

HISTORIC AND DESIGN REVIEW COMMISSION

May 06, 2015

Agenda Item No: 2

HDRC CASE NO: 2015-154
COMMON NAME: Maverick Plaza
ADDRESS: 345 S ALAMO / 418 VILLITA ST
LEGAL DESCRIPTION: NCB 130 ALL OF BLK
ZONING: D H HS RIO-3
CITY COUNCIL DIST.: 1
DISTRICT: La Villita Historic District
LANDMARK: Weaving Building / Bolivar Hall
APPLICANT: Michael Beaty
OWNER: City of San Antonio Transportation and Capital Improvements Department
TYPE OF WORK: Maverick Plaza improvements
REQUEST:

The applicant is requesting conceptual approval to reconfigure the perimeter wall and entrance to Maverick Plaza in the La Villita Historic District.

APPLICABLE CITATIONS:

UDC Sec. 35-643. - Alteration, Restoration and Rehabilitation.

In considering an application for a certificate to alter, restore, rehabilitate, or add to a building, object, site or structure the historic and design review commission shall be guided by the following general standards of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation in addition to any specific design guidelines included in this article:

- (a) Every reasonable effort shall be made to adapt the property in a manner which requires minimal alteration of the building, structure, object, or site and its environment.
- (b) The distinguishing original qualities or character of a building, structure, object, or site and its environment, shall not be destroyed. The removal or alteration of any historic material or distinctive architectural features should be avoided when possible.
- (c) All buildings, structures, objects, and sites shall be recognized as products of their own time. Alterations that have no historical basis and which seek to create an earlier appearance shall be discouraged.
- (d) Changes which may have taken place in the course of time are evidence of the history and development of a building, structure, object, or site and its environment. These changes may have acquired significance in their own right, and this significance shall be recognized and respected.
- (e) Distinctive stylistic features or examples of skilled craftsmanship which characterize a building, structure, object, or site shall be kept where possible.
- (f) Deteriorated architectural features shall be repaired rather than replaced, wherever possible. In the event replacement is necessary, the new material should reflect the material being replaced in composition, design, color, texture, and other visual qualities. Repair or replacement of missing architectural features should be based on accurate duplications of features, substantiated by historical, physical, or pictorial evidence rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural elements from other buildings or structures.
- (g) The surface cleaning of structures shall be undertaken with the gentlest means possible. Sandblasting, high pressure washes and other cleaning methods that will damage the historic building's materials shall not be undertaken.
- (h) Every reasonable effort shall be made to protect and preserve archaeological resources affected by, or adjacent to, any project.
- (i) Contemporary design for alterations and additions to existing properties shall not be discouraged when such alterations and additions do not destroy significant historical, architectural or cultural material, and such design is compatible with the size, scale, color, material, and character of the property, neighborhood or environment.
- (j) Wherever possible, new additions or alterations to buildings, structures, objects, or sites shall be done in such a manner that if such additions or alterations were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the building, structure, object, or site would be unimpaired.

FINDINGS:

- a. In general, the proposed improvements will increase visibility between the plaza and the street edge and improve the pedestrian experience at this location.
- b. The present-day wall along South Alamo was constructed circa 1970 and is a non-contributing element to the La Villita Historic District. Its alteration or partial removal will not have a negative impact to the integrity of the district. This is consistent with UDC Section 35-643(i).

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval as submitted based on findings a and b.

CASE MANAGER:

Cory Edwards

Design Narrative

The proposed improvements to Maverick Plaza are intended to create a welcoming and strongly defined gateway, both to the Plaza itself and the whole of La Villita. Specific changes include the following:

- Portions of the existing stone courtyard wall are removed and additional gates, designed to match the existing metal gate and fence system of the Plaza, are added. The overall opened area expands from 24' to 72'. Four pairs of 6' wide gates, one 12' and two 6' lengths of metal fencing are arranged symmetrically with the major axis of the Plaza. Stone salvaged from partial demolition of the existing masonry wall is re-purposed to form columns between the new gates. Decorative metal trim and graphics over the gates reinforces the entry.
- In addition to the enhanced gateway, six 'window' openings trimmed in metal grillwork are added through the existing masonry wall. These openings add an additional element of invitation to the Plaza while maintaining the overall character of the courtyard wall.
- Two existing large planters outside the Plaza are reconfigured to create a stone seat-wall parallel to the Plaza wall. The ground plane between the planters and Plaza wall is re-paved in a combination of aggregate concrete and clay pavers, matching the materials of the Plaza beyond.
- The existing Maury Maverick statue is relocated on axis with and facing the Plaza.
- A new system of decorative lights, matching the existing period light fixtures in La Villita at both the gateway and the adjoining planters, completes the project.

* Also included in this package is "A History of Maverick Plaza" narrative which was commissioned by the owner for this project.



