**Preserve Arkansas Mid-Mod Tour**

**Fuller-Shannon House**

**September 28, 2019**

The Woodland Hills Development is a beautiful shaded neighborhood set into a rolling landscape. It was created by brothers, Hubert and Allen Parker in the late-1950s. The Parkers were a successful local family who also owned a local Buick Dealership and furniture store. However, the Parkers expanded into real estate development in the 1950s, with Woodland Hills being one of their earliest projects. Some their other projects were “Birdland” near the Jonesboro Country Club, University Shopping Center on Nettleton, and Creekwood Subdivision, located just across the interstate from Woodland Hills to the southwest.

The street pattern in Woodland Hills was laid out to take advantage of the hilly nature of the area. This resulted in long, irregular blocks and several curving streets with mostly irregular lot sizes and shapes. Additionally, the Parkers decided to run the power lines for the area through the middle of the blocks to keep them from being visible from the street. A majority of the homes in the area were built in the mid-to-late 1960s. Unlike the homes on this side of Locust Drive, which had walkout basements, many of the homes on Twin Oaks were limited in square-footage due to the sloping terrain. In some cases, the terrain also necessitated that the house be placed further back on the lot, created minimal backyard space. One such lot was purchased by Robert and Anita Fuller in late 1967.

Robert S. Fuller was born on Valentine’s Day in 1936 in Searcy, Arkansas. He attended college at Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas, and went on to study at the Union Theological Seminary in New York City, where he obtained a master’s degree. While in New York, he attended The Julliard School of Music and performed in the Chorale at Carnegie Hall with The New York Philharmonic Orchestra, Leonard Bernstein, conductor. Though Robert was an accomplished pianist and choral director in New York, he chose to return to Arkansas in 1964 to teach choral music at Jonesboro High School for 14 years. During some of those years, he also was the Choir Director for First United Methodist Church and First Baptist. Anita C. Fuller was also from Searcy, Arkansas, where she was born on August 4, 1936. When the couple moved to Jonesboro, she took a position as the superintendent of public health nurses for Craighead County. The Fullers were very involved in various civic and church groups in Jonesboro and were regarded as beloved members of the community. Three years after the Fullers moved to Jonesboro, they were in need of a new house for their family of four. Because of their occupations in public service, the house needed to be economical in both scale and budget. It also needed to be handicap accessible, as Robert had contracted polio in high school and was left with severe mobility problems, which required him to walk with forearm crutches the remainder of his life.

## The couple turned to the local form of Stuck, Frier, Lane, Scott, Inc., for the design of their new house, as many of the architects there also attended First Methodist Church. The firm had been founded when Elmer Axtell Stuck opened his own private practice in Jonesboro in 1926, just two years after graduating from Washington University in St. Louis’s architecture program. Stuck was a member of the prominent Stuck family in Jonesboro, who owned a large lumber mill and building supply company in downtown. Because of his family connections, he was able to get several high-profile projects in the early years of his practice. Some of the more impressive commissions were the 1931 Medical Arts Building in Hot Springs and the 1934 Craighead County Courthouse and 1936 Earl Bell Community Center in Jonesboro. Over the years, the firm’s name changed a few times. The first one came in 1928 when he partnered with notable architect John Parks Almand until 1931. This was followed by a partnership with notable Modernist architect Yandell Johnson from 1931 until 1938. After that, the firm assumed the name of Elmer Stuck & Associates until 1960, when it became Stuck, Frier, Lane, Scott, Inc. In recent years the firm was once again renamed to simply Stuck Associates Architects.

## Among the staff at Stuck, Frier, Lane, Scott, Inc., was Aubrey E. Scott, Jr. Scott was born in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1922 to parents Aubrey and Mildred Scott. However, the Scotts moved to Arkansas when Aubrey was still a child, when his father, who was a banker, took a job in Blytheville. After Scott graduated from high school, he attended college at the Arkansas State Teachers College, now called University of Central Arkansas. However, with the outbreak of World War II, he enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps, where he served in the Pacific theater and eventually rose to the rank of captain. Shortly before the war’s conclusion, he was able to return state-side, when he was selected to be the Marine representative pallbearer in Franklin D. Roosevelt’s funeral.

