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Charles Albertson Home

• 2019 • AVENUE N 1/2 •

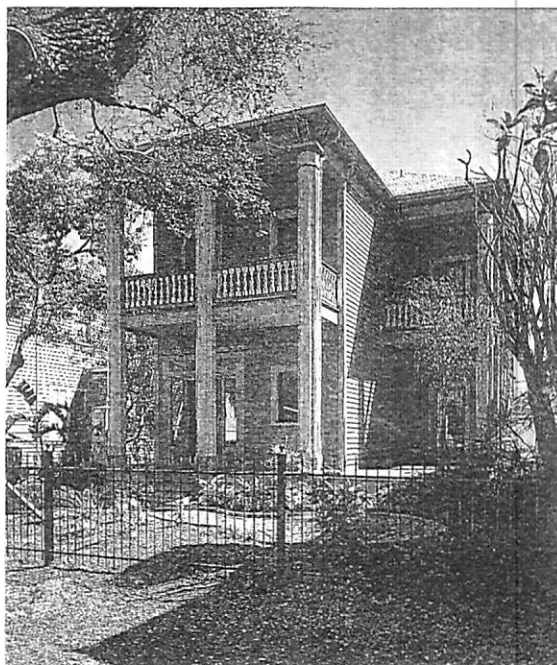
The unusual appearance of the Charles Albertson House is due in large part to the fact that it was once a wing of the house immediately to its east at 2017 Avenue N 1/2. It is not entirely clear when Albertson built his large house, but it most likely took place in 1870. At that point, Albertson is listed as a clerk working for Alfred Muckle on the Strand. Muckle was a cotton factor and merchant, and over the next decade Albertson appears to have worked his way up the ranks in the company, becoming first a "cotton classer" and eventually a "cotton buyer". Little else is known of Albertson except that he lived in the house until 1892.

Edward D. Garrat appears as the owner of the property following Albertson. E.D. Garrat & Co. sold "dry goods, notions and ladies ready made wear." Garrat owned the property until after the 1900 Storm when, in 1903, he sold it to Joseph Gengler. Gengler was the president of a very large wholesale goods company and probably bought the property as an investment as he only owned it for two years and then sold it to Ben Blum.

Blum is listed as the Treasurer of the Blum Hardware Company in 1905. The business advertises as selling "heavy hardware, blacksmith's supplies, iron, steel, stoves, granite and tinware." However, it would appear that Blum thought he could make a better go of it on his own and opened a competing business the following year under his name, Ben Blum & Co. Evidence of the competition can be seen in side-by-side advertisements in the Galveston Daily News, one for "Blum Hardware Co." and the other for "Ben Blum & Co." In addition to a very similar name, it seems Blum's offshoot company even sold virtually the same merchandise, a practice that today would probably result in a lawsuit.

It is during Blum's tenure in the house that the property was split into two separate houses. Blum appears to have continued to live in the house until 1923. There seems to have been an association between Blum and Harry Black, President of Black's Hardware in Houston, about this time, and perhaps Blum left Galveston for business opportunities on the mainland.

Following Blum's departure, the house was owned by L.



Wenc Jelinek, a draftsman with the US Engineers Office. Jelinek was by 1930 the Chief Draftsman in the US Engineers Office and continued to occupy the house until 1945. Jelinek's leaving signaled the decline of the house and by 1947 there are five tenants listed and the house was divided into apartments. Like many of the houses in Galveston, the Albertson House deteriorated under the constant pressure of multiple tenants. Finally, the house was rescued by its current owners and returned to use as a single family residence.

Today, the house remains as an unusual blend of the Greek Revival and Italianate styles. The dominant feature of the exterior of the house is the two bay front gallery with its colossal columns.

At first glance the columns appear to be classical fluted columns but closer inspection reveals them to be paneled octagonal columns. The use of octagonal columns on Italianate Houses is a reference to Tre Cento Italy where they were the precursor of the classical orders revived in architecture during the Renaissance. The Italianate Style is further reinforced by paired eave brackets over each of the columns. The massing and proportions of the house show the lingering influence of the Greek Revival Style and the balusters of the second floor galleries are the influence of classicism.

First glances are also defied by the entry door and surround.

Where you would expect to find a Greek Revival door and surround, instead is an exquisite Arts & Crafts door, with the tell-tale high proportioned rail and flush stiles and is complete with an art glass light. The door surrounds contain complementing art glass as well in a corresponding Arts & Crafts motif.



