

(Oct. 1990)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM



1. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company
OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: N/A

2. LOCATION

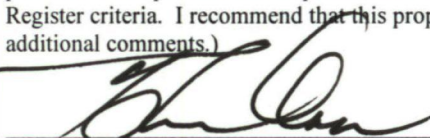
STREET & NUMBER: 1305 East Houston Street
CITY OR TOWN: San Antonio
STATE: Texas CODE: TX COUNTY: Bexar

CODE: 029

NOT FOR PUBLICATION: N/A
VICINITY: N/A
ZIP CODE: 78205

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this (☒ nomination) (☐ request for determination of eligibility) meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property (☒ meets) (☐ does not meet) the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant (☐ nationally) (☐ statewide) (☒ locally). (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)


Signature of certifying official

8-5-02
Date

State Historic Preservation Officer, Texas Historical Commission
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

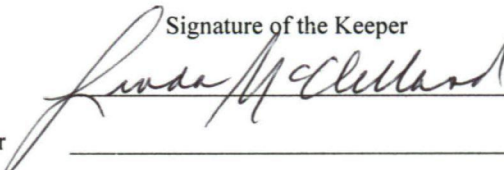
4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☒ entered in the National Register
See continuation sheet.
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
See continuation sheet
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action



9/26/02

other (explain):

5. CLASSIFICATION

OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY: Private

CATEGORY OF PROPERTY: District

NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:	CONTRIBUTING	NONCONTRIBUTING
	4	0 BUILDINGS
	0	0 SITES
	0	0 STRUCTURES
	0	0 OBJECTS
	4	0 TOTAL

NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES PREVIOUSLY LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER: 0

NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING: N/A

6. FUNCTION OR USE

HISTORIC FUNCTIONS: Commerce/Trade-warehouse; Industry-manufacturing facility

CURRENT FUNCTIONS: Industry-communications facility; Vacant

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Other- Warehouse

MATERIALS: FOUNDATION concrete
WALLS brick/concrete/tile
ROOF built-up
OTHER

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-8).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 5

Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company ("Merchants") is located immediately east of San Antonio's downtown on the block bounded by East Houston Street (south), Dawson Street (north), the Union Pacific right-of-way (west) and Cherry Street (east). Merchants is comprised of four buildings (with additions) constructed of brick, concrete and clay tile between 1909 and 1957. The buildings range in height from one to four stories and have flat, built-up roofs. Because all of the structures were built for the purpose of ice production or cold storage, they generally lack windows. The only exceptions are small office areas and the Houston Street elevation where windows emit light to the stairwell and elevator lobby. The buildings are strictly utilitarian with no significant detailing. Loading docks, warehouse doors, and suspended awnings characterize the exterior of the structures. The interiors also lack detailing and consist of large, open cooler spaces supported by concrete or steel columns. Cork insulation and coils used for cooling remain but are in generally poor condition. Three of the buildings utilize the lift-slab construction technique, an innovative method pioneered in San Antonio c.1950. Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company, vacant since 1999, is in fair to good condition and retains a high degree of integrity as an industrial facility.

The Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company (hereafter "Merchants") is comprised of four brick and clay tile buildings built between 1909 and 1953, with major additions added through 1957 (see photo 1). The buildings range in height from one to four stories. The complex is strictly utilitarian and displays no distinctive design details. Because the buildings were constructed primarily for ice production and cold storage, they lack windows. The exteriors are characterized by loading docks for both rail and truck transport.

The Merchants' buildings are sound and in generally good condition. Building 1, with its many additions and alterations, requires more extensive renovation than the three newer structures. Merchants is located on East Houston Street immediately east of the Union Pacific railroad tracks which once served the plant. The surrounding area is primarily light industrial in character. The locally designated Dignowity Hill Historic District, generally residential, lies east of Cherry Street, the eastern boundary of the nominated property. The Southern Pacific Depot National Register District (1979) is located approximately three blocks south of Merchants.

For purposes of the National Register nomination, Merchants is considered four buildings. Additions made to each of these buildings are not counted as separate structures. Reference is also made to the warehouse numbering system used by Merchants (see figure 1).

Building 1

Building 1 is the central structure of the complex. The oldest portion of Building 1 was constructed in 1909 with additions in 1926, 1929, 1930, 1933, 1942, 1944, 1946, 1949 and 1958 (office). The south (primary) elevation on Houston Street is regular in shape, as is the west (secondary) elevation along the railroad tracks (see photos 1, 2, & 5). The east and north elevations are irregular due to the various additions (see photos 3 & 4).

The major mass of the south elevation is four stories in height, stepping down to one story at the eastern end (see photos 1 & 2). Three (and perhaps four) building phases are apparent—the original, 1909 structure of red brick; the 1926 addition of slightly lighter red brick immediately abutting the 1909 building; and the 1958 office addition. It appears that the office might have been constructed in two phases as two colors of red brick are apparent.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 6

Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

On the south, the entire first floor of the building opens to an elevated concrete loading dock and is protected by a suspended metal and wood awning. The loading dock steps up at the office addition that is faced to the awning level with square, green mosaic tile. There are ten openings to the loading dock on the first floor of the 1909/1926 portion of the building. Seven of these are sliding warehouse doors, one is a later rollup metal door, and one is a wood paneled door with glass lights that served the original office. There is also one steel casement window.

There are six arched window openings with plain brick sills on the second, third and fourth floors of the south elevation. The two middle openings on the second and third floors are bricked in. One window on the fourth floor has been bricked and another serves as the fire escape landing. The other openings contain wood sash windows.

The building is topped by a simple tile parapet cap and has a flat built-up roof. Two elevator shafts protrude west of the center of the building. The painted sign reading "Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Co." runs across the top of the building on both the south and west elevations. Overall, the building's appearance, with the exception of the office addition, is virtually unchanged from a c.1926 photograph (see photo 15).

The west elevation of Building 1 exhibits four stages of construction extending from Houston Street north along the railroad tracks as follows (see photo 5):

- 4-story brick building with its 1-story wing extending north (both 1909)
- 3-story brick addition built above the 1-story wing (1928-29)
- 2-story brick addition (1930)
- 1-story warehouse (called Warehouse 3 by Merchants; 1946/49)

The entire first floor of the west elevation of Building 1 opens to a raised concrete railroad platform protected by a suspended wood and metal awning. There are eight warehouse doors opening onto the dock—two in the 1909 building; one in the 1909/1928 building; three in the 1930 building; and two in the 1946/49 addition. The door closest to Houston Street is a rollup metal door and the remainder are refrigerator-style doors. There are no windows on the upper floors of Building 1 on its west elevation. The west elevation of Building 1 prior to its 1928 addition is seen in photo 15.

