

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Casa de Dios (House of God)
Other name/site number: Ostrom Mission
Name of related multiple property listing: NA

2. Location

Street & number: 910 E. Mistletoe Avenue
City or town: San Antonio State: Texas County: Bexar
Not for publication: [] Vicinity: []

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 at the following levels of significance:
[] national [] statewide [] local

Applicable National Register Criteria: [] A [] B [] C [] D

[Signature] Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Date 6/27/2024
Signature of certifying official / Title
Texas Historical Commission
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property [] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria.
Signature of commenting or other official Date
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:
[] entered in the National Register
[] determined eligible for the National Register
[] determined not eligible for the National Register.
[] removed from the National Register
[] other, explain: _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

5. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private

Category of Property: Building

Number of Resources within Property

| Contributing | Noncontributing | |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| 1 | 0 | buildings |
| 0 | 0 | sites |
| 0 | 0 | structures |
| 0 | 0 | objects |
| 1 | 0 | total |

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: NA

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions: RELIGION: Religious Facility, EDUCATION: School; OTHER: Social Welfare Organization

Current Functions: WORK IN PROGRESS

7. Description

Architectural Classification: NO STYLE; OTHER: Early 20th Century Vernacular

Principal Exterior Materials: WOOD, GLASS

Narrative Description (see continuation sheets 6-8)

Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: B

Criteria Considerations: A (Religious Properties)

Areas of Significance: Social History (*local*)

Period of Significance: 1909-1942

Significant Dates: 1909

Significant Person (only if criterion b is marked): Ostrom, Sarah; Ostrom, Frances

Cultural Affiliation (only if criterion d is marked): NA

Architect/Builder: Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance (see continuation sheets 9-25)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography (see continuation sheet 26-29)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested. Part 1 approved May 8, 2023.
- 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
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): NA

Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: Less than one acre (approximately 0.2498 acres)

Coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: NA

1. Latitude: 29.453069°N Longitude: -98.483656°W

Verbal Boundary Description: The boundary includes less than one acre and is located on the western side of NCB 6461 BLK LOT 41 & 42 (Property ID: 377556), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas as recorded in the Bexar Appraisal District. Data accessed July 20, 2023 (Maps 2-3).

Boundary Justification: The nominated boundary includes less than one acre (approximately 0.2498 acres) on the western portion of the larger 0.4049 legal parcel identified as NCB 6461 BLK LOT 41 & 42 (Property ID: 377556). The boundary represents a portion of the original acreage historically owned by the Ostrom family. The 1959 building to the east is excluded since it was added outside the period of significance and was never associated with the Ostrom family.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Rebecca Wallisch
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Additional Documentation

Maps (see continuation sheets 30-34)

Additional items (see continuation sheets 35-46)

Photographs (see continuation sheets 5, 51-76)

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photograph Log

Name of Property: Casa de Dios (House of God)
City or Vicinity: San Antonio
County: Bexar
State: Texas
Photographer: Irene Allender
Date: September 2022 and February 2023

All photographs accurately depict property conditions. No changes nor significant deterioration has occurred since the photos were taken in September 2022 and February 2023.

Photo 1
Site View, Facing Southeast.

Photo 2
Site View, Facing South.

Photo 3
Primary (North) Elevation. View South.

Photo 4
Oblique. Primary (North) and West Elevations. View Southeast.

Photo 5
West Elevation. View Southeast.

Photo 6
South Elevation, View East.

Photo 7
South Elevation. View North.

Photo 8
South Elevation beneath Shed. View North.

Photo 9
South Elevation. View North.

Photo 10
South and East Elevations. View North.

Photo 11
East wing North Elevation. View South.

Photo 12
North and East Elevations. View Southwest.

Photo 13
Nave facing main entrance. View North.

Photo 14
East wing/transept. View East.

Photo 15
West wing/transept. View West.

Photo 16
View from transept into nave. View Northeast.

Photo 17
View from transept into nave. View Northwest.

Photo 18
View of cupola above transept.

Photo 19
View of apse from nave. View South.

Photo 20
Interior view of apse. View Southeast.

Photo 21
Stairs to raised altar. View Southwest.

Photo 22
East room in rear addition. View South.

Photo 23
East room in rear addition. View North.

Photo 24
Hallway in rear addition. View West.

Photo 25
Rear hall with exterior door. View South.

Photo 26
West room in rear addition. View North.

Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Narrative Description

Casa de Dios (“House of God” also known as the Ostrom Mission) at 910 E. Mistletoe Avenue in San Antonio, Texas, was founded in 1909 by Sarah Ostrom as a congregational mission that provided social services to the surrounding community.¹ Ostrom built the one-story vernacular wood-frame building with lumber from the West End Lumber Company and funds she saved to fix her own home. The simple unadorned building has painted clapboard and drop siding, a cross-gable roof, cruciform plan, a small front entrance porch, a pier and beam foundation, original and replacement windows, and a non-historic cupola. A rear addition was added c. 1955 and a smaller metal shed addition was added c. 1985. On the interior, the original floor plan, wood floors, walls, and beadboard ceiling are intact. Following Sarah’s death in 1925, her daughter Frances subdivided the surrounding property into the Mistletoe Addition, a residential neighborhood, but retained and continued to operate Casa de Dios until 1942. The 1959 building to the east is excluded from the boundary since it was added outside the period of significance and was never associated with the Ostrom family. Despite minor alterations throughout the years, the property retains a high level of historic integrity.

Setting

Casa de Dios is located at 910 E. Mistletoe Avenue near the intersection with North St. Mary’s Street in the central part of San Antonio, north of downtown. The surrounding Mistletoe Addition neighborhood was platted and developed by Frances Ostrom in the 1920s. Mistletoe Avenue is a short dead-end street, accessed only on the west from North Mary’s St. because it was truncated on the east end by U.S. Highway 281 ca. 1975.² Casa de Dios sits on the south side of the street between a one-story brick commercial building facing North Mary’s St. on its west, single family homes to the east and south, and an empty lot across the street (Maps 2-6, Figures 1-7). The surrounding area consists of historic-age residential single-family homes, and commercial and religious buildings built in the 1920s and 1930s. Nearby National Register historic districts include the Monte Vista Residential Historic District (NRHP 1998) to the north and west and Brackenridge Park (NRHP 2011) to the east. Nearby City of San Antonio local historic districts include East French Place a few blocks south and River Road to the east.

Site

The nominated boundary includes less than one acre and Casa de Dios is located on the western side of NCB 6461 BLK LOT 41 & 42 (Property ID: 377556). Mistletoe Avenue is divided and has a narrow green median with trees (Maps 1-6). The 1959 building directly to the east is excluded from the boundary since it was added outside the period of significance and was never associated with the Ostrom family. Landscaping along the north end of the property consists of grass and shrubs, while several mature trees are located along the west elevation. An unpaved driveway is located on the west side of Casa de Dios, leading to the rear of the property which appears to be utilized for parking. Wood fencing runs the length along the east and west property lines. A corrugated metal fence runs along the southern property line.

¹ The building was referred to as the House of God, Ostrom Mission, or Mrs. Ostrom’s Mexican Mission in most English-speaking publications, and Casa de Dios in Spanish-speaking publications.

² In the 1970s, construction began on U.S. 281/McAllister Freeway, which bisected the Mistletoe Addition further to the east and resulted in the demolition of the eastern half of the neighborhood.

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Exterior

Casa de Dios is a one-story, vernacular wood frame building clad with painted drop siding on the projecting front (north) bay of the building and clapboard siding on the remaining elevations, both of which date to the period of significance (1909-1942) (Photos 1-2). The building sits on a pier and beam foundation and has a cruciform plan. The roof is a cross-gable asphalt roof with a non-historic cupola at the intersection. The cupola, added c. 2003, is set at 45 degrees and is clad in single-hung aluminum windows on all four walls below a metal hip roof. The building retains its original double-hung, two-over-two screened wood windows throughout, with a few non-original replacements.

The primary elevation faces north onto Mistletoe Avenue (Photo 3). The main entrance consists of a small elevated concrete porch leading to non-historic double doors. The front gable features an overhanging roof, and an attic vent is located just beneath the gable. Corrugated metal conceals the foundation along the primary elevation.

The cruciform plan is visible on the west elevation of the building, where a small wing extends westward from the main north-south mass of the building (Photo 4). A secondary entrance is located on the north elevation of the wing, featuring a non-original door accessed by a small wood porch with no railings. Three, two-over-two double-hung screened windows are located to the north of the porch and two, two-over-two, double-hung screened windows are located at the west elevation of the wing. The west elevation of the c. 1955 rear addition features two, two-over-two double-hung, screened windows which may have been repurposed from the original exterior when the addition was added (Map 4, Photo 5).

The south (rear) elevation consists of the c. 1955 two-room addition (Map 4, Photos 6 and 7). The addition has the same clapboard siding as the original building, with double hung one-over-one windows. A corrugated metal shed addition was built at the rear c. 1985. The shed is supported by wood posts and includes a screened section. A central, rear entrance is accessible beneath the shed and by a small set of wood stairs (Photo 8). Small storage areas have been constructed on either side of the stairs. Glass block windows are located on either side of the door. At the southeast corner of the south elevation, a wide set of wooden stairs lead to a second rear entrance that features a non-original door framed by non-original windows (Photo 9).

The east elevation of the building is accessible via a narrow space between the subject building and a wood fence (Photo 10). The rear addition is visible on this elevation, and the windows on the addition have been boarded over. There are two two-over-two, double hung windows located on the east elevation of the east wing. A door has been infilled along the north elevation of the east wing (Photo 11). Three double hung windows, one of which is two-over-two and two of which are one-over-one, are located along the east elevation of the primary mass mirroring those on the west elevation. The one-over-one windows likely replaced original two-over-two windows during the 1950s addition (Photo 12).

Interior

The interior of Casa de Dios reflects its original use as a church and community center. The main space consists of a simple nave, transepts (or wings), and apse. The main entrance on the north elevation opens into the nave, which is a long, narrow room clad with two-tone painted wood siding (Photo 13). Three wood-frame windows are evenly spaced along the east and west walls of the nave. Non-historic lighting, vents, and fans hang from the painted beadboard ceiling. Stained wood floors are visible in the nave and transepts. The transepts extend east and west from the main mass of the building (Photos 14-17). Two original two-over-two, double hung wood-frame windows are located on the east and west walls of the transept. The non-historic cupola, added c. 2003, opens over the transept space (Photos 16, 18). The apse consists of a historic raised altar (Photos 19-21). The apse is currently being used as a kitchen. It appears that there were originally doors on both the east and west walls of the apse. Overall, the nave, transepts, and apse retain most of their historic finishes.

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The c. 1955 rear addition is accessed through doorways on the south walls on either side of the apse. Each doorway leads to a small room. The east room features a non-original full-lite glass door with full-lite glass panels on either side along the south elevation (Photo 22). A tripartite transom window is located above it. The east and west walls are smooth painted plaster or gypsum board and the east wall has no openings. The north wall of the room is painted clapboard wood siding that was likely the building's original exterior dating to the period of significance. The north wall features an adjustable transom above a five-panel wood door that leads into the main space (Photo 23). A doorway is located on the west wall of the room, which opens onto a narrow hallway directly behind the apse (Photo 24). Three doorways are located on the south wall of the hallway, leading to two restrooms and a back hall at the center that leads to the rear entrance (Photo 25). A door at the west end of the hallway leads to another room, very similar to that of the east room. The north wall of the west room is painted clapboard siding, while the remaining three walls are painted plaster or gypsum board (Photo 26). Electrical and plumbing have been updated, and lighting is non-historic.

Alterations

Alterations to Casa de Dios are minor. The primary (north) elevation has a ghost outline of a projecting front gable porch roof removed at an unknown date and the doors are non-historic. Historic photographs indicate that the front porch roof was not original to the building. Some secondary exterior doors have been removed and were infilled with wood siding or plywood. A small c. 1955 rear addition was built more than 50 years ago and is now considered historic but was added outside the period of significance. Windows on the addition include double-hung, two-over-two windows on the side elevation (likely repurposed from the original building) and likely historic double-hung, one-over-one wood windows and glass block on the back elevation. All rear exterior doors are non-historic replacements. Also at the rear, a corrugated metal shed roof was added c. 1985. On the interior, a non-historic kitchen was built on the raised altar in the apse. A projecting cupola skylight was added above the transept c. 2003. Upgraded plumbing, electrical, and renovated bathrooms added at an unknown date. The 1959 residence was built just to the east of Casa de Dios outside the period of significance and was never associated with the Ostrom family.

Integrity

Casa de Dios retains a high level of historic integrity. The building remains at its original location on Mistletoe Avenue in north-central San Antonio. Although the completion of U.S. 281 east of the property resulted in the demolition of much of the Mistletoe Addition, the otherwise primarily historic residential and commercial setting is largely intact. A wooden fence helps to conceal the intrusion of the 1959 residence to the east. Integrity of design, materials, and workmanship is visible in the intact one-story vernacular wood-frame form, painted clapboard and drop siding, a cross-gable roof, cruciform plan, pier and beam foundation, and remaining original windows. On the interior, the original floor plan, wood floors, walls, beadboard ceiling, and raised altar are intact. With all these aspects combined, Casa de Dios conveys the feeling of a historic congregational mission and social welfare organization that provided social services to the nearby community. It is no longer associated with the Ostrom family or their mission.

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Statement of Significance

Casa de Dios (“House of God” also known as the Ostrom Mission) at 910 E. Mistletoe Avenue in San Antonio, Texas, was founded in 1909 by Sarah Ostrom, a Progressive-Era social reformer, teacher, philanthropist, and Christian missionary. Before and during the Mexican Revolution, a large wave of Mexican immigrants settled near the Ostrom homestead adjacent to the rock quarry and “poor house.” In response, the Ostroms first began holding religious services for the nearby community in their backyard during the summer of 1909. As winter approached, Sarah and her daughter Frances wanted to continue providing services during the cold winter months. With money saved to repair their home after a fire and credit secured from the West End Lumber Company, they built Casa de Dios on their property in late 1909 as a small church and mission. Before the creation of modern government assistance programs, Sarah and Frances provided food, clothing, education, employment, and medical services to low-income Mexican families who were unable to receive assistance elsewhere.

