

The Lace House
161 Main Street
Black Hawk
Gilpin Co.
Colorado

HABS No. CO-122

HABS
COLO,
24-BHAWK,
2 -

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

Addendum to:
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COLO
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Building Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

THE LACE HOUSE

Location: Addendum to: HABS No. CO-122
161 Main Street
Black Hawk
Gilpin County
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Present Owner: City of Black Hawk

Original Use: Residence

Present Use: Historic House Museum

Statement of Significance: The Lace House is part of the Central City-Black Hawk National Historic District and is considered Colorado's premier example of Carpenter Gothic architecture. Fully restored, it is also one of the few structures in Black Hawk remaining from the 1860s.

Historian: Jamie M. Donahoe
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BACKGROUND¹

The Lace House is one of the many historic buildings in the Central City-Black Hawk National Historic Landmark District. The Historic District is actually comprised of the three towns of Black Hawk, Central City, and Nevadaville, located 35 miles west of Denver in Gilpin County, Colorado.

These three towns, as the site of the first and most productive gold mines in the vast, arid intermountain region of the western United States, were the scene of the first large population movement to the area. The district economy sustained regional socioeconomic development from 1859 through 1893, when its production was surpassed by other mining areas. While mining activity expanded around Central City and Nevadaville, Black Hawk emerged in the late 1860s as the processing and transportation center of the district after Nathaniel Hill brought smelter technology to Black Hawk. As a result, the three communities were economically as well as socially interdependent.

The initial building boom occurred in the early 1860s, after the first strikes in Gregory Gulch. Towns were hastily constructed and few substantial or non-utilitarian structures were built. The 1880s, however, were the high point of economic prosperity in the three communities of the mining district; during this decade, Gilpin County led the state in gold production building. The towns' architectural development during this later period reflected the optimism of continued prosperity, especially in residential construction. While there was little new commercial or other building, new residential building boomed into the early 1890s as people used their new found wealth to build newer, grander and more substantial houses, often replacing earlier structures. The Panic of 1893 precipitated a steep decline in Gilpin County mining and brought residential construction to a near halt. Increased yield in the mines between 1897 and 1899 led to a slight resurgence in home construction.

Today, the towns of Central City and Black Hawk retain an exceptional degree of their historic appearance and architectural integrity. With rare exceptions, the majority of contributing buildings in the NHL district are vernacular rather than high style designs, inspired by widely distributed pattern books and reflecting local taste, custom, and available materials.

Most of the domestic buildings are a simple vernacular type with a rectangular plan and intersecting gable roof; often eclectic and popular elements were added. These included Gothic Revival details such as ornamental bargeboards, carved porch details, and steeply pitched roofs, and Greek Revival features such as simple wood columns with capitals and wood window and door pediments.

Like the commercial and public architecture of the historic district, the towns' domestic architecture shows distinctive evolutionary stages. Few residential structures remain from the 1860s because of the lack of care and less permanent materials used in their construction. The Lace House is a notable exception. As transportation improved and community stability was attained, better craftsmanship, better materials, and the elaborate decorative elements brought in by the railroad, such as carved ornamentation for houses and cast iron storefronts for commercial buildings, brought maturity to the construction trade in Black Hawk, Central City and Nevadaville. By 1880 substantial

buildings replaced the earlier log structures and dominated the architectural landscape as families were formed and miners' and businessmen's affluence grew.

THE LACE HOUSE

The Lace House has both received lavish attention and suffered benign neglect during its 130-year history. It was built in 1863 as a wedding gift from Lucien K. Smith to his wife, Mary Germain. According to local folklore, Smith was the secretary of a company which built and managed a toll road from Black Hawk to Denver.² His father, Nelson Smith, and uncle, Ebeneser Smith, realizing the profit potential of a passable road to Denver, decided to take advantage of new territorial legislation that allowed the incorporation of toll road companies. The county commissioners were authorized, under separate legislation, to set tolls as follows: \$1.00 for a wagon and team of two horses, mules or oxen; .25 for each additional animal; .75 for a one animal vehicle; and .10 a head for each loose animal. Parties passing for funerals or religious ceremonies were exempt. The term of the tolls was to be twenty years. By October 3, 1861 the Smiths had completed their road.

Lucien Smith operated the final toll gate on the road to Black Hawk. The toll gate was apparently located on Main Street in Black Hawk, within a half mile of the business section. The building that now houses the Black Hawk Art School is thought to be the site of the original gate.³ Lucien also ran a saloon, offering food, drink, and a place to stay in conjunction with the toll gate. That business, combined with the income from the relatively high tolls, made Smith a very wealthy man.

