

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register Of Historic Places
Registration Form**

1. Name of Property

historic name Casa de la Masacre

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 32 Marina Street not for publication

city or town Ponce vicinity

state Puerto Rico code PR county Ponce code 113 zip code 00731

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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.)


Aida Belén Rivera Ruiz

11 Oct. 2005

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this 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
- other (explain): _____

for
Signature of the Keeper: Daniel J. Vaz
Date of Action: 10/20/05

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Casa de la Masacre
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: PUERTO RICO, Ponce

DATE RECEIVED: 8/18/05 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 9/13/05
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 9/28/05 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 10/01/05
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 05001098

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: Y NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT RETURN REJECT _____ DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

The Casa de la Masacre is locally significant under Criterion A for its association with the Nationalist Club in Ponce and under Criterion C as an example of a common vernacular building type. The two-story building was designed with commercial space on the ground level and residential occupancy above, a pattern common in Ponce and other urban settings throughout Puerto Rico. Used as the meeting hall of the local chapter of the Nationalist Party (commonly known as the Nationalist Club), the building is associated with a tragic chapter in Puerto Rico's political history that occurred on the afternoon of March 21, 1937, when a confrontation between police and the Nationalists resulted in nineteen deaths and left nearly two hundred people wounded. Today, the building reflects the social and architectural history of Ponce and retains integrity from its period of significance.

RECOM./CRITERIA Accept A & C
REVIEWER Daniel Viscan DISCIPLINE Historian
TELEPHONE (202) 354-2252 DATE 10/20/05

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic / Single Dwelling

Commerce/ Specialty store

Social / Meeting Hall

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Vernacular Creole

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation masonry

walls masonry / wood

roof galvanized metal

other

Narrative Description

X. See continuation sheets

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

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

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Social History
Architecture

Period of Significance

1910

Significant Dates

1937

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

X See continuation sheets.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

X See continuation sheets.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- 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
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property _____ less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1		752660	1992900	3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2				4			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description

Legally recorded lot: (389-062-472-01) cadastre registry Puerto Rico State Government.

Boundary Justification

Legally recorded Lot Limits

Casa de la Masacre

Ponce, Puerto Rico

11. Form Prepared By

name / title Juan Llanes Santos, Historian / Jacqueline Pagán, Architect

organization PRSHPO date June 2005

street & number PO Box 9066581 telephone (787) 721-3737

city or town San Juan state PR zip code 00936-4267

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña

street & number PO Box 9024184 telephone (787) 724-0700

city or town San Juan state PR zip code 00902

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**National Register Of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 7 Page 1

Casa de la Masacre
name of property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
County and State

Summary

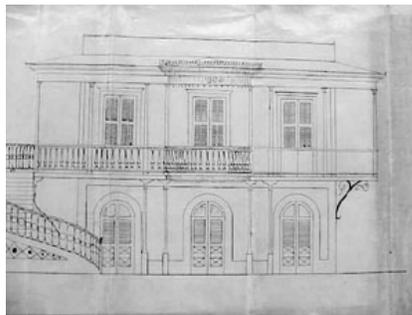
The property commonly known as “**Casa de la Masacre**” (House of the Massacre) is a two-story, brick masonry, vernacular style building of both domestic and commercial use with a modified rectangular floor plan, a flat roof and an “L”-shaped, wood balcony that runs along the two main façades at second level. The exterior walls are finished in stucco while wood predominates in most interior subdivision, floors and ceilings. It is located in a corner lot at the intersection of Marina and Aurora streets in the historic urban zone of Ponce. Given its dual function, the building features an attached independent entrance for the upper dwelling - a staircase enclosed in masonry and wood jalousies in the first and second floors respectively. Additionally, a carriage entrance from Marina Street echoes the main building in design and materials. Since the tragic event of 1937, the property retained an overall integrity and was restored in 1990. It presently houses the “Museo de la Masacre” (Museum of the Massacre).

