

The Charles L. and Italia C. Regini House

4502 Avenue O

I. Historical and Cultural Significance

The Charles L. and Italia C. Regini House stands at the northwest corner of the intersection of Avenue O and 45th Street. The property includes lots 13 through 15 of block 84 of the Denver Resurvey. The house lies within a predominantly residential neighborhood that developed during the first half of the twentieth century. Houses are typically one to two stories in height and characterized by decorative brick facades though wood-frame examples are not unusual. The list of architectural styles present in the area includes Craftsman and Prairie School (early twentieth century), assorted historicist styles including Spanish Eclectic, Italian Renaissance Revival, and Tudor Revival (1920s to 1940s), and Modern movements including the Ranch Style (1940s-1960s). The house lies to the south of the Cedar Lawn Historic District (National Register 2002, #02001570) and to the north of the Denver Court Historic District (National Register 2001, #01001471), but is outside the boundaries of both districts. Farther northwest lies the Broadway Cemetery Historic District (National Register 2014, #14000340).¹

Charles and Italia Regini

Charles Louis Regini was a life-long resident of Galveston best known as the owner of A-1 Food Shop located at 2007 37th Street during the 1930s and 1940s. His grave marker in Old Catholic Cemetery indicates that he was known as “Charley.” Census records list his birthplace as Texas, but his 1962 obituary reports that he was born 1897 in Rio Marina in the Tuscany region of Italy and immigrated to Galveston as infant with his parents John and Sandrina (Imparata), brothers

Joseph and Angelo, and sister Margaret. Charles Regini entered the US Marine Corps during World War I and served in France from September 1918 until July 1919.²

After returning home from the war, he married Italia Carubbi, who was born 1895 in Italy to Frank and Armida Carubbi. The Reginis had two children, Dorothy and Charles Jr.³ By 1939, the family lived at 4508 Avenue and their property included three vacant neighboring lots (lots 13-15 block 84 of the Denver Resurvey). In March of that year, Charles Regini transferred ownership of those lots to Elizabeth Rice, the wife of architect A. Murray Rice, for \$10.⁴ The transfer was part of an arrangement whereby Rice would design and supervise construction of a house on the property to serve as the new Regini family home.

A. Murray Rice

Albert Murray Rice was born November 1908 in San Luis, Potosi, Mexico to John A. and Lenora (Smith) Rice. After his father died in 1921, Lenora and the children relocated to her hometown, San Antonio, where she worked as a nurse. Murray attended Texas A&M College and returned to San Antonio after graduating to build his architectural career. He married Elizabeth Nuckolls, a native of San Antonio, prior to 1935.⁵

The Rices relocated to Galveston in 1938. They resided at 2915 Avenue Q ½. Rice's first project was a 1938 residence for John Chuoke at 4627 Avenue R ½. In March of the following year, he began working on a new house for the Regini family. He pulled a building permit (under Elizabeth's name) to construct a house initially valued at \$7200. Murray and Regini pulled a second permit the following month, this one valued at \$4800.⁶

Construction of the house

Construction of the house began in April 1939 and was completed that fall. Rice implemented a historicist design most readily categorized as Tudor Revival but demonstrating characteristics of English-and Norman-influenced revival styles as well, particularly in the masonry. In a September 17, 1939 article published just prior to the house's completion, the *Daily News* noted its design influences, describing it as "constructed of white rock along Old English lines."⁷ The article highlighted the roofed arcade connecting the house to the one-story garage and noted that the "design is in keeping with its location." The final cost of \$16,000 substantially surpassed the budget estimated in the building permits issued the previous spring. The result impressed the *Daily News* author, who called it "one of the most unique and attractive houses recently constructed here."⁸

Notes on the property's insurance record indicate that construction was completed in November 1939. On December 1, Elizabeth Rice sold the property back to Charles Regini for \$12,000. The precise circumstances of the arrangement between the Rices and the Reginis is poorly documented. The Regini family immediately took up residence in the house and remained there until 1942.⁹

After construction

The stay of A. Murray and Elizabeth Rice in Galveston was brief. In 1940, just two years after their arrival in the city, the couple relocated once again, this time to Houston. For a comprehensive biography of Rice, see the Appendix.

