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Enduring Debates and Multiple Values in the Controversial Restoration of an Early Twentieth-Century Texas Landscape

Partially funded by a prestigious Save America's Treasures grant, a plan to restore the landscape at the Elisabet Ney Museum in Austin, Texas, spurred conflict and renegotiation among various actors. These included the U.S. Department of the Interior, the Texas Historical Commission, local preservation and parks officials, and neighborhood and environmental advocates. Credentialed consultants and project proponents described the *Formosa* landscape restoration plan as a means to sustainably restore a mature museum landscape to the semi-tamed Texas prairie extant at the time of sculptor Elisabet Ney's lifetime and to bring the museum up to contemporary curatorial standards. The project raised the ire of residents in the Hyde Park neighborhood and some dissenting preservationists. This case study reveals enduring debates in preservation, differing interpretations and approaches to sustainability, and the complexities of cultural landscapes preservation. This paper offers a cautionary note on restoration as a treatment and argues for a values-based approach that acknowledges multiple community values and attachments to heritage sites.

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Enduring Debates and Multiple Values in the Controversial Restoration of an Early Twentieth-Century Texas Landscape

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To its champions, the Formosa landscape restoration plan represented an unquestionably valuable opportunity to restore an early twentieth-century landscape in Austin, Texas, associated with sculptor Elisabet Ney (1833-1907). Ney is known for her neoclassical sculpture and for spurring a statewide fine-arts movement during a time when Texas was considered a cultural wilderness lacking in the “civilizing” influence of the fine arts (Taylor 1938). In conjunction with an architectural restoration of Ney’s studio, a landscape restoration plan was formulated to interpret Ney’s life and works and to bring the Elisabet Ney Museum’s landscape up to contemporary curatorial standards. Funded by a federal Save America’s Treasures grant, heritage landscape professionals crafted a plan to restore a museum landscape that had evolved through alternating periods of volunteer stewardship, municipal tending, and benign neglect. The plan included restoration of the semi-tamed Texas prairie as gleaned from historical photographs during Ney’s lifetime.

What ensued was a controversy in which preservationists and City of Austin Parks Department officials, neighborhood and environmental advocates, and the Texas Historical Commission found themselves embroiled in an unwanted debate over a plan proposing substantial changes to a widely valued landscape. The museum and its grounds are publicly owned and managed by the City of Austin, which elevated the importance of public involvement and transparency in the planning process. In addition, the Elisabet Ney Museum is located in an established neighborhood that is known for its residents’ active participation in local planning and preservation. Members of the Hyde Park Neighborhood Association

were debating aspects of the Formosa landscape restoration plan at the same time they were applying for designation of the Hyde Park neighborhood as a local historic district.

This article briefly discusses the Elisabet Ney Museum landscape and describes salient issues that made this project both controversial and worthy of preservationists’ attention and debate. The case study highlights practical and theoretical issues increasingly faced by heritage professionals as they engage in a relatively recent domain of preservation practice – cultural landscapes preservation.¹ These challenges can be traced to enduring debates in the field of preservation about the best means of preserving and interpreting the past, differences in determinations of value between professionals and lay persons, and complexities in balancing stewardship of nature and heritage (Longstreth 2008).

The term “cultural landscape” can be somewhat difficult or even elusive to define. Alanen and Melnick note that cultural landscapes “exist virtually everywhere that human activities have affected the land” (Alanen and Melnick 2000, 3). The National Parks Service defines a cultural landscape expansively as: “a geographic area, including both cultural and natural resources and the wildlife or domestic animals therein, associated with a historic event, activity, or person or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values” (Birnbaum 1994, 1).

Cultural landscape preservation efforts are complicated by the dynamic nature of landscapes, which comprise ecological systems and human cultural uses and attachments that can never attain a static state of completion (Boyle 2008, 152). These efforts must apply a unique disciplinary approach, recognizing

landscape as both “artifact and system” (Melnick 2000, 16). A cultural landscape is therefore neither solely one nor the other, it is at once “product and a process” (Melnick 2000, 16). While the field of preservation has long concerned itself with the preservation of buildings, cultural landscape preservation is a more recent endeavor that requires broader, longer term approaches and the incorporation of interdisciplinary knowledge.