Description

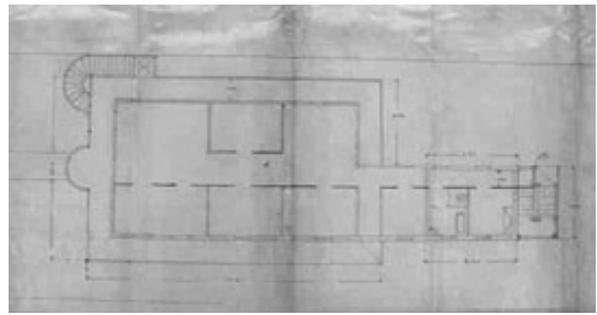
Written and graphic evidence found in the historic archives of the Municipality of Ponce confirm the existence of a domestic building at the “*Casa de la Masacre*” site as early as 1886. However, the existing property dates from the early years of the 20th century. By 1906, the owners of the property contracted the services of well-known civil engineer Blas Silva to design their new property. The result was a two-story, brick masonry and wood building very similar to the one that was eventually constructed excluding all-around setbacks, a more elaborate spiral staircase and a continuous upper floor balcony. Even though the final project was not executed after Silva’s design, most of his ideas were implemented in a more austere manner granting the appearance that the property would have by 1910, when the changes to the 19th century residence were completed.



Façade of house in Marina Street, 1886¹



Blas Silva's 1906 design.²



Blas Silva's 1906 design.³

¹ Archivo Histórico del Municipio de Ponce. Fondo: Ayuntamiento. Serie: Obras Públicas. Caja 21/7 05-1886.

² Ibid. Caja 25 09-1906.

³ Ibid. Caja 25 09-1906.

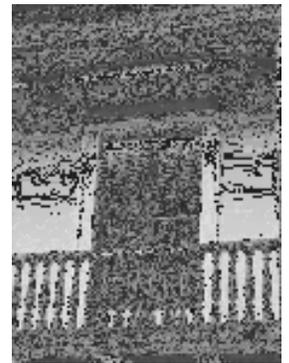
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Casa de la Masacre
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The building's main façades feature five double doors on each level, a continuous molding between ground and upper levels, a cornice well below the parapet and a covered "L"-shaped wooden balcony. The ground level entrances are solid wood plank doors emphasized by a simple offset and open transoms featuring curved wrought iron details; the upper level doors are wood as well and have jalousie panels, these have more elaborately designed brackets and cornices. The balcony has a rounded corner that follows the building's slightly curved corner; it features wrought iron support brackets, a simple balustrade and a corrugated iron roof supported by eight wood columns.



The ground level is divided into two main areas: a commercial space towards the corner of Marina and Aurora streets and a "garage" or carriage entrance that faces Marina Street. The commercial space is in turn divided in two areas as well; it opens on two sides towards the sidewalk and street, the other smaller space faces Marina Street. A wood beam supported by wood columns runs the length of the ceiling in the larger area. All interior ceilings and trims are wood, "bull's-eye" windows dot the back wall facing the side yard underneath the stairs; this area is accessible from the commercial area through two doors similar to the ones facing the streets.



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Summary

The “**Casa de la Masacre**” Building is significant under Criterion A as the property is very closely associated with an important event in the local history. It’s also significant under Criterion C in the area of architecture as an example of construction patterns at the beginning of the 20th Century in Puerto Rico.

Historical Background

After the United States occupation of Puerto Rico in 1898, the island’s political status within the US frame became a very complex and ardent theme within the local parties. A number of local political parties came about the turn of the 20th century. In one manner or another, these groups represented the very same three main tendencies that have dominated the political spectrum in Puerto Rico until present times: Statehood, Commonwealth and Independence. Within the Independence movement of the first decades of the 20th century, one party came to symbolize the radical opposition toward the presence and control of the island by the United States: the Nationalist Party.

Founded in 1922, the Nationalist Party became an extremely active organization (although with a small membership) when Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos gained its presidency in 1930. Born in a humble neighborhood in the aristocratic city of Ponce in 1892, Albizu Campos distinguished himself in the academic field in his local hometown schools. His remarkable qualities as a student earned him a scholarship to pursue a college education in the United States. Albizu attended the University of Vermont and later Harvard University, from which he graduated in 1921 with a law degree. Albizu entered the Nationalist Party in 1924 and by 1926 the party commissioned the young lawyer to serve as a political messenger of the Nationalist Party in Latin America. Albizu spent the next three years traveling through the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Cuba, Mexico, Panama, Venezuela and Perú.

Pedro Albizu Campos



At the time of his return in 1930, Albizu was transformed into a strong supporter for the open and militant challenge toward the United States’ presence in Puerto Rico. In the next years, Albizu and the Nationalist Party became dedicated critics of what they perceived and defined as the North American colonialist policy in the island and advocated armed struggle as a mean to achieve independence. The deteriorated economical conditions created by the Great Depression during the 1930’s provided the Nationalist Party the proper forum to spread their vision of proud nationalism and economical and political independence within a wider audience.

