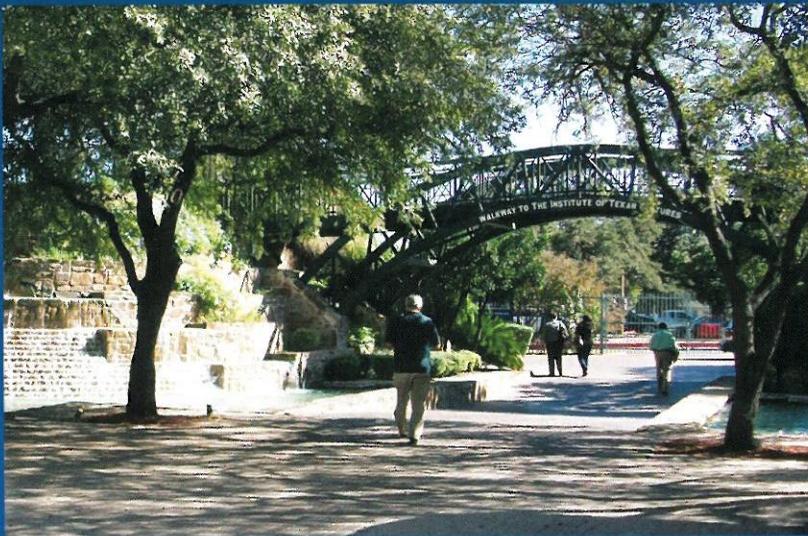




HemisFair PARK

by The City of San Antonio, Office of Historic Preservation

If you're visiting San Antonio for a convention or just exploring the city, take a stroll through HemisFair Park for a unique blend of the old and new. HemisFair Park, adjacent to the city's Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center, is bounded by E. Market Street (north), S. Alamo (west), Cesar Chavez Blvd. (south), and S. Bowie Street (east) and was the site of San Antonio's world exhibition in 1968. HemisFair '68 commemorated the 250th anniversary of the founding of San Antonio and celebrated the shared cultural heritage of San Antonio and the countries of Latin America. HemisFair opened on April 6, 1968 and continued through early October of that year. The "Confluence of Civilizations in the Americas," as HemisFair was themed, featured representation from over 30 different countries and drew more than 6.3 million visitors to San Antonio.



Previous Page: The Tower of the Americas This Page Clockwise From Top Left: HemisFair water feature; Former Schultze Store; Historic structures along former Goliad Street in HemisFair Park; HemisFair grounds.

The grounds of HemisFair initially served as farmlands for the Mission San Antonio de Valero (later the Alamo) in the 18th century. The Acequia del Alamo (Acequia Madre), the primary channel in an early Spanish colonial irrigation system of ditches for the mission, was constructed in 1718 and extends through the HemisFair site. Reconstructed portions of the original acequia alignment can be seen in the park today. By the late 19th century, the area had developed into a dense residential and commercial area with over 60 streets and a population of primarily German, Polish, and African American residents. Most of these early buildings and residences were demolished and the residents relocated to make way for the 92-acre HemisFair grounds in the mid 1960s utilizing partial funding from the federal Urban Renewal Program. Twenty four historic structures were retained and incorporated into the exhibition plan.

Today, HemisFair Park features lush landscaping and walkways, water features, a playground, an extension of the Riverwalk, historic structures, and a number of buildings constructed for HemisFair '68. The most prominent feature on the San Antonio skyline is the 622-foot Tower of the Americas, reportedly the tallest structure in the Western Hemisphere at the time of completion in 1968. The round tophouse took 20 days to slowly lift into place. The observation decks provide spectacular views of San Antonio, and the restaurant slowly rotates for a panoramic vista across the city.

The State of Texas Pavilion, the largest constructed for HemisFair, now serves as the Institute of Texan Cultures, with extensive exhibits highlighting the history and culture of Texas and its people. The museum is part of the University of Texas at San Antonio and is an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution. Ethnic and cultural history of the state of Texas is presented through exhibits, programs, events, a research library, an extensive historical photo collection and outreach programs. The mu-

seum's "Back 40" includes a 19th century one-room school house, a dog-trot log cabin, a frontier army barracks, a historic barn, and a west Texas adobe house for a living history lesson on the Lone Star state. For more information on the Institute of Texan Cultures, visit their website at: www.texancultures.com.

Other original HemisFair buildings that remain in the park include the former United States Pavilion complex and unique circular theater, which were converted into the John H. Wood, Jr. Federal Courthouse and Training Center. The Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center, also an original component of HemisFair, has been extensively remodeled and expanded over the last forty years. The HemisFair exhibition originally featured an elevated mini-monorail system within the grounds. Today, the concrete columns and steel beam structural members of the monorail system have been incorporated into one of the park's water features.

The twenty four historic homes and buildings that were retained for HemisFair provide a visible reminder of the 19th century neighborhood that developed previously on the site. A number of the houses front S. Alamo Street and the former Goliad Street, now the central east-west pedestrian access through the park. The smaller limestone block homes are typical of mid to late 19th century Texas houses, and the larger homes along Goliad reflect a variety of late 19th century architectural styles. Other buildings include the Schultze Store and Beethoven Hall, the former meeting place of the Beethoven Mannerchor singing society. The building is now home to the Magik Theater for children.

Walking through HemisFair Park is the best way to experience the history and architecture of the site. From the soaring Tower of the Americas to the landscaped walkways, HemisFair Park provides a quiet respite from the bustle of the city and is within easy access of the Convention Center.