

Sandwiching in History
James H. Hornibrook House
2120 S. Louisiana, LR
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By: Rachel Silva



Intro

Hi, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Welcome to the Sandwiching in History tour of the Hornibrook House! I'd like to thank the owners, Bob Blair and Sharon Welch-Blair, as well as the hostess of the bed & breakfast, Jessica Ledbetter, for allowing us to tour the house today.

The James H. Hornibrook House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974 for its extraordinary Queen Anne-style architecture and is one of the best examples of the style in Arkansas.

Hornibrook Family & House

James H. Hornibrook was born in 1840 in Toronto, Canada. After the Civil War, Hornibrook, his wife, Margaret R. McCulley Hornibrook, and their children (5 children—their son, Matt, died at a young age?) moved to Little Rock. In 1868 Hornibrook formed a partnership with local saloonkeeper Miles Q. Townsend, and the two men jointly operated a saloon and liquor distributorship for the next 22 years (Townsend died in early 1890; before Hornibrook). Their business was located at 109-111 N. Main St. (on the current site of the Statehouse Convention Center). In 1887 Hornibrook and Townsend formed the Little Rock franchise of

the Edison Electric Light Company with Townsend as President, Hornibrook as Vice President, and Nicholas Peay as Secretary/Treasurer.

By the late 1880s, Hornibrook had amassed quite a bit of wealth due to his successful business ventures, and in 1888 he commissioned architects Max A. Orlopp, Jr., and Kasper Kusener to design a grand residence at what was then the southern edge of Little Rock. The February 25, 1888, issue of the *Arkansas Gazette* contained a short article entitled, “A Handsome Residence,” detailing the plans for the Hornibrook House. The article named Orlopp & Kusener as architects for the house at 22st & Louisiana and said that it would be completed in 5 months with all work “done by Arkansans and out of Arkansas materials.” In addition, the \$20,000 home would be “one of the finest residences in the state” and include steam heat and plumbing. An article in the January 9, 1889, *Gazette* confirmed the home’s construction date and cost, listing the \$20,000 Hornibrook House as one of the most important buildings constructed in LR in 1888. Most of the other buildings on the list cost less than \$5,000, giving you an idea of Mr. Hornibrook’s wealth.

In September 1889 Hornibrook’s eldest daughter, “Lessie” (named after Hornibrook’s sister, Mary Leicester—pronounced “Lester”—Hornibrook Wagner), married Nicholas Peay at the Hornibrook House. An account of the marriage ceremony was published in the *Arkansas Gazette*, describing the home as “large and elegant, being furnished with everything that wealth and artistic taste could suggest.”

Sadly, James Hornibrook did not get to enjoy his new home very long. In the early morning hours of Saturday, May 24, 1890, Hornibrook’s lifeless body was discovered just inside the front gate. The May 25, 1890, *Gazette* detailed Hornibrook’s final hours. He spent most of the day with his family, and after supper, he and his daughter rode downtown in a carriage, where Mr. Hornibrook proceeded to entertain friends at his saloon. About 3:00 a.m., Hornibrook boarded a streetcar at Main & Markham streets, accompanied by 3 neighborhood residents (2 of whom were his employees). All 4 men got off the streetcar at 22nd & Main and went their separate ways. One man, en route to his own house, even accompanied Hornibrook to the front gate, where he got out his keys and said goodnight. But just after entering the gate, Hornibrook suffered an “apoplectic stroke” (could have been a stroke, aneurism, or heart attack) and collapsed on the pavement, striking his forehead. Nearly 3 hours later, a butcher’s delivery boy found Hornibrook’s body and alerted the servants. Hornibrook’s youngest

daughter, Maggie, lifted his body and “conveyed it without assistance to the porch,” but he was already dead...at the age of 49.

Margaret Hornibrook remained in the house until her death in 1893 (also at the age of 49), and the house was then occupied by the Hornibrook children—daughter and son-in-law, Lessie and Nick Peay, as well as sons, James and John. James H. Hornibrook and his wife, Margaret, are buried at Mt. Holly Cemetery.

In 1897 the Hornibrook House became the Arkansas Women’s College with Rev. E. M. Pipkin as president. An article in the *Gazette* (AG 4/18/1899 p. 27) praised the college, saying:

“Patronized by the best people, a part of the highest social life of the state capitol, a high grade of scholarship, and experienced teachers, this school is destined to become the peer of any in the land. And it is certain that no young woman who once becomes a student there can fail to have within her breast higher ideals of manhood and womanhood and to go forth into the world better equipped for the changeful vicissitudes of life.”

The college remained in the house for a few years, and then in 1900 the home was purchased by Col. Asbury S. Fowler and his wife, