



PRESERVATION  
— AUSTIN —

# PRESERVATION — AUSTIN —

SAVING THE GOOD STUFF

Spring 2017 ★ Volume 21 No. 2



## 25th Annual Historic Homes Tour

**O**pening of the Congress Avenue Bridge in 1910, and South Congress Avenue streetcar line the following year, forever changed South Austin. For decades, this largely agricultural community had been home to a handful of plantations and the pastoral campus of the Texas School for the Deaf. South Austin was brought into the city limits in 1891, yet, with limited access to town via an 1880s bridge, was still considered a remote backwater by those north of the Colorado River. Southsiders, however, knew their own potential and for years advocated for improved infrastructure to connect them to downtown.



South Congress looking north towards the Capitol, at Academy Drive, in 1914 (Austin History Center).

Hundreds turned out to see their dreams realized with the inaugural run of the new streetcar in 1911. As noted by the *Austin Statesman*, “South Austin... has been straining at the leash, so to speak, and demanding the removal of the handicap to its growth for a long time. All it has asked has been a chance, and now that it has its magnificent bridge and its streetcar facilities, a phenomenal development may be looked for.” New residential streets, lined with shining new bungalows, flourished and provided affordable homes for Austin’s working and middle-classes. South Congress Avenue, formerly a country road connecting Austin to San Antonio,

developed into a thriving commercial district and tourist destination as part of the new Meridian Highway stretching from Canada to Mexico.

The Bouldin Creek neighborhood offers a fascinating look at South Austin’s evolution from a sleepy rural community into the vibrant urban landscape we know today. “**Bouldin Years,**” our **25th Annual Historic Homes Tour,** showcases this history through five homes and the Texas School for the Deaf. Each unique, irreplaceable stop along the tour illuminates a different aspect of the neighborhood’s 19th and 20th century

heritage through diverse histories, lush gardens, and colorful, recently-renovated interiors. Join us to celebrate Bouldin’s past and present, as well as the people and places which make it one of Austin’s most iconic neighborhoods.



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SAVE THE DATE

# History Hunt in Bluebonnet Hills

Saturday, May 20 • FREE, RSVP required  
Additional Details TBD

Preservation Austin's annual History Hunt is coming to Bluebonnet Hills! This free architectural scavenger hunt engages K-5 aged children and their families in learning about Austin's historic neighborhoods. This year's event, presented with the South River

City Citizens Neighborhood Association, will be our first in South Austin. Families will follow clues to (top secret) stops throughout Bluebonnet Hills, learning about architectural elements and the neighborhood's history along the way. Sack races, hula hoops, and other activities will abound. Refreshments will be provided at the finish line, where prizes will be awarded to the race champions.

This event is free! All children must have an adult chaperone. For questions, or to volunteer, email Programs Coordinator Lindsey Derrington at [programs@preservationaustin.org](mailto:programs@preservationaustin.org). ★



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# Historic Homes Tour 2017

Homes Tour, continued from page 1



Dyer-McNiel House

Photograph by Joan Brook Photography

## Dyer-McNiel House (611 Bouldin Avenue, 1928)

Longtime post office employee Milas Dyer (1895-1969) built this Craftsman bungalow, one of Bouldin Avenue's first homes, for \$4,800 in 1928. The new north-south corridor took years to develop; first, because of completing ownership claims between Nicholas Dawson and sister Mollie, who had donated part of the land for the road, and later because of the city's sluggish efforts to provide sewers, much to the dismay of property owners who refused to settle for cesspools. Dyer, a native Austinite, veteran of World War I, and card-carrying member of the International Brotherhood of Magicians, lived here with his family until 1954. That year the Dyers swapped houses with the McNiels, trading their longtime home for a smaller one down the road. Fred A. McNiel (1910-1985) originally hailed from Mills, Texas. In 1944 he moved to Austin with wife Oleta (1916-1996) and their daughters to become chief engineer for the State Parks Board, which became the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in 1963. He retired after 30 years of helping to expand the state parks system, and the family remained here through the 1980s.

The bungalow's current owner moved here in the fall of 2011, hiring Architect Stuart Sampley, AIA and builder JGB Custom Homes for a renovation which balanced historic features with modern spaces. The project restored the home's historic 1/1 wooden windows and added period-appropriate 3/1 and 2/1 wooden window screens along the main façade. Extensive woodwork, including built-in bookcases, paneled knee walls, and battered Craftsman-style columns, remains the focal point of the living room. The entrance hallway now serves as gallery space for part of the homeowner's extensive art collection.

Removing a dining room wall allowed for an expanded kitchen connected by French doors to a spacious deck, and a small sitting area made way for a new master suite. The attic became a 600-square-foot loft accessed by a spiral staircase, increasing the home's usable space to 2,400 square feet. The loft features extensive built-in bookshelves and a claw foot tub from a downstairs bathroom. Sustainable upgrades include a new standing-seam metal roof and backyard water collection system. The project included renovation of the home's 1949 garage as well; shiplap from the house was repurposed for the garage workroom, and part of its original metal roof now serves as siding in the car area.

