

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Cheek-Neal Coffee Company Building

AGENDA ITEM: D

OWNERS: 2017 Preston, LLC

HPO FILE NO.: 15PL126

APPLICANTS: Anna Mod, SWCA Environmental Consultants

DATE ACCEPTED: Aug-03-2015

LOCATION: 2017 Preston Avenue

HAHC HEARING: Aug-27-2015

SITE INFORMATION: Lots 1, 2, 3, and 12 and Tract 13, Block 186, SSBB, Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site consists of 22,978 square feet of land area. The concrete and steel frame building contains 55,062 square feet and is a five-story structure with a one-story garage annex.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Protected Landmark Designation. The building was designated as a City of Houston Landmark in 2005. The owners are now seeking Protected designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The building for the Cheek-Neal Coffee Company at 2017 Preston Avenue was built in 1917 for the very innovative and growing coffee business interests of Joel Owsley Cheek and John William Neal, who developed the famous Maxwell House coffee brand.

Cheek began his early career in the wholesale grocery business, which included coffee, the product on which he eventually focused. Up until the late nineteenth century, green coffee beans were sold only in bags, had a very short shelf life, and had to be roasted at home. Cheek's company, the Nashville Coffee and Manufacturing Company, was the first to introduce successfully a prepared coffee already roasted, blended, and later even ground and canned, ready for home use. He persuaded Nashville's elegant Maxwell House Hotel to serve his coffee and then borrowed the hotel's name for his brand name.

Locally in Houston, Cheek and Neal expanded their business to the extent that by the 1920s it had captured one-third of the coffee market in the United States. Cheek and Neal pioneered innovative employee benefits programs such as profit-sharing and group insurance plans, and became prominent philanthropists.

The building at 2017 Preston, which housed Cheek and Neal's world-wide known business, was designed by architects Joseph Finger and James Ruskin Bailey of Houston. Joseph Finger (1887-1953) was one of the city's foremost architects from the 1910s through the 1940s. Bailey practiced with Finger from 1914 to 1919 before opening his own Houston practice in the 1920s.

The Cheek-Neal Coffee Company Building is a five-story, commercial building banded by exposed, horizontal and vertical structural concrete column supports. The façade between them is clad with brick. The building features some elements of the Arts and Crafts movement, including its ornamental parapet wall and decorative, diamond and triangular-shaped tiles which have been applied to the façade below the window sills. The structure was constructed for utilitarian purposes consistent with its use as a coffee roasting, packing and shipping concern.

The Cheek-Neal Coffee Company Building at 2017 Preston Avenue qualifies for Protected Landmark Designation under Criteria 1, 3, 4, 5, and 8.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Joel Owsley Cheek was born in the town of Burkesville, Cumberland County, Kentucky, on December 8, 1852. He was the son of Dr. James Hill Cheek (1809-1885) and his wife, Mary Agnes Bledsoe (1823-1898). The Cheek and Bledsoe families were closely allied with the prominent Kentucky families of Owsley, Lewis, and Whitley. Dr. Cheek was a friend and colleague of Dr. Joel Owsley (1790-1869), a member of Kentucky's Owsley family, which produced many doctors, judges, lawyers, legislators and even a Governor. Dr. Joel Owsley served as a Kentucky State Representative from Cumberland County (1825-1829) and (1850-1851). Joel Owsley Cheek was also descended from the Kentucky Bledsoe family through his mother, Mary Agnes Bledsoe, who was a daughter of William Hickman Bledsoe and Elizabeth Embree.

According to the book *Tennessee the Volunteer State*, Joel Owsley Cheek spent most of his early years "on the family farm in a mountainous section of Kentucky, which was more than forty miles from the nearest railroad." Joel O. Cheek "was educated in the district schools of Burkesville, Kentucky, and also attended the Agricultural and Mechanical College (later University of Kentucky) at Lexington through 1871-1872. He became a Latin scholar and a highly educated man. At the age of seventeen, there was issued to him a teacher's first grade certificate by the examiner of his native Cumberland County, where he taught in the district schools of Salem, Kentucky, for two terms; the first when he was seventeen and the second when eighteen years of age. And he was a teacher in a boarding school at Burkesville for a year, being then but nineteen years of age." But teaching was not to be Cheek's life long career.

According to the Kraft Foods website, "at the age of 21, his father gave him a silver dollar, which he called a 'freedom dollar' as a symbol of the boy's freedom to venture forth on his own." Cheek's biography in *Tennessee the Volunteer State* further states that Cheek "accepted a position as a traveling salesman (Census records referred to him as a "commercial tourist") for a wholesale grocery house at Nashville" in 1873. "He was twenty years of age when he made the long boat trip down the Cumberland River to Nashville to take his first position in the world of business. He began working for Webb, Scoggins & Company for fifty dollars per month. He was a total stranger without friends or money and his first work as a traveling salesman was done" in rural Kentucky where his "route was so wild and rough that progress was not possible except on horseback" where he carried his salesman samples in saddlebags. But such was his energy and ability that it was not long thereafter before he was made a partner in the firm.

After Cheek acquired an interest in Webb, Scoggins & Company, it was then renamed Cheek, Webb & Company. It was also during this time that Joel Owsley Cheek married on October 13, 1874 Minnie Helen Ritchie (1855-1895), who was the daughter of James Howe Ritchie and Helen Owsley (1829-1896), a daughter of Dr. Joel Owsley, who was the namesake of Joel Owsley Cheek. The Joel Cheek family is found listed in the 1880 census of Burkesville, Cumberland County, Kentucky. Listed is Joel Cheek, his wife, Minnie Cheek, and three of their children: Leon T. Cheek (born 1876), Robert S. Cheek (born 1877) and Mary E. Cheek (born 1880). Living next door is his father, Dr. James H. Cheek and wife, Mary A. Cheek and children: Hiram M. Cheek, John Cheek and Thomas Cheek. The occupation of Hiram and John Cheek is listed as "commercial tourist," and they most likely worked with their brother, Joel Owsley Cheek, selling groceries or coffee on the circuit.

