

• 1 • 8 • 9 • 9 •

Luther Murff Home

• 1 3 2 0 • 2 5 T H •

In 1899, when construction began on Luther Murff's new home on 25th Street, in what is now the Silk Stocking National Historic District, the island city was abuzz with activity. Hundreds of homes had been built in the area devastated in the 1885 fire. The Grand 1894 Opera House was host to elegant performances of the country's finest entertainment. Electrified street cars had replaced mule-driven street cars. The country's first medical school west of the Mississippi River had been established in Galveston by the University of Texas. Railroads carried both passengers and freight onto Galveston. The city's future was bright and its 35,000 citizens looked forward to ever-increasing prosperity during the 20th century.

In 1898, D.R. Beatty sold Murff the property on which Murff would build his home. In that year, the Texas railroad Commission ruled that all cotton grown in Texas must be pressed at the closest station to the point of production. Thus came the closing of the Texas Cotton Press and Manufacturing Company that operated between 24th and 25th streets and Avenue M and Avenue N. The property was divided into lots and sold at auction on December 5, 1898.

Designed by architect Charles W. Bulger, the house was typical of the Southern Victorian design of houses along the tree-lined avenue. Bulger began his work in Galveston during the 1890s. Previously, he worked in Colorado, and in 1904, he left Galveston for Dallas. In the "Galveston Architecture Guidebook," architectural historians Ellen Beasley and Stephen Fox cite Bulger for his distinctive work in the 1300 and 1400 blocks of Rosenberg Avenue and along 24th Street. "Designing houses for individual clients...or in multiples for speculative builders, he produced some designs that were austere and others that were extremely flamboyant."

While most houses along the 1300 and 1400 blocks of Rosenberg Avenue are attributed to Bulger, only the Luther Murff Home at 1320 Rosenberg is known to definitely be a Bulger design. It shares with



its neighboring houses, unusual proportions in the design of the front porches, and it is on the front porches where Bulger indulged ornamentation to its limits.

Murff completed construction on his two-story frame home in September 1899. A year later, Galveston was struck with the worst disaster in American history, when 6,000 people died during the 1900 Storm. While there are vivid personal accounts recorded by storm survivors, the city also has a terse account of the disaster through business and construction records from the period.

Insurance records for Luther Murff's house state simply: "The above building was blown off foundation 9/8/00. December 29, 1900, is now back on 4 foot brick wall."

Five years later, Murff, then president of Manhattan Mutual Benefit Association, moved his family to 2717 Avenue P and sold his home on Rosenberg Avenue to John L. George, who was a partner in the roofing and paving firm of Hoecker and George, with offices on Water Street.

George was responsible for converting the house to electricity, and continued to live there for the next 20 years.

James E. Marable and his wife, Emma, purchased the home in about 1925 and remained there for more than five decades. Marable was a graduate of the Columbia School of Mechanical Design in Washington, D.C., and the Electromotive Diesel training School in La Grange, Illinois. He began his 50 years of service to the Galveston Wharves on March 13, 1913 as a machinery inspector and master mechanic.

Previous owners purchased the house in 1986 and began restoration. The current owners have continued the loving care and maintenance of the house, adding a delightful herb garden in the rear of the house.

The Queen Anne style design is typical of Galveston's smaller, late Victorian houses. Its double galleries, supported by graceful turned columns, shelter guests from the elements while providing a splendid view of one of the island's beautiful avenues.

