

“It Takes a Village to Preserve a Historic Building: The LULAC Council 60 Clubhouse and the Efforts to Rehabilitate a Latinx Site in Houston, Texas”

Historical Context

Houston’s historical roots lead back to early Indigenous, Black, United States, and Mexican history during the 1800s. Today’s Houston rests on the homelands of the Karankawa, Akokisa, Atakapa-Ishak, and Sanas peoples. Native groups exchanged goods, customs, languages, and food with the Spanish and free and enslaved people brought to the Americas from the continent of Africa, beginning in the 1500s. After the United States fought for independence from Britain during the 1770s, Americans began expanding westward for new opportunities exclusively reserved for White men. As the United States conquered Indigenous peoples and defeated colonial empires, the nation added new territories to the republic that either allowed or prohibited the enslavement of Black people. Throughout the 1820s and 1830s, Americans moving into the West came into conflict with an emerging Mexican nation, fighting over resources, land, immigration, taxation, and the expansion of slavery.

Beginning in 1810, leaders of mixed racial and ethnic heritage rebelled against Spain to create the nation of Mexico. Revolutionaries of Indigenous, Black, and Spanish heritage like Father Miguel Hidalgo, Jose María Morelos, Vicente Guerrero, and others wanted to create a more equitable society. Because of the unjust caste system that placed individuals in hierarchies based on their skin color, sex, religion, birthplace, and ethnicity, people fought against the Spaniards and loyalists of the Spanish crown until 1821, when Spain recognized Mexico’s independence. Spain only agreed to Mexico’s claims after revolutionary Vicente Guerrero and the accommodationist Agustín de Iturbide compromised to end the Mexican War of Independence.¹ Although revolutionaries succeeded in prohibiting the enslavement of Black people throughout most of Mexico, the state of Texas and Coahuila was the exception. American immigrants and moderate Mexicans lobbied the Mexican government to allow slavery in this state.

Between 1821 and 1836, Mexican citizens and American immigrants in Texas and Coahuila debated with leaders in Mexico City over many issues until they fought to create the Republic of Texas. American immigrants like Stephen Austin, Haden Edwards, David G. Burnet, and others who had acquired land claims from Spain and Mexico had respected these requests in the newly formed state of Texas and Coahuila². They sought new economic opportunities in the state and brought chattel slavery into the region. Some Mexicans like Martín de León, Erasmo Seguín, Juan Seguín, and Lorenzo de Zavala worked with American immigrants to make Texas y Coahuila their home and helped found the Republic of Texas. Because they also sought opportunities in Texas and Coahuila, they partnered with American immigrants for their ambitions.³ Mexican presidents like Vicente Guerrero and Antonio López de Santa Anna pushed

¹ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “Agustín de Iturbide,” Britannica, July 15, 2023, accessed on August 30, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Agustin-de-Iturbide>.

² Eugene C. Barker, “Empresario,” TSHA Online, Texas State Historical Association, March 4, 2020, accessed on August 30, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/empresario#:~:text=Outstanding%20Texas%20empresarios%20includ ed%20Stephen,Wavell.>

³ Craig H. Roell, “De León, Martín (1765-1833),” TSHA Online, Texas State Historical Association, June 22, 2019, accessed on August 30, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/de-leon-martin>.

the Mexican government to pass laws restricting American immigration, centralizing trade, and prohibiting slavery in Texas and Coahuila. These measures influenced Americans and Mexicans to separate from Mexico to create the Republic of Texas.

General Sam Houston defeated Mexican president Antonio López de Santa Anna at the Battle of San Jacinto in 1836, which led to the independence of Texas and the founding of Houston, Texas. The military leader and his troops tricked Santa Anna's forces into the marshy terrain between Buffalo Bayou and Galveston Bay.⁴ The Texan soldiers stunned the Mexican infantry, leading to the death of 630 Mexican troops and 9 Texan forces.⁵ The defeat left Santa Anna alone with Houston and his infantry. Santa Anna signed the Treaties of Velasco, recognizing Texas' independence to secure his release. Upon his return to Mexico City, the Congress of Mexico never approved Texas' separation, leading to more conflicts between Mexico, Texas, and the United States. The Battle of San Jacinto and the surrounding land close to Galveston Bay laid the roots for the emergence of Houston.⁶

