

## JENIFER'S HOUSE



“Jenifer’s House”

Aaron Friedman decided that he wanted to build a Victorian-style house for his second granddaughter, Jenifer<sup>1</sup>. Before beginning this project, he studied Victorian architecture by checking out books from the library, reading design magazines, and reviewing house plans. He and his wife, Sarah, traveled to San Francisco and other cities to look at Victorian houses in hopes of finding an example on which he could base his next miniature house. As Friedman explained to *Mobile Press-Register* reporter Molly Hunter, “San Francisco was where I really got the feel for the architecture – the city is full of it. I

studied about archways, Victorian detail, furniture and the era’s colors. I really got an education on the era if nothing else.”<sup>2</sup>

Ultimately, Friedman noticed the Victorian-style house at the corner of Government and Georgia Streets in Mobile, Alabama. Completed in 1901, that house is known as the “Tacon-Tissington-Jones House” and also “Tacon-Tissington-Barfield House.”

“This home was quite large and had all of the gingerbread that I was looking for in a home,” Friedman commented. “However, it was so large that I had to cut down on the size and also leave the back of the house open so it would be easy to view all of the rooms. One thing was certain: I wasn’t going to build another replica as I did in Rachel’s House because I didn’t want to have to spend all that time getting everything so exact.”

The exterior of Jenifer’s House incorporates many of the classic elements of Victorian architecture outside and in, including copious San Francisco style “gingerbread” accents around windows and door frames, a round tower or turret, and decorative Victorian-era medallions, stained glass, moldings, brackets, spindles, and railings. Friedman painted the house yellow with brown, rust, and white trim.

Among other things, Friedman used tongue depressors, cut to size, for the gingerbread shingles under the roof gables. He also placed more than 4,000 cedar shakes on the different levels of the roof by hand. Some of those had to be hand cut to fit around curved surfaces or sharp angles, arches, and octagonal windows. The brick chimneys and foundation piers are made of real miniature fired bricks with mortar in between.



**Detail showing tongue depressors used to create gingerbread siding.**

The tower features octagonal stained glass windows. Friedman noted that the lapped wooden exterior siding had to be bent to fit around the curved tower. “That was quite a job,” he remarked. Friedman furnished the small room at the top of the tower as a sewing room, complete with a bust form and treadle sewing machine.



**Aaron Friedman points out details on “Jenifer’s House.”** *Photo courtesy of Alabama Department of Archives and History. Donated by Alabama Media Group. Photo by Dave Hamby, Mobile Press-Register.*

furniture and miniature wallpapers that were designed to scale and that reflect styles and colors common in the Victorian era. Sarah Friedman needlepointed an Oriental rug for almost every room in the house, and each rug is color coordinated to match the wallpaper in that room. Pearl Brook, a close friend of the Friedmans, designed and crafted the bedspreads as well as the curtains and draperies throughout the house, which include tiny café curtains in the kitchen, velvet draperies in the living and dining rooms, and dainty eyelet tie-backs in the master bedroom.<sup>3</sup>

Most of the floors throughout the house are walnut, which Friedman glued down one strip at a time and then sanded, stained, and varnished. Brass chandeliers hang in the foyer, living room, and dining room, some of which feature imported crystal with 23 karat gold plate.<sup>4</sup> Victorian style medallions grace the living and dining room ceilings.

Elegant double front doors with stained glass open into the entry foyer. This entrance area features sharp black and white tile flooring with a needlepoint rug made by Sarah Friedman in the center. A marble-top table stands on this rug, with a potted plant in full bloom and the daily newspaper placed atop the table. A mirrored coat rack stands next to the front doors, with a hat

Wooden porches surround both floors on three sides of the house. Friedman said that he was able to purchase and install pre-made columns, rails and spindles in most places, but he hand cut the brackets at the top of each column to match the Victorian brackets on the original house. He also made the curved sections of the porch railings by hand. Friedman mitered the wooden porch floors so that the boards, glued down one at a time, meet precisely. A swing, rocking chairs, bench, plant stands with potted plants, and hanging ferns complete the turn-of-the-century look and feel of the porches. The base of the house is surrounded by hand-made miniature landscaping with tiny flowers in full bloom.

The open “back side” of the house reveals a total of eight rooms, upstairs and down. Although Friedman duplicated many of the exterior features of the actual house, he did not attempt to duplicate any of the interior rooms. Instead, he created his own miniature version of what a Victorian-era home might include.

As noted by Hunter in the *Press-Register*, all of the rooms in the house include heavy looking

and purse made by Pearl Brook hanging from it. The entry is lit by a gold chandelier. A perfectly scaled dark oak stairway with paneling and wainscoting leads to the second floor. As quoted by Hunter in the *Press-Register*, Friedman said “It took me about three weeks to build the stairway.”<sup>5</sup> Friedman also pointed out the grandfather clock with a working quartz movement in the entry foyer.



