

(Oct. 1990)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM



1. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: Cotton Belt Building

OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: N/A

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: 1517 West Front Street

CITY/TOWN: Tyler

VICINITY: N/A

STATE: Texas

CODE: TX

COUNTY: Smith

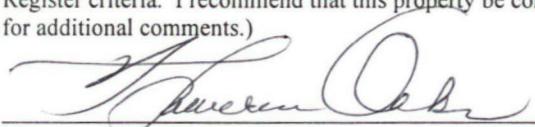
NOT FOR PUBLICATION: N/A

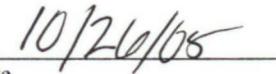
CODE: 423

ZIP CODE: 75702

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.)

  
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.

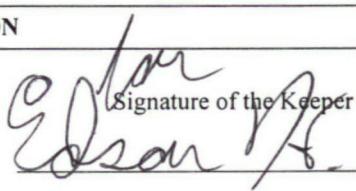
determined eligible for the National Register

See continuation sheet

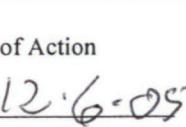
determined not eligible for the National Register

removed from the National Register

other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

  
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

  
12-6-05

**5. CLASSIFICATION**

**OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY:** Public-local

**CATEGORY OF PROPERTY:** Building

NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:	CONTRIBUTING	NONCONTRIBUTING
	1	0 BUILDINGS
	0	0 SITES
	0	0 STRUCTURES
	0	0 OBJECTS
	<hr/> 1	<hr/> 0 TOTAL

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

**NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING:** Historic and Architectural Resources of Tyler, Texas.

**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

**HISTORIC FUNCTIONS:** COMMERCIAL/Office Building

**CURRENT FUNCTIONS:** GOVERNMENT/Office Building

**7. DESCRIPTION**

**ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION:** Modern Movement: International Style

**MATERIALS:**  
FOUNDATION CONCRETE  
WALLS BRICK; STONE; METAL  
ROOF ASPHALT  
OTHER GLASS; METAL

**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION** (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-8).

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7      Page 5

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

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**DESCRIPTION**

Built in 1954, the Cotton Belt Building is a good local example of a modernist office building that combines the elements of International Style design with Art Deco classicism. It is one of five modernist examples in the city that utilize elements of the International style. The Cotton Belt Building is a two story commercial office building with basement designed by St. Louis Southwestern Railway president H. J. McKenzie and prominent Ft. Worth architect Wyatt C. Hedrick, and constructed by the Dallas construction firm of O'Rourke Construction Co. (City of Tyler Building Permits). Located on Front Street, a busy commercial thoroughfare that is now also known as Texas Highway 31, the Cotton Belt Building and its adjacent parking lot occupies a three-acre parcel just west of the intersection of Front Street and Glenwood Boulevard at the corner of Front and Hill Avenue, about 1½ miles southwest of the courthouse square. The building is an imposing yellow brick cube incorporating primary elements of the International Style such as volumetric massing, flat roof, ribbon windows, and a subtlety articulated entry featuring detailing derived from Art Deco classicism. Designed to follow the slightly north sloping contours of the site the building incorporates a symmetrical facade on the south and east elevations, each with an identical centrally placed entry (**Photo 1**). The two primary facades are arranged in three bays with the central entry flanked by office space articulated with ribbon windows on each floor. Topped with a flat built-up roof that is slightly recessed below the parapet wall, the building features a slightly recessed entry, detailed with square gray granite wall panels, limestone dentils and pink granite steps, leads to a set of double glass and aluminum entry doors. Three square fluorescent lights set flush with the ceiling of the entry vestibule illuminate the top step, which bears the words "Cotton Belt" in distinctive aluminum script. Polished aluminum handrails guide pedestrians to the entry doors. Now owned by Smith County, the building was constructed as the corporate offices for the St. Louis and Southwestern Railway, more widely known as the Cotton Belt, and contains two floors of offices and a full basement. Exterior alterations are limited to the replacement of original aluminum and glass doors with similar types, installation of an ADA accessible ramp on the east elevation and replacement of a few small original windows on the rear elevation with non-original types. Inside, the building retains most of its original materials, finishes, and floor plan, including, remarkably, a second floor roof-top outdoor patio intended as an employee recreation area. The Cotton Belt Building is one of several commercial property types defined in greater detail in the *Historic and Architectural Resources of Tyler, Texas* Multiple-Property National Register nomination. The Cotton Belt Building is preserved in excellent condition, retaining its architectural and historic integrity to a very high degree.

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**GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING**

As the largest city (U.S. Census 2000 population 83,650) and seat of government in Smith County, Tyler is about 90 miles southeast of Dallas (**Figure 1**). The surrounding East Texas topography consists of timbered, rolling hills of gray clay and red sandy soils. Intermittent creeks water the area before draining into the Sabine and Neches rivers on the north and west of town, respectively. The Cotton Belt Building is near the south edge of downtown Tyler, about 1 ½ miles southwest of the courthouse square (**Map-1-No. 1**). Facing West Front Street, the building is a prominent visual presence in an area containing a mix of

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7      Page 6

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

parking lots, non-historic strip commercial buildings, and modest 1950s and 1960s residences. The 1949 International Style influenced Elks Club Building (NR 2001), designed by prominent Tyler architect Carl Gregory is about one mile northeast on the east side of South Broadway. Across Broadway and about  $\frac{1}{2}$  block south of the Elks Club is the 10-story Petroleum Building (with oil derrick on the roof), built in 1953. About one mile east of the Cotton Belt Building is the Georgian Revival influenced Tyler Masonic Lodge (**Map 1-No. 2**), built in 1932. Approximate three miles northeast is Martin Hall at Texas College (**Map 1-No. 3**). Land uses in the immediate vicinity of the Cotton Belt Building are paved parking lots and post-1960 commercial buildings to the east and south, and incompatibly altered historic one-part and two-part commercial buildings to the north and 1950s and 1960s residences to the west.

No historic commercial district survives in Tyler's central business district due to the demolition of the imposing 1909 Classical Revival Smith County Courthouse and its replacement in 1956 with a modest Modernist style building. At that time the courthouse block was divided to allow the extension of Broadway through the center of the square and the construction of the new courthouse on the east parcel of the divided block. The focal point of the current square is the 1956 courthouse, located on the east side of Broadway, and the hardscaped park west of Broadway. Further changing the historic character of the square is the 1980s redevelopment of all of one block and portions of another facing the square and extensive on-going alterations to most 19th and early 20th century buildings fronting the square. Most buildings on North and South Broadway in the central business district and those along East and West Front Street have been incompatibly altered with removal of original or significant historic-era materials and the remodeling and modernizing of primary facades, increasing the visibility and significance of the Cotton Belt Building.

The Cotton Belt Building is one of two scattered institutional buildings and one central city commercial building being nominated individually to the National Register. About one mile east on Front Street, just west of the intersection of Bois D'Arc Avenue is the two-story 1932 Georgian Revival influenced Tyler Masonic Lodge (**Map-1, No. 2**). About three miles northeast is the three-story 1924 Martin Hall (a.k.a. Administration Building) at Texas College (**Map-1, No. 3**). These buildings represent a variety of historic non-residential property types and are among the most significant and intact institutional and commercial examples city-wide.

**THE COTTON BELT BUILDING**

The Cotton Belt Building faces south onto West Front Street and was built in 1954 (**Figure 2**). The building was designed by railroad president H.J. McKenzie, who graduated from Texas A & M with degrees in engineering and architecture (McGinnis:1), and the plans finalized by prominent Ft. Worth architect Wyatt C. Hedrick (McGinnis Interview 10/27/04). The building features important design elements associated with the International Style, including rectangular, volumetric massing, a symmetrical tripartite division of front and east side facade walls and a flat built up roof, recessed slightly below a parapet wall topped with slightly projecting coping. Bands of ribbon windows delineate each floor and flank the entry (**Photo 1**). The centrally placed recessed entry nods to Art Deco Classicism with its use of

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7      Page 7

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

luxury materials such as square panels of polished gray granite and limestone dentils. Double glass and aluminum storefront type doors provide access to the interior. Three square lights set flush with the entry ceiling illuminate the space. Original polished aluminum letters on the front of the building above the entry spell out the words "Cotton Belt." Below are the words Smith County Tax Office, identifying the current primary function of the building (**Photo 2**). Pink granite steps lead to the entry and are defined by polished aluminum handrails. Immediately in front of the entry doors polished aluminum letters spell out the words "Cotton Belt" in the railways distinctive trademarked logo script (**Figure 3**). Regular fenestration patterns on the front facade, and throughout the building, are composed of original 2/2 double hung sash aluminum frame windows set in horizontal panels of 18 panels per section. Each section is divided by fluted aluminum panels. Limestone frames the successive window sections creating a continuous ribbon band on each floor of each facade. Decorative aluminum screens mounted on the interior of the entry bay windows remain. The east elevation is virtually identical to the south (front) facade (**Photo 3 and Photo 5**). The west elevation (**Photo 4**) features the same massing and ribbon windows as the other elevations but in the basement level has three vehicle bays enclosed with original multi-panel wood and glass roll up doors. These bays access parking spaces originally designated for senior executives of the railroad. The rear (north) elevation incorporates the distinctive ribbon windows as well a pedestrian doors and loading dock space (**Photo 5**). The rectangular design of the Cotton Belt Building emphasizes the interior office function. At a glance the building does not appear to be especially large, but it measures 248 feet by 198 feet and has an exterior foot print encompassing 125,000 square feet. The interior heated and cooled floor area is 102,000 square feet arranged in basement, first and second floors. Surrounding uses include a service station to the east, incompatibly altered historic commercial buildings to the northeast, strip commercial and paved parking lots to the south and residences to the north and west. Immediately adjacent to the east side of the building is the original paved 200 space parking lot, which retains its original configuration and concrete aisle dividers.

Occupying an irregular shaped parcel of just over three acres overlooking the railroad's mainline at the intersection of West Front Street and South Hill Avenue, west of Glenwood Boulevard (**Figure 4**), the Cotton Belt Building was constructed by the Dallas construction firm of O'Rourke Construction Company, and financed by the St. Louis Southwestern Railway as its corporate headquarters. The building is sited and designed to take advantage of the north sloping terrain and utilizes a basement, which is only visible from the north and west elevations. The Cotton Belt Building utilizes a reinforced concrete pier and beam foundation and reinforced concrete walls sheathed with yellow brick veneer. At roof level, the parapet is capped with slightly projecting flat coping. Exterior alterations are limited to the removal of the double set of double doors and replacement of the original exterior doors with similar types, the replacement of a few rear elevation windows with incompatible types inside the original surrounds and the construction of an ADA accessible ramp on the east elevation, adjacent to the parking lot. Because the building is within an urban setting, no landscaping is present.

The building can perhaps best be understood as a large rectangle containing two smaller rectangular blocks (**Figure 5**) placed side by side with 56 x 110 foot courtyards in the center of each. This

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7      Page 8

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

design, the brainchild of president McKenzie, permitted each above ground office to have at least one wall of windows, which imparted a light, airy feel to the building (McGinnis:1). The courtyard closest to the front of the building was intended for use as an employee lunch and recreation area and was accessed from an interior hallway, which remains. Open to the sky, it was not favored by employees and was not used. Interior space is divided into two office floors and a basement, which originally incorporated three walk-in vaults, a 75 x 56 foot auditorium/cafeteria, small office spaces, storage, and space for mechanical equipment. Square piers support each floor and are regularly spaced throughout each floor area. Originally interior halls on the first and second floor stretched 150 feet from east to west and were lined with offices of identical appearance. Shorter halls provided access to north south oriented spaces. This configuration remains. Although original floor plans were located, they are not in reproducible condition. Current floor plans illustrate internal space use as it is today **Figures 6-8**). The first floor includes a very large office, containing almost 14,000 square feet. This was the accounting department, now still largely an open “pool” area, occupied by county and state offices. Other first floor offices included the general superintendent, vice-president and general manager, as well as personnel and division engineer. Today, these areas are occupied by various Smith County offices. The southeast corner of the second floor housed President McKenzie’s paneled office, complete with private bathroom, kitchen and board room. With two kitchens, 23 restrooms, a central pneumatic tube system for moving paperwork from office to office, an auditorium and cafeteria, it was “...the epitome of the ‘state of the art’ office space” (McGinnis:1).

