

THE 1896 William C. and Adele P. Skinner House

I. CONTEXT

The city of Galveston occupies a barrier island on the Texas Gulf Coast. Long before the incorporation of the city, the island was home to Native American tribes, Spanish explorers, and pirates who took advantage of its adjacent natural harbor. During the first half of the nineteenth century, as waves of settlers moved into Texas from the east, a group of investors led by Michel B. Menard identified Galveston as the most suitable location for a new port city that would capitalize on the growth of the Texas economy. In the 1830s, 40s and 50s, Menard and his associates in the Galveston City Company developed the city and its port infrastructure. They focused their efforts on the northeastern portion of the island, where several prominent early Texans constructed wharves. As a result of these investments, Galveston became the principal port in the region and the commercial center of Texas during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Coinciding with Galveston's rise to prominence, a class of wealthy business leaders emerged. During the 1880s and 1890s in particular, these leaders and their families built large and elaborate houses in the East End neighborhood. Among the most active architects in the city during this period were Nicholas Clayton, designer of Bishop's Palace (the Walter Gresham House) at 1402 Broadway (Avenue J),¹ Alfred Muller, designer of Trube Castle at 1627 Sealy (Avenue I),² and C.W. Bulger, the only one of the three to have been born in the United States. Practicing in Galveston after three years in Colorado, Bulger designed several houses in the East End. The list of his clients included plumbing and concrete contractor Isaac Heffron, investor and mayor Isaac H. Kempner, and William C. Skinner, a banker and the son of Texas pioneer James D. Skinner.³

William Skinner purchased the lot at 1318 Sealy in 1895 as the construction site of a home for his young family. By the time he hired Bulger to complete the design, Bulger had been in Galveston for five years but had not yet established his reputation in Texas. Ultimately, he would spend over thirty years in the state, based in Galveston until 1904 and afterwards in Dallas.⁴ Over the course of his career, he made substantial contributions to Texas architecture and the William C. and Adele P. Skinner House is one of the most noteworthy examples of his early work in the state.

II. OVERVIEW

Charles William Bulger was born in Carroll County, Indiana on August 1, 1851.⁵ While most contemporary sources list his name as “C.W. Bulger,” notices published in his native Indiana refer to him as “William Bulger”⁶ and articles dating from his time in Dallas use the name “Charles W. Bulger.”⁷ His parents were Sarah Stansel and Charles C. Bulger, one of the “pioneer citizens” of Carroll County.⁸ C.W. attended Wabash College in nearby Crawfordsville, though his course of study is unknown.⁹ He married Ida Connelly Bulger in 1876 and the couple moved to Anthony, Kansas by 1880.¹⁰

Located in Harper County on Kansas’ border with Oklahoma, Anthony had a population of 345 as counted in the 1880 census.¹¹ Bulger may have initially moved there to serve as the contractor for the construction of a flour mill.¹² After the project, the family remained in the town for about five years while Bulger worked as a contractor and began to design his own buildings.¹³ Along with Ida, he was part of the group that organized the town’s First Baptist Church.¹⁴

While in Kansas, Bulger entered into a partnership with Isaac Hamilton Rapp, who later designed important buildings in Santa Fe, New Mexico.¹⁵ Together, Bulger and Rapp designed several buildings in Anthony between 1886 and 1888, most notably a three-story opera house.¹⁶

In 1888, the men relocated the firm and their families to Trinidad, a town in southeastern Colorado. In Trinidad, Bulger ceased work as a contractor to focus solely on work as an architect.¹⁷ He would leave the city in 1891 after bouts of altitude sickness, but his brief tenure was highly productive.¹⁸ Among his and Rapp's most significant designs were Zion's German Lutheran Church and the five-story, Richardsonian Romanesque-style First National Bank Building of Trinidad.¹⁹

When Bulger came to Galveston in 1891, he left behind a growing architectural reputation in Colorado.²⁰ Arriving in town during the midst of Galveston's greatest economic boom, he once again established himself, this time without his partner, Isaac Rapp. His first major commission was for the design of a Y.M.C.A. Building at the corner of 23rd Street and Winnie (Avenue G). The building, the first Y.M.C.A facility in Texas, was financed through a bequest in the will of Galveston philanthropist Henry Rosenberg.²¹ Another major commission for Bulger came in 1896 with the construction of the E.S. Levy Building at 2221 Market (Avenue D).²²