*This house is sponsored by Clayton Bullock, Moreland Properties. Inherit Austin is providing its volunteers.*

## Dawson-Robbins House (1912 South Fifth Street, 1899)

The Dawson-Robbins House, designated a City of Austin Landmark in 2002, is one of a handful of Bouldin's Victorian Era cottages built by one of South Austin's earliest families. Nicholas and Marguerite Dawson settled here in 1851 while part of a wagon train traveling from Arkansas to California. Real estate became something of a family business among their children. Son Nicholas A. Dawson (1864-1939) studied engineering and law, and served in the state legislature from 1891-1893, before turning to development. He was instrumental in building the South Congress streetcar line and even helmed its first run in 1911. Mary (Mollie) Dawson (1853-1933) was a highly successful educator and, as principle of Fulmore School (now Fulmore Middle), was the first woman to hold such a position in Austin's public schools. She and sister Nannie developed numerous properties with their brother, building distinctive middle-class houses featuring rough-cut limestone, thick lintels and sills, steeply-pitched roofs, and angled projecting bays with narrow windows.

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Dawson-Robbins House

Photograph by Joan Brook Photography



# Historic Homes Tour 2017

*Homes Tour, continued from page 3*

The Dawson sisters sold this home at South Fifth and West Johanna streets to the Robbins family in 1899. The four-room house, replete with 18-inch limestone walls and 11-foot ceilings, may have faced West Johanna before its porch was enclosed for a kitchen in the 1920s. The Robbins owned the property until 1961 but it rented it out after 1930. Among their tenants were the Sheffields, whose dog Sandy became a beloved member of their son's class at Becker Elementary in 1954. The Austin Statesman described him as "the hero, guardian angel, best all-around boy and top scholar of the third grade" who received his own report card and school photo, and excelled at naptime.

The home's current owners purchased it in 1998 and have strived to preserve its historic appearance, including 2/2 historic wooden windows and the front gable's fish scale shingles. Subtle changes include an oversized lintel between the master bedroom and dining room, hewn from wood salvaged from Galveston's recently-renovated 1927 Hotel Jean LaFitte, and sustainable landscaping with drought-tolerant plants and a rainwater-collecting wildlife pool. A 2004 project restored the front and back porches and replaced the kitchen foundation. Stonework repointing was completed in 2016.

The Dawson-Robbins House joins homes at 1200 South Fifth and 2014 South Third, and Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks 1001 West Mary (1894) and 1105 South Lamar (1900), as the last Dawson houses of their kind in Bouldin. Mollie Dawson Elementary (named in 1952) and the Dawson Neighborhood are further evidence of the family's South Austin legacy.

## **Millbrook (1803 Evergreen Avenue, 1895-1940s)**

Millbrook has captured the imagination of Austinites for decades. Barely visible from the street, the five-building homestead overlooks a secluded limestone bluff and ravine. Its picturesque, carefully-composed blend of late 19th century industrial architecture with high-style architectural remnants is unlike anything else in the city.

Rancher W. C. Roy (1851-1916) purchased this land near the former Bouldin plantation home in 1894. Construction on his limestone gristmill was well underway when Roy realized that his water source, a Bouldin Creek tributary, was actually a wet-weather stream too inconsistent to provide power. He converted the building into a modest two-story home for his family. A double gallery ran along the south façade, and the main entrance faced west onto Evergreen Avenue (originally part of the Fredericksburg Road, now Lamar Boulevard).

When Ernest (1902-1987) and Maurine (1900-1946) Hardin purchased the property in 1939, it was crumbling and cows roamed freely throughout. The Hardins were highly-educated artists and professionals who met while teaching drama at Southwestern University before relocating to Austin, where Ernest joined the Speech Department at the University of Texas. The couple had admired the property for years and shared a distinct vision for its transformation.



Millbrook

*Photograph by Melanie Martinez*

They rebuilt two- and three-foot-thick limestone walls, arranged the 3,000 square-foot-home into eight rooms with a large entrance hall overlooking the courtyard, and extensively embellished the property with salvaged architectural features. Decorative iron grillwork and elaborate wood doors, trim, paneling, and railings from 19th century buildings, including a demolished Abner Cook-designed home, added Old World charm. Black slate and white marble tiles came from a recent renovation of the Driskill Hotel. A lush blend of yucca, bamboo, magnolias, bleeding hearts, palms, weeping willows, and more soon poured over ancient-looking stone walls and pathways along the creek. By 1941 the Hardins had christened the property "Millbrook," a name taken from a weathervane purchased off a Northeastern farmer and installed on the limestone carriage house. Ernest Hardin lived here his entire life and was known for lavish house parties. Outbuildings, including the two-story "Barn" with studio apartments and a garage, remain from this era though his aviaries and greenhouse are gone.

