National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

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7. Description

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Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Reuter House is a large masonry Spanish Colonial Revival structure located in Travis Heights, an early subdivision of hilly South Austin on the southern bank of Town Lake (Colorado River). The house is sited on a prominent hilltop overlooking the lake, the city's central business district just north of the lake and its centerpiece, the State Capitol. The property's nine city lots afford a private, wooded and natural hill-country setting in the middle of a densely-urban, near central-city neighborhood.

The Reuter House is a 12-room villa which includes basement, rooftop deck and detached garage/servants quarters and comprises about 4,500 square feet. Its asymmetrical footprint is a modified "U" in shape; its complex roof is covered with red barrel tile. Exterior walls are finished with carefully-placed native limestone arranged in the "peanut brittle" pattern.

The building has two major facades, with the main entrance facing north, the secondary entrance facing south. The structure is set well back from Mariposa Street on the north and is barely visible from that vantage point. Access to the main elevation is gained from a stone walkway commencing at Mariposa. The walkway, bordered by low stone retaining walls, meanders southward through a wooded area, past two-six foot retaining walls near the hill's summit where it ascends to the structure at the top of the hill.

The asymmetrical north elevation is composed of a two-story, gable-end block with one-story, flat-roofed wing extending eastward. The transition between main block and wing is achieved by an oversized, downward curving volute. Projecting deeply forward from the gable-end block is a one-story, arcaded porch with cupola marking the entrance. Palladian windows pierce the wall of the east wing.

The secondary facade facing Rosedale Terrace is the more commonly used approach to the structure. Three large, round-arched windows with double casement openings pierce the central block. Flanking legs of the "U" plan project southward, with the two-story west wing projecting farther than the single-story east wing. Access to the secondary facade is gained by a broad flagstone courtyard which culminates in a patio embraced within the arms of the "U" plan. The patio is marked with a mature live oak which was extant in 1934 when the house was built.

Three objectives appear to have influenced the interior design of the house: access to the view of the city and to the beauty of the grounds; creation of an interior space acoustically, visually and physically conducive to artistic performances and entertainment; and the subtle use of fine, well-crafted detailing and finishes. The result is an interior notable for its textural quality which is achieved by rough-textured, glazed and unglazed wall surfaces painted in rich earth tones, the use of cast concrete ornament and decorative tiling. Almost every interior space, including baths, affords a view of the grounds and/or Austin skyline. The three formal chambers are arranged in an ell with dining room and solarium opening into the central, commodious living room to facilitate recitals. Placed at the intersection of the ell was Mathilde Reuter's concert grand piano, visible from all locations within the rooms.

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only received date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number

7

Page

1

Interior detailing is also notable. The solarium exhibits a coved ceiling and chipped tile floor composed of fragments from The University of Texas Old Main Building, undergoing demolition when the house was constructed. The distinctive ceiling of the living room also is deeply coved while its walls, like those of the other formal rooms, are rough-textured, glazed plaster. A large fireplace is surrounded with a hand-carved wood mantel and over-mirror ornamented in high relief with roses and foliate forms. The ornate mantel and mirror were executed for the house by a San Antonio Mexican craftsman named Flores. Round-arched, deeply moulded windows with multi-colored glazing flank the fireplace.

From the living room two steps ascend to the dining room through a triple-arched opening defined by two freestanding concrete columns. Cast in three sections, the serpentine columns with foliate capitals are reminiscent of those on the Alamo. They exhibit fine, crisp detailing. Carved furnishings built for the dining room include a large buffet, small china cabinet, dining room table and six matching chairs. According to family tradition, these pieces also were crafted by Flores.

The small breakfast room in the west wing retains original leaded-glass cabinet work. Double doors open through a bay onto a small elevated porch which overlooks the grounds descending steeply to Alameda Drive and onward to the Blunn Creek floodplain.

The remaining spaces of the ground floor are devoted to kitchen with original cabinet work, two utility rooms, guest bedroom and bath.

A triple-flight stairwell with wrought-iron railing rises from the back entrance hall to the upstairs compartments. The landing gives access to the bedroom wing and rooftop deck which affords a remarkable, near-city view of Austin.

While some historic landscaping features are still in place, early photographs also demonstrate that formal landscaping was kept to a minimum. The emphasis instead was on maintaining and enhancing the grounds' natural state, native plantings and wooded setting. Photographs from 1935 and 1936 show native species, especially live oak and Spanish Oak, inhabiting much of the site. This condition persists today. At the north boundary of the property, the Reuters constructed the flagstone and mortar wall and bordered it with yucca. Both wall and some plants exist today. Flagstone walkways circling the house to east and west and converging on the broad main walkway descending to Mariposa, also were constructed early and are intact. There is still evidence of historic terracing on the property, which was marked by a low dry wall. The latter is gone but some terracing still exists. Formal gardening consisted of a rose garden at the top of the hill north of the house, which is extant (a second garden west of the walkway is a recent addition), and boundary plantings along Rosedale Terrace and Mariposa. Some of those plantings still exist.

