

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

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Stowers Building
Other name/site number: G. A. Stowers Furniture Company Building
Name of related multiple property listing: NA

2. Location

Street & number: 820 Fannin
City or town: Houston State: Texas County: Harris
Not for publication: Vicinity: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

Signature of certifying official / Title State Historic Preservation Officer 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

Stowers Building, Houston, Harris 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: NA

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions: COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store/furniture store

Current Functions: VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification: LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS/
 Commercial Style

Principal Exterior Materials: BRICK, METAL (pressed tin)

Narrative Description (see continuation sheets 6 through 8)

Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

	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.
X	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

Period of Significance: 1913

Significant Dates: 1913

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

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

Architect/Builder: Green & Finger, architects.

Narrative Statement of Significance (see continuation sheets 9 through 12)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography (see continuation sheet 13)

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: *Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Houston, TX*

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): NA

Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than one acre

Coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: NA

Lat: 29.757492° Lon: -95.363546°

Verbal Boundary Description: LTS 1&2 & Tracts 3A, 12A, 13, 13A & 13B, Block 93, South Side Buffalo Bayou (SSBB)

Boundary Justification: The boundary includes all legal parcels historically associated with the property.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Anna Mod, Historic Preservation Specialist (with assistance from Gregory Smith, National Register Coordinator)

Organization: SWCA Environmental Consultants, Inc.

Street & number: 10245 West Little York, Suite 600

City or Town: Houston State: Texas Zip Code: 77040

Email: amod@swca.com

Telephone: 281-617-3217

Date: 7 December 2014

Additional Documentation

Maps (see continuation sheets 14 and 15)

Additional items (see continuation sheets 16 through 22)

Photographs (see continuation sheets 5 and 23 through 33)

Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photographs

Stowers Building

820 Fannin, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photographed by Anna Mod, Fall 2014

Digital Files at SWCA Environmental Consultants, 10245 West Little York, Suite 600, Houston, Texas 77040

Photo #1 (TX_HarrisCounty_StowersBuilding_photo_0001)

South (left) and east facades (right), camera facing northwest.

Photo #2 (TX_HarrisCounty_StowersBuilding_photo_0002)

East façade (center) and partial south façade (left), camera facing west.

Photo #3 (TX_HarrisCounty_StowersBuilding_photo_0003)

East elevation and roof, camera facing west taken from the roof of the 1121 Walker

Photo #4 (TX_HarrisCounty_StowersBuilding_photo_0004)

East elevation, detail of cornice with BG Place (811 Main) in background, camera facing northwest

Photo #5 (TX_HarrisCounty_StowersBuilding_photo_0005)

East elevation, detail of cornice and glazed brick

Photo #6 (TX_HarrisCounty_StowersBuilding_photo_0006)

Interior, tenth floor, camera facing south

Photo #7 (TX_HarrisCounty_StowersBuilding_photo_0007)

Interior, first floor, camera facing southwest

Photo #8 (TX_HarrisCounty_StowersBuilding_photo_0008)

Interior, first floor, detail of column, camera facing northwest

Photo #9 (TX_HarrisCounty_StowersBuilding_photo_0009)

Interior, first floor, detail of decorative plaster

Photo #10 (TX_HarrisCounty_StowersBuilding_photo_0010)

East elevation, detail of ground floor storefront, camera facing west

Photo #11 (TX_HarrisCounty_StowersBuilding_photo_0011)

South elevation, detail of ground floor storefront, camera facing northeast

Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Description

The Stowers Building, also known as the G. A. Stowers Furniture Company Building, is located at 820 Fannin Street in Houston's central business district at the northwest corner of the Walker Street intersection. Completed in 1913 as the retail store for the G. A. Stowers Furniture Company, the ten-story, rectangular-plan building is constructed of reinforced concrete with a glazed white brick veneer and a projecting pressed metal cornice. The building was designed by architects Green & Finger and is an excellent example of the early twentieth century high-rise Commercial Style in Houston and visually illustrates the influence of the Chicago School.

Site

The property sits on Block 93, of the South Side Buffalo Bayou (SSBB) plat and is one of only two buildings on this block. BG Place, a 46-story skyscraper and integrated 10-story parking garage completed in 2011, envelopes the Stowers Building and is the only other building on this city block bounded by Walker to the south, Fannin to the east, Main Street to the west and Rusk to the north. Fannin is a major, one-way, south bound traffic artery. The surrounding area is an urban commercial neighborhood with surface parking lots, skyscrapers and multi-story parking garages. Other individually listed National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) properties in the surrounding area include the 1949 City National Bank Building (NRHP, 2000) and the 1921 Humble Oil Building (NRHP, 1999) located one and three blocks to the south respectively. Two blocks to the north on Main Street is the Kress Building (NRHP, 2002). The 1929 Texas State Hotel (NRHP, 2008) and the 1915 Texas Company Building (NRHP, 2003) are both two blocks to the north at the Fannin at Rusk intersection. Two blocks to the northeast is the 1911 United States Custom House (NRHP, 1974) at San Jacinto and Rusk.

The Stowers Building is three blocks southeast of the Main Street/Market Square Historic District (NRHP, 1984), Houston's late nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial historic district that includes Allen's Landing on Buffalo Bayou, the place of the city's founding at the foot of Main Street. Directly across Fannin to the east is the Melrose Building, the city's first modernist skyscraper (NRHP, 2014).

The Stowers Building represents early high-rise construction design and construction methods. The structure is an early example of concrete frame design with concrete floor slabs, a benefit of which was "fire proof construction." The east and south elevations are finished entirely of white glazed brick; the secondary elevations are clad with buff colored brick. The roof is flat behind a tall parapet. The building has a rectangular plan and a 5 x 7 bay structure with two primary elevations due to its corner location: the five bay elevation faces east onto Fannin and the seven bays face south onto Walker. Historically, the main entrance was on the eastern Fannin Street elevation. The building measures roughly 100' x 125' with the longer side along Walker. The east and south elevations follow the same composition and detailing. The two secondary elevations have an irregular window pattern. Most of these secondary windows are obscured by the adjacent building and alterations to the interior.

