

Untold Stories

The Historic Landscape of the Elisabet Ney Museum: Trees, Plants and the Centennial Wall

Introduction

Over the past two years we have researched the history of the Elisabet Ney Museum grounds.

We reviewed many of the same records cited by the Heritage Landscapes Ney Landscape Master Plan, as well as other resources. We have viewed these records through the different lens of a Texas historical perspective. We have drawn on the collective living memory of Texans and reached a number of conclusions differing from or overlooked by the Master Plan research.

We have found clear associations of features on the Ney grounds with these historic Texas figures:

--**Jane Yelvington McCallum**, Ney's protege, noted Texas suffragist, Texas Secretary of State and wife of Austin public school's longest-serving Superintendent, Arthur Newell McCallum. *Jane McCallum was called upon by the Texas Fine Arts Association in 1932 to assist in the improvement of the Ney grounds in preparation for the Texas Centennial in 1936 and Austin Centennial in 1939;*

--**Jacobus “Jac” Gubbels**, who restored the landscape of the San Jacinto Battlefield and Sam Houston's home in Huntsville, became the first landscape architect of the Texas Highway Commission and designed hundreds of depression era roadside parks in Texas constructed by the National Youth Administration. *Gubbels was almost certainly the designer of the Centennial wall that has framed and protected the Ney Museum for at least 70 years;*

--**Clara Driscoll (Sevier)**, Savior of the Alamo, benefactor of Laguna Gloria, wife of Hal Sevier, founding publisher of the *Austin American* newspaper. ***Clara Driscoll was the founder and first president of the Violet Crown Garden Club, credited with the gift of the Centennial wall;***

--**William Sidney Porter**, more popularly known by his pen name, **O. Henry**, widely credited for first referring to Austin as the City of the Violet Crown, in a story published in his *Rolling Stone* newspaper in 1894;

--**Fortunat Weigl** (and son, Lee), creators of ironwork gracing numerous historic Texas structures, ***including the still fully-functioning hand-wrought iron gate in the Centennial wall*** and of the protective ironwork around the Texas Declaration of Independence discovered by McCallum and displayed in the Texas capitol;

--**Texas Garden Clubs, Inc.**, the statewide federation of women's garden clubs in Texas that chose the beautification of the Ney Grounds as ***their first statewide beautification project, including the Centennial rock wall;***

--**Frank T. Ramsey**, pioneer Texas nurseryman and close personal friend of Ney who donated the crepe myrtles on the Ney grounds. Given his relationship with Ney when she was alive, Ramsey would very likely have been closely involved in their planting. Together with the Centennial wall, these plantings have served the very practical purpose of protecting the museum grounds from vehicle traffic and creating the pedestrian sanctuary we fear would be lost unless they are both preserved in place;

--**Austin Mayor Tom Miller** and National Youth Administration director and then Congressman and later **President Lyndon B. Johnson**, who were instrumental in providing depression relief program workers to the Ney grounds, as well as numerous other Depression-era structures throughout Texas, including the Shipe Park pool and pavilion immediately west of the Ney grounds and most of the Gubbels-designed roadside parks across the state.

This research has yielded a rich story of how Texans, particularly Texas women, advanced the liberated ideas Ney imparted directly to McCallum and how

McCallum was able to marshal the growing civic and political influence of these women toward realization of Ney's ambitions for future generations, as embodied in and symbolized by the thoughtful and unobtrusive features added after Ney's death.

We note that one stated purpose of the restoration project now beginning at the Ney is to explain the sculptor's life to students and other visitors. We believe the previously-unthinkable demolition of the graceful, protective, fully-functional Centennial wall in front of the museum would destroy this entire historical context, proposing as it does to replace the wall with a new fragile and impractical chicken wire fence devoid of the intrinsic history of the wall.

Further, we firmly believe and demonstrate here that much of this rich history, including, for example the failure to grasp how the early 1930s were for all Texans a time of preparation for Centennial observances, was either entirely overlooked or ill-understood by the research in the Master Plan.

Although we remain concerned about the jeopardy all this faces today, we are pleased to relate at least a part of the lost history of the site below.

