

**THE
NATIONAL BANK
OF COMMERCE**

TO THOSE
WHOSE EFFORTS TO CREATE AN OUTSTANDING
BUSINESS BUILDING
HAVE BEEN TIRELESS, WHOSE ZEAL AND ENTHUSIASM
IN THEIR DAILY LABORS AND WHOSE LOVE FOR
AND UNDERSTANDING OF BEAUTIFUL
AND USEFUL THINGS IS BEYOND
QUESTION, THIS BOOK
IS DEDICATED



THE GULF BUILDING

A BOOK DESCRIBING

THE GULF BUILDING

THIRTY-FIVE FLOORS . ONE THOUSAND OFFICES

A MODEST EFFORT AT PORTRAYAL,
WITH ART AND WRITINGS, OF THE
PARAMOUNT OFFICE STRUCTURE
OF THE SOUTH, THAT THOSE WHO
HAVE NOT SEEN MAY IN A MEAS-
URE APPRECIATE THE BEAUTY
AND DOMINANCE OF THE
BUILDING

ERECTED BY
THE JESSE H. JONES INTERESTS
FOR
THE NATIONAL BANK OF COMMERCE
HOUSTON, TEXAS



THE ENTRANCE

PRETHOUGHTS

THE GULF BUILDING is more than an office structure . . . it is, in intent and fact, a monument. A towering pillar of inspired architecture which expresses the true importance of the new South. It is a monument to every Texan who with unsurpassed courage has met the work and trial of pioneering and, overcoming the handicaps of ignorance and prejudice, has risen to an undisputed position of distinction. From Bowie, Crockett and Houston, undaunted in the face of murderous thousands, down the years through changing economic planes, through war and devastation, Texas has with unfaltering vision struggled to create a greater Southwest. The achievement has been worthy of the effort. Today the enterprise and progress of Texas is unchallenged. It is to visualize and enhance this rise to dominant power in trade, finance, industry, agriculture, art and education that the Gulf Building has been erected. It is a monument to a glorious past and the promise of a broader future. The purpose of this book is to make possible a more complete understanding of the true stature of Southwestern institutions as represented by the crowning architectural achievement of Dixie, a structure made possible by the foresight of Houston's commercial workers and citizens.

THE NEED

TO PROVIDE A STRUCTURE ADEQUATELY SATISFYING THE
REQUIREMENTS OF DOMINANT HOUSTON ENTERPRISES



VIEWING the history of Houston, an unusually exact parallel will be found in the growth of the two larger occupants of the Gulf Building and of the city itself.

In 1836, when J. K. and A. C. Allen founded the city, their aim, according to historians, was to provide a more healthful living place than the villages nestled along the banks of Buffalo Bayou, from the tide-water flats surrounding Galveston, to Harrisburg.

The National Bank of Commerce, chartered in 1912, was calculated to serve the banking needs of an entire people rather than the interests of a particular industry. Public approval of such ideals is evidenced by the continued growth of the institution, until in 1926 it was clear to officers and directors that new and larger quarters must be secured.

Many plans were presented, all seeking to establish a new home which would be ample for present needs and providing for future growth. Final determination to erect a building which would typify the importance of the bank in the community it serves was made in the early winter of 1927.

*The National
Bank of Commerce*

At this time, The Gulf Oil Companies which had their origin in Port Arthur, Texas, were seeking, owing to expansion, for the eighth time in their business life, new and larger offices.

The two needs coincided, and Mr. Jesse H. Jones chose to offer at once a suitable home for the National Bank of Commerce, of which he is president, and adequate offices for The Gulf Companies. Thus is the need for, and planning of, the Gulf Building evidenced.

Immediately after the requirements of the Bank and Gulf Companies had been established architects were started at the work of preparing models and plans for the new structure. One thing was clearly defined by the builder . . . the building was to be modern . . . daring in architectural design and planned for most efficient and economical use of office space. It must also be beautiful . . . in short, a building that would be outstanding in company with famed structures of the world. How completely these aims were accomplished is shown in this book.

For months ateliers of the world were combed for workmanship deemed worthy of a place in the structure. From all of America and Europe the finest in architectural beauty was viewed. Numerous models were fabricated and plans drawn, until at last there issued from the workrooms of the architects a design which combined the most modern in scheme with the most artistic in effect. The edifice had been conceived.

