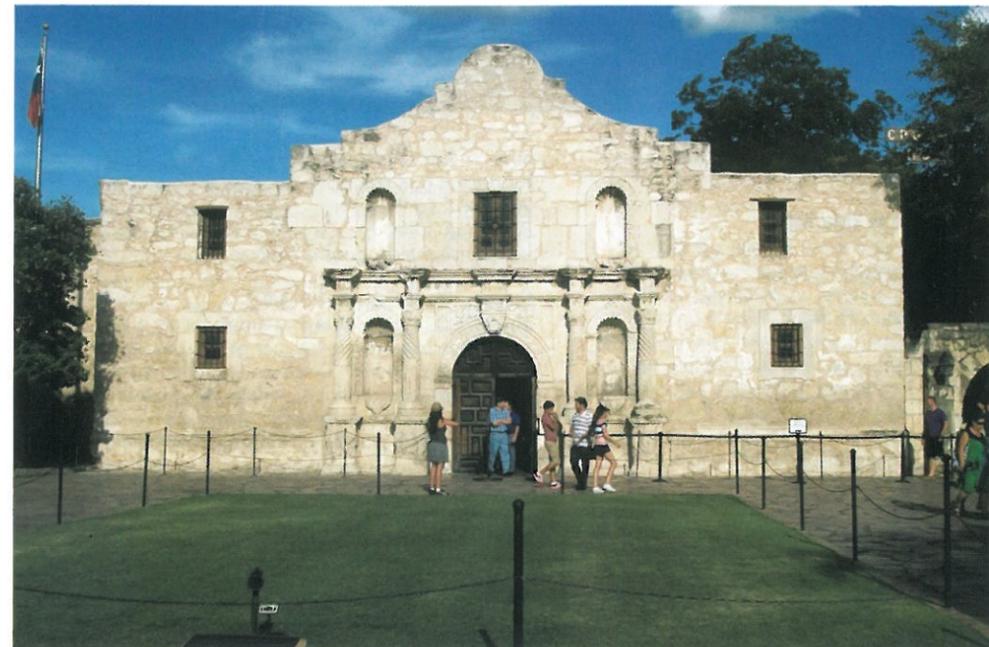




Previous Page Clockwise from Top Left: San Fernando Cathedral in Main Plaza, the home of José Antonio Navarro in Casa Navarro, Casa Navarro, the Cos House in La Villita; This Page: The Alamo.



Downtown San Antonio was one of the most important theaters in which the war for Texas Independence from Mexico played out. Though the Alamo is undoubtedly the most famous of these sites, the downtown area is filled with important locations from the Siege of Bexar, the series of conflicts fought in San Antonio between October 12 and December 11, 1835, before the famous battle of the Alamo.

Leading up to the Siege of Bexar were a number of skirmishes and battles which would culminate in the struggle for San Antonio. The first shots of the Texas Revolution were fired at the Battle of Gonzales on October 2, 1835. Mexican soldiers had loaned the settlers of Gonzales a cannon in 1831, but by 1835, with growing political unrest, Mexican soldiers were sent to retrieve it. Reportedly Texans raised a now famous white flag with the image of a cannon and the words "Come and Take It" and shots were fired. This was followed by the Battle of Goliad on October 10 and the Battle of Concepcion on October 28.

By that time, Mexican General Martin Perfecto de Cos had arrived in San Antonio and had chosen to take a defensive stand in Main Plaza, Plaza de Armas (Military Plaza), and the Alamo. His troops mounted defensive positions which included cannon emplacements. With 751 men, Cos tried to block access to and from town. Ben Milam and Frank Johnson, along with a number of Texan and Tejano volunteers, set up camp at the old Molina Blanco, believed to be in the vicinity of present day Providence High School (just north of downtown on N. St. Mary's Street). On December 5, Milam and Johnson lead an attack on Mexican troops at Main Plaza. Cos and his men withdrew to the Alamo on December 9 to develop a plan for counter attack. Milam was later killed by a sniper in the courtyard of the Veramendi Palace, a large residence built for the Veramendi family in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. On December 11, 1835,

the Texans officially accepted Cos's surrender, which took place in La Villita. Under the terms of the surrender, Cos and his men would leave Texas and no longer fight. The site of the surrender still stands, and the structure is known as the Cos House.

After the Siege of Bexar and surrender of General Cos, the Texan and Tejano volunteers occupied the Alamo, which had already been fortified by Cos. On February 23, 1836, Mexican General Antonio López de Santa Anna unexpectedly arrived in San Antonio. When Santa Anna demanded surrender, the Alamo defenders answered with a cannon shot. Santa Anna then raised a red flag of "No Surrender" at the top of San Fernando Church, meaning they would take no prisoners. Fighting ensued and continued for 13 days until the Alamo fell to Mexican forces on March 6. Following the bloody battle, General Santa Anna ordered the bodies of the Texans and Tejanos burned. It is not clear where the funeral pyres were located, but it's postulated that one location was along the Alameda, now Commerce Street.

Many of the sites and structures associated with the Texas Revolution are still visible in downtown San Antonio. Plaza de Armas (Military Plaza) and Main Plaza, where Cos set up his defenses, are still prominent public spaces in the city. The Veramendi Palace, where Ben Milam was shot and killed, was demolished in 1910, but was located where the Mexican Manhattan Restaurant today exists on Soledad Street between Commerce and Houston Streets. The Cos House still stands in La Villita, along with other 19th century period structures. The Alamo and its grounds remain at the heart of the city and are open to the public free of charge.

Other sites in the city are also associated with the Texas Revolution. These include the Fairmount Hotel, located at S. Alamo and E. Nueva

Streets, which was the site of a Mexican fortification that fired onto the Alamo during the battle. Casa Navarro, a State Historic Site located at W. Nueva and S. Laredo Streets, was the home of Jose Antonio Navarro, one of two native born Texans to sign the Texas Declaration of Independence. The homestead of Samuel Maverick, also a signer of the Texas Declaration of Independence, was once located where the Gibbs Building now stands at Houston Street and Alamo Plaza. Two cannons used during the siege of the Alamo were uncovered at this site during the building's construction. They were relocated to La Villita and can now be seen at the west entrance on S. Presa Street. The site of the De La Garza Home and Mint, which is identified with a historical marker on the east side of the Rand Building at Houston and N. Main, was where Ben Milam's troops engaged in a two-day battle to commandeer the compound as their headquarters. Milam Park, on the western side of downtown between Houston, Commerce, and Dolorosa Streets, once served as the city's burial ground and was the location of the interment of Mexican soldiers after the battle of the Alamo under the orders of Santa Anna.

These sites illustrate the key importance of San Antonio during the battle for Texas Independence. They are all within easy walking distance in San Antonio's beautiful downtown, so put on your walking boots and take a stroll into history!

SITES OF THE TEXAS REVOLUTION IN DOWNTOWN SAN ANTONIO

by Nicholas Fuqua, City of San Antonio, Office of Historic Preservation
photos by Office of Historic Preservation