



# The Magnolia Building

**A Living Dallas Heritage**

a landmark designation report  
by the Dallas Landmark Preservation Committee  
May, 1978

## THE MAGNOLIA BUILDING -- A LIVING DALLAS HERITAGE

- I. INTRODUCTION: This report has been prepared by the Historic Landmark Preservation Committee of the Planning Commission and by the Department of Urban Planning. It is a study of the Magnolia Building, renamed the Mobil Building, to determine its significance as a historic landmark and to consider the question of whether it should be protected. The study will also consider what features should be protected and what approaches are appropriate if the building is determined to be worthy of such protection.

Designation under the City's landmark program, together with preservation criteria, would be a major tool for preserving any building deemed to be historically significant as a living part of Dallas' heritage. If such a building is unoccupied or underutilized, an appropriate reuse would be essential for its continued viability.

Hopefully, a new use could be found for a historic landmark building which would not only preserve the building as economically viable, but which would provide some access and amenity to the public appropriate to its significance as a focus of community sentiment.

The Magnolia Building has for years been one of Dallas' most significant buildings. Its architectural distinction, its association with the city's economic life, and its extraordinary visual domination of the downtown skyline, topped by the Flying Red Horse, all reinforce its overall impact.

Now the building has been given to the City, and the City is considering resale of the property to a new owner who will preserve it through reuse. If it is determined that the building should be preserved, an important step in its reuse and preservation will be its designation under the City's landmark program.

The landmark designation program was established by City ordinance in 1973, making use of zoning and several other implementation tools. Section 19-A of this ordinance requires that one or more of twelve stated criteria shall be considered by the City Council in designating a building as a landmark. The Magnolia Building is likely to meet nine of the twelve criteria:

- a. Character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the City of Dallas, the State of Texas, or the United States;
- b. --
- c. Identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the City;
- d. Exemplification of the cultural, economic, social, or historical heritage of the City;
- e. --
- f. Embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen;
- g. Identification as the work of an architect or master builder whose individual work has influenced the development of the City;

- h. Embodiment of elements of architectural design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation;
- 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;
- j. Unique location or singular physical characteristics representing an established and familiar feature of a neighborhood community, or the City;
- k. --
- l. Value as an aspect of community sentiment or public pride.

This report will examine and describe the building's features and will present a calendar of the major events relevant to the building. It will also discuss the building's significance, and the degree to which it satisfies the criteria for historic designation.

## II. DESCRIPTION OF THE BUILDING

The Magnolia Building is a twenty-nine story skyscraper built in 1922 in a highly refined and accomplished Renaissance revival expression. It occupies a 100' x 160' site at the northeast corner of Akard and Commerce in the heart of Dallas' Central Business District. The building itself is 100' X 136', including the 20' frontage of the three-story "annex" on the east end which was part of the original building. The Commerce frontage of the property includes a 3' setback along Akard, the 136' building frontage, and an additional 21' wide two story building known as the Keating building or the Mobil-Keating building.

Only the building's Akard frontage to the west and its 136' Commerce frontage to the South are fully freestanding elevations on city sidewalks. Many similarly sited downtown Dallas buildings of the period had only two finished elevations with the all too visible "back" sides done in a different material and color and stripped of any embellishment. The Magnolia Building, on the other hand, was built with all four of its elevations finished, architecturally embellished, and done in the same tan-colored Indiana Limestone.

The building's twenty-nine stories, plus the Flying Red horse, brings its total height to 416 feet above the sidewalk. It has two basement levels, which extend out under the city sidewalk. The building's overall massing consists of: (1) A base, 100' X 136' composed of floors 1 through 3, which fully covers the site except for the 3' setback and the 21' Keating property. (2) A strongly symmetrical shaft, comprised of floors 4 through 25. The shaft is U-shaped in plan, with the light court facing south to Commerce Street, and it is surmounted at the top of floor 25 with a strongly articulated cornice. (3) A belvedere level consisting of the first penthouse roofed with green tile, (floors 26 and 27); a smaller second penthouse

(floors 28 and 29); an elaborately cupola'ed chimney stack; a water storage tank (above floor 29); and the famous Pegasus sign, the "Flying Red Horse."