During the Progressive Era, women carved out more roles in the public sphere through their work with philanthropic, social, religious, and political organizations. While these women-led organizations appeared in the U.S., Texas, and San Antonio at that time, Casa de Dios, located outside the city limits, appears to be the only social welfare organization founded independently by a woman without affiliation to a larger private organization or religious institution. It also appears to be the only organization that catered to the nearby Mexican population. After Sarah died in 1925, Frances inherited the family property. Frances subdivided the surrounding area into the Mistletoe Addition and continued operating Casa de Dios before selling it to the Nazarene Church. The property is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion B in the area of Social History at the local level of significance. When compared to other associated properties, Casa de Dios is the only extant resource associated with Sarah Ostrom’s productive life reflecting the period she achieved significance. The period of significance begins in 1909, the year of construction, and ends in 1942 when the Nazarene Church purchased the property. The property meets Criteria Consideration A (Religious Properties) because it is primarily significant for its secular function as a community social welfare organization.³

Brief History of San Antonio

Early Development

The area now home to the bustling metropolis of San Antonio was first explored by the Spanish in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Five Franciscan missions were established in the early eighteenth century, and soon after San Pedro Springs, a vital water source for the area, was declared public land by the Spanish crown.⁴ In the late eighteenth century, the region north of San Antonio’s downtown core was primarily agricultural, and numerous irrigation ditches or acequias were dug in the area to irrigate crops.⁵ In 1836, following the Texas Revolution and the battle of the Alamo, Bexar County was formed in the new Republic of Texas, with San Antonio selected as the county seat shortly after. When Texas formally joined the Union in 1845, the city grew quickly, and military installations were established to protect the new western frontier.

³ National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1995) 26-27.

⁴ Laurie E. Jasinski, “San Antonio, TX,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed October 6, 2022, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/san-antonio-tx>.

⁵ City of San Antonio, “Tobin Hill,” accessed October 6, 2022, <https://www.sanantonio.gov/historic/scoutsa/HistoricDistricts/TobinHill>.

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During the latter half of the nineteenth century, San Antonio's economy consisted of cattle ranching, distribution, military, mercantile, and light industry.⁶ The arrival of the railroads had a significant impact on the region's growth. In 1877 the Galveston, Harrisburg, and San Antonio Railway reached San Antonio, opening the city up to regional and state markets. In 1881 the International and Great Northern Railroad (IG&GN) also completed tracks through the city, linking it with Mexico and providing an essential source of trade and commerce.⁷ By the turn of the century, San Antonio had grown to 53,321 residents and was the largest city in Texas. Growth continued at a rapid pace during the early decades of the twentieth century. By 1910 the population reached 96,614 and rose to 253,854 in 1940.⁸

North-Central San Antonio and the Mistletoe Addition/Monte Vista Neighborhood

In the mid-nineteenth century, as the City of San Antonio continued to expand, large lots of land were sold off to wealthy Anglo settlers, including the Maverick family, Gillum & Young, William R. Turner, Colonel George Brackenridge, and Conrad Seabaugh.⁹ The area just west of the Casa de Dios was sold to Gillum & Young, who subsequently subdivided the area and sold off lots in what would later be known as Tobin Hill. Around the same time, in 1865 Conrad Seabaugh sold several hundred acres of land to Sarah Ostrom's husband, V.C. Ostrom, who may have been a business partner of his, just north of Tobin Hill and southwest of the land belonging to Colonel Brackenridge that would become Brackenridge Park.¹⁰

The city-owned rock quarry in current day Brackenridge Park was the location of Alamo Cement Company. The company was established in 1880 and leased land owned by the city for their operations until 1908. The quarry was later transformed into the Japanese Tea Garden.¹¹ In the 1880s, a second county "poor farm," with central annex and hospital, was established near the present-day intersection of N. St. Mary's Street and Mulberry Avenue at the northern end of town near the rock quarry (Figure 1).¹² Both locations were near the historic Ostrom homestead and future site of Casa de Dios.

Around the turn of the century, a streetcar was established in the city, taking passengers from the city center north to San Pedro Springs, creating a market for the land located along the route and resulting in a booming real estate industry. It was during this time that the Monte Vista suburban neighborhood, located north and east of Casa de Dios, was developed. The Monte Vista neighborhood was comprised of nearly 100 blocks and several additions and characterized by late 19th and early 20th century residential architecture featuring many period revival styles.¹³ In 1909, the area north of present-

⁶ Jasinski, "San Antonio, TX."

⁷ Max Morales, Jr. *International & Great Northern Railroad Passenger Station National Register Nomination* (Reference ID 75001951), (National Park Service, 1975), 8.1.

⁸ Jasinski, "San Antonio, TX."

⁹ City of San Antonio, "Tobin Hill."

¹⁰ Bexar County, Texas. Deed Book Volume T1, Page 444. Conrad Seabaugh to V.C. Ostrom. June 27, 1865. The land for Brackenridge Park was donated in 1899 and the park was established in 1901.

¹¹ Diana J. Kleiner, "Alamo Cement Company," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed November 3, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/alamo-cement-company>; "Japanese Tea Garden," San Antonio Parks & Recreation, accessed November 3, 2023, <https://www.sanantonio.gov/ParksAndRec/Parks-Facilities/All-Parks-Facilities/Parks-Facilities-Details/artmid/14820/articleid/2912/japanese-tea-garden>; Paula Allen, "Beyond 'Big Rock Piles': San Antonio's Rich History of Repurposing Defunct Quarries," *San Antonio Express-News*, June 3, 2023, <https://www.expressnews.com/news/article/san-antonio-quarry-zoo-alamo-stadium-18125005.php>.

¹²In 1849, Bexar County passed an order stipulating that the county and city must care for and bury its "poor and indigent" population. By 1857 the city had completed its first Bexar County Poor Farm, located off Southton Road. "Welfare problems given different treatment in the past," *San Antonio Express*, Aug 3, 1969, 108.

¹³ Maria Watson Pfeiffer and Sue Ann Pemberton-Haugh, "Monte Vista Residential Historic District, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas," National Register of Historic Places Nomination, 1998, 8-80.

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day Summit Avenue and west of McCullough Avenue north of Casa de Dios remained city property and was still largely undeveloped (Figure 3).

The onset of World War I led to growth in San Antonio, with the establishment or expansion of military installations throughout the city. Additionally, the city promoted itself as a tourist destination, with Brackenridge Park, the San Antonio Zoo, art museums, and theaters opening throughout the 1910s and 1920s. As the city expanded to meet the growing housing needs, new automobile suburbs for middle and upper-income residents were platted throughout north-central San Antonio, including Laurel Heights Terrace, Summit Place, Summit Terrace, and the Mistletoe Addition.¹⁴

By 1934, a “mortgage security” (also known as redlined) map of the City San Antonio indicated the area of north-central San Antonio east of N. St. Mary’s Street and west of Brackenridge Park where the Mistletoe Addition was located was at that time “definitely declining.” The neighborhoods west of N. St. Mary’s, including Laurel Heights and Monte Vista, were labeled “still desirable.” Although not always explicitly stated, these maps often indicated the presence of low-income or historically marginalized communities, which was then used as justification for downgrading the desirability of neighborhoods.¹⁵ According to City of San Antonio Directories, by 1940 residents of the Mistletoe Addition were diverse, and included those with Anglo, European, Spanish, and Asian surnames and a majority appear to have been renters.¹⁶

In the 1970s, the Urban Expressway (present-day U.S. 281) was completed, cutting a north-south swath of land along the western edge of Brackenridge Park. At that time, much of the Mistletoe Addition, the neighborhood surrounding the Casa de Dios, was demolished to make way for the new highway. As a result, Casa de Dios is one of the few extant structures in the former Mistletoe Addition.

Demographic Shifts in San Antonio at the Turn of the Century

The annexation of Texas in 1845 and influx of Anglo settlers had a profound impact on the social, cultural, political, and demographic make-up of the city. In 1840, Mexican Texans (Tejanos) owned 85 percent of town lots in the city and held 64 percent of land claims. By 1850, Tejano real estate ownership dropped to 9 percent, and again to 7.8 percent by 1860.¹⁷

Between 1860 and 1880 the population of San Antonio increased from 8,235 to 20,550.¹⁸ At that time, the demographic make-up of the town was diverse, consisting of large populations of Mexican, Tejano, Anglo, German, enslaved or formerly enslaved African Americans, European immigrants, and other residents. In 1870 the population of the city was roughly 50 percent foreign-born.¹⁹ Although the city was diverse and multi-cultural, it still maintained de facto geographic segregation with African American neighborhoods concentrated on the far east edge of the city, Mexican and Tejano communities on the west side, and Anglo Americans and Europeans in the east- and north-central parts of

¹⁴ Pfeiffer, *Monte Vista Residential Historic District*, 8-92.

¹⁵ Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers. “Mapping Inequality – San Antonio,” accessed September 6, 2023. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/holc/tiles/TX/SanAntonio/19XX/holc-scan.jpg>.

¹⁶ “City of San Antonio 1940,” Ancestry.com. *U.S., City Directories, 1822-1995* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011.

¹⁷ Márquez, Raquel, Louis Mendoza, and Steve Blanchard, (2007). “Neighborhood Formation on The West Side of San Antonio, Texas,” *Latino Studies*, 5: 288-316.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/248875820_Neighborhood_Formation_on_The_West_Side_of_San_Antonio_Texas.

¹⁸ Jasinski, “San Antonio, TX.”

¹⁹ Richard A. Garcia, *Rise of Mexican American Middle Class, San Antonio, 1929-1941*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), 17.

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the city.²⁰ By the turn of the century, white Anglo and European residents of the city had established themselves as the dominant political and economic class.²¹

The Mexican Revolution

In 1910 Porfirio Díaz, who served as President (and de facto dictator) of Mexico since 1876, was challenged by Francisco Madero. Madero and other revolutionaries criticized Díaz for the country's poor treatment of its agricultural and low-income workforce, land policies, and for Díaz's political intimidation tactics. After Madero quickly garnered widespread public support, Díaz subsequently had him arrested and imprisoned. However, Madero posted bail and fled to San Antonio, Texas where anti-Díaz revolutionaries, including the Magón brothers, had already established a growing community. Madero established a headquarters in San Antonio and issued his Plan de San Luis Potosí, a call to arms against the Díaz regime.²² In 1911 Madero successfully ousted Díaz, although by 1913 Madero and his Vice President were forced to resign and were ultimately assassinated. In subsequent years, the country's leadership changed several more times, and fighting persisted. When Alvaro Obregón became President in 1920, the country finally began the process of national reconstruction and the period of active warfare largely ceased, although political unrest persisted for several decades.²³

The Mexican Revolution in 1910 resulted in a vast migration, when hundreds of thousands of Mexicans fled north into Texas to escape the violence, having a profound impact on the explosive growth of San Antonio in the early twentieth century. While some individuals coming to Texas during this time were exiled political refugees, and part of the upper or middle income brackets of Mexican society, a majority were low-wage, semi-skilled, or unskilled laborers.²⁴ Between 1910 and 1920 the population of San Antonio grew from 96,614 to 161,379.²⁵ Many of the immigrants lived in quickly constructed dwellings, or *jacals*, outside the city center or were concentrated in the city's west side.²⁶ The arrival of unprecedented numbers of refugees strained the once relatively friendly relationship between Mexicans and Anglo Texans and created racial tensions in the diverse community.²⁷

The population influx created a large number of Mexican women seeking employment, a situation ripe for exploitation by industrial and agricultural companies. As a result, Mexican immigrant women were constrained to accept low-wage, labor-intensive jobs, including pecan shelling, work in garment factories or laundries, domestic labor, or small retail operations in Mexican communities. Mexican women and girls were forced to join the workforce at an early age to supplement family incomes, working long hours in difficult conditions, and were largely unable to attend school.²⁸ These conditions limited upward mobility and the creation of a Mexican middle-class in the 1910s and 1920s. The language barrier, combined with insufficient access to education, also closed off one of the most common middle-class occupations

²⁰ Márquez et al, "Neighborhood Formation on The West Side of San Antonio, Texas," 295.

²¹ García, *Rise of Mexican American Middle Class*, 22.

²² Robert C. Overfelt, "Mexican Revolution," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed September 06, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/mexican-revolution>.

²³ Jürgen Buchenau, "The Mexican Revolution, 1910-1940," Oxford Research Encyclopedia, September 2015, accessed September 6, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.013.21>.

²⁴ García, *Rise of Mexican American Middle Class*, 23.

²⁵ "Texas Almanac: City Population History from 1850-2000," accessed February 24, 2023, <https://www.texasalmanac.com/drupal-backup/images/CityPopHist%20web.pdf>.

²⁶ See San Antonio Historic Preservation Office "San Antonio's Westside: History, Culture, and Community," City of San Antonio, Texas, accessed November 3, 2023, <https://www.sanantonio.gov/portals/0/Files/HistoricPreservation/SA%27sWestside.pdf>.

²⁷ Adriana Ayala, *Negotiating Race Relations Through Activism: Women Activists and Women's Organizations in San Antonio, Texas during the 1920s (Dissertation)*. (Austin: University of Texas at Austin, 2005) 5.

²⁸ Judith N. McArthur, *Creating the New Woman, the Rise of Southern Women's Progressive Culture in Texas 1893-1918*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), *Texas Through Women's Eyes*, 5.