The building follows the traditional three part composition: base, shaft and cornice. The structural divisions of the bays are marked with square columns with corbelled bases on the ground floor and pilasters above. The original ground floor storefront has been replaced with aluminum framed, full height glass windows that fill the entire space between the columns. There is an inset paired aluminum framed door in the third bay and paired glass entry doors in the fifth bay. The south elevation has a single solid door and a paired door in the first bay and solid paired doors in the second bay. The aluminum framed second floor windows fill the space between the columns, creating the appearance of a double-height ground floor, and accentuate the building's base. The third through ninth floors compose the shaft of the building and full-height vertical pilasters with terra cotta capitals define the bays. Floors three through five have secondary pilasters with corbelled brick capitals between and flanking the paired windows emphasizing the building's verticality. Square spandrel panels are of the same glazed brick as the building and are located beneath each of the paired windows on the fourth and fifth floors. Above the fifth floor windows is a clear transition from a strict vertical

Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

emphasis to the gradual introduction of the building's terminus. This is accomplished by full width rectangular spandrels that span the entirety of each bay below and above the windows. The tenth floor has groupings of four 1/1 windows set into each bay. A pressed tin cornice tops the building with paired brackets aligning with the pilasters and divisions of the bays. In the center bay of the south and east elevations, the frieze has "STOWERS" embossed on it.

The building's secondary north and west elevations are unglazed brick with irregular fenestration. Historically, the windows were 2/2 metal sash with wire glass; these secondary elevation windows were replaced with the same metal 1/1 sash windows as on the other elevations. The 2011 construction of BG Place has obscured the secondary elevations from the public right of way.

Alterations to the two primary elevations include the replacement and relocation of the ground floor storefronts and entrances, the removal of the continuous metal canopy that once wrapped around the Fannin and Walker façades, and the replacement of all of the upper floor windows. The current entrance on Fannin was introduced when the building was partially renovated into office condominiums in the 2000s. The ground floor glazed brick columns are replicas of the originals and were added at an unknown date.

Floor Plan and Interior Details

The ground floor interior is divided into two main sections: the elevator lobby accessed via the paired glass entry doors in the fifth bay from Fannin; and, the open space to the south. The elevator entry lobby was completely renovated in the early 2000s by a previous owner and includes an enclosed fire stair, mechanical and electrical closets, and an egress hallway along the north and west walls with a single egress door onto Walker. Adjacent to the hallway to the east are the two small mechanical closets. Slightly to the north is an enclosed fire stair with access between the first and second floors only. The entry lobby floor is patterned marble tiles. The gypsum board walls include a wooden chair rail and reproduction decorative plaster crown molding. The remainder of the ground floor to the south has a concrete floor and open plan. Remnants of the original flat plaster remains on many (but not all) of the square columns, ceiling, and beams. Run-in-place Classical style decorative plaster composed of acanthus leaf, dentil and egg and dart moldings is on many of the column capitals and beams on the first and second floors only. Alterations include the addition of the escalator, the enclosure of the mezzanine with metal infill ceiling panels, and the enclosure of the original metal staircase (located in the northeast corner of the building) with a fire-rated enclosure.

The second floor retains much of its original decorative plaster on the ceiling beams and remnants of the flat plaster on the square columns. Men and women's restrooms and mechanical closets are located to the west of the elevators on this floor and all the floors above were added in the early 2000s. The remaining floor plan on floor two is open plan.

As part of the renovation in the early 2000s, the third and fourth floors were renovated as the model floors for an office condo concept. Hallways extend to the south and west from the elevator lobby to individual offices. The design of these floors is contemporary and utilitarian with gypsum board walls, carpet on the floors, drop ceilings in the hallways, aluminum framed sidelights adjacent to solid laminate clad office doors. The original ceiling beams are exposed in the offices and are plastered. No other original elements remain in the office spec area; above the false ceiling remnants of the original non-decorative plaster is believed to be intact. These two floors and those above have the similar placement of the new restrooms and mechanical closets to the west of the elevators.

Floors five through ten are open floor plates with exposed structural columns, many of which retain their original flat plaster. There is no decorative plaster above the second floor, an indication that the first two floors were the retail showrooms of the furniture company and the upper floors used for workshops. The tenth floor has a taller ceiling height and the plaster covers only the lower two-thirds of the square columns. Forensic evidence seems to indicate that a plaster ceiling once covered the exposed concrete space above. A small metal plate is visible on the ceilings of each floor along the west elevation, a patch of the original service elevator that was removed at an unknown date.

Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Summary

The Stowers Building, also known as the G. A. Stowers Furniture Company Building, is located at 820 Fannin Street in Houston's central business district at the northwest corner of the Walker Street intersection. Completed in 1913 as the retail store for the G. A. Stowers Furniture Company, the ten-story, rectangular-plan building is constructed of reinforced concrete with a glazed white brick veneer and a projecting pressed metal cornice. The building was designed by architects Green & Finger and is an excellent example of the early twentieth century high-rise Commercial Style in Houston and visually illustrates the influence of the Chicago School. Despite the window replacement and alterations to the tenth floor the building retains its architectural integrity.

Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Statement of Significance

The 1913 Stowers Building is an excellent example of early 20th Century high-rise construction in Houston, Texas, with a combination of traditional classical and Chicago School influences. Designed by the Houston architectural firm Green & Finger, the Stowers Building reflects a shift to simplified exterior ornamentation while respecting the traditional composition of base, shaft, and cornice. Located at 920 Fannin Street in Houston's commercial business district, the building was the local headquarters for the G. A. Stowers Furniture Company and its third Houston location. The Stowers Building retains a high degree of integrity and is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C in the area of Architecture at the local level of significance.

Houston's Pre-Modern Skyscrapers

Buildings taller than the typical two- and three-part commercial blocks began to appear in Houston in the last decade of the nineteenth century with the construction of the six-story Binz Building (1894-1895) at the intersection of Main Street and Texas Avenue. This building marked the city's first endeavors to build upward with an interior cast iron and steel frame aided by the steam powered elevator and non-combustible structural framing.¹ Designed by architect Olle J. Lohren, the heavy masonry cladding and Italian Renaissance embellishment, firmly root it to the ground as it simultaneously reaches skyward and higher than any previous building. In the early twentieth century, the eight-story First National Bank Building (1905) became Houston's first completely steel-framed vertical tower. Designed by Sanguinet & Staats, the building similarly utilized traditional Renaissance Revival ornamentation and followed the classical three-part composition of base, shaft, and cornice yet also began to enlarge the window openings between the vertical masonry cladding that defined the buildings bays.²

Between 1908 and 1913, Houston saw a boom in the new "skyscraper" construction with buildings ranging from seven to 17 stories in height.³ These new buildings followed the same composition and ornamentation established by the Binz Building and First National Bank Building. Traditional revival styles, such as the Renaissance or Gothic Revival styles, were used to ornament the exteriors. The skyscrapers were either 'I,' 'C,' 'U,' or L-shaped in plan to bring natural light and ventilation into the interior. The uses for these new skyscrapers varied and included hotels, apartments, retail spaces, and hospitals. Examples of these early skyscrapers include, the original 1913, C-plan Rice Hotel designed by Mauran, Russell & Crowell, with an addition by Alfred Finn in 1926 that turned it into an E-plan building, and the eight-story Beaconsfield I-plan apartment building, designed by A. C. Pigg in 1911.