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# Historic Homes Tour 2017

Homes Tour, continued from page 4

Millbrook's current owner has preserved this architectural treasure for nearly twenty-five years. Structural reinforcements, along with site plan improvements to enhance cohesiveness, are among the only alterations. One project relocated a Hardin-era fountain to the center of the courtyard and enclosed it with a stone sitting wall. Another added a stone wall along Evergreen Avenue and a central drive. In 1967, Millbrook became one of Austin's earliest sites to be designated a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark. It was one of Austin's earliest City Landmarks as well, designated in 1977.

*This house is sponsored by PSW Real Estate.*

## Collier House (907 West Annie Street, 1935)

American builders have relied on architectural pattern books since the Colonial Era. These widely-distributed publications featured sample plans, elevations, and details. They helped popularize a range of design movements from the Greek Revival style in the early 1800s to Craftsman bungalows a century later. The latter proliferated during the 1910s and 1920s, when companies such as Sears, Roebuck & Co. sold not only plans

but factory-cut building components. These were shipped and then assembled on-site, making homeownership more affordable for average families.

Calvin J. Collier (1882-1968) and wife Bathsheba (1892-1987) built this small bungalow for just \$1,200 in 1935. The Colliers had farmed land in southwest Travis County for years before moving to Austin during the Great Depression. Calvin is alternately listed as elevator operator, laborer, and janitor at the Travis County Courthouse. The home, likely purchased from a catalogue, is an excellent example of the modest working- and middle-class homes that define Bouldin's growth during this era.

The current owner moved in 2014 and embarked on an addition and remodel project with Elizabeth Baird Architecture & Design and JGB Custom Homes, completed the following year. Exposed shiplap ceilings and walls now lend warmth to the living room and kitchen. Colorful tile work and built-in bookcases were added throughout. The newly-built rear master suite takes design cues from the original home, but is set back by a narrow, low-profile connector which visually distinguishes the old from

the new. This connector includes the master bath and opens onto an outdoor shower. The light-filled master bedroom has a vaulted ceiling and sets of transomed French doors overlooking the back yard. A partition wall distinguishes the sleeping and sitting areas while preserving the space's openness. In total, the project added just 220 square feet.

Design Build Adventure designed the back yard's large wood-framed "pickin' porch" and steel-framed chicken coop for a previous owner. The coop, featured on the 2012 Funky Chicken Coop Tour, consists of two rooms (one for roosting, one for sunning) connected by central a "chicken chute." At the back of the lot is a tiny art studio.

*This house is sponsored by ML&R Wealth Management.*

## Texas School for the Deaf (1102 South Congress Avenue)

The state legislature established the Texas School for the Deaf (TSD) in 1856. The nearly 70-acre campus developed slowly at first because of inadequate funding, but by the early 1900s boasted substantial administration, residential, and classroom buildings. The Main Building (1877-1892), known as "Old Mule Ears," was the most iconic, with tall double towers facing north towards the Capitol and widely visible above their agrarian surroundings. Unfortunately it, along with the bulk of the school's early buildings, was demolished in 1956 to make way for new facilities designed by Fehr & Granger. Important pre-war buildings that do remain will be open for the tour:

Designed by Giesecke & Harris, the Clinger Gymnasium was completed in 1928 for \$36,000. It was just one of the firm's prominent 1920s commissions, including Norwood Tower and Austin High School. The buff brick building, deemed the "finest gymnasium Austin has ever laid" by the *Austin Statesman*, has a vaulted roof, maple floors, and delicate tile work above its main entrance. The gym was dedicated to beloved TSD student and resident educator Cora Clinger (1890-1979) in 1953. Its two-



Collier House

*Continued on page 6*

# Historic Homes Tour 2017

Homes Tour, continued from page 5

Photograph by Joan Brook Photography



Clinger Gym, Texas School for the Deaf

lane basement bowling alley, planned for restoration, will be off-limits on tour day.

The Heritage Center was designed by Giesecke & Harris as well, and completed as a laundry facility in 1925. It houses a trove of historic images and artifacts documenting TSD's 160-year history. Remnants of an 1891 iron fence which once ran along South Congress Avenue, and two ornamental light posts from the demolished 1915 Primary Building, have been installed along the building's south façade. The Tudor Revival Superintendent's Cottage, now offices for TSD's educational outreach center, was built in 1935. A small cottage next door housed the campus storekeeper. Niggli & Gustavson added four bays to the home's east façade in 1955 during Fehr & Granger's campus overhaul. Their architectural drawings for that project will be on display.

## Blackshear House

(806 Bouldin Avenue, 1951)

The Blackshear House joins just a handful of other homes, including the Bohn House (1938) and 3805 Red River (1947), that draw on the Art Deco, Streamline Moderne, and International Style movements here in Austin. Its white stucco exterior, steel-

framed windows, and flat roof embody the most stylish features of the time, designed by a somewhat unexpected builder.

Wells Simeon Blackshear (1887-1972) had moved from Waco to South Austin in 1940.

