

The 1883 Adolph and Regina Frenkel House

2424 Avenue L

Galveston, Texas

I. CONTEXT

The first resident groups of Galveston Island consisted of Native Americans, Spanish explorers, or pirates seeking to establish settlements to utilize the island's natural harbor. These settlements sporadically emerged and dissipated through the first third of the nineteenth century. During the 1830s, the Galveston City Company, led by Michel B. Menard, sought to capitalize on the island's geographic advantages by developing a bustling city to serve as Texas' primary commercial port. Thus, from its origins, the history of Galveston concerns the role of land speculators as shapers and facilitators of development.

Early investors, including Menard and Samuel May Williams, built houses to the west of the city for their families. The next generation of city leaders moved closer to the business district, most commonly building suburban houses on the island's eastern end. Until the last decades of the nineteenth century, the central portion of the island developed sporadically with a mix of residential, commercial, and industrial buildings. In 1871, the Texas Cotton Press built a since-demolished press facility on Avenue N between 24th and 25th streets. The press spurred additional development in the surrounding area. In the 1880s and 1890s, a primarily middle-and upper-class neighborhood emerged in the area. The core of the neighborhood, bounded by 23rd and 26th streets, Avenue K, and Avenue P, is now listed on the National Register as the Silk Stocking Historic District.¹

One of Galveston's active development groups in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was the Galveston Real Estate and Loan Association or GRELA. The outfit was led by some of the city's best-known business figures. As Galveston entered its era of greatest economic prosperity during the 1880s, GRELA carried on the entrepreneurial spirit of the Galveston City Company by seeking out opportunities for land speculation and development. In 1882, the group purchased six adjacent lots along Avenue L between 24th and 25th streets. The lots offered geographical advantages in their proximity to the business district and the harbor to the north as well as the Gulf of Mexico to the south, and also in their position near the island's natural ridge where floodwaters posed less of a risk. GRELA enticed prospective buyers by constructing three handsome, two-and-a-half-story houses on the properties, each sitting on two lots. The houses were built with matching plans, a common practice in nineteenth-century Galveston utilized in the construction of both simple and elaborate houses. Subsequent owners made alterations that now distinguish the three houses.

The westernmost GRELA house at 2424 Avenue L, which first served as the home of Adolph and Regina Frenkel and their family, retains exceptionally high integrity of its nineteenth-century design and materials. The Bavarian-born Adolph worked in Galveston for many years as a cashier and merchant. Regina was a community leader, most prominently through her role in the development of the Lasker Home for Homeless Children. The couple made a few alterations to the house after purchasing it in 1884. The integrity of these early alterations remains high and the house serves as an outstanding example of an architectural style employed by a nineteenth-century real estate developer and customized by its first buyer, a prominent Galveston family.

II. OVERVIEW

The Galveston Real Estate and Loan Association

The earliest mention of the Galveston Real Estate and Loan Association (GRELA) in the *Galveston Daily News* dates to April 1874, though the contents of the article make it clear that the group formed before that date.² The board of directors during the early 1880s included some of the city's most prominent businessmen: A.P. Lockett, Henry A. Landes, James D. Skinner, W.H. Willis, and contractor Frank Jones.³ Several similar real estate investment entities—the Galveston Building and Loan Company, the People's Loan and Homestead Company, the Gulf Loan and Homestead Company, and the Citizen's Loan Company, to name a few—operated in the city during the same period.

Previous research suggests that some nineteenth-century Galveston real estate companies typically operated as mortgage institutions rather than developers. For example, A.P. Lockett, Jr. (coincidentally, the son of the GRELA officer listed above) transferred property at 1414 Mechanic to the Gulf Loan and Homestead Company in 1874 and regained full ownership four years later.⁴ Elsewhere, in 1880 the Citizen's Loan Company facilitated a sale of property at 1509 Mechanic to Charles H. Hughes.⁵ Instances of such entities acting as residential developers—purchasing and improving land with the intent to sell at profit—are less common in primary sources. The Avenue L GRELA houses constitute the largest known example of such a project occurring on contiguous properties. In 1882, the group purchased six adjacent lots along Avenue L between 24th and 25th streets, located in city block number 84, with a plan to build three two-story houses as investments. The organization's capacity to take on such a project

appears to have relied to some degree on the involvement of Frank Jones, who served as the contractor.

