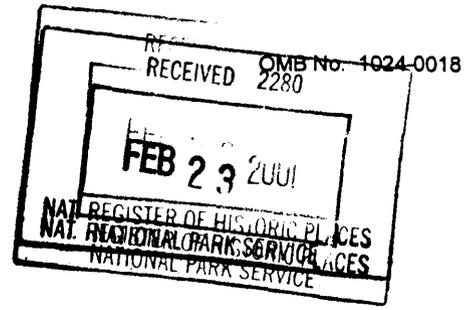


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

### NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

#### 1. Name of Property

historic name **Harris, Ethel Wilson, House**

other names/site number **NPS—LCS & HABS # 232**

#### 2. Location

street & number **6519 San Jose Drive; San Antonio Missions NHP (SAAN)**

not for publication

city or town **San Antonio**

vicinity

state **Texas**

code **TX**

county **Bexar**

code **029**

zip code **78214**

#### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

*Clayton K. Green*

Feb 22, 2001

Signature of certifying official

Date

**National Park Service**

State or Federal agency and bureau

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

*Thomas C. ...*

12-14-00

Signature of certifying official

Date

**State Historic Preservation Officer, Texas Historical Commission**

State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
  - See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register
  - See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

*[Handwritten Signature]*

4/3/01

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
One (1)		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
One (1)		Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Domestic

Sub: Single dwelling

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Commerce / Education

Sub: Office & School, work in progress

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## 7. Description

---

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Modern Movement, Wrightian

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### Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete; concrete block

walls Arkansas ledge stone (Veneer)

Wood frame; glass

roof Asphalt (built-up)

other

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### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Built in 1956, the Ethel Wilson Harris House is an approximately 2,000 square foot two-story frame, stone, and concrete structure closely resembling the "Usonian" style of Frank Lloyd Wright. The house is situated north of the compound at Mission San José, outside the perimeter walls. It consists of a six-room main residence designed in a square plan. The site planning accommodates a daylight basement, with a double garage at the rear, which opens into a former gravel pit that has been landscaped. Outstanding exterior features include the facade coursed with an Arkansas "ledge stone" veneer, the cantilevered roof planes, and the generous use of glass (see Photos 1 and 2). The floor plan reflects the flowing, open style of a Wright Usonian. The stone and wood accents in the interior living space complimented Ethel Wilson Harris' extensive collection of Mexican folk art.

The setting for this home is tranquil. The front yard (west) is surrounded by a privacy fence with mature trees (not all of the fence is extant) with two patios extending from the western entrances of the structure. The structure is nearly hidden from the historic mission scene. The back yard (east) is the former gravel pit that has been terraced on the north and south sides with stone and wooden railroad ties. An asphalt and gravel driveway extends from the garage. The back yard is separated from the amphitheater to the east by a wooden plank fence. The home's main (upper) living level retains a high degree of architectural and historic integrity, preserving Usonian style elements while unique tile accents (described below) showcase Ethel Wilson Harris' famed tile making that spanned most of her adult life. (For reference, floor plans and photo key plans follow, beginning on continuation sheet 7-5).

The main structural system consists of decoratively routed 6" x 12" clear-heart long-leaf yellow pine wood beams on routed 6" x 6" yellow pine columns (see Figure 5), carried atop a reinforced concrete lower level. The main level subfloor consists of a uniquely constructed poured, reinforced concrete slab over interlocking clay tiles (see Figure 6). A reinforced concrete block wall veneered in the ledge stone supports the roof to the north, wrapping around the west elevation. Similarly veneered frame wall form exterior walls of the kitchenette at the southwest corner (see Figure 7). A wood frame wall makes up the west exterior elevation. The interior walls are built of wood studs that are faced, for the most part, with 5/8" tongue-and-groove Western cedar paneling. The wood post and beam system is exposed throughout the building's main level; the beams running continuously from east to west supporting a cantilevered roof on both east and west elevations. The beams are similarly exposed on the exterior, and are designed to continue outside above the east window wall providing an interesting visual continuation of this unique structural system from interior-to-exterior. Two rooms on the east end -- the living room and master bedroom -- are cantilevered over the garage and feature a wall of glass panels, which wrap around to the north offering the living/dining and master bedroom spaces a panoramic view of the lush vegetation to the east (see Figures 8 and 9). (continued)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or a grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

**Conservation**

Art

**Period of Significance**

1956-1982

**Significant Dates**

1956-1958

1956

**Significant Person**

Harris, Ethel Wilson

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Harris, Robert (Architect)

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

(Following)

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### 9. Major Bibliographical References

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#### Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

#### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # 232
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

#### Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
  - Other State agency
  - Federal agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - Other
- Name of repository:  
**Daughter, Helen Wilson Harris Witte**

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### 10. Geographical Data

---

**Acreage of Property** 0.6 acres

#### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	14	550500	3248160
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2			

3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4			

See continuation sheet.

#### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**(Following)**

#### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**(Following)**

---

### 11. Form Prepared By

---

name/title **Mark A. Chavez, Chief of Professional Services**  
**Rosalind Z. Rock, Park Historian**

organization **San Antonio Missions National Historical Park**

date **December 8, 2000**

street & number **2202 Roosevelt Avenue**

telephone **210-534-8833**

city or town **San Antonio**

state **Texas**

zip code **78210**

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**Additional Documentation**

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

- √ A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- √ A **sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

- √ **Representative black and white photographs** of the property.
- √ **Color photographs** of the property and associated historical information.

**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Deed Record, Number 171288, Bexar County Courthouse, Deeds and Records, Volume 4169, pages 57-58.**

---

**Property Owner**

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(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name \_\_\_\_\_

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

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**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. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Harris, Ethel Wilson, House  
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### Description (continued)

Robert Harris, Ethel Harris' son, designed the house and his mother assisted with construction supervision. Although Robert did not ascribe any particular architectural style to the house, it is in keeping with Frank Lloyd Wright's "Usonian" style -- typified by its flat roof, clerestory windows, wall overhangs, window wall, and natural stone veneer exposed on the interior. Robert described perching the three-bedroom home atop an already-built foundation that his mother had installed, and then called her son to complete. Ethel wanted to cantilever over the foundation, and to do so, Robert had to design a reinforced concrete substructure to carry the main level. The clear-heart long-leaf yellow pine he utilized for the exposed beams and posts were recycled from a warehouse at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio. These pine structural members were stained and routed with decorative reveals. The bottoms of the reveals were painted gold (see Figure 5).

The ceilings throughout the home are painted sheetrock. The interior is a composite of flowing spaces, high ceilings, and borrowed light openings, which provide natural light from the clerestories above into hallways and the principle rooms (see Figure 10). The detailing is enhanced by the simple open-plan design and use of Ethel Harris' ceramic tile work located in the kitchen, living/dining space, and in the open entrance stairwell. Additional tiling is found in the two main level bathrooms and a small bathroom/shower in the basement. The finished flooring consists of tile in all rooms except the hall and bedrooms -- which are hardwood. The basement (basically unfinished) served as Harris' workshop and a two-car garage.

Beginning at the covered front entrance (see Figures 7, 11, and 13-23), one immediately begins to see examples of Harris' decorative tiles amongst many other tiles of varying sizes, shapes, and colors. Even the front drive (see Figure 12) is paved with terracotta tile arranged in random semicircular patterns, with an octagon of square tile at the center of the areaway. Approaching the main entrance from the east, visitors would enter through a unique iron gate which Robert brought in from Oaxaca, Mexico, (see Figures 13 & 14). There, one is greeted with two decorative panels featuring Harris' trademark "maguey" (or century plant) of 6" x 6" tiles made of local clay set into a high gloss forest green wainscot on the north wall (see Figures 15 through 18). A world of maguey is to come, for the house is filled with images of a plant beloved by the house's owner and symbolic of her career in tile and pottery making that spanned almost fifty years. A maguey in full bloom was the craftmark Harris registered in 1937. The mark is depicted in several forms throughout the house, including decorative glazed panels and large border tiles, and stair risers and floor insets in terra cotta. Two identical larger panels of three 8" x 8" tiles and bordered by 12 tiles that are 6" square can be seen inset into the free-standing ledge stone veneered wall which parallels the north exterior wall, enclosing the front entrance stairs, on either side of the "Huapango" panel described next (see Figures 19 and 21). The *Huapango* is certainly one of the most distinct compositions in the house. Composed of eight 6" x 6" multi-colored decorative glazed tiles, the scene is surrounded by 22 red-orange border tiles of varying lengths and measuring

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### Description (continued)

1 ½" wide. The installed panel, therefore, measures approximately 16" high by 29" wide. The texture of the tiles is smooth and their surface flat, although there is some dimensionality because of their being made in the *cuerda seca* method, by which the design was outlined in black and the glazes applied within the lines. The central figures in the panel are a couple dancing the Huapango, a traditional dance from Veracruz and the Huasteca regions of Mexico. A man seated in the left corner plays a dance tune on his guitar. In the right corner, a woman is seated. A white dove has alighted on her right hand and with the other, she holds a decorated pottery jar. Another couple is in the background, and a woman balancing a large platter of food is approaching. The frame is filled with stylized renditions of lush natural motifs: flowers, leaves and flowing water. This panel was showcased on national television in a PBS series called *Collecting across America*. The segment featured Mission San José, the Ethel Wilson Harris House, and a visit to eminent tile and ceramics collector Susan Toomey Frost's large collection of San José tiles and pottery. The show debuted in June 1997 and has enjoyed frequent reruns in subsequent years. The "Huapango" panel was also the favorite of tile devotees from 21 states who toured the Ethel Wilson Harris House during a symposium held in San Antonio in 1997. The design appears in Harris' catalog registered in the Copyright Office as AA 241680, following publication on August 2, 1937, in Washington, D.C.

The paved areaway leading to the front entrance is laid with large terra cotta tiles punctuated with dark green tiles set like diamonds (see Figure 15). Maguey tiles on the stairway risers were made by a second method, "*cuenca*," wherein the glazes were pooled within raised lines (see Figures 22 and 23). The tiles also have a different clay body, a terra cotta locally called "Saltillo." Originally from Mexico, Saltillo tile floors are ubiquitous in San Antonio but are not seen elsewhere with the innovative decorative treatment Harris employed here. Once atop the stair landing, one enters the living/dining space (see Figures 8 and 9), which is floored in terracotta tile with a black banding and a dark green base. Harris' maguay design appears in front of the fireplace and north stone wall (see Figure 24). The inset maguey tiles are made by a yet a third method. Here, glazes fill a maguey design recessed into the clay, almost as if the tiles have been stamped.

The living/dining area (see Figures 8 and 9) features exposed ledge stone on the north wall, a corner fireplace, and an almost unobstructed view to the east out a window wall. The room's other two walls are paneled. Copper accents (including the fireplace hood) compliment the space. At the southeast end of this space one enters the master bedroom, which makes up the southeast corner of the home. This room shares the same window wall as the living/dining area, offering a panoramic view to the landscaped former gravel pit.

West of the living/dining area is the kitchen and breakfast area. The kitchen is a simple wrap-around plan and it, along with the breakfast area, features more of Harris' unique tiles. A high-gloss ivory wainscot contains a band with another maguey design (see Figures 26 through 28). A stylized design of the plant itself, minus the

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### Description (continued)

bloom stalk, is used here. These tiles have smooth surfaces and were made by the *cuerda seca* method, wherein a black line outlines the design. The breakfast area opens to the west through double doors onto a tiled patio of yet another Harris design (see Figures 29 and 30). This totally unique “wavy” terracotta tile with a gloss forest green inset border is most certainly Harris’ design.

Completing the main floor plan are two additional bedrooms (immediately west of the master bedroom), and two bathrooms - one adjacent to the west bedroom, the second off the central hallway. Both bathrooms are tiled, however, the tile appears to be more of a commercial nature. A small kitchenette is located at the extreme southwest corner of the building, off the west bedroom. This bedroom has its own exterior entrance to the west; the arrangement offering the possibility for a self-contained apartment with its own entrance and bathroom. This exterior door opens onto a small tile patio with maguey plant tiles in the four corners. Another door from the kitchenette opens onto a deck (essentially a built-up roof over the screened-in work area described below).

The lower level, which once contained Harris’ workshop and studio, is accessed via the main stairway described above. The main space was a two-stall garage with work area to the north. The studio was at the southeast corner and featured metal divided casement windows opening east and south. This window arrangement afforded natural light into the studio. Harris mixed the production glazes in this studio. She installed a small tabletop electric kiln that she used to test new glaze formulas. Surviving test tiles indicate that she experimented with varying combinations of glaze colors to ensure that they would fire evenly when used on the same piece. All evidence of the former studio (including presence of a kiln, or kilns) had been removed long before the National Historical Park was established in 1978. A small bathroom with shower was located immediately north of the studio. This bathroom and shower floor is tiled in a “crazy quilt” style with brightly colored tiles in random fashion (see Figure 31). A large double door at the northwest corner of the basement opened to the south and into a screened and roofed outdoor work area; the latter in very poor condition.

The home is in very good condition having retained most of the original fabric. The architectural floor plan has not been altered. Surface-mounted electrical raceway for lighting and power has been added throughout both levels. It is recommended that all surface electrical raceway and appliances be removed. New electrical work is best hidden in walls. The main solid wood beams have numerous checks and cracks, and a few have twisted indicating an over-stressed condition. These must be rehabilitated or replaced. A central cooling system was added sometime in the 1960s, but was done so sensitively (ductwork is hidden in existing closets). Because of the large amount of glazing on the east wall on the main level, heat gain is considerable. As such, the existing cooling system is woefully inadequate. Failure of the built-up roof in a couple of areas has caused roof leaks, and resultant damage to sheetrock ceilings and paneled walls. This roof must be replaced, and interior finishes restored. Not much remains from the former studio in the lower level. When the Park Service took the building over, all traces of the studio had been removed; the spaces utilized mainly for storage. The basement bathroom, while maintaining original tile, is in very poor condition. The exterior screened workspace is deteriorated such

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that it is a safety hazard, and should be rebuilt or removed entirely. The roof above this area (forming the deck off the main level kitchenette) has been repaired insensitively, and is failing. The building requires code (mechanical and electrical) and accessibility upgrades. Because of the large amount of exposed wood, it is recommended that a fire suppression system be sensitively installed. The main level maintains the most significant architectural fabric and spaces -- having been altered least. Only cosmetic, and heretofore mentioned, repairs are required to bring the building back to near-original condition.

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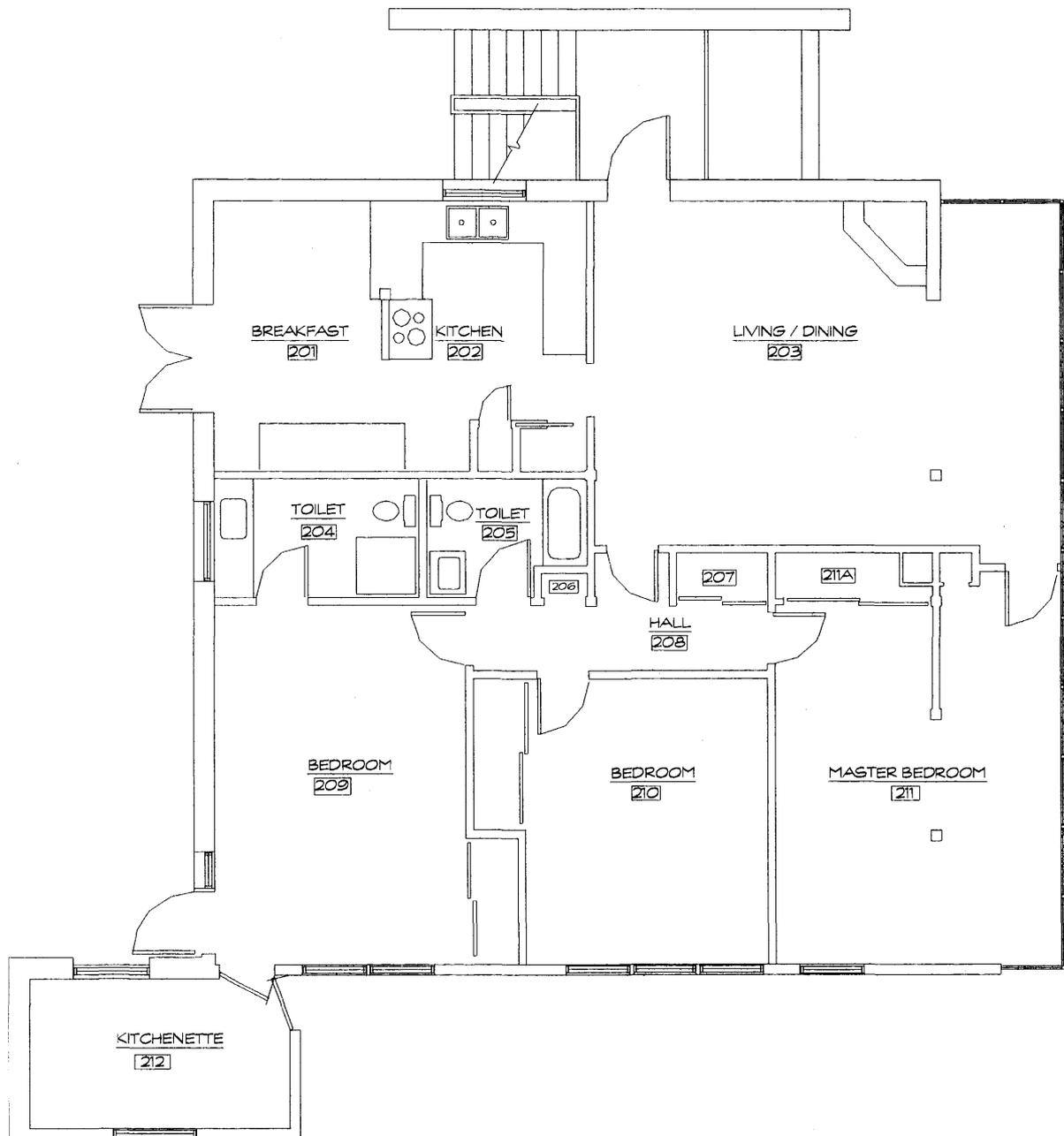
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MAIN LEVEL FLOOR PLAN - EXISTING



