

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Zilker Park Caretaker's Lodge
Austin, Travis County, Texas

Narrative Description

The 1929 Zilker Park Caretaker's Lodge is located just northeast of Barton Springs Pool, and just south of the Barton Springs parking lot and Andrew Zilker Road. The building is a single story, front facing 'I' plan with slightly protruding paired gables and wood shingles. It is wood framed on concrete footings, and veneered with uncut field Texas field stone in a 'peanut brittle' pattern. It is a strong example of Rustic Style Architecture as well as Tudor Revival, both popular in the first half of the 20th century.

The 1929 Zilker Park Caretaker's Lodge has already been listed as a contributing structure within the Zilker Park National Register Historic District, recognized by the National Register of Historic Places in 1997. Most of its contemporary surrounding structures have been demolished and replaced, though all the buildings historically associated with the site of the Lodge remain. The Lodge is a single story wood framed building on concrete footings, in a front facing twin gabled 'I' plan. Each gable slightly projects and features plain verge boards. It is veneered in uncut Texas field stone in a 'peanut brittle' pattern.

Largely hidden from view by the privacy fencing and vegetation that surround the site, the Caretaker's Lodge is bordered on the south by the Zilker Zephyr train tracks, on the west by the Zilker Park Playground, and on the east by the park's maintenance facility. The site's north border abuts the Barton Springs Parking Lot and Andrew Zilker Road.

The west facade was the intended entrance to the lodge. It features an inset face between two slightly projecting forward facing paired gables. Each of the gables is symmetrical: the northern most gable features a vent at the top of the gable and a set of double hung wood sash 6/6 windows. A stone veneer chimney rises just south of this gabled face, capped by a rectangular chimney pot. The front door is just south of the center of the facade, made of red painted wood. The southern most gable is again symmetrical and features a bank of three double hung wood sash 9/9 windows. All windows have stone masonry sills.

The north facade was the exterior wall of the garage and features only a single small 6/6 pans sash window at approximately six feet. A small cylindrical vent protrudes from the shingle roof just above this window, and steel gutters run along the bottom of the roof's edge. A small fenced paddock has been built here to enclose garbage and recycling bins.

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The east facade of the Lodge, like its west facade, features paired gables. The northern most gable features two overhead paneled garage doors that are no longer functional. The top row of each door are windows, while the rest of the doors are red painted wood. In the bay created by the two protruding gables are a small patio and second entrance. The door is centered on the facade, and flanked on either side by a 9/9 double hung sash window. On the southern most protruding gabled face, a vent at the top of the gable and a 12/12 double hung sash window is centered on the face.

The south facade features three banks of windows. Two 12/12 double hung wood sash windows flank a smaller 6/6 window that is central on the facade. An air conditioning unit has been installed on the far western side of the facade, resting on a concrete footing.

The original layout of the cottage as designed by Hugo Koehne included two bedrooms and a small bathroom connecting them on the the south side of the main living space, and a small kitchen and attached garage to the north of it. The garage was originally accessible only from the outside, and off the the garage there was a small utility room that also had an exterior door on the north facade. Little record exists of the renovations done to the cottage before 2014, but at one point the garage was enclosed to create additional living space, and a door was added in the northern east-facing gable, as is evidenced in photographs.

The new interior of the lodge reflects its original use as a single family home, but has been fully converted into a workspace for the Austin Parks and Recreation department after a renovation in 2014. This renovation included relocating the restroom and kitchen in order to create an ADA compliant bathroom, and reducing the size of the original bathroom to make the bedrooms into larger office spaces.

The entrance from the west facade opens into the main living area of the cottage. Directly across the room is the door and two window looking out of the eastern facade. The room has laminate flooring, and is drywalled with white trim. Recessed lighting and ductwork have been installed. In the northwestern corner of the main room, the original stone fireplace and mantle were preserved, but hearthstones at the base of the fireplace were removed and replaced with stone tile. Beyond the fireplace, an open doorway leads into a small kitchenette. This was the location of the original kitchen, but the walls separating it from the closet and garage have been removed, creating an open living and working space with the kitchenette on the western wall, and an ADA compliant bathroom in the northwestern corner. On the northeastern wall where two garage doors were originally are only eight windows at about six feet of height.

