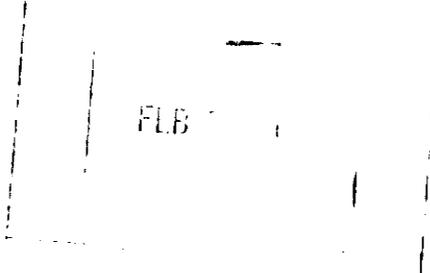


United States Department of the Interior  
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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: Lerma's Nite Club  
OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: N/A

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: 1602-1612 N. Zarzamora  
CITY OR TOWN: San Antonio  
STATE: Texas CODE: TX COUNTY: Bexar CODE: 029

NOT FOR PUBLICATION  
 VICINITY  
ZIP CODE: 78201

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

*Mark Wolfe* State Historic Preservation Officer Date 1/28/11  
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. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
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  
 See continuation sheet.
  - determined eligible for the National Register  
 See continuation sheet.
  - determined not eligible for the National Register.
  - removed from the National Register  
 See continuation sheet.
  - other, explain  
 See continuation sheet.

*Edson H. Beall* Signature of the Keeper Date of Action 3-21-11  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form**

Lerma's Nite Club, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

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**5. CLASSIFICATION****OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	PRIVATE
<input type="checkbox"/>	PUBLIC - LOCAL
<input type="checkbox"/>	PUBLIC - STATE
<input type="checkbox"/>	PUBLIC - FEDERAL

**CATEGORY OF PROPERTY**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	BUILDING(S)
<input type="checkbox"/>	DISTRICT
<input type="checkbox"/>	SITE
<input type="checkbox"/>	STRUCTURE
<input type="checkbox"/>	OBJECT

**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: 0

NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING: N/A

**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

HISTORIC FUNCTIONS: Commerce/Trade: specialty store  
 Recreation and Culture: music facility

CURRENT FUNCTIONS: VACANT/NOT IN USE

**7. DESCRIPTION**

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Modern Movement: Art Moderne

MATERIALS: FOUNDATION CONCRETE  
 WALLS CONCRETE  
 ROOF ASPHALT  
 OTHER

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-6)

**USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form**

Lerma's Nite Club, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

**APPLICABLE NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA**

Property:

- A** is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** 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** has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**CRITERIA CONSIDERATIONS**

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or has achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE:** Entertainment/Recreation; Ethnic Heritage: Hispanic

**PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE:** 1948-1961

**SIGNIFICANT DATES:** 1948

**SIGNIFICANT PERSON:** N/A

**CULTURAL AFFILIATION:** N/A

**ARCHITECT / BUILDER:** N/A

**NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE** (see continuation sheets 8-7 through 8-13)

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** (see continuation sheets 9-14)

**PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION ON FILE (NPS):** N/A

- 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 *Texas Historical Commission, Austin*
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

**USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form**

Lerma's Nite Club, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

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**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

ACREAGE OF PROPERTY: 0.4109 acres

<b>UTM REFERENCES</b>	<u>Zone</u>	<u>Easting</u>	<u>Northing</u>
1.	14	546092	3257297

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:** The legal boundary on file with the Bexar Central Appraisal District is "NCB 2085 BLK 25 LOT 13 AND 14"**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION:** The nomination includes all property historically associated with the building.**11. FORM PREPARED BY****NAME / TITLE:** Gregory Smith, National Register Coordinator, and Susana Segura**ORGANIZATION:** Save Lerma's!**DATE:** October 2010**STREET & NUMBER:** PO Box 831371**TELEPHONE:** 210-629-7310**CITY OR TOWN:** San Antonio**STATE:** Texas**ZIP CODE:** 78283**ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION****CONTINUATION SHEETS****MAPS****PHOTOGRAPHS** (see continuation sheet Photo-20)**ADDITIONAL ITEMS** (see continuation sheets Figure-15 through Figure-19)**PROPERTY OWNER****NAME:** Gilbert C. and Mary G. Garcia**STREET & NUMBER:** 147 Roslyn Ave.**TELEPHONE:** 210.884.8810**CITY OR TOWN:** San Antonio**STATE:** Texas**ZIP CODE:** 78204-2444

