

JOHN S. HARRISON HOUSE ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTIONS OF BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES

Jean M. Heide © 2001

The John S. Harrison House Homestead consists of a 12.856 acre parcel out of a 127-acre tract as described in the deed from Henry Friesenhahn to August Friesenhahn and recorded in Volume 1373, Page 312, Deed Records of Bexar County, Texas; said parcel being out of the Torribio Herrera Survey No. 68, Abstract 309, City of Selma, Bexar County, Texas. Its Architectural Classification is "Folk Victorian." The original materials used in the construction of the house are: wood, stone, asphalt, cedar shake under corrugated metal and concrete.

The Harrison House is a 1 story, 1852 stone building that was enlarged with wood frame additions and a Folk Victorian detailed full porch in c.1852.

The house is a seven-bay, hipped roof frame dwelling with a seven bay shed roof porch stretched across the entire front (east) façade. The center portion, consists of three bays, is a white washed stone building dating to 1852. Wood frame additions with wood novelty siding (c.1950) run the full length of the north and south walls of the original stone building and are finished on the west side with gabled ends nearly flush with the original west wall. A shed-roof addition is attached to the back half of the building's south addition. All sections of the house rest on pier and beam foundations of cedar posts or limestone blocks. The original roofing material was probably cedar shake shingles but it has been replaced over the years with corrugated metal.

The east elevation is divided into seven bays, with four windows and three doors distributed in an A-B-A-B-A-B-A pattern. The windows on the outermost bays are taller than those in the central bays, and feature 2/2 wood sashes. The central windows feature a 6/6 light configuration. The doors are paneled wood with transoms; the northernmost entry bay features a solid-core dark wood paneled door with a large oval beveled glass window. All doors on this elevation feature wooden screens decorated with turned decorative rails, and all windows are covered with metal screens.

The house sits on a bluff adjacent to the Cibolo Creek in Selma, Texas. Selma is about 16 miles northeast of San Antonio, Texas on Interstate Highway 35 half way between San Antonio and New Braunfels, Texas. With its first settler establishing a farm on the Cibolo Creek in 1847, William Davenport and John Brown are given credit as being the official founders of Selma as they were the large landholders of that time. Selma's city limits encompass a little over a 5-mile radius in Bexar, Guadalupe and Comal Counties and the town lies in a valley with the Balcones Escarpment to the west. Selma is experiencing a tremendous industrial growth with one of Texas' largest outdoor malls, The Forum, located at the juncture of IH-35 and Loop 1604 on its southeastern boundary less than two miles from the Harrison House. Retama Park (a horse race track) sits on IH-35 less than a mile from the Harrison home and is a major pull of tourists to the area. The original business district of Selma was destroyed with the widening of IH-35 in the 1950's and few of its older homes and none of its original businesses are left standing.

Continual residential growth has tripled the population of the city in since 2001. The John S. Harrison house is less than one mile from the junction of Evans Road and IH-35 and sits on the last remaining 12 acres of the original 127-acre tract directly in the middle of all this new growth.

The John S. Harrison House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in June 2006. The Nomination included all contiguous property owned by the City of Selma that was historically associated with the property.

In April 2009 the house was listed as a State Archeological Landmark by the Texas Historical Commission.

Cemeteries and Archeological Sites Outside the John S. Harrison House Homestead Property

Harrison & McCulloch Stage Stop at Evans Road and IH-35

Martin Schmid Family Cemetery located on the 18th Fairway on Olympia Hills Golf Course in Universal City

David G. Kincaid Family Cemetery located on the 18th Fairway on Olympia Hills Golf Course in Universal City

These two cemeteries were purchased from Andreas Stautzenberger in 1901 and excluded from any future real estate transactions. Sam Schmid and John Kincaid went together to the Bexar County Courthouse to have the cemeteries officially noted in the Bexar County Deed Records. Throughout the deed record history since 1901, the deeds contain the language "Save and Except for the Schmid and Kincaid Cemeteries." The cemeteries mysteriously disappeared in the 1950's during the construction of IH-35 through Selma. Headstones and fencing disappeared during that time as the cemeteries were located on the escarpment at the back of the Schmid farm near natural gravel pits that were accessed for the gravel to build the highway. In June 2002, the Texas Historical Commission awarded a Historical Marker to be placed at the 18th Fairway of the Olympia Hills Golf Course, which is now a municipal golf course owned and operated by the City of Universal City, Texas. Members of the descendants of both families, city dignitaries, and members of the San Antonio Conservation Society's Historic Farm and Ranch Committee attended the unveiling of the marker and reception at the golf course clubhouse. In 2009, the Kincaid Cemetery was re-established on the fairway complete with new fencing provided by the Selma Historical Foundation and headstones provided the Kincaid descendants. The Schmid Cemetery was "lost to history" as the legal metes and bounds description that would physically locate the cemetery on the fairway was

lost with the dismantling of the original fencing as the “legal description” documenting the Schmid Cemetery was based on the perimeter of the fence. A newspaper article in the San Antonio Light’s “Around the Plaza” dated Saturday, August 12, 1967, references a lawsuit brought by a Schmid descendant regarding the destruction of the cemetery. There were at least 14 people buried in the Schmid Cemetery.

