



Exploring the Chase Building Archive

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Background

The Black Diaspora Archive as the University of Texas at Austin documents the Black experience through the voices and stories of those who have championed the Black spaces that we use and benefit from today. For the Black Community in Austin, East Austin was an area that they were herded into and would terraform to become their own Black space. The John S. and Drucie R. Chase Building Archive is a collaborative effort between the BDA and the Center for Community Engagement (CCE) to document the history of Black East Austin and warn of the diaspora that lurks with its diminishing presence.

Collection Access

The Chase Building Archive is stewarded by the BDA and housed at LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collection. The archive is mainly comprised of nine oral history interviews with community members who grew up in the Robertson Hill neighborhood in East Austin. The oral histories and photographs from this collection can be accessed in the Benson's Rare Books Reading Room. To enable the archive to be widely accessible, these assets have also been ingested in UT's Digital Assets Management System (DAMS) and can be accessed via our Collections Portal.



Building History

The Building at 1191 Navasota Street in East Austin was initially designed by John Saunders Chase in 1952 to serve as the headquarters for the Colored Teachers State Association of Texas (CTSAT). The building served CTSAT for 14 before the group voluntarily dissolved to merge with the Texas State Teachers Association in 1966.



In 1968 the building was purchased by Dr. Elle Mae Pease and named the House of Elegance. Now a beauty salon, the building served as a social hub for the Black community in East Austin and a focal point for social events that Pease would facilitate.



In 2018 the building was purchased by the University of Texas and christened the John S. and Drucie R. Chase Building. The plan was to renovate the building so it could serve as the headquarters for the Center for Community Engagement. The Chase Building reopened in 2022 as the home for the CCE, who uses the building to deploy university resources to foster connections with the community and meet community needs.

Building the Archive

In anticipation of moving into the newly renovated Chase Building, the CCE began to conduct interviews with community members in 2019 to document the change that East Austin had undergone. The oral histories cover a wide range of topics including education, churches, and race and the City of Austin. Among them are excerpts about the importance of remembering Black East Austin.

"Our stories are important to us because we've been here for generations, and yet the community is changing so rapidly that we could be erased without a thought."
-Mrs. Patricia Calhoun



"If we aren't careful, this will be just like visiting a museum where people will come and say this is where African Americans used to live." - Mr. Clifton Vandyke Sr.

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