

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Valenti-Dissen House at 1507 Alamo

AGENDA ITEM: B

OWNERS: Pei-Lin Chong

HPO FILE No.: HP2025_0104

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

DATE ACCEPTED: 04-07-2025

LOCATION: 1507 ALAMO STREET, HOUSTON, TEXAS 77007

HAHC HEARING: 05-08-2025

SITE INFORMATION: Lot 2, 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 1507 Alamo is a one-story, wood frame Craftsman bungalow located in the historic First Ward neighborhood. The property is not within the boundaries of the High First Ward Historic District. The house was built in 1921 by Jacob Valenti, grandfather of former presidential aide Jack Valenti, and has been used as rental property since that time. The house was originally numbered 1509 Alamo but was replatted and changed to 1507 Alamo in 2021.

A number of short-term tenants occupied the house after its initial construction until restaurateur Nick Voinis and his family moved into the home around 1936. The Voinis family was one of several Greek families that moved to the 1500 block of Alamo in the 1930s and formed a small community of Greek immigrants there, many from the Greek island of Patmos and associated with Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church. The Voinis family remained in the home until 1944, about the same time other Greek families began moving out of the area.

In 1934, the Valenti family sold the property and an adjacent house, which Jack Valenti built in 1924, to Della Dissen, the oldest surviving daughter of cattle and lumberman Julius Settegast. The houses remained in the Dissen family until 2021 when they were sold to FW Heritage, LLC who carried out the rehabilitation of both homes and received Preservation Houston Good Brick Awards for both projects. The current owner purchased the property in 2024.

The property owner is seeking protected landmark designation for 1507 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 and Emily Ardoin 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 included the city's original business district centered around Market Square and extended northwest of Congress and Main Street to the city limits. In 1866, the First Ward's boundaries changed as land east of White Oak Bayou became part of the new Fifth Ward to reflect population increases in the north and northwest parts of the city. 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 settled in the area, seeking employment with the railroad or opening businesses to serve neighborhood residents.

Most 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. About 30% of the residential properties in the area were originally rentals, and as the neighborhood aged, this number increased considerably. Commercial buildings that housed corner grocery stores, saloons, barber shops, bakeries, meat markets, and drug stores were also built throughout the neighborhood.

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. More recently, historic residences have given way to rapid townhome construction. 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 1507 ALAMO

The house at 1507 Alamo was built as a rental property by Jacob Valenti in 1921. Valenti, who received a building permit for a 5-room cottage on Alamo for \$1,200, first leased the home to Bernhardt F. Kling, a printer. Accountant Walter M. DeVere and wife Julia, who worked at Foley's Brothers Dry Goods, moved into the house in 1923 and remained there until 1929.

Over the next few years, there were subsequent renters at the property, though most only stayed one or two years. These residents included Henke and Pillot baker Henry Getzie (1930), Alex Kanakis, a waiter, and wife Angeliki (1932), and John Mertie, a driver for Phenix Dairy (1934).

Around 1936, Nick Voinis, his wife Amalia, and their four children moved into 1507 Alamo. They would remain in the house until 1944 when the family purchased a home on the corner of Branard and Shepherd. Voinis emigrated to the United States from the island of Patmos, Greece in 1912, and arrived in Houston in the early 1920s. His family was one of several that made up a small community of Greek immigrants in the 1500 block of Alamo beginning in the early 1930s that lasted until the mid 1940s.

Voinis was a founding member of Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church and operated the Lone Star Café at 1317 Congress in downtown Houston.

OWNERSHIP HISTORY OF 1507 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 Valenta 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 his saloon and grocery store on the first floor and an apartment for his family 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 house, this time on property he owned at 1509 Alamo (now 1507 Alamo) and in 1924, he built a second rental house on the same lot, 1507 Alamo (now 1505 Alamo).

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 store building in 1934, Valenti and wife Lorenza moved to 1505 Alamo and rebuilt the Houston Avenue store in the same location. That 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 would remain 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 1509 Alamo (now 1507 Alamo) from Jacob Valenti in 1934 for \$4,250. The also included a 1924 Craftsman bungalow on the same lot, 1507 Alamo (now 1505), that Valenti built in 1924. 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

1507 Alamo is a one-story, wood-framed 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 AND RESTORATION HISTORY

1507 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 triangular wood brackets supporting the wide exposed eaves in the front gable and tapered wood columns at the front porch. The house is clad in narrow wood siding with wood trim.