**Front Entry**

The stately parlor features multicolor floral wallpaper in burgundy, green, and cream colors. The needlepointed rug, upholstery, and drapes all reflect these colors as well. The Victorian-era furniture in this room includes a secretary desk and old-style rectangular upright piano. A portrait of Sarah Friedman hangs above the ornate marble mantle surrounding the fireplace. This is actually a photograph of the painting by Mobile artist Carleton W. Furbush<sup>6</sup> that hung in the living room of the Friedmans’ home in Mobile. As Friedman told the *Press-Register*, “We just took a photograph of the one in the living room and framed it in a gilded Victorian frame.” A tray with red wine and cheese is set before the fireplace, which flickers with a fire. Friedman explained that the “fire” is really a tiny light that flickers on and off.<sup>7</sup>



**Parlor**

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The dining room is decorated with lavender and gold wallpaper and gold drapes that pick up the color in the wallpaper. The dining table is set with porcelain china and a matching soup tureen is set on the nearby buffet. Sarah Friedman needlepointed the bell pull that hangs on the wall adjacent to the kitchen. As quoted by Hunter in the *Press-Register*, Friedman said “I couldn’t find exactly what I was looking for to furnish the dining room, so I ended up ordering a kit,” he said.<sup>8</sup> Friedman also acknowledged that assembling the tiny individual kit pieces and then finishing the furniture turned out to be a very tedious process, even for someone with the patience he demonstrated in building this and other miniature houses.



**Dining Room**

The kitchen has a dark wood floor, bright yellow wallpaper, and café curtains made by Pearl Brook. Sarah Friedman needlepointed the two multi-color rag rugs on the floor and the “Home Sweet Home” sampler hanging on the wall. The kitchen is furnished with a wood stove,



**Kitchen**

“ice box” (prior to electric refrigeration), wooden chopping block, and pine furniture that were typical of the era. The kitchen sink has a hand pump for water. A hand mill for grinding grain and coffee is mounted on the cupboard, which also holds canned and boxed foods. Pots and pans hang on the wall and some fresh fruits and vegetables are set on the butcher block.

Upstairs, the master bedroom is furnished with an elaborate Victorian-era wood headboard, dresser, dressing table, and shaving stand with mirror. Needlepointed pillows made by Sarah Friedman decorate the bed, and a multicolor rug needlepointed by Sarah complements the colors found in the wheat basket patterned wallpaper. A bright yellow dress and broad brimmed hat made by Pearl Brook hang next to the mirrored dressing table. Pearl also made the elegant lace curtains that grace the windows. A porcelain water bowl, pitcher, and shaving mug and brush arranged on the dresser and shaving stand are ready for the gentleman’s morning shave.

The master bathroom includes an old-fashioned water closet with pull chain. The porcelain tub is enclosed in a walnut tub surround, with walnut wainscoting on the wall above. Likewise, the sink is enclosed in a walnut cabinet. A beautiful stained glass window in the wall above the tub lets in natural light. Yellow towels match the yellow paint on the walls, which coordinates with the yellow and brown tile flooring. Pearl Brook made the furry brown throw rug in this bathroom. A miniature newspaper lies on the floor, as if someone had taken the time to read the headlines before heading out for the day.



**Master Bedroom**

A small sitting area is arranged adjacent to the bathroom. Here, a needlepoint throw pillow by Sarah Friedman is placed on the upholstered love seat.

A second upstairs bedroom is furnished with a brass bed and brass hat rack. The floral pattern and grey stripes on



**Master Bathroom**



**Second Bedroom**

the bedspread repeat the Victorian era pattern in the wallpaper. The red, white, and blue needlepoint rug brightens the room and ties in with the white drapes with red trim. A red and white hat made by Pearl Brook hangs on the hat rack. A coal stove heats this room and a wind-up Victrola stands ready to provide musical entertainment. The family bible lies on the bed.

surrounded with frilly lace. An infant lies inside the bear skin rug. A child-sized rocking chair, toy chest, rocking horses, and even a miniature doll house in the corner are ready for playtime. The room is decorated with yellow wallpaper that has a teddy bear and “ABC” pattern, along with several of Sarah Friedman’s framed needlepoint wall hangings. The final touch: a framed photograph of Jenifer as a young girl sits on the dresser in the nursery.

The nursery room adjoining the second bedroom features a brass crib and a bassinet the bassinet and another baby is crawling on the



**Nursery**

Friedman completed Jenifer’s House in 1980, after about one year of construction.

*Information compiled by Jere Friedman. All photos by Jere Friedman unless otherwise noted.*  
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### **Sources:**

- Video of Aaron Friedman describing Jenifer’s House
- Hunter, Molly. “Grandpa does it again.” *Mobile Press Register* 29 July, 1980: D-4. Print.
- Fields, Mary Durland. “Southern House Tour.” *Nutshell News* Dec. 1992: 36-41. Print.

### **Endnotes:**

- <sup>1</sup> As an adult, Jenifer is now known as Georgie Friedman.
- <sup>2</sup> Hunter, Molly. “Grandpa does it again.” *Mobile Press Register* 29 July, 1980: D-4. Print.
- <sup>3</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>4</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>6</sup> Carleton W. Furbush (1895-1966) was a Mobile artist and very active in the Mobile Art Association. He was especially known for formal portraits of local women.
- <sup>7</sup> Hunter, *op. cit.*
- <sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

*[Continued on next page.]*

Additional photos of Jennifer's House:



**Rear View of Jenifer's House**



**Parlor**

Exterior Details below and next page.



