

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: The Hermann Estate Building
OWNERS: Hermann Lofts Homeowners Association
APPLICANT: Michael Marcotte, President,
Hermann Lofts Homeowners Association
LOCATION: 204 Travis – Main Street Market Square

AGENDA ITEM: III
HPO FILE NO.: 14PL118
DATE ACCEPTED: Feb-27-2014
HAHC HEARING DATE: Mar-27-2014

SITE INFORMATION

Lots 1, 2, 3, 9, 10 & 11, Block 19, Southside Buffalo Bayou, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic eight-story brick residential building.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Protected Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Hermann Estate Building, also known as the Hermann Lofts Building, was originally called the George Hermann Estate Building. Construction of the building began in 1916 and was completed in 1917.

The building was commissioned by the estate of George Henry Hermann (1843-1914), a Houston resident who accumulated a personal fortune through various business enterprises. Hermann was a philanthropist who donated much of the land on which Hermann Park now sits and funded what is now known as Memorial Hermann Hospital, among his many contributions to the City and residents of Houston.

The Hermann Estate Building was designed in the Neo-Classical style by Houston architect Louis A. Glover of F. Glover and Son architects. Louis Glover designed several other significant buildings in Houston including the Julia Ideson Building of the Houston Public Library, Lamar High School, Reagan High School, Milby High School, Deady Junior High School, and several private residences, including the Helm-McDonough house.

The Hermann Estate Building originally was designed to house personnel working in the cotton industry. The building housed cotton related businesses until approximately 1924. From 1924-58, the building housed various commercial businesses and tenants. In 1958, the building was sold to the Salvation Army, which occupied it until 1975. The building was vacant and boarded up from 1975 until 1996, when it was sold to private investors and converted into and sold as residential lofts, its current use.

The Hermann Estate Building is located within the Main Street Market Square Historic District, which is both a City of Houston historic district and listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Hermann Estate Building was designated a "contributing" structure to both the city and national historic districts. The Hermann Estate Building is adjacent on its north side to the Houston Cotton Exchange Building (1884) and on its south side to the W.L. Foley Dry Goods Co. Building (1889).

The Hermann Estate Building is a good and intact example of a World War I era commercial office building designed in the Neo-Classical style. The building's façade includes an iron sidewalk canopy, one of the very few remaining examples of this once prevalent architectural element in Houston.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

George Henry Hermann

The Hermann Estate Building is significant because of its association with the estate of George Henry Hermann, an influential and wealthy Houston businessman and a significant philanthropist. George Hermann was the youngest of four sons of Martha and John Hermann of Davos, Switzerland, who arrived in Houston in 1838. John Hermann, a veteran of the Battle of Waterloo, established a bakery on Main Street. George Hermann was born in Houston on August 6, 1843.

At the age of eighteen, George Hermann joined the 26th Texas Calvary serving in the Confederate Army until it was disbanded on May 15, 1865. He saw action in Texas and Louisiana.

In 1872, Hermann formed a partnership with W.J. and J.J. Settegast to sell land and cattle. From 1884 on, Hermann dealt exclusively in real estate. Among his many transactions was a tract of land in northern Harris County which lay at the center of the Humble oil producing field that was discovered in 1904.

Hermann went on to amass a huge fortune. At the time of his death, his estate was worth approximately \$5 million dollars. In May 1914, five months prior to his death, Hermann donated over 275 acres of land to the City of Houston for the establishment of what is now known as Hermann Park, which borders Houston's museum district and Rice University, and is home to the Houston Zoo (since January 1925) and Miller Outdoor Theater (which opened in 1923).

Hermann died on October 21, 1914, in a hospital in Baltimore, Maryland. Hermann's funeral was held in Houston's City Auditorium on October 27, 1914. Houston's schools, business and government offices were closed for the day by a public proclamation. Flags were hung at half-mast and the bell on top of City Hall tolled.

