

HAL THOMSON DALLAS ARCHITECTURAL LEGEND

Henry “Hal” Bowers Thomson, one of the most sought after residential architects in Dallas from 1908 to 1944, was part of a very early Texas ranching family. In 1830 his great grandfather, Alexander Cromwell Robertson, entered into a partnership with Sterling Robertson to bring settlers to Robertson’s Colony in what was then part of Mexico. Thomson arrived in Robertson’s Colony in 1831, and the Thomsons remained as Texas became a republic, then a state, then the seventh state of the old confederacy and finally its return to the union.

Hal Thomson, born in 1882, received his undergraduate degree from the University Of Texas in 1902 and a masters degree in architecture from MIT. He was trained in the Beaux-Arts tradition and traveled extensively in Europe in the early 1900s, studying numerous architectural styles.

Thomson arrived in Dallas in 1907 at a time when the city’s economy was booming and its wealthier residents were starting to build homes in the styles of the great European homes.

Thomson quickly became part of Dallas society, and he opened an architectural practice in Dallas in 1908. In 1914 Thomson married Geils Adoue who was a member of one of Dallas’ socially prominent families. Her father was Jean Baptiste Adoue, a Dallas merchant and one of the founders of the National Bank of Commerce.

Given his training, study of European architectural styles and his social connections, Hal Thomson became a favorite architect of many of those in the Dallas social set during what proved to be Dallas’ golden era for the construction of stately homes. The majority of the homes designed by Thomson were in the Park Cities and on Swiss Avenue. Thomson designed some of the most

elegant homes of the day in a variety styles, including Tudor, Georgian, Colonial Revival, Neoclassical, Italianate, Spanish Revival and French Revival. Many of the homes were palatial in size, such as the Georgian style home of George Lee at 6801 Baltimore, the Tudor home of Leonard Volk at 6920 Turtle Creek Boulevard, the Spanish Revival home of Harry Harlan at 4201 Armstrong Parkway and the Neoclassical home of Orville Thorp at 4908 Lakeside. Other homes were more modest in size, including the Colonial Revival home Thomson designed for himself at 3925 Potomac and James Elliott's Colonial Revival home across the street at 3926 Potomac.

Thomson was known for mixing styles within the houses he designed, such as the residence at 5314 Swiss Avenue that has been described as “a gleaming confection of Georgian, Neoclassical and Italianate elements.” He also included practical features in homes that took into account the Texas climate, such as sleeping porches, French doors and casement windows. Other homes, including the Volk home on Turtle Creek Boulevard, were only one room deep, which allowed for more light and breezes in its rooms.

Homes designed by Thomson remain in high demand today. Their owners hold onto them, but when one goes onto the market, it is identified as a Thomson home. While Thomson also designed commercial buildings, such as the Cotton Exchange Building, he is remembered for his homes that today stand as sentinels for a bygone era and a remarkable architect.

Tom Case

For the Park Cities Historic and Preservation Society

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