



HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Historic Assessment

Property Address: 139 Palo Blanco Street

1. Application Details

Applicant: Lydia Carolina Cantu
Type: Historic Landmark Designation
Date Received: 4 March 2024

2. Findings

The property at 139 Palo Blanco Street is a one-story Craftsman cottage located in the Mission Grove Addition in the Roosevelt Park neighborhood of City Council District 3. Emiliano Villarreal & Lydia Carolina Cantu currently own the property. The subject property was built circa 1922. The address first appeared in the 1924 City Directory as the home of Buford L. and Izola Mabery. Mr. Mabery worked as a vulcanizer for the Swinebrood Auto Supply Company and later as a clerk for the Reliable Tire Company. Mrs. Mabery was a hemstitcher for The Fair. In the 1922 City Directory, the property was listed as 147 Palo Blanco Street.

The subject property is located just outside the eastern boundary of the northern section of the Mission Historic District, along Kalteyer Street, but it is within the Mission Concepcion Protection Overlay District (MPOD) and the World Heritage Buffer Zone. It is three blocks south of Mission Concepcion, one block east of Concepcion Park and the Mission Concepcion Sports Complex, and two blocks north of the Riverside Golf Course. It is roughly one mile south of Roosevelt Park, across the IH-10 expressway.

The area designated as the Mission Historic District, located along the San Antonio River in the south section of the city, originally attracted both prehistoric Indian and historic Spanish and Anglo populations because of the prevalence of unique natural resources. The abundant water, game, and other natural foods seem to have provided prehistoric Indians with an ample non-agricultural subsistence type of lifestyle based upon hunting, gathering, and fishing. The arrival of the Spanish missionaries brought primarily agricultural exploitation of this area by means of the acequia systems. After the establishment of the Spanish Missions, the area was similarly utilized for agricultural purposes as well as local industries; this trend continued well into the twentieth century.

The Mission Grove Addition was platted in 1922 and developed by the J.L. Lytle Realty Company, who reported in April 1922 that “sixty to seventy lots” had been sold within a two-week period. The developers boasted that “almost every lot” featured natural trees (“giant pecans and stately hackberries”), a majority of which were pecan trees that were “40 to 60 years old,” and stated that it would be “one of the most valuable and beautiful additions in San Antonio.”¹ In 1926, it was the site of what became known as the “Back Yard Oil Boom,” when several residents discovered shallow oil fields on their properties. The story was quite a sensation at the time, drawing the attention of spectators, speculators, and developers.

On Friday, April 9, 1926, oil was discovered at a depth of 11 feet on the property of W.H. Hearne, a local lumber dealer, at 218 Weaver Street. The Grayburg Oil Company feared the oil might be from a

¹ Ad, *San Antonio Express*, March 26, 1922, pg. 36; “Lots Sell Well,” *San Antonio Light*, April 16, 1922, pg. 41.



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leak in its pipeline at Somerset, but subsequent tests led the president of the company, Dr. F.L. Thomson, to conclude that “it is not our oil but a seepage from an oil pool..., a real oil discovery despite its remarkably shallow depth.” The following day, “hundreds of spectators” flocked to the neighborhood to view the “mystery well.”² By the following Thursday, four oil-producing wells in as many back yards had drawn the attention of big oil companies and resulted in lease speculation, “wildcat” drillers, and soaring property values. The *San Antonio Light* reported, “Every available lot within a radius of a mile from the discovery well at 218 Weaver Street had been leased” and “every back yard in Mission Grove” was “now a prospective oil producer.” At least one property owner threatened spectators and lease seekers with “dire disaster” if they invaded her property.³ The *San Antonio Express* reported that a “mystic ‘big oil man from Tulsa’ ... entertained a crowd of about 50 observers at one of the Palo Blanco wells.”⁴

In a matter of weeks, at least nine oil-producing wells were developed in the Mission Grove neighborhood, ranging from eight to fifteen feet deep, some producing up to 30 barrels a day. One developer visited City Hall seeking a permit to install an 80-foot derrick to sink a well between 2000 to 3000 feet deep and was told by Acting Mayor Phil Wright that there was “no ordinance or law to prevent the drilling for oil in the city limits,” so far as he knew. The Commissioner of Streets, Paul B. Steffler, stated that street department laborers had begun “boring for oil” with “picks and shovels” to sink a well up to 30 feet deep on one of three lots owned by the city on Palo Blanco Street.⁵ City Commissioners reviewed the application by M.H. Davis for to erect a 1,000-gallon fuel oil storage tank on his property on Palo Blanco Street, but ultimately Davis was ordered to relinquish five of his top-producing wells that were sunk on city property.⁶ By the end of the summer, the excitement over the brief “boom” settled down, but landowners in Mission Grove continued to reference the presence of oil in real estate sales ads, and speculators continued to test for oil in the area for years.⁷

