

HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION  
NOVEMBER 27, 2017  
DEMOLITION AND RELOCATION PERMITS  
HDP-2017-0640  
2318 TOWNES LANE

## PROPOSAL

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Demolish a ca. 1940 house.

## ARCHITECTURE

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Two-story, rectangular-plan, side-gabled brick veneered house with an ornamental front-gabled bay to the right of the front door; cantilevered second story over square brick piers; a pair of bow picture windows on the ground floor; single and paired Colonial Revival-styled fenestration; several rear additions, and a carport to the right of the main house.

City permit records indicate a number of additions to the house from the 1980s through 2007.

## RESEARCH

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The house was built in 1940 by the Westenfield Development Company, the developers of much of Tarrytown. The house was first owned and occupied by J.W. “Wally” Sewell and his wife, Evelyn, who lived here until around 1944. Wally Sewell was an attorney in private practice in Austin; in 1948, he moved to San Antonio, where he spent the rest of his life. He was an assistant Bexar County Attorney at the time of his death in 1962.

From around 1944 until their deaths in 1982, the house was owned and occupied by William W. “Bill” and Florence Coates. Bill Coates was a ceramics engineer who had been born in Nebraska. He was also a building materials salesman, and was the manager of a saw manufacturing company in Austin for many years. In the mid-1950s, he served as vice-president of the Coates Company, tile dealers, with offices at 910 N. Lamar Boulevard. He was also a prominent horticulturalist, and this house on Townes Lane served as his gardens. He was frequently cited in the Austin newspapers for his expertise on horticultural issues, and was noted for growing a huge variety of plants at his Townes Lane house, including varieties of hibiscus, lemon trees, and other exotic plants. He also served on the City’s Parks Board for several years. In his business life, Coates helped develop a vertical brick-laying machine that revolutionized the construction of brick walls. Both he and his wife died in 1982.

## STAFF COMMENTS

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The house is beyond the bounds of any city survey to date.

Staff has evaluated this house with reference to the criteria for landmark designation:

- a. **Architecture.** The house is an adaptation of the Colonial Revival style with a cantilevered second story, a relatively rare feature in Austin architecture; however, it is unclear what is original on this house, and what has been added over the years, especially since the 1980s, to make an informed determination of historical architectural significance.
- b. **Historical association.** The longest-term owners of this house were Bill and Florence Coates; Bill Coates was a ceramics engineer, who helped develop a revolutionary brick-laying machine for rapid construction of brick walls, but perhaps his most significant contributions to Austin’s history and culture stem from his horticultural pursuits and his cultivation of many exotic plants on this property.

- c. **Archaeology.** The house was not evaluated for its potential to yield significant data concerning the human history or prehistory of the region.
- d. **Community value.** The house does not possess a unique location, physical characteristic, or significant feature that contributes to the character, image, or cultural identity of the city, the neighborhood, or a particular demographic group.
- e. **Landscape feature.** The property may qualify as a landscape feature for Bill Coates' horticultural endeavors on this property. Newspaper articles reference that he had over 30 different varieties of hibiscus and over 70 varieties of camellias growing on this property at one time. If those plants have survived since his death, then this house is virtually a private botanical garden.

#### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**




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Postpone to December 18, 2017 to fully evaluate the house in light of the criteria for landmark designation regarding architecture, historical associations, and landscape feature. If the Commission decides to release the permit, then staff recommends the completion of a City of Austin Documentation Package, consisting of photographs of all elevations, a dimensioned sketch plan, and a narrative history, plus detailed photographs of the grounds of this house as they relate to Bill Coates' gardens, for archiving at the Austin History Center.

## LOCATION MAP



1" = 119'

-  SUBJECT TRACT
-  PENDING CASE
-  ZONING BOUNDARY

**NOTIFICATIONS**

CASE#: HDP-2017-0640  
LOCATION: 2318 Townes Lane

This product is for informational purposes and may not have been prepared for or be suitable for legal, engineering, or surveying purposes. It does not represent an on-the-ground survey and represents only the approximate relative location of property boundaries.

This product has been produced by CTM for the sole purpose of geographic reference. No warranty is made by the City of Austin regarding specific accuracy or completeness.



2318 Townes Lane  
ca. 1940



OCCUPANCY HISTORY  
2318 Townes Lane

City Directory Research, Austin History Center  
By City Historic Preservation Office  
November, 2017

1985-86	William and Cindy Raman, owners Associate, Arnold White & Durkee
1977	William W., Jr. and Florence W. Coates, owners Retired
1968	William W., Jr. and Florence W. Coates, owners Retired
1962	William W., Jr. and Florence W. Coates, owners Vice-president, Clipper Manufacturing Company, ceramics consultant, 910 N. Lamar Boulevard.
1959	William W., Jr. and Florence W. Coates, owners Vice-president, Coates Company, tile distributors, 910 Lamar Boulevard.
1957	William W., Jr. and Florence Coates, owners

Vice-president, Coates Company, tile dealers, 910 Lamar Boulevard.  
Also listed is William W. Coates, III, a student.