Contracts were immediately let and ground was broken late in the summer of 1927. For weeks the rumble of great motor trucks blended with the shrill whistle of excavating machines and the blast of powder as the foundation pit was sunk deeper and deeper into the ground. Mixers dumped load upon load of concrete into the hole and

suddenly, like magic it seemed, on February 16, 1928, steel beams pointed their prophetic fingers cloudward as hardfisted ironworkers added their courage and skill to the training and art of executives and architects who had visioned and planned.

Steel rose rapidly and on June 4, 1928, the first brick was laid in the walls of the structure. An army of workers employed, on November 26th masonry was "topped in" and, excepting windows and ornamentation, outwardly the tower was complete.

Work of finishing the interior was rapid and on Tuesday, April 16, 1929, the first tenants, Sakowitz Brothers store, occupied their chosen location on the first five floors. Others followed rapidly so that by August 1, 1929, every tenant who had engaged space in the tower was at work in his new business home, except the National Bank of Commerce, whose quarters had been used as a workroom.

The general scheme of the building is a thirty-story shaft resting upon the center of a six-story base, the large scale of which gives the impression of strength needed to support the great weight above. Masonry masses of the base are simple, broad structural forms, the sturdiness accentuated by strong contrasts and occasional carving or rich ornamental ironwork.

The main shaft, which terminates in three setbacks, is a frank expression of modern provision for an abundance of light and air. There is no elaborate decoration or classic detail added, the design depending for its success upon studied proportions and balance of masses so tied together as to create a feeling that each part fits securely into the whole rather than a group of masses piled one atop the other.

The restrained ornamentation is modern and has been handled to accentuate the strength of the composition.

The Building
"Comparable with Any"

The Exterior Development and Design



THE MAIN LOBBY

THE ACCOMPLISHMENT

A MASTERPIECE OF MODERN AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE
TYPIFYING THE IMPORTANCE OF TEXAS IN WORLD AFFAIRS



THE OTHER chapters of this book will tell of the planning, execution, background and of the institutions which made possible the Gulf Building. It is for this section, then, to describe the achievement. It starts with a bold statement; it is left for the discerning reader to judge the worthiness of the designation.

Starting from a six-story base of Indiana limestone, which has been impregnated with iron to produce a rustic effect, a tower of stone and brick one hundred twelve feet square rises majestically to a height of four hundred forty feet, of proportions such as to convey the impression that the entire mass was hewn from a solid block of stone growing out of the pavement on which it rests.

The lower stories are embellished with incised ornaments and intricate details of iron and silverized bronze placed as accents to the dominating features, so contrasted with plain surfaces and pierced voids as to blend the whole into one harmonious mass.

Access to the building is through a massive entrance of carved stone rising three stories into the main lobby, a spacious colonnaded area with a vaulted and richly carved ceiling. The floor is of Breche

*A Harmonious
Mass of Masonry*

de Salernes French marble and the walls and columns are of Siena travertine, an Italian product.

*Decorative
Feature of Lobby*

Flanking the long sides of the lobby are eight mural panels illustrating the history of Texas, executed in wet fresco. The subjects are: Aboriginal Indians, circa 1500; Landing of La Salle, Matagorda Bay, 1685; Spanish Domination, 1770; Mexican Ascendancy, 1821; The Fall of the Alamo, 1836; Capture of Santa Anna, 1836; Houston, Capital of the Republic of Texas, 1837, and Modern Houston. This method of decoration has become a lost art in America, although there has been considerable interest in its revival during the past year. All of the work in these panels was executed at the building on wet plaster, a small section at a time, similarly to the work done on all of the original Italian frescoes, including such famous paintings as "The Last Supper." The paint applied to wet plaster is absorbed into the plaster in such a manner that the color becomes an integral part of the material. It is permanent and indestructible.

Doors leading into the banking room, elevators and shops and all radiator-enclosing grilles are unusual examples of metal-craft art done in Benedict nickel. Concealed lighting illuminates the fresco panels, while suspended fixtures of Benedict nickel and etched glass lend themselves as ornaments in the general scheme of illumination.

To the left on entering the lobby of the main building, one finds two banks of elevators: one set of four rising to the seventeenth floor, the other four operating to the thirty-fourth floor. These elevators, which are of most modern design, rise at the rate of nine hundred feet per minute. The doors, overdoor and frame are of nickel, richly ornamented with elaborate designs in etched and hand chased metal work. The cabs are of English hawwood panels, framed with nickel

and ornamented with grilles of the same metal. There are a total of fourteen elevators in the building, including those in the banking rooms, stores and service lifts.

