

NOTE: This is not final text. Refer to the Panel Text file for revised text. This file shows the sign designs.

PARK HISTORY

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.



1869: Earliest known photograph of Republic Square looking south toward the Colorado River. Citation TBD

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.



Walker's Austex Chile Factory assembly line. Walker's factories were located immediately south of Republic Square. Citation TBD

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.



The original Our Lady of Guadalupe Church was located immediately north of Republic Square. Citation TBA