Times were hard in those early years in the Valley. The Versers had been married in Rile
ey, Tennessee and had started their family when Mr. Verser became ill and was given six months to live. He arrived first by himself to see if the Valley climate would help him to get well. He thrived in South Texas and lived forty more years working as a farmer.

Huron's wife, who was also his first cousin, Lucy Verser followed with the little ones. After they purchased the sizeable house from Mr. C.W. Waterwall, who had built and run it as a boarding house, she had one more child, making six in all. Jack H. Verser, the baby of the family, was born in this house in 1916 or 1917. Family records are not clear on this point though his social security record says 1917.

What was to be the Verser House was initially the Chaudoin House. A series of pictures taken from atop the Hill Building in 1911 form a panoramic view of early Harlingen. It shows the L or T-shaped wood frame house in pristine condition. It must have been constructed in late 1910 or 1911, for Robert Runyon pictures, including Monroe Street, taken earlier in 1910 do not show it. Lily Chaudoin Cleary (R.W. Liston's mother) recalls her family move to the Valley where they first settled on Dilworth Road. Mr. R.L. Chaudoin came to Harlingen with R.S. Dilworth and Winston Harwood. Dilworth had a ranch west of town and south of the Arroyo Colorado. Hard times drove the Chaudoins into town where they rented what was later to be called the Verser House, and Lily's mother offered room and board. When they rented it and lived there, it was known as the Chaudoin House. Lily waited tables for her mother, and it was there she met her husband to be, Osie Liston.

The Verser family lived in the big house which they had purchased, and there were always several people who rented rooms. The main attraction was Lucy's wonderful home-cooked meals, served family style. It was great southern cooking. Many Harlingen people ate there on Sundays. Weekdays, men who worked downtown, chose the delicious Verser food for fifty cents a meal. Also, out-of-town businessmen soon learned the best place to go was to the Verser House on the one hundred block of West Monroe. The address was 114 W. Monroe. The site now across the street from New York Deli is a landscaped vacant lot with large trees.

The rented rooms were comfortable with a washstand, pitcher and bowl and nice furniture. The dining room was dominated by a square oak table which could expand to seat twelve people. This table remains in the possession of Jack's daughter Kathryn Hearn, who lives in McAllen. After the dwelling ceased to be a boarding house the dining area became a combination dining/living area for the family. On its east side was a living room with low built-in bookshelves and some antique furniture. There were seventeen rooms altogether, including the dining room, which was 20' by 40', and the kitchen. All the rooms had a view of the courtyard. The Verser family used the master bedroom on
the second floor east side as the sitting room for the family. There was no sitting room as such for the boarders.

Young Maxine Shaddix lived in one of the rooms with her mother after they arrived in Harlingen in April 1920. Later, she became Mrs. Flint Harris of San Benito and fondly remembers this place as home while she and Flint were courting and until she married and went to San Benito to live. Her mother paid Mrs. Verser $100.00 a month for a room and three meals a day for both of them.

Numerous, later prominent, Harlingenites stayed at the Verser House before becoming established in the community. John Myrick and his wife lived there as he began to practice law in 1915 as Harlingen's first attorney. In late 1926 and part of 1927 Ned Sondock, who would found the Delta Office Furniture Company predecessor to Delta Office Supply, lived there while waiting for his wife, Tillye, and their baby son to move to the Valley from Houston. Jim Sweeney, father of Mary Lou Rumbo, also lived there prior to his marriage and while working for the Ice Company which would evolve into CP&L.

The 1930 Harlingen telephone directory lists H.J. and Lucy Verser still living there along with several of their children. These were Annie Conner Verser, who taught school in Mercedes; Corrine Verser, who taught at the Harlingen Senior High School; Bessie Verser; and Murrell Verser, the oldest of the six siblings. He was a packer working at the Snavely Packing Company.

In 1966, eighty-eight year old Mrs. Verser followed her husband in death. The daughters continued to live there for a number of years. A series of fires took place in late summer of 1979. It was not occupied at that time, though it was still in the Verser name. Jack Verser offered any of its contents which could be re-cycled to the Harlingen Hospital Restoration Project. Doors, windows, plumbing, ceiling and floor boards were used to complete the Museum project. What were left over, unused, were the floor boards that were sold as fund raising souvenirs.

Four sisters, who are Lucy and Huron's grandchildren by Jack, and eight great grandchildren are the descendents now alive. Debby Verser Rektorik, one of the sisters, is Chief Special Services Officer at the Knapp Medical Center. Her father Jack passed away in 1998.

Regretfully the Verser House was lost by fire and the ravishment of time, but its memory lives on through this little story, the charitable mementoes purchased by generous citizens, and the fixtures of the house still serving the old F Street Hospital now at the Rio Grande Valley Museum.

Betty Murray's 1980 article was transcribed and annotated by Norman Rozef, Harlingen Historical Preservation Society, September 2003.