Beyond the Alamo®

Neighborhood Discovery Tours
Guidebook copy:

East Side / Ellis Alley

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DRAFT

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Neighborhood Discoveries – Eastside
This tour guide to one of San Antonio's unique neighborhoods is different than what you will find in hotel lobbies and visitor centers. More anthropological than commercial, it makes no claim to be the definitive guide to the "best of" anything. Instead, this is a tour made up of detours to the well-trodden tourist trail. We invite you to take this side road with us into some of San Antonio's overlooked, undervalued or simply unknown culturally-rich neighborhoods.

Within these pages you will find an introduction to the history as well as a contemporary exploration of some of the reasons the area is important to the larger San Antonio story. But, it cannot contain all there is to know. Hopefully, the stories and history visited here will inspire you to come back and make some true discoveries of your own.

Beyond the Alamo
Location, location, location. The old business axiom holds true for the earliest history of San Antonio. When a group of Spanish settlers needed a camp for their first expedition some 300 years ago, they picked a spot midway between the settled parts of Northern

Mexico and the French controlled towns of East Texas. That point is near where present South Loop 410 crosses the San Antonio River. Coahuiltecan, Payay, Lipan Apache and other native peoples already enjoyed this fertile river valley-a land they called "Yanaguana." Nevertheless, the Spanish chose to call it San Antonio de Padua in honor of their arrival on this saint's celebrated day. In late April of 1719, Governor Don Martin de Alarcon led some 72 Spaniards to the area to stay. Father Antonio de Buenaventura Olivares arrived soon after to establish the Mission San Antonio De Valero. We know this mission as the Alamo.

Today the Alamo is indeed "remembered" in history, myth, heart and controversy. Tourists come to San Antonio from throughout the world to see the legendary structure. But the story of San Antonio stretches far beyond those cool stone walls. One piece of this story is the significant role people of African descent have played in the establishment of San Antonio and continue to play in its cultural richness.

Canary Islanders

East San Antonio is generally thought of as *the* African-American section of town. Indeed, there was a concentration of African-Americans who settled the area by the early 20th Century. In addition, a bustling primarily black-owned business district developed during the years of legislated racial segregation. But African-Americans also settled in pockets across the city including areas on the far Westside and around the Monte Vista neighborhood. Furthermore, the roots of San Antonio's historically black St. Philip's College were first planted in downtown La Villita.

Interestingly, it was people of African descent who first settled in that nucleus of San Antonio. Their story is an unusual twist on the migration of most Africans to this country. Tragically, most people of African descent arrived in Texas unwillingly and were immediately forced into a life of slavery regardless of whether they were peasants or royalty back home. But a small group of settlers from the Spanish-controlled Canary Islands just off the coast of North Africa immigrated to a different reality.

In hoping to strengthen his hold on Texas, King Phillip V of Spain took his Brigadier General Riviera's advice that "One permanent Spanish family could do more to hold the country than 100 soldiers." The King promised impoverished Islanders passage to the frontier, free land and the title of "*hidalgo*" derived from the term "*hijo de algo*," which translates literally to "*son of something"* the lowest level of Spanish nobility and a rather impotent title on the far fringes of the Spanish empire. Nevertheless, it was an attractive offer. Eventually 56 dark-skinned, mostly gray or blue-eyed Canary Island Guanches came to Texas. Guanches are the indigenous North African Berber inhabitants of the Islands who mixed with the Spanish and adopted Spanish customs and beliefs.

The settlers arrived at Presidio San Antonio de Bejar on March 9, 1731. This weary group of travelers would go on to establish Villa de San Fernando Bejar, the first civil settlement in Texas. Around 1733, the same time the Islanders received permission to form their governing council or "cabildo", the budding settlement received a Spanish land grant for the croplands due east of the Islanders homes. This land would one day be developed by German and other Eastern European immigrants. Many of these families rented and eventually sold their properties to African-Americans who came to San Antonio in the years following the Emancipation Proclamation.

Juneteenth

June 19, 1865 or "Juneteenth" celebrates the end of slavery with the Emancipation Proclamation. More specifically, Juneteenth celebrates when the news of Lincoln's January, 1863, announcement finally made it to Texas over two years later. Indeed, according to a program from a 1902 Juneteenth parade and celebration, General Gordan George arrived at the port of Galveston on June 18th or 19th, 1865 and threatened "to empty his shotgun shells within the boundaries of the Lone Star state if the slaves were not set free immediately." Lincoln's proclamation had taken two years to reach Texas shores.

One hundred and two-year-old Eastside resident Augusta Whittier remembers Juneteenth celebrations in her hometown of Victoria, Texas. "We had so many floats and a big parade. It was a real celebration." Indeed, the parade described in the 1902 San Antonio celebration program lists the floats depicting work of African-Americans at the time. They included a printing press float, a stone mason float, an undertaker float and a carpenter float. Participants marched through downtown past the Alamo ending up at the old San Pedro Springs. Until the end of segregation in the mid-60s, blacks were only allowed to swim at the springs on Juneteenth.

History in the Hayloft

The 1902 program describing General George's arrival to Texas was one of several documents discovered in the old hayloft of Carter Taylor Williams Mortuary on the corner of Center and Hackberry Streets. Vera Williams Young, Director of the funeral home was cleaning some boxes in her upstairs garage when she took a closer look. Inside, Young found original posters from San Antonio Juneteenth celebrations in the late 1800's and early 1900's. Young's discovery led her to personally research Juneteenth happenings around the world. "Although Juneteenth is technically a Texas holiday, it is celebrated in Ghana, West Africa. They have celebrations in Tulsa and San Francisco and in more and more big cities. One day I hope our celebration will be as big as some that get 150,000 people. But since there are only 60 or 70 thousand blacks in San Antonio, we will need everyone to come out."

Emily D. West (Morgan)
While the stories of the many early African-Americans in Texas before the Emancipation Proclamation have been lost, the role of one African-American in securing the future of Texas remains strong in the hearts of many San Antonio residents. Emily D. West, known by many as Emily Morgan, the name of her presumed slave master James Morgan, is who most call the "Yellow Rose of Texas." With a luxury downtown hotel named in her honor, Emily Morgan has indeed become a contemporary Texas icon. While the detail's of West's history are debated by historians and folklorists alike, her legend and cultural importance endures.

Martha Ann Turner's book The Yellow Rose of Texas describes West as a mixed–race "golden-skinned girl resembling a Latin goddess." Most people assume West was a slave. However the Texas State Historical Association's Handbook of Texas Online says West was a free black from New Haven, Connecticut who signed a contract to work a year as a housekeeper for Morgan in New Washington, Texas. Colonel Morgan was away from New Washington on April 16, 1836 when the Mexican Military invaded and looted his warehouses. Santa Anna, the Mexican commander and *presidente* saw Emily and reportedly took her as part of the loot.

According to an article by San Antonio journalist and historian Claude Stanush, Santa Anna traveled with a red and white silk tent, cases of champagne, boxes of opium, and crates of fighting cocks. The Mexican leader had recently sent his teenage "bride" Melchora Barrera back to Mexico and was presumably ready for some female "companionship."

Willingly or not, West left New Washington with Santa Anna but reportedly sent a slave boy named Turner to Texan leader Sam Houston's army to warn them of the approaching Mexicans. West's access to this kind of information has been questioned by historians. Regardless, the Texans were able to crush the much larger, better prepared Mexican army at San Jacinto on the afternoon of April 21, 1836 because they took Santa Anna and his troops by surprise. Folklorists claim that a slave admirer penned a poem for her that became the "Yellow Rose of Texas" song. She is now linked with the song and the legend of her bravery at San Jacinto lives on.

Baptist Settlement
One of the first places former slaves and free blacks settled in San Antonio was known as the Baptist Settlement. This approximately ten-square-block district has long been an area of transition. The land was part of the Mission holdings divided among Los Adaes Indians from Louisiana and some early San Antonio settlers in the late 1700s. Ownership of the area changed in the early 1900s when the San Antonio Housing Authority purchased the title for $642,293.01. According to a 1940 article in the San Antonio

Light, 300 houses were "extracted" from the area to create a public housing development called Victoria Courts. In 2000, families were again "extracted" from their homes. This time, the Courts were demolished so that the land could be redeveloped into mixed-income residences and small commercial properties.

One of the early inhabitants of the Baptist Settlement was a well-educated, entrepreneurial school teacher named P.F. Roberts. Originally from Mississippi, Roberts settled in San Antonio after college. His first P.F. Roberts store sold meat and dry goods to Baptist Settlement residents from the corner of Victoria and Indianola. According to Roberts daughter, 86-year-old Henrietta Stevenson, the family lived behind a second store at 635 S. Pine Street. Stevenson remembered hearing her father get up early to retrieve the milk and bread that was left by delivery trucks outside the shop, "No one would think of stealing it," she mused.

