

**Dallas Landmark Commission  
Landmark Nomination Form**

**1. Name**

historic: John E. Mitchell Company Plant

and/or common: The Bomb Factory, Mitchell Buildings

date: 1928

**2. Location**

address: 3800 Commerce

location/neighborhood: Deep Ellum/Fair Park

blocks: 817

survey:

tract size:

**3. Current Zoning**

**4. Classification**

**Category**

district  
 building(s)  
 structure  
 site  
 object

**Ownership**

public  
 private  
 both

**Public Acquisition**

in progress  
 being considered

**Status**

occupied  
 unoccupied  
 work in progress

**Accessibility**

yes:restricted  
 yes:unrestricted  
 no

**Present Use**

agricultural  
 commercial  
 educational  
 entertainment  
 government  
 industrial  
 military

museum  
 park  
 residence  
 religious  
 scientific  
 transportation  
 other,specify

**5. Ownership**

Current Owner: Pan American Corp. 1996

Contact: John Miller

Phone: 748-1999

Address: 3200 Main, Ste. 1.3 Dallas, Texas 75226

**6. Form Preparation**

Date: September 1996

Name & Title:

Organization:

Contact: John Miller

Phone: 748-1999

**7. Representation on Existing Surveys**

Alexander Survey (citywide)  local  state  national  National Register

H.P.L. Survey (CBD)  A  B  C  D  Recorded TX Historic Ldmk

Oak Cliff  TX Archaeological Ldmk

Victorian Survey

Dallas Historic Resources Survey, Phase  high  medium  low

*For Office Use Only*

Date Rec'd: \_\_\_\_\_ Survey Verified: Y N by: \_\_\_\_\_ Field Check by: \_\_\_\_\_ Petitions Needed: Y N

Nomination: Archaeological Site Structure(s) Structure & Site District

**8. Historic Ownership**

original owner: John E. Mitchell Company

significant later owner(s):

**9. Construction Dates**

original: 1928

alterations/additions: 1929, 1930, 1941, 1957

**10. Architect**

original construction: J.A. Pitzinger

alterations/additions: J.A. Pitzinger

**11. Site Features**

natural:

urban design: situated next to the railroad tracks

**12. Physical Description**

Condition, check one:

excellent

deteriorated

unaltered

Check one:

original site

good

ruins

altered

moved (date \_\_\_\_\_)

fair

unexposed

*Describe present and original (if known) physical appearance. Include style(s) of architecture, current condition and relationship to surrounding fabric (structures, objects, etc.) elaborate on pertinent materials used and style(s) of architectural detailing, embellishments and site details.*

The three story building, 3800 Commerce, is the oldest, largest and most substantial structure associated with the John E. Mitchell Company of Dallas. Since its original construction in 1928, the building has undergone extensive modifications in 1929 and 1930, and minor ones in 1941 and 1957. The building is a sprawling, buff brick building with an L-shaped plan that appears much as it did in 1930 and retains most of its historic integrity. The plant stands in close proximity to other industrial/manufacturing structures including the Continental Gin Company complex.

The original architectural plans, prepared by architect and engineer J.A. Pitzinger, called for a two story masonry building with wood frame construction and expansive interior space. The Mitchell company factory was, as many other contemporaneous industrial buildings, utilitarian in both style and construction. Pitzinger's use of decorative detail was limited to the use of simple brick inlay, cast stone finishes and alternating surface planes of piers, spandrels and the entry bay. The plant, as originally built, encompassed the western half of the block and measured 100 feet wide and 214 feet deep. The front elevation includes a five bay configuration with a centrally located and slightly projecting entrance bay that is marked by a stepped parapet. The outer bays include a series of steel casement window openings. The side elevations are similarly detailed but lack ornamentation seen on the central entrance bay and corner piers. The rear elevation, with its loading docks, faces north toward the railroad tracks. The interior has a five inch concrete slab floor on the ground floor and oak floors with open joist framing on the second level and original roof. The ceilings have timber piers of pine on a 20 feet by 19 feet grid. Offices, sales, loading and receiving and woodworking shops were located on the first floor, while the assembly line was upstairs.

### 13. Historical Significance

*Statement of historical and cultural significance. Include: cultural influences, special events and important personages, influences on neighborhood, on the city, etc.*

The John E. Mitchell Company Plant is a 1928 structure, enlarged in 1929 and 1930 and altered slightly in 1941 and 1957 that stands in Dallas' Gin Manufacturing District. The Mitchell Company and its gin-related machinery enjoyed tremendous popularity throughout all of the country's cotton producing regions, particularly Texas, Arkansas and Louisiana, and helped cotton growers realize increased profits. Although a number of products were made at the plant, the Mitchell F.E.C. Unit—a device that cleaned and conditioned cotton before it was ginned—was its most important and profitable manufactured good. During its peak in the 1930's and 1940's, the John E. Mitchell Company claimed that approximately 50 percent of all gins with extractor-feeders used Mitchell equipment.

As a network of railroads criss-crossed the state and nation during the late 19th century, manufacturers selected strategically located cities in which to establish new branches, factories and stores, thereby expanding their markets. Dallas became one such center, and as farmers in nearby regions began to tap the vast potential of their fertile lands, the city became an important outlet for a complete range of agricultural implements. Firms based in Chicago and St. Louis, such as John Deere, opened facilities in Dallas. Advertisers in *Farm and Ranch* and other late 19th century trade journals confirm Dallas' position as the state's leading supplier of agricultural implements, which was even more significant considering that Texas' economy was based firmly on agricultural production until the post-World War II era. Of all the crops grown in the state, cotton has almost always been the most cultivated and most profitable. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it was grown in greatest abundance in the Blackland Prairie belt which includes Dallas and surrounding areas. The advent and expansion of the cotton gin manufacturing industry in Dallas was a logical outgrowth of both the state's ever-increasing cotton yields and the city's development as an agricultural implement supply center. By the 1920's, Dallas became the largest producer of cotton gin machinery and at its peak manufactured more than half of the gin machinery in the world.