Frank Jones was born in Montreal in 1843. He settled in Galveston in about 1875, first working as a carpenter. The obituary printed in the Galveston *Daily News* upon his death cites him as one of the city's "pioneer builders" and "best known contractors." His most famous contracting project was the 1890 Clarke and Courts Building at 2400 Mechanic, designed by Nicholas Clayton. He served as an officer for several real estate investment entities.⁶ While it is possible that he performed contracting services in cooperation with these organizations, the only such project yet discovered in primary sources is the GRELA house at 2424 Avenue L.

Construction of the house at 2424 Avenue L, the westernmost of the three Avenue L GRELA houses, is credited to Frank Jones in an August 1884 building summary published in the *Daily News*.⁷ The house lists the value of the construction at \$2500. The article fails to mention the other two GRELA houses. The building summary article relied on information provided by contractors themselves—Jones and three others. Perhaps the article's omission of the other two GRELA houses stems from the lack of involvement of any of these contractors. An alternative explanation concerns the fact that each listing in the article includes the building's owner. The lack of mention of the houses could indicate that GRELA had not identified buyers for them as of August 1884. Therefore, the article's inclusion of 2424 Avenue L and glaring omission of the other two GRELA houses suggests two possibilities, which are not mutually exclusive. First, Frank Jones may have served as the contractor only for the westernmost GRELA house, 2424 Avenue L. Second, the house at 2424 Avenue L may have been the first of the three GRELA houses to be purchased. Research has not uncovered a contractor connected with the other two

GRELA houses. Eventually, Samuel and Loretta Calder purchased the easternmost house (2016 Avenue L) and James T. Huffmaster purchased the middle house (2020 Avenue L).

Adolph Frenkel

In 1884, at some point between January and August, GRELA sold the westernmost of their three Avenue L houses. The buyer was Adolph Frenkel, a cashier for the Leon and H. Blum Land Company, then one of the largest land-and-livestock companies in Texas.⁸ Frenkel was born July 13, 1838, in Bavaria to Samuel and Eva (Marx) Frenkel.⁹ He immigrated in March 1853, sailing from Le Havre, France aboard the *George Hurlburt* and arriving in New Orleans.¹⁰ He likely spent some time in New Orleans, where he may have become acquainted with the family of his second wife, Regina Marx. However, Frenkel's whereabouts between 1853 and 1870 are uncertain. A man of the same name served in the Confederate Army with the volunteers of the 1st Regiment, Mobile, but a ten-year discrepancy in listed age impedes any connection between this man and the Adolph Frenkel who later lived in Galveston.¹¹ Frenkel was a resident or visitor to Cincinnati in 1866, when he married his first wife, Bertha Loewenstein.¹² The couple had four sons—Samuel, Charles, Benjamin, and Morris—and one daughter, Minnie.¹³

The Frenkel family lived in Meridian, Mississippi for a period after the Civil War.¹⁴ At some point before 1870, they relocated to Galveston, where Adolph first worked as a cashier for the Blum Company.¹⁵ He was still with the company in 1880, when the family resided on Church (Avenue F) between 24th and 25th streets.¹⁶ Bertha died in 1881 and was buried in Galveston's Old Hebrew Cemetery with an unnamed infant, suggesting that childbirth complications may have played a role in her death.¹⁷

Between 1881 and 1884, Adolph and the five children continued to reside at the house on Church between 24th and 25th streets. He continued to work as a cashier for the Leon and H. Blum Company, and his acquisition of the Avenue L in 1884 property indicates some accumulation of wealth. The house was located in a respectable area, and it was brand new, recently completed by an investment company led by reputable businessmen and under the supervision of one of the city's leading contractors.

