

## PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** Valenti-Dissen House at 1505 Alamo

**AGENDA ITEM:** A

**OWNERS:** Robert Foltz

**HPO FILE No.:** HP2025\_0105

**APPLICANTS:** SAME AS OWNER; PRESERVATION HOUSTON ON BEHALF OF THE OWNERS

**DATE ACCEPTED:** 04-07-2025

**LOCATION:** 1505 ALAMO STREET

**HAHC HEARING:** 05-08-2025

**SITE INFORMATION:** Lot 1, Block 1, Settegast on Alamo, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. Designation is requested for single-story house. The building is 1,380 square feet on a 3,286 square foot lot.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Protected Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The house at 1505 Alamo is a 1924 one-story, frame Craftsman bungalow located in the historic First Ward neighborhood. The First Ward is one of the four original wards created by the City of Houston in 1840. It extended northwest from the intersection of Main and Congress and included part of Houston's early business district and some of the city's earliest large commercial enterprises. While the ward system was abandoned years ago, "First Ward" is still used today to describe the area immediately west of I-45, east of Sawyer Street, south of I-10, and north of Washington Avenue.

First Ward developed as a working-class neighborhood, and the modest Folk Victorian, Queen Anne, and Craftsman homes built in the area reflect housing styles that were popular at the time. Recent rapid development, however, has drastically reduced the historic housing stock from the neighborhood's early days. The High First Ward Historic District was created in 2014 to preserve some of these structures, but 1505 Alamo is not within its boundaries.

1505 Alamo was built in 1924 by Jacob Valenti, grandfather of former presidential aide Jack Valenti, and was used as rental property for the majority of its life. The house was originally numbered 1507 Alamo but was replatted and changed to 1505 Alamo in 2021.

A number of short-term tenants occupied 1505 Alamo, originally numbered 1507 Alamo, after its initial construction until Joseph Valenti, Jacob Valenti's son, and wife Josephine moved into the home in 1928 with their two children, Jack and Lorraine. After the Valentis moved out in 1945, the home was rented to another long-term tenant, widow Antonette Gouras and her two daughters. The Gouras family would remain in the home until the early 1960s.

The Valenti family sold 1505 Alamo (numbered 1507 Alamo at the time) and neighboring 1507 Alamo (numbered 1509 Alamo at the time) to Della Dissen, the oldest surviving daughter of cattle and lumberman Julius Settegast, in 1934. The houses remained in the Dissen family until 2021 when they were purchased by FW Heritage, LLC who completed a rehabilitation of both homes. The current owner purchased the property in 2023.

The current owner is seeking protected landmark designation for 1505 Alamo to preserve one of the last remaining historic homes on the street and to ensure it remains part of the fabric of the neighborhood. The property meets Criteria 1, 3, and 8 for Landmark designation and Criteria 1 and 2 for Protected Landmark designation. The nomination was produced by David Putz with Preservation Houston.

## **HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE**

### *FIRST WARD*

The First Ward is one of the four original wards created by the City of Houston in 1840. It encompassed the city's original business district centered around Market Square and extended northwest of Congress and Main Street to the city limits. To reflect population increases in the north and northwest parts of the city, the boundaries of the First Ward changed in 1866 as the city designated the area east of White Oak Bayou to the newly created Fifth Ward. Although the ward system was abolished in 1905, the name First Ward is still used to describe the general area immediately west of I-45, east of Sawyer Street, south of I-10 and north of Washington Avenue.

First Ward developed as a working-class community largely due to its proximity to the downtown port at the foot of Main Street and what would become the Houston & Texas Central Railroad shops. A large immigrant community of primarily Germans and Italians initially settled in the area, seeking employment with the railroad or operating businesses catering to neighborhood residents.

The majority of the structures built in First Ward reflected styles that were popular in working class communities of the time, including small vernacular Victorian cottages and Craftsman bungalows. Commercial buildings that housed corner grocery stores, saloons, barber shops, bakeries, meat markets, and drug stores were also scattered throughout the neighborhood. About 30% of the residential properties in the area were originally rentals, and as the neighborhood aged, this number increased considerably.