"During the late nineteenth century the grocery trade became fragmented as dealers in liquor, tobacco, and coffee, for example, began to specialize. Coffee, long the favorite of wealthy urbanites, became a

staple consumer item during this period. Joel Cheek said coffee held a greater interest for him. He believed that he could improve on the blends he sold, and in 1882, Cheek began experimenting with various coffee blends to create the 'perfect blend of matchless flavor.'" Earlier, green coffee beans were sold only in bags, and they had a very short shelf life and had to be roasted at home.

Apparently Joel Cheek was very close to his parents as both left Burkesville in 1884 and relocated to Nashville to live with their son. In 1890, Joel O. Cheek and his first cousin, Christopher Tompkins Cheek (1842-1915), son of William P. Cheek (1799-1842) and nephew of Dr. James Hill Cheek, established their family's business empire on Second Street in Nashville when they started their own wholesale grocery firm. According to the Cheekwood Museum of Art website, within two years of the Cheek cousins joining forces, they were concentrating on the coffee market only. In 1892, with the help of coffee connoisseur Roger N. Smith (who had lived in Brazil with Confederate exiles), Cheek was one of the first to find a perfect blend that combined high-quality coffee beans, but it would cost far more than rival brands. Cheek's new company, the Nashville Coffee and Manufacturing Company, was the first to introduce a prepared coffee already roasted, blended, and later even ground and canned, ready for home use. Instead of competing at a disadvantage in the same coffee market, Cheek sought a prestige market. He persuaded Nashville's elegant Maxwell House Hotel to serve his coffee, and soon they served no other. Cheek even borrowed the hotel's name for his brand label, marking the beginning of "Maxwell House Coffee."

According to the websites of the Maxwell House Hotel and Travellers' Rest, "the original Maxwell House was built by Colonel John Overton, Jr. (1821-1898), of Travellers' Rest, near Nashville, which today is operated as a house museum and is open to the public. The Maxwell House Hotel was named after Overton's second wife, Harriet Virginia Maxwell (1831-1899), whom he married in 1850. Their son, Jackson May Overton (1857-1920) inherited Travellers' Rest and lived there until he died. According to Genealogy.com website (Day), Harriet Virginia Maxwell was a daughter of Jesse Maxwell, Jr. (1796-1856) and Martha Ravenscroft Claiborne (1809-1854). John Overton, Jr. was the son of Judge John Overton (1766-1833) and Mary McConnell White (1782-1862).

The Maxwell House Hotel, begun in 1859, was to become not only one of Nashville's greatest hotels, but it was to become one of the country's best known as well. The hotel became a political, civic, business, and social mecca for almost 100 years. Before the turn of the century, the hotel offered wealthy families the opportunity to come from their estates to spend the winter months at the Maxwell House."

"A coffee blend developed by Joel O. Cheek for the Maxwell House Hotel became so popular that the hotel owner ordered no other coffee to be served to his guests. This special blend soon became known as 'Maxwell House Coffee.'" Incidentally, the famous hotel was eventually converted to a residential hotel during its last years, and was destroyed by fire on Christmas night, 1961. It was later rebuilt at another location in 1979 and renamed.

"In 1893 Joel Cheek left the wholesale grocery company of which he was a partner and formed his own firm. The company grew rapidly under the management of Cheek, his sons and his cousin. In 1900, John William Neal, who shared Cheek's desire to produce coffee and strongly believed in Cheek's business philosophies, became Joel Cheek's partner. Neal was a native of Kentucky, like Cheek. John William Neal was born January 12, 1865, in Fountain Run, Monroe County, Kentucky, the son of James Martin Neal (1827-1906) and his wife, Margaret Dunn. His father, James Martin Neal, had served as a Kentucky State Representative from Monroe County, Kentucky, and he and his wife were devout

members of the Missionary Baptist Church. Their son, John William Neal, would share also that Christian devotion all his life.

On August 27, 1901 Joel Cheek and his partner, John W. Neal, formed the Nashville Coffee and Manufacturing Company on Market Street in Nashville, which was later renamed the Cheek-Neal Coffee Company. That same year they began to produce Maxwell House coffee for mass consumption. According to the 1900 Census of Nashville, J. W. Neal and his family were living at 806 Palmer Place.

Cheek and Neal had faith in the power of advertising and refused to skimp on that portion of the company's budget" which was a business practice that they continued during their many years of operation. They also were aggressive in expanding the company to markets all across the south. In 1903 Joel Owsley Cheek sent his son, Robert Stanley Cheek (1877-1967), to Houston to supervise the construction and opening of a second coffee plant for Cheek-Neal Coffee Company of Nashville. Found listed in the 1903-1904 Houston City Directory is Robert S. Cheek, Manager of the Houston Branch, "importers, roasters and packers of coffee." The office and factory was located at 1121 Carr Street, being the southwest corner of Carr and Conti Street in the Fifth Ward. The site consisted of a three-story, brick factory building with an attached one-story warehouse running parallel and adjacent to the railroad track of the Texas and New Orleans Railroad, which afforded efficient shipping. Robert S. Cheek was rooming at 1201 Milam Street at that time. By 1905 Robert S. Cheek had returned to Nashville and J. W. Neal, Joel Cheek's Nashville partner, had relocated to Houston and had assumed the management of the Houston Branch as Vice-President of Cheek-Neal Coffee Company. The 1905-6 Houston City Directory shows Neal boarding at the Hotel Bristol at 702-708 Travis. By 1907 John W. Neal's wife, Elizabeth (Mitchell) Neal, had joined her husband in Houston where they were living at 1910 Smith Street. Cheek-Neal Coffee Company had decided to move to Houston to expand their coffee business enterprise, no doubt due to the business dynamics and opportunities that Houston offered for their coffee business where coffee was being shipped directly to Houston's port from South America. In 1909 John W. Neal was residing in the up-and-coming new Avondale Addition in Houston where he built the first house there at 301 Avondale Boulevard.

