

THE NEILL-COCHRAN HOUSE MUSEUM

RECKONING WITH THE PAST: THE UNTOLD STORY OF RACE IN AUSTIN



Neill-Cochran
House Museum



Why does place matter? At the Neill-Cochran House Museum, it matters because, as stewards of the only intact slave dwelling in Austin, we all have the opportunity to walk in the steps of the people who built this city, both enslaved and free. We can look at and live the past through their eyes and experiences in an immersive way impossible to replicate anywhere else.

On the pages that follow, we invite you to come along with us on a journey through Austin's history with race in order to better understand our present. And then, take the next step by joining us as we move forward in our commitment towards a better future, by supporting **Reckoning With the Past: The Untold Story of Race in Austin**.

The Neill-Cochran House Museum

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*The Cochran family with an unnamed worker, c. 1895.
Neill-Cochran House Museum, Cochran Family Collection.*



THE SLAVE QUARTERS



The story of the building of the Neill-Cochran House Museum site is the story of the building of Austin.

Yet, unlike most of Austin, the physical context for this story remains standing. While Austin has obliterated much of its physical history (and what little remains is quickly disappearing in the current building boom), the Museum is doubling its efforts to restore and preserve the home and adjacent Slave Quarters.

By preserving and sharing these buildings, the NCHM is in the unique position of being able to allow visitors - Austinites and tourists alike - to walk in the shoes of those who came before us, to repopulate our city's landscape with the people who built it.

This includes **Lam**, an enslaved boy who the School for the Blind leased from his enslaver to

teach the white boarding students how to weave baskets in the 1850s; **Jacob Fontaine**, who founded one of the first Black newspapers west of the Mississippi and who lived a block away; and **Maggie**, who worked for the Cochran family and whose handmade soap was prized by the Cochran girls.

Lam, Jacob Fontaine, Maggie, and many others who lived and labored at this site, played incredibly important roles in the life of our city, roles that have been ignored as Austin has patterned itself as a progressive and yet overwhelmingly segregated metropolis.

Reckoning with the Past: The Untold Story of Race in Austin honors the contributions of every man, woman, and child connected to our site and brings their lives forward as evidence of Austin's difficult as well as inspiring history.

The Slave Quarters, 2020. Photo credit: Dr. Tara Dudley.

AUSTIN: AMERICA'S LEAST LIKELY GREAT CITY



When master builder Abner Cook died in 1883, the Rev. R.K. Smoot eulogized: *To give you an account of his life would be in a certain sense to write the history of this city.*

And Smoot's words proved prophetic, for 140 years later this is the history of Austin we know. Names like Cook, Pease, and Waller fill our history books and lend their names to creeks, roads, and parks.

But exactly who built Austin? Who were the carpenters, painters, and laborers who constructed the first buildings of what would become one of America's largest cities?

While White men like Cook and Waller receive the credit, they were not the ones actually doing the building. There would have been no national

capital for the new government to move into in 1839 without the scores of enslaved men Waller conscripted as he traveled west from Houston.

Yet we are still left with the haunting questions - who were these slaves, or, after Emancipation, these freedmen who built "Old Austin"? Where did they originate? What were their names? Who were their owners when they were enslaved? What were their fates after emancipation in 1865? Do their progeny still live among us?

By telling the authentic stories of our own site, the NCHM will open the doors to telling the larger history of our city and repopulate it with the men and women who brought it into being.

Goddess of Liberty with Workers, unknown photographer, February 1888. Collection Austin History Center, C00558.



BRINGING THE SLAVE QUARTERS TO LIFE

How does the Neill-Cochran House Museum connect to the larger Austin story? The people who intersected with the NCHM site had experiences that carried them far from its boundaries. This included the enslaved people the Hill family (who commissioned Abner Cook's work) sold to finance their project; men, women, and children leased out by their enslavers to the State to work at the School for the Blind; and later workers whose families were a part of the larger Austin economy. One of those was Mr. Rufus Howard (pictured right), who lived in neighboring Wheatville and worked as a gardener for both the Cochran family and for UT-Austin.

This project will bring these people and their stories to life by connecting Museum visitors to the places where they lived and worked. The restoration of the Slave Quarters will help us to experience life through their eyes, perhaps by experiencing the first floor as a laundry, dark, hot, and humid thanks to the always-boiling set kettle, as well as the back-breaking labor that kept a structure such as the main house operating.



The Slave Quarters is our portal into Austin's past. From this one modest building we reach out to Austin at its broadest. Those first Austinites who built this city, and those who continue with its construction today, have contributed to the growth of one of America's most successful modern cities. We may have ignored these laboring people of color in the past, but their exclusion we will no longer abide.



Above: Rufus Howard, before 1928. Neill-Cochran House Museum, Cochran Family Collection.

Left: Rendering of first floor of Slave Quarters as a Laundry. Credit: Lauren Graham.

THE PROJECT



Over a 12-month period through April 2023, the NCHM will reintroduce the Slave Quarters to the public through interpretation, restoration, and new programming for a total project cost of \$500K.

Interpretive Plan

The new Interpretive Plan will guide all aspects of the project moving forward. New programming and materials will contextualize the Slave Quarters as a place of enslavement and as a building used by free laborers.

Restoration

The Slave Quarters, while structurally sound, will require restoration to return the building to its antebellum appearance and use. The work will stabilize the chimney, open sections of the ceiling on both the first and second floors, and reintegrate the first and second floors through

the original trap door opening.

New Programming

On April 23-24, 2022, the Museum will welcome national advocate Joe McGill of The Slave Dwelling Project. Mr. McGill raises attention to slave dwellings around the US by overnighting in the structures and leading public community events. Mr. McGill will debut new educational opportunities and raise public awareness not just about the Slave Quarters but more expansively about Austin's early racial history.

Over the course of the year, the Museum will introduce new interpretive programming including tours, interpretive signage, exhibits, websites, video tours, brochures and maps.

Ginger Geyer and Jennifer Cumberbatch, holding Geyer's sculpture Topsy-Turvy, part of the artists' 2020 collaborative project with the NCHM, If These Walls Could Talk. Photo credit: Adisa Communications.



LEADERSHIP TEAM

Neill-Cochran House Museum

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 Karen Kincaid Brady, Business and Programming Director
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Project Team

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*To join us in this important work, please contact
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CAMPAIGN BUDGET



THE NEILL-COCHRAN HOUSE MUSEUM RECKONING WITH THE PAST: THE UNTOLD STORY OF RACE IN AUSTIN

Campaign Timeline: April 2022 - April 2023

Architectural Restoration of Slave Quarters Structure	\$149,750.00
Interpretive Plan	\$75,500.00
New Installation and Interpretive Materials	\$74,500.00
Innovative Educational Curriculum	\$50,450.00
Virtual Reality Tour	\$26,500.00
Project Administration	\$63,300.00
RWP Programming	\$20,000.00
Slave Quarters Experience: A Weekend for Community	\$40,000.00
TOTAL	\$500,000.00





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