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Over the past five years we have had the privilege of living and officially entertaining in the chancellor's residence. As this experience has unfolded, I have been keenly aware of the unique position this beautiful house occupies in the emerging sense of self for ECU.

Thousands of people come through the arched front doorway yearly and gain insight into East Carolina's distinctive style and character. This is true for the university, composed of trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, students, alumni and supporters; but it is also true for the surrounding community — townspeople of Greenville, residents of Pitt County, friends and official groups from across the state.

One legacy I wish to leave is an anecdotal history of the residence, based on discussions and interviews with some of its former residents from the time of its construction to the present. The interviews, which are rich in detail and memory, have provided information which I hope will enhance the residence as a symbol of East Carolina's ethos.

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The Chancellor's Residence

Gladys Howell
leaves ECU with a
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— a history of her
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Street across from the campus of East Carolina Teachers Training School. Jarvis Street separated the lot from the president's residence (now ECU's Personnel Department), inhabited by Robert H. Wright and his family.

Dail was involved in several business enterprises in Greenville, including the city's only brick-making company, Overland Automobile Agency, and

later the Chevrolet agency. He also owned four farms in the surrounding countryside.

Dail figured in the history of East Carolina in at least two ways. During the bond issue election on the establishment of a teacher training school in Pitt County, he claimed to have eaten the negative votes in his precinct so the affirmative vote would be unanimous. In addition, Dail's brick company furnished all of the brick for the new campus.

As a successful businessman in a thriving city, Dail did not find his wife's dream of a mansion in the popular Italianate style unrealistic.

He hired Murray Nelson, a Raleigh architect, to draw the plans and set aside \$25,000 to cover the construction. The architect thought the figure was adequate, but unforeseen difficulties proved his view too optimistic.

Although the site is one of the highest points in Greenville, springs developed as soon as excavation for the basement began. Water had to be pumped before the construction could continue. (To this day a sump pump in the basement runs almost continuously.)



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One of the features Mary Dail insisted on was the hand-carved wooden banister railings which grace the double staircase at the rear of the central foyer. A cut glass chandelier was added later.

When the problem was solved, the foundation and subflooring were built. By then, however, the money had run out. Further, Pitt County experienced a depression when tobacco prices fell sharply. To aggravate the situation, the Overland company experienced a strike in Detroit, hurting local agencies such as Dail's.

For all these reasons, construction on the house proceeded in fits and starts. After several years, Dail borrowed enough money to complete

the house sufficiently for occupancy. In 1928 the Dails moved in. Remaining work awaited funds for the proper quality. Mrs. Dail had discriminating tastes, according to her son, Alex, and preferred to do without rather than compromise. Thus, furniture was sparse, and no light fixtures were installed.

Many of the special features of the house were Mrs. Dail's inspirations. The curved wooden banister rail on the double staircase was hand-carved

by a Goldsboro artisan. This feature took weeks to complete. The mantel pieces were handmade by Griffin Lumber Company of Goldsboro. The high ceilings highlighted by plaster molding were made to her specifications. One of the bathrooms featured a shower with sprays coming from all points of a pipe, forming a fountain effect.

The bricks for the interior came from the Dail Brick Company, but the buff-colored exterior facing was ordered from an Ohio brick company. Surplus yellow bricks were stored at one of the Dail farms where years later they were discovered and used to face a new garage.

When the Dails moved in, the grounds were devoid of trees. Dail planted four oaks, two in the front and two in the back. Three of these survive as a living memory of the first occupancy of 605 East Fifth Street.

The house was steam-heated with a coal furnace. Radiators were placed throughout the house except for the sun parlor. Alex Dail remarked that it took a ton of coal a week to heat the house. He vividly recalls this since he did a great deal of the furnace-stoking.

Alex Dail recounted one occasion when the impressive entertaining capacity of the first floor was called into use. Following his graduation from Greenville High School in 1931, he and fellow graduates gathered in the foyer and living rooms for spiked punch and dancing to the gramophone.

The house was never completely furnished, and the crash of 1929 made the complete realization of Mrs. Dail's dream impossible.

In 1933 the Dails conveyed the deed to the property to L. Ames Brown for \$21,000. Brown was a Greenville native son who had enjoyed a successful advertising and journalism career in Washington, D.C., and New York. He purchased the house for his mother, Mrs. Nancy A. Brown, and his sister, Bessie. His mother, however, declined to move from her home on Fourth Street where she had reared her children. For a time Brown's sister and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. J.J. Sumrell, lived in the house.

In 1937 Brown sold the property to Hattie B. Young for \$22,000. For the next 12 years it was known as the Young House.

The house was actually home to two families of Youngs. Hattie Young, her



Ceiling fans salvaged from South Cafeteria were placed in the kitchen and breakfast room during Dr. Thomas Brewer's years as chancellor. The kitchen area originally featured a 9 x 22 foot breakfast room which extended across an area now enclosed as a guest bathroom.

