

**Dallas Landmark Commission  
Landmark Nomination Form**

**1. Name**

historic: Luna Tortilla Factory  
and/or common: Luna Tortilla Factory

date: August 1995

**2. Location**

address: 1615 Mckinney  
location/neighborhood: Little Mexico  
block: 298 lot: land survey: tract size:

**3. Current Zoning**

PD 193 (1-2)

**4. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agricultural	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> residence
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessibility</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes:restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes:unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> other, specify
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	

**5. Ownership**

Current Owner: Francisco Luna  
Contact: Franciso Luna Phone: 521-2844  
Address: 5016 Denton Dr. City: Dallas State: TX. Zip: 75235

**6. Form Preparation**

Date: August 1995  
Name & Title: Carolyn James  
Organization: Designation Task Force  
Contact: Kate Singleton Phone: 670-5200

**7. Representation on Existing Surveys**

Alexander Survey (citywide)  local  state  national  National Register  
H.P.L. Survey (CBD)  A  B  C  D  Recorded TX Historic Ldmk  
Oak Cliff   TX Archaeological Ldmk  
Victorian Survey   
Dallas Historic Resources Survey, Phase   high  medium  low

*For Office Use Only*

Date Rec'd: \_\_\_\_\_ Survey Verified: Y N by: \_\_\_\_\_ Field Check by: \_\_\_\_\_ Petitions Needed: Y N

Nomination:      Archaeological      Site      Structure(s)      Structure & Site      District

**8. Historic Ownership**original owner: Maria Luna

significant later owner(s): \_\_\_\_\_

**9. Construction Dates**original: 1938alterations/additions: 1961**10. Architect**original construction: Womack and Cozzo

alterations/additions: \_\_\_\_\_

**11. Site Features**

natural: \_\_\_\_\_

urban design: \_\_\_\_\_

**12. Physical Description**

Condition, check one:

 excellent good fair deteriorated ruins unexposed unaltered altered

Check one:

 original site moved(date \_\_\_\_\_)

*Describe present and original (if known) physical appearance. Include style(s) of architecture, current condition and relationship to surrounding fabric (structures, objects, etc). elaborate on pertinent materials used and style(s) of architectural detailing, embellishments and site details.*

The Luna Tortilla Factory was built in 1938 and is an example of the Spanish Eclectic architectural style. The Spanish Eclectic style draws upon the entire history and repertoire of Spanish architecture which includes Moorish, Byzantine, Gothic and Renaissance influences (McAlester). The identifying features of the Spanish Eclectic are a tile roof, the use of arches in conjunction with doors and windows, an asymmetrical facade, plastered walls and decorative grilles and balconies (McAlester). Elements of the Spanish Eclectic are apparent in the Luna Tortilla Factory and include the barrel vaulted openings, the wooden grilles, the tile roof, the entrance tower and the balconies.

On July 20, 1938 Maria Luna took a building permit to construct a new factory described as "a two story brick building costing \$14,000." (City of Dallas Building Permits) A local contracting firm, Womack and Cozzo, was hired to construct the building. This local firm advertised themselves as "builders of fine homes" and "get the best, it pays." (City Directory 1937)

The Luna Tortilla Factory occupies a corner site at the intersection of McKinney Avenue and Caroline Street. The factory has a tan brick exterior, and the wood trim is painted with a maroon paint. The roof of the factory is flat except for the red tile-covered eave that extends at an angle from the roof edge and that is visible from both the McKinney Avenue and Caroline Street elevations. The primary facade of the factory faces McKinney Avenue. In plan the building is a polygon. The factory has two wings that are pinned by an elevated entrance tower. To the West, the factory abuts directly an El Fenix Restaurant. The factory can be divided into four parts for ease of discussion: (1) the primary or southern elevation, (2) the entrance tower, (3) the side or eastern elevation and (4) the rear or northern elevation.

