

HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION
DEMOLITION AND RELOCATION PERMITS
MAY 4, 2022
GF-2022-050222
1100 EAST 5TH STREET

PROPOSAL

Demolish a compound Quonset hut warehouse erected on or moved to the lot ca. 1948.

ARCHITECTURE

1100 East 5th Street is an example of a rare multiple Quonset hut composed of five connected barrel-arch units, all of corrugated steel paneling. Roll-up metal bay doors provide access at the vault ends. A corrugated metal hood protects the western entrance, while the eastern portion of the site has been redeveloped into outdoor event space.

Quonset huts are generally accepted as a historically significant building typology within preservation industry standards. An example context statement from The City of Los Angeles describes Quonsets “as an important World War II-era building type and method of construction, notable for its simple construction, distinctive shape, and use of prefabricated materials, and flexible interior plan. Intact examples represent the design and development of a low-cost and highly-versatile structure by the U.S. Navy for military use during World War II, and its adaptive reuse for housing and other uses during the postwar years.”¹ In a 2003 historic thematic resource survey for the City of Fort Collins, Colorado, principal historian Adam Thomas notes that “[The Quonset hut] is one of the most unique American building forms ever created.”² “[It] was an engineering marvel,” asserts John Vara in the *Journal of Light Construction*. “It could be shipped anywhere and...assembled by a 10-man crew in one day, using only hand tools. Throughout World War II, the Quonset became the standard military utility building of all regions and climates...At the end of the war, [...] Quonsets were everywhere, from homes to churches and auto dealerships [...] Quonsets are now a rarity.”³

In 2015, Preservation Austin honored 1100 East 5th Street with a Merit Award for outstanding rehabilitation and adaptive reuse by Thoughtbarn and Delineate Studio. “Austin’s most iconic Quonset hut on East Fifth might well have been demolished for parking, or an apartment complex had not a development team led by Richard Kooris and Dennis McDaniel stepped in to transform it into Fair Market, hands down one of the most stunning event spaces in the city.”⁴

RESEARCH

The warehouse at 1100 East 5th Street was constructed in 1948-1949 by Ben H. Powell, Jr. Powell purchased the land from the nearby railway, which had previously used the lot for storage,⁵ and rented it out to the Steck Company. Powell, son of a prominent Austin judge, became an attorney after attending Virginia Military Institute, the University of Texas, and Harvard University in the 1930s,⁶ then worked in military defense in Washington before returning to Austin in 1945 to practice law.⁷ As a lieutenant colonel in the Army, Powell received a Legion of Merit award for his work in internal security, War Department policy development, and protection of foreign P. O. W.s.⁸ Powell later became general counsel, then executive vice president and director of Houston engineering firm Brown & Root, as well as the chairman of the American National Bank of Austin.⁹ Ben Powell, Jr. and his wife, Kitty King Powell, began the Powell Foundation in 1967 to provide charitable funds to the arts, education, conservation and healthcare.¹⁰

When considering warehouse construction, Powell’s background in the Armed Services likely led him to the economic

¹ City of Los Angeles Office of Historic Resources, 2015. “Sub-theme: The Quonset Hut, 1941-1965.” Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement.

² Thomas, Adam. 2003. *Soldiers of the Sword, Soldiers of the Ploughshare: Quonset Huts in the Fort Collins Urban Growth Area Historical Context and Survey Report*. Advance Planning Department, City of Fort Collins, Colorado.

³ Vara, John. 2010. *A Brief History of Quonset Huts*. www.jlconline.com/how-to/roofing/a-brief-history-of-quonset-huts_o

⁴ “News.” Delineate Studio. <http://www.delineatestudio.com/newsupdates/2015/12/10/delineate-studio-project-fair-market-part-of-2015-preservation-austins-merit-awards>

⁵ “Other 7 -- no Title.” 1946. *The Austin Statesman* (1921-1973), Feb 22, 7.

⁶ “Ben Powell Takes Honors at V. M. I.” 1936. *The Austin American* (1914-1973), Jun 21, 1.

⁷ “Ben Powells have Guests: Family to Visit for Holidays.” 1941. *The Austin Statesman* (1921-1973), Dec 23, 12.

⁸ “Col. Powell Arrives in Time for Holidays.” 1945. *The Austin American* (1914-1973), Dec 30, 2.

