

A HOUSE OF STORIES: 2327 AVENUE M

THE 1894 QUEEN ANN STYLE HOME IN THE SILK STOCKING DISTRICT HAS A UNIQUE HISTORY

BY KATHLEEN MACA

Through the years since it was built, the attractive Queen Anne house at 2327 Avenue M provided a home to several owners and numerous boarders, including three individuals who made headlines for very different reasons.

The home was built in 1894 on one and a half lots by the Hickenlooper family, on a site in close proximity to the brick warehouse of the immense Texas Cotton Press, where the majority of the stylish Silk Stocking District now exists.

This area of the island was originally developed in the early 1870s to include single family dwellings, a corner store, vacant lots, and industrial sites. After the cotton press went bankrupt and was demolished, the land was subdivided and sold at an 1898 auction. That resulted in the Hickenlooper home, still quite new at the time, being surrounded by a more welcoming residential community.

The house was designed with features typical of the Queen Anne style so popular at the time, including an asymmetrical façade decorated with ornate trim. The interior stairway featured a unique gridded, partially detached spindlework pattern, still in the home, that created an open look to the tight staircase.

Two fireplaces warmed the rooms in the winter months and seven porches on both floors allowed the gulf breezes to cool interior spaces in summer.

The nine room home originally had only one bathroom, but a second was added in later years. A slate and metal roof topped the structure, and a combination of gas and electricity provided power.

The Hickenloopers were a musical family. Jane Loening Hickenlooper (1860-1946) and her mother Lucy Palmer Loening (1841-1931) were talented pianists and music teachers. Jane's husband Carlos (1854-1948) worked at Thomas Goggan and Brothers in Galveston, the largest and oldest music retail establishment in the state.

The couple's eldest child, Lucy Mary Olga Agnes Hickenlooper (1880-1948) was a prodigy pianist, eventually becoming one of the most celebrated American female musicians of her time under the name of Madame Olga Samaroff.

Young Lucy had already embarked to Europe under the supervision of her grandmother to further her studies when the rest of the family, including a younger brother, survived the 1900 Storm in the home.

The Hickenloopers moved to St. Louis in 1903, and Thomas W. Stewart, owner of cotton brokerage T. W. Stewart and Company, lived there for one year before



moving to a home at 1422 Broadway that no longer exists.

In 1905, the structure was raised under the ownership of James Otey, creating a basement space below that is now enclosed by concrete block walls. He too only owned the home for one year before selling it to William Alonzo James (1865-1954).

Otey was the principal and science teacher at Ball High School and, as a single gentleman, took in boarders. Among the first boarders were Joseph D. Freeman, an assistant in the manufacturing department of J. J. Schott drugstore along with his wife Ella and their son Joseph, who also worked for Schott. After Freeman died in 1907, his widow and son remained in the home.

Other boarders over the years included several other teachers, including Orville A. Tearney, a director of manual training for the Galveston city schools; James H. Garrison and Herbert F. Fulkerson, teachers at the Third District School; Wilfrid D. Stearns, principal of the Rosenberg School; and employees of Goggan, Mallory Line and other well-known island businesses.





By the 1910 census, Otey's widowed sister Paralee Pauline Freeman had moved into the home with him along with her six children, ages 11 to 22. By today's standards, it is difficult to imagine so many people under one roof and with only two bathrooms available.

Otey had the home updated to be fully wired for electricity in 1915.

By 1920, there were fewer residents in the home. Otey lived on the second floor with a boarder. Ulysses Homer Miles, a 27-year-old teacher at the high school, resided in the front room, and Otey retained the remainder.

The first floor was rented by Harry M. Seaman, a chief law clerk with the Galveston Colorado & Santa Fe Railway, and his wife and two sons. At the time there was one bathroom on each floor.

Otey was popular among his co-workers, the students and the community, and fondly called "Mr. Chips" or "Jimmie." That is why what occurred in 1924 came as a surprise.

In June of that year, after classes were dismissed for the summer, Otey traveled to Washington, D. C. to attend a meeting of the National Education Association. Shortly after he left, the school board summarily dismissed him from his position without providing a definite reason.