Hermann, a bachelor, died without heirs. His will was read following his funeral service. It provided for the bulk of his estate to be used for the establishment and maintenance of a charity hospital, which was named Hermann Hospital (1925) and is now known as Memorial Hermann Hospital. Hermann also left the site of the Hermann family home at Walker and Smith Streets to the City of Houston to become "a resting spot or breathing space" and to be named Martha Hermann Square after his mother. Hermann Square is today the site of Houston's City Hall. Hermann's executors also used part of his estate for the construction of what is now the Hermann Building.

Louis Antonio Glover

The Hermann Building also is significant because of its association with Louis Antonio Glover (1884-1959), the architect who designed the building. Louis Glover was born in 1884 and raised in Harrisburg, Texas. He was the son of Houston architect Frank S. Glover. Louis Glover began working as a draftsman in his father's firm as early as 1907. In 1911, Frank Glover changed his firm's name to F.S. Glover and Son, Architects. In 1912, F.S. Glover and Son, Architects, designed the Tel-Electric Building for George Hermann who, among his other business ventures, was then president of the Tel-Electric Company.

Louis Glover died in 1959. At the time of his death, he was a member of Trinity Episcopal Church and the American Institute of Architects.

In addition to the Hermann Estate Building, Louis Glover designed several other significant buildings in Houston, including:

- The Julia Ideson Building of the Houston Public Library, 1926 (with Cram and Ferguson and William Ward Watkin)
- Mirabeau Lamar High School, 1937 (with John F. Staub, Kenneth Franzheim, Lamar Q. Cato and Harry D. Payne)
- John H. Reagan High School, 1926 (with John Staub)
- James W. Deady Junior High School, 1928
- Charles H. Milby High School, 1926
- Several private residences, including the Helm-McDonough house, which is located at 2107 Looscan Lane in River Oaks, and was designated a Landmark by the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission in 2012.

Relationship to the Cotton Trade Business

The Hermann Estate Building is significant in the area of commerce for its early association with the cotton industry, which played a significant role in the development of Texas and the City of Houston. The building is one block from the Old Market Square, the earliest open trading market in Houston and the site of the city's first City Hall. The Hermann Estate Building was constructed next door to the original Houston Cotton Exchange Building and originally was intended as an office building for "the use of cotton men and equipped with sampling and classing rooms." By 1916, when construction of the Hermann Estate Building began, the cotton trade in Houston was reaching its peak years and adequate space for people in the trade, including brokers, exporters and classers, was not available in the Cotton Exchange Building and they were spread throughout the area. Having a large office building next to the Cotton Exchange to house these workers was an obvious solution. When the Hermann Estate Building was completed in late 1917, it quickly filled with tenants. People in the cotton trade leased all of the upper floors, The Guaranty State Bank and the Federal Reserve Branch Bank shared the ground floor, and Gulf Publishing Company leased the basement. The relationship between the Hermann Estate Building and the cotton industry lasted for approximately seven years. A new Cotton Exchange Building was constructed at Prairie and Caroline Streets in 1924 and many of the Hermann Estate Building's cotton related tenants relocated there. In 1923, the Solo-Serve Company, Inc. (dry goods) moved into the Federal Reserve Bank quarters. In 1924, The Guaranty National Bank moved out and Solo-Serve took over the entire ground floor until the late 1950s when the building was sold to the Salvation Army. During World War II, the Selective Service rented all of the upper floors of the Hermann Estate Building. After the war, the building housed lawyers, union offices, real estate and finance loan companies.

By 1957, however, the building was nearly totally vacant. The Salvation Army bought the Hermann Estate Building in 1958 and occupied it until 1975. The building remained vacant until 1996 when it was sold to private developers (Douglas Crosson, Threshold Interests, Houston and Wally Hultin, Byers Street Properties, Denver) and converted into and sold by them as residential lofts. The renovated building offered the first residential lofts for sale in downtown Houston.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The Hermann Estate Building is significant in the area of architecture as a good and intact example of a World War I-era commercial office building designed in the Neo-Classical style. The building's iron sidewalk canopy on its east facing façade is one of the very few remaining examples of what was once a prevalent architectural element in Houston. The exterior façade of the building, including the iron sidewalk canopy and balustrade, were restored and preserved in the 1996-1997 renovation and conversion of the building to residential lofts.