After the war, he began attending the University of Tennessee, studying civil engineering, but soon transferred to the University of Arkansas, where he studied architecture from 1949 to 1952. Scott was a member of the third class to graduate from the program, alongside significant Little Rock architect, Dan C. Cowling. Scott was offered a position at the Stuck firm as soon as he graduated from the University, moving to Jonesboro in May 1952. In 1958, Scott sat for and passed the Arkansas Architectural Licensing Exam being awarded lincense No. 269. He remained with the Stuck firm for the whole of his architectural career, a relatively rare circumstance in the field. Scott was involved in the design of several significant projects by the firm in Jonesboro over the years, including the ca. 1960 Stuck Frier Lane Scott, Inc., office building on Southwest Drive, the 1960 Temple Israel, 1964 Craighead County Library, the 1965 Jonesboro City Hall, and the 1969 Jonesboro Municipal Airport. The firm also designed a number of churches in the area during this time, including the 1958 St. Michael’s Catholic Church in West Memphis, the 1962 Nettleton Church of Christ, the 1966 St. Paul United Methodist Church in Jonesboro, the 1966 First United Methodist Chapel in Osceola, and the 1968 St. Joseph the Worker Catholic Church in Corning.

## As luck would have it, Aubrey Scott and his wife, Margaret, were in the Chancel Choir led by Robert Fuller. The Scotts and the Fullers became great friends, so when the Fullers were looking for an architect, they naturally turned to Scott. Scott drew inspiration from the work of internationally renowned architect Edward Durell Stone when he was designing the Fuller House. Stone, who was a native of Fayetteville, Arkansas, was a common presence on the University of Arkansas campus during Scott’s time there, due in large part to the designing and construction of the Fine Arts Center, which was completed in 1951. Because of this, we was also a common presence in the architecture program’s drafting studios, offering advice and suggestions to any of the students on their projects. This led many of the students to hold him in the highest regard, and often, continue to use his work as inspiration for their designs even when they had gone out into the professional field. In the case of the Fuller House, it was Stone’s Modernist “dogtrots” that served as the primary muse. In the mid-1950s, Stone designed a series of houses that he called his “dogtrots.” While, three of the four designs were meant to be built in the Northeast, one was constructed in McGehee, Arkansas, for Jay Lewis. The central idea to the house was to completely eliminate any interior hallways. As Stone later said in an October 1962 article in *The Architectural Record*: “ The idea of a great open space through the house is an appealing one to me. A more spacious plan does away with all hallways, the bane of my existence.” This idea manifested in the plan of the houses with a large central space, which contained the living and dining areas, with all of the other rooms in two lines, one on either side, opening directly off of the main space. Additionally, Stone capped the designs with a simple, low-slung front-facing gable roof, and also raised the house up from the ground level, placing it on what he called a podium. While Scott’s design for the Fuller House does contain a hallway, the overall idea of the house is very similar.

Similar in form to Stone’s “dogtrot” designs, the Fuller House was designed as an open plan of three bays with the kitchen/dining on the left, the living in the middle, and the bedrooms on the right. There was no foyer or entry space added to the front or the back, aside from a small porch. However, there is a four-foot corridor in the bedroom wing, which accommodates access to the backyard, a utility closet and the only excess storage. On the exterior, the house was placed on a recessed foundation that was painted a dark color to give the illusion that the house was floating. In an effort to keep costs down, the house was clad in T1-11 siding with concrete block being used to build the foundation. Additionally, painted plywood sheets were used for the ceilings, which ran continuously from the interior to the edge of the eave on the exterior. The 1740 square-foot plan appears to be larger than it is due to vaulted ceilings in every room except the hallway and the bathrooms. To accommodate the requirements of the owner, the home’s main entrance was located at the rear so that it would be at ground level and not require any steps or ramp to access it. Additionally, the house had no interior steps and wide doorways, which swung to the outside to give easy exits. Robert Fuller had two upright pianos that were important to him personally and professionally, which had to be planned around. The high windows made the placement of pianos easier. However, the Fullers did not own a piece of Modernist furniture, quite the opposite in fact. Having a house full of early American-style furnishings gave Anita pause when she saw the modern design of the new house. Robert loved it and Anita did not. As she worried about putting her furniture in this house, she spoke with another architect friend, Hardy Little. He advised her that she could decorate it in any style. So, the home was decorated with early American wallpapers and drapery and Kentile brick kitchen floor to give an appropriate backdrop to their existing furnishings.

A point of interest, the plans and specifications are dated May 1, 1968, with a bid date of May 31. A major tornado hit Jonesboro in May of 1968. Only two bids were received, one from J.T. White Lumber Co. and the other from Barton Lumber Co., with J.T. White receiving the contract. Looking back, the tornado had required the services of all individual contractors for repairs. This unfortunate event lead to a delay in the construction of the house, as materials and workmen were busy repairing the city. The Fullers moved into their new home in 1969.