View from Alamo Street



View from Alamo Street



View from Alamo Street



View of entrance



View inside Maverick Plaza



View of entrance




existing plaza plan

Maverick Plaza
san antonio, texas



02.20.15
1504

BEATY PALMER ARCHITECTS



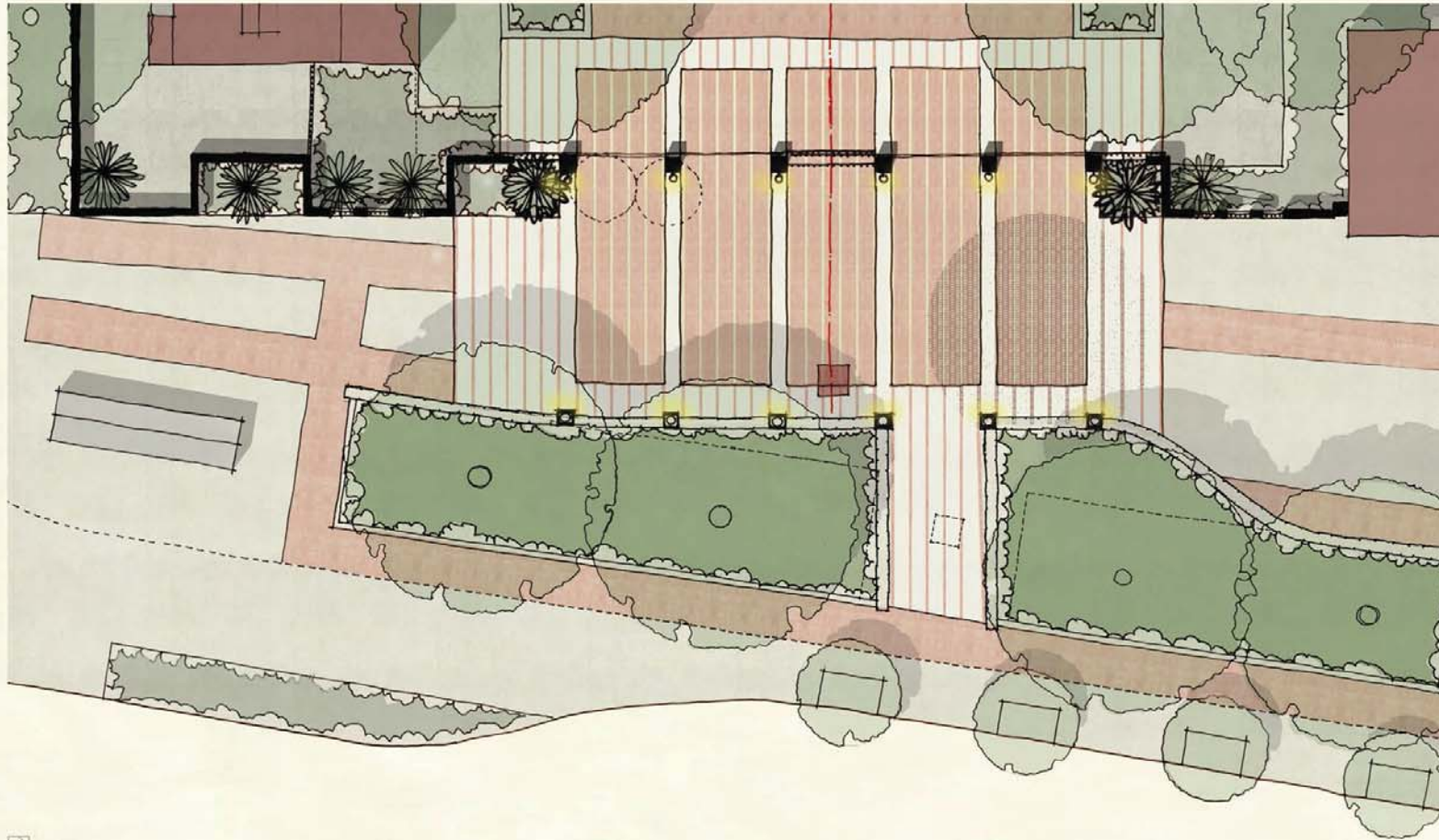

plaza plan

Maverick Plaza
san antonio, texas



02.20.15
1504

BEATY PALMER ARCHITECTS



enlarged plan

Maverick Plaza
san antonio, texas



02.20.15

1504

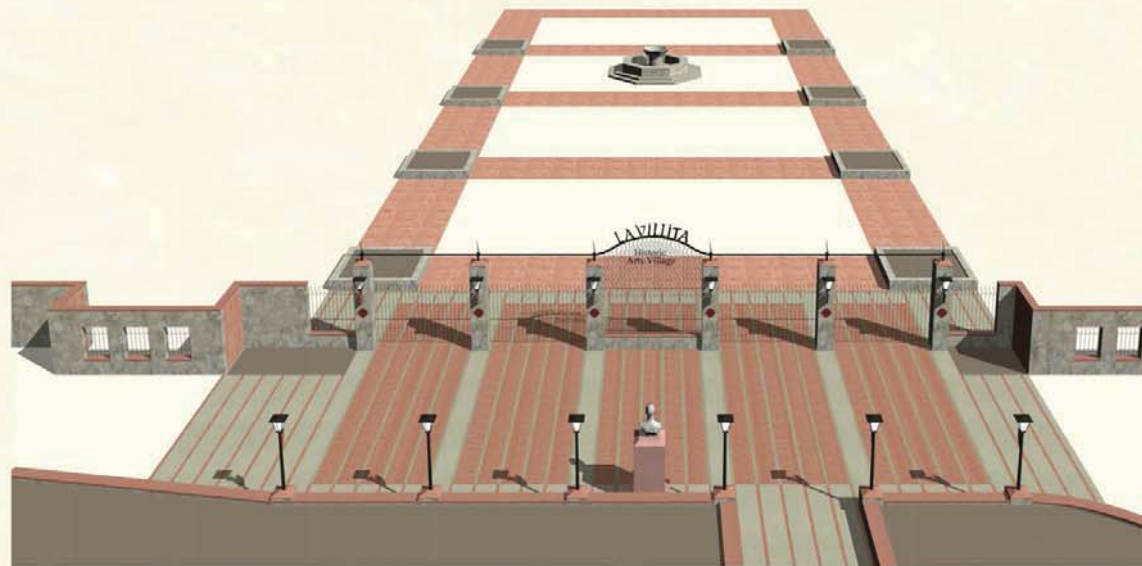
BEATY PALMER ARCHITECTS



Maverick Plaza
san antonio, texas

02.20.15
1504

BEATY PALMER ARCHITECTS



east elevation (gates closed)

