

GRAMMER-PIERCE HOUSE

I. CONTEXT

The Fairmount Historic District, located in Fort Worth, Texas, is the largest historic neighborhood in the southwestern United States. The district is comprised of more than 1,000 contributing structures that are mostly bungalows and American Four Square houses built in the late 1880s through the early 1920s. The neighborhood is made up of approximately 20 subdivisions that were platted between 1883 and 1907. Fairmount is, and always has been, a diverse neighborhood with houses occupied by business owners, doctors, lawyers, and educators as well as construction workers, stonemasons and railroad workers. After World War II the neighborhood fell into disrepair but has seen revitalization over the last 30 years.¹ The Grammer-Pierce House is a contributing structure to the Fairmount Historic District, it is an excellent architectural example of a California style Craftsman bungalow and has direct ties to one of Fort Worth's early prominent citizens as well as our nation's Indian heritage.²

II. OVERVIEW

On June 22, 1915, A. H. Richter and his wife Violet borrowed a sum of \$2,500 from W. R. Phenix, the current land owner of lot 8, block 1 in the Carlock Southside subdivision, to "place a substantial dwelling upon the property" in addition to purchasing the land for the sum of \$2,000. Lumber was purchased from the Farrar-Hurt Lumber Company and an ad listing the house for sale appears in January of 1916 in the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*.³

The Grammer-Pierce House was built at 2232 College Ave. and the first owners of the house, Edwin E. Nelson and M. Hazel, purchased the house for \$5,200 on Jan. 28,

1916. The couple owned it for 15 months before selling it and moving to Rhode Island. The house then sold to J. L. Bird in May of 1917, who immediately placed it back on the market.⁴

Mrs. N. E. (Lula Whaley) Grammer, widow of Nathaniel Elucid Grammer, purchased the house on November 8, 1917.⁵

Nathaniel Grammer was born in Turner's Crossroads, North Carolina, on March 25, 1863 to Dr. R. J. Grammer and Martha Elizabeth (Green) Grammer of Virginia, well-known and esteemed families of that state. He came to Fort Worth in 1884, married Miss Lula Whaley of Longview, Texas in 1885 and started a drug store business at 111 Weatherford in downtown Fort Worth that grew to be one of the largest and most modern in the city.⁶ In 1899 the Grammer Drug Store was located at 100 Main Street, and in 1904 Nathaniel added a second drug store at 200 Main Street.⁷

He took a prominent part in many business organizations and was a very active citizen in the community. Nathaniel was "prominent in Masonic circles. He was made a Master Mason in 1887, and a Royal Arch Mason in 1889. During the latter year he was made a Royal and Select Master and a Knight Templar. He was elected eminent commander of Worth Commandery in 1894 and took the Scottish Rite degrees in 1891. In 1897 he was awarded Rank and Decoration of a Knight Commander of the Court of Honor." Nathaniel was also a member of the Fort Worth Club and the Methodist Church. Working with J. P. Nicks, he organized the Fort Worth and Tarrant County Druggists' Association and Nathaniel served as treasurer.⁸ He also served as the vice-president of State National Bank.⁹

In 1894 a business card for N. E. Grammer and the Grammer Drug Store was placed in a time capsule under the cornerstone of Fort Worth's present day courthouse.¹⁰ The

card lists the store as the second oldest merchant in Fort Worth, and by 1920 the Grammer Drug Store is noted as being the oldest in Fort Worth.¹¹

Nathaniel Grammer passed away at his home at 808 Burnett Street on November 6, 1911, and his drug store business was passed on to his wife and children.¹²

Looking to escape business encroachment, Lula moved from Burnett to 2232 College Ave. on Fort Worth's Southside in 1917 with two of their four living children (Nathalie and Mary) while their son, R. M. Grammer, took over the drug store. After the move, Lula joined Broadway Baptist Church. She was also a member of the Sorosis Club and the Eastern Star.¹³

Quite active in the community, the Grammer family was also active in society. Carolyn Kemble Searcy of Fort Worth, granddaughter of Nathaniel and Lula, visited the home in 2010 and talked about parties that were held in the house where musicians played in the library and all of the furniture in the living and dining room was moved against the walls to accommodate dancing and merriment.¹⁴

