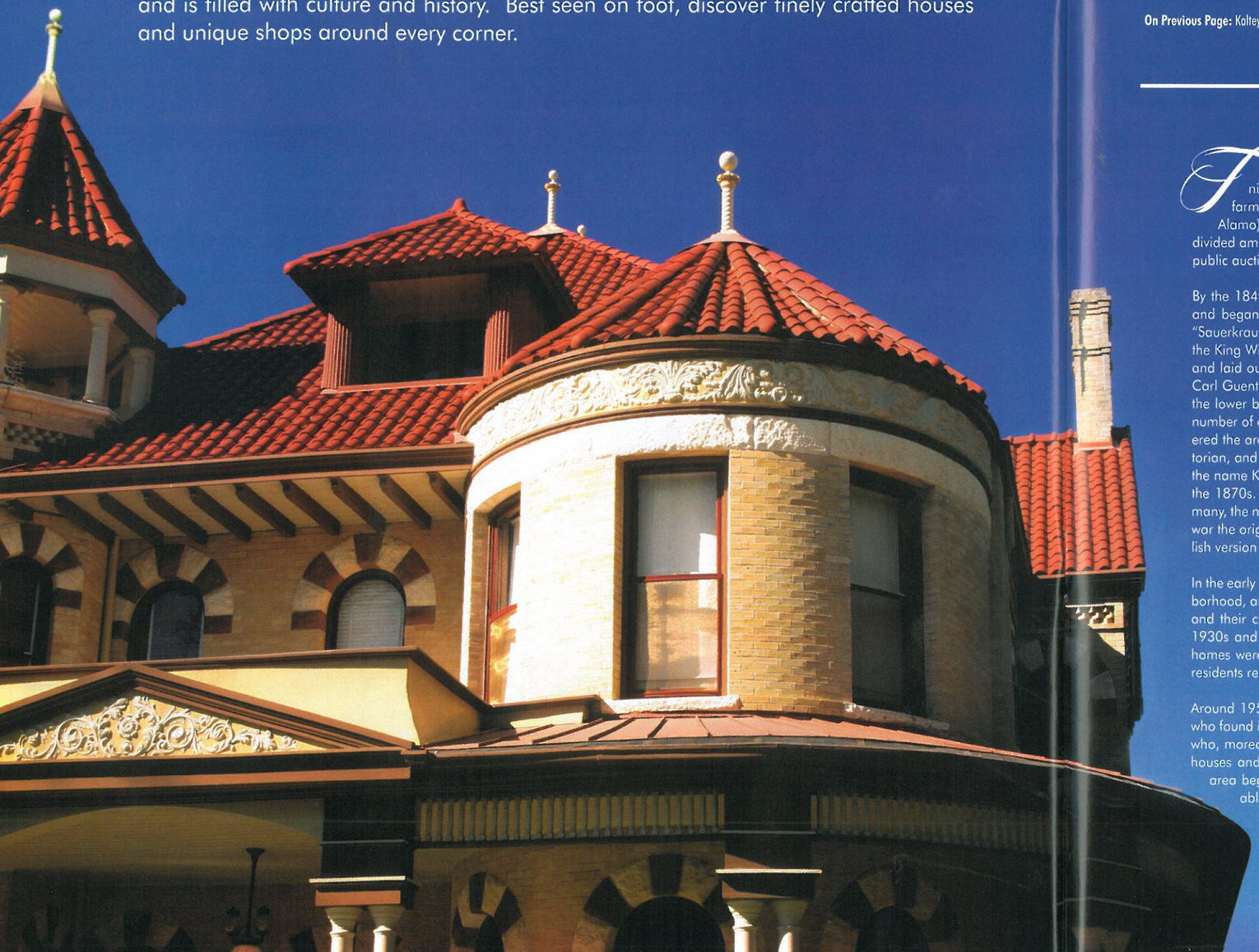
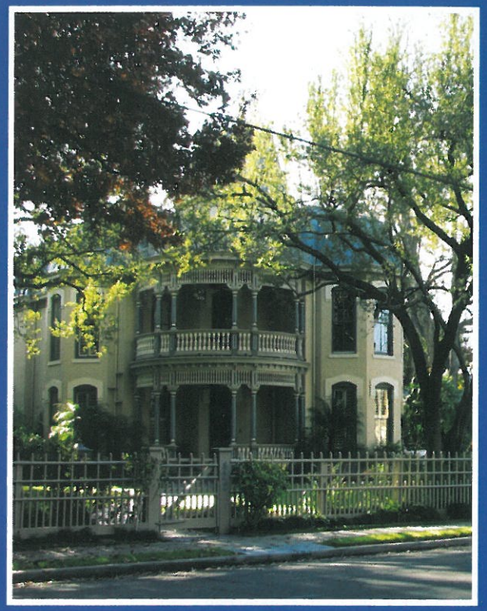
King William
NEIGHBORHOOD

by City of San Antonio, Office of Historic Preservation

Explore the Historic King William District, a 19th century neighborhood of beautifully restored mansions and bungalows. It is the first Historic Neighborhood District in Texas and is filled with culture and history. Best seen on foot, discover finely crafted houses and unique shops around every corner.