Mexicans and enslaved Blacks built Houston after the defeat of Santa Anna's forces in 1836. Captured Mexicans became servants of Texans after the Battle of San Jacinto. They constructed some of the first homes in Houston and even settled in the Galveston area. To build structures in the swamps, Mexican servants and enslaved Blacks cleared the marshes, often enduring malaria, unsanitary conditions, and long working hours. The Republic of Texas also provided land to Mexican veterans who had fought with Houston's army during the conflict. The inequities of Spanish, U.S., and Mexican society became apparent in the town's early history. Texans began to generalize Mexicans as inefficient individuals, criminals, and unhoused people as some struggled to make ends meet in the bayou town. These early characterizations failed to recognize that Mexicans and Blacks built the initial infrastructure that would jettison Houston's importance to the world throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁷

During the Texas Republic (1836-1845) and after Texas was accepted into the United States as a slave state in 1845, the Texas legislature passed laws limiting the liberties of Blacks and darker-complexioned Mexicans. Yet, these communities continued to live in Houston throughout the 1800s. The Congress of Texas approved bills that made it extremely difficult for free Blacks to remain in the republic because free Blacks required congressional approval to stay in the nation. Although the Texas Legislature allowed some Mexicans to hold onto their land, policymakers enacted legislation that denied property ownership to Blacks and Indigenous peoples. Mexicans who appeared to have Black and Indigenous heritage could not apply for new land grants. While Texas Independence provided more opportunities for Whites and lighter-complexioned Mexicans, historians like Gerald Horne argue that the War for Texas Independence was a counter-revolution as the republic denied liberties to Black, Indigenous, and darker-

⁴ "Battle Maps," San Jacinto Museum, San Jacinto Museum of History, accessed on August 30, 2023, https://www.sanjacinto-museum.org/The_Battle/Battle_Maps/.

⁵ L. W. Kemp, "San Jacinto, Battle of," TSHA Online, Texas State Historical Association, August 4, 2020, accessed on August 30, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/san-jacinto-battle-of>.

⁶ "Treaties of Velasco," TSHA Online, Texas State Historical Association, July 30, 2020, accessed on August 30, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/treaties-of-velasco>.

⁷ Arnoldo De León, *Ethnicity in the Sunbelt: Mexican Americans in Houston* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2001), 4-5.

complexioned Mexicans.⁸ These restrictions continued in Texas after the United States annexed the republic in 1845, and Mexico lost more than half of its land after the Mexican American War concluded in 1848. Throughout the 1800s, Mexicans and Mexican Americans increasingly worked in Houston's growing lumber, grain, cotton, and railroad industries while enduring some of the previously mentioned inequalities.⁹

In the late 1800s, a new wave of Mexican American migrants traveled to the town as strikebreakers, which led to the spread of Mexican heritage in Houston. Beginning in 1880, Black shipyard, cotton compressor, and railroad workers went on strike. To break this labor coalition, Houston employers began to recruit Mexican American laborers from South Texas to replace the picketers. By 1890, these Mexican American migrants established homes in Houston. Because some of them could not find jobs, they brought Indigenous forms of entrepreneurship. For example, they became street vendors who sold tamales in Houston's public spaces. The vendors steadily acquired new jobs as seamsters, hairdressers, and shoemakers by 1900. Mexican Americans began founding permanent neighborhoods in the Bayou City by creating economic opportunities and working in other professions.¹⁰

Houston's developing oil industry in 1901 and the beginning of the Mexican Revolution in 1910 led to the expansion of Houston's Mexican and Mexican American population. East of Houston, Texans found the Spindletop oil field. This finding led to the birth of Texas' petroleum industry. Because Houston had a robust banking industry and railroads, the city became the home of energy businesses. With a growing oil sector, new money flowed from the federal government to improve Houston's shipyards. Mexican Americans from South Texas moved to Houston in search of economic opportunities in the oil and shipping industries.¹¹ By 1910, the Mexican dictator, Porfirio Díaz, had angered many Mexicans because of his autocratic policies. Dissenters like Teresa Urrea, Ricardo Flores Magón, Francisco Madero, and others fought against the Díaz regime, leading to the Mexican Revolution.¹² Warring factions loyal to Mexican revolutionary legends like Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata resulted in highly violent conflicts throughout Mexico. As a result, about one million Mexicans sought refuge in the United States.

