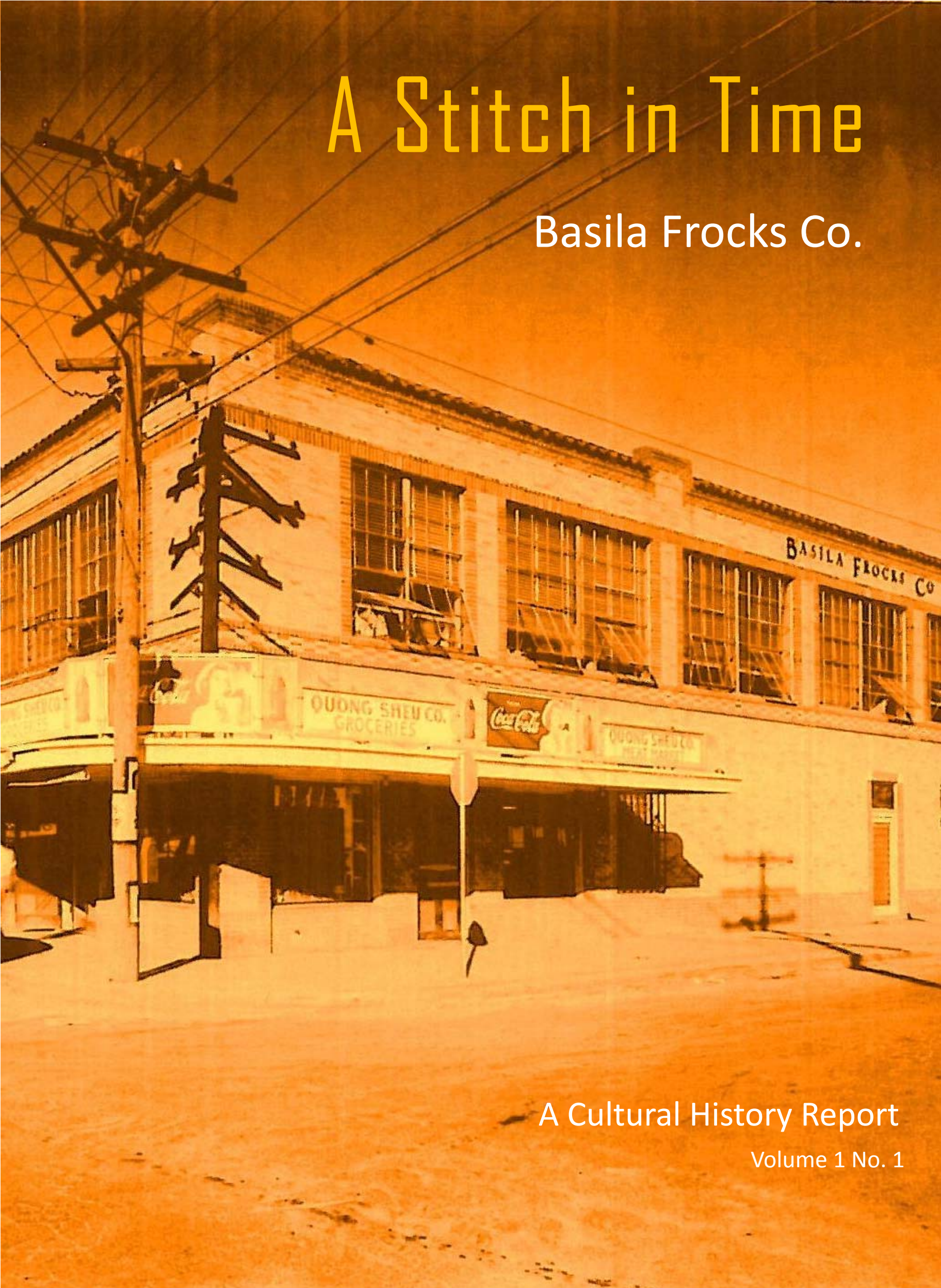


A Stitch in Time

Basila Frocks Co.



