

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Midland Tower
Other name/site number: NA
Name of related multiple property listing: NA

2. Location

Street & number: 223 West Wall Street
City or town: Midland State: Texas County: Midland
Not for publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this
 nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following levels of significance:
 national statewide local

Applicable National Register Criteria: A B C D

State Historic Preservation Officer
Signature of certifying official / Title **Date**
Texas Historical Commission
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting or other official **Date**

State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:
____ entered in the National Register
____ determined eligible for the National Register
____ determined not eligible for the National Register.
____ removed from the National Register
____ other, explain: _____

Signature of the Keeper **Date of Action**

Midland Tower, Midland, Midland County, Texas

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Federal

Category of Property

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register:

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions: COMMERCE/business

Current Functions: COMMERCE/business

7. Description

Architectural Classification: MODERN MOVEMENT/Modernistic

Principal Exterior Materials: Stone, Brick

Narrative Description (see continuation sheets 7 through 9)

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	A	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
	B	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	C	Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
	D	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations: NA

Areas of Significance: Architecture, Commerce

Period of Significance: 1948

Significant Dates: 1948

Significant Person (only if criterion b is marked): NA

Cultural Affiliation (only if criterion d is marked): NA

Architect/Builder: Hedrick, Wyatt C.

Narrative Statement of Significance (see continuation sheets 8 through 15)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography (see continuation sheet 16)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office (*Texas Historical Commission, Austin*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): NA

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10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property: 0.296 acres

Coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: NA

1. Latitude: 31.997450° Longitude: -102.076535°

Verbal Boundary Description: Midland Tower is located on Lots 10 through 12 of Block 65 of the original town, City of Midland, Midland County, Texas.

Boundary Justification: The boundary is the original and legally recorded boundary lines for the property.

11. Form Prepared By

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Date: July 1, 2014

Additional Documentation

- Maps** (see continuation sheet 17)
- Additional items** (see continuation sheets 18 through 22)
- Photographs** (see continuation sheets 5 and 6)

Midland Tower, Midland, Midland County, Texas

Photo Log

Midland Tower
Midland, Midland County, Texas
Photographed by Heritage Consulting Group, February 2014

Photo 1 of 25	TX_Midland County_Midland Tower_0001 Exterior View, North elevation, camera facing south
Photo 2 of 25	TX_Midland County_Midland Tower_0002 Exterior View, North elevation, camera facing south
Photo 3 of 25	TX_Midland County_Midland Tower_0003 Exterior View, North elevation, Main entrance, camera facing SE
Photo 4 of 25	TX_Midland County_Midland Tower_0004 Detail View, North elevation, Main entrance, camera facing south
Photo 5 of 25	TX_Midland County_Midland Tower_0005 Detail View, North elevation, low-relief sculpture, camera facing south
Photo 6 of 25	TX_Midland County_Midland Tower_0006 Detail View, North elevation, cornice, typical, camera facing south
Photo 7 of 25	TX_Midland County_Midland Tower_0007 Exterior View, North and West elevations, camera facing SE
Photo 8 of 25	TX_Midland County_Midland Tower_0008 Exterior View, West elevation, pedestal, camera facing SE
Photo 9 of 25	TX_Midland County_Midland Tower_0009 Exterior View, West elevation, tower, camera facing SE
Photo 10 of 25	TX_Midland County_Midland Tower_0010 Detail View, West elevation, entrance, camera facing east
Photo 11 of 25	TX_Midland County_Midland Tower_0011 Exterior View, West and South elevations, camera facing NE
Photo 12 of 25	TX_Midland County_Midland Tower_0012 Detail View, West elevation, spandrel, brick, and cast stone tower, typical, camera facing east
Photo 13 of 25	TX_Midland County_Midland Tower_0013 Detail View, West elevation, central tower bay, typical, camera facing east

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Photo 14 of 25	TX_Midland County_Midland Tower_0014 Exterior View, South elevation, pedestal, camera facing NE
Photo 15 of 25	TX_Midland County_Midland Tower_0015 Interior View, First floor, main entrance vestibule, camera facing north
Photo 16 of 25	TX_Midland County_Midland Tower_0016 Interior View, First floor, lobby, camera facing north
Photo 17 of 25	TX_Midland County_Midland Tower_0017 Interior View, First floor, lobby, camera facing south
Photo 18 of 25	TX_Midland County_Midland Tower_0018 Interior Detail, First floor, letter box, camera facing east
Photo 19 of 25	TX_Midland County_Midland Tower_0019 Interior View, First floor, lobby, camera facing east
Photo 20 of 25	TX_Midland County_Midland Tower_0020 Interior View, First floor, office space, camera facing SW
Photo 21 of 25	TX_Midland County_Midland Tower_0021 Interior View, First floor, camera facing north
Photo 22 of 25	TX_Midland County_Midland Tower_0022 Interior View, Second floor, camera facing NE
Photo 23 of 25	TX_Midland County_Midland Tower_0023 Interior View, Fourth floor, north east-west corridor, camera facing east
Photo 24 of 25	TX_Midland County_Midland Tower_0024 Interior View, Eighth floor, conference room, camera facing SE
Photo 25 of 25	TX_Midland County_Midland Tower_0025 Interior View, Ninth floor, staircase, camera facing SW

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Midland Tower, Midland, Midland County, Texas

Description

The 1948 Midland Tower at 223 West Wall Street in downtown, Midland, Midland County, Texas, is a nine-story modernistic office building with a two-story pedestal base and a seven-story tower. The building is in an urban setting on nearly a quarter of a city block, on a parcel measuring 100 feet by 130 feet. The building faces north onto Wall Street with a second primary elevation facing west onto Colorado Street. The south face runs along an alley; the east elevation is a party wall. In form, the building has a two-story pedestal limestone base supporting a seven-story brick tower with limestone trim. Windows are largely consistent, paired casement with three vertical lights. Between floors is a stylized silver-colored metal panel. Stylistically, the building may be considered Modernistic with Art Deco inspiration. Floors three through nine are dedicated to office use with a central elevator/stair/toilet unit; the elevators open west to a north-south corridor. Depending upon tenant leases, this north-south corridor connects to north and south east-west corridors. All corridors are single-loaded. Floors and offices have been modified as the building tenants have changed. The second floor is approximately similar in organization, though the floor extends to the lot lines. The first floor features ground floor storefronts and a highly decorated 'L' shaped marble lobby.

