

# ZONING CHANGE REVIEW SHEET

**CASE NUMBER:** C14H-2016-0073

**Council District:** 9

**HLC DATE:**

**PC DATE:**

September 26, 2016

October 25, 2016

**APPLICANT:** Jody Wingrove, for Rockafellow Properties, L.L.C.

**HISTORIC NAME:** Bremond Carriage House

**WATERSHED:** Shoal Creek

**ADDRESS OF PROPOSED ZONING CHANGE:** 504 W. 7<sup>th</sup> Street

**ZONING FROM:** GO to GO-H

**SUMMARY STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Staff recommends the proposed zoning change from general office (GO) district to general office – Historic Landmark (GO-H) combining district zoning.

**QUALIFICATIONS FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION:**

Architecture and historical associations

**HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION ACTION:** Recommended the proposed zoning change from GO to GO-H. Vote: 7-0 (Papavisiliou, Panju, and Reed absent).

**PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION:** Recommended the proposed zoning change from GO to GO-H. Vote: 12-0 (Shieh absent).

**DEPARTMENT COMMENTS:** The carriage house is listed as a Priority 1 for research in the Comprehensive Cultural Resources Survey (1984).

**CITY COUNCIL DATE:** December 8, 2016

**ACTION:**

**ORDINANCE READINGS:** 1<sup>ST</sup> 2<sup>ND</sup> 3<sup>RD</sup>

**ORDINANCE NUMBER:**

**CASE MANAGER:** Steve Sadowsky

**PHONE:** 974-6454

**NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION:** Downtown Austin Neighborhood Association

**BASIS FOR RECOMMENDATION:**

**Architecture:**

One-and-a-half-story, rectangular-plan, brick former carriage house with a shingled mansard roof with hipped-roof dormers; the original window and door openings survive but have been rehabilitated with glass and doors rather than the probable original garage-style door on the building. There is decorative iron work in the windows and door sidelights on the ground floor.

**Historical Associations:**

The carriage house and stable was originally built a block east of the existing site by the Bremond family but moved to this site at some point before 1894, when the building first appears on Sanborn maps. The Bremonds were one of the most prominent families in Austin in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and had a large wholesale grocery business for many years. They also branched out to banking and railroads. Members of the family

built houses in what is now known as the Bremond Block, a National Register Historic District, and with each of the Bremond family homes in the block individually landmarked. Family legend has it that the second wife of John Bremond, Jr. did not like having the stables so close to the family house, so it was moved to another portion of the Bremond property. Sanborn maps of 1894 and 1900 show the building in its current location, and indicate that it was a shingled building. The 1935 Sanborn map shows the building as a warehouse with a second-story apartment and a one-story addition to the rear, which is consistent with city directory listings. Ownership of the building remained in the Bremond family, who began renting it out as a commercial space in the 1930s. Southwestern Bell Telephone Company had the building as their warehouse in the 1930s; it was then a warehouse for the State Department of Vocational Education in the 1940s, an auto garage in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and around 1951, it was converted to a residence.

finally as the residence of William B. Houston, the grandson of John Bremond, Jr., and his wife, Virginia L. Houston, from approximately 1954 to 2004. The building serves as an office building today.

William B. Houston, the grandson of John Bremond, Jr., took over ownership of the building in 1951, and constructed an addition for apartments. He and his wife, Virginia Lipscomb Lockart Houston, began renovating the old carriage house, and moved in around 1953, as they are listed as the occupants in the 1954 city directory. The Houstons lived here until 2004, when William B. Houston passed away, and Virginia Houston moved to Dallas. Since 2004, the carriage house has served as an office building.

William B. Houston was the grandson of John Bremond, Jr., who took over the family wholesale grocery and coffee roasting business established by his father and his father's brothers. William B. Houston was born in Austin in 1917, and grew up in the landmarked Hale-Houston House at 706 Guadalupe Street. After his graduation from the University of Texas, he began working in the family business, but after the business closed in the mid-1950s, he embarked on other business ventures, including a successful real estate and construction company which built several buildings on the IBM campus in north Austin. His principal love, however, was sailing. He had a sailboat company and was a founding member of what later became the Austin Yacht Club. He and Virginia traveled extensively, and were very active in several charitable and philanthropic organizations in Austin. Virginia Houston was a three-time board member of the Junior League. She was a founding board member of Recording for the Blind, and served on the boards of the Live Oak Theater and the Seton Development Board.

**PARCEL NO.:** 0206010506

**LEGAL DESCRIPTION:** E 50FT OF LOT 3 BLOCK 079 ORIGINAL CITY

**ESTIMATED ANNUAL TAX ABATEMENT:** \$7,829 (non-homestead); city portion: \$2,184.

**APPRAISED VALUE:** \$1,400,000

**PRESENT USE:** Office building

**CONDITION:** Excellent

**PRESENT OWNERS:**

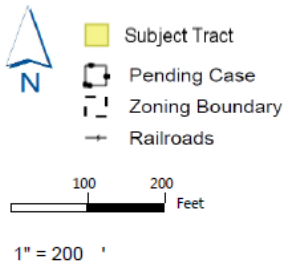
Rockafellow Properties LLC and Germer Properties, LLC  
504 W. 7<sup>th</sup> Street  
Austin, Texas, 78701

**DATE BUILT:** ca. 1890

**ALTERATIONS/ADDITIONS:** Masonry addition for apartments (1951); remodel including the enclosure of a balcony (1972).

**ORIGINAL OWNER(S):** John Bremond, Jr.

**OTHER HISTORICAL DESIGNATIONS:** None.



ZONING CASE#: C14H-2016-0073

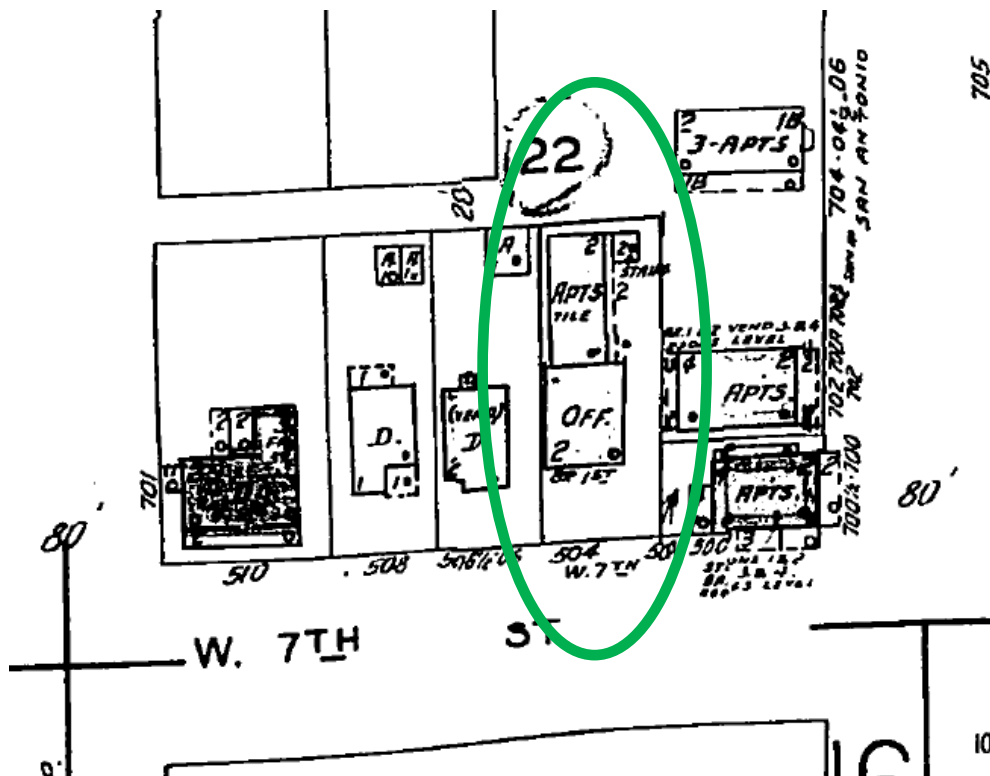
This product has been produced by CTM for the sole purpose of geographic reference. No warranty is made by the City of Austin regarding specific accuracy or completeness.



