

CHARLIE ERIC JENKINS

Few people leave a community the tangible monuments to the human spirit that Charlie Jenkins bequeathed to the people of Brazos County. A noted contractor in Bryan for more than forty years, he built many of the older homes and public buildings that still grace our community today.

Jenkins was born in England on November 4, 1861. His family came to the United States from London, England in 1873. In 1878 they moved to Texas, settling in Bryan in November of that year. Charlie was one of eight children in the family. One younger brother, George, was also a contractor and apparently worked with Charlie on occasion. George died an untimely death after contracting rabies from his dog. Another brother, Edwin, was a local druggist for nearly 70 years.¹ Edwin was active in civic affairs, serving as mayor of Bryan, as well as being a member of the City Council. Having voted since the time he came of age, and having held public office, Edwin was shocked when he applied for his pension and learned that he was not a citizen! The matter was finally rectified in 1950 when Edwin, now in his eighties, finally became an American citizen.²

Among the homes that Charlie Jenkins built in Bryan are the Hudson-Harrison house (1896) at 616 E. 31st St.,³ the Wipprecht home (1898), 500 E. 29th St.,⁴ the

¹Edwin J. Jenkins, "History of the Family of George Washington Jenkins and Mary Ann Newby Jenkins," Unpublished account written in 1957 by a brother of Charlie Jenkins. Copy available in the Bryan Public Library.

²Elizabeth B. Foster, Narrative History submitted with Registered Texas Historic Landmark application for Edwin Jenkins House, 607 E. 27th St., Bryan, TX. Copy obtained from author.

³Hardy, Heck & Moore, Inc., (Preservation Consultants, Austin TX), Historic Resources of Bryan, TX, a Comprehensive Survey and National Register of Historic Places Nominations for the City of Bryan, 1986.

⁴Brazos Heritage Society, **Guide to Historic Brazos County**, Bryan, TX, 1992.

Edge-DuPuy house (1901) at 508 E. 30th, and the home he built in 1892 for his brother, Edwin, at 607 E. 27th St.⁵ All of these homes are Victorian in style and remarkable for their craftsmanship. The records do not indicate that an architect was used on any of these projects. The similarity of some of the features in these homes, in particular an amazing use of natural lighting, leads one to the conclusion that Jenkins may have done as much design work as he did actual building. In 1890 Charlie built a house on E. 25th St. for himself and his bride, Julia Lula Birdwell. In 1956 this house was moved to 1400 E. 21st St.⁶ Although the house is in need of repair, Jenkins' artistic sensibility is still in evidence if you look past the peeling paint to the decorative details. Elements such as turned wood posts, jigsawn detailing and brackets, and spindlework attest to the care taken in building this family home.

Charlie's versatility is evident in his ability to build homes of many different styles. In addition to the structures mentioned above, he built Texas vernacular architecture for Charles Nitch at 704 E. 29th St. in 1890,⁷ Neoclassical Revival on a grand scale for Mrs. Onah W. Astin at 600 E. 29th in 1901,⁸ a graceful Queen Anne for John A. Moore at 601 E. 30th in 1902,⁹ American Foursquare for A.W. Wilkerson at 614 E. 29th in 1912,¹⁰ and a brick bungalow for J.M. Gordon at 615 E. 31st in 1925.¹¹

⁵Glenna F. Brundidge, (ed.) **Rich Past, Bright Future: Brazos County History**, Bryan, Texas, Family History Foundation, 1986 pp. 363, 367; and Narrative History, Edwin Jenkins House.

⁶Interview, April 10, 1991, with Julia Graham Bobbitt, the subject's eldest grandchild. She is the person who sold the house to be moved from its original site. Interviewed by author for purpose of obtaining information about her grandfather. Documentation in author's possession.

⁷Hardy, Heck & Moore.

⁸Jenkins, Family History.

