

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Last Concert Café Complex

OWNER: Dawn Fudge

APPLICANT: Dawn Fudge

LOCATION: 1403 Nance Street (includes 803 William Street building)

AGENDA ITEM: IIIe

HPO FILE NO: 11PL099

DATE ACCEPTED: Sep-9-2010

HAHC HEARING: May-19-2011

30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

SITE INFORMATION

Lots 1, 12 & Tract 11A, Block 4 Richey Addition, John Austin Survey A-1, Houston, Harris County, Texas. 77002. The complex consists of a café and two former residence buildings with connecting patio and adjoining outdoor area with performance stage.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Last Concert Café Complex is located at 1403 Nance Street in Houston's 'Warehouse District' on the northeast side of downtown Houston. Established in 1949, the Last Concert Café has become a legendary Houston restaurant and music venue. From 1949 through 1985, Elena 'Mama' Aldrete Lopez ran the Last Concert Café from her round table in the dining room of the café. Entrance was achieved by knocking at the red door and receiving access only after Mama visually approved the guests from the small red curtained window set in the red door.

In addition to the tile-roofed stucco café building on site are two 19th century residences that have been incorporated into the café complex – a six-room house built between 1848-1852 and facing west to William Street, and a two-room residence built as servants' quarters in the 1870s. Local tradition holds that both were used as a brothel from the early 20th century through the 1970s. In addition to these structures is a noncontributing performance stage built in 1986 at the eastern end of the property.

Architecturally, the Last Concert Café building is a good example of the Spanish style as applied to a commercial utilitarian building. The cafe is also important in the history of women and Hispanics in Houston for its association with Elena Lopez, the proprietor of Houston's first woman-owned Café post World-War II. The six-room and two-room residence buildings connected to the facility on the west represent good examples of an early Victorian style in a residential setting. The café complex is also significant in the area of music for the historic association with local and nationally known music performers, beginning with Xavier Cugat in 1950 and representing a continuation of music trends. Specifically, the Last Concert Café reflects cultural significance derived from the weekly presentation of musical performers promoting and reflecting the spread of popular music in United States, a café tradition that has continued since the café opening in 1949.

The Last Concert Café complex is unique among restaurants in Houston, as the café has functioned for sixty years serving the Houston community with popular music and Tex-Mex food in a Spanish

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

setting. The café building, as well as the adjacent two residential buildings, retain the original architectural character and detailing, the café from 1949 and the residence from the remodeling in 1897. The interior of the three buildings, particularly the café, have had few alterations. The site is significant for its association with the fostering of musical talent in formative stages, as well as following with accomplished performers and bands. The expansion to an outdoor stage for larger performances is in keeping with the café tradition established by Mama in 1949, has provided noted, as well as fledgling entertainers, space for discovery and viable showcase for talent.

The Last Concert Café Complex meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, and 8 for Landmark and Protected Landmark designation. In addition, the two contributing buildings on site were constructed prior to 1905.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

From 1949 through 1985, Elena Aldrete “Mama” Lopez ran the Last Concert Café from her round table in the dining area of the Café. Entrance was achieved by knocking on the western red door and receiving access only after Mama visually approved the guests from the small red curtained window set in the red door. The Last Concert Café building is a good example of the Spanish style as applied to a commercial utilitarian building. The Café is important in Spanish Women’s History for its association with Elena Aldrete “Mama” Lopez, the proprietor of Houston’s first woman-owned Café post World-War II. The six-room and two-room residence buildings connected to the facility on the west represent good examples of an early Victorian style in a residential setting. The Café complex of buildings is also significant in the area of music for the historic association with local and nationally known music performers, beginning with Xavier Cugat in 1950 and representing a continuation of music trends. Specifically, the Last Concert Café reflects cultural significance derived from the weekly presentation of musical performers promoting and reflecting the spread of popular music in United States, a Café tradition that has continued since the Café opening in 1949. The architect and building designers are unknown. The residence structure had the influence of owners Charles Stewart and Napoleon Fant. Elena Lopez influenced the design and interior pattern of the 1949 Café structure along with the patio between the buildings.

The Last Concert Café complex is unique among restaurants in Houston, as the Café has functioned for sixty years serving the Houston community with popular music and Tex-Mex food in a Spanish setting. The Café building, as well as the adjacent two residential buildings retain the original architectural character and detailing, the Café from 1949 and the residence from the remodeling in 1897. The interior of the three buildings, particularly the Café, have had few alterations. The site is significant for its association with the fostering of musical talent in formative stages, as well as following with accomplished performers and bands. The expansion to an outdoor stage for larger performances is in keeping with the Café tradition established by Mama in 1949, has provided noted, as well as fledgling entertainers, space for discovery and viable showcase for talent.

