

ROCK ISLAND PRESERVATION COMMISSION

NOMINATION FOR
LANDMARK DESIGNATION

90-2

Date 10-10-90

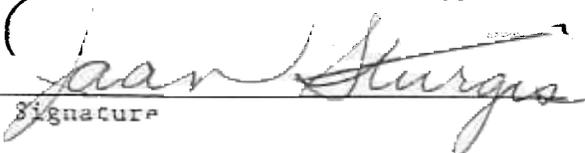
Time 1:30 p.m.

Common Street Address of Property: Fourth Avenue and 24th Street, Rock Island, IL

Name and Address of Property Owner: Robert Jackson, President, Illinois
Oil Products, Fourth Avenue and 24th Street, Rock Island, IL 61201

Please attach a simple statement setting forth the reasons for requesting designation. Please refer to the criteria listed on the reverse side. (These are excerpted from the Rock Island Preservation Ordinance.)

Name(s) and Address(es) of Applicant(s):


Signature

Jaan Sturgis, Landmarks Committee Chair
Rock Island Preservation Society
Name

128 West 14th Street, Davenport, IA 52803
Address

324-6628 (home) 326-7804 (work)
Telephone

1. Legal description of property (available from abstract or County Recorder of Deeds office).
2. Map indicating location of property proposed for designation (assistance available from Planning Division).
3. Recent photograph (copies of old photographs or drawings may also be included).
4. Indicate whether or not the owner is aware of the proposed designation. Property owner is in favor of landmark designation and has encouraged same with conversations with Linda Anderson, President, Rock Island Preservation Society.

The Rock Island Preservation Society proudly nominates the Illinois Oil Building located at the corner of 4th Avenue and 24th Street as October's building worthy of landmark designation. On at least five counts -- the social heritage of our area where at one time upwards of 500 people worked; the architectural style, Art Deco, is of significance to the public buildings built in Rock Island during the 1920s; a representative example of the noted and 50-year span of work of the architectural firm Cervin and Horn; a representative of a particularly good example of utilitarian structures, being an oil factory and what was reportedly the largest gasoline station in the world; in addition to being a readily identifiable structure in the community -- this structure stands out as a beacon to the community shining forth the rich architectural heritage that belongs to Rock Island.

Frank Welch's Illinois Oil Company business was originally located in Mediapolis, IA, a berg near Burlington. In 1907 he deemed it wise to relocate to Rock Island because of the proximity to the Mississippi and the railroads. During the 1920s and '30s, the hey day of the business, more than 500 people were employed in the business housed in Rock Island; and its service stations, both company and privately owned, dotted the countryside -- more than 100 in all -- in Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, Kentucky, Missouri, and places as far away as Oklahoma. Therefore, the economic prosperity of this business played directly on the affluence of the city of Rock Island thus impacting the economic stability and success of the Rock Island citizenry. Consequently, the results of this successful business assisted in the development of prosperous residential areas, an enhancement of the arts, and a furtherance of culture in the boundaries of the city of Rock Island.

Added to the above significance is the architectural style. The Illinois Oil Company building was built in 1922 and 1923 as a monument to the Art Deco style of architecture. The building is constructed of terra cotta and brick. Interestingly, in comparing and contrasting two other public buildings built in the same decade we find some similarities and some marked differences. The terra cotta probably all came from Chicago as none was manufactured here. The Fort Theatre displays multi-colored terra cotta and employs a wide variety of ornamentation related to the prairie heritage of this area. Although the Illinois Oil Building does employ snakes and serpents, these would be the only "prairie-type" ornamentation the building has. Too, the Fort Theatre uses green, blue, and red-orange terra cotta whereas the Illinois Oil structure limits its usage to blue and white. In contrast, the Fort Armstrong Hotel uses white terra cotta exemplifying predominantly classical motifs, a real divergence from the Fort Theatre and Illinois Oil. One should notice the extreme and unending geometric decorative elements on the Illinois Oil Building -- a trademark of the Art Deco style of architecture. This was an attempt at modernism with the use of a streamlined affect. The style drew characteristics from the

added sentences

more austere side of Art Nouveau, Cubism, American Indian art, and the Bauhaus movements. Regarded as a classical style, although not readily thought of as such, its lines were generally symmetrical rather than asymmetrical and were rectilinear rather than curvilinear. Generally, the term Art Deco is more applicable to the decorative arts; however, architecturally, a reasonable number of buildings were built within these parameters. Particularly in Florida and California, many extant Art Deco buildings remain.

The idea for the Illinois Oil Building structure came from Frank Welch after returning from a trip to Paducah, KY. He noted a fire station in Paducah and came back to Rock Island with a picture of it. The architectural firm of Cervin and Horn was selected to build an office building to house the oil company and its related businesses. Cervin and Horn are noted for such structures as the Safety Building, the Fort Theatre, the Masonic Temple, and Servus Rubber. Certainly, this long- and upstanding architectural firm should be long remembered for the work they did on this structure, making the Illinois Oil Company Building even more notable for landmark designation.

Too, with the emphasis on "sense of place" in the historic preservation movement today, the Illinois Oil Building is one that Rock Islanders and Quad Citians alike can readily recognize. Being on the approach to the Arsenal bridge, this structure is easily identifiable and visually familiar to a very large percentage of the populace at large.

Finally, the Illinois Oil Building stands as a beautiful monument to utilitarian/functional architecture. Not only is it significant architecturally, but it houses a working and viable business. At the time it was built, nine gas pumps were operated by personnel who promptly filled the patrons' cars with petrol. Although this aspect of the business is no more, the company still employs 50 people and continues to give back to the community economically.

For the many reasons listed above -- the social heritage/economic viability to the community, the significance of the art deco architectural style, the architects: Cervin and Horn, its offering to the "sense of place" movement as being readily visible, and its significance as a utilitarian structure -- the Rock Island Preservation Society proudly nominates the Illinois Oil Company Building as a unique and outstanding structure and requests local landmark designation.