

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Howard Oil Company Seedhouse

OWNERS: McLaughlin Realty

APPLICANT: Preservation Houston

LOCATION: 1200 National Street – First Ward

AGENDA ITEM: C.1

HPO FILE NO.: 14L299

DATE ACCEPTED: July-07-2014

HAHC HEARING DATE: Aug-28-2014

SITE INFORMATION: Tract 2A, Abstract 1 J Austin, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas, 70007. The site includes a historic two-story, wooden warehouse.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The 1912 Howard Oil Company Seedhouse at 1200 National Street is significant as a rare remaining Houston example of the cottonseed oil industry, one of Texas' most important business interests of the late 19th Century. The cottonseed industry flourished after the Civil War, with many mill buildings constructed in the South between 1880 and 1900. With its large cotton crop and rapidly expanding railroad network, Texas became a leading producer of cottonseed products.

The first Howard Oil Company mill facility was constructed in 1880 by the Howard Oil Company at Chaney Junction, an important Houston railroad junction located at what is now the intersection of Washington Avenue and Studemont Street. The mill complex was built under the management of Thomas R. Chaney, a national leader in the cottonseed industry, and for whom the railroad junction was named.

The Howard Oil Company mill was twice destroyed by fire and rebuilt - in 1886 and 1912. The cottonseed warehouse nominated for landmark designation was built in the 1912 reconstruction, and is the only part of the historic mill facility that remains. The 39,000 square foot seedhouse is constructed almost entirely of longleaf yellow pine, with interior brick fire walls located between sections of the warehouse.

The Howard Oil Company Seedhouse meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, and 5 for Landmark designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Cottonseed Industry

Cottonseed was once considered a waste byproduct of cotton production, until clever businessmen began to see its appeal as fertilizer, livestock feed, and cooking oil. As the South industrialized following the Civil War, the cottonseed industry began to grow. Between 1880 and 1900, mill buildings flourished throughout the South. Lynette Boney Wrenn, author of *Cinderella of the New South: A History of the Cottonseed Industry, 1855-1955*, notes that Texas, being a main producer of cotton, and with railroads rapidly expanding, became a leading producer of cottonseed products as mills opened all over the state.

Wrenn continues:

“By the twentieth century, overcapacity, or “misplaced capacity,” plagued the crushing industry. The relatively unsophisticated, inexpensive crushing technology prevalent until

after the Second World War fostered mill building, and the New South drive to industrialize encouraged numerous communities to organize their own crushing facilities. Oil mills sprang up wherever sufficient cotton grew. If cotton production declined in an area because of poor prices, crop failures, or other reasons, oil mills could not buy enough seed to operate at full capacity. They closed whenever adverse conditions persisted but reopened if seed supplies increased. The level of cotton production more than anything else determined the fate of oil mills, although management was an important factor.”

Howard Oil Company, 1880

A brief notice about the purchase of bricks for the Howard Oil Mills gives us a date of construction for the first Howard Oil Company mill building in 1880. A similar article ran in the *Galveston Daily News* on May 16, 1880:

“The Howard Oil Company are busily engaged in pushing the work of erecting their building, 650,000 feet of lumber and 2,000,000 bricks are to be used in its construction. The seed room alone is to be 98x500 feet. Steady employment will be furnished to 125 men after the first of October.”

The first Howard Oil Company mill was built in 1880 under the management of Thomas R. Chaney. Chaney was then the Secretary and General Manager of the company, which was based in Dallas, where Robert Gibson was President. The company’s move to open a branch in Houston coincided with the constructed junction of the Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio Railway, and the Houston and Texas Central Railway.

Chaney Junction, 1880

The junction of two railways, the Galveston, Harrisburg, and San Antonio railway, and the Houston and Texas Central railway, occurred in 1880 at what is now the intersection of Washington Avenue and Studemont Street. The intersection of the railways opened up industry in Houston and allowed for the development of the area. Even today on a satellite view of the area, one can see the junction and remnants of the many spurs which served the factories and warehouses that once occupied the area.

Two years after the intersection of the railways, a station was opened at the site. The opening of the station at the intersection, named Chaney Junction, was reported by the *Galveston Daily News* on February 19, 1882:

“A new station was opened by the Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio Railway, at its junction with the Houston and Texas Central, for transferring purposes. It is named Chaney Station, complimentary to Mr. T.R. Chaney of the Howard Oil Company.”