The Last Concert Café complex, located at 1403 Nance Street in Houston, Texas, is composed of three buildings including the main café which is a rectangular concrete block commercial café constructed in 1949 by Elena “Mama” (nee Alderete) Lopez. The two contributing buildings, one a six-room residence, the other a two-room residence, share a common rear patio with the café building. The café building is Spanish-style with stucco outside walls and red tile trim on the hip roof edge and sides. Two arched red doors are set in the front café wall, each with one small

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

viewing window near the center top. The former garage opening has been permanently closed (before 1970) and painted white. Elena Lopez named the 1949 café structure The Last Concert as her last commercial venture. Entrance to the café is, as tradition demands, by knocking on the red door. Today the building remains as an excellent example of post World War II commercial Spanish-motif architecture.

The six-room residence building that faces west at 904 William Street was first constructed by Benjamin Richey between 1848 and 1852 as a three-room residence and enlarged to the present size by Napoleon Fant in 1874-1875. The two-room building appears as an improvement on Lot 1 between 1873 and 1875 as a servant's residence and was remodeled in 1949. Local tradition and former owners relate that the six-room and two-room residence buildings were considered to have been a brothel from the early 20th century through the 1970s, operating as hourly room rentals. The unisex restroom, constructed at the north property line between the two-room outbuilding and former residence (now office), although constructed in 1950 of concrete block, is considered non-contributing. A performance stage located on the eastern half of the property with an outdoor dining area is also considered non-contributing, having been constructed in 1986. The stage has been remodeled and enlarged over the years to reflect the changing needs of the performance groups, including lighting, dressing rooms, storage and decoration.

The Last Concert Café complex is located north of downtown Houston and Buffalo Bayou in the Warehouse District, being about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile north of the Harris County Courthouse. One block to the south is the Dakota Lofts (former James Bute Paint Warehouse) which is on the National Register of Historic Places. The six-room former residence building is situated on the northeast corner of the intersection of Nance Street and William Street in an area known as the "warehouse" district of Houston. The café adjoins the residence building to the rear and east along Nance Street with the open stage area adjacent and east of the café, also fronting on Nance Street. The two-room former residence building fronts the north side of the café rear patio and cannot be viewed from the street. The central patio, constructed in 1949, provides access to all the buildings and stage area from the rear of the café and the rear of the six-room residence building.

The total property runs east along the north side of Nance Street for 200 feet and north to the exit ramp of IH-10 for 65 feet at the west end and 75 feet at the east end. The west hundred feet of the site is occupied by the three structures framing the central patio. The stage and open seating area occupies the eastern hundred feet of the property along Nance Street. A non-contributing concrete block unisex bathroom of ten feet by ten feet is nestled in the space between the six-room and two-room buildings. The café building faces south on the north side of Nance Street being set on the property line at the sidewalk.

The stage property to the east is fenced at the property line and sidewalk. The six-room building faces west and has an eight-foot wide dining patio along the south side of the building that is also on the property line of William Street and along the Nance Street sidewalk. The north side of the complex has about a twenty-foot average passage between IH-10 exit ramp (Nance Street) and the north sides of the six-room residence, the unisex bathroom, and two-room building.

The 1949 Last Concert Café building is a rectangle (46 feet x 20 feet), one-story, white stucco over concrete block with two arched red entrance doors and a former garage door to Nance Street. The

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

front and side facades are built-up above the flat roof. The building has roof trim edge on three sides of Spanish red tile. The two doors have historically remained locked to the exterior, both having a six-sided framed viewing window. Two outside lights and a small “Last Concert” sign are the only identifying marks on the exterior which tradition was established by “Mama” in 1949. Two small arched windows flank the matching arched doors on opposite sides and two center six light windows are centered between the two red doors. The arched trim of all the windows is detailed in red brick. A brick ledge runs under and connects the two square central windows. The brick ledge is lined underneath with one row of glass blocks that form the upper backdrop for a flower box. The line of glass blocks is continued as five blocks set in the stucco wall in line with the central window blocks but under each small window. Flower boxes are set in front of five glass blocks, flanking each of the red doors. Each of the four outside edges of the café building have a double course of exposed red bricks extending the full length of the building from bottom to roof edge interspersed with squares of white stucco concrete blocks. Each brick square exposes three courses of the red brick. The base of the brick corner trim ends showing six courses of brick on each of the building corners.

The 1949 café building is flanked on the east by the stage and open dining area; on the west by the rear of the six-room building and outdoor dining patio; and on the north by the 1949 Spanish-tradition patio.

The six-room building is lap and gap wood frame on brick piers with original red wood shutters covering the four-over-four light windows. The main building is 40 feet by 40 feet. The west entrance facade has a 12 foot by 20-foot central porch with gable roof flanking the entrance door and covering two of the four front windows. The hip roof is covered with brown asphalt shingles. The windows are two over two lights. An added rear, shed porch has wood steps and was re-surfaced with 1949 style siding.

The two-room former residence building is 12 feet by 24 feet with a red sheet-metal hip roof. Two doors (one to each former bedroom) are accessed with three brick steps at each door entrance. Former two over two light window openings are to the east of each entrance door. The styles and lights have been removed for dining purposes. The exterior front or south wall of the building was replaced with 1949 style siding. The remaining three sides, north, east and west are composed of the original board and batten sheathing.