The front elevation is asymmetrical with an integrated porch on the eastern half. Two sets of wood steps, accessed from the east and west, lead to a landing projecting toward the street from the porch. The porch features two tapered wood columns on rusticated concrete block bases and a balustrade with slender turned wood balusters. The recessed north wall includes the entry door and a single 1/1 window. A second entry door is located on the adjacent east wall. The west side of the front elevation features a single 1/1 window. A small, fixed wood window is centered in the front 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 two single 1/1 windows near the front of the house, a smaller pair of 1/1 wood windows near the center, and a larger pair of 1/1 wood windows toward the rear. A 1-story addition is located at the rear of the house on the southwest corner.

The house had approximately 1,000 square feet with two bedrooms and one bath when FW Heritage, LLC 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 and two baths and measures 1,380 square feet.

FW Heritage, LLC began the 2021 restoration by leveling the house and raising the home because the crawl space was too low to the ground. Two rows of intermediate piers and new beams were added for support and additional piers were added around the home to reinforce the existing beams. Damaged and rotted perimeter beams were replaced, and all weak or termite damaged floor joists were reinforced or replaced.

The existing front and back porches were completely rebuilt. On the front porch, rotting and damaged floor joists and deck board were replaced, and a landing with east- and west-facing wood steps replaced a single set of concrete steps. The original low wood balustrade was replaced with a new one to meet current building codes. The original tapered wood column at the northeast corner remained; ghosting above the existing concrete block base in the center of the porch revealed that another column had originally been present. A new tapered wood column was added to match the corner column. One of the two front doors, which had been replaced previously with a flat panel door, was replaced with a salvaged Craftsman-style door that matched the remaining original door. The original back porch, which had already been enclosed, was rebuilt as a mixed-purpose mudroom, laundry room, and storage space.

On the west elevation, a central pair of 1/1 wood windows were relocated toward the rear of the house. A pair of small single pane fixed windows toward the rear of the elevation was relocated to the new addition. 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.

Inside, the owners preserved the home's original five-panel doors and, where possible, original millwork. Damaged millwork was replaced with new trim cut to match the original. The original door hardware, including hinges, decorative door plates and knobs, were collectively reused throughout the house. The original double-hung, one-over-one windows were removed, repaired, and rehung. A few original windows had been removed previously and have been replaced with windows that match the original wood windows. 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 and built-in china hutch in the kitchen. Chimney bricks that were damaged were repointed where needed and the entire chimney left exposed. The built-in hutch was refinished and repaired.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Harris County Tax Appraisal and Building Assessment Records for 1509 Alamo, Houston, Texas, 77007. Harris County Archives. Accessed October 2024.

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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.

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_____, “Building Permits.” July 16, 1921.

_____, “Nick Voinis Buys Home for \$10,000.” April 23, 1944.

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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:

S	NA	S - satisfies	D - does not satisfy	NA - not applicable
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			
	<input type="checkbox"/>			
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			

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Planning and Development Department

- ☒ ☐ (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 |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | | | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | |
- (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 1507 Alamo.

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 1507 ALAMO
1507 ALAMO STREET

Photo 1: Oblique view of the northeast (front/left) elevation of 1507 Alamo Street. Photo courtesy of Strata Visuals, 2025.



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EXHIBIT B

SITE MAP

VALENTI-DISSEN HOUSE AT 1507 ALAMO
1507 ALAMO STREET

Map 1: Harris Central Appraisal District map of 1507 Alamo Street. Accessed 2025.