Figure 1

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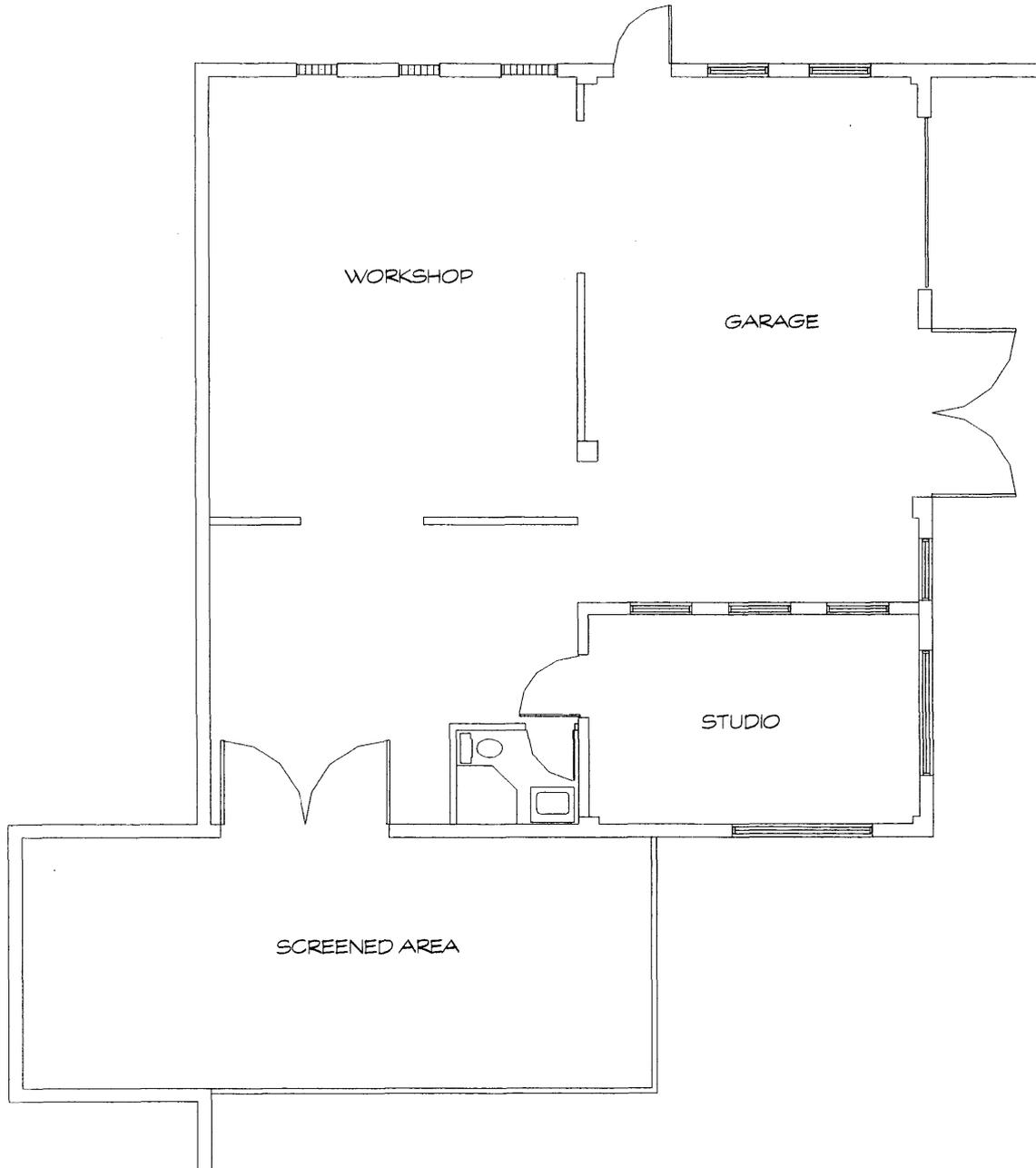
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LOWER LEVEL FLOOR PLAN - EXISTING



Figure 2

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

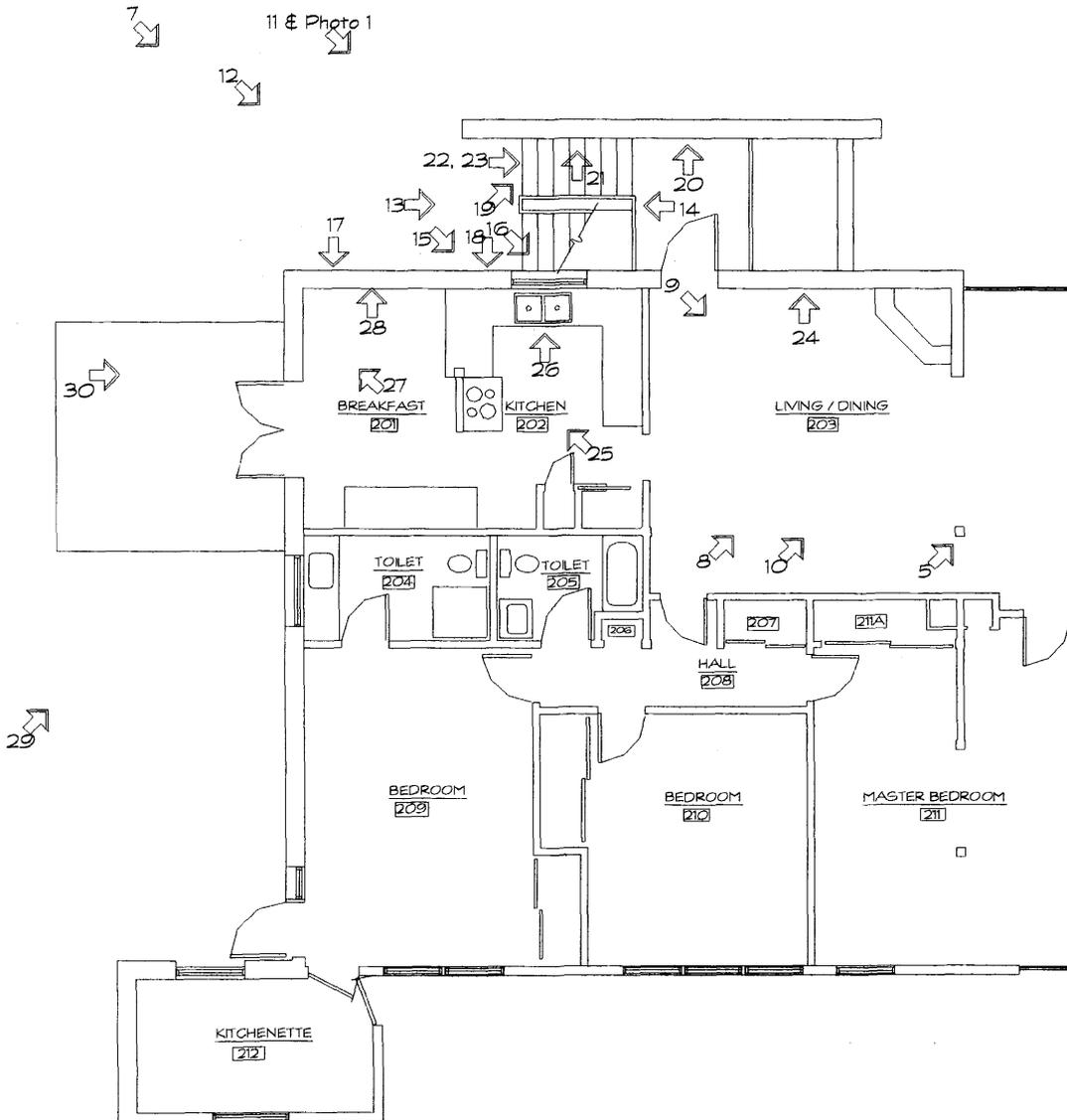
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MAIN LEVEL FLOOR PLAN - EXISTING  
PHOTO KEY (FIGURE #s)



Figure 3

Photo 2

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

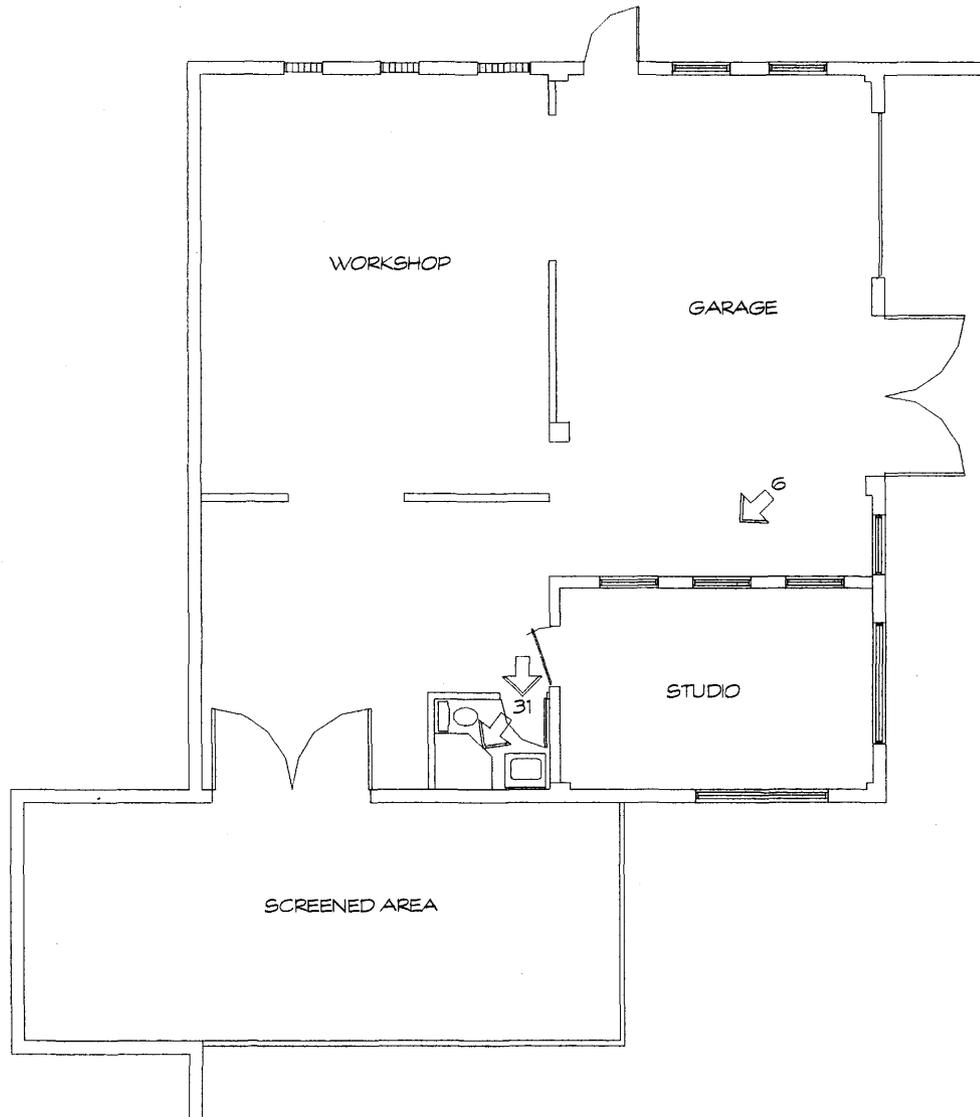
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LOWER LEVEL FLOOR PLAN - EXISTING

PHOTO KEY (FIGURE #s)



Figure 4

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National Park Service

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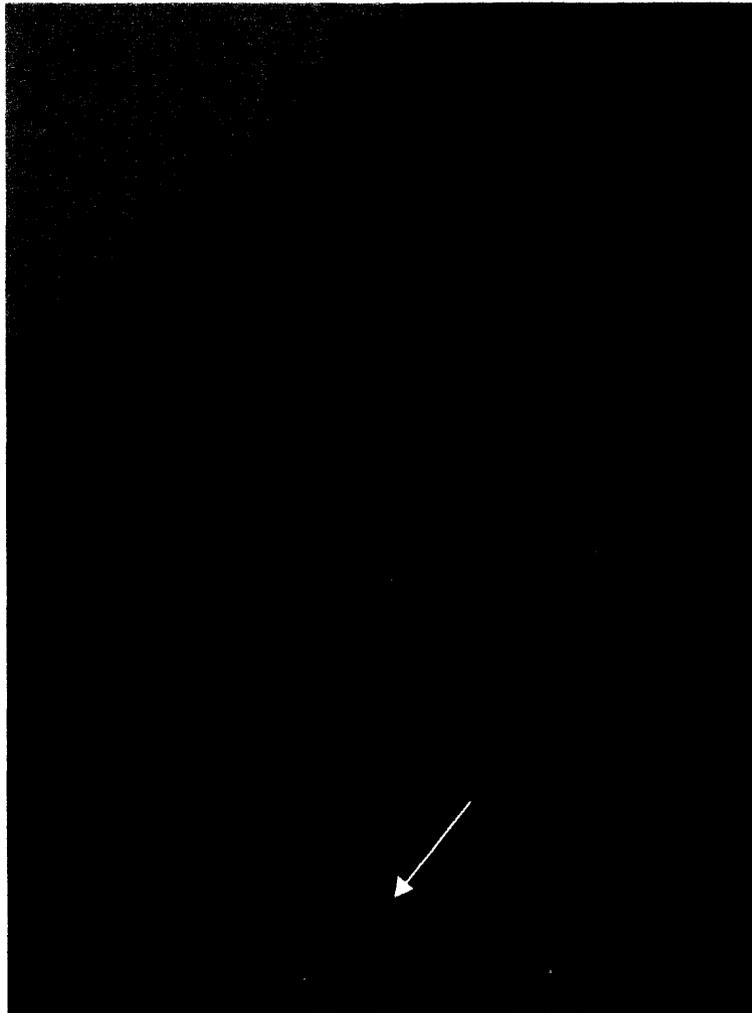
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1. Ethel Wilson Harris House
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Reynaldo Gonzalez
4. May 1999
5. San Antonio Missions NHP Archives
6. Living/Dining area, beam-to-column junction, looking northeast.  
The arrow points to the gold painted reveal routed into both wooden elements.
7. Figure 5

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1. Ethel Wilson Harris House
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark Chavez
4. July 1999
5. San Antonio Missions NHP Archives
6. Basement "ceiling," looking southwest
7. Figure 6

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National Park Service

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1. Ethel Wilson Harris House
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark Chavez
4. July 1999
5. San Antonio Missions NHP Archives
6. Living/Dining area, looking northeast
7. Figure 8

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1. Ethel Wilson Harris House
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark Chavez
4. July 1999
5. San Antonio Missions NHP Archives
6. Living/Dining area, looking southeast
7. Figure 9

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National Park Service

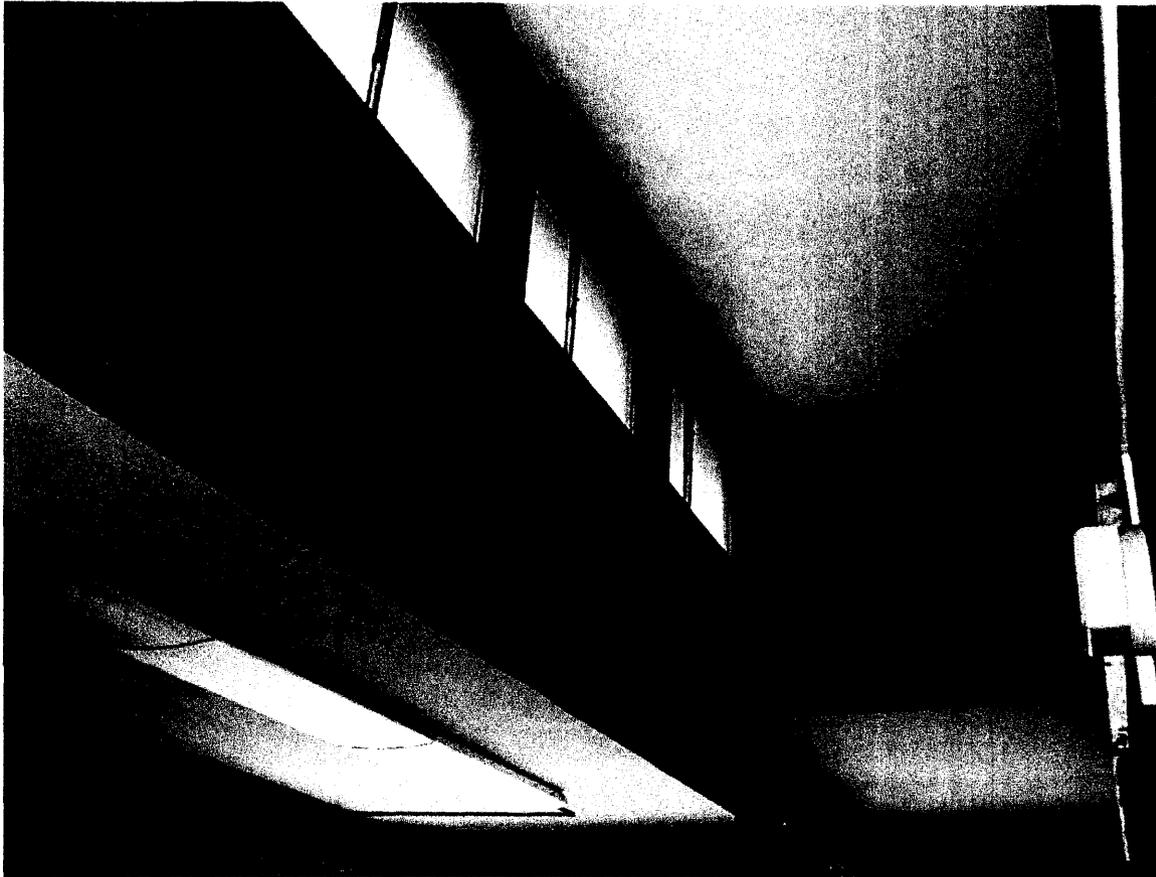
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1. Ethel Wilson Harris House
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark Chavez
4. May 1999
5. San Antonio Missions NHP Archives
6. Living/Dining area, looking northeast up at clerestory
7. Figure 10

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1. Ethel Wilson Harris House
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark Chavez
4. May 1999
5. San Antonio Missions NHP Archives
6. Main Entry, looking south
7. Figure 11

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National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

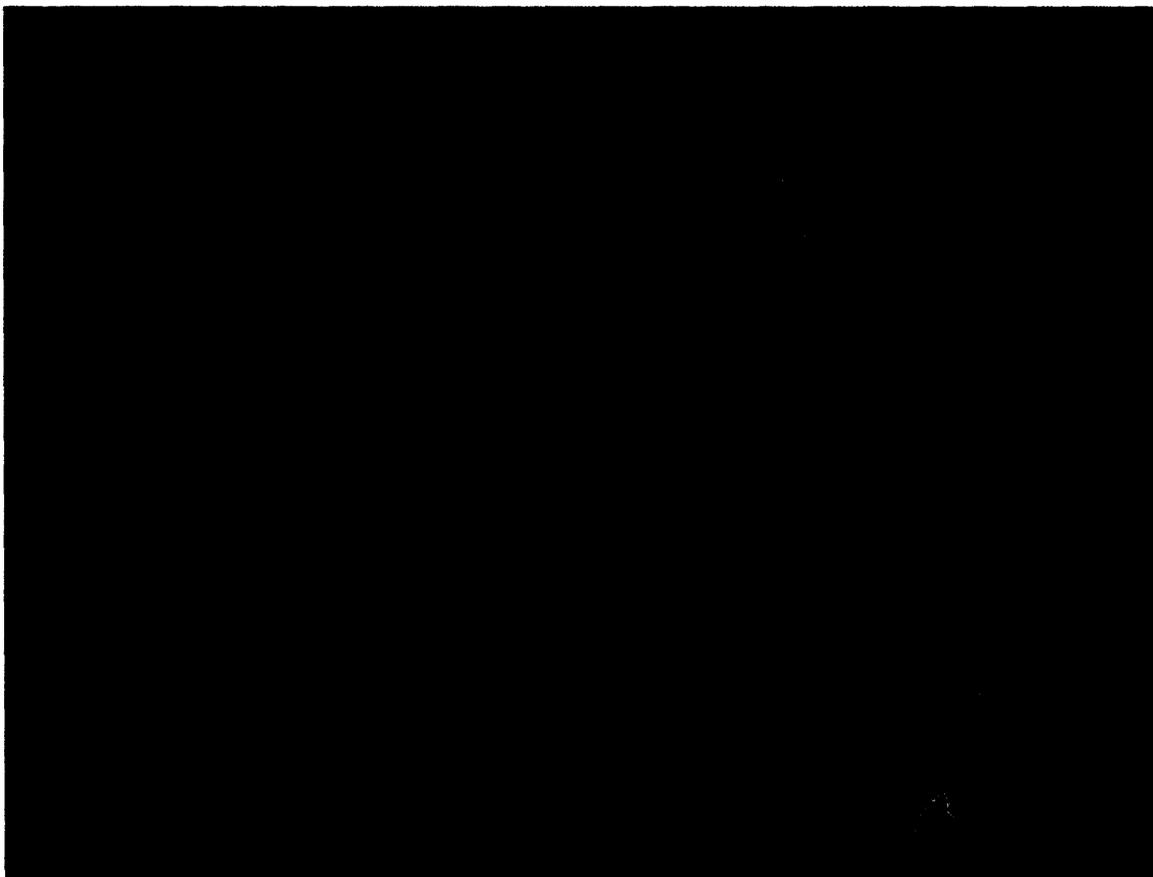
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1. Ethel Wilson Harris House
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark Chavez
4. May 1999
5. San Antonio Missions NHP Archives
6. Paved areaway at main entrance, looking south. Note the octagon shaped tiles in the center of the random shapes.
7. Figure 12