Originally the building was richly embellished on the first three floors' elevations on Akard and Commerce, with paired unfluted Ionic pilasters between bays, and full round unfluted Ionic columns flanking the Commerce Street entrance and supporting the third floor arch. The first two floors were "modernized" in 1948 with smooth, featureless dark gray granite cladding and flush-mounted aluminum framed windows and doors. A new building entrance was cut into the corner at Commerce and Akard, and the once-main entrance under the Commerce Street arch was largely filled in, with only a small door providing secondary entrance. Window and door openings were widened, necessitating removal of half of the pier widths in many bays. The columns at the Commerce entrance may be merely enclosed, but their capitals have probably been removed. Window sills were substantially lowered, and the Akard entrance was widened and finished in red granite.

The third floor elevation is intact, with its rich detailing and central arch on Commerce Street. Above this arch is a freestanding sculptural group, described thus in an entry in the building manager's manual:

Over the main (Commerce Street) entrance is a sculptural group, which is about twenty feet wide, the right-hand side of which represents the new-born industries, holding the lamp of intelligence. Gear wheels and mechanical accessories symbolize power which that golden flow of oil has made possible.

The left-hand side of the group stands for Commerce. The female figure here with the winged hat of Mercury represents progress and speed and she is telling her people, who were represented by the child holding "the world", or winged ball, to spread the products of Texas all over the world.

The cartouche in the center is enriched with the Magnolia. The laurel wreaths that surround this cartouche are the conventionalized treatment symbolic of enterprise, recompense to the workers

and profit for effort expended, and the entire group is under the American Eagle, which stands for the national protection of the United States.

This was made by Ulysses Ricci, one of the cleverest of the younger sculptors.

The shaft itself is quite simple in design, with unadorned identical one-over-one sash windows grouped into bays. The south facade consists of two shafts flanking the light court, joined and punctuated by a screen-like "bridge" consisting of a great segmental arch at floor 17 supporting an Ionic collonade at floor 18. Although the shaft elevation is quite severe and unadorned at most floors, it is modulated by several continuous string courses as well as a number of discontinuous friezes of a repeated shell motif.

A "mini-wing" twenty-five stories in height was added in 1938 to the northernmost bay of the east facade, and built to match the original materials and detailing. It was needed to accommodate air conditioning equipment at every other floor.

The richly articulated cornice at floor 25 was originally surmounted by a classical balustrade of the same limestone. Both this balustrade and a more elaborate one atop the second penthouse were replaced with pipe railings because of severe weather deterioration.

The richer architectural embellishment seen at the first three levels, but missing for most of the shaft, returns at the belvedere level. The green tiled hip roof, dormers, copper finials and chimney cupola, and classical limestone embellishments terminate the building's original composition. And atop the whole rides the Flying Red Horse, supported on a miniature oil derrick.

The building interior originally included a bank, entered through the

Commerce Street portal, but this space has been altered and subdivided. The extent to which original features remain is unknown. The banking lobby intersected the elevator lobby, which provided the main entrance to the tower floors from Akard. The elevator lobby is in nearly original condition with richly coffered ceiling, marble walls, and fine fixtures and details of bronze, travertine, and walnut. Most of the tower office floors have marble wainscoting along their main corridors.

The typical office floor has two wings flanking the light court. Some floors have the space within a wing partitioned; some leave the whole space open. The columns down the center of each wing are actually off center so as to permit a corridor to be built down the center in those floors which are partitioned. The executive suite of offices at floor 24 is partitioned and finished in walnut panelling.

The building's structure is a steel frame, with wood flooring added to the concrete floor slabs. Heavy masonry encases the steel structure, and exterior walls are 20-to-25 inches of masonry.

Several other features of the building are worthy of note. It has a utility tunnel, about 8 feet in diameter, connecting to the Adolphus Hotel under the street at the second basement level. At certain times, the Magnolia Building provided the Adolphus' steam heating through this tunnel. A connecting tunnel is reported to connect the Adolphus with the nearby Kirby Building.

The building has its own water well, as do several of the major older downtown buildings. During several periods it provided part or all of the building's water supply, including the draught years of 1953 and 1954.

A twenty-foot wide "annex", three stories in height, is part of the original

building's design. It ensured that a minimum 20 foot setback would always be provided for the tower's east elevation.

Skylights were originally located on the third floor roof, behind the arch, at the bottom of the light court, and on the roof of the annex. They have been closed over with opaque roofing material, but their frameworks are still in place.

Certainly the most renowned special feature of the building is the Pegasus sign, the "Flying Red Horse". The Flying Red Horse was in use world-wide as a trademark of Socony-Vacuum, of which Magnolia was a wholly owned production subsidiary.

According to A Brief History of Mobil, "The Flying Red Horse was adopted as a trademark in the U.S. shortly after the organization of Socony-Vacuum in 1931. But it had been used abroad for many years before - as long ago as 1911. Apparently the first to use Pegasus as a symbol of speed and power was the Mobil company in South Africa. It was Mobil Sekiyu in Japan, however, which first colored it red."

