



rev. 2013) is used as a textbook in architecture schools and is considered as a standard reference for preservation surveys. Realtors, appraisers, builders and architects also use this book.

5. Swiss Avenue and its surrounding neighborhoods have always been a primary “lab” that I have observed and learned from. In addition, the things that we did to save Old East Dallas have provided important models for other historic districts across the United States. *The Making of a Historic District: Swiss Avenue*, that I wrote in conjunction with Lyn Dunsavage, was published and reprinted three times by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The Trust’s field offices have recommended this book to others working to create historic districts throughout the United State.

#### **Historical Background of Neighborhood**

6. My first home at 4803 Swiss was in a block that was a mixture of many residential types and sizes —single family, duplex, triplex, quadruplex, and two small apartments—all peacefully coexisting; this is today the Peaks Suburban Historic District. My family moved next to 5703 Swiss Avenue, a fine Italian Renaissance style home that had never been lived in. It still had many of its original unused furnishings that had been specially ordered. Designed by Bertram Hill, it was completely original inside and out—grey green and gold silk brocade still hung in the panels in the living room and dining room, molded wall panels and wood floors were throughout. Baths, kitchen, closets and red-tiled front porch, back porches and front steps were all original. And most stunning were the hand-painted pastel garlands of molded plaster flowers that ornamented the cornice in the master bedroom and the sunroom of Rookwood tiles with a built-in

Rookwood statue and pool. This is where I learned to appreciate the original detailing in the homes along Swiss Avenue.

7. When I lived at 5736 Swiss, the neighborhood was safe, and I could walk alone to school at William Lipscomb, to the Skillman Shopping Center, and sometimes I was allowed to even walk to the Lakewood Shopping Center. Houses just like those on Swiss Avenue lined Gaston Avenue and Live Oak from Fitzhugh to La Vista. My grandmother had two sisters who lived in houses on Swiss, and two brothers that lived on Gaston. I could walk alone to their houses as well.

8. In 1952, three owners on Gaston asked that their houses be rezoned to allow them to have boarding houses. This was granted in 1954 and for the next 6 years these three were followed by more and more requests for multi-family housing on a house-by-house basis. Soon my home life as a child, and that of so many people on Swiss Avenue, was interrupted by constant trips to city hall to fight house-by-house and lot-by-lot rezoning requests. My mother was constantly calling neighbors to get them to come to council meetings. Little by little Gaston Avenue lost its single-family character, homes were torn down and garden apartments were built. By the late 1950s it was the “swingiest” place in Dallas with residents and interns, young attorneys, nurses, secretaries, and stewardesses all living around turquoise swimming pools along Gaston in lovely open garden apartments.

9. Then, one morning in about 1960, Swiss Avenue residents awoke to blazing headlines about a murder on Oram Street. An innocent person was shot outside one of the new apartments. Very soon there were additional crimes on Gaston. The open parking

lots and ungated entrances to the pool areas of the garden apartments made access and egress stunningly easy. As quickly as it had become THE place to be, it became a hot bed of crime (or so the headlines would suggest) and new apartments built on Amesbury and other streets near to SMU became more desirable.

10. Because Gaston Avenue seemed pretty “iffy,” some apartment builders set their eyes on the large lots of Swiss Avenue. Suddenly, the owners along Swiss Avenue were going to city hall to fight to keep Swiss Avenue intact. Zoning cases were filed for one house at a time. After several years of this trauma, the homeowners hired city planner Marvin Springer and put in place high-rise zoning in 1965. However, by now, Old East Dallas was so deteriorated that no one was interested in building any kind of new apartment, much less a high-rise.

11. At about this point I returned from four years of college in Boston. Swiss Avenue itself had gone downhill. On our side of the 5700 block of Swiss, the house on the far corner had cars jacked up in the front yard and appliances on the porch. The house next door to us had been subdivided into four apartments. One morning, I was sitting on mother’s front porch when a little girl about 10 years old came running over from next door. She asked to use the phone. I said, “sure” but asked why. She responded, “Because Daddy broke Mam’s jaw last night and I need to find some help for her.” Mom swung into action helping her and her mother, but this was pretty much the last straw. My parent’s purchased two Swiss Avenue houses. I helped to “restore” (more accurately renovate because I did not yet really understand the meaning of restore) both houses.