The boundaries of the Mission Historic District were designed primarily to include the lower four missions in the San Antonio area (Listed from north to south: Concepcion, San Jose, San Juan Capistrano, and Espada), their acequias and fields, and secondarily the significant preserved historic and prehistoric sites in the area. These boundaries represent an area less impacted than most areas of San Antonio by urban development. However, the eastern boundary of the northern section of the Mission Historic District divides the historical Mission Grove Addition neighborhood in half along Kalteyer Street, so properties on the 200 block of Palo Blanco Street are within the historic district, while properties on the 100 block are outside the historic district and therefore do not benefit from the protections offered by this designation.

² “Grayburg Company Survey Shows ‘Black Gold’ Not Pipeline Seepage,” *San Antonio Light*, April 10, 1926, pg. 1.

³ “Excitement Reigns at Mission Grove,” *San Antonio Light*, April 15, 1926, pg. 1; “Big Firms Send Experts to Field as Fourth Find Is Reported,” *San Antonio Light*, April 16, 1926, pg. 36.

⁴ “Friction Develops in New Oil ‘Field’ on South Edge of City as Sightseers Trample Gardens,” *San Antonio Express*, April 17, 1926, pg. 20.

⁵ “Mission Grove Gets Deep Test,” *San Antonio Express*, April 20, 1926, pg. 3; “Recent Rains Delay City’s Test for Oil,” *San Antonio Express*, April 28, 1926, pg. 7;

⁶ “Application to Build Storage Tank Held Up,” *San Antonio Express*, May 20, 1926, pg. 6; “Oil Wells in City Alley Are Ordered Covered,” *San Antonio Express*, May 25, 1926, pg. 9.

⁷ Ad, *San Antonio Light*, June 01, 1926, pg. 24; “Russell Starts Shallow Test in Mission Grove,” *San Antonio Express*, March 21, 1929, pg. 13.



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3. Architectural Description

The subject property is a south-facing house, situated near the southwest corner of a block bound to the north by Benita Street, the east by Roosevelt Avenue, the south by Palo Blanco Street, and the west by Kalteyer Street. The block includes other one-story Craftsman cottages, as well as Mission revival and minimal traditional residences. Based on images on Google Street View, the front yard was enclosed by a chain-link fence as recently as 2018, with swinging chain-link gates for access to the asphalt ribbon driveway and concrete paver sidewalk leading up to the concrete porch. The sidewalk has been removed and the chain-link fencing has been replaced by a boundary of three-foot high wooden posts with three rows of wide-spaced horizontal wood fence planks, painted white. The backyard is enclosed by four-foot-high vertical wooden fencing, painted white.

The subject property is a one-story vernacular residence with Craftsman style influence, which has a side-gabled roof with wide, overhanging eaves and a cross-gabled portico on the left side covering the half-width front porch. The portico is supported by two pairs of four-by-four square wooden columns, with each pair joined by vertical arrays of 4" x 24" horizontal wooden planks spaced 2" apart and painted white. Two concrete steps lead up to the concrete front porch, and three concrete steps lead up to the front door. The roof is covered with asphalt shingles. Based on images on Google Street View, there was green vinyl siding and red-brick veneer skirting as recently as 2018, which has been replaced by wooden clapboard siding. The single-sash wooden windows have been replaced by six-over-six vinyl windows.

Character-defining features of 139 Palo Blanco Street include:

- One-story vernacular residence
- Gabled portico over front porch
- Narrow wood siding

4. Landmark Criteria

The property meets six criteria under UDC 35-607(b):

- **2. Its location as a site of a significant local, county, state, or national event;**
- **11. It is distinctive in character, interest or value; strongly exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, ethnic or historical heritage of San Antonio, Texas or the United States;**
- **13. It bears an important and significant relationship to other distinctive structures, sites, or areas, either as an important collection of properties or architectural style or craftsmanship with few intrusions, or by contributing to the overall character of the area according to the plan based on architectural, historic or cultural motif;**

5. Staff Recommendation

A property must meet at least three of the 16 criteria used to evaluate eligibility for landmark designation, and this assessment determines that 139 Palo Blanco Street meets this threshold. Further research may reveal additional significance associated with this property.

