

JUDGES' HILL



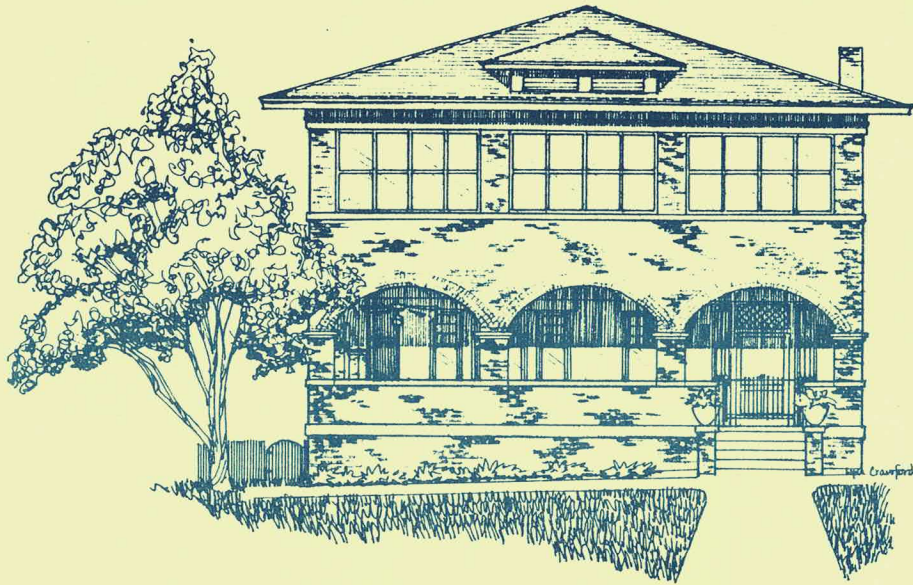
The Heritage Society
of Austin, Inc.
1985 Home Tour

JUDGES' HILL

Bounded by 19th Street, San Gabriel, 17th Street, and West Avenue, the area known as Judges' Hill is a small, peaceful enclave in the busy west University neighborhood. Located in Division E of the original city and part of a grant made in 1847 to developer Louis Horst by the State of Texas, many of the present houses are the second ones constructed on their lots. The first house in the area belonged to a famous early Texas attorney and politician, Elijah Sterling Clack Robertson (1802-1879). E. S. C. Robertson built his limestone Greek Revival style house in 1851 on the site of present day 1802 San Gabriel. The house was purchased in 1878 by Captain James E. Lucy, famous Texas Ranger and Austin city marshal. He lived there until his death around 1930. The Vance family then acquired the house and land, lending their name to adjoining Vance Circle and to the western part of the neighborhood, which became the Vance Park subdivision. The lovely old house was razed in 1966 by then owner, Mrs. Bob Teten, and the site is now occupied by the home of Judge St. John Garwood.

Perhaps it was E. S. C. Robertson who established the Judges' Hill tradition of houses occupied by attorneys, judges, and politicians. Another Robertson family also played an important role in the neighborhood. Josh Wesley Robertson, an attorney and mayor of Austin for three terms beginning in 1884, moved from Tennessee in the 1860's and purchased land in the Judges' Hill area, including the lot on which 900 West 17th was later built. His home was at 18th and West Avenue. Relatives of his by marriage, the Townsends, built the house next door at 1802 West Avenue in the 1870's. Judge Alexander S. Walker purchased this house at the turn of the century and there hosted William Jennings Bryan during a 1900 visit to Austin.

In 1891, Colonel E. M. House, a well-known politician and close advisor to President Woodrow Wilson, built a house at 1704 West Avenue. His home was visited by many political leaders in the early twentieth century. The house was demolished in 1966. Other Judges' Hill houses which have been occupied by prominent Austin attorneys include: 900 West 17th Street, purchased in 1940 by James P. Alexander, Chief Justice of the Texas Supreme Court from 1940-47; 903 West 17th Street, owned by Few Brewster while he was Associate Judge of the Texas Supreme Court from 1945 to 1957; 1802 San Gabriel, previously owned by Ireland Graves, Judge of the 26th Judicial District; and 1001 West 17th Street, previously owned by Judge James McClendon.



