

**Dallas Landmark Commission  
Landmark Nomination Form**

**1. Name**

**historic:** Republic Bank Tower  
**and/or common:** Republic Center  
**date:** 1954

**2. Location**

**address:** 300 N. Ervay  
**location/neighborhood:** Central Business District  
**block:** 477 **lot:** 3,4,5\* **land survey:** \_\_\_\_\_ **tract size:** 42000s/f  
*\* Please refer to Exhibits B & C*

**3. Current Zoning**

**current zoning:** CA-1(A) - CP

**4. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>	<u>_____</u> museum
<u>_____</u> district	<u>_____</u> public	<u>_____</u> occupied	<u>_____</u> agricultural	<u>_____</u> park
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <u>_____</u> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <u>_____</u> private	<u>_____</u> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <u>_____</u> commercial	<u>_____</u> residence
<u>_____</u> structure	<u>_____</u> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <u>_____</u> work in progress	<u>_____</u> educational	<u>_____</u> religious
<u>_____</u> site	<b>Public</b>	<b>Accessibility</b>	<u>_____</u> entertainment	<u>_____</u> scientific
<u>_____</u> object	<b>Acquisition</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <u>_____</u> yes: restricted	<u>_____</u> government	<u>_____</u> transportation
	<u>_____</u> in progress	<u>_____</u> yes: unrestricted	<u>_____</u> industrial	<u>_____</u> other, specify
	<u>_____</u> being considered	<u>_____</u> no	<u>_____</u> military	<u>_____</u>

**5. Ownership**

**Current Owner:** Four Point Star LP  
**Contact:** Sina Mahfar **Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Address:** 175 Great Neck Rd. #404 **City:** Great Neck **State:** NY **Zip:** 11021

**6. Form Preparation**

**Date:** 09/01/2003  
**Name & Title:** Jay Firsching, Preservation Specialist  
**Organization:** ARCHITEXAS – Architecture, Planning and Historic Preservation, Inc.  
**Contact:** Same **Phone:** 214-748-4561

**7. Representation on Existing Surveys**

Alexander Survey (citywide) local state national X National Register (pending)  
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: Republic Bank  
significant later owner(s):

**9. Construction Dates**

original: 1954  
alterations/additions: 1965 – Tower 2 addition. 1981-Extension 3. 1990c Building abated on interior resulting on major interior modifications.

**10. Architect**

original construction: Harrison & Abramovitz with Gill & Harrell  
alterations/additions: 1965 Harrell and Hamilton Architect; 1980 Omniplan Architects (Harrell and Hamilton); 1990 RTKL/Corgan; 1998 Architexas.

**11. Site Features**

natural: No notable historic natural features are extant or known.  
urban design: None

**12. Physical Description**

Condition, check one:

     excellent  
     good  
X fair

     deteriorated  
     ruins  
     unexposed

     unaltered  
     altered

Check one:

X original site  
     moved(date     )

**Description:**

(This information and portions of the Statement of Significance were drawn from Texas Historical Commission National Register Files USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form, Dallas Downtown Historic District, 1888-1957 (2002, pending))

In the 1950's Dallas entered the mainstream of American architecture with a series of new buildings that both set the stage for the city's fascination with and explored modern architecture in larger structures. (See Continuation Sheet)

**Description continued:**

Republic National Bank Building (1954): The first major downtown postwar office was the 36-story office building and adjoining eight-story banking pavilion for Republic National Bank.

The Republic Bank Building was designed by Wallace K. Harrison, Harrison and Abramovitz Architects of New York City with Gill and Harrell (of Dallas) as associate architects. In 1952, Harrison and Abramovitz had extensive experience in the design of high-rise office buildings and had recently completed the design of the United National headquarters in New York City. They had also recently completed the Alcoa Tower in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which utilized this same exterior aluminum panel system. The Alcoa Tower, still an important presence on the city's skyline, was revolutionary in its use of the glass and aluminum curtain wall system. Republic Bank was the second building to include this technology. The site was the block surrounded by Ervay, Pearl, Pacific, with other commercial structures, including the Medical Arts Building, to the east along St. Paul.

The building is comprised of two masses - an eight-story banking lobby and 36-story office tower set on this lower mass (or base) and with five basement levels. This tower portion of the building occupies the northwestern western half of the block, and is considered to be a 'prototypical fifties building' (David Dillon, Dallas Architecture 1936 - 1986), rising straight from the street to a flat top, with minimal decoration. The upper two floors of the eight-story base are set back slightly from the street line, giving the pedestrian the feeling that this building is at a more personal scale than it really is. At the time it was constructed, this was the tallest building in the Southwest.

