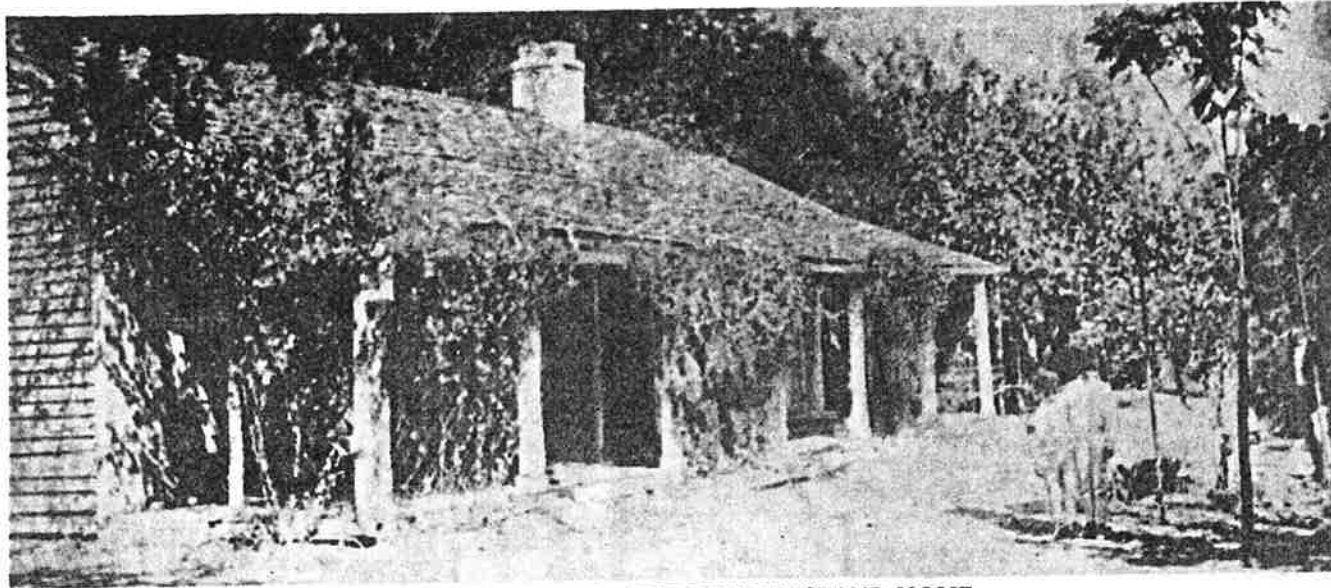


✓ HISTORIC Sites - SA  
Bowen's Island



PHOTOGRAPH OF THE BOWEN ISLAND HOME

## Bowen's Legacy Is His Island

A segment of San Antonio's colorful past recently was commemorated as City Public Service officials and local dignitaries gathered to dedicate an historical marker on the San Antonio River Walk. Placed on the River Walk adjacent to the C.P.S. main office at 145 Navarro, the marker serves as a reminder to passers-by of the interesting history of Bowen's Island.

In January, 1845, John Bowen purchased the first portion of the six-acre tract for \$300 from Maria Josefa Rodriguez de Yturri Castillo. Before the sale to Bowen, the land had changed hands many times and was even a property of legendary hero Davy Crockett. Over the next several years, Bowen bought the remainder of the island for \$1,800. The Bowen heirs kept the land until 1910.

The piece of land where C.P.S., the Tower Life Building and Granada Homes now stand was considered an island during Bowen's time. The San Antonio River bounded the property on the north, west and south. An irrigation ditch formed the east boundary.

In 1869, the upper portion of the ditch was filled in, and in 1913, the river was rerouted. This converted the island to a peninsula, but it retained the name "Bowen's Island."

Bowen, born Ralph William Peacock in Philadelphia, was the city's first postmaster during the Republic, and, in the early years of statehood, he served as postmaster and city treasurer. His home on Dwyer Avenue, LaQuinta, was the first U.S. Post Office in San Antonio.

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OVER ↓

## Bowen's Island

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Bowen actively supported the Union during the Civil War, even helping slaves escape from the Confederacy to Mexico. He died in 1867 and was buried on the island. His grave was later moved to San Fernando Cemetery #1.

Mary Elizabeth Bowen far outlived her husband and took pride in maintaining the beautiful garden she and John cultivated, especially the extensive collection of herbs. She died in 1903.

Bowen's Island was a popular entertainment spot during the late 1800s. Following Bowen's death, John Wolfram leased the island and opened the Central Garden, a well-known resort. Picnics, weddings, baptisms, camp meetings and revivals were held on the island. In 1900, a large amusement hall was built and used as a roller skating rink and dance hall.

In 1910, the Bowen heirs sold the island to D.J. Woodward and E.J. Altgelt for \$110,000. Three months later, the new owners put the property up for sale, and Lafayette Ward bought it for \$125,000.

Ward had grand plans for developing Bowen's Island and began by diverting the river. He did not live to see his dreams fulfilled, and his heirs sold the land to J.A. and F.A. Smith for \$300,000.

The two brothers then turned the island homestead into prime commercial property. They built the A.B. Frank Building, now the C.P.S. main office, and simultaneously constructed the Plaza Hotel, now the Granada retirement home. After those projects, the Smiths undertook construction of the Smith-Young Tower. The 35-story structure is now known as the Tower Life Building and remains one of the tallest buildings in San Antonio.

Today, Bowen's Island is bounded by the San Antonio River on the north, Nueva Street on the south, Dwyer Avenue on the west and Navarro Street on the east.

*Historic sites  
Bowen's Island*

*S. Antonio  
Paseo del Rio Showboat 6/86*