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of Anglo and African American women: teaching. Throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, waves of immigrants continued to arrive from Mexico, and people of Mexican origin in Texas tripled between 1920 and 1930.²⁹

Progressive Era Women's Social Activism

Progressive Era Women's Social Activism in the U.S. and Texas

At the turn of the twentieth century, advances in technology, industrialization, urbanization, and immigration, resulted in a period of social and political reform movements known as the Progressive Era. The Progressive Era (ca. 1890-1920) was characterized by social activism that promoted improved conditions for the poor, ending political corruption, furtherance of democratic values, and scientific advances. With the advent of commercially processed food, ready-made clothing, and advances in household technology, urban, upper- and middle-income women in the U.S. had more leisure time, thus becoming key proponents of the Progressive Era and social activism. Many participated in welfare organizations or joined volunteer associations to provide resources for under-served populations in their communities, and as a way of entering the historically conservative and patriarchal public sphere.³⁰ Women's participation in public activism was historically traced to the involvement of northern women in the anti-slavery movement. However, in the south, the deeply rooted patriarchal societal structure and strictly prescribed male and female roles stymied the early development of women's organizations and female public culture.³¹

In Texas, women's early forays outside the home were largely through participation in social or cultural clubs, like reading clubs, that did not purport to have any lofty social aims, but rather afforded women an opportunity to commune with other like-minded women in the public sphere. Eventually, organizations including the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC, 1890), the Texas Federation of Women's Clubs (TFWC, 1897), the National Congress of Mothers (NCM, 1897), and Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) encouraged conservative Texas women to step out of their domestic spheres and join the national movement initiated by northern women to "domesticate" politics.³² Concurrently, in 1896 the National Association of Colored Women (NACW, 1896) was formed by African American women as a federation of local black women's clubs. In rural areas of Texas, women did not flock to the urban women's clubs like the TFWC, but rather formed different groups like the International Congress of Farm Women and state affiliate Texas Farm Women.³³

Women's social and philanthropic groups proliferated, many organized by upper- and middle-class white women with often paternalistic, patriotic, or religious agendas. However, community-specific organizations were also founded by marginalized groups to help their own communities, although these often suffered from lack of funding or broader support. Although women were some of the driving forces behind Progressive-Era social movements in the U.S., these efforts were largely stratified by race, ethnicity, and class. In Texas, Progressive-Era reformers continued to uphold racial segregation, and Anglo, African American, and Mexican/Mexican American women all fought for social justice through differing channels, and often with varying goals.³⁴

²⁹ McArthur and Smith, *Texas Through Women's Eyes*, 79.

³⁰ McArthur and Smith, *Texas Through Women's Eyes*, 2.

³¹ Judith N. McArthur, *Creating the New Woman, the Rise of Southern Women's Progressive Culture in Texas 1893-1918*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 2-3.

³² McArthur, *Creating the New Woman*, 3.

³³ McArthur, *Creating the New Woman*, 47.

³⁴ McArthur and Smith, *Texas Through Women's Eyes*, xiii.

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As women emerged as key proponents of Progressive-Era social activism and philanthropic work, their key objectives were primarily focused on:

- Women's suffrage
- Americanization, acculturation, and assimilation of immigrants
- Child welfare: sanitation, education, sustenance
- Education
- Political activism
- Labor reforms
- Temperance

One of the main issues promoted by Progressive-Era women's organizations was improving maternal and childcare services. At that time, pregnancy, childbirth, and infant care were not well understood by the general population. Furthermore, as industrialization and urbanization saw increasingly cramped conditions in urban areas, combined with a lack of sanitation measures or food safety regulations, childhood illnesses abounded, and infant mortality was high. Finally, for low-income families, many children were forced into the labor market with little access to education, if any at all.³⁵ Another aim of some Progressive-Era social organizations was to "Americanize" immigrants through teaching English and American history and providing vocational training. Efforts to "Americanize" immigrants became increasingly popular with the onset of World War I and concerns over national security.³⁶

Settlement Houses in Texas

Progressive reformers established settlement houses to provide social services to the influx of immigrants arriving in the U.S. These settlement houses were also typically founded by white women who left their middle-income neighborhoods to relocate in low-income areas, where they established centers that provided financial and material assistance to the surrounding community. Progressive-Era African American women also formed social welfare clubs and organizations, and even participated in settlement work, however in most cases lacked the financial resources to provide settlement houses.³⁷

While some settlement houses were operated by secular groups or organizations, most settlement houses operated under the purview of religious groups.³⁸ It appears that Methodist and Presbyterian denominations were particularly involved in forming settlement houses, evident by the Rose Gregory Houchen Settlement in El Paso.³⁹ Settlement houses and relief organizations were often formed by evangelical women out of a sense of religious duty, resulting in the creation of small, women-led groups who established orphanages, homes for indigent elderly women, and shelters for "fallen" women.⁴⁰ Some other Texas examples include the Woman's Home in Fort Worth, Sheltering Arms in Dallas, and the Lasker Home for Children and the Bethesda Door of Hope in Galveston.⁴¹ Compared to state-wide women's organizations, these were small and localized. "Most southern settlements were small and centered around kindergartens

³⁵ McArthur and Smith, *Texas Through Women's Eyes*, 9.

³⁶ Ayala, *Negotiating Race Relations Through Activism*, 54-55.

³⁷ McArthur, *Texas Through Women's Eyes*, 20.

³⁸ Teresa Palomo Acosta, María-Cristina Garcia, and Cynthia E. Orozco, "Settlement Houses," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed December 15, 2022, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/settlement-houses>.

³⁹ McArthur and Smith, *Texas Through Women's Eyes*, 17.

⁴⁰ The term "fallen women" is understood as a euphemism for women employed in the sex work industry.

⁴¹ McArthur, *Creating the New Woman*, 78.

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and home missions. Yet for precisely those reasons they were important to enabling women, who overwhelmingly dominated both fields, to claim public space in southern cities.”⁴²

In 1911, the *Handbook of Settlements* listed seven Texas settlement houses, including the Neighborhood Houses in Dallas and Fort Worth (est. 1903) and the Rusk Settlement in Houston (est. 1909). The handbook did not note any settlement houses in San Antonio. Historian Judith McArthur stated that “While club women and college women used secular settlements to claim new territory as child savers and municipal housekeepers, evangelical women combined social economics with the older tradition of religious duty. Through mission settlements they attempted not only to rescue individuals but to modify the environments that put individuals at risk.”⁴³

The Evangelia Settlement, founded in Waco in 1906, was established by two young women as a day nursery for children whose parents worked in the nearby wool mill. The facility was successful and eventually expanded to a board of twenty women from all of Waco’s protestant denominations.⁴⁴ This type of mission settlement was dominated primarily by Methodist women under the purview of the Woman’s Board of Home Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Many fell under the banner of Wesley Houses, which had the dual purpose of social service and evangelism. Wesley Houses were run by women who received educational training in mission work. Wesley Houses opened in Houston (1903), Galveston (1906), Fort Worth (1911), and San Antonio (1913). One of the primary missions of the Wesley Houses was Americanization of the growing Mexican community in Texas, more so even than conversion to Protestantism. The Wesley House in San Antonio also offered free health services and was the only free dental clinic in the city.⁴⁵

Some settlement houses were particularly concerned with cleaning up the “vice” or “red light” districts of their cities and communities. As young women entered the workforce at higher rates, there emerged a middle-class fear of lurking dangers to women’s sexuality and anxiety about them being coerced or lured into prostitution, and thus the evangelical ‘purity movement’ crystalized.⁴⁶ These organizations “represented benevolent women’s attempts to create female-dominated refuges in morally dangerous urban environments.”⁴⁷ They organized refuges for fallen women with the aim of bringing women back from the brink of what they personally felt was a dire situation.⁴⁸

Progressive Era Women’s Social Activism in San Antonio

In the early twentieth century, San Antonio was the only large city in Texas that did not contribute direct relief funds to help its poor. Thus, relief efforts relied on local and community organizations to fundraise and determine how to distribute financial aid or other resources to those who needed it most.⁴⁹ In San Antonio, numerous social welfare organizations were established at the turn of the century, many operated by religious institutions or private organizations (see Table 1). The rapid growth of the city’s population, in large part due to the influx of Mexican refugees fleeing the revolution, made the need for social services in the city acute. Most of the organizations that catered to the Mexican and Mexican American community were located in the west-central part of the city. It was not until the Great Depression that New Deal federal relief programs and agencies were implemented signaling a shift in the perception that social welfare should be, at least in part, the responsibility of the government.

⁴² McArthur, *Creating the New Woman*, 79.

⁴³ McArthur, *Creating the New Woman*, 81.

⁴⁴ McArthur, *Creating the New Woman*, 81-82.

⁴⁵ McArthur, *Creating the New Woman*, 83.

⁴⁶ McArthur, *Creating the New Woman*, 84.

⁴⁷ McArthur, *Creating the New Woman*, 78.

⁴⁸ McArthur, *Creating the New Woman*, 87.

⁴⁹ Ayala, *Negotiating Race Relations Through Activism*, 119.

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Early women's organizations in San Antonio were largely run under national or statewide organizations, like the GFWC, TFWC, WTCU, and NCM, by white, upper-income women. Mary Eleanor Brackenridge, sister of Colonel George Brackenridge, emerged as one of the leading society women engaged in social activism in San Antonio. Brackenridge was one of the founding members of the Women's Club of San Antonio, established in 1898, which hosted the first TCWF conference in 1901.⁵⁰

Religious denominations also founded missionary societies out of their churches and taught women how to evangelize and spread the word of God to recruit new church members. In San Antonio, these missionary societies were plentiful, and could be found at the Government Hill M.E. Church, Prospect Hill M.E. Church, First Presbyterian Church, Sociedad Dorcas of the Methodist Church, United Presbyterian Church, Alamo Heights U.O. Church, Unitarian Society of San Antonio, Prospect Hill Baptist Church, First Baptist Church, Calvary Baptist Church, and St. Mary's Church. The primary aim of these societies was conversion and church fundraising, although some of the money fundraised went to missions locally or abroad.⁵¹

As the immigrant population in San Antonio exploded in the early decades of the twentieth century, numerous secular and religious organizations focused their efforts on providing aid, but also Americanization, to the expanding Mexican and Mexican American community in San Antonio. Most of these organizations were concentrated in the city's Westside, which was historically the Mexican Quarter (Figure 8). These included the Wesley House, the Mexican Christian Institute, San Antonio Council of Jewish Women, National Catholic Community House, and the Free Clinic (see Table 1). Most of these organizations were established under the purview of larger social welfare organizations or religious institutions, except for one small mission in a rural area of north San Antonio, near the poor house and Rock Quarry Road, operated by Sarah Ostrom and her daughter Frances. Based on extensive research, Casa de Dios appears to be the only charitable organization in what was at that time far northern San Antonio on the outskirts of the city, and the only one independently operated solely by a woman and her daughter without oversight from any larger religious, social, or political organizations.

Sarah Ostrom

Sarah Ostrom's Early Life

Sarah Frances Ostrom (née Hummer) was born in 1840 in Indiana to parents William and Theba Hummer, although by 1850 her family had relocated to Illinois.⁵² One of seven children, her father worked as a miller of grain products and owned real estate worth \$2,000 in 1850. Sarah's grandmother, Martha Evans, was one of the infamous captives whose story was memorialized in the 1909 book, *The Captives of Abb's Valley*, about a pioneer family taken captive by Native Americans from their remote settlement in Virginia.⁵³ It's possible that this family history inspired Sarah's later determination to aid women who fell upon hard times. From a young age, Sarah Ostrom had a desire to help those less fortunate, as one later article suggested that "during her earlier life, her young heart being deeply interested on behalf of the benighted ones in distant lands, she decided to sail for a foreign field" to provide aid to others. Although her

⁵⁰ Elizabeth M. Newton, *Who's Who Among the Women of San Antonio and Southwest Texas: A Blue Book and Directory and Year Book of the Women's Organizations*, (San Antonio: Miss Marin B. Fenwick, 1917), 19.

⁵¹ Newton, *Who's Who Among the Women of San Antonio and Southwest Texas*, 24.

⁵² 1850 McDonough, Illinois Census.

⁵³ James Moore Brown, *The Captives of Abb's Valley: A Legend of Frontier Life* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1909), accessed February 16, 2023,

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/590be125ff7c502a07752a5b/t/5cebe5a315fcc0da649612bd/1558963624410/Brown%2C+James+Moore%2C+The+Captives+of+Abb%27s+Valley.pdf>.

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international mission never came to fruition, Sarah would maintain her drive to help those in need throughout the remainder of her life.⁵⁴

In the 1866, Sarah married Velie Conklin (V.C.) Ostrom, who was born in New York around 1820 and graduated from Western Reserve College in Ohio as a Baptist minister in 1839.⁵⁵ Sometime during the 1860s, the couple relocated to Texas where, it was reported that, “during the Civil War much of her time was occupied in collecting and forwarding interesting and useful literature to Texas troops in their respective encampments [and] in providing clothing for and ministering to the sick and dying in Texas hospitals.”⁵⁶ Following the Civil War, in 1865 V.C. Ostrom purchased several large parcels of land in northern San Antonio from Conrad Seabaugh, where the couple resided by 1866.⁵⁷

In 1870 the couple lived on their homestead in the rural area north of San Antonio with their two children James and Mary. V.C. was a Minister while Sarah kept house, and the family had \$1,350 in real estate value and \$400 in personal value.⁵⁸ Their neighbors consisted primarily of farmers and laborers, many from Mexico with Spanish surnames. In 1880 their homestead was listed on Quarry Road (later Jones Road and roughly present-day St. Mary’s) and adjacent to the county poor house. By that time the couple had two more children, son Edward and daughter Frances “Fannie,” and their neighbors were listed as impoverished workers and Mexican or Mexican American farmers and laborers.⁵⁹

Deed records indicate that in 1867 V.C. Ostrom sold numerous parcels of land in San Antonio to his wife Sarah for \$1.⁶⁰ In 1883 the pair remained on their homestead near the city limits at 1822 Jones Road. V.C. still worked as a minister and Sarah had taken a position as a teacher at a private school house nearby.⁶¹ Shortly after, City of San Antonio records indicate that V.C. Ostrom died in 1885, leaving Sarah and her children alone on the homestead north of town.⁶²

Although little is known about V.C. Ostrom, in the late nineteenth century Sarah had already garnered a reputation throughout San Antonio for her generosity and philanthropy, among her many talents. Many newspaper articles also note that Sarah was prominent in the temperance movement. In 1883 Sarah Ostrom organized the philanthropic Ladies Benevolent Association in San Antonio with the aim of assisting “fallen women” and offering a place of refuge and avenues for rebuilding their lives.⁶³ Her husband appears to have supported her endeavors, as in 1883 he transferred a lot of land to her “being 25 feet south from the NW corner of Lot 13, Range 1, District 3, Upper Labor ditch” to Sarah for \$1 for use by her Women’s Benevolent Association.⁶⁴ That year, a concert was held at Turner Hall with musical performances, and at intermission, Sarah Ostrom read a paper on the work of the Women’s Benevolent Association.⁶⁵

In 1884 and 1885 Mrs. Ostrom traveled to cities and towns across Texas, including Galveston, San Marcos, Laredo, and Austin, to speak publicly about the need for her organization and reportedly published a pamphlet titled “A Plea on

⁵⁴ “Mrs. V.C. Ostrom – Sketch of a Good Woman Engaged in a Good Cause,” *Galveston Daily News*, December 5, 1884, 8.

