

ZONING CHANGE REVIEW SHEET

CASE NUMBER: C14H-2010-0040

HLC DATE:

November 15, 2010

PC DATE:

February 22, 2011

APPLICANT: Raul Aguallo Hernandez, owner

HISTORIC NAME: Paulson-Sing House

WATERSHED: Lady Bird Lake

ADDRESS OF PROPOSED ZONING CHANGE: 1705 Willow Street

ZONING FROM: SF-3-NP to SF-3-H-NP

SUMMARY STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff cannot provide a positive recommendation regarding the proposed zoning change from family residence – neighborhood plan (SF-3-NP) combining district to family residence – Historic Landmark – neighborhood plan (SF-3-H-NP) combining district zoning because the test for “historic” designation is not met: the house has its significance with associations with the Sing family only from 1982 to the present.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION:

The ca. 1930 Paulson-Sing House is a fairly common type of frame bungalow, which was owned and occupied by Axel Paulson, a Swedish-born cabinetmaker for the Calcasieu Lumber Company, and his wife, Esther, from around 1930 until their deaths. After a short period of the house being a rental unit, it was purchased by Margaret Sing in the 1980s. She was the daughter of Joe Sing (Hong Lee), who operated a Chinese laundry in Austin until his death in 1927, and which was later carried on by his widow, Frances for another 20-some odd years. Staff does not believe that the house has the requisite architectural or historical significance for individual designation as a historic landmark, and therefore cannot offer a positive recommendation for designation. This opinion, however, has absolutely no reflection on the importance of the Sing family to the history and culture of Austin, and to Asian-American or Latin American significance in the cultural makeup of the city, but only with the fact that the Sing family has owned this house only in the last 25 years, which is not within the historic period for consideration. Staff is well cognizant of the prejudices which prevented the Sing family from owning property in Austin during the early- and mid-twentieth century and the great stride that Margaret Sing made in the purchase of this house in the 1980s, but the Sing family lived for over 40 years (1940s – 1980s) in a house which still stands at 603 Medina Street in East Austin, and which staff believes has a greater context in the history of the family and the cultural history of the city.

The house recently received a subject marker from the Texas Historical Commission regarding the Sing family. The text of the marker is attached.

HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION ACTION: Recommended the proposed zoning change from family residence-neighborhood plan (SF-3-NP) combining district to family residence-historic landmark-neighborhood plan (SF-3-H-NP) combining district zoning based upon the architecture and historical associations of the house. Vote: 6-0 (Myers absent).

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION: Recommended the proposed zoning change from family residence-neighborhood plan (SF-3-NP) combining district to family residence-historic landmark-neighborhood plan (SF-3-H-NP) combining district zoning. Vote: 8-0 (Reddy off-dais).

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The house is beyond the bounds of the Comprehensive Cultural Resources Survey (1984) and is not listed in the East Austin Survey (1978).

CITY COUNCIL DATE: March 10, 2011

ACTION:

ORDINANCE READINGS: 1ST 2ND 3RD

ORDINANCE NUMBER:

CASE MANAGER: Steve Sadowsky

PHONE: 974-6454

NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION: East Cesar Chavez Neighborhood Association.

BASIS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

Architecture:

One-story rectangular-plan front-gabled frame bungalow with 1:1 fenestration and a full-width inset porch; round-arched doorway.

Historical Associations:

The house was built in 1930; Clement C. McCullough, a carpenter who was living at 2103 E. 2nd Street, is listed as the owner on applications for water and sewer service dating from 1930. He does not appear in city directories to have lived in the house. The house was built on the site of an earlier house which is shown on the 1922 Sanborn map; the current house is shown on the 1935 map.

The first known occupants of the house were Noel R. Neal, a machinist, and his wife Pearl, who rented the house in 1930-31. By 1932, Axel S. Paulson and his wife Esther had moved into the house. The 1930 U.S. Census shows Axel and Esther Paulson living at 2409 E. 1st Street, a house they rented. He was then 40 years old and had been born in Sweden. He is listed as a cabinet maker for a sash and door factory. Esther Paulson was then 33 years old and had been born in Texas to Swedish-born parents. They had two children: Elmer, 13, and Gladys, 8. City directories show that Axel Paulson was working as a cabinetmaker for the Van C. Kelly Lumber Company, and later for Calcasieu Lumber Company. Axel and Esther Paulson owned and lived in this house until they passed away; he died in 1961; she died in 1980. After Esther's death, the house became a rental unit for a short period of time, then was purchased by Margaret Sing.

Margaret Sing was the daughter of Joe Sing (Hong Lee), who had emigrated from his native China to the United States, and opened a Chinese laundry in Austin, after having lived in Boston and New Orleans. Around the turn of the 20th century, Sing had his laundry in the Bosche Building at 804 Congress Avenue; this building was a laundry building operated by Philip Bosche, who had established the first steam laundry west of the Mississippi (the building is a designated historic landmark). Sing then located his laundry at 113 E. 8th Street. The 1900 Sanborn map of downtown Austin shows a one-story building that was likely an older house given its wing-and-gable and front porch configuration, noted as a Chinese laundry. It is unclear whether Joe Sing had his laundry in this building in 1900; he does not appear in the Austin city directories before 1903-04, although there was a Hong Wah who operated a Chinese laundry at 806 Congress Avenue listed in the 1900-01 directory.

Joe Sing married Francisca Moreno in Austin, and together they raised their family, operating a laundry and living on the laundry premises for many years. They moved from E. 8th Street to E. 10th Street in the early 1920s, then to 311 W. 5th Street by 1927. Unfortunately, at the W.

5th Street location, tragedy struck when Joe Sing was hit by a car at 5th and Lavaca Streets. The driver was never apprehended, and Joe died of his injuries at the end of November, 1927. Frances took over the laundry business, remaining at 311 W. 5th Street until the early 1930s, when she moved to 207 E. 7th Street. She continued to operate the laundry business, and several of her children joined in the family enterprise. By the early 1940s, however, it appears that the family laundry had folded, so to speak. Frances does not list an occupation in city directories after 1939, and Margaret, the daughter who later purchased this house on Willow Street, was employed by the Austin Laundry and Dry Cleaning Company. At the same time that they discontinued their family laundry business, the Sings moved to a house at 603 Medina Street in East Austin, where they lived until the early 1980s. The family faced continued prejudice from their racial backgrounds, and were never able to purchase real estate on their own, until Margaret, in her retirement, purchased this Willow Street house. Her brother Joe, who had gone to work as a tool manufacturer, and his wife Mauricia, moved into this house with Margaret in the mid-1980s. Joe Sing, Jr. passed away in 1984; Margaret Sing passed away in 2007. The Willow Street house is now owned by Margaret's nephew, Raul Hernandez.

PARCEL NO.: 02020708030000

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Lot 3, Block 4, Outlot 36, Division O, Riverside Addition, minus the northeast 6.46 triangle.

ESTIMATED ANNUAL TAX ABATEMENT: \$1,147 (owner-occupied; no participation from AISD or ACC); city portion: \$574.

APPRAISED VALUE: \$181,198.

