

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Monkey House/Commissary (San Antonio Zoo)
Other name/site number: NA
Name of related multiple property listing: Historic Buildings and Structures of the San Antonio Zoo

2. Location

Street & number: 3903 North St. Mary's Street
City or town: San Antonio State: Texas County: Bexar
Not for publication: [] Vicinity: []

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this
[X] nomination [] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National
Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the
property [X] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following levels of significance:
[] national [] statewide [X] local

Applicable National Register Criteria: [X] A [] B [X] C [] D

[Signature] Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer 2/16/24
Signature of certifying official / Title Date
Texas Historical Commission
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property [] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria.
Signature of commenting or other official Date
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:
[] entered in the National Register
[] determined eligible for the National Register
[] determined not eligible for the National Register
[] removed from the National Register
[] other, explain: _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Monkey House/Commissary (San Antonio Zoo), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

5. Classification

Ownership of Property: Public - Local

Category of Property: Building

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: NA

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions: Recreation and Culture: Zoo (animal enclosure)

Current Functions: Recreation and Culture: Zoo (animal enclosure)

7. Description

Architectural Classification: Spanish Revival

Principal Exterior Materials: Clay Tile, Rubble Limestone

Narrative Description (see continuation sheets 7 through 9)

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	A	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
	B	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	C	Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
	D	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations: NA

Areas of Significance: Politics/Government; Architecture

Period of Significance: 1935-1942

Significant Dates: 1935

Significant Person (only if criterion b is marked): NA

Cultural Affiliation (only if criterion d is marked): NA

Architect/Builder: Adams & Adams / W.C. Thrailkill

Narrative Statement of Significance (see continuation sheets 10-14)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography (see continuation sheet 15-16)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University – University of Texas at San Antonio, Special Collections
- Other –

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): NA

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: Less than one acre (0.17 acres)

Coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: NA

1. 29.462740° -98.473471°

Verbal Boundary Description: The boundary of the property is equal to the footprint of the building plus the stone platforms on which animal cages originally sat, approximately 145 x 62 feet in size. See Map 4 for precise delineated boundary.

Boundary Justification: Due to the density of resources located within the San Antonio Zoo and lack of clear delineation between the open spaces associated with particular buildings and the surrounding landscapes, the boundary is limited to the footprint of the building and the areas historically associated with the building.

11. Form Prepared By

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Date: April 18, 2023

Additional Documentation

Maps (see continuation sheets 17-19)

Additional items (see continuation sheets 20-27)

Photographs (see continuation sheets 28-48)

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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Photograph Log

Monkey House/Commissary (San Antonio Zoo)

San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photographed by Irene Allender, February 2024 (except Photo 5, July 2022)

Photo 1

North and east elevations. View southwest.

Photo 2

Primary entrance on north elevation. View south.

Photo 3

Restored window on north elevation. View south.

Photo 4

Enclosed animal passageways on north elevation. View south.

Photo 5

Works Progress Administration plaque on north elevation. View south.

Photo 6

East elevation. View west.

Photo 7

Infilled animal passageways on east elevation. View southwest.

Photo 8

South elevation. View northeast.

Photo 9

Entrance on south elevation. View north.

Photo 10

Plaza located south of the building. View southwest.

Photo 11

West elevation. View east.

Photo 12

Interior north elevation entrance and corridor. View north.

Photo 13

Former office, now family restroom. View east.

Photo 14

Former central food preparation area, now subdivided into main corridor and adjacent restroom. View south.

Photo 15

Former central food preparation area and lofted space, now nursing room. View southwest.

Photo 16

Roof truss. View southwest.

Photo 17

Former east end, now restaurant food preparation area. View east.

Photo 18

Former animal holding area, now food prep area. View south.

Photo 19

West end, now stroller storage. View northeast.

Photo 20

Animal passageway door, painted but remains in place. View northwest.

Photo 21

View of south and east elevations from zoo entrance. View northwest.

Monkey House/Commissary (San Antonio Zoo), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Narrative Description

The Monkey House/Commissary is a one-story building within the San Antonio Zoo, and is nominated under the Multiple Property Submission “Historic Buildings and Structures of the San Antonio Zoo.”¹ Constructed in 1935-37 through the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the building was designed by Adams & Adams, the San Antonio architectural firm that designed many of the buildings and structures within the zoo in the New Deal Era. The building is a Spanish Revival style building with a flat roof and red clay tile parapet, limestone rubble exterior walls, and minimal detailing. Rectangular in shape, the building has symmetrical north and south elevations, each with prominent central arched entrances trimmed with limestone quoins. The building features historic steel-frame windows. Its main entrances each consist of paired wood doors with historic screen doors below a simple wood fan transom. Historically, metal animal cages were affixed to the exterior of the west, north, and east elevations; these are no longer extant but their raised stone bases remain. The interior is divided into three major spaces with interior animal enclosures in the east and west rooms and supporting functions in the central space. Simple materials—including exposed wood rafters and decking and concrete floors—characterize the interior. The Monkey House/Commissary retains good historic integrity from its period of significance (1935-1937), as an excellent example of the “New Deal-era Buildings and Structures” property type outlined in the “Historic Buildings and Structures of the San Antonio Zoo” MPS and as a good example of Rustic architecture designed by noted San Antonio architecture firm Adams & Adams.²

Setting

The Monkey House/Commissary is located at 3903 North St. Mary’s Street within the boundaries of the San Antonio Zoo (*Map 3*). Within the zoo complex, the building is just north of the main entrance building, nestled between the historic Aquarium and Reptile House, and is situated with its primary elevation facing north-northwest (*Map 4, Photo 2*). The building is surrounded by other zoo enclosures and structures mainly constructed between the 1920s and 1940s and is accessible via pedestrian access or zoo vehicles only.

Site

The Monkey House/Commissary is largely surrounded by paving with some planting beds and fountains. A flamingo enclosure abuts its west elevation. To the south, there is now a paved plaza with tables and seating for the food and beverage kiosk located within the building. A non-historic fenced patio area, situated atop the historic raised bases on which the animal cages once sat, wraps the north and east elevations (*Map 4; Photos 1, 6, 8, & 10*).

Exterior

The Monkey House/Commissary’s design and construction clearly communicate its property type as a New Deal-era Building within the San Antonio Zoo and is emblematic of the rustic style of design apparent throughout the zoo. Its main elevation historically faced north/northwest, although following the 2023 rehabilitation both the north and south elevations are public-facing. In order to simplify the descriptive narrative, elevations will be referenced using the four main cardinal directions, with the main elevation as the north elevation. The building has a rubber membrane flat roof and shallow parapet walls capped with red clay tiles. Clay scuppers protrude at equal intervals around the perimeter; the majority are extant, but some have been replaced with non-historic metal scuppers or are missing. Exterior walls are rubble limestone atop a concrete foundation. Historically, metal animal cages were affixed to the exterior of the

¹ Rebecca Wallisch, “Historic Buildings and Structures of the San Antonio Zoo,” National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Submission (MPS) Draft, 2023.

² Wallisch, “Historic Buildings and Structures of the San Antonio Zoo,” 30.

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west, north, and east elevations, but have since been removed to provide more appropriate housing for the animals. Some remnants of their outlines are noticeable on the building, and the platforms remain intact.

Large rectangular window openings with historic steel-frame windows pierce the walls. Simple limestone block sills ground each opening. The majority of window openings are positioned horizontally and set high above the floor elevation; on the north elevation, two larger, vertically positioned window openings flank and emphasize the main entrance. Some windows were previously modified to allow for window HVAC units, ventilation panels, and other protrusions; however, these were either repaired or replaced in-kind during the 2023 rehabilitation. Arched masonry entrances framed with protruding limestone quoins are centrally located on the north and south elevations, and an additional two secondary entrances pierce the north elevation. During rehabilitation, two additional entrances were added to the south elevation in line with those on the north elevation for the stroller rental and the café. Small exterior animal passages pierce the north and east elevations; all of which have been infilled with rubble limestone. Several of the interiors of the passageways retain their historic metal animal security doors, which are fixed shut.

