

Garden

San Antonio was criss-crossed by five major *acequias* (irrigation ditches), dug by Franciscan fathers in the seventeenth century, and became famous as a garden spot in otherwise hot, dry South Texas. One of these acequias once ran through the garden and connected the Alamo with Mission San Jose.

Cottonwood abounded in this area, and Mission San Antonio de Valero's common name, the Alamo, means "cottonwood" in Spanish. A legendary cottonwood tree, there when the Alamo fell, graced the Menger garden until the first half of this century. Buffalo, venison and other wild game were hung from the tress branches and raised and lowered by pulleys for use in the kitchen.

The garden was famous for the alligators which lived in the small pool until the 1950's after they were moved to a pool inside the main lobby. Legend says they were given to the Menger in partial payment for a bill which a hotel patron could not pay in full. Palms, loquats, mangoes, banana trees, oleanders, and other flora that thrive in San Antonio's semi-tropical climate grace the garden today.

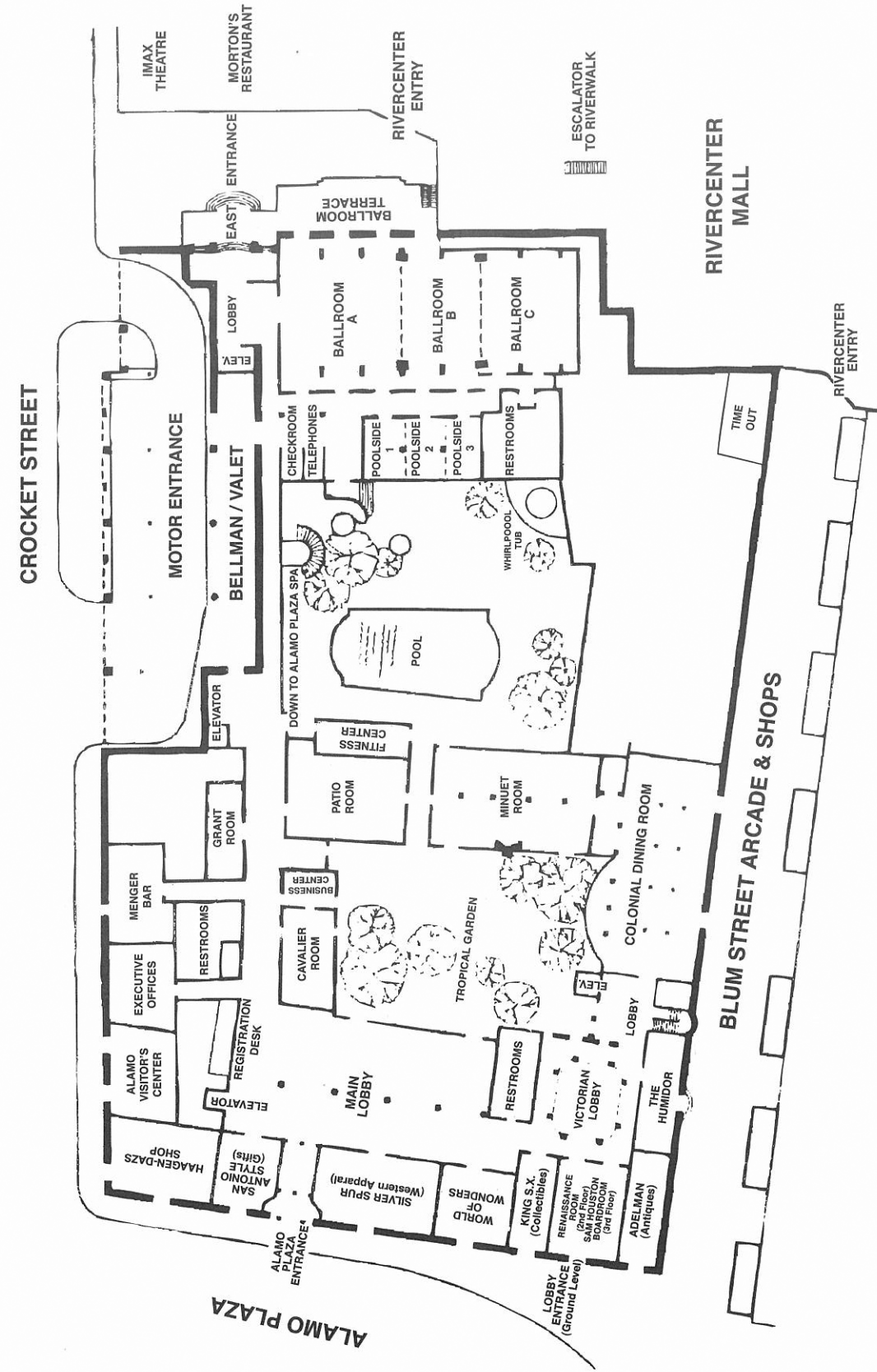
Tunnels

Underneath the first floor of the Menger is a network of tunnels. When the hotel was first established at the site of Menger's brewery, barrels of his brew were rolled through these underground tunnels from the brewery to the hotel. The hotel used large vaults in the basement under the front part of the building for storage of vast stocks of meats and other foods. Tunnels connected these vaults with the rear of the building. Wines were stored in a specially built wine cellar in the eastern part of the basement.