12. 5707 Swiss, the house next door, was oddly subdivided into four apartments. I lived there from ca.1966 to 1977. My husband was in medical school and then a resident at Parkland, and therefore was often gone. I was terrified much of the time because police helicopters were circling overhead almost daily. It was a constant reminder of the crime that surrounded us.

13. Gaston's apartment complexes were too small to afford live-in managers. They had not been built to have individual washers and driers; instead coin-operated appliances began to be added in little shacks in the parking lots. The unpaved Swiss Avenue/Gaston alleys were used as driveways, and were the only way to access about one-third of each apartment's parking that was head-in off of the alleys. This made it impossible to fence the alleys for safety and still keep sufficient parking spaces to have the one space per apartment that was required. As the years went by, at least one apartment complex was illegally turned into a single-room occupancy. Others served as halfway houses. But the vast majority simply housed a number of people in a single apartment. One person who took a tour of a nearby apartment in 1985 described multiple mattresses on the floors of each room, some with enough to fill the entire floor surface.

14. In ca. 1972, a member of the new Urban Design department staff came to talk to Swiss Avenue homeowners about possibly becoming an historic district. My father paid for a survey of the owners, and we generated support. Urban Planning was thrilled, and we all began work, hoping to be successful. It took until 1973 for us to create the new historic district and the zoning ordinance that made it possible.

15. There was a small group of dedicated neighbors that came together to actively work on creating this historic district. It eventually grew to eleven people who founded the Historic Preservation League, Inc. that is today called Preservation Dallas. Our first project was the creation of a historic district for Swiss Avenue, and it was in working on this that we realized the need for a city-wide group that could help other neighborhoods undertake the same sort of effort. South Boulevard-Park Row became the second residential historic district. And there were individual landmarks that needed to be saved. But in 1972, we were completely focused on Swiss Avenue. It would not be an exaggeration to say that there were almost a dozen people who gave almost full-time (or if working, then their full-time after work hours) to the creation and the marketing of the Swiss Avenue Historic District (“SAHD”) for a period of at least two years.

16. It was in this atmosphere that the Dallas County Medical Society Auxiliary accepted the Aldredge House and the responsibility for its preservation. While Swiss Avenue was in the process of becoming an historic district, no one was certain that it would work. The planning department thought that uses such as offices, galleries, museums, lodge or fraternal organization, low-density multi-family and even banks would be required to restore the district. *See Ex. A, 1973 SAHDA Ordinance.* At that time, there were no listings in the MLS book for this area because realtors did not typically show houses there. Loan funds were not obtainable, except for an occasional special program by Lakewood Bank that was aimed at preserving part of their lending area.

17. At the same time that Swiss and Gaston were deteriorating, today's Munger Place (comprised of the streets of Junius, Tremont, Victor, Worth and Reiger between Fitzhugh and Henderson) also became seriously deteriorated. The area had been rezoned for apartments. A few were built, but as Gaston crashed, no one dared to build another new apartment in Munger Place. Individual houses were subdivided for weekly furnished rentals. By 1976, a high percentage of the houses in Munger Place were red-tagged as unfit for human occupation. Houses there were available for \$7,000 to \$15,000, while those on Swiss were now much more (one had sold for the shocking price of \$240,000—to someone from out of town who did not realize that most houses were available for about \$100,000). Lyn Dunsavage and I tried for a solid year to sell one house on Junius Street (not as agents, just as neighbors). It had never been sub-divided. It was on the market for \$15,000, and it was just one block from our district. Every person who called wanting to live on Swiss, who now discovered it was beyond their price range, was directed to this house.

18. At or about this time, Weiming Lu, the same urban planning director that had proposed Swiss Avenue as a historic district, advised us that Munger Place was unsalvageable. In 1975-76, it “met none of the criteria that indicated a neighborhood could be saved”. In fact, the planners confided to us that the city had effectively written off everything below Beacon. At that time, there was no Junius Heights Historic District and no Peak's Suburban Historic District. Our Swiss Avenue District was a narrow sliver peninsula located in a sea of redlined, apartment-zoned land.

