

## EVERY HOUSE HAS IT'S SECRETS

Anne K. McCuen\*

I am the house located at 807 East Washington Street in Greenville, South Carolina. I have always stood at this same location. However, originally this address was 5 Washington Road.<sup>1</sup> I am 100 years old, going on 101 years, in excellent condition, and I am known as the Poinsett Club.

At the moment, my architectural design is that of Southern Colonial Revival and it was during the Progressive Era of Greenville, an era of rapid growth of textiles and related businesses, that I was built. As an old Southern Colonial style house, just as are many old Southern ladies, I am large. However, just like the ladies, I have not always been so large. Over the years I have been added to more than once, and I have had some of my insides rearranged more than once.

Originally, I was built as a two-and-a-half story family home with approximately 3770 square feet on each of my first two floors. My half floor or attic, also had living space. I was of brick and had attached to my backside an addition made of wood, which was two stories high and measuring 11 to 12 feet in width and a little more than 38 feet in length. I, also, had a one-story high porte-cochere, which was open but covered with a roof.

My front porch was open, rectangular and about 370 square feet as compared to my larger, present-day porch of about 476 square feet. My front door was flush with my front wall; whereas, today my front

\*Anne King McCuen is a graduate of Furman University and the University of South Carolina College of Library Science. Active in the field of local history, she is the author of 14 articles on Greenville in the *Greenville Magazine*. She has either served as chair or as a board member of numerous local organizations, among which are: the Greenville County Historic Preservation Commission, the West End Association, the City of Greenville Board of Architectural Review, and the Greenville County Historical Society. Her latest book is *A Pile of Rocks*, which answers long-standing questions about the Dark Corner of Greenville County.

door is in a recess of the front wall which is about four to five feet deep.<sup>2</sup>

One of my most impressive architectural features is my double stairway. It is considered by a well-known, present-day architect to be probably my "greatest architectural feature."<sup>3</sup> This was certainly considered to be so by the little daughter of Perry Quinn. I clearly remember my mortification the day that the little child slid down one of my stair bannisters.<sup>4</sup>

The spot on which I stand was once one corner of an entire vacant block, a block formed by five streets: McBee, Washington, Manley, Pettigru and Williams Streets. My block was created from a downtown Greenville area known as Boyce Lawn.

In 1884, William Goldsmith and his new real estate company had bought Boyce Lawn from the former estate of Dr. James Pettigru Boyce; and my block, when owned by James Boyce's descendants in 1888, had been divided into nine parcels. But about 1904, it was re-surveyed as 11 lots, apparently because Washington Street had been widened and paved: thus, giving my block a slightly different shape.<sup>5</sup>

Lewis Parker, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 1902, bought all of the lots - the entire block.<sup>6</sup> There were only a handful of neighbors anywhere in sight. Mr. Parker, at the time, was president of Victor Manufacturing Company and Apache Mills in and near Greer, South Carolina. He was vice-president of Piedmont Savings and Loan Company and vice-president and treasurer of Monaghan Mill here in Greenville. He had been a co-founder of the Young Men's Business League.<sup>7</sup>

Lewis and Margaret Parker conceived the idea of my existence about 1902 - 1903, when they lived at 237 River Street. They, with their two live-in servants, lived on the west side of River Street in the second block from Pendleton Street.<sup>8</sup> They were neighbors to Florence and D. T. Bacot, Laura and James West, and Dora and Harris T. Poe.

D. T. Bacot was a retired professor at Furman, James West was a fertilizer dealer and was associated with the Columbia and Charleston

Railroad, and Harris Poe was with the F. W. Poe Manufacturing Company.<sup>9</sup>

I am not sure of the exact date on which I came into use or, as I like to think, came into life; but if the corner stone in my base is to be believed, then I was ready for occupancy in 1904. I do not remember if my plans were drawn by an architect or not but I felt confident that they must have been.

