

A HISTORY OF
THE TUCSON MUSEUM OF ART BLOCK
1775-1975

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HISTORY OF THE TUCSON MUSEUM OF ART

The Tucson Museum of Art is located in El Presidio Historic District. Its modern art museum is surrounded by some of the oldest houses existing in Tucson. A completed Museum opened its doors to the public on May 3, 1975, two hundred years after the founding of the Royal Presidio of San Agustin del Tucson.

The Tucson Museum of Art had its beginnings in 1924, when the Tucson Fine Arts Association was founded by Mrs. E. F. Harris, Mrs. George Kitt and Mrs. Alice Teasdale. The Fine Arts Association used space in the Temple of Music and Art for exhibition. The group incorporated in 1936. During World War II, the Association became inactive.

After the war, in 1947, another art group was formed. They called themselves Tucson Independent Artists Group. Two years later they were invited to take over the Tucson Fine Arts Association. This group held their exhibitions in the Samuel Kingan home at 325 W. Franklin, which had been given to them rent-free in 1955, by the University of Arizona. Two years later the group bought the home for \$13,000.

In 1962, the name was changed to The Tucson Art Center, Inc. and an adult art education program was begun. Later this program was expanded to include a variety of arts and crafts courses for adults and children.

The Tucson Art Center acquired its first major gift in 1965. In this year it began looking for a site for the construction of a museum. In 1970, the Mayor and Council designated the present historic block as the building site for the Tucson Art Center.

In 1973, the Mayor and Council approved the plans drawn for the Art Center by William Wilde and Associates. A 99 year lease was entered into with the City, for one dollar a year. The Tucson Art Center agreed to restore four of the five historic houses which were located on the block.

The Tucson Art Center library, located in the E.N. Fish House, was opened to the public in 1974. It houses an extensive collection of Art books, slides and photographs with a strong emphasis on Primitive, African and Pre-columbian art.

In 1975 The Tucson Art Center became the Tucson Museum of Art.

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OUTLINE OF HISTORY OF TUCSON AS PERTAINS TO TMA HISTORIC BLOCK

- 1775 Tucson was founded on the east bank of the Santa Cruz River. On August 20th, the location for a Spanish presidio was chosen by Lt. Col. Hugo O'Connor, Inspector and Commandant of the northern frontier of New Spain and Father Garces, resident Franciscan priest of San Xavier Mission.
- 1776 The Spanish Garrison of 47 men was moved from Tubac to Tucson.
- 1777 Capt. Don Pedro Allende took command of the Presidio of San Agustin del Tucson and had a temporary palisade of logs built.
- 1783 The adobe walled Presidio was completed. The walls were 12 Ft. high and 3 ft. thick and were located approximately along Main, Washington, Church and Pennington streets. The TMA block is located in what was the N.W. corner of the Presidio complex. The Museum patio was once known as La Plaza Militar. The only entrance was located south of the Fish House at Alameda Street.
- 1786- These were the Golden Years of Spanish rule. Tucson was a
1810 thriving and successful outpost. Spain had entered into a peace policy with the Apache Indians, who came to settle near the Presidio. During these years, San Xavier Mission was built.
- 1810- The northern provinces were neglected as Mexico embarked
1821 on a revolution against the Spanish government. Spain stopped supporting the Apaches and the Indians went on the war path. Settlers fled the Santa Cruz valley, abandoning their ranches and mines.
- 1821 Mexican Independence. The transition to Mexican rule made little difference to Tucson, but at San Xavier the priests left the mission, refusing to swear allegiance to Mexico.
- 1837 Apaches, under the leadership of Mangas Colorado, went on the war path. Mexico instigated policy of paying \$100 for every Apache scalp.
- 1846 First Americans entered Tucson. Capt. Philip St. George Cooke
lead his Mormon Battalion through on his way to California. This was the start of the Mexican American War, which ended in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. Mexico ceded California, Northern Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and most of New Mexico to the United States. Tucson was excluded.
- 1848 Manuel Carrillo, great-uncle of Maria Navarrette Cordova, is said to have built the original Cordova House (the two west rooms). As the family story goes, Carrillo acquired the property as part of a Spanish land grant belonging to his father.

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PAGE TWO. OUTLINE OF HISTORY, TMA BLOCK, Cont.