The exterior of both portions of the building is clad in a skin of square aluminum embossed panels. As an example of architecture influencing a company's decisions, the embossed star on the exterior aluminum panel was designed to reduce deflection of the panel (oil canning) that affects truly flat panels; Republic liked this star design so much that they later adopted it as their corporate logo.

Fenestration consists of a regular pattern of bands of single-pane, operable casement windows, with the exception of the Pacific Avenue façade which contains a series of evenly distributed single-hung aluminum windows surrounded by a framework of decorative marble panels which provides visual relief to the building and orients the visitor the original main building lobby.

There is a considerable amount of storefront glazing on the first two floors of the Pacific Avenue façade at the lobby, originally allowing pedestrians a view into the modern interiors of the bank. At street level, a series of glass and aluminum revolving doors provided access to the lobby. The surrounds for the doors and the original window glazing remain in place, but the doors themselves have been replaced with hinged, solid glass doors.

The Ervay façade is almost entirely devoid of windows above street level. The eight-story section of the building features balcony setbacks as described earlier. At street level, storefront windows provide views into retail spaces. Windows are set upon a granite base. The street level façade has been reconfigured, having originally featured a wide setback which has been somewhat reduced, and the original black granite base had been replaced with pink Texas granite. All doors on his façade are modern, the original revolving doors at the primary lobby entrance having been replaced with solid-panel glass doors. An original, large decorative 'eyebrow' accents this primary entry point.

**Description continued:**

On the high-rise tower, an internal fire stair running continuously through the building is ventilated by a series of aluminum louvers running in a regular pattern down the center of the tower façade. At the base of the high-rise tower is a series of flat metal panels penetrated by a single fire exit door. The original lobby entry to the tower was located at the corner of the corner of Ervay and Bryan Streets and featured a revolving door and storefront windows. This entrance had been replaced with storefront matching that on the rest of the building.

The Ervay side of the tower features the building's most notable architectural element, a large aluminum-clad spire. The spire is triangular in plan, tapering inward from bottom to top. The base of the tower features three legs, the largest of which engages the face of the building's top seven floors. The remaining two legs angle outward to rest on the building's roof. The form of the spire is clearly responsible for the fact that it is known informally as 'the rocket'.

The Bryan Street façade features the building's typical historic fenestration on the upper floors and modern street-level storefronts matching those on the remainder of the building. The original parking garage entry, near the east end of the street-level façade, has been replaced with a storefront due to alterations to the underground parking, though the ramp beyond is still in place. A new entry to the parking garage exists farther to the east in a location that was originally the entry point for armored cars servicing the bank.

The easternmost and southernmost façades of the 36-story high-rise tower feature typical fenestration and details. The regular alternating bands of embossed panels and windows give a dramatic effect to these façades.

At the time of construction, the building forms reflected the programmatic needs of the bank with large, open banking floors in the first eight levels accommodating the banking lobby, customer services, bank offices, an auditorium, and flexible lease space giving room for expansion of the bank's offices. The street level facades allowed for the inclusion of some retail. Historically, the site also accommodated drive-in (and walk-up) banking tellers at the corner of Live Oak and St. Paul Streets. These have since been removed with subsequent additions to the building.

**Floor Plan**

The eight-story portion of Republic Bank was designed primarily to house bank-related activities. Below grade, several levels of parking garage existed below the first basement. This basement contained the bank's vaults, customer service areas for safety deposit boxes, and an unusual network of conveying systems for transporting money to and from various locations in the bank. The first floor contained two primary lobbies, one for the high-rise tower, and one for the banking center. The remainder of the first floor was comprised of parking ramps, an armored car area, and retail space.

The second and third floors housed the impressive two-story banking lobby with its serpentine balcony. Offices were located adjacent to the elevator lobbies within the tower section of the building. Levels 4-6 were a mix of office space for Republic Bank, and lease space. This left the bank with the ability to grow and eventually occupy the entirety of the eight-story section of the building. Level 7 contained an impressive structural element, a massive concrete truss system which supported the suspended floors below.

## *Continuation Sheet*

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### Description continued:

On the eighth floor, a flexible meeting area was constructed with movable partitions and a fully appointed auditorium.

The tower itself (floors 9-34) consisted of shell space surrounding a central core of elevators, service areas, fire stairs and restrooms. The uppermost floors contained mechanical and elevator equipment.

Spatially, the floorplan of the building remains largely intact today. Vaults and lobbies remain in their original locations, though much of the bank-specific infrastructure, such as conveying systems and armored-car areas have been removed or abandoned. All interior plaster has been removed in previous abatement projects.

