

Norwood Avenue's *Casita Concreta*

Reminiscent of a medieval cottage with steeply pitched roofs and multi-storied gables, the house at 30 Norwood Ave is anything but traditional. On first glance, the house appears to be of conventional, modern, concrete-block construction; but on closer inspection, a different story emerges.



Finished in 1932, the house was built using thin, elongated concrete blocks that perform as exterior siding and interior walls, with poured concrete filler. Exterior corners are accented with contrasting concrete quoins echoed by the window surrounds. Interior walls are also concrete. But a most extraordinary living room and dining room floor consists of two-foot-by-two-foot squares made of red, green, yellow and brown terra cotta pottery shards set in concrete. Green corner tiles add a contrasting accent.

Stories tell that 30 Norwood's original owner/builder manufactured these squares during a Grove Park Inn re-roofing project. He carried home shards of the original roof tiles and—using a form he set up in front of the house—made them into 2x2 foot structural concrete mosaic floor tiles. The ceilings in the living and dining rooms are also made of two-foot concrete squares, all lifted into place by block-and-tackle and held together invisibly by rebar. Rather than an industrial feel, the house is welcoming, light-filled and spacious, with a lovely view of trees to the west, including from the master bath shower.

Neighborhood stories of the house abound, including one about Charlton Heston briefly living in the basement. Another tells of the house being abandoned and forlorn for a long period. Homeless folks used the house as a crash pad—even building fires on the concrete living room floor—until a small group of investors made it habitable again and sold it. The new owner, an architect sympathetic to its charms, still affectionately calls it *Casita Concreta*—Little Concrete House. During his renovations, paint was stripped from the floors revealing the mosaic tiles, the kitchen was “bumped-out,” and bathrooms were upgraded. Delightful custom iron railings were installed with a branch-and-twist motif at the front stairs and porch, at two west-facing balconies in the rear, and on interior stairways.

The current owner, Robin Croog, has added her own design touches with the help of designer Randy Shull, a former Norwood Park resident. They created the dramatic stone fireplace surround and remodeled the kitchen. The garage was re-purposed into a light-filled office/studio with the old garage doors installed on a track on a new interior wall to create handy storage space.



Whether you see this as a Fairytale Cottage—or remember its darker days as a Haunted House—the unique abode at 30 Norwood will capture your imagination.

Thanks to the Fall issue's contributors:

Susan Canale, Robin Croog, Delce Dyer, John Farquhar, Murray Lee, Kim Moore, Kristen Zonneville, and the many neighbors who delivered it to our doors.

CHILI AND COSTUMES!

Come join the fun at the Norwood Park Annual Fall Festival.

Sunday, October 29, 4:00 to 6:00 pm in the cul-de-sac on Garden Terrace.

All chili's welcome! Hot, Hotter, Hottest; with meat, without meat, with beans, without beans, with Gram's secret ingredient or store-bought (we won't tell).

