

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

99-68



1. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: Humble Oil Building
OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: Main building

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: 1212 Main Street
CITY OR TOWN: Houston VICINITY: N/A NOT FOR PUBLICATION: N/A
STATE: Texas CODE: TX COUNTY Harris CODE: 201 ZIP CODE: 77002

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this x 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 x meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide x locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Curtis J. Tunnell 22 Dec. 1998
Signature of certifying official Date
State Historic Preservation Officer, Texas Historical Commission

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain) :

Edson H. Beall 1.27.99
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

5. CLASSIFICATION

OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY: private

CATEGORY OF PROPERTY: building

NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:	CONTRIBUTING	NONCONTRIBUTING
	1	1 BUILDINGS
	0	1 SITES
	0	0 STRUCTURES
	0	0 OBJECTS
	1	2 TOTAL

NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES PREVIOUSLY LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER: 0

NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING: N/A

6. FUNCTION OR USE

HISTORIC FUNCTIONS: COMMERCE: business

CURRENT FUNCTIONS: VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Other: 3-part vertical block
Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals - Italian Renaissance

MATERIALS: FOUNDATION STONE (granite)
WALLS BRICK; STONE (limestone)
ROOF ASPHALT
OTHER CONCRETE; GLASS; METAL (steel); METAL (copper)

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-9)

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Humble Oil Building
Houston, Harris County, Texas

The Humble Oil Building embodies early 20th century commercial design tenets ranging from classicist revivalism based in Beaux Arts traditions to mid-century modern aesthetics. Occupying nearly an entire city block in Houston's downtown business district, the building experienced four distinct construction phases. The New York architectural firm of Clinton and Russell designed the original 9-story, I-plan building in 1921 for the southern half of the block. Between 1934 and 1936 prominent Houston architects John F. Staub and Kenneth Franzheim centered their 17-story cruciform Humble Tower in the northern end of the block. Three years later they completed a 9-story addition at the northwest corner of the block. In 1948 architects George Pierce and Abel B. Pierce added a tenth floor to this addition and filled in the southern courtyard of the original 1921 building. The steel and concrete frame construction of each component is sheathed in limestone at the base, brown and buff tapestry brick above with cast stone classical detailing focused on the upper floors and parapet in a manner typical of contemporaneous 3-part vertical blocks. The final phase of construction added a free standing oval pavilion in the midst of one of Houston's first downtown urban plazas, designed in 1963 by Houston architects Wilson, Morris, Crain and Anderson for the northeast corner of the block. Despite this late change to the site and subsequent alterations to the ground level facades and interior spaces, the building retains a sufficient degree of its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association to remain recognizable to its period of significance.

In 1921 the Humble Oil and Refining Company built its new corporate headquarters on the site of the Van Alstyne home, a large Victorian era mansion designed by noted architect Nicholas J. Clayton. The surrounding area was soon transformed from an elite residential neighborhood into the commercial heart of Houston's downtown business district. The new building occupied the southern half of a block bounded by Dallas Avenue on the north, Main Street on the east, Polk Avenue on the south and Travis Street to the west. As a result of a series of four additions over the course of the next few decades, the building eventually encompassed the entire block (see Plan-21).

The prestigious New York architectural firm of Clinton and Russell designed the 9-story building on an I-plan form ornamented with detailing drawn from the Italian Renaissance Revival style. Constructed at a cost of \$1.8 million, the building featured a steel skeleton sheathed with tapestry brick and cast stone classical detailing (see Photo-26). Subsequent additions maintained the imagery established by these materials and details, albeit in more modern interpretations. Prominent Houston architects John F. Staub and Kenneth Franzheim completed the 17-story Humble Tower addition in 1934-36 at a cost surpassing \$1 million (see Photo-27). Their cruciform skyscraper commanded the northern end of the property, providing a new Dallas Avenue entrance façade. Staub and Franzheim again expanded the building in 1938-39, designing a 9-story block for the northwest quadrant of the block (see Photo-30) linked to the earlier portions via a light court. Plans to construct

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a mirror image addition (see Photo-29) in the northeast quadrant were never realized. Additions in 1948 filled the original façade's entry courtyard, added a tenth floor to the northwest addition and transformed the light well into office space (see Photo-31).

THE ORIGINAL BUILDING

Despite these additions, the Polk Street (south) entrance remained the building's principal façade throughout the period of significance. Upon completion of the 1921 building, it extended across the entire width of the block from Main to Travis. Projecting wings at either end of the symmetrical composition formed an entry courtyard leading to the building's formal entrance. A line of street trees sheltered the sidewalk, as they continue to do today. The ground level featured gray Indiana limestone sheathing with large display windows for retail spaces. Floors two through six featured tapestry brick sheathing pierced by steel casement windows with vertical mullions. Floors seven through nine featured similar sheathing and fenestration, but classical detailing executed in cast stone included denticulation, pilasters, escutcheons and cornice lines distinguished this level from those below. A deeply projecting boxed copper cornice with scrolled copper brackets surmounted this composition. The resultant tripartite façade conformed to the classic principals of composition and proportion predominant in the early 20th century. Few changes intrude on this character apart from the historic 2-story infill of the entry courtyard, changes to the storefront level dating to the 1960s and the loss of the iron balconies that originally graced the seventh floor windows (see Photo 1).

The same carefully crafted articulation continued on the prominent side elevations, and to a much lesser extent across the original rear (north) elevation. The 10-bay Travis Street (west) and Main Street (east) elevations were identical (see Photos 2 and 4). Changes reflect those found on the Polk Street façade. Simpler ornamentation across the northern elevation clearly reflected its status as a minor element of the composition, with the subsequent additions obliterating much of this elevation.

The building's interior featured 16' ceiling heights at the ground floor, with 12' ceiling heights on each of the upper floors. Offices lined a central corridor connecting the two wings of the building. On the first floor this central corridor was bisected by a second corridor that connected the main entrance with banks of elevators. On some floors this central corridor connected to smaller, peripheral hallways extending down each wing. These corridors and hallways were handsomely finished with terrazzo floors and gray marble wainscoting. Although interior spaces were often reconfigured over time, the third, fourth, fifth and ninth floors still retain these circulation features.

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THE HUMBLE TOWER

Architects John F. Staub and Kenneth Franzheim designed the first addition to the building in 1934. They sought to double the size of the original building through construction of the 17-story cruciform Humble Tower, completed in 1936. Their design employed materials and lines similar to those of the original in an effort to create a unified composition. The Humble Tower nevertheless proved a bold statement of modern architectural precepts, its verticality offsetting the horizontal block of the original building. Resting on a foundation of reinforced concrete and granite blocks, the steel and concrete tower featured limestone and tapestry brick sheathing. Simple limestone string courses encircled the tower above the third and twelfth floors, with a denticulated cornice demarcating the transition to the 3-story lantern that surmounts the composition. The tower's simple brick surfaces were relatively unadorned, with ornamentation reduced to a few classical motifs such as the colossal urns accentuating the apex of each recessed corner.

The tower's primary (north) façade fronts onto Dallas Avenue, with a 2-story entrance centered in the limestone sheathing of the ground floors. The third through fourteenth floors are clad in tapestry brick, with rows of steel casement windows and chamfered corner bays emphasizing the building's verticality. The 3-story lantern housing the cooling system steps back from the shaft at the fifteenth floor, with vertically aligned ventilation grilles continuing the lines established below. All four sides of the tower are similarly detailed, although subsequent additions obscure most of the west elevation. Changes include storefront and awning reconfigurations dating to the 1960s.

The interior of the tower is connected to the original building via a north-south corridor linking the front entrance on Polk Avenue to the tower entrance fronting Dallas Avenue. The tower corridors were joined through the elevator lobbies to the original building, with finishes such as the marble wainscoting providing unity between the two components.

