

Williamson House

1807 Jersey Street • Shingle style • c. 1890 • architect unknown

The house at 1807 Jersey Street is an almost perfect example of the Shingle style of design first introduced on Mount Desert Island in Maine in 1879 by the architect William Ralph Emerson. The Shingle style quickly succeeded Queen Anne as the most up-to-date design, from the early 1880's, and in many ways is a development and Americanization of the Queen Anne style. In it, the frame of the structure is totally concealed and walls and roof are perceived as a thin skin shaped by the enclosed space. The style brought a new freedom and openness into the planning of the American house.

The Williamson House presents many of the most typical features of the Shingle style of architecture. The exterior walls have a uniform cover of shingles, extending even to the posts of the porches and verandas. Windows are small-paned and often form horizontal bands. The roof is of a moderate pitch and has a single broad gable in the front. The over-all effect is altogether simpler and quieter than the Queen Anne style, with more horizontal emphasis and much less variety of color and texture. While the style was developed to its greatest extent in domestic architecture, it did have its influence in public buildings, a remarkable example of which would be the Hotel del Coronado, near San Diego, California. Built in 1886-88 to the designs of the brothers James and Merritt Ried, it may be the largest Shingle style building still standing.

The interior of the Williamson House is notable for its fine woods -- maple, butternut and oak -- all used in different rooms. Two of the most outstanding features of the house are located in the entry hall: the exceptional newel post and the arch over the fireplace. Also to be noted is the beading on doors of the living room and dining room, as well as the mantels. The back part of the house uses pine woodwork in the kitchen and the second floor back bedrooms. Hardware throughout the house is solid brass. All of the chandeliers throughout the house match.

Glass is exceptional and should be noted in the window of the stairway landing and in the music room. The built-in bookcases in this room also feature leaded-glass doors, and a built-in mirror is mounted in the room. The house originally had three fireplaces, in the entry hall, the living room and the music room; however, the living room unit has been closed.

One of the architectural delights of the Williamson House is the small stair leading down to the side door, located just beyond the main staircase. Also of interest is an old church pew located in the music room and rescued from a church in Burlington, Iowa.

The second floor of the Williamson House (not open to the public) houses bedrooms and baths, with the baths being notable for the marble baseboards, floors, sinks and showers.

The house contains seventeen rooms, including the baths and pantries. The present owner paints the house himself and the job requires 60 gallons of paint!