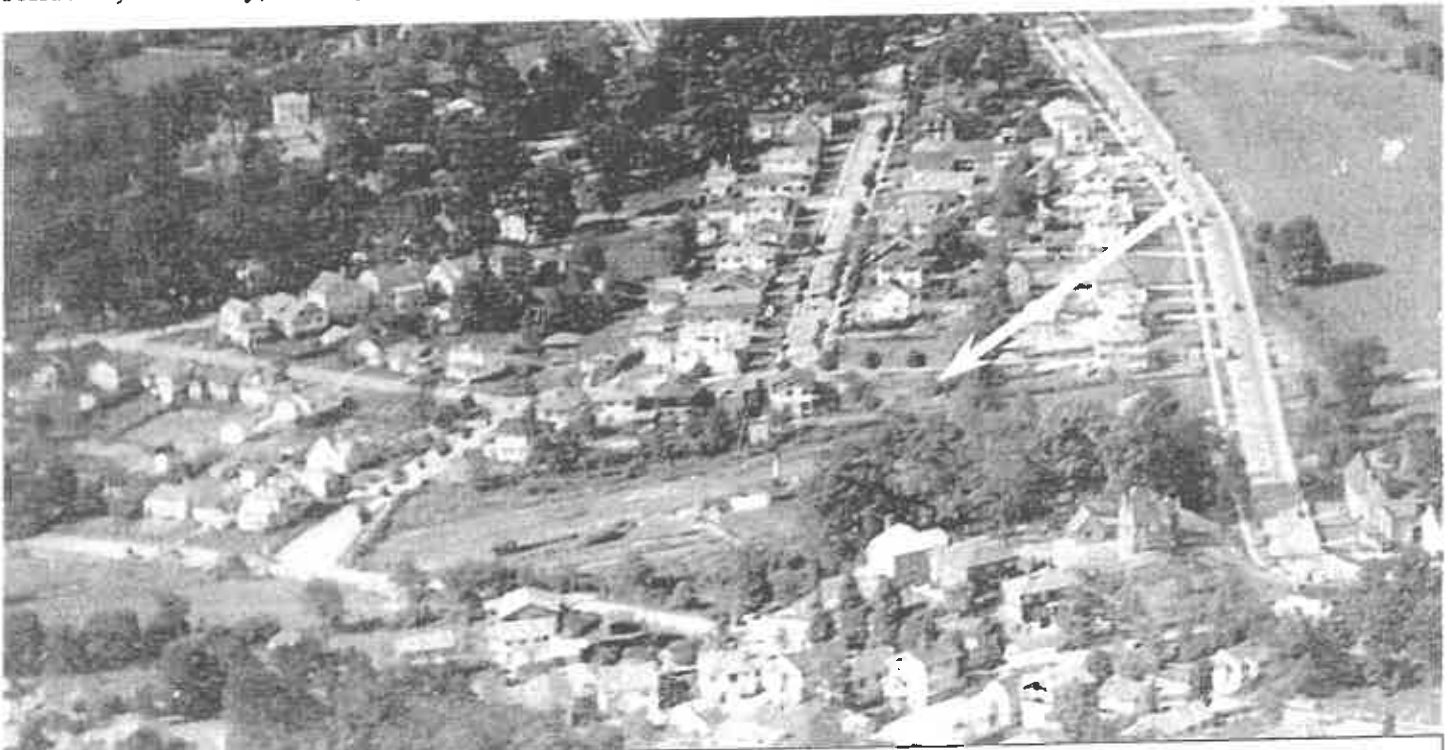
As usual, we'll vote for our favorite chili—and this year, for the best cornbread! All children in Halloween costumes win a prize. Also new this year: the best grown-up costume wins a prize too!

30 Norwood Avenue- Percy's Fire-proof House

This unusual one-and-one-half-story-plus-basement, Tudor Revival house appears to be built of elongated concrete blocks, with contrasting concrete quoins and window surrounds, and a steeply pitched multi-story side-gable roof with a shed roof projecting bay at the southeast corner.

In 1916, the Central Development Company, developers of Norwood Park, sold Lot 106, at the end of E. Virginia Avenue (now Norwood Ave.) to real estate investor Joseph Selby. Selby two months later sold the Lot to builder/developers J. T. Bledsoe & Company. In March of 1918, Bledsoe & Co. sold the lot to a "steamfitter", William A. Russel, and his wife Annye, who I believe were planning to build their dream home on the lot. The Russells had moved to Asheville in 1916 from Forsythe County. But then sadly, just four months later, Annye, at the age of 31, suddenly succumbed from an acute appendicitis, leaving William and three small children. Although William remarried a few years later, and remained in Asheville, he never built on the property. William Russell died in 1928 leaving the Norwood lot as part of his estate. In 1930, Russell's widow and heirs sold the vacant lot to Floridians, J. P. & Ethel Threadgill.