The building is eight stories high and has approximately 90,000 square feet of interior space. The upper floors form a T -configuration over the first floor base. The structure is built over a basement and sub-basement that currently serve as garage and storage areas for the building's residents. The structure is reinforced concrete construction. The east elevation is faced with yellow brick and the other three sides are painted stucco on masonry with steel framed windows. The upper seven floors of the building are composed of five repeating bays each containing three undecorated wood framed windows joined by a common stone-like sill. Each bay is divided by a brick pilaster that protrudes slightly from the wall surface, as do the sills.

An entrance lobby with marble floors and wainscoting is on the first floor, as is the entrance to the single elevator that serves the building. A cast iron sidewalk canopy runs the length of the Travis Street facade (approximately 100 feet) and extends from the top of the ground floor to the second floor. Six pairs of thin iron columns that reach to a decorated cast iron frieze support the canopy. An iron railing crowns the canopy on three sides, creating a balcony on the second floor.

The windows of the east elevation are double hung sash windows except on the second floor where the central window in each bay extends below the lintel and instead is a multi-pane French door. The size and type of windows on the north and south elevations vary from double hung sash type toward the front to large steel framed awning windows toward the rear. The west elevation also contains large steel framed awning windows.

A plain stone cornice that is upheld by oversized modillions decorates the roofline. Decorative terra cotta at the frieze level under the cornice enhances the Neo-Classical aspect of the building.

There is a commercial unit (currently housing a restaurant) on the ground floor of the building that is entered through a separate entry on Travis Street in the third bay.

In 1996-1997, the building was renovated and converted to 28 residential loft units. The historical integrity of the building's exterior was preserved in the renovation. As part of the renovation, all exterior masonry and terra cotta elements and stucco surfaces were cleaned and repaired; the cast iron balustrade and all components of the canopy were restored; the windows were replaced with energy efficient windows; the doorway entrances to the building located in the fourth and fifth bays of the ground floor were converted to entrances to the two parking garage levels; and a three tiered zig-zag metal fire escape that ran down the center of the east elevation that was not original to the building was removed.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Houston: The Unknown City 1836-1946, Johnston, Marguerite (Texas A & M Press: 1991)

"Hermann Building Being Redeveloped into Lofts", *Downtown/Neartown This Week*, May 15, 1996

"Hermann Lofts: Purchasing a Piece of History", *News of the Downtown District*, Summer 1996

