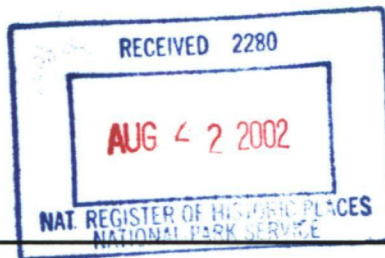


(Oct. 1990)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM



1102

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: Kress Building
OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: St. Germain Lofts

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: 705 Main Street
CITY OR TOWN: Houston
STATE: Texas CODE: TX COUNTY: Harris CODE: 201 ZIP CODE: 77002
NOT FOR PUBLICATION: N/A
VICINITY: N/A

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

7-22-02

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):

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

10/4/02

5. CLASSIFICATION

OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY: Private

CATEGORY OF PROPERTY: Building

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

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

NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING: N/A

6. FUNCTION OR USE

HISTORIC FUNCTIONS: COMMERCE/TRADE: department store

CURRENT FUNCTIONS: DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling and
COMMERCE/retail store

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Late 19th and Early 20th Century Revivals: Renaissance Revival

MATERIALS: FOUNDATION CONCRETE, METAL
WALLS CONCRETE, TERRA COTTA, BRICK, STONE
ROOF ASPHALT
OTHER

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

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Kress Building
Houston, Harris County, Texas

Narrative Description

The 1913 Kress Building remains an impressive feature in the central business district of downtown Houston, Texas. The 8-story, L-shaped commercial block occupies a prominent site at the southeast corner of Main and Capitol Streets, a few blocks south of Buffalo Bayou. Designed by S.H. Kress & Co.'s staff architect Seymour Burrell, its reinforced concrete frame is sheathed almost entirely in terra cotta, which was used both to simulate stone and for brightly colored ornament in the spandrels and near the building's crown. Following Beaux-Arts traditions, as adapted to the tall building in America, the Kress Building features symmetrical façades with a tri-partite vertical arrangement and detailing derived from the Italian Renaissance. An adjacent building to the east, which shares a party wall with the Kress Building, was converted for use as an annex in 1952. Although a 1983 renovation of the main block included alterations to the first-floor storefronts and the removal of the bracketed cornice, the building retains sufficient integrity to identify it with its historic period and significance.

The Kress Building's corner lot is large and flat and surrounded by dense urban development. It lies near the north end of downtown, at the head of what was, for many decades of the 20th century, Houston's primary retail and commercial district. Although the area was somewhat neglected in the 1960s and 1970s, the district has, along with the Kress Building, more recently been revitalized with a mixture of residential and service uses. Despite the razing of several downtown buildings, much of the area's recent development has focused on the rehabilitation of historic buildings and the setting retains some of its early 20th-century character.

The Kress Building's two façades, facing Main and Capitol Streets, are arranged symmetrically and divided into three vertical sections, as if a column's "base," "shaft" and "capital." The "base" section includes the first floor storefronts, with expanses of glass separated by pilasters, and the second story, where gray terra cotta was used to simulate stone blocks. On the second floor, deeply raked horizontal joints on the pilasters and angled vertical joints above the windows create an element of stylized rustication and give the base a sense of mass and solidity. A simple belt course marks the top of the base section and the beginning of the "shaft." The shaft includes the third through seventh floors, which are essentially identical, sheathed in white terra cotta with brightly colored decoration in the spandrels. A wider, more prominent belt course, adorned with a cartouche at each of the eight main pilasters, marks the start of the "capital," just above the seventh-floor windows. Elaborate terra cotta ornament, placed between each of its windows, distinguishes the eighth-floor. The building was originally capped by a prominent bracketed cornice and a stepped parapet that echoed the arrangement of the pilasters below. The parapet featured the name "Kress," in the company's characteristic arched lettering, centered on each façade. The decorative cornice and parapet were removed in a 1983 renovation, replaced by an unadorned concrete parapet that begins just above the eighth-floor windows.

The Main Street façade of the Kress Building faces west and is composed of four bays, each of which includes three windows. Most of the original windows were double-hung, but casement windows were used on the third through seventh floors in the central two bays. All of the windows are currently fixed aluminum frames, but a single vertical mullion divides each of those that was originally a casement. The façade's outer two bays project slightly and are flanked by wide terra cotta pilasters. Each pilaster includes a narrow inset strip that forms a tall, stretched "U". The mullions that separate each outer bay's three windows are expressed as narrow pilasters. The windows on the second and eighth floors have complete pilasters. Those of the middle floors, while broken by moulding at each head and sill level, are continuous from their bases at the third floor to simple capitals at the seventh, emphasizing the building's verticality. In the outer

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Kress Building
Houston, Harris County, Texas

bays, each spandrel is nearly filled with ochre terra cotta. The corners of the rectangular spandrels, which are rounded toward the center, are green, separated from the ochre by a raised white moulding. The central two bays of the Main Street façade are identical. As in the outer bays, continuous narrow pilasters separate the windows in the "shaft." Their bases and brightly colored capitals are larger and more elaborate than those in the outer bays. The spandrels are again decorated with ochre and green terra cotta, but the ornament's design, which includes both geometric and organic elements, differs from that in the outer bays. The second-floor windows of the central bays are divided by pilasters, which lack bases or capitals but include that floor's typical rustication. The eighth-floor windows are smaller than the others to allow for wider mullions with applied ornament.