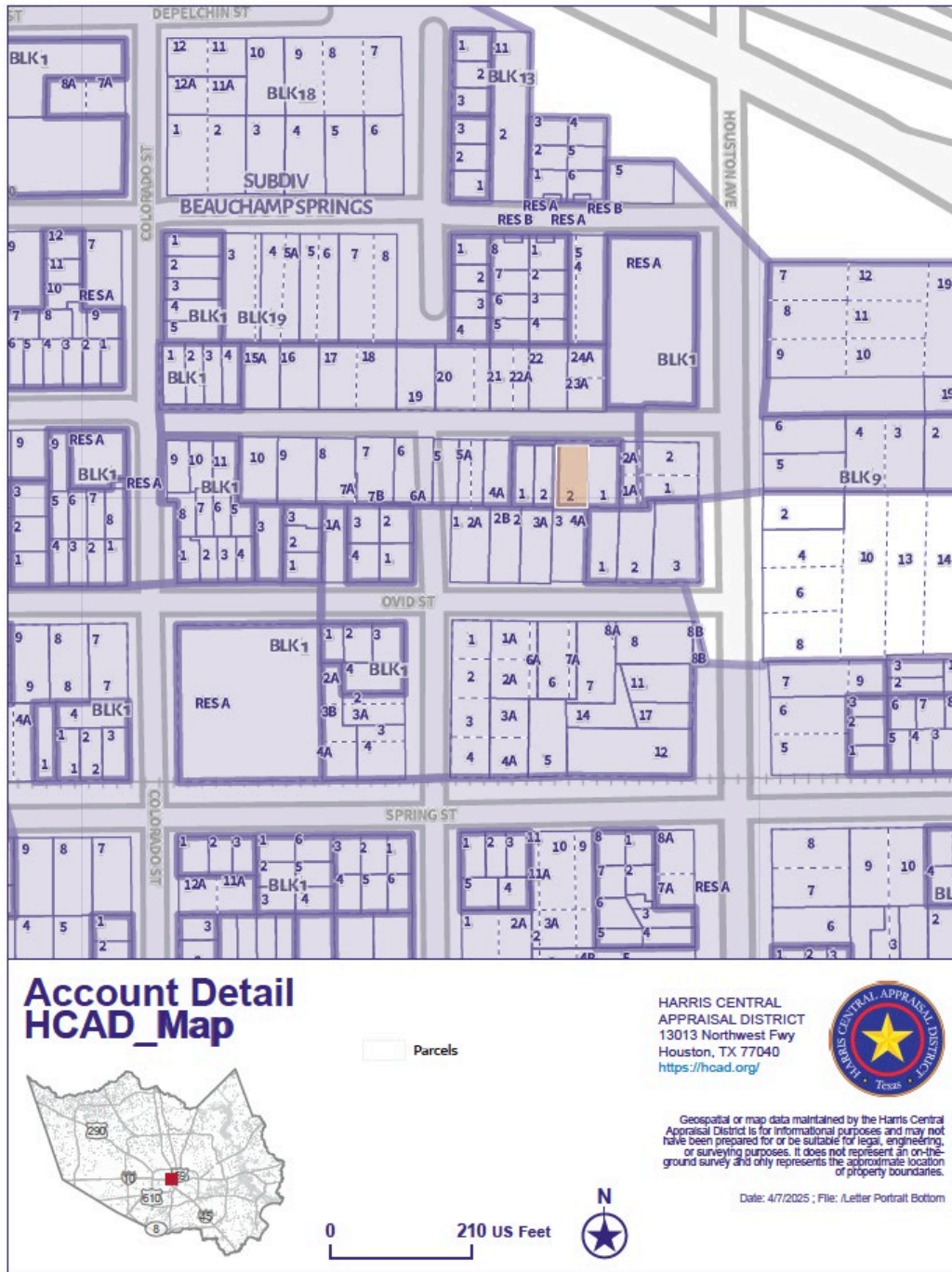
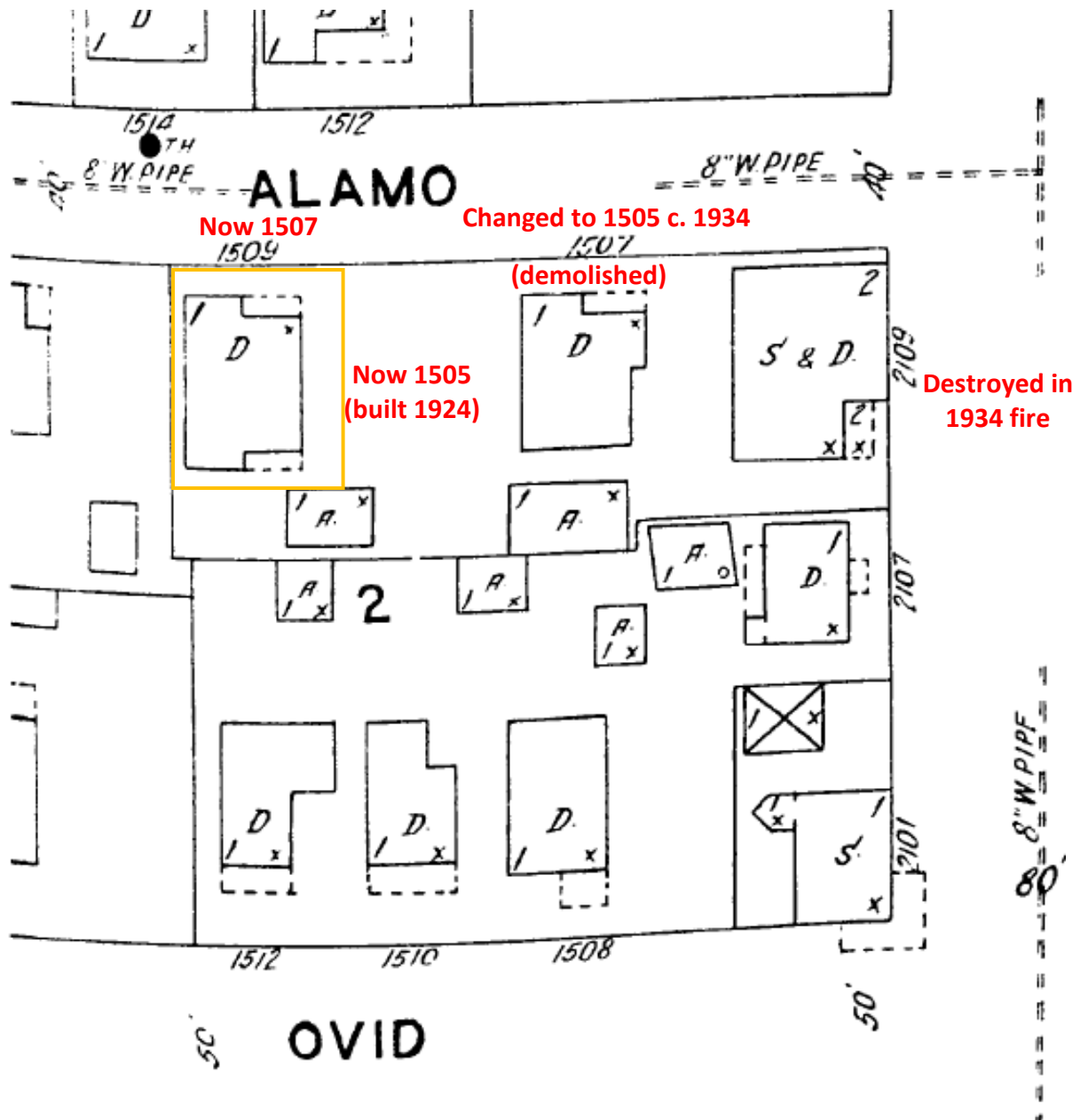