The neighborhood around the junction was soon known as Chaneyville. The mill was a very important source of industry and labor in Houston. The Houston City Directory of 1882 “Historical Business Review” reports:

“The Howard Oil Works, located at the crossing of the Central and Southern Pacific, outside the corporation limits, west of the city, employs 100 hands, uses up 110 tons of cotton seed per day, and probably disburses to employees \$1,000 per week. The refinery capacity is 500 to 600 barrels per day.”

Inman Compress, a cotton compress facility, opened just to the east of the Howard Oil Company in 1883. The compress processed and created cotton bails for shipment from Texas. The Howard Oil Company and the Inman Compress were complementary cotton-related businesses.

An enormous fire, beginning in the lint room, destroyed the first Howard Oil Company complex in 1886. The fire was so devastating to the company that news of it was carried by papers nationwide and reported in *The New York Times* on August 30, 1886, under the title “Big Oil Works Burned”:

“Destruction of the Howard Company’s Mills at Houston

The Howard Oil Mills, in the suburbs of Houston, caught fire at 12:20 yesterday morning and continued burning until nearly daylight, completely destroying the mill, machinery, stock on hand, adjunct buildings, and five box cars belonging to the Houston and Texas Central Railway Company, loaded with cottonseed, standing inside the mill yards. John L. Kane, of Galveston, until recently Superintendent of the mills in this city, said: “It being Saturday night, the fires were all put out. The watchman was cooling down the boiler and other machinery preparatory to making a cleaning of the entire work. While at work he noticed a small blaze above on the second floor. He immediately attached a length of hose lying near to a fire plug and attempted to turn on the water, but without avail. The firemen, who soon came, were powerless to do any work. The fire rapidly spread from the lint room, where it started, to the main part of the building, sweeping everything before it. Two large empty iron tanks about 50 feet from the main building were the only things in the place not destroyed.

The mills were estimated by Mr. Kane to be worth between \$250,000 and \$300,000. They were insured for \$150,000 in Northern and European companies, and also in nearly all the companies represented in Texas. The building covered three and one-half acres of ground. The works gave employment to 180 men. One of the oil tanks had barrel capacity of 4,500 gallons and another 3,500. There were 600 tons of seed and 70,000 sacks destroyed. The mills were considered to be the finest in the United States. They belonged to the Howard Company. The general offices are in Galveston. Superintendent C.H. Sprong, of the water works, says that he went to the engine works of the company and found his engines there with high pressure on. He cannot explain at present why the water supply failed to reach the mill.”

The fire at the mills attracted the attention of the Houston mayor and leading citizens, who quickly adopted a motion to inspect the city waterworks to make sure that a problem of water pressure would not occur again. The fire also made the city leaders think about adding adequate fire prevention outside of the city limits. Two artesian wells were drilled in 1887 to supplement water coming from Buffalo Bayou. At the time, all firefighters in Houston were volunteers.

Building Anew

The Howard Oil Company mill was rebuilt quickly, as competitors were developing and operating mills in the area. The Howard Oil Company could not afford to skip a cotton crop. *The Galveston Daily News* reported on June 27, 1887:

“The Howard Oil mills destroyed by fire several months ago are now being rebuilt, and will probably be ready for work in time for the coming crop.

The new oil mill near Chaney junction, just outside of the city limits, and going up, and will equal in magnitude the works of the Howard mills. These mills will employ 500 men.”

J.L. Kane was the President of the company by this time; the headquarters were now located in Galveston.

Due to increased competition in the 1880s and 1890s, and the need to control pricing, many of the cottonseed oil mills formed a syndicate, which went head to head with a syndicate located in New Jersey. After the state of Louisiana sued, the syndicate formed into a company, the American Cotton Oil Company, headed by Thomas R. Chaney. The Howard Oil Company became a part of this syndicate. At some point and by 1890, the Howard Oil Company became known in Houston as the National Oil Company. The company underwent several name changes between 1890 and 1924.

The complex succumbed to another catastrophic fire in 1912. Virtually the entire plant was destroyed with most buildings catching easily thanks to wood saturated with decades of oil. Only the cotton hull house south of the railroad tracks and the refinery operation located three blocks north were saved. The company made plans to construct four new one-story brick buildings with floors of cement, including three warehouses, sized at 80x480 each, to hold cottonseed, hulls, and oil, respectively, along with a slightly larger building that would house the mill. The building that is the subject of this designation can be traced to this reconstruction process. Although newspaper reports indicated that the new structures would be one-story and made of brick, a photograph taken by locomotive engineer James Pirie documents the rebuilding of the seed house in 1912 and clearly shows a two-story wood frame structure which matches that seen today.