John Paul and Catherine Moore
October 4, 2009
Austin, Texas

Passing Ney's Torch

Elisabet Ney is important not only for her sculpture, but for her part in intellectual history and specifically in feminist history. The first woman to be admitted to the Munich Academy of Art in Germany, her migration to Texas and her building of the studio itself speak to her role in the growth and empowerment of women in civic and political life. Her influence on Texas women is a rich story to be told. The Ney grounds tell not only the story of Ney, but the story of two of the most significant women in Texas history, Jane McCallum and Clara Driscoll, who figure

prominently in the Ney property's Centennial rock wall and the existing trees and plants.

The implementation of the Elisabet Ney Museum Restoration Master Plan for the studio and grounds of the museum, located at 403 East 44th Street in Austin, Texas, began with a City of Austin Capital Improvement Project in August, 2009, which is an immediate threat to the existing historic trees and plants. The Centennial wall is still under threat by its eventual planned destruction under the Master Plan.

Jane McCallum

Jane Legette Yelvington McCallum was born in La Vernia, Texas, in 1877. She came to Austin with her husband, Arthur Newell McCallum, where he would serve as Superintendent of Austin Schools from 1903 to 1947. Austin's McCallum High School is named in his honor.

A noted woman's suffragist and prolific writer on the role of women in public life, reformer Jane McCallum (1877-1957), lived near Hyde Park at 613 West 32nd Street. During the last years of Ney's life, the young Jane McCallum would make the trek to visit Ney in her studio, Formosa, then on the rural outer fringes of the city.

The first published work in McCallum's career as writer and public figure was a Fine Art League prize-winning essay "The Builder of Formosa" in a University of Texas literary journal, *The Texas Magazine*, about her early visits with her mentor Elisabet Ney. Her biography, *A Texas Suffragist* by Janet G. Humphrey, includes a photograph of McCallum at Formosa, taken about 1905.

Elisabet Ney held strong views of a woman's place in life and was actively engaged with some of the principal figures of her time. But when McCallum made her formative visits to Ney's studio, Texas women had few rights independent of their families and at marriage forfeited even these to their husbands. In the years before Ney's death, Texas women were still a decade away from winning the right to vote in elections.

In 1915, McCallum was elected president of the Austin's woman suffrage society, to seek out the vote for women. She would often give public speeches and wrote a suffrage column for the Austin newspaper, working to secure passage in 1919 of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, which granted the right to vote to women. Although this was a landmark victory, it was only a step toward full emancipation for Texas women. By Austin's Centennial year of 1939, opponents had enough votes in the Texas State Senate to block a measure that would have allowed women to serve on juries. There was still work to be done. Women were not allowed to serve on juries in Texas until 1954. And when they finally won that right, Jane McCallum became Travis County's first female Grand Juror.

McCallum, whose work on behalf of Texas women was clearly inspired by her mentor, Elisabet Ney, in 1922 revisited the late artist in an article published in *Holland's Magazine*. Ney, McCallum wrote, "when but a little past 16 years old, (would) astound and terrify her mother, horrify her bishop, scandalize her friends and neighbors and defy all conventions by announcing her intention to seek what for a woman during that age was considered rank heresy--a career."

When Ney arrived in Munich seeking admission as the first female student to the Academy of Arts, McCallum wrote, "it is said that the outraged and astounded dignitaries with one accord adjusted their spectacles and glared at her as if she were one demented. How she finally overcame their crusted prejudices, thus beginning a 'track to the water's edge' that has since been 'beaten by thousands of feminine feet,' is a victory not to be accounted for in ordinary ways."

Following Ney's "track to the water's edge," in 1923, McCallum became executive secretary of the Women's Joint Legislative Council, a coalition of six statewide women's organizations, popularly known as the "Petticoat Lobby." The group grew as a statewide political power, seeking funds for child health care, education, literacy and prison reform.

McCallum led the Petticoat Lobby in the campaign to elect the 33-year-old Dan Moody as Texas' youngest governor, in 1926.

She was rewarded with appointment as Texas Secretary of State, serving in that office during Moody's two terms as governor and was reappointed by his successor, Governor Ross Sterling. According to the *Handbook of Texas*, McCallum remains the only Secretary of State in Texas history to hold the office under two governors for more than two terms.