Architectural description

The three GRELA houses share identical L-shaped floor plans and cross-gabled roofs.¹⁸ In their original configurations, the footprints measured approximately 38 feet wide and 30 feet deep. Each property also included a two-story carriage house, accessible from the alley between Avenue L and Avenue K.¹⁹

Of the three GRELA houses on Avenue L, the Frenkel retains the highest degree of integrity of nineteenth-century design and materials, and thus provides the best demonstration of the houses' original appearance. The house is a two-story, five-bay, wood-framed Victorian house with a two-story rear (northern) addition. The house is setback approximately forty feet from Avenue L. The sidewalk in front of the house has multi-colored square pavers, which continue along Avenue L in front of the other two neighboring GRELA houses, suggesting that the sidewalk dates to the 1883 development. The front walkway of the Frenkel House retains Octagon-and-Dot pavers that match the material and color of the sidewalk pavers, and is therefore also considered to be original. The two eastern GRELA houses lack these pavers and have modern-material walkways instead.

The Frenkel House is raised approximately four feet from ground level. Painted lattice skirting adorns the brick-pier foundation. There is no evidence suggesting that the house was elevated during the post-1900-Hurricane grade raising of Galveston Island. As the grade-raising projecting involved the addition of some dredge fill in this part of the island, it is likely that, as constructed, the house stood a bit higher than four feet above grade.

The house has a hipped roof with a widow's walk at the crest. A gable face, extending to the south, is decorated by an arched window and a dentilled cornice. The primary (south) elevation has a two-story, recessed double gallery extending across the western three bays. Aside from the orientation of the gable front and wing plan, the façade exhibits symmetry in the configuration of openings. The main entrance sits in the center bay. The entrance has wooden double doors fitted with clear, architectural glass. The two western bays of the first story have walk-through windows that give access to the gallery. The eastern two bays, sitting beneath the cross gable, have a coupled set of four-over-four wood sash windows. The same fenestration pattern is utilized on the second story, where three walk-through windows give access to the gallery and another set of coupled windows stands below the gable face, in line with those of the first story. Above the second level of the gallery, the cornice is dentilled.

The four-bay east elevation has a projecting bay at its north end, corresponding with the two-story rear addition. On both the first and second stories, the projecting bay has four-over-four wooden sash windows on all three visible sides. The windows of the first story are taller than those of the second story, but the widths are the same. The other three bays of the east elevation have a symmetrical, planar appearance, with four-over-four wooden sash windows arranged in a regular configuration on both stories. The two-bay west elevation has two four-over-four sash windows on the first story and no windows on the second story.

A rear addition has two sections, both built by the Frenkel family shortly after Adolph's purchase of the house. The first section, standing at the east side of the rear elevation, has two stories. This portion of the addition is characterized by a projecting bay at the northeast corner and by a bank of windows at the top of the west elevation. A one-story northern wing of the addition once housed a kitchen and now functions as a screened porch. The screen enclosure was completed by the current owners. The roof above all sections of the building has matching composition shingles.

The Frenkel family at 2424 Avenue L

A year after settling his family in the new house, Frenkel traveled to New Orleans to marry his second wife, Regina Marx.²⁰ Regina was born August 1858 in Frankfurt, Germany to Simon and Annalia (Herz) Marx.²¹ She immigrated to the US before 1885, perhaps following her brother Henry who settled in New Orleans in 1865.²² The marriage between Adolph and Regina took place on December 17, 1885, at Henry Marx's house on Chippewa Street.²³ The marriage did not produce any additional children, but the younger of Adolph's children from his first marriage spent most of their childhoods at 2424 Avenue L with their father and Regina.