William Menger led reporters on a tour of the tunnels, as described in this account in the San Antonio Express: "After taking a bird's-eye view of the upper stories, the rooms and hall of which we found very comfortable and well-furnished, we descended to the large wine cellars under the building. Here we found nearly every brand of the choicest imported liquors, the quality of which we can vouch for by having indulged in frequent and deep potations. Having procured a candle, we entered a long dark tunnel leading to the brewery, where we found a large quantity of the delightful beverage. Menger's own beer, some of which we were obliged to dispense with, and could not but pronounce it 'goot'."

Chisholm Trail

In the garden The Chisholm Trail Marker was placed the summer of 2012 to commemorate the history of the cattle drives and Texas ranchers. In 1864, Scot-Cherokee Jesse Chisholm took trade to Indian camps near Wichita Kansas and a trail was made to be used for Texas cattle to be shipped to Abilene, Kansas. Between 6 and 10 million cattle and a million mustangs were driven on this route. The entire trails begins South of San Antonio up to Kansas.



Personalities

William A. and Mary Menger

The success of the Menger Hotel was due to the combined efforts of German immigrants William and Mary Menger. Mr. Menger came from Germany to Texas in 1847; Mary Baumschlueter Guenther came in 1846 at the age of 28. Her first husband died only six weeks after her arrival. The widowed Mrs. Guenther opened a boarding house at the corner of St. Mary's and Commerce Streets, where William Menger was among her patrons. The couple was married in 1851 and together they operated the boarding house, moving to Alamo Plaza in 1855. The brewery established by William Menger near the boarding house became a huge success; this success led to the founding of the Menger Hotel in 1859.

William Menger was considered charitable toward the poor and active in the civic life of the city. He was responsible for bringing the first steam fire engine to San Antonio about which the San Antonio Express noted, "Mr. Menger has exhibited a public spirit in adorning our city (with the his hotel) and procuring a steam fire engine that entitles him to the thanks of all of us."

The hotelier became seriously ill in March of 1871. The Daily Express commented, "Our community can ill spare a gentleman of such public spirit, such enterprise, such generosity, such wonderful energy." He died that evening, and his funeral procession the next day was said to have been a mile long. The Mayor, City Aldermen, and representative of many civic and cultural organizations were present. Following his death, Mary Menger continued to manage the hotel, but by 1881, she and other family members sold the hotel and property to Major J. H. Kampmann for \$110,000.

Theodore Roosevelt

In 1892, Teddy Roosevelt paid his first visit to the Menger at age 29 while on a trip to hunt javelina. In 1898, he returned with Colonel Leonard Wood to organize the first U.S. Volunteer Calvary, the "Rough Riders," which fought in Cuba during the Spanish-American War. Among those who came with them for this purpose were socialites from New York City. The Gilded Age millionaires who signed the register and attracted a great deal of attention include Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr., Hamilton Fish, Reginald Ronalds, and Woodbury Kane. In 1905, some of these unlikely Rough Riders returned for a Menger Reunion Banquet prepared by famed Menger master chef Adolph Metrovich. The meal featured soft shell crab a l'Americaine, Cailles en aspic, and Ris d'agneau aux pointes de'asperges.

Sidney Lanier

Sidney Lanier was a frequent Menger Hotel patron when he came to San Antonio to enjoy the climate and sulphur baths. He often entertained guests with musical recitals on his flute, which he played with notable success. "San Antonio is charming," he wrote to his wife. "The hotel at

which I am stopping is of stone with a fine paved court in the rear, after the manner of the Cuban hotels, and fair broad pavement in front where we sit in arms chairs and look upon the Alamo Plaza."

Gutzon Borglum

The famous sculptor Gutzon Borglum, who designed the Mount Rushmore Memorial in South Dakota, kept his studio at the Menger for many years. Here he designed a large scale model used for casting a bronze memorial to the Old Trail Drivers of Texas, depicting a close-crowding herd of longhorns following two mounted trail drivers.