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Lerma's Nite Club  
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

### NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

Lerma's Nite Club is the southernmost unit of a five-unit 1-part commercial block built c.1948 at 1612 N. Zarzamora on the west side of San Antonio, Texas. The entire 10,302 square foot building is being nominated to the National Register. The building is constructed of non-reinforced concrete masonry units, covered in stucco, and is a good example of late Art Moderne design, distinguished with rounded corners on the primary west façade and a tiled wainscot, with five storefront bays, each with a central doorway flanked by flattened octagonal windows, and a flat roof.

The Lerma's Nite Club building occupies a lot bounded by Laurel Street to the south, Zarzamora to the west, an alley to the north, and the property line to the west, and is located southeast of the intersection of Zarzamora and Culebra. The building is approximately 150 feet wide and 70 feet deep, and is constructed of unreinforced concrete masonry units at the exterior walls, and also between each of the five tenant spaces. The exterior walls have reinforced pilasters at more or less regular intervals. The foundation consists of continuous concrete strip footings under the load-bearing masonry walls. The interior slabs are not part of the foundation.<sup>1</sup>

The primary facade faces west along Zarzamora Street. It is set back approximately 15 feet from the street to allow for angled parking. The façade is divided into five bays, the outermost of which are slightly larger than the inner three. Each bay is defined by a central double doorway flanked by flattened octagonal windows, some of which have been covered with plywood and metal grates. The windows and doorways occupy the lower half of the façade, and are placed over a tiled wainscot, which has been painted. The top half of the façade is divided from the lower half by a horizontal wooden frame that once held address numbers. Above the frame, generally centered over each window and doorway, is a small rectangular opening originally used for ventilation. Some of these openings have been infilled and covered, while others are occupied with air conditioning units.

The first bay has historically been occupied by a dry cleaning establishment. The bay features a double door behind a metal security gate, and each window is covered with an octagonal steel mesh security screen. The ventilation openings above the address board are open, with only steel bars and no glass. The parapet features signage painted directly on the wall. The second bay was originally a bakery and donut shop, and was most recently a tire shop. The storefront has been altered with the addition of a roll-up garage door, which resulted in the removal of half of the left window. The left and center opening above the address board are filled in from behind, while the right opening is filled with an air conditioning unit. The parapet features signage painted directly on the wall. The third bay housed various retail businesses, including a variety store beginning in the late 1940s. The doorway is covered by a metal security gate, and the windows are covered with an octagonal steel mesh. The fourth bay originally housed a butcher shop, and features a mansard awning over the doorway, covering the central ventilation opening. Above the awning is an internally-illuminated projecting sign which reads "OPEN." The doorway is covered by a metal security gate, and the windows are covered with an octagonal steel mesh. The fifth bay has always housed a night club, first known as El Sombrero, and later as Lerma's. The doorway is filled with flat metal double doors, and the windows have been covered with painted plywood. The ventilation openings have also been covered. Above the address board the wall is painted with signage featuring the words "Lerma's Nite Club."

<sup>1</sup> Sparks, Patrick. *Lerma's Night Club Structural Evaluation*. Round Rock, Texas: Sparks Engineering, Inc., 2010, p 2.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Lerma's Nite Club  
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

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The south elevation is approximately 75 feet wide. It retains one pair of flattened octagonal windows (covered with painted plywood) on the western half, and a single door centered on the eastern half. At the halfway point, the parapet steps down approximately 1 foot. The wall has been stuccoed and covered in several coats of paint, but vertical structural piers are still apparent. It is likely that a doorway was once between the windows, and other openings originally on the façade may have been later filled in.

