

Crossing Hays Street Bridge:

Visiting the Hays St Bridge

You've seen tons of pictures of the Hays Street Bridge, and finally decide to pay it a visit. After climbing up the stairs on Cherry Street, you look around, and a cool breeze hits you. At this height, the massive and beautiful structure that frames our city is revealed, surrounding you in the steel structure that has the same architectural underpinnings as the Eiffel Tower.

While many enjoy the view *from* the bridge looking towards downtown, the most iconic views *of* the historic bridge can actually be seen at street level from the corner of Cherry and Lamar Streets, looking up. Dozens of yards away, the Hays Street Bridge stands tall, with both arches fully outlined.

There's a plaque at the start of the bridge that provides some information about its importance as a historic landmark; but that's just the tip of the iceberg of the entire complete history of this bridge.

Origins of the Bridge

The Hays Street Bridge first became a landmark when it was moved to San Antonio in 1910. Its origins are debated - several say the two distinct arches came from the Phoenix Bridge Company in Pennsylvania, while others believe they were purchased from Morgan Steamship Lines in Louisiana. Wherever its origin, this bridge is a relic of the past, with both companies dating back to the mid 1800s.

At the time, San Antonio's railway cut through the city. It crossed routes into the city from the East side. Construction of the bridge, however, provided a much needed connection for the community, as it provided a route over the busy railways into downtown.

After the bridge had fallen into disrepair in the 1980s, a group of community activists came together to prevent the beloved bridges' demolition. Later known as the Hays Street Restoration Group, the community group procured a \$2.89M grant from the Federal Highway Administration.