With new Mexican immigrants and a growing Mexican American population, both communities began creating barrios and forging business opportunities throughout Houston in the 1920s. Ethnic Mexicans lived in barrios as city councils crafted segregation laws that separated racial and ethnic populations from the White majority in the early twentieth century. Because demographic-collecting government agencies classified ethnic Mexicans as Whites, city councils

⁸ See Gerald Horne, *The Counter-Revolution of 1836: Texas Slavery & Jim Crow and the Roots of U.S. Fascism* (New York: International Publishers, 2022).

⁹ Martha Menchaca, *The Mexican American Experience in Texas: Citizenship, Segregation, and The Struggle for Equality* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2022), 47-49.

¹⁰ De Leon, *Ethnicity in the Sunbelt*, 6.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 9.

¹² See María Esquinca, "Teresa Urrea: The Mexica Joan of Arc," November 5, 2021, in *Latino USA*, produced by, podcast, MP3 Audio, <https://www.latinousa.org/2021/11/05/teresaurrea/>; See Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Bad Mexicans: Race, Empire, and Revolution in the Borderlands* (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 2022).

created housing covenants that barred people from living in specific neighborhoods who could not maintain a home's aesthetic.¹³

Thus, Mexicana/os and Mexican Americans in Houston settled in Magnolia Park and First, Second, and Fifth Ward. Although in different neighborhoods, the community began giving their barrios names. For example, some called one area *El Alacrán* (scorpion) and another *El Crisol* (crucible), giving Mexican identities to the communities.¹⁴ Mexicana/o and Mexican American entrepreneurs created businesses to serve their customers. Historian Jesús Jesse Esparza provides examples of prominent stores like “Jose Gomez’s sign painting company, Eciquia Castro’s café, Francisco Hernandez of the Alamo Furniture Company, Jose and Socorro Sarabia of Hispano Americana Book Store, Melesio Gomez of La Consentida café, and La Preferencia Barbershop of Magnolia Park.” The formation of barrios and storefronts helped provide homes and services for Houston’s growing Mexicana/o and Mexican American community.¹⁵

Despite finding economic opportunity throughout Texas, including Houston, Mexicana/os and Mexican Americans experienced violence, civil rights abuses, restrictions to certain professions, and few educational opportunities. These historical injustices led to the formation of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) in 1929. The violence from the Mexican Revolution in the 1910s spilled into Texas’ borderlands. White Supremacist Texans used the ferocity to generalize Mexicans as bandits, radicals, and revolutionaries. With the help of the Texas Rangers and vigilantes, they formed a coalition that wrought havoc on Mexican communities, leading to the death of thousands of Mexicans. Historian Monica Muñoz Martinez’s book *The Injustice Never Leaves You* discusses the lynching, extrajudicial murders, and the massacre of ethnic Mexicans in Porvenir, Texas, and how surviving families kept the memories of their loved ones alive. Mexican American lawyers like Jose Tomas Canales, Alonso Perales, and others created LULAC to fight for civil rights for Mexican Americans because of these tragic events.¹⁶

Mexican Americans increased LULAC’s presence throughout Texas by creating local chapters to fight for civil rights. In the early 1930s, concerned Houston residents Manuel Crespo and Mariano Hernandez organized a meeting at the Crespo Funeral Home to create a LULAC chapter in Houston. They wanted to bring the organization to the city to address inadequate housing conditions and discriminatory hiring policies and ensure equal treatment. Crespo and Hernandez grew the movement by inviting Houstonians Juvencio Rodriguez, Isidro Garcia, and John H.

¹³ Martha Menchaca, *The Mexican American Experience in Texas*, 102-103; See Richard A. Garcia, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class: San Antonio, 1929-1941* (College Station, Texas: Texas A& M University Press, 1991), 27-28.

