

Christian Hess House
811 Main Street
Wheeling
Ohio County
West Virginia

HABS No. WV-207

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

CHRISTIAN HESS HOUSE

HABS No. WV-207

Location: 811 Main Street, Wheeling, Ohio County,
West Virginia.

Present Owner: Historical Restoration Investment Association.

Present Occupant: Robert Adamo.

Present Use: Residence.

Significance: This two story building is an outstanding example of the French Renaissance, or Second Empire, style of architecture. Built in 1876 for Christian Hess, a local tailor, this house is in excellent condition and remains much as it was when the Hess family lived here.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION:

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: c. 1877. The Ohio County Land Book of 1877 states that Christian Hess had obtained this lot about 1877 and the value of buildings on the lot was zero. The following year, 1878, the value of buildings on the lot was \$4,000.00.
2. Architect: S. M. Howard; contractor, Benjamin Exley. Howard was a Wheeling architect who was responsible for the design of a number of churches in the area.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The Hess House was built on the South one half of Lot 23 in the Washington District of Wheeling. The following references to the title of this lot are found in the Ohio County, West Virginia Deed Books.

1846	Deed 18 November, recorded in Deed Book 29, page 196. Joshua Hanna et al to John McFerran. \$2500.00 for all of Lot 23, Old Town Plat.
1868	Will, probated 14 September recorded in Will Book 4, page 453-454. John McFerran devised to Jane B. Sweeney, wife of Thomas, South one half of Lot 23 and to Elizabeth M. Gilfillan, North one half of Lot 23.

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- 1876 Deed, 26 July, recorded in Deed Book 65, page 362. Alfred Caldwell, Special Commissioner for Thomas Sweeney, bankrupt to Christian Hess. \$6100.00 for South Half of Lot 23.
- 1911 Will, probated 18 January, recorded in Will Book 10, page 410. Christian Hess devised to John A. Hess, Henry N. Hess, Anna J. Glesenkamp, Mary Agnes Hess all his real property to be divided equally among his four children.
- 1911 Deed 25 April, recorded in Deed Book 137, page 137. John A. Hess, Henry N. Hess and Anna Glesenkamp to Mary Agnes Hess South half of Lot 23.
- 1947 Will, probated 26 March, recorded in Will Book 25, page 362. Mary Agnes Hess devised to Ralph D. Conrad, Co-Trustee of her estate "my dwelling located at No. 811 Main Street."
- 1958 Deed, 6 February, recorded in Deed Book 396, page 191. Ralph D. Conrad, Trustee to Isa D. Orum south half of Lot 23.
- 1972 Deed 28 September, recorded in Deed Book 537, page 209. Isa D. Orum to Historical Restoration Investment Association south half of lot 23, west side Main Street.

4. Original plans, construction, etc.: Not known.
5. Alterations and additions: Very little has been done to alter this structure. Alterations have been limited to necessary modernization. According to Mrs. Robert Adamo, a first floor bathroom was inserted under the front hall stairway, and the hallway was blocked to permit expansion of the kitchen area. The dining room at the rear of the house has been converted into a family room, and two picture windows have been inserted on the west and south walls.

Upstairs the wainscoting on back hallway has been removed because it had been slashed by previous tenants. The small front room over the front door has been converted into a bathroom; a bedroom has been reduced to accomodate a walk-in closet for the front bedroom; and a bathroom replaced a large linen closet.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Building:

Christian Hess was born in Germany in 1825. He learned there the trade of practical tailor and moved to the United States in 1845.

After serving a year's apprenticeship in Cincinnati, he moved to Wheeling, where he "engaged with Daniel Schrambra for the sum of ten dollars per month" as a tailor. At the end of a year he formed a partnership with Christian Hausenhauer. At the end of two years he was able to buy his partner out for \$750.00. Shortly after that Hess was able to purchase a corner lot on Main and Fourteenth Streets, where he erected a "fine three-story premises, 45 x 60 feet, the whole costing him, in those times, \$12,200.00. Here he has remained ever since." 1

Hess' skill as a tailor soon earned him the respect and business of Wheeling's citizens. "Today he may be credited with presiding over one of the most reliable and desirable businesses of the kind in the in the state." 2

"His present family residence, however, built in 1876, is located on Main Street, a splendid brick structure with a thirty-three foot frontage, commanding a view of the river, and in point of architecture and attractive surroundings, second to few in this section."3 The Wheeling Daily Intelligencer dated August 31, 1876, lists buildings recently erected or about to be built in Wheeling: "Mr. C. Hess, brick residence (two stories front and three back), French style, on west side Main Street, between 8th and 9th Streets; \$9,000.00. The front will be of stone and pressed brick. Mr. S. M. Howard is the architect, and Benjamin Exley the contractor."

The Hess family continued to live in this house until the death of Mary Agnes Hess, Christian's daughter, when the property became a boarding house and office. The Historical Restoration Investment Association bought the house in 1972 and both restored and adapted it to modern needs.

C. Sources of information:

Newton, J. H., G. G. Nichols, and A. G. Sprankle. History of the Panhandle; being Historical Collections of the Counties of Ohio, Brooke, Marshall and Hancock, West Virginia. Wheeling, W. Va.: J. A. Caldwell, 1879

Wheeling Daily Intelligencer, August 31, 1876.

Interview: Mrs. Robert Adamo, August 24, 1976.

Prepared by: Candace Reed, Historian
Historic American
Buildings Survey
September 1976.

