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Much of what landscape architects do is help people to see something different in the world around them, often in places that they assume they already know.

—David Malda,
“Landscape Narratives and the San Antonio River”

Populations move. Plants disperse genes by way of seeds and pollen; wetlands accrete and erode; animals forage, mate, roam. Humans leave their—homes in search of work, land, education, safety, and opportunity. Migration is a process by which organisms track resources, discover, and escape. The patterns of migration reflect spatial and temporal changes in the landscape. Migration is a cipher and a signifier—it helps us unravel the invisible threads that hold together an ecosystem.

Stephanie Carlisle and Nicholas Pevzner,
Scenario Journal 6: Migration, 2019

INTRODUCTION TO CONTEXTS

There are many ways to contextualize any landscape. Determining which to focus on is an exciting challenge that landscape architectural historians face when developing a cultural landscape report (CLR). Early in this process, the clients asked the consultant team for help understanding where Brackenridge Park fits into the national landscape. This question helped guide the team's decisions about which contexts to focus on. It also became clear that it would not be enough to provide only historical contexts, because contemporary contexts related to preservation and ecology also help situate the park. Several of the context chapters look backward as well as forward, establishing where cultural movements, events, and trends have been globally, nationally, or locally, where they are heading, where Brackenridge Park fits in, and where it can go.

Chapter 1 provides a global and national perspective of river cities, situates San Antonio as a river city, and situates Brackenridge Park as a foundational point on the San Antonio River's riparian corridor. The chapter touches on river cities as historic loci of human settlement, but it spends more time on a discussion of the long history of management of and interventions on rivers to ensure human survival in drought and flooding conditions. Specifically, the historic management of the Mississippi River is discussed. Looking ahead, South Korea's Cheonggyecheon River is discussed as a precedent that illustrates the current trajectory for healing riparian corridors. Initially, this landscape seems far removed from San Antonio, but the river's scale and size are similar to the upper course of the San Antonio River that flows through Brackenridge Park; also comparable are the urban issues surrounding these two ecological restoration projects. This chapter suggests that Brackenridge Park contains the promise for ecological healing in the face of climate and population changes that are already occurring in San Antonio, as in the world.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the evolution of preservation in America, highlighting its beginnings and gradual transition from focusing on landmarks and buildings to expansive and complex landscapes. The chapter situates San Antonio within the American tradition of historic preservation, calling attention to how San Antonio's preservation movement has reflected national trends and how it has been ahead of its time.

Finally, this chapter presents a way forward for preservation in San Antonio. An extensive discussion of National Heritage Areas is included to suggest preservation and treatment of Brackenridge Park that will establish it as part of the larger urban and cultural fabric of San Antonio. Considering the overview of how preservation in America and San Antonio have evolved over time, always on the “right side of history,” the context includes a call to seize an opportunity—that is, to recenter research and interpretation of the park on Indigenous, African American, and Mexican American contributions, perspectives, and histories, in greater balance with the park’s well-documented colonial history.

Chapter 3 focuses on park development and design in America, providing a way for park leadership to better understand the ways that Brackenridge Park, when it became a park in 1899, followed national trends and the ways that it maintained a regional identity. A brief inclusion of international movements and trends that informed park making in America is included before a longer discussion of American municipal park design. In addition, discussion about the formation of the first national parks is included. Brackenridge Park arose at a critical time, when municipal and national parks were emerging.

Building on the overview of park development in the United States, chapter 4 drills down into two related topics: American tourism in parks and the use of automobiles in parks. This chapter serves to illustrate the national trends that were occurring and how Brackenridge Park reflected the national trends as well as set itself apart.

Chapter 5, “Ethnographic Imprints on the Landscape,” is an attempt to define San Antonio’s predominant ethnographic cultures, how they have evolved over time, and how they have made lasting marks on the city and the park. A brief discussion of migration as part of a global cycle is included. The discussion then zooms in to look at America’s transforming population and how San Antonio’s population trends compare. The purpose of this context is to emphasize the rich opportunity that exists to recenter preservation research and interpretation and to enable park leadership to consider how a recentering will ensure future stewardship, given future population trends.

Chapter 6, “The Ecology of Brackenridge Park,” builds on the broad context provided in chapter 1, “River Cities.” This later chapter drills down to a finer level of detail, focusing purely on Brackenridge Park and the status of its ecological health. The chapter illustrates the critical need for ecological intervention at Brackenridge Park. Readers should recall the Cheonggyecheon River precedent described in chapter 1 as they consider the ecological needs and opportunities in Brackenridge Park.

Chapter 7, “George Brackenridge: A Portrait,” is another chapter that bids CLR users to look backward in order to look forward. It provides human context for the birth of San Antonio’s regional vernacular park, focusing on the fascinating individual who donated the original 199 acres to the city of San Antonio. It aims to illustrate that Brackenridge shaped the park’s distinctive and lasting character not as a designer but simply as a visionary and compassionate citizen. It is a well-deserved feel-good story of one person’s life and legacy.

Yet this historic portrait is also a beginning—it suggests a pathway that might eventually feature other individuals who have contributed to the park’s character. Many of these individuals are called out in part three of this CLR, in chapter 14, “Analysis and Evaluation.” Since one intention in these context chapters is to begin recentering research, responding to San Antonio’s historic and future diversity, chapter 7 provides reasons to dig deeper into the histories of people who are not yet as well documented as Brackenridge. George Brackenridge’s history, wholly instrumental to Brackenridge Park as a park, should eventually be showcased alongside other park contributors and alongside the histories of individuals and/or groups who were instrumental to this cultural landscape before it became the municipal park it is today. Some of these histories will be hard to document, and some may not be celebratory, but they are no less valuable in helping to tell a whole truth.



CHAPTER 1. RIVER CITIES

The visionaries who formed Brackenridge Park, seeming to recognize the San Antonio River’s major significance and value, paid simple homage to the river: they sited the park in alignment with its sinuous course, even as the city surrounding the park was adapting to an urban grid. A more expected approach would have been to fit the park into the developing grid. That form follows water—the formation of the city of San Antonio and the formation of its municipal park—is evident in Brackenridge Park.

San Antonio is a city whose entire existence is due to the presence of the San Antonio River. This fact is foundational to Brackenridge Park as a cultural landscape. To gain greater understanding of this claim, it is helpful to pull back and consider river cities as a global phenomenon that spans time, geographies, and scales.

Around the world, rivers and other bodies of water have been the spine on which settlements develop.¹ Historically, rivers “have been harnessed in city making for industrial and commercial production, for water supply and waste removal, and for energy production. They offer an essential means of transportation and communication, irrigation for food production, and opportunities for defense.”² The presence of water allows for the existence of civilizations. Yet each river city engages in its own complex network of geographical, social, cultural, infrastructural, ecological, and environmental relationships,³ and what results is a drastically different settlement pattern based entirely on the character of the river.⁴

1 Thaisa Way, *River Cities, City Rivers* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, 2018), 4.

2 Way, *River Cities, City Rivers*, 2.

3 Way, *River Cities, City Rivers*, 3.

4 Way, *River Cities, City Rivers*, 2.

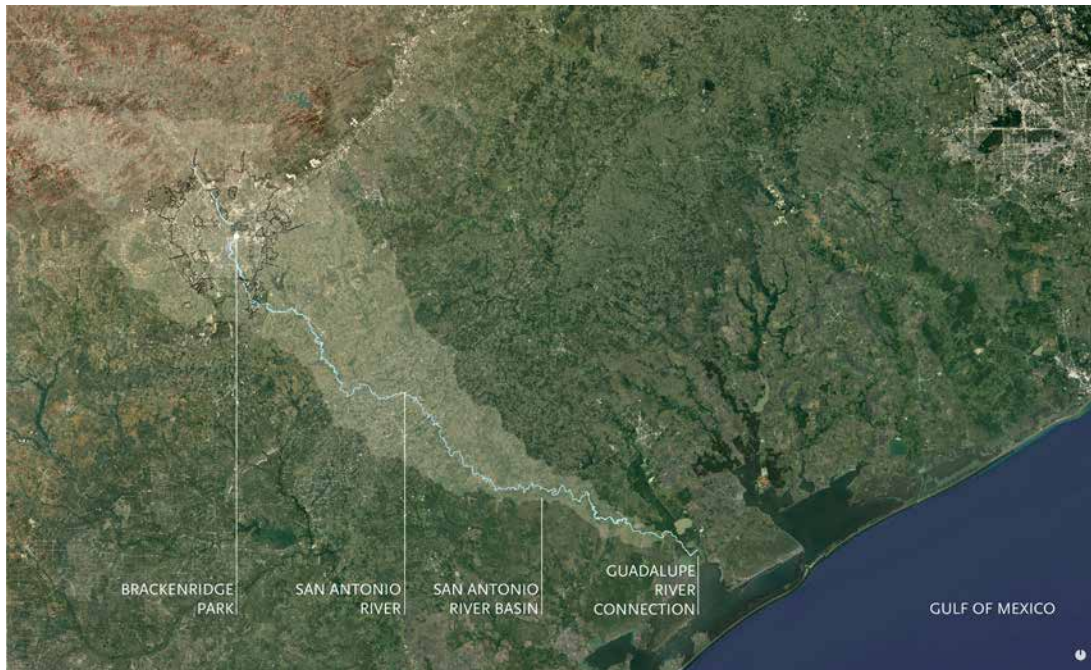


FIGURE 1-1. The 240-mile-long San Antonio River begins north of Brackenridge Park and flows through Bexar County and four other counties. The Balcones Escarpment fault line is visible above San Antonio. Source: Reed Hilderbrand

HUMAN ATTEMPTS TO CONTROL WATER

Whether they are globally significant watercourses or local meandering streams, rivers are life-giving, but they also bear destruction.⁵ People have thus attempted to control them for millennia. The 240-mile-long San Antonio River begins just north of Brackenridge Park and flows southeasterly through Bexar County and four other counties until it reaches the Gulf of Mexico. (figure 1-1). Within the city of San Antonio, irrigation was the first documented use of the river; it also became a recreational asset due to its low volume and slow movement.⁶ The San Antonio River has also been a constant source of flooding and drought, with interventions to manage these issues occurring even in the present.

What follows is a comparison of human efforts to control rivers of vastly different scales and geographies. In size, the San Antonio River falls between the Mississippi River and South Korea's Cheonggyecheon River. These distinctly different rivers both offer relevant examples of the positive and negative effects of human intervention.

In the case of the Mississippi River, which is approximately 2,300 miles long,⁷ writer John McPhee, in his widely referenced 1987 *New Yorker* essay "Atchafalaya," said that the "army replaced nature."⁸ In an attempt at comprehensive flood control in south Louisiana, Congress charged the US Army Corps of Engineers with maintaining the current course of the river through the use of river control structures (figure 1-2). Historically, the river has

⁵ Way, *River Cities*, *City Rivers*, 7.

⁶ David Malda, "Landscape Narratives and the San Antonio River," in *River Cities: City Rivers*, ed. by Thaisa Way (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, 2018), 252.

⁷ "Mississippi River Facts," National Park Service, Department of the Interior, November 24, 2018, accessed June 14, 2019, nps.gov/miss/riverfacts.htm.

⁸ John McPhee, "Atchafalaya," *New Yorker*, December 22, 2017, accessed June 13, 2019, [newyorker.com/magazine/1987/02/23/atchafalaya](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1987/02/23/atchafalaya).

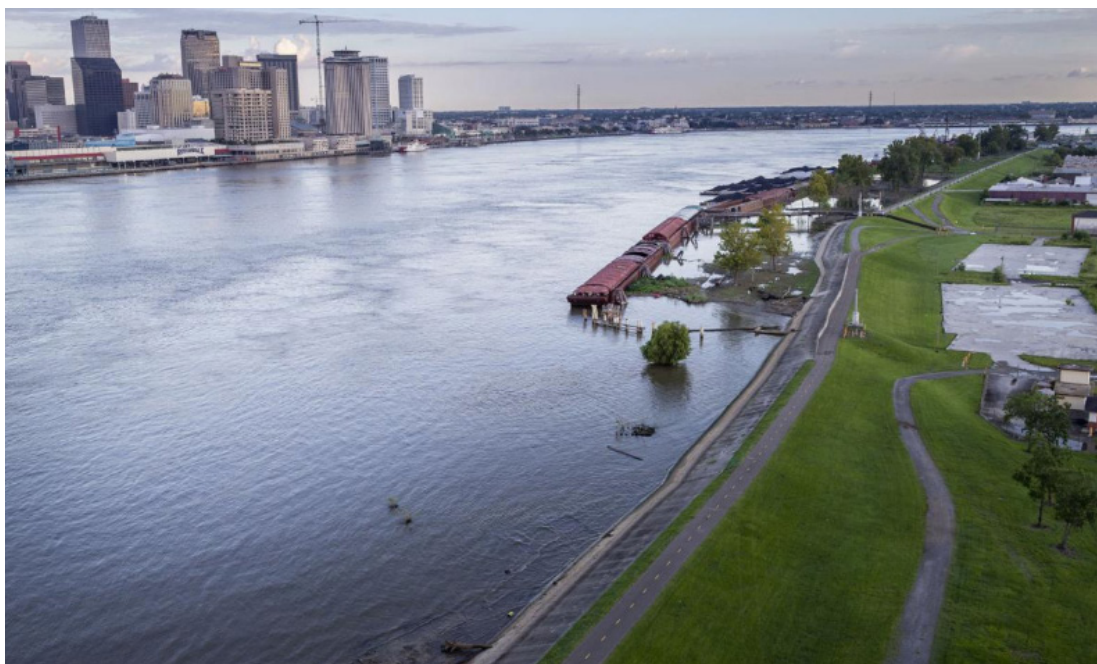


FIGURE 1–2. View of the Mississippi River and concrete levee walls in Algiers, Louisiana. During periods of high water or flooding, the river is sometimes at grade with the top of the levee. Source: Bill Feig, *The Advocate*

shifted course across the deltaic plain roughly every seven hundred to eight hundred years,⁹ unevenly depositing sediment that builds fertile land in some places and allows subsidence in others. Before 1900, Louisiana experienced a net gain in land, but channelizing the river caused coastal Louisiana communities to sink at an alarming rate as regenerative river sediment was propelled off the continental shelf.¹⁰

In recent decades, cities have been realizing the extent of the issues created through attempts at river control and taking steps to remedy the effects.¹¹ In Seoul, South Korea, the less-than-seven-mile long Cheonggyecheon River was part of a recent and significant urban renewal project. In the early 1900s, the river was channelized for sanitation reasons, and an elevated highway was eventually built above it.¹² As a result of these actions, the riparian corridor experienced decreased biodiversity, illegal dumping, major flooding, and higher temperatures due to heat island effect.¹³ In the early 2000s, a campaign was launched to promote removal of the elevated freeway and restoration of the stream through the creation of an ecological and recreational park¹⁴ (**figure 1-3**). This ecological restoration project has resulted in benefits including flood protection from a two-hundred-year flood event, increased biodiversity, reduced heat island effect, reductions in air pollution and rates of respiratory disease, and increased ridership of public transportation. There have been

9 Milton B. Newton, *Atlas of Louisiana; a Guide for Students* (Baton Rouge, LA: School of Geoscience, Louisiana State University, 1972), 24.

10 McPhee, "Atchafalaya."

11 Way, *River Cities, City Rivers*, 2.

12 "Visit Seoul—Cheonggyecheon," Home: Visit Seoul—The Official Travel Guide to Seoul, I Seoul U, February 13, 2019, accessed June 14, 2019, english.visitseoul.net/attractions/Cheonggyecheon-Stream/_35.

13 Lucy Wang, "How the Cheonggyecheon River Urban Design Restored the Green Heart of Seoul," Inhabitat Green Design Innovation Architecture Green Building, MH Sub I, LLC, November 18, 2014, accessed June 13, 2019, inhabitat.com/how-the-cheonggyecheon-river-urban-design-restored-the-green-heart-of-seoul/.

14 Wang, Lucy. "How the Cheonggyecheon River Urban Design Restored the Green Heart of Seoul."



FIGURE 1–3. View of the Cheonggyecheon Stream after removal of the elevated highway. Areas were built into the stream to slow water and support bird and aquatic biodiversity. Source: Alexander Robinson, published in “Cheonggyecheon Stream Restoration Project”

economic benefits as well, including increased spending from foreign tourists and increased property values.¹⁵

When river cities become stewards of their water resources—enacting sustainable practices along watercourses and “thinking of the city as a landscape”¹⁶—they reap tangible cultural and ecological benefits. Over 75 percent of the world’s population is projected to live in cities by 2035. Many challenges, such as energy and food supply shortages, water security issues, climate changes, poor air quality, and increased poverty and social equity issues, will be realized; these challenges are “embedded in urban systems and landscapes.”¹⁷

In San Antonio, these realities have been present for much of the city’s history, given that it was the largest city in Texas by 1920 and one of its oldest and most diverse municipalities. But the impacts are accelerating. San Antonio is the nation’s twenty-fourth-largest Standard Metropolitan Area. It is also currently the seventh most populous city in the country,¹⁸ and it continues to grow; social and environmental extremities are likely to continue impacting the city and its river.

15 “Cheonggyecheon Stream Restoration Project,” Landscape Performance Series, Landscape Architecture Foundation, July 16, 2018, accessed June 13, 2019, landscapeperformance.org/case-study-briefs/cheonggyecheon-stream-restoration.

16 Way, *River Cities, City Rivers*, 2.

17 Way, *River Cities, City Rivers*, 3.

18 Malda, “Landscape Narratives and the San Antonio River,” 243.

SAN ANTONIO AS A RIVER CITY

THE RIVER'S FORMATION

“San Antonio is a confluence of geologies, climates, and cultures”¹⁹ created by seismic activity that occurred in the area north of the city. The uplift of the limestone foundation created the rugged terrain known as the Balcones Escarpment. This is the fault line that delimits the boundary between the sub arid conditions of the Great Plains to the west and the subtropical conditions of the Coastal Plains in the east (**figure 1-1**). This same line separates the rugged Texas Hill Country from the flat and fertile Blackland Prairie. A micro example of these two different but abutting conditions can be experienced in Brackenridge Park. Although the escarpment is a geological feature, it is essential to San Antonio's experience of water. Fissures along the escarpment allow water to trickle down to the Edwards Aquifer below, creating the rechargeable source of water from which numerous springs, and the San Antonio River, flow.²⁰

EARLY RIVER INTERVENTIONS: SHAPING A CITY

San Antonio is the definition of a river city. The city has a three-hundred-year “heritage of simultaneously constructing the city and the river.”²¹ This has allowed for the development of management strategies that address both drought and deluge.

When Spanish settlers arrived in the region beginning around 1535, they found a climate not unlike that in some parts of Spain. Knowledgeable in the art of using scarce water resources for irrigation, they sought water before settling and then created a system of acequias.²² Construction of the acequias began in 1719 and represented the first interventions on the San Antonio River. The acequias drew water from the San Antonio River to missions as a source of irrigation and drinking water. When they were in use, growth of the city was based on access to the river.

As the city grew, bouts of cholera occurred in 1846, 1849, and 1866. The increased population meant increased water contamination and health risks, and this became the impetus for an important change. The city awarded a contract to the San Antonio Water Works Company in 1877, initiating the commercialization of the municipal water system. The Water Works Company, of which George Brackenridge was an original shareholder,²³ drilled deep artesian wells into the aquifer and installed the infrastructure that allowed water to be delivered through pipes to paying customers. The wells were so successful that they prompted other San Antonians, and many outside of Bexar County, to drill artesian wells that depleted the aquifer over the next thirty years. This remains a problem today, and as a result of over pumping and extended droughts, the springs are sometimes dry for years at a time.²⁴

Between 1890 and 1899, the shape of the city transformed from the use of long narrow plots to orthogonal street grids as the reliance on artesian wells became commonplace (**figure**

19 Malda, “Landscape Narratives and the San Antonio River,” 246.

20 Malda, “Landscape Narratives and the San Antonio River,” 249.

21 Malda, “Landscape Narratives and the San Antonio River,” 241.

22 Charles Porter Jr., *Spanish Water, Anglo Water: Early Development in San Antonio* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2009), 6-7.

23 Porter, *Spanish Water, Anglo Water*, 101.

24 Porter, *Spanish Water, Anglo Water*, 123.

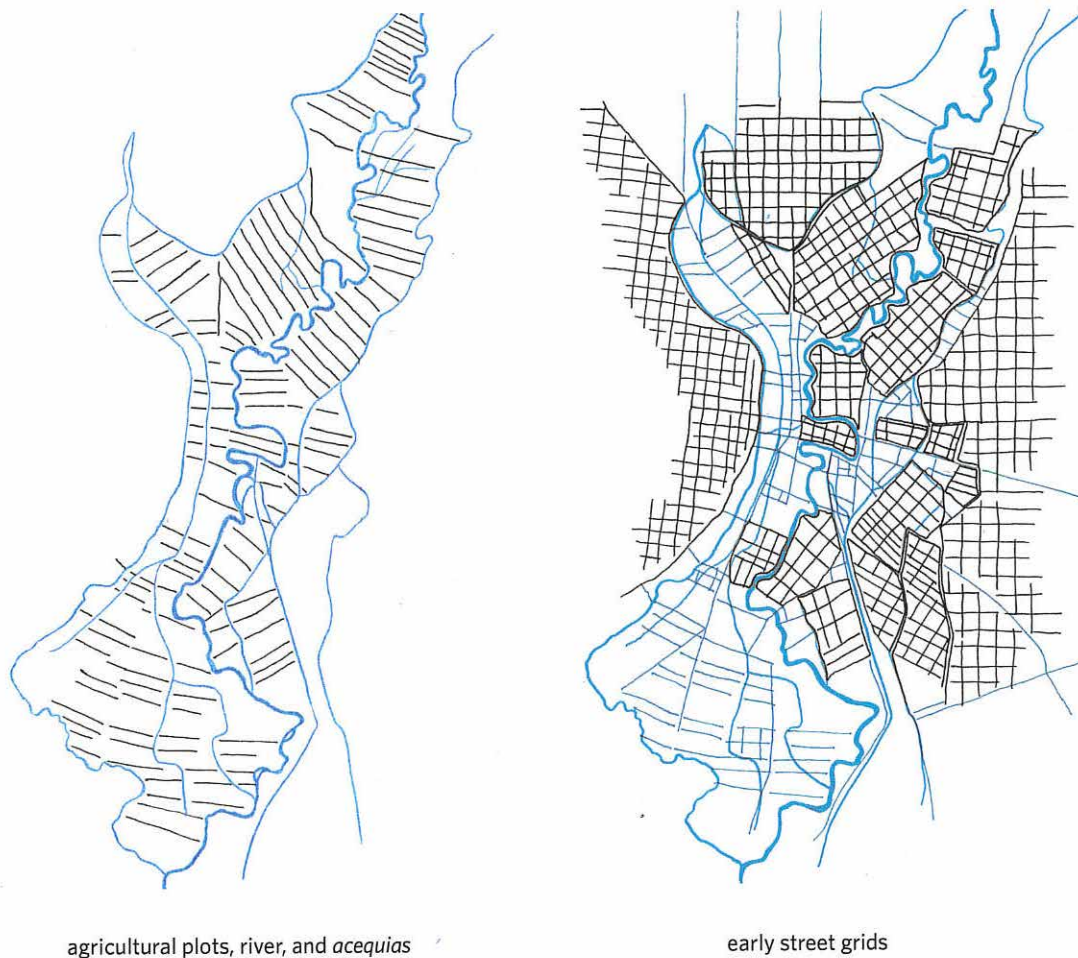


FIGURE 1-4. Two diagrams illustrate the 1890s transformation from long, narrow agricultural plots to an orthogonal grid system in San Antonio. In the diagram on the left, blue lines originating from the San Antonio River illustrate the location of acequias and dams that provided agricultural irrigation. Source: Reed Hilderbrand

1-4). Use of the acequias was discontinued beginning in 1899,²⁵ and the last acequia, the San Pedro, finally closed in September 1912.

TWENTIETH-CENTURY RIVER INTERVENTIONS: FLOODING, DROUGHT, AND TOURISM

Flooding due to heavy rain in 1913 and a catastrophic flood in 1921 had an entirely different impact on the city (**figure 1-5**). In the early 1900s, the slow-moving river became something that needed to be contained and controlled in an attempt to avoid future flooding.²⁶ The city commissioned an engineering study, and the initial intervention in 1924 was a retention dam on the Olmos Creek Basin. Afterward, the San Pedro and Alazán Creeks were cleared, straightened, and widened at the points where they met the San Antonio River south of the city. Bends in the San Antonio River at either end of the city were removed,²⁷ and in the “Great Bend” of the river, two 650-foot-long box culverts designed to catch flood overflow were installed.²⁸

25 Porter, *Spanish Water, Anglo Water*, 120.

26 Fisher, Lewis F. *Crown Jewel of Texas: the Story of San Antonio's River*. San Antonio, TX: Maverick Pub Co, 1997. 31-32.

27 Fisher, *Crown Jewel of Texas*, 1997. 42.

28 Fisher, *Crown Jewel of Texas*, 1997. 45.



FIGURE 1-5. Photo of downtown San Antonio after the flood of September 1921. Source: San Antonio River Authority, published in Lewis F. Fisher, *River Walk*



FIGURE 1-6. A dotted line shows the location of the cutoff channel that would be constructed along the San Antonio River to protect the Great Bend. This introduced a loop that would become the framework for the San Antonio River Walk. Source: Lewis F. Fisher, *River Walk*

A cutoff channel was constructed, which served to preserve the character of the Great Bend,²⁹ and also allowed for the diversion of floodwaters during extreme rain events and the potential flooding that would have resulted without the cutoff channel. The Great Bend and cutoff became a circular route, and this eventually became the framework around which the San Antonio River Walk formed (**figure 1-6**). The cutoff enabled businesses to be on the river without fear of flooding.³⁰ Beautification and the creation of an identity for San Antonio were factored in after these major flood-reduction infrastructures were completed.³¹

Between periods of flooding, water shortages remained an issue. As a result of both drought and artesian wells pulling water from the Edwards Aquifer, the river and springs stopped flowing. The city intervened around 1928 by installing pumps on abandoned wells, extracting water, and redirecting it for use within the city.³² The River Walk, first proposed in 1929 by architect Robert Hugman and conceived of as a tourist attraction, was constructed beginning in 1939 as a Works Progress Administration project³³ (**figure 1-7**).

This is the city experience that most visitors to San Antonio still encounter. Tourists see a consistently flowing river along the River Walk, but San Antonians experience daily reports of declining aquifer levels.³⁴ The lively shops, restaurants, and activities along the five-mile stretch belie the reality of drought concerns and the legacy of water conservation efforts within the city. In 1997, the San Antonio River Tunnel became operational, and it prevented what would probably have been major flooding throughout downtown and surrounding areas in October of the next year³⁵ (**figure 1-8**).

As scientific research progresses, more is learned about the outcomes of heavily engineering water bodies, and this is transforming the types of river interventions completed today and planned for the future. Despite human efforts toward control and conservation of the San Antonio River, larger ecological forces as well as human intervention have had a great impact on the river and its primary source, the Edwards Aquifer.

29 Malda, "Landscape Narratives and the San Antonio River," 253.

30 Malda, "Landscape Narratives and the San Antonio River," 253.

31 Malda, "Landscape Narratives and the San Antonio River," 253.

32 Malda, "Landscape Narratives and the San Antonio River," 250-52.

33 Malda, "Landscape Narratives and the San Antonio River," 253.

34 Malda, "Landscape Narratives and the San Antonio River," 241.

35 "The People's Waterway," San Antonio River Improvements Project, San Antonio River Authority, accessed June 8, 2019, sanantonioriver.org/riverhistory/history.php.



FIGURE 1-7. A promotional plan of the San Antonio River Walk, proposed in 1929 by architect Robert Hugman. It was first conceived of as a tourist attraction called Shops of Aragon. It was constructed beginning in 1939 as a WPA project. Source: San Antonio Conservation Society, published in Lewis F. Fisher, *River Walk*



FIGURE 1–8. Photo of Inlet Tunnel flood control structure at Josephine Street. The structure became operational in 1997 and prevented a major flood the following year. Source: Reed Hilderbrand

Looking Ahead

From small missionary outpost to large urban city, San Antonio's identity and function have shifted drastically, as have those of its river.³⁶ Yet the San Antonio River continues to be a "central element in local identity and survival."³⁷ Cultural preservation and ecological conservation and development of the Brackenridge Park landscape must remain in tune with the river. Forward-thinking ecological restoration measures grounded in the site's unique regional character present an opportunity to heal the landscape's riparian corridor and to interpret stories related to the city's origins that are not yet apparent to visitors or locals. This is essential in formulating the next phase of San Antonio's identity as an increasingly diverse and progressive urban River City.

36 Malda, "Landscape Narratives and the San Antonio River," 243.

37 Malda, "Landscape Narratives and the San Antonio River," 241.

CHAPTER 2. NEW DIRECTIONS IN PRESERVATION

San Antonio's preservation and conservation efforts have a long history. These efforts have always succeeded in being ahead of their time, in that the city recognized the need early in the twentieth century to both preserve its cultural heritage and to prioritize environmental stewardship of the San Antonio River. The San Antonio Conservation Society, founded in 1924, was one of the first preservation groups in the United States that organized with the intent of preserving not just a landmark but also the historic landscape surrounding it as well as the region's historic natural environment.¹ This was a radical and progressive departure from other early preservation groups. Likewise, the San Antonio River Authority (SARA), founded in 1937 to oversee and protect the San Antonio River, is an early example of legislated protection for a natural asset; SARA arose out of 1917 state legislation geared toward the protection of Texas's water resources after severe flooding in 1913 and 1914. To understand San Antonio's unique situation as a city steeped in forward-thinking preservation approaches, it is useful to understand the evolution of preservation at the national level.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION AS AN AMERICAN ACTIVITY

As early as the mid-1800s and as America continued to mature as a nation, citizens developed a concern for maintaining a sense of cultural connection. Out of this arose the historic preservation movement. Its history can be viewed in chronological stages according to what kind of resource was being protected:

- a. Individual buildings associated with historic persons and events intended to inspire patriotism (purchase of Mount Vernon by private women's group in 1856)
- b. Places of high aesthetic value (formation of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities [SPNEA] in 1910)

¹ Lewis F. Fisher, *Saving San Antonio: The Preservation of a Heritage*, 2nd ed. (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2016), 95.

- c. Historic environments in their entirety as the setting for historic sites and buildings as well as a means of preserving a way of life (Rockefeller begins development of Colonial Williamsburg in 1927)
- d. Historic neighborhoods in order to maintain integrity of urban areas, using municipal historic district designation (in Charleston in 1931, in Vieux Carré New Orleans in 1937)
- e. Urban districts, Main Streets, entire historic cities and towns, adaptive reuse, and economic benefits of preservation (federal urban renewal in the 1950s and 1960s catalyzed efforts such as NTHP Main Street Center in 1977, NPS standards for treatment of historic properties in 1995)

Each of these transitions in the evolution of American preservation has come with a broadening of the subjects to be protected. In 1990, James Marston Fitch recognized this broadening in his book *Historic Preservation: Curatorial Management of the Built World*, writing,

From an emphasis on buildings, they [preservationists] have come to understand the equal importance of the gardens, open spaces, and streets around them—that is, of the connective tissue that binds the built world into an organic, life-sustaining whole.

In addition, the following excerpts on preservation demonstrate the expansion from preservation of the past to the present. In 1965, Charles B. Hosmer Jr. wrote in *Presence of the Past* that

even in the early period before the Civil War there is abundant evidence of an emergent national consciousness that caused some individuals to look upon the preservation of historic sites as a sign of cultural maturity.

In Hosmer's two volumes documenting the history of the preservation movement in America through the 1960s, neither San Antonio nor any properties there are listed in the index, suggesting that what was happening in San Antonio was little known to the national preservation community. Instead, the book primarily focuses on work being done on the eastern seaboard and its colonial period, the rural plantations of the Deep South, and the California missions.

Forty-four years later, architectural historian John Stubbs wrote in his book *Time Honored* that

the sense of one's physical position and place in time is in large part based on historic places, whether they are individual buildings, or entire cities, or the countries in which they are situated.

