



Downtown Doorsteps

SELF-GUIDED TOUR

-  **FEATURED HOMES**
- 1. 709 Rio Grande Street
- 2. 1310 San Antonio Street
- 3. Cambridge Tower
- 4. 706 Congress Avenue
- 5. Brown Building



-  **POINTS OF INTEREST**
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- B. Pease Elementary School
- C. Moonlight Tower
- D. Bertram Building
- E. Scottish Rite Theater
- F. Texas Chili Parlor
- G. The Cloak Room
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- I. Heman Marion Sweatt Travis County Courthouse
- J. Austin History Center
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- N. Walter Tips Building
- O. O. Henry Hall
- P. Republic Square
- Q. West Sixth Street Bridge



 **NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICTS**

- i. Congress Avenue
- ii. Sixth Street

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Downtown Doorsteps: Self-Guided Tour

This self-guided tour is a companion piece to Downtown Doorsteps: Preservation Austin's 2020 Virtual Homes Tour. It showcases this year's featured homes and historic sites in between.

Most locations on this tour are not open to the public. Sites are meant to be experienced from the public right-of-way. Please be mindful of owners' property and privacy.

Content corresponds to a [five-mile bike route](#) from our friends at Bike Austin. The route begins at 709 Rio Grande Street and runs clockwise. Sites are accessible by foot and by car as well!

To achieve the full 2020 Homes Tour experience, we invite you to purchase a ticket to the virtual tour at preservationaustin.org.



BIKE  **AUSTIN**

1: Featured Home - 709 Rio Grande Street (1905)



Joseph D. Sayers commissioned this gracious home by Page Brothers Architects soon after finishing his second term as Governor of Texas. Sayers led the state through numerous tragedies during his tenure, including the heartbreaking Galveston Hurricane in 1900. Wife Orline Walton Sayers lived here until her death in 1943. A painter and renowned hostess, she was known as the “Dolly Madison of Texas” for turning the Governor’s Mansion into the “center of the state’s social and cultural life.”

A: Sampson-Nalle House (1003 Rio Grande Street, 1877)



Merchant George Washington Sampson, namesake of Congress Avenue's 1855 Sampson Building, built this grand Victorian Era home in 1877. His descendants have owned and cared for it ever since, and pursued its gorgeous, Preservation Merit Award-winning adaptive reuse into offices with Clayton & Little Architects in 2012. Classical Revival style colonnades were added to the Italianate style residence at the turn of the 20th century, reflecting two distinct architectural eras.

B: Pease Elementary School (1106 Rio Grande Street, 1876)



Edwin Waller designated this land for educational purposes in his original 1839 city plan. Austin's first public school opened here in 1876. The Second Empire style structure was heavily damaged by an arsonist in 1897, and was rebuilt and renamed for Governor Pease in 1902. Additions in 1916 and 1926 completed the building you see today. Pease Elementary closed in 2020, despite the dedicated

efforts of Pease families. The school is integral to the history of public education in Texas as the state's oldest parcel of land continuously dedicated to that cause.

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2: Featured Home - 1310 San Antonio Street (1890)

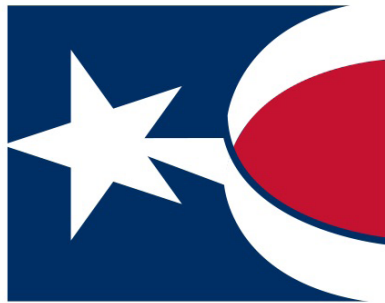


Austin's newly appointed Internal Revenue Collector, Major Joseph W. Burke, built this home just west of the Texas State Capitol for his young family. The Pennsylvania native and Union Army veteran was a leading member of Austin's Republican Party, while wife Nellie came from a rough and tumble Texas pioneers. After Nellie's death in 1925 the home sold to stenographer Clara Besserer, who

converted it into apartments to meet the growing demand for professional housing downtown.