Most of the houses in Baptist Settlement were front-gabled one room wide wooden homes called "shotguns." The name "shotgun" comes from an old tale that said a shotgun blast fired in the front door would come out the back. This style was common in New England during the early nineteenth century and followed the westward expansion of the railroads in the 1850s. The one-story version seen in the Baptist Settlement was popular in many southern cities. Most of the structures were built between 1880 and 1930.

The housing stock of the Baptist Settlement is similar to what was found in the neighborhoods destroyed by nearby HemisFair Plaza. According to Rev. Claude Black, lifelong San Antonio resident, former City Council Member and Pastor Emeritis of Mt. Zion Baptist Church, some of these early Baptist Settlement residents organized Mt. Zion in 1871. Despite an 1886 storm and flood, 1890 fire and 1974 arson attack, the church remains active on the corner of Hackberry and Nebraska streets. Churches such as Mt. Zion and New Light Free Mission Baptist anchored the Baptist Settlement area. Said the 84-year-old Rev. Black, "As an old man looking back at a time when I was young and I was talking to 'old men' I remember how some of them built churches by simply coming into an area and building what they called a 'brush arbor'. They just built frames and set up brush and sticks on top to try to keep the rain out the best they could. They would get some benches and they would start a church. Out of that beginning have developed some of our finest churches. I was thinking about the courage of those men, the innovation, the dedication."

A second church that began in the brush of the Baptist Settlement was Second Baptist Church. The congregation now worships in a 1000 seat sanctuary inside a striking, variegated, tan brick structure with numerous standing seam metal roofs located at 3310 East Commerce. The building, designed by a black architect named Norrell Haywood, a protégé of renowned San Antonio architect O'Neil Ford, features a picturesque central atrium surrounded by smaller buildings that is characteristic of Ford's distinct style.

That Corner at Center and Chestnut

First organized in 1879, Second Baptist Church spent over half a century in an equally impressive building. Originally known as Macedonia Baptist Church and housed in a frame house at Indiana and Goliad in the Baptist Settlement, the church was part of a migration eastward to the area known as Ellis Alley. Church members eventually raised funds to build an impressive gothic stone building on the corner of Chestnut and Center Streets. A 1910 article in the *San Antonio Light* recalls how church members paid $1 each for the privilege of digging the foundation for the new structure. Second Baptist's longtime minister, S.H. James Jr., was San Antonio's first black City Council member. He was instrumental in negotiating the city's desegregation ordinance in 1965. With the construction of Highway I-37, a structure some on the Eastside call the city's "Berlin Wall," the great stone church was lost.

An 1873 Augustus Koch Bird's Eye View Map of San Antonio shows a "colored" church just east on Center Street. This unidentified building was the old St. Paul's Methodist Episcopal Church, now St. Paul's United Methodist and the namesake for nearby St. Paul's Square. Established in 1866, St. Paul's is the oldest African-American church in San Antonio. Its early membership was primarily newly freed slaves who were once restricted to the balcony of Travis Park United Methodist Church in downtown San Antonio while the white owners worshipped below. According to an article in the *San Antonio Register*, St. Paul's current limestone structure at the corner of Cherry and Chestnut was built in 1922 for $70,000. The article advertised an upcoming "Every Member Drive" to liquidate the remaining debt of $2,700.35.

Farther east at 321 N. Center Street sits the G. J. Sutton State Office Building, also known as the SAMSCO building. SAMSCO (San Antonio Machine and Supply Company) was a machine shop and foundry that moved to existing brick buildings here in 1904. Additions were made in 1906 and 1912. The state of Texas acquired the buildings in 1975. They are named for G.J. Sutton , the first black representative to the Texas Legislature. After his death, Sutton's wife Lou Nelle succeeded him, becoming the first female in the state legislature. The Sutton name is legendary on San Antonio's Eastside. G.J.'s younger brother A.C. Sutton still directs the family funeral home on the corner of Cherry and Hackberry Streets. All fifteen of the Sutton children were born in a house connected to the business. Their father S.J. was principal of both Douglass and Wheatley schools.

The Business of Necessity

Local funeral home director, Vera Williams Young, emphasized the longtime importance of black-owned funeral homes. "There are institutions in black communities that have always lasted no matter what else happens. They are the church and funeral homes. In addition, there are black hair salons and barber shops. These areas are still generally segregated today." Indeed these are businesses that have always been fully black

controlled and operated. Young said, "It is simple, you always need someone to bury you and black people know about doing black people hair." Driving through San Antonio's Eastside today, one will undoubtedly see a high concentration of churches, funeral homes, hair salons and barber shops.

One building that still stands on this once busy corner is the Beacon Light Lodge. Still owned by the Masons, a men's fraternal organization, the Lodge once housed the Odd Fellows, the Star Tom Lodge, the Free and Accepted Masons as well as O.J. Carter's (of Carter, Taylor, Williams Mortuary) first undertaking parlor. After leaving Williamson and Son Mortuary, O. J. Carter went into business with S.J. Sutton. Eventually, Carter's wife Annie ran the business as Carter Undertaking Co. The mortuary was then passed on to an adopted "niece" named Julia Taylor. Taylor and her husband ran the business with the help of Edward "Eddie" Williams. When Williams died in 1991, his sister Vera Williams Young and her family took over the still operating Carter, Taylor and Williams Mortuary. Sutton went on to open his own funeral which now operates as Sutton's Paradise Funeral Home. Other prominent African-American owned funeral homes that are still in business are the Lewis Funeral Home on Hackberry Street and Collins Mortuary on Chestnut Street. According to an oral history of Abbey Louisa McCammel, mother of Vera Williams Young, Mr. Collins once embalmed his dog and set him out in front of the funeral home.

Ellis Alley

A drive through the Eastside will also provide a glimpse of numerous alleys tucked into city blocks. When African-Americans first moved to the Eastside, most lived in these narrow enclaves. It was not until the end of the American Civil War in 1865 that Texas laws changed to allow ex-slaves to own property at all. One of these former slaves was Isabel Scott. After the Emancipation Proclamation, she declined an offer to stay and work on the Fredricksburg, Texas farm where she had been a slave. Instead, Scott moved to San Antonio, eventually met her husband Edward and purchased property at 231 Ellis Alley. Scott's great-granddaughter Nettie Brooks Hinton still lives on San Antonio's Eastside. Together with local development groups, the San Antonio Department of Historic Preservation and San Antonio Conservation Society, she has helped steer the move to salvage this early enclave of black home ownership.

What remains of residential Ellis Alley are three wood frame cottages that are representative of the housing stock at this time. According to a history of Ellis Alley written by Debs McCray for the San Antonio Conservation Society, the 1905 city directory showed that 15 houses were located on Ellis Alley, all occupied by African Americans, 10 of whom were homeowners. These plots originally belonged to Felipe Elue and Joseph de la Buame through a Spanish land grant. In 1848, they sold it to Anthony Dignowity, a Czech doctor and the namesake of Dignowity Hill to the northeast. Dignowity in turn sold some of the land to Sam Maverick, a prominent landowner of the

day. Maverick eventually divided Ellis Alley into 25-foot lots, many of which were rented and purchased by African-Americans between 1875 and 1886.

Like much of the near Eastside, the Ellis Alley area was racially mixed into the early 1900s. Maverick sold the still-standing 217 Ellis Alley to Ed Duran in 1886. He lived there until around 1910 when it was sold to an African-American family. The structure that still stands today was either built or rebuilt in 1910. The oldest remaining structure in the area is 225 Ellis Alley. It was built in 1885 and continually expanded. In 1882, Maverick sold this land to Sam Abrams who lived there with his son until 1902.

The San Antonio Register – Voice of the Eastside

Stories of the thousand small kindness exchanged in the fledgling Ellis Alley community still seem to whisper from between the boards of the small leaning houses. And since the 1930s, these stories have also lived on the pages of the *San Antonio Register*. As Edwin Glossen, editor of the *Register* tells the story the paper was born in a two story brick building on N. Center Street which held its predecessor, the *Inquirer.* When Valmo Bellinger, son of Eastside savior, kingpin, political genius and gambling legend Charles Bellinger, approached the *Inquirer* publisher G.W. Bouldin about running an ad for a slate of political candidates his father supported, Bouldin refused. "Valmo looked at him and said, you just bought yourself some competition," said Glossen. "That was 1931." Bellinger moved into offices next to the *Inquirer* and began publishing the Register. The Inquirer eventually folded.