The patio is about 18 feet between the café rear wall and entrance to the two-room frame building. There is about 36 feet between the rear porch of the six-room building and the entrance to the stage dining area. The floor of the patio harkens to the 1949 construction, being of concrete that is green and white painted squares bordered by a wide (2 feet to 4 feet) band of green concrete.

The Last Concert Café building is accessed by traditional knocking on the red door. Upon viewing the knocker, the proprietor allows admittance to the select few. Food and popular music, along with Spanish décor, Texas booths and tables greet the customer. The concrete floor reflects painted square tiles in red and green motif. The brown leather booths line the front (south) wall with a row of small tables opposite. Mama’s historic round table takes the place where the piano once played by Xavier Cugat and his New Orleans friends in the 1950s. The original bar, faced in glass blocks supported by a painted brick wall forms the northwest corner of the room. The old kitchen, now a

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

service area, is framed by interior walls of stucco. The walls are painted by James Bute paint colors developed by Bute himself for the painting of the McKee Street Bridge in 1985.¹

After Mama died in 1982 at the age of 90, Gary Anderson operated the café as a leasehold and went broke during the process. Anderson went to Bute in the summer of 1985 and had Bute replicate the McKee Bridge paint and colors that he used on the interior of the Last Concert Café and two-room former residence building. The Bute colors were treated by a triple fungicide to prevent mildew and mold, being acrylic house paint that stuck to concrete very well. Colors picked from Bute deck were an aqua-marine named Atlantis, which was a strong mix of green and blue; the purple color named Prunella, suggested color of prunes, but to match the Mulberry fruit in the area; a light lavender named Thatch, which was used for a blending color; and a soft flat-tone light machinery grey known as Alaska Fog.²

The original bar with the glass block front is intact as are the original square tables and leather covered benches of the booths. The original picture of Franklin D. Roosevelt still hangs at the back of the bar with two photographs of Mama, one as a young girl, the other at her round table just prior to her death. The original painted concrete floor is intact and the service area for the kitchen remains the same, except for the two service openings to the dining area are now closed. The only change was in 1980 when the kitchen was enlarged and expanded into the old garage area.³

The six-room former residence building reflects the original colors from 1897 and remnants of the original wallpaper on the walls and ceilings. One rear former bedroom had been converted to a kitchen facility at an unknown date. The rear-enclosed porch has been converted in the past ten years to a dining hall with a ladies restroom at the north end. The former porch of the 1873 building on the northeast end of the original building has been converted into a small one-room office that is accessible only from the rear porch.

In 1949, the rear portions of the garage attached to the east side of the café, the exterior of the rear porch of the six-room residence and the outside walls of the two-room residence were re-sheathed with lap and gap large siding of the day. Brick flowerbeds fronting the porch and two-room residence building were constructed in 1949 of complimentary brick to the café.

The unisex bathroom is concrete block with two stalls hidden by a small wood fence. The access to the open-air dining and stage area to the east of the patio is across a built-up wood platform placed there at an unknown date. The stage is placed at the far eastern end of Tract 11 (Lot 12, part of Lot 11) boundary line at Charles Street west line and centered on the patio. The backdrop wall of the stage is painted at various times to reflect the band or seasons.

A History of the Development of Block 4 Richey Addition and Lots 1, 2, 11, and 12

Rosanna and Benjamin Richey constructed a large house on the south side of Liberty Road between 1846 and 1848 and a smaller residence with front and rear porches about 150 feet south of the main

¹ Dedicated July 16, 1985

² Personal Communication: Kirk Farris, May 2009

³ Interviews: 2009, Kirk Farris; Dawn N. Fudge.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

house between 1848 and 1852. In 1846, the Richey family had four children at home and listed one slave in the Harris County Tax Records.

Benjamin Richey purchased about 22 acres on the North Side of Buffalo Bayou (NSBB) from Noel Mixon and Edward Walker of Harris County on March 4, 1846. There were no improvements mentioned in the sale.⁴ Richey assembled additional acreage on the north side of Buffalo Bayou up to 33 acres that was appraised at \$400 in 1852.

Rosanna Richey died in 1854 and Benjamin began settlement of her estate with his four children who inherited a percentage of the property. The settlement took three years with Benjamin deeding the town lots, some farm acreage, and the eastern 12 acres to the four children, retaining the homestead property amounting to about ten acres in 1858. Benjamin Richey immediately subdivided the homestead acreage into lots and blocks known as the Richey Addition, North Side Buffalo Bayou.⁵ Richey noted in the probate papers that the original homestead tract of about 16 acres was not part of Rosanna's separate property and had been deeded to Benjamin Richey in 1846 by Noel Mixon and Edward Walker.⁶ The Richey homestead had been appraised in 1858 at \$3500 in the Rosanna Richey probate and Benjamin immediately claimed the homestead improvements were not part of his wife's estate and were his separate property.