The north elevation is approximately 75 feet wide. It retains one pair of flattened octagonal windows on the western half, and regularly-spaced ventilation openings along the top half of the elevation. The windows are currently covered in white custom metal security grates. At the halfway point, the parapet steps down approximately 1 foot. The wall has been stuccoed and covered in several coats of paint. It is possible that a doorway was once between the windows, and other openings originally on the façade may have been later filled in. Signage advertising the dry cleaning establishment is painted directly on the wall. A small yellow internally-illuminated box sign reading "Lakeview Cleaners" is attached just below the parapet.

The rear (east) elevation of the building is partially covered by an open wood-framed addition, and is secured behind a chain-link fence. It features regular door openings, providing access to each retail unit.

The interiors of each unit are largely open from side wall to side wall. In the Lerma's unit, the roof is supported on steel columns, but it has bowed considerably and is in danger of collapsing. The night club is characterized by an open dance floor in the center, a low stage along the north wall featuring large Aztec-themed mural, and a bar with restrooms and a kitchen along the paneled rear (east) wall.

According to a structural report recently prepared by Sparks Engineering, both the north and the south walls are out-of-plumb, and the "building exhibits substantial distress (large cracks and lateral bowing of walls) resulting from soil-induced movement that is characteristic of shallow foundations on clay soil."<sup>2</sup> The current roof framing is undersized and severely decayed, and the report recommends that it be completely replaced with all new framing supported by new structural steel beams. Despite its dilapidated condition, the building retains a good degree of integrity. Many changes to the building obscured rather than removed historic features such as window openings and the tile wainscot, and may be reversed during rehabilitation of the property. The building still clearly reads as a postwar 1-part commercial block with Art Moderne features, and retains a very high degree of association with an important aspect Tejano culture in San Antonio.

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<sup>2</sup> Sparks, p 2.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Lerma's Nite Club  
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Lerma's Nite Club at 1612 Zarzamora Street on the west side of San Antonio, Texas, is a conjunto music venue that was in continuous operation at the same location from the late 1940s through the summer of 2010. The business occupies a tenant space in a five-unit Art Moderne one-part commercial block in the heart of a busy commercial district. The Conjunto style of music that was regularly performed at Lerma's from its establishment in the 1940s is a regional style popular in south Texas and northern Mexico, and is characterized by its instruments (accordion, bajo sexto, bass, drums, and vocals) and themes popular with the working-class segment of the Mexican population. Lerma's is a rare historic example of a night club devoted solely to this popular music form in San Antonio, and is nominated to the National Register under Criterion A in the areas of Entertainment and Ethnic Heritage: Hispanic at the local level of significance. The period of significance is 1948 through 1961, ending at a point fifty years ago, per National Register guidelines.

Lerma's Nite Club is the heart of conjunto music in the city of San Antonio, but the building is structurally deficient and is threatened by both potential for collapse of its roof and walls, as well as demolition by the City of San Antonio as an unsafe structure. The music venue has been recognized by the city government as being culturally significant because of the musicians who have played there, and stands as a very important part of the community's collective history. It is the longest-running live conjunto music venue in Central and South Texas. Members of the Conjunto Hall of Fame and the Texano Roots Hall of Fame including Eva Ybarra, Henry Zimmerle, Bene Medina, Santiago Jimenez, Lidya Mendoza, Valerio Longoria and the late Esteban Jordan have played at the venue.<sup>3</sup>

### Conjunto Origins and Development

Conjunto music is a unique Texan fusion of the German and Czech accordion sounds with the Mexican *ranchera* played by migrating farmworkers in the fields of Texas ranchers and farmers. The Tejano migrant workers traveled from crop to crop in communities with strong German and Czech influences entertaining their fellow family and friends. The polka sounds caught their attention and they soon began adopting the use of the accordion with their own native bajo sexto that evolved in Mexico. For people who love to dance, conjunto music runs the gamut of dance styles; polkas, waltzes, schottizes, redobas, doble paso (two-step), boleros, mambo, huapango, cumbia and mazurka. For those that love the variety of sound in music, there's also conjunto country, a synthesis of blues, rock, jazz, salsa, Latin jazz, Cajun zydeco conjunto, merengue and reggae.