During the 1880s, the customized the house for their own use. By the end of the decade, the house had a two-story rear addition, two wooden cisterns, and gas and electric lighting. The interior had plastered walls, two bathrooms, four porches, and six closets. Decorative tile in the entrance hall may also date to this period.²⁴ Adolph and Regina constructed the two-story addition at some point between Adolph's 1884 acquisition of the property and the completion of an 1889 insurance record document.²⁵ Some of the interior features described in the document may have incorporated elements of the original GRELA design. Between 1889 and 1899, the

family built a small, one-story addition to the carriage house.²⁶ In the 1912 map, the carriage house is labeled “Servants,” indicating that the family regularly employed full-time domestic servants during the first part of the twentieth century. The 1900 US Census identifies one such servant named Clara Matthews.²⁷

Adolph worked as a cashier for Leon and H. Blum Company for over thirty years.²⁸ His son Samuel joined him at the firm between 1886 and 1891. Later, the two went into business together. A. Frenkel & Son, fruit and commission merchants, had offices at 2115 Strand and remained in business until 1894. Upon the firm’s dissolution, Adolph worked for several years as an agent of the Mutual Reserve Fund and, later, the New York Life Insurance Company. Samuel worked as a traveling salesman for the Marx & Blum Company. Benjamin became a physician and surgeon, Morris worked as a stenographer, and Charles was an attorney and businessman.²⁹ Eventually, all four sons relocated to New York.

Adolph, Regina, and Minnie were in Galveston during the devastating 1900 Hurricane. All three survived and took a Southern Pacific passenger train to New Orleans within days of the storm. They remained there, staying with Regina’s brother-in-law Sol and awaiting the completion of repairs to their Galveston home.³⁰ The exact nature of the storm damage and the duration of the Frenkel’s stay in New Orleans are unknown, but Adolph re-established his office as a New York Life agent by 1901.

Regina Frenkel

After the storm, as the children gradually moved away from Galveston, Regina Frenkel began to play a more active role in the Galveston community. She participated in the National Council of

Jewish Women and she worked for the Red Cross during World War I. And she devoted great efforts in the early development of the Lasker Home for Homeless Children.³¹

The Lasker Home for Homeless Children began in 1894 as the Society for the Help of Homeless Children. Under the charter, nine women directors administered the organization, including fund-raising efforts and admission decisions. Following the loss of its first facility, located at the corner of 37th Street and Avenue R, during the 1900 Hurricane, the organization constructed a new building at 16th Street and Avenue K. In 1913, banker and investor Morris Lasker donated \$15,000 towards the expansion of that building. Afterward, the institution was renamed in Lasker's honor.³²

Regina Frenkel served as president of the Lasker Home for many years and was one of the most pivotal leaders in its history. After a tenure as vice president, she was appointed to serve as the organization's second president at some point between 1913 and 1915.³³ A 1932 article reports that she had been president of the organization for 28 years, which appears to be an overestimation of her tenure but nonetheless indicates a long-standing influence over the direction of the organization.³⁴ A retrospective article on the 1913 Lasker Home, written in 1955, credits Regina and Rabbi Henry Cohen as moving forces behind Morris Lasker's 1913 donation.³⁵

After Adolph Frenkel's death in February 1921,³⁶ Regina remained in residence at the Avenue L house. She continued her work to improve and expand the Lasker Home until her death in 1934. The *Galveston Daily News* recounted a eulogy given by Rabbi Cohen, one of the city's most important community leaders.³⁷

“During her long affiliation with the home she had mothered several hundred children, he said, many of whom had been a credit to the institution and to her untiring work.

“He spoke of her varied associations in the community life of the city, and declared that not only would she be missed for her cultural and civic endeavors, but as an actual worker in the ranks. ‘The many floral offerings,’ he said, ‘are representative of the respect and esteem in which she was held, and each bud and flower typifies some good deed she had performed or kindly thought that she had engendered throughout her lifetime.’”

