

If Walls Could Talk; The Story Of Remodeling A Historic Home

By Sylvia Contreras

One summer's day in 1998, the walls of our 92 year old home gave us a whisper. Now don't get me wrong, I'm not talking about ghosts.

My husband, Larry, and I had finally paid off our home of 15 years and, because it's an old home, had to decide whether to remodel or tear it down and build a new home. We decided to remodel. So, my husband, son, Mark, and I began our task, a decision we would never regret.

One thing we had to do was

install new insulation, which required also removing and replacing the old siding on our house. Mark and I were not able to help everyday with this so Larry hired someone to help him.

On one particular day something very strange happened. As Larry and his helper were removing the siding, they were tossing the pieces into a designated pile. When the days work was done, Larry noticed two boards laying away from the pile facing the opposite direction of the other boards.

He asked his helper why he put the boards there and he said he didn't know.

As Larry picked them up he noticed an inscription on each board. These boards were signed by two men. One was Joe Porter, signed Monday, August 6, 1906 and the other was E.P. Newsom, signed Monday August 6, 1906.

You can only imagine how we felt to have come across something that old. We learned that most contractors or builders would sign their name and date a board used to build their houses. We felt very fortunate to have come across these boards.

We decided to put an ad in our local newspaper describing the boards and asking if anyone had known or known of these two men. Unfortunately, no one responded.

We put the boards aside and would show them to others every now and then, pretty much giving up on finding out who these men

were. Until one day I read in our local newspaper that the Eagle Lake Preservation Alliance presented a plaque to a local resident for researching the beginnings of her home.

That immediately got my attention and I contacted ELPA member Mary Ann Kaluza. She advised me to contact Eve Lucas.

Months went by and I finally contacted Eve on February 2001. It was wonderful speaking with her because she seemed as excited as I was.

We made arrangements to meet and talk about the steps in researching my homes beginnings. Eve was extremely helpful.

First, I went to the Colorado County Courthouse to do a deed search. After many lunch breaks spent searching, I tracked all the deeds belonging to my house. Thankfully, my house had only three previous owners.

I also began going to the Nesbitt Memorial Library in Columbus, Tx during my lunch breaks and Wintermann Library in Eagle Lake on Saturdays hoping to find something with information on my house.

I looked at Sand-Burn Maps and newspaper articles dating back as early as 1903. I also researched Tax Appraisal rolls. I also enlisted the help of Bill Stein in my research.

Eve suggested I take the time to speak to some of the local residents who may have lived in Eagle Lake at the same time as these men. I hoped someone would remember them or maybe they could just tell me more about the places I would come across in my research.

One person I really counted on for information was Mr. Robert Samuel Martin. Mr. Martin was a very well known and a lifelong resident of Eagle Lake.

I called and asked him if I could interview him and he was so pleased to do so. The information he provided helped to aid in my research. I was truly blessed to have received his knowledge.

I continued doing my research

during my lunch breaks, going through deed books and reels of Micro-film, making copies here and there.

Sometimes I came out with information and other times coming our empty handed and disappointed, feeling like I was up against a brick wall. I almost gave up but it was too late. I had the fever for finding out the history of my house no matter what it took. All I had left to do was take all the information I had found and put all together so it would all make sense.

I was lucky enough to have found enough information to get me really excited about my house. I just needed to prove that it sat in it's current location in the Burns Pendleton Griffin Addition of Eagle Lake. I looked at Sand-Burn Maps hoping to find that proof. Sand-Burn Maps were used for insurance purposes in case of a fire.

These maps showed the dimensions of your property and all buildings on that property. These maps were redrawn every ten to twelve years so I thought I would be able to find my house. The earliest Sand-Burn Map I found was from 1907, but my house was not shown in it's current location. I then looked at a map from 1912 and still could not find it. Out of sheer frustration, I once again contacted Eve Lucas for her opinion. She was just as puzzled as I was.

By this time I was ready to once again give up. Then Eve gave me a glimmer of hope. She remembered my mentioning one of the deed owners, Mr. and Mrs. Fritz Emshoff. She too had come across these names while researching her house and happened to keep the article in which the names were mentioned.

