



ANGELA ADELAIDE  
TRIGG  
TERMITE HALL

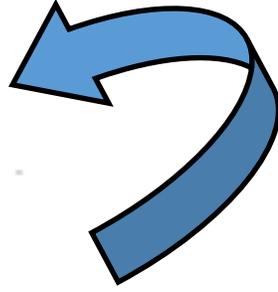


## **The Greene-Marston House, "Termite Hall,"**

2000 Dauphin Street

Added to the National Register of Historic Places on January 11, 1983.

broad and thick, and their facings have pointed Tudor arches. At the far end of the hall a massive stair of carved oak rises to a landing, twists, and disappears above. On the landing stands an ancient clock. It hasn't ticked for years, but a few nights ago, when the whole house was asleep, it struck two hundred times.



Caldwell Delaney describes

Termite Hall in his book, *Deep South*, 1942.



**Termite Hall** — Pictured is a Termite Hall family photo as the house looked several years ago. Termite Hall is noted for its architectural design, with Victorian columns lining the porch and columns connected by semicircular archways decorated with jig saw carving and pendants hanging from the center of the columns. The historic home is located on Dauphin Street and has changed many times over the years.

# Terror in Termite Hall?

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## History haunts this old house

By **BETTY SPENCE**  
Press Register Correspondent

Halfway House. Rapier House. Greene-Marston House. Termite Hall. These are some of the names to which the historically important house located at 2000 Dauphin St. has answered to for almost 150 years.

Oral history says the house was known during the 19th century as Halfway House. In 1919, shortly after the city limits had been extended to include it, it became the family residence of Regina Demouy Rapier, the widow of Col. John L. Rapier, who owned and ran the business side of The Mobile Register. Henceforth, came the name, The Rapier House.

When the house was added in 1983 to the National Register of Historic Places by the U.S. Department of the Interior, it was registered as the Greene-Marston House.

During the lifetime of the present owners, Eleanor Marston Benz and Adelaide Marston Trigg, the house noted for its architectural variations, has been and is more popularly known as Termite Hall.

Marston family members, which have occupied the house since 1919, use 1851 to date the house's erection, although records suggest a house on the property prior to 1851 when  
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**Regina Angela Rapier**  
1882-1978

Parents:

John Rapier and Regina Demouy

Married:

John Winthrop Marston

Children:

6 children died before the age of  
seven

Only two survived childhood,  
Eleanor and Adelaide

**Adelaide Caroline Marston**  
1919-2008

Parents:

John Marston and Regina Rapier

Married:

Edmund McKeon Trigg

# Historical

(Continued from Page 1)

Margaret K. Greene lived in the original 1½ four-square cottage.

The house is listed in the 1974 Landmark Survey which catalogs existing buildings which illustrate the evolution of 19th century architecture in Mobile, as the Green House.

The earliest knowledge of the house depicts it as having been a big farm dwelling with a cabbage farm around it and a saw mill across the street. The original estate, consisting of about 12 acres, took in the other side of what is now Dauphin Street. The front entrance of the house faced Old Shell Road, then called Springhill Old Shell Road.

Oral history says the house was once a stage coach stop for carriages going back and forth from Mobile to Spring Hill. The name Halfway House came from the location being designated as half way between the courthouse and Spring Hill College.

Older Mobilians living into the mid-1900s recalled seeing a horse trough on Old Shell Road in front of the entrance to Halfway House.

Reflecting the house's historical association with writers, Mary and Nettie Chandler, who wrote for The Mobile Register, the latter writing the "Betty letters" for the Betty Bienville society column, are said to have taken refuge in Halfway House during the yellow fever epidemic of 1887.

It is generally believed that Martin Van Heuval in 1903 enlarged the house into the two-and-one-half building it is today, employing Victorian columns connected by semi-circular archways in the two porches and jigsaw work in the gables.

An Englishman, William Syson who was president of a lumber and shipping company, further altered the house in

1910 by replacing the porch windows with French doors and glassing in two of the western bays of the front porch.

Syson, who supposedly wanted to reproduce his country house in England, brought back from his yearly trips, dark oak panels of "funeral grandeur," to panel the front parlor, the dining room, the hall and carved stairway.

The present owners of the Greene-Marston House say the house with its jigsaw decorated gables and its handsome fireplaces has been as it is today ever since their grandmother bought it from the Sysons in 1919.

Family tradition says that the 1½-story cottage attached on the west side of the main house was apparently once the unattached kitchen and servant's quarters.

In 1932, the house became the property of Regina Rapier Marston, the mother of the present owners who remember when there were peach, fig and pecan orchards on the north side of the estate.

Playing as little girls in the fancy doll house Syson had built for his daughter, is another fond memory of Mrs. Trigg and Mrs. Benz.

The doll house was made of the same oak as the bookcases in the library in the main house. The play house had several large rooms and French windows with window seats that lifted up.

During the depression Mrs. Marston sold the doll house to the yardman who according to Mrs. Trigg, "added a kitchen and bathroom and lived in it."

Heavy 3-by-5 planks off a huge barn the Marston girls remember as having a hay shute, were over the years traded by Mrs. Marston for the services of handymen.

Today, the house that "jes grew," into a rambling conglomerate of periods and styles, or arches, gables, and gee-gaws, is more popularly known as Termite Hall.



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over the years.

As early as 1942, the house is called Termite Hall in Caldwell Delaney's "Deep South."