A minister in the Primitive Baptist Church, he studied bookkeeping at Baylor University and sustained his nine-member family through the Great Depression by farming. Here he worked as a contractor doing residential additions and repairs, drawing on experience building homes in Arkansas (1921) and Waco (1929). Blackshear purchased this lot at Bouldin Avenue and Ebony Street in 1949. At age 62, he set about building a new family home by hand with son Harold, a student at the University of Texas, with limited hired help. According to Harold, his father had an innate sense of scale and proportion, envisioning buildings in his "mind's eye" and working without drawings of any kind.

The house's plan evolved during construction. 22-foot pine timbers salvaged from a 19th century cotton gin were

used for the building's balloon-framed structure. Old-growth trees determined its setbacks and roofline. Harold built closets and casework, and other sons installed plumbing and oak floors. The second story became an apartment, accessed by a second-hand fire escape. They completed the 1,934-square-foot house in 1951, and Harold excavated another 563-square-foot apartment underneath the home in 1955. He later became a successful architect in the United States Air Force; his mother Hallie remained here until the early 1980s, after his father's death.

Jay Billig, the current owner, moved in in 2014. He designed and contracted renovations including a modern kitchen, enlarged bathrooms, and custom cabinetry. The home's historic features have been lovingly preserved and maintained.

*This house is sponsored by Green Mango Real Estate. Volunteers are provided by Mid Tex Mod. ★*



Blackshear House

Photograph by Lindsey Derrington





# Our Austin Story

## Great Cities Tell Great Stories

Ted Lee Eubanks and Charles Peveto

*A great city may be seen as the construction of words as well as stone ... Yi-Fu Tuan*

**A**ustin began with a bang. In 1839, Republic of Texas President-elect Mirabeau Lamar accepted an invitation from his friend, Jacob Harrell, to hunt in Central Texas. Harrell had established a trading post, Waterloo, on the Colorado River between Shoal and Waller creeks. Legend says that Lamar shot a buffalo at what is now the corner of what is now Congress Avenue and 8th Street.

Lamar slayed more than the bison. During this trip, Lamar would remark that “this should be the seat of future government.” With those words, Lamar ended President Sam Houston’s hope of the capital remaining in his namesake.

Lamar took office several months after the hunt. The Texas Congress appointed a site-selection commission to locate a site (someplace other than Houston) for a new permanent capital. They chose a place on the western frontier, specifically Harrell’s Waterloo. Lamar chose Judge Edwin Waller to survey the site, sell lots, and erect public buildings for the new state capital in Austin. Although the state purchased over 7000 acres, Waller narrowed his plan to the 640 acres that fronted the Colorado River between two creeks, Shoal and Waller.

Waller designed a fourteen-block grid bisected by a broad north-south thoroughfare, Congress Avenue, running up from the river to Capital Square. Waller’s design



Wooldridge Square

Photo by Ted Eubanks

included a central square (Capitol Square) and four smaller, secondary squares. Decades passed before Austin officially named the four squares Brush, Hamilton (now Republic), Bell (now Wooldridge), and Hemphill (no longer a public square). Today only Brush, Republic and Wooldridge remain.

These squares are the original civic spaces in our city. As such, they are extensions of the community over space and time. If they function true to their civic roles, they can be “the settings where celebrations are held, where social and economic exchanges take place, where friends run into each other, and where cultures mix.”

Long ignored and abused, Austin’s squares are being revived. Republic Square is being

renovated, a new park plan for Wooldridge Square is in development, and attention will soon shift to Brush Square as its revival is considered. Yet, civic spaces, to be successful, require more than design. Civic spaces need *people*.

The purpose of *Our Austin Story* is to engage the public in the shared heritage expressed in, by, and through these city squares. This project is sponsored by the Downtown Austin Alliance, working in partnership with the Austin Parks and Recreation Department. Preservation Austin Executive Director Kate Singleton serves as Committee Chair, and the Austin History Center, Friends of Wooldridge Square, Mexic-Arte Museum, Austin Convention & Visitors Bureau and Shoal Creek Conservancy are among the many partners in this effort.

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*Our Austin Story, continued from page 7*

*Our Austin Story* will develop, in concert with the public, an interpretive strategy for each of the three remaining squares. These interpretive narratives will relate key storylines and stories to their most appropriate square. These interpretive plans will help inform park planning, in-park interpretation, marketing, public engagement, and programming.

This effort is Austin's first attempt to embrace its past - the good, bad, ugly, and sublime - in its most public of spaces. The interpretive narrative developed by *Our Austin Story* will help visitors and resident alike better understand Austin's *present* by acknowledging Austin's *past*. *Our Austin Story* is more than a historical exercise,

though. *Our Austin Story* will guide the public in learning to embrace the past in a way that brings meaning to the present and illumination to the future.