NORTHWEST ADDITION

Designs for the next expansion were commissioned from architects Staub and Franzheim, with ground breaking ceremonies held in May 1938. Although plans called for a pair of 9-story additions flanking the tower, only the northwest portion was completed in 1939. It again featured limestone cladding on the lower two floors with tapestry brick sheathing and simple classical detailing above. The repetition of these materials and the surmounting denticulated cornice visually unified the various components. With five bays facing north onto Dallas Avenue and 11 bays facing west onto Travis Street, this addition was linked to the original building by a slightly set back 3-bay hyphen. The set back eased the transition between the austere addition and the more ornate original building. Few changes apart from those to the storefront and the awning alter the historic appearance of this component of the building.

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On the interior of this addition peripheral corridors interconnected the elevator banks of the tower with the west wing of the original building. Office spaces lined both sides of these corridors. Originally lined with rose marble wainscoting, these corridors have been greatly altered over the years. The later commercialization of the building is most evident here as tenants altered historic spatial configurations to accommodate changing uses. Most floors retain little evidence of their historic interiors.

1948 RECONFIGURATIONS

In 1948 the architectural team of George Pierce and Abel B. Pierce designed an addition to the building's Polk Avenue façade. The wrought iron fence that originally enclosed the courtyard and several live oak trees were removed. A 2-story addition filled in the recessed portion between the projecting east and west wings, obliterating the historic entrance. A limestone portal with a stylized keystone centered within the new addition continued to serve as the primary entrance to the building, however. This same campaign apparently resulted in the construction of a tenth floor on the northwest addition and the reconfiguration of the light well as office space by 1950.

1960s RECONFIGURATIONS

As the company's new headquarters on nearby Bell Street (see Map-22) reached completion in 1963, modernization efforts at the original headquarters were commissioned from the Houston architectural firm of Wilson, Morris, Crane and Anderson. Their efforts resulted in construction of one of Houston's first downtown urban plazas at the northeast corner of the property. Slate paving covered the entire surface of the plaza as the setting for an oval pavilion designed as the Air France ticketing office (see Photo 4). This low Modern Movement building introduced an expansive sweep of glass and steel to the streetscape. Marvin Affrime, director of the Space Design Group, completed the interior design of the building. Alterations by subsequent tenants rendered these components of the property incapable of meeting Criterion Consideration G, resulting in their classification as Noncontributing elements.

Similar efforts were focused on the headquarters building. By 1965 much of the original limestone facing was replaced with black granite and the first and second floor windows were enlarged to accommodate aluminum storefront windows. A copper canopy encircled the building to unify it visually with the new pavilion, resulting in the loss of sections of brick and limestone from the first and second floor levels around the perimeter of the building. This same renovation effort radically altered original spatial configurations, especially on the first floor. The new design divided the building's enormous floor plan roughly in four. With subsequent redistribution of internal retail space, a variety of storefront window systems and finishes resulted. Likewise, transformation of the upper floors into commercial office space also damaged historic finishes and spatial configurations.

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Despite such alterations, however, the building retains a significant amount of its historic fabric, often hidden behind modern wall construction. With the vast majority of its historic exterior intact, the building therefore retains sufficient integrity of design, materials and workmanship, as well as location, setting, feeling and association, to remain recognizable to the period of significance. As planned rehabilitation efforts through the Investment Tax Credit program materialize, the Humble Oil Building should survive into the next millennium as a prominent reminder of Houston's commercial past.

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.
- 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 VALUE, 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: N/A

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Commerce

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE: 1921-1948

SIGNIFICANT DATES: 1921 1934-36 1938-39 1948

SIGNIFICANT PERSON: N/A

CULTURAL AFFILIATION: N/A

ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Clinton and Russell; Staub and Franzheim; Pierce and Pierce

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (see continuation sheets 8-10 through 8-16)

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

BIBLIOGRAPHY (see continuation sheets 9-17 through 9-20)

PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION ON FILE (NPS): N/A

- 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*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government:
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

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With formation of the Humble Oil and Refining Company in 1917, the course of the Texas oil industry and the Houston economy shifted profoundly. Established to exploit discoveries at Humble Field near Houston, the modest oil company evolved during the early 20th century into one of the world's largest petroleum conglomerates, now known as Exxon. Its founding coincided with demands for oil and gas generated by World War I. Contemporaneous improvements to the Houston Ship Channel soon secured the city's position as the focus of the regional oil market. By 1920 three quarters of the region's oil production emanated from the company's fields around Houston. Capitalizing on these developments, the company commissioned the New York architectural firm of Clinton and Russell to design its headquarters building in 1921. In the subsequent two decades the company's practice of vertical integration of exploration, production, transportation, refinement, purchasing and marketing concerns established it as a leader among 1200 oil related firms in the city known as the World's Oil Capital. As a result, annual net income skyrocketed from \$878,000 in 1917 to \$186 million by 1948, with a corresponding increase from 541 to 18,954 employees during the same period. To accommodate this tremendous growth, the headquarters building experienced a series of additions that significantly expanded its presence in downtown Houston's commercial center. As these expansions directly reflect the growth of the corporation, the Humble Oil Building is therefore nominated at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the area of Commerce.

The tremendous growth of the oil industry in the early 20th century is considered to be one of the most significant developments in the industrial history of our country (Larson, 2). The earliest commercial production of oil in the United States began in Pennsylvania in 1859, but not until the 1894 discovery of Texas' first commercial oil field near Corsicana did the state participate in the new industry. Relying on the expertise of respected Pennsylvania oilmen James Guffey and John H. Galey, local businessmen completed the first well in 1895, sparking the first oil boom in Texas. This development coincided with a shift from the production of oil for light to the commercial production of oil for energy. As a result, the Texas oil industry would primarily focus on producing oil for power, especially for machinery in the rapidly developing industrial sector.

Subsequent discoveries of oil at Spindletop near Beaumont on January 10, 1901, promulgated a radical change in the Texas economy, previously based on cattle and cotton. Texas oil production jumped from 834,039 barrels in 1900 to 4.4 million barrels in 1901. By 1902 Spindletop produced 17 million barrels, approximately 96% of the state's oil production (*Texas Almanac*, 1954: 227). Within the year more than 100 companies placed approximately 200 oil wells into production at Spindletop. Spindletop's position atop a geological formations known as a salt dome fostered exploration of similar formations across Texas, Louisiana and Oklahoma. New drilling methods, techniques and equipment soon established Texas as an important component of the national oil industry (Rister, 1939: 50).

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The impact of Spindletop far surpassed the economic value of the oil it produced. The discovery brought to Texas men with experience and capital who would eventually lead the state's most influential oil companies. For example, the Galey-Guffy-Mellon team that drilled the Spindletop gusher evolved into the Gulf Oil Company. Other Spindletop pioneers such as Joseph Cullinan, Arnold Schlatt, John Gates and James Stephen Hogg went on to form the Texas Company, later known as Texaco. The Humble Oil and Refining Company and Magnolia Petroleum Company also evolved from Spindletop antecedents. At a time when little was understood about Texas geology, these men initiated new methods of locating oil and bringing it to market. Their practical solutions to the technological problems associated with oil exploration and production fostered petroleum geology as a significant component of the oil industry.

Subsequent discoveries in the region included fields at Jennings, Louisiana (1901) and Sour Lake (1902), Saratoga (1903), Baston (1903), Humble (1905), and Goose Creek (1908) in Texas (see Map-23 through Map-25). Situated between Beaumont and Houston, these early Texas fields produced between 10 and 11 million barrels of oil annually by 1908 (Giddens, 115). The Humble Field alone produced about three million barrels of oil (Clark, 54). Its location near the small town of Humble just 18 miles northeast of Houston established the city as a leading oil center for the southwest. By 1940 six major oil companies and more than 1200 smaller concerns would office within Houston's city limits. Its status as a nationally recognized oil center garnered Houston the appellation of the World's Oil Capital (*Houston Chronicle*, 9/02/40).

