



CITY OF SAN ANTONIO
OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

From Crockett to the Civil Rights Movement: Layers of Significance on Alamo Plaza

September 2018

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City of San Antonio Office of Historic Preservation
Crockett Block

Brief History

Built for the Maverick brothers William and Albert in 1882, this four bay Italianate structure provided first floor retail space. The second and third floors housed the Alamo Hotel once they were completed in the 1890s. Architect Alfred Giles designed the commercial building as well as the finish out of the upper floors. During his career in San Antonio, Giles designed over 20 different properties for the Maverick family, including the Maverick Bank Building which opened at the corner of Alamo Plaza and Houston Street in 1885.¹ The Crockett Block helped catalyze development of the surrounding area; over the next decade, seven new buildings, five of which stood at least three stories in height, were built within a block. Of those seven structures, only the Reuter Building and the Crockett Block remain today.

By the late 1970s, the four individual units had been modified to the point that block no longer spoke as a cohesive structure, but instead appeared to be four distinct buildings. In 1982, property owner Bill Schlansker commissioned local architectural firm Saldaña & Associates to restore both the Crockett Block and Palace Theater buildings. A one story rear addition intended for a future restaurant was completed at this time.

Significance

Local: Maverick family association

The Maverick family built their homestead c. 1850 at the northwestern corner of the Alamo complex, where the Gibbs Building sits today. Samuel's son Albert constructed a home a little more than a block northeast in 1877, and his son William established a home in 1893 on Taylor Street several blocks to the north. The Mavericks owned many acres in this part of downtown, some of which was later donated to the city for a park and to St. Mark's Episcopal Church.² The prosperous Maverick family continued to lead in San Antonio's business and political communities; Albert's son Maury served as a congressman and mayor of the city. Character defining features associated with Maverick family:

- Location: key to the story is the placement of this building on the land owned by the Maverick family beginning in the mid-nineteenth century (photo 1)



¹ George, Mary Carolyn Hollers. *The Architectural Legacy of Alfred Giles*. Trinity University Press: San Antonio, 2006.

² Fisher, Lewis. *Maverick: The American Name that Became a Legend*. Trinity University Press: San Antonio, 2017.

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Crockett Block

State: Architect/Architecture

Alfred Giles, born and educated in England, immigrated to Texas in 1873. After working for local contractor John H. Kampmann, Giles established his own firm and quickly became one of San Antonio's most prolific architects. His diverse portfolio includes many ornate homes such as the Oge, Groos, Sartor, and Steves homes in the King William Historic District, the Lambermont in Government Hill, and the Pershing House on Fort Sam. Giles also designed over a dozen county courthouses across the state. Locally, the Italianate style is more commonly seen in residential neighborhoods, so this commercial structure with such high integrity is a rare example.

Character defining features associated with architectural significance:

- Materials: limestone, brick
- Style details: cornice with decorative brackets, pilasters, expansive storefront windows, narrow arched windows (photo 2)
- Interior: layout of second and third floors, wood casing and baseboards, wood floors (photo 3)



Photo 2



Photo 3

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Palace Theater

Brief History

Opened in 1923, the Palace Theater Building on Alamo Plaza was designed by George Willis as an entrance for the entertainment venue. This three story commercial structure shows Prairie and Chicago influences, with one bay dedicated to a box office and the other intended for retail. The second and third floors provided office space for the Palace. This building was constructed with the intention of supporting an additional six stories.³ The theater, originally managed by Louis Santikos, it was designed to house moving pictures but briefly switched in the late 1920s to exclusively feature live productions. The construction of bigger and more ornate venues led to its decline, and the theater itself was demolished in 1952.⁴

Louis Santikos arrived in Texas in the early 1900s, spent several years in Waco where he purchased his first theater, and by 1918 had begun operating the Rialto Theater on Houston Street. The Express News coverage of the grand opening of the Palace Theater pronounced it “San Antonio’s Finest Theater.”⁵ Santikos moved back to Greece in the 1920s, where he distributed films until civil war spurred him to move his entire family back to San Antonio in the 1940s. His son John completed a degree in business from St. Mary’s, and took over the family business when Louis moved back to Athens in the late 1950s.