The Flying Red Horse sign was erected in 1934 for the national convention of the American Petroleum Institute. The sign is a sandwich of two horses, 14 feet apart. Each horse is 40 feet long and 30 feet high, and the supporting "oil derrick" raises the sign to a total of 50 feet high. The porcelain enameled steel sign was made in Dallas, using 800 sq. ft. of sheet metal, 2500 lb. of steel angles, 1/4 mile of neon tubing, and a 3 h.p. motor and reduction gear to turn the sign. The sign is legible for three miles, and has been reported as visible from an airplane over Hillsboro, 65 miles away.

III. CALENDAR OF THE BUILDING'S CONSTRUCTION, MODIFICATION, OCCUPANCY, AND SOME RELATED EVENTS.

- 1920 - Building designed by architect Sir Alfred Bossom of London and New York, with associate architects Lang & Witchell of Dallas.
  - Water well drilled to 1,668 feet, Paluxy sands.
- 1921 - February, construction begins.
- 1922 - June, construction is completed.
  - August, building is opened with Magnolia, Southwestern National Bank, and various leasing tenants as occupants.
- 1929 - Mercantile Bank, R. L. Thornton President, moves into banking space.
- 1934 - The Flying Red Horse is installed for A.P.I. Convention.
  - R. L. Thornton is President of the Dallas Chamber of Commerce.
  - Fair Park is chosen as site for Texas Centennial due to efforts of R.L. Thornton and his business leaders group.
  - Water well in the building is shut down as uneconomical.
- 1936 - Texas Centennial is held in rebuilt and expanded Fair Park.
- 1938 - Twenty-five story "mini-wing" is added, and air conditioning is installed.
- 1943 - Mercantile Bank moves out of Magnolia Building and into their own newly completed quarter, the Mercantile Bank Building.
- 1943-1948 - Elevators are replaced, new cabs, doors & mechanism, semi-automatic controls.
- 1948 - Major Building Alterations
  - a. First two floors are "modernized"
  - b. Dallas Federal and E. F. Hutton occupy remodeled Mercantile Bank Space.
  - c. Stone ballustrades at first and second penthouse levels are removed and replaced with pipe railings.
- 1953 - The water well is reconditioned and put into service after the drought crisis.
- 1956 - First two floors are again remodeled, though not drastically, for Continental Airlines.
- 1959 - The building is re-named the Mobil Building after Magnolia is merged into Socony-Mobil to form the Mobil Corp.
- 1973 - The Flying Red Horse sign is turned off to conserve energy during the energy crisis.
- 1974 - Continental Airlines moves out; Mobil occupies the space after a minor remodeling.
- 1976 - Mobil offers the building to the City of Dallas at no cost, plans to move to new leased space.
  - City of Dallas accepts the offer of the building in August.
- 1977 - The Historic Landmark Preservation Committee gives the building first priority status.
  - City assumes ownership in December.
- 1978 - Mayor Folsom appoints Mayor's Committee on the Mobil Oil Building to study the most appropriate action for the City to take with regard to the building.
  - The building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
  - The Committee of 100, with a grant from the Texas Historical Commission, matched with private funding, commissions Anderson, Notter, Finegold of Boston to conduct an economic and architectural feasibility study for reuse of the building.
  - HLPC commences study of the building as a candidate for the City's historic designation program.

#### IV. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MAGNOLIA BUILDING

Landmark and Symbol: Community Sentiment; Established and Familiar Visual Feature of the City; Part of the Development of the City.

From the time of its completion in 1922 until the completion of the Mercantile Bank Building in 1943, the Magnolia Building was Dallas' tallest building and unchallenged landmark with its Flying Red Horse at the peak of the famed skyline.

In Dallas: The Deciding Years, A.C. Greene refers to "the most prominent landmark in Dallas history, the Flying Red Horse sign". He goes on to say that "the Magnolia Building (now the Mobil, but still-holding onto Pegasus) remained the tallest structure, with or without the horse - which is three stories tall - in Dallas for nearly twenty years. It seems to be a mark which will stand. No other high-rise edifice has held "high" honors so long in the years since".

Only three buildings outside of New York were taller than the Magnolia Building when it was built, the Philadelphia City Hall, Hartford's Traveler's Insurance Building, and Seattle's L. C. Smith Building. It was the tallest building south of Washington D.C., and was taller than any building in Europe. The building dominated the scene for miles around, and a reporter described it on opening day as being "like a great peg driven into the ground holding Dallas in its place from no matter which direction the town is approached".