At the very same time that the Nationalist Party was increasing its militancy, President Franklin D. Roosevelt designated a new governor for the island: General Blanton Winship. The sixty-five year old soldier assumed the governorship on February 15, 1934. The next five years of Blanton’s government were characterized by an open struggle against the Nationalist Party and a direct persecution of its leadership.

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Blanton Winship's term initiated the most politically convulsive time in our history. From 1935 until 1939, the "undeclared" war between the government and the nationalists moved violently fast. In October 1935 the State Police in the town of Río Piedras murdered four party members. The Nationalists responded by killing the State Chief of Police, Colonel Francis Riggs, in February 23, 1936. That very same day, the two young men responsible for Riggs's death were captured and executed by the police in San Juan.²

Riggs's death provoked Winship's rage. The governor ordered raids to be conducted in the Nationalist Party's Committees in all mayor towns. The purpose of the raids was to find evidence that incriminated the party's leadership in Riggs's assassination. Such evidence was never found. Nonetheless, the government finally brought against Albizu Campos and other leaders of the party charges of "sedition". In two very controversial trials, Albizu and seven other persons were found guilty and received sentences ranging from two to ten years in federal prisons in the United States. But the elimination of the "party's heads" did not stop the Nationalists' militancy or the government repression. This dual intransigency embarked both sides toward the violent collision that took place in Ponce in 1937.

Gov. Blanton Winship¹



The local committee of the Nationalist Party in Ponce (called the Nationalist Club) was located at 32 Marina Street, corner with Aurora Street (the property presented in this nomination). The house had been used as the group's meeting hall since 1926. In 1937, the Ponce committee planned the annual celebration of the Slavery Abolition Commemoration. The day picked for the parade was Palm Sunday, March 21, 1937, unbeknownst to the nationalists that date was to become one of the darkest days in our history.

The nationalists were planning to use the parade not only to commemorate the historic date but also to publicly criticize the incarceration of the party's leadership. They had planned the event for weeks and were expecting the assistance of party members from other towns of the island. The parade had also received the City Mayor's (José Tormos Diego) permission. But at the last minute, Governor Winship instructed the new State Chief of Police, Colonel Enrique de Orbeta, to contact Tormos Diego and have him cancel his authorization to the parade. At the very same time (as it was latter confirmed) the Governor ordered Orbeta to increase the police force in the southern city and to stop, by all means necessary, any demonstration conducted by the nationalists in Ponce.³

¹ *Life*. February, 1938. pp. 21.

² Francisco A. Scarano. *Cinco siglos de historia*. Segunda Edición. México: McGraw-Hill, 2000. pp. 793 – 799.