⁹ “2 Austinites New Directors of Federated.” 1975. *The Austin American Statesman* (1973-1980), Jun 29, 1.

¹⁰ <https://www.powellfoundation.org/history>

wartime surplus from Central Texas military bases, the Austin-based Tex Building Equipment Co.,¹¹ or Houston-based National Steel Products when considering warehouse construction. Survey L.A.'s thematic context statement on Quonset huts and architect-historian team Chris Chiei and Dr. Julie Decker's *Quonset: Metal Living for a Modern Age* define clues to 1100 E. 5th Street's potential origin. "Private manufacturers continued to produce Quonset huts in a limited capacity after the war...for housing, storage, commercial, or light industry uses. However, the United States military found itself with a surplus of Quonset huts which it sold to the public for approximately \$1,000 apiece. These huts were adapted for a wide variety of everyday peacetime uses and functioned as housing, churches, supermarkets, barns, retail spaces, restaurants, garages, and industrial factories."¹²

The "Multiple Utility Building," measuring 82 feet by 102 feet, could be modified to extend in set increments in both directions. "It accomplished larger spans by introducing a rectilinear steel frame upon which arched roof segments were joined one to the other with low, sloping valley gutters," remark Chiei and Decker. "It was possible to add an endless number of modules in increments of 61'-6" in one direction and 100' in the other...In the years following World War II, National Steel Products exceeded this by construct[ed] their Houston headquarters from an assemblage of units covering more than five full acres.¹³ Thus, it is possible that the structure at 1100 E. 5th Street was purchased from a nearby military installation or from a nearby manufacturer, then erected on-site.

The building originally housed the Steck Company's Warehouse No. 1 and remained in use until the company's purchase and dissolution in the mid-1960s. According to the Hart Graphics collection at the Austin History Center:

The Steck Company began as the Christian publishing house Firm Foundations. Firm Foundations started in the late 19th century in Austin and published weekly bulletins and songbooks for the Church of Christ. In 1912, E. L. Steck took over the printing side of the business from his father and founded the E. L. Steck Company, which continued to publish works for Firm Foundations well into the 1920s. In 1921 they dropped the 'E. L.,' changing the name to the Steck Company, and continued to prosper as a general line commercial printing company selling printing, lithographing and stationery to cities, schools, counties, banks and commercial accounts in Texas. In 1928 the Steck Company facilities moved to 9th and Lavaca streets, where it prospered for many years. In 1937, it produced the first four-color process on newsprint in the U.S.¹⁴

Steck's business soared after World War II, becoming a major employer in Austin as GIs returned home. In a 2004 zoning change report for E. L. Steck's landmarked home, Steck—Austin's first city manager—incorporated the Steck Company in 1932, served as president until 1947, and then chairman of the board, building the company into one of the largest publishing concerns in the Southwest.¹⁵ The 1928 Steck Company headquarters at 9th and Lavaca are still extant, although modified; other known midcentury production and warehouse facilities on Steck Avenue and Shoal Creek Boulevard have been demolished.¹⁶ After the Steck Company changed hands and moved its facilities elsewhere, the building at 1100 E. 5th Street served a variety of businesses, including a sailboat company, an office furniture warehouse, a rock and crystal store, and an event space.

PROPERTY EVALUATION

The 2016 East Austin Historic Resource Survey lists the property as not eligible for local designation, as it does not recognize the Quonset hut as a distinct building style. The 2005 Saltillo District survey lists the property as a medium priority.

Designation Criteria—Historic Landmark

- 1) The building is more than 50 years old.
- 2) The building appears to retain high to moderate integrity. The bay doors have been replaced, though the openings themselves do not appear to have been modified to an extent compromising the building's overall integrity of form; the leftmost bay door appears to have been extended to the ground from the original loading-dock height to allow accessibility from the street. Wood bay door panels have been removed, though they may not have been original to the

¹¹ "Quonset." 1946. The Austin American (1914-1973), Apr 21, 17.

¹² City of Los Angeles Office of Historic Resources, 2015. "Sub-theme: The Quonset Hut, 1941-1965." Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement.

¹³ Chiei, Chris and Julie Decker. Quonset: Metal Living for a Modern Age, <http://quonsethuts.org>

¹⁴ Hart Graphics, Inc. Records, 1915-2003. Austin History Center. https://txarchives.org/aushc/finding_aids/00169.xml

¹⁵ Sadowsky, Steve. "Zoning Change Review Sheet: C14H-04-0007." Apr 26, 2004.