Organizational patterns established in these first Texas oil fields exerted a profound influence on the development of the entire oil industry. Early exploration efforts in the region were impeded by the evasive nature of oil in the ground and property laws concerning underground minerals. While the State of Texas ceded its claim on underground minerals to land owners by 1866 (*Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, January 1941: 305), its fugitive nature continued to spawn court cases in the industry's earliest years. As oil and gas were contained within the land, but capable of migrating with pressure changes, ownership often came into question. Precedents such as the 1889 Pennsylvania Supreme Court decision in *Westmoreland Natural Gas Co. v. DeWitt* defined oil as fugitive or vagrant, much as English common law defined wild animals as belonging to their captors. Ultimately upheld in the June and November 1935 cases of *Brown v. Humble Oil and Refining Co.* before the Texas Supreme Court, the concept was applied to underground migratory minerals such as oil. This initiated what quickly became known as the Rule of Capture, assigning ownership of oil to anyone who could gain possession (Rundell, 24). As a result, frenzied searches for oil characterized the first two decades of the industry in Texas. Small independent operators drilled as many wells as possible, as quickly as possible, in an attempt to maximize profits. The rapid development of a field resulted in a cycle of high initial oil productivity followed by diminishing returns as resources were depleted. Local demand seldom used more than a fraction of this initial production, depressing oil prices as supply outstripped demand. Enormous price fluctuations resulted from this pattern. Smaller

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operators often increased their production to try recouping lease and equipment investments in the face of lower prices. Pumping wells at full capacity seemed necessary to prevent neighboring wells from siphoning off proprietary reserves. These conflicting practices proved wasteful of both natural and capital resources and set wildcat producers at odds with the major oil concerns. Small local producers viewed low prices as a result of control of storage and distribution by the majors, while these corporations placed the blame on haphazard and inefficient oil field development by the producers. Not until the late 1920s and early 1930s were these overproduction cycles disrupted by the development of conservation measures and more efficient drilling techniques.

During this period, transportation, storage and refining operations increasingly became the province of corporations such as the Gulf Oil Corporation, the Magnolia Petroleum Company and the Texas Company that maintained strong financial ties to Eastern firms such as Standard Oil. Texas' independent oil producers relied on antitrust laws to combat this consolidation of the industry. The state's courts sided with the independent producers following the precedent of the 1907 ruling against the Waters-Pierce Oil Company, the Standard Oil of New Jersey affiliate operating in Texas (Haley, 14). In 1909 the Texas Supreme Court upheld lower court decisions that the Water-Pierce Oil Company violated Texas antitrust laws. The company was fined and its permit to operate in Texas revoked. Additional lawsuits ousted several other large companies the following year. Independent producers also managed to block legislation permitting vertical integration of producing, piping, storage, refining and purchasing operations within a single corporation. The legal climate in Texas favored the growth of local companies and the small independent producer.

Within these parameters, a group of Spindletop veterans founded the new Humble Oil and Refining Company. Drillers William Stamps Farish and Robert E. Blaffer met in Beaumont and formed a partnership in 1904 before moving on the Humble Field. In 1903, Ross S. Sterling opened a feed store supplying grain and hay for the mules used to haul the casings and other needed supplies associated with drilling. His success soon led into banking and investment in oil properties. With prices down by 1909, Sterling bought two producing wells in the Humble Field. To conserve capital Sterling formed a partnership with other small operators in the Humble Field, most notably Walter Fondren. They named this new concern the Humble Oil Company. The company bought other wells as the market declined, adding fields in Sour Lake and Goose Creek, as well as Oklahoma, before moving their headquarters to Houston when the Texas market began to prosper in 1912.

In these initial years, small independent producers such as Humble could only sell their production to larger oil companies such as Standard Oil of New Jersey with a substantial network of pipelines, storage and refining facilities. With World War I intensifying the demand for gasoline, Humble's board became interested in transportation and refining operations as a means of capitalizing on their production capability. Blaffer, Farish and their new partner, North Texas oil field developer Harry Weiss, urged construction of a small refinery. They were convinced that producing oil in small

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quantities with simpler equipment would enable them to profitably compete with the larger refineries in the local gasoline market. Their Globe Refining Company soon furnished gasoline to Houston at a price larger companies could not match. The company quickly proved successful. Sterling in turn purchased the Southern Pipe Line Company to provide the piping and equipment needed to transport oil from the Goose Creek fields to the Houston Ship Channel. These simple ventures laid the groundwork for the vertical integration of the local oil industry.

In response to these new developments, the company reorganized in June 1917 as the Humble Oil and Refining Company. The new corporation owned 217 oil wells along the Gulf Coast, north Texas and Oklahoma, in addition to the refining and pipe line components. Its new charter provided for all functions allowed under the newly passed Texas Company Act, including production, transportation, storage and refinement. Capitalized at one million dollars, the new listed Ross S. Sterling as president, with Fondren, Farish, Weiss, Blaffer and Sterling's brother F.P. serving as vice presidents (Larson, 56). Jesse H. Jones, C.B. Goddard and L. A. Carlton completed the original board of directors. Lack of capital for expansion and equipment plagued the newly formed company. Inclusion of the well-connected Jones failed to attract additional financing and Jones sold his stock within the year (*Houston Chronicle*, 14 April 1963). In response, the company sold a half interest in the company to Standard Oil of New Jersey in February 1919 for \$17 million. This infusion of cash financed construction of new pipelines and refineries while leaving the company in local control, thereby avoiding penalties under Texas antitrust laws. By 1920, three quarters of oil production from the Gulf Coast region came from Humble fields around Houston and the company was on its way to becoming an industry leader.

As a result, Ross Sterling commissioned the New York architectural firm of Clinton and Russell to design the company's new headquarters in 1920. Architects Charles W. Clinton and William H. Russell formed their partnership in the late 19th century, becoming well known for their Italian Renaissance palazzo style office buildings around New York. The Broad Exchange Building (1902; NR 1998) is the firm's only surviving office building in Manhattan. Other surviving examples of their work include an Upper East Side townhouse at 4 East 62nd Street (1898, NR 1984), the Graham Court Apartments (1901), Central Park West's Langham Apartments (1905; NR 1982) and the Aphorpe Apartments (1906-08; NR 1978). Designed long after these commissions, the Humble Oil Building is the firm's only known work in Texas.

The Humble Oil Building arose in an elite residential neighborhood rapidly becoming the heart of Houston's developing business district. The 9-story building occupied the southern half of an entire city block. Its approximately 210,000 square feet of office space distinguished it as the largest office building in Texas at the time (*Houston Chronicle*, 1921). Construction of the new headquarters

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facilitated consolidation of many offices around town into a unified symbol of corporate stability and prosperity. The building's classically derived architectural style was chosen to reinforce this corporate image.

Unprecedented growth in Houston during the 1920s paralleled the expanding oil industry. Already established as an important rail center, Houston developed into a regional center of the Texas oil industry during this period. Shipments of oil through the port of Houston dramatically increased during World War, prompting improvements to the ship channel. Completed in 1925, the resultant facilities provided advantages for oil companies in the region, thus securing Houston's financial position as the largest inland port city in the south. Concomitant growth in the decade following construction of the Humble Oil Building transformed Houston from a city of 138,000 to one of nearly 300,000 people.

The company expanded as well during this period. The infusion of capital from Standard Oil afforded opportunities to accelerate the search for new oil fields. Throughout this decade the production of crude oil continued to be the company's most important operation, a drive that was industry wide. Fixed assets for the company steadily increased from \$13 million in 1918 to more than \$233 million 11 years later. Attempting to maximize its production revenues, the company focused on its pipeline and refining operations, completing the Baytown Refinery in 1921. It simultaneously strengthened its pipeline operations, increasing its initial holdings of 60 miles of pipeline to more than 3,918 miles of truck line pipes and another 2,357 miles in gathering lines by 1929. The Humble Pipe Line Company provided approximately 90% of the company's earnings during this period. These profits funded pipeline expansion as well as other company operations such as acquisition of new oil fields, thereby cushioning the company from the dramatic economic events which would soon unfold.

