

D. A. MILLETT HOME HISTORY

Beginnings

1865 – Burials begin at Catholic-owned Mount Calvary Cemetery.
1870 – US Land Office annuls all claims in area.
1872 – US Congress sells land to city for exclusive use as a cemetery.
1874 – Denver re-deeds land to Bishop Machebeuf for Mount Calvary Cemetery at \$1.25 an acre.
1887 – Samuel Morgan buys 20 acres for \$20,000.
1892 – Mayor Platt Rogers sues for return of land.
1903 – US Supreme Court ruling upholds sale.
1909 – Civic Realty Co purchases several lots. Deed requires home priced above \$5000.
1919 – D. A. Millett purchases land and builds a home.

Owners

The 40-year-old Millett had traveled widely around the country before settling in Denver. Born in Milwaukee, he had graduated from Seattle's Washington University and later served as editor of Columbia University's Law Review. Millett then moved to Arizona where he founded the Flower Pot Cattle Company and made his fortune.

In 1917, Millett came to Denver with the American Live Stock and Loan Company, for which he served as Assistant General Manager and, ultimately, Chairman.

He arrived in Denver with a wife, Ruth Dickson Millett, and two children: 4 year old Hilary and 1 year old Ruth. Daniel Caldwell Millett was born soon after arriving in town, and a final child, the future doctor William Dickson Millett, was born here at 860 Vine.

Style

The history of the Millett family in America traced back to Massachusetts in 1635. It is therefore little wonder that the style D. A. Millett chose for his home recalled some proud New England roots. The Georgian or Colonial Revival style had become popular in Denver by the 1890s, and harkened back to a more austere form. Its rectangular plan employed a hipped roof, prominent front entry, classical pilasters, and many-paned windows with keystones and shutters.

Famed Denver architects William Ellsworth Fisher & Arthur Addison Fisher played the design straight, garnering accolades for achieving "elegance through minimal ornament" in this house. They thus matched not only Mr. Millett's family past, but also mirrored his personal temperament and fiscal restraint.

Construction

Even with minimal ornament, the elegant design required superior craftsmanship. As such, Millett invested a considerable sum in the construction. Even without including architect fees, cost overruns, or ancillary expenses, costs exceeded \$65,000. A final reckoning may well reach six figures.



The list of companies who contributed to the project is extensive. The Denver Brick Manufacturers' Association provided the bricks. Denver Sheet Metal put a slate roof over their heads. Shutters came from George Tritch Hardware. H. P. Wilson began plastering and cementing, while C. H. and C. S. Grant painted and wallpapered. E. Burkhardt & Sons wired the panels and gates. Denver Hardwood Company stained the hardwood floors, Carl Eckman cleaned the brick of lime, and more than a dozen others contributed similarly to the effort.

But no amount of expense can overcome endemic issues between owners and contractors. One contractor, Martin Plumbing & Heating, was particularly chastised. With their misplaced sewer lines,

disconnected downspouts, broken appliances, radiator leaks, incorrect floor drains, several unpaid subcontractors, and unresponsive communications, it's no wonder that the surety bond for their work was revoked and replacement contractors required.

Great workmanship and extraordinary honesty were also in evidence. When a problem arose with the French doors, Hallack & Howard Lumber provided immediate replacements, apologizing for the sort of trouble that "occurs very seldom indeed, particularly in the case of a door 2 1/4" thick." And when Charles Heimbecher received payment for additional work to repair an incorrectly graded drain, the check was returned. "We feel that neither you, nor we, are responsible for this mistake, and therefore it does not seem right to accept your check on the bill." Yet Fisher

demurred, insisting that “you should accept this check and I am, therefore, returning it.”

By September 1919, just six months after the land was purchased, the house was already being plastered. But work continued in fits and starts for another 14 months. Even Fisher & Fisher admitted to Mr. Millett in the end that “this house was built very slowly.”

Interior Design

Furnishing the home required a sensitive balance between design and cost. The Fishers informed Chicago lighting supplier Victor S. Pearlman & Company that “this house is rather a severe New England type of Colonial... [and] we plan to furnish the house in the same character.” Yet when the first samples arrived, the Millets thought the vendor had missed the mark. “While they like the fixtures very much they feel that they are entirely too elaborate for their house.” They were also watching costs rather closely: “Mr. Millett said that he thought that he might get lighting fixtures for or in the neighborhood of \$1000 but we doubt very much it such fixtures would be good enough for the house.”

Ballou Interiors of New York had similar problems. “The Studios advise me that Mr. Millett does not see his way clear to come East in regard to selecting furniture for his house. I have, therefore, written him requesting permission to make the selection for him subject to his approval.... Personally, I think Fifteen Thousand dollars would be a minimum to cover the main furnishing of such a house, but if he only wants to spend Nine or Ten, I shall be glad to tackle it.” Yet when Mr. Millett traveled to the coast in 1920, he returned empty-handed. The Fishers were “at a loss to know what he is going to do in regard to his furniture as he will be unable to find suitable selection here. About the only way that he can purchase it through Denver people will be by photograph.”

Despite all the troubles, Millett clearly appreciated the Fishers’ management of the construction. Upon paying the balance of the account on November 8, 1920, he offered rather uncharacteristic emotion: “I want to take this opportunity to express to you the pleasure I have had in the business connection that has existed between us, and thank you for the very courteous and efficient service you have rendered. With kindest personal regards. Very truly yours, D.A. Millett”



Life in the Neighborhood

When the Millets moved into the house late in 1920, they encountered many young families in the area. At 830 Vine, food company manager George Bartlett had two young daughters. 815 Vine housed Roger Knight along with his wife Nell and two small children. And Phillip Zang around the corner at 815 Gaylord had three daughters under the age of five. With two or more children in most of the neighboring homes, the Millett brood would have no shortage of playmates.

Of course, it was also an area of great wealth and prestige. Anchoring the southern end of the block at 801 Vine was Steven Knight, who had made their mark in Denver banking, baking, and education. Just across 8th Avenue from the Knights were Francis and Gwendolyn Van Derbur, whose daughter Marilyn would win the Miss America pageant in 1958.

Across the street from the Millets at 869 Vine were William & Permelia Porter, heirs of deceased patriarch John Evans, former governor of Colorado. And in 1967, this home would return the area to its Catholic past, with Archbishop James Casey living here until his death in 1986.

Denouement

D. A. Millett was an ardent Catholic: vestryman at St John’s Cathedral and board member at St Luke’s Hospital. He was also rather active socially, as a member of the Denver Country Club, the Denver Club, the Mile

High Club, the Wigwam Club, and the Mile High Duck Club.

It was thus more the loss for his family and society when D. A. Millett passed away in his home on Wednesday, August 3, 1955.

His widow, Ruth, remained in the home until the early 1970s, soon after which the entire area of Morgan’s Addition was identified as a historic district – just the eighth so tabbed within the City and County of Denver.

As that designation and this brief history might reveal, there is history in this home – much more than can be told in a few pages or felt in a brief visit. Walk the home yourself, and begin to feel the lives and loves of this place. It has a story to tell... and many new chapters yet to be written.