Midland Tower is in downtown Midland, Texas, one block east of the city center intersection of Wall Street and Big Spring Street. With a population of approximately 150,000, Midland is the largest city and county seat of Midland County. The downtown and the area immediately surrounding Midland Tower are characterized by high- and mid-rise office buildings and surface parking lots. The area may be considered transitional with many vacant buildings. Midland Tower is on a 13,000 square foot parcel which runs 100 feet east-west and 130 feet north-south. The base of the building is constructed to the lot lines and there are no character-defining landscape features. The site is flat with slight slope from north to south and from east to west.

The building is located at the southeast corner of the intersection of Wall and Colorado Streets. Wall Street is the city's primary east-west arterial with one lane of traffic and one lane of parking on each side. Colorado Street is a secondary street and runs north-south with one lane of traffic and angled parking on each side. To the north, across Wall Street, is the Midland County Courthouse. Located at the center of a full city block, the Courthouse is a Brutalist-inspired concrete, eleven-story structure modernized in 1983. North of the Courthouse is the 12-story, quarter-block, 1929 Neo-Gothic Petroleum Building. To the east of the Courthouse is Centennial Park, a full block hardscape park with the city's convention center, Midland Center, to the east of that. Diagonally to the northwest of the tower is a half-block surface parking lot. West of that is One Wall Plaza, the former 15-story 1959 office tower modernized in 1984. North of the parking lot is the 12-story Western United Life Building, and the nine-story, 1965 Building of the Southwest. Both buildings are vacant, slated for demolition. Directly west of Midland Tower, across Colorado Street, is the Bank of America Building (the tallest skyscraper in Midland, twenty-four stories and 330 feet tall). To the south of the Bank of America building (and southwest of the tower) is a modern ramp parking structure. Along the south side of the tower is an east-west alley that runs the length of the block. South of that is a modern ramp parking garage that connects via a sky bridge to the Bank of America Building at the west. To the east and adjacent to the tower is a small two-story commercial building. Beyond that are the Wall Towers. First built in 1963 as a nine-story office building, a second 12-story tower was constructed to the west in 1968. The southeast quadrant of the block (at the opposite quadrant from Midland Tower) is a surface parking lot.

The Midland Tower is a reinforced concrete structure comprised of a two-story 24 foot tall full site pedestal with a seven-story, 80 foot tall tower. At the roof is a penthouse and elevator override structure. The tower is asymmetrically located on the base; it aligns with the west façade, but set back from the base by 15 feet on the north and east and 30 feet on the south.

The building's primary elevation faces north onto Wall Street with a second street-facing elevation on the west overlooking Colorado Street. The two pedestal elevations are similar in materials and design. Materials are

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consistent, with a limestone skin and a polished six-foot tall granite base. Store windows are modern metal frame surmounted by horizontally ribbed silver metal canopy. Doorways are recessed with a similar, but more pronounced ribbed silver metal canopy. Windows at the second floor are also metal frame, paired casement style with three vertical lights. The window band at the second floor is slightly recessed with slightly stepped courses at the sill and head that run the length of the elevation.

The pedestal elevations are similar with slight differences. The primary difference is length, which is reflected in the bay structure. On the north (Wall Street), fenestration divides the elevation into six approximately equal bays with storefront windows in each bay at the ground floor and paired windows at the second. The center west bay has the building's primary entry. It is defined by being recessed and interrupting the horizontal coursing. Centered over the doorway and below the second floor window is a stylized limestone base relief of oil rigs and bison. The entry door itself is recessed three feet from the building face and has two sets of paired aluminum doors in aluminum frame surmounted by transom featuring two aluminum medallions with bison heads. A storefront entry is located in the second bay from the east. It is similar but clearly secondary to the main entry. Again, it is recessed paired aluminum doors with full sidelights and transom; the entry is covered by a silver metal canopy. The pedestal's west elevation has eight bays and a single entry, which leads to the building's lobby. The entry is located in the fourth bay from the south. It is similar in design to the north building entry, but only three doors across. Storefront window treatments here are similar to the north.

At the northwest corner is an internally illuminated vertical blade sign. The pedestal base on the south, facing the alley, is utilitarian brick. The east face of the pedestal is a party wall. The four faces of the tower are identical. Each face is five bays across. The skin is brick accented with vertical limestone trim. Windows are consistent with paired silver aluminum casement with three vertical lights in silver aluminum frame. Between floors are paired, stylized, silver-colored aluminum panels. To accent the verticality, the center aluminum mullion between the windows continues across the spandrels and runs the height of the building to a stylized cornice panel. Further accenting the vertical, the three center bays subtly protrude while the mullion is slightly narrower at the outsers and more pronounced in the central bays.

Exterior Alterations

The exterior design is intact. The corner blade sign at the second floor has been added. The store windows have been replaced. The second story windows also have been replaced. Finally, the retail entry doors are modern but compatible.