1. Newton, Nichols and Sprankle, p.278.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Wheeling Daily Intelligencer, August 31, 1876.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character. This two story residence is a beautiful example of Second Empire French architectural style. It was constructed in 1876. Of particular note are the exterior cast iron window box, the front interior foyer, the stained glass and numerous interior details.
2. Condition of fabric: Both the exterior and interior are in excellent condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The building is rectangular - twenty six feet across the three-bay front (east) and is approximately seventy seven feet deep. Two stories plus an attic and basement in the front; three stories in the rear with no basement.
2. Foundations: Cut stone and brick.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The wall construction is masonry with beveled stone quoins at the corners on the front (east). These quoins are in an alternating pattern of large and small units. The entire exterior is painted blue with trim in white.
4. Structural system, framing: Masonry bearing walls spanned with timber framing throughout.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc. There is an open colonnaded wood frame porch wrapping around the north and west walls of the rear section. This extends from the level of the first floor, front section, and affords an excellent view of the Ohio River to the west.
6. Chimneys: There are two chimneys with corbeled brick caps on the north and south walls, rear section.

7. Openings:

- a. Doors and doorways: The front entry is a double doorway, wooden paneled with a stained glass fixed transom. The doorway is flanked on either side by ornate wooden pilasters capped by a classical pediment of pressed metal. The doors and trim are stained to match the dark natural color of the wooden doors. The pilasters and cornice are painted white. There are other exterior doors on the north side. All appear to be original.
- b. Windows and shutters: There are high windows on both the front (east) and side (north), front section. The sills and jambs are simply detailed, while the windows are capped with heavy pressed metal Victorian pediments. Ornate shallow brackets flank each side at the top. Above this is a triangulated spanning element on the first floor windows. All of these windows are double hung with a single pane, each sash. The balcony-like window box and enclosing cast-iron grill at the first floor windows, front, is an unusual feature. It is probable that there was only one window on the south side originally. This is a three foot diameter porthole window at the second floor landing, front section. Large windows in the back (second floor, rear section) offer an impressive view to the west. One thing of general importance is the stained glass, located at several points on both the exterior and interior.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The basic roof shape, front section, is mansard with the roof on the south abutting a parapet wall. A pedimented section extends over the south bay, accenting the entry. The rear section has a flat roof.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The roof has a heavy bracketed cornice with alternating long and short brackets. The fascia between the long brackets has recessed panels.
- c. Dormers, cupolas and towers: There are two dormers in the front section and none in the rear. One is on the north and one on the west. Each has pilasters on the sides and a classical pediment, all wood and painted white.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The bottom floor, front section, has a full basement, part of which has been converted to an apartment. A separate wine cellar, ten feet wide, extends the entire width under the front section at the basement level. There is another apartment on the ground floor rear section, that was inaccessible. The two main floors of the house are organized similarly with an entry hall and circulation corridor along the south wall. When the house was constructed this hallway extended through to the rear on both floors, but the first floor hallway has since been closed off at the back of the front section. The front section has two large rooms to the right of the hallway on both the first and second floors. The rear section, main floor, is divided into two large rooms. There is a large open attic space over the second floor of the front section.
2. Stairways: There are two major stairways in the house - one along the south wall in the entry hall and another, parallel to the front, in the connecting space between the two building sections. Both are straight runs. The front stairway has a particularly striking newel post and stair rail.
3. Flooring: The floor coverings in the house are not original in most cases. The entry hall has an original tile floor, but the hardwood floors and carpeting in other areas are modern.
4. Wall and ceiling finishes: The wall and ceiling finishes are one of the most interesting aspects of the house. The entry hall has a four foot high dark reddish brown wainscot of a rectangular relief pattern. This wainscot continues up the stairway to the second floor. There is a decorative pattern wallpaper above the wainscot. The two main rooms of the front section also have very well preserved intricate patterns of plaster relief in the ceilings. Other rooms of the house are not so ornate but are equally interesting in their own right. The kitchen, for instance, has a pressed tin ceiling and an unusual milk glass wainscot.
5. Doors and doorways: The door at the end of the hall, front section, has a stained glass panel. There are large double pocket doors connecting rooms on the first floor of the front section. The one connecting the two main rooms has a curved top portion.

6. Special decorative features: The windows of the two front rooms, first floor, have neo-grec cornices. Each window has wooden shutters that fold back into the wall, and all appear to be original. The fireplace mantels in both rooms are finely finished slate, painted to give the appearance of marble.
7. Notable hardware: The large pocket door still has the original milk glass door knobs.
8. Mechanical equipment: Conventional.

D. Site and Surroundings:

The house faces due east and west on a site which slopes from Main Street, at the front, toward the Ohio River at the rear. It is tightly situated between two adjacent residences on the street, abutting the one directly to the south. The house is set back slightly from the street with an ornate cast iron fence along the sidewalk. A walkway and steps along the north wall lead down to the rear of the building. There is a large back yard. There are no outbuildings.

Prepared by: John McRae
Historic American
Buildings Survey
September, 1976

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey under the general direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, and Kenneth L. Anderson, HABS Principal Architect, in cooperation with The Friends of Wheeling, Inc. The measured drawings were made during the summer of 1976 under the supervision of John M. McCrae (University of Florida) with architectural technicians Mark L. Hall, Foreman, (Pennsylvania State University); Edward C. Freeman (Arizona State University); Ruthie D. Wiley (Mississippi State University); Alan G. Wilig (City College of New York); and Architectural Historian Candace Reed (George Washington University). The photographs were taken in 1977 by HABS Photographer Jack E. Boucher.

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