This case study provides insights into how this duality between artifact and system can make restoration to a particular period of historical significance problematic in the context of cultural landscapes. It draws from Longstreth’s insights into the dangers of overly rigid determinations of historical significance (Longstreth 2008, 15-16; 1999, 329) and the growing importance of preservation of parks infrastructure (Longstreth 2008, 10). It provides examples of elements introduced into a museum landscape that have gained historical associations over time. Easily overlooked landscape features, such as individual trees, a 1930s-era wall with an ironwork gate (see fig. 7), and a brick arch in a dam (see fig. 6), have proven to be flashpoints between professional determinations of significance and community values. The case study shows how landscape features may be determined “nonhistoric” and expendable by professionals, while gaining community affection and having historical significance when viewed from other perspectives.

This case reveals the importance of including open deliberation over the choice of treatment and in determinations of historical and community significance. It is recommended that preservationists consider theoretical frameworks, such as Mason’s values-based preservation, to ensure the incorporation of local knowledge and the richness of social meanings and community attachments in the context of cultural landscapes (Mason 2006). It further highlights risks in selecting restoration as a treatment for cultural landscapes and reinforces the recommendations for an expanded practice of preservation that is capable of acknowledging political, cultural, social, and environmental concerns (Hohmann 2008).

ELISABET NEY’S LANDSCAPE AND THE FORMOSA RESTORATION PLAN

With the hope of establishing a new life, Elisabet Ney emigrated from Germany to the U.S. South in 1871 after a career sculpting the great men of Europe.² Ney and her husband, Edmund Montgomery, settled at Liendo Plantation near Hempstead, Texas, in 1873. In 1892, after a substantial gap in her artistic career, she was approached to sculpt heroes of the Texas frontier, Sam Houston and Stephen F. Austin, for the Texas Exhibit at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition. The same year, Ney commissioned the construction of a studio in the developing suburb of Austin called Hyde Park.³ She named this studio and home Formosa.

Formosa became a social and artistic center in Austin, attracting artists, statesmen, and admirers to the cause of arts and arts education in Texas (Taylor 1938, 96-97). Ney and Formosa were highlighted in *The History of American Sculpture*: “Secluded from the world in her little studio of stone, which nestles among the trees on the outskirts of Austin, Texas, still dwells and toils Elisabet Ney, one of the most interesting of characters as she is one of the best equipped of women sculptors (Taft 1903, 214).” Figure 1 shows the studio and southern portion of the site around the time of Ney’s death in 1907. Figure 2 shows a contemporary aerial view of the property within the Hyde Park neighborhood.

One hundred years later, the Formosa landscape restoration plan proposed restoration of the landscape to circa 1907. In the plan, the working lands of Ney’s studio and home were interpreted as representing Ney’s philosophy on the role of art, nature and society, and her aesthetic, which combined elements of the rustic and neoclassical (Heritage Landscapes 2007). The plan states: “The objectives for Formosa, The Elisabet Ney Museum, are to provide a richer, more engaging and authentic visitor experience of the former studio of Elisabet Ney” (Heritage Landscapes 2007, 1). The plan describes the use of a restoration approach to “provide a rich landscape for interpretation through direct experience of this land and Ney’s design aesthetic. The tones of the bird



Fig. 1. Formosa, c. 1902-10 (Courtesy Texas State Library and Archives Commission).



Fig. 2. Aerial view of Formosa and Hyde Park National Register District boundary (City of Austin, CAPCOG aerial 2009).

song, the flash of butterfly wings, the buzz of insects, the trickle of water, and the shadow of grasses moving in the wind will enrich the perception of the Formosa landscape” (Heritage Landscapes 2007, 1).

In order to accomplish these objectives, the Formosa landscape restoration plan calls for restoration of the 2.45-acre museum landscape in three parts to reveal the early twentieth-century landscape as it appeared around the time of Ney’s death. Recommendations include re-creation of a former lake along Waller Creek that would function only during storm events, reconstruction of servants’ quarters, reconstruction of walks and the carriage drive, restoration of a prairie and vegetable garden, and reconstruction of a cedar and chicken-wire fence, among other interventions. Figure 3 shows the existing conditions in 2007, and Figure 4 shows the landscape as it is proposed upon completion of all three phases of the landscape plan. Only a portion of the first phase of the plan has been implemented at this time.

Supporters saw the landscape restoration plan as a means to present visitors with a complete sensory experience and to tend to a landscape that had suffered some neglect in recent years. The Texas Historical Commission and the City of Austin emphasized the completeness of historical documentation based on an analysis of historical photographs and documents.

The City of Austin stressed that the restoration of short-grass Texas prairie, as recommended in the plan, would require less irrigation and maintenance and would help repair lost functions associated with prairie ecology.