Under Valmo Bellinger, the *Register* didn't miss a weekly edition for nearly half a century. An interview with Valmo's wife Josephine tells about the early days of the paper. She met Valmo when he called her boss at a major black benevolent association in Houston and asked if he knew a woman who could be a bookkeeper and accountant. Josephine's boss recommended her on the spot. Soon after, Josephine found herself typing articles and proofing copy for the paper. Eventually they married and Valmo asked her to do a column of her own. This became "Jo's Jottings," a popular social and personal weekly column. Other early columns included Katherine Beverly's literary "Poetry Corner" and the Butter Krust Family Photo Ads. Butter Krust, a local bread factory paid families some "dough" and some real bread for posing. In addition, the *Register* had contributors from outlying communities and for a while, other editions were published in Austin and Corpus Christi.

In late 1978, two employees walked out on Valmo and Josephine. Valmo suffered a heart attack shortly afterwards. Josephine ran the paper alone during his recovery and eventually sold it to Edwin Glossen in 1979. These days Glossen, a San Antonio native who played football and studied journalism at the university of Missouri says, "The community exists through this paper. I haven't worked in 21 years. This is not work. I enjoy every minute." As a high school football star at all-black Phyllis Wheatley High

School, Glossen and his teammates were bussed every two weeks to play the nearest team in their division in Houston. Glossen said that they got mere mentions in the mainstream *Express-News*. "I grew up in this paper (the *Register*.) I have a whole scrapbook full of clippings and they are all from the *Register*. No one else covered the black sports."

When asked what keeps the paper community focused, Glossen replied, "People grow up in this paper. Kids sell it. I've sold it. I've done everything. Heck, I delivered a stack of papers this morning. People meet me and know me.. So I write articles of encouragement to kids. With a paper like this, it all comes back to me."

Commerce Street Commerce

This sense of accountability is one characteristic of the self-reliance that resulted from segregation. In response to denial of services and access, African-Americans in San Antonio created their own. Most importantly, the businesses created in this area were supported by the entire community. The tightly-woven fabric of that community changed radically with integration and the disbursement of people and resources. When asked about the history of the area, Rev. Claude Black responded, "Before you talk about the history of an area like this you must know the context. History is not made by wealth. It is made by creativity, by doing without and by overcoming limits. This is all part of the history of black people. In talking about poverty areas, you must know the history that led to that area."

The history of today's East Commerce Street begins in 1905 when the Spanish laid the initial route. A painting by artist Herman Lungkwitz dated 1854 shows East Commerce (then called La Alameda) as an area with sparse development and cottonwood trees for vegetation. Had Lungkwitz painted a century later, he would have depicted a mix of restaurants, doctor's offices, grocery stores, theaters and nightclubs. In many ways San Antonio has always been a "tourist town." Whether providing saloons to cowboys or all-night clubs, restaurants and lodging to travelers or WWI troops coming through the Southern Pacific Station, Commerce Street was hopping with visitors and locals alike.

Longtime East San Antonio residents recall the popular Lifesaver Grill in the 1300 block of East Commerce. Demolished in 1995, the Lifesaver was a reliable spot for a reasonable meal, a jukebox and occasional live music. In the same block, Maggot's Grocery remains open after nearly 120 years. Larry Maggott owns the store that his Polish grandfather Theodore opened as a general store in 1881. His grandparents lived in a house attached to the back of the store which then had a wood façade. Most days, Magott can be found stocking shelves and bustling around much as he did as a youngster. He recalls many of the other family-owned businesses in the area that have disappeared. "The Lifesaver was next door to what's now my parking lot. They would bring all the really great black athletes down for a meal and when I was a kid we would get to go meet

them. Mrs. Brown cut hair across the street. There was a paper company and a liquor shop and lots of barber shops." Although the daily stop of the "Sunset Limited" route stopped in 1970, train travelers still come to Magotts for provisions. After 35 years at the checkout, Rose Stevenson knows most customers by name. She remembers walking by the store when the area was still primarily German and Polish. "I used to go to the Chocolate Bar across the street. But this was all German and we couldn't come in here. Things started to change in the 40s when more black people came." Many of these newcomers were military men who started businesses and bought property.

Eighty-three year old Sylvester Mitchell has lived on East Commerce Street for 77 years. He recalls that, "Everybody went to Sam Woo's," a Chinese restaurant demolished by the building of I-37. According to playwright and third generation Eastsider Sterling Houston, the popular lunch spot navigated the limits of segregation by having two front doors that opened to two counters angled back towards the same kitchen. "Blacks would use one door and whites the other and they would sit there looking at each other," said Houston.

Area gambler and political boss Charles Bellinger had a taxi stand on Commerce Street and would often round up local young men and take them to the nearby Cameo Theater. A.C. Sutton of the politically active Sutton family recalls how Sporty Harvey used to box in the Froggy Bottom club on Commerce (also destroyed by I-37.) Sutton does not mince words in condemnation of the highway's placement. "Black business were doing too well and getting too close to downtown. Some people didn't like it and the highway stopped it."

As with S.J. Sutton and P.F. Roberts who ran businesses in addition to being educators, most people needed more than one occupation to make ends meet. Some of this extra income came from speakeasies that brewed "white lightning." Other Eastside residents worked for companies centered around the railroad tracks such as Alamo Iron Works and Steves Lumberyard. Many worked as porters, waiters, mail clerks and repairmen on the rails. Some found work in construction even pouring Eastside sidewalks. The name of Avis Bland, a black contractor, can still be seen in front of the Fredrich Air Conditioning Factory. Another contractor, A. Hamel's, had a stone works store located across the street from the factory at 1122-24 East Commerce.

St. Paul's Square and Sunset Depot

Just east of I-37 is St. Paul's Square and the Southern Pacific "Sunset" Depot. In the mid-1800;s, San Antonio was the only major city without rail service and mule trains utilizing as many as 330 mules per train of carts regularly traveled city streets. An 1877 *San Antonio Express-News* article mentions the presence of the Corps of Engineers, camped "on the hill near Mrs. Dignowity's place," as they surveyed for the rail line. And on February 19, 1877, the Galveston, Harrisburg, and San Antonio railroad established a depot at the foot of the hill below Fort Sam Houston, then known as Rattlesnake Hill.

The railway was later purchased by the Southern Pacific Company. Immigration of Germans and other eastern Europeans centered on this area. In addition, many African-Americans who worked on the railways settled in housing along the rails.

Then in 1903, the Southern Pacific Railroad built a new station on East Commerce and residential development shifted south and east. The Southern Pacific Depot was built of brick on a concrete foundation and with a red clay roof. It cost $115,000 to build and was designed by John D. Isaacs, the Assistant Engineer of the Maintenance-of-Way for the Southern Pacific Company in San Francisco, California. The waiting room of the station was lit with some 500 incandescent electric lights distributed on arches, panels, and around each of the two stained glass rose windows. Additional lighting was by combination of gas and electric fixtures. During the first few years, the building became known as the "house of 1000 lights." In the north gable, a stained glass window shows the medallion of the Sunset Route with the year "1902" Roman Numerals. The depot is often called "Sunset Station" for the famous "Sunset Limited" train route across the south from California to Florida.

With the arrival of the new station, the surrounding area became a busy commercial district. Most of the buildings in the area were constructed between 1900 and 1920. The structures housed hotels, saloons, night clubs, retail stores and boarding houses. The area was named St. Paul's Square after the St. Paul's Methodist Church on Center Street. The train brought a wide range of visitors who used these services. The first train into the Southern Pacific station carried "distinguished Boer visitors from South Africa." A relay team from Mexico comprised of Tarahumara Indians arrived at the station March 22, 1927 to compete in a University of Texas track meet. The Indians, known for their endurance running, went to visit the meet site, returned to San Antonio and then ran the 82 miles to Austin to compete. President Calvin Coolidge and his wife arrived at the station on February 16, 1930 and Judy Garland came on January 30, 1937. The depot has also been the site of many movies including of The Alamo with John Wayne, Get Away with Steve McQueen as well as parts of Selena and The Newton Boys.

Several factors led to the deterioration of St. Paul Square during the 50's and 60's. These include the passenger transportation shift from trains to automobiles, populace moving with the city's growth northward, the opening of HemisFair Plaza which turned Commerce into a one-way street diverting traffic from the neighborhood, and the construction of I-37. In the final preparation for the 1968 HemisFair, city leaders decided the traffic pattern would be better served if Commerce Street were a one way street. However, "In the black Mecca of business, they found themselves closing down," said Lou Miller, Executive Director of the African-American Chamber of Commerce. "They were no longer able to bring people from downtown. There was no traffic flow." From 1981 to 1987, citizens and Eastside leaders fought the Texas Department of Transportation on plans for Commerce Street and I-37. The citizens wanted a two-way Commerce Street to facilitate traffic into the St. Paul Square area. In 1987, the partial

one-way compromise we have today was passed. One still cannot exit east on Commerce when traveling north on I-37.

Cameo Theater and Entertainment District

One of the focal points of the old St. Paul's Square area was the Cameo theater, the first white-owned theater to open its doors to African Americans in San Antonio. Since 1919, the walls of the Cameo have heard every sound from the notes of Count Basie, Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith, to the dialogue of Native Son, the sermon's of Rev. Claude Black, to wailing 1980s heavy metal and to the now current silence before a hoped-for revival.