As newer buildings succeeded to the status of "the tallest", each in turn followed the fashion set by the Magnolia Building of a spectacular night time lighting display crowning the building. The Mercantile, the Republic, the Southland Life, the First International, and now the Reunion Tower have all followed the tradition set by Magnolia and its Flying Red Horse which gives the Dallas Skyline its unique character of exuberance and festivity at night. But even today the Magnolia Building and the Flying Red Horse remain for many, "the" symbol of Dallas and its skyline.

## Economic, Social, and Historical Heritage of the City: The Oil Industry.

The building is virtually synonymous with the early days of the Texas oil industry which has contributed so much to the wealth and color of the city. The first commercial oil discovery in Texas was made in 1896 at Corsicana, after drillers for a water well hit oil. Magnolia was founded at Corsicana in 1898, combining a number of small interests into the earliest producing, refining, and distributing corporation in the Texas field. The company grew on the development of the great Spindletop field near Beaumont which came in with the Lucas "gusher" in 1901. But oil fields were producing in North, West and East Texas as well. In 1918, Magnolia became 45% owned by Socony (Standard Oil Company of New York) and became the main producer for the giant Socony operation. Magnolia moved from Corsicana to Dallas, which numbered over 160,000 population, and began planning their building at Akard and Commerce in 1920. The building was completed in 1922, and by 1925 Magnolia had become a wholly owned producing subsidiary of Socony.

1931 saw the discovery of the immense East Texas oil field only a few miles east of Dallas. It was the world's largest. It dwarfed even Spindletop and was the "Middle East" of its day. Occurring during the depths of the Great Depression, the discovery of the East Texas Field and its development by Dallas oil and banking interests started Dallas toward economic recovery much sooner and faster than the rest of the nation.

Historically Significant Person or Persons: R.L. Thornton and the Citizens Council.

Hand in hand with the oil industry, Dallas' banking industry developed, building on its earlier basis in cotton and agriculture. In 1929, one of Dallas' top three banks, the Mercantile Bank, had just emerged in its present form and name after a series of changes in organization. The bank was founded and currently headed by the renowned R.L. Thornton, "Mr. Dallas", or as Saturday Evening Post called him "The Duke of Dallas". His slogan during his term as Mayor in the 1950's would

show his devotion to growth, progress, and new building: "Keep the Dirt Flying!"

In the inauspicious year of 1929, Thornton and Mercantile Bank moved into the space formerly occupied by the Southwestern National Bank on the first floor of the Magnolia Building. They made their home in the Magnolia Building from 1929 through 1943, when they moved into their own new Mercantile Bank Building. The arrangement of Magnolia's corporate offices in a tower literally supported on a base housing a great bank is a symbol of Dallas' economic life which would be hard to overlook. It is likely that Mr. Thornton's decision to top out his new bank tower with a colorful neon-lighted beacon was incubated in his years of tenure beneath the renowned Flying Red Horse.

In Dallas Public and Private, Author Warren Leslie states simply that,

"The most influential leader of Dallas was the late R.L. (Bob Thornton, chairman of the Mercantile National Bank and one of the most remarkable men Dallas every produced. In his heyday of leadership he had a magnetism and color that has not been replaced. During the thirties and forties and most of the fifties he was the most powerful man in town though he neither had nor wanted the influence of an Amon Carter in Fort Worth, which was practically a one-man city. Among other things, Thornton served four terms as mayor of the City of Dallas, but far more important than that, he organized the decision-makers in Dallas. In 1937 he brought about the founding of the Citizen's Council.

Thornton was an exceptional man, even by Dallas standards. He was born in a dugout in Hico County and he and his brother argued until his brother's death about which one was the older. He had little schooling and he used to mispronounce English with great enthusiasm. It was Thornton who coined the phrase "the dydamic men of Dallas," and he was always talking about things that were "tremenjus," "stupenjus" or whatever. This was of course, all an act. He was a big, rangy fellow with quick, shrewd eyes and a shock of white hair. He had enormous charm and humor and a gift of phrase, and his use of language was simply one of the assets in his projection of personality.

"If it's a do meetin", I'm goin", he used to say. "If its a don't meetin', I'm staying home."

And he insisted, "Ain't nobody built anything big enough in Dallas. As soon as its built, it's outgrewed."

He loved activity and the swirl of events around him. Once he said, "All these people complainin' about traffic downtown. Hell, its easy -- you got big business, you got traffic. You got traffic, you got a problem. If you don't want a problem, you go to Forney, Texas. In Forney, Texas, they got no problem, no traffic and no business."

