

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME: The T. E. Swann Warehouse
OWNER: Wood Street Investments, L.P.
APPLICANT: Wood Street Investments, L.P.
LOCATION: 1011 Wood Street
30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: 03/23/97

AGENDA ITEM: III
PC MEETING DATE: 05/15/97
HPO FILE NO.: 97LD20
DATE ACCEPTED: 03/20/97
HAHC HEARING DATE: 04/24/97

SITE INFORMATION: A parcel containing .585 acres, being Lots 1, 2, the adjoining west 40' of Lot 3, the west 45' of Lot 6, the west 15' of Lot 11 and all of Lot 12, Block 58, NSBB, John Austin Survey, Abstract 1, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The structure on the site is a rectangular, 3-story masonry/steel frame building clad with brick veneer and features a flat roof with parapet wall. An L-shaped parking lot is located to the west and south of the building.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE: The T. E. Swann Warehouse was constructed in 1923 by Thomas E. Swann. Mr. Swann owned the T. E. Swann Furniture Company and The Talking Machine Company of Texas.

Before the turn-of-the century much of the land on the north side of Buffalo Bayou had been owned by the expanding railroad companies. Early on, they began leasing some of their land for commercial development. In 1915 the Walker-Smith Company, a wholesale grocery business, leased a parcel in Block 58 from the Texas and New Orleans Railroad. That lease specified that construction of a suitable building for conducting a wholesale grocery business would begin within sixty days. By late 1915, a two-story, brick and concrete building, measuring 110' in width by 100' deep, had been built on the northeast corner of the property (San Jacinto at Wood), leaving the remaining 60' vacant. In 1920 Thomas E. Swann, a businessman originally from Tyler, Texas, purchased the lease of the property, now containing one building, from the Walker-Smith Company. Mr. Swann had previously owned the Swann Furniture Company, which operated stores in all of the principle cities of Central and East Texas. In 1912, after becoming interested in the wholesale distribution of Victor talking machines, he formed a new company known as The Talking Machine Company of Texas. He located his new company in Houston because it offered greater facilities as a shipping point which was afforded by the Houston Ship Channel and the intersection of the major railroad lines. For three years, the address for the company was listed in the City Directory as simply North San Jacinto, southwest corner of Wood Street. This is the location of the existing 1915 building located on Mr. Swann's property.

In 1923, with his business prospering, Mr. Swann began construction of a second warehouse on this property, adjacent to the existing one. Having only 60 feet remaining on the west side of his building, the new warehouse would be only 60 feet wide and 100 feet deep. Fronting Wood Street, it was constructed with a third floor to accommodate both the narrow width of the building and the need for more storage space. Architecturally resembling its two-story neighbor, this new warehouse featured similar masonry and steel construction, a concrete loading dock stretching across the front face, and a four foot parapet wall with terra-cotta tile coping surrounding a flat roof. In September 1923 with construction underway, Mr. Swann leased the entire second floor and one-third of the first floor space in his existing building to the Fisk Tire Company, leaving only two-thirds of the first floor space for his own talking machine business. Once the new building was completed in February, 1924, The Talking Machine Company moved into the new, three-story building. The company was first listed in the City Directory at 1011 Wood in 1924. Once moved into the new warehouse, the business

became known as the T. E. Swann Company. Later that same year, Mr. Swann relocated his family back to Tyler, and W. W. Moore became trustee for the property. From this point, all lease agreements written concerning either building, referred to both the two-story and the three-story buildings as the "Swann Warehouses."

In 1923 Mr. Swann sold his company and leased the three-story building to H. F. Reichardt, who had recently started his own electric company, The Reichardt Electric Company. Mr. Reichardt operated his company at that location until 1942. In 1975, Central Supply Electric Company occupied the building at 1011 Wood and the Day Furniture Company was next door in the two-story building. In 1984 Day Furniture Company moved into the Swann Warehouse at 1011 Wood and occupied that building until being purchased by the present owner.

The warehouse building at 1011 Wood Street represents a type of construction that was popular in the 1920's and remains an excellent example of the industrial vernacular architecture which is characteristic of the many commercial warehouse buildings of that era in the warehouse area.

