

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME: City of Houston Fire Station No. 3
(private ownership)

OWNER: Robert L. Deutsch

APPLICANT: Robert L. Deutsch

LOCATION: 1919 Houston Avenue

30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: Jul-14-03

AGENDA ITEM: I

P.C. MEETING DATE: 08-21-03

HPO FILE NO.: 03L110

DATE ACCEPTED: 7-14-03

HAHC HEARING DATE: 8-14-03

SITE INFORMATION

Tracts 7A and 8A, Block 284, W. R. Baker Addition, NSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is a two-story brick building.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

Fire Station No. 3, built in 1903, is the only historic fire station remaining today in the First Ward, as well as one of the few remaining examples of civic architecture from the late-Victorian-era period constructed during the years Houston was expanding its salaried Fire Department. Its design is attributed to Olle J. Lorehn (1864-1939), one of Houston's most well-known, turn-of-the-century architects. He was commissioned to design several other fire stations including Fire Station No. 7 (1899), now the Houston Fire Museum at 2325 Milam (City of Houston Landmark), Fire Station No. 9 (1899) (demolished) and the old Central Fire Station (1903) (demolished) in downtown Houston. The rock-faced, cast concrete surfaces over arched entryways and arched window openings were characteristic of the work of Lorehn.

Olle Lorehn was born in Sweden and immigrated to the US in the 1880s and to Texas in 1890 where he became the second architect licensed in the state. By 1894 he had an office in the Kiam Building at 320 Main Street, known as "Lorehn and Fritz." Other buildings that are extant of which there is documentation of being designed by Lorehn include Sacred Heart Church (1912) at 1111 Pierce (now called Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral, which is slated for demolition), the James Bute Company Warehouse (1910) at 701-711 William Street, the Metropole Hotel (1911) (demolished) at 1605 Preston, the Palace Hotel (1903) at 216 LaBranch (City of Houston Landmark), Nabisco Production Plant Building (1902) (demolished) at 3 North Chenevert Street, and the only remaining residential example, the W. T. Carter, Jr. House (1912) at 18 Courtlandt Place (with Birdsall P. Briscoe). An important building documented as a design of Lorehn was the Binz Building at 513-19 Main (demolished in 1950). This building was the first tall office building in Houston. When it was completed in 1895, Lorehn secured his reputation as a capable and imaginative architect.

Fire Station No. 3 and No. 7 are the only fire stations remaining of Lorehn's work. There is another fire station on Sampson Street that is most likely the work of Lorehn, which exhibits a slight variation in styling from the other two fire stations. The architectural style of Fire Station No. 3 is Lorehn's own interpretation of the Romanesque Revival style. The extant building is a fine example of turn-of-the-century fire stations that were built in Houston during the years the Fire Department was expanding after becoming a non-volunteer based organization. During construction of the building a cornerstone was placed at the northeast corner of the building, facing east, which is visible in an historic photograph in the *City of Houston Book* for 1923. When the façade was altered after 1937, fortunately the cornerstone was saved and relocated at the same corner facing

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north. The cornerstone reads: “Board of Public Works – C. H. Bering, J. R. Cade, C. G. Pillott; Fire Committee – W. E. Buckley, Chair; Wharton Bates, J. A. Thompson; Chief of Fire Department, J. P. Arto, 1905.”

Steam was the mode of power for the horse driven fire engines at the turn of the century. Fire Station No. 3 had two such units called the “Cosmopolitan,” manufactured by American LaFrance. These units were most likely the same type that were acquired in 1902 by Fire Station No. 7 on Milam when they acquired their horse-drawn wagon at a cost of \$500 and the ¼ size LaFrance Steamer at a cost of \$4,500 to which an American heater was added. The steamer was called “an ordinary one of the quick-steaming type, weighing about 4400 pounds . . . a capacity of 400 gallons of water a minute . . . of the rotary type.” Horses had to be housed at the site until equipment became motorized around 1920. There is an existing photograph of Fire Station No. 3 in the Metropolitan Research Center collection which shows the chimney of the engine’s boiler which is barely visible behind the horse team in the lefthand driveway.

The station was most likely constructed on Houston Avenue to not only serve the First Ward Community but also the growing residential neighborhoods to the north of White Oak Bayou. Located north of White Oak and just to the east side of Houston Avenue was the large Germantown neighborhood. This neighborhood was established as early as the 1880s and extended east from Houston Avenue to the railroad yards in the Second Ward. There were a number of commercial buildings constructed in Germantown fronting the east side of Houston Avenue. The majority of these commercial buildings and residential buildings of Germantown remain today between Houston Avenue and I-45. When I-45 was constructed, a center section of old Germantown was demolished but much of the western section remains east of I-45. To the north of Germantown was the newly platted neighborhood of Brooke Smith Heights, which was developed in 1905. It was soon followed by Woodland Heights in 1907, which was developed by William A. Wilson. Woodland Heights extended west from Houston Avenue.

Fire Station No. 3 served Houston’s Fire Department until 1937, when this building was sold, and a newer “modern” station was constructed at Crocket and Colorado (demolished). The building was used at one time by a charity furniture operation similar to the Salvation Army, which converted the façade to a storefront when they installed three plate glass display windows to display furniture for sale. The second floor, formerly the dormitory and quarters for the firemen, was then used as housing for indigent laborers who refinished the furniture for the charity organization. Later the building was purchased by the Montalbano family in 1960 and was occupied by Montalbano Tire and Auto Repair which bricked-in the storefront windows and used the building as a warehouse and storage for used tires.

RESTORATION HISTORY AND PRESENT CONDITION

Fire Station No. 3 has experienced several alterations since being sold by the City of Houston in 1937 to a private entity. The original two sets of sliding pocket panel doors were removed and replaced with glass storefront display windows. At that time, the four column supports that were astride the two arched doorways were replaced with two new supports. A wood addition with a shed roof was constructed and added to the rear of the building as well. In 1960 the storefront windows were bricked-in with different color brick.

When the current owner purchased the building in 1993, a phased restoration was undertaken with plans to use the building as loft residences on the second floor and artist studio/workspace on the ground floor. The second floor work has been completed which included a new roof and restoration or re-installation of period wood windows on all elevations some of which had been removed and the opening bricked-in on the north and south elevations. The interior space was restored very similar to the configuration of the original dormitory for the firemen which included restoration of bathroom and kitchen fixtures and cabinets.

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Phase Two of the project, soon to be undertaken, will be restoration of the first floor façade, including demolition of the façade alterations, installation of four steel support columns, exterior brick construction of the first floor façade, reconstruction to match the original two arched doorway openings, restoration of existing cast rusticated stone, reconstruction of the two pairs of pocket panel sliding doors in the archways, installation of three sets of wood sash windows with 1/1 lights and chemical cleansing of the paint from the brick façade.

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 | NA | S - satisfies | D - does not satisfy | NA - not applicable |
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HAHC RECOMMENDATION:

At a public hearing on August 14, 2003, 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 City of Houston Fire Station No. 3 as a Landmark of the City of Houston.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: None

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SITE LOCATION MAP
HOUSTON FIRE STATION No. 3
1919 HOUSTON AVENUE
NOT TO SCALE