Maverick Plaza
san antonio, texas



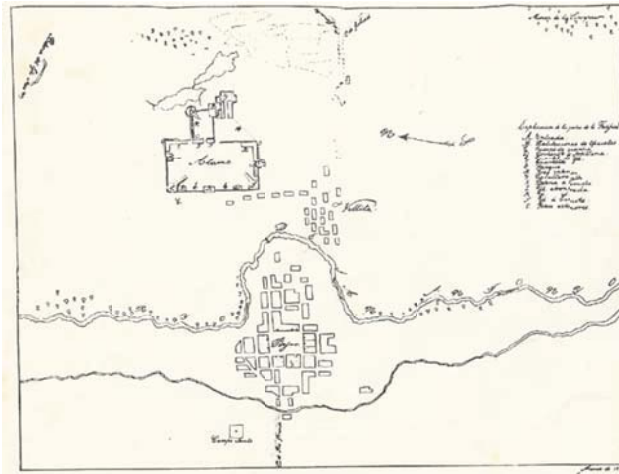
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BEATY PALMER ARCHITECTS

A History of Maverick Plaza

Compiled by Maria Watson Pfeiffer
March 2015

The property that comprises today's Maverick Plaza was part of lower farm lands (*Labor de Abajo*) of Mission San Antonio de Valero (the Alamo). The labor lay between the irrigation ditch (*acequia*) that served Mission Concepción to the south (generally following the Presa/St. Mary's Street right-of-way), the Alamo acequia or Acequia Madre to the east (in HemisFair Park), the Alameda to the north (today's Commerce Street), and the crossing of the Concepción and Alamo acequias to the south (the intersection of St. Mary's and S. Alamo streets). This fertile farm land was sparsely populated by squatters during the mission period. Mission San Antonio de Valero was secularized in the 1780s, and in the 1790s its lands were distributed to the mission Indians and refugees from the East Texas presidio of Adaes. The old mission was then occupied by a Spanish cavalry unit, and soldiers and their families began to build homes in the surrounding area, giving rise to the settlement that became known as La Villita. In 1835 and 1836 the area played a key role in the fight for Texas independence during both the Siege of Bexar and Battle of the Alamo. Mexican forces dug earthworks immediately south of Maverick Plaza at the site of today's Fairmount Hotel during the Battle of the Alamo.¹



Map of San Antonio de Bexar drawn by Ygnacio de Labastida, 1836
The Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin

Though a comprehensive title search has not been conducted on the Maverick Plaza property, certain parcels have been examined in depth. At least part of the land was owned by Clemente Delgado whose son, José Antonio, sold it to John W. Smith in 1839, only three years after the Battle of the Alamo. Smith served in 1837-1838 as San Antonio's first mayor under the Republic of Texas and then served two more terms in 1840-1841 and 1842-1844. After his death in 1845,

¹ Joseph H. Labadie et al. *La Villita Earthworks*, San Antonio: University of Texas at San Antonio Center for Archaeological Research, Survey Report 159, 1986, 12-17.

Smith's widow María de Jesus de Lee was forced to sell property to satisfy unpaid taxes. John Smith's La Villita land was subdivided and sold at public auction.²

John Farrell purchased lots 5 and 6 of John W. Smith's La Villita property for \$300 at a public sale in June 1852. The property was described as "recently occupied as a lumber yard and livery stable."³ Farrell conveyed the property to his wife in 1853, and after her death sold it to stable owner William D. Cotton in November 1856. Cotton held the property for only one year before selling it for \$335 to William R. Storey. The modest sales price indicates that there were few improvements on the property.⁴

The Northwest Corner of Nueva and Alamo Street

In 1859, only two years after William Storey purchased the lots at the northwest corner of Nueva and Alamo, the property became the subject of a complicated lawsuit between Storey and F.M. and Mary Julia Marshall. The district court case has not been examined, but it resulted in the court awarding the property fronting 26 varas on South Alamo to the Marshalls and the adjoining 14 vara lot to Storey. In total, the property fronted 111 feet (40 varas) on Alamo Street and was 122 feet (44 varas) deep. Both the Marshalls and Storey sold their shares to Friedrich (Fritz) Schenck in 1860.⁵

Little is known about Fritz Schenck, who is listed in the 1860 United States Federal census as the operator of a "beer saloon." It is not clear if Schenck operated his saloon on the Maverick Plaza property. No subsequent census listings have been found for Schenck, and he does not appear in the 1877 San Antonio city directory. The property Fritz Schenck purchased was again the subject of a lawsuit when his twelve heirs filed suit to partition his land. The partition was ordered and the property sold to P.H. Wolfe (more commonly and hereafter spelled Wolf) on December 29, 1888. The property remained in the Wolf family at least until 1940.⁶

Maverick Plaza: 1888-1961

The earliest Sanborn's Fire Insurance map depicting the area today encompassed by Maverick Plaza was published in October 1888, shortly before P.H. Wolf purchased the above-described

² Ibid, 17-18; Edward W. Heusinger, *A Chronology of Events in San Antonio*, San Antonio: Standard Printing Company, 1951, 79. In his discussion of land ownership, Labadie speculates that it is not clear if Clemente Delgado's son had legal title to the property when he sold it to Smith. Whatever the case, after Smith's death his La Villita land that included today's Maverick Plaza was designated lots 5 and 6. It is not clear how those lot numbers correspond to later subdivisions of NCB 114. Labadie indicates that "John W. Smith appears to have had legal title to Lot 6." John W. Smith died at Washington-on-the-Brazos while serving in the Republic of Texas Senate. His widow married James B. Lee.