During the early years of Houston skyscrapers, most developers hired architects from out-of-town for both high-rise and low-level construction. Sanguinet & Staats of Fort Worth, Mauran, Russell & Crowell of St. Louis (1912 Union National Bank and 1913 Rice Hotel), D. H. Burnham & Co. of Chicago (1909, Scanlan Building), Jarvis Hunt of Chicago (1911, Southern Pacific Building), and Warren & Wetmore of New York (1915, Texas Company Building) each designed a new skyscraper for Houston prior to 1915.⁴ The city's first true skyscraper, Sanguinet & Staats' 16-story C. F. Carter Building (1919), was the tallest building in Texas for a few months after its construction and the tallest building in Houston until 1926.⁵

¹ Fox, Stephen, "Scraping the Sky," *Ephemeral Houston*, p. 193.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Fox, Stephen, "Scraping the Sky," *Ephemeral Houston*, p. 193; and, Fox, *AIA Houston*, 64, 73, and 81.

⁵ Long, Christopher, "SANGUINET AND STAATS," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/cms01>), accessed November 20, 2014. Uploaded on June 15, 2010. Published by the Texas State Historical Association; and Fox, "Scraping the Sky," 196.

Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

From 1913-1917 tall buildings in Houston slowed as World War I began and construction stopped altogether from 1917-1918 after the United States joined the war.⁶ When construction began again in the early 1920s, Houston joined the rest of the U.S. and the world in the effort to identify a modern style to accompany the many advancements of the twentieth century. The Stowers Building is a remaining example of the early efforts in building skyward in the pre-World War I period in Houston.

The G. A. Stowers Furniture Company

The G. A. Stowers Furniture Company began in Birmingham, Alabama by George Arthur Stowers (1867-1917) who by age 17 was able to start his own furniture store with \$500 capital saved out of his two-dollar-a-week job in a candy company.⁷ Stowers eventually operated stores in Alabama and Tennessee as well as Texas, with stores in Cuero, San Antonio, Dallas, Waco, Ft. Worth and Houston.⁸ Stowers moved his business from Birmingham to Dallas in 1889, but soon after, he relocated to San Antonio, where his business was thereafter headquartered. In Houston, the first store was established in 1901-1902 at 411-413 Main Street and managed by William H. Stowers.⁹ Nearby competition at that time included the Rhodes-Haverty Furniture Company located at 210 Milam and the Wadell Furniture Store. By 1907, city directories the company had moved to a seven-story building at 701-703 Main Street and Marion P. Strickland was president. Strickland maintained rooms nearby at the Hotel Bender while residing in San Antonio. The company may have remained on Main Street were it not for a fire that decimated their building. By 1913 the company had moved into the current ten-story Stowers Building at the corner of Fannin and Walker Streets. By 1920-1921, the Stowers company referred to its store as “The Big White Store” while advertising “Complete Home Furnishings” “on easy terms” and offering “Refrigerators, stoves and ranges, draperies, carpets and rugs, office furniture.”¹⁰

By 1935 the company had a warehouse and factory located at 104-120 N. Hamilton where they made mattresses. By 1945 the company sought to change its image and employed a new slogan and new logo. The new slogan was “Dependable Furniture for Cottage and Mansion.” The warehouse had moved to 3114 McKinney by this time. Eight pages of furniture company ads in the 1945 City Directories indicate the large amount of local competition. In 1966 the company was sold to Gordon’s Jewelers Inc. and the store on Fannin Street was closed.¹¹ A new store was opened at 12850 Memorial Drive and the warehouse remained on McKinney.

By 1974 Gordon’s Jewelers Inc. occupied the Stowers Building where they remained as the last major tenant. The Gordon Jewelry Corporation, headquartered in Houston, was the nation’s second-largest jewelry store chain until it was surpassed by the Zale Jewelry Corporation which bought Gordon’s in 1989. Gordon’s was founded by Meyer Morris Gordon (1882-1961) a Lithuanian immigrant who came to Texas in the late nineteenth century. Following a general mercantile business, he opened his first jewelry store, McGaughon & Gordon, in 1916 and later bought out his partner, changing the name to Gordon’s. He first expanded to Beaumont and then Louisiana before the company opened a suburban location and then expanded to shopping malls nationwide.¹²

⁶ Fox, “Scraping the Sky,” 197.

⁷ Pease, S. W., “STOWERS, GEORGE ARTHUR,” *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fst69>), accessed November 10, 2014. Uploaded on June 15, 2010. Published by the Texas State Historical Association

⁸ Pease, S. W., “STOWERS, GEORGE ARTHUR,” *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fst69>), accessed November 10, 2014. Uploaded on June 15, 2010. Published by the Texas State Historical Association and City Directories, City of Houston.

⁹ City Directories, City of Houston. It is not known if William H. Stowers was a relative of G. A. Stowers. William H. appears in a later city directory as a salesman of the company and by 1920 is no longer associated with the company.

¹⁰ Houston City Directory, 1923-24, page 188.

¹¹ *San Antonio Express News*, May 7, 1990.

¹² Natalie Ornish, “GORDON JEWELRY CORPORATION,” *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/dhg01>), accessed November 19, 2014. Uploaded on June 15, 2010. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Green & Finger, Architects

The architect of the Stowers Building is Green & Finger, identified on a published illustration of the building in the *Houston Daily Post* on February 2, 1913 with their signature.¹³ No other historic architectural drawings have been located. The design of the building is very similar to its predecessor on Main Street, completed in 1903 and also designed by Green when he was in a partnership with Gerhard C. Svarz.¹⁴ The earlier building, located at 701-703 Main Street, burned in 1912 and prompted the company to move to this location at the corner of Walker and Fannin Streets. Both buildings are also similar to the Stowers Building in San Antonio completed in 1910 and demolished in 1982. Similar features include the two-story base, the paired windows in each bay, the paired arched windows on the tenth floor, the projecting cornice, and the corner blade sign and graphics.