After teaching summer courses at Southern Illinois University, Fuller accepted full-time position at Oak Park and River Forest School as the Choral Director 1977, where he remained until his retirement. The Fullers placed their Jonesboro home on the market in the spring of 1978.

Howard and Claudia Shannon came to Jonesboro in 1974, one year after their marriage. Due to family issues, Claudia felt she was needed at home. However, interior design was a field few people understood in Arkansas. Both Claudia and Howard had degrees in Interior Design and had met while working for Holiday Inns International home offices in Memphis. Howard, a Jackson, Mississippi, native, had first gone to Auburn University for architecture and finished in interior design within the same department. Claudia attended the University of Kansas because Interior design was not offered in Arkansas. In 1974, they were among the few to arrive in Arkansas with this education. Howard and Claudia opened Interior Design, Inc. and completed the interiors of Mercantile Bank, Citizens Bank, The Juvenile Probation Home, a few offices and the Elks Club between 1974 and 1976. They were close to deciding to move to a larger city when House Beautiful Interiors on Southwest Drive was made available to them. Considering their one-year-old son and her family, they bought the store and drapery workroom. They continued to do space planning and specification for commercial projects under the name of Interior Design, Inc., and residential design at House Beautiful. They had been renting one of Elmer Stuck’s first commissions, a duplex he had designed for his aunt in 1927 on Washington Avenue, where they had their business office on one side and their residence on the other. By 1978, they had a second child on the way and felt it was time to buy their own home. Luckily for them, the Mid-Century Modern design had fallen almost completely out of favor by the time the Fuller House hit the market. With the interior design field still in its infancy in Jonesboro, it was still a struggle to find consistent work, which meant they were also needing an economically priced home. They fell in love with the Fuller home and to their benefit; there were few offers for the Modernist residential building. This allowed the Shannons to purchase and move in August 1978 with a two year old and an infant. They loved the trees and the home’s windows. Floor to ceiling windows in the living area and glass in the gables brought the outdoors into the home. The Shannons were both outdoorsy people who grilled most every night and loved to entertain, so the house’s open design and abundant natural light appealed greatly to them. The front bedroom with the smaller closet was perfect for the couple’s son. While the middle bedroom, with ample closet space, was ideal for their daughter. As such, one change that was made was to move the hanging light fixture in the dining room to the center allowing for a table to seat 8 to 12 persons. Previously it had been near the kitchen allowing for the piano/sitting area to be at the front of that room.

The Shannons respect for the design of this Mid-Century Modern home meant that they only made minor changes to the interior of the house over the last 40+ years. Primarily, this has been in paint colors and wall finishes. However, a few of the other notable changes are the centering of the dining room chandelier to allow for a larger dining table, the addition of an antique wardrobe for a dry bar in front of the door leading to the front third bay, and the replacement of the bathroom countertops and master bath shower with solid-surface. Surprisingly, the bathrooms have their original medicine cabinets and floor/ wall tiles, and the kitchen countertops are still the white Formica with post form edge as they were built originally. Most of the lighting in the house is original as well, including the square recessed lights in the hall and bathrooms and the exposed lamp, porcelain fixtures in closets and utility area. However, additional fixtures have been added, such as track lighting in the living room and the study, and ceiling fans in the kitchen and master bedroom.

The landscape carries the most changes by the Shannons. Five of the major trees have been removed by falling or fear they were dying and might fall. In the early years, Howard Shannon terraced the yard with railroad ties, which have rotted now in many cases. A pea gravel perimeter, which caught the drip from the roof, was added and has proved to be very beneficial. Other Arkansas rocks have been used in the landscape. Due to the deep shade and the inability to grow grass, the plantings have changed numerous times.

The only design flaw that has been apparent over the years is the 2/12 pitch of the roof with a typical shingle roof within multiple large trees. Falling leaves, limbs and gumballs have caused the need to keep the roof swept over the years. On occasion, the limbs have penetrated the ceiling. That in combination with a few hailstorms has proved the need to change the roof 4 times in 40 years. The last time in 2016, the Shannons made the good decision to go with a heat welded, modified bitumen commercial roof system with a layer of 1.5” polyisocyanurate, or ISO, for insulation. This was planned to hold for the remainder of the Shannon’s lives. However, a neighbor’s tree fell into the Shannon’s carport in the spring of 2019, crushing it and two cars. The rebuilt carport was replaced exactly as built.

The home has been furnished by the Shannons from their lifetime collection of an eclectic mix of art, antique and reproduction furnishings with a few contemporary pieces.