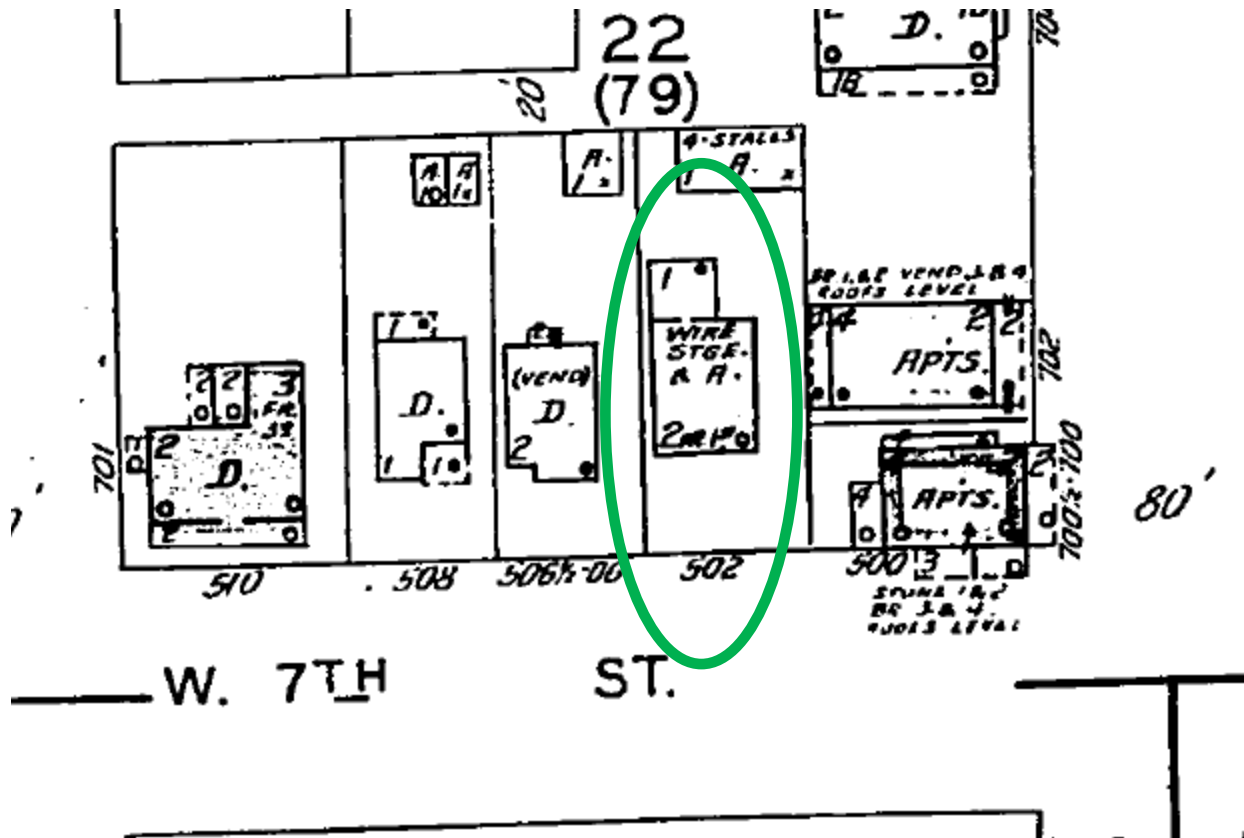
Created 07/19/16



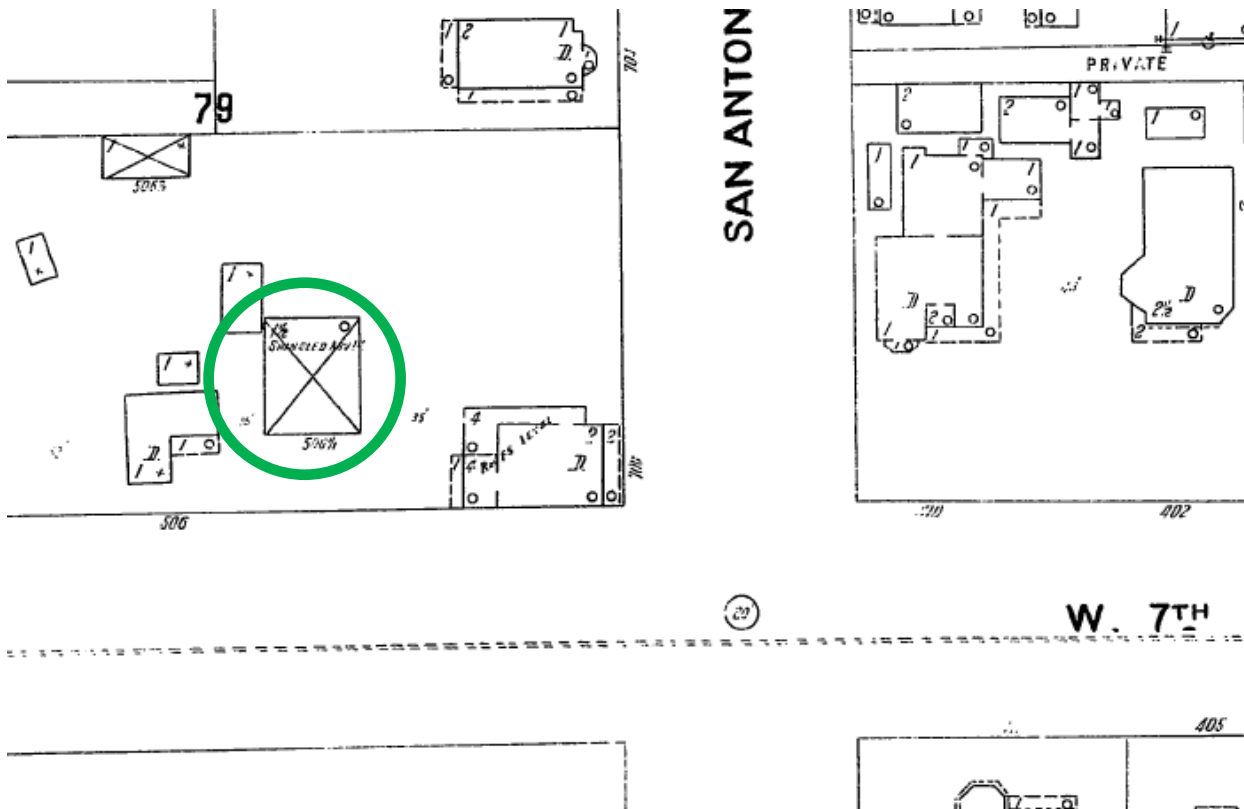
The Bremond Carriage House, 504 W. 7<sup>th</sup> Street



The 1961 Sanborn map shows the building as an office building with the ca. 1951 apartments behind it.