¹⁶ Hudgins, Matt. "Hart Graphics Site for Sale." Austin Business Journal, Apr 29, 2001.

<https://www.bizjournals.com/austin/stories/2001/04/30/story4.html>

building.




- 3) Properties must meet two criteria for landmark designation (LDC §25-2-352). Staff has evaluated the property and determined that it may meet two criteria:
- a. Architecture. The building is a good example of a multi-bay Quonset hut and may be the last remaining five-bay specimen in Austin. The Quonset hut was originally intended to be a temporary building type, but this particular building has gained recognition over the years in Austin. Preservation Austin named it “Austin's most iconic Quonset hut” in 2015 when its rehabilitation received the organization’s Merit Award.
 - b. Historical association. The property is associated with Lt. Col. Ben H. Powell, Jr, and with the Steck Company, a major influence on Austin’s economy during the time of its construction. The original 1928 Steck Company headquarters at 9th and Lavaca are extant, though the production building’s fenestration has been somewhat modified. No other midcentury Steck warehouse facilities exist. E. L. Steck’s 1921 home at 305 E. 34th Street is landmarked, though it is more strongly associated with Steck’s development of the E.L. Steck Addition in the 1920s.
 - c. Archaeology. The property was not evaluated for its potential to yield significant data concerning the human history or prehistory of the region.
 - d. Community value. The property does not appear to possess a unique location, physical characteristic, or significant feature that contributes to the character, image, or cultural identity of the city, the neighborhood, or a particular demographic group; however, the Commission may consider the building’s role as an example of Austin’s changing identity as development bridged the gap between World War II and the postwar commercial boom.
 - e. Landscape feature. The property is not a significant natural or designed landscape with artistic, aesthetic, cultural, or historical value to the city.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

If the Commission feels that the warehouse’s associations are individually significant, along with its clear architectural merit, consider initiation of historic zoning. Should the Commission decide against initiation, approve the application upon receipt of a City of Austin Documentation Package.

LOCATION MAP



-  SUBJECT TRACT
-  PENDING CASE
-  ZONING BOUNDARY

1" = 250'

NOTIFICATIONS

CASE#: GF 22-050222

LOCATION: 1100 E 5TH STREET

This product is for informational purposes and may not have been prepared for or be suitable for legal, engineering, or surveying purposes. It does not represent an on-the-ground survey and represents only the approximate relative location of property boundaries.

This product has been produced by CTM for the sole purpose of geographic reference. No warranty is made by the City of Austin regarding specific accuracy or completeness.



