

**Tyler Historic Resources Survey**

**Tyler, Smith County, Texas**



**The City of Tyler, Texas**

**Planning Department**

**January 2014**

**Preservation Central, Inc.**

**Austin, Texas**

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Austin, Texas

**Intensive-Level Survey of Selected Cultural Resources in  
Downtown Tyler, Texas**

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**Prepared for:**

The City of Tyler Planning Department

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**Enclosures:**

Survey Report

Cultural Resources Inventory

Texas Historical Commission Historic Resources Survey Forms

Digital Photographs of Each Surveyed Property

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Terri Myers, November 2013

**TYLER HISTORIC RESOURCES SURVEY**  
**TYLER, SMITH COUNTY, TEXAS**

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## **INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF WORK**

The purpose of the Tyler Historic Resources Survey is to assist the city of Tyler in planning for the preservation of its cultural resources and heritage. Results of the survey may be used to establish local landmarks and historic districts governed by city ordinance and design review, and to nominate resources for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

On August 11, 2013, the City of Tyler contracted with Preservation Central, Inc., an Austin-based historic preservation consulting firm, to conduct a survey of approximately 130 historic resources within the city limits. The resources (buildings, structures, objects, and sites) selected were thought to have been built between 1947 and 1972. The dates were chosen to pick up where previous surveys left off and to project beyond the typical cut-off date of 1963 (the end of the 50-year "historic" period) for future planning efforts.

All surveyed resources lie within the central core of the city in an area bounded by Front Street on the south, Gentry Parkway on the north, Palace Avenue on the west, and Beckham Avenue on the east. The survey consisted of documenting the physical attributes of each resource by recording them on a form prepared by the Texas Historical Commission, and to photograph their primary elevations. In most cases, especially for complex buildings, multiple photographs were taken. As part of the documentation, the surveyors were charged with assessing the relative merits and integrity of these resources to determine whether they are High, Medium, or Low preservation priorities, and if they would be contributing or noncontributing elements of a potential historic district. The assessments were recorded on the survey form and are included in the inventory.

Though the resources were expected to range in date from the early postwar period starting in 1947 and to date no later than 1972, some actually pre-dated the target date by many decades and others were of more recent vintage than 1972. Still others selected for survey were missing altogether and are presumed to have been demolished in the recent past. The surveyors speculated that some of the oldest properties may have been altered in the postwar period and the date assigned to them reflects the date of

alteration rather than the date of original construction. They further surmised that new properties on the list likely replaced older ones within the past several decades. Some of the addresses contained no built features or merely served as parking lots, attesting to recent redevelopment in the downtown core. Despite these anomalies, the majority of the surveyed resources date from the early post-World War II era to the mid-1970s, as expected

The Tyler Historic Resources Survey documented the salient features of 130 resources or addresses, in the case of vacant lots. The information is collected in the accompanying inventory of properties. The inventory contains the following information: address, approximate age, property type and use, number of stories, condition, stylistic influences (if any), noteworthy features (if any), construction materials, dates of alteration (if determined), and an assessment of whether the property would be considered contributing or noncontributing to a potential historic district. Some resources were found to have high preservation values and these may be eligible for individual listing in the National Register of Historic Places or as City of Tyler Landmarks. The grand Neo-Classical house at 604 Waldert and the 1954 Smith County Courthouse are High priorities.

Of the total 130 addresses, 88 (68 %) date to the historic period ending in 1965 as defined by the Secretary of the Interior. Of the surveyed resources, 8 (.06%) were determined to have outstanding preservation values and were listed as "high" priorities. Such High priority properties are good candidates for National Register or local landmark designations. Another 44 (38%) were determined to be good or typical examples of their type and therefore Medium priorities, and 78 (60 %) were low priorities either because they are nonhistoric (post 1963) or because they have suffered severe alteration since their original construction or historic-period alteration. Medium and High priorities are considered Contributing resources in a potential historic district. Low preservation priorities are considered Noncontributing elements of a potential district.

Because the selected properties were scattered throughout the city and their neighboring resources, if any, were not surveyed as part of this project, it was impossible to definitely determine whether any new historic districts exist. A possible exception is

the Smith County Courthouse Square and several adjacent commercial blocks with resources dating from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to Mid-Century Modern office buildings from the 1950s and 1960s. Another potential district lies in the upper northwest quadrant of the survey area and includes W. Bow, W. Wilson, N. Ellis, N. Harris, and N. Bonner streets and avenues. A number of contributing properties were identified in this area in a previous survey and, when added to this effort, may constitute a potential National Register District. A windshield survey of the affected areas should be done to see if the earlier surveyed properties still exist and, if so, remain relatively intact such that they still convey a good sense of their historic fabric and character.

This report details the present survey area, field and research methodology, survey results, and recommendations for preservation planning. It also contains a brief historic context and development history of this part of Tyler. This document is not intended to be a comprehensive history of Tyler, but rather to provide a context for understanding its growth and development and the role of its historic resources in that process. In addition to this survey report, additional work products include an inventory of properties; digital files of labeled color photographs of all resources surveyed, and a survey database. One unbound and five bound copies of the survey report and inventory are submitted as work products. All information is also recorded on CD and submitted as a work product.