Moreover, in the same book Stubbs referred to the San Antonio River Walk as “one of the first American projects of this type,” demonstrating smart-growth planning and how “the vision of one architect backed by a whole community” was realized. He praised the project, stating, “over thirty years later, it is more successful than ever”² (**figure 2-1**).

² John H. Stubbs, *Time Honored: a Global View of Architectural Conservation*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2009.

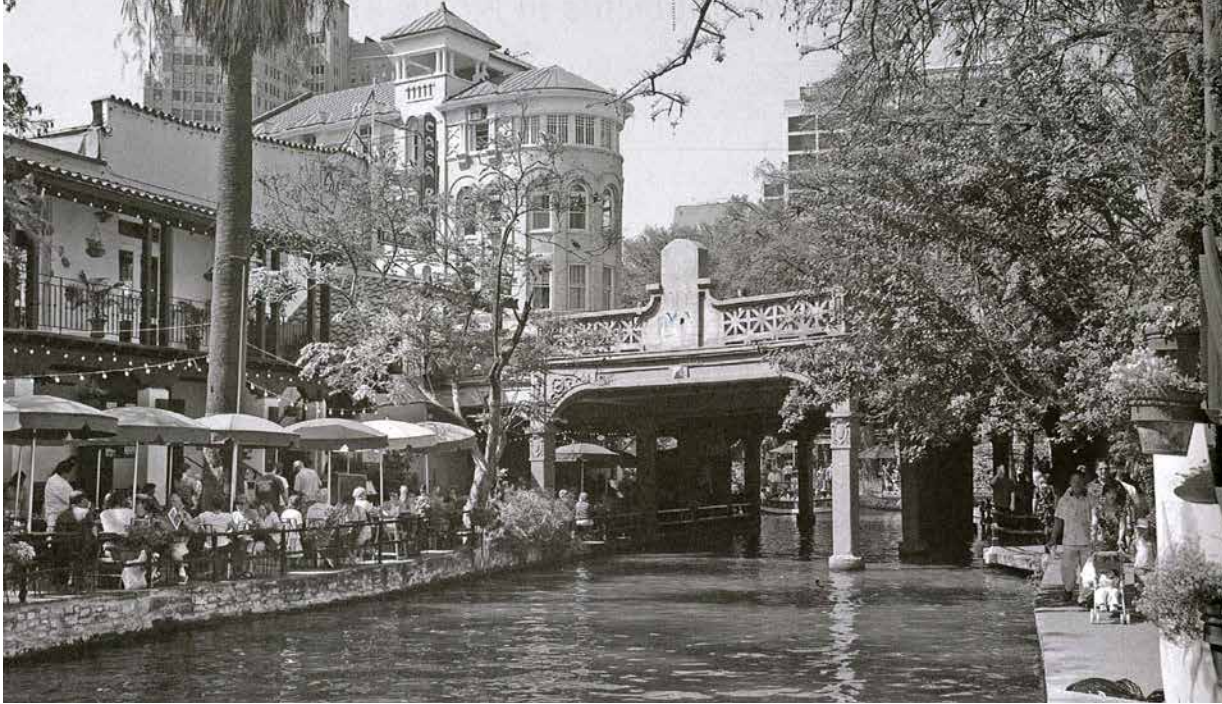


FIGURE 2-1. Pictured is the San Antonio River Walk in the first decade of the 2000s. John Stubbs wrote that the WPA-era project demonstrated “the vision of one architect backed by a whole community,” and noted that it has remained successful. Source: John Stubbs, *Time Honored*

Of great importance to this CLR, the maturation of preservation has been marked by the “entry of professionals (architects, landscape architects, art historians, archaeologists) into the field which hitherto had been filled almost exclusively by antiquarians: that is, by laymen who, whatever their training or erudition in other fields, were usually amateurs” in the area of buildings and landscapes, and almost all were volunteers.³ Today, each of these disciplines offers academic concentrations in preservation, and several universities and research institutions have developed preservation degree options or certification programs. Because of these advances, it is a fortunate time to tackle the complexity of a resource such as Brackenridge Park.

SAN ANTONIO’S EARLY COLONIAL HISTORY AND PRESERVATION

Preservation in San Antonio, as in America, continues to evolve and mature. The early formation of governmental and nonprofit preservation entities in the city to serve as stewards for natural and cultural resources continues to impact the city today. Lewis Fisher’s 2016 *Saving San Antonio* chronicles the events and persons who introduced the concept of preservation to San Antonio. The city’s story offers several unique aspects in its approach that are only now being embraced in the larger national arena.

San Antonio is known for its history and architecture and the tourism that these generate. The Spanish roots of the city are self-evident in its name. Other aspects of its history and culture are less well-known. Over time, many of its historic and cultural resources have been threatened, and some have been lost. When one considers the several high-growth periods in the city’s history, it is surprising that so much of the community’s historic fabric survives.

3 James Marston Fitch, *Historic Preservation: Curatorial Management of the Built World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1990), ix.



FIGURE 2-2. Photo of the Alamo, circa 1900s, the first public landmark preserved west of the Mississippi River. In *Saving San Antonio*, Lewis Fisher wrote, “Preservation of no landmark in America can equal that of the Alamo in depth of symbolism, breadth of players and sheer drama.” Source: Collection of Wallace L. McKeehan, Sons of DeWitt Colony Texas

Each city tackles the need and impulse to preserve differently, and how a city chooses to do so reveals a great deal about its character and values. The following section surveys the growth of the preservation movement in San Antonio. This overview suggests why the concern for the current condition and future of Brackenridge has finally emerged as a subject that matters greatly to the San Antonio community.

Gandhi said that “the greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.” One could easily substitute “community” for “nation” and “culture” for “animals,” and the sentiment would still stand. San Antonio’s approach to the preservation of its culture is indicative of how values have shifted and how the practice of preservation has evolved along with the city.

If we survey how preservation has shaped the San Antonio landscape of today and how San Antonio has developed its own particular approach to the topic, we can see that in general, the milestones in local activity have reflected most of the national trends. Certainly, the initial outcry to save the Alamo is reflective of the urge to save places important to the founding fathers and patriots, and nowhere was this urge for independence better represented than at the Alamo (**figure 2-2**). The shrine’s interface with downtown San Antonio has been through many iterations and continues to be a lightning rod for debate. But the basic compunction to save the building and its surroundings was an early cause for citizen involvement and, like the drive to save Mount Vernon, was accomplished primarily by local women.

The 1877 arrival of the railroad in San Antonio connected the place and its people to the rest of the nation. San Antonians began to travel farther and see the efforts that were beginning to cement the identities of their counterpart historic American cities. They also traveled to Europe, where they witnessed the use of dedicated historic districts to save centuries of culture and facilitate sensitive layering of various periods of architecture. San Antonians began to take note of the value of their home city. With progress came business, construction, and competition for strategic locations, many of which were occupied by early buildings from the earliest settlements and urbanization. As Fisher so aptly puts it,

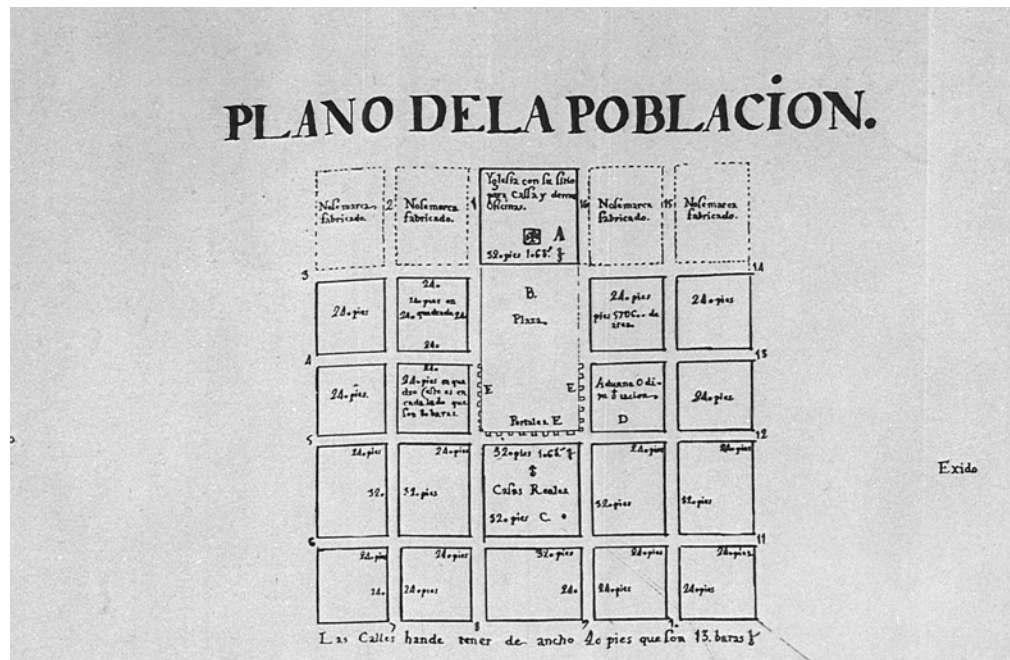


FIGURE 2-3. An original plan of the pueblo of San Fernando, in Spain, demonstrates an example of a Laws of the Indies town. Rectangular blocks are arranged around the plaza, the church, and royal house fronting the plaza. Note the narrow streets in response to the hot climate. Source: John Reys, *The Making of Urban America*, Figure 17

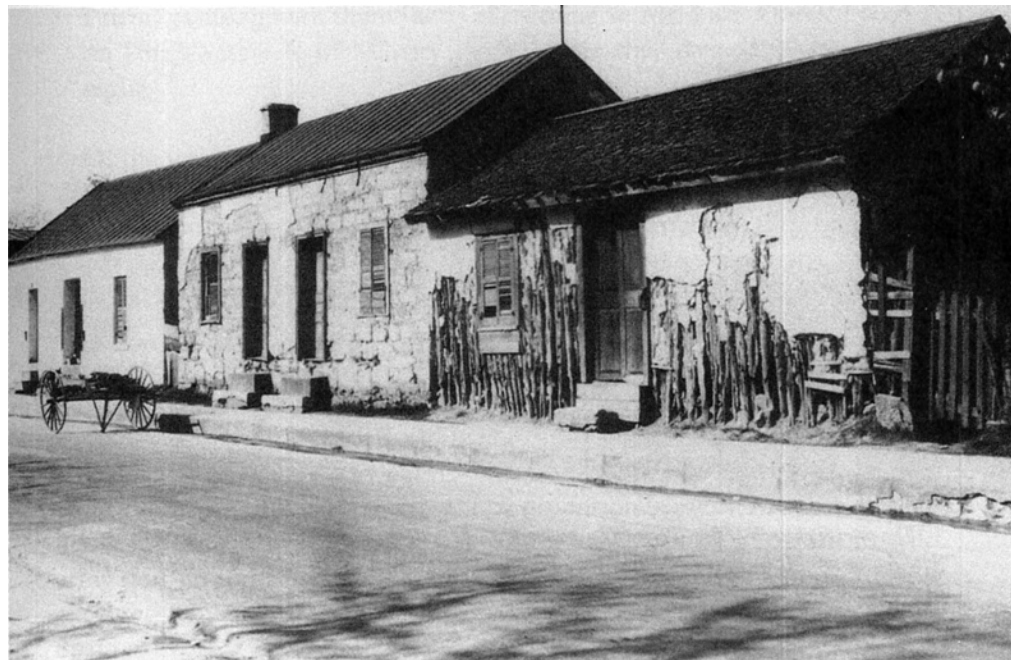


FIGURE 2-4. A photo of houses that once stood on Laredo Street illustrates San Antonio's early architecture. Plastered adobe is seen at the left; flaking plaster revealing caliche blocks underneath is seen in center; and on the right, mud and plaster are seen falling away from indigenous palisade, or vertical log construction. Source: Witte Museum Collection, published in Lewis F. Fisher, *American Venice*

Travelers, who once claimed to think they were in Italy rather than in Texas and who marveled over the mix of cultures and “confusion of unknown tongues,” now began to warn local residents about the value of what San Antonio had to lose by becoming a modern city.⁴

The urban plan of the city embedded its European roots and also impacted its later preservation. The first settlers laid out San Antonio according to the Law of the Indies developed by Spanish monarch Philip II in 1573 (**figure 2-3**). Plazas organized the plan and provided space for military festivals. Because of the hot climate, the streets were to be narrow in order to minimize exposure to direct sun.⁵ (This provision would create a dilemma several centuries later for those trying to save the earliest structures.) The first structures were primarily flat-roofed and constructed of cedar logs covered with adobe or lime plaster.⁶ These early adobes, built right up to the sidewalk or street edge, became the first preservation battles (**figure 2-4**).

The Spanish presence in the area is attributable to the San Antonio River, which served as a spine along which colonial settlers could establish agriculture and grazing. Many locals and tourists alike do not realize that the water and land rights distribution system had been brought to Spain by the Moors, who in turn, beginning around 1719, translated the idea to this area of New Spain by building a system of “eight engineered acequias [and] hand dug ditches which diverted water from the river for nearly two hundred years.”⁷

Lacking settlers for the new area, the Spanish established a system of missions along the river in order to convert the Indigenous Americans. San Antonio has the nation’s largest grouping of Spanish missions, with four along the river south of town, and the church of the fifth, now the Alamo, in the heart of the city⁸ (**figure 2-5**). Although San Antonio was initially the most important settlement in Texas, later it struggled because of its isolated location, making



FIGURE 2-5. Contemporary map of the system of Spanish missions developed along the San Antonio River, built with the intent of converting Indigenous people to Catholicism. Source: Texas Beyond History, Texas Archaeological Research Laboratory, University of Texas at Austin

4 Fisher, *Saving San Antonio*, 13.

5 Fisher, *Saving San Antonio*, 18.

6 Fisher, *Saving San Antonio*, 19.

7 Fisher, *Saving San Antonio*, 17.

8 Fisher, *Saving San Antonio*, 14.



FIGURE 2-6. 1857 painting entitled “Crockett Street Looking West,” by German-born painter Karl Friedrich Hermann Lungkwitz. San Antonio’s early urban character is conveyed through unpaved roads, varied fence types, and the allotment of open yards behind houses providing space for kitchen gardens, cows, and other domestic animals. Source: Witte Museum Collection

market access difficult. The missions, initially successful, began to fail after several decades, because the Indigenous population was decimated by disease epidemics to which they had no immunity and because the Catholic faith was so alien to their animistic belief system. Moreover, it was natural that the Indigenous population resisted colonial occupation and settlement. As Fisher writes, “Between 1793 and 1824...all missions were gradually closed and their lands secularized.”⁹ This left the future of some of the nation’s most significant and historic architectural and landscape complexes in jeopardy.

New American colonists were led to San Antonio at the end of 1820 as a buffer to the Indigenous resistance and territorial expansion by Comanche people. By 1835, the residents of San Antonio felt that the Mexican government, led by Santa Anna, was grabbing more power and compromising their freedoms, and the battle of the Alamo ensued in 1836. Despite having established the Republic of Texas, the community continued to be pummeled both by Comanche and Mexican forces. By the time the United States had finalized annexation of Texas, the colonially descended population had been cut in half, and “future president Rutherford B. Hayes...described San Antonio simply as an ‘old, ruined Spanish town.’”¹⁰

The following decade redefined the city, with “immigrants pouring in, forming their own communities in the shadow of the surviving Spanish culture.... Unrest in Germany in particular drew disenchanted intellectuals accustomed to an urban environment, and German superseded Spanish as San Antonio’s dominant language.” By the time of the Civil War the German population had grown to eight thousand¹¹ (figure 2-6).

9 Fisher, *Saving San Antonio*, 21.

10 Fisher, *Saving San Antonio*, 25.

11 Fisher, *Saving San Antonio*, 25.



FIGURE 2-7. Headquarters of the San Antonio Conservation Society are located in the Anton Wulff House in the King William District. The home was built between 1869 to 1870 by German immigrant Anton Wulff, who became the city's first park commissioner. The organization saved the house from demolition and restored it in 1974. Source: San Antonio Conservation Society

This capsule of San Antonio, from its early settlement to the end of the 1800s, illustrates the complexity of its evolution into an American place as well as the layering of cultures that assimilated to form the distinctive character that has come to define it.

San Antonio's participation in what we call preservation today had from the outset a marriage of the built and the natural environment, as specified in the mission of the San Antonio Conservation Society from its founding in 1924 (**figure 2-7**). Whereas several of the earlier concerns were for threatened historic structures, the disastrous flood of 1921 seemed to impress upon leaders and citizens alike that the fate of this place that the Spanish colonized because of its water resources would need to always consider the symbiotic relationship between the waters of the San Antonio River and the civilization that it had spawned (**figure 2-8**).

The other distinctive quality of the preservation movement in San Antonio is that from its beginnings, those who did the hard work, formerly and fondly referred to as “little old ladies in tennis shoes,” not only recognized the inherent value of the cultural layering that created the city but also were determined to keep the physical evidences of these various cultures and, more importantly, the intangible exuberance of the resultant diverse population. Fisher describes the first generation of women who led the movement: well educated, well traveled, and ready to participate as equal citizens as voters, as teachers, as artists, and as social workers.

Vigorous and imaginative, these women and their future compatriots did not need more admonitions on the uniqueness of their city from cosmopolitan travelers, warnings which in the previous century fell on deaf ears locally anyway. They felt its charm instinctively. The entire mix of their cultures was their birthright, the soul of their home city, and



FIGURE 2–8. Navarro Street after 1921 flood, the worst flood on record in San Antonio in terms of loss of life and property. Note the mesquite block paving floating. Source: *San Antonio Express-News* Archives.

it was not to be taken away. Their goal became the saving not only of landmarks but of traditions and ambience and natural features as well, the preservation of no less than San Antonio's entire historic cultural and natural environment.¹²

In 1964 the city of San Antonio reached a critical point in its progression to a mature American city at which preservation and conservation had seats at the table. They applied to the National Trust for Historic Preservation to host their annual meeting, and it was held to great success. From that point on, the community of preservationists in America gained an immense respect for the accomplishments of the leadership of San Antonio in both the public and private sectors. There, the union of nature and culture was at the heart of decision-making. Although national events, such as urban renewal and the interstate highway system, have challenged the determination of preservationists, the net result has been a community that is singular because of its deep cultural roots and the respect it has for those roots.

It is equally important, however, to point to the typically European and colonial focus of preserved histories. This CLR attempts to move the needle. It formalizes an acknowledgment that Brackenridge Park contains an untapped opportunity to recenter local research and interpretation of Indigenous and Mexican origins and perspectives as well as African American perspectives and to recenter local research and interpretation of the historic and lasting impacts this cultural diversity has had on the landscape.

¹² Fisher, *Saving San Antonio*, 92.

NEW DIRECTIONS IN PRESERVATION IN SAN ANTONIO

With an established legacy of preservation, where can San Antonio's preservation community go next? Committing resources to historic diversity and to inclusive interpretation is one new direction. There are also many different ways to designate and protect cultural, historic, and natural assets, ranging from international to local programs. One recent and significant outcome of San Antonio's preservation movement is that in 2015, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) bestowed the honor of a World Heritage Site designation on the San Antonio Missions, elevating the city's significance to the international level. Brackenridge Park has been on the National Register of Historic Places since 2011, distinguishing this landscape as significant at the local and state levels.

Often, cultural assets overlap in terms of historical and/or environmental relationships. With vision and leadership in place, municipalities and local stewards can leverage these relationships toward longer-term preservation and environmental health efforts and to meet economic goals for their cities. To begin discussion regarding this opportunity in San Antonio, it is helpful to understand the designations that currently exist in the city, to consider their potential relationships, and to consider designations that do not currently exist in the city.

UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES

UNESCO is an intergovernmental organization established after World War II to "promote peace and change the minds of men,"¹³ and it is often perceived as the "cultural arm" of the United Nations.¹⁴ The UNESCO designation is the global standard for recognizing sites that contain a unique archaeological heritage, and it is thought to be a universal tool for preservation and cultural memory and a driver for development, peace, and intercultural dialogue.¹⁵ Sites are "selected on the basis of six cultural and four natural criteria,"¹⁶ which are not limited to archaeological significance but cover a wide range. To be included on the list, "sites must be of outstanding universal value and meet at least one" of the ten selection criteria.¹⁷ The San Antonio Missions were successfully nominated because they met three of the ten criteria:

Criterion (ii): exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design

Criterion (iii): bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared

13 Lynn Meskell, "UNESCO's World Heritage Convention at 40: Challenging the Economic and Political Order of International Heritage Conservation," *Current Anthropology* 54, no. 4 (2013): 483-94, [jstor.org/stable/10.1086/671136](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/671136). 484.

14 Meskell, "UNESCO's World Heritage Convention at 40," 485.

15 Meskell, "UNESCO's World Heritage Convention at 40," 492.

16 "World Heritage List Nominations," UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed June 12, 2019, whc.unesco.org/en/nominations/.

17 "World Heritage List Nominations," UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed June 12, 2019, whc.unesco.org/en/nominations/.

Criterion (iv): be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history¹⁸

The Nomination for Inscription summarized the justification for including the San Antonio Missions on this prestigious list as follows:

Closely located along a 12.4-kilometer (7.7-mile) stretch of the San Antonio River basin in southern Texas are five Spanish colonial mission complexes built in the early eighteenth century. According to the Laws of the Indies, missions were required to be at least one day's ride apart, but for various reasons the Franciscan missionaries established the San Antonio Missions closer together than is found anywhere else in the Spanish colonial empire. In spite of their proximity to each other, each mission was planned to be able to succeed on its own and to prepare for eventual secularization....

The resulting ensemble is the most complete and intact example of the Spanish Crown's efforts to colonize, evangelize, and defend the northern frontier of New Spain during the period when Spain controlled the largest empire in the world....

At the heart of the missions are the substantial remains of extensive water distribution systems whose acequias carry the San Antonio River's waters to irrigate nearby labores. These irrigation systems supported a secure source of food for the inhabitants and provided agricultural surpluses that were sold or traded for other goods, giving the missions agricultural and financial independence.... These water distribution systems eminently illustrate an exceptionally important interchange between indigenous peoples, missionaries, and colonizers that contributed to a fundamental and permanent change in the cultures and values of all involved.¹⁹

18 "San Antonio Missions: Nomination for Inscription on the World Heritage List PDF," 159-61, San Antonio, TX, January 2014, whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/1466.pdf.

19 "San Antonio Missions: Nomination for Inscription on the World Heritage List PDF," 158, San Antonio, TX, January 2014, whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/1466.pdf."

San Antonio's Acequias 1778

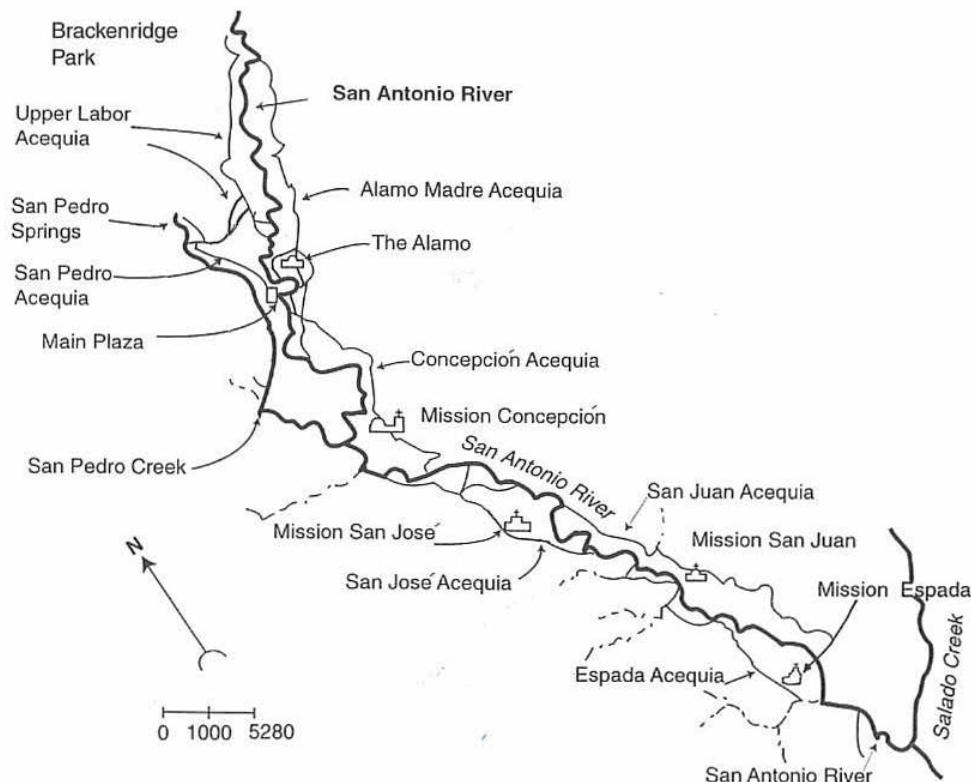


FIGURE 2-9. Illustration of San Antonio's acequia and mission system by 1778, when acequias were used for secular development. Brackenridge Park is labeled at the northern portion of the map. Source: Frank Himes, published in Frank W. Jennings, *San Antonio: the Story of an Enchanted City*

In July 2015, when the United Nations voted to make the San Antonio Missions a World Heritage Site, it became the first in Texas.²⁰ The eighteenth-century sites were built by Franciscan missionaries and demonstrate both the Spanish Crown's colonization, evangelization, and defense efforts and the interweaving of Spanish and Indigenous cultures within the San Antonio River basin. The five missions were founded independently, but together they illustrate a common approach to water distribution, defense, food production, and other activities necessary for colonization, evangelization, and secularization²¹ (**figures 2-9 and 2-10**).

As of this writing, there are twenty-three World Heritage Sites in the United States. The website WorldAtlas say that "of these, ten are cultural, one is mixed, and twelve are natural sites, with most of them being national parks."²² Neither Brackenridge Park nor the approximately twenty-mile length of the San Antonio River from its headwaters to the San Antonio Mission Park are in the UNESCO designation. In other words, a formal recognition of the relationship between the park site and the missions has not been made—this presents

20 Press Release. "United Nations Declares San Antonio's Spanish Missions a World Heritage Site." National Parks Conservation Association, July 6, 2015, accessed June 02, 2019, nps.org/articles/538-united-nations-declares-san-antonio-s-spanish-missions-a-world-heritage

21 "San Antonio Missions," UNESCO World Heritage List, UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed June 2, 2019, whc.unesco.org/en/list/1466.

22 "UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the USA," WorldAtlas.com, March 5, 2019, accessed June 12, 2019, worldatlas.com/articles/unesco-world-heritage-sites-in-the-united-states-of-america.html.

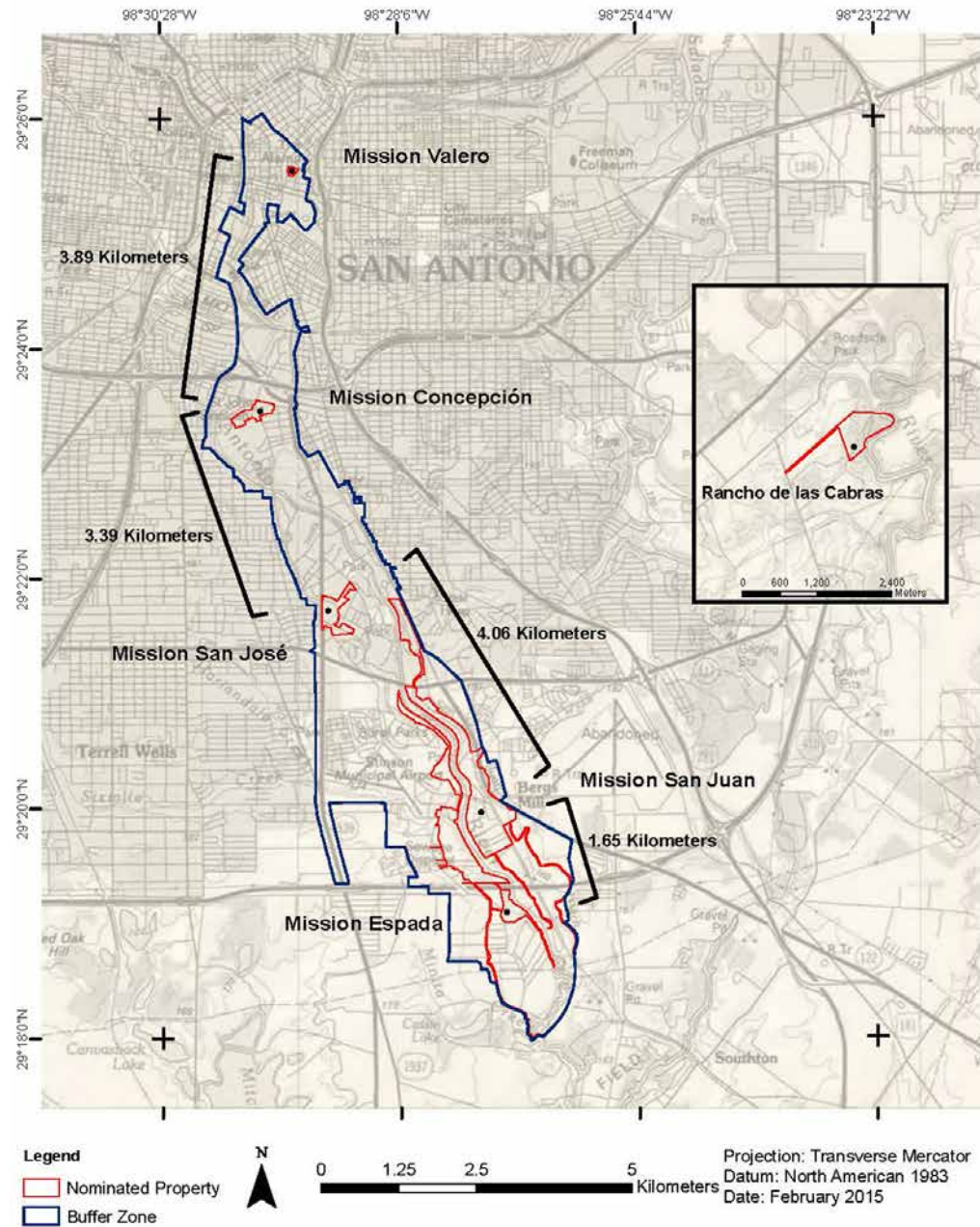


FIGURE 2-10. A map shows the San Antonio missions property included in the UNESCO World Heritage Site Nomination. The nomination began at Mission Valero (later the Alamo), but did not extend north to Brackenridge Park, where the acequia that served the Mission Valero began. Source: "San Antonio Missions: Nomination for Inscription on the World Heritage List"

both a gap and a path forward for San Antonio's preservation record. That path may not lie within the criteria of the World Heritage Sites, but the UNESCO designation provides an important building block.



FIGURE 2–11. A 2013 excavation of the original Alamo dam that diverted water from the San Antonio River to the Acequia Madre de Valero to deliver water to the mission-turned-fort (Alamo). Source: Darren Abate, *San Antonio Express-News*.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Another building block is the presence of sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In the state of Texas, there are over 3,300 sites listed at the time of this writing, and within San Antonio, there are 138 individual listings.²³ The National Register of Historic Places (National Register) was created by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. This database records and recognizes places “worthy of preservation,”²⁴ and it is maintained by the National Park Service. This program was designed to protect the nation’s historic and archaeological resources²⁵ by encouraging preservation and reuse of historic properties. It was initiated during the 1960s, when urban renewal federal funding prioritized both new highways and suburbs and the demolition of older buildings and neighborhoods.²⁶

The 2011 National Register Nomination for Brackenridge Park states that the park meets three of the four criteria—among these is Criterion D: “Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important to prehistory or history.”²⁷ The National Register Nomination elaborates on this criterion, noting that it is significant for the collection of Prehistoric-Aboriginal archaeology that encompasses Paleoindian (12,500-8,800 BCE), Early to Late Archaic (8,800-1,200 BCE), and Late Prehistoric (1,200-350 BCE) periods as well as archaeological deposits from the Spanish colonial period through the twentieth century.²⁸

23 “National Register of Historic Places Listings in Bexar County, Texas,” Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, September 16, 2019, Accessed November 2, 2019, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Register_of_Historic_Places_listings_in_Bexar_County,_Texas.

