

New Orleans Historic District Landmarks Commission

Landmark Designation Report

April 2010



**Whitney Bank Building
2650 Canal Street**

**Whitney Bank Building
2650 Canal Street**

Landmark Designation Report

Architectural Rating:	Blue
Construction Date:	1966
Architect:	Parham and Labouisse
Site Description:	Square 581, Multiple Lots
Municipal District:	1
Assessment District:	05
Zoning:	C-1A
Owner:	Mainstream Properties, LLC 1417 Horridge Street Vinton, LA 70668
Date Nominated:	October 9, 2009

The nomination of this property was based upon its architectural and historical significance. City Ordinance No. 5992 MCS defines a Landmark or Landmark site as: A building(s) (landmark) means an unimproved parcel of ground (landmark site) or such parcel with improvements or such improvements without grounds (landmark), wheresoever located in the city, subject to the jurisdiction of the historic district landmarks commission, of particular historic, architectural, or cultural significance, which parcel plus its improvements, if any:

- (1) Exemplify or reflect the broad cultural, political, economic, or social history of the nation, state, or community;
- (2) Are identified with historic personages or with important events in national, state, or local history;
- (3) Embody distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period, style, method of construction, or of 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 former Whitney Bank located at 2650 Canal Street was the second Whitney



Figure 1. 2700 Broad Street. 1929

provide any parking or drive through amenities. A press release heralding the opening of the new branch states:

"When the Whitney Broad Street Branch opened on Canal and Broad Streets in 1926 it was established to serve what was essentially a residential neighborhood. We have seen the steady march of business out Canal Street, the growth of a substantial business community in the mid-city area, and the movement of many new families into neighborhoods which were little developed when Whitney first went to Canal Street. We are proud that our Broad Street branch has grown with the area, and we hope, has substantially contributed to this growth. It is through the confidence of our depositors and customers that we have grown, and it is through our confidence in the future growth and development of the neighborhood and of the entire New Orleans area that we have provided a branch building which has been designed to provide expanded customer service for many years ahead."

The grand opening included an exhibition of rare prints and photographs by Leonard Huber titled "Long Remembered". The exhibit was a nostalgic look at Canal Street and the Mid-City area. Leonard Huber produced numerous books on the history and architecture of New Orleans, including the Cemeteries volume of the New Orleans Architecture series. He was also the president of the Louisiana Landmarks Society and Friends of the Cabildo.

Whitney Bank, established in 1883, is the oldest continuously operating bank in New Orleans. The bank experienced a huge boom following World War II, resulting in the construction of new branches and expansion into the neighboring parishes. Whitney Bank began acquiring property for the new Broad Street branch immediately after the end of World War II in 1947 and continued until the 1960's. The bank encompasses a little more than one third of the entire square. Through a title search it was discovered that John Slidell, businessman, politician and the city of Slidell's namesake, owned much of the square until his death in 1871. Originally

the square consisted of mainly residential properties until it slowly morphed into a commercial area. Today only five buildings remain on the square that were present in 1908.

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

The Whitney Bank is a fine example of mid 20th century modern architecture. (Figure 2) The building featured all of the most modern conveniences in financial institutional design. The building is set back in the lot with parking located in front of