### **SURVEY AREA**

Tyler is a mid-sized city in East Texas that was founded as the county seat of Smith County, Texas, in 1847. Because of its early founding, importance as a county seat, rise as a regional agricultural hub, and consistent development throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Tyler possesses a large number of cultural resources spanning much of the city's historical development. Tyler's initial growth -- both commercial and residential -- naturally occurred around the courthouse square and spread out from there. As the city's fortunes increased, more commercial buildings crowded onto the streets around the square, pushing residential neighborhoods to the edges of the central city. Light industrial plants such as lumber yards and cotton mills lined the railroads that passed through town, adding to the city's built environment.

This survey of cultural resources focuses on the city's original central core, including the courthouse square and surrounding commercial blocks, scattered houses south of the railroad tracks, and more dense collection in neighborhoods north of the lines. It also includes some railroad-related industrial plants and commercial buildings along the tracks. All of the resources in this survey lie within the city's central core, in an area bounded by Front Street on the south, Gentry Parkway on the north, Palace Avenue on the west, and Beckham Avenue on the east. The nearly square area was divided into quadrants which were surveyed as discrete entities one at a time.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Survey Methodology***

Before commencing field investigations, Principal Investigator Terri Myers conducted minimal research on the growth and development of Tyler and specifically, the project area which lies at its central core. She read articles on the city of Tyler and Smith County in the Handbook of Texas online, a relevant section of Margret Howard's archeological report for Texas Parks and Wildlife, *Archeological Survey of Tyler State Park, Smith County Texas*, September 1996). She also obtained the inventory of cultural resources prepared by architectural historian Diane E. Williams for the city of Tyler during the period from 1994-1998. Finally, she studied the Sanborn Fire Insurance maps of Tyler which show its development from 1883 to 1950.

In addition, Ms. Myers checked resources at the Texas Historical Commission. Information available to researchers at the Commission and its adjacent library include survey cards completed in the 1970s for certain properties in Tyler, files on National Register nominations for both individual resources and districts, and files on Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks and Subject Markers. Little relevant information on the properties in this survey effort was found at the Texas Historical Commission.

With this background information, Ms. Myers traveled to Tyler on September 30, 2013, and met with planning staff Heather Nick and Amber Doyle, Preservation Officer, to discuss the survey. At Ms. Myers' request, the staff had prepared an informational letter on city letterhead to distribute to property owners or tenants should they have

questions about the project. The staff had prepared four nearly equal-sized maps of the survey which, when put together, constituted the whole of the project area. The maps were very useful in that each contained the addresses of properties to be surveyed in the area covered by a particular map. These maps helped the surveyor navigate the streets and neighborhoods in what otherwise would have been a difficult endeavor in a discontinuous project area such as this one. They also showed apparent dates of construction and some building information for many properties. In some cases this information proved to be in error, likely due to dates of building permits for additions or alterations issued later than the original construction. As a result, a Victorian-era house built in 1900 might have been dated much later, reflecting major renovations that required building permits. This issue will be discussed later in this section.

After discussing the project with the planning staff, Ms. Myers systematically canvassed each of the four zones to develop a methodology for the intensive-level survey. The properties to be surveyed were scattered across the four maps; rarely were two targeted properties found in the same block. In several cases, the subject properties were surrounded by nonhistoric new construction or by historic resources that had been surveyed in previous efforts. To reduce the distance between the surveyor, the subject resources, and her base of operations (her car), she decided to conduct the survey one zone at a time rather than street-by-street which is the usual method in an intensive-level survey. The zone method further made sense as each area was generally bounded by major arterials, railroad lines, or other impediments to pedestrian traffic.

### *Intensive-level Survey*

Intensive-level field investigations were conducted in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for such surveys. Within each zone, Ms. Myers first documented the pre-determined properties along east-west streets starting at the northernmost edge of the zone and continuing to the southernmost edge of the zone. She then started at the westernmost edge of the zone and documented properties along the north-south streets to the easternmost edge of the zone. She conducted the entire survey in this cross-hatched manner for all four zones.

Ms. Myers started her intensive-level survey in the northwest corner of the overall project area, in Zone 1. Her first property, a fast food restaurant, lay at the southeast corner of W. Gentry Street and N. Palace Avenue. She progressed eastward along Gentry Street until the zone terminated at N. Broadway Avenue. Only two properties fronted onto this section of Gentry Street; one, fronting onto W. Gentry Parkway, was actually addressed on N. Border Avenue and therefore was surveyed as a Border Avenue property. Ms. Myers then surveyed properties addressed on the next east-west street to the south. Ms. Myers continued in this manner until all pre-selected resources on each east-west street in Zone 1 was photographed and recorded. She then documented the north-south streets in Zone 1. Following Zone 1, Ms. Myers documented the north-south streets in Zone 3 as they were continuations of the north-south streets in Zone 1.

Ms. Myers returned to Tyler with historic architect Karen McGraw AIA on November 8, 2013. Ms. McGraw is a veteran surveyor and has worked as a team leader on numerous survey projects with Ms. Myers including 2,200 properties in Phoenix, Arizona, and 2,100 properties in McAllen, Texas. Ms. Myers enlisted Ms. McGraw's assistance to help finish the survey in a timely manner. The two worked as a team in the same way Ms. Myers had completed the first part of the survey. They proceeded to Zone 3 and surveyed east-west streets throughout the region, then crossed N. Broadway and surveyed first the east-west streets in Zone 2, followed by the north-south streets in Zone 2. Finally, they surveyed properties the east-west streets in Zone 4 and finished with the north-south streets in that section. By surveying disassociated properties in this cross-hatched fashion, regardless of nearby properties in another zone, the team felt sure that all properties were documented.

