

INTRODUCTION:

In the fall of 1995, Parshall + Associates Architects of Austin, TX, completed a report for the Women's Chamber of Commerce of Texas regarding Austin's historic Norwood House. The Parshall Report was generated in preparation for the residence to be moved back to its original location - the first step in the Chamber's plan to restore & repurpose the Norwood property.

The following document, historian Martha Doty Freeman's "History of the Norwood Estate", was included in the Parshall Report. It is reprinted here with Ms. Freeman's permission. The Norwood Park Foundation wishes to express its appreciation to Ms. Freeman for sharing her work with visitors to our website.

Thank you, Martha!



HISTORY OF THE NORWOOD ESTATE

by Martha Doty Freeman

The Ollie Osborne and Calie Gove Norwood estate was comprised of an impressive assemblage of residences, outbuildings, and site features that were constructed over a period of approximately seven years. The estate was located on a prominent bluff on the south bank of the Colorado River and overlooked downtown Austin where O. O. Norwood constructed two landmark structures - the Motoramp Garage and the Norwood Office Building on West 7th Street. The estate that was the location of a home in 1922 appears to have grown dramatically during the mid-to-late 1920s as Norwood's business ventures in Austin and the Lower Rio Grande Valley prospered. Its evolution from a property with a single residence in 1921-1922 to an estate with a formal landscape and numerous site features in 1925-1926 reflected Norwood's success at dealing in municipal, school, flood control district, and other bonds.

O. O. Norwood was born on August 16, 1887 in Macune, San Augustine County, Texas, to Dr. Edwin Osborne¹ and Melisa (Skinner) Norwood (Texas Dept. of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, 1961). As a young man, Ollie Norwood worked at or owned a drug store in Macune. Sometime after 1905, he moved to Houston where he was involved in a mercantile business that took him to the coastal prairie region, including Wharton County, where he met Calie Regina Gove, a schoolteacher at Nottawa on the Lizzie Prairie (Porter various dates; 1995).

Calie Gove was a descendant of German natives Georg Simon and Catherine Elizabetha Reuss who immigrated to Texas from Bremen on August 15, 1845, and landed at Indian Point (Indianola) on May 9, 1846. Calie, a granddaughter of Simon and Catherine, was born on December 21, 1894, in Matagorda to William Burkhart Gove, a fisherman, and Laura Louisa Jordan Gove, who had grown up in the German community at Long Mott, Calhoun County. Calie attended public school in Matagorda and then studied at normal institutes in San Marcos and Palacios after which she received a teacher's certificate and taught in a one-room schoolhouse in Wharton County (Gadus et al. 1993; Porter various dates).

In about 1917 or early 1918, Ollie Norwood was drafted and inducted into the Army in San Antonio. On June 18, 1918, he married Calie Gove in San Antonio and

¹ Dr. Norwood was born in San Augustine on May 2, 1848, and was educated in San Augustine and at Tulane University in New Orleans. He married Melisa Skinner and had four children: Beatrice, Dora, Ollie, and A. B. Norwood (Porter various dates; 1995).

then was shipped out with the American Expeditionary Force to France. Calie returned to her family home in Matagorda until Ollie's return after the war; the couple then moved to Austin where they lived south of the river at 1307 Newning Avenue (Porter 1995).

Norwood's employer was J. Louis Arlitt who owned a leading bond house with his two brothers, C. W. and Norman Arlitt.² He opened the house in 1914 and after the War was positioned to capitalize on the booming bond business. He purchased municipal grade bonds throughout the South which he sold wholesale to banks and other dealers. By the 1920s, he had at least half a dozen clerical employees (Davis and Grobe [1926]: Volume 2:790), one of whom was O. O. Norwood.

By 1921-1922, Ollie Norwood had become J. L. Arlitt's purchasing department manager (R. L. Polk & Co. 1922), and he and Calie had begun to look for property in South Austin where they could build a new home. On September 6, 1921, they purchased the core of their future estate - lots 1-5, Block 50, Travis Heights Subdivision - from the Citizens Loan and Investment Company, William H. Stacy, Vice-President, for \$2,500.00 (Travis County, Deed Record 331:280).

