

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Millane Building

OWNER: Paul T. Barr

APPLICANT: Anna Mod, SWCA Environmental Consultants

LOCATION: 3601 S. Sandman Street

30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: VI.b

HPO FILE NO: 10PL94

DATE ACCEPTED: May 19, 2010

HAHC HEARING: July 15, 2010

PC HEARING: July 22, 2010

SITE INFORMATION: Tracks 1, 2A, 5A and 6A, Block A, Albermarle Place, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a two-story, masonry, commercial building.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation

SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Millane Building at 3601 S. Sandman Street was constructed circa 1957. The architect of the building has not been confirmed although it has been attributed to Eugene Werlin. Thomas Millane and his son John, transplants from Wisconsin, were partners in the development and operation of the Millane Building. The building is a visible reminder of the development of mid-century Houston and the early suburban movement of small businesses away from downtown into office buildings located on or near commercial corridors. Tenants over the years included insurance agents, geotechnical offices, a food broker, a bar, a hair salon, a meter manufacturer, pet food distributor, import companies, lithographer, and an architectural firm

The Millane Building is an excellent example of early modernist commercial architecture. The building incorporates characteristic elements of the mid-century Modernist style including a flat roof, ribbon windows, expansive use of aluminum framed floor-to-ceiling storefront glass on the ground floor, and elongated, coursed, rough faced sandstone detailing. The building remains on its original site with minimal alterations.

The Millane Building meets Criteria 1, 4 and 5 for Landmark and Protected Landmark designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Millane Building is an early example of modernist architecture along Richmond Avenue and shows the beginnings of commercial development west of the former Shepherd's Dam Road. Richmond Avenue was not a continuous street until the 1960s because large tracts of land -- including where the Millane building is located -- were privately held. The Millane Building provides a snapshot of Houston's growth after the end of World War II but before the development of Richmond Avenue as a continuous thoroughfare.

The Millane building is an excellent example of early modernist commercial architecture. The building's flat roof and sleek, unornamented design are representative of the style, and its small scale is typical of buildings from the late 1940s and 50s. This building is part of the evolution of modernism in Houston and contrasts with the later explosion of modernist design and office

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

development along Richmond Avenue (2600-4200 blocks) in the 1960s by firms such as: Neuhaus & Taylor; Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson; and, Lloyd, Morgan & Jones. The small scale, proportions and materials of the building have more in common with the Village Theater (MacKie & Kammrath, 1941, demolished) and the Craig's Department Store (Eugene Werlin, 1955, altered), both on University Blvd. in the Rice Village. The architect of the building has not been confirmed although it has been attributed to Eugene Werlin. The building is the best example of this small scale, mid-century Modernist architectural form in the vicinity as the adjacent Shepherd Shopping Center has undergone extensive unsympathetic alterations. There is a small Miesian style office complex at 1955 Richmond Avenue, designed by Burdette Keeland and Harwood Taylor (1954), with a rear apartment (now office), a small courtyard and a second small building closer to the street. This small office residential/office complex was designed by Burdette Keeland and Harwood Taylor in 1954. The residential building in the rear is a brick, steel and concrete Miesian box and the front stucco building is raised on steel pilotis with parking below as foreshadowing of this uniquely Houston office building type popular in the 1960s along Richmond Avenue.

Property and Ownership History

The Millane building was constructed circa 1957 replacing two open-air, wood-framed sheds and a small office building, all part of the Richmond Lumber Company which had operated on the site since the 1920s. The building is representative of the development of mid-century Houston and the early suburban movement of small companies away from downtown into office buildings located on or near commercial corridors.

The property, located on Block A of Abermarle Place, was outside of the city limits until 1920. Genesee Street in Fourth Ward, approximately 2.5 miles northeast of the intersection of Richmond Avenue and S. Sandman, was the western city limit in 1900.¹ By 1913, the city had expanded to the 1600 block of Yoakum at Richmond Avenue, nine blocks east of the property.² On the 1913 City of Houston Street Guide by J.M. Kensen, present day S. Shepherd Drive is shown as Shepherd Dam Road and on other maps of the period as Shepherd's Dam Road. By 1920, the city limits were one block west of the intersection of Shepherd Dam Road and Richmond Avenue directly west of the Millane property, yet there are no platted lots shown at the intersection.³ During the first half of the twentieth century, Richmond Avenue was not a continuous street and had only small, sporadic pockets of development west of S. Shepherd Drive.⁴ The property occupies Lot One (1) and the adjoining West ½ of Lot Two (2) and the adjoining 23.5 feet of Lots Five (5) and Six (6), in Block A of Albemarle Place.⁵ Obedience Smith was the owner of over 3,000 acres deeded to her by the Republic of Texas with the rough boundaries of W. Dallas on the north, Shepherd Drive on the west, Rice University on the south and Main Street on the east. ⁶ Early deeds of the Millane