On the southern side of the main living room, three doors open into three small rooms. The original restroom, center, has been reduced so that the bedrooms on either side could be converted into larger office spaces. The bathroom has been converted into space for electrical, security and data equipment, as well as lockers for the Park Rangers. A single 6/6 double hung sash window is centered in the room.

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In the southwestern corner of the cottage is a bedroom with a window on both the south and west wall. The western facing window is a bank of one 9/9 and two 9/6 double hung sash windows, while on the southern wall there is a single 12/12 double hung sash window. In the southeastern corner of the room, a similar bedroom has a 12/12 double hung sash window on the southern wall and the eastern wall.

In 1960, a cold war era demonstration fallout shelter was constructed on the north eastern corner of the site, where its concrete entrance and protruding ventilation shaft are still visible. The concrete stairwell entrance rises above the ground by about 16 inches, and is covered in a sheet of galvanized steel with a padlock securing it. After descending the concrete stairs, a long passage takes a sharp left turn into a small room with concrete walls. These walls are by design eight inches thick, reinforced by steel rebar. In the main room of the shelter, the far wall features built in cupboards with a fold down table, while the wall to the left features a small bench and a bed that folds down from the wall to be supported by chains on either end at approximately 4 feet above the ground. The walls were painted taupe so as to be welcoming, and paint colors like yellow and sienna were chosen for style.

Unfortunately, about four to six inches of standing water currently fill the shelter. While it has been unchanged by renovation or restoration, it will require intervention before it is safe to be visited or shown by the Park Service.

The current condition of the exterior of the Zilker Caretaker's Lodge site is excellent, especially as it has recently undergone an extensive renovation during which great attention was paid to the historic characteristics of its exterior. Much of the original workmanship is present and well preserved on the exterior of the cottage, most notably the Texas uncut stone siding in its 'Peanut Brittle' pattern. The roof was recently redone with a more accurate hardwood shingling, as opposed to composite shingling that had been present before. There is a small gutter leak or runoff that is causing some deterioration and discoloration near the chimney on the western facade.

Unfortunately, aside from the original fireplace, the interior of the cottage bears little resemblance to the original. However, the integrity of the exterior is very strong and many small changes made to its facades over time have been restored to their original state. Because the cottage was architect designed and we have access to its blueprints, it is easy to determine which features are most accurate and guide restoration. Its footprint and facades remain almost identical to Kuehne's original designs, and even though the garage doors are no longer functional, they remain present on the facade. The recent renovation, in addition to restoring the roof, removed electrical meters and equipment from the south facade of the cottage and consolidated them on the western face where they would be less visible. Renovation allowed much of the electrical equipment to be relocated indoors. On all facades, most if not all of the original stone veneer and mortar are present. The original front door was refinished and reused, with the exception of the lock and handles which were modernized. Wherever possible, the original windows were refinished and rehung. Where the

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windows could not be restored, they were duplicated to the best of the renovators ability. Following a break in, another window on the western facade had to be recreated in 2015. Aside from the addition of a sidewalk to the front door and an outdoor classroom in the front lawn, the building bears a striking familiarity in feeling to the original.

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Statement of Significance

The Zilker Park Caretaker's lodge was designed in 1929 by Austin area architect Hugo F. Kuehne and built later that year before the city's landmark swimming hole, Barton Springs, opened for the season. The first known resident caretaker, Buster Robinson, and his family moved into the lodge in 1935. The lodge was occupied by the caretakers or superintendents of the park until 2010, including Buster's son Jack who also raised his children there from 1964-1978. Veneered in local Texas stone, it still sits in its original place just north of the Barton Springs Pool. Now in use as the the Zilker Park Rangers' Headquarters, the Lodge is eligible under criterion A and C of the National Register for the significant role Zilker Park and its stewards played in the development of city's park system, as well as for its excellent example of the Tudor Revival and Park Rustic Styles and architect Hugo Kuehne's impact on the city.