The relative scarcity of references to Bulger and his work during the early 1890s suggests a newcomer's struggle to compete with well-established architects Clayton, Muller, and Nathaniel Tobey. In a sign of some degree of professional advancement, in 1893 Bulger was elected, along with Clayton, as members of the southern chapter of the American Institute of Architects at its second annual meeting in Birmingham, Alabama.²³

Based on architectural details, architectural historians Stephen Fox and Ellen Beasley have speculated that Bulger may have been responsible for the designs of houses at 1821 and 1823 Winnie in 1893, though no contemporary sources have yet been found to indicate his role.²⁴ His earliest confirmed residential projects in Galveston date to 1896. Of the houses that Bulger is known to have designed in that year,²⁵ the most prominent was the large, Queen Anne-style house built in the East End neighborhood for William C. Skinner, a member of one of Galveston's elite families.

William's father, James D. Skinner, arrived in Galveston from his native Kentucky and married Sallie Adelaide Chambers, who had been born in Culpeper, Virginia.²⁶ Sallie was a member of one of Texas' most important early families. Her uncle, Thomas Jefferson Chambers, was a leading figure during the era of the Texas Republic and early statehood.²⁷ James Skinner, after partnering in the grocery firms Garey & Skinner and Skinner & Stone during the 1870s,²⁸ established himself as a leader of the lucrative cotton trade by the end of the century. He and his partner, Henry C. Stone, operated as cotton factors and merchants from their offices on Strand between 21st and 22nd Streets.²⁹ In the 1890s, he began a new firm with his son, J. Sidney Skinner,³⁰ while also serving as President of the Galveston Cotton Exchange.³¹

During James' tenure with the cotton exchange, the 1900 Galveston Hurricane struck the island, causing unprecedented damages and jeopardizing the city's future. In his role as a city leader, Skinner traveled to Austin after the storm to meet with Governor Joseph D. Sayers. He was also part of a local relief committee that issued updates and appeals for assistance.³² After his death in 1901, the Galveston Daily News published statements given in his honor by both the Galveston Cotton Exchange and medical faculty of UTMB.³³

James and Sallie had come to Galveston from Liberty, Texas. In 1873, they built a Greek Revival house at 1605 Broadway.³⁴ They had three children: J. Sidney, Gertrude, and William. J. Sidney, after working with his father as a cotton factor and merchant, eventually served in the customs service as well as the Department of State in Washington, D.C.³⁵ Gertrude and her husband, Edward Reed Girardeau, resided in the house at 1605 Broadway, which was demolished in the early 1960s.³⁶ William, the youngest of the three siblings, eventually acquired property at 1318 Sealy and hired Bulger to build the house that still stands on the lot.

William Cooke Skinner was born September 26, 1870 in Liberty.³⁷ In 1890, the first year he is listed individually in a Galveston City Directory, he worked as a clerk for Skinner and Son, the firm owned by his father and brother.³⁸ By the following year, he had become an exchange clerk and assistant teller at American National Bank.³⁹ For the rest of the 1890s, he worked as a

teller at Weekes, McCarthy, and Company, a bank located at the corner of 23rd Street and Mechanic (Avenue B).⁴⁰ Simultaneously, he served as treasurer of the Winnie Loan and Improvement Company.⁴¹

In 1895, William married Adele Preston,⁴² the daughter Calvin Preston, a Deacon from New York, and Emeline McWaters.⁴³ A January 5, 1896 notice in the Galveston Daily News described William and Adele as being “now cozily ensconced in their new home, No. 1707 Winnie.”⁴⁴ The circumstances of their tenure at 1707 Winnie are unknown, but by the end of 1896, construction was complete on the house that Bulger had designed for them at 1318 Sealy.⁴⁵

In an article describing 1896 construction projects in Galveston, the Skinner House is listed first among the seven houses designed by Bulger that year and is described as “the handsome home of Mr. Wm. C. Skinner.” The article lists the cost of construction as \$4000, nearly twice as costly as any of Bulger’s other 1896 houses.⁴⁶

The two-and-a-half-story, four-bay Queen Anne-style house faces south. The primary façade has three gable ends and a gallery that wraps around the house’s southwest corner. Ionic columns support the roof of the gallery and the open second story porch above. Characteristic of Queen Anne architecture, the sizes and locations of the windows are irregular. A majority of them retain their wooden shutters. Particularly notable is the tri-partite bay window at the top of the south façade. The house retains its wood siding. The upper portions are accentuated with shingles installed in a dove-tail pattern.

