



Republic Square

Interpretive Panel Draft

Produced by Fermata, Inc. for the Downtown Austin Alliance

Sign 1: Republic Square – General Description

Edwin Waller’s original design of Austin consisted of a grid with a central square (Capitol Square) and four smaller secondary “public squares.” In 1888, the squares were named Brush, Hamilton (now First Baptist Church), Bell (now Wooldridge), and Hemphill (now Republic).

Austin initially invested little in parks and public spaces. Although the original city plan set aside public land, people quickly found other ways to use these spaces for storage, garbage dumps, or other uses. Between 1950 and the early 1970s, Republic Square was used as a parking lot.

Returning the square to its original purpose began in 1976 as part of the U.S. Bicentennial celebration. Austin chose the current name, Republic Square, in tribute to the Republic of Texas.

In 2017, the Downtown Austin Alliance, the Austin Parks Foundation, and the Austin Parks and Recreation Department joined to give Republic Square a dramatic makeover. The civic space that you experience today is a reflection of the spirit and intent of Edwin Waller’s original inspiration.



CAPTION:

IMAGE: Earliest Known Photograph of Republic Square, 1869

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Sign 2: Republic Square – Austin’s Birthplace and the Auction Oaks **ALREADY INSTALLED**

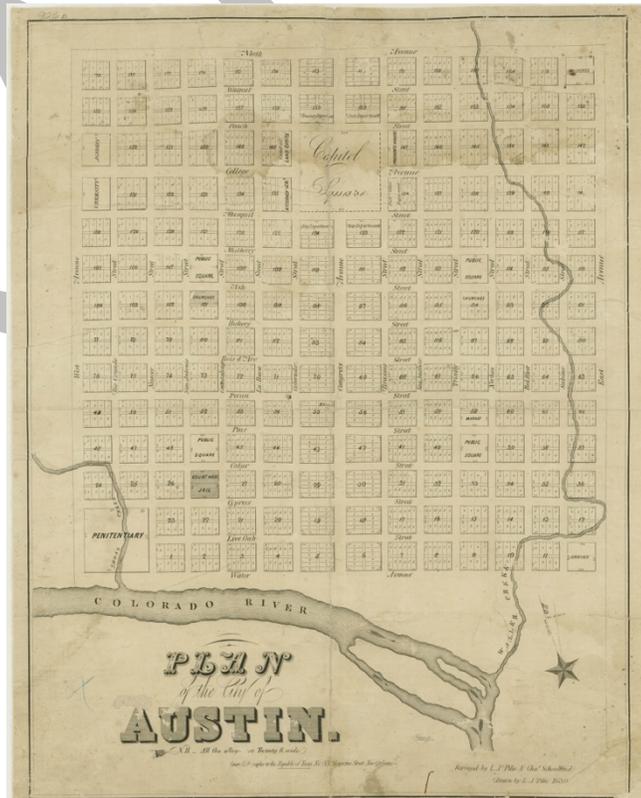
[Judge Edwin Waller held the first auction of Austin city lots under these oaks in 1839.]

On January 24, 1839, the Republic of Texas directed President Mirabeau Lamar to select a site for a capital. Lamar chose the small settlement of Waterloo, on the north bank of the Colorado River, as the site for what would become Austin.

Judge Edwin Waller arrived in May 1839 to lay out a plan for the new capital city. The “Waller Plan” encompassed one square mile, 14 city blocks by 14 city blocks, between Waller Creek on the east and Shoal Creek on the west.

On August 1, 1839, Waller held the first auction of city lots under a small grove of live oaks in what we now call Republic Square. Funds from this sale were used to begin the construction of government buildings in the new capital.

CAPTION: Edwin Waller's original design of Austin consisted of a grid with a central square (Capitol Square) and four smaller secondary "public squares." In 1883, the squares were named Hemphill (no longer a public square), Brush, Hamilton (now Republic) and Bell (now Wooldridge).





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Sign 3: Republic Square – Guadalupe Park and Austin’s Mexico

Austin's original Mexican-American community once enveloped Republic Square. This neighborhood, known as "Mexico," stretched from Congress Avenue to Shoal Creek, and from West 1st Street to West 7th Street. By the 1880s, the park was so popular among Mexicans living nearby that newspapers dubbed it "Mexican Park." The space often hosted concerts and dances, church fundraisers, and the annual celebration of Mexico's independence (Diez y Seis de Septiembre).

In 1907, the Catholic diocese built Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, as well as a parochial school, at the corner of West 5th Street and Guadalupe Street facing Republic Square. The square would thereafter be known as "Guadalupe Park" among local residents.

The City Plan of 1928 began the process of convincing people of color to move east of East Avenue (now I-35). The plan recommended that city services (schools, roads, utilities) be denied to people of color unless they lived within the "Negro District."

By the Great Depression, the residents of "Mexico" had moved east, along with their stores, churches, foods, and fiestas. Many from Austin's current Latino population, now residing east of I-35, can trace their lineage to Guadalupe Park and the "Mexico" neighborhood



CAPTION:

IMAGE DESCRIPTION
Our Lady of Guadalupe
Church

*****NEED ORIGINAL OR HIGH
RES SCAN*****



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Sign 4: Republic Square – The Tex-Mex Revolution

The soul of Republic Square is food, and that food is Tex-Mex. San Antonio is often credited with popularizing this cuisine. But, Austin had an equally critical role in its ascendancy.

Austin's Tex-Mex began in the *cocinas* of Latino women who lived around the square. Families in the neighborhood made tamales and Mexican candies to sell along Congress Avenue. These kitchens were the beginnings of the Tex-Mex industry that helped shape American cuisine and that thrives in Austin still.

Walker's Austex Chile Company, located adjacent to the square, distributed its Mexene chili powder and other foods throughout the nation. Children in the square played as their parents worked in the factory preparing Tex-Mex foods for the national market.

The food tradition continues today with the Sustainable Food Center's farmers' market that is held each Saturday morning at Republic Square.

CAPTION:

IMAGE DESCRIPTION

Photograph of an assembly line of women sealing, labeling and packing cans at Walker's Austex Chili Factory located at 500-502 West 3rd