- 1954 William W., Jr. and Florence W. Coates, owners  
President, Coates Company, brokers, 910 Lamar Boulevard; president, Clipper Manufacturing Company, saws, 910 Lamar Boulevard; and manager, Acme Brick Company, manufacturers, 910 Lamar Boulevard.  
Also listed is Florence C. Coates, a student.
- 1952 William W., Jr. and Florence Coates, owners  
District manager, Clipper Manufacturing Company, saws, 900-A Lamar Boulevard.
- 1949 William W., Jr. and Florence Coates, owners  
District manager, Clipper Manufacturing, saws, 2721 Guadalupe Street.
- 1947 William W., Jr. and Florence Coates, owners  
Manager, Clipper Manufacturing Company, saws, 2721 Guadalupe Street.
- 1944-45 W.W. and Florence Coates, owners  
No occupation listed  
NOTE: William C. [sic] and Florence Coates are also listed at 1424 Preston Avenue; he was the manager of Clipper Manufacturing company, saw manufacturers, 2721 Guadalupe Street.  
NOTE: John W. and Evelyn Sewell are listed at 2511 Spring Lane. He was a lawyer, with offices at 823-24 Brown Building, 710 Colorado Street.
- 1942 John W. and Evelyn Sewell, owners  
Lawyer, 823-24 Brown Building, 710 Colorado Street.  
NOTE: William W., Jr. and Florence Coates are listed at 1424 Preston Avenue; he was the manager of the Coates Company, electrical supplies, 2721 Guadalupe Street.  
NOTE: J.W. (Wally) Sewell's 1962 obituary shows that he was a partner in the Smith and Sewell law firm in Austin from 1938 until 1948, when he and his family moved to San Antonio. He was an assistant district attorney I the civil section of Bexar County in San Antonio at the time of his death.
- 1941 John W. and Evelyn Sewell, owners  
Partner (with Langston Smith), Smith & Sewell, attorneys, 821 Brown Building, 710 Colorado Street.
- 1940 The address is not listed in the directory.  
NOTE: John W. and Evelyn Sewell are listed at 2420 Harris Boulevard. He was a partner with Langston Smith in Smith and Sewell, attorneys-at-law, 821 Brown Building, 710 Colorado Street.

#### **BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES:**

##### **William W., Jr. and Florence Coates (ca. 1944 – ca. 1982)**

The 1940 U.S. Census shows William and Florence Coates at their former home at 1424 Preston Avenue, a house they rented. William Coates was 42, had been born in Nebraska, and was a building materials salesman. Florence Coates was 40, had been born in Missouri, and had no occupation listed. They had 2 children: Florence Clare, 5; and William Coates, III, 2. Both children had been born in Texas.

The 1930 U.S. Census shows William W. and Florence W. Coates living at the Flatiron Hotel on St. Mary's Avenue in Omaha, Nebraska. William W. Coates was 32, had been born in Nebraska, and was a ceramics engineer in the building materials business. Florence W. Coates was 30, had been born in Missouri, and was a stenographer in a general office. They had no children listed with them.

William Waldron Coates, Jr. died in January, 1982. His death certificate shows that he was living at Westminster at 4100 Jackson Avenue at the time of his death, but that his home address was this house. He was born in Nebraska in 1897, and was an engineer and salesman for ceramics. Florence Clara Weber Coates died in November, 1982. She was living at Westminster Manor at the time of her death. She was born in 1899 in Missouri and was a homemaker.

## **Coates Expands Hibiscus Collection With Cuttings**

**By NELLA MAE DIETER**  
The Austin Statesman Society Staff

The search for hibiscus varieties need not end prosaically with what the seed catalogs or nurseries have to offer. So says W. W. Coates who has 30 varieties of hibiscus growing in his garden at 2318 Townes lane.

"I keep my eyes open for new hibiscus and when I'm on a trip, I stop every time I spy one my garden doesn't hold. Then I wheedle a cutting from the owner," Coates says. "In taking a cutting, be sure to get new wood. It is sure to take root when you put it into productive soil."

The way gardener Coates achieves his excellent rootings and subsequent successful hibiscus blooms is to stick the new-found cutting into a propagation bed which he has prepared near his garage. The bed is shaded and is a mixture of one-third to one-half peatmoss and sand and rich dirt. Kept moist the hibiscus cuttings send out roots, and after a stay in that bed to gain sufficient strength, these new roots are ready to be transplanted to the garden.