He was for years the president of the State Fair of Texas, which is the nation's biggest state fair and attracts more than 2,500,000 visitors annually. Outside of Dallas itself, the fair was the single dearest thing to his heart. "The State Fair of Texas has greener grass, bluer lagoons, and higher skyrockets than any other fair in the world," he once said. "It's got a cash register under every bush, and we're plantin' more bushes."

The period of 1929 to 1943 was one of the most significant in Mr. Thornton's career as a civic leader, although his term as mayor was not until the 1950's. It was in 1934 that Mr. Thornton, as President of the Dallas Chamber of Commerce, welcomed the prestigious national convention of the American Petroleum Institute, no doubt pointing proudly to the newly installed Flying Red Horse thirty stories above his bank.

By 1934, Thornton's genius for organizing business and civic leadership and for "selling Dallas", had secured the selection of Dallas' Fair Park as the site of the upcoming Texas Centennial. Fair Park was expanded and thoroughly rebuilt into an impressive and cohesive setting for the 1936 Centennial, which "put Dallas on the map" as a bright spot of prosperity in a nation slowly climbing back from the depression. Author Leslie recalls,

"The roots of the powerful Citizens' Council in Dallas go back to 1936, when the city became the site of the Texas Centennial. Dallas' chief weapon in the battle for the Centennial had been the lure of \$3,500,000 it offered in support of the fair, but raising it had been slow work. One problem was that it took so long to get an answer from companies that had been asked to give the money."

In The Lusty Texans of Dallas, John William Rogers continues the story as Fortune Magazine had written it in the article "The Dydamic Men of Dallas," in February 1949

For a booster in any other town the cup would have been running over. But Bob Thornton was dissatisfied. It had been a hell of a job. "Those were dydamic days" he recalls, his face flushed at the very thought of them, "but there was no organization. We had to have men who could underwrite...sometimes you'd get a bunch together, they couldn't say yes or no. We didn't have time for no proxy people - what we needed was men who could give you boss talk. Then I saw the idea. Why not organize the yes and no people? So I went down to Nate Adams."

Nathan Adams was definitely the man to see. He was head of the Southwest's largest bank, the First National Bank in Dallas, director of fourteen of the region's industries and though he was getting on in years -- he was sixty-seven-- someone you should be very sure to check with on any scheme

affecting Dallas.

Thornton exploded into his office. "Nate," he said, his arms flailing the air, "what we need is the boss men organized so we can act quick. . . dydamic kind of organization . . . stupendjus effort . . . people doin' things!"

When Thornton had run down a bit Adams laid his cigar in a big glass ash tray and, in the anticlimactic way deals are consumated in Dallas, nodded his head. It was a fine idea - as a matter of fact, he'd been thinking of it himself all along.

Says Rogers, "The burden of Messrs. McCombs and Whyte's story (in Fortune Magazine is that Dallas, like the Italian Cities of history is a mercantile oligarchy largel of bankers and merchants and that probably not since the cities of the Renaissance has there been such a striking example of an oligarchy in action as in the Citizen' Council of Dallas."

In 1937, the Dallas Citizen's Council was chartered as the permanent outgrowth of the business and civic leadership team Thornton organized to secure the Centennial. The Citizen's Council went on to exert effective and powerful leadership in Dallas for many years. It has recently been reconstituted under Mr. Alex Bickley's leadership to better meet today's diversified leadership needs.

During the "dydamic" years of 1929 through 1943, the Magnolia Building's great arched entrance on Commerce had led into the Mercantile Bank, the business home of R. L. Thornton, and certainly a focal point for the Citizen's Council.

#### Architectural Innovation and Design Significance:

The Magnolia Building's architectural and historical significance was recognized by Prof. Blake Alexander's 1974 survey, according to it "national significance" as an architectural landmark. In March of 1976, the City's H.L.P.C. gave the building and its Flying Red Horse first priority status. And in 1978, the building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Magnolia Building is one of the finest examples of the skyscraper, the unique and totally American building form which so powerfully expressed the growth, the aspiration, and the technological daring of America. The contribution of the skyscraper to world architectural forms is as significant and as uniquely American as the contribution of jazz to the world's music.

The skyscraper is so American that Lord Bossom, although he championed the form, wished never to see it in England. He felt it would be totally inappropriate there because of the townscape, the natural light, and the different cultural tradition. Britain must have agreed, for the first skyscraper to invade the London Skyline did not occur until the late 1950's, with the much criticized Shell Building beside the Thames River.