It was alluded to that he was not fit for the position though no voting member could state why, even though Otey - a member of the faculty for 19 years - had seen the school through some tumultuous periods. A letter addressed to him and signed by president of the board Charles Fowler merely stated that "it has been vaguely hinted that various and sundry criticisms have been leveled against Ball High for several years."

In the same meeting, it was decided to release mathematics professor P. H. Underwood, due to one complaint that he was in the habit of using harsh language with his pupils. His students and co-workers denied it.

Widespread protest ensued immediately, and leading citizen Edmund Cheesborough advised Otey to stay on the east coast until the dust had settled.

Members of the student body composed a letter to the school board, stating in part, "We feel that the Galveston public schools have sustained a great loss...and that the student body generally has lost one of the best friends and educators this city has ever known."

The Daily News was swamped with letters to the editor from citizens and Ball alumni from both on and off the island. Petitions were circulated, meetings were held, and updates often appeared in the newspaper above news of foreign wars.

Otey was kept up to date on the situation and the outcry by friends, while he attended a meeting of the Benevolent Order of Elks in Boston and visited other east coast cities.

Though the outcry happened quickly and loudly, the protestors' victory came quietly within a month—not even noted in local news. Otey attended a rotary club meeting on July 29, a day after his return, and he received a

standing ovation.

Both Otey and Underwood retained their jobs at the high school, and no specified reasons for their dismissal was ever made public.

By 1930, Otey was living in half of the home on Avenue M alone, and other half was occupied by Daisy Pothoff, an elderly woman who lived there with her son, daughter, son-in-law, and two grandchildren. She passed away in the home four years later.

After Pothoff's death, her family moved out of the house and Otey lived alone in the home, retiring from work by 1950.

After living the majority of his life on the island, Otey returned to his hometown of Pittsburgh, Texas, shortly before he passed away in 1954, leaving his home to the First Baptist Church.

The church listed the property for sale in 1955 touting ten rooms, two bathrooms, hardwood floors, and southern exposure porches.

Fred Wimhurst, Jr. purchased the home in January and sold it to Alice Henry Kerr soon after, leading to the darkest chapter in the home's history.

Kerr had previously worked for a practical nurse named Mary Edith Tobleman who operated a convalescent home at Twenty-first and Sealy Streets beginning in 1950. Kerr was hired as a night attendant for the patients.

When Tobleman became ill and was forced to close her business, Kerr purchased the equipment in the facility. She then began operating under the name of Tobleman Nursing Home misleading clients about their association over her former employer's objections.

The obstinate Kerr amended the name to Tobleman Kerr Nursing Home over Tobleman's protests to being associated to the business run by a woman with virtually no experience.