On January 24, 1863 Smith married Mary Germain.⁴ They honeymooned in Denver for two months and returned to the house at 161 Main Street, which Lucien had arranged to have built as a surprise for his new bride. They lived in the house only until 1865. Legend has it that after losing a child in the seventh month of Mary's pregnancy, the Smiths no longer wanted to live at "Tragedy Point", so they sold their house and moved to Central City.⁵

The house was sold on August 11, 1865 to Charles W. Fisk. For \$400, Fisk received a number of mining claims in the Enterprise, Russell and Gregory Mining Districts and "one house and lot situate in Black Hawk City and known as the house and lot of Lucien K. Smith, the lot being 40 feet front and 100 feet deep".⁶ Charles W. Fisk owned a mine which was "one of the prominent producing mines in Gilpin County".⁷ He had started a quartz-mill of eight stamps and a circular-saw mill, with George B. Allen as a partner, just outside Black Hawk.⁸ Fisk purchased and sold a number of different mining claims while he was in business.

From that point, the house changed hands a number of times. Fisk sold it to Samuel B. Morgan on June 22, 1867. For \$7,800, Morgan received some mining claims and "also the house wherein the said Charles W. Fisk now resides, situated on the south side of Main Street in the City of Black Hawk, aforesaid with the lot whereon the house is situated being the same house erected by Lucien K. Smith about the year 1863 and by him conveyed to said Charles W. Fisk."⁹

Morgan assigned the house in a trust deed, but defaulted on the loan and lost the house. Willard Teller, the trustee, sold the house at auction to the highest bidder. John E. Barber purchased the

house and lot for \$1,940. This complex transaction took place July 20, 1874.¹⁰ Barber, of New York City, sold the house to Daniel A. Spearin on July 28, 1874 for \$600.¹¹ Spearin owned the property for nine years, the longest period of ownership until that time. He sold it in 1883 to Lydia Osborne (also Osbourn, Osbourne) for \$575.¹² She lived there until late 1896, at which point she sold it to Rosa Pircher. For \$700, Pircher purchased the Lace House and an old log stable which had also belonged to the Osbornes.¹³

The frequent change of ownership, decreasing value of the house, and the eventual defaults on loans are indicative of the economic slump which hit Black Hawk in the mid-1860s. It had become more difficult to recover minerals using stamp mills as the surface ores supplies were depleted and complex sulfide ores were mined. As a result, production declined. One solution to the problem was the smelting process, in which ores were heated to high temperatures and allowed to burn in the open air, driving off the sulfur. The roasted ore was then put into smelting furnaces and reduced to slag and copper matte, which contained the valuable minerals. Smelting was a new technique and the first attempts in Black Hawk were not successful. However, in 1868 Nathaniel P. Hill organized the Boston and Colorado Smelting Company and opened a smelter in Black Hawk, using a new combination of chemicals to extract the ores. His smelter revitalized the mining industry and the city of Black Hawk, giving rise to the prosperity of the 1880s.¹⁴

Not much information has been found about the other early residents of the house. Lydia Osborne was interviewed in 1950 at the age of 97. She said her husband, a mining technology engineer, purchased the house upon the family's return from a three-year visit to their native England. Osborne was at that time employed by an English mining syndicate, and during the period he was in the area he was associated with the Bobtail tunnel workings.¹⁵ Mrs. Osborne also said the house was originally built by the Gregory Mining company as the home of the mining company's superintendent. She may have been referring to Charles W. Fisk, the second owner of the house. The house was one of the "showplaces of the day"¹⁶ and the Osbornes entertained many guests, such as H.A.W. Tabor, Peter McFarlane, and the family of Governor Evans.¹⁷

Mrs. Rosa Pircher, who purchased the house in 1896, was a miner's widow with four sons. She purchased the house "with her husband's insurance money after he died of the 'miner's disease'."¹⁸ She lived there until after World War I, when she went to California to live with one of her sons.¹⁹ According to Frank R. Hollenback's history of the area, *Central City and Black Hawk Then and Now*, Lou Pircher lived in the house from 1904 - 1913. He was the Gilpin Tramway Superintendent and left town to work for the Moffat Road at Tabernash.²⁰ Apparently, his mother then left town as well. Rosa Pircher was the last person to live in the house before it began to fall into serious disrepair.²¹

The house remained vacant for a number of years, with the city periodically taking title to it for back taxes. It went in and out of city ownership several times before 1925 when the city of Black Hawk formally took possession of the house.²²

In 1935 the house was sold to Leo Elden Cull.²³ A letter from G. Cull to Dolores Spellman recounts a fire at the house in 1938. The fire was caused by sparks from the railroad which was just across Main Street.

