

Cornelius Granberry Lancaster (1863-1947)

Marshall, Harrison County, Texas

One of Northeast Texas' most noted architects, C.G. Lancaster, was born in Marshall on March 4, 1863. (This date appears in his 1947 obituary, but 1864 is cited in family records on a website, "*My Heritage.com*") His father, John, was one of Marshall's pioneer physicians and the Lancaster family home* on E. Travis St. has its own historical marker.

In 1895 Lancaster formed a partnership with another of Texas' famous architects, J. Reilly Gordon of San Antonio. "*The celebrated architect who drew up the plans for the world's buildings. It is a strong alliance, and will doubtless work to the mutual advantage of both members of the firm.*"ⁱ

The first, and perhaps only, project the two collaborated on was the Harrison County Courthouse which began construction in 1899, following a fire which completely destroyed the one built only ten years previously. According to Harrison County Court records, the contract with the two architects was signed within a month of the fire because the commissioners wished to stave off any campaigns to change the location of the county seat. No other architects were considered.ⁱⁱ



Figure 1: Photo of old Harrison County Courthouse (the Little Virginia Courthouse) burning in 1899

The most accurate description of the architectural innovations of this first of Gordon’s Beaux-Arts classical style is found in *James Riely Gordon: His Courthouses and Other Public Architecture*, by Chris Meister

“From the outside, it may appear that Gordon simply draped Beaux-Arts features over his Signature Plan for Harrison. Inside, however, the style allowed a major change to his central core. Relieved of the structural necessity of a forest of piers, Harrison has an open rotunda with a grand flight of steps leading to the second-story district courtroom doors. The staircase is made of cast iron with imposing art nouveau newel posts and marble treads. Brackets cantilever from the walls to support the second and third floors of the rotunda, leaving their circular balustrades unobstructed. Acanthus leaves and electric lights decorate these brackets. Ancillary stairways at the corner of the rotunda lead to the third floor and courtroom balcony. Art glass lights pierce the lowest level of the of the courthouse dome.”



Figure 2: Courthouse prior to wing expansion



Figure 3: Expansion of the Courthouse wings

Later Lancaster was named the supervisor of all improvements, repairs etc. with this Richardson-Renaissance style public building. In that capacity he also supervised the remarkable extension of the east and west wings of the edifice in 1914 and 1917.

In 1896, C.G. Lancaster designed a home for the Italian hotelier Charles Ginocchio at the foot of North Washington St** where it intersects the Texas & Pacific Railway depot. Across the street, at the behest of Mr. Ginocchio, he also designed the home for Ginocchio’s bartender Emile Meyer*. The story passed down through the Ginocchio and Pedison families is that Meyer was so important to the hotel owner that he wanted to be sure and keep him close at hand.



Figure 4: The Ginocchio Hotel in Marshall, early 1900s

Finally, Lancaster designed the Ginocchio Hotel **, built in 1902, but authorized by the officials of the Texas and Pacific Railway in 1896 to be built at the entrance to the depot, with 48 feet along the depot siding and 120 feet along North Washington. In addition to the hotel itself a grocery store and barbershop will be on the south side

The hotel, the Ginocchio-Pedison Home, as well as the Matthewson Home* built in 1902 on West Burleson St. all feature a unique paneling - curly pine - cut from land in Victoria Parish, Louisiana, and now apparently extinct. One explanation for its unique look came from Texas Forrester Lynn Reisner. He explained that the unique pattern of the wood is the result of “self- pruning” on the western side of a virgin pine forest. Reisner explained that the western side of the tree received more sunlight, adds many tiny branches to the trunk. In a drought, those branches are cast off, leaving a pattern of knotholes – called “curly pine.” Virgin pine forests no longer exist; therefore, the wood is for all intents and purposes, is extinct.

In 1898, Lancaster designed the building for Marshall’s first department store, Joe Wiseman and Company*. The next year saw tragedy strike the Weisman family when the family home at 313 S. Washington burned to the ground. Lancaster was immediately engaged to design the new one and apparently, he outdid himself. Using words such as “*palatial mansion*” and “*elegant residence*” the *Marshall Messenger* describes Lancaster’s design for the Weisman- Hirsch Home **as “*by far the handsomest residence in town.*”

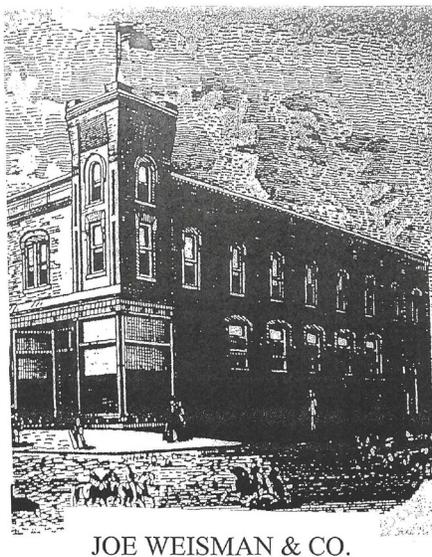


Figure 5: Old Joe Weisman Store on N. Washington



Figure 6: Weisman-Hirsch home on South Washington

As he was supervising the construction of the Weisman house Lancaster also had two other major projects - the historic 1901 Harrison County Courthouse, and Temple Moses Montefiore (1900). The Jewish synagogue on the corner of Burlison and Fulton streets was noted for its Moorish accent quite common in Jewish houses of worship built turn-of-the-century. It was razed in 1973 when the Jewish congregation could no longer support it. The Marshall Police and Fire Complex was built on the site in 1974.



In the next decade he designed the Mathewson House, Marshall City Hall *(1910), the three-story Elks Club building**, with its concave stained-glass window, considered by many the crown jewel of his commercial designs. (1903)

In 1910, Lancaster designed a New City Hall on the southeast corner of Peter Whetstone Square. His own office was in the basement. It burned in 1928, caused when a cigarette, pitched in a wastebasket, smoldered all night. Lancaster's office was also destroyed, taking with it all of his plans and work of the previous 25 years. He became responsible for the new Marshall City Hall as well.



Figure 7: Marshall City Hall, circa 1940s

He also created the Marshall High School (1909) on West Houston St. Other area high school buildings he designed included Henderson (1917). East and West End Elementary Schools in Marshall (1917) Overton (1916) Mineola (1924) Mineral Wells (1913) and Avinger (1935)



Figure 8: Old Marshall High School on West Houston St.

His commercial work also included bank buildings and structures in Pittsburgh, Henderson, in Carthage. He also designed the first Piggly Wiggly* grocery store in Marshall on E. Houston St. Fragments of the plans and drawings for many of those projects are in the Harrison County Historical Museum.

In his hometown, commercial structures included the Hawley Building – a car dealership - Marshall Mill and Elevator and the Coca- Cola bottling Plant* at 805 N. Washington St., built in 1920. Its Art Noveau look with glass brick trim and large show windows is a complete departure from the colonial, gabled style that he used at the turn of the century.

The Great Depression of 1939 destroyed his business. He moved briefly to Kilgore but things did not improve and he went to work in 1939 as a supervisor for the WPA, the Works Projects Administration. He was based in Dallas, where he died in 1947. A carbon copy of that WPA application is part of the family papers held by son, Jesse in the 1990's. They include a list of many of the commercial buildings Lancaster constructed ,including the East (one story) wing of the Starr Home,* now a state historic site.

Lancaster died December 1, 1947 and is buried in Greenwood Cemetery in Marshall.

*Indicates structures extant in 2017.

**Indicates structures on the with either RTHL designation or on the National Register of Historic Places

Sources:

Interviews:

Author with son, Son, Jesse C. Lancaster, Tyler, TX, who had the Lancaster Family papers. (April, 1992)

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Primary Sources

Various issues of the *Marshall Tri-Weekly Herald* 1863-1896

Various issues of the *Marshall Evening Messenger* including his obituary, 12, 3, 1947 in the *Marshall Evening Messenger*

Plans and artifacts in the archives of the Harrison County Historical Library.

Cornerstone of Marshall Elks Bldg. established 1903

Cornerstone of 1901 Harrison County Courthouse

Secondary Sources

Historical Marker Application essays for:

Temple Moses Montefiore

Weisman-Hirsch Home

Ginocchio Home and Ginocchio Hotel



Figure 9: C.G. Lancaster

Historical Marker Essay

For

Cornelius Granberry Lancaster (1863-1947)

Harrison County, Texas

Gail Beil, author 2017

One of Northeast Texas' most noted architects, C.G. Lancaster, was born in Marshall on March 4, 1863. (This date appears in his 1947 obituary, but 1864 is cited in family records on a website, "My Heritage.com") His father, John, was one of Marshall's pioneer physicians and the Lancaster family home* on E. Travis St. has its own historical marker.