Building 1 consists of a series of cold storage rooms opening from the stairwell and elevator vestibule on the south side of the building. The building's interior, originally constructed of heavy timber, was totally remodeled in 1958 using steel and concrete construction. The lift-slab technique was used in a portion of the structure. Only the areas surrounding the stairwell and elevators still exhibit wood construction (see photo 12). Wooden shutters cover the unglazed window openings.

The building is entered through loading dock doors. Steel and wooden stairs and two freight elevators (now inoperable) provide access to the upper floors. From the vestibule, one passes through refrigerator doors in the foot-thick walls into the cold storage units. Steel I-beams support the poured in place structure in the buildings center portion of the building while square, poured in place concrete columns support the eastern and western (1929) portion. The interior of the building's northwest portion is poured in place concrete with concrete beams.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 7

Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Generally, the rooms are lined with 4" to 8" of cork insulation that is delaminating from the walls. In some areas, a plaster coating has been added over the cork. Most of the rooms still have metal cooling coils suspended from the ceilings. The spaces are strictly utilitarian and apart from doors, contain no openings or architectural features (see photo 13).

The first floor of the north portion of the building steps down in the area where the 1909-vintage freezing tanks were remodeled in 1949 to accommodate a new cold storage vault. This vault is poured in place concrete with steel I-beam construction.

The northeastern portion of the building exhibits three phases of construction (see photo 3). The original (1909) engine room was enlarged in 1933. The building's second story is built of lighter red brick and has a third story of clay tile construction. (A company insurance policy indicates that the third story was added in 1946). Antiquated ammonia chilling equipment remains in both the old and newer engine rooms and each area also has a water well. A third capped well remains in the plant yard. The interior of the 1928 office structure is partitioned into several rooms. The ceiling is suspended acoustical tile and the walls are covered with wood paneling.

The 1946 addition is 1-story with poured in place square concrete columns and a vaulted concrete ceiling. Walls are of tile and there is a concrete foundation and flat, built-up roof. In 1949, a rectangular addition (called Warehouse E by Merchants) was made to the east elevation of the 1946 structure (see photo 4). This structure is also tile with a concrete foundation and flat, built-up roof. Sometime later, a triangular tile enclosure was added at the northeast juncture of these buildings. This addition contains a small office.

Building 2

Building 2 was constructed in 1944 with an addition in 1954 (see photos 6 & 7). (The building comprises Warehouse 2 and Warehouse D as described by Merchants.) The 1944 portion of Building 2 is a 1-story structure with square, poured concrete columns and a ribbed concrete ceiling. It has a raised concrete foundation, tile walls and a flat, built-up roof. Its south (primary) elevation faces on Houston Street and its east (secondary) elevation is on Cherry Street. The 1954 addition (Warehouse D) immediately abuts the original building at its northern end and is constructed using the lift slab technique.

The building is essentially square with an indentation at its southwest corner to accommodate a loading area. The 1944 portion contains approximately 13,060 sq. ft. and the 1954 addition measures 49' X 145'. The south elevation of Building 2 is plain with the exception of one small window at its western corner, an enclosed area at the end of the loading dock (see photo 6). A raised concrete loading dock runs the entire length of the building's west elevation, as does a metal and wood canopy. The canopy is partially suspended and partially supported by metal pipes. Three warehouse doors open onto the loading dock, two in 1944 portion and one in the 1954 portion. The east elevation of Building 2 is entirely plain (see photo 7). The roofline of the 1954 addition rises about two feet higher than the 1944 structure.

The interior of the 1944 structure is supported by square concrete columns. The building is an open plan structure with no window openings or other details. The interior of the 1954 structure is supported by round, steel columns.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 7 Page 8

Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Building 3

Building 3 was constructed in 1952 with an addition in 1955. (The building comprises Warehouse 4 and Warehouse 5 as described by Merchants.) It is a 1-story tile building with concrete foundation and a flat roof constructed using the lift slab technique (see photos 8 & 17). It is located north of Building 2 and is separated by a 20' wide space. It measures approximately 126' X 145'. A raised concrete loading dock extends the length of its west and south elevations. The loading dock dies into the south wall of the 1955 addition. The east end of the dock on the building's south side is enclosed for a bathroom. The building's east elevation is plain except for a small window that opens into this bathroom. A metal and wood awning supported by metal pipes protects the entire loading dock. Three warehouse doors open onto the dock.

The 1955 addition is offset from the 1952 portion of Building 3. The offset is accounted for by the residential structure that stood for many years at the northeast corner of the Merchants' site (the southwest corner of Dawson and Cherry Streets). The house was later demolished. The 1955 addition is a 1-story tile building with concrete foundation and a flat roof constructed using the lift slab technique. It measures approximately 100' X 160'.

One door opens from the south elevation of the 1955 addition onto a small loading dock. The east elevation of the building along Cherry Street is plain (see photo 9). Due to structural problems, the building's north wall along Dawson Street was reconstructed in 2001. The new wall is built on the original foundation using concrete block in a similar size and pattern to the original tile construction. The interior of Building 3 (both the 1952 and 1955 portions) is open plan (see photo 14). Both sections have a concrete roof structure supported by round, steel columns.

Building 4

Building 4 is comprised of a structure built in 1953 with an addition in 1957 (see photo 10). (The building is called Warehouse 6 by Merchants.) It is a 1-story tile building with concrete foundation and a flat, built-up roof. The 1953 portion of the building (3,975 sq. ft.) is angled at its southern end to accommodate the railroad siding that ran into the Merchants plant. A loading dock runs along the west, south and east elevations. One door opens to the dock along the east elevation.

The 1957 addition abuts the older structure immediately to the north and measures approximately 83' X 93'. Its east elevation has three windows and one office door, and one sliding warehouse door opens from the building's short south elevation. The majority of the south elevation is a party wall with the 1953 building. Both the 1953 and 1957 portions of the structure are constructed of tile and steel. The flat, built up roof is supported by round, steel columns.

The Merchants site is strictly industrial and contains no landscaping or distinctive site features. Perimeter fencing is chain link. Remnants of the railroad siding that entered the plant yard and helped define the shape of Building 4 are still visible (see photo 11). The small square office for the weigh station stands at the northwest corner of the site. It is built of tile with a flat roof.

Occupied by Merchants Ice and Cold Storage from 1909 until 1999, the buildings are an intact and good example of early to mid-20th century industrial warehouse construction. The buildings will be redeveloped for commercial use.

