

Texas Historical Commission staff (BB), 8/31/2007, ck/dku 9/5/7, rev 10/2/07, rev 10/8/07
18" x 28" Recorded Texas Historic Landmark marker without post, attach to masonry
Harris County (Job #07HR02) Subject AD, BC, BG (Atlas 14042) UTM: 15 271400E 3294234N
Location: Houston, 712 Main and 711 Travis

GULF BUILDING

PROMINENT REAL ESTATE DEVELOPER, PUBLISHER, STATESMAN AND BANKER JESSE H. JONES OPENED THE GULF BUILDING IN 1929 WITH GULF OIL, NATIONAL BANK OF COMMERCE, AND SAKOWITZ BROTHERS AS PRIMARY TENANTS. ALFRED C. FINN DESIGNED THE 430-FOOT HIGH ART DECO EDIFICE WITH A SIX-STORY BASE TOPPED BY A TALL TOWER THAT DIMINISHES IN SIZE AS IT RISES. THE 37-FLOOR, STEEL-FRAME STRUCTURE REMAINED HOUSTON'S TALLEST SKYSCRAPER FOR 34 YEARS. IN 1986, THE BUILDING, THEN OWNED BY A SUCCESSOR BANK, UNDERWENT A \$50 MILLION RESTORATION. IT WAS RENAMED THE JPMORGAN CHASE BUILDING IN 2000 AND CONTINUES TO BE A MONUMENT TO THE CITY'S GROWTH, MODERNITY AND FINANCIAL PROSPERITY.

RECORDED TEXAS HISTORIC LANDMARK – 2007
MARKER IS PROPERTY OF THE STATE OF TEXAS

**RECORDED TEXAS HISTORIC LANDMARK MARKERS:
2007 Official Texas Historical Marker
Sponsorship Application Form**

Valid November 15, 2006 to January 2, 2007 only

This form constitutes a public request for the Texas Historical Commission (THC) to consider approval of an Official Texas Historical Marker for the topic noted in this application. The THC will review the request and make its determination based on rules and procedures of the program. Filing of the application for sponsorship is for the purpose of providing basic information to be used in the evaluation process. The final determination of eligibility and therefore approval for a state marker will be made by the THC. This form is to be used for subject marker requests only. Please see separate forms for either Historic Texas Cemeteries or Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks.

Proposed marker topic (Official title will be determined by the THC): **The Gulf Building**

County: **Harris**

Town (nearest county town on state highway map): **Houston**

Street address of marker site or directions from town noted above: **712 Main and 711 Travis**

NOTE: Recorded Texas Historic Landmark markers must be placed at the structure being marked.

Recorded Texas Historic Landmark markers definition: Recorded Texas Historic Landmark (RTHL) markers are awarded to structures deemed worthy of preservation for their historical associations and architectural significance. RTHL is a legal designation and comes with a measure of protection; it is the highest honor the state can bestow on a historic structure, and the designation is required for this type of marker. The RTHL designation becomes effective upon approval by the THC. Official Texas Historical Markers signify the RTHL designation; designation comes only through application to and approval by the THC and must include public display of an Official Texas Historical Marker. Owners of RTHL-designated structures must give the THC 60 days written notice before any alterations are made to the exterior of the structure. RTHL status is a permanent designation and is not to be removed from the property in the event of a transfer of ownership. Only the THC can remove the designation or recall the marker. The marker must remain with the structure and may not be removed or displayed elsewhere until or unless the THC gives express approval in writing for such action. Once designated as RTHL, properties are subject to provisions of Texas Government Code, Section 442.006(f).

Criteria:

1. **Age:** Structures eligible for the RTHL designation and marker must be at least 50 years old.
2. **Historical significance:** Architectural significance alone is not enough to qualify a structure for the RTHL designation. It must have an equally significant historical association, and that association can come from an event that occurred at the site; through individuals who owned or lived on the property; or, in the case of bridges, industrial plants, schoolhouses and other non-residential properties, through documented significance to the larger community.
3. **Architectural significance:** Structures deemed architecturally significant are outstanding examples of architectural history, either through design, materials, structural type or construction methods. In

THC use only

Job _____; NR/C+ _____; IR _____; Prev _____

all cases, eligible architectural properties must display integrity, that is, the structure should be in a good state of repair, maintain its appearance from its period of significance and be considered an exemplary model of preservation. Architectural significance is often best determined by the relevance of the property to broader contexts, including geography. Any changes over the years should be compatible with original design and reflect compliance with accepted preservation practices, e.g., the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*.

4. **Good state of repair:** Structures not considered by the THC to be in a good state of repair—i.e., restored—are ineligible for RTHL designation. The THC reserves the sole right to make that determination relative to eligibility for RTHL markers.

Special considerations for RTHL marker applications: If a structure has been individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) under either Criterion A or B and Criterion C (Architecture), the historical text compiled as part of the National Register nomination process may be submitted as part of the marker process, provided it includes the required reference notes and other documentation. Acceptance of the National Register information for the purposes of the marker process will be up to the sole determination of the THC. Listing in the NRHP does not guarantee approval for an RTHL marker. See the THC web site at <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/markerdesigns/madnrcrit.html> for National Register criteria.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Any individual, group or CHC may apply to the THC to request an Official Texas Historical Marker for what it deems a worthy topic. Only complete marker application packets that contain all the required elements can be accepted or processed by the THC. For RTHL markers, the required elements are: sponsorship application form; narrative history; documentation; online map (see details below); site plan; floorplan; historic photograph and current photographs clearly showing each side of the structure.