Development At Barton Springs

By the time the first Grist Mill was built on the shore of Barton Springs, it had long been a pilgrimage site for Native Americans. Seven springs feed the pool and keep it cool as the waters flow into the Colorado River.¹ When the city of Austin acquired the land from A.J. Zilker in 1917, it had already served as a military encampment, local bathing hole, a sawmill and a much sought after source of fresh water for early Spanish and Anglican settlers.² Since then the springs have transformed into the heart of the metropolitan park Austinites now know, and many of those changes were watched over by those living in the Caretaker's Lodge.

At the beginning of the 20th century, with the bounty from a thriving artificial ice business, Andrew Zilker began to acquire property around the springs. In 1903, it is likely he personally fund-

¹ Barton Springs Pool Master Plan: Prepared for City of Austin Parks and Recreation. Austin, TX: Limbacher & Godfrey Architects, 2008.

² McGilvray, Julie D. Zilker Park Cultural Landscape Report. Master's thesis, The University of Texas At Austin, 2012.

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ed the construction of the amphitheater around Eliza Springs, in honor of his membership in the Elks Lodge #201.³ This development to the springs was one of the first major construction projects to be completed for the public's use, and many would follow. After the death of his wife in 1916, Zilker approached the Austin School Board with the proposal that he donate the land directly surrounding the springs to the public. His hopes in this donation were that the city would purchase the land from the school board for use as a public park, thus ensuring both new public lands and new educational standards for Austin Citizens. The voters approved of the public purchase of Zilker's land, and after a final 3-2 vote by the city council, Zilker officially passed the deed to the city of Austin.

The debate on how to best use the site began almost immediately. In 1918, the City of Austin began discussing development at Barton Springs with Mrs. James S Myrick, who would pay the city for the privilege to develop a bathhouse and sell swimsuits and concessions at the site.⁴ The public pushed back quickly, arguing that if anyone should profit from the site, that it be the public.⁵ This was the beginning of a surge of interest in public park land in Austin that would see the Barton Springs Pool rapidly developed. Despite the city's claim they lacked the funds to properly improve the land, the springs would be a thriving and profitable city park by 1925. The Austin Water, Light and Power department headed by Commissioner C.N. Avery took over the park in 1919⁶, and in 1920 called for bids on the construction of a concrete trap dam above the springs.⁷

Austin called for bids on the design and construction of their own two story bathhouse and dance pavilion in 1922. When bids came in as high as \$25,000, consulting architect Hugo Franz Kuehne was asked to revise the design so that cost might be lowered.⁸ Construction on Kuehne's new bathhouse and pavilion was well underway by April of 1923, and was expected to be finished by the time school let out that spring.⁹

"Business is picking up at the Barton Springs Municipal Swimming Pool," wrote the Statesman in 1923.¹⁰ On Average, more than 600 bathers were visiting the pool daily, and Commissioner

³ McGilvray, Julie D. Zilker Park Cultural Landscape Report. Master's thesis, The University of Texas At Austin, 2012.

⁴ "Bathhouse for Barton Springs." 1918. The Statesman. Mar 08

⁵ "Will discuss bathhouse at springs." 1918. The Statesman. Mar 14.

⁶ "\$10,000 Expenditure to Make Barton Springs Playground of State: 200,000 visit Austin Park." 1925. The Austin American. Feb 8.

⁷ "Barton Springs Dam Bids Called." 1920. The Austin Statesman. Jan 4.

⁸ "Construction Bids on Barton Springs Pavillion Too High." 1922. The Austin Statesman Dec 19, 12.

⁹ "Work of Improving Barton Springs is Progressing Fast." 1923. The Austin Statesman. Apr 22, 12.

¹⁰ "City May Insure Hundreds Who Swim in Barton Springs." 1923. The Austin Statesman. June 14.