³ BCDR K2:65-66 (June 15, 1852).

⁴ BCDR J2:449-452 (May 6, 1853); BCDR P1:56-57 (November 7, 1856); BCDR P1:57 (March 2, 1857).

⁵ Bexar County District Court, Case 1977; Bexar County Deed Records (BCDR) R1:674-675 (January 7, 1860); R1:673-674 (January 25, 1860).

⁶ BCDR 60:311-14 (April 9, 1889); BCDR 59:515-517 (December 29, 1888); BCDR 59:517-519 (December 29, 1888), BCDR 74:503-508 (November 18, 1889). Another district court case in Travis County involved a dispute between Mrs. F. Schenck and E. Hallman, et al (Travis County District Court case #8031). The deed to Alamo Cracker Manufacturing Company includes a detailed inventory of bakery equipment. The property included lots 5 and 6 which were subdivisions of land once owned by the estate of John W. Smith.

land. The land appears to have been vacant at that time. Adjoining Wolf's property on the remaining portion of today's Maverick Plaza were five small stone residences. Three faced on South Alamo Street (211, 213, and 219), one faced on Nueva (later numbered 325), and one faced on the street later named Womble Alley.⁷ These structures all appear on the 1873 bird's-eye-view map of San Antonio.



Sanborn's Fire Insurance Map, 1888, Sheet 13

321 and 325 East Nueva Street

The house at 325 East Nueva was the older of the two structures immediately west of P.H. Wolf's property. The date of the small stone house is not precisely known, but as noted, it appears on the 1873 bird's-eye-view map of the city. D.K. and Lula Newsum owned 325 East Nueva from 1909 until 1925, living there until they moved to Travis County. It was still standing in 1961, though an addition had been made to the front of the structure.⁸

A two-story brick structure was built at 321 East Nueva sometime between 1888 and 1892 on land acquired by Christina Lipps (also spelled Lips) in 1884. Lipps purchased some of the property from Martin Delgado, a grandson of the original landowner, Clemente Delgado. Another parcel was acquired by Lipps from adjoining owner S.S. Womble for whom Womble Alley was named. According to an affidavit filed by her daughter, Christina Lipps moved to the property in August 1890, and it is possible that this was the date of the building's completion. After Lipps's death in 1899, her children sold the property for \$2,500 to Adolph Haag. After a

⁷ Womble Alley, known for Kate Womble who operated a boarding house fronting on the street, was changed to King Philip V Street on October 12, 1939 (Ordinance #754, I-353:584).

⁸ BCDR 295:227 (January 5, 1909); 834:227-229 (July 6, 1925). The Newsum's purchased 325 E. Nueva from L.F. Ballay who had purchased it from Hortense E. Waller (BCDR 276:55, August 17, 1907). It should be noted that the reference given for Ballay's purchase in the deed records is not correct. The deed has not been located. The Newsum's sold the property to P.M. Fenley. Fenley immediately conveyed it to J.W. Webb and Fred C. Goeth (BCDR 837-838, July 9, 1925).

succession of owners, the building became the property of Jennie and William Campbell in 1914. The Campbells held the property at least until the 1930s.⁹

The full chain of title has not been researched, but by 1965 the property at 321 and 325 East Nueva was owned by Winifred Wolf, the widow of Henry Wolf, a son of P.H. Wolf. Mrs. Wolf also owned the adjoining property at the corner of Nueva and South Alamo streets (see discussion below). The Sanborn's Fire Insurance map updated to 1961 indicates that the structure at 321 East Nueva was demolished by 1961. The same map shows that additions had been made to the structure at 325 East Nueva which remained standing at that time. Winifred Wolf sold these properties to the Urban Renewal Agency of San Antonio in July 1965.¹⁰

P.H. Wolf and the Alamo Cracker Manufacturing Company

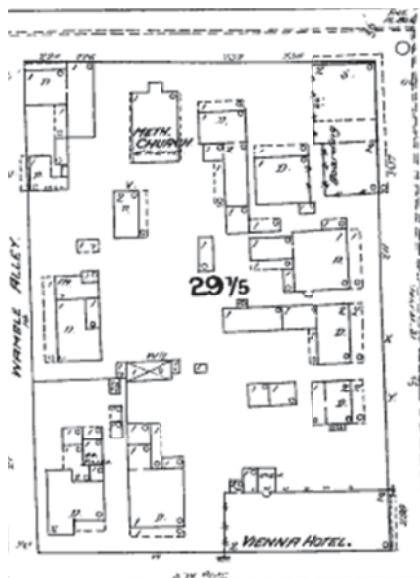
P.H. Wolf built a two-story brick structure to house his Alamo Cracker Manufacturing Company immediately after purchasing the property at the corner of South Alamo and East Nueva streets. The following year he conveyed the building, its equipment, and all furnishings to the company for \$24,000. The sale included the two-story building, all of the equipment and furnishings, and a stone house—possibly the structure at 317 South Alamo.