Hyde Park neighborhood residents became alarmed when news spread of the proposed demolition of a limestone wall dedicated in 1939, removal of mature trees, reconstruction of a cedar and chicken-wire fence, and other interventions that some felt would dramatically change a familiar landscape. The limestone wall had been donated by the Violet Crown Garden Club, a local chapter of the Texas Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc., and its wrought-iron gate was created by a locally celebrated craftsman (*Daily Texan* 1981). Hyde Park residents exchanged concerned e-mails on the neighborhood listserv and wrote letters and articles to the local newsletter as awareness grew of impending removal of approximately sixty-eight trees and shrubs in the first phase of the master plan and other major changes in future phases (*Austin American Statesman* 2009).⁴

The museum grounds had been appreciated by many as an open, publicly owned property that was considered a personal sanctuary by some and a collective gathering place for community events. It was not unusual for people to play guitar, walk along Waller Creek at one of the few neighborhood access points, or gather pecans from the site’s northern pecan grove.

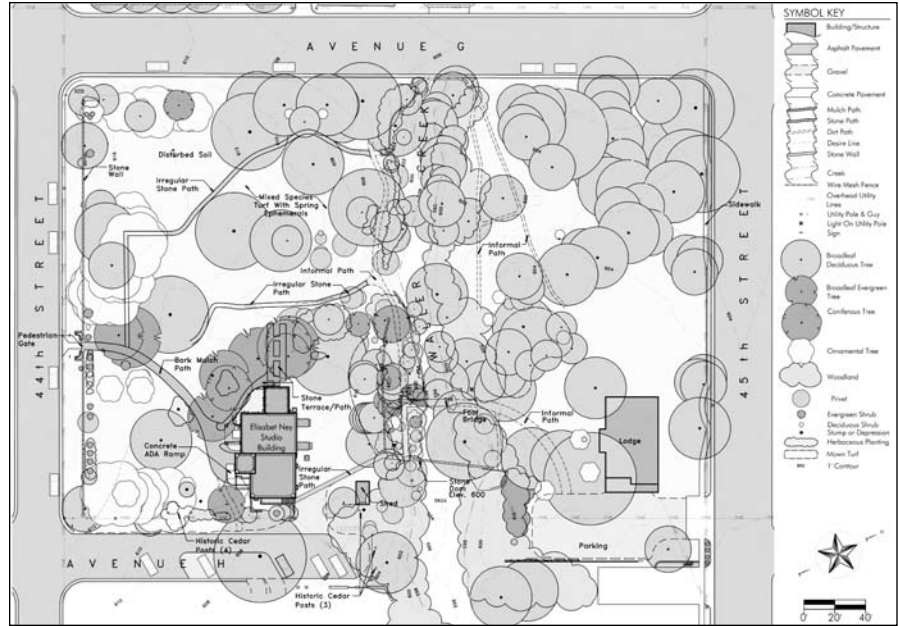


Fig. 3. 2007 Existing Conditions Plan (Heritage Landscapes for the Austin Parks and Recreation Department).

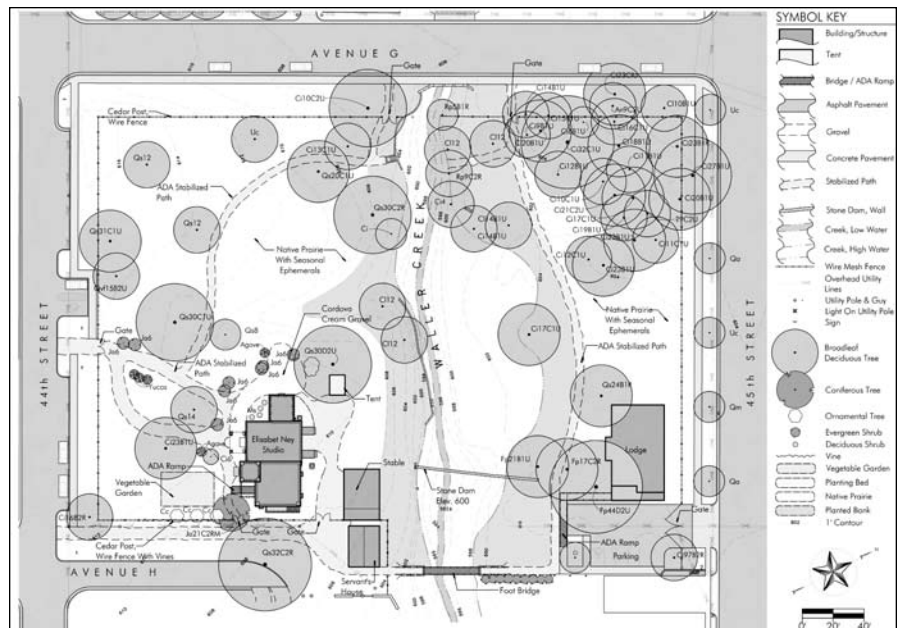


Fig. 4. Landscape Restoration Plan (Heritage Landscapes for the Austin Parks and Recreation Department).