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

APPLICABLE NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA

- ☒ **A** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH EVENTS THAT HAVE MADE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE BROAD PATTERNS OF OUR HISTORY.
- ☐ **B** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE LIVES OF PERSONS SIGNIFICANT IN OUR PAST.
- ☒ **C** PROPERTY EMBODIES THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF A TYPE, PERIOD, OR METHOD OF CONSTRUCTION OR REPRESENTS THE WORK OF A MASTER, OR POSSESSES HIGH ARTISTIC VALUE, OR REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT AND DISTINGUISHABLE ENTITY WHOSE COMPONENTS LACK INDIVIDUAL DISTINCTION.
- ☐ **D** PROPERTY HAS YIELDED, OR IS LIKELY TO YIELD, INFORMATION IMPORTANT IN PREHISTORY OR HISTORY.

CRITERIA CONSIDERATIONS: N/A

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Industry, Engineering

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE: 1909-1957

SIGNIFICANT DATES: 1909; 1913; 1944; 1952; 1957

SIGNIFICANT PERSON: N/A

CULTURAL AFFILIATION: N/A

ARCHITECT/BUILDER: W.E. Simpson Company (engineers)- additions including 1933 and 1948; Louis L. Guido (builder)- 1933 addition; J.B. Martin (builder)- 1948 addition.

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (see continuation sheets 8-9 through 8-14).

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

BIBLIOGRAPHY (see continuation sheet 9-15).

PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION ON FILE (NPS): N/A

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☒ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

PRIMARY LOCATION OF ADDITIONAL DATA:

- ☒ State historic preservation office (*Texas Historical Commission*)
- ☐ Other state agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other -- Specify Repository: *Merchants Ice & Cold Storage, records owned by Urban Ice.*

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 9

Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Merchants Ice Company (later Merchants Ice and Cold Storage) was chartered in 1909 by a partnership led by Henry Vogt, a Louisville, Kentucky, manufacturer of commercial ice making equipment. The company was sold within four years, and its new shareholders included Eugene Nolte and Charles A. Zilker, a pioneer in the Texas ice business. The Merchants plant was constructed a short distance north of the new Southern Pacific depot along railroad tracks that enabled easy shipment of goods. The initial 4-story brick structure was expanded numerous times, and eventually, four buildings occupied an entire city block. The company first specialized in the production and sale of ice, but shifted its focus to cold storage as home refrigeration became affordable and popular. Zero degree storage was added by the late 1920s, and freezer space was expanded during World War II to accommodate government supply needs. After the war, Merchants constructed additional warehouses to fulfill distribution contracts with the Quartermaster's Market Center. To meet building needs quickly and economically, Merchants utilized the lift-slab construction technique pioneered by San Antonio engineer, Tom Slick. By 1957, the plant had reached its full development, encompassing some 1.8 million cubic feet of refrigerated space. Merchants' business declined by the 1980s with decreased rail traffic and increased reliance on trucking, but the company remained at this location until it closed in 1999. Merchants meets Criterion A in the area of Industry (local level) as a facility that exemplifies the development of the ice and cold storage business over a 90 year period. It also meets Criterion C (local level) in the area of Engineering for use of the lift-slab construction technique. Criteria Consideration G does not apply because the majority of buildings are over 50 years old and the complex was completed only a few years beyond the 50-year point.¹

The Organization of Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company: 1909-1913

Merchants Cold Storage Company was capitalized for \$40,000 and granted a charter by the Texas Secretary of State on July 6, 1909 (Merchants to F.C. Weinert, December 13, 1913). Eight of Merchants' original eleven partners lived in Louisville, Kentucky, among them brothers Henry and Adam Vogt, E.H. Wedekind, and C.W. Fitchner. Others included Henry Vogt's son-in-law, G.A. Heuser, and Soren Thurstensen, chief engineer of the Henry Vogt Machine Company.

Henry Vogt (1856-1936) and E.H. Wedekind were known in the late 19th century as manufacturers of ice and refrigeration machines. Vogt, born in Louisville to German immigrant parents, graduated from high school in 1874 and became a mechanic and journeyman machinist. He first established a machine shop and foundry that specialized in building hydraulic elevators, and sold the business to Otis Elevator Company in 1892. Vogt then built a modern plant to manufacture artificial ice using ammonia absorption technology (Vogt Views, 5:1, 1988).

Pioneering work in refrigeration had been underway in Texas for some 30 years prior to Henry Vogt's entry into the market. A Ferdinand Carre absorption machine was being used in Texas during the Civil War, and shortly after the war ended, several companies manufactured ice in San Antonio. By 1873, David Boyle of Jefferson, Texas, pioneered the use of ammonia technology to manufacture ice. Boyle left Texas the following year and contracted with Crane and Company of Chicago to manufacture his machines. One of Boyle's units was purchased in 1876 by Richard King to experiment with meat refrigeration. Other pioneers in Texas refrigeration included Charles and Andrew Zilker who operated a Carre ice machine in San Antonio about 1880, and later established ice plants in partnership with George W. Brackenridge (*Sixty Years of Ice; Handbook of Texas* 5:510-12).

¹ *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* (1990, rev. 1997), pp. 41, 43.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 10

Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

While others pioneered refrigeration technology, Henry Vogt's success apparently derived from his willingness to accept stock in trade for the equipment that he manufactured. Vogt entered the refrigeration field at a time when owners of ice and cold storage plants generally lacked sufficient capital to purchase equipment. To promote sales, he began to accept notes and/or stock from companies that installed his products. In a letter to Merchants in 1988, Henry Vogt Heuser speculated that his father and grandfather's involvement in the fledgling San Antonio business resulted from such an arrangement (Heuser to Emrick, June 15, 1988). Indeed, Merchants' company records include a drawing by Henry Vogt Machinery Company dated June 2, 1909 for a brine tank coil that presumably was installed at the new refrigeration plant.

Apparently seeking to raise additional capital, Merchants' charter was amended on February 27, 1911 to increase the company's stock to \$140,000 (Merchants to Weinert, December 13, 1913). Two years later, in mid-December 1913, the Louisville partners, with the exception of Fitchner, who had moved to San Antonio, sold their interest in Merchants. In addition to Fitchner, the new owners included Eugene Nolte, Earl D. Scott, J.D. Dodson, and J.H. Kirkpatrick. Kirkpatrick had held a small share of the company's original stock. (Stock declaration, December 1913). The Merchants' charter was renewed in the name of the new partnership on December 19, 1913 (Merchants to Weinert, December 13, 1913; Secretary of State receipt to Merchants Ice Company).