24 “National Register of Historic Places: FAQs,” National Parks Service, US Department of the Interior, accessed June 10, 2019, nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/faqs.htm.

25 “National Register of Historic Places: FAQs,” National Parks Service, US Department of the Interior, accessed June 10, 2019, nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/faqs.htm.

26 Fisher, *Saving San Antonio*, 7.

27 Maria Watson Pfeiffer and Steven A. Tomka, “Brackenridge Park,” National Register of Historic Places, Texas Historical Commission, San Antonio, TX, June 15, 2011, 3.

28 Pfeiffer and Tomka, “Brackenridge Park,” 8.

In layman's terms, the archaeological investigations at Brackenridge Park "have produced evidence of human visitation and occupation extending back 11,000 years," with prehistoric sites having been "identified north of the park in Olmos Basin, at the headwaters of the San Antonio River, in the park itself, and south of the park."²⁹

One example of this archaeological heritage was discovered in 2013 on the grounds of the Witte Museum in Brackenridge Park. There, a team of University of Texas at San Antonio archaeologists unearthed remnants of the Acequia Madre de Valero, originally constructed between 1718–1719 to divert water from the San Antonio River to the Mission San Antonio de Valero—the first of San Antonio's missions to be established. A *San Antonio Express* article published on May 2, 2013, noted that "the dam is the oldest unearthed in San Antonio,"³⁰ and this remains true today (**figure 2-11**).

Many other sites on the National Register are located in the vicinity of Brackenridge Park and the San Antonio Missions, including the Alamo and the Alamo Plaza Historic District, the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, the San Antonio Downtown River Walk Historic District, the Espada Aqueduct, Miraflores Park, and San Pedro Springs Park.³¹ When the astounding archaeological heritage of Brackenridge Park, including the fact that the upper course of the San Antonio River occurs in the park and is the location at which the first missionary acequia was built, is considered collectively with its neighboring National Register sites and with the UNESCO World Heritage Site (which also enjoys a National Register listing), the city's larger preservation story, including its gaps, begins to unfold.

NATIONAL HERITAGE AREAS

National Heritage Areas (NHAs) are yet another designation for cultural assets within a city, and they may hold the key to unlocking the city's next entrance into preservation and the protection of ecological resources. The National Park Service defines an NHA as

a place designated by Congress where natural, cultural, historic and scenic resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally distinctive landscape arising from patterns of human activity shaped by geography. These patterns make National Heritage Areas representative of the national experience through the physical features that remain and the traditions that have evolved in them. Continued use of National Heritage Areas by people whose traditions helped to shape the landscapes enhances their Significance.³²

Although San Antonio has one UNESCO World Heritage Site and numerous National Register sites, there are no National Heritage Areas in the entire state of Texas.

²⁹ Pfeiffer and Tomka, "Brackenridge Park," 29.

³⁰ Scott Huddleston, "Long-Buried Parts of Acequia Unearthed," *San Antonio Express*, May 2, 2013, accessed June 13, 2019, [sfchronicle.com/news/local/article/Long-buried-parts-of-acequia-unearthed-4484433.php](https://www.sfbay.com/news/local/article/Long-buried-parts-of-acequia-unearthed-4484433.php).

³¹ "National Register of Historic Places Listings in Bexar County, Texas," Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, October 23, 2019, accessed November 1, 2019, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Register_of_Historic_Places_listings_in_Bexar_County,_Texas.

³² "National Heritage Area Feasibility Study Guidelines," 2, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, August 2003, accessed June 06, 2019, [nps.gov/subjects/heritageareas/feasibility-studies.htm](https://www.nps.gov/subjects/heritageareas/feasibility-studies.htm).

As of March 15, 2019, Congress has designated fifty-five NHAs throughout the country, including within Texas's bordering states of Louisiana, Arkansas, and New Mexico. NHAs provide long-term benefits such as sustainable economic development, healthier environments and people, improved quality of life, increased community engagement, and the opportunity for education and stewardship.³³

The first NHA was realized under the Reagan administration in 1984. The general attitude under this administration, which came to leadership in 1980, was that governmental regulation was an impediment rather than a benefit, with Reagan declaring, "government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem."³⁴ In the arenas of preservation and conservation, this outlook propelled the creation of a type of park that prioritized partnerships and management by multiple owners at both state and local levels, as opposed to the traditional National Park Service (NPS) model that is owned and operated by the federal government.³⁵ The outcome was legislation creating the Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor that paved the way for future NHAs. The overall site today spans an eight-hundred and sixty-two mile region, from Chicago to the Illinois River, and includes areas that are rural, urban, industrial, and governmental. The scale of this project and the ability to create multijurisdictional collaboration became emblematic of future NHAs.

The NPS—formally established in 1916, with Yosemite recognized as a national park in 1890, prior to the formation of the NPS—emerged from an era when people viewed governmental regulation more favorably than it would come to be viewed during the Reagan era. Therefore, the major administrative difference between national parks and NHAs is that whereas the NPS is responsible for taking care of the resources that Congress has declared to be important to the nation's heritage, the people who live in the region are responsible for protecting an NHA, with some assistance from NPS.³⁶

NHAs are also different from other landscape conservation efforts because they are specifically designed to benefit local communities. This can take the shape of economic development or conservation of locally/culturally valued resources.³⁷ Traditional NHAs include watersheds, regional landscapes tied to a distinctive culture, political subdivisions, as well as working landscapes and "worked-out" landscapes (such as an abandoned mine).³⁸ These are "lived-in landscapes,"³⁹ whether they have been "worked" or "lived in" previously or whether they are still integral to daily human commerce, recreation, and social and political systems. This is another way that national parks and NHAs differ. The main component of an NHA is the people who helped define its culture and those who are bearers of the region's history and its future.⁴⁰ This is key, because NHAs are often realized due to the efforts of local residents,⁴¹ and they are not controlled by NPS in the traditional top-

33 "What Is a National Heritage Area?," National Park Service, US Department of the Interior, May 29, 2018, accessed June 02, 2019, nps.gov/articles/what-is-a-national-heritage-area.htm.

34 Brenda Barrett and Eleanor Mahoney, "National Heritage Areas: Learning from 30 Years of Working to Scale," *The George Wright Forum* 33, no. 2 (2016): 164, [jstor.org/stable/44131249](https://www.jstor.org/stable/44131249).

35 Barrett and Mahoney, "30 Years of Working to Scale," 164.

36 "National Heritage Area Feasibility Study Guidelines," 3, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, August 2003, accessed June 06, 2019, nps.gov/subjects/heritageareas/feasibility-studies.htm.

37 Barrett and Mahoney, "30 Years of Working to Scale," 170.

38 Brenda Barrett, "National Heritage Areas: Places in the Land, Places in the Mind," *The George Wright Forum* 22, no. 1 (2005): 10-11, [georgewright.org/221barrett.pdf](https://www.georgewright.org/221barrett.pdf).

39 "What Is a National Heritage Area?," National Park Service, US Department of the Interior, May 29, 2018, accessed June 2, 2019, nps.gov/articles/what-is-a-national-heritage-area.htm.

40 Barrett, "Places in the Land," 12.

41 Barrett, "Places in the Land," 12.

down manner; rather they are designated areas that receive federal support and recognition without the regulatory authority.⁴²

The major benefit to local and state groups of an NHA designation is that they are partnering with NPS and are not turning over full responsibility of the resource. In these situations, the role of NPS is to assist in management planning, interpretation, and resource preservation and to provide funding.⁴³ Therefore, NHAs facilitate working partnerships between federal, state, and local groups to preserve in a cost-effective way the nationally important resources that NPS has not been able to address.⁴⁴

The partnerships that make up NHAs allow for the sharing of resources and responsibility, and they also build relationships and trust between a diverse group of stakeholders⁴⁵ who share a regional identity and a common narrative.⁴⁶ NHAs are seen as “venues for partnership” that allow for more resiliency. In 2008, congressionally mandated studies of twelve NHAs and their usage of federal funding showed that “the highest-priority work for all 12 of the NHAs was cultural and natural resource conservation,” with about one-third of the investments having gone toward watershed and river corridor restoration, documentation of cultural practices and folk traditions, and landmark preservation.⁴⁷

DESIGNATING AN NHA

There is currently no law or statute that governs the establishment of an NHA. But in August 2003, the NPS did complete a draft document called the National Heritage Area Feasibility Study Guidelines that provides a methodology for obtaining an NHA designation. The first step involves a feasibility study completed by NPS as an order or directive from Congress. Alternatively, local groups can commission an independent study if they want to obtain the NHA designation from Congress.⁴⁸ This study should engage the public, and there must be widespread support from the residents who live in the proposed area. Finally, the submitted proposal must have support from stakeholders, which may include local citizens, nonprofits, private businesses, and local governing bodies.⁴⁹

If undertaken without congressional authorization or NPS oversight, the feasibility study must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) which requires an Environmental Assessment (EA), Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, and Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. If quantifiable negative or positive impacts are identified, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) may also be required. Finally, consultation with State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs), the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and American Indian tribes and tribal organizations is required. These steps are necessary before the Department of the Interior can make a recommendation to Congress to designate an area as an NHA.⁵⁰

42 Barrett and Mahoney, “30 Years of Working to Scale,” 166.

43 Barrett, “Places on the Land,” 14-15.

44 Barrett, “Places in the Land,” 14-15.

45 Barrett and Mahoney, “30 Years of Working to Scale,” 163.

46 Barrett and Mahoney, “30 Years of Working to Scale,” 169.

47 Barrett and Mahoney, “30 Years of Working to Scale,” 167.

48 “Heritage Areas: Background, Proposals, and Current Issues,” EveryCRSReport.com, Congressional Research Service, July 22, 2019, accessed June 06, 2019, [everycrsreport.com/reports/RL33462.html](https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL33462.html).

49 “National Heritage Area Feasibility Study Guidelines,” 4, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, August 2003, accessed June 06, 2019, [nps.gov/subjects/heritageareas/feasibility-studies.htm](https://www.nps.gov/subjects/heritageareas/feasibility-studies.htm).

50 “National Heritage Area Feasibility Study Guidelines,” 5-6.

Although it did not become law, in 1999 the NPS presented to the House of Representatives a set of interim criteria for proposing legislation to designate an NHA. These criteria are as follows:

1. An area has an assemblage of natural, historic, or cultural resources that together represent distinctive aspects of American heritage worthy of recognition, conservation, interpretation, and continuing use, and are best managed as such an assemblage through partnerships among public and private entities, and by combining diverse and sometimes noncontiguous resources and active communities;
2. Reflects traditions, customs, beliefs, and folklife that are a valuable part of the national story;
3. Provides outstanding opportunities to conserve natural, cultural, historic, and/or scenic features;
4. Provides outstanding recreational and educational opportunities;
5. The resources important to the identified theme or themes of the area retain a degree of integrity capable of supporting interpretation;
6. Residents, business interests, non-profit organizations, and governments within the proposed area are involved in the planning, have developed a conceptual financial plan that outlines the roles for all participants including the federal government, and have demonstrated support for designation of the area;
7. The proposed management entity and units of government supporting the designation are willing to commit to working in partnership to develop the heritage area;
8. The proposal is consistent with continued economic activity in the area;
9. A conceptual boundary map is supported by the public; and
10. The management entity proposed to plan and implement the project is described.⁵¹

There are eight steps to consider when undertaking an NHA feasibility study to ensure that a comprehensive study is completed. First, if a study area is not defined, then the study team must create a process for determining the appropriate study boundaries. Second, a public involvement strategy that ensures public understanding of the study, maximizes contribution and participation by participants within the study boundary, and proposes tactics to access public support is also needed. A third component is determining how the place is “representative of the national experience,” pulling key themes forward that help tell the story of the region and how it contributes to the “national story.”⁵² The fourth step is completing a Cultural Resource Inventory to determine whether the area is a “nationally distinctive landscape” and which resources support the themes previously outlined.⁵³ Note that “an exhaustive resource inventory may not be necessary,” and instead, “the study team [will need to] focus on identifying a strategic assemblage of natural and cultural resources that relate to the identified themes.”⁵⁴ The fifth step involves evaluating management alternatives to NHA designation for the area, ranging from considering the pros and cons of

51 “National Heritage Area Feasibility Study Guidelines,” 4-5.

52 “National Heritage Area Feasibility Study Guidelines,” 6-7.

53 “National Heritage Area Feasibility Study Guidelines,” 9.

54 “National Heritage Area Feasibility Study Guidelines,” 9.

taking “no action” to evaluating the merit in creating an NHA. Intermediate management interventions must also be considered, such as “other types of heritage partnerships, trails, or other NPS assisted or unassisted endeavors.”⁵⁵ The sixth step is determining what the actual heritage area boundaries would be (which may differ from the study area boundaries identified in step one). The seventh step is describing the entity that will manage the NHA and creating a conceptual financial plan.⁵⁶ The final step is evaluating public support as well as the commitment by local partners to the designation of the NHA.⁵⁷

The path to an NHA designation is long and involved, but a real opportunity exists in San Antonio to create a world-class destination for cohesively teaching about our shared heritage from a cultural and ecological perspective. Brackenridge Park and its twelve thousand years of documented history, with the upper course of the San Antonio river flowing through it, collectively present the possibility to fill in existing preservation gaps in the city. An NHA designation would be the impetus for additional resources that would enable the city’s leadership to elevate regional preservation efforts in tandem with progressive conservation efforts for the San Antonio River.

MILESTONES IN NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PRESERVATION

1894	National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty (Great Britain) formed.
1916	National Park Service formed providing philosophical foundation for uniting preservation and conservation movements by targeting the preservation of nonrenewable resources.
1933	The Historic American Building Survey (HABS), a WPA program, records nation’s culture as joint venture of NPS, the Library of Congress, and the American Institute of Architects.
1945	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) chartered.
1949	National Trust for Historic Preservation (United States) chartered to address “preservation of sites, buildings, and objects of national significance or interest.”
1965	International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) established.
1966	Passage of National Historic Preservation Act, including National Register of Historic Places.
1969	Passage of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), requiring Section 106 review for projects using federal funds, thereby conflating the concern for natural and cultural resources into a single program.

⁵⁵ “National Heritage Area Feasibility Study Guidelines,” 9.

⁵⁶ “National Heritage Area Feasibility Study Guidelines,” 11.

⁵⁷ “National Heritage Area Feasibility Study Guidelines,” 12.

SELECTED MILESTONES IN PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION IN SAN ANTONIO ⁵⁸

1921	<p>Devastating flood occurs.</p> <p>Daughters of Republic of TX Alamo Chapter formed by Adina De Zavala.</p>
1924	<p>San Antonio Conservation Society, one of the first community preservation groups in United States, founded by thirteen women to save 1859 Market House (razed for street widening a year later) and city's cultural heritage. Sought to preserve historic built and natural environment "to keep the history of Texas legible and intact to educate the public."</p>
1936	<p>San Antonio Conservation Society purchases Espada Mission acequia aqueduct, the only Spanish structure of its type still in use in the United States.</p> <p>Restored San Jose Mission compound dedicated.</p>
1937	<p>San Antonio River Authority founded to oversee and protect the San Antonio River.</p>
1941	<p>San Jose Mission compound except church ceded to Texas as state park; designated as National Historic Site.</p>
1953-1957	<p>Proposed city plans for underground garages beneath Travis Park, Main Plaza, Alamo Plaza, and part of La Villita are finally killed when Texas Supreme Court rules it illegal, ending threat of garages beneath city parks.</p>
1957	<p>San Antonio Conservation Society purchases twenty-five acres near Espada dam for Acequia Park.</p>
1960	<p>City highway bond issue including North Expressway through Olmos Basin floodplain is defeated; passes the next year. Lawsuit filed by San Antonio Conservation Society and Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word.</p>
1967	<p>City of San Antonio adopts first historic zoning ordinance and creates a preservation commission. The following year, King William, the first local historic district, was established and members of the Historic and Design Review Commission were appointed.</p> <p>San Antonio Missions National Historical Park legislation introduced in Congress.</p>
1971	<p>Conservation Society holds first preservation seminar.</p>
1974	<p>City hires first Historic Preservation Officer, revises historic districts and landmarks ordinances.</p>

⁵⁸ Fisher, *Saving San Antonio*.

- 1977 National Trust for Historic Preservation presents Crowninshield Award to San Antonio Conservation Society for national impact on historic preservation activities.
- North Expressway project opens as McAllister Freeway; litigation dropped in 1970.
- 1978 San Antonio Missions National Historical Park passed by Congress; opens in 1983.
- 1979 First draft of Brackenridge Park Master Plan presented to community.
- 1993 City master plan includes historic preservation requirements.
- 1998 Brackenridge Park Master Plan is updated.
- 1999 Restoration of San Juan Acequia to maintain rights to the water that historically irrigated Mission San Juan Capistrano and adjacent farmlands.
- 2005 City makes successful legal claim to Miraflores Gardens with help from land survey paid for by San Antonio Conservation Society.
- 2006 Initiation of World Heritage nomination process for the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park.
- 2010 San Antonio Conservation Society, San Antonio Zoo, San Antonio Parks Foundation, Brackenridge Park Conservancy, and Friends of Parks halt proposed lease of land at northern edge of park. It would not have been in compliance with adopted 1979 Brackenridge Master Plan.
- 2014 San Antonio's five Spanish Colonial Missions nomination for World Heritage Site submitted to UNESCO. Culmination of eight years of work by NPS, San Antonio Conservation Society, Los Compadres, Archdiocese, and others.
- 2015 ICOMOS endorses the missions' World Heritage nomination and the World Heritage Committee awards World Heritage Status after nine years of work.
- 2016 Preservation advocates block the University of the Incarnate Word's attempt to lease land to build a dormitory/parking garage near Alamo Stadium in Brackenridge Park.
- San Antonio landscape architect and 2014 National Humanities Medal recipient Everett Fly commissioned to produce National Register nomination for historic African American communities in Bexar County.
- 2017 A new Brackenridge Master Plan is adopted.

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CHAPTER 3. PARK DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN IN THE UNITED STATES

Most American municipal parks from the second half of the nineteenth century owe some debt to Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux's Central Park. Ethan Carr notes that "following the declaration of New York City's Central Park as a 'public place' for 'public use' in 1853, hundreds of municipalities developed peripheral tracts of land into pastoral scenery and picturesque woodlands."¹ In 1865, Vaux described Central Park as "the big artwork of the Republic"² (**figures 3-1 and 3-2**). San Antonio is one of the municipalities that followed suit, with Brackenridge Park among those parks that were likely influenced by Central Park. Brackenridge Park's founding fathers also likely drew inspiration from the emergence, beginning in the 1860s, of national parks.

Central Park and the earliest national parks trace their origins to the American picturesque movement (with its beginnings in the English picturesque movement). American municipal parks were also informed by Birkenhead Park (an English predecessor), 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, also known as the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, and the City Beautiful movement that emerged from that fair, and programs such as the Works Progress Administration during the Great Depression.

The evolution of parks can also be traced according to their primary uses. Municipal parks in the United States have evolved over the years. Their uses have changed, typically as a result of increasing population densities, the recreational tastes of Americans, and evolving approaches to park conception and design. In the early 1980s, sociologist Galen Cranz categorized the different eras of park design according to changes in four broad uses. In 2004, she updated these categories to include a fifth period of distinct usage.³ She wrote that "these categories summarize the role of city parks within the American social structure

1 Ethan Carr, *Wilderness by Design: Landscape Architecture and the National Park Service* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 18.

2 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 18.

3 Galen Cranz and Michael Boland, "Defining the Sustainable Park: A Fifth Model for Urban Parks," *Landscape Journal* 23, no. 2 (2004): 102–20, doi.org/10.3368/lj.23.2.102.



FIGURE 3–1. View of the mall in Central Park, circa 1902. Recognizing a need for a grand space where citizens could promenade and socialize, this elm-lined formal area became the central spine of the park plan. Source: centralparknyc.com

and the intellectual and moral life of the culture.”⁴ Although overlap exists between the categories, both in terms of time and activity, Cranz’s five broad uses, listed in the following table, roughly correspond to the major movements this chapter elaborates on.

<u>USAGE/CATEGORY</u>	<u>MOVEMENT</u>	<u>TIME PERIOD</u>
The Pleasure Ground	Picturesque	1850–1900
The Reform Park	City Beautiful	1900–1930
The Recreation Facility	Works Progress Administration	1930–1965
The Open-Space System	Historic Preservation	1965–1995
The Sustainable Park	Ecological Conservation	1995–Present

EMERGENCE OF THE AMERICAN PICTURESQUE

Before Central Park, the American sensibility for landscape had been largely shaped by the European tradition of seeing “places as pictures and seeing land as landscape.”⁵ According to historian of the picturesque Christopher Hussey, between 1730 and 1830 in Great Britain, “the relation of all the arts to one another through the pictorial appreciation of nature was so close that poetry, painting, gardening, architecture, and the art of travel may be said to have been fused into the single ‘art of landscape.’”⁶ Through the work of British park “improvers” such as Lancelot “Capability” Brown (1716-1783),

the technology and aesthetics of the modern landscape park emerged in the English countryside...by regrading topography into rolling meadows, by impounding streams and ponds into large lakes, and by planting thousands of trees in scattered groves that framed and directed views.... Such scenes followed visual rules of composition derived (at least indirectly) from landscape painting, descriptive poetry, and of course the existing visual character of British pastureland and woodlots.⁷ (figure 3-3)

4 Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), x.
5 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 11.
6 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 12.
7 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 14-15.

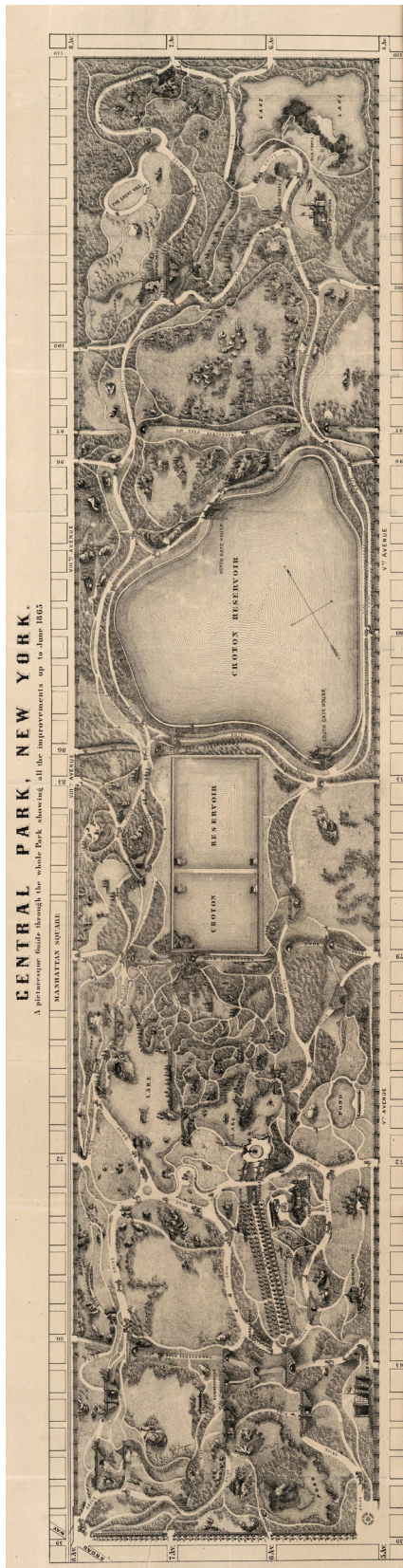


FIGURE 3-2. An early plan of Central Park. The title reads, "A picturesque guide through the whole Park showing all the improvements up to June 1865." Source: David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, davidrumsey.com.

The art historian Nicolas Pevsner defines the English picturesque as

asymmetrical, informal, varied and made of such parts as the serpentine lake, the winding drive and winding path, the trees grouped in clumps and smooth lawn (mown or cropped by sheep) reaching right up to the French windows of the house.⁸ (figure 3-4)

ANDREW JACKSON DOWNING (1815–1852)

The language of the picturesque that would distinguish the design of Central Park traces its American origins to the work of Andrew Jackson Downing. Downing was "the first American writer on landscape architectural topics."⁹ With his 1841 book *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening Adapted to North America*, Downing became the most popular horticultural authority of his time.¹⁰ The book "was so widely read and had such far-reaching effects at a time when the arts of America were groping forward eagerly for expression and guidance" that it made Downing famous.¹¹ Through his periodical *The Horticulturist* (1849–1852) and through his books, Downing sought to instruct the gentry on the proper ways to develop the home grounds of a suburban estate and, by translation, the larger context of parks (figures 3-5). Downing's ideas drew heavily on the work of the proponents of the romantic landscape movement in eighteenth-century England. He felt, however, that the practice of landscape gardening in the new nation had to reflect America's republican values of "moderation, simplicity, and civic responsibility."¹²

Downing's formula for landscape design included a broad front lawn, plantations of trees, "ponds and lakes in the irregular manner," winding walks and drives, flower gardens, pavilions, bridges, rustic seats, kitchen gardens, and orchards.¹³ What mattered in the picturesque was not so much the selection of plant materials, the architectural style, or the geometry of the landscape plan but the overall general effect.

8 Nikolaus Pevsner. *The Englishness of English Art* (London: Penguin, 1964).

9 Norman T. Newton, *Design on the Land: The Development of Landscape Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1978), 260.

10 Newton, *Design on the Land*, 260.

11 Newton, *Design on the Land*, 261.

12 Judith K. Major, *To Live in the New World: A. J. Downing and American Landscape Gardening* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997).

13 Andrew Jackson Downing, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening Adapted to North America* (New York: Wiley, 1841), xiv.



FIGURE 3–3. A view of the Blenheim Palace landscape in the English countryside. In 1763, the landscape was transformed and “modernized” when Capability Brown “erased” the formal gardens surrounding the castle, built two dams to create a new 40-acre lake, and designed new serpentine drives and a new entrance. Source: John Thorn, “Try a Little Wilderness: Andrew Jackson Downing”



FIGURE 3–4. Two photos of the Red Book for Vinters, Kent, 1797. Sir Humphrey Repton succeeded Capability Brown as landscape designer for the British aristocracy of the late-18th century, using his unique “Red Books” to illustrate his clients’ existing landscapes adjacent to his improved designs. Source: Yale Center for British Art.



FIGURE 3-5. Two photos of Downing's 1841 *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*. The document introduced the language of the picturesque to Americans. On left, the cover is shown. On right, the inside cover image depicts the grounds of a Dutchess County, NY residence. The hallmarks of Downing's design directives are visible— asymmetry, exotic tree types, curving walks, and seats for relaxation. Source: John Thorn, "Try a Little Wilderness: Andrew Jackson Downing"

The picturesque landscape designer knew that although engineering and horticulture might be science, they were to be deployed for emotional effect; he sought to engineer the emotions through the deployment of plants, of paints, and of buildings.¹⁴

The formula for the picturesque landscape went through many permutations. It traveled from the English countryside and the work of Capability Brown, Humphrey Repton, and John Claudius Loudon to the French suburbs, where it was reincarnated as the *jardin anglaise*. It traveled to the American frontier in the plantation settings of Mount Vernon and Monticello, to estates along the Hudson River Valley in upstate New York, and, finally, to suburban landscapes of the Deep South.

In addition to widely introducing the ideas of the English picturesque to American gardeners, designers, and broad groups of citizens, "Downing's place in the history of landscape architecture rests also upon two other significant acts of service." First, in 1850 he brought the young English architect Calvert Vaux to America. Second, Downing, along with the Romantic poet William Cullen Bryant initiated a journalistic campaign for a public park in New York.¹⁵ These two acts would have lasting impacts.

Seven years after Vaux began practicing in America, he asked Frederick Law Olmsted to join him in the competition for a plan for Central Park.¹⁶ Their design won, and it would catapult Olmsted's career and reputation in America. Olmsted would eventually come to be known as the father of landscape architecture—a field that at the time had yet to be defined in the American economy or psyche.

14 Roger G. Kennedy, *Architecture, Men, Women, and Money in America 1600-1860* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989), 453.

15 Newton, *Design on the Land*, 266.

16 Newton, *Design on the Land*, 266.

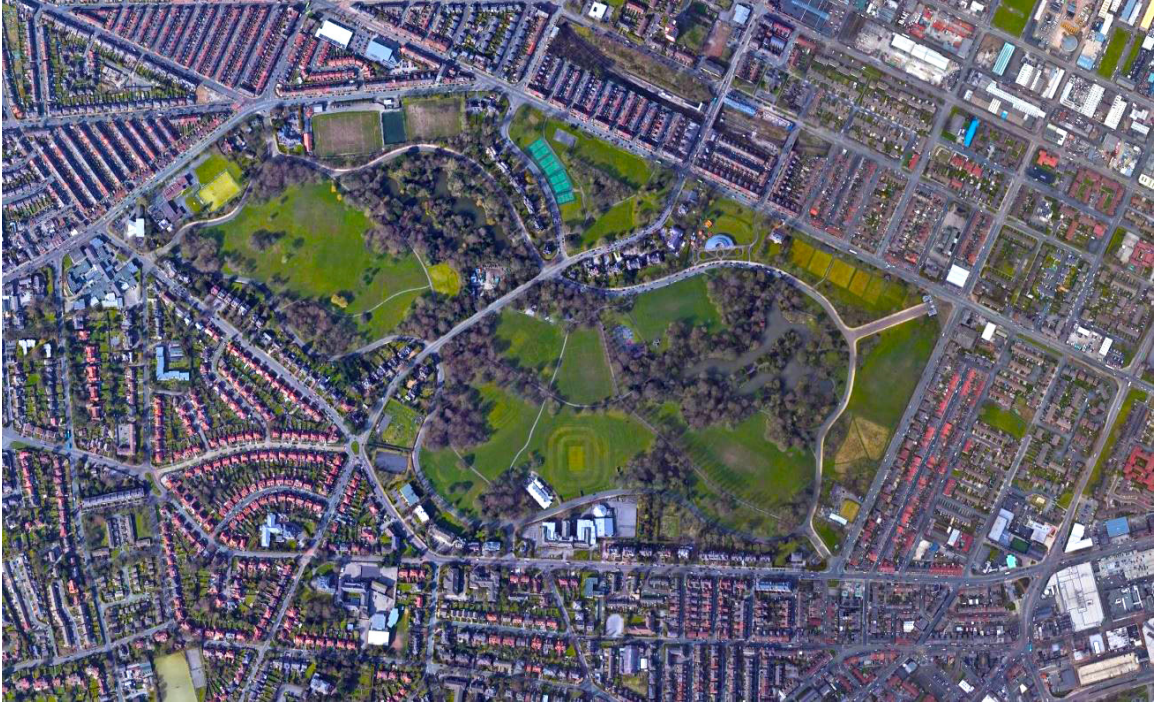


FIGURE 3–6. A contemporary aerial view of the 1847 Birkenhead Park. The park made a lasting impression on Frederick Law Olmsted. Source: [googleearth.com](https://www.google.com/earth/)



FIGURE 3–7. View of Birkenhead Park with boathouse in center background. Source: [parksandgardens.org](https://www.parksandgardens.org/)

BIRKENHEAD PARK (1847) AND FREDERICK LAW OLNSTED (1822–1903)

The translation of the English picturesque to the American picturesque served as the underpinning for Olmsted and Vaux's design for Central Park, but a park predecessor also informed their design. In 1850, the same year Downing brought Vaux to America, Olmsted visited Birkenhead Park in the city of Liverpool, located in Merseyside, England. Birkenhead Park would serve as a forerunner to the municipal park movement in America, starting with Central Park (**figures 3-6 and 3-7**).

The European revolutions of 1848 were a major impetus in the transition from English park enclaves designed for wealthy private patrons to parks conceived and designed for the urban working class. With the rise of the industrial manufacturing sector, workers migrated to cities to live closer to their places of work. Texas was not isolated from this global trend. Between 1847 and 1861, German immigrants migrated in large numbers to San Antonio as well as to the entire Texas Hill Country.