PROPERTY INFORMATION

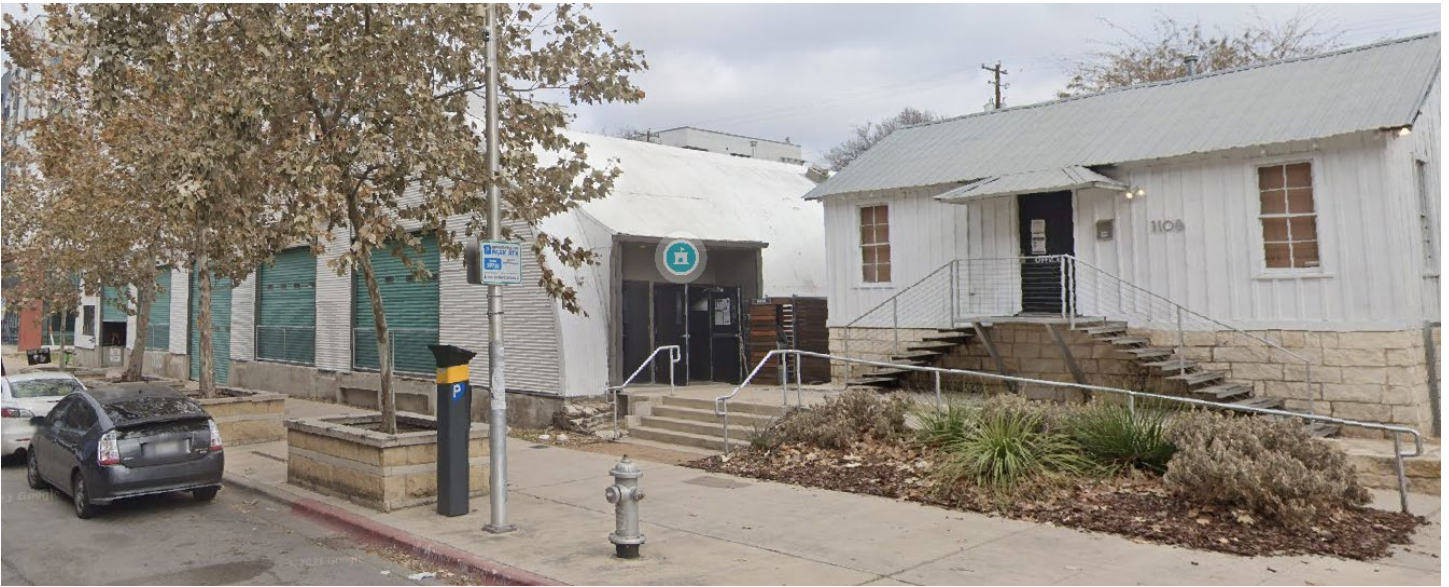
Photos



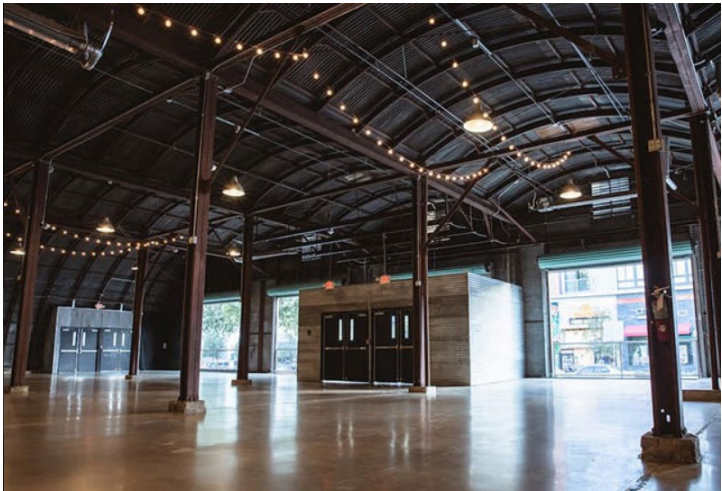
Google Street View, 2022



<https://www.pinterest.com/fairmarketatx>, n.d.



Street View showing the eastern entrance, added concrete steps, and bay door heights.



"A one-of-a-kind...unique community space housed in an iconic Quonset-hut-style building and surrounded by the vibrant character of East Austin." <https://www.austintexas.org/listings/fair-market/7331/#details>. Interior photographs showing existing structural components from <https://vimeo.com/672366943> and <https://www.thoughtbarn.com/projects/fair-market/>



Pre-rehab, the building was TOPS Furniture Warehouse and Nature's Treasures. <https://www.loopnet.com/property/1100-E-5th-St-Austin-TX-78702/48453-191769/>

Water service permit, 1948

OWNER Ben H. Powell Estate ADDRESS 1100 E. 5th St.
 PLAT 22 LOT 1,2,3,4,5 BLK 4
 SUBDIVISION Taylor Sub. of O.L. 2
 OCCUPANCY office
 BLD PERMIT # 107386 DATE 3-27-68 OWNERS ESTIMATE \$1,500.00
 CONTRACTOR owner NO. OF FIXTURES no
 WATER TAP REC # -- SEWER TAP REC # --
 remodel exist com. bldg.

Building permit, 1968



1958 aerial photograph showing proximity to rail lines and previously constructed storage warehouses



Steck Company headquarters at 9th and Lavaca, 2022, Google Street View



Douglass, Neal. [The Steck Co. building], photograph, March 21, 1948; (<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph62787/m1/1/>: accessed April 28, 2022), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <https://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Austin History Center, Austin Public Library.



Douglass, Neal. Steck Company Building, photograph, January 4, 1950; (<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph63103/m1/1/>: accessed April 27, 2022), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <https://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Austin History Center, Austin Public Library.

Ben Powell Takes Honors At V. M. I.

Ben Powell, Jr., only son of Judge and Mrs. Ben Powell and graduate this year from Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Va., received at graduation the highest award for scholarship available to students of the Institute, the Jackson-Hope medal. It is interesting to recall that Tom Martin Davis, son of Mr. and Mrs. Louis Davis of Austin, also received this award on graduation from the school several years ago.