Interior

Midland Tower was constructed as an office building, organized around a central elevator/stair/toilet tower with a north-south pair of elevators opening west. The first floor has a floor plate of approximately 13,000 square feet. When first built, urgent demand for office space prompted what normally would have been built out as retail space to be used as offices. As the building moved into the 1960s, the offices were removed and retail spaces began to be established. Today, the building has an "L" shaped lobby that connects the north and west entries with the central elevator bank. This space has its original terrazzo floor and marble walls with new infill wood paneling. The ceiling is cove-plaster. At the east, with an entry off Wall Street and off the north lobby, is a retail space which originally housed a barber and offices, but now houses a restaurant. The area along the west was also originally offices organized around a central oval. This space has been adapted to a building lobby/meeting area with architectural stone flooring, wood paneled walls, and architectural painted gypsum board ceiling. The area at the south is currently used as the leasing office with wall-to-wall carpeting, painted gypsum board walls and acoustical dropped tile ceiling.

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The second floor is also 13,000 square feet. As built, it was designed for a single tenant with a warren of offices loosely organized around irregular corridors north and south of the elevator lobby. Over time, the space was modified to accommodate different tenants in varying configurations. By the 1990s, it featured wall-to-wall flooring, painted gypsum board walls and acoustical dropped tile ceilings.

Floors three through nine each have a floor plate of approximately 7,200 square feet. The basic design was an "H"-shaped corridor with the center of the "H" being the elevator lobby. As first built-out, certain floors were designed for single floor tenants, which resulted in corridors being modified. Over the years, as spaces and floors were re-tenanted, the floors were modified to meet various needs. Generally speaking, by the 1990s, all floors had been refitted with wall-to-wall flooring, painted gypsum board walls and acoustical dropped tile ceilings. Most recently, the property's office floors have been updated with these modern improvements being removed and new walls, floors and ceilings installed.

Interior Alterations

As is common in many commercial buildings, the interior has been modified over time to accommodate changing tenants. The ground floor was originally built out as office space. It is more common for this space to be designed as retail; however, this change did not occur for a couple of decades. As part of the most recent redevelopment, the western storefront spaces have been adapted into a building reception area with conference room. Other recent changes include truncating the east the lobby corridor.

All upper floors were intended for office use and remain in this use. Finishes have been modernized incrementally over time with the replacement of walls, ceilings and flooring. Most recently, the building's owner undertook updating the entire interior, along with systems upgrades. Presently, approximately half the building is completed while the other half awaits new tenants. Floors four, six, eight, and nine have been completed. In general terms upper floor corridors remained in their "H" configuration but with the east-west lengths truncated or extended, as necessary. Materials are modern to fit a typical office setting. Floors two, three, five, and seven are currently awaiting renovation.

Integrity

Midland Tower is significant under Criterion A for Commerce and Criterion C for Architecture, and the building has sufficient integrity to convey its historic values under both criteria. The building is in its original location and the setting today is similar to its historic setting. The design and workmanship is largely intact. The ground and second floor windows have been changed, but other details remain, including the entry doors and upper floor windows. It largely remains its original statement of style. Similarly, materials and workmanship are largely intact. Overall, the building today has the same feel as when built. The primary changes have occurred on the interior where floors have been modernized and reconfigured as tenants changed.

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Statement of Significance

The 1948 Midland Tower in Midland, Texas, is a modernistic office building developed as a center for the oil industry, particularly independent operators in the Permian Basin fields. Plans for the Midland Tower were first announced in January 1946, and due to extreme need for office space in the booming oil town, some tenants moved in by February 1948, before construction was complete. Upon opening, the Tower had 51 tenants, all of which were affiliated with the oil industry in some manner, including Humble Oil, Ohio Oil (of the Standard Oil Trust), as well as geologists, engineers, accountants, lawyers, equipment suppliers, driller and operators. Architecturally, the Tower was strikingly modern and served as a manifestation of Midland's "new" oil boom. The building is nominated to the National Register under Criterion A in the area of Commerce, as it provided one-quarter of the office space in the city and was occupied exclusively by oil associated business. The building is also nominated under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as an excellent postwar example of modernistic design by noted Texas architect Wyatt Hedrick.

Midland is the self-proclaimed "Cattle, Oil, Financial and Merchandise Center of the Permian Basin," a sedimentary basin located in West Texas and the adjoining area of Southwestern New Mexico. ¹ Beginning in Borden, Scurry, and Mitchell Counties in west-central Texas, the basin stretches southwest towards the Rio Grande. The Permian Basin measures approximately 250 miles east to west, and 300 miles north to south. A rugged and largely desolate landscape, the region was not settled until the early 1880, when the Texas and Pacific Railway was laid through west Texas.

Settlement of Midland began in 1881 as a stop on the T&P Railway halfway between Fort Worth and El Paso. Originally called "Midway," the settlement's name was changed to "Midland" in 1884 when it acquired a post office. The town grew gradually over the next few decades, becoming the county seat of Midland County in 1885 and an important cattle-shipping center by 1890. The city incorporated in 1906, but extended droughts and a depressed agricultural economy limited the city's growth through the early 20th century. In 1920, Midland only had a population of 1,795.

