

D. L. Musselman is best known for his long-term ownership and presidency of Gem City Business College, which was at one time the largest commercial college in the West. In 1881, Musselman acquired possession of all the lots from 2221 west to the corner and shortly thereafter erected this house, though not living there himself. Oral tradition has it that it is a honeymoon cottage, and this would square with the marriage of his daughter in the year the property was purchased. However, in 1882 Musselman sold the house parcel to A. F. J. and Candace Prevost, who sold it back to Musselman in 1886 at three times its purchase value, suggesting construction in or shortly after 1882. History repeated itself in 1896, when Musselman once again sold the small eastern parcel of his quadruple lot, then bought it back two years later after the owner had made improvements. In the interim he also paid off his lien to F. W. Menke, who had united the four lots with a Mankato stone wall at the time Musselman built his own house at 2303 Maine.

The cottage is a charming example of small scale Queen Anne design. The lower half is sheathed in clapboard, the upper half in drop siding rather than the more usual shingles. Between the floors runs a scalloped belt course. Originally the house also had a front porch set into the southwest corner. This was glazed on two sides with very early examples of clustered casement windows, perhaps the product of the late 1890s remodeling. These windows were saved and reinstalled in the new walls when the porch became absorbed into the parlor as a music alcove.

The house has undergone a number of other alterations as well, all of them sensitive to the scale and materials of the original design. A small sitting room behind the parlor originally had an exterior door; this has been replaced with a band of windows, and the space converted to a dining room. In the 1920s or thereabouts, the living room gained a simple fireplace. The upstairs plan was originally fully circulatory, with all rooms interconnected. (Successive owners have modified the relationships and some of the partition walls between the bedrooms.) Most recently, the Nelsons have extended the house into the rear lot in order to expand the tiny original kitchen.

The house has enjoyed at least two moments of local distinction since the Musselmans sold off the property once and for all in 1898. Robert Halbach, of Halbach-Schroeder Department Store fame, lived there briefly before his house in Lawndale was built. And the composer of "Santa Claus is Coming To Town" played his immortal tune on the piano.



D. Lafayette and Mary Musselman Cottage
2221 Maine
Queen Anne Style, 1881 or 1882
architect unknown

current owners: George and Judy Nelson

*Behind Closed Doors
October 15, 1994*