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UA11 Western Kentucky University: President's Homes

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NEWS

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Western Kentucky University

President's Homes

Henry Hardin Cherry, Western Kentucky University's first president (1906 - 1937), lived in his own home until 1931. It is believed that he lived at three different addresses prior to moving into the home built by Western in 1931. These addresses, as listed in the Bowling Green City Directory, were 1338 College Street, 1426 College Street (his stable is listed at 1426 1/2 College Street) and 410 East 15th Street (this address is across from Cherry Hall.)

On July 7, 1931, the Board of Regents approved a \$26,000 contract with Van Construction Company of Louisville to build the first president's home and for it to be completed October 1. The address, as listed in the 1931 Bowling Green City Directory, was Russellville Road, South of 15th Street. (This home was occupied by three of Western's presidents.) Today, this structure is known as the Craig Alumni Center.

The architect for this home was Brinton B. Davis of Louisville. Davis had a 30-year affiliation with Western and became known as the "Hill Builder." He designed the 1909 Master Plan, 10 major campus buildings, the school's swimming pool and stadium.

The first home was described as federal architecture with typical federal ornamentation including the semi-circular front portico, the accenting balustrades and the Grecian urn above the front central windows.

The home has 16 rooms, five full baths, two one-half baths, a patio and a half basement. The first floor consists of a library, reception-living room combination, formal dining room, office, kitchen, recreation room and a family dining room. The second floor has five bedrooms and the third floor contains two bedrooms.

Dr. Cherry lived here until his death in 1937.

In September 1937, the home underwent some redecorating and painting.

In 1938, a \$6,000 contract was awarded to the lowest bidder, J. R. Hale Jr., of Fort Thomas, to repair and redecorate. This contract included refinishing furniture, new furniture, new carpets, shades, curtains and draperies.

Dr. Paul L. Garrett was WKU's second president and occupied this home until 1955.

The third president, Dr. Kelly Thompson, lived here from 1955 to 1966.

In 1956, the home was remodeled with the work being done primarily by campus personnel supervised by L. T. Smith. One of the main architectural changes was the conversion of the sun porch, in the back of the house, into a family room.

The following is quoted from the May 25, 1956 edition of the *College Heights Herald*: "The furniture was refinished and cleaned entirely by the students of the Trade School, under the direction of Michael Bardin.

A celadon green was chosen to bring out the beauty of the living room, library and dining room which are all visible as one enters the front door. This is complimented by drapes and upholstery of the same hue. A beautiful champagne carpet furnishes the final touch of beauty to the front part of the house. The upper two floors show exquisite taste in furnishings and decoration, with various color schemes and matching draperies.

Mr. George Lyon, of the State Department of Engineers at Frankfort, designed the modern kitchen The cabinet paneling is done in birch. It is certainly one of the most beautiful kitchens to be seen in this area.

The ground work around the house as far as flowers, shrubs, and beautification, is the excellent work of Mrs. Paul L. Garrett. Her helpful hints and advise concerning the whole project would surely have been missed greatly by all who were concerned with the remodeling. Other work done on the outside was by Mr. Woodward and his crew which included the widening of the driveway and newly concreted walks.

Miss Sarah Tyler and Miss Margie Helm were very helpful in furnishing the library and various book shelves in the home with selected books from an approximate 8,000 books given to the Kentucky Library by the state to be used any place on the campus.

Many people helped with this work which can be termed as a campus project "

In 1960, renovations included the closing of the back entrance and a fire escape from the third floor. "The closing of the back entrance was to make the back more beautiful and make a family entrance," said Ken Helm of the *College Heights Herald*.

In 1965, four bids were studied by university officials for the construction of a new home to be located in the southwest area of campus. The specifications for the residence were prepared by Ben Johnson and Associates, architects from Owensboro. All bids were turned down because of the high cost.

Alumni Affairs activities were moved to the home in 1966.

In 1964, the University purchased the 15-room home of M. E. Schell located at 1536 State Street and it was used as a temporary student center. It was converted to a women's dormitory in 1965. The College Heights Foundation spent \$100,000 in 1966 to convert it to a temporary president's home. (The College Heights Foundation set aside \$75,000 for property for a new home.) This home now houses Continuing Education.

Dr. Thompson lived at this address until 1969 when Dero Downing became president.

Dr. Downing lived here until his retirement in 1979.

Dr. John D. Minton, Sr., interim president in 1979, lived in his own home.

In October of 1978, the Board of Regents appointed a committee to look for a home for Western's next president. In February of 1979, the property at 1700 Chestnut Street, owned by Ed Alford, was recommended. Alford had bought the property from Dr. Frank Moore who purchased the land in 1958.

On March 1, 1979, the Board of Regents, in cooperation with the College Heights Foundation, purchased the home for \$165,000. Approximately \$97,000 of the cost was paid by the College Heights Foundation, and the University covered the difference in annual payments of \$6,500. The Foundation agreed to pay \$35,000 for renovations and the University paid an additional \$66,000 for renovations. Western paid approximately \$1,000 a month to the Foundation for rent on the property. The rent was determined by how much income the Foundation would have received if the money had been invested elsewhere.

Dr. Donald Zacharias became president in the fall of 1979 and lived at 1536 State Street until the new home was remodeled at 1700 Chestnut Street.

The renovation included new heating and cooling systems, new electrical wiring, painting, decorating, installing kitchen cabinets, work on floors, new draperies and new carpets and rugs. Approximately \$29,000 was spent on new furniture.

Dr. Zacharias was the first president to live in this home which continues to serve as the president's home.

Dr. Paul Cook served as interim president during part of 1985 and 1986 during which time he lived in his own home.

Dr. Kern Alexander was WKU President from 1985-1988 and maintained his residence in the President's Home.

Dr. Thomas Meredith became Western's eighth president in 1988. He moved into the home at 1700 Chestnut Street and continues to live there with his wife, Susan, and their two sons.