The house is accessible from Sealy street through an original iron fence via a concrete walkway and wooden steps. The house’s entrance has double doors and a sunburst transom. It opens to a tiled vestibule and a second set of double doors. The interior of the house is characterized by an extensive amount of well-preserved original wooden trim. The first room of the interior is a central passage way with a fireplace, which has decorative green tile and a black-tiled hearth. The passage way connects to the front doors and first-story hallway via doors, to a

front parlor via a column-supported opening, and to the second story via a wooden staircase. The doorways and openings retain their Queen Anne-detailed trim, including turned pilasters and ornamented, unglazed transoms.

The front parlor has black-tiled fireplace with pilasters and a mirror in the overmantel. A window in the western wall has stained glass with a floral motif. To the north of the parlor, a dining room has another floral-themed stained-glass window in the central portion of an octagonally-projecting bay in the west façade. The dining room gives access to the kitchen and living room via doors with transoms. The existing finishes of the kitchen and living room, which occupy the rear portions of the first story, are the result of historically-sensitive early-twenty-first-century renovations.

The stairway to the second story has a distinctive carved handrail. The stairs pass by a cascading series of stained-glass windows before reaching a hallway that gives access to each of the three second-story bedrooms. The second story, while lacking the extensively detailed woodwork of the first story, retains a substantial amount of Victorian character in its painted door trim and wall molding. At the rear of the house, a spiral metal staircase gives access to the finished attic, which includes a bedroom and bathroom. The area was renovated in the early twentieth century.

Given its accentuated Queen Anne details, the Skinner House stands out as the most heavily stylized of Bulger's nineteenth century houses. As Beasley and Fox note, Bulger "let himself go" with the design.⁴⁷ Among his surviving residential designs from his Galveston period, the house ranks alongside the Isaac Heffron House (503 17th Street) and the Isaac H. Kempner House (1502 Broadway) as his most elaborate.

During the first decades of the twentieth century, the house served as the home of the active Skinner family. William worked as a teller for bankers Bertrand Adoue and Joseph Lobit,

who operated from 2102 Strand.⁴⁸ He would serve as pallbearers at the funerals for both men.⁴⁹ After 1921, he worked for interests of Maco Stewart, including Guaranty Building and Loan Company and Stewart Title.⁵⁰

The family included two daughters, Margaret and Elizabeth. Margaret, born 1899, wrote fashion columns for the New York World under the pen name “Ann Harris” during the 1920s and later worked as a secretary for an author.⁵¹ She married Neil O’Keeffe, a successful comic artist, and the family split time between New York and Dallas.⁵² Elizabeth, born in 1903, studied to be a librarian, married G. Lloyd Webb, and lived in Galveston and Houston.⁵³

The 1910 census also lists a servant, Georgia Brown, and a tenant, Alberta Odell, as residing at 1318 Sealy.⁵⁴ A 1903 listing in the “Female Help Wanted” section of the Galveston Daily News suggests that the household included at least one servant during the first decade of the century.⁵⁵ None of the later censuses list any extra-familial residents. The family lived in the house until 1943, when they sold it to Olaf and Florence Olsen.⁵⁶ William died in 1953 while residing at 1507 24th Street.⁵⁷ Adele died in 1966 as a resident of Houston.⁵⁸

Born 1888 in Arondale, Norway, Captain Olaf Baardsen Olsen lived in Oakland, California before settling in Galveston by 1930.⁵⁹ He was a sea captain for Lykes Brothers, an international shipping company, for 25 years.⁶⁰ He and his wife Florence lived in the house along with a long-time tenant, William J. Long, an employee of the Santa Fe Railroad Company.⁶¹

On May 7, 1961, the Olsens sold the house to Curtis Penn (C.P.) Wade, Jr., a U.S. Customs inspector,⁶² and Althea Consuela Wade (Thomson), a teacher.⁶³ The Wade family lived in the house for nearly twenty years. In 1976, they opened the house to public visitors as part of the third annual Galveston Historical Foundation Historic Homes Tour and for a series of “Victorian Saturdays” through the summer.⁶⁴ Advertisements for the summer tours refer to the house as “the Skinner-Wade House,” in recognition of its then current owners, and “Jasmine,” for unknown reasons.⁶⁵

In 1979, the Wades sold the house to David K. Rassin, a neonatologist at UTMB, and his wife, Glenda.⁶⁶ The list of subsequent owners includes Philip and Beth Contreras, David Lindsey and Susan Kinsley, and the current owners, Barbara Bryant and Lloyd Campo.⁶⁷ Philip Contreras, an architect, undertook a substantial rehabilitation project, for which he and his wife won an East End Historical District Restoration Award in 2001.⁶⁸ Despite the changes in ownership and the severe tropical weather events that have struck Galveston Island on multiple occasions since the house's construction in 1896, it retains a remarkable amount of integrity of its early design, including the exterior fenestration and siding and the interior woodwork.