PRESENT USE: Residence

CONDITION: Excellent

PRESENT OWNER:

Raul Aguallo Hernandez
1705 Willow Street
Austin, Texas 78702

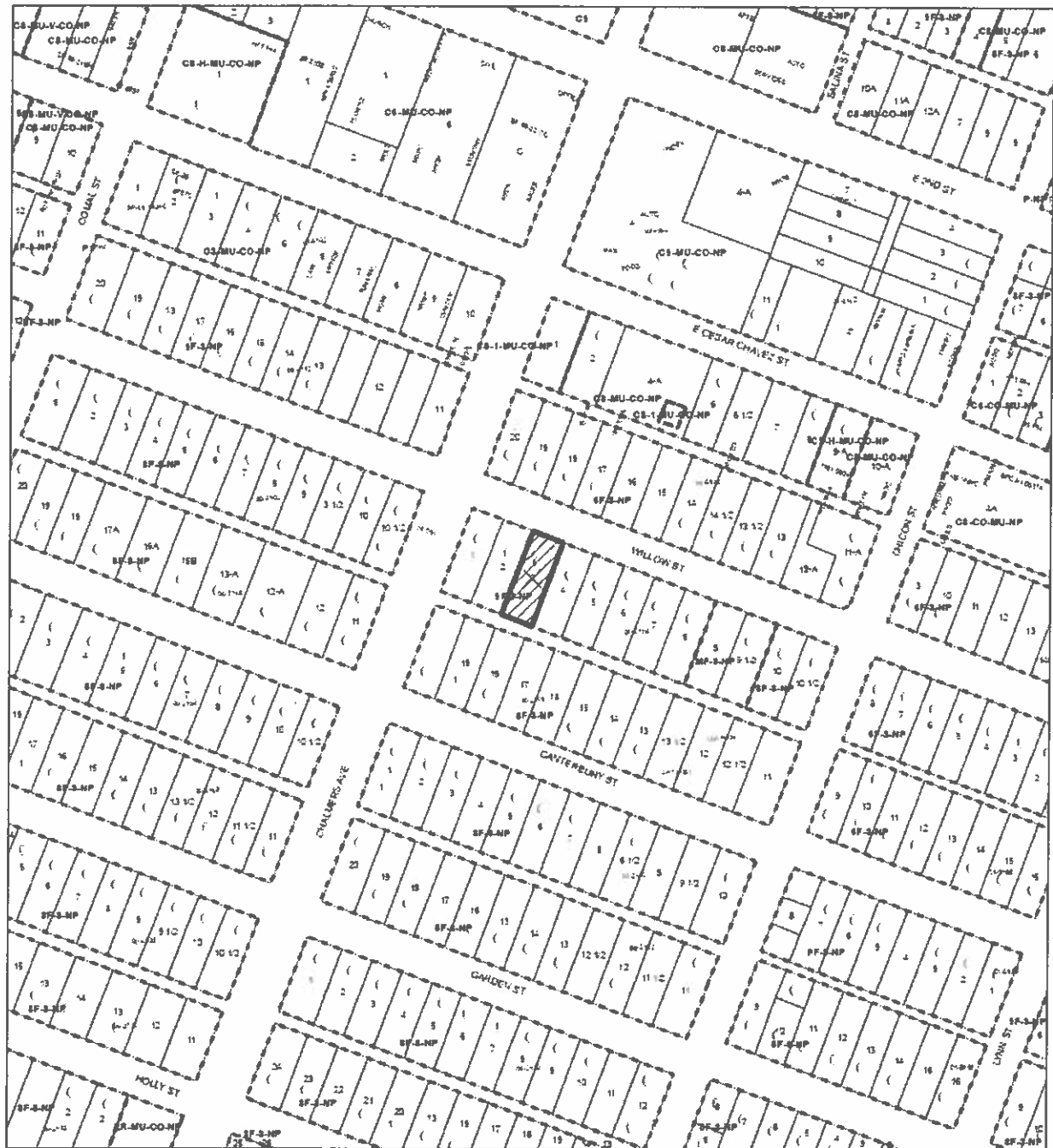
DATE BUILT: ca. 1930

ALTERATIONS/ADDITIONS: Non-historic metal porch railings and posts; the metal railings and posts were on the house when Margaret Sing purchased the house.

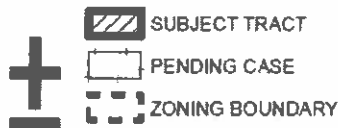
ORIGINAL OWNER(S): Axel and Esther Paulson

OTHER HISTORICAL DESIGNATIONS: The house has recently (October, 2010) received a subject marker from the Texas Historical Commission relating to the Sing family, who purchased the house in the mid-1980s. The story of the current owner discovering a virtual treasure trove of historical items dating from this grandfather, Joe Sing, and the lives of Asian-Americans in Austin was the subject of a recent feature in the Austin American Statesman.

LOCATION MAP



HISTORIC ZONING



ZONING CASE#: C14H-2010-0040
 LOCATION: 1705 WILLOW STREET
 GRID: K21
 MANAGER: STEVE SADOWSKY



This map has been produced by the Communications Technology Management Dept. on behalf of the Planning Development Review Dept. for the sole purpose of geographic reference. No warranty is made by the City of Austin regarding specific accuracy or completeness.

**1705 Willow Street
ca. 1930**



**OCCUPANCY HISTORY
1705 Willow Street**

City Directory Research, Austin History Center
By City Historic Preservation Office
November, 2010

2005	Margaret Sing No occupation listed
1997	Margaret Sing No occupation listed
1992	Margaret Sing Retired
1985-86	Joe M. Sing, renter Retired Also listed are Joe J. Sing, employed by the University of Texas; Margaret Sing, retired; and Monica Sing, retired.
1981	Jesse and Eva G. Arzola, renters Carpet layer NOTE: The directory indicates that Jesse and Eva Arzola were new residents at this address.
1978	Esther M. Paulson, owner No occupation listed
1975	Esther M. Paulson, owner Widow, Axel S. Paulson No occupation listed

1972	Esther M. Paulson, owner Widow, Axel S. Paulson No occupation listed
1969	Esther M. Paulson, owner Widow, Axel S. Paulson No occupation listed
1964	Esther M. Paulson, owner Widow, Axel S. Paulson No occupation listed
1960	Axel S. and Esther Paulson, owners Millman, Calcasieu Lumber Company
1957	Axel S. and Esther Paulson, owners Millman, Calcasieu Lumber Company
1953	Axel S. and Esther Paulson, owners Cabinet maker, Calcasieu Lumber Company
1949	Axel S. and Esther Paulson, owners Cabinet maker (no place of employment listed)
1947	Axel S. and Esther Paulson, owners Cabinet maker (no place of employment listed)
1944-45	Axel S. and Esther Paulson, owners Cabinet maker, Calcasieu Lumber Company
1942	Axel S. and Esther Paulson, owners Millman, Calcasieu Lumber Company Also listed is Gladys Paulson, no occupation stated.
1939	Axel S. and Esther Paulson, owners Cabinet maker, Calcasieu Lumber Company Also listed are Elmer A. Paulson, a helper at Calcasieu Lumber Company, and Gladys Paulson, a student.
1937	Axel S. and Esther Paulson, owners Cabinet maker, Calcasieu Lumber Company Also listed is Elmer Paulson, a woodworker at the East Avenue Mill, 401 East Avenue.
1935	Axel S. and Esther Paulson, owners Mechanic, Van C. Kelly Lumber Company, 2200 E. 6 th Street.
1932-33	Axel S. and Esther Paulson, owners Carpenter (no place of employment listed) Also listed are Noel R. and Pearl Neal, renters; Noel R. Neal had no occupation listed.
1930-31	Vacant Noel R. and Pearl Neal are listed at this address; he was a machinist.