The construction of the house at 30 Norwood Avenue is as unique as was its creator and builder, J. P. Threadgill, a real estate developer from Miami, Florida. Joseph Percy Threadgill, who went simply by the name "Percy", was born in 1893 at Fort Concho, San Angelo, West Texas, to Homesteaders, William & May Threadgill. In 1911, a devastating drought drove the Threadgills back east. Percy was 17 years old when his father packed the family onto a train and moved them east to Miami, Florida. The city of Miami, which was incorporated in 1896 just after the arrival of the railroad, by 1911, still only had a little over 5,000 residents. But soon, Miami exploded into a real estate boom that by 1920 would cause the population to swell to almost 30,000 residents. Percy Threadgill, a young energetic optimist, decided after a brief stint as a postal clerk, to try his hand at selling real estate. Soon he was successful enough to open his own firm. By 1925, Miami had burgeoned to 110,000 residents, and Percy, who by this time had married Ethel Hamrick of Gaffney, SC, had become one of Miami's



This 1923 aerial photograph of Norwood Park shows the then empty lot at 30 Norwood Avenue (see arrow).

top real estate developers. He built a "coral rock" home for his family on NE 28th Street, just one block from Biscayne Bay.

Before the days of air-conditioning, the hot, humid, mosquito-infested summers in Miami would become unbearable, and so those who could afford to, would escape to cooler destinations, one of the most popular being Asheville, North Carolina. The Threadgills first summered in Asheville in 1925. It was then that Percy was, through an acquaintance, persuaded to purchase a huge 5,000-acre mountain tract in Cattail Creek, near Burnsville in Yancey County. With a developer's eye, he saw it as an attractive summer alternative for his monied Miami clients. This turned out to be an advantageous move for Percy, as the real estate boom in Miami would not last long. Upon return to Miami, Threadgill began marketing his new venture- "Hollywood Manor", advertising 50 ft. x 120ft. sized campsites, only 40 minutes from Asheville, and only \$88!

As the real estate boom in Miami been to slow almost to a halt, Percy had his mountain retreat to develop. Because the Cattail Creek property was rather remote at first, Asheville became the family's base camp when they would come to the mountains. In fact, when "Black Thursday" hit in October of 1929, the Threadgills were staying in Asheville. Ethel was in Mission Hospital following complications from the birth of their daughter Joan who was born in August.

Although they did return to Miami, in November, after six months in Miami, little Joan was struggling to thrive. So, in June of 1930, Percy moved the family back to Asheville to Mission Hospital where he knew she would get the care she needed. A month later, Percy & Ethel purchased the vacant lot, which would become 30 Norwood Avenue.

But Percy the builder/developer wasn't interested in just building a standard house. Percy, with real estate development at a standstill, and with time on his hands, found it a good time to concentrate on one of his pet projects- a "fire-proof house". In fact, the year before, in May of 1929, Percy, giving his address as "Burnsville, NC" had filed for a U. S. patent for a building system for construction of a fireproof building. Akin to the modern-day ICF (Insulated Concrete Forms) building system, Percy's system utilized "*slabs or bricks of suitable dimension which may be formed of soapstone, serpentine, marble, or molded of concrete or other compound plastic*", which combined with special pins and metal ring ties would be used to build a lightweight fireproof building. The beauty of Percy's system was that not only could the panels be of any fireproof material, concrete, stone, clay, or gypsum, but that the panels themselves, like the ICF system, could be used as the formwork for any intervening structural concrete columns or beams that may be necessary.

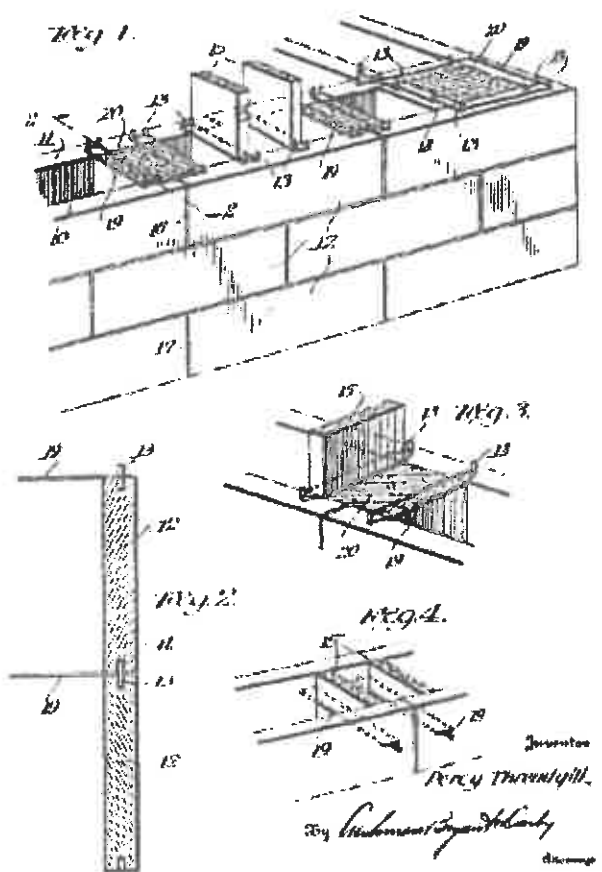
Percy began construction of the house immediately upon purchase of the lot. According to the recollections of his daughter Helen, Percy, who had a penchant for construction, and who often provided construction management on his real estate projects, did his own construction on the house at Norwood. This is evidenced by the 1931 Asheville City Directory, which listed him as "contractor".