8. Significance

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Specific dates	1934	Builder/ Architect Ti	nos. D. Jones	

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Few historic residences in Austin can equal the commendable balance between siting, architecture and view which the Reuter House exhibits. The Spanish Colonial Revival villa is one of the most distinctive homes in South Austin. It is notable for the textural quality of its architectural finishes and for craftsmanship, two characteristics of the Spanish Colonial Revival Style. The house also is unusual for the quantity of surviving interior furnishings which were originally crafted and/or carved for it when built. It gains significance through its association with Louis Reuter, a successful and innovative groceryman in Austin, and his wife Mathilde, who for years contributed to Austin's cultural arts communities.

At the height of his career as an Austin groceryman, Louis Reuter and his wife Mathilde built a permanent residence in Austin. Both Reuters were avid horsemen and had found the location of their future home site while riding in South Austin. In the early 1930s, Reuter began acquiring town lots platted over a prominence in the subdivision of Travis Heights, an early development south of the Colorado River. The Reuter property exhibited eccentric topography and native vegetation, including live oak, Spanish Oak and cedar. Here, in 1934, the Reuters built an architecturally pretentious, rambling, romantic residence in the Spanish Colonial Revival Style so popular throughout the southwestern United States during the 1920s and 1930s.

Born and raised in San Antonio, Louis Reuter (1886-1945) began working in the grocery business as a teenager. For 15 years he worked for J. Oppenhiemer and Co., a wholesale grocery firm in San Antonio. About 1917 he became interested in a new grocery marketing plan pioneered by Memphis-based Piggly Wiggly. The plan was based on self-service and cash-payment principles for the retail grocery market. Purchasing a Piggly Wiggly franchise for the Central Texas area, Reuter established in 1918 what is believed to be Austin's first self-service grocery store.

Who originated or first applied the concept of self-service in the retail market is not known. Emerging shortly before World War I, the concept was embraced rapidly by many retail markets due to the war-induced labor shortage. Few markets, however, felt the impact of the self-service principle as pervasively as the grocery market. Clarence Saunders, founder of Piggly Wiggly, first applied the idea within the grocery market in 1916 when he opened his first Piggly Wiggly in Memphis.

The concept was simple yet revolutionary. Saunders' application included a number of changes from the old "Mom and Pop" system. They included, for example, a rat maze arrangement of aisles, requiring the customer to view all stock, turnstiles at beginning and end, personal

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only received date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number

8

Page 1

carrying baskets, and check-out counters where customers paid cash. All of these practices contrasted with the old system where the proprietor, not customer, selected the goods which often were inaccessible behind a counter, and where credit and delivery were more often the rules. The familiarity of these procedures today obscures their originality in 1916 and remarkable influence and success thereafter.

In 1916/17, with 15 years of experience behind him, Louis Reuter recognized the potential of Saunders' concept. Perhaps with the influence of colleague and fellow Piggly Wiggly pioneer in San Antonio Edgar Basse, Reuter opened his first Piggly Wiggly in Austin, at 117 West Sixth Street. Within 10 years he had established five other branches in Austin and Lockhart and an office/warehouse for distribution of stock in Austin. A number of stores quickly followed Reuter's lead with the self-service principle. Kash Karry, a long-lived and early adherent of the system, was one of the earliest to do so as were the defunct Casha-Packa and Helpy-Selfy, all established by 1924. With the opening of his second and third stores, Reuter introduced another innovation to retail grocery marketing in Austin, the chain store. The earliest stores to follow were the emigrant Great Atlantic and Pacific Co. (A & P), and native adherents including Slaughters and Kash Karry. Reuter would own and manage his chain in Austin for 20 years. About 1938, he sold it to the South Texas Butt family who with other stores established the H.E.B. grocery chain which thrives today in various locations in Central and South Texas.

The "Mom and Pop" grocery concept would survive, if tenuously, for decades; nevertheless the new self-service concept was an irresistible principle which in time would capture a massive share of the retail grocery market. The teens, 1920s and 1930s were the decades of experimentation and implementation of a radical 20th-century marketing technique. At the forefront of that important step in the evolution of retail marketing in Austin and Central Texas was Louis Reuter who can be credited with the first known application of a self service grocery market in the city and with its first expansion into a grocery chain operation.

