

# DESIGN

Winter 1996



## *San Pedro Springs Park, Texas*



## DESIGN

### Winter 1996

A Park Practice Program publication. The Park Practice Program is a cooperative effort of the National Park Service and the National Recreation and Park Association.

**Roger G. Kennedy, Director**  
National Park Service  
**R. Dean Tice, Executive Director**  
National Recreation and Park Association

#### EDITORIAL STAFF

U.S. Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  
Managing Editor: Kathleen A. Pleasant  
Guest Editor: Scott E. Stover, R.L.A.

You can order a one-year subscription to the Park Practice Program publications **TRENDS**, **GRIST**, **DESIGN** for only \$55. A separate subscription to **DESIGN** is \$35. A Library Set of selected back issues of **TRENDS**, **GRIST**, **DESIGN** plus attractive binders are available for \$85. Subscription inquiries should be addressed to: National Recreation and Park Association, 2775 So. Quincy St., Suite 300, Arlington, VA 22206, telephone (703) 820-4940.

The Park Practice Program includes: **TRENDS**, a quarterly publication on topics of general interest in park and recreation management and programming; **GRIST**, a quarterly publication on practical solutions to everyday problems in park and recreation operations including energy conservation, cost reduction, safety, maintenance and designs for small structures; **DESIGN**, a quarterly compendium of plans for park and recreation structures which demonstrate quality design and intelligent use of materials.

The information presented in any of the publications of the Park Practice Program does not reflect an endorsement by the agencies sponsoring the program or by the editors.

Articles, suggestions, ideas and comments are invited and should be sent to the Park Practice Program, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127, telephone (202) 343-7067.

Dear Readers:

This Winter 1996 issue of **DESIGN** focuses entirely on San Pedro Springs Park in Texas. San Pedro is the second oldest public municipal park in the United States and it has a history as fascinating and exciting as our country itself. Scott E. Stover, R.L.A., with the Park Design and Project Services section of San Antonio's Parks and Recreation Department serves as guest editor for this issue as he researched and wrote the text as well as shared the photographs and illustrations, some being one of a kind remaining in the department files.

We hope you enjoy this special issue of **DESIGN** which captures the adventure, events and diversity of persons who helped to make San Pedro Park an area rich in history which has learned to adapt, and to survive.

Kathleen A. Pleasant  
Managing Editor, Park Practice Program

All plans contained in **DESIGN** are presented as guidelines and suggestions, not as blueprints for construction. Before building from any plan, be sure to consult federal, state and local safety and building codes. We particularly recommend your checking building plans for compliance with the National Fire Protection Association's NFPA No. 101, The Life Safety Code.

Also, to assure barrier-free design that permits access for all people, check your plans for compliance with The U.S. Department of Justice ADA Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities (ADAAG), 28 CFR Part 36, Appendix A.

# San Pedro Springs Park, Texas

by Scott E. Stover, R.L.A.

Two hundred and eighty-seven years ago a park was officially named in what would eventually be one of the largest cities in the United States. That city is San Antonio, Texas, and the park would become known as San Pedro Springs Park, the second oldest public park in the country. The



Figure 1. The fort, believed to be the oldest complete structure in Texas.

history of the city and park have paralleled and in many ways, the history of San Pedro Springs Park chronicles the history of both the State of Texas and the United States. It is filled with a diversity of people, events and cultures. The land surrounding the springs has served as a ritual ground for Native American Indians, was a military base for the United States Army, was a confederate prisoner of war camp and a major tourist attraction. The peoples that have occupied the site include Native American Indians, Aztecs, Spanish explorers,

underground aquifer systems. The water finally rises through many springs, one of which is the springs at the park. The springs originally flowed and formed a large lake surrounded by several smaller ones, overflowing to form the San Pedro Creek that runs five miles to

the south before joining the San Antonio River.

French cavaliers, Mexican and Canary Island settlers, American pioneers and Texas patriots.

Throughout the history of the park it is the springs which have been central to the popularity of the area; if it were not for the springs, the park would not exist.

The springs are supplied from underground streams of water that flow as far away as 60 miles to the west. The water flows through the underground caverns and the limestone known as the Edwards Aquifer, one of the nation's largest

As long ago as 9000 B.C., people congregated at the springs. The area was home to a vanishing tribe of people who reached seven feet in height. They lived in the caves at the north part of the site. Animal bones of mastodons, giant tigers, dire wolves, Colombian elephants and extinct horses have been found in the area as well stone projectile points and tools of the Paleo-Indians who hunted these Ice Age animals.

Many different tribes of American Indians lived at the springs at varying times. For thousands of years the tribes of the high plains and those of the lowlands met at the springs to trade. Over the course of time, this intertribal bartering wore a footpath that traversed the springs. This ancient prehistoric

DESIGN -- A publication of the Park Practice Program

San Pedro Springs Park, Texas		Contributed by Scott E. Stover, R.L.A. Parks & Recreation Dept San Antonio, Texas
Index	Winter 1996	
PD-0002	Control N-1784-PD	

---

highway led from the Rio Grande River to the springs and continued on to the Sabine River, which separates Texas and Louisiana. It eventually became known as the El Camino Real, or the King's Highway, and would become an important transportation artery vital to the Spanish sovereignty in Texas. It was a vital link for the Spanish missions between the Rio Grande and the Sabine Rivers and was the gateway from Nacogdoches on the eastern boundary of Texas to the seat of the Spanish authority in the province of Coahuila, Mexico. During the 1600s the Payaya Indians took up residence at the springs and called their village the Yanaguana. The descendants of this tribe would become the main residents of the Spanish missions developed in the San Antonio area.