George Willis was born and raised in Chicago. He studied architecture at Armour Institute of Technology for two- and- a half years before apprenticing for another two- and- a half years in the office of Frank Lloyd Wright. It was during this time that he became acquainted with renowned California architect, Myron Hunt (1868-1952), who was also associated with Frank Lloyd Wright and other Prairie School architects. Hunt, who referred to Willis as “one of Wright’s best beloved draughtsmen,” moved to Pasadena, California in 1903. Willis followed, and apparently worked with Hunt for about one year. He then moved to Dallas where he was associated with Stewart Moore (1906) and J. Edward Overbeck (1907-1909). After practicing alone in 1910, Willis moved to San Antonio in 1911. He worked with Atlee

B. Ayres until 1916 and briefly with Charles T. Boelhauwe before opening his own practice in 1917. Willis and Emmett T. Jackson officed together for several years and the two collaborated on various projects. George Willis designed or collaborated with other architects on numerous commercial and residential projects. These include the following San Antonio structures, the 1926 Bexar County Courthouse addition (with Phelps, Dewees and Jackson; NRHP 1977)); the San Antonio Municipal Auditorium (with Ayres, Ayres and Jackson; NRHP 1981), the Builders Exchange Building (NRHP 1994), the Sunken Garden Theater (with Harvey Smith and Charles Boelhauwe; Brackenridge Park NR District 2011), and the L.T. Wright House (NRHP 1983). Willis designed several houses in the Monte Vista National Register District (NRHP 1998).⁶

The Palace Theater was distinctive for its unique arcade, which stretched from Losoya Street to Alamo Plaza. At the time of its construction, the Palace was the highest capacity theater in the city, although its interior detailing paled in comparison to its peers, the Texas and the Majestic, which both opened before the end of the decade. Although the connection with the theater itself has been severed, the arcade entrance remains intact in the southern bay. A rooftop addition, including penthouse and deck, was built in the early 1990s.

³ “Mammoth Building Planned Beside Big Palace Theater.” Palace Theater Section, *San Antonio Express*, March 4, 1923.

⁴ Kothmann, Laytha Sue Haggard. “George Willis, Prairie School Architect in Texas.” Thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1988.

⁵ Palace Theater Section, *San Antonio Express*, March 4, 1923.

⁶ Pfeiffer, Maria Watson. *National Register of Historic Places Nomination for Milam Building, Bexar County, Texas*. 2015.

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Palace Theater

Significance

Local: Association with Louis Santikos

Louis Santikos founded the largest movie theater company in Texas. At the Palace Theater, he introduced the first theater orchestra to the city, and as technology progressed he introduced new features into each location. The company continued to flourish under the direction of his son John, weathering a bankruptcy in the late 1980s. John Santikos was a philanthropist, supporting a variety of community efforts in San Antonio, and after his death Santikos Enterprises, including all of the family's theaters, transferred to the San Antonio Area Foundation.

Local: Architect/Architecture

George Willis arrived in San Antonio the same year that Louis Santikos came to Texas. Working with many well-respected local architects and firms including Atlee B. Ayres, Charles T. Boelhauwe, Emmett T. Jackson, Phelps & Dewees, and Harvey Smith, Willis was a prolific designer. His Prairie School influence was unique in San Antonio. This is the only indoor theater known to have been designed by Willis.

Character defining features associated with architectural significance:

- Exterior Details:
 - Fenestration pattern: symmetrical windows over each bay
 - Ribbon windows, reflecting Chicago influence with 1-2-1 emphasis
 - Terra cotta detailing defining base from upper floors, and above third floor windows
- Interior details:
 - Plaster molding and details on wall and ceiling, attributed to master plaster worker Louis Bauml (photo 4)
 - Barrel vault roof in entrance to former arcade (photo 5)