The Spanish word "conjunto" literally means "group," and refers to both a musical style and the band that performs it. Conjunto music has always been anchored by the accordion, and is largely considered to be music for dancing. Today in the United States and Mexico, a conjunto band is composed of four main instruments: a button accordion, a bajo sexto (a twelve-string guitar), a bass, and a drum kit. Conjunto is a melding of musical styles across cultures, and retains the influence of German and Eastern European settlers who brought their accordions – along with song structures such as waltzes and polkas – to the region in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, conjunto was the music of working class Tejanos, from rural agricultural laborers in small towns, to blue collar tradesmen in Texas' large cities.

<sup>3</sup> A list of noted performers who have played at Lerma's is included in an appendix at the end of this section.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Lerma's Nite Club  
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

The origins of conjunto music emerged in Texas and northern Mexico during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and continued to evolve into the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Ethnomusicologist Manuel Peña identifies four distinct eras of conjunto music beginning in the 1870s. The first era started in the 1870s, and continued in the 1920s, a period without a recognized conjunto ensemble makeup. Little documentation of this period's music exists. The second period runs from the 1920s through the end of World War II, and represents the time when commercial recording and radio had a direct impact on popular Tejano music. The "golden era" of conjunto is generally regarded as the immediate postwar period through about 1970, and the final era represents a period of decline and rebirth of the musical form through the present day.<sup>4</sup>

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a cultural and commercial link between Monterrey, Mexico, and *el norte* (including South Texas) helped to transport musical forms across the border. Class distinctions within the Mexican and Tejanos communities led to the adoption of distinct musical styles, largely based on the affordability of certain instruments, and the accessibility of formal music training. This led to the working-class adoption of the accordion as a primary instrument, and its use either solo or in smaller musical groups.<sup>5</sup> The conjunto ensemble is essentially a folk tradition with origins that date to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and which became commercially viable through recordings and live performances in the 1920s. It is largely associated with working-class Texas Mexicans (*Tejanos*), and Mexican *norteños* ("northerners") from the region just south of the Texas-Mexico border. The style is very much dependent on the accordion, originally a one-row or two-row button type brought to Texas and Mexico by German and East European immigrants. In combination with the bajo sexto and/or a *tambora de rancho* ("ranch drum"), the accordion became the preferred instrument for musical performances along the border in the 1890s. Performances of this music often took place at dances organized in any space that could accommodate them, including cantinas, public plazas, and private homes. Weddings and other celebrations including *funciones* (multi-day festivals), *fiestas patrias*, and *baile de regalos* served as events where traditional music was often played. Most of the dance styles associated with conjunto were derived from popular European dances, including the polka, waltz, and schottische, but others such as the *huapango*, originated in Mexico.<sup>6</sup> Conjunto musicians historically have little formal music training, but many are extremely talented multi-instrumentalists. Arrangements are learned by listening, and are practiced repeatedly.

The formative years of conjunto began in the 1920s with the advent of recording and radio, and was dominated by *la generacion vieja* (old generation) musicians. During this era, the recording of Tejano music allowed for the standardization of playing styles, especially those of popular accordionists such as Narciso Martínez, whose records help set standards for other players. Beginning in the 1920s, the impact of the recording industry, the advent of record players and the radio, and interest in the marketability of regional music began to transform conjunto from a loosely-defined musical phenomenon into a more distinctive and identifiable style. Large national record labels such as RCA-Victor, Decca, Brunswick, and Columbia, along with their subsidiaries, became interested in the marketing of Tejano music, much like they had done with African-American music. The first commercial recording of a Mexican-American artist is generally regarded to be Los Hermanos Bañuelos' *corrido* (ballad) "El Lavaplatos" in Los Angeles in 1926. By the late

<sup>4</sup> Peña, Manuel, *Musica Tejana*. Pp. 86-94.