Following the dramatic profits of East Texas oil, wildcatters began seeking opportunities in the Permian Basin. Geologists believe that the basin could produce oil, but at deeper and potentially unprofitable depths with undetermined pools. The first commercial discovery oil well in the basin was in Mitchell County in 1921, but the strike did not sustain. It was not until the 1923 Santa Rita oil well came in that oil became a demonstrated financial success. The discovery of oil in West Texas and the subsequent economic boom of the 1920s led to an economic boom in the city, which began to quickly grow as the economic center of the Permian Basin. As oil exploration boomed in surrounding counties, Midland developed into an operating center for the industry. The prospect of oil drew thousands of investors and workers into the region and injected new life into the town. Newcomers included not only wildcatters and independents, but also major oil companies, such as Shell. By 1929, 36 oil companies were based in Midland, and by 1930, the city's population jumped to 5,484. One of the physical outcomes was the construction of Wyatt Hedrick's Petroleum Building, completed in 1929, which served as an exchange-style building for the industry.

During the 1930s, the Great Depression dampened oil production and prices, and Midland felt the effects. In 1930, 42 petroleum-related businesses were listed in the city directory. By the mid-1930s that number dwindled to 18, and one third of the town's workers were unemployed.² Vacancy rates for the town's office buildings rose, and—as was

¹ James Collett, *Midland* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2010), p. 102.

² John Leffler, "Midland, TX," in the *Handbook of Texas Online* (www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hdm03), accessed February 28, 2014. Uploaded on June 14, 2010. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

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the case in cities nationwide—new construction came to an abrupt halt. Although some operators discovered new oil reserves for drilling, oil prices plummeted to 10 cents a barrel. In the second half of the 1930s, oil production began to recover, helped in part by a new federal tariff on foreign oil.³ By 1940, the town was once again a commercial center of the oil and gas industry and population again began to grow.

The opening of new oil wells in the area brought more workers to the city, which grew to a population of 9,325 by 1940. The outbreak of World War II sparked a strong and consistent national demand for crude oil over the next several years, although state and national production and price controls remained in place.⁴ The region also benefitted from the creation of the Midland Army Air Force Base, at the time was one of the largest training bases in the world; this drove up local demand for oil and garnered Midland significant clout in western Texas. As a result of these developments, Midland's population grew to 14,000 by the end of the war.⁵ From 1940 to 1946, building value grew by 400% and in 1948 it ranked 10th among Texas cities in the number of building permits.⁶

West Texas oil and gas production grew rapidly beginning in 1945, resulting in a second boom for Midland. While in 1944, only nine pools were discovered, an average of 30 new pools was found each year from 1945 to 1947.⁷ In the words of the Reporter-Telegram, "Midland experienced its greatest year in 1946 and the outlook for 1947 was even better." In 1948, oil reserves were projected at four billion barrels, 866 million more barrels than in 1947.⁸ The 1948 discovery of oil at Spraberry Trend in Midland County, the first oil found in Midland, further stimulated industry excitement. By 1948, the Midland Reporter-Telegram could write:

*The petroleum industry has been largely responsible for [Midland's] fast growth and development. Midland today being the capital and business center of the vast Permian Basin area of West Texas and Southwestern New Mexico. . . . Petroleum, pouring millions of dollars into the area annually, quite naturally is the leading industry in the city and section.*⁹

Between 1946 and 1951, the number of oil companies operating in Midland nearly tripled, soaring from 135 to 363 businesses.¹⁰ According the *Midland Reporter-Telegram*, "The oil industry has expanded its operations in Midland during 1946 as fast, and as far, as office and residential facilities would allow."¹¹ But the limited office space threatened growth. At this time, the only major office building was the 1929 12-story Petroleum Building, and 1938 First National Bank Building. These then were supplemented by smaller structures as the six-story Leggett Building and the three-story Permian Building.

Several individuals responded with specific if smallish office projects. The Honolulu Oil Company built its own two story office. Charles and Harry McClintic hired Wyatt Hedrick to design the six-story McClintic Building.

Roger M. Olien and Diana Davids Hinton, *Wildcatters: Texas Independent Oilmen* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, c. 1984, reprinted 2007): 68.

³ Leffler.

⁴ Olien and Hinton, *Wildcatters*, 67.

⁵ Franks.

⁶ Midland City Directory, Midland Reporter-Telegram, February 29, 1948, January 2, 1949; "Midland, TX," *The Handbook of Texas Online*. In the five years from 1942 to 1947, the number of active oil wells in the Permian Basin grew from 18,867 to 25,745. In 1942, daily average production was 306,862 barrels; in 1947, that production grew to 817,025.

⁷ Midland Reporter-Telegram, January 7, 1947; February 2, 1948.

⁸ Midland Reporter-Telegram, February 29, 1948. Section 8, p. 1.

⁹ Midland Reporter-Telegram, February 29, 1948.

¹⁰ Olien and Hinton, *Wildcatters*, 92.

¹¹ Midland Reporter-Telegram, January 7, 1947, p. 6.

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Midland Tower

Midland Tower is locally significant under Criterion A as a critical office project conceived and funded by the town's leading oilmen to create a center for the community's burgeoning oil industry. Once completed, the tower held one-quarter of Midland's office space, with offices all occupied by the oil businesses. Architecturally, the tower was strikingly modern and served as a manifestation of Midland's "new" oil boom against the Neo-gothic Petroleum Building, built during the town's first boom.