A Cultural History Report

Volume 1 No. 1



Volume I No. 1

March 2016

A STITCH IN TIME

A Cultural History Report of the Basila Frocks Co. Building
500 N. Zarzamora



CITY OF SAN ANTONIO
OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Created by the City of San Antonio
Office of Historic Preservation
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San Antonio, Texas 78204
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March 2016

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About This Report

Cultural significance is evaluated by identifying and assessing heritage values associated with a site. Values, as identified in the *Burra Charter*, are organized in categories of aesthetics, historic, scientific and social values. For this report, values have been determined through research, engagement with community, and primary information gathered through site visits.

This report would not be possible without the invaluable advice, feedback, archival material and research from the San Antonio Conservation Society, the Westside Preservation Alliance, The UTSA Institute of Texan Cultures, The UTSA Center for Cultural Sustainability, Garza-Bomberger & Associates and the San Antonio Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Special thanks to individuals, Caitlin Brown, Rachel Delgado, Pat Ezell and Lynne Hendry for their research and loan of photographs and other archival documents.

About Cultural Significance

The City of San Antonio Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) protects the cultural resources that make San Antonio unique. OHP recognizes and promotes the understanding that San Antonio's historic environment is a shared resource. This mutual heritage, composed of many layers of time and cultures, includes the intangible as much as it includes the tangible.

The concept of cultural significance is encouraged in heritage management practices to ensure the recognition of all the cultural meanings a place might hold. Understanding a place and assessing its cultural significance is a valuable tool in the decision-making process of a place.

Cultural Heritage Reports produced by the OHP follow the guiding principles and philosophies of the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) as provided in various documents, including *The San Antonio Declaration*, the *Venice Charter*, the *Burra Charter*, the *Nara Document on Authenticity*, and the *Washington Charter*, among others.

San Antonio holds the distinction of containing a World Heritage site within its City limits—The San Antonio Missions, inscribed in July 2015. The benefit of utilizing the international frameworks for conservation of our heritage is an advantage that may be utilized throughout this historic city.

Overview of the Basila Frocks Building

Location: 500 N. Zarzamora

Additional Addresses: 3019 W. Martin

3021 W. Martin

Construction Date: 1929

Architect: Phelps & Dewees

Contractor: H.R. Heath

Original Owner: Nicholas and Marie Basila

Current Owner: The Overland Group

Built to house garment manufacturers on 2nd floor, commercial shops on the 1st floor. The Basilas, immigrants from Syria were socially and civically engaged in San Antonio society. The Basila Frocks Co. operated at the height of San Antonio's garment manufacturing economy.



Sanborns 1911-1950 map



Aesthetic Values

Aesthetic values communicate sensory experiences such as form, scale, color, textures and building materials, but may also include sounds and smells associated with the place and its use.

The Basila Frocks building is composed of pleasing proportions, especially for the urban environment it's situated in. Its stature, figuratively and metaphorically, articulates a sense of stability as it anchors a busy, commercial intersection.

Currently, it is the most visible and notable structure on this vibrant corridor. Though the largest structure in the immediate area, the building is harmonious with its environment and evokes not only the time in which it was built, but contemporary design values as well—it utilizes an urban setback with ample parking in the rear and retains its original sturdy materials and quality design.

The building exemplifies Daylight Factory architecture including its high-rated fire safety materials. Structurally composed of reinforced concrete beams and piers, the building is clad by structural clay tiles with wire-riated brick veneer on the street facing facades. The brick veneer is yellow in color, with accents of orange and brown, the rear facades do



not have the brick veneer. Concrete structural frames as seen in the Basila Frocks building were introduced in the United States in the late 19th century, to allow expanses of windows, a dominant feature of Basila Frocks on all four facades. The building's L-Shaped plan is an excellent response to the urban corridor and reflects hints of Italianate style, as do parapets with alternating tile medallions and the informal brick banding surrounding doorways and windows.

The building's name is featured in bronze, concave letters on the West and South facades. On the South elevation the numbers "019" remain. These appear to be original as they are bronze and also concave, typical of work done in the early 20th century.

Modifications to the exterior have altered the informal lines of the original design, arched windows added at a later date may be easily removed restoring the original storefront display windows.



