

Robert Palliser Tenant House

2903 Avenue N ½

Lot 7, Southeast Outlot 39

Built October 1909

Located on the northern portion of the southeast quarter of city outlot 39, 2903 Avenue N ½ was built in April 1909 by Valery Austin and Robert Palliser. The outlot was original owned by William Pitt Ballinger, who established his homestead on the land in 1856. Referred to as “suburbia” and located south of Avenue M, early settlers considered living in the outlots healthier than living “in town” where city blocks were more densely populated. Many members of Galveston’s elite established early homes and urban farms in the outlots including the Ballingers, and city founders, Michel Menard (*1605 33rd Street, built 1838. Extant*) and Samuel May Williams (*3601 Avenue P, built 1839. Extant*).

After the Civil War, as the city of Galveston grew, Galveston’s outlots were divided to accommodate the expanding population. To divide each outlot into four individual blocks, even numbered streets that started at the harbor and originally dead-ended at Avenue M were carried south to the beach. To divide the outlots north to south, half-alphabet streets were established south of Avenue M that resulted in half-avenues such as Avenue N ½.

During the 1900 Storm, the Ballinger house on the southeast quarter of outlot 39 was destroyed and later demolished. The Ballinger family retained a piece of land on the northwest corner of Avenue O and 29th Street but subdivided the remaining land fronting Avenue O and sold the lots to individuals who constructed primary residences. The north part of their outlot was sold to real estate developer Valery E. Austin and building contractor, Robert Palliser, who built modest housing for the middle class along the south side of the 2900 block of Avenue N 1/2.

Robert Palliser was born in England in 1851. He immigrated through New York during the 1870s and arrived in Galveston prior to the 1880 U.S. Census which noted his residency on the island. Palliser began investing in Galveston real estate in 1884 and was an established and well respected brick contractor and builder by the time he and Austin formed their partnership to build eight houses on Avenue N ½. Construction began on the western end of the block in 1908 and in October 1909, three identical houses were built on lots 5, 6 and 7, which included 2903 Avenue N ½. When construction was completed, Austin and Palliser officially dedicated the strip of houses “Austin Place” on 26 May 1909.

The original insurance record for 2903 Avenue N ½ described a one-story frame house with a metal roof elevated on three foot piers. The house contained five rooms, one hall, one bathroom, two closets, a kitchen pantry and two porches. After the dedication, the houses were sold to

individual families. A 1910 insurance record for 2903 Avenue N ½ noted Charles M. Kapner as owner yet no deed of sale for Kapner was discovered within the Galveston County Clerk archive. It is more likely that Kapner was just a tenant. Galveston City directories confirmed Kapner resided at 2903 N ½ for one year, 1911-1912. If Kapner did purchase the property, it reverted back to Palliser very quickly as Galveston County Tax Assessor books confirm Palliser paid taxes on the house from 1909-1914 and subsequently maintained ownership of the property until his death in 1925. His daughter, Helen Mary Mathis, inherited her father's estate, which included vast real estate holdings that included 2903 Avenue N ½.

After Mathis inherited the house, she continued to use 2903 Avenue N ½ as rental property. In 1968, she sold the house to Eugene and Dorothy Donovan, who rented the house from Mathis for several years before they became the owners. Eugene Patrick Donovan was born in Galveston in 1924 and was a veteran of World War II. In 1943, Eugene married Dorothy Doris Davis. Dorothy was born in Bastrop, Texas, in 1923. After being discharged from the Army, Eugene and Dorothy returned to Galveston. In 1987, the Donovans transferred ownership of 2903 Avenue N ½ to their daughter, Georgia Callies. After Dorothy's death in 2008, Eugene moved to Mexia, Texas, to live with Callies. In 2013, Callies sold 2903 Avenue N ½ and ended forty-five years of Donovan family ownership. Eugene Donovan died in 2018. The current owners purchased the house in 2020.

