

History of the Wilkerson House

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The structure that is the subject of this application is located at 614 East 29th Street in Bryan, Texas. Within the community it is widely recognized as one of Bryan's noteworthy homes, being specifically listed in the Brazos County Tour Guide, published by the Citizen's for Historic Preservation, and in the Historical Assessment for Brazos Valley prepared by the Brazos Valley Development Council, the area Council of Governments.

The original owners of the house were Mr. and Mrs. A.W. Wilkerson. They purchased the property in 1905 from F.E. and Pearl Pryor for \$1750.00.¹ A small house located on the property was razed and the existing pier and beam structure built in 1912.

Mr. Wilkerson was a prominent Bryan banker, holding the position of Cashier of the City National Bank for many years, in addition to being a Director of the bank. A house across the street from the Wilkerson house was built by Mr. Ed Hall, president of the First State Bank and Trust. Another house located one block away on East 30th Street, the Boatwright home, was constructed during the same era by Mr. Boatwright, one of the founders of the First National Bank. For obvious reasons the area soon became popularly known as "Banker's Row", a term still used by some of the older Bryan residents.

The second owners of the house were Mr. and Mrs. John Parker. Mr. Parker acquired the house in 1919. Several members of the Parker family were very active in the business affairs of the community. John Parker managed the Parker family's extensive cotton business in the Brazos Bottom and along with Mr. Wilkerson served on the Board of Directors of

¹ Deed attached as Exhibit "A."

the City National Bank. John Parker's father, Milton "Mit" Parker, was one of the founders of the City National Bank and John Parker's brother, Sam, for years ran the Parker Lumber Company which today is still a thriving business. The house remained in the Parker family until 1936 when it was sold to Dr. and Mrs. Lamar Jones.

Dr. Jones was a very popular dentist in Bryan for many years. According to his obituary published in the Bryan Daily Eagle on March 10, 1966, Dr. Jones was a lifelong member of the community who was active in civic affairs. He served on the Bryan Board of Education, now called the School Board, was one of the early presidents of the Bryan Lion's Club and also served as president of the Brazos Dental Association. Additionally, he served on the staff of St. Joseph's Hospital and was head of the dental unit of the 56th Evacuation Hospital in Italy for three and a half years during World War II.

Mrs. Marie Jones was also quite involved in community civic affairs. She served as President of the local Woman's Club during the 1961-62 year and as President of the Bryan Garden Club. She was also active with the Fine Arts Council. In 1970 Mrs. Jones sold the home to Joseph G. Ginn who was, at the time, a vice-president with Alenco Manufacturing in Bryan. In 1976 the home was sold to the present owners, Bill Batchelor and Colleen Jennings Batchelor.

The structure was built in 1912² by Mr. Charlie E. Jenkins, an architect and contractor whose work has had a pervasive impact on the City of Bryan. Several of Mr. Jenkins' buildings have already been granted Texas historic structure markers and several more are eligible for them. The Astin-Porter home at 600 East 29th, the Jenkins home at 607 East 27th and St. Andrew's Episcopal Church are all marked historic structures built by Mr. Jenkins.

² Date of construction and identity of contractor established through examination of records of Parker Lumber Co.; copies of the relevant ledger sheets for 1912 and 1913 are attached and marked Exhibit "B."

The exterior of the house is cedar. This material was presumably chosen as an effective method of dealing with mildew and rot. Each room in the house, with the exception of the bathrooms, has at least three openings to the outside (windows and/or doors) and the structure is oriented so as to take full advantage of the prevailing southerly breezes. A large wrap-around porch that shields three sides of the house from direct sunlight demonstrates another highly effective method of coping with the climate. The porch is open on the front and enclosed on the side and back, although the enclosed portions have windows that open for summertime cooling. The side of the house without a porch features a porte cochere. The tongue and groove porch floorboards are cedar and are a full one inch thick. The style of the house is referred to by some as the Homestead Style.³ While the house has several decorative features on the exterior the style represents a marked departure from the highly ornate buildings constructed only a few years earlier.

The interior of the house is almost totally wood. All of the walls are wooden and are covered with wallpaper. With only a few exceptions, all of the door and window hardware is brass. There are eight large rooms plus three and one half baths. Originally the home was heated with wood or coal-burning stoves as evidenced by the fact that every room in the house except the living room has a flue (now covered over) connected to a chimney. The living room has a coal-burning fireplace. Ceilings in the home are ten and a half feet high downstairs and nine and a half feet high upstairs. The high ceilings combined with the very large double-hung windows throughout the house and the orientation to the South cause the home to be quite well ventilated. There are even a total of six windows on three different sides of the attic that are still today used to ventilate and cool the area during the hot summers.

The two largest bedrooms⁴ in the house were originally connected to an upstairs sleeping porch on the second floor and located on the southeast side of the building. During the ownership of the house by the Jones family

³ See attached pages marked as Exhibit "C" from Old House Journal.

⁴ Dimensions of the two rooms are approximately 14 1/2' x 16' and 13' x 18'.

one half of the porch was converted into a bathroom. However, the "sleeping" porch is still valuable as an energy conservation feature since it serves to shield the bedrooms from the morning sun and furnishes a sometimes excessive amount of breeze when the house is opened up.

The downstairs area features quarter-sawn oak flooring and oak stairs. Very large pocket doors separate the living room from the dining room and the large entry room. French doors open from the living room onto the side porch and from the dining room onto the back porch. A separate "servant's stairs" from the butler's pantry area up to the stairway landing is typical of the larger homes built at the time. In fact, an early picture of the home, a copy of which is enclosed,⁵ indicates that there was a separate servants quarters at the rear of the home during the early years.

The flooring in the upstairs rooms is an extremely hard pine heartwood, sometimes referred to as "long-leaf pine" or "rich-litred pine". All of the individual tongue and groove planks run the entire length of the room; many are as long as eighteen feet. The interior walls and woodwork upstairs are also an exceedingly hard pine, thought to have been brought from the East Texas mills. Square nails can be seen when removing any woodwork.

With the exception of the conversion of one-half of the sleeping porch into a bathroom and the addition of the half-bath downstairs underneath the stairway, (both projects being executed by the Jones family,) there have been no significant alterations to the house since its construction. In fact, some of the original plumbing and light fixtures still remain and are in good working order.

⁵ Exhibit "D."