Writer Sterling Houston, recalls "going to the Cameo at least twice a week" as a boy. Houston laughed as he recalled his baby-sitter. "From when I was six to ten years old. She would take me to the theater. She was the one who talked to me about race for the first time. She was also a madam at a rather notorious bordello on Cherry Street." Houston said the theater showed, "everything. You had your cartoon, your short subjects, previews and of course Saturday serials. It was 10 cents for a double feature." Houston also recalls the vaudeville acts that would come. He would see the performers costumes hanging on the clotheslines of neighborhood women who provided a room for the night.

Rev. Claude Black remembers when, as a young minister, he held services in the Cameo. In order to use the theater for Sunday services, Black had to clean up from Saturday 1940s kiddie cowboy movies. In a 1999 article about the potential restoration of the Cameo, Black told the *San Antonio Express-News*, "there was everything from popcorn boxes to ice cream left in there. It was a job to clean up but they never charged me rent."

The art-deco tiles of the front and deep colors of the theater's façade were restored in the 1980s. The Zaccaria family's Cameo Theatre Corporation now owns the theater and an adjacent office building. Future proposals for the site have included everything from a dinner theater to a salsa club.

Old San Antonio City Cemeteries Historic District

One of the most significant "living" records of geographical and social change during 19th century San Antonio is the Old San Antonio City Cemeteries Historic District. Recently named to the National Register of Historic Places, the District encompasses over 100 acres on the city's near Eastside. Noted cemetery historian Maria Watson Pfeiffer led this effort to attain national designation and provided comprehensive research on the area. Before City Council's move to designate a new city cemetery in the mid 1800s, San Antonio burials were conducted at the old public and Catholic burial grounds on the city's near west side (now Milam Park and Santa Rosa Hospital.) These eight acres in the center of the city were inadequate for the rapidly growing city center.

However, there were no City funds to spend on improving or buying land. So on October 2, 1850, City Alderman Onesiums Evans proposed that the City look at land the city already owned near what was known as Powder House Hill. This land was a part of San Antonio's original town tract granted to the municipality in the 18th century by the King of Spain and was named for the ruins of buildings apparently used as weapon and gunpowder storage by the Spanish.

The decision to use the Powder House land was in line the East Coast Rural Cemetery movement began by Jacob Bigelow in the1830's. This effort proposed moving cemeteries from increasingly congested urban centers. Other benefits of the Powder House land included its rocky soil unsuitable for farming, good drainage and ventilation, fine views of countryside for visitors and a sense that the higher land was symbolically closer to heaven. Two years elapsed between the original request to consider the Powder House Hill and the actual survey of the area. Finally, in 1852, officials decided that one-half of the area would be sold at public auction, one-quarter reserved for free burials and one-quarter held for sale at a future time. Also during this time the Council had the old Catholic cemetery leveled and cleaned up. It is not known why the city had control over the Catholic Cemetery. There is also no documentation of the time and place of disposal for the old city and Catholic cemetery burials. The public auction of land meant that mayors and doctors or clerks and drivers, all contributors to San Antonio's development were buried in the same cemetery.

Additional land was sold to private ethnic, religious and fraternal groups and the complex eventually included 31 individual cemeteries, 24 primarily Anglo-American and seven primarily African-American. During the 19th century, most Latinos were interred at San Fernando Cemetery on San Antonio's West Side. This ethnic division mirrored that of the living; Anglos and Blacks east and Latinos west of downtown. The last public City Cemetery (#7) was created in November 1904 and was designated as a pauper's cemetery.

Fraternal Organizations

On November 28, 1853, Alamo Masonic Lodge purchased 16 acres of land from the city for its burial ground immediately west of City Cemetery #1. The Alamo Masonic Lodge, sold the Independent Order of Odd Fellow, San Antonio Lodge #11 six acres of its cemetery land on the same day it was purchased from the city. Other Masonic orders were established in 19th century San Antonio but Anchor Masonic Lodge #424 was the only other lodge to purchase and develop a cemetery in the area. Four lodges and four "sister" lodges of the Order of the Sons of Hermann were active in San Antonio. Harmonia Lodge #1 purchased property east of City Cemetery #5 and south of the Polish Catholic (St. Michael's) cemetery. Membership in this order increased and the Hermann Sons eventually purchased 4.2 acres at the southern end of the cemetery complex. This property was sold to the Hermann Sons Cemetery Association. The Hermann Sons remains an active fraternal organization in San Antonio and maintains its headquarters

building at 515 South St. Mary's Street. Other early lodges include the Knights of Pythias who received a gift from the city of a tract between the St. Joseph Society and Anchor Masonic cemeteries. The African American Pythian lodge was apparently excluded from this gift and petitioned for its own burial ground in 1894.

Indeed, the sale of cemetery plots to private organizations was especially important to African-Americans in San Antonio who depended on such groups for insurance and death benefits. Often denied membership in the United States, African-American groups got their charters from Canadian and British Organizations. Most African-American fraternal organizations that petitioned for cemeteries received lots subdivided out of City Cemetery #3. These include the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows, the United Brothers of Friendship, St. Elmo's Lodge who all received plots in 1894-5. The Beacon light lodge petitioned the city for burial land in 1890 and did not receive it until 1902 when it purchased five lots out of City Cemetery #3. This group held their meetings in the historic Beacon Light Hall at 220 Chestnut near the Southern Pacific Depot. Previous to the establishment of African-American private cemeteries, there was a "Colored Peoples" burial ground set aside in 1876 west of the military cemetery. However in 1884 the military cemetery was later expanded to encompass that land. It is not known how many "colored" burials took place between 1876 and 1884 and there is no record of how and where graves were disposed.

National Cemetery

The expanded military cemetery corresponded with the expansion of Congress's intent to include all honorably discharged veterans in addition to those who died in battle in military cemeteries. Soldiers who were originally interred in forts across West Texas and at other Army posts were re-interred at the San Antonio National Cemetery as the remote installations were abandoned. This included more than 300 Buffalo Soldiers. By 1907, the government realized it had to find a new larger area. The Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery, originally called the Post Cemetery, was established adjacent to Fort Sam Houston in 1922.

Religious Cemeteries

The Cemetery District also includes a number of private religious and family cemeteries. When Elenora Lorch, a Philadelphia woman visiting her daughter and son-in-law, Regina and Siegmund Feinberg, found that there was no Jewish cemetery in San Antonio she contributed $100 in 1855 to purchase four acres for a cemetery. The following year the San Antonio Hebrew Benevolent Society was founded and the Feinbergs transferred a portion of the cemetery to the Hebrew Benevolent Society in 1873 to create the first private religious cemetery. While most Catholics in the 19th century were buried in San Fernando Cemetery on the west side, German Catholic members of St. Mary's church were buried in the upper half of City Cemetery #1. Other churches to have private cemeteries include St. Michael's Church (1887) which was part a thriving Polish neighborhood. Now largely Hispanic, the church remains active and continues to care for

this lone remaining evidence of San Antonio's large Polish community. St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Benevolent Association was formed to care for several German Catholic congregations and received plots in 1889. During this time, San Antonio's first African-American Catholic congregation was formed and St. Peter Claver Church was given land in City Cemetery #3. The cemetery is now cared for by the members of Holy Redeemer Catholic Church. Lutherans were the only Protestant denomination to bury members in its own cemetery in San Antonio. St. John's Lutheran Church received land in 1866 and received a plot east of the German Catholic cemetery. As the church expanded, it took additional plots south of Commerce St. Emmanuel Lutheran Church also petitioned for plots in 1892. The two churches merged in 1922 and the cemeteries consolidated in 1926.

Family Cemeteries

The majority of early San Antonio families of note were buried in group cemeteries. Two exceptions are the Dignowity and Dullnig plots. Anthony Michael Dignowity, a Czech physician who came to San Antonio in 1846 purchased a large amount of property during land sales of the 1850s. He built a home on a hill several blocks north of the cemeteries in 1854. The site is now a City park that bears the family name as does the local historic district where many of the cemeteries are housed. In 1855, Dignowity sold land to Seigmund Feinberg to establish the Hebrew Benevolent Society's burial ground, today Temple Beth-El cemetery. About 1872, Dignowity's wife Amanda established the family's cemetery on a two acre tract west of the Society's land. Family members were buried at the southeast corner of the cemetery while the remainder of the land was sold to non-family members. After her husband's death in 1876, Amanda Dignowity advertised land in the *San Antonio Express-News* as "laid off as a private cemetery with reasonable lots." In 1947, the area was declared abandoned and ownership was assumed by the City of San Antonio. Members of the Dullnig Family are buried at the northern edge of City Cemetery #5. There is no official title to this land. The Dullnigs, like other families, purchased lots from the city, built a private walled enclosure and buried family members there. George Dullnig was born in Austria in 1846 and came to the United States as a child. With little education, he established a small shoe store that grew into the city's largest early department store. The family home still stands at 124 Nolan.