The image of the American big city became synonymous with its core of skyscrapers, and its "canyons" crowded with people and traffic. The erection of the Magnolia Building, "the" skyscraper of the southwest, symbolized the entry of Dallas into the fraternity of American "big cities".

The Magnolia Building is one of the first representatives of the new style of skyscraper office building launched by New York's Woolworth Building, which supplanted the earlier generation of Chicago-school inspired skyscrapers. The older buildings presented a solid wall to the street and were flat-topped, often with a massive cornice putting a firm horizontal lid on the composition. The newer style would use a solid mass only for the first few stories, breaking up the main shaft with setbacks or by splitting it with a light court. The emphasis was much more vertical with continuous piers rising many stories high. And the skyline treatment was the reverse of the Chicago School's. It became a series of setbacks and successively smaller and higher tower-like elements and pointed forms, so that a building's skyline became a cluster of forms rising to a peak rather than a powerfully horizontal flat lid.

This newer type of skyscraper abandoned the original Sullivanesque or Prairie School ornamentation, and returned to historical styles, often using Gothic ornament as in the Woolworth Building, or classical or Renaissance ornament as in the Magnolia Building.

Not only was the Magnolia Building Dallas' first skyscraper of the "New York type", it seems also to have been the first major architectural commission to a New York Architect. Prior to that time, Dallas' architectural, as well as cultural and economic inspiration was purely Midwestern, drawing on Chicago or St. Louis.

In his Dallas Historic Landmark Survey, prepared for the City of Dallas in 1974, Prof. Blake Alexander points out this earlier dominance of midwestern influence in Dallas, both economically and architecturally. After the arrival of the railroads in the early 1870's, "the connection to St. Louis and Chicago began a relationship with these two midwestern cities which lasted well over half a century and involved cultural as well as economic influences." With Kansas City rounding out the picture, we see a pattern of dominant midwestern influence.

Kansas City gave Dallas the architects of "Old Red", the 1890 courthouse, and the influential city planner, Goerge Kessler. Chicago influences dominated the scene, with the two themes of the earlier Chicago School and the Beaux Arts revival resulting from the Columbian Exposition. Both of these were well represent in Dallas. And Chicago architects designed the Federal Reserve Bank and the Union Terminal. St. Louis architects designed the Adolphus, the Kirby Building and the Dallas City Hall on Harwood.

Alexander points out the end of this iron-clad architectural dominance of the midwest in Dallas by the 1920's, an era grandly announced by the Magnolia Building in 1922. "The decade of the twenties," he says, "brought a wide range of influence and opened many new sources for the architects and their clients. No longer were St. Louis and Chicago the principal sources of architectural style."

The Dallas firm of Lang and Witchell, who were associate architects on the Magnolia Building, had practiced quite successfully in the Chicago School and Prairie School styles. Their association with Bossom on the Magnolia Building may have helped steer them to newer New York-oriented styles, in particular the Art Deco style of which they became the Dallas masters.

The orientation to New York rather than Chicago or St. Louis may also have reflected the orientation of Magnolia itself to New York. Just two years earlier, Standard Oil Co. of New York, Socory, had purchased 45% of Magnolia's ownership, very possibly providing the capital necessary to build their building. And by 1925, Magnolia was the wholly owned producing subsidiary of the New York oil giant.

The Magnolia Building's design quality goes beyond its exemplification of the skyscraper form. Its masterful composition uses the arched "bridge" to unite the otherwise too narrow double shafts. The soaring verticality is punctuated, "slowed down for a breath," as it were, by the skillful use of horizontal string courses and the cornice. Rich and skillfully crafted limestone classical detailing is placed at strategic points in the otherwise simple design, particularly at the base, close to the pedestrian, and at the skyline of the building.

In December 1977, O'Neil Ford writes in a letter describing his observations as a young architect working next door to the Magnolia Building in the 20's:

The Magnolia Building, A. Harris Store (Kirby Bldg.), and the Adolphus Hotel were all around us and all were serious buildings, done by serious architects, and this core of quality made Dallas entirely unique among Texas Cities. From the sidewalk to the roof of the Magnolia Building, there was certain evidence of good design and careful workmanship."

In summary, the Magnolia Building is undoubtedly Dallas' finest example, and one of the nation's finest, of what could be called 1920's New York skyscrapers. Exhibiting the urbanity and wealth of the 1920's, they are a generation of tall buildings employing a U or E-shaped plan, and richly done with careful

historical ornamentation and detailing. And the Magnolia Building is the skyscraper that made Dallas look like the "big city" it had become.