C: Moonlight Tower (15th and San Antonio Streets, 1894)

Austin purchased thirty-one of these triangular, 165-foot-tall Moonlight Towers from Detroit in 1894 and installed them throughout town. Six carbon arc lamps, accessed by a central hand-operated elevator, shed light across whole neighborhoods. Awed residents wondered how their crops and chickens would be affected (both were fine). Austin's seventeen remaining towers are the only ones intact, and in operation, nationwide. The popular belief that they were a public safety response to the Servant Girl Annihilator murders remains unsubstantiated.



Frontier Bank of Texas

D: Bertram Building (1601 Guadalupe Street, 1866-1880)

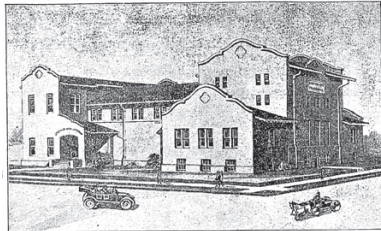


PICA 27200 Austin History Center, Austin Public Library

German immigrant Rudolph Bertram built this Italianate commercial building in three stages between 1866 and 1880. His general merchandise store and wagon yard catered to farmers and traders traveling south to Austin along the Georgetown Road (now Guadalupe Street). Its suburban setting on the outskirts of town quickly grew into a dense urban neighborhood. Bertram sold the business in 1881

and it became a grocery at the turn of the century. Restaurants have occupied the Bertram Building since 1940, catering to the UT and capitol crowds. The beloved Clay Pit has been here since 1998.

E: Scottish Rite Theater (207 West 18th Street, 1871-1915)



The Austin Turnverein opened in 1871. The German American club featured a gymnasium, theater, bowling alley, and beer garden. Vaudeville's Majestic Theatre opened here in 1907 (and later relocated to Congress Avenue, in what is now the Paramount Theater). The Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasons purchased the building in 1914. Its auditorium was well-

suited to the order's theater-based degree presentations, in which one-act plays presented philosophical questions to members during their advancement to higher ranks. The masons transformed the limestone turnverein into the Spanish Renaissance Revival style Scottish Rite Cathedral, opened in 1915. They opened a community-focused nonprofit theater here in 2004.

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3: Featured Home - Cambridge Tower (1801 Lavaca Street, 1965)



Cambridge Tower embodied opulent urban living at the height of the Cold War. Dallas developers opened this 15-story residential tower, then the tallest in Austin, with New Formalist detailing and colorful branding geared towards young professionals. Floorplans boasted names such as Envoy, Chancellor, and Premier with wall-to-wall carpeting in shade of “Gold” or “Martini.” Austin’s own Swinging Sixties could rub elbows at the “Mediterranean style” swimming

pool and Table Royale restaurant. Children were permitted but not encouraged (because of the building’s height, so management claimed) and if things took a turn for the worse, Cambridge Tower boasted its own fallout shelter.

F: Texas Chili Parlor (1409 Lavaca Street)

This Austin staple opened in 1976, just one year before the 65th Texas Legislature designated chili con carne the official state dish. San Antonio’s 19th century Chili Queens popularized chili parlors, which proliferated into early 1900s. Our own Texas Chili Parlor drew a creative clientele including musicians Willie Nelson and Guy Clark; writers Gary Cartwright and Bud Shrake; and future governor Ann Richards. During its early years the bar banned patrons under 22 years of age to discourage college students’ more amateur approach to drinking. Guy Clark’s “Dublin Blues” immortalized Texas Chili Parlor’s Mad Dog Margherita, made with mezcal, in 1995.



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G: The Cloak Room (1300 Colorado Street)

The 1891 Goodman Building features paired doors and an elegant double-gallery with near-impossibly thin columns. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas moved into its second floor in 1975 and purchased the landmark in 1992. A comprehensive restoration in 2001-2002 was followed by a three-year, Preservation Merit Award-winning rehabilitation completed in 2019. The Cloak Room, its downstairs bar, has drawn politicians and college students alike since the 1970s. Its dim lights and speakeasy atmosphere are legendary. When the Austin American Statesman asked about legislators' drinking preferences in 1980, The Cloak Room's manager responded, "Yeah, they all drink serious."