Following Rosanna's death in 1854, the settlement of the estate in 1858, and the plat of the Richey Addition in 1858, Benjamin Richey began lot sales in May 1858 in the Richey Subdivision. Richey sold raw land lots of 50 feet x 100 feet on the platted Blocks for \$95 each.⁷

Benjamin Richey sold four lots out of the south part of Block 4 Richey's Addition numbered 1, 2, 11, and 12 to John D. Patterson of Chantangua County, New York, and issued a deed on March 22, 1859, for \$400 cash citing "improvements."⁸ Patterson was in Houston at the time of the purchase as the payment, signing of the deed and recording of the instrument all occurred on the same day, March 22, 1859. Patterson had purchased the property one year previous with a Bond for Title deed or Contract for Sale instrument, as Patterson rendered the taxes for one Houston lot in 1858-1859 at \$500. The improvements consisted of a two-room residence building with a full front shed porch and cutout rear porch. Also on March 22, 1859, Patterson purchased 176 acres of farmland on Cypress Creek.⁹ Patterson left Texas to live in Chantangua County, Westfield, New York, prior to the Civil War, but was unable to sell his Texas land until after the war in 1866 when Mrs. Rachel

⁴ HCDR: L/129 recorded November 4, 1846

⁵ Plat: Book 1 page 558 August 1858.

⁶ HCDR: L/129

⁷ Richey TO J W Maxwell HCDR: U/97 May 5, 1858 2 notes \$50 and \$34 each. Lot was in Block 3 opposite Lot 1 of Block 4.

⁸ HCDR V/97 March 22, 1859, attested to J B Dart Notary Public of Harris County by Benjamin Richey on March 22 and recorded March 22, 1859 in Harris County Clerk's Office.

⁹ HCDR: V/96 Patterson paid \$100 for land on the north side Cypress Creek in Sarah M Terrell Survey which joined land of Blackburn and House. Land had been sold by J. J Cain and Massie for Amizi A. Tucker through Sheldon E. Bell on November 13, 1856 HCDR: P/692.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Stewart purchased the lots for \$600 also citing “improvements.”¹⁰ The Patterson appears to have rented the home during the Civil War while living in New York.

Charles and Rachel Stewart had moved to Houston in 1866, purchasing the old Richey home that fronted one hundred feet on Liberty Road on Lots 3, 4 and 5 of Block 4 of the Richey Subdivision and Lots 1, 2, 11, and 12 with improvements on Block 4. The existing improvements on Lots 1, 2, 11 and 12 were also mentioned in a mortgage signed January 1, 1868, and recorded March 27, 1868, by Charles Stewart noting a debt by Stewart of \$1200 gold from June 18, 1867, to Robert Calvert (now deceased) with balance of \$500 due. Stewart paid the \$500 balance and redeemed his property.¹¹ The Stewart residence buildings (on Lots 3, 4 and 5), as well as the one story residence located on Lots 1, 2, 11 and 12 are shown on the 1869 Wood map and the 1873 Birds-eye map of Houston.

Charles Stewart (1836-1895) was a well-known attorney who practiced in various East Texas counties, a legislator and congressional representative born in Memphis, Tennessee. In 1858, he was elected prosecuting attorney for the Thirteenth Judicial District where he lived in Marlin, Texas. He married Rachel Barry of Marlin in 1860; in 1861 he was one of the two youngest delegates to the Secession Convention; served with the Tenth Regiment of Texas Infantry thorough out the Civil War and later in George Baylor’s cavalry; coming to Houston in 1866, he practiced law with D. U. Barziza, J. B. Likens and G. H. Breaker, gaining a reputation as both a civil and criminal attorney. Much of his work in Houston involved litigation against railroads. Charles Stewart served as Houston city attorney from 1874 to 1876; elected to the Texas Senate in 1878 where he advocated tax-supported public education; elected for five terms to the United States Congress (1883-1893) moving to Washington, D.C., where he worked for the Houston Port appropriations as a member of the Rivers and Harbors Committee; returned to Texas to practice law with his son John in Houston; died in San Antonio September 23, 1895; and was buried in Glenwood Cemetery, Houston, Texas.

Charles and Rachel Stewart lived in the large Richey home on Block 4 that was located on Lots 3, 4 and 5 that fronted on the south side of Liberty Road with their son John, sister Delia Stewart from Tennessee, and one black domestic servant from 1866 through 1873.¹² Three Stuart servants born in Hanover and family were living in the small house on Lots 1, 2, 11, and 12.¹³ The Stewart home was valued at \$1200 by the 1870 Tax Assessor with the residence (with two porches) on Lots 1, 2, 11 and 12 valued at \$400. Prior to selling their homestead property purchased as the Benjamin Richey homestead, the Stewarts got a Quit Claim Deed from the Heirs of Rosanna Richey stating the property “we are entitled by our inheritance from our deceased mother, Rosanna Ritchey, and from four deceased brothers.” The Quit Claim was signed by J. E. and Rosanna O. McGee; David J

¹⁰ HCDR: 5/39 signed in New York Chantangua County, Westfield, and witnessed by John Francis, Commission of Deeds for Texas appointed by the Governor for the State of New York, September 18, 1866; filed in Texas January 18, 1867, recorded February 26, 1867.