By the 1700s Spain was in fear of French aggression from their colonizing in the Louisiana area. The Roman Catholic Church was, at the same time, anxious to build missions to instruct the Indians. In response to both issues, Spain sent out explorers to locate sites to build permanent establishments consisting of both military presidios and Catholic missions. One of the first of these expeditions was led by Father Antonio de San Buenaventura de Olivares, accompanied by Father Isidro Felix de Espinosa. On April 13, 1709, the expedition had reached the site of the springs and Espinosa wrote "...after going through a mesquite flat and some holm-oak groves we came to an irrigation ditch, bor-

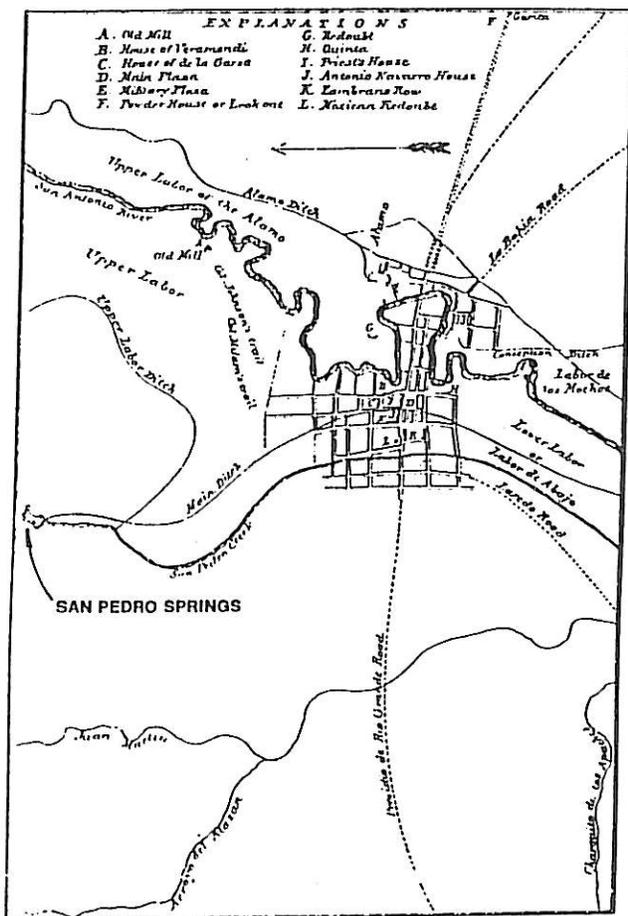
dered by many trees and with enough water to supply a town. It was full of taps or sluices of water, the earth being terraced. We named it San Pedro Springs."

Father Espinosa returned to the area in 1716, with eight other priests, in the expedition that was headed by Alferes Domingo Ramon. The French trader, Louis Juchereau de St. Denis, acted as captain of the convoy and as interpreter of this expedition. St. Denis was part of a diplomatic plan by the Spanish government to try to settle trade negotiations between the French governor of the Louisiana Colony and the Spanish Texas colonies. He was an experienced trader and had become familiar with the native Indians and their customs. The Indians trusted him and they allowed the expedition to peacefully enter their land.

Ramon developed plans for a series of missions in Texas to stop French encroachment into Texas. These plans were quickly approved by the Spanish government and in 1718 Martin de Alarcon, a soldier of fortune and the governor of the province of Texas, and Father Olivares set out to achieve the goals of the Ramon plans. The two men did not get along and they split up during the course of their journey. Alarcon ended up creating a presidio to defend west Texas and San Antonio. Olivares took charge of the Mission San Antonio de Valero, which would become famous as the Alamo.

In May of 1718 Alarcon selected the site at the springs for the Villa de Bejar and the first presidio and also for the Mission San Antonio de Valero. In 1719 the Spanish Governor ordered the construction of the canals, or acequias, that would serve the villa and the mission. The mission named by Olivares was moved a few months after its initial erection to a better place that had been found on the east bank of the San Antonio River several miles to the south. The Villa and the presidio were also moved from their original site near the springs in 1722 by the Marques de Aguano. It was at some point during this time that a structure that exists on the site today and known as the "fort" was built on the site (see figure 1). It is believed to be the oldest complete structure in Texas. The exact use or history of this building is not known, but an old print shows it to have been the southwest corner of a stockade. The stockade was built of cedar posts and was burned by the Indians, leaving the stone fort standing. The remnants of the building has rifle ports and for many years served as refuge for visitors to the springs from Indian attacks.

San Pedro Springs became a public park or "exido" in 1729 when King Philip V made a royal grant of land to San Antonio de los Llanos, or the "San Antonio of the plains," the name given the San Antonio settlements as a group. The grant of land was for six leagues of land, about 26,570 acres. Some parcels of land were reserved for the King to grant to



**SAN ANTONIO & ITS ENVIRONS**

Taken from actual Survey Illustrating the stonning of the Town by the Texans under Col. Milam.

Figure 2. An early 1800s map of San Antonio showing the area of the original Canary Island settlement and the location of San Pedro Springs.

future settlers, other parcels of land were given to existing settlers, and the area around the springs was declared public land for use and ownership of all people of the town. This fact makes San Pedro Springs Park the second oldest public municipal park in the nation, second only to The Boston Commons. The intention of the original grant was clear, but the specific land in

and was a customary honor bestowed upon the first settlers of a new Spanish colony. These Canary Island settlers were the first civilian settlers of Texas, after the many religious and military persons already here. The 56 settlers traveled for nearly a year from their homeland off the coast of Africa to Vera Cruz, Mexico City and finally to San Antonio. They arrived in

question was not clearly defined and over time much of the land was granted to individual citizens.