Green & Finger was a short-lived partnership of Lewis Sterling Green and Joseph Finger. Finger was a junior partner in the firm and the partnership only lasted a few years. Other Houston buildings designed by the firm include the De George Hotel (1913, extant), American National Insurance Company Building, (1912, demolished), and the Model Laundry Company Building (1912, demolished). In 1912, the pair also designed the Panama Hotel and the Cotton Compress & Warehouse Co., both in Galveston, and the Temple Freda in Bryan and Dickinson High School. Prior to his partnership with Joseph Finger, Green was associated with Gerhard C. Svarz and later with Birdsall Briscoe and Victor Grimmer. Green died in 1929, possibly in a house fire.¹⁵

Finger went on to become a well-known Houston architect of commercial and civic buildings including Houston's City Hall (1939) and the city's first Houston Municipal Airport Terminal and Hangar (1940). He was born in 1887 in Bielitz, Austria where he received his technical education and immigrated to the United States in 1905, first settling in New Orleans. He arrived in Houston in 1908 and worked for a branch office of C. D. Hill and Company. In 1912 he became a junior partner with Lewis Sterling Green. He had several other partnerships before establishing his own practice that he operated until 1944.¹⁶

Finger was the city's foremost Jewish architect and designed numerous synagogues including the 1925 Congregation Beth Israel Temple (Recorded Texas Historic Landmark, NRHP 1994) and the Beth Israel Mausoleum (1925). His noteworthy civic and commercial buildings include the Montgomery County Courthouse in Conroe, TX (1936), the Houston Turnverein (1929, NR 1978; demolished 1993) and the Clarke and Courts warehouse in Houston (1936, NR 1994) and a series of stores for the Weingarten grocery chain. His extant hotel and commercial buildings in downtown Houston include the Auditorium (1926), Texas State (1929, NRHP 2008), De George (1913), and Plaza (1925) hotels and the retail store Battlestein's (1923 with subsequent additions).¹⁷

Architectural Significance

The Stowers Building is a representative example of early high-rise construction in Houston with traditional and Chicago style influences. Designed by the Houston firm of Green & Finger, the ten-story building was constructed by the builder Pearson & Co. in 1912 for a cost of \$160,000.¹⁸ The building was completed in 1913 and was one of a handful of tall buildings marking the beginning of the city's early skyscraper exploration. Of similar scale at the time were the 10-story Cotton Hotel (1913, demolished), the 10-story Bender Hotel (1909, demolished), the 16-story S. F.

¹³ *Houston Daily Post*, February 2, 1913.

¹⁴ Houston City Directories, 1908-1912 and Houston Metropolitan Research Center photograph collection (MSS 0114-0856 and -0874).

¹⁵ Research notes by Stephen Fox, Fellow of the Anchorage Foundation of Houston, supplied by Gregory Smith, Texas Historical Commission.

¹⁶ Fox, Stephen. "FINGER, JOSEPH," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ffi37>), accessed November 9, 2014. Uploaded on June 12, 2010. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

¹⁷ Stephen Fox, "FINGER, JOSEPH," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ffi37>), accessed November 9, 2014. Uploaded on June 12, 2010. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

¹⁸ Interview between Stephen Fox and Randy Pace regarding construction notice in the San Antonio commercial Recorder.

Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Carter Building (1909-1910), the 11-story Scanlan Building (1909, NRHP 1980), the 9-story Southern Pacific Office Building (1911, NRHP 1984), the 11-story Union National Bank (1912, NRHP 1984), the 17-story Rice Hotel (1913, NRHP 1978), and the 13-story Texas Company building (1915, NRHP 2003).

Skyscraper design in Chicago and New York began to show more transparency in the late nineteenth century as architects experimented with the technological boundaries of the steel frame. This led to progressively more window openings and diminishing masonry cladding as the buildings grew taller. Houston's early skyscraper boom followed behind the northern cities by several decades. The Stowers Building reflects both the traditional and new technological developments of a Houston skyscraper of the early twentieth century. The traditional aspects include the three-part composition, the pronounced metal cornice, and the masonry exterior. The innovative elements include its ten-story height, the glazed brick cladding, the paired windows, and the flatness and minimal decorative elements of the building plane. The exterior brick cladding lend the building a lighter feeling solely due to the color and flatness of the material and the paired windows reflect a greater penetration of the exterior building plane to give the exterior more transparency and address the practical need for a greater amount of light into the interior. Paired windows are also seen on the Scanlan and Texas Company Buildings, both nearby and contemporary examples.

The Scanlan Building, designed by Daniel Burnham of Chicago in 1909, is the only other skyscraper in downtown Houston to use glazed brick for the exterior veneer. The Scanlan Building's brick is grey in color as compared to the white brick of the Stowers Building. A contemporary and notable building with a glazed brick exterior is the 40-story Equitable Building in New York constructed in 1915.

The Stowers Building is an excellent example of Houston's early twentieth century Commercial Style high-rise construction. The building retains its original exterior glazed brick cladding, overall three part composition, window openings, terra cotta pilaster capitals and pressed tin cornice. On the interior, the building retains its original decorative plaster on the first and second floor ceilings and flat plaster on the columns. Despite the redesign of the tenth-floor fenestration, whereby the original paired arched windows were replaced with sets of four rectangular 1/1 sash windows, the building remains recognizable as a good example of early twentieth century high-rise design and construction. The replacement windows of the building's shaft replicate the design and proportions of the original 1/1 windows despite the change in material from wood to metal. While large-scale window replacements can severely compromise a building's architectural integrity, the window alterations in this case follow the overall proportions of the original design, and do not severely compromise the building's appearance. Only integrity of materials has been partially compromised by the window replacement and the alterations to the ground floor storefront and tenth floor.

Conclusion

The Stowers Building, also known as the G. A. Stowers Furniture Company Building, is located at 820 Fannin Street in Houston's central business district at the northwest corner of the Walker Street intersection. Completed in 1913 as the retail store for the G. A. Stowers Furniture Company, the ten-story, rectangular-plan building is constructed of reinforced concrete with a glazed white brick veneer and a projecting metal cornice. The building was designed by architects Green & Finger and is an excellent example of the early twentieth century high-rise Commercial Style in Houston and visually illustrates the influence of the Chicago School. Despite the window replacement and alterations to the tenth floor the building retains its architectural integrity. The Stowers Building is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C in the area of Architecture with significance at the local level, as an example of one of the few remaining early twentieth century high rise buildings.

Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Books

- Fox, Stephen. Houston Architectural Guide, 3rd ed. Houston: American Institute of Architects, Houston Chapter, 2012.
- Fox, Stephen. "Scraping the Houston Sky 1894-1976." Ephemeral City: Cite Looks at Houston, edited by Barrie Scardino, William F. Stern, and Bruce C. Webb, 193-211. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003.
- Guedes, Pedro, ed. *Encyclopedia of Architectural Technology*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1979.
- Henry, Jay C. Architecture in Texas 1895-1945. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993.
- Longstreth, Richard. The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2000.
- Rifkind, Carole. *A Field Guide to Contemporary American Architecture*. New York: Penguin Group, 1998.

