ZOWINAJO

INTRODUCTION

by Lena Megee's grandson, JTW

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ZOWINAJO

Introduction and notes

Zowinajo is a travelogue from 1921. As the author Lena Megee introduces it herself, it is "The Account of an Informal Trip across the Wind-Swept Plains of Texas, into Age-Old New Mexico, and over Some of the Least Haunted Portions of the Colorado Mountains".

The original text is typewritten (with a few manuscript corrections and notes) and includes a hand-drawn map and twenty-one photographs. It is a just short of 25,000 words. It is nicely bound in green leather with gold title and author on the spine:



The original typescript is just on one side of each page, which is an apparently non-standard 8 x 10.75 inches, with the photographs mounted on separate unnumbered pages and facing the text. Due to the single-sided production, and also in part the thickness of the photographs, the whole is over an inch thick, a good size. Although carbon-copies might have been made, I believe it to be the only copy.

Provenance

Lena Megee had one child, Margaret Lee Thomas. The document was among her effects on her death in Somerset, England, and passed to me, her son, James Thomas Waterfield (JTW), transcriber and author of this introduction.

Transcription notes

Originally transcribed in 2010-12, the original text has been followed as far as possible, down to font[1], line spacing, page and line-breaks.

American spelling has been retained, eg 'color', 'center', and many places where a doubled consonant might be expected such as 'traveled', 'reveled' or 'marvelous', although occasionally some textual oddities have been identified as typographical errors and corrected, as below:

- very minor corrections have been made in square brackets, eg [the](p3), won[d]ered (p28) and corrob[or]ated (p 29), Linds[a]y for Lindsey (p44), Mt for Mr (p60), lon[e]liness (p62), op[i]nion (p68);
- double spaces between words have been removed silently;
- double spaces after ; (about 50:50 in the original) have been standardised as single spaces, though double spaces after : and . (generally consistent in the original) have been retained.

Other changes made in converting to the new format include:

- page size has been amended to A4 for modern convenience;
- an extra line has been inserted between page number and text (permitted by the extra page height).

The text inserts typed changes from above the line where these occur (rarely), and incorporates some manuscript amendments, presumably by the author, now showing faded to brown in the original, including some marginal new-paragraph marks. Line breaks following these are necessarily different for some lines if not the rest of the paragraph.

The (few) annotations by later generations have been ignored.

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[1] in fact 'Dark Courier' (thanks to HP) has been used to improve readability over standard Courier.

The whole was re-proofed in September 2018 with some typos and oversights corrected; any earlier 'finished' copies should be replaced. However, there may yet remain some apparent errors, which are the fault of the transcriber's; the original, allowing for the manuscript corrections and those noted above, is flawless.

Value of document and the case for preservation

The book had been preserved primarily as a family heirloom, a record of one's progenitors; a rather large annotation to the family tree, so to speak. It is a nice object in itself. The transcription was undertaken as a method of disseminating this record for subsequent generations, as well as helping preserve it in electronic form from the vicissitudes of the real world. The paper used for the original, for example, is becoming brittle and is easily cracked on the edges when turning the pages, and it seems likely that the photographs are darkening with age.

As it approaches its 100th anniversary, does it have any additional value? Might there be other descendants of the original travellers? Or might it be of interest to others, maybe those currently working in similar positions in Texas libraries?

Of the text itself, it has to be admitted that my American grandmother's prose is not going to win any prizes. A quiet, careful character[2] comes across – through the precise typescript – with a gentle if sometimes dry appreciation of the world and its oddities. Although we hear of wonders and marvels, they are rarely described to convey the thrill itself –"there is something unspeakably thrilling about" much that is found – but usually "there are no words in our language that can convey the picture of it." Perhaps unfortunately, the photographs taken and included do not always remedy this difficulty, and despite best efforts with contrast and brightness are often more suggestive than evocative.

The style also has a tendency to echo words[3] – sometimes rhetorically (eg "the sensation of flying away, away from every care") but not infrequently due, apparently, to some slight inflexibility of diction, as in "through a deep slash in a mountain, through which..."; or, again, illustrating both analepsis and echo-jarring[4]:

the old, old adobe houses. One could easily imagine one were back in some old-world city.

There is an interesting tension between the planned or imagined and the experience – a sort of inverse to Wordsworth's emotion recollected in tranquillity. This issue is a conscious one, mentioned in the very first sentence: "It was a premeditated trip, so premeditated, in fact, that I sometimes had qualms about its proving as interesting as it might ...had it not been planned so definitely". This tension continues through discussions about diversions and felicitous omissions from the itinerary; and often the experience falls short of the imagined:

we found everything exactly as we had expected, everything in its place precisely as we had read and heard about it. For that reason alone it was vaguely disappointing.

