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Rundown Mansions Reminders of Past

[By Scott Wigton](#)

2/1/1995

I grew up in a haunted house.

It was a house haunted more by history than by phantasms, although I remember how my scalp tingled when I found the word 'ghost' scrawled across a basement wall.

Perhaps it was an indicator of truth; more likely it was a joke.

But in a sense, maybe the word ghost is appropriate. In retrospect, I see my old home -- built in the early 1920s in the now historic Maple Ridge district -- as a ghost itself.

Thin Shadow of the Past

Yes, the bricks and stucco and wood remain. But the spirit of those times in which it was built -- a time of optimism, wealth and unlimited growth stemming from Tulsa's oil abundance -- is gone. Gone, too, are many of the homes that in their immensity, variety and grandeur reflected those boom days. Sorting through newspaper clippings, I sadly noted how home after home, mostly in the downtown area, became casualties of progress.

The location of many of Tulsa's earliest and most magnificent residences, hallmarks of the then Oil Capital of the Nation, are now marked by drab office and apartment buildings. Even so, much of

Tulsa's early heritage is preserved in several neighborhoods. Central Tulsa, in fact, contains more of Tulsa's early history than perhaps any other part of the city. According to the Tulsa Historic Preservation plan report prepared by the Urban Development Department, the area includes two neighborhoods, Brady Heights and Tracy Park, on the National Register of Historic Places. At least 10 others are eligible to be placed on the register.

Unlike many of the homes built today which lack imagination and distinctive style, the historic homes of Central Tulsa reflect a variety of styles ranging from the simplicity of squarish Prairie School-type houses to the fine ornamental woodwork of Victorian homes.

Tulsa's oldest home, nothing more than a wooden shack constructed in the 1880s, now stands in Owen Park after being moved from its original location on North Cheyenne Avenue.

Boomtown Downtown

Although it is hard to imagine now that most of Tulsa's wealth flows southward, in the early boom days many of Tulsa's wealthy

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and upper-middle class families preferred the scenic heights and cool breezes found north of downtown.

Some of Tulsa's most prominent early citizens -- doctors, lawyers and judges -- settled into comfortable homes overlooking the fledgling downtown.

Many of the more interesting homes, of course, were built by the oil barons and businessmen of the teens and '20s whose extravagant homes more than matched their oil-swelled egos.

Men such as Tate Brady, builder of Tulsa's first hotel, and W.A. Springer built their mansions in North Tulsa. Both still stand today, although Tate's is the worse for wear, having served as an apartment building since World War II.

Driving through these historic areas today, one can see they really are only ghosts of their former selves. Decay and disrepair remain evident although many homeowners have made great strides toward redeeming their neighborhoods.

In Brady Heights for example, which boasts an active neighborhood association, residents take pride in refurbishing their historic homes and dispelling negative impressions nonresidents may have.

Tim Williams, former president of the Brady Heights Neighborhood Association, said residents form a close knit group committed to maintaining the area's historical integrity.

Williams himself has lived in Brady Heights for 15 years, and in that time has restored at least seven historic homes.

Renovation and Innovation

But much of our history remains in doubt. Downtown, The Mayo and the Mincks-Adams hotels, art-deco classics, are mere shells. In surrounding neighborhoods, once impressive homes stand empty, windows broken, and roofs sagging. They seem to be yearning for the days when prosperity flowed like the black gold pumped out of Tulsa's brimming oil-fields.

But those days are gone and unless somebody taps an undiscovered pool under the city, they aren't coming back.

The hope is, however, with continued community concern the expression of those times -- the homes, neighborhoods and buildings -- can be saved. They are, after all, ghosts we should not mind being haunted by.

[By Scott Wigton](#)

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