

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME: The National Biscuit Company/ Purse & Company Wholesale Furniture Building
OWNER: Frost Family LTD. I
APPLICANT: Frost Family LTD. I, Mary Valente, agent
LOCATION: 15 North Chenevert Street
HEARING NOTICE: Jan-15-98

AGENDA ITEM: IIa

P.C. MEETING DATE: Mar-05-98
HPO FILE NO.: 98L042
DATE ACCEPTED: Jan-02-98
HAHC HEARING DATE: 02-12-98

SITE INFORMATION

Parcels 4-12, Block 113, SSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The main building, located at 15 N. Chenevert, is a rectangular, 6-story masonry brick building which features a flat roof with parapet wall and prominent corner tower. The one-story corrugated metal warehouse (constructed 1969), which is detached from the main building, is located to the north at 1702 Ruiz and is not part of the landmark application.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation for Building at 15 N. Chenevert Street

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The National Biscuit Company Building/Purse & Company Wholesale Furniture Company Building is pending being listed in the National Register of Historic Places (1997). The National Biscuit Company building, completed in November, 1910, is located in the old warehouse area, which grew up along Buffalo Bayou between the 1890's and the 1920's. Considered since 1910 as the most prominent industrial landmark in Houston, east of Main Street, the building dominated the warehouse district until 1947 when Nabisco chose to build a larger factory building southeast of downtown. According to Stephen Fox, "the brick and terra cotta-faced, concrete-framed building is the most monumental in the Second Ward wholesale district, made more so by its corner stair tower. 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 to 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. What is surprising about the warehouse district is how much still remains of its industrial vernacular buildings, rail trackage, and brick-paved streets."

The National Biscuit Company Building was constructed in Houston by the National Biscuit Company and its opening dedication luncheon was held on December 4, 1910. It was designed by Nabisco's corporate architect, Albert G. Zimmerman (c1866-1947). He produced similar structures for the firm in Kansas City and New York. The National Biscuit Company Bakery (factory) of red brick, accented with window trim of light buff terra cotta and white brick, housed the company's southwest regional headquarters for baking, packing and shipping the famous baked variety of treats. Each factory building featured a completely enclosed smoke-proof fire-escape stair way tower usually placed on a corner, a signature of their buildings, plus at least a second similar brick-enclosed stairwell elsewhere. Nabisco continued operation here until 1947 when they sold the building to the Purse & Company, a wholesale

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furniture dealer. The only alterations made by Purse were the replacement of the original doors with aluminum and glass doors behind the original wrought iron gates. The building facade has seen little other exterior changes, with the exception of aging, since 1910.

The original Nabisco Building, constructed in 1902 (Olle J. Lorehn, architect) at 1719 Commerce Street, is not part of this application and is under separate ownership. It was Nabisco's first production plant in Houston and is located directly to the southwest of the National Biscuit Company/Purse & Company Wholesale Furniture Building, at 15 N. Chenevert Street, the subject of this landmark application.

RESTORATION HISTORY/CURRENT CONDITION:

The applicant was granted approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness by the HAHC at its public hearing on January 15, 1998. The Certificate of Appropriateness was requested for the restoration of the building at 15 N. Chenevert for residential apartment use and to renovate the warehouse at 1702 Ruiz to be used as a parking garage. The application included the following: 1) Wood Window: Existing wood windows at North facade (Ruiz Street) and East facade (Chenevert Street) will be repaired and refurbished to include the following : removal of existing peeling paint, removal of remaining painted-over glass, replacement of deteriorated wood trim with new wood sashes and construction of new to match existing where missing; new window glass; and all wood surfaces primed and painted; 2) Metal Windows: Existing metal windows at South facade (towards Commerce Street) and at the highest level of West facade (towards Jackson Street) will be repaired and refurbished to include the following: removal of existing peeling paint, removal of cracked/broken wire glass, replacement of rusted parts with new metal parts to match existing profiles, new wire glass where required (existing original wire glass will be rearranged in logical sequence to maintain appropriate appearance from exterior), securing lower sashes in fixed, inoperable position to resolve the safety issue of pivoting windows, lengthening chains of upper sashes to maintain operability, all metal surfaces primed and painted; 3) New Windows: New openings will be created on the West facade (facing Jackson Street, between the main building and metal warehouse) to accommodate new windows to meet building code requirements for light and ventilation. New windows and patio doors (doors at first and second floors at West facade only) will be painted wood, double hung windows and hinged doors (not visible from street). The windows from the upper fifth floor area to the roof area (facing Chenevert Street, setback from parapet approximately fifty feet) will be replaced with new windows to match existing, (non-operable); one window in each bay will become a patio door to access the new roof terraces; 4) Entry Doors: The existing glass and aluminum storefront doors installed by the previous owner at the main entrance from Chenevert Street will be replaced with new wood glass doors and sidelights. The existing pair of wood exit doors at the southeast corner of building facing (Chenevert Street) will be replaced with new wood doors to match existing; 5) New Landing and Ramp: To meet current building code, a new landing with steps on each side will be added to the main entrance at Chenevert Street to accommodate the requirements for a level landing in lieu of the existing steps directly to the doors. An ornamental iron handrail based on the design of the existing original iron fanlight grille above the entry doors will be installed at the new landing. At the side entrance to the metal parking garage at 1702 Ruiz Street, a new concrete ramp will be constructed to meet accessibility requirements. The Ramp will be faced with brick and topped with an ornamental iron handrail based on the design of the iron window grilles at the basement windows along Ruiz; 6) Loading Dock Doorway At Chenevert Street: The existing roll-up doors (believed to be original) will be left in place and motor operators added inside (doors will likely be in "up" position most of the time). New ornamental iron grills, similar to existing, will be installed in the openings of the roll-up doors for security to the patios and apartment units beyond; 7) Miscellaneous: The 23' wide concrete and steel cast canopy (later alteration) between the West facade of the main building (alleyway) and the metal parking garage, will be removed to allow light

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and ventilation to the proposed apartment units on the first and second floors. Balconies with iron railings will be added to create individual patios on the West loading dock facing the alley; four balconies above the loading dock patios will also be added to the West facade. The alley area immediately behind the brick building will be paved with stamped concrete to create a plaza area with fountains and containerized landscaping. (Not visible from street); 8) Install metal grill gate at garage entry doors on metal warehouse at 1702 Ruiz.

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

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

HAHC RECOMMENDATION:

At a public hearing on February 12, 1998, the Houston Archaeological and Historic 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 National Biscuit Company/Purse & Company Wholesale Furniture Building as a Landmark of the City of Houston.

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PUBLIC COMMENTS: NONE

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Recommends that the Planning Commission accept the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and forward their recommendation to City Council that the National Biscuit Company/Purse & Company Wholesale Furniture Building be designated as a Landmark of the City of Houston.

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SITE LOCATION MAP

NATIONAL BISCUIT COMPANY/PURSE & COMPANY WHOLESALE FURNITURE BUILDING

15 NORTH CHENEVERT STREET

NOT TO SCALE