

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME: 411 Fannin Street
(commonly known as the Mafrige Building)
Owner: Don Mafrige Real Estate
APPLICANT: Don Mafrige; Lynn Edmundson
LOCATION: 411 Fannin Street
30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: Jul-12-99

AGENDA ITEM: III a

MEETING DATE: Aug-12-99
HPO FILE NO.: 99L76
DATE ACCEPTED: Jul-10-99
HEARING DATE: Aug-12-99

SITE INFORMATION

Lot 12, Block 46, SSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas, and fronting 50 feet on Fannin Street and running back between parallel lines 125 feet in depth. The structure on the site is a four-story commercial building.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The building at 411 Fannin remains as tangible evidence of the economic development of Houston and its early ties to the prosperity of the cotton and railroad industries. The building also housed the Cargill Company, which developed into one of Houston's largest printing and stationery companies. Built by two of Houston's most prominent business leaders, James A. Baker Jr. and John M. Dorrance, this building reflects the significant contribution that the cotton and railroad industries played in propelling Houston into prominence as a trade and transportation center at the beginning of the 20th century. These two individuals were also associated with several successful and notable business ventures, including the law firm of Baker & Botts, the Rice Institute, the Commercial National Bank, and the Dorrance & Company. Each of the entities were directly linked to the most significant segments of Houston's economy.

At the turn of the century, Houston became a major commercial center for the cotton, railroad, and oil industries. The law firm of Baker & Botts, one of the oldest and most prestigious law firms in Houston, soon became involved in all aspects of legal services for most of the newly formed businesses. The firm officially dates to 1840 and was started by Houston lawyers, Peter W. Gray and Walter Browne Botts. The law firm appeared in the Houston City Directory under the name of Gray and Botts between 1865-1872 (Houston City Directories 1865-1971). The firm became known as Gray, Botts, and Baker when James A. Baker, a former Harris County District Judge, joined the firm in 1872. Two years later Peter Gray died, and James A. Baker Jr. joined the firm and the name was changed to Baker, Botts and Baker. Since that time the firm has been engaged continuously in the practice of law with new partners adding their names behind that of Baker and Botts. In 1971 the firm reclaimed its early name and continues today as Baker & Botts (Freeman, The People of Baker & Botts).

With the growth of the railroad industry in the later part of the 19th century, the law firm became general counsel for several of the larger railroad companies most notably the Houston and Texas Central and the East and West Texas. With James A. Baker at its head, Baker & Botts quickly became established as the regional leader in railroad law and eventually served as general attorneys for all of the Southern Pacific Lines in Texas (Freeman, The People of Baker & Botts). James A. Baker, Jr. was also the personal friend and attorney for the

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estate of William M. Rice and was instrumental in the litigation concerning the disposition of the Rice fortune and the establishment of the Rice Institute. Although the institute had been chartered in the late 1890's, the legal battle over the estate lasted for years and was only settled in 1906. Captain Baker became the first Chairman of the Board of Trustees for the Rice Institute, and served in that capacity until his death in 1941. Heading the Rice Trust with millions to lend was a natural role for Captain Baker as he was also actively involved as a banker throughout his life.

In 1886, Captain Baker had organized the Commercial National Bank with a capitalization of \$500,000.00. The early board of directors for the bank included William B. Chew, John M. Dorrance, Henry Gardes, William D. Cleveland, James A. Baker, and J. S. Rice. All were influential city leaders with ties to both the cotton and railroad industries. Captain Baker also served as Director of Union National Bank in 1905 and as President of the South Texas Commercial National Bank from 1914 to 1926.

John M. Dorrance was head of Dorrance & Company, one of the largest cotton exporters in Houston. Born in Massachusetts, he had started in the cotton industry in New York at the age of fourteen and continued in that profession for over fifty years. He soon was relocated to North Carolina and then to South Carolina before ending up in St. Louis in 1884. With the railroad connections between Houston and St. Louis well established, Dorrance began traveling to Houston to further his cotton exporting business. The proximity and convergence of many significant railroads lines soon enticed Dorrance to establish the Houston based cotton firm of Dorrance, Neville & Cairnes in 1897, which later became Dorrance, Cairnes & Company and then finally Dorrance & Company (Tyler, The New Handbook of Texas, Texas Historical Commission). During the twenty years he lived in Houston, John M. Dorrance diversified his interests and associated himself with many public and private enterprises where he gained considerable recognition as an astute businessman and civic leader.

John M. Dorrance served as vice-president of the Commercial National Bank until 1908, and then served in a similar position for the South Texas National Bank of Houston until it was consolidated as the South Commercial National Bank in 1912. He served as president of the Standard Compress Company from 1898 through 1912, and in 1913, he organized the Shippers Compress of Houston. He was also president of the Brazos Tile & Brick Company. He was vice-president of the Houston Cotton Exchange and a member of the New Orleans Cotton Exchange (Tyler, New Handbook of Texas, Texas Historical Commission).

