

Mel and Audrey Disney – Clayton Memories

of 7507 Westmoreland Avenue and Cyrene Kelsey

Miss Cyrene Kelsey, a Hanley Granddaughter who sang alto in the Festival Concert Quartette Co. of Saint Louis, lived in the house at 7507 Westmoreland Ave. (lot 21, Hanley Place subdivision, originally part of the Hanley farm). More than likely she lived in the house since it was built of used lumber materials in 1922. She never married and had a brother who lived with her for a period of time. Audrey and Mel Disney are the second owners and have lived in the house longer than the Hanley relatives.

At the time of her death Miss Kelsey had acquired about 13 residential properties south of Forsyth in the area of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, a high-rise office building and The Crescent/Plaza condos. A local attorney and developer acquired the properties from her estate and as the homes deteriorated, were condemned, and demolished, the area was ready for new, large, development. It could be said - "Miss Kelsey was Clayton's only slum landlord !" A failed election in the late 60's or early 70's, would have relocated the Clayton city government center to the area along with the city's library, a new ice rink, a park and the possibility of a new movie theater. Next, Arab investors started a development with foundation excavation, abandoned the project and the area became known for a period of time, as "Lake Clayton".

Mel and Audrey Disney moved to 7507 Westmoreland Avenue in early spring 1964. They purchased the house from the estate of Cyrene Kelsey. The home was full of items, including several pieces of furniture:

- A glass cabinet, like an attorney bookshelf, but with doors, and three sides of glass (the Disneys still use it). A pot-bellied stove on the back porch, which they gave to the Missouri Historical Society.
- A side board from Hanley House, which they still have
- Many historical books - sold some, gave some away, still have some.
- An architectural book - small, hard-bound, from the era when St. Louis had an architectural society.

Age of the house - officially 1926, but Mel feels it is much older, as it was made of used material. (After the 1904 World's Fair, used wood siding was readily available.) Many houses in Overland, Wellston, and University City used material from the World's Fair buildings.

The house was originally heated by pot-bellied stove, then soft coal, then hot water. It has been claimed the fireplace was added later, because of the design, but Mel does not agree because it has a shallow box (but no grate to burn soft coal). It is pink granite.

A neighbor, Bob Bliss, who grew up in the house to the west (7515 Westmoreland) in the late 1920's, early 1930's, remembers when a concrete basement floor was poured in Disney's house. Bob's son, Rick lives at 7515 Westmoreland now, the third generation to own the house. The house to the west of 7515 has a third or fourth generation living in it also.

In the 1970's, at the time of Clayton's first dedication of Hanley House, a lady (a Hanley family member) knocked on Disney's door, and asked if she could see the house. She recognized the entrance hall's light fixture, and identified it as original to the house. She said it was "Vaseline" glass.