On one occasion, with Dead Man's Hole which is accorded a place in the last chapter's subtitle, there is a vivid description but it is not, in fact, visited – a case where the imagination is sufficient unto itself.

Often, of course, the chance discovery is better than all the planning:

Again we wondered whether we had missed much after all by not following our original plan, for even though Phantom Canyon may have had some features of its own to rival this one in interest, it is not possible for it to have been any more tremendous and thrilling, albeit well-nigh terrifying, than this wild, unknown chasm of ours.

This tension is of course now particularly familiar to the tourist, though it may be of historical interest to find it so firmly rooted in 1921. Other material in the text is also piquantly of its period. The motor car is an established thing, rather than a novelty, yet roads are patchy (and gasoline not always easy to find); the countryside truly wild, yet with evidence of a nascent tourist industry; and

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[2] she met me as a young child, but I do not remember her in person.
[3] interestingly, this stylistic feature was repeated by the writer's daughter in her (typewritten) letters.
[4] it isn't quite palilalia, but Jasper Fforde's echolocators are sadly missed on occasion.

the women on the trip are independent professionals well before such a phrase was thought necessary to characterise such. Particularly striking is their independent spirit and practicality, from dealing with mechanical issues down to developing their own photographs. Just who were they?

More about the travellers...

Just who were they indeed? There is little clue in the travelogue itself.

Although not explained explicitly in the narrative – perhaps such things were expected to be obvious to the intended readers? - the author's daughter recounted how the travellers gave their names to their Dodge car. Miss Allen only appears as such in the tale, and Zona too lacks a second name; so tracing these required a bit of research. As fully reconstituted as possible, the travellers are:

1. Zo: **Zo**na (Peek)

2. Wi: Miss (**Wi**nnie) Allen

3. Na: Le**na** Meghee – the author and first person in the narrative

4. Jo: **Jo**hn, the freshman (though apparently to be pronounced '-ho' in the car's name).

Marvin, Zona's brother, should also be mentioned: 'another youthful freshman', he 'substituted for Miss Allen as far as Snyder' – ie for the duration of 'chapter one' – but although useful in this 'most disastrous' part of the trip, his name did not contribute to the car's.

Professor Mel Oakes, unofficial historian of the Physics department of the University of Texas (see his website at http://www.ph.utexas.edu/utphysicshistory), was particularly helpful in producing most of the connections and pictures assembled below.

One thing perhaps surprising for the casual reader is the respective ages of the travellers; what would be expected to be a 'gap year' or perhaps graduation frolic is nothing of the sort. In 1921, Zona was 34, Miss Allen was 26, and Lena was 36; though John, of course, was a freshman. One wonders at their association.

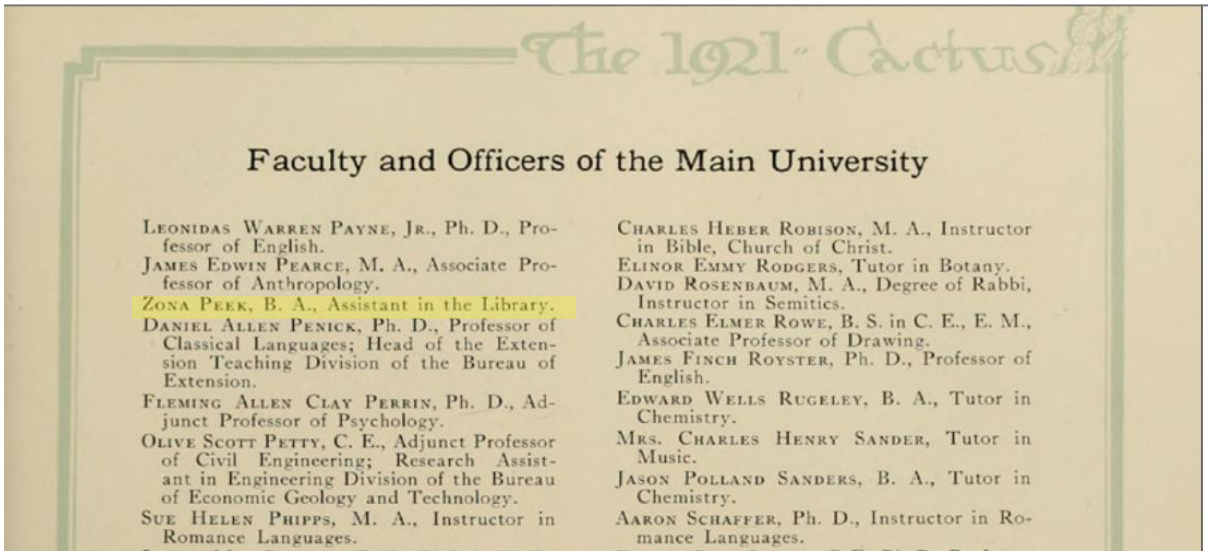
As well as wishing to find out a bit more about those on the trip - the narrative tactfully eschewing much personal comment and portraiture in favour of the actual sights and experiences - one of the objects of this research was to find out about any descendants of the travellers[5].