Other recent modifications, including the addition of hand-painted signage, a living artisan tradition of San Antonio's Westside, inspires and evokes both a cultural and artistic response.

Clockwise from upper left: current Western and Southern facades; 1949 Western and Southern facades; rear facades; detail of structural clay tile; hand-painted signage; original address numbers.

Once a venue for music and restaurants, community storytellers have reminisced about the sounds of orchestral and Texas Jazz pouring out of the windows during dances and of the aromas of simmering cuisines from its several restaurants.



Clockwise from upper left: Basila Frocks garment workers in an undated photograph; Club Don Quixote ad; Club Don Quixote news blurb; Juanita Rosas Delgado and Placida Rosas, garment workers employed at Jay-Ann Frocks which operated out of the Basila Frocks Building. The two sisters are wearing fur coats they sewed.

Social Values

Social values refer to the associations that a place has for a particular community or cultural group and the social or cultural meanings that it holds for them.

The Basila Frocks building is representative of San Antonio's confluence of cultural identities. Built and owned by a Syrian family, the building housed a long-lived Chinese owned grocery store and several Mexican and Mexican-American businesses all of which employed workers of those various ethnicities, as well as Anglos and African Americans.

The building contains an important gendered story through its association with the garment industry, a major employer in the community providing jobs primarily to women.

The garment industry was a diverse workforce ethnically-speaking, though the cultural value to Latinas is extremely high. Throughout the nation, Latina seamstresses have been a major economic and cultural force having been credited as the thread that stitches together family and community.

As the economic force of the garment industry waned and the factories left, they were replaced by businesses that represented the cultural arts and traditions of the increasingly growing Latino community of the Westside. A music venue featuring local, national, and international music groups; the League of United Latino American Citizens Skyline Ballroom, a

social gathering space; a cabi- netry artisan; several Tex-Mex restaurants as well as service oriented businesses—health care, shoe store, notary public, a VFW post and a hardware store served and employed and worked for the community. Overtime, the place has become important to the Westside identity and remains one of the more visible and long standing reminders of the community's prosperity, labor trades, musical arts, and cultural traditions.



Wonderful world of trivia: Perry Salinas, owner-operator of the Don Quixote nitery, 500 N. Zarzamora, makes tape recordings of the many visiting Latin guest stars there . . . recent names of note there include a Mexican senator from Cuernavaca and a brother-in-law of a former Mexican president . . . The increased interest

Sunday, March 10, 1929

NIX STRUCTURE TO BE LARGEST IN S. A.

Deal Reveals Doubling of Market St. Values in 2 Year.

VACANT 31 S. A. GARMENT PLANTS EMPLOY 5,000 WORKERS

6 BUILDING
TOTAL ARE
1,033,098
FEET

BASILA FROCKS KNOWN NATIONALLY

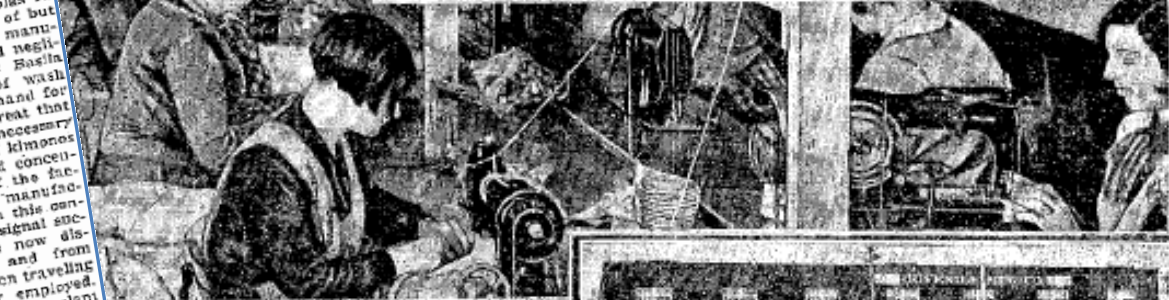
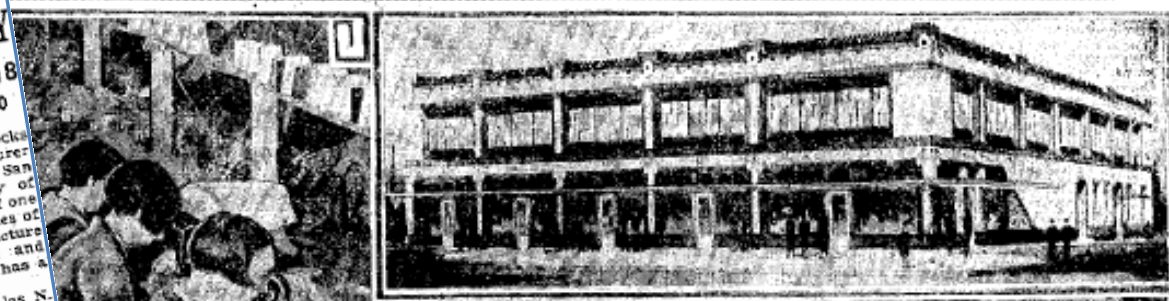
First Article Produced 18
Years Ago in San Antonio