Like many neighborhoods its age, the First Ward began a long period of decline in the 1950s. Many of the historic houses and buildings were demolished at this time and replaced by industrial buildings. Empty lots where single-family homes once stood currently dot the area, and rapid townhome construction predominates. Nevertheless, the First Ward still has a number of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century buildings that represent some of the oldest structures in Houston. Concerted efforts by residents and advocacy groups to preserve the remaining historic housing stock resulted in the City of Houston designating part of the First Ward the High First Ward Historic District on May 28, 2014.

### *HISTORY OF 1505 ALAMO*

A five-room frame house at 1507 Alamo (now 1505 Alamo) was built as a rental property by Jacob Valenti in 1924. Valenti leased the home the following year to realtor Carl Haas and his wife Jennie, who remained at the address until 1926. Painter Leo Morris and wife Dottie moved in the following year (1927) before Valenti's son Joseph and wife Josephine moved into the home in 1928. The Valentis had two children: future presidential aide Jack, born in 1921, and Lorraine, born in 1925. Joseph and Josephine Valenti would remain at their Alamo Street home until 1944 when they moved to the 1300 block of West Bell.

The following year, 1945, widow Antonette Gouras moved into the house with her two daughters: Stavroula, also known as Steve Ellen or Stevey, and Maria. Steve Ellen Gouras later became the longtime choir director at Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church. In the 1960s and 1970s, she performed on local radio and television stations singing as the character of Madam Cluck Cluck, a woman who had been bitten by a chicken which caused her to make clucking noises when she sang. Steve Ellen Gouras married Harris County deputy Horace Warfield on March 15, 1956. The Warfields and Antonette Gouras remained in the house until the mid-1960s.

## *OWNERSHIP HISTORY OF 1505 ALAMO*

### *THE VALENTI FAMILY*

*Gianchino "Jacob" Valenti (b. June 24, 1870; d. November 20, 1945)*

*Lorenza Graffato Valenti (b. May 8, 1875; d. February 18, 1950)*

Jacob Valenti was born June 24, 1870, in the small village of Contessa Entellina on the island of Sicily. He emigrated to the United States, arriving in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1891 at the age of 21. Lorenza Graffato Valenti was born May 8, 1873 (some sources say 1878) in Contessa Entellina and emigrated to the United States, arriving at New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1891. Jacob and Lorenza were married in 1891, shortly before their departure from Sicily. After their arrival, Jacob and Lorenza moved immediately to Houston where their son Joseph was born in 1892.

In Houston, Jacob worked briefly for the Texas and New Orleans Railroad before operating a saloon and grocery store, first on Leeland Street and then on Gabel Street, before purchasing, in 1912, a two-story building on the southwest corner of Houston Avenue and Alamo (2109 Houston Avenue, demolished) that housed a saloon and grocery store on the first floor and an apartment on the second. In 1913, Valenti built a five-room cottage at 1505 Alamo (now 2109 Houston Avenue, demolished) to use as rental property. In 1921 he built another rental, this time on property he owned at 1509 Alamo (now 1507 Alamo) and in 1924, he built a second rental on the same lot, 1507 Alamo (now 1505 Alamo), giving him three rental properties on the block.

Valenti continued to operate his Houston Avenue grocery store and saloon until the early 1920s when he began leasing the store to a number of different grocers. After a fire destroyed the building in 1934, Valenti and wife Lorenza moved to 1505 Alamo (demolished), the home at the back of the Houston Avenue lot he had been using as rental property and rebuilt the Houston Avenue store in the same location. The same year, he sold both 1507 (now 1505) and 1509 (now 1507) Alamo to Della Dissen, the oldest surviving daughter of Julius J. Settegast. The Houston Avenue property would remain in the Valenti family until the 1960s.

Jacob and Lorenza remained at 1505 Alamo (now 2109 Houston Avenue, demolished) until the time of their deaths, Jacob in 1945 and Lorenza in 1950. They are buried at Forest Park Lawndale.