The north elevation faces the main public path that winds through the zoo (*Photos 1 and 2*). Rubble limestone forms the wall and red clay tiles cap the parapet. Nine bays organize the north elevation. The middle three bays (bays four through six) protrude slightly from the plane of the elevation and the parapet rises in a shallow peak. The center bay, bay five, contains an arched masonry entrance framed with protruding limestone quoins. The entrance consists of a pair of non-original metal doors and topped with a simple metal fan transom that emulates the original wood design (*Photo 2*). From the east, bays four and six flank the main entrance and each contains a vertical window opening with a large historic steel-frame window. Each window has fourteen fixed lights along the top and sides with a large central fixed pane with vertical center mullion (*Photo 3*). Bays two and eight contain masonry openings for secondary pedestrian entrances with non-original metal doors. Bays one, three, seven, and nine each contain a horizontal window opening with a ganged pair of historic (or replaced in-kind) six-light steel-frame windows. Small square animal passageways are located along the foundation line (*Photo 4*). From the east, one passageway is located in bay one, two are located in bay three, two are located in bay seven, and one is located in bay nine. All the passageways are infilled with rubble limestone. Scuppers pierce the wall below the parapet line at the east and west ends of the wall and between bays one through four and bays six through nine. Non-original aluminum scuppers are located on the protruding portion of the elevation between bays three and four and between bays six and seven; the rest of the elevation retains its historic clay scuppers.

The east elevation faces the non-original fenced patio area that wraps around the east and north elevations (*Photo 6*). Rubble limestone forms the wall and red clay tiles cap the parapet. Three bays organize the east elevation. Each bay contains a horizontal window opening with a ganged pair of historic six-light steel-frame windows (*Photo 18* shows the windows from the interior). Non-original security screens cover the window openings. Small square animal passageways are located along the foundation line at the north and south ends of the wall and between each bay. All are infilled with rubble limestone (*Photo 7*). Historic clay scuppers pierce the wall below the parapet line at the north and south ends of the wall and between each bay. The north-most scupper is missing.

The south elevation largely mirrors the north elevation (*Photos 8 and 10*). It historically faced utility spaces and a neighboring non-historic building which has since been removed. Rubble limestone forms the wall and red clay tiles cap the parapet. Nine bays organize the south elevation. The middle three bays (bays four through six) protrude slightly from the plane of the elevation and the parapet rises in a shallow peak. A square rubble limestone exhaust chimney, flush with the elevation, breaks through and extends above the parapet between bays four and five. The center bay, bay five, contains an arched masonry entrance framed with protruding limestone quoins. The entrance consists of a pair of non-original solid metal doors with a simple metal fan transom (*Photo 9*).

From the east, bays one, three, seven, and nine each contain a horizontal window with a ganged pair of historic six-light steel-frame windows. In bay four, a square limestone mullion divides the window opening in two; each opening

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contains a historic six-light steel-frame window. Historically, bays two and eight mirrored bays one, three, seven and nine with horizontal pairs of six-light windows. However, during the 2023 rehabilitation, additional double entrance doors were installed beneath the windows to allow access to the new Changos Café and stroller rental areas of the building. Shed roof awnings were placed in front of the entrances, but they are not attached to the Monkey House building and are easily removable. Scuppers pierce the wall below the parapet line at the east and west ends of the wall and between bays one through four and bays six through nine. Non-historic aluminum scuppers are located on the protruding portion of the elevation between bays three and four and between bays six and seven; the rest of the elevation retains its historic clay scuppers.

The west elevation faces an adjoining flamingo enclosure (*Photo 11*). Rubble limestone forms the wall and red clay tiles cap the parapet. The west elevation contains no fenestration. Historic clay scuppers pierce the wall below the parapet line; their configuration mirrors the east elevation. A rock installation within the flamingo enclosure abuts and conceals approximately the north third of the elevation. A steel frame covering the adjoining flamingo enclosure abuts the west elevation; three columns are affixed to the west elevation below the parapet line. No changes were made to this elevation during the 2023 rehabilitation.

Interior

The interior was historically divided into three major spaces with the animal interior enclosures in the east and west rooms and supporting food prep functions in the central space. The original interior animal cages are no longer extant; these were removed to provide more appropriate accommodation for the animals. However, some historic metal animal metal animal were retained on the interior and fixed in place and painted (*Photo 20*). The central space now consists of a corridor that travels from the primary entrances on the north and south elevation (*Photos 12 & 14*). Restrooms are located on either side of the corridor, along with a nursing room and janitor's closet (*Photos 13 & 15*). The west portion of the building is a large open storage space for stroller rentals, with historic exposed ceiling consisting of trusses and rafters (*Photos 16 & 19*). The east portion of the building contains a walk-in-cooler, kitchen, and food and beverage station (*Photos 17 & 18*). Historic finishes are utilitarian and include exposed ceiling trusses, rafters, decking and concrete floors.

Alterations

The Monkey House was rehabilitated in 2023 in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and with approval from the Texas Historical Commission. Exterior alterations are relatively minor and do not prevent the Monkey House/Commissary from conveying its historic design. The largest alteration is the removal of the metal animal cages historically affixed to the exterior of the west, north, and east elevations. However, these were removed to provide more appropriate accommodation for the animals. Other exterior alterations include the addition of two entrances on the south elevation, non-original scuppers, non-original exterior doors, and some replaced (in kind) windows. On the interior, alterations were more substantial to accommodate the building's new uses, which now include storage for stroller rentals, restrooms, and a food and beverage kiosk with a kitchen. During the rehabilitation character-defining features were retained, including the open and exposed roof structure with wood trusses on the east portion of the building, concrete floors, and several remaining fixed-in-place animal gates.

Integrity

The Monkey House/Commissary retains good historic integrity and meets the Registration Requirements outlined in the "Historic Buildings and Structures of the San Antonio Zoo" Multiple Property Submission (MPS). The building clearly conveys its historic property type as a New Deal-era Building and as an Architect-designed Rustic Building in

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the San Antonio Zoo.³ The building remains in its original location near the entrance of the zoo, and with other extant New Deal-era buildings surrounding it, it retains excellent integrity of *setting*. Relatively unaltered since its original construction, the Monkey House/Commissary also retains good integrity of *design* and *materials*. Although the 2023 rehabilitation altered some interior spaces to accommodate a change in programming, this is in line with the registration requirements outlined in the cover document. With its simple massing, exterior walls composed of local rubble limestone, and modest Spanish Revival elements visible through the roofline, red clay tile parapet, and arched entrances, the building clearly conveys the unique rustic design apparent throughout the zoo. The largest alteration is the removal of the exterior metal animal cages and the interior reconfiguration; however, as the MPS states:

Due to the evolution of zoo design and best practices, many buildings and structures within the zoo have changed function or been retrofitted to conform to updated zoo standards. Historic resources with additions or alterations may be eligible if the original building or structure is largely intact, if the character-defining features are extant and legible, and if the resource otherwise retains a majority of the seven aspects of integrity.⁴

In the case of the Monkey House/Commissary, the cages were removed due to changing knowledge of animal welfare and the animals' need for more space, and the Monkey House/Commissary otherwise retains its historic scale and shape. Other alterations, including non-original scuppers, non-original exterior doors on secondary entrances, and replaced (in kind) windows, are relatively minor and do not substantially impact the building's integrity per the MPS. As the MPS states:

Replacement windows do not necessarily detract from the overall integrity of historic resources if they retain their original configuration and are generally consistent with the original design . . . some buildings and structures within the zoo are accessed by hundreds of thousands of people annually, which results in significant wear and tear on features such as doors . . . for doors utilized by humans, acceptable alterations include replacement doors compatible with the original design.⁵

The Monkey House/Commissary maintains its historic fenestration patterns; additionally, although some windows have been altered, many historic windows remain and the original design intent is clearly evident. Replacement doors are simple and compatible with the historic design, and the character defining arched masonry entrances with fan transoms remain on the primary entrances. On the interior, the Monkey House/Commissary has been reconfigured to accommodate a new use, however its interior character-defining features were largely retained. *Workmanship* is evident in the building's rubble masonry construction and restrained detailing. Overall, the Monkey House/Commissary effectively communicates the *feeling* of a building designed and constructed with natural, local materials as well as its *association* with the New Deal-era expansion at the San Antonio Zoo and the firm Adams & Adams.

³ Wallisch, "Historic Buildings and Structures of the San Antonio Zoo," 27.

⁴ Wallisch, "Historic Buildings and Structures of the San Antonio Zoo," 30.