Urban legend has it that the house was built by an engineer in the employ of E. W. Grove, and that the broken tiles used in the concrete floors came

Nov. 3, 1931.

P. THREADGILL
BUILDING
Filed May 16 1929

1,529,841



from construction of the Grove Park Inn. No way that this is could be true, as not only was the Inn built two decades earlier (1913), but Grove died in 1927. A more likely source for the tiles and bits of stone, in my opinion, were from the surplus materials left-over from Asheville's building boom which crashed shortly before Threadgill's arrival.

The home was completed by 1931, which was the same year that the city renamed Virginia Avenue to Norwood Avenue. Threadgills immediately moved into their new home at 30 Norwood Avenue. Now the family had three homes, Miami, Asheville, and Cattail Creek, to which they alternated their time. After construction of the house, Percy turned his attentions back to developing his land at Cattail Creek. Land rich, but cash poor, Percy defaulted on his construction loan from Reed Kitchen in 1933, so the house was sold and the Threadgills moved retreated to Cattail Creek,

In 1934, the home was leased as the manse for Hillside Methodist Church and functioned as the home of Rev. James B. McLarty and his family. But then in 1935, the home was sold to what would be a long-term owner/occupier Cleveland Baber. The Baber family would own the house for the next 43 years!

Baber was the foreman of the composing rooms of the Asheville Citizen-Times- a position he held until his retirement in 1947. "Colonel" Baber was from Alabama, and after his retirement he maintained a plantation in Alabama as well as the house at 30 Norwood. Baber died in 1957, but his widow Mary continued to own the home until selling it in 1978, at the age of 94. Mary, who had earlier returned to the Baber home in Alabama, lived another five years, dying in 1982, at the age of 99.

From 1978 to 1999, the home belonged to a succession of four owners, mostly composed of absentee landlords. When Tom Gallaher purchased the home in 1999, it was in shambles, having been vacant for several years. At one-point, homeless squatters had even lit fires on the living room floor to keep warm. Fortunately, they had chosen a "fire-proof" house! Also, local children had blocked the roof drains on the upstairs deck to make a swimming pool which later caused the roof of the current office to collapse, leaving the space open to the elements.

Gallaher undertook a massive restoration of the home. The living room floor was covered in black paint. Citric acid was used to remove the paint and discover the terrazzo-like concrete/broken tile design. The stairs to the second-story floors had also been painted and were stripped to reveal their beautiful concrete design. The railing and light fixture on the entrance porch, staircase railings, living room fireplace screen and curtain rods were all crafted from re-worked rebar by an Asheville artisan. The original kitchen was a galley about half its current width, with an entrance off the staircase. The doorway was closed off and the kitchen expanded outward on both long sides.

Gallaher sold the restored home to its current owner in 2014. Since Threadgill's patent was granted in 1931, at a time when building construction was at a virtual standstill, I doubt that there were any other buildings built with his unique system. The house at 30 Norwood Avenue, now restored, remains as a testament to the genius and inventiveness of the man they simply called "Percy"!