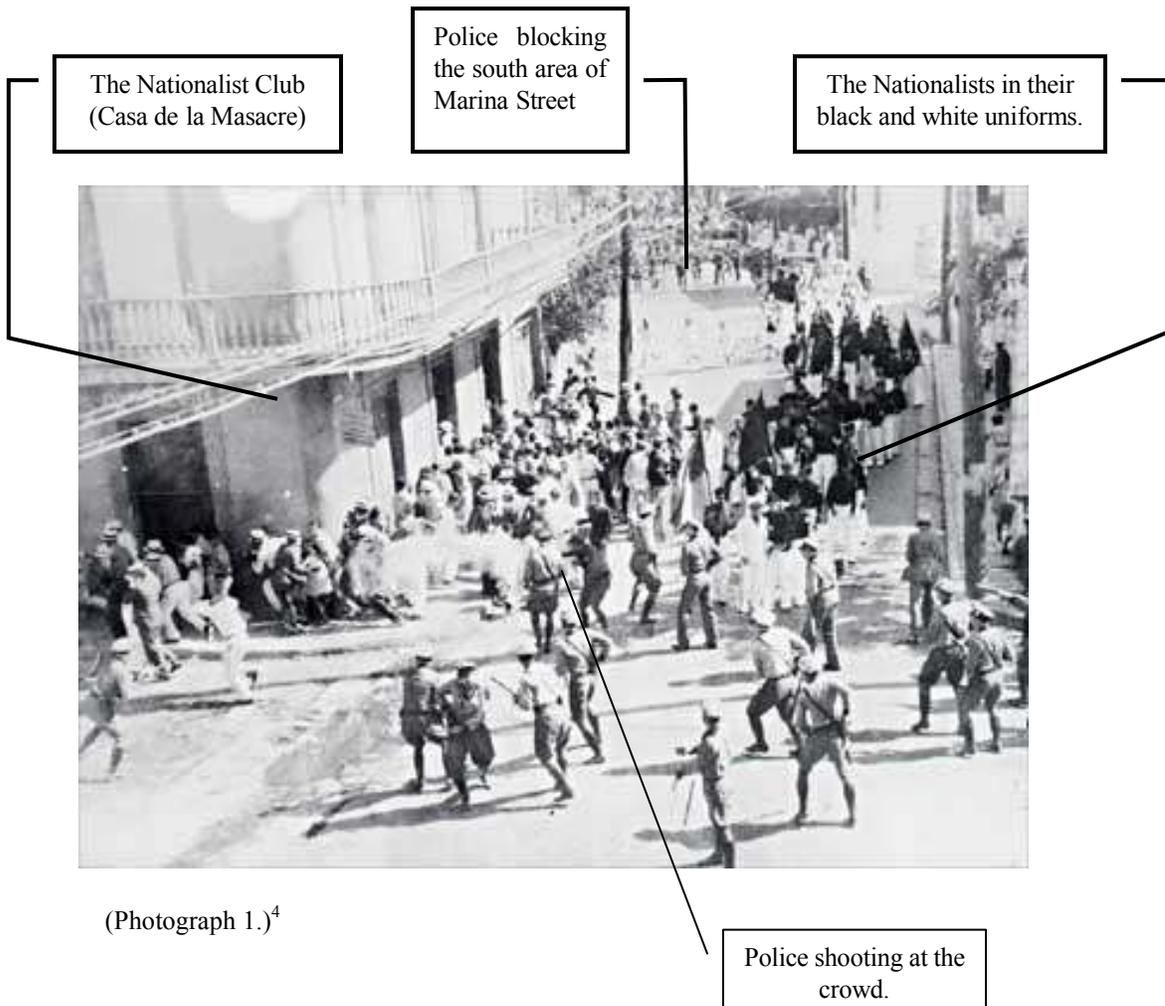
³ Raúl Medina Vázquez. *Verdadera historia de la Masacre de Ponce*. Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 2001. pp. 50 – 65.

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⁴ *El Imparcial*. 23 – 27 de marzo de 1937.

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Casa de la Masacre
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Photograph 2.



Photograph 3.⁵

The picture labeled as Photograph 1 was taken by a photographer of a local newspaper ("El Imparcial") at the very beginning of the shooting. The picture was crucial during the investigation conducted by the Hays Commission to attribute the responsibilities in the events to all those involved. The pictures above (2 and 3) appeared in the 1938 Life magazine article about the incident. The pictures show family members of some of the victims in front of the bullet's ridden walls of "Casa de la Masacre".

The violent and disturbing incidents occurred in Ponce deeply shook the entire population in the island, regardless of political beliefs. Representatives of the *American Civil Liberties Union* (ACLU) immediately came to Puerto Rico and formed a group of well-recognized citizens to investigate the incident. After months of research, the Hays Commission (Dr. Arthur Garfield Hays was the President of the ACLU and served as the commission's president) came to the conclusion that the Government (Governor Winship directly) was responsible for the incidents; that the Nationalists were exercising their basic rights of freedom of speech and association; and that the killing of defenseless party members and by-standers had to be recognized as a "massacre". The afternoon of Palm Sunday March 21, 1937, became the most violent and one of the saddest days in our political history.

⁵ Life Magazine, February 1938.

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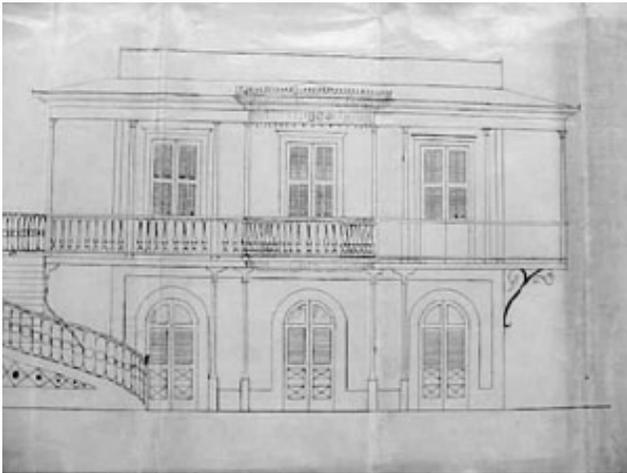
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Casa de la Masacre
name of property
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The Building