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Avery recommended the city take out an insurance policy to protect the city from any damages.¹¹ By 1925, bathers were again visiting at an all time high, breaking all previous records.¹² Despite the city's earlier concerns, the cost of admittance to the Barton Springs Pool had proved profitable enough to operate the entirety of the picnic park around it. Mr. Avery's report to the city claimed that in May of 1925, the bathhouse and concessions stand had taken in more than \$3,000, while paying only about \$1000 in salaries.¹³ Avery then announced his plan to construct stone and concrete terraces and walls around the springs, and to construct more amenities for the picnickers that now frequented the park. By the beginning of the 1926 summer season, the entirety of the Barton Springs swimming hole was to be enclosed.¹⁴

When the city planning commission hired the firm of Koch & Fowler to design the plan for Austin in 1928, the firm recommended even further developments to Barton Springs Park.¹⁵ In October of 1928, the Austin Statesman reported that Barton Springs Pool would undergo great changes under the direction of City Manager Adam R. Johnson. He proposed a new concrete dam to replace the rock dam, and extend the size of the swimming hole by 150 feet.¹⁶ A photograph published in the Statesman shows the efforts to expand the channel underway in March of 1929, and expected to be complete soon.¹⁷ Johnson also asserted that the "growth of the Barton Springs Park as a recreation center also demanded the erection of a house for the keeper."¹⁸ A call for bids in the Austin Statesman dated October 26th 1928 asks for bids on the construction of the new dam and also speaks of plans for the erection of a rustic concession stand.¹⁹ While the Caretaker's Lodge is not specified in this call for bids, we know Kuehne designed both structures in April of this year, if the dates on his drawings are to be believed.²⁰ In April 1929, another article states that the contracts for the construction of a caretaker's residence and a concession stand had been officially agreed upon. 'Brydson Lumber Company was the successful bidder for the contract to build the

¹¹ "City May Insure Hundreds Who Swim in Barton Springs." 1923. The Austin Statesman. June 14.

¹² "Water Fine in Austin." 1925. The Austin Statesman. Aug 08.

¹³ "Business Booming in Barton Springs." 1925. The Austin Statesman. June 18.

¹⁴ "Extensive Improvements to be Made at Barton Springs Next Season." 1925. The Austin American. Dec 13.

¹⁵ Barton Springs Pool Master Plan: Prepared for City of Austin Parks and Recreation. Austin, TX: Limbacher & Godfrey Architects, 2008.

¹⁶ "Barton Springs To Get Many Changes." 1928. The Austin Statesman (1921-1973), Oct 02, 8.

¹⁷ "Barton Springs Coming Resort." 1929. The Austin Statesman (1921-1973), Mar 01, 11.

¹⁸ Weeg, William J. 1935. "Gala Day is Planned at Market for Over 400,000 Central Texans." The Austin Statesman (1921-1973), Jun 05, 1.

¹⁹ "Barton Springs Work to Start Nov. 15." 1928. The Austin Statesman (1921-1973), Oct 26, 14.

²⁰ Drawings. Kuehne, Hugo Franz, 1884-1963. Austin History Center, Austin, Texas.

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residence, which will cost \$4638” while “Electric wiring contracts for both buildings went to the Fox-Schmidt Company at \$335. Harper and Linscomb were awarded the contract for plumbing in the residence and R.E. Howell and Son will put in plumbing fixtures in the Concession Building.”²¹

In May of 1929, the Austin American celebrated the ‘ole swimmin hole’ opening for season, boasting that the pool was twice as large as it used to be after the old dam was torn away and it was replaced with a new, concrete wall.²² City manager Adam Johnson had overseen \$50,000 of work into improvements of the springs, most of that money being spend on new dams and locks, but also on landscaping, paving the road, and new picnic grounds. This 1929 article also mentions the construction being undertaken on the new concession building and caretaker’s house, both of which were expected to be complete no later than June.²³

In 1930, the city parks and playgrounds commission under Hugo Kuehne requested \$200,000 for work on city parks. At least \$30,000 of that amount was expected to go to Barton Springs to improve the grounds.²⁴ When in 1931 A.J. Zilker donated another parcel of land, Barton Springs park became a part of the larger Zilker Park, and the responsibilities for its management and keeping only grew.²⁵ The first known resident caretaker, B.J. “Buster” Robinson, moved into the cottage with his family in 1935.

Architect Hugo F. Kuehne

An Austin native, Hugo Franz Kuehne was born February 20th, 1884.²⁶ He received his degree in Civil Engineering from the University of Texas before moving to Boston to study architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1908. In 1910 he returned to Austin to assist in establishing the study of architecture at the University of Texas, and was named the adjunct professor in charge of the program.²⁷ An article in the Austin Statesman announcing the program praised

²¹ “Barton Springs Contracts Let By Council.” 1929. The Austin Statesman (1921-1973), Apr 25, 9.

