

# Good Neighbor House attempts to bring change to community

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## Free showing

Good Neighbor House, 2301 Colcord Ave., will open its doors to the area's largely Hispanic community with a free showing of the film "La Misma Luna" ("The Same Moon") at 7 p.m. July 9. "A story about a boy's love for his mom and her love for him, it's a real tear-jerker," said Rick Allen, Good Neighbor board member. The film, which also is presented by the Sanger Heights Neighborhood Association, is in Spanish with English subtitles.

A movement to bring back the Progressive Era of American history — when do-gooders of many stripes sought to enact social change in their communities by planting settlement houses in urban areas — is under way in Waco.

The Good Neighbor House, 2301 Colcord Ave., considers itself a modern-day settlement house, said supporter Rick Allen, a former city councilman and innkeeper who lives and works down the street from it.

From the 1890s through the eve of World War I, young, predominantly well-educated, white liberals with religious motives and social consciousness moved into poor neighborhoods to try to help alleviate the effects of poverty on local residents.



Children play at the Jack & Jill School's playground at 2301 Colcord Ave in 1950.

The Texas Collection, Baylor University

One way these reformers — mostly women — accomplished their goals was to establish neighborhood centers to provide financial and material assistance to the needy, as well as social and educational opportunities for disadvantaged people in their surroundings.

Laine Scales, a Baylor University professor and associate dean, purchased the distressed Colcord Avenue property — a vandalized, foreclosed home that is nearly a century old — in 2010, with the notion of bringing back the first genuine settlement house in Waco in more than 60 years.

Scales and the Good Neighbor House board of administrators hope to line up Baylor undergraduate and graduate students to "settle" the rehabilitated mansion of about 3,500 square feet when it is restored and ready to open.

They would be the heirs — in spirit and tradition — of the home's former occupants.

Doctor of osteopathy Julia May Sarratt Sinclair (1881-1937) and her husband, John D. Sinclair (1875-1924) called 2301 Colcord Ave. their home from their marriage in 1910 until Julia Sinclair's death on July 30, 1937.

J.D. Sinclair was a longtime Waco resident who worked his way up the business ladder. He started as a stockboy at Goldstein & Miguel's dry goods shop in 1889, then was a

bookkeeper for other local firms and a bank auditor less than 25 years later.

Meanwhile, Ohio native Julia Sinclair started her practice (as Dr. Sarratt) in 1906 at the Provident Building at Fourth Street and Franklin Avenue — the elite office building for many of Waco's up-and-coming young professionals of the 1920s.

After about 20 years, she gave up her practice because of ill health, but maintained her involvement in local medical organizations.

From the mid-1940s until the 1990s, the house at 2301 Colcord Ave. was home to the Jack & Jill School, which traced its educational pedigree through Waco's first Montessori nursery school.

Grace J. Greenhill came to Waco about 1914 to open her kindergarten largely at the behest of her New York friends who had contacts in the area.

Greenhill was a disciple of Maria Montessori (1870-1952), the Italian physician and educator who espoused the philosophy of education that bears her name.

With its emphasis on children as “absorbent” beings who needed a nurturing climate in which they could thrive through creative activity and exploration, the Montessori method was a radical departure from the regimented, rote learning of the 19th century.

Grace Greenhill, the wife of Frederick Greenhill (1883-1931), opened the school at 1815 Austin Ave., now the parking lot for Community Bank and Trust at 18th Street and Washington Avenue.

Carrie Godshaw (1884-1973), daughter of Bavarian immigrant and merchant prince Sam Sanger (1843-1919), was one of the leading proponents of the Montessori method in Waco, according to one of her statements attached to a Fred A. Gildersleeve photograph.

Godshaw said she wanted the progressive educational opportunity for her daughter Elva (Godshaw) Levy (1910-94), a member of the inaugural class of 20 youngsters.

Grace Greenhill was the only teacher in the school's early years. After her death in 1932, the school was operated by Minnie Duncan (1889-1972).

“I think it was an unusually progressive kindergarten for its day,” recalled Laura Risher Dossett in an article in the December 1990 issue of Waco History and Heritage. “We did a lot of interesting things and we had a teacher who taught us French.”

Sometime in the 1930s, the Greenhill Montessori School moved from Austin Avenue to Homan Avenue, then to Colcord Avenue during World War II. Sometime in those years, the name was changed to Jack & Jill School, which inherited a lot of the original equipment and books of the older institution, Good Neighbor House supporter Allen said.

Allen said as Good Neighborhood House reclaims its historic roots, the board is eager to reconnect people with the site.

“We'd like to find people who grew up at Jack & Jill, and their parents,” he said. “We want to hear their stories and see their photographs. We'd love to find where the old playground equipment went.”

He estimates more than 1,000 Wacoans went through the for-profit day care facility during its heyday.

People with memories to share are urged to contact GoodNeighborWaco.com because two classes of Baylor University students in the Oral History program want to collect the material for scholarly use.

**Additional sources: GoodNeighborWaco.com, Waco Tribune-Herald files, Montessori.edu, Ancestry.com, the Handbook of Texas Online.**

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