19. On the advice of the National Trust, we organized a revolving fund for Munger Place, and purchased about two dozen badly deteriorated houses. I chaired this effort and spent two years overseeing tenant relocation, restoration drawings, documents requiring restoration after purchase, and working with Lakewood Bank and Fannie Mae to create Fannie Mae's first inner-city lending program in the nation. Finally, we discovered a way to resell loans on the secondary market. Lakewood Bank provided construction loans for the restoration, and Fannie Mae agreed to purchase the loans when work was finished. I have attached some photos of Munger Place at that time, most of them Revolving Fund houses. These were all within perhaps 6 or 7 blocks of Aldredge House. *See Ex. B, Pictures of Munger Place and Swiss Avenue before and after restoration.* It was not until this revolving fund effort that we were finally able to get MLS agents actively involved in Old East Dallas. Ebby Halliday led the way by agreeing to list and sell some of our revolving fund houses.

20. Before our fledgling group decided to support the inclusion of Aldredge House in our ordinance, we consulted the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Would it be positive? I personally called Russell Keune, head of Field Services for the National Trust. He visited Dallas, and advised us as we worked to create the district. I knew he was familiar with other districts throughout the country. We were advised that it would be a positive step -- having a prominent group invested in the area and meeting at Aldredge House would give us sort of a "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval." It sent a strong signal that there was hope for the district and that this part of Dallas should not be abandoned. It also indicated a belief that the neighborhood was safe. Given that real



estate agents were then actively working to dissuade potential purchasers from buying on Swiss Avenue, Aldredge House became an important positive symbol.

21. We learned that other historic districts across the country either included or were working toward including similar uses. Public access and inviting people into an area was a strong positive for any historic area. It would raise Swiss Avenue's visibility, make the neighborhood inviting, play a valuable role in historic preservation education, *etc.* The more we learned, the more exciting it became that arguably the most important house in the district had a large and reliable non-profit group that wanted to make Aldredge House its home. Thus, we wrote a letter supporting the Auxiliary using Aldredge House.

22. On behalf of the Historic Preservation League (now Preservation Dallas), we wrote in 1973:

- Every historic district needs one house that can be opened to the public regularly.
- Aldredge House is the ideal house, identified in historic landmark study as one of the three most architecturally outstanding residential structures in Dallas and is therefore of crucial importance to Swiss Avenue.
- It is very fortunate that a club of the caliber of the Medical Alliance is willing to provide the upkeep of this residence as a public service.

23. As time went by, and as I began to travel around the country working on *A Field Guide to American Houses*, I came to appreciate Aldredge House even more—and understood why Blake Alexander had rated it so highly. In the section I wrote on French Eclectic style homes, I included a photograph of Aldredge House. In addition, the home's dormer and its entry door were both models for illustrations in the book. *See Ex. C, French Eclectic chapter excerpts.*

24. In the early 1970s, many houses in our district had original or near original interiors. It was not unusual that Aldredge House had the floor plan that Mrs. Aldredge had left, or that it still had its original arrangements of bathrooms, closets, etc. However as the years have gone by, living standards have changed dramatically. As a result, many of the homes on Swiss Avenue have had major interior modifications and even large rear additions. However, because Aldredge House is owned by a non-profit organization, it still has its small closets. Mrs. Aldredge's clothes still hang in some of them. It still has its radiators and even window AC units. Wall moldings are still in place in the bedrooms.

25. This is very important and rare today. Houses are changed one-by-one for very predictable reasons. Each new owner typically makes changes. The house across Glendale from me (5649 Swiss) has had three major renovations just in the last 20 years. Each of its three separate and very complete renovations has taken more than a year. This helps explain why a home in the hands of a group with a purpose for preservation is an extremely important part of any historic district—and why selling it for single-family use would likely destroy its historicity.

#### **Criteria for Designating House as Historic**

*26. Why else is Aldredge House important? There are a number of different reasons that a house can be designated as historic. Aldredge House is outstanding in almost all of the main categories:*

27. Being designed by an important architect is one criterion that can make a house eligible for historic status. Hal Thomson, the architect, was arguably the best domestic architect in early 20th century Dallas, and Fooshee (later of Fooshee and Cheek) was not

far behind. Aldredge House was a rare collaboration between these two important architects.

