

138 Fayetteville Road: The “Oakhurst Castle”

In a neighborhood dominated by modest one- and 1½-story frame bungalows and cottages, the house that artist Frank B. Judson built at 138 Fayetteville Road in Decatur’s Oakhurst section is an eye-catching departure from the norm. The two-story masonry-clad home Judson built for his family in 1908 has become part of local folklore for its idiosyncratic architecture and its mysterious builder and first owner.

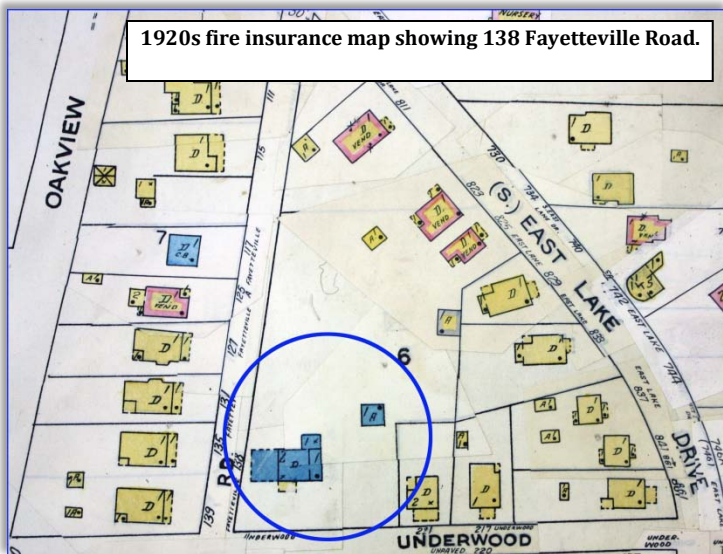


Frank Judson, c. 1910

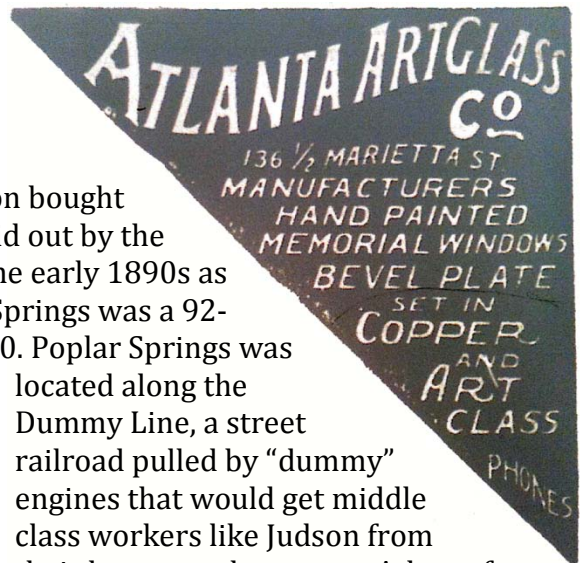
Judson was born in Ontario, Canada, in 1870 and he came to Atlanta in 1906 or 1907 to work as a salesman for the Atlanta Art Glass Company, a manufacturer of architectural and decorative stained glass. Judson was one of four sons of noted landscape artist William Lees Judson (1842-1928). While his brothers stayed close to their father and settled in California where they founded Judson Studios, the still-active and longest-lived art glass studio in the United States, Frank Judson chose to work for established companies.

After serving in the U.S. Army in the 1890s, Judson went to work at the Detroit Art Glass Company. In 1895 he married Ada Scaman (1874-1955) and the pair had two children: John (b. 1898) and Josephine (1900-1991). Throughout the 1890s and first years of the twentieth century, Judson appears to have moved fluidly between Canada and the United States.

When he and his young family arrived in Atlanta, Judson bought three lots in the fashionable Poplar Springs suburb. Laid out by the Atlanta Suburban Land Company at the same time in the early 1890s as nearby Candler Park, Kirkwood, and East End, Poplar Springs was a 92-acre tract in the heart of what became Oakhurst in 1910. Poplar Springs was



unimproved lots that became 138 Fayetteville Road.



located along the Dummy Line, a street railroad pulled by “dummy” engines that would get middle class workers like Judson from their homes to downtown Atlanta for a nickel each way.

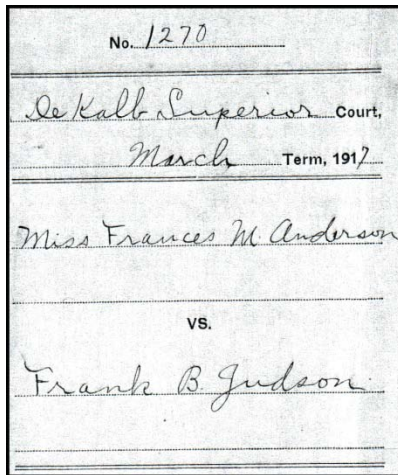
Judson bought his lots along Fayetteville Road. He purchased two of the lots at the corner of Underwood Road and Fayetteville from the Atlanta Suburban Land Company in November 1907; the third lot (located south of Underwood) he bought from Mattie Underwood one year later. He paid \$500 for the two

No records survive documenting construction of the house. Judson family members who have visited later owners recounted distant family oral traditions of Judson building the home on his own with the help of family members who pressed quartz cobbles into the wet concrete that forms the home's exterior cladding.

The Judson house captures architectural trends popular at the turn of the twentieth century: a foursquare plan, a late Victorian tower, and tall narrow single-light double-hung windows. Its spacious courtyard, constructed of Stone Mountain granite, appears to have been completed after the house. Its parapet with battlements and sturdy walls that extend to the sidewalk are part of why the property is locally known as the "Oakhurst Castle." Stained glass panels in the courtyard complement stained glass in the home's transom and



sidelights and survive as tangible reminders of Judson's career and art. Another addition was the construction by the mid-1920s of a one-story carriage house or garage.



For its time, the Judson home was an expensive undertaking. Judson borrowed heavily against the property and by 1915 he was selling off parcels to pay his creditors. Although he had been made president of the Atlanta Art Glass Company by 1912, by early 1916 the company appears to have folded and Judson was being sued for defaulting on his many debts. By early 1917 all of his DeKalb County property had been seized and he was rumored to be living in Alabama. Judson died sometime between 1917 and 1920 and his widow and children moved back to Detroit.

In 1921, Frances M. Anderson, one of Judson's creditors, sold the home to Mrs. Rosa Lee, a widow who lived there with her sons until her 1945 death. The property remained in the Lee family until the 1980s. After sitting vacant for several years and faced with potential demolition by the City of Decatur as a nuisance, the property was revitalized by new owners in the 1990s and in the early 21st century.



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