<sup>5</sup> Manuel H Peña, *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto: History of a Working-Class Music* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), pp. 42-43.

<sup>6</sup> Peña, Manuel. *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto*, at [www.manuelPeña.com](http://www.manuelPeña.com). Accessed December 1, 2010.

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Lerma's Nite Club  
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

1920s, major record companies would advertise in Spanish language newspapers, announcing auditions for new recording artists, with sessions in temporary recording studios, often situated in hotels including San Antonio's Gunter Hotel.<sup>7</sup>

Historian Manuel Peña considers the period between 1935 and 1960 as the time when conjunto coalesced into an identifiable musical style that transformed it into a "powerful symbol among the Texas-Mexican working class."<sup>8</sup> Commercial recordings made between 1928 and the postwar period reveal dramatic changes to what constituted conjunto music, first in the way the accordion was played, and secondly, by the addition of instruments to the traditional accordion and bajo sexto duo, namely the *tololoche* (contrabass) and standard drum kit. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a distinction was commonly made between accordion music and vocal music, in that the former was considered to be appropriate for dancing, while the latter was meant for listening. Although the combination of accordion and vocals was attempted in the 1930s, it wasn't until the postwar period that the two instruments were heard jointly in conjunto.<sup>9</sup> The 1930s brought innovation from many conjunto musicians, but Narisco Martinez is largely credited with developing a personal style of accordion playing that transformed the ways other musicians handled the instrument. Martinez' innovation involved focusing much less on bass keys, and playing solely on the treble side, resulting in a clearer and brighter sound, and leaving the bajo sexto to provide the lower bass notes. This method of playing became the standard way for most conjuntos. In 1936, Santaigo Jimenez added a contrabass to his ensemble, a move that was followed by other bands.<sup>10</sup>

## Classic Era Conjunto in the Postwar Period

The classic era of conjunto began in the late 1940s, when conjunto coalesced into a recognized and lasting musical style. Historian Manuel Peña identifies several significant changes in conjunto during the 1950s:

- The four-instrument ensemble (three-row button accordion, bajo sexto, electric bass, and drums) became the standard conjunto ensemble.
- Accordionists virtually abandoned the playing of bass notes, with a new focus almost exclusively on playing with the right hand. Furthermore, the accepted accordion sound became more staccato.
- With the addition of drums, tempos tended to shift downward to a slower pace, and dances such as the *taquachito* replaced the polka.
- Finally, vocals became more common in conjunto, and by 1960, and the instrumental polka gave way to the corrido (or "sung polka," albeit performed at a slower pace than traditional polkas).<sup>11</sup>

After World War II, a new generation of musicians continued to transform the conjunto sound through choice of instruments and techniques by which they played them. Before the 1940s, conjunto instruments were often limited to only bajo sexto and accordion. In the postwar period, drum kits and bass (acoustic and later electric) became accepted as standard instruments in conjunto ensembles. In 1949 Valerio Longloria introduced a standard trap drum kit to his

<sup>7</sup> Manuel H Peña, *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto: History of a Working-Class Music* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), pp. 39-40.

<sup>8</sup> Manuel H Peña, *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto: History of a Working-Class Music* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 73.

<sup>10</sup> Peña, *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto*, at [www.manuelPeña.com](http://www.manuelPeña.com). Accessed December 1, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Manuel H Peña, *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto: History of a Working-Class Music* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), pp. 94-97.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Lerma's Nite Club  
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

ensemble, and also added prominent vocals to what had been previously largely an instrumental style.<sup>12</sup> By the mid-1950s, the tololoche was replaced by electric bass.<sup>13</sup>

