

Delta Sources and Resources

**The Bloodworth House:
Where Heritage Meets Hollywood**
626 Cynthia Street
Poplar Bluff, Missouri
by LaDawn Lee Fuhr

Poplar Bluff, Missouri is called “The Gateway to the Ozarks” and situated mere miles from the Arkansas state line. This homey hamlet located in Southeast Missouri serves as the Butler County seat and is named after the multitude of poplar trees inhabiting this bluff on the Black River. There is a proper English manor house in Poplar Bluff, nestled within the historic downtown district on an eclectic, tree lined street among a sundry group of dwellings. This majestic home is steeped in history while it continues to make history. This house is the Blood-

worth House, where heritage meets Hollywood, and its story is deeply intertwined with its lineage.

Situated at 626 Cynthia Street, The Bloodworth House was built in the early twentieth century by Judge Charles T. Bloodworth and was originally a Queen Anne style cottage in red brick. Judge Bloodworth was a civil rights activist and an advocate for the disenfranchised. Because of his opposition to the Ku Klux Klan, they tried to assassinate him by shooting him in the chest on his front porch of his then home in Corning, Arkansas, but Judge Bloodworth survived and prevailed, relocating his family, including four sons who became his permanent body guards, from Corning to Poplar Bluff. Those sons also grew up to become lawyers whose service exceeded the call of duty. Son Charles served as a judge advocate at



The Bloodworth House Library.
Photograph by LaDawn Lee Fuhr.



The Bloodworth House Foyer.
Photograph by LaDawn Lee Fuhr.

Nuremberg and returned home with one of only three hand-written Nuremberg trial transcripts, now housed at the University of Missouri. Ralph served as Japanese war crimes prosecutor and brought justice to, and for, many in a post-war panacea of healing. The outstanding Bloodworth legacy would continue through the offspring including Ralph's daughter, noted writer Linda Bloodworth-Thomason.

Linda Bloodworth-Thomason was born in Poplar Bluff to Ralph and Claudia Bloodworth. She is a successful writer, screenwriter, producer, author, and documentarian. A graduate of the University of Missouri, she left for California not long after college. She began her storied career as a teacher, an advertising consultant, and a reporter, all while freelancing as a screenwriter. Along with her Arkansas-born husband, Harry Thomason, they formed Mozark Productions, the name being an homage to both of their home states, and together changed the perception of the South and of the marginalized among global audiences. Their hit shows in-

cluded the iconic *Designing Women*, *Filthy Rich*, *Hearts Afire*, *Evening Shade*, and *Women of the House*. Together they wrote, produced, and directed *A Man From Hope*, the story that introduced future President Bill Clinton to the world. They were also instrumental in Democratic convention operations in 1992 and 1996, along with co-chairing the 1993 presidential inauguration.

The indomitable duo has been nominated for, and won, a plethora of awards in their industries including Emmy, Golden Globe, Director's Guild, People's Choice, and GLADD, and recent accolades for Bloodworth-Thomason's 2013 marriage equality film, *Bridegroom*, which won the audience prize at the Tribeca Film Festival and at the Los Angeles Outfest Film Festival. Another winning collaboration they added to their resume is the expansion and refurbishment of the Bloodworth family home. The Bloodworth House was renovated into a five thousand square foot, English Baroque marvel in the early 1990s, with the overhauls liter-

ally encasing the original structure. Some of the best master builders in the world were contracted, including the Queen's craftsmen, Artisans of Crowther of S'yon Lodge, who rebuilt Windsor Castle in the seventeenth century. Notable additions include a massive library with over forty types of molding, and a stunning selection of antique furnishings from the William and Mary period, 1689-1702.