Captain Richard King

Cattle baron Richard King, who, in the 1840's established the fabled million-acre King Ranch south of San Antonio, held a large cotillion party at the Menger in July of 1860. Captain King later died at the Menger in 1885. Funeral services were held in the Menger parlors, with services by the minister of San Antonio's First Presbyterian Church.

Oscar Wilde

Oscar Wilde stayed at the Menger in 1882 while traveling through the United States on a lecture tour. Wilde gave a lecture at the Turner Theater on "Decorative Art" and visited San Antonio's oldest landmarks, the mission. He later commented, "Those old Spanish churches with their picturesque remains and domes and their handsome carved stonework, standing amid the verdure and sunshine of the Texas prairie, gave me a strange thrill of pleasure." Wilde was described as flamboyant, wearing a lace-frilled black velvet coat, knee-length trousers, scarlet stockings, and silver-bucklet slippers as he strolled through the Menger patio sipping spiked lemonade and smoking long, foreign cigarettes.

William Sidney Porter ("O. Henry")

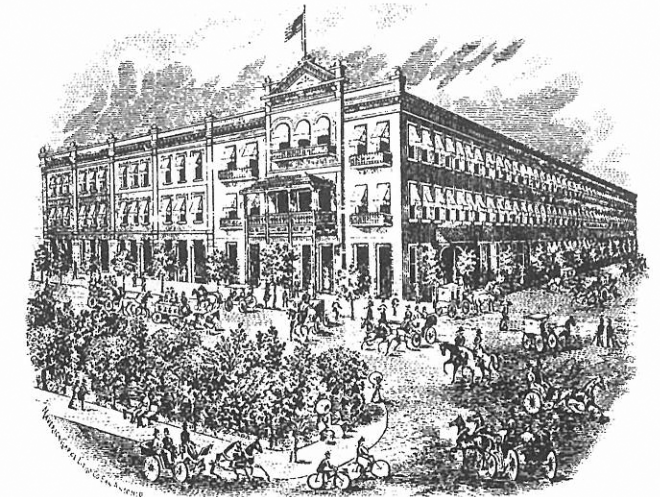
O. Henry mentioned the Menger in several of his works. In "Seats of the Haughty," he writes: "We stopped in San Antonio long enough for Solly to buy some clothes, and eight rounds of drinks for the guests and employees of the Menger Hotel, and order four Mexican saddles with silver trimmings and white Angora *suaderos* to be shipped down to the ranch."

THE HISTORIC MENGER HOTEL

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A Self Guided Tour



Building Chronology of the Menger Hotel

1859 The original two story, fifty room hotel was built. The hotel quickly became so popular that a three-story addition, directly behind, was built soon after.

1871 William A. Menger died.

1874-75 Additional property was acquired to the north.

1881 The hotel was sold to Major J. H. Kampmann. The kitchen was relocated and a third story added to the Alamo Plaza portion, along with a three-story addition to the north.

1887 A fourth story was added to Blum Street side. Improvements included the addition of an artesian well, steam laundry, electric lights, and steam elevator.

1897 The kitchen was remodeled and new fixtures and furnishings were added to the dining room.

1899 A fifty-room addition was built.

1909 The noted architect, Alfred Giles, made extensive changes to the hotel. To the exterior, an ornamental marquee of ground floor and iron was added. The original (south) lobby was embellished with a new marble floor and Renaissance-revival style details, including Corinthian columns and filigreed balustrades.

1912 Architect Atlee B. Ayres was commissioned to renovate the dining room and add thirty rooms.

1943 The hotel was purchased by W. L. Moody, Jr.

1949-50 A four-story, 125-room addition was built, and a new lobby and air conditioning throughout the hotel was added. The bar was moved to the Crockett Street side.

1953 The Menger Patio Club and swimming pool were added.

1966-67 A five-story addition was built.

1988 A massive restoration of the hotel was completed. A new ballroom, several meeting areas, and 33 rooms and suites were added.

1990 Colonial Dining Room restoration.

1992 Extensive renovation and restoration of the original 1859 building and retail spaces.

A Suggested Self-Guided Tour of The Menger Hotel

Although much of the architecture, history, appointments and artifacts found at the Menger Hotel certainly qualify as museum-quality, it remains a public hotel - as it has been since 23 years after the fall of the Alamo.

Before beginning a tour of the Menger's delightful space, study the historic photographs and other memorabilia in the glass cases in the main lobby and other public areas. These include fascinating pre-1900 photographs of the original registration desk, the Victorian lobby, Colonial Dining Room, basement kitchen, storeroom and laundry.