The Regini family spent nearly three years in the house Murray designed for them on Avenue O. After leaving the A-1 Food Shop, Charles Regini had a career as a meter inspector for

the city water department. He died in 1962.¹⁰ Italia died 1993 and is buried in Galveston alongside her husband.¹¹ In July 1942, Regini sold the house to Charles J. Michaelis II, a Galveston native best known as the president of Galveston Model Laundry, which operated from a building at 25th Street and Postoffice. Michaelis was also president of the Ideal Dry Cleaning Company and associated with the Gulf Copper Manufacturing Corp.¹²

Michaelis was born in October 1904 to Charles J. Michaelis Sr. and Kate (Cortes) Michaelis.¹³ He married Margaret Cox, born October 1905 in Galveston.¹⁴ The couple had one son, Charles J. Michaelis III, who was born in 1931.¹⁵ In 1942, the family purchased the house at 4502 Avenue O from Charles and Italia Regini. As Charles III grew into adulthood, he joined his father in the laundry business. He eventually took on leadership positions as his father transitioned out of the business.¹⁶ Charles II died in 1966, leaving the widowed Margaret as the house's owner. She sold it in December 1972 to Joe Max and Anita Taylor.¹⁷

At various points in his life, Joe Max Taylor served as Galveston County Sheriff and, later, Director of the American National Insurance Company, Director of Moody Gardens, and Director of Landry's Inc. The Taylors remained in the house for five years and during their tenure they took special interest in the landscaping of the property. In 1973, the Galveston Garden Club awarded them with a plaque recognizing their efforts.¹⁸ In April 1976, the house featured in the Garden Club's Homes and Gardens Show.¹⁹ The following year, the Taylors sold the house to physician Hugh B. Burris, Jr. In 1979, Burris sold the house to current owners Sanford and Norma Rubin, both professors at UTMB.²⁰

II. Architectural Description

The Regini House is a two-story, four-bay, reinforced-concrete-framed house with a one-story garage connected by covered arcade. The style is best categorized as Tudor Revival. The house addresses Avenue O, from which it is setback approximately 45 feet. The Avenue O frontage has a concrete-slab sidewalk with a landscaped curbstrip. A secondary frontage addresses 45th Street, from which the house is set back 35 feet. The 45th Street frontage has no sidewalk; concrete-slab walkways to a side entrance and to the garage lead directly to the street and do not have curb-cuts. The garage in the northeast corner of the property is accessible from 45th Street. The landscape on the south and east sides of the house is characterized by mature plantings, including olive, cherry laurel, lime, Japanese yew, pittosporum examples and an assortment of palms.

The house is raised approximately three feet from ground level. The foundation, presumably concrete in material, is obscured by the masonry-veneer cladding which extends to the base of the house. The veneer, termed "Rock Veneer" in the property's insurance record, features irregularly-shaped units intended to mimic the effect of the field-stone houses found in historic architecture of Western Europe and the British Isles. Header-bonded red brick lines each opening. In most cases, brick lintels are straight and window frames are rectangular. At the top of the front doorway and window bays at the southeast corner of the house, however, the openings have Tudor arches. Matching brick is found in a corbeled chimney extending above the roofline on the southern slope. The roof is hipped with a cross-gable projecting eastward and a gable face in the western portion of the primary (southern) facade. Most of the roof tiles are original but over the years a few broken pieces have been replaced by matching tiles from architectural salvage. Original copper drainpipes remain in place.

The plan of the house is roughly L-shaped as the depth of the western portion is greater than that of the eastern portion. The one-story, hip-roofed garage in the northeast corner of the property is connected to the main house by a gable-roofed arcade. Both the garage and the addition are original elements of the house. Rice utilized consistent materials and design elements.

The four-bay primary (south) elevation features a highly-decorative, asymmetrical design typical of the Tudor Revival houses of the 1930s. The field-stone-inspired rock-veneer serves as the essential cladding, but half-timbering in a section of the second story and a projecting oriel window in the easternmost bay provide visual and textural variety. The westernmost bay is delineated by a gable face. In this bay, each story contains a tripartite, wood-framed bay window. Moving eastward, the next bay has smaller wood-framed windows on each story and a massive, rock-veneered chimney projecting from the building and extending its full height. The third bay contains a wood-framed window next to the Tudor-arched front doorway in the first story and a tri-partite, wood-framed window in the aforementioned half-timbered section. The westernmost bay has a Tudor-arched bay window in the first story and a projecting oriel window in the second story.