As Louis Reuter left his mark on the commercial history of Austin, his wife Mathilde (b. 1885) was a major force in Austin arts, music and literature from the time of her arrival in 1918. Mrs. Reuter was trained in New York as a lyric soprano and sang minor roles with the Metropolitan Opera. She also served as a model for the very prominent Texas sculptor Pompeo Coppini on several occasions, including the figure of Columbia in the University of Texas Littlefield Fountain. Already involved in the arts community in San Antonio, she found in Austin an environment receptive to her developed interest in the arts. As a clubwoman,

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only received date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number

8

Page

patroness of the arts and performer, she had a profound impact on Austin over a fifty year period. Her involvement in poetry, musical composition and in education earned her great respect in the fledgling Austin arts community.

In 1934, the Reuters commissioned Louis' nephew Thomas D. Jones, San Antonio builder, to construct their house. Although Jones probably drew the existing, unsigned plans for the house and participated in other design decisions, Louis and Mathilde are credited for its architectural style and recital-oriented plan. Jones had applied for the building permit by September 2, 1934, citing his intention to build a two-story stone residence with garage at 806 Rosedale Terrace for \$12,000. In fact, the building cost \$15,000 at a time when new construction costs in Austin were commonly less than half that figure. The Reuters occupied the house on December 12, 1934. Louis Reuter died eleven years later, in 1945 in Hot Springs, Arkansas. He was buried in San Antonio. Mathilde continued to reside in the house until 1973 when it was sold to Dr. and Mrs. William Rhea Keast. Keast is a former president of Wayne State University who with his wife now lives in New Hampshire. Ms. Reuter, now in her 101st year, is feeble and living in a nursing home in Austin.

Under the Keast's 13-year ownership, a few cosmetic alterations were made, the heating system was modernized, and central air was installed upstairs. Needed maintenance was undertaken but with no loss of integrity to the house.

In July of 1986, the house conveyed to Susan Toomey Frost of Austin. The house has been restored inside and out. To insure authenticity, the program has been conducted with active participation of relatives of Mathilde Reuter and historic photographs. Walls throughout have been returned to their original color, and glazing has been restored. Original light fixtures have been re-hung. In a few cases where the originals were gone, period fixtures have been mounted. The owner's restoration program has also concentrated on locating and restoring to the house original furnishings, art objects and fabrics belonging to the Reuters. This effort has enhanced the existence of numerous pieces of furniture which originally had been crafted and/or carved for the house in 1934, and which conveyed to the current owner in 1986.

That year the Reuter House was granted City of Austin Landmark status and became a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark. Early this year, the house received a restoration award from the Austin Heritage Society.

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only received date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number

8

Page

Despite the intense building boom of 1980-1984, the house is surrounded today by its original nine lots. Perched high on the hill overlooking Travis Heights, the Colorado River (Town Lake), and the city, the property has become a rare wooded, central-city oasis due to intense urban growth since its construction. Various factors contribute to its significance. Its solid construction, skillfully-laid masonry and careful maintenance have left the building in excellent condition. The structure exhibits exceptional integrity. Some aspects of original landscaping are still evident on the property and add interest. The building achieves further significance through the existence of original furnishings. Typical of its era and style, the structure exhibits creditable craftsmanship executed in a variety of materials by a variety of craftsmen, most of whom remain unidentified. Of considerable interest to the structure is the association of Louis Reuter, early 20th-century groceryman who introduced important innovations to Austin's retail grocery market. Also of interest is Mathilde Reuter, longtime resident of the house and musician who contributed materially to the development during the 1920s-1940s of Austin's cultural arts community.

Apart from these factors, each important in defining the historical and physical significance of the property, are elements of equal importance: architecture and siting. One of the most notable residences in South Austin, the building is a good example of Spanish Colonial Revival architecture in Austin. It is a structure which conforms almost as much to eccentricities of terrain and individual taste as to the style which it reflects. Its eccentricities — such as exterior oversized volute, porch with serial arches of differing radii, flagstone veneer instead of the expected stucco — define its unique character and meritorious quality. The architectural quality of the Reuter House together with its remarkable siting make this property a highly commendable one in Austin.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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Chief of Registration

May 8, 1918:5; April 2, 1927:6; May 14, 1932:5;

	September 2, 1934:2.		see continuation sheet
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Keeper of the Nation	nal Register	Charles and	7//

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United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only received date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number

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Powell, James, (interview with J. Strong) May 8, 1986 via telephone; grandnephew to Mathilde Reuter, conerning house at 806 Rosedale Terrace, its history, biographies of Louis and Mathilde Reuter, her contribution to arts in Austin, 477-9939; July 1, 1986 via telephone concerning M. Reuter's modeling for Pompeo Coppini.

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Title USA, Run Sheet File No. 15551J, Austin.