Alas, the conclusion has to be that the only such descendants – unless and until 'John' is identified, anyway - are Waterfields. For of 'John' (once, 'Johnny'), no more can be ascertained beyond his status as freshman 'in the University' – presumably Austin – and that he was 18 in June 1921.

[5] who might be supposed to be interested in the text...

1. Zo: Zona (Peek)

First up, identifying her surname:



The 1921 Cactus

Faculty and Officers of the Main University

Leonidas Warren Payne, Jr., Ph. D., Professor of English.
James Edwin Pearce, M. A., Associate Professor of Anthropology.
Zona Peek, B. A., Assistant in the Library.
Daniel Allen Penick, Ph. D., Professor of Classical Languages; Head of the Extension Teaching Division of the Bureau of Extension.
Fleming Allen Clay Perrin, Ph. D., Adjunct Professor of Psychology.
Olive Scott Petty, C. E., Adjunct Professor of Civil Engineering; Research Assistant in Engineering Division of the Bureau of Economic Geology and Technology.
Sue Helen Phipps, M. A., Instructor in Romance Languages.
Charles Heber Robison, M. A., Instructor in Bible, Church of Christ.
Elinor Emmy Rodgers, Tutor in Botany.
David Rosenbaum, M. A., Degree of Rabbi, Instructor in Semitics.
Charles Elmer Rowe, B. S. in C. E., E. M., Associate Professor of Drawing.
James Finch Royster, Ph. D., Professor of English.
Edward Wells Rugeley, B. A., Tutor in Chemistry.
Mrs. Charles Henry Sander, Tutor in Music.
Jason Polland Sanders, B. A., Tutor in Chemistry.
Aaron Schaffer, Ph. D., Instructor in Romance Languages.

Note the date (year) of the publication - the same as that of the trip; and a librarian: pretty conclusive! And now for some background (ignore the first chap):