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This 16 x 39 foot receiving hall was used extensively by the Howells, who entertained thousands of guests during their years in the residence. The double staircase and massive window necessitate a ceiling of double height in the back of the foyer.

husband, and their son, W.F. "Red" Young, his wife, Ann, his daughter, and ultimately, a son and a niece. The Youngs were owners of a chain of department stores in eastern North Carolina.

Alterations were made on the first story to provide a private suite for the elder couple. The wall creating what is now the den and a hallway was erected to form a bedroom; the breakfast room was divided to provide a bath.

The W.F. Young family had bedrooms upstairs. Their daughter was five years old when they moved in; a son arrived five years later. Young's 12-year-old niece joined the family when her mother died.

The Youngs provided the cut glass chandeliers in the foyer and the dining room. These were birthday or Christmas gifts to Ann Young.

The back double window in the foyer was covered by a sheer custom-made silk curtain which came to the floor. This had to be replaced every three years.

The Youngs used the sun parlor as the family den or as a place for the younger generation to entertain friends. At that time the two French doors could be used to close the sun

parlor off from the living room.

Apparently there was a great deal of social activity among the high school friends of the Young children, and in many ways the house lived up to its potential for graciousness.

During the latter days of their ownership, termites were discovered in the dining room, which required considerable repair work.

Following the death of the elder Young, the house was put up for sale.

Dr. John D. Messick became president of East Carolina Teachers College in 1947, at which time he and his family moved into the two-story frame house on the northeast corner of Fifth and Jarvis Streets which had served all of the presidents. When the board of trustees and Messick heard the Young House was for sale, they decided it would make a more appropriate president's residence. On June 3, 1949, the deed was conveyed to the school.

In *East Carolina University: The Formative Years 1907-1982*, Dr. Mary Jo Bratton gives \$30,000 as the price. Messick recalled \$37,000 or \$38,000. Whatever the exact cost, the house was a wonderful acquisition for the school.

Because there had been little work on the house in the years before its sale, major renovations were needed before the Messicks could move in. A great deal of additional work was needed to repair the termite damage, and much of the underground structure had to be replaced.

The house was painted and carpeted throughout; wallpaper was used only in the stairwell area of the foyer.

The only structural change was the placing of a counter in the breakfast area. The basement and bathrooms were redone, and new fixtures were installed where needed. The state paid for these renovations but refused to refurnish the house, except for providing rattan furniture for the sun parlor.

Mrs. Arthur L. Tyler, whose husband was on the board of trustees, arranged for Belk Tyler's, a Rocky Mount department store, to provide an interior decorator. The Messicks brought a considerable amount of fine furniture of their own, including a baby grand piano, but the house required more. The interior decorator advised on these acquisitions and Belk Tyler sold them at cost.

During their stay the Messicks had



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full-time help at their own expense every day except Sunday. Preparations for entertaining were handled without assistance from caterers. Additional domestic help and faculty wives occasionally assisted.

Many people were entertained at the house. Lauritz Melchior, the noted Wagnerian tenor, is one of the most fondly remembered guests. A reception was held at the house following his concert on campus. Still in formal attire, Melchior, his wife, and his accompanist sat in the kitchen with the Messicks after the reception and enjoyed a midnight feast.

Messick remembers sunbathing on the flat roof outside the master bedroom with his six-year-old grandson.

When asked if his children felt living in such a public house impinged on their privacy, he replied, "They loved it." His second daughter had her wedding reception there.

In 1960 Dr. Leo W. Jenkins became president of East Carolina College. The house finally had a family to fit its scale — he had six children, ranging in age from a son in college to a three-year-old.

Since 12 years had elapsed since the college purchased and renovated the house, some refurbishing was required to accommodate the new occupants. The state assumed the cost of furnishing the areas used for public purposes, which included all of the downstairs. The master bedroom upstairs was also furnished by the state.

New carpeting was required in some rooms. An interior decorator, hired by the state, assisted in the acquisition of new furniture to fill the living room, sun parlor, foyer, dining room and den. Much of this furniture is still in use.

At that time the governor's mansion in Raleigh was not air-conditioned, so a feeling existed that presidents' homes should not be air-conditioned at state expense. In time, the Jenkins bought window air conditioners.

The state supplied the 12 to 14 foot Christmas tree each year since this was a public decoration. Both the Messicks and the Jenkins placed the tree on the landing at the rear of the foyer.

During the Jenkins' stay, East Carolina's Housekeeping Department began providing maid service.

Catherine Washington has filled this position almost continuously since 1970.

The yard and groundwork continued to be provided by the Grounds Department of the college. These services tend to integrate the house and its social life into the larger university structure in a very special and personal way.

The wooden garage was in a state of disrepair and needed replacing. A new two-car garage with storage space was built on the northwest corner of the lot with newly-discovered yellow bricks left over from the construction of the house. A brick planter-wall was also built along the driveway to separate the university house from its neighbor to the west. The Jenkins grew flowers in the planter, which now features bamboo.