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1. 139 Palo Blanco Street – Front façade

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2. 139 Palo Blanco Street – Right side (East)



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3. 139 Palo Blanco Street – Left side (Southwest oblique)

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4. 139 Palo Blanco Street – Rear (North)



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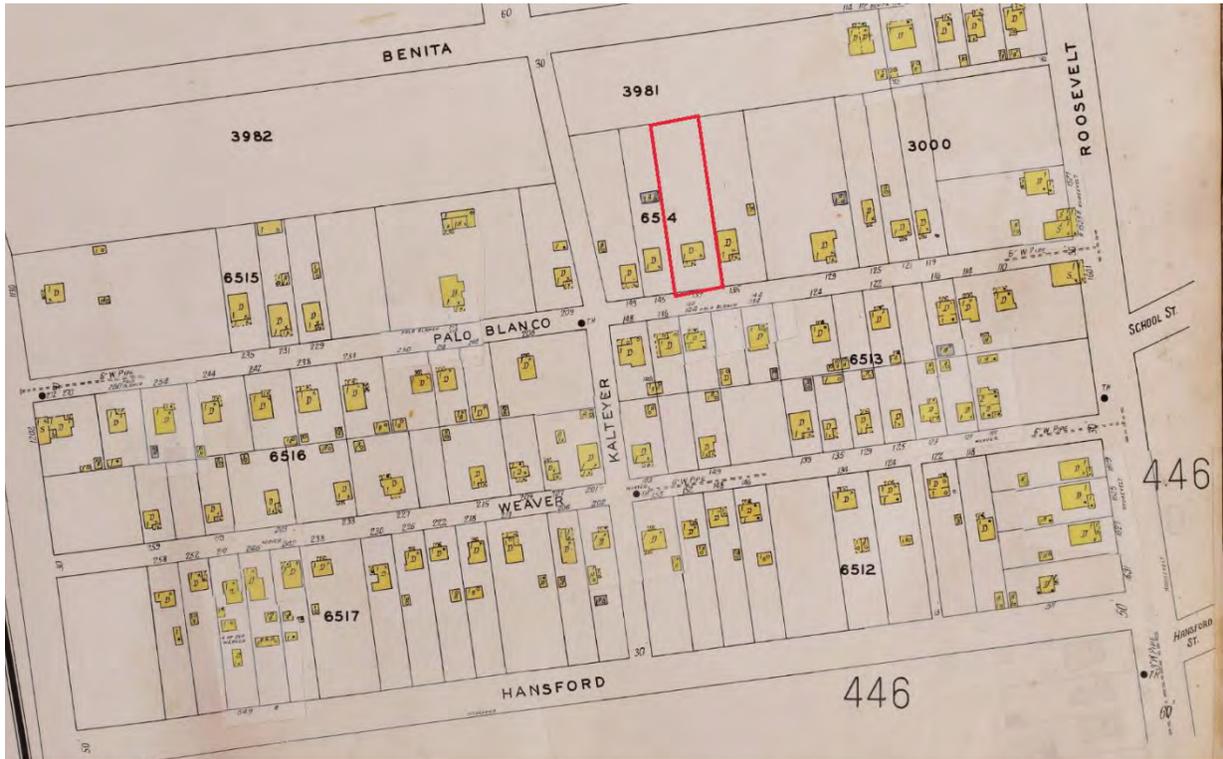
5. 139 Palo Blanco Street (Northwest oblique)

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6. Sanborn Map (1931), Vol.4, Sheet 444