Finally, due to failing health, Lula moved into her daughter Mary's home at 3712 Hamilton, and sold the house in 1940.¹³ She passed away on Nov. 16, 1952 and is buried next to her husband in Oakwood Cemetery in Fort Worth.¹⁵

Following the Grammers, 2232 College Ave. was sold to Chas R. Latiolais and his wife in 1940 and they owned it until 1946 when the Mutual Building and Loan Association obtained it.¹⁶

Mark Pierce and Alice Lewis, the fifth owners of the house, were married Aug. 18, 1915 in Lindsey, Oklahoma. Mark went into the real estate business after marriage and he and Alice had two sons, Maurice Lewis in 1916 and William Ainsworth in 1919.¹⁷

After the stock market crash in 1929 the real estate market was no longer viable and Mark and Alice lost all they had. The Pierces moved to Fort Worth where their son William had connections to help Mark find work. Gradually the Pierces recovered financially and purchased a home in an “old established residential area in Fort Worth” at 2232 College Ave. with the title to the house listed only in Alice’s name.¹⁸

Alice was part Choctaw Indian from Indian Territory (Oklahoma), and she was proud of her Indian heritage. Her grandson, Roy Pierce, recalls nights spent in the house with Alice telling bedtime stories in the Choctaw language, which were translated into English so her grandchildren could understand. Alice’s siblings include Grady Wallis Lewis, first attorney for the Choctaw Nation, and Anna Lewis, an author who wrote books about Chief Pushmataha, also known as one of the greatest Choctaw chiefs.¹⁹

Mark and Alice were the second longest residents of the house when they sold it in 1970 due to health reasons, and to move to San Antonio to live near their son, William.²⁰

In later years, the house had multiple owners and several renters. Subsequent owners of the Grammer-Pierce House include: William Robert Black, 1970-1979; Daniel and Deborah Brantley, 1979-1980; Richard and Anne Williams, 1980-1982; D. Michael Beene, 1982-1992; Edell Washington, 1992-2004; Lorin Fulton, 2004-2008; Eric and Stacy Luecker, 2008-present. Restoration of the house began in 2004.²¹

During their ownership, the Beenes enclosed the sleeping porch at the rear of the house (west side) and converted it to accommodate a master bathroom and closet. They also removed the wall between the breakfast room and kitchen and enclosed a rear open porch adjacent to the sleeping porch to create a utility room with storage.²² A building in the back yard, originally listed as as servants’ quarters, burned sometime in the 1970s due to an electrical malfunction according to neighbors.²³

III. SIGNIFICANCE

Entered into the National Register of Historic Places in 1990 as a contributing structure to the Fairmount historic district, the Grammer-Pierce House's close ties to one of Fort Worth's influential citizens and prominent business men, and the Pierce's American Indian heritage, make it a structure of significant importance.²⁴

The house is an excellent example of Craftsman architecture in the Fairmount district, retaining its integrity in original materials and design. Stained beamed ceilings accent a living room flanked by an original brick fireplace on one end and wood French doors leading to a library on the other. A massive Craftsman colonnade with hanging lanterns and built-in bookcase shelves with leaded glass doors stands as a divider between the living room and dining room that also has beamed ceilings accented by original corner lights. A built-in buffet with a curved front, mirrored back, original brass Craftsman style hardware, and beveled glass doors complete with a European-style shield design remain intact today. A wooden swinging door leads from the dining room into the kitchen that still contains the original pantry for the house. In addition, a claw foot tub and a built-in cabinet remain in the centrally located bathroom, originally the only bathroom for the house, and a built-in linen closet remains in the hall.

An ad for 2232 College Ave. from 1917 states the house has every floor hardwood with every built-in feature. Large rooms, a paved driveway, a garage and a house full of windows that sits on a deep lot is just part of the benefits it lists. The ad concludes: "a home like this will bring you complete happiness, ambition and success. You will be free to work. You will have courage to go forward." This description still applies today.²⁵

IV. DOCUMENTATION

¹ Historicfairmount.com, (2014), *historicfairmount.com* – Available at: <http://www.historicfairmount.com> (Accessed 17 Aug. 2014).