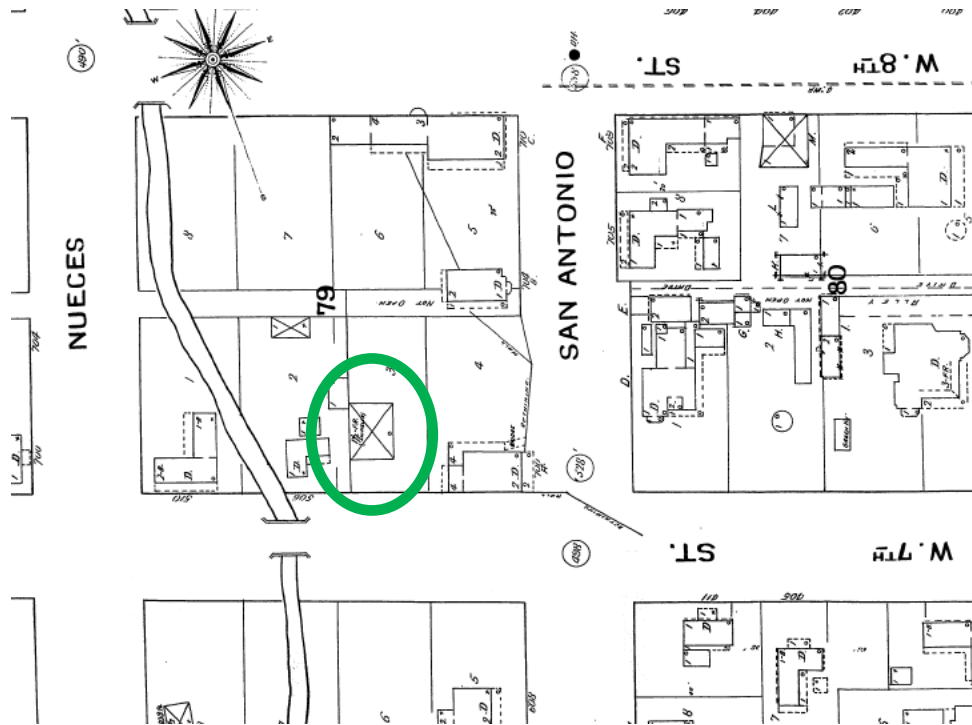


The 1935 Sanborn map shows the building with an address of 502 W. 7<sup>th</sup> Street; it is shown as a warehouse.



The 1900 Sanborn map shows the building with the reference that it was shingled above.





The 1894 Sanborn map shows the building. This is the first map to show this section of the city.

## **HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

### **504 W 7<sup>TH</sup> STREET, AUSTIN, TX 78701 aka "THE CARRIAGE HOUSE"**

Anyone familiar with Austin history will surely know about the Bremond and Robinson families and their contribution to the growth of Austin in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. They were prominent in various commercial enterprises, brought the railroad to downtown and established the fire brigade among other accomplishments.

The "Bremond Carriage House" located at 504 W 7<sup>th</sup> Street is a unique piece of history and architecture. The Carriage House was originally located within the "Bremond Block" and served as the stable for the various Bremond family homes located along Guadalupe, 7<sup>th</sup> Street & San Antonio.

---

As the story goes, the second wife of John Bremond Jr. was not happy about living so close to the stables. So, he moved it a block west onto 7<sup>th</sup> Street on the block where the family originally settled before building the historical residences we see today.

Researching the City of Austin and Travis County tax records reveals that the ownership of the property by John Bremond Jr. first appears in the early 1900's. In the 1903 Tax Roll of the City of Austin, his personal property listed at 504 W 7<sup>th</sup> Street included horses valued at \$450.

The building remained in the family and, in 1951, (according to a permit card located at the Austin History Center) the grandson of John Bremond Jr., William B. Houston, added on a "masonry addition...for apartments". He was renovating the building in anticipation of taking residence. William first appears in the City Directory as residing at 504 W 7<sup>th</sup> Street in 1954. When he married his second wife, Virginia Lipscomb Lockart, in 1971, she moved in and they continued to reside here until the late 1990's or early 2000's.

Bill and Virginia were very active in the Austin social scene, real estate business and philanthropic community. As a footnote, Bill's first wife, June, remarried Frank C. Erwin Jr. for whom the Erwin Center was named at the University of Texas. Bill, June and Virginia all attended the University of Texas at Austin.

It is Virginia Lipscomb Houston's side of the family that adds some interesting history to the "Carriage House". The Lipscomb's can trace their US residency back to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century when Virginia's ancestors crossed the ocean from England and settled in the colony of Virginia. Her great-great-grandfather, Judge Abner Smith Lipscomb, moved to Texas from Alabama in 1839. He was Secretary of State of the Republic under President Lamar and helped frame the current Texas constitution. He continued in public service and was later recognized by appointment to the Texas Supreme Court and having a county in northwest Texas named for him.



## **F2 - OCCUPANCY HISTORY – 504 W. 7<sup>TH</sup> ST - FROM AUSTIN CITY DIRECTORIES**

1910 – 1922 – 504 W. 7<sup>TH</sup> IS NOT LISTED IN THE AUSTIN CITY DIRECTORY

1924 – QUIST GARAGE

1927 -1933 – VACANT

1935 – 1941 – SOUTHWEST BELL TELCO WAREHOUSE

1942 – 1945 – STATE DEPT. FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

---

1947 – CARROLL VONROEDER & JOHNSON'S GARAGE

1949-1952 – FRED R. MOORE & JOHNSON'S GARAGE

1953 – VACANT

1954 – 2004 (APPROX)– WILLIAM B. & VIRGINIA L. HOUSTON

1954 – ADDITIONAL: O'CONNELL & PROBST ARCHITECTS

1997 – ADDITIONAL: HENNIG PRODUCTIONS

1997 – ADDITIONAL: JOHN H. MUIR

2000 – ADDITIONAL: HENNIG PRODUCTIONS

2000 – ADDITIONAL: TEXAS COTTON MARKETING CORP.