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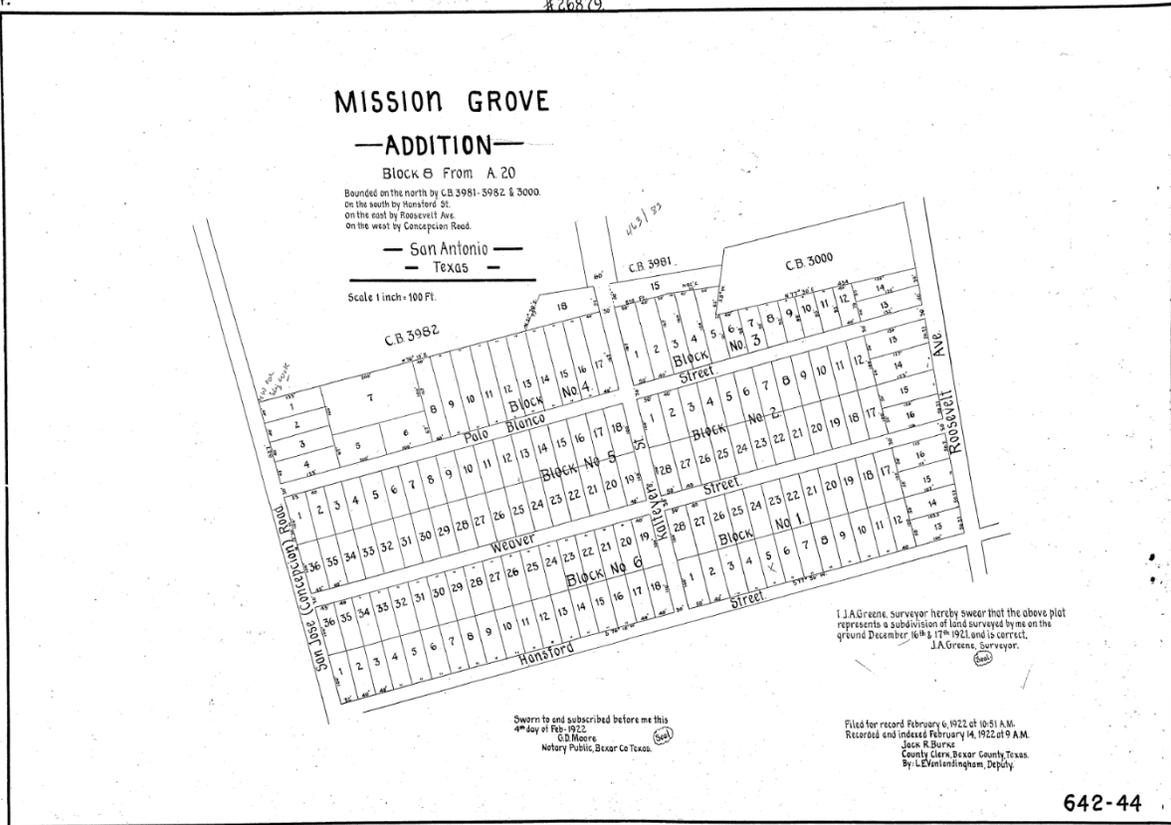
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4.

26879.



7. Bexar County Plat Book 642, pg. 44 (1922)

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MISSION GROVE ADDITION

Have you seen this nice new addition situated between Roosevelt Avenue and South Loop?

THEN LET US SHOW YOU.

Lots \$250 to \$350 each, \$10 cash, \$10 per month, no interest.

Beautiful trees; each lot faces on large water main and macadamized street; gas and sewers in Roosevelt.

If you ever expect to own a home, it will pay you to start today, you can not duplicate this property and price.

**J. H. LYTLE REALTY COMPANY,
209 Gibbs Building.**

8. San Antonio Light (January 22, 1922), pg. 32

Build your home under the trees in

MISSION GROVE

—pick out your lot today!

TREES are everywhere—giant pecans and stately hackberries that cast cooling shade over every lot, giving added beauty and desirability to these choice homesites.

MISSION GROVE is located in the southern part of the city, between Roosevelt Avenue and Concepcion Road, both of which are paved thoroughfares. Prices are so low and terms so attractive that these tree-shaded lots are within easy reach of all homeseekers.

All the streets within MISSION GROVE are of macadam, and water mains have been laid throughout the property. Gas has been piped up to the addition in two places on Roosevelt Avenue and electric connections are available from both Roosevelt Avenue and Concepcion Road.

Every lot in MISSION GROVE fronts on a macadam street and is directly served by a large water main.

If you are tired of paying rent and want a real home in a place where values are steadily increasing, pick out your lot today in MISSION GROVE! It's the opportunity of a lifetime!

