The Alamo

Preserving the Shrine of Texas: Liberty and the Growth of the City of San Antonio
The Alamo is where a small group of defenders held off the centralist army of General Antonio Lopez De Santa Anna. The Battle and death of the defenders on the morning of March 6, 1836 has come to symbolize courage and sacrifice for liberty. The grounds and two remaining buildings – the Church and the Long Barracks – stand as silent reminders of those who lived and died at the Alamo. Since the Battle, the City of San Antonio has developed around the Alamo. The Office of the City Clerk holds many original documents showing how the Alamo has changed and developed as the City has grown.

More than 2.5 million people visit the Alamo annually.* The Alamo Shrine (or Church) still stands in the same spot as it did during the 1836 Battle. Alamo Plaza, the area in front of the Alamo, was originally part of the Alamo’s courtyard and mission compound.

The Alamo was built in its current location in 1724, and was formally know as San Antonio de Valero.

*Visitation statistics per the Alamo Website [www.thealamo.org](http://www.thealamo.org)
Timeline of Significant Alamo and Texas History Events

1731 - Fifty-five Canary Islanders arrive in San Antonio to establish a civilian settlement, San Fernando de Béxar

1718 - Establishment of Mission San Antonio de Valero by Father Oñate

1835 - Siege of Béxar

1841 - Samuel Maverick acquires land around Alamo Plaza

The Republic of Texas passed an act returning the church of the Alamo to the Catholic Church

1845 - The United States Government took over the building and grounds

1850 - A new wooden roof was added to the Alamo and the famous bell shaped facade was added to close in the gable of the new roof

1877 - The Alamo is vacated by the US Army. Honoré Grenet, buys the Convento and courtyard

1878 - Streets cars are running in Alamo Plaza

1879 - The Alamo Monument Association is organized to purchase remains of the Alamo

1883 - Texas purchased the Church of the Alamo Property and place the Alamo in the custody of the City

1905 - The Texas legislature gives control of the Alamo to the DRT

1912 - Upper walls of Alamo Convent removed so they do not overshadow the Alamo

1936 - Texas Centennial Commission makes plan to build a memorial to honor the defenders

1939 - Work on the Alamo Cenotaph is complete

1935 - Mexican troops attempt to retrieve a cannon that had been given to Gonzales colonists for protection from Indian attack. The skirmish that ensues as Gonzales residents dare the Mexicans to "come and take it" is considered the opening battle of the Texas Revolution.

1823 - Mexican officials approve Austin's plan to bring three hundred families into his colony. This group becomes known as the "Old Three Hundred"

1813 - The Spanish government grants Moses Austin permission to establish a colony of Anglo-Americans in the Texas area. When he dies the following June, his son, Stephen F. Austin, receives authority to continue the colonizing effort

1848 - The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo is signed

1845 - The U.S. Congress approves, and President James K. Polk signs, a joint resolution making Texas the 28th state

1837 - The Republic of Texas is officially recognized

1861 - Texas Rejoins the Union

1869 - Texas Secedes from the Union - Civil War

1910 - Texas celebrates 100 years of statehood

Office of the City Clerk
Timeline of Significant Events - 1836

March 6 - A 13-day siege of the Alamo by Mexican troops led by Santa Anna ends on this day with a battle in which all remaining defenders are killed.

March 2 - The Texas Declaration of Independence is adopted at Washington-on-the-Brazos.

March 10 - Sam Houston abandones Gonzales and retreats to avoid the advancing Mexican army. Panicky settlers in the area flee as well in an exodus called the Runaway Scrape.

March 27 - About 350 Texan prisoners, including their commander James Fannin, are executed at Goliad by order of Santa Anna. An estimated 30 Texans escape.

April 21 - In a battle starting about 4:30 p.m. and lasting 18 minutes, Texan troops led by Sam Houston defeat the Mexican army commanded by Santa Anna at San Jacinto near present-day Houston.

May 14 - Santa Anna and Texas provisional president Davd. Burnet sign two Treaties of Velasco.
At the time of the Battle, the Alamo did not have its classic bell shaped facade. In the years following the Battle, the Alamo stood in ruins.