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National Park Service

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1. Ethel Wilson Harris House
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Roxana McGregor
4. March 1999
5. San Antonio Missions NHP Archives
6. Entry stairs, looking east
7. Figure 13

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1. Ethel Wilson Harris House
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark Chavez
4. May 1999
5. San Antonio Missions NHP Archives
6. Entry stairs, detail of gate, looking west
7. Figure 14

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1. Ethel Wilson Harris House
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark Chavez
4. May 1999
5. San Antonio Missions NHP Archives
6. Main Entry, detail of green tile wainscot, looking southeast
7. Figure 15

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1. Ethel Wilson Harris House
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark Chavez
4. May 1999
5. San Antonio Missions NHP Archives
6. Entry Stair, looking southeast down to lower level
7. Figure 16

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1. Ethel Wilson Harris House
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark Chavez
4. May 1999
5. San Antonio Missions NHP Archives
6. Entry Stair, ledge stone wall with three tile panels, looking northeast.  
Two maguey panels flank the *Huapango* panel.
7. Figure 19

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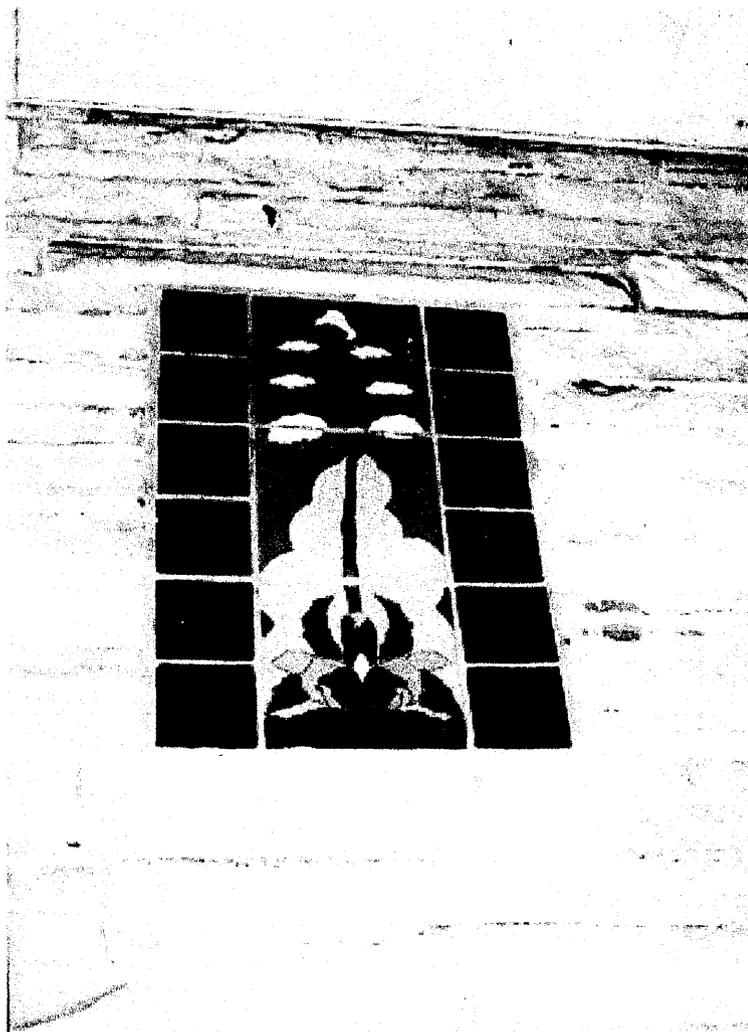
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1. Ethel Wilson Harris House
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Roxana McGregor
4. March 1999
5. San Antonio Missions NHP Archives
6. Entry Stair, detail of maguey panel, looking north
7. Figure 20

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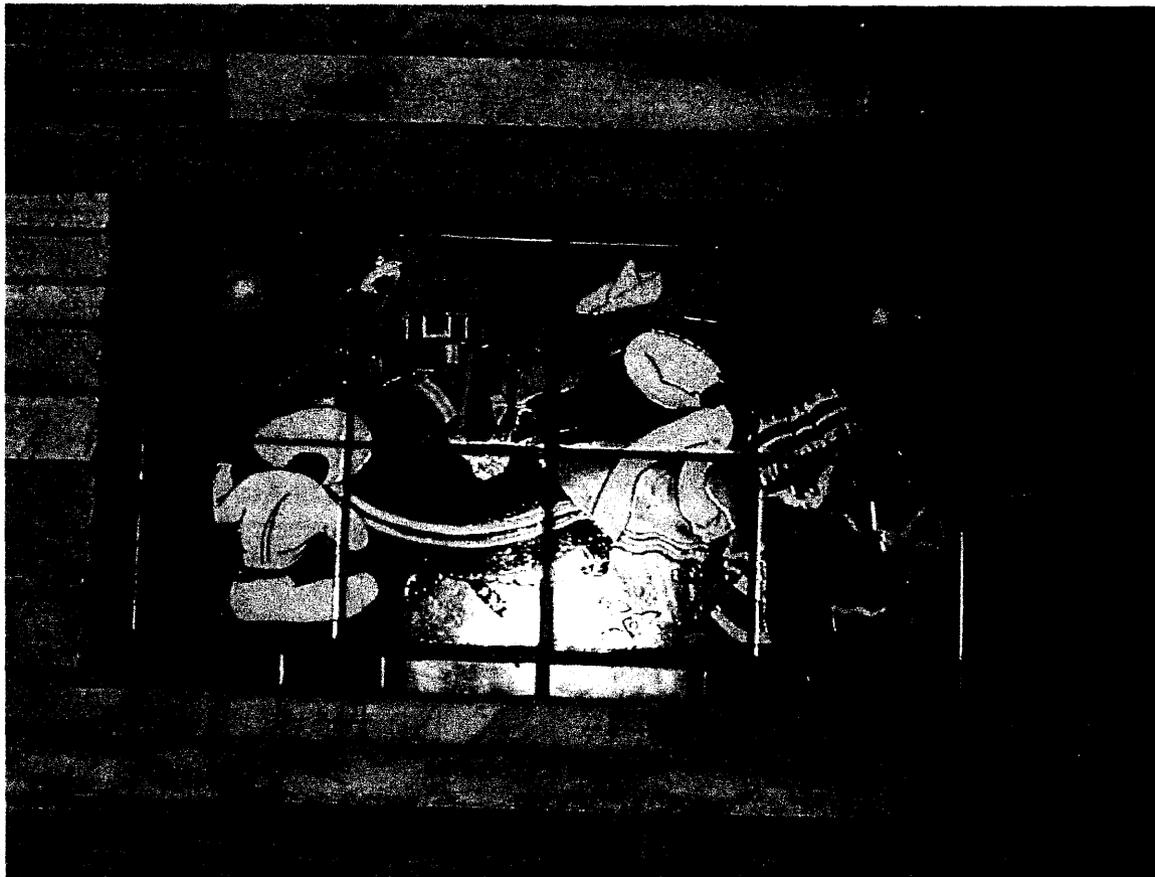
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1. Ethel Wilson Harris House
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark Chavez
4. October 1999
5. San Antonio Missions NHP Archives
6. Entry Stair, detail of *Huapango* panel, looking north
7. Figure 21

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1. Ethel Wilson Harris House
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Roxana McGregor
4. March 1999
5. San Antonio Missions NHP Archives
6. Entry Stair, looking east; detail of maguay tiles on stair risers
7. Figure 22

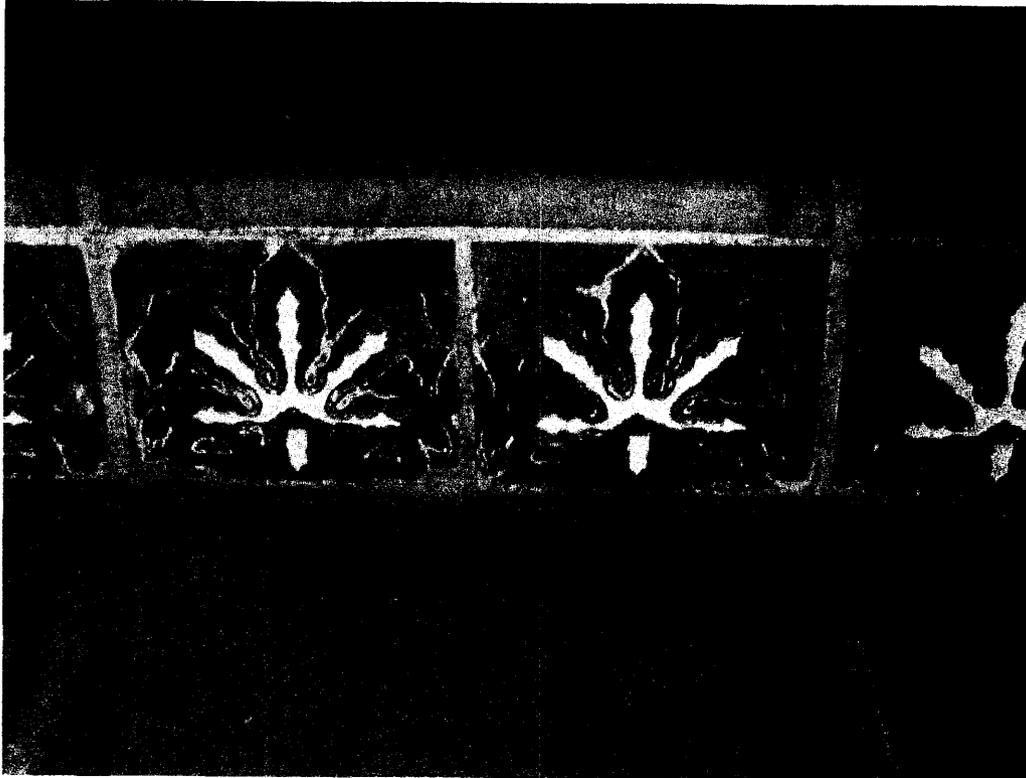
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1. Ethel Wilson Harris House
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Susan Toomey Frost
4. Fall 1995
5. Susan Toomey Frost
6. Entry step risers, detail of maguay tiles; looking east.
7. Figure 23

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1. Ethel Wilson Harris House
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark Chavez
4. October 1999
5. San Antonio Missions NHP Archives
6. Living/Dining area, looking north; detail of tile at base of floor
7. Figure 24

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1. Ethel Wilson Harris House
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Roxana McGregor
4. March 1999
5. San Antonio Missions NHP Archives
6. Kitchen, detail of stove, looking northwest
7. Figure 25

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1. Ethel Wilson Harris House
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark Chavez
4. May 1999
5. San Antonio Missions NHP Archives
6. Kitchen, detail of sink, looking north
7. Figure 26

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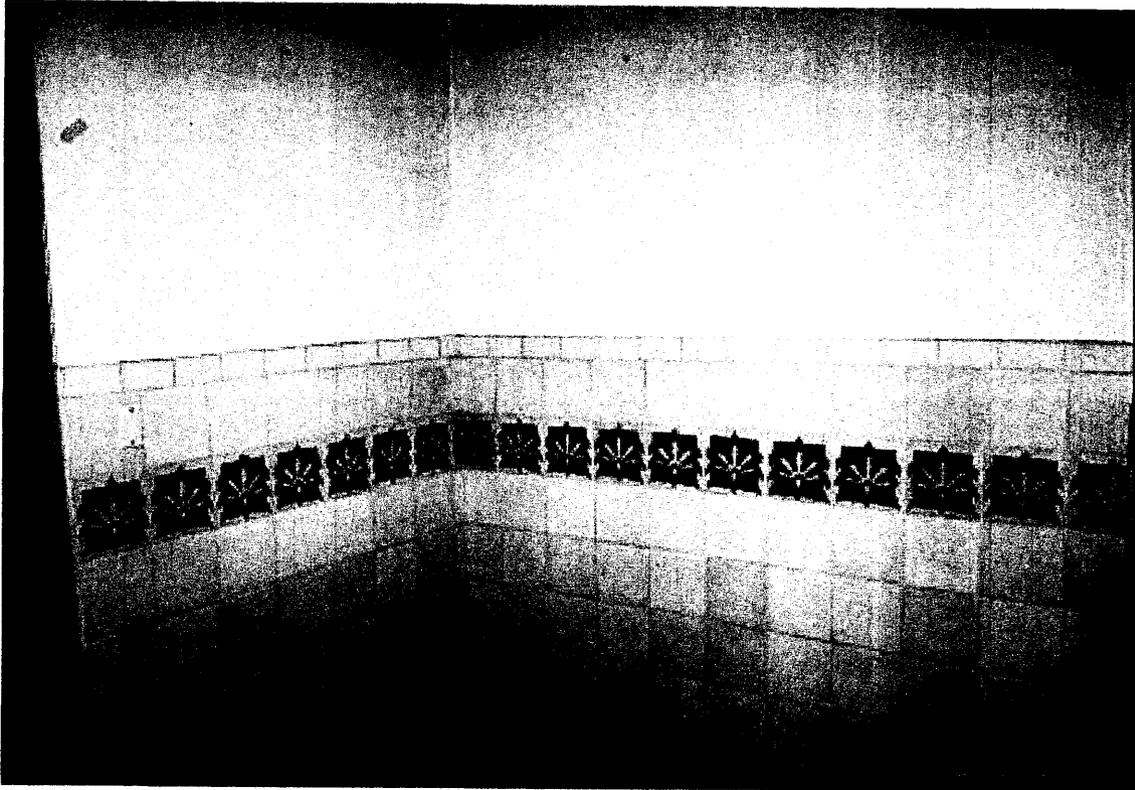
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1. Ethel Wilson Harris House
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Roxana McGregor
4. March 1999
5. San Antonio Missions NHP Archives
6. Breakfast room, looking northwest
7. Figure 27

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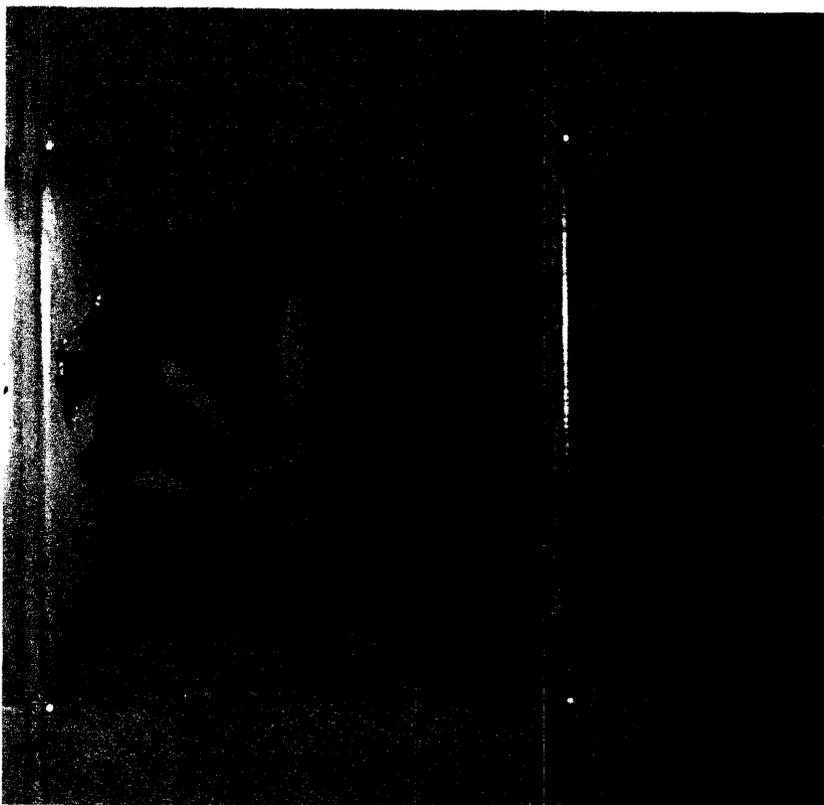
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1. Ethel Wilson Harris House
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark Chavez
4. October 1999
5. San Antonio Missions NHP Archives
6. Breakfast room, detail of maguery tile, looking north
7. Figure 28