Later owners of the house

For a brief period following Regina’s death, Minnie Frenkel lived alone in the Avenue L house. Eventually, she relocated to an apartment at the Jean Lafitte Hotel. For the ensuing decade, the Frenkel children leased the property to various tenants. In 1945, they sold it to August O. Gleich, Sr, who immediately gifted it to his son.³⁸

August O. Gleich, Jr. had recently returned to the US following military service in World War II. He lived at the house between 1945 and 1947, working as a laborer and grocer. After he sold the house, it was used primarily as a rental property for about twenty years.³⁹ Late-twentieth-century owners included Martha Rapp Speer, Charles and Ernestine Mallini, Donald and Kathy Dupre, and William and Judy Kracke.⁴⁰ In 1993, the house underwent its first substantial rehabilitation. The following year, Galveston Historical Foundation included it as part of the annual Historic Homes Tour event.

Integrity

The house retains excellent integrity of its historic design and materials. The most substantial alteration to the original design was the early rear addition. As this change occurred during the Frenkel era, the addition itself has historic significance. Sanborn maps from 1889, 1899, 1912, and 1947 demonstrate that the house has not undergone substantial alterations in scale or form since the Frenkel addition. The maps also illustrate the evolution of secondary buildings on the lot. The 1889 map depicts only the original two-story carriage house at the back of the lot. The 1899 map shows the Frenkel family's one-story addition to the backhouse. The 1912 map shows a new one-story building at the western edge of the property. Between 1912 and 1947, this building was removed and replaced with a larger one-story building. In the 1947 map, the two-story rear building is labeled "2422 ½," indicating that the Frenkel and Gleich families made that building available for rental separately from the main house.⁴¹

The original rear building was demolished in 1971 by William and Judy Kracke.⁴² The current owners constructed a new alley building featuring a three-car garage and an upstairs storage area. The design for the new back building received approval from the city's Landmark Commission.

Late in the twentieth century, the original entryway was altered with the installation of a stained-glass surround. The current owners removed this entryway and installed a double-doored entrance designed to match more closely the house's original design.

Notwithstanding these changes, the house retains sufficient integrity to convey its significance from the Frenkel era. Among the historic materials that remain intact, the tiled entryway, three slate fireplaces with Eastlake ornamentation, and two sets of pine pocket doors

stand out. The interior also retains plaster walls in several rooms, original pine floors with five-inch board widths, baseboards, wood trim (including second-story crown molding, twelve-inch baseboards, and wainscoting of the first story and stairway), interior doors, and two-light transoms. On the exterior, the house retains historic windows, doors, and cypress siding. The paved front walkway, recently repaired by the current owners, also retains materials presumed to be original.

III. SIGNIFICANCE

The Adolph and Regina Frenkel House is a high-integrity example of a Victorian house built early in the development of the area now regarded as the Silk Stocking Historic District. The house is the best-preserved component of a residential investment that is one of the most prominent examples of land-speculative development in late-nineteenth-century Galveston. The most notable architectural features, including the double gallery and decorated front gable of the south façade, remain in place.

The Galveston Real Estate and Loan Association, which was led by some of the city's most prominent businessmen, developed the house and two neighboring buildings for resale. Adolph Frenkel, a cashier for Leon and H. Blum Company, one of Galveston's most important outfits during the last decades of the nineteenth century, bought the house and his family remained there for over fifty years.

After the 1900 Hurricane, Regina Frenkel emerged as an important community leader. She was active in several organizations, but her most meaningful contributions regarded the Lasker Home for Homeless Children. Regina worked with Rabbi Henry Cohen to secure Morris Lasker's donation to build the home in 1913. Afterward, she served as president of the Lasker

Home for at least twenty years, providing leadership to the organization and, as remembered by Cohen, mothering hundreds of homeless children.

IV. ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1 – The Frenkel House indicated by blue arrow in this close-up from Augustus Koch's 1885 bird's eye view of Galveston.

