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Architectural Analysis of 1022 W. Magnolia Ave
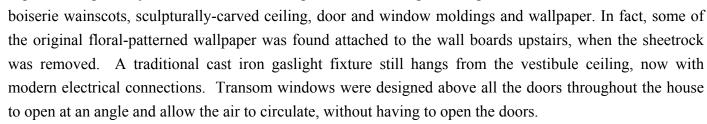*By: Architectural Historian*
Shelley Roff, PhD

Once a grand house on the outskirts of San Antonio in the historic Beacon Hill neighborhood; this 1911 Neoclassical home is in need of some tender loving care. It could be the perfect house for an architect or a couple who would love to restore the elegance and rich details of an historical house. Just recently, this house suffered from a fire on the upper front porch, whose structure was already sagging from a shift in the soil. Do note that the structure of the house is in fine, stable condition.

1002 Magnolia has a Victorian floor plan with a two-story corner wrap-around porch and adjacent enclosed sleeping porches. It is a typical Four-Square plan with the entry vestibule, kitchen, living and dining rooms each occupying one of the four corner of the house. On the second floor, these spaces are replicated by four bedrooms.

Victorian design, still very popular at the turn of the century, meant one could expect a large entry vestibule with an elegant staircase, high ceilings, wood boiserie wainscots, sculpturally-carved ceiling, door and window moldings and wallpaper. In fact, some of the original floral-patterned wallpaper was found attached to the wall boards upstairs, when the sheetrock was removed. A traditional cast iron gaslight fixture still hangs from the vestibule ceiling, now with modern electrical connections. Transom windows were designed above all the doors throughout the house to open at an angle and allow the air to circulate, without having to open the doors.

The plan may be Victorian, however the exterior style of the house is clearly Neoclassical Revival. Two prominent gables extend boldly over the curved walls of the enclosed sleeping porches and form classical

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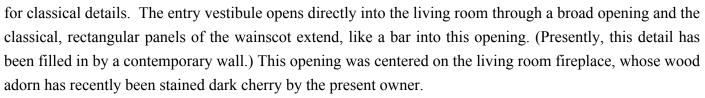Email: homes@joebarfield.com

pediments. Carved wood brackets, imitating stone corbels that would have been used by the Greeks, dress the underside of the eaves. At the front door, slim fluted Ionic columns flank each side of the entry with the bottom third left bare (a detail I have seen in Early French Renaissance buildings). Doric columns dress the ground floor porch, although the capitals are now missing.

Following the correct rules of classicism the upper porch columns are in the Ionic order, and the massive columns that support the sleeping porches to the north and east sides are also Ionic but adorned with fluting. The feature that most clearly distinguishes Neoclassical design from the earlier Greek Revival is large-scale two story columned entrance facades.

John and Alice Jackson built the house in 1911 and lived there for eight years. There is still quite a bit of evidence of Alice's taste in the home and her preference for classical details. The entry vestibule opens directly into the living room through a broad opening and the classical, rectangular panels of the wainscot extend, like a bar into this opening. (Presently, this detail has been filled in by a contemporary wall.) This opening was centered on the living room fireplace, whose wood adorn has recently been stained dark cherry by the present owner.

The living room opens directly to the dining room through another broad opening, which can be closed off by large paneled sliding pocket doors. The rectangular panel wainscot pattern and the classical molding of the doors and windows is mirrored in the glass-panel doors and ornamental frame of the built-in china cabinet. The fireplace surround and mantle in the dining room is constructed of oak and a white ceramic tile covers its fire-brick walls. A classical garland motif with fanciful bows is embossed on the surface, which is replicated on the firebreak below.

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The metal firebreak standing in front of each fireplace was used to block the view of the opening in the summer and to keep out winter drafts. Each is uniquely ornamented with a delicate woman's portrait in profile, a common type of image seen in cameos, a popular form of jewelry in the Victorian era. The design that protrudes from the surface is hammered out from the back with a technique called repoussé. *Could this be a portrait of Alice Jackson?* It is entirely possible. Many Victorian women of means had their portrait done for cameo jewelry, often by an Italian carver. At the very least, we might assume that Alice found or commissioned these enchanting firebreaks. They are also accompanied by two original bronze chain-curtain firescreens.