YONAHIAN 1920

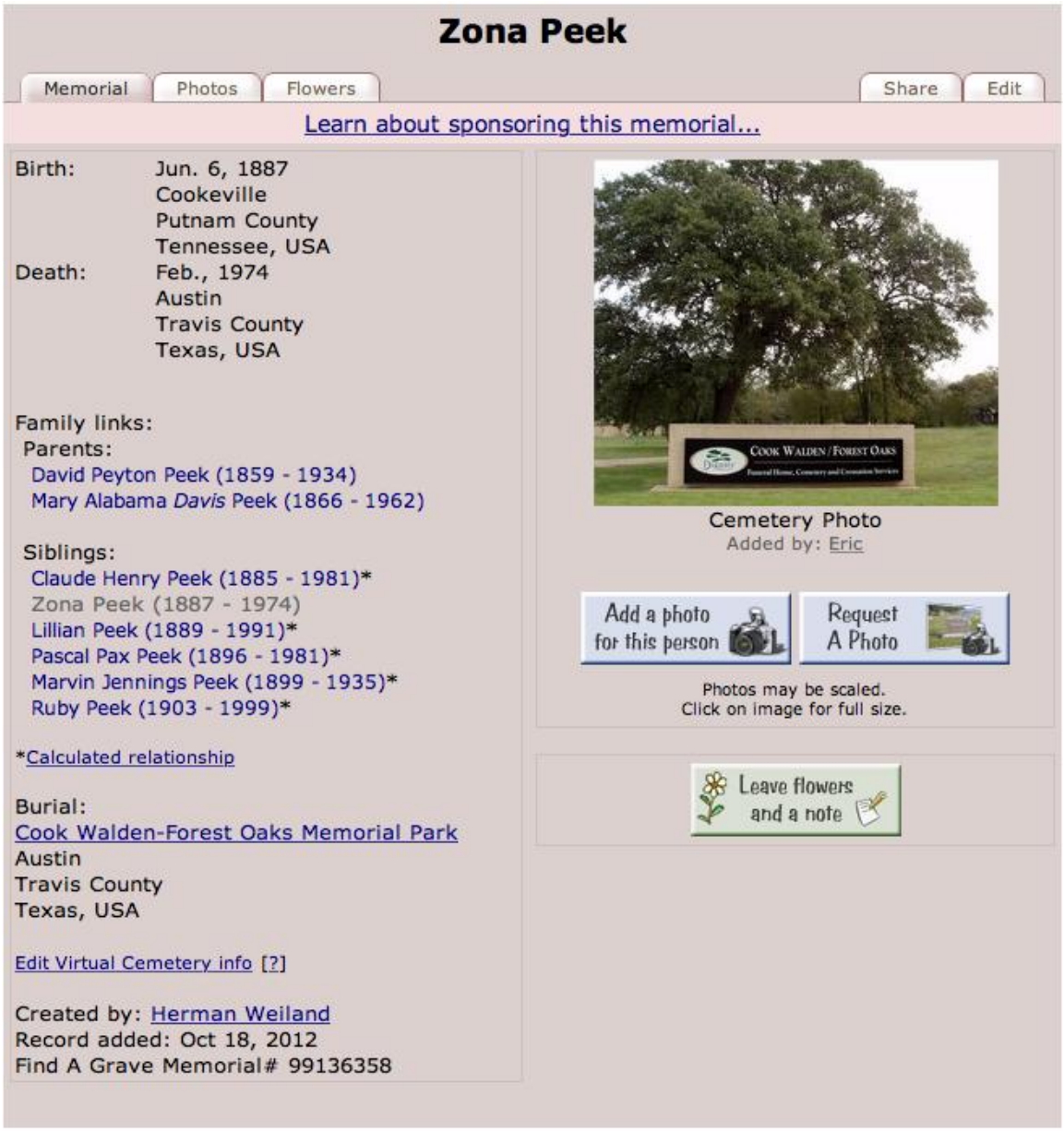
Page 106, 1920 Edition

THE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

One of the most active organizations of Piedmont College is its Alumni Association. The President, Mr. E. E. Keener, graduated in 1914, afterward taking his master's degree at Peabody. At present he is engaged in the work of psychological examination of students, being director of Measurements and Standards of the city schools of Richmond, Indiana, and acting-principal of one of the Richmond schools. :: Miss Zona Peek, our Secretary-Treasurer, graduated in 1912. She took her Library Course in the Atlanta Carnegie Library School, and for several years served as the efficient Librarian of Piedmont College. Now she is Assistant in the Serial and Binding Department in the Texas State University, at Austin. :: The present plan of the Alumni Association is to work with the present and former students of Piedmont College to erect a handsome building for the Home Economics Department, to replace their well-equipped rooms that were destroyed by the recent fire.

Page 102

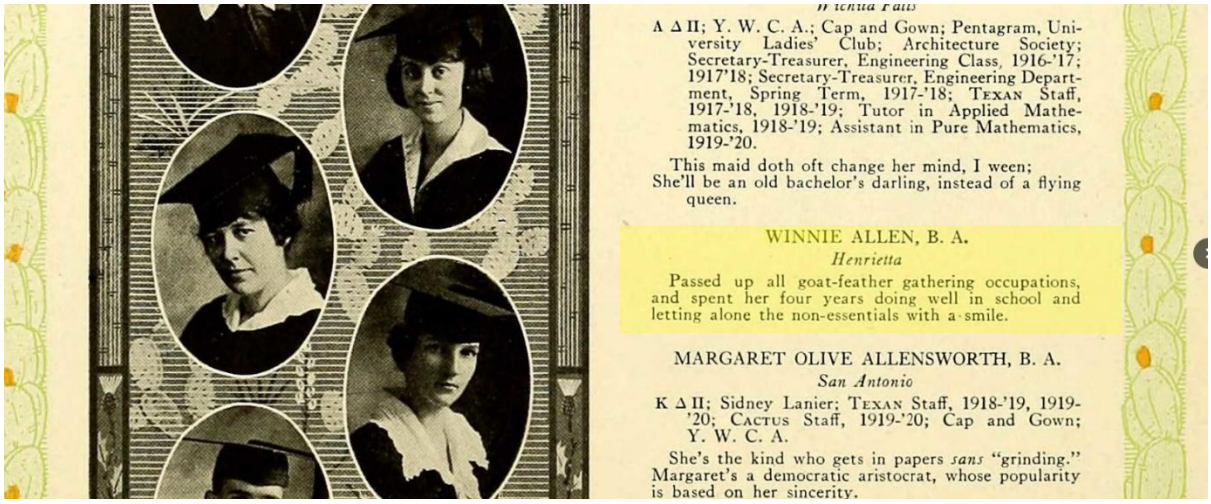
Sadly she appears not to have had children; she did not marry, her death certificate (Austin Texas, on 23 Feb 1974 aged 86; she was born on 6 June 1887) shows her full name of Lora Alzona Peek and was registered by her sister Lillian Peek.



