



# Moving History

By Nicholas Fuqua, City of San Antonio Office of Historic Preservation

On the Westside of the city stands a log cabin, an anomaly among buildings in San Antonio, indeed in South Texas. The structure is an anachronism from the surrounding neighborhood of 1940s and 50s tract housing representing the boom years following World War II. In fact this house is 200 years older than those nearby. Set on a small rise on a corner lot, the two-story log home with bright red windows, heavy stone chimneys, and surrounded by a white picket fence suggests a scene of rolling wooded hills rather than the rocky terrain and scrub brush of the South Texas landscape. To the passing visitor, the home indeed appears unique. However, to those in any way familiar with historic architecture of this region, the

house is all the more extraordinary because they will find no other log construction in the area. Suitable trees were difficult, if not impossible to find, so historically structures were built out of the materials at hand: caliche, adobe, and limestone. So how did this unusual house end up here?

The home at 554 East Broadview was brought piece-by-piece from the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia in 1952 by Texas contractor and history enthusiast Hal Clayburne. The house was originally built by William Porter around 1755 in Rockbridge County, Virginia, when the western part of the colony was the new frontier. It is fitting then that the house was moved to San

Antonio, given the pioneering spirit of the state of Texas. Clayburne also brought back a smaller log cabin built around 1800 from the same area in Virginia, adding it to the property and linking it to the main house.

Hal Clayburne had always wanted an early American home to live in. The 1950s was a time of renewed interest in Colonial American design and history, and Clayburne, an avid history enthusiast, was part of that trend. On one of his family's many trips to Virginia, Clayburne found the old house sitting vacant and alone in a pasture. "All the shingles were gone, and the front porch sagged just like a tired old man with a big load on his shoulders...we had seen a lot



Previous Page: The 1755 building on 554 East Broadview; This Page Clockwise From Top Left: The stairwell restored to its original beauty. The dining room and fireplace. Proud owner Rose Perez showing off her hard work.

of cabins, but this one seemed special because it stood in the same county where Sam Houston was born." Could Sam Houston, hero of Texas, have visited the home at some point?

The area was thinly settled at the time and Sam Houston left when he was fourteen. The possibility remains tantalizing. Clayburne felt that the old cabin symbolized a unique bond between Texas and Virginia. He paid a few dollars for the old cabin, dismantled it, and shipped it to Texas by train. He rebuilt the cabin for his family, adding the modern amenities necessary for contemporary living. Clayburne kept the rustic character of the house but modified the interior to fit the needs of his family.

Today the property is owned by Rose Perez, who is eager to tell the story of her old log cabin. She had had her eye on the property for some time before purchasing it. "I grew up near this area and always liked the different styles of homes on West Broadview, so one day while I was driving around I spotted this house...it was so old, a little creepy and musty smelling, but still so charming. I just got an overall good feeling about it." She eventually was able to purchase the house at auction in 2010 and proceeded with clean-up and restoration. "It was quite an experience. I had never purchased a house at an auction...it was exciting and nerve wracking at the same time. I ended up using the last of my retirement savings to buy it as

I couldn't get lender financing because of its condition." She made interior improvements, added a new metal roof, and repainted the exterior to reveal the chinking between the logs, which had been painted all one color and had masked the appearance of the log construction. She also installed a new picket fence to replace the original split-rail fence that surrounded the property. With all the improvements, the house remains rustic and picturesque. Rose continues the same passion for history that Hal Clayburne began through her love of preservation and her devotion to the house.