Sometime between September 1921 and October 1922, the Norwoods hired Brydson Lumber & Construction Company to build a home on their South Austin property; they obtained a building permit for a \$7,860.00 structure on June 1, 1922 (Porter various dates).³ Brydson, a lumber and construction company headed by J. Y. B., and R. W. Brydson, and by W. F. Warren in 1922, was located at 1612-1620 Guadalupe Street in Austin. The company had started business in Austin in 1888 when John J. and Robert W. Brydson opened a contracting and building firm under the name Brydson Brothers. They were joined later by their brother Burt and by a nephew, William F. Warren. Shortly after finishing the Norwood House, Burt Brydson sold his interest in the firm; John J. died in 1933, the year the firm incorporated as Brydson Lumber Company. The company routinely carried a complete stock of building materials such as lumber, roofing, builders' hardware, paints, and wallpapers. They also produced fine cabinet work for the many residences they constructed in Austin during the first half of the twentieth century (Skaggs [1952]:94).

² Arlitt also was Norwood's brother-in-law, being married to Beatrice Norwood; the Arlitts divorced in 1925 (Norwood 1981).

³ A photograph owned by Mrs. Brooks Porter, Jr., made in about 1922 when the Norwood House was the primary improvement on lots 1-5 and before the grounds were landscaped, depicted the house and a sign for "Brydson General Contractors" attached to one of the exterior columns.

As originally constructed, the Norwood House was a one-story brick bungalow with a partial basement and was characterized by wide eaves and a gabled roof covered with flat tiles. Special features included six exterior battered brick and cobble columns capped by squares of concrete or cast stone. Four of the six columns supported four wooden posts detailed to match the angle of the column. At the front entrance of the house, a pair of double wooden beams terminating in a radius sat atop the wooden posts and, in turn, supported double wooden secondary beams that spanned the area from the lower beams to the wall plate.

The front porch faced southeast and consisted of a concrete slab with a brick facing. Entrance through a multi-paned wooden front door led to a living room, dining and sun room, and kitchen. Other rooms included a small breakfast room adjacent to the kitchen, and a service porch that led to a back door. A large bedroom was located adjacent to the breakfast room and to a sleeping porch. A hallway provided access from the bedroom to a large tiled bathroom before terminating in a second bedroom at the front of the house. Access to the basement was through a door in the hall and through a subterranean area that had been excavated adjacent to the exterior basement wall. Early heating was accomplished using coal; the Norwoods frequently used the sleeping porch during the warmer months when they could enjoy the breezes (Porter 1995).

Interior finishes included heavily textured plaster walls and ceilings, a linoleum floor in the kitchen, and dark hardwood floors that were partially covered with throw rugs. A picture molding was located in the dining and living rooms, the latter of which also featured an ornate cove molding. The living room was separated from the dining room by fabric-covered French doors. There were numerous built-in features including closets, a work counter with glass cabinets above on the wall between the kitchen and dining room, and mantle-high cabinets on either side of the brick and tile fireplace in the living room. Invoices for furnishings demonstrate that the Norwoods purchased items such as rugs, a vanity, bed, chifferobe, rocker, breakfast set, shades, parlor suite, and linoleum from the Swann-Schulle Furniture Company at 401-403 Congress Avenue in Austin (Porter various dates; 1995).

Adjacent to the house, and apparently built about the same time, was a brick two-car garage that included a maid's quarters with bath. Like the house, the garage had a tile roof and was compatible with the residence in style and detailing.

On October 10, 1922, the Norwoods expanded their holdings, purchasing part of the area designated as Travis Park by the Citizens Loan and Investment Company and lying between Block 50 where their house was located and the lower bank of the bench

adjacent to the River. At the same time, the Norwoods obtained exclusive right to land necessary to maintain a boat landing and boat and bath house (Travis County Deed Record 340:227). This purchase was followed on May 9, 1923 by the acquisition of lots 7-9 and the east half of lot 10, Block 51; and lot 1 in Block 49 (Travis County Deed Record 349:490).

Norwood's purchase of additional property roughly coincided with his tenure as purchasing manager for J. L. Arlitt. Then, in about 1924 or 1925, he opened his own office and began to deal in bonds in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, a booming market. An early deal that was notable for the enormous commission Norwood took involved Hidalgo County flood control bonds that were issued in June 1924. In a lawsuit filed two years later (Travis County, District Court Cause No. 42537), Norwood and the Edinburg State Bank and Trust Company were accused of having appropriated \$477,900 out of a \$1,620,000 bond total; Norwood personally was paid \$218,700.