The grounds had been used as an outdoor studio by the Elisabet Ney Sculpture Conservancy, a nonprofit organization that provided arts-education from the late 1980s to 2005 in a small 1920s-era bungalow on site (George 2011; Cardozier 1995). Some residents fondly remembered classes of art students and their supplies spilling into the landscape. Overgrown crape myrtles along the perimeter gave the landscape a sense of seclusion, while free museum admission and

an accessible landscape drew repeat visitors and a constituency for the pre-restoration landscape. Some questioned why the professional determination that recreating a Ney-era landscape in exacting detail was more important than preserving a mature museum landscape appreciated by the community. There were concerns about removal of landscape features that were more recent than Formosa's official period of significance.

MULTIPLE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS AND COMMUNITY VALUES

Part of the controversy surrounding the Formosa landscape restoration plan was based on conflicting opinions about the historical significance of events after 1907. In the National Register of Historic Places, the significance of the property was specifically tied to Elisabet Ney's life and the architectural significance of the studio (Bell 1972). The period of significance in the National Register reflected the studio's construction dates of 1892-1902. Neither the National Register nomination nor the landscape restoration plan determined the Texas Fine Arts Association (TFAA) to be a part of the historical significance of the landscape. Ney's friends and admirers had established the TFAA on site in 1911. Its mission was:

The preservation of the Elisabet Ney Art Museum and Collection; the promotion and promulgation of art and art principles; the arousal of widespread interest in art in Texas, by holding art exhibits from time to time, and the acceptance of proper art loans and gifts by the Association for the Elisabet Ney Museum (Heritage Landscapes 2007, 96).

The TFAA used and shaped the grounds for hosting events and organizing for the arts. Throughout the TFAA's stewardship of the property, events were held both inside the studio and outside on its grounds.

Over time, the TFAA established its own distinct imprint on the landscape. In the 1930s, the TFAA began to actively raise money and engage in efforts to beautify the museum grounds. These efforts drew on the contributions of the statewide Texas Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc. and a local chapter called the Violet Crown Garden Club. It also involved the participation of the City of Austin and employees funded through the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and Civil Works Administration programs (Texas Fine Arts Association 1933, 22 ; 1934, 18). The landscape efforts included grading the site, planting trees and other vegetation, and constructing flagstone pathways (Fig. 5), a stone terrace, and an arch built into a Ney-era dam (Fig. 6). In addition, a bungalow owned by the University of Texas, called the Lodge, was moved to the property.

The TFAA's beautification efforts, like other depression-era public-works projects, offered employment while focusing on the enhancement of the public realm through naturalistic landscaping. The plan was drafted and overseen by Jacobus "Jac" Gubbels (1896–1976) (Texas Fine Arts Association 1933, 22). Gubbels was later to become the first landscape architect for the Texas Highway Department (Cushman 2000; Gubbels 1938). As a consultant to the City of Austin, he formulated plans that led to some of the most familiar and beloved landscapes in Austin, including Shoal Creek and Zilker Park, among others (Rotary Club n.d.). Gubbels promoted tree preservation, erosion control, and native tree and wildflower plantings along roadsides and parks throughout Texas (Gubbels 1938; Cushman 2000).



Fig. 5. Flagstone paths prior to removal, September 2009 (Photographs by author unless otherwise noted).



Fig. 6. Ney-era dam with brick arch built into it by TFAA, July 2010.

A limestone wall was built along the southern border of the site. Donated by the Violet Crown Garden Club, it is unknown whether Gubbels's landscape plan included the stone wall, as his plans were lost. Figure 7 shows the stone wall with the inscription: "This wall a gift of the Violet Crown Garden Club 1939." A photograph of the stone wall and landscaping is titled "First State Beautification Project" in the *Texas Garden Clubs Handbook* (Greene 1949, 57).