In the years following World War II, Midland was a boom town again, and with office space at a premium, Midland Tower was the brainchild of local oil men. As conceived, the announced Tower was a \$750,000, 50,000-square-foot building to be built on an as yet unspecified site. The oil men making the announcement operated under the name "Midland Office Building, Inc.," though the legal entity was not actually established until June 5th. That company had 26 stockholders, and was headed by the 37-year old Robert L. Wood, who also headed up the Western Company. Others involved were Ralph Lowe, Gaines E. Hall, O. C. Harper, Harry Adams, Guy Maybee, Robert Turpin, M. C. Ulmer and John House. Most were independent oil men. House was the division superintendent for Humble Oil, then based in Humble, Texas, north of Houston.¹²

Plans for the Midland Tower were first publicly announced in the *Midland Register-Telegram* on January 30, 1946. By July 2 of 1946, the building program began to coalesce. The site was a 13,000 square foot parcel at the corner of Wall and Colorado Streets. The site was then occupied by the Weaver-Wilson Texaco Station. The station and land was owned by Ralph Lowe, one of the corporation's board members, and a very successful oil man. The corporation acquired the site for \$50,000.¹³ Initially, the building was to be eight stories with an estimated cost of \$850,000. To move forward, however, the building needed approval from the Civilian Production Administration to secure the steel needed for the frame. That federal agency replaced the War Production Board in October, 1945 and was charged with the transition from strict wartime controls to peacetime production.¹⁴

Designed by architect Wyatt Hedrick, construction began in the fall of 1946, beginning with demolition of the gas station. By January, foundation work started. By February 1948, although construction was not quite complete, the building was being occupied. By August of that year, work was done. Upon completion, the *Reporter-Telegram* called it "one of the southwest's finest, most modern and attractive office buildings...Midland Tower further cements Midland's position as the headquarters center of the oil industry in West Texas and Southwest New Mexico."

As conceived and built, it was not the tallest building in Midland. That honor belonged to the 12-story Petroleum Building (214 W. Texas Avenue; now called the Hogan Building). Designed by Wyatt Hedrick and completed in 1929, the neo-Gothic building was constructed by T. S. Hogan during the first Permian Basin oil boom. The building was designed to serve as a headquarters to an assortment of businesses within the oil industry. Symbolically, it was located just across the street from the County Courthouse. Unfortunately, only months after the building was completed, the stock market crashed, the price of oil dropped, and the boom busted for years thereafter.

Located on the opposite corner of the County Courthouse from the Petroleum Building, Midland Tower represented a modern counterpoint, a symbolic architectural statement of a new era of West Texas oil. the tower was the largest

¹² Midland *Reporter-Telegram*, January 30, 1946, p. 1.

¹³ Midland *Reporter-Telegram*, July 2, 1946; September 29, 2002. Considered a "Legend of the Oil Industry" and a member of the Petroleum Museum's Hall of Fame, Lowe is credited with a 500-well drilling record from 1940 to 1965.

¹⁴ Midland *Reporter-Telegram*, June 2, 1946, July 2, 1946; in 2014 dollars, Midland Tower was a \$10 million project.

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post-war structure until the next building boom in the late 1950s, highlighted by the Wilco Building (1958; 22 stories) and the Gulf Building (1959, 15 stories; now One Wall Plaza). The other major construction projects in Midland in the era of the tower were the six-story McClintic Building, six-story Wilkinson-Foster Building, three-story Stanolind Building and the Midland Memorial Hospital, all in 1948. In total, Midland in 1948 had 18 major office buildings with 353,300 square feet, of which the Midland Tower represented roughly one-fourth.¹⁵

When construction began, office space was at a premium and applications exceeded the available square footage. The building opened with no vacancies.¹⁶ Yet, as the building opened, oil discovered at the Spraberry Trend oil field spurred even more growth and office demand; between 1946 and 1951, the number of oil companies operating in Midland nearly tripled, soaring from 135 to 363 businesses.¹⁷

Midland Tower represented a significant and symbolic statement of this “new” Midland. In size, this building alone increased the City’s office space by 33%. Architecturally, its modernist design was unlike anything the city had seen and was as contemporary an architecture statement as found in the state. Physically and architecturally, it stood as a marked counterpoint to the twenty-year old Neo-Gothic Petroleum Building. Both buildings were designed by Wyatt Hedrick; one represented the earlier oil boom, while Midland Tower represented the current and future boom. As important, the building was the brainchild of city’s leading oilmen, and the result of investments by over two dozen of their compatriots. Not surprisingly then, the building was fully pre-leased and remained fully occupied until the next construction wave in the late 1950s.

When the building opened, the tower had a total of 51 tenants. All were affiliated with the oil industry in some manner. Humble Oil occupied the entire second and third floors. Ohio Oil (of the Standard Oil Trust) occupied the seventh floor. Other tenants included professional services from geologists and engineers to accountants and lawyers, equipment suppliers, driller and operators, and refiners. Through the 1950s, with continued growth in the West Texas oil industry, the building remained essentially full with a slight turnover in and shuffling of tenants. For example, by 1955, Humble Oil (which built its own building) no longer had offices in the tower. But the Western Company now occupied the entirety of the second floor (and other offices), Sun Oil occupied the third floor, Ohio Oil Company expanded from the seventh floor and other floors and Ralph Lowe’s oil enterprise occupied the top floor. The mix of tenants remained more or less the same.¹⁸

Unfortunately beginning in the 1960s, and accelerating into the 1970s and 1980s, the tower slipped in the marketplace from a Class A to B and finally C. Its reputation, occupancy and rents all began to wane. By the early 1960s, Midland had 72 office buildings with over two million square feet. Eighty percent of this office space had been added as the number of oil businesses more than tripled. Generally, these were more modern, taller, and of grander stature. Vacant offices began to appear in the tower and full floor tenants became fewer. Current ownership is attempting to reverse this trend by a full systems upgrade and re-tenanting.

Architectural Significance of Midland Tower

Midland Tower was designed by noted Texas architect Wyatt Hedrick and is locally significant under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as the work of a master, and also as an excellent example of postwar modernistic design more typically associated with architecture of the 1930s.