In England, Birkenhead Park demonstrated the combination of the two trends that were driving the world at that time, the technical and the social. Planned as part of a new industrial community on the Wirral Peninsula across from Liverpool, Birkenhead Park was a response to the rising merchant class's desire to provide a "Gentlemen's Park" for the growing cargo port and manufacturing population of Birkenhead. The investors supporting the park were encouraged by the passage of the Third Improvement Act in 1843, which provided public funds for the purchase and construction of public open spaces for the working class.¹⁷

Birkenhead's civic leaders were also interested in the development of a park site with available land surrounding it that could be developed as homesites facing the open areas of the park. What would later be described as the "proximate principle" was an impetus for park development, with the surrounding landowners anticipating financial gains from the sale of lots adjoining the park property.¹⁸ City commissioners hired Joseph Paxton to design the landscape garden and to incorporate the financing principle in the construction of Birkenhead Park, which was the world's first municipal park to be funded with local taxpayers' resources.¹⁹

Olmsted spent several days in Liverpool visiting Birkenhead Park at various times of the day, walking its paths, and observing the activity that occurred within the park boundaries. He recorded his observations in his book *Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England*.

Walking a short distance up an avenue, we passed through another light iron gate into a thick, luxuriant, and diversified garden. Five minutes of admiration, and a few more spent studying the manner in which art had been employed to obtain from nature so much beauty, and I was ready to admit that in democratic America there was nothing to be thought of as comparable with this People's Garden. Indeed, gardening had here reached a perfection that I had never before dreamed of. I cannot undertake to describe the effect of so much taste and skill as had evidently

¹⁷ Newton, *Design on the Land*, 227.

¹⁸ John L. Crompton, "The Genesis of the Proximate Principle in the Development of Urban Parks in England," *Annals of Leisure Research* 9, nos. 3-4 (2006): 214, doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2006.10816432.

¹⁹ Crompton, "Genesis of the Proximate Principle," 214-15. "In the contemporary era, the proximate principle is perhaps most obviously manifested in the private sector context of golf courses which are often incorporated as central features of real estate developments."

been employed; I will only tell you, that we passed by winding paths, over acres and acres, with a constant varying surface, where on all sides were growing every variety of shrubs and flowers, with more than natural grace, all set in borders of greenest, closest turf, and all kept with consummate neatness.²⁰

Many of the ideas displayed at Birkenhead, translated from the great English estate garden tradition and its foundations in the picturesque, were further translated and amplified at Central Park.

THE BEGINNING OF AMERICA'S PUBLIC PARKS (1850–1899)

CENTRAL PARK AND THE AMERICAN PLEASURE GROUND

During the colonial and most of the antebellum period, parks were similar in size and scale to parks in European cities and urban centers. They related to densely populated areas and were a brief respite from the urban experience. Jackson Square in New Orleans is an example of such an urban park, often the size of a city block and originally laid out as a military parade and training ground that followed the European model for a park located as a focus within a district, neighborhood, or city.

Cemeteries, which emerged in the US in the 1830s, preceded the concept of large parks for the public; cemeteries were used not only for burial, but also for strolling and picnicking. The development of large parks, designed to mimic the healthful qualities and psychological benefits of country living, became the goal of US city planners and designers during the 1840s, as urban centers became more congested from growth and immigration. Those who could afford to looked for places to live that provided convenient access to the commerce and society of the city but also offered the spaciousness and quiet of rural living. This was particularly true of cities on the eastern seaboard, where early industrialization produced overcrowding and unhealthy living conditions. This trend toward larger parks was first realized in its most complete manifestation in America at Central Park in New York City, which “was the first public park developed in the context of what became the urban park movement.”²¹

Consisting of multiple recreational opportunities, large passive areas, and water bodies—both recreational and institutional (the city reservoir)—and providing for passive activities such as strolling, taking carriage rides, picnicking, listening to music, and boating, Central Park quickly came to represent the ideal urban park. It also represented what Cranz referred to as the Pleasure Ground park (**figures 3-8 and 3-9**).

In Europe, the “pleasure gardens of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had been designed according to three rules prescribing the relationship between nature and art: (1) the garden should orient itself to the image of nature; (2) in mirroring nature, it should be differentiated from the surrounding landscape and recognizable as something different; and (3) this difference should not be an unnatural contrast but rather a heightening of nature in the image of nature and reason.”²²

20 Frederick Law Olmsted. *Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England* (New York: Putnam, 1852), 62.

21 Cranz, *Politics of Park Design*, xi.

22 Cranz, *Politics of Park Design*, 24.



FIGURE 3–8. A contemporary aerial view of Central Park. The photo demonstrates the variety of spatial shapes and scales, providing a range in the experience for park users. Source: smithsonianmag.com



FIGURE 3–9. The circuit of roadways in Olmsted and Vaux's plan for Central Park were important places to see and to be seen. "While intended for the enjoyment of all, Central Park was the perfect setting for the wealthy to display the splendor of their carriages and attire." Source: Bernd H. Dams and Andrew Zega, *Central Park, NYC: An Architectural View*

Olmsted and Vaux borrowed from the ideals of their British counterparts to develop a park that provided an experience of pastoral meadows and picturesque woodlands and that would “preserve, reveal, and often enhance the existing scenic characteristics of a place by regrading, planting, and otherwise ‘improving’ as necessary to create calculated visual compositions.”²³ Both men understood the complementary yet conflicting purposes of public parks—to promote the individual and personal appreciation of natural beauty while also providing spaces to accommodate a larger, more diverse population so that they may experience that beauty. Olmsted and Vaux also knew that achieving these goals would require the “‘assemblage of movement of great crowds,’ as long as ‘the driving room, riding room, walking room, skating, sailing and playing room’ were ‘not only liberally designed,’ but ‘studied and adapted to the natural circumstances of the site with the greatest care.’”²⁴

From aesthetic and design perspectives, all of the municipal Pleasure Ground parks that emerged between 1850 and 1899 were primarily designed using picturesque principles—utilizing the democratic informality of winding roads and walks and “an overall composition of smoothness, harmony, serenity, and order, with an occasional reminder of the awesome grandeur of a mountain, a deep crevasse, long waterfall, or steep crag.”²⁵

But the pastoral surroundings could be compromised by the density and popularity of the suburbs. As a response to the dual ideal of the park surrounded by suburbs, Olmsted envisioned parks and parkways as the thread that would stitch together residential developments, thereby inserting landscape ribbons and nodes to buffer housing density. Much of the Central Park budget was reserved for the circulation strategy of separating vehicular routes with pedestrian and equestrian paths. Bridges, tunnels, and underpasses eliminated crossings so traffic could flow unimpeded. The result was a “refined system of roads and paths, as well as places to congregate and promenade, all were combined in a single work of landscape art: the public park.”²⁶ By making movement through the park as effortless and carefree as possible, “the designers allowed for thousands of individual visitors to appreciate landscape scenery personally.”²⁷

Central Park became the gold standard for park development in America and represented a successful diagram for cities and their aspirations for making municipal parks. By the 1890s, hundreds of American cities had developed parks.²⁸ Because of the effect that parks had on adjacent lands, they became a component of city planning. Some forty years after the implementation of Central Park, considerations and decisions related to New York’s suburban development and the connectivity design moves at Central Park would have provided strong points of reference when Brackenridge Park was envisioned.

23 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 18.

24 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 21-22, quoting Olmsted and Vaux’s “Preliminary Report for Laying Out a Park in Brooklyn, New York.”

25 Cranz, *Politics of Park Design*, 24.

26 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 18.

27 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 22.

28 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 24.

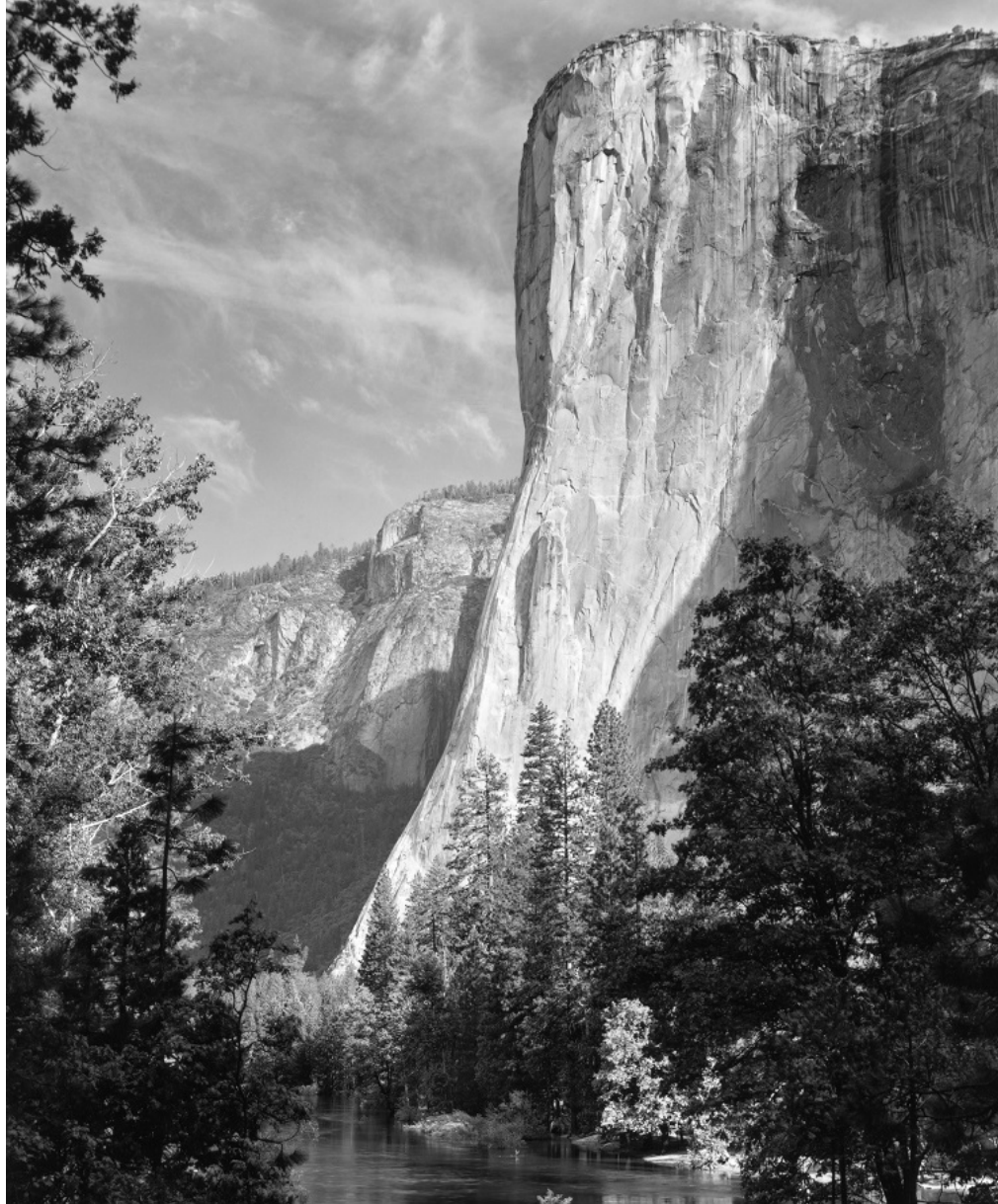


FIGURE 3-10. Ansel Adams' "El Capitan," Yosemite. Adams' photographs of Yosemite, beginning in 1950, widely exposed the grandeur of the natural wonder to the American public. Source: anseladams.com

THE FIRST NATIONAL PARK (1872)

During the same fifty-year period that America's municipal parks were being created, the federal government was acquiring and developing parks on a larger scale. As environmentalists joined real estate developers to plan city growth, public and private interests prodded state and federal agencies to secure and preserve remote scenic areas. In 1864, Congress granted Yosemite Valley to the state of California, effectively making it a state park rather than a national park. In return the state would "manage the scenic wonder for public use, resort, and recreation...inalienable for all time."²⁹ Although different in character, both Central Park and Yosemite Valley "expressed the cultural value placed on landscape beauty"³⁰ (figure 3-10).

²⁹ Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 11.

³⁰ Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 11.

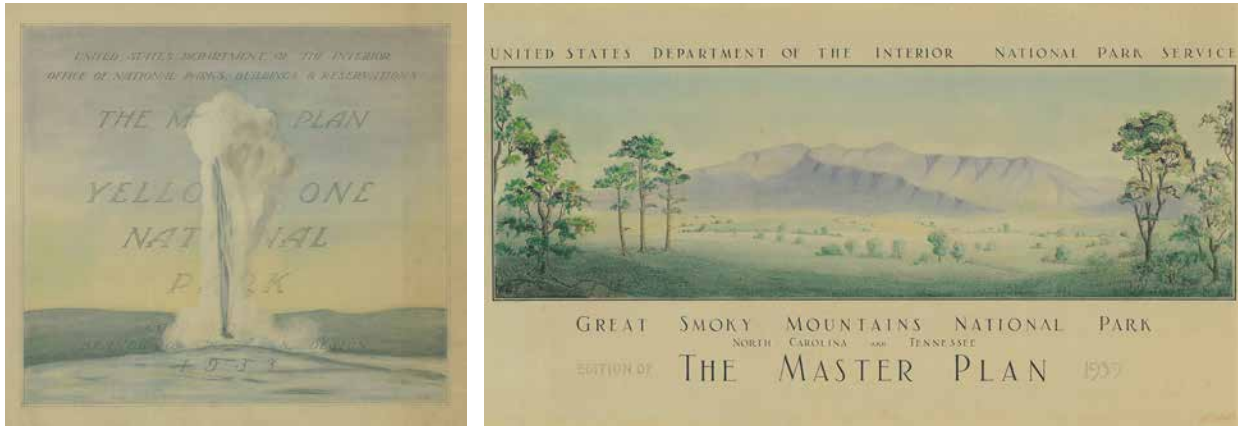


FIGURE 3–11. 1933 Master Plan for Yellowstone National Park and 1939 Master Plan for Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Early master plans for the National Parks, which preceded Cultural Landscape Reports, were essential to managing these sites. Source: National Archives, Record of the National Park Service.

National parks emerged from a fascination with the sublime. Carr notes that “Sublime (or awesome) scenery, epitomized by Niagara Falls, held a particularly powerful hold on the American imagination.”³¹ Along with picturesque principles influencing municipal parks, this principle also would be translated to America’s sublime wilderness landscapes. “From the pastoral scenes of the Connecticut River Valley to the sublime spectacle of Niagara, British picturesque aesthetics underlay the American tourist’s awakening for landscape beauty.”³² In the national parks, picturesque principles would be applied in the form of providing visitors with framed views.

The governor of California, Frederick F. Low, named Olmsted as the chairman of the commission overseeing proposals for Yosemite’s development. Olmsted proposed what he called “the noblest park or pleasure ground in the world.”³³ He suggested the construction of a one-way carriage loop (up one side of the valley and down the other) “which shall enable visitors to make a complete circuit...reach all the finer points of view.” This was a classic park carriage drive, in other words, “with suitable resting spots and turnouts...at frequent intervals.” The circuit drive “would be complemented by a system of pedestrian paths leading to points of view accessible only by foot.”³⁴ Olmsted took measures to prevent “injury to the scenery” and to “minimize the impact of visitors by concentrating their activities through a thoughtful development of the valley.”³⁵ “The formula for the careful, minimal development of Yosemite Valley was based on the formal and theoretical precedents of the landscape park, a genre Olmsted had already exploited with great success to accommodate large numbers of tourists seeking picturesque scenery in a public setting.”³⁶ Soon after he returned to New York in 1865, however, Olmsted’s plan for Yosemite would be tabled by the park commission.³⁷

31 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 12.

32 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 12.

33 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 28.

34 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 29.

35 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 28–29.

36 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 29.

37 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 30.

In 1872, Congress approved an act to create Yellowstone National Park. The park, which occupied lands in not one but two states, Wyoming and Montana, became the first national park by default, because “the new park remained under the jurisdiction of the secretary of the interior...since there was no state government to receive a land grant.”³⁸ But with no precedent for federal management of a park, it would take many years and development pressure from the completion of a nearby railroad line before the government implemented a process for more comprehensive design and management of Yellowstone. In 1891, Hiram M. Chittenden, “completed and improved most of the park’s road system: a ‘general circuit or belt line connecting all the important centers of interest....’ The Grand Loop formed the basis of the 150-mile figure-eight loop drive still in use today”³⁹ (figures 3-11).

Chittenden knew and respected Olmsted’s work, and in his approach to Yellowstone, he “embraced municipal park engineering and design theory.”⁴⁰ According to landscape historian Ethan Carr, Yellowstone’s development “comprised an analogy with municipal landscape design,” and especially with Central Park.⁴¹

By 1911, there were “twelve existing national parks,”⁴² but they received modest federal appropriations due to limited visitorship:

The lack of interest on the part of Congress, it was felt, could be directly attributed to the apparent indifference of the traveling public. Increased appropriations would come only with increased use of the parks, and increased appropriations were needed, ironically, because poorly planned visitor accommodations were already degrading scenery and polluting natural systems in several parks.⁴³

At the inception of municipal and national parks, the design intent overwhelmingly “embodied the higher hopes of modern progress. From Manhattan Island to Yosemite Valley, the idea and the formal design components of the landscape park proved adaptable to the needs of cities and the nation to demonstrate the vitality” of America.⁴⁴ Brackenridge Park’s visionaries could not have avoided these national hopes and their role in park making. The landscape of Brackenridge Park provided them with the opportunity to apply picturesque principles in a blended manner—applying them toward a Pleasure Ground municipal park but on a site that contained the kinds of wilderness qualities that national parks were beginning to preserve. As businessmen, they must have been especially attuned to carving out a place of significance for San Antonio in the larger national fabric.

38 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 31.

39 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 32.

40 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 32.

41 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 33.

42 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 2.

43 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 3.

44 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 34.



FIGURE 3–12. Aerial perspective of the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago World's Fair, 1893. Source: posterazzi.com

CITY BEAUTIFUL MOVEMENT AND THE REFORM PARK (1900–1930)

Around the turn of the century, a new movement emerged. The City Beautiful movement grew out of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago⁴⁵ (figure 3-12). The exposition was intended to introduce America to “the products of men’s handiwork and mechanical skill”⁴⁶ from around the world. Through its collection of exhibits at a grand scale—including art galleries, electrical light displays, agricultural and transportation advancements, horticultural displays, and replicas of statuary, all set within stark white classical buildings and against a park-like backdrop—Americans were introduced to a version of the world.

The fair “was the unprecedented awakening of public interest in civic design.... The country had never seen anything like it before, and to most visitors the fair was like a dream of unimaginable opulence. A vibrant new interest was aroused far and wide in what design could do for America’s towns and cities.”⁴⁷ The City Beautiful movement that it prompted shifted the role of the city as a symbol of economic development and industrialization to one of beauty and aesthetics. The Columbian Exposition was the first demonstration in America that cities could be designed.⁴⁸ As a result, city centers that featured plazas surrounded by museums, courthouses, offices, and other public buildings were often planned as the heart of City Beautiful schemes.

Programming for early municipal parks had primarily focused on passive uses, but it became increasingly important to policy makers to provide more cultural activities within park grounds. During the City Beautiful movement, there was a shift in park aesthetics, as civic additions such as museums, conservatories, architectural memorials, and zoos were included within large municipal parks. Park settings were made for grand buildings

45 “The City Beautiful Movement,” New York Preservation Archive Project, accessed June 3, 2019, nypap.org/preservation-history/city-beautiful-movement/.

46 Newton, *Design on the Land*, 365.

47 Newton, *Design on the Land*, 367.

48 “The City Beautiful Movement,” New York Preservation Archive Project.

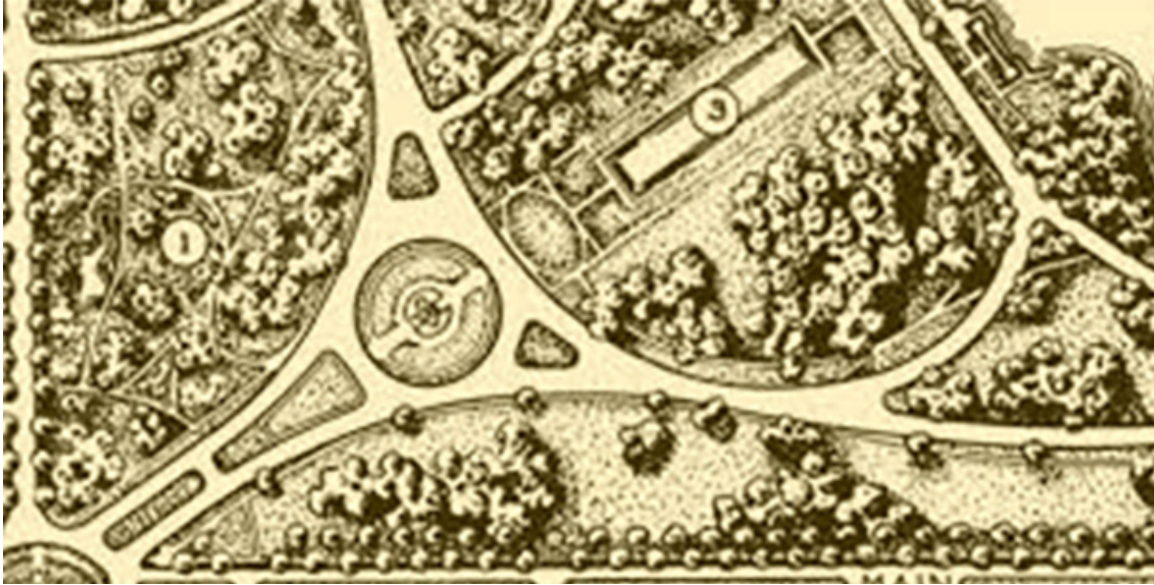


FIGURE 3–13. In 1914, Houston industrialist George Hermann deeded Houston 285 acres for the creation of a municipal park across from Rice Institute. Landscape architect and planner George Kessler designed the formal aspects of the park's entry and water features, including the "grand basin," and an elliptical island with a Sunken Garden. Source: hermannpark.org.



FIGURE 3–14. A 1932 photo of the main entrance to Houston's Hermann Park shows the manifestation of Kessler's plan. Source: *Houston Chronicle*

and monuments rather than scenes of landscape beauty⁴⁹ (figures 3-13 and 3-14). The Columbian Exposition “justified the museums, botanical gardens, zoological gardens, aquariums, arboretums, meteorology observatories, and music halls we see in parks today.”⁵⁰ Like many design trends, it took several years for City Beautiful to reach San Antonio, which experienced the movement’s influence beginning around 1915.

Cranz refers to the evolution of municipal parks during the period from 1900 to 1930 as the era of the “Reform Park,” noting that it grew out of trends that developed in the late nineteenth century that were rooted in social ideas about the health of the average citizen. There was a general social attitude that citizens had the right to participate in activities that both revived the soul through communing with nature (an opportunity the Pleasure Ground park had provided) and stimulated the physical body through active outdoor recreation. Whereas early park programming involved passive and unstructured activities, the dawn of a new century brought new ideas about how parks should be used and organized. Central to this change in perspective was the idea that organized activities planned by a recreational specialist were the most effective means to bring exercise and fresh air to the masses. In 1906, the Playground Association of America formed and became the leading force in programming theory for urban parks.⁵¹

Baseball, football, art classes, gardening, and nighttime activities became the norm for urban parks focused on recreation and leisure. During the 1920s, “golf for everybody” became the goal of recreation departments, and parks with enough open space installed courses throughout the country.

The design of the Reform Park fell increasingly to park employees and thus reflected the current ideas of planned recreation, with less emphasis on the healing power of picturesque aesthetics and more emphasis on the active uses planned for the park.

The rationale of reform park design was as highly evolved and consistent as that of pleasure ground design, but virtually antithetical to it; it represented much more than an erosion of the older ideal. Thus water was not used for psychic effects but for practical ones.⁵²

Architecturally, the theories of the kinds of buildings that could be included in a park were carried over to the reform movement from the picturesque. “Permanent buildings were excluded if their purpose was not considered compatible with that of a playground or small park. Accordingly, museums were permissible, but courthouses and schools were not.”⁵³

⁴⁹ Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 36.

⁵⁰ Cranz, *Politics of Park Design*, 14.

⁵¹ Cranz, *Politics of Park Design*, 66.

⁵² Cranz, *Politics of Park Design*, 88.

⁵³ Cranz, *Politics of Park Design*, 96.



FIGURE 3–15. A photo of the Vulcan colossal sculpture in Vulcan Park, facing the downtown Birmingham skyline. Source: [jstor.org/stable/40947144](https://www.jstor.org/stable/40947144)



FIGURE 3–16. The Dreyfous Bridge is an art deco bridge in New Orleans City Park designed and implemented as a WPA project. Source: Works Progress Administration

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION AND THE RECREATION FACILITY (1930–1965)

Brought on by far-reaching changes in workplace rules and growing leisure time in the middle class, the park of the recreation era sought not only to provide places of recreation—both passive and active—but also to respond to public demand for newer opportunities for physical exercise as well as staged entertainment events. This additional emphasis added a new layer of commercialization onto the previous layers of aesthetic stimulation and organized recreation.

During the Great Depression, parks nationwide provided huge opportunities for employment of hundreds of workers doing basic tasks with rudimentary tools under several New Deal programs (**figures 3-15 and 3-16**). Headed first by the Reconstruction Finance Administration and by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), Depression-era projects updated the infrastructure, installed new recreational areas and buildings, and virtually remade the landscape of some parks. These kinds of changes are especially prominent in Brackenridge Park, where an extensive list of items was accomplished with the aid of WPA funds and workers. During this period, approximately \$90,000 was earmarked for projects to improve the infrastructure of Brackenridge Park and its zoo as well as of Koehler Park. Investments included the construction of rock retaining walls along the San Antonio River to control erosion. The city forester, Stewart King, who became a noted landscape architect, supervised a project to build a drive—Tuleta Drive—from Broadway to the recreation area at Brackenridge.⁵⁴

Later in this period, other changes occurred in urban parks. World War II reduced park budgets, and they improved little following the war. Due to the continuing shortage of funding, staff was reduced, and plantings were simplified. “Economy...led to the removal of previous planting, especially shrubbery, though here decisions to strip parks rather than fund the supervision and maintenance of planted areas could be justified as proceeding from concern for safety and ease of surveillance.”⁵⁵

With the end of World War II and the return of war veterans, a veritable boom in population occurred, characterized by large numbers of middle-class families with young children. It was during this time that the “small children’s amusement park[s], sometimes called Kiddieland, Storyland, or Fairyland,” were constructed across the country.⁵⁶

Another New Deal program, the National Youth Administration, was also responsible for development in the park, including the second low-water crossing and part of the Sunken Garden Theater.

⁵⁴ Maria Watson Pfeiffer and Steven A. Tomka, “Brackenridge Park,” National Register of Historic Places, Texas Historical Commission, San Antonio, TX, June 15, 2011, 65.

⁵⁵ Cranz, *Politics of Park Design*, 123.

⁵⁶ Cranz, *Politics of Park Design*, 126.

PARK PRESERVATION AND THE OPEN-SPACE SYSTEM (1965–MID-1990S)

Increasingly, parks began to be viewed as more than just recreational opportunities and entertainment venues. The importance of open space with no programming or prescribed uses gained wider acceptance within urban park planning, and such plans were increasingly implemented due to further budgetary constraints brought on in part by “wholesale middle-class flight from the inner city” and the resulting loss in tax revenue for the maintenance of urban infrastructure and employment.⁵⁷

“Anything goes” became the mantra of park planners and theoreticians who increasingly saw their influence diminishing and their user base disappearing. Although this attitude pervaded the era culturally and physically, city boosters continued their attempts to stimulate park attendance and user satisfaction. As such, parks updated their programming to include trampoline, motocross, and other new and more urban activities.

An important milestone was reached during this era when, in 1963, the “National Park Service declared Central Park and Prospect Park as National Historic Landmarks, making their preservation, as opposed to remodeling, important and possible.”⁵⁸ This decision ushered in an era of park preservation that coincided with the expansion of interstate highways. Included in the concept of preservation was to “preserve the historic legacy of the parks, not just responding to present demands for their services”⁵⁹ (figures 3-17 and 3-18).

57 Cranz, *Politics of Park Design*, 137.

58 Cranz, *Politics of Park Design*, 135.

59 Cranz, *Politics of Park Design*, 141.



FIGURE 3–17. Pictured is the 1985 draft plan for rescuing New York’s Central Park from decades of neglect. The plan was a touchstone for future park preservation planning in the US. It emphasized the critical role that consistent management of both natural and built components of the park played in long-term preservation. Source: Elizabeth R. Barlow, *Rebuilding Central Park*

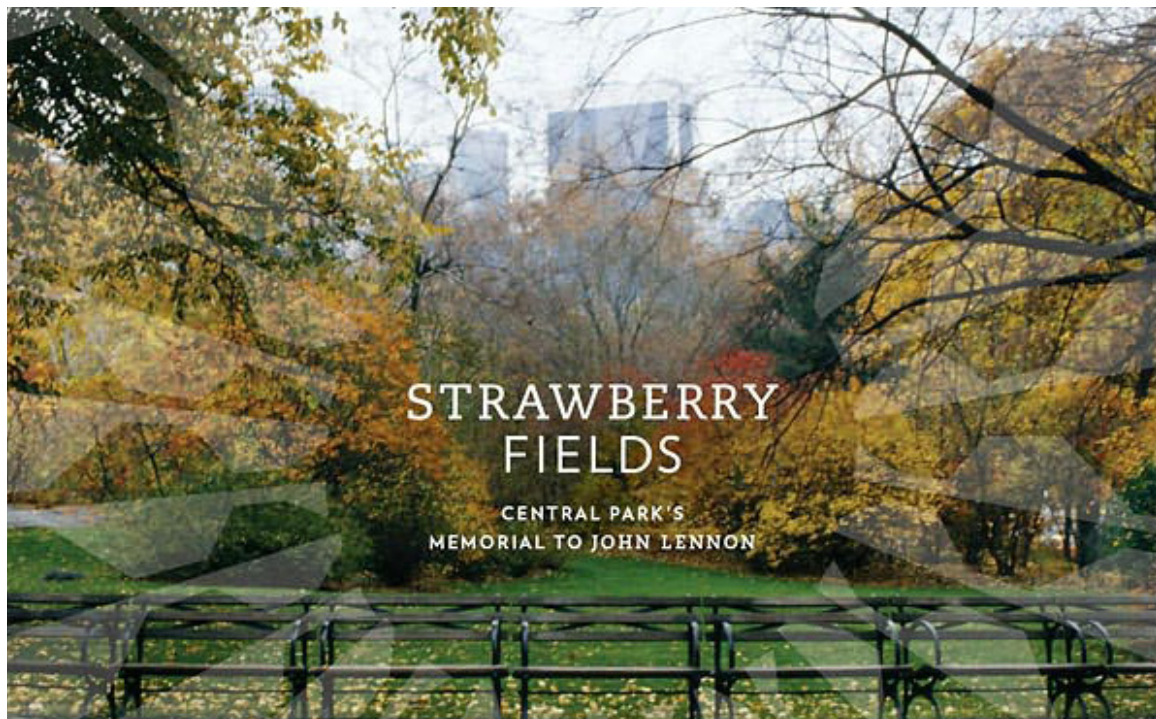


FIGURE 3–18. The ability of park planners to respond organically to changes over time has been key to Central Park’s support by the city and community. Strawberry Fields, shown here, was designed to be carefully inserted without interrupting the overall character of the park. It was designed after public outcry and Yoko Ono’s gift to memorialize John Lennon in the park that he loved gained traction. When jogging became popular, auto roadways were closed to cars during morning and evening running hours. Source: Sara Cedar Miller, *Strawberry Fields: Central Park’s Memorial to John Lennon*

THE SUSTAINABLE PARK (1995–PRESENT)

Today, according to Cranz, “ecological problems may be counted among our most pressing social problems,”⁶⁰ and as cities grapple to become more sustainable, parks have begun to contribute to their ecological restoration. According to Cranz, the model for sustainable park development includes three general attributes: “(1) self-sufficiency in regard to material resources and maintenance, (2) solving larger urban problems outside of park boundaries, and (3) creating new standards for aesthetics and landscape management in parks and other urban landscapes.”⁶¹ In this fifth era of park design, citizen participation, ecological education, and policy implications fall under the aegis of park administration.