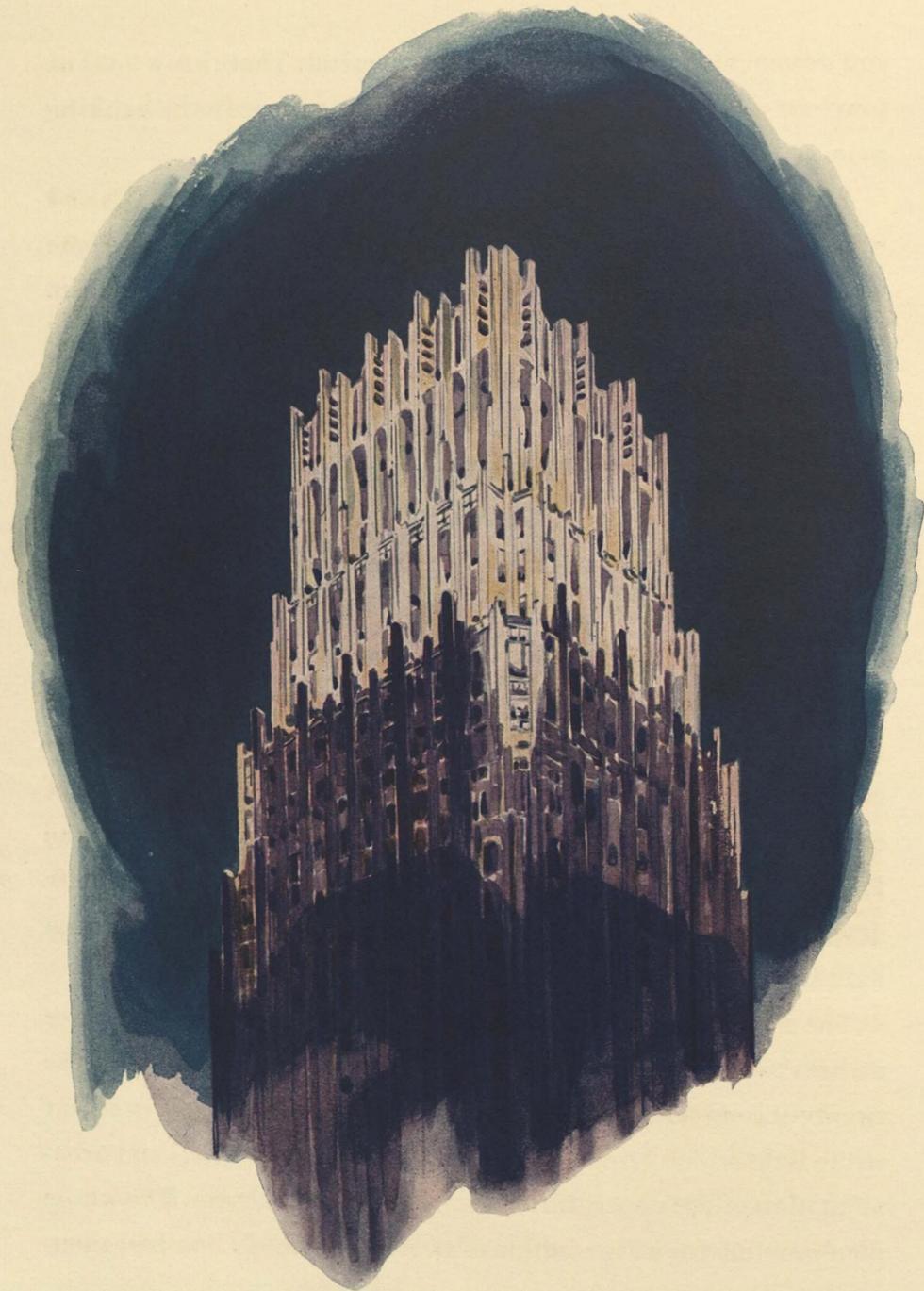
Typical office floors have elevator lobbies with marble walls and rubber tile floors, the corridors have the same floor and marble base with doors and trim of select gumwood brought to furniture polish.

Access to the observation tower on the roof is by means of a metal and marble staircase. On this is located a powerful telescope through which Galveston and the surrounding territory may be viewed on a clear day. Visitors are admitted during daylight hours.