¹⁵ Midland Reporter-Telegram, February 29, 1948, January 2, 1949, City Directory.

¹⁶ Midland Reporter-Telegram, February 29, 1948, August 8, 1948.

¹⁷ Oilmen and Hinton, *Wildcatters*, 92.

¹⁸ City Directory, 1948, 1950, 1955.

Midland Tower, Midland, Midland County, Texas

At the time of the building's design and construction, Wyatt Hedrick was considered one of the premier architects in Texas. Hedrick first came to Texas in 1913, when he was hired by the Stone and Webster Engineering Corporation of Boston as a construction engineer for the company's Dallas office. Shortly after and until 1921, he headed his own construction company in Fort Worth. He then became a partner in the architectural firm Sanguinet and Staats, which had offices in Fort Worth and Houston. In 1925, Hedrick opened his own architectural practice with offices in Fort Worth, Dallas, and Houston, and later in Midland. The next year, after Sanguinet and Staats retired, Hedrick bought the remaining interest in their practice. From the 1920s through the 1950s, Hedrick built his firm in to an active nationwide practice. At one time, his was considered the third-largest architectural firm in the United States. To this point in his career, superior examples of his work include the Medical Arts Building (Fort Worth, TX, 1926), the Texas and Pacific Terminal and Warehouse (Fort Worth, 1931), Sterick Building (Memphis, TN; 1930), Will Rogers Memorial Center (Fort Worth, 1936), and City Hall (Fort Worth, 1938). He also designed scores of schools and facilities for various Texas colleges and universities.

Midland Tower is one of more than a dozen buildings designed by Hedrick in Midland over two decades, from the late 1920s to the late 1940s. Several were public buildings, now all demolished. These include City Hall (1930), Post Office (1937) and Midland Memorial Hospital (1950). Hedrick was also responsible for a half-dozen smaller shops and stores. Among his major commercial projects, there are six that are noteworthy: In chronological order:

- Sharbauer Hotel (117 W. Wall Street, 1928, demolished): The six-story Sharbauer Hotel was built by Midland rancher and civic leader Clarence Sharbauer. The \$200,000 hotel had 150-rooms and was built in the Commercial style. In 1930, another 100 rooms were added in a new wing in the same style. Southeast of the Courthouse, it was Midland's premier hotel. A registered Texas landmark, it was demolished in 1973.
- Petroleum Building (220 W. Texas Street, 1929): The 12-story Neo-Gothic style office building was developed by oil man and entrepreneur Thomas Hogan. The intent, similar to the tower, was to develop an office center for the Midland's petroleum industry. The building opened on July 5, 1929, but was largely vacant through the 1930s. The building is a Texas Registered Landmark.
- First National Bank Building (105 W. Wall Street, 1938): Hedrick contributed a nine-story addition at the west of the old First National Bank Building. Of commercial design, it featured ground floor retail spaces with upper floor offices. Presently, the building is vacant.
- Midland Reporter-Telegram Building (201 E. Illinois Street, 1947): Hedrick designed this one-story half-block office/printing press structure for Midland's newspaper. The building fronts onto Illinois and the south elevation features red-brick with aggregate stone panels with aluminum windows. Other elevations are blank red-brick walls.
- McClintic Building (300 W. Texas Avenue, 1948, altered): Hedrick designed this building at the same time as the Midland Tower. It was a six-story quarter-block building to the west of the Petroleum Building. In stark comparison to the tower, the McClintic Building is articulated horizontally. In the 1970s, an additional six-stories were added to the building and it was renamed the Western United Life Building. It is slated for demolition.
- Midland Tower (223 W. Wall Street, 1948)

Midland Tower, Midland, Midland County, Texas

Among these, the Petroleum Building and the Midland Tower stand out architecturally, the Petroleum Building as the city's finest example of Neo-Gothic architecture and the Midland Tower as arguably one of, if not the, city's best example of late Moderne/Modernistic design. Both were symbolically located across the street from the County Courthouse, the Petroleum Building on the north, Midland Tower closer to downtown on Wall Street at the south. Architecturally, the two represent Midland's two great historic oil boom eras, the Petroleum Building for the first, the tower for the second. Both served the same function, as an office center for the local oil industry. Both represent Hedrick's design skills in Midland at their best.¹⁹

The Midland Tower is an outstanding late example of modernistic design, frequently utilized throughout Texas for buildings during the 1930s and 1940s, and applied with less frequency into the early 1950s. Buildings of this style are often categorized as "Art Deco" or "Art Moderne," terms derived from Paris's 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, which is commonly (but imprecisely) used to describe a diverse assortment of "modernistic" art and architectural styles of the 1920s through the 1940s. The Midland Tower's appearance is a combination of fairly traditional design concepts with elements of the modern vocabulary common in public and large-scale commercial buildings designed and constructed in the 1930s and early 1940s, especially those built through New Deal recovery and work-relief programs. A modernistic appearance was commonly achieved by utilizing a geometric, stylized form of ornamentation in place of a more literal interpretation of historicist design. This approach was applied to formal design components, such as columns and cornices, as well as in limited areas of applied decoration, often in the form of low-relief sculptural carvings and flattened moldings. The Midland Tower retains "columns" in its alternating pilaster and window/spandrel bays, but does not have a corresponding cornice, and the ornament consists of geometric and figurative reliefs. Buildings designed in this style achieved a novel and modern appearance even when the interior plans and functions remained utilitarian. The style evoked progress without completely abandoning the familiarity, solidity and monumentalism of classical idioms. While most buildings of this type date to the 1930s and early 1940s, many architects and designers in the immediate post-World War II era (through the early 1950s) returned to the style, often simplifying ornament and detailing even further than was common in the 1930s, or eliminating it entirely. The Midland Tower is an excellent example of this trend, featuring a two-part plan with a tower set on a base, rectangular block massing, a flat roof, and stacked windows between pilasters. The classical orders are reduced to simple piers; the building lacks a pediment. The building represents the latter days of the modernistic style, constructed entirely in the late 1940s but with characteristics more commonly found in prewar buildings.²⁰