2005 – VARIOUS TENANTS: ARNOLD GARCIA LAW OFFICE, CRIDERAMERICAS  
GREENHOUSE BUILDERS, VIZIX DIGITAL STUDIO, TEXAS COTTON MARKETING

2006 – HILLOCK LTD. NEW OWNERS

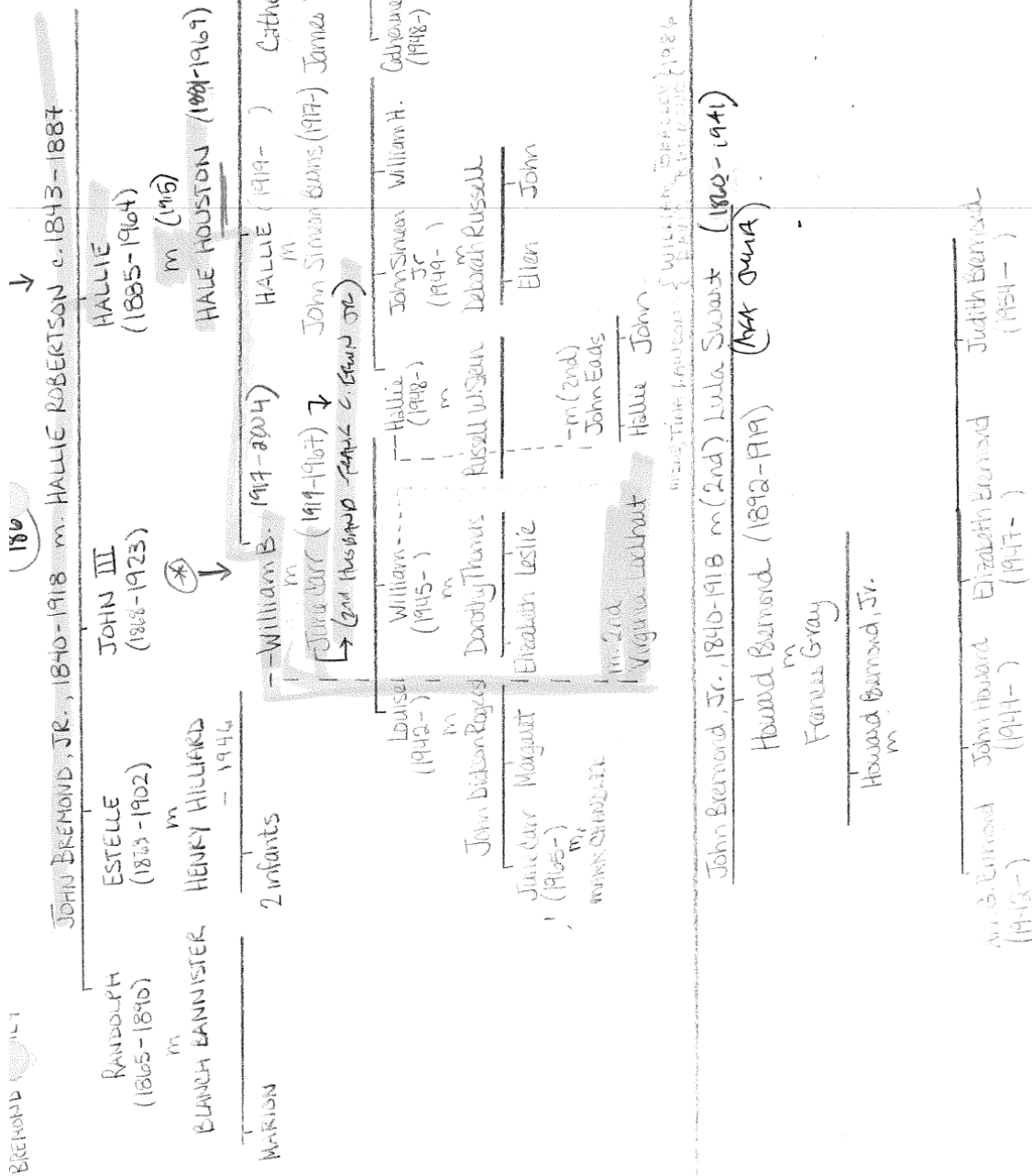
2006 – 2013 - VARIOUS TENANTS: ARNOLD GARCIA LAW OFFICE, PADDINGTON  
MEDIA, AFFORDABLE PROCESS SERVING, M&M BIOMEDICAL, NOTOPOS

2013 – BAT BRIDGE ENTERTAINMENT LLC / ROCKAFELLOW ENTERTAINMENT

OWNER: Rockafellow Properties, 161 Roadrunner Lane, Burnet, TX 78611

OWNER – Germer Properties, 11300 Musket Rim, Austin, TX 78738

BREMOND



Family tree of the John Bremond, Jr. family

# Obituaries

WTS 504 W. 7th St

## A Gentleman of Old Austin: William Bremond Houston

Austin History Center



Bill Houston enjoying a sail.

**By Mary C. Kahle**  
STAFF WRITER

The next time you drive by the downtown block encompassed by Guadalupe, San Antonio, 7th, and 8th Streets, slow down and take a moment to savor a little bit of "Old Austin." According to Sue McBee in *Austin: The Past Still Present*, the "Bremond Block" forms the heart of

"Austin's most important historic district." It's also where William Bremond Houston grew up. Bill, who passed away on July 17th, was a businessman, athlete, and world traveler whose relatives and surroundings form a picture of early Austin.

Born in 1917, Bill grew up in the Hale Houston House at 706 Guadalupe. McBee writes that Bill's great-grandfather, John Bremond, came to Austin from Philadelphia in 1845 and became good friends with John Robinson, a Little Rock transplant. She writes, "It was the continuing friendship of these two men which ultimately produced the Bremond Block: of the 12 children of John and Elizabeth Bremond, two daughters and a son married two sons and a daughter of the 10 children of John and Elizabeth Robinson." In subsequent years the descendants lived in many of the houses on the block, and Bill, the son of Hallie Bremond and Hale Houston, grew up playing and swimming at Barton Springs with his many cousins. Later, Bill and his wife Virginia lived for a time in the restored carriage house behind one of the his-

toric Bremond homes.

Bill attended Miss Hubrick's School, a private primary school, before going to Pease School, the first Texas school built with public funds, according to the Austin History Center. He then attended Austin High and the University of Texas. He'd always been athletic, and he played tennis and handball at the Austin Athletic Club, the old building next to today's Austin Recreation Center.

After college Bill embarked on a career path that reflected his enthusiasm for both business and athletics. First he worked at the John Bremond Wholesale Grocery and Coffee Company before its sale in the 1950s. Then he started what Virginia calls a "low-key" sailboat business, selling boats and starting fleets. He sailed all over the world, and he was a founder of what is now the Austin Yacht Club. He taught Virginia how to sail, and she crewed for him for several years before they married. Friend Bill Hudspeth has a story of crewing for Bill when he was captain and questioning him on something; Bill replied, "Listen, we came out here to sail, not to have a debate."

to have a debate.

Bill later entered real estate, establishing the Powell Houston Partnership with his good friend Ben Powell. The company built buildings, including seven for IBM. According to Virginia, Bill was "not the type to be president or chairman," and he enjoyed being at the work sites and "in there" with the workers. Eventually he became so busy with building construction that he no longer had time for sailing.

Bill also loved golf, and true to form, he golfed at many different places. He enjoyed going to Scotland by himself, where he'd take buses from course to course and simply find people to play with. Virginia says that he never had trouble finding partners because people took to his easy-going manner. He took lessons from

and became friends with beloved instructor Harvey Penick, and he once again combined business with pleasure when he briefly owned a golf range.

Bill's love of travel started early, beginning when he and Ben Powell took the "grand tour" of Europe in the 1930s (crossing the ocean on the Queen Mary) and taking off after the grocery company was sold. He and Virginia stayed in a houseboat in Kashmir twice, and they also traveled to Sri Lanka, South Africa, and Europe.

Bill's other interests lend spice to the picture.