She came from a large family, as shown on the 'virtual memorial' above; note too her brother Marvin, on board for part of the trip.

2. Wi: Miss (Winnie) Allen

Miss Winnie Allen's (presumed) self-assessment in her year-book[6] indicates a self-deprecating studiousness:



Wichita Falls

Δ Δ Π; Y. W. C. A.; Cap and Gown; Pentagram, University Ladies' Club; Architecture Society; Secretary-Treasurer, Engineering Class, 1916-'17; 1917'18; Secretary-Treasurer, Engineering Department, Spring Term, 1917-'18; TEXAN Staff, 1917-'18, 1918-'19; Tutor in Applied Mathematics, 1918-'19; Assistant in Pure Mathematics, 1919-'20.

This maid doth oft change her mind, I ween;
She'll be an old bachelor's darling, instead of a flying queen.

WINNIE ALLEN, B. A.
Henrietta

Passed up all goat-feather gathering occupations, and spent her four years doing well in school and letting alone the non-essentials with a smile.

MARGARET OLIVE ALLENSWORTH, B. A.
San Antonio

K Δ Π; Sidney Lanier; TEXAN Staff, 1918-'19, 1919-'20; CACTUS Staff, 1919-'20; Cap and Gown; Y. W. C. A.

She's the kind who gets in papers *sans* "grinding." Margaret's a democratic aristocrat, whose popularity is based on her sincerity.

Dated... c 1921? So just what are, or were, 'goat feathers'? Briefly, time-wasting distractions; from a short piece written by one Ellis Parker Butler in 1918.[7]

Miss Allen was a teacher for a while and thus 'the pedagogue' of the Zowinajo narrative, before becoming librarian and archivist:



"Miss Winnie Allen was a native of Henrietta, where she graduated from high school in 1917. She went on to the University of Texas, interrupting her academic career several times to teach school, and received her master's degree in 1925. She immediately went to work as an assistant in the University of Texas Archives, which at that time consisted of the Stephen F. Austin papers and about twenty other collections, mostly Spanish documents relating to the history of Texas. In 1936 she became the chief archivist, a position she held for thirty-five years. She built the University of Texas Archives into one of the major depositories in the United States for material relating to the history of the Southwest; when she retired in 1960 it contained about 4,000 collections.

But Allen made another contribution to Texas history. Her thinking about historical evidence went far beyond the documents and letters normally found in archives – she was a pioneer in the use of oral history – and in 1952 she circulated a paper entitled "A Tentative Plan for a State Program of Texas Life" among her colleagues and friends. In it she called for the creation of a state agency to coordinate

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[6] screen shot sent to me by Prof Mel Oakes

[7] "Goat-feathers, you understand, are the feathers a man picks and sticks all over his hide to make himself look like the village goat. It often takes six days, three hours and eighteen minutes to gather one goat-feather... Goat-feathers are the distractions, side lines and deflections that take a man's attention from his own business and keep him from getting ahead. They are the Greatest Thing in the World--to make a man look like a goat." - Ellis Parker Butler, 'Goat-Feathers'
They include distractions for a writer such as "cleaning the letters "a" and "o" on his typewriter with a toothpick, serving on boards or assisting in fund-raisers." http://richsiegelauthor.com/guest-author-shirley-garrett-goat-feathers-totem-poles/
So, a bit of a diversion - goat's feathers indeed, at least confined to footnote here.

all efforts to locate and preserve records relating to Texas history, including historic buildings and landscapes, and for a privately-funded foundation to support the agency's efforts. She sent it not only to academics but also to politicians and influential businessmen and then peppered them with letters about it. Governor Alan Shivers was so impressed with the idea that in 1953 he got the legislature to pass a bill establishing the Texas State Historical Survey Committee, which launched an inventory of historic structures in the state and started a program to record and mark them. That committee eventually became the Texas Historical Commission, which is now the state's major preservation agency and a model for preservation agencies in other states."[8]

She was living as Miss Allen in 2906 Rio Grande Street in the 1950s, as pictured here (and also see following text):

2906 Rio Grande Street
ca. 1929



OCCUPANCY HISTORY
2906 Rio Grande Street

City Directory Research, Austin History Center
By City Historic Preservation Office
February, 2007

1992	Richard H. Chetham, owner Retired
1987	Richard H. Chetham, owner Chief radio tech, University of Texas Also listed is Mrs. Marguerite E. Chetham, retired.