On Previous Page: Kalteyer House located at 425 King William Drive. **This Page Left:** Villa Finale is the first National Trust Historic Site in Texas **Right:** West House located at 422 King Willam Drive

The King William Neighborhood is a beautiful tree-lined historic district just south of downtown San Antonio. The neighborhood occupies land that was once irrigated farm land belonging to the Mission San Antonio de Valero (the Alamo). When the mission was secularized in 1793, the lands were divided among the resident Indian families from the mission or sold at public auction.

By the 1840s, a large number of Germans had immigrated to Texas and began to settle in this area. As a result, it became known as "Sauerkraut Bend" to the rest of San Antonio. The area known today as the King William Neighborhood was subdivided into lots in the 1860s and laid out with the present streets. One of the earliest to settle was Carl Guenther, a German immigrant who built Pioneer Flour Mills on the lower bend of the San Antonio River, which is still in operation. A number of other successful and influential German immigrants discovered the area and began building mansions using Greek Revival, Victorian, and Italianate architectural styles. The primary street was given the name King Wilhelm in honor of King Wilhelm I, King of Prussia, in the 1870s. During World War I, when America was at war with Germany, the name was changed to Pershing Avenue. A few years after the war the original name was restored, but this time it was given the English version of the name, King William, and it has remained so since.

In the early 1900s King William began to wane as a fashionable neighborhood, and by 1920 many of the original homebuilders had passed and their children moved to other parts of San Antonio. During the 1930s and 1940s the neighborhood declined. Many of the fine old homes were converted into apartments and only a few of the earlier residents remained.

Around 1950, however, the area began to attract a group of people who found its proximity to the downtown business district attractive and who, moreover, recognized the potential of restoration of the fine old houses and smaller cottages. The interest in the preservation of the area began to be aroused and it once again became a "fashionable" and desirable place to live. One resident, Walter Mathis, personally purchased and rehabilitated twelve houses in the neighborhood including his own home at 401 King William Street known as Villa Finale.

In 1967 the King William District was designated the first Local Historic District in San Antonio. In addition to local historic district designation, King William also became a National Register Historic District in 1972. An expansion of the district known as the South Alamo Street-South St. Mary's Street Historic District was listed in the National Register in 1984. The local historic district also expanded to include this more eclectic neighborhood of cottages and bungalows south of Alamo Street affectionately known as "Baja King William."

The South Alamo Street-South St. Mary's Street portion of the district is a residential area that retains most of its late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fabric and as such, indicates the density and type of development that once spread from the city's core south to the San Antonio River. The district's over 450 structures include many finely crafted houses that illustrate the stylistic eclecticism typical of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century architecture. Bungalows dominate the southern portion of the district and commercial structures are largely limited to South Alamo Street. The popular commercial area is known today as Southtown, a lively spot for restaurants and nightlife and home to the First Friday Arts Walk.

King William is best seen on foot. Visitors can pick up a walking tour brochure at the San Antonio Conservation Society Headquarters located in the Wulff House at 107 King William Street or download a printed version at www.saconservation.org/tours/sitevisits_kingwilliam.htm. Several structures in the neighborhood are particularly outstanding, such as the Wulff House, Villa Finale at 401 King William Street, the Oge House at 209 Washington Street and the Steves Homestead at 509 King William Street.

The Steves Homestead and Villa Finale are both house museums open to the public. Villa Finale is the first National Trust Historic Site in Texas. Visitors should begin at the Villa Finale Visitors Center at 122 Madison Street. Both homes have been beautifully restored along with wonderfully landscaped grounds.

Visitors can enjoy a delicious lunch at the adorable Filling Station restaurant at 701 South St. Mary's in a historic Texaco station or brunch at the Pioneer Mill's Geunther House at 205 E. Guenther. For a chance to relax with the locals, grab a beverage and pull up a chair at the Friendly Spot Ice House at 943 South Alamo Street. Be sure to explore, there are treasures to be discovered around every corner.