Chain of Ownership

Robert Palliser to Palliser Family Trust, 2 October 1908

Helen Palliser Mathis to Eugene P. Donovan, 10 July 1968

Eugene P. Donovan, Jr. to daughter, Georgia S. Callies, December 1987

Georgia Callies to Duncan Colville, August 2013

Colville to Jennifer Reed, October 2015

Reed to current owners, May 2020



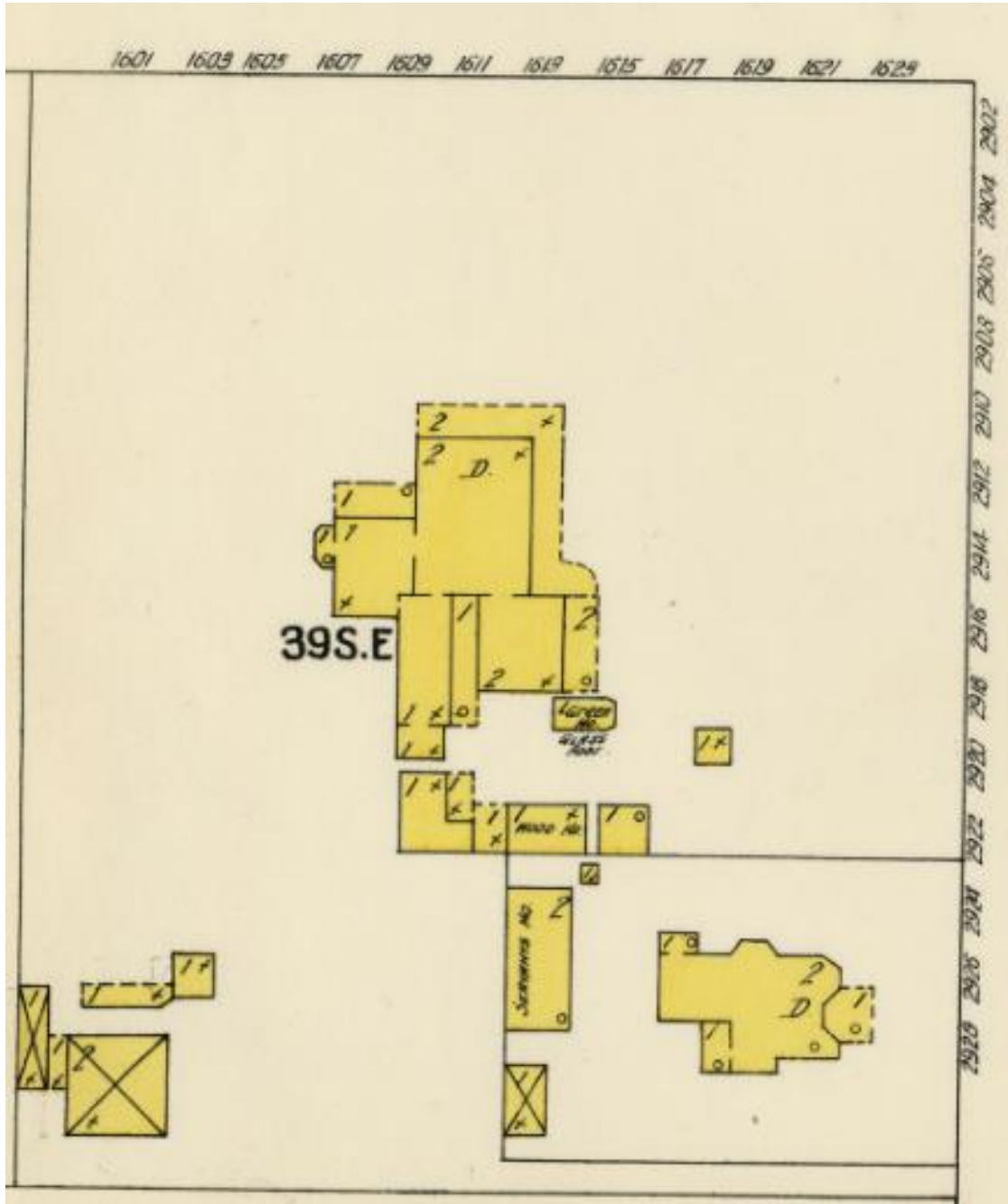
Robert Palliser (1851-1925)