While attempting to minimize harmful impacts to natural resources and the climate, the sustainable development movement attempts to “balance ecosystem/environment protection, economic development, and quality of life.”⁶² The park is now viewed as a tool for creating sustainable cities, with a sustainable city being defined as a place in which ecological and environmental systems are protected, and decent employment, housing, commerce, and lifestyle opportunities are attainable.⁶³ There is now a pressure on parks to be spaces that mitigate urban heat islands, improve water quality, manage stormwater, mitigate habitat loss, and facilitate the adaptation of our cities to climate change. This era of park design is an attempt to reincorporate nature into cities. There are relatively simple on-site sustainable solutions such as redesigning our streetscapes to include trees and vegetation, permeable paving, and stormwater storage capacity, while others are more complex and involve rethinking infrastructure and transportation systems.⁶⁴

This park movement looks at systems holistically—for example, an urban park might contribute to microclimate cooling, economic stimulation, and the mental health of park visitors. Dorothy C. Ibes interprets this in a piece called “Sustainable Urban Park Systems,” in which she explains that sustainability is the “balance and maintenance of social, financial, and natural capital.”⁶⁵

60 Cranz and M. Boland, “Defining the Sustainable Park.”

61 Cranz and M. Boland, “Defining the Sustainable Park.”

62 Cranz and M. Boland, “Defining the Sustainable Park.”

63 Efraim Ben-Zadok, review of *The Sustainable City*, by Steven Cohen, *Journal of Urban Affairs* 41, no. 3 (2019), 419–21, doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2018.1507209.

64 Daniel C. Esty, *A Better Planet: Forty Big Ideas for a Sustainable Future* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), 342.

65 Dorothy C. Ibes, “Sustainable Urban Park Systems,” *Cities and the Environment (CATE)* 7, no. 2, art. 8 (2014): 1, digitalcommons.lmu.edu/cate/vol7/iss2/8.

Brackenridge Park's developmental evolution reflects the trend in sustainable parks in several ways. First, there is the rich history of water rights and access to the San Antonio River and the acequias; the case can be made that Brackenridge has always played a role in creating "self-sufficiency in regard to material resources" and "solving larger urban problems." The trend continued with the implementation of the San Antonio River Tunnel, at the southern end of the park, which protects downtown San Antonio and the River Walk from flooding and droughts. Today, a greater importance is being placed on improving the ecology of the park in a way that enables humans to be immersed in the landscape. This Brackenridge Park is evidence that the park staff is making strides toward creating a sustainable park, and central to this report is the eco-restoration of the San Antonio River/Riparian Corridor and the vegetation/soils/hydrology systems.

A broad understanding of the development and evolution of America's municipal parks and a peripheral view into the origins of the first national parks provide understanding of Brackenridge on a continuum of US park history. The Site History section of the CLR, which provides a chronological history of Brackenridge Park, further and more specifically reinforces the fact that Brackenridge exists on this continuum.

CHAPTER 4. AMERICAN TOURISM AND AUTOMOBILES IN PARKS

Social, technological, and economic changes unfolded against the backdrop of the development of America's municipal and national parks. The rise of tourism in America and the rise of the automobile are two examples of such changes. A cursory look at the early inclusion and usage of roads in parks enlivens the understanding of Brackenridge Park beyond its place on the continuum of park history. This context provides a basis for more clearly understanding the San Antonio park in the language of its regional vernacular.

THE RISE OF AMERICAN TOURISM

Few people traveled for pleasure in America until the early 1790s, but an increasing interest in American landscapes around that time prompted a rising number of Americans to tour the country. Tourists were in pursuit of picturesque travel. "The object of picturesque travel," according to art scholar Bruce Robertson, "was the discovery of the particular beauty in 'the scenery of nature.'"¹ Tourists sought out "the ingredients of landscape—trees—rocks—broken-grounds—woods—rivers—lakes—plains—vallis [sic]—mountains."² Moreover, they desired that these scenic elements be designed or composed so they could be viewed as if in a "natural" frame in which "distances should be contrasted: light and dark, high and low, rocky and wooded, cultivated and wild"³ (figure 4-1).

By the 1820s, Americans were fully enamored with picturesque scenery. Those who could afford to became sightseers, drawn to places of sublime natural beauty such as Niagara Falls and the Hudson River Valley and to the more pastoral scenes of America's broad cultivated river valleys, such as that of the Connecticut River.⁴ The American tourism industry was well established by the 1830s, with popular hotels and spas, scenic attractions, and passable roads and routes.⁵

1 Bruce Robertson, "The Picturesque Traveler in America," *Views and Visions* (Washington, DC: The Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1986), 189.

2 Robertson, "Picturesque Traveler in America," 189.

3 Robertson, "Picturesque Traveler in America," 189.

4 Ethan Carr, *Wilderness by Design: Landscape Architecture and the National Park Service* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 12.

5 Robertson, "Picturesque Traveler in America," 189.



FIGURE 4-1. A painting by William Guy Wall entitled “Cauterskill Falls on the Catskill Mountains, 1826-1827,” depicts the kind of picturesque landscapes travelers sought out. Source: Ellwood C. Parry, III, *Views and Visions*.

Travel became so popular that in the early nineteenth century “the United States was being traversed by tourists both foreign and American.”⁶ Prior to the Civil War (1861–1865), travel for pleasure was an activity undertaken mostly by the elite. Some traveled to spas or mineral springs to “cure an ailment or to maintain health.”⁷ Some traveled to purely scenic destinations. After the Civil War, the development of the railroad network expanded travel possibilities.⁸ People vacationed at the Jersey Shore and Florida coast, in major cities, and at mountain campsites. Since transportation was slow, vacations required much planning and were therefore extended in duration.⁹

Early tourism was not limited to the East Coast and the Florida coast. San Antonio promoted itself as a winter destination to affluent residents of the Northeast and the midwestern hub of Chicago (**figure 4-2**). Long before the WPA-era development of San Antonio’s River Walk, the missions, golfing amenities, and Brackenridge Park were all promoted as major attractions for East Coast tourists. In its first permutation as a pleasure ground park, Brackenridge Park was promoted as a “natural” park. As a 1908 *San Antonio Express* article stated, “If one is fortunate to possess a carriage or motor car, a journey may be taken to the more secluded recesses of Brackenridge Park, where the scenery is still unspoiled by the mechanical touch of the landscape gardener.”¹⁰ In 1916, with the opening of the golf course, which was one of the first in the South, the city promoted major tournaments and advertised the course through national travel magazines and newspaper articles.

6 Robertson, “Picturesque Traveler in America,” 189.

7 Livia Gershon, “How American Tourism Began,” *JSTOR Daily: Education & Society*, JSTOR, June 13, 2016, accessed May 29, 2019, [daily.jstor.org/how-tourism-began/](https://www.jstor.org/stable/4471111).

8 Gershon, “How American Tourism Began.”

9 Gershon, “How American Tourism Began.”

10 “Opportunities to Move Around on the Day of Rest,” *San Antonio Express*, August 2, 1908, accessed November 6, 2019, [newspapers.com/image/30933621/](https://www.newspapers.com/image/30933621/).



FIGURE 4-2. A January 1917 article discusses San Antonio's ability to compete with California and Florida for northern tourists. The Brackenridge Park golf course, "old quarry," and zoological collection in a "wonderful natural setting" are noted as tourist draws. Source: *San Antonio Express-News*, published in *The Portal to Texas History*, University of North Texas Libraries

In the 1920s, San Antonio caught the attention of Henry Ford, who promoted automobile ownership by sending photographers and filmmakers throughout the United States to document sites where auto travel and tourism could thrive. Brackenridge Park was one of those sites.

PARKWAYS AND PARK BOULEVARDS IN MUNICIPAL PARKS

The fifteenth-century Italian Renaissance architect Leon Alberti wrote in his 1485 architectural treatise, *De re aedificatoria*, that a road should be made "rich with pleasant scenery."¹¹ The American version of this aesthetic road was called a *parkway*—a term that "originated in Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1699 and was initially applied to roads with wide, grassy central medians."¹² But in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, roads and modes of transportation were not refined. The primary transportation options were either train or horse and carriage. "Carriages were often open to the weather and without padding or suspension.... The discomfort of carriages, which in fact were not much worse than most European ones, was nothing compared to the roads, which were rutted in dry weather and swampy in wet."¹³

11 M. G. Lay, *The Ways of the World: A History of the World's Roads and of the Vehicles That Used Them* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 314.

12 Lay, *Ways of the World*, 314.

13 Robertson, "Picturesque Traveler in America," 190.

The concept of American parkways was popularized in the late 1850s with the development of Central Park. “Olmsted’s design sank the four main transverse traffic roads below ground level and used bridges to carry local surface traffic over these arteries. These surface roads then crossed over the path network on a separate set of bridges.”¹⁴ Initially, these roads would have served carriages. After the construction of Central Park, Olmsted and Vaux continued to employ parkways as a component of park development with the construction of Ocean and Eastern Parkways in Brooklyn’s Prospect Park.¹⁵ Olmsted’s solutions that separated through traffic from park traffic prompted designers and engineers to begin considering scenery when designing roads.

As tourism increased in America, municipalities and city parks evolved from purely picturesque expressions into places heavily influenced by the City Beautiful movement. Automobiles, which emerged near the turn of the twentieth century, remained a presence and became more integrated into park planning during this period. Additional parkways were built in New York and Washington in the period between world wars.¹⁶

THE ADVENT OF AUTOMOBILES AND ENTRY INTO NATIONAL PARKS

“On January 29, 1886, Karl Benz was granted the German patent...for a three-wheeled vehicle powered by a four-stroke, single-cylinder gasoline engine”—this event is widely considered the birth of the automobile.¹⁷ Ten years later, and four years before the opening of Brackenridge Park, in 1896, Henry Ford introduced the first motorized vehicle in America—a four-horsepower Quadricycle.¹⁸ When George Brackenridge donated 199 acres of riverfront property to the city of San Antonio in 1899 to be used as a municipal park, forty years had passed since Central Park’s opening. Germans had developed a reputation for their automobile advances, and Henry Ford had founded the Detroit Automobile Company. Ford then founded the Ford Motor Company in 1903 and introduced the Model-T in 1908.

George Brackenridge and other city boosters, many of whom had German origins and must have felt a proud connection to German advances in automobile technology—including hotelier Ludwig Mahncke, had a visionary ambition at the outset: a grand park and boulevard system. The motorized vehicle would be at the forefront of that vision. A June 30, 1905, *San Antonio Express* article reported that the system would “contain 800 acres and provide fifty miles of drives” as well as contain a new park¹⁹ (**figure 4-3**). The article further stated,

If the plans of George W. Brackenridge and some of his associates succeed, San Antonio before many months will have one of the finest park and boulevard systems in the United States barring no city large or small. These plans are nothing less than to give this city a continuous system of parks and drives which will encircle the north, northeast and northwest sides of the city.²⁰

¹⁴ Lay, *Ways of the World*, 314.

¹⁵ Lay, *Ways of the World*, 314.

¹⁶ Lay, *Ways of the World*, 314.

¹⁷ Vaclav Smil, *Creating the Twentieth Century: Technical Innovations of 1867-1914 and Their Lasting Impact* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005), 112.

¹⁸ “Henry Ford Test-Drives his ‘Quadricycle,’” History.com, A&E Television Networks, LLC, June 28, 2019, accessed June 18, 2019, [history.com/this-day-in-history/henry-ford-test-drives-his-quadricycle](https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/henry-ford-test-drives-his-quadricycle).

¹⁹ “...and Boulevard...may be given San Antonio,” *San Antonio Express*, June 30, 1905, PDF documentation of news article from Maria Pfeiffer.

²⁰ “...and Boulevard...may be given San Antonio,” *San Antonio Express*.

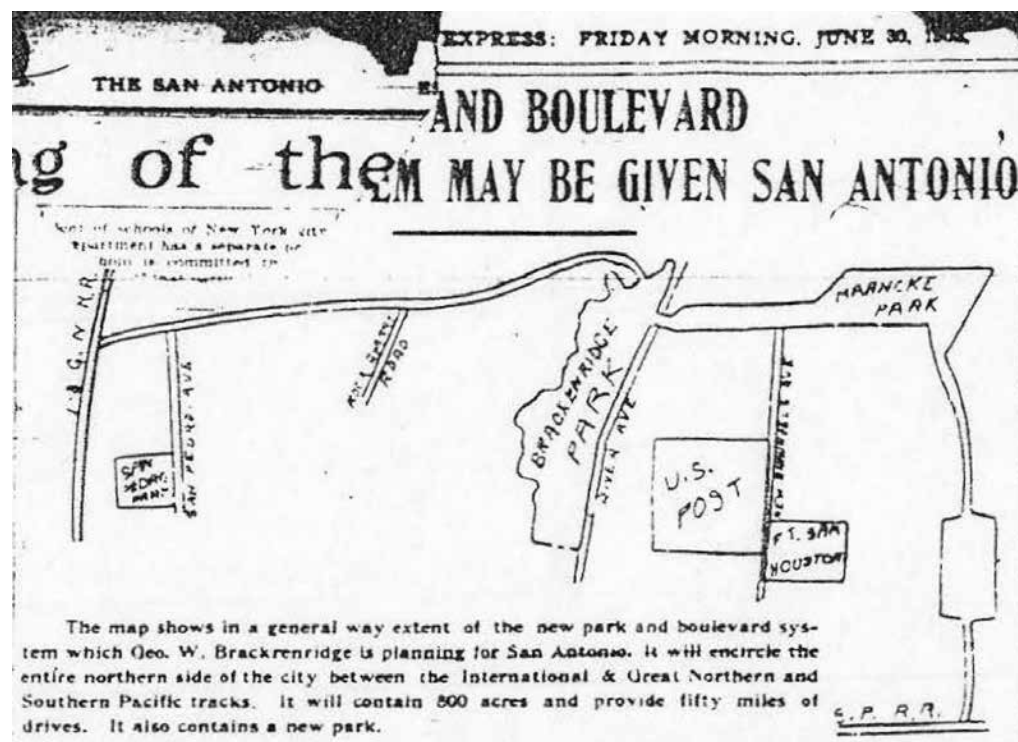


FIGURE 4-3. A map sketch shows the park and boulevard system George Brackenridge envisioned. It was published with a June 1905 *San Antonio Express-News* article, entitled "Park and Boulevard System May Be Given San Antonio." The title is cut off due to a tear. Source: Maria Pfeiffer Collection

Brackenridge's vision for a park and boulevard system that included Brackenridge Park as part of the northwest side of the loop never materialized, although the role of roads and automobiles was certainly privileged during Brackenridge Park's development.

Whereas municipal parks were quick to invite the increasingly popular automobile in through the design and implementation of parkways and boulevards, national parks were slower to accept this mode of transportation. For the most part, cars were banned in federal parks for the first decade of the twentieth century.

During the development of Yosemite in the early 1860s, before the advent of automobiles, circulation within national parks was largely accomplished by horse and carriage. As motorized vehicles became more readily available and affordable, people began to arrive at their favorite destinations by car in increased numbers. Finally, "at the dawn of the 20th century... the lure of taking them [horseless carriages] out to view the scenic wonders of America's national parks was irresistible."²¹

The middle class achieved a newfound freedom of mobility. Families no longer had to live in urban centers or near transportation hubs. The first motorists visited Yosemite National Park in 1900 and Yellowstone two years later. Unprepared, park officials forbid them from entering parks. For nearly a decade, vehicles were prohibited in national parks.²² The reasons for the ban included concerns that they "endangered park visitors, spooked the horses who

21 Donna R. Braden, "Automobiles Enter the National Parks," Past Forward: Activating the Henry Ford Archive of Innovation, The Henry Ford Center, Dearborn, MI, August 12, 2016, accessed May 22, 2019, thehenryford.org/explore/blog/automobiles-enter-the-national-parks/.

22 Braden, "Automobiles Enter the National Parks."



FIGURE 4-4. Postcard of the Wawona Big Tree tunnel in Yosemite, circa 1917-1920. Source: The Henry Ford Museum, Gift of Jim Johnson, 2016.57.2.

regularly pulled tourist carriages and wagons, and seemed out of keeping with the quiet solitude of the parks.”²³

Finally, in 1907, a year before Ford introduced the Model-T to the country, Mount Rainier National Park was the first to officially allow automobiles. Glacier allowed automobiles in 1912, followed by Yosemite and Sequoia in 1913 (**figure 4-4**). Motorists still faced long lists of requirements and regulations, including “written authorization to enter, time restrictions on the use of their vehicles, strict attention to speed limits, and rules about pulling over for oncoming horses and honking at sharp turns.”²⁴

The turning point for vehicles in national parks occurred when the National Park Service was created on August 25, 1916. The 1916 act of Congress that established the National Park Service within the Department of the Interior is known for its dual mandate. The act states that the purpose of national parks is “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for future generations.”²⁵

Stephen Mather, the first National Park Service director, wanted all Americans to experience the kind of healing power that he had found in the national parks. He realized that the automobile was transforming people’s lives and that it would be the impetus for people to explore the parks independently.²⁶

In the early twentieth century, as automobile clubs became popular, they increased pressure on state and local governments to improve park roads. As a result, Congress slowly acted to make park roads safer for motorists. By 1917, as America entered World War I and travel

23 Braden, “Automobiles Enter the National Parks.”

24 Braden, “Automobiles Enter the National Parks.”

25 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 5.

26 Braden, “Automobiles Enter the National Parks.”

to Europe dwindled, railroad companies and highway associations launched an aggressive campaign called “See America First.”²⁷ The same year, all restrictions on vehicles were abandoned, and motor fees became a considerable source of revenue for national parks. A typical visitor “drove to the park, camped out, and controlled his or her own itinerary for seeing the sights.”²⁸

In 1920, for the first time, the number of visitors to national parks reached one million during a single year. Mather concluded that people had turned to parks for “health, happiness and a saner view of life” and that the automobile “has been the open sesame.”²⁹ As the parks received more visitation, Congress was more willing to financially support them.

In 1925, yearly visitation to the parks exceeded two million and in 1928, three million. Annual appropriations went toward improvements geared to motorists, including campgrounds, picnic areas, parking lots, supply stations, and restrooms. Newly paved roads were designed to harmonize with the landscape and offered plenty of scenic turnouts and vistas.³⁰

Between the end of World War I in 1918 and American entry into World War II in 1941, the National Park Service modernized and developed the park system extensively. Engineers and landscape architects designed scenic roads, campgrounds, administration areas, and other interventions (**figure 4-5**). These years proved to be the most intensive period of development in the park system’s history. During this era, parks obtained a consistent visual character and were upgraded to a level of comfort and convenience that visitors have come to associate with their experience of scenery, wildlife, and wilderness.³¹

AUTOMOBILES IN SAN ANTONIO AND BRACKENRIDGE PARK

Although national parks eventually accepted the inevitability of automobile tourism and designed accordingly, municipal parks were ahead of the curve. In particular, Brackenridge Park came into being at a pivotal time for the automobile, which made an entry into San Antonio the same year that Mahncke laid out the initial park features.

The first recorded horseless carriage in San Antonio was an electric vehicle used by the Staacke Brothers Livery Service in 1899. The first gasoline vehicle arrived in 1901. “Because automobiles were so expensive at this time, often costing more than most houses, the earliest examples in any given city was usually acquired by a doctor, who could justify the cost as he could now make double the number of house calls than with horses...”³²

In the summer of 1902, bicycle shop owners Lewis Birdsong and Frank Crowthers acquired one of the first mass produced vehicles in the world, the single cylinder Curved Dash Oldsmobile. They established the city’s first automobile agency and sold Oldsmobiles to several customers including Fred Cook, the president of San Antonio’s first automobile

27 Braden, “Automobiles Enter the National Parks.”

28 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 7.

29 Braden, “Automobiles Enter the National Parks.”

30 Braden, “Automobiles Enter the National Parks.”

31 Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 1.

32 Hugh Hemphill, “Automobiles in San Antonio, 1899-1916,” Texas Transportation Museum, accessed May 22, 2019, txtransportationmuseum.org/history-car.php.



FIGURE 4-5. Postcard of “A Yellowstone Public Automobile Camp,” circa 1920. Source: The Henry Ford Museum, 90.238.6.

club, which was established in the fall of 1903. Cook led members on regular outings to destinations including to the Medina River and New Braunfels, Texas.³³

At that time, common rules were not yet established for automobile travel. In March 1910, the San Antonio City Council introduced the first set of road rules, “at more or less the same time the police department acquired its first automobiles and motorbikes.” The posted speed limit within the business district was 10 miles per hour, and outside of this zone the speed limit ranged from 18 to 25 miles per hour.³⁴

BRACKENRIDGE: THE DRIVING PARK

George Brackenridge had an extensive library and travelled widely. As a banker, he would have had knowledge of developments occurring nationally. Mahncke, as a hotelier, would also have had knowledge of national trends in tourism. Thus, it is highly probable that the vision for a large central park in San Antonio was influenced by trends for both national and municipal parks. The introduction of roads for carriage and automobile tourism was conceived from the start. It was decided that the park ‘should be a driving park more than a picnic place.’ To this end, Mahncke designed and opened several miles of driveways that all converged on the river at the north end of the park.”³⁵

Most notably, the design and decisions regarding placement of Brackenridge Park’s roads did not reflect the formality of Central Park’s roads. Instead, the directive that the design would be grounded in the “the existing visual character” of the indigenous landscape became an important principle as Brackenridge was developed (**figure 4-6**). A *San Antonio Express* newspaper article noted, “These roads have been opened through the dense forest

³³ Hemphill, “Automobiles in San Antonio.”

³⁴ Hemphill, “Automobiles in San Antonio.”

³⁵ Pfeiffer and Tomka, “Brackenridge Park,” 48.

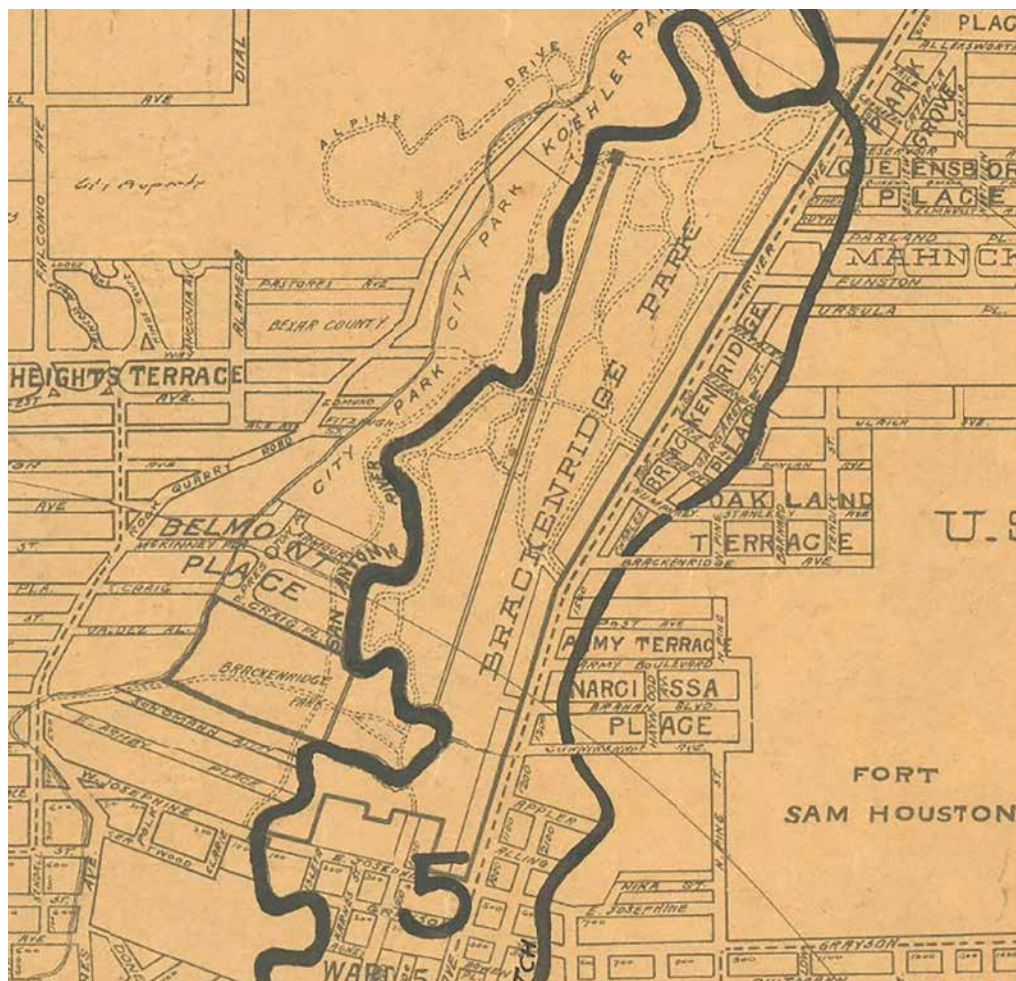


FIGURE 4-6. Detail of the 1921 “Ward Map of the City of San Antonio” shows the extensive system of roads in Brackenridge Park. The roads are represented with dotted lines. The San Antonio River is represented with a thick black line, and the Acequia Madre de Valero “ditch” is shown with a black line east of the river. Source: City of San Antonio Archives.



FIGURE 4-7. Circa 1917 photo shows a horse-drawn carriage and an automobile at the Tuleta Street low-water crossing. Source: Jay Louden, WorkShop.

upon a plan to give the most pleasure and variety of scenery,” with road construction careful “not to disturb the throne of a single monarch of the forest.”³⁶ Relaying its general character as a woodland, driving park, the 1905 article stated that “The course is already well wooded with live oak and elm trees.”³⁷ The newspaper also printed a sketch that shows the unusual shape the park would take on, following the siting and shape of the San Antonio River and its surrounding acequias (**figure 4-3**).

Like the municipal parks’ contemporary, the national parks, Brackenridge Park connected tourists to vast and scenic woodland areas and to the San Antonio River, through the usage of automobiles. But to further emphasize the point, in its execution, Brackenridge Park’s vernacular design is distinct from its predecessor, Central Park, in expressing a regional character. Brackenridge, Mahncke, and their colleagues took their most important cues, not from Central Park, but from the San Antonio site’s indigenous hydrologic and vegetative patterns, as well as its exposed limestone geology. They determined the placement of roads in response to the existing woodlands and in response to the San Antonio River. For example, two “low-water crossings,” one built in 1917 at Tuleta Street, and the other built in 1939 at Avenue A, physically connected automobiles with the river, and they created a park that is inextricably linked to the automobile—a natural feature to be experienced upon spinning tires and through open windows, with the only-in-Brackenridge opportunity for one to run their fingers through the cool spring water as their vehicle rolled through the river. Brackenridge Park, from the outset, was a masterpiece of regional vernacular design not yet seen in other early municipal parks (**figure 4-7**).

³⁶ Pfeiffer and Tomka, “Brackenridge Park,” 48.

³⁷ “...and Boulevard...may be given San Antonio,” *San Antonio Express*.

CHAPTER 5. ETHNOGRAPHIC IMPRINTS ON THE LANDSCAPE

One goal of a CLR is for landscape historians to enable communities to see their cultural landscapes from different and perhaps surprising perspectives—to expand the view. When Olmsted visited San Antonio in 1857 and remarked on the city’s “odd and antiquated foreignness” and “jumble of races, costumes, languages and buildings,”¹ he could not have predicted that it would maintain an enigmatic cultural identity for well over a century.

This chapter attempts to define San Antonio’s predominant historic ethnographies. A brief discussion of migration as part of a global cycle is also included. Then, in order to make the connection between San Antonio’s ethnographically layered cultures and the global perspective, the discussion zooms in to look at America’s transforming population and how San Antonio’s population trends compare. Finally, this section considers the preservation of these layers and discusses their cultural and ethnographic imprints on Brackenridge Park.

Early in its history, San Antonio recognized its unique relationship with drought and flood conditions and the precious resource of water. Treating water as an equitable resource, one so precious that its conservation was also accounted for at the outset of settlement, shaped San Antonio and informed future conservation measures. The city’s cultural identity is a resource as well, and San Antonio is in a unique position to set the pace for the rest of the country, not merely in capitalizing on its cultural identity or freezing it in time—which would be impossible—but instead in interpreting it meaningfully to create a legacy of continued stewardship of public space resources (**figure 5-1**).

1 Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey through Texas* (New York: Dix Edwards, 1857), 150-51.



FIGURE 5-1. “Eye of God” painting on the ceiling of the Mission Concepcion library room. The San Antonio Missions complex is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, in part, because details such as this, inspired by nature and pervasive in the architectural details of these complexes, demonstrate the weaving of Spanish and Coahuiltecan cultures. Source: “San Antonio Missions: Nomination for Inscription on the World Heritage List”

SAN ANTONIO’S EARLIEST BLENDED CULTURES

San Antonio’s history of ethnic layering resulted in an amalgamated culture that is original and unique to the city, but what should that culture be termed? The US Office of Management and Budget defines the terms *Hispanic* and *Latino* both as “a person of Cuban, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.”² According to a 2013 Pew Research Center study, although most Americans are ambivalent about the federal terminology, Texans are an exception: 46% of “Hispanic Texans prefer Hispanic, while just 8% prefer the term ‘Latino’—roughly a 6-to-1 ratio.”³

Among the “jumble of races” that Olmsted observed, the two most predominant would have been what this CLR will call San Antonio Tejanos and Hill Country Germans. Distilling the historic cultures of San Antonio into two dominant ones in no way discounts the ethnically and racially diverse landscape that existed in San Antonio from earliest exploration, beginning in the mid-1500s. But these two cultures, complex in and of themselves, seem to have established a lasting foothold that is present to this day.

SAN ANTONIO TEJANOS

Unlike *Hispanic* and *Latino*, the term *Tejano* is not a federal designation. It is a cultural term defined in *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* as someone who is “a Texan of Hispanic descent.” The Texas State Historical Association defines *Tejano* as “a Texan of Mexican descent, thus a Mexican Texan or a Texas Mexican.”⁴ To add San Antonio as a qualifier to

² US Census Bureau, “Hispanic Origin,” United States Census Bureau, US Department of Commerce, March 7, 2018, [census.gov/topics/population/hispanic-origin/about.html](https://www.census.gov/topics/population/hispanic-origin/about.html).

³ Mark Hugo Lopez, “Hispanic or Latino? Many Don’t Care Except in Texas,” Pew Research Center, October 28, 2013, accessed November 22, 2019, [pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/10/28/in-texas-its-hispanic-por-favor/](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/10/28/in-texas-its-hispanic-por-favor/).

⁴ Adán Benavides, “Tejano,” *Handbook of Texas*, Texas State Historical Association, June 15, 2010, accessed November 22, 2019, [tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/pft07](https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/pft07).



FIGURE 5-2. Circa 1870–1880 quilt made by Antonia Ruiz Herrera, daughter of two prominent Tejano families in San Antonio. The quilt incorporates symbols of Mexican Texas. Source: Witte Museum Collection

Tejano, using the latter definition, provides yet more regional and cultural specificity—*San Antonio Tejano*.

San Antonio's Tejano culture is an amalgamation. Various Indigenous Coahuiltecan groups—the original inhabitants of the area—began mixing with Spanish missionary settlers who arrived in 1718 and with Canary Islanders (known as the *Isleños*) who were sent by an order of the Spanish crown in 1731 to settle the area. The blending of these groups formed the Mexican American culture that is distinct to the area and different from the Mexican American cultures along the Texas border or in other cities in the United States (figures 5-2 and 5-3).



FIGURE 5–3. Photo of two tortilleras making tortillas in San Antonio in 1944. The image demonstrates a lasting Mexican food culture in the city. The culture was prevalent in San Antonio early, as evidenced by the presence of the Mexican Village in Brackenridge Park in the 1920s, where vendors sold crafts and food. Source: Library of Congress, USF 33-012057

EARLY AFRICAN AND CANARY ISLANDER IMPRINTS

With the first Spanish explorers came the first Africans.⁵ As early as 1527, accounts of the expedition that sought to conquer the New World, led by Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, mention a Moroccan by the various names of Mostafa al-Azemmouri, Estabanico de Dorantes, Esteban the Moor, and, occasionally, “the first black man” in the New World. The Reverend Father Frier Marco De Niza’s descriptions detail how al-Azemmouri was routinely sent out into Indigenous lands to discover new territories for the Spanish Crown.⁶ In 1689, African soldiers accompanied the Spaniard Alonso de Leon’s expedition when they established a military garrison, or presidio, at the site of a Papaya Indian village, Yanaguana (present-day San Antonio).⁷

Villa San Fernando de Béjar (present-day San Antonio), or Villa de Béjar, was the settlement that evolved outside of the presidio, and it “acquired the reputation of a racially-mixed post as the small garrison of soldiers intermarried with the local Indians.”⁸ In 1718, Martin De Alarcon was appointed the new governor of the region, and his expedition brought “the first families,” which comprised Spanish soldiers and their families; Christianized Tlascalcan natives from central Mexico; enslaved Africans—Muslim captives from West Africa who may have been freed or resold to the Spanish; Christianized Moors; and “a group of racially mixed scouts or probable slaves” who were from Spanish provinces of the West African Coast. There were many interracial marriages within Villa de Béjar, and the mixed populace called themselves Tejanos, since they were the first residents of the Tέjas Spanish colony.⁹

5 Bruce A. Glasrud, ed. *African Americans in South Texas History* (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 2011), 3.

