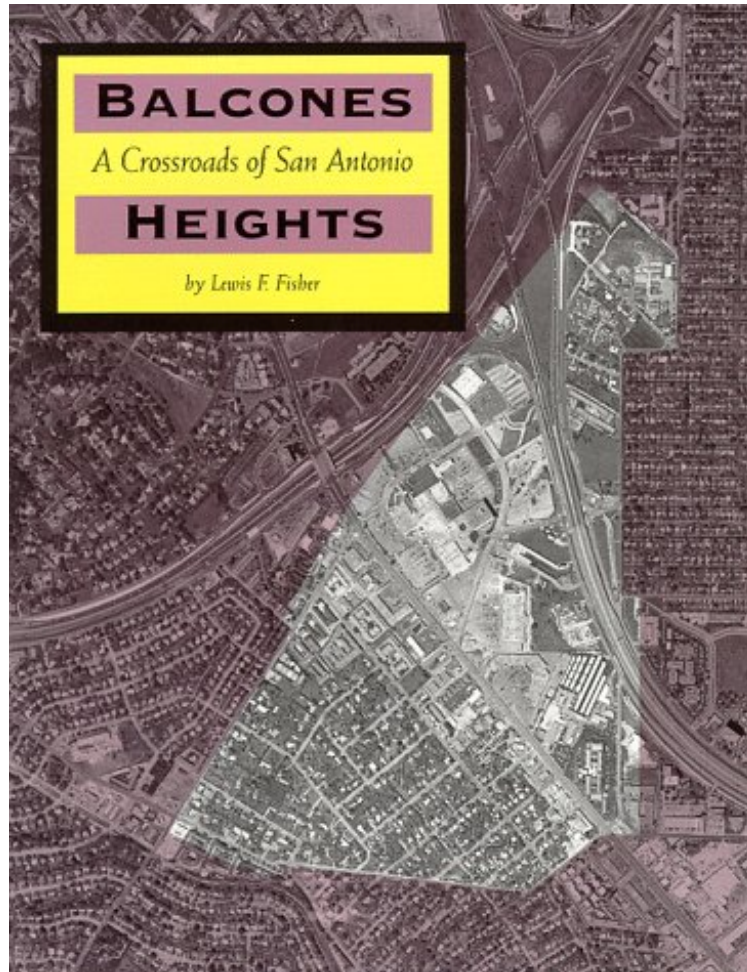


[Download] Balcones Heights: A Crossroads of San Antonio

Balcones Heights: A Crossroads of San Antonio

Lewis F. Fisher

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Lewis F. Fisher : Balcones Heights: A Crossroads of San Antonio before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Balcones Heights: A Crossroads of San Antonio:

More than the historical profile of one city, this well-illustrated book documents the successful struggle of a new suburb through a bitter incorporation war with the adjacent metropolis and then its survival through the use of revenue from traffic fines, a strategy told, uniquely, from the suburb's point of view. Also analyzed is the growth of Balcones Heights as one of the most densely populated cities in Texas and the bonanza of sales tax revenues which brought not only municipal affluence but also the problems and challenges of cities many times its size.

Call it a suburban rags-to-riches story. The miniscule municipality of Balcones Heights was once in such desperate

straits that it initiated a draft for street repairs. It was the fall of 1949, six months after incorporation, and there was less than \$500 in the treasury. With most of the streets unpaved, and the paved ones crumbling, the town council passed an ordinance requiring all males aged 21 to 45 among the town's 400 inhabitants, except active ministers of the gospel, to spend five days each year working on the public streets. You could buy your way out for \$1 a day, but failure to do so was a misdemeanor with a fine of up to \$100 per day. That's just one of the nuggets in Lewis Fisher's *Balcones Heights: A Crossroads of San Antonio*, . . . a history that would have made the Chamber of Commerce choke. --San Antonio Express-News

About the Author Lewis F. Fisher is the author of numerous books on San Antonio, including *San Antonio: Outpost of Empires*, *Saving San Antonio: The Precarious Preservation of a Heritage* and *River Walk: The Epic Story of San Antonio's River*, which won a national Benjamin Franklin Award as Best Regional Book. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

From Chapter 2: The sudden incorporation of Balcones Heights sparked a free-for-all. Charges and counter charges flew as San Antonio City Hall adopted a scorched-earth policy toward the upstart suburb. San Antonio's city council unanimously vowed Balcones Heights would get no electricity for new homes, no sewer connections, no garbage pick-up and no help putting out fires or arresting criminals. By the time the dust settled four years later, after a reform administration took over in San Antonio, Balcones Heights was dug in for the long term. No matter that San Antonio now offered all the basics plus bus service and street lights if only Balcones Heights would dissolve itself. Balcones Heights might not have much of a tax base, but it would make ends meet somehow, thank you very much. Balcones Heights would open its own parks, patch its own roads, sort out its own zoning squabbles and do all the things self-governing places were supposed to do.

From Chapter 3: Then there was the matter of law enforcement. "Are they running a speed trap in Balcones Heights, the pint-sized town in north San Antonio?" wondered acerbic Evening News writer Paul Thompson in his front page column in 1955. "They sure are," followed the quote from a local builder, who claimed he got a ticket for driving 20 miles an hour in a school zone. "This laying for motorists has been going on for two years in Balcones Heights, and it's about time someone fought it." Thompson said the county sheriff's office told of "a steady run of squawks about wholesale ticketing of motorists in Balcones Heights." Then he reported how Mayor Frank Gaskins "sprang to the defense" of his two-man police force. "We enforce the speed laws out here and we'll continue to do it," Thompson quoted Gaskins as saying. Noting that the accused later allowed that he "might have been going 21 or 22 mph," Gaskins marveled that the accused "admits he broke the law a little bit. Can you rob a bank a little bit? Can you murder your wife a little bit? We take the view that a little bit is the same as a whole lot."

From Chapter 4: When fate threw Balcones Heights a lifeline in the form of an interstate highway, its residents grabbed hold and hardly looked back. As Interstate 10's intersection with Loop 410 became a major crossroads of San Antonio, the modern era beat a quick path to the once downtrodden suburb. No more did its elected officials have to worry about how to re-jigger second hand fire trucks or agonize over creative ways to fix the unpaved streets. In the rush of the 1960s came the metropolitan area's second regional shopping mall, followed by a blizzard of commercial and apartment construction. Now that there was commercial property worth taxing, taxes were finally levied and two bond issues passed. Then came a master plan, paved streets, a drainage system and streetlights down Fredericksburg Road. A preview of how dramatically things would change came on October 24, 1960, as celebrities flocked to San Antonio for the world premiere of the movie *The Alamo* at the Woodlawn Theater. Picked for the public celebration was the mall site up Fredericksburg Road beside the year-old Handy Andy supermarket in Balcones Heights. Its bakery produced what was billed as "The World's Largest Battle of the Alamo Cake." Movie stars descended on the suddenly dazzled suburb. John Wayne himself cut the cake.