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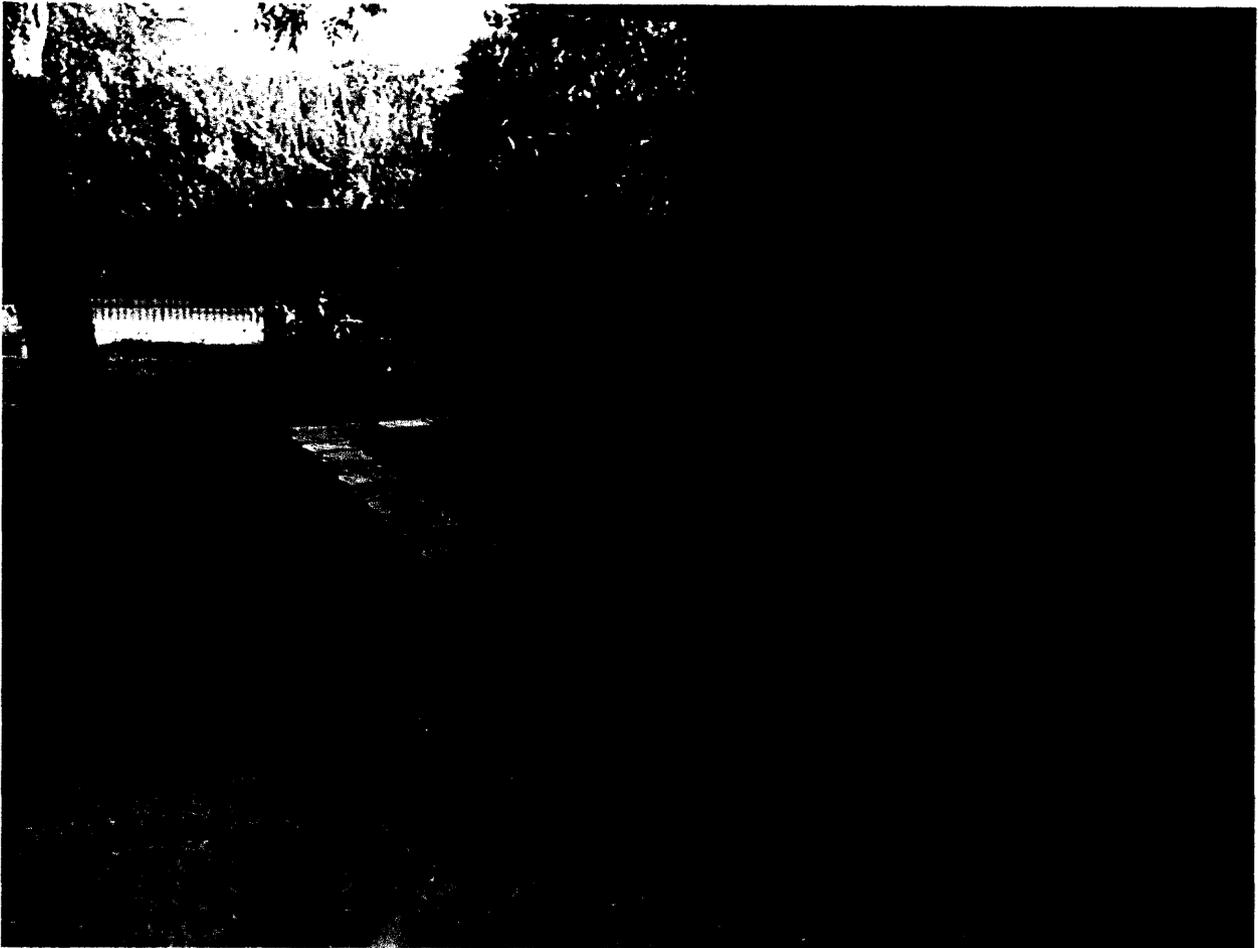
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1. Ethel Wilson Harris House
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark Chavez
4. July 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP Archives
6. Kitchen patio, looking north
7. Figure 29

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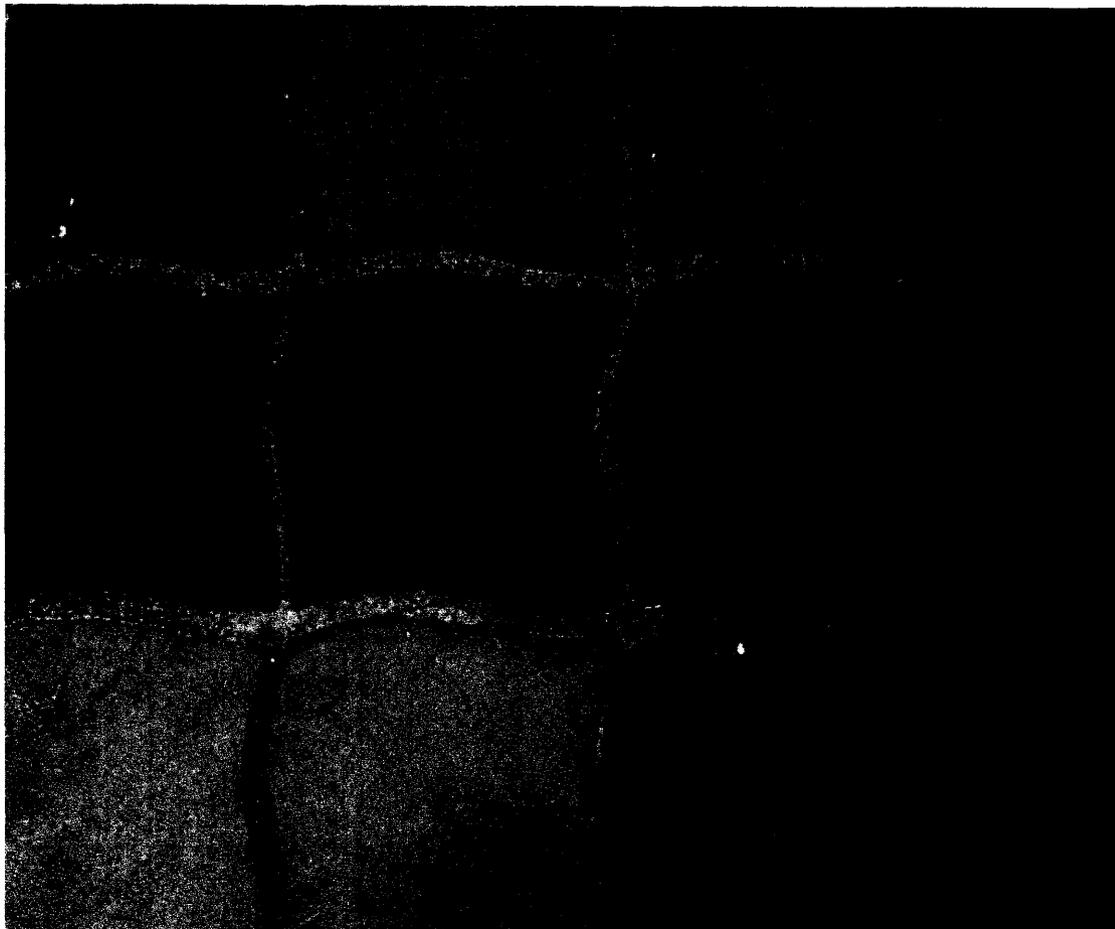
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1. Ethel Wilson Harris House
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark Chavez
4. July 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP Archives
6. Kitchen patio, detail of "wavy" tile, looking north
7. Figure 30

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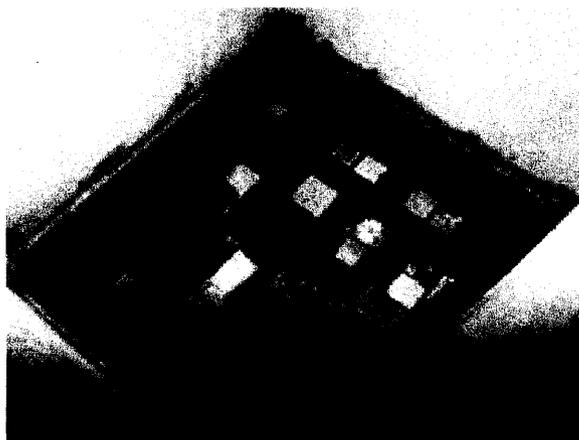
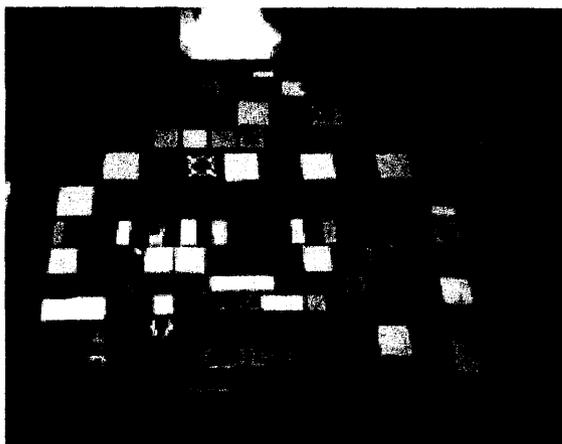
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1. Ethel Wilson Harris House
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Susan Toomey Frost
4. Fall 1995
5. Susan Toomey Frost
6. Basement restroom (L) and shower (R) floor tile.
7. Figure 31

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**Statement of Significance**

The Ethel Wilson Harris House is significant in that it was the primary residence of Ethel Wilson Harris, whose long and distinguished career included a commitment to historic preservation, symbolized by her charter membership in the San Antonio Conservation Society. Ethel Harris' tireless efforts on behalf of the preservation of the structures of San Antonio's 18<sup>th</sup> century missions; and her promotion of local traditional native crafts of pottery and tile making are noteworthy. The house served as a showcase for Harris' tiles and extensive Mexican folk art collection. Built for Ethel Wilson Harris, who stands out as an early historic conservationist, promoter of traditional artisanry, and one of the earliest woman managers of a historic site in the United States, the home is the only property associated with her life and work. It is a reflection of her conservation commitment and lifestyle while serving to showcase her tiles as well as her collection of Mexican folk art. With its period of significance of 1956-1982, although being less than fifty years of age, the home has achieved exceptional significance as the residence of a woman who accomplished major achievements in the areas of historic conservation, preservation, and park management. Most notably was Harris' development and promotion of traditional Hispanic arts and crafts (particularly tile and pottery works), beginning in the Works Progress Administration (WPA) era of the 1930s.

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**Historical Background and Significance**

Ethel Wilson Harris was instrumental in various conservation efforts in San Antonio, especially in the preservation of Mission San José, later to be included in San Antonio Missions National Historical Park. (The National Park Service individually listed Mission San José as a National Historic Site in 1941; the National Historical Park was created in 1978). Mrs. Harris served as park manager of Mission San José State Park, from approximately 1938 to 1963. Her efforts through living history exhibits, arts and crafts demonstrations, theater presentations, and the sale of ceramic craft items made on-site greatly aided in the preservation of the mission. In the late 1930s Dr. Amy Freeman Lee, noted San Antonio artist and art historian, referred to Ethel Wilson Harris as "...San Antonio's most expert technician in the ceramic craft of making tiles...she has done more to encourage interest and to aid the development of this art than any other individual." Dr. Lee went on to laud Harris' originality in developing motifs: "She originated the practice of depicting ideas on tiles instead of using purely decorative designs, and thereby, created a thematic element in the art."

Born in Sabinal, Texas in 1893, Ethel Wilson moved to San Antonio with her family when still a child. Her family's friends included a large family that visited San Antonio regularly and harbored a great interest in Mexican art objects. The young Ethel accompanied them on forays into the West Side of the city, to the Mexican markets where artisans publicly plied their trade and sold the items to visitors. With these friends she also began what were to be lifelong annual trips into Mexico, chiefly to Oaxaca and Chiapas, bringing back quantities of items for sale.

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Statement of Significance (continued)

During World War I, Ethel Wilson worked as a secretary at Camp Stanley military installation where she met her future husband, Arthur L. Harris. After the war, Harris resigned from the military and taught school. He not only encouraged his young wife in her interests but also helped her to perfect the glazing methods she employed in her pottery. She began a workshop with friends that became known as "Mexican Arts and Crafts." It was to promote apprenticeship and employment in crafts traditional to the area such as basket weaving, pottery, tile making, and wrought-iron work. The first shop was in downtown San Antonio on North St. Mary's Street in a historic structure known as the "Nat Lewis Barn" or the "Old Rock Barn."

Ethel Wilson Harris' deep love and commitment to the preservation of items historic led to her joining with others in the founding of the San Antonio Conservation Society, today the city's premier and very active conservation organization. She proposed to the group that had recently acquired and restored the granary at the site of Mission San José, that she lease it as a shop for the display and sale of what her workshop produced. In May 1932, the Society's general committee approved the plan and in 1933 began what was to be a long and enduring relationship of Ethel Wilson Harris with the mission of San José.

By 1934 she was listed as president of San José Potteries and also of Mexican Arts & Crafts, both located at the Lewis Barn. San José Potteries fired the work done by Mexican Arts & Crafts until 1937, when Mrs. Harris built her own kiln. By then San José Potteries had relocated to a lot adjacent to the mission. Tiles and other items continued to be made at the barn downtown. They were brought to be fired at San José Potteries and then sold within walking distance at the granary. Also in 1937, Harris copyrighted her now famous craftsman's mark of a *maguey*, or century plant. At the same time she copyrighted her Mexican Arts & Crafts catalog of designs with the Library of Congress. Although credited with most of the work produced by San José Potteries and Mexican Arts & Crafts, Harris worked with other artists who drew the designs.

With continued encouragement by her husband, Ethel Wilson Harris exhibited and marketed the tile items widely. At both the Chicago (1936) and New York (1940) World's Fairs, she exhibited the shop's work. Riding the tide of a mission revival style in architecture, she marketed her products nationally to architects, contractors, tourist and gift shops as well as department stores, including Marshall Field's in Chicago.

Despite the onset of the Depression, her business continued to thrive. By the late 1930s her abilities brought her the designation by the WPA as the technical supervisor over WPA Arts and Crafts projects in San Antonio. During this time, her staff began to refer to her as "Miz Harrie." Under the WPA what was manufactured was no longer sold but distributed free to tax maintained or charitable institutions. Among the many and varied projects she supervised and lent her inimitable style to were:

- A mural of 768 separate tiles installed at Alamo Stadium depicting the history of sports in San Antonio (see Figures 32 through 39);

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Statement of Significance (continued)

- A tiled bar with Mexican cantina scenes installed at the officers club at Randolph Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas. (The authors inquired about the panel, and current managers of the Officers' Club assumed it destroyed during one periods of the Club's remodeling).
- Tile benches for the Moorish-style building of Jefferson High School, San Antonio; (Assumed destroyed also – a visit to the high school confirmed their disappearance).
- Various tiles depicting fairy tales installed at playgrounds across the city; (since destroyed);
- A large plaque of 42 tiles depicting a legend related to the Texas war for independence from Mexico inset into a wall along the San Antonio River downtown, (see Figures 40 through 42);
- Tile panels commemorating historical events set into wrought iron tables for houses at La Villita, an older area of the city developed as a tourist attraction, (see Figures 43 through 48);
- Tile panels set into a wrought iron table in private ownership (Mr. Slater Anderson, San Antonio, Texas), see Figure 49.
- Roofing tiles for the Arneson River theater, San Antonio (see Figure 50);
- La Villita floor tiles (see Figures 51 and 52), including one showing the *maguey* craft mark (the latter was not located);
- Wall murals set into hand-made wrought iron frames (see Figure 53).

By 1939 Ethel Wilson Harris was a widow. Still undaunted, she and her four children moved into San José mission close to her shop. This was permitted with the thought to having someone living on site to dissuade vandals. She brought her kiln with her. An apartment was created in what was called the "prefecture" or Spanish Officer's Residence along the west wall of the mission compound. This was to be her residence until the structure under consideration was designed and built.

Mission Crafts, her tile and pottery making business, paid rent for the use of space at the mission. The employees worked for her private business and she directly supervised them. Employees report that she was very strict in all of her managerial duties, especially quality control and cost containment. She performed the duties of highest responsibility, such as the mixing of the glazes and the firing. Family members report that she closely supervised the monthly kiln firings, waking up several times during the night to monitor the temperature. She also was an inspired marketing director and public relations officer who wrote the brochures and press releases. Harris also directed the artistic design and production of the pottery. Because she was not an artist herself, others did the actual drawing of the new designs.

Many of the graphic designs executed under her direction depict dancing. Her favorite artist, Fernando Ramos, was a locally prominent flamenco dancer. Ramos worked as an independent contractor on an as-needed basis for Ethel Harris. Employees and her family report that she would describe to Ramos what she wanted, sometimes to the smallest detail. When Ramos obtained a job dancing in New York City, Harris valued his design work so highly that she flew to New York and waited for him to execute the drawings for an important commission.

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**Statement of Significance (continued)**

Her revival of native crafts continued after the designation of San José as a National Historic Site in 1941. At that time she was presented by the Conservation Society to the Advisory Board which was developed to oversee the administration of the site. The board, made up of representatives of those responsible for the site through a series of cooperative agreements, included the San Antonio Conservation Society, the Archdiocese of San Antonio, the Texas State Parks Board (predecessor of today's Texas Parks and Wildlife Department), and the National Park Service. The Advisory Board considered who would be best suited to act as custodian or manager of the site. Ethel Wilson Harris was approved and began a career as the first woman park manager in Texas, and possibly one of the earliest to hold such a position in the United States. Because of her efforts on behalf of the encouragement of Mexican arts and crafts, the Texas legislature in 1943 officially commended her work.

Among her many park activities, she began holding a series of harvest festivals emulating the fiestas or celebrations that would have taken place at the mission in its heyday. In the same vein, the Conservation Society was invited to participate in the citywide annual spring Fiesta with a one-night River Festival.

By 1948, Ethel Wilson Harris and friend Elizabeth Graham, who had been instrumental in the River Festivals, moved the event to La Villita (translated "little town" – a several block area abutting the San Antonio River near downtown containing some of the oldest structures in the city). This event, originally for one night only, was named by Mrs. Harris "Night in Old San Antonio" and has come to be known as "NIOA." It grew to two days and by 1958 was extended to four. Originally developed to "preserve San Antonio traditions and the spirit of Fiesta," it became the single largest fund-raiser employed by the Conservation Society. Native crafts demonstrations, sale of items made, dancing, music and traditional foods were highlighted. Today, it still ranks as one of the most popular and highly attended event during Fiesta outside of the parades.

All her life she maintained a dedication to the perpetuating of Mexican arts and crafts, but also during her years as park manager Ethel Wilson Harris evoked her deep and abiding commitment to the preservation of the historic structures at Mission San José. At the regular meetings of the Advisory Board, usually held annually, Harris not only acted the impeccable hostess, providing memorable meals for administrative representatives, but continued to provide information with regard to elements of structures in need of repair. She repeatedly recommended that roofs for the Indian Quarters be repaired, and when this proved insufficient, that they be replaced. Mrs. Harris took an active role in seeking funds to perform the needed maintenance, even personally contacting the director of the National Park Service. Later it would be said of her persistence: "Although her words would go unheeded throughout the remainder of the decade, time would prove Harris right."

Mrs. Harris set about to find a source of funding for at least some wall repair as well as providing for what she believed was adaptive use of the reconstructed rooms in the compound walls at Mission San José. To do this, she proposed that the Indian quarters be converted into apartments to alleviate the wartime shortage of housing

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Statement of Significance (continued)

in San Antonio for military officers and their families. Her recommendation was rejected by the Advisory Board in 1943 as being too intrusive on the historical fabric and requiring too extensive and costly renovations, the installation of plumbing, etc., for it to be feasible.

However, by the spring of 1946 Mrs. Harris was proceeding with some of these renovations herself. She arranged for Elizabeth Frazier, a painter, to rent a "studio and living quarters in the wall" (assumed to be the Indian Quarters) for \$35.00 per month. In addition, the tenant would pay for all renovations and repairs. Mrs. Harris believed that this would not only help with the care for the walls, which were constantly in need of repair, but "...it also will add attraction to the atmosphere of the missions to have Miss Frazier and her friend Miss Rabe, both of whom are sincere fine artists."

