
From 1878 to Today: The Storied Past of 1301 Broadway

Exploring the individuals who called Darling's Birdcage their home

By Kathleen Maca



Darling's Birdcage: If you think this is the name of something from a Disney movie, you'd be mistaken - it's the name of a charming home on Broadway.

Flourishing Second Empire style architecture, the home features intricate woodwork, a three-story cupola at the center front, two porches, a two-story appendage in the back, and is surrounded by a black iron fence featuring cherubs that were crafted in Decatur, Texas.

But Broadway was not its original location when it was constructed. The house was built in 1878 by Curtis Ames Darling (1837-1910) and his wife Sarah Anne Curtis Lubbock (1841-1905) on a lot at 1416 Ball that they had purchased four years earlier. Darling worked as a merchant for P.J. Willis & Brothers Dry Goods on 24th and Strand streets.

The Darlings had three children: Carrie Whitaker "Daisy" Darling (1861-1938), Grace Hanford Darling (1867-1923), and a son William who had passed away at the age of one several years before they built the home.

The Darlings built the new two-story home at 1416 Ball that cost \$1,700 to construct. Its mansard roof is said to have been the first of its kind on the island and resulted in the home becoming quite a novelty, coming to be known as Darling's Birdcage. It was likely inspired by the architecture in Darling's home state of Massachusetts.

It was an exciting time in Galveston. The island's first telephone had been installed, finishing touches were being put on an ornate Cotton Exchange Building on Mechanic Street, and unbeknownst to most of the population, Galveston's own world heavyweight boxing champion Jack Johnson had just been born.

The fact that Sarah's uncle was former Texas governor Francis Richard Lubbock, who had suggested burning Galveston to the ground during the Civil War to keep it from falling into enemy hands, was most likely rarely discussed.



A WORK IN PROGRESS During the extreme winter storm that hit Galveston and most of Texas during Valentine's week in February 2021, Darling's Birdcage was significantly damaged when water pipes burst and much of the home was flooded. The owner has been working to complete the last of the repairs to the home so it can be painted.

Cotton factor Theodore Oscar Vogel, Sr. (1849-1938) and his wife Imogene Cornelia Schneider (1855-1936) purchased the Darling home in 1881 for \$6,500. They only remained in the house for two years before selling it to William Byrd Wallis (1858-1927) and Sallie E. Sears (1861-1934) in 1883.

Their son Edmund Sears Wallis was born the following year, but like the son of the home's previous family, he would pass away after only one year.

A native of Chappell Hill, Texas, William Byrd Wallis was a stock and bond trader at the time he purchased the house. He was later a successful banker with Galveston Trust and Safe Deposit Company and the People's Bank.

Wallis was also the uncle of Hollywood director and Galveston native King Wallis Vidor, famously known for directing portions of the 1939 hit movie *The Wizard of Oz*.

The next owner of the home was Mary Hawley Willis (1870-1957), the second wife of Short Adam Willis (1848-1917), who purchased it in 1895, a year after their marriage.

Short Willis was one of the nephews of P. J. Willis whose firm employed the home's original owner Curtis Darling. Short also worked for his uncle's firm which was by then engaged in the wholesale grocery and dry goods business and cotton factorage, trading throughout the Southwest. His mother Narcissa Moody Worsham Willis' (1828-1899) home at 26th and Broadway is now known as Moody Mansion.

After two short years, the Willis family established a new permanent residence in Litchfield, Connecticut, and passed the home to Mary's parents Joseph Henry Hawley (1846-1927) and his wife Sarah Ann Brown (1847-1910).

Joseph was living in the house and his wife was visiting Mary when the devastating 1900 Storm struck the island. He wrote a letter to them detailing his experiences 10 days later.

Though the letter explained some of the grievous losses of friends and acquaintances, it assured them that the house at 1416 Ball had sustained little damage. The weather vane was bent, and the dining room chimney was blown down and the falling brick crushed the porch roof.

The east side of the home was pummeled with flying brick and other debris, and the roof had a few leaks but held fast. He also noted that the yard was filled with all sorts of remains from other homes and establishments.

