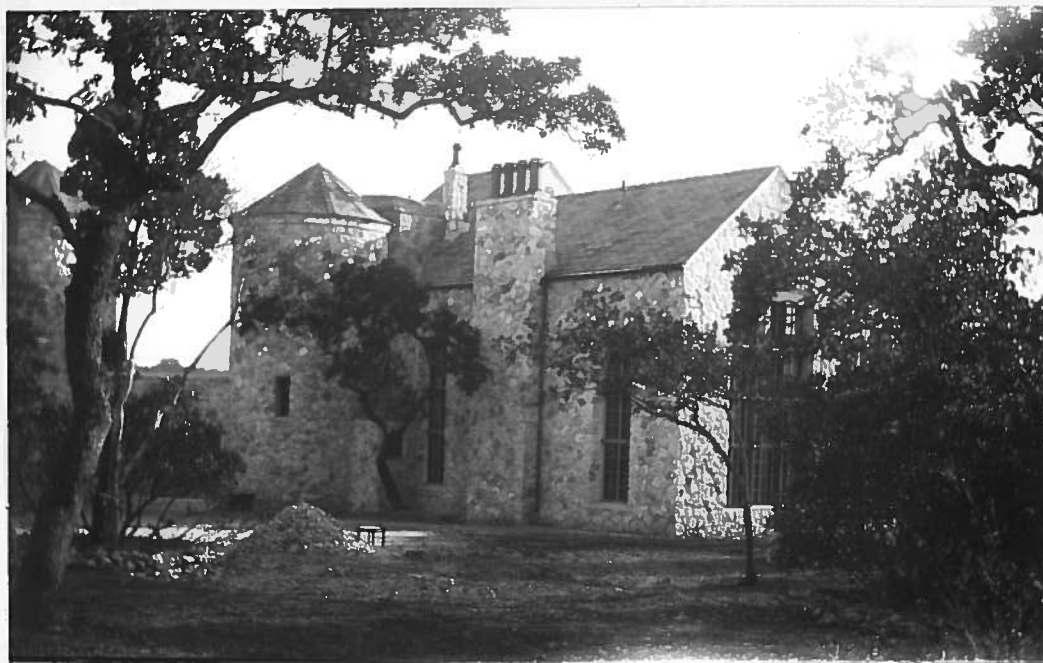


The Towers (1926 to 1955)

In 1924 (or early 1925) my parents, Judge and Mrs. James W. McClendon, purchased approximately twelve and a half acres of cedar brakes west of Austin, from a Mr. James. It was located at the corner of, what now is the intersection of West 35th Street and Mount Bonnell Road. Our entrance gate was directly across the road from "Laguna Gloria," the home of Mr. and Mrs. Hal Sevier. (Mrs. Sevier, nee Clara Driscoll later deeded the place to the Fine Arts Association for an Art Museum.)



View from the North

George Lewis Walling, a young architect and native of Austin, was chosen to draw up the plans for our new house. He had just returned from studying architecture at *Fenfaine-bledu*, France and it was his ambition to build a Normandy French chateau. This was his first house after he began his practice as an architect, and this was a golden opportunity to fulfill his dream.

Enough surface limestone was dug up on the acreage to build the house, the guest house, a bridge on the driveway and two pillars for the entrance gate.

After the stone was collected a crew of Mexican stone masons were brought in from San Antonio to build the structure of the house. They brought their own tent and supplies and camped on the place until their job was completed. (I heard later that several other people hired them to build homes for them here in Austin before they returned to San Antonio or wherever.)

During all the construction, Mama and the contractor were running into a lot of problems and having to make many changes because George Lewis was "long on art and short on specifications."

After the walls were erected came the thick, sturdy, slate roof, then the floors. The living room (15' X 30'), dining room and all the upstairs bathroom floors were of an attractive Mexican tile, which was made by an Italian in San Antonio by the name of Lozano. The floor of the ground floor porch was of flagstone.

By the time the house was finished George Lewis had imported an artist, a Miss Kingsberry from New York City, to do the decorating. She and George Lewis had met as students at *Fountainhead*. It was she who painted the fresco which borders the top of the two-story living room walls. In order to paint the living room ceiling, a scaffold had to be built. Here she lay on her back in order to do her work. The decorations of animals and thistles, first were stenciled, then finished with a brush. Also, on the outside wall in a niche, she painted a falconer. Peter Mansbendel, famous Austin woodcarver, carved two coats of arms over the dining room window (outside) which Miss Kingsberry then painted. These last two works of art were covered up when Westwood Club attached an addition to the original structure.

The andirons, poker, tongs and shovel (and I think the banisters for the circular staircases,) were built by our local iron worker, Mr. Weigel. The hardware for the doors were ordered by Tips Company and were similar to that which was used on old Normandy houses.



Southeast corner of the house, showing coats of arms above dining room windows, and "The Falconer".

As a finishing touch, George Lewis had bought a huge chandelier in New Orleans, which he hoped Mama would like and buy, which she did. It was of wrought iron with amber and blue glass. Originally it had been a gas lamp but had been converted to electricity.

The house took a year to build and on July 6th and 7th of 1926 our furniture was moved in. Mama had been buying antique furniture for several years. However, the dining room furniture and a huge table for the living room were built by Becker Lumber Co. from pictures that George Lewis had brought from France.

The house had been my mother's from the very beginning. Though the design was George Lewis' idea it was her brainchild and she supervised its construction, making several changes from time to time to make it more suitable to our Texas way of life. Therefore it was she who named it "The Towers" for the two towers, one on each side of the drive. These towers were joined by a bridge over the driveway which served as a portocochere at the front door. This bridge Papa called the "Bridge of Sighs." When asked by her friends what the design of the house was, she would reply, "Normandy French with a little Texas for convenience" (like the screened in porch.)

When we moved into "The Towers" we were considered "way out in the country". From Exposition Blvd. to our place there were only a few houses, each one being protected from its neighbors' by plenty of acreage. By World War II the city had approached as close as Scenic Drive (now called "Pecos.") By the time the city's water filter plant was completed in 1954 (I think) we were completely surrounded by houses, on both sides of the Lake, in fact.

By then we had all the inconveniences of the city and country and none of the conveniences of either.

About that time a group of young people were trying to buy up some land on the Lake in order to organize a country club. Our property was the only piece available. One of

the charter members was Arthur Fehr, an architect who had a special interest in the house and wanted to preserve it. He and George Lewis Walling and Miss Kingsberry had become friends while attending the Art School at Fontainebleau.

After twenty-nine years ~~we~~ were ready to move back to town, so were happy to find a buyer, especially one that would preserve the house as best ~~it~~ they could, so in July of 1955 the Westwood Country Club bought "The Towers" and the McClendons moved back to town to the same neighborhood where I was born.

Written 1978

Mary Anne McClendon