D.1 - 1

HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION
JANUARY 28, 2013
DEMOLITION AND RELOCATION PERMITS
2906 RIO GRANDE STREET
HDP-2012-0428

PROPOSAL

Demolish a ca. 1929 house.

ARCHITECTURE

One-story, rectangular-plan, front-gabled frame bungalow-style house with an enclosed, partial-width, projecting inset front porch, now with modern replacement windows; single and paired 1:1 fenestration.

RESEARCH

City utility permits and Sanborn maps reveal that the house was built in 1929 by Benjamin F. Lensing, who lived at 2914 Rio Grande Street, as a rental unit. Benjamin F. Lensing never occupied this house, and he died in 1929. The house was rented to a wide variety of tenants, the first being John McCoy, a laborer at Lone Star Ice Company, and his wife, Lucinda. The McCoys lived here for about a year. There were frequent changes in the tenants of this property; in the early 1930s, the house was rented by UT instructor Melvin Thomas, Helmer and Bertha Rydberg (he worked in the display department at Scarbrough's department store), and William Butler, an engineer at the Austin Ice Company. The first time that there was a tenancy of more than a year or two in this house was in the 1940s, when the house was rented by C. Alfred and Elfreida Anderson. He was a mechanic. Winnie Allen, who had been a teacher in the Austin public schools, and later an archivist at the University of Texas, rented this house in the 1950s.

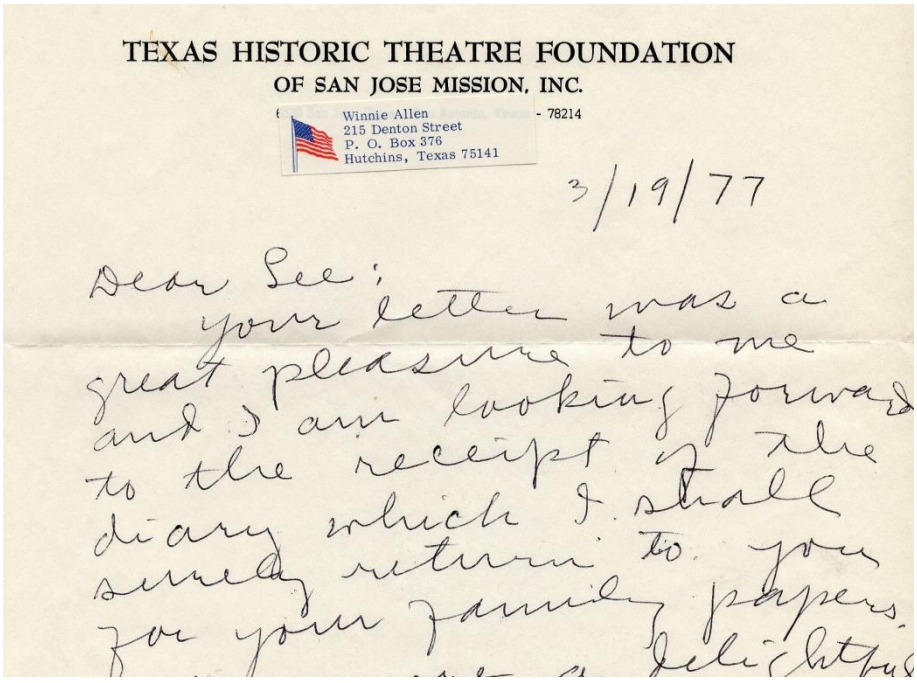
STAFF COMMENTS

The house is listed in the Comprehensive Cultural Resources Survey (1984) but without a priority for research.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Release the demolition permit. The house has been modified, and has neither the architectural nor the historical significance to warrant individual designation as a historic landmark.

It is of course possible that she married after this, but she still styled herself 'Winnie Allen' in 1977, in a holograph letter (from 215 Denton Street, PO Box 376, Hutchins, Texas 75141) enclosed in the original Zowinajo book:



TEXAS HISTORIC THEATRE FOUNDATION
OF SAN JOSE MISSION, INC.