ROBBINS-DAVIS HOUSE
1608 West Avenue
Owners - Bruce and Peggy Kruger

This two-story brick early twentieth century house has the shallow pitched hip roof, dormers, and chunky columns traditionally associated with the Bungalow style of architecture. It was a source of pride to H. D. Dear when he built it in 1909. He used a picture of it in the City Directory the following year to advertise his business as a contractor.

The house was designed to be as cool as possible in the Texas heat. Situated on a high point, its wide overhangs, porches on three sides, ceiling-high windows, and location of the kitchen on the north side cooled the house.

The first owners were R. Brown Robbins, his wife Julia Eilers Robbins and their two year old daughter Julia Eilers, affectionately known as "Peachie." Robbins was the son of John William Robbins, legislator and State Treasurer for nine years, who resided down the street at 1300 West Avenue. Although only twenty-six when he moved in, Robbins had been successful as a partner with his father in the Stacy Robbins Company, a real estate and insurance company.

Nine years later, financial problems and a nervous breakdown caused Robbins to move to Wichita Falls, and he sold his West Avenue home to Louis and Caroline Davis. Louis Davis was vice president of McKean-Eilers, a wholesale drygoods company. Members of the Davis family lived there for fifty-one years including Caroline Davis' father, Judge Edward R. Kone. Judge Kone came to Austin from San Marcos to be commissioner of the newly created Texas Department of Agriculture. He was a farmer and lawyer who had been a county judge in Hayes County for many years. The Kones celebrated their sixtieth wedding anniversary at 1608 West Avenue in 1932. At that time, Judge Kone was a judge in the Corporation Court.

When Caroline Davis died in 1969, Phillip Shaw, a retired Air Force colonel, became the owner. The present owners, Bruce and Peggy Kruger, bought the property in 1977 and live there with their two small children. He is a psychologist in private practice, and she is an administrator at the University of Texas.

The house has had few major changes. A second bathroom was added upstairs, and a cook's quarters was attached behind the kitchen. The original brass furnace grates are still in place, but gas now fuels the furnace instead of coal. Highlights of the house are rich paneling, leaded glass front door and side lights, the entry area with shutters, fireplace, and window seats, and stained glass windows over the built-in buffet in the dining room.



J. W. SCARBROUGH, SR. HOUSE
1801 West Avenue
Owners - Earl and Jo Sue Howard

This house was built in 1920 for J. W. and Cornelia Rice Scarbrough and was their family's home for fifty years. The "Casa" was designed by architect Edwin C. Kreisle in a revival of Italian Renaissance, with slate roofing, deep overhanging cornice, arched pediment over the main entrance and elliptical arched windows on the main floor level. The private living quarters on the second level have operable shutters.

The main level contains the public areas designed to accommodate the large numbers of people sometimes entertained there. Most of the rooms on both levels open onto large porches overlooking the walled-in grounds and gardens. From the entry hall, an elliptical staircase leads up to the second level, where the floors are full run hardwood, with no seams perpendicular to the grain.

John William Scarbrough was born in Rockdale but resided most of his life in Austin. His father, E. M. Scarbrough, was a co-founder of Scarbrough and Hicks department store. J. W. and his brother became owners of the firm after the death of their father. J. W. was general manager and later president of Scarbroughs. He was known for his great interest in educational and religious institutions and in various charities.

Cordelia Scarbrough was from a prominent Galveston family and the Scarbrough - Rice wedding in 1912 was an important Galveston social event. Mrs. Scarbroughs interests included the Settlement House and the Hogg Foundation.

Some people known to have been entertained by the Scarbroughs here are former Texas governors James Ferguson, Allan Shivers and Tom Moody; R. Niles Graham; Walter Long, manager of the Austin Chamber of Commerce; and numerous civic leaders with whom Mr. Scarbrough worked on civic projects.

The house had been vacant for over two years and was beginning to deteriorate when it was purchased in 1976 by Earl W. Howard, M.D. and his wife Jo Sue, who have undertaken extensive restoration.