Despite use since 1985 as a county office building, interior spaces retain a high degree of integrity with original restroom fixtures and tile--pink in women’s facilities and brow in the men’s spaces--original polished aluminum stair rails, some original interior doors and original louvered transoms, vaults, plaster walls, and asphalt tile flooring. Amazingly, one original Trane air conditioning unit is still in use as is one original steel boiler, manufactured by Pacific Steel. Mail chutes and air intake vents are original, and some of the original basement offices feature original light fixtures. The building largely retains its original space configurations with the basement auditorium and cafeteria converted to storage, the construction of new basement office spaces and the conversion of office space along the third floor of the north elevation into secure offices for the Texas 12th Court of Appeals.

**SUMMARY OF PHYSICAL CONDITION AND INTEGRITY**

With few exterior or interior alterations since its construction in 1954, the Cotton Belt Building is an excellent example of a modernist office building that mixes International Style elements with details derived from Art Deco classicism. Built from plans drawn by railway president H. J. McKenzie and prominent Ft. Worth architect Wyatt C. Hedrick, AIA, the building displays a high level of craftsmanship, is an important local example of how accomplished architects melded the modernist Art Deco with the modern International Style. The building’s exterior and interior character-defining elements—massing, brick work and fenestration patterns and materials, entry detailing and interior finishes—are maintained in excellent condition and retain a high level of integrity of location, setting, materials, design, workmanship, feeling and association within the period of significance.

**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 VALUES, OR REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT AND DISTINGUISHABLE ENTITY WHOSE COMPONENTS LACK INDIVIDUAL DISTINCTION.

**D** PROPERTY HAS YIELDED, OR IS LIKELY TO YIELD INFORMATION IMPORTANT IN PREHISTORY OR HISTORY.

**CRITERIA CONSIDERATIONS:** N/A

**AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE:** Community Planning and Development; Architecture

**PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE:** 1954-55

**SIGNIFICANT DATES:** 1954

**SIGNIFICANT PERSON:** N/A

**CULTURAL AFFILIATION:** N/A

**ARCHITECT/BUILDER:** McKenzie, H. J., and Hedrick, Wyatt C.; Builder: O'Rourk Construction Co.

**NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE** (see continuation sheets 8-9 through 8-22).

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** (see continuation sheets 9-23 through 9-31).

**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:

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8      Page 9

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

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**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Constructed in 1954 from plans drawn by Cotton Belt president H. J. McKenzie and prominent Ft. Worth architect Wyatt C. Hedrick, the two-story and basement Cotton Belt Building is a good local example of a modernist office building that combines the International Style and Art Deco classicism. The building is significant for its architecture and as the corporate headquarters and general offices of one of Tyler's most successful, long-lived and economically important businesses. The building housed consolidated the railway's Texas and Missouri rail operations under one roof and brought the corporate headquarters back to Tyler, where the rail line began in the 1870s. The building also is significant for its low rise International Style/Art Deco architecture. Built during a period of prosperity for the Cotton Belt line and a time of continued population growth and economic expansion fostered by the East Texas oil industry, the building is related to the historic context *Community Development in Tyler, Smith County, Texas 1846-1950*. The Cotton Belt Building is categorized as a commercial resource, which is defined in more detail in the *Historic and Architectural Resources of Tyler, Texas* Multiple Property National Register nomination. The Cotton Belt Building is one of five commercial buildings in Tyler to utilize elements of the International Style but differs from the other local examples in size and massing and incorporation of Art Deco elements. The Cotton Belt Building is maintained in good condition and retains a very high degree of integrity. It derives its primary significance from its associations with the St. Louis Southwestern Railway, from development patterns during the height of Tyler's oil boom, which spanned more than 40 years and fostered intensive community development and from its architectural form. For these reasons, the Cotton Belt Building is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criteria A and C in the areas of significance of community development and planning, commerce and architecture within a period of significance extending from 1954 to 1955. Although the period covered by the historic context could not be extended beyond 1950 for financial reasons, Tyler's social, economic and development patterns continued unchanged from the late 1940s into the 1950s. Thus the period of significance for this building is extended to the current 50 year mark, which is 1955.

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**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND THE RAILROAD**

Settled in 1846, when Smith County was created from Nacogdoches County, Tyler incorporated in 1850 and served as the seat of Smith County as well as the site of branches of State and Federal courts. From its earliest settlement in the 1840s, when businesses located around the courthouse square, until the arrival of the railroad in 1873 the marketing and shipping of Smith County agricultural products formed the basis for Tyler's economy. But almost at once this base was augmented by small scale manufacturing such as blacksmithing, milling, logging and tanning as well as legal and government services. As a result Tyler's economy was diversified at an early date, even though the scope was small and the territory served limited. With the arrival of the International & Great Northern Railroad in 1873 and the establishment of the Tyler Tap Railroad in 1877 and its subsequent merger into the St. Louis Southwestern Railway (Cotton

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8      Page 10

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

Belt, thereafter), manufacturing, food processing, food distribution, saw and planing mills, and banking and insurance firms became important components of Tyler's economy (Whisenhunt 1983:29). The railroad made an enormous impact on Tyler and the surrounding area, more than doubling business (Smallwood 1995:ch.15a, p. 11). In the late 19th century this diverse economy fostered 15 labor unions representing workers in various fields (Smallwood 1999:426). Local bank failure occurred in 1891 and then the nationwide Panic of '93 slowed the economy but by mid-decade economic troubles eased and Tyler's position as a Federal, state and local government and legal services center bolstered the economy and Tyler's influence statewide. "During the last quarter of the nineteenth century Tyler enjoyed a reputation as the political capital of Texas: the so-called 'Tyler Crowd' furnished governors, senators and lesser officials galore, and for more than a generation, its influence in both [Democratic] party and state affairs had to be reckoned with." (White 1940:1245).

Rail transportation, which arrived in 1873, expanded Tyler's county prominence and fueled growth as the hub of a network of local and regional routes that developed over time into county, state and U.S. highways, and replaced unreliable and inefficient antebellum steamboat service to New Orleans via flat boats embarking from Belzora, about 20 miles north of Tyler on the Sabine River (Tyler Public Library a). The railroad supported the diversification of Tyler's economy, including industrialization and manufacturing begun during the Civil War and agricultural expansion, which appeared in the immediate post-war era. The growing economy brought more residents to Tyler, fostering retail expansion, subdivisions and a supply of mass produced building materials for Tyler's developing neighborhoods.

The area around the courthouse square remains Tyler's commercial core, and retains many pre-1900 buildings. However, most have been altered with facade modernizations dating to the 1950s and 1960s. These changes significantly modify understanding of the original, or historically significant, roles of many buildings. A few downtown buildings have been restored or rehabilitated to reveal underlying historic fabric that once again connects the historical record with the physical artifact. Additional buildings may benefit from future restoration. Among the few unaltered surviving 19th century commercial buildings in Tyler is the one-story brick Kamel Building on East Ferguson Street, just off the square. Surviving, intact early 20th century commercial warehouse buildings include the Moore Grocery Co. and the Tyler Grocery Co. buildings (both NR 2002) on adjacent North Broadway parcels. By the 1940s Tyler's downtown commercial district had spread south along Broadway and was moving east and west along Front Street, displacing older residential properties and marking the steady economic advance of Tyler business. By 1954, when the Cotton Belt Building was erected, West Front Street was largely commercial.

Throughout the 1890s and for the next 30 years, agriculture, manufacturing, wholesale and retail commerce, banking, insurance and legal services continued to fuel the economy. The Tyler Chamber of Commerce was established in 1900 as the Tyler Commercial Club to promote business interests. Meat processing, storage and shipment, canning, storage and distribution of grain, fruit and vegetables were joined by several wholesale grocery firms in the early 1900s including the Moore Grocery Company,

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8      Page 11

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

which was established prior to 1900. The wholesale grocery industry expanded in 1903 when John B. Mayfield, a resident of what would become the Charnwood Residential Historic District started a second wholesale grocery, the Mayfield Grocer Co. By 1914 Mayfield's firm had grown to six branch facilities (Tyler Public Library d:215). Telephone service was established in Tyler in 1896, and Tyler had two phone companies until the 1940s. One was the S.A. Lindsey Telephone Company, which by 1905 had 25 miles of telephone lines in city (Texas State Library b). Samuel A. Lindsey was a prominent attorney, judge and businessman also involved in land speculation in south Tyler including the area that would become part of the Azalea District. In 1932 Lindsey developed the 15-story People's National Bank (NR 2002), a Tyler landmark and testament to the community's economic health during one of the worst years of the Great Depression. A number of other important Tyler buildings were erected in 1931 and 1932 including the Woman's Building on South Broadway and St. John's Lodge on West Front Street.

Better roads throughout Texas facilitated commerce and in 1918 a Tyler-Dallas motor truck service was established to carry freight and passengers. The seven hour, 106-mile trip included several stops (Texas State Library c). As roads continued to improve truck, bus and auto travel became more attractive spurring by the 1920s development of gas stations and vehicle repair garages throughout central Tyler. By the mid 1920s Tyler retail enterprises included 30 businesses involving the automobile, eight auto salesrooms, five hotels, 12 barber shops, four bakeries, 18 cafes and restaurants, eight furniture stores, six hardware stores, 27 grocers, three theaters, eight shoe stores, 10 drug stores, three large department stores, three banks, 24 drygoods stores and many more (St. Louis Southwestern Railway:14). Suburban development included neighborhood grocery stores, dry cleaners and other service establishments. Tyler remained a legal center with a U.S. District Court, as well as the various Smith County courts; none of the associated buildings survive. The Blackstone Hotel opened in 1921 and was demolished in 1985; a parking lot now occupies the site. Its companion, the 1938 Blackstone Building (NR 2002), survives on North Broadway. It originally housed Tyler's first union bus station and office space. The Tyler Chapter of the Texas Association of Business was established in 1922 in response to a booming business climate (Whisenhunt 1983:59). In the late 1920s the Minnelee Bus Lines operated from 110 North Broadway (Tyler Public Library d), providing inter-city transit service. In 1929 the Jenkins-Harvey Super Service Station and Garage (NR 2002) was erected to serve the growing number of motorists. Between 1920 and 1930, significant economic growth in Tyler and Smith County occurred in dairying operations. Rose culture remained important and developed more rapidly after irrigation was introduced in 1924. Tomatoes, pecans, and peanuts also became important crops. Two fertilizer plants used a cottonseed meal base to make their product, and the Sledge Manufacturing Co. employed more than 100 people.

In 1930, Tyler was on the threshold of its greatest economic era, a 30-year-plus period of unprecedented growth and development. In October 1930 oil was found in nearby Rusk County when Dad Joiner's Daisy Bradford #3 proved to be a producing well. In March 1931 Guy Vernon Lewis brought in the first producing oil well in Smith County, located near the community of Arp, southeast of Tyler. As more wells came in drillers, riggers, geologists, pipers, surveyors and others moved to Tyler, and refineries and exploration companies developed headquarters in Tyler. The boom affected just about every aspect of

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8      Page 12

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

---

life in East Texas, and oil added greatly to the Tyler and Smith County economy (UT, Austin PCL:a). While the population increased from 9,255 in 1920 to 13,009 in 1930, Tyler received a huge influx of people between 1930 and 1950. In the early days of what would prove to be the city's most prosperous era, St. John's Lodge No. 53 erected a new lodge building on West Front Street, about four blocks southwest of the courthouse square. In 1940 the population reached 20, 879 and in 1950 it had grown to 28, 854 (U.S. Census). The population continued to increase through the 1950s and 1960s.

Tyler benefited greatly from the discovery of the East Texas Oil Field. As the largest town in the five county oil field area before the oil boom, it provided the most developed infrastructure and a wide range of business and professional services. At the junction of several state and U.S. Highways, Tyler had good communications, rail and truck service, a number of banks and related financial institutions, hotel and office space, a system of paved roads, and a variety of neighborhoods offering housing types to people of all income levels. As a result Tyler became the East Texas headquarters for many oil companies beginning with the discovery of the Van gas field west of Tyler in the 1920s. With the discovery of the East Texas field in 1930-31, 33 companies established offices in Tyler and almost all of the larger independent operators in the field set up land-leasing headquarters. Although Tyler had several office buildings and two large hotels, the Tyler and the Blackstone, neither existing hotel rooms nor the office space would prove adequate to meet new demands. In 1931 in response to increased population and demand for legal services the Federal government began planning a new post office and Federal courthouse building for downtown Tyler, and purchased a lot held as an investment by Tyler's Masonic lodge for improvement with a new building. Shortly thereafter, the Masons purchased a lot on West Front Street and commenced construction in early 1932 of a permanent lodge building. In 1932 Samuel A. Lindsey, Chairman of the Board of People's National Bank, financed the construction of a 15-story bank and office building immediately west of the county courthouse. In 1932 "the Blackstone [Hotel] added nine stories to accommodate the newcomers" (Clark:131), and in 1938 Edmond P. McKenna, owner of the Blackstone Hotel, and a group of investors active in the Chamber of Commerce, financed the Blackstone Building, containing a union bus terminal on the first floor and five floors of office space.

