

HISTORY OF 717 VINE STREET

Subdivision

The land which would comprise 717 Vine Street was not within the original Denver city limits. Indeed, it would not be so until February 1883, when the city doubled in size to encompass 13 square miles. Speculators coveted the land for the rapidly-expanding city, and just six months after annexation the South Division of Capitol Hill was born.

Subdivision founders Donald Fletcher, Thomas H Hawkins, Samuel J Skoop, and Joseph J Baughman took the liberty of naming the streets after themselves. Josephine Street was thus Skoop Street, Columbine Street was Baughman, Elizabeth Street became known as Hawkins, and 10th Avenue was Fletcher Avenue.

It was only in 1903 that this became Vine Street. In so doing, it adopted the nomenclature of a Philadelphia-born developer. Green & York streets were named after two Pennsylvania counties, while Race, High, and Vine were mirrored after a similar triad in the City of Brotherly Love.

Unfortunately, the leading developer here wasn't much beloved. In 1891, Donald Fletcher established a new town on Denver's eastern plain, called "Fletcher." But when the Panic of 1893 struck, he ran out on the effort, leaving much debt and no water supply. The 200 residents were angered, but some remained. In 1907 they changed the name of the town from Fletcher to "Aurora," ensuring that Fletcher's eponym would be lost but his legacy retained.

The Neighborhood Grows

It would be years before many homes would be built on this street. In 1903 and 1912, homes were erected at 736 & 740 Vine, respectively, but serious development came only in 1920, when six new homes were planted. Although expensive homes for the time at \$8000 each, they were outdone when a new phase in street development began on August 22, 1924. It was then that R J Welton obtained a building permit to build a home at 717 Vine Street for an anticipated cost of \$13,000. Every home on this street thereafter would cost a similarly dear amount.

Records don't indicate the architect for the home, but Richard Jackson Welton definitely built it. A former carpenter and draftsman, he was relatively new as a building contractor. But partnering with young and yet experienced June Mackie enabled him to deliver the home quickly – indeed, the home's connection to the city water supply was



completed just three days after the original permit was issued.

First Owners

The home's first owner was Lillian Hambly Pfeiffer. Though just 46 years old at the time of construction, she had already widowed for six years. Her husband Charles had been a steam heating contractor "well known in business circles," and a rather social man: high priest of Templar Lodge 84, venerable commander of the Delta Lodge of Perfection, and assistant rabban of the El Jebel Temple.

As Charles' second and much-younger wife, Lillian was left to her to raise the couple's daughters, Marjorie (14 years old in 1924) and Charline (age 11). Hard hit by the Great Depression, however, the family soon moved off to a \$90 monthly rental at 10th and Sherman.

In her place came the Suchotzki family. In 1907, Russian-born Charles Vincent Suchotzki escaped his revolutionary homeland for freedom. On the way from New York to California, he stopped briefly in Denver, and never left. It is here that the medium-sized, nearsighted immigrant would become a major hotelier and restaurateur.

An early automobile enthusiast, Suchotzki was a leader in the Colorado Automobile Club and president of the National Restaurant Association. He remained in the home from 1927 to 1942, along with his third wife Helen, stepdaughter Helen, and their colored servant, Effie Lewis.

A Fisherman's Palace

Discharged from the U.S. Army in 1917, stout former bank teller Stanley Malcolm Wright wanted nothing more than to go fishing with his cousin Drew McGill. Born in Denver, the two had misspent much of their youth at Sloan's Lake with a line and a pole. Now reunited in a land renowned for trout, they wondered why good flies could only be had from England.

In 1921, they started making their own. Wright-McGill soon became the world's largest manufacturer of fishing tackle, with their famous "Eagle Claw" hook leading the way. In World War II, their products were everywhere: Britain



ordered 60 million in one fell swoop to enable troops to obtain food, and sailors and aviators everywhere received hooks to help in the event of emergency.

In 1938, the founders asked DuPont in 1938 to develop a substitute for the silkworm gut now in short supply. What emerged was a synthetic super polymer called nylon, perfect for fishing lines, stockings, and a thousand other uses.

And 717 Vine was resplendent in the holidays. Honored as one of Denver's ten top hostesses, Ruth Wright was called "famous for her Christmas entertaining and the décor in her home at the Yuletide season. She prefers seated dinners of 12 to 16

[and] loves to cook... She has Minton china in turquoise and white and always tries to entertain at home because she feels it is 'more flattering' to the guests."

Old Money

From the nouveau-riche to the oldest of Denver's "old guard," 717 Vine hosted the family of John Evans Jr. As great grandson of territorial governor John Evans, he brought with him a weighty reserve full of history and influence. The Rio Grande Railroad, University of Denver, First National Bank of Denver, Denver Tramway Company, Winter Park ski resort, and dozens of other institutions comprise the legacy of this powerful family.

Even still, John Evans Jr. preferred simple sports jackets, drove a yellow Jeep station wagon, and lived a conservative life. In sharp contrast to his decorated service with the famed 101st Division paratroopers in World War II, the tall man with blue eyes and strong chin was a homebody, preferring to read history or relax at the family ranch in South Park.

When he purchased the home in 1949, the 33-year-old Evans was administering his family's wealth as president of the Evans Investment Company, vice president of Walter S Cheesman Realty, and vice president of the Republic Building Corporation. His parents were just 10 blocks away, and his three children – Gladys (11), John III (8), and Anne (4) – lived here along with his second wife, Mary. But they stayed here only a few years.



A Star is Born

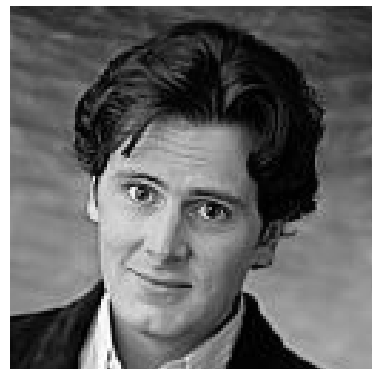
The real mainstays at 717 Vine Street were the Eigemans. They owned this home for 42 years, and profited much therefrom. In 1952, when they bought the home, its assessed value was just \$12,410 – the same as it had been nearly 30 years earlier. But when they sold in 1994, its value had appreciated greatly, now returning a tidy \$350,000.

John C Eigeman would have been well aware of such figures. As a senior partner in the accounting firm of Peat Marwick Mitchell & Company (now known as KPMG) and later auditor for Brinkerhoff Drilling Company, such numbers were second nature to him.

Another important number for John and his wife Irene was 4 – that is, the number of children they raised in this home: Sheila, Megan, Michael, and Nancy.

But their troublesome grandchild Chris Eigeman would garner the largest numbers. Plucked from obscurity to star in

the acclaimed movie *Metropolitan*, he now has nearly two dozen movies to his credit, several television series under his belt, and a well-deserved reputation as "the poster boy for acerbic postmodern male angst."



Post Script

All of the foregoing makes clear that much has already happened in this home. But if history is any guide, it should be equally clear that the future is likely to bring something entirely new, and that the past is merely prelude.