6 Lhoussain Simour, *Recollecting History beyond Borders: Captives, Acrobats, Dancers and the Moroccan-American Narrative of Encounters* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 45-62.

7 Glasrud, *African Americans in South Texas History*, 3; and “Spanish Exploration and the Colonial Era (1689-1820),” Mission Trails, The City of San Antonio—Official City Website, accessed October 23, 2019, www.sanantonio.gov/Mission-Trails/Prehistory-History/History-of-San-Antonio/Spanish-Exploration-Colonial-Era/Spanish-Exploration-Colonial-Era-Narrative.

8 Kenneth Mason, *African-Americans and Race Relations in San Antonio, Texas, 1867-1937* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 4.

9 Mason, *African-Americans and Race Relations*, 4-5.



FIGURE 5-4. Map illustrating the route of original Canary Islanders to San Antonio via Vera Cruz, Mexico. These families were believed to have been a mix of Canary Island, Spanish, African, Genoese Italian, and Portuguese people. Source: Gerry Rickhoff and Bexar County Clerk's Office, published in *The Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State Historical Association

Around 1730, fifteen families from the Spanish Canary Islands were recruited to come to the colony in New Spain and settle within Villa de Béjar. The Spanish crown recruited enlistees to go to the colony by offering “land grants, irrigation rights, horses, titles of minor nobility to heads of families..., subsistence allowances throughout the journey by sea and overland, tools for farming and construction of homesteads, and the opportunity to serve in the government (*ayuntamiento*) they were to initiate”¹⁰ (figure 5-4). As the Canary Islands actively participated in the Atlantic slave trade, many of the Islanders, being a mixture of Spanish, African, Genoese Italian, and Portuguese people, shared similar traits with people already in Villa de Béjar.

In the Canary Islands, it was said that the racial mixing created a “new” people who replaced Indigenous Canary Islanders.¹¹ It was these dark-skinned people who were sought by Spanish authorities to go to the New World, because the authorities believed the “new” Canary Islanders, with their “racially-mixed heritage would...blend easily into foreign overseas populations.”¹²

Although they were also of racially mixed heritage, the Islanders had connections to the crown and were “true European Spaniards”; believing in the caste system (*las castas*), they thought of themselves as a “white ‘elite’ group,” which set them apart from the Tejanos. Some of the terms used to describe the Tejanos included *mulatto*, *mestizo*, *Afro-mestizo*, *Eurafrian*, *Eurindian*, and *Espanol*.¹³

Under the Spanish and Mexican governments, there was movement between the classes and races of people within the colony, and there are some records of people of African descent receiving land grants and marrying into upper-class Spanish families.¹⁴ There was often a desire among the Canary Islanders to increase economic status, which frequently led to interracial marriages with people of African descent, and this was not regarded as taboo.¹⁵

THE ENSLAVED

In 1776, despite racial mixing, Africans were still a recognizable presence in San Antonio, with 150 of the 2,060 inhabitants listed as a “mixture of whites and blacks.” By 1790, records show that 862 people were listed either as mulatto or simply as black. Likely due to an increase in enslaved runaways, the percentage of the population with African heritage had increased by 1800. Afro-mestizos and mulattos were identifiable groups until about 1824, when “racist notions about blacks” became more common, and more people began claiming Mexican or Spanish descent than they did their African ancestry.¹⁶

San Antonio embraced the institution of slavery, as did most other Southern cities. Although slavery did not contribute greatly to San Antonio’s economy in comparison to other cities, San Antonio’s slaveholders were wealthy and powerful people who proffered the institution.

10 Armando Curbelo Fuentes, *The Canary Islanders in Texas: The Story of the Founding of San Antonio* (San Antonio, TX: Maverick Books/Trinity University Press, 2018), xvi.

11 Mason, *African-Americans and Race Relations*, 5.

12 Mason, *African-Americans and Race Relations*, 5.

13 Mason, *African-Americans and Race Relations*, 6-7.

14 Glasrud, *African Americans in South Texas History*, 3-4.

15 Mason, *African-Americans and Race Relations*, 7.

16 Mason, *African-Americans and Race Relations*, 7.

There were few slaveholders and enslaved people, however. Census records from the 1850s to 1860s show an overall decrease in the percentage of the enslaved population and of slaveholders.¹⁷ In 1860, there were approximately 500 enslaved people in a city of nearly 8,000 free people, compared with 220 enslaved people and a free population of 3,168 ten years earlier in 1850.¹⁸

	Total free population	Total enslaved population
1850	3,168	220
1860	7,683	514

Census Records for San Antonio¹⁹

But newspaper coverage of the “Texas Troubles,” a series of well poisonings and fires that occurred throughout Texas in the 1860s, spread fear of enslaved people. In response, the council of San Antonio enforced strict ordinances that restricted the behavior of the enslaved population.²⁰

Between 1850 and 1860, there were also nearly four hundred free blacks in the state of Texas, according to the US Census. The counts were incomplete, though, because many free blacks with Spanish surnames were not counted. Some estimate that the numbers would have been twice the census counts, but most of the new blacks arriving were enslaved.²¹ Notably, within San Antonio, only 19.3 percent of the enslaved were adult males, which means that most enslaved humans were laboring as house servants rather than laboring to produce economic gains.²² An important exception is the enslaved people who labored in the tannery and saw mill that were operable in what is now Brackenridge Park.

After the Civil War ended in 1865, many formerly enslaved people migrated to Texas, as it was thought that they would have a better life than they would have in the Deep South²³ (figure 5-5).

CANARY ISLANDERS

The Canary Islanders were the first *civilians* in the colony. They arrived in the presidio after the soldiers and friars, and they established the colony’s first governing cabildo, with its building located between the San Antonio presidio and Mission San Antonio de Valero, in 1731 in the name of King Philip V of Spain. The first mayor and head of the cabildo of San Antonio was an Islander by the name of Juan Leal Goraz. Incidentally, the Isleños had chosen him to lead the expedition from the Canary Islands to the New World, and they naturally thought of him as a leader within the colony. The population of the settlement totaled about three hundred people and included the soldiers and their families, the friars, the natives, and the Islanders. Although the Islanders were the newest settlers in the colony, the first

17 Glasrud, *African Americans in South Texas History*, 37.

18 Glasrud, *African Americans in South Texas History*, 33-34.

19 Glasrud, *African Americans in South Texas History*, 37.

20 Glasrud, *African Americans in South Texas History*, 33-34.

21 Glasrud, *African Americans in South Texas History*, 4.

22 Glasrud, *African Americans in South Texas History*, 37.

23 Glasrud, *African Americans in South Texas History*, 1.

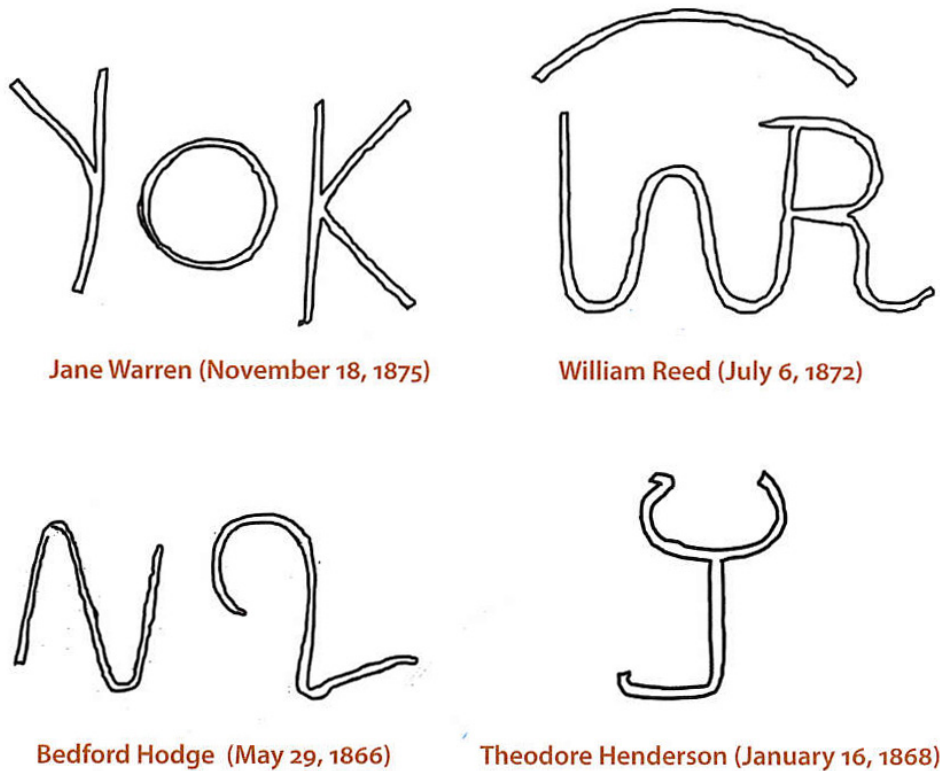


FIGURE 5–5. Some African Americans worked in the cattle industry. African American cattle brand registrations appeared in San Antonio as early as 1852, though the majority were registered after Emancipation in 1866. Brands were typically made from letter characters in the applicant's name. Source: *300 Years of San Antonio and Bexar County*

cabildo comprised entirely Canary Islanders, and it was the job of this new government to create houses, streets, a plaza, and a new church as well as to get water to these new settlers²⁴ (figure 5-6).

The Isleños came to the New World with royal decrees that offered “free use of the water for irrigation purposes if the supply to the missions was not cut off.” Disputes over water rights in the colony are covered in volumes of court records.²⁵ Before the cabildo was elected, the captain of the presidio, Juan Antonio Perez de Almazan, was the supreme authority over all inhabitants, and naturally, there was friction caused by the election of a civilian government. Almazan refused to return horses to the Islanders for use in farming and would not grant them titles to the land granted by the Spanish Crown.²⁶ Friar Miguel of the Franciscan ministry was also against them; he did not want the Islanders to use water from the river, as it was to be used only for the missions. What both the missionaries and the military hoped was that the Canary Islanders would divide up and live within the five missions. But the settlers decided to take up residence around the cabildo and function as a separate, self-governing town. So naturally, Captain Almazan and Friar Miguel devised a plan to have Antonio Rodriguez Mederos, cabildo councilor and the canal builder in the settlement, supervise the building of a canal to irrigate the Mission Concepcion estate, which would delay the building of the

²⁴ Fuentes, *Canary Islanders in Texas*, 5-8.

²⁵ “Acequias,” Mission Trails, The City of San Antonio—Official City Website, October 17, 2016, accessed October 28, 2019, www.sanantonio.gov/Mission-Trails/Mission-Trails-Historic-Sites/Detail-Page/ArtMID/16185/ArticleID/4230/Acequias?ID=53.

²⁶ Fuentes, *Canary Islanders in Texas*, 8, 13.



FIGURE 5-6. Circa 1850 Map of Plaza de las Islas, laid out in the 1700s by Canary Island settlers. The plaza is today the main plaza in downtown San Antonio. Source: City of San Antonio, "Spanish Exploration and the Colonial Era"

canal that the Islanders desperately needed. Accepting this position meant Mederos could not work on the irrigation projects for the cabildo and its occupants. This action on the part of the military and missionaries separated the cabildo and the missions permanently and garnered much scorn for Mederos. He would later work on a canal project for the cabildo, however, and he would supply water to both their fields and the town.²⁷

When the Concepcion Canal was completed in 1738, the Isleños petitioned the new captain, Jose de Urrutia, who immediately approved the construction of the San Pedro Canal, as he saw the need for irrigation within the town. Mederos was unanimously elected to direct the project, and after three years of intense work, the canal was completed. It supplied water to all houses, the fort, and adjoining farmlands to cover an area of over four hundred acres on either side of the canal. In 1741, Mederos was elected president of the cabildo because of his contributions to the community.²⁸

The San Pedro Canal continues to supply water to surrounding croplands today and is referred to as the Mother Canal. The cabildo that they established is the foundation for the way the city is governed today. The impact of these settlers cannot be underestimated, as traces of this strong and outspoken community still remain today.

²⁷ Fuentes, *Canary Islanders in Texas*, 42.

²⁸ Fuentes, *Canary Islanders in Texas*, 54-57.

HILL COUNTRY GERMANS

Another predominant European culture entered San Antonio over a hundred years after its original colonial settlement. Beginning in the 1840s, German immigrants settled the Texas Hill Country between Austin and San Antonio and developed a distinctive regional culture.

During the nineteenth century, German immigrants were the largest ethnic group from Europe residing in Texas, constituting over 5 percent of the total population in 1850. There were so many settlers that the region in the south central part of the state stretching from Galveston to Houston, west to the towns of Hondo and Mason, and just past San Antonio became known as the German Belt.²⁹

In the early 1800s, the state of Texas offered land contracts to begin colonies by settling specific groups of immigrants in vacant lands—contracts included stipulations that the immigrants be “professants of the Catholic religion [and] be of good moral habits” and often detailed where the immigrants were to be from.³⁰ Initially, there were several plans in place to attract German immigrants, but the most successful method of attracting these settlers was chain migration, or using a dominant personality to write letters to their homeland describing emigration to the New World as a “solution to economic, social, political or religious problems” of the homeland. Johan Friedrich Ernst was the first of these dominant personalities, and because generous land grants were available to Europeans within Stephen F. Austin’s Texas colony, he was able to obtain a land grant of over four thousand acres, thus forming the central core of the German Belt.³¹

In 1830, Austin was the arbiter of a project, located in present-day Austin County, that invited Swiss and German immigrants to come to settle Texas. The Swiss and Germans were thought to be industrious and of good character, and Austin described how “above all, they will oppose slavery,” as he favored the exclusion of slavery from the state.³² Although he did not enforce this within the colony, his abolitionist position on slavery did discourage large planters from coming to Texas.³³ Austin thought that if he introduced a few “respectable families” that were “pleased with the country,” he would have no issue in persuading other families to follow them.³⁴ This wasn’t difficult to do, as Ernst wrote many “America letters” to Germany describing the positive aspects of the new land that were heavily publicized in the newspapers, and in this way he encouraged “a steady stream of migrants” from northwestern Germany to come to Texas.³⁵

Another factor that increased German immigration to Texas was a society of wealthy and titled Germans, called the Verein. Members of this society were interested in overseas colonization and took advantage of what was called the “Verein grant” (also referred to as the Adelsverein, the Verein zum Schutze Deutscher Einwanderer in Texas, or the German Emigration Company). This grant cost \$120 for a single man and \$240 for a household and

29 Terry G. Jordan, “Germans,” *Handbook of Texas*, Texas State Historical Association, June 15, 2010, accessed November 1, 2019, tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/png02.

30 Rudolph Leopold Biese, *The History of the German Settlements in Texas, 1831-1861* (Austin, TX: Press of Von Boeckmann-Jones, 2008), 21-25.

31 Jordan, “Germans.”

32 Biese, *History of the German Settlements*, 26.

33 Terry G. Jordan-Bychkov, *German Seed in Texas Soil: Immigrant Farmers in Nineteenth-Century Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 24.

34 Biese, *History of the German Settlements*, 26.

35 Jordan, “Germans.”

included the following benefits:

Each agreed to cultivate at least fifteen acres for three years and to occupy his house for the same period. In return of this, the Verin promised (1) free transportation to the colony, (2) free land in the colony (160 acres for a single man and 320 acres for a family), (3) a free log house, (4) provisions and all goods necessary to begin farming, supplied on credit until the second successive crop had been harvested, and (5) numerous public improvements, such as the construction of roads, mills, cotton gins, hospitals, schools, churches, orphan asylums, and even the canalization of rivers.³⁶

Although the Verin was a disaster financially, it was the main impetus for bringing thousands of Germans to Texas. Many of these immigrants died in epidemics, and many others never made it to the settlement but made their homes in cities such as San Antonio, Galveston, and Houston because of better economic opportunities. The settlers were mainly farmers, but there were also some landowners, artisans, and “university-educated professionals and intellectuals.”³⁷

The German migration continued through the 1850s, after the organized immigration projects ended, and more migrants came to settle in the German Belt through the 1890s (**figure 5-7**). In 1880, the population of San Antonio was about a third German. By the turn of the twentieth century, German immigration was focused on the cities rather than on the rural settlements, and of the city dwellers, the third and fourth generations were very prosperous and moved to the suburbs. This signaled the decline of affluent German neighborhoods, German schools, and the German press in San Antonio.³⁸

In a sense, San Antonio’s blended identity is a predecessor to new patterns of immigration transforming the city’s cultural landscape today, and it is representative of larger migration patterns globally.

³⁶ Jordan-Bychkov, *German Seed in Texas Soil*, 42-43.

³⁷ Jordan, “Germans.”

³⁸ Jordan, “Germans.”

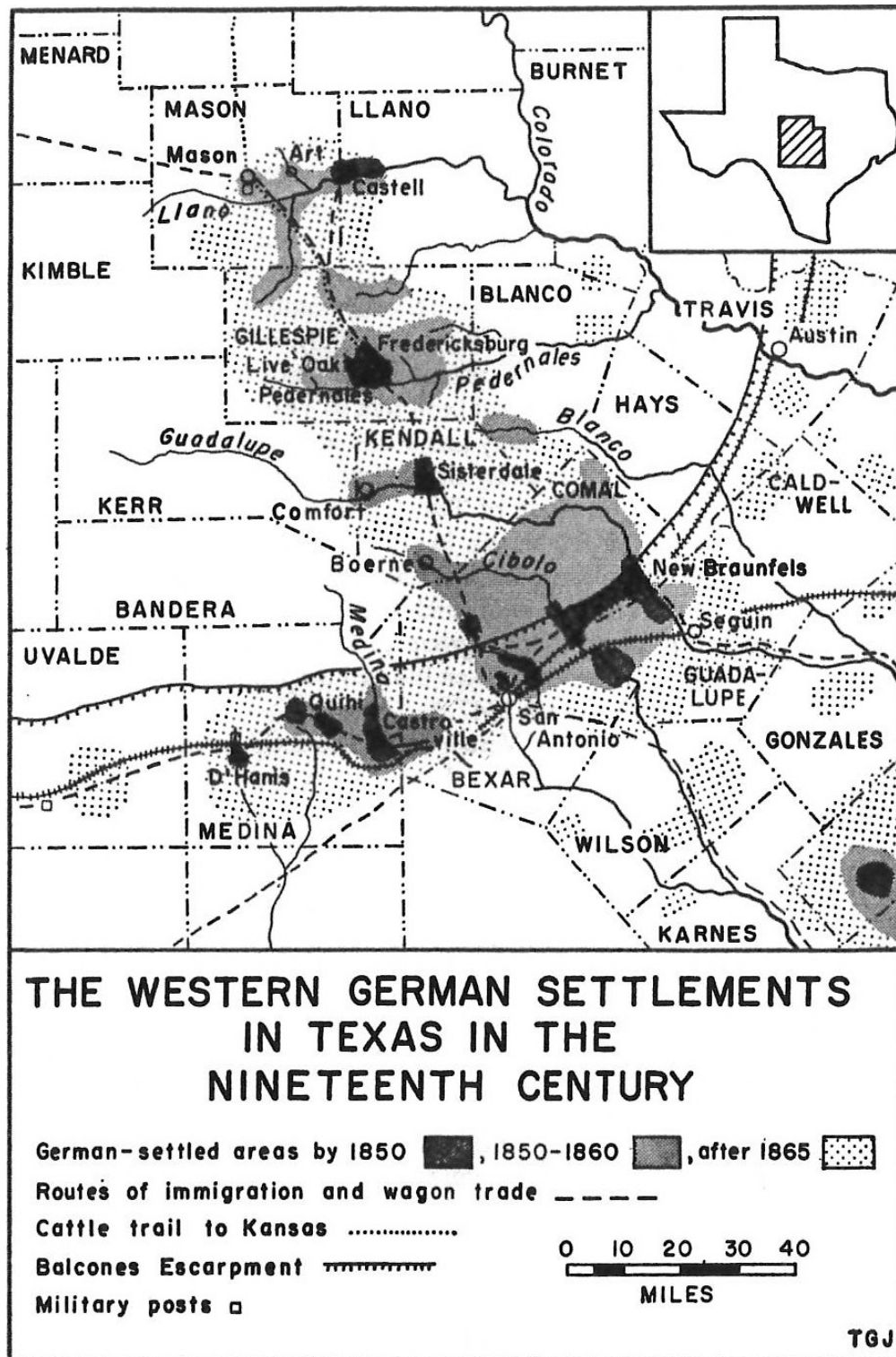


FIGURE 5-7. Map illustrating German settlement in the Texas Hill Country between 1850-1865 and after. Northern San Antonio appears to have attracted the most German settlers. Source: Jordan-Bychkov, *German Seed in Texas Soil*, Figure 17.

GLOBAL, NATIONAL, AND LOCAL PATTERNS OF MIGRATION

Just as humans have settled rivers for millennia, migration has occurred throughout human history.

The large-scale movement of people goes back more than a hundred thousand years when early homo sapiens began migrating out from the African continent. Just as other species migrate in reaction to resource availability, habitat quality, and stress or disturbance—human populations move (voluntarily or involuntarily) for a wide range of motivations.”³⁹

Migration...can describe flows of populations as diverse as the seasonal patterns of migrant laborers and nomadic herders, the relocation of populations in response to earthquakes or civil wars, the zealous journeys of missionaries or explorers, the voluntary seasonal travel of retirees, or the involuntary removal of populations ensnared by mass incarceration.

It can also describe “complex and traumatic histories such as the forced migration resultant of ethnic cleansing or the transatlantic slave trade.”⁴⁰

The seasonal migration pattern of Indigenous Coahuiltecan groups (also known as the Payaya), the missionary settlement of Spaniards, the colonial settlement of Spain’s Canary Islanders, the chain migration that brought German immigrants to San Antonio, and the presence of an enslaved population in San Antonio are all examples of the global pattern of migration. “These large-scale movements of individuals and communities from one location to another, or one way of life to another, [are] now recognized as having far-reaching effects on culture, language, genetics, law, economics and the environment.”⁴¹ Examples include the first Spanish colonists (Canary Islanders) laying out plazas and providing space for military festivals in accordance with the Law of the Indies⁴² as well as the system of water and land rights that was brought first to Spain by the Moors and then from Spain to San Antonio.⁴³

Brackenridge Park contains its own example of the effects of hybridized cultures on the structure of laws and imprints on the landscape. It displays turn-of-the-century buildings that melded the German architectural styles of “half-timbering or rock-and-mortar”⁴⁴ with native limestone materials (**figure 5-8**). This resulted in regional vernacular buildings and structures that dot the park and the city (**figure 5-9**).

39 Stephanie Carlisle and Nicholas Pevzner, “Introduction: Migration,” *Scenario Journal*, PennDesign, July 2, 2017, accessed November 22, 2019, scenariojournal.com/article/introduction-migration/.

40 Carlisle and Pevzner, “Introduction: Migration.”

41 Carlisle and Pevzner, “Introduction: Migration.”

42 Lewis F. Fisher, *Saving San Antonio: The Preservation of a Heritage*, 2nd ed (San Antonio, TX: Maverick, 2016), 18.

43 Fisher, *Saving San Antonio*, 17.

44 Hubert G. H. Wilhelm, “Organized German Settlement and Its Effects on the Frontier of South-Central Texas” (Dissertation 1523, Louisiana State University, 1968), iv, accessed November 4, 2019, digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/1523.

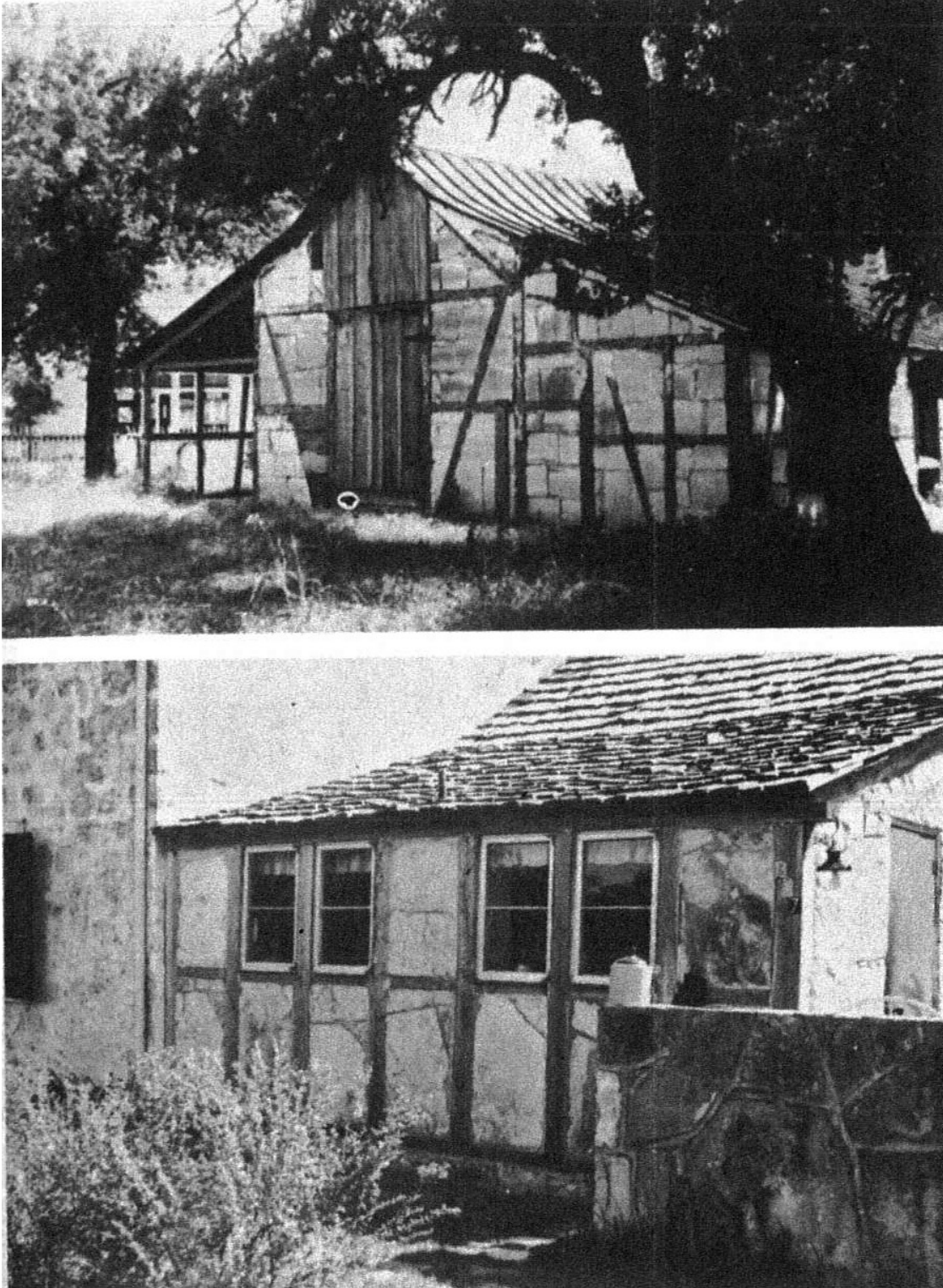


FIGURE 5–8. Two circa 1857 half-timbered houses in Kendall County, located northwest of Bexar County. The traditional German building method in which squared-off jointed timbers are secured with wooden pegs, and sometimes left exposed on the exterior of the building. These homes illustrate the method in combination with native Texas limestone. Source: Jordan-Bychkov, *German Seed in Texas Soil*, Figure 5.



FIGURE 5–9. The lower pump house in Brackenridge Park, constructed in 1885. German half-timbering construction melded with native limestone material can be observed in other places in the park, including the Japanese Tea Garden, where Mexican building methods are also seen, and the amalgamation of cultures is more pronounced. Source: Brackenridge Park Conservancy

AMERICA'S TRANSFORMING POPULATION—LOOKING AHEAD Twenty-Five YEARS

Although various forms of human migration are nothing new, the United States is presently in the midst of a major cultural transformation. Migration has been widely covered in mainstream media over the past year, and it is being addressed by world leaders. “[B]oth *Science* and *Nature* ran special issues on Human Migration. *The Economist* included a special report on the topic.... Last year, the United Nations General Assembly hosted its first high-level summit to discuss large movements of refugees and migrants and plan a coordinated global response.”⁴⁵

The United States has begun transitioning to a society that is more urban and in which people possess increased ethnic and racial plurality (beyond Western European heritage). Widespread projections, including a 2018 study by the Brookings Institute, show that by 2045—just twenty-five years—the nation will become a “minority white” population. The study states that the projections “confirm the importance of racial minorities as the primary demographic engine of the nation’s future growth, countering an aging, slow-growing and soon to be declining white population.”⁴⁶ With this transition, the population has also heightened its attunement to cultural factors.

⁴⁵ Carlisle and Pevzner, “Introduction: Migration.”

⁴⁶ William H. Frey, “The US Will Become ‘Minority White’ in 2045, Census Projects,” Brookings, March 14, 2018, accessed November 22, 2019, [brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2018/03/14/the-us-will-become-minority-white-in-2045-census-projects/](https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2018/03/14/the-us-will-become-minority-white-in-2045-census-projects/).

Texas as a whole has also become more diverse, with Houston ranked as the most diverse city in the nation. Dallas is ranked fifth, Arlington ninth, Fort Worth twenty-fifth, and Austin forty-seventh.⁴⁷ San Antonio is, today, ranked sixty-second out of the five hundred most diverse cities in the country on a combination of socioeconomic, cultural diversity, religious diversity, and economic diversity.⁴⁸ When isolating only southern cities, San Antonio rises as the fifteenth most diverse city in the South. So it is inevitable that the stewards of the nation's cultural landscapes will look different in the very near future than they look today.

SAN ANTONIO'S POPULATION—PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

San Antonio's population already provides, and has throughout most of its history, a snapshot of what other American cities of the future will look like in twenty-five years—places led by people who possess distinctive ethnic identities and/or an amalgamation of their respective ethnic cultures. The Demographics Research Group of the University of Virginia analyzes census and demographic data, and in 2013, the group created the Racial Dot Map, which captures one dot per person in the entire United States (308 million dots). The results illustrate that San Antonio's population is overwhelmingly Hispanic, at 63 percent, while the remainder of the population is made up of “pockets of white, black, and Asian communities”⁴⁹ (figures 5-10 and 5-11).

In San Antonio, Tejanos already play numerous leadership roles in the city. Although Mexican immigration to the city has declined overall in recent years, those who are still migrating—largely from Monterrey, Mexico—have financial means and are entering the business sector. A 2013 study by the San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce found that “Mexican Nationals, both domestic and foreign, generated \$2.7 billion on spending in 2012, across a 20-county area of south and central Texas.”⁵⁰ Indeed, San Antonio's landscape stewards will be representative of these demographics, if they are not already.

ETHNOGRAPHIC LANDSCAPES AND PRESERVATION

“As...development patterns push up against long-established migration patterns, some of which are coming into focus for the first time, how can cities...be designed to be more mindful of these flows? ...[W]hat kinds of assistance can designers, planners, land managers, and restoration ecologists offer?”⁵¹ Communities are faced with the opportunity to determine at a civic level which aspects of their ethnic identities and culture to preserve for future generations.

Do I fit in this landscape—is there a place for me here? Can I find myself in this landscape's story; is it relatable to me? These central questions can inform an approach to preservation and interpretation that is both rooted in history and forward-looking, toward the goal of

47 Adam McCann, “Most Diverse Cities in the U.S.,” *WalletHub*, Evolution Finance, April 10, 2019, accessed June 16, 2019, wallethub.com/edu/most-diverse-cities/12690/.

