

Homes of History: Hickman house becomes Damesworth home

Written by By Ava Barlow, Staff Writer
Thursday, 10 March 2011 13:57 -



March 3, 2011 - The John and Ann Elizabeth May Hickman home was built in Leonard and was originally built on what is now the northeast corner of Houston and Elm Streets. It was a two story, four-bedroom house with a kitchen, living room and dining area. The steps leading upstairs were in the only downstairs bedroom. There was a back porch and a wrap-around porch on the front of the house. The original home might have had bathing rooms, but indoor toilets were still a thing of the future. On a rafter in the attic, the house was signed by the builder and dated September 1, 1900. This house, like so many of the other homes written about, had plank walls throughout.

Ann Elizabeth died on April 6, 1915 and John lived on in the house, with their son Billy eventually moving in with his father. John died on Nov. 5, 1931, and the house became property of the son. Billy was a blacksmith with a shop on the southeast corner of the square and lived in the house for several more years.

Pink and Nancy Leo Jones bought the house and lived in it for several years as well. Though the exact time of their purchase is not known, it was in or before the mid-1950's since Gary Jones, their adopted son, has his earliest memories in the house. Nancy Leo, who went by Leo, died Aug. 10, 1966, and Pink and Gary continued to live in the house, which was in bad need of repair by this time, for several more years.

Gary remembers his father allowing the carnies from the Leonard Picnic carnival to rent the upstairs and an apartment out back when they came to town each year. Gary was rewarded with tickets for the carnival rides from the workers staying in the home.

Sometime during the early 1970's the house was abandoned and continued to sit where it was built until 1982. Pink died Oct. 19, 1979, and some locals called it the haunted house while it was empty.

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Any changes to the house before 1982 are not known. The house was probably plumbed for water several years after being built. The upstairs bathroom had a claw foot tub that was moved into place before the walls for the room were installed due to the door opening being too small.

Robert and Peggy Damesworth bought the house in 1982 and had it moved to its current location off of Cottonwood Street. The house was transported out onto Connett Street and north to the Kiwanis Park area and across the field. Many thought the move would cause the house to collapse, but it fared the move well.

But, moving the "haunted house" did not keep local kids from visiting it at its new location and vandalizing it. A beautiful oak mantle with a beveled glass mirror was over the fireplace in the living room, and the Damesworths had plans to restore the mantle. However, after vandals beat it to pieces and broke the beveled mirror, they had to have it replaced.

The home has gone through lots of changes since the Damesworths have owned it. They had the house worked on for five years before moving in. The master bedroom was widened by six feet and the stairs were moved to the kitchen area. By widening the master bedroom, the bathroom was also enlarged which allowed a large tub to be installed, as well as a shower. There is also a door in the master bedroom leading to a private porch on the west side of the house.

The back of the house was lengthened by 10 feet and the kitchen was moved into the new area with a dining nook on the west end. The new kitchen was outfitted with new cabinets and an industrial stove so family gatherings would be easier to prepare for. Off of the kitchen area is a laundry room, half bath and mudroom that leads to the new back porch. The original back porch did not fare in the move so a new back porch was built across the width of the south side of the house with steps at each end.

There are three bedrooms upstairs and one bathroom with the original claw foot tub now in all its shining glory. During the restoration, the tub was re-enameled in its location since removing it would've required taking out a wall.

The old kitchen area is now a sitting/office area that gives a clear view of the long narrow living room. The living room has two doors that lead out onto opposite ends of the wrap-around porch.

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The one used most often before the move is used very little now as almost all the foot traffic into the house enters through the back porch and mudroom.