Virginia says that he didn't believe in buying new cars and was known for his second-hand cars. He pulled sailboats behind his big green Chrysler, and he once bought a car for \$200 simply to tow a boat from the East Coast down to Austin. She also recalls the dump truck he used during his real estate career as the "worst looking thing." He was a "pack rat" who had warehouses to store all his things, and he loved to eat menudo at Joe's Bakery.

Virginia fondly says that it's hard to describe Bill, although she calls him understated, fair, and kind.

Truly, these are just the qualities you'd expect from a gentleman of Old Austin.

His wife Virginia, his children Will and Louise, his stepchildren Fran and Robert, their extended families, and his two sisters survive Bill Houston.

Obituary of William B. Houston  
West Austin News, August 12, 2004

**Virginia Lipscomb  
Lockart Houston**

**April 10, 1925-Sept 24, 2012**

Virginia Houston died in Dallas, Texas, after 87 years of striving for the horizon. Her body had been failing her for many years, but her soul continued to reach after more knowledge, more books, and more new places. Virginia Lee Lipscomb was born in Temple, Texas to Frances and Joe Lipscomb. The Lipscomb family



heritage was a source of pride. Having arrived in Virginia from England in the 17th century, they migrated over the generations to Texas, where Virginia's great-grandfather, Joel Abner Lipscomb, was secretary of state of the Republic of Texas. Virginia spent her high school years in Terrell, where she developed her passion for acting and witnessed history in the arrival in Terrell of the Royal Air Force training base preceding and during World War II. She attended the University of Texas, where she was a member of Zeta Tau Alpha sorority and was president of the Curtain Club and played leading roles in seven major productions of the UT Drama Department. Upon graduation, she helped organize and served on the board of an Equity traveling stock company, Interstate Players, financed by Interstate Theaters. She married Bob Lockart, the brother of one of her fellow actors, in 1947. As she and Bobby raised their family, she became a three-time board member of the Junior League of Austin, cherished a lifetime friendship with her sewing club, and served on the Zeta House Board, until Bobby's death in 1964. As a young widow, she worked for the Texas Senate as assistant calendar clerk and later became auction manager at KLRN for three years. She learned to sail and crew for Bill Houston, who would become her husband in 1971. Virginia and Bill restored and lived in the Bremond carriage house on West 7th, where they lived 27 years. During those years she was a founding board member of Recording for the Blind, was on the board of the Live Oak Theater and on the Seton Development Board. Together, Virginia and Bill traveled adventurously and everywhere, from South America to India to Sri Lanka to South Africa. Bill Houston died in 2004. After Bill's death, she eventually moved to Dallas and was living at The Forum at Park Lane when she died. Virginia was a devoted mother of two children, Fran Lockart Hillyer and Robert Lockart and a fascinating grandmother to four grandchildren, Julia Lockart, Christopher Lockart, Nathan Hillyer, and Matt Hillyer, and a great-grandmother to Naomi Hillyer and Sophia Hillyer. These children and her step-grandchildren and great-grandchildren, Louise Houston Rogers, June and Mark Chandler and Katie Chandler; Margaret van Hofwegan and Grace, Anna, and Olivia van Hofwegan; Will and Tina Houston, Elizabeth and Stephen Beal and Houston, Blakeley, and AnnMarie Beal; Leslie and Theron Bryant and Ava Bryant; and David and Bradley Houston, were the joy of her life. Also surviving are her brother The Reverend William Lipscomb and his wife Shirley and family, and by her beloved sister-in-law Olivia Lockart Vlahos and her family. Virginia's life was enriched by her life-long passions for theater, poetry, reading, travel, and her never-failing sense of humor. In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to the Virginia Lipscomb Curtain Club Endowed Scholarship, in care of Sondra Lomax, 1 University Station, D-1400, Austin, TX 78712. Services will be held at on Saturday, September 29, 2012 at 11:00 a.m. at the Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd, 3201 Windsor Road, Austin, TX 78703, and in Dallas at The Forum at Park Lane, on Tuesday, October 2, at 11:00 a.m. in the Robertson Room. For more information, please visit <http://www.sparkman-hillcrest.com>.

Obituary of Virginia Lipscomb Houston  
Austin American Statesman, September 28, 2012

# John Bremond & Company

---

*Phoebe Allen, AGS Member*

The history of John Bremond & Company is an extraordinary puzzle – each piece leads to another, connecting the family to one of Austin's oldest commercial establishments, the city's first firefighters, its first railroad, its oldest bank, and the six homes of its historic Bremond Block as well as a triple bond to Austin's pioneer Robinson family.

John Bremond, the progenitor of Austin's Bremond family, was born in 1813 in New York City to Catherine Green Bremond (1795-1874) of Fishkill, New York, and Paul Barlie Bremond (1770-1851), a French émigré physician who came from Marseilles to the U.S. in 1805.<sup>1</sup> According to Mary Josephine Butler Cooper<sup>2</sup>, great-granddaughter of John Bremond, "Family lore hands down the story that Dr. Bremond had been a physician to Napoleon."

John's oldest brother, Paul Bremond (1810-1885), left school at the age of 12 and apprenticed with a hatter in New York City. Paul later established a business in Philadelphia, but it failed in the panic of 1836. Choosing to begin anew in the Republic of Texas, he established a successful general merchandising business in 1839 in Galveston, the major port and principal city of the Republic with a population of more than 3,000. He moved to Houston in 1842, where he was a well-known railroad financier and entrepreneur. In 1848 Paul Bremond initiated the organization of the Galveston & Red River Railway, which was to become the Houston & Texas Central Railway that arrived in Austin in 1871. He later built the Houston East & West Texas Railway to serve the timber belt between Houston and Shreveport. Paul's

daughter Margaret was the first wife of William Marsh Rice, benefactor of Rice University.<sup>3</sup>

It is likely that John Bremond followed in his brother's footsteps to some degree, working first as a hatter in Philadelphia,<sup>4</sup> marrying his wife Elizabeth Roberts there in 1833, and then heading to Texas in 1846. John established a dry goods and grocery store at 109 East Pecan (Sixth Street), across from the present Driskill Hotel, as early as 1847. The June 13, 1918 issue of the *Austin American* newspaper states, "This establishment has been in operation in the same building and under the same name since 1847. ... It is one of the oldest business houses in Austin, and one of the oldest wholesale establishments in Texas."

There were several options for reaching Austin in the 1840s. El Camino Real, the old San Antonio highway, offered overland travel by wagon through Louisiana and Arkansas. One could travel aboard a boat from the east coast all the way to the port of Galveston or Brazoria. The Colorado River was not yet navigable, but from Galveston steamboats traveled up the Brazos River as far as Richmond or Groce's Landing near the old Austin Colony's capital of San Felipe, or—if the rivers were up—as far as Washington-on-the-Brazos. One then proceeded overland in wagons. Alternatively, Mr. Bremond might have utilized the Erie Canal—which opened in 1825 and was the superhighway of pre-Civil War America—to travel from Albany to Buffalo, then by steamboat down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to New Orleans, boarding a vessel there for Galveston. (Perhaps this was

the reason for Bremond's presence in Buffalo at the time of his death.)

According to Frank Brown's *Annals of Travis County and the City of Austin from the earliest times to the close of 1875* (25.37), John Bremond came to Austin from Philadelphia in October of 1846.