The Charles Albertson Home

2017 Avenue N 1/2
Galveston, Texas 77550

Several commercial leaders lives are woven through the early history of this home. Built in 1870, the house was described as a "classic example of the Post-Civil War Southern town house type with octagonal columns and bracketed eaves and was the home of cotton buyer Charles Albertson."¹

An Insurance Description and Estimate of Present Cash Value also dates the house to 1870 with an addition in 1879. This description also states that the house is a "shingle and metal roofed frame building with two stories."² The Charles Albertson home also appears as the only building on the block in the 1871 Birds'-Eye View Map of Galveston from the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, Texas.³

One of the more interesting features of the house is that it was later divided into two homes that now sit side-by-side (2017 and 2019 Avenue N ½) and are both occupied as single-family dwellings. Each of these homes has a "1900 Storm Survivor" plaque displayed at the front door.

The original house was built at the Lost Bayou section of the current San Jacinto Historical District. The Hitchcock Bayou, with its two bridges along 21st street, extended into the Island from the Gulf side and was described by residents as "a disease-breeding area that would go dry in the summer and leave thousands of decaying fish and crabs to pollute the air"⁴ This bayou was filled during the 1870's and is not represented on subsequent maps as homes were built over the area.⁵

So, the Albertson home was one of the earlier ones to have been

bravely built nearer the Gulf in an area known as the "out lots" (SW ¼ O. L. 44 as seen on attached Insurance Valuation papers) as opposed to being built on the commercial and more populated residential bay side.

Galveston was established by an act of the Mexican Congress in 1825 due to it's natural deep harbor and is the oldest port on the Gulf west of New Orleans. In 1860 the first railroad-The Galveston, Houston, and Henderson Railroad- reached the young city. In 1870, as Texas was readmitted to the Union, shipping and commerce were burgeoning and the Medical College and The Galveston Historical Society were founded the following year.⁶

The city's population is listed as 7,300 before the War Between the States, then as 22,200 in 1880, and over 37,000 in 1900 largely due to the influx of 4,000 immigrants a year.⁷

Charles Albertson built his home in 1870 and was active in the city until 1900. He was listed as a clerk working for Alfred Muckle on the Strand, then as a cotton factor and merchant⁸ and, over the next decade, appears to have worked his way up in the company, becoming first a "cotton classer" and eventually a "cotton buyer" in 1885.⁹ By that year the bustling city was the largest in Texas and the third largest cotton market in the nation handling 62% of the state's cotton and 12% of the nation's.¹⁰ So, Albertson's life in Galveston spanned the critical growth period of the city as well as influencing Texas and the nation at the same time.

Little else is known about Albertson after 1900; his name is not among the recorded deaths in the Great Storm of 1900.¹¹ But by then

a new name, Edward D. Garrat, appears in records as owner of the property.

E.D. Garrat and Company was a dry goods and ladies' ready-to-wear store. The home's description was "building now being roped. Contractor agrees to have a man sleep on the place at night." The value was set at \$2040.00. Comments on the same page but dated May 8, 1901, state that "The place is in a wrecked condition. Glass out. Vacant and uninsurable." Further remarks note the "story above and rear gallery down....some 40 lights of glass out."¹² No indication was found that Garrat ever lived in the house; instead, he quickly sold it again.

Joseph Gengler, President and General Manager of the Peter Gengler Company his father started, next owned the house a short time. His family's grocery shipped food and goods by train from the port throughout Texas and beyond. Gengler's influence is seen in news articles stating that the business handled "500-600 delivery orders on week days and 800-900 on Saturdays." It was billed as the "largest, finest wholesale and retail grocery in Texas, IF NOT IN THE ENTIRE SOUTH."¹³

By 1903 Ben Blum acquired the property valued at 2890.00.¹⁴ Blum had arrived on the Island in 1874 and, for twenty-two years, sold junk gradually phasing into a wholesale hardware business called Ben Blum and Company. He then sold this successful business and created Blum Hardware Company. It was advertised as "Dealers in General Heavy Hardware, Hay Rakes, Steel Plows, Mowers and Harrows, Stoves, Tinware and Graniteware. Local agents for Glidden and Waukegan Barbed Wire and Buffalo Standard Scales. Nos. 2211 and 2213 Strand."¹⁵

His involvement in civic, religious, and commercial affairs of the city was extensive.¹⁶

In 1903 Blum accepted the challenge to remodel the house he'd acquired on Lots 3 and 4 of Avenue N ½, destroyed though it was after the Storm. It took "10 days to complete" and was described as having "one wooden cistern" and "a one-story stable." It was wired for electricity and had "a pantry with 6 rooms, 2 halls, 1 bathroom, 7 porches, and 2 mantels and grates." There were "2 brick flues" and "brick piers 2 feet in height." It measured "28 x 40, 24 x 30, 8 x 20," with the "one-story addition 12 x 28 and 8 x 16."¹⁷

It is during Blum's tenure that the property was divided with the wing that is the subject of this narrative moved east to Lot 4. Drawings of the site show the basic footprint of Lots 3 & 4 house as two rectangles side-by-side with the eastern portion (now 2017 N1/2) prominently closer to the street than the smaller, narrower, western rectangle. A natural division line is evident. Today the eastern wing, including the main entrance of the joined house with its four octagonal columns and double galleries with walk-through wooden windows, remains closer to the street and appears to have been moved directly to the side.

