

**Dallas Landmark Commission
Landmark Nomination Form**

1. Name

historic: LaFrance Building

and/or common:

date: 6/6/97

2. Location

address: 3600 Commerce Street

location/neighborhood: Deep Ellum/Fair Park area

block: 1/820 lot: 7, 8, 9 & 10

land survey: John Gigsby

tract size:

3. Current Zoning

current zoning: Deep Ellum P.D.D. 269

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: City Pockets, Ltd.

Contact: c/o John Miller

Phone: (214) 748-1999

Address: 3200 Main Street, Suite 1.3

City: Dallas

State: TX

Zip: 75226

6. Form Preparation

Date: 6/16/97

Name & Title: John W. Miller (Historic research by Kate Singleton)

Organization: John W. Miller Company

Fax: (214) 748-8643

Contact: John Miller

Phone: (214) 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: American La France Company

significant later owner(s): Downtown Dallas News, Clark & Burrows

9. Construction Dates

original: 1924

alterations/additions: Various interior renovations

10. Architect

original construction: George W. Hewitt was the contractor, Dallas Press Brick Co.

alterations/additions:

11. Site Features

natural:

urban design: Typical of 1920's 2-story with commercial on the ground floor and residential above.

12. Physical Description

Condition, check one:

excellent

good

fair

deteriorated

ruins

unexposed

unaltered

altered

Check one:

original site

moved(date _____)

The main building is a handsome two-story red brick commercial style structure with a green roll tile visor that has Mission influence. The building was constructed by George W. Hewitt of Dallas Press Brick Company at a cost of \$20,000. It was constructed to house the American La France dealership with apartments upstairs. The first floor has a retail window configuration. The transoms above the display windows have the small leaded glass panes, which were indicative of the time but are now rarely seen intact. The two-story building is reminiscent of the commercial buildings, apartments and neighborhood retail centers of the time. The second story has 6 over 6 divided light double hung wood windows.

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The one-story building to the north (behind the main building) was originally wood frame and was faced with brick when the La France building was constructed.

The one story building to the east is of the same style as the main 2 story building. The display windows maintain the same large panes as the main building. With leaded glass panes in the transoms above the display windows. This building also has a roll tile visor.

On the soffit below the roll tile visor on both buildings are small decorative metal rosettes. These rosettes are individually framed with decorative molding.

13. Historical Significance

This building was constructed for the American La France Fire Engine Company in 1924. On March 28, 1924, Joseph E. Schmitz took out a building permit to construct this structure at a proposed cost of \$20,000. The contractor for the job was George W. Hewitt, president of Dallas Press Brick Company. Joseph E. Schmitz was the manager of the American La France Company in Dallas. R.A. Rhodes was treasurer and Joseph E. Schmitz, Jr. was secretary.

The American La France Company (ALF), one of the best known fire equipment and truck makers in the United States, occupied this building until 1928. Apparently, this was the only American La France dealership in North Central Texas and the city of Dallas as well as many surrounding cities purchased their fire equipment from this location. During the 1920's, business was good enough for the Elmira, New York based company to have a dealership in Dallas. The building's close proximity to the State Fair grounds made it an ideal location. Representatives from cities and towns all over Texas would come to the State Fair. From there, they could see the latest models of fire trucks and engines and order one custom-made for their community.

American La France is probably one of the best known names in fire fighting equipment in the United States. The company offered a wide diversity of engines, trucks and equipment. ALF was one of four companies that manufactured complete engines unlike most that combine components. The company's equipment is also found on engines built by other manufacturers like Ford, hence a Ford La France fire truck. By the 1920's when this structure was built, American La France dominated the fire fighting industry.

The City of Dallas' equipment was almost exclusively American La France. Around 1915, the Dallas Fire Department was making the transition to modern motorized equipment. The city purchased American La France and Seagrave fire trucks to replace the horse-drawn steam pumpers. In the 1920's and 1930's, Dallas seemed to favor the American La France 750 gallon Rotary Gear Pumper and the American La France 1,000 gallon Piston Pumper. The city had approximately 12 to 15 of the 750 gallon pumpers and eight to ten of the 1,000 gallon pumpers.

In honor of the importance of the American La France company, the street in front of the building was renamed "La France" which is still on maps today.

Mr. Schmitz apparently quit working for La France and became president of the Pioneer Fire Equipment Company. They were headquartered in this building. Mr. Schmitz eventually moved to Denton and lived there until his death August 24, 1937. He had remained in a fire protection related business until his death.

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In subsequent years, the building continued to serve various commercial uses. The company of Clark and Burrows was in the building in the 1930's and Federal Household Appliances in the 1940's. In more recent years, the building housed the Dallas Downtown News.

During the 1920's, the City of Dallas was experiencing a great deal of growth. The city had become a major manufacturing and wholesale market. The major railroads linked Dallas to other large cities like Chicago and St. Louis. Like many of the buildings constructed close to Fair Park, this one served as a place to showcase an industrial product. The Murray Company Building (1921) showcased fire fighting equipment and trucks. The prosperity of the times and this company is reflected in this handsome structure.

14. Bibliography

Ingram, Arthur. **Fire Engines in Color**. New York: MacMillin Publishing Company, 1973.

Lichty, Robert. **Collecting and Restoring Antique Fire Engines**. Blue Ridge Summit, PA.: Tab Books, 1981.

Mallet Janette. **Fire Engines of the World**. New York: Vilo Company, 1981.

McCall, Walter. **American Fire Engines Since 1900**. Sarasota, Fl.: Crestline Publishing Company, 1976.

Texas/Dallas History Division, Dallas Public Library
Building Permit Books
City Directories 1923-1940
Dallas Morning News Clipping File
Obituaries
Texas Death Records

15. Attachments

District or Site Map

Additional descriptive material

Site Plan

Footnotes

Photos (historic & current)

Other: _____

16. Inventory of Structures-Historic District Only (Page ___ of ___)

Please complete this form for each structure in a proposed historic district

a. Location and Name

b. Development History

Original owner: _____

Architect/builder: _____

Construction/alteration dates: _____

c. Architectural Significance

Dominant style: _____

Condition: _____

Alterations: _____

d. Category

Contributing

Compatible

Non-contributing

excellent example of an supportive of the district in age, intrusive; detracts form the architectural style that is typical of style and massing but is not character of the district or integral to the district; retaining representative of the significant essential integrity of design style, period and detailing, or area of significance typical of the district

e. Statement of Significance

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| 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.</p> | <p><u> x </u></p> | <p>H. Embodiment of elements of architectural design, detail, material or craftsmanship which represent a significant architectural innovation.</p> | <p>_____</p> |
| <p>B. Location as the site of a significant historical event.</p> | <p>_____</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.</p> | <p>_____</p> |
| <p>C. Identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the city.</p> | <p>_____</p> | <p>J. Unique location of singular physical characteristics representing an established and familiar feature of a neighborhood, community or the city.</p> | <p><u> x </u></p> |
| <p>D. Exemplification of the cultural, economic, social or historical heritage of the city.</p> | <p><u> x </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.</p> | <p>_____</p> |
| <p>E. Portrayal of the environment of a group of people in an era of history characterized by a distinctive architectural style.</p> | <p>_____</p> | <p>L. Value as an aspect of community sentiment of public pride.</p> | <p><u> x </u></p> |
| <p>F. Embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or specimen.</p> | <p>_____</p> | | |
| <p>G. Identification as the work of an architect or master builder whose individual work has influenced the development of the city.</p> | <p>_____</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 Villareal, Chair
Designation Task Force

Jim Anderson, Urban Planner
Historic Preservation