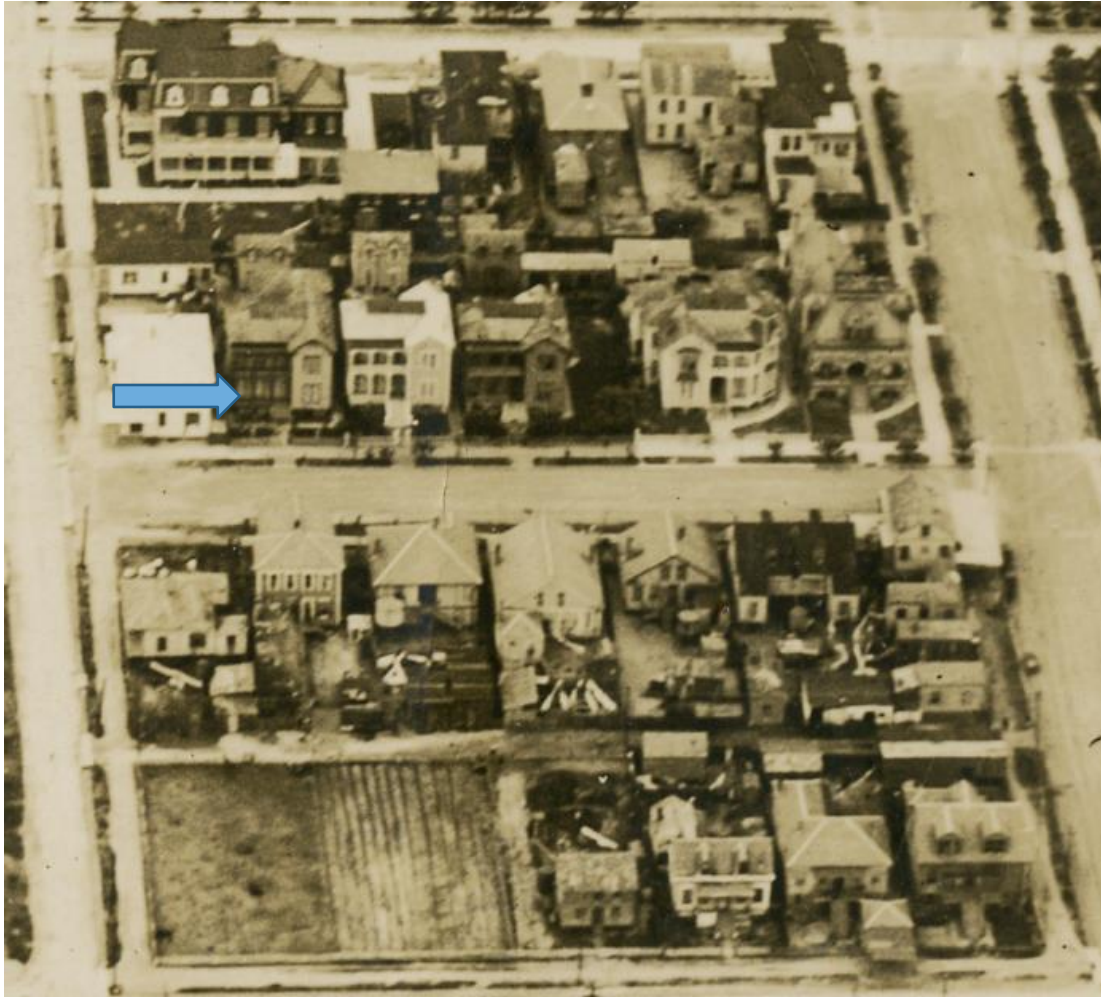
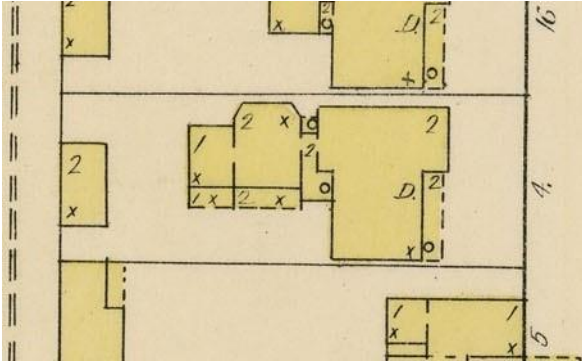