*"He at once opened a stock of goods in a small boardroom, about 16 feet square, on the east side of Congress Avenue, located about thirty yards below Pecan Street. He remained there awhile, afterwards moving to the stand on the south side of Pecan Street, now occupied by his son, John Bremond. At the time there was a small pine building on the ground, perhaps twenty feet square, with a shedroom attached. John Bremond did business at this stand until his death. About the year 1849 he established a small branch store on the east side of the Avenue, between Sixth and Seventh Streets, in charge of his son Eugene. ... Bremond's business gradually increased until he felt justified in erecting more commodious quarters, which he did. In 1847 he went North to purchase goods. Upon his return he brought to Austin his oldest son, Eugene, then about thirteen years old. In 1848 he again went North after goods, and returned with his entire family [his wife and six more children]. Mr. Bremond went North in 1866, and suddenly died in July of that year at Buffalo, N.Y., in his 52<sup>nd</sup> year."*

Bremond's Austin business venture flourished. He enlarged the store building in 1852, the same year he was chosen as a member of the Provisional Railroad Association of Travis County, an organization of prominent men who encouraged the construction of a railroad from the Texas coast to Austin.<sup>5</sup> Since the 1871 arrival of the

railway would affect and shape the future of the business, it would be interesting to learn just how John's support for the railway was connected to that of his brother Paul in Houston.

In an entry in Governor Elisha Pease's journal for July 4, 1856, the first occupant of the Governor's Mansion recorded that John Bremond joined him there to view the Capitol fireworks, an indication of his high standing in the youthful city. In August of 1858, Bremond met with other businessmen to end the era of fighting fires with the bucket brigade. Formerly a fireman in New York, who knew drill routines and equipment, he aided in organizing and chartering Austin Hook and Ladder Company No. 1.<sup>6</sup> His son Eugene was also a member of this company, and John Jr. became a member of the Washington Fire Company.

A later newspaper clipping<sup>7</sup> describes the elder Bremond: "The first John Bremond was once a fire chief...He was quite a dresser and had his uniforms tailored in New York. He used to twirl a small cane as he walked down the street. A real dandy, reports a remote cousin, Edward Robinson, who is still a volunteer fireman."

In the Oct. 7, 1854 edition of Austin's *Texas State Times*, Bremond advertised "cheese, chains, clams, clothing, crackers, cranberries, crowbars and cutlery." The dry goods store faced Pecan Street, and the grocery department opened to Brazos Street. In 1865, the year before his death, the elder Bremond brought his sons Eugene and John, Jr. into the business as partners, establishing John Bremond & Company.

### The Bremond-Robinson Connection

The family of John Henry Robinson (1819-1897) holds many pieces of the Bremond

puzzle. The two families were good friends, and three of his children married three of John Bremond's children. The Robinson homestead at Bois d'Arc (7<sup>th</sup>) and Rio Grande was a block from the Bremond homestead at Pecan (6<sup>th</sup>) and Nueces Streets.<sup>8</sup>

Born in London, England, Robinson was a seaman in his younger days on a merchant vessel that traveled between Liverpool and New Orleans. His ship was wrecked off the Virginia coast on his last voyage. In 1836 he married Elizabeth Sheridan in New Orleans. His Irish wife preferred to stay in the United States, so Robinson started a bakery in New Orleans as the door-to-door salesman of cakes and baked goods made by a partner, the future father of Colonel Edward Mandell House.<sup>9</sup> Robinson soon moved to Little Rock, Arkansas, where he opened a store. His first son was born there in 1839.

In the mid-1850s Robinson loaded his family into a covered wagon and brought them to Austin. He opened a general merchandise store on the west side of Congress Avenue just north of Fifth Street in 1856. The 20-inch-thick-stone load-bearing walls built in 1856 are incorporated in the oldest documented structure in Austin, the Robinson-Rosner Building, which was enlarged in 1886.

Now the puzzle pieces become complicated. John H. Robinson was in partnership for a time with Eugene Bremond, who married his daughter, Mary Amelia Robinson, in 1861. When Eugene went back to work for his father at John Bremond & Company, Robinson partnered with his own son, John Robinson Jr., as J.H. Robinson & Son. In 1868, John Robinson Jr. married Madeline Bremond. He was one of the original founders of the old Washington Fire Engine Company organized in that year at 601 Brazos Street; that original building is still standing. When John Robinson Jr. decided to join John Bremond & Company

as a partner, his younger brother Alfred Robinson, who married Pauline Bremond in 1869, replaced him as the 'Son' in the Robinson firm.<sup>10</sup> Alfred died in 1885, leaving the store to his younger brother Alonzo. (The Robinson family founded the Austin White Lime Company, which is still in operation today in northwest Austin.)

### **Bremond's Bank**

From the Bremond store's inception, Eugene made private loans to early settlers – charging the standard 18% interest – from a room at the rear of the store. Preferring banking to dry goods and groceries, Eugene sold his share of the business in 1870 to his brother John, who subsequently added their sister's husband as his partner.

The State National Bank, known locally as "Bremond's Bank," was chartered in 1882. It was located at the west end of the store, at 109 East Sixth, across the alley from Joe Koen's Jewelry. Major George Littlefield accepted a position on the board of directors in company with Eugene's son, Pierre. Lewis Hancock (who would inherit from his father George the corner lot he would sell to Emerson Monroe Scarbrough in 1905) served as vice president. Eugene's wife's brother, J.G. Palm, was the cashier, and Eugene's son, Walter Bremond, was the assistant cashier and later succeeded his father as president.<sup>11</sup> In 1887, Eugene became a member of the newly established Board of Trade, an organization comparable to today's Chamber of Commerce.

### **The Railroad Brings Change**

The Houston and Texas Central Railroad, originally incorporated by John's brother, Paul Bremond, reached Austin in December of 1871.<sup>12</sup> The railroad station was conveniently located near the Bremond store on Market

Square, bordered by Fifth, Trinity, Sixth, and Neches Streets. Prior to the railway, "Overland wagons pulled by teams of mules and oxen transported lumber, cotton, and other articles for hundreds of miles to the coast or rail outlets, increasing the cost of such items as much as 600 to 700 percent."<sup>13</sup> Candles, for example, were selling for \$9.00 a pound! Although it initially took 17 1/2 hours or more for the trains to travel between Houston and Austin, rail travel profoundly changed transportation, the business economy, and John Bremond & Company. Shifting from retail to wholesale operations, John Bremond & Company was now able to supply dry goods and groceries to smaller stores throughout Central Texas.