⁵⁵ U.S. Department of Commerce, “Twelfth Census of the United States – Precinct 8, Bexar County, Texas – 1900,” available on Ancestry.com.

⁵⁶ “Mrs. V.C. Ostrom – Sketch of a Good Woman Engaged in a Good Cause,” *Galveston Daily News*.

⁵⁷ Bexar County, Texas. Deed Book Volume T1, Page 444. Conrad Seabaugh to V.C. Ostrom. June 27, 1865.

⁵⁸ U.S. Department of Commerce, “Ninth Census of the United States – Bexar County, Texas – 1870,” available on Ancestry.com.

⁵⁹ U.S. Census 1860, 1880, courtesy of Ancestry.com.

⁶⁰ Bexar County, Texas. Deed Book Volume U1, Page 507. V.C. Ostrom to Sarah F. Ostrom. August 6, 1868.

⁶¹ 1883 City of San Antonio Directory, Ancestry.com.

⁶² San Antonio Metropolitan Health District, Division of Statistical Services, “Death records 1873-1926,” accessed February 3, 2023, <https://webapp9.sanantonio.gov/ArchiveSearch/Viewer2.aspx?Id={7C44FE6D-1ED6-48C7-80F5-76C4D2F43F45}&DocTitle=Death%20Records%201873-1926&PageNo=&TotalPages=&MimeType=application/pdf&RelatedDocs=>

⁶³ “A Noble Work,” *The San Antonio Light*, July 10, 1884, 1.

⁶⁴ *San Antonio Light*, September 1, 1883, 4.

⁶⁵ Transcripts of this paper were not included in any publications found in archival research to date. “Woman’s Benevolent Association Concert,” *San Antonio Evening Light*, February 28, 1883, 4.

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Behalf of Outcast Women,” to encourage financial backing of her proposed refuge.⁶⁶ Sarah Ostrom was skilled at using the publicity to garner support for her cause and was interviewed by newspapers across the state, including the *Galveston Daily News*, who published “A Sketch of a Good Woman Engaged in a Good Cause” about Sarah in 1884. The profile stated that:

Her whole life has been one continued effort to gladden the sorrowing and bind up the broken-hearted – making provision for the relief of afflicted and destitute widows and orphans – dispensing light, comfort, and joy to all on whose behalf her energies are directed. She is known, far and near, as the prisoner’s friend – the attendant at the bedside of the dying in the almshouse, hospital, and brothel, and it has been said thus of her, by clergy and other estimable friends that ‘she is just another Florence Nightingale in Texas land;’ that ‘her heart can take in 80,000 people at once.’⁶⁷

The profile also included references from various ministers and businessmen about Sarah’s reputability. At that time, a woman traveling alone, giving public speeches, and fundraising for “fallen women” was not commonplace and aroused suspicion and mistrust. Nonetheless, Sarah remained committed to her cause and contacted *San Marcos Free Press* to have them publish that through her travels to Austin and Houston she had achieved substantial success garnering support for her fallen women’s home. She stated that railroad managers and lumber merchants in Houston gave liberally of both money and lumber, and also offered to provide her free transportation of materials to construct her home.⁶⁸ Records indicate that Sarah may have succeeded in financing and constructing a safe house on the family’s property for women in need, although sources were unable to confirm its completion or location.⁶⁹

After the death of her husband in 1885 and subsequent inheritance of his landholdings, Sarah was noted as a large holder of real estate in the Laurel Heights (present-day Monte Vista) neighborhood just east of her homestead. In 1896, newspapers reported that Sarah and her daughters, Frances and Mary, were assaulted and robbed at their home during a severe storm.⁷⁰ Despite the harrowing experience, the women remained steadfast and stayed in their home near the rock quarry and poorhouse and continued to serve the surrounding community. Census records indicate that in 1900 Sarah worked at the poorhouse and lived with her son Edward, a lawyer, and daughter Frances, a teacher.⁷¹ Sarah’s eldest son Edward died in 1904, and that same year her daughter Mary married John Milton McCoy. With her other son James having relocated to Oklahoma, Sarah and Frances became the sole occupants of the homestead in San Antonio.⁷² In 1913 and 1915 San Antonio City Directories show Sarah and Frances lived at their homestead on Jones Avenue and Frances worked as a stenographer for Cherokee Life Insurance.

⁶⁶ Review of available newspaper articles and source materials was unable to uncover this pamphlet. “What Express Files Tell of Years Ago,” *San Antonio Express*, January 7, 1919, 6.

⁶⁷ “Mrs. V.C. Ostrom – Sketch of a Good Woman Engaged in a Good Cause,” *Galveston Daily News*, December 5, 1884, 8.

⁶⁸ *San Marcos Free Press*, October 2, 1884, 2.

⁶⁹ An article by Texas Public Radio suggests that Sarah Ostrom may have assisted San Antonio madam M. Volino in converting her former brothel into a home for fallen women, still extant and known as Providence Place. Additional research could not confirm this claim. Kathleen Creedon, “A San Antonio madam walks into a church...and turns her brothel into a rescue home,” *Texas Public Radio*, accessed <https://www.keranews.org/arts-culture/2022-04-15/a-san-antonio-madam-walks-into-a-church-and-turns-her-brothel-into-a-rescue-home>.

⁷⁰ “Ladies Assaulted,” *San Antonio Daily Light*, May 4, 1896, p15.

⁷¹ U.S. Department of Commerce, “Twelfth Census of the United States – Precinct 8, Bexar County, Texas – 1900.”

⁷² *FindAGrave.com*, “Ostrom, James Arthur,” accessed October 9, 2022. https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/66859251/james-arthur-ostrom?_gl=1*cr1zjy*_ga*MTc5MDAzNjQ3Ni4xNjQ4NDkwODk4*_ga_4QT8FMEX30*MTY2NTA2NDA1MS40MS4xLjE2NjUwNjcyMTM_uMC4wLjA.

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*Casa de Dios (House of God) – Ostrom Mission*⁷³

In the early decades of the twentieth century, with the arrival of a large wave of Mexican refugees to San Antonio, the area surrounding the rock quarry near the Ostrom homestead became home to numerous low-income immigrants and laborers. Furthermore, as the city grew, and the Tobin Hill streetcar line was established along San Pedro Avenue, the Tobin Hill neighborhood expanded northwards toward the rock quarries, where “live the Mexican ‘squatters’ in their houses of tin strips, flattened-out tin cans and waste lumber.”⁷⁴

Sarah and Frances Ostrom found themselves amid “a thickly populated Mexican district apparently uncared for by religious workers.”⁷⁵ Although the area was rapidly developing, transportation networks to and from north San Antonio were still crude, and many of the newly arrived immigrants lacked the means of traveling to the city center for goods or services. Being people of faith, the Ostroms were determined to assist and first began holding religious services in their backyard during the summer of 1909. Sarah and Frances had taught Sunday school at various denominations throughout the community, and their services quickly became popular amongst the locals. As winter approached, the women decided they should erect a building to continue providing services during the cold winter months. Having saved a bit of money to repair their home after a fire, they instead decided to put their funds into constructing a meeting place for the community. However, their savings were not sufficient to cover the costs, so the Ostroms secured credit from the West End Lumber Company to finance and complete the building.⁷⁶ No known architects or builders were listed in articles related to Casa de Dios’s construction, and it was likely built by local laborers.

When the building was completed, Frances and Sarah painted it white with large black letters reading House of God on the front elevation (Figure 9). Even though Sarah was the widow of a Baptist Minister, Casa de Dios welcomed any of the Christian faiths to worship within its walls. A local newspaper article heralding the small neighborhood church noted that the Ostroms had lived on the property for years and had lived a life devoted to their faith and to helping others.⁷⁷ Once the building was complete, the Ostroms “called in Mexican missionaries of the various protestant denominations to preach to the increasing crowds. In the last four years, they have been assisted by Spanish-speaking ministers of the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist Churches, holding services three times a week.”⁷⁸ Sarah and Frances took it upon themselves to learn Spanish to better communicate with their neighbors, and they acted as the sole directors of the mission, leading Sunday school and gospel sing-alongs.⁷⁹ On Tuesday nights, the church hosted night school for the working children of the community. Sarah Ostrom’s work was described in the local newspaper:

So in a way the little mission has become a kind of neighborhood center and from it is carried on a “one woman” settlement work. Mrs. Ostrom is the woman and she knows her people thoroughly. She goes among them familiarly, visits them in their homes, nurses them in time of sickness, rejoices with them in their pleasures, comforts them in case of death.⁸⁰

Although Casa de Dios was one of many social and religious organizations founded by and for women in San Antonio during the Progressive Era, society publications touting women’s organizations, like the 1917 *Who’s Who Among the*

⁷³ The building was referred to as the House of God, Ostrom Mission, or Mrs. Ostrom’s Mexican Mission in most English-speaking publications, and Casa de Dios in Spanish-speaking publications.

⁷⁴ “Need a Home, But Build a House of God Instead,” *San Antonio Light*, November 23, 1913, p20.

⁷⁵ “Need a Home, But Build a House of God Instead,” *San Antonio Light*, November 23, 1913, p20.

⁷⁶ “Need a Home, But Build a House of God Instead,” *San Antonio Light*, November 23, 1913, p20.

⁷⁷ “Need a Home, But Build a House of God Instead,” *San Antonio Light*, November 23, 1913, p20.

⁷⁸ “Need a Home, But Build a House of God Instead,” *San Antonio Light*, November 23, 1913, p20.

⁷⁹ It is believed that Sarah and Frances ran the mission themselves without the help of staff. Research did not reference any staff.

⁸⁰ “Need a Home, But Build a House of God Instead,” *San Antonio Light*, November 23, 1913, p20.

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Women of San Antonio and Southwest Texas: A Blue Book and Directory and Year Book of the Women's Organizations, did not mention Sarah Ostrom.⁸¹ At that time, for middle-class, primarily Anglo and white women, participation in philanthropic or social organizations had the added benefit of providing social status. In fact, many such organizations charged membership fees, thus limiting their membership to only those in the higher echelons of society. However, it does not appear that Sarah Ostrom had an interest in performative philanthropy, nor a need to assert her social status. Despite substantial means garnered from her inherited landholdings, Sarah Ostrom spent most of her life on her rural homestead outside the city, with laborers and residents of the poor house as her neighbors. Occasionally, Sarah traveled throughout Texas to promote her philanthropic endeavors and try to secure support and funding. Her apparent disinterest in mixing in San Antonio high society, except for the purposes of fundraising, is likely why she was omitted from many of the turn-of-the-century society pages and publications.

In 1913 Sarah Ostrom organized a relief society at Casa de Dios to collect clothing, shoes, bedding, fuel, food, and other items to donate to needy families, and served as treasurer. By that time, Sarah had furnished Casa de Dios with an organ, seats, heating, lighting, fuel, music, books, Bibles, Sunday school literature, and more.⁸² Sarah advertised the church services in local newspapers, including the Spanish-speaking newspaper *El Regidor*.⁸³ She also assisted local Mexican residents with securing work, publishing advertisements on their behalf in the local paper, including one for a 19-year old boy who was the sole breadwinner of his family, with sick parents and two young sisters.⁸⁴ "Mrs. Ostrom says that those desiring an efficient helper, a yard man or a house servant, would find the young man honest, truthful, industrious, and reliable."⁸⁵ Casa de Dios also served as a night school for the Mexican children of the community who had to work during the day. Sarah and daughter Frances had previously worked as teachers and taught the children in the evenings in the subject building. That year, Frances Ostrom was selected by the Bexar County Sunday School Association as an officer for her "work among the Mexicans."⁸⁶

At that time, local and state governments provided limited public services and specifically little financial aid for the low-income population of the city, and thus aid mostly came from religious institutions or philanthropic organizations.⁸⁷ Throughout the 1910s, Sarah Ostrom's mission at Casa de Dios was considered amongst the city as one of the primary relief organizations distributing aid to low-income families that they could not get elsewhere. The Christmas Cheer Association, a city-wide fundraising effort to raise clothing, food, and toys for the city's underprivileged during the holiday season, consistently provided baskets to Casa de Dios for distribution. In 1913 it was reported that the Christmas Cheer Association brought baskets to the county poor house, but also "Mrs. Ostrom's mission at the Rock Quarry was remembered with books, fruit, and toys, as it was also a children's home in West End."⁸⁸ The following year, the Christmas Cheer Association had completed over 450 baskets of food, clothing, and toys which were delivered to charitable organizations and schools throughout San Antonio, including the Free Clinic, Knok school, Golden Rule Grocery Co., various police stations, Bowie School, Wesley House, and Mrs. Ostrom (who received 14 baskets).⁸⁹

⁸¹ Newton, Elizabeth M. *Who's Who Among the Women of San Antonio and Southwest Texas: A Blue Book and Directory and Year Book of the Women's Organizations*, (San Antonio: Miss Marin B. Fenwick, 1917) accessed February 23, 2023, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433075966899&view=lup&seq=25>.

⁸² "Plans Relief for Mexican Families," *San Antonio Light*, December 7, 1913, p8.

⁸³ "Nueva Iglesia," *El Regidor*, September 14, 1914, p4.

⁸⁴ Research did not yield any information highlighting the voices or experiences of those served as Casa de Dios.

⁸⁵ "Young Man Wants Work," *San Antonio Light*, July 26, 1916, p2.

⁸⁶ "Officers Elected for Bexar," *San Antonio Express*, October 13, 1913, 14.

⁸⁷ David R. Johnson, *In the Loop: A Political and Economic History of San Antonio* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2020) 152.

⁸⁸ "Remember County Poor," *San Antonio Express*, December 24, 1913, 7.