¹¹ Mortgage Records: 2/423 January 16, 1868, recorded March 27, 1868.

¹² Part of Lots 5 and 6 of Block 4 of Richey Addition were impacted by Liberty Road crossing the Block from a southwest to northeast angle. Twelve lots of 50 feet x 100 feet made Block 4. All streets in the Richey Addition were oriented the compass points of due north and due east.

¹³ United States Eighth Census, 1870 Harris County: August 7 1870, page 525

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

and Eliza A. Wilson; and by their attorney Henry Cline.¹⁴ Charles Stewart being a shrewd attorney, in anticipation of selling the old Richey homestead improvements, secured the Quit Claim from Rosanna's heirs in order to clear any questions regarding his title to the land and improvements that he and his wife had purchased originally from Benjamin Richey.

Kate and Napoleon Fant

Charles and Rachel B. Stewart deeded half of Lots 1 and 2 Block 4 of the Richey subdivision to Napoleon Fant on May 24, 1873, for \$350 cash and \$500 in vendor's lien notes that adjoined Lot 3 to the north and fronted 100 feet on William Street with 50 feet on Nance (formerly Third and Eagle Streets). Fant paid part of the cash in gold of \$175. Less than two years later, the Stewarts sold the east half of Lots 1 and 2 for \$150 to Fant and vendor's lien notes for \$350, noting that the lot fronted 50 feet on Third Street (Nance) and was bounded on the west by Fant's Place.¹⁵

Napoleon Fant was born in Union County, South Carolina, in 1845 to Sanford and Caroline Fant, a farming family. Napoleon was the second child but first son of three Fant children. Napoleon was a Private in Company C, 7th South Carolina Cavalry, moving to Company D Cavalry Battalion, Holcombe Legion of the South Carolina Volunteers, having enlisted on March 8, 1863, at Unionville, South Carolina. Napoleon served for the duration of the Civil War and was paroled at the Appomattox Court House, Virginia, on April 9, 1865. Napoleon came to Houston, Texas, after the war with his brother, John J. Fant, who became Sheriff of Harris County, Texas.¹⁶ In August 1870, Napoleon was boarding in the First Ward and working as a printer with William Woodward, 28, a printer from Tennessee, and William Bruman, 22, a printer from Texas. After Napoleon's marriage to Kate Moffett (1853-1891), he moved his bride into the William Street house.

Napoleon and Katie Fant were living in the residence with their three small children and a domestic servant as noted on the 1880 census. On the same property lived Katie's parents, A. B. and Elita Brooks, probably on the west part of Lot 2 fronting William Street and next door at 806 William. Napoleon was a printer at the time; his father-in-law owned a lumber company. Napoleon went into the lumber business within the year and began building sawmills in east Texas counties.

Fant enclosed the rear (east) porch of the 1848-1852 house and expanded the original 3-4 room house to the present six-room residence with large central hallway and transoms above each door into the hall between 1874 and 1875 to accommodate the growing family. Thus, 1874-1875 appears to be the date of the expansion of the building into six rooms addressed as 904 William Street. Fant's tax on the house jumped to \$800 from \$500 in 1875.

Fant's tax appraisal increased to \$1000 in 1882 and stayed at that rate through 1889. John Napoleon Fant was the given name of Napoleon Fant. In about 1888, Napoleon Fant went to northern Polk County to build a sawmill and tram road at Easom.¹⁷ A post office was opened at the sawmill and

¹⁴ HCDR: 10/805 December 20, 1872

¹⁵ HCDR: 12/66; 13/774; 48/521. Fant lost the release of the vendor's lien and had to get a second copy from Charles Stewart who was then living in Washington D. C. in March 1890

¹⁶ Napoleon and John's uncle Joseph Fant had been Sheriff of Unionville, South Carolina during the 1860s.

¹⁷ Houston Post: 1899 August 15, p. 6

CITY OF HOUSTON

named Fant, also making Napoleon Fant the Postmaster.¹⁸ Napoleon died in 1899 and was buried in the family plot in Glenwood Cemetery.