Thomas R. Chaney died in 1914; his death was reported by *The National Provisioner*, the weekly cottonseed oil trade publication, whose New York members adopted a resolution about the impact of his work in developing the industry. He had, in 1895, written a chapter on the cottonseed oil industry for Chauncey Depew’s *History of American Commerce*. He also, in 1903, wrote the entry “Cotton-Seed Oil Industry” that appeared in the *Encyclopedia Americana*.

The cottonseed oil industry declined dramatically in the period after World War II. However, even today, Texas is a leading producer of cottonseed oil; however, there is little demand for the product.

The building through the decades

Sanborn Fire Insurance Company maps, historic maps of Houston and the Houston City Directories document the transitions in the Howard Oil Mill Company complex.

1880s: The August 1885 Sanborn map shows the Howard Oil Company’s Cottonseed and Oil Mill. The cotton seed warehouse is much the same as it would be rebuilt after the fire. The cottonseed warehouse is constructed wood with iron siding. Located to the North is a brick pressroom and refinery. A wooden cooper shop and barrel house is located north of the brick buildings.

1890s: The October 1890 Sanborn map shows the complex as it was rebuilt following the 1886 fire. The seed warehouse now extends northeast parallel to the railroad spur. A wooden cake room is located in the northeast corner of the property. The brick buildings housing the lint room, mill room and press

room have been replaced by wooden structures. There are two small brick structures on the site. There is no refinery.

William M. Thomas and Co.'s street-map of 1890 shows the Howard Oil Company mill (now known as the National Oil Company) as a large, triangular shaped warehouse with a mill and smokestack. The southern side of the triangular shaped complex is where the reconstructed seed house is still located today. The original building is so large that its northern end reaches north of Winter Street. The Inman Compress is located just east of the complex. The Southern Cotton Oil Company is located south of the complex, just east of the railroad line (now Studemont Avenue). The Merchant and Planters Cotton Oil Company was located east of downtown Houston.

The mill was also depicted on the 1891 Birdseye view of Houston and the Whitty and Scott map of 1895.

1900s: The 1907 Sanborn map is much the same as the 1890 map, except for a name change to the Industrial Cotton Oil Company. It is worth noting that a refinery for the same company is located northeast of the property.

1910s: The 1915 map shows the buildings as the Industrial Cotton Oil Company. The 1918 Houston City Directory also lists the Industrial Cotton Oil Company at the site.

1920s: A 1922 topographical map of Houston shows the site with only one building– the seedhouse. The 1924 Sanborn details the changes to the company and the building. The complex had undergone another name change to the American Cotton Oil Company, but that company and the mill were no longer in operation. The buildings had been substantially altered. Part of the cake room in the northeast corner of the property was still extant. Another warehouse had been built to the east of the cake room. The warehouse that paralleled the railroad spur north of the existing seed house had been demolished. The buildings in the center of the complex that housed the lint room, mill room and press room have been combined into one structure. The refinery to the northeast of the property was also not in operation. The 1925 Houston City Directory noted the American Cotton Oil Company at the site.

The July 1928 Sanborn map showed the seedhouse operating as a warehouse, with rice in one section of the building, and wholesale radios and refrigerators in the other (probably the Philco site). The building to the north of the seedhouse (the old mill, press and lint rooms) had been separated from the seed house by a wire fence and housed the Clorox Chemical Company. A mattress factory was located in what was left of the cake room building.

The 1930 Houston City Directory lists the seedhouse at 1200 National and lists the Federal Warehouse Company at the site. The Clorox Chemical facility was listed at the 1300 National address. The Sealy and Perfection Mattress Company is also listed at 1300 National.

Subsequent Owners

According to the current owners, who inherited the property from their father, the seedhouse was used for storing grains during World War II. According to the owners, Finger Furniture owned the building from 1945-1947 and used it as an office furniture outlet. It was Finger, according to the current owners, who added a second floor inside the east end of the building.