In 1731 the Spanish government introduced settlers from the Canary Islands to San Antonio. These settlers were the forerunners of other Spanish settlers that were to come later to settle in Texas. They were given the title of *hijos dalgos de solar concido* which means "land-holding nobles." This was a rank of lesser nobility

March of 1731, finding the presidio consisting of only a square surrounded by a stockade, which included the commander's residence, a chapel, storehouse, barns, barracks and adobe mud houses for the married soldiers. Their farmlands had not been prepared by the presidio commander, so they were given the land that earlier missionaries and Indians had tilled around the springs. They became familiar with the plant and wildlife around the springs and that contributed to their food supply. Mesquite pods were ground to a fine meal as the Indians had taught them. The prevalent deer, turkey and wild hogs provided meat. By July the presidio officials had marked out their plots of land for settlement that centers on what is now in the center of the present downtown San Antonio area. They chose San Fernando for the name of their community. These Islanders were the only sponsored Spanish natives to cross the Atlantic Ocean as settlers.

With the introduction of the Canary Island settlers, a strain was placed on the existing water system at the springs that was begun when the villa, presidio and mission were located at the springs. The first community project was to dig an acequia from the main lake at the springs to the new settlement site with its branches watering an individual's land. For a number of years there was constant fighting over the rights to the water between the clergy, the military and the settlers. Finally in 1778 Governor Rioperla authorized construc-

---

tion of the Upper Labor Acequia and these irrigation projects would remain the main source of water for San Antonio for more than 100 years (see figure 2).

Upon completion of the Upper Labor Acequia, portions of land south of the springs were granted, confiscated and even sold to various persons over the years. The protracted fighting between Mexico and Spain left the city of San Antonio in an impoverished condition. The Spanish royalists opened the doors to Anglo-Americans, hoping to dilute the Mexican influences in the territory, granting the first parcel of land to colonists from the United States led by Stephen and Moses Austin. For ten years battles raged which drained the Mexican economy, but on July 1, 1821, Mexico received its independence from Spain.

During this time and up until 1835 the roughly 20,000 Anglo settlers were harassed by the Mexicans. Grievances and friction with Mexican officials were common. The first acts of violence between Anglo colonists and Mexicans were recorded in November of 1835. The Texas revolution had begun! When Santa Anna arrived in San Antonio from Mexico in February of 1836, the city's only defense was a group of 187 volunteers who had barricaded themselves into the Alamo mission grounds. Santa Anna's 5,000 men, who camped at the springs, attacked and subsequently killed all the volunteers. Only the women, children and two young male servants were spared.

Texas eventually gained its independence from Mexico and became an independent Republic.

A Texas Rangers unit led by Major John Coffee Hayes established a base in San Antonio. When not on scouting missions searching for unfriendly Indians or Mexican raids, they would join the Mexican Caballeros and the Comanche warriors on the grounds near the San Pedro Springs for horsemanship and marksmanship competitions, cockfights and fandangos. The demonstrations were popular with hundreds of citizens witnessing the revelry, and judges awarded prizes.

By the late 1840s the relationship between the United States and Mexico had become increasingly strained, and when the United States annexed Texas in early 1846, it was the last straw. Mexico broke off all diplomatic ties with the U.S. and war was officially declared on May 13, 1846. As President James K. Polk prepared to draft a war message, Brevet Colonel William Selby Harney was dispatched to the area with three companies of the 2nd U.S. Dragoons. With no place for the soldiers to stay in town, they set up camp at San Pedro Springs, thus making the park the site of the first U.S. military base in Texas. In August of 1848, three regiments of troops joined Harney led by Brigadier General Wool. Together they formed the Chihuahua Expedition and they stayed in the park until September at which time they joined others in the offensive

battles against Mexico.

During the War with Mexico the City Council of San Antonio was anxious to secure a permanent military presence in the city. It became a supply center for the war and in turn became one of the state's most progressive cities. When the war ended in 1848 San Antonio strove to keep the prosperity that comes about with military facilities. They offered the Army 100 acres of land at the springs to build a fort as long as the military did not dig away any of the stone around the springs or in the creek. However, officials in Washington, D.C., rejected the offer.

In 1850 John Russell Bartlett of the Mexican Boundary Commission camped at the springs before departing to survey and establish the limits of the new territory acquired because of the war. The Rio Grande River became the new boundary between Texas and Mexico.

In 1851 the city felt entitled to the land around the springs and set in motion the process of defining the confusing and disputed boundary. A lawsuit resulted, *Luis et al., v. San Antonio*. The Texas Supreme Court decided in favor of the city, defining the limits of the original six league grant of land. The city removed trespassers, sold off some portions of the land and had the City Surveyor, Francois Giraud, set the limits of the public park. Giraud laid out a parcel of land that had the springs in the virtual center of the park and that is

how the 46-acre park exists today. The dedication of the park as a new public square was on November 6, 1852.

In May of 1855 the park became part of a U.S. military experiment. In March of that year Congress, with the help of then Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, passed a bill to provide \$30,000 to purchase and import camels to use for military purposes in arid parts of the United States. The camels were unloaded in Indianola and brought by Major Henry Wayne to the park where they were quartered until a permanent location was selected. The experiment was a disaster. Although the camels outperformed the other animals that were currently in use, horse lovers denounced the camels and they were swiftly removed.

While running for Governor of Texas, General Sam Houston made a famous speech at the park, campaigning against secession from the Union. He ridiculed the opposing Democratic platform, and as he was speaking the platform on which he stood collapsed. He continued speaking, however, among the fallen planks. Houston won his run for the Governorship, and in 1860 he returned to the park where he spoke so eloquently the year before. He again was speaking to keep Texas in the Union. San Antonio voted against secession by a large majority.

