

2018

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Recommended Citation

Phipps, Betty (2018) "Watrous Doll House on Display," *Sunland Tribune*: Vol. 11 , Article 5.
Available at: <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/sunlandtribune/vol11/iss1/5>

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Watrous Doll House On Display

By BETTY PHIPPS

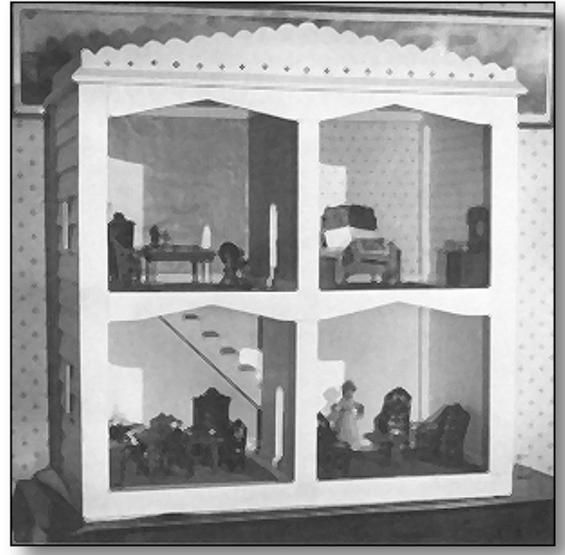


Original owners of the doll house were (left to right) Mary, Louise and Margaret Watrous.

Between 1890 and 1897, Mary, Margaret and Louise were born to Nannie Givens and Harry James Watrous while they were living at 801 Madison Street in Tampa.

Around 1900, their father built a doll house out of scrap lumber and the family began adding furniture and accessories little by little through the years. Much of the furniture was made from cigar boxes: the headboard of the bed and the back of a dresser mirror clearly show the box stamp.

Harry Watrous built one of the first homes in Hyde Park at 1301 Morrison Avenue, where the girls lived until they married. Two brothers were born in that house, Harry Jr. and Tom. No doubt the girls had the usual troubles with little brothers messing up their things. Mary married Robert L. James of Lexington, Ky., and moved to his antebellum home, Walnut Lawn, on Military



Doll house has been refurbished

Turnpike. Margaret received her nurse's training at Henry Grady Hospital in Atlanta. She was a well-known and beloved nurse in Tampa for many years. Late in life, she married Frank Langley of Tampa. Louise married Claibourne M. Phipps and they had two sons, Dick and Harry.

The doll house stayed on Morrison Avenue until Louise and Claibourne moved to their home on Davis Islands. It was always available for relatives and neighborhood children to entertain themselves while grown-ups were visiting.

After Claibourne's death, Louise Phipps moved to South Dakota Avenue, where the doll house was kept on a sleeping porch, just

off the kitchen. There, a new generation of nieces, nephews and grandchildren enjoyed the "funny" house.

When she moved to a small apartment, Louise Phipps gave the house to the Tampa Junior Museum with the stipulation that it be in reach of the children. It had to be played with. When the Museum closed in 1979, Catherine Ortmeyer Healy graciously stored the house in her attic and the furniture was neatly packed.

Now the doll house has a new home at the Knight Cottage of the Tampa Historical Society. The house has been painted, the furniture reglued and polished, and it is ready for a new imaginary family to move in and make it into a home.

Like most restored homes, it needs everything: curtains, lamps, rugs, dishes, pictures, books, toys, whatever is found in a real home, but all in miniature.

Antique buffs and doll lovers of all ages are asked to go through their belongings with an eye to the small, small world of make-believe. Contributions of furnishings for the house will be catalogued as to name of donor, history of object plus any data the owner feels would add to the historical value of the house.