The commercialization of conjunto continued to shape the form. After World War II, the major recording companies largely abandoned their interest in the recording of regional artists, Tejano musicians included, in order to concentrate on American popular music. This left a gap which was soon filled by smaller regional labels such as Ideal Records of Alice, Texas. By 1950, Ideal was the primary producer of Tejano records. In addition to changes within the Tejano recording business, the postwar period also introduced a change in venue type in which people would experience the music. By the late 1940s and into the 1950s, there was a proliferation of commercial Conjunto dance venues, music promoters, and professional musicians throughout rural and urban south Texas. Commercial ballroom dances in venues such as armories and fraternal halls became popular, and the era was also marked by the commercialization of dance venues, including rural dance halls and small urban night clubs such as Lerma's. Venues for conjunto artists also included weddings and other traditional celebrations.<sup>14</sup>

The influence of regional record companies allowed for the emergence of widely-recognized conjunto stars. The new era of conjunto found a leader in Valerio Longoria, from Kenedy, Texas, who returned from service in the U.S. Army during World War II to establish a musical career. He is credited with introducing vocals and drums as a standard component of conjunto, as well as a wider range of musical influences, including the Cuban *bolero*. The group El Conjunto Bernal also rose to fame in the mid-1950s, and their mastery of instruments solidified their popularity and influence in the genre. Formed in Kingsville in 1954, and fronted by accordionist Paulino Bernal and his brother, bajo sexto player Eloy,<sup>15</sup> Conjunto Bernal became stars of the conjunto style.<sup>15</sup>

Conjunto music continued to be distinguished from other Tejano music forms not only by choice of instrumentation, but along divergent socio-economic lines within the Tejano communities. Conjunto was still generally regarded as music for the rural and urban working class, in contrast to the larger *orchestra tejana*, which was popular amongst those who were in the middle class and more apt to become "Americanized" in the postwar period. These classes became more distinguished when many rural Tejanos moved to cities such as San Antonio and took on blue collar jobs, while the Tejano middle class worked in white collar professions. The simple arrangements and limited instrumentation of conjunto were eclipsed by newer styles (including the influence of rock and roll) and larger bands beginning in the 1960s, but conjunto has remained popular nevertheless, supported by conjunto festivals in San Antonio and elsewhere.<sup>16</sup>

### Lerma's Nite Club

The building that houses Lerma's Nite Club is a postwar 1-part commercial block in the historically Hispanic West Side neighborhood of San Antonio. The building's first listing in the San Antonio city directory is 1948 (it was not listed in 1946, and the directory for the year 1947 is unavailable), so the building was most likely constructed c.1948. It has the

<sup>12</sup> Peña, *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto*, at [www.manuelpeña.com](http://www.manuelpeña.com), accessed December 1, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Manuel H Peña, *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto: History of a Working-Class Music* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Limón, José E. "Texas-Mexican Popular Music and Dancing: Some Notes on History and Symbolic Process." *Latin American Music Review / Revista de Música Latinoamericana* 4, no. 2 (Autumn - Winter 1983), p. 232.

<sup>15</sup> Peña, Manuel, *Musica Tejana*, pp. 94-105.

<sup>16</sup> Reyna. *Conjunto!*, vol. 3 liner notes.

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Lerma's Nite Club  
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

hallmarks of commercial buildings hastily constructed in the early postwar building boom throughout the United States to meet the needs of a growing economy. It is built of unreinforced concrete masonry units, is set back from the street to allow for angled parking, and its style picks up on common Art Moderne characteristics (namely the curved corners and octagonal window) that were popular in commercial design prior to World War II.