28. Having been built and lived in by an important family is another criterion that can make a house eligible for historic status. Both the Lewis's, who built the house, and the Aldridge family, who lived there for about fifty years, were prominent families and were active in various aspects of Dallas' social, commercial and political life. Significantly, Rena Munger Aldredge was the daughter and the niece of the two Munger brothers who developed what are today the Swiss Avenue, Munger Place and the "short blocks" of the Junius Heights Historic Districts. The home that she and her husband chose to purchase was right in the heart of these three developments (today three historic districts). Mrs. Aldredge lived in 5500 Swiss during the heyday of Munger Place's social prominence, and then remained in her house and joined in actively with neighbors attempting to keep their neighborhood safe. When she needed to leave her house in the early 1970s, the area was still zoned for high-rise. Many remaining houses had been subdivided for rentals or other uses. A sale of her house could easily have resulted in its demolition or its conversion to one of the undesirable uses she had fought against for so many years. She wanted her house to remain intact and deeding it to a strong non-profit group that agreed to its preservation was the safest way to achieve her desire.

29. Architectural importance is a third criterion that can make a house historic. Aldredge House could be declared a landmark for this reason alone. It has extraordinarily fine stylistic and architectural details. For this reason, I included both photos and

drawings of details about Aldredge House in *A Field Guide to American Houses* (both the original 1984 edition and the 2013 revision).

30. Another important criterion to make a house historic is that the house must be where it was built. Most uses are movable and changeable. A restaurant can operate almost anywhere. A concert venue can change. An industrial plant is not necessarily affected by being moved a few miles. However, an historic house cannot be moved and still be deemed to have its historic integrity. In the early days of historic preservation, moving houses to what are now sometimes called “architectural zoos” was not unusual. However it soon became obvious that by moving it, a house lost much of its value. The landscape was changed, the surrounding neighborhood was eliminated, outbuildings were lost and houses never settled in quite comfortably on a new site.

#### **Entertaining and Events at the Aldredge House**

31. It was always contemplated that Aldredge House would be used for entertaining. One of my earliest priorities was that the Auxiliary obtain a parking lot on Gaston Avenue that could handle the associated car traffic. I well remember mentioning this to various Auxiliary members several times in the early 1970s, and I was quite relieved when I heard that a lot had been obtained. In an organization that then had dues of \$15, raised to \$30 when they were deeded the house, the purchase of a lot on Gaston for parking was a huge undertaking.

32. The reason that I hoped a parking lot would be obtained was that I knew that the Auxiliary contemplated using the house for parties, weddings and events and I thought that a parking lot was essential for this to work.

33. The first “event” that I clearly remember at Aldredge House was when I lived at 5600 Swiss, one block away. It was about 1977-78. Suddenly there were huge trucks, and production vehicles and lighting vans parked everywhere around the house. My four children (then between 7 and 10) walked down everyday after school. They would come back full of excitement. A new TV show to be called “Dallas” was being filmed at the Aldredge House, and my children would say, “it is going to be a BIG HIT, Mom.” “I seriously doubt it,” was my standard response. No one would be interested in such a show. This was a major factor in all of my children going into some phase of movie and documentary production. They watched the process for weeks, I have been told by Janis Burklund, the Director of the Dallas Film Commission, that the Aldredge House is considered a prime asset and very important to film’s economic contribution to the city.

34. I have attended Swiss Avenue Historic District Association monthly board meetings at Aldredge House for decades, as well as many special meetings and membership meetings for our district. We have never been charged. The Swiss Avenue Historic District Association also has never been charged for using the Aldredge House during the annual home tour. The Aldredge House has been a tour home, it has hosted Mother’s Day lunches, and for the last several years it has been the location for a lecture series on preservation given during the tour.

35. During the entire time I lived at 5600 Swiss (just four doors from Aldredge House), I was never bothered by the house or its events. Even the “Dallas” film crews did not cause any disturbance.

