



HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Historic Assessment

Property Address: 702 San Pedro Avenue

1. Application Details

Applicant: Family Services Association of San Antonio
Type: Historic Landmark Designation
Date Received: 18 July 2024

2. Findings

The property at 702 San Pedro Avenue is a three-story commercial building located in the Tobin Hill neighborhood of City Council District 1. The Family Services Association of San Antonio currently owns the property.

Set on a busy urban corridor at the corner of San Pedro Avenue and West Poplar Street on San Antonio's near north side, the Guarantee Motor Car Company building contains an enormous amount of information about the City. The building's story reveals the greater San Antonio story encompassing the local history of the automobile industry, as well as cultural and socio-economic heritage. Constructed during the City's rapid manufacturing growth of the early 20th century, the building was designed by the architect Harvey P. Smith.

Designed as a three-story brick, concrete and hollow tile automobile showroom and full-service station, the structure was a departure from older ideas of motor car building construction type. The building originally covered a ground area of approximately 16,000 square feet and used the roof slab for parking purposes. Each floor and the roof were reached by long, low-grade ramps, permitting quick and easy access to all parts of the building. The entire roof surface was covered with a heavy asphalt finish to provide protection from the weather, and to allow for car traffic.

The Guarantee Motor Car Company was founded by Joseph Francis "Frank" Hagan (1882-1946) in 1912. The original shop was located at 104 East Travis Street, where Hagan and his associates were distributors for a variety of early quality automobile brands, including Krit, Cole, King, Chalmers, and Maxwell. When the new building on San Pedro Avenue opened, Hagan was the distributor for Chrysler in the San Antonio and South Texas area. Hagan also served for years in leadership of the San Antonio Automotive Trades Association, and was instrumental in planning and hosting the earliest and most successful car shows in Texas.

The Guarantee Motor Car Company building was described by the San Antonio Light as "One of the South's Finest." The first floor contained the display room, general office, private offices and salesmen's rooms, as well as the waiting room for customers, with men's and women's restrooms attached. The men's restrooms included showers for the use of tourists coming in from long drives. The first floor also included the tire room, and the rear part of the building was devoted to the quick service department, exclusively for repairs and adjustments which only required a short time to accomplish. The front portion of the second story was devoted to the parts department, and there was a public stairway leading up from the display room to a waiting room. The repair shop covered the entire rear portion of the second story. Along the entire south side of the building running from San Pedro Avenue to Maverick Street,

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HISTORIC PRESERVATION

were the wide, spacious, drive-in stations to service of cars with gas, oil, water, air, etc. These stations included the most modern of gasoline pumps and oil fountains of the period.

The outward appearance of the Guarantee Motor Car Company building is well-maintained, and the integrity of the exterior is largely intact. The building's structural components and materials—reinforced concrete columns and beams, wire-striated brick—are durable and have withstood deterioration over its nearly 100 years of existence. The exterior street fronting façade of brick veneer appears intact without loss or deterioration. The rear facade clay tile materials are also intact. Several modifications to the original exterior, including the addition of windows to fill in the original showroom doors appear to be reversible. In the immediate area, there are no other existing industrial structures of this era or style.

3. Architectural Description

Architect Harvey P. Smith (1889-1964) aimed to make the Guarantee Motor Car Company building “the most complete and perfectly equipped building of its kind possible.” Born in Minnesota, Smith moved to San Antonio in 1915 and worked with Atlee B. Ayres and Ralph H. Cameron before opening his own office in 1924. Some of his best-known works include the Sunken Garden Theater in Brackenridge Park (1937), which he designed in association with George R. Willis and Charles Boelhouwe. Smith, however, is best remembered for his work in the area of historic preservation and his restoration work for the Spanish Governor's Palace (1928), Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo (1933), and Mission San Francisco de la Espada.

This commercial structure with Renaissance revival style influence is made of reinforced concrete with a veneer of dichromatic brickwork on the west and south facades, featuring stone tile and ornamental stone trim. All windows on the upper levels are the steel ventilator type. The four-by-three window groupings on the second floor pivot along the center-line of the upper two panes, while the four-by-four window groupings on the third floor pivot on the center line of the middle two panes.

The original nine large plate glass windows and transoms on the west façade along San Pedro Avenue have been replaced by three groups of three-by-three fixed windows. The pair of central entrance doors have also been infilled by three-by-three fixed windows. The central four-by-three center-pivot window is flanked by pilasters and topped by a decorative blind arch. Other ornamental trim features include crests, quoin, lintels, frieze and relief work.

The original seven large, steel roller bay doors under the second story overhang along West Poplar Street, which had been used for automobile service, have been infilled with concrete walls, steel security doors, and groupings of glass block windows. One bay door remains in on the right corner of the east façade along Maverick Street, which is secured by iron bars.

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On the right side of the north façade, a colorful mural by artist David Blancas, titled "Of Family and Service," fills the space beneath the steps of the three-story fire escape. It depicts the history of the Family Service Association, the current owner of the building and the oldest human service non-profit in San Antonio, established in 1903.

The Guarantee Motor Car Company building is composed of pleasing proportions, especially for the urban environment it's situated in. Its stature, figuratively and metaphorically, articulates a sense of stability as it anchors a busy, commercial intersection. It remains one of the most visible and notable structures on this vibrant corridor.

4. Landmark Criteria

The property meets six criteria under UDC 35-607(b):

- **3. Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the development of the community, county, state, or nation;**
- **4. Its identification as the work of a master builder, designer, architect, or landscape architect whose individual work has influenced the development of the community, county, state, or nation;**
- **11. It is distinctive in character, interest or value; strongly exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, ethnic or historical heritage of San Antonio, Texas or the United States;**

5. Staff Recommendation

A property must meet at least three of the 16 criteria used to evaluate eligibility for landmark designation, and this assessment determines that 702 San Pedro Avenue meets this threshold. Further research may reveal additional significance associated with this property.