In 1946 The American Service Company based in Maryland, sold "two (2) parcels of vacant real estate" on which the building stands to T.H. Wu for "a cash consideration of \$8,000.00."<sup>17</sup> T.H. Wu conveyed one-sixth interests in the property to Lim S. Hong, Charlie She Jew, Huey Soon, Louis On and Louie Lin.<sup>18</sup> The earliest known tenants of the building included Huey's Variety Store, the San Antonio Baking Company, and Lakeview Cleaners. By 1951, El Sombrero Nite Club is listed as occupying the space that would eventually become Lerma's Nite Club, operated by Pablo Lerma. The property continued to change hands through different owners and heirs until 1988, when the current owners, Gilbert C. Garcia and his wife, Mary, purchased the property from Harry Wise and Mark J. Sideman for \$60,000.<sup>19</sup>

In 1948, Pablo Lerma took over the lease of the El Sombrero and turned it into an exclusively live conjunto music venue, later naming in "Lerma's." His son Armando took over the business when his father retired, but eventually he fell ill and decided not to continue with the family business. Mary and Gilbert Garcia, and Gilbert's father were very good friends of the Lerma's and took over the lease in 1981, agreeing to retain the family name for the business. The building owner passed away, and the executors of his estate decided to put the building up for sale and offered it to Mary and Gilbert in 1988. Gilbert, a saxophonist and now bar owner, and his wife Mary decided to invest their retirement savings in purchasing the building. The Garcia's are ardent lovers of conjunto music and have provided a venue for local conjunto musicians to ply their trade, get paid, and show off their musical talent.

Through the 1950s, Lerma's was one of only a small number of documented commercial music venues in San Antonio that regularly booked regional conjunto artists. Primary source materials regarding Lerma's are scarce. No known newspaper advertisements or posters are known to exist from the historic period (through 1961), and a thorough text search of the San Antonio Spanish language newspaper *La Prensa* through 1959 yields no mention of the nightclub in articles or advertisements, although other night clubs and music venues did post advertisements during the period. A distinction may be drawn between clubs such as Lerma's, which catered to a regular working-class clientele, and had neither the means nor the need to advertise, and larger night clubs in the city which hosted big acts that appealed to Tejanos with higher incomes, and could afford to advertise in a large circulation newspaper such as *La Prensa*.

Up until the building was vacated in the summer of 2010 on order of the City of San Antonio, Lerma's Nite Club continued to be home to dancing couples and fans of conjunto. Cover charges helped to maintain a safe and friendly atmosphere, and prevent the sorts of problems associated with other bars in the neighborhood. Besides continued use as a conjunto venue, the nightclub had more recently hosted events significant to the local community. A portion of the movie "Selena" was filmed inside Lerma's Nite Club in the mid-1990s, and the venue is easily recognized in the film's exterior shots, as well as the interior scene featuring the nightclub's Aztec-themed "Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl" mural which still decorates the wall behind the stage. In 2007, the San Antonio female rock trio Girl in a Coma filmed their "Clumsy Sky" video inside Lerma's.

<sup>17</sup> Bexar County deed records, Vol. 2217, p. 104-05; 3/19/1946.

<sup>18</sup> Bexar County deed records, Vol. 2217, p.106; 4/3/1946.

<sup>19</sup> Bexar County deed records, Vol. 4319, p. 230; 5/26/1988.

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## Preservation of Lerma's Nite Club

On July 6, 2010, the city Dangerous Premises Unit (DPU) served a search warrant on the property, motivated by a Dangerous Assessment Response Team (DART) complaint based on 311 calls. They found several violations at the Lakeview Cleaners dry cleaning establishment at the north end of the building. The electrical, mechanical and plumbing violations soon extended to the remainder of the building and the other units, including Lerma's Nite Club. Because of violations that were considered fire hazards at the cleaners, the City of San Antonio DPU ordered an emergency evacuation of the building. The DPU reports their findings to the Dangerous Structure Determination Board (DSDB), which has the power to demolish private property from 24 hours to 30 days after a simple majority vote. When the city demolishes a building, the value of the property is reassessed at the lower value (without a structure); the city sends the bill for the demolition to the property owner and puts a lien on the property. Current estimated cost of demolition for the whole building is \$40,000.