From 1947-1954, the building was used as a distributorship for Philco Appliances and Electronics. This is consistent use with the Houston City Directory of 1952, which lists the structure as housing the

Crumpacker Distributing Corporation and Moore Engineering Company, which distributed household appliances.

In 1954, the building was leased out as a kitchen cabinet distributorship. The 1961 Houston City Directory lists the occupants of 1200 National as Delmar Cabinet Company, Henderson & Sons Fertilizer Company, and the E.L. Crumpacker appliance distributorship. E.L. Crumpacker was the owner of the building during this period.

The current owners, the McLaughlin family, purchased the building in 1966 from E.L. Crumpacker.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The 1912 Howard Oil Company Seedhouse is a rectangular building of 39,574 square feet, under a gabled roof of asphalt shingles. It is roughly 90 x 490 feet. It sits on the southern edge of a 70,088 irregularly shaped parcel of land. The site is located just north of Washington Avenue and east of Studemont Street off a private spur of National Street.

The structure of the building – walls and framing – is long-leaf yellow pine. The exterior walls of the building are clad in sheet metal siding. The seed house is divided inside into four sections, each separated from the others by a brick fire wall slightly taller than the structure. Each fire wall is top with a cap. In the center of the structure is a cupola, from which the supervisor oversaw the operations of the mill. The seed house has a concrete floor.

The structure has received a newer exterior cladding of metal, but the structure retains openings on the inside that would have led into the concrete bays.

The building is clad in sheet metal. There are five large openings, two on the eastern bay and one in each of the other three bays. The brick fire walls are visible between the bays except for the eastern-most fire wall, which is covered with sheet metal but visible at the roof. A small room in the center of the building projects from the roof; this was the supervisors' work area. Any opening from this room would have been clad in sheet metal and are no longer visible. The structure is topped with a gable roof. The roof overhangs the structure and has wooden brackets to help support it.

Although the exterior has been altered and is now clad in sheet metal, the interior remains very much intact. The Howard Oil Company Seedhouse retains its significance as the oldest remaining example of the cottonseed industry in Houston and as a reminder of the importance of cotton to the region.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Wrenn, Lynette Boney. *Cinderella of the New South: A History of the Cottonseed Industry, 1855-1955*. University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, 1995.

The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited, and supplemented with additional research and sources by the Historic Preservation Department, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION

Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation

(a) The HAHC, 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 |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <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 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 checked="" 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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present; | | |
| <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. | | |

AND

- (9) If less than 50 years old, or proposed historic district containing a majority of buildings, structures, or objects that are less than 50 years old, whether the building, structure, object, site, or area is of extraordinary importance to the city, state or nation for reasons not based on age (Sec. 33-224(b)).

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Howard Oil Company Seedhouse at 1200 National Street.

HAHC RECOMMENDATION

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CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