Capt. Powell also was one of two seniors who graduated with distinguished honors from the Reserve Officers Training camp. He received his commission as second lieutenant of the Reserve corps, U. S. A., this automatically replacing his college rank of captain.

Judge and Mrs. Powell and their nephew, Edward Rather, of Sugarland, attended commencement, accompanied by Lieut. Powell. They have gone to Washington for a visit of several days and will visit relatives in Richmond, Va., and stop in several places of interest en route to Pensacola, Fla., from which point they expect to follow the Gulf coast to Austin, by way of New Orleans, Houston and Huntsville.

Lieut. Powell plans to enter the University of Texas in September to work toward his degree in law. The family will reach Austin about July first.

Ben Powells Have Guests Family to Visit For Holidays

Holiday guests of Judge and Mrs. Ben Powell will be Judge Powell's parents, Misses Inez and Louise Powell of Huntsville and Dr. Anna Powell of Denton; and Mrs. Powell's brothers, John Henry Rather of Huntsville and Edward Rather and Mrs. Rather of Sugarland, and her nephew, Edward Rather, Jr., of Houston.

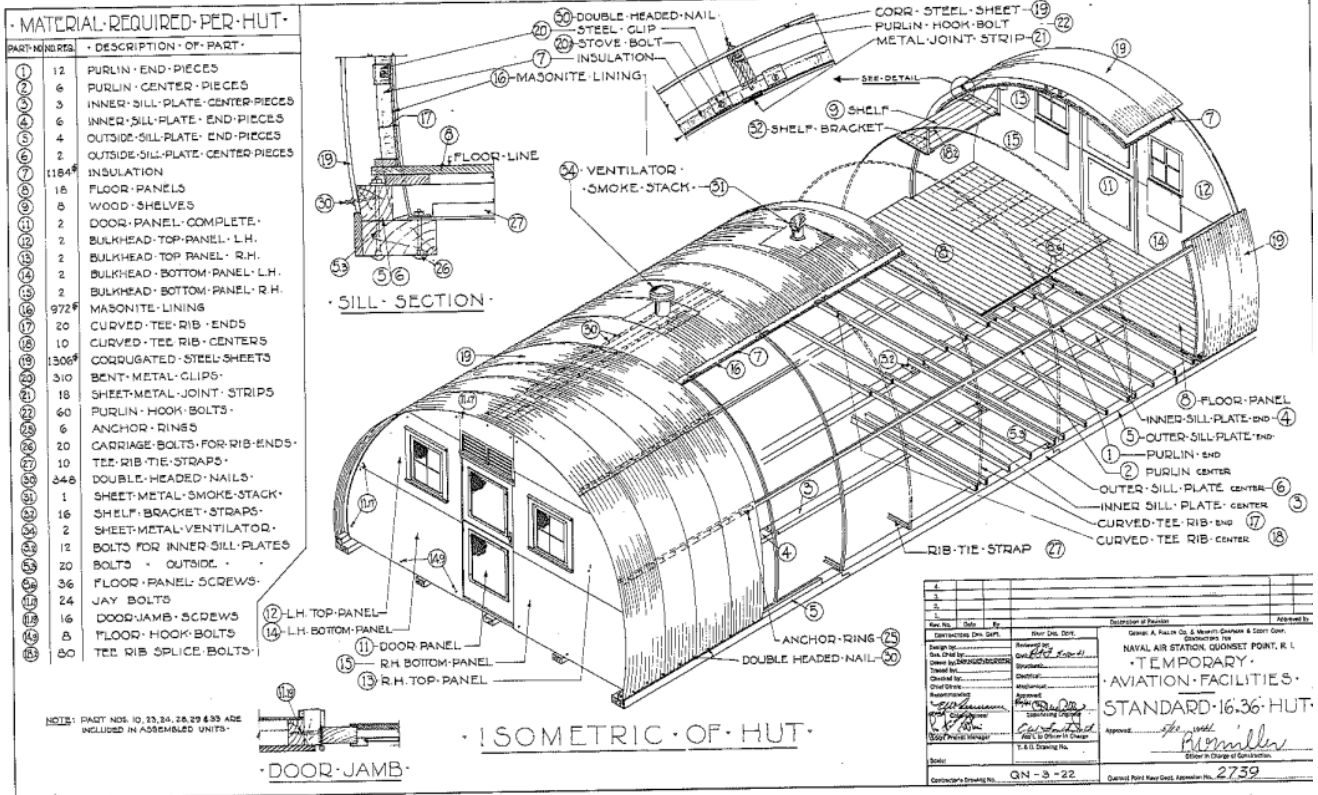
Their little granddaughter, Nancy Duncan Powell of Washington, D. C., will also be with them for Christmas. Her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Ben Powell, Jr., will be unable to come since Mr. Powell is engaged in defense work in Washington.