For more information see: Percy by Helen Threadgill
Baden at: <http://www.blurb.com/b/2010482-percy>

House Histories– Arts & Crafts Tour 2019

* 30 Norwood– Percy's Fire-proof House!

Chain of Title:

09/05/1916 Central Developemnt Co to Joseph & Lucy Selby NORWOOD ADDITION Db. 211 / 65.

11/06/1916 Joseph & Lucy Selby to J T Bledsoe & NT Robinson LOTS 93-98 105-106 BK 154 P 205 Db. 209/143.

03/20/1918 (rec'd-04/29/1918) J T Bledsoe & NT Robinson to W A & Annie Russell NORWOOD ADDITION Db. 220 / 612.

07/29/1930 (rec'd- 08/18/1931) American National Bank, GDN to Ethel H Threadgill LOT 106 BK 154 P 205 Db. 442 / 176. *"American National Bank...guardian of Eliza Hope Russell, Grace E. Russell, Martha A. Russell, and Billie Burke Russell..."*. *"Superior Court...Judge Hoyle Sink..."*. *"for \$500"*.

07/05/1930 (rec-d 08/18/193) Lula Dacota Burke Dull Russell to Ethel H Threadgill LOT 106 BK 154 P 205 Db. 435 / 455.

08/29/1931 Percy & Ethel H Threadgill to Reed Kitchin [D/T] E VIRGINIA AVE Db. 316/138. *"one note in the sum of \$2,200..."*.

07/18/1933 Reed Kitchin, TR to Alexander M & Jessie M Hardie S MGN EAST VIRGINIA AVE Db. 459 / 106.

01/22/1935 Alexander M & Jessie M Hardie to Cleveland Baber LOT 106 BK 154 P-205 Db. 469 / 517.

01/04/1977 C. Baber, Widow to Mary Winton Baber POA Db. 1157/ 367.

08/23/1978 Mary Winton Baber by AIF; Lottie B. Crook to Christopher Stuart McGrayne [DEED] BUNCOMBE COUNTY Db. 1197 / 503.

01/08/1982 Christopher Stuart McGrayne to Robert E. & Dianna McCormac Bowles [W/DEED] LOT 106 PB 154/205 Db. 1288 / 101.

01/26/98 Dianna McCormac Bowles to David L. McFarland [DEED] LOT 106 PB 154/205 NORWOOD AVE Db. 2005 / 152.

01/26/98 David L. McFarland to Richard J Matta, TR; Chase Capital Asset Management LLC [DEED] LOT 106 PB 154/205 NORWOOD AVE Db. 2005 / 154.

01/19/99 Richard J Matta, TR; Chase Capital Asset Management LLC to William K Reed, TR, Norwood Pearson Trust [TR DEED] VARIOUS TRACTS DT 2023/434 Db.2070 / 692.

04/27/99 William K Reed, TR, Norwood Pearson Trust, WNC Properties LLC to Tom Gallaher [DEED] LOT 106 PB 154/205 NORWOOD AVE Db. 2089 / 373.

04/29/03 Tom Gallaher; Strauss & Assocs, PA to Tom Gallaher Living Trust [DEED] CORR LT 106 PB 154/205 NORWOOD AVE Db. 3188 / 0683.

04/04/2014 Tom Gallaher Living Trust to Robin Croog NORWOOD AVE 0.08 AC Db. 5197 / 1976.