The primary elevation is a two story wing anchored at its eastern end by a raised two story entrance tower. On the ground floor, the planar brick wall is accentuated by seven bays. Three arched windows that have a decorative turned wooden grille at the apex of each are interspersed between three utilitarian doors; one of the doors has a canopy cantilevered over it, and another recessed door is lit by a decorative light fixture. The brick work of the arch-surround stands in

## Continuation Sheet

Item # 12

(Page 2 of 3)

a soldier course that follows the contour of the arch. The bottom two-foot strip of each arched window has been enclosed with a flat tile that matches the trim color. An approximately two-foot high strip of brick that runs along the base of the wall is painted to match the maroon trim. The second floor of the factory houses apartments. The facade of the second floor is distinguished by a recessed balcony that is framed by two small octagonal windows protected by a metal screen consisting of two pairs of crossed, raised metal members. The balcony is set back under the main roof of the building. Four decorative wrought iron columns support the roof. The recessed balcony facade consists of a symmetrical arrangement of a door framed by two pairs of double-hung windows of six lights each. An additional pair of double hung windows is set into the recessed wall. The second floor of the building steps in approximately two feet where it meets the neighboring El Fenix building.

The entrance tower that anchors both wings of the building displays identical facades on both McKinney Avenue and Caroline Street. Slightly greater in height than the two wings, the entrance tower has a low pitched pyramidal roof. Entry into the store through the tower is via two arched opening that are both infilled with a metal and glass door framed by two large sheets of glass. The original doors to the factory were two inches thick and were manufactured in Oklahoma City (Francisco Luna, Interview). The entry was setback and the doors were placed at a 45 degree angle. These double doors opened out and had sidelights on either side of the doors. These doors are now on the Pike Park recreation building (Francisco Luna, Interview). Shielding each entrance is a maroon canvas awning that rests on two, curved wrought iron supports. Directly above each door is a floor to ceiling double-hung window divided into six lights. Each window is embellished by a wrought iron balustrade. The railing of the balustrade has a decorative element at its center. Just below the roof line on both facades of the tower are identical fluorescent signs that read "Luna's". The elongated white canopies over the signs protect the glass from freezing rain (Francisco Luna, Interview). An element of importance to the entrance tower is the factory's street signage. A florescent sign supported on a white metal pole at the corner of McKinney and Caroline displays the inscription "Luna's Tortilla Factory" with white letters against a maroon background. This sign has been in this location since 1938 (Francisco Luna, Interview).

The eastern facade of the factory that faces Caroline Street is also two-stories and made out of tan brick. This elevation of the building is less decorative than the primary facade. At ground level, the painted brick course continues along the lower two-feet of the building. An entrance to the working section of the building is framed by two double-hung windows to the right and one to the left. Toward the rear of the building are two former service bays that are now bricked in. One of these bays contains a nondescript wooden door. On the second floor, the wall is interrupted by five windows. Two windows are in line with the openings in the floor below. Another small window is located near the center of the wing, and the last two windows occur as a pair. A significant element of this eastern elevation is the industrial, aluminum vent that emerges from the rear wall of the factory. Also visible on this elevation of the building is a large storage tank with the signage "Luna's Tortilla Inc". Two buildings that are separate from the main building of the factory extend toward the rear of the property. One is a single story brick building with one window and an exterior ladder that runs diagonally up the wall to provide access to the building's roof top. Abutting this building is a low brick building with a large garage door type opening.

**Continuation Sheet**

**Item # 12**

**(Page 3 of 3 )**

The rear or northern elevation of the factory is also made out of brick. The two story elevation is broken on the second floor by four windows. Also visible is the above mentioned vent as well as the storage tank that sits directly in front of the rear facade. The rear of the building has a flat roof and lacks the decorative tile of the other elevations.

### **13. Historical Significance**

*Statement of historical and cultural significance. Include: cultural influences, special events and important personages, influences on neighborhood, on the city, etc.*

The Luna Tortilla Factory is one of the few remaining physical reminders of the vitality that existed in Dallas' first Hispanic barrio called Little Mexico. Little Mexico was at one time home to a predominantly Hispanic community which at its height numbered 8,000 to 10,000 people (The Dallas Downtown News, November 13, 1978). The social center of Little Mexico was Pike Park which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and Hispanic owned businesses such as the Luna Tortilla Factory created an entrepreneurial core that enriched the community. The Luna Tortilla Factory is important to the history of Dallas not only for its success as an Hispanic owned business but also for its ties to the Luna family, a family which starting with the matriarch, Maria, has made considerable contributions to the Hispanic community of Dallas.