Cheek-Neal Coffee Company did not abandon their coffee business interests in Nashville. Instead they expanded their interests when Joel Cheek's son, Robert S. Cheek, supervised the construction of a new roasting plant for Cheek-Neal at 2 Cummins Station. Cummins Station had been built in 1907 by William Cummins at 201-315 10th Avenue South. The 400,000 square foot, 5-story warehouse, built as the first concrete frame building in Nashville by Oliver Contracting Company, housed many businesses. Robert S. Cheek then managed the plant as Vice President, his brother Frank L. Cheek was also a Vice President, another brother, Newman Cheek, was Secretary-Treasurer and still another brother, Joel O. Cheek, Jr. was a Department Manager. Later, Christopher T. Cheek, Joel Cheek's cousin and former business partner in the wholesale grocery business, would relocate his own business, C. T. Cheek & Sons, to 1 Cummins Station as well. Christopher Cheek's sons managed the business; Leslie Cheek was President and W. T. Cheek, was Vice-President. A brother of theirs, Hiram M. Cheek, was a foreman for Cheek-Neal Coffee Company. Another son of Joel Cheek, William Francis Cheek (c.1882-c.1970), was in charge of the Indianapolis, Indiana, sales territory for Cheek-Neal Coffee Company.

According to the magazine *Café Ole*, and the book *Listening to America*, President Theodore Roosevelt, who was an avid coffee drinker and savored it from cups the size of soup bowls, which even had a special name, called Harvard cups, drank his coffee with no less than 6 lumps of sugar. Roosevelt is

reportedly to have coined the phrase "Good to the last drop" when in 1907 he was drinking Maxwell House coffee at the Maxwell Hotel in Nashville. Roosevelt was offered another cup of Maxwell House coffee, and he answered, "Delighted! It's good to the last drop." When asked if the company could use Roosevelt's remarks in the advertising for the Maxwell House coffee brand, Roosevelt is said to have replied, "Yes, by jove, if I may have another cup." In another researched source, *Uncommon Grounds, the History of Coffee and How It Transformed Our World* by Mark Pendergrast, it is reported that Roosevelt, who had just returned from a bear hunt in the Mississippi cane-brakes, and while visiting the Hermitage, the famed Nashville Resort, is where Roosevelt had his first cup of Maxwell House coffee and made the famous remark. In 1908 an ad appeared in the Nashville City Directory boasting that the coffee "was served to President-elect Taft and a thousand guests at Atlanta" in addition to refreshing Teddy Roosevelt at the Hermitage. According to Pendergrast, Teddy Roosevelt probably never uttered the words "Good to the last drop." If he had, why did not the 1908 advertisement use the phrase? It has also been reported that the likely origin of the phrase dates back to the Coca-Cola Company, which had called its beverage "good to the last drop" in 1908, but that slogan had ceased being used and was forgotten.

Randy Pace, City of Houston Historic Preservation Officer, interviewed Mrs. Geneva Bryan of Nashville over the telephone in 2005. Mrs. Bryan, who is the widow of Worcester Allen Bryan, was born in 1912. Mrs. Bryan related to Pace that she had personally known Joel Cheek, who was a close friend of her parents, Charles Dudley Jones and his wife, Georgia Knox Jones. Charles D. Jones was President and Treasurer of Charles D. Jones & Company, which was a wholesale grain firm. In fact Mrs. Bryan also related that for a high school graduation gift, Mr. Cheek presented her with a platinum diamond bar pin in which there are 5 diamonds, which she proudly owns and wears even today. Her parents only lived a few blocks from the Cheeks at that time. According to Mrs. Bryan, Joel Cheek was attending a party at the Bryans' home one evening when the Bryans were living in the Elliston Apartments, 2305-2309 Elliston Place in Nashville. Cheek told those gathered there that evening that he was seated next to President Roosevelt at the breakfast sponsored by the Ladies Hermitage Association, at the Hermitage, the home of Andrew Jackson. Actually, the breakfast had been held on October 22, 1907, and Roosevelt, who had given the ladies his backing for their preservation project of Jackson's home previously, was being honored there. Mrs. Bryan further explained that Cheek said he was telling Roosevelt about his Maxwell House coffee during breakfast, and that he (Cheek) had asked the ladies to serve his coffee of which Mr. Cheek had generously agreed to donate. When Cheek asked Roosevelt to let him know his opinion of the coffee, and seeing the bottom of his cup, the President replied, "That was good to the last drop." However, the first known Cheek-Neal Coffee Company advertisement, which used the famous Roosevelt slogan for Maxwell House coffee, seems to have appeared only as early as 1921.

