

Turn-Of-The-Century House

1903 OSCAR A. WALKER HOUSE
1311 25th STREET (BATH OR ROSENBERG)

In the 1890's Stephen V. Eaton owned the block known as NE16, and the Sanborn Maps in the Rosenberg Library Archives show small buildings on the lots. In 1900, S.V.Eaton is listed as the property owner, and the total improvements are recorded as \$11,600. After the storm, Eaton sold Lots 2, 3, 4, 8 and 25 through 32 to John Charles League, a well-known Galveston real estate investor. The NE16 and SE16 blocks were subdivided into 32 lots. Lots 1 to 8 were platted with lots 36 feet wide and 140 feet deep facing 25th Street with Lots 25 to 32 facing 26th Street in Block NE16. Avenue M½ was abandoned and became Lots 8 and 25.

County tax records show M.B.Walker as tax payer from 1904. In 1905, improvements of \$1,400 show on the records which indicate in 1903 or 1904 Oscar A. Walker and wife, Mary B. Walker, built this "town house". The property being a mere thirty-six feet in width, the house is only twenty-seven feet wide; although the space is so well utilized, rooms—all with eleven foot ceilings— seem very spacious. The 1905 City Directory listing gives information: Oscar A. Walker, Clerk, D.G. Fellman Company; residence, 1305 25th; Oscar A. Walker, Jr., Collector, Texas Bank & Trust Company, same address.

The city directories do not list the 1311 Street address until 1921, and before, list this address as "1305" 25th Street: In 1913 Walker, Jr. is listed across the street at 1310 25th Street; the Senior is still listed at 1305 25th Street. There may have been a long-running mistake in the city directories but more than likely a change occurred in the address because we know that Oscar A. and Mary B. Walker resided in this house until 1935. The house was vacant in 1936-37; a general warranty deed transferred the property to O. A. Walker, Jr. in 1937; Oscar A. Walker, probably the Junior, resided there in 1938; Oscar A. Walker III and Emily resided there in 1939; . . . Oscar A. Walker, Jr. and Elise (he was Vice-President of U. S. National Bank) resided there in 1943-44, and finally the house passed from Walker ownership in the mid-1940's. A succession of several owners follows who rented the house for residential purposes and even — at one time — leased the house to a physician who practiced medicine on the premises.

The styling and floor plan of this two-story house follows a scaled-down version of large Victorian houses. This house and the counterpart house shown on the Saturday Tour in Turn-of-the-Century category have basically on the exterior the same bay arrangement, hipped roof, and gable end plan on the front elevation. There are open galleries on the upper and lower floors with lacé-like carpentry decorations. The frieze above the porches with brackets, pierced by stylized leaves on the columns, extends across both galleries in delicate duplication. The upper sawtooth trim still has pendants. The house has a nice open side porch extending east off the lower porch. The windows

on the front elevation of the house recess into the upper floor walls enabling passage to the galleries.

The present owners had searched Galveston for a charming, modest size house that needed restoring. The remodeling was done personally by the owners. The house was still activated for gas fixtures; the outlets were removed and the one remaining original fixture in the house was installed in the upper hall. All over-door transoms had been boarded over or removed. The transoms were replaced and several have been activated. Both the front and rear stairways had been closed off with partitions. The present bar area was a utility room. An abundance of door and window trim was missing as were rosettes, finials and certain other ornamentation. Patterns of the existing wood embellishments were taken to Houston where items were milled and then re-installed in their original positions.