Winnie Allen
215 Denton Street
P. O. Box 376
Hutchins, Texas 75141

- 78214

3/19/77

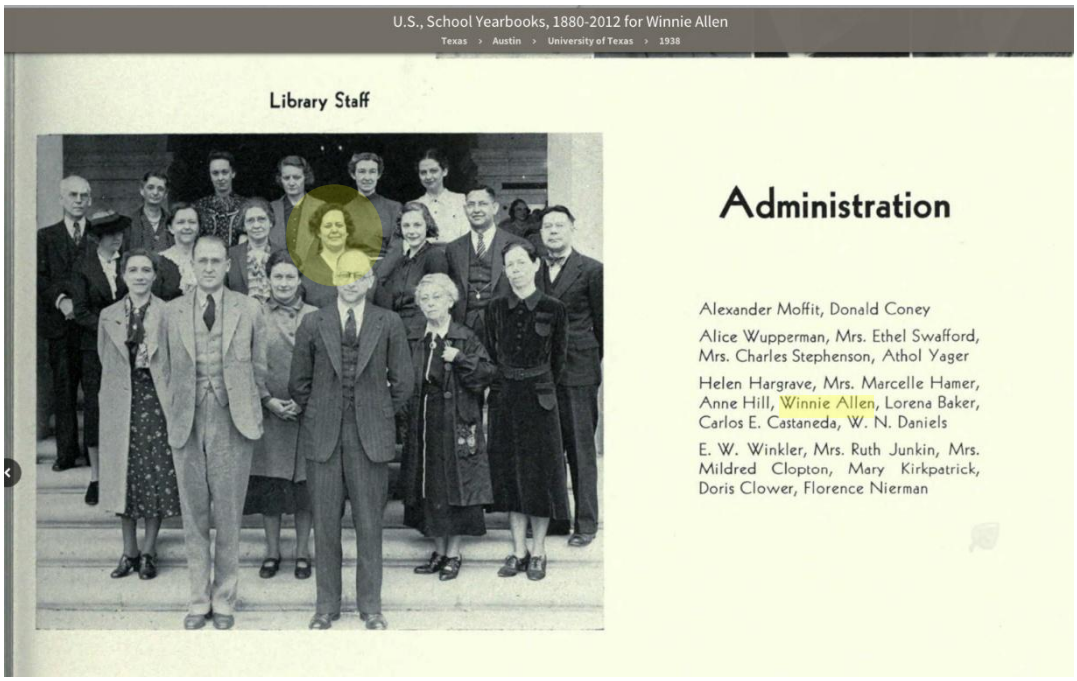
Dear Lee;
your letter was a
great pleasure to me
and I am looking forward
to the receipt of the
diary which I shall
surely return to you
for your family papers.

She was then just short of 82, for she was born on 13 April 1895. She died on 1 August 1985[9]; it is to be presumed childless.

[8] http://bigbendnow.com/2011/05/the-rambling-boy-remarkable-women-of-the-ut-library-system/

[9] https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fal63 gives date of both birth and death, as well as another summary of her career, with particular note of her work as archivist.

Here she is in her role of librarian/ archivist:



And from the Waterfield family archive, admittedly not very clear of Miss Allen but pleasingly showing her in friendly context with Lena:



The reverse of the photo is annotated: "Wimberley Camp. Winnie [Allen] Lena [Megee] Lin [Thomas] Mrs Megee (my grandmother - MLW)" - the square brackets are part of the text[10]. The photo is undated, but one might guess that it is before the 1921 trip[11], but perhaps not by much.

Of course, given her subsequent career, it might be claimed that the Zowinajo trip was stimulating if not formative of Winnie Allen's thinking about archives and oral history, but without more biographical detail this is probably no more than a query, and little more than a footnote to her work anyway.

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[10] written by 'MLW': Margaret Lee Waterfield – Lena's daughter; see family tree at end. JTW
[11] the reasoning being that Lena married and then had a baby soon afterwards – so would have been living in a different context.

3. Na: Lena Meghee

The Meghee sisters were something of a phenomenon!



Mary Lena is described here as 'Assistant Librarian'. She had previously done a spell assisting the Red Cross in France (as mentioned in the text). Soon after the 1921 trip she married Howard Rice Thomas (in 1922; he was teaching engineering at the University of Texas at Austin), and Margaret Lee was born in the spring of 1923.