The Formosa landscape restoration plan describes the depression-era beautification efforts as simply ornamental and non-historic. It recommends removal of plantings and stone and brick landscape elements of the TFAA-era to restore the property to circa 1907. A Ney-era dam with a brick arch (Fig. 6) built by the TFAA is recommended for modification to restore its former appearance and recreate a former lake that had been on the property prior to 1898.⁵

Dissenting views saw the remaining depression-era landscape elements as significant artifacts worthy of preservation. This perspective was reinforced by references to Gregory Cushman (2000), who has written on the historical significance of depression-era conservation efforts of Gubbels in tandem with women's garden clubs. Cushman writes of the coordination of Gubbels with local garden clubs during the restoration of the San Jacinto Battlefield

and highlights a shared cause in beautification efforts in promoting native plantings and celebrating Texas landscapes and history (Cushman 2000, 57). He describes these efforts as providing opportunities for social cohesion, not only intended to beautify landscapes and address issues such as soil erosion but to restore social bonds in a time of economic crisis.

In the landscape restoration plan, the TFAA and garden clubs' initiatives were interpreted simply as the installation of an ornamental garden. Alternatively, the efforts to beautify the museum grounds can be understood as remnants of social movements that sought to promote the fine arts. The TFAA was part of a larger national trend among arts organizations, mostly organized by women, whose mission was to enrich their communities by organizing art exhibits and other cultural events (Prohaska 1993). Their shrines, monuments, and garden tea parties can be viewed as out of touch with the best practices and curatorial standards of the present. On the other hand, these same remnants may be treated as tangible artifacts. This highlights rifts in perceptions of historical significance and the problematic nature of the common practice of reducing landscape elements into a binary distinction between historic and "nonhistoric."



Fig. 7. Stone wall and new landscaping, June 2010.

While the landscape restoration plan treated landscape elements from the Texas Fine Arts Association as irrelevant to Elisabet Ney's narrative, this view was dismissed by Hyde Park resident and architectural historian Mary Carolyn George. George described the mature and unrestored museum landscape as representing Ney's legacy in the arts. She decried ending the period of significance at Ney's death as "tragic" and has written of the connection between Ney and the women who founded the Elisabet Ney Museum (*Pecan Press* 2010, 16).

Additionally, there was skepticism of the plan's assumptions about Elisabet Ney's design intent in the landscape. While Formosa's landscape was described as an integral part of Ney's narrative, aesthetics, and personal philosophy in the landscape restoration plan, questions were raised about the ability to infer this from the available evidence. Photographs of the heavily overgrown landscapes of Liendo Plantation; of Funchal, Ney's villa and studio in Portugal; and of Formosa were used to call into question Ney's intention in creating the landscape proposed in the restoration plan (Halley 2010). The issue of design intent is further complicated in that Formosa was not simply a historic designed landscape; it included functions associated with Ney's semi-rural lifestyle, which suggests the importance of understanding it as a historic vernacular landscape.⁶ Similar complications are likely in any analysis of the Texas Fine Arts Association's landscape, in which function, use, and the actions of many volunteers played an important role in changing the landscape over time, rather than simply the intention of landscape architect Jac Gubbels at a particular point in time.

In a broad interpretation of the landscape's significance, the Formosa landscape may be understood as complex, layered, and evolving. It is a landscape that was shaped by Ney's vision, by Ney's servants who gardened and tended the grounds, by Ney's use of the grounds as a place of work, and in the promotion of the fine arts in Texas. It is also a landscape in which many tended to Ney's memory over time, and a place where women exercised growing social power through the development of the fine arts, their participation in the gardening movement, and their contributions to the practice of preservation.⁷

ENDURING DEBATES, LANDSCAPE COMPLEXITIES

The controversy over the Elisabet Ney Museum landscape contains the trace of an early debate in the history of preservation about the desirability of restorations aimed at replication of a particular state from the past versus preservation of heritage sites as they have aged and evolved. This debate extends to the historical origins of the "modern" practice of historic preservation. In the mid-nineteenth century (at the time when Elisabet Ney was living in Europe), there were spirited debates about appropriate interventions in the restoration of medieval churches. Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc famously championed applying the principle of unity of style, which was intended to bring historic buildings to a state of perfection. William Morris and John Ruskin railed against this idea, questioning restorations that "scrape" buildings of the patina and modifications of the past and create a wholly new state that they felt inappropriately perfects the past.