### Site Features

There are no historic site features. The sidewalk is made of concrete along Pacific Street, Granite pavers on Ervay Street and brick pavers on Bryan Street.

### Physical Condition/Integrity

Republic Bank still stands as a dramatic Dallas icon. The exterior remains largely intact with modifications only to the street-level storefronts. The building exterior is in good condition, but the building's operable single-pane windows are somewhat deteriorated. A study of the feasibility of re-gasketing the windows is currently underway.

The floorplates of the tower itself have been abated and consist of shell space. The 8-story mezzanine, is occupied by a combination of commercial tenants and parking areas. The most significant areas of the mezzanine, the entry and banking lobbies, remain spatially intact, though all plaster has been removed. Major details, such as the banking lobby's serpentine balcony and marble details, also remain intact.

### Additions

Republic Tower (1965): This 52-story new office building, called Republic Tower, was constructed at the northeast corner of the site; the grand opening was held January 1965. This 52-story second tower also had a base that aligned with the eight-story base associated with the 1954 Bank Building. Matching aluminum panels were used on this new tower, making the Republic Bank Building and the Republic Bank Tower, although different masses and heights, form a cohesive office complex. The lower levels were intertwined with interior lobby and corridors.

With the completion of this second tower, the Republic complex occupied three-fourths of the city block, and contained 1,700,000 square feet of banking and office space. Architects for this new tower were Harrell and Hamilton of Dallas.

Addition (1981): In 1978, the last remaining structure on the block - the Medical Arts building was demolished and an 8-story addition was made to the Republic complex. This addition provided additional lobby and office space for the complex, and was designed to complement the structures. With this addition the Republic complex now occupies the entire block. Omniplan (Harrell and Hamilton's firm under a new name) were the architects for this addition.

## *Continuation Sheet*

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### **Description continued:**

The aluminum cladding at this new addition is similar to the panels used on the exterior, although after 25 years, there is a slight difference in the original color.

Republic complex was closed in the mid 1990's; it has recently undergone a renovation to rehabilitate the interior public spaces, and to remove hazardous materials (primarily asbestos) from the building. This project resulted in the removal of most interior partition walls and ceilings. Fortunately, the floors and decorative elements such as the travertine and marble finishes, remain intact and can be restored. The original office tower and banking building are now very much in the condition indicated by the original 1950s construction drawings which show the upper floors as blank floorplates, ready for finish out as the tenants saw fit.

The Republic Bank building retains much architectural integrity - exterior changes have been limited to storefront and entry door changes, and the loss of the drive-in teller areas. Although the additions were made in 1965 and 1981, these were designed in association with the original architect to be complementary to the historic building and do not detract from its integrity in setting, feeling and association. In summary, the building retains a remarkably high degree of integrity in its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

### **'Modern' Architecture**

Modern Architecture is defined as 'the term used beginning in the early 20th century to describe a movement that combines functionalism with aesthetics ideals that include rejection of historical design precepts and styles' as defined in Dictionary of Building Preservation, Ward Bucher, editor (Publisher, Preservation Press and John Wiley & Sons, New York; 1996.) This term is typically used to describe buildings from the earlier decades of the twentieth century thru the present that incorporate full expression of structure and materials, new emphasis on interior uses and spaces (with interior uses often expressed in the exterior form), strong relationship between indoor and outdoor space, and buildings that appear lighter, more buoyant.

Identifying and recognizing modern architecture has been a challenge since the end of World War II, at both local and national arenas. At the American Institute of Architects' annual convention in 1948 (held in Grand Rapids, Michigan) a committee was established that would study the creation of an honor awards program that would recognize current work, and bring suggestions back to the Institute for such; this was adopted by resolution. The AIA Honor Awards program was created, and in 1949, held its' first jury for the sole purpose of recognizing modern architecture. Some of the early projects thus recognized included Lever House (1952), Connecticut General Life Insurance (1958), Zeckendorf Plaza which included a Hilton Hotel (1959), Pepsi-Cola Building (1961). Of interest is the Oak Cliff Savings and Loan building in Oak Cliff, by Prinz and Brooks which received an Honor Award in 1954; this illustrates Dallas' embrace of modernism during the 1950's.

Those buildings in Dallas that are designed in this genre typically have many of the characteristics: curtain-wall exterior cladding, horizontal or ribbon windows, balance and regularity in the building form, absence of ornamentation (or ornamentation through materials), flat roof, smooth and uniform wall surfaces, and windows set flush with walls. Often the design and materials at the first floor relate to the activity at this level, while the materials at the upper levels are different.