The historic boundaries of Little Mexico begin at the intersection of Cedar Springs and McKinney Avenue and extend eastward along McKinney to Akard, north on Akard to Harry Hines, north on Harry Hines to Wichita, then east to Bookhout and north again to the railroad tracks (The Dallas Downtown News, November 13, 1978). From this point, the barrio proceeded west behind Little Mexico Village and Pike Park, meandered around the American Paper Company complex to Alamo, then ran south to Cedar Springs and back to McKinney. The site occupied by Little Mexico was originally the first planned residential development in Dallas and was occupied primarily by wealthy Jewish families as well as by an immigrant population that included Germans, French, Swiss, Irish and Scottish people (The Dallas Downtown News, November 13, 1978). But when the railroad tracks were laid in 1873, this area was suddenly "on the wrong side of the tracks", and the wealthy inhabitants moved to an area known as the Cedars around Old City Park (The Dallas Downtown News, November 13, 1978). As a result of the departure of the affluent, the site became home to a mix of poor Jews, German immigrants, laborers, African-Americans and prostitutes (The Dallas Downtown News, November 13, 1978).

In 1859, the first, small group of Mexicans were recorded in Dallas, and over the remainder of the nineteenth century, the Mexican population of Dallas grew steadily (Amy Simpson). However, it was not until the turn of the century when Dallas saw an increase in railroad related employment that significant numbers of Mexicans began arriving in Dallas in search of jobs (Amy Simpson, 2). The railroad provided jobs for the new immigrants and, moreover, railroad cars often served as their first Texas home (Gilbert Bailon). The railroad car community, located near the MKT track, formed the core of Little Mexico (Amy Simpson, 2). Little Mexico grew rapidly after World War I during a period of instability in Mexico from 1910 to 1920 (Amy Simpson, 3). By 1920, between 7,000 and 10,000 Mexicans were living within "the cramped ten-block boundaries of Little Mexico" that was described contemporaneously as having "irregular, narrow, twisted, unpaved streets, flanked by ancient wooden houses and by wooden shacks grouped closely, as if the inhabitants would have only to thrust a hand out the side window to shake their neighbor's hand in greeting a buenos dias, while nearby stand sky-reaching smokestacks and the comparatively enormous buildings." The flow of immigrants was unlimited until 1929 when Texas imposed a quota on Mexican immigration (Amy Simpson, 3). Into the 1950's Little Mexico was a cohesive, densely populated neighborhood that was in many ways insular and independent (The Dallas Downtown News, November 13, 1978). But with the beginnings of the urban rehabilitation movement, slum areas that included Little Mexico were bulldozed and in some cases rebuilt (The Dallas Morning News June 9, 1957). The development of two major expressways severed the district and encouraged its decline (Amy Simpson, 9). Within the boundaries of Little Mexico, families grew and businesses flourished. The story of Maria Luna and the Luna Tortilla Factory is proof the capitalistic spirit that thrived in this immigrant population.

## Continuation Sheet

Item # 13

(Page 2 of 4)

Maria Luna was a widow with two young children when she came to Little Mexico from San Luis Potosi, Mexico, in 1923 at the age of 23 (The Dallas Morning News November 24, 1989). Possessing little education and speaking no English, Maria Luna obtained work in Porero's grocery store in order to provide for her children (The Dallas Morning News July 7, 1991). Despite her obstacles, Maria Luna was "business-minded" and used her prior experience of running a butcher shop in Mexico to her advantage (Francisco Luna, Interview). After working at the store for eight months, Maria Luna recognized an opportunity and purchased a repossessed corn grinder "on time" from the owner of the store. In February 1924, less than one year after coming to the United States, she opened her first tortilla factory at 2209 Caroline Street within the boundaries of Little Mexico. The Caroline Street factory was housed in a two-story, gable-roofed frame building that was previously a carpentry shop (Francisco Luna, Interview). Carmen Ramirez (Luna) recalls, "But when I came to Dallas as a six year-old girl from San Luis Potosi in 1923, all these blocks were filled with houses and all the Mexican people lived here" (The Dallas Downtown News, November 13, 1978). Maria Luna and her two children, Carmen and Francisco X, lived above the factory. As Florentino Ramirez, Maria Luna's grandson, states, "most of the business people lived in the neighborhood, above their stores or next door. We lived in an apartment upstairs from the tortilla factory" (The Dallas Downtown News, November 13, 1978).