Miss Mary Rather, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Rather and niece of Mrs. Ben Powell, will remain in Washington in charge of Lyndon Johnson's office.

The members of the family who are in Washington will spend Christmas together.

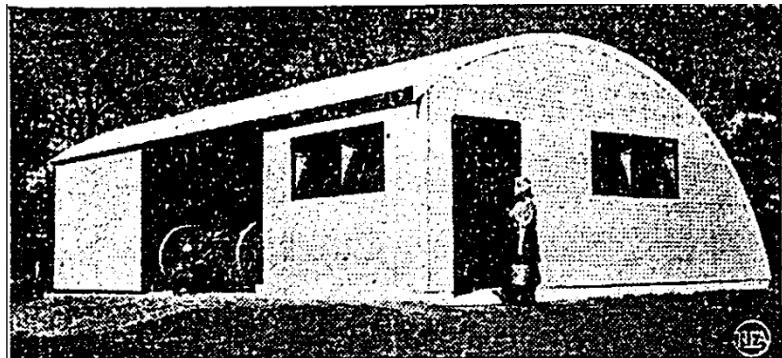
"Ben Powell Takes Honors at V. M. I." 1936. *The Austin American* (1914-1973), Jun 21, 1.

"Ben Powells have Guests: Family to Visit for Holidays." 1941. *The Austin Statesman* (1921-1973), Dec 23, 12.



“Quonset Hut Layouts,”

<https://www.history.navy.mil/content/dam/museums/Seabee/Online%20Reading%20Room/Manuals%20and%20Publications/Manuals/Quonset%20Huts/QH%20layouts.pdf>



**Mrs. Ben Powell, Jr.,
To Return to Arlington**

Mrs. Ben Powell, Jr., and daughters, Nancy Duncan and Marian Rather, will leave Tuesday for Arlington, Va., after a month's visit in Texas. Maj. Ben Powell, Jr., is now on the staff of Provost Marshal Gen Allen Gullion in Washington, D. C.

They visited his parents, Judge and Mrs. Ben Powell in Austin, and her parents, Judge and Mrs. John M. Corbett in Bay City.

QUONSET BARN—The "Quonset 24" utility building of many war uses has now been converted to the ways of peace, and especially for services on the farm. The packaged, easy-to-erect all-metal structure, shown above, manufactured at the Great Lakes Steel corporation's Detroit plant, is described as ideal for farm tools, implements and vehicles or, with open front, as a barn for farm animals.

"Mrs. Ben Powell, Jr., to Return to Arlington." 1943. *The Austin American* (1914-1973), Aug 08, 1.

"QUONSET BARN." 1945. *The Austin American* (1914-1973), Nov 04, 10.

Col. Powell Arrives in Time for Holidays

Lt. Col. Benjamin H. Powell, Jr., who has just completed more than five years of army service, reached home in time to be with his wife and two daughters and his parents for the holidays. He has resumed his law practice in the firm of Powell, Wirtz, Rauhut and Gideon, in which he was engaged for a year before he entered the military service in the early autumn of 1941.

Col. Powell was awarded the Legion of Merit for outstanding service, and the medal of this order was pinned on his uniform by Maj. Gen. Lerch, provost marshal general. The citation, on which the Legion of Merit was bestowed, recorded his service of "significant responsibility in the office of the provost marshal general, particularly as assistant to the director and as executive, internal security division, and later executive assistant to the provost marshal general. Lt. Col. Powell was responsible in important measure for the origin and development of many basic war department policies and programs designed to provide for the internal security of the nation, the protection of American prisoners of war in enemy custody, and the utilization and re-education of enemy prisoners of war . . . With uncommon perspective, a remarkable talent for analyzing intricate policy problems, and sound judgment, he served as one of the provost marshal general's most trusted advisers in determining major questions of policy and in planning for the future . . . He was responsible to a substantial degree for the successful accomplishment of the missions of the provost marshal general."