### **13. Historical Significance**

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

#### **Statement of Significance:**

The Republic Bank Building (1954) is significant as a contributing building to the Dallas Downtown Historic District, as are its two major compatible additions (1965, 1981). As the first major downtown post-war office building in Dallas, it is one of the most visible, architecturally important and recognizable buildings in the city. It has additional significance due to its association with Fred F. Florence, long-time president of Republic Bank and distinguished civic leader. The building is also important for its association with the original tower's architects, Harrison and Abramovitz of New York with Gill and Harrell of Dallas. Harrell also designed the building's 1965 and 1981 additions. A formidable influence on the post-war skyline of Dallas, the building is distinguished for the large decorative mast atop the original tower and its exterior skin of aluminum panels, each embossed with a star. The building's banking lobby boasts marble and terrazzo finishes with 50s-modern detailing including a massive serpentine balcony decorated in gold leaf. The Property is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the area of economics for its association with the history of mid-to-late-20<sup>th</sup> century banking in Dallas and Republic Bank, once the largest bank in Texas. It is also eligible under Criterion B at the local level as the property is strongly associated with long-time president of Republic Bank, Fred F. Florence. The building is also nominated under Criteria C in the area of architecture at the national level of significance for its association with architects Harrison and Abramovitz, and at the local level for its association with George Foster Harrell.

Dallas gained prominence and influence as a banking center during the first half of the twentieth century as a result of the location of the Federal Reserve Branch in the city in 1914 as well as the East and West Texas oil booms during the 1920s and 1930s. Banking industry leaders became some of the most powerful and influential among the city's social, political and economic elite. Republic Bank was founded in 1920 by University of Texas Law School graduate, Eugene DeBogory. However, it was guided to eventually become the state's largest banking institution by Fred L. Florence.

#### **The Banking Industry in Dallas**

Historians have noted that, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Dallas had a perpetual currency problem. The succession of political changes -- government under the Republic of Texas, the United States, the Confederacy and then Reconstruction -- contributed to the lack of circulating money in the somewhat isolated North Texas community. Republic of Texas paper currency had no standard value after statehood, and Louisiana and Mississippi banknotes were usually accepted only when -- and if -- they were endorsed by Texas businesses. Mexican silver dollars were also accepted in trade in Dallas before the Civil War, and all agreed that the most acceptable rate of exchange was in "hard money."

The self sufficient and suspicious early residents and business owners on the North Texas prairie formed significant political opposition to the chartering of banks. Early Dallas resident John Beeman was perhaps the only local businessman to operate a small money-lending business, loaning cash at 5 per cent in 1850, which rose to 12 per cent during the panic of 1857.<sup>1</sup> As the Confederacy unraveled in 1864 and 1865, both U.S. and Confederate currency deflated, so cash was scarce and fairly worthless, resulting in "much hardship."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Writers Project, *WPA Dallas Guide and History*, 1942, p. 161

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

## *Continuation Sheet*

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The first private banking house in Dallas was opened by T.C. Jordan and E.G. Mayes sometime before 1868 with capital of \$20,000 in gold (it was Mayes' cash but the bank carried Jordan's name). Locating on the west side of the courthouse square, Jordan charged 5 per cent interest, or 2 per cent on collateral of gilt edged securities. Meanwhile, a second private banking concern was established in 1868 by Col. William H. Gaston and A.C. Camp, with a dry goods box as a teller counter and the founders' pockets as safe deposit vaults.

In 1873, Col. Christopher Columbus Slaughter and partner W.E. Hughes took control of the first private bank, Jordan & Co., and reorganized the business as the City Bank of Dallas. The City Bank re-opened with \$50,000 in capital at the corner of Commerce and Market Streets. Reorganized again under Hughes in 1880 as the City National Bank, it absorbed the private banking house of the Gannon Brothers (1881), the Dallas National Bank (1886), the State National Bank (1894), Trinity National Bank (1909), Tenison National Bank (1920), and in 1929 merged with the American Exchange National Bank to become the powerful 1<sup>st</sup> National Bank of Dallas.

Gaston and Camp also pursued various mergers and acquisitions in the latter part of the century. Merged with the Exchange Bank in 1881 and becoming the National Exchange Bank in 1887, the financial institution continued to expand and was renamed American National Bank in 1905, eventually acquiring the City National Bank to become 1<sup>st</sup> National Bank. Thus, the first two Dallas banks, through a complicated but directly traceable line of descent, became a single powerful institution: the 1<sup>st</sup> National Bank of Dallas.<sup>3</sup>

The arrival of the railroads in Dallas in 1872 and 1873 brought swift economic expansion, as the city's opportunities as a trade center were significantly augmented. Four more private banks were established during the 1870s, including the first chartered as a state bank: the Dallas County Bank, opened in 1873.

