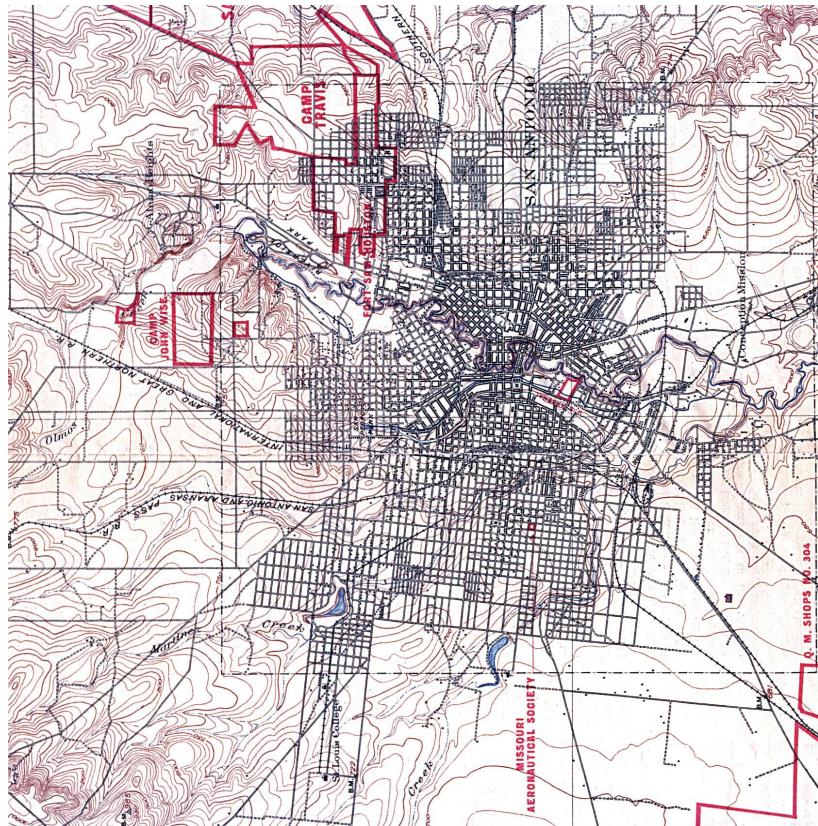


History

History

What came to be known as Alamo Heights was mentioned in Mary Maverick's memoirs on the Texas Republic as being a "wild and wonderful and beautiful area." She reminisced about going riding in the area with a group and 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



Topographic street map of San Antonio, 1918. Broken line shows San Antonio's 36 square-mile City boundary line. Dots show dwelling units.

watched us." Charles Orchard, an archeologist, documented and even recorded meetings with transient Native American groups in the basin area.

19th Century

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 "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 providing protection for these Headwaters.

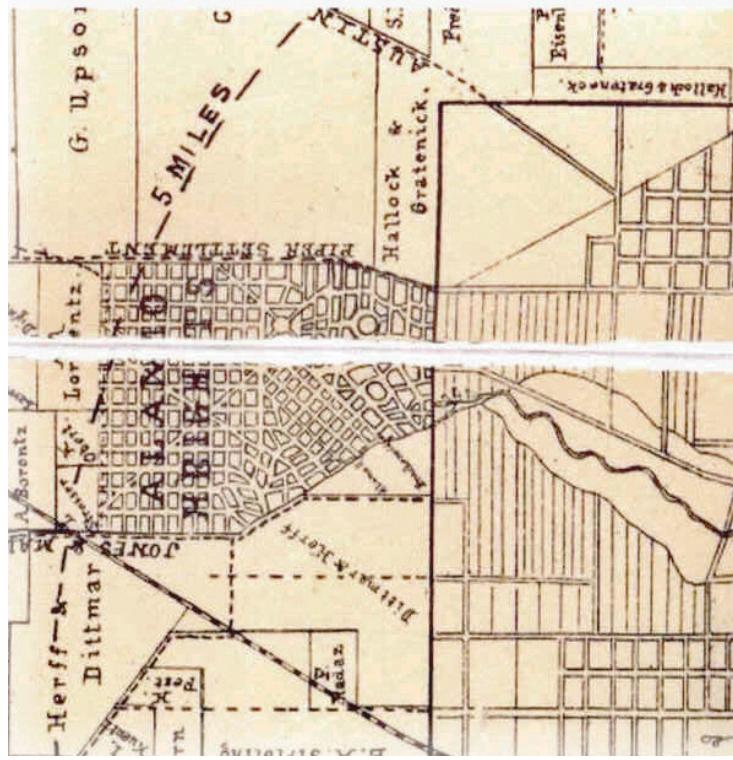
On the grounds of what would eventually become The University of the Incarnate Word, Brackenridge then built a three-story addition to the Sweet Homestead which he called "Fernridge." Brackenridge sold the Headwaters and 280 acres surrounding it and his magnificent Villa to the Sisters of Charity (who 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. The oldest surviving structure in Alamo Heights, this two-story 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.

History



Argyle Hotel, 1919 Owned by the O'Grady family and famous for food and hospitality.



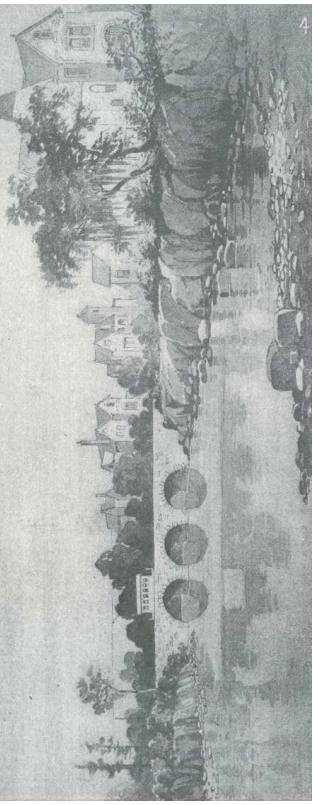
Partial map of Bexar County, 1897, created by John Rullman showing subdivisions of original surveys.

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-based 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.

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

History



Chamberlain Investment Co.'s Lake in Alamo Heights. Note the street car crossing the little bridge.

20th Century

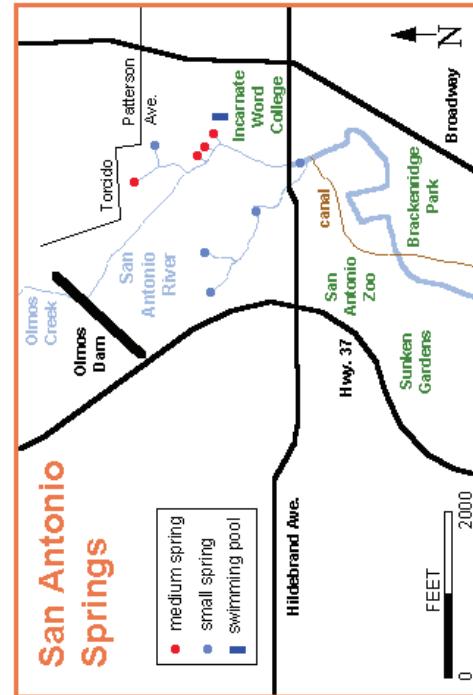
Finally, in 1909, many properties were acquired by Clifton George, Sr. of Oklahoma, who was to become Alamo Heights' principal developer. George did whatever it took to sell lots in Alamo Heights, such as donating land for worthy causes, including land for the establishment of the Texas Military Institute 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 additional 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. Convincing 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 to pave all its streets by 1928, to purchase the public water system from its developers, and to provide fire, police and emergency services for good value, while retiring debt. These were not small accomplishments 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.



Old map of San Antonio Springs. The Blue Hole is the red dot closest to blue rectangle found above words, "Incarnate Word College."

LOOKING
AHEAD

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