¹⁴ De Leon *Ethnicity in the Sun Belt*; 13; Jesus Jesse Esparza, “La Colonia Mexicana: Mexican Americans in Houston,” *Houston History Magazine*, December 2, 2011, 2; Mario Castillo, “Gracie Saenz Discusses LULAC Council #60,” October 15, 2021, in *Your Houston*, produced by Your Houston, podcast, MP3 Audio, <https://yourhouston.podbean.com/e/gracie-saenz-discusses-lulac-council-60/>.

¹⁵ Esparza, “La Colonia Mexicana,” 2-3.

¹⁶ See Monica Muñoz Martinez, *The Injustice Never leaves You: Anti-Mexican Violence in Texas* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018); Benjamin Heber Johnson, *Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans into Americans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

Duhig. They became the founding members of LULAC Council 60 Magnolia, electing Hernandez as the council's first president in November 1934.¹⁷

LULAC Council 60 had no permanent meeting space between 1930 and 1950. Council 60's members met at many locations throughout Houston. For example, they first gathered at a filling station on Navigation Boulevard and 74th Street. LULAC members then assembled at the Harris County Courthouse, International Longshoremen's Association Union Hall, Milam Building, the Benito Juárez Hall, and other meeting spaces. Moving from location to location led to strategizing and logistical difficulties.¹⁸ Although many lived in Magnolia Park, others had to travel from different wards to attend council meetings. Despite such challenges, Council 60 helped Mexican Americans pay for poll taxes, obtain resources for schools, and influence Mexicana/os to acquire their U.S. citizenship. LULAC and Council 60 found success in their endeavors over the years.¹⁹

After World War II concluded in 1945, returning Mexican American veterans, entrepreneurs, and barrio residents advocated for their inclusion into U.S. society. LULAC began to include Latin Americans in the organization, favoring those who wanted to acquire U.S. citizenship and acculturate to mainstream society. To protect Mexicans and Latin Americans, LULAC's leadership began to argue that Spanish-speaking U.S. citizens were indeed White. They reasoned that White classification would shield them from segregation laws. LULAC Council 60 followed the trend. The membership did not use protests to achieve their goals and claimed that Spanish-speaking Mexican and Latin American citizens were Americans interested in building a stronger nation.²⁰

Council 60 became the leading chapter for LULAC throughout the 1950s. LULAC elected members John J. Herrera (1952-53) and Felix Tijerina (1956-60) as national presidents, launching Houston's Latina/o community to the national spotlight. Herrera's familial roots date to when Texas belonged to Mexico; his ancestors fought against Santa Anna and signed the Texas Declaration of Independence. He had many working-class positions until he ascended the economic and political ladder to become the first Mexican American to run for Texas Senate in Harris County in the late 1940s. Although Herrera lost, he gained clout within political circles. Herrera also served as counsel for the historic Supreme Court case *Hernandez v Texas* (1954), which forbade the exclusion of Mexican Americans from juries.

Furthermore, Houston restauranter Felix Tijerina led Council 60 for nearly half a decade. Born in South Texas, his family relocated to Houston, where he soared through the restaurant ranks to open Felix Restaurants with his wife, Janie Tijerina. He was a fierce advocate of education. Tijerina proposed that Mexican Americans learn English early to master the language. The president partnered with like-minded organizations to create "Little Schools of the 400." The schools taught Spanish-speaking five-year-olds 400 essential English words to prepare them for

¹⁷ Sehila Casper, National Trust for Historic Preservation, and Houston Field Office, "Protected Landmark Application Form," (National Trust for Historic Preservation, Washington, D.C., 2020), 3.

¹⁸ Sehila Casper, National Trust for Historic Preservation, and Houston Field Office, "Protected Landmark Application Form," 4.

¹⁹ De Leon, *Ethnicity in the Sunbelt*, 84-85.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 126-127.

public education. Little Schools of the 400 became the predecessor of the national Project Head Start.²¹ Through Herrera and Tijerina's leadership, Council 60 established legacies that affected Houston and the United States through their involvement in *Hernandez v Texas* and the Little Schools of the 400.