Design and Landscape

Former San Antonio Mayor, Sidney Lanier, wrote the following words about the Cemetery District: "…the visitor may stroll off to the eastward, climb the hill, wander about among the graves of heroes in the large cemetery on the crest of the ridge, and please himself with the noble reaches of the country east and west and with the perfect view of the city."

Indeed, a walk through the Old San Antonio City Cemeteries District still provides some of the city's finest vistas. Although San Antonio's cemeteries do not have many of the Romantic design elements common in cemeteries of the same era, many 19th and 20th

century fences, columns, grave markers and mausoleums remain. Noted monument maker, Otto Zirkel had his marble and granite company on the near Eastside adjacent to the Southern Pacific tracks. Other stone cutters, florist and gardeners lived and work near the growing cemetery complex. Both the range of population and artifice make the Historic District a striking monument to the history of what was then Texas's largest city.

The Martin Luther King Jr. March and Freedom Bridge

It is best not to refer to San Antonio's annual Martin Luther King Celebration Jr. as a "parade." Assistant City Manager Travis Bishop will quickly correct the error. "The first thing everyone needs to understand is that it's a *march*." What may seem to be a technicality is fundamental to the spirit that guides San Antonio's nearly month-long series of events to honor the slain civil rights leader. King's birthday on April 15 was first made a federal holiday in 1986. That year, former San Antonio mayor, Henry Cisneros, attended an Atlanta observation of the holiday. Cisneros returned to San Antonio questioning why the city had no event of its own. So in the fall of 1986, he gathered a diverse group of some 100 community leaders to plan a celebration that would include all aspects of human freedom for which King fought. Some fifteen years later, San Antonio's Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration includes a city-wide series of events culminating with a march that attracts nearly 40,000 people. According to Aronneta Pierce, chair of that first Martin Luther King Jr. Commission, the success of San Antonio's MLK march is no accident, " From the beginning we said, 'let the process of our coming together as planners exemplify the spirit of King.' From the beginning, we were not just planning an event, we were building a community." Indeed, the community created by the MLK Commission continues to pay homage to the past while building future coalitions. The march is always led by a garbage truck in memory of the garbage collector's strike King was supporting in Memphis when he was assassinated. According to Bishop, the march continues to highlight current social justice issues such as voting rights and welfare reform. The Commission also takes the celebration of King's life seriously. For nearly a month leading up to the march, city schools, universities, churches and art centers stage commemorative events including a yearly ecumenical church service. And, on the 3rd Monday in January, as a swelling crowd that includes everyone from NAACP groups to Girl Scouts marches nearly three and a half miles over the New Braunfels Street Martin Luther King Jr. Freedom Bridge to MLK Plaza in the heart of San Antonio's Eastside, the inclusive community of King's vision marches on.

Dignowity Hill

The peeling grandeur of Dignowity Hill sits regally atop a sloping hill east of Hackberry Street. Found on the National Historic Registry of Neighborhoods, it is named for Anthony Michael Dignowity, a Czech-American writer, public official and medical doctor who was born in Kuttenberg, Bohemia in 1810. Dignowity immigrated to the US in 1831. He came to San Antonio from Nachez, Mississippi with a group of volunteers for the Mexican War. According to a story in Physicians of the Republic of Texas, he was taking his first meal in San Antonio when he was summoned to take care of some

men hurt in a street fight. He decided to remain in San Antonio and put his skills to use. A noted abolitionist, Dignowity was forced to leave the South in 1861 because he was against secession. His wife remained in San Antonio while he worked in Washington DC during the Civil War. He returned to Texas in 1869 and died in 1875. His widow, Amanda J. Dignowity, also studied medicine although women were not allowed to practice at the time. She ended her studies to accompany her husband to Texas. Despite her husband's difficulty and loss of property during the war, Mrs. Dignowity, a native of Virginia, is quoted in Indian Wars and Pioneers of Texas as saying, "I am every inch a Texan…I have no higher wish than to here pass in the quiet of my home, surrounded by my children and grandchildren, the remainder of the years allotted to me on earth."

Dr. Dignowity built this home, often called Harmony House, on a hillside with a fine view of downtown San Antonio. The land remains as present day Dignowity Park. He sold plots of the surrounding land with its fine breezes to his various well-heeled friends. Noted San Antonio families such as the Friedrichs, Elmendorfs, Lockwoods and Otts built homes in this area. According to the San Antonio Historic Society, the area was first settled as estates with one house per block in the 1850's. The homes were typically two story, constructed of limestone and brick, and reflected the best designs of their time.

Emil Elmendorf House

One example of the distinctive design of the Dignowity Hill area is the Emil Elmendorf house on Burleson Street. Designed by prominent architect Alfred Giles, it is one of the few remaining Victorian raised-cottages and is gracefully integrated into the sloping hill of the site. It has a raised main floor and is constructed of random-coursed ashlar limestone with porches across the front and the rear. While there is decorative woodwork concentrated in the front of the house, it is secondary to the spacious and comfortable structural style Giles desired. Giles designs are also seen in the historic King William Neighborhood and in many Southern Texas courthouses. According to A Guide to San Antonio Architecture, Giles was the seventh son of a wealthy Englishman who came to San Antonio in 1873 to find a warmer climate for his rheumatic heart. He worked for master builder John H. Kampmann who taught him the characteristics of local building. According to an1883 *San Antonio Express-News* article, Alfred Giles took bids for the two story, rock, Elmedorf house that were between $7,400 and $10,000. The house was built in 1884.

Elmendorf himself was born in New Braunfels, Texas in 1850 and was a respected local businessman who ran a series of hardware stores begun by his father known as Elmendorf and Company. The successful company built a new three-story building on Military Plaza in 1890, carried stock valued at $100,000 and traded throughout Texas and Mexico. Emil and his brother Henry operated the business after the death of their father, Charles, for whom nearby Elmendorf, Texas is named.

Hays Street Bridge
Looking down Hays Street from Dignowity Hill one can glimpse the trusses of the iron Hays Street Bridge. In 1982, the city put up steel gates at both ends to prevent cars from falling through the rotted wood deck. The bridge originally carried narrow gauge trains across the wild swamps of the Atchafalaya River in Louisiana. The parts of the Whipple-style bridge were moved to San Antonio between 1908 and 1910. The bridge is actually two different iron truss bridges linked together, a "whipple" and a "phoenix" style. Only five other Whipple-style bridges exist in Texas. The phoenix style is more common. There is ornate 19th Century scroll work in the upper corners of the trusses. The City of San Antonio named the bridge a historically significant landmark in 1982. Some hope to open it again to pedestrian and bike traffic providing an additional link between Eastside neighborhoods and downtown San Antonio.

Denver Heights
When the railroad station moved from Government Hill down to East Commerce Street, both residential and industrial development shifted. African-Americans began to move farther east. In addition to incoming African-American households, the blocks that surround the rail station were home to German, Jewish, Irish, Polish, Indian, Mexican and Chinese families. The area, known as South Heights, extended out east past New Braunfels Street and North to Nolan Street. In 1916, it was renamed Denver Heights. After the Depression, many Anglos began to move out and establish San Antonio's first northern suburbs. Many sold their homes to African-American families. While many of the houses were already deteriorating, the proximity to the railway and streetcar lines leading to jobs made them attractive purchases.

Much of Denver Heights was destroyed in the building of the Alamodome. Carlos Richardson, president of the Denver Heights Neighborhood Organization and Director of New Community Builders, is working to salvage what historic homes are left. One is the old Bellinger Clinic on Hackberry Street, which was owned and run by the daughter of Charles Bellinger, Dr. Ruth Bellinger. Another important structure in the neighborhood, the old Leonard Pharmacy, sits on the corner of Iowa and Pine Streets. Owned by W.H Leonard and his wife Belle, the Pharmacy was connected to a movie theater and the old Keyhole Club, a gathering place for political rallies, parties and dancing. Whether for a soda in the pharmacy or something stronger at the Keyhole, nearly every older Eastsider has a story about the shell of the elaborately tiled building at Iowa and Pine. Diagonally across the street from Leonard's is Han Lee Grocery. In the mid 1900s Wong Shee and Shung Lew bought the store from previous owners and moved into the attached house. The owners of Han Lee are descended from the Chinese families that General Pershing brought to San Antonio from Mexico during his 1916 Punitive Expedition. Most worked at Fort Sam Houston for a number of years before receiving legal immigrant status and moving into the community. The shells of numerous Chinese grocery stores dot the eastside as landmarks to this unique immigration story.

