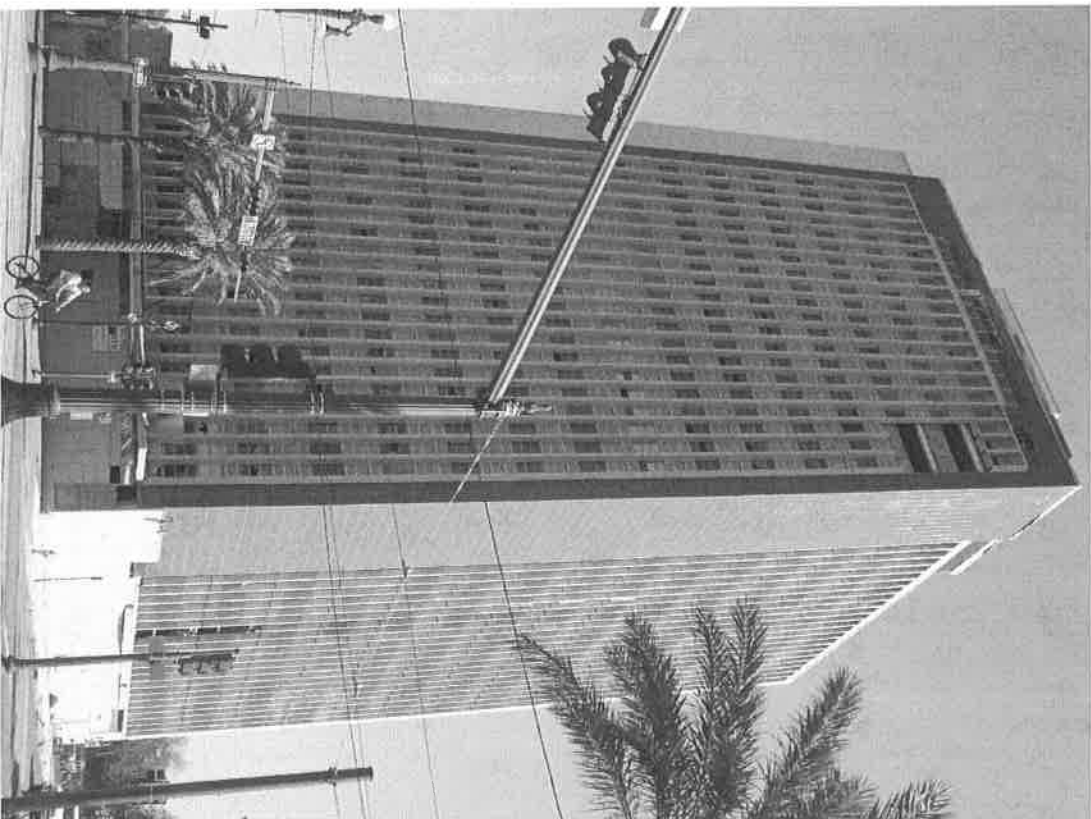


Central Business District Historic District Landmarks Commission

**Landmark Designation Report
October 2, 2009**



**The Texaco Building
1501 Canal Street**

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1501 Canal Street**

Landmark Designation Report

Architectural Rating:

Blue

Construction Date:

1951

Architect:

Claud E. Hooton Architect (New Orleans and Houston)
Haase Construction Co., General Contractors (New Orleans)

Site Description:

Sauare 158, Lot 16

Municipal District:

2

Assessment District:

06

Zoning:

CBD-2

Owner:

1501 Properties, LLC
3330 Veterans Blvd., Suite C
Metairie, LA 70002

Date Nominated:

August 7, 2009

The nomination of this property was based upon its architectural and historical significance. City Ordinance No. 6699 MCS defines a Landmark or Landmark site as: A building(s) (landmark) and/or its lot of record or any part thereof or vacant sites (landmark site), wheresoever located in the Central Business District of the City of New Orleans subject to the jurisdiction of the Central Business District Historic District Landmarks Commission, of particular historic, architectural, or cultural significance, which said landmark and/or landmark site meets at least one of the following criteria: 1) Exemplify or reflect the broad cultural, political, economic, or social history of the nation, state, or community; or 2) Are identified with historic personages or with important events in national, state, or local history; or 3) Embody distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period, style, method of construction, or indigenous materials or craftsmanship; or 4) Are representative of the notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual ability has been recognized.

History of the Property

The following is excerpted from the National Register Designation Report.

The Texaco Building (1951) is a seventeen story welded steel frame structure in the late International Style. It is located at the corner of Canal and Marais Streets on the edge of the New Orleans Central Business District (CBD). Surface materials include brushed aluminum, glass, blond brick and green enamel-coated sheet steel. There has been some cosmetic deterioration, but overall the building has been little altered since it opened as a Texaco office tower in 1953.

