

# Brack Pack

## NEWSLETTER

Brackenridge Park Conservancy

January 2022

**DONATE**

*Your gift supports the BPC mission to protect, restore, and preserve Brackenridge Park.*

### New Board Members & Officers

Please welcome the new members to the Brackenridge Park Conservancy Board of Directors.

**Robin Howard**



A former BPC Board member, Robin has a passion for organizations that promote the welfare and education of children and the cultural arts. She has been a Court-appointed child advocate for CASA since 2016 and is a board member of VOICES for Children.

She has served as co-chair for the BPC annual fundraiser for four years, including the 2022 Party in the Park.

**Suzanne Mathews**



A former BPC Board member, Suzanne is currently a member of the Board of Trustees of Lotusland.

Past board service includes the San Antonio River Foundation, the Drama League (New York), and the Board of Visitors of the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, where she founded the Winston Salem Light Project.

**Stuart Selig**



Stuart has spent two decades working in the sports, entertainment, media, and hospitality industry. He serves as vice president of global partnerships for Legends.

At Legends, he is focused on naming rights and venue monetization efforts on behalf of Spurs Sports & Entertainment for the AT&T Center as well as their new project, the Rock at La Cantera. He also works as project



She has also served on the board of the San Antonio Botanical Garden, Battle of Flowers Organization, and the Baylor Club.

Suzanne has an extensive background as an art dealer and collector and is on the Board of Directors of Lucifer Lighting Company, where she is also the director of external relations.

manager focused on opening two new Italian concepts at the Pearl for Maverick Restaurant Group.

Stuart served on the BPC Advisory Board.

The 2022 Board Officers were elected by consent at the BPC's Annual Meetings on Jan. 27. The officers are Nick Hollis, Board chair; Lukin T. Gilliland, Jr., vice president; Tim Swan, secretary; and Suzanne Scott, treasurer.



*BPC Board Members Mary Alice Cisneros and Leticia Van de Putte, Gemma Kennedy, Patricia Pratchett, and Marcie Ince*

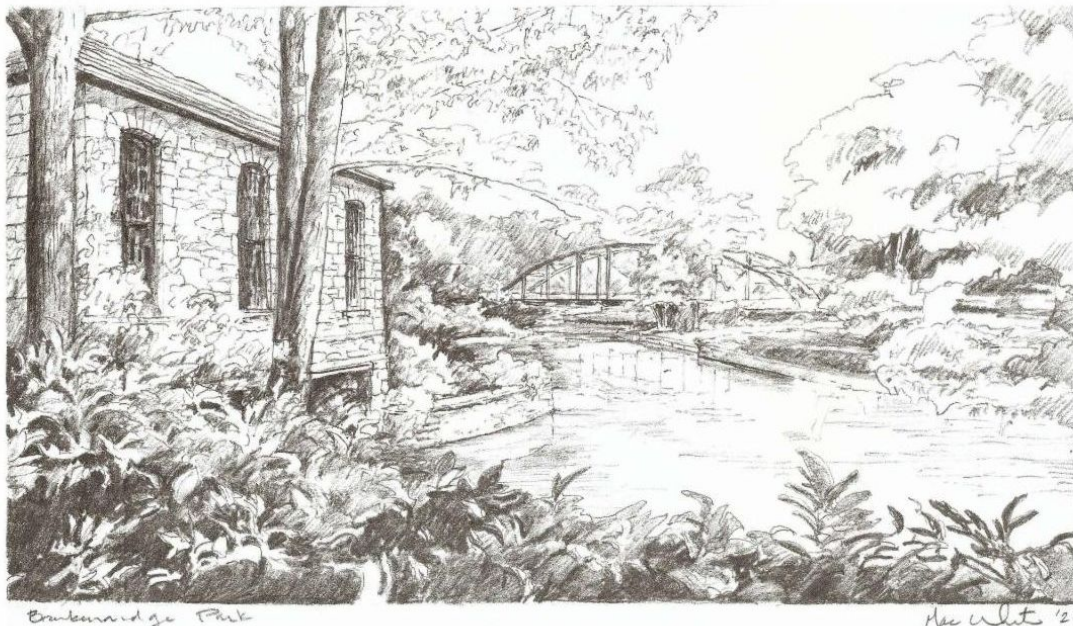


*Outgoing Board Chair Joe Calvert, Incoming Board Chair Nick Hollis, and Incoming Vice President Lukin T. Gilliland, Jr.*



*BPC Executive Director Joe Turner, Kirk Feldmann, and Incoming Board Treasurer Suzanne Scott*

## A Special Event Honoring Tracy & Nelson Wolff



The Mays Family Foundation has generously joined the Brackenridge Park Conservancy as the presenting sponsor for "Party In the Park", our annual fundraising event that will be held at the north river bend near



Lambert Beach.



On March 23, 2022, the Hon. Nelson W. Wolff and Mrs. Tracy Wolff will be our guests of honor as we celebrate their contributions to our community and to the Park.

Invitations will be in your mailboxes soon!



## Why Things Are



The rock quarry walls (pictured left) in the Park are geologic, physical barriers created by the edge of the Balcones Escarpment.

This quarry edge was created by commercial rock mining in the earliest days of San Antonio's history and became exceptional, dramatic backdrops to what is today the historic San Antonio Zoo, the Japanese Tea Garden, and the **Sunken Garden Theater**.