The history of Basila Frocks Company, the first manufacturer of women's wear to locate in San Antonio, is likewise a history of the growth and development of one of the most important industries of the city, that of the manufacture of wash frocks for women and children for which this city has a nation-wide reputation.

In September, 1914, Nicholas N. Basila, with an initial plant of but four machines, began the manufacture of silk kimono and negligees for women. In 1912 Basila added the manufacture of wash cotton dresses and the demand for Basila Frocks proved so great that within five years it was necessary to drop the production of kimono and negligees entirely and concentrate all the facilities of the factory on the design and manufacture of the line in which this concern has achieved such signal success. Its products are now distributed in 34 states and from Mexico to Canada. Fifteen traveling salesmen are regularly employed.

The dress-manufacturing plant was erected in 1929. The window area amounts to 50 per cent of the floor space and provides a bountiful supply of natural light insuring the operators against eye-strain.

All wash frocks produced by Basila Frocks Company are made on its own premises under the supervision of trained instructors and the local concern is able to produce acceptable styles for women in all sizes from 14 to 52.



Milam Leads in 0
Spases Smith-Youn
Tallist.

The Six Professional
leg, to be constructed at
southeast corner of Na
and College streets, will
be the largest building in
Texas. It will have a 10
story tower, 100 feet high,
and will contain 1,000,000
cubic feet of space. The
building will be 100 feet
wide and 100 feet deep.

These facts are reported in
the latest completed survey
of the city and suburbs for
the year 1928. The survey
shows that the city has
grown 25 per cent since
1920. The population is
now 100,000 and the area
is 100 square miles.

The survey also shows
that the city has a large
amount of vacant land. The
total area of vacant land
is 10,000 acres. The city
has a large amount of
vacant land in the center
of the city.

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NEW FACTORIES GIVE S. A. FIRST PLACE IN GARMENT INDUSTRY

With new plants rapidly entering San Antonio, this city comes to the front as the leading garment manufacturing center of the South. Growing from probably the least important industry a few years ago, it has become a major industry in San Antonio, with more than 5,000 workers employed in the plant, according to C. C. Lee, secretary of the San Antonio Manufacturing Association and industrial department of the chamber of commerce.

The city boasts of 23 such plants at present and three of which have been added during the last two or three years. Three of these plants were brought to this city during the last couple of weeks, Lee said. These plants include an investment of over \$1,000,000 in the construction of a new plant, the construction of a new plant, and the construction of a new plant.

The plants operating in this city under existing laws have shown a steady increase in production. The plants operating in this city under existing laws have shown a steady increase in production. The plants operating in this city under existing laws have shown a steady increase in production.

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Industrial San Antonio!

ELEVEN HUNDRED alert and active Manufacturing Industries in San Antonio are fast making this territory known as the Industrial Center of the Southwest.