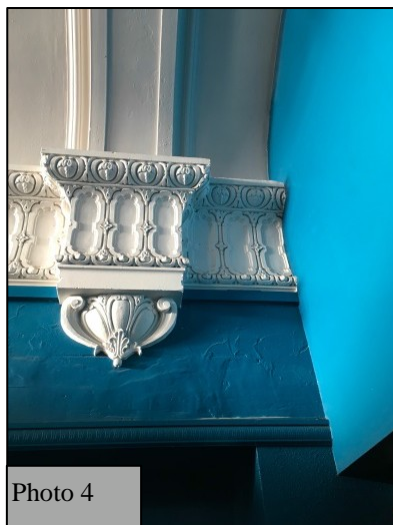


Photo 4



Photo 5

Woolworth's BuildingBrief History

F.W. Woolworth's, "Everybody's Store," first opened in San Antonio in 1912. The company traced its history to 1879, when Frank Winfield Woolworth opened his first store in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. His brother Charles Sumner, who managed one of F.W.'s stores, then began building his own mercantile business, later partnering with Fred Morgan Kirby. In 1912, the Woolworth brothers joined with Kirby and two other partners to establish the modern F.W. Woolworth Company. The Founders, as they were known, led the business to great success. Construction of the Woolworth Building in New York, the tallest building in the world until 1930, began in 1910 and would be complete by the end of the year. When F.W. died in 1919, there were 1,081 stores. The 1920s saw dramatic expansion, with new stores in Cuba and Germany. In 1929, the company boasted global sales of \$303 million in its 1,825 stores.

Woolworth's arrived in San Antonio in 1912, opening store #650 in the Blum Building at 320 E Houston St. The store moved to the Alamo Plaza location in 1920. The prominent corner lot had been the home of the Maverick Bank Building, constructed in 1885, which was later known as the Swearingen-McCraw Building. Johanna Steves purchased the property in 1914, and by 1918, the local newspaper reported that despite being fully leased, the building would be demolished as soon as economically feasible. The high cost of materials related to World War I delayed these plans for another two years.

Bright neon signs advertising department stores, theaters, and other retailers lit Houston Street in the early 20th century. This Main Street of Texas served as the premier shopping district in the state's largest city. Retail giants including Sommer's, Kress, Grant's, Frost Brothers, Walgreens, and Wolff & Marx dominated the streetscape, punctuated by the elaborate Majestic and Texas Theaters. Woolworth's entrance in 1912 at the corner of Houston and North Presa Streets placed them in the center of this commercial destination. The move two blocks east stirred the imaginations of residents, who envisioned an impressive new structure that might reach heights similar to the eight-story Gibbs Building to the north. When plans for the three story store became public, the San Antonio Light published an op-ed challenging those critical of the new building's reduced stature to explain why this national firm would endeavor to erect a skyscraper in San Antonio only to be surrounded by single story structures.

San Antonio architects Adams & Adams designed the Chicago style commercial structure, and it was built by contractors Coleman and Jenkins, also a local firm. Coverage of the grand opening proudly announced the inclusion of a lunch counter and soda shop, furnished with "the last word in sanitary equipment." Almost half of Woolworth's locations featured food service, and many of the larger stores had lunch counters, snack/beverage bars, and bake shops. San Antonio's lunch counter and soda shop, purported to be the largest in the city, was located in the rear of the store and initially styled with clean white enamel. In 1937, Woolworth's remodeled the store; improvements included installation of air conditioning and the addition of a bakery with a large display on the first floor.

Integration

After 1930, San Antonio's population growth was surpassed by Dallas and Houston. By 1960, estimates of local demographics indicate that while African Americans made up less than 10% of the city's population, approximately 40% of San Antonio residents were Mexican American.⁷ Despite no formal segregation ordinance being passed, San Antonio practiced de facto segregation in public and private spaces. Discrimination of African Americans and Mexican Americans was rampant but not identical, and some have argued this blurriness in the racial divide provided the foundation for what was then perceived as reduced hostilities in the city.⁸ Local

⁷ Goldberg, Robert A. "Racial Change on the Southern Periphery: The Case of San Antonio, Texas, 1960-1965." *The Journal of Southern History* 49, no. 3 (1983): 349-74.

⁸ Ibid., Morland, Kenneth. "Lunch Counter Desegregation in Corpus Christi, Galveston, and San Antonio, Texas." Atlanta:

Woolworth's Building

politics at this time were dominated by the Good Government League (GGL), which sought to enhance the local economy by suppressing racial hostility. The GGL supported Mexican American and African American candidates and worked with community leaders in churches and the media to maintain its hold on local government. Scholars also point to two important institutions that influenced the city's unique path to integration: local churches and the military.

