

MONTICELLO PARK & WOODLAWN LAKE

by Elizabeth Porterfield and Amy Unger • photos provided by Office of Historic Preservation



While in San Antonio, take time to explore one of our historic neighborhoods on the near northwest side. Just a short drive from downtown, the Monticello Park Historic District features attractive homes reflecting a wide range of architectural styles popular during the 1920s, 30s, and 40s. Take a stroll around beautiful Woodlawn Lake and tour the streets of Monticello Park to experience pre-WWII residential architecture that is distinctly San Antonio. From IH-10 West, take the Woodlawn Avenue/Fredericksburg Road exit and head west on Woodlawn Avenue for approximately 1.15 miles.

Woodlawn Lake, originally known as West End Lake, was created in the late 1880s, with water supplied by artesian wells and the nearby Alazan Creek. The West End Town Company purchased about 1000 acres of land south and west of the lake and developed the West End into one of San Antonio's earliest suburbs. Large Victorian homes on ample lots dotted the area, which at that time was quite remote from the city. Today, only a few of these

fine homes remain standing. An 1892 electric streetcar, called the West End Line, provided access to the lake and neighborhood from downtown. West End Lake became a popular entertainment and recreation spot, with a dance pavilion, row boat rentals, and later a bathhouse and diving platform.

By 1920, the lake's popularity had begun to wane and the property was deeded to the City. In an effort to improve the image of the area, the name was changed to Woodlawn Lake. Throughout the 1920s the city made many improvements to the lake area including planting of trees, construction of a swimming pool, recreation hall, tennis courts, and restrooms. Today, Woodlawn Lake is a picturesque locale with walking trails, recreational facilities, and a sweeping view of the downtown skyline.

The area immediately north of Woodlawn Lake, now largely part of the Monticello Park Historic District and identified by brown historic district street



OPPOSITE PAGE: Woodlawn Lake; **TOP LEFT:** Spanish eclectic style home on West Gramercy. **TOP RIGHT:** Thomas Jefferson High School.

signs, began to develop in the 1920s through the Woodlawn Park Development Company. Organized in 1927, the neighborhood was platted as Woodlawn Park, with the original main entrance directly across from Woodlawn Lake on Josephine Tobin Drive. The surviving concrete monument and planter, which originally included a gas lighting fixture, marked the entry to the neighborhood. Although streets were laid out and some properties were constructed, the venture didn't survive the depression, and much of the land was sold off to smaller developers. Development of the area began again in earnest after 1935.

A drive through the neighborhood streets of W. Summit, W. Kings Highway, W. Gramercy, Donaldson, and Furr reveals a wide array of architectural styles. Reflecting San Antonio's Spanish colonial heritage, the Spanish Eclectic style is characterized by stucco cladding, red tile roofs, arched door and window openings, elaborately carved door surrounds, and decorative tile work. An excellent example of a Spanish Eclectic style home is 2165 W. Gramercy. Inspired by Medieval English cottages, the Tudor Revival style is quite prevalent within the neighborhood and features steeply pitched roofs with prominent gables on the façade, large chimneys, decorative half-timbering in the gable ends, and arched doors. Many fine examples of Tudor style homes are located in the 2000 block of W. Summit. The Colonial Revival style, reflecting a renewed interest in early American Colonial architecture, is also very common with features including symmetrical facades, central doors with small entry stoops, and paired multi-pane windows. The Monterey, another prevalent Spanish-influenced style, is identified by a second story balcony (partial or full length) that projects out from the façade below the main roofline. One noteworthy example of a Monterey style home is 2130 W. Summit, built as an early demonstration home and touted in ads as "the new home of the new era." The use of native limestone gives much of the neighborhood a distinctly San Antonio feel. Palm trees, although not indigenous, lend a sense of tropical lushness to the more arid natural landscape.

Don't miss a tour down Mary Louise, dubbed the "Million Dollar Street" in 1926. In 1928 a plan was undertaken to build 30 homes by local members of the West Texas Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. The project began with two homes in the 200 block designed by prolific San Antonio architects Atlee B. and Robert M. Ayres. Homes by other architects were to follow in alphabetical order, with each architect designing two homes in distinctive styles. It is unclear whether the plan was ever fully realized, but

the homes along Mary Louise reflect a unique character and charm.

N. Straus Nayfach, a noted local architect, designed several homes along Mary Louise and throughout the neighborhood. Best known as the architect of the Alameda Theater on W. Houston Street in San Antonio, Nayfach largely designed homes for middle class buyers. His work is recognized by the use of local limestone and his signature architectural detail—two overlapping boards at the top of the wall just below the roofline. Although his career was cut short by his untimely death, Nayfach reportedly designed over 40 homes within the neighborhood. See Nayfach's work firsthand at 466 Mary Louise, a beautiful 1940 Spanish Revival style home with a unique arched window, and 503 Mary Louise. Other Nayfach designs include the multi-family residences at 502 and 507 Club Drive and his own home at 505 Club Drive.

The final stop you don't want to miss is San Antonio's spectacular Thomas Jefferson High School at 723 Donaldson. Constructed between 1930-32 and designed by San Antonio architects Adams and Adams, the school is a masterpiece of Spanish Moorish design. It is designed around two courtyards, with a commanding central tower, arcaded façade, and elaborate cast stone detailing that creates a truly remarkable public school campus. Local artisan Hannibal Pianta, whose studio was located nearby on Fredericksburg Road, produced the intricate cast stonework. In 1937, Thomas Jefferson High School was chosen by the United Press as "the most outstanding high school in America" and was featured in Life Magazine in 1938. Built during the height of the Great Depression, the school received criticism for its excess but nevertheless provided many local jobs during construction as a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project. It remains a public school within the San Antonio Independent School District.

The construction of Thomas Jefferson High School spurred new development in the area immediately to the east of the school. Called Monticello Park for its proximity to the school and in reference to Thomas Jefferson's Virginia home, the area is now part of the larger Monticello Park Historic District. Encompassing much of the area north of Woodlawn Lake, the district was formed in 1995 and has been expanded several times.

For more information on the Monticello Park Historic District, visit the City of San Antonio Office of Historic Preservation website at: www.sanantonio.gov/historic.