The East Texas Field fostered construction of refineries, and a rail network around the field made it possible to move the oil efficiently. The field's crude oil was of good quality needing only minimal equipment to make gasoline. At least 95 small refineries were initially built, but after a few years as production evened out, that number dropped to 76. One of these was just east of downtown Tyler. Called LaGloria, the refinery turned out gasoline and originally was known as the McMurrey Refinery. It remains in operation. Trucking also became big business, with big rigs hauling refined gas from local refineries.

Legal services became even more important after the discovery of oil as related law suits and corporate activities surged; the need for office space grew. Throughout the 1930s agriculture, especially dairying, continued to be important to Tyler's economy. By the mid 1930s, 48 dairies had permits to retail or wholesale dairy products in Tyler. Roses, blackberries, peaches, pecans, and vegetables also were important local crops. Lumber and related milled wood products significantly contributed to local prosperity with 25 saw mills county-wide in 1937 (UT, Austin PCL:a). Additional principal industries in

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8      Page 13

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

---

the county in the 1930s included canning factories, foundries, machine shops, a rail car factory, a grist mill, peanut products, and the manufacturing of crates, boxes mattresses, work clothing and house dresses. Services included 16 passenger auto agencies, six commercial auto agencies, 19 auto tire dealers, seven bakers, 33 cigar stands, 36 confectioners, 13 delicatessens, 15 department stores, 26 druggists, 38 dry goods stores 134 independent grocers and seven chain grocers, seven lumber companies, and 59 restaurants, and a pottery, among many others (Tyler Public Library:f).

In the 1940s oil and gas production and services related to that industry were the primary economic engines. In February 1940, the East Texas Industrial Exhibit Association sponsored the second annual Industrial Exhibit to showcase Tyler manufacturing, distribution and service capabilities. In addition, a number of local industries expanded in 1940, adding more space and personnel. Prominent among these are Sledge Manufacturing Company and Tyler Iron and Foundry Company. Both had government contracts associated with pre-World War II mobilization activities. Surveys were made of plant and tool capacities in Tyler to assist local firms in securing national defense contracts. To attract business and support local companies seeking government work, the Tyler Chamber of Commerce's Industrial Committee prepared facts and statistics for certain defense industries sending briefs to government bureaus and agencies reporting the advantages of Tyler including its large supply of surface water and underground water available from reservoirs at Blackburn Dam on the Neches and Prairie Creek Reservoir in Smith County (Tyler Chamber of Commerce b).

Writing in the early 1940s, Tyler's business boosters could boast of the community's great economic advantages. The Chamber of Commerce described Tyler as the "Center of the East Texas Oil Industry," a statement well founded. "The people of Tyler and of all other cities and towns within or adjacent to the oil field have been told that they have not known what the late depression meant" (Tyler Public Library d). As a result of the boom, Tyler school population increased from 4,261 students in 1930 to more than 6,000 in 1936. In this era, as Tyler's business community continued to grow and the city became more densely developed, the West Front Street area between Broadway and Glenwood Boulevard began to change from a largely residential street to a commercial one. Assessed valuations for 1930 were \$17,477,254, for 1935 they were \$28,679,113 (Tyler Chamber of Commerce b). While prosperity was a reality for those involved in the oil business, other aspects of the economy were affected, with minorities, unskilled laborers and tenant farmers largely by-passed by the boom.

As important as the East Texas field was to the local and regional economy, it proved vital to the success of the Allies in World War II. Texas oil fields produced 80 percent of all oil needed by the Allies, and the East Texas Field provided the major portion. As World War II began, oil producers and the government realized overland transit of oil was the only safe way to ship oil from the fields to east coast ports, from where it would be transferred to the battlefield. To secure transit, two pipelines were laid, one from the East Texas Field to the refineries of New York and the Philadelphia area, stretching about 1,400 miles. Called Big Inch, it measured 24 inches in diameter and every day during the war it delivered almost 300,000 barrels of crude oil. The other pipeline was known as Little Inch, and it measured 20 inches in diameter. It ran from Beaumont to Big Inch near Little Rock, Arkansas. From there it paralleled Big Inch

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8      Page 14

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

eastward. Every day of the war it delivered almost 200,000 barrels of aviation gasoline, motor gasoline and other refined products for use by the Allies (*New Handbook of Texas*:774). U.S. military presence also fueled the Tyler economy through the local Signal Corps Radio Operator Training School, the U.S. government's lease of the Tyler airport for use as a government field, and the establishment in 1943 of Camp Fannin (Whisenhunt 1983: 69-78), an infantry training center northeast of Tyler with 2,500 civilian employees. In 1945, the camp became a military separation center and the airport returned to civilian use.

By the mid 1940s Tyler had three banks, two large hotels--the Blackstone with 200 rooms and the Tyler with 75 rooms--offices of more than 30 oil companies, refineries, garment factories, box and crate factories, canning plants, an airport, two commercial colleges, two colleges for African Americans --Butler College and Texas College--one daily and one weekly newspaper, two rail lines, four bus lines and several truck freight lines (Tyler Public Library d:235). Residential development boomed with new areas of substantial brick dwellings in revival styles appearing in south Tyler and northwest Tyler. One of the city's most visible neighborhoods from this era is the Azalea District (NR 2003), in south central Tyler, which contains a large concentration of Tudor Revival and Colonial Revival brick dwellings. This area was Tyler's elite address between the 1930s and early 1960s, housing oil company executives, oil entrepreneurs and others associated with the oil industry or made wealthy by it. It remains one of the community's most prestigious residential neighborhoods.

Oil and gas, industrial and manufacturing enterprises and the machine shops of the St. Louis and Southwest Railway (Cotton Belt) were Tyler's primary post-World War II businesses. The railroad was the largest industrial employer in the city in 1947 with 523 employees and an annual payroll of more than \$1,000,000. Other large firms included the Sledge Manufacturing Co., the Woldert Company, the Tyler Pipe and Foundry Company, and the McMurrey Refining Co., Delta Drilling Co., Thompson Manufacturing Co., the Richardson Co., the Bryant Heater Co., American Clay Forming Co., the East Texas Cotton Oil Co., and the East Texas Crate and Basket Manufacturing Co. The Mayfield Grocery Co., still in business with four branch offices, was joined by two competitors. The Wadel-Connally Co., a wholesale hardware distributor, had nine branch offices (Woldert 1948:148-149). In the late 1940s the State of Texas located a tuberculosis sanitarium at former Camp Fannin (later the Tyler Chest Hospital and now University of Texas, Tyler Health Center), and the McMurrey Refinery announced plans to build a \$40,000 plant in Smith County. Both facilities added to Tyler's economic diversity and created new jobs. Business and residential development continued as new office buildings were erected in the late 1940s and the 1950s. One of the most visible is the 1953 modernist Petroleum Building on South Broadway. Another important building from this era is the 1954 Cotton Belt Building, erected as the new corporate headquarters for the St. Louis Southwestern Railway Company. The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, a prominent social and service club present in Tyler since 1891 erected a Modernist lodge building (NR 2002) in 1949 on South Broadway, opening their doors to the community for dances, private parties and other social activities. Residential construction continued as in-fill in established neighborhoods throughout south Tyler, including the Azalea District and in northwest Tyler. New neighborhoods of tract-type housing also appeared in southeast Tyler and northwest Tyler.

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8      Page 15

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

---

By the end of 1931 there were 3,607 wells in the East Texas field, and more than 109,000,000 barrels of oil were produced. Members of the Texas Geological Society met in Tyler December 17, 1931, and 59 geologists gave papers estimating the field's potential barrels. The average estimate was 2.1 billion barrels. In time the field proved to have far more oil than these experts predicted. "Cumulative production of crude oil and natural gas liquids in northeastern Texas through 1950 was approximately 4 billion barrels. By January 1, 1993, when the Texas Railroad Commission calculated the field at 100 percent production, it had produced more than 5 billion barrels of oil (*New Handbook of Texas*:774). After more than 60 years, some wells still operate.

**THE COTTON BELT AND ITS 1954 BUILDING**

The Cotton Belt Building was built in 1954 by the St. Louis Southwestern Railway Company at a cost of about \$1.5 million. Railroad president, H. J. McKenzie, a native Texan, who graduated from Texas A & M with degrees in engineering and architecture, designed the building himself and hired noted Ft. Worth architect Wyatt C. Hedrick to finalize the plans and supervise construction. McKenzie and Hedrick created an architecturally distinct building that combined important elements of the *au currant* International Style with details and finishes reflective of Art Deco classicism. Located on a three-acre parcel in block 636 of the City of Tyler, the Cotton Belt Building is on a primary east-west street at the southwest edge of Tyler's central city business area. This parcel apparently remained vacant until it was developed by the Cotton Belt line, which purchased it, for an undisclosed amount, on February 27, 1953 from the estate of J. H. Herndon, a prominent local businessman and land speculator (Smith County Deed Records). In 1935, the block now containing the Cotton Belt Building was platted as the Herndon-Bright Subdivision, presumably to take advantage of Tyler's westward moving residential development. However, the property on busy Front Street (a.k.a. Texas Highway 31) near the intersection of commercial Glenwood Boulevard was more suitable for commercial development than residential, and when the Cotton Belt line made an offer for most of block 636, the property was sold for commercial use. The City of Tyler building permit #2965 for the 125,000 square foot Cotton Belt Building was issued February 15, 1954 and construction began shortly thereafter. The permit estimated the value of the building to be constructed at about \$1.2 million, and noted that it was to be built of concrete and brick, have a built up roof, and include a basement and two floors. Newspaper accounts and publications on the Cotton Belt put the final price tag at \$1.5 million, a very hefty sum for the mid-1950s. The Dallas firm of O'Rourke Construction Company, which also built the Tyler Theater and other projects, undertook construction under the supervision of J. L. (Red) Jordan (*Tyler-Courier-Times-Telegraph* 3-20-1955).

The St. Louis Southwestern Railway (Cotton Belt) had its beginnings in 1871 when Confederate veteran and Tyler businessman James P. Douglas organized the Tyler Tap Railroad with a group of prominent Tyler citizens. The Tyler Tap's mission was to bring rail service to Tyler by linking with either the Texas & Pacific line or the International & Great Northern (I&GN) Railroad's line, which the community hoped would come through Tyler. When the I&GN routed their main line through Troup, southeast of Tyler, citizens clamored for service, and the I&GN built a terminal trunk line from Troup to

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8      Page 16

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

Tyler, initiating service in 1873. Meanwhile, Tyler Tap investors continued their quest for main line rail service, building northeast and connecting with the Texas & Pacific in 1877. After reaching Big Sandy, other investors became interested in the Tyler Tap, including J.W. Paramore and R.C. Kerens of St. Louis (Reed:412-413). "During the entire life of this little railroad, it remained strictly a community enterprise, built by local capital, augmented by state aid in the form of 298 land certificates, totaling 190,720 acres, and officered [sic] and manned by local people" (Anderson:9). In 1878 the Tyler Tap reorganized into the Texas and St. Louis Railway Co. with James P. Douglas as president, and James W. Paramore, Financial Agent. The board of directors was composed of W. M. Senter, J. L. Sloss, M.C. Humphrey, J.D. Goldman, all of St. Louis, and C. Goodman, J. H. Brown and Alfred W. Ferguson of Tyler. This small line with 21 miles of completed track and another 50 miles of graded roadbed became a major rail company called, after several reorganizations and name changes, the St. Louis Southwestern Railway of Texas. Known colloquially as the Cotton Belt, it operated in concert with the portion of the line outside Texas, which eventually stretched northeast through Arkansas, Missouri and Illinois. The line initially shipped cotton from Texas and Arkansas to the growing compresses, warehouses and markets of St. Louis (Reed:413), expanding service over the coming decades to include fruit, truck, dairy products, livestock and meat products, furniture, clothing, canned goods, rail car components and other manufactured items as agriculture became more diversified and industrialization and manufacturing gained importance throughout Texas. By 1880 tracks of what would become the Cotton Belt stretched from Athens, 27 miles west of Tyler, to Texarkana. In 1881 track was extended west from Athens to Corsicana, reaching Gatesville in 1882. By the early 1880s, Tyler was served not only by a trunk line of the I&GN, but by a growing inter-state railway headed by a Tyler resident with headquarters in the city.