The Main Street storefront originally included the primary entrances to the first-floor S.H. Kress & Co. retail store. Bays one, two and three featured wide expanses of glass that curved inward toward the two entrances in bays one and three, with tall transoms of prism glass indicating the interior mezzanine. The store's signage ran the length of those three bays, just above the transoms. Bay four appears to have originally included an open, arched automobile entry, perhaps to access rear parking.(Figure-18) The storefront was substantially altered in a 1983 renovation. Instead of comprising its own distinct element, the storefront now relates more directly to the upper floors and the overall elevation. The outer two bays are distinguished by their slight projection and a rustication similar to that of the second floor. Each one includes an arched entrance with glass doors, sidelights and transoms. The central two bays on the first floor are simple storefronts, with 3-part aluminum frame windows and short transoms. The mezzanine windows and signage were removed.

The north-facing Capitol Street façade is nearly identical to the Main Street side, but it is comprised of seven bays instead of four, each of which is slightly narrower than the Main Street bays. The two outer bays are identical to those of the Main Street façade. The five central bays, while maintaining most characteristics of the central bays facing Main Street, include a few additional and distinct elements. The three windows in each of those bays were originally double-hung and are currently single-pane aluminum frame windows. The pilasters separating each bay's windows are identical to those of the Main Street façade, but wider pilasters with distinct capitals were used between the bays themselves. This arrangement is repeated on the second and eighth floors, where the pilasters between bays are slightly wider and distinct from those separating the individual windows. The arrangement and design of the terra cotta ornament is identical on both façades.

The Capitol Street storefront has also been significantly altered. Each bay originally included a large display window and mezzanine-level prism glass transoms, with relatively wide terra cotta pilasters between bays. As on the Main Street side, signage for the S.H. Kress & Co. store ran the length of the façade, just above the transoms. The current configuration matches the remodeled Main Street storefront, with rusticated outer bays and unadorned storefronts across the center, but it includes a few minor variations. The arched opening in bay one is filled with concrete instead of glass, with a single recessed door centered below, and bay seven's arched glass storefront does not include an entrance. The Capitol Street entrance is instead in bay three, where the storefront differs slightly to allow for doors. As on the Main Street façade, the mezzanine transoms and signage are gone.

The annex to the Kress Building, which adjoins the Capitol Street façade and extends to Fannin Street to the east, predates the Kress Building itself, and the two have shared a common wall since the latter's construction in 1913. The four-story international style annex, however, bears no resemblance to its original appearance. First constructed in 1910 to serve as the Gas Building, it featured two-story Beaux-Arts façades with elaborate brickwork.(Figure-19) After being

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Kress Building
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purchased by S.H. Kress & Co. in 1947, the building was substantially altered. During the 1952-53 renovations, two more floors were added and the entire building was redesigned. Both façades of the rectangular building are now devoid of ornament, with the second through fourth-floor windows arranged in a grid and framed by a protruding band. The first floor of the Capitol Street side includes three bays of simple storefronts. At the corner, the upper floors are cantilevered over the first floor entrance, which is set in a chamfer. The annex's Fannin Street side allows automobile access to a concealed parking area within.

The 1983 alterations of the Kress Building's storefronts and the removal of its cornice and parapet have no doubt compromised the building's integrity of design and materials. The horizontal and vertical arrangement of the façades, the abundant use of terra cotta and the inclusion of brightly colored ornament continue to define the building, however, maintaining several of the most significant components of its historical composition. Its location in downtown Houston and the retention of several buildings from the same period of development have also kept the Kress Building in its appropriate context and retained its integrity of setting and feeling. Removal of the building's abundant signage has diminished its integrity of association with the S.H. Kress & Co. store, but even in its original state, the Kress Building was as much a downtown office building as a retail store. It is still clearly recognizable as such, and it retains the integrity of its commercial associations. The substantial changes to the building have diminished its merits as a work of architecture, but it retains sufficient integrity to convey its historical significance in the commerce of downtown Houston.

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: 1913-1952

SIGNIFICANT DATES: 1913, 1952

SIGNIFICANT PERSON: N/A

CULTURAL AFFILIATION: N/A

ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Architect (1913) = Seymour Burrell; Builder (1913) = Buchanan & Gilder

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (see continuation sheets 8-8 through 8-15).

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

BIBLIOGRAPHY (see continuation sheet 9-16 through 9-17).

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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Kress Building
Houston, Harris County, Texas

Statement of Significance

The 1913 Kress Building is a significant historical asset of Houston, Texas. It was one of several tall buildings constructed downtown in the early 20th century, towers that rose dramatically above existing buildings, only to be dwarfed themselves in the coming decades. Its elaborately decorated Renaissance Revival façades reflected contemporary trends in the design of skyscrapers, affirming Houston's arrival and anticipating a prominent role for the Kress Building itself. S.H. Kress & Co., the building's financier and most visible tenant, was establishing 5 & 10 cent stores ever more rapidly on Main Streets across the country. With its own architectural staff and the strict oversight of founder Samuel H. Kress, the retail chain was committed to housing its stores in impressive buildings with consistent, recognizable features. One of the largest buildings ever built by the company, Houston's Kress Building was relatively unique for incorporating professional offices. As a lasting remnant of downtown Houston's early 20th-century commercial development and a reminder of the legacy of S.H. Kress & Co., the Kress Building is nominated at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the area of Commerce.

