History & Folklore

From the Liberty County Historical Commmission Walking Tour –

E.W. & Mary Olivia Ellis Pickett Home, 405 Bowie Street

405 BOWIE IN 1915

405 BOWIE IN 1926 IN THE SNOW

405 BOWIE IN 1942

Today, we want to take you on a journey through time and share the story of a remarkable family and their home – the Ernest William Pickett and Mary Olivia Ellis Pickett House. This house is not just a building; it is a testament to a family's legacy, the excitement of Texas oil discovery, and the elegance of early 20th-century life.

Ernest William Pickett and Mary Olivia Ellis Pickett were pillars of the Liberty community. Ernest, more commonly known as "Ernie," was a dedicated businessman, longtime District Clerk and prominent figure in the area, along with his wife, Mary Olivia, whose charm and grace were well known, created a home that reflected both their ambition and their hospitality. Pickett's story is intertwined with Liberty's history in a unique way.

The original Pickett house was built in 1911 and was a wooden home with architecture typical of other homes in Liberty during this period. However, the history of the house is inseparable from the story of Texas oil. In 1925, the discovery of oil in the Liberty area brought prosperity, excitement, and a sense of possibility. For the Picketts, like many families of the era, this discovery was transformative. It brought wealth and prestige and inspired bold decisions. In late 1924, E.W. Pickett and Associates had formed a company to drill for oil in south Liberty. Mr. Pickett, a resolute Catholic, vowed he would build a new church if they made a well. Late in the night on January 1, 1925, the Winfree-Pickett Well No. 1 came in and, it was a "gusher!" Mr. Ernie employed Houston architect, J.M. Glover, to design a new church as well as expanding and creating a new home which would not only accommodate their growing family but also host the social gatherings that would become legendary in Liberty. It was decided to build in the Spanish Colonial style in red brick for both the church and the home.

In 1926, the Pickett family undertook a remarkable architectural feat: they built a new house around the original 1911 structure. Imagine, if you will, living inside your old home while a new, larger, more luxurious home takes shape around you. This creative approach allowed the family to preserve the charm and memories of the original house while embracing Spanish Colonial design and the grandeur befitting their new prosperity. The new 1-1/2 story Pickett house featured elegant touches, including wide porches, tall ceilings, and large windows that allowed light to fill every room – a hallmark of Texas residential architecture of the period. The red brick exterior with combination tile roof which included gable extensions on each side of the house formed an inset porch with three arched bays. An elaborate entry with round columns and finial accents enhanced the gables and porch.

One of the most striking features of the new home was its second-floor ballroom. This was not merely a decorative space; it was the heart of social life in Liberty. The Picketts hosted parties, dances, and gatherings that brought together business leaders, neighbors, and friends. These events reflected the family's generosity and social influence.

The house also tells the story of the Pickett family itself. Ernest William Pickett came from a line of hardworking and enterprising Texans. His family emphasized community, integrity, and perseverance – values that were mirrored in the way he conducted his life and business. Mary Olivia Ellis Pickett brought warmth, culture, and sophistication to the home, balancing Ernest's ambition with grace. Together, they created not just a house, but a legacy that would be remembered for generations.

Today, when we look at the Pickett house on Bowie Street, we see the story of a family who embraced opportunity, celebrated life, and built a home that reflected both their personal and civic pride. It stands as a symbol of Liberty's history during a time of growth and change – an era when oil discoveries reshaped communities, and families. The Picketts played a central role in that transformation.

The Ernest William Pickett and Mary Olivia Ellis Pickett House is a treasure. By intentionally combining the old house and a new house, this is one of the most unusual houses in Liberty. It reflects the family who lived there, the social and economic forces that shaped Liberty, and the creativity and vision that turned a simple 1911 home into a remarkable and elegant 1926 landmark. This historic home has remained in the Pickett family over the years. Their grandchild, Benjamin Ellis Picket, Jr. and wife, Deborah, now live in this beautiful home.

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In the photo at left: Ernest William "Ernie" Pickett is seated at far left, youngest boy is Charles Patrick "Pat" Pickett, seated boy is Ernest William "Billy" Pickett Jr., the little girl is Arlene Pickett and standing at right is Mary Olivia Ellis Pickett. The year is 1918.

Additional information about the history of Immaculate Conception Catholic Church

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