Following the grant, the group established a "memoran-

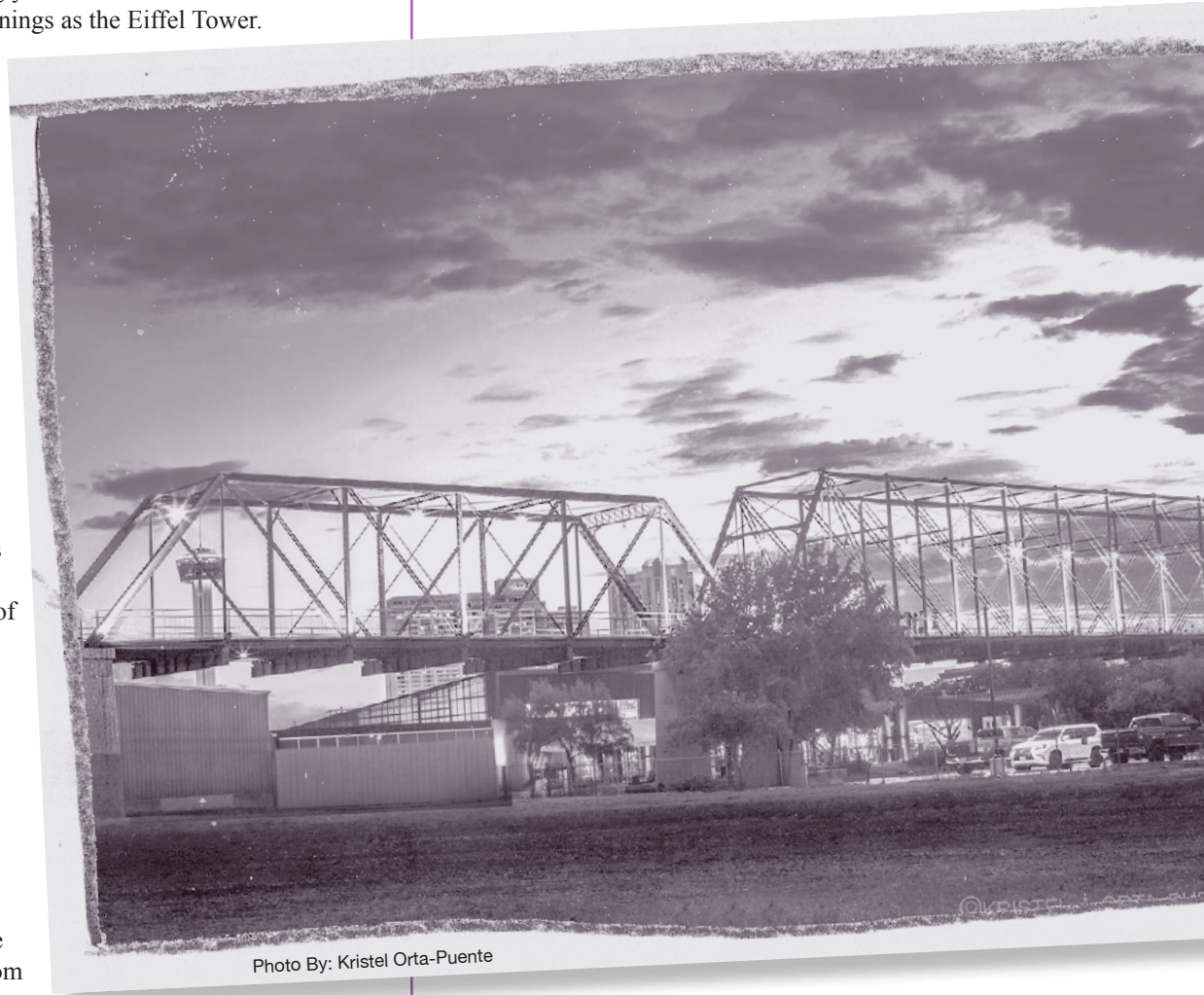


Photo By: Kristel Orta-Puente

dum of understanding" with the city in 2002, wanting to ensure that the land surrounding the bridge would be designated as a park. The group received monetary donations as well as a land donation of 1.7 acres next to the bridge in 2007 by the Dawson family with the understanding that the land would be turned into a public park.

Later, in 2012, the bridge received recognition and placement on the National Register of Historic Places. This act signified the importance of the architecture, and protects it from future fears of demolition.

Obscuring historical sites ignores the racial and cultural ties communities have to those landmarks, and instead subverts an important part of their identities in favor of commercial and capital profit.

A Walk Down Memory Lane

Written by Elyse Andrews and Cathy Terrace

The Contemporary Visual Importance of the Hays St Bridge

While no longer for vehicular transportation, the Hays St. Bridge is now widely used by the community. Joggers, and dog walkers alike travel across, taking in the views of the surrounding neighborhoods.

Here, San Antonio's beautiful skyline can be enjoyed from the bridge, which acts as a frame for the city. With its unique view, the Hays St. Bridge became a favorite site for taking pictures for celebrations such as graduations, quinceañeras and weddings. Many public events also occur on the bridge—from parties to yoga and performances.

Named one of the “best big cities to live and work as a moviemaker” in 2018, San Antonio has a plethora of historic landmarks, including the bridge. Even the San Antonio Film Commission includes multiple perspectives of the Hays St. Bridge in their location gallery.

To fully capture the beauty of the bridge paired with the Tower of the Americas, requires standing at street level on the corner of Cherry and Lamar. From here, San Antonians can appreciate the bridge's full form - and many participated in an Instagram competition this summer.

Just like the outline of the Alamo and the Tower of the Americas, the Hays St. Bridge is a recognizable symbol in San Antonio. Even the Neighborhood Association of Dignowity Hill clearly sees this—their logo incorporates that incredible view from Cherry and Lamar.

Unfortunately, this priceless view that Dignowity Hill and all of San Antonio take pride in will cease to exist for photographers, filmmakers, and the public following the construction of the Bridge Apartments

on Cherry and Lamar.

Reality of Development

So let's revise our introduction from before: You've seen tons of pictures of the Hays St. Bridge, and finally decide to pay it a visit. Walking up Cherry St., a large apartment building towers over you - you're in the right place, but it's hard to know for sure from street level, until you're almost under the bridge.

After climbing up the stairs on Cherry Street, you continue to sweat under the stagnant summer heat, with a noticeable lack of breeze.

As you walk across the bridge, the city skyline looks amazing—but the giant apartment complex to your right is difficult to ignore.

As it draws your attention, you stare into the four-story tall apartment complex. The rooms seem like they're right next to you, as though the space is crowded. The height of the neighboring building makes you forget how high up you are—it kind of diminishes the bridge's presence.

Once built, this development effectively erases one of the most iconic landmarks in San Antonio. Similar views of the bridge will essentially be privatized - the view shown here, for instance, will only be available from the complex itself.

Final Thoughts

In San Antonio, the only location with viewshed protection is the Alamo. There are recent plans to extend viewshed protection to other locations in San Antonio, but unfortunately the bridge is not able to be considered for this round of approvals.

Our community clearly sees value in the Hays St. Bridge; it's why it's still standing. The worth of San Antonio's historic landmarks does not simply reside in the structures, but also the space around them, and the relationship of the communities around them.

This bridge is a reflection of the growth of San Antonio throughout the twentieth century, and should absolutely be elevated for the public to see how it has served its community. Obscuring historical sites ignores the racial and cultural ties communities have to those landmarks, and instead subverts an important part of their identities in favor of commercial and capital profit.

The Hays St Bridge, like the many other beautiful and recognizable structures in San Antonio, deserves to be viewed in full. It is a public space, one meant to be preserved not only for this community, but for the entire city. It demands our attention.

Editor's note: *For an update on the Hays St. Bridge case against the City of San Antonio read the editorial announcing the Texas Supreme Court will hear the case that will determine what will happen with the land at Cherry and Lamar streets.*