The Military Model

San Antonio experienced a population boom in the 1950s as the five military bases in the area expanded to support the country's efforts in the Cold War. By 1954, the armed forces achieved integration of all units. The bases demonstrated that integrated stores, recreational facilities, schools, and other amenities could not only function but thrive.⁹ As black servicemen ventured out from the bases, however, they found their movements limited by racial divides enforced in restaurants, hotels, theaters, and stores. Rev. Claude Black explained that the decision was based on economics. "That was not, in my opinion, a change that came out of the moral commitment of this community. That was a change that came out of the economics of this community... Our real central economic base was those military installations."¹⁰ Harry Burns, president of the NAACP chapter in San Antonio, said "It was very difficult for Black military servicemen to accept the treatment that they were receiving, after they had gone through the experience that they had been in actually, while overseas in war, especially in combat."¹¹

Religious Leadership

The Catholic Church integrated all of its parochial schools and colleges in San Antonio in 1954, just over a month prior to the Supreme Court's decision on *Brown v Board of Education*. The San Antonio Council of Churches, led by Reverend C. Don Baugh, worked diligently to encourage its members to embrace integration within their congregations. This organization would prove to be key to the integration of lunch counters in 1960.

In addition to the aforementioned military and religious influences, the importance of the local NAACP chapter cannot be overstated. Led by Harry Burns, the organization made significant progress working with the San Antonio City Council to pass integration ordinances for parks, golf courses, and tennis courts in 1954, followed by swimming pools, buses, railroad stations, and municipal buildings in 1956. Though the NAACP's goal of immediate integration of schools was not achieved, a gradual desegregation plan was passed in 1955 which led to an integrated school system by 1960.

On January 1, 1960, the *San Antonio Register* covered the election of Joseph Luter as president of the local branch of the NAACP, with Burns serving as vice president. Labor legislation and integration of lunch counters topped their list of priorities for the year. "Luter said that the branch could not accept the philosophy of "separate but equal" eating accommodations. He pointed to the fact that Negroes spent tens of thousands of dollars downtown, and should have all of the same conveniences of other shoppers, not just the stand-up sandwich bars and snack counters – which, incidentally, are not segregated."¹² Youth director Mary Lillian Andrews, who was a student at Our Lady of the Lake College, sent letters to six stores downtown requesting full integration of their facilities. Visits from leaders of local black congregations followed.

Nationally, the conversation surrounding integration of lunch counters escalated as four young black men in

Southern Regional Council, 1960.

⁹ Moreland, *ibid*.

¹⁰ Transcript, "Interview with the Rev. Claude W. Black Jr., 03-15-1994." Interviewed by Cheri Wolfe, Oral History Office, Institute of Texan Cultures, San Antonio, Texas.

¹¹ Transcript, "Interview with Harry V. Burns, 11-16-1993." Interviewed by Cheri Wolfe, Oral History Office, Institute of Texan Cultures, San Antonio, Texas.

¹² "Joseph V. Luter Elected President of Local NAACP." *San Antonio Register*, January 1, 1960.

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Greensboro, North Carolina quietly protested by sitting in a segregated Woolworth's lunch counter in February 1960. Inspired by their success, young people across the South employed the tactic to draw attention to continued racial discrimination. Media coverage focused on the inconvenience to local businesses, loss of profits, and a somewhat sensationalized threat of violence. Rev. Baugh, as leader of the Council of Churches and a member of the GGL, brought together white religious leaders, the Chamber of Commerce, and retail managers with lunch counters downtown. A week after Andrews' letters, the NAACP organized a Sunday rally of more than 1,500 residents where Rev. Claude Black committed to demonstrations the following Thursday at the segregated lunch counters. Rev. Baugh convened a final meeting with his group of white ministers and businessmen, publicly announced it would take place on Wednesday, the day before the sit-in deadline, and then secretly rescheduled for Tuesday. Key testimony came from the local Sears store, which had integrated its lunch counters in the 1950s to no detriment. Other southern Sears locations saw staggering financial losses after refusals to integrate brought demonstrations. This local example broke through the shadow of fear with a clear economic argument, and with some assurances, seven stores agreed to desegregate their lunch counters on Wednesday, March 16. The conditions were threefold: a commitment from the Council of Churches for all "Protestant clergy to make a special announcement from their pulpits...commending the businessmen for their vision and action"¹³ and encouraging that their congregations to support their businesses; a commitment from four black community leaders, Reverend Samuel H. James, Reverend P.L. Wood, realtor Samuel J. Davis, and mortician James Taylor, that the lunch counters would not see a sudden inundation of African American customers; and a commitment from the black community that no demonstrations would take place for 30 days at those lunch counters that remained segregated. Joske's was the sole dissenter in the group, claiming that they needed additional time to consult with their headquarters in New York.