Along with her son Robert Harris who had become an architect, Ethel Wilson Harris designed the house built outside the walls at Mission San José. The architectural style appears to be a reflection of both his affinity for the work of Frank Lloyd Wright and his mother's love of openness, and natural elements, which would not be intrusive in the landscape adjacent to the mission structures. The house would also serve her functionally, providing a location for her workshop and as a backdrop for display of her personal collection of Mexican arts and crafts. Harris maintained a home studio downstairs, where she mixed the production glazes. She installed a small tabletop electric kiln that she used to test new glaze formulas. Surviving test tiles indicate that she experimented with varying combinations of glaze colors to ensure that they would fire evenly when used on the same piece. Tiles from her kiln grace the stairway to the lower level workshop and accent the kitchen. She moved into the house when it was completed in 1956. The tiles installed in the house at the time of building serve as an excellent representation of those that Harris' tile studios produced over the years.

None of the tiles produced when Harris served as technical supervisor of the Arts and Crafts division of the Works Projects Administration in San Antonio appear in the home. However, tiles that were produced by the private business that she founded in 1929, Mexican Arts and Crafts, Inc., appear instead. These include three *maguey* panels that are discussed in Section 7.

All the tiles appear to have been installed when the house was built. The tilework in the house represents various stages in Ms. Harris' career. The designs of the Huapango and *maguey* panels date from the 1930s and were both copyrighted. They are representative of Harris' earlier work at Mexican Arts and Crafts. They also serve as a reminder of the two-year period she served as president of San José Potteries. During the time she ran the company, her copyrighted designs were executed. Harris copyrighted no geometric designs; however, San José Potteries is thought to have made such designs in its early years. Therefore, the pottery might have been the source of the geometric tiles found in the basement bathroom and shower (see Figure 31).

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Statement of Significance (continued)

The variety of tiles date from the early period until 1955 when they were installed. They were laid like a crazy quilt of color on the floor.

Mosaic floors are common in San Antonio sunrooms and outdoor patios. They were usually made from the controlled breaking of tiles into odd shapes, but the Harris patchwork is evidence of her recycling border and corner tiles used to set tables and panels. Furthermore, the squares and rectangles are glazed in the colors that formed the basic palette of the early production years. The balance of the tiles installed in the house reflect her career at mid-point and can be said to be forerunners of what was produced at Mission Crafts for the following two decades. As a rule, only small items were offered for sale in the Gift Shop. Larger items, such as panels and tables, were executed on special order. Ethel Harris' personal favorites are indeed reflected in the house. Her artisan's mark of the *maguery* is a design motif repeated throughout the house. Her love of good cooking and entertaining, dancing and partying is expressed in the Huapango panel and kitchen tiles.

The house reflects other fresh ideas as well. The risers in the stairway (see Figures 22 and 23) are the forerunners of the concrete tile pictured as Figure 54 and are the first known appearance of Harris pooling the glaze within raised lines. This method allowed for quicker production of the relatively large number of tiles needed to construct the stairs. The stairway tiles could easily have encouraged Harris to adopt the *cuenca* method for producing the souvenir tiles sold in the Gift Shop. "*Cuenca*" refers to the unglazed tile being stamped or pressed resulting in raised lines into which the glazes were painted. An unknown artist, quite possibly her architect son Robert, produced the designs in the stairway, living room insets, and kitchen. The tiles of fruits and vegetables that are set with green surround tiles beneath the stovetop (see Figure 25) are the only "new" tiles that appear to have gone into limited commercial production at Mission Crafts. To date, only a handful of single tiles have been documented in collections.

The larger terra cotta and smaller inset tiles with a stylized *maguery* design have been seen so far only in the home's stairway and living room floor. Likewise, the stylized *maguerys* used to border the kitchen walls appear to have been made exclusively for the house. No single examples of these tiles have been found in collections or for sale. The design of the *maguery* composed of two tiles (see Figures 17 and 18), however, was copyrighted and appears to have been widely produced. Two installations of the design are known in San Antonio. The design was so "good" that an unidentified company or individual maker copied it. This "knock-off" is in a collection in California.

Ethel Wilson Harris' continued concern for preservation of historic sites in San Antonio came to the forefront in the 1950s. Encroaching post-war urbanization coupled with the river channelization project to be carried out by the U.S. Corps of Engineers in an effort to control flooding in the downtown area, were two issues of greatest concern. As a result, the Conservation Society, including Harris, began considering a proposal that a comprehensive plan be developed incorporating a system of parks including all the missions, the *acequias* (irrigation ditches), Espada dam, and Espada aqueduct, creating a drive along the river. This plan became

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### Statement of Significance (continued)

known as Mission Parkway. In response to the need for action, Mrs. Harris called a Conservation Society Advisory Board meeting to consider such a plan to include all four missions south of downtown San Antonio.

By 1957 Ethel Wilson Harris could report to the Advisory Board that the acquisition of the 64-acre Espada Dam property by the San Antonio Conservation Society looked promising. It was hoped that if this occurred it would be taken over by the Texas State Parks Board and that possibly it would be integrated into the National Historic Site. This was not to be. However, by 1958 the Corps of Engineers had changed their plans, saving the Espada aqueduct and dam, and the Espada *acequia* system, leaving a park along the river incorporating them. A National Historical Park including all the mission sites was not to be created until 1978.

In 1963, after so many years of dedication to work at Mission San José, "Miz Harrie" retired as park manager. She continued to live and work in the house until the early 1980s when she moved to an apartment in Alamo Heights (now bounded by the City of San Antonio) and continued to work actively with the Conservation Society as well as make her annual trips to Mexico.

Over Harris' years at Mission San José, the designs, glazes and production techniques in her tile and pottery making business evolved. As the cost of labor rose and there were fewer employees at Mission Crafts, Harris changed her basic method of production technique from *cuerda seca* (flat designs with black outlining, see Figures 28, 56 and 57) to *cuenca* (those with raised lines, see Figure 55). Mission Crafts generated quick sales at affordable prices to tourists with its souvenir tiles in raised outline. Employees made innumerable tiles that depicted Mission San José and the Alamo by using this method that was less labor intensive. Regarding the evolution of Harris' use of color, early designs from the Mexican Arts and Crafts period were executed in a palette limited to basic colors that closely corresponds to those used in the popular Bauer and Fiesta lines. In contrast, a wide array of hues was available for decorating the tiles and pottery during the last years at Mission Crafts.

In the 1960s, trendy colors and motifs such as mushrooms and butterflies began appearing alongside the Mexican motifs that were so widely popular in earlier years. Another change was in the clay body itself. In the 1960s, Ethel Harris ceased using clay that was dug locally by her employees and switched to commercial clay that she purchased. A few Mission Crafts tiles have a pinkish tint instead of the cream-buff color of the tiles normally seen. The reddish color is most likely the result of Harris having the employees mix the normally used clay with the leftover terra cotta that was used to make the house tiles. Harris even experimented with concrete in a larger format. The 12 ½" concrete tile of the HemisFair tower (see Figure 54) illustrates these new methods of production and how Harris strove to be contemporary and satisfy the public's changing tastes. An unknown artist created the stylized design of the San Antonio River and skyline, whose inclusion of the HemisFair Tower dates this tile to 1968. This tile is the largest known to have been produced in the San José family of potteries. In Figure 54, it is paired with the smallest, a 3" size in the *cuenca* technique.

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**Statement of Significance (continued)**

She continued to work with a group for the development of a theater on the park grounds outside the walls at Mission San José in a former gravel pit close to her house. In 1977 Ethel Harris closed the doors of the arts and crafts shop she had maintained at San José since the 1930s. Some of the designs sold at the shop were very popular and were produced for many years. A few pieces with the same design have been found with labels or "backstamps" (see Figures 58 and 59) from all three of the potteries Harris managed. Fernando Ramos, the principal artist who worked for her, continually created new designs that were passed on to the workers that she saw were up to the task. Most of the later designs appear to have originated in special commissions or for occasions that received top priority.

At Mission Crafts, sales dictated production. Lucille Carmona, who decorated tiles there for some 35 years, stated that if a tile or piece of pottery was sold in the Gift Shop, she was to decorate another to replace it on the shelves. If a design had been slow to sell, she was instructed to abandon it. Carmona reported that because she kept so busy replacing the best selling items, that there was little time to execute newer designs on the speculation that they might sell in the Gift Shop. Carmona reported that when the pottery ceased production in 1977, many designs remained that had never been made.

Helen Cox Christian, Ethel's childhood friend for whom Ethel's daughter Helen was named, also occupied the house. Ethel Harris was the granddaughter's godmother. When her husband passed away, Helen moved into the Harris House. She later became terminally ill and died in the house.

A longtime china painter, Helen transferred her skills to decorating tiles and pottery. She is the person who designed the fruit and vegetable tiles in the kitchen (see Figure 25), plus many of the flower designs that were placed into production. Helen was assistant manager of the pottery.

About two years before her death Ethel Wilson Harris suffered several strokes and was moved to a nursing home. Prior to that time, she had moved from the house at the park to a high rise apartment near her son Don. With her death on September 21, 1984 an era came to an end. Her forward thinking, along with that of fellow Advisory Board and Conservation Society members, helped preserve San Antonio's missions and bring about the creation of San Antonio Missions National Historical Park. Shortly before her death the finalization of the cooperative agreements to enable the new National Historical Park to fully function were concluded.

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Summary

Ethel Wilson Harris -- through her single-minded commitment to the revival of the arts and crafts of the descendents of the early inhabitants of San Antonio's missions, to their communities, and to the preservation of the structures that remain from the Spanish colonial era -- epitomized the determined women of San Antonio who began the work to preserve the unique culture and landscape of the area for future generations. As a result of her commitment, Ethel Wilson Harris was the recipient of many acknowledgments, citations and awards. After the recognition by the Texas legislature in 1943 for her work in preserving and encouraging Mexican arts and crafts, many others were to follow. Among them, Harris was cited for her contribution of a tile mural for San Antonio's 1968 HemisFair Women's Pavilion, a Citation of Honor from the Texas Society of Architects in 1973 for her work for historic preservation in San Antonio, and the Bronze Medallion of Bexar County and the title of Honorary Hidalgo of Bexar for her work in emphasizing the importance of Hispanic heritage in Texas history.

Ethel Harris' establishment of Mission Crafts within the mission walls was in itself a specific and very significant event in the history of Mission San José worthy of recognition. Although the tiles installed in the house built on the grounds do not depict any specific event at the mission, they do reflect the life and work of Ethel Wilson Harris, and as such, are an integral part of the mission's history. Harris played a vital role in the restoration of the mission. Her leasing in the early 1930s of the granary as a sales outlet for Mexican Arts and Crafts, provided income for the complex and was of significant interest to tourists visiting the newly restored mission. Harris conceived of the Indian Harvest Festival, the predecessor to Night in Old San Antonio that drew people to the mission and raised money for its support. Harris also conceived of the outdoor theater with the same objectives. She is responsible for adding another cultural dimension, that of the performing arts, to the mission complex. By reviving and promoting *Los Pastores* and *Las Posadas* (two local cultural traditions celebrated around Christmas), she popularized traditional Mexican customs for thousands of San Antonians and visitors.

With regard to the mission complex itself, Harris played a critical role in assuring that it was consolidated under one ownership and management, first as a state park and then as part of a National Park. It was her vision and management of San José for so many years that made the mission complex much of what it is today.

Apart from a small plaque placed by the San Antonio Conservation Society at the base of the tree planted in her memory, her house is the only permanent testimony to Ethel Wilson Harris. Without the house containing so many examples of her tiles, most visitors to the mission complex would not know that a nationally acclaimed pottery had been located there. Visitors already knowledgeable about her tiles expect to see examples when they make their pottery pilgrimages to Mission San José. Were it not for the tiles installed in her house, they would be astonished and disappointed that there were none remaining. The *maguey*, Harris' trademark, at one time graced the mission complex. The logo was executed in wrought iron. At one time, two flowering *magueys* were mounted on either side of the passageway to the pottery. Live *magueys* were even planted throughout the

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**Summary, (continued)**

mission grounds, but most seem to have either died or been removed. Thus, possibly the only remaining symbols of Harris' artisanry so closely identified with Mission San José are to be found in the tiles in her house.

Elsewhere, several of her one-of-a-kind murals have endured. Such larger pieces consumed a great deal of time and materials to produce. As a result, they were executed only on special order and paid for in advance. For example, only one rendering of the famous Huapango scene described in the narrative in Section 7 is known to have been executed. The scene, minus the border tiles, is set in a table that belongs to a collector in Los Angeles. Panels such as the Huapango are rare and usually seen only in public places. No doubt, many wonderful panels are installed in private homes. With the passage of time and increased awareness of the importance of San José tiles and pottery, more of their locations will become known.

Although the period of significance for the Ethel Wilson Harris house is 1956-1982, it has achieved an importance of major historic value. The home serves as an example of the adaptation of the Usonian style of Frank Lloyd Wright. The use of its elements of cast concrete, stone and wood, as well as interior open, flowing living areas reminiscent of the Usonian style, are reflective of the persona of the woman who lived there. The open living areas served as a backdrop for Ethel Wilson Harris' extensive Mexican folk art collection. The tile accents throughout are examples of the various styles and periods of her tile making efforts that began in the 1920s and flourished in the 1930s with the Works Progress Administration. The daylight basement was designed as her workshop. The house was built for Harris as her residence toward the end of her lengthy sojourn as park manager at Mission San José. Harris moved into the house when it was completed in 1956. She retired as site manager of the mission complex in 1963. She continued living and working productively in the house for some 18 years. Harris lived in the house and worked in the downstairs studio until approximately 1981. She then moved into a high rise apartment complex at 6609 Blanco Road, near her son Don. When she suffered a series of paralyzing strokes and required specialized care, she moved to Chandler House at 1510 Howard Street, San Antonio, Texas. Harris died in 1984.

Starting as the park's caretaker in the early days of the San Antonio Conservation Society's efforts at preservation of the structures at the Mission San José, Ethel Wilson Harris was among the first women in the country to serve in a park managerial capacity. Her former home, although less than 50 years old, preserves and showcases unique examples of her lifetime achievements in tile works, and is the only remaining structure associated with this exceptional woman's life, to do so.

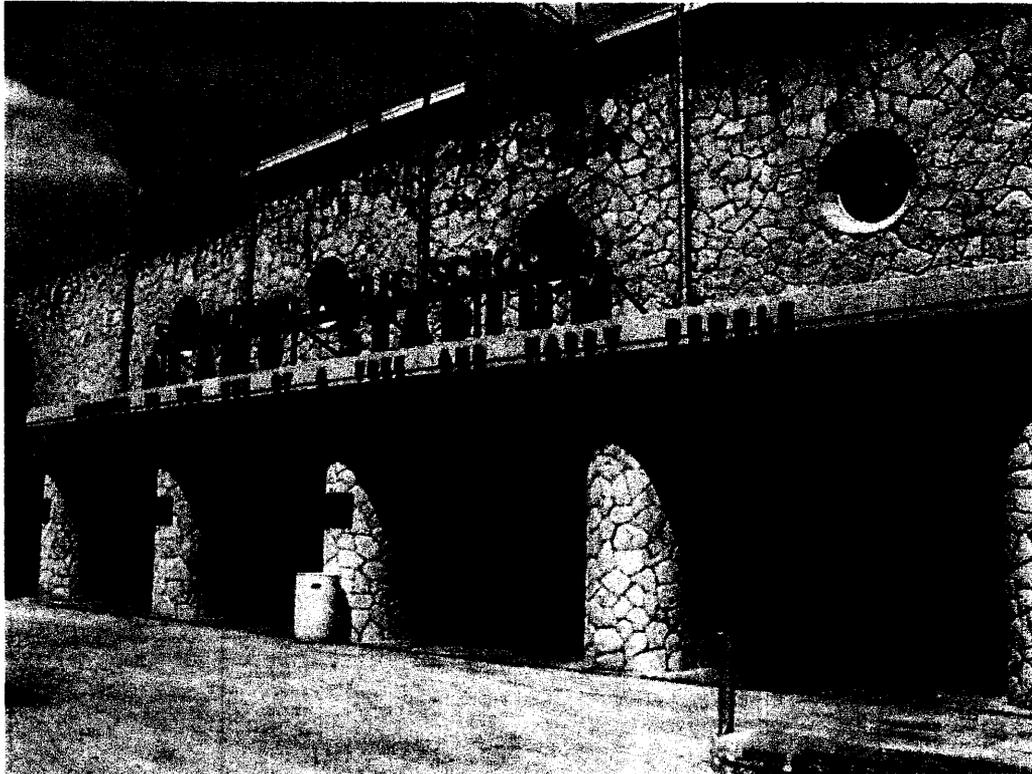
United States Department of the Interior  
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1. Alamo Stadium
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. July 28, 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP archives
6. Main (west) entrance to the stadium. One of the most remarkable collections of Ethel Harris's extant murals is located just beyond this portico.
7. Figure 32

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1. Alamo Stadium
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. July 28, 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP archives
6. Main (west) entrance to the stadium. Ms. Harris's tile murals appear over the main entrance and support pylons.
7. Figure 33

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

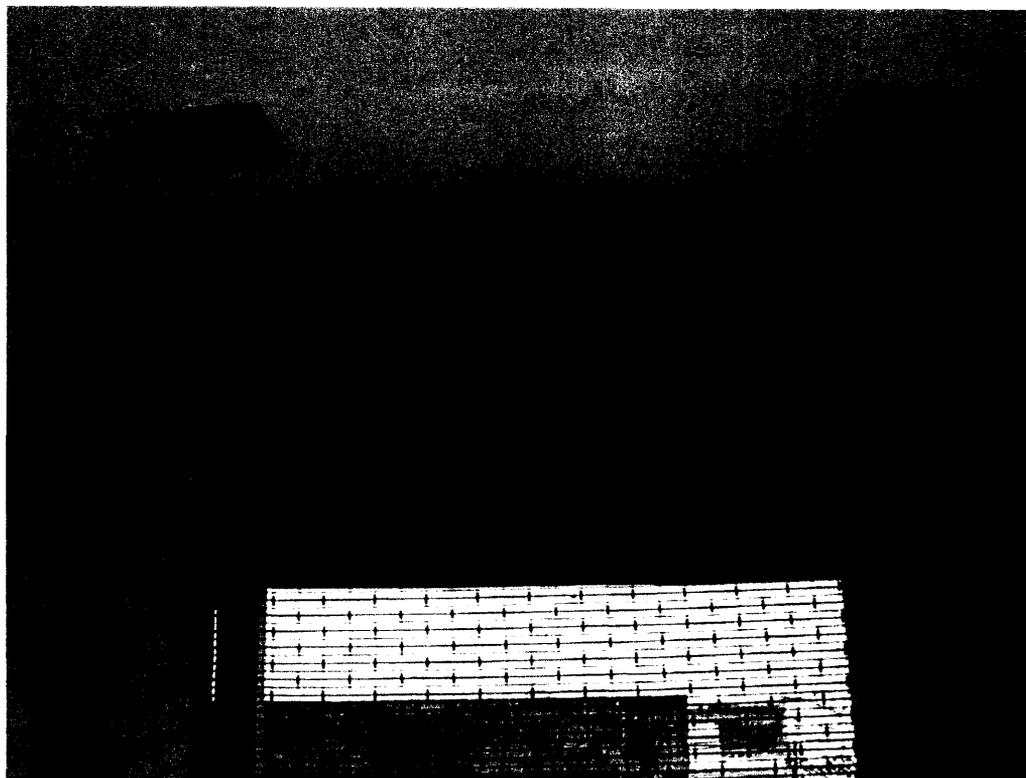
**National Register of Historic Places  
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1. Alamo Stadium
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. July 28, 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP archives
6. Mural depicting sporting events in San Antonio. Here, the various local schools (and their marching bands) extant in the 1930s, have all been represented in a "game" in the Stadium.
7. Figure 34