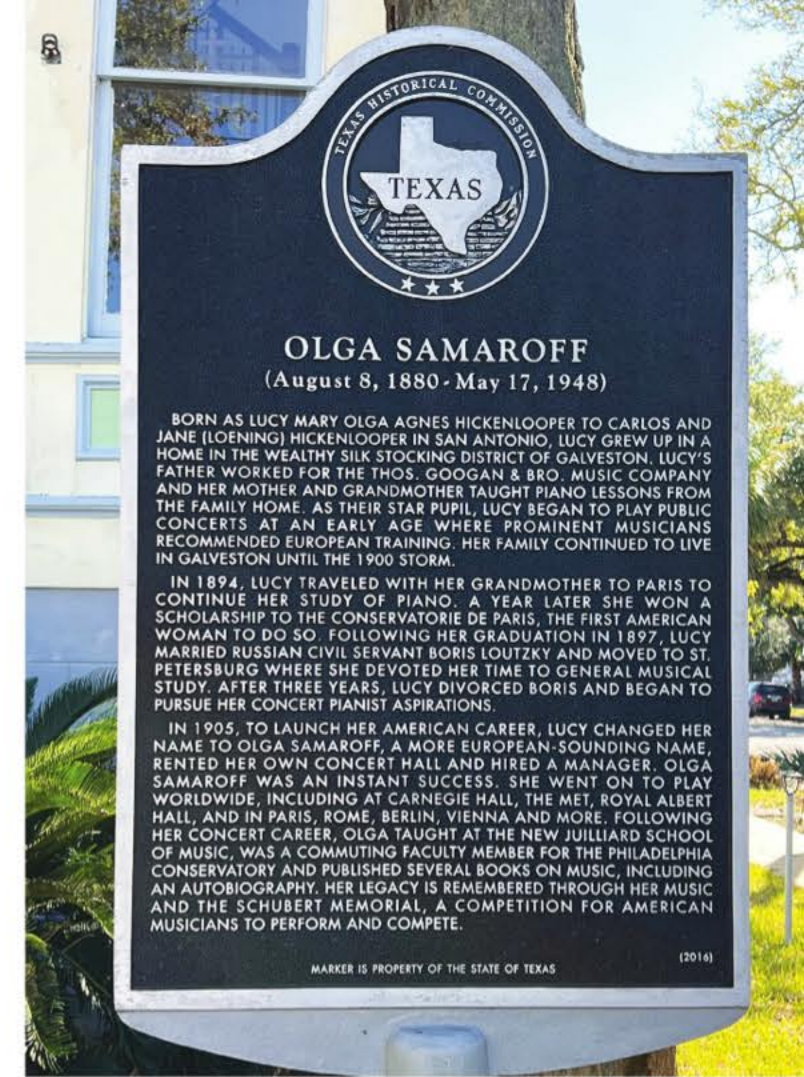
Kerr herself had a tumultuous past. She had married and divorced the same man twice, with the grounds for divorce cited as the wife's cruel treatment of the husband.

The woman opened a convalescent facility at the home on Avenue M, without obtaining a license to operate there or anywhere in Texas and remained in business for three years.

In March 1958, Mrs. Robert Wallace reported for her first day of duty at the facility. She had been hired by Kerr with the understanding that she would be familiarized with the procedures and trained to work as a night attendant.

When she arrived at the home with a friend, her insistent knocking was finally answered by one of the patients, and Wallace realized that the ten patients had been left unattended overnight though three were bed bound, and one was blind. There was no furniture in the downstairs rooms, no food in the home, and shockingly unsanitary conditions.

Wallace and her friend used their own money to purchase cleaning supplies and food for the patients, and began to



tend to their needs while they waited for help from the county to arrive.


Records found by the women were the only means of identifying the patients and contacting their relatives. Those that did not need immediate hospitalization waited for family members to arrive.

At the time, Kerr, who had adopted the name of Alice Tobleman Kerr, was in Nacogdoches in the process of setting up another convalescent home. Galveston authorities contacted officials there to alert them of the situation.

When she returned to Galveston several days later, she found her home empty of patients, and quickly packed her belongings to return to Nacogdoches.

The city took no action against Kerr because she had not violated any city ordinances, as few were in place at the time. The incident instigated a round of investigations of the other four nursing homes on the island, and it inspired a review of the need for additional local regulations.

The residence returned to the market, overcame its one sad chapter, and has since been home to several owners and tenants. It is currently owned by Leon Galicia and stands as a charming example of the Silk Stocking District's beautiful architecture.

In 2017 a historic marker to commemorate the residence as the one-time home of Madame Olga Samaroff was erected at the home. 



Photos by Kathleen Maca

MADAME OLGA SAMAROFF

GALVESTON ROOTS TO INTERNATIONAL ACCLAIM AS ONE OF THE FIRST GREAT AMERICAN FEMALE PIANISTS, AS WELL AS ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL MUSIC EDUCATORS OF HER TIME

BY KATHLEEN MACA

A look at the lovely home on the corner of Avenue M and Twenty-fourth Street would not give most passersby a hint that one of the greatest American female pianists once called it home, but it's true.

Lucy Mary Olga Agnes Hickenlooper (1880-1948) was born in San Antonio on August 8, 1880 to Jane Lucy Loening (1860-1946) and Carlos Hickenlooper (1854-1948), who was an army clerk at Fort Sam Houston.