Early 20th-Century Development in Downtown Houston

By the turn of the 20th century, Houston had begun to establish itself as a vibrant and modern American city. The city's population effectively doubled each decade from 1870 to 1890 and nearly doubled again between 1890 and 1893, when its population was estimated at 50,000.¹ It had telephones by 1880 and, in 1882, joined New York as the only two American cities with electric power plants.² Both a seaport and a major railroad hub, the city's commerce centered on transportation and trade, exporting cotton, lumber and cattle and importing goods and supplies as well as exotic items from around the world.

Intense growth and commercial prosperity would continue to characterize Houston through the first few decades of the 20th century. Beginning at Spindletop in 1901, the discovery and extraction of oil all over Texas ushered in a new economic base for Houston, which naturally became the center for its processing and distribution. This was further aided by the dredging and widening of Buffalo Bayou to create the Houston Ship Channel, allowing oceangoing vessels direct access to the city as well as numerous oil refineries established along the waterway. Meanwhile, the cotton, lumber and transportation industries continued to thrive, as did the increasing numbers of banks, businesses, and services established to support the city's booming economy.

Through the 19th century, Houston's downtown business district remained relatively small, both in terms of its geographic area and the scale of its buildings. It was concentrated primarily near the Old Market Square, at the north end of Main Street on the south bank of Buffalo Bayou, and consisted mainly of two to four-story masonry commercial buildings. The Main Street/Market Square Historic District (NR 1983) illustrates the area's architectural development. While the antebellum buildings, such as the Pillot Building or the Kennedy Bakery, followed relatively simple vernacular traditions, more stylish and ornate examples, including the 1884 Houston Cotton Exchange Building (NR 1971) and the 1889 W.L. Foley Building (NR 1978), appeared during the last quarter of the 19th century.

¹ Marguerite Johnston, *Houston: The Unknown City, 1836-1946* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), 98.

² Johnston, *Houston*, 92.

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Downtown Houston, at the end of the 19th century, was arranged along Main Street in four recognizable subdistricts. Warehouses and wholesale establishments were concentrated near Buffalo Bayou, between Allen's Landing and Franklin Street, with financial buildings between Franklin Street and Congress Street and retail establishments on the south end from Congress to Texas Avenue. The areas immediately surrounding this commercial core were dedicated mostly to residential use, with large Victorian homes around "Quality Hill" to the east and along Main Street and Texas Avenue to the south.

Beginning around the turn-of-the-century, however, Houston's commercial district expanded both out and up in an effort to keep pace with the city's economic growth. Following the lead of the largest American cities and the rising cost of downtown land, Houston focused its commercial construction efforts on erecting taller and taller buildings. Jacob Binz is credited with building Houston's first skyscraper, a six-story concrete, stone and steel building, in 1894.³ The Binz Building's location at the corner of Main Street and Texas Avenue is also telling, as it foreshadowed the commercial district's southward expansion along Main Street. As mentioned above, retail establishments were already concentrated near the south end of downtown, and the influx of new stores, like S.H. Kress & Co., played a significant role in that expansion.

During the first two decades of the 20th century, taller steel and concrete-frame buildings became the norm in downtown Houston. More daring examples, such as the 16-story building labeled "Carter's Folly," were still popularly considered dangerous, and most ranged from five to eight stories. While several buildings between 10 and 15 stories were built by the start of World War I, the city's real vertical explosion would not occur until the late-1920s and 1930s. Typical of the pre-WWI period were buildings like the eight-story First National Bank Building (NR 1983, Main Street/Market Square Historic District), designed by Fort Worth architects Sanguinet and Staats in 1905. Its rhythmic, symmetrical facades and classically inspired details illustrate the widespread influence of the Ecole des Beaux Arts, where many prominent American architects were trained in the late-19th century. Designed both by Texas and out-of-state architects, downtown Houston's 20th-century buildings often reflected such national trends.

The 1920s brought unprecedented growth and expansion to downtown Houston, which during that decade grew from the third largest city in Texas to the largest city in the south.⁴ Much of the downtown growth focused on newer areas of development, which spread south along Main Street. From the 1920s through the 1960s, this new south end of Main, between Texas and Clay Avenues, would serve as "the operational and symbolic center of Houston."⁵ While smaller buildings were still built, the 1920s would witness the construction of several towers over 30 stories, which became more and more common toward the end of the decade. The 36-story Gulf Building (NR 1983), built from 1927-1929, illustrates both the vertical expansion of the city and the period's changing stylistic attitudes. Designed by Alfred C. Finn, the architect of Houston's most prominent 1930s skyscrapers, it indicates the rejection of classical ornament in favor of simplified geometric and organic patterns, as well as the stepped massing that would define the Art Deco skyscrapers of the 1930s.