Lancaster was a student at the Agriculture and Mechanical College in Bryan when he and his high school sweetheart, Allie Beckworth, 14, decided to run off and get married. He was only 18 and the *Marshall Tri-Weekly Herald* got word of the story under a headline "Runaway marriage" detailed the whole escapade in the story with a little unsolicited advice.

"While we do not approve of children playing such practical jokes on their parents The Messenger wishes them all joy and happiness and sincerely hopes they may never regret the step they have taken"ⁱⁱⁱ

The parents of both did not find the "practical joke" very funny and the marriage was annulled. Motivation for this rash act was hinted at in a "personal" entry in the *Tri-Weekly Herald*. "Mr. E.M. Beckwith, who retained his family in this city for several months after the removal of the land office of the T. and P. land office to Dallas with which department he was affiliated, has removed his family to that city where they will make their future (....) The people of Marshall regret the move and will gladly welcome their return to this city at any time."^{iv}

Lancaster continued his studies at what is now Texas A&M but never graduated, apparently for financial reasons. He returned to Marshall in 1884, set up an office and immediately begin plying his trade. He also married again, this time to Donnie Birdsong. The two had six children, five of whom lived to maturity. Their only son, Jesse Cornelius, was also an architect in practice for time with his father in Dallas before moving to Tyler.

In 1895 Lancaster formed a partnership with another of Texas' famous architects, J. Reily Gordon of San Antonio. "The celebrated architect who drew up the plans for the world's buildings. It is a strong alliance, and will doubtless work to the mutual advantage of both members of the firm."^v

The first, and perhaps only, project the two collaborated on was the Harrison County Courthouse which began construction in 1899, following a fire which completely destroyed the one built only ten years previously. According to Harrison County Court records, the contract with the two architects was signed within a month of the fire because the commissioners wished to stave off any campaigns to change the location of the county seat. No other architects were

considered.^{vi} The commissioners decided Gordon would create the basic design, aided by Lancaster who would then supervise the actual construction. The construction contract was awarded to Sonnefield and Emmins, and Lancaster would settle any differences between architect, contractor and commissioners court himself.

The most accurate description of the architectural innovations of this first of Gordon's Beaux-Arts classical style is found in *James Riely Gordon: His Courthouses and Other Public Architecture*, by Chris Meister

From the outside, it may appear that Gordon simply draped Beaux-Arts features over his Signature Plan for Harrison. Inside, however, the style allowed a major change to his central core. Relieved of the structural necessity of a forest of piers, Harrison has an open rotunda with a grand flight of steps leading to the second-story district courtroom doors. The staircase is made of cast iron with imposing art nouveau newel posts and marble treads. Brackets cantilever from the walls to support the second and third floors of the rotunda, leaving their circular balustrades unobstructed. Acanthus leaves and electric lights decorate these brackets. Ancillary stairways at the corner of the rotunda lead to the third floor and courtroom balcony. Art glass lights pierce the lowest level of the of the courthouse dome.

Later Lancaster was named the supervisor of all improvements, repairs etc. with this Richardson-Renaissance style public building. In that capacity he also supervised the remarkable extension of the east and west wings of the edifice in 1914 and 1917. Photographs, now in the historical museum archives, taken in 1914 show a huge worm gear in the basement of the courthouse and also on the third floor slowly pushing out the original façade allowing for an expansion of the courthouse.

From the ashes of a house fire at Border (now Travis St.) and Lafayette streets arose "a handsome seven room modern cottage for Mr. Marion Robertson." Total cost, according to an advertisement in Marshall Evening Messenger, was \$2,500.

1896, C.G. Lancaster designed a home for the Italian hotelier Charles Ginocchio at the foot of North Washington St**. where it intersects the Texas & Pacific Railway depot. Across the street, at the behest of Mr. Ginocchio, he also designed the home for Ginocchio's bartender Emile Meyer*. The story passed down through the Ginocchio and Pedison families is that Meyer was so important to the hotel owner that he wanted to be sure and keep him close at hand.

Additionally, advertisements in local newspapers name Lancaster as architect for the Drayton Powell Home at Burleson and Grove Streets, the "Grovil Womack Place on West Burleson and the Green Flag Store. It is likely that he was also responsible for the imposing presidents' home on the Wiley College campus since it is strikingly similar to the Weisman home and was built some two years later.

Finally, Lancaster designed the Ginocchio Hotel **, built in 1902, but authorized by the officials of the Texas and Pacific Railway in 1896 to be built at the entrance to the depot, with 48 feet along the depot siding and 120 feet along North Washington. In addition to the hotel itself a grocery store and barbershop will be on the south side. The description of the hotel that appears in the June 20. 1895 edition of the MEM was followed to the letter when the hotel was constructed some seven years later.