Not content to rest on his achievement with the Cotton Belt, Douglas resigned his post as president in 1880 to organize the Kansas and Gulf Short Line. It served the growing lumber industries in counties south and east of Tyler. The original Cotton Belt hospital was completed at Tyler in 1888 (Anderson:36) and operated for 17 years at its West Elm and the Cotton Belt tracks location; it is no longer extant.<sup>1</sup> Locomotive and rail car shops also were built at Tyler and the original wood shops were staffed by about 100 to 150 men (Smith County Historical Society j). Despite all this, debts mounted and in 1887 the line converted to standard gauge to improve solvency. When that failed, the company reorganized in 1891 as the St. Louis Southwestern Railway of Texas with headquarters in Tyler (Reed:421) and control over the Texas portion of the line. Another company was created to handle the sections of track built in Arkansas, Missouri and Illinois. Simultaneously, the Tyler Southeastern Railway Co. was created, taking over Douglas' Kansas and Gulf Short Line; in time this became known locally as the Lufkin branch of the Cotton Belt.

<sup>1</sup> Tradition says that a railroad hospital operated in the house at 223 East Charnwood Street. Deed records show a railroad hospital south and west of the present intersection of East Charnwood Street and South Fannin Avenue (Smith County Deed Records), but do not identify the railroad affiliation. The hospital is no longer extant.

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8      Page 17

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

---

With expanding business the Cotton Belt built a larger service infrastructure in Tyler. In 1898 the railroad converted its wood fired locomotives to oil, using petroleum from Texas' first commercial oil field in Corsicana, about 80 west of Tyler. That same year the line constructed new locomotive repair shops at Tyler. The Cotton Belt was a primary economic force, providing salaries for workers, a means to ship farm products, manufactured goods and bolster local retail sales. That the Cotton Belt was important to Tyler is evidenced by a City sponsored banquet given in early December 1897 for Cotton Belt officers and employees citing "immense benefits that have accrued to Tyler and Smith county [sic] on account of the Cotton Belt Railway...." (Tyler Public Library n:12-4-1897). The railroad provided about \$576,000 a year in salaries, more than the value of the entire cotton crop for 1897, and the presence of so many railroad employees furnished local "...farmers and gardeners with a market for vegetables and produce..." (Tyler Public Library n:12-4-1897). The northeast section of town developed with the homes of railroad workers. In 1900 Tyler entered a 30-year period of prosperity centered around the success of its railroads. At that time the Cotton Belt had about 600 miles of track in Texas, and its Texas headquarters were in Tyler, located at the west end of Ferguson Street (UT Austin, PCL a; Smith County Historical Society k) adjacent to the Lufkin Branch tracks. The shipment of agricultural products continued to grow in the early 1900s, with the spring and summer shipment of hundreds of carloads of peaches, tomatoes and berries. Tyler businesses included canneries, packing houses, storage sheds and warehouses, wholesale groceries, factories, railroad car and equipment fabricators, lumber yards and planing mills, and booming legal and mercantile sectors. Suburban development expanded with varied residential construction in areas all around the original city center. Rail service made all this possible, providing quick and reliable passenger service. It also allowed shipment of local products and the receipt of goods manufactured elsewhere, including all types of mass produced and specialty building materials such as stained glass, carved newel posts, and plumbing fixtures, as well as labor saving appliances, machinery and tools.

About 1904, Cotton Belt executives, always seeking better management practices and higher profits, announced plans to relocate the line's headquarters and shops to Texarkana. The City of Tyler sued the railroad "...on the ground that in consideration of the purchase of 12 acres by the citizens of Tyler for railroad purposes, the company agreed to maintain perpetually general offices and shops at Tyler (Reed:421). After a lengthy trial that the railroad won, and an appeal it lost, the Cotton Belt was directed to retain its headquarters and shops in Tyler. Not only did the railroad lose this battle, it was ordered in 1904 by the Texas Railroad Commission to erect "...a proper, ample and commodious passenger depot for the accommodation of the travelling public commensurate with the needs of said city and of the travelling public" (City of Tyler e), to replace the "...inadequate old frame building that was a disgrace, alike, to the city and the Company" (Texas State Library d). The railroad responded promptly and in 1905 built on the north side of Oakwood Street (then called Common Street) a small brick depot (NR 2002). Having lost their bid to move their shops and headquarters, the Cotton Belt expanded the shops in 1910, more than doubling capacity at a cost of more than \$200,000 (Texas State Library d). Just northeast of the town square, the new depot was the heart of the small but bustling railroad district:

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8      Page 18

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

---

railroad shops and roundhouse to the north of the tracks and the railroad commercial district known as The Levee, which was immediately south. A one-story brick freight depot with office space was built by the Cotton Belt at about the same time as the passenger station. It was located west of the passenger depot on the south side of Oakwood Street west of Spring Street adjacent to the Cotton Belt tracks. Still shown on Sanborn maps in 1948, the Cotton Belt freight depot is no longer extant.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the Cotton Belt contributed significant community income through salaries and taxes, and Cotton Belt employees continued to foster the development of northeast Tyler, an area situated just north of the shops, roundhouse and yards. In 1923 the railroad had a Tyler payroll of \$2,290,000 and employed 1,543 people. By 1927 the number of employees had dropped to 1,055 and the payroll to \$1,717,751, and by 1935 employment and payroll had further dropped to 711 people who received a total of \$1,124,277. A big water consumer, the railroad routinely paid, during the 1930s, more than \$10,000 a year to the city water department. Cotton Belt taxes for 1936 included \$13,500 to the City of Tyler, \$16,800 to Smith County and \$500 to the Bullard Independent School District (Tyler Public Library m). Cotton, corn, fruit, vegetables and nuts and timber products were the primary crops shipped from Tyler through the 1930s. In 1932, the Southern Pacific Railroad and the Cotton Belt merged, with the Cotton Belt permitted to retain its separate identity, headquarters and shops in Tyler. Throughout the decade the railroad served Smith County farmers, Tyler's agricultural related businesses and its manufacturing concerns, despite the decline of the timber industry and the rise of highway trucking and airline service. With the discovery of oil in the east Texas in 1930-31, the railroad picked up new business transporting pipe, steel, iron, and machinery and equipment needed in the booming oil field, as well as building materials for Tyler's exploding suburbs. Inaugurating fast freight service on its Blue Streak Merchandisers, the Cotton Belt and Southern Pacific lines shipped goods, manufactured parts and equipment from Midwest factories to West Coast assembly plants in just two days, and offered next day service to any point on the Cotton Belt line. **Figure 9** shows the Cotton Belt Route between Dallas and St. Louis. Despite this, the line found itself insolvent in 1935, and the Southern Pacific and the Cotton Belt filed for reorganization in Federal court (Reed:422). Debts were paid in 1947, and the Cotton Belt continued its highly successful Blue Streak Merchandiser service. However strong freight service was, passenger service was declining nationwide as the automobile gained primacy as Americans' transportation mode of choice. In 1953 the Cotton Belt discontinued passenger service from Tyler to Waco, and in 1954 passenger service between Dallas, Mt. Pleasant and Texarkana ceased operation. In 1954, Cotton Belt president H. J. McKenzie consolidated rail operations in Tyler and built a new headquarters building on West Front Street in Tyler known as the Cotton Belt Building. Dedicated in 1955, the Cotton Belt Building combined "...personnel in Tyler which for many years had been housed in various buildings throughout the city...(Anderson:92) and also brought in executives and personnel formerly housed in Missouri. The building is currently used by Smith County as its tax office and archives. The Cotton Belt headquarters, the depot and two altered shop buildings and a shed are all that remain of what was Tyler's single most important business.

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8      Page 19

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

The Cotton Belt Building was the result of improved economic conditions and railroad revenues following World War II, the thriving Tyler economy, the resolved financial troubles the Cotton Belt encountered during the Great Depression, and the design abilities of railroad president H. J. McKenzie and architect Wyatt C. Hedrick. On April 30, 1947, the St. Louis Southwestern Railway of Texas and the St. Louis Southwestern Railway Company (headquartered in St. Louis, Missouri) filed petitions in Federal court in St. Louis to dismiss their bankruptcy proceedings on the grounds that they had regained solvency and were able to meet their financial obligations (*Corporate History of the St. Louis Southwestern Railway Lines*:25). After due process, on July 24, 1947 both the Cotton Belt in Texas and the portions of the line operated in other states received control of their properties. On December 18, 1953, in the first step toward operations consolidation, the St. Louis Southwestern Railway Company was authorized by the Interstate Commerce Commission to lease and operate all of the properties associated with the St. Louis Southwestern Railway Company of Texas. Following this approval, Cotton Belt president and Texas native H. J. McKenzie made plans to relocate corporate headquarters to Tyler (Anderson:93), the community of origin for the line. McKenzie (**Figure 10**), made president of the Cotton Belt in 1952, was a former Southern Pacific Chief Engineer in that line's Houston offices. While with Southern Pacific he designed an award winning railroad suspension bridge for the Pecos River at Del Rio, Texas. On Southern Pacific's main line between Los Angeles and New Orleans, the bridge is an impressive structure that holds the record as the highest bridge in the United States on a main line (McGinnis:1).

McKenzie is credited with drawing the plans for the 125,000-square-foot Cotton Belt Building, with Hedrick providing supervision of the construction (McGinnis:1). It has been said that McKenzie often visited the construction site, supervising the project. An able manager and a gifted designer, McKenzie also reportedly realized the value of his employees and maintained an open door policy (McGinnis:3). To improve the quality of his employee's working lives, McKenzie included two courtyards in the design of the massive building (**Figure 11**). Despite air conditioning and heating throughout the building, a primary reason for the courtyards was to provide natural light and air into every original first and second floor office through at least one wall of tall windows. The courtyard closest to the front of the building was intended for use as an employee patio, where tired workers could relax at lunch or on breaks. However, this idea was a failure as employees refused to use the space (McGinnis:2). Perhaps its barren appearance, lack of vegetation and shade, the heat generated from the surrounding brick walls, and the hardscape surface underfoot made it undesirable. Or perhaps it was the clear view all interior offices had of the space that discouraged people from using it. In time, McKenzie admitted the patio was a "bad idea" (McGinnis:2). Another well-intentioned, but not well received, McKenzie idea was a public address system installed to transmit "soothing" music to every office. Apparently in this case, one's man solace was another's irritant, and the music was turned off. In addition to his abilities as a manager and designer, McKenzie appears to have been an approachable man with a sense of humor and a community perspective. The basement level auditorium/cafeteria easily accessible from the east side entry and parking lot, offered good food, according to several former employees, who also reported that many workers from nearby businesses ate at the Cotton Belt. In the waning days of passenger rail service, food was still an important

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8      Page 20

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

feature of the rail travel experience and it may have been that McKenzie valued his employees and his community as much as his passengers and freight customers.

The Cotton Belt Building housed the line's corporate headquarters and general offices, and when completed it allowed hundreds of Cotton Belt employees previously assigned to five different buildings in Tyler to work under one roof. It also necessitated the relocation to Tyler of many company employees formerly assigned to St. Louis and other locations. Special trains brought transferees to Tyler in 1954, and when the Cotton Belt was absorbed by the Southern Pacific, many of these same people, including president McKenzie, retired in Tyler or in the surrounding area (McGinnis:3). In addition to corporate offices, the Cotton Belt Building housed traffic, passenger, personnel, general claims, the general agent, transportation, auditor of passenger accounts, accounting, inspector of transportation, freight protection and merchandize station services, freight claims, division superintendent, signal safety, communications, engineering, chief engineer, dispatch, legal, marketing, among others. Company revenue, papers, and legal documents were all stored in the three basement vaults and the various storage rooms.

From 1955 to the early 1980s, the Cotton Belt Building continued to serve as the corporate headquarters and general offices of the St. Louis Southwestern Railway. But in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as trucking, private automobile and air travel cut deeper into American railroad business, more and more of the company's operations were moved to San Francisco and other regional offices. Southern Pacific Company, long a rival of the Cotton Belt, and a major share holder since the 1930s, slowly absorbed the Cotton Belt (McGinnis:3). Finally, the Cotton Belt Building was no longer needed. Employees were transferred, and in 1985 the building was sold to Smith County for \$900,000. As a condition of the sale, the Southern Pacific was allowed continued use of 35,000 square feet of the building, rent free, for three years. At the end of that time, in 1988, the remainder of railroad employees were transferred or retired. On April 12, 1991 the last of the Cotton Belt records stored in the building were moved to Houston, Denver and San Francisco. Undoubtedly much interesting, and historically important, information was moved or discarded that day, never to be recovered. But the building lives on, and since that time it has housed the county tax offices and a number of other county, state and Federal offices. Despite its new life as a county building, the Cotton Belt Building remains a highly visible landmark in the community and is still known by its original identity.