Rectangular in shape, the building was constructed of a masonry/steel/wood frame with brick veneer exterior. It is a three-story building with a full basement. The front of the building features a loading dock which stands three feet high and spans the building's entire 60 foot width along Wood Street. The building features a flat roof around which is a four foot parapet wall with overlapping, terra-cotta tile coping. Two pairs of wood panel doors and two single wood panel doors with an upper glass provide access to the building from the loading dock. Originally, the two upper floors featured three sets of paired wood multi-light windows and a set of three wood multi-light windows on the first floor (existing). A canopy with shed roof supported by round, iron columns probably covered the loading dock in an earlier period.

The building is located in the old warehouse area, which grew up along Buffalo Bayou between the 1890's and the 1920's. According to Stephen Fox, "the area developed in response to the overlap of major transportation arteries - the bayou itself, navigable by barge, and a series of railroad lines. It was railroad expansion after the turn-of-the-century that made the lightly settled working-class neighborhood on the north bank of Buffalo Bayou and the somewhat denser middle-class residential district on the south bank attractive locales for commercial development. The north side (today's NoHo), in Fifth Ward, became the 'factory district.' The south bank, in Second Ward, became the 'wholesale district,' reflecting Commerce Street's long-standing identification as Produce Row, where wholesale grocery, meat, produce and baking establishments were concentrated until 1950. However, as early as the 1930's, as Houston, along with the rest of the country embraced the automobile, and later airplanes, railroad usage once central to the development of the warehouse district, began to decline. As businesses moved away from downtown also, these warehouses were no longer needed. Thus, the reason for most of the early warehouses becoming vacant and remaining so until the recent interest in the area for residential-loft residences. What is surprising about the warehouse district today is the abundance of the remaining industrial vernacular buildings, rail trackage, and brick-paved streets."

RESTORATION HISTORY/CURRENT CONDITION: Most of the original windows (front-second and third floors and side and rear elevations) have been replaced with a combination of aluminum 2/2 horizontal and multi-light paned windows, the canopy has been removed and the brick has been painted. The applicant plans to restore the building to its original appearance on the Wood Street facade and is applying for a certificate of appropriateness (HAHC - 4/24/97) since the building is pending landmark designation. Application includes request for the following rehabilitation work:

- 1) Front (North elevation) - original entry doors which are wood with two horizontal panels below a large upper glass will be duplicated and placed in the original openings; pair of doors in the center and single door on left will be operable only; current aluminum windows with 2/2 horizontal lights (later alteration) will be replaced with wood 4/4 divided light windows (painted white) to match original (triple set of windows on first floor - north elevation - are original wood multi-light paned windows as is one window in rear); remove existing fire escape stairs and awning over far left door; existing gutters and down spouts will be restored to their original condition; construct a metal awning with smooth metal shed roof over the existing loading dock measuring 12' X 60' supported by 2" round iron posts; install a metal picket balustrade 42" in height to skirt loading dock to meet safety requirements;
- 2) Side (West elevation) - replace 20 existing aluminum windows (later alteration) with new 4/4 divided light, polyvinyl windows (white) with double paned insulated glass to fit existing openings and to match configuration of windows on front of building; 8 new openings will be made in the brick for additional windows of the same type which are required to meet lighting requirement code (marked "new" on diagram);
- 3) Rear (South elevation) - install same type windows as west elevation by replacing 9 existing aluminum windows; 4 new openings will be made like those on west elevation (marked "new" on diagram); original entry doors like those on the north elevation will be duplicated and placed in the original openings; 1 new door opening will be created for fire escape door (accessed by concrete deck and steps) which will match other doors (marked "new" on the diagram); construct concrete handicap access ramp with tubular metal railing and metal mesh balustrade; and painted brick wall surfaces (entire building) will be cleaned and repaired to its original appearance using environmentally safe paint removal procedures; tile coping around parapet wall will be restored to original appearance and new roof (with R20 insulation) will be installed over existing one.

The first floor of the building will be used for offices and the upper floors will be used for luxury apartments.

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 D NA S - satisfies D - does not satisfy NA - not applicable

(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;

HAHC RECOMMENDATION:

At a public hearing on April 24, 1997, the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission determined that the application complied with criteria found in the Historic Preservation Ordinance, and recommended that the Planning Commission accepts the recommendation of the HAHC and forward it to City Council for the designation of the T. E. Swann Warehouse as a landmark to the Planning Commission.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: None

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: That the Planning Commission accepts the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and forward it to City Council for designation of the T. E. Swann Warehouse as a Landmark of the City of Houston.

Site Location Map
The T. E. Swann Warehouse
1011 Wood Street
Not to scale