### *THE DISSEN FAMILY*

*Emma Adela “Della” Settegast Dissen (b. December 29, 1871; d. August 15, 1936)*

Emma “Della” Settegast Dissen was born in Houston, Texas on December 19, 1871 to cattleman and realtor Juluis Joseph Settegast (b. March 29, 1845; d. July 8, 1933) and Katherine Floeck Settegast (b. May 26, 1852; d. March 21, 1924). She was the first of ten children born to the couple. She married wholesale grocer Bismark Charles Dissen (b. October 22, 1870; d. July 17, 1933) on June 5, 1899. The couple had three children, with one, William Julius Dissen (b. January 8, 1901; d. January 29, 1962), living until adulthood.

Della Dissen purchased 1507 Alamo (now 1505 Alamo) from Jacob Valenti in 1934 for \$4,250. The sale price included a second Craftsman bungalow on the same lot, 1509 Alamo (now 1507 Alamo), which Valenti built in 1921. She continued to use both homes as rental property, and upon her death in 1936, both houses passed to her son William. They remained in the Dissen family until 2021.

## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

### ARCHITECTURAL STYLE

#### *American Craftsman*

1505 Alamo is a one-story frame, Craftsman bungalow. The Craftsman style evolved out of the popular Arts and Crafts Movement of the early 1900s, when architecture shifted away from the more elaborate Victorian style. It was the prevailing architectural style in the United States between 1900 and 1930.

Craftsman style is often associated with bungalow house forms, and both were inspired by architect brothers Charles Sumner Greene and Henry Mather Greene. The Greene’s were from California and practiced together in Pasadena from 1893 to 1914. They began designing simple Craftsman bungalows around 1903, according to Virginia McAlester, author of *A Field Guide to American Houses: Identifying and Understanding America’s Domestic Architecture*. The defining features of bungalows include low-pitched gabled roofs, wide eaves (usually with exposed brackets under the eaves), partial or full-width porches supported by tapered square columns or piers, and prominent but simple decorations.

### ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

1505 Alamo is a one-story wood frame house with a front gabled roof on a pier and beam foundation. The rear portion of the roof is hipped. The house is not highly styled but does include Craftsman details such as wood brackets supporting the wide exposed eaves in the front gable and a single tapered wood column on a brick base at the northeast corner. The house is clad in narrow wood siding with wood trim.

The front elevation is asymmetrical with an integrated porch on the east side. The recessed north wall includes the entry door and a pair of 1/1 windows. A second entry door is located on the adjacent east wall. The west side of the front elevation features a pair of 1/1 ganged wood windows. A small, fixed wood window is centered in the gable near the ridge. The east elevation includes a pair of 1/1 wood windows near the front of the house, a small, fixed wood window near the center of the elevation, and a single 1/1 wood window toward the rear of the house. The west elevation features three pairs of 1/1

wood windows; the central pair is smaller than the other 1/1 windows on the house. A 1-story addition is located at the rear of the house on the southwest corner.

## RESTORATION HISTORY

1505 Alamo was an approximately 1,000 square foot home with two bedrooms and one bath when new owners purchased the home in 2021. After a sensitive rear addition housing the primary bedroom, ensuite bath, and walk in closet, the home now has three bedrooms, two baths, and 1,380 square feet.

Previous owners began their restoration by leveling and raising the house because the crawl space was too low to the ground. Two rows of piers and beams along the length of the house were added for support and additional piers were added around the home for beam reinforcement. Damaged and rotted perimeter beams were replaced, and all weak or termite damaged floor joists were reinforced or replaced as well.

The existing front and back porches were completely rebuilt. On the front porch, rotting and damaged floor joists and deck board were replaced, and new porch guardrails and handrails designed to match the original were installed to meet current City of Houston codes. The original, front-facing Craftsman-style front door was refinished, and a second east-facing front door which was not original to the home was replaced with a matching Craftsman-style door. The original back porch was rebuilt as a mixed-purpose mudroom, laundry room, and storage space.