⁹Records of the Parker Lumber Co., currently in private hands; Brazos Heritage Society, **Guide to Historic Brazos County**, Bryan, TX, 1992; and Interview, May 18, 1992, Ruby Jenkins, the subject's daughter-in-law.

¹⁰Hardy, Heck & Moore; Brundidge, p. 383; and Narrative History submitted with

Jenkins must have taken justifiable pride in his work, for in one of these houses it has been discovered that he signed and dated the wooden walls in the kitchen before they were covered with wallpaper.¹² At a minimum this suggests his willingness to take credit and responsibility for his work. Perhaps he also knew that these houses would be standing long after his demise and that someday we would want to know more about their origins.

In 1912 Jenkins began construction of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church.¹³ The church is constructed of brick, stone, and concrete. It took two years to build and still stands at the corner of W. 26th and S. Parker. When one of the church towers was struck by lightning in 1938, Jenkins came to the rescue with some of the special metal shingles he had saved for 26 years. Fortunately, he had a sufficient quantity to completely repair the damage.¹⁴

Service to the community was an important part of Jenkins life. He served as secretary to the Board of Stewards of the Methodist Church for approximately thirty years. Jenkins helped organize and administer the Bryan Fire Department and served that organization in numerous capacities for 53 years, including many years as its chief. Later in life, Jenkins served as the Plumbing and Building Inspector for the City of Bryan. He died in 1943, only a few weeks after having retired from that position.¹⁵

Registered Texas Historic Landmark application for A.W. Wilkerson House, 614 East 29th St., Bryan, TX.

¹¹Jenkins, Family History.

¹²This is the Wilkerson House, which belongs to the author. The board he signed is in the possession of the author.

¹³Jenkins, Family History; Brundidge, p. 146, 386, and Narrative History submitted with Registered Texas Historic Landmark application for St. Andrew's Church. 217 W. 26th St., Bryan, TX.

¹⁴Brundidge, p. 146.

¹⁵Jenkins, Family History; **Bryan Daily Eagle**, October 26, 1943.

When he died on October 26, 1943, Jenkins' obituary ran on the front page of the **Bryan Daily Eagle**. In it he was referred to as a "well-known and highly esteemed" citizen. When you look at the community assets he left all of us, there is no doubt his buildings were as solid and inspiring as his reputation.

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APPENDIX

Supplemental List of Charlie Jenkins Structures

W.B. Roman, Sr. House -- 802 E. 24th St.¹⁶

W.B. Roman, II House -- 800 E. 24th St.¹⁷

McMichael-Wilson House -- 712 E.30th¹⁸

Mrs. Sarah Goodman House at 1430 Baker Ave (formerly 105 S. Baker).¹⁹ Mrs. Goodman taught music here.

Sam Cavitt House--709 E.31st²⁰

West Side School (now the original, central part of Bowie Elementary), 401 W. 26th St.²¹

Parker Lumber Company building, 419 N, Main St.²²

¹⁶Jenkins, Family History; Interview, May 11, 1992 with Julia Bobbitt by the author on the subject of this history. This home was built for the subject's sister and her husband.

¹⁷Ibid. This house was built for the son of Alice Jenkins Roman and W.B. Roman, Sr.

¹⁸Interview, February 2, 1980 with Julia Bobbitt by Paul Van Riper regarding the subject of this marker application. See also Narrative History attached to Registered Texas Historic Landmark application for the McMichael-Wilson house, 712 E. 30th St, Bryan, TX.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Interview with J. Bobbitt, April 10, 1991, Ibid. Interview with Ruby Jenkins, Ibid.

²¹Records of the Parker Lumber Company, Bryan, Texas. Accounts are listed by the name of the contractor and the name of the project, in this case, "C.E. Jenkins -- West Side School."

²²Records of the Parker Lumber Company.

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Parker Lumber Co., Records, currently in private hands.

Interview with Julia Graham Bobbitt, February 2, 1980; April 10, 1991; and May 11, 1992.

Interview with Ruby Jenkins, May 18, 1992.