

# **THE 1859-60 GEORGE WASHINGTON GROVER HOUSE**

**1520 MARKET STREET, GALVESTON, TEXAS**

## **I. CONTEXT**

When George Washington Grover arrived in Galveston in 1850, the city had been growing for over ten years since its founding by Michel B. Menard and the Galveston City Company in 1838. During the 1840s, wharf facilities expanded rapidly and observers anticipated further growth in the years ahead. After years of traveling the west, Grover was likely drawn to Galveston by the same spirit of entrepreneurial possibility that attracted so many other early settlers. After marrying Eliza Anne Crane in 1852, Grover established their residence in the area of town now called the East End. In 1858 or 1859, he purchased property at 1520 Market Street (then designated 460 East Market) to serve as the location of a house that would be the family's home for the next forty years.<sup>1</sup>

## **II. OVERVIEW**

George Washington Grover was born on November 9, 1819 in Sacketts Harbor, New York to Nathan and Frances Grover. He spent the majority of his childhood in Cincinnati after the family relocated when he was young. He was in the audience when Andrew Jackson, Henry Clay, and Marquis de Lafayette passed through the city on separate occasions. As a teenager, he worked as a bookkeeper for the Cincinnati Type Foundry and, later, the Louisville Type Foundry.<sup>2</sup> In 1839, his father moved the family again, this time to a farm seven miles south of Austin, Texas.<sup>3</sup> There, Grover quickly immersed himself in pioneer activities.<sup>4</sup> In 1840, he fought on behalf of the Republic of Texas against a Comanche-led war party at the Battle of Plum

Creek.<sup>5</sup> The battle ensued after a band of Comanche and Kiowa, responding to a smaller skirmish between Comanche and Texas representatives, cut a swath through the Republic's land, raiding warehouses, stealing horses, and killing 23 people in what became known as the Great Raid of 1840.<sup>6</sup> On the evening of August 11, 1840, several groups of Texan volunteers came together near Plum Creek to repel the Comanche-led warriors, and Grover fought alongside his father.<sup>7</sup>

The following year, Grover volunteered to serve the Republic of Texas once again, this time as part of the artillery company for an expedition to Santa Fe, which was at that point held by Mexico but claimed by Texas.<sup>8</sup> President Mirabeau Lamar urged the trip in the hopes of expanding trade influence. The endeavor proved to be disastrous as all of the men were taken as prisoners by Mexican authorities. Grover and his cohorts marched all the way to Mexico City, where they remained imprisoned until April 1842.<sup>9</sup> While detained, Grover edited a weekly newspaper called *True Blue* under the pseudonyms "Simon Pure" and "Snooks." In a total of six issues written by hand from April and May 1842, the single-page newspaper reported on the expedition and prison life.<sup>10</sup> These accounts of the expedition continue to serve as important historical sources.<sup>11</sup>

After his release from Mexico City, Grover returned to Cincinnati and married Hepzy Dana Andrews in May 1844. Andrews was the younger sister of Grover's lifelong friend and future business partner, Wright S. Andrews. The marriage was tragically brief as Hepzy died of unknown causes that September. Grover continued to live in Cincinnati until February 1849, when he and Wright Andrews joined a gold expedition to California.<sup>12</sup> After departing from New Orleans, their ship made stops in Panama and, after being blown off course by a storm, Hawaii. When they finally reached San Francisco, they established a supply store<sup>13</sup> and gathered gold.<sup>14</sup> In their return trip, their gold, stored in a trunk and buckskin belts, was lost when the boat caught fire. Years later, Grover was involved in a second boat fire when the steamship *Louisiana* of Port Lavaca caught fire off of Galveston, killing forty people.<sup>15</sup>

### *Arrival in Galveston and construction of house*

In 1850, Grover returned to Texas and settled in Galveston. In the following year, he was joined by Wright Andrews and his brother Henry Andrews. The trio quickly formed a business<sup>16</sup> and opened a mercantile house in the heart of Galveston's emerging commercial district at the corner of Strand and 22nd Street.<sup>17</sup> According to an 1857 advertisement, the firm sold a variety of groceries, including canned oysters.<sup>18</sup> Henry Andrews left the business after a brief tenure.