<http://www.nationalhistoricregister.com/TX/Harris/districts.html>

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

EXHIBIT A
PHOTOS
HERMANN ESTATE BUILDING
204 TRAVIS STREET



CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

APPEARANCE IN 1980 PRIOR TO LOFT CONVERSION

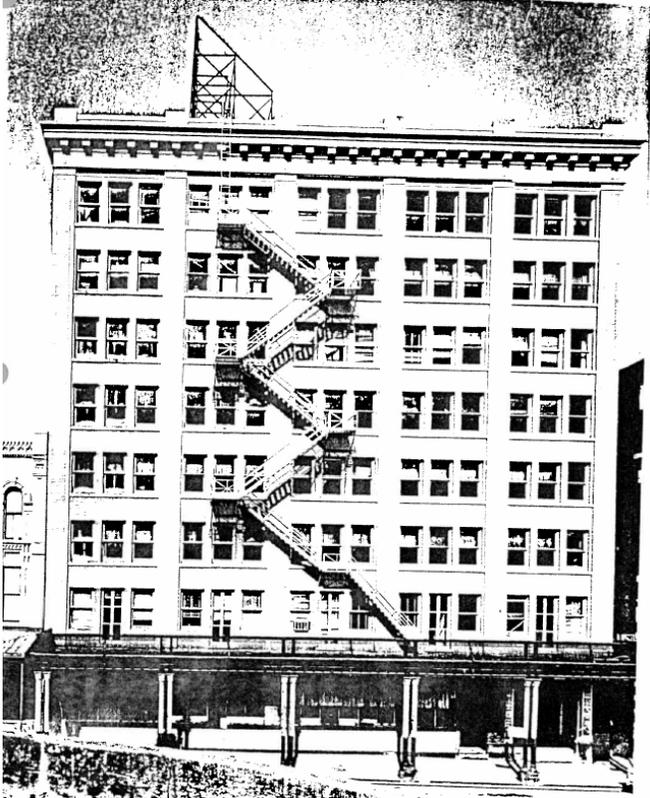