Mary Barefield

Napoleon and Kate Fant sold the house on Lot 2 that had been occupied by Kate's parents, the Brooks, to Charles C. and Mary Barefield for \$500 in promissory notes on March 20, 1890. The same day, the Fants sold the houses at 904 William to George W. Littlefield of Travis County, Texas, for \$1600.¹⁹ On June 20, 1890, Littlefield gifted the land and houses, citing "natural love and affection for my niece," Mary Barefield, with the stipulation that she was "to be made to secure said property to her and her family for a homestead, not to be sold or disposed of by her and her husband or by her along unless the same shall be exchanged for another homestead or unless the proceeds of a sale shall be invested in another homestead."²⁰

The tax appraisal on the two houses had dropped to \$800 by 1893, probably due to the national recession that began in 1893 as a stock market crash. In 1897, the tax appraisal rate for the land and improvements on Lot 1 increased to \$1200. The 1907 Sanborn Fire Map shows the enlarged residence building with the northeast porch now enclosed and an additional shed porch on the east rear of the building. The front porch is now centered on both sides of the front door, partially expending across the front of the building as a shed porch. The building was labeled in 1907 as "Boarding."

Mary Barefield and her husband separated some time before 1900. Mary moved to Gonzales Texas and rented the property to boarders. In June 1900, a Richard Knight, 39, from North Carolina and his wife, Olivia, 42 from Texas and Richard's 16-year-old daughter, Georgia, lived in the house. The Knights had been married eight years. Olivia's married son from a previous marriage and his wife Carrie were also living with the Knight family. Richard Knight listed his occupation as a carpenter, as did his son-in-law Paul Saulter.²¹

The Warehouse District north of downtown Houston had become Hispanic between 1900 and 1910 with many of the residents being employed by the numerous railroads bisecting the area. Due to the need for railroad employees in the district, now known as the Fifth Ward, rent houses began to fill up the vacant lots in the Fifth Ward neighborhoods and the larger older homes were converted into boarding houses.

In 1901, Mary Barefield sold Lot 1 with improvements for \$500 and notes and vendor's lien to D. A. Middleton who remained an absentee landlord, renting the rooms out for boarders.²² In the sale instrument to Middleton, Mary Barefield of Gonzales noted that her act was "separate & apart from

¹⁸ The name stuck until 1892. In 1902, the mill was sold to new owners who changed the name of the community to Petersburg. The community became Potomac in 1903 and changed to Wakefield in 1925.

¹⁹ HCDR: 48/512

²⁰ "HCDR: 52/8 June 23 1890 George

²¹ United States Federal Census: 1900 Harris County Precinct 1 ED 88, 5th Ward of Houston, Texas.

²² HCDR: 128/99 May 2, 1901

CITY OF HOUSTON

her husband whose whereabouts are to her unknown and against who proceeds for divorce are now pending.”²³

D. A. Middleton and his wife rented the improvements for about three years and then deeded the boarding house property to Levi Sam, a local investor, for \$960 on March 2, 1904. Levi rented the property as a boarding house to Miss Mary Roberts who occasionally worked as a saleslady at Ed Kiam’s Dry Goods Store in downtown Houston. Mary Roberts ran the boarding house from 1907 through 1916. Boarding house operators on William Street were listed as “Rental Agents.”²⁴ Levi Sam died and his estate sold the property to Mrs. Carrie Edel and her husband, Julius Edel, on May 8, 1917. Mrs. Carrie Estelle Edel and her husband, Julius Edel sold Lot 1 Block 4 with improvements to Frank and Louise Aldrete on October 29, 1919, and released the Vendors Lien and Deed of Trust on October 30, 1928.²⁵

Louise and Frank Aldrete

Frank and Louise Aldrete (sometimes seen as Aldrette) moved into the former six-room boarding house in 1919 and rented the rear house to Deck Ballard, an African American, and Jose Travino during 1920. By 1925, daughter Ruby Aldrete is living in the rear building. The rear building rooms show vacancy in the city directories from 1929 forward except for one year of rental in 1940 to a Frank Motor.²⁶ However, the 1930 census shows Ray Aguilar, 21, and Sam Gonzalez, 18, as roomers with the Aldrete family. Frank Sr. employed by the railroad as a night watchman on the swing rail bridge over Buffalo Bayou. Frank Aldrete died before 1950 and his widow, Louisa, died on November 29, 1950, at age 91, being born in Mexico in 1859.

Elena “Mama” A. Lopez

City of Houston Permit No.1080 for approximately \$450 for Lot 1 Block 4 Richey Addition and on June 6, 1950, the Harris County Tax Assessor appraised the new improvements at 1403 Nance as \$480 plus. According to an interview with Edgar Arthur Wollam, Elena Aldrete Lopez had “hocked all her jewelry from a previous marriage” to pay for the construction of the Last Concert Café building. Edgar related that a cousin of Louise Aldrete living in New York and working as a chef on passenger liners, Sam Gonzales, visited Houston and the Aldrete family, mentioning that Elena should open a restaurant where there was a large open space facing Nance Street, at the rear of the William Street residence.

Edgar Arthur Wollam, a former Merchant Marine sailor, came to live with the Aldrete family during the times he was in Houston and when Mama was operating the Last Concert Café beginning in 1951. In an interview with Edgar Wollam, he stated that Elena Lopez adopted him into her family as her son. At one time, Mama leased the management of the Last Concert Café to Edgar who leased the café at various times until Dawn N. Fudge arrived in 1986. From the time of the café opening in 1949 to Mama’s death in 1982, some thirty-three years, Mama operated the Last Concert

²³ HCDR: 128/99

²⁴ Morrison & Fourmey City Directory, 1912.