### ***Documentation***

The intensive-level survey itself consisted of completing a Texas Historical Commission Historic Resources Form and photographing primary elevations of each resource. The form was used to denote the salient characteristics of each resource within its boundary. Small outbuildings were generally not documented unless they displayed significant historic features. Numerous buildings, particularly light industrial complexes

and other resources along the railroad tracks were counted as one resource unless completely detached, in which case the secondary unit was identified as a "B" or "C" unit associated with the main resource. Multiple photographs were taken of such complexes to show the various aspects on the site. In some cases, such as the AT&T building at 611 W. Elm Street, the original building was determined to be the "resource" due to its age and significant architectural features, and the large modern unit was described as a secondary addition. Both sides were photographed.

A field identification number was assigned to each resource and noted on the planning zone maps. For every built resource in the project area, the surveyor noted the address; approximate date of construction and any major alterations; resource and property type; historic and current use; plan type or roof form; number of stories; exterior materials; architectural style or stylistic influence; and condition. Additions or alterations to the original building were described where pertinent. The surveyors found that dates furnished with the maps were often incorrect based on their knowledge of architectural styles and building forms. Some of the discrepancies may be due to later additions or renovations assigned by the city permit department. Other discrepancies could not be accounted for. In such cases, the surveyors acquiesced to the city dates if they were within five years of the perceived dates.

### *Assessments*

The surveyors assigned each resource a preservation priority of High, Medium, or Low. All High and Medium priority resources are considered contributing resources in potential historic districts. All low priority resources are non-contributing. A baseline priority of Medium was assigned to all properties constructed during the historic period (pre-1963). If alterations or additions to the historic building compromised their integrity such that it no longer conveys its historic character, the building was assigned a Low priority. Buildings constructed after 1963 are automatically assigned Low preservation priority because they are less than 50 years old. Exceptions were made for some properties whose construction dates were close to 1963 and the property displayed particularly noteworthy architectural features. If buildings retain an exceptional degree

of integrity and/or are especially illustrative examples of an architectural style or construction method, they were assigned a High priority. All properties, regardless of priority were photographed using 10 megapixel color digital media.

### ***Preservation Priorities***

As part of the documentation process, the surveyors assigned “preservation priorities” of High, Medium, or Low to each discrete resource in the field. These priorities were generally made based on surveyor’s immediate impression about the resource’s age and architectural significance. Once the survey was completed and all resources had been assigned, the Principal Investigator reviewed each survey form and accompanying photographs to finalize the preservation priorities. In this way, the Principal Investigator could compare each property to those from throughout the central city survey area. Interestingly, few changes were made from the initial impression to the final decision on preservation priorities. Ultimately, the factors that weighed most on the decisions were age of property, architectural merit, retention of architectural fabric, extent of alterations and where they occurred (on the primary façade or rear of the building), and rarity of property type.

High priority properties are resources that meet the age criteria (50 years old or older), display high architectural values, retain original architectural fabric (material) to a large degree, and/or represents a unique or significant architectural type. The Neo-Classical Woldert House and the Smith County Courthouse are among the few High priority properties in the project area. The AT&T building at 611 W. Elm Street would have been a High priority if it had not been altered by the construction of a massive and highly-visible addition on its east elevation. High preservation priorities may be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and would certainly be considered a Contributing property if located in a Historic District.

Medium priority properties are resources that meet or approach the age criteria and are good or typical examples of an architectural style or type. They may have suffered a moderate degree of alteration but they must retain sufficient design and fabric to be recognizable to their period of significance (generally their construction date to the

end of the historic period). They may include properties like the AT & T building that possesses significant architectural design or fabric but which has been altered by a large addition. They may also include simple bungalows, Victorian-era L-plan houses, modest Tudor Revival dwellings, and, more recently good examples of Ranch style houses. While they may not be individually eligible for listing in the National Register, Medium priorities would be considered Contributing resources in a historic district.

Low preservation priorities are either nonhistoric (less than 50 years old) or so severely altered in original design or fabric that they no longer convey a good sense of history. Severely altered properties occur throughout the survey area and include bungalows that have lost their porches, battered porch posts, siding and windows; Victorian L-plans that have had their siding replaced, porches removed, and decorative features removed or covered over; commercial buildings that have had their storefronts completely altered by applications of inappropriate siding material such as stucco or new brick, by replacement windows, by reduction or enlargement of windows and/or doors, or by the enclosure of windows and/or doors. Such resources have lost their architectural significance and would be Noncontributing elements in a potential historic district.

### ***Work Products***

Data obtained during the intensive-level survey and recorded on Texas Historical Commission Survey forms was compiled into an inventory in a Microsoft Access database. All survey materials, including this report, the inventory of surveyed properties, a database, and digital photographs, are submitted as work products to the City of Tyler. The survey, report, and all other work products are consistent with directives provided by the Texas Historical Commission and the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Identification and Evaluation*.