His son, daughter-in-law, and grandson survived the ordeal at their home and were by the time of the letter, en route to Litchfield.

The Hawleys continued to live in the home until 1907 when Mary sold it to postmaster Harry A. Griffin and Phoebe Eldridge Sawyer Griffin as an investment property. They quickly sold the property the next year but in a rare instance, it went to two different buyers.



James McKay Lykes purchased the lot at 1416 Ball in 1908, where he intended to build a new home for his family. On July 1 of that same year, Griffin sold the existing frame house, Darling’s Birdcage, to Peterson B. Goodwyn (1868-1958) and his wife Emily Lucas (1876-1957) for the cost to move it off the land, which was \$500.

Goodwyn was a bookkeeper and cashier at E. H. Young, a cotton sample room. He and his wife had a two-year-old daughter Lillian. The house’s new owners moved the structure onto a fresh foundation at its current location at 1301 Broadway, opposite Sacred Heart Church. After its move, lathe and plaster were removed from the three remaining chimneys so that repairs could be made to them as well as a bit of cracked brickwork.



DARLING’S BIRDCAGE The two pictures above of 1301 Broadway were taken on March 31, 2019 before the home was extensively damaged when the water pipes burst during the winter storm in February 2021. On the opposite page is an aerial photo taken of Galveston in 1930 that features the area between 13th Street and 14th Street, and Broadway and Sealy. The house is located in the middle part of the picture at the bottom. It’s third-story mansard roof (now gone) is said to have been the first of its kind on the island and resulted in the home becoming quite a novelty, coming to be known as Darling’s Birdcage.

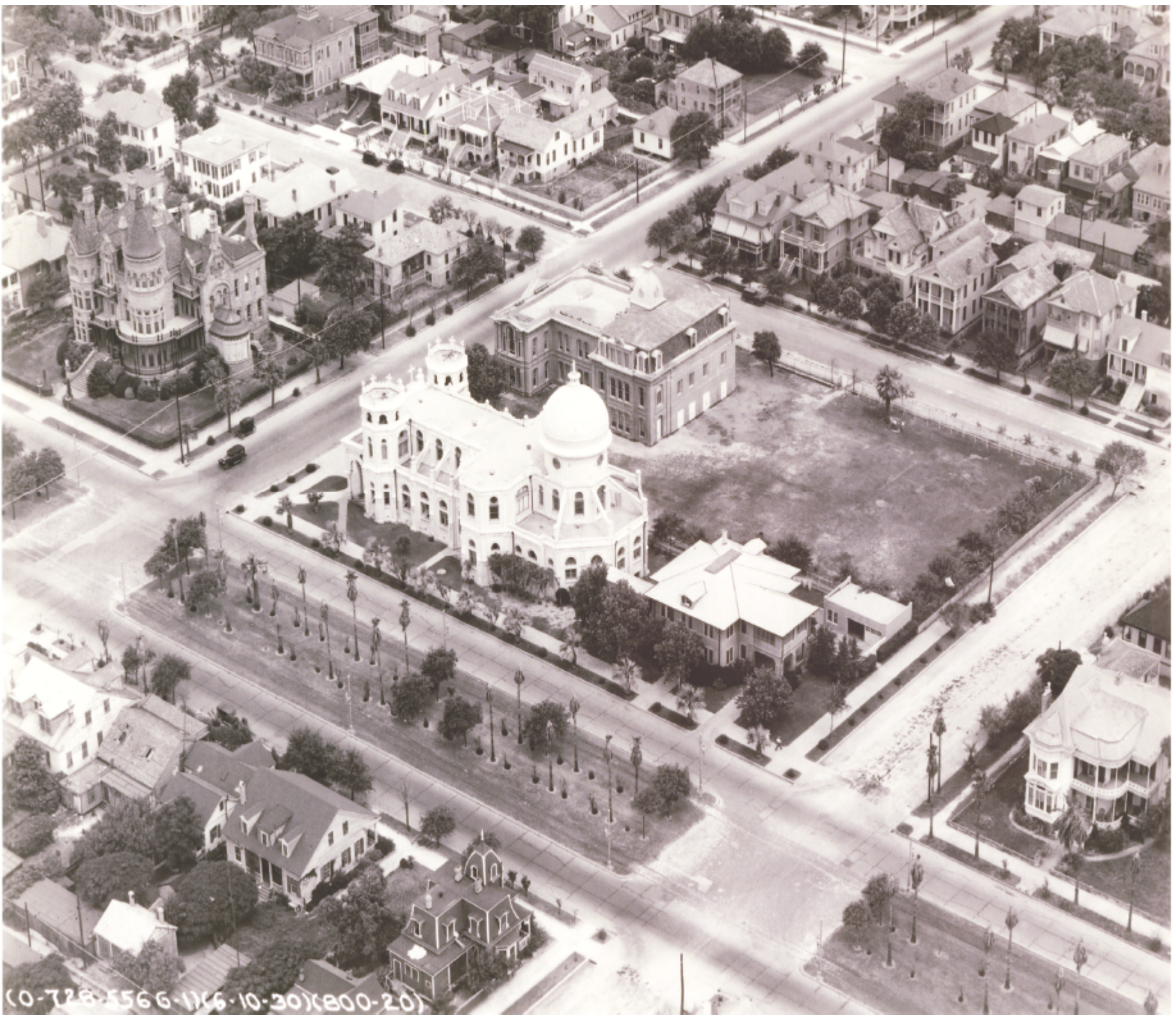
Goodwyn had the house wired for electricity in 1911 and listed it for sale the following year. Without any success in selling the home, he offered it as a rental property for the next 20 years.