H: Westgate Tower (1122 Colorado Street, 1965)



Designed by internationally renowned architect Edward Durrell Stone, the 26-story Westgate Tower opened as Austin's tallest high-rise. Like Cambridge Tower, its New Formalist design draws inspiration from Classical architecture. Brick solar screens and integrated columns define the exterior. Each unit features full-height windows and balconettes with stunning views. The Lumbermans' Investment

Association spearheaded the project in 1962. The tower's height and prime location at the western boundary of the Capitol grounds caused much controversy. The legislature nearly halted the building's construction in 1965, though it quickly became a popular home address for legislators, lobbyists, and business leaders. The prominent Headliners Club was located here until 1975.



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"A building does not have to be an important work of architecture to become a first-rate landmark. Landmarks are not created by architects. They are fashioned by those who encounter them after they are built. The essential feature of a landmark is not its design, but the place it holds in a city's memory."

- Herbert Muschamp, NY Times architecture critic

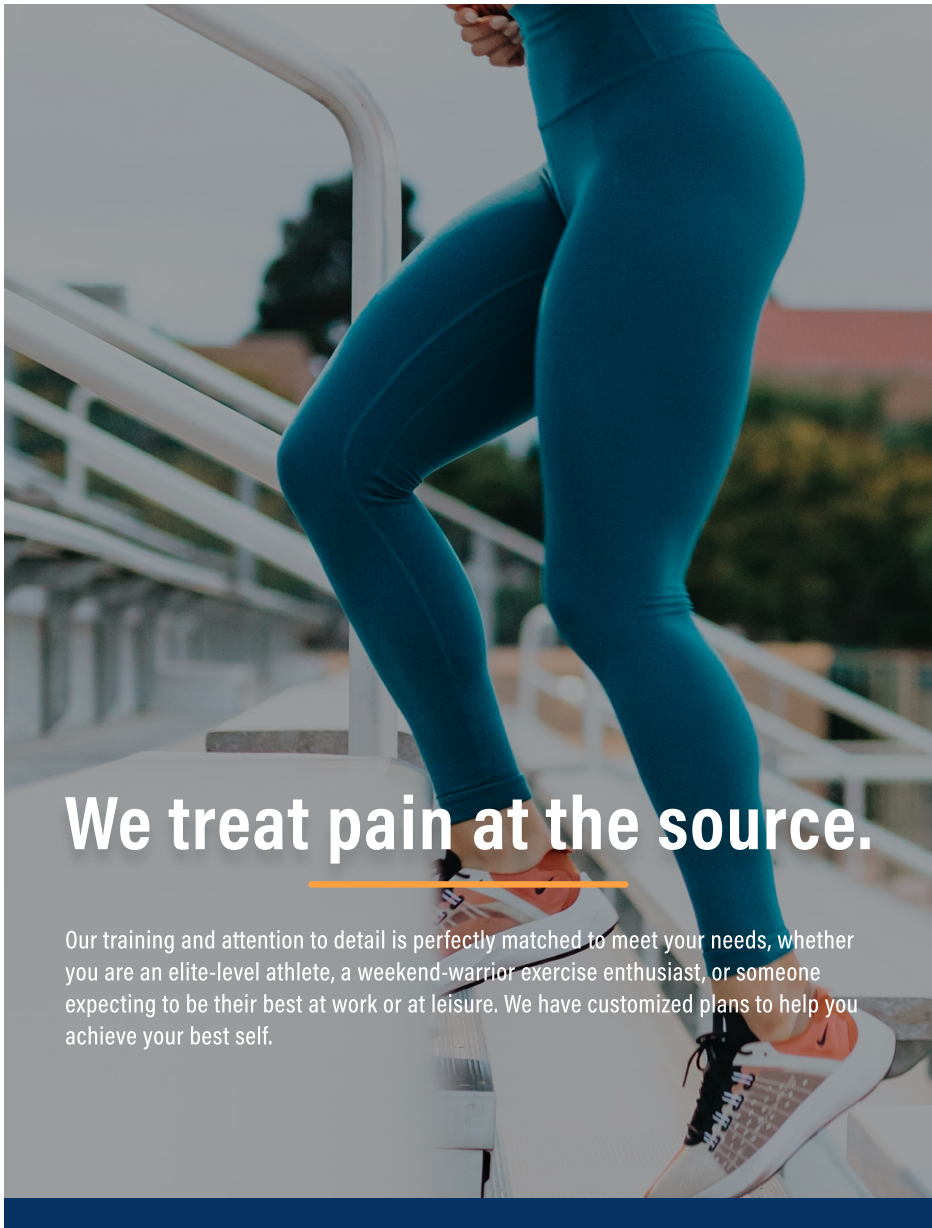
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I: Heman Marion Sweatt Travis County Courthouse (1931)