Cheek-Neal Coffee Company also continued to flourish after moving to Houston, when Joel Cheek sent another son, Leon Tracy Cheek (1876 -1966), to Jacksonville, Florida, where in 1910 he opened and managed another large and expansive coffee plant there at 375 E. Bay Street. According to Wayne W. Wood's *Jacksonville's Architectural Heritage*, the plant was designed by Jacksonville architect, Roy Benjamin, and the building was constructed by Turner Construction Company. Leon T. Cheek also became a director of the Atlantic National Bank in Jacksonville, which was the largest bank in the state at that time. And as the owners of the Maxwell House brand, Cheek-Neal Coffee Company roasted, packaged and shipped Maxwell House coffee also from their new location in Houston where they operated the plant from 1904 to 1916.

According to a *Houston Chronicle* article dated March 25, 1917, the new, enlarged site for the Cheek-Neal Coffee Company was constructed in 1917 under the direction of John William Neal. The larger plant at 2017 Preston Avenue was “filled with state-of-the-art machinery for cleaning, roasting, grinding and packaging coffee” at a cost of \$100,000. When the new plant opened, the article lauded “Neal as being ‘one of the best informed men in the American coffee industry.’” The building was designed by the Houston architectural firm of Finger and Bailey. The general contractor was General Contracting Company, located at 523-525 Beatty Building. Lone Star concrete cement was used throughout the building and was supplied by W. L. Macatee and Sons. Other contractors included Otis Elevator Company, Brosius Art Glass Company, Barden Electric and Contracting Company, F. E. Newbery Electric Company, Repsdorph Tent and Awning Company, James Bute Paint Company, Lee Rogerson (plumbing), W. E. Humphreyville Company (partitions, plastering and ornamental stucco), and Teolin Pillot Company, who furnished the office furniture and modern filing devices.

In 1915 other nephews of J. W. Neal, George Frederick Austin and his brother James W. Austin, joined Cheek-Neal as salesmen. They were sons of Charles A. Austin and his wife, Matilda F. Neal, sister of John William Neal. The Austin boys and their cousin, Herschel Duncan, lived with their uncle at 301 Avondale for a time while working in Houston. J. W. Neal’s son, James Robert Neal, also joined Cheek-Neal Coffee Company by 1918 and was a Vice-President and Assistant Manager of the new, enlarged Houston Branch in the Third Ward. J. Robert Neal was one of the first property owners to buy a lot in the newly developed River Oaks Subdivision in Houston, and he lived there at 2217 Troon Road. According to the 1920 R. G. Dun “Mercantile Agency Reference Book” for Harris County, Texas, Cheek-Neal Coffee Company’s Estimated Pecuniary Strength was rated as “Aa” (over \$1 million) and their General Credit was rated as “A1” (High).

The former location of the Cheek-Neal Coffee Company was then leased by Herschel M. Duncan in 1916. According to a *Houston Chronicle* article about the history of Duncan coffee in Houston, in 1907 Herschel M. Duncan, a nephew of John W. Neal, had also come to Houston “where he discovered he had an unusual sense of taste and smell.”

His brother, Charles Duncan, also worked with Herschel in the coffee business. Herschel M. Duncan was born in November 1888, and his brother, Charles Duncan, was born in March 1890, both being born in Monroe County, Kentucky. They were sons of John Green Duncan (1858-1941) and his wife, Margaret Permelia Neal, a sister of John W. Neal. Herschel M. Duncan was soon promoted to superintendent of his uncle's business, Cheek-Neal Coffee. When Cheek-Neal Coffee moved to 2017 Preston in 1917, Duncan went into the coffee business himself at the former location of Cheek-Neal Coffee Company in 1916 with only one coffee roaster. His interest in the coffee business venture was no less inspired by the population and business growth Houston was experiencing shortly after the Houston Ship Channel was widened and deepened in 1915, an event which would spring-board Houston to its world port status today. According to the 1915 Houston City Directory, Duncan was also Vice-President of the Robinson Sash and Door Company located on Odin Avenue, southeast corner of Maury in the Fifth Ward. Duncan, who achieved his own fame as the founder of Admiration Coffee, known for its Admiration coffee blend, which later became a special blend, Maryland Club, expanded his coffee business too which grew to one of the six largest coffee-roasting businesses in the United States. “Duncan challenged his uncle’s slogan by countering with his own, declaring that, with Admiration Coffee, ‘even our last drop is good.’” In 1937 Maryland Club “appeared on grocery shelves as ‘the coffee you would drink if you owned all the coffee in the world.’” Duncan coffee company continued

operating at 1121 Carr (1200 Carr) and 2001 Rothwell until 1961 when they opened a new \$3 million plant at 7105 Katy Road. Under the direction of Charles M. Duncan and his son, Charles M. Duncan, Jr. the company was the largest food product manufacturer with headquarters in Houston at that time with total sales of \$90 million.

According to *Time Magazine* internet archives, by 1929 over 150 big companies had opened concerns within the last five years in Los Angeles, including Cheek-Neal Coffee Company. The company kept growing late into the 1920s, and they expanded production throughout the country. Cheek-Neal Coffee Company opened several factories, including one in Richmond, Virginia, in 1916 where construction was managed by James Howe Cheek (c.1888-1976), another son of Joel O. Cheek, and then directed by James H. Cheek as Vice-President.

Cheek-Neal also opened in 1921 their largest plant in Brooklyn, which was directed by Frank L. Cheek (1894-1968), another son of Joel Cheek. In just over two years Maxwell House had overtaken Yuban coffee to become Manhattan's top brand. Joel Cheek's biography states that Frank L. Cheek, who managed the Brooklyn plant, and was Secretary of Cheek-Neal Coffee Company in 1915, was commissioned in the First World War as "a first lieutenant of the One Hundred and Fourteenth Field Artillery, having risen to that position from the ranks, as he volunteered as a private. For fourteen months he was in France and while there, very much against his wishes, he was taken from the general staff to which he had been assigned, to the position of superintendent of construction of three large coffee plants, which roasted all the coffee for the American Expeditionary Forces in France. Of these he had complete charge. It was his desire, however, to remain on active duty at the front but his capability in the line of his business led to his services being requisitioned for the special purpose indicated."