The building occupies much of a city block. Its prominent street corner design reads from a three-quarter view within the greater CBD. The first two stories have a straightforward rectangular footprint. Originally the first floor was leased to the National Bank of Commerce and A and G Cafeteria. The second story contains offices and service space. Above that the building rises in an "L" shaped layout with banks of open office space facing Canal and Marais streets. The top (seventeenth story) has a reduced footprint with executive facilities and a boardroom.

At the time of its opening the building was hailed by company officials as "being 50 years ahead of its time." For instance, the welded steel frame structure was much lighter than (then conventional) reinforced concrete. It permitted the office spaces to be open, flexible and totally free of cumbersome interior support columns. Air conditioning was provided by a central cold water system serviced by a large squarish cooling tower set above the 17th story roofline. There was even a central system for providing chilled water for drinking fountains throughout the building. Finally, virtually all interior lighting was recessed in the ceilings.

Seen from the preferred three-quarter view, the abstract exterior design is anchored by a tall, crisp, green vertical slab surfaced with enamel-coated steel. (It was noted at the time that enamel clad steel was common for service stations but rare for urban office buildings.) Most of the front of the flat slab form (Canal Street) is contrasted with an active system of 17 inch deep brushed aluminum vertical fins. These fins set off a continuous bank of single leaf, brushed aluminum-clad casement windows on each floor. Below the windows are complementary opaque panels tinted a contrasting lighter green than the slab. Many of these panels feature vents with in-set electric fans that feed off the cold water cooling system. (In winter the building is heated with hot water using the same vents.) This

system of fins is capped at the top by a brushed aluminum ledge – thus it is framed and limited, allowing the slab to protrude beyond it at the top and on each side. At the northwest edge of the Canal Street façade is a narrow slightly lower section entirely clad in blond brick. This contains most of the building's vertical wind load bracing. Behind the slab, on the Marais St. elevation, is a second expanse of fins, windows and panels – here framed off in blond brick. There is also wind bracing on this elevation. The top of the slab is pierced by a short range of floor-length windows. These light the previously mentioned executive area.

The rear elevations (inside the "L") are sheathed in blond brick; they, too, feature areas of fins, windows and panels, though they are less extensive than on the principal elevations.

There are two entrances on the Canal Street side, the grander of which is framed up in black polished marble. Both the Canal and Marais elevations have shopfronts. These feature a distinctive design with bands of windows held in place by a system of brushed aluminum horizontal glazing bars. The kick plates are of polished black granite. The old bank and cafeteria interiors are largely gone (though the vault remains). The building's lobby survives largely intact. The distinctive modernist security desk, with its rounded ends, is extant. There is also an elevator bank with polished black marble and a brushed aluminum surround. Other interior features of note include solid core polished wood office doors, stylized lobby clocks in which the plaster wall surface forms the clock face, and various hall clocks mounted perpendicular to the wall on strongly geometrical brackets.

Originally large "TEXACO" letters were mounted vertically on the Marais Street side of the green slab. These have been lost but not to the detriment of the building as an architectural statement.

Criteria 1) Exemplify or reflect the broad cultural, political, economic, or social history of the nation, state, or community

The triumph of European Modernism was probably the overriding American urban architectural trend of the post-World War II era, through the 1950s. It was a boom that, on the whole, relaxed some of the rigors of Modernist ideology but embraced its architectural vocabulary. The European International Style, which had only a fledgling hold in this country before the war, emerged as the standard American way to be modern. Indeed, the International Style, in its various permutations, reshaped major downtowns and created a new image of the American city that would have international reach.

The 1950s American building boom was fueled by post-war recovery, prosperity and the resulting need for new buildings of all kinds. And, for a variety of reasons, it came to be dominated by the abstractions of what we now term the late International Style. Some have noted the influence of Walter Gropius, who became Dean of Harvard's Graduate School of Design in 1937. His many graduates of the 1930s and 40s read like a *Who's Who* of American architectural practice from the 1950s and beyond. Similarly, Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe became director of the architecture program of the Armour Institute in Chicago (later the Illinois Institute of Technology) in 1938 and had his own stream of dedicated graduates as well as a wide circle of professional influence. Others have noted widespread corporate patronage. Then too, there were the efforts of the *Union Internationale des Architects*, dubbed "one of the most influential propagators of modern architecture after the Second World War." But in a larger sense, from reviewing the history of the post-war period, one can also infer that by 1950 the old Art Deco mode was fading from fashion. The International Style was relatively new on the greater American scene, had a strong quasi-moral philosophy behind it (as Art Deco did not) and for a long time had no serious competition (at least not for large and/or tall buildings). Aesthetes and critics of the day hailed the style's emergence. In 1958, *Look's* architectural editor John Peter noted: "There is now a general body of theory and practice that constitutes a Modern style which is rapidly becoming as clearly defined as the Greek style or the Gothic style.... In almost every type of building - office, factory, bridge, dam, school, hospital - modern architecture... works. Only in the private family dwelling, where human needs are scaled to modest and even obsolete handicraft building methods, does modern architecture lag behind." "Architecture has now scraped itself clean of the encrustations of the past. It has advanced new purposes and new forms." In the same vein, Wolf von Eckardt offered in 1961, "Even those who still prefer 'traditional' at home accept 'modern' as the appropriate architecture for the