²⁵ HCDR: 774/157

²⁶ Morrison & Fourmey City Directories: Houston.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

Café from the round table in the café corner, adjacent to the bar, always parting the red curtain to verify who she would admit to the café. A re-closed curtain meant no admittance to the person knocking. The first visit to the Last Concert Café was always with trepidation and high anticipation to determine if one would be accepted as a customer by Mama. Great relief and joy would accompany the opening of the red door and entrance to the mysterious interior of the Last Concert Café.

The menu was small, encompassing what dish Mama had chosen for the evening. The tortillas were hand made in the open kitchen that could be viewed from the booths lining the front café wall. The bar lower wall was made of illuminated glass blocks which also served to light up the piano area where the performers played during the colder evenings of winter. Summers were always on the patio with the performers playing from a slight built-up deck on the east side of the patio. Tables were always available on the patio all seasons. However, special customers were afforded the private tables situated on the enclosed (heated and air-conditioned) rear porch of the residence that fronted on the west side of the patio. The porch tables have been used throughout the years for café business, but are no longer as selective among customers. The tables are still sought after by knowing customers at lunchtime during the business week. Customers accepted the changing menu and have found the Last Concert a place to relax, unwind, and enjoy special music and musicians after a pressing business day in Houston. An atmosphere designed and promoted by Mama from the inception of the idea of the Last Concert as a café and popular music scene.

The Last Concert building at 1403 Nance Street constructed as Mama's last commercial venture in 1949 exhibits the work of a unique designer of the times. The red and white detailing of the residence building at 904 William occupied by the Alderete family and Mama Lopez is reflected in the exterior décor of the Last Concert building, down to the red curtain over the glass of the two red entrance doors to the café.

Popular Music in the 1950s

Possibly due to brother John Alderete's connection as a music salesman and Elena Lopez's interest in promoting the Last Concert, the name and place immediately became the Latin popular music focus in Houston. The first performer playing at the Last Concert was Xavier Cugat (1900-1990) in the 1950s, who was a Spanish-Catalan-Cuban-American bandleader, but also a trained violinist and a special person in the advancement of Latin music in the United States as popular music. Born *Francesc d'Asis Xavier Cugat Mingall de Bru I Deulofeu*, Xavier Cugat came to the Last Concert when he played New Orleans, Louisiana.²⁷ Mama installed an upright piano against the interior wall of the kitchen for performers to use who would bring their own instruments to the Last Concert.²⁸

The Last Concert became a place that provided a venue for new and aspiring musicians in Latin and popular music during the evenings. The outside patio became a practice location for these local performers during the early evenings and an after-hours venue for accomplished musicians who were playing in Houston at other clubs such as the Shamrock, the Cork Club, the White Horse, or

²⁷ Interview with Edgar Arthur Wollam, adopted son of Elena "Mama" Lopez.

²⁸ Interview with Edgar Arthur Wollam, 2009.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

the Houston Music Hall. The after-hours performers in town attracted the late-time newspaper reporters from the Houston Press, Chronicle and Post. Their presence insured Mama of a kind article in a following newspaper, made interesting by the presence of personalities such as Jose Greco in 1952-53 and the occasional drop-in by Xavier Cugat and his group. Mariachi groups in town would come by the Last Concert after the evening performance for a meal and jam session.²⁹

The sixties brought small groups from the Ballet Folklorico. Because of the early evening jam time for aspiring musicians and the late, after-hours attended by the professional musicians in town, the Last Concert began a tradition established from opening in the 1950s that continues into 2009 of dual group performances during the evenings. Sunday afternoons became the time for locals to jam after 3 p.m. Also due to the amateur hours beginning at 7pm, the Last Concert assisted many new musicians and groups to have exposure and a place to develop their musical skills.

A small juke box was available that Edgar Wollam stuffed with Latin music, South American tunes, Spanish records and popular music that he purchased during his time as a merchant marine sailor when visiting various countries. Popular music performers who got their start at the Last Concert included John Cowan, David Nelson, Peter Rowan, Tim O'Brian, and Steve Earle, along with small groups such as Railroad Earth, New Monsoon, and a string band known as Yonder Mountain.³⁰ Edgar Wollam recalls Lightnin' Hopkins, Pete Mays, Lavelle White, James Bolden, Rex Bell of Galveston Old Quarter, Billy Gibbons, Mickey Phoenix, Flying Tigers (1957), Le Mafia (nine Grammys), Sebastian Pot Roast, Butterfly High, the Sheet Rockers and Little Johnnie Singleton and Reid Fennel playing at the Last Concert in the early days. Carolyn Wonderland played many years at the Last Concert as a regular and has been able to perfect her guitar blues playing and singing to be more like a modern-day Janice Joplin.³¹ The High Tailers, who have played at the Last Concert for the past twenty years every Thursday night, are the longest running band to play there.

