

The Zahn House 1841 / 2015

Maybe it is best that a house can't talk but even in their silence they sometimes have a story worth telling, and the Zahn house is just such a place. The original deed for the land was dated December 11th, 1841, when the land was purchased from the Corporation of the town of Victoria. Back then Victoria was part of the Republic of Texas.

Records don't reflect the original price for the land but it was recorded in November, 1845 that the land and recently built house sold for \$130.00.

The property changed hands four more times and then in February, 1860 the property was purchased by Herman and Alvina Zahn for the grand sum of \$125.00, and from this sale it became known as The Zahn House. This was an early example of the fact that real estate values don't always go up.

The old Zahn house was built of wood and not properly maintained for many years. In 2013 the house was "Red Tagged", meaning that it was marked for destruction by the city. The owners of the property, Mr. and Mrs. Hankins, realized the historical value of the house but at the same time needed the land for building a new structure, so they asked for and received several extensions of the destruction date from the city.

Victoria, Texas has a very active preservation society and the City Council had recently passed an ordinance requiring owners of property in the historical district to post notice when an older structure was to be demolished. This notice put many concerned citizens on high alert.

Mr. and Mrs. Hankins offered the structure to the city if they would move it off of their property. At this point in time John and Judy Clegg volunteered to move the historical building for free to anywhere in Victoria, at no cost to the new owner, if the house was properly prepped for moving. As it turned out the old house would never have been rescued if it had not been for the generous offer to move it for free from John and Judy Clegg of Clegg Industries.

Although the City Council didn't think it was a fit for the city they realized that before it could be moved the prep work needed to be done and appropriated \$12,160 for this work. At the same time that the Council turned down the house Mr. Benjamin Caraway volunteered to take the house and restore it, making it part of his bed and breakfast establishment located at 310 S. Wheeler. In addition to the grant from the city the Victoria Preservation Society kicked in another \$2,700 to complete the prep-work needed for the move. Mr. Derrick Tarkington and his crew contracted to perform the pre-move prep work and did a fine job readying the old structure for moving. (On a tragic note, shortly after the move Derrick's nephew Brandon Tarkington was killed in a traffic accident.)

Concerned citizens, way too many to name, got involved and attended a City Council meeting requesting that the historical structure be moved to another location. Thanks to those concerned citizens, The Preservation Society, The Victoria City Council, Mr. and Mrs. Clegg, Mr. and Mrs. Hankins, and Mr. Caraway, the 174 year old Zahn House lives again. And, what a story it would have if it could only talk.

The Zahn House is a piece of Texas history rescued by civic minded citizens. Local citizens in Victoria know that preserving and learning about the past helps us prepare for the future.

Article by: Will Armstrong, Mayor of Victoria, 2004-2013, and passionate about Victoria, Texas.