#### Architects Whose Work has Influenced the Development of the City:

Sir Alfred Charles Bossom was a British Architect of considerable renown, who practiced in New York for a number of years because of the opportunity to design skyscrapers which fascinated him. His training, career and influence are well described in the report prepared on the Magnolia Building for the National Register

Sir Alfred Charles Bossom, the building's designer, was an internationally-known architect, author, critic, and statesman. A baron in the British nobility, he served as a conservative member of Parliament until retirement in 1959.

Born in 1881, Bossom trained at St. Thomas School and the Architectural School of the Royal Academy of the Arts. He came to the United States in 1903, already an architect of some reputation, and established offices in New York City, at 680 Fifth Avenue. In a long and successful career, he designed dozens of major buildings across the country, focusing particularly on skyscrapers, a design feature he felt was not suitable for his native England. As his son put it after his death: "He said the light was not right, the temperament of the people was not right and he didn't want to dot up the historical buildings."

In the United States conditions were clearly "right". After arrival, Bossom designed a number of skyscrapers, including the Magnolia Building; the Seaboard National Bank, in New York City; the First National Bank, in Jersey City New Jersey; the American Exchange National Bank, in Dallas; and the Liberty Bank, in Buffalo, New York. He also designed housing for workers at United States Steel, in Pittsburgh, in 1904; headed the restoration planning at Ft. Ticonderoga, in 1908; planned industrial villages for American munitions plants during World War I; and became supervising architect for the United States Shipping Board, in 1917-1918. In England, he introduced prefabricated housing shortly before World War II.

Bossom's designs often followed European patterns, especially Spanish and Italian models. He liked columns and ornate designs. He was particularly proud of the Magnolia Building, which he designed with the intent to establish Dallas as the center of the oil industry in the Southwest. When finished, he exclaimed in his exuberant style: "This is the tallest structure ever built south of Washington, D.C., including the Aztecs!"

Toward the end of his career, Bossom was elected chairman of the Royal Society of the Arts (1957-1959).

He also established the Alfred C. Bossom Traveling Scholarship, awarded annually by the Royal Institute of British Architects for architectural study

in the United States; and the Bossom Lectures and Scholarship, for investigating new processes in building. The latter indicated his interest in modern technological processes, which he often tried to combine with classical forms. In 1952 Bossom received an honorary degree from the University of Pittsburgh. He published widely, including: Building to the Skies; An Architectural Pilgrimage in Old Mexico; A Bird's Eye View of Europe; Some Reminiscences; and numerous articles on architectural and political subjects.

He died in 1965, at age 83.

In Bossom's books one gains further insight into his architectural thinking.

An Architectural Pilgrimage in Old Mexico is essentially a book of photographs intended to popularize the Mexican Spanish Colonial style among American architects. He found it highly flexible and adaptable to the functional arrangements of modern buildings; well suited to the quality of North American natural light, which he found bright, clear, and rather flat and uninteresting; and every bit as American as Colonial or Georgian styles. His fascination with the skylines of buildings shows up in his many captioned examples. They including a number of buildings with ballustraded parapets or parapets with rows of obelisk-like finials which strongly resemble his own skyline treatment atop the Magnolia Building.

His book Building to the Skies was written in 1934 as a hard hitting message to the British public and building industry. The profusely illustrated volume includes his own Magnolia Building and American Exchange Bank Building in Dallas, as well as his Seaboard Bank in New York, the Hibernia Bank in New Orleans (with a composition very similar to the Magnolia's) and several others. But the vast majority of the pictured examples are by other architects, representing most of the significant skyscrapers of the post-Chicago School area. We see the Woolworth Building, the Chrysler Building, the Empire State Building along with four Dallas projects by Lang and Witchell. These four are in the Art Deco style, Dallas Power and Light, Lone Star Gas, the Cotton Exchange, and Southwestern Bell.

He dismisses the earlier and simpler flat-topped skyscrapers of the Chicago School type as "packing crates", excusable only because they were first attempts.

He doesn't even mention Sullivan in a brief discussion of early Chicago skyscraper pioneers. In this he accurately reflects the main stream of leading American architectural thinking of the time. He felt that graduated setbacks and light courts should break up the building mass, and that a tapering, richly detailed skyline should top the skyscraper.