- Completed application packets must be duly reviewed, verified and approved by the county historical commission in the county in which the marker will be placed.
- The sponsorship application form, narrative history and documentation must be in the form of Microsoft Word or Word-compatible documents and submitted via email attachments to the THC by no later than January 2, 2007.
- Required font style and type size are a Times variant and 12-point.
- Narrative histories must be typed in a double-spaced format and include separate sections on context, overview and significance.
- The narrative history must include documentation in the form of reference notes, which can be either footnotes or endnotes. Documentation associated with applications should be broad-based and demonstrate a survey of all available resources, both primary and secondary.
- Applications for RTHL markers must include a current city or county map through TopoZone.com that clearly denotes the proposed marker location. Instructions for using TopoZone.com are available on the THC web site.
- Immediately upon notification of the successful preliminary review of required elements by the THC, a non-refundable application fee of \$100 is required. The fee shall be submitted to the THC within ten working days of application receipt notification.

APPROVAL BY COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

The duly appointed marker representative (chair or marker chair) noted below for the CHC will be the sole contact to the THC for this marker application. To ensure accuracy, consistency and efficiency, all information to and from the THC relative to the application will be via direct communication with the CHC representative. All other inquiries (calls, emails, letters) to the THC will be referred to the CHC representative for response. By filling out the information below and filing the application with the THC, the CHC representative is providing the THC with notice that the application and documentation have

been reviewed and verified by the CHC and that the material meets all current requirements of the Official Texas Historical Marker Program.

As chair or duly appointed marker chair, I certify the following:

- Representatives of the CHC have met with the potential marker sponsor and discussed the program policies as outlined on the THC web site.
- Representatives have conveyed information on the RTHL designation, including legal restrictions, to the property owner.
- Representatives of the CHC have reviewed the history and documentation for accuracy and made additional notes as necessary.
- It is the determination of the CHC that the structure, history and documentation meet the THC criteria for eligibility.

CHC comments or concerns about this application, if any:

Name of CHC contact (chair or marker chair): **Trevia Wooster Beverly, Sec. for HCHC**

Mailing address: **2507 Tannehill Drive** City, zip: **Houston, Texas 77008-3052**

Email address (required): **treviawbeverly@houston.rr.com**

Daytime phone (with area code): **713.864-6862**

PERMISSION OF PROPERTY OWNER FOR MARKER PLACEMENT

Property owner: **JPMorgan Chase Bank**

Address: **712 Main Street, Suite 2500, TX 2-E089** City, state, zip: **Houston, TX 77002** Phone: **713 216 5053**

Legal Description of the property (metes and bounds, lot and block, etc.): **Block 81, South Side of Buffalo Bayou, Lots 1, 2, 6, 7, 8 and 12, and parts of Lots 3 and 11.**

Upon receipt of the application, the THC will provide the owner with a letter that outlines the legal responsibility of ownership under the Recorded Texas Historic Landmark statute. The letter must be signed by the owner and returned to the THC before the evaluation can be completed.

NOTE: The property owner will not receive other copies of general correspondence from the THC. All procedural correspondence (notice of receipt, requests for additional information, inscriptions, shipping notices, etc.)—with the exception of payment notices—will be sent via email to the CHC representative, who is encouraged to share the information with all interested parties as necessary. Given the large volume of applications processed annually and the need for centralized communication, all inquiries about applications in process will be referred to the CHC for response. The CHC is the sole liaison to the THC on all marker application matters. The THC will, however, provide regular updates to the CHC via the Internet, email or listserv on the progress of all applications.

PAYMENT INFORMATION

Prospective sponsors please note the following:

- Payment must be received in full within 45 days of the official approval notice and must be accompanied by the THC payment form. The THC is unable to process partial payments or to delay payment due to processing procedures of the sponsor. Applications not paid in the time frame required may, at the sole discretion of the THC, be cancelled or postponed.

- Payment relates to sponsorship of the marker in partnership with the THC, which provides the match for program costs.
- Payment does not constitute ownership of a marker; Recorded Texas Historic Landmark and other Official Texas Historical Markers are the property of the State of Texas.
- If, at any time during the marker process, sponsorship is withdrawn, a refund can be processed, but the THC will retain the application fee of \$100.
- The Official Texas Historical Marker Program provides no means of recognizing sponsors through marker text, incising or supplemental plaques.

Marker sponsor (may be individual or organization): **JPMorgan Chase Bank**

Contact person (if applicable): **Eugene T. Kearney**

Mailing address: **712 Main Street, Suite 2500, TX 2-E089** City, zip: **Houston, TX 77002**

Email address (required): **Gene.Kearney@chase.com** Phone: 713 216 5053

SHIPPING INSTRUCTIONS

In order to facilitate delivery of the marker, neither post office box numbers nor rural route numbers can be accepted. To avoid additional shipping charges or time delays, use a business street address (open 8 a.m.—5 p.m., Monday—Friday).

Name: **Eugene T. Kearney**

Street address: **712 Main Street, Suite 2500, TX 2-E089** City, zip: **Houston, TX 77002**

Daytime phone (required): **713 216 5053** Email (required): **Gene.Kearney@chase.com**

TYPE AND SIZE OF RECORDED TEXAS HISTORIC LANDMARK MARKERS

As part of its review process, the THC will determine the appropriate size marker and provide options, if any, for the approved topic based on its own review criteria, including, but not exclusive of, historical significance, replication of information in other THC markers, relevance to the statewide preservation plan and the amount of available documented information provided in the application narrative. In making its determination, however, the THC will also take into account the preference of the CHC, as noted below.