During the Civil War the city's allegiance was divided. The land around the springs became a

prisoner of war camp for captured Union soldiers. The prisoners cleared and grubbed away the thick brush to make it more suitable for a camp while other prisoners cut wood and built several buildings for shelter. They were often moved and upon their return would find their shelters burned and destroyed.

City leaders were disheartened at the damage done to the park. On December 21, 1863, an ordinance was passed to prevent any encampment of troops, mule trains or any body of men within the boundaries of the park and prohibiting the defiling of the park. The long practice of having the park avail-

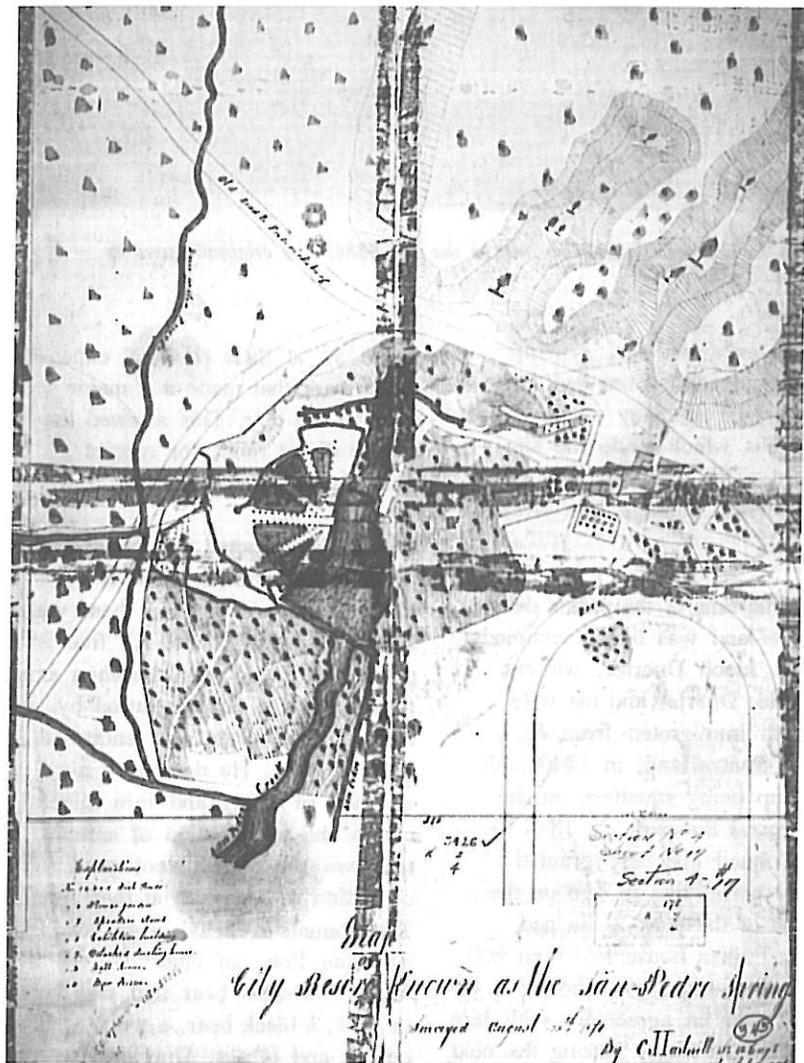


Figure 3. San Pedro Springs Park around 1870 showing the racetrack in the lower right corner and the springs and lakes in the center.



*Figure 4. The grotto that was built in the late 1880s was originally used to keep food cold.*

able for encampments, grazing animals and camp fires had stripped the park land of many of the trees and shrubs which made the site beautiful. This practice was now over, but the damage was already done.

At the time of the park's dedication, the land was being occupied by John Jacob Duerler, without legal title. Duerler and his wife Elizabeth immigrated from St. Gallen, Switzerland, in 1849 and ended up being squatters on the land around the park. In 1864 the City Council officially granted Duerler permission to live on the grounds of the park as he had already built a house less than 200 feet from the springs. The city entered into an agreement with him for a 20-year lease. During the next ten years he and his family would make many improvements (see

figure 3), at their personal expense, to the park that made it a major asset to the city. This allowed the city to direct funds for repairs needed elsewhere.

He constructed five fan-shaped artificial lakes to the west of the natural lake and stocked them with fish and aquatic plants. All five ponds terminated in a common axis forming half a circle secured by rock embankments and encircled by foot paths. He developed a museum of costly and rare mineral curios and a collection of animals that was the largest zoological collection in the south at the time. The animals included birds, a Mexican lion, an emerald-eyed blind Cinnamon bear that was kept in a pit, a black bear, a wolf, a coyote and others. Duerler also constructed a race track, an exhibition building with a ballroom,

a tropical garden and a beer garden, which became a popular place for the city's German population. The improvements and the way Duerler managed the park grounds and the springs made the park a nationally admired recreation center and resort.

In 1874 Mr. Duerler died and the contract was passed on to his son, Gustave Duerler, and to his son-in-law, Isaac Lerich. The upkeep proved to be too much for the new caretakers and in 1882 they sold their stake in the park to Frederick Kerble for \$4000.

On June 22, 1878, Colonel Augustus Belknap, who had bought all the stock of the San Antonio Street Railway System, led the first mule-drawn car from Alamo Plaza to San Pedro Springs Park. This was the first line developed in the city. Two cars were used, one that was open-aired and the other totally enclosed. Relief mules were stationed along the route in case the driving mules got tired. The fare was six and one half cents, ran from six in the morning until midnight and took 16 to 20 minutes.