Wolf operated a bakery at this site for many years. He also began leasing at least part of the brick structure for residential purposes very soon after its completion. The 1892 Sanborn's map shows the Vienna Hotel operating in the building. It is known that in December 1892 Wolf leased the hotel and its furnishings to P.C. Ross for use as a boarding house. An inventory of the furnishings indicates that the hotel had twelve beds. As part of that lease, Wolf retained a portion of the property for his own use as a bakery. This included the rear dining room and kitchen, half of the cellar, and the yard on the north side of the hotel. In spite of this supporting evidence, no further information has been located about the Vienna Hotel or P.C. Ross.¹¹

⁹ Christina Lipps died on August 23, 1899. She was married to Albert Lipps who died in Mexico in about 1893. The couple was separated. Adolph Haag owned the property for three years before conveying it to August Limburger. The building was acquired by Charlotte J. Hewitt in 1905, sold by her to Mary H. Nooe in 1906, and conveyed by Mary Nooe's husband, John, to Jennie and William Campbell. See the following references for this chain of title. BCDR 33:425-426 (Womble to Lips, May 21, 1884); BCDR 33:196 (Delgado to Lips, February 21, 1884); BCDR 196:331-332 (Estate of Christina Lips, Affidavit of Heirship, August 15, 1901); BCDR 167:308 (Lips to Haag, September 14, 1899); BCDR 196:308-310 (Haag to Limburger, August 15, 1901); BCDR 252:424 (Hewitt to Nooe, October 24, 1906); 437:529-530 (Nooe to Campbell, May 8, 1914).

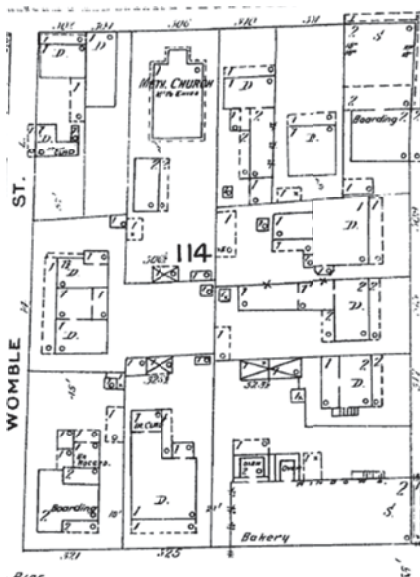
¹⁰ BCDR 5399:280-282 (July 29, 1965). Sanborn's Fire Insurance Map, updated to August 3, 1961.

¹¹ BCDR 94:421; 118:319-324. Wolf's property fronted 26 varas on Alamo Street. It included land that had been awarded both to F.M. and M.J. Marshall and William Storey as settlement of a District Court lawsuit (District Court Case 1977). The property included lots 5 and 6, which were subdivisions of land owned by the estate of John W. Smith. Ross paid Wolf \$100/month for a one-year lease with a three-year renewal option. The address of the Vienna Hotel was 321-323 S. Alamo.



Sanborn's Fire Insurance Map, 1892, Sheet 14

Wolf Baking Company continued to operate at 323 South Alamo at least until 1930. By that time P.H. Wolf had left the bakery to become the vice president of Jenner Manufacturing Company. Two of his sons, Edgar and Henry, continued to operate the bakery. The elder Wolf, now widowed, moved nearby to 637 South St. Mary's Street but continued to operate the Wolf Apartments on the bakery building's second floor.¹²



Sanborn's Fire Insurance Map, 1896, Sheet 27

¹² San Antonio city directory, various years. The City of San Antonio assessed property owners for the improvement of South Alamo Street twice during the 1920s. P.H. Wolf paid \$22,340 in 1927 and in 1929, \$16,755. In May 1929, the City Council approved a special assessment to widen Alamo Street between Market and Nueva Streets. P.H. Wolf's assessment totaled \$16,755 (City Council Minutes, May 17, 1929). The 1927 assessment was for unspecified "improvements," while the 1929 assessment was for street widening purposes

P.H. Wolf died on January 1, 1933, but his estate was not settled until 1936 when his property, except the bakery structure, was ordered partitioned among his children. By 1951 the ground floor of the bakery building was used as a repair shop for coin operated machines, and the upper floor was a rooming house. P.H. Wolf's son Henry eventually acquired full interest in the bakery property, which he owned at the time of his death in August 1961. The Sanborn's Fire Insurance map updated to 1961 indicates that the building had been demolished by that time. Winifred Wolf, Henry's widow, held the property until 1965 when it was acquired by the Urban Renewal Agency of San Antonio.¹³

309, 313, and 317 South Alamo Street

The small stone houses that stood at 309 and 313 South Alamo remained standing in 1904 but were demolished by 1914 when a large fireproof structure was built on the property. The building had stores on the ground floor and a hotel on the second floor. The stone house at 317 remained standing in 1924 but was demolished within ten years. It was replaced by an automobile repair shop that remained standing in the early 1960s.



Smith's Auto Repair, 317 S. Alamo Street
San Antonio Development Agency Collection
San Antonio Public Library, Texana/Genealogy Department

113 Womble Alley

The stone house 113-115 Womble Alley remained standing until c. 1920 when it was demolished for construction of a private 14-car garage and the Shepherd Laundries' plant. The garage and laundry abutted the west wall of the commercial structure at 307-315 South Alamo. Shepherd Laundries occupied the land that extended from South Alamo Street to Womble Alley and its official address was 313-315 South Alamo. The company was established by W.W. Shepherd, Sr. in Beaumont in 1890 and later expanded to Houston. Will Shepherd opened a branch in San Antonio in 1921. The company did business at the La Villita location for 45 years

¹³ BCDR 5399:280-282 (July 29, 1965).