To accomplish these vital initiatives, Council 60 bought a residential home in Houston for political strategizing, cultural celebrations, and as a permanent meeting location. Since Felix Tijerina was a successful businessman, he helped six other council members finance the purchase of a house close to downtown Houston. At an initial price of \$10,500, Tijerina loaned \$5,000 to Council 60, and the other LULAC associates paid the remaining \$5,500 to buy a two-story house on 3004 Bagby Street. They used their community relationships to transform the two-floor home into a multipurpose building. Council 60 remodeled the structure by constructing a meeting room, a bar, and an office within the home. Fellow council members hosted a gala on December 17, 1955. LULAC's national president, Oscar Laurel, Houston city and Harris County officials celebrated with Council 60 on a cold December Houston evening. Council 60's new headquarters allowed the Latina/o community to celebrate events and was the birthplace of projects like Little Schools of the 400 and other initiatives.²²

Throughout the 1960s, Mexican Americans were at the forefront of flexing their political muscle to alter the Democratic Party's policies in favor of civil, social, and economic rights. Mexican Americans had a long history of working with Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) throughout his career as the Senator of Texas to advance Latina/o civil rights. Because Mexican Americans had worked with Senator Johnson throughout the 1950s, their experience motivated them to create Viva Kennedy clubs throughout the United States. The associations saw John F. Kennedy's 1960 presidential campaign as an opportunity to advance civil, social, and economic rights for Latina/os. With thirty state Viva Kennedy groups throughout the United States, Latina/os helped elect President Kennedy and Vice President LBJ in the 1960 election. During the 1960s, Latina/os shaped Kennedy's New Frontier agenda and LBJ's Great Society. Both presidents' platforms focused on creating a more equitable society despite some flaws.²³

Council 60 was pivotal to developing the Latina/o electoral block, swaying President Kennedy to visit Houston, and influencing federal programs. On November 21, 1963, President Kennedy visited Council 60 at the Rice Hotel in Houston. LULAC members strategized at the clubhouse how to convince a sitting president to speak to Latina/os in Houston. Their endeavors succeeded as Kennedy delivered a speech at the hotel. Jackie Kennedy addressed the audience in Spanish, signaling how the administration viewed Latina/os as a critical component of their constituency.²⁴ Although Ms. Kennedy did not speak Spanish fluently, her Dominican Republic assistant, Providencia Paredes, had undoubtedly assisted the First Lady in anticipation of the gala

²¹ Ibid, 130-131, 133-137.

²² Thomas H. Kreneck, *Mexican American Odyssey: Felix Tijerina, Entrepreneur and Civic Leader, 1905-1965*. (Houston: University of Houston, 2001) 164.

²³ See Chapter 6 "Viva Kennedy!" in Julie L. Pycior, *LBJ and Mexican American: The Paradox of Power*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997).

²⁴ Sehila Casper, National Trust for Historic Preservation, and Houston Field Office, "Protected Landmark Application Form," 5.

event.²⁵ Kennedy's attendance had been the first time a sitting president had met with a Latina/o group in U.S. history. Council 60 also helped found the federally funded SER (Service, Employment, Redevelopment) Jobs for Progress in 1966. This work advancement program helps place people in search of work with employers. In 1968, LULAC worked with the Department of Housing and Urban Development to create LULAC Housing. This initiative offers resources for Latina/o homebuyers and housing opportunities for low-income families and seniors. Council 60 worked diligently to provide material gains for Houston and Latina/os in the United States throughout the 1960s.²⁶

Community Efforts

By the 2010s, the LULAC Council 60 Clubhouse had deteriorated, so meeting inside the structure was no longer safe. Storms, humidity, and environmental factors had damaged the house's roof and infrastructure. Historic LULAC Council 60 member Alfonso "Al" Maldonado recalled that, "I remember looking up, I could see holes in the ceiling. . . I could see the rafters. And I just had this terrible thought of one day we're going to be in a meeting, that second floor is going to fall right upon us." In 2013, Al (Council 60's President) pounded his gavel one last time, declaring that members could no longer meet at the clubhouse. The council considered rehabilitating the home to bring it back to its heyday. They worked with national and historic preservationists in Houston to gradually repair the house.²⁷