After completing the Skinner House project in 1896, Bulger designed several other significant buildings in Galveston. The E.S. Levy House at 1514 Ball (Avenue H) and the Isaac Heffron House at 503 17th Street (1900) stand out as notable examples. Between 1904 and 1906, the Bulger family transitioned from Galveston to Dallas. During this period, he continued to undertake prominent projects in Galveston, including the Heffron Building at 101 21st Street (1906), a remodel of the Stewart Title offices in the Kaufman and Runge Building 220 22nd Street (1905), and the Isaac H. Kempner House at 1502 Broadway (1906).⁶⁹

In Dallas, Bulger launched a new architecture firm with his son, Clarence C. Bulger, a graduate of Galveston's Ball High and an active participant in the formation of the Texas State Association of Architects in 1908.⁷⁰ The firm of Charles W. Bulger and Son specialized in churches, completing projects in more than twenty states by 1922, and designed other significant buildings.⁷¹ Their most famous projects are the since demolished 1907 Praetorian Building at 1607 Main in Dallas, which was the first skyscraper in the West,⁷² and Waco's Praetorian Building, built in 1913.⁷³ Clarence, who performed most of the design work for the firm during these years, continued to have a successful career in Dallas after C.W. Bulger's death in 1922.⁷⁴

III. SIGNIFICANCE

As a National Historic Landmark district, the East End is widely recognized and celebrated for its history. The neighborhood is significant partly due to its extraordinary concentration of intact nineteenth century architecture, a collection of surviving back buildings, and the remnants of historical working class sections of the neighborhood. More than any other feature, however, it is the assortment of large, elaborate Victorian houses designed by distinguished architects on behalf of prominent citizens that defines the character of the East End. Accordingly, the Skinner House is an outstanding example of this essence of the city's history due to its associations with William C. Skinner and C.W. Bulger. Skinner, the son of a leading figure in the Texas cotton trade during its greatest boom and himself a career baker, belonged to one of the elite families that collectively developed the East End in the 1880s and 1890s. For his part, Bulger was one of Texas' earliest members in the southern chapter of the AIA and he contributed to the design of several important buildings in the state. The Skinner House represents an important milestone in his early career and one of his most significant contributions to the architecture of the East End.

IV. ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1 - Zion's German Lutheran Church in Trinidad, Colorado in 2012. (Photographer: Jeffrey Beall, accessible via https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Zion%27s_German_Lutheran_Church.jpg.)



Figure 2 - The William C. and Adele P. Skinner House at 1318 Sealy on August 17, 2016. (Preservation Resource Center, Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, Texas.)



Figure 3 - The central passage of the William C. and Adele P. Skinner House at 1318 Sealy on August 17, 2016. (Preservation Resource Center, Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, Texas.)

