



The Bhaktivedanta Institute for Higher Studies and the Legacy of the Tigert-Barrow House



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THE BHAKTIVEDANTA INSTITUTE FOR HIGHER Studies recently secured as its research library headquarters the Tigert-Barrow House, a seven-teen-room Gainesville mansion which “guards the north entrance to the Boulevard area and the heart of the Northeast Historic District.” Situated in the prestigious Duck Pond neighborhood, it is not far from the University of Florida campus. The premises previously served as home to the Universities longest serving president, John J. Tigert, who guided Florida through the challenges of the Great Depression and Second World War, as well as to Dr. Mark Barrow, a local cardiologist with a PhD in history, who along with his wife, Mary, proved instrumental in preserving Gainesville’s rich architectural history during the latter part of the twentieth century.

The Design of the Tigert-Barrow House

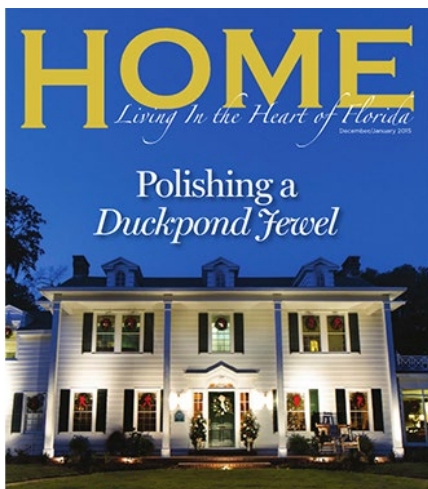
The famed Gainesville developer, M. M. Parish, built the house for use by his family while constructing



Early Sketch of Tigert House

homes in the Duck Pond neighborhood during the 1920s. Parish modeled the building after George Washington’s Mount Vernon home, with noticeable Colonial Revival features including “symmetrical massing, impressive portico, gable dormers and fan-light over the entry,” and in particular, “the house’s

main staircase exactly duplicates the one at Mount Vernon.”¹ A magnolia tree planted in the front yard had been taken as a cutting from a tree planted by another American president, Andrew Jackson. More recently, the building was featured on the cover of the magazine, *Home: Living in the Heartland of Florida* (Dec/Jan 2005), in an article titled “Polishing a Duckpond Jewel.”



Tigert-Barrow House featured in Home magazine, Dec/Jan 2005

UF Presidents in Residence

Parrish would unfortunately need to use the house to settle debts with a road contractor due to financial challenges resulting from the Great Depression. The new owner ended up renting it for use by the University of Florida to house its presidents. The first, John J. Tigert, had previously served as the U.S. Commissioner of Education (the Secretary of Education being the modern equivalent) under the Hardy and Coolidge administration before becoming UF's third president. His family lived in the home between 1928 and 1947. Although these were challenging economic times for the State of Florida, nonetheless, enrollment at UF more than tripled during Tigert's tenure. Tigert Hall, the University's Administration Building, was named after him in 1960.

After Tigert's retirement, J. Hillis Miller, the University's fourth president, lived in the house until 1953, after which the President's House (now the Earl and Christy Powell University House) began to

serve that function. Enrollment at UF continued to swell and numerous campus construction projects were completed under his leadership, including the Century Tower by the Plaza of the Americas. During this period, UF gained recognition as a coeducational university. Miller also proved key in establishing a health sciences program that included a nursing and medical school, with the J. Hillis Miller Health Center subsequently named in his honor. His son, Joseph Hillis Miller, Jr., became a prominent American literary critic and scholar.

The Tigerts in India

As for Tigert, shortly after his retirement from UF he traveled to India with his wife, Edith, as a member of the Government of India's recently established University Education Commission. Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan served as commission chair. This group had been “appointed to inquire into and report on the conditions and prospects of university education and advanced research in India ... [and] to recommend a constructive policy in regards to the problems ... and needs of the country.”

The author of Tigert's biography, George Coleman Osborn, wrote of the experience:

Tigert considered this appointment the most challenging single assignment he had encountered in a long life of education experiences. Indeed, as he wrote the Indian ambassador [September 27, 1948], he was looking forward with great anticipation to the opportunity of visiting India, a most interesting country, with the hope of making some small contribution to India's status as a new democratic state.²

While traveling in India examining various colleges and universities, the Tigerts frequently crossed paths with Prime Minister Jawaharl Nehru at official functions. Tigert relished the challenge of the entire project, finding it “pleasant and stimulating.” While he considered the chairman, Dr. Radhakrishnan, “a great man but very difficult to get close to,” he also

¹ Historic Preservation Alachua County, “Northeast Historic District, Gainesville,” http://plaza.ufl.edu/juna/HistoricPreservation/historic_commission/historictowns/gainesville/nedis/ne.htm, access date November 5, 2021.