### ***Survey Research Methodology***

Research efforts for the Tyler Historic Resources Survey were minimal as the purpose of the project was to document the physical attributes of the pre-determined

properties. A previous multiple-property survey conducted by architectural historian Diane E. Williams contributed greatly to our understanding of the project area's cultural resources. Our research primarily focused on secondary sources in order to provide a general context for the growth and development of the community. The report is not intended to be a comprehensive history of Tyler. Several Handbook of Texas articles on Smith County and the city of Tyler were used as background information. Our main source for dating and analyzing growth and development in Tyler was the body of Sanborn Fire Insurance maps dating from 1883 to 1950. To date resources, the consultants relied on their knowledge of historic architectural styles and building forms, Sanborn maps, and dates provided by the city of Tyler.

## **HISTORIC CONTEXT**

### ***Summary***

Tyler, Smith County, is one of the largest and most important cities in East Texas. It was named for President John Tyler for his support of Texas' petition to become part of the United States. Shortly after Texas was admitted as a state, the Texas legislature established Smith County and allowed for the selection of a county seat. Commissioners sought a place near the geographical center of the county and on February 6, 1847, they purchased a 100-acre site that included a small settlement. There a townsite was laid out in 28 blocks around a central courthouse square. Several log courthouses on the square sufficed until 1852, when a larger brick courthouse the log building on the square (Christopher Long accessed 12/11/2013). First a town, and then a city, Tyler largely maintained its grid-like configuration around the courthouse square until the advent of intersecting railroad lines interrupted its symmetry in the 1870s.

### ***Brief History of Tyler***

As the county seat, Tyler immediately attracted settlers who quickly established Methodist and Baptist churches, Masonic and Odd Fellows lodges, and a newspaper. At the center of a rich agricultural district, Smith County drew many planters from the Old

South and Tyler, the county seat, became the hub of agriculture-related commerce. Only four years after Smith County was authorized, its population had grown to 4,202, many of whom were farmers or plantation owners who relied on Tyler as a shipping point for their agricultural produce. Tyler's success led a number of prosperous men to build commercial buildings around the courthouse square. Many of these catered to the city's judges, lawyers, and clerks who served the county government. The dense cluster of business buildings lent the town a sense of permanence and stability (Christopher Long accessed 12/11/2013). By the 1850, Tyler attracted a number of factories, including ones that made hats, chairs, bricks, and cotton thread (Knight and Howard in Howard et. al., 1996: 25).

Tyler continued to flourish until the Civil War and its aftermath upended its economic base. The Old South immigrants had brought their slaves to Texas and the county was heavily dependent upon their labor. The 1860 census counted 1,201 slaves in the city of Tyler, more than a third of the city's entire population. Like other East Texas counties that depended on slave labor for their success, Smith County voted to secede from the United States when states' rights and slave ownership were put to the test. The city contributed to the war effort with its men and boys and by building one of Texas' largest ordnance plants (Christopher Long accessed 12/11/2013).

### ***Postwar Depression to Railroads***

The South's ultimate defeat resulted in economic chaos for all areas with high slave populations, including Smith County and the city of Tyler. Much of the city's wealth evaporated with Emancipation and few had the means to buy labor needed to run their farms and businesses. Hope arose with the prospect of two railroad lines – the Texas and Pacific and the International and Great Northern – thought to pass through the city in the early 1870s but those dreams were dashed when both railroads bypassed the town. Still, railroads ultimately reached Tyler and brought much-needed industry to the town. In 1874, the Houston and Great Northern established a branch line to Tyler and town leaders pressed to have a spur, known as the Tyler Tap Railroad, built to Ferguson (Big Sandy) completed by 1877. Two years later, the Texas and St. Louis Railroad

acquired the tap line and established its machine shops and hospital along the rail line in Tyler. A year later, the Kansas and Gulf Short Line Railroad reached the town and it, too, built machine shops in the city. As a result of its great railroad access in the 1870s, Tyler regained its reputation as a major shipping point in East Texas. In addition, it gained industries such as cotton oil plants, machine plants, workers' housing and related facilities, and infrastructure used to ship goods from the numerous railroad sidings in the town.

### ***New Residents and New Businesses***

Tyler also reaped the benefit of new residents attracted by the railroads and their opportunities. The railroads brought hundreds of laborers and skilled workmen to the city and its population nearly tripled in the decade between 1880 and 1890. Some families seized upon Tyler as a place to increase their wealth and shape the history of a city. Betting on Tyler' ability to rebuild after the war, two men founded the Bonner and Williams Bank in 1870, the city's first. Despite several fires in the downtown district in the 1870s, businesses were reborn on their sites. Tyler saw its first public school in 1882 and by 1885, Episcopal, Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Church of Christ, and Presbyterian congregations had all built churches. In addition, the city boasted two private colleges, private schools, and more public schools (Christopher Long accessed 12/11/2013).

A myriad of businesses and light industrial plants sprang up across the town and along the railroad tracks. They included a plow factory, three planning mills to keep up with all the new construction, wagon and carriage factories, an ice factory, several gristmills and cotton gins, hotels, an opera house, a waterworks, two banks, and two weekly newspapers. Tyler gained status as a bona fide city in 1907. In 1909, a new three-story courthouse was built on the courthouse square. It towered over the city of 10,400 residents as reported in the 1910 census (Christopher Long accessed 12/11/1213).