Erected in 1954 during a time of railroad prosperity and great growth and development as a result of Tyler's booming oil-based economy, the Cotton Belt Building is significant as the corporate headquarters and general offices of the St. Louis Southwestern Railway Company, a firm that began in Tyler in 1871 as the Tyler Tap, and became Tyler's largest employer, surviving mergers and insolvency. The Cotton Belt Building is also significant for its International Style/Art Deco influenced design, created by railroad president H. J. McKenzie and brought to fruition by Ft. Worth architect Wyatt C. Hedrick. The building is an important local example of the melding of the International Style with the pre-war modernist Art Deco style, and illustrates how the 1950s mania for modern was tempered by echoes of pre-war opulence and classicist design. While the International Style was applied to four other commercial buildings in Tyler, the Cotton Belt is unique among them in its size, low rise massing and incorporation of

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8      Page 21

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

---

Art Deco influences. The building is a tribute to the problem solving abilities of railroad president, engineer and architect H. J. McKenzie, who like the Cotton Belt Building itself, was multi-faceted.

**SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUALS**

While many factors and individuals contributed to the successful development of the Tyler, the community's major architects and builders had a highly visible impact on the character of the city. Among the most important local figures are the individuals associated with the design and construction of the Cotton Belt Building. H. J. McKenzie and Wyatt C. Hedrick contributed to design and development in Texas. Thus, they also are significant within the larger context.

**H. J. McKenzie (1904-1991)**

Harold J. McKenzie was born in Houston, October 11, 1904. He was one of four children and third in the order of birth. He graduated from Houston's Central High School and entered Texas A & M in 1923. He took his first degree in architecture in 1927 and then served in the U.S. Army as a 2nd Lieutenant. On December 22, 1929 McKenzie married Jewel Ina Gatlin, a teacher, and the couple had two children (McKenzie:9). As an employee of the Southern Pacific Railway, he found that his architectural training was insufficient for the design projects to which he was assigned and when "...one of the best civil engineers from the Chief Engineer's office organized an engineering night school..." (McKenzie:30), McKenzie enrolled. He completed the three year course in structural engineering and went on to design many rail related structures including water towers, bridges, and underpasses. One of his most important designs was the 1944 Pecos High Bridge built on the Southern Pacific line at the Pecos River in West Texas. On July 1, 1951, McKenzie succeeded Colonel F. W. Green as president of the St. Louis Southwestern Railway Company and the St. Louis Southwestern Railway Company of Texas, also known as the Cotton Belt. In addition to the line's new corporate headquarters in Tyler, McKenzie is credited with overseeing the dieselization of the Cotton Belt. The Cotton Belt was the first railroad to completely convert to diesel operations, and with new diesel locomotives, increased speed and reliability increased freight revenues and more than doubled the railroad's net income (McKenzie:97). McKenzie served as Tyler's Chamber of Commerce President in 1971, and furthered the cause of post secondary education in the city. McKenzie remained in Tyler after retirement and died in 1991.

**Wyatt C. Hedrick, AIA (1888-1964)**

Hedrick was born in Virginia in 1888 and graduated from Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia in 1909 with a bachelor of arts degree. He received an engineering degree in 1910 from Washington and Lee University. Hedrick joined the prominent Fort Worth architectural firm of Sanguinet and Staats and in 1922 became a partner. That arrangement continued until 1926 when Hedrick purchased Sanguinet's interest. In 1925 Hedrick established a firm in his own name and designed buildings across Texas and in other states, including the Shamrock Hotel in Houston, the Adolphus Tower in Dallas, Fulton national Bank Building in Atlanta, Georgia and buildings for General Motors in Arlington, Texas. He served as

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8      Page 22

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

consulting architect for Alcoa in the design of their Port Lavaca and Rockdale plants. Hedrick was registered to work as an architect in Texas, Florida, Mississippi, Oklahoma and Tennessee. Hedrick was a member of the American Society of Civil Engineers and the American Institute of Architects. He died in Houston in 1964 at the age of 75 (Houston Post 5-6-64, AIA Directory, 1956:238). Hedrick worked on many buildings throughout Texas including projects in Dallas, Houston and Ft. Worth. In addition to his work on these and other projects he a number of standardized military building plans for several branches of service, including the National Guard Bureau in Washington D. C. and the Texas National Guard, and was retained by the Texas National Guard Armory Board as early as 1939.

**JUSTIFICATION OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Cotton Belt Building is an important local landmark associated with Tyler's largest employer and major contributor to its economic life, as well as with Tyler's booming oil economy during its most productive years. Built in 1954 from plans drawn by railroad president H. J. McKenzie and brought to fruition by Ft Worth architect Wyatt C. Hedrick, using International Style and Art Deco elements, the Cotton Belt Building consolidated corporate headquarters and general offices for the St. Louis Southwestern Railway under one roof and continued the historic presence of that line in Tyler's business community. The Cotton Belt Building is a unique design in Tyler, combining low rise International Style features with limited Art Deco classicism, and reflects the importance of the Cotton Belt line in Tyler's business life as well as the prosperity and development created by the East Texas oil boom.

The Cotton Belt Building conveys not only the rich heritage of mid-20th century architectural styling, but provides an understanding of H. J. McKenzie's desire to build economically while promoting his railroad as progressive and sensitive to then-current trends in architectural taste and company needs. The building retains high levels of integrity of location, setting, materials, design, workmanship, feeling and association within the period of significance and is maintained in good condition. The Cotton Belt Building remains one of Tyler's most significant and intact, non-residential central city buildings.

The nominated property is significant for its association with Tyler's largest and most long lived employer, the St. Louis Southwestern Railway, and for its association with the development of Tyler during the height of the East Texas Oil Boom. For these reasons the Cotton Belt Building is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C at the local level of significance in the areas of community planning and development, commerce and architecture. The building is worthy of preservation as a highly intact local landmark that, through its functions as the Cotton Belt's corporate headquarters and general offices, associations with continued community development during the East Texas Oil Boom, and its architectural form, documents aspects of Tyler's business and development life between 1954 and 1955.

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 9      Page 23

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

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**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 9      Page 24

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

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National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 9      Page 25

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Tyler, Smith County, Texas

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National Park Service

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CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 9      Page 26

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

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**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 9      Page 27

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

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**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 9      Page 28

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

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**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 9      Page 29

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Tyler, Smith County, Texas

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**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 9      Page 30

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

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**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 9      Page 31

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

---

Smith County Appraisal District  
Map

Smith County, Texas  
William McGinnis, Historic Photograph; Building Plans

Williams, Diane E, Austin, Texas.  
Photographs

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

**ACREAGE OF PROPERTY:** 3.01 acres

**UTM REFERENCES**      Zone    Easting      Northing  
                          15            281901            3581284

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:** Lots 1, 2, 3 and 8A through 20 in New City Block 636, City of Tyler.

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION:** Nomination includes all property historical associated with the building.

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

**NAME/TITLE:** Diane Elizabeth Williams (Architectural Historian)

**ORGANIZATION:** for the City of Tyler, Texas and Historic Tyler, Inc.      **DATE:** June 30, 2005

**STREET & NUMBER:** P.O. Box 49921

**TELEPHONE:** 512 458-2367

**CITY OR TOWN:** Austin

**STATE:** Texas

**ZIP CODE:** 78765

**ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION**

**CONTINUATION SHEETS**

**MAPS** (see continuation sheet Map-32)

**PHOTOGRAPHS** (see continuation sheet Photo-44)

**ADDITIONAL ITEMS** (see continuation sheets Figure-33 through Figure-43)

**PROPERTY OWNER**

**NAME:** Smith County, Texas; Smith County Courthouse, Attn: William McGinnis

**STREET & NUMBER:** P. O. Box 2011

**TELEPHONE:** 903 535-0760

**CITY OR TOWN:** Tyler

**STATE:** Texas

**ZIP CODE:** 75710

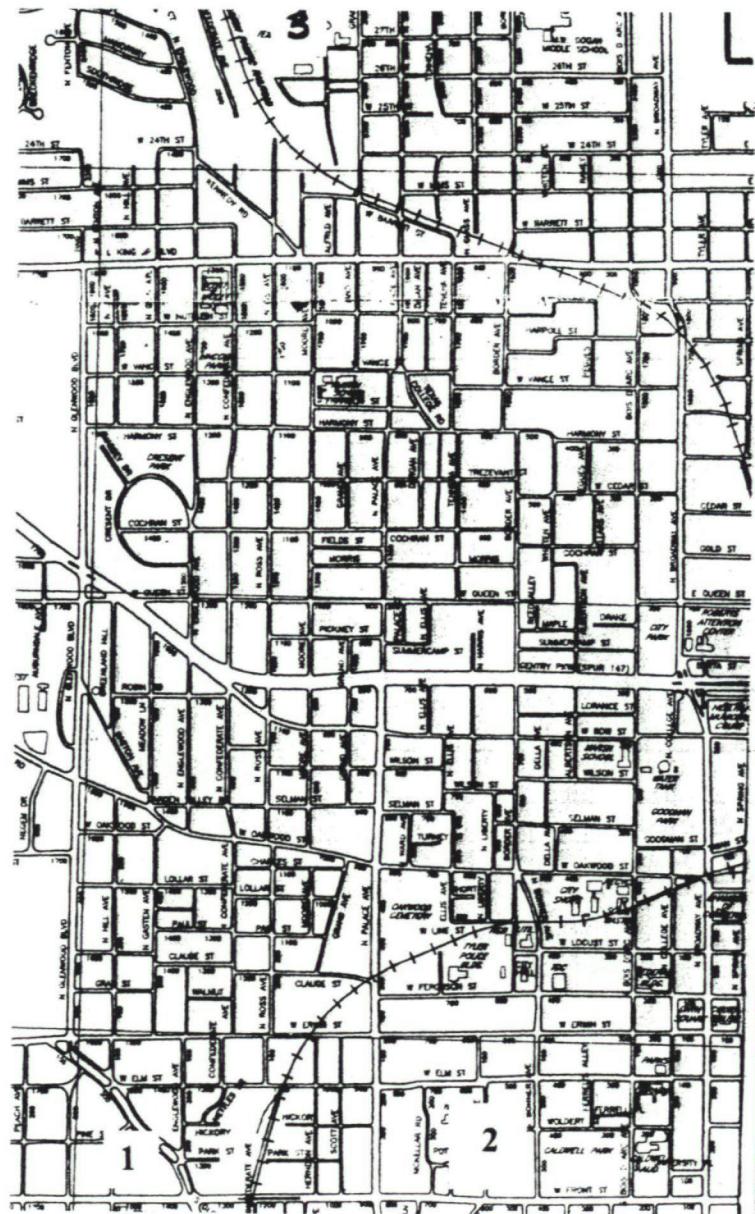
**United States Department of the Interior  
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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number MAP Page 32

