

CASS MANSION: DUTCH REVIVAL RESIDENCE OF DOCTORS AND CELEBRITIES

The Dutch Revival style was incredibly popular in Denver in the 1890s. What about it do you think appealed so much to people building homes at the time?

This Dutch Revival home was built for the family of Oscar David Cass, M.D. The land was purchased in 1891, but the house was not finished and occupied until 1899, five years after Dr. Cass died. His wife Emogene and his children (two daughters and a son) lived there until 1918. As with other grand mansions built in the late 1800s, the Cass Mansion is located in Capitol Hill.

History

Dr. Cass was born in Lyman, New Hampshire in 1823, and he attended Vermont Medical Center where he received training as a doctor and a surgeon. He practiced medicine in New York, California, Iowa and Kansas. He was in California during the Gold Rush of 1849, which is where he learned about gold dust and how valuable it could be. Dr. Cass came to Denver in 1860. Although he never gave up practicing medicine entirely, he was devoting most of his energies to establishing an investment brokerage and banking office in downtown Denver in 1861. Cass founded one of Denver's earliest banks, which he called the Exchange Bank. The Exchange Bank was one of the first firms to purchase gold dust from the miners. Gold dust was used as currency prior to the passage of the Legal Tender Act of 1862. The Exchange Bank issued script and minted coins on a small scale, and was one of the first to loan money charging high interest rates. O.D. Cass and his brother Joseph Cass opened a branch bank in Central City, as well. Most of the Cass family fortune came from transporting gold dust from Denver to banks on the east coast during the Civil War (Noel and Norgren, 1997).

Dr. Cass was also active in real estate speculation and development. In 1860, Cass and his business partner, Dr. J.W. Graham, bought an entire block of land at 16th and Curtis streets in downtown Denver: it was known as the Cass and Graham Block. Cass also engaged in freighting mule trains from the Missouri River to the Rockies in the early days of Denver.

The Cass Mansion became home to the Friedman family from 1918 to 1939. Rabbi William Friedman joined with other Denver religious leaders to create the Charity Organizations Society to raise funds to support local health and welfare agencies. Today, his organization is known as United Way. In 1890, Rabbi William Friedman founded another enduring organization, the National Jewish Hospital for Consumptives. This hospital served hundreds of penniless Jewish victims of tuberculosis who came to Colorado hoping for a cure.

Another notable resident of the house was Ann B. Davis, character actress and two-time Emmy Award-winner best known for her role as Alice Nelson, the maid on "The Brady Bunch" television series in the late 1960s and 1970s. Ann moved to the Cass Mansion in the 70s to join an Episcopal community led by Reverend William C. Frey.

Structure

The 8th Avenue façade of Cass Mansion has a steeply pitched gable roof with distinctive stepped parapet walls typical of Dutch Revival architecture. A conical roof and whimsical finial cap the turret that anchors the southeast corner of the building. The dormer on the east elevation also has a stepped parapet in a smaller version of the front and back facades. The dormer is flanked by two tall, thin chimneys built with decorative brick detailing. The walls are made of tightly laid red-orange brick set with thin mortar joints known as butter joints, and the mortar is dyed to match the brick, which gives the building a smooth, monolithic appearance. The composition is accented with horizontal bands of Manitou sandstone. The foyer of the building is dominated by a 19th century Scottish stained glass window brought from Glasgow, while quarter-sawn oak cabinets and woodwork trim the

walls. The main staircase has more handcrafted woodwork, and seven functional gas fireplaces still heat the house during the winter (Cass Mansion Denver Landmark Application).

For the last 10 years, the historic Cass Mansion has served as the office of Market Perceptions & HealthCare Research, a research and consulting firm working primarily with health care and public sector institutions. The Cass Mansion has retained its original charm, from the beautifully detailed woodwork throughout the home to the seven original (and still functional) gas fireplaces in many of the offices.

Architect

The mansion's architect, Willis Adams Marean, was born in Woodhull, New York in 1853. He came to Denver in 1880 and worked for Frank Edbrooke from 1881 to 1895. In 1895, Marean left Edbrooke and Co. and partnered with another former Edbrooke and Co. employee, Albert Julius Norton, to form Marean and Norton. Active from 1895-1946, Marean and Norton designed numerous residences, commercial buildings and public facilities. Among their more notable structures are the Chamber of Commerce and YMCA buildings in Denver, Fort Morgan City Hall, the Cheesman-Boettcher House (now the Governor's Mansion), the Greek Theater in Denver's Civic Center and the Cheesman Park Pavilion. Other notable buildings no longer standing include Denver's Shirley Hotel, Shirley Hotel Annex and Plymouth Place Hotel.

References

Noel, T. and Norgren, B. 1997. *Denver: The City Beautiful*. Denver: Historic Denver, Inc.

Cass Mansion Denver Landmark Application.