Four hundred fifty feet above the street level is mounted the Jesse H. Jones Aeronautical Beacon. This is the Houston air mail beacon authorized and approved by the United States Department of Commerce. Utilizing twenty-three thousand candle power, this light is visible on clear nights for a distance of fifty miles. Two shafts of light are incorporated into the scheme, one of fifteen thousand candle power, pointing vertically into the heavens and another of eight thousand candle power, sending a horizontal beam toward the Houston Airport. The searchlights are equipped with an automatic device which changes globes in case of burned-out filaments, so that light is constant between sunset and sunrise.

*Houston's
Official Air Beacon*

The general arrangement of exterior floodlighting for the edifice utilizes two hundred thirty-two projectors distributed between the twenty-second floor and the top of the building, bathing it in a clear white light which brings into strong contrast the carvings and ornamentation of the upper thirteen stories of the structure. The whole plan provides for a distribution of twelve million six hundred thousand candle power.



THE TOWER AT NIGHT

THE IDEAL

SEEKING TO GIVE GREATER SERVICE THE NATIONAL BANK OF COMMERCE MOTIVATES A PARAMOUNT OFFICE STRUCTURE

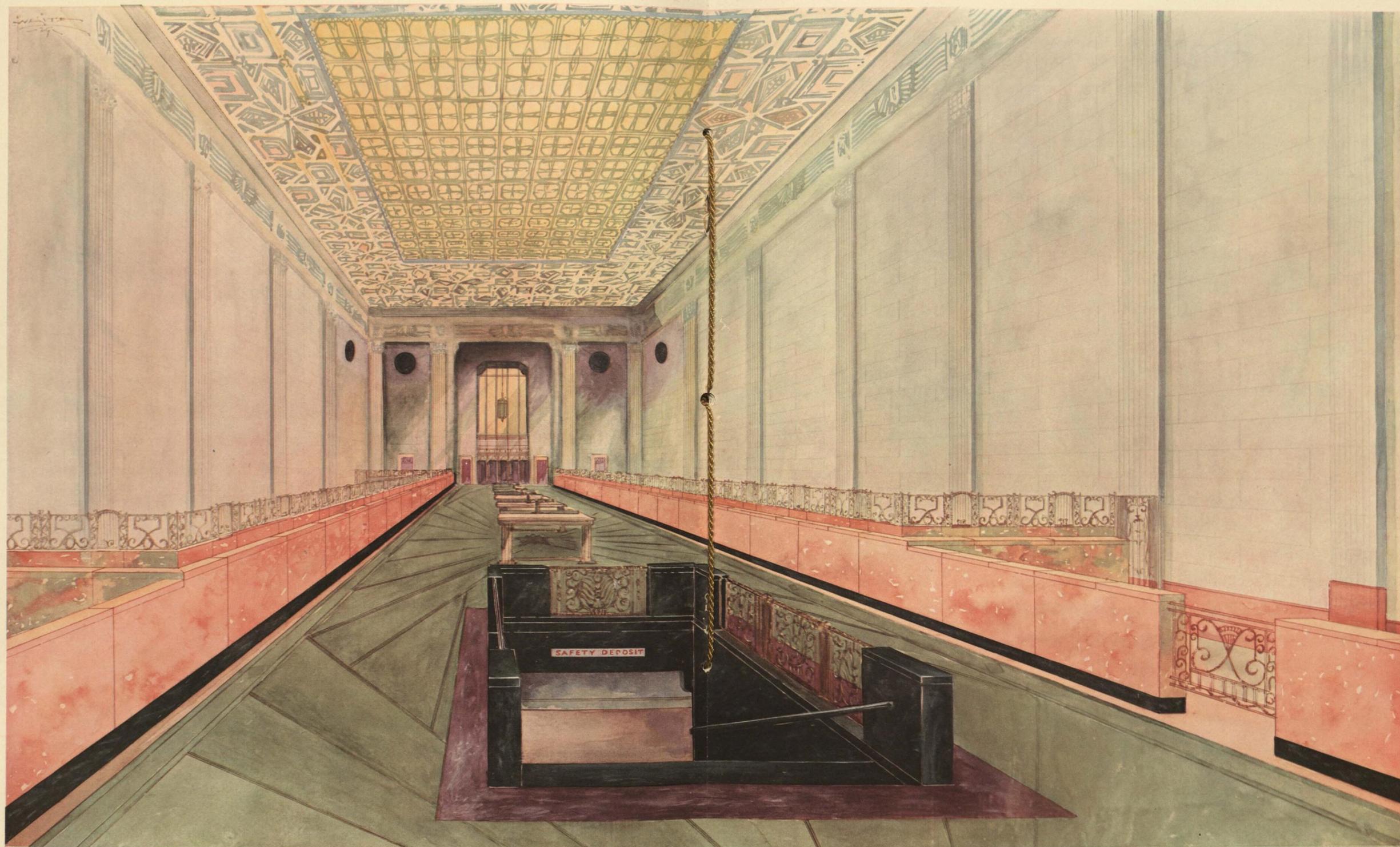


TIME is the true test of worthiness. History, whether of a nation or of a banking institution, is a safe measuring stick of ability to serve the people. On this proposition The National Bank of Commerce invites comparison.