The sponsor/CHC prefer the following size marker:

- 27" x 42" RTHL marker with post (\$1500)
- 27" X 42" RTHL marker without post* (\$1500)
- 18" x 28" RTHL marker with post (\$1000)
- 18" x 28" RTHL marker without post* (\$1000)
- RTHL medallion and 16" x 12" plaque with post (\$750)
- RTHL medallion and 16" x 12" plaque without post* (\$750)

*For an RTHL marker without post, indicate to what surface material it will be mounted:

- wood
- masonry
- metal
- other (specify)

SUBMITTING THE APPLICATION (via email required)

When the CHC has determined that the application packet is complete, that the history has been verified and that the application meets the requirements of the Official Texas Historical Marker Program, the required elements only should be forwarded to the THC via email at the following address: markerapplication@thc.state.tx.us.

- The CHC or marker chair should send an e-mail containing the following attachments:
 - This application form
 - The subject history (narrative and footnotes)
 - A TopoZone.com map of the proposed marker location
 - Photographs (may be sent as attachments or by separate mail; digital photos are acceptable)
 - Site plan (may be sent as attachment or by separate mail; if sent separately, it must be on letter size paper)
 - Floor plans (may be sent as attachment or by separate mail; if sent separately, plans must be on letter size paper)
- Follow these steps to attach the files:
 - Most email services have the “Attach” or “Attachment” command under the “File” menu or in an email toolbar.
 - Select the file for attachment
- Send the email including the attachments, with all requirements met.

RECORDS RETENTION BY CHC: The CHC must retain both the hard copies of the application as well as an online version, at least for the duration of the marker process. The THC is not responsible for lost applications, for incomplete applications or for applications not properly filed according to the program requirements. For additional information about any aspect of the Official Texas Historical Marker Program, visit the Markers page on the THC web site (<http://www.thc.state.tx.us/markerdesigns/madmark.html>).

GULF BUILDING
710-724 Main Street
Houston, Texas

1927-1929
Alfred Finn, Kenneth Franzheim
and J.E.R. Carpenter, architects
Jesse Holman Jones, builder

CONTEXT

The Gulf Building officially opened on April 16, 1929. It was built by Jesse Holman Jones, and was the centerpiece of the vast real estate empire of this real estate magnate, banker, *Houston Chronicle* publisher and head of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and Secretary of Commerce. “Jones was so successful and the RFC was so needed to solve the problems of the Great Depression that by 1940 a writer for the *Saturday Evening Post* proclaimed his powers second only to the president’s.”¹ Today, Jones’ great fortune continues to do good work through Houston Endowment, the philanthropy he and his wife established in 1937 with the broad mandate to respond to the ever-changing needs of the communities it serves. Houston Endowment now has \$1.5 billion in assets and, in 2005, contributed nearly \$65 million primarily to universities and human services institutions.²

The Gulf Building was headquarters for Gulf Oil Corporation and the home of Jones’ bank, the National Bank of Commerce (today, JPMorgan Chase Bank in Houston). It was the site of a 1931 meeting of bankers and business leaders, held in Jones’ office on the 33rd floor, which accounts for the fact that no Houston banks failed during the Great Depression.³

Times were good when the Gulf Building was commissioned in 1924. Times were better in Texas’ largest city. Census takers counted 292,352 people in Houston in 1930, more than double the population in 1920. Its 111.4 percent rate of growth for the

decade was one of the most remarkable for a city of this size in the history of the United States, according to the 1931 *Texas Almanac*. An inland port connected to deep water by the fifty-mile Houston Ship Channel, the city was the shipping point for an enormous movement of cotton, petroleum products, lumber, rice and other Texas raw materials. It was the terminus of eighteen railroads, home of nearly fifteen petroleum refiners, four rice mills, numerous cotton and textile mills, chemical works, fertilizer factories, iron foundries... and more.⁴

When construction of the Gulf Building began in 1927, “the prosperity of the golden ‘20s was at its peak, and Houston was beginning to look like a city,” wrote Sam Franklin in the *Houston Chronicle* on December 2, 1927. The Gulf Building opened in April 1929, just six months before the appalling stock market Crash of October 1929.

The *Houston Chronicle* called the “towering” Gulf Building a stabilizer of property values on Main Street. “What the modern Lamar and Democratic buildings, the Levy Brothers, the Kirby and the Humble buildings have done to move business southward, the Gulf Building is doing to insure that, in those blocks to the north, there will be no less bustle, and no decreased property values.”⁵

Located at the corner of Main and Rusk in the heart of Houston’s downtown business district, the Gulf Building’s initial tract consisted of all of Lots 1, 2, 6, 7, 8 and 12, and parts of Lots 3 and 11, in Block 81, on the South Side of Buffalo Bayou, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. This property ran 149 feet on Main Street, 252 feet on Rusk Avenue and 150 feet on Travis Street.⁶ “The thirty-seven-story Gulf Building covers all the property except eighty-two feet on Travis Street by one hundred feet on

Rusk Avenue on which there is a three-story building containing stores, offices and apartments on which we have disregarded the improvements.”⁷

“They tore down a two-story building at Main and Rusk to make way for the mammoth tower,” wrote Sam Franklin in *The Houston Chronicle*, on Dec. 2, 1965. “It had, between the years of 1911 and 1927, been occupied by the Houston Trunk Factory. Before 1911 the site had gained historic distinction as the location of the home of Mrs. Charlotte Baldwin Allen, one of the pioneers of Houston.”⁸ Indeed, the Allen residence tract may be Houston’s *second* most historic site. Jesse Jones reserved the city’s *most* historic site, the home of the first capitol of the Republic of Texas, for his Rice Hotel.