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

**Map 1: Location Map Showing the Cotton Belt Building and Two Other Properties Being Nominated**



## 1. Cotton Belt Building

## 2. Masonic Lodge

### 3. Martin Hall at Texas College

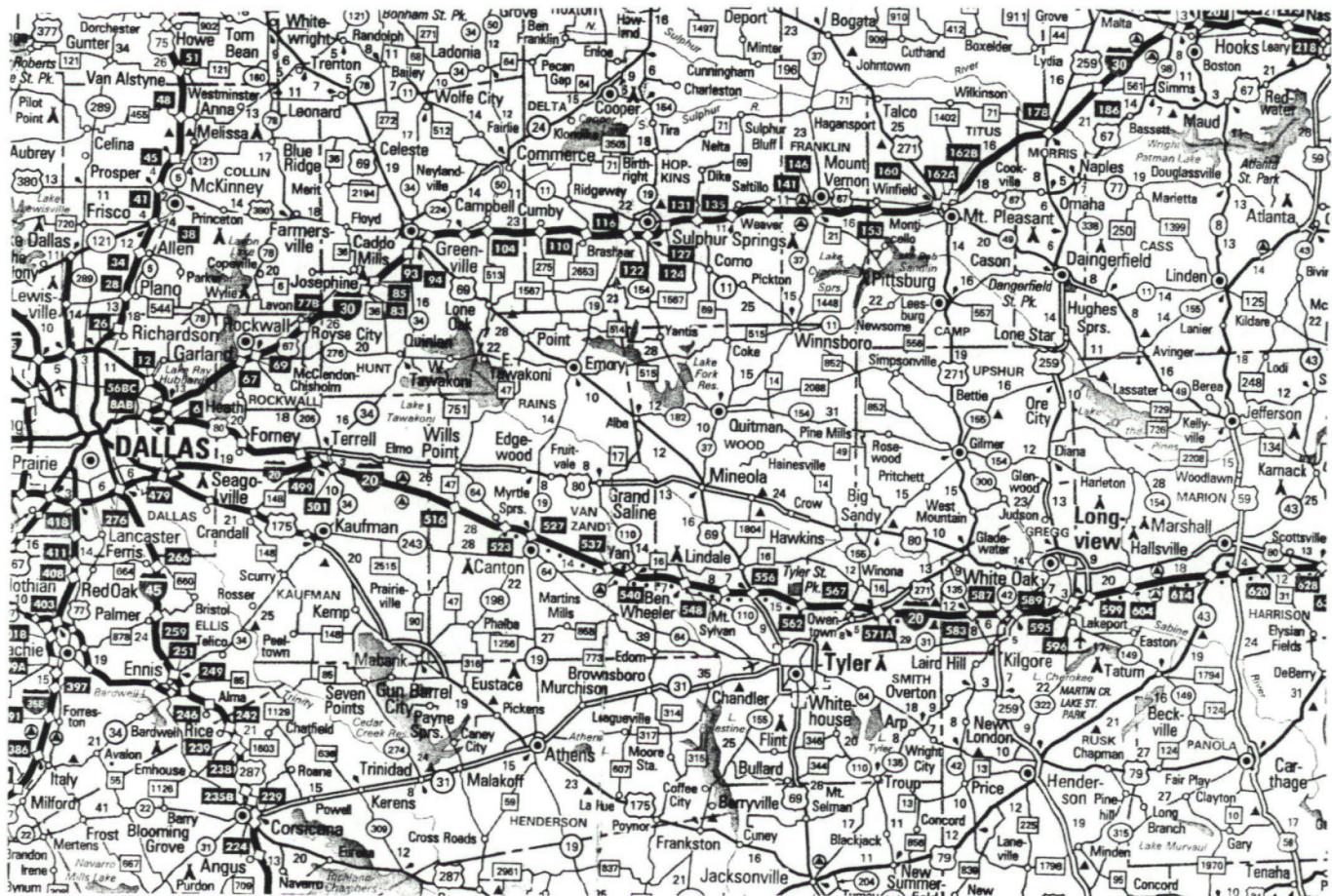
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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number FIGURE Page 33

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

**Figure 1:** Regional Location Map



**Source:** AAA Texas  
No Scale

North

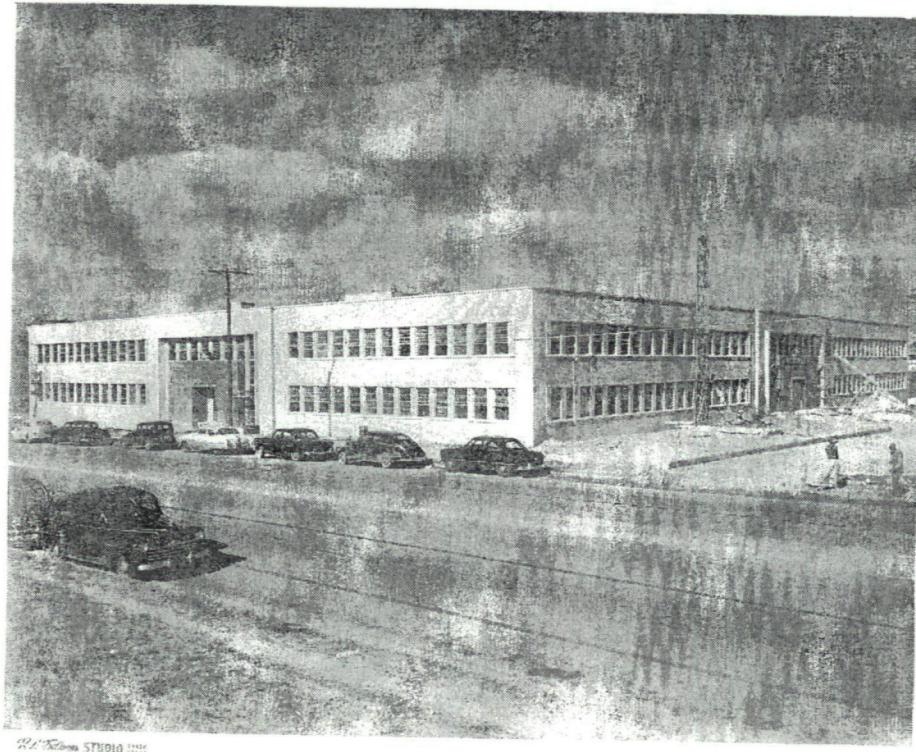
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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number FIGURE Page 34

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

Figure 2: Cotton Belt Building, ca. 1955



Source: Smith County Texas

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number FIGURE      Page 35

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

**Figure 3:** Cotton Belt Logo



**Source:** Corporate History of the St. Louis Southwestern Railway Lines

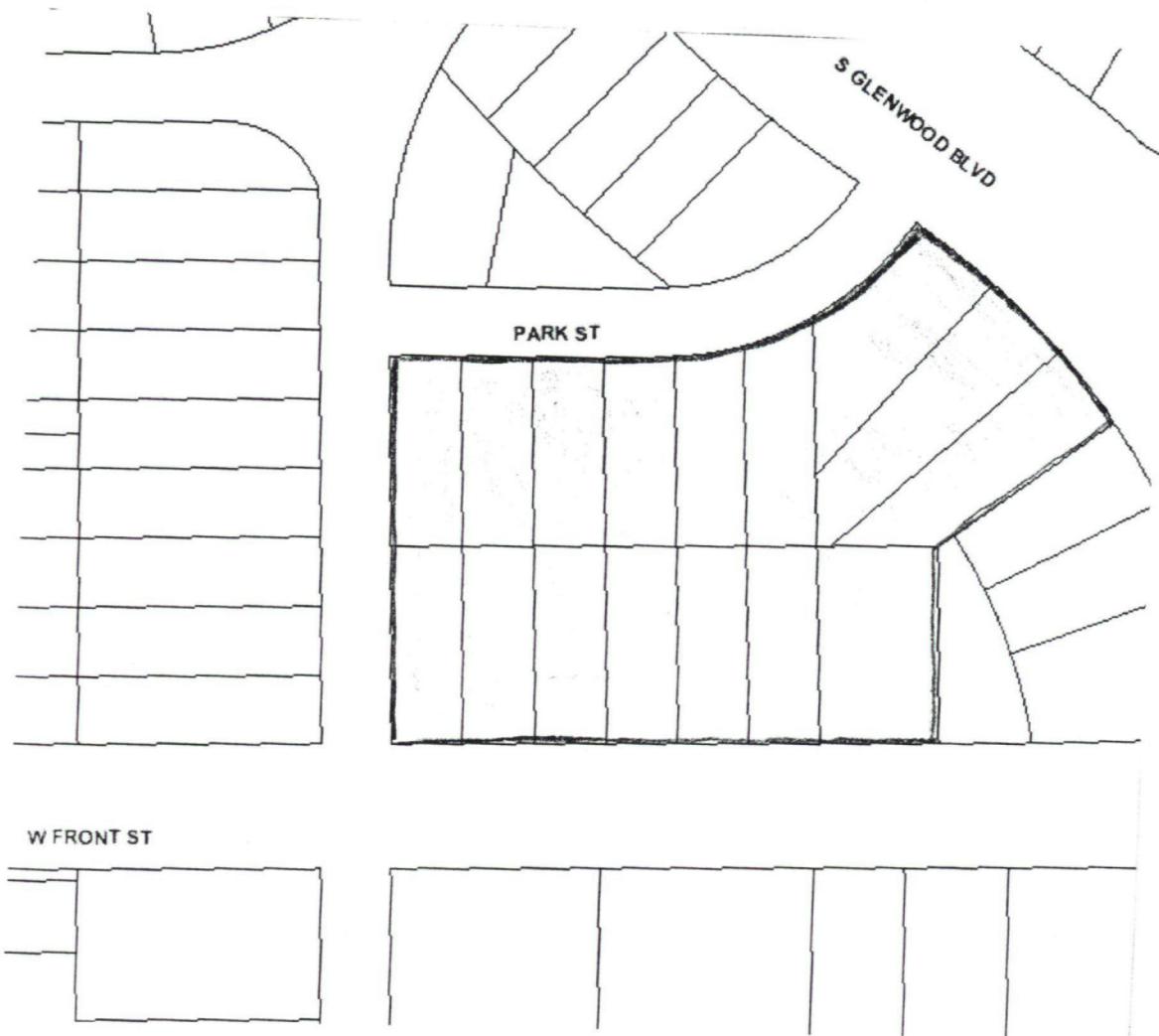
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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number FIGURE Page 36

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

**Figure 4:** Parcel Map



Source: Smith County Appraisal District  
No Scale

North



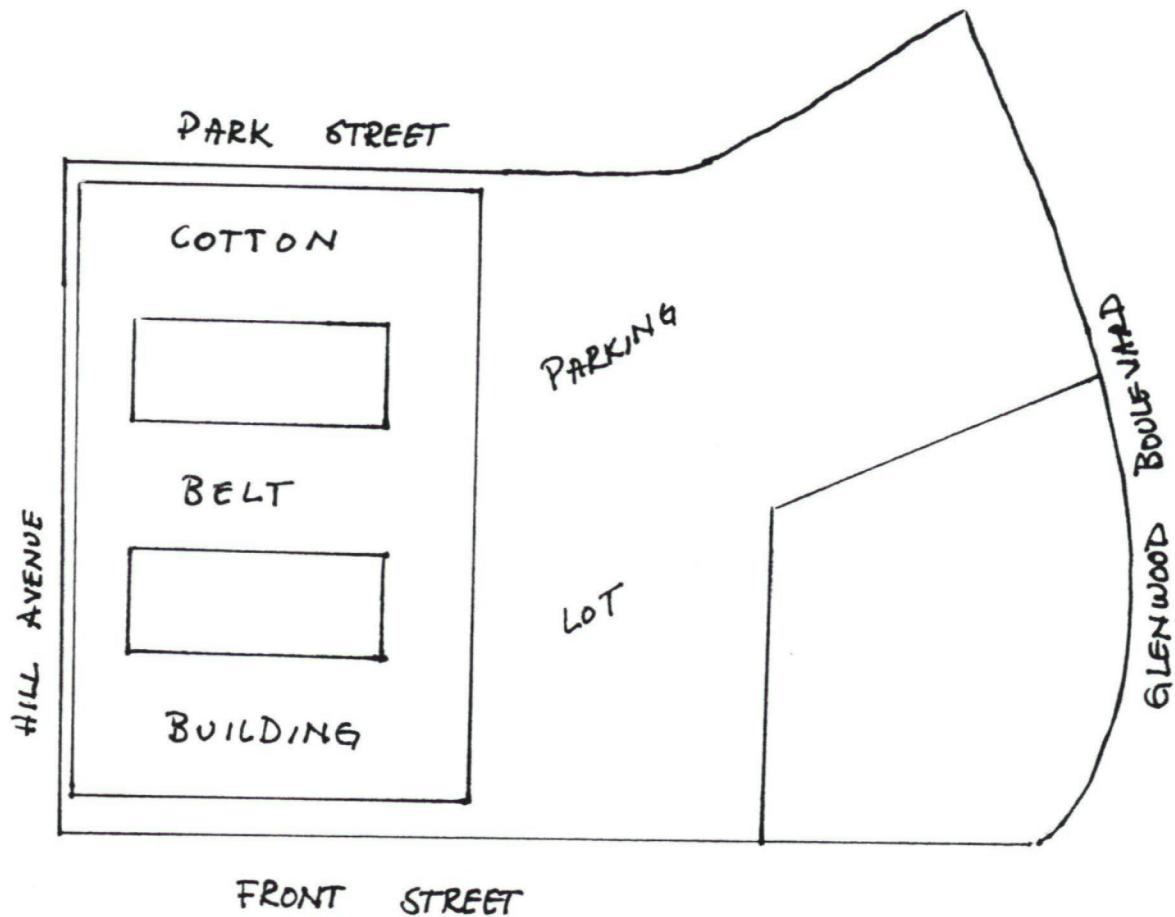
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National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number FIGURE Page 37