In 1852, Grover married Eliza Ann Crane, the daughter of Ambrose Byron Crane, Galveston's Deputy Collector of Customs serving under Gail Borden, Jr.<sup>19</sup> Eliza was born in St. Marks, Florida in 1834 before her family moved to Texas in 1837.<sup>20</sup> George and Eliza's family soon grew with the births of children Louise, Mable, Sidney, and Walter.<sup>21</sup>

After residing for periods at different locations on the eastern portion of the island, the Grovers established a permanent residence with the construction of a two-story brick house at 1520 Market in 1859-1860. Judging from the house's scale and its carpentry and masonry details, Grover may have employed a designer or contractor to complete the project, but no such figure has been identified. However, later articles do note the sources for many of the building materials used in the house. The bricks were manufactured on Galveston Island at J. M. Brown's brickyard at Mud Bridge.<sup>22</sup> The pine flooring came from Pensacola, Florida.<sup>23</sup> The marble window sills came from Vermont.<sup>24</sup> Lastly, the granite steps to the western entrance came from New Hampshire.<sup>25</sup>

According to the recollections of Grover's son Walter, later a leading Galveston historian, the house may have been the second largest dwelling in Galveston (after Ashton Villa) upon its completion.<sup>26</sup> It was certainly among the most finely detailed antebellum houses in the city. The earliest description of the house, published in a 1936 newspaper article, provides an overview of the house's interior as well as some notes on its original construction. The article details

*“ceilings of unusual height, bordered with attractive hand-made friezes, and with hand-made center designs built about the ceiling gas fixtures. Throughout the house are hand-cut stained glass panes, and all window and door sills are of marble. The mantel and hearth in the great parlor on the ground floor are of black marble, and the fireplace on the second floor is of white marble. The old kitchen at the rear was built over a large underground cistern which supplied water to firemen when fires broke out nearby. Two other cisterns and a cellar are under the house, and one of the cisterns is still being used, supplying the family with cool water during summer months.”<sup>27</sup>*

After its construction, the house “became a social center,” according to Walter Grover. “Many gay parties were held there, and, according to the custom of the time, friends and relatives visited there from distant places and enjoyed their hospitality.”<sup>28</sup>

#### *Career and city leadership*

The firm *Grover & Andrews* operated from the Strand until 1861.<sup>29</sup> In that year, Grover was elected city alderman. He went on to serve as Galveston Mayor pro tem during the war after other members of the city government retreated to Virginia Point. When the Union Army took control of the city, it was Grover who met with their officers.<sup>30</sup> After the deaths of Union leaders Captain Jonathan Mayhew Wainwright and Lieutenant Commander Edward Lea during the Battle of Galveston on January 1, 1863, Grover aroused controversy when he offered space in his own family’s plot in the Episcopal section of Broadway Cemetery for their burial.<sup>31</sup>

During the battle, a shell fired from the harbor smashed into the second story of the Grover House’s north façade. The house, which sits just three blocks from the harbor, survived the battle, but the cannonball remained lodged in structure until late in the late century. Later occupants of the house also reported finding Civil War-era ammunition throughout the lot.<sup>32</sup>

Following the war, Grover's decision to treat Union soldiers with respect remained controversial, but not enough so to preclude his continued involvement in business and governmental affairs. In 1866, he served as the bookkeeper for the First National Bank of Galveston.<sup>33</sup> In 1869, he was elected city treasurer. Newspaper accounts of his election reveal the lingering debate over his actions during the Civil War. City Alderman Rush Plumley protested the election on the grounds that Grover had supported the Confederacy. Fellow Alderman Theodore Wagner came to Grover's defense, reminding the group that Grover had been condemned during the war for being too pro-Union. Plumley demurred, and denied "aspersing the character of Mr. Grover." The debate was closed shortly thereafter.<sup>34</sup>