The hotel, the Ginocchio-Pedison Home, * as well as the Matthewson Home* built in 1902 on West Burleson St. all feature a unique paneling - curly pine - cut from land in Victoria Parish, Louisiana, and now apparently extinct. One explanation for its unique look came from Texas Forrester Lynn Reisner. He explained that the unique pattern of the wood is the result of "self- pruning" on the western side of a virgin pine forest. Reisner explained that the western side of the tree received more sunlight, adds many tiny branches to the trunk. In a drought, those branches are cast off, leaving a pattern of knotholes – called "curly pine." Virgin pine forests no longer exist; therefore, the wood is for all intents and purposes extinct.

Another theory is that small insects invaded the tree, causing the twisting design. Whatever the cause, the most significant fact is that there is no more.

Many of Lancaster's private homes and commercial buildings were finished by the skilled carpenters of the team in Texas and Pacific shops. Apparently, their workload was sporadic because very often, as the newspapers in town report, in

the construction of Lancaster's homes and commercial buildings it's often stated that the wood work is being done by "the skilled craftsmen of the T&P shops."

In 1898, Lancaster designed the building for Marshall's first department store, Joe Wiseman and Company*. The next year saw tragedy strike the Weisman family when the family home at 313 S. Washington burned to the ground. Lancaster was immediately engaged to design the new one and apparently, he outdid himself. Using words such as "palatial mansion" and "elegant residence" the *Marshall Messenger* describes Lancaster's design for the Weisman- Hirsch Home **as "by far the handsomest residence in town." Again, the craftsmen from the T & P shops were employed to cut and finish the quarter-sawn oak paneling the foyer and dining room. He also used curly pine to trim the mop boards and fascia on the second floor of the Weisman Home. *Proof of Lancaster's role in designing came when a board under the house bearing the name, "C.G. Lancaster" was discovered. It is now in the Harrison County Historical Museum.

As he was supervising the construction of the Weisman house Lancaster also had two other major projects - the historic 1901 Harrison County Courthouse, and Temple Moses Montefiore. (1900) The Jewish synagogue on the corner of Burlison and Fulton streets was noted for its Moorish accent quite common in Jewish houses of worship built turn-of-the-century. It was razed in 1973 when the Jewish congregation could no longer support it. The Marshall Police – Fire Complex was built on the site in 1974.

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According to an interview published on June 8, 1914 in the Morning Messenger, Lancaster took on a new project “White Way Lights” It is unclear precisely what they were, since city records show that street lights were established in downtown Marshall in 1895-96, but according to the interview he had already planned a white way for the front of the Perkins building (then on the southeast side of Peter Whetstone Square).and the Marshall Hotel “which will be strictly up-to-date with the most modern fixtures.”

If those in authority should shake off the seemingly lethargic feeling of spring and the other three seasons and build the white way around the square and down North Washington avenue, Marshall would no longer have such adverse criticism passed and be referred to as acting behind the times. The Perkins Bros have started a movement with hopes the city would follow suit.

Some things never change.

The Great Depression of 1939 destroyed his business. He moved briefly to Kilgore but things did not improve and he went to work in 1939 as a supervisor for the WPA, the Works Projects Administration. He was based in Dallas, where he died in 1947. A carbon copy of that WPA application is part of the family papers held by son, Jesse in the 1990's. They include a list of many of the commercial buildings Lancaster constructed ,including the East (one story) wing of the Starr Home,* now a state historic site.

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The Harrison County Historical Commission (Harrison CHC)

Harrison CHC Mission Statement

*“The Harrison County Historical Commission (Harrison CHC) is the county agency in Harrison County, Texas for historic preservation. Its mission is to assist the commissioner’s court and the Texas Historical Commission (THC) in the **preservation of our county’s historic and cultural resources** and to protect and preserve the county’s historic and prehistoric resources for the use, education, enjoyment and economic benefit of present and future generations.”*

You can find more information on the Harrison CHC at:

<http://harrisoncountytexas.org/historical-commission/>

ⁱ Marshall Evening Messenger, July 11, `1895 Gordon only designed the Texas Pavilion

ⁱⁱ Ibid, Oct 27, 1899

ⁱⁱⁱ Marshall Triweekly Herald, Aug. 9, 1884

^{iv} IBID Feb. 9, 1884

^v Marshall Evening Messenger, July 11, `1895 Gordon only designed the Texas Pavilion

^{vi} Ibid, Oct 27, 1899