⁵ Wallisch, "Historic Buildings and Structures of the San Antonio Zoo," 28.

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Statement of Significance

The Monkey House/Commissary at the San Antonio Zoo in Bexar County, Texas, was built in 1935-37 to serve as a commissary and winter housing for animals. The building was equipped with heating so that animals, including primates, birds, and other species, could be brought inside during winter cold snaps. It was also equipped with large-scale refrigerators and freezers, which housed fresh produce and meat, delivered every few months by local vendors. Between its construction and 2022, the building continued to house various animals and serve as the commissary where animal meals were prepared. The Monkey House/Commissary was completed in 1937 during a campaign to construct new buildings and make additional improvements through federal funding provided by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Like many of the buildings in this period, the Monkey House/Commissary was built using local limestone from the quarry site. Designed by local architectural firm Adams & Adams, who designed many of the WPA-era buildings and structures within the zoo, the building features random rubble masonry walls, symmetrical front and rear (north and south) elevations, and modest Spanish Revival style elements evident in the prominent arched entrances and red clay roof tiles. The building is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of Politics/Government and Criterion C in the area of Architecture. Specifically, it exemplifies certain historic contexts as described in the "Historic Buildings and Structures of the San Antonio Zoo" Multiple Property Submission (MPS).⁶ Applicable historic contexts discussed in the MPS include "New Deal-era Zoo Improvements," "Rustic Design at the San Antonio Zoo," and the "Adams & Adams" architectural firm. The period of significance (1935-1937) the period during which the building was designed and built with significant assistance from the WPA.

Early Development and Evolution of the San Antonio Zoo

In 1899 George W. Brackenridge, owner of the San Antonio Water Works Company, deeded 340 acres along the San Antonio River to the City of San Antonio for use as a public park, later called Brackenridge Park. In 1912 Brackenridge fenced in an area south of the park (near the present-day golf course) where he kept a small herd of animals, including buffalo, deer, and elk. Like the park, Brackenridge intended for the enclosure to be freely accessible to the public, and people began visiting and donating a variety of animals to the informal collection.⁷ Around the same time, San Antonio residents had been petitioning the City to create a freely accessible public zoo, and in 1914 San Antonio Parks Commissioner Ray Lambert noted that a former limestone quarry to the north of Brackenridge Park, with terraces and overhanging caves, would be an ideal location for animal enclosures. Historically, this area consisted of agricultural homesteads, the County poor house, and a Mexican neighborhood that was home to many Mexican refugees. Soon after Lambert pinpointed the area for a zoo, Brackenridge deeded the land to the City for use as a park, and the residents were evicted. Lambert worked with Brackenridge to move his animal herd to the quarry in 1914, marking the beginning of the San Antonio Zoo, and the two started a partnership to expand the facility.⁸

The landscape of the former quarry inspired Lambert and Brackenridge to construct a natural, cageless zoo, a new idea for zoo design only recently invented in Europe, pioneered by Carl Hagenbeck. Hagenbeck, a German native, had traveled through the U.S. in the 1890s performing trained animal acts. Near the turn of the twentieth century Hagenbeck decided he wanted his own zoo, where animals could be displayed in open-air exhibits free from cages, appearing as they would in their natural habitat.⁹ In 1900 Hagenbeck bought a farm and hired engineers, architects, and sculptors to construct moats, hedges, artificial rocks, and winding pathways, which would give a sense that humans were roaming freely with dangerous animals. Hagenbeck's design was revolutionary in that it allowed animals to be kept outdoors and gave them more freedom of movement. At the same time, due to industrialization and urbanization,

⁶ Rebecca Wallisch, "Historic Buildings and Structures of the San Antonio Zoo," National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Submission (MPS) Draft, 2023.

⁷ Wilbur L. Matthews, *A History of the San Antonio Zoo* (San Antonio Zoological Society, 1989), 4.

⁸ "It's just like home to them," *The San Antonio Light*, 9.

⁹ Vicki Croke, *The Story of Zoos: Past, Present and Future* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 144-145.

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the once abundant natural landscape was increasingly limited and city-dwellers also sought new ways of experiencing “nature.”¹⁰ However, despite an emphasis on “natural” exhibits, zoo designers did not emulate the animals’ natural habitats; rather, “zoo planners interpreted the natural world, rather than mirroring it.”¹¹ Ultimately, these natural exhibits were designed with the visitor in mind, and not the animals.¹²

The San Antonio Zoo was an early adopter of the “natural,” barless, cageless zoo concept in the United States. The onset of World War I temporarily halted improvements at the San Antonio Zoo, but in the 1920s Lambert, along with a group of San Antonio businessmen and zoo boosters, began promoting the idea of constructing a barless, cageless zoo. In 1925 a newspaper boasted that the San Antonio Zoo had grown to include 10 acres and 100 steel cages, and “it is a great attraction, popular alike with visitors to San Antonio and home folk—a sort of perpetual show where it doesn’t cost anything to see the menagerie.”¹³ Several years later, Hagenbeck’s son Heinrich, who consulted on barless zoo construction throughout the U.S., visited the San Antonio Zoo and remarked that it had “the finest natural possibilities of any place he has ever seen.”¹⁴

Criterion A: New Deal-era Zoo Improvements¹⁵

In the late 1920s a group of businessmen and zoo boosters decided to create a formal zoological society to advocate for the San Antonio Zoo, and in 1928 they established the San Antonio Zoological Society (SAZA). The SAZA slowly took over operations of the zoo from the City before officially assuming control of operations in 1931 with Fred Sullivan as director.¹⁶ In 1934 Sullivan stepped down and Fred Stark was selected as the new director of the zoo, and soon after Richard A. (Dick) Friedrich was instated as president.¹⁷ Stark had been involved with the booster group prior to the establishment of the SAZA; in the mid-1920s he also worked for the zoo during breaks from college and showed an aptitude for the care of birds and animals.¹⁸

Friedrich and Stark assumed their roles at the zoo amidst a difficult era. The stock market crash of 1929 and subsequent Great Depression had a profound impact on the nation, and as a byproduct, the development of the zoo. Fortunately, then-president Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) passed a series of New Deal legislative initiatives aimed at providing funding for infrastructure improvements, promoting the arts, and putting U.S. residents to work. The Works Progress Administration (WPA), established in 1934, was one of the most expansive of these programs.¹⁹

Under the leadership of Friedrich and Stark, the San Antonio Zoo was able to procure WPA funding for numerous projects. By 1935 Stark was overseeing over 100 WPA workers, and a multitude of new structures and buildings were constructed in the late 1930s and early 1940s (*Figure 7*).²⁰ Due to its unique location and the abundance of available local limestone from the quarry site, many of these buildings and structures were constructed using the native material.²¹ This was a much-needed cost-savings measure, but also further lent to the zoo’s distinctive “natural” appearance.

¹⁰ Croke, *The Story of Zoos*, 145.

¹¹ Elizabeth Anne Hanson, *Nature Civilized: A Cultural History of American Zoos, 1870-1940*, Dissertation (University of Pennsylvania, 1996), 241.

¹² Wallisch, “Historic Buildings and Structures of the San Antonio Zoo,” 7.

¹³ C.M. Meadows, Jr., “Donors Help City Finance Zoo Expense,” *Fort Worth Record-Telegram*, December 28, 1925, 9.

¹⁴ “Hagenbeck in S.A. to Confer on Zoo,” *The San Antonio Light*, March 4, 1929, 7A.

¹⁵ Wallisch, “Historic Buildings and Structures of the San Antonio Zoo,” 15-17.

¹⁶ Matthews, *A History of the San Antonio Zoo*, 14.

¹⁷ Matthews, *A History of the San Antonio Zoo*, 19.

¹⁸ Matthews, *A History of the San Antonio Zoo*, 9.

¹⁹ Wallisch, “Historic Buildings and Structures of the San Antonio Zoo,” 15.

²⁰ Matthews, *A History of the San Antonio Zoo*, 26.

²¹ “S.A. Zoo ‘Slum Problem’ is Eliminated,” *San Antonio Light*, June 25, 1939, 18.