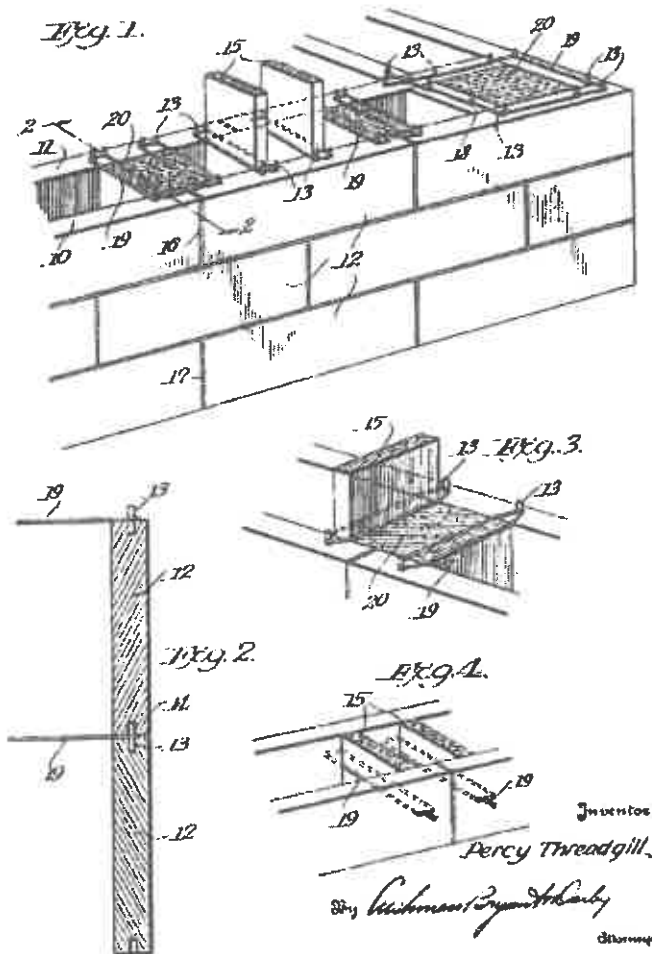
Awarded Patent

BURNSVILLE, NOV. 14. (AP)—Percy Threadgill of Burnsville has been awarded United States Patent No. 1,829,841 for his new and improved method of building a building with a new feature.

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BUILDING
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1,829,841



Miss Threadgill Is Engaged To Lt. Tom Baden

Mr. and Mrs. J. Percy Threadgill, formerly of Asheville and now of Miami, Fla., and Mr. Helen Estates, Pensacola, N. C., have announced the engagement of their daughter, Miss Helen Hamrick Threadgill, to Lt. Tom B. Baden, son of Mr. and Mrs. James H. Baden of Washington, D. C.

Miss Threadgill was graduated from Chevy Chase Junior college in Washington, D. C., and will be graduated from the University of North Carolina in June with an A. B. degree in sociology. She is a member of Pi Beta Phi sorority.

Lt. Baden, now stationed in Washington, attended Mercersburg academy in Pennsylvania and was graduated from the University of North Carolina in March, 1943, with an A. B. degree in political science. He is a member of Sigma Nu fraternity, and at the university he was tapped for the Golden Fleece and the Order of the Grail. He was one of the students chosen for Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities.

The wedding will take place in the late spring.

History and High-Lights

30 Norwood Avenue Asheville, North Carolina

30 Norwood was built by a Mr. Bain, said to be E.W. Grove's engineer for the Grove Park Inn and downtown's famous Grove Arcade. Dates of construction vary from the early-1920s, up to and including 1926.

Norwood Park's first homes date from 1914. According to Mr. Bain's daughter, the entire house was built by using hand-poured 24" x 24" x 18" concrete forms, then block-and-tackled into place on reinforcing bars.

Anecdotally, the Bains bought the first Cadillac in Asheville. Did they park it in the current garage? Not known, but the garage was built according to the grandson & his wife of owner #2 (post-Bain, pre-Farrell) as a stable/carriage house for horses, hence the cattle guards at the entry.

The home also served for a time as a parsonage for a Presbyterian church on Hillside (now a Methodist church). The daughter of the then-minister Rev. Farrell was Eileen Farrell, who played the much-married (17 times) "Lisa" on CBS' long-running soap opera, *As the World Turns*. She recalls riding her bicycle "down the stairs" from the third floor to the main living area.

Other residents reportedly were Charlton Heston and his wife Lydia Clark Heston who rented the basement. Mr. Heston was director of the Asheville Community Theater from 1947-48.

For many years the house was abandoned before it was put into a multi-property Real Estate Investment Trust in the mid-1990s. We have pre-renovation photos. Between investments made at 30 Norwood by that REIT and the current owner – extending into 2013 – the house is now one of the most "eccentric and exuberant" of Norwood Park's homes and has been featured on home tours for local and national preservation conferences.