By 1870, Grover had launched his own grocery company in the old Grover & Andrews location at 22nd Street and Strand. An advertisement in the 1872 city directory lists the firm as retail dealers in "family supplies, produce and boat stores." For unknown reasons, the company was out of business by 1874. Between 1874 and 1881, Grover was an employee of Rice & Baulard, sellers of paints and oils from a store at 213-217 23rd Street.<sup>35</sup> The firm had begun in 1853 as a partnership of Joseph W. Rice and Victor Baulard, who traded throughout Texas and western Louisiana.<sup>36</sup> Grover served as the company's bookkeeper and may have had other duties during his tenure.

Grover was an artist himself and two of his works survive as portrayals of mid-nineteenth-century Galveston. The first depicts the capture of the U.S.R.C *Harriet Lane* during the Battle of Galveston.<sup>37</sup> The second, "Galveston as Seen from the Main Top of Ship at Central Wharf – October, 1855", was given to the Rosenberg Library by the Galveston Historical Foundation and restored in 1968.<sup>38</sup>

The 1895 city directory lists Grover as a "collector." By 1899 he was retired.<sup>39</sup> Newspaper accounts reveal that he remained active in these years by recounting his early exploits in the Battle of Plum Creek, the Santa Fe Expedition, and the Battle of Galveston.<sup>40</sup> He died on

December 21, 1901, after a fall.<sup>41</sup> His wife Eliza died in 1913 as one of the oldest citizens in Galveston.<sup>42</sup>

### *The Grover House in the twentieth century*

The Grover House withstood the Battle of Galveston, the disastrous 1885 fire that destroyed many houses in the East End, and the devastating 1900 Galveston Hurricane. By the last event, the Grover family had sold the house to Charles H. Hughes, a partner of the insurance firm *Hughes & Stowe*.<sup>43</sup> In April 1906, St. James Methodist Episcopal Church began renting the house from Hughes for services and classes.<sup>44</sup> The church then purchased the building on July 31, 1907.<sup>45</sup> As listed in the 1908 city directory, the house had five residents, including caretaker Alice W. Phillips, her husband, engineer Earle W. Phillips, and their son Earle Phillips, Jr., a clerk at the wharf.<sup>46</sup>

In 1909, Landon C. Chambers purchased the house for use as his family's primary residence.<sup>47</sup> Chambers was the nephew of General Thomas Jefferson Chambers, an early Texas land speculator and government figure during Mexican rule.<sup>48</sup> Landon Chambers worked in real estate and as a sheriff in Chambers County.<sup>49</sup> By the time he purchased the Grover House, however, he was retired. Until his death in 1919, he lived at the house with his wife Charcilla, a daughter Cecile, a stenographer, and a son Robert, a shipping clerk.<sup>50</sup> The family occupied the house until 1970 and made some alterations to the original fabric during their stay. In 1943, a hurricane "severely damaged" the house, which the *Galveston Daily News* by then recognized as one of Galveston's historic landmarks.<sup>51</sup> Afterwards, the family replaced the roof's original slate with mid-twentieth-century synthetic roofing materials.<sup>52</sup> The cupola was also removed.<sup>53</sup> In the 1950s, the family added a second-story screened porch on top of the front gallery.<sup>54</sup> The last Chambers family heir died in 1970. A bank initially planned to demolish the house and redevelop the land.<sup>55</sup> However, John Vernon Proctor of Texas City purchased it in 1972 with the

intention of rehabilitating it.<sup>56</sup> Proctor may have been responsible for the removal of the screening on the second story porch.

In 1974, Bill Caldwell and his wife owned the property.<sup>57</sup> They resided in the house until selling it to Doris Childress in 1980.<sup>58</sup> Between 1987 and 1994, Childress' daughter, teacher Sara Cutler, operated a Montessori school called the Children's House from the building.<sup>59</sup> In 1994, current owners David and Rebecca Hughes purchased the property from Childress and undertook a substantial rehabilitation project to uncover and restore as many original features as possible. They completed another extensive rehabilitation after the house was damaged during Hurricane Ike of 2008.