It is possible that J. E. Sirmine had some influence on my design, for he was a cotton-mill architect and resident engineer for the building of Poe Mill. In 1902 he had opened his own business on Main Street after having been employed by the Lockwood-Greene Company of Boston. He was very closely associated with my owner, Lewis Parker, and was surely aware of my design and approved of it.

I, also, do not remember exactly who my builder was. It might have been J. F. Gallivan, who some years later made some major changes in me. In fact, at that time in 1913/1914 when he made some changes in me; might have been when my front door, with its elliptical arch and its fan light and side lights with tracery, was recessed, my front porch enlarged and made two stories high instead of just one story high as it originally was built, and my beautiful Ionic columns "made of cypress" were put in place.<sup>10</sup> Like all births, my birth was somewhat painful to me - hammers, nails, saws, roofing, etc.

I was built facing McBee Avenue, later called Washington Road, on the corner of McBee Avenue and Williams Street, on lot #9. I was somewhat lonely, for all of the other lots in my block were still vacant and the several homes on Broadus Avenue were more than a block away. There were no residences, only a wooded area in front of me; an area which extended to the Reedy River and part of which, in time, would become the beautiful Cleveland Park.

The year of the beginning of my conception, 1902, was a long time ago - even the buildings which belonged to our State government in Columbia were just then getting electric lights installed. J. A. Bull's grocery store on Main Street in Greenville was selling both cranberries

and nice peaches for just 25 cents a basket. Big, long stalks of beautiful, bleached crisp celery were just five cents a bunch.<sup>11</sup>

Textile Mills in Greenville were so important at the time that the *Greenville Daily News* writer, Abraham Jones, gathered news from the residents of each mill village and wrote a column called "News from the Mills."<sup>12</sup>

In my birth year, 1904, it was predicted by the *Greenville Daily News* "that more residences will be erected during this year than ever before in the history of the city."<sup>13</sup> By the 12<sup>th</sup> of March, according to A. G. Gower of Gower Supply Company, there was a decided improvement in the residences themselves. They "were being more expensively constructed and handsomely finished than heretofore."<sup>14</sup> And just think: I, with my pocket doors between my entrance way and my parlors, my bathrooms with marble floors and my skylight over my double stairway, was one of those houses! In 1903, just the year before I was built, Lewis Parker and his associates had organized the Carolina Power Company, which later became Duke Power Company.<sup>15</sup> So, there was not a doubt in my mind but that I would have electric lights.

The newly published *Greenville Century Book*, written by S. S. Crittenden, had ads by Smith & Goldsmith, Realtors, stating that at Boyce Lawn, where I was to be built, there were water and sewage connections and that electric cars ran through the property.<sup>16</sup> All of these amenities were new. The Greenville Gas, Electric Light and Power Company advertized electric lights and electric fans in the home and now gas ranges were available.<sup>17</sup>

In 1904, I was probably happier than were any of the Greenville couples who attended the big dance to celebrate the opening of the new hotel at Chick Springs or any of the Greenvillians who were going to the World's Fair in St. Louis. I could not have been created at a better time! When I was completed, the Parkers, "Mr. Lewis" and "Miss Margaret" as I called them, moved in and brought with them three children. Lucia was nine, almost ten; Austin was seven, almost eight; and Margaret, Jr. was five.<sup>18</sup>

The sounds of hammers and saws and workmen all day was one thing; but three young children suddenly invading my space was another. It took some getting used to. But, to off set that adjustment, "Miss Margaret" was having beautiful drapes and curtains hung on my windows, lovely paintings hung on my walls, and beautiful pieces of furniture moved in. What lovely rooms I soon had! And "Mr. Lewis" was having shrubbery planted outside around my base, a lawn sown and some outside walkways laid.<sup>19</sup> He also parked in the driveway his brand new automobile which was one of less than a dozen automobiles then in Greenville.<sup>20</sup> I was now the lovely Parker family home. And as might be expected little Lewis Parker, Jr. soon joined the Parker family. There is nothing like a new baby in the house!