For more information about *Our Austin Story*, go to the website at [www.downtownaustin.com/ouraustinstory](http://www.downtownaustin.com/ouraustinstory), and share your stories of and experiences at Austin's original civic spaces, our historic squares, at [engage.downtownaustin.com/our-austin-story](http://engage.downtownaustin.com/our-austin-story). ★



SFC Downtown Farmers' Market at Republic Square Photo by Ted Eubanks



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## CodeNEXT Draft Available for Comment

### CODENEXT SHAPING THE AUSTIN WE IMAGINE

In January 2017, the City of Austin released the first draft of the new land development code, dubbed CodeNEXT. The initiative to rewrite the code dates back to 2012, when the Imagine Austin comprehensive plan targeted streamlining the code as a key priority.

Exactly how the proposed new code will affect Austin's historic resources remains unknown. The code proposes using a system

of "transects" that will apply form-based zoning to the Central Austin neighborhoods containing the highest density of historic building stock. However, maps illustrating which transects will apply to which areas

won't be released until April, so it's difficult to assess how appropriate the rezoning will be. The code also leaves many procedural questions unanswered - like how the new transect zones will overlap with existing historic district design guidelines or neighborhood plans. What's more, the draft leaves the historic preservation ordinance (Section 23-4D-7070) largely unchanged, missing the opportunity to resolve the many contradictory and confusion requirements in the current ordinance.

So, what should preservation advocates do to ensure that CodeNEXT protects our historic assets? Anyone can read and comment online, using the Civic Comment tool at [codenext.civiccomment.org](http://codenext.civiccomment.org). Preservation Austin aims to post a set of organization-wide comments by April 15 - you can simply endorse or elaborate

on those comments as well. Perhaps most importantly, you can attend Open House sessions and make sure preservation issues are part of the discussion. Check [austintexas.gov/codenext](http://austintexas.gov/codenext) for upcoming dates and to sign up for alerts. The next scheduled session will be on **April 8, 2017, from 2pm to 4pm at Anderson High School.**

The stated aims of the code include making the development process more predictable, and to encourage development to better respond to neighborhood character. It may still be possible for the next version of the code to improve those areas, but only if the voices of preservation advocates are included in the feedback that the City hears.

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**P**reservation Austin presents our Facebook Heritage Quiz the first Friday of every month! The first respondent to correctly identify a local landmark receives a \$5 gift card to East Austin's Cenote Café, housed in the 1887 McDonald-Cain House, courtesy of your favorite preservation nonprofit.

### January 2017: McClendon-Price House (1606 Pearl Street)

Architect Charles Page designed this 1906 residence for Judge James McClendon and wife Annie. Annie's father had given the property, now in the historic Old Judges Hill neighborhood, to the couple as a wedding gift. Judge McClendon served as the Chief Justice for the Court of Civil Appeals for 26 years. Ed and Betty Price later purchased the home in 1960, when Ed Price was serving as the University of Texas head football coach. The house is a two-and-a-half story foursquare, with architectural elements of the Prairie and Craftsman movements. In addition to being a City of Austin landmark, 1606 Pearl Street is also a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark. It was recently for sale, with realtor photographs giving a rare glimpse of the interior of this historic Austin home.

★ **Winner: Josh Conrad**



McClendon-Price House

### February 2017: Sweet Home Baptist Church (1725 West 11th Street)

After the Civil War, former enslaved people gathered together in communities throughout Texas for support. The Sweet Home Baptist Church is one Austin landmark from an early freedmen's community known as Clarksville. In 1871, former slave Charles Clark purchased approximately 360 acres of land and subdivided it for other former slaves. The first members of Sweet Home Baptist Church gathered under a tree to worship, before building their first church in the 1880s. The congregation built a second church in 1922, which burned. However, the congregation rebuilt the current church building in 1935, reusing wood from the burnt church. Last year, the church celebrated its 145th birthday.

★ **Winner: Tracy Warren**



Sweet Home Baptist Church

### March 2017: Howson Community Center (1192 Angelina Street)

The community center at 1192 Angelina Street in East Austin, now known as the Howson Community Center, opened in 1929 to serve African American organizations recently exiled to the east side by the 1928 city plan. Two years earlier, seven different African American clubs had joined to form the Community Welfare Association to promote health and education. The group built the community center to provide a meeting place for these clubs as well as for health care. The Community Welfare Association distributed milk, operated a nursery school, offered art classes, and held meetings for groups as diverse as the Girl Scouts and the American Woodmen.

★ **Winner: David Loesch**



Howson Community Center



**T**he Preservation Committee meets monthly to discuss projects brought to our attention by the public; by architects, developers or planners needing assistance; or by PA members and staff. This working committee provides advocacy, recommends policy positions, and forms partnerships with other neighborhood or preservation groups working on preservation issues. Members are restoration architects, historians, realtors, developers, planners, experienced neighborhood advocates, and other professionals with expertise in various aspects of historic preservation. Our process is to discuss and sometimes debate these items, then vote on a position for approval by PA's Board or Executive Committee.