The National Bank of Commerce was organized on July 3, 1912, and on July 8th, its charter was granted by Lawrence O. Murray, United States Comptroller of the Currency. The new institution opened for business on that same day in part of the Commercial Bank Building located at the corner of Franklin and Main Streets. The capitalization was \$500,000.

The new institution soon outgrew the original home, and on March 14, 1914, a move was made to the Mason Building, five and one half blocks south on Main Street. These quarters also were found inadequate and on July 11, 1916, the location was again changed, this time to an inside section of the original Gulf Building located directly across Main Street from the present structure. September 4th, the entire Main Street frontage of the building was leased, and on December 27, 1927, the bank purchased this structure. February 12, 1918, real estate holdings were

*History
of the Institution*



MAIN BANKING ROOM LOOKING TOWARD TRAVIS STREET ENTRANCE

further increased by acquisition of the Foster Building adjoining, thus giving it one hundred feet of Main Street frontage.

Banking rooms in the original Gulf Building have been enlarged four times since its purchase, each remodeling being necessary to give greater accommodation to customers.

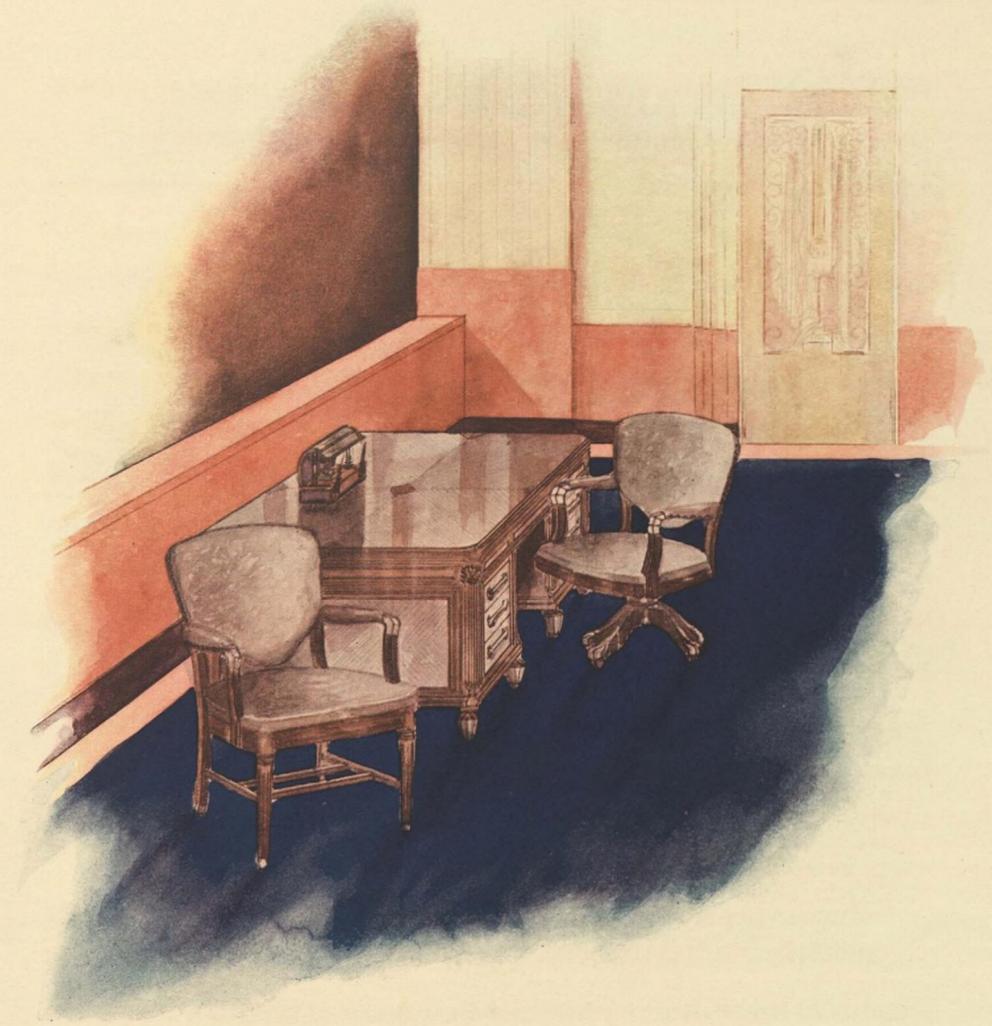
*Col. O. T. Holt,
First President*

