

Grande Dame of Turtle Creek

By David Flick, Staff Writer, *Dallas Morning News*
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There was a time, during one of the most colorful eras in Dallas history, when the building at 3525 Turtle Creek Blvd. was so famous, it didn't matter that it had no other name.

“This was the most prestigious address in town: 3525. That's all you had to say, and people knew where you were from,” said Col. James Pinckney Caston, a longtime resident of the building, which is nearing its 50th anniversary.

People may have known other things about the building, as well: that actress Greer Garson lived there, as did oilmen, wealthy widows, several opera stars and two U.S. senators.

During the early 1960s, heartthrob Fabian stayed there while in town for a play. Actor Tyrone Power and his new bride were honored with a party there. And the Duchess of Argyll dined in the penthouse, capping a tour of Dallas that included a visit to a mobile home show.

Depending on how closely people followed news of Dallas society, they might have known that 3525's private club was once raided by the city vice squad, that a socialite's body was found floating in the building's swimming pool and that the 18th-floor apartment of Minnie Marcus – widow of the founder of the city's most renowned department store – was burglarized, with thieves taking \$75,000 in jewelry and breaking into her liquor cabinet.

When construction of 3525 was announced in 1957, it was the first luxury high-rise along Turtle Creek, a strip that has since become Dallas' version of Chicago's Gold Coast.



JIM MAHONEY

Dallas architect Howard Meyer's 22-story building at 3525 Turtle Creek Blvd. was built in 1957 with tinted, reinforced concrete and Mexican brick.

Residents are working to put the building on the National Register of Historic Places. A documentary film also is planned.

Preservation Dallas, which is helping residents apply for historic status, has called the design by Dallas architect Howard Meyer “the most fully realized and successful modernist apartment building in Texas, perhaps in America.”

“Best site in Dallas”

But Mr. Meyer, who died in 1988, once said in an interview that when builders Edward Dicker and Jerome Frank hired him, they gave him a simple marching order: “We're giving you the best site in Dallas. Don't spare the horses.”

The 22-story building was constructed of tinted, reinforced concrete and Mexican brick near the site of what had long been the clubhouse of the Dallas Country Club.

Its pinwheel design gave each unit three views and nonconjoining walls that assured greater privacy. The heavy concrete construction allowed internal walls to be moved and rearranged at the whim of a resident's designer.

The building's most noticeable feature — the latticelike concrete *brise soleil* — was designed to filter the harsh Texas sun.

There were powder rooms on each floor for the maids, a large staff contractually forbidden to accept tips, a daily courtesy carwash, a swimming pool (with private cabanas) and a dining room.

Price of Luxury

All that luxury came with a price. Units, which were then apartments, started at \$350 a month when the building officially opened in 1958. Three-bedroom apartments rented for \$700, and the penthouses went for \$1,500 a month.

The building was converted to condominiums in the late 1970s. Today, a unit on the 15th floor is being offered for \$460,000, according to Nancy Martinez of Virginia Cook Realtors, and other units have been priced at up to \$850,000.

The building is coming back into demand despite being literally overshadowed by newer, taller and glitzier residential high-rises, Ms. Martinez said. Its 1950s architecture, particularly the distinctive sunscreens, can cut both ways with clients.

“You show it, and they either get it or they don't,” she said.

Old money, oil money

Mr. Dicker's explanation in 1957 that the luxury high-rise was needed “because the rich man has been neglected in the past 30 years” triggered nationwide snickering. But when 3525 opened the next year, it was an immediate success.

The building was a favorite of both old money and oil money.

Sarah Cockrell Dargan, granddaughter of Dallas pioneers Alexander and Sarah Cockrell, rented an apartment there, as did Addie Samuell, widow of philanthropist W.W. Samuell. Jack Pew, the Sun Oil executive, lived on the 16th floor. Oil magnate Clint Murchison Sr. maintained an apartment on the fifth.

In less-security-conscious days, the elite residential building had a restaurant and beauty shop (the Salon de Coiffure) open to the public.

The private Club 3525 had a separate entrance off the porte-cochere, through which 56 of its patrons were loaded into paddy wagons in May 1960 after a vice squad raid to curtail after-hours drinking.

Plenty of Notice

In an unrelated incident that same month, Mrs. Ballard Y. Burgher, wife of a prominent real estate investor, was found dead in 3525's signature round swimming pool, her shoes left at poolside. News accounts said authorities found no evidence of suicide or foul play.

More often, notices in the public broadsheets reflected awe or amusement toward the building's elite clients. *The Dallas Morning News'* Paul Crume frequently featured 3525 in his *Big D* column during the late 1950s and early '60s.

Mr. Crume's readers were invited to click their tongues at the story of a young 3525 resident who worked as a lifeguard and whose family chauffeur delivered lunch each day to him poolside. Then there was Mr. Crume's item about a tenant's dog that could purportedly enter an elevator and push the button for the lobby, to be met by a staff member who would take him for a walk.

In the early days, people would walk up from Turtle Creek Boulevard (then only two lanes wide) and try to talk their way onto the private floors, said F.C. Brown, a staff supervisor who has worked at 3525 since 1962, when he washed cars.

It was the job of the staff to ensure privacy. Some residents were easier to shield than others.

Hollywood stars who were appearing in local theaters often stayed in the building's apartments, Mr. Brown said. That included Fabian.

"A lot of the ladies would come by and want to meet him," Mr. Brown recalled. "They'd try to slip a guy two or three dollars to let them wait outside the door for an autograph."

Life, he remembered, was less formal then. Joe Lambert, a landscaper and arts patron, and Angus Wynne Sr., a prominent lawyer, always had time to talk football with the doormen.

Some of the oldest residents complain that times have changed, though none would do so for the record.

"It's just not the old families anymore," one resident said.

A veteran resident who welcomes the change is Col. Caston, who served in both the Army and Air Force.

Influx of younger people

"Younger people are moving in now," he said. "I think it's all for the better."

He has lived at 3525 for about 20 years, he said, and describes it as "a very private building. Nobody goes to each other's apartment unless invited."

But residents become neighbors.

Col. Caston said he got to know actress Greer Garson well. She and her husband, oilman Buddy Fogelson, once came to the colonel's apartment for Thanksgiving dinner.

In turn, Col. Caston was a frequent guest in Ms. Garson's penthouse, as – on occasion – were actors Joan Collins and Van Johnson and former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Pianist Van Cliburn would play at her birthday parties.

Col. Caston said he couldn't imagine living anywhere else.

"Once you've lived in the Grande Dame of Turtle Creek, really nothing is ever the same," he said. "There are people you couldn't dynamite out of this building. Like me."

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