JAMES C. NAGLE HOUSE
1615 Pearl
Owners - James and Gayle Browne

On July 1, 1914, John H. and Mary H. Chiles sold the lot legally described as 75' x 128' of Out lot 10, Division E, Austin to James C. and Emily St. P. Nagle for \$1000. The Nagles erected a two story frame residence on that lot, then known as 1607 Pearl, and moved there from their home in Hyde Park. The style of the new house was transitional from the Edwardian style of the early twentieth century toward the more classical revival style. At that time, James Nagle was chairman of the State Board of Water Engineering and held that position until 1916. In 1918, he became president of the Panama Pacific Products Company.

It is uncertain how long the Nagles lived at 1607 Pearl. Though they retained ownership until 1924, by 1918 the house was occupied by John W. and Cordelia Scarbrough. John was a son and employee of E. M. Scarbrough. They remained in residence until 1920, when they moved to 1801 West Avenue.

K. C. Miller, a businessman and real estate agent, purchased the property in 1924 and leased it to a series of tenants over the years. By 1930, the property had acquired its present day address, 1615 Pearl, and the George H. Harrington family lived there. Their rent was \$75 per month. Mr. Harrington was a civil engineer and was also active in real estate. The family remained in the house until Mr. Harrington's death. The house later became a rooming house for young men attending the university.

Charles Hilberg purchased the house in 1955 and rented it to a succession of tenants and students for all but one year of his ownership. In 1975, he sold it to University professor James C. Browne and his wife Gayle. After renting the house for a few years, the Brownes undertook an extensive restoration and remodeling project, including enclosing the side porch and adding a glassed-in living area in the rear. The original gas cook stove remains in the kitchen. The Brownes moved into the now elegant house in 1984.



THOMPSON-ALEXANDER HOUSE
900 West Seventeenth
Owners - Scott and Marvel Mann

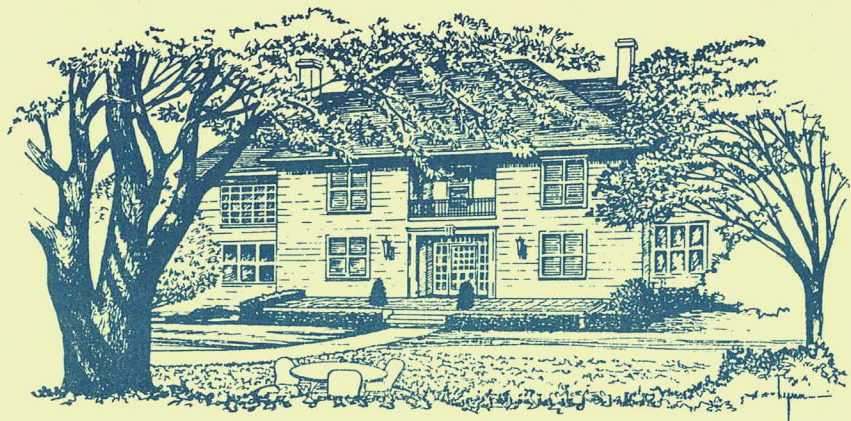
This brick Georgian Colonial Revival house is one of the "judges" homes of the area, occupied by Judge James P. Alexander and his family from 1940 to 1949. It exhibits Palladian influences in its bracketed pediment, oval attic window, and arched front door openings.

Judge Alexander first came to Austin from Waco in 1931 as an Associate Justice to the Texas Supreme Court. In 1941, he became Chief Justice. Mrs. Alexander lived here for two years after the Judge's death and still resides in Austin.

H. A. Thompson, leader in livestock and ranching in Texas, had the house built in 1906. The crown moldings and woodwork are thought to have been copied from Mount Vernon's by Thompson's nephew, who was the house designer. The living and dining room mantels are believed to have been carved by Peter Mansbendel. In the dining room hangs a large crystal chandelier of European manufacture with matching wall sconces. There are five bedrooms, four and one-half baths, five fireplaces, a large third floor family room and guest suite, and a three car garage with apartment. The house once had an Otis hydraulic elevator with a landing room of its own on the second floor.

Several other families have owned the property. From 1949 until 1965, Charley F. and Margaret Hilsberg, creators of "Hansel and Gretel Restaurant," lived there. Landrum and Ada Hickman, who had extensive real estate holdings, were owner from 1965 until 1972. David and Martha Tiller, then owners of "Mrs. Robinson's Restaurants," modernized and painted the house between 1972 and 1976. The third floor was finished by Richard and Sandra Kocurek while they lived here from 1976 until 1979.