AXEL S. PAULSON

Axel S. Paulson, 72, of 1705 Willow, died in a local hospital Tuesday.

He had been a resident of Austin 42 years and was a member of Trinity Chapel Church. Before his retirement, he was a cabinet maker at Calcasieu Company. He came to America from Sweden at the age of 17.

He is survived by his widow of Austin; daughter, Mrs. Raymond Tiggs, Austin; son, Elmer A. Paulson of Austin, two sisters, Dr. Jennie H. Paulson, Wichita Falls; Mrs. Tyra Swenson, Sweden; two brothers, C. A. Paulson, Wichita Falls and Gustaf Paulson, Sweden. Three grandchildren, Ronald Riggs, Miss Sharon Paulson and Miss Linda Paulson, all of Austin, also survive.

Funeral services will be held at Weed-Corley Funeral Home Wednesday at 4 p.m. Rev. Melvin Clearman and Rev. Loyce Estes will officiate and burial will be in Capital Memorial Park.

Obituary of Axel S. Paulson
Austin American, July 19, 1961

PAULSON, Mrs. Esther Marie, 88, 1705 Willow, died Saturday. Services 1 p.m. Monday, Weed-Corley Funeral Home. Burial, Capital Memorial Park. Survivors: daughter, Mrs. Raymond (Gladys) Riggs of Austin; three grandchildren.

Funeral notice for Esther Paulson
Austin American-Statesman, January 20, 1980

Man Is Seriously Injured By 'Hit-and-Run' Driver

Hong Lee, 65, owner of the only Chinese laundry in the city, was seriously but not fatally injured late last night when run down by a "hit-and-run" driver at Fifth and Lavaca streets.

He was taken to the City hospital in a Cook ambulance. Police were making an investigation in an effort to apprehend the driver of the car.

News story of the hit-and-run accident involving Hong Lee (Joe Sing)
Austin American, November 29, 1927

JOE SING FUNERAL

**Laundry Man, Fatally Hurt by
Auto, to Be Buried.**

Funeral services for Joe Sing, 67, owner of the Hong Lee Chinese Laundry in Austin, who died Wednesday morning at the city hospital following injuries received Sunday night when he was struck by an automobile, will be held at 2 o'clock Thursday afternoon from the residence at 211 West Fifth street.

The deceased is survived by his widow, one son, Joe Sing Jr., and three daughters, Mrs. G. S. Laguna, Miss Maggie Sing and Miss Ruby Sing, all of Austin.

Sing died from concussion of the brain. The driver of the automobile who hit him Sunday night sped on without stopping to render aid. Sing had conducted a laundry business in Austin for 40 years. He was born in China and came to Austin after short residences in Boston and New Orleans.

Notice of the funeral of Joe Sing
Austin American
December 1, 1927

MRS. FRANCOES M. SING

Mrs. Frances Moreno Sing, 603 Medina Street, died in a local hospital Saturday. She was born and reared in Travis County and was a member of Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church. Survivors are four daughters, Miss Margaret Sing, Mrs. Frances Hueal-
lo, Miss Roberta T. Laguna, all of Austin, and Mrs. Ruby Ruiz of Del Valle; three sons, Joe Sing and Lupe Laguna, both of Austin, and Jesse Laguna of San Diego, Calif.; a brother, John Salazar of Waco; 8 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren.

Rosary will be recited Tuesday at 8:30 p.m. at the Cook Funeral Home. Requiem mass will be offered Wednesday at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church with Rev. Antonio Gonzales, OMI, officiating. Burial will be in Oakwood Cemetery under the direction of the Cook Funeral Home.

Pallbearers will be Edward G. Villegas, Edward M. Villegas, Charles Halsell, Joe G. Villegas, Manuel Villegas Jr., and John Morales, all nephews of the deceased.

Obituary of Frances Sing (widow of Joe Sing - Hong Lee)
Austin Statesman, December 31, 1962

Joe Moreno Sing

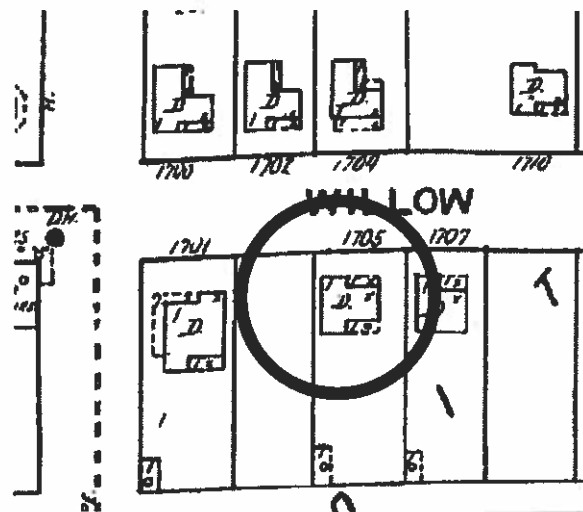
Joe Moreno Sing, 76, of Austin died Thursday morning.

Rosary will be recited Saturday evening at 7:30 PM at the Mission Funeral Home Chapel. Funeral Mass will be Sunday at Guadalupe Catholic Church. Burial will follow in Assumption Cemetery.

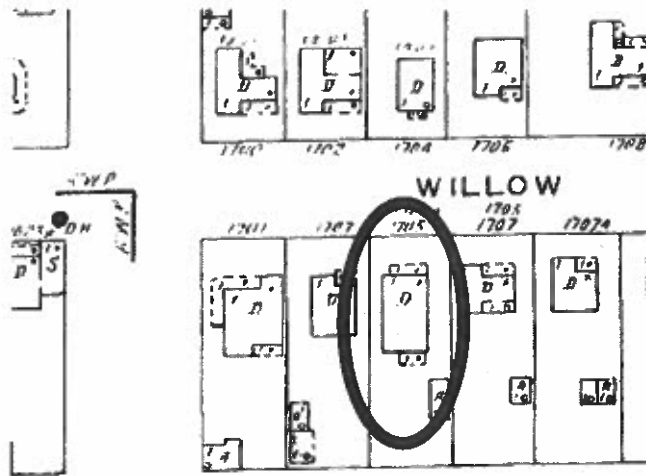
He is survived by his beloved wife, Mrs. Mauricia Varela Sing of Austin; his beloved children, Mr. Joe John Sing, Mrs. Ofelia Maldonado, both of Austin; one sister, Ms. Margaret Moreno Sing of Austin; two nieces, Ms. Frances Aguillo and Ms. Bertha Phipps, both of Austin; two nephews, Mr. Guadalupe Laguna of Austin, and Jesse Laguna of San Diego, California; four grandchildren; and one great-grandchild.

Obituary of Joe Sing, Jr.
Austin American-Statesman
March 9, 1984

NOTE: Utility permits indicate that the house was built in 1930. There was an earlier house on this site, shown on the 1922 Sanborn map (below); but it appears that the current house was built in 1930 by Clement C. McCullough, a carpenter who lived at 2103 E. 2nd Street, and that the first occupant of the house was Noel R. and Pearl Neal, followed by Axel S. and Esther Paulson, who lived here until their deaths.