By 1885 there were six banks operating in the city, and in 1889 the National Bank of Commerce opened, which would eventually be the only bank in Dallas to retain its original identity well into the next century, operating under the same name from its founding until 1940. The State of Texas finally established a bank charter system that guaranteed deposits in 1905, causing additional expansion and realignment of institutions. Dallas, having been designated by the state as a reserve location in 1902, by 1905 had six national banks, two state banks, 20 private banks and one trust bank.<sup>4</sup>

The opening of the 11<sup>th</sup> District Federal Reserve branch in Dallas in 1914, the result of a strenuous campaign by Dallas bankers and other financial leaders to have the bank located in their city, centralized many banking functions, including the clearance and collection of checks and provision of currency, for hundreds of member banks in Texas and parts of Louisiana, Oklahoma, Arizona and New Mexico. Perhaps more than any other influence, the location of the Federal Reserve branch in Dallas finally and firmly established the city as a major banking center for the entire southwest, a role it would play until the 1980s.

The advent of the Depression temporarily halted many of the plans for expansion in Dallas. By the end of 1931, 18,500 unemployed people applied for relief. Retail sales in the city fell from \$189 million in 1929

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid p. 162

<sup>4</sup> Ibid p. 164

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to \$130 million by 1935, and building permits plummeted \$3.5 million between just 1930 and 1931.<sup>5</sup> But the effects of the Depression would halt the city's growth only temporarily. The businessmen of Dallas formed a collective leadership that, while they competed fiercely with one another for profits, they realized that civic welfare and urban progress were shared responsibilities that all would profit from eventually. Originally founded to secure the council-manager form of government, the Citizens Charter Association became a political organization of businessmen who worked to get the right men elected to office. But they eventually also evolved into an organization that promoted good citizenship as well as good government as they worked diligently to promote the City of Dallas world-wide.

The restrictive credit policy of the Dallas branch of the Federal Reserve Bank, which controlled discount and interest rates and loans to member banks, as well as setting credit policies, is credited with preventing any more bank failures than occurred in the Dallas area during the onslaught of the Depression.<sup>5</sup> In 1930 the American Exchange National Bank merged with City National Bank to form First National Bank of Dallas with Nathan Adams as its president.<sup>6</sup> The merger made First National Bank the largest bank in the South, insuring its survival during the Depression years. Always interested in diversifying its economy, local bankers branched into the oil business. Dallas became a financial and legal center for oil with distribution companies and manufacturing plants for oil well equipment. Nathan Adams, president of First National Bank of Dallas, and Fred Florence, president of Republic National Bank and Trust Company, played pivotal roles in accepting underground oil and natural gas reserves as collateral for the financing of large-scale production.<sup>7</sup> As a result, Dallas became the financial center for the oil and gas industry, not only for Texas, but the surrounding states of Louisiana and Oklahoma as well. Although considered gamblers at the time, it was perhaps the best banking decision ever made.

The City of Dallas received a phenomenal economic boost during the Depression years from the influx of federal dollars for relief and civic improvement projects. But even more importantly, in 1934 Dallas was selected by the Texas Centennial Commission as the site of the central exposition for the state's centennial celebration. Robert L. Thornton, president of the Dallas Chamber of Commerce, led a group of Dallas businessmen intent on obtaining the state's approval of Dallas as the site for the exposition. Local businessmen formed the Texas Centennial Central Exposition Corporation with the intent of securing Dallas as the site for this important event. The presidents of the three most important banks in town composed the executive committee of this organization: R. L. Thornton of Mercantile National Bank, Nathan Adams of First National Bank of Dallas, and Fred Florence of Republic National Bank.<sup>8</sup> The City of Dallas offered the state fairgrounds and its buildings, valued at \$4 million, while the business community provided \$2 million and a bond package overwhelmingly passed, even in the midst of the Depression, authorizing another \$3 million.<sup>9</sup> Although Dallas lacked the historical charisma of its competing cities of

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5 Harvey Graff, *The Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, Application for Local Landmark Designation*, City of Dallas (1976).

6 Joan Perez, "Adams, Nathan," in *The New Handbook of Texas* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1996) vol. 1, p. 24.

7 Joan Perez, "Adams, Nathan," in *The New Handbook of Texas* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1996) vol. 1, p. 24 and Joan Perez, "Florence, Fred," in *The New Handbook of Texas* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1996) vol. 2, p. 1035.

8 Kenneth Ragsdale, *The Year America Discovered Texas: Centennial '36* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1987) 83.

9 O'The bond package passed by a vote of 5,520 to 1,088. When investors could only sell \$1.8 million in bonds, 28 Dallas businessmen underwrote the additional necessary expenses of the fair. Fairbanks, 93.