In 1898, Robinson—who managed the dry goods phase of the business—retired and sold his half interest to his partner for \$50,000. Since Bremond primarily handled the grocery business, an agreement was signed with the company's chief dry goods competitor, McKean-Eilers on Congress Avenue, selling them the dry goods business, with John Bremond & Company retaining the grocery business.<sup>14</sup>

The company was one of the first in the nation, in 1905, to roast, grind and distribute their own blend of coffee. Prior to that time, each family had to roast and grind the green coffee beans they purchased. Since there was no other roasting plant in Texas, the red one-pound and three-pound cans of John Bremond Coffee soon became familiar in grocery stores from Texarkana to Brownsville. Eventually they distributed four blends for home consumption – John Bremond, Early Breakfast, Golden Eagle, and a stronger blend for café use.<sup>15</sup>

In 1915 John Bremond & Company incorporated with a capitalization of \$100,000. John Jr. died in 1918, leaving the business to his children – John Bremond III,

Howard Bremond, and Hallie Bremond Houston. Howard died in 1919, and his two siblings bought his third interest.<sup>16</sup>

In 1924, with the rail depot now at Third Street and Congress Avenue, the company moved to Third & San Jacinto Streets. John III died in 1928, leaving the business to his sister and her husband, Hale Houston. John Bremond & Company closed its doors there around 1967, according to Hale's son, Bill Houston. (William B. Houston - RESIDEN

#### Bremond & Company Building Demolished

At the time of its demolition in 1979, the Bremond & Company Building was the oldest commercial structure in Austin and housed OK Records, Catman's Shine Parlor, Moma's Money Restaurant, City Pharmacy and Don Politico's Tavern. The adjacent Pope Building, also demolished, was the home of the blues club, Antone's. In 1981, the Bremond store was replaced by the Littlefield Mall's 24 apartment units and ground-level retail space. The 500 parking spaces provided in the mall made it possible for the historic Littlefield Building, built across the street in 1912, to survive intact.

#### The "Original" Bremond Block

The history of the Bremond Block Historic District, which lies between Seventh and Eighth, Guadalupe and San Antonio Streets on one of Austin's seven hills, is well documented, but the "original" Bremond block was at another location. At first the Bremond family lived above the Bremond store. Pauline Bremond (Mrs. Alfred Robinson) was born there. According to a 1958 Cooper-Nagle interview, "The daughter of the first Mrs. John Bremond told the story that her mother was very unhappy when she first came to Austin to join her husband at this frontier community. She was so afraid that the Texas sun would



bake the brains of her little daughters that she made them hats, cut holes in the top of the hats, then pulled their hair through and tied the hair in a knot, so that the little girls could not take their hats off."<sup>17</sup> (See Pg. 170) *OLD BREMOND BLOCK*

The John Bremond homestead was in the block between Sixth and Seventh, Nueces and Rio Grande (Block 75). After his death, the block was divided into quarters. Eugene received the northwest quarter and built a house there for his daughter Lillie, who married Dr. Ralph Steiner. The southeast quarter of the block, with the original Bremond home facing Sixth Street, was given to John's daughter Louisa (Mrs. Hugh Haynie). His daughter Virginia (Mrs. Joseph Nagle) received the northeast quarter, and the Nagle family lived there until the home was torn down in the 1950s. John Jr. received the southwest quarter of the block, but never lived there.

Maerki's Bakery was the first building on the southwest corner. According to a 2002 interview with Mary Jo Cooper, the Maerki home just east of the bakery first faced south on Sixth Street, before Mrs. Maerki had it turned around and moved to face Seventh Street because of the traffic on Sixth.<sup>17</sup>

Mrs. Cooper recalled visiting the Steiner and Nagle homes, but could recall no home at the southeast corner of the block. After the death of her own mother when she was five, Mrs. Cooper was raised by her mother's sister, Mary Robinson Martin, in a home still standing at Seventh and Nueces Streets. She also recalled the nearby Robinson home.

#### **Relationship of the Bremond Block Historic District**

In 1866, the year of his father's death, Eugene Bremond purchased the north half of the now historic Bremond Block. For a few years, he and his wife Mary Amelia Robinson

lived at the northeast corner of the block in the former Greek Revival home of one of Austin's first doctors, William Phillips. After the death of Eugene's wife in 1872, he married Augusta PALM, a daughter of the noted intellectual Sir Svante Palm (who gave his extensive library collection to UT and for whom Palm School is named). Eugene and Augusta moved to the Victorian Italianate home on the southwest corner of the block in 1874.

Taking up residence in the Phillips-Bremond home was Eugene's son Eugene Jr., who was deaf and mute and required live-in companions. His caretakers over the years included his grandmother Elizabeth Bremond (1814-1898), her daughter Madeline with husband John Robinson, Jr., and Elizabeth's youngest daughter, Kate Eggleston. John Jr. bought the home in 1906 and rented it to one of his employees, Hale Houston, who would eventually become president of the company. Houston married John's daughter Hallie Houston in 1915, securing Bremond occupancy of the Phillips-Bremond-Houston house for the next 50 years.

In 1891, Eugene brought his widowed, pregnant sister, Pauline Bremond Robinson, and her six children to live in the house next door. (Pauline and her unmarried daughter Kate later raised an infant here when the child's mother, Josephine Robinson Butler, died in the influenza epidemic of 1918, leaving four young children. The remaining three children were raised by Josephine's sister, Mary Robinson Martin, one block away. Mary Jo Butler Cooper was one of those three children. She recalls that all of the Bremond and Robinson cousins were close, and that her aunts would sew together in her Grandmother Pauline's home.)

Eugene's sister, Josephine Bremond Crosby, and her husband Josiah lived briefly in the house on the northwest corner of the block. It

was remodeled and enlarged for Eugene's son Walter and his bride in 1887. A home was built in the lot adjacent to Eugene's home for his youngest son Pierre and his bride, St. Louis socialite Nina Abadie, in 1898. Pierre and Nina used tin cans for golfing holes early in their marriage and constructed Austin's first golf course and country club with Lewis Hancock.

(ACW w. Jm NW → JUD WADSWORTH)  
John Jr. was actually the first to purchase land and a Greek Revival style house, not unlike the Governor's Mansion, on the now historic Bremond Block in 1864. John Jr. lived in this house until he demolished it to build a formal Victorian home on the two lots on the southeast corner in 1886. His first wife died as the house was nearing completion. His second wife didn't like the unsanitary stables being so close to their home, so she had them moved to a site on or near the older Bremond block. → 504 W. Jm

The first house in Austin to boast an indoor toilet, John Jr.'s magnificent home adds the final piece to the Bremond puzzle and is testimony to the success of John Bremond & Company.

#### Descendants of Hallie Elizabeth Roberts & John BREMOND

(→ indicates offspring)

##### 1. Eugene (1832-1910)

m. #1 Mary Amelia Robinson, 1861, daughter of J.H. Robinson Sr. (b. Ark. ca.1842) → Elizabeth, Walter (married Mary Anderson, 1886, became president of State National Bank, died 1925; his son Walter, Jr., who had 5 daughters, was president of Capital National Bank, d. 1953), Eugene Jr., Lillie (Mrs. Ralph Steiner).

m. #2 Augusta Palm (born 1849 in Sweden to Sir Svante Palm - a noted intellectual who gave UT his extensive library) married in 1874

→ Pierre Augusta Bremond (m. Nina Abadie, 1897), Maud Carr.

2. Marie Louise (Louisa) (1838-1889) m. 1853, Hugh Haynie → Eugene, Mollie Blocker, Elizabeth, Hugh, Brooks, Joe, Minnie McNeese, Pauline Hegglesline.

3. Josephine (b. 1840) m. 1856, Josiah Crosby (one of the six original founders of El Paso) → Marie Louise (Lula) Hardcastle, Madeline Wood, William, Virginia Moran, Josephine, Katherine Faskally, Yndita, Josiah Jr.