Conclusion

Completed in 1948, Midland Tower served as an important office building for Midland's second oil boom. It was developed by local oilmen as a center for the oil industry, particularly independent operators, in the Permian Basin and allowed Midland to maintain its place as the oil hub for West Texas, and is nominated under Criterion A in the area of Commerce. The building is also nominated under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as one of two premier works by Wyatt Hedrick in Midland, representing the architect's skillful modernist design.

¹⁹ Midland Reporter-Telegram, February 29, 1948, January 2, 1949, City Directory.

²⁰ Gregory Smith, "Jacksboro County Courthouse, Jack County, Texas" National Register nomination; Anna Mod, et al, "Seaholm Power Plant, Travis County, Texas" National Register nomination.

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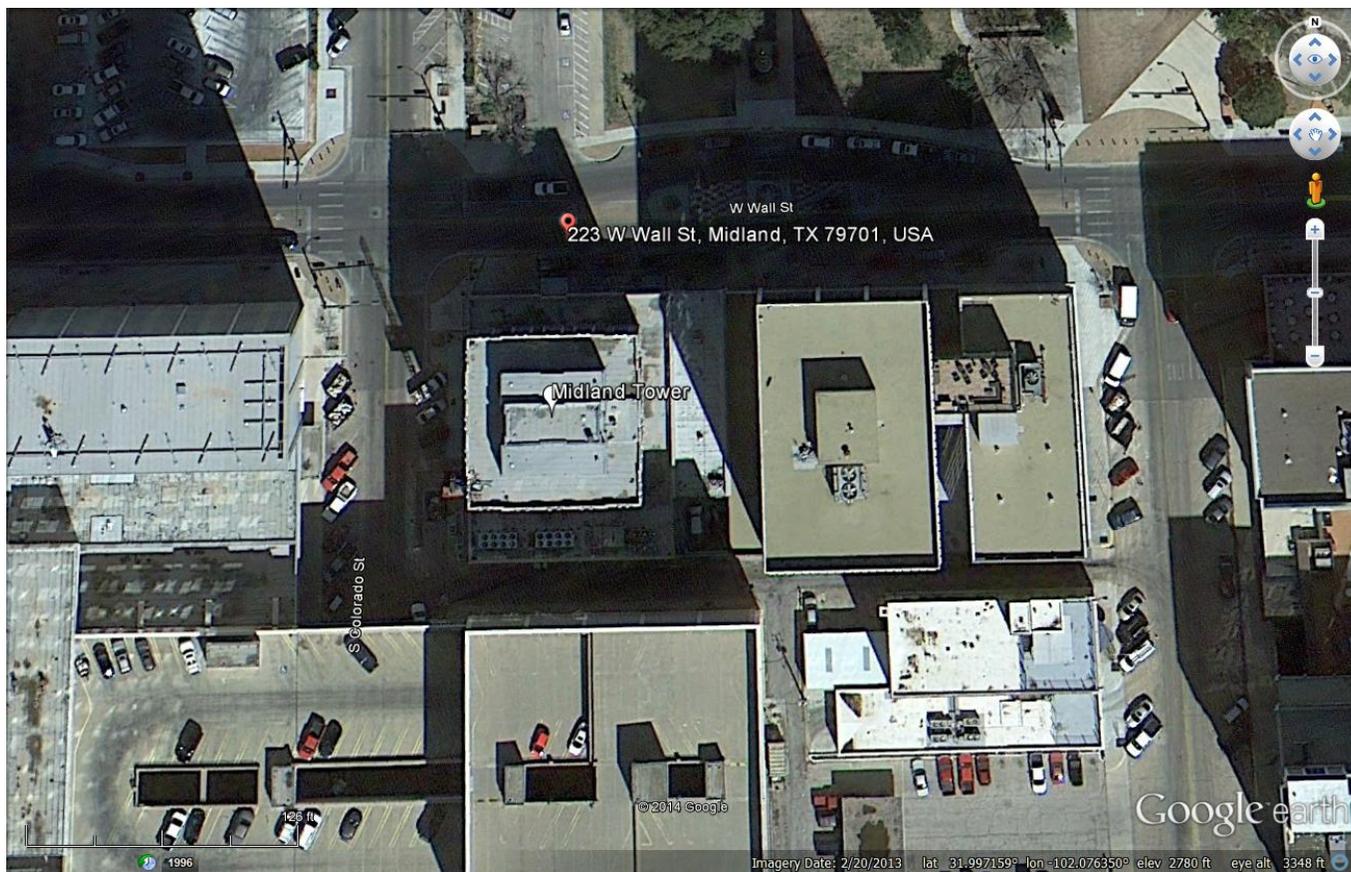
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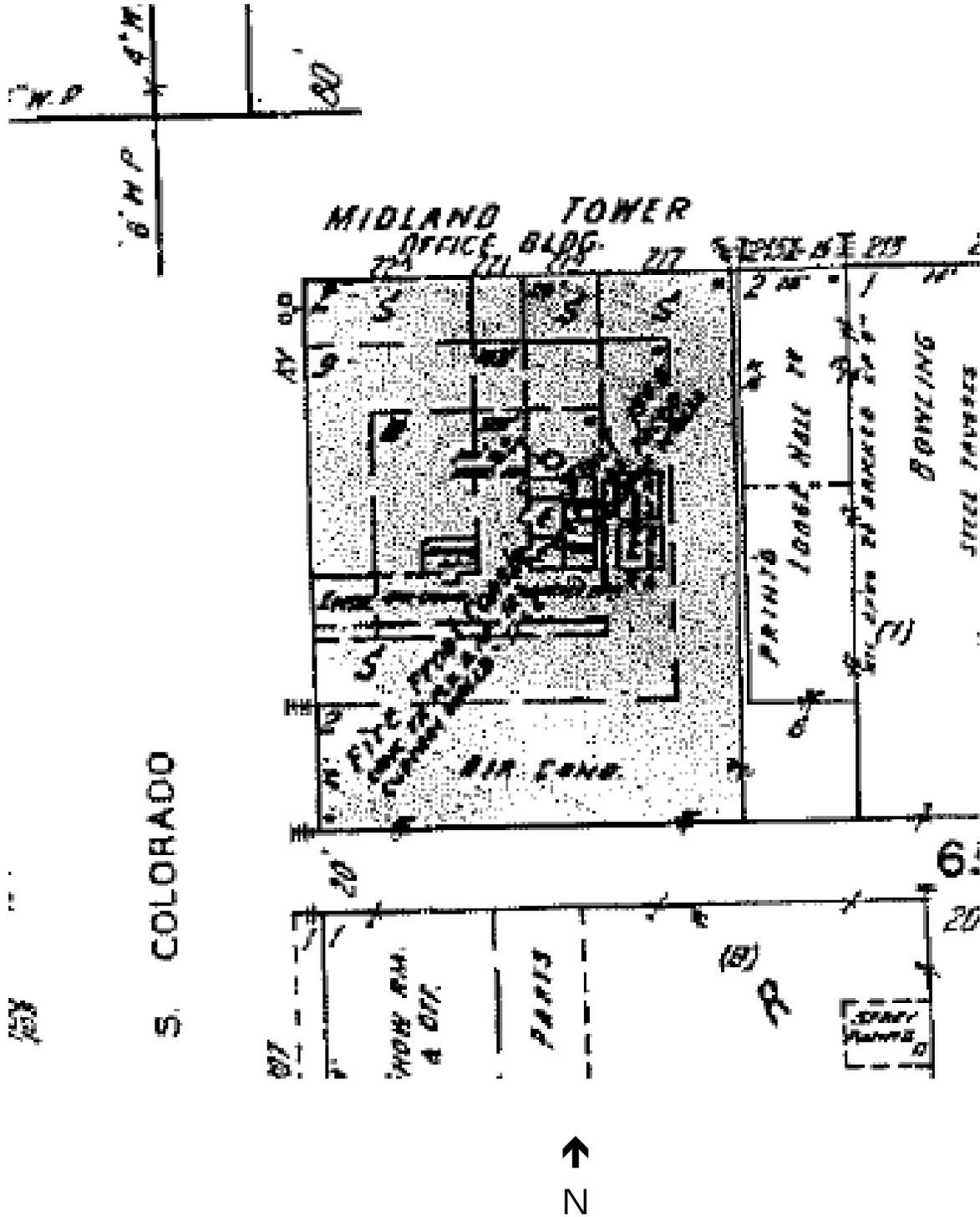
Midland Tower, Midland, Midland County, Texas