Repairs to the roof, which involved installing new roof decking and 30-year shingles, uncovered a layer of original wood shingles beneath another two layers of composition shingles. The weight of the multiple layers of roof had caused the eastern wall of the home to lean out and away from the structure, and once the roofing was replaced, the eastern wall was pulled into alignment with the rest of the building. Additional work to stabilize and strengthen the load of the roof included reinforcing the original 2'x4' rafters and joists with 2'x6' lumber. It was further strengthened with braces, purlins, and collar ties. All electrical wiring, sewer and plumbing were replaced to meet current City of Houston codes. Central heat and air were also added.

Inside, the previous owners preserved the home's original five-panel doors and, where possible, original millwork, including three door jambs with Jack Valenti's signature on them. A fourth door jamb with Valenti's signature was salvaged and framed in a decorative shadowbox, a visible reminder of the previous residents of the home. Millwork that could not be salvaged was replaced with new trim cut to match the original. The original door hardware, including hinges, decorative door plates and knobs, were reused throughout the house. The original double-hung, one-over-one windows were removed, repaired, and rehung. Most of the original window hardware was either missing or damaged beyond repair and was replaced with period appropriate hardware.

The restoration project also revealed the home's original brick chimney. Chimney bricks that were damaged were repointed where needed and the entire chimney left exposed. To improve the flow of the house, a wall was removed between the kitchen and dining area. Doors that existed between the rooms were repurposed in the new rear addition, and shiplap from the removed walls was used to replace damaged shiplap in other areas of the house. The original bathroom cast iron sink was reglazed and is

now used in the secondary bath. The home's original wood floors, damaged beyond repair because of multiple layers of linoleum, were replaced with bamboo flooring.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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\_\_\_\_\_, Texas Marriage Records and Index, 1837-2015

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Harris County Tax Appraisal and Building Assessment Records for 1509 Alamo, Houston, Texas, 77007. Harris County Archives. Accessed January 2025.

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\_\_\_\_\_, "Building Permits." October 28, 1913.

\_\_\_\_\_, "J.J. Valenti Rites to be Held Friday." November 21, 1945.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Past Week is Active in Building." May 4, 1924.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Real Estate Transfers." April 27, 1934.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Stavroula 'Stevey' Warfield, Singer, Choral Director, Dies at 83." January 6, 2008.

Houston Post Historical Archive (1885-1995). Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas. Accessed January 2025.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Building Permits." July 16, 1921.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. Houston Public Library online, Texas Digital Sanborn Maps, Accessed January 2025.

*The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Cara Quigley, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.*

## **APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION**

### **Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation**

(a) The HAHC, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider one or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the type of designation:

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## Houston Archaeological & Historical Commission

**Planning and Development Department**

**S**    **NA**                      **S - satisfies**    **D - does not satisfy**    **NA - not applicable**

- ☒ ☐ (1) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area possesses character, interest or value as a visible reminder of the development, heritage, and cultural and ethnic diversity of the city, state, or nation;

☐ ☒ (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;

☒ ☐ (3) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is identified with a person who, or group or event that, contributed significantly to the cultural or historical development of the city, state, or nation;

☐ ☒ (4) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area exemplify a particular architectural style or building type important to the city;

☐ ☒ (5) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area are the best remaining examples of an architectural style or building type in a neighborhood;

☐ ☒ (6) Whether the building, structure, object or site or the buildings, structures, objects or sites within the area are identified as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, state, or nation;

☐ ☒ (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present;

☒ ☐ (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of 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)).

### **Sec. 33-229. Criteria for protected landmark designation**

**S**    **NA**                      **S - satisfies**    **D - does not satisfy**    **NA - not applicable**

- ☒ ☐ (1) Meets at least three of the criteria for designation in section 33-224 of this Code;

☒ ☐ (2) Was constructed more than 100 years before application for designation was received by the director;

☐ ☒ (3) Is listed individually or as a contributing structure in an historic district on the National Register of Historic Places; or

☐ ☒ (4) Is recognized by the State of Texas as a Recorded State Historical Landmark.

## STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Protected Landmark Designation of the Valenti-Dissen House at 1505 Alamo Street.