Norwood's successes in marketing bonds were paralleled by his growing interest in real estate and building. He continued to add to his estate in South Austin, purchasing lot 2, Block 49 on November 16, 1925; and lots 3-12 and 14-15 in Block 49 on April 5, 1926 (Travis County Deed Record 383:208; 386:637). He looked downtown as well, buying lots in 1925 that became the location of the Motoramp Garage, Motoramp Annex, Austin Club, and Norwood Building by 1927-1929. His increasingly high profile in Austin also brought him into contact with contractors and architects. For example, Norwood turned to the firm of Giesecke and Harris to design and Frank Barron to build his impressive downtown projects; he turned to Austin architect Hugo Kuehne to design and contractor Frank Barron to build the major additions to his estate that he envisioned by 1925 and completed in 1929.⁴

Frank Barron, with whom Norwood maintained a close business and personal relationship for many years (Porter 1995), was a native of Austin who was born on May 16, 1888, to N. B. and Hortense (O'Banion) Barron. Barron began his career as a brick

⁴ It is not clear from the records examined in 1995 how early Kuehne provided architectural services to Norwood. Kuehne's name first surfaced on October 27, 1922, when he certified to Norwood that Brydson Lumber Company was entitled to a third payment on their contract, which amounted to \$15,683.00 instead of the \$7,860.00 indicated on the building permit. His name also appeared on 1923 invoices for exterior lighting and architectural ornaments such as the Portland cement vases ordered from the Architectural Decorating Company of Chicago, Illinois (Porter various dates). But no documents have been located that indicate that Kuehne was responsible for the design of the house itself.

mason and worked for a local lumber company before starting his own business. He began building houses and then expanded his firm by acting as contractor for commercial structures (Barron 1982). Norwood hired him in 1925 or 1926 to build the Motoramp and Austin Club, jobs that were followed in 1928 by construction of the Norwood Building. Between the late 1920s and 1952, when he died (Texas Dept. of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics 1952), Barron worked on apartment construction, additions to City Hall on Eighth Street, the telephone building on Ninth Street, and the First Baptist Church on Tenth Street (Barron 1982).

Hugo Franz Kuehne, architect for work completed at the Norwood Estate in 1925-1926, was born in Austin on February 20, 1884, to Franz Conrad and Clara (Langer) Kuehne (Marquis 1952:426). In 1906, he graduated from the University of Texas with a degree in Civil Engineering; two years later he received a bachelor's degree in architecture from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He worked briefly as an architect in Austin before being hired by Dean T. U. Taylor to organize the School of Architecture in the College of Engineering at the University (Austin American, November 27, 1963; November 28, 1963; Marquis 1952:426).

In about 1914, Kuehne returned to private practice, and for almost 50 years he was a member of a number of distinguished architectural firms in Austin including Kuehne, Chasey & Giesecke; Kuehne and Milburn; and Kuehne and Kuehne (Austin American, November 27, 1963; Marquis 1952:426). Shortly after World War I, he designed a number of buildings in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, including several in Hidalgo County. Buildings for which he was responsible in Austin included the Barker House, Austin Public Library, Commodore Perry Hotel, International Life Building, Department of Public Safety, several State Hospital buildings, and the Austin National Bank.

Historic photographs and other documents indicate that Kuehne designed and Barron constructed the site features and formal landscapes at the Norwood Estate that made it an Austin showplace by 1926. Site improvements completed during this period included shingled bathhouses and a large swimming pool that was supplied by city water initially. After 1929 it was supplied by warm mineral water after Norwood had a well drilled that hit a deposit in the Edwards Formation at approximately 500 feet (Sellards 1940:58, 62). A second addition was a greenhouse that was built on a slope so that the greenhouse itself was on the upper level adjacent to the formal gardens, while downslope was an entrance to a room beneath the greenhouse where the gardener could stay overnight if necessary. Inside the greenhouse portion of the building, Norwood raised vegetables, irrigating them with a hydroponic system (Porter 1995).

Adjacent to the greenhouse and overlooking the Colorado River was a series of low brick walls that terminated in what Calie Norwood called the “tea room” - an open, square-plan building whose pyramidal tiled roof was supported by four square brick columns. A wooden pergola extended from the front of the tea room and terminated in two additional square brick columns. In later years, Ollie Norwood screened in the tea room and took daytime naps there because it was cooler than the house (Porter 1995).

A fourth improvement consisted of tennis courts that had been built in 1925 and were located between the house and Riverside Drive (The Austin Statesman, August 3, 1926:10). Finally, two one-story, frame bungalows were located on the estate. The first of these, occupied by Calie Norwood’s parents, William B. and Laura Louisa Gove, was situated downslope from the Norwood House and was moved when that portion of the property was condemned for the IH-35 right-of-way. A second frame bungalow was located near the tennis courts and was occupied by Ollie Norwood’s parents until the mid-1930s (Porter 1995).