The demand for oil remained strong throughout the 1930s, buffering Houston and the state's other oil-producing centers from the economic effects of the Great Depression. The discovery of the East Texas Field in 1931 again expanded the Texas oil industry. Experts projected the capacity of the new field at double the reserves in the state. Humble's holdings in the field would prove its greatest reserve in any one field (Larson, 395). As with earlier fields, however, the dramatic increase in production threatened to cripple oil prices. Humble initiated voluntary production cuts to curb falling prices. With the failure of this effort to halt free falling prices, however, newly elected Governor Ross S. Sterling ordered oil production in the East Texas Field shut down. This crisis ultimately bolstered the state Railroad Commission's authority to enforce conservation regulations such as restrictive production limits, thereby transforming its regulatory relationship with the oil industry.

As the industry settled into more stable production patterns, Humble broadened its focus on technological innovations to improve profits. By increasing drilling depths in existing wells suffering from early decline, for example, its production department tapped into deeply buried oil deposits at

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little additional cost. Such cost efficiencies fostered continued prosperity for the company throughout the 1930s. To meet skyrocketing demands for natural gas and its derivatives the company amassed vast holdings of gas reserves in southwest Texas. As a result of such efforts, the company's investment in production and exploration activities grew from 34% of the company's fixed assets in 1930 to 61% by 1941. Production personnel increased from 2,200 to 3,800 during the same period.

To accommodate this tremendous growth, the company commissioned the 17-story Humble Tower addition to its Houston headquarters. Designed by prominent architects John F. Staub and Kenneth Franzheim, the skyscraper form harmonized with the original building's architectural classicism through materials, line and proportion rather than detailing. The formal elegance of the new tower expressed the company's prominent role as a leader in the oil industry. At a time of widespread unemployment, the hundreds of jobs associated with the construction project provided a significant boost to Houston's economy. Its anticipated cost of \$1 million was cited as the largest private building project undertaken in the nation during 1934 (*Houston*, 1934-36: 15).

Staub and Franzheim were among Houston's most prominent architects. Both were graduates of the architectural program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Before setting up practice in Houston, Staub worked with Harrie T. Lindeberg in New York, while Franzheim worked with C. Howard Crane in Detroit. Staub's career in Houston spanned nearly 50 years, with his residential projects for wealthy and influential leaders of Houston sprinkled throughout elite neighborhoods such as Memorial, River Oaks, Shadow Lawn and Shadyside. Among these was the River Oaks residence he built for Houston philanthropist Miss Ima Hogg, known as Bayou Bend (1927; NR 1979). His work for Humble founders included homes for William S. Farish and Jesse H. Jones, as well as Rice University's Fondren Library (1949) and Harry C. Weiss Hall. Franzheim first worked in Houston as an associate architect for Alfred C. Finn's work on the Gulf Building (1927-29; NR 1983) project for Jesse Jones. He officially moved to Houston in 1937 to partner with Staub on the Humble Tower project. He established a prominent commercial practice in Houston producing a series of major projects in the 1950s such as the Foley's Department Store (1947) and the Blaffer Wing (1953) of the Museum of Fine Arts. He received an AIA Award of Merit in 1950 for the Foley's design.

In 1938 Humble undertook a third addition to the building designed by architects Staub and Franzheim. They envisioned identical 9-story wings flanking the tower on the east and west, although only the western portion of the design was completed. Each addition to the Humble Oil Building reflects a particular period of expansion for the company and the associated financial impact on the economy of Houston. A few comparative figures (Larson, Appendix II) reveal the patterns of the company's growth:

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	1917	1921	1934	1938	1948
EMPLOYEES	541	6,100	11,420	13,235	18,954
NET INCOME	\$878,000	\$6.5 million	\$22 million	\$36 million	\$186 million
TOTAL ASSETS	\$10 million	\$107 million	\$244 million	\$362 million	\$861 million

By 1963, however, the company's 42,000 employees outgrew this location and it built an impressive 44-story tower several blocks to the south. The original headquarters underwent modernization efforts resulting in Houston's first urban plaza (Fox, 38). The Houston architectural firm of Wilson, Morris, Crane and Anderson designed a slate covered plaza for the northeastern quadrant of the block, the site originally intended for the second portion of the 1938-39 Staub and Franzheim addition. An oval pavilion housing an Air France ticket terminal occupied the center of this plaza, with an interior designed by Marvin Affrime. As director of the Space Design Group, he was noted for designing similar facilities throughout the world. Although this low glass and metal building bespeaks the design trends of the period, neither it nor the slate covered plaza meet Criteria Consideration G.

The broad economic and social significance of the Humble Oil and Refining Company exerted a strong influence on 20th century commerce in Texas. The association of this building with the oil firm marked it as a significant landmark for Houston. Only a handful of comparable buildings survive, including the Texas Company Building (1913) and the Gulf Building (1927-29; NR 1983) in Houston and the Magnolia Building (1921; NR 1978) in Dallas. Exhibiting size, scale, massing and materials characteristic of the American office skyscraper typology from this period, the Humble Oil Building testifies to the company's development into an international power in the oil industry.

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Humble Oil Building
Houston, Harris County, Texas

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Houston, Harris County, Texas

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Houston, Harris County, Texas

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Houston, Harris County, Texas

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF PROPERTY: approximately 1.5 acres

UTM REFERENCES

	Zone	Northing	Easting
1	15	271140	3293820

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lots 1-12 in Block 271, South Side of Buffalo Bayou, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas, including a strip between the theoretical north line of the block and the building, as adopted by City Council on 28 February 1938 in the J.S. Holman Survey, A323

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundaries include all property historically associated with the development of the building.

11. FORM PREPARED BY (with assistance from Bruce Jensen, THC Architectural Historian)

NAME/TITLE: Lynn Edmunson, Historian

ORGANIZATION: N/A

DATE: May 1998/December 1998

STREET & NUMBER: 2216 Brentwood Drive

TELEPHONE: (713)522-3431

CITY OR TOWN: Houston

STATE: TX **ZIP CODE:** 77019

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

CONTINUATION SHEETS

MAPS (see continuation sheet Map-22 through Map-25)

PHOTOGRAPHS (see continuation sheet Photo-26 through Photo-32)

ADDITIONAL ITEMS (see continuation sheet Plan-21)