4. John Jr. (5/1/1841-1918) m. Hallie Robertson 1861 (d. 1887) → Randolph, Estelle Hilliard, John III (1868-1923), Hallie Houston (1885-1964); wife #2 Lula Julia Trippe m. 1890, NYC → Howard

5. Mary "Dear Aunt" (b. circa 1842) m. 1869, Hugh Haralson

6. Madeline (1845-1923) m. John H. Robinson Jr. in 1868 → Mary Louise "Mazie," Madeline "B" (Mrs. Robert W. Shipp), Henry, Edward (m. Louise Hamby, stepdaughter of Kate Bremond Hamby; d. 1928; lived in "House on the Hill")

7. Virginia (b. circa 1846 in PA) m. 1872, Joseph A. Nagle → Bremond, Virginia (-1962), Joseph, Everard, Stephen (-1922), Edward (-1955).

8. Pauline (1849 in Texas -1935) m. 1969, Alfred H. Robinson (1844-1885) → Mary (Mrs. Joe Martin), Elizabeth "Lizzie" (moved back to mother's home as a widow with children), Catherine "Miss Kate," Josephine (Mrs. Thomas Butler) → Mary Josephine (Mrs. Douglas Cooper).

9. Pierre (1853-1871).

10. Katherine (1855-1939) m. #1. Everhard Eggleston; #2. Gen. W. R. Hamby

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Tyler, Ron, editor. *New Handbook of Texas*, p. 720; and *Biographical Encyclopedia of Texas*, 1880. p. 177

2. Mary Josephine Butler Cooper interview by Phoebe Allen, Aug. 9, 2002, at Mrs. Cooper's home in Austin, Texas. Mrs. Cooper, the granddaughter Alfred and Pauline Bremond Robinson, is the great-granddaughter of both John Bremond and John Robinson.

3. Maxwell, Robert S. *Whistle in the Piney Woods: Paul Bremond and the Houston, East and West Texas Railway*. Texas Gulf Coast Historical Association, 1963.V. 7, no. 2.

4. This statement is inferred from notes in the Bremond biographical file of the Austin History Center. Paul Bremond is listed in the Philadelphia city directories as a hatter on Chestnut Street from 1831 to 1839. J. Bremond is listed as a hatter on Chestnut Street beginning in 1841; in 1845 as Bremond & Florence, hatters. J. Bremond continues through 1848, the year Bremond brought his remaining family to Austin.

5. *Texas State Gazette*, Austin, Sept. 11, 1852 and Jan. 29, 1853

6. Barkley, Mary Starr. *History of Travis County & Austin, 1839-1899*. p. 231. Waco: Texian Press, 1963.

7. Bremond biographical files, Austin History Center. Clipping is unidentified, undated.

8. The 1876 Robinson home still stands at 702 Rio Grande and is recognized by the Texas Historical Commission.

9. The heir of his entrepreneurial father, who eventually settled in Houston, E.M. House (1858-1938) moved to Austin in 1885 after studies at Yale and Cornell and travel in Europe. He managed the successful campaigns of four Texas governors (Hogg,<sup>1</sup> Culberson,<sup>1</sup> Sayers, and Lanham) and was a well known Democrat and politician at the state and national levels. In 1912 E.M. House managed Woodrow Wilson's presidential bid and became a close advisor, authored a novel considered to be a blueprint for the New Deal, and participated in international negotiations during and after WWI, including Versailles. His negotiations with the Germans between 1914 and 1918 literally kept us out of WWI for four years, according to historian Barbara Tuchman. In 1891 House built a

Richarsonian Romanesque home on West Avenue, the most architecturally and historically significant home in Austin until its demolition in 1967.

10. Robinson biographical files, Austin History Center.

11. The March 4, 1923 issue of the *Austin Statesman* indicates that the bank was moved across the alley from its original place of business in 1865. State National Bank, which was located at 109 East Sixth until at least 1924, was liquidated in 1926 due to excessive loans to farmers on the cotton crop, following the previous year's crop failure. It was absorbed by Capitol Bank – which was located on the first floor of the Norwood Tower – and then other banks, including Republic Bank, which was eventually incorporated by today's Chase Bank.

12. Paul Bremond had been one of the incorporators of Galveston & Red River Railway in 1848. The name changed to the Houston & Texas Central Railway Company in 1856. A branch line to Austin was abandoned before the Civil War, but Washington county planters, as the Washington County Railway Company, undertook the completion of the line to Brenham from Hempstead in 1861. The H&TC bought this line and extended it 25 miles to Ledbetter in January 1871, and additional 25 miles to McDade by September, 25 more miles to Manor by November, and the remaining 18.69 miles to Austin in December.

13. Maxwell, Robert S. *Whistle in the Piney Woods: Paul Bremond and the Houston, East and West Texas Railway*. Texas Gulf Coast Historical Association, 1963.V. 7, no. 2. p. 3.

14. Thompson, J.K. Term paper of 1952. From recollections of Edward Brock, Jr., secretary-treasurer of the Bremond Company, who joined the company in 1888 at the age of 16. Brock's father had been the company bookkeeper beginning in 1881.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

17. Interview, 1958, with Virginia Nagle, granddaughter of John Bremond, and Mary Jo Cooper, granddaughter of Alfred and Pauline Bremond Robinson. Austin History Center, Bremond biographical files.

## ***Bibliography***

*Austin Statesman*, March 4, 1923.

Barkley, Mary Starr. *History of Travis County & Austin, 1839-1899*. Waco: Texian Press, 1963.

Bremond & Company. Building file C14h-78-028, City of Austin Planning Commission.

Bremond, John. Biographical file, Austin History Center.

Bremond Genealogy. Bremond biographical file, Austin History Center.

Brown, Frank. *Annals of Travis County and the City of Austin from the earliest times to the close of 1875*.

Germany, Lisa. *Bremond Block Historic Walking Tour & Map*. Heritage marketing, Austin Convention & Visitors Bureau, in cooperation with Historic Landmark Commission. City of Austin, 1994.

Historic Landmark Commission files on the Bremond Building, and minutes from June 19, 1978.

Maxwell, Robert S. *Whistle in the Piney Woods: Paul Bremond and the Houston, East and West Texas*

*Railway*. Texas Gulf Coast Historical Association, 1963. Series 7.2, November, 1963.

Nagle, Virginia, and Cooper, Mary Jo. Interview, 1958. Bremond biographical file, Austin History Center.

Reed, S.G. *A History of the Texas Railroads*. Houston: St. Clair, 1941.

Robinson, John H. Austin History Center biographical file.

Robinson & Rosner Building file, Congress Avenue HB files, Austin History Center.

*Texas State Gazette*, Austin, Sept. 11, 1852 and Jan. 29, 1853

Thompson, J.K. "A History of John Bremond & Company," term paper, 1952. Bremond biographical file,

Austin History Center.

Tyler, Ron, editor. *New Handbook of Texas*. Austin: The Texas State Historical Association, 1996. "Paul

Bremond," by Robert S. Maxwell.

United States Census, 1850, 1860.

*Special Thanks to Ed Vandevort, Mary Jo Cooper, and the staff of the Austin History Center.*

Phoebe Allen is a self-proclaimed History Detective, researching the "genealogy" of houses and commercial buildings for nomination as city, state and national historic landmarks.