

Mary Maverick stated in her memoirs of the Texas Republic how wild and green and beautiful the area was, remarking that all were armed as they dashed on their horses up one side of the River to the Headwaters, then down the other side of the Olmos Basin, "doubting not that the Indians watched us."

By 1850, the City of San Antonio declared that its boundaries would extend as far north as the Headwaters. In 1852, the City faced financial difficulty and sold the property, including the Headwaters, to James R. Sweet, who built a house near it, called the "Old Sweet Place." By 1859, his holdings had grown to 108 acres. In turn, the estate was bought in 1869 by George W.

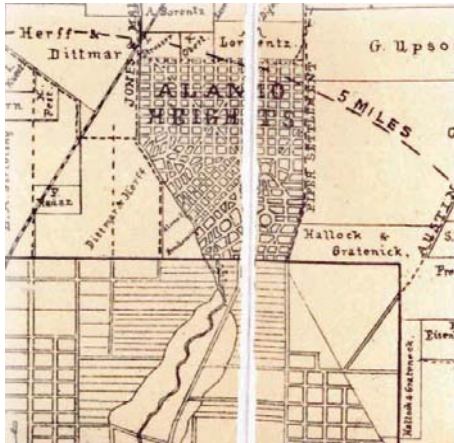
Brackenridge, who renamed it "Alamo Heights." Through Brackenridge's foresight and philanthropy, the City of San Antonio eventually acquired a water system utilizing the magnificent Edwards Aquifer and the protection of these Headwaters.

On the grounds of what would eventually become The University of the Incarnate Word, Brackenridge then built a three-storey addition to the Sweet Homestead which he called "Fernridge." Brackenridge sold the Headwaters and 280 acres surrounding it and his magnificent Villa to the Sisters of Charity (who still own both) in 1897. All the while, he insisted that they preserve the house, and the grounds, never to cut down a shrub or tree. He and his sister then retired to another house on Burr Road before he died in 1920.

However, even before George W. Brackenridge was building his "Alamo Heights," another visionary was planning his magnificent ranch headquarters on the bluffs of the Olmos, later known as "The Argyle." This mansion was the center for his 1400-acre horse ranch. As the oldest surviving structure in Alamo Heights, the original, two-storey ranch house was built in 1859. It became well-known for its hospitality; among those who knew Anderson and dined there with him was Col. Robert E. Lee. However, Anderson, loyal to the Union, was forced to sell his ranch and gracious house only two years later, on the eve of the Civil War, never to return to Texas.

Thirty years later, the development history of the City of Alamo Heights began in earnest. In 1890, poet Hiram McLane, whose family had bought the Anderson property in 1861, sold his house and his 1400 acres of ranch property to the Chamberlain Investment Company. This Denver-based company, through its local agents, Charles W. Ogden, R.H. Russell, and J.W. Ballantyne Patterson, planned a suburban development called Alamo Heights. First, the company turned the old Anderson-McLane ranch house into a new hotel, calling it "The Argyle." (Patterson was a Scotsman, and the bluffs surrounding the old ranch house reminded him of home, Scotland's Argyleshire.) Then, the company laid out generous lots

around the hotel for fine home sites. Next, it employed a Denver engineer to lay out broad roads that followed the natural contours of the heights, allowing for natural drainage and graceful curving drives. Then, the company built a private waterworks, utilizing a large spring that also retained the Head of the River area, with its own lake, for public use. Last, the great trees were left beside the roads or even in the middle of the curving drives.

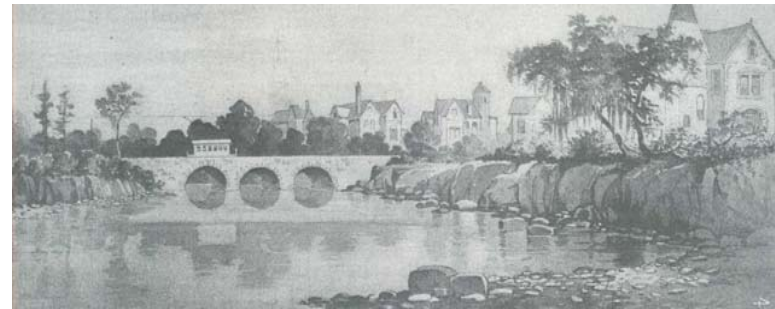


Unfortunately for the Denver-developers, however, nobody came and built houses, as all the “fashionable” people in 1890 still lived south of Commerce Street and all the graveled roads stopped at Josephine Street. Struggling, the company planned to put in its own rapid transit (street cars pulled by mules) and negotiated with the City of San Antonio to build a street to Alamo Heights (River Road, now Broadway). However, between 1891 and 1893 only twelve homes were built. Then, growth completely stalled until 1906.

Finally, in 1909, many properties were acquired by Clifton George, Sr. of Oklahoma, who was to become Alamo Heights’ principal developer. Clifton George did whatever it took to sell lots in Alamo Heights, such as donating land for worthy causes, including land for the establishment of the Texas Military Institute in Alamo Heights (1911-1989). George also built twenty houses himself in Alamo Heights, named streets after previous developers and for his wife (Mary D), and moved his family into the former country club. He also planned “pocket parks” of green space and created smaller lots for smaller houses.

By 1921, Alamo Heights was finally robustly developing throughout its city limits. Its scattered, intermittent development insured a mix of various incomes and age groups as well as a variety of architectural styles, which is still a significant feature of its character today.

Then, after the news that the City of San Antonio needed to build and fund a 1.6 million dollar dam across the Olmos Basin (after the disastrous 1921 flood of downtown San Antonio) and sought addi-



tional property tax revenues for funding through the annexation of outlying suburban areas, Alamo Heights began to consider its incorporation as an independent municipality. A meeting was hastily assembled on June 4, 1922 at the Alamo Heights School and, as a



result, Bexar County Judge McCloskey was petitioned to establish a city government under the laws of the State of Texas. Convinced that the City of San Antonio would *triple* their



property taxes if annexed into the City, the residents ratified this move to incorporate 289 to 8 in an election held at the Argyle Hotel. Alamo Heights became a municipality on June 20, 1922. Despite not having a city charter, yet, citizens elected Argyle owner Robert O'Grady

as Mayor, as well as five aldermen and a town marshal.

In the ensuing years, the City of Alamo Heights passed needed bond elections, paving all its streets by 1928, buying the public water system from its developers, and generally providing fire, police and emergency services for good value while retiring debt, which was no small accomplishment for a town of less than 8,000 completely surrounded by the City of San Antonio.

Alamo Heights continues to attract residents and visitors, alike, through its unique blend of history, sense of community and character, which all trace their origins back to a familiar source: the

blue springs that comprise the headwaters of the San Antonio River.

