

A Story of Crockett Circle

In Paris, Texas there is a short street called Crockett Circle. Located near Clarksville Street and Southeast 19th, the street got its name from the tale that said Davy Crockett and his men camped there on their way to the Alamo. A plaque on a small group of trees near that corner once commemorated the event, but both trees and plaque have long been removed. The tale further stated that the Crockett contingent stopped in nearby Honey Grove to gather honey for sustenance on their way to fight for the independence of Texas from Mexico.

Mr. and Mrs. Jess Alford (Lucile was her name) bought the property from a family named House. Some edifice was thought to have been on the land long before, and Lucile told me that somewhere in the front yard there was buried a cobblestone foundation. Old photographs of the property show a stucco-faced wall covered with a frieze of Grecian urns and swags. It is my understanding that Mrs. Alford found this undesirable, and the stucco was removed coincidental with the building of the home in 1937. The brick retaining walls remains today.

A “Oklahoma” rock wall parallels an abandoned alley west to east through the middle of the property. It continues south to Crockett Circle Street forming the east border. This rock appears to be of the variety used to build Holy Cross Episcopal Church. Mrs. Alford reported a traveling worker appeared one day and contracted to build the barbecue pit onto this wall. In the far back lot there is an ash disposal built of the same rock. We feel the rock wall preceded the building of this home some years prior. Our children spent many hours walking this wall into “never-never land.”

The Alfords and their two children moved into this home, now referred to as Crockett Circle, in January 1938. Mr. Alford was a successful business man with several ventures going. He owned the construction company that built the home (he also built part of Amarillo Air Force Base during the war); later he owned the local Ford Company, a ranch east of town, and at one time raised turkeys commercially. He was also a partner in a local box factory. Obviously he was successful financially. Mrs. Alford told me the workmen built the garage first, outfitted the room above, and lived onsite while the house was under construction. Mrs. Alford was a lovely southern lady who contributed greatly to life in Paris. She was active in both civic and church affairs.

Sherley Simon, an architect situated in Tyler, Texas was hired to do the plans for the new Alford home. An article in the “Paris News” announced the construction. Mr. Simon had earlier designed the Freeman home, later the Lightfoot home, at 508 S. Church. In later years, Mr. Simon designed a home for Mr. and Mrs. Ted McClain located at 2131 Clarksville Street. Both homes are still standing.

Mrs. Alford told me the beautiful wood work, arches, and moldings located throughout the home were the work of an American Indian carpenter. His name had long been lost to her. The interior walls of the home were built of “box car siding” according to Mrs. A. She pointed out this always made it extremely handy for hanging pictures or heavy mirrors.

The glass-walled room we call the garden room originally had been a screened breezeway leading from the main house to the garage. In the 1950’s the Alfords added two large sliding glass doors, (one on the terrace side, one on the west side), to create a TV room. The LeDerer family changed the room again later.

Some years later, Mr. Alford began to suffer from a heart condition. It was at that point that the elevator was added. French doors leading to the terrace from the main downstairs hall was the spot selected to build the elevator shaft attached to the rear of the main section of the house. That elevator has been a bonus in caring for elderly parents, hauling Christmas decorations, and moving the vacuum!

The LeDerers purchased the house in 1974. Mrs. Alford and I had become friends, and when Mr. Alford died, she decided it was time to move back home to Henderson to be near her sister. She knew we loved this home, and she wanted this house, as she put it, “to keep having birthday parties and Christmas trees.” We were eager to fill her wishes.

Our first stages of change were both cosmetic and functional.

The Martin Brothers Paint Contractors came from Dallas and repainted the interior of this home. Their skill was unparalleled.

The living room surface initially was plaster-covered lathe. In later years, following a leak from the upstairs shower, plaster was removed and the ceiling covered in sheetrock.

The living room, with its incredibly beautiful molding, is painted in four shades of yellow to accent the involved planes. We added interior shutters. Mrs. Alford reported that a maid had broken a piece on the chandelier many years before. With a little glue, the repair has gone unnoticed. The tile surrounding the fireplace is Delft chosen by Mrs. Alford.