Traditionally, the making of tortillas, a staple of the Mexican diet, was the work of women who ground the corn into the *masa* which is the principal ingredient in tortillas. When she purchased her corn grinder, Maria Luna did not know how to make tortillas, and she had to depend upon the expertise of the women of Little Mexico to help her launch her new business (The Dallas Morning News July 7, 1991). However, because the husbands of many of the women were reluctant to allow their wives to work outside of the household, Maria filled dishpans with the *masa* which she took to the women's homes each morning, and later in the day she collected the finished tortillas (The Dallas Morning News July 7, 1991). With time the husbands recognized that Maria was honorable, and by 1925, approximately 25 women were working at the tortilla factory producing about 500 tortillas by hand each day. Maria Luna did not rest upon her early success (Francisco Luna, Interview). She was constantly searching for news ways to improve her business (Francisco Luna, Interview). According to her son Francisco, his mother installed stoves along one wall of the factory in an assembly line fashion and built a framework to hold ten #3 galvanized tubs in order to speed the cooking of the corn. Thus, the factory could cook ten tubs of corn at once (Francisco Luna, Interview). In 1929 the factory purchased 56 sacks of corn (each sack equals two bushels and weighs 112 pounds) every week, and Francisco Luna tells an amusing story during Prohibition when government agents came to Luna's because of the large purchases of corn. (Francisco Luna, Interview). Maria Luna told the officers, "You're crazy," when accused of producing illegal moonshine (Francisco Luna, Interview). The officers went on to search the premises for the sugar and a still used in alcohol production but found nothing.

Maria Luna was clearly an ambitious business woman. By 1929, the factory began home delivery to Little Mexico, the West Dallas Barrio, Cement City and El Rancho Grande which occupied the present site of Texas Stadium (The Dallas Morning News, July 7, 1991). At this time they were also shipping tortillas to grocers throughout Texas and even as far as St. Louis, and about this time a man named Elmer Doolin began buying *masa* (The Dallas Downtown News, November 13, 1978). Eventually, Doolin's orders grew to over 1,000 pounds per day and Francisco states, "We knew he was making chips over there on Summer Street, but we

## Continuation Sheet

Item # 13

(Page 3 of 4)

didn't find out until later that he was making Frito's." In 1936, Luna's Tortilla Factory entered mainstream Dallas life when Sammy's Restaurant in Highland Park Village became a customer (The Dallas Morning News, July 7, 1991). Eventually, the factory's business spread to New Orleans, East Texas, Oklahoma and Missouri. By the late 1930's it was obvious that the business required new quarters, and the present factory was opened in 1938 at 1615 McKinney Avenue on a site approximately ten to fifteen feet away from the Caroline Street factory (Francisco Luna, Interview). The original factory was demolished in the second half of the 1950's by order of the City of Dallas (Francisco Luna, Interview). Francisco Luna to this day laments the destruction of this early building that he dreamed of turning into a museum to house the old-time tortilla production equipment in honor of his mother's memory (Francisco Luna, Interview).

The new factory sat on a block with sixteen to twenty houses that were long and narrow and as Francisco Luna says, "Everything was in one block" (Francisco Luna, Interview). Maria Luna and her family moved into one of four apartments above the factory. Three apartments each measured approximately 640 square feet while the family's unit was a much larger and had four bedrooms and three bathrooms (Francisco Luna, Interview). The McKinney Avenue factory was located amongst the few Mexican restaurants in Dallas at the time (The Dallas Downtown News, November 13, 1978). In the vicinity of the factory was the original El Fenix founded by Miguel Martinez (The Dallas Downtown News, November 13, 1978). In 1946, the factory was mechanized (Francisco Luna, Interview). Francisco Luna was from the beginning an integral part of the factory's success, and at twelve years old he began making deliveries in a Model T to local businesses (Francisco Luna, Interview). He would call the restaurants in the morning and commence delivering the tortillas all day (Francisco Luna, Interview). Francisco Luna attended Cumberland Hill Elementary, and, after graduating from Crozier Tech High School, he wanted to go to medical school but remained with the family business and completed one business course at Metropolitan (Francisco Luna, Interview). Francisco and his wife, Alejandra, traveled to eating establishments that sold chili and taught the proprietors how to make enchiladas; thus they successfully increased the market demand for their tortillas (The Dallas Morning News July 7, 1991). "There were no Mexican restaurants outside of McKinney Avenue but a lot of places sold chili. We'd go into every place that had a chili sign and teach them how to make Mexican dishes, how to prepare the rice and beans and guacamole," according to Francisco Luna (The Dallas Downtown News, November 13, 1978). The close-knit nature of this family becomes obvious upon learning that it was not until 1951 that Francisco, his pregnant wife and their three children moved into their own home leaving the apartment over the factory to his mother, his sister, her husband and one child (The Dallas Morning News July 7, 1991). Although the Luna Tortilla Factory is similar in appearance to its original condition, the factory was remodeled in the summer of 1961 when the service area was decreased and the factory area increased. A mosaic interior designed by Pedro Aguire, Jr. was also commissioned at this time (The Dallas Downtown News, January 1, 1961). On Wednesday, November 22, 1989, a four-alarm blaze damaged the roof and second floor of the Luna Tortilla Factory (The Dallas Morning News November 24, 1989).