The house again reverted to the city for non-payment of taxes in 1943. That same year, the city sold the house to Evelyn Hume for the sum of \$10.00. The stipulation that she was "not to tear down the above house, but is to repair it, the same as originally" was made part of the sale.²⁴ Mrs. Hume did make a few repairs but returned to Greeley permanently without completing the work. The house remained unoccupied for many years. A number of efforts were made by the city, civic groups and individuals to purchase the house for restoration. Despite the many offers, Mrs. Hume refused to sell the house for many years.²⁵ In 1973, however, she deeded the house to the city of Black Hawk. In 1976, the city decided to apply for status as a Centennial-Bicentennial site and restore the house.

Restoration itself was a long and arduous process. The primary group responsible for the renovation was the Little Kingdom Historical Foundation, which had previously restored the ceiling of the Central City Opera House. The group had been founded after the Central City Black Hawk National Historic Landmark District was designated for the purpose of restoring noteworthy buildings. Funds for the restoration came from community donations, grants, and matching funds from Mrs. Edith Barbour Andrews, whose great-grandfather was Nathaniel Hill.²⁶

Restoration was begun in 1976. In 1977, exterior restoration was completed; the house was reroofed and received new paint, and all missing parts of the gingerbread were replaced.²⁷ As repairs were made to the house, new pieces were dated before they were put in place to distinguish them from the original structure.²⁸

DESCRIPTION

The Lace House is an example of the Gothic Revival style popular in many boom towns of the late nineteenth century. The house is also often presented as the classic example of a Carpenter Gothic structure of the mining era. The house has been restored and furnished with period furnishings acquired through donations or purchased specifically for the house.

Site

The house is built on a terraced, north-facing lot on the south side of Gregory Gulch. Three feet to the east is the Belt House, currently scheduled for conversion to a casino. The Belt House was likely built before the Lace House since without it, the east side of the Lace House would have been visible from the street and would probably have received more ornate treatment and decoration.

An 1895 photo shows two houses to the west of the Lace House, one with the same setback and one built above, on the hill. The front house reportedly burned in an 1898 fire which also slightly damaged the roof of the Lace House. It is not known when the other house was destroyed by fire. Portions of a stone foundation and the remains of a few beam ends are still visible.

A driveway in front of the house serves a number of houses built above Main Street. The driveway to the house is reached by a wooden stairway with eighteen steps, two terraces up from the street.

From the driveway, there are an additional eight steps up to the porch. Stone retaining walls were built in front of and in back of the house. There is a picket fence in front of the Lace House and what is now the side yard.

Exterior

Typical of many houses in the area, the Lace House is a gable front and wing shape, one and a half stories in height. A single story, one room ell extends the plan to the west. The main block of the house has a steeply pitched, cross-gabled roof covered with wooden shingles. The ell has a shed roof, which slants to the south (rear).

The house is covered with board and batten siding. The battens are placed from 9" to 13", center to center, apart. The house is painted according to its historic color scheme, determined from paint chip analysis during the restoration process. The colors come from Pittsburgh Paint's historic color collection, and the body of the house and the window sashes are shades of ivory while the trim is Yorktown brown. The ivory colors have a peach or orange tint to them.

Two brick chimneys rise from the main block of the house, and a third one rises from the kitchen ell. The kitchen chimney leads from the stove in the kitchen. The two others led to no longer extant fireplaces. There was one fireplace in the dressing room upstairs. The other fireplace was likely in the parlor. These two chimneys have had new flashing and been repaired and capped with cement. The fireplaces were removed at an unknown date.

Ornamentation is very elaborate on the front and the west side. The east side, back and kitchen ell are much plainer. On the front and west side, the barge boards, porch eaves, porch columns, and window cresting are all ornately carved gingerbread, and there are finials at the top and bottom edges of each of the decorated gables. Four patterns of gingerbread are used on the house: that in the roof eave, the porch eave, the gable peak and the window cresting.²⁹

The house has a front porch which extends the width of the house. A porch railing supported by plain, square balustrades, rotated 45 degrees to appear diamond-shaped, runs between columns. The columns themselves have sawn out boards placed between slender posts. The construction is simple, but the effect is elaborate. Decorative, inter-columnar arches each have a drop ornament in the center. Gingerbread trim "drips" from the porch roof. The porch floor is tongue and groove.