- 1849 Gold discovered in California. Tucson became an important supply post. 60,000 persons passed through Tucson by 1851.
- 1853 Hiram Stevens, a native of Vermont, came to Tucson after having served in New Mexico during the Mexican American War.
- ✓ 1853 The Gadsden Purchase. The United States purchased Southern Arizona and New Mexico for a transcontinental railroad route. Tucson burst with surveyors, freighters, cattle drivers and new settlers. The town expanded outside the Presidio walls and the old walls began to disappear.
- ✓ 1856 The Mexican garrison left Tucson and 8 months later a company of U.S. Dragoons occupied Tucson.
- 1861 Civil War broke out. U.S. troops were removed from Arizona. Apaches went on the war path. Only a few citizens remained in Tucson. The rest of the state was abandoned to the Indians.
- ✓ 1862 On February 14th, President Jefferson Davis declared Arizona a territory of the Confederate States of America. Tucson citizens welcomed the protection.
- 1862 Union soldiers entered Tucson and established martial law. The first map of Tucson was commissioned by Major David Fergusson in the effort to locate the homes of Confederate sympathizers.
- 1863 February 24th, President Lincoln signed a law creating the Territory of Arizona. Discovery of gold in Northern Arizona influenced Congress to bring Arizona into the Union as gold was needed for the Civil War effort. The first capital was established in Prescott, but was moved to Tucson in 1867.
- 1864 U.S. Marshall Milton B. Duffield, newly appointed by President Lincoln, arrived in Tucson and purchased a house on the TMA block. It still stands as the north portion of the Stevens House.
- 1865 Hiram Stevens started on a mercantile career which was to make him one of the richest men in the Territory. Stevens purchased property on the TMA block.
- 1865 E.N. Fish arrived in Arizona and purchased property on the TMA block. He was born in Massachusetts and traveled to San Francisco in the Gold Rush years.
- 1867 Edward Fish established E.N. Fish & Co., general merchandise store on the corner of Main and Congress.
- 1868 Leonardo Romero, Jr. was born in the house at the corner of Washington and Meyer. His father and mother were born in Hermosillo, Mexico. Leonardo Sr. came to Tucson as a boy. He was the town carpenter and his shop was located in the Meyer St. portion of the family home.

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PAGE THREE. OUTLINE OF HISTORY, TMA BLOCK, Continued.

- 1871 Tucson incorporated as a municipality.
- 1872 H.S. Stevens entered the hardware business under the name of Hughes Stevens & Co.
- 1873 Stevens purchased the Duffield house. It is not known exactly when Stevens built his house which incorporated the Duffield home and adjoined the Fish to the south.
- 1874 H.S. Stevens elected Arizona delegate to U.S. Congress.
- 1874 E.N. Fish married Maria Wakefield, who had come to Tucson the year before to teach in the first public school.
- 1879 James Lee sold the Cordova property to Gabino Ortega for \$100. It is not known when or from whom Lee acquired the property, as Tucson kept no records prior to its incorporation in 1871. It is known that Lee did not live on the property.
- 1879 Gabino Ortega and his wife, Carmen, purchased the Cordova property from James Lee and enlarged the house adding the 3 east rooms plus the zaguan in 1879. Ortega was a farmer and rancher.
- 1880 J. Knox Corbett arrived in Tucson at the age of 19. He came for his health from his hometown of Sumpter, South Carolina.
- 1880 Southern Pacific Railroad completed its line across Arizona. Ranchers, settlers flocked to Arizona and Tucson quickly lost its Spanish-Mexican character.
- 1881 H.S. Stevens had by now purchased half of the TMA block where he had his home, stables, carriage house and an orchard.
- 1884 Severin Rambaud purchased the Romero house for \$700. Rambaud was born in France and went to San Francisco during the Gold Rush. A renowned cook, he is accredited with introducing French bread to San Francisco. The Rambauds lived in the Romero House until 1936.
- 1885 J. Knox Corbett married Lizzie Hughes, oldest daughter of Sam Hughes and Atanacia Santa Cruz, two early pioneers. The Sam Hughes House still stands at the corner of Main and Washington.
- 1890 J. Knox Corbett started the very successful J. Knox Corbett Lumber Company.
- 1893 H.S. Stevens committed suicide in the family home

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PAGE THREE. OUTLINE OF HISTORY, TMA BLOCK, Continued.

- 1905 Petra Stevens, Hiram's widow, sold the vacant property north of the family home to her niece, Lizzie Corbett, and Knox. Petra Stevens was the eldest sister of Atanacia Santa Cruz Hughes. The two sisters lived side by side on Main Street (the Corbett House is now between the two homes.).
- 1906 J. Knox Corbett built his house on the TMA block. It was designed by D.H. Holmes, one of Tucson's leading architects.
- 1909 E.N. Fish died.
- 1935 The Fish children, Florence, John and Clara sold the family home to Hoagland Gates for \$8,500. The house was divided into rental apartments and remained so until the City leased the property to the TMA in 1973.
- 1936 Refugio Rambaud, widow of Severin Rambaud, willed the Cordova House to Arturo Cordova, son of her great-niece, Maria Cordova. Maria had been living in the house with her children since the 1920's.
- 1943 Hoagland Gates and his wife Margaret purchased the Stevens house and remodeled it into apartments.
- 1963 Hiram Corbett, son of Knox Corbett, sold the family home to Mercer W. Bouldin, who used the home for his legal offices until the City leased the property to the TMA.
- 1968 The City of Tucson acquired the TMA block as part of a major Urban Renewal project.
- 1968 The Cordova property (N.E. corner of TMA block), including 3 houses, was condemned by the City of Tucson, but the Cordova family contested, claiming ownership by right of Spanish land grant. The case was finally settled at the State Supreme Court, but Mr. Raul Cordova is still searching the archives for proof of his family's claim of ownership.
- 1973 The City of Tucson leased the historic block to the TMA. As part of the lease agreement, TMA agreed to restore 4 of the 5 historic buildings (Corbett house excluded) within 5 years from the completion of the first phase of the Museum (1980).
- 1973 The Junior League of Tucson, Inc. contracted with TMA to restore La Casa Cordova.
- 1975 In May, the TMA completed the Museum and opened its doors to the public. The Junior League completed restoration of La Casa Cordova and turned it over to the TMA to develop as a Mexican Museum.
- 1977 The Tucson Heritage Foundation contracted to stabilize the Edward Nye Fish House for the TMA.

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