

# The Neill-Cochran House Museum Slave Quarters



Slavery lasted only a moment in Austin's history, yet its impacts continue to rumble through our community today. -Ted Lee Eubanks



**W**elcome to the Neill-Cochran House Museum Slave Quarters (Quarters). This small building, hidden behind the Neill-Cochran House Museum (Museum), dates to 1855 – only five years before the Civil War and ultimately the end of legal enslavement. During your visit you will learn not only about the building itself, but the lives of the enslaved who lived and worked here as well.

In November 1528, an enslaved African named Estéban came ashore in present-day Texas at Galveston Island, nearly a century before “twenty and odd” captive Africans arrived in Jamestown in 1619. For five centuries enslaved Africans and now African Americans have occupied a central and **essential** role in the American experiment. Whether or not American democracy has succeeded or failed has always depended on the degree to which freedom is not only offered but guaranteed to all our citizens. For most of the five centuries that Africans have been here, America in general and Texas specifically have reneged on that essential promise.

The Quarters is tangible proof of this failure of democracy as well as its ultimate restoration and fulfillment. Constructed under the supervision of master builder Abner Cook, the Quarters is the last remaining intact building in Austin where enslaved Africans worked and lived.

Now owned by The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America in Texas, the Quarters is currently being restored in consultation with Dr. Tara A. Dudley of the University of Texas. To tour the Quarters is to step back to the birth of Austin and the earliest days of its struggles to survive at the edge of the western frontier.

The enslaved who lived in the Quarters were essential players in Austin’s earliest dramas. Yet, as is the rule rather than the exception when retracing the history of America’s enslaved Africans, these histories have been obscured, erased, and forgotten. As Annette Gordon-Reed has written about her experiences (right) in and knowledge of her hometown in East Texas.

The singular goal in our work at the Quarters is to not only restore these histories but to resurrect the names, faces, and lives of the men and women who worked and lived here. The enslaved were denied not only their freedoms but their identities which we are now working to restore.

The enslaved evolved into freedmen and freedwomen then into free people. At every step, the skill, talents, passions, and proficiencies of people of color evolved as well. The foundation for one of America’s great cities, laid carefully by enslaved Africans, is revealed in these Quarters. We welcome you to the Quarters, and hope that you will not only learn about but celebrate the lives and histories illuminated here.

“For many years, Blacks like the ones in Conroe and Livingston—all over the country, really—have had their stories written out of history. The tyranny of ideas about “the archive,” or what constitutes the official record, all too often, has buried their knowledge and rendered it suspect.”

-Annette Gordon-Reed



Neill-Cochran House Museum

2310 San Gabriel Street

Austin, Texas 78705

(512) 478-2335

<https://www.nchmuseum.org/>



This publication is supported in part by Humanities Texas, the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

