



MEDIA CONTACT:  
Jeanne Albrecht  
210-392-9047  
October 2017

## SAN ANTONIO CONSERVATION SOCIETY Fact Sheet

### *OVERVIEW*

From the city's Spanish Colonial Missions to the famous River Walk, the San Antonio Conservation Society has saved the historic attractions that make San Antonio a world class tourist destination.

For over 90 years the San Antonio Conservation Society has battled to conserve the buildings, waterways, parks and intangible heritage of this multicultural city. The Society has laid the foundation for a dynamic, growing city projected to add almost a million new residents in the next quarter century.

Instrumental in the conservation of downtown landmarks like the **Rand Building**, **Maverick Building**, **Casa Navarro**, the **Aztec Theater**, and the **Fairmount Hotel**, the Society also helped save many buildings in La Villita Historic District, where it hosts its annual fundraiser, "A Night In Old San Antonio®" (NIOA®).

Founded in 1924, the Society has accomplished many things, which include, but are not limited to:

- Society members purchased everything from aqueducts and farmland to the bronze-medallioned door of the San José Granary in a decades-long campaign to conserve the San Antonio's five Franciscan Missions – the only World Heritage Site in Texas. The Society brokered the establishment of a state park at San José Mission with the Catholic Church in 1941. In 1978 the Society was critical in the creation of the National Historical Park, and in 2006 launched the UNESCO World Heritage nomination that led to its inscription in 2015.
- In 1965, the Society purchased part of the Old Ursuline Convent (1850), to prevent demolition. The Society's Foundation provided matching funds that leveraged the first federal restoration grant from the Economic Development Administration.
- In 1985, the Society spearheaded the move of the 1906 **Fairmount Hotel** four city blocks to save it from demolition, at that time the largest building ever moved on pneumatic tires.
- In 1988, the Society purchased the **Aztec Theater** when threatened by demolition to restore as a performing arts center.
- Its historic gas station survey led to the landmarking of over two dozen stations in 2017.
- The demolition of Mary Catherine Hall at Assumption Seminary in 2000 underscored the need for a comprehensive inventory of historic buildings in San Antonio, leading to an official City historic survey program with ongoing support from the Conservation Society.

## EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

For the past 57 years, the San Antonio Conservation Society has coordinated, produced and sponsored its annual Heritage Education Tours for over 2,800 fourth grade students annually from 25 public and private schools, at no cost to the schools. The Society furnishes transportation, admission and tours to various historical locations, including the Alamo, Steves Homestead House Museum, Casa Navarro, Yturri-Edmunds Historic Site, Spanish Governor's Palace, Mission San Jose, Mission San Juan, Mission Espada and Mission Concepcion. **Heritage Education Seminars** give teachers hands-on lessons about architecture and preservation planning.

Since 1975, the Society's **Historical Research Library** has a wealth of materials on architecture, archaeology, history, customs, and cultures of the San Antonio region. The collection includes books, maps, architectural documents, photographs (many digitized), oral histories, Sanborn maps, city directories, building surveys, and over 98 linear feet of periodical clippings. Library staff and volunteers handle over 1,000 research requests a year.

The Society sponsors nationally recognized speakers on topics of interest to neighborhood organizations, developers, public agencies, and city officials. The Society has developed walking tour brochures and apps to enrich the experience of visiting historic areas for visitors and locals.