The first president was Colonel O. T. Holt, one of Houston's pioneers and a distinguished Texan of his day. Upon his death, G. C. Street was elected president (March 25, 1913), his administration continuing until February 25, 1915. Mr. Street was followed by R. M. Farrar, who gave the bank a most capable administration. Mr. Farrar resigned January 11, 1921. Judge S. A. Lindsey, of Tyler, Texas, next took the helm, retiring March 14, 1922, to be succeeded by Jesse H. Jones, builder of the Gulf Building.

An interesting sidelight upon the changing direction of the organization is secured through knowledge that of the original board of directors, only two remain: N. E. Meador, now vice president, and H. S. Filson, a member of the executive committee.

From the beginning in 1912, the bank's growth has been steady and since the assumption of control by the present group, the capital, surplus and deposit accounts which were on June 30, 1915, as follows: Capital, \$500,000.00; Surplus and Profits, \$24,827.13; Deposits, \$1,041,137.54; have grown until on June 30, 1929, they were: Capital, \$1,000,000.00; Surplus and Profits, \$2,398,934.78, with Deposits totalling \$10,452,497.57.

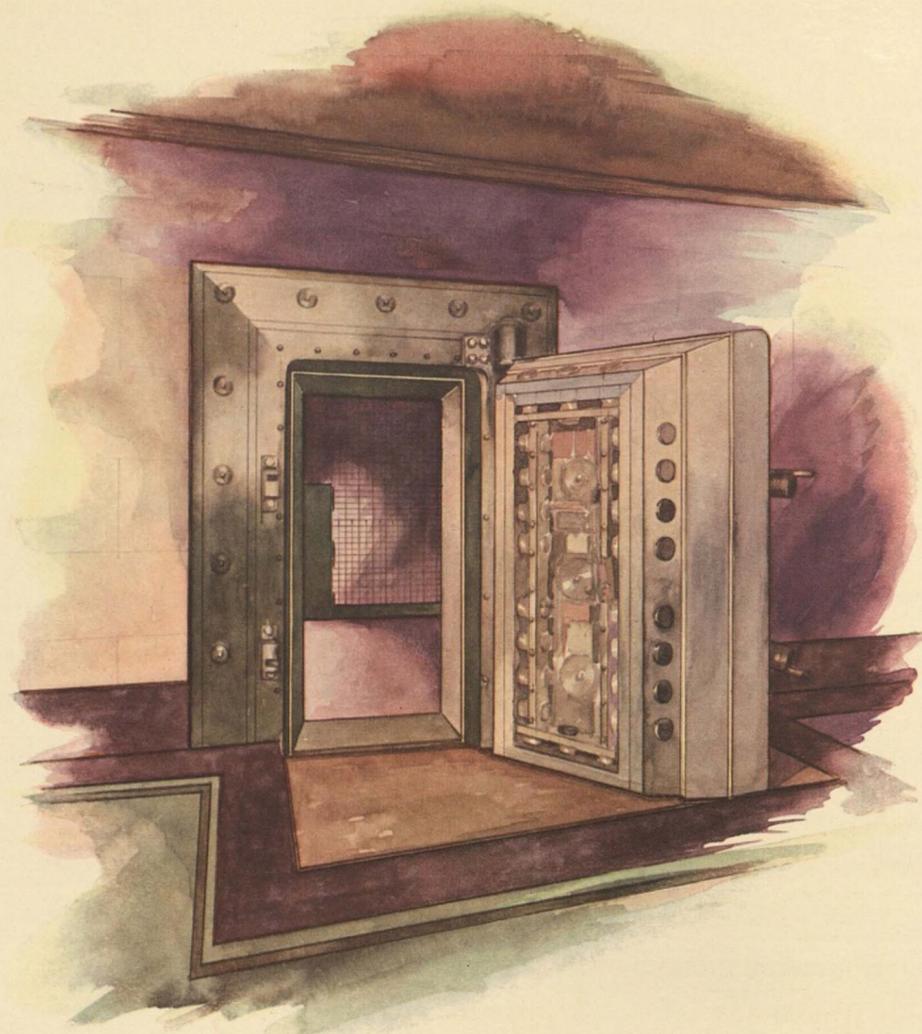
March 27, 1929, additional capital was provided by the stockholders to fit more nearly the great banking quarters then nearing completion. It is noteworthy that nearly the amount of original capital has been returned to stockholders in dividends.