## HAHC RECOMMENDATION [LEAVE BLANK FOR HAHC REPORT – INCLUDE FOR ACTION REPORT]

The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends to City Council the Protected Landmark Designation of the [Full Name of Landmark] at [Address].



## EXHIBIT A

### PHOTO

VALENTI-DISSEN HOUSE AT 1505 ALAMO  
1505 ALAMO STREET

Photo 1: Oblique view of the northeast (front/left) elevation of 1505 Alamo Street. Photo courtesy of Strata Visuals, 2025.



## EXHIBIT B

### SITE MAP

VALENTI-DISSEN HOUSE AT 1505 ALAMO

1505 ALAMO STREET

Map 1: Harris Central Appraisal District map of 1505 Alamo Street. Accessed 2025.

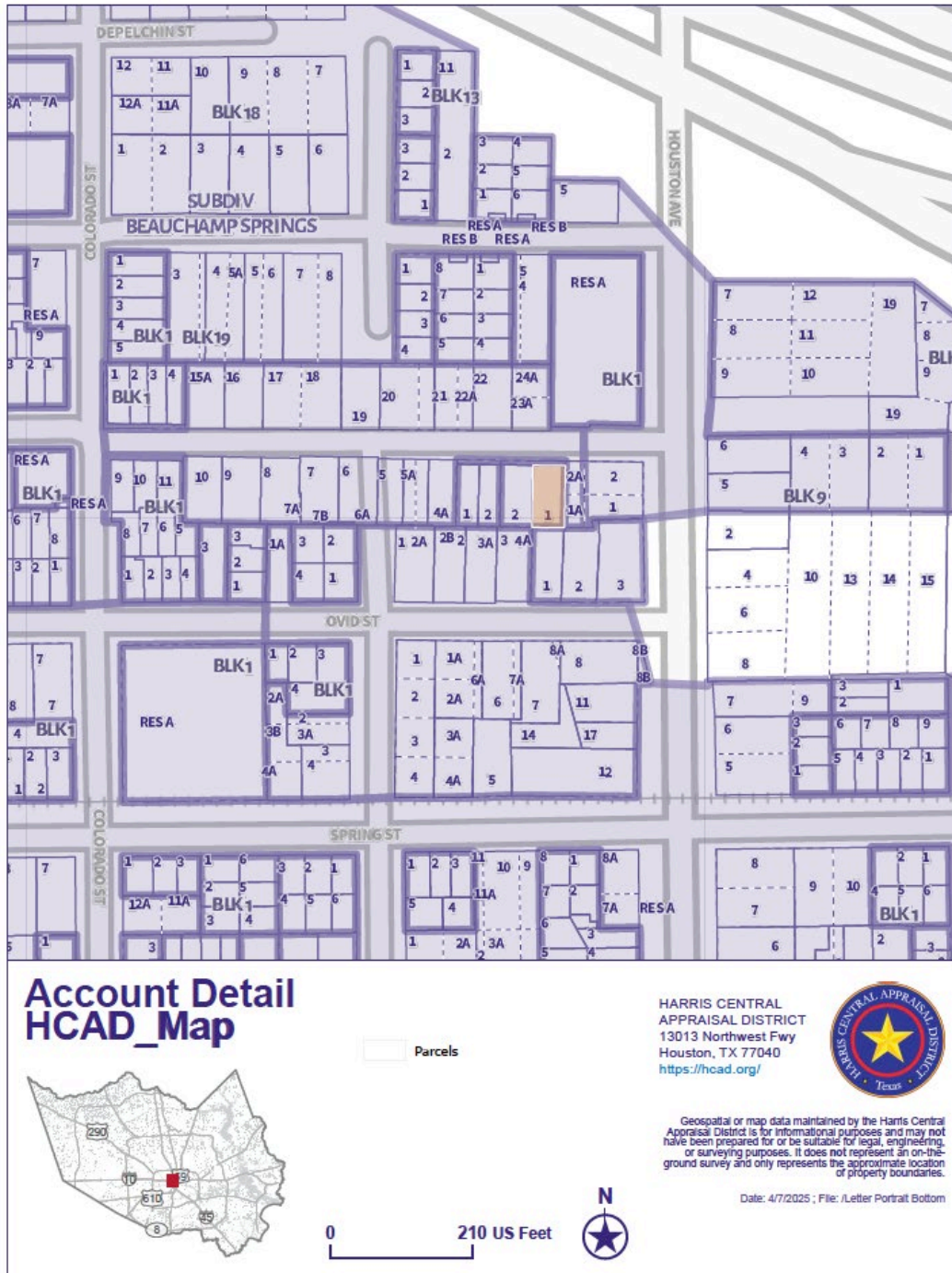
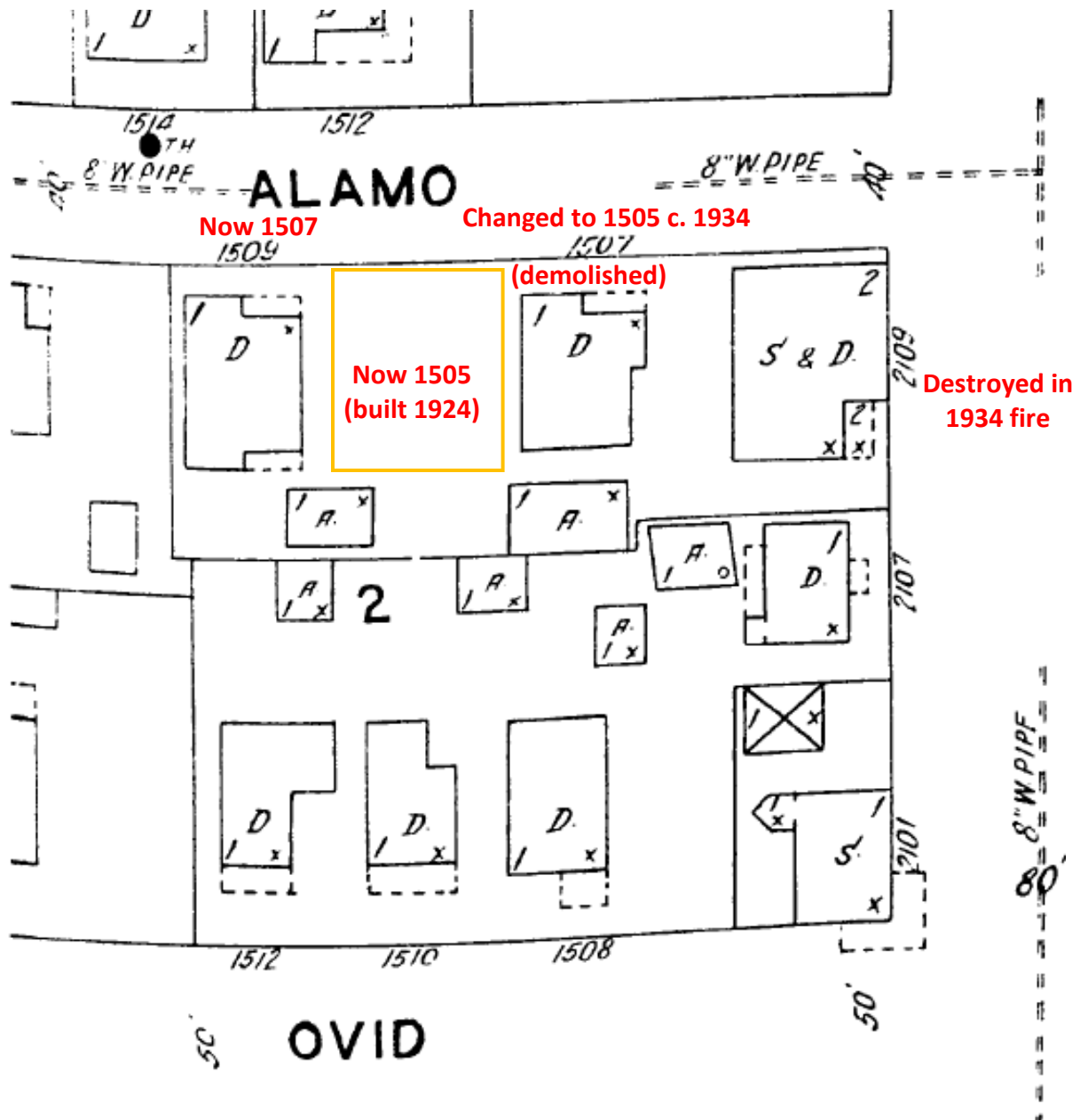