Urra to
Taft Bot
Gets
New Home
on West A

Write for
free copy of
this book
to
San Antonio
Chamber of
Commerce
and
Manufacturing
Association
1015 West
Main
San Antonio,
Texas

citizens. Top right: Basila Frocks plant, underway; right center, Juvenile Manufacturing Co.; lower right, Pinesilver plant; lower left, Bear plant, underway; below, A. B. Frank building and factory.

Library Plans to Be Ready for Figures March 15

This will be checked by the library officials and working men. The library will be ready for figures March 15.

Apartment Bids to Close March 27

This will close March 27 at 3 p. m. for the closing of the bids. The bids will be closed on March 27.

S.A.P.S. Co. and South Tex. I Build Office, I

Work has been started on the new office building for the S.A.P.S. Co. and South Tex. I. The building will be 100 feet high and 100 feet wide.

The building will be 100 feet high and 100 feet wide. The building will be 100 feet high and 100 feet wide.

Historical Values

The Basila Frocks building is related not only to histories of people who immigrated here due to historical and political events in their countries of origin, but also to broad historical developments in San Antonio and the United States.

A boom in San Antonio's economy reflected the nation's boom of the "Roaring 20s," particularly in the months preceding the Stock Market crash of 1929. Reporting great increases in building construction, retail sales and industrial entrepreneurship, San Antonio's economic prosperity was keeping pace with the nation's.

The industrial economy of San Antonio spurred the Basila Frocks Company into existence. According to newspaper reports, San Antonio's Garment industry grew from virtual non-existence to the leading industry in a few short years, making the City the "Capital of Garment manufacturing" the same year the Basila Frocks building was constructed. By 1929, 31 Garment manufacturing factories were located in San Antonio and employed over 5000 citizens.

San Antonio's development in the industry also reflected changing national social norms: women no longer wanted to sew their clothes; they preferred to purchase them "ready-made." Basila Frocks garments would be sold nationally and were advertised in newspapers as far away as the Dakotas and Maryland at prices made affordable for the economic downturn that would hit the nation in October of 1929, just a few short months after the Basila Frocks building was constructed.

The economic downturn would eventually halt Basila Frock's production at this location in 1936, but other garment manufacturers would continue to operate from 500 N. Zarzamora.

Historical advancements in workplace environments for industrial workers are reflected in the Basila Frocks building including the safety of fire-rated structures and spaces lit by daylight.

The architectural firm of record, Phelps & Dewees, is a noted firm in the City. Architects of local landmarks such as Alamo Stadium, The Travis Building, and the Commercial National Bank among others, the firm now known as Garza-Bomberger & Associates is the oldest architecture firm in the state of Texas and will celebrate their 100th anniversary in 2019.

See the fabrics actually cut and sewn into frocks on our Fourth Floor tomorrow.

The Vogue
ECONOMY FOURTH

See "Basila" frocks in the process of being made on our Fourth Floor tomorrow.

Monday—Sale of Over 1000 Smart, New, Cool "Basila" Cotton Frocks

Made in San Antonio with the Finest of Workmanship, Fabrics and Styling Details! Every Dress Fits and is Guaranteed Sun-Fast and Tub-Fast!

Choose from 50 Styles!

Every Frock Washable and Guaranteed to be Fast Color!

Smart! Cool! Comfortable!

Buy San Antonio Made Frocks!

\$1.98 3 for \$5.50

Printed Voiles and Batines, Eynol Batines, Linen, Lawns, Broadcloths, Piques and Ric-Rac Mesh

Sizes from 14 to 52

Mail Orders Filled

Phone Orders Filled

Vogue—Economy Fourth Floor

SAN ANTONIO EXPRESS: SUNDAY MORNING, MARCH 3, 1929.

Basila Frock Company to Have \$55,000 Home on Lakeview Avenue



This attractive building will be the new home of Basila Frock Company on Zarzamora Street at Lakeview Avenue. The perspective is by Phelps and Dewees, who drew the plans. Contract has been awarded to H. R. Heath at \$44,262, and permit

issued. The total cost will be about \$55,000.