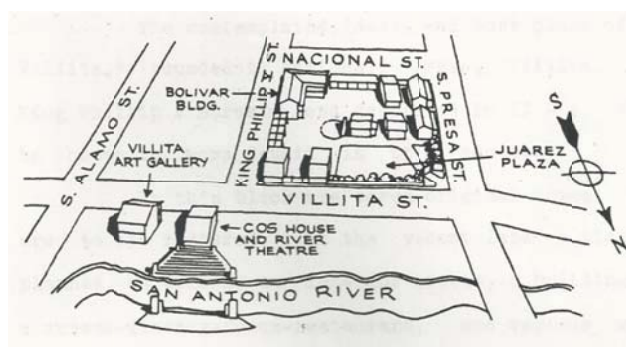
before the property was purchased by the Urban Renewal Agency of San Antonio in March 1966 for \$314,540.¹⁴



San Antonio Light, January 21, 1927, 16.

Plaza Nueva: 1969-1970

As La Villita transitioned from a residential to commercial and light industrial area in the early-to-mid 1900s, its historic buildings deteriorated and were either demolished or surrounded by concrete block and metal structures and additions. These conditions led Mayor Maury Maverick to call for restoration of La Villita, San Antonio's oldest neighborhood. Maverick's goal, as stated in the officially adopted La Villita Ordinance, was to recreate "the Little Spanish Village; for the promotion of understanding and peace between the American nations; to preserve Spanish and Southwestern Culture; to foster arts and crafts."¹⁵ The city acquired buildings within the initial area and utilized National Youth Administration (NYA) workers to complete the restoration under the supervision of project architect O'Neil Ford. La Villita was dedicated in May 1941.



Map of Original La Villita Restoration Area
The Villita Ordinance, October 12, 1939

The city remained committed to expanding La Villita beyond the NYA restoration area, which did not include buildings south of Nacional Street and east of King Philip V Street (formerly

¹⁴ Arthur J. Simpson (ed.), *The Century in Southwest Texas*, San Antonio: Southwest Publications, 1935, 196; BCDR 533:686-695 (March 23, 1966). At the time of the sale to the Urban Renewal Agency, Shepherd Laundries was owned by L.E. Travis, Sr. and P.A. Renton, Jr. and his wife, Carol.

¹⁵ *The Villita Ordinance*, adopted October 12, 1939 by the City of San Antonio.

Womble Alley). Some additional structures were purchased and renovated during the 1940s, but it was not until the middle-1960s that a larger area was acquired.¹⁶

In the years preceding HemisFair '68, the city's Urban Renewal Agency acquired entire blocks of real estate needed for the fair site. While most of the property purchased under the Civic Center Urban Renewal Plan (also referred to as Urban Renewal Area No. 5 or Project Tex. R-83) lay east of Alamo Street, the plan was enlarged in 1966 to include La Villita. The boundaries of La Villita were defined as the San Antonio River on the north, Martinez Street (later reconfigured as Durango Boulevard and today known as César Chavez Boulevard) on the south, Presa Street on the west, and Alamo Street on the east. While some property remained in private ownership, other parcels were purchased for the city through the urban renewal process.¹⁷

The city commissioned two studies of the La Villita area in the years leading up to HemisFair. The first, completed in April 1966 by Southwest Research Institute, studied the history and operations of La Villita and recommended use of both current and anticipated new facilities. Following that study, on April 27, 1967, the city council approved hiring architect Arthur Mathis, Jr. to prepare a master plan "for the rehabilitation and extension of La Villita Historic Area."¹⁸ The master plan was adopted by city council on June 29, 1967.¹⁹

The 1967 La Villita Master Plan subdivided La Villita into three study areas. Today's Maverick Plaza was at the southeast corner of part of Block A. Describing the whole of Block A, which extended west to Presa Street, the report stated "The portion of Block A facing Nueva and South Alamo streets...contains many nondescript commercial buildings, presently being demolished..."²⁰

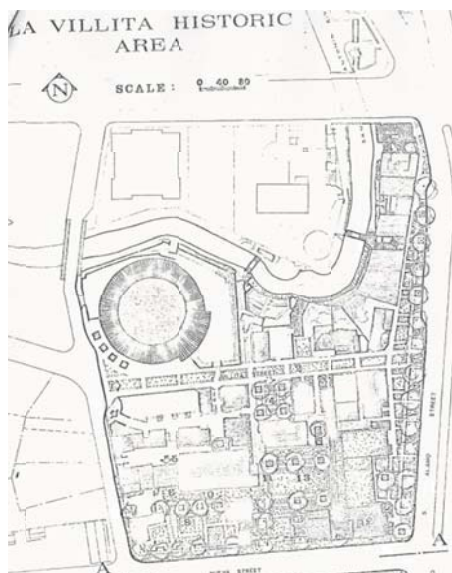
¹⁶ The Combs property at 502-508 Villita was purchased in 1947 and the McAllister property at the corner of Villita and South Alamo streets was bought in 1949.

¹⁷ City of San Antonio, *Master Plan, La Villita Historic Area*, 2.

¹⁸ City of San Antonio Ordinance 35,377, City Council Minutes, April 27, 1967. Mathis was paid \$12,500. His team included architects Jerry Rogers, Marvin Eickenroht and Robert Harris.

¹⁹ City of San Antonio Ordinance 35,556, City Council Minutes, June 29, 1967.

²⁰ City of San Antonio, *Master Plan, La Villita Historic Area*, 9.