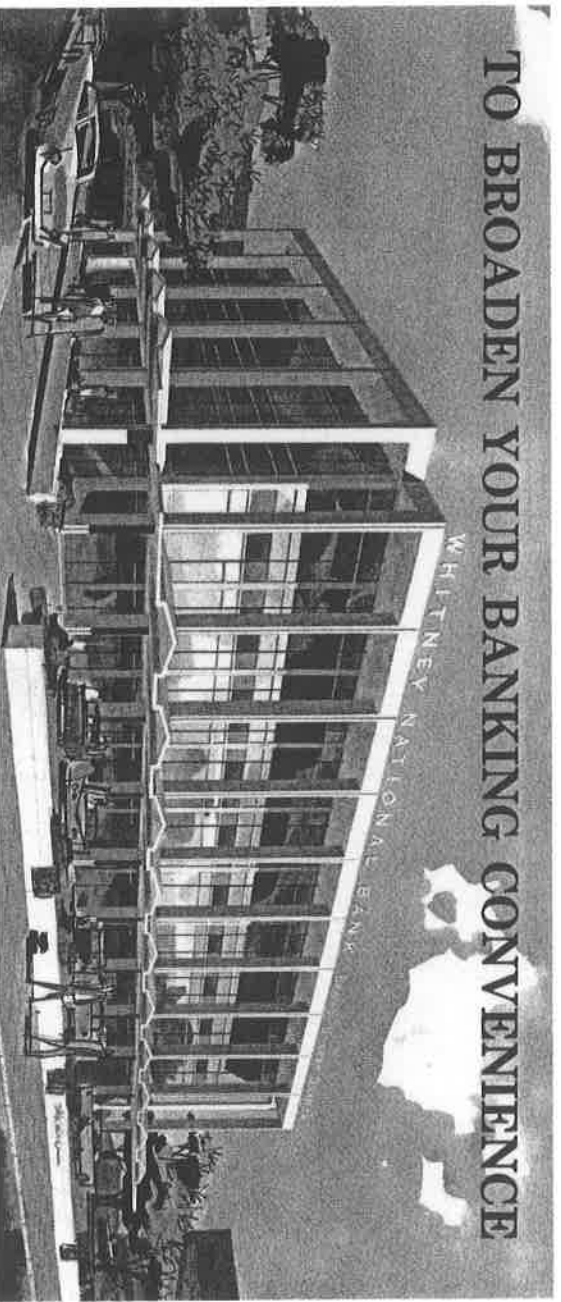


Figure 2. Pamphlet from 1966

the building on Broad Street and on the Cleveland Street side. The two-story building has a flat roof and glass curtain walls featuring tinted glass windows separated with aluminum mullions and brown and taupe spandrel glass. Cast concrete columns clad in white marble extend from the cantilevered eave to the surface level. The columns divide the Canal Street elevation into five bays and the Broad Street elevation into ten bays. The most striking feature of the building is the white cast concrete awning that protrudes above the main floor on three elevations. The awning is punctuated with a pointed archway centered in each bay. The main entrance was located on the Canal Street elevation with a secondary entrance on the Cleveland Street elevation. Enveloping the entire property is a low concrete wall punctuated with wrought iron panels featuring the cursive initials of Whitney Bank.

The Whitney Bank and the Automotive Life Insurance Building, located at 4140 Canal Street, are two, rare examples of the New Formalism style in New Orleans modern architecture. New Formalism began in the 1950's as a response to the rigid rules of the European International Style. New Formalism can be identified by the use of classicism, emphasis on a uniform grid as well as the use of clean lines and geometric forms. The style embraced the use of arches, stylized columns and the use of colonnades. New York City's Lincoln Center, began in 1959, is an internationally recognized example of New Formalism and greatly influenced the



Figure 3. Lincoln Center, New York City

design of the Whitney Bank and the Automotive Life Insurance Building. (Figure 3) The impact can be seen in the arched colonnade on the Automotive Life Insurance building and the cantilevered eave with stylized columns present on the Whitney Bank building. New Formalism was commonly used for large scale projects such as the Los Angeles Music Center and the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C., as well as museums, colleges and auditoriums. This vocabulary was well suited for the design of a prestigious new bank.

The building is located on a 43,000 square foot site, which provided 22,000 square feet of service space and 32,000 square feet of parking area. One of the most modern features of the building were the two drive up windows which allowed customers to complete transactions without having to leave their cars. Whitney Bank advertised lots of parking, sheltered walkways, twenty-four hour depository, twenty-six tellers and several thousand safe deposit boxes located on the second floor. (Figure 4)

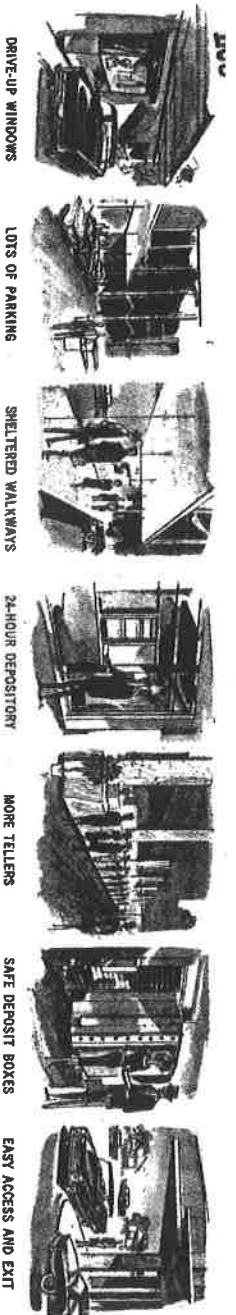


Figure 4. Pamphlet from 1966

Many of mid 20th century buildings constructed in New Orleans are concentrated on the Canal Street corridor, including the recently designated IBM Building and Automotive Life Insurance Building. They represent the boom in post war construction happening in New Orleans at that time. Many companies, including Whitney Bank, were expanding and needed larger office buildings and chose prestigious Canal Street for their new flagships. This also allowed companies to reflect their movement towards modernization and new technologies.