The house popularly known as “**Casa de la Masacre**” (House of the Massacre) is located at #32 at the Marina Street and Aurora Street intersection in the Municipality of Ponce. It’s a two-story house built in brick masonry and wood. The existence of a residence at that location is shown in the 1886 diagrams found at the Historic Archives of the Municipality of Ponce. But the present building dates from early 20th century. By 1906, the owners of the property contracted the services of well-known Civil Engineer in Ponce, Blas Silva, to design a new façade and a new space arrangement for the property. Although the changes done to the house did not follow completely Silva’s design, his signature can still be found in the appearance that the property will have by 1910, when the changes to the 19th century residence were completed.



Blas Silva’s 1906 drawing.⁶



Photograph 1937⁷

⁶ Archivo Histórico del Municipio de Ponce. Fondo: Ayuntamiento. Serie: Obras Públicas. Caja: 27/09-1906.

⁷ Centro de Investigaciones Históricas, UPR, Recinto de Río Piedras. Colección Benjamín Torres. Caja: Fotos de la Masacre de Ponce.

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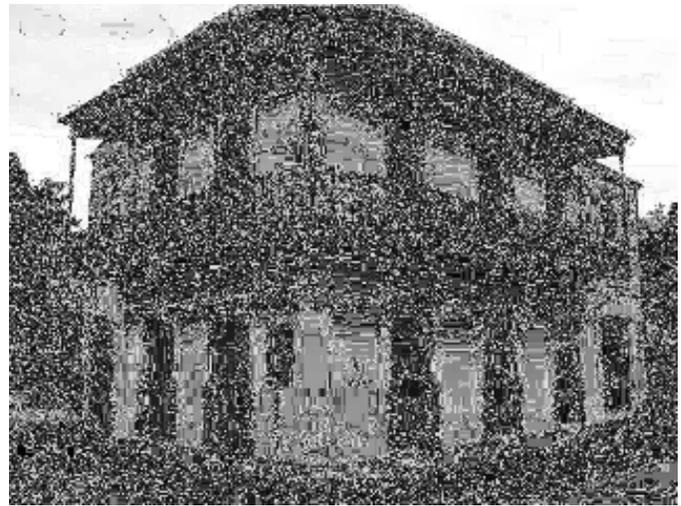
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Photograph, 1987.



Photograph, 2005.

The house follows an architectural style typical of the vernacular pattern used at the beginning of the 20th century. It's also a good example of the economical development of the city, as the house was used as a residence and a commercial space, very typical of other residences in the economically growing city of Ponce. The property was under the economical pattern of "absentee landlord", as the house was not usually occupied by the owners, but used as real estate income.

At the time that the house reached national notoriety (1937), the owners were Francisco de Jesús y Graciela Toro Vendrell. They sold the house to Juan Riera Ginard and Carmen M. Toro de Riera in 1945.⁸ These last owners never occupied the residence, but used it as source of income, renting the upper floor as a residence and the first floor as a commercial space.

In 1987, through a Joint Resolution of the Legislature (Joint Resolution # 2951), the corner where the house is located was designated a Historic Zone. Realizing the historical importance of the building, the Legislature decided that the house should become property of the People of Puerto Rico and assigned the amount of \$60,000 to the *Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña* (Institute of Puerto Rican Culture) to acquire the residence. The house was bought in 1988 from the previous owners and is currently used as the "Museo de la Masacre" (Museum of the Massacre). The interventions in the house have kept it consonant to his historical appearance as it was at the beginning of the 20th century.

⁸ Registro de Propiedad. Municipio de Ponce. Folio: 93, Tomo: 395, Finca: 4731.

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But beyond it's architectural merits, and definitely more important than these, is the relationship of the property with the significant events of 1937. For the people of Puerto Rico, the house represents and symbolized the tragic events of March 21,1937. In our collective memory, there are very few properties so vividly associated with historical events as "**Casa de la Masacre**". The association in the popular mentality of "**Casa de la Masacre**" to the tragic incident is as deep as the events at Wounded Knee in 1890 are to the American Indians (Native Americans) or as profound as the events in Boston in 1770 are to the American people.