That evening, a burning cross was found in Travis Park, the location of a monument to the Confederate dead. According to the *San Antonio Light* article, it was accompanied by signs that "admonished stores not to accept negro customers. It threatened negroes with visits from the Ku Klux Klan and instructed them to "beware." It was decorated with a crude drawing in the same red ink of a tree with a hangman's noose."¹⁴

In an op-ed on March 18, the *San Antonio Register* wrote that although other cities had seen sit-ins lead to integration of lunch counters, "San Antonio is the first, however, to act without demonstrations, by resolving the issue in interracial conference." President Eisenhower spoke out within a day of the integration, suggesting "the formation of biracial conference groups to help allay tensions," although he made no mention of San Antonio.¹⁵ A formal interracial council was soon created to address ongoing tensions surrounding restaurants, hotels, and other public accommodations. A fundraising banquet, previously organized by Second Baptist Church and St. Paul Methodist Church, at Villita Assembly Hall on Friday, March 18, provided the opportunity to celebrate the victory. Guest of Honor Jackie Robinson, former baseball player for the Brooklyn Dodgers, was quoted in the *New York Times* the next day. Speaking of the successful integration, he said "It is a story that should be told around the world."¹⁶

Several national chains, including three that integrated in San Antonio on March 16, stated publicly that month that their stores would follow whatever local custom demanded, whether that meant integration or closure of counters until such time that the community built consensus on how to move forward.¹⁷ Joske's said as much in a response to Mary Andrews in April.¹⁸ Joske's chose to open its basement eating establishment, the Chuck

¹³ Moreland, *Ibid*.

¹⁴ "Cross Burned in Travis Park" *San Antonio Light*, March 17, 1960.

¹⁵ "San Antonio Shows The Way" *San Antonio Register*, March 18, 1960.

¹⁶ "Both Races Accept Move by 5 Stores – Dinner Ends Eventful Week." *New York Times*, March 20, 1960.

¹⁷ Pitrone, Jean Maddern. *F.W. Woolworth and the American five and dime : a social history*. McFarland & Company: Jefferson, North Carolina, 2003, p. 156.

¹⁸ Kuhlman, Martin Herman. "The Civil Rights Movement in Texas: Desegregation of Public Accommodations, 1950-1964."

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Woolworth's Building

Wagon, to African Americans, but its more refined fourth floor restaurant, the Camellia Room, remained segregated. Sit-ins and picketing began in April, after the agreed-upon 30 days had expired. On May 3, a white customer slapped a black picketer. Both were arrested, and Joske's promptly closed both the Chuck Wagon and the Camellia Room. Joske's publicly deployed the local custom narrative in a quarter page advertisement in the Express News and the San Antonio Register. It stated:

“For 86 years Joske's has, as a matter of basic policy, conformed to the established and accepted customs of this community. When those customs and practices change, Joske's will change with them. Because of the continuing demonstrations involving the Camellia Room and the Chuck Wagon, and because Joske's wishes its customers to shop in an atmosphere of harmony, all Joske restaurant service to its customers has been temporarily discontinued. At such time as community action brings about a solution to this problem, Joske's will resume its former service to its customers. In the meantime, Joske's will continue to participate, as it has during the past several months, in all civic efforts to bring about a solution to the community problem affecting restaurant facilities.”¹⁹

Joske's reopened its restaurants later that summer, integrating after continued lobbying by churches as well as meetings with the newly established Interracial Committee.²⁰

PhD diss., Texas Tech University, 1994.

¹⁹ “Joske's Closes All Dining Facilities.” *San Antonio Register*, May 6, 1960 p. 1,3. Advertisement on p. 6.