Restructuring of the original company culminated on December 31, 1913 when J.D. Dodson and Earl Scott, who both lived outside of Texas, resigned as directors. Eugene Nolte, a South Texan who lived at that time in New York, presided as president of the company at its liquidation and reorganization as Merchants Ice Company (Minutes, December 31, 1913). Others attending the meeting included Nolte's brother, Walter, and Charles A. Zilker. Under the guidance of Eugene Nolte (president), Fichtner (general manager) and Zilker (consulting engineer), Merchants became a profitable company that expanded its capacity through use of modern cold storage techniques. As the business prospered, the capacity of the refrigeration plant was increased by additions that were made each decade, the last in 1957.

At the time of the company's 50th anniversary celebration in 1959, it was claimed that the Merchants plant was the first cold storage warehouse in South Texas. This claim has not been substantiated, but Merchants is indeed the oldest remaining cold storage facility in San Antonio. Another notable example remaining in San Antonio is the Blue Star Street Industrial Historic District (1917/1934; NR 1994).

The Plant: 1909-1939

Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company was constructed two blocks north of the Southern Pacific railroad depot (1902; NR 1975) at the northeast corner of Starr Street (today Houston Street) and Walnut Street (the right-of-way for the Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio, whose successors were the Texas and New Orleans, Southern Pacific, and Union Pacific companies). The plant site was located in Block 4, New City Block 567, and the initial parcel was purchased by Merchants on July 15, 1909. It fronted 208' on Starr (Houston) Street and 104' on Walnut Street (BCDR 302:289).

A building permit was issued on June 24, 1909, for a \$20,000 brick "cold storage plant" measuring 98' X 122' (Merchants Company files). The San Antonio *Daily Express* reported on July 4, 1909:

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 11

Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

"The past week saw the ground broken for the excavating for the new \$100,000 plant of the Merchants Cold Storage Company at Starr and Walnut Streets. Eighty-five men are now at work in excavating and putting in a concrete foundation and twenty teams are given employment doing the hauling. This work will be finished not later than Tuesday when the brick work and main construction begins. The plant will be finished in ninety days and by the middle of autumn will be in working order. The dimensions are 122 feet in length and 94 feet in width and it will be four stories in height."

At the time the Merchants warehouse was constructed, the residential neighborhood immediately adjoining the Southern Pacific railroad tracks was transitioning from residential to light and heavy industrial use. Soon, other warehouses were built to take advantage of rail sidings to ship both raw and manufactured goods.

When Merchants opened, residential structures still stood on the southeast corner of new City Block 567 as well as on its northern portion facing Dawson Street. In the center of the block stood the San Antonio Oil Works' cotton oil mill and the San Antonio Milling Company's cotton gin that was leased by Lange Soap Company (Sanborn's Maps, 1912). San Antonio Oil Works had operated at this site since at least 1896.

The initial Merchants plant consisted of the 4-story cold storage warehouse together with an engine room and ice tanks for the manufacture of eighty tons of ice daily (*Fifty Years of Progress*). In order to produce ice, Merchants apparently dug an artesian well at their site. On May 25, 1910, the company "in consideration of the friendship and good will of the Lange Soap Works toward the Merchants Ice Company," agreed to grant Lange free use of their surplus water for 15 years (Agreement, March 25, 1910).

The Noltes and their partners kept pace with new technology, and Merchants was successful under their ownership. For example, the original steam plant, powered by coal and oil, was converted to electricity resulting in substantial savings (*Fifty Years of Progress*). In what appears to be the first financial statement compiled by Merchants, the company's real estate was valued at \$32,402, its buildings at \$55,660, and its machinery at \$88,396. Taking depreciation into account, the company was valued in December 1917 at \$74,410 (Aikman to Cable, December 18, 1917). Revenues for 1917 totaled over \$112,000, including \$84,898 from ice sales and \$27,386 from storage, and the company showed a profit of \$29,639.

The profitability of Merchants allowed the partners to expand their plant. In 1912, the first year Merchants was depicted on Sanborn's Fire Insurance maps, the plant was comprised of the Starr (Houston) Street building that included the engine room and freezing tanks. Subsequent Sanborn's maps and building diagrams compiled by company officials illustrate that by 1930, the plant had expanded as to the east (a 4-story addition in 1926-27) and twice to the north along the railroad tracks (a 3-story addition in 1928-29 and a 2-story addition in 1930). The 1930 addition housed rooms for storage of bananas and an addition in 1933 provided storage, mechanical, and office space.

Drawings for the 1930 and 1933 additions (and later work) are included in the W.R. Simpson and Company archives (today HDR Simpson). Notes in company records appear to indicate that the Merchants buildings were designed by company officers in conjunction with engineers and builders. No references to architects have been found. The 1933 addition was constructed by Louis L. Guido (Contract, Louis L. Guido and Merchants, May 25, 1933).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 12

Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Additions in the 1920s and 1930s were made in response to rapid changes in the refrigeration business. By the late 1920s, home refrigerators were replacing "ice boxes." Until that time, Merchants' business was largely dependent on the manufacture and sale of ice, and to remain competitive, the company shifted its focus to cold storage. The new warehouses allowed Merchants to store a wide variety of foods including fresh fruits and vegetables, cheese, cured meats, pecans in the shell, chili pods, eggs, and some fresh poultry.

General manager C.W. Fichtner died in August 1928, and was succeeded by Charles M. Smith who realized the need for below zero degree storage space. The 1928 warehouse was constructed to fill this market niche, and local meat packers responded by bringing large quantities of fresh meat to Merchants for freezing (*Fifty Years of Progress*). This innovation was apparently a turning point in this company's development.

Merchants continued to grow during the Depression. It was at this time that Merchants Ice and Cold Storage, as it was then, called was dissolved and reincorporated, apparently to satisfy revised Texas statutes (Shareholders statement, September 7, 1933). At the time of the re-incorporation, Merchants was certified as owning a site fronting 430 feet on Houston Street and 150 feet on the Texas and New Orleans railroad right of way (Dodson and Ezzell to Merchants, September 7, 1933). (Starr Street, an extension of Houston Street, had been renamed and the T & N.O. was a successor line to the Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio).

The Plant: 1940-1958

Prior to and during World War II, Merchants converted 20,000 square feet of warehouse space once used for ice making into freezer rooms (1940 and 1941) and added 4,000 square feet of new ice vaults (1942). This action was apparently in response to a request by the United States government that all refrigerated warehouses furnish additional freezer space for meats to be shipped to training camps and installations in the United States and abroad (*Fifty Years of Progress*).

By August 1943, Merchants' president, Charles Smith, reported that the plant had 550,000 cubic feet of storage space and ice making capacity of 70 to 80 tons (Smith to Ophuls, August 11, 1943). Smith's correspondence with a colleague reflected the ever-changing nature of Merchants' business.