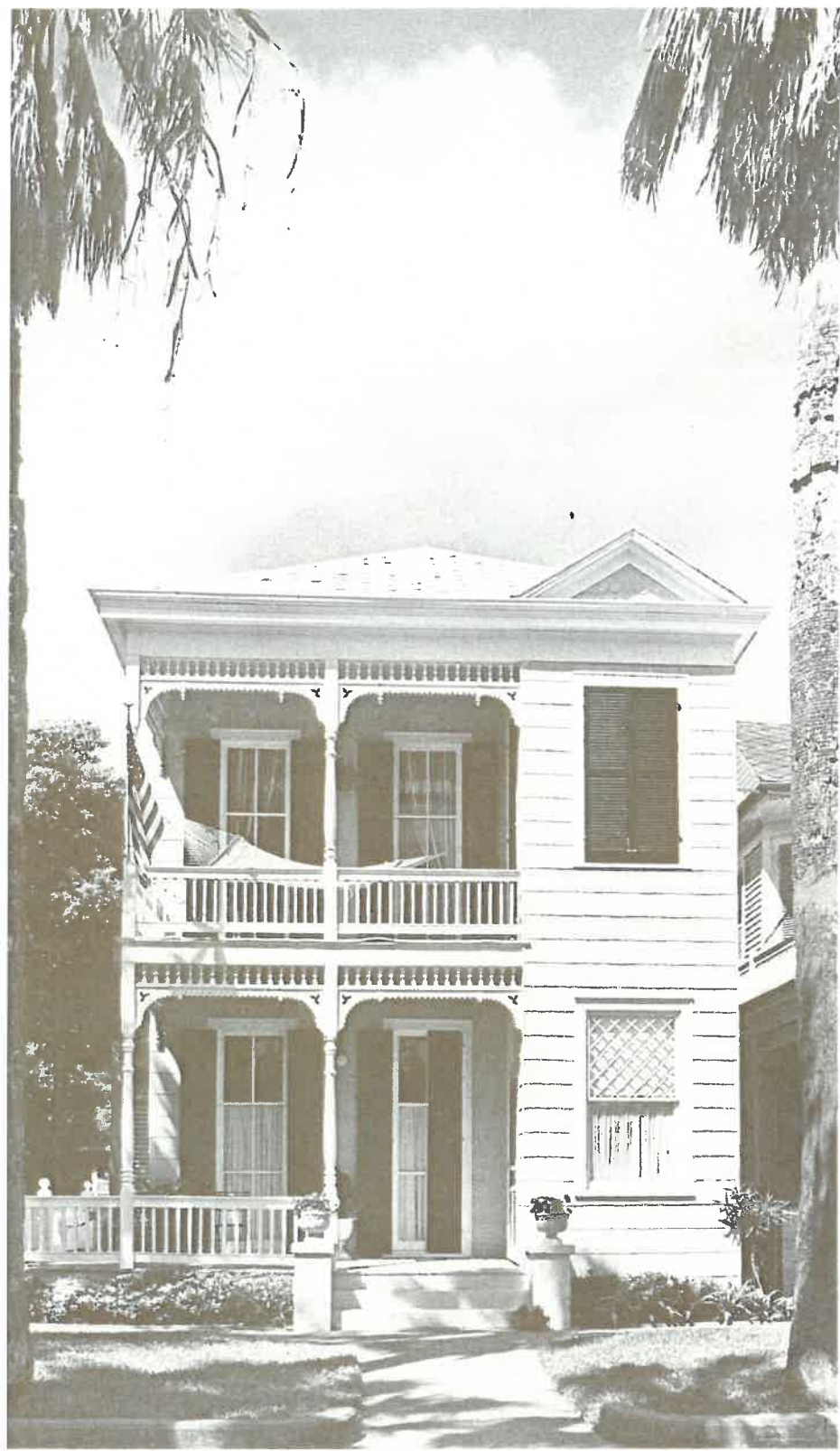
The entrance hall is narrow and reminiscent of Charleston houses. The entry graces a lovely proportioned, gently rising stairway to the second floor. A decision was made to paint the dark balusters white but retain the brown wood tone of the handrail. The ceiling fixture is an English brass open bird cage. The painting here is a Salvador Dali, and other fine art is abundant throughout the house, key to the interior design.

The drawing room walls are upholstered with white linen. The focal point in the room is an Austrian porcelain stove that also serves as a source of heat. The wood carvings are German antiques. The oil lamps on either side of the sofa are antique Italian. The pocket doors, in fine working order, have original brass hardware, all repolished.

The dining room walls are upholstered above the one-third paneled wainscotting with a traditional chintz of English design. Overhead is a Venetian chandelier executed in the Waterford style, and the mirror above the sideboard is Mexican hammered tin done in the English tradition. The porcelain figures are Korean. The clock is a Seth Thomas, Adamantine Clock, patented in 1880. The ribbon back chairs are modern reproductions but finely handcarved by a friend of the owners.

The trophy room is in its original finish of red pine. The English ironstone plate collection is an unusual one. The trophies are an antelope, a Python snake, a great horned owl, and a piranha—the toothed fish. The chandelier in the room is a Tiffany-styled piece. Note the pair of turn-of-the-century brass wall lights originally fired by gas. The gas petcocks are still in place. The library table is Irish, country victorian, ornately handcarved. The powder room is designed as a beach dressing tent, circa 1895. The rear "up-stairway" is off this room.

The rear upper sitting room also has the original red pine paneling and contains a Victorian library table and a nice Dutch armoire. Above the armoire is a sand cast pot by local artist, Hays Parker. The oil painting on the



easel is by the architect and teacher, William Anzalone. On the wall are Chinese wood-carvings.

The master space has a miniature Victorian iron mantel from St. Louis with its summer cover in place. The hallway shelf is handcarved with Neptune figures. The headboards of the beds were found in an antique shop in Galveston. Notice the Tibetan wood blocks done by Monks.

The guest room is decorated in the Victorian fashion and contains antiques belonging to the owner's family. The chandelier is a Dutch woodcarved, turn-of-the-century piece. The small groupings of oil paintings are European antiques. The Victorian settee is from New Orleans.

The former nursery or luggage room, with a lovely "walk-through" window to the gallery, contains a Louis XVI caned bed, an Adam coat rack because the room had no closet, and an Irish "potty" table.

Upstairs, all rooms are accessible from the hall. The hallway ceiling fixture is the only original one to the house and is Empire in style. Installed at a time when owners had little confidence in electricity, the fixture was adapted to both electricity and gas. In the hall is an interesting miniature of an eighteen-foot mural designed for the Marriott Inn's Camelot Pub.

The bathroom is masculine in feel with a splash of red in the flocking of the Victorian border. An interesting map on the wall shows the major travel routes of Texas pioneers. . . Galveston at the time was the largest and most important city.

Architectural remodeling was done in exact detail of the original house. The interiors, however, have been designed for cheerful, contemporary living today.

When the owners purchased the house, it was in a period of decline . . . electricity for the upstairs came from a line through the bathroom window and extension cords . . . both stairs had been partitioned off. The house, with much vision, planning, and effort, has turned into a pleasant, livable home!

American Society of Interior Designers, with business offices in Houston, these professional people live here because they love the Island ambience, its people and the "quieter" life. □