OVERVIEW

In 1924, Jones went to his architect, Alfred C. Finn, and said: “We are planning a building – something better than what we now have.”⁹

This brief announcement was the beginning of the Gulf Building, the “better” building that officially opened on April 16, 1929, was restored in 1986—reportedly the largest restoration ever undertaken in the country with private funds¹⁰—and today remains a landmark in Houston’s sleek, modern skyline. A full-color brochure published by the Jesse H. Jones Interests in 1929 trumpeted this “paramount office structure of the south” as “the tallest building west of the Mississippi.”¹¹ At thirty-five stories,¹² the Gulf Building remained the tallest building in Houston for more than thirty years.

His biographer, Bascom N. Timmons, says the tall building seemed to symbolize Jones and reflect his character. “Many Houstonians felt that here surely would be the one that would be named the Jesse H. Jones Building, but he had no such intentions. It was

named the Gulf Building, and the oil company for which he had erected a ten-story structure when it came to Houston in 1914, moved in as its chief tenant. The old Gulf Building became the Rusk Building.¹³ The new Gulf Building was the centerpiece of Jesse Jones' vast real estate empire, which consisted of a half-hundred buildings in Houston alone.¹⁴

Jones was proud of this building. Even this cool banker's demeanor warmed considerably as he described the beautiful structure to a prospective lender: "This is really a remarkable building and is so regarded by everyone who sees it, so that I cannot help but be of the opinion that it would be a desirable loan for the Metropolitan Life to make entirely aside from the security and revenue."¹⁵

Not surprisingly, the building has been revised a number of times since 1929.

A central air conditioning system was installed between 1938 and 1939.¹⁶ Two annexes of a compatible style, one of thirteen stories, the other of sixteen, were added on Travis Street between 1946 and 1949.¹⁷ The banking hall was altered in 1959-1960 to permit expansion of bank operations into the Bank of Commerce Building (one of the new Travis Street buildings). Galleries were opened in the north wall of the banking hall ... the central stair (down to the Safe Deposit Department) was removed and the terrazzo floor was carpeted.¹⁸ The original terrazzo floor was restored in 2002.¹⁹

An impressive stained glass window commemorating the Battle of San Jacinto was installed above the Travis Street entrance to the bank lobby in 1959.²⁰

The beacon and the public observation telescope were removed before 1965, when Gulf Oil installed a fifty-three-foot-high rotating, lighted disk of the company's logo, known as "The Lollipop." It was removed in 1974, during the Energy Crunch.²¹

In 1969-1970, the bank expanded into the Sakowitz space on Main and Rusk. This new home for its retail banking center saw the street-level department store display windows replaced with anodized aluminum framed bronze glass panels.²²

Finally, the \$50 million restoration of the Gulf Building was begun in 1981. This action not only preserved a landmark for the city and a glorious lobby for the National Bank of Commerce's successor, Texas Commerce Bank (today JPMorgan Chase Bank), but it earned the building a listing on the National Register.²³ Work was done under the direction of Property Management Systems. Architect for the restoration was the Houston firm of Sikes Jennings Kelly, the MEP engineer was Texas Energy Engineers, Inc., and the general contractor was Warrior Constructors, Inc.²⁴ Work was completed in 1986, the bank's centennial year.

In 1977, Texas Commerce's chairman, Ben Love, recalls that the bank's need for space was critical. "We were faced with a question: renovate or raze?" In his memoirs, Love outlines the thinking that led to the conclusion to renovate. "First, the elegant, historic Gulf Building was the bank's traditional home. More practically, space in a renovated Gulf Building would be cheaper than space in a new, Class A structure. Space in a Class A structure, however, would be easier to lease.

"Renovating around our major tenant, Gulf Oil Company, posed a daunting problem," he continued. "But Gulf, which occupied twenty floors, solved that problem by moving into a new building in Houston Center. ...the significant investment tax credit that TCB could earn for restoring a landmark building was financial icing on the cake."²⁵

According to Ann Holmes, fine arts editor of the *Houston Chronicle*, "the *dues ex machine* which made possible the saving of the building—much to the delight of Love

and the bank's officers and directors—was the tax credit the bank could take. It is an incentive for historic rehabilitation afforded by the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981. For this building, 25 percent (in this case, \$12.5 million) of construction costs could be taken against the corporation's income tax bill, spread over the years of construction. Though the bank still pays 75 percent of the price, on a square-foot basis the cost is less than a new building.²⁶

And so, the bank restored the Gulf Building and built two new buildings, the Texas Commerce Tower and the Texas Commerce Center, both designed by the renowned architect I.M. Pei. These moves preserved a landmark, kept most of the banking department in its traditional home, gave other departments room to grow, saved money on rent, equipped the bank with a modern, efficient garage, and provided world-class headquarters for the multibillion-dollar, statewide organization TCB had become. “The decision, although tough to make at the time, seems obvious in retrospect,” Love added.