In the late 1880s the city authorized funds to make more improvements to the park. The grotto, which was originally developed as a summer house to keep food items cool, is one of the few remaining structures from these improvements (see figure 4). The structure is about 12 feet high and is constructed of various formations of

rocks, pebbles and quartz. A bandstand was built and Sunday concerts by the military bands became a popular pastime. During construction work in the northeast portion of the site, city workers blasting stone discovered a cave in which skeletons of Indians, stone pottery, arrowheads and other relics were found.

Caves were known to exist in the park. An 1870 map shows two caves clearly noted and other caves were also found ten years earlier. In 1731 a Canary Island immigrant, Francisco Rodriguez, reportedly buried several chests of gold and silver coins near the springs. He died before he could tell anyone exactly where he had buried the treasure which has never been found. The chests were supposedly hidden in the caves beneath the northern edge of the park. Another myth was that a cave linked the park, via the bear pit, to the Alamo. Passageways were also believed to exist between the bear pit and nearby homes that would allow people to escape when under attack by Indians. Yet another legend is the "lure of Lolita" which occurred in the 1850s. A man by the name of Pedro Lara lived in the park near the fort and used the talents of a girl he claimed was his daughter, but who most likely was a slave. She would entice men to spend the night with her. The men would be murdered, robbed and their bodies hidden in the caves under the park. Around 1900 workmen found skeletons in a small cave near the fort that fueled this legend.

Almost every day there was a special event going on in the park. A family could spend a full day there with something to do for everyone. There was beer and fine liquors served with gourmet food, dancing in the pavilion, swimming at the bathhouse, visits to the museum, the zoo and the tropical gardens, and a lake for strolling or paddling. The lake banks were heavily wooded with an abundance of tropical aquatic plants. The east bank of the lake sported a large pecan grove with tables and chairs for picnickers. It was truly one of the most popular places in San Antonio. In 1883 there were 600 people who watched the A.B. Grady Cowboy Company, a traveling rodeo originating in Lockhart, Texas. In 1885 a museum of natural history was built with Gustave Jermy, a Hungarian naturalist, who moved to the park and became superintendent of the attraction. On April 2, 1885, Dr. W.F. Carver held his show as a world renowned marksman and champion riflshot which drew crowds of over 500. A week after the show, H.A. Penrose challenged Carver to a shooting match. Penrose broke the record by killing 90 birds out of a possible 100. Carver only shot 81. The crowd had a good time betting and calling out their wagers to pool sellers who circulated among the crowds. It seems that the park grew into its heyday during the years of Kerble's management.

Kerble's lease ended in 1891 and that same year the city took control

of all city parks. By that time, however, the park was in a transitional period. According to Colonel Clyde Hanson in his article "Los Manantiales de San Pedro," citizens had already begun digging artesian wells to supply themselves with clean drinking water because the springs had become contaminated by horses, sewage and drainage runoff. Thus, the city's dependency on the springs for water had declined. This is a possible cause for the eventual decline of the park. Once the importance of the springs had dried up, the main attraction of the park was gone.

The city made immediate improvements to the park by installing electric lights to replace the old gas burning lights, and a baseball park replaced the race-track in the southeast corner of the park. An anti-saloon delegation successfully had alcohol banned



*Figure 5. The bandstand was moved from Alamo Plaza in 1897 and was built over the bear pit.*



*Figure 6. A photo from the late 1890s shows the lake, taken from the springs looking south. (See also Figure 7 that was taken from the same location.)*

from being sold in any public park. However, citizens could apply for and obtain a permit to run concessions which quickly proliferated throughout the park. There was a shooting gallery, food stands, hobbyhorse rentals and all varieties of craftsmen selling their wares. One successful concessionaire was J. Dudley Spenser who placed small row boats for hire in the lake. It became fashionable to be seen

paddling your boat on the water. Swans and ducks floated along with the boats and catfish; trout and perch could be seen swimming underneath. Small architectural renditions of Greek temples, Irish flats and Dutch barns became swan houses and were scattered along the edge of the lake. Balloons were also hauled to the park and it was possible to ride the balloon up in the sky, drift over the park and see the city beyond. Parachute leaps by

male and female professional jumpers were also held. The Saturday papers always listed the Sunday events at San Pedro Springs Park as more and more events and people flocked to the park. The crowds soon took a heavy toll on the park grounds and facilities.

In 1897 with a new mayor in office, another major improvement



Figure 7. The pool, built in 1954, as it looks today.

program was announced. Five driveways were installed through the park, new plantings were added, the pavilions, benches and fencing were all painted, and all rustic bridges were repaired or replaced. The popularity of the concessions ceased, and the park had green open spaces once again. Concerts and martial competitions continued. The Ostrich Farm at San Pedro Springs sold ostrich plumes to visitors. A bandstand was moved from Alamo Plaza and was assembled over the former bear pit (see figure 5). The fan-shaped ponds built by Duerler over 25 years earlier were filled in. The lake was stagnant due to variations

in the flow of the springs and it was walled with masonry. The grotto was raised about three feet to a conical shape with a single fountainhead that sprayed ferns that were planted in the rock cavities of the surface. With all the improvements to the park, it became full of activity once again (see figure 6).