The 1922 Sanborn map shows the earlier house at 1705 Willow Street.



The 1935 Sanborn map shows the current house at 1705 Willow Street.

Unless the Plumbing is done in strict accordance with City Ordinances, do not turn on the water.

PERMIT FOR WATER SERVICE

Austin, Texas

N-A 3458

Dec. 20

M. C. C. McCullough

Address 1705 Willow

Plumber Myers Plumbing Co.

Size of Tap 1/2

Date 8-13-30

Date of Connection		8/18/30		Foreman's Report	
Size of Tap Made	2 1/2"	No. Fittings	1	Curb Cock	1
Size Service Made	2 1/2"	1 Elbow	1	1 St. Elbow	1
Size Main Tapped	2 1/2"	1 Bushing	1	1 Nipple	1
From Front Prop. Line to Curb Cock	12' 6"	1 Plug	1	1 Union	1
" " " "	14'	1 Stop	1	1 Box	1
Location of Meter	at curb	1 Lid	1	1 Valves	1
Type of Box	iron	1-24" 94" 2 1/2" 1/2" 1/2"		Rep. No.	915
Depth of Main in St.	2'	Foreman's Signature	BEASON		
" " Service Line	18'				
From Curb Cock to Tap on Main	12' 6"				
Checked by Eng. Dept.	8-13-30				

INDEXED

Permit for water service to Clement C. McCullough (1930)

Connecting Charge \$ 12.00

No. 9595A

Application for Sewer Connection.

Austin, Texas, 8/13 - 1930

To the Superintendent of Sewer and Public Improvements,
City of Austin, Texas.

Sir:-

I hereby make application for sewer connection and instructions on premises owned by C. C. McCullough at 1705 Willow Street which place is to be used at a Lot 3 residence In this place there are to be installed 4 fixtures.

I agree to pay the City Sewer Department the regular ordinance charge.

Respectfully, C. C. McCullough

Location of Public Sewer

Stub Out

Connected 8-18-1930 A.K. 9-13

Size of Main Six inches

Size of Service Four inches A. F. Bates

4 Feet Deep P-7167

11 Feet from Property Line in alley

Feet from Curb Line

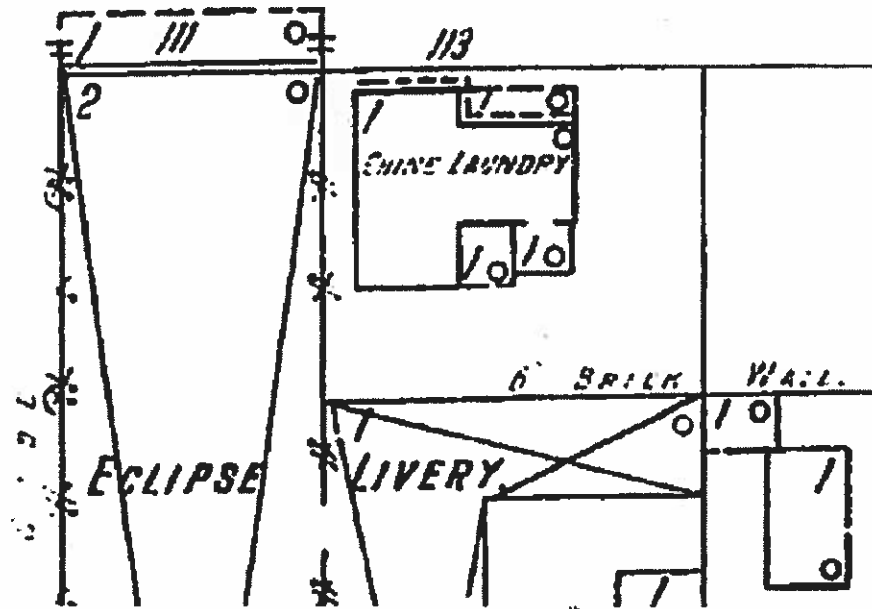
Inspected by Alex Boatwright

Connection made by Uniceto Alvarado

Sewer service permit to Clement C. McCullough (1930)

SING FAMILY HISTORY

The 1903-04 Austin city directory shows the Hong Lee Chinese Laundry located at 804 Congress Avenue, the building formerly the home of the Bosche Laundry, which was the first steam laundry west of the Mississippi River, and a designated city historic landmark. Hong Lee (or Joe Sing) does not appear in the 1900-01 city directory, but there is a Hong Wah Chinese Laundry at 806 Congress Avenue in that directory. Hong Lee does not appear in the 1905 city directory, but from 1906 through 1922, he is listed either as Hong Lee or Joe Sing, as the proprietor of a laundry at 113 E. 8th Street. City directories prior to 1918 do not list the spouse of the householder, but Frances Moreno Sing is listed in the 1918 directory and thenceforth. The Sings lived at 113 E. 8th Street, which was listed in the 1905 city directory as the home of Tom Kenney, an African-American cook. The Sanborn map of 1900 shows what appears to have been a one-story wing-and-gable plan house with a front porch, and which is noted as a "Chinese laundry" but it is not clear the connection between Hong Lee and Tom Kenney, and whether this business was operated by Hong Lee or someone else.



The 1900 Sanborn map shows the Chinese laundry at 113 E. 8th Street, the address of Hong Lee in city directories from 1906 through 1922.

The 1922 city directory is the first to list Joe Sing – prior directories had shown him as Hong Lee. The 1922 city directory is also the first to note that the name of his business was the Hong Lee Laundry.

By 1924, Joe and Frances Sing, as well as the Hong Lee Laundry had moved to 404 E. 10th Street, where they remained only for a few years. The 1927 city directory shows the Hong Lee Laundry at 311 W. 5th Street, where Joe Sing is listed as Hong Lee with his wife Frances. Their son Joe lived at 1011 W. 5th Street and worked as a waiter at the Joe Lung Café. Daughter Mary lived at 400 Colorado Street and worked at the Austin Laundry and Dry Cleaning Company.

Joe Sing was hit by an unknown driver in November, 1927 and died of his injuries. He was known well enough in Austin to make the newspaper and his funeral notice was a news story rather than the family-submitted obituaries common of the day. Frances Sing continued the laundry business at 311 W. 5th Street, where she continued to live. Joe Jr. was listed in the 1929 city directory as a laundryman for his mother; Maggie and Ruby Sing also lived at 311 W. 5th Street but had no occupations listed in the directory of 1929. By the time of the publication of the 1930-31 city directory, Joe, Jr., Margaret, and Ruby were all working for their mother at the laundry on W. 5th Street. Frances Sing maintained the laundry business on W. 5th Street until around 1934; the 1935 city directory shows her living at 207 E. 7th Street, and she has no occupation listed in the directory. The directories of 1937 and 1939 show Frances, Joe, Jr., Margaret, and Ruby at 207 E. 7th Street, but only Frances is listed with an occupation of having a laundry. In the early 1940s, the family moved to 603 Medina Street, a house which still stands, but they had gotten out of the family laundry business. Frances had no occupation listed in the directories of the early 1940s, Joe, Jr. was working at the Joe Lung Café, and Margaret worked for the Austin Laundry and Dry Cleaning Company as a folder. Ruby Sing had no occupation listed.



