

This Month in Austin AGC History – Holiday Party Ties Past and Present Together

On December 7, 2021, over 100 construction professionals gathered at the [Driskill Hotel](#) for the annual Austin AGC Holiday Party event. Guests enjoyed the ambience of the historic hotel along with delicious food and beverages, background sounds from a local Austin musical duo, and great networking with industry colleagues. The Chapter chose this location in homage to our 75th anniversary we've been celebrating throughout the year. Founded in 1946, the Chapter's first organizational meetings were held at the Driskill until a permanent location for our offices was established on South Lamar in 1947.

The Driskill Hotel is rich in history dating back to the 1800s. Colonel Jesse Lincoln Driskill, a Tennessee native and cattleman, moved here in 1869 with his wife and four daughters and two sons. At the time, Austin was the westernmost metropolitan area in Texas and established as the State Capital in 1872. After amassing a sizeable fortune in the cattle business, Driskill in 1884 purchased the land at the corner of Brazos and Pecan (later renamed 6th Street) for \$7,500 and set out to build a luxury hotel that would rival those in emerging American cities like New York, Chicago and San Francisco. Thanks to the skills of the local construction industry at the time, the plot was transformed in two years to a prominent hotel at a total cost of \$400,000, roughly \$92 million in today's dollars. Though Driskill soon lost his cattle fortune in 1888 due to drought and a cold winter, the hotel remained as his legacy contribution to the Austin community.



The Driskill in 1888

Standing in the hallway of the hotel's 2nd floor while waiting for guests to arrive to the party on the evening of December 7th, AGC staff and volunteer leaders had the opportunity to reflect on how the construction accomplishments of the industry's past continue to influence and benefit our community of today. Current Chairman of the Austin AGC



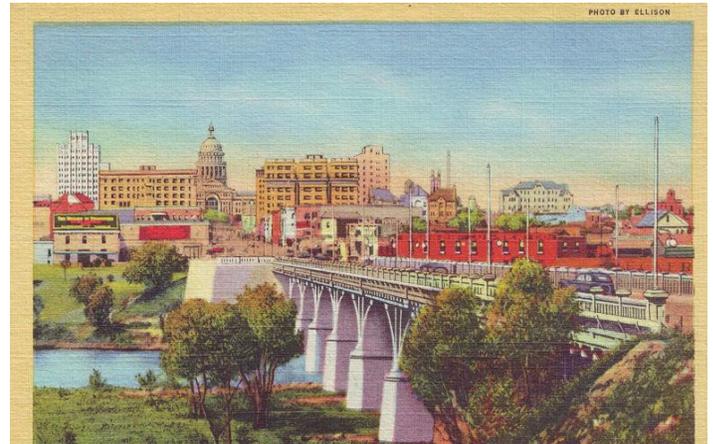
Workers with Chamberlin finish concrete on a Driskill balcony

Networking Committee, Tim Rosenberg with Chamberlin Roofing and Waterproofing, shared many details about [balcony repairs he and his colleagues at Chamberlin worked on at the Driskill a few years prior](#). At that time, the hotel showed signs of water damage to the soffits and balustrades of the four major balconies – two on the Sixth Street side and two on the Brazos Street side. Given Chamberlin's extensive experience in building repair and restoration, they were brought on as the prime contractor to remediate the water intrusion and restore the balconies. The project scope included balcony deck replacement and waterproofing, balustrade restoration and façade repair. Since the property is historic, careful consideration had to be given to make any updates reflective of the hotel's original design and construction.

This ongoing cycle of "building the future and restoring the past" is, in essence, what the construction industry and AGC organization is all about. The local Austin AGC Chapter was organized 75 years ago by local leaders who wanted it to serve as the collective voice for local commercial builders. Those initial leaders contributed greatly to Austin's quality of life, and today our current leaders continue to construct new buildings for a growing population while preserving many older,

iconic properties. Over this anniversary year [we've highlighted in monthly articles](#) some of the industry leaders who helped build both our City and our AGC Chapter. For their work and vision, we are truly grateful today.

As noted in a previous history article, our office has been located here at 609 South Lamar since 1947. Just like the Driskill has sat as a quiet observer of all the changes to downtown Austin for almost 140 years, so too has our office seen this part of town evolve over the past 75 years. What was once a simple transportation corridor (Old Fredericksburg Road) in and out of the city is now a very desirable location for both new residential and commercial buildings. Also, and just like with the Driskill again, our leadership and staffing has changed over the years, and our building has needed repairs to keep it up to date and functional, but our AGC mission to serve as a place for local builders to gather and strengthen our industry together has remained the same.



Austin Skyline 1940s

What will the next 75 years bring to Austin and our skyline? We can't be certain exactly what this town will look like in the year 2096, but it's reasonable to expect that it will look quite a bit different from today while still retaining many older



Austin Skyline 2021 (photo courtesy Austin Business Journal)

Austin buildings. The new buildings recently or soon to be completed will serve the next generations of Austinites, just like the old Driskill Hotel continues to charm guests today nearly 140 years after it first opened in 1884. As the old saying goes, "Someone is sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago." For construction, specifically, we enjoy a great quality of life today in part to the many construction professionals who over the years have consistently transformed architectural dreams into a built reality.

If you work in the local construction industry, the Austin AGC salutes and greatly appreciates you! Your skill brings buildings from the planning phase to completion. As a result, we have a beautiful City to behold and enjoy, one that attracts many of the best and brightest people from around the globe to visit and live. As our 75th anniversary year ends, the Austin AGC hopes all in the local construction industry will take a moment to appreciate the many projects you and your industry colleagues have helped build here. We all have a lot to be thankful for!