The scrape versus anti-scrape debate has remained central to preservation discourse. By 1964, Viollet-le-Duc's unity of style principle had been widely rejected by preservationists, specifically referenced in the Venice Charter and later, the Burra Charter, as inappropriate for heritage conservation. Likewise, the ICOMOS San Antonio Declaration of 1996 calls out "dynamic cultural sites, such as historic cities and landscapes, [that] may be considered to be the products of many authors over a long period of time whose process of creation often continues today" (ICOMOS 1996). Worldwide heritage conservation appears to be moving away from the application of strict restorations and toward a paradigm of multiple narratives that recognize communities' values and associations over time rather than attempting to achieve a complete restoration to a single period. This is a position that merges anti-scrape arguments with contemporary concerns for polyvocality, or the incorporation of multiple values and narratives associated with heritage sites.

Although international charters caution against restoration to a single period, this approach remains an accepted treatment within the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*

and the *Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*. Restoration to a particular period in time is a legitimate choice of intervention; however, some preservationists caution against the use of restoration, which may be more appropriate to buildings than to landscapes. Nancy Rottle (2008, 36) points out that restoration to a single period of significance can conflict with the dynamism of landscapes. She emphasizes that a static view of historic resources runs the risk of severing cultural landscapes from a richer view of continuities and messy interactions in a stream of history. It can oversimplify the complexity of interactions between humans and nature (Rottle 2008, 136-138).

The Formosa landscape restoration plan's approach emphasized restoration as a treatment for the landscape. As critics of the plan advocated for the preservation of remnants outside the official period of significance that they felt held aesthetic, historical, or environmental value, proponents emphasized the necessity of replicating Ney's landscape in exacting detail in order to ensure authenticity. Deliberation over which features to preserve and the best means to do this was reduced by the choice of restoration as a treatment prior to public engagement. For some, the plan provided a sense of certainty about the proper state of the landscape; however, others felt it overlooked local knowledge and practical considerations that may have informed its recommendations.

SHARED AND CONFLICTING FRAMES OF SUSTAINABILITY

The controversy over the museum landscape is also indicative of multiple perspectives and approaches to sustainability. Proponents of the Formosa landscape restoration plan and its critics seemed to share concern for finding sustainable means to steward the property. However, their preferred methods and paths diverged.

The landscape restoration plan includes sustainability as a central component of the landscape management plan. The plan states:

Sustainability includes the preservation of historic resources through reuse or adaptation of resources. These places of historic character already exist, were shaped by past actions, and are repositories of past energies in terms of materials, fuel, and human efforts. As a result, the Restoration of the Formosa landscape is inherently a recycling process that captures and reuses imbedded past energies of place (Heritage Landscapes, 216).

A rationale for restoring the prairie was to create a low-maintenance landscape to reduce the need for mowing and fertilizing and to offer opportunities to interpret Ney's life. Authors of the plan cite other practices associated with sustainability, including stormwater management, composting, use of durable plantings, invasive species removal and suppression, use of low-impact machinery for landscaping, procurement of local materials, tree planting for carbon sequestration, and materials salvage, among other actions associated with best practices in sustainability.

Opponents of the plan argued for their version of sustainable practices, focusing on the retention of landscape features that they felt served practical functions, such as the shade and passive cooling provided by mature trees in a hot and dry climate. Critics pointed out that in the Formosa landscape restoration plan, the connections between present-day benefits afforded by trees were ignored if a resource fell outside the official period of significance. Mature trees were planned for removal if they did not fit within this period. Additional trees that dated from the Ney era were also slated for removal in the restoration of the relatively youthful landscape of 1907. These trees were to be removed with new trees planted in their places, without discussion of the potential value of their age, patina, and ecological function. It was also pointed out that the plan did not contemplate the possibility of managing natural tree attrition, rather than immediate tree removal. Critics called for more deliberation about resources slated for removal.⁸

There were also concerns that the reconstruction of the chicken-wire fence and creation of the prairie would change the ways visitors had accessed and interacted

with the landscape. Neighborhood residents pointed to the use of the grounds for egg hunts and other community events and worried about the ability to use the grounds. The demolition of the wall and the construction of a prairie and chicken-wire fence was interpreted as an attempt to privatize a landscape regularly utilized by residents and the public. There was an acute sense that a heavily used and appreciated landscape might be lost (see Fig. 3 for existing conditions prior to restoration).

Critics of the plan also raised the question of the Austin Park and Recreation Department's ability to steward the restoration over time. Landscape consultant Jill Nokes questioned the practices used in seeding the short-grass prairie and noted the presence of invasive species (National Trust for Historic Preservation 2010). Other critics likened the prairie to a vacant lot. There were sentiments that the new fence was not likely to be easily read as an original and valued feature of the landscape. Some of these perceptions may have been related to aesthetic aversions to materials considered cheap and ephemeral, which contrasted with perceptions of the stone wall as historic and stately and to the permeability of the rest of the site's perimeter. Ruskinian sentiments were expressed about stone features said to have been meant to last for the ages. A reconstructed chicken-wire fence was said to be no match for a stone wall.