"For the past several years we have continuously built more freezer space at our plant. In addition to this we have converted several large cooler rooms to freezers. In February of this year we took on an egg breaking deal with the Cudahy Packing Company and were obliged to freeze approximately 30,000 pounds liquid eggs daily for them. As we manufacture ice, the demands in that channel has increased very considerably... We are doing a "whale" of a business this year and in addition to selling all ice we can make, both our coolers and our freezers are entirely filled and have been so for the past 90 days." (Smith to Neiman, August 10, 1943)

Peacetime was equally lucrative for Merchants. Under contract with the Quartermaster's Market Center in Fort Worth, Merchants constructed warehouses that provided the center "all refrigerated storage facilities required in San Antonio." Merchants also entered into a contract with Southwest Distributing Company to construct a warehouse that would satisfy Southwest's contract with the Quartermasters' office to "receive and distribute all fresh fruit and vegetables required in the area." (Agreement between Merchants and Southwest Texas Distributing Company, May 13, 1953). In an application

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 13

Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

to the Small Business Administration for financing to expand Merchants' facilities, company president Charles Smith wrote "our warehouse is the entire center for all Army movements" (Smith to Martin, December 31, 1954).

All of the company's post-World War II construction was comprised of 1-story buildings that did not require elevators. These structures were more adaptable to changing needs, were less costly to maintain and operate, and facilitated shipping that relied increasingly on truck transportation (Wright and Perry, 1948). In 1945, Building 2, a 1-story facility comprising 63,986 square feet, was built at the southwest corner of Houston and Cherry Streets (see photo 16). This construction essentially filled the portion of New City Block 567 owned by Merchants at that time. Seeking to expand further, the company purchased the remainder of the block (with the exception of one lot) in 1946 and 1947 from the Doolin and Neese families. Prior to that time, the property was occupied by the San Antonio Oil Works (BCDRE 2409:288; 2318:316).

Merchants built and/or expanded its warehouses on its enlarged site between the end of the war and 1957. To expedite construction, the company used the new lift-slab technique pioneered by San Antonio engineer, Tom Slick at his Institute of Inventive Research, a division of Southwest Research Institute. Seeking a less expensive construction technique, Slick's engineers devised what came to be called the Youtz-Slick Lift-Slab (named jointly for the New York architect, Philip Youtz, who was working on a similar concept at the time). Concrete floor and roof slabs were built on the ground, separated by a wax surface and the slabs were then jacked up steel columns to the required height. Demonstrated at Southwest Research Institute, the lift slab was first used in a full-sized structure at Trinity University's Northrup Hall in 1950 (George 1992, 95).

Merchants used the lift slab technique only two years after Northrup Hall was completed, and eventually employed it in four projects:

- Building 3 - 1952
- Building 2 (addition)- 1954
- Building 3 (addition)- 1955
- Building 1 (remodeling of central portion)- 1958

Use of the lift slab technique in the construction of Building #3 is illustrated in photo 17.

In addition to these projects, other post-World War II additions to the Merchants plant include:

- Building 1 (addition)- 1948
- Building 4- 1953
- Building 4 (addition)- 1957

Using modern building techniques, Merchants was able to put warehouses into service quickly to maximize business opportunities. The use of steel and concrete ("fireproof") construction in Merchants' new structures and remodeling of old Building 1 in 1958, allowed the company to lower its insurance premiums and provide competitive rental rates to clients. By 1958, the fully developed plant contained some 1.8 million cubic feet of refrigerated space with a capacity of 425 tons of refrigeration equipment (*History of Company*).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 14

Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Merchants filled its growing plant by leasing refrigerated rooms or entire buildings in its storage facility to various wholesale distributors. Available leases dating to the 1940s and 1950s provide information about Merchants' operations. As examples, Laxson Brothers, a meat distribution company, rented a 15' X 40' room with 40' of loading dock for \$275 per month. The space was to be kept between 33 and 38 degrees. Local department stores Sears, Roebuck and Company and Wolff and Marx rented space throughout the 1940s for fur storage. In 1958, Kimball Company wholesale grocers rented 567 sq. ft. to be kept at 0 degrees or below for \$216 (Merchants Company Records).

Merchants Ice and Cold Storage: 1959-1999

At the time Merchants celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1959, the company claimed to be the second largest refrigerated warehouse in Texas, and "one of the most modern plants in the United States." The plant had stopped manufacturing ice and was now able to handle between sixty to seventy million pounds of merchandise annually. Merchants' frozen food inventory included meats, fruits, fruit juices, vegetables, dinners, rolls, bread, cakes, pies, eggs, shrimp, fish, Mexican foods, butter and poultry. Other products included pecans (both in the shell and shelled), garden seeds, black eyed peas, chili pods, spices, dried fruits, and cheese (Wachtel to Secretary of State, August 25, 1972; *Fifty Years of Progress*).

Merchants had experienced remarkably consistent management and ownership between the time it was reorganized in 1913 and its 50th anniversary in 1959. Though Eugene Nolte's widow, Claudia, had died in 1958, Eugene Nolte, Jr., remained a director, as did Mrs. C.W. Fichtner, widow of the plant's early manager. Merchants' president, Charles M. Smith, had been with the company for 41 years and General Superintendent Sam E. Bedford for 39 years. General Manager Albert R. Pillus had served Merchants for 30 years.

In 1981, Merchants' officers purchased the corporation from stockholders, and the company was incorporated as Merchants Cold Storage Company. Company president James S. Edney was succeeded by vice president Charles A. Emrick. By the 1980s, warehouse and manufacturing facilities in San Antonio were largely shifting their locations to newly constructed office parks on the outskirts of the city adjacent to outlying rail facilities and interstate highways. Merchants' records indicate that the number of railcars loaded at the Houston Street plant declined from 24 in 1986, to 8 in 1987, to 1 in 1988. The company continued to operate the Houston Street facility until 1999 when it ceased operation.

The property was purchased by Urban Ice Limited in 1999 for commercial redevelopment by computer-related businesses. The building has been judged eligible for the National Register under Part I of the Rehabilitation Tax Credit program.

The Merchants Ice and Cold Storage facility illustrates the evolutionary growth of a company from its inception, through its expansion, to its dissolution 90 years later. Merchants meets Criterion A in the area of Industry (local level) as group of buildings that illustrates the growth and development of an ice and cold storage business from its charter until its demise 90 years later. It also meets Criterion C (local level) in the area of Engineering (local level) for its use of the lift-slab construction technique, pioneered by San Antonio engineer, Tom Slick.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 15

Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

Bexar County Deed Records

[Anonymous] *Fifty Years of Progress*. Manuscript, [1959].