The ell is also covered with board and batten siding, but unlike the rest of the house, is unornamented with the exception of the hooded window on the front. The back and east side are not visible from the street and are built very close to the hillside with its retaining walls and the house to the east. The rear has only a small hip knob for decoration. Plain fascia boards are used on the overhanging eaves on the east, west and back sides of the house.

The front and west side gables feature a variation of a venetian window; there are two lancet windows grouped with a quatrefoil beneath a steeply raked pediment. The other windows on the front and west side of the house have a finished casing and are hooded; all windows on the back and east have plain, rough sawn casings.

The exterior doors, with the exception of the "deacon's door", are raised four panel doors. The formal entrance to the house has four panes of glass over the two panels. All the hardware on exterior doors is metal. The door from the back of the kitchen leads to a narrow passageway behind the house. The passageway varies between 2' to 2' 6" wide. There is a new, poured concrete stoop outside the back door. The southeast corner of the house has a new cement foundation. A sheet of plastic has been placed between the house and the foundation, presumably for waterproofing purposes. The remaining stone foundation appears to be original.

Interior

The rooms of the museum have been designated as the parlor, music room, hall, dining room, washroom, kitchen, upstairs hall, dressing room, master bedroom, and children's room. On the HABS drawings, the rooms of the house are labeled as parlors, the kitchen, or bedrooms. This documentation uses the museum's room designations.

During the restoration, some changes were made to the house to accommodate its function as a museum. Heating and plumbing were added for the first time. The washroom and music room were shortened and a bathroom and utility room for the furnace were added in the space. The bathroom, containing a toilet and lavatory sink, still has the only plumbing in the house. The bathroom fixtures are old and appropriate for the house. A furnace chimney and sewer vent have been added with these changes. However, they are not visible from the front. Upstairs, the heating duct has been covered with a bench seat in the front bedroom.

The dining room has two six-over-six-light single hung windows, one on the north, the other on the south. The wainscoting including the top molding is 36" high. The molding is painted dark maroon. The rest of the woodwork in the dining room has a combed finish, historically accurate according to analysis.

A door in the back of the room leads to the laundry room. The laundry room has wainscoting, painted white, and a single two-over-three-light casement window. The laundry room leads to the kitchen. The kitchen has tongue and groove walls and ceiling, painted blue. The hutch along the east wall was found in the house in 1976, but it is not known if it is original to the house. The cook stove was manufactured by G.F. Filley of St. Louis. Originally configured to run on gas, it was modified to burn wood. The stove was purchased for the Lace House because it had been reconfigured, as were many stoves used in Colorado and other places before gas was made available.

Located on the east side of the house, the parlor has two six-over-six-light single hung windows on the north side. The east wall is windowless and served as the "coffin wall". Today, there is a piano against the wall. Elaborate carved decoration has been applied to the ceiling; it was not original, nor does it replace something that was original to the house.³⁰

The "music room" in the back of the house has one six-over-six-light single hung window in the rear (south) wall and one six-light casement window high up on the east wall. Placement was probably to allow light in from the east side, despite the presence of the house next door.

There is an opening, the width of double doors, from the parlor to the hallway. Stairs lead up to the second floor at the back of the hall. The treads are approximately 9" wide; the risers are 7" high. A modern, wooden handrail has been attached to the wall.

At the top of the stairs is a door which leads outside. A deck just outside the door is attached to a stairway leading up to the privy. The deck and stairway were built during the restoration process; until that time only a plank and a 2 x 4 nailed to trees and serving as a railing were used to bridge the way to the privy.³¹

There are three rooms upstairs, the master bedroom, the children's room and the dressing room. All the rooms have sloping ceilings because of the roof framing (there is no attic). The two bedrooms, in the gables, have the paired lancet windows. The windows are full height and can be opened like doors. The window surround is plain wood, without the molding seen elsewhere in the house, and traces the outline of the window. There are no other windows in the bedrooms. The children's bedroom can be accessed only through the master bedroom. The sewing room has one six-over-six-light single hung window on the south side. It is entered from the hallway at the top of the stairs.

All the interior doors are very plain four-panel doors. Doorknobs on the interior doors are white porcelain. The trim set consists of a decorative molding surrounding plain door and window surrounds. All the rooms have a plain baseboards topped with the same molding which is around the door and window surrounds. The same trim set was used throughout the house, and the same molding is atop the wainscoting in the kitchen, laundry room and dining room. The trim colors throughout the house were determined by paint chip analysis.³² Wallpaper patterns were chosen as representative of the period.

With the exception of that in the lancet windows in the front gable, none of the glass in the house is original. The floors are all original, with the exception of the floor in the "children's room", which had been burned. Original floorboards range in width from 6" to 9" wide. The floor of the upstairs hall is unfinished wood. The floors in the other rooms either have been carpeted or painted.