Downtown buildings constructed during these first decades of the 20th-century provide a physical record of Houston's rising prominence. Its rapid economic growth was reflected in its equally rapid physical growth, and no more

³ Johnston, *Houston*, 111.

⁴ "Main Street/Market Square Historic District," National Register Nomination (1983).

⁵ Stephen Fox, *Houston Architectural Guide* (Houston: American Institute of Architects, 1990): 20.

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so than in downtown. The city's commercial district spread from a few blocks of small-scale buildings to a wide area of towering skyscrapers. At the time of its construction, the Kress Building was a perfect fit, exemplifying the city's newfound economic prosperity and architectural maturity while also predicting the horizontal and vertical direction of future growth.

S.H. Kress & Co.

Samuel H. Kress was one of the pioneers in the establishment of nationwide retail chains during the late-19th and early-20th centuries. The concept of S.H. Kress & Co., to offer a wide array of goods at extremely low prices, followed a model set by the first and most well-known of such "five-and-dimes," F.W. Woolworth & Co. Despite being a Pennsylvania native, Kress focused his initial efforts on the South, opening the first Kress store in Memphis, Tennessee in 1896. By 1900, he had opened twelve stores in five southern states, including Houston's first store, which opened that year.⁶

With its corporate headquarters in New York after 1900, S.H. Kress & Co. would eventually spread throughout the country, and by 1955, the year of its founder's death, the chain included 262 stores with an annual gross income of \$167.9 million.⁷ Although inflation did increase prices over the years (the stores changed from five-and-tens to 5-10-25 Cent Stores early on), S.H. Kress & Co. continued to offer a variety of goods at incredibly low prices, made possible by the sheer volume of sales. On any store's vast selling floor, one could find products ranging from jewelry to candy, with everything in between. The stores naturally developed a social dimension as well, which was encouraged and marketed with amenities like lunch and soda counters and slogans like, "Meet your friends at Kress."⁸

S.H. Kress & Co. distinguished itself from early on in the design of its stores. While many such chain stores preferred to lease buildings, Kress was committed to building its own. Beginning in 1905, the company had its own architecture division, which at its height employed over 100 architects and draftspeople.⁹ Through this centralized approach, Kress developed several characteristic design features that made their geographically extensive stores readily identifiable.

Some characteristic "Kress" features remained constant throughout the company's building history. Regardless of the materials, nearly all Kress stores were buff-colored or a similar tone. Their symmetrical façades typically featured the word "Kress" in a distinctive arched lettering, essentially a company logo, near the top. This was intended to distinguish the store as specifically Kress, a compliment to a long sign above the storefronts that read "S.H. Kress & Co. 5-10-25 Cent Store," which was rendered in a design and lettering style that was typical of all five-and-dimes. Kress storefronts were also unique, with the end sections of plate glass curving toward recessed entrances and a row of prismatic glass transoms that facilitated the use of an interior mezzanine. The word "Kress" was applied liberally, appearing on the storefronts and doors as well as set into the floor of the entrance. These features encouraged passersby to follow window displays toward the interior while ensuring that they knew which store they were entering.¹⁰

⁶ Bernice L. Thomas, *America's Five-and-Ten-Cent Stores: The Kress Legacy* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1997): 4-5.

⁷ Thomas, *America's Five-and-Ten-Cent Stores*, 5.

⁸ Thomas, *America's Five-and-Ten-Cent Stores*, 10.

⁹ Bernice L. Thomas, "Five and Dime Design," *Historic Preservation* 45:1 (Jan./Feb. 1993), 65.

¹⁰ Thomas, *America's Five-and-Ten-Cent Stores*, 11-15.

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Kress stores went through a number of stylistic changes through the years. With centralized control of design, however, those changes uniformly affected stores across the country. The Kress stores of the early-20th century were similar to other commercial buildings of the period. Most ranged from two to four stories, and while some early examples included other tenants, the buildings were most often reserved exclusively for Kress, including warehouse and office space above the selling floor. Designed by company architects Julius H. Zeitner and, later, Seymour Burrell, the buildings were classically detailed and often featured a prominent cornice and parapet. The Kress stores blended well with other "Main Street" buildings across the country, although they were often more ornate than others in the small towns they inhabited. Examples include the 1909 Goldsboro, North Carolina store or the 1911 store in Trinidad, Colorado, which also housed the local Masonic lodge.¹¹

This early Kress style reached an apex in the late-1920s with elaborate Beaux-Arts and revival designs, as in the 1928 stores built in Tampa, Florida and Wichita, Kansas. Under the direction of head architect George E. Mackay, Kress stores also began incorporating impressive marquees with dramatic flood lighting directed back toward the façade. While the use of marquees and other elements of Mackay's designs were continued, his tenure was short-lived, and the company underwent a significant shift in terms of architecture in the 1930s. Encouraged by Edward F. Sibbert, who joined the architectural staff in 1929, S.H. Kress & Co. announced formally that the company would now build solely in "modern" styles. For Sibbert, this meant Art Deco façades composed of simplified geometric forms and highly stylized ornament.¹²