In 1910 the park was the home of the first officially sanctioned zoo. An animal show that was stranded in the city set up in the park and when the owners could no longer pay to have the animals fed, the animals were sold to the city. All the animals, including the original Duerler animals, were later moved to Brackenridge Park. That same year a successful demonstration of

the wireless telephone was held at the park to the amazement of the crowds. Also, the Daughters of the American Revolution erected a granite marker, the first of over 123 in the park, tracing the original El Camino Real, with a major ceremony in the park. In 1922 a municipal swimming pool was constructed by cementing the original lake bed. The springs would fill the pool and flush it with clean water three times every 24 hours. A bridge that spanned the lake was retained to cross the pool between the shallow and the deep ends. This became the most popular attraction at the park, replacing the springs, although it was still water-related.

In 1929 the first branch library of the San Antonio Library System was constructed facing San Pedro Avenue. The library was designed by local architect Atlee B. Ayres who designed many of the city's landmarks. The San Pedro Playhouse was also begun. The theater's facade was copied from the old Market House which stood on West Market Street as early as 1876. The architect, Bartlett Cocke, copied the details of the market by placing lead sheets over the originals that were stored at that time in a city warehouse. Gutzon Borglum selected the site for the playhouse on a corner of the park shaded by a grove of oak trees. Borglum's studio was in nearby Brackenridge Park from 1924 to 1937 where he created the preliminary designs and models for the four presidents later to be carved into the faces of Mount Rushmore.

---

The playhouse is believed to be the oldest city-built and owned community theater in the United States.

In 1940 the swimming pool was closed because the springs' flow could no longer sufficiently circulate and cleanse the waters, due to increased water demands lowering the aquifer levels and to a long drought. The remaining flow of the springs was capped and the pool left unused for nearly ten years. In 1954 a new pool entirely dependent on city water supply was constructed with the financial assistance of Howard E. Butt, a local grocery businessman (see figure 7). McFarlin Tennis Center was opened on the northeast corner of the park. By this time the park was again deteriorating. Many attempts to renovate the park were tried in the ensuing years but none were successful due to the costs and the lack of a master plan. It became just another neighborhood park, its history forgotten or unknown to most. The opening of Brackenridge Park took the focus and the crowds away from San Pedro Springs Park. Up until the opening of Brackenridge Park, San Pedro Springs Park was the largest park in the city. Many blamed the deterioration of the park on all its "improvements." Most of the various fountains, markers, ornate gas lamps and other features that once graced the park are gone. The ones that do remain have been vandalized and are inoperable.

The neighborhoods around the park have changed considerably.

To the east now lies a community college whose students are the most frequent visitors to the park. The older homes that once were the estates of wealthy businessmen are mostly gone and the ones that remain have been converted to offices and apartments. To the south lies the headquarters and the bus parking lots for the city transit system. The San Pedro Creek is now bounded on one side by an asphalt bus parking lot and the other by the transit system's office building. Beyond the transit system property the creek is little more than a concrete lined drainage ditch. To the north lies older homes that have been converted to offices, apartments and restaurants. The only remaining neighborhoods bordering the park are to the west where the original small, wood frame houses still stand.

The tennis center was expanded in the '70s, the ballfields fenced, playgrounds, asphalt roadways and parking were added (see figure 8). These improvements took the place of the shady walks and ponds of the past. The springs no longer flowed except in heavy rains, and underneath the swimming pool where a pump constantly removes the water, depositing it into the San Pedro Creek. With the springs dry, the one significant feature of the park that remained was its history. Yet its condition continued to erode.

Recognizing the need to rehabilitate the park and preserve this historic treasure, the city commissioned several planning studies. A

plan developed in 1977 called for a brick plaza above the springs to be installed as a way of drawing attention to the historically significant area. The plan envisioned placing historic markers, benches and lighting at the brick plaza. It also proposed the lining of the existing swimming pool with stone for a more natural appearance, and for the creation of some community garden plots. Due to a lack of funding, only a portion of the brick plaza was actually implemented and the rest of the plan was forgotten.

In 1986 a second plan was developed with an expanded playground area and amphitheater. Some of the playground equipment was installed, but not the amphitheater. In 1993, the city commissioned Rehler Vaughn Beaty & Koone (RVBK) Architects to develop a comprehensive Master Plan for rehabilitation of the entire 46-acre park. After completing extensive historical research and receiving input from dozens of interested groups, a Master Plan was developed (see figure 9). The central component of the plan was the restoration of the lake adjacent to San Pedro Springs. It called for removing almost one acre of asphalt and the rearrangement and relocation of many contemporary developments in order to create large open green spaces for both active and passive recreation. An integrated system of landscaping, fencing and walkways was envisioned to organize the park's design. Also included were preser-

