive, had only spotty development - a mix of small, single-family structures and small warehouses. The next block to the east of Morningside is exclusively single-family residential except for the lots facing south onto Bissonnet. City directory research of the 2400 and 2500 blocks in the early 1950s note a residential neighborhood with increasing commercial businesses infiltrating between 1952-1960. Business ventures in the 2400 block of Bartlett in 1955 include Gift Raps, Inc. (2445); Apartments (2412); Stewart Refinishing, (furniture repairs, 2415); Elmo Charles Construction Company (2441) and Clark & Clark, breeders and distributors of chinchillas (2441). There was also a 'Poultry Ranch' on the large parcel just to the north of North Blvd.

An architect of the building has not been found and it is possible that an engineer designed the building. The utilitarian warehouse is constructed of reinforced concrete with clay tile back up and a decorative brick and limestone veneer on the primary façade exhibits the structural systems and minimal aesthetics popular in the 1950s. The secondary facades have brick detailing around the windows and doors and the corner quoins are also expressed in brick. The use of reinforced concrete was a major development in warehouse construction that was embraced by warehouse designers/builders in Houston in the early 20th century as owners sought ways to minimize the risk of fire. The material first appeared in the United States after the Paris 1867 Exhibition yet it was not until the 1880s that the material began serious testing and experimentation with

² Houston Chronicle

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new construction applications and technologies.³ Changes in the design of multi-story warehouses were taking place nation-wide, especially around major shipping centers, and at the same time, smaller warehouses were more easily able to borrow new technology from bridges, factories and other industrial buildings.⁴ Such is the case with the Gift Raps Warehouse - its construction technology seems to be directly borrowed from the interstate highway system under development at the same time. The exposed C-beams under the cantilever are used continuously throughout the building and are exposed as the ceilings on both floors. A separate reinforced concrete deck was poured on top of the beams for the finished floor - just as a roadbed is poured on top of beams of this type for a highway bridge.

The Gift Rap warehouse is an important yet modest mid-century building in this mixed-use industrial/commercial area of Houston.

Benton F. Love (Ben Love, 1924-2006) was born in Vernon, Texas to Nell Scott and Benton F. Love. He was the couple's only child. In 1932, the family moved to Paris, Texas and onto his grandfather's homestead. He graduated from Paris High School in 1941 and a year later walked from class at the University of Texas to join the Army Air Force. He received his commission and wings from Ellington Field in Houston in April 1944 and joined the 351st Bomb Group, 8th Air Force in England, and flew 25 combat missions against the Germans. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and assumed the rank of Captain at age 20. He returned to the University of Texas after WWII and met and married Margaret McKean in 1947 and the couple moved to Houston. In 1948, the couple established Gift Raps, Inc., a manufacturing firm that Love merged with a New York stock exchange company in 1962.⁵

Love entered Houston's banking industry in 1956 and in 1967 joined Texas Commerce Bank-Houston. He was elected President in 1969 and three years later became Chairman and CEO of Texas Commerce Bancshares, a position he held until he retired in 1989. During his tenure as CEO, Texas Commerce grew from a single bank with \$1 billion in assets to 80 banks and 7 foreign offices with over \$20 billion in assets. In 1987, Texas Commerce and Chemical Bank of New York (now J. P. Morgan Chase) merged under Loves leadership, the largest banking merger of its time.⁶

³ Guedes, Pedro, p. 256

⁴ Guedes, Pedro, p. 100-101.

⁵ Houston Chronicle obituary, Ben Love, 02/07/2006

⁶ Houston Chronicle obituary, Ben Love, 02/07/2006

Ben Love served on corporate boards and on civic and community boards including the Greater Houston Partnership, The University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center, Reserve City Bankers Association, Council of Overseers of the Jesse H. Hones Graduate school of Administration, Rice University, The Houston Host Committee that attracted the 1992 Republican National Convention to Houston, the Mighty Eighth (Air Force) Heritage Museum in Savannah, GA, the Texas Aviation Hall of Fame, and Houston Grand Opera among others.

He was a member of Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity and was honored as a distinguished alumnus by the University of Texas in 1975. Love was recognized by Texas A&M's Business School as the "Texas Business Executive of the Year (1983)" and a member of the Texas Business Hall of Fame (1989). In 1984, Dun's Business Month designated Texas Commerce Bancshares as one of the nation's five best-managed companies while under his leadership.