²⁰ Goldberg, *ibid.*

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Woolworth's Building

Significance

Local: Architectural

Adams & Adams was a local architectural firm consisting of Carl C. Adams and his nephew Carleton W. Adams. The firm was founded in 1909, but Carl died in 1918, before the Woolworth Building was designed. Max Friedrich joined the firm as an associate and worked with Carleton to design many of San Antonio's most prominent buildings, including the San Antonio Drug Company, the National Bank of Commerce, the Protestant Orphan's Home, Jefferson High School, Trinity Methodist Church, and the renovation of City Hall in 1927. Other outstanding examples of their work in the state include the Texas State Library & Archives and the State Highway Building in Austin, the King Ranch residence Santa Gertrudis, the Kerr County Courthouse, and the West Texas Utilities Building in San Angelo.²¹

Character defining features associated with the architectural significance (photo 6):

- Chicago style window: the three part windows with large single pane center panel flanked by two narrow, double-hung windows are characteristic of the Chicago style.
- Awning (current awning is not original)
- Exterior materials (primarily brick)
- Decorative cornice



Photo 6

²¹ Huskey, Lee Ann, Betty Ann Janert, and Maria Watson. *National Register of Historic Places Nomination: Jefferson High School, Bexar County, Texas*. 1983.

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Woolworth's Building

State: Commercial

Commerce Street served as San Antonio's major east/west thoroughfare until the Maverick family began developing multi-story office structures along Houston Street in the 1880s. Expansion of the commercial district was constrained by nonexistent or weak bridges crossing the river and creek until modern iron bridges were constructed to span the waterways in the late 1800s. With the introduction of horse-drawn streetcars in 1878, followed by electric streetcars in 1890, Houston Street, with its wider right-of-way, began to surpass narrow, congested Commerce Street as the town's premier business thoroughfare. The wider street allowed horse-drawn vehicles, and later automobiles, to mix with streetcars. These vehicles brought shoppers and office workers to Houston Street, and Commerce Street never regained its preeminence as the city's commercial center. Retail businesses multiplied. The busy thoroughfare boasted clothing, luggage, shoes, hats, and home goods stores, making it a shopping destination. Department stores filled in from Wolff and Marx in the Rand Building on the western end to Woolworth's at Alamo Plaza. Even as activity in the downtown core declined after 1940, the collection of department stores, theaters, and office buildings from this time remains remarkably intact. Although the buildings range in height, type, and scale, Houston Street retains a high degree of integrity and features a relatively intact street wall representing nearly 40 years of development downtown. Notable Buildings include the Peck / Vogue Building (c.1900) at six stories, Gunter Hotel (1909) at 12 stories, Burns Building (1912) at four stories, Brady Building (1914) at eight stories, Frost Brothers Department Store (1917) at three stories, Bennett Building (1917) at four stories, Central Trust Building (1920) at 12 stories, Maverick Building (1922) at nine stories, Majestic Theater Building (1929) at 14 stories, and Kress Building (1938) at five stories.²²

Character defining features associated with the commercial significance:

- Terrazzo tile work on sidewalk: the Houston Street entrance (currently used by Jimmy John's) tile work features the word "Woolworth's" in red on a white background. (Photo 7)
- Color – F.W. Woolworth incorporated red into his stores (paint, counters, exterior and interior) beginning with his first store in Lancaster, PA.²³
- Storefronts



Photo 7

²² Edwards, Cory, Claudia Guerra, and Jenny Hay. *National Register of Historic Places Nomination: San Antonio Downtown and River Walk Historic District, Bexar County, Texas*. 2018.

²³ Winkler, John K. *Five and Ten: The Fabulous Life of F.W. Woolworth*. Books for Libraries Press: Freeport, New York, 1940.

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Woolworth's Building

National: Civil Rights Movement

While Woolworth's was one of several businesses in San Antonio to integrate its lunch counters on March 16, 1960, the Greensboro demonstrations placed a national spotlight on the company and its response to the pressure to integrate its facilities. Locally, Woolworth's claimed to have the largest downtown lunch counter, and its success as chain variety store lent it additional importance as international industry leader. Oklahoma City saw a handful of lunch counters integrate in 1958, but it took several days of sit-in demonstrations to spur this change. San Antonio's method of proactively and quietly integrating was unique and earned the city a moment of attention, albeit brief, from a nation transfixed by the Civil Rights Movement and its associated social struggles.

Character defining features associated with the Civil Rights Movement significance:

- Tile: the lunch counter was located in the rear of Woolworth's on the first floor. Some tile remains intact on columns and walls that is presumably original to the lunch counter (most likely from its 1937 renovations but could be more recent)²⁴ (photos 8 and 9)



Photo 8



Photo 9

²⁴ Advertisement, p. 8-A, *San Antonio Light*, July 2, 1937.