## ***Twentieth Century***

Despite its new industries, agriculture and its associated trades remained Tyler's principal business. Though more expensive to raise without slave labor, cotton held sway as the county's most valuable cash crop well into the twentieth century, accounting for more than four-fifths of its agriculture-based economy. Sometime in the mid-1890s, however, truck farming and fruit orchards gained ground with their cash crops. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more than one million fruit trees – mainly peach—were counted in the county. After a peach blight devastated much of the area's fruit industry in the early 1900s, farmers began to cultivate roses which flourished in Tyler's climate and soil. Roses became a staple of Tyler's agricultural community and by the 1940s, more than half of the country's rose bushes were grown within a ten mile radius of the city (Christopher Long accessed 12/11/2013).

## ***Oil***

Tyler's economy remained tied to agriculture and, to a lesser extent, railroad business and county government until 1930, when major oil discoveries were made nearby. The East Texas oilfield, as it was known, drew numerous oil companies to Tyler where they established offices and contributed to the local economy. Its location and amenities made Tyler a significant hub for the oil and gas industry in East Texas. Other industries and businesses were drawn to the city in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but petroleum exploration and extraction has remained a vital part of Tyler's economy to the present.

## ***Development in the Project Area***

The earliest Sanborn Fire Insurance maps of Tyler drawn in 1883, show a densely developed core between about Front Street on the South, Locust Street on the north, Vine or Bonner streets on the west, and Spring Street on the east. Railroad tracks ran to the west of Vine on the west, north of locust on the north, and just east of Fannie (Fannin) on the east. Already two additions, Pabst to the north, and Caspary to the northwest had

been platted to accommodate new building starts. African Americans were noted as living in “Negro Tenements” on the east side of the I & GN Railroad tracks behind the city jail on E. Erwin. Some areas were sketched in north of the St. Louis, Arkansas and Texas railroad line, but they weren’t fleshed out in the maps at that time (Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, No. 1889). Nearly all the properties in this survey effort lay in the city core and north of the St. Louis, Arkansas, and Texas line.

### *The Downtown Core*

The blocks platted in the vicinity of the courthouse square were intended to be divided into as many individual lots as possible. The choicest lots fronted onto the square itself. Most were only 25 feet wide and were two stories in height. The next most valuable lots lay on adjacent blocks and fronted onto other commercial businesses so as to be within walking distance of the courthouse and serve as an advertisement to their neighbors across the street. Early commercial buildings were simple frame storefronts but by the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they were either of load-bearing brick or brick veneer construction.

The late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century commercial buildings in the courthouse region that were documented in this project were typically frame buildings faced with brick veneer (that sometimes were covered in stucco), and featured a first floor recessed storefront and a second floor with arched or flat-arched windows that once served as offices. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a person might find just about anything he or she desired in the central business district. Businesses sold dry goods, furniture, liquor, meat, and groceries. One might receive refreshment at one of many restaurants, stay at one of several hotels, eat in dining rooms or cafes, play billiards, have a photograph made, discuss the news of the day at a saloon, or enjoy the opera (Sanborn Fire Insurance Map 1893).

## ***Residential***

Well-to-do white families tended to live in the central city on neatly platted lots and blocks in the early years of the twentieth century. If they were able, they built two-story brick houses with wide porches and broad lawns on residential streets. While they preferred not to share their domestic blocks with commercial buildings, they welcomed churches and schools in their midst. The few large houses that remained on predominantly commercial blocks were sometimes broken up into apartments to house traveling businessmen or single persons. As commercial development increased in the central core, new residential additions were platted around the periphery of the old city. Eventually, much of the housing stock in the central core, below the railroad tracks, would be lost to redevelopment in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today, residential nodes survive but they are not as cohesive or extensive as they once were.

By 1900, the many railroad lines that ran around the city were cluttered with lumber yards, cotton mills, planning mills, wagon yards, and other industrial or outside work spaces. Despite their noise, dust, and general lack of appeal for family life, houses could be found clustered in enclaves around tracks and work yards. In some cases they were occupied by African Americans who had few housing options at the time. Some lived close to the city but beyond the railroad tracks; in 1889 a collection of small frame shelters identified as "Negro Tenements" lay between E. Elm and E. Erwin streets, east of the I & GN Railroad line. In some instances, mill owners and other businessmen who relied on a steady work force provided homes for laborers and their families. These small, box-like frame houses were inexpensive and close to the job sites.

Between about 1902 and 1907, Sanborn maps show a considerable number of African Americans living north of the city, particularly in the 500 blocks of N. Liberty and N. Border. The 1907 map clearly depicts a "First ME Church (Negro)" at about 500 N. Liberty and a "Negro Rest(aurant)" at 512 N. Border. Nearby, on N. Liberty, stood a row of eight frame "shotgun" houses (one room wide and two- to three-rooms deep). Such houses were identified with African Americans throughout the South since the Civil War and well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The church, restaurant, and houses lay immediately north of the Cotton Belt line, just outside the city.

Southwest Railroad lines while the East Texas Cotton Oil Company occupied a large piece of property on the east side of town along the railroad tracks.

The area north of the railroad tracks was densely populated with frame Victorian-era houses with bay windows and full-façade front porches on the west and small frame houses, typically bungalows with partial-façade porches and shotgun houses with full porches on the east side of town, at this time. These neighborhoods had few businesses but featured several churches including the CME (Colored Methodist Episcopal) church and a Missionary Baptist Church on the eastern side. The True Vine Baptist Church (Colored) lay on N. Ellis at W. Oakwood.