The Gulf Building was restored for \$50 million. This is the same building and land that were originally appraised at less than \$10 million.²⁷

The Gulf Building's principal architect was Alfred C. Finn, with Kenneth Franzheim and J.E.R. Carpenter listed on all drawings as consulting architects. The W. E. Simpson Company of San Antonio was the structural engineer; Reginald Taylor of Houston and Robert J. Cummins of Houston were mechanical and consulting engineers, respectively. The initial general contractor was the Hewitt Company, but American Construction Company took over during the pouring of concrete slabs in 1927 and completed the project.²⁸

Planning apparently began in 1926 for new quarters for the National Bank of Commerce. In early 1927, the Gulf Oil companies (Gulf Refining Company, Gulf Production Company and Gulf Pipe Line Company) became involved because they needed more space. News releases from spring 1927 indicate that the National Bank of Commerce and Sakowitz Brothers were to share frontage on Main Street, with the bank at the corner. However, the banking hall ended up in a westward extension of the base of the building, which ran back through the block to Travis Street, while Sakowitz obtained the Main-Rusk corner.²⁹

Finn, who received his professional training in Sanguinet & Staats of Fort Worth, the state's foremost commercial architectural firm during the '20s, was sent to work in its Houston office in 1913. His first large commission was Jones' ten-story Gulf Building. During his early years in practice in Houston, Finn designed a number of large homes as well as commercial structures, but after the early 1920s, he concentrated on commercial projects. Jones became his chief patron.³⁰

Kenneth Franzheim, an MIT-educated architect, was stationed in Houston during World War I. By 1925, he was practicing independently in New York, and in 1928, he designed the temporary coliseum in Houston for the Democratic National Convention for Jesse Jones.³¹

J.E.R. Carpenter, also an MIT graduate, was best known for his many multi-story apartment buildings in New York—which is probably where he met Jones. He collaborated with Franzheim on the Democratic convention coliseum in Houston.³²

The division of responsibility among the three is open to debate. Franzheim was probably the design architect, with Finn doing the drawings and supervising, and Carpenter not much.³³

For four years, plan after plan and model after model were drawn and made in Finn's Houston office and in the New York office of Franzheim. As Finn said in an interview published in the *Houston Chronicle*, "The first model was very modest. But each building...became a little more ambitious. Each building went up a story or two. Each building was more magnificent. These...were the 'something better' which Mr. Jones sought."³⁴

Revisions continued, especially to the top of the building, even after construction began. "The steel was up some 12 stories when ...the present step-back top...was ordered."³⁵

Franzheim later reproduced in his professional brochure a number of studies for the building. The resolution was derived from one of the most imitated precedents for American skyscraper design in the 1920s, Eliel Saarinen's second-prize winning entry to the Chicago Tribune Building competition of 1922. Although Saarinen's design was never built, it inspired buildings from the east coast to the west."³⁶

The Gulf Building souvenir booklet published by the Jones Interests elocuted this sequence of construction: "Ground was broken late in summer 1927. Mixers dumped load upon load of concrete into the hole and suddenly, like magic it seemed, on February 16, 1928, steel beams pointed their prophetic fingers skywards. On June 4, 1928, the first brick was laid Masonry 'topped out' on November 26 and excepting windows and ornamentation, outwardly the tower was complete. On Tuesday, April 16, 1929, the first

tenant, Sakowitz Brothers, occupied their chosen location on the first five floors. Others followed rapidly so that by August 1, 1929, every tenant was at work in his new business home excepting the National Bank of Commerce, whose quarters had been used as a workroom.³⁷

The Gulf Building's six-story rectangular base is clad in Indiana limestone. It supports a thirty-story tower, faced with tapestry brick, which diminishes in size at the 25th, 28th and 32nd floor levels. The Main Street (east) elevation is seven bays long; the Rusk Avenue elevation is eight bays wide. An extension of the base...runs west from Main Street through the middle of the building to provide access from Travis Street.³⁸

“At first, the builder installed the Jesse H. Jones Aeronautical Beacons at the top, with two huge beams – one pointing skyward, the other toward the airport to warn off airmail pilots.”³⁹ Also mounted on the roof was an observation deck equipped with a powerful telescope.⁴⁰

Of the beacons, the *Chronicle* reported that “the building is easily seen at night from Sugar Land.”⁴¹ Of the Heiss telescope with 30, 60 and 90 power magnifications, the *Chronicle* said: “With the third magnification, on a clear day...Galveston would be brought to within a half-mile by the telescope!”⁴²

There were originally three principal entrances to the building, two on Main Street and one on Travis. Each was set into a three-story-high portal outlined by scalloped molding. The deeply inset doors were framed by a header panel of abstractly patterned angular and scroll-like ornamentation supported on stylized corbels which merge with the ornament of the header panels. Bronze screens commenced above the

ranks of the glazed doors. The screens' open work ornamentation framed three arched windows. Third story banks of windows were simply treated.⁴³

Frescos in the Main Street lobby depict scenes from Texas history by artist Vincent Maragliatti. The walls are faced with travertine marble; the floor is inlaid French marble; the elaborate detailing is silvered Benedict nickel. "National Bank of Commerce" is etched above the doors to the banking hall.⁴⁴

The three-story banking hall features an ornate ceiling and skylight with gold leaf detailing. The walls are Indiana Limestone; the floor is patterned terrazzo. The original art deco writing tables are still in place. Today, Jesse Jones' portrait hangs on the south wall alongside a painting of Ben Love, the last chairman of Texas Commerce Bancshares, successor to the National Bank of Commerce.⁴⁵