PROPERTY OWNER

NAME: HCI Construction and Design

STREET & NUMBER: 210 Baronne Street

TELEPHONE: (504)679-5040

CITY OR TOWN: New Orleans

STATE: LA **ZIP CODE:** 70112

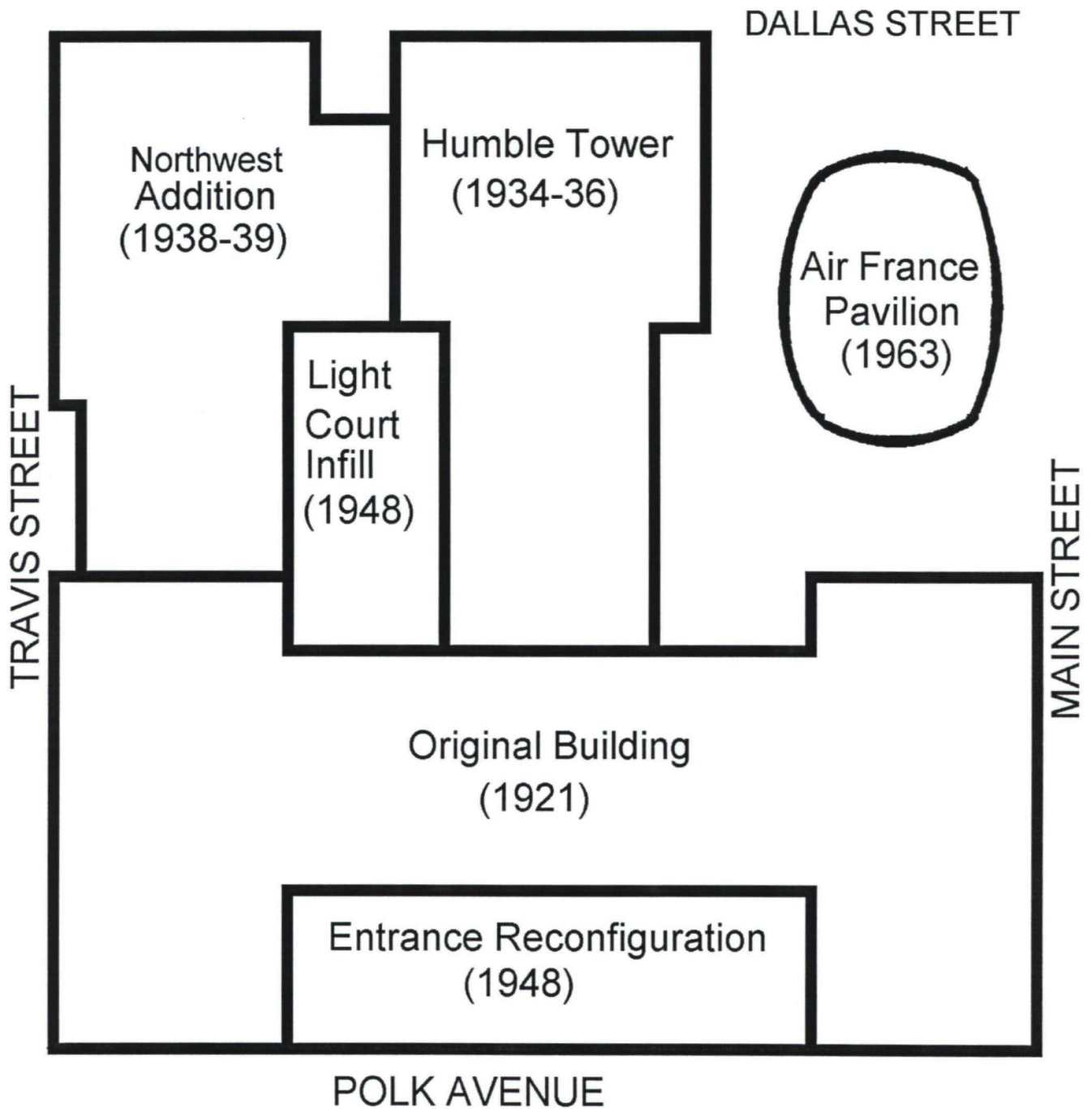
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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Humble Oil Building
Houston, Harris County, Texas

Section PLAN Page 21

SITE PLAN OF BUILDING WITH ADDITIONS



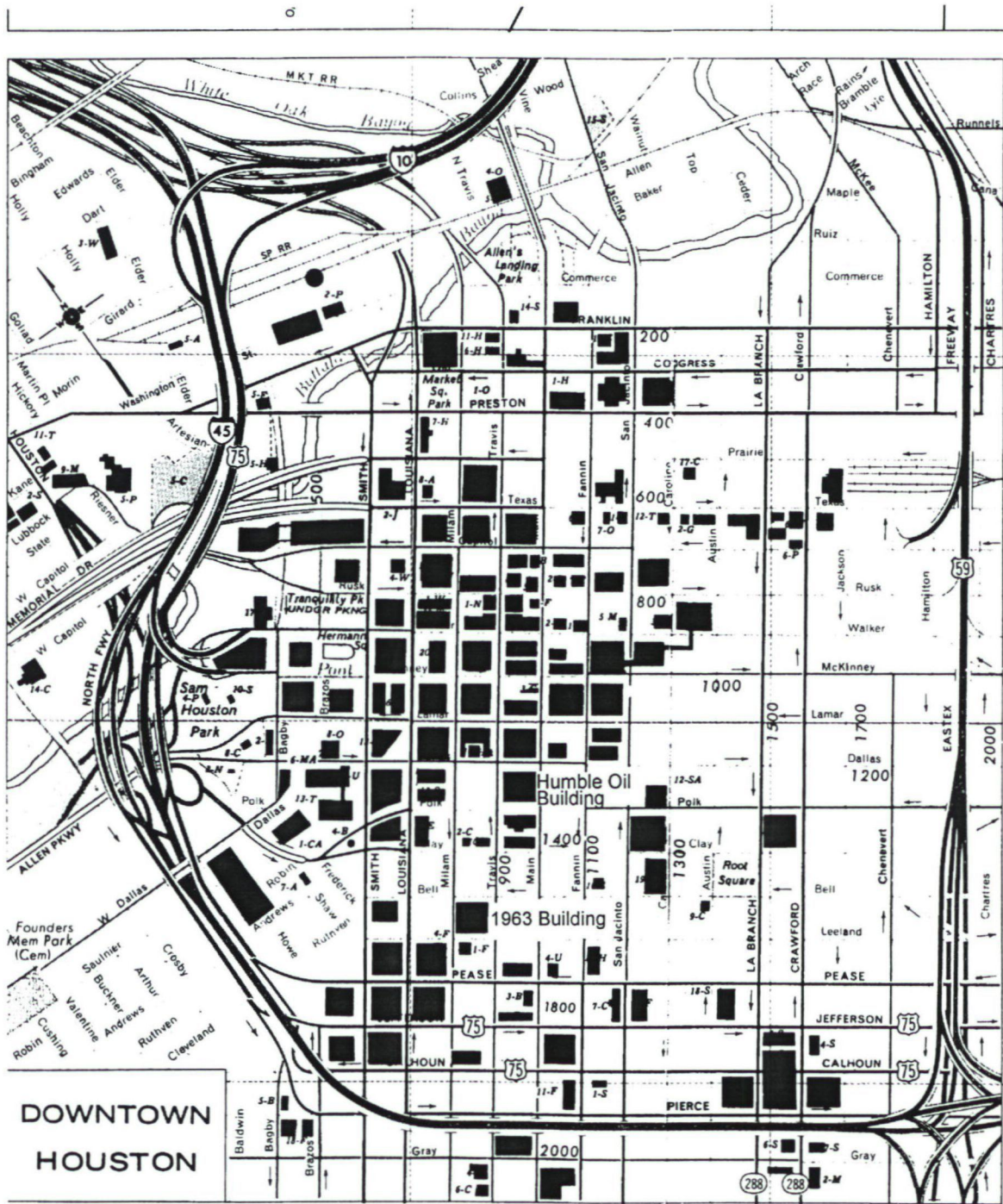
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Humble Oil Building
Houston, Harris County, Texas