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It was during this era of activity that the Monkey House/Commissary was designed and constructed using WPA funds. Between 1935 and 1937, the architectural firm Adams & Adams designed the building and W.C. Thrailkill oversaw its construction (*Figure 1*). Built at a cost of \$18,000, the building features symmetrical front and rear (north and south) elevations, and like many New Deal-era Zoo buildings is constructed with limestone rubble masonry walls extracted from the quarry in which the zoo sits.²² Acme Wire & Iron Works completed the metal animal cages affixed to the building, Ed Friedrich Sales Corporation provided the electric refrigerators, and Jud & Ormond (later Jud Plumbing & Heating) installed the heating system.²³ The building originally housed multiple functions, including animal commissary and hospital, an office for Zoo staff, and monkey cages.²⁴ The commissary, located in the center of the building, was designed to house the facility that prepared all meals for each resident of the zoo. It included floor drains to facilitate frequent hosing as well as ample room for worktables and individual food containers for each animal.²⁵ The east and west ends of the building each contained a large room to house animals. Designed to allow monkeys and other small primates to move between interior and exterior enclosures, small animal passageways are located along the base of the north and east exterior elevations. Historically, the passageways led to metal cages affixed to the exterior of the building, although they have since been removed due to changing knowledge of animal welfare and the need for more space (*Figure 6*).²⁶

Historically, large quantities of food were delivered to the commissary building by local vendors, including the Younes Produce Co. who provided fresh seafood, the Union Meat Company which provided fresh meat, Bohnet's Bakery which provided stale whole wheat bread, and Fehr Baking Company which provided fresh bread.²⁷

The Monkey House/Commissary was also intended to help fill a deficit in the zoo's winter needs, as well as become one of its drawing winter attractions. While winters in San Antonio are relatively warm and mild, the zoo was still not equipped to handle all its animals in cold weather. Prior to the construction of the Monkey House/Commissary, the zoo resorted to using the much smaller former commissary building on an ad hoc basis to temporarily house monkeys, birds, and other animals that require climate-controlled shelter during freezing weather.²⁸ The Monkey House/Commissary's east and west rooms, in addition to housing primate enclosures, were designed to also serve as heated winter quarters for birds and other smaller animals. It was additionally designed with public circulation space in mind so zoo-goers could visit their favorite animal residents during the colder winter months.²⁹

²² "Work Gets Underway on Zoo Commissary," *San Antonio Express*, December 3, 1935, 11.

²³ "Special Meeting of the Commissioners of the City of San Antonio," City of San Antonio Municipal Archives and Records, April 8, 1936, accessed April 17, 2023, <https://webapp9.sanantonio.gov/ArchiveSearch/Viewer2.aspx?Id={E301651A-A0A1-4C95-B716-28DE6131C990}&DocTitle=Special%20Meeting%20of%20the%20Commissioners%20of%20the%20City%20of%20San%20Antonio&PageNo=&TotalPages=&MimeType=application/pdf&RelatedDocs=>.

²⁴ Jenny Hay, *Historic Resources Survey of the Cultural Landscape of the San Antonio Zoo*, City of San Antonio Office of Historic Preservation, 2017, 8.

²⁵ "Chow Time at the zoo," *Express and News*, September 12, 1971, 65.

²⁶ "Monks Enjoy New Home," *San Antonio Light*, July 23, 1936, 13.

²⁷ "Meeting of the Commissioners of the City of San Antonio," City of San Antonio Municipal Archives and Records, August 31, 1933, accessed April 17, 2023, <https://webapp9.sanantonio.gov/ArchiveSearch/Viewer2.aspx?Id={7B17E9A4-ED47-4D94-91BC-63636A3B26CC}&DocTitle=Meeting%20of%20the%20Commissioners%20of%20the%20City%20of%20San%20Antonio&PageNo=&TotalPages=&MimeType=application/pdf&RelatedDocs=>; "Special Meeting of the Commissioners of the City of San Antonio," City of San Antonio Municipal Archives and Records, August 24, 1933, accessed April 17, 2023, <https://webapp9.sanantonio.gov/ArchiveSearch/Viewer2.aspx?Id={33BD7CC6-D075-46A1-9C63-7494A1201541}&DocTitle=Meeting%20of%20the%20Commissioners%20of%20the%20City%20of%20San%20Antonio&PageNo=&TotalPages=&MimeType=application/pdf&RelatedDocs=>

²⁸ "S.A. Zoo Rates High Over Nation," *San Antonio Light*, September 13, 1935.

²⁹ "Winter Zoo Trips to be New Order," *San Antonio Light*, July 17, 1936, 7.

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In addition to the Monkey House/Commissary, other work funded or constructed through the WPA at the zoo includes the Bird of Prey Aviaries, the Hippopotamus House, the Elephant House, the Reptile House, excavated areas for the rhino exhibit, a sea lion pool, additions to Monkey Island (no longer extant), and a series of moats and masonry walls. In 1939 it was reported that Zoo improvements had totaled \$183,483 in federal funds, with the City contributing an additional \$54,119, for a total of nearly \$240,000.³⁰

Criterion C: Rustic Design at the San Antonio Zoo³¹

The San Antonio Zoo was established and designed in the early twentieth century, concurrent with an era of environmental romanticism embodied through the development of rustic design in the burgeoning national parks. Uniquely sited within a former rock quarry and adjacent to the headwaters of the San Antonio River (*Map 2*), early buildings, structures, and enclosures in the San Antonio Zoo were constructed using local limestone. The quarry setting and limestone building materials lent the property a rustic, “natural” feeling that had only recently become popular in zoo design. Improvements in the zoo halted during World War I, and little construction appears to have occurred during the early- to mid-1920s, but the 1930s and early 1940s saw a boom in construction, aided by WPA funds. In keeping with the rustic, natural feeling of the zoo, New Deal-era buildings utilized native limestone and consisted of random, coursed, or squared rubble masonry. Buildings constructed during this time, as well as other structures such as bridges, enclosures, and retaining walls are largely devoid of extensive decorative details. Some New Deal-era resources do exhibit some stylistic or architectural features (such as the Monkey House), but these are minimal and simple designs reflective of the era.

While other zoos across the country were also undergoing New Deal-era expansion projects using federal funds, none had the abundance of natural stone at their disposal like the San Antonio Zoo. Instead, most zoos utilized mostly concrete in their New Deal-era zoo building campaigns, making the San Antonio Zoo a unique “natural” zoo that actually incorporated native materials into the construction of its buildings, structures, and exhibits.³² While the use of raw concrete with visible formwork can be found throughout the zoo, there is a clear hierarchy of materials, with local limestone on prominent display and concrete used in more utilitarian spaces.

The Monkey House/Commissary exemplifies the qualities of rustic design exhibited throughout the zoo. It is a simple rectangular building that features limestone random rubble exterior walls extracted from the quarry in which the zoo sits. Ornament is minimal and subtle. Red clay tiles cover the roof parapet, and the front and rear (north and south) elevations feature prominent arched entrances; both elements indicative of the Spanish Revival style. Limestone quoins surround the main arched entrances on the front and rear elevations but do not feel overly ornate; they blend with the surrounding materials and lend a rustic textural quality to the building. Steel frame windows are plain and utilitarian. Inside, the ceilings are exposed to the rafters, walls are flat plaster, and the majority of the floors are concrete. In both form and materials, the Monkey House/Commissary lends itself to the overall rustic design of the San Antonio Zoo.

³⁰ “S.A. Zoo ‘Slum Problem’ is Eliminated,” *San Antonio Light*, June 25, 1939, 18.

³¹ Wallisch, “Historic Buildings and Structures of the San Antonio Zoo,” 21-23.

³² Victoria McCollum, *The Architecture of Keeping Animals: Preservation Responses to Changing Animal Welfare Ideals in Mid-sized American Zoos*, Thesis, (Clemson University, 2018), 37.