36. Almost every part of our historic district has some sort of urban edge. Some houses back up to a car wash, others to bars, parking lots, outdoor patios and even a liquor store. The majority of our homes back up to apartment complexes. These often have open dumpsters and attract people to walk along the alley and search through them. Apartment residents also work on their cars in the parking lots, sometimes with loud music turned up. Mattresses and furniture are dumped in the alley when people move, and trash from the dumpsters are left open nearby. One house is next to the Post Office with constant traffic and postal trucks parked just over the fence. Those who reside on Live Oak and La Vista face wide streets with fast through traffic particularly at rush hour. The Swiss Avenue Historic District is a narrow peninsula of single-family zoning (only one- to two-blocks wide) that is completely surrounded by a relatively dense urban setting.

#### **Parties are Typical on Swiss Avenue**

37. The houses along Swiss Avenue were built in the early twentieth century, a different era from today and one in which entertaining was the norm. There were relatively few restaurants and venues for events like weddings, teas and receptions.

38. There were regular parties in my house. With my grandmother having four brothers and sisters in the area, even a Sunday dinner at my house was a large event with multiple cousins, siblings and in-laws. My mother's wedding reception was at her home, 5703 Swiss Avenue. Some of the parties honoring her were at houses along the street.

39. Fast forwarding to today, my neighbors, across the street, the Bonifields, had both of their daughter's wedding receptions outdoors at their Swiss Avenue home. My

daughter's wedding reception was at my house. We rented a tent and tables and chairs. We hired a caterer and a florist. The actual wedding was held at Savage Park, and then we briefly closed off half of the street in the 5600 block for the entire wedding party and guests to parade from the wedding at Savage Park to my house a block away for the reception. We took photos in the front yard, and proceeded to the back for cocktails and dinner. There was a band outdoors with amplified music.

40. Then there was the complete disruption of the neighborhood when my daughter was directing "Night of the White Pants" with Tom Wilkinson – a funny comedy that stars Swiss Avenue and was mostly shot at my house. Production vans were everywhere. The make-up trailer was parked in the median. There was one night "get-away" scene that dozens of people showed up to watch. Some brought their children.

41. Until about 1980, the Dallas newspapers occasionally wrote about parties that took place on Swiss Avenue. Having parties and hiring caterers, and all of things associated with entertaining, are part of what Swiss Avenue houses were built for. It was and still is a common and accepted use. *See Ex. D.*, societal party articles from historical decades.

42. The use of our houses along Swiss Avenue for entertaining and hosting of meetings and events occurs regularly today, even though not written up in the newspapers.

43. *Aldredge house is not out of character with its immediate neighbors as they also have frequent parties and gatherings.*

44. This is best demonstrated on Saturday night, September 12, 2015. Harryette Ehrhardt and I decided to drive down and determine how things were going with a wedding that we knew was scheduled for that night at Aldredge House. We wanted to see firsthand how the parking at Aldredge House was being handled. As we approached there appeared to be cars parked everywhere along Swiss Avenue. But once we reached the 5500 block, we saw groups of helium balloons in front of 5521 Swiss - the Hamiltons' house across the street from Aldredge - and saw that the front door was open. It looked like a party and the Hamiltons later told me they held a charity event that evening. There were also several cars parked in the McCunes driveway next door at 5514 Swiss. And, in addition, there were a number of folks milling out in front of 5420 Swiss, the Deans home. There were also two valet parkers standing outside the Parkmont entrance to Aldredge House, but no cars in the driveway. We drove to the Alliance's Gaston Ave parking lot and found it about 2/3 full, neatly parked and with an off duty policeman watching over it.

45. Vehicles were also neatly parked behind the Aldredge House and off the alley. When we turned down the alley, someone an Aldredge House official asked if we could be helped to find a parking place. Upon inquiry, we learned that Aldredge guests were not parked on the street in front. Some rode shuttles buses from the church, some took Uber and the rest were parked in the parking lot. We were then told that there were three other events that evening at various neighbors' houses.

46. We heard amplified music as we drove down the alley. It sounded loud in the alley behind Aldredge House, but when we drove by a house next to the Aldredge House,



it was extremely loud and was clearly coming from that back yard. Many others heard the music from the party at this neighboring house. According to neighbors, it continued until well past midnight. Because it is difficult to tell where sound is coming from until you get next door to it, the music that night has been cited on the blogs as an example of Aldredge House as a “bad neighbor”. However, the party at Aldredge House had no amplified music and was finished before 11 p.m..