The banking quarters were of Jones' own design,⁴⁶ "an immense space, seventy by one hundred-twelve feet...the walls of which rise sheer and unobstructed to a ceiling forty-three feet from the floor, which, with the exception of a French marble border, is of terrazzo in a number of blended colors and aluminum strips laid in an intricate pattern of radiating designs. The walls are of French limestone, embellished with fluted pilasters supporting on their carved capitals an elaborately ornamented stone frieze, from which springs the cornice and richly decorated coffered ceiling. Panels of especially fabricated glass and metal ribs, which form an ornate design in the central area of the ceiling, supply the entire room with a flood of mellow daylight."⁴⁷

"A quarter of a century afterward, when he had seen all of the banking edifices in this country and Europe, Jesse Jones still believed his own were the most perfect banking quarters ever erected in any country."⁴⁸

Gulf Oil occupied 110,522 square feet on floors seven through nineteen (twenty-year lease); Sakowitz had a twenty-five-year lease on 65,200 square feet from the basement through the fifth floor on the Main/Rusk corner; the National Bank of Commerce occupied 19,350 square feet in the basement and the main floor with entrances on Main and Travis.⁴⁹ Other “sundry tenants of high type”⁵⁰ among the forty-seven on the “list to date” published by the *Houston Chronicle* on July 28, 1929, included Lerner Shops, Western Union Telegraph Company, Harrison Oil Company, J. S. Abercrombie Company, Oscar F. Holcombe and Maurice Hirsch. Most signed three-to-five-year leases⁵¹ and paid between \$2 and \$3 per square foot for space.⁵²

The estimated population of the building was 2,500, with a “lobby flow” of 30,000 to 35,000 persons daily. “Here’s a small city in itself. Richmond or Conroe or Liberty, nearby county seats, each has only about 2,000 population. Every resident of one of these towns could be at work in this skyscraper and then there would be lots of ... room.”⁵³

The story then cited some of the “fireproof” building’s luxuries: “the most modern lighting system, steam heat, wire service ... The elevators in the Gulf Building break all speed records in the world. These ‘lifts’ – as the English would say – take one aloft at the rate of a floor-and-a-half a second.”⁵⁴

HISTORICAL/CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Gulf Building is one of the premier examples of 1920s Manhattan-style, setback skyscrapers in the Southwest. The level of excellence exhibited in its Gothic design,

coupled with extensive interior and exterior art deco detailing, evokes a feeling of confidence and stability.⁵⁵

It was headquarters for a major oil company and home of the forerunner of the first major Texas bank holding company to move into interstate banking with its 1987 merger with Chemical Bank of New York (today JPMorgan Chase Bank).

The Gulf Building was the centerpiece of the real estate empire of one of the country's business leaders. The Joneses had no children. Their fortune today funds Houston Endowment, a philanthropy that has contributed more than \$1 billion to organizations that touch and improve nearly aspect of life in the greater Houston community.

“The Gulf Building is remarkable in profile. Some of the detail—particularly the ornamental frames of the second-floor windows—is obvious in its Gothic recall, and the distressed limestone finish of the base has a texture which is almost fabric-like in appearance. These details contrast with the massing of the tower and help make up an interesting whole. By layering, chamfering and staggering the depths and heights of vertical piers on the uppermost setbacks, a romantic, soaring quality is achieved which both the builder and the architect sought. The detailing in the lobby and the banking hall comprise one of the most memorable and urbane sequences of public spaces in downtown Houston.”⁵⁶

Even today, with all the changes over time, Jesse Jones' elegant, “better” Gulf Building stands out as a graceful landmark in a much loftier, sleeker, more modern skyline which, thanks to the oil boom of the late 1970s and early 1980s, has been called a portfolio of that era's best-known architects.

DOCUMENTATION

¹ Bunger, Walter L. and Pratt, Joseph A, *But Also Good Business: Texas Commerce Banks and the Financing of Houston and Texas, 1886 -1986*, Texas A &M University Press, 77.

² Houston Endowment, 2005 Annual Report, 5.

³ Bunger, Walter L. and Pratt, Joseph A, *But Also Good Business: Texas Commerce Banks and the Financing of Houston and Texas, 1886 -1986*, Texas A &M University Press. Chapter 5 recounts this event in detail.

⁴ *The Texas Almanac – 1931*, 335-336.

⁵ *Houston Chronicle*, “*Gulf Building To Be Stabilizer For Property Values*,” July 28, 1919.

⁶ Miscellaneous Leases – Gulf Building – as at April 5, 1929. Houston Endowment, Box Folder Block 81, Gulf Building loans 1928-1933.

⁷ Houston Endowment, Gulf Building files, a \$4.5 million loan application dated April 5, 1929, to Theo W. Pinson, 907 Republic Bank Building, Dallas, Texas, from the Gulf Building Corporation, signed by N. E. Meador, President. The loan was to be secured by a first mortgage on the land.

⁸ Timmons, Bascom N., *Jesse H. Jones, The Man and the Statesman*. Pages 118-119. Henry Holt & Company, New York, 1956, 118. In 1906, Jones obtained the site at the northwest corner of Main and Rusk, initially, as a site for a hotel. The home of Charlotte Baldwin Allen, wife of one of the founders of Houston, was originally located there, but by the time of Mrs. Allen’s death in 1895, the neighborhood was in transition from residential to commercial use.

⁹ *Houston Chronicle*, *Gulf Building Was “Evolved”*: *Inception Was Five Years Ago*, July 28, 1929.

¹⁰ *Houston Chronicle*, *Renovated Building banks on history*, Ann Holmes, July 26, 1986.