The two-story structure with basement, covering space 104x120 feet, is to be completed in 95 working days from February 15. Store spaces will occupy 60x120 feet on the Lakeview Avenue side and the frock company

will occupy the remainder of the building. Starting in 15 years ago with two machines, the company now uses 100, and has distribution of its frocks in all of the 48 States, according to F. Basila. He spent three months studying other factory buildings, their lighting systems, etc.

"While in the high priced New York spaces machine operators have only three-foot work space and have to use electric lights," Basila said, "ours will have four-foot spaces and will work by daylight in every instance."

The company has petitioned the city to extend its west delivery zone to include the factory site, and is joined in the petition by other similar manufacturers. They are: Bexar Overall Company, Commerce and Pinto; Bell Overall Company on Lakeview, and Lady Jane Dress Factory.

spots of the city. Some of the show places of San Antonio have been a some of the largest and most beautiful structures in San Antonio as indicated by the Lakeview Hills is one of the

"While in the high priced New York spaces machine operators have only three-foot work space and have to use electric lights," Basila said, "ours will have four-foot spaces and will work by daylight in every instance."



Statement of Significance

Set on a busy urban corridor at the Northeast corner of Zarzamora and W. Martin on San Antonio's Westside, the Basila Frocks building contains an enormous amount of information about the City. The building's story reveals the greater San Antonio story encompassing history, cultural and socio-economic heritage.

Constructed during the City's rapid manufacturing growth of the early 20th century, the building was designed by the architectural firm of Phelps & Dewees. Designed as a two-story structure, it was built to house factory spaces on the top floor and shops on the street level. Though its outward appearance is in need of maintenance, the preservation and integrity of the exterior of the Basila Frocks building is largely intact. Fragile elements such as glass, and a now disappeared canopy are easily replaced. The building's structural components and materials—reinforced concrete columns and beams, wire-striated brick, structural clay tile—are durable and have withstood deterioration over its nearly 80 years of existence. The exterior street fronting façade of brick veneer appears intact without loss or deterioration, though water infiltration is noticeable in the SE corner. The rear facade clay tile materials are also intact. Several modifications to the original exterior, including the addition of arched windows over the original display windows appear to be reversible. In the immediate area, there are no other existing industrial structures of this era or style.

The social and intangible heritage of the building is as important as its architectural heritage. Metaphorically, it remains as intact as the tangible. As a cultural arts center featuring music, spirituality, culinary traditions, entertainment, and labor history, the Basila Frocks building is uniquely situated in its ability to convey the heritage values of San Antonio. The association of people, from its architects, to its owners, to other individuals such as music empresario Perry Salinas, Jazz great Ralph Duran and organizations such as LULAC, and the owners of the Queog Sheu Grocery store reflects the confluence of San Antonio's diverse and vibrant culture. Additionally, as a key employer of garment workers, the building speaks to the important labor history that developed San Antonio into a prosperous city.

The building has served multiples uses over the years including night clubs, restaurants, ballrooms, housing, health services, and an Assemblies of God congregation. The Basila Frocks building is a place of change and adaptation over time, but its primary cultural significance is that it reflects San Antonio's multi-faceted identity and history.

Threats and Recommended Treatment

The greatest threat to the building is that its disuse and lack of maintenance has led to vandalism and trespassing. The combination may give the appearance that the building is not valued and may lead to demolition instead of rehabilitation. Many individuals from the community want investment and a strong development at this corner. Their preference is for rehabilitation and re-use of the building over demolition. Due to quality and durable materials, and design, the building's integrity remains high.

Removal of modifications to the exterior on the first level would restore the building original daylight window expanses. Although hand-painted signage was added at a later date, it reflects continuity of cultural traditions and should not be discouraged from future considerations. Existing modifications to the street width which impacted the sidewalks and therefore walkability, offer an opportunity to reconsider the landscape and create both a pedestrian friendly and vehicle accommodating streetscape.

The Basila Frocks building is eligible for local designation. The building also appears to be eligible for National Register designation. Designation would provide financial relief and incentive in the form of generous tax credits that will offset rehabilitation costs and is recommended as a possible course for restoring the building. Its location at a key corner offers a great opportunity for investment in a neighborhood poised for economic revitalization. Sensitive development that perpetuates and sustains the community's cultural values while balancing economic prospects would be an optimal way to manage change.

