

Gayle Brennan Spencer
154 Parkhill
San Antonio, Texas 78212
210/826-8456

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Contact: Gayle Spencer, 826-8456,
or Linda Zimmermann, 224-6163

Portraits Portray Personalities Who Shaped San Antonio

As current Mayor Nelson Wolff and members of City Council prepare to conduct business in new chambers in the Municipal Plaza Building, the eyes of their predecessors will be looking over their shoulders. Twenty-four portraits of former mayors now are hanging in the new home of City Council and can be seen following Mayor Nelson Wolff's ceremonial ribbon-cutting at 10 a.m. on Thursday, May 19.

The San Antonio Conservation Society served as custodian of the portraits for more than 30 years. In 1993, the society underwrote the restoration of the collection to help educate the public about some of the notable personalities who played a significant part in the history of San Antonio.

During the city's dedication of the chambers, President of the San Antonio Conservation Society, Marianna Jones, will be presented a citation recognizing the organization's restoration of the portraits, as well as a \$30,000 contribution the society made to enable the city to hire expert Cisi Jary to re-paint the decorative motifs around the ceiling.

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To properly prepare the "mayors" for their return to public viewing, the Conservation Society commissioned Magdalena Morales MacTaggart, an art restoration expert, to provide the necessary "face-lifts." Some of the canvases required painstaking re-lining, in-painting, varnishing and re-stretching. Many of the ornate frames also needed touch-ups.

The lineage began in 1837 with John W. Smith, the scout who was the last messenger in and out of the Alamo before its fall. James Sweet, who served three terms between 1858 and 1862, had a magnificent home built at the headwaters of the San Antonio River. He later sold the home, now on the grounds of Incarnate Word College, to George Brackenridge.

While city leaders today often profess the desire to make San Antonio a "world-class" city, James H. French charted a more modest course in 1877: "We will cease to be a frontier town." During French's five terms between 1875 and 1885, he was responsible for the development of a more logical system of street names to end some of the confusion created by the existence of numerous streets with multiple names. Also during his terms, the first iron bridge was built across the river. In a foreshadowing of more recent city history, his dreams for progress were curtailed somewhat by the emergence of the Taxpayers' Association.

The concept of term limitations, however, took many years to develop. Bryan Callaghan, the son of the tenth mayor, served as mayor for an

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unprecedented number of years: from 1885 to 1892; 1897 to 1899; and 1905 until his death in office in 1912. Callaghan was responsible for moving City Hall from what was known as the "Bat Cave" to the impressive "new" structure still in use on Military Plaza.

Colorful stories about Callaghan abound. When a property owner objected to the widening of Commerce Street, the mayor simply set city crews to work in the middle of the night to remove his building. He also was indicted by a grand jury for the unauthorized use of funds to pay a mayor pro tem while Callaghan took a one-month leave of absence. Callaghan's method of dealing with his version of "Watergate" was to have the grand jury thrown into jail. An appellate judge threw all of the charges and counter charges out, and everyone adjourned to Scholtz Palm Garden on Losoya.

Frederick Terrell may have only served as mayor for one month and 12 days following the 1903 resignation of Marshall Hicks to seek higher office, but he is still represented in the collection by a splendid portrait. Augustus Jones, mayor in 1912, exhibited a penchant for appointing committees to advise council. He died in office, but he left behind a long legacy of committee-appointing mayors.

San Antonians have demonstrated a propensity to elect relatives. Sam C. Bell, mayor from 1917 to 1921, was soon followed by his brother-in-law, John W. Tobin, mayor from 1923 until his death in 1927. Bell's wife, Agnes,

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and her brother also happened to be grandchildren of the first mayor, John W. Smith. Sam Bell himself was the grandfather of a later mayor, Sam Bell Steves, who came into office in 1952.

C.M. Chambers, first elected in 1927, was criticized by many for his "folly" in purchasing 2,400 acres of land outside of the city limits. The city's gift of the land to the federal government resulted in the construction of Randolph Air Force Base. The legacy of Chambers' terms in office includes the Sunken Gardens, the San Antonio Zoo, San Pedro Playhouse and the San Antonio Public Library (now home to the Hertzberg Circus Collection).

C.K. Quin, mayor from 1933 to 1939 and 1941 to 1943, envisioned San Antonio becoming a tax-free city when he negotiated the purchase of the city's electrical and gas system. His political sparring partner, Maury Maverick (a relative, of course, of one of the city's early mayors, Samuel A. Maverick), left a major imprint on the city because of his ability to help obtain New Deal programs for the city.

Among these projects are the restoration of La Villita and the construction of the landmark walkways along the banks of the San Antonio River. It is said that Maverick was so eager to reorganize city departments that, as he was raising one hand to be sworn into office in 1939, he fired the police chief with the other.

As City Council continues to chart what paths San Antonio should

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take in the future, the portraits restored by the San Antonio Conservation Society serve as a reminders of the great things that city leaders can accomplish, as well as lessons of pitfalls to avoid.