



Previous Page: Travis Park looking south toward St. Anthony Hotel, Confederate Civil War Monument in Travis Park; This Page from Left: St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Travis Park United Methodist Church.

Historic Travis Park

by Elizabeth Porterfield and Nicholas Fuqua * photos by City of San Antonio Office of Historic Preservation

Take a stroll through historic Travis Park, located in downtown San Antonio between Travis, Jefferson, Pecan, and Navarro Streets. The land originally belonged to Samuel Maverick, a signer of the Texas Declaration of Independence, and was deeded to the city in 1870 after Maverick's death. By 1876 the City had made upgrades to the park, including installing painted wooden benches and enclosing the area with a fence. A bandstand was also constructed on the southwest corner of the park. The fencing was removed in 1891 and the bandstand demolished in 1937.

The development of Travis Park into a formal urban square was a result of the City Beautiful Movement, which sought to integrate beauty and order into the urban landscape during the 1890s and early 1900s. This coincided with an increase in the establishment of memorials to the Civil War following the death of Robert E. Lee in 1870 and

the end of Reconstruction in 1877. Cities throughout the South began memorializing their Confederate dead.

The focal point of Travis Park is the Confederate Civil War Monument in the center. The monument was erected in 1899 and was funded by the Barnard E. Bee Chapter of the Daughters of the Confederacy. The park had served as a camp for Confederate soldiers, and reportedly, a hospital for wounded soldiers was located on the site. The Confederate monument did face resistance during construction, however. An April 1, 1898, Daily Light article indicated opposition on the grounds that the "monuments erected today will be the scoff of a later generation." Despite controversy, the monument was completed in 1899 at a cost of approximately \$3,000. The ceremony for the laying of the foundation stone on June 4, 1899, was attended by veterans of both the Union and Confederate armies.

In 1953 an attempt was made to build an underground parking garage directly beneath the park. The venture was successfully stopped by heirs of the Maverick family. Today, a concept plan for Travis Park is being developed to rehabilitate this historic urban space.

At the northern edge of the park, St. Mark's Episcopal Church congregation was established in 1858, and the cornerstone of the church building was laid in 1859. The outbreak of the Civil War and the following years of Reconstruction delayed completion of the church until 1875. St. Mark's Church was designed by Richard Upjohn, one of the nation's leading church architects working in the Gothic Revival style of the 19th century. Gothic Revival style elements include the buttresses and window tracery. Originally, wooden louvered openings were located below the stained-glass windows on both sides of the sanctuary, allowing for cross ventilation. A cannon found on the grounds of the Maverick homestead was donated to create the original church bell. Elaborate wooden trusses, octagonal wooden columns, and stained glass windows adorn the church's interior.

The Parish Hall and Education Building additions on the west side of the church were completed in 1926-27. In 1949, the church was enlarged when the original side entrance was enclosed with a stained glass window and a Gothic Revival style tower entrance was constructed. A recent restoration has returned the church's interior more closely to Upjohn's original design.

Samuel and Mary A. Maverick were founding members of St. Mark's and donated the first stained glass church window. Robert E. Lee and Lt. John B. Hood were also members of the early congregation. Future President Lyndon B. Johnson and Lady Bird Taylor were married at St. Mark's in 1934. Today, St. Mark's Episcopal Church continues to thrive as an active urban parish in the heart of historic San Antonio.

Flanking the southern edge of Travis Park is the elegant St. Anthony Hotel. The first section of the hotel at the corner of Travis and Navarro Streets was constructed in 1909 for Texas cattlemen B.L. Naylor, A.H. Jones, and F.M. Swearingen. An adjacent addition to the hotel, connected through the first floor lobby, was constructed shortly thereafter in 1910 and featured a rooftop terrace. Both hotel "towers" were originally eight stories in height with Mission Revival style parapets gracing the rooflines.

An extensive renovation undertaken in 1935 transformed the St. Anthony into a luxury hotel. Two additional stories were added giving the roofline its current appearance, the Travis Street façade was unified, an elaborate lobby known as Peacock Alley was designed, and the

interior spaces were lavishly upgraded. A writer dubbed the renovated hotel as "the Waldorf on the Prairie." A 1941 addition at the eastern edge of the building expanded the hotel across the entire city block and included a parking garage with drive-up reception desk, additional guest rooms, and a new ballroom.

The St. Anthony Hotel was reportedly the first fully air-conditioned hotel in the world and was one of the first hotels to offer a drive-up garage registration desk and guest rooms outfitted with automatic doors and lights. Many significant guests have visited the St. Anthony Hotel including Eleanor Roosevelt, Douglas MacArthur, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Will Rogers. The historic St. Anthony Hotel was restored in 1983 and continues to provide luxurious accommodations for overnight guests, weddings, and events.

Near the St. Anthony Hotel is Travis Park United Methodist Church, whose Methodist congregation was established by missionary Rev. John Wesley DeVilbiss in 1846. Methodist missionaries were sent to Texas reportedly in response to an 1835 letter from Col. William B. Travis to a Methodist publication asking for the presence of the Methodist faith in San Antonio. Travis was killed at the Battle of the Alamo in 1836, but Methodist missionaries, including the Rev. John Wesley DeVilbiss, came to Texas shortly thereafter. He established the first Methodist church in San Antonio on Soledad Street in 1852.

The cornerstone of Travis Park United Methodist Church was laid in February 1883, with completion of the church in 1886. A large addition to the south side of the church was constructed in 1901-02 and included a small spire atop the existing tower. A larger spire added later remains today. The church reflects elements of the Romanesque Revival style with large rounded-arch windows, heavy limestone walls, and round tower.

An adjacent office building south of the church on Navarro Street was purchased in 1910 and known as Harmony Hall. An extensive 1948 renovation of Harmony Hall produced the mid-century modern façade and monumental stained glass cross of the church's Youth Building. The 4,700-piece stained glass installation was designed by the Jacoby Stained Glass Studio of St. Louis, Missouri, with stained glass pieces from many different countries. Travis Park United Methodist Church remains an active congregation in downtown San Antonio.

Travis Park and its surrounding buildings reflect the evolution of downtown San Antonio over the last 150 years. Enjoy a walk through Travis Park to experience a part of San Antonio's urban history.