The first tenants were short term. Louis J. Demarest, a wharf superintendent for the Fruit Dispatch Company, rented the home in 1913.

The next year the house was leased by Robert A. Crossman, who co-owned Crossman livery stables on Postoffice Street with his brother William. Crossman’s son Archie, a local chauffeur lived with him.

James Monroe Crain, a 74-year-old flagman at the railyards, retired shortly after leasing the home in 1916. Having previously lived in the Lucas Terrace Apartments, his wife Ida Sparks Crosland enjoyed having a “proper” place to host meetings of the Missionary Society.

The small house was filled with three generations of the Crain family. In addition to the Crains, three of their five adult children and three grandchildren resided in the home.



Mattie Garrett Craine Clark, widow of lawyer Robert Clark after just seven years of marriage, lived in the home with her daughters Aileen and Maude. Maude, only 18 at the time, was already a kindergarten teacher.

The Crain's youngest daughter Lillian Ida Crain Johnson, a divorcee, lived there with her son Elmo Johnson, Jr. She worked in real estate. Lorena Crosland Craine, the eldest daughter who had never married, taught music in the home.

Ida, the matriarch of the Crain family passed away in the home in 1920, and her husband, a veteran of Terry's Rangers during the Civil War, died at home in 1923.

After the couple's passing, Goodwyn sold the house at 1301 Broadway to James Daniel Claitor (1886-1955), a general sales manager for Triple XXX, and his wife Ora Ethel Eviston (1886-1965) for \$4,500. The new owners raised the home and made repairs to it in 1925.

Three years after the purchase, the couple listed it for sale touting its three "colonial period" fireplaces, ivory woodwork, seven rooms, one bathroom, full garage, and garden in the back.

The 1928 sale to Eugene Cecil Arnold (1892-1964) for \$8,000 doubtless helped to fund Claitor's new business of the Hitchcock Pecan Company in 1929. Earlier that year, Arnold had married Sepha Rohde.

Arnold, who once lived in his parents' grand home on 24th Street known as the 1899 Conness-Arnold House, maintained the diminutive Broadway home as a rental property for almost a decade.

The couple finally moved to the 1301 Broadway home after their fourth child was born in 1937. The family were the longest residents of the unique home, remaining for over 20 years.

Others have lived in the home since, but Darling's Birdcage will always hold the nickname created in honor of the man who brought a bit of East Coast architecture to a southern island shore.