**United States Department of the Interior**  
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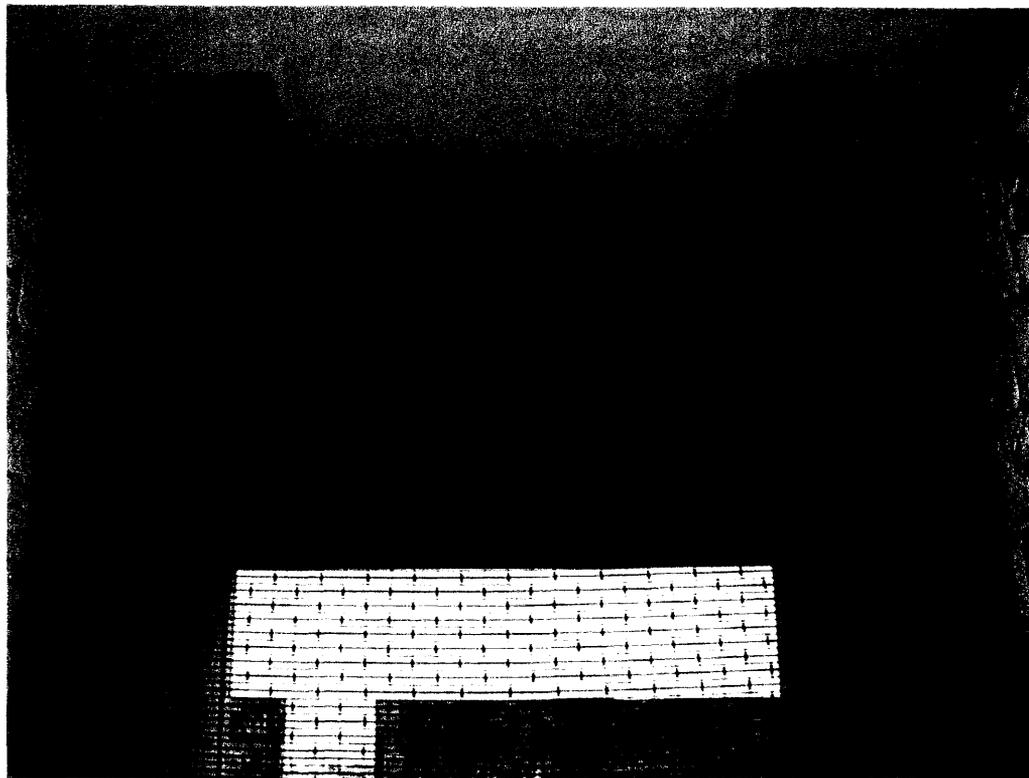
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1. Alamo Stadium
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. July 28, 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP archives
6. Mural depicting life and culture of San Antonio extant in the 1930s.
7. Figure 35

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

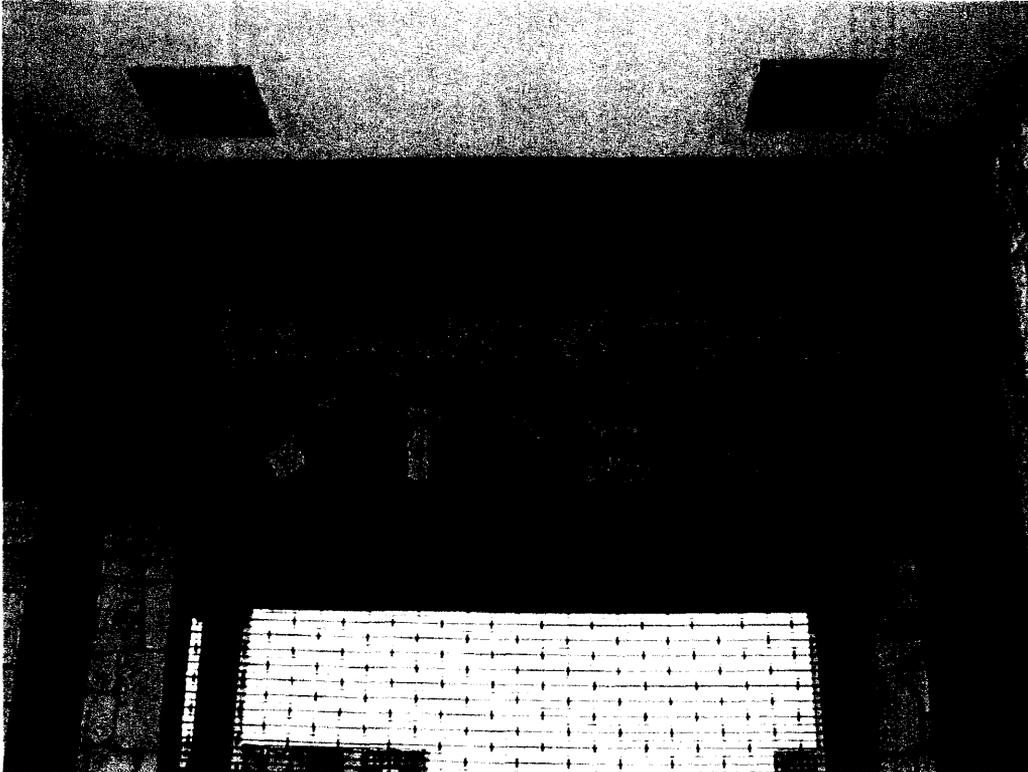
National Register of Historic Places  
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Harris, Ethel Wilson, House  
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1. Alamo Stadium
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. July 28, 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP archives
6. Mural depicting life and culture of San Antonio extant in the 1930s.
7. Figure 36

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1. Alamo Stadium
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. July 28, 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP archives
6. Detail of previous Figure.
7. Figure 37

**United States Department of the Interior**  
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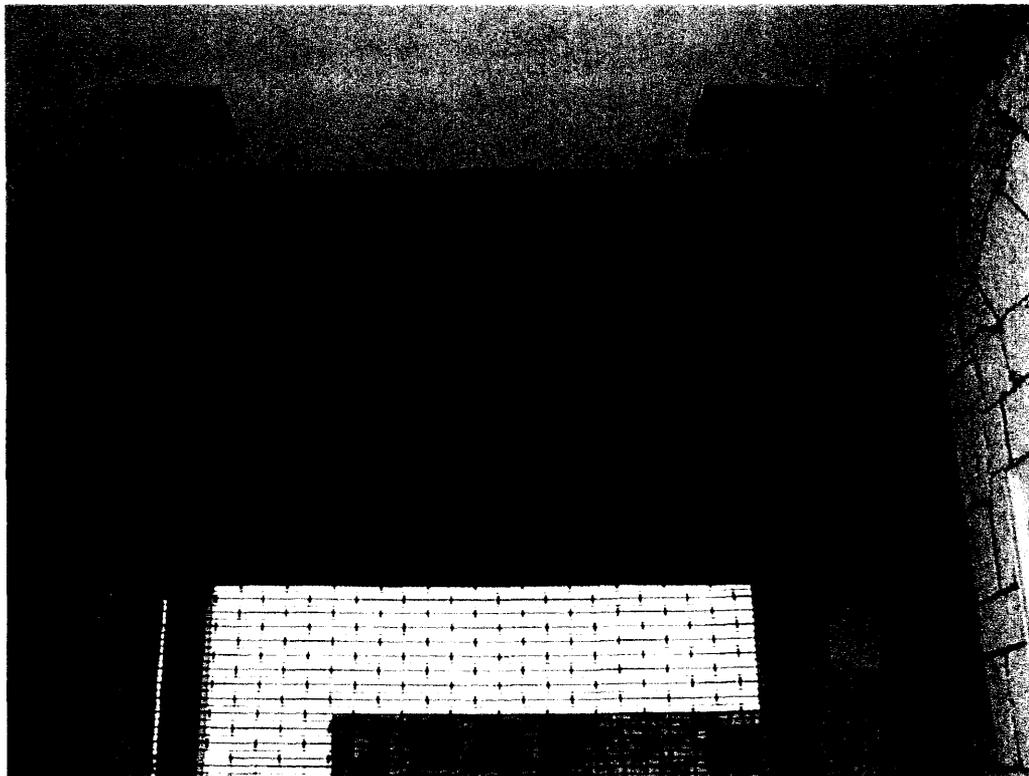
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1. Alamo Stadium
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. July 28, 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP archives
6. Mural depicting life and culture of San Antonio extant in the 1930s.
7. Figure 38

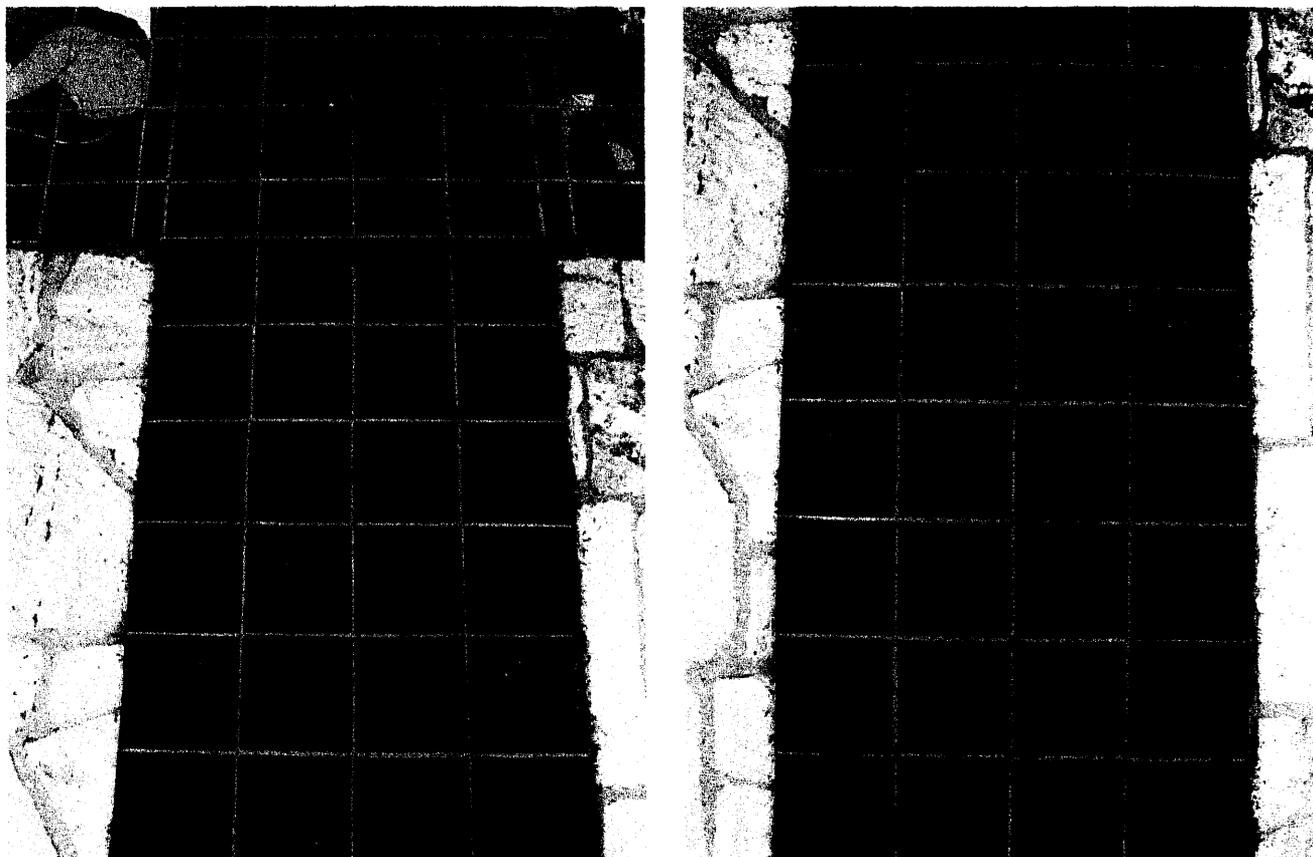
United States Department of the Interior  
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1. Alamo Stadium
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. July 28, 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP archives
6. Detail of one of the bands of brilliant blue panels between two murals, running down one of the stadium's support pylons. The text appears on the following page. Note Harris's "craftmark" in the lower right of the panel on the left.
7. Figure 39

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A CENTURY OF SPORTS  
IN  
SAN ANTONIO TEXAS  
1840 1940  
DESIGNED & MADE BY  
WPA ARTS & CRAFTS  
O.P. 665-66-3-46



CRAFTSMARK



HISTORICAL RESEARCH  
WRITING PROJECT  
O.P. 165-1-66-109

DIVISION OF COMMUNITY  
SERVICE PROGRAMS  
DISTRICT 10

WORK PROJECTS  
ADMINISTRATION

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1. San Antonio Riverwalk (*Paseo del Rio*)
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. July 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP
6. Tile mural inset into a wall along the San Antonio Riverwalk in downtown San Antonio depicting a legend related to the Texas war for independence from Mexico.
7. Figure 40

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**Harris, Ethel Wilson, House**  
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1. San Antonio Riverwalk (*Paseo del Rio*)
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. July 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP
6. Location (see arrow) of the mural pictured in Figure 40.
7. Figure 41

**United States Department of the Interior**  
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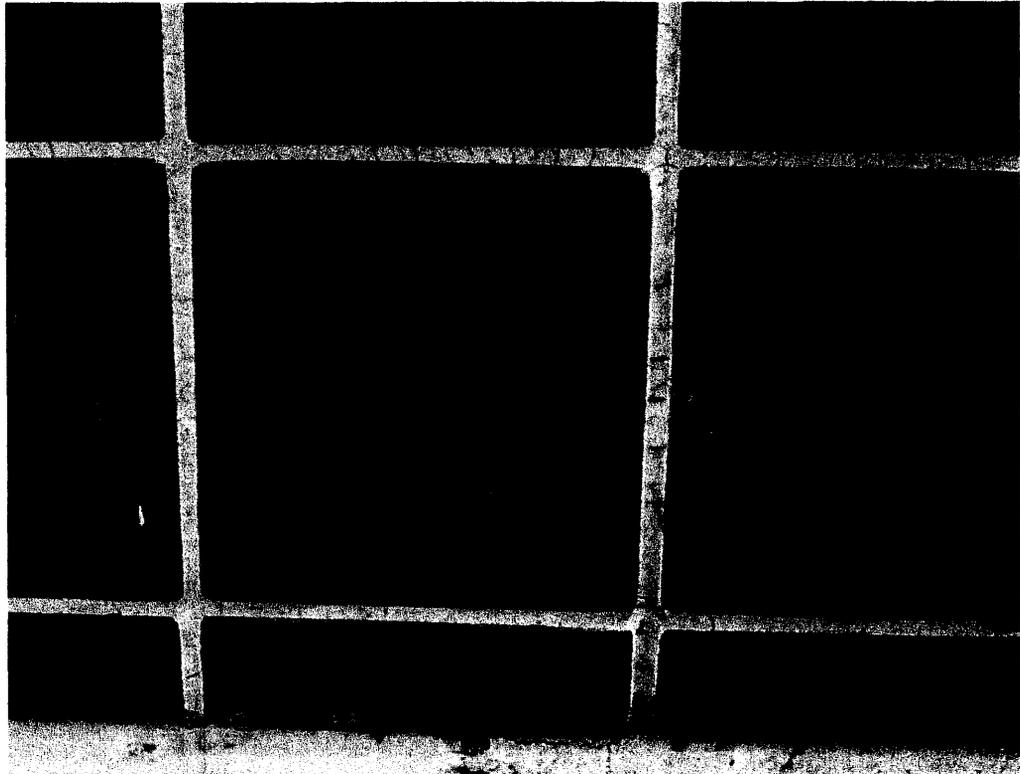
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**Harris, Ethel Wilson, House**  
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1. San Antonio Riverwalk (*Paseo del Rio*)
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. July 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP
6. Detail of Harris's "craftmark" from the mural pictured in Figure 40.
7. Figure 42

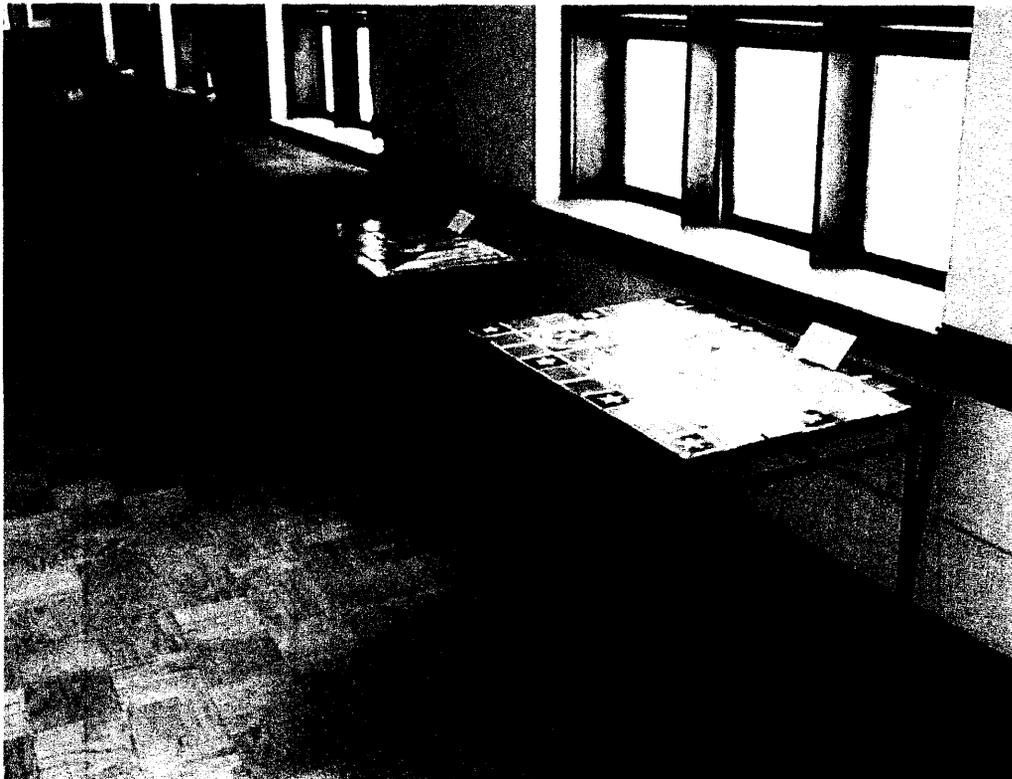
United States Department of the Interior  
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Harris, Ethel Wilson, House  
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1. "La Villita" (Little Village) post office
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. July 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP
6. A few of Harris's wrought iron tables with examples of her tiles.
7. Figure 43

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Harris, Ethel Wilson, House  
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1. "La Villita" (Little Village) post office
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. July 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP
6. Detail of one tile table.
7. Figure 44