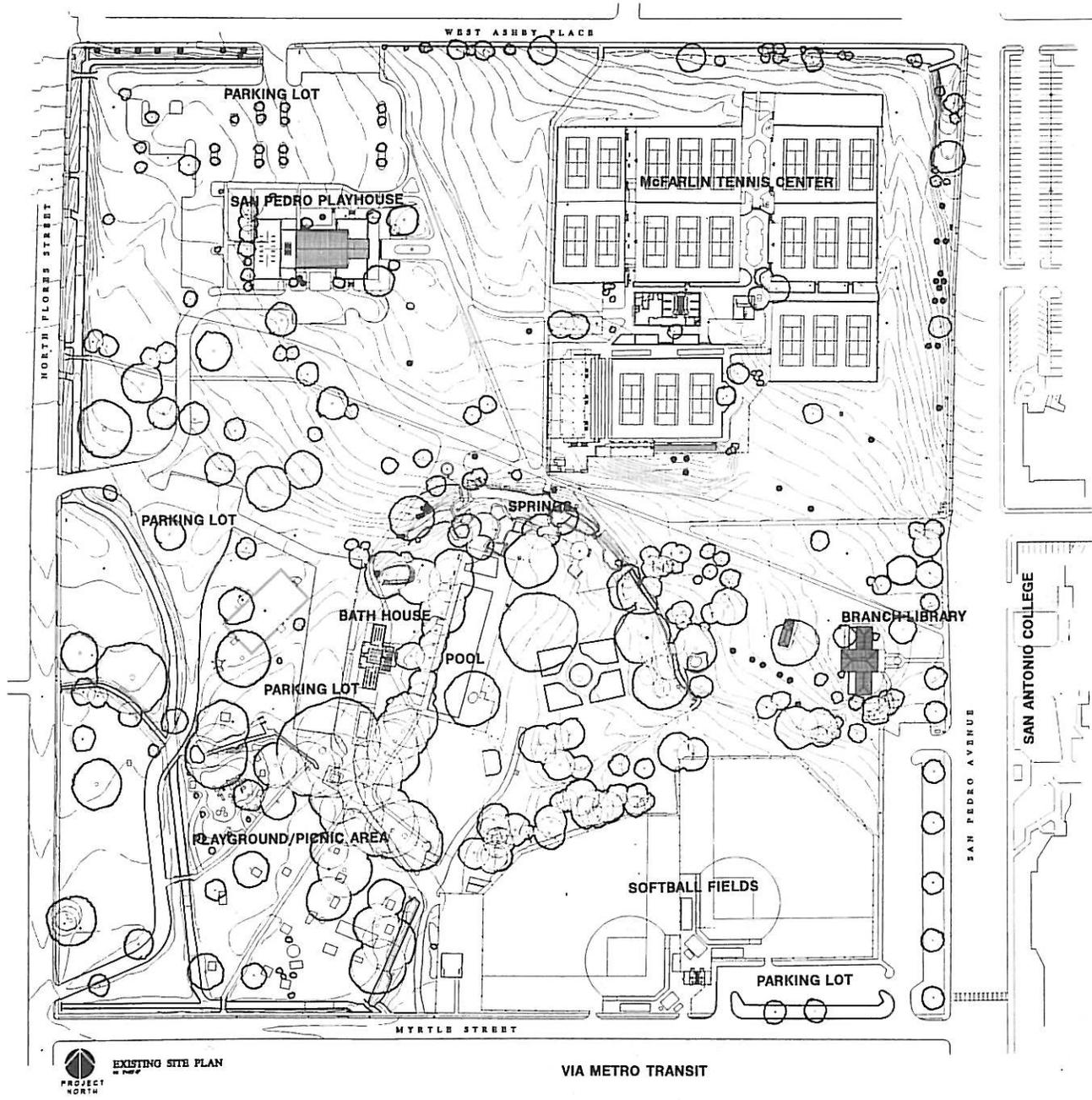


Figure 8. The park as it exists today.

---

vation and revitalization of historic components.

The Master Plan was reviewed and endorsed by neighboring businesses and institutions, four neighborhood associations, the San Antonio City Council, The San Antonio Parks Foundation, San Antonio Historic and Design Review Board, The San Antonio Parks Advisory Board, The San Antonio Planning Commission and San Antonio College, among others.

In 1995 an association of Beaty Saunders Architects Inc. and Rehler Vaughn & Koone, Inc., both of San Antonio, was commissioned to prepare detailed design work to implement the comprehensive Master Plan. The Master Plan had become funded as part of a \$54 million Parks Bond program passed by the voters in 1994. The San Pedro Springs Park Master Plan was budgeted \$4 million of the Bond funds.

The current design concept for the rehabilitation of the park rests on three principles. The first is to restore the springs and the lake as both the historic and literal center of the park. The second is to redesign the perimeter of the park to visually organize the park's boundaries and to restore the formality of the perimeter. To maximize green space by reconfiguring and redesign of some of the contemporary

design elements of the park is the third design concept.

The San Pedro Springs is in the precise center of the park. This area will be restored according to the Master Plan. The concrete covering over the existing stone steps around the springs will be removed, the damaged retaining walls around the springs will be rebuilt, asphalt paving will be removed and new paving will be added to facilitate access to the springs, the existing stone and concrete walls lining the spring pools will be reinforced, spring pool drains inlets will be relocated to allow the pools to fill, and the spring water flowing out into the San Pedro Creek will be recirculated to fill the spring pools.

The existing swimming pool, built in the old lake bed, will be removed and a new lake and pool will be developed to recall the look of the historic lake but will also serve as a swimming facility in the summer months. This feature will not be served by spring water, but rather by domestic piped water and conventional swimming pool equipment. The existing bathhouse will be remodeled and expanded to incorporate public restrooms and concession functions as well as to conceal pool equipment. The existing freestanding toilet rooms and concession building in the area will be demolished. A fencing system of panels and gates will enclose the pool during the summer months when swimming activities are taking place. The fencing will

be opened up during the other months of the year to allow access to the lake. Lighting and pedestrian walks trace the perimeter of the lake and lead to the springs.

A perimeter walkway system of patterned concrete with masonry pavers at major access points will be constructed. Strong emphases will be given to reinforce the perimeter to the site and the four corners and major entry points on each face of the park. Major pedestrian promenades on both the north/south and the east/west axes serve to connect the four sides of the park to the center. A system of site lighting along the park's perimeter and the main promenades will also help to strengthen this emphasis.