The John E. Mitchell Company property stands in the area known locally as the "Gin Manufacturing District" which included numerous factories, warehouses and offices that dealt with the production and sales of cotton gin equipment and machinery. Among those listed in the city directories throughout the 1920's and 1930's were: Continental Gin, the Murray Company, Lummus Cotton Gin Company and Carver Cotton Gin Company. These factories were, in particular the Mitchell Company, in close proximity to the intersection of the Missouri-Pacific (formerly Texas and Pacific) and the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe railroads. Each of these cotton gin businesses was directly served by and had easy access to railroads, which enabled Dallas to become an industrial, trade and retail center in Texas and the Southwest.

These companies, which produced a complete line of gin equipment, were vital in the success and profitable operation of the John E. Mitchell Company and they encouraged the use of Mitchell F.E.C. Units to enable gins to operate more efficiently. Rather than being regarded as competitors, these companies manufactured products that sometimes were advertised as best suited for Mitchell equipment.

**Continuation Sheet**

Item #13

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In 1929, a new machine, the Triple Cleaner, was introduced. It cleaned and conditioned the cotton before it was ginned, representing a significant leap in the ginning process and became the backbone of the company. This cleaner, when used with the Extractor, was know as the Feeding, Extracting and Cleaning Unit or Mitchell F.E.C. Unit. In subsequent years it was improved and refined.

This and other improvements made the Mitchell Company a leader in the cotton gin industry and the firm's contributions were recognized by leading gin manufacturers and trade journals. The endorsement by these gin manufacturers reflects the importance of the John E. Mitchell Company in the cotton gin industry in Texas and is an indication of its role in the state's cotton culture and economy.

Throughout the 1930's, profits for the Mitchell Company continued to soar, despite the near collapse of the cotton market during the Great Depression, and the firm struggled to meet increased demands for its equipment. Reduced prices of cotton obviously made the crop's cultivation less profitable. However cotton remained an important commodity, and gins and related machinery were a vital link in the processing of this raw good into usable consumer product.

New ideas regarding cotton ginning that were promoted by agricultural specialists in trade journals also encouraged sales for extractor-cleaners in the 1930's. Recommendations for extractor-cleaners by the only state trade journal for ginning greatly benefitted the Mitchell Company.

In 1938, the company co-founder and president John E. Mitchell died. His son, John E. Mitchell, Jr., assumed control of the company and continued their profitable operation. As the Mitchell Company experienced continued prosperity, the country, as a whole, slowly rebounded from the Great Depression. However, events in Europe began to have an impact on the United States.

The United States entered into World War II and brought great changes to the cotton industry. The War Productions Board, a government agency created to redirect the nation's industrial capacity toward the war effort, issued orders limiting the manufacture of certain goods. One of its mandates, L-93, prohibited the production of cotton gin machinery, thus threatening to put the John E. Mitchell Company out of business. As a consequence, company officials worked to secure government defence-related contracts. In early 1942, the company reached an agreement with the Navy to produce a half million 1.10-inch anti-aircraft projectiles. During the war, the Dallas plant of the John E. Mitchell Company became a leader in the manufacture of munitions and four times was awarded the prestigious "E Award" for "outstanding production of war materials". The first award was presented on January 29, 1943, with numerous military, governmental and civic officials in attendance.

## 14. Bibliography

See National Register Nomination for John E. Mitchell Compant Plant, Nov. 1988, Hardy-Heck-Moore

**Designation Merit**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>A. Character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City of Dallas, State of Texas or the United States. <u>  x  </u></p> <p>B. Location as the site of a significant historical event. <u>          </u></p> <p>C. Identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the cultural and development of the city. <u>          </u></p> <p>D. Exemplification of the cultural, economic, social or historical heritage of the city. <u>  x  </u></p> <p>E. Portrayal of the environment of a group of people in an era of history characterized by a distinctive architectural style. <u>          </u></p> <p>F. Embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or specimen. <u>  x  </u></p> <p>G. Identification as the work of an architect or master builder whose individual work has influenced the development of the city. <u>          </u></p> | <p>H. Embodiment of elements of architectural design, detail, material or craftsmanship which represent a significant architectural innovation. <u>  x  </u></p> <p>I. Relationship to other distinctive buildings, sites or areas which are eligible for preservation according to a plan based on historic, cultural or architectural motif. <u>          </u></p> <p>J. Unique location of singular physical characteristics representing an established and familiar feature of a neighborhood, community or the city. <u>          </u></p> <p>K. Archaeological value in that it has produced or can be expected to produce data affecting theories or historic or prehistoric value. <u>          </u></p> <p>L. Value as an aspect of community sentiment of public pride. <u>  x  </u></p> |
|---|---|

**Recommendation**

The Designation Task Force requests the Landmark Commission to deem this nominated landmark meritorious of designation as outlined in Chapter 51 and Chapter 51A, Dallas Development Code.

Further, the Designation Task Force endorses the Preservation Criteria, policy recommendations and landmark boundary as presented by the Department of Planning and Development.

Date:

          Ambrosio Villanueva            
 Chair  
 Neighborhood Designation Task Force

          Tiffany S. Tuley            
 Tiffany Tuley, Urban Planner  
 Historic Preservation