In 1946 Heman Marion Sweatt was denied admission to The University of Texas Law School because he was Black, despite the school's acknowledgement that he met the requirements for admission. With the help of the NAACP, and future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, Sweatt brought legal action in a landmark case that began here at the Travis County Courthouse. In *Sweatt v. Painter*,

the United States Supreme Court ruled that separate law school facilities could not provide a legal education equal to that available at The University of Texas Law School. Sweatt's sacrifice and dedication helped pave the way for African Americans' admission to colleges and universities across the nation, and led the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. The courthouse was renamed in his honor in 2005.

J: Austin History Center (810 Guadalupe Street, 1933)



Architect Hugo Kuehne designed Austin's first permanent public library, overlooking Wooldridge Square, in the Italian Renaissance Revival style. Master craftsman Fortunat Weigl produced the wrought iron details; Peter Mansbendel carved the interior woodwork; and artist-architect Bubi Jessen painted cavorting Pegasus figures in the entrance loggia.

The building replaced a smaller temporary library which opened here in 1926, and was moved to segregated East Austin to become the Carver Branch Library for Black Austinites (now the George Washington Carver Genealogy Center). Central Library moved into the new Faulk Building in 1979. The original library reopened as the Austin History Center in 1983 with the support of local advocates including Preservation Austin.

K: Bremond Block (West Seventh and Guadalupe Streets)

The Bremond Block was designated as Austin's first National Register Historic District in 1970, just a few years after President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the National Historic Preservation Act. Its architecture includes Greek Revival homes dating to the 1850s, along with the Classical Revival Eugene Bremond House (1877), the Second Empire Pierre Bremond House at Eight and San Antonio (1886), and the castle-like North-Evans Chateau (1874-1894). Many of the homes were built by the Bremond and Robinson families, partners in business and marriage. Preservation Austin was an early advocate for saving this incredible collection of 19th buildings.

4: Featured Home - 706 Congress Avenue (1872)



This City of Austin Landmark has lived many lives over the past 150 years, including as numerous saloons and the Austin Chamber of Commerce. Rhealee Hat Shop replaced the building's facade with Vermont marble paneling and the store's name in stylish neon in 1941. It was one of many shops along Congress to update aging storefronts to compete with modern shopping centers in Austin's suburbs. The current owner

meticulously restored the building to its 1918 appearance, including limestone masonry, round-arched windows and doors, and steel-framed balcony.

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5: Featured Home - Brown Building (710 Colorado Street, 1938)



Construction industry titan Herman Brown commissioned this Art Moderne office building at the height of the Great Depression. His firm, Brown & Root, was heavily involved in federally-funded infrastructure projects - work reflected in the Brown Building's marbled elevator lobby with stylized etched-glass panels depicting a dam, highway, and oil field. Powerful office tenants included Lyndon B. Johnson and

Ralph Yarborough, along with important state agencies. Lucy Baines Johnson and the LBJ Holding Company reopened the Brown Building in 1998 after a \$11.5 million renovation into ninety loft-style apartments, supported by federal historic tax credits.