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Houston and San Antonio, Thornton and the others sold the city on their image of "progress" rather than history. Moreover, the city possessed the necessary infrastructure to support an endeavor such as a world's fair. In particular, the city had an incredibly diverse network of transportation that included eleven railroads, four electric interurbans, fifteen bus lines, forty-one freight lines, ten airlines, eleven state highways, and five federal highways.<sup>10</sup>

With the discovery of oil in East Texas and the city's capture of the state's Centennial Exposition, Dallas weathered the Depression years better than most Texas cities. Although no oilfields were discovered within the Dallas area, the Dallas bankers were the first to lend oil operators money on oil reserves still in the ground. Dallas emerged from the Depression as an important southern metropolis with a regional dominance in wholesaling, retailing, banking and insurance. By 1940, in fact, it had the third highest average per capita income in the nation.<sup>11</sup>

Following on the heels of the Depression, shortages of construction materials during World War II continued the slowdown in the construction industry with virtually no buildings constructed in the Central Business District during the war years, except for the Mercantile Bank Building (phase one design by Walter Ahlschlager and Donald Nelson). Completed in 1942, it may have been one of the few skyscrapers built during the war years as bank president R. L. Thornton managed to continue to receive steel shipments, earning it the name of "Dallas' Battleship." The Mercantile Bank Building ushered in a new era - and a new image - for the banks of Dallas. Rising thirty-one floors and crowned by a modernistic clock spire, Mercantile became not only the tallest building on the Dallas skyline, it also became the most modern building on the Dallas skyline. In the future, Dallas bankers would compete to build the tallest and the most modern buildings within the Central Business District.

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<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Ragsdale, *The Year America Discovered Texas: Centennial '36* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1987) 82.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Fairbanks, "Dallas in the 1940s: The Challenges and Opportunities of Defense Mobilization," in *Urban Texas: Politics and Development*, Char Miller and Heywood Sanders, editors (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1990) 141.

**The Rise of Fred F. Florence and Republic Bank**

Fred Farrel Florence (1891-1960) was born Fred Fromowitz in New York City in 1891. His family moved to Texas a year later where Florence attended public school through the tenth grade. At age fifteen he began work as a janitor at the First National Bank in Rusk. He advanced to assistant cashier by 1911 and moved on to positions as bookkeeper at the American Exchange Bank in Dallas (1911), cashier at the First State Bank in Ratcliff (1912), and vice president (1912), then president (1915) of the Alto State Bank. He served as bank president in Alto until 1920 and served as the town's mayor from 1919-20. In 1920 he moved to Dallas to become first vice president of the Guaranty Bank and Trust Company, which became Republic National Bank and Trust Company in 1922 and was renamed Republic National Bank of Dallas in 1937.<sup>12</sup> Republic completed and occupied the city's tallest building in 1926 (1309 Main Street, now known as the Davis Building, a City of Dallas Landmark). Shortly thereafter the company established a separate bank to service farm and ranch loans. Toward that end, Fred Florence arranged for the acquisition of North Texas National Bank in 1929. Under his leadership, both banks managed to survive and grow through the Great Depression. He is also credited with helping other regional banks by investing in them during the banking crisis of 1933. In 1937 the Republic National Bank and Trust Company was renamed Republic National Bank of Dallas. Under Florence's administration, Republic took the lead in cotton financing and investment in the relatively new Texas oil market.<sup>13</sup>

Under Mr. Florence's management, Republic National Bank took a leading role in establishing new investment strategies and relationships. For example, Florence organized a wholly owned subsidiary, the Howard Corporation, in 1946 to receive the petroleum properties of Republic National in exchange for its authorized capital stock. The Howard subsidiary was invested heavily in foreign stocks, banks, shopping centers and undeveloped property and by 1948 Republic had grown to be largest bank in Texas. Howard's stock was transferred to a separate trust in 1955, but in 1973 the Federal Reserve Bank required Republic to divest itself of the Howard Corporation's non-banking assets in order to form a holding company known as the Republic of Texas Corporation.<sup>14</sup>

By the early 1950s, Republic had grown to a 60 million-dollar company and had outgrown its Main Street office tower. The Republic National Bank, designed in 1954 by Harrison and Abramovitz of New York, rose 34-stories along the northern edge of the city's old east-west grid. The anodized aluminum panels with an embossed star design became the bank's own logo. Fred Florence, chairman of the bank, exceeded the height of his competitor's Robert Thornton's Mercantile Bank. Florence, however, included portraits of his competitors, Robert Thornton and Nathan Adams, in his new boardroom.<sup>15</sup>

By the 1980s Republic had invested itself in significant loans to the real estate industry in Texas. With the crash of the Texas real estate market, Republic bank found itself in deep financial trouble. In an effort to offset losses, Republic merged with rival Interfirst Corporation to become First Republic Bank Corporation. Unfortunately, Interfirst was in no better condition than Republic. The new corporation failed within twelve months resulting in the biggest bank failure in US history.<sup>16</sup>

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12 "FLORENCE, FRED FARREL." The Handbook of Texas Online. <<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/FF/ff114.html>> [Accessed Mon Aug 19 9:50:43 US/Central 2002 ].