Section MAP Page 22

CONTEXTUAL MAP OF DOWNTOWN HOUSTON



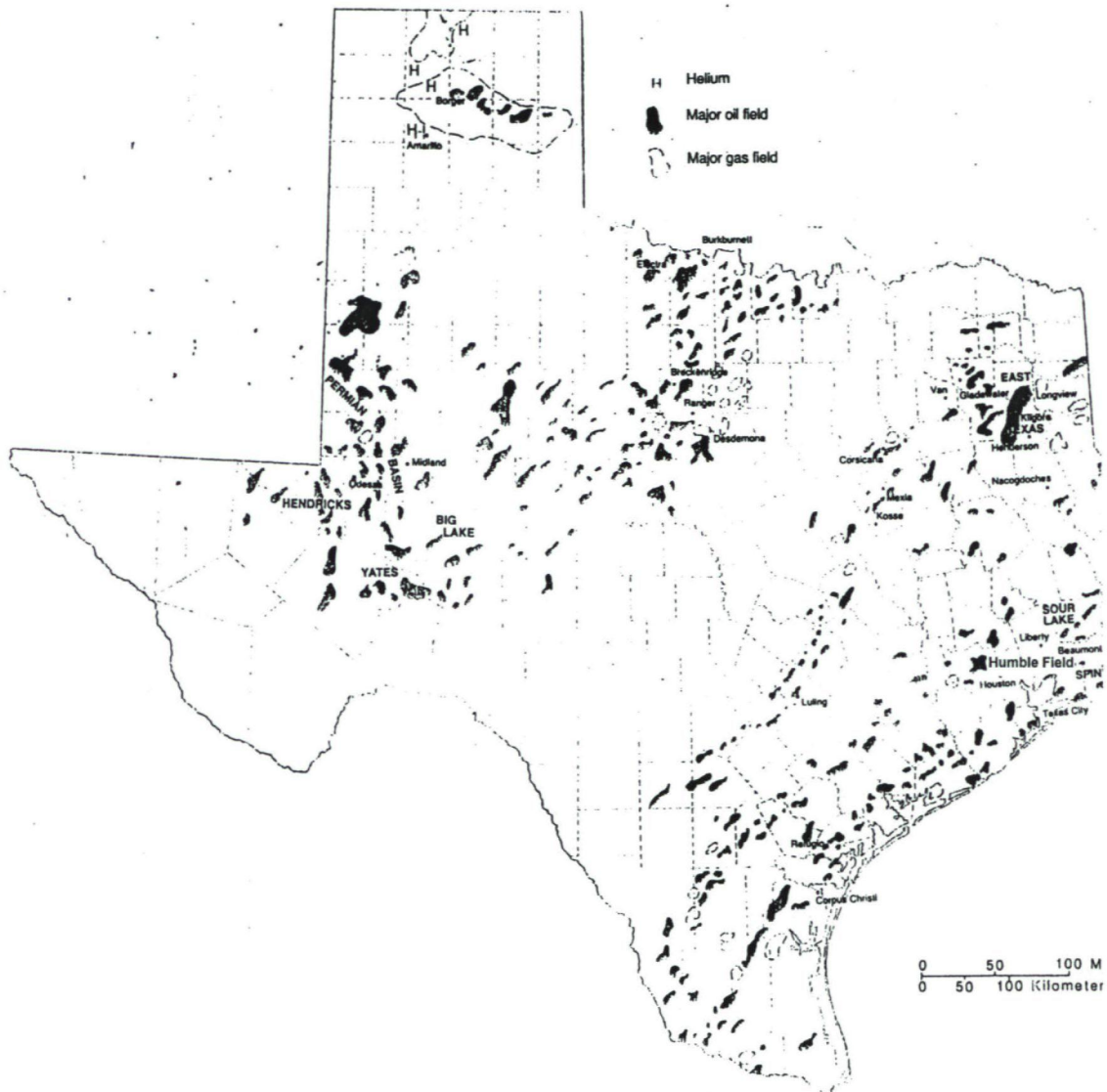
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Section MAP Page 24

Humble Oil Building
Houston, Harris County, Texas

MAJOR OIL AND GAS DISCOVERIES IN TEXAS
(SOURCE: *TEXAS GULF COAST*, 1988)



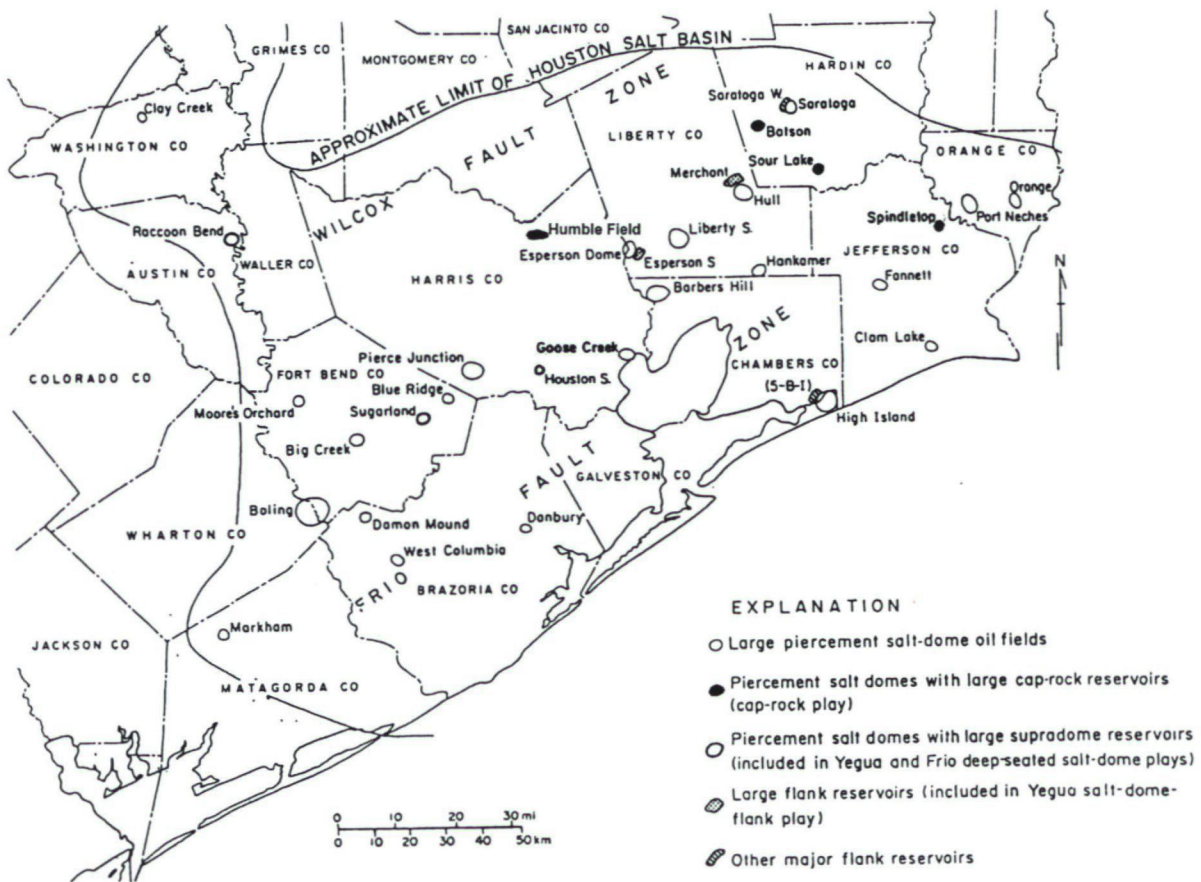
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Section MAP Page 25

Humble Oil Building
Houston, Harris County, Texas

MAJOR OIL DISCOVERIES IN THE GULF COAST REGION (SOURCE: *ATLAS OF MAJOR TEXAS OIL RESERVOIRS*, 1983)



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Section PHOTO Page 26

Humble Oil Building
Houston, Harris County, Texas

HISTORIC PHOTO OF BUILDING, 1921
(SOURCE: METROPOLITAN RESEARCH CENTER, HOUSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY)



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Section PHOTO Page 27

Humble Oil Building
Houston, Harris County, Texas

HISTORIC PHOTO OF TOWER ADDITION, 1936
(SOURCE: METROPOLITAN RESEARCH CENTER, HOUSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY)



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Section PHOTO Page 28

Humble Oil Building
Houston, Harris County, Texas

HISTORIC AERIAL VIEW OF DOWNTOWN HOUSTON SHOWING TOWER ADDITION, 1936
(SOURCE: BOB BAILEY STUDIOS)