### **III. SIGNIFICANCE**

George W. Grover was active in some of the defining events of the settlement of the western United States during the middle of the nineteenth century. He participated in the Battle of Plum Creek, the Santa Fe Expedition, and the Gold Rush. He cofounded a grocery firm in the heart of Galveston's business district during the era of the city's rise as a primary port in the region. And when the Civil War came to the city, Grover's decisive actions as Mayor pro tem left a lasting impact on the city's history. His importance as a historical figure was heightened by his efforts to record the events that he witnessed through journals, paintings, and retrospective articles.

His house at 1520 Market is now among the oldest buildings in Galveston's East End National Historic Landmark District. Along with the Henry Rosenberg House at 1306 Market and James Brown's Ashton Villa, the Grover House stands out as one of Galveston's earliest masonry residences. While the Grover House has some Greek Revival details, including the presumably original door surrounds on the south facade, it is less typical of Greek Revival architecture in comparison with the timber-frame antebellum houses in the East End.

The house was recognized for its architectural value as early as 1936, when a newspaper account cited the house as “a fine example of the old style of architecture.”<sup>60</sup> J.D. Claitor, a two-term president of the Galveston Historical Society, in 1951 described the house as “one of Galveston’s most cherished landmarks.”<sup>61</sup>

Dates of Construction: 1859-1860

Owners: David and Rebecca Hughes

1520 Market Street

Galveston, Texas, 77550

Contact: Matthew Pelz, Galveston Historical Foundation

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<sup>1</sup> Insurance Record for 1520 Market, Texas History Center, Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas; Galveston County Tax Roll, 1859." Preservation Resource Center, Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, Texas.

<sup>2</sup> George W. Grover’s autobiographical sketch included in “G.W. Grover Dead.” *The Galveston Daily News*; December 22, 1901. Preservation Resource Center, Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, Texas.

<sup>3</sup> Personal statement by Walter E. Grover, son of George W. Grover, at the winter meeting of the Galveston Historical Society. November 30, 1949. Preservation Resource Center, Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, Texas.

<sup>4</sup> “G.W. Grover Dead.” *The Galveston Daily News*; December 22, 1901.

<sup>5</sup> “In the Indian Times,” publication of paper presented by George W. Grover given at a meeting of the Texas Historical Society of Galveston. *The Galveston Daily News*; Monday, March 18, 1895. Web. *Newspaper Archive*. <http://www.newspaperarchive.com>. Accessed June 27, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Roell, Craig H. "Linnville Raid of 1840," *Handbook of Texas Online*. Texas State Historical Association. Web, (<https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/btl01>). Accessed June 28, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> “In the Indian Times,” *The Galveston Daily News*; March 18, 1895.

<sup>8</sup> Carroll, H. Bailey. "Texan Santa Fe Expedition," *Handbook of Texas Online*. Texas State Historical Association. Web, (<https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/qyt03>). Accessed June 28, 2016; Grover, George W. "Minutes of Adventure from June 1841." Texas History Center, Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas.

<sup>9</sup> Carroll, H. Bailey. "Texan Santa Fe Expedition," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

<sup>10</sup> Kleiner, Diana J. "*True Blue*," *Handbook of Texas Online*. Texas State Historical Association. Web, (<https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/eet28>). Accessed September 9, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Grover, George W. "Minutes of Adventure from June 1841."

<sup>12</sup> Personal statement by Walter E. Grover, November 30, 1949.

<sup>13</sup> Personal statement by Walter E. Grover, November 30, 1949.

<sup>14</sup> Morgan, *Trinity Protestant Episcopal Church*, 304.

<sup>15</sup> Morgan, *Trinity Protestant Episcopal Church*, 304-305.