Native American Campsites on original 127-acre Harrison Property and Olympia Hills Golf Course as noted in the archeological study done by Eric A. Schroeder of Paul Price Associates, Inc. in June 2002.

Archeological Sites Inside the John S. Harrison House Homestead Property

Outbuildings/Structures listed on National Register in June 2006

Wilhelm Geier House Foundation Remnants in conversations with Steven Jones of Raba Kistner, (consultants to the City of Selma) regarding the archeological digs done on the Harrison Property during the restoration/rehabilitation phase of the property.

The John S. Harrison House

The house sits at the back of what is now the Forest Creek Subdivision and is somewhat remote as it sits in the center of the last remaining 12 acres of the original farm. For over 15 years since the purchase of the property by the City of Selma, the property was very overgrown with dense underbrush and trees and was subject to vandalism and lack of care. The Olympia Hills Golf Course is located directly adjacent to the rear of the property. The house faces to the east and is surrounded by live oaks. A dirt road that parallels the Cibolo Creek runs along the north side of the property and passes directly beside the house. This road dating back to 1852 was the original private road belonging to the house that ran from the Old Austin Road at its juncture with the creek up to the house. The original John S. Harrison house was a single room dwelling made of limestone blocks and had a chimney and fireplace. The house was constructed in 1852 as the cornerstone of the house has that date inscribed on it. Around 1905, the last owner, Henry Friesenhahn, hired local Selma carpenter, Albert Albrecht, and had the original house encased within a story and a half, frame Victorian style structure.

The Bexar County Deed Records reference Harrison and his wife, Martha Jane, purchasing the property in 1852 after moving from New Braunfels to Selma. The Harrison’s purchased 127 acres made up from parcels of land bought from Johannes Kaderli, Adam Wuest and Henry Kempel along the Cibolo Creek just inside what is today the Bexar County border. (Johannes Kaderli and Adam Wuest had come to Texas with the original group of settlers arriving with Prince Carl of Solms from Braunfels, Germany. Prince Carl came to Texas in 1845 at the direction of the German Emigration

Company to establish a German Colony in Texas.) The Harrison's lived in the house for two years while John served as the first postmaster for Selma. Their home sat at the end of what was then to evolve into Hill Street and later into Evans Road about a half mile from the crossing of the old stage/post road (Old Austin Road) and Cibolo Creek, which is the location of the still-existing limecrete stage stop on Harrison's Star Route 6285 from Austin to San Antonio.

The Harrison's sold their farm to Wilhelm Geier and his son-in-law, Martin Schmid, in 1854 and moved to Pleasanton, Texas. The Schmid's made no significant changes to the house during the 40 years they lived there. In 1869, Geier and Schmid split the 127 acres into two sections: 30 acres owned by Geier and 97 acres owned by Schmid. Wilhelm Geier and his wife, Dorothea, did build a ramshackle, composite-type house of shingles, wood and stone on a pier and beam foundation just a few yards from the home of their daughter, Johanna, and her husband, Martin Schmid (the original Harrison house). It is believed that the Geier house was torn down in the late 1930's. The Schmid's lived in the original limestone block house until 1894 whereupon Sam Schmid (the surviving son) moved his widowed mother to the Government Hill area of San Antonio and Sam moved to his 450 acre farm at the Nine Mile Hill area off Fredericksburg Road in San Antonio (today San Antonio's medical complex). Sam's brother, William, had been a Bexar county deputy and was killed in a shootout in nearby Bracken, Texas in 1889. William was serving as Selma's postmaster at the time of his death. The Martin Schmid Family Cemetery was established in 1880 with the death of Martin Schmid. Martin, his in-laws, Wilhelm and Dorothea Geier, wife Johanna, son William and daughter Sedonia Haile, were all buried in the family cemetery at the southwestern edge of the 127-acre farm. The Texas Historical Commission awarded the Geier-Schmid Farm an historical marker that was placed at the site of the family cemetery on the 12th fairway of the Olympia Hills Golf Course in June 2002.