Mrs. Alford informed me early on that each year, bees invaded the living room chimney, and honey would drip onto the hearth. She was so right. The Alfords had not used the fireplace in years, so it was filled with sticks and bird nests. After that was removed, we could really see the handiwork of the bees. They maintained a huge hive in the east wall of the house. It took many attempts to convince the bees to move elsewhere. In 2009, Richard Hunt designed and installed a beautiful cap on this chimney. The fireplace does have a cleanout door outside the east end of

the house, but we learned early on that the efficient chimneys pulled all of the central heat out of the house, so we gave up wood fires.

The original design of the powder room under the main staircase was pink ceramic tile to wainscot level, and pink paper with glittering green fern fronds atop. The tile was broken in some areas, so we opted to remove all of it, paper the room in a wild paper and hang an antique chandelier over the sink. The chandelier came from an old Paris physician's home on the corner of 8th Street and Lamar. This little "surprise" jewel of a room always elicits a positive response. French Brown Tile Company in Dallas did a rather involved floor of vinyl tiles. The little crank-out window is original to the home.

Originally, the front stair was covered with a green runner similar to the green runner in the upstairs hall. We removed it. The original runner remains upstairs.

The library received a huge change. Originally, the room contained only the small inset bookshelves on the north end of the fireplace. We filled the room with beautiful shelves and cabinets. Mr. John Cleaver carved the doors to match those of the dining room. The chandelier is original to the home.

When the time came to select hardware for the new construction, Mr. J.W. Harrison, contractor, suggested I contact Hidell Hardware Company in Dallas. I took a knob from the dining room, and when I inquired at the store, the owner said, "Oh yes. We used that knob in the Alford home in Paris about 1937." NOW THAT WAS SOMETHING. Forty years later I put in an order.

The dining room has all the original features. Mr. Alford referred to the fireplace (double opening with library) as "Cile's folly." Lucile pointed out that the fire, when lit, was way too close to the behinds of dinner guests. Original to the house is a clean out to both fireplaces in the basement. We removed the white on white embossed paper and replaced it with a bold blue and white design. The chandelier is original.

The butler's pantry is a reflection of the old kitchen design. The original knotty pine is in place, as well as the inset rack for trays. The row of hooks below the tray rack was moved from the original kitchen. The Alford's dishwasher was installed in the pantry, and a bank of shallow drawers was added. The glass-front cabinets are original to the house. Mrs. Alford said she once got a call that Mr. Alford was coming home from his work on Amarillo Air Force Base. She quickly ran and cut flowers, put them in the pantry sink, turned on the water, and ran to get prettied up. The sink ran over and flooded all the drawers full of her table linens. To my knowledge, that is the ONLY flood this room ever suffered.

Before we moved in in 1975, we also did remodeling on the original upstairs. The original master bedroom is situated on the east end of the house. From the outside, the east end of the house appears to have a shuttered window. Inside, the window was shuttered and covered with sheetrock to afford a wall large enough to accommodate a headboard. The Alford's had placed their bed over that east window. The room and bath were repainted, but no other work was done. In the ensuing years, the shower pan was replaced, and later the entire drain/pipes were replaced. Both situations required a redo of living room ceiling after the leak. Although it no longer works, an original in-house phone (with bell in butler's pantry) was left on the wall. The built-in dressing table, shelves, closets and bank of drawers are original.

Two identically-sized bedrooms flank the double central chimney. Closets in each room were refitted with sliding folding doors. To each room we added a built-in desk, bookshelves and cabinet. The rooms are the perfect size for a bedroom. Each room will accommodate a bed of any size, room for a reading chair and lamp, and affords a student a desk for homework. Opposite each room across the back hall is an additional closet, bank of drawers and window seat with storage below.

Between these two bedrooms is a bathroom. Originally fitted with a single sink, this room had a window overlooking the center of the front porch. Again, we shuttered the window, faced the wall with sheetrock, and installed two vanity sinks, large mirrored medicine chests, and dressing table with banks of drawers and cabinets. A hand shower was installed in the tub.

The west end of the home contains what was the original 4th bedroom. It features two closets for hanging clothes, built-in book shelves, and private bath with shower. The small hall leading to the bath has an additional closet with shelves and dirty clothes bin.