The youngest son of Joel Cheek, Newman Cheek (c.1896 - ?), who also volunteered to serve in the World War and was assigned to the Three Hundred and Tenth Infantry, Seventy-eighth Division, known as the Lightning Division, saw service in France as well. Upon his return to the United States, Newman Cheek served as Secretary of the Cheek-Neal Coffee Company.

Not all of Joel Cheek's sons entered the coffee business. Joel Owsley Cheek, Jr., (c.1886-1952) engaged in farming in Davidson County, Tennessee. Another son, John Hancock Cheek (c.1890-1975) became the first agent for the Dodge Brothers automobile and was President and sole owner of the Cumberland Motor Company in Nashville, which operated until the 1960s. The business was touted in its advertising as the "World's First Dodge Dealer."

According to *Art for Trade's Sake*, "at about the same time that artists began designing industrial products, advertisers [like Cheek-Neal Coffee Company] began incorporating prominent art forms into their newspaper and magazine commercials to add prestige to their products. Together, they educated the American public about good taste and, in turn, good (that is, profit-bearing) spending habits. According to Roland Marchand, 'When an advertising art director sought to create an aura of style around a product that did not itself convey an adequate prestige image, he was likely to turn to high art for the desired association. An early and popular style was that of oil paintings' and in addition to "replicating known works of art, however, advertisers also adapted high-culture styles for their own purposes. A 1928 Maxwell House advertisement, for example, depicts a coffee-drinking party in impressionist style."

In the 1920s Cheek-Neal Coffee Company placed full page, color ads for Maxwell House coffee drawn by famous artists including Henry Raleigh, Pruett Alexander Carter, and Maxfield Parrish in magazines,

such as *Good Housekeeping*, *Pictorial Review*, *Woman's Home Companion*, *McCall's*, *The Ladies Home Journal*, and *Literary Digest*, depicting every subject imaginable. Their ads depicted the history of the Maxwell House Hotel and the history of their coffee company (including a painting of Joel Cheek shown riding horseback in his early days) and ads showing high-class parties aboard yachts and ocean liners.

Not only did they advertise in national newspapers, such as the *New York Times* (May 5, 1922), but they also placed their color ads in local Houston magazines, such as the 1928 issue of the *Houston Gargoyle* which was published as a weekly from January 3, 1928 to June 5, 1932, and thereafter as a bi-weekly until publication ceased in September 1932. Cheek-Neal Coffee Company also published booklets, cookbooks and brochures with their advertising, one of which was "Dainty Dishes and How to Make Them, Compliments of Cheek-Neal Coffee Company" with a by-line below giving the locations of their coffee plants in the United States. Another cookbook was "Secrets of Coffee Flavors and Some Unusual Recipes" published in 1927 by Cheek-Neal. The last page of the book contains photographs of the seven U.S. coffee production plants of Cheek-Neal Coffee Company.

The advertising of Cheek-Neal Coffee Company was specialized as well. "American Jewish families first became acquainted with kosher Maxwell House coffee in the early 1920s when its parent company, Cheek-Neal Coffee, extolled the virtues of its product in the Yiddish press. 'It's a mitzvah to tell you that this Passover you won't have to turn down the pleasure of your favorite drink,' proclaimed one such advertisement, drawing unabashedly on the language of the seder service. No longer will you have to make do with a glass of tea at the end of the seder. You can have a cup of coffee instead for Maxwell House is now Kosher for Passover.'" A decade later, in 1930 the appearance of the Maxwell House Haggadah, published by General Foods Corporation, solidified this 'unique relationship between a product and a people.' With more than 20 million copies distributed free (in supermarkets) during the past half-century, the modest-looking Maxwell House Haggadah has become one of American Jewry's most familiar and enduring cultural treasures. It speaks to us of ancient Jewish history and of contemporary family lore, of Moses and Uncle Sol."

Thus, Cheek-Neal Coffee Company spent huge sums of money advertising their coffee product which proved very lucrative for the company as the coffee became so popular that it eventually gained a staggering one-third of the American coffee market. The company also produced Maxwell House Tea, which was sold, like their coffee, in tin containers. The containers were manufactured by Metal Package Company of New York City. By combining the figures issued by the Crowell Publishing Company, of New York, giving the expenditures of leading national advertisers in thirty magazines with the estimated volume of advertising by national advertisers in newspapers prepared by the Bureau of Advertising of the American Newspaper Publishers Association, a 1924 table showed that they spent the exorbitant sum of \$300,000 for advertising in newspapers and magazines.

But a successful business to Cheek was based not just on revenue. According to Cheek's biography in *Tennessee, the Volunteer State*, Cheek had learned a great deal from his father, Dr. James H. Cheek, who was a "man of sterling character and of the most marked humanitarian principles. He administered to the poor as readily to the rich, never refusing to make a call when his professional aid was needed. Thus as the years passed he went about doing good and he may well be accounted one of the most successful of men when judged by the standard of a modern philosopher who said: 'Not the good that comes to us but the good that comes to the world through us is the measure of our success.'" Dr. Cheek was also

successful in instilling his principles in his own son, Joel O. Cheek, who "early realized that no great enterprise or business could succeed unless the full cooperation and enthusiasm of all employees could be obtained and with this in view he established a bonus system of profit-sharing" in which every employee participated. "The company was also among the first to install the group insurance plan, whereby all employees were insured without cost to them. The result is that Cheek-Neal" at that time was "one of the finest organizations in the country." The biography goes on to state that "Mr. Cheek meets and personally knows everyone in the establishment and is honored and esteemed by all, from the highest salaried employee to the lowest."