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Criterion C: Adams & Adams, Architects³³

Born in 1885 in Nebraska, Carleton Adams and his family moved to San Antonio in 1890. Adams went on to study architecture at Columbia University, graduating in 1909 and returning to San Antonio. Along with his uncle Carl C. Adams he co-founded the architectural firm Adams & Adams. Carl Adams died in 1918 and Max C. Friedrich took over as associate of the firm with Carleton Adams. The firm constructed numerous residences throughout San Antonio, but they specialized in large commercial and public buildings. Carleton Adams was known to experiment with a variety of styles, but most popularly Spanish Colonial Revival and Art Deco.³⁴

Many of the buildings and structures completed at the San Antonio Zoo during the New Deal-era, including the Monkey House/Commissary, were designed by Adams & Adams. The San Antonio Zoological Society (SAZA) first hired the firm after meeting with zoo consultant Heinrich Hagenbeck in 1929, although the Great Depression delayed most development and construction until the mid-1930s.³⁵ The Monkey House/Commissary, with its Spanish Revival detailing, as well as the later Moderne Hippopotamus House, reflect Carleton Adam's stylistic tastes. Other buildings, such as the Elephant House, were designed simply as rustic stone structures to house the animals. Other Adams & Adams work at the zoo include numerous quarry wall exhibits, the old zoo restrooms, and the Baumberger Moats.³⁶ All these works utilized the local limestone in their construction, giving the zoo a cohesive, natural feeling that blended in with its surrounding environment. Furthermore, the use of stone made these facilities durable and easy to clean, while still being aesthetically appealing to the visitor.³⁷

Conclusion

The Monkey House/Commissary building was constructed during a pivotal moment in the evolution of the San Antonio Zoo. Between 1934 and 1940, the San Antonio Zoo was able to procure \$183,483 in Works Progress Administration funding and an additional \$54,119 in municipal funding for a total of nearly \$240,000 to spend on developing and improving the zoo for both its animals and its visitors.³⁹ Most zoo development during this period was designed by local architectural firm Adams & Adams and used materials from the former quarry in which the zoo sits; not only providing savings on construction material expenditures, but also lending the New Deal-era buildings and structures a distinct rustic style that sets them apart from other WPA-funded developments at other zoos across the country. Designed by Adams & Adams and constructed between 1935 and 1937 of local limestone, the Monkey House/Commissary is an excellent reflection of this period in the zoo's development. The building is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of Politics/Government and Criterion C in the area of Architecture for its association with the San Antonio Zoo and historic contexts discussed in the "Historic Buildings and Structures of the San Antonio Zoo" multiple property submission form.⁴⁰ Applicable historic contexts in the MPS include "New Deal-era Zoo Improvements," "Rustic Design at the San Antonio Zoo," and "Adams & Adams." Although the building was rehabilitated utilizing state rehabilitation credits in 2023 to accommodate a new use, these changes adhere to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and were approved by the Texas Historical Commission. The rehabilitation was completed in order to to accommodate the changing needs of the zoo and create more suitable conditions for the animals, and the building meets the registration requirements outlined in the MPS and retains sufficient integrity to clearly convey its historical significance as a New Deal-era building in the San Antonio Zoo.

³³ Wallisch, "Historic Buildings and Structures of the San Antonio Zoo," 15-17.

³⁴ Long, "Adams, Carleton W. (1885-1964)."

³⁵ "Hagenbeck in S.A. to Confer on Zoo," *The San Antonio Light*, March 4, 1929, 7A.

³⁶ Hay, *Historic Resources Survey of the Cultural Landscape of the San Antonio Zoo*, 7-9.

³⁷ Wallisch, "Historic Buildings and Structures of the San Antonio Zoo," 22.

³⁹ "S.A. Zoo 'Slum Problem' is Eliminated," *San Antonio Light*, June 25, 1939, 18.

⁴⁰ Wallisch, "Historic Buildings and Structures of the San Antonio Zoo."

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- "Monks Enjoy New Home," San Antonio Light, July 23, 1936, 13.
- "S.A. Zoo Rates High Over Nation," *San Antonio Light*, September 13, 1935.
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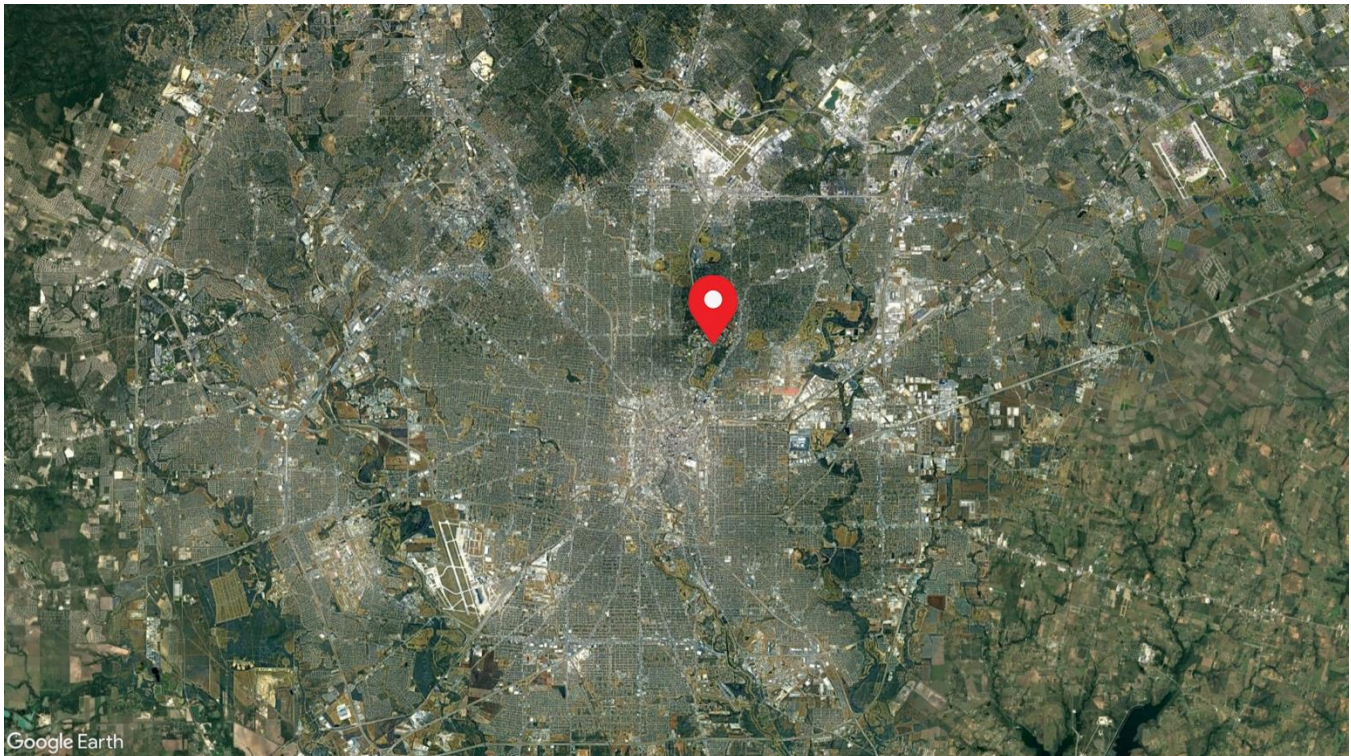
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Maps

Map 1. Map of Texas showing the location of Bexar County within the state of Texas.