This original bath had, in addition to the door in, a door to the back hall, as well as a door to one of the "twin" bedrooms. We closed both these door and built in a sink with cabinets below. At some point a new shower pan was installed in this shower also.

This was the stage of the house when we moved in in 1975. Before we moved in, the carpenters set up their saw horses in the garden room, and we hosted the first dinner party. We had a German supper with German sausages, sauerkraut, potatoes, cooked apples, pumpernickel bread, strudel and beer. This house has been throwing parties since.

After we had lived in the house for a year, with the help of architect William Lightfoot and contractor J.W. Harrison, we began the next phase to make Crockett Circle fit the LeDerer family.

The original kitchen had been faced with knotty pine. One lightbulb hung from the ceiling affording the ONLY illumination. A window and original back door faced S.E. 19th street. The window was in a pantry formed by a wall separating the present kitchen into two sections. Another window faced north. The Alford's and their two children ate on a small table in front of that window. There was no separate breakfast room. The floor in both kitchen and butler's pantry was/is bois d'arc. The floors remain today as beautiful as they were in 1937. They are now coated with polyurethane, but the color is unchanged.

The kitchen was completely gutted. It had taken me a year working in the old kitchen to know just what we needed. The wall forming the pantry was removed, and much needed additional bois d'arc flooring was found under all the old cabinets. One would never find the patch now. The old pantry window and original back door became openings to the new breakfast room. The north-facing window became the door to a huge walk-in pantry large enough to accommodate a freezer. Above the freezer is huge storage for trays, baking sheets, pizza pans, etc. Two walls of shelving accommodate lots of foods, large pots, serving dishes, and party ware.

The east wall of the kitchen has both a gas cook-top and an electric one. In summertime a cook may use the electric top which adds little heat to the kitchen, but in winter, a simmering pot of soup on the gas stove makes for a cozy spot. A warming oven is under the gas top, and large drawers roll out to accommodate heavy cookware. A large custom-made stainless vent covers both cooktops.

The back splash is covered in beautiful blue and white ceramic tile from Germany. Architect Lightfoot designed a large light fixture/pot rack faced with the same tile. The fluorescent fixture lights up a very large island topped by strips of maple forming a chopping surface 3 1/2 feet by 5 1/2 feet. Rogers Wade made it, as well as all the cabinetry. The island is equipped with a stainless bar sink with disposal. A garbage can on wheels fits handily on one end, and a large stainless cart fits under the side. The cart is easily moved to the sink to hold hot jars when canning, etc. A knee hole on the opposite side accommodates two stools for diners, choppers, or lookers/droolers. Electric outlets afford plugs for food processors, mixers, blenders. A bank of small drawers holds utensils. A knife rack across the remaining end holds an array of knives and sharpening steels.

The south wall of the kitchen has the original window overlooking the expansive front yard. Fairly recently we replaced the ovens with stainless GE ovens. Both are self-cleaning, and the top oven can also cook by convection. All the cabinet doors are covered and lined with Formica for easy clean up. Above the ovens (where the air is dry) a cabinet affords a good place for crackers and cereals. A false back in this cabinet affords access to the electrical connection for the ovens. The kitchen sink is a double stainless wonder that will accommodate a huge turkey roaster or up to a four-year-old toddler. The right, deep sink has another disposal. Beside the

sink is a dishwasher. Next to the dishwasher is a huge cabinet built to accommodate all the daily use dishes and glassware. The cook is able to unload the entire dishwasher without moving a step. This was my finest design accomplishment! The west wall with its doors to the breakfast room accommodates a large refrigerator. The cabinet above this refrigerator is designed to be removed separately in the event a larger built-in unit (such as a Sub-Zero) were to be installed. Next to the refrigerator is an upper cabinet and below another bank of drawers for silver, bread, foils and baggies.

The north wall of the kitchen has a broom closet, desk with shelves above, door to pantry and another fabulous cabinet. This cabinet (a step from the stoves) holds all the spices and condiments. I designed the depth to accommodate up to a 5 pound can of Crisco. Everything else just seemed to fit.