Central to the overall scheme of the park is the idea of reducing asphalt and relocating contemporary design components to allow for more green space. Deletion of almost one acre of asphalt paving will be performed, while adding to the overall parking count in the park. McFarlin Tennis Center will be rearranged to improve the aesthetics and functionality of the facility and will also open up vistas and improve the interface between the tennis center and the park. Parking at the San Pedro Playhouse will be rearranged to create a major passive recreation area in the northwest corner of the park while providing more parking and a major

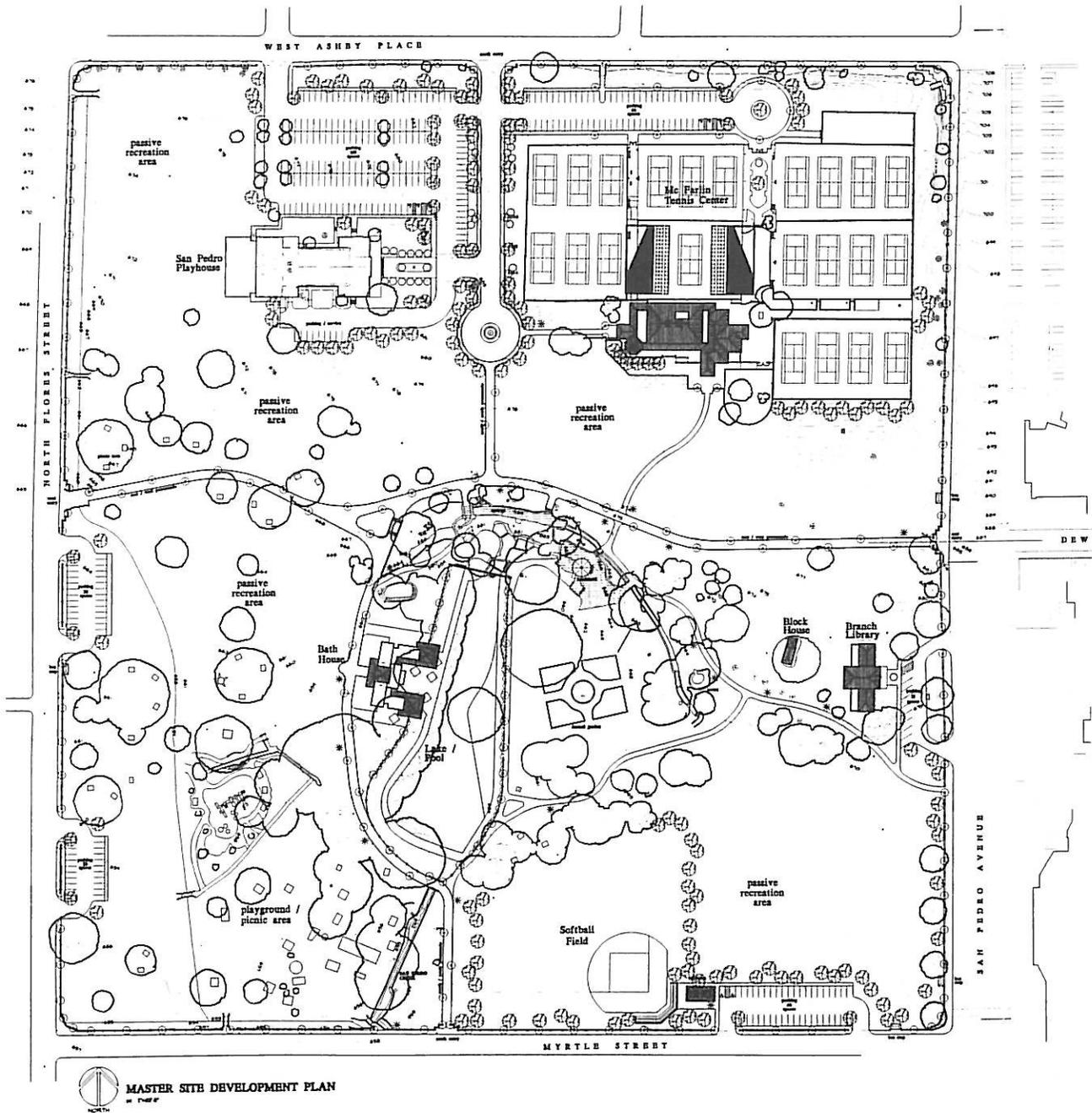


Figure 9. The Master Plan as developed in 1995.

---

vehicular access from the north. One of two existing softball fields will be deleted in the southwest quadrant of the park while also making the remaining field less formal. This will create another major green space in the park's southeast corner and also open vistas into the park. Parking and paving will be deleted east of the existing bathhouse to create a large new green area near the center of the park.

A system of markers for points of either historic or cultural interest in the park site have been incorporated into the park's design. These markers will be sequenced so that a visitor can enjoy a historic walk around and through the park. The design of the markers and graphics is planned to be commissioned to artisans with a view to both communicating the historic and cultural information but also to express through art some of the history of the park.

The Master Plan project for San Pedro Springs Park will be broken into three phases as money becomes available from the bond program. The first phase will begin construction in January of 1997. The last phase will be completed by April 1999, 290 years after Father Espinosa first named the springs in April of 1709.

#### References:

Cox, I. Wayne., *Archaeological Survey Report of San Pedro Springs Park*, San Antonio, Center for Archeological Research, The University of Texas at San Antonio, 1987.

Crook, Cornelia E., *San Pedro Springs Park - Texas' Oldest Recreation Area*, Privately printed in San Antonio, Texas, 1967.

Barnes., *Combats and Conquests of Immortal Heroes*, San Antonio, Guessaz & Ferlet, 1910.

---

*Scott E. Stover, R.L.A., is a Landscape Architect with the Park Design and Project Services Division of the Parks and Recreation Department, City of San Antonio, Texas, and is Project Coordinator for the San Pedro Springs Park Master Plan project.*