

History of the Waldrop House

by Barbara Allen Bowser
1983

The structure that is the subject of this application is located at 615 East 29th Street, Bryan, Texas. The house is specifically listed in the Brazos County Tour Guide published by Citizens for Historic Preservation and in the Historical Assessment for Brazos Valley prepared by the area Council of Governments and various other local publications as a noteworthy home in the community.

The original owners were Allister M. Waldrop, Sr. and his wife, Nanne Shelby Willis Waldrop. They had two children, Nanne Shel Waldrop (Mrs. Charles F. Howard) and Allister M. Waldrop, Jr. (married Florence Abernathy). The land was purchased from Edward and Mollie Hall for the sum of \$750.00.¹ Mr. Hall served as president of the First State Bank and Trust Co., of Bryan. He built the house that still stands next door at 611 East 29th in Bryan.

Allister Waldrop was born on December 16, 1877, in Bryan, Texas, to Mr. and Mrs. W. V. Waldrop. In 1896, Allister Waldrop and Ernest F. Parks established a retail mercantile business known as Parks and Waldrop. In 1911 it became A. M. Waldrop & Company. As Brazos County grew, so did the business. It would span seventy years, two generations and two locations on Main Street, downtown Bryan, and the other in College Station, Texas. The business became one of Bryan's first exclusive men's clothing establishments. In 1975 A. M. Waldrop, Jr., retired after selling the College Station store and closing the Bryan store. He and his wife still reside in Bryan. He followed in his father's footsteps in the Methodist Church, Rotary, Chamber of Commerce and other organizations.

Allister Waldrop, Sr.'s leadership in Brazos County went beyond his mercantile business. He was an active leader in civic affairs, and a steward and trustee of the First Methodist Church of Bryan. He was a long time member of the Chamber of Commerce of Bryan and served a term as president; he was a member of Ivanhoe Commandry of Knights Templar and

¹ Deed attached as Exhibit "A"

was a Shriner. Mr. Waldrop was identified with many state and national business concerns relating to his mercantile establishment and was president of the Texas Retail Clothier and Furnisher Association.

However, probably his most outstanding contribution was his service on the local school board. At the time of his death on January 18, 1936, he was president of the Bryan City School Board.

Mrs. Waldrop, the former Nanne Shelby Willis of Waco, Texas, was also active in community affairs. She was a member of The Woman's Club, the L. S. Ross Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the Garden Club, and was a charter member of the William Scott Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. She served as president for most of these organizations and was three times president of The Woman's Club. One of Mrs. Waldrop's special interests was the small park between the Southern Pacific Depot and the Bryan Hospital. She was active in the Woman's Civic League, which maintained the park. She protected it during World War II from being made into a parking lot. Finally the new library was built on the site. For many years the Waldrop home was a favorite meeting place for local clubs. Mrs. Waldrop remained in the home, along with her attendant, Mrs. Margie Peterson, until her death in 1970. The house was then occupied by Lt. Col. and Mrs. Paul Davis, until it was sold to the present owners, Howard Van and Barbara Allen Bowser, Sr., in 1978.

The architectural firm of Jones & Tabor of Houston, Texas² designed the house. It is a style often referred to as "The American Foursquare" (Texas Prairie Architecture).

Practical as well as philosophical considerations lay behind the movement away from excessive ornamentation, and the Foursquare was essentially an inexpensive way to provide large amounts of comfortable living space.³ According to documents filed in the Brazos County Courthouse on April 20, 1909, H. T. Lewis agreed "to furnish all the material and labor for erection and completion of a two story resident according to the plans and specifications as drawn by Jones & Tabor

² Photograph of original blueprint Exhibit "B"

³ Old House Journal marked as Exhibit "C"

Architects of Houston, Texas, for A. M. Waldrop and Nanne Shelby Willis Waldrop, for the sum of \$4,000.00.⁴

The exterior reflected the trend of the times toward simplicity of design and use of natural materials -- the lower level of wood and the upper level wood shingles, stained dark.⁵ The unusual feature is a porch that wraps around two sides rather than a simple front porch. The columns are a paneled boxed-in post supported by a masonry brick foundation. A touch of Colonial was added by inserting Palladian windows in dormers on three sides.

The front entry into the home from the wrap-around porch is a focal point of the home. The leaded glass door with fixed panels above and on each side provides a rainbow of colors in the early morning sun. The interior is almost all wood paneling with wallpaper covering all walls. There are nine large rooms with an additional two and one-half baths. All bedrooms are on the upper level. The ten foot ceilings and ornate ceiling fans provided adequate ventilation and a cooling system in the hot summer months. An upstairs veranda across the rear was not only decorative but was also a gathering place overlooking the gardens below.

There are a total of twenty-four large windows and fifteen doors throughout the house that allow access to each room with little or no hallway (another concept of the Foursquare). Originally the house was heated with wood as evidenced by a flue (one removed during remodeling in 1950) connected to a chimney in each room except one room on the upper level. A fireplace in the living room is still used today.

The two largest rooms are the living room and dining areas, separated by large pocket doors.⁶ The dining room has a built-in china/cabinet buffet that extends the entire length of the exterior wall. Centered in the room is the original crystal chandelier imported from Italy. A call bell system located at the head of the table was a means to summon servants during meal times. Both lower and upper level flooring are of hard pine along with interior walls and woodwork. The stairway is of oak and provides a passageway from upstairs to both the kitchen and living area.

⁴ Mechanics and Materialmans Lien Exhibit "D"

⁵ Street Scene Exhibit "E"

⁶ Dimensions of the two rooms are 16' x 16' and 16'4" x 19'

ATTACHMENT:

Brazos County Historical Commission, Marker Ceremonies
Sunday, May 27, 1984 -- 2:00 pm
Bryan, Texas

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1893
E .J. Jenkins
607 East 27th Street

1912
A. W. Wilkerson
614 East 29th Street

1909
Allister M. Waldrop
Sr., 615 East 29th Street

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Hon R .J. Holmgreen, Judge, Brazos County
1979 – 1984

Mrs. Walter Young, Chairman
Brazos County Historical Commission
1981 - 1984

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Ceremonies Marking Three Historical Homes

Presiding: Hon R. J. Holmgreen, Brazos County Judge

Marker Program:

Present Markers in Brazos County and Future Projects
Mrs. Walter Young, Chairman,
Brazos County Historical Commission

Program, page 2

Allister M. Waldrop, Sr. Home

Unveiling and Reading of Marker: Eleanor Nance, Secretary, BCHC
Acceptance of Marker, by Owners Mr. & Mrs. Howard Van Bowser
Presentation of Certificate of Recognition: Mrs. Young

[Photograph of home]

"Waldrop House" Designed by Houston architects Jones & Tabor, this home was built for Allister (1877 - 1936) and Nanne Waldrop in the early 1900s. Waldrop, a prominent area retail merchant, also served as President of the Bryan School Board. The Waldrop House, built in the American Foursquare style, reflects the architectural trend of the times toward simplicity of design. Interesting features include the Palladian dormer windows and the use of wood shingles on the second story.