LOTS: \$150 to \$350 NOISE OF **\$10** DOWN AT **\$10** per **and \$10** month

Live on Your Lot While Paying for It!

PURCHASERS of lots will be permitted to erect garages on the rear of their property for use as dwellings while the lots are being paid out.

This plan is being successfully employed in numerous American cities and it will work equally as well in your case. You can live on your lot while paying for it, thus saving the expense of your real home.

NO INTEREST

NO TAXES FIRST YEAR

Go out Roosevelt Avenue to School St., then look to the right. You can't miss the beautiful trees in MISSION GROVE. Or take the Hot Wells car and walk three blocks west to Roosevelt Ave. Our salesmen will be on the ground today and Monday to show you these exceptional lots and to answer any questions concerning their purchase. Make certain of your lot and tree by coming.

Many lots in the mission addition we have promoted in San Antonio are being offered at 50% to 60% off their original price. MISSION GROVE offers an equal opportunity for profitable investment.

Don't Fail to Visit Mission Grove Today

EVERY person who enters the property today between 8:30 a. m. and 5 p. m. will be requested to write his or her name and address on a slip of paper and hand the slip to one of our representatives. At 5 o'clock some one of these persons will receive a 50% credit on any \$250 lot.

J. L. LYTLE REALTY CO.

209 GIBBS BUILDING
CROCKETT 715

9. San Antonio Express (March 26, 1922), pg. 36

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Land Owners to Sink Test Wells at Scene of New S. A. Oil Find



Grayburg Company Survey Shows 'Black Gold' Not Pipeline Seepage.

With experts pronouncing it a real oil find, property owners in Mission Grove, in the heart of the south residential district, were preparing Saturday to sink test wells near where oil was discovered at a depth of 11 feet Friday. Combined tests will be made of the well, located on the property of W. H. Heame, 218 Weaver street to determine its production. Oil was still flowing into this well Saturday.

Plans for the tests and posting of property were made at a meeting of the residents Friday night. An expert driller will be employed, and tests begun at once, they said.

FLOCK TO WELL.

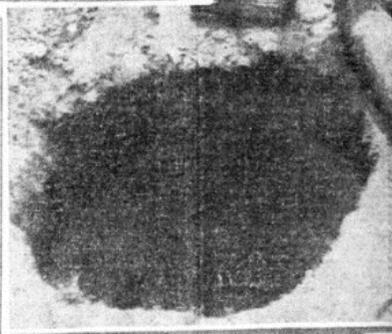
W. H. Heame, local lumber dealer, and promoter of the subdivision, said Saturday that he has granted permission for the test.

Meanwhile, hundreds of spectators

JURY BRINGS IN VERDICT AFTER 36 HOURS

Defendant's Counsel Gives Notice of Appeal for New Trial.

Filing into the Thirty-seventh District court soon more than 36 hours after being given the case, a jury Saturday morning returned a verdict of guilty in the case of Thad L. Griffith, charged with the death of George Mason. Punishment was assessed as 20 years in the penitentiary. Griffith sat at his counsel's table



Here's the Mission Grove oil well. E. B. Gorsuch, 222 Weaver street, a neighbor, is shown in the upper picture bringing out a bucket of oil and the lower picture shows the shaft sunk in the backyard in which oil stands at 11 feet.

10. San Antonio Light (April 10, 1926), pg. 1

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Scouts Watch S. A. As Oil Wells Spout in Mission Grove Yards



Every back yard in Mission Grove now has its potential oil well. Even garage space is being utilized for drilling. E. B. Goruch, shown here has put a pump on his well.

Big Firms Send Experts to Field as Fourth Find Is Reported.

Scouts for several big oil companies Friday were reported watching the Mission Grove oil field, San Antonio's newest find in shallow oil fields. With the bringing in of the fourth well Thursday, word has gone out that a real field has been uncovered.

Oil scouts at first stoutly stouted the theory that fluid found in the well of W. H. Hearn, 218 Weaver street, was "live oil." Tests, however, have proven otherwise, and oil men now declare the "black gold" is coming from a big pool nearby. The oil is of good grade, and high gasoline content and even if found only in small quantities in the shallow wells would prove profitable.

But with the proving up of the field northward and westward, and the wells becoming deeper, oil men believe someone is on the verge of striking. Only a deep test, they assert, is necessary.

Plans for the test already are being made, with the result that every available foot of ground in the Mission Grove subdivision is being sought for lease.