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

Figure 5: Site Plan



Source: Diane E. Williams  
No Scale

North  
▲

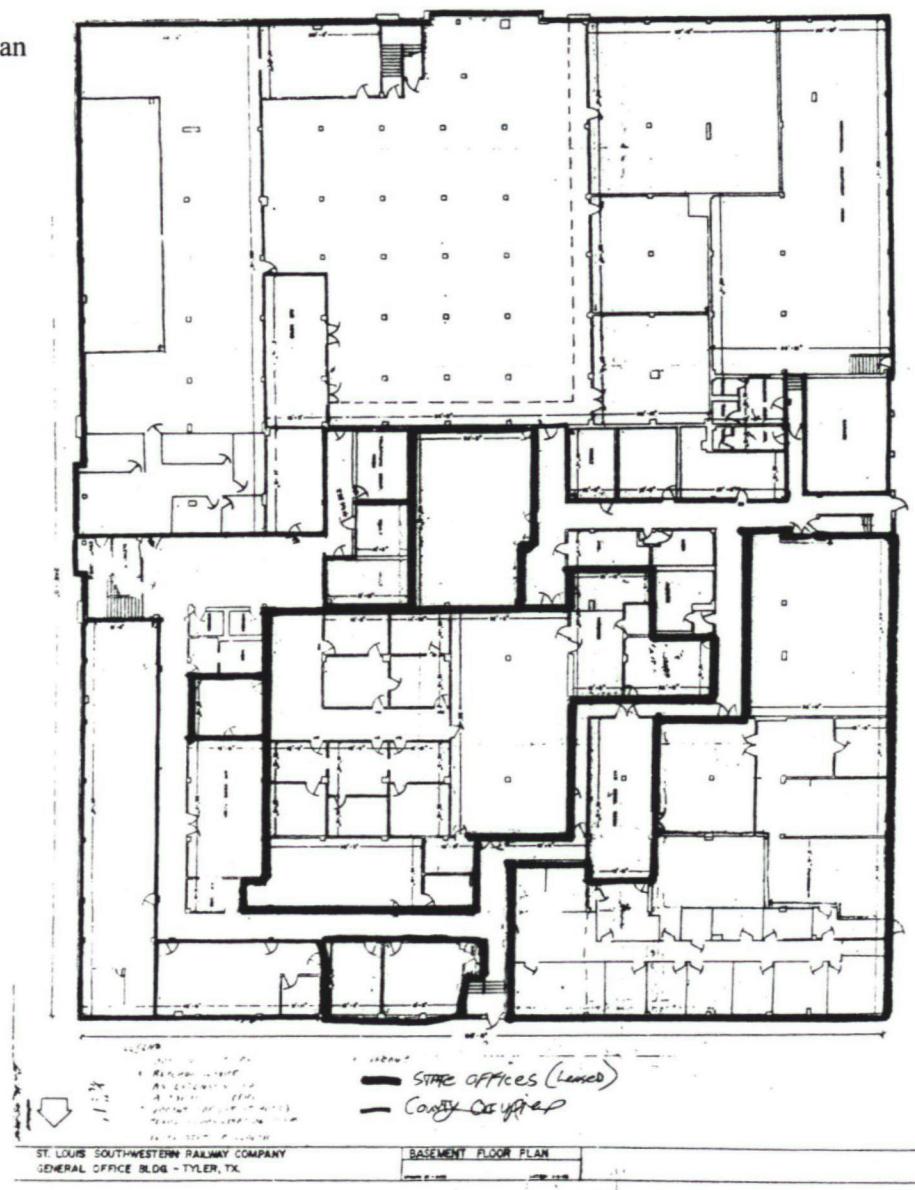
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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number FIGURE Page 38

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

**Figure 6: Basement Floor Plan**



**Source:** Smith County  
No Scale

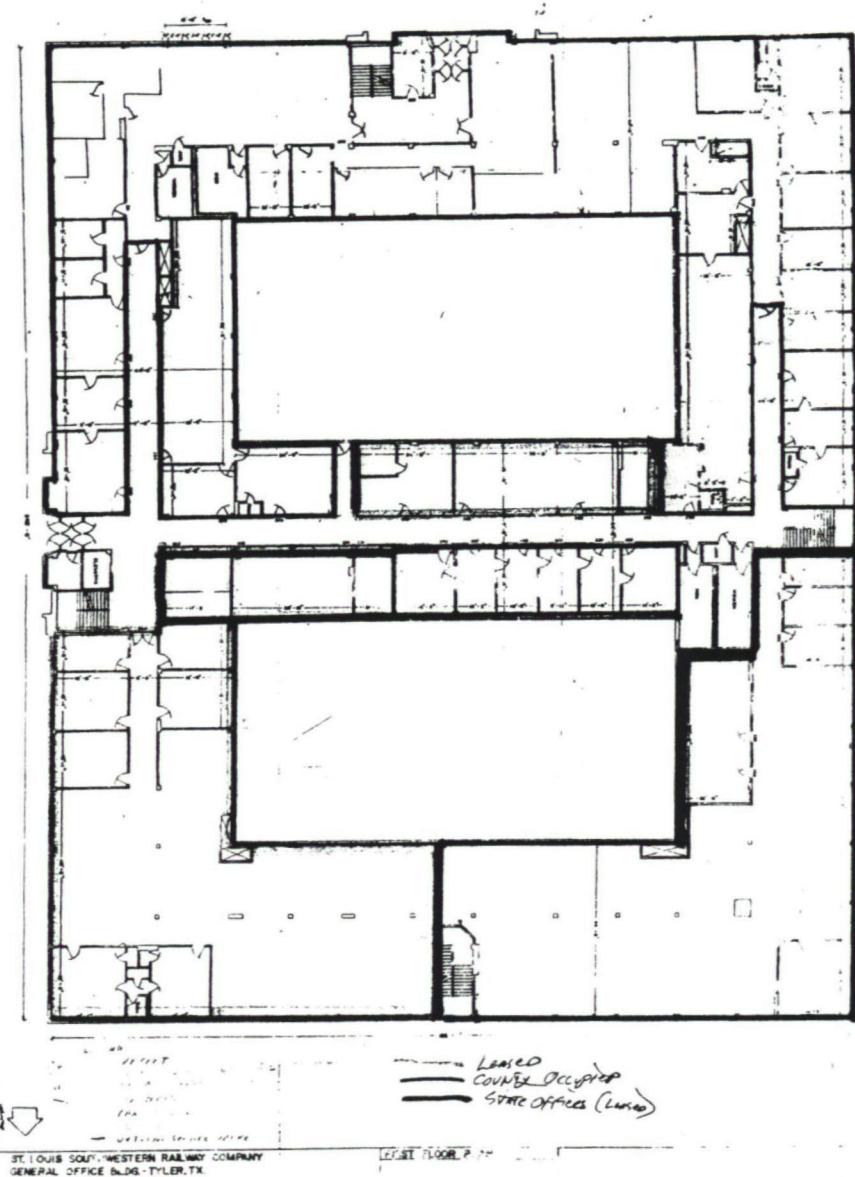
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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number FIGURE Page 39

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

**Figure 7: First Floor Plan**



Source: Smith County  
No Scale

North



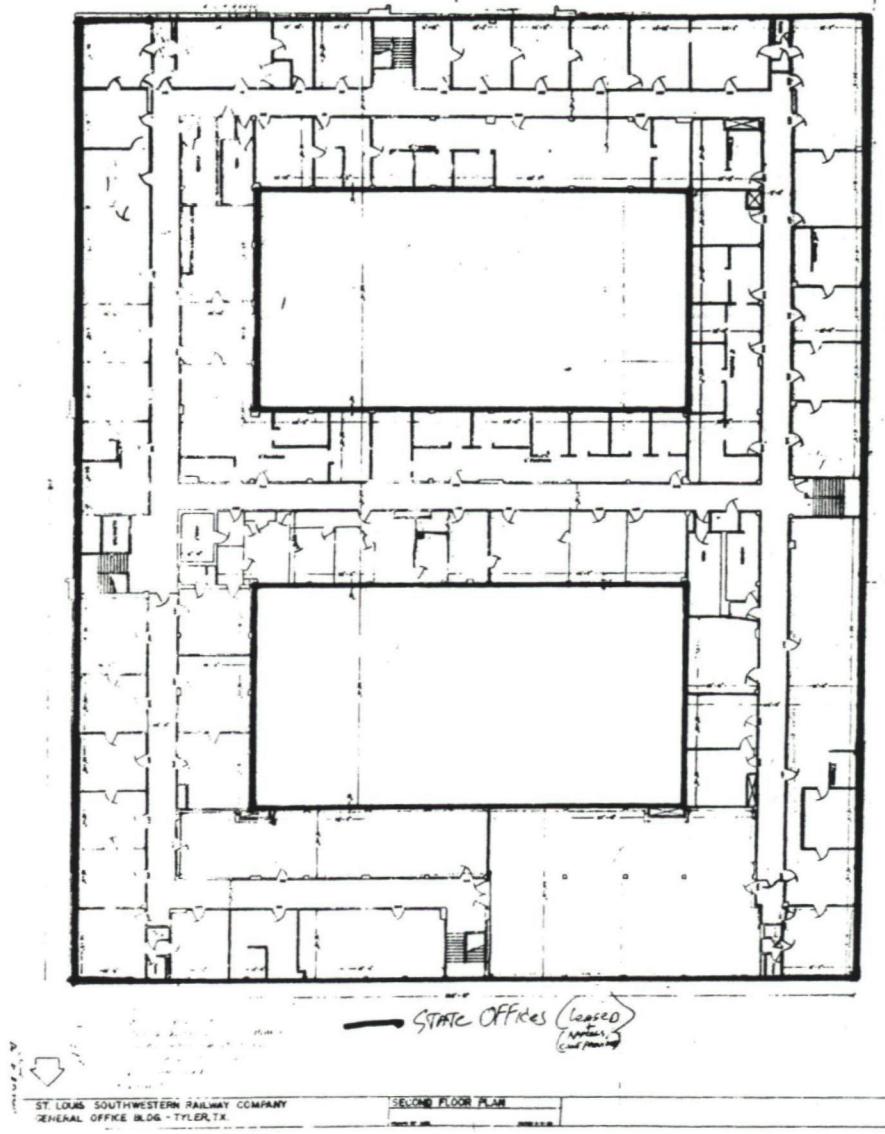
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National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number FIGURE Page 40

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

**Figure 8:** Second Floor Plan



**Source:** Smith County  
No Scale

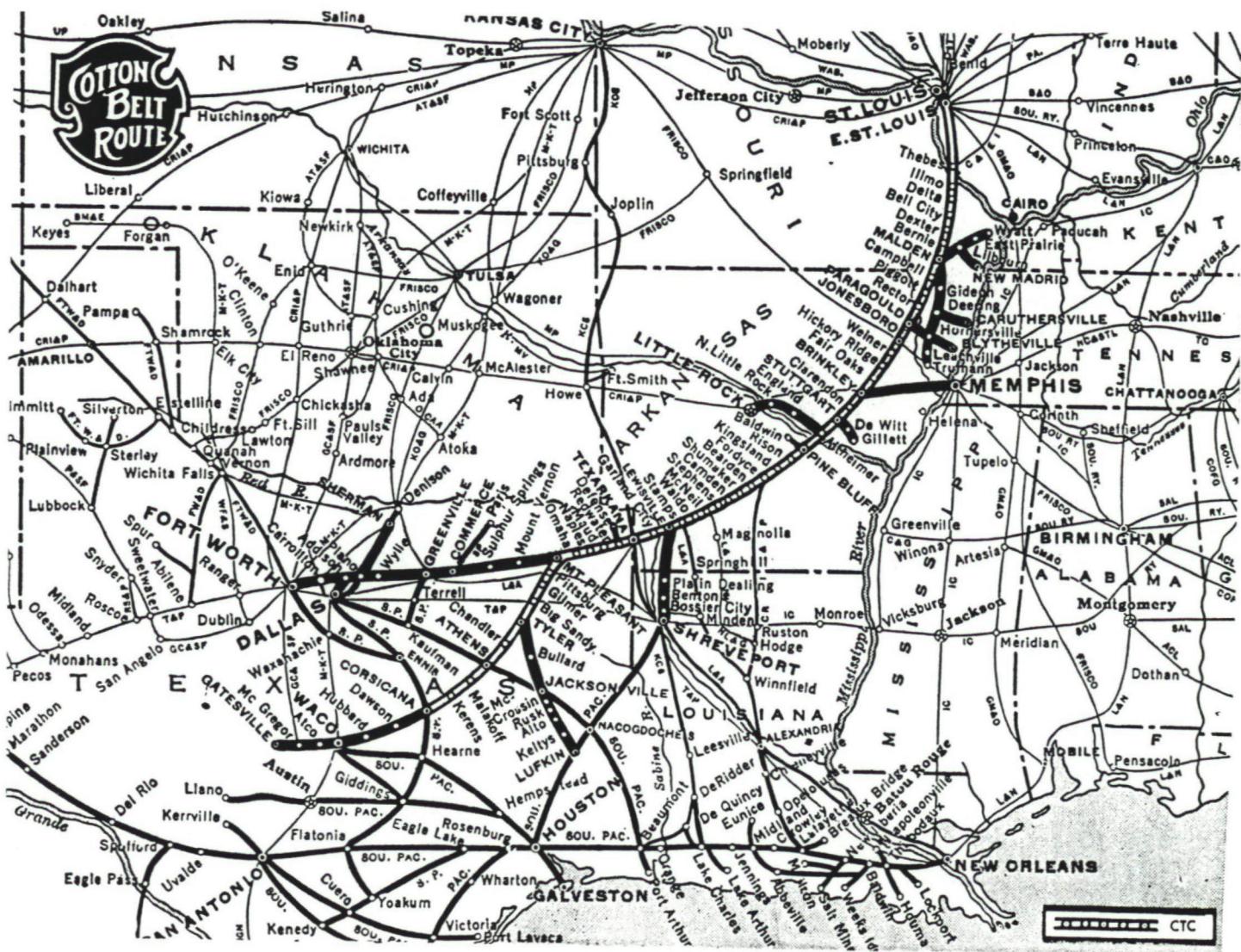
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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number FIGURE Page 41

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

Figure 9: Cotton Belt Route, ca. 1957



Source: Corporate History of the St. Louis Southwestern Railway Lines  
No Scale

North



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number FIGURE Page 42

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

Figure 10: Harold J. McKenzie, n.d.