He felt the skyscraper form itself would be extremely undesirable in Britian because of the existing townscape and because of the thin, cool, moist natural light. His message to the British - his lesson to be learned from the skyscraper - was the process. Speedy, efficient, well coordinated, with a cooperative team spirit, unencumbered by multiple regulatory agencies and obsolete building codes, the American skyscraper building process flows along smoothly in his book from site selection through design through financing and construction. He mentions that the Magnolia Building was constructed in 17 months, a feat unheard of in Britian, and not so very common in 1970's America.

Bossom remained an outspoken and expressive personality and a real fan of Texas after he shifted his career efforts from architecture to government as a Member of Parliament. O'Neil Ford recalls in a letter:

"In 1951 while I was on a lecture tour in England I met some ex-Dallasites and they saw to it that I was made a member of the Anglo-Texas Society. Most of them had lived there during the early oil drilling or cotton-buying days and all of them were devoted "Texans". On the occasion of my first meeting with this doughty group, I met their President Lord Bossom. It was he who imported all the tamales and enchiladas . . . for the numerous parties that became big news in London. I had the pleasure of seeing him on several other occasions and until a short time before his death he was the best teller of Tall Texas Tales in England - and he continued to supply the food for all the gatherings."

The associated architects of the Magnolia Building were the outstanding Dallas firm of Lang and Witchell. Blake Alexander, in his Dallas Historic Landmark survey of 1974, says:

"Of those architects who contributed significantly to the quality of the city, one firm is clearly the leader in the number of buildings they built over a very long period of time and in the quality of their work throughout the life of the firm. This is, of course, the firm of Lang and Witchell."

During the first decade of the twentieth century, they were Dallas' outstanding practitioners of the Chicago School and the Prairie School, designing the Sullivanesque Sanger Bros. Store (now El Centro College), the Higginbotham House, and the Higginbotham-Bailey Building.

They proved amazingly adaptable and able to keep abreast of new ideas in American architecture. After their association with New York architect Bossom, they eventually moved to the New York - oriented Art Deco style and became its leading practitioners in Dallas, as they had previously been in the Chicago School styles. Dallas Power and Light, Lone Star Gas, the Cotton Exchange, and Southwestern Bell were noteworthy enough examples to be pictured in Lord Bossom's rather comprehensive book on skyscrapers.

V. Summary of the Building's Significance:

The Magnolia Building's significance is multi-faceted. The building with its Flying Red Horse, has been an established and familiar visual feature of the city, and the focus of community sentiment and public pride for many years. It was the focal point of the famed skyline which symbolized Dallas. And at the pedestrian scale the Magnolia Building was the anchor of the "Akard Street Canyon" pictured on so many postcards. To many people, the historic center of downtown is at the "knuckle" of Akard and Commerce, where the Magnolia Building in its relationship to two other distinctive and historic buildings, the Baker and the Adolphus, forms a unique architectural ensemble. They display the range of Beaux Arts inspired classicism applied to tall buildings which characterized the early twentieth century era of our history.

The Magnolia Building displays much of Dallas' social and economic heritage, as a hub for not only the Texas oil industry, but also the Dallas banking industry which helped develop it. And no group or individual have significantly contributed more dramatically to the growth and development of the City than the Citizen's Council and its organizer, R. L. Thornton, Sr. whose business home was in the Magnolia Building for nearly fifteen years.

The building is significant as the work of architect Lord Alfred Bossom, who not only designed noteworthy skyscrapers around the country, but who also championed the cause of the skyscraper and its streamlined construction process in the U.S. and Britain. Even in its associated architects, the building is distinguished, for they were the innovative Dallas firm of Lang and Witchell, whom Blake Alexander calls the outstanding Dallas firm of the period.

The building embodies elements of architectural design, detail, materials, and craftsmanship which represented the best and most modern of their era, the more valuable because of their rarity today.

The skyscraper caught the imagination of the American people and expressed its spirit as has no other architectural type or specimen before or since. And the Magnolia Building is one of the outstanding examples of the skyscraper's distinguishing characteristics. Its soaring verticality and its renown as "tallest" for so many years made it "the" skyscraper of the southwest. And although Bossom's design approach is quite different from Louis Sullivan's, he very successfully carries out Sullivan's principal that tall buildings must have a clearly expressed base, shaft, and top. Unlike so many of today's highrises, which seem to be all shaft with neither top nor bottom, Bossom's composition has a masterfully designed base and skyline.

As a beloved and familiar landmark, as a portrayal of our economic and civic history, and as a masterful example of the architecture of its era, the Magnolia

Building is an irreplaceable part of Dallas' heritage, and worthy of designation as a historic landmark.

CITY OF DALLAS:

Historic Landmark Preservation Committee  
Department of Urban Planning  
May 17, 1978