Uncommon Grounds by Pendergrast also states that Cheek-Neal Coffee Company opened their last plant in Chicago in 1927, a "direct result of the J Walter Thompson Survey" and ad campaign there. A monoplane, the "Miss Maxwell House", flew across the country to push the coffee, while a new electronic sign in New York's Times Square flashed "Good to the Last Drop." That year Joel Cheek's coffee netted a profit of \$2.7 million and became the leading national brand. The coffee also caught the eye of Edward F. Hutton, "Lucky Ned", the millionaire stockbroker who had become Marjorie Merriweather Post's second husband and, in 1923, CEO of the Postum Cereal Company.

According to the Kraft Foods website, "because of his (Cheek's) wise business choices, Postum Company (Battle Creek, Michigan) paid a record sum for the right and title to Maxwell House coffee" on August 1, 1928, "when it acquired the Cheek-Neal Coffee Company, and the company's name was changed to Maxwell House Products Company." According to the Harvard Business School website, when Postum (General Foods Corporation) acquired Cheek-Neal Coffee Company, Postum was being directed (1924-1935) by Colby M. Chester (1877-1965), a native of Maryland. Chester's undergraduate degree was from Yale University, and he also acquired his JD from New York Law School. Under Chester's leadership, General Foods' annual sales rose from \$25 million in 1924 to \$120 million in 1935.

After Cheek-Neal Coffee Company was sold, J.W. Neal directed his activities in Houston elsewhere, where he died on August 31, 1940. According to his obituary in the *Houston Chronicle* on September 1, 1940, Colonel J. W. Neal was a Houston banker, outstanding civic leader and prominent Baptist layman. He was Chairman of the Board of Directors of Second National Bank from 1928 until his death. He was a member of numerous organizations and directed many civic and philanthropic campaigns and drives. He served as Director of Community Chest drives and was Vice President of the Chamber of Commerce for nine years as well as serving eleven years on the Board of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). He was survived by three grandchildren: Mrs. Marion Ruby, Washington, D.C., J. Robert Neal, Jr., and Nina Margaret Neal of Houston. He was buried in Forest Park Cemetery in Houston, and the pallbearers were his nephews Charles W Duncan, Herschel M. Duncan, Fred Austin, J. M. Austin, E. M. Hailey, and Tommie Bayer as well as his grandson, W. B. Ruby. J. W. Neal's son, J. Robert Neal (1894-1939), had also served the Second National Bank as Vice-President as well as serving as the head of the Houston Park Board in 1938. The Neals also held interest in the Navarro Oil Company, founded in 1922 by Stephen Farish.

J. W. Neal and his wife supported various philanthropic organizations. According to the Memorial Hermann Hospital website, Memorial Healthcare System in Houston, also known as the Baptist Sanitarium and Memorial Baptist Hospital, Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Neal set up in 1928 the Margaret Ophelia Neal Trust Fund of \$100,000 in memory of their daughter who died at age 2. The fund is used to care for sick, disabled, injured and suffering children. By 1937, 614 children had been treated. In 1940 the Neals

also established another memorial fund for their son, J. Robert Neal, who had died in 1939, which provides for X-ray treatment of cancer victims. Elizabeth (Mitchell) Neal died on March 7, 1970, in Houston and was buried in Forest Park Cemetery beside her husband, son and daughter. She had been born December 27, 1869 in Fulton, Obion County, Tennessee, the daughter of Robert Henry Mitchell (1844-1916) and his wife, Margaret Ophelia Major.

According to research by Gary Coover in his “Avondale Walking Tour,” the Neals decided to leave their home at 301 Avondale and move to the Warwick Hotel Apartments in 1929. Neal, who was a “civic leader and ardent churchman, and was known for his unfailing good humor and high spirits,” donated his home at 301 Avondale Boulevard to Rev. E. P. West, who was their pastor at Second Baptist Church.

The Neals were prominent members of the church, then located at McGowan at Milam.

Joel Cheek retired to Jacksonville, Florida, after the company was sold in 1928 for a price which was reported anywhere from \$25 million to \$42 million in cash and stock. Joel Cheek died in Jacksonville of pneumonia on December 23, 1935, but he was buried in his beloved city of Nashville. According to his obituary, he was a church worker and philanthropist. He had also served as President of the National Coffee Roasters Association and a member of the executive Board of the Atlantic National Bank in Jacksonville, Florida.

According to the Kraft food website, about a year after Postum Company acquired Cheek-Neal Coffee Company in August 1928, “in July 1929 the Postum Company changed its name to General Foods Corporation,” which later became part of the huge Kraft Foods conglomerate. According to Kraft Food's website, Joel Owsley Cheek is “counted among ‘Nine of the World's Most Renowned Food Pioneers, all of whom had a commitment to quality, and their entrepreneurial spirit and their passion for innovation have created techniques and food products that people across the world know and love.’” Kraft information further states that “its history is traced to many different roots and founders, which includes the legacy of some of the world's most renowned food pioneers, including J.L. Kraft, Joel Cheek, Adolphus Green, Johann Jacobs, Oscar Mayer, C.W. Post, Dr. Ludwig Roselius, Philippe Suchard and Theodor Tobler.”

Although the managing owner's name changed from Cheek-Neal to General Foods, according to Cole's City Directory of Houston, General Foods continued their Maxwell House coffee business at 2017 Preston in the name of Cheek-Neal through 1947. Since the time Cheek-Neal Coffee Company was purchased, according to the Kraft Foods website, “there have been many improvements made in Maxwell House processing and packing methods to keep pace with the nation's ever-changing taste for good coffee.” In 1947 they created the Maxwell House instant (soluble) coffee which was introduced to consumers in the United States after it was used by the armed forces in World War II.