Denver Heights is also home to the Frederick Douglass School. In 1914, the San Antonio Independent School District built this school to serve as the new location for the former Rincon School (located on what is now Convent Street in downtown San Antonio.) This school was established in 1869 to serve African-American students of all ages. It was first called the Rincon Street School, then Riverside School in 1884 and finally renamed for the African-American abolitionist and statesman in 1902. The first principal of Douglass High School at this new campus was S.J. Sutton who began serving the old school in 1891. He remained at Douglass until 1933. In 1924 Douglass incorporated a junior high school into its facility as part of the creation of junior high schools in the city becoming the first junior high in Texas for African-Americans. In 1933, Phyllis Wheatley high School was built for African-Americans and Douglass became solely a junior high. Then in 1969 as a part of school desegregation, Douglass became a non-segregated elementary school which it remains today.

In 1920, Dr. Charles Austin Whittier brought his young bride Pearl Augusta to their new home in San Antonio. The building still stands on the southeast corner of Crockett and Hackberry Streets. Dr. Whittier went on to establish the Whittier Clinic in a building attached to the house. His widow, now 102, recalls that the clinic had two overnight rooms where Whittier performed minor surgery and kept patients overnight. According to Shirley Boteler Mock's, *San Antonio, Texas, 1900-1940: A Period of Mutual Aid*, there was a ratio of 4,970 black Texans for every black physician in 1932. To address this deficiency, Whittier began training black interns in his clinic. Always politically active, Whittier later became the first black doctor to integrate downtown Santa Rosa Hospital. As State Director of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, Whittier helped bring a suit that brought an end to the exclusion of Negroes from voting in the Texas Democratic Primaries. His widow remembers that the contentious Whittier consistently resisted the limits of segregation. She said, "I would want to go to the plays that came downtown. I mean I really wanted to go but he would say, 'I'm not spending my money to go in someone's back door.' And he wouldn't. And I never did get to go," she mused.

Charles Bellinger 1875-1937

The past promise and prosperity experienced by the Eastside owes much to Charles Bellinger. Born in Lockhart, Texas on April 15, 1875, Bellinger was a youngster when he was first hired by a white gambler to run his game. Savvy young "Charlie" not only made the man rich, he earned enough to move his own young family to San Antonio in 1905. Indeed, one story says Bellinger was on his way to Reno, Nevada when he stopped for a poker game in San Antonio and won $10,000. He immediately declared San Antonio was "his Reno" and called the city home. This gambler's luck continued during his prosperous life as a true political boss whose power spanned beyond the edges of the Eastside.

Eventually Bellinger won enough to open several saloons, a real estate firm, a finance company, the first black theater, cafes and other businesses that provided countless jobs

for African-Americans. However, Bellinger made his real money in the "numbers." Under the turned-away eye of local police, Bellinger's lotto consisted of the numbers 1 through 80. A correct pick of nine or ten won the jackpot. Five to seven correct won a player smaller amounts of money. Everyone from black maids and porters to rich white ladies played the "numbers." The money Bellinger made on this lottery and his other enterprises transferred to immense political power. By organizing black voters into a powerful and desirable voting block for political candidates, Bellinger brokered favors and services for the Eastside. His support for then-mayor, John Tobin, is said to have resulted in paving, lights, plumbing, a meeting hall and a branch library for the Eastside. Indeed, the power Bellinger enjoyed was a rarity for an African-American. San Antonio was one of the few cities in Texas that allowed African-Americans to vote in Democratic Primaries. He controlled city elections for nearly fifteen years due to his control of the votes of nearly 1/4 of the voters.

One oft-told story holds that a young nervous would-be politician showed up at Bellinger's office seeking his approval. After waiting nervously outside Bellinger's door to be admitted, the young man was finally seen. Bellinger gave the politician his support and the young man went on to a long successful career in politics. His name was Lyndon B. Johnson. One politician who publicly decried Bellinger's influence was the legendary Maury Maverick. Maverick at one time tried to repeal the fought-for presence of African-Americans in the election primaries simply because he resented that Bellinger's power prevented Maverick from gaining a permanent political foothold in the city.

Sterling Houston recalled how his father became one of Bellinger's proteges and eventually opened his own clubs and businesses. "When you think about it," said Houston, "There were not many options." Such employment paved the way for the children of Bellinger and his associates to educate their children, many of whom went on to great success in more legitimate fields. It was a risky business. A 1936, "failure to pay income taxes," that was revealed by a disgruntled politician got Bellinger an 18-month sentence in Leavenworth prison and a $30,000 fine. However, rumor has it that connections to FDR secured his parole shortly thereafter.

Inman's Barber Shop

Some have said that the civil rights movement in San Antonio was born in Mr. Inman's barber chair. Indeed, faded blue and red barber stripes on the front of the building's shell at 827 Hackberry still recall an era when the plans and politics swirled around the heads of Eastside leaders and local boys alike. According to *San Antonio Express-News* columnist Cary Clack, who grew up on the Eastside, "Going to Inman's meant many things: going to get a haircut, going to get religion, going to talk politics, going to organize or going for fellowship." And while the legendary shop stands empty, the legacy of John Inman thrives.

Born in 1896 to a farmer and his wife in a settlement of some 12 to 15 African-American families southeast of San Antonio, Inman cut hair while getting his degree at Guadalupe Seminary College in Seguin. He went on to use that degree to teach from behind the chair rather than inside the pulpit. During WWII Inman was kicked off of Kelly Air Force Base where he was living and had his first barbershop. Later, Inman opened his shop on Hackberry during the 1920's and it was soon the spot where you could find information on issues affecting the African-American community. As A.C. Sutton once said, "Anything that looked like a movement, he would be a part of." At the Hackberry St. Shop nearly all his income came from within the African-American community and he was free from sanctions from the white community for his activism.

The role of the black barber is not that different from that of the African "griot" or storyteller who held onto the stories of a village. He spread the news of the community and initiated young boys into the talk of politics, sports and women. Indeed, within the walls of Inman's, black men and boys found a safe space to talk, to plan and to protest.

In 1928, Inman was elected president of the local NAACP. Over the years, he organized Eastside residents to sign up for the poll tax and to petition City Hall for more fire hydrants on the Eastside. When pecan workers organized for better wages and working conditions during the Depression, Inman encouraged them to use his shop as a meeting place. He also actively pushed African-Americans to patronize businesses that did not racially discriminate. In interviews before his death at 100, John Inman recalled the rocky years of 60's when he participated in restaurant sit-ins in San Antonio. He once said, "The harder they fought me the harder I fought back. I was never afraid of risking my life for the cause of justice and freedom."

Carver Cultural Center

Another story of risk and commitment on the Eastside is that of Ms. Norva Hill. During the 1960s, the building now known as the Carver Community Cultural Center had fallen into disuse. As the story goes, bulldozers arrived and Hill and other employees of a social service agency called United Citizens Project Planning and Operating Committee stood in protest before the machines. The women demanded that the city save the building that housed the literary and cultural soul of the Eastside. The bulldozers stopped.

The story of the Carver is nearly a century old. From 1905 to 1929 a Colored Library Association organized by Eastside civic leaders provided library services for the African American community with help from the Carnegie Library board. The library was originally housed in a wood frame structure. In 1919, the association received the support of the War Services Board to finance construction of a larger assembly building. In the early 1920's the City of San Antonio retired the outstanding notes on the property and became the owner. Then in 1929 the old buildings were demolished and a new structure was funded by a $75,000 appropriation of a city bond issue. Some claim that

city officials simply did not want African Americans to use the new downtown Municipal Auditorium. Benevolent in intention or not, the new building was renamed the Carver Library Auditorium.

Nearly every elderly Eastsider has a story about the Library Auditorium. Henrietta Stevenson remembers her kindergarten graduation and watching with awe as an older cousin went off to a dance. Joyce Sowells met her husband on the stage at one of the Center's many fashion shows. "It is a real love story, the Carver and me."

In addition to community events of all kinds, the Carver was a stop on the "chitlin circuit," a semi-official name for the tour of clubs, churches and community centers that African-American entertainers would play during segregation. According to Bernice Williams, who included the Carver in a project on lost jazz shrines, performers such as Etta James, Redd Foxx, Gatemouth Brown, Duke Ellington, Charlie "Bird" Parker, Count Basie and many others regularly played the Carver. Many of these performers played whites-only shows at the Majestic Theater or other venues and then came and jammed after-hours in black clubs.

After desegregation, changes in housing patterns and poor maintenance of the building led to its closure and resulted in the demolition order which Hill's protest halted. Eventually the efforts she spearheaded convinced the city to renovate the building. The remodeled structure opened in 1976. The Carver Development Board, a city-appointed independent 501(c) 3 governing body hired Jo Long as Director. She served the center until 1999. With Long's arrival, the focus of the center became multi-cultural visual and performing arts with an emphasis on African-American culture. Long's skill in developing diverse programming garnered national praises for the center.