The new LULAC Council 60 membership collaborated to rehabilitate the clubhouse in the early 2010s. Houston native Ray Valdez moved back to his hometown in 2012 after living in Washington for several years. Itching to reconnect with the Latinx community, he attended a LULAC Council 60 event where he met Al. Valdez had informed his wife, the Honorable Lydia G. Tamez, that he would join the council after attending several meetings. Believing that LULAC was no longer significant, she interrogated Ray on why he wanted to volunteer for a historically irrelevant organization. Valdez gradually told his wife about the clubhouse and invited her on a short walk from their house to visit the historic site, "I take my wife, Lidia Tamez, who's now Judge Tamez, with me, and we go on this little walk, and she's like, 'Oh my God, we have to save this house.'" A restauranter had proposed buying the property from Council 60 to turn it into a parking lot, which they briefly considered. Council 60, with supportive members like Tamez and Valdez, shifted course, deciding to rehabilitate the historic home instead of selling it.²⁸

²⁵ Mikaela "Mika" Selley, interview by Jonathan Angulo, July 16, 2023, transcript and recording, LULAC Council 60 Clubhouse Oral History Project, Latinos in Heritage Conservation. Interview in possession of Latinos in Heritage Conservation.

²⁶ Alfonso "Al" Maldonado, interview by Jonathan Angulo, July 16, 2023, transcript and recording, LULAC Council 60 Clubhouse Oral History Project, Latinos in Heritage Conservation. Interview in possession of Latinos in Heritage Conservation.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Raymond "Ray" Valdez, interview by Jonathan Angulo, July 17, 2023, transcript and recording, LULAC Council 60 Clubhouse Oral History Project, Latinos in Heritage Conservation. Interview in possession of Latinos in Heritage Conservation.

Throughout the 2010s, new Council 60 members formed relationships with an archivist and a national nonprofit to begin planning the clubhouse's restoration. The council had partnered with Mikaela Selley, at the time, the Hispanic Collections Archivist at the Houston Public Library, to learn more about the structure. Knowing its importance to Latinx history, Selley motivated Council 60 to find ways to save the house. Selley leveraged her years of forming partnerships with cultural resources organizations to connect the National Trust for Historic Preservation (the National Trust) with council leadership.²⁹ Although Council 60 members were first reluctant to work with the nonprofit, they realized they had to trust a national organization to save the clubhouse, considering Hurricane Harvey damaged the home even more in 2017. Because of the home's debilitated structure, the city could demolish the house because it was a safety hazard.³⁰

Council 60, Selley, and the National Trust created a coalition that allowed them to repair the most damaged aspects of the clubhouse. During the mid-2010s, the National Trust, Selley, and Council 60 collaborated to find archival documents about the houses' historical significance. They found historical pictures of the home, an image of the original seven trustees, historical newspaper articles, and the structure's architectural plans. The coalition secured a \$140,000 American Express Disaster Recovery Grant to begin stabilization of the clubhouse by using these sources in their application. New LULAC Council 60 member and the first Latina elected to Houston's at large district, Graciela Saenz, assisted with back taxes on the property and legal litigation.³¹ Graciela recalled how essential working with leaders in Houston assisted in preserving the clubhouse:

Ray and Lydia were instrumental in helping to get the application for charitable exemption refiled with the county, with letters of support from significant leaders in our community, the added support of it being a national treasure, the fact that we had already filed with our Houston City Council for it to be a protected landmark. . . we had leadership in the community that was saying it was important.

With the grant and the clearing of the clubhouse's taxes, the council could move forward on new preservation efforts.³²

Despite LULAC's national significance, no local, state, or federal historic preservation organization had given the clubhouse a historic designation until 2020. Council 60 knew that their research could help them acquire, at the minimum, local historic designation. Leadership connected again with the National Trust to draft an application for a protected landmark designation. They utilized archival documents to submit a Protected Landmark Application to the Houston City Council. In the fall of 2020, Houston's elected officials unanimously voted to

²⁹ Mikaela "Mika" Selley, oral history.