Scott and Marvel Mann, owners of Equitable Savings, have redecorated the interior and exterior during the six years they have resided here.



NALLE-JOSEPH HOUSE
1700 San Gabriel
Owner - Edward Joseph

On a bluff above Shoal Creek, this Mediterranean cut stone traditional house, designed by architect George Louis Walling, was built in 1932 for Ewell Nalle, whose father Joseph Nalle was an early major of Austin. Mr. Nalle, associated with his father's lumber business, used only the finest lumber and materials in his home, importing the roof slate from Belgium and the breakfast room tiles from Italy.

In the dining room is a brass chandelier which had hung in the Joseph Nalle home. The living room is graced by a sterling silver chandelier cast in Michigan, and a Weigel wrought iron balustrade highlights the entry foyer. Mr. Nalle later had interests in the carbon black and gasoline industries, and from 1935 to 1939, he was Austin's postmaster.

In 1947, the second and current owner, Austin born businessman Edward Joseph, purchased this house for his family. His wife, the former Thelma Rogers, had wanted to build a house. She changed her mind when she saw this one, and described it as perfect in every detail. The upstairs porches were glazed in, and later an elevator replaced a stairway near the kitchen. The Joseph's enjoyed watching football games at House Park from the upstairs sunroom. Their son, Roger Joseph, and a daughter, now Mrs. John R. Williams, grew up in the home and continue to reside in Austin.

The large oak tree in the front yard is listed in Austin's 1976 Tree Registry as having a circumference of thirteen feet and nine inches. The house was the Austin Symphony League 1983 Designer Showcase.



OSCAR ROBINSON HOUSE
1711 San Gabriel
Owners - Kirby and Suzanne Cannon

This house was built circa 1921 by Oscar Robinson and occupied by his family for fifty years. Only two other families have lived here. William and Norma Lynch purchased it in 1971. Home builder Kirby Cannon and his wife, commercial real estate broker Suzanne Cannon, became owners in 1979.

The lot was part of the property formerly owned and occupied by Mrs. S. M. Robertson. The original house has had several major changes over time. The Robinson's added a porch and created a butler's pantry from existing space. The Lynch family combined the porch and pantry with the kitchen to make one large room that incorporated the old butler's pantry cabinets. The two story section on the south side was added in the 1940's by the Robinson's.

Oscar Robinson, the original owner, was a member of a pioneer Austin family. He began his distinguished career operating a clothing store on Congress Avenue from 1906-14. By the mid 1920's, he built Travis Cotton Seed products which escalated into ten mills. After working for two decades with South Texas Cotton Oil, Robinson was noted as a genius in market analysis and product distribution. He and his wife Floy had two children, a son Carr and a daughter Floy Ross. Floy Ross is the present Mrs. Charles Green, whose late husband was an executive editor of the Austin American Statesman.

The Robinson's had a fabulous flower garden with roses and caladiums. One story about the garden is especially memorable. Mrs. Robinson had thrown all her energies into a cantankerous rosebed, which ignored all the help it received. The bed only produced a handful of miserable blooms, and the more it was worked, the worse it became. The whole family criticized it, and Mrs. Robinson became very defensive about the whole project. One morning, the bed was in bloom with gorgeous crimson beauties. Upon inspection, however, Mrs. Robinson could see that every beautiful flower had been carefully wired to its bush. Mr. Robinson had spent three hours wiring roses the night before. He never considered the time he spent as wasted.

Mrs. Green recalls that when her family lived there, the trees were small and there were woods all around; you could see the hills and all the way to Shoal Creek. With a little imagination, one could stand on the front steps and still see children playing in the woods and wading in the creek.

CREDITS

We wish to express our sincere gratitude to the following individuals and their committees for countless hours of volunteer time.

Entertainment provided by the following:

Willard Dyer - accordian
Charles Khederian - banjo
Mrs. M. Lawrence Naumann (Jo Lynn) - harp
Colleen Moore - piano
Don Tharp - piano
Singing Noteables of Harmony, Inc. - Women's quartet

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