48 McCann, “Most Diverse Cities in the U.S.”

49 Kolten Parker, “Stunning Diversity Map Shows San Antonio's Racial Divide,” *San Antonio Express-News*, September 15, 2014, accessed November 22, 2019, expressnews.com/news/local/article/Stunning-diversity-map-shows-San-Antonio-s-racial-5757061.php.

50 Scott Beyer, “‘Mexican Nationals’ Are Transforming San Antonio,” *Forbes*, June 17, 2016, accessed November 22, 2019, forbes.com/sites/scottbeyer/2016/06/17/mexican-nationals-are-transforming-san-antonio/#3a8b8ff0dab6.

51 Carlisle and Pevzner, “Introduction: Migration.”

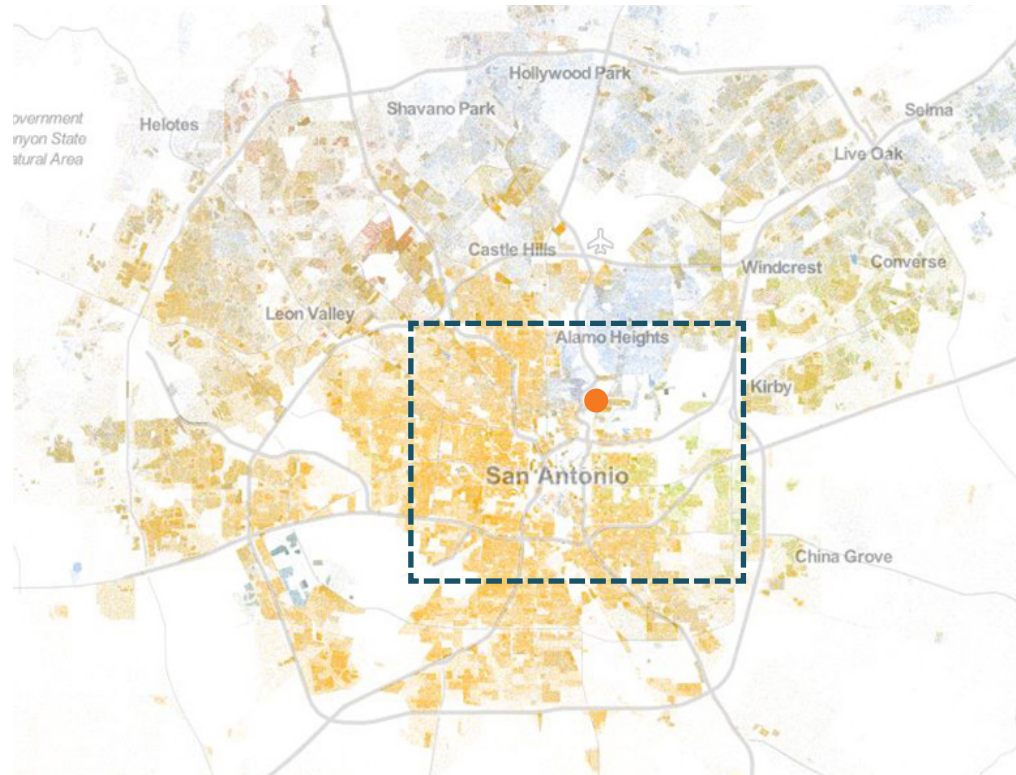


FIGURE 5–10. A map illustrating San Antonio's racial composition. Brackenridge Park is shown with a red dot; the area bounded in blue is shown below. Hispanic: yellow, White: blue, African American: green, Asian: red. The 2013 map was generated with 2010 census data. Source: Weldon Center of University of Virginia

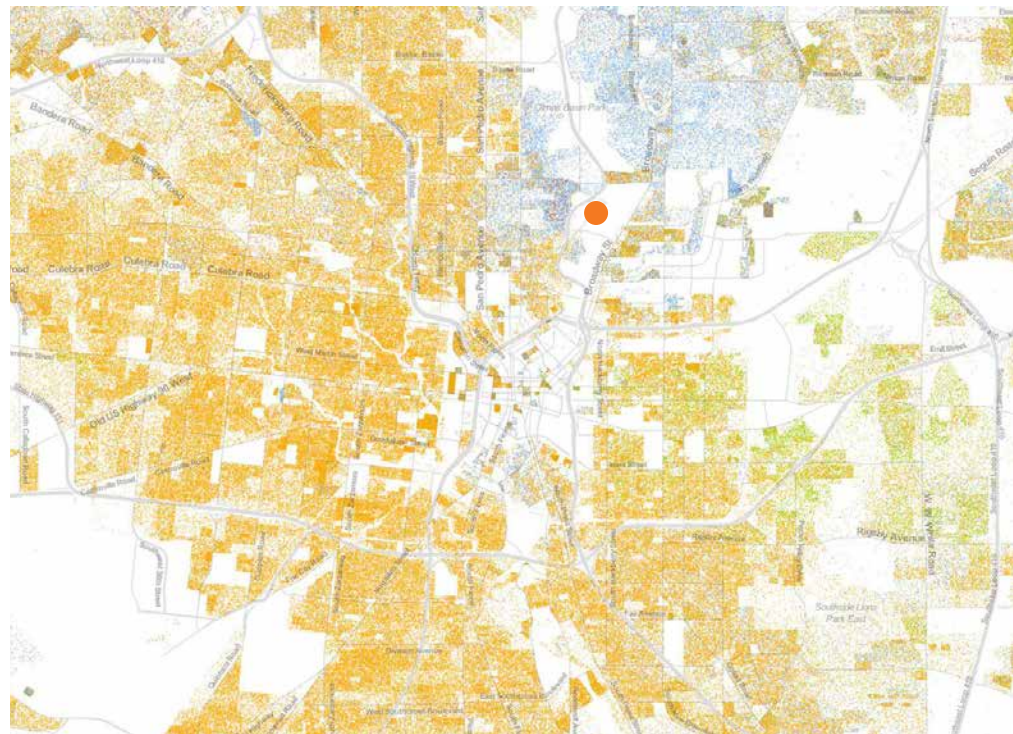


FIGURE 5–11. An enlargement of the 2013 "Racial Dot Map" shows the areas immediately surrounding Brackenridge Park. Except for areas directly north and northeast of the park, the majority of the population surrounding the park is Hispanic, with a mixed Hispanic and African American population located southeast of the park. Source: Weldon Center of University of Virginia

making places that are not merely places hyper programmed to attract users but places imbued with meaning with which future generations will strongly connect—.

The National Park Service defines a cultural landscape as “a geographic area, including both cultural and natural resources and the wildlife or domestic animals therein, associated with a historic event, activity, or person exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values” and further notes that there are four types of cultural landscapes, which may overlap: “historic sites, historic designed landscapes, historic vernacular landscapes, and ethnographic landscapes.”⁵² These four types of cultural landscapes have been defined in the introduction to this CLR, and they are included in the glossary located near the end. It is helpful, however, to repeat the definition for an ethnographic landscape here. An ethnographic landscape is defined as one that contains

a variety of natural and cultural resources that associated people define as heritage resources. Examples are contemporary settlements, religious sacred sites and massive geological structures. Small plant communities, animals, subsistence and ceremonial grounds are often components.⁵³

Ethnographic landscapes offer a more recent way of reading landscapes, and they can be more difficult to recognize. In municipal parks, especially—which history typically traces to European traditions—identifying ethnographic components is challenging. Brackenridge may be an exception.

Just as San Antonio has continually advanced water conservation efforts according to scientific developments, the city must acknowledge and respond to changing national, statewide, and local demographics as it invests in preservation of the Brackenridge Park landscape. Thus city officials can determine what stories should rise to the surface of preservation planning and interpretation.

BRACKENRIDGE PARK’S CULTURAL AND ETHNOGRAPHIC IMPRINTS

The process of cultural evolution is as constant as the process of ecological evolution. As people migrate and cultures change, the impact of those cultures becomes embedded in the landscape, emerging as new forms of architecture, engineering, agricultural practices, and even cultural traditions that are transformed into meaningful traditions.

Traces of the San Antonio Tejano culture have been present in Brackenridge Park throughout its history, although the physical evidence of this culture prior to the park’s use as a park is more challenging to identify and must be researched further. The Mexican Village of 1920 is one example. Ray Lambert used existing structures to create what he named the Mexican Village in approximately 1920. The Mexican Village became a tourist attraction made up of “four small stone structures that were constructed to house food and craft concessions to serve visitors to the [Japanese Tea] garden and adjoining park.”⁵⁴ The stone structures were originally homes associated first with the quarries and later with the Alamo Portland

52 Charles Birnbaum, “Protecting Cultural Landscapes: Planning, Treatment and Management of Historic Landscapes,” Technical Preservation Services, National Park Service, accessed November 2, 2019, nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/36-cultural-landscapes.htm.

53 Birnbaum, “Protecting Cultural Landscapes.”

54 Maria Watson Pfeiffer and Steven A. Tomka, “Brackenridge Park,” National Register of Historic Places, Texas Historical Commission, San Antonio, TX, June 15, 2011, 201. 7.

Cement Company. It is important to note that this was a commercial enterprise, and it is one that potentially exoticized Tejanos, although this is only a possibility. It is mentioned in order to draw attention to the need to reveal histories sometimes, not for the purpose of celebration but for the purpose of truth telling and representation.

In contrast to the Tejano imprints, there are also imprints of Mexican heritage on the Brackenridge Park landscape. Miraflores Gardens, largely in ruins, contained an extensive private art collection. The area was Urrutia's effort to pay homage to his native Xochimilco, Mexico, and to provide patronage to numerous Mexican artists and artisans.⁵⁵ Dionicio Rodriguez's faux bois is another mark of the legacy of Mexicans in San Antonio.

As early as the 1930s, according to local historian Maria Pfeiffer, another form of San Antonio Tejano culture emerged in the park—a tradition that persists today. From news clippings, it is not clear whether the tradition began with Mexican American families, or whether they embraced the tradition and it evolved to be associated with this group. However, by the 1950s, Mexican American families began camping along the banks of the San Antonio River in Brackenridge Park over Easter weekend. Families cook out, set up a variety of games, such as piñata competitions, sack races, egg hunts, and breaking open cascarones, which are dyed and hollowed out eggshells that have been dried and stuffed with confetti to later be smashed open over a recipient's head. For many, the weekend concludes with a community prayer.⁵⁶ The event has become so steeped in the park's history that many families return over generations to the very same spot to camp each year. This tradition informs the park's identity from an outside perspective, while it is also a reflection of San Antonio's larger identity. Similar traditions exist throughout South Texas, but there are no known similar traditions in other cities that contain significant Mexican American populations, making it a distinctly San Antonio Tejano tradition (**figure 5-12**).

"This annual spring outing is reminiscent of the Romerías, the spring outings in Spain where the townspeople hike to a spot in the countryside to honor a saint or visit a hermitage with prayer and food." Hand in hand with this tradition is the prevalence of the cascarones, which are found in other Mexican American communities as well as throughout Mexico. Both the hike to the countryside around Easter that has taken root in south Texas and the cascarones likely came about during Spanish missionary and colonial settlement of the area. Although the tradition has outgrown Brackenridge and expanded into other parks, it seems to have first taken hold at Brackenridge.

There may also be Native American traditions inextricably linked to the Brackenridge landscape. Some research shows that the Indigenous Native American population was drastically reduced or assimilated into Tejano culture. There are Native Americans today in San Antonio, however, who trace their lineage to this area and to the Coahuiltecan groups (**figure 5-13**).

55 Nancy A. Aguirre and Elisa Urrutia, "A Place in Exile: People Fleeing the Mexican Revolution Enriched San Antonio Life," in *300 Years of San Antonio and Bexar County* (San Antonio, TX: Maverick Books/Trinity University Press, 2019), 55.

56 Emilie Eaton, "San Antonio Family Has Celebrated Easter at Brackenridge for 66 Years," *San Antonio Express-News*, April 21, 2019, accessed November 22, 2019, [expressnews.com/news/local/article/San-Antonio-family-has-celebrated-Easter-at-13784182.php](https://www.expressnews.com/news/local/article/San-Antonio-family-has-celebrated-Easter-at-13784182.php).



FIGURE 5–12. Photo of a family celebrating Easter in Brackenridge Park. Source: Ricardo Romo and Harriet Romo 2012 Exhibition, University of Texas at San Antonio



FIGURE 5–13. Pictured is a traditional Coahuiltecan dance being performed at a San Antonio mission. Descendants of San Antonio's Indigenous bands and tribes still exist. American Indians in Texas is an organization that works to preserve cultures and traditions of the Coahuiltecan and other Indigenous people in Texas. Source: *300 Years of San Antonio and Bexar County*.

It is the meaning imbued in the Easter tradition that suggests to the CLR researchers that it is an ethnographic landscape. Ultimately, however, “the only way to identify ethnographic landscapes is through the knowledge of the people who give them meaning in the first place.”⁵⁷ Therefore, San Antonio’s Mexican American community must determine whether the tradition truly holds cultural meaning and value, and if the tradition is truly inextricable from Brackenridge Park and the community’s culture, steps toward preservation can be taken. Through this process, “many parks have been able to gain a great deal of understanding about the associations between the lands and resources under their stewardship and the traditionally-associated people for whom the resources hold deep cultural significance.”⁵⁸

For an American city that was born of Mexican origin (by way of Indigenous American and Spanish roots), that has maintained a strong Mexican heritage—even as colonialism entered its territory and later as it transitioned to statehood—and is 63 percent Mexican today, ethnographic layers matter. In a nation whose demographics are drastically and rapidly shifting and that is in the midst of a charged political climate in relationship to the cycle of migration, this layer of the landscape’s history presents an opportunity. That opportunity is to create a model for the preservation, interpretation, and celebration of ethnographic landscapes impressed on public municipal spaces. Delivering powerful messages about belonging and about the physical legacies of America’s immigrant populations, which continue to evolve over time, is another pathway to ensuring stewardship and preservation.

57 Michael J. Evans, Alexa Roberts, and Peggy Nelson, “Ethnographic Landscapes,” *CRM* 24, no. 5 (2001): 55, webpages.uidaho.edu/css501/images/Readings/ethnographic%20landscapes.pdf.

58 Evans, Roberts, and Nelson, “Ethnographic Landscapes,” 55.

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CHAPTER 6. THE ECOLOGY OF BRACKENRIDGE PARK

It is impossible to extract ecological realities from cultural imprints at Brackenridge Park. One can hike up Alpine Drive and encounter the surprising arid desert landscape that overlooks the Sunken Garden Theater and Japanese Tea Garden. One can be immersed in the Japanese Tea Garden or wandering at the San Antonio Zoo and experience the sublime magnitude of the historic quarry walls, glimpsing some of the site's geology. One can jog along the historic motorways that crisscross through the more humid and densely wooded wilderness area. And one can stand and take in the Riparian Corridor itself, which in some areas feels sunny, open, and sweeping and in other areas feels secluded, shady, and quiet. Varied natural environments are a pronounced part of the human experience of the Brackenridge Park (**figure 6-1**). The unifying thread for the entire park is the San Antonio River.

The National Park Service (NPS) specifies that a Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) “guides management and treatment decisions about a landscape’s physical attributes, biotic systems, and use when that use contributes to historical significance.”¹ As part of those decisions, “a CLR must establish preservation goals for a cultural landscape.”² Therefore, a fundamental challenge underlies the protection of Brackenridge Park—to deliver treatment and management practices that balance the allowance for inevitable and contemporary human uses with the provision for the cultural preservation and improved ecological health of Brackenridge Park. In other words, preservation and future development must respond to both the human and ecological sides of the cultural landscape. This is strikingly true for Brackenridge Park.

The ecological research consulting arm of the Lady Bird Wildflower Center documented and assessed Brackenridge Park’s overall ecological health on July 30 and July 31, 2018. The findings were summarized in an Ecological Site Assessment (ESA), completed in November 2019. The findings present an alarming picture. Along with diminished integrity of cultural

¹ Robert Page, Cathy A. Gilbert, and Susan A. Dolan, *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports* (US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resource Stewardship and Partnerships, Washington, DC, 1998), 3.

² Page, Gilbert, and Dolan, *Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports*, 3.



FIGURE 6-1. Four images illustrate varied landscape experiences one encounters in Brackenridge Park, June 2018. Top left, a view from Alpine Drive looking south to downtown San Antonio. Arid desert vegetation can be seen in the foreground. Top right, a view of the Wilderness Area and a historic roadway. Bottom left, San Antonio River landscape in Brackenridge Park near the Witte Museum in the northern portion of the park. Cypress trees dot the river bank, and the river is generally open and sunny. Bottom right, San Antonio River landscape near Avenue A/Woodlawn Avenue low-water crossing in the southern portion of the park. This section of the river is densely shaded. Source: Suzanne Turner Associates

resources, which is detailed in chapters 13 and 14 of this CLR, Brackenridge Park's ecological health is diminished, and the two are thoroughly intertwined.

Live oak canopies need maintenance. Soil is bare, compacted, and eroding, endangering the health of existing trees and undermining the river's integrity. There is no young generation of trees to replace the aging canopy in the coming years. Natural bottomland woodland and riverbank plant communities that once protected and enriched the river are either nearing collapse or are gone. As a result, the San Antonio River, frequently described as containing crystal-clear water, appears dark and unhealthy in areas. It is laden with duck, goose, and heron excrement, contamination from surrounding parking lots and roadways, and the excessive runoff that comes with urban development. Its WPA-era limestone retaining walls are crumbling; its banks are eroding.

The consultant team, comprised of landscape architectural historians, designers, and ecology experts, worked together throughout the development of the CLR. The Treatment strategy found in chapter 15 was developed in close collaboration with the Wildflower Center, and it reflects the ESA's major recommendations. These recommendations confront Brackenridge Park's compromised ecological and cultural health. The final ESA, which is included at the end of this CLR, also contains detailed recommendations specific to the site's ecology.

The CLR and ESA are companion pieces. Because the ESA is scientific in nature, this chapter summarizes some information contained in the ESA in layperson's terms. The ESA is also referenced throughout the CLR.

SUMMARY OF ECOLOGICAL SITE ASSESSMENT

The ESA provides critical information about Brackenridge Park's soil, hydrologic, and vegetative health. Three main points must be understood:

1. Brackenridge Park is in poor ecological health—its vegetative diversity is in trouble, and its overall function, which impacts the health of the soil, tree canopy, plant communities, and wildlife, is suffering.
2. Healing Brackenridge Park's ecology will rely on ecological restoration (eco-restoration) measures (defined in the next section) that aim to return a level of functionality to its ecological systems.
3. The ecological health and the cultural health of Brackenridge Park as well as contemporary human use are all interdependent. This means future development and design will need to work together and include ecological expertise.

Several key findings in the Wildflower Center's report, particularly those that intersect with cultural considerations for the park, are summarized in the following paragraphs.

ECOLOGICAL COMPOSITION AND HEALTH OF BRACKENRIDGE PARK

Much of Brackenridge Park was once a tallgrass savannah community, comprised mainly of tall grasslands with “up to 20 percent tree and shrub canopy,”³ though areas near the river may have contained a higher tree and shrub canopy. In the first half of the nineteenth century (1800 – 1850), preceding its development as a park, “row crop agriculture led to over 80% of the original vegetation” of tallgrass savannah communities throughout Texas “to be lost.”⁴ Compounded by urban development over time, “Today, less than one percent of the original tallgrass prairie remains”⁵ on ecological sites such as those found within Brackenridge Park.

Brackenridge Park is ecologically diverse. Three primary types of ecological sites exist in the park today, along with several minor ecological sites. Each ecological site is defined by its own distinctive soil type, hydrology, plant communities, and community dynamics, and typically, these ecological sites are named according to findings on the area’s county soil survey (**figure 6-2**). Examples of some of the different types of ecological sites can be found in the Wilderness area (Southern Clay Loam), along Alpine Drive and the quarry area (Low Stoney Hill), along the San Antonio River (Clayey Bottomland), and in the open space, or park-like, areas (more Southern Clay Loam).

Each ecological site, regardless of its location, has varying human uses and varying degrees of health, ranging from low to high. In Brackenridge Park, only one area in the entire park was found to be in moderate/high ecological health (**figure 6-3**). This is a very small portion in the northeast section of the Woodland/Wilderness area, which is dominated by dense woods containing live oaks and cedar elms. But for the most part, this area is in moderate health, although it also contains areas in low/moderate and low health. Most of the riparian corridor along the San Antonio River is in low health.

3 Michelle Bertelsen, *Brackenridge Park Ecological Site Assessment*, (San Antonio: Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center at the University of Texas at Austin, 2019), 15.

4 Bertelsen, *Brackenridge Park Ecological Site Assessment*, 15.

5 Bertelsen, *Brackenridge Park Ecological Site Assessment*, 15.

ECO-RESTORATION INTERVENTIONS

Poor ecological health is not unusual in urban park settings, but development and design interventions can improve it while making these settings even more engaging places for people to be. The Wildflower Center ESA and the CLR Treatment advocate for eco-restoration. Eco-restoration is the process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged, or destroyed.⁶ Eco-restoration typically focuses on the goal of repairing the function, or health, of damaged ecosystems but not necessarily on re-creating a historic ecological community. This is because the mix of human uses and environmental or climatic changes today would not support a purely historic expression of the ecology—in this case, a tallgrass savannah community.

Ecological function repair, then, focuses on restoring a site's ability to capture energy and cycle nutrients and on allowing the living part of the system to exert control over resource flows (or to maximize hydrologic processes). For example, during a moderate rain event, a healthy forest will experience very little runoff and a higher level of water infiltration. But if the forest has experienced a loss of plant cover and contains compacted soil, the amount of runoff will increase.

To achieve this kind of ecological function repair, the WFC recommends a combination of two eco-restoration techniques. First, Low Impact Development (LID) interventions are recommended. LIDs “reduce runoff and improve water quality by capturing and treating it in a series of dispersed, but interconnected, systems such as rain gardens, bioswales, and filter strips.”⁷ These interventions will improve the health of Brackenridge Park while creating engaging outdoor spaces. Second, land management practices that increase the overall health of natural areas by improving water infiltration, cleansing, and self-repair capacity are recommended.

6 “What Is Ecological Restoration?,” Society for Ecological Restoration, accessed November 22, 2019, ser-rrc.org/what-is-ecological-restoration/.

7 Bertelsen, *Brackenridge Park Ecological Site Assessment*, 8.

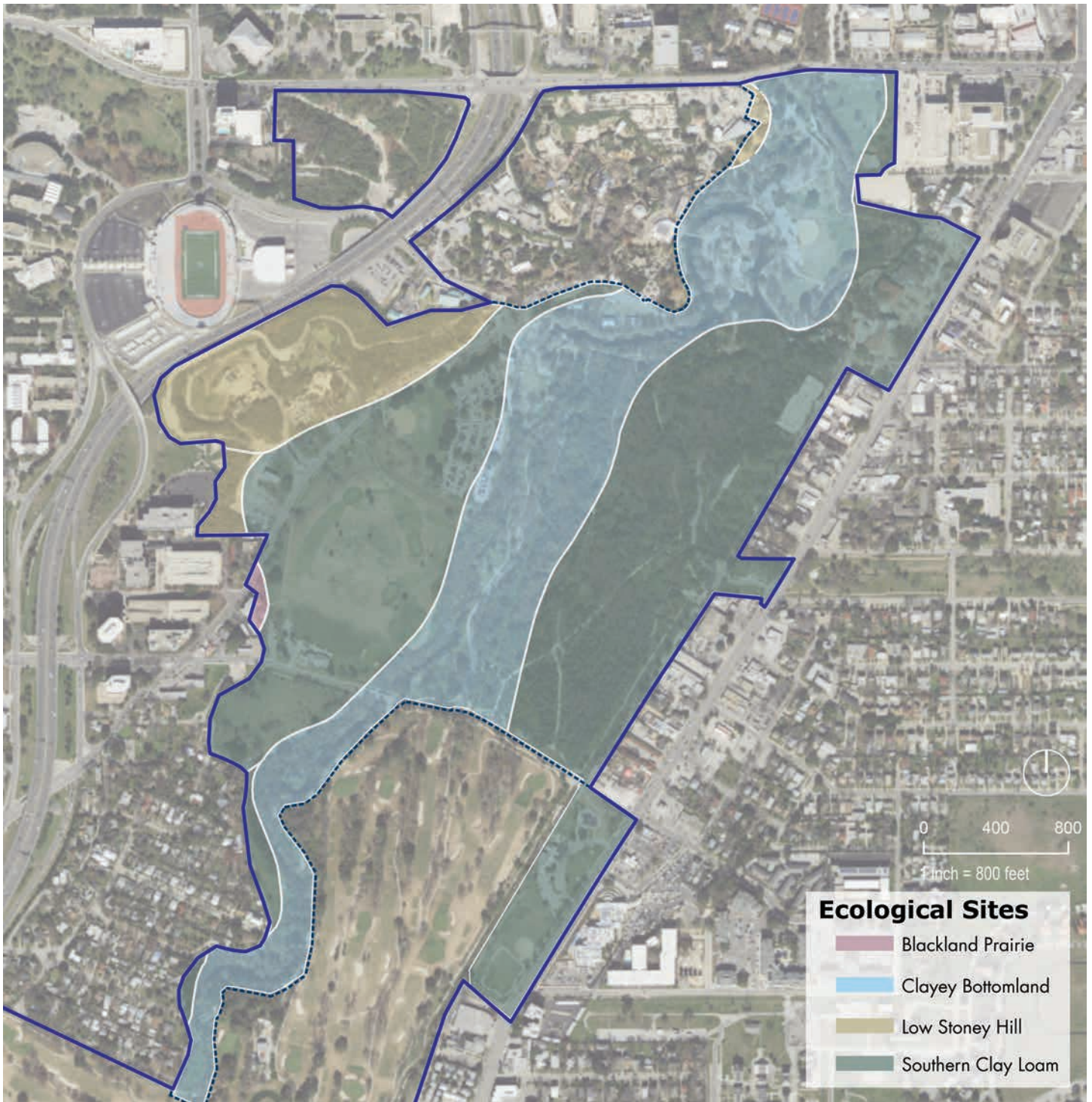


FIGURE 6-2. A diagram shows Brackenridge Park's three primary soil types and one minor area of Blackland Prairie. Source: Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, "Brackenridge Park Ecological Site Assessment"

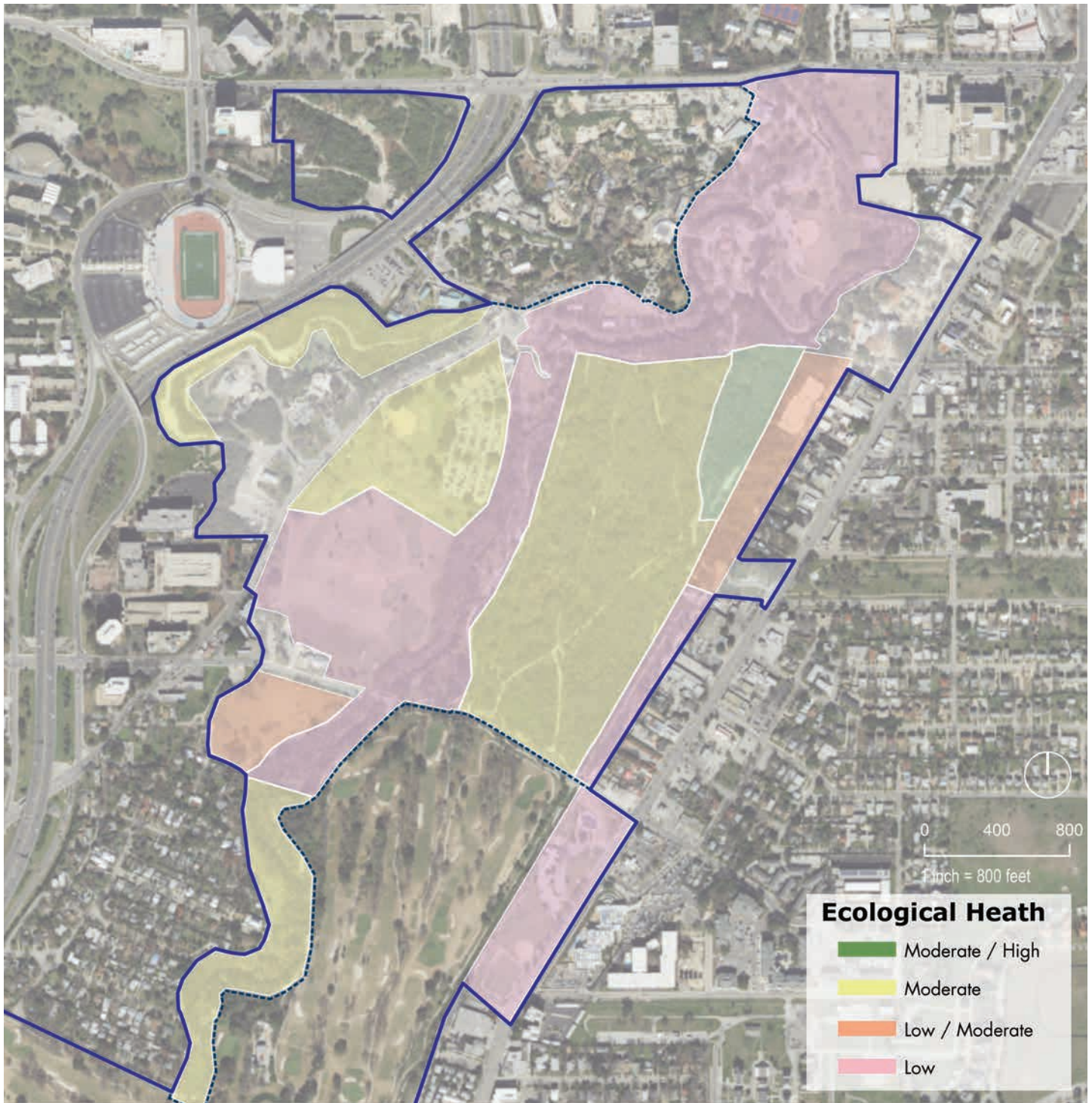


FIGURE 6-3. A diagram shows Brackenridge Park's ecological health, from "Moderate/High" to "Low." Source: Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, "Brackenridge Park Ecological Site Assessment"

HUMAN USES AND ECOLOGICAL FUNCTION

If we are to truly understand ecology as a larger context that shapes Brackenridge Park, it is crucial to understand the interdependence between human uses and ecological function (**figure 6-4**). Consider the situation of one parking lot in which numerous cars park or of one driving range heavily managed with toxic fertilizers and herbicides. These features contaminate stormwater. If soil surrounding these features and close to the river is compacted and exposed, it cannot absorb, hold, or filter water. Roots become stressed and stormwater carrying soil and contaminants flows uninterrupted to the river's edge. Thus, the river is impacted, along with historic live oaks and newly planted trees that do not have the ecological quality needed to grow and thrive.⁸

People have been drawn to Brackenridge Park landscape for its natural attributes and its river and shaded bottomland for thousands of years. And its soil, plant communities, and hydrology are doing important work. At the most basic level, they provide a respite from the heat and noise of the city. When natural communities are healthy, they do more—they clean water, protect the river, and provide rare wildlife habitat in the city. When natural communities are unhealthy, they lose the ability to provide those services and become vulnerable to collapse. For humans to continue enjoying the beauty and benefits of Brackenridge Park—and they should—the park's natural components, structures, and cultural experiences need to be cared for.

⁸ Bertelsen, *Brackenridge Park Ecological Site Assessment*, 40.