Maria Luna's legacy extends beyond the successful business she and her family built. She was well-respected in the community and generous to those in need (Francisco Luna, Interview). As a founding member with a dozen or so other Hispanic business owners, Maria Luna was involved in the Second Mexican Chamber of Commerce - the precursor to the Dallas Hispanic Chamber of Commerce - which was established in 1940 with the mission to foster improved relations among the Hispanic businesses and to expand business contacts out into the Dallas business community (Gilbert Bailon). Maria Luna was also involved in several clubs as well

**Continuation Sheet**

Item # 13

(Page 4 of 4)

as in her church, Cathedral Guadalupe (Francisco Luna, Interview). Maria Luna, who was born on January 31, 1900, became an American citizen in 1941 and died on March 29, 1972 (Francisco Luna, Interview). In 1989, the City of Dallas honored the memory of Maria Luna with a park in her name. The park is located at Mapel Avenue and Lucas. Francisco Luna dedicated his energy to Luna's Tortilla Factory. Now retired from the business, he modestly recalls the satisfaction that he feels from his involvement in two community projects. One was the pilot program to clean-up up Little Mexico in the mid to late 1950's called the El Barrio Study that was recognized nationally as one of the most successful project of its type and the other is his work with his wife in helping to transport donor eyes to Mexico with the Lion's Club (Francisco Luna, Interview). In the tradition of a successful family business, the factory is managed by the fourth generation of Lunas; three of Francisco's six children are actively involved in the business (Francisco Luna, Interview). Today, the factory produces 1500 dozen tortillas per day, employs 18 people and orders 5000 pounds of corn every two weeks (Francisco Luna, Interview).



LANDMARK DESIGNATION FORM  
**CRITERIA FOR ELIGIBILITY**

---

**X** \_\_\_ **History, heritage and culture:** Represents the historical development, ethnic heritage or cultural characteristics of the city, state, or country.

\_\_\_ **Historic event:** Location of or association with the site of a significant historic event.

**X** \_\_\_ **Significant persons:** Identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the city, state, or country.

**X** \_\_\_ **Architecture:** Embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, landscape design, method of construction, exceptional craftsmanship, architectural innovation, or contains details which represent folk or ethnic art.

\_\_\_ **Architect or master builder:** Represents the work of an architect, designer or master builder whose individual work has influenced the development of the city, state or country.