⁸⁹ "More than 450 Christmas Baskets Await Delivery," *San Antonio Express*, December 23, 1914, 9.

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In 1915, the Christmas Cheer Association again donated baskets, including to the Casa de Dios. They stated that “Mrs. Ostrom yesterday furnished a list of needy persons to the association. It was lengthy, but in each instance the need of the individual or family specified. Indeed, the information was said to be the most complete ever turned in for Christmas work.”⁹⁰ That year, the Cheer Association established eight distribution stations for cheer baskets throughout the city. These included Golden Rule Grocery, Wesley House, two police substations, two schools, the Free Clinic, and Casa de Dios. In 1920, the Christmas Cheer Fund sent baskets to Mexican Christian Institute, Wesley House, YWCA International Institute, Casa de Dios, Catholic Community House, and Associated Charities.⁹¹ The fact that Casa de Dios was one of only a handful of distribution centers for donated Christmas baskets indicates the faith that the city and other philanthropic organizations had in her efforts. The other distribution centers consisted of schools, civic centers, and much larger organizations that operated as affiliates to religious institutions.

In addition to the donations Sarah received from city-wide fundraising efforts, she continued to find or create additional avenues for supporting her philanthropy. In 1914, the children and youth of the Ostrom Mission put on a concert and benefit at the Travis Park Methodist Church in order to “provide fruits, nuts, etc... for the children and young people of this mission. This is an interdenominational work carried on by Mrs. Ostrom and her daughter, Miss Frances Ostrom.”⁹²

In 1919 a large column appeared in the *San Antonio Express* describing Sarah’s work at Casa de Dios, and particularly her role in starting a free milk program. While the *San Antonio Express* and *Evening News* had started a Free Milk Campaign around that time, Sarah had already been operating one beginning two months prior. As they described:

West of Brackenridge Park there’s a tiny little cottage set right down in the middle of a corn field... Promptly at 11 o’clock hundreds of little children, swinging shining pails, line up in front of the cottage. In a few moments a sweet-faced, snowy-haired little woman may be seen emerging from the front door... who carries a heavy tin can, from which the little woman pours a white liquid into the waiting buckets of children... This fairy godmother to hundreds of little boys and girls is Mrs. Sarah F. Ostrom, and she may rightly be called the pioneer of the free milk movement in San Antonio in 1919.⁹³

The newspaper nicknamed the building the Corn Field Milk Station and Sarah stated that many of the children she served walked for miles to receive the free milk she provided (Figures 10-11). When Sarah read in the newspaper that local San Antonio dairies were disposing of thousands of gallons of milk, she set out to redirect the milk from being wasted. She personally appealed to the local Creamery Dairy Company (later known as the Mistletoe Creamery), to give her the extra milk and hired “Brother Garcia” to haul the milk via mule cart from the dairy to her mission building where she distributed it. The Free Milk Campaign Committee, spearheaded by the newspaper, was so impressed with her work that they offered to pay Mr. Garcia’s fee of \$6/month for delivering the milk, and provided her with additional ice to keep it cool. The committee also opened a free milk station at the Wesley House, with the intention of opening three more over the summer months of 1919.⁹⁴ In addition to her work to open a free milk station, the newspaper noted Sarah Ostrom’s other charitable work, stating “Not only does Mrs. Ostrom give free milk to the children, but she tells their mothers how to take care of sick little babies so that they will get well, and well little babies so that they won’t get sick. For Mrs. Ostrom studied to become a physician years ago.”⁹⁵ Although research was unable to uncover any additional information

⁹⁰ “Christmas Baskets,” *San Antonio Express*, December 15, 1915, 4 courtesy of the Portal to Texas History.

⁹¹ “Christmas Cheer Begins Sending Baskets to the Poor,” *San Antonio Express*, December 21, 1920, 16.

⁹² “Christmas Benefit Entertainment,” *San Antonio Express*, December 15, 1914, 3.

⁹³ “Quaint Little Cornfield Milk Station Feeding Boys and Girls Through Generosity of Woman,” *San Antonio Express*, June 10, 1919, 16.

⁹⁴ “Quaint Little Cornfield Milk Station Feeding Boys and Girls Through Generosity of Woman,” *San Antonio Express*, June 10, 1919, 16.

⁹⁵ “Quaint Little Cornfield Milk Station,” *San Antonio Express*, 16.

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about Sarah Ostrom's medical education, she may have received valuable hands-on training while ministering to soldiers during the U.S. Civil War.

It's important to note that due to the conservative nature of southern society at that time, women had very few acceptable avenues through which to perform autonomous social and political activism outside the home. As a widowed woman, social activism through a religiously affiliated establishment provided Sarah Ostrom with a means of pursuing a broader role in society. Men were more readily agreeable to women's activism in church work, "because men viewed church work as suitable for women and as 'no compromise of female modesty and refinement.'"⁹⁶

In 1921 Frances worked as a stenographer at Kelly Field, while Sarah worked in gospel and charity work at Casa de Dios. They both resided in the property at 1822 Jones Road near the mission.⁹⁷ Sarah Ostrom died on December 26, 1925 of natural causes, still residing on the subject property. On her death certificate, Sarah was listed as a missionary.⁹⁸

Sarah Ostrom's Legal Battles

In addition to her charitable work at Casa de Dios and throughout San Antonio, Sarah Ostrom was also regularly referred to as the only female lawyer in San Antonio. While Sarah never formally earned a law degree or was admitted to the bar, both being inaccessible to women at that time, she did notably defend herself in court on several occasions. Following the death of Sarah's husband in 1885, she became the sole provider, caretaker, and head of her household and farmstead. At that time, women had just begun to make modest inroads in the legal profession in the U.S. While some precedent exists for women participating or advocating in U.S. court cases or performing informal legal services in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the first woman was not admitted to a U.S. law school until Lemma Barkaloo in 1869. Over the subsequent decades, other women slowly began to enter the legal profession, although many states continued to legally deny women the right to practice law.⁹⁹ It wasn't until 1902 that Edith W. Locke became the first woman in Texas admitted to practice law in the state.¹⁰⁰ In 1914, Irene Gertrude Brown and Rose Zelosky became the first two women in Texas granted law degrees, and Brown subsequently became the first official female lawyer in San Antonio.¹⁰¹

It is within this context that Sarah participation and self-advocacy during her legal battles with the City of San Antonio and others is remarkable for its time. Around 1890, it appears that Sarah sued the City of San Antonio for the unlawful use of a portion of her property for Rock Quarry Road. She alleged that the city unlawfully used her land for a highway to carry city garbage to the dump. That year, Sarah created quite a stir when she appeared in court, "arrayed in a robe of spotless white," and announced that she would be defending herself. Attorney for the plaintiffs, Ex-Attorney General McLeary, protested vociferously to the judge, but was overruled. Newspapers from Galveston to Fort Worth reported on the unique occurrence, and stated that "Mrs. Ostrom, though not a licensed lawyer, proceeded with the defense and conducted her side of the case with consummate skill and conspicuous ability," and "acquitted herself with more ability than many a young man of the law on his first case."¹⁰²

⁹⁶ John Patrick McDowell, *The Social Gospel in the South, The Woman's Home Mission Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1886-1939* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1982), 117.

⁹⁷ Ostrom, U.S., San Antonio City Directory 1921, City Directories, 1822-1995. Ancestry.com.

⁹⁸ "Sarah F. Ostrom," Texas, U.S., Death Certificates, 1903-1982. Ancestry.com.

⁹⁹ "A Timeline of Women's Legal History in the United States and at Georgetown University," accessed January 31, 2023, <http://wlh.law.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/cunnea-timeline2.pdf>.

¹⁰⁰ Ann Zeigler, "Review: Rough Road to Justice: The Journey of Women Lawyers in Texas, 2009," accessed February 24, 2023, http://www.thehoustonlawyer.com/aa_may09/page51.htm.

¹⁰¹ University of Texas at Austin School of Law, "History-Makers: The First Women at Texas Law," accessed February 22, 2023, <https://law.utexas.edu/news/2021/03/08/history-makers-the-first-women-at-texas-law/>.

¹⁰² "A Woman Pleader," *Fort Worth Daily Gazette*, September 2, 1890, 2; "Will do her own talking," *Galveston Daily News*, September 3, 1890, 2.

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It appears that the court case was eventually resolved sometime in the early 1900s, and Sarah Ostrom permitted the city to use her land for Rock Quarry Road in exchange for a clean bill on her back taxes. Over the course of her time in San Antonio, Sarah was also involved in several other legal cases regarding her landholdings, some of which she argued herself. Considering the immeasurable barriers to women lawyers in Texas at the turn of the century, Sarah's position arguing in her own defense in front of the court in 1890, more than two decades before Irene Brown became San Antonio's first female lawyer to graduate law school and pass the bar exam, is remarkable, and a testament to her pioneer spirit.

Casa de Dios After Sarah Ostrom

Few sources were available, and little is known about Casa de Dios after Sarah passed away. Following the death of her mother, Frances Ostrom subsequently subdivided the land they owned in the area into what would become the Mistletoe Addition (Figures 5-7).¹⁰³ As owner, Frances took it upon herself to act as real estate agent. She enlisted J.C. Stinson to act as sales manager, and together they subdivided the property into 55 lots with lights, gas, telephone, water, sidewalks, curbs, and paved streets.¹⁰⁴ Frances and J.C. Stinson marketed the lots as French Village, with custom homes designed to evoke French cottages.¹⁰⁵ It appears that at some point in the late 1920s or early 1930s, Frances vacated the homestead property and moved to a rental unit nearby on St. Mary's Street.

A newspaper article from 1927 outlining Frances Ostrom's development of the Mistletoe Addition noted that the subdivision was located on the original Ostrom homestead acquired in 1869 and that the "Ostrom estate" had originally encompassed 25 acres, although 10 acres were eventually sold off. Another article from 1928 described the changes in the area following Frances Ostrom's development of the neighborhood, recounting how "along Jones Avenue wide acres of oats and grain stretched out 'once upon a time' and only a short while ago the last remnant of the sole surviving farm gave way at last to development." Frances described the rural nature of her childhood among the possums, rabbits, and wolves that once roamed their homestead. At the time they moved there the nearest store was the Costanolos, which was the Robert E. Lee hotel by the late 1920s, and Frances claimed that it wasn't until 1885 that any other houses were built north of their plot. The article noted that "The last stone of the Ostrom farmhouse was torn down in 1926. It had been a typical old stone house—four rooms and an eight-foot hall. Its barns, made of timber, rotted down slowly and painfully."¹⁰⁶

Thus, it appears that all the buildings associated with the Ostrom family, except for Casa de Dios, were demolished in the 1920s to make way for the Mistletoe subdivision. Completed following the death of Sarah's husband, Casa de Dios was financed, built, organized, and operated solely by Sarah with help from her daughter Frances. It is telling that when Frances subdivided the estate and demolished their residence, she maintained the Casa de Dios building and continued to operate it as a mission through the 1930s. Thus, the building appears to be the only extant structure associated with the productive life of Sarah Ostrom.

¹⁰³ Preliminary research indicates that the Creamery Dairy Company was a precursor to the Mistletoe Creamery founded by J. Frank Kline. The Creamery Dairy Company, which was reorganized as Mistletoe Creamery in 1922, provided the Ostrom's with free milk for Casa de Dios. It is possible that the Mistletoe Addition was named for the dairy that contributed free milk to the patrons of Casa de Dios, however research could not confirm this. The historic Borden's Creamery at 875 East Ashby Place just south of Casa de Dios was designed for Mistletoe Creamery and purchased by Borden Company in 1933, see Maria Watson Pfeiffer, Ann Benson McGlone, and Charlotte Adams, "Borden's Creamery, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas," National Register of Historic Places Nomination, 2021, pages 13-19, <https://atlas.thc.texas.gov/NR/pdfs/100007273/100007273.pdf>.

¹⁰⁴ "Mistletoe is Newest S.A. Addition," *San Antonio Light*, June 13, 1926, p53.

¹⁰⁵ "S.A. French Village Homesite Sales Reach \$100,00 Total," *San Antonio Light*, February 27, 1927, 1.

¹⁰⁶ *San Antonio Light*, April 8, 1928, 3.

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Through 1940, city directories list the property at 910 E. Mistletoe (formerly 1822 Jones Road) as Casa de Dios, and it appears Frances Ostrom continued to oversee and be involved in the church after her mother's death. In the 1940s Frances accepted a position as a stenographer for the WPA and resided at 3010 St. Mary's Street.¹⁰⁷ In 1942, Frances Ostrom, along with Trustees for Casa de Dios, sold the property to the General Board of the Church of the Nazarene.¹⁰⁸ Frances died in 1944.¹⁰⁹

In 1948 city directories list the property at 910 E. Mistletoe as the Iglesia de Nazareno Church, which it remained for some time. In 1959 Bernabe Maes was pastor of the self-supporting church, and the congregation built a three-bedroom parsonage next door, likely the adjacent non-contributing building. The congregation also planned construction of several additional Sunday school rooms, although it is unknown if these were completed.¹¹⁰ In the late twentieth century, the building was home to the Brad Braune Studio, a studio for the San Antonio-based artist who purchased the property from Bernard Lifshutz and Arthur P. Ventman in 1982.¹¹¹ In 2021 the property was sold to Bureau Inc. and the current owners plan to pursue historic tax credits to rehabilitate the building, although its future use has yet to be determined.

Criterion Consideration A: Religious Properties

Although the wife of a Baptist Minister, Sarah Ostrom's Casa de Dios was not associated with any formal religious institutions. Sarah and her daughter Frances financed the construction of the building independently. Casa de Dios was described as a congregational church and mission under the Protestant umbrella, meaning it operated independently of any larger religious organization. Although the property was used for religious purposes between its construction in 1909 and 1942, Casa de Dios was primarily used for a variety of secular functions. Ostrom's resourceful nature allowed her to secure milk, clothes, food, and other supplies for the community. She provided employment resources, medical advice, and taught night school to the neighborhood children. The property meets Criteria Consideration A (Religious Properties) because it is primarily significant for its secular function as a community social welfare organization.¹¹²

Criterion B: Social History

Casa de Dios is significant within the broader context of Social History in Progressive Era San Antonio under Criterion B, and for its association with Sarah Ostrom, a teacher, philanthropist, tenacious fundraiser, and self-made social worker who operated on her own, outside the city proper, without oversight from broader organizations setting the mission apart from most social welfare organizations of the time. Her work is reflective of the limited avenues Progressive-Era women in the South had for entering the public sphere. Casa de Dios was a valuable resource to the community of Mexicans who settled nearby following the Mexican Revolution and was the only known social welfare organization located in northern San Antonio serving that area. Sarah's efforts to provide basic social services to the local community with limited resources made her significant and elevated her among her fellow social reformers. When compared to other

¹⁰⁷ U.S. Department of Commerce, "Sixteenth Census, Bexar County Precinct 1, 1940," accessed October 9, 2022, available on Ancestry.com.