The following are just a few of the projects the Preservation Committee has worked on during the last few months:

- PresCom has continued to support the application from the Aldridge Place neighborhood for designation as a Local Historic District. The case was reviewed by the Planning Commission as part of their late-January meeting. The case was, remarkably, passed by that group on the consent agenda, meaning that the Commissioners supported the application with no need for discussion or testimony.

This feat recognizes the work that Aldridge Place neighbors have put into the application and into gathering demonstrated support from property owners. Preservation Austin wholeheartedly supports the designation of local

historic districts as a means by which to preserve more historic properties in our city, including those that do not merit status as individual landmarks, and to allow residents a greater role in the process of preservation. We applaud the efforts of the Aldridge Place neighborhood and will continue to support them at public meetings as the process moves forward.

- Members of the Preservation Committee, and PA staff, attended a grassroots meeting to discuss historic districts in East Austin. The meeting was organized by long-time East Austin residents and attended by people from a variety of neighborhoods that were included in the East Austin Historic Resources Survey. PA also hosted a second Local Historic District workshop on February 25. This well-attended workshop series is funded in part by a grant from the Butler Family Foundation, and is free and open to the public. PA hopes to improve the process by which local historic districts are designated and support additional neighborhoods in pursuit of the designations.
- The Preservation Committee has begun to discuss and compile comments on the first draft of the city's proposed new land development code under CodeNEXT. Please see the additional article (page 6) for more information about the new code and PA's response.
- The Preservation Committee was given a presentation by the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department's Cultural Resource Specialist regarding how PARD will spend nearly a million dollars that City Council allocated to it through the Hotel Occupancy Tax. The funding will aid new and ongoing brick and mortar projects at several sites, including various on-going work items at the Oakwood Cemetery Chapel; restoration of windows and doors at the Elizabet Ney Museum; restoration plans and installation of new HVAC to protect collections at the O.Henry Museum; and restoration of the garden shed and various landscape masonry repairs at Mayfield Park. Any remaining funds will be directed to historic resources at other PARD site. ★





# President's Message

★ John Donisi



Preservation Austin advocates for policies, ordinances and programs that help further historic preservation in our city. We often support projects such as the East Side Historic Resource Survey, as well as additional funding and staffing for the City's preservation program, as a regular part of fulfilling our mission to promote Austin's diverse cultural heritage through the preservation of historic places.

In February, the City of Austin released the results of an audit of its Historic Preservation Program, part of the Planning and Zoning Department. The audit identified several key issues that need to be corrected for the program to function effectively. The audit stated that "the Planning and Zoning Department is not effectively administering the historic preservation program, which may prevent the program from achieving

its objectives." It went on to define issues relating to the program's implementation, including the need for consistent application of fees and justification of administrative reviews. The Historic Landmark Commission indicated that it does not receive information with enough time to make informed decisions, and expressed concern that the designation process is not working effectively and that some of the criteria for designation are unclear. The audit also noted that Austin differs with other cities on two critical points: there is no legal guidance during commission meetings, and the qualifications for becoming a commissioner, per the ordinance, are recommendations and not requirements.

The audit further compared Austin's program with that of comparable cities in Texas and across the country, including San Antonio,

Dallas, Portland, Oregon, Raleigh, and Charlotte. Most notably, the audit looked at staffing levels for nine other cities and found that these ranged from three to nineteen full-time employees, while the average for most cities was six. Currently, Austin has just three full-time staff members, despite the fact that the Historic Landmark Commission has the second highest caseload per meeting of the cities surveyed. On average, it handles thirty-two cases per meeting.

Preservation Austin recognized many of these issues long before the audit. In meetings with City Council members and senior city staff, we have voiced concern about the ability of the Historic Preservation Program to achieve the objectives of protecting and enhancing neighborhoods, buildings, and sites that reflect elements of Austin's cultural, social, political, and architectural history. As this process moves forward and the City budget process begins, Preservation Austin will advocate for funding for additional staff for the historic preservation program; attendance of an assistant city attorney at all the Historic Landmark Commission meetings; funding for training for the Commission and staff by the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions; and revisions to the ordinance that will help the program meet its stated goals.

Sincerely,

John Donisi,  
President ★

*Based on Historic Preservation Office records, from fiscal year 2014 to fiscal year 2016 the office received and reviewed approximately 1,700 demolition applications for residential and commercial properties that were over 40 years old.*



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# 85th Legislative Session: What You Need to Know

Alyson McGee, Immediate Past President

**T**he 85th session of the Texas Legislature is in full swing and, as usual, a number of bills have been introduced that impact historic preservation activities at both the local and statewide level. Here are some of the important ones:

**HB 2393 & SB 550** – Although amending different pieces of existing legislation, both bills expand the usage of the State’s historic rehabilitation tax credit, allowing the credit to be used against the insurance tax, in addition to the franchise tax as currently allowed. With the expectation that the franchise tax will be reduced or eliminated entirely, this will help ensure the state continues to provide an incentive to encourage the adaptive reuse of historic buildings being used for commercial and non-profit purposes. **Preservation Austin supports legislation that expands and strengthens the State’s historic rehabilitation tax credit program.**