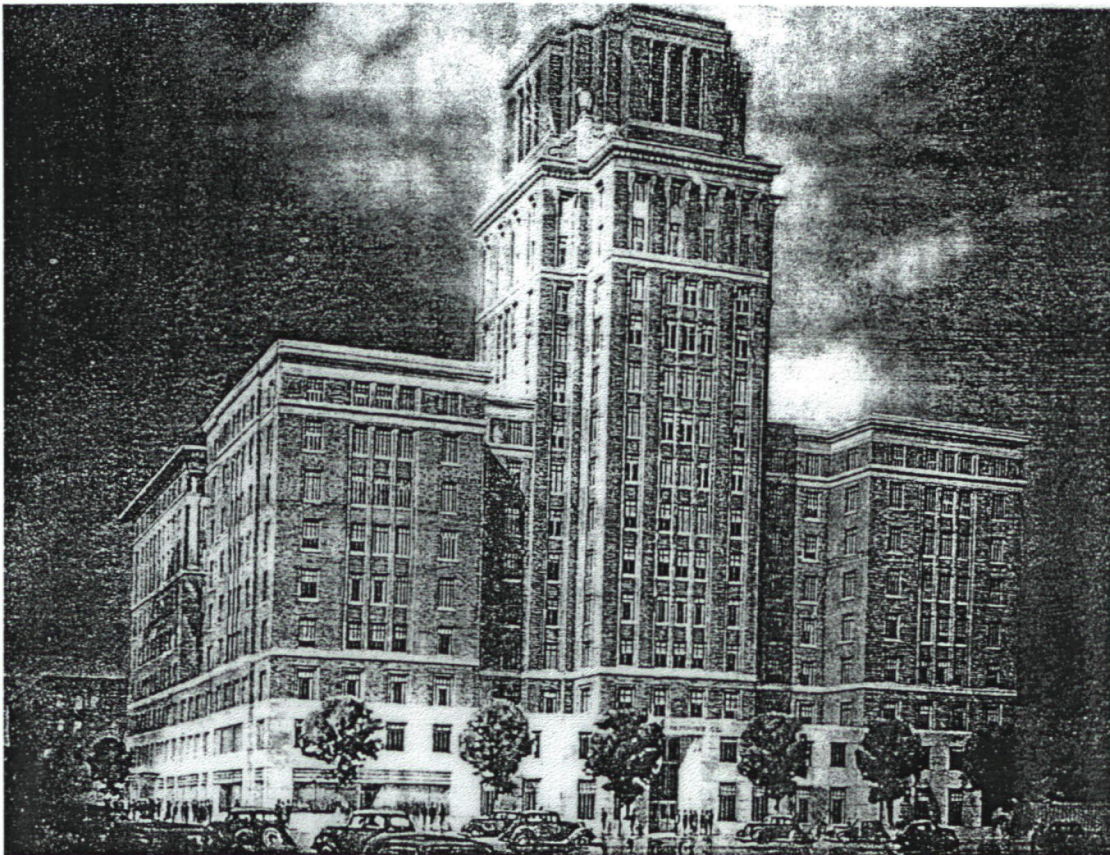
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Section PHOTO Page 29

Humble Oil Building
Houston, Harris County, Texas

ARCHITECTURAL RENDERING OF PROPOSED ADDITIONS TO BUILDING, 1938
(SOURCE: METROPOLITAN RESEARCH CENTER, HOUSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY)



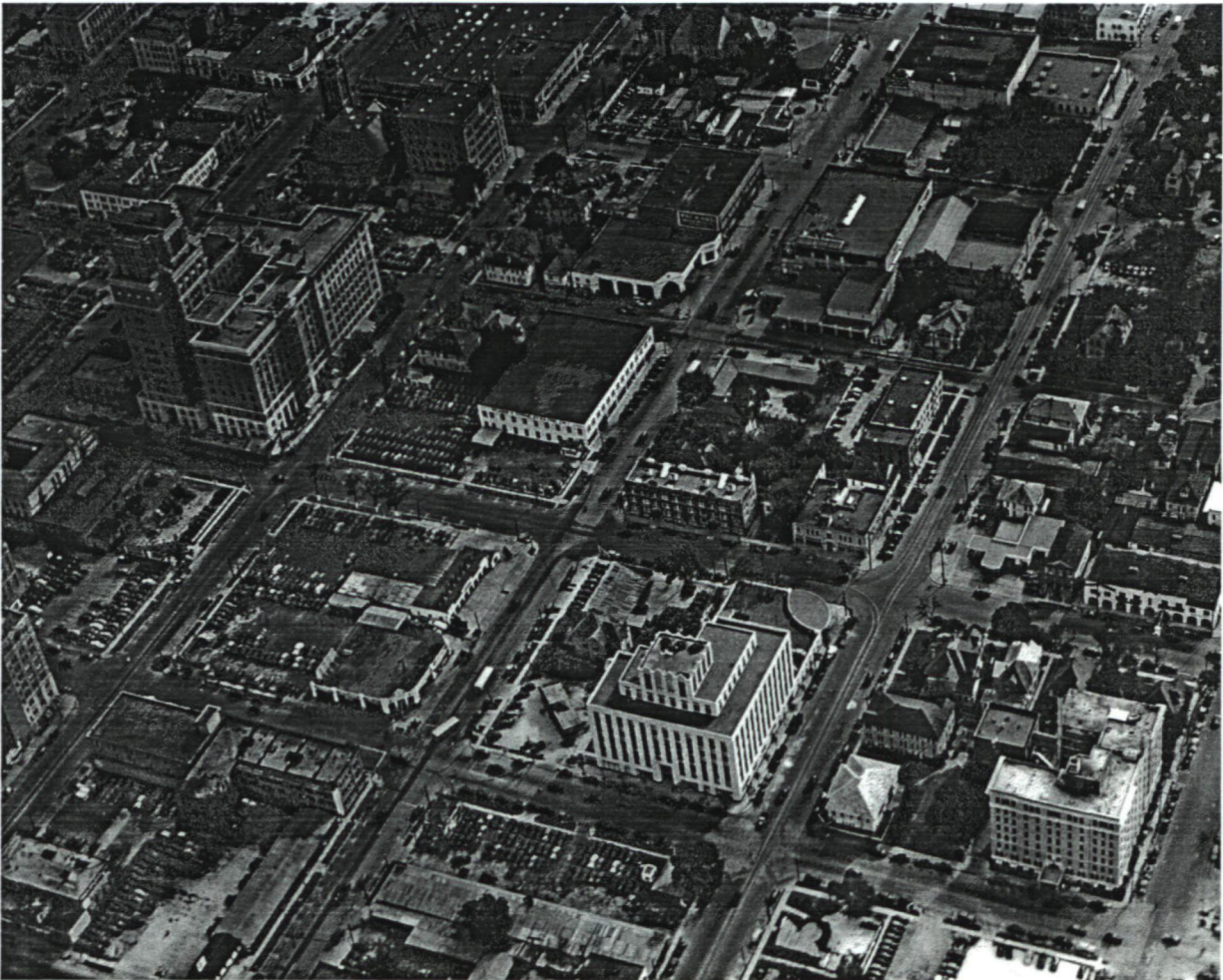
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Section PHOTO Page 30

Humble Oil Building
Houston, Harris County, Texas

**HISTORIC AERIAL VIEW OF DOWNTOWN HOUSTON SHOWING NORTHWEST ADDITION, 1939
(SOURCE: BOB BAILEY STUDIOS)**



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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section PHOTO Page 31

Humble Oil Building
Houston, Harris County, Texas

**HISTORIC AERIAL VIEW OF DOWNTOWN HOUSTON SHOWING 10TH STORY ADDITION, 1952
(SOURCE: BOB BAILEY STUDIOS)**



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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section PHOTO Page 32

Humble Oil Building
Houston, Harris County, Texas

PHOTO INVENTORY

HUMBLE OIL BUILDING
1212 MAIN STREET
HOUSTON, HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS
LYNN EDMUNSON, PHOTOGRAPHER
MAY 1998
ORIGINAL NEGATIVES ON FILE WITH THE PROPERTY OWNER