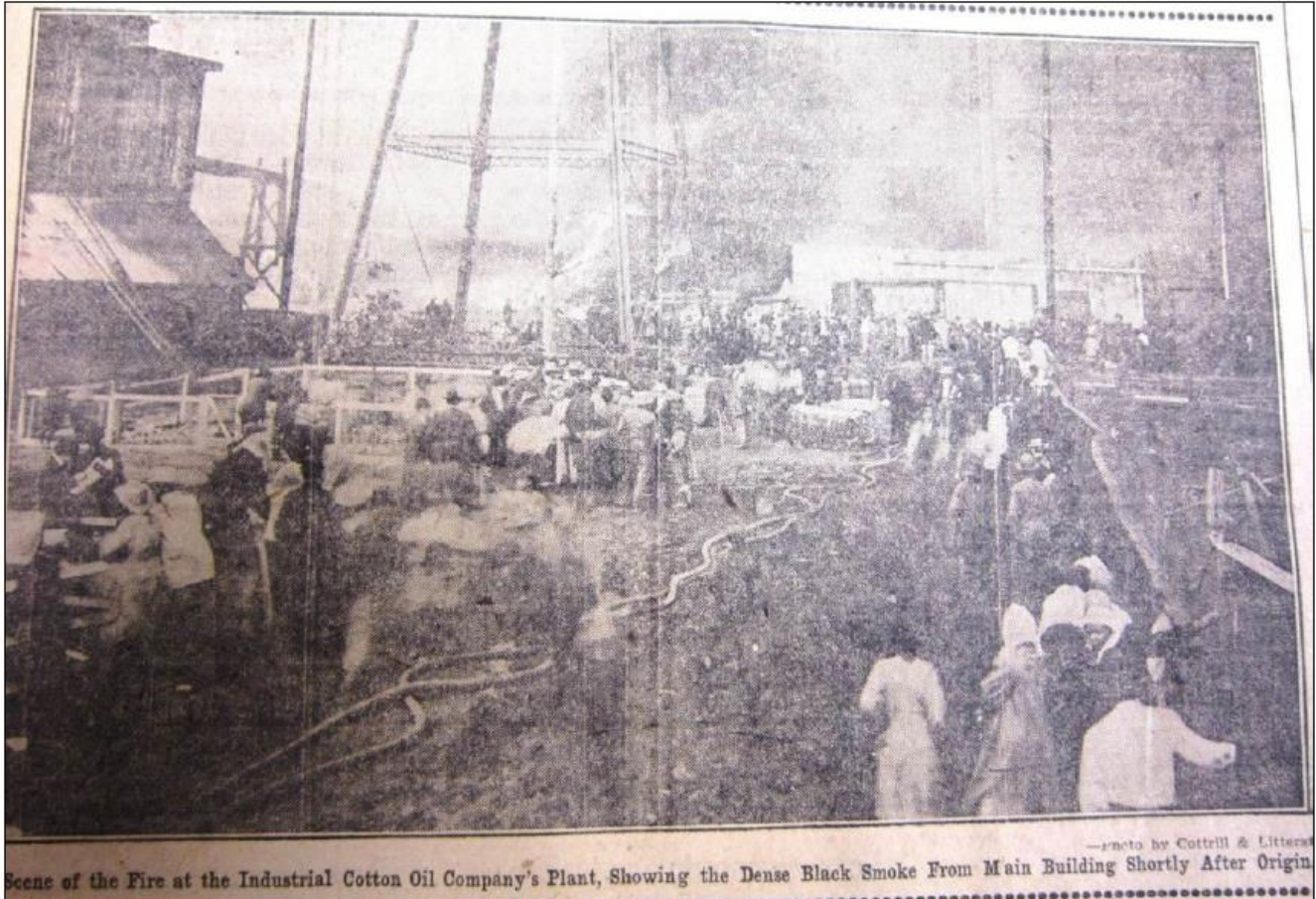
EXHIBIT A
PHOTOS
HOWARD OIL COMPANY SEEDHOUSE
1200 NATIONAL STREET



EXHIBIT A
ADDITIONAL PHOTOS
HOWARD OIL COMPANY SEEDHOUSE
1200 NATIONAL STREET

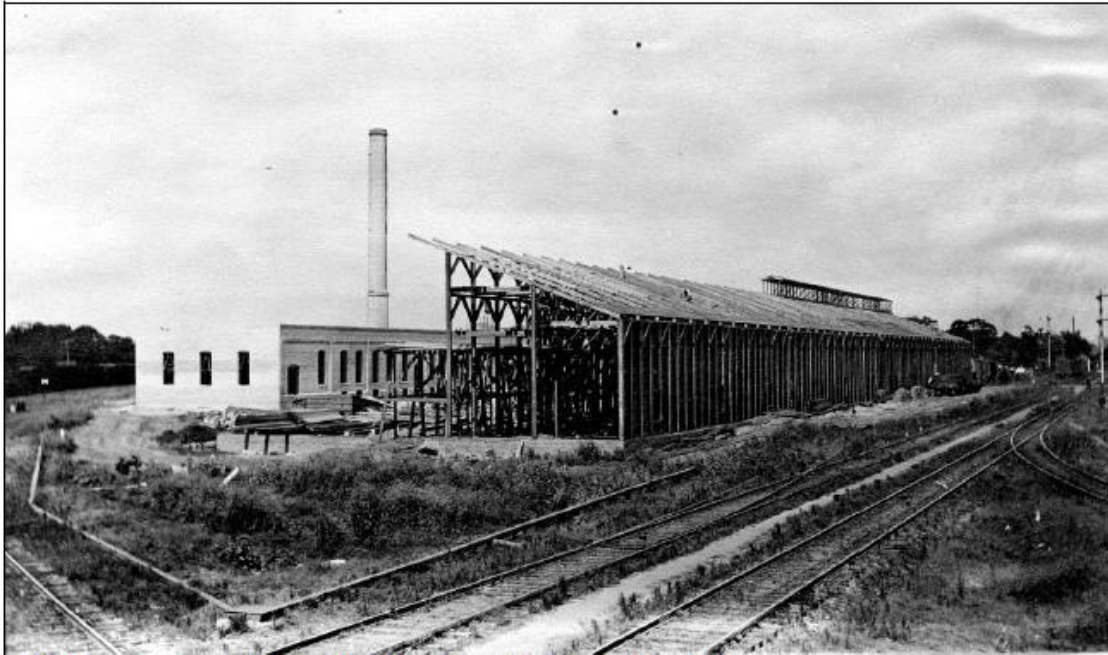


EXHIBIT B
PHOTO OF 1912 FIRE
HOWARD OIL COMPANY SEEDHOUSE
1200 NATIONAL STREET



Houston Post photo of Industrial Cotton Oil Co. fire. It ran on page 14 on 7 January 1912.

EXHIBIT C
PHOTOS 1912 CONSTRUCTION
HOWARD OIL COMPANY SEEDHOUSE