[McCallum's legacy was carried on by her niece, Janet Poage (1919-1993), who lived with the McCallum family while attending the University of Texas. In the mid 1970s, Janet Poage was a founder and driving force behind the creation of Austin's Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve. Poage's daughter, Carolyn Poage Palaima, is the current president of the Hancock Neighborhood Association, adjacent to Hyde Park, and served as the chair of the City of Austin's Tree Task Force, carrying Ney's influence on Texas women up to today.]

Early in her first term, McCallum discovered the long-lost original Texas Declaration of Independence in the capitol basement. She carefully studied how best this historic document could be displayed to the public.

Significantly for the story of the Ney Museum, the craftsman selected to create a safe and reverent place for the Declaration, behind a graceful, hand-wrought Tree of Liberty, was the German immigrant master ironworker, Fortunat Weigl.

The Weigls, Hammer in Hand

Like Ney, Weigl learned his craft in Germany. He landed, with his wife and two young sons, in Galveston in 1913. Slow to learn English, Weigl worked for a plumber and as a laborer on construction of the Austin Post Office at 6th and Lavaca. Later, he found work for more than a year helping to create decorative wood carvings for the German-Swiss craftsman Peter Mansbendel, son-in-law of Hyde Park founder Monroe Shipe.

Hyde Park neighborhood lore holds that Mansbendel, having arrived after Ney's death, worked for a time in the basement of her studio, although no confirmation has been found in the historical record.

It *is* a matter of historical record, however, that Mansbendel staked Weigl to the necessary equipment to practice his iron working skills with a \$75.38 written promissory note for Weigl to purchase a forge, anvil and other tools. Weigl used these tools to create decorative iron railings for a project by architect Roy L. Thomas in San Antonio.

Weigl's lasting craft still graces not only the state capitol, but Austin's first permanent Public Library (now the Austin History Center), Laguna Gloria, the French Legation, the Bremond block and many other of Austin's finest historic private homes and, among their last projects, the cemetery gates of the LBJ Ranch at Stonewall, Texas.

Weigl taught his sons the family craft and worked alongside them. Each piece the family produced was a hand-forged original, using no molds or patterns but a distinct set of designs. In 1981, the Weigl family's craft was recognized with an exhibit at Laguna Gloria entitled "Hammers in Hand: Weigl Family Ironwork."

Fortunat's son, Lee Weigl, whose home a few blocks from the Ney Museum at 4107 Avenue H in Hyde Park bears a Texas Historical Commission marker, continued with the family business until he and his brother retired in 1977. The family's last workshop, at Cesar Chavez and Red River, now the Ironworks barbecue restaurant, is itself a recognized historic landmark.

Lee Weigl was also the long term Scoutmaster for the Boy Scouts at Shettles Memorial (now Hyde Park United) Methodist Church.

Later, McCallum would say that the discovery and display of the Declaration was among her proudest professional accomplishments.

Texas Centennial Decade

Near the end of McCallum's service as Secretary of State, Texans were beginning to organize events and celebrations for the Centennial of Texas independence from Mexico in 1936. A Constitutional amendment creating a permanent Centennial

Commission was approved by voters in 1932, and communities across Texas began beautification efforts and planning for observances.

As historian Francis Abernathy observed, "the Texas Centennial Decade" encompassed more than just the 100th anniversary of Texas Independence in 1936. It also included the centennial year of Ney's birth in 1933 and the Austin Centennial of its selection as the capital city of Texas, in 1939.

None of these historic Texas observances are recognized in the Ney Master Plan research.

After Ney's death in 1907, Ella and Joseph B. Dibrell purchased the Ney studio property in 1909. The Texas Fine Arts Association (TFAA) occupied the Ney studio and grounds after the association's founding in 1911.

In 1932, the TFAA asked McCallum to join its library committee and to help upgrade the Ney Museum.

As demonstrated in historical records untapped by the out-of-state consultants who compiled the Ney Master Plan, McCallum clearly used her influence among Texas women to fulfill this role, enlisting people well known to her and to the members of the Texas Fine Arts Association.

Garden Clubs of Texas

McCallum was effective in securing assistance of the newly united Texas Federation of Garden Clubs. The group chose as its first statewide beautification project the grounds of the Ney.