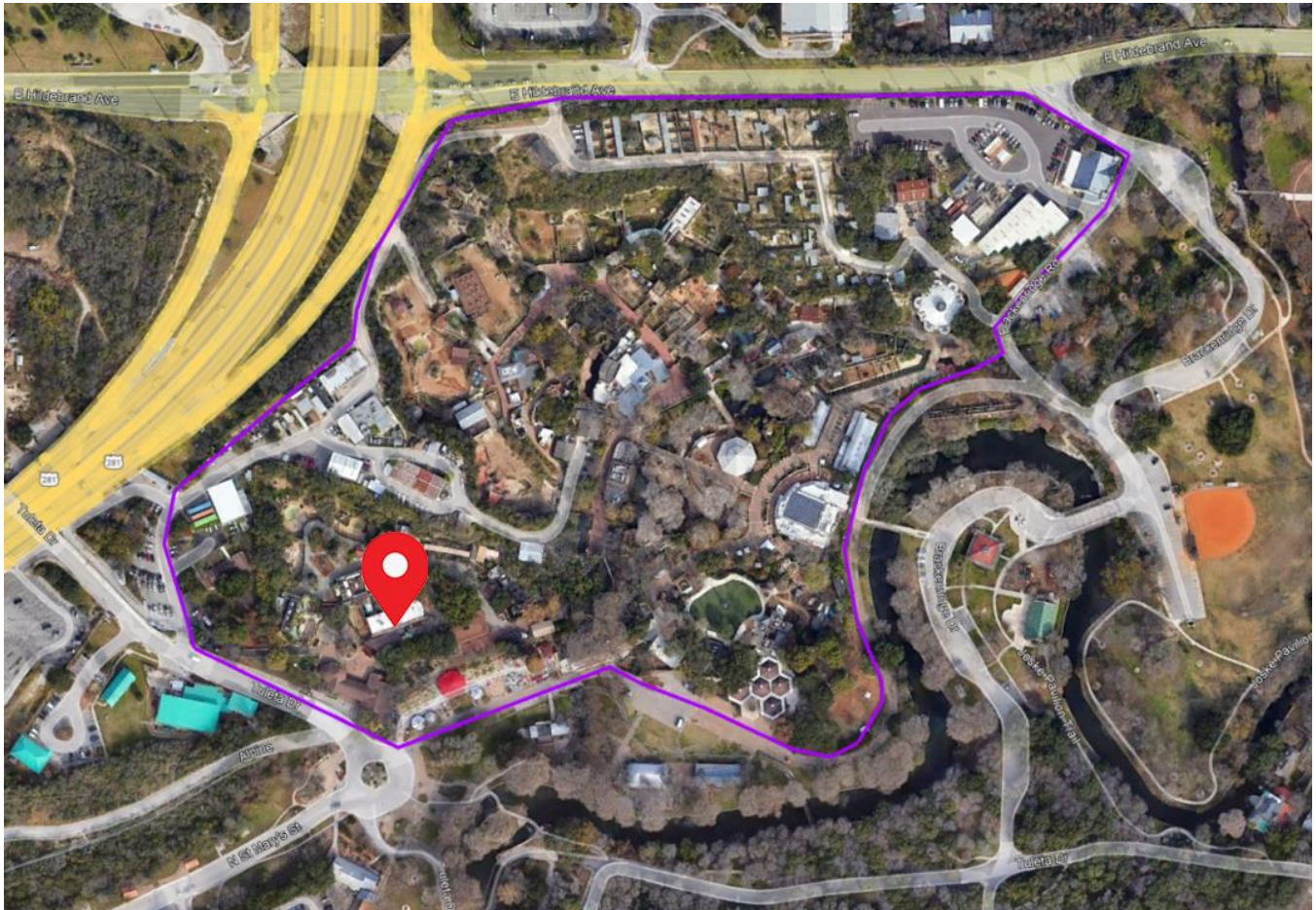


Map 2. Contextual map of the Monkey House/Commissary within the city of San Antonio. Red flag points to the nominated property. Google Earth, Accessed January 30, 2023.



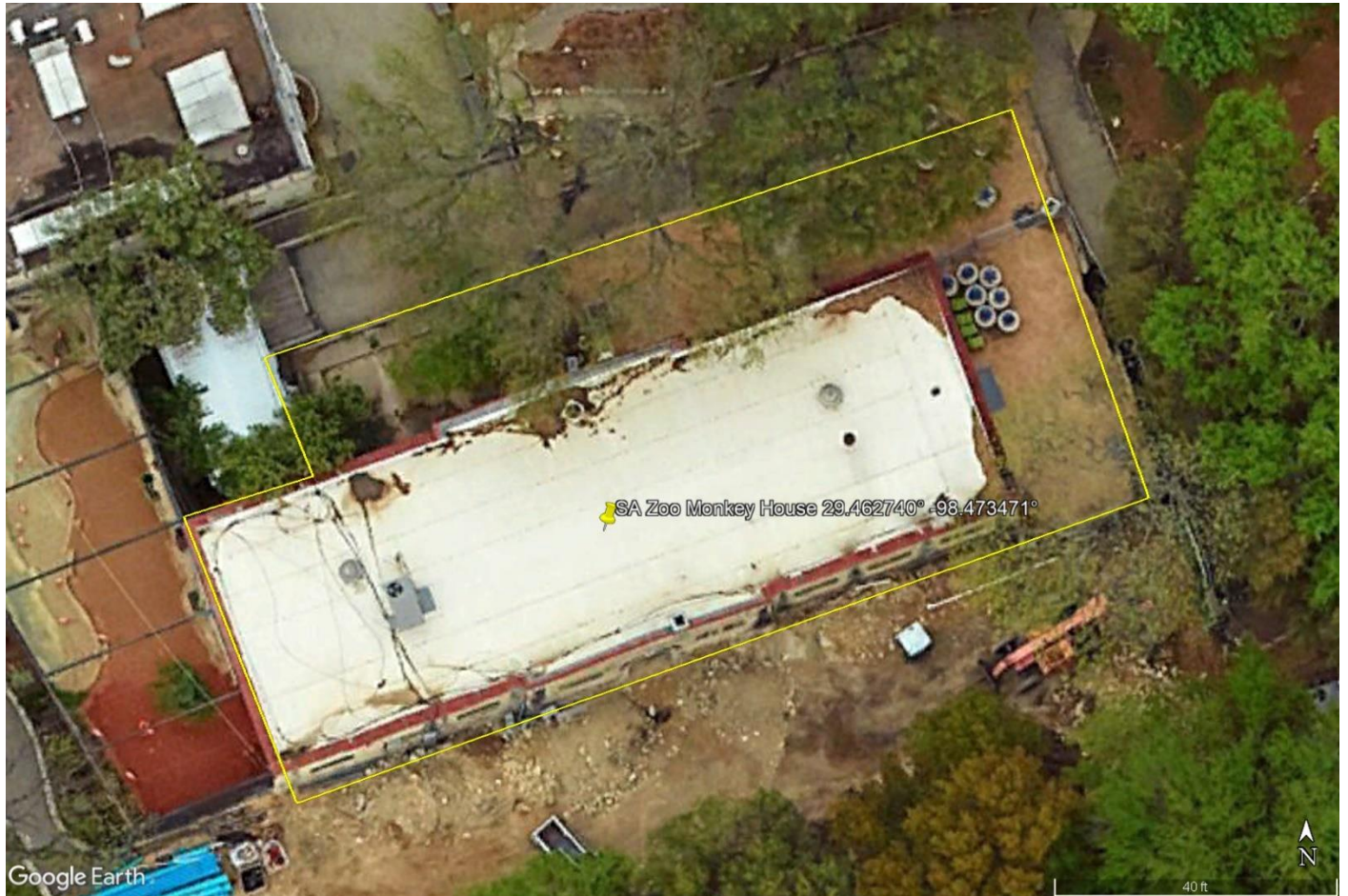
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Map 3. Contextual map of the Monkey House/Commissary within the San Antonio Zoo. Purple outline represents the boundaries of the San Antonio Zoo. Red flag points to the nominated resource. Base map from Google Maps, accessed January 17, 2023.



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Map 4. Site map. Google Earth, accessed February 19, 2024.



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Figures

Figure 1. Monkey House/Commissary under construction, c. 1936. University of Texas at San Antonio Special Collections.