This style of building is fairly rare in New Orleans and is constantly threatened by deterioration or demolition. The Whitney Bank Building retains much of its original exterior materials and architectural integrity. It is an excellent example of its type and reflects the evolution of Canal Street from residential corridor to commercial boulevard.

Criteria 4- Is representative of the notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual ability has been recognized.

The architecture firm Parham and Labouisse designed the new Broad Street branch and Gervais F. Favrot Co. Inc. was the general contractor. Parham and Labouisse had worked on several projects including the New Orleans International Airport, City Hall the State Office Building and State Supreme Court building. The firm was successor to Goldstein, Parham and Labouisse, 1947 to 1962, which designed many



Figure 6. National American Bank

modern structures in the New Orleans area including the Petrolane building on Jefferson Highway and the National American Bank building at Lee Circle, both of which have been demolished. (Figure 5 and 6) Parham and Labouisse joined the firm early in their careers and became partners in 1947.



Figure 5. Petrolane Building, 1954

Frederick Parham studied architecture at Tulane University and continued his studies at Columbia and Oxford. He was a member of the first Vieux Carre Commission and was a founder of the Vieux Carre Property Owners and Residents Association, VCPORA. In addition he served for fourteen years on the City Planning Commission. F. Monroe Labouisse also studied architecture at Tulane University and continued his studies at MIT and the Fountainebleau School of Fine Arts.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends the landmark designation of this property as it fulfills two of the four criteria determining its eligibility. It is an excellent example of mid 20th century architecture and it is complimentary to the numerous mid 20th century buildings present on Canal Street. Ensuring the protection of this building would in turn protect the integrity of the Canal Street corridor. Canal Street has numerous examples of modern architecture, which should be celebrated and preserved in their entirety.

Bibliography

New Orleans Main Public Library
Whitney vertical file-pamphlets and press release
The Times Picayune, August 9, 1971
The Times Picayune, April 17, 1966
Sanborn Maps 1893, 1896, 1908, 1997
Title Search research

C. RAY NAGIN
MAYOR

CITY OF NEW ORLEANS

C. ELLIOTT PERKINS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

March 31, 2010

Mainstream Properties, LLC
1417 Horridge Street
Vinton, LA 70668

**Re: Whitney Bank Building
2650 Canal Street**

7008 1830 0001 0246 4121
7008 1830 0001 0246 4138

Dear Sirs:

The above referenced property, for which you are listed as the owner in municipal records, will be considered for designation as a local historic landmark at The Historic District Landmarks Commission meeting of Thursday, April 15, 2010 at 9:30 a.m. in the City Council Chamber, 1300 Perdido Street. Landmark Designation will permanently place the structure under HDLC jurisdiction.

Landmarks designated by the Commission are buildings or sites which have been determined to be of architectural significance, connected with a notable personage, the work of a noted architect, or of importance to the social, political, economic, and/or cultural history of New Orleans.

I am enclosing a copy of City Council Ordinance #5992 MCS which both created the HDLC and empowers it to review and designate landmarks. Please refer to Section IX and X for a detailed description of the Commission's landmarks authority and procedures. Landmark nominations include all accessory structures on a lot of record, such as service buildings, fences, etc., unless otherwise noted.

You are encouraged to attend the Commission meeting, but your attendance is in no way required. You will receive written notification of the Commission's action.

The provisions of Ordinance #5992 prohibit the demolition of a building or the issuance of a demolition permit while a structure is under designation and require that a Certificate of Appropriateness be obtained from the Commission if an owner intends to make any exterior alterations to the building. A work application is enclosed for your use, should you contemplate any external work.



A formal report has been prepared regarding the significance of the property, it will be sent under separate cover. If you have any information about the history of this property that would be helpful in our research, please contact our office. The Commission will review the report, and will seek the opinions of the owner and any other interested parties at the public hearing.

Furthermore, you should understand that if your building is designated as a landmark, the Commission's jurisdiction would extend only to its external appearance. The interior arrangement and use would not be in the purview of the Commission. Moreover, the Commission does not regulate paint colors. Routine maintenance and restoration work can be approved by the staff, with dispatch, but larger alterations, new construction and demolition must be approved by the Commission itself.

The ordinance, work applications, guidelines and additional information is also available on our website, www.cityofno.com. If you have any questions concerning this matter, please contact me at (504) 658-7041.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Lillian J. McNee".

Lillian J. McNee
Architectural Historian

Approved by:  Eleanor Burke, Deputy Director

enclosures

cc: Justin Schmidt