Architectural Description

The 1955-56 Gift Raps, Inc. building is two-story, reinforced concrete warehouse with steel casement windows and a cantilevered second floor. The building is located on the north side of Bartlett Street equidistance between Kirby Drive and Greenbriar (west and east boundaries, respectively), north of Bissonnet and south of US Hwy 59 inside Houston's 610 Loop.

The 5 x 5 bay, rectangular building is symmetrical with a cantilevered overhang on the primary, south, façade. The roof is flat and has a concrete parapet cap. The reinforced concrete structural system is visible and defines the bays on the south façade. This façade has a salmon-colored brick veneer that wraps around onto the secondary east and west facades. The bricks are long (11 ¼") and narrow (7/8" H), typical of mid-century buildings, a design element that emphasizes the horizontality of this modest warehouse and softens its blatant structural expression. Tapered, reinforced concrete structural beams support the cantilevered second floor. Beneath the overhang, the ground floor is symmetrical with the first and fifth bays and the second and fourth bays mirroring each other. The first bay has an overhead metal rolling door adjacent to a standard height entry door. There are no entries in the second and

fourth bays - only the salmon-colored brick and a portion of the bevel-edged, Cordova Cream limestone panels that surround the central bay entry door: a metal door with a single upper light flanked by full width sidelights. The overhead door in the fifth bay is wooden and has three framed horizontal panels and six framed vertical panels.

Beneath the overhang, the structural system is visible: prefabricated reinforced concrete C-beams supported by square, reinforced concrete columns. The prefabricated, reinforced C-beams are similar in technology and design to beams used in the interstate highway underpass construction of the period. The columns and tapered beams were cast in place and have a smooth finish. The rows of square columns with their tapered ends, give visual evidence of the regularly spaced structural system of the interior. This tapered exterior beam is repeated on the interior of the second floor - the tapering extends from the structural column to the exterior wall.

A raised brick frame surrounds the windows that alternate between brick spandrel panels in a simplified A-B-A pattern. This A-B-A pattern is composed of ten steel casement windows, "A"; six small brick spandrel panels, "B"; and three larger brick spandrel panels, "C". The entire composition reads: A-B-A-B-A-C-A-B-A-C-A-B-A-C-A-B-A-B-A.

The steel casement windows project when opened. This means that the inner end of the sash slides along a track on the jamb as the sash swings outward.

The east and west facades are five bays wide and symmetrical. The first bay on the east façade has the cantilevered second floor and shows the partial wrap around of the decorative brick veneer. The remaining four bays have paired, evenly spaced 2/2 metal casement windows. These two facades, as well as the north façade, are exposed clay tile with brick detailing around the windows and expressed as flush corner quoins. The flat roof has a terracotta parapet cap. The west façade is the mirror image of the east only the ground floor shares a party wall with the adjacent building.

The symmetrical, five bay north façade has the same steel casement windows grouped in pairs, two per bay, on the second floor. The first bay of the ground floor also has the paired windows. The second bay has a bricked-in opening that was once an overhead door. The third bay has a standard entry door and adjacent metal casement window. The fourth bay is a repeat of the first and the fifth has a second overhead door opening with the wooden paneled garage door similar to the one on the south façade.

The windows on the three secondary facades are framed with brick, three stretcher courses interspersed by two header courses. The windowsills are brick and the lintels cast iron. The corner quoins are expressed in brick and alternate three courses of headers and stretchers.

Bibliography

Bankers' Hours, Houston: Texas Commerce Bancshares, Inc. Volume 27, Number 6, 1989.

City Directories, Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, various dates.

City Telephone Book, Microfiche, Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, various dates.

Guedes, Pedro. Encyclopedia of Architectural Technology. New York: McGraw-hill Book Company, 1979.

Houston Chronicle, obituaries, 02/07/06

Sanborn Maps, 1934-1950, Volume 11, Houston.

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 - 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;
- (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 Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends to the Houston Planning Commission the landmark designation of the Gift Raps, Inc. Warehouse at 2422 Bartlett Street.

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SITE LOCATION MAP
GIFT RAPS, INC. WAREHOUSE
2422 BARTLETT STREET
NOT TO SCALE