1200 NATIONAL STREET



Seed Warehouse under construction, 1912, James Pirie, TXDoT photo T14B



An upstairs view at the Seed House in 2014

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

EXHIBIT D

SITE MAP

HOWARD OIL COMPANY SEEDHOUSE

1200 NATIONAL STREET

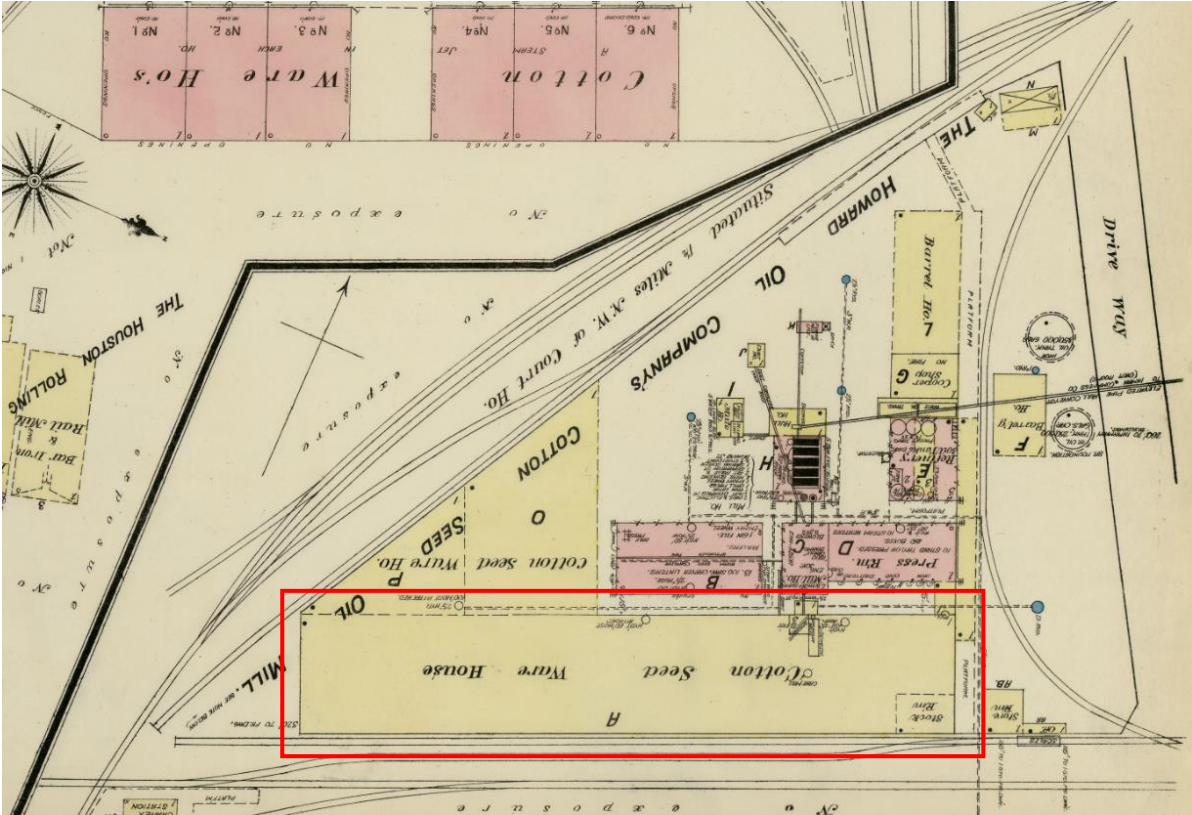


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EXHIBIT E 1886 SANBORN MAP HOWARD OIL COMPANY SEEDHOUSE 1200 NATIONAL STREET