Eligibility Criteria Met

The San Antonio Unified Development Code, Article VI, Division 2, Section 35-607 provides eligibility criteria for historic designation. The criteria follow the Secretary of Interior Standards set for historic preservation. A property must meet three of the criteria in order to meet eligibility requirements. The assessment of this report indicates that The Basila Frocks Building located at 500 N. Zarzamora is eligible for local landmark designation under the following criteria:

Its value as a visible or archeological reminder of the cultural heritage of the community, or national event; [35-607(b)1] For its prominent visibility in a community with few structures of its size and era and for its distinct values of socio-economic and cultural heritage to the community in which it exists.

Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the development of the community, county, state, or nation; [35-607(b)3] For its connection to the Basila family who contributed to the economic and social development of San Antonio, to various musicians and social organizations, and to the architectural firm of Phelps & Dewees.

Its identification as the work of a master builder, designer, architect, or landscape architect whose individual work has influenced the development of the community, county, state, or nation; [35-607(b)4] As the work of architectural firm Phelps & Dewees who designed several of San Antonio's legacy landmarks including Alamo Stadium and the Travis Building.

Its embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style valuable for the study of a period, type, method of construction, or use of indigenous materials; [35-607(b)5] As an example of a daylight factory, a type of building which benefitted from reinforced concrete construction introduced in the early 20th century, allowing broad expanses and window walls making for safer and healthier working conditions for factory workers.

Its unique location or singular physical characteristics that make it an established or familiar visual feature; [35-607(b)7] For its prominent presence along N. Zarzamora and W. Martin, a historically and culturally significant corridor.

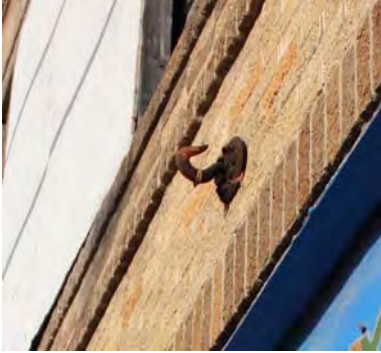
Its historical, architectural, or cultural integrity of location, design, materials, and workmanship; [35-607(b)8] For its distinctive corner location, durability of materials such as structural clay tile, and its daylight factory design with Italianate influences

It is distinctive in character, interest or value; strongly exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, ethnic or historical heritage of San Antonio, Texas or the United States; [35-607(b)11] For its contribution to the economic heritage of San Antonio as the "Garment Capitol of the South" in the 1930s, for its reflection of the cultural heritage of seamstress workforce and for its later contribution to San Antonio's music industry.

It bears an important and significant relationship to other distinctive structures, sites, or areas, either as an important collection of properties or architectural style or craftsmanship with few intrusions, or by contributing to the overall character of the area according to the plan based on architectural, historic or cultural motif; [35-607(b)13] For its relationship to other factories in San Antonio's historic core, linking them to San Antonio's prosperity of the Roaring 20s.

It represents a resource, whether natural or man-made, which greatly contributes to the character or image of a defined neighborhood or community area; [35-607(b)] As a reminder of the confluence of cultures and social heritage of San Antonio's Westside.

Materials and Details



Canopy Hook



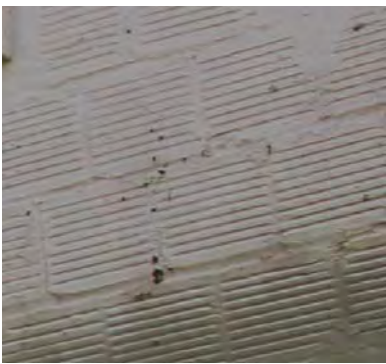
Original Address Numbers



Striated Wire Brick Veneer



Terracota Roof Tile



Structural Clay Tile



Hand-painted signage



Terrazo Floor, interior entry



Original cast-iron balustrade



CITY OF SAN ANTONIO
OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION