



FACT SHEET

OVERVIEW

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

For over 95 years the Conservation Society has battled to conserve the architectural, natural and intangible heritage of San Antonio. The Society has laid the foundation for a dynamic, growing multicultural city projected to add 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 cultural celebration and fundraiser, “A Night In Old San Antonio®” (NIOSA®).

- 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.
- Its historic gas station survey led to the landmarking of over two dozen stations in 2017, and in 2021 the Society’s Capital Club helped secure the 1935 Pure Oil gas station on Nogalitos with a grant.
- In 2019, the Society unveiled a plan to preserve the Crockett and Woolworth Buildings on Alamo Plaza as part of the new Alamo museum. The Society helped form the Coalition for the Woolworth Building and in 2021 saw a member of that Coalition become a Tri-Chair of the Alamo Citizens Advisory Committee.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

For 60 years, the Conservation Society of San Antonio has sponsored annual **Heritage Education Tours** for over 2,000 fourth grade students from 20-25 public and private schools, at no cost. The Society furnishes transportation, admission and tours to historical locations including the Alamo, Steves Homestead, 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 to supplement the tours. The Society recently completed virtual tours of the Missions and other landmarks.

Since 1975, the Society's **Historical Research Library** has shared a wealth of materials on architecture, archaeology, history, customs, and cultures of the San Antonio region. The collection spans books, maps, architectural documents, photographs, oral histories, Sanborn maps, city directories, building surveys, and periodical clippings. Library staff and volunteers handle over 1,100 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 tourists 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:

- **Building Grants Program**—The Society awards over \$75,000 annually to preservation, restoration, and educational projects. Recent efforts include rehabilitation of the Escobedo Dairy and Rinconcito de Esperanza on the West Side, interpretive signage at Ellis Alley, and the restoration of the 1906 Kelso House.
- **Special Board Allocations**—Examples include Everett Fly's documentation of African-American resources in Bexar County; \$100,000 to restore the City Council Chamber, \$300,000 for restoration of the Bexar County Courthouse; \$100,000 for the Majestic Theatre; \$50,000 for the Hays Street Bridge restoration 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 Conservation Society of San Antonio 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, Mission Heritage Partners, 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:

- Brackenridge Park Conservancy
- Lerma's Night Club
- City of San Antonio Living Heritage Symposium, 2017-19
- Ellis Alley Enclave
- San Pedro Creek Culture Park
- Neighborhood Workshops 2018-19
- Mission District Design Guidelines
- World Heritage Plan Land Use Amendments
- City of San Antonio Vacant Building Registration Program
- Historic Farm and Ranch Complexes Survey
- Historic Gas Station Survey and Designation
- Neighborhood Conservation Districts

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, Texas Festival and Event Association Conference, and the International Festival and Event Conference.

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; with over 1,500 currently enrolled. 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 13 full time and 2 part time employees.

About half of the Society's \$2.5 million annual budget comes from "A Night In Old San Antonio[®]," with the rest coming from leases, investments, membership dues, and contributions. The Conservation Society is a 501(c)(4) non-profit organization. The 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 as a house museum open to the public. 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 c.1859. The original mill was built after 1824 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.
- **Conservation Corner**, consisting of the 1856 **Jeremiah Dashiell House**, the 1853 **Gray-Guilbeau House** and the 1856 **Otto Bombach House** in La Villita, currently home to three restaurants.
- **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.

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](#)" (NIOA®) for four nights during the city's annual Fiesta celebration. NIOA® celebrates the city's diverse cultural legacy for more than 80,000 revelers annually. Through the magic of 200 food, drink and atmosphere booths; a dozen continuous live musical acts; traditional ethnic dance troupes; children's games; decorations; souvenirs; and 12,000 volunteers, NIOA brings the city's heritage alive in 15 areas. Solely sponsored by and benefiting Conservation Society, the 71st presentation of NIOA will be held **Tuesday through Friday, June 22-25, 2021**. NIOA 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 million netted at NIOA 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 NIOA proceeds have funded restoration in La Villita, HemisFair, and other historic neighborhoods. The 15 NIOA 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 food for kids; **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**—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; **IRISH FLAT**; **MAIN STREET USA**—honoring All-American favorites; **MEXICAN MARKET**—the original area of NIOA® 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.

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