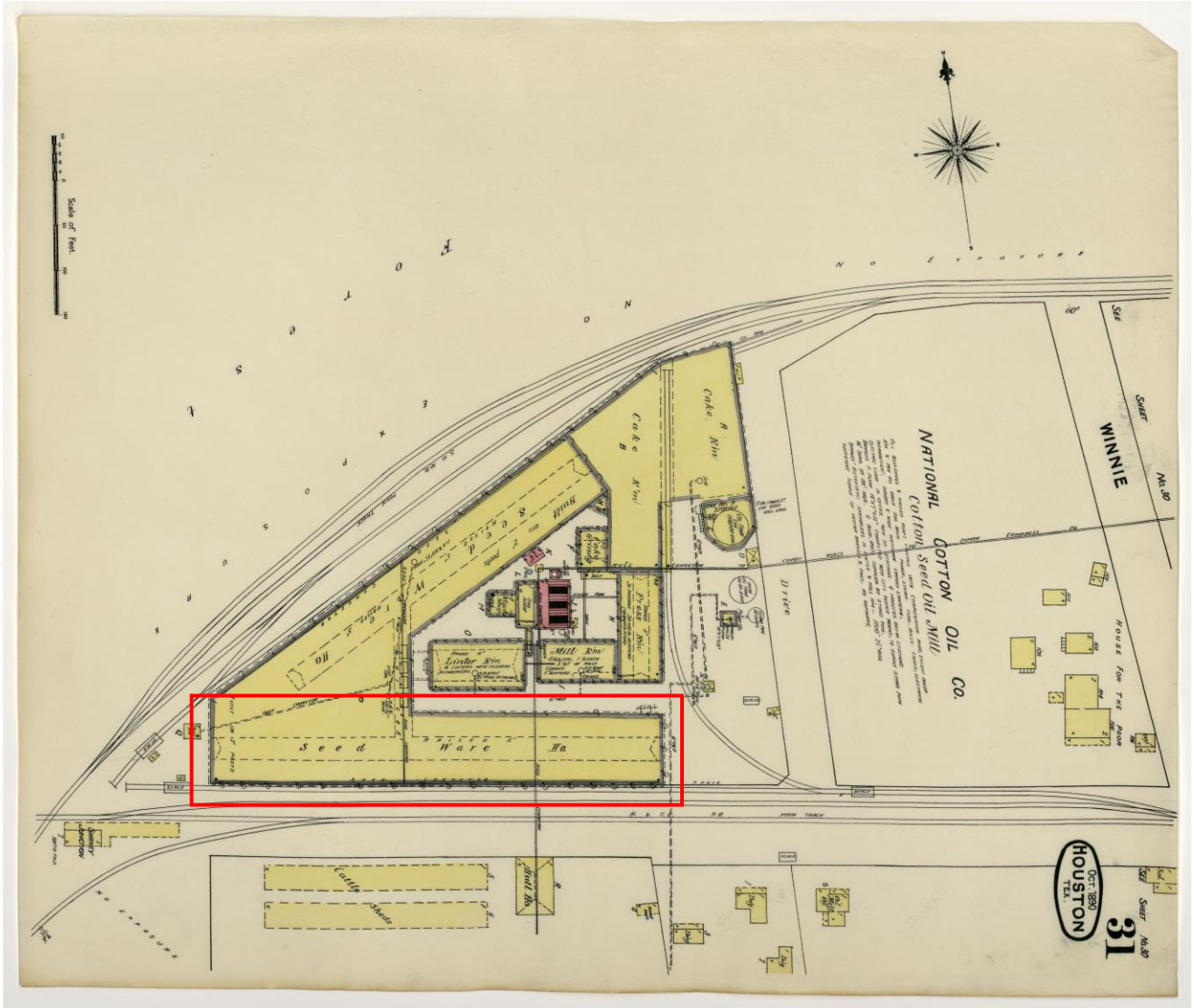


CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

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EXHIBIT E 1890 SANBORN MAP HOWARD OIL COMPANY SEEDHOUSE 1200 NATIONAL STREET