George, Mary Carolyn Hollers. *O'Neil Ford, Architect*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1992.

HDR Simpson Company Archives.

Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company, Company Files. Owned by Urban Ice, Ltd.

San Antonio City Directories, various years.

San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 4, 1909.

Sanborn's Fire Insurance Maps, various years.

Tyler, Ron (ed.). *New Handbook of Texas*. Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1996.

Vogt Views, Volume 5, Number 1, 1988.

Wright, Col. Clark C. and John P.H. Perry. "The Trend to One-storied Warehouses." *Distribution Age*, April 1948.

Zilker, Charles A. *Sixty Years of Ice*. Privately Published.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF PROPERTY: 4.0 acres

UTM REFERENCES	Zone	Easting	Northing
	14	550740	3255020

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION The site is comprised of NCB 567, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas. It is bounded on the north by Dawson Street, on the south by East Commerce Street, on the east by North Cherry Street, and on the west by Walnut Street (Union Pacific Railroad right-of-way).

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION The boundaries encompass all property historically associated with the building since 1947, with the exception of Lot 1, NCB 567 (vacant) which was acquired c. 1990.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE: Maria Watson Pfeiffer

ORGANIZATION: ReSearch

DATE: February 2002

STREET & NUMBER: 213 Washington Street

TELEPHONE: (210) 222-1586

CITY OR TOWN: San Antonio

STATE: TX

ZIP CODE: 78204-1336

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

CONTINUATION SHEETS

MAPS

PHOTOGRAPHS (see continuation sheet Photo-17)

ADDITIONAL ITEMS (see continuation sheet Figure-16)

PROPERTY OWNER

NAME: Urban Ice, Ltd. (attn: John Miller)

STREET & NUMBER: 1925 San Jacinto, Suite 401

TELEPHONE: (214) 303-1925

CITY OR TOWN: Dallas

STATE: TX

ZIP CODE: 75201-7104

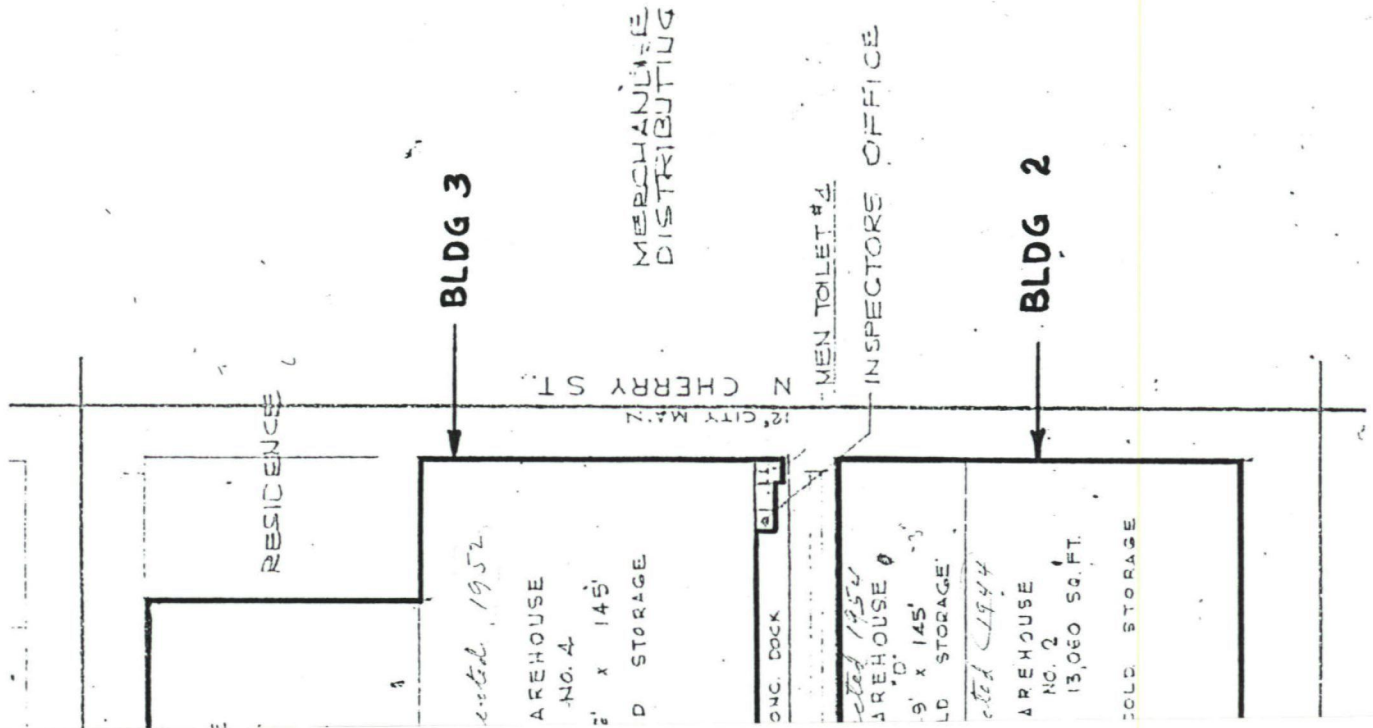
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section FIGURE Page 16

Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Merchants Ice & Cold Storage
Site plan with construction dates



**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section PHOTO Page 17

Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company
1305 E. Houston St.

San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photography by Maria Watson Pfeiffer, February 2002, unless otherwise noted

Negatives held by Maria Watson Pfeiffer, unless otherwise noted

1. South elevation, Building 1 (Houston Street), looking northeast
2. South elevation, Building 1 (Houston Street), looking west
3. North and east elevations, Building 1/east portion, looking south
4. North elevation, Building 1/west portion, looking south
5. West elevation, Building 1, looking northeast
6. West and south elevations, Building 2, looking northeast
7. East elevation, Building 2 (foreground) and Building 3 (background)
looking north
8. East elevation, Building 3 (foreground) and Building 2 (background)
Looking southwest
9. North elevation, Building 3 (foreground) and Building 4 (background),
looking west
10. South and east elevations, Building 4, looking northwest
11. Plant yard looking west, Building 1 on left and Building 4 on right
12. Interior, Building 1, showing elevator lobby/stairwell area
13. Interior, Building 1, showing typical cooling room
14. Interior, Building 3, showing lift slab construction
15. South and west elevations, Building 1, looking northeast c. 1926. Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company files.
16. South and east elevations, Buildings 1 and 2, 1946. Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company files.
17. Lift slab construction, Building 2, 1944. Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company files.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: TEXAS, Bexar

DATE RECEIVED: 8/12/02 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 9/11/02
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 9/27/02 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 9/26/02
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 02001060

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

___ ACCEPT ___ RETURN ___ REJECT ___ DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Locally important industry associated with provision of cold storage and refrigeration in conjunction with domestic needs early in company's history and later with needs for refrigerated facilities along railroad line. As a complex of buildings (or small district) the inclusion of 1957 changes & history is acceptable and this date forms a logical end to P.D.S. corresponding with complex also sign for its life span construction

RECOM./CRITERIA *Accept A+C*

REVIEWER *Linda McClure* DISCIPLINE

TELEPHONE DATE

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

expansion and fullest development

INFO 225-3555

MERCHANTS

INFO 225-3555

WHOLESALE AND RETAIL

ICE & COLD STORAGE CO.