As reported in the federation's written history, with the Texas Centennial in 1936 and the Austin Centennial in 1939 at hand, the task of restoring and replanting historic gardens was a paramount concern to garden club members intending to transform Texas into a land of welcoming beauty for thousands of visitors. A \$10,000 endowment was created for Centennial beautification projects including the Ney grounds.

The Texas Federation of Garden Clubs, founded in 1928, was an association of city garden clubs in Texas, including Austin's Violet Crown Garden Club. Garden clubs in early Texas were significant avenues for the involvement of women in public life. In 1938, the name of association was changed to Texas Garden Clubs, Inc. and it continues in 2009 with 438 clubs. A photograph on page 57 the *Texas Garden Clubs, Inc. Handbook, 1952-53*, beneath a headline that says "First State Beautification Project" shows a young man sitting atop the Centennial wall with the following caption:

"A portion of the grounds showing Garden Club plantings of the Elisabet Ney Museum and a section of the rock wall built in 1939 by the Violet Crown Garden Club. In 1933 each club member of the Texas Garden Clubs was invited to contribute individually to the restoration fund for this museum and the grounds."

History of Texas Garden Clubs, Inc., 1928-1948, records that the Dallas Garden Club was first to make a commitment to the project.

In addition to the stonework, Violet Crown club members went to Liendo, the estate near Hempstead, Texas, where Ney and her husband had lived 20 years before Ney came to Austin, and transplanted dogwood, beautyberry bushes, jonquil and narcissus to the Ney grounds. Some of these survive today, among them likely an extraordinary buckeye, slated from demolition.

The plaque on the Centennial wall commemorating these efforts honors the local Violet Crown Garden Club, but the fact is, this lovely wall represents the efforts and contributions of many others beyond Austin. The project was to follow the plan of a "nationally famous landscape architect."

Mystery of the Centennial Wall

Research by the Heritage Landscapes consultants attendant to the reconstruction of the Ney grounds in 2009 offers little more than a single paragraph at page 102 on the wall:

After a discussion of landscaping events up to 1934, it states the following:

"No additional record of landscape work undertaken by the grounds committee was located for the remaining years of the 1930s. However, it is known that the stone wall along the front of the property was constructed in 1939. Funded by the Violet Crown Garden Club of Austin, the was constructed along the entire 7th (44th) Street frontage of the property. The wall, about three and one half feet high, was constructed of irregularly shaped pieces of Cordova Cream Limestone, the same stone used in the construction of the studio building. Stone pillars were constructed at both ends of the wall. A gate was constructed in the wall, and two low stone planters constructed as part of the wall were located on either side of the gate. It is believed that the existing iron gate is the original gate, dating to 1939. It is not known whether or not the gate was located at the exact place where the swinging double gate existed in Ney's cedar and wire fence; however a comparison of photographs indicates that the iron gate in the wall was positioned reasonably close to the location of the gate in the fence."

Although this one paragraph, the most exhaustive on the Centennial wall in the consultants' report, merely draws the supposed date of its construction from the plaque on the wall and avers the wall was "funded" by the Violet Crown Garden Club, it cites no records to support this conclusion, while *History of Texas Garden Clubs, Inc.* reports contributions from its members across the state.

Mrs. J. W. (Willie B.) Rutland, whose near 40 years of (largely volunteer) dedication to the Ney made her its longest-serving curator, confirmed in a 1966 oral history interview for the Austin History Center that the gate was created and installed by the Weigl family, the same craftsmen that created the enclosure around the Texas Declaration of Independence McCallum had discovered. **Rutland also pointedly observed that the gate opening was narrowed to prevent vehicle access to the grounds.**

Local historians have long speculated that the Centennial wall might have been built earlier, since its design, materials and construction share these features with so many other structures created in Travis County and Central Texas by federal New Deal reconstruction and economic recovery programs including the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, the National Youth Administration, Works Progress Administration and the Civil Works Administration. During the Texas Centennial Decade, Austin's population grew by more than 60 percent and the area benefited from more Depression relief work than any other city in Texas.

These, the first federal stimulus funds, destined for public works across America, were spent to bring America out of the Great Depression.