¹¹ Thus boasted “*A Book Describing The Gulf Building*,” an elaborate brochure published by the Jesse H. Jones Interests in 1929. Actually, Smith Tower, built in Seattle in 1914, was 30 or 40 feet taller, according to Stephen Fox, Fellow of the Anchorage Foundation of Texas. Per the www.emporis.com website, Smith Tower is 467 feet tall. According to *The Gulf Building Houston Souvenir Booklet*, the Gulf Building is 440 feet tall; per the Houston Architectural Survey done by Drexel Turner et al (Houston Southwest Center for Urban Research, 1980, Vol. 1), the Gulf Building is 450 feet high; per *The Houston*

Chronicle, Sunday July 28, 1927, “Distinctly Modern And American Deco Style of Building”, the building rises “to a height of 428.6 feet.” Finally, Sikes Jennings Kelly architects, in a Sept. 1, 1983, press release announcing the \$50 million rehabilitation/restoration of the 36-story Gulf Building (soon to be the Texas Commerce Bank Building), the structure is 428’-4 ½” tall. Whatever. It can safely be stated that the Gulf Building was the tallest skyscraper in Houston from 1929 until 1963, when it was surpassed by the Exxon Building (then known as the Humble Building).

¹² The number of floors cited by various sources ranges from 34 to 37. The *Souvenir Gulf Building Houston* booklet published by Jesse H. Jones Interests gives original source datum on this and more:

- 37 stories.
- 35 office floors.
- 422,809 square feet floor area.
- 1,000 offices.
- 2,500 daily population (estimate).
- 30,000 people pass the lobby daily.
- 11,000,000 pounds steel.
- 1,000,000 bricks.
- 450,000 cubic yards sand and gravel.
- 110,000 sacks cement.
- 400 miles wire.
- 75 miles conduits.
- 25 miles steam and water pipes.
- 2,137 windows.

¹³ Timmons, Bascom N., *Jesse H. Jones: The Man and the Statesman*, Henry Holt & Company, New York, 118. Also on pages 77-79, see Jones’ desire for the gracious harmony of a ten-story skyline for Houston inspired by his trip to Paris. This was dashed in 1912 when S.F. Carter built a sixteen-story structure for his Lumberman’s Bank.

¹⁴ *ibid*, 118

¹⁵ Jesse Jones to Paul Hammond, May 2, 1929. Houston Endowment, Box Folder, Block 81, Gulf Building Loan 1928-1933.

¹⁶ Turner, Drexel et al for the Houston Southwest Center for Urban Research, 1980, Vol. 1, *Houston Architectural Survey*, 183.

¹⁷ Victor, Sally, *National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form*, prepared for Texas Commerce Bancshares, April 1, 1982, “describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance,” continuation sheet 4.

¹⁸ Turner, Drexel et al for the Houston Southwest Center for Urban Research, 1980, Vol. 1, *Houston Architectural Survey*, 183.

- ¹⁹ Brochure, *JPMorgan Chase Building*, Greater Houston Preservation Alliance.
- ²⁰ Victor, Sally, *National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form*, prepared for Texas Commerce Bancshares, April 1, 1982, “describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance,” continuation sheet 3.
- ²¹ *ibid*, continuation sheets 2-3.
- ²² Turner, Drexel et al for the Houston Southwest Center for Urban Research, 1980, Vol. 1, *Houston Architectural Survey*, 183.
- ²³ Love, Ben F., *Ben Love, My Life in Texas Commerce*, Texas A&M University Press, 206-207.
- ²⁴ Sikes Jennings Kelly news release, September 1, 1983.
- ²⁵ Love, Ben F., *Ben Love, My Life in Texas Commerce*, Texas A&M University Press, 206.
- ²⁶ *Houston Chronicle, Renovated building banks on history*, Ann Holmes, July 26, 1986.
- ²⁷ Houston Endowment, Gulf Building files, *Excerpt from Appraisal Report Rendered by E. M. Willoughby & Company, Chicago, Illinois, March 7th, 1929*. The original building was appraised at \$5,210,000, the land at \$4,117,500.
- ²⁸ Victor, Sally, *National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form*, prepared for Texas Commerce Bancshares, April 1, 1982, continuation sheet 4.
- ²⁹ Turner, Drexel et al for the Houston Southwest Center for Urban Research, 1980, Vol. 1, *Houston Architectural Survey*, 185.
- ³⁰ *ibid*.
- ³¹ *ibid*, 185-186.
- ³² *ibid*, 186.
- ³³ *Houston Chronicle, Renovated building banks on history*, Ann Holmes, July 26, 1986.
- ³⁴ *Houston Chronicle, Gulf Building Was ‘Evolved;’ Inception Was Five Years Ago*, July 28, 1929.
- ³⁵ *ibid*.
- ³⁶ Turner, Drexel et al for the Houston Southwest Center for Urban Research, 1980, Vol. 1, *Houston Architectural Survey*, 186.