schools of their children, their places of business, and – a little more reluctantly – for their churches and temples.” The triumphal emergence was complete.

In a poetical sense, to a later generation Modernist post-war buildings came to symbolize their era, a period of growing corporate wealth and power and American ascendancy. Writing in 1992, architectural historian Alan Gowans asserted that “Modern coincided with and came in great part to express the nation’s rise to imperial superpower.” Be that as it may, American Modernism surely did inspire imitation in other countries. In the decade or so after the 1950s, the gleaming curtain-wall downtown office block in cities like Chicago and New York inspired tall building developments across the world in cities ranging from London to Singapore. For these projects, American downtowns projected to the world “the image of the modern city,” as the Taschen guide to the International Style has noted so succinctly.

Criteria 3. Embody distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period, style, method of construction, or indigenous materials or craftsmanship

The Texaco Building is of statewide architectural significance because it is a particularly consummate 1950s corporate skyscraper. The New Orleans CBD has Louisiana's only collection of cultural resources exemplifying an important American architectural trend of the postwar era – the triumph of European Modernism on the corporate/institutional/ urban scene. Other larger downtowns in the state simply do not have significant concentrated architectural resources that date from this period. Generally speaking, the buildings in these other CBDs either represent the pre-WWII era or the immediate recent past (1970s and later). Texaco is one of a dozen or so urban International style skyscrapers (and other large buildings) that shaped the character of downtown New Orleans in its mid-century building boom.

Among the various post-war commercial and institutional buildings in Louisiana's large cities, the Texaco Building is particularly consummate. A sleek composition in solid and fin and glass articulated surfaces, it is truly a fine example of a 1950s corporate skyscraper. It has an abstract sculptural element, being strongly three-dimensional. And there is dynamism in the way the vertical and horizontal elements play off against each other. Taken as a whole, the Texaco Building has vastly greater visual interest than, for instance, the neutral surfaced modernist box with windows cut in where needed. Indeed, Texaco's slick curtain walls and gleaming contrasting vertical slab project the "image of the modern city" 50's style as do very few contemporaneous buildings in the state. Despite various attempts, the staff of the Division of Historic Preservation could find little information about Claude E. Hooton, the building's architect. He practiced in New Orleans and Houston. New Orleans city directories show his office at two different French Quarter addresses in the 1950s. The only other known design in New Orleans in which he had a hand is the Pan-American Life Insurance Co. Building (1951). Here Hooton served as associate architect for Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. The architect died October 15, 1993. His last place of residence was Natchez, Mississippi.

The local newspaper hailed the seventeen story Texaco Building as the tallest on Canal Street. It was announced in the *Picayune* May 26, 1951 with images of the design. Construction began in August of 1951 and the building's exterior was largely complete by September 1952, per images in the paper. Texaco opened it to public inspection October 14, 1953.

Founded in 1902, the Texas Company (or Texaco) had offices in New Orleans from the very early days. Approximately 500 employees (according to the *Picayune*) moved into the new building at 1501 Canal from other locations in the city. The producing department, occupying nine stories, handled exploration, drilling and producing in East Texas and the states of Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Delaware, Maryland and New Jersey. The sales department handled all phases of marketing for Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas and Tennessee.

Texaco occupied the candidate until 1984 when the company moved to a new corporate tower at 400 Poydras (New Orleans CBD). For many years 1501 Canal was occupied by the Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. The vacant building was purchased by a local development company in 2006 for rehabilitation using the National Register tax credit. The proposed use is apartments.

Staff Recommendation

The staff recommends that the Texaco building be designated as a landmark as it fulfills two of the four criteria required to establish significance. The building is significant as it exemplifies the broad cultural and social history of New Orleans. The 1950s American building boom was fueled by post-war recovery, prosperity and the resulting need for new buildings of all kinds. It came to be dominated by the abstractions of what we now term the late International Style. 1501 Canal also is one of a dozen or so urban International style skyscrapers (and other large buildings) that shaped the character of downtown New Orleans in its mid-century building boom. It is an example of the International Style of architecture that is an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period, style, method of construction, or indigenous materials or craftsmanship.

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