Through the 1930s and into the early 1940s, Sibbert designed countless new Kress stores in this vein and remodeled several others to match the modern theme. Although eclectic and often cleverly regional, the whole of Sibbert's designs exhibit a unified and consistent stylistic vocabulary. From the 1932 store in Lubbock, Texas (NR 1992), with its stylized cow's head marquee anchors, to the elegant relief work of the 1934 store built on Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles, Sibbert combined the simple, rectangular massing of Art Deco with an ornamental language derived from the work of Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright.¹³

Over the years, Kress's architects also mastered the stores' interior design. The architectural division was responsible for designing every light fixture and display case, with everything carefully arranged to showcase the goods on sale and encourage browsing. Kress even patented its design for candy counters, which they advertised as especially sanitary. Architect-designed storage bins and shelves filled the stores' upper floors, as extra supplies of every item were warehoused on site. Even the arrangement of the manager's office, down to the location of the company-issued desks and file cabinets, was dictated on the plans. As on the exterior, uniformity among all stores was a high priority, and every store's tan, cream and ivory paint (neutral colors were used to make the merchandise stand out) was purchased directly from S.H. Kress & Co.¹⁴

Samuel H. Kress himself maintained strict control over the design of Kress stores, and no plans were allowed to leave the headquarters without his expressed approval. He was always willing to spend money on design and construction, but he would not settle for less than the highest quality product. Beginning in the 1920s, Samuel Kress

¹¹ Thomas, *America's Five-and-Ten-Cent Stores*, 20-40.

¹² Thomas, *America's Five-and-Ten-Cent Stores*, 20-40.

¹³ Thomas, *America's Five-and-Ten-Cent Stores*, 60-108.

¹⁴ Thomas, *America's Five-and-Ten-Cent Stores*, 15-18, 78-79.

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Kress Building
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became a serious collector of medieval and Renaissance art, and he seems to have fashioned himself a modern-day patron of the arts. Through the Kress Foundation, established in 1929, he donated countless works of art to museums nationwide, and the Kress buildings were undoubtedly considered an important component of his patronage. In a clear expression of this attitude, the Kress family coat of arms was incorporated in the designs of several stores, first on the interior and, later, as exterior ornament as well. For Samuel Kress, the crest was a symbol of his commitment to the public, evidenced in the quality of the building and the merchandise inside.¹⁵ In a sense, the Kress stores were intended to bring fine art to the broader public. During the Christmas season of 1938, Samuel Kress made perhaps his boldest statement of that intent, displaying one of his finest Italian Renaissance paintings, Giorgione's *The Adoration of the Shepherds*, in a window of the Fifth Avenue store in New York.¹⁶

The significance of Samuel Kress's role in the stores' design is further indicated in the declining quality of Kress buildings after his departure from the company's daily operations in 1941. Changing market forces, however, were perhaps a more significant factor. As Main Streets lost ground to suburban shopping malls and much larger discount stores became the norm, the five-and-dime, as both a commercial and architectural type, disappeared. By 1944, S.H. Kress & Co. no longer needed designers and replaced the Architectural Division with the "Buildings" Division. Edward F. Sibbert remained with the company as a vice president and head of the Buildings Division, assuming an executive role, but he became dissatisfied with the new direction of the company and resigned in 1954. The era of S.H. Kress & Co. as originally conceived was over, and after being sold to Genesco, Inc. in 1963, the Kress operation was officially closed in 1980.¹⁷

The Kress Building

Houston was home to the first S.H. Kress & Co. in Texas, which opened in 1900. Like several of the chain's earliest stores, it was housed in a leased building on Main Street. It must have been profitable because Kress also opened a second corporate office in Houston in 1907. That office was combined into the New York headquarters by 1916, but the step indicates the importance that Houston was gaining in the South, where Kress focused the early years of its enterprise. Kress experienced Houston's rising prominence first-hand in the early-20th century, and it was only a matter of time before they built a permanent home in the city.

The explosion of the petroleum industry and the opening of the Houston Ship Channel would certainly have encouraged Kress's existing interest in the city, and by 1913 the company was ready to make a considerable investment in Houston's downtown. The Main Street Bridge was about to open, bringing even more potential shoppers into downtown from the rapidly growing neighborhoods on the north side of Buffalo Bayou. When a 1912 fire destroyed several blocks along Main Street, in the retail-dominated south end of the commercial district, S.H. Kress & Co. was quick to purchase a prominent lot at the corner of Main Street and Capitol Avenue. The Kress Building would be the first to rise from the ashes.

A March 30, 1913 article from the *Houston Post* announced the start of construction on, "a handsome, thoroughly fireproof and in many way distinctive building for S.H. Kress & Co.'s store."¹⁸ The building, to be constructed by

¹⁵ Bernice Thomas, "Five and Dime Design," 65-66.

¹⁶ Thomas, *America's Five-and-Ten-Cent Stores*, 131-133.

¹⁷ Thomas, *America's Five-and-Ten-Cent Stores*, 164-168.

¹⁸ "New Kress Building First on Site of Main St. Fire," *Houston Post*, March 30, 1913, 47.

