

Miller House

1477 Maine Street - Second Empire Style - 1866 - Architect unknown

The magnificent three-story brick house on the northwest corner of Maine and 16th Streets was built by David Miller, one of Quincy's early merchants. Miller traded in wholesale groceries, wines and liquors, and was also proprietor of the "Quincy House" hotel at 933 Vermont Street. It is interesting that although the house is dated to 1866, the cornerstone is curiously dated 1867.

The huge porch across the front of the house shades and protects the arched double-door entrance and the tall front windows which extend nearly to the floor. The first room upon entering is a large central hall, repeated on the second and third floors. This was no doubt convenient for Mr. Miller, as when the "Quincy House" was filled, the overflow of guests was often accommodated in the Miller residence. At one time the bedroom doors were numbered so that non-family guests could be assigned to a definite room!

The graceful winding staircase leads to the upper floors. The climb is considerable, as the ceilings throughout the house are 14 feet high, with the exception of the servants' quarters in the rear of the house. An earlier owner had an elevator installed for his convenience; however, a power failure at one time stopped the cage midway between the first and second floors, trapping the owner and his manservant for the duration of the outage. That problem was resolved when a special generator was installed in the garage exclusively to power the elevator in an emergency!

To the right of the entrance hallway is a parlor, with its attractive woodwork and embossed molding, the marble fireplace and the gold-leaf mirror over the mantel, and the crystal-prism chandelier. The large cherry corner cupboard was apparently built for that room, and has been refinished by the present owners. A library is located to the left of the central hall, also with fireplace, and crystal-prism chandelier, suspended by an interesting chain of square brass links. Behind the library is the dining room. The wall covering is a silk-screened paper imported from France, depicting hunting scenes. The seven-branch crystal chandelier adds further elegance to the room. Adjacent to the dining room is a butler's pantry complete with sink and large storage area, which leads on into the main kitchen, a roomy, old-fashioned space.

The second floor houses four large bedrooms and two baths as well as an ample linen closet, and the third floor includes three bedrooms, a bath, a gunroom and storage space. In the back of the house are the servants' quarters over the kitchen. There is a back stairway from the kitchen to the two bedrooms and bath above. The rooms are, of course, smaller and ceilings lower than in the main part of the house. Woodwork throughout the house is apparently the same with the exception of the servants' quarters.

The style of the Second Empire takes its name from the French Second Empire, the reign of Napoleon III (1852-1870). The hallmark of the style is the high mansard roof, with a curb around the top of the visible slopes. Dormer windows are universal, and the chimneys are important elements in the composition of the upper part of the building. Each extending wing or pavilion has its own roof, sometimes with the same convex slopes as the main unit. In general, buildings of the Second Empire style are tall, boldly modeled, and emphatically three-dimensional in effect. Few American cities are without houses in this style which got a hold in domestic architecture in the middle fifties. The Miller house embodies most all of the features so common with the "Americanized" adaption of the style.

Miller sold the house in 1875 to Charles Lee, who in turn sold it to Henry Williamson in 1880. For a number of years the Miller House was the residence of Ralph Gardner, the present owners having acquired the house from the Gardner estate in 1973.

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