

## VOLUME 7, NO. 2 Summer 1989

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A Campbell Bat Tower Restoration Project in Texas  
Murphy, Mari

On the banks of the Guadalupe River in the central Texas Hill Country stands one of the state's more unusual historical landmarks, the legacy of Dr. Charles Campbell. Built in 1918 by San Antonio's mayor, Albert Steves, the "Hygieostatic Bat Roost" was the first of the Campbell bat towers erected on private land. The name Steves chose for the bat roost reflected his feelings about its purpose; "hygieostatic" was derived from the Greek *hygieia* and *stasis*, meaning "standing for health." The tower is the area's last remnant of Campbell's grassroots campaign to control malaria by recruiting bats to eat the disease carrying *Anopheles* mosquito.

The tower still stands at the country home of the former mayor's grandson, Marshall Steves, the third generation of the family to grow up with a famous bat roost in the backyard. Marshall Steves is a BCI Trustee. Family records don't say when bats first arrived at the tower, but everyone agrees bats have been there for many years. The current population is a mix of about 1,000 Cave myotis (*Myotis velifer*) and Mexican free-tailed bats (*Tadarida brasiliensis*), though at one time there may have been as many as 10,000. Several years ago the resident colony began declining. Age has taken its toll on the historic bat roost, and a project to restore it is being undertaken with BCI's guidance. The tower has been damaged by years of weathering and hail storms, which allowed increased light and air circulation into the roost. A slight modification of the inner design will increase the chances of attracting even more bats, and the outside will be reshingled, once again stabilizing the roost temperature.

In his 1925 book, *Bats, Mosquitoes and Dollars*, Charles Campbell writes that Albert Steves carefully watched the progress of Campbell's novel experiment to attract bats to roosts built specifically for them. Steves was mayor of San Antonio in 1914, the same year that the City Council passed a resolution protecting bats within the city. He also presided when funds were appropriated to build San Antonio's first Municipal Bat Roost. Though mosquitoes were never a big problem at the Steves ranch, Albert Steves' concern was for the small town of Comfort, only a mile away.

For his grandson, Marshall, watching the bat emergence on summer evenings has always been exciting. Today, Marshall and his wife, Patsy, hope that the restoration of this unique historical landmark will bring great numbers of bats to the community once more.

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*Now a historical landmark, the "Hygieostatic Bat Roost" was built in 1918 near Comfort, Texas – the first on private land. Marshall Steves (right) and his son, Sam (left), show off the restoration project. PHOTO BY MERLIN D. TUTTLE*

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