Whist Clubs were the fad in Greenville. There were at least three separate ones - the Practice Club, the Tuesday Club, and the Thursday Club. But, "Miss Margaret" was too busy with her new house and her little children to attend any of them, or even to go with "Mr. Lewis" to the opening dance at the new Chick Springs Hotel. In the fall of 1904 she did begin to attend duplicate-whist parties at the Austin home on North Main Street,<sup>21</sup> at the Patterson home,<sup>22</sup> and at the Morton home on Washington Road. She, also, attended an evening of dancing at the Capers home where a beautiful German Dance was enjoyed - a German Dance being a cotillion or a complicated dance for many couples with fancy steps introduced into a waltz.<sup>23</sup>

"Mr. Lewis" was busy with his mill work. He was said to possess 'in a peculiar degree' the confidence of the cotton world.<sup>24</sup> In the latter part of the year, "Mr. Lewis's" father, W. H. Parker, former Commissioner of Equity in Abbeville (SC), because of his failing health, put up for sale his house in Abbeville and moved to Greenville to live with "Miss Margaret" and "Mr. Lewis."<sup>25</sup>

Now, I had to contend with several small children and an old man who for four years had been in declining health, but "Miss Margaret" did have her two live-in servants who occupied the nice rooms in my attic. And, just as all children do, the Parker children

grew up rapidly. In the fall of 1909, Lucia, by then about 16 years old, was sent off to boarding school in New York.

The following June of 1910 was a very sad homecoming for Lucia.<sup>36</sup> She returned home to find that her beautiful home had been severely damaged by fire about two months prior to her arrival. At the time, the newspaper reported that I was almost a total loss. I certainly felt like I was a total loss. The newspaper also said that I had been "one of the handsomest and most valuable" residences in the city.<sup>37</sup> What a terrible ordeal it had been. Although these comments did help my feelings a little; I still had to be repaired, almost rebuilt. My damage was estimated to be about \$35,000 and "Mr. Lewis" only had \$22,000 of insurance on me.

No one was at home when I caught fire. Some said maybe rats started the fire. Imagine rats in a house like me! It must have been from another cause, for it started in my roof. In later years, some suggested that the fire might have been started by sparks from a C & WC train engine passing nearby. But that train did not begin service until the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 1910, and that was some months after by fire.<sup>38</sup>

But, fire or not - the Parker's busy life continued. On Friday following the fire, "Mr. Lewis" and "Miss Margaret" were chaperons in Spartanburg at the festival german.<sup>39</sup> In mid May, "Mr. Lewis" spoke before the Senate Committee in Washington about marketing cotton.<sup>40</sup> The following day he was in Charlotte and, in early June, he spoke in Georgia.

At summer's end he, along with Dr. J. B. Earle, G. E. Wilson and W. C. Moore; all bought themselves 4½ horsepower Oldsmobile runabouts.<sup>41</sup> In early November, since he was president of the State Ball Committee, he and "Miss Margaret" attended the ball in Columbia. She wore a beautiful brocaded satin gown in rich coral tint elaborately trimmed with jetted lace, effectively combined with the fabric. She wore diamonds and carried an armful of white roses.<sup>42</sup>

By the end of the year, 1910, "Mr. Lewis" had organized the Parker Cotton Mill Company, a company which owned 16 cotton mills.<sup>33</sup>

My year had not been so great. But, at least, I was livable again to the tune of \$18,500 (a little more than \$366,000 in today's money). "Miss Margaret" began serving as a fund raiser for The Hospital Association. In 1912 the hospital opened, later, to become the Greenville General Hospital.<sup>34</sup>

Why James F. Gallivan, who had done my extensive remodeling, was not immediately paid by "Mr. Lewis," I do not know. But I do know that four years later (in 1914), when World War I broke out in Europe, the price of cotton fell so low that cotton remained unpicked. Five months later, Parker Cotton Mill Company failed. "Mr. Lewis" resigned and returned to the practice of law.<sup>35</sup>

Mr. Gallivan's bill for my repair was still unpaid; and with the mills having failed, "Mr. Lewis" not only would not, but could not, pay the bill; so a Mechanic's Lien was put on me.<sup>36</sup> Not only that, about the same time, "Mr. Lewis" had been diagnosed with cancer of his jaw, a cancer known to be a most painful type.