### *Postwar Era in Downtown Development*

Since the end of World War II, major redevelopment has taken place in the downtown core. Most significantly, a new courthouse replaced the old one on the courthouse square in 1954. In the same vein, numerous historic commercial buildings, typically two story brick storefronts, flanking the courthouse square were demolished and replaced with large, modern office buildings designed in so-called Postwar Modern or International Styles. To the southeast and east of the new courthouse, along E. Erwin Street and N. Spring, some of the older commercial buildings survive but most have been modernized or remodeled in ways that have radically changed their appearance since the 1950s.

Likewise, virtually all of the frame shotgun houses north of the central core and the box-like houses near the railroad tracks have been removed, likely in urban renewal efforts in the 1960s and 1970s. A few frame Victorian era dwellings and scattered 1920s bungalows remain but most are surrounded by more recent construction and, in some cases, vacant lots. In the southern part of the project area, the grand Neo-Classical Woldert House still stands in a small node of residential buildings, a vestige of early 20<sup>th</sup> century domestic architecture still in the central core.

## **SURVEY RESULTS**

The Tyler Historic Resources survey of historic resources identified and documented selected properties within a roughly 108 -block area in the city's downtown core. The Smith County Courthouse lies at the center of the project area which is comprised largely of commercial buildings in the immediate vicinity of the courthouse, light industrial properties along the railroad tracks and some of the major arterials, and domestic resources primarily found at its northern extent. Specifically, Preservation Central surveyed the pre-determined resources within an area bounded by Front Street on the south, Gentry Parkway on the north, Palace Avenue on the west, and Beckham Avenue on the east. All of the resources surveyed in this effort lie within those boundaries.

The survey documented a total of 130 resources scattered throughout the project area. Eighty-eight (approximately 68%) are considered to be of historic age (built pre-1965), 38 (approximately 30%) of which were built between 1966 and the present, and 4 (.03%) of which are of unknown origin (parking lots). Although historic resources are generally defined as those 50 years old or older; the Scope of Work extended the end date to 1972 for future planning purposes. Thus, resources built between 1966 and 1972 were assessed as if they were historic-age properties. Eight of the 130 properties appear to have been built during the period from 1966 and 1972.

### ***General Building Campaigns***

The resources may be grouped into eras that represent various times of growth in Tyler. Although Tyler has a long history of growth and development dating at least to 1846, no resources in this survey effort were determined as dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century though one Modified Folk Victorian house at 707 N. Ellis appears to have been built 1900. This is a conservative date. A two-part commercial block at 101-103 N. Spring Street may date to the 19<sup>th</sup> century but alterations have obscured its early appearance. Like the Spring Street properties, some other buildings on the survey list may have early

fabric at their core but they have been so modified that they no longer convey their original history.

Only five properties appear to date to the earliest decades of the twentieth century, between 1900 and 1919. Twenty-one properties appear to have been built between 1920 and 1940. This may be attributed in part to the popularity and longevity of Craftsman and Tudor Revival bungalows. Several commercial buildings and light industrial buildings along the railroad tracks are date to the pre-World War II period. Little domestic construction occurred during World War II and that fact is reflected in the lack of resources built in the project area during that time. In the postwar period, however, new construction surged in Tyler's downtown district where significant redevelopment, including the replacement of the Smith County Courthouse, took place. Twelve of the surveyed resources were dated to 1950 alone, with another 16 built about 1955. In total, the years between 1947 and 1960, saw at least 54 new construction projects in the central core, likely due to nearby gas and oil exploration which contributed to Tyler's relative prosperity and a general climate of optimism in the postwar period. The sixteen properties built between 1961 and 1972 reflect steady but less aggressive redevelopment after that initial postwar growth spurt. Of the 30 selected properties built between 1973 and the present, virtually all replaced older buildings on their sites (Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, various dates).

### ***Domestic Properties***

Thirty-three domestic resources in the project area account for about 25% of the selected properties in the project area. Thirty are single-family homes while three are duplexes. Domestic properties in the target zone range in style from the ca. 1900 Folk Victorian House at 703 N. Ellis Street and the magnificent ca. 1905 Neo-Classical Woldert House at 604 Waldert, to more modest Craftsman influenced bungalows (examples are 120 S. Adams and 807 Pabst), Tudor Revival houses (such as 714 N. Harris), and a single example of Prairie School architecture (508 Ferguson). Postwar designs include a rare example of a Monterrey Style house at 310 Vine, six Minimal Traditional dwellings, and three Ranch Style houses (one at 623 W. Bow). One house

displayed both early Ranch and Minimal Traditional traits (325 W. Wilson). Some houses possessed no distinctive stylistic influences. Modern houses in the project area tend to feature hipped roofs over box-like forms. Some of the new domestic construction in the northern reaches of the project area may be associated with urban renewal efforts as the neighborhoods are old and once had numerous Shotgun houses and other small frame dwellings that likely deteriorated and were removed over the years. New construction include houses at 418 E. Bow, 401 E. Bow, and 812 N. College.