L: The Driskill (604 Brazos Street, 1886)



Cattle baron Jesse Lincoln Driskill built this massive Richardsonian Romanesque hotel for the huge sum of \$400,000 in 1886. The building features Colonel Driskill's bust over the south entrance, and his sons over the east and west entrances. Its storied bar was the center of Austin's social and political scene. Lyndon B. Johnson had his first date with future wife Lady Bird at the hotel restaurant, and spent the night of his 1964

presidential election here. Preservation Austin helped save the Driskill from demolition in 1969 and officed here for many years. This iconic landmark now stands in the Sixth Street National Register Historic District, designated in 1975.

GG Gill
Group

M: Paramount Theatre (713 Congress Avenue, 1915)

The Paramount opened as the Majestic Theatre, a vaudeville house, in 1915. A major remodel in 1930 readied the venue for talking pictures, and the newly-named Paramount Theatre continued as a first-run movie palace and live stage. Suburban theaters and television led to its decline and near-demolition in the 1970s before advocates, including Preservation Austin, rallied to its cause. The Paramount became a nonprofit in 1975 and merged with the Stateside Theatre in 2001 as the Austin Theatre Alliance. The organization celebrated the theater's 2015 centennial with the installation of a meticulously fabricated reproduction of its long-lost "Paramount" sign.

N: Walter Tips Company Building (710 Congress Avenue, 1877)

This stunning landmark is one of the gems of the Congress Avenue National Register Historic District, listed in 1978. German immigrant Walter Tips constructed the building for his hardware store. Its opulent design blends the Venetian Gothic and Italianate Renaissance Revival styles. Each floor features five sets of arches: round-arches at the street, segmental arches on the second story, and paired lancet arches above, all framed by elaborate Corinthian columns. The first two stories were obscured by midcentury cladding before a significant restoration by Franklin Savings and Loan, supported by Preservation Austin, was completed in 1981.



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O: O. Henry Hall (601 Colorado Street, 1881)



This Italian Renaissance Revival style building originally served as Austin's federal courthouse and post office. The Texas State University System purchased it in 2015 and embarked on a \$4.7 million rehabilitation with O'Connell Architecture and the Lawrence Group to remedy years of deferred maintenance and alterations. The project included individual scopes of work for each of the building's 160 historic windows, including ten different window types and sizes. It

was completed in August 2018 with the support of state historic tax credits. O. Henry Hall now serves as beautifully rehabbed offices for the Texas State University System.

P: Republic Square (West Fifth and Guadalupe Streets, 1839)

Edwin Waller designated four public squares in his original city plan. The southwest square was dubbed "Guadalupe Park" by the turn of the century because of the thriving Mexican American neighborhood that surrounded it. Austin's "Mexico" was home to Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church, and families used the park for cultural events and annual Diez y Seis de Septiembre celebrations. The community began moving to East Austin in the 1920s, particularly after the 1928 City Plan codified segregation. The city paved the square for parking but restored its green space in 1976, in celebration of the US Bicentennial. A public-private partnership between the Downtown Austin Alliance, Austin Parks Foundation, and the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department has led to beautiful improvements.



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Q: West Sixth Street Bridge (at West Avenue, 1887)

This hand-built, Romanesque style bridge over Shoal Creek opened the area beyond West Avenue, the city's original western boundary, to development in 1887. The bridge features some of the state's oldest masonry arches and spans today's Shoal Creek Trail. Armed with a restoration study by Sparks Engineering and Limbacher & Godfrey Architects, the Shoal Creek Conservancy is working to repair its stonework, install lighting, and enhance its setting through landscaping and ecological restoration.

Images of 2020 Featured Homes are by Leonid Furmansky, Preservation Austin's 2020 Homes Tour Photographer.



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