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1. *“La Villita”* (Little Village) post office
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. July 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP
6. Harris’s “craftmark” from table in Figure 44.
7. Figure 45

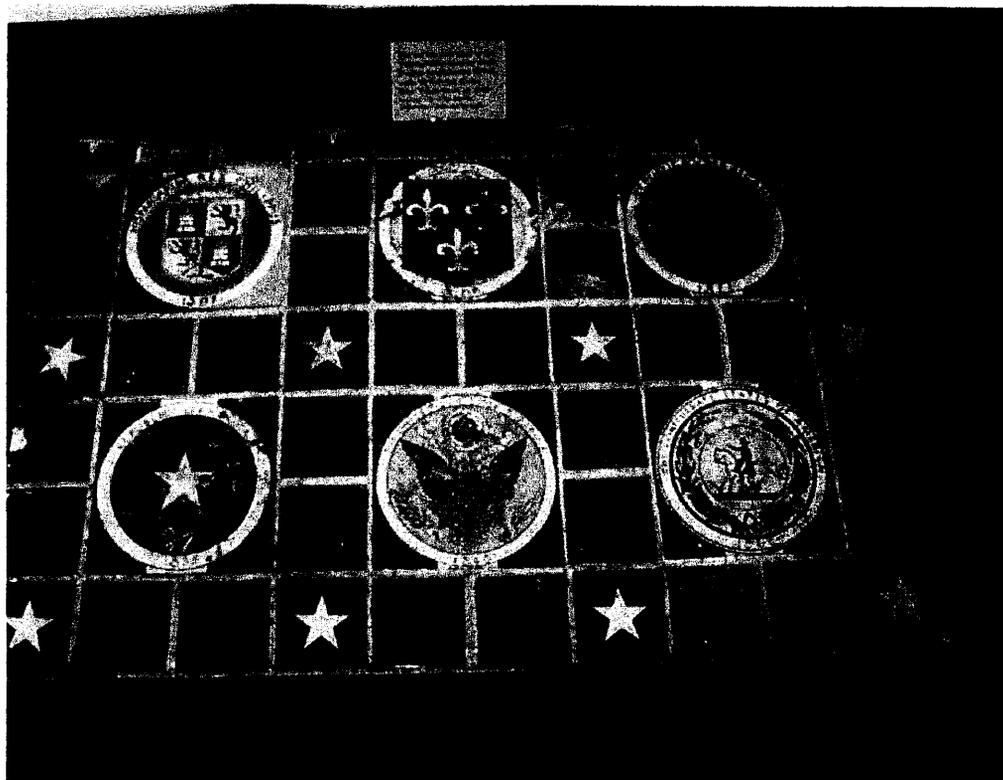
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1. "La Villita" (Little Village) post office
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. July 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP
6. Detail of a second table.
7. Figure 46

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1. "La Villita" (Little Village) post office
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. July 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP
6. Detail of a third table.
7. Figure 47

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1. "La Villita" (Little Village) post office
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. July 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP
6. Close-up of the table pictured in Figure 47.
7. Figure 48

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1. Residence of Mr. Slater Anderson
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. November 30, 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP
6. Approximately 4-foot by 6-foot table containing Harris's tiles in private ownership.
7. Figure 50

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

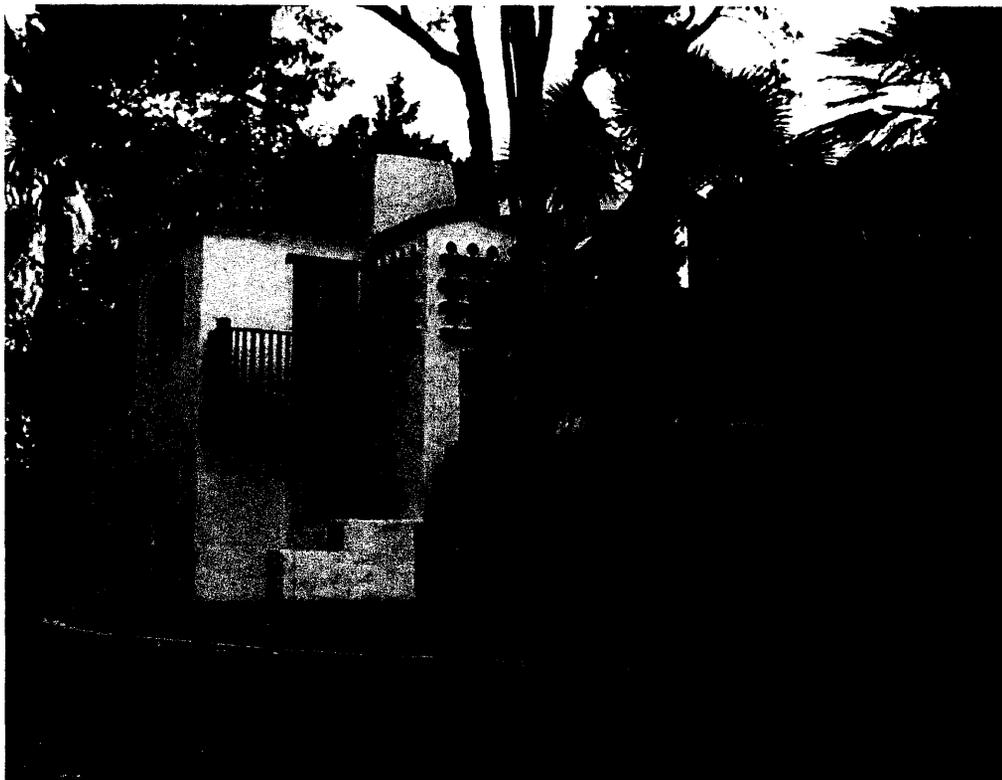
National Register of Historic Places  
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Harris, Ethel Wilson, House  
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1. San Antonio Riverwalk (*Paseo del Rio*)
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. July 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP
6. Arneson River Theater. Harris produced roofing tiles for this structure.
7. Figure 50

**United States Department of the Interior**  
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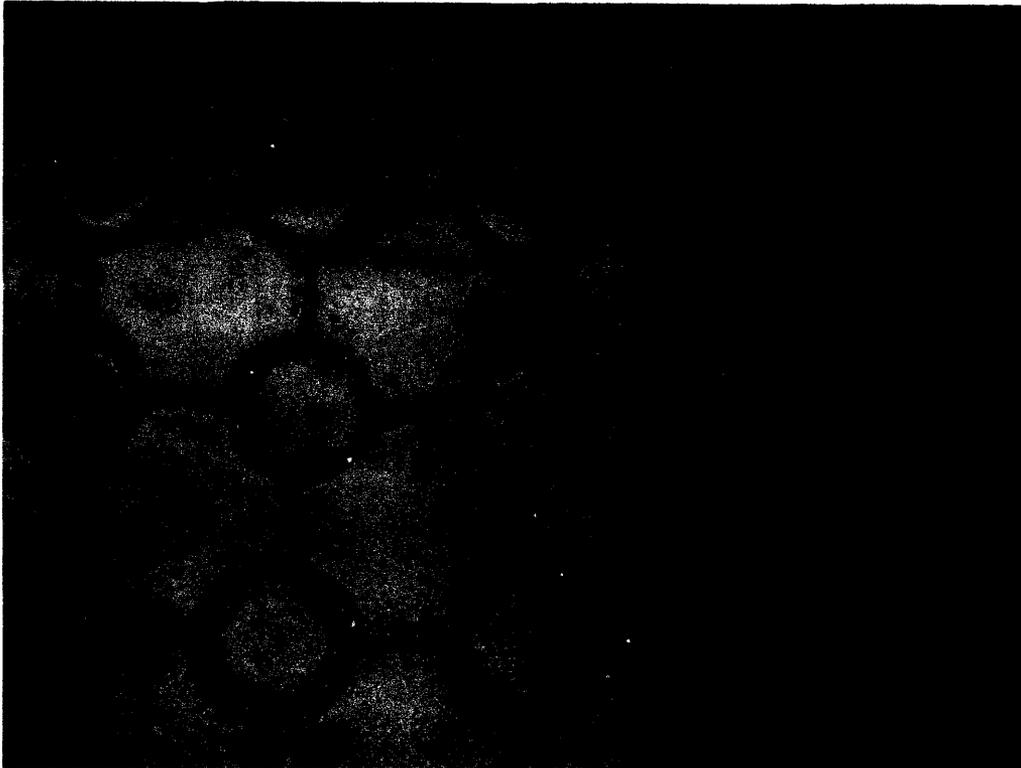
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1. "*La Villita*" (Little Village)
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. July 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP
6. Unique floor tile produced by Harris.
7. Figure 51

**United States Department of the Interior**  
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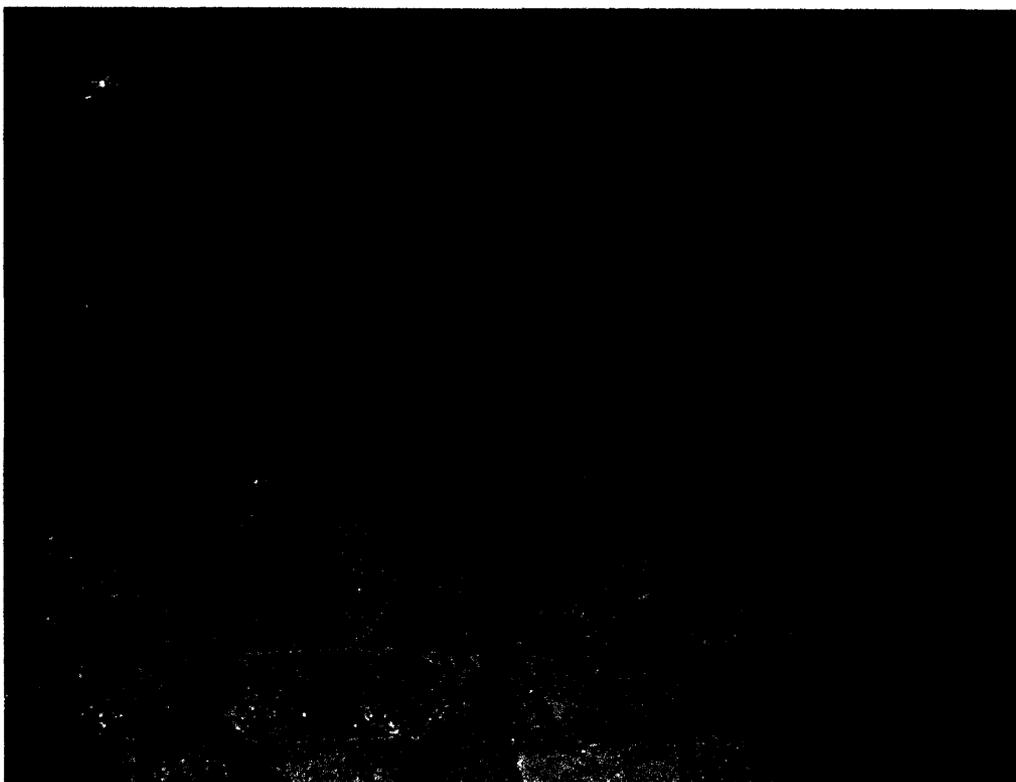
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1. *“La Villita”* (Little Village)
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. July 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP
6. Another example of Harris’s unique floor tiles.
7. Figure 52

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Harris, Ethel Wilson, House  
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1. "La Villita" (Little Village) post office
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. July 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP
6. Wall mural in wrought iron frame.
7. Figure 53

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Harris, Ethel Wilson, House  
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1. Private collection of Susan Toomey Frost
2. Travis County, Texas
3. Susan Toomey Frost
4. Fall 1995
5. Susan Toomey Frost ©
6. Stylized design of the San Antonio River and skyline, whose inclusion of the HemisFair Tower dates this tile to 1968. This tile is the largest known to have been produced in the San Jose family of potteries, and it is paired here with the smallest, a 3" size of *cuenca* (raised lines infilled with glaze—see also Figure 55) vintage.
7. Figure 54

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1. Private collection of Susan Toomey Frost
2. Travis County, Texas
3. Susan Toomey Frost
4. Fall 1995
5. Susan Toomey Frost ©
6. *Cuenca* vintage tile. The unglazed tile on the left shows how the tile was pressed (or stamped) to allow glazes to be pooled separating each color. The tile on the right has been glazed and fired.
7. Figure 55

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Harris, Ethel Wilson, House  
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1. SAAN Museum Collection
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. July 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP
6. *Cuerda seca* style of tile-making. In contrast with the previous method (Figure 55), this tile remains flat prior to being glazed. Black lines separate the various colors.
7. Figure 56

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

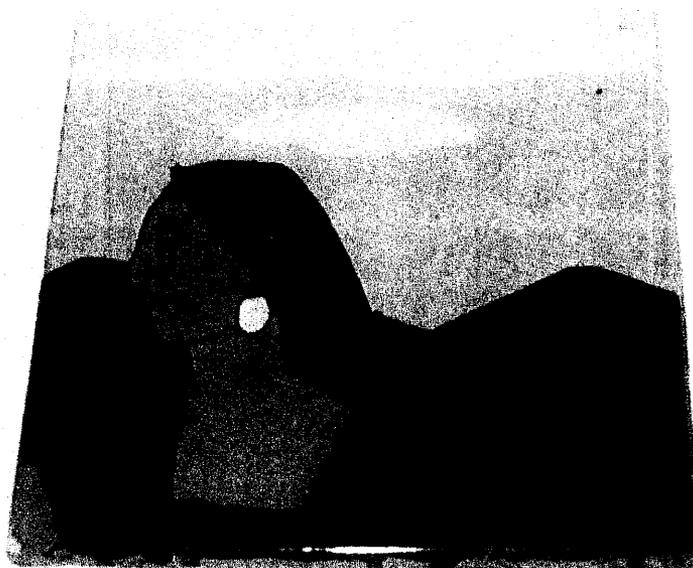
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1. SAAN Museum Collection
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. July 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP
6. Another example of the *cuerda seca* method.
7. Figure 57

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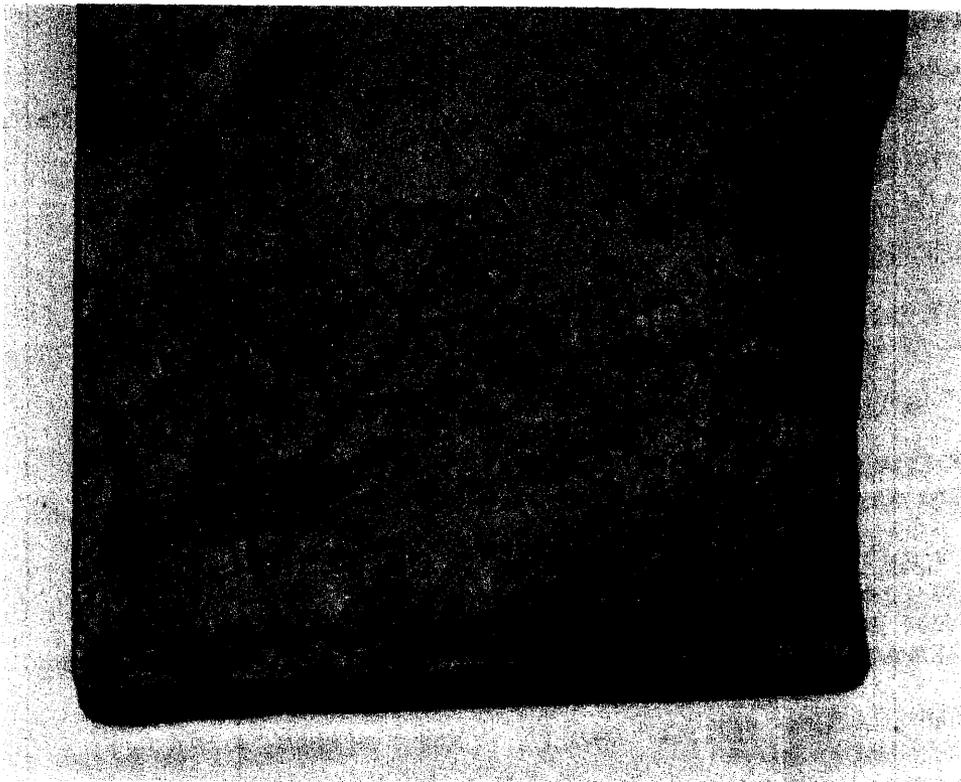
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1. SAAN Museum Collection
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. July 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP
6. Example of Harris's "backstamp." The mark is that of a maguay bloom.
7. Figure 58

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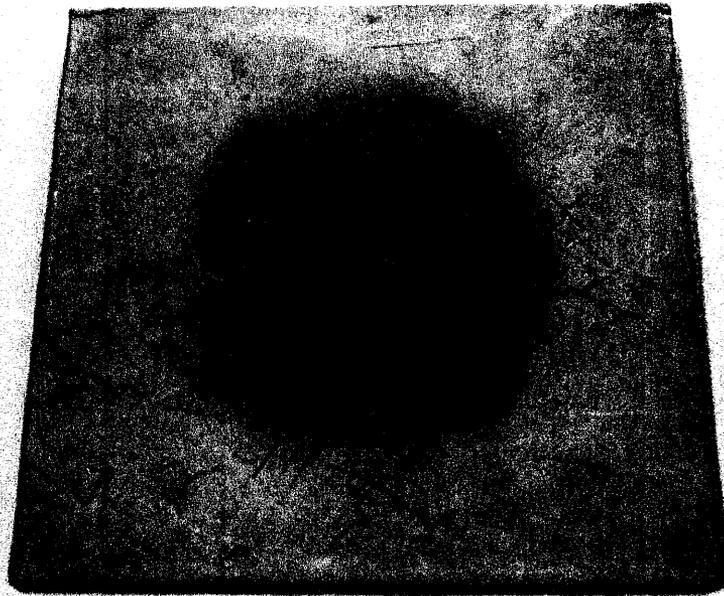
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1. SAAN Museum Collection
2. Bexar County, Texas
3. Mark A. Chavez
4. July 2000
5. San Antonio Missions NHP
6. With the exception of those tiles going into murals (walls, wall hangings, tables, etc.), all of Harris's tiles were signed on the backs. The signing was done in ink prior to firing. The inscription reads: "San Jose Mission / San Antonio Tx."
7. Figure 59

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Verbal Boundary Description

The lot on which the Ethel Wilson Harris House is located was included as part of a tract deeded to the Texas State Parks Board in 1941 by Bexar County, the San Antonio Conservation Society, and the Roman Catholic Archbishop of San Antonio. This tract was described as being, "...an irregular shaped tract of land out of the San José Mission lands, and lying between Trawalter Drive [now San José Drive] and the Old San José Mission Ditch...and being out of Bexar County Block 4001 [now New City Block 7664]."

See the accompanying map of the Northern Section of Mission San José and the below deed record, Number 171288, recorded in the Bexar County Courthouse, Deeds and Records, Volume 4169, pages 57-58. The approximately two-acre site whose coordinates appear in the deed record is shown labeled on the enclosed map. The Ethel Wilson Harris House and immediate setting are denoted by the arrow as to its location within that tract. From these documented records, it is clear that the tract includes the lot on which the Ethel Wilson Harris House was constructed.