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Casa de la Masacre
name of property
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Bibliography

Archivo Histórico del Municipio de Ponce

Fondo: Ayuntamiento. Serie: Obras Públicas, Planos.

Plano Núm: 02 – 1873

Plano Núm: 27 – 1894

Plano Núm: 09 – 1895

Fondo: Ayuntamiento. Serie: Obras Públicas

Caja 21/7 05- 1886

Caja 25 09- 1906

Cámara de Representantes. Resolución Conjunta Número 2951.

Centro de Investigaciones Históricas, Universidad de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Río Piedras.

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Pérez Marchand, Rafael V. *Reminiscencia de la Masacre de Ponce*. San Juan: Litolibros, 1972.

Periódico “El Imparcial”, 22 de marzo del 1937

Pico, Fernando. *Historia general de Puerto Rico*. Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1988.

Registro de Propiedad. Municipio de Ponce

Folio: 93 Tomo: 395 Finca: 4731

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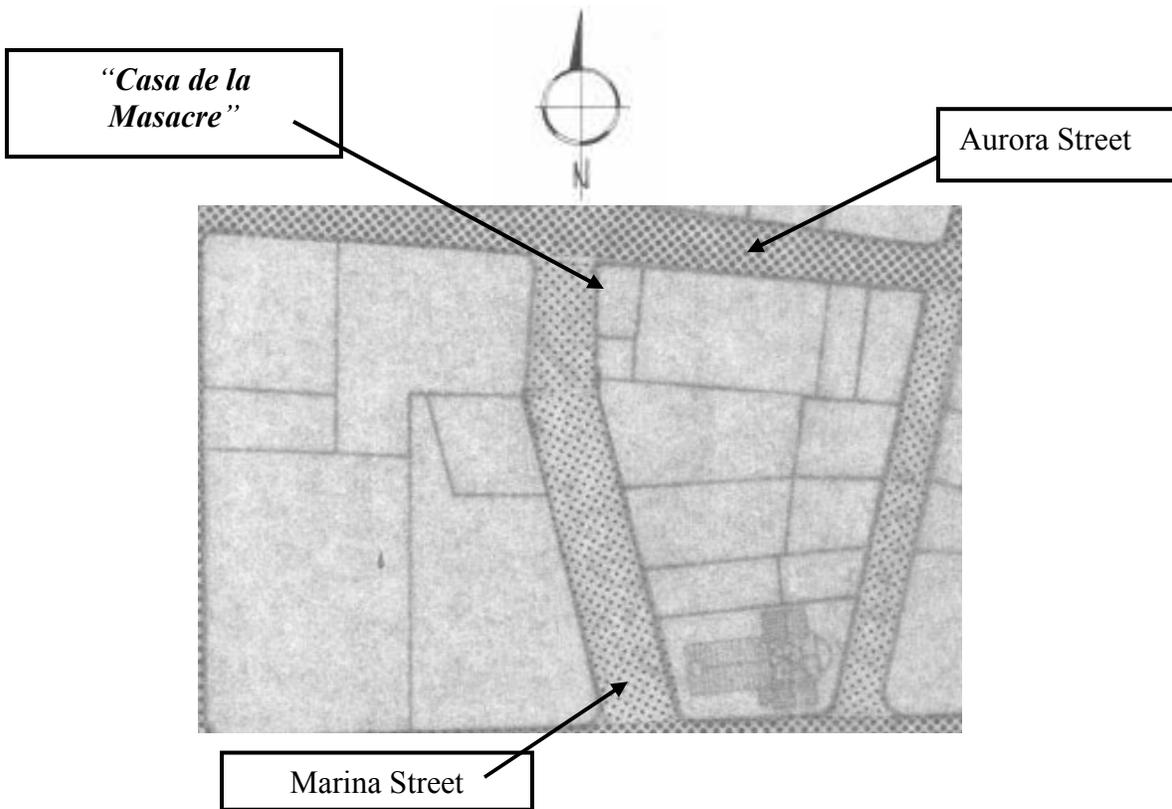
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Casa de la Masacre
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Map of Puerto Rico



Site Map



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A southeast view of Casa de la Masacre. (Photo: Juan Llanes)

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Partial views of "Casa de la Masacre". (Photos: Juan Llanes)

