

Walter Williamson House

1807 Jersey Street - Shingle Style

Architect: Frederick W. Clarke (Architect Certification Project)

c. 1894 (Tax records show \$50 value in 1890, \$2400 value in 1894)

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, on the upper stories, extending even to the posts of the porches and verandahs on the first story. The first story is covered with 4" clapboard. Windows are small-paned and often form horizontal bands. The roof is of a moderate pitch and has 8 gables with 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. The wood of the pocket doors are of the same wood as the wall panels in each room. Two of the most outstanding features of the house are located in the large entry foyer; the exceptional open staircase with its outstanding newel posts and the arch over the fireplace. Also to be noted is the beading on the entry foyer arch, pocket doors of the living room, music room, and dining room, as well as the mantels. Of additional interest is the carved wood also in these rooms. The library, living room, music room, and dining room all open off the large entry foyer. All of the rooms downstairs and several rooms upstairs have oak floors with borders. The back part of the house uses pine woodwork in the kitchen and butler's pantry, and the second floor back bedrooms. Hardware throughout the house is solid brass. Unusual for the age of the house is the forced air heating system. The home's lighting was originally gas and electric, with some of the original gas hardware and fixtures still visible. There is also a gas fireplace in the music room. All of the chandeliers throughout the house are similar. The "Quincy made" butler bell (for the front door and dining room) is still functional and rings in the kitchen. There is a speaking tube on the second floor.

The leaded glass is exceptional and should be noted in the window of the stairway landing and the music room. The built-in bookcases in the music room (curved) and the library also feature leaded-glass doors. 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 staircase leading down to the side door, located just beyond the main staircase. There is also a boot closet under the main staircase. The second floor of the Williamson House (not open to the public) houses bedrooms and baths, with one of the baths being notable for the marble baseboards, floor, sink and shower.