San Antonio
Premier Telecom Facility
Fiber Optic Services
200 West Loop East, Suite 1000
Houston, TX 77027
713.865.1111
www.premierfiber.com

lampToFiber.com
On RAMP TO FIBER
lampToFiber.com

STORAGE

MERCHANTS ICE & COLD STORAGE COMPANY
1305 E. HOUSTON ST.
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 1 of 17



MERCHANTS ICE & COLD STORAGE CO.

1305 E. HOUSTON ST.

SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 2 of 17



MERCHANTS ICE & COLD STORAGE CO.

1305 E. HOUSTON ST.

SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 3 of 17



MERCHANTS ICE & COLD STORAGE CO.

1305 E. HOUSTON ST.

SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 4 of 17



MERCHANTS ICE & COLD STORAGE CO.

1305 E. HOUSTON ST.

SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 5 of 17



MERCHANTS ICE & COLD STORAGE CO

WAREHOUSE
NO. 2

WATCH FOR CARS

MERCHANTS ICE & COLD STORAGE CO.
1305 E. HOUSTON ST.
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 6 of 17



MERCHANTS ICE & COLD STORAGE CO.
1305 E. HOUSTON ST.
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS
PHOTOGRAPH 7 of 17



MERCHANTS ICE & COLD STORAGE CO.
1305 E. HOUSTON ST.
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 8 of 17



MERCHANTS ICE & COLD STORAGE CO.
1305 E. HOUSTON ST.
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 9 of 17



MERCHANTS ICE & COLD STORAGE CO.

1305 E. HOUSTON ST.

SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 10 of 17



MERCHANTS ICE & COLD STORAGE CO.

1305 E. HOUSTON ST.

SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 11 of 17



MERCHANTS ICE & COLD STORAGE CO.

1305 E. HOUSTON ST.

SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 12 of 17 -



MERCHANTS ICE & COLD STORAGE CO.

1305 E. HOUSTON ST.

SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 13 of 17



MERCHANTS ICE & COLD STORAGE CO.

1305 E. HOUSTON ST.

SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 14 of 17

MERCHANTS
ICE AND COLD STORAGE CO.

MERCHANTS
ICE
WHOLESALE
AND RETAIL.

MERCHANTS ICE & COLD STORAGE CO.

COLD
STORAGE

RAILROAD
CROSSING



MERCHANTS ICE & COLD STORAGE CO.

1305 E. HOUSTON ST.

SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 15 of 17

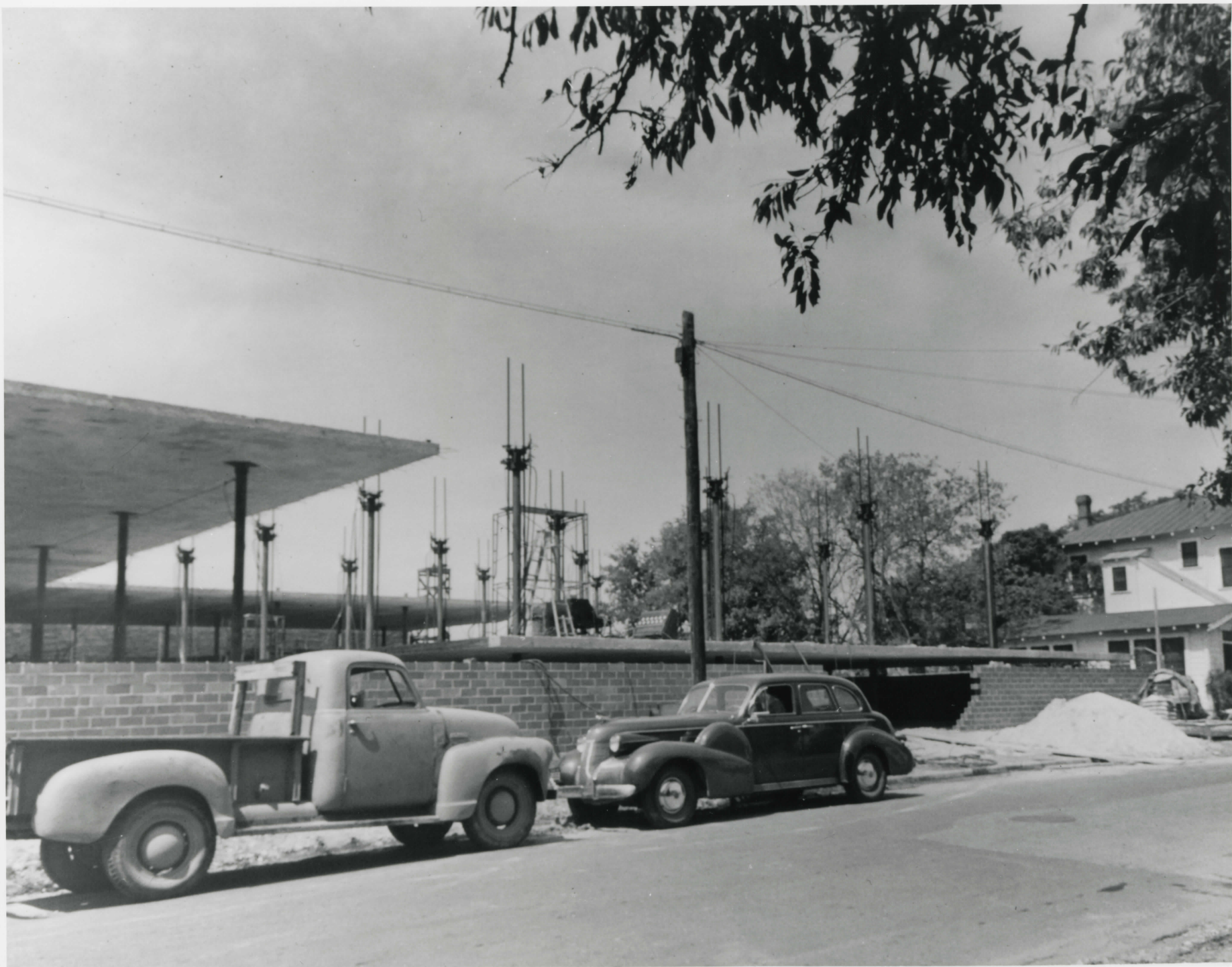


MERCHANTS ICE & COLD STORAGE CO.