In desperation, "Mr. Lewis," with the help of his former law partner, J. A. McCullough, transferred me and the land on which I stood to "Miss Margaret."<sup>37</sup> Although, ordinarily, this transfer may have been legal, "Mr. Lewis's" rapidly mounting debt raises some questions about the legality of the transaction, but no one seemed to notice.

The total debts of "Mr. Lewis" were determined to be \$1,021,888.45.<sup>38</sup> or a little more than \$17,298,000 in today's money. Shortly after my transfer to "Miss Margaret," on the first of April 1916, she sold me to their friend and former law partner, J. A. McCullough;<sup>39</sup> and just ten days later, "Mr. Lewis," at only 50 years of age, died here in his home. Dr. Fletcher Jordan was his attending physician.<sup>40</sup> (Mrs Lewis Parker would die in November 1928).<sup>41</sup>

J. A. McCullough and his family only lived here for two years. They were moving out of town and sold me in 1918, during World War I, to the Allen Graham family.<sup>42</sup>

One of my most pleasant memories of the Graham family living here was the night that Alice Todd of Simpsonville, with her new groom, Zenas Grier, spent the first night of their honeymoon here. They had been married earlier in the evening in Simpsonville, and the train out of Greenville would not leave until the next morning. Zenas worked for Scales Wilcox Co., which was owned by Allen Graham.

By the same token, one of my most unpleasant experiences was when Alice Todd Grier and Mrs. Allen Graham smoked cigarettes within my walls. The two of them were real "trend-setters, being probably the first two ladies in Greenville to smoke cigarettes." Little did I know at the time that some years later, after I had become the home of a men's social club - the Poinsett Club, the Griers would bring their family on Sunday to eat in my dining room; and that when Alice Grier's daughter Elizabeth married Thomas Gower, that their wedding reception would be held right here in the Poinsett Club.<sup>43</sup>

About 1927, with the Great Depression approaching, funds short, and considerable damage having been done to me by still another fire: Allen Graham turned me over to trustees who were to handle his affairs.<sup>44</sup>

Speaking of the Great Depression, actually, I was the one with the "great depression." One does not know what pain is until one is on fire. And, besides the intense pain that I endured in my attic, I still bear there the scars of that terrible experience. I was also depressed because I had heard that "Miss Margaret" was ill over at her oldest daughter's, Mrs. Hamlin Beattie, house. She died and they tell me that she was buried next to "Mr. Lewis" in the Christ Church cemetery.

I had to brace myself and become accustomed to still another family moving in. The Graham Trustees sold me to Zaidie Poe Brawley.<sup>45</sup> "Miss Zaidie" livened things up a bit. She would invite Elizabeth Grier, to come and play with her "little" Patty, who was

about the same age. Mrs. Brawley enjoyed being a hostess, but because of the Depression, she also felt the need to make some money.

Having learned at Pawley's Island how to make the hammocks for which Pawley's Island was noted, she began to make hammocks to be sent to Pawley's for sale. She first taught and then employed some of the neighborhood teenagers in the assembly line of making hammocks. Among these teenagers was George Wilkinson, Jr. and Franklin Smith, who were paid ten cents per hour for threading rope through holes in wood stays. This little pay meant a lot to those boys then during the Depression. In 1934, when Patty Brawley married Bennett Rose, so many people were at the reception here that "getting in and out was like getting in and out of a Clemson football game."<sup>46</sup>

Mr. Brawley ran the Brawley Motor Company. But with the Depression on, the Brawleys soon had to sell me to Fred Symmes and Mrs. Harriet Poe Cogswell.<sup>47</sup> and, by 1935, I was in the hands of a group of Greenville men who had a plan to establish a men's social club.