Outhouse/Privy

The outhouse measures 41 3/4" and 73 3/4 ". The door frame is 26 1/2 " wide; the actual door opening is 20 1/8". It is a frame structure, covered with clapboard siding and painted to match the house. The door and door frame are unpainted.

GOTHIC REVIVAL AND CARPENTER GOTHIC STYLES

Carpenter Gothic is a vernacular variation of the Gothic Revival and gets its name from the style's elaborate, exterior jigsawn trim.³³ Andrew Jackson Downing, the leading tastemaker of the day, was a self-trained landscape architect and recognized horticulturist who wrote *Cottage Residences*, a collaborative effort with Alexander Jackson Davis. The book's designs and Downing's architectural philosophy are credited with creating the Gothic Revival style in the United States.

Downing's second best seller, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, confirmed his status as the principal proponent of the Gothic Revival in domestic architecture.³⁴

Across the country, his designs were copied and changed, and the designs were worked in wood rather than stone. Many homes built in the federal or a vernacular style were given a new, updated look with the addition of gingerbread. Left to their own devices, as there were no prescribed orders as there had been with classical orders, carpenters created elaborate scroll work, cut outs and finials. Although the original Gothic drew on only a few sources -- ecclesiastical or the forms of nature -- the Carpenter Gothic had many sources. Some of the designs made reference to Eastlake furniture designs or were based on an owner's particular request to use a design element, but the majority of the designs were builders' own creations and limited only by their own ingenuity. The style presented an ideal opportunity for skilled American craftsmen to use the new machinery, such as the scroll saw, which was made possible by the Industrial Revolution.

The names given to Gothic Revival, and particularly Carpenter Gothic, houses reflect the style's elaborate use of ornamentation. The Wedding Cake House (Kennebunkport, Maine) and the Lace House are just two examples of nicknames which evoke visions of gingerbread.

ENDNOTES

1. Much of the background information was taken from the NHL nomination for the Central City-Black Hawk Historic District dated May 1990.
2. Mona Dawkins, "History of the Lace House of Black Hawk, Colorado." Tour guide script at the Lace House.
3. Sandy Jensen, Personal Communication, February, 1992.
4. Dawkins, 3.
5. Ibid.
6. County Record, Book 21, p 161, Gilpin County Courthouse, Central City, Colorado.
7. Frank Hall, History of the State of Colorado Volume III (Chicago: The Blakely Printing Company, 1891), 421.
8. O.L. Baskin, History of Clear Creek and Boulder Valley, (Chicago: O.L. Baskin and Co., Historical Publishers, 1880), 547
9. Gilpin County Record, Book 37, page 90.
10. Gilpin County Record, Book 47, page 194, 195.
11. Gilpin County Record, Book 58, page 66-67.
12. Gilpin County Record, Book 86, page 136.
13. Gilpin County Record, Book 125, page 86.
14. Sarah J. Pearce and Christine Pfaff, Guide to Historic Central City and Black Hawk, (Evergreen, Colorado: Cordilla Press, 1987), 7.
15. Betty Craig, "Little Lady, 97, Unfolds the History of Lace House", Denver Post, June 21, 1950, p. 26.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.

18. Frances Melrose, "Lace House Restoration Planned in Black Hawk", Rocky Mountain News, June 28, 1976.
19. Ibid.
20. Frank R. Hollenback, Central City and Black Hawk: Then and Now, (Denver: Swallow Press, 1961), 108-109.
21. "First Phase of Lace House Restoration Completed", Rocky Mountain News, August 6, 1977, 6B, 17B.
22. Ibid.
23. Melrose, 11.
24. Ibid; Gilpin County Record, Book 216, page 136.
25. Ibid.
26. Frances Melrose, "Lace House's Restoration Efforts Torn by Vitriolic Fund-Raiser Feud", Rocky Mountain News, January 7, 1979.
27. Joanne Ditmer, "Raising the Roof", The Denver Post, June 8, 1977, 17BB.
28. Sandy Jensen, Personal Communication, February 1992.
29. At this writing, floor plans and patterns for the gingerbread are available for purchase at the Lace House.
30. Sandy Jensen, Personal Communication, February, 1992.
31. Sandy Jensen, Personal Communication, February, 1992.
32. Sandy Jensen, Personal Communication, February, 1992.
33. See Andrea McArdle's Carpenter Gothic for plates of Gothic Revival houses throughout New England.
34. Andrea McArdle, Carpenter Gothic, (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1978), 11-24.