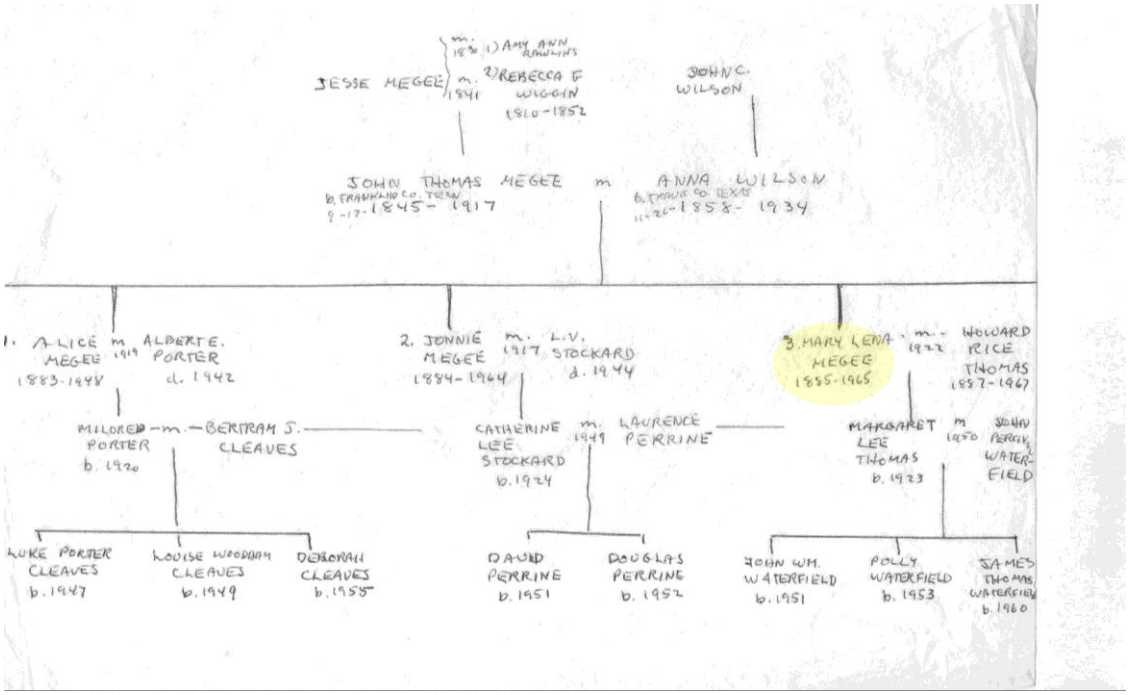
The Waterfield family records include an original of the print used by the 'Alcalda', as well as others:







And, just to be clear, here she is on a family tree, or part of it anyway:



There, then, are the only known descendants[12] of the 1921 trip, down in the bottom right of this tree; and the author of this note, and transcriber of the document, is me right there in the corner, James Thomas Waterfield (JTW).

[12] Though there are further descendants not shown on this tree below John Wm and myself.

4. Zowinajo

The last traveller (with apologies again to 'John') is of course Zowinajo herself, the Dodge automobile. She comes over as a character not unlike my grandmother; determined, perhaps even a bit dogged when faced with horrible quantities of work, doing her best and that with serenity and only occasional a sly remark betraying her sense of humour:

Never once did the engine fail us. We experienced every conceivable condition of road from bad to worse, including mud, sand, rocks, water, and the steepest grades that have ever been travelled by automobiles--and Zowinajo went over them all smiling. What if we did break a few springs, what if the tires did evaporate like steam; did we not go on in spite of all of these so-called troubles...

Again Professor Oakes has done the hard work; here is what he discovered about the vehicle (including a picture of a probable match):

"The car was a Dodge touring car. The Dodge brothers introduced the car in 1914. It changed very little over the years. In 1919 they raked back the windshield. Sadly the photos in the diary are all from the rear. In 1921, it had a base price of $1,285 (Equivalent to $16,329 in 2018). This might suggest they they had an earlier model. It had a thick wooden steering wheel and a 212-cubic-inch, four-cylinder L-head engine. With a 35-horsepower engine it could approach 50 mph."



Possible reconstruction of the trip

It has been a long-pondered idea of mine that the trip might be reconstructed on its centenary in 2021. What would the intervening years reveal? How much would remain recognisable? Would the division of labour still be a useful arrangement? But I need to find three or four[13] others who might be interested – just another reason for putting this document 'out there'...

JTW 2012 (original transcription) – 2018

PS 2026: sadly didn't happen. I could blame covid...

[13] I am getting old enough to consider promoting such a venture without actually joining in personally :/