Articles

- Houston Daily Post*, February 2, 1913.
- "Stowers Name Woven Into the History of South Texas," *The Laredo Times*, Sunday, July 14, 1940.

Archival Collections

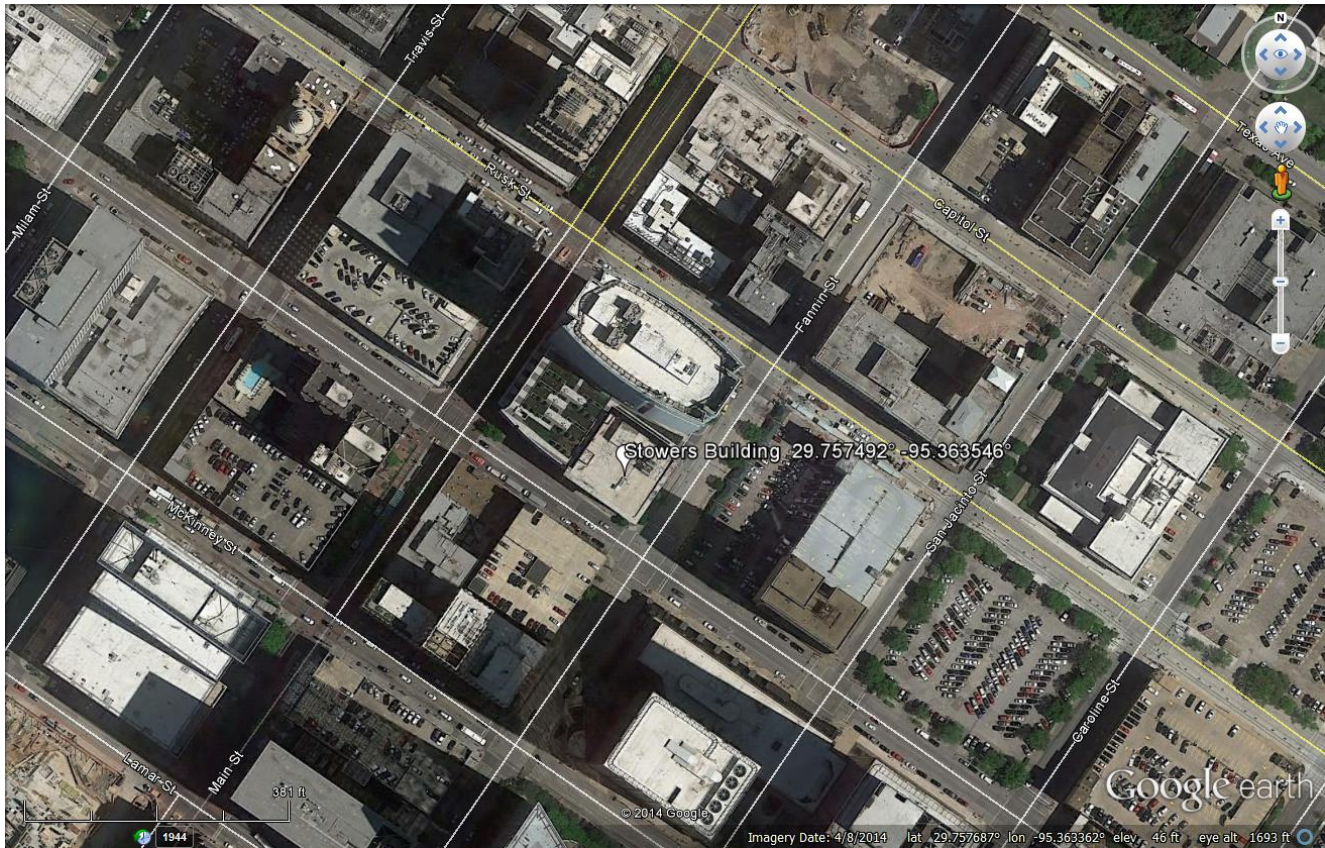
- Houston City Directories, Clayton Library Center for Genealogical Research, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas.
- Sanborn Maps of Houston, Texas, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

Online Resources

- Fox, Stephen. "FINGER, JOSEPH," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ffi37>), accessed November 9, 2014. Uploaded on June 12, 2010. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.
- Ornish, Natalie. "GORDON JEWELRY CORPORATION," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/dhg01>), accessed November 9, 2014. Uploaded on June 15, 2010. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.
- Pease, S. W. "STOWERS, GEORGE ARTHUR," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fst69>), accessed November 10, 2014. Uploaded on June 15, 2010. Published by the Texas State Historical Association and City Directories, City of Houston.

Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Google Earth, accessed December 8, 2014.



Lat: 29.757492° Lon: -95.363546°

Verbal Boundary Description: LTS 1&2 & Tracts 3A, 12A, 13, 13A & 13B, Block 93, South Side Buffalo Bayou (SSBB)

Boundary Justification: the boundary includes all legal parcels historically associated with the property

Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Stowers Building Location (center)



Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Historic Photo #1

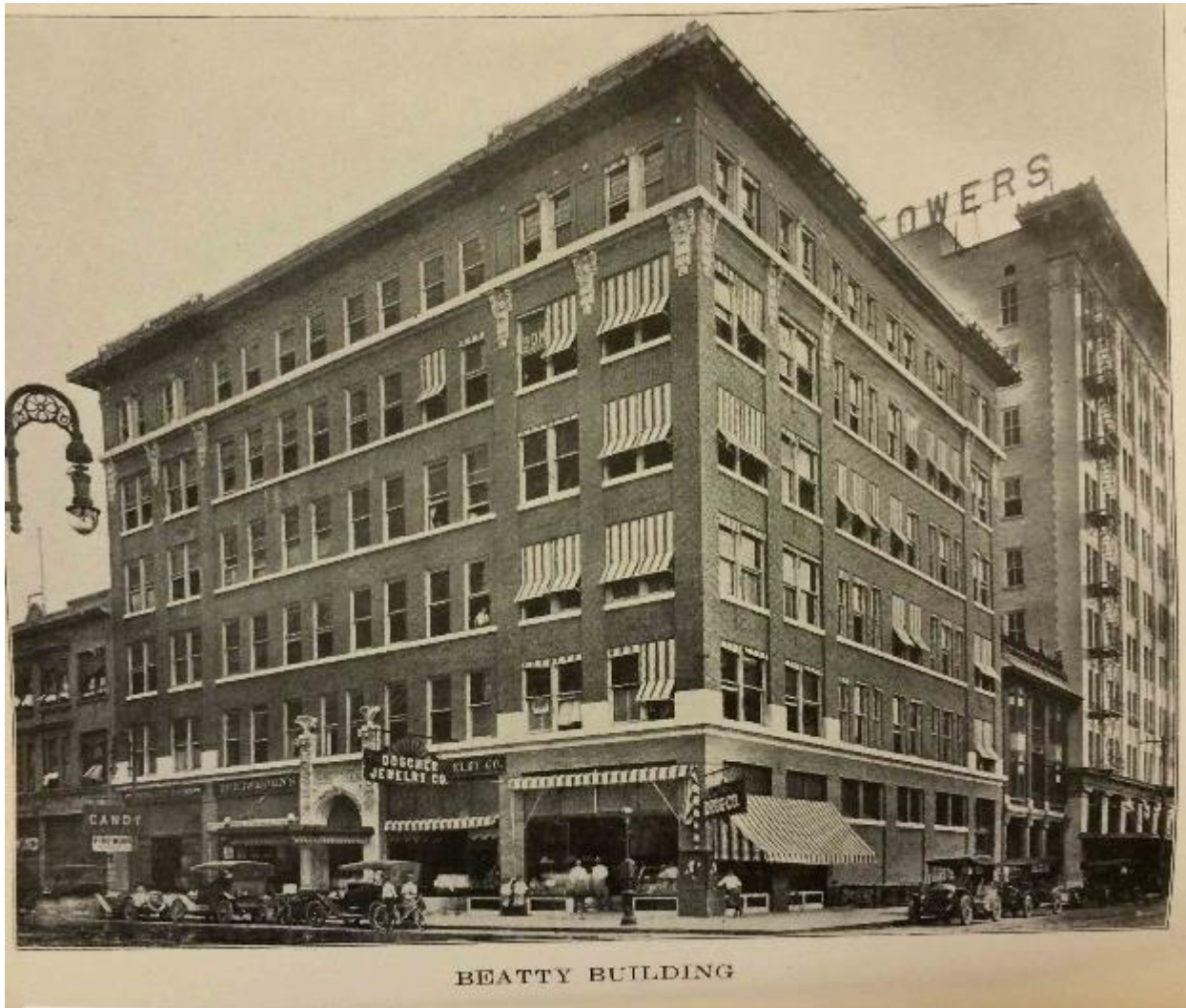
East façade, view north down Fannin from Walker intersection, camera facing north, ca. 1915. Courtesy HMRC, HPL; see photo log for call number.



Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Historic Photo #2

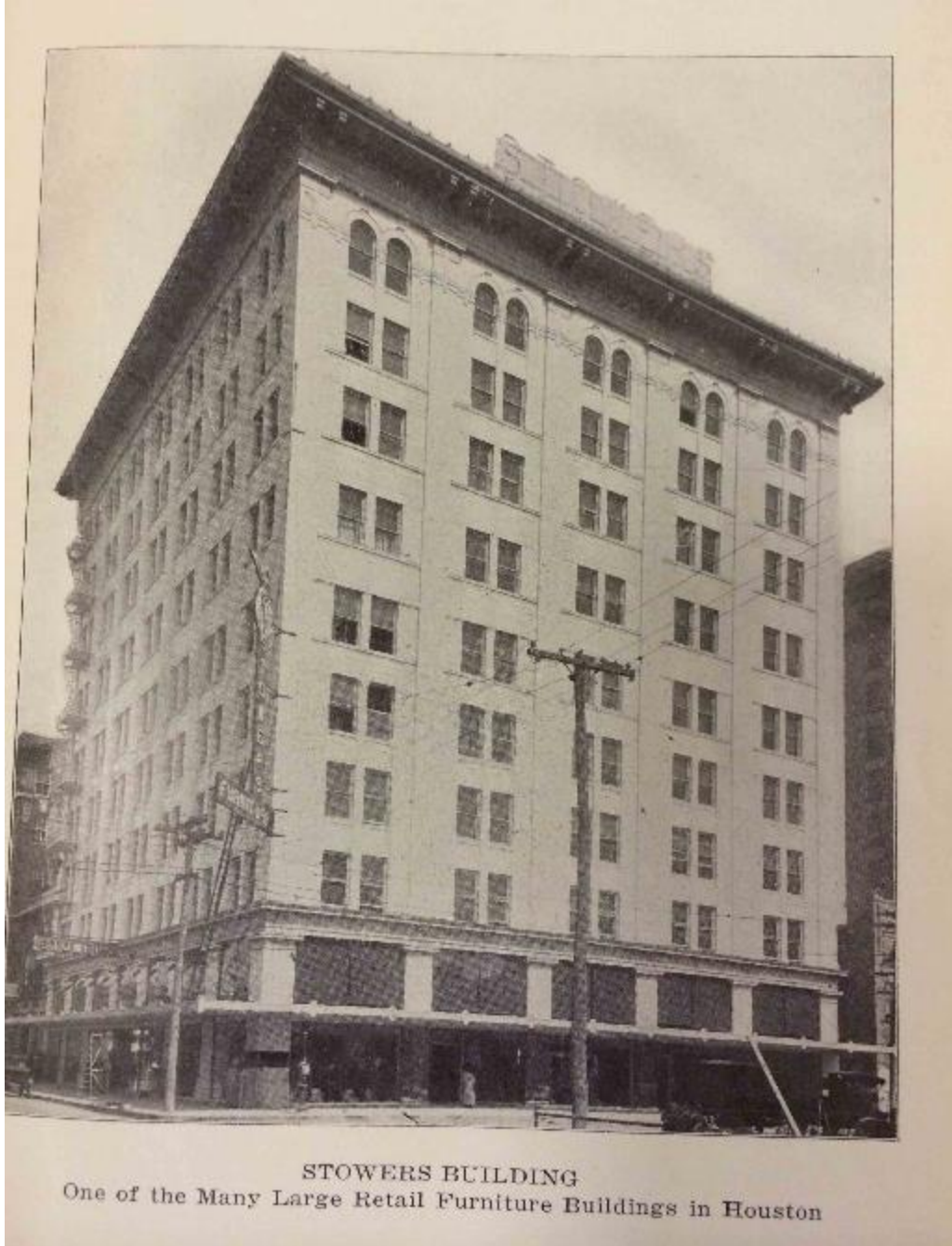
Partial west and south elevations (behind Beatty-West Building), view east down Walker from Main Street camera facing east, 1916. Courtesy HMRC, HPL; see photo log for call number.



Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Historic Photo #3

East and south facades, camera facing northwest, 1916. Courtesy HMRC, HPL; see photo log for call number.



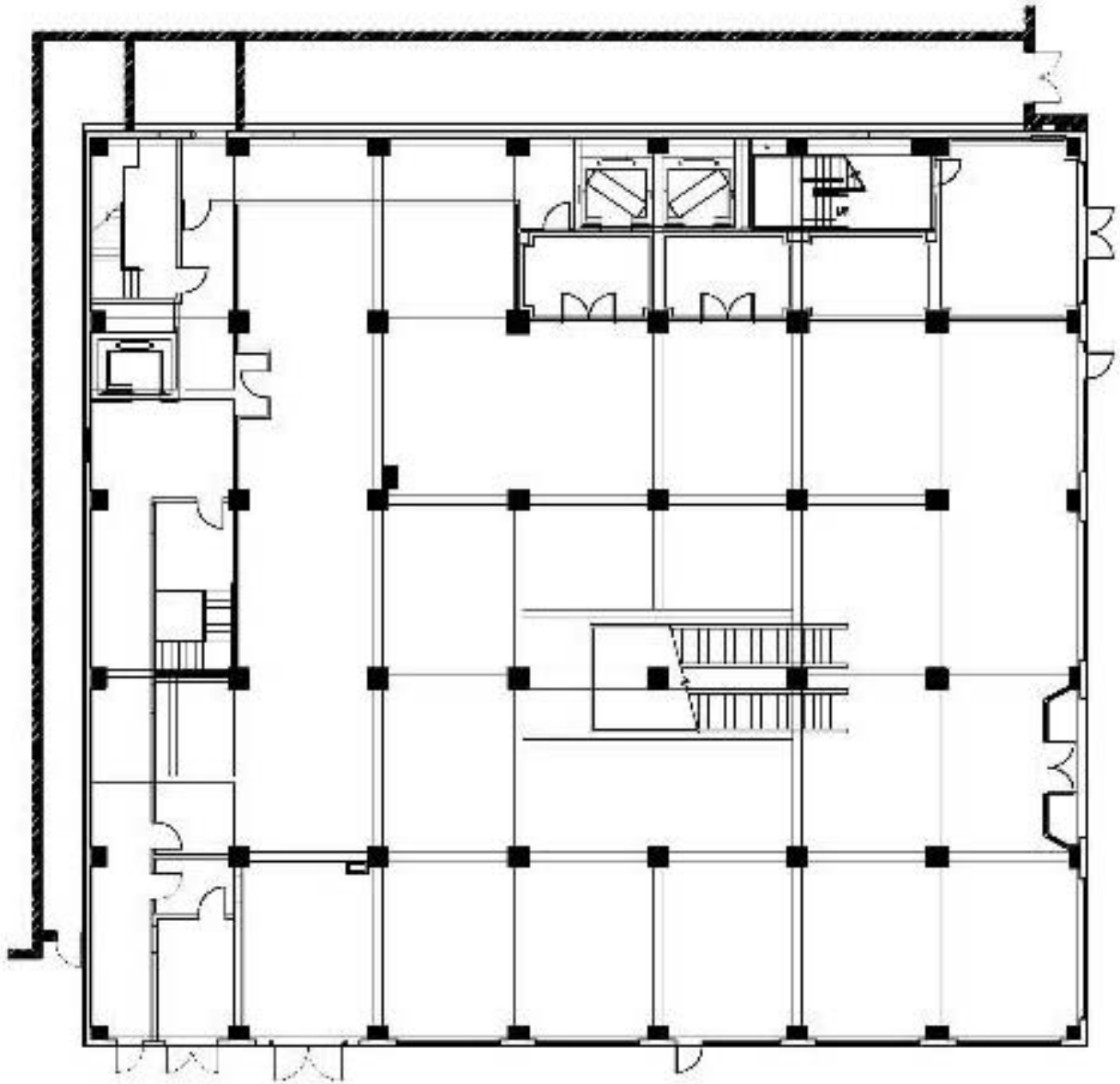
Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Historic Photo #4
East façade, camera facing west, 1930. Courtesy HMRC, HPL; see photo log for call number.



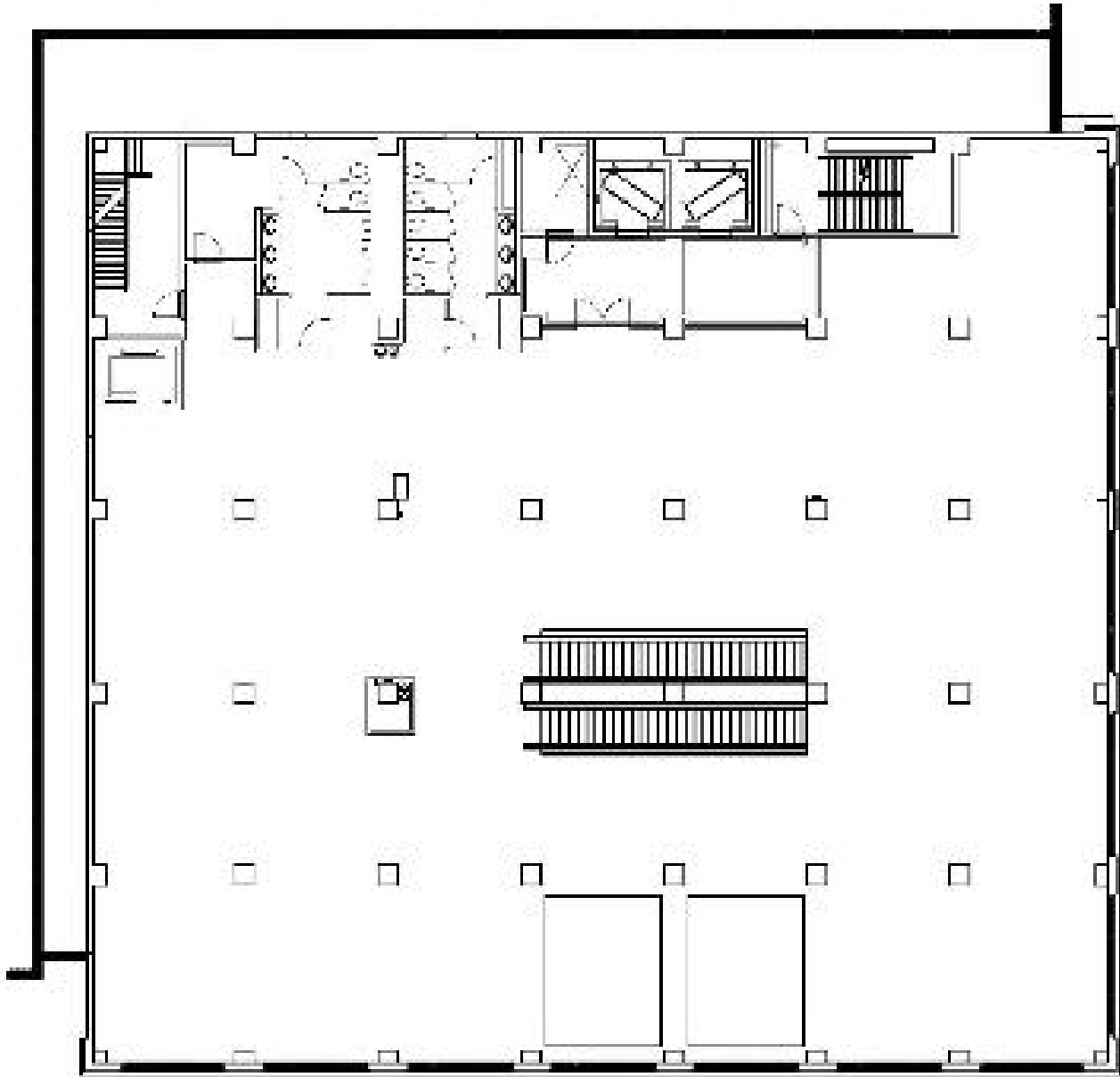
Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

