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## 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 is credited with laying the foundation for a dynamic, growing city that is projected to add almost a million new residents in the next quarter century.

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

Founded in 1924, the Society has accomplished great things:

- Society members purchased everything from aqueducts and farmland to the bronze-medallioned doors of the San José Granary in a decades-long effort to conserve the buildings and lands of San Antonio's five Franciscan Missions – the only World Heritage Site in Texas. The Society brokered the establishment of a state park at San Jose Mission with the Catholic Church in 1941. In 1978 the Society was critical in the creation of the National Historic Park, and in 2006 launched the UNESCO World Heritage nomination that led to inscription in 2015.
- In 1965 the Society purchased part of the Old Ursuline Convent (1850), slated for demolition. The Society's Foundation provided matching funds that leveraged the first federal restoration grant from the Economic Development Administration.
- The Society spearheaded the 1985 move of the 1906 Fairmount Hotel four city blocks to save it from demolition, the world record-winner for the largest building ever moved on pneumatic tires.
- In 1988 the Society purchased the Aztec Theater to restore this Mexican-American performing arts center.
- The demolition of Mary Catherine Hall on the grounds of Assumption Seminary in 2000 underscored the need for a comprehensive inventory of historic buildings in San Antonio, leading to an official City of San Antonio historic survey program, fueled by with ongoing support from the Conservation Society.

## EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

For over 40 years the Society's **Heritage Education Tours** have introduced fourth and fifth graders to the San Antonio River, Alamo, Main and Military Plazas, the Navarro Houses, La Villita, HemisFair Park, the King William District, the Yturri-Edmunds Historic Site, and the Missions. **Heritage Education Seminars** give teachers hands-on lessons about architecture and preservation planning.

The Society's **Historical Research Library** has a wealth of materials on architecture, archaeology, history, customs and cultures of the San Antonio region, open to the public. The collection includes books, maps, architectural documents, photographs (many now 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 Preservation speakers on topics of interest to businesses and neighborhood/city/county organizations, and has developed walking tour brochures and apps for discovering 80 downtown landmarks.

## GRANT AND FUNDING PROGRAMS

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

- **Community Grants Program**—The Society awards between \$50,000 and \$125,000 annually to preservation, restoration and educational projects. Recent efforts include rehabilitation of the Escobedo Dairy on the West Side and Everett Fly's documentation of African-American resources in Bexar County.
- **Special Board Allocations**—Examples include: \$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 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 was bestowed 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, including—but not limited to—the San Antonio City Council, Bexar County Historical Commission, Bexar Land Trust, Board of Adjustment, Building Standards Board, HemisFair Park Area Redevelopment Corporation, Historic and Design Review Commission (HDRC), Los Compadres de San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, Planning Commission, 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:

- UNESCO Nomination
- River Improvement Overlay District

- Brackenridge Park Conservancy
- World Heritage Plan Land Use Amendments
- City of SA Vacant Building Registration Program
- Historic Farm and Ranch Complexes Survey
- Historic Gas Station Survey and Designation
- Neighborhood Conservation Districts
- Street Name Ordinance
- Unified Development Code (UDC)
- VIA Métropolitain Transit's Ellis Alley Enclave

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 D.C. Society representatives attend the National Preservation Conference, Preservation Action, the Texas Historical Commission conference and the Festival Association Conference, among others.

### **AWARDS**

The Society has sponsored Historic Preservation Awards since the 1950s, honoring restoration and rehabilitation projects, craftsmen and advocates biennially. The Society's biennial Publication Awards recognize authors and publishers of high quality, well-researched works related to the Society's purpose. Conversely, the Society has received numerous awards including the Louise DuPont Crowninshield Award, the highest honor in historic preservation from the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

### **MEMBERSHIP AND BOARD**

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

The officers of the Conservation Society are full-time volunteers elected by the Society's 35-member board of directors for a one-year term, with a cap of two consecutive terms. These officers, Presidential appointees, former presidents and directors in term supervise over 40 committees. The Society employs 15 full-time and 4 part-time employees.