²² “Swimmin’ Hole Bigger and Better, Opened Saturday.” 1929. The Austin American. May 5.

²³ “Swimmin’ Hole, Bigger and Better, Opened Saturday.” 1929. The Austin American (1914-1973), May 05, 1.

²⁴ “City Plans \$200,000 Allotment for Work on Parks during 1930; Council Hears Plan.” 1929. The Austin American. Sep 29, 16.

²⁵ Weeg, William J. 1935. “Gala Day is Planned at Market for Over 400,000 Central Texans.” The Austin Statesman (1921-1973), Jun 05, 1.

²⁶ Kuehne, Hugo Franz, 1884-1963. Austin History Center, Austin, Texas.

²⁷ Architecture Instruction Now Offered.” 1910. The Austin Statesman. Sep 26.

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Kuehne as a native son returning home, who was “in thorough accord with the people of his native state.”²⁸ This would be the beginning of his long and prolific career in Austin.

In 1915, Kuehne established his own private practice and was not reticent in voicing his opinions on the development of city planning and architecture in Austin. He spoke to the Rotary Club at the Driskill Hotel in August 1914 about the meaning of the business of architecture in Austin.²⁹ Only a few months later, Kuehne issues a report criticizing the placement of a boathouse in lakeside park he was developing with George S. Iredell. He condemns it as a ruthless blot on the landscape that “mars the entire landscape and bars the magnificent view up the lake from the shore.”³⁰ His letter goes on to insist that the lakeside park must be well planned, and that the park should be thoughtfully regraded and landscaped. While he does not specifically call out the ‘Rustic’ style we now associate with park architecture, this article clearly illustrates Kuehne’s thoughts on the development of public lands and what role he believes architecture should play in the landscape.

Kuehne designed several single family homes in this era of his career, most of which called upon a Classical or Colonial Revivalism. The Cox-Craddock, the Weller-Meyers-Morrison, and the Ben Barker houses in Austin all reflect this.³¹ Even when he stepped away from classical or colonial revivalism, his structures seemed stoic and symmetrical. In addition to practicing in the design of private homes, Kuehne also worked on municipal buildings. He designed the Austin Public Library, now the Austin History Center, in 1933, churches, and more than two dozen school buildings built in Austin and surrounding cities.³²

In 1928, Kuehne was asked to be a member of the newly formed Parks and Playgrounds Committee. As W.T. Caswell, the anticipated chair of the committee, was on extended holiday, it was Kuehne that Mayor P.W. McFadden asked to convene to first meeting at City Hall.³³ He presided over several referendums calling for funds to be given to the betterment of public parks, a cause he already had a long history of supporting. In 1929, he penned the designs for both the Zilker Caretaker’s Lodge as well as the new Windmill Concession stand, which was called upon to be ‘Rustic.’³⁴

²⁸ Architecture Instruction Now Offered.” 1910. The Austin Statesman. Sep 26.

²⁹ “Hugo Kuehne Will Speak.” 1914. The Austin Statesman, Aug 06.

³⁰ “Boathouse is in Wrong Place, Says Mr. Kuehne.” 1915. The Austin Statesman. Feb 1915.

³¹ Sommer, Leslie C. “Cox-Craddock House.” National Register of Historic Places nomination, 2001. Texas Historical Commission, Austin, Texas.

³² Kuehne, Hugo Franz, 1884-1963. Austin History Center, Austin, Texas.

³³ Park Board to Hold Session Wednesday” 1928. The Austin Statesman, Jun 18.

³⁴ “Barton Springs Work to Start Nov. 15.” 1928. The Austin Statesman. Oct 26.

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The Caretaker's Lodge certainly showcases some staple attributes of Tudor Revival style architecture popularized in the early part of the 20th century. Some of the most notable similarities include the paired, steeply pitched gables that dominate the western and eastern facades, the tall and narrow windows, plain verge boards and a prominent chimney.³⁵ As is common in Tudor Revival architecture after 1920, the composition of front facing gables is symmetrical.³⁶ The National Park Service Rustic Style, coined 'Parkitecture,' borrows some traits from the Tudor Revival as well as many others. The most important goal of park architecture is not to detract or distract from the natural environment.³⁷ This means a building may take differing forms depending on its environment, in pursuit of that goal. It was not unusual for Kuehne's work to feature masonry, but the 'peanut brittle' pattern he calls out in his blueprints is not seen widely in his other Austin work. It seems this was an effort to marry the style of the building to the feel of the park.