EXHIBIT C  
HISTORIC DOCUMENTATION  
VALENTI-DISSEN HOUSE AT 1505 ALAMO  
1505 ALAMO STREET

Figure 1: 1924 Sanborn Map of 1505 and 1507 Alamo Street. The dwelling that was previously numbered as 1505 Alamo was demolished approximately after 1965 according to Building Land Assessment (BLA) documentation. Accessed 2025.



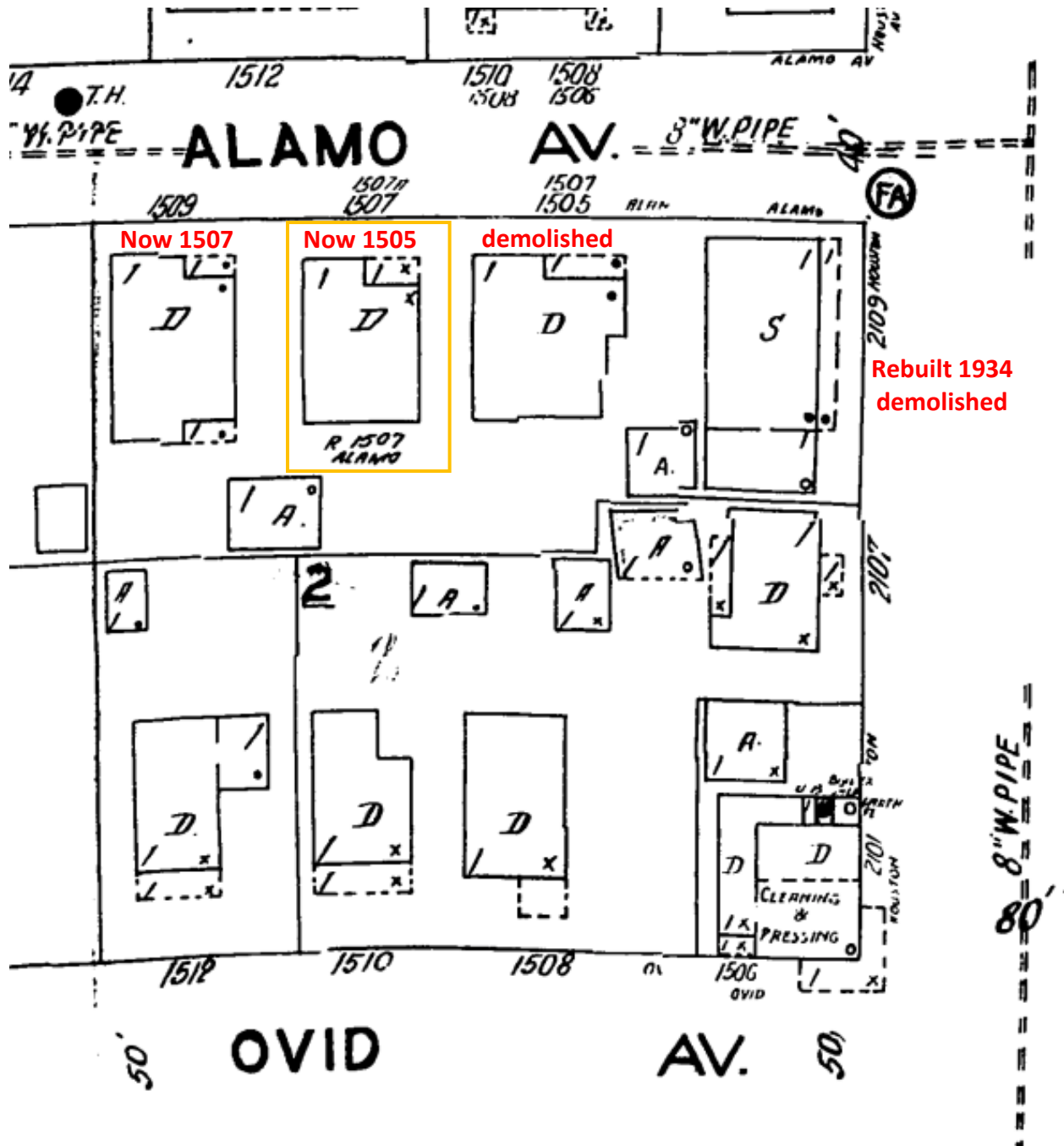


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Figure 2: 1950 Sanborn Map of 1505 and 1507 Alamo Street. Accessed 2025.



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Figure 3: BLA documents of 1505 Alamo Street (previously numbered as 1507 Alamo). Document is circa 1950s. Accessed 2025.

Map No. _____ Addition <u>Burns</u>		No. Sq. Ft. <u>1148</u>		Price Per Sq. Ft. <u>1.45</u>		Price <u>\$ 1660</u>	
Block <u>1</u> Lot <u>E. 34' of 142 (25)</u>				Percent Good <u>70</u>		<u>1160</u>	
OWNER <u>Valenti</u>				Other Bldgs. <u>Garage 75</u>			
ADDRESS <u>1507 Alamo</u>				Total All Bldgs. <u>1235</u>			
TYPE OF PROPERTY <u>Res</u> OCCUPIED VACANT							
BASEMENT, Whole Part _____		FLOORING, Pine, Hardwood, Cement, Tile, Marble, Dirt _____		LAND VALUE			
FOUNDATION, Concrete, Stone, Brick, Piers, Posts. _____		INTERIOR TRIM, Plaster, Hardwood, Marble, Metal, Built-in Features _____		Front x Depth      Unit Value      Factor      Front Ft. Value - - \$			
WALLS, Brick _____ Stone _____ Hollow Tile, Stucco, Metal, Concrete Blocks, Box _____ Weatherboard _____		HEATING, Furnace, Stoves, Fireplace, Chimneys, Gas _____					
ROOF CONS., Concrete, Steel, Wood Truss _____		LIGHTING, Electricity _____					
ROOF, Hip, Gable, Mansard, Flat _____		PLUMBING, Sewer, Water, Baths _____					