CORNER SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICES

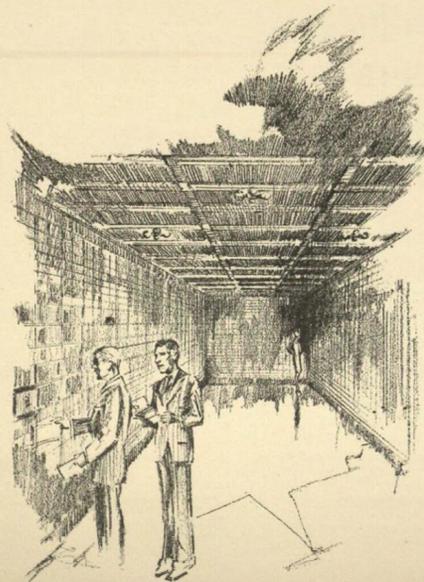
The new home of the bank has been designed to visualize the prestige and importance of the institution to the community.

Access to the main banking room is through the building lobby and also from Travis Street. On entering, one finds himself in an immense space, seventy by one hundred twelve feet, the walls of which rise sheer and unobstructed to a ceiling forty-three feet from the floor, which, with the exception of a French marble border, is of



IMPREGNABLE: THE SAFETY DEPOSIT VAULTS

terrazzo in a number of blended colors and aluminum strips laid in an intricate pattern of radiating designs. The walls are of French limestone, embellished with fluted pilasters supporting on their carved capitals an elaborately ornamented stone frieze, from which springs the cornice and richly decorated coffered ceiling. Panels of especially fabricated glass and metal ribs, which form an ornate design in the central area of the



ceiling, and supply the entire room with a flood of mellow daylight.

The officers areas, cages, and working spaces on each side of the room are separated from the public space by a low, friendly screen of "rosato d'or marble" and Benedict nickel grilles, the proportions and color of which are in perfect harmony with the room proper.

Just forward, on entering from Main Street, a handsome marble staircase leads to the safe deposit department. A marble screen and grilles of Benedict nickel separate the stair hall from the vault lobby, in which are located the coupon booths, and opening off from which are the vault and numerous conference rooms.

*The New
Banking Home*

Separated from the banking room in the Travis Street end, elevators and staircases provide access to the various bank departments and workrooms located above the main room.

Artificial illumination for the main area is provided by means of reflectors above the glazed ceiling panel, and also by ornamental fixtures of etched glass and nickel studding the ceiling.

A spacious directors room on the second floor overlooks the banking room through two large carved marble openings, separated only from the main room by silverized metal balustrades.

In every appointment, these quarters are a definite departure from the banks of a few years back. Friendly cooperation is typified in the warm coloring and low, intimate counters and railings. Every department having contact with the customer is designed to facilitate his errand and place him in immediate touch with the necessary person and things about the bank. The impression is of a great lounge for the meeting and entertainment of guests, a dominant ideal of the officers, directors and employees of "The Bank of Courtesy" . . . a well earned designation of this institution.



AN ELEVATOR LOBBY

EXPANSION

AN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE NARRATIVE OF THE GROWTH AND PRESENT QUARTERS OF THE GULF COMPANIES



ABOUT November 1, 1904, the sales department of The Gulf Refining Company was moved to Houston from New Orleans, Louisiana, occupying a single room in what was then the South Texas Commercial Bank Building. For about six months this arrangement continued when rapid expansion made by greatly increased production, necessitated a move to larger quarters which were secured on the ground floor of a building at the corner of Franklin and Main Streets. This was the first of a series of seven movements of offices which has at last led to the elaborate quarters that are now held by The Gulf Companies in the Gulf Building.

A few months and enduring growth brought another and still more commodious business home, this time on the top floor of the First National Bank Building. E. M. Taliaferro was then district sales manager, but upon his death in September, 1906, Mr. C. L. Kerr succeeded him, taking charge on October 15, 1906. Mr. Kerr still holds this position but with greatly augmented duties, owing to the increased volume of sales in the Southwestern area.