¹⁰⁸ Bexar County Deed Records, Deed Book Volume 1969, Page 150-151 Frances Ostrom, et al, to The General Board of the Church of Nazarene, May 6, 1943.

¹⁰⁹ FindAGrave.com, "Ostrom, Frances," accessed October 9, 2022, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/84860761/frances-ostrom?_gl=1*os17w6*_ga*MTc5MDAzNjQ3Ni4xNjQ4NDkwODk4*_ga_4QT8FMEX30*MTY2NTEwNzg5Mi40OC4xLjE2NjUxMDg3ODEuMC4wLjA.

¹¹⁰ "Nazarenes Note Gains," San Antonio Light, March 29, 1959, 10A.

¹¹¹ Bexar County Deed Records, Deed Book Volume 2568, Page 901. Bernard Lifshutz and Arthur P. Veltman, Jr. to Brad Braune, April 21, 1982.

¹¹² National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1995) 26-27.

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associated properties, Casa de Dios is also the only extant resource associated with Sarah Ostrom's productive life reflecting the time period she achieved significance.¹¹³

Conclusion

The property is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion B in the area of Social History at the local level of significance. The period of significance is 1909-1942. The property meets Criteria Consideration A (Religious Properties) because it is primarily significant for its secular function as a community social welfare organization.

¹¹³ National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1995) 14-16.

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--- "What Express Files Tell of Years Ago." *San Antonio Express*, January 7, 1919, 6.

--- "Christmas Baskets." *San Antonio Express*, December 15, 1915, 4.

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- "Christmas Benefit Entertainment." *San Antonio Express*, December 15, 1914, 3.
- "Christmas Cheer Begins Sending Baskets to the Poor." *San Antonio Express*, December 21, 1920, 16.
- "Quaint Little Cornfield Milk Station Feeding Boys and Girls Through Generosity of Woman." *San Antonio Express*, June 10, 1919, 16.
- "More than 450 Christmas Baskets Await Delivery." *San Antonio Express*, December 23, 1914, 9.
- "Officers Elected for Bexar." *San Antonio Express*, October 13, 1913, 14.
- "Remember County Poor." *San Antonio Express*, December 24, 1913, 7.
- "Welfare problems given different treatment in the past." *San Antonio Express*, Aug 3, 1969, 108.

San Antonio Light

- "A Noble Work." *The San Antonio Light*, July 10, 1884, 1.
- "Issue Bonds to Build New Poor House," *San Antonio Light and Gazette*, March 16, 1911, 1.
- "Ladies Assaulted." *San Antonio Daily Light*, May 4, 1896, p15.
- "Mistletoe is Newest S.A. Addition." *San Antonio Light*, June 13, 1926, p53.
- "Nazarenes Note Gains." *San Antonio Light*, March 29, 1959, 10A.
- "Need a Home, But Build A House of God Instead." *San Antonio Light*, November 23, 1913, p20.
- "Plans Relief for Mexican Families." *San Antonio Light*, December 7, 1913, p8.
- "S.A. French Village Homesite Sales Reach \$100,00 Total." *San Antonio Light*, February 27, 1927, 1.
- *San Antonio Light*, September 1, 1883, 4.
- *San Antonio Light*, April 8, 1928, 3.
- "Woman's Benevolent Association Concert," *San Antonio Evening Light*, February 28, 1883, 4.
- "Young Man Wants Work." *San Antonio Light*, July 26, 1916, p2.

Other

- "A Woman Pleader." *Fort Worth Daily Gazette*, September 2, 1890, 2.
- "Mrs. V.C. Ostrom – Sketch of a Good Woman Engaged in a Good Cause." *Galveston Daily News*, December 5, 1884, 8.
- "Nueva Iglesia." *El Regidor*, September 14, 1914, 4.
- *San Marcos Free Press*, October 2, 1884, 2.
- "Will do her own talking." *Galveston Daily News*, September 3, 1890, 2.

Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Maps

Map 1: Bexar County, Texas



Map 2: Bexar County Appraisal District Map. The boundary includes less than one acre and is located on the western side of NCB 6461 BLK LOT 41 & 42 (Property ID: 377556), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas as recorded in the Bexar Appraisal District. Data accessed July 20, 2023. The boundary represents a portion of the original acreage historically owned by the Ostrom family. The 1959 building to the east is excluded since it was added outside the period of significance and was never associated with the Ostrom family. See also Map 3.



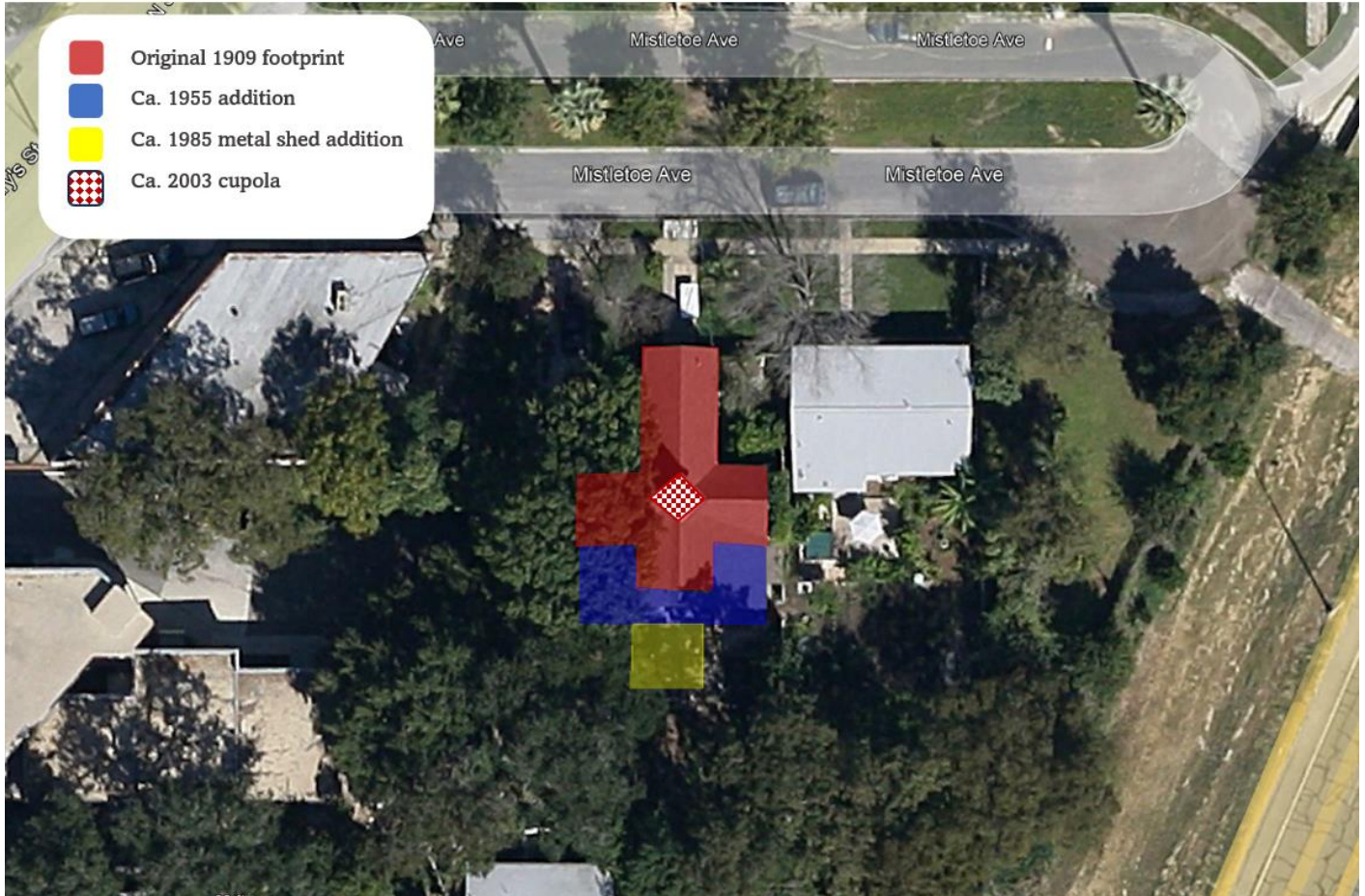
Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Map 3: Google Earth Map (2023) showing Casa de Dios with nominated boundary in red. Accessed October 29, 2023.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Map 4. Google Earth Map showing changes to property over time.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Map 5. Bing map of property showing larger site.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

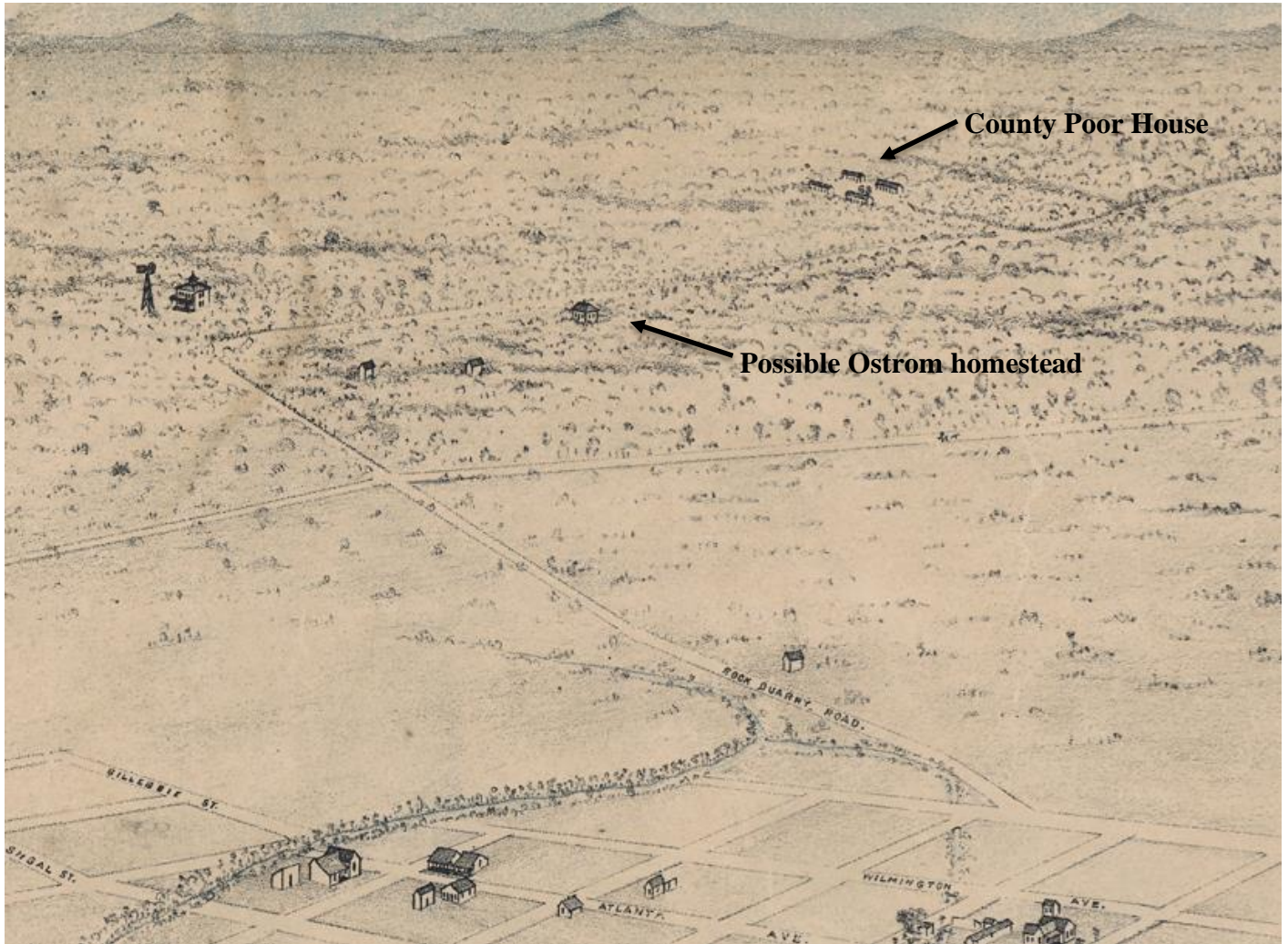
Map 6. Google Earth Map, accessed October 29, 2023.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Figures

Figure 1: 1886 Koch's Birdseye Map of San Antonio showing county poor house and possible Ostrom homestead. A map with the exact location of the homestead was not available.