Col. Powell also received a letter from Gen. Brehon Somervell, commanding general of the army service forces, in appreciation of



Lt. Col. Ben H. Powell, Jr., of Austin, center, who has just returned home after more than five years of army service, is shown here as he received the Legion of Merit medal at the hands of Maj. Gen. Lerch, provost marshal general of the United States, while Brig. Gen. Bryan, deputy provost marshal general, reads the citation on which it was awarded. Col. Powell, who reached home in time for the holidays, has resumed his law practice in the firm of which his father, Judge Ben H. Powell, is the senior member.

his military service.

His duties in the service carried him throughout the United States, and through the European theater of war, to Japan, Korea, China and most of the islands of the Pacific.

Col. Powell and Mrs. Powell, the former Miss Kitty King Corbett

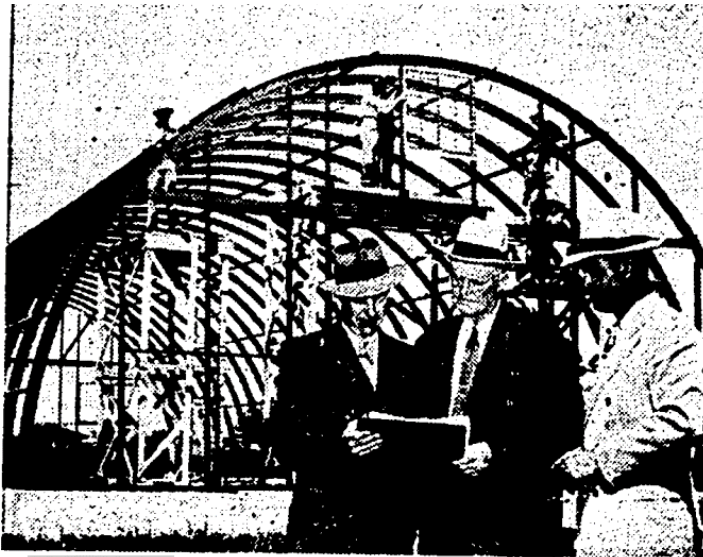
of Bay City, have two daughters. He is the son of Judge and Mrs. Ben H. Powell of Austin. Col. Powell graduated from VMI, with the bachelor of arts degree; then received his bachelor of law degree from the University of Texas, and his master's degree in law from Harvard.

"Col. Powell Arrives in Time for Holidays." 1945. *The Austin American* (1914-1973), Dec 30, 2.

Texas and New Orleans Railroad company, construct open shed, 1100 East Fifth street, \$1,175.

Texas and New Orleans Railroad com-

"Other 7 -- no Title." 1946. *The Austin Statesman* (1921-1973), Feb 22, 7.



QUONSET—J. E. McDonald, State Commissioner of Agriculture (center), Carl Stautz (left) and Jim Pace, members of the firm of Tex Building and Equipment Company, distributors for Central Texas, inspecting plans of a Quonset "40" building (40 feet by 100 feet) being erected at the corner of Dallas Highway and Airport Boulevard. Commissioner McDonald said, "Here is a great new aid to agriculture . . . an easy-to-erect all-purpose building to serve numerous farm, ranch and warehouse needs. "The Quonset helped provide a quick and efficient answer to the problem of speeding military construction throughout the world, and now," said Mr. Pace, sales manager, "Quonsets are entering the service of American industry."

there's no end to the list of uses for the **"QUONSET 20"**

Drying Room	Powerhouse
Dry Kiln	Print Shop
Dwelling	Produce Stand
Factory	Radio Station
Farm Storage	Recreation Hall
Feed Storage	Restaurant
Feed Store	School
Furniture Shop	Shoop Shaker
Garage	Show Room
Greenhouse	Silverware Culture
Hatchery	Ski Lodge
Hog House	Slaughter House
Hunting Lodge	Stock Shed
Kennel	Storage Shed
Laboratory	Summer Cottage
Laundry	Tenant Farmhouse
Leather Storage	Tin Shop
	Tire Storage
	Warehouse
	Welding Shop

This partial list of recent uses to which the "Quonset 20" has been put suggests its great versatility and adaptability. Let's talk over your building problem.