Source: Google Earth, accessed December 4, 2014



Midland Tower, Midland, Midland County, Texas

Figure 1 – Sanborn Map, 1948



Midland Tower, Midland, Midland County, Texas

Figure 2 – The Reporter-Telegram, February 29, 1948, Midland Chamber of Commerce, aerial



Midland Tower, Midland, Midland County, Texas

Figure 3 – The Reporter-Telegram, February 29, 1948, Midland Tower under construction



Figure 4 – The Reporter-Telegram, February 29, 1948, Signs of Progress, Wyatt C. Hedrick

Midland Tower, Midland, Midland County, Texas

*** REPORTER-TELEGRAM, MIDLAND, TEXAS, FEB. 22, 1948 ***

SIGNS OF PROGRESS

REFLECTING THE PROGRESS AND DEVELOPMENT IN MIDLAND

WE ARE PROUD OF THE CONFIDENCE PLACED IN US.....

and proud to have been chosen as architect by many of the leading establishments during the years Midland has made such splendid progress. It is, and always has been our aim to offer the best architectural and engineering service obtainable. It is our intention to continue to merit the confidence in the future development that is sure to come. Pictured below are a few of the buildings we designed . . .



McCLINTIC BUILDING—ERECTED 1948

Our
Heartiest
Compliments
To The
MIDLAND
REPORTER-
TELEGRAM
And Its
Staff
On Such
A Modern,
Up-To-Date
Newspaper
Plant.



FIRST NATIONAL BANK BUILDING—ERECTED 1938



MIDLAND TOWER—ERECTED 1947



MIDLAND REPORTER-TELEGRAM—ERECTED 1947



SCHARBAUER HOTEL—ERECTED 1928



PETROLEUM BUILDING—ERECTED 1929



MIDLAND MEMORIAL HOSPITAL—PROPOSED ERECTION 1948

WYATT C. HEDRICK

ARCHITECT and ENGINEER

MIDLANDFT. FORTHDALLASHOUSTON

Midland Tower, Midland, Midland County, Texas

Figure 5 – Midland Tower, early 1950s, from building owner’s files



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