First Floor Plan



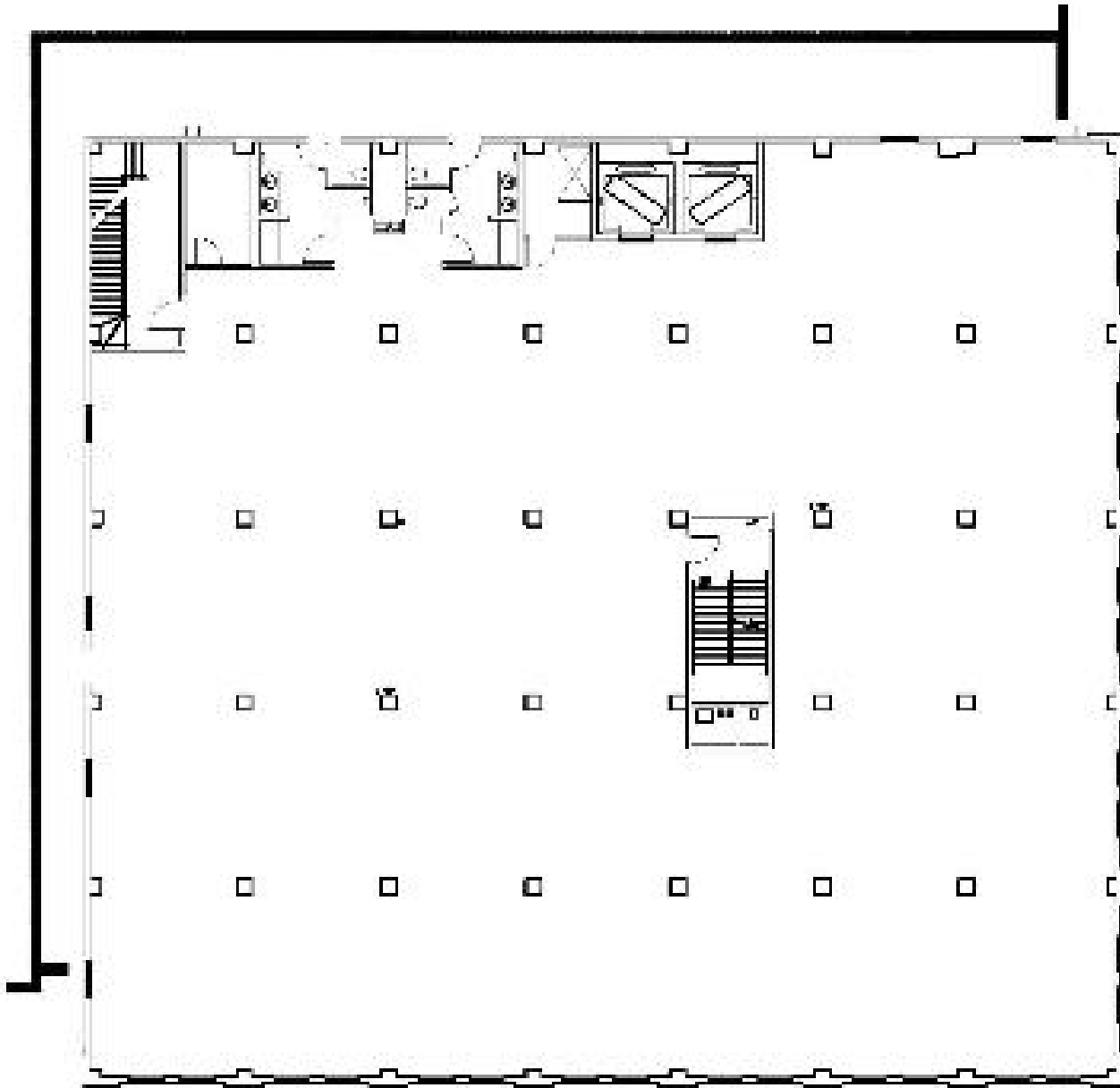
Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Second Floor Plan



Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Typical Upper Floor



Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo #1
South (left) and east facades (right), camera facing northwest, 2014.



Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo #2

East façade (center) and partial south façade (left), camera facing west, 2014.



Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo #3

East elevation and roof, camera facing west taken from the roof of the 1121 Walker, 2014.



Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo #4

East elevation, cornice detail (BG Place, 811 Main in background), camera facing northwest, 2014.



Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo #5
East elevation, detail of cornice and glazed brick, 2014.



Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo #6
Interior, tenth floor, camera facing south, 2014.



Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo #7

Interior, first floor, camera facing southwest, 2014.



Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo #8

Interior, first floor, detail of column, camera facing northwest, 2014.



Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo #9
Interior, first floor, detail of decorative plaster, 2014.



Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo #10

East elevation, detail of ground floor storefront, camera facing west, 2014.



Stowers Building, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo #11

South elevation, detail of ground floor storefront, camera facing northeast, 2014.



-fin-