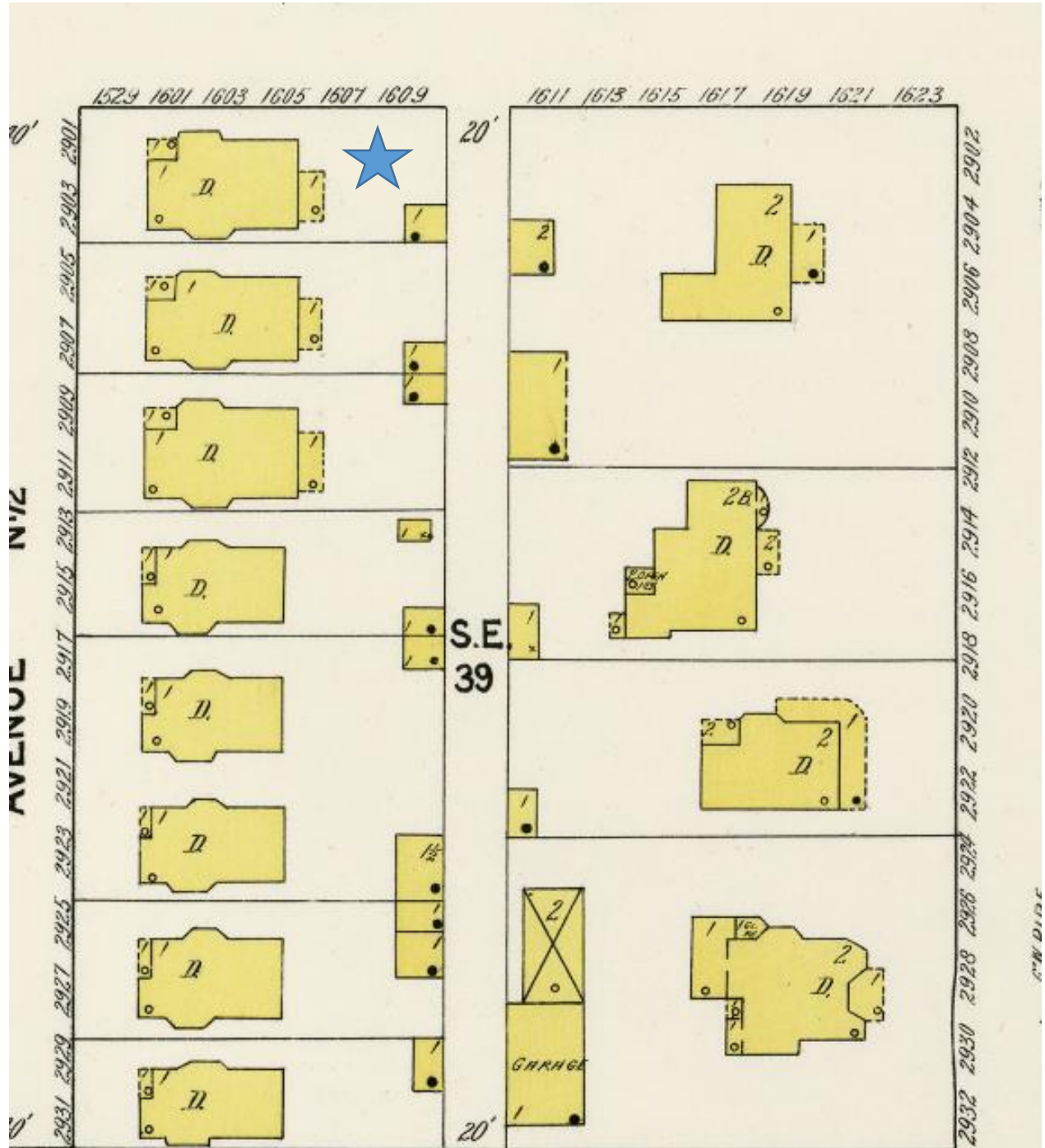
Helen Mary Palliser Mathis (1906-1972)

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, South East Outlot 39

1899- The majority of the outlot was owned by Ballinger Mills. His house, built in 1856, sat in the middle of the lot and faced 29th Street. Destroyed during the 1900 Storm, the remains of the Ballinger house were later demolished. After the matriarch of the Ballinger family died, the outlot was divided and sold off to developers. The Ballinger family retained a portion of the lot, however, and Ballinger's grandson, Ballinger Mills built his house on a portion of the land, at 2902 Avenue O, in 1911.