Building owners Mary and Gilbert Garcia made a presentation to the DSDB on July 26, 2010. Twenty-eight supporters of the building's preservation appeared at this meeting, with twenty speakers requesting an extension to allow the owners to conduct a feasibility study and continue to complete all the necessary repairs. The DSDB granted a 60-day extension and offered more time in which to meet their guidelines. A group of community members banded together and formed the SAVE LERMA'S coalition. The group is currently organizing community fundraisers and conducting a general cleanup of the property (through a volunteer effort) and has received in-kind architectural services from Community Design Studio, and a grant for a more detailed structural engineers report for \$1,500 from the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The San Antonio Conservation Society has reached out to the owners and is encouraging them to apply for grant money that is available for historic preservation and repairs. The Westside Development Corporation is providing pro-bono business consulting services.

The San Antonio Historic Design and Review Commission recommended designation of the entire Lerma's Nite Club building as a San Antonio historic landmark on Sept. 15, 2010. On October 21, 2010, the San Antonio City Council unanimously approved city landmark designation for the building. The designation wouldn't prevent the city's Dangerous Structure Determination Board from demolishing it, but the designation demonstrates the city leadership's willingness to preserve the property.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Zarazua, George. "Conjunto Club is Labeled Historic." *San Antonio Express-News*, Sept. 17, 2010.

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## Appendix: Significant conjunto artists who have played at Lerma's

### Members of the Conjunto Hall of Fame

- Esteban Jordan
- Mingo Saldivar
- Valerio Longoria
- Ruben Vela
- Santiago "Flaco" Jimenez
- Leonardo "Flaco" Jimenez
- Amadeo Flores
- Santiago Jimenez Jr.
- Paulino Bernal y Conjunto Bernal
- Tony De La Rosa
- Eva Ybarra
- Gilberto Garcia
- Ruben Naranjo
- Henry Zimmerle, Jr.
- Bene Medina

### Members of the Tejano Roots Hall of Fame

- Tony De la Rosa
- Paulino Bernal
- Lydia Mendoza
- Leonardo "Flaco" Jimenez
- Mingo Saldivar
- Esteban Jordan
- Los Dos Gilbertos
- Los Pavos Reales

### National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Award recipient

- Lydia Mendoza

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Lerma's Nite Club  
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Lakeview Cleaners at 1612 Zarzamora (north end of nominated building), 1951.  
Source: Institute of Texan Cultures Archives, San Antonio.



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Lerma's Nite Club  
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Aerial Photograph  
Source: Google Maps, accessed November 30, 2010





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Lerma's Nite Club  
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Lerma's Nite Club prior to closing in July 2010. No date.

Photo courtesy Rachel Martinez



Photo courtesy Kathy Stickelbault Samms



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Lerma's Nite Club  
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Lerma's Nite Club interior, 2010.  
Photo courtesy Susana Segura



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**PHOTOGRAPHS**

Lerma's Night Club  
1612 N. Zarzamora  
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas  
All Photos by Gregory Smith  
October 2010  
Printed with HP Viverra inks on HP premium Plus paper by THC staff

Photo 1  
West elevation  
Camera facing east

Photo 2  
Southwest oblique  
Camera facing northeast

Photo 3  
South elevation  
Camera facing north

Photo 4  
Southwest oblique detail  
Camera facing northeast

Photo 5  
West elevation detail, showing southernmost retail spaces  
Camera facing southeast

Photo 6  
North elevation  
Camera facing southwest

Photo 7  
Lerma's stage along the north wall.  
Camera facing north

# Lerma's

NITE CLUB

1602

PRIVATE  
PROPERTY

REZONING  
CITY OF TAMPA  
COUNTY - FLA. 33602  
APPLICANT: [illegible]  
BY THE CITY ENGINEER

OPEN

Lerma's  
NITE CLUB

1602

REZONING





Free  
PHARMACY

LAKEVIEW LAUNDRY CLEANERS

896-8096

NO PARKING



OPEN





LAKEVIEW CLEANERS

THE TIRE SHOP  
3800 N. ZARZAMORA

OPEN

Lemas  
NITE CLUB

N. ZARZAMORA ST

ROAD WORK AHEAD

MOTOR