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Kress Building
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Buchanan & Gilder, was scheduled to take about seven months and cost about \$300,000. The walls were to be built of reinforced concrete, with additional steel columns in the basement and on the first floor. They intended to use the "Turner or mushroom system of reinforcing," the first building in Houston to employ this innovative construction method. According to the article:

The system obviates the use of beams in ceilings through a fibrous network of rods running in all directions throughout the concrete filling of the floors and ceilings. These rods radiate umbrellalike from the tops of the columns and bring into play the principle upon which the structure of the well-known fungus is built.¹⁹

The system was undoubtedly appealing to Kress architects, who were always interested in technology that facilitated longer clear spans on the selling floor.

The new Kress Building also boasted "the longest unbroken line of show window space in the city," and was described as "the only entirely terra cotta-faced structure of its height in the South and West outside of San Francisco and Los Angeles."²⁰ It was clearly an ambitious project for Houston, and S.H. Kress & Co. may have been overly ambitious at first. The article quotes F.E. Haynes, Houston manager for the company, saying that, "It will be the tallest 5 and 10-cent store building utilized solely for that purpose in the country."²¹ Either he was misquoted, or the size of the store was significantly scaled back, however, because S.H. Kress & Co.'s store and offices would only occupy 3 ½ floors of the building, including the basement, with the remainder leased as professional offices.²² It was therefore always referred to as the "Kress Building," as opposed to bearing only the name of the S.H. Kress & Co. store.²³

The Kress Building was most likely designed by Seymour Burrell, a Kress architect from 1910-1918. Julius H. Zeitner, Kress's first staff architect, was still employed and signed as co-architect of the Houston building, but Burrell seems to have been the company's main designer after 1911.²⁴ Kress stores were most often sited in the small-scale commercial districts of America's small towns, and in 1913, the Houston building was by far the largest ever built by the company. Only the flagship New York store on Fifth Avenue, built in 1935, would ever surpass the Houston building's height, and even then by only one story. The tall commercial block was, then, a rare building type for the chain, and the Kress Building was a relatively unique project.

Burrell's design followed architectural trends that became popular in the last decades of the 19th century and continued to shape tall buildings through the 1920s. The Kress Building's three-part vertical organization, articulated as if a column's "base," "shaft," and "capital," was a common design metaphor. As buildings grew increasingly taller in the late-19th century, architects had developed methods for augmenting the monotony of identical, repeating stories. Chicago architects are often credited as the defining designers of the new building type, and it was the most recognized of those early skyscraper designers, Louis Sullivan, who established the column-like model, where "lower stories (public or

¹⁹ "New Kress Building," *Houston Post*.

²⁰ "New Kress Building," *Houston Post*.

²¹ "New Kress Building," *Houston Post*.

²² "Kress Building," *Houston Architectural Survey*, Vol. 1, Southwest Center for Urban Research, 1983.

²³ Thomas, *America's Five-and-Ten-Cent Stores*, 24.

²⁴ Thomas, *America's Five-and-Ten-Cent Stores*, 21.

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Kress Building
Houston, Harris County, Texas

semipublic) function as a heavy base; attic stories (service) as a rich and emphatic crown; intermediate stories (office) as a tall shaft, with soaring piers that express verticality and decorated spandrels that recall the horizontal dimension.²⁵

The Kress Building, then, illustrates the established conventions for buildings of its type and period. Through the 1920s, a majority of skyscrapers were arranged in some form of three-part vertical block. Although more progressive and modern architects were suppressing the use of historicist ornament by the 1910s, Classical and Renaissance-inspired details like those of the Kress Building remained far more common. Although unique in Houston, Burrell's extensive use of terra cotta was also reflective of contemporary trends and, once again, owed much to the work of Sullivan and the "Chicago School," who often used terra cotta as a decorative, but also fireproof, sheathing on steel-frame buildings. Furthermore, the Kress Building's terra cotta is in many instances intended to imitate stone, illustrating some early 20th-century architects' tendency to substitute modern materials for more traditional ones while retaining the latter's formal characteristics.

Although the overall form of the Kress Building was clearly that of an office block, Burrell's design also incorporated some characteristic features that would identify the building with S.H. Kress & Co. The ground-floor storefronts were, besides their greater length, much like those of any Kress store across the country, with expansive product displays leading to the curved glass marking each entry. S.H. Kress & Co. signage above the storefronts and the characteristic Kress logo in each parapet also followed the company's nationwide design standards.(Figure-19)

The Kress Building, with its prime location and distinctive design, quickly realized the prominence that the company had anticipated. Early tenants included a number of physicians and dentists, as well as the first offices of the Harris County Medical Society and the Houston Academy of Medicine Library. Finger and Bailey, a well-known local architecture firm, also located in the Kress Building, and Gulf occupied the eighth-floor penthouse until 1917.²⁶

For decades, S.H. Kress & Co. thrived on the corner of Main and Capitol, and by 1947, the Houston store was in need of expansion. The company purchased the adjacent 1910 Gas Building, a handsome 2-story brick building that shared the Kress Building's east party wall. The building was especially attractive to Kress because of its overbuilt foundation, originally designed to handle a 20-story building. Although they didn't intend to dwarf their own building, Kress did add 2 more stories to the Gas Building in their 1952-1953 renovations. The 4-story annex was really an entirely new building, with no recognizable components of the original left intact. The new International style design was simple and plain, and it illustrates the company's changing attitudes regarding its buildings. The annex exhibits very little evidence of creative thought and is more of a generic building envelope than anything specifically associated with Kress. Clearly, less and less emphasis was being placed on design (recall the company's 1944 replacement of its Architectural Division with a Buildings Division).