The east elevation has three bays, all of which are located beneath the east-facing cross gable. The second story has wood-sash windows in the southern and central bays. On the first story, the southern bay has a Tudor-arched bay window matching the one found in the easternmost bay of the south elevation. The central and northern bays are characterized by a one-story, gabled portico that projects slightly from the body of the house and contains a projecting bay window. The portico features several Tudor-style details, including the flared shape of the roof, the short wooden columns supporting the roof, and the copper roof over the projecting bay.

A side entrance is recessed beneath the portico. The east elevation extends northwards via the arcade and garage. The two-stall garage has materials matching those found on the main house. Both garage doors are decorated by brick-lined, Tudor arches matching those found on the main house.

The house retains a high degree of integrity of its historic design and materials. A 1939 photograph of the house published in the *Daily News* shows that the house retains all of the character-defining features as designed by Rice. The only material change of note is a possible porch infill in the southeast corner of the house. The 1939 photo taken two months prior to the completion of construction does not show windows installed in the two Tudor-arched openings. Additional evidence found by the current owners upon their acquisition of the house suggests that the space was built as a recessed porch and was later enclosed. The current owners installed the existing windows to match the profiles of other windows of the house.

The house retains sufficient integrity to convey its historic significance as an example of Galveston's historic architecture. The style, broadly categorized as Tudor Revival, represents the trends in historicism that dominated suburban residential architecture in the US during the 1920s and 1930s.

III. Appendix

*Biography of Albert Murray Rice**

Albert Murray Rice was born in San Luis Potosi, Mexico, on 17 November 1908. His parents were John Albert Rice (1885-1921) and Lenora Smith (1888-1980). They married

* Prepared by Jami Durham and available from the Preservation Resource Center, Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, Texas.

in San Luis Potisi in December 1907. The couple resided in Tampico, Mexico where John was employed as an engineer. In addition to Albert Murray, the couple's daughter, Eleanor was born in Mexico a year later.

By 1920, the family was back in the United States. Lenora and the children were recorded in San Antonio on the US Census that year, residing with her mother, Nora Smith. John Albert Rice was residing in Birmingham, Alabama, where he was employed as a locomotive engineer for the Atlanta, Birmingham & Atlantic Rail Road. He died in Birmingham on 6 October 1921.

Albert Murray Rice received his advanced degree from Texas A&M University. A San Antonio City Directory in 1929 identified A. Murray Rice as a partner in the architecture firm Rice Decosta Allison. The other partners in the firm were Joseph Decosta and W. C. Allison. The 1930 US Census recorded Rice in San Antonio and noted his occupation as an engineer for a lumber company.

During his short period of residence on Galveston Island, Rice was accepted into the Texas Society of Architects in 1939. Affidavits attached to his file, received by GHF upon request in August 2018, indicate that Rice was the exclusive designer of homes for two San Antonio lumber companies- Jackson Lumber, owned by L. A. Jackson attested to the fact that Rice designed all of their Alamo Heights area houses from 1930 to 1934 (each valued at \$3000 and up) and Allen & Allen Lumber Dealers attested to the same time frame for homes exclusively designed by Rice (each valued at \$2500 and up).

Sometime after 1930 and prior to their arrival in Galveston, Rice married Elizabeth Rebecca Nuckolls. Elizabeth was born on 13 October 1907 in San Antonio. Her parents were Ambrose Pare Nuckolls (1870-1907) and Betty Sue Warren (1874-1962).

The US Census recorded her in 1930, single and living at home with her mother and working as a bookkeeper for an adding machine company.

The 1939 Galveston City Directory is the only directory that included an entry for A. Murray and Elizabeth Rice. Their time on the island appears to be short. The only other house documented on the island designed by Murray is 4627 Avenue R ½, contracted by John Chuoke, who resided at 4919 Avenue O. The house was built as tenant property for Chuoke in 1938 at a cost of \$7000.