A notable feature of the site was the extensive gardens, a portion of which may have been designed by Hugo Kuehne. Laid out with formal walks between the house and the greenhouse and tea room, the garden area centered on a circular pool with fountain in the center of which was a statue. Profuse dahlias lined the walks, and the arc of the circular walk around the pool was punctuated by regularly spaced evergreens. In addition, the Norwoods kept other gardens at the back of the house in which they grew vegetables. Calie Norwood used the produce, canning great volumes of vegetables.

The Norwood Estate, fully developed by the late 1920s, reflected the wealth and prestige of a man who was fast becoming well-known in Austin for his very visible private and public activities. Described by a niece as entrepreneurial, eccentric, and imaginative (Porter 1995), and by other acquaintances as an individual who was both gambler and salesman, and who had a talent for grasping entireties and total concepts (Harris and Harris 1981), Norwood continued to move ahead with both his bond and security business and with his real estate developments. He invested in land in Hidalgo, Bexar, and Sabine counties (Travis County, District Court Cause No. 58181) and a ranch in Real County where he built a large stone residence and kept exotic game. He was extravagantly generous with his extended family, providing occasional employment to some relatives and insuring that others were provided for (Porter 1995). His formation of the Norwood Buildings Corporation in 1929 best expressed the scope of his ambitions. Under the category “Purpose”, Norwood wrote “...to establish, own, buy, sell, maintain, erect or repair any building or improvement, and to accumulate and lend money for said purpose, and to purchase, sell, or subdivide real estate in towns,

cities and villages, and their suburbs, not extending more than two miles beyond their limits, and to accumulate and lend money for that purpose" (Texas Secretary of State, 1929).

The year 1929 represented something of a watershed for many capitalists, and Ollie Norwood was no exception. If the dozen years leading up to that date had been characterized by ever-increasing prosperity, the dozen years after were marked by a precipitous decline as Norwood lost his downtown real estate, took out loans he was unable to repay, became involved with George Parr of Duval County, and was the target of numerous lawsuits, some of which involved the bond sales of the 1920s from which he had derived his considerable income. In 1931, for example, the Edinburg Consolidated Independent School District discovered the \$88,000 premium Norwood had charged to handle a sale of bonds in 1927, and the District sued to recover the money (Travis County, District Court Cause No. 52134). A year later, heirs of the J. R. Alamia estate in Hidalgo County sued Norwood over an earlier purchase of land from the estate's administrator, A. Y. Baker (Travis County, District Court Cause No. 58181). Another suit in Bexar County led to a judgment in excess of \$90,000 against Norwood and the administrator of the A. Y. Baker estate (Travis County, District Court Cause No. 58181). In Austin, holders of notes sued Norwood for payments (Travis County, District Court Cause No. 51142), and he lost the Norwood Building to the Security Trust Company which itself entered receivership during the Depression. Other suits followed between 1934 and 1937 (Travis County, District Court Causes 53616, 55649, 55736, 55737, 58181).

Somehow, the Norwoods managed to retain possession of their beloved Real County ranch and the estate in South Austin. Nonetheless, times were exceptionally difficult. Norwood retreated from downtown and made the basement at the Edgecliff house his office. In addition, he and Calie decided to open their pool to the general public, charging a daily fee for its use (Porter 1995). They appear to have mortgaged their Austin estate to George Parr in 1938 (Travis County Deed Record 584:127), not recovering title until 1946.

In the meantime, Norwood's health began to fail and Calie assumed increasing responsibility for the family's more-limited finances. The area around them was changing as well, and in 1953 they lost portions of their land to the City of Austin for highway right-of-way (Travis County Deed Record 1338:78-84, 87-88). Several years later, as the estate became too big to manage, they moved to a smaller home at 1615 Lupine Lane in South Austin where Norwood died on May 11, 1961 (Austin American, May 11, 1961).

On June 19, 1961, Calie Norwood⁵ sold the South Austin estate to Robert D. Carr of Victoria. At that point, the property included lots in Blocks 49-51 and land vacated and closed by the City of Austin totaling 4.34 acres together with an easement for the maintenance of a boat landing and boat and bath house on 50 feet of the water's edge of the Colorado River (Travis County Deed Record 2315:117-120). Carr, the new owner, was described by one informant as "The Concrete King of Texas". Manufacturer and possibly wholesaler of concrete products, Carr decided to open an Austin office in the former Norwood home (Small 1995).