There has never been a building so useful for so many purposes as the "Quonset 20." The list of jobs it does is a long one, growing longer every day.

The "Quonset 20" is a clear-span building 20 feet wide by any desired length—24', 36', 48', etc. Built entirely of steel, it is substantial, durable, fire-resistant and easily maintained. Yet construction is fast, economical and unusually

flexible, because the steel sheathing and interior building materials can be nailed to the "Quonset's" Stran-Steel frame . . . just as you nail to wood.

Proved in war, improved for peace, the "Quonset 20" is a better building investment from every angle. Call or write us, and we'll gladly give you all the details:



"Quonset" buildings are products of Stran-Steel Division, Great Lakes Steel Corp.

Tex Building Equipment Co.

O. Box 1170, Austin

Phone 2-4121

"QUONSET." 1946. *The Austin American* (1914-1973), Apr 21, 17.

"Display Ad 57 -- no Title." 1947. *The Austin Statesman* (1921-1973), Jan 02, 17.

Other substantial permits issued at the office of City Building Inspector John C. Eckert since July 1 include:

Ben Powell Jr., quonset multiple building for warehouse, 1100 East Fifth Street, \$25,000.

C H Brownlee stone veneer res-

"Apartments Scheduled Near UT." 1948. *The Austin Statesman* (1921-1973), Jul 08, 18.

SAILBOAT SALE!



For You And The Kids
Mon., Tues., Wed. Only

(Used Boats Also Priced to Clear)

SUNFISH — The most popular sailboat in Austin and the world. Fun for all members of the family **\$49500**

SNIPER — World's most popular racing boat — two-man — stable — 16 ft **\$149500**

INTERLAKE — For racing and family sailing. Extra large cockpit. Austin's most popular sloop, 18 ft. **\$199500**

FLYING JUNIOR — An international class boat, ideal for couples or as junior trainee, 14 ft. **\$89500**

TEMPEST — The most exciting boat of all. Designed at the invitation of IRU as the boat to replace the Star in the Olympics. Self-bailing cockpit and keel keep Tempest from swamping or capsizing. Easy to sail **\$349500**

FLYING SCOT — Wonderful family boat with large cockpit. Very stable. Large fleets make Scot a fine racing boat. Has been selected by the Gulf Coast Yachting Assn. as the club class-boat **\$269500**

SAILBOAT SALES CO.

WAREHOUSE 1100 EAST 5TH

GR 6-3009

"Display Ad 4 -- no Title." 1968. *The Austin Statesman* (1921-1973), May 13, 3.

2 Austinites new directors of Federated

Longtime prominent Austin businessman William C. Milstead has been elected a director of Federated Capital Corp. of Houston, according to the company's president, Nelson Works.

Works also announced the election of Ben H. Powell Jr., chairman of American National Bank of Austin, as an advisory director of Federated.

Milstead is a director of the American National Bank, a Federated member bank, and chairman of Austin Industries, Inc., an Austin-based building products and services company.

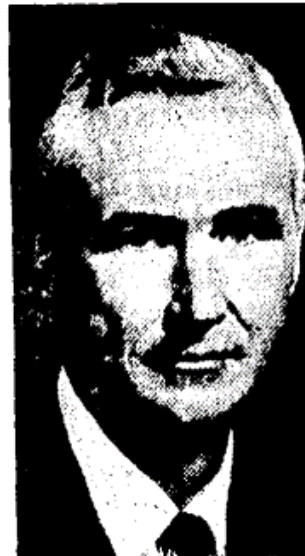
He is a native of Austin and an alumnus of Rice University. Milstead is also a director of First Federal Savings and Loan in Austin.

Powell is also executive vice president, director and general counsel of Brown & Root, Inc. of Houston.

Born in Huntsville, Powell is a graduate of the Virginia Military Institute, University of Texas Law School and Harvard Law School.

He had been a director of American National Bank of Austin since 1959 before his election as chairman earlier this year.

Federated Capital Corp., with assets of more than \$1.1 billion, is Texas' seventh largest multi-bank holding company.



WILLIAM C. MILSTEAD
New Federated director



BEN H. POWELL JR.
Named by Federated

"2 Austinites New Directors of Federated." 1975. *The Austin American Statesman* (1973-1980), Jun 29, 1.