**HB 3418** – If passed this bill will regulate how municipalities designate historic properties. First, it would require that any designation based on an historic event must show it is a “widely recognized” historic event. Second, designation of properties associated with historical figures could only pass if the historical figure in question actually lived at the property. It would further require a 3/4 vote by a planning or zoning commission to approve designation, and require city

officials to take action within 30 days on applications to construct, reconstruct, alter or demolish a building that is individually designated or is located in a historic district. The language regarding designation criteria is overly restrictive and eliminates the ability to designate based on local significance or due to a person’s association with a site they did not inhabit (such as one designed by an important architect). The time frame dictated for approvals are not possible and, most importantly, it inappropriately infringes upon the right of local governments to regulate land use within their jurisdiction. **Preservation Austin does not support the State legislature imposing such restrictions on local governments.**

**HB 3810 & SB 2005** – These companion bills transfer management and operation of the French Legation historic site in Austin from the Facilities Commission to the Texas Historical Commission (THC). Having the THC assume responsibility provides this special historic site with the agency’s expertise in managing historic sites and house museums across the state. It would mean the Legation would be the first and only State Historic Site located in the Capitol city. Key to the success of the transfer is appropriation of financial and staff resources so the THC can make necessary repairs to the house, develop a thorough interpretive program for the site, and hire professional staff to

manage the property. **Preservation Austin supports the transfer of this iconic Austin site to the THC.**

**HB 4146** – A similar bill introduced during the 2015 legislative session (HB 38190) didn’t make it out of committee because of staunch opposition by Preservation Austin and others. This bill would allow individuals to appeal State Historical Marker determinations by the THC to an administrative court. This would mean individuals could circumvent the effective review process already in place, whereby County Historical Commissions (CHCs) review and forward to the THC requests for new State Historical Markers and revisions to existing markers. The bill would take the responsibility for decisions regarding historical significance and accuracy away from the trained and knowledgeable professionals at the THC and create a superfluous, politicized and expensive level of bureaucracy that has no place in the telling of our State’s history. **Preservation Austin is joined in opposition by the Travis County Historical Commission, and other CHCs across the state.**

**Funding for the Texas Historical Commission** – Both the House and Senate’s original appropriation bills did not include funding for THC capital projects, or the Heritage Trails program that helps promote heritage tourism across the state. The Senate bill included \$5 million for the Historic Courthouse Grant Program and

*Continued on page 13*



*Legislative Session, continued from page 12*

later added \$1.5 million back in for the Heritage Trails program. However, (at the time this article is written) the House version still does not include any funding for either of those programs. With dozens of Counties ready and waiting to restore their courthouses and the THC managing 21 sites across the state, there

is hope that use of the Rainy Day Fund will include additional funding for the Historic Courthouse Grant Program and THC capital projects. **Preservation Austin supports funding for the THC and all its programs, which help preserve, protect and promote historic sites across the state.**

**FIND YOUR  
TEXAS STATE  
LEGISLATORS  
HERE:**

**[fyi.legis.state.tx.us](http://fyi.legis.state.tx.us)**

***Citizen advocacy does work!***

Preservation Austin urges citizens to write, call and email your state Representatives and Senators to let them know what you think about legislation that impacts historic preservation. To find out how to contact your legislators go to the “Who Represents Me” web site and enter your address. From there you can click on your legislators’ names to access their webpages and get

contact information. Preservation Austin will be contacting legislative offices as well, and testifying at committee hearings – working with you to “*Save the Good Stuff.*” ★



★ **Become a Sustaining Member**

Interested in increasing your contribution to Preservation Austin by making giving easier and more convenient? Our new Sustaining Membership program allows you to set up automatic \$10, \$25, or \$50 monthly gifts through your checking account until you decide to make a change. You’ll eliminate annual renewal notices AND receive one of our Sustaining Member shopping totes featuring beloved Austin landmarks! You’ll also help Preservation Austin cut down on mailing and processing costs while providing steady, reliable support for our education and advocacy initiatives. See our website for details! ★





**I**nherit Austin, a membership level of Preservation Austin, hosts social, cultural, and educational events to raise awareness among the next generation of preservationists. IA is committed to the same mission as Preservation Austin and offers activities that appeal to singles, couples, and families.

Check out our new Instagram account (@InheritAustin) and join our two advocacy campaigns, #Iheartatxblbds, which highlights buildings of all shapes and sizes that we love, and #atxroadside, a celebration of historic gas stations, motels, diners, and mini-golf courses, such as the iconic Peter Pan Mini Golf course on Barton Springs Road. Speaking of mini-golf, we enjoyed a great night at Peter Pan on January 19, where we learned about the history of putt-putt and identified some of Austin's significant roadside resources.



Be sure to check our Facebook page for announcements of our “Last Hurrah” events, in which we show some love to long-time Austin establishments that will sadly be facing the wrecking ball.