The spacious basement was used for the children's recreation, such as slumber parties. Jenkins also used this area to practice his hobby of oil painting. He would line up his canvases, paint in all of the skies, then all of the fields, and so forth. In this manner, he was able to complete a number of paintings in one session which he used as gifts for weddings or other special occasions. They have also been used as auction items by the Wake County Mental Health Society and others.

During this period Dr. Wellington Gray, then dean of the School of Art, assisted in providing the president's house with rotating exhibitions of student and faculty art. This introduced a new function the house could perform in bringing the activities of the school into the public consciousness.

Guests from throughout the community, state and nation were regularly entertained by the Jenkins, including Edward R. Murrow, famed CBS news director, Pulitzer Prize winning poet Mark Van Doren, Senator Barry Goldwater, Rep. Edith Green, U.S. senators from North Carolina, and state legislators. In time the food services of the university catered these affairs so that it was possible to entertain greater numbers.

One of the Jenkins' daughters, Suzanne, was married in the foyer. Using the landing as an altar, Dr. Robert L. Holt, then vice chancellor and dean, performed the ceremony. Thus the lovely setting acquired a new ceremonial function.

Jenkins says his children enjoyed living in the house and were

privileged to meet so many people of wide renown.

In 1978 Dr. Thomas Brewer became chancellor of ECU. Dr. and Mrs. Brewer and their teen-aged son moved into the house in July of that year.

Almost 20 years had elapsed since the university had first acquired the house, and during that period it had been used extensively by the two first families.

The Brewers were forced to choose between building a new chancellor's residence away from the campus or having extensive renovations made on the existing structure. They opted for the latter. Plans were immediately drawn for the needed improvements.

The original coal-fueled steam heat system had earlier been converted to oil. Radiators, however, were no longer modern or efficient. Since air conditioning of a public home was no longer considered objectionable, a central heating and cooling system was installed.

Three heat pumps were put in back of the house, and ducts and vents were installed. Ceiling fans were placed downstairs in the kitchen, den and sun parlor. The sun parlor fans were salvaged from South Cafeteria and thus gave a new link to the campus nostalgia chain.

The house was completely redecorated. New paint and wallpaper were applied; furniture was recovered, and new carpeting was installed. Exposed floors were refinished. The foyer was adorned with a large wooden planter and fountain where fresh plants could be displayed. Spotlights were installed in the foyer and dining room to enhance the art work. All bathrooms were provided with new fixtures.

Outside, a redwood fence was built around the back area, and the front shutters were painted chocolate brown.

The central heating and cooling system and modernization of the bathrooms greatly enhanced the livability of the residence. The Brewers occupied the house through December 1981.

Dr. John M. Howell became acting chancellor of ECU in January 1982. In May 1982 he was named chancellor, and in July of that year we moved into the residence.

Since there had been recent renovations, major changes were not required. The foyer, however, was

restored to its receiving hall openness by removing the planter. The sparse furniture in this room consisted mainly of pieces owned by us, including a pair of antique inlaid nested tables and two inlaid chairs refinished by the chancellor. A large authentic Oriental rug was added to the smaller ones enhancing the formal appearance of the foyer.

The sun parlor was furnished with white wicker pieces, and a rich array of green plants added to its solarium attributes. To tie all of the exterior features together, the shutters and fence around the back area were painted jade green to match the color of the tile roof.

During this period we embarked on a policy of acquiring a permanent art collection for the residence. The practice of having the School of Art rotate exhibits at the house had

become burdensome for the staff and unreliable for us.

The acquisition of art created by ECU faculty and students seemed an appropriate way to leave a permanent legacy. Purchased with discretionary funds, these works may be found in the foyer, living room and dining room.

In May 1985 another wedding took place in the foyer of the residence when our son, Dr. David Howell, married Dr. Sara Miller. The *deja vu* ambiance was furthered by the presence of Dr. Robert L. Holt, who officiated. Again the landing, backed by the beautiful double window, formed the altar.

We have followed the practice of former chancellors in using the house extensively for entertaining faculty, trustees, staff and students from the university family in addition to guests

of the university, lecturers, artists, political leaders and community friends and supporters.

Because catering services are available through the university as well as from private professionals, entertaining is an easy and enjoyable way of showing appreciation to our friends and integrating the university and community.

The chancellor's residence is an architectural gem of which ECU and Greenville should be proud.

By Gladys D. Howell

The above is an abridged version of a more extensive description and history of the chancellor's residence. The material for this study was derived from taped interviews with Alex Dail, John Messick, Leo Jenkins, Ann Young and Sam Underwood.



The formal living room features a fireplace faced with black marble, elegant ceiling molding, a cut glass chandelier and cut glass prisms above the mantel. Two arched openings lead to the foyer; two openings on the other side lead to the sun parlor.