¹ Map of the City of Houston, P. Whitty, 1900

² Houston Street Guide, 1913, J. M. Kelsen

³ Map of the City of Houston, 1920, Texas Map and Blueprint

⁴ Map of the City of Houston, 1968, Ashburns

⁵ Harris County Appraisal District (HCAD).

⁶ Chapman, Betty. *Central Houston carved from land deeded to Obedience Fort Smith*. Houston Business Journal, Friday, February 26, 2010, (reprinted from the week of December 26, 1997 – January 1, 1998).

CITY OF HOUSTON

Building property state the property was a part of Lot No. 3 of the Obedience Smith original survey, indicating Obedience Smith's holdings extended a bit farther west.⁷

The Houston City Directory from 1920-1921 includes only two listings west of Shepherd Dam Road: one for a dairy and the second for a residence. This is indicative of the rural nature of the street beyond the subject property. At this time, S. Sandman was known as Josephine Street; the name did not change until the 1920s.⁸ The 1930 map shows the first plans for the “proposed loop around the congested district” including the proposed and extant Greenbriar/Shepherd/Farnham split, marking a significant change from the minimally developed nature of this intersection a decade earlier. By 1945 the city limits were extended to Ulrich (west of Sage), yet Richmond Avenue is still a discontinuous street west of Kirby Drive.

In April of 1923, Sam Houston, an attorney, sold the property (Block A) to William C. Crow, a real estate investor. Subsequent sales were to Belle V. Lindsay Letts, J. F. Means and Flora H. Bigger. The Sanborn map of 1926 show the Richmond Lumber Company located on the western half of Block A with a 2111 Richmond address. The company had two open-air, wood framed lumber sheds and a small office on the site. The company operated continuously there until 1955 when they moved to 1621 S. Post Oak Road. In 1942 the two lumber company partners, H. G. McDaniel and Oscar C. Baker, purchased the land.

Houston’s explosive growth in the first half of the twentieth century was known to manufacturers and exporters nationwide. In February of 1949, an article⁹ appeared in the Racine Journal Times announcing that Alfred E. Wright, co-founder of the Wright Rubber Products Company of Racine, was moving his company to Houston. Wright founded the Racine-based Wright Manufacturing Company in 1923 with his brother Clarence to manufacture rubber flooring. The company was bought by Taylor Manufacturing in 1943 and assumed the name of its new owner.¹⁰ In January 1949 the original company named restored and its corporate office transferred to Houston, where construction began on a new headquarters. Company officers were Thomas F. Millane, president, and Frank Wilson, vice president.¹¹ In the newspaper, Mr. Wright explained his decision to relocate to Houston: “Houston is a seaport with access to the East and West Coasts; fast developing Central and South American markets; raw materials are close; lower power and heating costs; absence of state income taxes; large labor market; and, excellent and sufficient housing.”¹² The 1955 Houston City Directory lists the address of the Wright Manufacturing Company as 5200 S. Post Oak Road, site of the present-day Meyer Park shopping complex.

In April of 1955, O. C. Baker of the Richmond Lumber Company sold the property to Thomas F. Millane and John F. Millane, father and son. In addition to being an executive at the Wright Manufacturing Company, Thomas F. Millane (1896-1959), was a licensed attorney who served by appointment in the U.S. Bankruptcy Courts in Racine from 1939 to September 1945 and was a

⁷ General Warranty Deed, April 19, 1923; Volume 544, pages 163-164; Harris County Deed Records.

⁸ General Warranty Deed, November 20, 1924, Volume 597, page 287, Deed Records of Harris County.

⁹ Racine Journal Times, 21 March 1949.

¹⁰ Racine Journal Times, 4 February 1949.