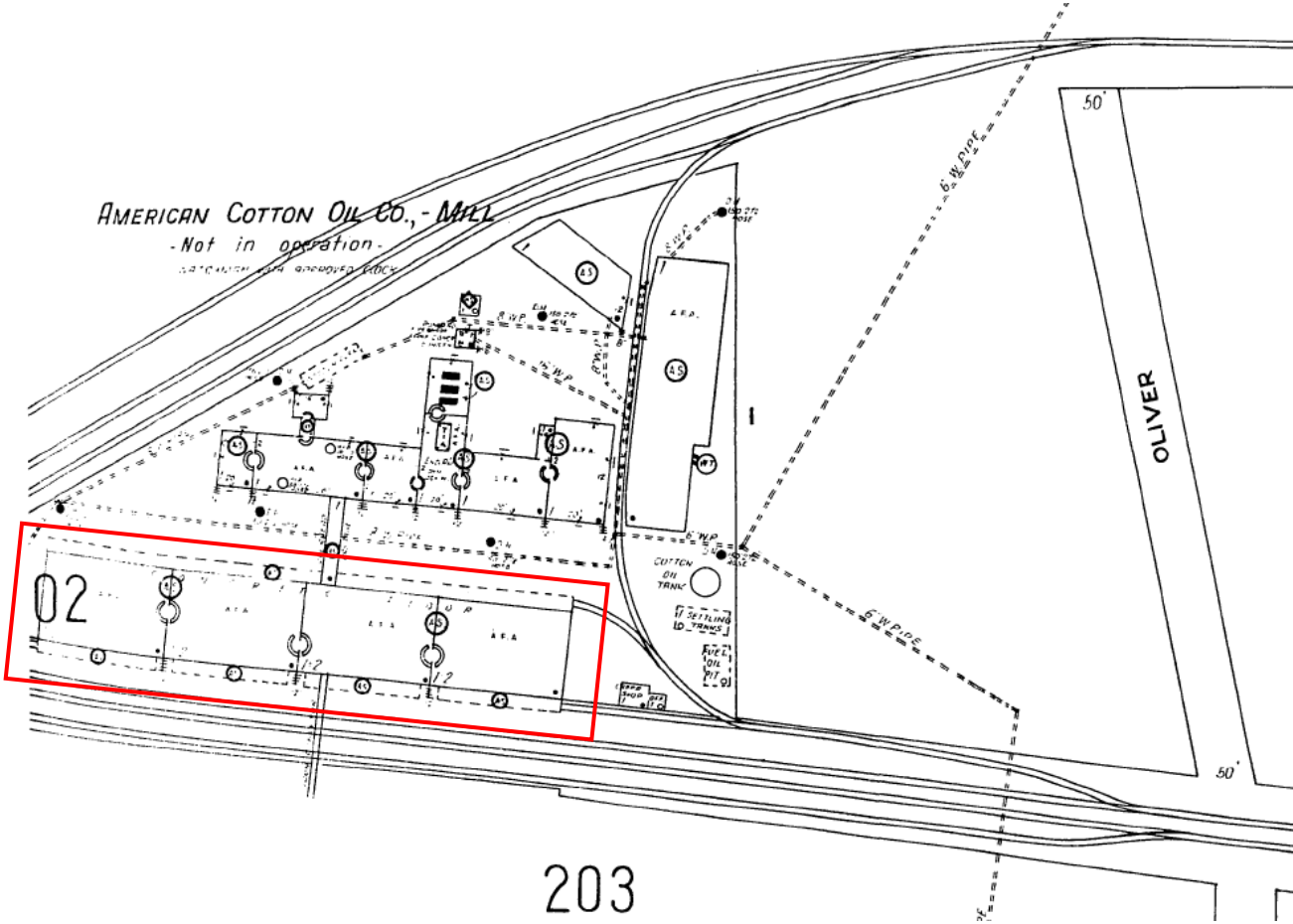
Original located at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

EXHIBIT E
1924 SANBORN MAP
HOWARD OIL COMPANY SEEDHOUSE
1200 NATIONAL STREET



CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

EXHIBIT F
1891 BIRDSEYE VIEW OF HOUSTON
HOWARD OIL COMPANY SEEDHOUSE
1200 NATIONAL STREET