By 1940, the US Census recorded Rice and his wife, Elizabeth, living in Houston, Texas. Rice's occupation is noted as an architect in the construction industry. During World War II, Rice was called to active duty by the US Naval Reserves on 17 November 1942. Notes in his Texas Society of Architects file indicate he was ordered to report to the US Navy Recruiting Office in Houston, where he was noted as a draftsman and architect. He was discharged from active service in 1946 but recalled in August 1950 and stationed in San Francisco. His second discharge occurred on 8 June 1953, after which, he returned to Houston. Rice remained a commissioned officer of the US Naval Reserves, ranked as a lieutenant commander, through 1961.

Rice continued to pay his membership dues to the Texas Society of Architects until his death. From 1962 through 1964, Rice was living in St. Auburn, Washington. In October 1965, he was living in Spenard, Alaska. From July 1966 through June 1968 he resided in Cleveland, Ohio. He was found dead in his house in Houston, Texas, on 13 June 1969. His remains were cremated and buried in Houston's National Cemetery. Elizabeth died in San Antonio on 18 January 1979. She was buried in Houston's National Cemetery with him.

IV. Figures

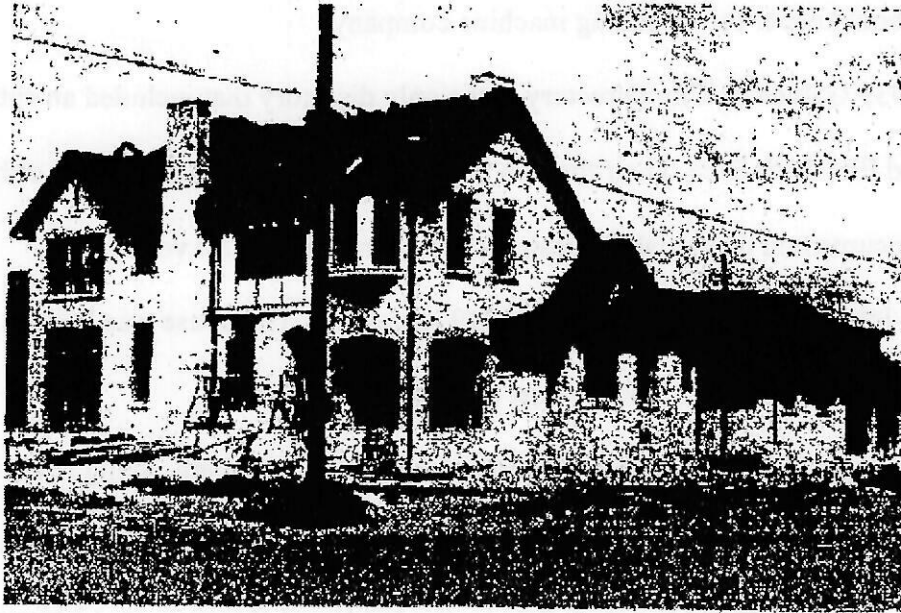


Figure 1 – A photograph of the Regini House taken in September 1939, two months prior to its completion. “Rock Home Under Construction Here,” Galveston Daily News; September 17, 1939, p. 12.



Figure 2 – Joe Max and Anita Taylor, pictured here in front of the house, received a plaque from the Galveston Garden Club in 1973 in recognition of their landscaping efforts on the Regini House property. “Mr. and Mars. Joe Max Taylor..” Galveston Daily News; August 27, 1973, p. 7.



Figure 3 – A photograph of the house taken 1976 to publicize the house’s inclusion in the Galveston Garden Club’s Homes and Gardens Show of that year. (“The Garden and Patio..” Galveston Daily News; April 5, 1976, p. 16.)

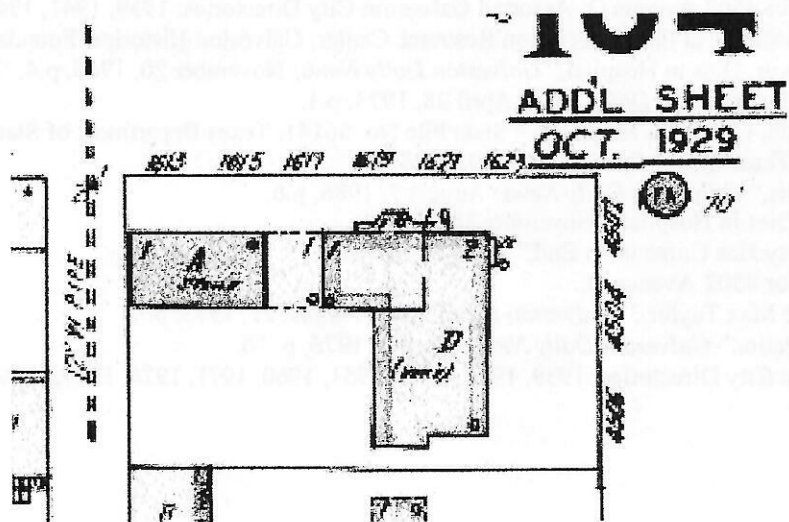


Figure 4 – The property and house as depicted in a 1947 Sanborn fire insurance map.