Women in Texas in the Mid 20th Century

Although the women's suffrage movement had achieved the vote for women in 1919 and property rights for her separate property five years previous (1913), Texas women concentrated on achievements in the arts, journalism, creative writing, and education.³² Women in the professional field were few, unable to achieve degrees due to financial hardships and ingrained attitudes.³³ Women of wealth and position usually spent their time in the political world or ran for office where possible.³⁴ Some women supported the preservation of historic sites, buildings, churches, and, in

²⁹ Interview with Edgar Arthur Wollam, 2009.

³⁰ Interview 2009: David

³¹ Interview with Dawn N. Fudge, 2008, 2009.

³² Ann Fears Crawford and Crystal Sasse Ragsdale, *Women in Texas, their Lives, their Experiences, their Accomplishments* (Burnet, Texas: Eakin Press, 1982), 183-187, 233-235; and *Texas Women, Frontier to Future* (Austin, Texas: State History Press, 1998), 116-118; *Houston Post*, November 2, 1918; also "Women in Texas History" in Mike Kingston, editor, *Texas Almanac 1886-1987* (Dallas: Dallas Morning News, 1985), 229-234.

³³ Crawford and Ragsdale, *Women in Texas*, xi – xiii.

³⁴ Crawford and Ragsdale, *Texas Women*, xiv-xv.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

San Antonio, Texas, the Alamo mission.³⁵ Whatever the field, women many times remained in seclusion and out of the public eye in order to more fully achieve their goals in life.³⁶

Following World War II and women's role running machinery and becoming factory workers, there were more acceptances for women in the workplace. This was the setting in which Elena "Mama" A. Lopez began development of the business to be known as the Last Concert Café and featured popular music beginning in the 1950s with Latin musicians. The tradition of promoting and supporting up-and-coming popular music performers as well as providing a venue for musicians who have achieved success has continued with the present owner, Dawn N. Fudge.

Dawn came to work at the Last Concert in the evenings, following her day job, to learn the restaurant business in 1986 after taking a Leisure Learning Course entitled, "So You want to Own a Restaurant."³⁷ In April 1999, Dawn N. Fudge acquired Lot 12 and part of Lot 11 (Tract 11) on the east side of the Last Concert Café to expand the evening music performances to an outdoor dining area and stage on the edge of Chapman Street on Lot 12. Edgar Wollam and Joe Lopez, the adopted son and natural son of Elena "Mama" Lopez, sold all of Lot 1 that included the Last Concert Café at 1403 Nance and the house fronting at 904 William Street to Dawn N. Fudge on August 31, 2007.³⁸

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

Description of Café building exterior

The Last Concert building exhibits integrity in the distinctive brickwork combination with stucco over concrete block, a practical but delicately balanced design of the time, particularly for a commercial structure.

Description of residence architecture of 1890s and two-room building with hip roof.

The early residence structure on Lot 1 built between 1846 and 1852 was encapsulated into a Victorian-style structure that doubled the size of the building. The exterior sheathing was replaced with improved siding of the day and the addition expanded south to add a 12 foot wide central hall from front to back with transom doors from the old residence into the hallway. On the south side of the hall, three rooms were added with each having a transom door to the long hall. Two over two light windows with two windows per southern exposure room, all with red shutters, accent the white exterior sheathing. The building was raised several inches from the original level and a rear porch added partially across the east (rear) of the building. The rear porch covered the old cistern at the rear of the original building. The cistern is intact under the rear porch in 2010.

³⁵ "Women in Texas History," 229-234.

³⁶ Crawford and Ragsdale, *Texas Women*, 88-90.

³⁷ Since Mama's death in 1982, three other management groups had operated the Last Concert Café and music venue before Dawn N. Fudge arrived in 1986: Lorenzo _____, Gary Anderson, Debra Harper & Michael Mann.

³⁸ Harris County Appraisal District Records No. 0300940000014 & No. 9300940000012, Year: 2009.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

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CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

community sentiment or public pride.

AND

- (9) If less than 50 years old, or proposed historic district containing a majority of buildings, structures, or objects that are less than 50 years old, whether the building, structure, object, site, or area is of extraordinary importance to the city, state or nation for reasons not based on age (Sec. 33-224(b)).

OR

- The property was constructed before 1905 (Sec. 33-229(a)(2));

OR

- The property is listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places or designated as a “contributing structure” in an historic district listed in the National Register of Historic Places (Sec. 33-229(a)(3));

OR

- The property is recognized by the State of Texas as a Recorded State Historical Landmark (Sec. 33-229(a)(4)).

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of Last Concert Cafe Complex at 1403 Nance Street.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

EXHIBIT A LAST CONCERT CAFE COMPLEX 1403 NANCE STREET



CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

EXHIBIT B SITE LOCATION MAP LAST CONCERT CAFE COMPLEX 1403 NANCE STREET NOT TO SCALE