EXHIBIT C
HISTORIC DOCUMENTATION
VALENTI-DISSEN HOUSE
1507 ALAMO STREET

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 3: BLA documents of 1507 Alamo Street (previously numbered as 1509) from 1933-1934.
Accessed 2025.

Form 590

INVESTIGATE

Map _____
Vol. 8
Page 231

Feb. 10th 1933, 19__

Valenti, Jake Owner

Lot 1-2-Strip Adj Block 1

117.5x85' Burns Addition

REMARKS:
2-Frame Dwelling

County Value.....\$ 2400

Owners Value.....\$ 2000

No. _____ Street _____

N
W E
S

Harris County
BUILDING ASSESSMENT
Houston, Texas

Form 381

Map No. 8 Permit No. 6wa
Vol. 8 Page 231-30
2-1-, 1934

Owner Valenti, Jake
No. 1509 Alamo Street or Avenue

Addition Burns

Block _____ Lot _____

Collage

Size of Building
15 wide 82 deep 1 stories

Size of Garage
_____ wide _____ deep _____ stories

Material: Frame, Brick, Veneer, Stucco.

Inside Finish: Rough, Plain, Ornamental, Hard Wood, Pine, Plaster.

Roofing: Slate, Tile, Tin, Shingle, Copper, Composition, Iron, Tar and Gravel, Paper, Asbestos.

Permit Value, \$ _____

No. Sq. Ft. _____ Per. Sq. Ft. _____
No. Sq. Ft. _____ Per. Sq. Ft. _____
No. Sq. Ft. _____ Per. Sq. Ft. _____

600
100
200

Assessed Value of Building, \$ 1935 400

Rendered in name of _____

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Figure 4: BLA of 1507 Alamo Street (previously numbered as 1509 Alamo). Document is circa 1950s. Accessed 2025.

Map No. _____ Addition <u>Burns</u>		No. Sq. Ft. <u>1032</u>		Price Per Sq. Ft. <u>1.50</u>		Price <u>\$ 1550</u>	
Block <u>1</u> Lot <u>W. 83' x 142' (26)</u>				Percent Good <u>70</u>		<u>1080</u>	
OWNER <u>Settegast, J. J. Hirs</u>				Other Bldgs.			
ADDRESS <u>1509 Alamo</u>				Total All Bldgs.		<u>1080</u>	
TYPE OF PROPERTY <u>Res</u> OCCUPIED VACANT							
BASEMENT, Whole Part _____		FLOORING, Pine, Hardwood, Cement, Tile, Marble, Dirt _____					
FOUNDATION, Concrete, Stone, Brick, Piers, Posts. _____		INTERIOR TRIM, Plaster, Hardwood, Marble, Metal, Built-in Features _____					
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. _____		510-900		TOTAL			

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Planning and Development Department

Figure 5: 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

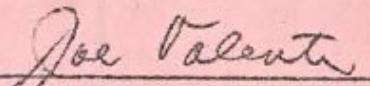
Dear Sir:

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