1912- By 1912, Austin Place subdivision had been developed and dedicated. The footprint of 2903 Ave N 1/2, built in 1909 and denoted with the blue star, can be seen for the first time. The footprint of the one-story frame dwelling with two porches is identical to the footprint of the two houses west. The five houses on lots 1-4, built in 1908, also share identical footprints. The Ballinger Mills house, built in 1911, can be seen on the southwest corner of the outlet, at 2902 Avenue O.



1947- In 1947, the 1912 maps were updated. The only change to lot 7 (2903 N 1/2) was the addition of a one-story automobile garage. The map also records the completed Ballinger Mills house, 2902 O, built in 1911 and modified in 1922.



Galveston City Directory Search

1908-1909 (2903 Avenue N ½ not included in the cross directory)

Valery E. Austin (Austin & Co.), notary public, city commissioner streets and public property, secy West End Dock Co., vice-pres board of mgrs. John Sealy Hospital, r. 1502 Market. 2. Phone 1605
Austin & Company (Valery E. Austin), real estate, land and collection agents, 307 22nd, phone 334

Robert Palliser, brick contractor and builder, office Builders Exchange box 67, phone 358, president Galveston Builders Exchange, r. 1902 Ave M. 4. Phone 1621

1909-1910

2903 Avenue N ½ noted "vacant" in cross directory

1911-1912

Charles M. Kapner, clerk E. H. Young, r. 2903 Ave N ½. 2. Phone 2484
Edwin Young, exporter cotton seed product, r. 1905 Broadway

1913

2903 Avenue N ½ noted "vacant" in cross directory

1914

Wiley Shockley, helper Seaboard Lumber & Milling Co., r. 2903 Ave N ½

1916

Ernest A. Morris, dental surgeon, 600 American National Co. Bldg, tel.241, r. 2903 Avenue N ½ (2), tel. 6073

1919

Edgar C. Moore (Minnie), city salesman Ullman Stern & Krausse, wholesale grocers and importers, r. 2903 Ave N ½

1921

Maner C. Hoecker (Leonora N), public cotton weigher, r. 2903 Ave N ½

1924-1925

Ole E. Wroldsen (Johnnie), marine captain, r. 2903 Ave N ½

1928-1929

Ole E. Wroldsen (Johnnie), leverman, r. 2903 Ave N ½

1930

Dennis McGowen (Ollie), police, h. 2903 Ave N ½

1932-1933

J. J. Kahled, h. 2903 Ave N ½

1936-1937, 1939

Herman Weinert Jr. (Ottie), physician and surgeon 202 Medical Arts Bldg., 906 22nd, tel. 3400, h. 2903 Ave N ½, tel. 6827

1941

Edson E. Dailey (Gertrude), capt US Army, h. 2903 Ave N ½

1945-1946

Mrs. Mary F. Mullins, clerk Wimberly Insurance, h. 2903 Ave N ½

1949, 1951

Mrs. Mary F. Mullins, stenographer Gulf Colorado & Santa Fe Ry, h. 2903 Ave N ½

1952

Richard L. Mullins (Mary), insurance agent, h. 2903 Ave N ½

1953, 1954

Frederick L. Herauf (Dorothy) mgr Henry's Book Store, h. 2903 Ave N ½

1955

Eugene P. Donovan (Dorothy), stillman helper, h. 2903 Ave N ½

1960

Eugene P. Donovan (Dorothy), desk clerk YMCA, h. 2903 Ave N ½

1968

Eugene P. Donovan (Dorothy), stillman helper, h. 2903 Ave N ½

1971

Eugene P. Donovan (Dorothy), stillman helper, h. 2903 Ave N ½

Mrs. Dorothy Donovan, secretary Central Methodist Church, h. 2903 Ave N ½

1980

Eugene P. Donovan (Dorothy), stillman helper, h. 2903 Ave N ½

1989

2903 Ave N ½ noted as "vacant" in cross directory.

Eugene P. Donovan (Dorothy), retired to Maple, LA

1991

2903 Ave N ½ noted as "vacant" in cross directory.

1993, 1994, 1995

Georgia Callies, retired, h. 2903 Ave N ½

Eugene and Dorothy Donovan, retired, h. 2903 Ave N ½

1996 (*Last year city directories were issues in Galveston*)

Eugene and Dorothy Donovan, 2903 Ave N ½