

RETURN TO THE CENTER OF THE PLAZA

Stop 9: Alamo Plaza

For the Texans, the battle was not only a devastating blow, but a total loss. The best evidence we have suggests that every able bodied male who took up arms here in defense of the Alamo died – almost all of them while fighting in combat. A few, however, were killed by execution following the battle. Santa Anna then ordered the Mexican army to gather the bodies of the Alamo defenders and burned them on 3 funeral pyres outside the walls of the compound.

Shortly after the battle, Texans were already remembering the men of the Alamo. Six weeks after this battle, Santa Anna fought another battle along the San Jacinto River, located near the modern city of Houston. This time he lost—defeated by Texans led by General Sam Houston as they furiously shouted the battle-cry: “Remember the Alamo!” The Texan victory ended the Texas Revolution and paved the way for a newly independent nation, the Republic of Texas. The Battle of the Alamo became one of the most famous battles in American history. Many people wonder why so little of the Alamo from 1836 still exists. As you can see, much has changed since the battle.

The answer to that question is tied to San Antonio’s role as a frontier community. Vacant buildings on a frontier never stood empty for very long. You’ve already seen that happen with the transition from mission to military outpost.

An important change to the compound occurred shortly after the Battle of San Jacinto. The Mexican soldiers still here knocked down what walls they could and destroyed the Alamo’s cannon before they left. The Mexican Army wanted to make it difficult for the Texans to refortify the town.

The Alamo came closest to being abandoned in the years following the Texas Revolution. Comanche Indians and the Mexican Army still posed a serious threat. The Mexican Army actually recaptured San Antonio twice in 1842. The situation remained unsettled until Texas joined the United States in 1845. With statehood came the United States Army and stability.

The United States Army needed a place to store supplies in San Antonio. In 1847, it converted the Long Barrack into a warehouse. Three years later the army placed a roof on the old church and moved in. The rounded parapet you see today was placed there by workers employed by the U.S. Army. The army left the Alamo in 1877 and moved a mile away to their new home, eventually named Fort Sam Houston.

So what happened to the rest of the compound? Samuel A. Maverick, a member of the Alamo garrison who left before the siege, actually initiated the final destruction of the old west wall. He lived in San Antonio before the war and returned after the revolution ended. In the late 1840s he bought several of the old Indian convert houses. He built his own two-story house on the corner of North Alamo and Houston Street where the Hotel Indigo is now. For years his hardware store occupied the north end of this block.

By 1882 the old mission compound had changed significantly. The City purchased the plaza and tore down the old gatehouse. A merchant acquired the Long Barrack and converted it into a general store. The State of Texas purchased the church in 1883 and designated it a memorial to the men who died at the Alamo fighting for Texas' independence. A short time later the City paved the plaza with blocks of mesquite wood, built sidewalks along the street, and even installed a fountain and public restrooms for tourists. A horse-drawn trolley car—later powered by electricity—ran through the middle of the old mission compound. As the 20th century dawned, San Antonio was no longer a frontier town. The community had evolved from a mission to a modern city.

Cenotaph:

As part of Texas's Centennial celebrations in 1936, plans were made to build a memorial for the Alamo Heroes. Sculptor Pompeo Coppini designed the Cenotaph, which means "empty tomb" and in 1939 it was erected in Alamo Plaza. For more information, visit....