Exterior of the Hotel

The Menger has evolved into the rambling structure of today over a period of many years, and four of San Antonio's most important architects of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. John Fries, Alfred Giles, Atlee B. and Robert M. Ayres are associated with the design of the Menger as you see it today.

The original, fifty-room hotel built in 1859 is the two-story limestone building located at the southwest corner of the block. As you look at the hotel from Alamo Plaza, the original part is to the right. Its classical design is attributed to John Fries, San Antonio's first architect of note, who is credited with repairing the shattered ruins of the Alamo in 1850, giving the building its distinctively shaped parapet. Fries also designed the City Market House in 1858, now demolished and the Casino Hall building of the same year, also demolished.

A glazed, iron canopy across the main floor, support on iron columns, forms the balcony for the second floor with original 1869 railings. The cantilevered, tile-roofed porch over the second floor is supported on thin iron columns. Initially, shutters, rather than awnings, provided shade from the strong west sun. The canopy was added when the hotel was remodeled in 1909 by architect Alfred Giles. Interestingly, Blum Street, to the immediate right of the building, served as a wagon yard for stage coaches, wagons, carriages, and horses.

Atlee B. and Robert M. Ayres were commissioned in the 1950's to design the portions to the north of the original structure, including the main lobby.

Main Lobby

The main lobby was built during the 1949-53 improvements to the hotel, which also added a 125-room, four-story wing and swimming pool to the east. The lobby addition necessitated the removal of part of the portion of the building constructed in the 1880s. The display case surrounding the fireplace contains interesting photographs and memorabilia from the Menger past.

Empire-style Credenzas

On the east wall, near the glass garden wall, is a fine example of a walnut Empire-style credenza from England, ca. 1830. The drawer pulls are a later addition.

On the west wall there hangs a four-panel painted screen of French original, executed circa 1800-1930. The scenes are typical of the late Baroque style. The wooden frames are ornately carved and originally to the oil canvases.

Oil Painting 1902

This painting, depicting a woman in triumph standing on a roped calf, is by Chicago painter Frank Lewis Van Ness. The frame, which is of the period, is of wide, flat oak and made for this painting. Van Ness, a well-known portrait and genre painter at the turn of the entry, studied under leading portrait artist G.P.A. Healy.

The French Vitrine (display cabinet)

A ca. 1900 reproduction of the Louis XV style. It is crafted of gilt bronze, ormolu-mounted mahogany. In the cabinet is a valuable collection of Chinese porcelain, ca. 1940-60, referred to as role medallion-ware because of the use of the famille rose palette combined with rich decoration and extensive use of gilding. It was made in China, mainly for export to Europe and North America. Its condition is excellent. It likely was purchased by William Menger on one of his buying trips to Europe.

Victorian Lobby

This magnificent three-story space is the original 1859 lobby of the Menger. Called the Victorian lobby because of its roots in the second half of the nineteenth century, actually it reflects the 1909 remodeling, designed by noted San Antonio architect Alfred Giles. Giles transformed the simple utilitarian space into a grander, neoclassical one which showed the influence of the neoclassical style which was popular then.

The room is oval in plan and dominated by eight Corinthian columns. In historic photographs, taken prior to the 1909 remodeling, the columns shown are of cast iron and are fewer in number. The early columns were simply enclosed by the more up-to-date plaster columns in the neoclassical style, and several columns were added to create symmetry, an important characteristic of neoclassical design. The new columns are ornamented with festoons, garlands, and modillions which are painted to resemble stone. Decorative wrought iron scrollwork comprising the balustrade is from the earlier Victorian period.

The leaded skylight was added as part of the 1909 alterations, as was the decorative tile floor, which extended into the Colonial Room Restaurant. Tile continued to be used frequently in public spaces during this period because of its durability and decorativeness.

Many pieces of furniture in this lobby and throughout the Menger are believed to have been purchased by William Menger on his frequent buying trips to New York and Europe in the 1860's.

The Seth Thomas Clock

An early example of a double dial calendar tall clock. The clock, which was custom-made and matched a suite of furniture, has a case made of oak, handsomely decorated with giiffin heads. Two of its matching pieces were “discovered” in the hotel's basement and restored.

French Cabinet

A stunning example of elaborate inlay and ebonized marquetry, characteristic of Napoleon III-revival style which was popular ca. 1865.

Victorian Walnut Settee

In the Empire style and showing the influence of the High Victorian and rococo, it is a rare example of an American piece from the 1870's.

“Musicians in a Wine Cellar”

Oil on Canvas

ca. 1860-80

This Louis O. Kurz painting, depicting a woman dispensing wine to two musicians, is by an Austrian artist born in 1833. Kurz was a mural, scene, and decorative artist who came to the United States in 1848. He was a founder of the Chicago Art Institute and served in the Union Army. The frame is of lovely carved wood and gesso, combining over a dozen linear border patterns, including ears of corn.