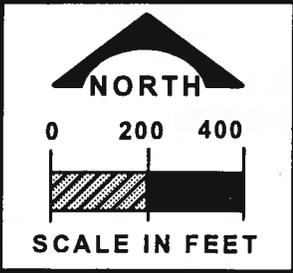
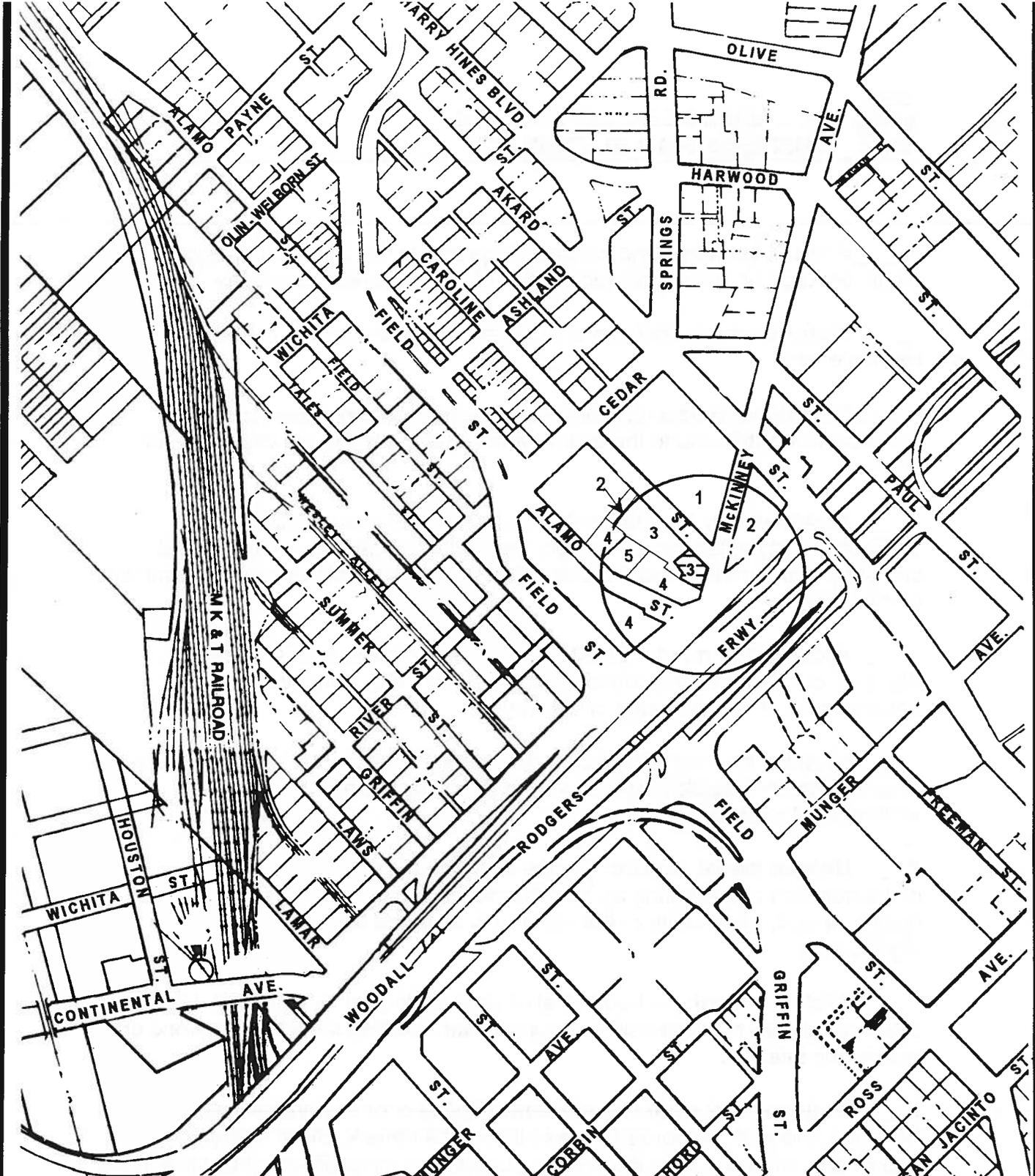
\_\_\_ **Historic context:** Relationship to other distinctive buildings, sites, or areas which are eligible for preservation based on historic, cultural, or architectural characteristics.

**X** \_\_\_ **Unique visual feature:** Unique location of singular physical characteristics representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community or the city that is a source of pride or cultural significance.

\_\_\_ **Archeological:** Archeological or paleontological value in that it has produced or can be expected to produce data affecting theories of historic or prehistoric interest.

**X** \_\_\_ **National and state recognition:** Eligible of or designated as a National Historic Landmark, Recorded Texas Historic Landmark, State Archeological Landmark, American Civil Engineering Landmark, or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

**X** \_\_\_ **Historic education:** Represents as era of architectural, social, or economic history that allows an understanding of how the place or area was used by past generations.



**NOTIFICATION**

200' Area of Notification

5 Property Owners Notified

Map No. J-7

Case No. Z001-152/10019-C(JA)