
Reminiscences of the Heritage neighborhood

By Anne Olivia Boyer

This article is the first in a series about the history of the Heritage neighborhood.

She lives now by herself, in a small comfortable room looking out on the courtyard of Westminister Manor, a fountain splashing gently in the shade. Surrounding her are a few reminders of the times when her world had a larger scope: a photograph of an old family mansion, a watercolor of another family home painted by her kinsman Gordon Fowler, some exquisite wrought animals carved in wood by her late husband, Albert W. ("Grip") Penn.

Myrle Penn can remember when her family's domain extended across much of what we now call the Heritage Neighborhood, and their influence was extraordinary. Her father-in-law, District Judge Robert L. Penn, had moved his large family in 1903 from 13th Street out to what was then an extremely rural area, far to the north of the Austin city limits. He purchased a large tract of land, extending from what is now West Avenue to Shoal Creek, and he, his wife Ada, and their nine children took up residence in the building we call the Heritage House, 3112 West Avenue.

The Heritage House, a na-

tive limestone structure, originally dates from the 1840s, according to Gordon Fowler, who once owned the home. A log cabin stood on the site; it was burned by the Comanche Indians. Decade by decade the house now standing was built, from 1853 through the 1880. Gordon says at one time the "middle room" was famous for being "the coolest room in Texas" and ballroom dancing was taught there to University of Texas students. It was, seemingly, a lovely place to raise a family.

Unfortunately, Judge Penn died in 1909 at age 43, leaving his wife 10 acres, \$10,000 and nine children. Confronted with the difficulty of raising this large brood

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