In September of 1997, the Carver Development board announced plans for the Carver Complex. The $12 million plan is anchored by a $5 million dollar commitment from San Antonio Spurs center David Robinson and his wife Valerie through the David M. Robinson Foundation. Plans for the complex include the Carver Academy, a privately financed and governed school for 220 children from kindergarten through eighth grade; the Little Carver Civic Center housed in the historic Porter Memorial Church, new facilities for the Carver School of Visual and Performing Arts, a renovated Carver Center and rehabilitated housing in the area. Indeed, the "spur" of Robinson's gift has sparked interest in the housing stock and other abandoned properties including a plan to renovate the 472,000 square foot Friedrich Air Conditioning factory building.

Carver Public Information Officer Ross Horner said "I think the truest legacy of the Carver is seen when an elderly man stops at the historic plaque on the outside of the building and tells his grandson, "I checked out my first book here." With the Carver's big plans for multifaceted development, that child may one day tell his own grandson,

"This is where I decided to be a dancer or a painter or a writer. This is where I learned about my community and the world."

Colored YWCA/Delta House/Myra Davis Hemmings Resource Center (MDHRC)
South of Dignowity Park at 328 N. Pine Street is a renovated gray Victorian house with a wide wraparound porch. Inside the glass-paned front door, the row of portraits that hang on a wall of the Myra Davis Hemmings Resource Center (MHDRC) seem to watch over what goes on inside the house. Indeed, the faces in the photos, past Presidents of San Antonio's Delta Alumni Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta, Inc., could tell stories about all that has passed by these sturdy walls. The most important story would explain how this building has housed a century of service and commitment to African-Americans in San Antonio.

One of the faces on the wall is Joyce Sowells. In addition to being a past Delta President, Sowells was the teen program director of the YWCA from 1946-49. The MHDRC is located in what was the YWCA's building. In response to San Antonio's African-American community's desire for a YWCA, a branch was opened on the Eastside in 1918. For over 60 years, the center served as an important meeting place for African-Americans from all parts of the city. "We planned all kinds of activities," said Sowells. "We would have 'Friday Hops' and charm classes. Young people would come by all the time just to see what we were having."

But like many Eastside institutions, the "Y" discontinued programming by 1970. And like many houses in the area, the building deteriorated and was vandalized. The house remained vacant until 1980 when the Deltas asked the city for permission to purchase the building, which sat on four city-owned lots. The sorority got a loan to purchase the house. They acquired the property on July 27, 1981 and eventually secured $300,000 in community Development Grants for the restoration project. Today, the building includes a living room, dining room kitchen, office, four meeting rooms, two complete baths, a library, elevator, handicapped access, central heat and air and a large auditorium on the second floor. The building was formally dedicated on September 7, 1986 and the women burned the mortgage September 19, 1993.

The MDHRC is named after longtime San Antonio resident Myra Davis Hemmings. Hemmings taught English and drama at Douglass and Phyllis Wheatley Schools. Together with her husband John W. Hemmings, she founded the San Antonio Negro Little Theater Company in 1931. According to a December 18, 1931 article in *The Register* (San Antonio), the Company performed "Bought and Paid For" in the Carver Library Auditorium that year. The entire proceeds of the play were given to charity.

Ella Austin Community Center

Farther north on Pine Street is yet another organization with a century long commitment to the Eastside. On any given day, over 150 children will receive comfort and care, hundreds of meals will be served to senior citizens, and established San Antonio artists will meet with young "Artists in the Making." If visitors are lucky, they might catch folk artist Rev. Seymour Perkins leading the morning Senior Nutrition Program's Gospel Choir. In the corner of the room where the Senior Nutrition Program gathers and sings is a lone picture of a woman. She has upswept hair, fine features and dark determined eyes. Her name is Ella Austin and this work happens in her name.

Housed in the former Ralph Waldo Emerson Junior High School, the Ella Austin Community Center operates in tribute to a woman whose name is more known than her history. What is known is that, in 1897, the married but childless Sunday school teacher became appalled by a lack of social services on the Eastside and started taking homeless children into her own home. Austin's original orphanage at 1920 Burnet St. now houses the Ella Austin Health Center. This clinic provides medical and dental care for more than 7,000 children and adults yearly on a sliding scale, pay-as-you-can basis.

In the early 1900s, Austin, with the help of the Women's Progressive Club, purchased that property on Burnet Street and built a two-story building that served as an orphanage for decades. A 1915 notebook of Progressive Club's minutes found in the papers of Mrs. Annie Carter lists the names of the committees working for the orphanage. Carter was on the Transport Committee that used the horse and buggy from her Carter Undertaking Company. 102-year-old Augusta Whittier remembers that she was on the Food Committee. Whittier, who joined the club in 1920 does not remember meeting Austin. "I think she was gone before my time," she said. The Progressive Women's Club still leases the Burnet Street building to the Health Center for $1/year. Over the years the building was rebuilt after a fire; it also served as a day care facility for senior citizens. In 1968 the board decided to close the orphanage in favor of the multi-service center. In 1980, the health service center, which maintained its Burnet Street location, was officially separated from the community center.

The San Antonio Light once reported that Austin lived from 1856-1902 and that her husband was a barber. A barber named Edward Austin is registered as a 'colored' man in the 1900 city census which says he was married to an A.S. Austin born in 1856 in Ohio. The couple had one child who was not living at the time of the census. Their address was listed as 926 W. Houston. Whether the census taker misunderstood or misspelled Ella or if the details of her personal life remain a mystery, her commitment to social service on the Eastside endures.

Artemisia Bowden and St. Philip's College
A 1902 early letter to Artemisia Bowden from James Steptoe Johnson, bishop of the West Texas Dioscese of the Episcopal Church reads:

> I include $32 to defray expenses in San Antonio. I have old fashioned thoughts about you traveling on Sunday, and do not think it should be done unless necessary… In order for your identification you will please have a bow of red ribbon about 1/2 inch on your left shoulder.

The woman who stepped off of a train with a ribbon on her shoulder stepped into a legendary place in the story of education of African-Americans San Antonio. Bowden served for 52 years as dean of the college. But the St. Philips story begins before her time.

In 1885 a small group of educated blacks approached Johnson with request to form St. Philips College. St. Philip's Church was part of the Protestant Episcopal Church. Johnson then began what was called St. Philip's Normal and Industrial School. This first school offered weekend sewing classes for six black girls held by a Miss Cowan in an old adobe house at what is now 502 La Villita, the original location where the Canary Islanders settled.

In 1902, Johnson hired Bowden as administrator and teacher. Under her supervision the school grew from an industrial school for girls into a high school and later a junior college. During this period the institution was known as Bowden's School. In 1917 Bowden moved the school from La Villita to the Eastside of San Antonio. In 1925 the school built the Johnson Memorial Building. Joske of the Joske Department store donated $6,000 to the $41,844 of the building.

St. Philip's remained a private Episcopal school until the Depression when the church and Diocese of West Texas could not handle financial responsibility. Bowden took on the responsibility of keeping the school financially soluble. Her first act was campaigning to have the San Antonio Independent School District take over the institution because it supported all white schools. Finally, in 1942 after numerous refusals, the board reluctantly agreed to incorporate St. Philip's. It became a municipal junior college affiliated with San Antonio College under the auspices of the San Antonio Independent School District. The name St. Philip's Junior College was retained.

Elderly African-Americans, like Georgia, in the neighborhoods still remember the early days when "Miss Bowden came knocking on doors to get mamas to take their kids to school." Georgia went to school at St. Philips. She and her brother Sylvester both graduated from St. Philip's College. Sylvester remembers years later when you wouldn't see Bowden for months "because she would be out

raising money on the East Coast." By all accounts, Bowden was a ceaseless advocate and a tireless fundraiser.

The transition to a public junior college increased the diversity of St. Philip's population. A district board of trustees eventually replaced the SAISD and was called the San Antonio Union Junior College District (now Alamo Community College District). Under this administration in, 1955, St. Philip's college began admitting white students and black students were admitted to San Antonio College. The current student body is 47% Latino, 30% Anglo, 21% Black, 3% Other.

Artemisia Bowden began a tradition of commitment to educating a diverse population and providing focused career-based training. Her motto…."Learn to do something, and do that something well," still holds as true today as the 1902 afternoon she stepped off of that train.

St. Peter Claver/ Healy Murphy Learning Center

This will be my work someday; it is the great need of this time. The Holy Spirit has helped me to make this decision. –Mother Margaret Mary Healy Murphy

No one who overheard these words, uttered to a friend by an Irish woman one Sunday morning in1887, knew that they would continue to impact education in San Antonio in the 21st Century. But the details of Mother Margaret Mary Healy Murphy's early life of compassion and service might well have predicted her future. No doubt the legacy of St. Peter Claver School and the ongoing work of Healy Murphy Learning Center prove her commitment to filling great needs of the time.