Two more moves of offices were made between 1906 and 1913,

*Mr. C. L. Kerr
Assumes Management*



A TYPICAL BUILDING CORRIDOR

the last being into the Kress Building, where an entire floor was occupied. In the summer of 1916 a consolidation of all Southwestern departments of The Gulf Company brought the Gulf Pipe Line Company, the Gulf Production Company and the Legal Department to Houston from their former location at Beaumont, the amalgamation of forces making necessary still larger quarters in the original Gulf Building on Main Street



OFFICES OF C. L. KERR

opposite the present structure of that name. This building was erected by the Jesse H. Jones Interests under a contract with The Gulf Company. All departments were housed here, but not all of the available floor space was used. Mr. Underwood Nazro, vice president, Gulf Pipe Line Company and Gulf Production Company, moved to Houston and took charge of all departments, save only that of sales. This arrangement continues today. When the space in the

*Efficient New
Quarters*

original Gulf Building was taken there were only one hundred fifty employees in the Houston offices and the area used was slightly over 25,000 square feet. Rapid growth of the organization soon necessitated taking 55,000 additional square feet in the Foster and Mason Buildings, which have been occupied for the past two years.

No other office space was available in Houston, and the ever widening horizon of these interests demanding even larger and better offices, negotiations were begun with Mr. Jesse H. Jones which culminated in a contract for twelve floors in the outstanding building which is the subject of this book.

In the present Gulf Building twelve floors with a total area of 110,000 square feet are occupied. Eleven hundred employees are engaged in the work of enlarging the scope and influence of The Gulf Companies in today's offices.

On floors seven to nineteen, inclusive, of the building various departments of The Gulf Companies enjoy unusually fine accommodations. Finished throughout to correspond with the balance of the structure, these offices are seemingly apart. The atmosphere is of a great machine, working at top speed to accomplish an end.

Employees pass swiftly from office to office. A great general work room is filled with the subdued noise of things being done. It is as though a giant were breathing softly at his task.

In designing these quarters one idea was paramount. They were to be as compact and efficient as planning and familiarity with routine work could make them. Anything not conducive to the swift execution of duties was discarded . . . beauty is combined with utility. The scheme is of great, high-ceilinged rooms with an abundance of sunlight (which is an outstanding feature of the entire building)



GENERAL OFFICES

and air. Lighting fixtures are so placed as to obliterate shadows, desks and furniture arranged to give immediate access to those things which are a part of daily work; even the detail of placing telephone instruments where they are most convenient was considered.

Private suites of the executives are planned to give easy communication with departments and their furnishing is such that, while enjoying the distinction of good taste, no



ostentation or elaborate detail has been added. Each part of the office space has a definite load to carry and the arrangement is calculated to meet any possibilities.

Beginning at the seventh floor and operating to the eleventh a modern automatic dumbwaiter system is used for the conveying of heavy parcels. It is on these floors that the general offices are located. From the eleventh floor to and including the nineteenth a most complete pneumatic tube system gives instant dispatch of documents; private Western Union service is maintained on the twentieth floor; three telephone switchboards handle the interoffice and general telephone traffic.

Senior executive offices are on floors eleven (sales department), sixteen (legal department), and seventeen (Gulf Pipe Line and Production Companies). All of the offices are served by the bank of four local elevators which operate to the seventeenth story.

The work of planning this business home receives the highest praise from those with authoritative knowledge of office and building planning; it has been called "perfect."

AD SUMMAM

THE STORY IS TOLD. THE ATTEMPT HAS BEEN TO HONESTLY DESCRIBE A SUPERLATIVE EDIFICE WHICH HAS BEEN ERECTED AND TELL OF THE INCIDENTS AND NEEDS WHICH LED TO ITS CONSTRUCTION. THE GULF BUILDING DEFIES PORTRAYAL; NO WORDS CAN ACCURATELY SET FORTH THE SURPASSING BEAUTY AND MASSIVENESS OF THE STRUCTURE. IT MUST BE SEEN. THE SPONSORS OF THIS BOOK TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO EXTEND THE READER A CORDIAL INVITATION TO VISIT THE SOUTH'S
PARAMOUNT BUSINESS BUILDING.

LAUDATIO

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MR. JESSE H. JONES

BUILDER

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ALFRED C. FINN, HOUSTON

KENNETH FRANZENHEIM, NEW YORK

J. E. R. CARPENTER, NEW YORK

ASSOCIATED ARCHITECTS

•••••

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