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# Ties to historic Guilbeau family may save ranch buildings on San Antonio's Northwest Side

[Scott Huddleston](#), Staff writer

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For the second time this month, the Historic and Design Review Commission is requesting that a cluster of agricultural structures on San Antonio's outskirts be considered for historic landmark designation — despite opposition from a property owner.

The HDRC voted 5-1 to recommend that the City Council initiate a designation process for the property at 9290 Leslie Road, near Helotes, in Council District 7 on the Northwest Side. A house and two barns are believed to have connections to one of the earliest families from France to arrive in Texas in the 1800s.

A lawyer representing a family that has held the property for nearly 80 years and last year sought a demolition permit argued that the house is not historic. The structures are on a 12-acre parcel, of which 75 percent is in a floodplain, near the westbound lanes of Loop 1604. From the highway, the house and barns are obscured from view by wooded terrain.



The city's Office of Historic Preservation said this house at 9290 Leslie Road appears to have been built in the 1880s for members of the historically prominent Guilbeau family. A representative for the family that now owns the property questioned whether it is historic

Scott Huddleston /Staff

James Griffin, the attorney representing the Bowen-Creamer family, which owns the property, said the house has not been occupied for about five years. The property has since been repeatedly vandalized, marked with graffiti and littered with trash and debris by trespassers, he said.

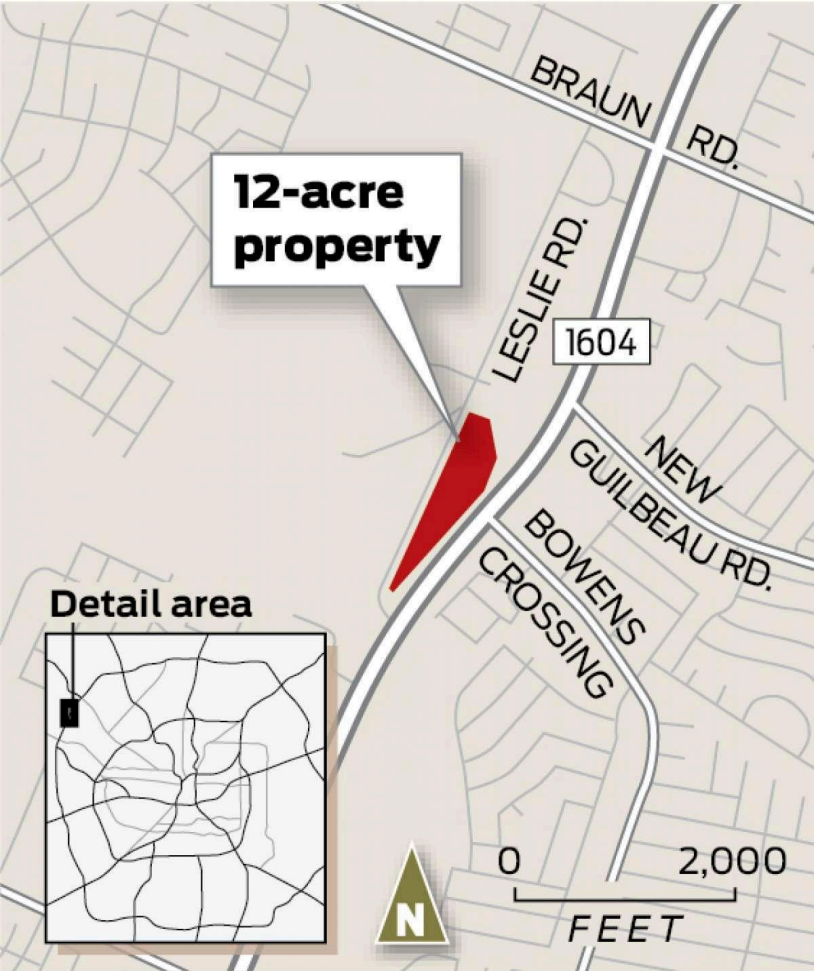
The family, which withdrew its demolition request a year ago, has studied options to reuse the house but hasn't "been able to find anything reasonable or feasible," Griffin told the commission Wednesday. There's a remnant of a smaller rock house that is "past the point of return," having been built in the floodplain, and is likely the only historic landmark on the tract, he said.

"Inside and out, we don't believe there's any real historic components to that main home. If there are, it's certainly been lost long ago, from the fireplace to the asphalt shingle roof to everything in between," Griffin said.

But according to an Office of Historic Preservation staff report, the one-story structure is a "stucco-clad limestone, dogtrot folk house" built around 1885 — a building type not commonly found after 1890.

# Proposed landmark

This 12-acre property at 9290 Leslie Road includes a house that the city's Office of Historic Preservation believes was built in the 1880s for the historically prominent Guilbeau family, whose members were among the first settlers in Texas to arrive from France.



Mike Fisher/Staff artist

“Folk houses represent the first period of American architecture built by colonists between the 17th century and the introduction of the railroad, which came to Bexar County in 1877,” a staff memo stated.

The house is believed to have been built for Francois Guilbeau III, whose grandfather had arrived in San Antonio from France in 1839, and his wife, Catarina, whose family, the Callaghans, included three San Antonio mayors and were descendants of local settlers from the Canary Islands in the 1700s.

Francois Guilbeau III purchased the property in 1881 and operated Helotes Ranch, later listed in deed records as the Old Guilbeau Farm and Ranch, according to the city memo. Since Dr. Porter Guy Bowen purchased the ranch in 1942, the property has been in the Bowen-Creamer family.

The tract is near existing historic landmarks, including the 1906 original sanctuary of Zion Lutheran Church and two cemeteries associated with the church on Leslie Road, and the Philip Ruempel Farm, whose restored limestone house and barn now function as part of the Two Step Restaurant and Cantina at Braun Road and Loop 1604.

Patti Zaiontz, president of the Conservation Society of San Antonio, said the group supports historic designation of the property as a “rare early example” of an 1880s ranch structure “with a tangible link to the Guilbeau family.” Although it has likely been overlooked because of its remote location amid heavy vegetation, it is linked to other historic agricultural sites in the area, Zaiontz said.

Sarah Zenaida Gould, a District 7 resident and cultural heritage expert, also has supported historic designation of the site.



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“We’ve already lost quite a few of the city’s historic limestone structures, and areas like the Old Guilbeau Farm and Ranch are an important visual reminder of the agricultural history of the areas surrounding the original city footprint. While our city has grown by leaps and bounds, structures like the intact limestone house on this property are of particular significance to telling District 7’s history,” Gould wrote in comments opposing demolition in November 2019.

In an unrelated case Dec. 2, the HDRC supported a request from nearby residents and an OHP staff recommendation for the council to initiate a landmark designation process for a midcentury dairy barn and two adjoining structures at De Zavala Road and J.V. Bacon Parkway, in District 8, on the Steubing Farm property. The owner, De Zavala Ventures Ltd., purchased the site two years ago and has opposed historic designation of the barn. It sits on a 12.5-acre tract where a shopping center is planned.

Scott Huddleston covers Bexar County government and the Alamo for the San Antonio Express-News. To read more from Scott, [become a subscriber](#). [shuddleston@express-news.net](mailto:shuddleston@express-news.net) | Twitter: [@shuddlestonSA](#)

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