“Venting Cattle on the Frisco System”

Oil on Canvas

1902

This F. L. Van Nees painting portrays cattle herding, roping and branding. An interesting note is that this painting was used in the scenery for the film, Giant, which starred James Dean, Rock Hudson, and Elizabeth Taylor.

Colonial Room Restaurant

Built as an immediate addition to the original hotel, the Colonial Room Restaurant was remodeled by noted San Antonio architect Atlee B. Ayres in 1912 to reflect the prevailing neoclassical style of that time. As part of the remodeling, the original cast iron columns were enclosed by wooden ones in the Greek Revival style, and carved wooden dentils, arched window openings, and other decorative millwork, and additional mirrors were added.

The resulting decor is typical of other fine old hotels of that era such as the Algonquin in New York City and the Bellevue-Stratford in Philadelphia. The modernization may have occurred to counter the new hotels built in 1909, the St. Anthony, The Crockett, and the Gunter.

The unusual plaster mantelpiece around the fireplace features two caryatids, each topped by an Ionic capital. Decorative scrollwork and a tablet with a nymph motif further embellish the mantel, which originally was painted to resemble wood graining.

Many elaborate balls and parties, hosted by San Antonio's social and political elite, were held in this room. Often Spanish moss and other atmospheric flora were hung from the columns to create setting for parties with elaborate themes. Among the many celebrities who have dined here are Presidents Grant and McKinley, General Robert E. Lee, and French actress Sarah Bernhardt.

The Colonial Room of the Menger Hotel has been in continuous use since it was opened. Many of the Menger chefs came from Europe to create dishes which reflected the German, Mexican, French, and American blend of cultures found within San Antonio. By the late 1860's, the hotel had firmly established its culinary reputation. Known for its wild game, the menu featured such exotic dishes as wild turkey stuffed with chestnuts, potted antelope, and dried buffalo tongue. Soup made from soft-shell turtles caught from the nearby San Antonio River was one of the dining room specialties. The Menger's famous mango ice cream has remained on the menu for over a hundred years.

Renaissance Room

Despite its name, this elegant second floor reception room is most strongly influenced by the neoclassical style, popular in America from about 1790-1830 and reborn as Colonial Revival architecture after the influential Chicago World's Fair of 1893. The decorative plaster ornamentation on the ceiling features abstracted urns, shells, lyres, and anthemion (honeysuckle) motifs. The mantelpiece is identical to the one found in the Colonial Room Restaurant.

The Menger Bar

In 1887 Major Hermann Kampmann decided that a new taproom should be built within the hotel as a replica of the House of Lords Pub in London. The architect, who was sent to England to examine the pub, installed a paneled ceiling of cherrywood, booths and beveled mirrors from France, and decorated glass cabinets at a cost of \$60,000. The cost and craftsmanship of the bar reflect the contribution it made to the life of the hotel. Specialties of the bar included mint juleps served in silver tumblers in hot weather, and hot rum toddies in the winter.

It was in this bar that Teddy Roosevelt recruited many of his Rough Riders, volunteers for the first American volunteer cavalry that fought in Cuba during the Spanish-American War. Many of those who traveled with him for this purpose were members of New York's elite, including Hamilton Fish and Cornelius Vanderbilt.

During Prohibition, the famous bar was disassembled. It was moved, piece by piece, to the current location.

Events and Parties at the Menger

In 1871, the Menger was host to Generals William T. Sherman, Ekin, Card and Carlton. A fifteen-gun salute on Alamo Plaza in front of the hotel greeted the four.

In 1877, a two-day celebration of the arrival of the “iron horse” to San Antonio, the railroad, was launched at the Menger. Texas Governor R. H. Hubbard addressed the crowd gathered on Alamo Plaza for the event from a front balcony of the hotel. San Antonio Mayor J. M. French, the president of the railroad, the U.S. cavalry and many others joined the governor inside the Menger for the public reception honoring the arrival of the railroad.

In 1906, the Menger was the setting for a debutante ball given by Clare Driscoll in honor of Miss Eda Kampmann and Katherine Yoakum. The San Antonio Express society editor described the honorees as “two of the season's most beautiful and interesting debutantes, both of whom belong to San Antonio families of great importance.” Miss Driscoll, credited with saving the Alamo from demolition, wore a gown of yellow net over taffeta, yellow flowers in her hair, and exquisite lace and jewels. She carried a bouquet of white hyacinths and maidenhair fern.