La Villita Plan, Block A
Use Study and Recommendations, La Villita Area, 1968,

The report went on to state,

The newly acquired area in the southeast corner of Block A should be developed for commercial purposes, with spaces to be leased to provide rental income. This area should be used for contemporary arts and crafts and any large scale production of the more traditional arts and crafts, with spaces provided for display and retail sales. Other shops, of a character consistent with the overall operation, and refreshment facilities could be provided in this area.²¹

Key to the city's planning in 1968 was reconstruction of the historic Friedrich Groos house at the southeast corner of Block A at South Alamo and East Nueva streets. The report recommended the structure be rented for arts and crafts and shops on the ground floor and offices on the second floor. In addition, the plan envisioned a large plaza "to relate to the typical market plaza type of operation reminiscent of the historic period." The space could "provide additional facilities for evening parties." Adjoining buildings would have porches fronting on the plaza. As outlined in the report, La Villita visitors would come to this area to examine arts and crafts and make purchases. The plaza would be open to South Alamo "for direct access from HemisFair."²²

The Greek Revival Friedrich Groos house was considered by the Texas State Historical Survey Committee and San Antonio Conservation Society to be the finest structure endangered by HemisFair '68. (The house was in the path of the San Antonio River extension.) The 1873 house stood at 314 East Commerce Street opposite St. Joseph's Catholic Church and by the 1960s was occupied by the St. Joseph's Society.

²¹ Ibid, 22.

²² Ibid, 22-23. Friedrich Groos was a pioneer banker in San Antonio who, together with his brothers Karl and Gustav, founded F. Groos and Company which was later named the Groos National Bank.



Friedrich Groos House as it appeared c. 1965
San Antonio Development Agency Collection, UTSA

After discussions with the Conservation Society and State of Texas, the San Antonio City Council passed a resolution on August 25, 1966, requesting the Urban Renewal Agency to relocate the Groos house “to another location within said area; manifesting the intent of the city of San Antonio to purchase said structure and to renovate and maintain such structure within the project area for historic purposes in the future.” The resolution requested the Urban Renewal Agency to “dismantle and relocate the Groos Home.”²³

The site chosen for relocation of the Groos house was the southeast corner of newly-expanded La Villita. The house was dismantled, its stone blocks numbered, and the material stored at the La Villita site. After lengthy negotiations, high bids, and code compliance challenges that spanned over a year, the house was never reconstructed. The caption for a photograph published in the *San Antonio Express*, on November 19, 1967, read in part, “The rubble of the Groos House marked and set aside for reassembling, has a bleak outlook now, following bid opening last week.” The reconstruction bid for the Groos house alone was \$130,000 which was above the \$50,000 amount set aside to rebuild both the Groos and Schultze houses, the latter another important structure within the HemisFair site. The caption concluded, “Best possibility now is that stone from both houses will be used for walls in expanded La Villita.”²⁴



Proposed Groos House Site at Maverick Plaza, c. 1967.
San Antonio Conservation Society.

²³ City of San Antonio Ordinance 66-526, City Council Minutes, August 25, 1966.

²⁴ *San Antonio Express*, November 19, 1967.

Preservations were encouraged, however, when code compliance issues that complicated reconstruction were resolved, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development increased its reconstruction allocation to \$99,000. There was also brief speculation that the Groos House might be rebuilt as the official residence of Governor John Connally during the fair. Ultimately, the house was not reconstructed.²⁵

The Groos House stones remained piled on the future site of Maverick Plaza throughout the construction and run of HemisFair. On June 5, 1969, eight months after the close of the fair, former San Antonio Conservation Society president Wanda Ford spoke on behalf of the society, recounting the saga of the Groos House's demise. She recalled that a contractor "pushed the stones into the southwest corner of the Villita property where they lay as the city went back on its promise to rebuild." She went on to say that "we learned that the building would not be reconstructed but instead the huge stones would be used in a wall around the proposed extension of the La Villita area." Ford concluded with the revelation that the society had just learned that the limestone blocks had been "broken to bits and used as rip-rap on a stream embankment channelization project." The Groos House she said "had an ignominious and shameful end."²⁶

In early 1969 the city directed the Planning Commission to proceed with designating La Villita a historic district. The district was also entered on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972, and the local district expanded in 1975. Concurrent with designating the La Villita Historic District, the city proceeded with plans to develop the unnamed plaza that became known informally as Plaza Nueva. Architects Arthur Mathis, Jr. and Jerry Rogers were in charge of the project, which included beautification of the Villita Street mall.²⁷

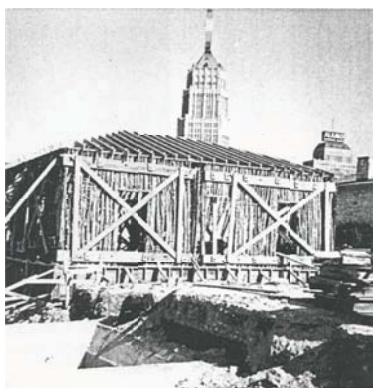
Consistent with previous studies, the plaza was developed as a special events space, and one historic structure was relocated to the site. The structure known as the Cirilus Gissi House, built in the *palisado* style of cedar posts and plaster, was dismantled at its original 141 South Street site in the HemisFair area and rebuilt at the plaza's southwest corner. The 175 x 250 foot plaza featured aggregate concrete and tile walkways, live oak trees in planter boxes, and perimeter limestone wall along both Alamo and Nueva streets. The January 28, 1970, dedication program for the plaza and Villita Street mall states that "The benches in the mall area were formed from old limestone obtained from structures cleared in the Rosa Verde Urban Renewal Project Area."²⁸

²⁵ San Antonio *Express*, November 29, 1967; La Villita vertical file, San Antonio Conservation Society.

²⁶ Wanda Ford, Statement to the City Council and the Press, Radio and T.V., June 5, 1969.

²⁷ City of San Antonio Ordinance 37-190, City Council Minutes, January 16, 1969.

²⁸ *Program of Dedication for Nueva Plaza and Villita Street Mall*, La Villita Vertical File, San Antonio Antonio Conservation Society. The Rosa Verde Urban Renewal project was in the area of Santa Rosa Hospital and Milam Park.