The small child had a future ahead of her almost as daunting as her given name. The family lived in a house on Avenue C with a maternal grandmother, Lucy Palmer Loening (1841-1931), and two servants.

When the youngster was six the entire family, which now included George Hickenlooper (1885-1948), moved to Houston. Two years later in 1888 they relocated to Galveston.

Both adult females in the home were talented pianists and began giving lessons in their series of rented homes. Carlos secured a job as a correspondent at Thomas Goggan's music store, probably due to the women's musical connections in the community.

In 1892, the Hickenlooper family built a two-story Victorian style home at 2327 Avenue M, just blocks from the Ursuline Academy where Lucy attended school. In addition to her schoolwork, she was tutored in music by her strict grandmother. The family had been shocked when Lucy began improvising tunes on the keyboard by the age of three, displaying a natural aptitude.

At the age of 14, Lucy left school and went to Paris, France, with her grandmother to study music. Despite a gruff reception by professors who believed that Americans were not meant to be musicians, within one year she became a first American woman to win a scholarship to study at the Paris Conservatoire National de Musique.

After her graduation in 1898, she and her grandmother went to Berlin, Germany, where the elder woman had once performed concerts. While there, Lucy worked with a Russian mentor and became enamored with the Russian culture.

While they were away from America, the Great Storm of 1900 struck Galveston Island, thankfully sparing the lives of their other family members.

The young pianist met Russian engineer Boris Loutsky (1865-1943), an early designer of internal combustion engines, and the young couple traveled to New York City in January 1901 to be married before making a home in St.



Petersburg, Russia.

For the next three years, she assumed the duties of a wife and relinquished her plans for a music career, but she devoted her spare time to studying chamber music, orchestral scores, and performing with friends.

The Hickenlooper family remaining in the United States left Galveston in 1904 to move to St. Louis, Missouri. When Lucy divorced her husband that same year on grounds of cruelty, she returned to live with them.

The move also presented an opportunity to pursue a concert career. On the advice of her manager, Henry Wolfsohn, she abandoned her dauntingly long given name for a more exotic professional one.

She made her professional American debut as Madame Olga Samaroff, the name of a distant ancestor, in January 1905, at Carnegie Hall with the New York Symphony Orchestra. Positive reviews of the performance led to multiple private engagements, and a London debut the



Olga Samaroff in 1920

Images courtesy of Library of Congress



Images courtesy of Library of Congress

Magazine image courtesy of Wikimedia

following May.

Her concert career flourished internationally beginning in 1906, and she became one of the first female pianists to make recordings, starting in 1908 - first with Welte Mignon Company in Germany and later with Victor Talking Machine Company in New Jersey. Her later recordings became highly prized by music lovers.

A severe illness in 1910 resulted in a hiatus from performing, and she returned to the family home in St. Louis to recuperate.

In 1911, Samaroff married English-born conductor Leopold Stokowski (1882-1977) and once again gave up performing. When she met Stokowski, he was an unknown church music director. She was instrumental in the development of his career, utilizing her powerful connections to obtain his appointment as conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra.

After spending the first two years of their marriage entirely supporting her husband's career, she began to perform again, in 1913, and became the first American pianist to perform all thirty-two Beethoven sonatas in public.

Samaroff also performed in Galveston many times

including at Scottish Rite in 1915.

The tall slender beauty with brown eyes was outspoken about the importance of music in society and often punctuated her concerts with "notes" or spoken explanations about features of each piece. This approach was received enthusiastically by audiences, who felt they had become privy to the thought processes of a brilliant artist.

She performed with most of the leading American orchestras as well as those of the major cities of Europe, playing with many famous musicians. Some tours included as many as 70 performances per season.

As busy as their performance schedules were, the couple managed to have one daughter, Sonya Maria Noel Stokowsky, in 1921. The family wasn't destined to be a happy one however, as the couple divorced two years later due to Stokowski's infidelities.

After the divorce, Samaroff and her daughter purportedly took refuge with friends, including George Gershwin, Irving Berlin, and Dorothy Parker. It did not take long before she resumed performing and exploring new opportunities.

Samaroff was selected as the first American-born

member of the piano faculty of the Julliard School in New York in 1924, and she retained the position for the rest of her life.