The Kraft Foods website further states that the Maxwell House coffee concern was relocated (from 2017 Preston) to a larger, more modern facility at 3900 Harrisburg Avenue in Houston, where it occupied 800,000 square feet, and employed 480 employees engaged as Kraft's sole U.S. provider of instant coffee products. In 2006, this facility was divested by Kraft Foods to Maximus Coffee Group LP. In March 2007, the neon Maxwell House coffee cup sign that glowed like a beacon over the city's East End was removed from the side of the 16-story coffee roaster building.

Beginning in 1949, the use of the old Cheek-Neal Coffee Company Building at 2017 Preston had changed as it was occupied by five different companies including, ACME Hamilton Rubber; Bickely

Manufacturing Corp. (rubber goods); Bickely Brothers (school furniture); Senak Company of Texas (household furniture); and the Loel Company (floor coverings). The property has been unoccupied for the past 45 years until the current owners took possession with plans for its restoration.

Joseph Finger

According to the *Handbook of Texas*, Joseph Finger, the architect of the Cheek-Neal Coffee Company Building, was born on March 7, 1887, in Bielitz, Austria. Finger received his primary, secondary, and technical education in Bielitz. Immigrating to the United States in 1905, Finger settled initially in New Orleans. He moved to Houston in 1908 where he worked in the branch office of the Dallas architect, C. D. Hill and Company. In 1912, Finger became the junior partner of Houston architect, Lewis Sterling Green. Between 1914 and 1919 he was in partnership with James Ruskin Bailey and from 1920 to 1923 with Lamar Q. Cato. From 1923 to 1944 Finger practiced under his own name. From 1944 until his death, he was in partnership with George W. Rustay. From the beginning of his first partnership, Finger was identified with the design of office, hotel, retail, industrial buildings and a few residences. Finger was responsible for designs for the American National Insurance Company Building in Galveston (1913, demolished); Cheek-Neal Coffee Company (Maxwell House) Building in Houston (2017 Preston Ave. – City Landmark); the Ricou-Brewster Building in Shreveport, Louisiana (1924, with Seymour Van Os); the De George (1913), Tennison (1922), Plaza (1925), Ben Milam (1925), Auditorium (1926), and Texas State hotels (1929) (City of Houston Landmark) in Houston; the Vaughn Hotel, Port Arthur (1929); the Charlton Hotel, Lake Charles, Louisiana (1929); and the McCartney Hotel, Texarkana (1930). Finger designed retail stores for Everitt-Buelow (1926, altered), Levy's (1930, altered), and Battelstein's (1923, 1936, 1950) in Houston, and numerous auto showrooms in Houston during the 1920s. He was architect of the Model Laundry, Galveston (ca. 1913), Texas Packing Company (1924), H. M. Tennison Manufacturing Company (1925), and Truscon Steel Company (1941) buildings in Houston." Finger also designed a small number of residential buildings, including the Simon and Mamie Minchen House (1931) (City of Houston Landmark).

As the city's foremost Jewish architect from the 1910s through the 1940s, Finger designed many Jewish institutional buildings, as well as buildings for individual Jewish clients. Among these were Congregation Beth Israel Temple (1925), Congregation Beth Israel Mausoleum (1935), and Congregation Beth Yeshurun Synagogue (1949), as well as the Concordia Club (1915, demolished) and the Wolff Memorial Home (1930, demolished). During the 1930s Finger was responsible for such major public buildings as the Montgomery County Courthouse, Conroe (1935, altered); Jefferson Davis Hospital (1937, demolished; with Alfred C. Finn); Houston City Hall (1939) (City of Houston Landmark); and the Houston Municipal Airport Terminal and Hangar (1940). At the time of his death, Finger and Rustay's Harris County Courthouse (1953) was under construction in Houston. Finger was best known for his exuberant modernistic designs. These included the Art Deco-style Houston TurnVerein (1929, demolished), the A. C. Burton Company auto showroom (1929, demolished), and the Barker Brothers Studio (1930). Finger's office produced the Clarke and Courts printing plant (1936) and the Carnation Company creamery (1946-47, demolished) in the streamlined modernistic style. Finger's public buildings of the 1930s and 1940s were also designed in the modernistic style. Among the prominent clients for whom Finger designed multiple buildings, for both personal and business use, were the industrialist Henry M. Tennison, the confectioner W. H. Irvin, the merchant Philip Battelstein and

his sons, the grocer Joseph Weingarten and his brothers, the oil operator James M. West and his sons and business associates, Simon Minchen, a real estate developer and Joel Cheek, a coffee manufacturer.

Finger was a member of the American Institute of Architects. He was also a member of Congregation Beth Israel, the Independent Order of B'nai Brith, the Houston TurnVerein, the Westwood Country Club, Chamber of Commerce, and the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks. Joseph Finger died on February 6, 1953, in Houston.

James Ruskin Bailey

James Ruskin Bailey was one of Houston's most popular architects of the early twentieth century. He designed residential, office, institutional and hotel structures. He was born in Philadelphia in 1889. Educated at Carnegie Tech, he came to Texas in 1908 to be a draftsman for the Texas Company (later Texaco) in Port Arthur. In 1909 he moved to Houston where he married Margaret Scott, a daughter of the President of First National Bank. From 1914 to 1919 he was engaged in a partnership with Joseph Finger, who became one of Houston's foremost architects. From 1919 to 1921, Bailey worked on his business interests, including the Ford Motor Company dealership. He re-entered the field of architecture in 1922 during the real estate boom in Houston. During the 1920s the financial district began to slide southward up Main Street as several new bank buildings were constructed outside the confines of the old Victorian banking corridor. One such new bank building, the Public National Bank Building at 402 Main Street (City of Houston Landmark), was one of Bailey's first major commissions in 1925. From that time forward, his practice seems to have focused on commissions for the rehabilitation or additions to older buildings.