Figures 8 and 9 show the prairie after restoration on the southern portion of the site. The stone wall remains for now (Fig. 9) and contrasts with the prairie. The wall is recommended for removal in a future phase of the restoration plan.

In *Cultural Sustainability: Aligning Aesthetics and Ecology* (1997), Joan Nassauer argues for the value of ecological landscape restoration while placing emphasis on the need to tend to community perceptions: "The community values signs of care in the landscape, and these signs of care can prevent misuse of nature by showing traces of well-intentioned human action to maintain the landscape.... A landscape that does not show signs of care may be perceived as abandoned and messy" (Nassauer 1997, 75). Given the level of participation in the neighborhood, the museum's need for community support, and the potential for the prairie restoration to improve environmental performance, perceptions of the landscape matter. They are likely to impact the degree to which the restoration is accepted as a successful act of either sustainability or preservation.

Cosgrove has written that the terms preservation, protection, conservation, and sustainability contain the roots of shared goals aimed at "arresting or at least negotiating the social and environmental impacts of change with the intention of sustaining values inherited from the past" (Cosgrove 2006, 57). Likewise, Holleran shows the common roots of the American historic preservation movement and early wilderness conservation movements (Holleran 1998). Despite a shared history and related impulses between preservation and environmental conservation, the controversy is evidence of divergent understanding of the best practices for stewardship and sustainability. The controversy raised important questions about pursuit of sustainability at heritage sites: Are major interventions in the landscape needed in order to fulfill



Fig 8. Side view of property facing east, September 2010.



Fig 9. View of the wall along the southern perimeter of the property, June 2010.

a commitment to sustainability? Can abstaining from certain interventions (such as leaving stone features and trees in place) count as sustainable practices? Should the informal use of grounds be considered in restoration and sustainability efforts?

CONCLUSION: AN ARGUMENT FOR VALUES-BASED CULTURAL LANDSCAPE PRESERVATION

Randall Mason writes: "It is axiomatic that historic preservation reflects, in some manner, its society in the choices of what gets preserved, how it is preserved and interpreted, and who makes the decisions" (Mason 2006, 1). Mason draws a distinction between two cultures of preservation, one that he calls "curatorial," which is typified by an approach that "looks inward, building on preservation's roots in connoisseurship and craft approaches to conserving artworks." The alternate approach he calls "urbanistic," which seeks "to connect historic preservation to the work of other fields and disciplines, such as planning, design, and education, in pursuit of solutions that address broader social goals" (Mason 2006, 2). The emerging trend over the last generation, according to Mason, has been a shift away from the curatorial model to one that is open to competing values associated with a particular historic site. This recognition of a "multiplicity of values" invites a more expansive sense of place than that allowed by the curatorial impulse alone and acknowledges that "different values are perceived by different lenses" (Mason 2006, 1).

As an extension of values-based preservation in cultural landscapes, Heidi Hohmann offers a vision for an expanded model for cultural landscape preservation (Hohmann 2008, 126). The model moves from "effective preservation," which is preoccupied with visual and composition replication, to an "efficient preservation" that satisfies economic, use, and access prescriptions. The model then moves to an "expanded preservation," which consists of preservation practices that are able to address ecological, cultural, interpretive, political, and moral concerns. Hohmann notes that cultural landscape preservation lacks "strong internal critiques" that would serve to raise concerns in this expanded set of domains. The case study of the Formosa landscape

restoration plan reveals that these critiques may, in fact, be present when plans are opened to debate early in the process.

While the landscape restoration plan sought a unifying and complete vision of the landscape in 1907, the present reality is a landscape that reflects enduring questions of preservation and contemporary issues of cultural landscapes preservation. Only part of the first phase of the restoration has been implemented at this time. The newly installed prairie and recreated driveway now coexist with the Violet Crown Garden Club wall and a few trees retained in response to neighborhood outcry (see Figs. 7, 10). Non-native invasive species, such as Bermuda grass, have appeared in the restored landscape, and efforts are being made to eradicate it and replant the prairie a second time. The 1920s-era Lodge remains boarded up, as it has been since 2005, awaiting rehabilitation in a future phase (Fig. 11). Original Ney-era fence posts have not been secured to a newly reconstructed cedar and chicken-wire fence as planned and seem more evocative of the passage of time as artifacts standing alone (Fig 12).