"Hibiscus will take any kind of abuse but cold weather," according to Coates, who will give special

attention to his varieties before frost time. For the new cuttings just rooted this year he plans to dig around them and "hill up" dirt around them, thus protecting them below the dirt line. The larger hibiscus plants he will protect with boxes he makes and stacks away during the summer months. It is possible to force hibiscus into a dormancy period during the winter by digging them and keeping a ball of dirt around the roots while they are in the cellar or some other warm place. Mr. Coates suggests that the roots be kept damp during this time.

The success of the Coates hibiscus comes largely from the preparation of permanent beds in which they live. Mr. Coates believes. He is a great advocate of the value of manure for any flower bed. As he says, "manure has a high water retention value, and that is important in Austin where the summer sun takes away so much of the water needed by the plants." To prepare a permanent growing place for hibiscus Mr. Coates prefers one-third black gummy dirt, one-third sharp sand, and one-third cow manure or peatmoss. In his garden all beds are dug 18 inches deep and filled four to six inches above ground level. The hibiscus stand where they get full sun.

"Hibiscus are heavy feeders and vicious growers," Mr. Coates says. He acidifies the soil in the hibiscus bed by sprinkling one handful of copperas on the topsoil for every foot in height of the hibiscus. Next year he plans to experiment with degrees of acidity, observing the results in two beds containing different strengths of copperas.

Not too concerned with the names of his varieties, which indeed he has no way of knowing in many instances, one of Mr. Coates favorites is Kamapva, colored like the Talisman rose.

His garden is full of uncommon plants which give him a great deal of satisfaction in proving his theory that "any plant which lives in California can adapt to Austin." In his garden now are rhododendron plants budding; four varieties of holly—English, Japanese, Chinese, and American. He grows dogwood and says it does beautifully when given the same treatment as camellias. Three varieties of ginger lilies, a white redbud, six shades of japonica, and yellow poinsettias are part of his gardening pleasure along with his hibiscus.

Article on W.W. Coates' hibiscus garden at this house  
Austin Statesman, October 1, 1945

## Anything Will Grow in Austin Soil

Some years ago, W. W. Coates Jr. a ceramic engineer and business executive with a dozen irons in the fire, decided he would have to concentrate on one hobby and one hobby only.

He found gardening more stimulating than bridge, more rewarding than golf.

Cotes' sprawling lawn at 2318 Townes Lane, open at the front and



walled midways to form a secluded back yard, is the proof of his decision. In an offhand and deceptive simple method of operations, he has achieved several botanical rarities for Austin, including a small but lively production in citrus products. The fact that citrus groves in Texas are presumably limited to the Rio Grande Valley is the thing that got him interested, of course, for one of Coates' chief characteristics is an instinct to try to disprove almost any given fact.

"I have simply shown to my own satisfaction that you can grow anything in Austin if you really want to," he said.

Coates is growing lemons and kumquats on the east side of his house. The sweep from the north is broken, and in winter the young trees are benefited by their position next to vents from the house. Coates is immensely pleased that his lemons and kumquats, though frozen to the ground last February, survived the severest winter in 50 years.

He has harvested lemons the size of oranges, Coates reported. The kumquats are gastronomically interesting to him because he wants to try out an English marmalade recipe he acquired some where.

Coates is also demonstrating that olives can be grown in Austin—slowly, of course, but surely. (Groves planted by the Romans 2,000 years ago are still being harvested in Europe.) He has an English walnut coming along nicely, almonds and a grafted product that is supposed to yield hickory-pecans. Coates admits he is pretty curious about this last number.

Banana production is no longer a novelty in Austin, but Coates is nursing an import from New Orleans, a dwarf fruiting banana in which he is interested.

Coates makes no claim to being Irish, and therefore has no call on a green thumb. He does, however, have a remarkable facility for sticking something in the ground and

getting it to grow, apparently with a minimum of effort. He has cut through the abracadabra common to many gardeners, particularly women gardeners, and describes his operation in a remarkably lucid style. "Mix three parts black dirt and one part sharp sand," he advises. "Then you're ready to go to work." He uses the iron sulfates with a liberal hand to acidize the strongly alkaline soil typical of Austin.

Actually, Coates' methods are more meticulous than his description of them indicates. He may plant identical varieties in several kinds of mixtures, then observe them closely to pick out the one that progresses best. He also tries out varieties of the same plant, discarding the ones he finds least amenable to wind and soil. Coates has a greenhouse for rooting and nurturing tender plants. One of the things he hopes to develop there is a night-blooming cereus that blooms in the day.