## GRANT AND FUNDING PROGRAMS

Each year, the Society awards scholarships, grants, and funds to researchers and private and commercial property owners for academic purposes and to maintain or restore historic properties:

- **Community Grants Program**—The Society awards over \$50,000 annually to preservation, restoration, and educational projects. Recent efforts include rehabilitation of the Escobedo Dairy on the West Side and interpretive signage at Ellis Alley.
- **Special Board Allocations**—Examples include Everett Fly's documentation of African-American resources in Bexar County; \$300,000 to the Hidalgo Foundation for exterior restoration of the Bexar County Courthouse; \$100,000 to Las Casas Foundation for the Majestic Theatre; and \$87,000 to the City Clerk of San Antonio to preserve archival documents.
- **Scholarships**—Two annual \$2,500 Society scholarships that are administered by the **Texas Architectural Foundation**. Students in college-level historic preservation programs are eligible for scholarships from the **Eleanor Freeborn Bennett Educational Fund**.
- **Endowments**—\$100,000 to the School of Architecture of the University of Texas at San Antonio for *The San Antonio Conservation Society Endowed Professorship in Memory of Mary Ann Blocker Castleberry*.

## ADVOCACY EFFORTS

Society officers, committee chairmen, and members monitor more than 36 local, county and regional community meetings. This includes the Bexar County Historical Commission, Bexar Land Trust, Board of Adjustment, Building Standards Board, Hemisfair Park Area Redevelopment Corporation, Historic and Design Review Commission, Las Casas Foundation, Los Compadres de San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, Planning Commission, San Antonio City Council, San Antonio River Oversight Committee, and the Zoning Commission.

Examples of public initiatives in the past several years that benefited from the Society's input are:

- River Improvement Overlay District
- Brackenridge Park Conservancy

- World Heritage Plan Land Use Amendments
- City of San Antonio Vacant Building Registration Program
- Lerma's Night Club
- Historic Farm and Ranch Complexes Survey
- Historic Gas Station Survey and Designation
- Neighborhood Conservation Districts
- Unified Development Code (UDC)
- VIA Metropolitan Transit Ellis Alley Enclave
- Alamo Plaza Master Plan

The Society is active in dozens of neighborhood associations, preservation groups, chambers, parks and wildlife associations, and historical societies. It has a strong presence on Capitol Hill in both Austin and Washington, D.C. Society representatives attend the National Preservation conference, Texas Historical Commission conference, and the Festival Association Conference, among others.

### AWARDS

The Society has recognized restoration and rehabilitation projects, craftspersons and advocates at its awards dinner since the 1950s. Its Publication Awards recognize authors and publishers of high quality, well-researched works related to the Society's purpose. The Society has received numerous awards, including the Louise DuPont Crowninshield Award, the highest honor in historic preservation.

### MEMBERSHIP AND BOARD

Membership in the Society is open to all; currently numbers approximately 1,700. The Capital Club is open to businesses, foundations and individuals who donate \$500 or more to support the Conservation Society Foundation's mission to encourage stewardship of San Antonio's historic resources. The Junior Associates, formed in 1955, inspire and teach heritage values to younger generations.

The president of the Conservation Society is a full-time volunteer elected for a one-year term, with a cap of two consecutive terms. The Board also elects five vice presidents, a secretary and a treasurer. Presidential appointees, former presidents and 30 member-elected directors supervise over 30 committees. The Society has 15 full time and 4 part time employees.

About half of the Society's \$2 million annual budget comes from "A Night In Old San Antonio<sup>®</sup>," with the rest coming from real estate income, interest and dividends, membership dues, and contributions. The Conservation Society is a 501(c)(4) non-profit organization. The San Antonio Conservation Society Foundation is a 501(c)(3) sister organization governed by the same board of directors.

### SOCIETY PROPERTIES

**House museums: The Steves Homestead**, on the banks of the San Antonio River in the King William District, is operated by the Society as a house museum that is open daily. This elegant three-story mansion of French Second Empire design is constructed of smooth-dressed ashlar limestone. The **River House** sits at the rear of the property, adjacent to the **Carriage House** and **Visitors Center**.

**The Yturri-Edmunds Historic Site** is located on former *labores* (fields) of Mission Concepción on the San Antonio River and Mission Road. A very rare adobe block house, the Yturri-Edmunds home dates from 1840-60. The original mill was built in 1820 and reconstructed in 1972. Two other buildings were moved to the site—the 1881 Oge Carriage House and the 1855 Postert House.