She couldn't remember why she kept that particular article, but I believe it was meant for me. The article was from the January 27, 1912 edition of the Eagle Lake Headlight. The article reads: "Mr. Fritz Emshoff has bought Mr. W.A. Dallas' house on Railroad Ave., now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Dallas, which he will remove to the Griffin Addition where he will make his home." ***Jackpot*** I was thrilled. Now I finally knew why I could not find my house in it's current location on the Sand-Burn Maps.

I went back to look at the January 1907 Sand-Burn Map and looked for my house on Railroad Ave. There I found a house that fit the dimensions and description of my house. I looked at the February 1912 map and found the same thing. I knew then that I was on the right track, but I still needed proof that Mr. W.A. Dallas had built or lived in this house.

I found something printed in The Farris 1912-The Last Hotel of Early Eagle Lake. It reads: "Following Mrs. Clower's death early in 1906, R.B. Dobbins, administrator of her estate, was granted permission by the April 1906 Colorado County Court to sell her estate. Sale of the old Good Hotel and it's property was completed to W.A. Dallas in the summer of that year."

This was also recorded in the County of Colorado, Deed Records, Book 33, September 7, 1906, p. 13. I also found an article in the September 15, 1906 issue of the Eagle Lake Headlight headlined "The old 'Good Hotel'". It reads: "With the tearing down of this old house disappears one of Eagle Lake's oldest landmarks." In the final remarks of the article it reads: "Mr. Dallas will build a comfortable rent house on the site."

I wanted to mention a little bit about Mr. W.A. Dallas. This information was found in The Farris 1912-The Last Hotel of Early Eagle Lake. Mr. Dallas was an official of the San Antonio-Aransas Pass Railroad. He came to Eagle Lake in 1891 from Brenham.

He was the son of early Texas settlers in the area of Old Independence. He was educated at the original Baylor College and was also a graduate of Eastman College in Poughkeepsie, New York. After his arrival in Eagle Lake, he met, courted and married Miss Georgia Zeigler, daughter of Captain and Mrs. George Zeigler and granddaughter of Mrs. Dilue Rose Harris. Mr. George Zeigler was Eagle Lake's first postmaster after the Civil War.

Mrs. Dilue Rose Harris' name is synonymous with The Runaway Scrap to Texas historians. Several articles from the Eagle Lake Headlight in 1912 speculated that Mr. Dallas was going to build a new home on the site of the old Good Hotel. Instead, as announced in the April 6, 1912 edition of the paper, Mr. Dallas was going to erect a twelve thousand dollar modern brick hotel. We now



Evelyn Stowers of the Eagle Lake Preservation Alliance presents a plaque to Larry and Sylvia Contreras commemorating the 100th Birthday of their house, which they have recently finished remodeling.

know this hotel as the Farris 1912. Mr. and Mrs. Dallas were well known and very active in the community. They both were members of the Christ Episcopal Church. Mr. Dallas was a Member of the Local Masonic Lodge, serving as an alderman, he was a Shriner and a solo alto in the Eagle Lake Coronet Band. Mr. and Mrs. Dallas had no living children. Their only son died as an infant.

Mr. Dallas passed away in 1940 and was buried at the the Masonic Cemetery. I knew it probably had been many years since anyone visited Mr. Dallas' grave, so I went to pay my respects to the man who built my house. Through my research, I felt like I had come to know the Dallas'. My only regret was not finding a picture of them. But my connection will always be deep because in many ways Larry and I are like them. Larry is now an Alderman for the city council, a post Mr. Dallas once held. We, like the Dallas', had only one child. Unfortunately, Mr. and Mrs. Dallas' son died as an infant.

I wasn't so lucky when trying to find out information about the second owners of my house, Mr. and Mrs. Fritz Emshoff. I once again went to speak with Mr. Robert Samuel Martin. He did remember Mr. Emshoff and told me that he was in fact still alive and living in a nursing facility in Columbus, Tx.

I was so excited that I would finally be able to speak to someone who actually lived in my house. But, once again I was somewhat disappointed. When I went to visit Mr. Emshoff, I found that he was suffering from dementia and couldn't give me any information at all. The employees at the facility told me he had a son, Arthur, and that I should try contacting him. I didn't contact him right away, instead heading back to the library to do more research, hoping to find some articles that mentioned Mr. Emshoff.