### ***Commercial Resources***

The majority of the resources documented by the Tyler Historic Resources Survey are commercial in nature. Commercial resources as defined by the National Register bulletin vary greatly and include office buildings, retail stores, banks, union buildings, restaurants and bars, and warehouses. Some seventy-one properties were identified as some type of commercial entity. Fifty-six buildings were noted as Commerce: business (retail), such as Levine's at 107 E. Spring; four as Commerce: Financial institutions. Including Regions Bank at 100 E. Ferguson; five as Commerce: food and drink such as the fast food restaurant at 822 W. Gentry Parkway; one as Commerce: professional; and five as Commerce: "other". Some buildings with business associations, such as theaters and industrial plants were identified primarily as cultural and industrial properties but they, too, could be seen as commercial properties. At approximately 56%, commercial buildings represent more than half the properties surveyed in this effort as should be expected since the boundaries define the city's main business district.

The commercial resources may be loosely grouped stylistically according to the same time periods as the domestic properties. Early commercial buildings around the Courthouse date to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and are generally defined as "two-part" commercial buildings (two stories) with retail or other business taking place on the first floor and offices or apartments occupying the second floor. Examples of two-part commercial buildings include Levine's store at 107 N. Spring, the Edward Jones building at 101 E. Erwin, and the adjoining buildings at 103-05, and 107 E. Erwin. In architectural detail, they tend to be of load-bearing or brick veneer construction with

glass storefronts on the first floor and a row of identical, segmental arched windows across the narrow second floors. They often have decorative, corbelled brick along the cornices. These types of late Victorian era commercial buildings survive on E. Erwin Street near the courthouse but they have been considerably altered by changes in the fenestration (window and door) patterns, applications of stucco over the original brick facades, replacement brick that is out of character with the building, and incongruous decorative detail.

Other early twentieth century commercial buildings followed the lead of the late Victorian buildings but with added detail. The Art Deco Bristolls building at 200 W. Erwin is one such building. It features casement windows, corbelled brick walls, and decorative wrought iron and tile. Although it has been altered, defining features of the Art Deco style are still extant and the building was identified as a High preservation priority due to its rare architectural attributes.

In the immediate postwar period, Tyler saw considerable redevelopment in its commercial core as large bank and office buildings consumed blocks where narrow two-part commercial structures once stood. Now, with the passage of time, some of these replacement buildings are now eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places on their own by virtue of their ages (50 years old or older) and their striking Mid-Century Modern design. Although not a commercial building, the Smith County Courthouse (100 N. Broadway) is an example of a major building campaign that replaced an earlier Victorian-era and adopted Modern design. Several commercial buildings nearby followed its lead, including those at 218 N. Broadway and 103-105 W. Ferguson.

Other commercial resources reflecting "modern" design include old gas stations from the 1950s. Maddox Air Conditioning at 507 W. Elm and Mike's gas station at 902 N. Beckham are among them. Even light industrial buildings such as the Story-Wright building at 415 N. Bonner adopted the modern designs. Such buildings tend to celebrate modernity and look toward the future. They place an emphasis on form and material, with style coming not from applied decoration but rather from the building itself. Awnings, canted entries, lally poles, large windows, and metal awning signs themselves became the decorative features. The Story-Wright complex at 415 N. Bonner Avenue is

an excellent example of Modern style applied to an industrial use. It is very intact, displays its design to an outstanding degree, and is considered a High preservation priority.

### ***Education, Social Properties, and Culture***

One building at 120 S. College was identified as an educational building. Built about 1950, it was given a Medium preservation priority. Another building was categorized as a social building. Built about 1975, it is a Low preservation priority by virtue of its recent construction. Two theaters, Symphony Square at 107 E. Erwin and the Rose Theater at 111 S. Broadway fall into the Culture category. Symphony Square is the older of the two but has been modified so much that it no longer conveys a sense of its own history. The Rose Theater, on the other hand, is in poor condition but continues to impart its historic use as a theater. The plaza west of the courthouse is also listed for Culture: outdoor recreation. While the plaza itself has played an important role in Tyler's downtown core, it has been landscaped with modern plantings, walkways, and monuments such that it no longer conveys a sense of history.

### ***Government***

The Smith County Courthouse, while not the tallest building in downtown Tyler, is arguably the most imposing and impressive due, in part, to its siting at the center of town, surrounded by major through streets. Built in 1954, it is a model of early postwar modern design for a civic building. It retains its form, fenestration, materials, and decorative details to a significant degree and is listed as a High preservation priority.

### ***Industrial***

A number of industrial plants were identified in the survey. By their very nature, they tend to consist of several resources, generally an office, storage, loading docks, and various special use resources. Also by nature, they are prone to alteration as advances in work requires. The surveyors did not identify each element of a given site but rather

focused on the main or original resource with notations about other elements on the site. One interesting industrial site on Bois D'Arc consists of what appears to be a massive concrete water tower and a small, hipped roof pump house. No other resources occupy the site, a fact that enhances the appearance of the tower and pump house. Built about 1955, it was listed as a Medium priority.

### ***Religious***

Four religious properties were documented. Three are undistinguished; one of these appears to have been built as a commercial building and is now used as a church. The fourth is a small orange-brick building at 623 W. Bow. It is very similar in appearance to early postwar Ranch Style houses and may, in fact, have been built as a residence except for the double entry doors. Though it does not convey a strong religious feeling, it nonetheless possesses its original form and style, roof pitch and form, and fenestration pattern to a degree that it was identified as a Medium priority.