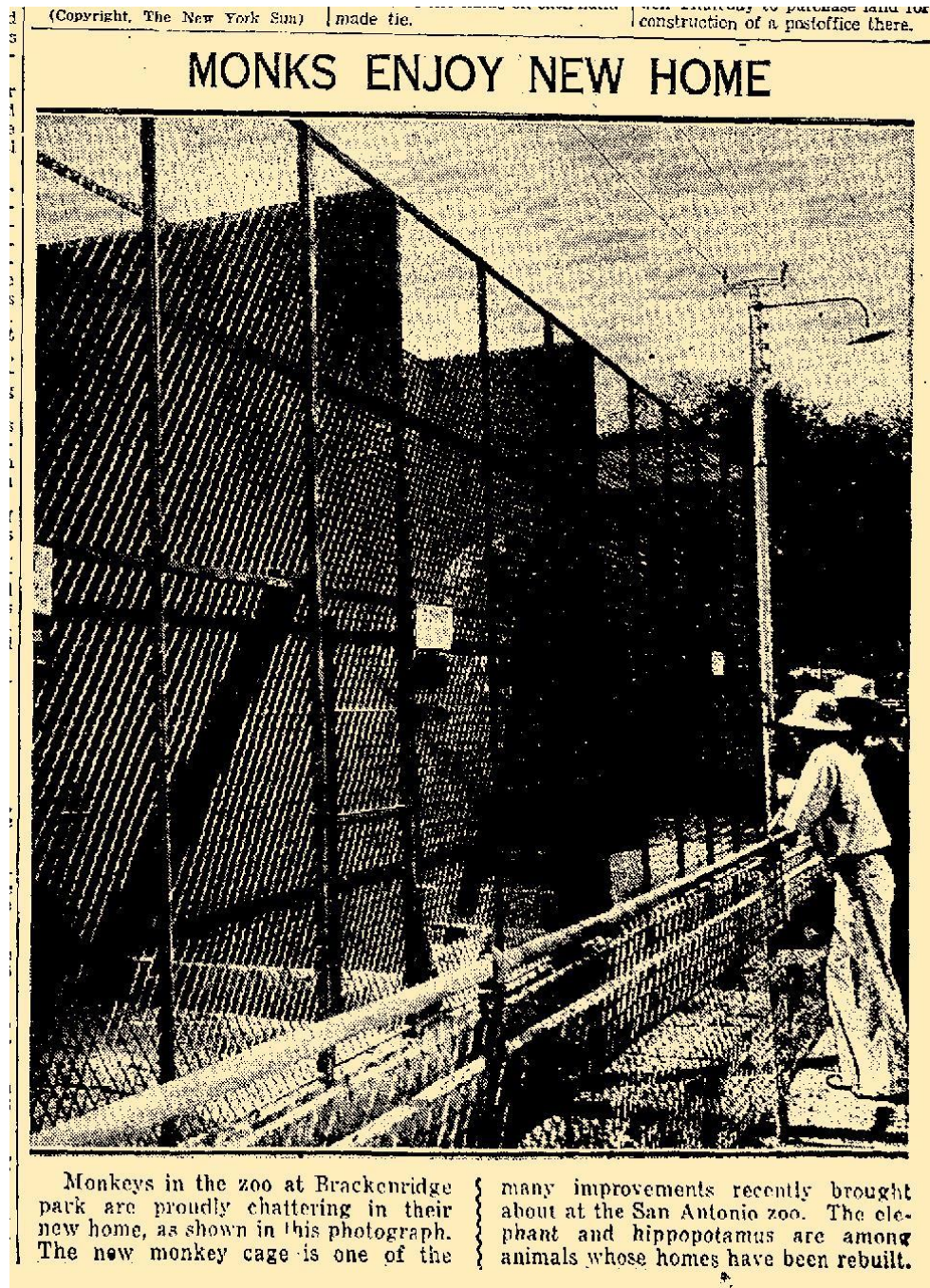
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Figure 2. Monkey House/Commissary, c. 1939. University of Texas at San Antonio Special Collections. Note original metal animal enclosures at far right of photograph.



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Figure 3. Historic photo of Monkey House/Commissary in 1936, courtesy of *San Antonio Light*, July 23, 1936, p13.



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Figure 4. Ca. 2018 photograph showing the affixed monkey cages (no longer extant), courtesy of the San Antonio Zoo Facebook page.



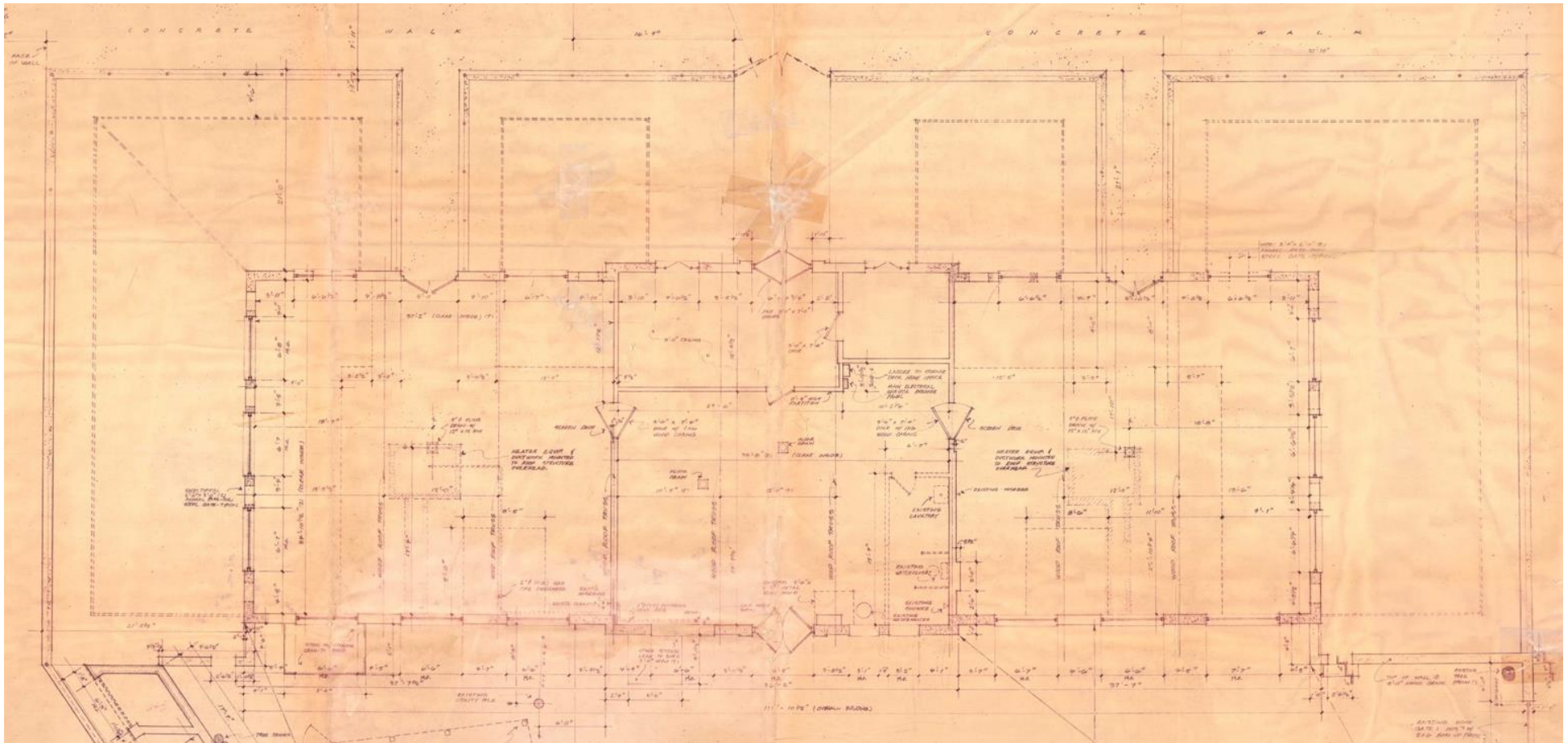
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Figure 5. Ca. 2018 photograph showing the affixed monkey cages (no longer extant), courtesy of the San Antonio Zoo Facebook page.