The house at 603 Medina Street, where the Sing family lived from the early 1940s through the early 1980s

The Sing family maintained their residence at 603 Medina Street from the early 1940s through the early 1980s. Margaret continued her job at the Austin Laundry and Dry Cleaning Company for many years, then went to work for the Home Steam Laundry. Joe, Jr. was a machine operator at Hall Level and Manufacturing Company, a tool manufacturer located in the 1100 block of E. 4th Street. He married Mauricia in the early 1950s, and continued to live with his mother and sister Margaret in the house on Medina Street. Frances Sing passed away in 1962; Joe, Jr. with his wife Mauricia, and sister Margaret continued to live on Medina Street until the early 1980s. Joe, Jr. passed away in 1984, but is still shown in the 1985-86 city directory as living in the house at 1705 Willow Street with his sister Margaret. Margaret Sing continued to live in the Willow Street house until her death in 2007.



Proclamation

Be it known that

Whereas,

Joe Sing (Jo Fung Sheng) was one of the first Chinese immigrants to settle in Austin in the late 1800s and the Sing Family Papers is the earliest archive about Austin's Asian American citizens acquired by the Austin History Center; and,

Whereas,

Mr. Sing opened Hong Lee Laundry at 311 West 5th St. providing laundry service to Austinites and many State Legislators; and,

Whereas,

Margaret Sing, second daughter of Joe Sing, worked at Hong Lee Laundry and bought a family home at 1705 Willow Street; and,

Whereas,

The home provides a physical link to the family's Chinese history and has been awarded a Texas Historical Marker which is being dedicated today;

Now, Therefore,


I, Lee Jeffingwell, Mayor of the City of Austin, Texas, do hereby proclaim

October 23, 2010

as

**The Sing Family Home Historical Marker Dedication
in Austin.**

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the City of Austin to be affixed this 30th Day of August in the Year Two Thousand Ten


Lee Jeffingwell, Mayor, City of Austin



The Sing Family

I. Context

According to The New Handbook of Texas, "[t]he Chinese were the first of the Asian immigrants to come to Texas."¹ Also according to research done on early Asian residents in Austin at the Austin History Center, Mr. Joe Sing was one of the first Chinese men to settle in Austin, Texas. He was a pioneering Asian to set roots in Austin, Texas by establishing a laundry business. He came from China to financially support his family due to massive levels of poverty in that country, in hopes of providing better a quality of life for his family. Joe Sing married Frances Moreno who played a key role in establishing Hong Lee Laundry.²

Mrs. Frances Moreno Sing, wife of Joe Sing, stated that at times other Chinese men would come ask for loans from him because during the 1800's, it was difficult for minorities to ask for loans from financial institutions due to the discrimination against minorities. He had a ledger to show such transactions being made at that time.³ Mr. Sing's financial support to his fellow community allowed for business growth in the Austin community. The Chinese families in Austin established restaurants, grocery stores, and laundries. Mr. Sing's willingness to support his community and fellow neighbors was an important contribution to Travis County on two counts: 1) Building community networks within themselves to sustain financial stability and 2) He invested his time and resources to assist his community to contribute to the economic growth of Travis County.

II. Overview

Joe Sing, previously known as , Jo Fung Sheng, was born in China in 1860 and came to the United States around 1890 to find work. His name was "Americanized" to sound more familiar to western ears, thus, Jo Fung Sheng became Joe Sing.

Joe Sing first came through Boston then New Orleans and eventually settled in Austin. He opened Hong Lee Laundry on 311 W. 5th Street. His business provided laundry service to many State Legislators and Austinites.² After settling in Austin, Sing married Francis Moreno, a Mexican American woman, who was employed as a cook for the first female Governor of Texas Ma Ferguson.² Because of the law back then, Moreno unjustly lost her U.S. citizenship for marrying a Chinese man.

The couple had four children, Senovia, Joe Jr., Rumalda, and Margaret. Sing's family knew him as a quiet man who never talked about his life in China even though he corresponded with his family in China during his time in Austin. Joe Sing died in 1927, at the age of 67 in a hit-and-run car accident.

Margaret Sing, second daughter of Joe Sing worked at Hong Lee Laundry, helping her dad as much as she could as a child. Eventually she got a job working at Home Steam Laundry. She never married because she had to take care of her mother. She resided in her home on 1705 Willow until her death in 2006. Having faced discrimination, Joe Sing and his wife were never able to own property and were subjected to renting all their lives. Because of this Margaret took great pride in becoming the first homeowner in the Sing family and especially as a single woman.² This house was built by Axel Paulson, a carpenter at Calcasieu Lumber Company in 1930⁴ and shows many unique characteristics of homes by this builder such as long leaf yellow pine lumber used

for flooring. This company helped many families afford homes by providing low-interest loans through low monthly installment plans.⁵

Following Margaret's death, her family found a box of items in her home that belonged to Joe Sing. They donated the items to the Austin History Center and the collection became The Sing Family Papers, the first and oldest Asian American archive acquired under the Asian American Liaison program. This collection includes valuable research materials about early Asian Americans in Austin, including family photographs, a certificate of residence and correspondences with other Chinese in America. This collection is one of the few primary sources on early Asians in Austin.

III. Historical/Cultural Significance:

The Sing family has always held onto the Chinese culture that was passed down through oral history, documents and pictures. This was typically done at the family home on a Sunday afternoon or after dinner. 1705 Willow is the only family structure that is left physically to connect the family to Chinese heritage. This home is also a link to the history of early Chinese in Austin. Because this history is under documented, it is vitally important to preserve the structure and help uncover the history of Asian Americans in Austin.

VI. Documentation:

¹ Tyler, Ron., editor. *The New Handbook of Texas*. Austin, 1996, p.86

² Mary Frances Aguallo. November 23, 2009. Digital recording. Austin History Center, Austin Public Library, Austin, Texas.

³ Sing Family Papers (AR2008.002). Austin History Center, Austin Public Library, Austin, Texas.

⁴ Morrison & Fourmy's Austin (Texas) City Directory 1930-31

⁵ Centennial Report. Calcasieu Lumber Co. 1883-1983. Austin File – Lumberyards – Calcasieu L3610 (1) 1960=1969. Austin History Center, Austin Public Library, Austin, Texas.

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Following Margaret Sing's death, her family found a box of items in her home that belonged to Joe Sing. They donated the items to the Austin History Center and the collection became The Sing Family Collection, the first and oldest Asian American archive acquired under the Asian American Liaison program. This collection includes valuable research materials about early Asian Americans in Austin.

THE SING FAMILY IN AUSTIN

BORN IN CHINA AS JO FUNG SHENG IN 1860, JOE SING IMMIGRATED TO THE U.S. AROUND 1890 TO FINANCIALLY SUPPORT HIS FAMILY. HE SETTLED IN AUSTIN, BECOMING ONE OF THE FIRST CHINESE IMMIGRANTS IN THE CITY. SING OPENED HONG LEE LAUNDRY ON 311 W. 5TH STREET, WHICH HE RAN ALONG WITH HIS WIFE, FRANCIS (MORENO), A MEXICAN-AMERICAN WOMAN WHO LOST HER U.S. CITIZENSHIP FOR MARRYING A CHINESE MAN. JOE SING SUPPORTED THE AUSTIN CHINESE COMMUNITY BY PROVIDING LOANS FOR OTHER CHINESE MEN, WHO FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO PROCURE FUNDS OTHERWISE BECAUSE OF DISCRIMINATION. JOE AND FRANCIS HAD FOUR CHILDREN, INCLUDING MARGARET, WHO BOUGHT THIS PROPERTY, BECOMING THE FIRST HOMEOWNER IN THE FAMILY.