- PHOTO 1 - View of Polk Avenue (south) and Main Street (east) elevations, camera facing northwest
- PHOTO 2 - View of Polk Avenue (south) and Travis Street (west) elevations, camera facing northeast
- PHOTO 3 - View of Travis Street (west) and Dallas Avenue (north) elevations, camera facing southeast
- PHOTO 4 - View of Dallas Avenue (north) and Main Street (east) elevations, camera facing southwest
- PHOTO 5 - Detail of Polk Avenue (south) elevation, camera facing northwest
- PHOTO 6 - Detail of Main Street (east) elevation of tower addition, camera facing northwest

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Humble Oil Building
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: TEXAS, Harris

DATE RECEIVED: 12/31/98 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 1/11/99
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 1/27/99 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 2/14/99
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 99000068

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT RETURN REJECT 1.27.99 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

**Entered in the
National Register**

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N



7#

HUMBLE OIL BUILDING
1212 MAIN STREET
HOUSTON, HARRIS CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 1 of 6



END
ROAD WORK

METRO

9054

U.S. MAIL
FIRST CLASS

#11

HUMBLE OIL BUILDING
1212 MAIN STREET
HOUSTON, HARRIS CO., TEXAS
PHOTOGRAPH 2 of 6



Travis ST 1000

ONLY

STREET CLOSURE

HUMBLE OIL BUILDING
1212 MAIN STREET
HOUSTON, HARRIS CO., TEXAS
PHOTOGRAPH 3 of 6

A



#15

HUMBLE OIL BUILDING
1212 MAIN STREET
HOUSTON, HARRIS CO., TEXAS

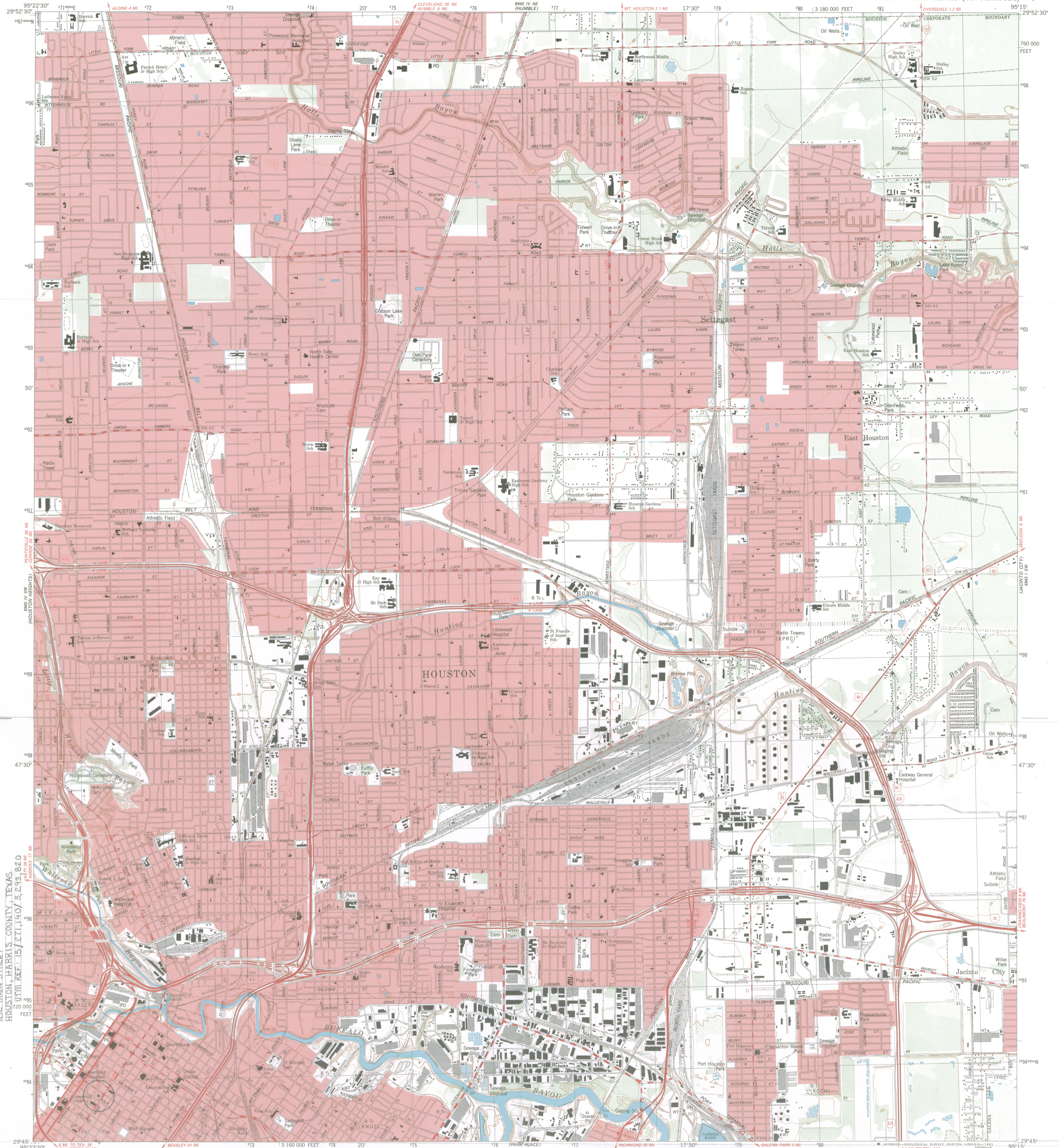
photo 15
PHOTOGRAPH 4 of 6





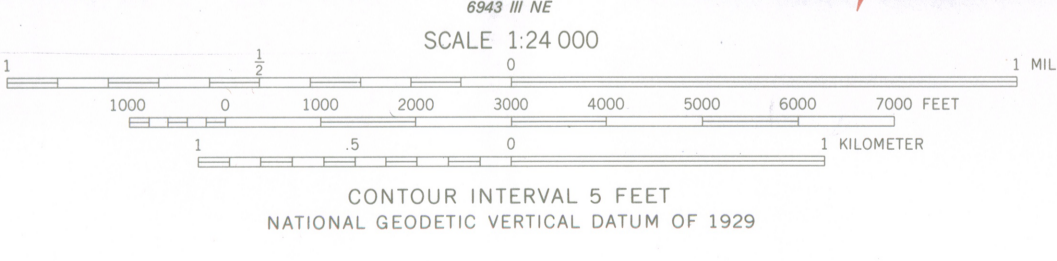
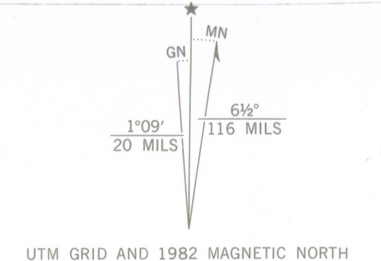
#113

HUMBLE OIL BUILDING
1212 MAIN STREET
HOUSTON, HARRIS CO., TEXAS
PHOTOGRAPH 6 of 6



THE HUMBLE OIL BUILDING
1212 MAIN STREET
HOUSTON, HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS
UTM REF: 15/271,407 3,293,820
LANTY 28 MI
LANTY 29 MI
LANTY 30 MI
LANTY 31 MI
LANTY 32 MI

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Control by USGS and NOS/NOAA
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1976. Field checked 1976. Map edited 1982
Projection and 10,000-foot grid ticks: Texas coordinate system, south central zone (Lambert conformal conic) 1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid, zone 15
1927 North American datum
To place on the predicted North American Datum 1983 move the projection lines 20 meters south and 22 meters east as shown by dashed corner ticks
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown
A portion of this map lies within a subsidence area
Contouring based on 1973 adjustment of vertical control



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway, hard surface	Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
Secondary highway, hard surface	Unimproved road
Interstate Route	U. S. Route
	State Route

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

2995-431

SETTEGAST, TEX.
N2945-W9515/7.5

1982
DMA 6943 IV SE-SERIES V882