² Historic Resource Survey Form, Historic Fort Worth archives; *New Encyclopedia of Texas, Men of Texas*, p. 752-753 (copy from file on Grammer at Tarrant County Archives).

³ Tarrant County deed records, county clerk, Tarrant County courthouse: V. 479, p. 576-577

⁴ Deed records: V. 493, p. 576; V. 525, p. 59; Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, Rhode Island; *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, classifieds, July 8, 1917.

⁵ Deed record: V. 525, p. 530; *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, “Tarrant County Courts,” December 10, 1911.

⁶ *New Encyclopedia of Texas*, p. 752-753.

⁷ *Era Druggists' Directory*, 12th edition, 1906, (D. O. Haynes & Co. Publishers), p. 184; Fortwortharchitecture.com, (2011), *fortwortharchitecture.com* – Available at: <http://www.fortwortharchitecture.com/oldftw/grammerdrug1900.jpg> [Accessed 18 Aug. 2014].

⁸ Nathaniel E. Grammer obituary, *Dallas Morning News*, November 7, 1911. *New Encyclopedia of Texas*, p. 753

⁹ Fort Worth City Directory, 1902-1903, p. 146.; *Fort Worth Telegram*, Jan. 12, 1904, p. 7.

¹⁰ Williams, Mack. *In Old Fort Worth (1977)*; *Fort Worth Gazette*, March 17, 1894.

¹¹ *The Encyclopedia of Texas*, Vol. 2, compiled and edited by Ellis A. Davis and Edwin H. Grobe (Texas Development Bureau, Dallas, Texas, 1922), p. 525.

¹² Nathaniel E. Grammer obituary. *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, “Tarrant County Courts.”

¹³ “Funeral Services Monday for Mrs. Nat Grammer.” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, November 16, 1952.

¹⁴ Mrs. Nat Grammer obituary; Statement by Mrs. Carolyn Kemble Searcy (granddaughter of Nathaniel and Lula Grammer) to Eric and Stacy Luecker, 2010.

¹⁵ Mrs. Nat Grammer obituary; Deed record: V. 1770, p. 18; Fort Worth Genealogical Society, records for Historic Oakwood Cemetery. Visit to Oakwood Cemetery by Eric and Stacy Luecker.

¹⁶ Deed records: V. 1770, p. 18; V. 1779, p. 116.

¹⁷ *Biography of Willie Alice Lewis (1892-1972)*, 1981.

¹⁸ Alice Lewis biography; Deed record: V. 2029, p. 517

¹⁹ *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Oklahoma Historical Society, Vol. 33, p. 301-305. Email from Roy Pierce (grandson of Mark and Alice Lewis Pierce) to Stacy Luecker, May 23, 2013

²⁰ Alice Lewis biography; Statement by Maurice W. Pierce (grandson of Mark and Alice Pierce) to Stacy Luecker, 2013.

²¹ Deed records: V. 4857, p. 595; V. 5218, p. 232; V. 6674, p. 836; V. 3183, p. 348; V. 6930, p. 1932; V. 7263, p. 1732; V. 10742, p. 1027; TAD.org, (2014), *tad.org* – Available at: <http://tad.org> [Accessed 17 Aug. 2014]. Instrument ID: D204068250; D204114591; D204170888; D204170889; D208110142; Fort Worth city directory.

²² Statement by Michael Beene (owner of 2232 College Ave. from 1982-1992) to Stacy Luecker, 2009.

²³ Statement by Jose (Pepé) Cardona (resident at 2213 College Ave.) to Eric and Stacy Luecker, 2014.

²⁴ National Register of Historic Places (April 5, 1990), item number 90000490 *NIRS*; Fairmount Historic District website; *Meyer Brothers Druggist*, March 9, 1912, p. 22

²⁵ *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, classifieds, August, 26, 1917.

Additional Sources:

- Texas Digital Sanborn Maps (1867-1970)
- Ancestry.com
- University of Texas at Arlington photo archive
- *Southern Pharmaceutical Journal*
- Longview, Texas Historic Society
- *Terral Times*
- Tarrant County death records
- Fort Worth Public Library genealogy archive
- Fort Worth Masonic Center