1305 E. HOUSTON ST.

SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 16 of 17



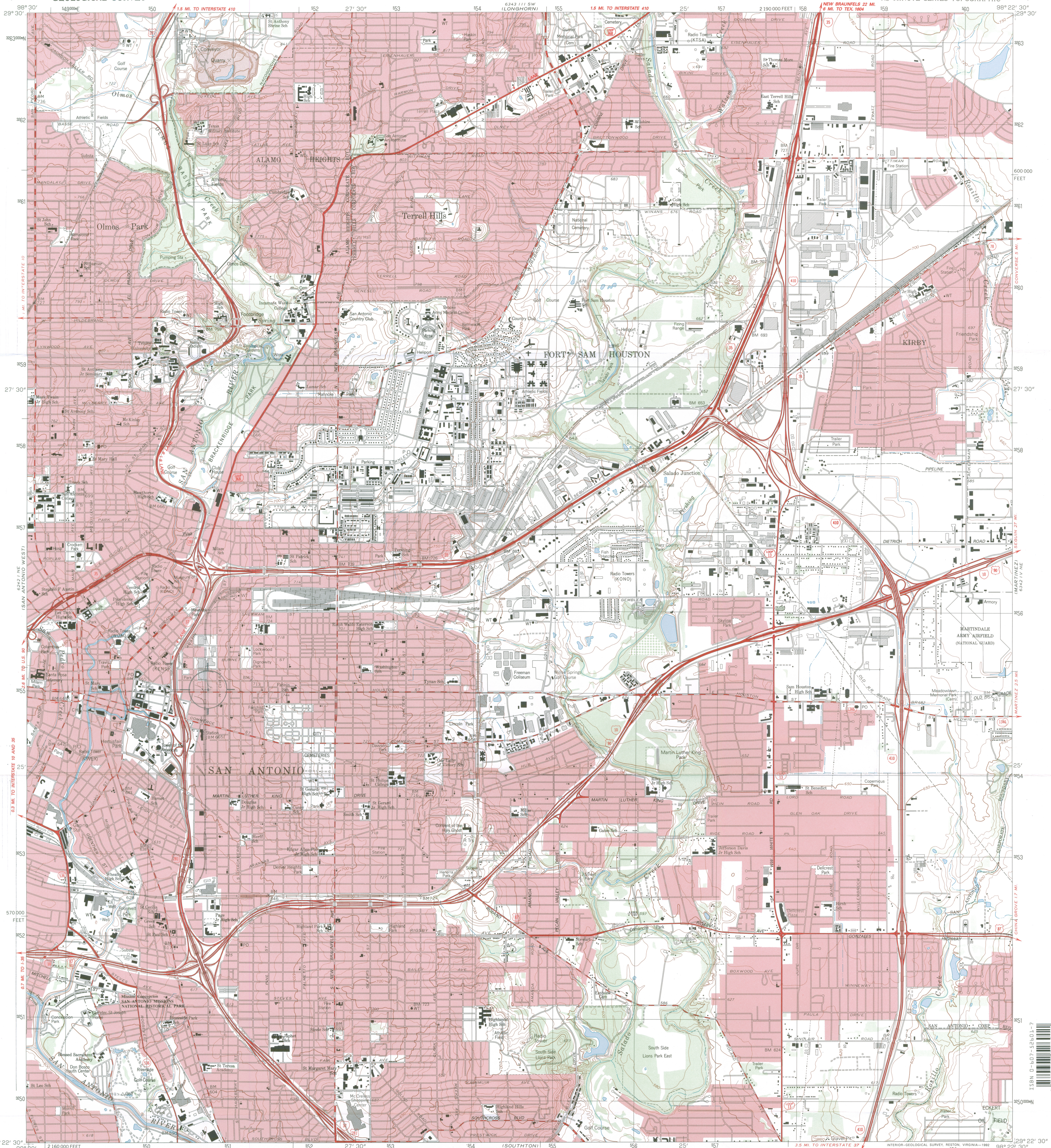
MERCHANT ICE & COLD STORAGE CO.

1305 E. HOUSTON ST.

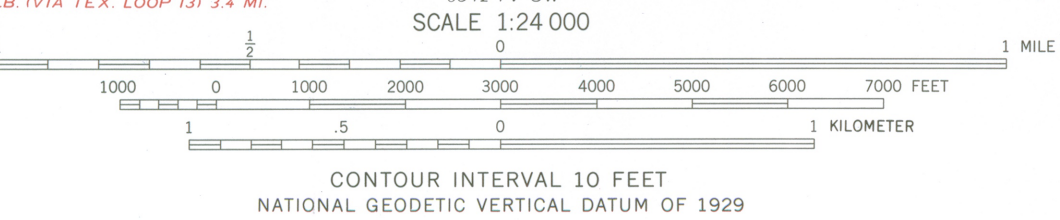
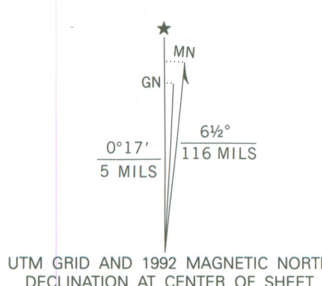
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 17 of 17

MERCHANTS ICE & COLD STORAGE COMPANY
1305 EAST HOUSTON STREET
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS
UTM REFERENCE: 14/550740/3255020



Produced by the United States Geological Survey
Control by USGS, NOS/NOAA and USCE
Compiled by Defense Mapping Agency from aerial photographs
taken 1952. Revised from aerial photographs taken 1986
and other source data. Field checked 1987. Map edited 1992
North American Datum of 1927 (NAD 27). Projection and
10 000-foot grid ticks: Texas Coordinate System,
south central zone (Lambert Conformal Conic)
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid, zone 14
The difference between NAD 27 and North American Datum of
1983 (NAD 83) for 7.5 minute intersections is given in USGS
Bulletin 1875. The NAD 83 is shown by dashed corner ticks
There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of the
National or State reservations shown on this map
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown



ROAD CLASSIFICATION	
Primary highway, hard surface	Light duty road, hard or improved surface
Secondary highway, hard surface	Unimproved road
Interstate Route	U. S. Route
	State Route

SAN ANTONIO EAST, TEX.
29098-D4-TF-024