In 1960, just before his retirement from his architecture practice, the Austin City Council awarded Kuehne a plaque in recognition of his 33 years of service to the city in planning, zoning and parks.³⁸

In his nomination for the Austin's Most Worthy Citizen Award, his nominator specifically called attention to his 'rare insight and vision' in bringing about an orderly and beautiful development in the city.³⁹ He served on the Parks and Recreation Board, the Austin City Zoning Commission, the Chairman of the Austin Plan Commission, the Chairman of the Austin Planning Legislative Commission.⁴⁰

A History of Caretakers

B.J. "Buster" Robinson and his wife had five young children when they moved into the lodge in 1935. Buster had been originally hired by the newly established Recreation Department in 1928, when he was responsible for piling stones at the base of the springs to create a pool.⁴¹ In 1924,

³⁵ McAlester, Virginia Savage. *A Field Guide to American Houses: The Definitive Guide to Identifying and Understanding America's Domestic Architecture*. Random House, 2015. Pg. 449

³⁶ McAlester, Virginia Savage. *A Field Guide to American Houses: The Definitive Guide to Identifying and Understanding America's Domestic Architecture*. Random House, 2015. Pg. 450

³⁷ Tweed, William C. *Parkitecture: A History of Rustic Building Design in the National Park System: 1916-1942*. Sequoia National Park: Author, 1978.

³⁸ "Last Tribute Paid Today to Kuehne." 1963. *The Austin Statesman*. Nov 27, 17.

³⁹ "Architect Hugo F. Kuehne Nominee for Austin's most Worthy Citizen." 1953. *The Austin Statesman*. Dec 15, 7.

⁴⁰ "Architect Hugo F. Kuehne Nominee for Austin's most Worthy Citizen." 1953. *The Austin Statesman*. Dec 15, 7.

⁴¹ "Zilker Park Oral History." 2011. Austin Parks and Recreation Department.

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Buster worked for the Parks Board by coordinating with the Texas Relief Commission working to quarry stone and built picnic sites in the park. When he was named caretaker of Zilker Park in 1935, the family moved into the Caretaker's Lodge. His youngest son Jack was only five years old at the time, and Jack and his five older siblings would grow up in the park. He described the cottage as quite small, with his four older siblings sharing a room and he sleeping "wherever was convenient."⁴²

In June 1935, Robinson stood in the Caretaker's Lodge waist deep in the waters that had overflowed the Barton Springs Pool. On a phone call to the American Statesman, Robinson reported that his wife and children had fled to high ground at the Zilker Park Boy Scouts' Lodge, while Barton Springs was 'raging mad' and the water had reached as high as the dance floor of the Pavilion on its shore.⁴³ Less than two weeks later, efforts began to clean the pool, pavilion and Caretaker's Lodge so that the park might open again for the 4th of July.⁴⁴

Buster Robinson was in charge of preparing the park for its opening every spring. This involved painting walls and stones with copper sulphate to stop the growth of algae, filling and flushing out the pool, and dragging the bottom of the pool to dislodge all duckweed and moss.⁴⁵ The pool was cleaned overnight several times over the course of a summer, though it rarely resulted in the pool being closed for more than a day.⁴⁶ Beyond the needs of simply the pool, it seems that by this time the caretaker was responsible for the larger park. Buster also had to arrange for the landscaping to be cared for, picnic tables to be repaired and repainted, and the leveling the model airplane field.⁴⁷

Jack Robinson, like his father, had to deal with the dangers of floods in his position as caretaker. He recalled one day during his tenure when water levels in Barton Springs began to rise on an otherwise beautiful summer Sunday. Barton Springs employees had to help swimmers cross the lower dam while water gushed over the upper, before the whole of the springs became full and impassible.⁴⁸

⁴² "Zilker Park Oral History." 2011. Austin Parks and Recreation Department.