Cirilus Gissi House Reconstruction, July 17, 1969
San Antonio Conservation Society

Though no documentation has been found to determine the origin of the stone used in Maverick Plaza's perimeter walls, the walls offer some constructive lessons for the future. The Conservation Society remained concerned about the appearance of the plaza's stone perimeter wall in the aftermath of losing the fight to save the Groos House. A rough draft of a statement by Elsa (Mrs. William A.) Watson to the city's River Walk Advisory Commission and Fine Arts Commission expressed the society's concern "about the rock wall being built on the Alamo Street side of the Nueva Plaza extension of La Villita."²⁹

O'Neil Ford, the project architect for La Villita's initial restoration, was also concerned. Responding to complaints about the new wall, Ford visited the site. In an undated memo to an unknown person, Ford lamented, "It is a darn shame the city removed the beautiful stone on that very site that came out of the Groos House." He found the "scale of the stones" used in the Nueva Plaza wall to be "entirely unlike any of the various kinds of stone work normally associated with traditional buildings."³⁰ Ford offered various solutions including partial plastering and reworking of mortar joints. Watson, in her statement, echoed Ford's findings and indicated that the society's concerns had been expressed to Robert Frazier, director of the Parks and Recreation Department. It is unclear if the city responded to these concerns.

Maverick Plaza Today

Within a year of the plaza's completion it became clear that additional enhancements were needed. The San Antonio *Light* published an editorial on October 8, 1971, that described Nueva Plaza as "a tiny desert in the middle of an oasis."³¹ The plaza, it was noted, had been built by the city's public works department with no funds for landscaping. Urban Renewal director Winston Martin "acknowledged public criticism of the 18-month old plaza...in his explanation of the move to make the public space more inviting to visitors."³² Martin remarked, "It's an

²⁹ Elsa Watson, undated draft of presentation to the River Walk Advisory Commission and Fine Arts Commission, collection of Maria Watson Pfeiffer. It is not known if this statement was formally delivered. Watson was the great granddaughter of Friedrich Groos' brother, Karl.

³⁰ O'Neil Ford, handwritten, undated memo to unknown individual, copy in collection of Maria Watson Pfeiffer.

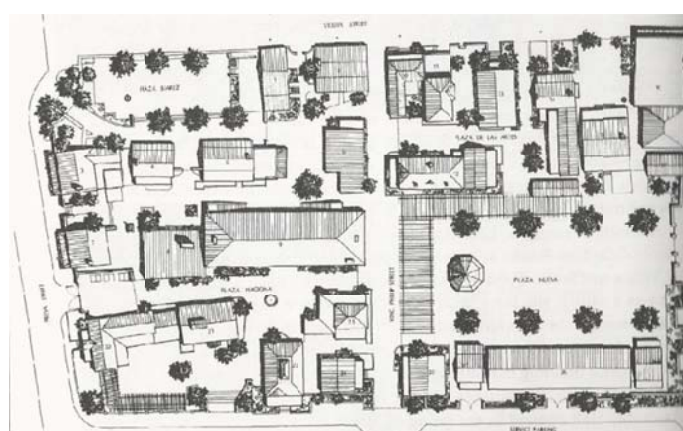
³¹ "Keep It Up!" San Antonio *Light*, October 8, 1971, 16-B.

³² "Add 'Rustic Touch'," San Antonio *Express*, October 6, 1971, 2-A.

extremely hot, unpleasant place during the day...there is no life during the day...tourists walk by and look in but won't go in...there's nothing of interest to draw them in."³³

Landscape architect Jim Keeter was hired to address these concerns. Keeter's plans included the addition of shade trees, wood and iron park benches, planters, grape arbors and a "non-spraying native-stone fountain." Changes were also proposed to change the appearance of the stone walls in order to "better relate them to neighboring walls."³⁴ The wall modifications apparently addressed complaints by O'Neil Ford and others that the stone work was incompatible with traditional masonry found in La Villita.

In 1974, 35 years after the beginning of La Villita's restoration, it was expanded to include the area between Maverick Plaza and South Presa Street, completing the vision of those who proposed restoring the "Little Village."³⁵



La Villita Plan

Saldana, Williams & Schubert and Ford, Powell & Carson

Plaza Nueva was officially named Maverick Plaza by the City Council on April 26, 1984. To further commemorate the man whose vision led to the restoration of La Villita, the Conservation Society donated \$15,000 to the city to commission a bust of Maury Maverick. The bust was unveiled at a ceremony on February 3, 1987.³⁶

A \$2.1 million renovation of La Villita in 1981-1982 by the architectural firms of Ford, Powell and Carson and Saldana, Williams and Schubert included new structures to house bathrooms and a concession stand in Maverick Plaza. These additions did not compromise the plaza's integrity, but instead contributed to its character and functionality as a space for public gatherings. In 2014 Maverick Plaza, the largest of La Villita's historic plazas, remains a popular and well-used public gathering space.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid. Winston Martin also remarked that the City designed and constructed the plaza through its Public Works' budget, but that the Urban Renewal Agency would correct the noted deficiencies.

³⁵ The 1974 expansion and restoration was overseen by architect William Parrish.

³⁶ City of San Antonio Ordinance 58-666, City Council Minutes, April 26, 1984. The bust was sculpted and cast by Lawrence M. Ludtke. The renaming discussion involved Mayor Henry Cisneros, Parks and Recreation Department Director Ron Darner, and the San Antonio Conservation Society.



Views of Maverick Plaza c. 1970
San Antonio Public Library, Texana/Genealogy Department