THE STATE OF TEXAS : 171288 Vol 4169 pgs 57  
COUNTY OF BEXAR :

WHEREAS, by their several agreements in writing, all dated May 8, 1941, the County of Bexar, the San Antonio Conservation Society, and the Roman Catholic Archbishop of San Antonio, owners of the several tracts of land, and interests therein, comprising the San Jose Mission National Historic Site, did grant unto the Texas State Parks board certain titles and privileges for the preservation, maintenance and operation of said properties under the covenants, stipulations and limitations therein set forth; and

WHEREAS, the San Antonio Conservation Society is the owner of the hereinafter described tracts of land which have not been turned over to said Texas State Parks board heretofore, but which, in fact, are a part of said San Jose Mission National Historic Site upon a part of which are situated a portion of the historic structures connected with said San Jose Mission; and

WHEREAS, by deed dated May 8, 1941, recorded in Vol. 1831, pages 131 to 136, Deed Records of Bexar County, Texas, the San Antonio Conservation Society conveyed its interest in certain lands used in connection with said San Jose Mission National Historic Site to the State of Texas for the purposes and under conditions therein described; and

WHEREAS, certain tracts of land owned by the San Antonio Conservation Society were not included in the above referred to instrument and said San Antonio Conservation Society now desires to convey said tracts of land to the State Parks board.

NOW, THEREFORE, KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS; that the San Antonio Conservation Society, acting herein by and through its President, for and in consideration of the agreement of grantees herein to preserve, maintain and operate said properties in the aggregate known as San Jose Mission National Historical Site under the conditions of and for the purposes stipulated in those several agreements hereinabove referred to, HAS GRANTED, SOLD AND CONVEYED and by these presents does GRANT, SELL AND CONVEY unto the State of Texas, all those certain tracts of land, together with all improvements thereon, lying and being situated in Bexar County, Texas, and described as follows, to-wit:

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Harris, Ethel Wilson, House  
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Verbal boundary description, cont.

Being an irregular shaped tract of land out of the San Jose Mission lands, and lying between Trawalter Drive and the Old San Jose Mission Ditch, part of said ditch being the Northeast line of the Texas State Parks Board tract, and being out of Bexar County Block 4001, said tract of land being more particularly described as follows:

BEGINNING: At a point in the Southeast line of the Joe Reyes tract, said point being the Northwest corner of the Texas State Parks Board Tract, same being the Southwest corner of the San Antonio Conservation Society Tract, said point also being N.23°13'E. 97.5 feet from the Southeast corner of the Reyes tract in the North line of Mission Road.

THENCE: N.23°13'E. with said Joe Reyes Southeast line, same being the San Antonio Conservation Society Northwest line at 96.0' cross the Joe Reyes Northeast line and continuing with the Reyes Southeast line extended 135.2 feet to its intersection with the South line of Trawalter Drive for a total distance of 231.2 feet.

THENCE: With said South line of Trawalter Drive as follows:  
Easterly 72.9 feet along the arc of a curve to the right whose radius is 379.32 and delta angle is 23°48' to its

P.T. S.60°10'E. 167.2 feet to the P.C. of a curve to the right. Easterly 137.9 feet along the arc of said curve whose radius is 379.32 feet and delta angle is 20°50' to its P.T. S.59°20'E. 213.0 feet to the P.C. of a curve to the right. Southeasterly 195.1 feet along the arc of said curve whose radius is 379.32 and delta angle is 29°28' to its P.T. S.9°52'E. 162.0 feet to its intersection with the North line of Pyron Avenue and also with the old San Jose Mission Ditch.

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Harris, Ethel Wilson, House  
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Verbal boundary description, cont.

4103 East 335

THENCE: with the said Old San Jose Mission Ditch and its meanders  
as follows:  
N.13°01'W. 110.0 feet to an angle in same.  
N.13°52'W. 39.5 feet to an angle in same.  
N.31°11'W. 36.5 feet to an angle in same.  
N.57°25'W. 30.0 feet to an angle in same.  
E.61°55'W. 31.5 feet to an angle in same.  
N.79°21'W. 113.0 feet to an angle in same.  
N.68°50'W. 52.3 feet to an angle in same.  
N.62°29'W. 75.8 feet to an angle in same.  
N.48°59'W. 34.5 feet to a point.

THENCE: S.39°52'W. 152.7 feet with the South line of the herein  
described tract same being the North line of the Texas  
State Parks Board Tract to the place of beginning.

Containing 2.00 acres of land more or less.

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the above described premises, together with all and  
singular the rights and appurtenances thereto in any wise belonging, unto the  
State of Texas, for park purposes only, so long as the same shall be preserved,  
maintained and operated by or under the direction of the grantee herein as the  
San Jose Mission National Historic Site, and in the event of the termination of  
such agreement or agreements, or maintenance or operation thereunder, the herein  
described premises shall thereupon immediately revert to and vest in the San Antonio  
Conservation Society, or its successors and assigns; and the said Society does here-  
by bind itself, its successors and assigns to warrant and forever defend all and  
singular, the said premises unto the State of Texas, against every person whomso-  
ever lawfully claiming or to claim the same, or any part thereof, by, through or  
under said grantor.

In witness whereof the San Antonio Conservation Society has this 23rd  
day of September, 1950, caused these presents to be subscribed by its  
President and its Secretary.

SAN ANTONIO CONSERVATION SOCIETY

By Mrs. Helen D. ...  
President of the San Antonio  
Conservation Society

Mrs. Ruth ...  
Secretary of the San Antonio Conservation  
Society

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Harris, Ethel Wilson, House  
Name of Property

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Verbal boundary description, cont.

STATE OF TEXAS  
COUNTY OF BEXAR

Before me, Grace Larson, a notary public, of Bexar County, Texas, on this day personally appeared Ethel Wilson Harris, president of the San Antonio Conservation Society, known to me to be the person and officer whose name is subscribed to the foregoing instrument and acknowledged to me that the same was the act of the said San Antonio Conservation Society, a corporation and that she executed the same as the act of such corporation for the purpose and consideration therein expressed, and in the capacity therein stated.

Given under my hand and seal of office, this the 20<sup>th</sup> day of February, 1950.



Grace Larson  
Notary Public in and for  
Bexar County, Texas.  
GRACE LARSON  
Notary Public - Bexar County, Texas

Filed for record July 17, 1958, at 9:47 o'clock AM.  
Recorded July 25, 1958, at 2:37 o'clock PM.  
FRED HUNTRESS, County Clerk, Bexar County, Texas.  
By Andrew Gay Jr. Deputy.

Boundary Justification

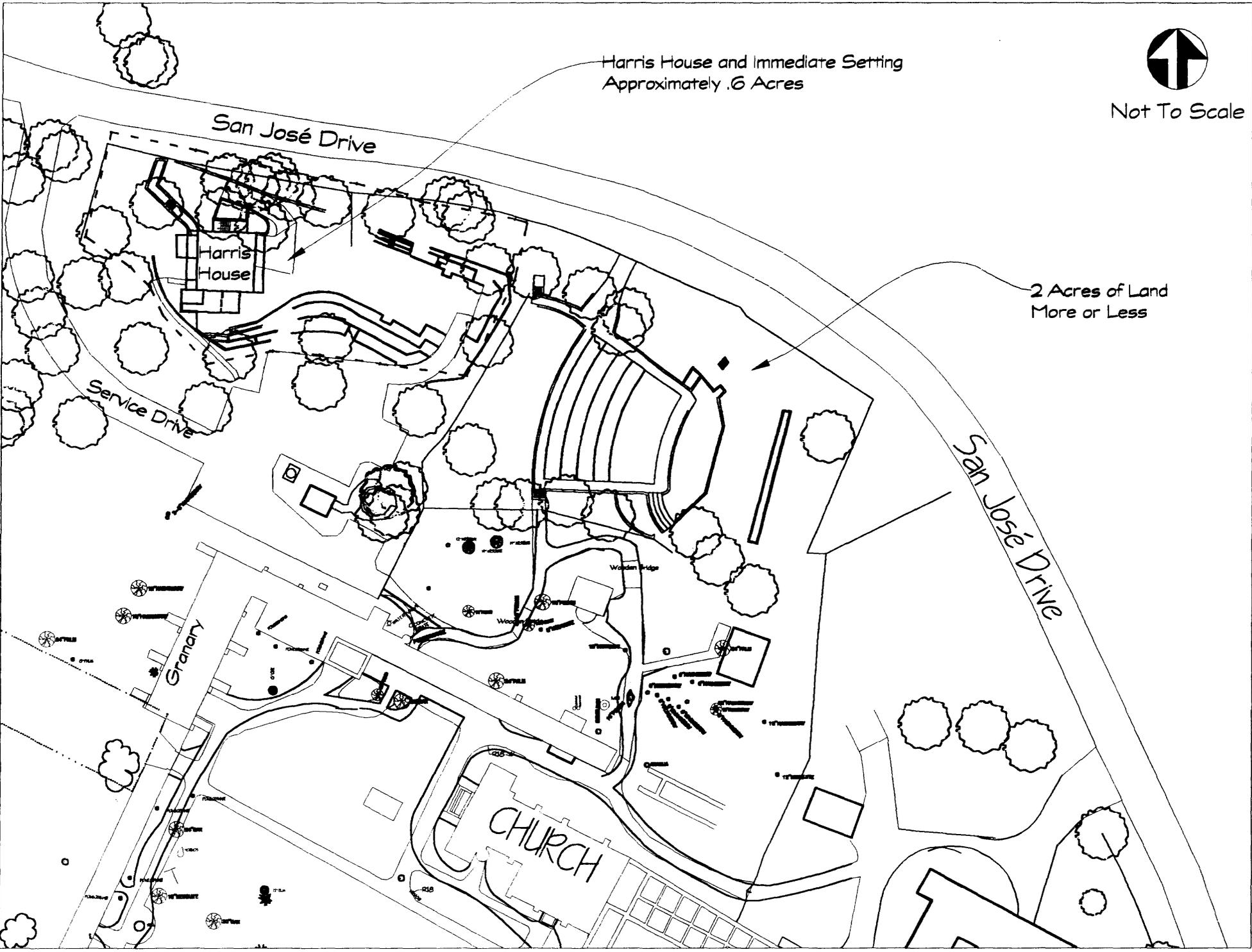
The irregular 2-acre tract on which the Ethel Wilson Harris House was constructed also includes an amphitheater, grist mill, and all property between the remnant of the San José *acequia* (irrigation ditch) and Trawalter Drive, now known as San José Drive. (See attached map). Only the amphitheater, constructed in the 1950s, is related to Ethel Harris. It was built through the efforts of Mrs. Harris and was the site of various plays offered to the public visiting the mission. The amphitheater does not contribute to the significance of the home under consideration. The mill is associated with Mission San José – listed separately in the National Register of Historic Places. Only the house and its immediate setting are included in this nomination. This area is separated by a privacy fence and mature trees to the west, a service drive and parking lot on the south, San José Drive to the north and a plank fence on the east (measuring ca. .6 acres).

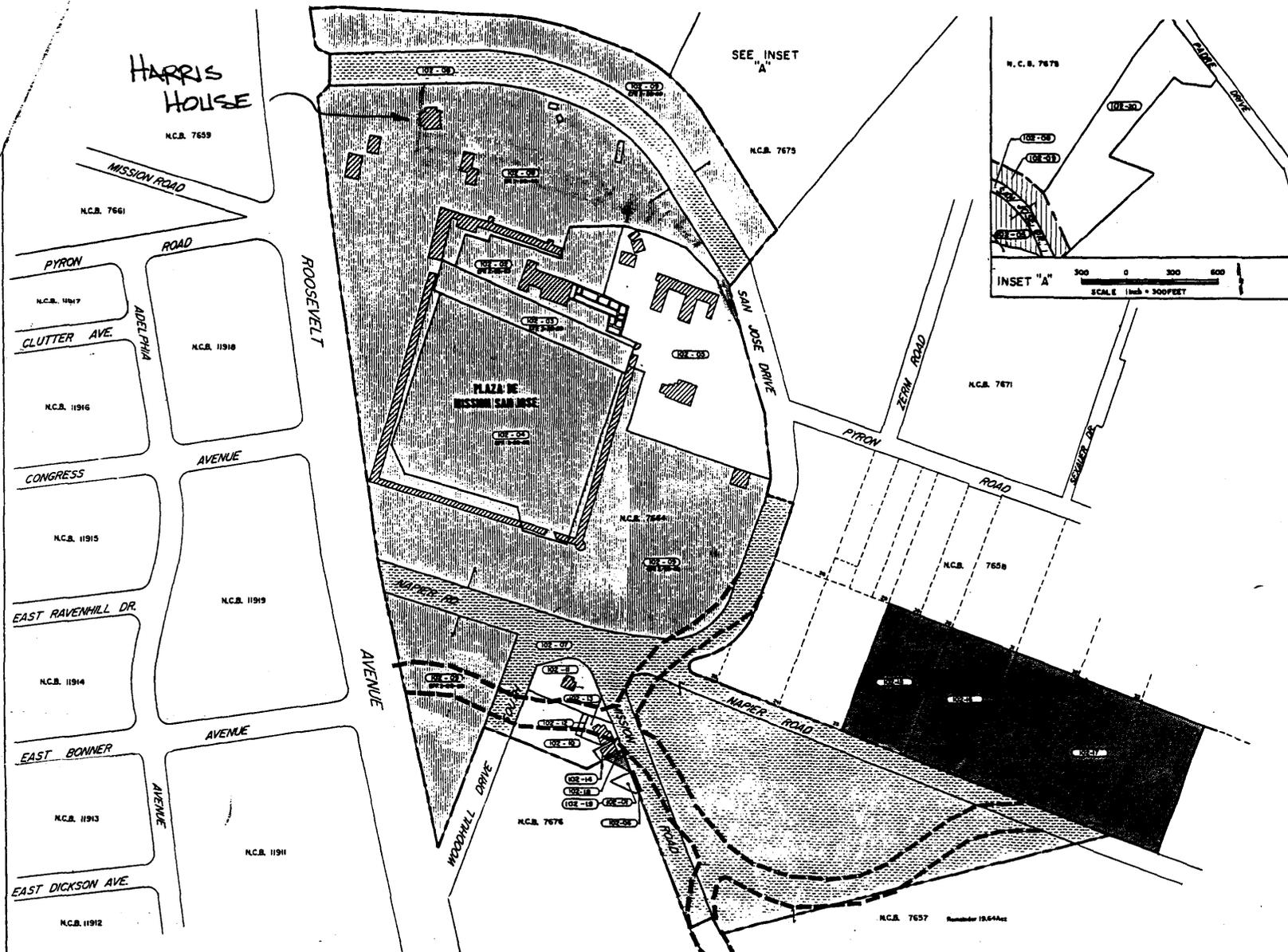


Not To Scale

Harris House and Immediate Setting  
Approximately .6 Acres

2 Acres of Land  
More or Less





COM-D-94	102-01	ROBLES, GERTRUDE, ET AL.	0.02	FEF-0
	102-02	ARCHBISHOPS OF SAN ANTONIO	1.06	LTF
	102-03	STATE OF TEXAS, ET AL.	0.63	LTF
	102-04	STATE OF TEXAS, ET AL.	3.90	LTF
	102-06	ARCHBISHOPS OF SAN ANTONIO	+ 2.66	LTF
COM-D-94	102-06	ROBLES, GERTRUDE, ET AL.	0.01	FEF
	102-07	CITY OF SAN ANTONIO	10.15	LTF
	102-08	CITY OF SAN ANTONIO	1.45	RDW
	102-09	STATE OF TEXAS	+ 16.80	LTF
	102-10	MORENO, MELCHOR, ET. U.	0.44	FEF
	102-11	A. B. A. PROPERTIES	0.32	FEF
	102-12	ORTIZ, MARIO & CLAUDIA	0.01	FEF
	102-13	EPSTEIN, STEVEN J.	0.06	FEF
	102-14	HERNERA, RUTH A.	0.04	FEF
COM-D-97	102-10	CASIAS, PETE L., ET AL.	1.00	FEF-0
COM-D-98	102-16	LOZANO, RICHARD W., ET. U.	1.00	FEF-0
PUR-D-08	102-17	BAKER, VERA E. AYALA	3.00	FEF-0
SEC-D-	102-18	L. B. H. LEASING CO., LTD.	0.02	FEF-0
SVE-D-	102-19	TO: L. B. H. LEASING CO., LTD.	-0.02	FEF-0
	102-20	POPE, WANDA GRANNAN, ET. AL.	9.71	FEF-0

AREA OF STUDY

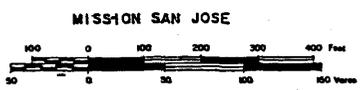
EN. = EFFECTIVE DATE OF COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT  
 + FEE ACQUISITION LATER IF AVAILABLE  
 N.C.B. = NEW CITY BLOCK

LEGEND

	FEDERAL LAND
	FEDERAL LAND (LESS THAN FEE)
	PUBLIC LAND
	PRIVATE LAND
	TRACT NUMBER
	PARK BOUNDARY
	TRACT BOUNDARY
	TRACT BOUNDARY (LESS THAN FEE)
	ACQUISITION DEFERRED

102-01	102-02	102-03	102-04	102-06	102-07	102-08	102-09	102-10	102-11	102-12	102-13	102-14	102-16	102-17	102-18	102-19	102-20

ESTABLISHED: NOVEMBER 1978  
 BOUNDARY CHANGE: NOVEMBER 15, 1982, NOVEMBER 6, 1987 & NOVEMBER 28, 1990 - PUBLIC LAW 101-428  
 DATE DRAWN: NOVEMBER, 1991  
 MAPPED BY: THE DIVISION OF LAND RESOURCES, SOUTHWEST REGION  
 REVISED: 3-13-2006



DATE BY: 6/1/78	CHK BY: 7/27
APPR BY: AK	
REGION: SOUTHWEST	
DRAWING NO: 472	80,028-3
SHEET: 3	OF 12

UNITED STATES  
 DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
 NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
 DIVISION OF LAND RESOURCES

SAN ANTONIO MISSIONS  
 NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK  
 BEXAR COUNTY  
 TEXAS  
 TITLE: SEGMENT 102

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National Park Service**

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**SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD**

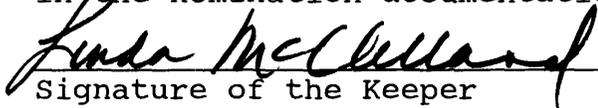
NRIS Reference Number: 01000325

Property Name: Harris, Ethel Wilson, House

County: Bexar County State: Texas

Multiple Name

-----  
This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

  
Signature of the Keeper

April 3, 2001  
Date of Action

=====  
Amended Items in Nomination:

Section 3. Federal Agency Certification. The level of significance is, hereby, entered as "local."

Section 10. Geographical Data. The following is, hereby, added to clarify the verbal boundary description:

"The boundaries of the .6 acre parcel being nominated correspond to a dotted line on the accompanying map, and are drawn to follow the privacy fence and row of mature trees on the west, the southern curblineline of San Jose Drive on the north, the existing plank fence on the east, and the northern edge of the service drive and parking lot on the south."

-----  
The National Park Service and the Texas State Historic Preservation Office were notified of this amendment.

**DISTRIBUTION:**

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)