⁴³ Charles, E. "Family Half Marooned by Overflow at Barton. " 1935. The Austin American. Jun 16.

⁴⁴ "Barton's to be Ready July 4th: Workmen Busy Cleaning Up Pool After Flood." 1935. The Austin American. June 23.

⁴⁵ "Swimmin' Hole Faces Refurbishin'." 1955. The Austin American. Mar 13.

⁴⁶ "Barton's pool to close for 'spring cleaning'." 1960 The Austin American. Jun 05

⁴⁷ "Swimmin' Hole Faces Refurbishin'." 1955. The Austin American. Mar 13.

⁴⁸ Barnes, M. "Former Austin Parks Chief Jack Robinson 'Loved to Nurture'." 2014. McClatchy-Tribune Business News. Apr 28.

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A Community Shelter

In the 1950s, public attention was turning to the threat of a nuclear attack from Russia. When the Soviet Union successfully tested their atomic weapon in 1949, an era of intense fear began across the country.⁴⁹ An article in the *Austin Statesman* in April of 1954 tried to illustrate the severity of the threat, insisting H-bomb destruction could happen in Austin and leave decimation in its wake.⁵⁰ The article was accompanied by an image of Austin as it might be effected by a Nuclear Blast. In 1958 the paper further insisted that Texas, of all US states, had the most targetable sites in the nation.⁵¹ The attitudes in Austin were not unique, as all over the nation the conversation of how to protect the public in the event of a nuclear attack began.

In the year 1960, the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization (OCDM) oversaw a program called The National Shelter Policy.⁵² The mission was to have a prototype fallout shelter built in every state in the nation, so that citizens could be educated on the best way to protect their families. Congress made 2.5 million dollars available to this program in 1960, though it was described as a small office focusing on outreach and education.⁵³

The *Austin Statesman* reported in January of 1960 that Zilker Park would play home to two fallout shelters, one built above and another below ground.⁵⁴ Both were proposed for the property surrounding the Caretaker's Lodge, but there is no evidence the second, above ground shelter was ever built in the park. The underground shelter was built on the northeast corner of the Caretaker's Lodge site in the early months of 1960, one quarter of a mile east of the Barton Springs Bathhouse.⁵⁵ It was the first shelter for public demonstration in Texas, and the first OCDM demonstration shelter to be built in the whole of the Southwest.⁵⁶ It was said that Austin was selected as the site of the shelter because of it being the capital and also its central location within the state of Texas.

⁴⁹ "Soviet Atomic Bomb Test." Cold War Museum. http://www.coldwar.org/articles/40s/soviet_atomic_bomb_test.asp.

⁵⁰ Rogers, Bob. "City Shattered by H-Bomb! Yes, It Could Happen Here." 1954. The *Austin Statesman*. Apr 01, 1.

⁵¹ "State Said 'Best' Target of Enemy." 1958. The *Austin Statesman*. Jun 25, 15.

⁵² United States. Homeland Security. National Preparedness Task Force. Civil Defense and Homeland Security: A Short History of National Preparedness Efforts. Washington DC, 2006.

⁵³ Symposium On Human Problems In The Utilization of Fallout Shelters. Edited by George Baker, John Rohrer and Mark Nearman. Washington DC: National Academy of Sciences, 1960.

⁵⁴ "Zilker Due 2 Fallout Shelters." 1960. The *Austin Statesman*. Jan 08, 15.

⁵⁵ "Fallout Shelter Pushed for Monday Opening." 1960. The *Austin American*. April 10.

⁵⁶ "City Shelters to be Seen by Official." 1960. The *Austin Statesman*. May 5.