When Ray Lambert (right) became the City's parks superintendent in 1915, he quickly set in motion a building boom in Brackenridge Park that didn't end until the beginning of World War II. After the Japanese Tea Garden was built in 1917, the city's cultural leaders and park officials discussed transforming the old quarry into an outdoor theater. The quarry's deep excavations



shaped in a huge semicircle provided a natural setting for an open-air amphitheater. Observing the site, the manager of the Boston National Grand Opera Company urged the city to consider such a facility, saying that it could be “developed into one of the show places in the country.”

Lambert chose instead to construct an enormous designed landscape with patterns formed by rocks and flowers. The landscape feature became known as the Texas Star Garden (pictured below), sometimes referred to as the “sunken garden.” The garden was designed with the lone star of the Texas flag as its organizing motif. During the mid 1920s, choral and theatrical performances were held in the Texas Star Garden, which were well-received.



Later, the Tuesday Musical

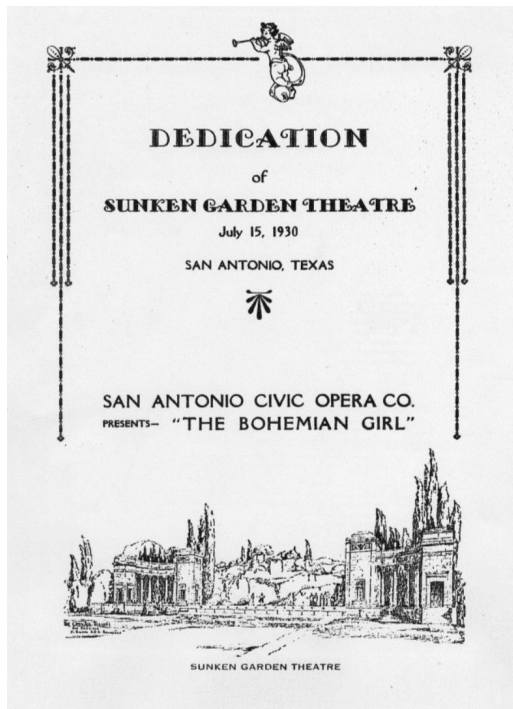


Gutzon Borglum, a nationally renowned sculptor who had been making his studio in Brackenridge Park since



Club's Mrs. Eli Hertzberg and the San Antonio Civic Opera Company's Mrs. Lewis Krams-Beck urged the city to consider the site for outdoor musical and other events too large for the Municipal Auditorium.

moving to San Antonio in 1924, drew plans for a theater that "would present a Grecian style of architecture." The final design, however, was completed by local architect Harvey P. Smith.



The Sunken Garden Theater opened on June 24, 1930, with a performance by the San Antonio Civic Opera Company of Gilbert and Sullivan's "The Yeoman of the Guard." At its dedication three weeks later, the program stated the theater would "provide outdoor summer entertainment for citizens...and cultural fame and distinction for our city.... This is the beautiful theatre that we have longed for—which we have talked about for so long, and that we are dedicating tonight."



In 1937, the Texas centennial celebration provided many opportunities for commemoration throughout the state. Because this happened during the Great Depression, substantial federal funding was available to aid in building improvements, new construction, and the addition of landscape features as part of the New Deal.

As part of the centennial celebration in San Antonio, the Sunken Garden



Theater project received \$62,000. Improvements included dressing rooms and stage support buildings, restrooms, and seating, and a concrete floor was added to the theater seating area. A concession area was built by the NYA in 1937-38. The Sunken Garden Theater was a popular venue for symphonic, jazz, dance, drama, and pop music performances for many years.



Several renovations have occurred over the years since the theater's initial construction. The latest renovation was completed in 1984 at a cost of \$320,000. The theater's seating was replaced, and ancillary structures were renovated or built.



The entryway at St. Mary's street is a three-part structure. The centerpiece consists of an iron entry arch mounted on a cast stone base. The archway reads "Sunken Garden Theater."

The Art Moderne-influenced supporting base consists of lighted side pieces and a central decorative panel that reads "A memorial to the heroes of the Texas Revolution, 1836–1936." The central panel depicts a trail drivers'

camp scene rather than an image related to the revolution. This is possibly explained by the involvement of the Old Trail Drivers Memorial Association in planning local Centennial commemorations.

On the face of the northern side piece is a bronze plaque that reads: “1926–1951, San Antonio Civic Opera Company. This arch was made possible through the effort and courtesy of Jack White, Mayor; Henry Hein, Commissioner.” Following Hein’s name is a list of individual and corporate donors, including architect Harvey Smith, Voss Metal Works, and Alamo Iron Works, all likely involved in designing and fabricating the entryway.

Driveways along both sides of the centerpiece are flanked by lighted structures matching those in the center and curved wing walls with decorative balusters, all of cast stone.

The Sunken Garden Theater is a Texas State Archaeological Landmark.

**Sources: Cultural Landscape Report**  
**Maria Pfeiffer**



*Sunken Garden Theater and Pioneer Hall (above), also in Brackenridge Park, were two major products of the 1937 Texas Centennial program.*

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### OUR MISSION

The Brackenridge Park Conservancy is a steward of and an advocate for the park and an instrument for preserving and enhancing the park’s natural, historic, educational, and recreational resources for the enjoyment of current



and future generations.

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