Among those most responsible for bringing these dollars to Texas and specifically to Austin, were two legendary political rivals: Austin Mayor Tom Miller and an ambitious young man who would serve as the first Texas director of the New Deal National Youth Administration (1935-37) before he was elected to the U.S. Congress in 1937, Lyndon Baines Johnson.

Miller (1893-1962), who was considered the most widely popular elected official in the 10th Congressional District, decided not to run against Johnson in the 1937 election, but continued to be effective in bringing federal relief funds to Austin during his first reign as Mayor, from 1933-1949.

Miller, like Johnson, McCallum and Clara Driscoll, was a strong supporter of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and used his considerable Washington ties and influence to bring to Austin the first federal housing project in the nation;

acquired land for Robert Mueller Airport and what is now Austin Bergstrom International Airport and the federally-financed construction of the dam on Lake Austin that bears his name. During Miller's administration, Austin acquired thousands of acres of parks, including what is now Emma Long Park, Deep Eddy Pool, three city golf courses, Doris Miller Auditorium and what is now Auditorium Shores. He worked for the construction of both Interstate 35 and MoPac and helped to create the Austin Symphony Orchestra.

Among the fruits of the combination of Miller and Johnson are the Shipe Park swimming pool, as well as a log cabin style pavilion, directly across Avenue G from the Ney Museum on a tract that was originally purchased by Ney but later returned to Monroe Shipe. Architect W. Eugene George and architectural historian Mary Carolyn George have confirmed that the pool and pavilion were built by the Civil Works Administration in 1934. There is evidence to strongly suggest that these same workers also built the wall. (The Master Plan, without attribution, reports "In the 1920s Shipe Park was constructed.")

Jacobus "Jac" Gubbels

Convincing clues to the Centennial wall's actual design and provenance begin with a notation in the *Texas Garden Club Handbook* that in 1933, the combined Garden Clubs of Texas endorsed the planting plans of the Texas Highway Commission and the appointment of Jack Guebbels (sic), Highway Landscape Arts..." The reference in *History of Texas Garden Clubs* to a "nationally famous landscape architect" would seem to also refer to Gubbels.

Page 101 of the Ney Master Plan confirms from TFAA records that in 1932 a "Mr. Jacque Gubbels (sic), identified as a 'Landscape Engineer' had developed plans for the grounds and they had been approved by the TFAA. Unfortunately, it appears that the plans for the changes to the grounds have not survived, and only a limited description of the work is contained in the records of the TFAA."

And, although the Master Plan researchers apparently failed to grasp its significance, they do report that "'Grading' and 'rolling' also occurred, which was

undertaken by the 'Reconstruction Finance Corporation' employees, under the supervision of the City Manager. Although the extent of the work is not known, it must have been extensive, given the number of men at work on the Ney property." The report continues,

"We have had as many as twenty men at work on the grounds, under the direction of Mr. Gubbles (sic) for more than a month." (page 101, Master Plan)

Actually, the name Jacobus "Jac" Gubbels (1897-1976), as it is correctly spelled, is known to Texans as the first landscape architect of the Texas Highway Department, sometimes referred to as the unsung hero of the roadside park. During the Centennial Decade, specifically between 1935 and 1939, Gubbels was responsible for the design of 674 "wayside parks" across Texas. Most of these were built by the National Youth Administration, whose first Texas director was Lyndon Johnson. A 1999 Texas Department of Transportation brochure listed only 41 of these Depression Era roadside parks that then survived more or less intact. Some of Gubbels' work has been saved through efforts of the Texas Historical Commission.

According to Gregory T. Cushman's "Environmental Therapy for Soil and Social Erosion: Landscape Architecture and Depression-Era Highway Construction in Texas," a chapter from Volume 22 of *Environmentalism in Landscape Architecture*, Gubbels, born in Groningen, the Netherlands, attracted attention at age 12, when he wrote an essay about the city's parks and became a protege' of the local director of public works. After studying landscape architecture in Germany, Gubbels worked in Sumatra, came to the United States in 1922, worked in New Jersey, Michigan and Colorado before opening his own landscape design firm in Houston in 1927.

Cushman records that "Gubbels specifically promoted masonry construction in roadside parks because it was inexpensive to build, long lasting and 'natural'..."