47. Many of our neighbors throw parties small and large throughout the year in their homes and in their backyards, and I support this practice as part of the character of living on Swiss Avenue.

### **Crime in Our District**

48. The BOA Application suggests that Aldredge House is a magnet for crime and that a number of false alarms is somehow unsavory. My record is far, far worse than that of the Aldredge House. Over the last approximately fifteen years, I have called 911, the police and the fire station on several occasions.

49. And, there has also been real crime. Before I completely fenced my rear yard, a pick-up truck drove in the back drive in the middle of the night and unloaded the garage. Not only that, but my sister who was living in the rear quarters at that time, saw the truck drive off and then come back a second time and get a second load. Some of the haul was recovered in a nearby pawn shop.

50. Another time someone working at my house went out to the corner of Glendale. A man approached him with a gun under a jacket (or what the robber said was a gun),

and demanded his wallet. Recently a workman's tools were stolen out of a truck that was briefly left open while he came inside my house to pick up something he had forgotten.

51. A couple of years ago, there was a shooting in the Swiss/Gaston alley just off of Glendale—only a half block from my house. I personally heard the shot. I have heard gunshots often over the past thirty years while living on Swiss Avenue.

52. There is petty crime throughout our district. Recently there has been a rash of front porch robberies. Again, our district is a very small peninsula of relative calm in a large urban setting.

### **Aldredge House in the Swiss Avenue Historic District**

53. Our district has always valued the Alliance's commitment to the neighborhood, and the role of the Aldredge House in the neighborhood.

54. Any complaints in the past involving Aldredge House were always resolved in a friendly manner because the Alliance has wanted to be a good neighbor, and the SAHD has valued the Alliance as a neighbor. About twenty years ago, a set of "House Rules" were developed by the Alliance. They specified "no amplified music outdoors," "valet parking for groups over 40," and "an off-duty police officer for security for groups over 40."

55. The alleged issue of idling trucks was the result of mud in the alley behind Aldredge House.

56. Until this recent set of complaints, I had not heard of any neighborhood complaints against Aldredge House. My assumption was that if there were problems, the Aldredge House liaison would have been contacted. And, given the immediate response

to the most recent complaints, I feel certain that Aldredge House would have addressed any concerns quickly and carefully.

57. Many SAHD neighbors agree with me; In August of 2015, our SAHD neighborhood association voted to support the allowing of Aldredge House to maintain its current uses and operations. We then sent the letter to the administrator of the Board of Adjustment to tell him that SAHDA supports the Aldredge House and its legal nonconforming uses.

58. In 1982, the Swiss Avenue neighborhood asked the City of Dallas to eliminate all the "special uses" that had been included in the original Swiss Avenue Historic District ordinance, with two exceptions, one of which was the Aldredge House, which neighbors and the city explicitly recognized with a legally protected nonconforming use status.

59. In my professional opinion, I view the potential termination of the Alliance's use of Aldredge House as a huge loss to the neighborhood. When I attend an event or meeting, and someone asks me where I live, and I say Swiss Avenue, frequently someone will say with great enthusiasm, "I went to a wedding there." Or "my friend had her anniversary party there." I believe that losing the Aldredge House would be a loss not only to the value of my home, but to the value and recognition of our entire historic district. It would be similar to Fair Park losing the Science Place. It was something that brought many people into the Park. They enjoyed Science Place, and learned something and identified with it. It is now gone. The buildings remain, but they are a shadow of their former selves.



FURTHER AFFIANT SAYETH NOT.

Virginia S. McAlester

Name:

Title: Founder

THE STATE OF TEXAS

§

COUNTY OF DALLAS

§

§

BEFORE ME, the undersigned authority, on this day personally appeared Virginia Savage McAlester known to me to be the person who executed the foregoing instrument and she acknowledged to me that she executed the same for the purposes and considerations therein expressed.

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND AND SEAL OF OFFICE this 6<sup>th</sup> day of October 2015.



Gini Romero  
NOTARY PUBLIC IN AND FOR  
THE STATE OF TEXAS  
MY COMMISSION EXPIRES: 9/29/18