

ROBERTA CRENSHAW

1914-2005

“

Barton Creek is our first priority. Dense development along Barton Creek, too close to the stream, will pollute Barton Springs Pool and ultimately destroy one of the area's most valuable assets.”

-excerpted from Austin Environmental Council mission statement, 1970



Roberta Crenshaw was a true visionary and one of Austin's earliest open space advocates. She and a handful of other enlightened citizens in the 1950s and 60s recognized Austin's potential as a thriving metropolis within a haven of green spaces and natural springs.

Roberta Crenshaw's passion for parks was inspired by her travels abroad. She was a headstrong woman of high society who refused to be intimidated even as she clashed repeatedly with powerful political and business interests. Roberta's principal ambition was to save the best green open spaces for the citizens of Austin to use and enjoy. She fought tirelessly to safeguard Austin's natural treasures from the ill-effects of rapid and unregulated growth, even in the face of open hostility and sexism.

Parks Advocate

Austin Environmental Council Founder 1970-1973

Parks and Recreation Citizen's Board Chair 1964-1968

Parks and Recreation Board 1953-1968

In 1954 Crenshaw donated 6 acres of land from her estate to become Reed Park. She was appointed to the Parks Board in 1953, where she served for 15 years, the last 4 as Chair. She was pivotal in the creation of a true Parks and Recreation department in 1965, persuading the City Council to transfer the Parks Division over from Public Works. She was also a key figure in creating the plan for the Town Lake hike and bike trail while keeping it free from commercial interests.

In 1970 she co-founded Austin's first home-grown environmental organization called the Austin Environmental Council.

The Council was focused on keeping development off of Barton Creek and other green spaces. She was one of six other plaintiffs who first attempted to use legal means to stop development. It was the AEC that first pushed for the City's first environmental office, the Office of Resource Management. It was a landmark achievement to institute an environmental perspective inside the workings of the city.

Roberta felt a tremendous responsibility and burden to work in great haste. In her mind, the stakes were extremely high; she believed that if the proper protections were not put in place immediately, the most beautiful parts of Austin would be lost forever. Time would show, however, that the level of intensity she put into her work could not be sustained, leading her into a health crisis from which she would never fully recover. Even so, Roberta had already made so many significant contributions, the way had been paved for continued environmental progress in Austin.

ROBERTA CRENSHAW CONT'D



Photo Credit: Austin American-Statesman, 1967

Remarkably, Roberta embarked on the majority of her work before environmentalism was even a mainstream term. Certainly had she not laid the essential ground work at such an early phase in Austin's development, it would not be the city it is today. The enduring natural state of Barton Creek and Barton Springs can be traced directly back to her strident efforts beginning five decades ago.

BARTON CREEK
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TIME STREAM