"For his first jobs in Texas, Gubbels restored the San Jacinto Battlefield to its 1830s appearance, using old military plans, as well as the grounds around the Sam Houston home in Huntsville--*both projects promoted by*

local women's clubs (emphasis added). The City of Austin then hired Gubbels to help it spend a \$750,000 bond issue earmarked for parks and boulevards. Recommending that Austin use this money to buy open green space that would require little maintenance, Gubbels supervised the purchase of land along Shoal Creek, Plum (Blunn) Creek and in Zilker Park--areas that remain important sections of Austin's celebrated greenbelt system."

Gubbel's role in the beautification of Texas highways was acknowledged by Walter Prescott Webb in an article in *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* in April 1939. Webb noted "In December Mr. Gubbels book, *American Highways and Roadsides* was issued by Houghton Mifflin & Company. While the title is general, the entire story is based on what has been done in Texas. All the illustrations are taken from Texas roads. A reading of this book will make driving over Texas highways more interesting because it explains the purpose behind all that has been done."

Webb's friend Roy Bedichek, in his 1947 *Adventures with a Texas Naturalist*, noted "Better still, Jac Gubbels, Landscapist for the Texas Highway Commission, has scattered demonstrations along every automobile highway in Texas. Bridge approaches, culverts, borders, roadside parks, highway intersections, wide places in the road, and unsightly corners are landscaped and ornamented for the most part with trees, shrubs and flowers native to the area so adorned."

According to a profile published by the Texas Highway Commission, Gubbels left the Highway Department in 1947 to formulate a 20-year Master Plan for public school sites in Austin. This was the final year Austin schools were overseen by Jane McCallum's husband.

In an extraordinary report to the TFAA leadership on May 5, 1934, delivered in writing because he was too ill to attend the annual meeting, TFAA President, the Rev. Harris Masterson of Austin, reported "The association has co-operated with the C.W.A. and the relief commissions have co-operated most splendidly with Mrs. Pressler, as the Chairman of the Grounds Committee, the Violet Crown Garden

Club of Austin and the Garden Clubs of Texas. We have been limited in our accomplishments by the lack of even the small amounts of money, which were necessary but which could have been used to such advantage with the help available, and which would have gone so far toward the perfection of the plans.

"The Mayor, the Honorable Tom Miller and various branches of the city government have been most cordial in their co-operation and help at the Ney Museum."

This message can be read a number of ways, but it seems to be both an expression of gratitude and a veiled plea for further help from Mayor Miller.

Given no persuasive evidence to the contrary, the clear confirmation of plans developed by Gubbels for landscaping the entire site; the failure of the consultants who developed the plan to recognize the significance of Gubbels' involvement; the clearly noted support of New Deal Era construction both on the grounds and immediately adjoining the Ney at Shipe Park, together with the Centennial Wall's similarity with other Gubbels designs across Texas, give substantial support to the notion that the wall might have been constructed by one of these relief programs and even more so to the notion that Gubbels is responsible for its design.

Jane McCallum accomplished what she was asked to do. Working with Gubbels, someone she would have obviously known from his work with her husband, and working with the Weigls she knew so well, Jane McCallum had marshaled the growing force of Texas women to memorialize the figure who had so influenced her own life and, through her, the life of modern day Texas.

With much of Gubbels' landscape already ravaged without recognition or understanding of its historical significance, today, much of the landscape developed by this significant historic professional Gubbels has already been destroyed. Only the Centennial wall survives intact at this writing and has every justification necessary for its preservation. But there is more to this story.

Conquest of a Century

Whatever the actual time of its construction, the commemorative stone plaque on the wall is clearly linked to the Austin Centennial in 1939.

Elisabet Ney figured large in the community-wide observance of Austin's first 100 years as capital of Texas. In April 1939, a pageant with an epic cast of 1,600 members re-enacted the city's history over the course of a week of performances at House Park, attended by most of the city's 75,000 residents.

Although Austin is home to the state capitol, as well as some of the oldest public buildings in Texas, including the General Land Office, Governor's Mansion and Austin State Hospital, the program for this epic pageant, entitled "Austin's Conquest of a Century" mentions none of these. Instead, Austinites paid homage to four unique local landmarks: Treaty Oak, the French Legation, O. Henry's home and the **Elisabet Ney Museum**.