Drawing of the Ruins of the Alamo

*COSA Public Information Office Records* – photo from *UTSA’s Institute of Texan Cultures, San Antonio, Texas*
For Sale ...

Stones from The Alamo’s Wall

After the Battle, the Alamo became ingrained in the memories of Texans. People in San Antonio and the surrounding communities longed for any item associated the battle ground. In 1840, it was approved by the City Council to sell stones from the Alamo Wall for .50 per cart load.

Stones from the Alamo were purchased by the Texas Legislature to build a memorial on the grounds of the State Capital.
The US Army and The Alamo

The U.S. Army arrived in San Antonio shortly before Texas became part of the Union. The U.S. Army took an early interest in the Alamo and completed several early drawings of the buildings and grounds. In 1847, a plan to restore the Alamo to make it useable for the U.S. Army was carried out. The buildings were remodeled, a new wooden roof was added, the walls were reinforced, and the face of the Alamo church was repaired, giving the Alamo its symbolic bell-shaped facade.

On June 9, 1853 the City Council granted the US Army permission to use the Alamo as a quartermaster depot

Council Journal Book B, 1849-1856
June 9, 1853, Page 222

The US Army moving into the Alamo after renovations have been completed

COSA, Public Information Office Records – photo from UTSA’s Institute of Texan Cultures, San Antonio, Texas, The San Antonio Light Collection
Custodianship of The Alamo

After the 1836 Battle, the Alamo Church and grounds fell into ruins. Little attention was given to the Alamo’s condition. In 1841, the Catholic Church was given custodianship by the Republic of Texas. When Texas was annexed, the U.S. Government took over the buildings and grounds, but the Catholic Church still had a landlord role over the church and grounds. In 1883, the new Catholic Bishop of San Antonio transferred the Alamo to the State of Texas. The state then placed the Alamo in the custody of the City of San Antonio, on condition that the City care for the building and pay a custodian for that purpose.

On February 20, 1883 the members of the City Council agreed that if the State of Texas purchased the Alamo, the City of San Antonio would take care of, preserve and keep the Alamo in good order.

Office of the City Clerk, Council Journal Book E, 1879-1884, February 20, 1883, Page 421

Through Ordinance #JF 481 on July 20, 1885 the City Council officially accepted custodianship of the Alamo from the State of Texas.

Office of the City Clerk, Council Journal Book F, 1884-1886, July 20, 1885, Pages 454 - 456
Custodianship of The Alamo

Immediately following the Alamo’s transfer to the City of San Antonio, there was a push to rescue and clean up the Alamo and surrounding grounds. Citizen groups from St. Mark’s Episcopal Church and the Alamo Monument Association were instrumental in the initiative. City leader Joseph Dwyer contributed a large collection of animals for the museum exhibit. Within six months of taking over the Alamo, the City opened the doors of the Alamo as a Shrine. In keeping with the agreement to care for the building, the City hired the Alamo’s first Custodian, Tom Rife, on July 27, 1885. Tom Rife was a Veteran of the Texas War of Independence and former San Antonio Policeman. Until his death, he helped preserve and protect the Alamo.
Samuel Maverick and Alamo City

Samuel Maverick was a land baron and legislator. He first arrived in San Antonio in 1835, where he engaged in land speculation. He was the representative for the Alamo Defenders to the Convention of 1836 where he help draft the Texas Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the Republic of Texas. His presence at the Convention saved him from a premature death at the Battle of the Alamo. He had strong ties to the Alamo, and wished to live where his comrades gave their lives defending liberty. In 1838, Samuel Maverick moved his family to San Antonio and built a two-story home in the northwest corner of the old Alamo compound. In 1848, Maverick began subdividing; this became known as “Alamo City.” Through purchasing and subdividing the land, he had a great impact on the evolution of Alamo Plaza.