11. San Antonio Light, April 16, 1926, pg. 36

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SAN ANTONIO EXPRESS, SATURDAY, APRIL 17, 1926

Friction Develops in New Oil "Field" on South Edge of City as Sightseers Trample Gardens

The much-heralded oil boom in Mission Grove, between Roosevelt Avenue and Concepcion Road, in the southern edge of the city, was developing considerable friction between sight-seers and property owners. Friday, the latter invoking business-like measures to protect their flowers and gardens from trampling.

Oil has been seeping into the San Antonio River near the new "discovery well," for at least 15 years old-time residents of that area pointed out, and was also discovered in a well drilled on the old fair grounds some 20 years ago. Actual interest or belief in development of any paying quantities of oil was not evidenced on any hand.

"There is no oil here, and you keep off the grass," one sign warned the throngs of visitors to the area.

Six wells were "producing" Friday. The biggest producer was located on Wenner Street at a depth of about 12 feet. When informed of reports that his well was running possibly eight barrels daily the owner admitted such to be the case. "I am quitting now to get a pump so I can go down," he said. "You see the eight barrels it is running now is water."

The mystic "big oil man from Tulsa," put in his appearance and entertained a crowd of about 50 observers at one of the Palo Blanco wells. A tattered leather coat was his sole credential but he at once gained the attention of the crowd.

The well at this address has been dug in a darkened corner of the garage with oil seeping at the bottom. The fight among the giants of the oil business to corner this new field was being circulated and discussed freely as the crowd milled around the well. The big man from Tulsa had already been out once, had his offers spurned, and was due to return Friday afternoon.

"Sh—here he comes," someone whispered as a battered roadster drew up and disgorged a carelessly-attired little man who went at once to his task.

"Now when you ain't got a snugg," he discoursed as he merged from the darkness of the garage. "There is always a sure way to tell about the gravity and other things, us oil men want to know about. Watch me closely and you'll know something about the work."

Before his open-mouthed audience the demonstrator then held at arm length the back of an envelope which dripped a fluid. As he held it high he massaged it vigorously between the thumb and forefinger. "This is a high test oil," he surely declared. "When it works this this way and shows yellow in the sun it has got plenty of gasoline. Shouldn't wonder if it wouldn't run a flier just like it is."

"Say mister, you dipped that paper in the wrong barrel," the 10-year-old son of the property owner interrupted. "That barrel has water in it, papa took out as he dug the well. The oil is there in a bucket."

Amateur geologists vied with purchasers of oil stock at some time in the past discoursing on the possibilities of the field. Around each of the six houses where wells have been dug groups of persons listened attentively to weighty arguments concerning possibilities of development adduced by technical analysis.

BETTY SCHEER TO PLAY TITLE ROLE IN "DULCY"

Miss Betty Scheer, 505 West Gramercy Place, will play the title role in "Dulcy," three-act comedy, which will be presented May 10 in the Alamo Heights High School Auditorium by the Temple League Players. It is being directed by Mrs. H. M. Griffith, and proceeds will be used for the new Temple Beth-El now under construction. Others chosen for parts

12. San Antonio Express, April 17, 1926, pg. 20

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**MISSION GROVE
GETS DEEP TEST**

**2,000 to 3,000-Foot Well to
Be Drilled in Backyard
Field.**

An 80-foot derrick will soon loom up in a Mission Grove back yard, where oil was found at a depth of less than 15 feet by several home owners.

O. A. Elder said Monday that he would sink a test well to a depth of from 2,000 to 3,000 feet in an effort to bring in a paying oil field. He said he had not decided on the location. He visited the city hall to get a permit for the well, but he was told by Acting Mayor Phil Wright that so far as he knows there is no ordinance or law to prevent the drilling for oil in the city limits, so long as he does not interfere with anyone.

Three street department laborers, with picks and shovels, have started "boring for oil" on one of three lots owned by the city on Palo Blanco street, in the heart of the Mission Grove back-yard neighborhood derrickless oil field.

Com. of Streets Paul E. Steffler said the well would be sunk to a depth of 30 feet, 15 feet deeper than the deepest well now producing oil in the field. Oil was found at a depth of 11 feet in most of the wells.

13. San Antonio Express, April 20, 1926, pg. 3

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14. San Antonio Light, April 20, 1926, pg. 16

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