### ***Preservation Priorities***

Out of the total number of resources surveyed, High preservation priorities was assigned to eight properties, or .06% of the resources documented. These represent exceptionally intact examples of a significant architectural style or construction method, or resources known to have particular historical importance. Most resources classified as high priority are considered individually eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The High priority resources of Tyler include residential, commercial, and governmental resources. All high-priority resources would be considered contributing features of any National Register historic districts or local historic or conservation districts defined within the survey area, and all would be eligible for local landmark status. High priority properties identified in this survey are:

719-721 Bois D'Arc: Exceptional Art Deco commercial block

415 N. Bonner: Very intact Mid-Century light industrial complex

100 N. Broadway: Smith County Courthouse

522 N. Broadway: Ca. 1960 Mid-Century Modern office building

110 College: When it comes of age, this 19-story skyscraper would be eligible

611 Elm Street: Ca. 1955 AT&T office building. Outstanding detail

103-105 W. Ferguson Street. Outstanding Mid-Century Modern office building

604 Woldert: Superb example of Neo-classical domestic architecture

Medium preservation priority was assigned to 44 resources, or approximately 38 % of the resources surveyed. These are good or typical examples of an architectural type or style that have suffered relatively few exterior alterations. They would be considered contributing features of any National Register historic districts or local historic or conservation districts created within the survey area. Medium priority properties are found throughout the project area and range from domestic properties (houses), to gas stations, office buildings, industrial complexes, and commercial buildings.

The remaining 78 resources, or 60% of the total surveyed, were assigned a Low preservation priority either because they are not of historic age or because they have been altered so severely that they no longer convey a sense of history.. These resources may lack several or all aspects of integrity needed to be contributing elements of potential historic districts. These aspects are integrity of design, workmanship, materials, feeling, association, location, and setting. Virtually all Low priority properties retained integrity of location but fell far short in the remaining essential aspects of integrity. All Low priority resources would be considered noncontributing features of any National Register historic districts or local historic or conservation districts within the survey area. Some might reach Medium status when they come of historic age or if they are restored to their original appearance.

In general, nonhistoric (post-1965) resources are automatically considered low priority resources, as they are not of historic age and/or were built outside the period of significance. In Tyler, however, several good exceptions exist, due to the fact that they

possess outstanding or unique design and/or hold a prominent place in the downtown center.

### ***Potential Historic Districts***

Because this was not a comprehensive survey but rather a generally unrelated collection of resources scattered throughout the central core, it is difficult to positively identify potential historic districts. By comparing these results with those in a previous survey conducted by architectural historian Diane E. Williams, however, there may be a potential historic district in the largely residential section in the northwest quadrant of the current survey. The potential district centers on W. Bow Street and would include the 400-700 blocks of W. Bow, the 700-800 blocks of N. Harris Avenue, the 500-700 blocks of W. Selman Street, the 600-800 blocks of N. Ellis, and parts of blocks within that zone.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Specifically, the Tyler should:**

- **Undertake a Windshield Survey in the Northwest quadrant of the project area to confirm whether properties previously surveyed still exist and still retain their integrity to provide the basis for a local or National Register district.** Previously mentioned blocks of N. Ellis, W. Bow, N. Harris, W. Selman and W. Wilson may have sufficient historic fabric and integrity to qualify as a historic district.
- **Nominate eligible high-priority resources for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and/or as City of Tyler landmarks.** The Tyler Historic Resources Survey documented 8 High-priority buildings in the project area. High priority properties should be designated as local landmarks and nine of those may be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. National Register listing is primarily honorary and carries no restrictions against demolition or alteration unless a federal undertaking is involved. However,

National Register listing allows owners of income-producing properties to apply for federal tax credits for approved renovation. Furthermore, the presence of National Register properties in a community helps convey a sense of history and helps attract heritage tourism.

- **Consider other resources in Tyler for designation as local landmarks.** Historic resources not documented in this survey may be eligible for local landmark designation. In addition, properties that possess extraordinary historic significance for the community but were not considered high priorities in this survey may also be eligible for local designation.
- **Conduct additional research on the surveyed neighborhoods for possible designation as local historic districts.** Boundaries for the potential conservation districts should be drawn to define cohesive enclaves of historic with concentrations of high and medium priority resources, few modern intrusions, and logical physical boundaries. Historic districts should contain at least 50% Medium priority (contributing) properties to qualify.
- **Perform additional surveys to incorporate potential landmarks lying outside the present survey area boundaries.** Subsequent survey efforts should encompass particularly intact or historically significant areas as well as known historic properties outside the survey area.
- **Develop official design guidelines that Tyler can use to consistently regulate the type and nature of changes permitted for local landmarks and properties in conservation districts.** By encouraging sensitive alterations to historic buildings and architecturally compatible new construction, design guidelines provide a mechanism by which to maintain the historic character of Tyler's commercial and residential enclaves. Within potential conservation districts design guidelines should address signage, storefronts, awnings, alterations to historic buildings, and the reversal of inappropriate alterations. In residential areas, design guidelines should regulate exterior modifications, additions, and new construction within historic districts.

- **Hold town-hall meetings or workshops to educate historic building owners and realtors.** Topics should include the Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits available to income-producing properties eligible for the National Register or constructed before 1965. Design guidelines and conservation districts should be discussed to get citizen input on proposed restrictions.

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