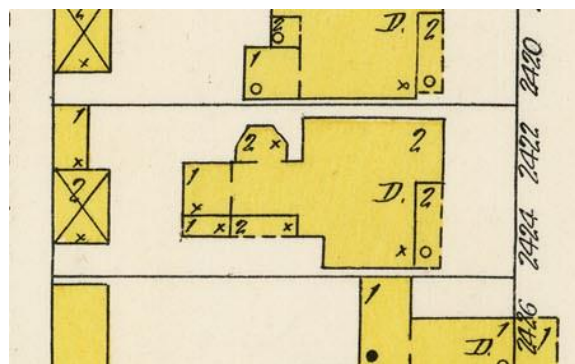
Figure 2 – The Frenkel House indicated by blue arrow in this closeup from “Little Frank’s Balloon” 1912 aerial photograph. The photograph was taken from the south. The original back building is visible to the rear of the house. (Courtesy of the Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas).



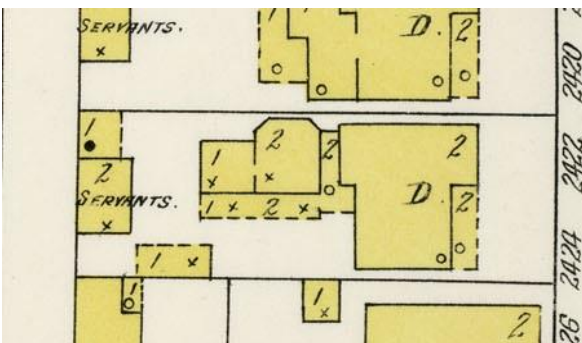
Figure 3 – The Frenkel House (left) in a photo that appears to date to the 1980s or 1990s. (Texas Historical Commission National Register Commission via The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas).



1889



1899



1912

Figure 4 - Sanborn fire insurance maps from 1889, 1899, and 1912. (Dolph Briscoe Center, University of Texas, Austin, Texas.)

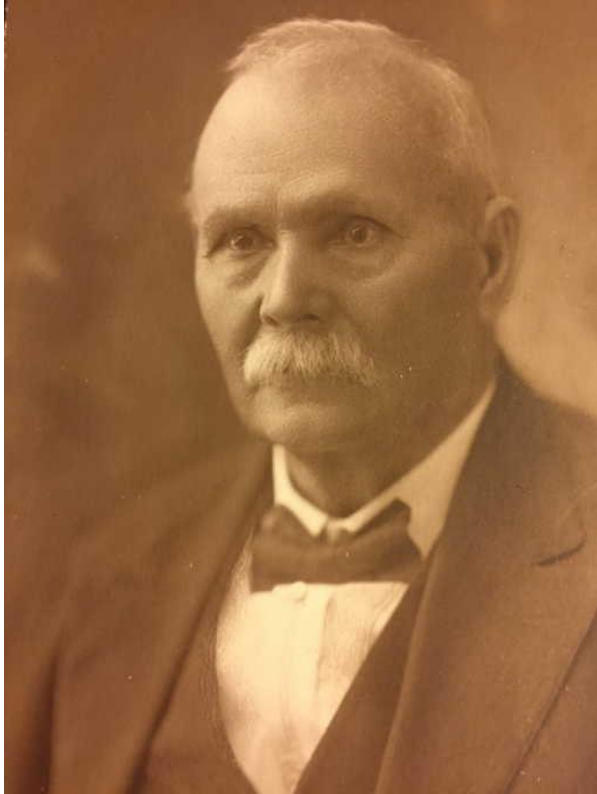


Figure 5 – Photograph of Frank Jones. Date unknown.