Clara Driscoll (Sevier)

Preservationist Clara Driscoll (Sevier) (1881-1945) well known in Texas as the "Savior of the Alamo," founded Austin's Violet Crown Garden Club and was its first president. Driscoll saved the Alamo with her own funds and donated her home, Laguna Gloria, built on the site Stephen F. Austin had planned to build his own home, to the Texas Fine Arts Association in 1943 to be used as a museum. Driscoll's father had a multimillion dollar ranching, banking petroleum and commercial development empire in Corpus Christi, Texas. In 1906, she married Henry Hulme Sevier, a Texas state legislator, United States ambassador to Chile and the founder of the Austin American in 1914, a predecessor of today's Austin American Statesman. In her business life, Driscoll served as president Corpus Christi Bank and Trust. After a divorce from Sevier in 1936, Driscoll resumed her maiden name and focused on civic involvement, serving as the vice chairman of the Texas Centennial Exposition Board, and as Director General of the Pan American Round Table, among many other interests.

What Is in a Name

At least one account of the founding of the Violet Crown Garden Club, reports that the name Violet Crown was suggested by the club's founder and first president Clara Driscoll's husband, *Austin American* publisher Hal Sevier, who had recently read the term in a story by another renowned Austinite, and Ney contemporary, William Sidney Porter, known most widely by his pen name, O. Henry.

The term was used in a sarcastic reference to Austin society published in the story "Inspector Tictocq, the Great French Detective, in Austin." The story appeared in O. Henry's newspaper, *Rolling Stone*, published in Austin in 1894. A political farce dealing with the missing socks of a visiting populist political figure, the story draws on the real life populist, Sockless Jerry Simpson, ancestor of the present-day Austin family of Don E. Simpson.

Frank T. Ramsey

Another early Hyde Park resident, a friend of Ney's who once wrote her a poem that moved the sculptor to tears, made substantial contributions to the Ney grounds. Nurseryman Frank Taylor Ramsey, for whom Ramsey Park in Austin's Rosedale neighborhood is named, was nicknamed "Fruit Tree Ramsey" by the children of Hyde Park. He was renowned for developing a pecan species which bears prolifically, still enjoyed in Hyde Park today. Ramsey, along with fellow nurseryman Eugene Howard, contributed hundreds of crepe myrtles across Austin, working with the Violet Crown Garden Club, including those on the Ney grounds. Given their relationship, it is hard to imagine that Ramsey wouldn't have paid careful attention to the placement of these plants. Complementing the Centennial wall, these have served to block vehicle access to the Ney grounds, preserving and protecting them as a pedestrian sanctuary today surrounded by traffic on busy city streets on three sides.

Their removal would not only eliminate this protection, shade and beauty, but is disrespectful of the memory of this prominent Austinite and Hyde Park resident, whose family home still stands at Avenue B and 45th.

Some of the significant treasures of the history of women and Texas are slated to be destroyed, rather than saved, by the Elisabet Ney Museum Master Plan restoration process.

Conclusion

The neighborhood that surrounds the Ney Studio today, Hyde Park, Austin's first planned suburb now at the heart of Austin, is a National Register Historic District. It is peopled by knowledgeable preservationists devoted to the safekeeping of an important and irreplaceable heritage.

In the mind's eye of almost all of its neighbors, the graceful public space of the Ney Museum and grounds includes and, has included for most of living memory, the Ramsey plantings and Centennial wall so rich with the history honored here.

Like Texans anywhere, we honor and wish to preserve nearly any structure associated with Clara Driscoll, to mention only one of the figures linked to the Centennial wall. This is doubly true of a structure so graceful and functional, clearly put in place to last for the ages. It is, after all, a monument *to* Elisabet Ney, expressing the esteem and affection of Austin and all of Texas. It is the only such monument in existence.

This wall was dedicated 30 years after Ney's death. In another 30 years, Austin will celebrate its Bicentennial and will likely look back on the historic observance of the city's first century to see what remains of our shared legacy. We fervently hope our children will be able to still find this wall and not have to report that some damn fools tore it down.

©Copyright 2009 John Paul and Catherine Moore