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- <sup>16</sup> "Wright S. Andrews." *The Galveston Daily News*; Saturday, March 26, 1906. Web. *Newspaper Archive*. <http://www.newspaperarchive.com>: Accessed July 5, 2016.
- <sup>17</sup> Personal statement by Walter E. Grover, November 30, 1949.
- <sup>18</sup> The Texas Almanac for 1857. Galveston, 1856. Web. *Google Books*. <https://books.google.com/books?id=MD88AQAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>: Accessed July 5, 2016.
- <sup>19</sup> "Texas, County Marriage Index, 1837-1977, George W. Grover and Eliza A. Crane, August 21, 1852." Index Number M59184-1, GS Film number: 1008865; Personal statement by Walter E. Grover, November 30, 1949.
- <sup>20</sup> "Mrs. E.A. Grover," *The Galveston Daily News*; May 21, 1913. Preservation Resource Center, Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, Texas.
- <sup>21</sup> "Two Historic Waterfront Paintings Restored." *The Galveston Daily News*; Saturday, August 18, 1968. Web. *Newspaper Archive*. <http://www.newspaperarchive.com>: Accessed May 30, 2016.
- <sup>22</sup> "Many of Heroes of Battle Buried Here." *The Galveston Daily News*; Saturday, July 11, 1936. Web. *Newspaper Archive*. <http://www.newspaperarchive.com>: Accessed May 30, 2016; Personal statement by Walter E. Grover, November 30, 1949.
- <sup>23</sup> Claitor, J.D. "Walter E. Grover – 'Mr. Galveston'," Account from interview of Walter E. Grover by J.D. Claitor in 1951. Preservation Resource Center, Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, Texas.
- <sup>24</sup> "Many of Heroes of Battle Buried Here." *The Galveston Daily News*; July 11, 1936.
- <sup>25</sup> "War, Storms, Fire Fail to Destroy Island Home." *Houston Post*; November 10, 1966.
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- <sup>27</sup> "Many of Heroes of Battle Buried Here." *The Galveston Daily News*; July 11, 1936.
- <sup>28</sup> Claitor, J.D. "Walter E. Grover – 'Mr. Galveston'," 1951.
- <sup>29</sup> "Wright S. Andrews." *The Galveston Daily News*; Saturday, March 26, 1906.
- <sup>30</sup> Personal statement by Walter E. Grover, November 30, 1949.
- <sup>31</sup> Cotham, Edward T., Jr. *Battle of Galveston: The Civil War Struggle for Galveston*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998, p. 138; Personal statement by Walter E. Grover, November 30, 1949.
- <sup>32</sup> "Many of Heroes of Battle Buried Here." *The Galveston Daily News*; July 11, 1936; "A Sturdy Veteran of Fire, Battle and Storm." *The Galveston Daily News*; Sunday, February 10, 1935. Web. *Newspaper Archive*. <http://www.newspaperarchive.com>: Accessed May 17, 2016.
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- <sup>34</sup> "Local Intelligence." *Flake's Galveston Bulletin*; Saturday, May 15, 1869. Web. *Newspaper Archive*. <http://www.newspaperarchive.com>: Accessed March 25, 2016.
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- <sup>36</sup> "Baulard, Victor Joseph," *Handbook of Texas Online*. Texas State Historical Association. Web, (<https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fbaaq>). Accessed June 28, 2016.
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- <sup>38</sup> "Two Historic Waterfront Paintings Restored," *The Galveston Daily News*; August 18, 1968.
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- <sup>40</sup> "In the Indian Times," *The Galveston Daily News*; March 18, 1895.
- <sup>41</sup> "G.W. Grover Dead." *The Galveston Daily News*; December 22, 1901.
- <sup>42</sup> "Mrs. E.A. Grover," *The Galveston Daily News*; May 21, 1913. Preservation Resource Center, Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, Texas.

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- <sup>54</sup> Texas Historical Commission. Historic Marker Application: Grover-Chambers House, Text, no date. Web, (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth477726/>). Accessed May 10, 2016.
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- <sup>61</sup> Claitor, J.D., "Walter E. Grover – 'Mr. Galveston'," 1951.