V. Sources

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- ² "C.L. Regini Sr. Dead of Heart Attack At 64," *Galveston Daily News*; September 21, 1962, p.6; "Certificate of Death, Charles Louis Regini, Sr." State File No. 61774. Texas Department of State Health Services; Austin Texas, USA; *Texas Death Certificates, 1903–1982*; "Regini, Charles Louis." File number 130216. US Military Record. Web. *FamilySearch*. www.familysearch.com. Accessed January 10, 2019; <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/33998869/charley-l-regini>; "Charles L. Regini, 1962," *Find a Grave*. Web. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/33998869/charley-l-regini>. Accessed January 10, 2019.
- ³ "Italia Carubbi Regini, 1993," *Find a Grave*. Web. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/33998846>. Accessed January 10, 2019.
- ⁴ Insurance Record for 4502 Avenue O, Texas History Center, Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas.
- ⁵ "Certificate of Death, Albert Murray Rice." State File No. 42338. Texas Department of State Health Services, Austin Texas; "Certificate of Death, Elizabeth Rice." 18 January 1979. Texas Department of Health, State Vital Statistics Unit, Austin Texas; "Certificate of Death, Leonora Smith Rice." 10 May 1980. Texas Department of Health, State Vital Statistics Unit, Austin Texas; "Certificate of Death, John A. Rice." Reference ID: cn 18138. *Alabama Deaths*. Department of Health, Montgomery, Alabama; "A. Murray Rice, Texas Architect #745." Texas Society of Architects file. Texas Board of Architectural Examiners. Austin, Texas. On file at Preservation Resource Center, Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, Texas.
- ⁶ "Building Permits For Work Here Total \$29,548," *Galveston Daily News*; April 9, 1939, p. 24.
- ⁷ "Rock Home Under Construction Here," *Galveston Daily News*; September 17, 1939, p. 12.
- ⁸ Insurance Record for 4502 Avenue O; "Rock Home Under Construction Here," September 17, 1939.
- ⁹ Insurance Record for 4502 Avenue O.
- ¹⁰ "C.L. Regini Sr. Dead of Heart Attack At 64," September 21, 1962.
- ¹¹ "Italia Carubbi Regini, 1993," *Find a Grave*.
- ¹² Insurance Record for 4502 Avenue O; Assorted Galveston City Directories: 1939, 1941, 1945, 1951, 1960, 1971, 1974, 1977, 1979. Available at the Preservation Resource Center, Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, Texas; "C.J. Michalis Jr. Dies in Hospital," *Galveston Daily News*; November 20, 1966, p.4; "Old Model Laundry Has Come to an End," *Galveston Daily News*; April 28, 1973, p.1.
- ¹³ "Certificate of Death, Charles J. Michaelis." State File No. 56141. Texas Department of State Health Services; Austin Texas, USA; *Texas Death Certificates, 1903–1982*
- ¹⁴ "Margaret Michaelis," *Galveston Daily News*; August 7, 1986, p.6.
- ¹⁵ "C.J. Michalis Jr. Dies in Hospital," November 20, 1966.
- ¹⁶ "Old Model Laundry Has Come to an End," April 28, 1973.
- ¹⁷ Insurance Record for 4502 Avenue O.
- ¹⁸ "Mr. and Mars. Joe Max Taylor." *Galveston Daily News*; August 27, 1973, p. 7.
- ¹⁹ "The Garden and Patio." *Galveston Daily News*; April 5, 1976, p. 16.
- ²⁰ Assorted Galveston City Directories: 1939, 1941, 1945, 1951, 1960, 1971, 1974, 1977, 1979; Insurance Record for 4502 Avenue O.