Source: Cotton Belt News Special Issue, 1952.

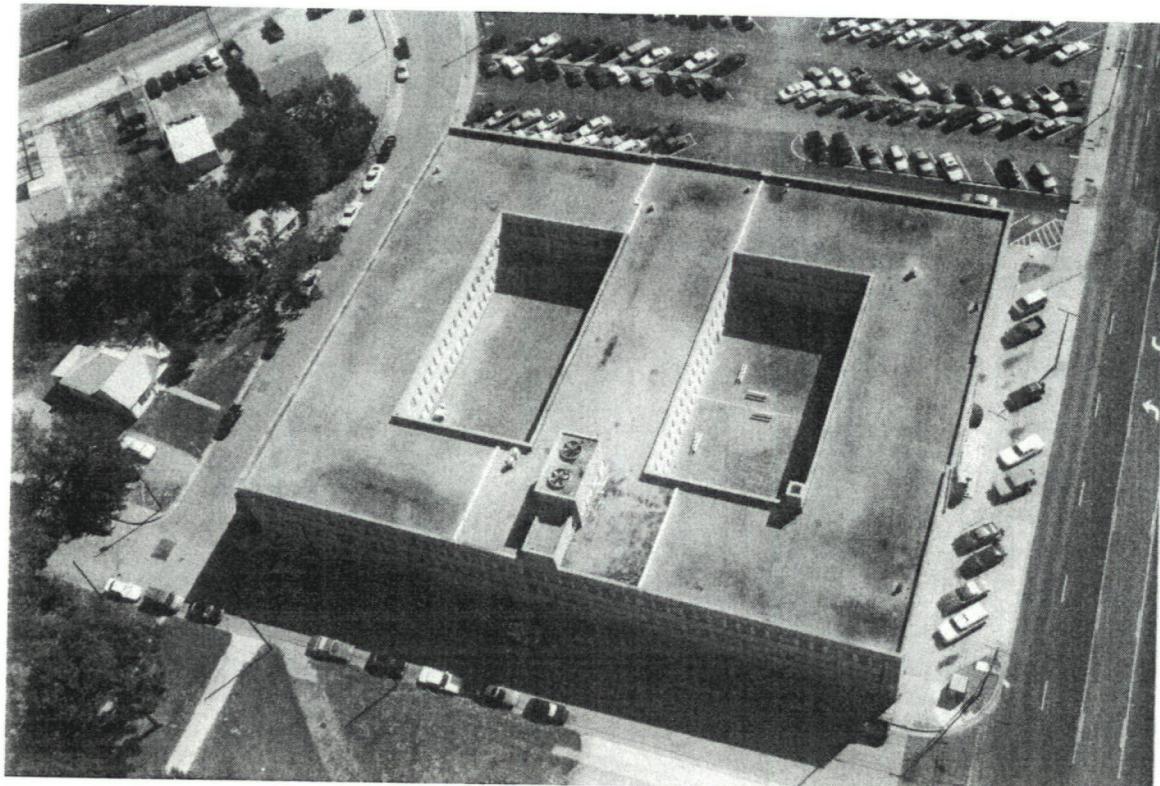
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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number FIGURE Page 43

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

**Figure 11:** Aerial View of the Cotton Belt Building, n.d.



Source: Smith County

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number PHOTO Page 44

Cotton Belt Building  
Tyler, Smith County, Texas

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**PHOTO INVENTORY**

COTTON BELT BUILDING  
TYLER, SMITH COUNTY, TEXAS  
DIANE ELIZABETH WILLIAMS, PHOTOGRAPHER  
DECEMBER OCTOBER 2004, MAY 2005  
ORIGINAL NEGATIVES ON FILE WITH THE TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

PHOTO 1 OF 5:  
South elevation looking north.

PHOTO 2 OF 5:  
Detail, front entry, south elevation looking north.

PHOTO 3 OF 5:  
Detail, east elevation looking west.

PHOTO 4 OF 5:  
West elevation looking northeast.

PHOTO 5 OF 5:  
North and east elevations looking southwest.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Cotton Belt Building  
NAME:

MULTIPLE Tyler, Texas MPS  
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: TEXAS, Smith

DATE RECEIVED: 10/28/05 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 11/21/05  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 12/06/05 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 12/11/05  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 05001405

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 12-6-05 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

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



Cotton Beet Building

1517 W. Front St

Tyler, Smith Co, Texas

Photo 175

# COTTON BELT SMITH COUNTY TAX OFFICE

TAX OFFICE  
HOURS  
8:00 - 4:30

TAX OFFICE  
HOURS  
8:00 - 4:30

ATM





Cotton Beet Building  
1517 W. Front St.  
Tyler, Smith Co., Texas  
Photo 375







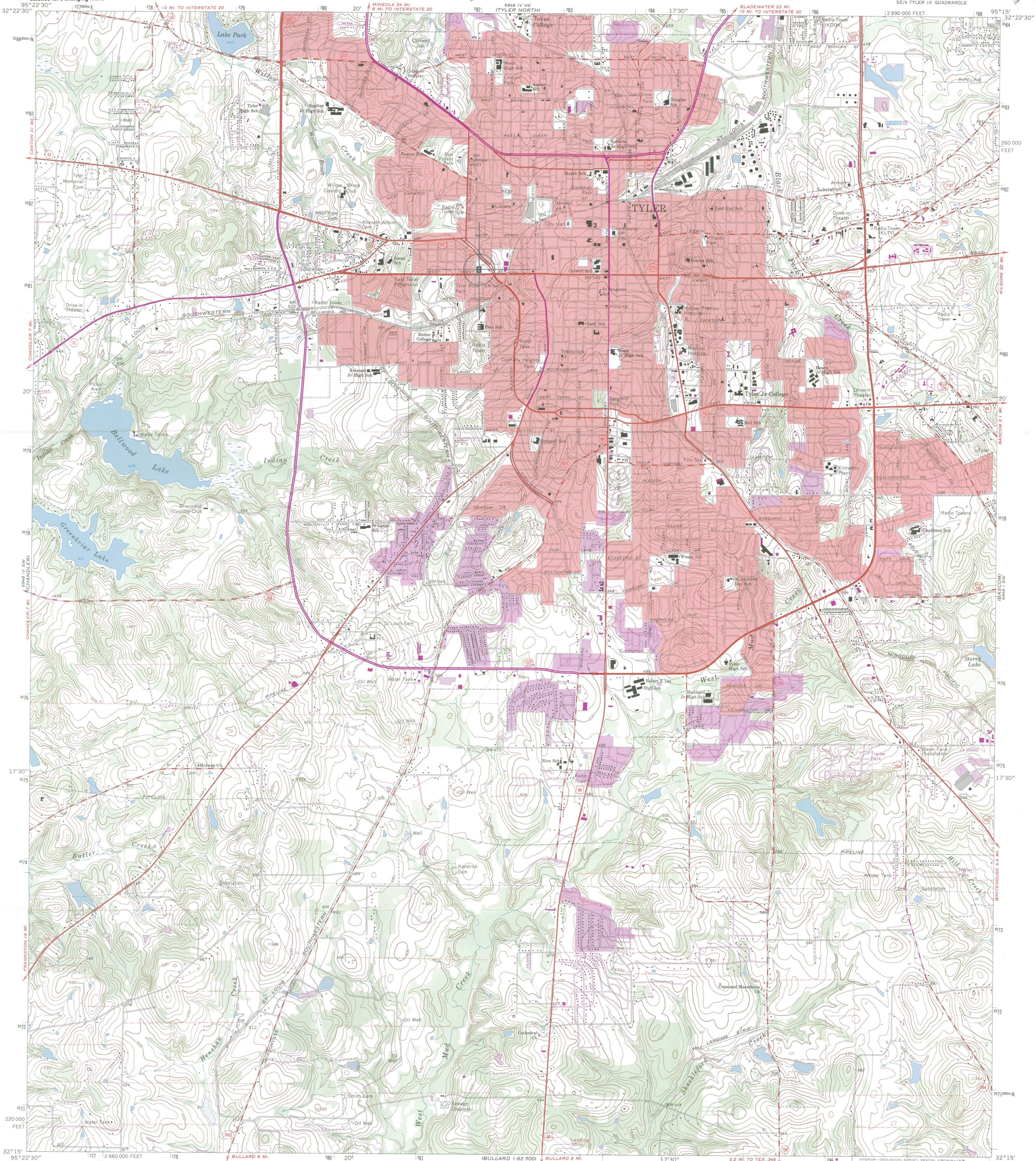




U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

COTTON BELT BUILDING  
1517 WEST FRONT ST  
TYLER, SMITH CO., TEXAS  
UTM ZONE 15  
281901E  
3581284N

cottonBelt Building



TYLER SOUTH QUADRANGLE  
TEXAS—SMITH CO.  
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)  
SE/4 TYLER 15 QUADRANGLE

6948 IV NW  
WINONA

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey

Control by USGS and USC&GS

Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial

photographs taken 1965. Field checked 1966

Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum

10,000-foot grid based on Texas coordinate system,

north 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

Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence lines

Revisions shown in purple compiled from aerial photographs

taken 1973. This information not field checked

Purple tint indicates extension of urban areas

UTM GRID AND 1973 MAGNETIC NORTH  
DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET

1°14' 133 MILS  
22 MILS

20% TOTAL RECOVERED FIBER

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, P.O. BOX 25286, DENVER, COLORADO 80225  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

1 1000 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000 6000 7000 FEET  
1 5 0 1 KILOMETER

CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET  
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929



QUADRANGLE LOCATION

ROAD CLASSIFICATION  
Heavy-duty — Light-duty —  
Medium-duty — Unimproved dirt —  
U.S. Route — State Route —

TYLER SOUTH, TEX.

SE/4 TYLER 15 QUADRANGLE

N3215—W9515/7.5

1966  
PHOTOREVISED 1973

AMS 6948 IV SE-SERIES V882

MILLER BLUEPRINT CO.  
P.O. BOX 2065 78760 50 W. 6TH 78701  
AUSTIN, TEXAS PH #512-474-7579;  
1-800-252-3469 FAX #512-474-7095

4 9515 7.5 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000 6000 7000 FEET  
4 9515 7.5 0 1 KILOMETER



# TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Rick Perry • Governor  
John L. Nau, III • Chairman  
F. Lawrence Oaks • Executive Director

*The State Agency for Historic Preservation*

TO: Linda McClelland  
National Register of Historic Places

FROM: Gregory W. Smith, National Register Coordinator  
Texas Historical Commission

RE: Cotton Belt Building, Tyler, Smith County, Texas

DATE: October 25, 2005



The following materials are submitted regarding Cotton Belt Building:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Original National Register of Historic Places form
<input type="checkbox"/>	Resubmitted nomination
<input type="checkbox"/>	Multiple Property nomination form
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Photographs
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	USGS map
	Correspondence
	Other: _____

COMMENTS:

SHPO requests substantive review

The enclosed owner objections (do       ) (do not       ) constitute a majority of property owners

Other: \_\_\_\_\_