The only information I could find in the Eagle Lake Headlight archives were a couple that mentioned that he was the manager of the Frazer Opera House and that he later took a job with Mr. G. Hermann & Sons. I still wanted more information so I contacted Mr. Arthur Emshoff. Unfortunately, he could not tell me too much about his father and his family. Mr. and Mrs. Fritz Emshoff had divorced and he and his sons were not close. Soon after that conversation, Mr. Fritz Emshoff passed away.

I continued my research by searching for information on the last owners of my home, Mr. and Mrs. F.T. Kollmann. Mr. Kollmann's grandfather, Edo Kollmann was born October 26, 1832 in Tettens Oldenburg, Germany. He was a native of the Grand Dukedom of Oldenburg, Germany. Edo Kollmann immigrated to Texas at the age of 24, arriving here in December of 1853. He became a citizen November 10, 1859. He owned his own business in Frelsburg, Tx by the name of the "Edwin Kollmann Store". More details on Edo and Margretha Kollmann, see "The History of Frelsburg-Kraewinkel (Crows Nest)" at the Nesbitt Library in Columbus.

Mr. Kollmann and his wife were married June 30, 1912 and on January 21, 1913, gave birth to a son who died a few days later due to illness. Then on August 19, 1914, they had a daughter, Mary Alice Kollmann. Mr. Kollmann owned his own business, F.T. Kollmann-Tinner and Plumber, dealing in galvanized casters, flues, tin roofing, gutters, pipe, and pipe fittings. His store also boasted a general line of plumbing supplies and fixtures carried in stock. His store was located at

the the northwest corner of the town square in the Wintermann Building. Mr Kollmann passed away on July 17, 1964.

I wanted to make contact with at least one living member of the Kollmann family. When Larry and I moved into our home, we had a neighbor, Mrs. Marsalia, who we contacted for more information. I was so glad I contacted her. She new Mr. and Mrs. Kollmann and was in fact friends with them. She still kept in touch with their daughter, Mary Alice. I was told that Mary Alice lived in Seguin, Tx and Mrs. Marsalia gave me her telephone number. I couldn't wait to call her.

While the phone was ringing, I was very nervous. I didn't want her to hang up on me, thinking I was crazy or a solicitor. When she finally answered, I heard the softest voice and became very excited. I asked if she was Mary Alice and she said yes. I then explained who I was and the purpose of my call. She seemed a little confused. She asked me to hold while she put her husband on the phone. I explained to Mr. Tiggett who I was and he listened very patiently, but told me that it would be better for me to speak to their son Gary. He told me that he and Mary Alice were ill and couldn't help much. Mr. Tiggett gave me Gary's number and I thanked him for his help and that I looked forward to speaking with their son.

The next day, I attempted to call Gary Tiggett but got his answering machine instead. I left a message and thankfully he returned my call. When I explained what I was doing he seemed very interested in finding out what had become of his grandparents home. He had very fond memories of visiting them as a child. He gave me all the information he could over the phone and I promised to keep him updated on the remodeling and that I would like for him to be present at the 100 year plaque presentation for our home. But he surprised me.

On July 3, 2003, Gary called and told me that he would be passing through to go to Houston to visit his brother and that he would like to stop, visit and see the house. I was delighted that he asked. On July 4, Gary arrived at our home and we gave him the grand tour. He was able to tell us a little bit about where things were located when his grandparents owned the house.

He remembered where the wood stove sat and where the out house sat. Now a large tree grows there and we joked about it, saying that it was well fertilized. We visited for a while and then he had to continue his trip. We agreed to keep in touch and that I would still like him to be present at the plaque presentation.

This has been an amazing journey, thanks to those two old boards. I have finally had contact with people, living or not, that had a connection to my house. I now feel that when Larry and I first saw the house in November of 1979, it was destiny that we buy it. We have been blessed to have been able to bring life back into this old house with the help of color, a mixture of old and new, family and friends. It has truly been a labor of love.

We now hope that we can build memories in this house so that the next owners will have just as much interest in the history.

In the celebration of 100 years in this old house, built September 1906, and still standing in September 2006.

With Great Pride,
Larry and Sylvia Contreras,
Present Owners
September 30, 2006
Mr. Robert Samuel Martin has since passed away.



Lesley Matthews Carey presented the program, "The History of the Matthews Family in Colorado County" to the Eagle Lake Study Club at the September meeting held in the Wintermann Library. (Photo courtesy of Mary Ann Kaluza)

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