Approximately 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**

**The Steves Homestead**, on the banks of the San Antonio River in the King William District, is owned and operated by the Society as a house museum open daily. Designated a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark and on the National Register of Historic Places, this elegant three-story mansion of French Second Empire design is built of ashlar limestone from a quarry where the city's popular Sunken Gardens sit today. Guided tours by trained docents combine family anecdotes and local history to tell

the story of this family, the city and its era. The Society also owns and maintains other properties on the homestead: the **River House** (the city's first private indoor swimming pool); the Carriage House (built by the Steves family in 1876 and restored to its historic appearance in 1976); ; and **Visitors Center**.

**Presently closed to the public, the Yturri-Edmunds Historic Site** and house museum is located on former *labores* (fields) of Mission Concepcion 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 moved and 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, and purchased by the Society in 1976, it serves as the committee headquarters of the Society's "A Night in Old San Antonio<sup>®</sup>."
- **Otto Bombach House** in La Villita— leased to the Little Rhein Steak House.

### **A NIGHT IN OLD SAN ANTONIO<sup>®</sup>**

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<sup>®</sup>" (NIOSA<sup>®</sup>) for four nights during the city's Fiesta celebration. NIOSA<sup>®</sup> celebrates the customs and cultures unique to our region and its proceeds support the community through the preservation, education and research programs of the Conservation Society. NIOSA is the top fundraiser for historic preservation in the nation. In the past ten years alone, more than \$12 million has been netted at NIOSA to fund the Society's mission. NIOSA 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, resource library and house museums. NIOSA's community impact totals \$1.3 million annually with payments of \$511,000-plus paid to the City in rental, fees, permits and taxes, and over \$800,000 paid to local suppliers and entertainers.

What began as a one-night street festival in 1938 with a handful of costumed Society members serving food and drink from river barges, has grown into a mammoth enterprise involving over 20,000 costumed volunteers who stage and man the event in April. Over 80,000 visitors celebrate the nation's largest preservation festival with a dozen entertainment stages and more than 240 decorated food booths in 15 heritage-themed areas. NIOSA directly benefits the city of San Antonio through rent, police, fire, trash and health inspection payments, totaling over \$4.5 million since 2000.

The 15 areas presented at NIOSA<sup>®</sup> include **ARNESON THEATRE**—an open-air theatre overlooking the San Antonio River, built by the Works Projects Administration in the late 1930s; **CHINATOWN**—a giant Chinese dragon greets guests for traditional Chinese cuisine; **CLOWN ALLEY**—for the child in everyone with games, face painting and kid foods; **FRENCH**

**QUARTER**—celebrates the early French settlers of South Texas with bistro décor and gourmet cuisine; **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 at NIOSA® where San Antonio’s rugged past takes center stage; **HAYMARKET**—duplicates the site near San Fernando Cathedral where citizens gathered to exchange fresh produce and livestock during the Spanish Colonial period; **INTERNATIONAL WALKWAY**—offers foods from Italy, Greece, England and Belgium; **IRISH FLAT**—pays homage to Irish immigrants with Irish folk bands, sing-alongs and green beer; **MAIN STREET USA**— features two stages of entertainment and serves All-American favorites; **MEXICAN MARKET**—the original area of NIOSA® celebrates the city’s strong cultural ties to Mexico with folkloric dancers, Latin rhythms, cascarones (confetti-filled eggshells), folk art and Mexican foods; **MISSION TRAIL**—commemorates San Antonio’s indigenous peoples and the historic missions where they lived and worked; **SAUERKRAUT BEND**—celebrates San Antonio's German immigrants who built homes in the King William neighborhood along a bend in the San Antonio River; **SOUTH OF THE BORDER**—features the regional foods and décor of Northern Mexico and South Texas; and **VILLA ESPAÑA**—depicts a Spanish village with authentic Spanish dishes.

NIOSA also sponsors NIOSITAs (mini-NIOSAs) 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 NIOSITAs visit [www.niosa.org](http://www.niosa.org).

For more information on the Conservation Society and its many programs, visit [www.saconservation.org](http://www.saconservation.org) or contact the Conservation Society at (210) 224-6163; fax (210) 224-6168; or [conserve@saconservation.org](mailto:conserve@saconservation.org)