¹¹ Racine Journal Times, 4 February 1949

¹² Racine Journal Times, 21 March 1949

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

member of the Milwaukee Bar Association.¹³ He came to Houston from Wisconsin with the Wright Manufacturing Company.¹⁴ His wife, Eugenia (née Jazwiecki), and the couple's son, John F. Millane and daughter-in-law, Wilomine Ruth Bibby ("Billie"), joined them in Texas.¹⁵ Father and son were partners in the development and operation of the Millane building. Thomas F. Millane was a member of the Milwaukee Elks Lodge No. 46, the Milwaukee Athletic Club, the Braeburn County Club of Houston and the Houston Yacht Club.¹⁶ While in Houston, in addition to the building and his role with the Wright Company, Thomas F. Millane is listed as chairman of the board for Merchants State Bank which in 1959 was located at 306 Main Street.¹⁷ Millane's son, John F., died in 1967 at age 46; his widow Billie remained in Houston. After Thomas' death in 1959, his wife Eugenia continued to live in their house at 4510 Ivanhoe in Houston's Afton Oaks neighborhood.¹⁸

The subject building first appears on 1950s paste-overs of the 1926 Sanborn Map, and it is first listed as the "Millane Building" in the 1959 city directory. There is a 1955 listing for the General Controls Company at 3605 S. Sandman, indicating the building may have been standing yet not fully leased or completed.¹⁹ Tenants over the years included insurance agents, geotechnical offices, a food broker, a bar (The Carnival Room), a hair salon, a meter manufacturer (General Controls Company), pet food distributor, import companies and a lithographer. An architectural firm, Cudworth & Bryson (later Cudworth Associates), led by Edmund Cudworth, AIA (B.Arch/BS Architectural Engineering, University of Houston, 1951) had an office in the building from late 1950s to the early 1970s. Examples of Cudworth's work include the Center Building in Deer Park, TX; an addition to Davis High School for Houston Independent School District (HISD); a bulk Storage/Material Handling Facility in Lima [sic], OH; Butler Stadium Complex, HISD; and, a Stadium Complex for Wharton ISD and Wharton Jr. College. The building continued to be called the Millane Building and city directories continue to list small businesses as tenants well into the late 1970s.

In 1959, the Millanes sold the property to Sol A. Levy who had his advertising office in the building in the 1960s. In the 1960s and 1970s, the American Opinion Library, the former outreach retail publication arm of the conservative John Birch Society, had an office at 2115 Richmond Avenue. The building was purchased by the current owner in 1983 and has remained in continuous use with small offices upstairs and ground floor tenants including an architectural firm, a lounge and remains in use with small offices upstairs and ground floor tenants.

The Millane Building provides a snapshot of Houston's growth after the end of World War II but before the development of Richmond Avenue as a continuous thoroughfare. It is an example of the small office buildings that developed outside of downtown as more Houstonians were able to travel about town in automobiles and is a good example of early modernist architecture of the period.

¹³ *Racine Journal Times*, Saturday 18 August 1945, p. 2

¹⁴ Social Security Death Index

¹⁵ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 20 [28] June 1984

¹⁶ *Milwaukee Journal*, 5 September 1959

¹⁷ *City Directory of Houston*, 1959, p. 31

¹⁸ *City Directory of Houston*, 1968.

¹⁹ *City Directory of Houston*, 1955.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

Richmond Avenue was surveyed by Hicks & Company, a cultural and environmental consulting firm, in 2007 in compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act on behalf of the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County, Texas (METRO). The survey was conducted to determine if any historic resources exist along Richmond Avenue and, if so, whether they would be impacted by the planned University Line light rail expansion. The survey identified the Millane building (called The Sandman Building) as well as the Richmond Avenue Modern Commercial District (bounded by Buffalo Speedway, Colquitt Street, eastside Street and Portsmouth Street) as eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C.²⁰ These findings were accepted by the Texas Historical Commission in the Final Environmental Impact Statement issued in January 2010.²¹ [This report left off the 1954 Fred Winchell Studio at 1955 Richmond Avenue and it is likely the Richmond Avenue modern district is more realistically bounded on the east by Kirby Drive and on the west by the railroad tracks.]

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The Millane Building is located on the southeast corner of S. Sandman Street and Richmond Avenue, one block west of the intersection of S. Shepherd Drive, in an urban commercial area of Central Houston. The two-story commercial building has two primary facades: one facing north onto Richmond Avenue; and, one facing west onto S. Sandman and is surrounded by concrete sidewalks with no landscaping. The Modernist style masonry building has a rectangular plan with aluminum-framed two- and three-part glass storefronts staggered in a saw tooth pattern on the north and west facades. Ground floor commercial storefronts face north and west and there are additional small offices on the second floor. The building is set back from the street in line with the earlier residential development on the east side of S. Shepherd. This set back accommodates seven head-in parking spaces along Richmond Avenue. The building incorporates characteristic elements of the mid-century Modernist style including a flat roof, ribbon windows, expansive use of aluminum framed floor-to-ceiling storefront glass on the ground floor, and elongated, coursed, rough faced sandstone detailing. The building remains on its original site with minimal alterations.