Unfortunately, the talented musician injured her shoulder in a fall in her apartment in 1925, forcing her to retire from performing concert tours.

She devoted herself to teaching and working with young artists, incorporating European influences from her past without the harsh approaches to instruction that she endured. Her daughter Sonya was also reaching an age that required more of her attention, and Lucy was happy to devote the extra time to her.

Always eager to share her enthusiasm for music, and her knowledge about the subject, Samaroff became the first woman to serve as music critic for *The New York Evening Post* from 1926 to 1928.

In the effort to provide more opportunities beyond her direct students, she established the Schubert Memorial Foundation in 1928, the first competition which provided professional performance opportunities solely for American music students, who were often discriminated against internationally and by the larger concert venues.


In 1932, she also created Layman's Music Courses which educated audiences in the study and appreciation of music. Samaroff published four books for the course: *The Layman's Music Book*, *The Magic World of Music*, *A Musical Manual*, and *The Listener's Music Book*, in addition to her autobiography *An American Musician's Story*. She also lectured and appeared on educational radio and television broadcasts speaking about the subject of music.

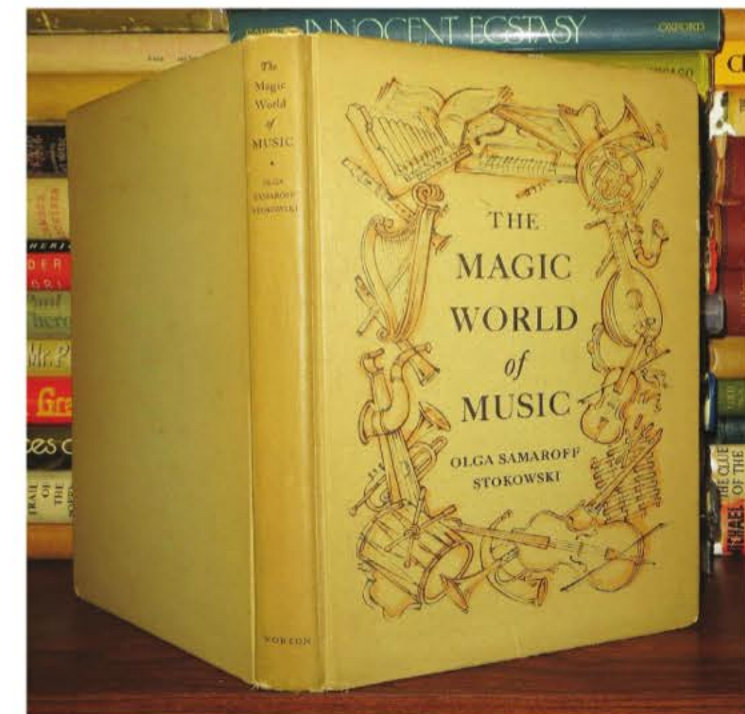
Samaroff organized the Musician's Emergency Aid during the Great Depression, and she was chosen as one of the twenty-five musicians to work for a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project in 1935.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed her as a member of the Advisory Committee on Music to the Department of State in 1944.

When her portrait was painted by Orlando Rouland, a noted American artist, it made headlines across the country. Rouland gained fame for executing portraits of such luminaries as Thomas Edison and Theodore Roosevelt, and it was considered an honor to be his subject.

After years of breaking international and gender barriers in the performance world of classical music, Olga Samaroff died in New York City on May 17, 1948. She suffered a heart attack alone in her apartment, after giving several private piano lessons. It seems fitting that her last day was spent sharing her exceptional gift.

The internationally acclaimed pianist who spent her formative years in Galveston is remembered with a historical marker that stands outside of the home where she once lived at 2327 Avenue M. 



FROM TOP: Olga Samaroff with her husband Conductor Leopold Stokowski on the cover of the November 1914 edition of *The Musician*; Samaroff's book titled *The Magic World of Music* that was published in 1936.

PAGE 34: Olga Samaroff playing the piano in 1915; Samaroff and her husband Leopold Stokowski in 1915.