Additional historic sites and properties owned and managed by the Society include:

- **Anton Wulff House**— Society headquarters in the King William Historic District.
- **Stuemke Barn**—1867 rough-hewn limestone barn reconstructed behind Wulff House in 1982.
- **Jeremiah Dashiell House**—built circa 1850 and located in the La Villita Historic District.
- **Louis Gresser House/Gresser Complex** in La Villita—deeded in 1806 by the Spanish Government to José Ignacio Casas, and purchased by the Society in 1976, it is the headquarters of the Society's *A Night In Old San Antonio* heritage festival.
- **Otto Bombach House** in La Villita— leased to the Little Rhein Steak House.

### **A NIGHT IN OLD SAN ANTONIO®**

Each spring, the La Villita Historic District—an 18th century Spanish neighborhood on the banks of the San Antonio River downtown—becomes "**A Night In Old San Antonio**" (NIOSA®) for four nights during the city's annual Fiesta celebration in April. NIOSA® celebrates the city's diverse cultural legacy for more than 85,000 revelers annually. Through the magic of 200-plus food, drink and atmosphere booths; 13 continuous live musical acts; two traditional ethnic dance troupes; children's games; decorations; souvenirs; and 10,000 volunteers, NIOSA brings the city's heritage alive in 15 areas. Solely sponsored by and benefiting Conservation Society, the 70<sup>th</sup> presentation of NIOSA will be held **Tuesday through Friday, April 24-27, 2018**. NIOSA is the top fundraiser for historic preservation in the nation and truly lives up to its motto as a "Celebration for Preservation." Out of the roughly \$1.4 million netted at NIOSA annually, proceeds support restoration and preservation of historic properties and parks throughout the city and neighboring counties, as well as education and advocacy programs and projects such as the Heritage Education tours, seminars, community tours, scholarships, the resource library and the house museums. In addition, in the last decade alone, over one million dollars in NIOSA proceeds have funded restoration in La Villita, Hemisfair, and other historic neighborhoods. The 15 NIOSA areas include **ARNESON THEATRE**—an open-air theatre overlooking the San Antonio River, built by the Works Projects Administration in the late 1930s; **CHINATOWN**; **CLOWN ALLEY**—with games, face painting and kid foods; **FRENCH QUARTER**; **FROGGY BOTTOM**—pays tribute to the city's early African-American settlers who migrated to San Antonio from Louisiana in the mid-late 1800s; **FRONTIER TOWN**—the largest area where San Antonio's rugged past takes center stage; **HAYMARKET**—duplicates the site near San Fernando Cathedral where citizens exchanged fresh produce and livestock during the Spanish Colonial period; **INTERNATIONAL WALKWAY**; **IRISH FLAT**; **MAIN STREET USA**—honoring All-American favorites; **MEXICAN MARKET**—the original area of NIOSA® celebrates the city's strong cultural ties with folkloric dancers, cascarones (confetti-filled eggshells) and Mexican foods; **MISSION TRAIL**—commemorates San Antonio's indigenous peoples and the historic missions where they lived and worked; **SAUERKRAUT BEND**; **SOUTH OF THE BORDER**—features the regional foods and décor of Northern Mexico; and **VILLA ESPAÑA**—authentic Spanish dishes.

NIOSA also sponsors NIOSITAS® (a mini-NIOSA) throughout the year for conventions, meetings, and festivals—for groups from 300 and up—to raise additional funds for historic preservation. To learn more about NIOSA or NIOSITA, visit [www.niosa.org](http://www.niosa.org).

For more information on the San Antonio Conservation Society, contact [conserve@saconservation.org](mailto:conserve@saconservation.org) or 210-224-6163, or visit [www.saconservation.org](http://www.saconservation.org) or its Facebook page at [Facebook.com/saconservation](https://www.facebook.com/saconservation)