The 1899 Sanborn map depicts one house¹⁸ while the 1912 Sanborn map depicts two houses.¹⁹ It is not, however, until 1914 that an occupant, "George Knigge, a billing clerk in the Ben Blum Company," is listed as a resident of the newly-moved wing.²⁰ Then Sol A. Blum, "a traveling salesman for Ben Blum and Company" lives there in 1919.²¹

In the same time period Ben Blum was residing next door at his original location. And in 1908 several employees resided with him in his wing of the house such as Louis M. Kaminsky, “a traveling sales man for Ben Blum and Company”²² and, in 1913, David E. Wolfe , with no profession listed.²³

In order to accommodate Galveston’s burgeoning population of port, rail, and cotton workers, plus the influx of immigrants and students, many Galvestonians built houses to serve as rental property, especially after the 1885 fire.²⁴ It appears that Blum merely used the very large house he already owned, adapting it to the needs of his business and new tenants. Now, many years later, we might call this a “win-win” situation.

After Blum’s death, the moved wing at 2017 N ½ was sold to Sam T. Clark and a series of owners followed²⁵ until the present owners opened their weekly news magazine one morning in January, 2012.....and, since then, began yet another remodel of the historic property.

Note: Listings in bold face are included in this narrative folder.

¹ Beasley, Ellen and Fox, Stephen, Galveston Architectural Guidebook, 1996, The Galveston Historical Foundation, page 157.

² **Description and Estimate of Present Cash Value, City of Galveston, Texas, November, 1900.**

³ “Birds’-Eye View Map” of Galveston, Texas. 1871. The Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas. www.birdseyeview.org

⁴ Davis, Brian M., Lost Galveston, Images of America Series, 2010, Arcadia Publishing, Charleston, South Carolina, page 123.

⁵ “Birds’-Eye View Map” of Galveston, Texas, 1885. The Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas. www.birdseyeview.org

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- ⁶ Alexander, Denise, Galveston's Historic Downtown and The Strand District: Images of America Series, 2010, Arcadia Publishing, Charleston, South Carolina, pages 9-11.
- ⁷ Cartwright, Gary, Galveston: A History of the Island, 1991. MacMillan Publishing Company, New York, New York, pages 77, 119, and 180.
- ⁸ Directory, The City of Galveston, Texas, 1881-1882.
- ⁹ Directory, The City of Galveston, Texas, 1884-1885.
- ¹⁰ Remmers, Mary W., Portrait of Galveston Island, Second Edition, Morgan Printing Company, Austin, Texas, pages 14, 17.
- ¹¹ Galveston Texas History Center, "1900 Storm Recorded Deaths," The Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas. www.gthcenter.org/exhibits/storm/1900/index.html
- ¹² **Description and Estimate of Present Cash Value, City of Galveston, Texas, January, 1903.**
- ¹³ Advertisement for The Peter Gengler Company, *The Galveston Daily News*, September 1, 1914.
- ¹⁴ **Description and Estimate of Present Cash Value, City of Galveston, Texas, January, 1903.**
- ¹⁵ Directory, The City of Galveston, Texas, 1905.
- ¹⁶ Obituary of Ben Blum, *The Galveston Daily News*, April 20, 1929.
- ¹⁷ **Description and Estimate of Present Cash Value, City of Galveston, Texas, January, 1903.**
- ¹⁸ **Sanborn Maps, City of Galveston, Texas, Avenue N ½ between 20th and 21st Streets, 1899.**
- ¹⁹ **Sanborn Maps, City of Galveston, Texas, Avenue N ½ between 20th and 21st Streets, 1912.**
- ²⁰ Directory, The City of Galveston, Texas, 1914-1915.
- ²¹ Directory, The City of Galveston, Texas, 1918-1919.
- ²² Directory, The City of Galveston, Texas, 1908-1909.
- ²³ Directory, The City of Galveston, Texas, 1913-1914.
- ²⁴ Davis, Brian, Lost Galveston: Images of America Series, Arcadia Publishing, Charleston, South Carolina, 2010, pages 36 and 46.
- ²⁵ **Description and Estimate of Present Cash Value, City of Galveston, Texas, original date illegible with 5 cut newspaper sales notices attached and dated.**