Andreas Stautzenberger along with his sons, Hugo and Armin, lived in the house from 1894 to 1905, when the Stautzenbergers sold the farm to Henry Friesenhahn in 1905. It was the Friesenhahn's who added the side additions, front porch, utility porch and back kitchen and side room after 1905. The Friesenhahn family owned and worked the farm for over 96 years. The farmhouse and its last remaining 12 acres were sold by Harold Friesenhahn (the grandson of Henry) to the City of Selma in December 2001.

Four-Room Addition (ca. 1905)

The house remained as John S. Harrison had built it from 1852 up until 1905 when the last family to own it (Henry Friesenhahn) built side additions and a front and side porch. The original outdoor staircase leading up to a sleeping loft in the attic was torn down for the addition on the south side of the house. The loft had two windows on the south side and one window on the north side that were covered over by the new additions. The original house was a two-room, limestone block house with an exit door at each elevation. The front room fireplace mantel was about five feet in height and five feet in width and was enclosed at the time of the 1905 additions. The chimney is still visible in the attic and one can look down the chimney to the living room level. "Sam Schmid's

Headquarters” is inscribed in longhand on the sleeping loft/attic’s north wall. The inscription dates back to about 1868. (Sam Schmid was a son of the house’s second owner, Martin Schmid.) Two small chimneys were added between each room of the 1905 additions to allow for wood burning stoves. A wooden porch complete with ginger bread lattice was built across the entire front of the house and down the north side in an “L” shape. Years later, in the 1930’s, the north corner of the side porch was removed and that lumber was used for the building of a small bathroom and a small kitchen adjacent to each other at the rear. The original wooden front door with oval glass pane on the north side 1905 addition had wooden floral adornments (wreath appliques) on the exterior side. The walls of both side additions were made of wood and the entire house had hardwood floors. The walls were wallpapered and then painted over in later years. The windows in the house are vertically sliding, wood-frame windows. The two front windows of the 1852 section were made of square-shaped, multi-panes of glass. There are three doors on the front of the house leading out onto the front porch. Each door opens to a main room. The front door to the far right (north side 1905 addition) opens to a bedroom which has a second bedroom connected to it through an interior doorway. The front bedroom was the original parlor room of the 1905 addition. The chandelier that graced the ceiling of the parlor has long since disappeared. The middle front door leads into the living room which was the front room of the original 1852 limestone block house. The living room has a doorway into the rear section that was the back room of the original house. The door leading from the front bedroom to the living room was an original doorway of the limestone block house. Through the far left front door is the 1905 south side addition containing the dining room, bathroom, kitchen and screened porch. In the 1960’s, Harold Friesenhahn enlarged the 1930’s kitchen and moved the old bathroom next to the screened porch at the left rear of the house. The door leading from the dining room into the living room is also an original doorway of the limestone block house. There is a second small wooden porch with lattice adornments on the north side addition that leads into the second bedroom at the right rear of the house. This side porch is the section remaining from the original “L” shaped porch that wrapped around the north corner of the house.

Auxiliary Features

Other historic resources on the site include a garage, wooden barn, smokehouse, shed, chicken coop and remnants of a modern 25 ft. windmill. A small, dilapidated wooden shed which held the cistern was still standing, however, the cistern itself is no longer there. The smokehouse is directly south and several yards from the screened porch on the south side of the house. A dilapidated wooden barn missing its doors and handmade (hammered) latches sat a few hundred yards to the west and rear of the house along with an open shed-type, two-car garage between the barn and the house. The remnants of the modern, metal windmill (without its blades) set in a concrete block stand directly adjacent to the rear of the house. The chicken coop is located at the rear of the house on the north side of the property adjacent to the road. This chicken coop was originally the carriage house. A hand-dug well that has been filled in with dirt is still located in the front yard. The depth of the well is approximately 50 feet. In the 1950’s, during the time the Friesenhahns were actively farming the land, a wooden bunkhouse with a clay floor was used by the farm hands, however, the bunkhouse no longer exists.

John S. Harrison House Restoration/Site Development Plan

The City of Selma purchased the property from former Mayor Harold Friesenhahn in December 2001 for the express purpose of restoring the Harrison House as a community center or library. The house was to have been Phase II of the TEA-21 Enhancement Project for the Selma Stage Stop. Since the awarding of the grant money to the City of Selma by the Texas Highway Department for the restoration of the stage stop, creation of a 14-acre roadside park and tourism center, the City hired Raba-Kistner, Inc. to restore and rehabilitate the house. Steve Jones of Raba-Kistner was the consultant on the project. The restoration/rehabilitation was finished in the summer of 2016 and a grand opening of the Harrison House and its outbuildings was held on August 2016 at the site. The ceremony was attended by local city government representatives, local descendants, the local media, and descendants of the four families that lived in the house over the course of its history.

Submitted by Jean M. Heide

Member of the San Antonio Conservation Society Farm & Ranch Committee