I had gotten in somewhat a state of disrepair during the Depression, so I was needing to be improved - as painful as that would be. And, I would soon find out that psychologically I was going to have to learn to make some adjustments. No more family activities with father, mother and children but men only. The club was for men only!

I was now owned by a group of 135 businessmen. Of this group of men, about 30% were associated with textiles or textile related businesses, about 7% were associated with the new automobile industry, about 11% were physicians, 6% were attorneys, 9% were associated with realty, stocks and bonds, 3% were in the insurance business and the remaining 33% were men associated with a variety of businesses, from utilities, paint, meat packing, ice plants, road construction, to grocery stores, etc.<sup>48</sup>

Money was still hard to come by following the Depression, so to save on buying the necessary office furniture for this new entity, the Poinsett Club, as they had decided to call themselves, shopped around

for bargains. A used furniture company in New York had some office furniture for sale, furniture which had once belonged to the New York real estate tycoon, Edward West "Daddy" Browning. Sixty-year-old Browning had died the year before and his assets of six to seven million dollars (now 70 to 80 million) were left to his twenty-four-year-old wife, Peaches Browning, whom he had married when she was only fifteen years old.<sup>49</sup> The Poinsett Club bought some of this furniture.

In June of 1935, I, as the new Poinsett Club, was prepared for a reception, buffet supper and dance. Most all of the members with their wives attended the function.<sup>50</sup>

During World War II, the officers from nearby Greenville Army Air Base were allowed to use my facilities, including my bedrooms. So, I have been well apprized not only of World War I and II, but also of the United States involvement in Vietnam and Korea and now Iraq.

It was not until 1959, that the Poinsett Club made any decision to make me larger. Very well did I remember the pains of my birth and of my fires and my facelift or front-facade change. An addition might be even worse.

A large dining room and kitchen were added on my west side in 1959. In 1970, a large new ballroom, new parlors and bars were added. My side was extended about 120 feet and back end was widened to 120 feet. The saving grace was that, as usual, my new rooms were elegantly furnished. In 1985, a large addition was made to my back and right side, my dining room was extended, a storage area added and my porte-cochere was raised from one story in height to a two-story height, which then did away with all of the nice dormer windows in my attic. But, my attic rooms were no longer used as servants's quarters, so the windows were no longer a necessity. Part of my basement was converted to a bar and the Coramandel Room.<sup>51</sup> My attic was filled with air-conditioning ducts.

From the time that I became the meeting place for a men's club until after the 1970s, a considerable amount of gambling was done here. In 1972 we learned that the Greenville Police were planning a

raid, but by the time the police arrived all of the gambling tables and equipment had been moved next door into the Brawley's garage and had been covered with tarpaulin.<sup>52</sup>

The swimming pool in my backyard, one of the first in Greenville, by the early 1970s had become a nuisance. The neighborhood boys, over a number of years time, used it for skinny-dipping at night. Many of Greenville's present-day businessmen claim to have participated in this fun - among them are attorney Harry Edwards and Dr. George Wilkinson. Over the years many parties, dances, wedding receptions for members or a child of a member, and debutante and Cotillion balls have been held here. And, I have had my share of chefs and managers over the years, each one doing things a little differently.

I have enjoyed all of the social occasions. And, I have enjoyed and have become somewhat educated by overhearing discussions among businessmen. I know something about the textile world, about automobile sales, as well as lawyering, insurance and even the operation of grocery store chains. In more recent years, many of the rules around here have been changed. In 2000, the decision was made to extend membership to women. Some years earlier, a policy had already been made to admit racial and ethnic minorities among its male members. So, things keep changing for me.

It was so sad for me to learn just this past February that one of "Mr. Lewis's" first mills - Victor Mill - had burned. The entire thing was being demolished, brick by brick, and the spot was being cleared for a proposed redevelopment of "affordable housing."<sup>53</sup>

For me, this has been 100 years of great experiences. And, I look forward to another 100 years. But, because of Greenville's rapid growth, I sometimes worry for fear that I, too, might be replaced by "an affordable, multi-family building" or a high-rise office building and/or expensive condominiums.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Greenville (SC) City Directory, 1905-1942+.