(2010)

MARKER IS PROPERTY OF THE STATE OF TEXAS



Proclamation

Be it known that

Whereas,

This evening's Tea Reception graciously hosted by the Asian American Cultural Center is a special celebration of the Asian American families who settled our City and paved the way for future generations; and,

Whereas,

We are pleased to join in acknowledging five families who played a significant role in Austin's history - the families of Joe Sing, Joe Tung, Fred Wong, Harry Ng and Duke Tu; and,

Whereas,

The archives of the first Asian Americans in Austin, gathered and preserved in the Austin History Center, will become precious treasures for future generations and valuable materials for historians and researchers;

Now, Therefore,

*I, Will Wynn, Mayor of the City of Austin, Texas,
do hereby proclaim*

April 24, 2009

as

*A Tea Reception Honoring Austin Chinese American History
and Chinese Deputy Consul General Zhou Ding
in Austin.*

*In witness whereof, I have hereunto
set my hand and caused the seal of the City
of Austin to be affixed this 22nd Day
of April in the Year Two Thousand Nine*

Will Wynn, Mayor, City of Austin



Austin History Center

In 1860 Joe Sing, migrated from China to the United States to find work and became one of the first Asian immigrants to reside in Austin. Five generations later, his family is still here.

Come listen to his family's story.

East Austin Stories Documentary Screening

13 Stories, including the Sing Family!

The short documentaries of East Austin Stories are the result of collaborations between East Austinites and student filmmakers at the University of Texas. At the end of each semester, we hold free screenings to a public audience, where the storytellers, neighbors and the film students get a chance to hear and enjoy each other's stories. Previous stories can be found online at www.EastAustinStories.org

What: **FREE** Short Film Screening

When: May 13, 2010

Where: Our Lady of Guadalupe Church
1206 E. 9th St. &
Kenny Dorham's Backyard
1106 E. 11th St.

Time: Guadalupe: 7pm
Kenny Dorham's: 9pm

THE AUSTIN STATESMAN

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HIT-RUN VICTIM

Chinese Laundryman Dies of Injuries.

Joe Sing, 67, owner of the Hong Lee, only Chinese laundry in Austin, died Wednesday morning about 3:15 o'clock at the city hospital as result of injuries received when he was struck down Sunday night by an automobile whose driver sped on without stopping to offer aid.

Sing, known as Hong Lee to his Austin patrons, was knocked unconscious and died of concussion of the brain.

Here 40 Years.

For nearly 40 years he had conducted a laundry business here. He was born in China, and came here after brief periods of residence in Boston and New Orleans.

Surviving are his widow, one son, Joe Sing Jr., and three daughters: Mrs. G. S. Laguna, Miss Maggie Sing and Miss Ruby Sing, all of Austin.

Funeral services will be conducted Thursday afternoon at 3 o'clock from the home, 311 West Fifth street. Burial will be conducted in Oakwood cemetery by C. B. Cook.

Rotarians to Hear Musical Prodigies

The McRae Sisters of Waco, musical prodigies of Waco, who are attending St. Mary's academy, will be introduced to the Rotary club next

Issuance of Auto Licen Will Begin We

Issuance of 1928 highway licenses will begin in Travis county Dec. 7, one week from today. County Tax Collector J. R. Williams said Wednesday.

Marking the close of November business, registrations for 1927 Wednesday reached a total of 15,193.

Mr. Williams said that headlight test certificates, which must be presented to secure the 1928 number plates, must be dated within a month of the date of application for licenses.

Use cars, practicing will be sue, if nated tively. room e Trav senger numbe 329-70 this t bers e

PAVING CHECK

Homestead Right Is Upheld in Case.

Street paving orders of Texas cities received a blow today in decision of the supreme court upholding the homestead right of R. D. Johnson against the city of Fort Worth. The suit was by the city to collect a paving lien for the use of the Beach Manigan Paving company. The street paving had been ordered prior to Johnson's purchase from persons not entitled to claim the land as a homestead. After Johnson's purchase the paving was completed. The court held the lien invalid against Johnson.

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ON THE NEWS



Jarrad Henderson AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Mary Frances Aguillo shows a family photo of her grandmother, Francisca Moreno Sing, who married Chinese immigrant Joe Sing, with her children. With Aguillo are daughters Anna, left, and Terry, who in 2007 discovered a box of artifacts shedding light on their family's cultural history.

Roots in the attic

Forgotten box reveals clues about Chinese immigrant's life more than a century ago

By Juan Castillo

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF



SING FAMILY PAPERS

AR2008002

AUSTIN HISTORY CENTER

Joe Sing lived in Austin in the early 20th century and started a laundry business on Congress Avenue with his wife, Francisca Moreno Sing, who cooked for Gov. Ma Ferguson.

They could write chapters in history books about people like Joe Sing, a Chinese immigrant who blazed trails in Austin around the dawn of the 20th century, and his lay-down-the-law wife, Francisca, who helped him. Sing eclipsed one barrier after another — poverty, a strange land and language, discriminatory laws — to succeed as a businessman, husband and father.

But Sing apparently also was a modest man, and his gritty story went with him to his grave in 1927. There it probably would have stayed had his descendants not discovered a box 80 years after his death.

"A magic box," Terry Aguillo, Joe and Francisca's great-granddaughter, says with hints of wonder and gratitude.

The story of Joe Sing and Francisca Moreno Sing is the subject of a flurry of attention — a new state his-

See **ROOTS**, A6

statesman.com

Watch a video of Joe Sing's descendants with this story online.

■ Chinese stories hard to find, A8

ROOTS: Immigrant found success in business, love after he moved to Austin

Continued from A1

ritical marker, a featured spot in the Austin History Center exhibit on pioneer Chinese immigrants and a recent student documentary, part of the East Austin Stories film project at the University of Texas.

It begins sometime in the late 1800s, when Joe Sing left his family and his homeland in search of the proverbial better life in the United States.

Sing found it in Austin, where he soon bridged Anglo, Asian and Mexican American worlds. One of the city's first Chinese residents, Sing married Francisca, an American of Mexican descent who cooked for Gov. Ma Ferguson and who, like her husband, did not lack for resolve. Together they opened the Hong Lee Laundry, which flourished by catering to bankers, legislators and white-collar workers on Congress Avenue. The couple had four children and apparently enjoyed a loving marriage. Sing never became a U.S. citizen, however — the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 forbade it — and under another law, Moreno, without realizing it, forfeited her citizenship simply by marrying Sing.

But, perhaps because the Sing-Moreno story was not passed down in the detail it might have deserved, their descendants never really made too much of their family heritage, their ancestors' pioneering spirit or their own melting-pot mix of heritage as American, Chinese, Mexican.