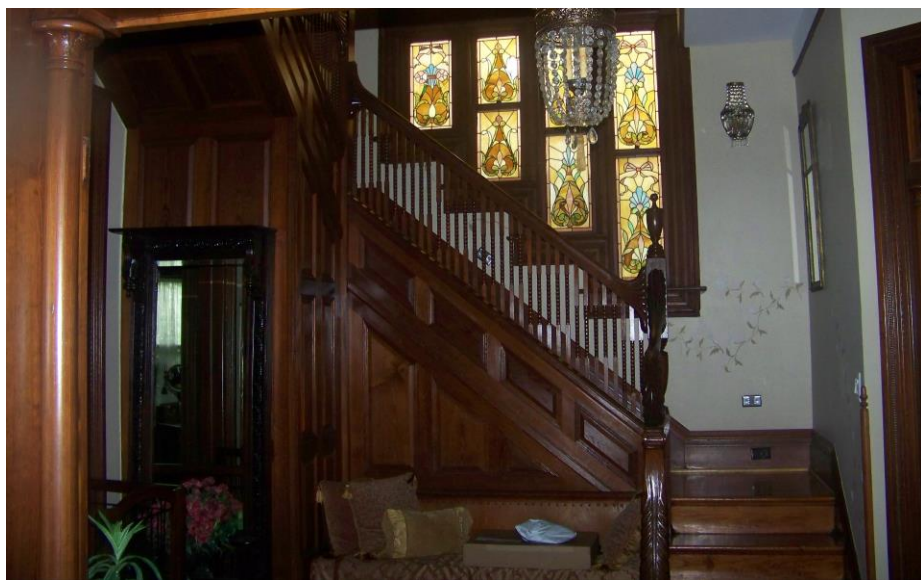
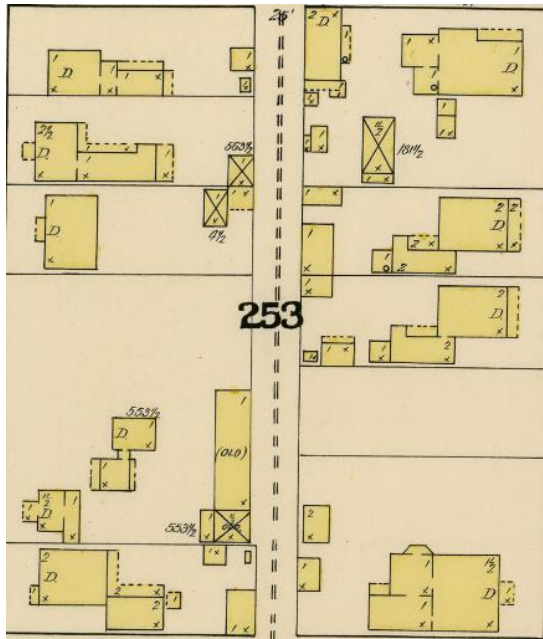
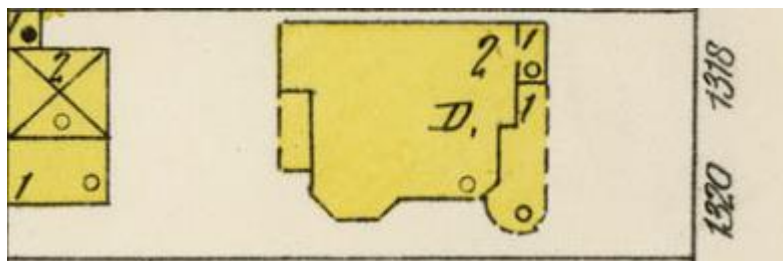


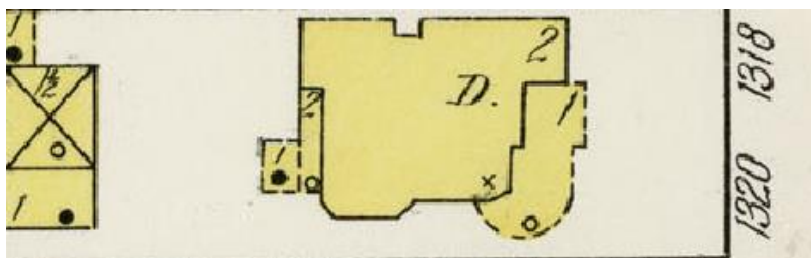
Figure 4 - The staircase of the William C. and Adele P. Skinner House at 1318 Sealy on August 17, 2016. (Preservation Resource Center, Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, Texas.)



1889



1899



1912

Figure 5 - Sanborn fire insurance maps from 1889, 1899, and 1912. (Dolph Briscoe Center, University of Texas, Austin, Texas.)



Figure 6 – The Purcell Houses on Avenue Q between 27th and 28th Streets, also designed by C.W. Bulger in 1896. (Preservation Resource Center, Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, Texas.)



Figure 7 - Margaret and Elizabeth Skinner, daughters of William and Adele. ("Today's Pictures." *The Galveston Daily News*; Sunday, November 25, 1923, p. 10. Web. Newspaper Archive. <http://www.newspaperarchive.com>: accessed September 6, 2016.)



Figure 8 - The Skinner House shown in a 1977 photograph promoting the third annual Historic Homes Tour. ("The Skinner-Wade House." *The Galveston Daily News*; Saturday Morning, January 25, 1977, p. 14-B. Web. Newspaper Archive. <http://www.newspaperarchive.com>: accessed September 2, 2016.)



Figure 9 – The Praetorian Building in Dallas, designed by the firm C.W. Bulger and Son. ("Praetorian Building." *Historic Downtown Dallas Residences*. Web. Dallas Public Library.)

Chain of Title prepared by Jane Chapin, 1983. (Texas History Center, Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas.)

STEWART TITLE COMPANY

CHAIN OF TITLE TO

BLK 253 Lot 12

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