Eugene Walter, a long-time friend of the Marston family has with his prolific literary achievements both popularized the name Termite Hall and endeared the grand old house to a wide literary audience.

An embellished account of how the house came to be named Termite Hall, as well as a full page photo of Mrs. Marston in a rocking chair on the upstairs front veranda, appears in Walter's Time Life, "American Cooking: Southern Style."

Mrs. Trigg laughs when she says, "It's not true that mother ever fell through the floor." According to her, the family started jokingly calling the

house Termite Hall following an incident involving the crumbling of a balustrade railing that went around the terrace just outside the parlor.

The Marston girls and some friends had been sitting, as was their custom, on the wide wooden rail.

"When the last person jumped off, the rail fell into the yard. Termites had hollowed out the columns holding up the balustrade. We started calling the house Termite Hall and the name stuck."

Walter's "Delectable Dishes From Termite Hall," is another of the house's literary associations, as are his novels and ballet play, "The Masque of Adelaide and Triggerino."

Other works inspired by Termite Hall are those of play writes, Tom Perez (who like

Walter, spent a lot of enjoyable time at 2000 Dauphin St.) and Tom Atkins.

Mobilians are familiar with Perez, "Cockroach Hall," which predates Atkin's play entitled, "Pigeons."

In a sense, the numerous literary associations of the house of many names, go all the way back to 1874 when the husband of Regina Demouy Rapier, Col. John L. Rapier, formed a partnership with John Forsyth Jr. to operate the Register, and who at the death of Forsyth in 1877 became the principal owner.

The property of the widely acclaimed house is not as large as it once was and the house is showing its age. But the owners contend they have kept the house, "because we love it and don't plan to sell it."

# Adelaide Marston Trigg and the Haunted Book Store

Mobile Register, November 7, 1982

By RALPH POORE  
Port City Writer

Literary journalist Christopher Morley warned the owners of The Haunted Book Shop, in giving his permission for them to use the name from one of his novels as the name of the bookstore, that others who had used the name had soon gone out of business.

In the more than 40 years since, the Mobile bookstore has almost given up the ghost twice, but has remained an institution very dear to the city's book lovers.

The bookshop has become a part of the city's mythology because soon after its establishment it became not only the mecca for Mobile's intellectuals but also a gathering spot for almost everyone who had business to transact downtown.

One-time employee of the bookshop and now City Museum Director Caldwell Delaney related that "Those who grew up since downtown has gone down" as the center of the city's activity "don't know what it's like" to go into a bookstore that is "intellectually alive" and filled with "exciting people."

Delaney attributed much of the shop's success to its founder, the late Cameron McRae Plummer. He said Plummer was the "best informed human being I know" and called him the "perfect person to be in a book store."

Mrs. Plummer, whom her friend call Mary Francis and who now run the bookshop, said that her husband had suffered from tuberculosis during his youth, and while bedridden he read the entire Encyclopedia Britannica and all of the Harvard Classics.

Before The Haunted Book Shop, Delaney said, no place in the city

existed for people who loved books to meet and talk. He said visitors to the shop were made welcome and were served coffee and "on occasion something stronger."

But he also attributed some of the store's attraction for young men to the charm of then co-owner Adelaide Marston, who is now Mrs. Edwin M. Trigg.

Mrs. Trigg was newly graduated from Ursuline College in New Orleans when Plummer approached her in 1941 about opening a bookstore in Mobile. Although Hammel's Department Store and a Royal Street newsstand handled books, she said there were no bookstores in the city at the time. In fact, the last bookstore had closed in the late 1920s.

Her relatives warned her against the venture saying that people in Mobile would not support a bookstore. Nevertheless, Mrs. Trigg and Plummer raised approximately \$1,500 to begin the business and began receiving orders as they were building the book shelves.

The bookshop opened at 56-58 S. Conception St. in the Chamberlain-Rapier building, noted for its carriage archway which runs through the center, dividing the house into a north and south side. Plummer lived with his mother in the north side of the building, and the book shop was in the south side.

With very little money available, the two owners did everything they could to save money. Locating an old buffet, they cut it down for use as display table. That particular piece is still used.

They also bought some used furniture and lanterns. When finished, the place "looked quite haunted," Mrs. Trigg said.

nington.

The bookstore didn't have enough books at first to fill its shelves, Mrs. Plummer said, so the books were stood up with their bindings open to take up more space on the shelves.

Although it was founded just before World War II and while the country was still feeling the effects of the Great Depression, the establishment's timing was nevertheless fortuitous.

Brookley Air Force Base was under construction and near completion. A few months after the bookshop opened the war began and the city's population practically doubled, as workers poured into Mobile to jobs at the shipbuilding companies.

All that activity created a great demand for technical books, and The Haunted Book Shop supplied them. Mrs. Trigg said that a 6-foot-long "coffin box" of technical books would arrive at the store and be sold out within a week. Given a classical education, Mrs. Trigg said, she soon became proficient in technical language.

Those technical books also gave the bookshop the cash flow it needed to survive.

As the migrants arrived in Mobile for war work, efforts were made by the government to educate and train them. That created a demand for the text books from the adults who were filling the night education classes.

The Haunted Book Shop also made an effort to supply the many vessels which docked in Mobile, their hands eager for something to read.

Another reason the shop developed a reputation in Mobile was that it emphasized service. If a particular book was not available at