Carr's conversion of the Norwood Estate from residential to office use resulted in a number of changes to the interior of the Norwood House. Photographs made after 1961 and data gathered from informants indicates that Carr may have removed some or all of the plaster finish from interior surfaces while he applied wood paneling to the walls in some rooms. He painted over the decorative molding and replaced original light fixtures with fluorescent lights. He added two small bathrooms. He converted the kitchen to an office space, changed casement windows in the kitchen and back bedroom into picture windows with fixed glass, and modified a window in the bathroom, removing the casement and opening the space to accommodate a patio door.

According to a subsequent owner (Small 1995), Carr used the Norwood House as an office for no more than six months. Then, frustrated with the neighborhood association for "meddling in his business", and disgusted with his office help, he vacated the house, locked the front door, and put the property on the market. Purchaser of the property on December 10, 1963, was Joe A. Small, Sr., of Travis County (Travis County Deed Record 2695:89-91), who immediately moved his western history publishing company to the estate.

Joe Small was born near Chriesman, Burleson County, Texas, on March 18, 1914, to Joe Willis and Laura Watson Hairston Small. He attended the University of Texas briefly and then left to begin publishing his first magazine, Southern Sportsman. Assisted by his wife, Elizabeth Berry Small of Lufkin and Austin and, later, by his sons, Joe, Jr. and Robert, Joe Small ran the magazine out of his home at 3303 Bridle Path. In 1953, the Smalls moved their office to 709 West 19th Street where they published True West, Frontier Times, and a score of other magazines and reprints.

In 1963, the Smalls purchased the Norwood Estate from Robert Carr. They used the Norwood house as their main office for almost two decades, locating the art department in the garage and servant's quarters, rejuvenating the swimming pool, and

⁵ Calie Norwood died in Austin on February 26, 1976.

acquiring the Gage House at 1009 Edgecliff for use as the circulation department. They made few changes to the property, replacing the tile roof on the main house with asphalt shingles when it began to leak, and planting a limited number of trees and flower beds in the vicinity of the house (Small 1995).

By the late 1970s, Joe Small's health began to fail and circulation figures for the magazines decreased (Small 1995). In the early 1980s, the family decided to sell the property to developers who planned to build a condominium on the property. Neighborhood protest resulted in the filing of a suit against Small and revision of plans for the condominium development. Subsequently, Westlake Hills resident Jimmy Zombola moved the greenhouse on the Norwood estate to his property off of Bee Caves Road near Eanes Elementary School (Small 1995) and the City, seller, and developer moved towards an agreement about disposition of the house itself.

On March 1, 1984, an agreement between the Smalls and SW Development Corporation provided for the Smalls to convey 3.08 acres to the Corporation. By agreement with the City of Austin, the Corporation was obligated to relocate the Norwood House to Lot 11 and a portion of Lot 10, Block 51, Travis Heights, a tract of land still owned by the Smalls. The Corporation also was required to restore "the exterior of the Norwood House in accordance with the City Agreements". Restoration was "subject to various permits and approvals to be obtained from the City, including compliance with the rules and regulations of the Building Standards Commission and the Historic Landmark Commission". Once moved, the house was to be zoned Historic by the City (Travis County Deed Record 8478:680-685).

Moving of the Norwood House occurred in 1984 and resulted in a partial salvaging of the structure. The contractor (Rio Pecos Construction Company, Inc.) or owner disassembled specific elements such as the brick and cobble columns and then replaced them in an irregular manner. The contractor also removed the bricks used in the exterior walls, sold them (Zweiger 1995), and then used new brick that differed from the original. Exterior details that changed and further compromised the integrity of the structure included the pattern of brick work around doors and windows and the configuration of the cobble and brick columns and front porch. Architect Andy Vernooy noted damage to the interior of the house that had occurred at an unspecified time and the loss of built-in features that were characteristic of the home's architectural type (American Statesman, December 19, 1985).

Litigation and inability to pursue the project in a timely manner resulted in a collapse of the proposed development on the Norwood estate. Then, in June 1985, the City Council authorized \$2.5 million in certificates of obligation to enable the Austin

Parks & Recreation Department to buy the Norwood Estate from the development firm for use as a park. Subsequently, Travis Heights residents pressured the City to acquire the Norwood House itself from the Smalls and move it back to its original site. When Riverside Drive was widened, the City of Austin acquired both the house and site on which it was located, and in 1989 the City Council voted to reserve the property for five years to allow the Women's Chamber of Commerce of Texas to raise funds for the moving and restoration of the house. In 1995, the goal of the Chamber remained the removal of the house to its original site, its restoration, and the restoration of the Norwood Estate grounds to their configuration in the 1920s.