13 "REPUBLIC BANK." The Handbook of Texas Online. <<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/RR/cor1.html>> [Accessed Mon Aug 19 9:41:51 US/Central 2002 ].

14 Ibid

15 Ibid

16 Ibid

**Continuation Sheet**

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Fred Florence was president from 1929 until 1957, when he became chairman of the executive committee with the duties of chief executive officer. Under his direction deposits at his bank increased from \$1 million to almost \$900 million. Florence's influence was broad both locally and nationally. His credits include the following<sup>17</sup>:

*Business Directorships*

Lone Star Steel, Chairman

Bond Stores

Wyatt Industries

MKT Railroad Company

Dallas Power and Light

Austin Bridge Company

Hotel Baker

Sanger Brothers

Neiman Marcus

*Business Association Memberships, Committees and Commissions<sup>18</sup>*

Dallas Joint Stock Land Bank, executive committee (and vice president)

American Bankers Association (1934)

National Defense and War Loan Committee (1941-44)

Credit Policy Commission of the American Bankers Association (1951-54)

American Bankers Association, vice president (1954), president (1955)

Texas Bankers Association, president (1956)

Texas Mid-Continent Oil and Gas Association, Director

*Other Activities and Memberships<sup>19</sup>*

Texas Centennial Central Exposition, president (1936)

Greater Texas Pan-American Exposition, president (1937)

State Fair of Texas, board member

Dallas Civic Federation, member

Dallas Citizens Council, member

Dallas Clearing House, member

Dallas Chamber of Commerce, member

Southern Methodist University Executive Council, member

Southwestern Medical Foundation, member and trustee

National Merit Scholarship Corporation, director

Southwest Research Institute, director

Research and Educational Foundation, director

Hebrew Union College, trustee

St. Mark's School of Texas, trustee

Texas Research Foundation Executive and Endowment Committees, vice president, treasurer, and member

Dallas United Charities, board member

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17 "FLORENCE, FRED FARREL." The Handbook of Texas Online. <<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/FF/ff114.html>> [Accessed Mon Aug 19 9:50:43 US/Central 2002].

18 "FLORENCE, FRED FARREL." The Handbook of Texas Online. <<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/FF/ff114.html>> [Accessed Mon Aug 19 9:50:43 US/Central 2002].

19 Ibid

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National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, Dallas County chapter, life chairman  
American Cancer Society, Texas division, treasurer  
March of Dimes, campaign chairman  
Temple Emanu-El, director  
Jewish Federation for Social Service, president  
United Palestine Fund for Dallas and Texas, chairman (1924)  
Combined Campaign for American Reform Judaism, national chairman (1960-61)  
Camp Fire Girls, national director  
Boy Scouts of America, director. In 1956 President Dwight D. Eisenhower named him chairman of the banking committee of the  
People to People program, Banking Committee chairman, appointed by D. D. Eisenhower  
St Paul Hospital, board chairman and trustee  
In addition to these activities, he was appointed by Governors Ross S. Sterling and Miriam A. Ferguson, and President Franklin Roosevelt to serve on various recovery and relief boards during the Great Depression. Florence established the Florence Foundation in December 1956 to support charitable, religious, educational, scientific, and recreational projects "for the benefit of humanity."<sup>20</sup>  
*Honors and Awards*<sup>21</sup>  
Linz Award (1944) for civic contributions to Dallas  
Dallas Distinguished Salesman Award (1954)  
Kudos College award of the Dallas Advertising League (1955)  
Dallas Press Club Headliner of the Year for 1956  
Greater Dallas Planning Council Distinguished Civic Service Award (1960)  
Westminster College at Fulton, Missouri, honorary doctorate (1955)  
Oklahoma City University, honorary doctorate (1956)  
Texas Technological College, honorary doctorate (1960)  
Catholic Benemerenti Medal as general chairman of the building campaign for St. Paul Hospital (1959)  
Florence was a thirty-second-degree Mason, a Shriner, and a Democrat. On February 21, 1928, he married Helen Lefkowitz; they adopted two children. He died in a Dallas hospital of hepatitis on December 25, 1960.<sup>22</sup>

