



## The Merchants Mutual Insurance Company Building

2317-19 Strand

Galveston, Texas

### Color Photo – restored building?

#### History

Designed in the French Renaissance style by Donald McKenzie and Fritz Weinherner, the building with its highly decorative iron front is centrally located in Galveston's Historic Downtown and has been featured in many articles, books and film about Galveston. Its first description in Flake's Daily Bulletin in 1869 holds today. "It is unlike any other in external appearance ... The front is of iron and brick, the casting being perhaps a little more ornamental than usual. The same remark applies to the iron columns which support the ground floor and the heavy framework above." The Building burned on December 3, 1869 in the Moro Castle fire and was rebuilt in 1870 with wood inserts in its exterior walls that cause a burning building to collapse inward. The distinctive Mansard roof was the only one to survive the 1900 storm, likely because the fourth floor was built sturdily to hold huge water cisterns to collect rainwater and "remit it through pipes to stands and closets on every floor".

The Merchants Mutual Insurance Building was a proud and prominent feature of "Insurance Row", the name given to the south side of the Strand between 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> streets. The Company was capitalized with \$250,000 to write fire and marine insurance and many of the leaders of Galveston including W.L. Moody, H. Kempner, George Sealy, Leon Blum and M. Kopperl served as Directors. Later, the building was owned by Halff, Weiss and Company, a wholesale clothing company that served "Texas, West Louisiana, New Mexico, Arkansas and the Indian territory." As Galveston declined in importance as a business center, the Building deteriorated. From 1941 to 1977, it hit its low point serving as a furniture warehouse with its front completely boarded. (photo?)