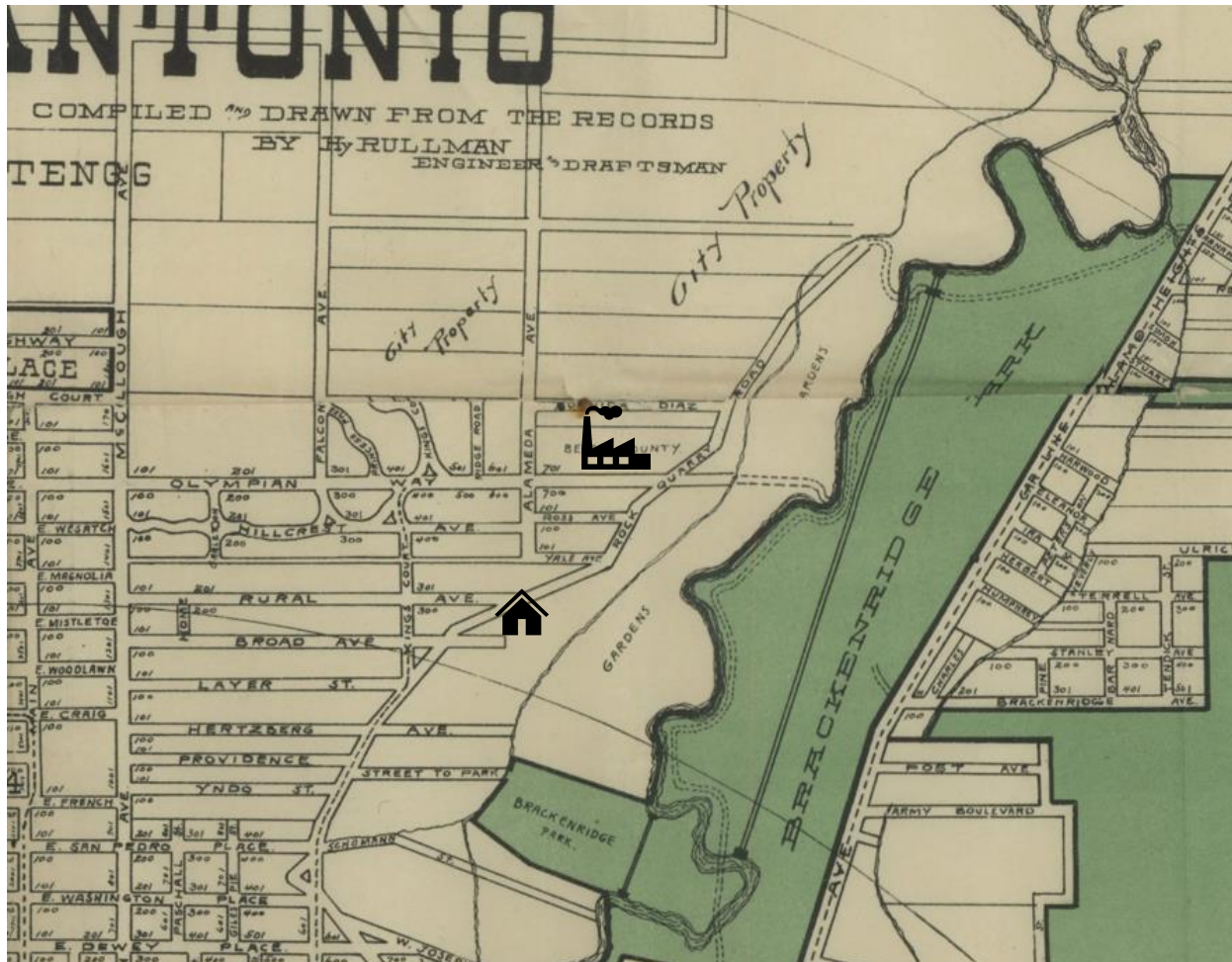
Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Figure 2: 1889 Map of San Antonio Courtesy of the Texas State Library and Archives. House icon indicates the approximate location of the Ostrom homestead and future location of Casa de Dios/Ostrom Mission, factory icon indicates the location of the rock quarry and county poor house.



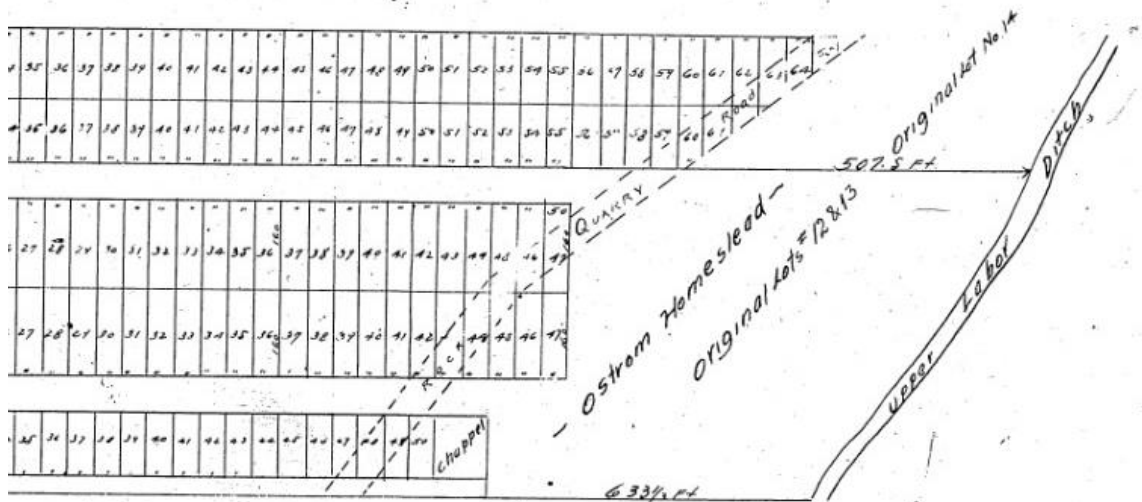
Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Figure 3: 1909 Map of San Antonio Courtesy of the Texas State Library and Archives. House icon indicates the approximate location of the Ostrom homestead and Casa de Dios/Ostrom Mission, factory icon indicates the location of the rock quarry and county poor house.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Figure 4. 1913 Plat Map showing location of Ostrom Homestead.



The State of Texas }
 County of Bexar } This is to certify that, whereas my original
 plat of Subdivisions O.C. Lots 12 & 13 in range one (1) District
 three (3) of San Antonio Texas was lost in the City Engineers
 office without having been recorded upon the County re-
 cords, therefore I do here by re-dedicate to the Public the
 free use and benefit of the certain streets known as Broad
 Ave. & Rural Ave. west of Rock Quarry Road as designated
 thereon; Also Home Street.

Witness my hand this 28th day of January, 1913

Lorch J. Ostrom

Sworn and Subscribed to before me this 28th day January A.D. 1913

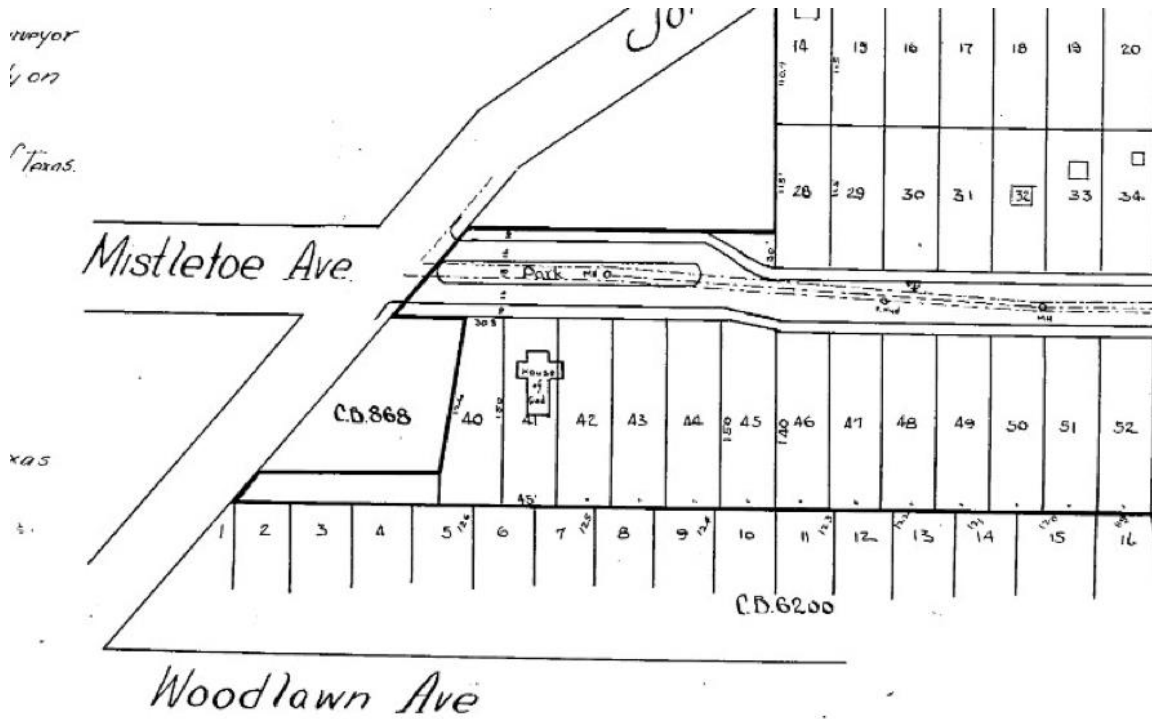
J. Frances Osborn

Notary Public Bexar County Tex.

Seal

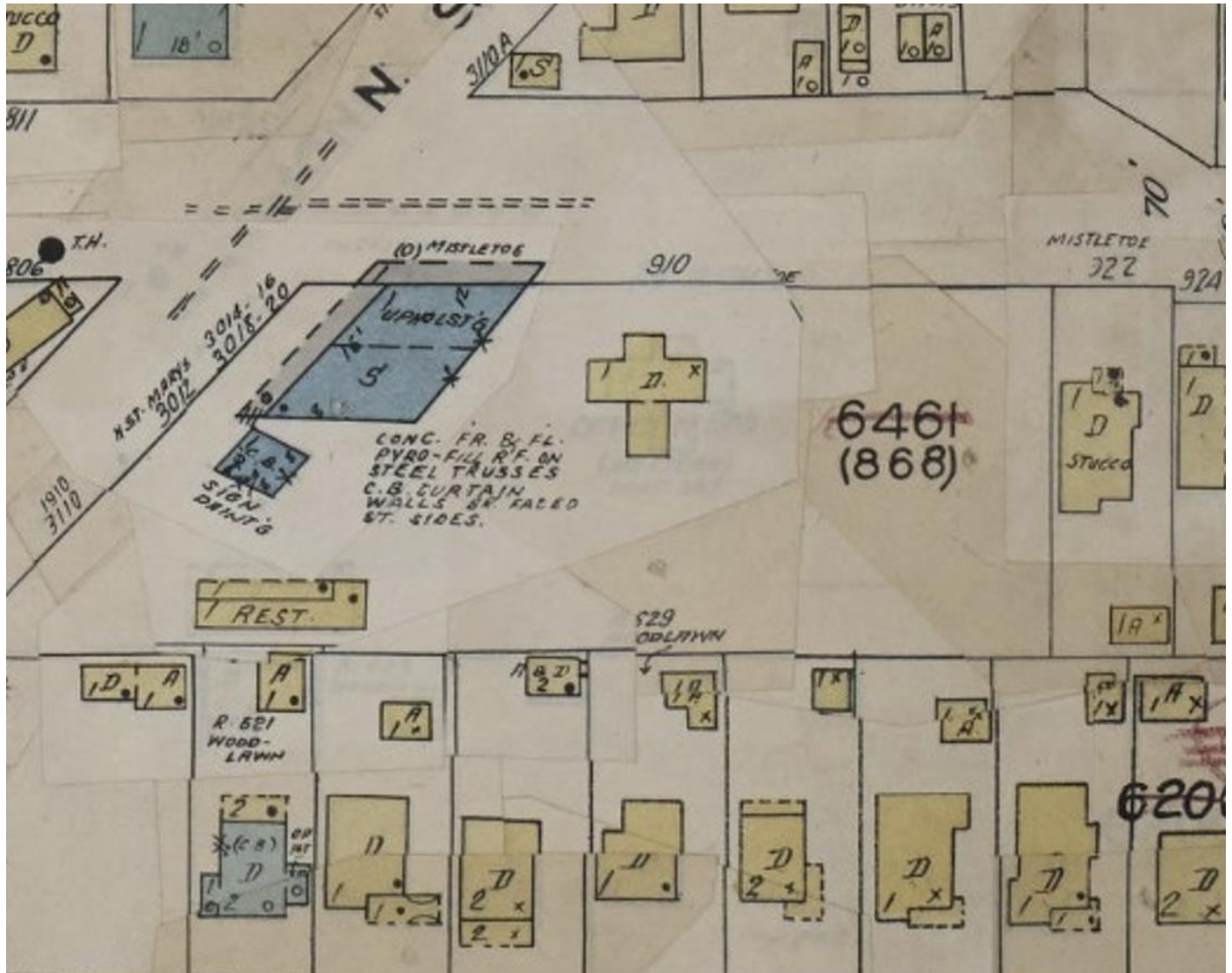
Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Figure 5. 1926 Plat Map of Mistletoe Addition, Bexar County Plat Book 642, Page 246 showing Casa de Dios (House of God).