**Join Inherit Austin at this year's Spring “Egg-stravaganza” on the beautiful grounds of the historic French Legation, April 8th at 10am.** This is the 15th year of our popular Egg Hunt, and we're thrilled to be expanding

the program to include more family-friendly fun, including food trucks, music, family portraits, and a petting zoo! Purchase \$10 tickets in advance on the Preservation Austin website, \$15 tickets will be available at the door.

Look for Inherit Austin at the Annual Homes Tour, where we'll be providing volunteers for the Dyer-McNiel House on Bouldin Avenue! ★

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## Preservation Grants Awarded to Austin Theatre Alliance and Norwood Park Foundation

**O**ur Grants Committee has awarded matching funds to further the maintenance and preservation of two of Austin's most beloved landmarks, the Paramount Theatre and Norwood House, for our winter grant cycle. Established in fall 2016, this new program supports important preservation activities such as education efforts, “bricks and mortar” projects, historic resource surveys, local historic designations, and more. Nonprofits, neighborhood groups, public entities, and individual property owners are all eligible.

The nonprofit Austin Theater Alliance received a “bricks and mortar” grant to provide much need repairs for the balconies and awnings of Congress Avenue's iconic Paramount Theater. “To watch the transformation of the façade as this work has taken place has been illuminating. The preservation efforts on the 100-year-old façade make this block of Congress Avenue shine brighter, and the building is made stronger. We couldn't do this important work without the support from Preservation Austin and our generous community,” said Maica Jordan, Chief Development Officer of the Austin Theatre Alliance.

The Norwood Park Foundation, which strives to restore the 1922 Arts and Crafts style Norwood House and grounds overlooking Lady Bird Lake for public use, received a Planning Grant. This will contribute to the cost of completing the project's schematic design phase, including a statement of historical significance, historic landscape plan, and civil engineering plans. The Austin Theatre Alliance, Norwood Park Foundation, and their many dedicated supporters have worked tirelessly to preserve these buildings for generations to come. We are thrilled to be a small part of these big projects,

*Continued on page 15*





# Our New & Renewing Members



**WATERLOO CIRCLE**

Susan Griffith & Curtis Fuelberg  
 Paula & Lee Aaronson  
 Meta Butler Hunt  
 Kent & Reenie Collins  
 Emily Moreland  
 William & Regan Gammon  
 Peter Flagg Maxson & John Taylor, III  
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 Shannon Barrientes  
 Jeff Cohen  
 Dan Day  
 Lesley Morisset  
 Angela Reed & Ian Reddy

**ADVOCATE**

Jack & Karen O'Quin

**FRIEND**

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 Joseph DiQuinzio, Jr. & Sue Littlefield  
 Bill Hart & Liz Barhydt  
 Michael Holleran  
 Dr. Emma Linn  
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 Edward Tasch & Anne Crawford  
 Chris Thomas

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 Jeff & Pam Autrey  
 Charles & Sylvia Betts  
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 James & Gayle Browne  
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 Maricella Ruckel  
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 ML&R Wealth Management  
 PSW Real Estate

*Preservation Grants, continued from page 14*

and thank these nonprofits for all they do to preserve Austin's treasures!

The Grants Committee meets once a quarter and is looking for good projects to fund. See our website for more detailed information and our grant application!

[www.preservationaustin.org/programs/grants](http://www.preservationaustin.org/programs/grants)



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## PA CALENDAR OF EVENTS • 2017

**APR  
8**

### **Annual Inherit Austin Egg Hunt**

French Legation (802 San Marcos Street, 78702), 10am-noon. Welcome in the spring with this annual tradition, reimagined at the historic French Legation! Adult and children's tickets are \$10 in advance and \$15 on the day of the event. Egg Hunt begins at 11 am.

**MAY  
20**

### **History Hunt in Bluebonnet Hills**

This annual architectural scavenger hunt (and games!) for K-5 kids and their families will be our first-ever in South Austin. Presented in partnership with the South River City Citizens Neighborhood Association. **FREE**, see Page 2 for details.

**APR  
29**

### **25th Annual Historic Homes Tour in Bouldin Creek**

This year's tour features the rich and diverse history of Bouldin Creek neighborhood, seen through classic South Austin homes as well as the historic campus of the Texas School for the Deaf. See Page 1 for details.

**JUN  
15**

### **Summer Grant Deadline**

PA offers quarterly matching grants of up to \$5,000 for a variety of preservation projects. Nonprofits, neighborhoods, public entities, and building owners may apply.

★ Visit [www.preservationaustin.org](http://www.preservationaustin.org) for details and tickets today!

### MONTHLY EVENTS

#### **Juggling and Jawing Historic Austin Happy Hours**

Our happy hour series with the UT Student Historic Preservation Association continues! Venues are announced monthly, check our website and social media to see where we'll be this spring.

#### **SFC Farmers' Market Downtown**

Our Education Committee represents PA at the Sustainable Food Center's Farmers' Market Downtown, held in Republic Square, on the first Saturday of each month. *Come on by!*