When Margaret Mary Healy Murphy moved into a house at 215 Blum in San Antonio (near today's Rivercenter Mall) she was both a widow and an orphan. She was born Margaret Mary Healy to Richard and Jane Healy in Cahirciveen, County Kerry, Ireland on May 4, 1833. Her mother died when she was only five. She immigrated to the United States with her father, a physician, in 1845. They settled in West Virginia where education was considered the responsibility of the family. Together with other German and Irish immigrants, the Healy family began a Sunday School for adults and children. They also taught reading and writing to many of the African-American plantation workers in the area. Exposure to the plight of these workers sensitized the young Healy Murphy to the importance of education. Eventually her family moved to New Orleans. Shortly thereafter she lost her father. The family then moved to Matamoros, Mexico to settle in an enclave of Irish immigrants. Tragedy continued when both of Margaret's brothers and an uncle left Mexico for the California Gold Rush and never returned. Margaret remained with her aunts and soon met an Irish entrepreneur named John Bernard Murphy. They were married in the Matamoros Cathedral on May 4, 1849, her sixteenth birthday.

The Murphys built a ranch in San Patricio County and the lessons Healy Murphy learned from her physician father helped her care for the ill throughout the rugged region. One morning, she encountered an abandoned Mexican girl named Delphine. She was never able to locate the girl's family and soon the girl became her close companion. Many years later, Delphine was the woman who heard Healy Murphy's comment after church about helping educate African-Americans in San Antonio.

The Murphys relocated to Corpus Christi and Bernard Murphy became a successful lawyer and eventual mayor of the town. Healy Murphy again found herself in constant service tending to victims of a yellow fever epidemic in the town and a devastating 1875 hurricane. Again, she endured personal loss when her husband became ill and died in 1884.

That tragic turn sent Margaret first to Temple, Texas to make an unsuccessful attempt at starting a school for black children. She eventually came to San Antonio. It was 1887 and the 13th Amendment had theoretically made slaves citizens. However, Jim Crow laws and immeasurable social discrimination had left the black illiteracy rate at more than 80%.

Furthermore, the legal requirement of educating the races separately obstructed the construction of sufficient public schools for the African-American population. Using money from her husband's estate, Healy Murphy bought property at the corner of Live Oak and Nolan for $2,800. She opened St. Peter Claver School at this site on September 17, 1888 and dedicated an adjoining church on September 18, 1888. It was the first private school in Texas dedicated to serving African-American children. The school was named for the newly canonized Jesuit Saint who had devoted his life to helping slaves. By January, St. Peter Claver School had 60 children but Healy Murhpy's hardships continued, this time they were financial. There was much discrimination against the school and little funding. According to Sr. Mary Boniface O'Neill, former principal of St. Peter Claver, "a banker said to Mother Mary, 'Yes, if you change your mission (to educate black children) you can have all the money you want.'" Eventually, Healy Murphy began a religious order, the Sisters of the Holy Ghost to stabilize staffing at the school. Beginning in 1896, she made numerous recruitment trips to Ireland to bring young nuns back to serve with the Order.

Sister Boniface was one of those nuns. She taught at the school for 36 years before becoming director in 1970. Academics at St. Peter Claver were excellent. The school persisted through both World Wars and the Great Depression. By the 1940s Catholic schools in San Antonio had began to integrate. Public schools followed in the late 1950s and by the 60s there was less need for the institution. Led by Sister Boniface, the school refocused its vision and changed its name to the Healy Murphy Learning Center (HMLC). Now an alternative high school and Day Care Center, HMLC serves dropouts, pregnant girls and other students who do not succeed in conventional school

environments. No longer a religious school, HMLC is chartered by the state of Texas and includes vocational and traditional academic training. While different in nature, the mission of HMLC echoes the original hopes of Mother Margaret Mary Healy Murphy: to find a great need and fill it.

Holy Redeemer Catholic Church

Bishop John Anthony Forest was the 3rd Catholic Bishop of San Antonio and was witness to remarkable growth in the diocese in the early 1900s. His most lasting achievement was overseeing the increase in charitable institutions. He established the Home for the Colored Poor in San Antonio in 1901. This home became the core of Holy Redeemer Parish. In February of 1901 Rev. A. J. Dumolin, pastor of St. Peter Claver's Church for Catholic African-Americans, sought to obtain four lots held by the diocese at what was then called East-End between Vargas and Gevers Streets. Dumolin petitioned Forest for the property, received it and began construction later that year. The first buildings were completed in April and mass was celebrated that Thanksgiving. East-End African-American Catholics continued to be served by leaders of St. Peter Claver until 1910 when Father Welbers set up Holy Redeemer Parish as a separate and independent unit. A Josephite Priest, Welbers, was pastor of Holy Redeemer for 37 years**.** During his tenure the church, school and rectory were built. The church continued to grow. Holy Redeemer Credit Union was founded in 1950. A new convent was started in 1960. The Parish school closed in 1968 when the Josephite sisters withdrew from the parish.

Conclusion

Indeed, the streets of San Antonio's Eastside are lined with legends. Some are living, some are only stories and some are coming back to life. When Rev. Claude Black speaks at Mt. Zion Baptist Church, one can imagine the early thatched lean-tos in the Baptist settlement swelling with praise and promise. It is a promise of community still seen in the craftsmanship of the early German and Eastern European settlers who built the wooden houses that line the shady streets. It is the promise of struggle felt in the tens of thousands of feet that march in memory of Martin Luther King every January. It is the promise of rebirth with each new nail that strengthens the renovated Ellis Alley Settlements and with each child that learns to dance, sing and imagine at the Carver Community Center. It is a promise of progress yet to come, a promise of a vibrant past not to be forgotten.

East Side / Ellis Alley
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Further resources and community groups:

The Institute of Texan Cultures, photo archives

Neighborhoods Acting Together

Councilman Mario Salas and the Fair Share Agreement Committee

Alamo City Chamber of Commerce

African-American Chamber of Commerce

Community of Churches for Social Action

Express-news Archives at http://mysanantonio.com

The Handbook of Texas online. www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/

The University of Texas, San Antonio. Microfilm collection of the Register

The San Antonio Public Library, Main Library, Texana collection. Microfilm collection of the San Antonio Light

The San Antonio Public Library, Main Library, Texana collection.

St. Philip's College Archives

The Private Collection of Vera Williams Young

Special thanks to the input of community historians and their generous work to ensure that this history is not lost.

Mark Barnes, archivist at St. Philip's College

Rev. Claude Black, pastor, Mt. Zion Baptist Church and former city councilperson

Travis Bishop, Assistant City Manager

Edwin Glossen, editor of The Register

Nettie Hinton, eastside activist

Ross Horne, lifelong eastside resident

Sterling Houston, playwright

Larry Maggott, owner of Maggott's grocery

Sylvester Mitchell, eastside resident

Aaronetta Pierce, Martin Luther King Commission

Carlos Richardson, President, Denver Heights Neighborhood Association

Henrietta Stevenson, eastside resident

A.C. Sutton, Director, Sutton's Paradise Funeral Home

Augusta Whittier, Widow of CA Whittier and lifelong eastside resident

Bernice Williams, artist and community activist

Mariah Pfieffer, community historian

Vera Williams Young, Director, Carter, Taylor, Williams Mortuary

About the writer:

Jenny Browne has a bachelor's degree in African American studies from University of Wisconsin, Madison. She has worked and studied in Africa, Central America, Eastern Europe, and Asia as a travel correspondent. In San Antonio, she works as a journalist and as a poet in residence for the Texas Commission on the Arts, Arts San Antonio, and Gemini Ink. She was nominated for a 2000 Pushcart Prize and her poems will be featured with the other Texas poets in the Poetry Society of America's Poetry in Motion Project in Austin, Texas. Her first collection, Glass was published in 2000 by Pecan Grove Press.

About **Gemini Ink**:

When the Office of Cultural Affairs began to work on developing the Neighborhood Discovery Tours, it contracted with Gemini Ink to handle the researching, writing and editing of the manuscripts.

Gemini Ink is San Antonio's non-profit, literary arts center. It is located in new offices at 513 S. Presa, San Antonio, Texas 78205.
Their phone is 210-734-WORD (9673) or Toll-free 877-734-WORD (9673).
Fax is 210-737-0688 and email is info@geminiink.org

The mission of Gemini Ink is:

- to celebrate art in literature
- to expose as wide a segment of the area's population as possible to the best current and classical literature in an entertaining, educational and enlightening fashion
- to design a program of the humanities, involving professional performers from several artistic disciplines for each performance, including writers, actors, singers, musicians, and academic scholars
- to celebrate individual bodies of literature which identify with various cultural or ethnic groups, thereby encouraging cross-cultural acceptance
- to offer university-and master-level classes in various types of writing, literature, theory, philosophy, psychology, and the related arts