



La Villita

SAN ANTONIO'S "LITTLE VILLAGE"

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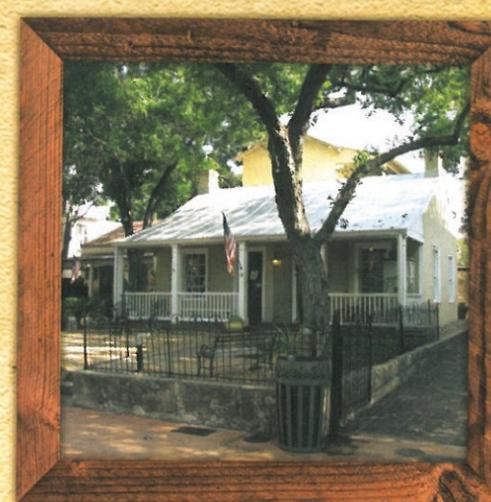
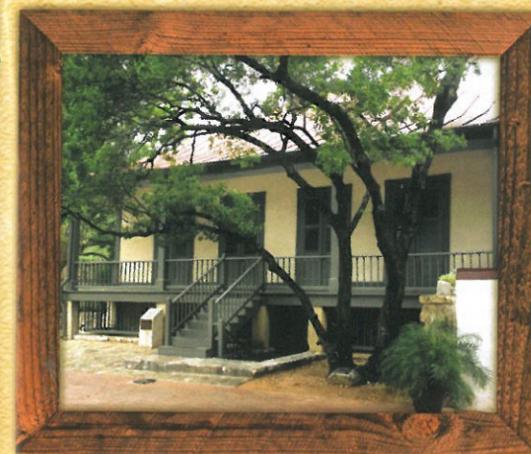
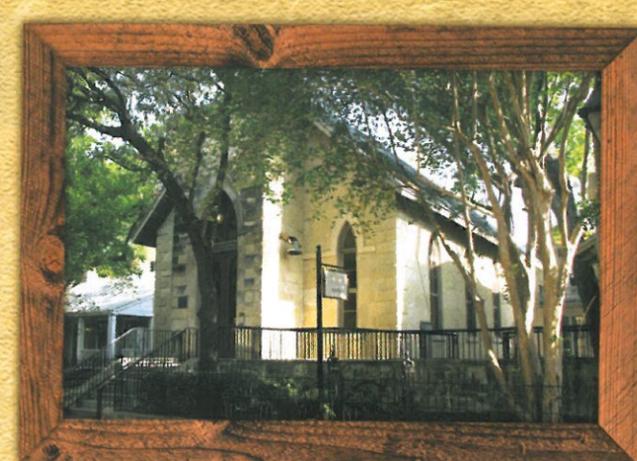
For a step back in time, enjoy a stroll through one of San Antonio's oldest neighborhoods, La Villita. This quiet "little village" is located south of Market Street and the San Antonio River between South Alamo and South Presa Streets. The narrow pedestrian streets and quaint buildings of La Villita reflect the many cultures that have influenced the development of San Antonio.

The area of La Villita, first settled in the 18th century, was part of the land belonging to Mission San Antonio de Valero, now known as the Alamo. Spanish soldiers stationed at the presidio in today's Military Plaza as well as early colonists established primitive homes within the area. After the Alamo Mission was secularized in 1793, the lands surrounding the mission were divided among residents and the native Indians. For a short time, La Villita was known as the Pueblo de Valero and was a separate municipality with its own alcalde or mayor. Development within La Villita continued into the early 19th century as the area proved desirable for its higher elevation during frequent flooding of the San Antonio River.

La Villita played a significant role in the Texas Revolution of 1836. The Cos House, one of the oldest structures remaining in La Villita, was the site of the surrender of Mexican General Martin Perfecto de Cos in the Battle of Bexar in 1835. Cos arrived in San Antonio in October 1835 to suppress rebel Texian and Tejano forces seeking independence from Mexico. After taking a defensive stand in Main and Military Plazas, Cos and his troops retreated to the Alamo and eventually surrendered in December 1835. Cos's surrender was reportedly signed at the small building in La Villita that bears his name.

Just a few months later in March of 1836, Mexican General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna arrived in San Antonio and defeated the Texian and Tejano forces at the Battle of the Alamo. A Mexican artillery battery during the battle was located at the eastern edge of La Villita near present day South Alamo and Nueva Streets where the Fairmount Hotel now stands.

Following independence from Mexico and later Texas statehood, La Villita became home to large numbers of German immigrants arriving in Texas in the 1840s and 50s. The eastern edge of La Villita along South Alamo



Clockwise from Top Left: Bowen-Kirchner House, Little Church of La Villita, Florian House, Cos House, Dashiell House,

Street was affectionately called "Little Rhein" in the mid-19th century for its predominantly German population. The German English School, whose buildings are still located along S. Alamo Street, was established in 1859 for the education of local German children. French, Swiss, and other European immigrants began settling in the area in the later 19th century. Most of the remaining buildings within La Villita date to this period of growth.

By the early 20th century, however, the area of La Villita had severely deteriorated. San Antonio Mayor Maury Maverick, along with the San Antonio Conservation Society, spearheaded the restoration of La Villita in 1939 to save this significant part of San Antonio's early history. Many of the historic buildings were restored by the National Youth Administration under the leadership of San Antonio architect O'Neil Ford. New structures and plazas within La Villita were also established during this time.

Today, La Villita is an arts and crafts "village" with small artisan shops, galleries, and restaurants. The area also hosts numerous public and private events throughout the year. The most notable of these is the annual A Night in Old San Antonio (NIOA) hosted by the San Antonio Conservation Society. This four-night fundraising event in April attracts 85,000 visitors to La Villita with food, music, performances, and cascarones (confetti eggs).

A stroll through the peaceful "old world" charm of La Villita is well worth a visit. One stop you'll want to see is the Little Church of La Villita. Constructed in 1879 and originally a German Methodist church, it is now a non-denominational church that is a popular location for weddings. Next door to the Little Church of La Villita is the original site of what became

St. Philip's College. The "St. Philip's Saturday evening sewing class for black girls" originated in a small adobe house at this location in 1898. It soon became St. Philip's Industrial School, and a series of two-story brick buildings that still stand today in La Villita were constructed. The school relocated east of downtown in 1917 and is today part of Alamo Colleges.

Historic commercial structures along the eastern edge of La Villita include the ca. 1854 McAllister House and Store and the Otto Bombach House and Store built in 1856. Both buildings now house restaurants including the Little Rhein Steakhouse, so named for the early German influence in La Villita. Just behind the Bombach House and Store is the Gray-Guilbeau House, now the elegant Fig Tree restaurant.

The numerous historic houses throughout La Villita reflect the early European influences that shaped San Antonio. Many of the houses are simple cottages of caliche block (soft limestone) construction with wide front porches and double front entrances. Particularly noteworthy is the Dashiell House, an unusual 1856 "raised basement" house not commonly found in San Antonio. Later 19th century houses with more elaborate Victorian detailing include the Dosch-Rische House and the W. Shafer House along S. Presa and E. Nueva Streets.

Interpretive markers throughout La Villita highlight the history and importance of this early San Antonio community. A walking tour with historic photographs is available at the Shops at La Villita Historic Arts Village website (<http://lavillita.com/history>). Visit La Villita and enjoy the serenity and beauty of historic San Antonio.