In 1926, John Henry Kirby, a prominent lumber and oil man, commissioned Bailey to transform his florid Victorian house, built in 1897, and rehabilitate it into a picturesquely massed, opulently decorated, neo-Jacobean country house. Bailey redesigned the structure into a rambling, 36-room, English Manor house. The interest in this style of architecture certainly is reflected in his 1928 rehabilitation of the Barringer-Norton Building at 506 Main (City of Houston Landmark) and is also a testament to the real estate boom in the 1920s. The company was and still is one of the premier men's clothing stores in Houston. Today the company is known as Norton Ditto, which continues its legacy as one of the oldest and finest men's clothiers in the state.

Bailey also made sympathetic additions to the rear of the Spanish Mission Revival styled Eastwood Elementary School, 100 Telephone Road (1927). When he designed the Educational Building for the First Methodist Church, 1320 Main (1929), he not only designed the building to be sympathetic to the neighboring historic church building, but the building was also designed for possible future conversion into an office space. In 1930 he designed a four-story retail store and administration building for the Peden Iron & Steel Company, 610 N. San Jacinto. This building, designed in the modernistic Perpendicular style, was one of the last constructed in the Fifth Ward "factory district."

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The Cheek-Neal Coffee Company Building is a five-story, commercial building with an attached one-story garage annex. The building is banded by exposed, horizontal and vertical structural concrete column supports and the façade between them is clad with brick. The building also features metal frame multi-light windows. The building features some elements of the Arts and Crafts movement, including

its ornamental parapet wall and decorative, diamond and triangular-shaped tiles which have been applied to the façade below the window sills. The red brick veneer buildings were designed and constructed with reinforced concrete foundations. Both buildings feature flat roofs with tar and composite roofing materials. Flooring inside the buildings is concrete. Access to the upper floors of the main building is through internal stairwells. The external stairwells are currently unsafe. The building contains one cargo elevator and one conveyor shaft which is 6' by 12'. There is also a small basement area. The structure was constructed for structural and utilitarian purposes consistent with its use as a coffee roasting, packing and shipping concern.

The first floor of the garage and main building contain a total of 13,062 square feet and floors 2 through 5 each contain 10,500 square feet. Column spacings are 17'-6" by 16'-6". Ceiling heights on the first floor and fifth floors are 12', and the second, third and fourth floors are 11'-3". Flooring weight capacity is 250 pounds per square foot. Although the building's façade has suffered some deferred maintenance, the interior space appears much as it did in decades past. The interior remains intact as it did in decades past as open warehouse space and has not been improved or modified from its original state. The building contains one cargo elevator and one dumbwaiter.

According to a circa 2005 environmental report on the property, the site is not listed in any environmental database and there are no negative environmental issues regarding the property. The report stated that no further environmental investigations were required.

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Planning and Development Department

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The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Erin Glennon, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION

The HAHC shall review each application for designation of a protected landmark that is included in an application for designation of a landmark at the same time and in the same manner as it reviews and considers the application for a landmark. The HAHC and the Planning Commission, in making recommendations with respect to a protected landmark designation, and the City Council, in making a designation, shall consider whether the building, structure, site, or area meets at least three of the criteria in Section 33-224, or one of the criteria in Section 33-229, as follows:

S NA**S - satisfies NA - not applicable**

Meets at least three of the following:

- ☒ ☐ (1) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area possesses character, interest or value as a visible reminder of the development, heritage, and cultural and ethnic diversity of the city, state, or nation;
- ☐ ☒ (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;
- ☒ ☐ (3) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is identified with a person who, or group or event that, contributed significantly to the cultural or historical development of the city, state, or nation;
- ☒ ☐ (4) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area exemplify a particular architectural style or building type important to the city;
- ☒ ☐ (5) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area are the best remaining examples of an architectural style or building type in a neighborhood;
- ☐ ☒ (6) Whether the building, structure, object or site or the buildings, structures, objects or sites within the area are identified as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, state, or nation;
- ☐ ☒ (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present;
- ☒ ☐ (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride.
- ☐ ☒ (9) If less than 50 years old, or proposed historic district containing a majority of buildings, structures, or objects that are less than 50 years old, whether the building, structure, object, site, or area is of extraordinary importance to the city, state or nation for reasons not based on age (Sec. 33-224(b)).

OR

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

☐ ☒ The property was constructed before 1905 (Sec. 33-229(a)(2);

OR

☐ ☒ The property is listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places or designated as a “contributing structure” in an historic district listed in the National Register of Historic Places (Sec. 33-229(a)(3);

OR

☐ ☒ The property is recognized by the State of Texas as a Recorded State Historical Landmark (Sec. 33-229(a)(4).

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Protected Landmark Designation of the Cheek-Neal Coffee Company Building at 2017 Preston Avenue.

HAHC RECOMMENDATION

The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends to City Council the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of the Cheek-Neal Coffee Company Building at 2017 Preston Avenue.

EXHIBIT A

PHOTO

CHEEK NEAL COFFEE COMPANY BUILDING 2017 PRESTON AVENUE



EXHIBIT B
SITE MAP
CHEEK NEAL COFFEE COMPANY BUILDING
2017 PRESTON AVENUE