The breakfast room was designed to look like it might have been a porch that was enclosed to form a room. The south wall has large windows overlooking the front yard, and the north wall has a door to the parking area. The east wall (the old original outside wall of the house) has a breakfast bar with small sink for water for coffee pots. Cabinets underneath provide more storage. The west wall has floor to ceiling cabinets with bead board detail. Ceramic pulls like those used on old pie safes were used. The wood floor is covered in blue/white calico vinyl tiles from French Brown in Dallas.

In addition to the renovation of the kitchen, and addition of the breakfast room, we renovated the garden room, turned the garage into a master suite, added a bath, shop, back stair, created a game room from old storage, and added a laundry to the second floor.

As was mentioned earlier, the garden room was created by the Alford's in the 1950's when they glassed in the original breezeway. We added footage to the west by adding the pantry, coat closet, new entry and half bath. The original unwieldy glass door on the west was removed. French doors and a new brick porch/planter box were built. What had originally been a closet on the breezeway became a wet bar with mirrored walls, glass shelving, ice maker and small bar frig.

Architect Lightfoot dropped the ceiling in this garden room, covered the drop with lattice, and created a pathway to run wires to speakers as well as add much needed lighting to the room. The room was lined with heavy shelving to accommodate a large record collection. In later years shelving has been added with the advent of CD's. The room is a music lovers delight. It is also our primary television-watching spot.

Taking a note from the copper-roofed porch of the terrace door, Bill Lightfoot designed a copper-topped bow window to fill the old garage opening. Thus the master bedroom is a delight

to see both inside and out. The bowed window added much visual interest to the addition to the house, and kept it from being one long, boring line. The original laundry/storage room north of the garage became our dressing room. The beautiful cabinetry from the original master bedroom was repeated. Adjoining our dressing room is a room with large shower, a sunken Japanese soaking tub and toilet.

New construction afforded a new back stair to the old storage room, allowing it to be converted to a game room. Beyond the back hall, a large shop was built. It now has the old cement sink from the original laundry room. The new arched lattice way was planned to connect to a garage, but we never got the garage built. Plans are available.

Above the original garage had been a storage room, accessible only from upstairs back hall over an open roof top. The room had no cooling or heating. The new stair afforded access to this large room. We added a wet bar, lots of storage for games and toys, a closet large enough to accommodate a folded ping-pong table, and a film screen. This room has been the scene of many gatherings of our children and their friends, and at one time housed the Presbyterian Sunday Youth Group. Painted in bright primary colors, the old wooden floors and walls are sturdy enough for any activity.

We added new stairs from this game room to a new room built over the old roof of the original breezeway. This room has large closets for out-of-season storage, and has a large laundry area with sink, drip dry closet, large table for folding clothes, a niche for a sewing machine, and just about anything a person needs to run a large household. A large folding door will let you close off all the mess if you want to leave it.

All floored attic covers the area of the rooms on either side of the central chimney. A basement is accessible from garden room and reaches as far as the central chimney. A cement channel around perimeter of the basement catches ground water in extreme rainy seasons, and a sump pump we installed some years ago whisks it away. The basement contains the original cut offs to gas/water.....and all electrical breaker boxes are located there. The basement provides safe cover from tornados. Smoke and heat detectors are wired throughout the house, and a security system is in place.

There are 3 hot water heaters and five zones of heating/cooling in the house. David Powers of Power Heat and Air was a young worker in Si Weiler's Air Conditioning company when central air was added to the house. He, and now his son, still maintain all the units with twice/year visits. Let's face it. We have been spoiled rotten living here for all these glorious years.

The original house had a shake roof, and when we moved in, two additional layers had been added through the years. We replaced the shake with asphalt shingles in 1993. This is

supposedly a 30-year roof. Richard Hunt installed the roof, and has done all the maintenance on the house since the death of J.W. Harrison. Harper roofing maintains the flat roof.

The beautiful lanterns over the front door and on the front porch are original to the house. Through the years, the lacquer on the polished brass wore off, and it was nearly impossible to keep them looking good. We had them painted black, and I think their beautiful shapes are even more enhanced by the paint. Underneath, they are still solid brass.

It has been a joy, privilege and great responsibility to live here and raise our children. We hope we have maintained and honored the integrity of this great home. It has been our true intention to do so.