



The History of the Georgetown Art Center Building

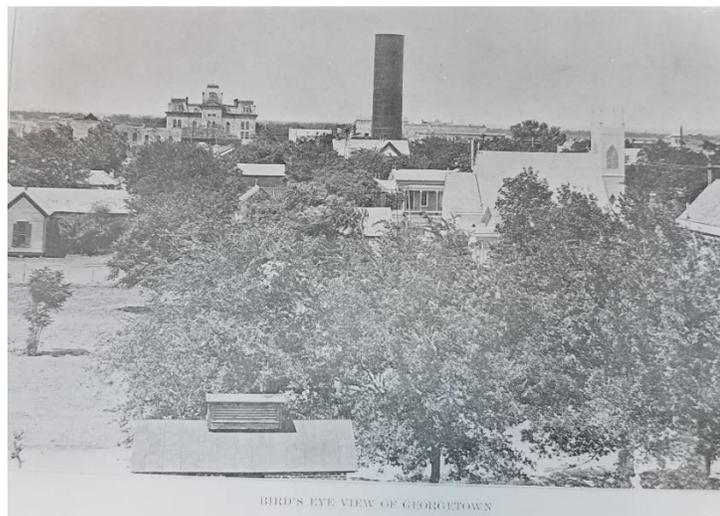
Background

Texas had only been a state for three years before the City of Georgetown was incorporated and became the Williamson County seat in 1848. Settlers came from the eastern United States and abroad to farm and ranch. The San Gabriel river and county courthouse were the focal point for commerce and governance. There were highs and lows during the last half of the 19th century, but the city established the essentials of fire protection, water, law enforcement, and city management to assist the growing population.



Municipal Services

The city's water supply, provided by Georgetown Water Company, a private entity, came from a standpipe at the corner of 9th and Main Street. The original structure was of wood, but was replaced with a standpipe of 20 feet in diameter and 100 feet tall of riveted iron plates in 1883-1884. This towering structure could be seen throughout the town and was adjacent to wooden structures that housed the essential services of the volunteer fire department, a plumbing shop, the office of the Georgetown Water Company, and a small bell tower with a brass alarm bell.



First municipal building

The land that 816 South Main sits on was privately held by at least half dozen families from 1837 to 1890. The parcel was sold to the City of Georgetown in 1891. At that time, the city posted bids for a city hall and C S Belford, a local lumberyard and business owner, was selected to design the structure. After another sealed bid process, C W Schell constructed the two-story, L-shaped building of pitched face ashlar limestone. The building completed in 1892 housed city hall and the mayor's office on the second floor, and the calaboose (Western/Southwestern term for common jail) and the marshal's office on the first floor facing 9th street. The fire department's hook, ladder, and hose cart was on the first floor facing main street with access via three bays with wrought iron gates and with storage above on the second floor.



As with many early fire departments, ultimately horses and/or mules were used to pull the equipment and the animals were housed in the bays with dirt floors. One wing of the building for city governance and one wing for fire protection and volunteer planning. The fire alarm bell, as mentioned previously,



was originally placed on a wooden tower structure, for a short while was attached to the water standpipe, and then moved the roof of building in a steel tower.

The bell was cast in St Louis in 1882. Local historians surmise that Georgetown Hook and Ladder Company and the City split the cost of the bell that is still on site today.



If you would like to view some of the volunteer requirements and by-laws for the early fire departments, please review the documents on the city website:

<https://fire.georgetown.org/about-us/>

Within a couple of decades of the building's occupancy, the city water utility was established via a bond election in 1911 and those services were moved to the historic Georgetown Light and Water Works adjacent to today's public library. For much of the 20th century, 816 Main Street was dedicated to city fire protection. The second floor facing main street became living quarters for on call firemen. A fire pole was provided so they could quickly access their equipment on the first floor. In the 1950's the building next door was built to house modern fire trucks with rollup doors and was recently sold by the

city to an Austin sandwich company. For a number of years, a pocket park with benches, flag poles, historic markers, and the St Louis fire bell has been on the corner to honor the heritage of this Fire Station 1.

Cultural District

As part of the City's Downtown Master plan to develop an arts and cultural district, the city invested in the renovation of the building into an Art Center. With support from the city's Arts & Culture Board, Georgetown Art Works was chosen to manage the center and the doors were opened in the Fall of 2013.

Some of the key features that were included in the renovation

- A. The fireman's slide pole modified to be a vibrant red interior circular stairway to the second floor



- B. The original fire alarm bell is incorporated into the splash pad seating area
- C. Circular splash pad is in the footprint of the original water standpipe



Image courtesy of the Austin American Statesman

- D. Preserved graffiti from the old jail are visible in the studio



Photo courtesy of Todd White

Current Building Status

The former firehouse living quarters on the second floor and, subsequently, city office space were made available as rental studios for artists in 2019. We think this is a great addition to the cultural district.

The Georgetown Art Works board and volunteers at the Georgetown Art Center would love for you to visit the historic space that we use each and every day

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References

Moore, Harry. (1983, October). Georgetown City Hall, Calaboose and Fire Engine House.

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Moore, Harry. (1983). Main at 9th Street Fire Station No. 1. Georgetown Public Library, Texas Reading Room, Georgetown Heritage Society records for 820 Main Street (425).

Black and white historic images courtesy of the Georgetown Public Library