Figure 6 – The Clarks and Courts Building at 2400 Strand. Jones served as contractor for the Construction of the building in 1890. Artwork of Galveston, 1894.



Figure 7 – Photograph of Regina Frenkel. Date unknown. (Galveston and Texas History Center, Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas).



Figure 8 – Photograph of the 1913 Lasker Home for Homeless Children. Date unknown. (University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, texashistory.unt.edu; crediting Texas Historical Commission.).



Figure 9 – The front (south) façade of the Adolph and Regina Frenkel House at 2424 Avenue L. November 2018. (Preservation Resource Center, Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, Texas).



Figure 10 – The east façade of the Adolph and Regina Frenkel House at 2424 Avenue L, looking north. November 2018. (Preservation Resource Center, Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, Texas).



Figure 11 – The north façade and addition of the Adolph and Regina Frenkel House at 2424 Avenue L, looking southeast. November 2018. (Preservation Resource Center, Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, Texas).



Figure 12 – The west façade of the Adolph and Regina Frenkel House at 2424 Avenue L, looking north. November 2018. (Preservation Resource Center, Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, Texas).



Figure 13 – Tile in the entrance hall of the Frenkel House at 2424 Ave. L. was likely installed by Adolph and Regina Frenkel. (Preservation Resource Center, Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, Texas).

V. SOURCES

¹ Karger, Bonnye. "Silk Stocking Historic District." National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. Based on research by Lennie Brown. August 1995, March 1996.

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³ "The City," *Galveston Daily News*; Tuesday, April 10, 1883, p.1

Note: This article mistakes the company with the Citizens' Loan Company. A correction was printed the following day, April 11, 1883.

⁴ City of Galveston Landmark Nomination for the Earnest Seiling House, 1509 Mechanic. December 2016. Available from Preservation Resource Center, Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, Texas.

⁵ City of Galveston Landmark Nomination for the Alfred D. and Jane M. Brown House, 1509 Mechanic. August 2017. Available from Preservation Resource Center, Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, Texas.

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¹⁰ United States Census, 1900, Galveston, Galveston, Texas. Database, *FamilySearch* <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:M3GC-CX6>. Accessed 25 November 2017. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1972; The National Archives at Washington, D.C.; Washington, D.C.; *Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New Orleans, Louisiana, 1820-1902*; NAI Number: 2824927; Record Group Title: *Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*; Record Group Number: 85

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¹⁶ United States Census, 1880, Galveston, Galveston, Texas.

¹⁷ "Bertha Frenkel, 1921," *Find a Grave*. Web. <http://www.findagrave.com>. Accessed November 25, 2017.

¹⁸ "1883 Adolph Frenkel Home, 2424 Avenue L," 1994 Homes Tour Catalog; Insurance Record for 2424 Avenue L.

¹⁹ Insurance Record for 2424 Avenue L; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1889. Dolph Briscoe Center. University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

²⁰ "Louisiana, Parish Marriages, 1837-1957," Adolph Frenkel and Regina Marx, 15 Dec 1885.

²¹ Ibid.; Texas Department of State Health Services; Austin Texas, USA; *Texas Death Certificates, 1903-1982*.

²² "Henry Marx Dead," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*; December 8, 1898, p.12.

²³ "Orange Blossoms," *New Orleans Times Democrat*; December 17, 1885, p.4.

²⁴ Insurance Record for 2424 Avenue L; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1889.

²⁵ Insurance Record for 2424 Avenue L.

²⁶ Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1899. Dolph Briscoe Center. University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

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³⁸ “1883 Adolph Frenkel Home, 2424 Avenue L,” 1994 Homes Tour Catalog.

³⁹ “1883 Adolph Frenkel Home, 2424 Avenue L,” 1994 Homes Tour Catalog.

⁴⁰ Insurance Record for 2424 Avenue L.

⁴¹ Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1889; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1899; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1912. Dolph Briscoe Center. University of Texas, Austin, Texas; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1947. Dolph Briscoe Center. University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

⁴² Insurance Record for 2424 Avenue L.