<sup>2</sup> Sanborn Fire Map, Greenville, SC, 1920.

<sup>3</sup> Interview of James Neal, Architect, February 15, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Interview of George Wilkinson, MD, March 5, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Archie Vernon Huff, Jr., *Greenville: The History of the City and County in the South Carolina Piedmont* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), p. 270.

<sup>6</sup> Deed Book HHH, 494, Greenville County, SC, Register of Deeds, Greenville, SC

<sup>7</sup> *The Greenville Daily News*, Greenville, SC, April 12, 1916.

<sup>8</sup> 1900 United States Census, South Carolina, Greenville County.

<sup>9</sup> Greenville, SC, City Directory, 1901-1902.

<sup>10</sup> Interview of Warren Arseneau, January 26, 1905

<sup>11</sup> *The Greenville Daily News*, Greenville, SC, October 2, 1902.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, October 3, 1902

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, March 5 1904.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, March 12, 1904

<sup>15</sup> Huff, p. 254.

<sup>16</sup> S. S. Crittenden, *The Greenville Century Book* (Greenville: Press of *The Greenville News*, 1903); Greenville, SC: Greenville County Bicentennial Commission, 1976, p. 135.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>18</sup> Based on 1900 United States Census, South Carolina, Greenville.

<sup>19</sup> Picture, copy of which is in the author's possession. Original at the office of the Greenville County Historical Society.

<sup>20</sup> Huff, p. 269.

<sup>21</sup> *The Greenville Daily News*, Greenville, SC, October 23, 1904.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, December 4, 1904.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, October 23, 1904.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, August 6, 1904.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, October 28, 1904.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, June 16, 1910.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, April 11, 1910.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, October 3, 1910.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, April 17, 1910.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., May 15, 1910.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., August 31, 1910.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., November 7, 1910.

<sup>33</sup> Huff, p. 238.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>35</sup> *The Greenville Daily News*, Greenville, SC, January 6, 1915.

<sup>36</sup> Stored in Office of Greenville, SC, Register of Deeds. File now missing.

<sup>37</sup> Deed Book 34, 8, Greenville County, SC, Register of Deeds, Greenville, SC.

<sup>38</sup> Estate Record, Apt. 75, File 47, Greenville, SC, Probate Court, Greenville, SC.

<sup>39</sup> Deed Book 36, 117, Greenville County, SC, Register of Deeds, Greenville, SC.

<sup>40</sup> South Carolina Death Certificate for Lewis Parker.

<sup>41</sup> South Carolina Death Certificate for Margaret Parker.

<sup>42</sup> Deed Book 20, 279, Greenville County, SC, Register of Deeds, Greenville, SC.

<sup>43</sup> Interview of Mrs. Elizabeth Grier Gower, February 14, 2005.

<sup>44</sup> Deed Book 112, 339, Greenville County, SC, Register of Deeds, Greenville, SC.

<sup>45</sup> Deed Book 142, 442, Greenville County, SC, Register of Deeds, Greenville, SC.

<sup>46</sup> Interview of Dr. George Wilkinson, March 5, 2005.

<sup>47</sup> Deed Book 171, 493, Greenville County, SC, Register of Deeds, Greenville, SC.

<sup>48</sup> Original membership list and appropriate Greenville City Directories.

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.green-wood.com>.

<sup>50</sup> *The Greenville News*, Greenville, SC, June 1, 1935.

<sup>51</sup> Plats in Henry McKoy, "Sketch of the Poinsett Club in Greenville, South Carolina, in its Formation and Early Years."

<sup>52</sup> Interview of Porter Rose, February 16, 2005.

<sup>53</sup> *The Greenville News*, Greenville, SC, February 11, 2005.