ROOFING, Composition, Metal, Slate, Wood, Shingles, Tile, Asbestos _____		ELEVATORS _____					
EXTERIOR TRIM, Stone, Terra Cotta, Metal, Wood, Marble, Granite _____		CONDITION, Good, Fair, Bad, Obsolete _____					
PERMIT DATE _____ NO. _____ AMT. _____				TOTAL <u>220-450</u>			

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Planning and Development Department

Figure 4: Statement from Joe Valenti to Mr. Burford C. Rodgers in 1965 regarding the status of the properties which are believed to be now known as 1505 and 1507 Alamo. Block numbering and subdivision naming has since changed. Accessed 2025.

February 18, 1965  
1340 West Bell  
Houston, Texas

Mr. Burford C. Rodgers  
Tax Assessor and Collector  
City of Houston, Texas

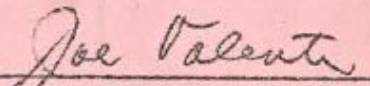
Dear Sir:

I leased Lots 1 and 2, Block 11 Beachamp Springs to Henderson and Carter Food Company about seventeen (17) years ago at which time they constructed their own building out of used lumber.

I just recently found out when they vacated the building and left same on my property that they had not paid the taxes all of these years.

I might be able to salvage something out of the building or use it providing I can get some adjustment on the valuation. If you will inspect same, I will try and take over the building and pay up the back taxes.

Yours very truly,

  
Joe Valenti

Re: Account 14-208-0-3



Figure 5: BLA document showing the house originally numbered as 1505 Alamo, which was later demolished post 1965. The dwelling currently listed as 1505 Alamo can be seen on the right hand (west) side of the photograph. Accessed 2025.