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Figure 6. 1912 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, updated to 1951 (Vol. 2, Page 204), showing Casa de Dios incorrectly labeled as a dwelling. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



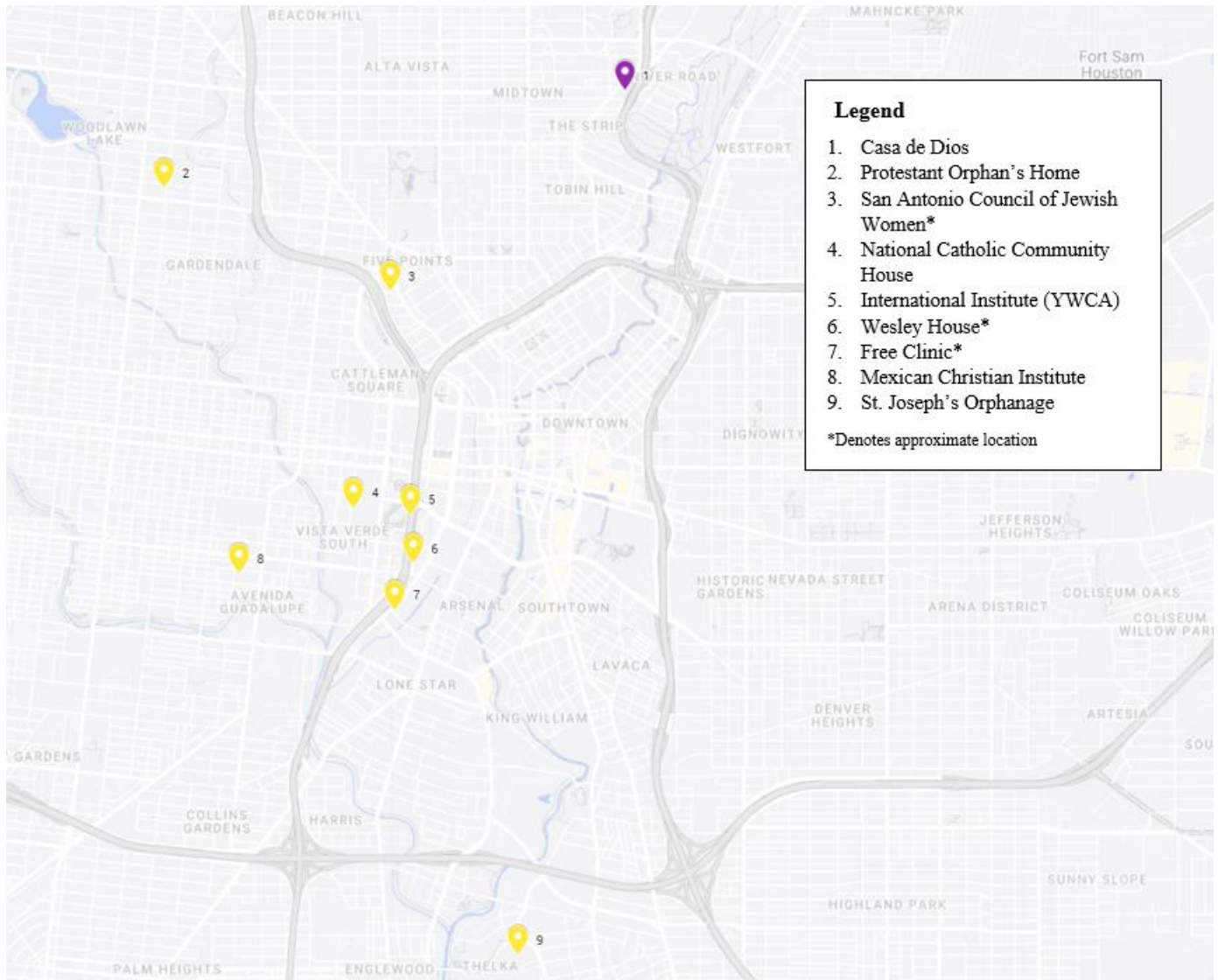
Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Figure 7. Boundary of former Mistletoe Addition shown on 1963 USGS aerial. Boundary courtesy of Bexar County Plat Book 642, Page 246.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Figure 8. Map of San Antonio showing the location of Casa de Dios in relation to other Progressive-era social and philanthropic organizations. Courtesy of Google Maps.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Figure 9: View of Casa de Dios (House of God), courtesy of *San Antonio Light*, November 23, 1913, p 20.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Figure 10: Casa de Dios and Sarah Ostrom, courtesy of *San Antonio Express*, June 10, 1919, p 16.

Quaint Little Cornfield Milk Station Feeding Boys and Girls Through Generosity of Woman



Mrs. Sarah Ostrom, Pioneer in Distribution, Will Be Aided in Work by Express-News Milk and Ice Fund.

WEST of Brackenridge Park there's a tiny little cottage set right down in the middle of a corn field. Here a strange and beautiful thing may be seen any bright morning. Promptly at 11 o'clock hundreds of little children, swinging shining tin pails, line up in front of the cottage. In a few moments a sweet-faced, snowy-haired little woman may be seen emerging from the front door. She is closely followed by a tall stalwart youth who carries a heavy tin can, from which the little woman pours a white liquid into the waiting buckets of the children. One by one they thank her, their eyes asparkle and their soft

Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Figure 11: Children at Sarah Ostrom's milk station at Casa de Dios, courtesy of *San Antonio Express*, June 10, 1919, p 16.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Figure 12: Frances Ostrom (top left), Ostrom homestead (bottom left – demolished 1926), and French Village residential neighborhood on former Ostrom farm site (bottom right), courtesy of *San Antonio Light*, April 8, 1928, p31.

Ancient Farm To Be Center Of Traffic

By BESS CARROLL

OVER many a road blazed by adventurers, long ago, the huge stride of progress has marched into San Antonio, leaving great monuments in its footprints. And now this Texas whose breath is the stream of power, whose blood is an electric flow, has followed an old wagon road to the door of an ancient farmhouse.

Though phantom wolves may still howl their hymns to the moon there, San Antonio's last prairie is being linked to the heart of her business being.

Beside the banks of the San Antonio river, where a tented city once stood buried in the mist of prehistoric oblivion, steam rollers snort and machinery does its superhuman work as the geographical end of St. Mary's street is gradually dragged along by iron horses—the street-building equipment of the city of San Antonio—to meet Jones avenue. And history of the kind known only in this "new world" of ours is being made.

PROGRESS FOLLOWS TRAIL.

For the gigantic march of development is taking its parade of houses and money down an old Indian trail, across the path of the ragged Texas army of 1836, and along the course of what was, until recently, a shady country lane.



City Street Extended to Ex-prairie

brought their nine-acre farm in '60 (they acquired water rights issued by the crown of Spain to this land when San Fernando cathedral was still young. But because it occupied a rise in the flat prairie surrounding it, the Ostrom farm very seldom "took the water" from the Upper Labor Ditch, a canal dug in very early times for irrigation purposes.

RAISED TRUCK.

"There were several other farms out 'this way," Miss Ostrom explained. "Cabbages and other 'truck' were raised on one. The nearest store was Custanola's, occupying the site of the present Robert E. Lee hotel; it was in the brush. Brackenridge park was largely a pasture. Later Rubiola's 'country store' opened; soon after came a rural saloon. It was not until about 1895 that any houses were built on the North Side this far out. The mule car street 'railway' edused some development."

The last stone of the Ostrom farmhouse was torn down in 1926. It had been a typical old stone house—four rooms and an eight-foot hall. Its barns, made of timber, rotted down slowly and painfully. Land that had been green and virgin once was paved for the first time, in April, 1926. The last of the old prairie, plowed by oxen when at last its fertile acres



"You used to be lined up

with San Antonio's downtown district. In 1927 alone eight million dollars, according to real estate estimates, were spent in new building alone on St. Mary's. Included in the



Above: Miss Frances Ostrom, who recalls ex-... The French village, at right, now occupies the city, and the nearest grocery store was where

Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Table 1: Philanthropic and Social Welfare Organizations in Progressive-era Texas and San Antonio*

| Name | Date | Location | Secular/ Denomination | Emphasis | Notes |
|--|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|--|
| U.S./Texas | | | | | |
| Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) | 1874 | Nationwide | Christian | Politics/Social welfare: Prohibition, public health, suffrage, | One of the few organizations to extend membership to Black women, although in separate unions. |
| National Council of Women | 1888 | Nationwide | | Social welfare: Women | Frances Willard, President; Susan B. Anthony, Vice President. |
| National Association of Colored Women's Clubs | 1896 | Nationwide | | Politics: Civil rights, suffrage | Later became the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs. Advocated against Jim Crow laws, lynching, and for the improvement of educational opportunities. |
| Texas Federation of Women's Club (TFWC) | 1897 | Statewide | Secular | Social welfare: Women | Later joined the national General Federation of Women's Clubs in 1899. |
| Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) | Ca. 1866 (U.S.) 1908 (TX) | Nationwide | Christian | Social welfare: Women | |
| Texas Congress of Mothers (later the PTA) | 1909 in Dallas | Statewide | | Social welfare/Politics: Children, education | Founded as a branch of the National Congress of Mothers (NCM). |
| Texas State Conference of Social Welfare | 1911 | Statewide | | Social welfare | Formerly known as Texas Conference of Charities and Corrections. For coordination of charitable institutions, and introduction of scientific methods of administration and work. |
| League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) | 1929 | Nationwide/ Statewide | Secular | Civil Rights | |

Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Table 1: Philanthropic and Social Welfare Organizations in Progressive-era Texas and San Antonio*

| Name | Date | Location | Secular/ Denomination | Emphasis | Notes |
|---|------|--|--------------------------|---|--|
| San Antonio | | | | | |
| St. Joseph's Orphanage | 1870 | 919 Mission Road | Catholic | Social welfare: Children | |
| Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society | 1876 | Temple Beth-El | Jewish | Social welfare; Poverty | |
| The Protestant Orphans Home | 1890 | 802 Kentucky Ave | Protestant | Social welfare: Children | New building in 1913 after original burned in a fire. |
| The Woman's Club | 1898 | | Secular | Social welfare: Young girls and juvenile homes | Founded by E. Brackenridge. First meeting in Room 5 of Daily Express Building |
| The City Federation | 1902 | | Secular | Civic/Political: Suffrage, | Founded by Lida B. Alford. To unite all women's organizations being done for welfare of the community. |
| San Antonio Council of Jewish Women | 1907 | 719 W. Poplar or 1023 W. Poplar (1927 Directory) | Jewish | Mexican Community | Founded by Mrs. Flora M. Schwab of Cleveland, Ohio. Affiliated with City Federation of Women's Clubs, Free Kindergarten Association, and General Federation. English and Americanization school. |
| St. Mary's Council of the Queen's Daughters | 1908 | | Catholic | Social welfare: Poverty, orphans, health care | |
| Equal Franchise Society | 1912 | | Secular | Politics; Suffrage | Listed as political, Brackenridge also a founding member. First meeting held in parlor of Menger Hotel |
| Graduate Kindergarten's Club | 1912 | | Secular | Education; Promote kindergarten causes | Affiliated with Council of Mothers and Parent Teachers Association, Meetings held at Gunter Hotel |
| Pan-American Roundtable | 1916 | St. Anthony or Gunter Hotel | Secular | Social welfare: Cooperation between U.S. and Latin America; | Promoted social welfare for immigrant children and women. It was an independent, nonsectarian, nonpolitical organization loosely based on the Pan American Union |
| Daughters of Isabelle | 1913 | | Catholic | Philanthropic | Had three branches, music, literary, and philanthropy. States that "it has been solicitous for |

Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Table 1: Philanthropic and Social Welfare Organizations in Progressive-era Texas and San Antonio*

| Name | Date | Location | Secular/ Denomination | Emphasis | Notes |
|--|-----------------------------|---|--------------------------|---|--|
| | | | | | the wellbeing of a Mexican settlement work conducted by the Carmelite nuns of San Fernando Street. Also states they established a Red Cross center at the Catholic Women's club house. States one at South San Saba and one East End |
| South side community Club | | | | Social welfare: General | Mrs. B.F Morris president |
| Wesley Community House | 1913 (SA) | San Saba Street and maybe later 150 Colima Street | Methodist Episcopal | Mexican Community; Americanization, Health Services | 1919 newspaper lists it at 623 South San Saba |
| Mexican Christian Institute/ Instituto Cristiano Mexicano | 1913 | 1600 San Colima and Jacinto Street | Protestant | Mexican and Mexican American community | Free health clinic, provision of goods like clothing, employment assistance, religious study, kindergarten. |
| La Liga de Defensa Pro-Escolar (School Improvement League) | | | Secular | Mexican community by Mexican Community | |
| Cruz Blanca | Pre-1913 | | | Mexican community by Mexican Community | |
| National Catholic Community House | Closed 1924, re-opened 1927 | 520 Matamoros | Catholic | Naturalization School | |
| Casa Regina | | | Catholic | Social welfare: Women in need | |
| Clinic (Red Cross?) | | 1117 San Carlos Street | Catholic | Health care: Clinic for Mexicans | |

Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Table 1: Philanthropic and Social Welfare Organizations in Progressive-era Texas and San Antonio*

| Name | Date | Location | Secular/ Denomination | Emphasis | Notes |
|--|----------|--|--------------------------|--|--|
| Home/House of Neighborly Service | | 1515 Lakeview Avenue | Presbyterian | Social welfare: Mexican Community | |
| San Antonio Mission Home and Training School | | San Saba and Monterrey | | Social welfare: Mexican Community | |
| YWCA San Antonio | 1910 | New building in 1919 at 518 North Pecos Street | | Social welfare/ Women: English-language School | 1915 located at 5 th (now McCullough) and Broadway International Institute at 515 North Pecos Street YWCA Pine Street for African American women Mrs. Charles Venable first president. First at the Old James Place on Commerce Street. New building in 1914 at 5 th and Avenue C. |
| International Institute (YWCA) | Pre-1920 | 518 N. Pecos | | | |
| Sociedad de la Beneficencia Mexicana | | | | Mexican community by Mexican Community | |
| San Antonio Charity Association | | | | Social welfare: Poverty | Within the purview of the Associated Charities. |
| Public Health Nurses' Association | 1915 | City Health Office | Secular | Health care | Included one African American woman out of the five women on staff. Later became part of the city health office. |
| Free Clinic | Pre-1914 | 1141 South Laredo Street | | Health care | |
| Associated Charities | | Chandler Building | | | |

**This table includes only those women-run organizations or clubs that provided social welfare, health care, or political services. It may include organizations that serve both a religious function and one of the aforementioned functions. The table excludes literary, study, music, luncheon, and culture clubs. Also excludes religious societies with a sole focus on church fundraising or evangelizing. Excludes neighborhood-specific PTA clubs, fraternal organizations, patriotic societies, and purely social clubs.*

Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photos

Photo 1: Site View, Facing Southeast.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 2: Site View, Facing South.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 3: Primary (North) Elevation. View South.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 4: Oblique. Primary (North) and West Elevations. View Southeast.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 5: West Elevation. View Southeast.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 6: South Elevation, View East.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 7: South Elevation. View North.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 8: South Elevation beneath Shed. View North.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 9: South Elevation. View North.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 10: South and East Elevations. View North.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 11: East wing North Elevation. View South.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 12: North and East Elevations. View Southwest.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 13: Nave facing main entrance. View North.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 14: East wing/transsept. View East.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 15: West wing/transsept. View West.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 16: View from transept into nave. View Northeast.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 17: View from transept into nave. View Northwest.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 18: View of cupola above transept.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 19: View of apse from nave. View South.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 20: Interior view of apse. View Southeast.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 21: Stairs to raised altar. View Southwest.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 22: East room in rear addition. View South.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 23: East room in rear addition. View North.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 24: Hallway in rear addition. View West.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 25: Rear hall with exterior door. View South.



Casa de Dios (House of God), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 26: West room in rear addition. View North.