Never made much, that is, until that day in 2007 when, in the historical East Austin home of Margaret Sing, the late daughter of Joe and Francisca, they stumbled upon a box they hadn't known existed. About 3 feet long and 2 feet deep, the cardboard box contained personal

'Pioneers from the East: First Chinese Families in Austin'

The exhibit continues through Oct. 31 at the Austin History Center, 810 Guadalupe St. Center hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tues. through Sat. and 10 a.m. to noon on Sunday.

For information, on how to preserve the stories of Asian Americans in Austin and Travis County, call Esther Chung at 974-7394 or visit www.austinhistorycenter.org/filmseries/fbc.

To view "Five Generations," a documentary on Joe Sing and Francisca Moreno Sing by UT students Chelsea Hernandez, Adrian LaGuette and Rhea Rivera, visit www.austinhistorycenter.org.

effects more than 100 years old that belonged to Joe and Francisca. The contents awakened family members' curiosity about their ancestry, stoked their pride and their introspection and moved them to tears. The items revealed, too, a family secret. They told a story of family — a story long stored away and now reclaimed.

Lost culture

In the 1970s, schoolmates taunted Anna Aguillo, Terry's younger sister. They called her Chinese and pulled up the skin at the corners of their eyes, recalled her mother, Mary Frances Aguillo, a blunt-talking woman with a sassy sense of humor and at 79 the oldest living descendant of Sing and Moreno.

"When I was younger, my eyes were



Journal News/Photo: AMERICAN STATISTICAL

Esther Chung has been working with the Sing family while examining historical documents about Joe Sing's experience as one of Austin's first Chinese settlers around the end of the 19th century.



SING FAMILY PAPERS, AR-209/0002/ AUSTIN HISTORY CENTER

Margaret Sing, one of Joe and Francisca's daughters, had the box in her attic.

quite slanted, and I definitely looked different," said Anna, 40, a special education coordinator with the Aus-



SING FAMILY PAPERS, AR-208/0002/ AUSTIN HISTORY CENTER

Francisca Moreno Sing was known as a lay-down-the-law type of person.

tin school district. "The teasing made me feel like an outcast."

Anna and Terry knew that their

great-grandfather was Chinese. They had seen Joe Sing's portrait, taken when he was probably in his 60s — Sing, with a shock of black hair flecked with gray, his back straight, staring solemnly at the camera. When they were kids, Sing's son, Joe Jr., made it a point to remind the girls their Chinese heritage, too. "Not Mexican," said Anna, who added that her great-uncle used his father's atlas in his bookkeeping at home.

But that's as far as it went, Anna said. Joe Jr. didn't speak Chinese and with no exposure to the language, customs or other Chinese relatives — no family ever followed Joe Sr. to America — the Aguillo sisters celebrated Mexican traditions far more. Perhaps the only exceptions were the steamed white rice and other Chinese food they ate every day.

Their mother never met Joe Sr. who died at 67 in a hit-and-run ac-

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

dent. Yet Mary Frances says she felt as if she knew Sing any way because her grandmother, a disciplinarian who raised her and impressed her with her work ethic and devotion to God, constantly talked about him. "He must have been a very, very good father, parent or husband," Mary Frances said. "By talking about him, she kept him alive."

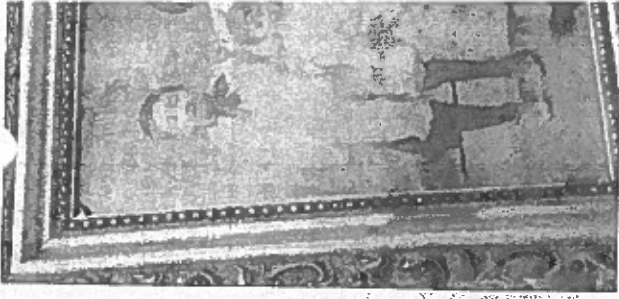
Discovering the past

Joe Sing was not a quixotic nonad seeking adventure. Like many Chinese men, then, he probably had no other choice but to leave his relatives in China so that he could help them survive, said Esther Chung, who collects Asian American history at the Austin History Center and has been working with the Aguayo family.

It is not known when exactly Sing arrived in Austin, though from documents and correspondence Chung thinks it was sometime around the turn of the century. Sing was in Galveston in 1880, according to the U.S. census. It's known, too, that he lived in Boston and then worked in Shreveport, La. In New Orleans in 1894, he was issued, under the name of Joe Hall, a certificate of residence, a document required for a Chinese national to work in the U.S. Sing's real name was Jo Peng Sheng. In Austin, he was known to his customers as Hong Lee. Why he used three names at different times in his life is a mystery.

Nor is it known when Sing married Francisca or when they started the laundry business on Congress Avenue and Fifth Street. They had four children — Joe Jr., Rimalda, or Ruby, as she was known; Margaret; and Senovia, Mary Frances' mother.

After her husband died, Francisca closed the original laundry and opened another one under her own name in 1937 at 207 E. Seventh St. When Francisca became ill, Margaret, who never married, devoted her life to taking care of her mother at a house they rented on Medina Street until Francisca died in 1962 at age 83. In 1984, Margaret had saved



Most of the items found in the box in will be on display at an Austin Histo

up enough money to pay cash for home at 1705 Willow St. The quair two-bedroom bungalow built in 193 has been handed down to Terry, 24 year-old son Raul Hernandez, fifth-generation descendant who is records coordinator at St. Edward's University.

Until Margaret's death in 2007, th home was a lively hub of activity an the site of family holiday celebra tions.

"Everybody used to gather here, Raul says, standing in front of an oversized, graffiti-style print of the Virgen de Guadalupe that hangs in the living room. Two decorative, framed antique Virgen prints — they belonged to Francisca — anchor oppo site ends of another wall. Before she died, Margaret stipulated that they never be removed, and she meant it too. When the house was vacant for a short time, the family tried taking

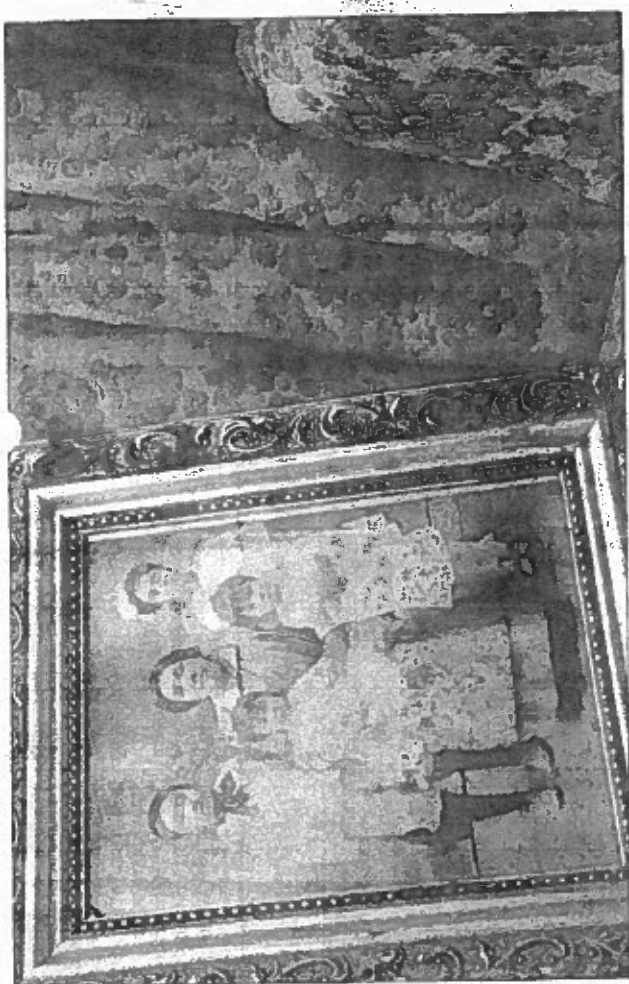
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Most of the items found in the box in Margaret Sing's attic, such as this photo of Francisca Moreno Sing and her children, will be on display at an Austin History Center exhibit on the city's Chinese pioneers.

up enough money to pay cash for a home at 1705 Willow St. The quaint two-bedroom bungalow built in 1930 has been handed down to Terry's 24-year-old son Raul Hernandez, a fifth-generation descendant who is a records coordinator at St. Edward's University.