Coates has never taken a census in his yard and he doesn't know how many trees, shrubs, vines and plants he has there. He believes he has some 70 varieties of camellias, however. A lot of things have been sent to him from over the world, amateur gardeners being bound together in a great and nameless fraternity; other things he picks up in travels over the country.

"I wouldn't say this is a lazy man's hobby," Coates puts it, "because you can't turn your back on it. You have to work a little every day, or almost every day. I'm out of town a part of the time and I have to dig in to catch up when I come back. But I don't know of a better way to put in your time, at that."



EXOTIC PLANT — Bill Coates examines a leaf of the rare Cat's Claw Climber growing in a cedar tree at his home at 2318 Townes Lane. The solid yellow South American climb-

er is one of several tropical plants growing in Coates' yard. Coates said he has traveled all over the world and doesn't remember where he got the plant.

Article on William W. Coates, Jr.'s cat's claw climber at this house  
Austin American-Statesman, April 15, 1971



**NEW BRICK WALL PROCESS**—A vertical brick-laying machine, first of its kind in the world, forms a 12 by 12 foot reinforced wall at the Elgin Standard plant near Elgin. The giant machine, which resembles an oversize waffle iron, can form the bricks or any other masonry material into varying patterns at the rate of 2,000 per hour. Developed by W. W. Coates and

Mac McLarney of the CM Masonry Process Corporation, the machine can also insulate or plaster walls, complete with provision for water pipes and conduits. Time for one wall from loose brick to the finished panel is 30 minutes. This time could be cut to 10 minutes if a fast-drying mortar is used, Coates, a ceramic engineer, said.

News story on the development of a vertical brick-laying machine developed by W.W. Coates and Mac McLarney  
Austin Statesman, July 1, 1964

Westenfield Dev.Co.

2318 Townes Lane  
153 & E.25' of  
152

Tarry-Town #6

2-story brick ven.res.&amp; frame gar.

300n - 1-5-40

10

Building permit to the Westenfield Development Company for the construction of this house  
(1940)

Connection Charge \$ #2343 N<sup>o</sup> 16903

APPLICATION FOR SEWER CONNECTION.

Austin, Texas, 5-13 1940

To the Superintendent of Sewer and Public Improvements,  
City of Austin, Texas

Sir:—

I hereby make application for sewer connection and instructions  
on premises owned by W W Huff  
at 2318 Townes Lane Street,  
153 & E.25' of 152  
further described as lot \_\_\_\_\_, block \_\_\_\_\_, outlot \_\_\_\_\_  
subdivision Tarrytown #6, division \_\_\_\_\_, plat \_\_\_\_\_  
which is to be used as a Res

In this place there are to be installed 10 fixtures.

I agree to pay the City Sewer Department the regular ordinance  
charge.

3 DEEP Respectfully, [Signature]  
AT - PL DTG.  
Stub Out

Connected 5-21 1940 Per Ad  
Size of Main 6 inches. 1-22-40  
Size of Service 4 inches. 1-13-40  
5 Feet Deep in ST  
12 1/2 Feet from Property Line Com 36  
Feet from Curb Line E of W  
Inspected by Harrison  
Connection made by Harrison L 6  
129102 31 B-1340  
B-1340

Sewer connection application by W.W. Huff for this address (1940)

# WATER SERVICE PERMIT

Nº 20140 *Sec. 162*

## Austin, Texas

Received of W.W.Coates Jr Date 8-23-43

Address 2318 Townes Lane

Amount Two and 50/100 - 100 \$ 2.50

Plumber: self Size of Tap 5/8"

Date of Connection 9-23-43

Size of Tap Made 3/4

Size Service Made. 14

**Size Main Tapped**

From Front Prop. Line to Curb Cock *56"*

[illegible]

Location of Meter	Meters	Kilometers	Miles	Feet	Inches
CUBA					

Type of Box 200H

Depth of Main in St. ....

Depth of Service Line.....

From Curb Cock to Tap on Main.....	Fi			/			/	/		
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Checked by Engr. Dept. M B Z 10-6-45 N

Water service permit to William W. Coates, Jr. for this house (1943)

W. W. Coates 2318 Townes Lane  
153 and 1/2 of  
162 152

Tarrytown #6

**Brick veneer addition to residence**

33005 2-26-47

**\$2500.00**

C. E. Ward

None

Building permit to William W. Coates, Jr. for a brick veneer addition (1947)

City records show that air conditioning was added to the house in 1984, the same year as a permit was issued for an addition to create a utility room. A permit was issued in 1986 for a second-story guest room, and a second-story master suite was permitted in 1992. A permit was issued in 2007 for a living room, dining room, and master suite to the guest house.