A title search on 411 Fannin indicates that the property was sold several times between 1893 and 1906. Early Sanborn maps from 1885 and 1896 indicate the presence of a smaller two-story structure existing on the property which was also confirmed through a survey of the Houston City Directories (Morrison & Fourmy's, Houston City Directories 1885-1935). In 1905 the property was sold to several of the City's most prominent business leaders, George L. Porter, J. S. Rice, William M. Rice, and James A. Baker, Jr. In 1906 James A. Baker Jr. sold a half interest in the parcel of land at 409-411 Fannin Street to John M. Dorrance for the construction of a warehouse building for his cotton exporting business. The 1907 Sanborn Map confirms the construction of the current building on the site. The building was constructed of solid brick load bearing exterior walls with heavy timber framing to accommodate the heavy loading and equipment needed for the storage of cotton. Its fireproof construction assured the safety of warehousing this commodity. It is not clear, however, whether the building was ever used for the storage of cotton or not. The location of the building, which was a significant distance from the railroads and docks, would seem to make the site impractical as a staging area for the distribution of cotton.

The 1908 Houston City Directory lists the Cargill Company, a stationer, printer, and engraving company at that location. The Cargill Company was one of the largest printing and engraving companies in Houston. In 1917 James A. Baker Jr. and J. M. Dorrance sold the property and building to Ennis Cargill of the Cargill Company.

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Because the printing and stationery business requires the use of heavy printing presses and the storage of large amounts of paper, the substantial construction of this building may have been the main reason that Cargill chose the site. In 1920 the Cargill Company sold the property and building to Ennis Cargill, the president of the company. The Sanborn Map of 1924 clearly identifies the existing building as the Cargill Company, manufacturers of Stationery, which also corresponds to a historic photograph dated c. 1915 (Photographic Collection, Texas Room, Houston Public Library). The Cargill Company occupied the building until 1936 when the property was sold to the Mafrige family. It has remained in the Mafrige family to the present time with numerous individuals and companies leasing space throughout the years.

RESTORATION HISTORY/CURRENT CONDITION:

The building at 411 Fannin was built c. 1907. The four story, rectangular building is constructed of solid brick load bearing exterior walls with heavy timber framing. Built facing west, the principal façade fronts Fannin Street and consists of three identical bays. An early photograph shows the upper three floors possessing three sets of paired double hung windows with one over one lights. Four colossal pilaster columns extend the entire height of the upper three floors accentuating the principal façade between each of the windows. The pilasters support a classically proportioned entablature. According to an early photograph, large flat Corinthian capitals capped the center two pilasters while the outer two pilasters were finished by a much simpler capital.

The primary facade was finished in a speckled brownish face brick, which was mortared directly to the solid brick bearing walls behind it. The ornamental work, as well as the spandrels between the windows, appears to have been some sort of cast in place cement-plaster. The window openings, including those double wide openings on the Fannin Street facade, have no steel lintels or headers, but are rather spanned by segmented brick arches which are visible in some of the unfinished interior areas.

The building was extensively remodeled around 1950, drastically changing its exterior appearance. At that time, the existing window openings were partially infilled with masonry and the windows replaced with ones of more horizontal proportion. The front facade was sheathed in white granite as part of this remodeling.

In 1988, concerned because the granite was beginning to de-laminate from the masonry beneath, the owner had the panels removed to prevent injury to pedestrians below. Once these panels were removed, it was discovered that the clips used to support the granite had destroyed the original ornamental elements evident in the historic photograph. Following an evaluation of the existing conditions, it was determined that the best course of action would be to cover the damaged surfaces with a new stucco finish and recreate as much of the early twentieth century appearance of the building as possible. The restoration of the original window configuration using paired one-over-one single hung replacement windows further reflected this earlier appearance. A new cornice, very loosely based on the one evident in the historic photograph was created to complete the upper facade renovation. The name "Mafrige" and two dates, "1898" and "1998", not original to the building, were added to the cornice.

At the time of the 1950s remodel, the storefront and building entry were pushed back several feet from the face of the building, creating a recessed covered area. Because the space directly behind the storefront is currently occupied, the owner does not wish to reconstruct the storefront at its original location. The decision was made to maintain the current configuration and improve it cosmetically, as much as possible, to recreate the character of the turn of the century building. The two six-foot wide sections of masonry wall on either side of the storefront were covered with a rusticated cast stone veneer. Additionally, the frameless glass entry doors will soon be replaced by wood and glass doors with sidelights, more in keeping with the character of the building. The remainder of the aluminum storefront will be painted "Hartford Green" to match the windows on the upper

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floors. Eventually, at such time as the tenants at the storefront spaces change, the owner would like to reconstruct the entire storefront out of wood.

While the work executed on the building is not an exact restoration, a more compatible alteration was achieved. Admittedly, the ideal situation would have been to leave the original fabric of the primary facade exposed. But, based on the poor condition of this original fabric, complete restoration would not have been practical.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend designation of the building at 411 Fannin (commonly known as the Mafrige Building) as a landmark to the Planning Commission since the application complies with the applicable criteria.

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 | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event; |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present; |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride. |

SITE LOCATION MAP
411 FANNIN STREET
NOT TO SCALE