The asymmetrical west facade has four bays and faces S. Sandman from north to south, the first bay is a two-part, repetitive aluminum-framed floor-to-ceiling glass storefront with transom. The second bay includes a central, coursed, rough-faced sandstone vertical stack that extends above the roofline mimicking a chimney. This stack is flanked by a solid, aluminum- framed panel and door, both with glass transoms. This bay marks the entry to the second floor with the building's address, 3601, appearing in the transom above the solid wooden door. Just inside, the coursed sandstone detailing continues as a railing/planter box adjacent to the single run staircase. The remaining three bays, defined by a narrow, brick-veneered vertical member, each have an angled aluminum framed glass store with single light transom. These three bays angle back in a regular saw tooth pattern with the entrances to each commercial space set on a 25-degree angle. The second floor follows the five-bay division with narrow, continuous, replacement aluminum framed ribbon windows in the first bay, coursed sandstone in the second and alternating horizontal two-light windows and corrugated metal siding in bays three through five. A small, wood-framed, full-width balcony with

²⁰ Historic Resources Survey Report, Hicks & Company, 2007.

²¹ Final Environmental Impact Statement, University Corridor.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

metal balustrade and rail, projects slightly between the two floors and runs continuously along the west and north facades. The fascia of the balcony and roof are metal siding with horizontal ridges that emphasize the building's low profile and horizontality.

Bays two through four of north facade repeat the staggered saw tooth design of the west. The first bay has a small vertical column of coursed, rough-faced sandstone on its exterior (eastern) edge and this front storefront only is flush with building plane. All of the entry doors on this facade solid wood. The third bay storefront has a small (12 inch) base of the coursed, rough faced, sandstone and this aberration is the only example of a three-part storefront composition (base, large storefront window, transom) on the building. This small detail harks back to the more traditional storefront composition of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Ironically, these were derived from Classical building compositions that modernism sought to move beyond or outright reject. The second floor has a replacement, full width, aluminum framed ribbon window with alternating opening sizes. On the northeast corner of the building is a metal sign with the current name, "Sandman Building."

The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Courtney Spillane, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chapman, Betty. *Central Houston carved from land deeded to Obedience Fort Smith*. Houston Business Journal, Friday, February 26, 2010 (reprinted from the week of December 26, 1997 – January 1, 1998).

City of Houston City Directories, various dates, 1920 - 1970.

Fox, Stephen. *Houston Architectural Guide*, second edition. Houston: America Institute of Architects, 1990.

Harris County Deed Records, various dates, 1923 to 1991.

Hicks & Company. *Historic Resources Survey Report, University Corridor Project, Volume 1*. Prepared for: Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County, Texas. 2007.

Obituary, Thomas F. Millane. *Milwaukee Journal*, [n.d.] September 1959.

Obituary, John F. Millane. *The Milwaukee Journal*, 5 June 1967.

Obituary, Billie Millane. *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 20 [28] June 1984.

Racine Journal Times, Saturday 18 August 1945, p. 2.

University Corridor, Final Environmental Impact Statement, Chapter 3, January 2010.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

- (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.

AND

- (9) If less than 50 years old, or proposed historic district containing a majority of buildings, structures, or objects that are less than 50 years old, whether the building, structure, object, site, or area is of extraordinary importance to the city, state or nation for reasons not based on age (Sec. 33-224(b)).

OR

- The property was constructed before 1905 (Sec. 33-229(a)(2));

OR

- The property is listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places or designated as a “contributing structure” in an historic district listed in the National Register of Historic Places (Sec. 33-229(a)(3));

OR

- The property is recognized by the State of Texas as a Recorded State Historical Landmark (Sec. 33-229(a)(4)).

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Planning Commission accept the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommend to City Council the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of the Millane Building at 3601 S. Sandman Street.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

EXHIBIT A

MILLANE BUILDING
3601 S. SANDMAN STREET



CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

EXHIBIT B SITE LOCATION MAP

MILLANE BUILDING
3601 S. SANDMAN STREET

NOT TO SCALE