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Reuter, Louis and	Mathilde, House			
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8. Significance	Section 1
Period Areas of Significance—Check and justify below	
Specific dates Builder/Architect	
Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)	
summary paragraph	Region, Louis and Mathilde, House
completeness clarity	Travis County govern
applicable criteria	
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9. Major Bibliographical References	
10. Geographical Data	
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12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification	
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State Historic Preservation Officer signature	
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13. Other	
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Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to	1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1
Signed Date	Phone:



Photo by Julie Strong, February 1987, neg. with Texas Historical Commission, Austin

View from Mariposa Street, camera facing south

Photo 1 of 12



Photo by Julie Strong, February 1987, neg. with Texas Historical Commission, Austin

Main elevation (north), camera facing south

Photo 2 of 12



Print 3
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franis county
Austin

Reuter, Louis and Mathilde, House 806 Rosedale Terrace Austin, Travis County, Texas

Photo by Julie Strong, February 1987, neg. with Texas Historical Commission, Austin

Northwest oblique, camera facing southeast

Photo 3 of 12



Photo by Julie Strong, February 1987, neg. with Texas Historical Commission, Austin

East elevation, camera facing southwest

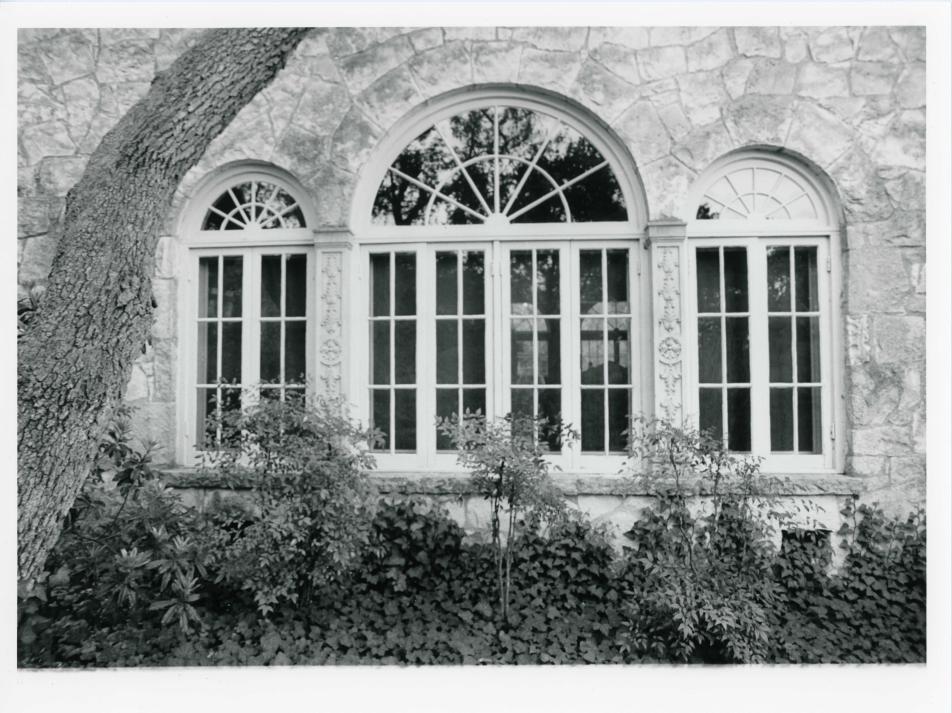
Photo 5 of 12



Photo by Julie Strong, February 1987, neg. with Texas Historical Commission, Austin

Secondary (rear) elevation, camera facing north

Photo 4 of 12



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Reuter, Louis and Mathilde, House 806 Rosedale Terrace Austin, Travis County, Texas

Photo by Julie Strong, February 1987, neg. with Texas Historical Commission, Austin

Detail, Palladian windows, north elevation Camera facing south

Photo 6 of 12



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> Reuter, Louis and Mathilde, House 806 Rosedale Terrace Austin, Travis County, Texas

Photo by Julie Strong, February 1987, neg. with Texas Historical Commission, Austin

Rooftop view of central city Camera facing northwest

Photo 7 of 12



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> Reuter, Louis and Mathilde, House 806 Rosedale Terrace Austin, Travis County, Texas

Photo by Julie Strong, February 1987, neg. with Texas Historical Commission, Austin

Interior detail, LR fireplace with handcarved mantel/mirror
Camera facing East

Photo 8 of 12



Print 9

Reuter, Louis and Mathilde, House 806 Rosedale Terrace Austin, Travis County, Texas

Photo by Julie Strong, February 1987, neg. with Texas Historical Commission, Austin

Interior detail, DR with handcarved furniture
Camera facing West

Photo 9 of 12



What 2/25/1935

Reuter, Louis and Mathilde, House 806 Rosedale Terrace Austin, Travis County, Texas

Photographer unknown, historic photo dated 2-25-35

Main elevation, camera facing southeast

Photo 10 of 12



Photographer unknown, historic photo dated 2-25-35

Secondary elevation, camera facing northwest

Photo 11 of 12



Photographer unknown, historic photo dated 2-25-35

Living Room detail, camera facing east

Photo 12 of 12