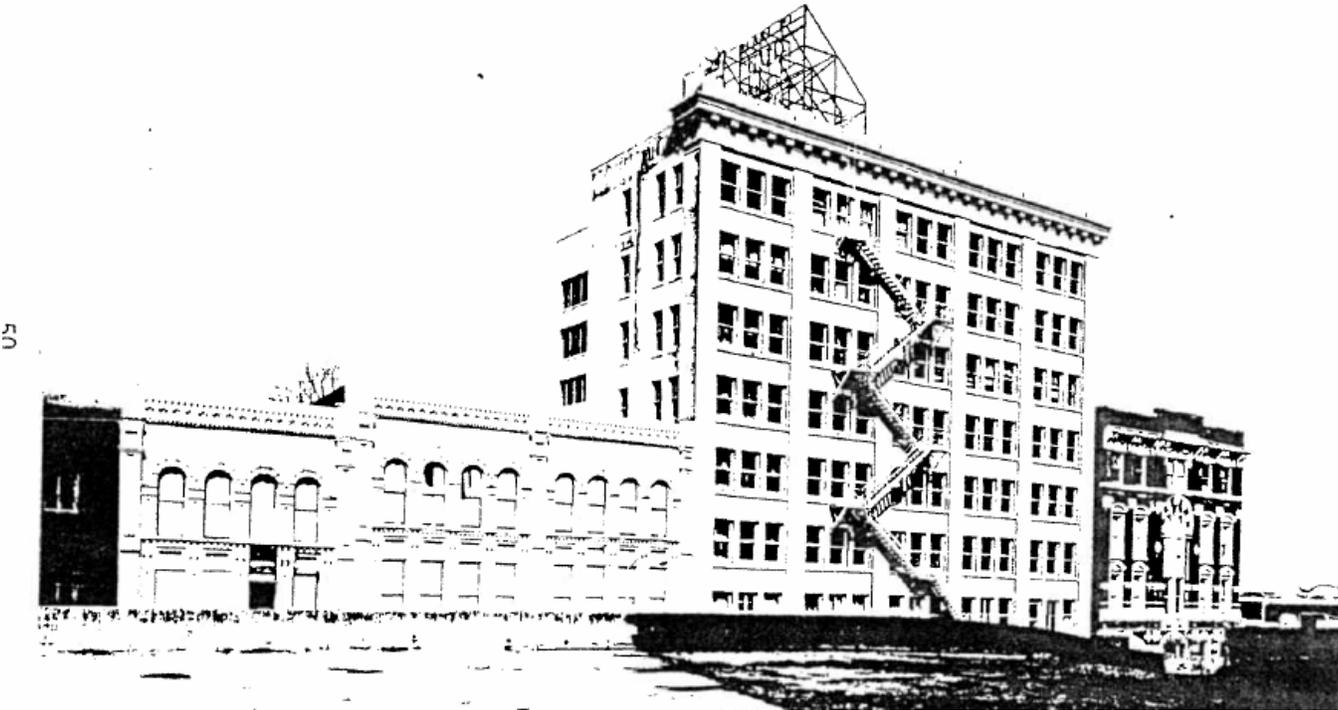
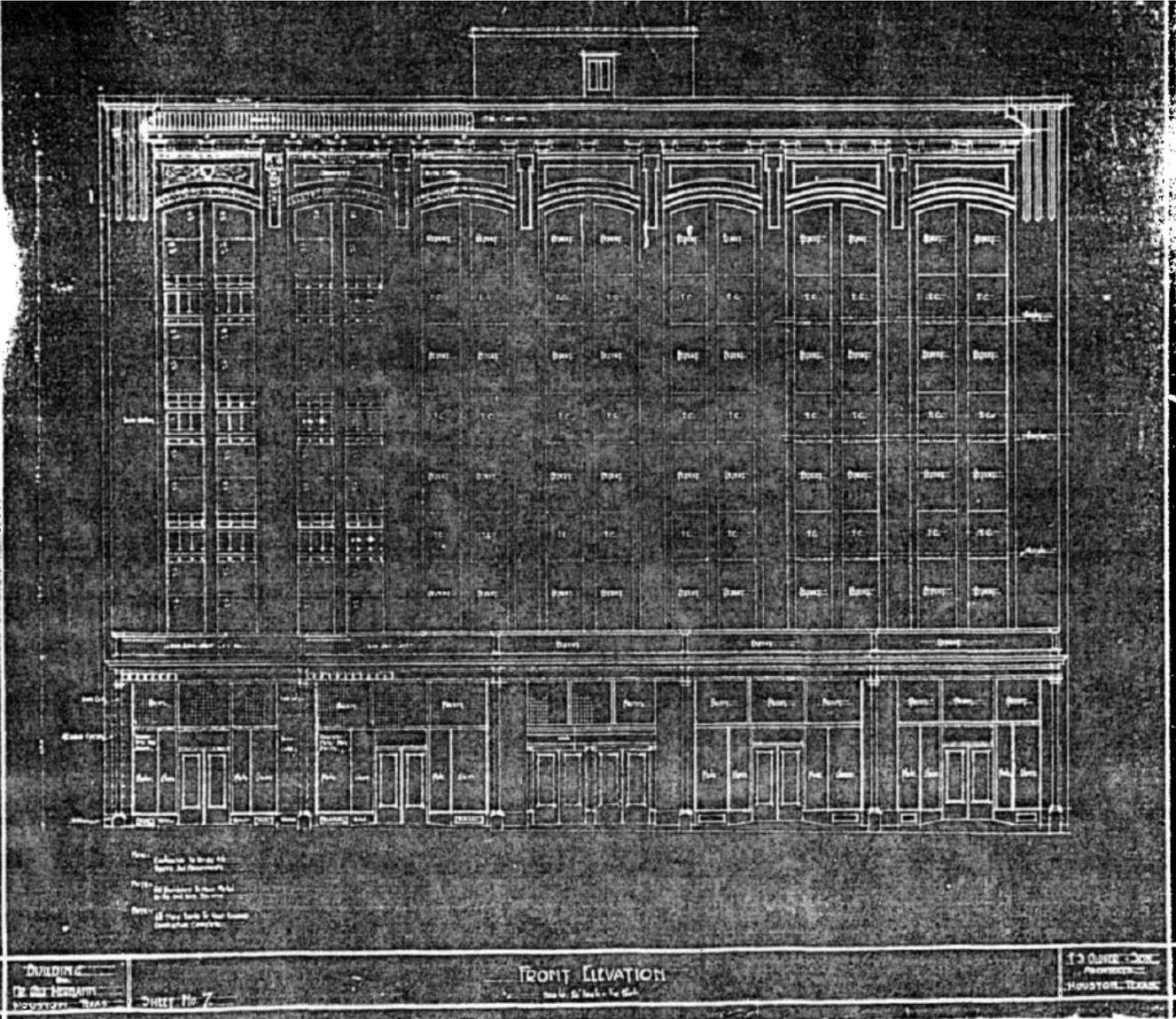


EXHIBIT B
ORIGINAL ARCHITECTURAL DRAWING
HERMANN ESTATE BUILDING
204 TRAVIS STREET



CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

EXHIBIT C
SITE MAP
HERMANN ESTATE BUILDING
204 TRAVIS STREET

MAIN STREET MARKET SQUARE HISTORIC DISTRICT