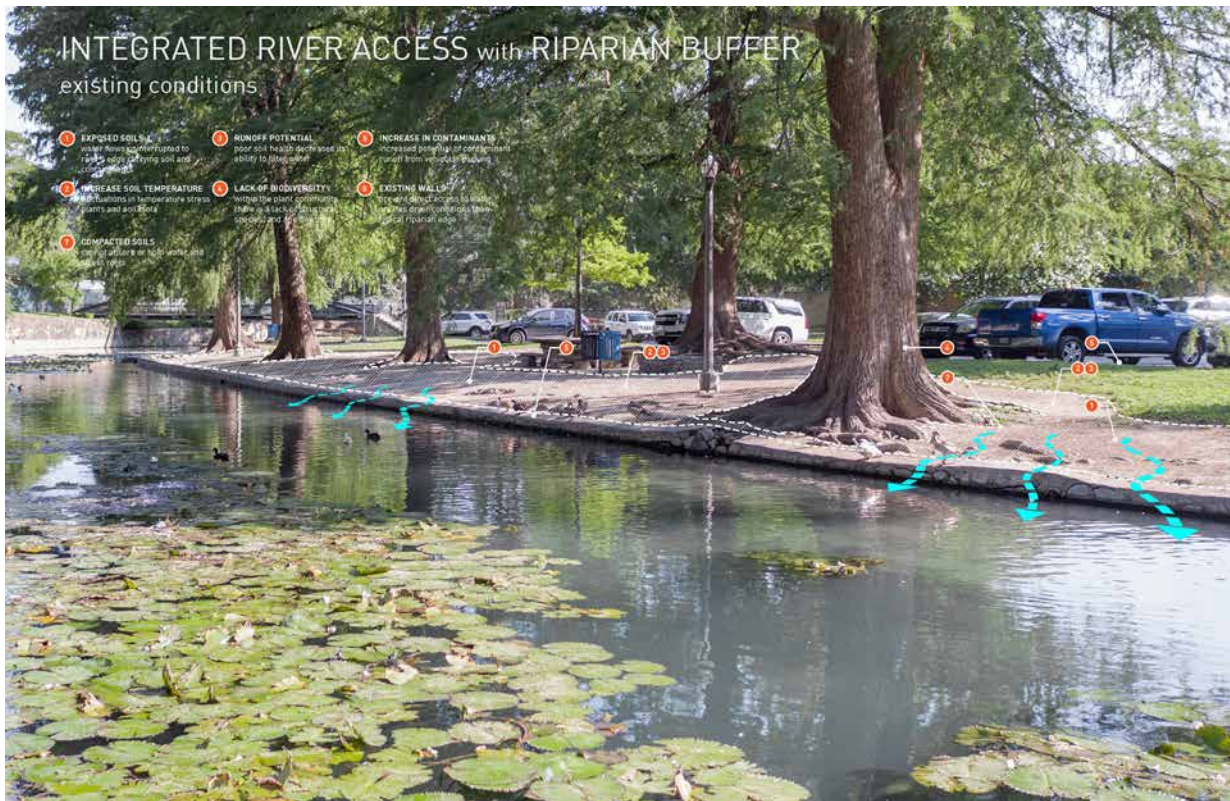


FIGURE 6-4. Top: diagram shows existing conditions of stormwater runoff and other contaminants into the San Antonio River. Bottom: a rendering of eco-restoration that heals the ecology while maintaining human access to the river and improving the overall experience. Source: Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, "Brackenridge Park Ecological Site Assessment"

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CHAPTER 7. GEORGE BRACKENRIDGE, A PORTRAIT

The land that became Brackenridge Park was shaped to a large extent by the vision of its donor, George Washington Brackenridge (**Figure 7-1**). For that reason, an exploration of his life and legacy infuses significance into the chronicle of the park's development at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Brackenridge spent most of his life in Texas, but he was never able to reconcile the region's active participation in slavery during the antebellum period and the culture of racial discrimination that continued after the Civil War. Although he was a sharp and sometimes ruthless businessman, he worked during his mature years to better the community of San Antonio and the plight of its underserved citizens, particularly through his support of public education. Brackenridge Park is another part of his public legacy.

Born on January 14, 1832, in Warrick County, Indiana, George Washington Brackenridge was the second child, and second son, of John Adams and Isabella Helena McCullough Brackenridge. John Adams Brackenridge (1800-1862) had deep northern roots. His Scottish forebears had first settled in Pennsylvania. He studied law at Princeton, where he not only reaped the benefits of an Ivy League education but also made friends and connections that would prove invaluable throughout his life. As a young college graduate, he moved to Indiana, joining "the movement westward that characterized his time."¹ The fact that he became a staunch Unionist is not surprising given his Pennsylvania roots and those of his father.

George's grandfather, a Presbyterian minister, was sent in 1795 to Washington, DC, which was just then developing its urban bones. It was there that, "with a fine sense of nationalism and nonpartisanship, he named his sons for three presidents who had worshiped in his congregation: John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison."² The mere gravity of these names and those given to the next generation of Brackenridge men cannot be

1 Marilyn MacAdams Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), 19.

2 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 18.

underestimated in terms of the psychological baggage and inspiration they carried. Certainly, the notion of patriotism was at the core of this family.

It was probably not lost on George that his namesake and America's first president was also a surveyor for Culpeper County, Virginia, in 1749.³ As a young man, George Brackenridge attended Hanover College and Indiana University and studied surveying and engineering. But by 1850, his father's health was precarious, and John Adams Brackenridge became dissatisfied with his economic prospects in Indiana.⁴ He worried that his business was not producing the wealth needed to provide for the future of his large family of eight children, should his health not improve.⁵ To test the waters in a warmer climate filled with apparent opportunities, he encouraged George to "take on the responsibilities of manhood."⁶ After a year of studies at Hanover, George began to explore Texas for its business prospects.⁷

BUSINESS PROSPECTS IN SOUTH TEXAS

The younger Brackenridge spent time between 1850 and 1851 trading merchandise along the Lavaca Bay in Texas, and he returned home having profited and displaying "the remarkable ability to look into the future.... Texas, he predicted, was on the verge of a boom."⁸ He convinced his father to make a move. At the time, Texas was luring immigrant groups from abroad. For Americans, Texas represented the next frontier where land was plentiful and cheap and where the burgeoning immigrant population needed goods and services. When George Brackenridge moved with his family from Indiana to Texas in late 1851, he was nineteen years old. With profits earned in Indiana from peddling the family's dry goods, the family purchased a large tract of land between the Navidad and Lavaca Rivers in Texana, Texas,⁹ approximately halfway between San Antonio and Houston and near the Gulf Coast. It was probably clear to the elder Brackenridge that to live prosperously in Texas, the presence of water was key. The location between two rivers proved a good selection.



FIGURE 7-1. Portrait of George Brackenridge at age 79, 1911. Source: *San Antonio Light* Photograph Collection, MS 359: L-333-F

3 "Surveying," George Washington's Mount Vernon, Mount Vernon Ladies Association, accessed November 4, 2019, mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/surveying/.

4 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 21.

5 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 21.

6 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 22.

7 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 21-23.

8 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 22.

9 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 17, 23. Texana is approximately 130 miles southeast of San Antonio.



FIGURE 7-2. Portrait of the Brackenridge family, circa late 1880s, prior to the 1886 death of George's mother Isabella and the 1905 and 1906 deaths of his brothers James and Tom, respectively. George is seated at center, and Eleanor is at far left. Source: Austin-Travis County Collection, Austin Public Library

The mercantile family (**figure 7-2**) initially operated a dry goods and local bank in the area. As the Civil War brewed, George “left to other men the debates about disunion and slavery in the 1850s. He listened to the arguments. But it was the vast stretches of thinly populated land rather than politics that fired his enthusiasm.”¹⁰ Following his father’s example and using his education as surveyor and engineer, as well as money borrowed from his father, in 1854 George started buying land on his own in Bexar and Guadalupe Counties.¹¹

George Brackenridge would not make his move to San Antonio until 1866, but he would travel there frequently, “trading in merchandise and occasionally taking up a mortgage on the land... [S]ometimes his duties took him to taverns and boarding houses...”¹² and he became familiar with the city. The human landscape he entered there displayed a powerful blend of Tejano, Mestizo, German, and Spanish influences that could be felt in the city’s architecture, artistic heritage, culinary heritage, and traditions.¹³ Central Park was underway in the northeast, and the Civil War was looming before the nation. This event and its outfall became the national backdrop that influenced Brackenridge’s actions as a philanthropist, banker, and developer in San Antonio and elsewhere in Texas.

The year 1857 brought an extended drought, and most farmers’ crops failed that year. Brackenridge liquidated his landholdings, paid off his debts, and ended up essentially broke at the end of 1857.¹⁴ “The experience gave him an abiding distrust of land speculations, without curing him of speculating.”¹⁵

10 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 29.

11 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 29.

12 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 28.

13 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 28.

14 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 29.

15 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 30.

From about 1857 to 1860 George worked as surveyor of Jackson County,¹⁶ where he was “able to do the things he enjoyed most—fish, hunt, camp out, tramp through the woods, observe nature, meditate, and read.”¹⁷ He also learned the locations of the most valuable land in the county based on soils, topography, and access to water. As always, the banks of the rivers were premium tracts, not only for the water resource but also for the land on the banks, which would be richly fertile from flooding and deposition. These experiences would serve him well as he continued to invest in real estate. But after three years of surveying, he became discouraged by his earnings, thinking that it had been a mistake to cut his education short to make the move to Texas. In October of 1860, he enrolled as a student at Harvard University and intended to study law. “Education, he believed, was the key to improvement of both the individual and the human race.”¹⁸ But again, his university career was cut short, this time by the outbreak of the Civil War.

THE CIVIL WAR AND NEW VENTURES

When the Civil War erupted, the elder Brackenridge and his son George chose the side of the anti-secessionists, while George’s three brothers enlisted in the Confederate Army. This put George in the position of outsider not only within his family of siblings but also in his adopted state and community. This would shape his position in the business community and in society for the rest of his life. But George was not just a loyal Unionist; he was an opportunist and an innate capitalist, and at the age of twenty-nine, taking risks came naturally. Because of the cotton blockade, Brackenridge “became a war profiteer in the Matamoros cotton trade and with his family and a friend, he formed the cotton firm of Brackenridge, Bates, and Company.”¹⁹ They bought cotton contracts from local farmers and refused to accept Confederate specie, the Confederate currency of the time. It was during this period that Brackenridge met Charles Stillman, a financier who virtually controlled shipping traffic on the Rio Grande and who would prove to be one of the more prominent investors throughout Brackenridge’s career. By the war’s end, “Stillman was one of the richest men in America.”²⁰

By July of 1863, Brackenridge was forced to leave Texas under duress. His public support for the Union and refusal to accept Confederate money during business transactions turned local residents against him. During his father’s Indiana law career, John Adams had argued a case that was attended by a young attorney in training. That young attorney, Abraham Lincoln, became president of the United States in 1860. Brackenridge biographer Sibley includes an account that says that while the two lived in neighboring counties in Indiana, Brackenridge actually invited Lincoln to work briefly in his office and to use his extensive law library.²¹ This political connection in Washington, DC, helped George Brackenridge land a job at the US Department of the Treasury, a defining opportunity that proved beneficial in his next career as a banker.²²

16 “Brackenridge, George Washington,” *Handbook of Texas*, Texas State Historical Association, August 19, 2016, tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fbr02.

17 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 30.

18 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 31.

19 “Brackenridge, George Washington,” *Handbook of Texas*.

20 “Brackenridge, George Washington,” *Handbook of Texas*.

21 For a discussion of the various versions of this event and their reliability, see Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 19–20, footnote 5.

22 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 77.



FIGURE 7-3. San Antonio's First National Bank Building at corner (213 E. Commerce Street), 1886. Brackenridge maintained a garden on the roof, where he entertained and housed a cow for fresh milk. He and his sister Eleanor kept a downtown residence on the upper three levels of the adjacent Loan and Trust building. Source: University of Texas at San Antonio, General Photograph Collection, 069-8410

When the Civil War ended in 1865, Brackenridge returned to Texas and San Antonio. The family business still held substantial quantities of cotton, and they were well positioned to supply the surging demand from within their own storehouses. In 1866, Brackenridge founded a bank with the extensive profits from his cotton business along with resources supplied by his friend and business associate Stillman (**Figure 7-3**). The early years of the bank were successful. Brackenridge supplied funds to the cattle industry when it was at its peak following the war and before the advent of homesteaders and barbed wire in the mid-1880s. A blizzard in January 1887 effectively ended the cattle business as it had existed before that time. In previous years, cattle on open lands were able to move south in advance of severe weather, but the newly installed fences prevented them from turning south, and millions of cattle froze to death on the prairies and pastures of the Midwest and Southwest.²³

By the time the cattle business fell into decline, Brackenridge had already made his fortune. He then set about sharing his wealth with institutions throughout Texas, with most of his largest donations made to advance educational causes.²⁴ He maintained his close friendship with the Stillman family. The Stillmans continued the economic and social prominence they had created through two strategic marriages, when James Stillman's daughters both married Rockefellers.²⁵

23 Sibley, George W. *Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 111.

24 Sibley, George W. *Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 202.

25 Sibley, George W. *Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 208.

In addition to Brackenridge's work in banking and in the cattle industry, his financial backing and leadership of the San Antonio Water Works, the city's first municipal water system, was one of the best-known of his investments, although it did little to build his fortune. "The system of pumps, pipes, raceway, and reservoir fascinated him and brought out a latent talent for civil engineering."²⁶ But expanding the network of pipes, meters, and other infrastructure as the city rapidly grew in population and area required Brackenridge to reinvest almost every penny of profit the Water Works produced. He repeatedly proclaimed that the investors had seen almost no dividends through the years. Banking problems during the second decade of the twentieth century further reduced Brackenridge's fortunes. Reversals in the cattle business in 1917 consumed his time and energy. By the time of his death, he was still a wealthy man, but his fortune had been diminished through serious reverses at the bank and the distribution of his assets in advance of his death. His final will created a series of trusts for relatives and friends valued at approximately \$1.5 million.

In the years between 1851, when he first arrived in Texas, and 1865, when he returned to Texas from Washington, DC, George Brackenridge explored many avenues—land surveying, land investment, legal studies, and banking. His is one American story. His family's prosperity and connections no doubt contributed to his ability to explore broadly in his business ventures. Brackenridge also witnessed many changes and advances in his lifetime. In 1866, the population of San Antonio was 10,000. By 1920, the year of his death, the city's population was 160,000, and San Antonio was the largest city in the state of Texas.²⁷ In 1866, the primary modes of transportation in San Antonio were ox carts, mule wagons, and horses. By 1920, modes of transportation had shifted. Railroads, streetcars, and automobiles were widely accessible.

From the beginning, San Antonio was a multicultural city with a population of Europeans, Americans, Mexicans, Africans, and many mixes—Tejanos, Texans descended from Mexicans, and Mestizos, who descended from Indigenous people and Spanish colonists. Traffic signs were printed in three languages; English, German, and Spanish. Brackenridge's family advantages surely enabled his early explorations, but his economic success and exposure to the diversity of Texana and San Antonio were likely as influential on his Union politics and his philanthropy.

PHILANTHROPIC INFLUENCES AND LEGACY

So who really was George Washington Brackenridge, and what were the defining influences that positioned him for a long and full life of entrepreneurial investments, land speculation, urban innovation, educational reform, and park making? The Sibley biography is a good beginning for collecting and connecting the facts of his life. But there are many missing links in terms of his day-to-day experiences, and the reader struggles to understand how such a maverick genius came to be. Correspondence and personal records that he destroyed before his death perhaps held the key to some of these questions. The known facts of his life contribute to composing a picture of a bright, independent, thoughtful young man who essentially followed a different drummer.

²⁶ Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 131.

²⁷ Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 145.

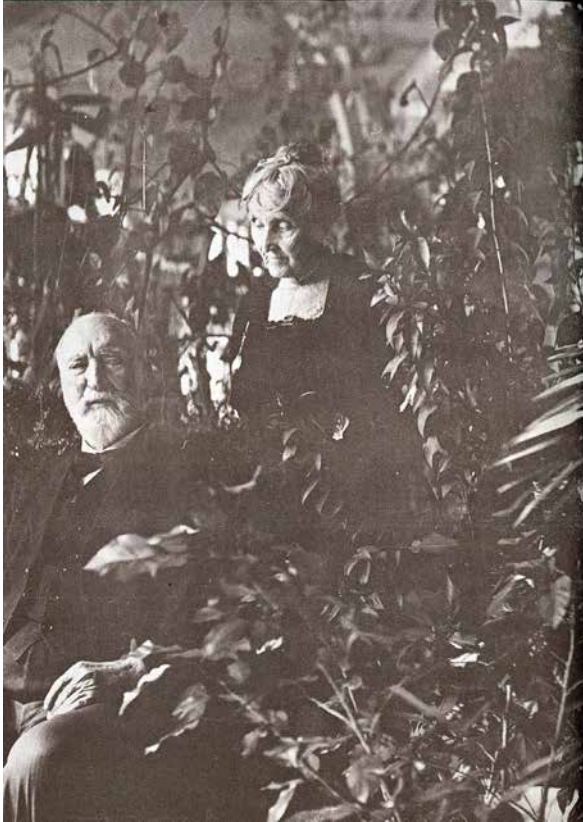


FIGURE 7-4. Portrait of George and Eleanor Brackenridge taken in 1920, the year of his death. The original photo includes the note, "Taken by Georgie, 1920." Source: Claire B. Cramer, published in Marilyn MacAdams Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge*

We can only speculate about most of these questions. George was highly intellectual and thought deeply, with a philosophical bent, about most things in life. Surely, the influences of his family of origin were intense and lasting. His antislavery and pro-Union views could easily have been instilled early in life by the example of his Presbyterian minister grandfather. Although George rejected all organized religion and struggled perennially with the existence of an afterlife, he certainly had a strong and unflinching moral character.

The excellent education that George's father received stood in high contrast to George's own two attempts to complete his education. Perhaps from watching and being taught by his father, he came to value that to which he aspired but never completed—a college education. Clearly, he wanted to help young people who might not have access to a college education, along with those who were often shut out of higher education because they lacked the financial resources. This passion led him to his unprecedented efforts to provide educational opportunities especially for African Americans and to women.

In 1866 Brackenridge brought his mother and his sister Eleanor to make their home with him, "an arrangement that proved agreeable for all three of them"²⁸ (figure 7-4). His mother, Isabella, and sister Eleanor were forces in and of themselves. "Both were women of intelligence and purpose, and they promptly found useful places in San Antonio. Mrs. Brackenridge devoted herself to the care of the city's orphans, while Eleanor pioneered in the women's club movement, eventually becoming one of the most prominent women in the state."²⁹ In addition, she was an organizer of San Antonio's Equal Franchise Society, which advocated for women's right to vote.

The source of George's fondness for the natural landscape is unclear, but one might assume that it had roots in his early childhood experiences in Indiana, still very much a wild frontier at the time. The move to a starkly different landscape in Texas would have impressed him with a different kind of natural wildness. Sibley states that George and his mother were "both nature lovers," and that when he purchased the property at the head of the San Antonio River (1869), which for the next twenty-eight years would be his home, he and his mother "delighted in the natural beauty of the setting and devoted themselves to preserving it" (figure 7-5)³⁰. And George was impressed with "the transitory nature of man's sojourn on earth. By the early twentieth century, the village of Texana his family had known in the

28 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 126.

29 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 126.

30 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 128.

1850s had vanished because of the coming of the railroad in 1886.³¹ From this personal experience of loss through neglect and attrition, the notion of preserving place became important to his outlook and worldview.

George's affinity for land, its political and natural boundaries, its shape, and its character were demonstrated through his education as an engineer and surveyor. The experience of working as a county surveyor would have put him in touch with the Texas landscape in a visceral and immediate way. At the time, this Jackson County landscape would have been one of great variety in landform, vegetation, and wildlife. One of Brackenridge's recreational favorites was sailing a houseboat called the *Navidad*, which he owned with his brothers James and Tom (**figure 7-6**). George's purchase of not only the headwaters but additional acreage along the San Antonio River in 1876 signaled his keen awareness of the value of water in Texas as well as his own desire to experience it as a pivotal part of his life. Eventually, his conviction that this most precious of natural resources in the city belonged to all led to his gift of the land and its transformation into a park, ensuring this wish in perpetuity.

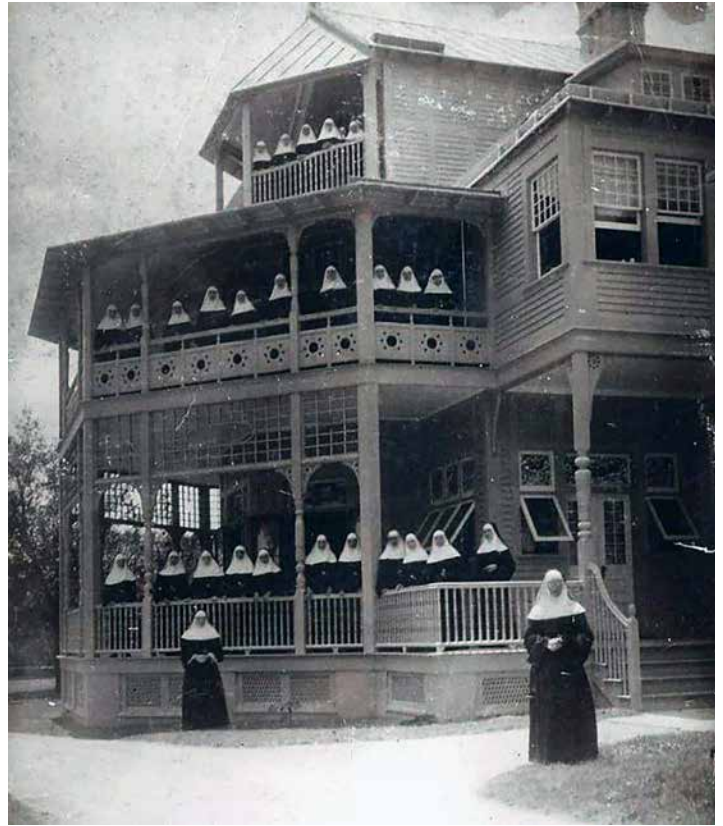


FIGURE 7-5. Brackenridge's Victorian mansion in San Antonio, in which George lived with his mother and sister, until 1897, when he sold 40 acres, including the home, to the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, seen in this image. Source: Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, published in *San Antonio Express-News*

Travel certainly was a significant force and inspiration in Brackenridge's life. His early life was filled with regional travel, and his later business endeavors would have required that he visit the great banking capitals of New York and perhaps London, although documentation does not survive for most of his travel. Surely he had seen the great parks of Olmsted and Vaux in Manhattan.

In 1905, Brackenridge was ready to depart on an extensive around-the-world trip by land and sea, including Hawaii, Australia and New Zealand, Ceylon, India, Egypt, and, finally, the capitals of Europe.³² The journey was chronicled and published by his niece Isabella Mathews, entitled *Spring Days in Two Hemispheres*, in 1908. Along with his niece, he had included as guests his sister Eleanor; "Colonel Almon Libbey Varney, a retired army man whose company he enjoyed; Mrs. Varney; and Miss Marin Fenwick, a San Antonio journalist."³³ But as the departure date approached, his brother James's health took a turn for the worse, and George sent Eleanor ahead with the group while he remained home. James died in August 1905. George settled the estate and then left with Isabella and the Varneys to join Eleanor's party in the Orient. But before the globe had been circled, brother Tom died

31 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 14.

32 Isabella H. Mathews, *Spring Days in Two Hemispheres* (New York: Peyton Steger; Leopold Classic Library, 1908), passim.

33 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 207.



FIGURE 7-6. A photo of George Brackenridge aboard his and his brothers' houseboat, the *Navidad*, possibly named for the *Navidad* River that ran along land his family purchased and lived on when they first moved to Texas. Source: Claire B. Cramer, published in Marilyn MacAdams Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge*

in March 1906, while the group was preparing to leave Egypt for Europe.³⁴ Not surprisingly, much of the trip was spent crossing water and studying the ancient cultures that had grown up on the banks of the world's great rivers. The discussion in Mathew's diary of sites visited always included visits to places of landscape interest. In former British colonies such as New Zealand and India, there were impressive public parks and botanical gardens. In cultures in which nature was worshiped, as in the Orient, the care and protection of great forests was noteworthy.

Notably, when George was called home for his brother Tom's untimely death, he had just finished touring and learning about the many wonders and challenges of the Aswan Dam on the Nile, which was in the process of being raised higher.³⁵ The power of water and its manipulation by ancient and modern cultures almost seemed to be a subtext of the tour's itinerary.

Despite the amazing tour, the passing of both his brothers within several months of each other must have brought George's own mortality home. He determined to retire "and to enjoy family and friends and travels while there was yet the opportunity."³⁶ He was thoughtful about the legacy that he would leave in Texas. He pondered the nature and effects of philanthropy and was never secure in the impact of his largesse given to the people of the state, and particularly to the citizens of San Antonio. "He subscribed actively to the utilitarian theory that the test of merit was whether the greatest good was accomplished for the greatest number."³⁷ Certainly, Brackenridge's vision of the significance and the potential

34 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 207-8.

35 New World Encyclopedia, s.v. "Aswan Dam," MediaWiki, accessed November 7, 2019, newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Aswan_Dam.

36 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 208.

37 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 8.

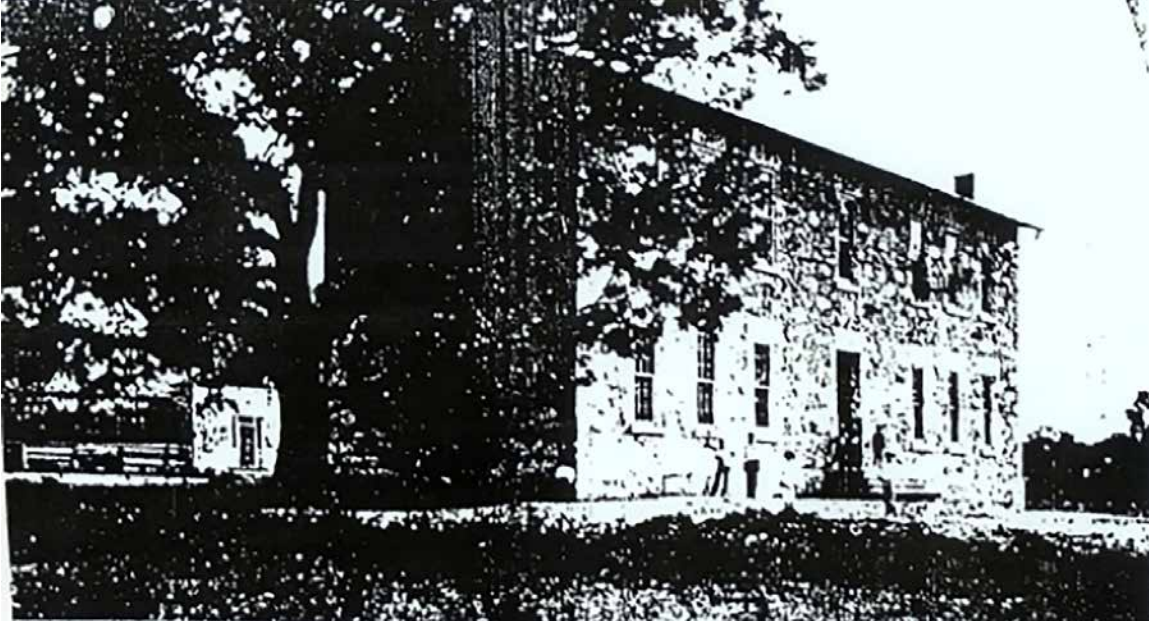


FIGURE 7-7. Rincon/Riverside/Frederick Douglass School at 701 North St. Mary's Street in San Antonio. George Brackenridge supervised the demolition of the Confederate Tannery in Brackenridge Park, and the stones were used to build the school. Source: "A History of Douglass Academy."

for the San Antonio River to become the focal point of San Antonio's premier park saved a landscape of immeasurable importance for future residents and visitors of San Antonio.

Yet he questioned his decision to dispense his fortune for public causes, "suffering pangs of conscience that instead of helping he was injuring society." He wrote to an associate in 1894, saying, "By far the most difficult task undertaken by humanity is that of the proper distribution of charity. The pleasure of giving is usually marred by the fear of...probable injury to the subjects relieved, by destroying their individuality and making them less self-sufficient, to say little of the injury done the community by converting good citizens into mendicants."³⁸

Between the end of the Civil War and the turn of the century, Brackenridge dedicated himself, along with his banking pursuits, largely to education. After the Civil War, according to his friend Alexander W. Terrell, Brackenridge "turned his attention first to black education, because...he wanted to make retribution for his family's ownership of slaves in the prewar years."³⁹ He was appointed a member of the Freedmen's Bureau, and in that role, he "supervised the demolition of a Confederate armory and the building of a Negro school from the stones"⁴⁰ (figure 7-7). By 1909, the school became part of the public school system, and in 1914, when the district wanted to sell the property, Brackenridge, who was the property's sole surviving trustee, allowed the sale "on the condition that the proceeds... be put into another Negro school."⁴¹ Between 1901 and 1905, he contributed large sums of money to the creation of two other San Antonio schools for African Americans. Even earlier, he had become a major financial supporter of Guadalupe Colored College at Seguin, a higher education institution that had been founded in 1884 by a black Baptist organization.⁴²

38 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 10.

39 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 166.

40 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 166.

41 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 166.

42 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 167.



FIGURE 7–8. Bronze sculpture of George Brackenridge designed by Italian-born sculptor Pompeo Coppini in the 1930s, cast in 1970, and installed two years later at the Broadway and Funston Place entrance to Brackenridge Park. A companion piece of a teacher and children was designed but never completed. Source: *The Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State Historical Association

“Brackenridge’s most substantial contributions to education and other causes for blacks came in an era when nationwide there was little interest” in the advancement of African Americans.⁴³

In the final judgment, Brackenridge’s gifts to education—both in his insistence on academic freedom in the face of political influence at the University of Texas and his commitment to equal access for all, regardless of race, gender, and financial assets—will have had the most lasting mark on the state. Brackenridge conceived of a foundation—the George W. Brackenridge Foundation—and laid its groundwork in 1913 before his death. It was the first of its kind in the state and one of the few in the nation at the time it was planned, only eight years after Andrew Carnegie had set the pattern.⁴⁴

In 1963, the Brackenridge Scholarship Program shifted the focus of the program from student loans to the provision of an annual four-year scholarship awarded to one or more graduates of each public high school in Bexar County for their college of choice. Today, the foundation funds “the untried, the new, and the more imaginative opportunities in education.”⁴⁵ This inclination to change individual lives one by one and to push the boundaries of current thinking about how to educate the youth of tomorrow is as broad reaching and creative as the man who had the vision to establish the foundation.

43 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 168.

44 Sibley, *George W. Brackenridge, Maverick Philanthropist*, 16.

45 Mary L. Kelley, *The Foundations of Texan Philanthropy* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 21.

In *The Foundations of Texas Philanthropy*, historian Mary L. Kelley writes that “in the three decades following the creation of the George W. Brackenridge Foundation...donors established approximately 180 private philanthropic institutions. The vast majority were ‘family affairs,’ funded from business profits and post-Spindletop oil revenues.”⁴⁶ Philanthropists in Dallas, Houston, and throughout the state followed Brackenridge’s lead and established permanent trusts that became famous first in Texas but now hold their own on a national and international stage. Brackenridge’s legacies in San Antonio have been chronicled and celebrated. His establishment of a philanthropic “trope” in Texas might be his most enduring legacy.

During the mid-1950s, sculptor Pompeo Coppini created a plaster sculpture of George Brackenridge with an eventual plan to recast the sculpture into a bronze figure for permanent display at Brackenridge Park (**figure 7-8**). Coppini’s death in 1957 put the project on hold for a dozen years. In 1969, Coppini’s longtime colleague, Waldine Tauch, completed the project, and the following year it was permanently located at the entrance to Brackenridge Park on the north side of Brackenridge Drive where it intersects with Broadway and becomes Funston Street on the east side of Broadway. But in fact, Tauch did not succeed in completing the entire project. Coppini’s original work was intended to convey Brackenridge’s larger legacy. He had also been creating a separate sculpture portraying a teacher and children. This was to be mounted on a vertical monument in the park, near the Brackenridge sculpture.⁴⁷

George Washington Brackenridge’s love of land, water, and the natural and cultural universe; his compassion for people from all backgrounds and walks of life; his understanding that education is critical to changing the course of lives; and his ability to visualize a future that gave all the opportunity to connect with a place where they felt at home lives for all time in the park that bears his name.

⁴⁶ Kelley, *The Foundations of Texan Philanthropy*, 21.

⁴⁷ Pompeo Coppini, *From Dawn to Sunset* (San Antonio: Naylor, 1949), 396.

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