³⁰ Sehila Casper, "Now a Locally Protected Landmark, the LULAC Council 60 Clubhouse Looks to the Future," Saving Places, National Trust for Historic Preservation, September 20, 2021, accessed on August 30, 2023, <https://savingplaces.org/stories/now-a-local-protect-landmark-the-lulac-council-60-clubhouse-looks-to-the-future#:~:text=The%20Clubhouse%20will%20forever%20stand,National%20Register%20of%20Historic%20Places>

³¹ Graciela "Gracie" Saenz, interview by Jonathan Angulo, July 16, 2023, transcript and recording, LULAC Council 60 Clubhouse Oral History Project, Latinos in Heritage Conservation. Interview in possession of Latinos in Heritage Conservation.

³² Ibid.

designate the clubhouse a City of Houston Protected Landmark. The City of Houston’s recognition will allow the council to acquire state and federal acknowledgment to elevate the home’s history.³³

LULAC Council 60 Clubhouse Today

After its many preservation successes, Council 60 created a nonprofit solely reserved for the rehabilitation of the clubhouse for future Latinx programming. LULAC members founded C. 60 Inc. to make “the Clubhouse both a historic and cultural hub while continuing its legacy as a collective for local community organizations and advocates.”³⁴ Leadership fundraised and acquired more grants to rehabilitate damaged walls and flooring inside the home. New financial resources have allowed Council 60 to safely enter the structure and make more renovations.

In the Summer of 2023, LHC partnered with Council 60 members to reactivate the clubhouse. Both organizations recruited Houston’s Mariachi Monarcas to reignite the home’s Latinx history. Mariachi Monarcas performed songs like “Cielito Lindo,” “Guadalajara,” “Desperado,” and other classics. The Mariachi’s performance garnered the attention of neighborhood residents, who looked at the site with smiles. Other pedestrians walked by Babsby St. in awe of the show. They removed their phones from their pocket and recorded videos of the mariachis, sharing the reproductions with their friends or on their Instagram stories. Al and his partner danced on the clubhouse’s front porch, slowly trickling into the home to dance the evening away. The reactivation of the site revealed how Council 60 plans to use the house and the potential for future projects.

C. 60 Inc. is working with Mikaela Selley to commemorate the 60th anniversary of President Kennedy’s visit to Houston and reimagine the historical site. Selley will highlight the contributions of Providencia Paredes to the Kennedy family. Many do not know that the First Lady, Jackie Kennedy, counted on Paredes as her personal assistant, the first Latina to work in a U.S. President’s immediate circle. Kennedy’s assistant helped the First Lady with her Spanish as the family created more robust ties with the Latinx community.³⁵ Selley reflected on Paredes's importance during the event and envisioned how she would craft the anniversary exhibit:

There’s some interviews with her and it’s an incredible story that a woman from the DR [Dominican Republic] was in the White House with Jackie as her personal assistant. She was mostly in charge of her fashion with her wardrobe choices and making sure she had the right outfits. She helped her with her Spanish, so we’re going to talk about that.

The exhibit’s inclusion of Paredes highlights her importance to the history of Houston and Latinx history more broadly. Beyond the 60th anniversary, Selley will contribute to C. 60 Inc.’s

³³ Sehila “Now a Locally Protected Landmark, the LULAC Council 60 Clubhouse Looks to the Future,”

³⁴ “Home,” Council 60 Clubhouse, accessed on August 30, 2023, <https://council60clubhouse.com/>.

³⁵ Lindsey Bever, “Providencia Paredes-the woman behind Jackie Kennedy-dies at 90,” *The Washington Post* March 23, 2015, accessed on August 30, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/03/23/providencia-paredes-the-woman-behind-jackie-kennedy-dies-at-90/>.

transformation of the historic site. She will assist with choosing images to highlight in picture frames or mural paintings once the clubhouse site is open to the public.³⁶

While the LULAC Council 60 Clubhouse is not yet open to the public, its rehabilitation demonstrates the importance of historic preservation. The history of the conservation of the clubhouse reveals how protecting Latinx places is a collective effort. The house only stands because local, state, and national partners worked together to rebuild the home. Although it took many years, the clubhouse is on a stable footing, which will allow Latinxs to learn about our history in Houston and contributions to the United States.

³⁶ Mikaela “Mika” Selley, oral history.