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the prints down for safekeeping but couldn't because they were bolted to the wall.

With Margaret Sing's death came the task of cleaning the house and sorting through her belongings, a chore that lasted weeks. The family thought it was done until a worker installing central air conditioning told Raul he had found a box in the attic. Terry recalls telling her son to "just throw it away," and Raul says they came oh-so-close to doing so. But he insisted, and later that day, with a trash can beside her, his mother began digging through the box.

"Fred, she pulled out the cuminets with disinterest at first until she realized what lay before her. Spread out on the large antique dining table, which had hosted so many family meals, were the mementos of the lives of Joe Sing and Francisca Moreno.

Austin historian Margaret Sing's family photo of Francisca Moreno Sing and her children.

what's wrong?"

"I told him, 'You don't understand. Look at this,'" Terry recalls answer- ing, her voice rising. "And then I found the document, his papales (pa- pers) to come to the United States, and I thought, 'Oh, my God.'"

Terry can't hold back her tears anymore.

The family had never seen Sing's 1894 certificate of residence, which says he was 35 years old, was 5 feet 7 inches tall and had an olive complexion and three scars. In the photo, Sing looks vaguely sideways and wears a Western-style suit. He has a round, clean face and a stoic expression, and his head is shaved in the front. Though it isn't visible, it's likely that ho wore his hair braided in a tail or queue in the Chinese custom then.

History center translators later helped decipher the letters, which revealed something more that the family had not known — Joe Sing had children in China. A son regu- larly wrote to him, once to ask for \$200 to help with his pending wedding. So did a son-in-law. In fact, many people in China wrote to ask for money, in- cluding Sing's mother, who in one let- ter delivered the news that his father had died. The revelation that Sing had children in China raised questions: Did Joe Sing have a wife or an ex-wife in China? Did Francisca know her husband had other children?

These and other questions remain a mystery, though Mary Frances sug- gests that if there was another wife in China, her grandmother would never have stood idly by had she known. Joe Sing made it in Austin because Francisca pushed him, she says. "She was one of those people, what she said went. 'We're going to do this, come hell or high water,'" Mary Frances says, prompting Terry to joke that her mother, with her bossy manner, took after Francisca.

Reclaiming history

The Aguallios and Raul had no inkling that their find mattered to anyone outside their family until a couple of weeks later when Terry saw

See EBOOTS, A8

ROOTS: Box stirs memories, interest in Chinese culture

Continued from A7

a blurb in the newspaper. It said that the Austin History Center was collecting Asian history and was seeking donations. Mary Frances turned over the Sing family papers, as they are now known at the center. The papers are a gem — the oldest and the biggest of the Asian collection and among the rarest of their kind in the country, Chung says.

With the box came a watershed rediscovery of roots. "It's enlightened us to grow more passionate about the history and to want to learn more about the Chinese culture," Anna says.

Family members ponder what part of them came from Joe and Francisca. "A strong work ethic," says Mary Frances, who still works organizing bus tours to New York and other cities. "I don't believe in retirement," she declares.

Finding the box wiped the cobwebs off faded memories. When Chung explained that Francisca lost her citizenship for marrying her husband, Mary Frances recalled

that her grandmother sobbed upon learning that bit of news when she applied for retirement benefits. Her daughters said she had never shared the story before.

Raul did the research that led to the state historical marker, which will go up in October dedication ceremonies at Margaret Sing's old house, where he now lives. He vows not to mess with its character. That would be a disservice to history and to his Aunt Margaret. "How many ethnic women working in a laundry could buy a home by themselves?" he marvels. Recently Raul bought Chinese vases and bookends to place in the living room with the Virgens. Next, he wants to apply for a national historical designation, and he wants to visit China one day.

When she pulled history from a box in 2007, a wave of regret fell over Terry, who wished she had tried harder to learn about her great-grandfather before. But now, she says, "With all of this, it's like 'I know who you are.'"

jcastillo@statesman.com; 445-3635

5th Street location, tragedy struck when Joe Sing was hit by a car at 5th and Lavaca Streets. The driver was never apprehended, and Joe died of his injuries at the end of November, 1927. Frances took over the laundry business, remaining at 311 W. 5th Street until the early 1930s, when she moved to 207 E. 7th Street. She continued to operate the laundry business, and several of her children joined in the family enterprise. By the early 1940s, however, it appears that the family laundry had folded, so to speak. Frances does not list an occupation in city directories after 1939, and Margaret, the daughter who later purchased this house on Willow Street, was employed by the Austin Laundry and Dry Cleaning Company. At the same time that they discontinued their family laundry business, the Sings moved to a house at 603 Medina Street in East Austin, where they lived until the early 1980s. The family faced continued prejudice from their racial backgrounds, and were never able to purchase real estate on their own, until Margaret, in her retirement, purchased this Willow Street house. Her brother Joe, who had gone to work as a tool manufacturer, and his wife Mauricia, moved into this house with Margaret in the mid-1980s. Joe Sing, Jr. passed away in 1984; Margaret Sing passed away in 2007. The Willow Street house is now owned by Margaret's nephew, Raul Hernandez.

PARCEL NO.: 02020708030000

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Lot 3, Block 4, Outlot 36, Division O, Riverside Addition, minus the northeast 6.46 triangle.

ESTIMATED ANNUAL TAX ABATEMENT: \$1,147 (owner-occupied; no participation from AISD or ACC); city portion: \$574.

APPRAISED VALUE: \$181,198.

PRESENT USE: Residence

CONDITION: Excellent

PRESENT OWNER:

Raul Aguallo Hernandez
1705 Willow Street
Austin, Texas 78702

DATE BUILT: ca. 1930

ALTERATIONS/ADDITIONS: Non-historic metal porch railings and posts; the metal railings and posts were on the house when Margaret Sing purchased the house.

ORIGINAL OWNER(S): Axel and Esther Paulson

OTHER HISTORICAL DESIGNATIONS: The house has recently (October, 2010) received a subject marker from the Texas Historical Commission relating to the Sing family, who purchased the house in the mid-1980s. The story of the current owner discovering a virtual treasure trove of historical items dating from his grandfather, Joe Sing, and the lives of Asian-Americans in Austin was the subject of a recent feature in the Austin American Statesman.