Although Kress must have been encouraged enough by its Houston store's success to build the annex, by the 1960s Houston's downtown retail establishments had begun a steady decline. Even today it appears that, "not even the daily presence of approximately 180,000 workers downtown can compensate for the defection of shoppers to suburban

²⁵ Carole Rifkind, *A Field Guide to American Architecture* (New York: Plume Books, 1980): 196.

²⁶ "Kress Building," *Houston Architectural Survey Vol. 1*, Southwest Center for Urban Research, 1983.

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Houston, Harris County, Texas

mall.²⁷ This trend was not limited to Houston, and S.H. Kress & Co. was losing ground across the country, evident first in their 1963 sale to Genesco and finally in the closing of the entire Kress operation, including the Houston store, in 1980.

With S.H. Kress & Co. gone, the Kress Building was stripped of the company's associative characteristics, including its storefronts, signage and parapet, in 1983. It continued to function as an office building, however, and maintained a high rate of occupancy. Eventually, the Kress Building became more valuable for residential use, and it has been converted into loft apartments, the "St. Germain Lofts," with retail establishments on the ground floor. Like many of the buildings built by S.H. Kress & Co. across the country, the quality of the Kress Building's initial design and construction has greatly facilitated its continued adaptation and reuse.

Houston's 1913 Kress Building exemplifies important aspects of the city's history. Its location, height and style are all indicative of early 20th-century trends in Houston's downtown commercial development. Renaissance-inspired detailing, a three-part vertical arrangement and terra cotta facades all identify the Kress Building with its period and function, illustrating its role, along with similar commercial buildings of the era, in declaring Houston's rising importance and prosperity. Although most of the characteristic S.H. Kress & Co. features have been removed, the Kress Building remains a testament to that company's commitment to high-quality architecture and a reminder of the five-and-dime's role in American communities of all sizes. It is nominated under Criterion A in the area of Commerce at the local level of significance.

²⁷ Fox, *Houston Architectural Guide*, 20.

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Houston, Harris County, Texas

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Kress Building
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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF PROPERTY: less than one acre

UTM REFERENCES	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	15	271540	3294200	3	##	#####
2	##	#####	#####	4	##	#####

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Kress Building and Annex are located on Block 80, Lots 9, 10, 11, 4 and 5, which falls within the lower league of the John Austin Two League Grant, Abstract A-1, Houston, Harris County, Texas.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nomination includes all property historically associated with the building.

11. FORM PREPARED BY (with assistance from Peter Ketter, THC Historian)

NAME/TITLE: Janet Wagner and Dr. Margaret Swett Henson

ORGANIZATION:

DATE: May 15, 2001

STREET & NUMBER: 1700 West Loop South

TELEPHONE: (800) 926-2135

CITY OR TOWN: Houston

STATE: Texas

ZIP CODE: 77027

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

CONTINUATION SHEETS

MAPS

PHOTOGRAPHS (see continuation sheet Photo-20)

ADDITIONAL ITEMS (see continuation sheets Figure-18 through Figure-19)

PROPERTY OWNER

NAME: Randall Davis

STREET & NUMBER: 1210 West Clay, No. 10

TELEPHONE: (713) 526-3222

CITY OR TOWN: Houston

STATE: Texas

ZIP CODE: 77019

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Kress Building
Houston, Harris County, Texas

Kress Building, Houston, c.1913
America's 5&10 Cent Stores



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Section Figure Page 19

Gas Building, c.1920 (converted to Kress Annex in 1951)
Courtesy of Houston Endowment



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Kress Building
Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo Log

Kress Building
705 South Main Street
Houston, Harris County, Texas
Photographed by Randall Davis, May, 2001
Negatives on file with Texas Historical Commission

Photo 1 of 3
Northwest oblique, camera facing southeast

Photo 2 of 3
Northwest oblique, camera facing southeast

Photo 3 of 3
Northeast oblique, camera facing southwest

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Kress Building

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: TEXAS, Harris

DATE RECEIVED: 8/22/02 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 9/23/02
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 10/09/02 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 10/06/02
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 02001102

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 10.4.02 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



KRESS BUILDING

705 SOUTH MAIN STREET

HOUSTON, HARRIS CO, TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 1 of 3