During the controversy over the Formosa landscape restoration plan, many of the concerns expressed were brushed aside. Critics were told that the plan was a strict restoration and that there was little room for modifications or compromises because of the exacting nature of the restoration. Some concerned citizens were told that they should not be worried about the removal of the stone wall because that was to occur in a later phase of the plan. While still in draft form, the plan seemed to remain impenetrable to the issues raised.

At present, there are discernible shifts in official positions in response to information raised during the controversy. The Texas Historical Commission and the City of Austin have moved toward official recognition of the historic significance after 1907. The Texas Historical Commission determined Formosa to be eligible at a local level of significance for its association with the Texas Fine Arts Association and the Violet Crown Garden Club through the year 1941 (Wright 2010). The Austin City Council passed a resolution directing the city manager to work with the local landmark commission and other stakeholders to preserve the stone wall and respect the historic fabric associated with other periods of significance (City of Austin 2010). However, according to

the Texas Historical Commission, the Formosa landscape restoration plan is a complete and unified vision for the landscape and cannot be modified in piecemeal fashion to incorporate new information.

Due to the uncertainty of future funding and a landscape plan that cannot evolve, implementation of future phases of the plan seems to be in question. Thirty years ago, J.B. Jackson wrote that the preservation movement seemed to require dramatic discontinuity and the necessity of ruins before renewal and restoration (Jackson 1980, 101). One must ask whether preservation's paradigm has changed since then and whether heritage sites need to go through periods of neglect, rejection, and massive restoration. A tenon in the Violet Crown Garden Club wall speaks poignantly of the TFAA's plans to extend the stone wall around the perimeter seventy years ago; the TFAA's landscape was also one that never reached a state of completion. Here, it seems that cultural landscape preservation could benefit from consideration of methods of care and restoration that are incremental and community-based, rather than relying solely upon a sweeping and unified vision.

This case study illustrates how restoration as a treatment for cultural landscapes can result in significant controversy and resistance. A strict restoration taken at face value runs the risk of oversimplifying the complex craft of preservation, turning it into what appears to be a highly technical exercise that shuts out local knowledge to its own peril. While historical photographs and documentation provide a valuable window into the past, they cannot answer complex questions regarding what is valued, what should be preserved, and the means to steward heritage sites over time. This controversy consists of questions in which preservationists must fully engage a constituency broader than heritage professionals alone (Mason 2006; Longsteth 2008). This can lead to heritage projects that have a broader acceptance and potential for greater success. Through a values-based preservation, creative and pragmatic solutions may be sought to provide a broader view of history and community.

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Fig. 10. Reconstructed driveway and new plantings, January 2011.



Fig. 11. The Lodge moved onto site during the 1930s, January 2010.



Fig. 12. Remaining fence posts from the Ney-era fence, October 2010.

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ENDNOTES

1. For a brief history and overview of cultural landscapes preservation, see "Why Cultural Landscapes Preservation" in *Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America* (Alanen and Melnick 2000). See also Longstreth, 2008.
2. For a brief biography of Elisabet Ney, see the Elisabet Ney Museum page of the Austin City Connection website: <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/elisabetney/>.
3. The restoration plan contrasts the Formosa landscape and the Hyde Park neighborhood; however, a national register district and a local historic district include all of Formosa's buildings (including the 1920-era Lodge) as contributing elements of the neighborhood (Freeman and Moore 1988; City of Austin 2010).
4. Neighborhood listserv messages are archived on a Hyde Park Yahoo Group archive and were last retrieved August 15, 2010.
5. The Austin City Council originally ordered the dam breached and the lake drained in 1898 for health and safety reasons (Heritage Landscapes 2007, 182). The landscape restoration plan recommends both stabilization and reconstruction of the Ney dam and "modification as needed to slow water during storm events" (Heritage Landscapes 2007, 212).
6. See the Secretary of the Interior's guidelines for cultural landscapes for definitions of these terms: http://www.nps.gov/hps/hli/landscape_guidelines/terminology.htm.
7. For a brief history of the Texas Garden Clubs, Inc., describing the beginnings of the gardening movement in Texas and its connection to women's growing social involvement, see Texas Garden Clubs, Inc. Retrieved May 27, 2011, from <http://www.texasgardenclubs.org/history.html>.
8. Two ashe junipers from the Ney era, a mountain laurel, and a stand of crape myrtles were retained after considerable outcry.

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