² George Coleman Osborn, *John James Tigert: American Educator* (Gainesville, FL: The University Presses of Florida, 1974), p. 494.

found him “quite fair and impartial as a presiding officer.” Meanwhile, Mrs. Tigert wrote home:

John and I have grown so *fond* of him ... In spite of his austere and ascetic appearance and his tremendous learning he has a delightful sense of humor and is as simple as a little child in his enjoyment of fun. He is constantly singing little Sanskrit songs to himself, keeping time with his hand on a little pair of priest cymbals. ... This association [with him] has been the *highlight* of our [last] four months.³

As a member of the University Education Commission, Tigert had been “assigned the problem of establishing a balance in curriculum between science and the humanities. This he enjoyed immensely because he could introduce the general education idea that he had begun over a decade earlier at the University of Florida.”⁴ He recommended to the commission that the “Indian courses in social sciences and humanities would have to be developed on Indian lines with appropriate background and materials. However, the courses in general mathematics, physical sciences, and biological sciences could be much the same as those at Florida.”⁵

Upon completion of their work, Dr. Radhakrishnan held a press conference presenting copies of the recently published University Commission Report. After the chairman made his presentation, Tigert had a chance to speak as well. Reports published in the *Delhi Statesman* and the *New Delhi Hindustan Times* (August 26, 1949), noted how Tigert expressed that it had been a “great privilege to work under the inspiring leadership of Dr. Radhakrishnan,” and that he “thanked the people of India and the government for the generous hospitality extended to him and Mrs. Tigert during their stay in India.” A few hours later, “Premier Nehru gave the education commis-



Dr. and Mrs. Tigert at Snowdon in Simla, India, 1949

sion a final party especially honoring the Tigerts since August 25, the day of the presentation, was their fortieth wedding anniversary.”⁶

Soon after returning to Gainesville, the couple needed to prepare for a move to South Florida where the following semester Tigert resumed his career as a visiting professor of philosophy at the University of Miami.

Dr. Mark & Mary Barrow in Residence

The second couple most identified with living in the home are Dr. Mark Barrow and his wife Mary. While Dr. Barrow had been a well-established Gainesville cardiologist who also happened to hold a Ph.D. in History, the Barrows are likely best known for their historical preservation work. For example, in 2016 the couple won a special Lifetime Achievement Award as winner of the Fifth Annual Spirit of Gainesville Awards for having “provided a lifetime of community service that has resulted in the historic preservation of fourteen buildings including the historic Thomas Center.”⁷ Along with the Tigert House, the Barrows are also credited with helping save the Kirby Smith building, the Robb House Medical Museum, the former Gainesville Gospel Tabernacle, and the Hodge House, among many others. In further recognition, Gainesville Mayor Lauren Poe delivered an official proclamation that October 4, 2018 would

3 Ibid, p. 499.

4 Ibid, p. 495.

5 Ibid, p. 497.

6 Ibid, p. 500.

7 Peggy MacDonald, “Dr. Mark Barrow and Mrs. Mary Barrow: Spirit of Gainesville Nominees,” *Gainesville Sun*, January 1, 2016, updated January 12, 2016.

be “Dr. Mark and Mary Barrow Day” in honor of the couple’s historical preservation work along with Dr. Barrow’s many significant contributions to the local medical and artistic communities.

According to Peggy MacDonald, who served as Executive Director of the Matheson History Museum in Gainesville from 2015–2019, “Many of the buildings that have become Gainesville institutions and are now taken for granted, including the Thomas Center, only exist today due to the diligent efforts of Mark and Mary Barrow. Through sheer tenacity this power couple of historic preservation saved, relocated, and restored numerous buildings that are cherished today and helped establish the precedent for continued historic preservation activities in the future.” Further, they “helped establish the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation and were on the original board of Historic Gainesville,” as well as being “one of the founders” and “longest serving board member[s] of the Matheson History Museum.”⁸

In an interview with Dr. Barrow conducted in 1997 by the UF Historian, Samuel Proctor, Barrow recalled buying the home around 1970 for \$35,000 from a military historian teaching at the University of Florida. As he was just starting out in his own practice, he needed to secure a bank loan of \$25,000, but found the local banks uncooperative as they considered the neighborhood in financial distress. Apparently, a typical response from the loan officers was that the neighborhood would become “a slum in five years and be bulldozed down. Buildings and houses will be put there. We do not loan money here.” Fortunately, the Barrows met a former president from a local bank who lived a few houses away from the Tigert



City of Gainesville’s recognition of Dr. Mark and Mary Barrow for their contributions to the community.

House, and with his assistance, a loan was approved. Barrow admitted that in the end, “we bought the house for practically nothing,” and over the years his family had been able to refinance the building to help fund future renovation projects.⁹

As a side note, the Historic Thomas Center a few blocks south of the Tigert House, which had also in good part been preserved with the critical assistance of the Barrows, had for a time, previously served as home to Santa Fe Junior College in its formative years during the 1960s. In a coincidence of sorts, M. M. Parish, Jr., the son of the builder of the Tigert House, noted how his family had also played a central role securing the land for the present day Santa Fe College campus in northwest Gainesville.¹⁰

More recently, Keith and Roberta Watson purchased the home, doing major renovations. The house was also made available for public events during these years.

The Future of the Tigert-Barrow House

In October 2020, Howard Resnick purchased the property, continuing renovation work. Resnick has a PhD in Sanskrit from Harvard University and has translated more than a dozen volumes from Sanskrit. He plans to base his writing efforts out of the house, and has agreed to make available its extensive 8000 volume collection as a research library for the Bhaktivedanta Institute for Higher Studies, the Institute for Vaishnava Studies, and similar projects, as well as for use by local scholars and residents of the nearby Duck Pond neighborhood.

8 Ibid.

9 Samuel Proctor, “Interview with Mark Barrow, May 16, 1997,” Samuel Proctor Oral History Program: University of Florida History, George A. Smathers Libraries UF Digital Collections, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00006287/00001>, access date November 5, 2021.

10 Mary Ann Cofrin, “Interview with Mercer Moorman Parrish,” April 28, 1994, Matheson History Museum, George A. Smathers Libraries UF Digital Collections, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/MH00001734/00001>, access date November 5, 2021.