The library was built in England, disassembled to send by ship to New Orleans, then by barge, Mark Twain style, up the Mississippi River to Cape Girardeau, and eventually trucked into Poplar Bluff. Some of the details of the craftsmanship include the "Lord Byron Fireplace," which once belonged to the poet's father-in-law. The outside area of the Bloodworth House includes seasonal plantings, European statuary, and a formal garden. A pristine carriage house is located beyond the beautiful courtyard behind the Bloodworth House. While The Bloodworth House is beautiful front to back, inside and outside, it is much more than a pretty face. The Bloodworth House has been the backdrop for entertainment events and hosted the legendary Lily Tomlin, iconic comedian, television, and film star Leslie Jordan, and *Designing Women's* Julia Sugarbaker, the late, great Dixie Carter.

The Bloodworth House also serves as the headquarters for a multitude of philanthropic endeavors including the Claudia Foundation, the Charlie Classics Reading Program, and the Designing Women Foundation. All of these organizations were founded by Linda Bloodworth-Thomason and are intended to help the educational efforts and pursuits of students while giving back to the community. The Claudia Foundation was created by Bloodworth-Thomason in 1989 to honor her late mother, Claudia Bloodworth. A non-profit foundation, its mission is *to promote positive change in the lives of individuals, especially women . . . to educate, equip and enrich. In particular, it offers challenging opportunities and resources for individuals to explore their personal goals and ed-*

ucational possibilities through personal interaction, scholarships, academic experiences, the arts, and a close community. Since inception, the Claudia Foundation has awarded one hundred and thirty-two scholastic scholarships totaling almost two million dollars and giving that many young people opportunities. The Claudia Foundation is a cultural mainstay of Poplar Bluff.

The Charlie Classics Reading Program began in 1990 to honor Linda Bloodworth-Thomason's grandfather Charles, the original owner of Bloodworth House. Bloodworth-Thomason believes "that reading is the cornerstone of education and that reading great classic literature expands the mind of the reader." The goal is for junior and senior high students to read one hundred literary classics, chosen from a list provided by the Charlie Classics committee, in a school year. To take the program out into the community, each student is assigned a citizen mentor who also reads the books with them, verifies the reading, and enables the two to have discussions about the assignment. Over three hundred thousand Poplar Bluff students have been impacted by the Charlie Classics Reading Program, with three thousand books donated to the school system. Fifty-two scholarships totaling more than two hundred and fifty thousand dollars have been awarded including scholastic scholarships and incentives. The next goal for the Charlie Classics Reading Program is to expand the reach nationally.

The Designing Women Foundation began in 2009 to run as a concurrent scholarship program with the Claudia Foundation. The Designing Women Foundation also works with the Charlie Classics Reading Program to award scholarships for both higher education and vocational education based on need and with at-risk individuals to reward their renewal with support for training and education. They often hold "Power of the Purse" fundraisers at the Bloodworth House to help fund these and other scholarship programs.

The Bloodworth House is a design marvel

with a heart, tucked into a small Southern town, and it should not be missed. It offers a diverse global history lesson in one destination, where guests can enjoy the integrity of the Delta and beyond through the fascinating lineage of the Bloodworth clan and the carefully curated culture. A visit to The Bloodworth House is an outstanding journey in history, architecture, literature, entertainment, education, philanthropy, politics, community involvement, and sense of place. The Bloodworth House also serves the community in many ways including as a popular site for events, both booked and planned independently for the community by the venue. Easter egg hunts, movie nights, and tea parties have been put together for the public. The Bloodworth House is available for tours and private events including weddings, meetings, reunions, and more. Find out more about the Claudia Foundation, the Charlie Classics Reading Program, and the Designing Women Foundation by contacting The Bloodworth House at 573-686-3040 or by email, claudiadirector@gmail.com. ▲▼▲

Links:

<https://www.theclaudiafoundation.org/charlie-classics/>

<https://www.theclaudiafoundation.org/>

<http://www.designingwomenfoundation.org/>



The Lord Byron fireplace
with a photo of Claudia Bloodworth.
Photograph by LaDawn Lee Fuhr.