**Harrison and Abramovitz**

Harrison and Abramovitz were prolific designers of mid t high-rise buildings with most of their commissions being constructed in New York and surrounding areas. Republic Bank is their only building constructed west of the Mississippi. Their impressive list of accomplishments includes:<sup>23</sup>

Erastus Corning Tower, Albany (1973)  
Socony-Mobil Building, NYC (1956)  
Continental Can Building, NYC (1961)

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.skyscrapers.com>

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Three Mellon Center, Pittsburgh (1951)  
New York Hilton Hotel, NYC (1963)  
Tour GAN, Courbevoie, FR (1974)  
AXA Financial Center, NYC (1963)  
Tower at Erieview, Cleveland (1964)  
National City Tower, Louisville (1972)  
Fifth Third Center, Cincinnati (1969)  
Regional Enterprise Tower, Pittsburgh (1953)  
Westinghouse Tower, Pittsburgh (1970)  
1 Empire State Plaza, Albany (1973)  
2 Empire State Plaza, Albany (1973)  
4 Empire State Plaza, Albany (1973)  
Bank One Plaza, Milwaukee (1961)  
Hytower, Toledo (1970)  
Erie County Savings Bank, Buffalo (1969)  
Four Gateway Center, Pittsburgh (1960)  
Springs Building, NYC (1962)  
300 Saint Paul Place Building, Baltimore (1957)  
LaGuardia Airport ATC Tower, NYC (1963)  
Morningside Gardens I, NYC (1957)  
Morningside Gardens II, NYC (1957)  
Morningside Gardens III, NYC (1957)  
Morningside Gardens IV, NYC (1957)  
Morningside Gardens V, NYC (1957)  
Morningside Gardens VI, NYC (1957)  
Phoenix Mutual Life Building, Hartford (1964)  
601 Grant Street, Pittsburgh (1958)  
Sloan House Nurses' Residence, NYC (1962)

**George Foster Harrell (1906-1980)**

George Harrell was a Virginia native and grew up in Rocky Mount. He received his bachelor's degree in architecture from the Georgia Institute of Technology, and his master's of architecture from the University of Pennsylvania, graduating in 1931. After beginning his practice in New York City, Harrell moved to Dallas where he continued his work. In 1950, he became a partner in Gill and Harrell, Architects, and in Harrell and Hamilton in 1956. With Gill and Harrell, he partnered with Harrison and Abramovitz of New York in the design and construction of Republic Center. His firm designed subsequent additions to the building in the 1960s and 80s.

Other commissions include:

U.S. Steel Building, New York World's Fair (1939)  
Ouachita National Bank and Parking Structure, Monroe, Louisiana (1958)  
Fairmont Hotel, Dallas (1969)

Harrell was president of the Dallas chapter of the American Institute of Architects and the Texas Society of

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Architects, director of the Texas Research League and the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, and chairman of the City of Dallas Urban Task Force. He died on March 17, 1980.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> "HARRELL, GEORGE FOSTER." The Handbook of Texas Online. <<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/HH/fhazq.html>> [Accessed Wed Sep 4 10:59:38 US/Central 2002 ].

## ***14. Bibliography***

See individual citations in text of report.

**15. Attachments**

*District or Site Map*

*Site Plan*

*Photos (historic & current)*

*Additional descriptive material*

*Footnotes*

*Other:* \_\_\_\_\_



LANDMARK DESIGNATION FORM  
CRITERIA FOR ELIGIBILITY

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Republic National Bank Building

**History, heritage and culture:** Represents the historical development, ethnic heritage or cultural characteristics of the city, state, or county.

**Historic event:** Location of or association with the site of a significant historic event.

**Significant persons:** Identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the city, state, or county.

**Architecture:** Embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, landscape design, method of construction, exceptional craftsmanship, architectural innovation, or contains details which represent folk or ethnic art.

**Architect or master builder:** Represents the work of an architect, designer or master builder whose individual work has influenced the development of the city, state or country.

**Historic context:** Relationship to other distinctive buildings, sites, or areas which are eligible for preservation based on historic, cultural, or architectural characteristics.

**Unique visual feature:** Unique location of singular physical characteristics representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community or the city that is a source of pride or cultural significance.

**Archeological:** Archeological or paleontological value in that it has produced or can be expected to produce data affecting theories of historic or prehistoric interest.

**National and state recognition:** Eligible of or designated as a National Historic Landmark, Recorded Texas Historic Landmark, State Archeological Landmark, American Civil Engineering Landmark, or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

**Historic education:** Represents an era of architectural, social, or economic history that allows an understanding of how the place or area was used by past generations.