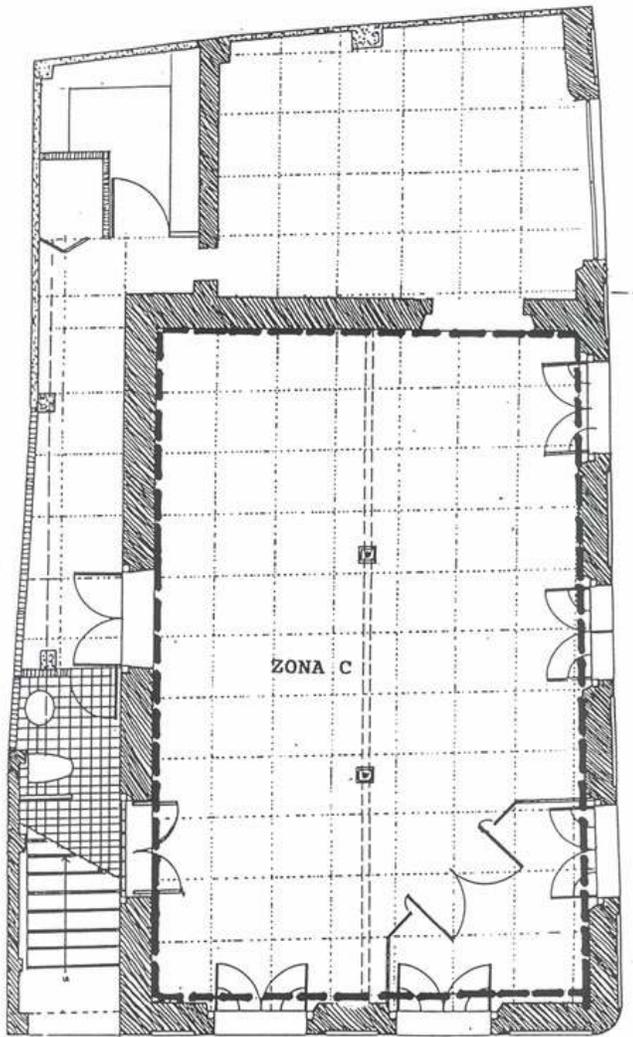
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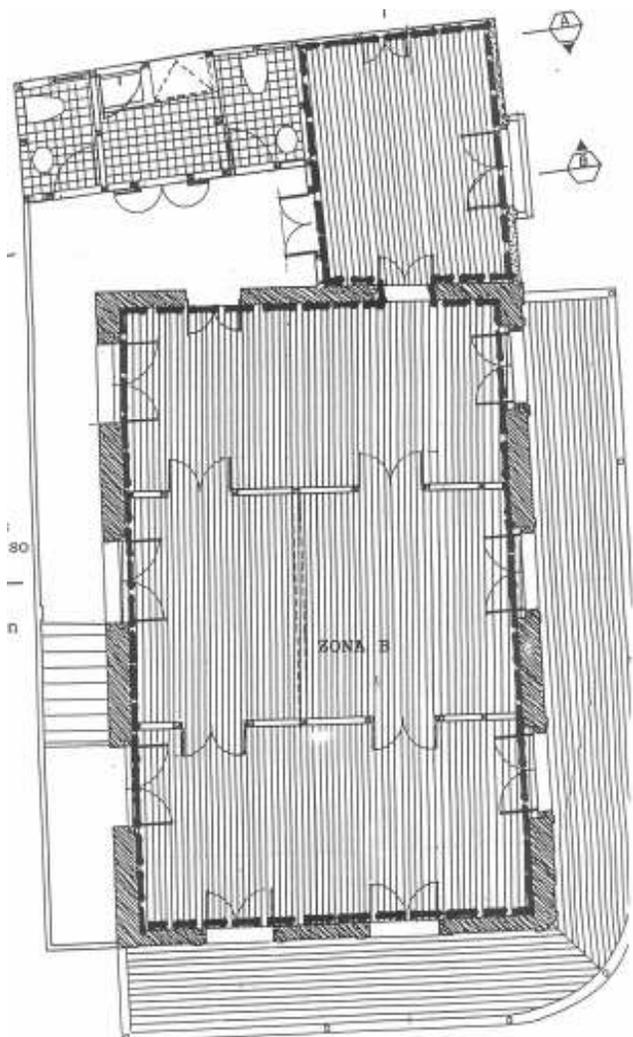
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Casa de la Masacre
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Floor Plans



Ground Floor



Upper Floor

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Aurora's Street Facade

Marina's Street Facade