Survey Book 1, Page 114 and 115 survey of Samuel Maverick’s land, 1849 by Francois Giraud, the City of San Antonio Surveyor
Samuel Maverick and Alamo City

The City Surveyor, Francois Giraud, first surveyed the area in 1849. The survey was completed on onion skin paper and placed in Survey Book 1. The notes provide details about the property, including notes on the old Alamo walls and an acequia that ran on the property.

In 1885, City Surveyor, C.P. Matlack resurveyed the area and enlarged the survey. He noted on the original survey’s accuracy.

The 1885 survey was then used in 1914 to show how streets and other buildings were developing around the Alamo.

*City Engineer’s Records, Map of Plat and Field Notes of Alamo Property, 1885 and 1914, by C.P. Matlack, the City of San Antonio Surveyor*
New Life for the Convento

After the U.S. Army moved out of the Alamo, the Catholic Church (the Alamo’s landlord) decided to sell the convento building. Honore Grenet purchased the building and set up a wholesale grocery inside. He also leased the Alamo from the Catholic Church for a warehouse. Honore Grenet died unexpectedly in 1881, and his heirs sold the building to merchants Charles Hugo and Gustavo Schmeltzer.
Early Map of Alamo Plaza

Completed by the City Engineer’s Office, the map above shows a paving plan for Alamo Plaza. The map is not dated, but is estimated to be from the late 1800’s.
Development of Alamo Plaza

The City Engineer’s Office completed the map above detailing the main parts of the Alamo Mission: the acequias, City streets and the area that became Alamo Plaza. The date for this map is unknown, but is estimated around the 1880’s.

City Engineer’s Records, Map of Alamo Mission, date unknown

In 1888, Alderman Anton Wulff called for the building of four paved streets around the plaza and the landscaping of a garden in the center with multiple iron benches installed.

COSA, Public Information Office Records – photo from San Antonio Conservation Society
In 1883, the City was looking to extend the property line bounding Alamo Plaza. The City Engineer conducted a survey of Alamo Plaza. The survey above not only shows the proposed new lines for Alamo Plaza, but in addition, it shows the name of property owners and businesses.

City Engineers Records, Sketch of Survey of Proposed New East Line of Alamo Plaza, May 22, 1883
Development of Alamo Plaza

On March 25, 1905, the City Engineer’s Office completed the survey entitled “Subdivision of Alamo Property.” The survey shows the Alamo Church building; the convento courtyard is highlighted in red. Noted on the survey are Alamo Plaza, Bonham Street, and East Houston Street. Various measurements are provided along with a note about the Alamo Ditch.

City Engineer’s Records, Sketch of Survey of Proposed New East Line of Alamo Plaza, May 22, 1883
When East Crockett Street was widened and extended, the survey included much of the Alamo Property and Alamo Plaza. In addition to survey and engineering data needed for street improvements, this map also shows businesses and property owners. Furthermore, this map provides a scaled image of how the Alamo property and Alamo Plaza appeared in 1914.

*City Engineers Records, Proposed Widening and Extension of East Crockett Street*, 1914
Surveying and Urban Planning

City Block Numbers are an essential part of urban planning. In the planning and development of San Antonio, the Alamo (church complex) was assigned City Block Number 115. Part of the Alamo Property and Alamo Plaza fall into the following City Block Numbers – 423, 143, 145.

Maps showing city block numbers are often detailed, and show businesses and property owners. They also help capture changes to the property over time.

“Plat of CB 115 Showing Alamo Church Property and Adjoining Buildings” shows the Alamo Church, Plaza, other buildings, and also notes property owners. While the map is not dated, it was likely created in the mid-1920s. The map describes the Alamo shrine as having stone walls, an earth floor, and a reinforced concrete roof. It also notes that the shrine was rebuilt in 1918, and updated with fire-proof construction.
Trueheart Surveys of the Alamo

Edward G. Trueheart was the City Engineer from 1899 to 1901. During his tenure he produced several surveys of city blocks throughout the City. Several of the surveys show the Alamo and Alamo Plaza.

The map to the right shows the Alamo complex (NCB 115) and adjacent streets.

City Engineers Office, Engineer's Office Block Maps Book XX, Page 115, November 1, 1900
Trueheart Surveys of the Alamo

Completed by Edward Trueheart the Block Maps capture the Alamo Plaza and the Alamo Property from different perspectives

Top Left: City Engineers Office, Engineer's Office Block Maps Book XX, Page 145 914, October 1, 1900

Top Right: Top Left: City Engineers Office, Engineer's Office Block Maps Book XX, Page 140, November 1, 1900

Bottom Right: Top Left: City Engineers Office, Engineer's Office Block Maps Book XX, Page 151, November 1, 1900
Tax Maps

The City Block Tax Maps show the lot lines, the block and lot numbers, the street names, lot dimensions, and easements of property within the city limits.

Broken down by City Block Number, the maps provide another way of looking at the Alamo property.

Right: New City Block Plat Map Books (100) City Block # 115
Tax Maps

Left: New City Block Plat Map Books (400) City Block # 442

Middle: New City Block Plat Map Books (400) City Block # 425

Right: New City Block Plat Map Books (700) City Block # 772
Renovations and Beautification of Alamo Plaza

In the early 1900’s, the area around the Alamo began to change again. The second floor of the convento building was removed in 1912. Alamo Plaza was repaved in 1915. In the 1930’s, the grassy square and flagstones were installed in front of the Alamo Church. Also during this time the Alamo Church received a new roof and extensive landscaping was done throughout the Alamo Complex. By 1935, beautifications were complete and the Alamo began to take on its current look.

Map Above: City Engineer’s Office Records, Plat showing proposed Paving on East Side of Alamo Plaza, January 12, 1915

Left: COSA, Public Information Office Records – photo from UTSA’s Institute of Texan Cultures, San Antonio, Texas, San Antonio Light Collection; Express News Collection
Aerial View of Alamo Plaza - 1931

In 1931, aerial photos of Alamo Plaza was taken from a blimp over downtown. The photos show a unique perspective of the Alamo Complex and Alamo Plaza.

**Left:** This image shows the three gardens which make up Alamo Plaza. This image also shows showing buildings and how streets flowed into and around the Alamo Complex.

**Middle:** In this image, the remolded convento area and courtyard to the left of the Alamo Church.

**Right:** This image provides a good perspective of how cars moved around Alamo Plaza.

*COSA, Public Information Office Records – photos from UTSA’s Institute of Texan Cultures, San Antonio, Texas, San Antonio Light Collection*
The Alamo and the Texas Centennial

One-hundred years after the battle of the Alamo and after Texas won its independence from Mexico, people came from near and far to celebrate and remember. The Alamo became the backdrop for many of the celebrations; a large flag-draped platform was set up in front of the convento. The Catholic Church was an active participant in the celebrations and even hosted a church service in front of the Alamo. Flags from the defenders’ countries of origin were also on display, along with a military guard. In honor of the Centennial, President Roosevelt visited the Alamo in June of 1936. The Texas Centennial Commission announced plans for the erection of a memorial in honor of the Alamo defenders. In September, the City Council and several others backed the plan for the memorial that is known as the Alamo Cenotaph.

COSA, Public Information Office Records – photos from UTSA’s Institute of Texan Cultures, San Antonio, Texas, Express News Collection
The Alamo Cenotaph

In 1939, construction was completed on the Alamo Cenotaph, which is located on the North end of Alamo Plaza. According to tradition, the Cenotaph marks the spot where the slain defenders of the fortified mission were piled after the battle and burned in great funeral pyres. Seen on the sides of the Cenotaph are carvings of the Alamo defenders, including depictions of William B. Travis, Jim Bowie, Davy Crockett and James B. Bonham. The monument also bears the names of men who died at the Alamo.

In addition, the following inscription can be found on the revered memorial:

_Erected in Memory of the Heroes who sacrificed their lives at the Alamo, March 6, 1836 in the defense of Texas, "They chose never to surrender nor retreat, these brave hearts with flag still proudly waving perished in the flames of immortality that their high sacrifice might lead to the founding on this Texas."

_COSA, Public Information Office Records – photo from UTSA’s Institute of Texan Cultures, San Antonio, Texas, Zintgraff Collection_