- ³⁷ *Souvenir Gulf Building Houston* booklet, Jesse H. Jones Interests.
- ³⁸ Brochure, *JPMorgan Chase Building*, Greater Houston Preservation Alliance.
- ³⁹ *Houston Chronicle*, *Renovated Building banks on history*, Ann Holmes, July 26, 1986.
- ⁴⁰ Victor, Sally, *National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form*, prepared for Texas Commerce Bancshares, April 1, 1982, “describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance,” continuation sheet 2.
- ⁴¹ *Houston Chronicle*, “*Building Tower Is Visible Many Miles From City*,” July 28, 1929.
- ⁴² *Houston Chronicle*, “*Telescope Atop Building Brings Coast In Range*,” July 28, 1929.
- ⁴³ Victor, Sally, *National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form*, prepared for Texas Commerce Bancshares, April 1, 1982, “describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance,” *ibid*, physical appearance, 1.
- ⁴⁴ Brochure, *JPMorgan Chase Building*, Greater Houston Preservation Alliance.
- ⁴⁵ *ibid*.
- ⁴⁶ Timmons, Bascom N., *Jesse H. Jones, The Man and the Statesman*. Henry Holt & Company, New York, 1956, 118.
- ⁴⁷ *A Book Describing The Gulf Building: Thirty-Five Floors . One Thousand Offices*, Jesse H. Jones Interests.
- ⁴⁸ Timmons, Bascom N., *Jesse H. Jones, The Man and the Statesman*, 118-119. Henry Holt & Company, New York, 1956, 119.
- ⁴⁹ Houston Endowment, Gulf Building files, *Excerpt from Appraisal Report Rendered by E. M. Willoughby & Company, Chicago, Illinois, March 7th, 1929*.
- ⁵⁰ Jesse Jones to Morgan B. Brainard, President, Aetna Life Insurance Company, February 3, 1930, Houston Endowment, Box Folder Block 81, Gulf Building loans 1928-1933.
- ⁵¹ *ibid.*, *Gulf Building Tabulations*, by Alfred C. Finn.
- ⁵² *ibid.*, *Miscellaneous Leases - Office Space - Gulf Building – As at April 5, 1929*.
- ⁵³ *Houston Chronicle*, “*Population of Building Put At 2500 to 3000*,” July 28, 1929.
- ⁵⁴ *Houston Chronicle*, “*Elevators In New Structure Are World’s Fastest*,” July 28, 1929.

⁵⁵ Victor, Sally, *National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form*, prepared for Texas Commerce Bancshares, April 1, 1982, “describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance,” 1.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, “statement of significance,” continuation sheet 3.

Trevia Wooster Beverly
Secretary, Harris County Historical Commission
2507 Tannehill Drive * Houston, Texas 77008-3052
713.864-6862 ** E-mail: treviawooster@houston.rr.com

December 27, 2006

Texas Historical Commission
ATTN: Charles T. Sadrick III
Historian, History Programs Division
P.O. Box 12276
Austin, Texas 78711-2276

*Please
advise
me w/pt.*

RECEIVED
JAN - 4 2007
Texas Historical Commission

Reference: GULF BUILDING

Dear Charles:

Enclosed are photographs and floor plans as submitted, and a letter from HCHC member, Barbara Eaves, who prepared the application.

Thank you for your help with this application.

Sincerely,

Trevia

Enclosed
4 black & white photos of the building
4 additional color photographs
floor plans

B A R B A R A
E A V E S

December 11, 2006

Ms. Trevia Beverly
Harris County Historical Commission
Marker Liaison
2507 Tannhill Drive
Houston TX 77008

RE: Gulf Building marker reapplication

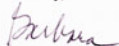
Dear Trevia

Enclosed are the new and old photographs for the Gulf Building marker reapplication, along with photographs of the Travis Street and Main Street sites where the markers are proposed to hang. Also enclosed is the site plan (or the best we could find – a sketch by Alfred Finn, architect, that was part of Houston Endowment's archive), and the floorplans from the Houston Public Library, Finn Collection. These include the 8 1/2"X11" reduction requested, plus a legible copy of the original 42"X30" blueprint.

I believe this should complete my part of the package. Next, we need the bank's sign off – the bank being represented by Gene Kearney.

Please let me know promptly if you need anything else.

Sincerely,



Cc: Gene Kearney



The Gulf Building in Houston, from the corner of Main and Rusk, 1929.

18606



The Gulf Building in Houston, from the corner of Main and Capitol, 2006.

18606

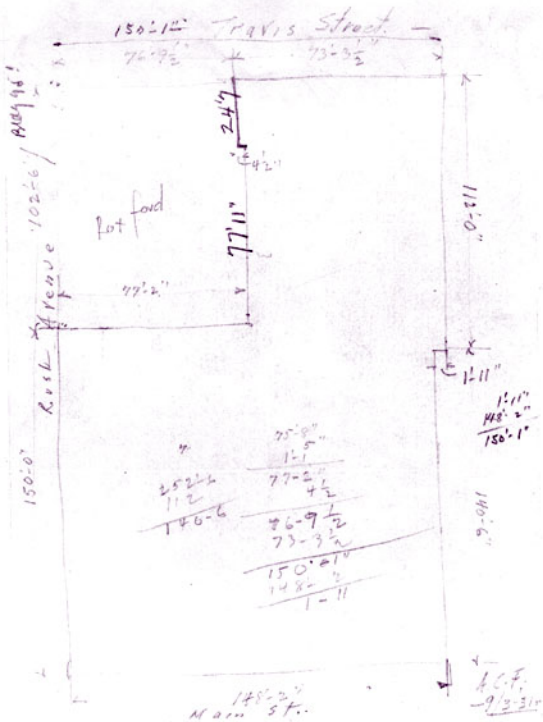


The Gulf Building in Houston, from the corner of Main and Rusk, 2006.

13606



The Gulf Building in Houston from the Travis Street side, 2006.



The sketch by architect Alfred C. Finn is the nearest thing to a plot plan we could find among the 600 drawings on file in the Architectural Archives, Houston Metropolitan Research Center. This drawing is from the collection at Houston Endowment.