KRESS BUILDING

705 SOUTH MAIN STREET
HOUSTON, HARRIS CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 2 of 3

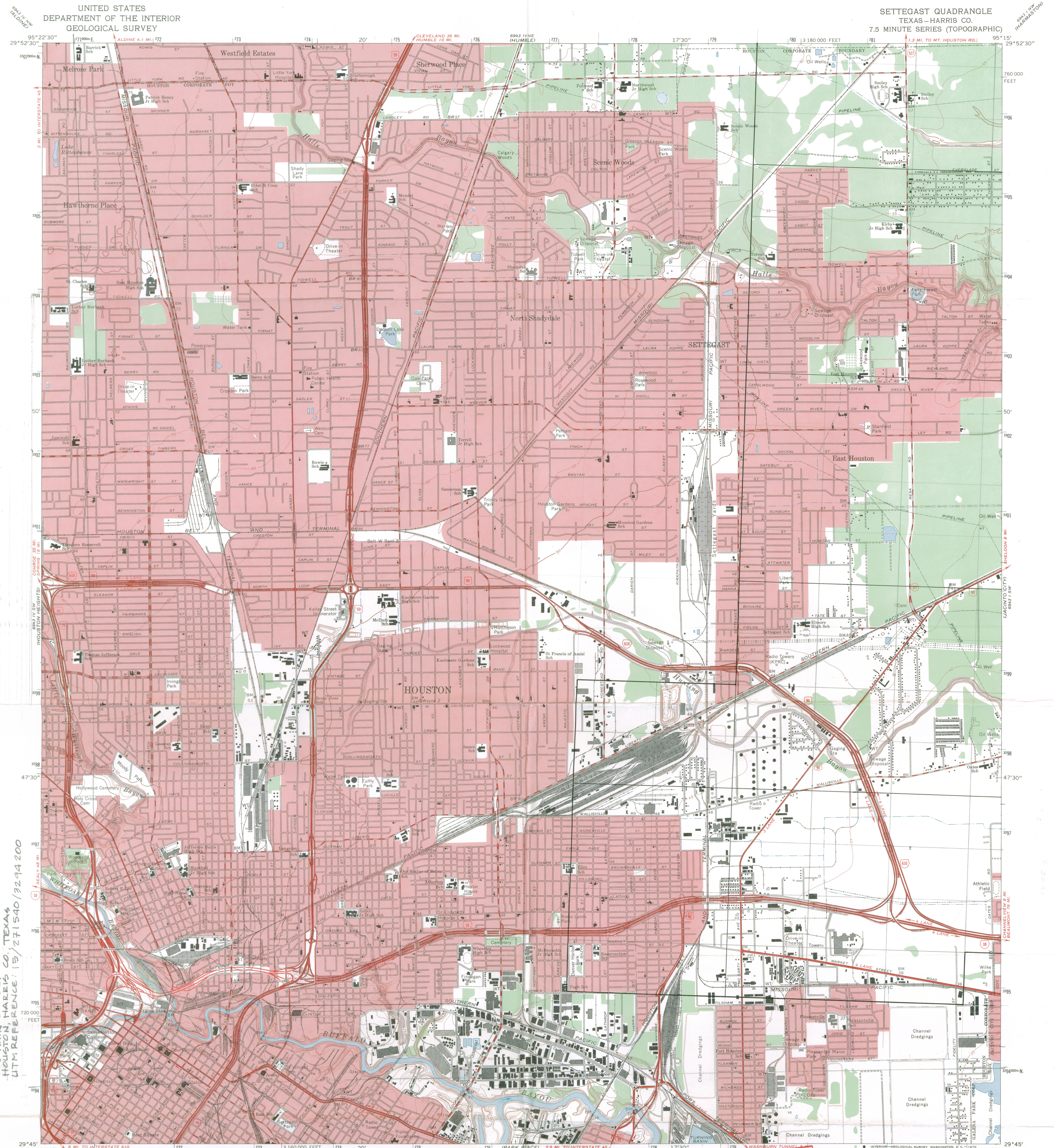


KRESS BUILDING

705 SOUTH MAIN STREET

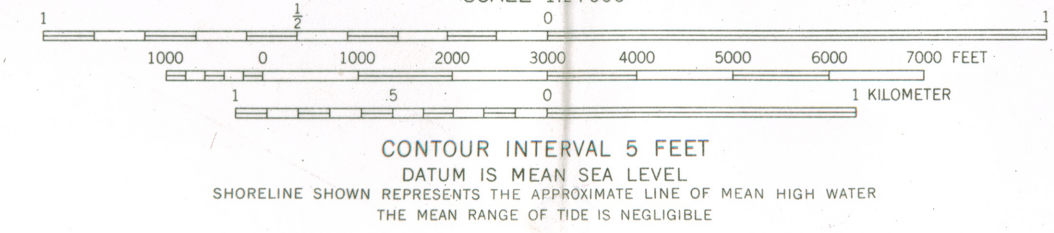
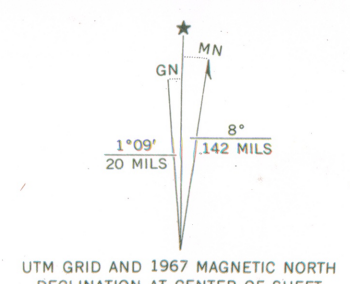
HOUSTON, HARRIS CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 3 of 3



SPRESS BUILDING
705 MAIN STREET
HOUSTON, TEXAS
UTM REFERENCE: 13/271540/3294200

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Control by USGS, USC&GS, and USCE
Planimetry by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken
1966. Topography enlarged from 1:31 680-scale AMS map of Settegast
Quadrangle. Original map by planetable surveys 1943. Revised 1967
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum.
10,000-foot grid based on Texas coordinate system, south central zone
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,
zone 15, shown in blue
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown



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By: _____ Date: _____
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ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Heavy-duty	Light-duty
Medium-duty	Unimproved dirt
Interstate Route	U.S. Route
	State Route

SETTEGAST, TEX.
N2945—W9515/7.5

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