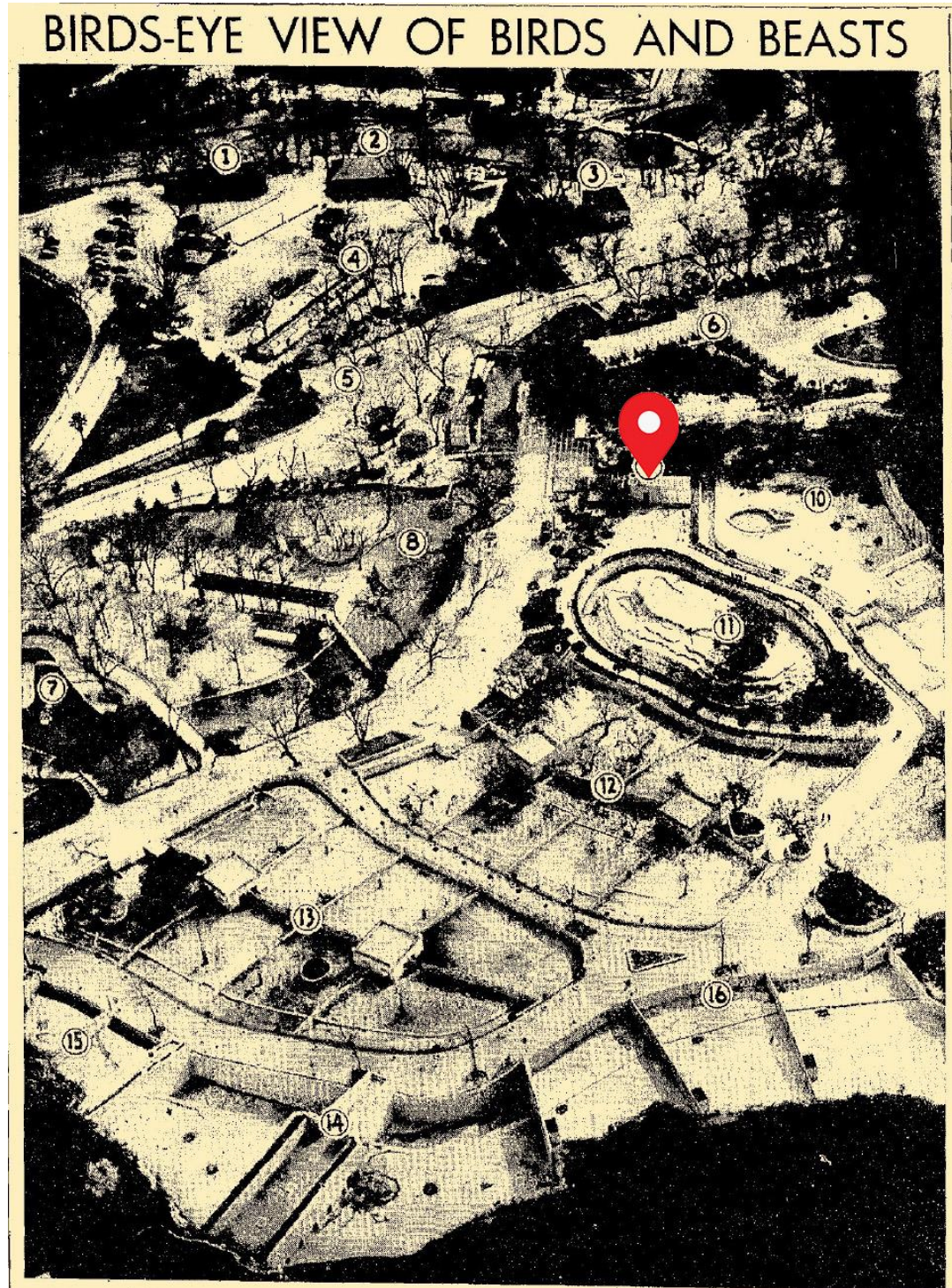
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Figure 6. Undated, unsigned plan of the Monkey House/Commissary. University of Texas at San Antonio Special Collections.



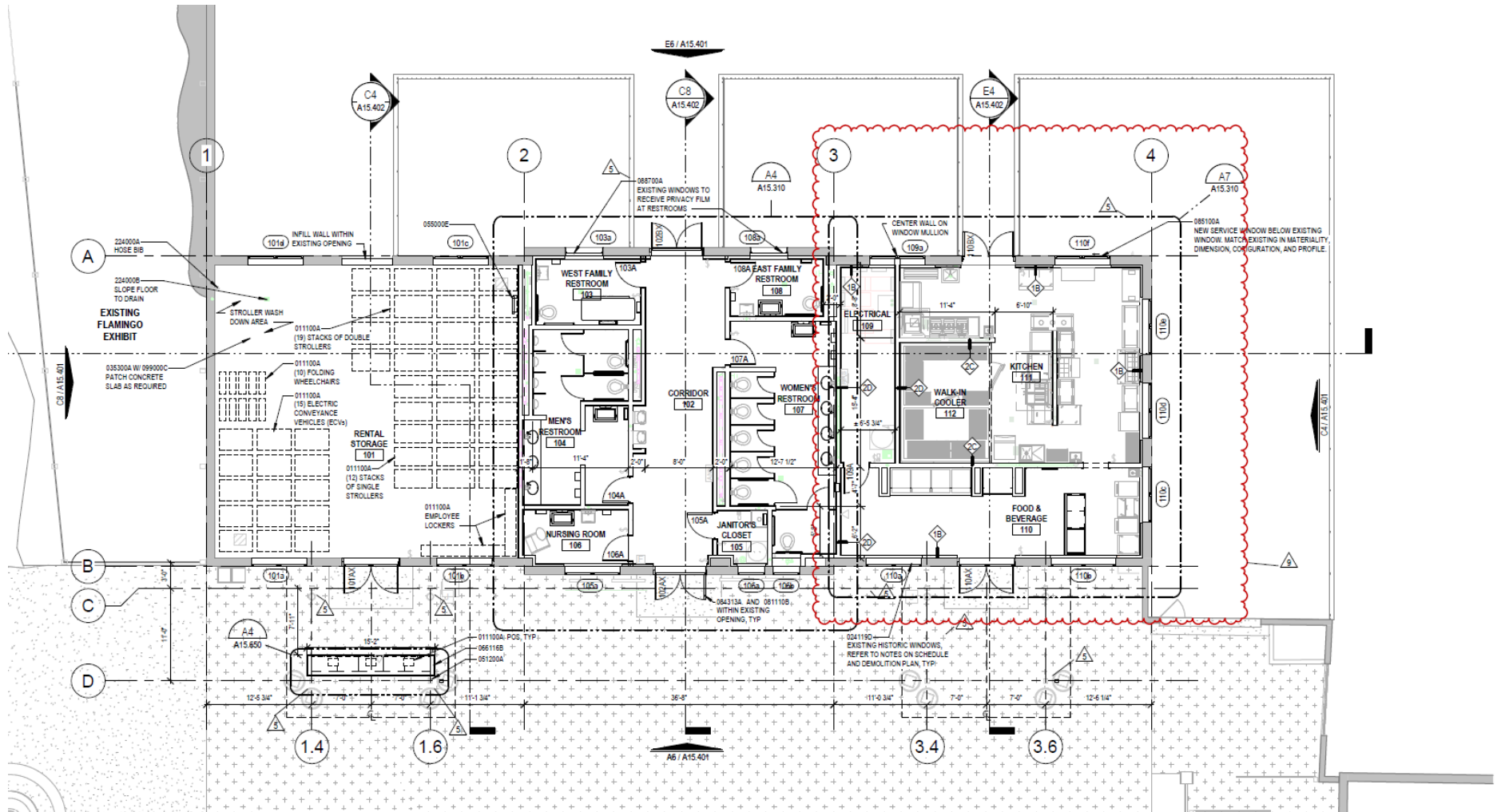
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Figure 7. Newspaper photograph showing the recently constructed New Deal-era buildings at the San Antonio Zoo, 1941. Red flag points to the nominated property. "Birdseye View of Zoo," *San Antonio Light*, March 9, 1941, 15.



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Figure 8. Monkey House/Commissary Existing Plans (PCAV Destinations 2022).



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Photographs

All photos February 2024 (Except Photo 5, July 2022)

Photo 1: north and east elevations. View southwest.



Monkey House/Commissary (San Antonio Zoo), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 2: primary entrance on north elevation. View south.



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Photo 3: Restored window on north elevation. View south.



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Photo 4: enclosed animal passageways on north elevation. View south.



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Photo 5: Works Progress Administration plaque on north elevation. View south.



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Photo 6: east elevation. View west.



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Photo 7: infilled animal passageways on east elevation. View southwest.



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Photo 8: South elevation. View northeast.



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Photo 9: entrance on south elevation. View north.



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Photo 10: plaza located south of the building. View southwest.



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Photo 11: west elevation. View east.



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Photo 12: interior north elevation entrance and corridor. View north.



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Photo 13: former office, now family restroom. View east.



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Photo 14: former central food preparation area, now subdivided into main corridor and adjacent restroom. View south.



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Photo 15: former central food preparation area and lofted space, now nursing room. View southwest.



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Photo 16: roof truss. View southwest.



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Photo 17: former east end, now restaurant food preparation area. View east.



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Photo 18: Monkey House/Commissary former animal holding area, now food prep area. View south.



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Photo 19: west end, now stroller storage. View northeast.



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Photo 20: animal passageway door, painted but remains in place. View northwest.



Monkey House/Commissary (San Antonio Zoo), San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Photo 21: View of south and east elevations from zoo entrance. View northwest.



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