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The shelter at Zilker park has interior dimensions of 8 feet by 8 feet, with 8 inch reinforced concrete walls. It represents one of five ways that a government approved fallout shelter can be built. It was also the first to have custom furniture built inside, to best use the minimal space.⁵⁷ Many local contractors contributed so the model could be made very affordably, including a two weeks supply of food given by the H.E. Butt Company and the flooring given at a half off discount by the Modern Floors Company.⁵⁸

Texas Governor Price Daniel officially opened the shelter in a ceremony held on April the 11th, 1960. Also in attendance were Austin Civil Defense director Terrell Blodgett, Mayor Tom Miller, Regional Civil Defense Director Welcome Wilson and State Defense Mobilization Director James Garner.⁵⁹ Terrell Blodgett, who at the time was both the City Manager and the City Civil Defense Director, announced at this ceremony that the shelter would be available for tours every Tuesday from 1pm until 5pm, and otherwise by appointment with his office.⁶⁰ This shelter and another, privately funded in the same year in the University Hills area, would be visited by the National OCDM Director Leo Hoegh on May 13th of 1960 before he was honored in a ceremony. In the summer of 1960, a film entitled 'Target... Austin, TX' was produced by local television station KTBC in order to further educate the public on the need for preparedness in the event of a nuclear attack.⁶¹ It tells the story of three Austin Citizens on the day of a nuclear attack, including the family of Dorothy Klukis, who have built a home fallout shelter and stocked it responsibly. This short Public Service film was made throughout Austin, and any images of the Klukis Family surviving in their home fallout shelter were filmed in the Zilker Park demonstration shelter.⁶²

By 1971 there were more than 200 public fallout shelters in Austin, though there is not a record of how many private shelters might have been built into backyards or as basements in new homes.⁶³ It would seem that at least one shelter was built in the model of the Zilker Park Demonstration Shelter, as a homeowner discovered a very similar one in their backyard in 2008. Built by a

⁵⁷ "Fallout Shelter Pushed for Monday Opening." 1960. The Austin American. April 10.

⁵⁸ "Fallout Shelter Pushed for Monday Opening." 1960. The Austin American. April 10.

⁵⁹ "Model Fallout Shelter Opening Ceremony Near." 1960. The Austin Statesman. April 6.

⁶⁰ "Model Home Shelter Officially Opened Here." 1960. The Austin Statesman. April 12.

⁶¹ "Target Austin TX." Directed by Gordon Wilkinson. Performed by Cactus Pryor, Coleen Hardin, Matt Martinez. Texas Archive of the Moving Image.

⁶² "Target Austin TX." Directed by Gordon Wilkinson. Performed by Cactus Pryor, Coleen Hardin, Matt Martinez. Texas Archive of the Moving Image.

⁶³ "Nuclear Attack Alarm; From Panic to Apathy." 1971. The Austin Statesman. May 9.

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Colonel in the backyard of his West Lake Hills home, the shelter has a shockingly similar layout to the prototype constructed under the caretaker's cottage.⁶⁴

A Summary

The Caretaker's Lodge, sometimes called the Caretaker's Residence or the Caretaker's Cottage, remains one of the earliest standing structures from the boom of building and beautification that happened to Austin's park systems in the 1920s and 30s. The property is strongly associated with the development of not only Zilker Park and Barton Springs, but the city of Austin's approach to park planning and beautification as a whole. Substantial improvements were made to the springs after the city of Austin acquired the land, and the developments were happening often in tandem with other changes to the city. The decision to construct a caretaker's residence in the park tells a unique story about the value the city placed on its safety, and Buster Robinson and later Jack Robinson both were able to witness the changes that park saw. This includes the construction of a cold war era demonstration fallout shelter on the corner of the property - a site which tells the story of an era in history that is often invisible.

The Lodge also embodies the distinct characteristics of a specific focus in Hugo Kuehne's career. As an Austin darling, Kuehne's career in Austin was successful as soon as it started. As early as 1914, Kuehne was very vocal about the need to beautify and value public lands within the city. At the time that he designed the Caretaker's Lodge, he was serving on the Parks and Playgrounds Board as well as the City Planning Commission. As he typically designed private residences in the classical or colonial revival style, this single story, stone clad structure shows thoughtfulness and reservedness on Kuehne's part. It embodies key characteristics of not only the Tudor Revival Style, but also the Park Rustic Style, which was developing nationwide at this time in history. It is a unique and precious statement of Austin, and of Kuehne's work.

⁶⁴ Barnes, M. "Blast from the past." 2013. McClatchy - Tribune Business News. Oct 02.

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NPS Form 10-900

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

**Zilker Park Caretaker's Lodge
Austin, Travis County, Texas**

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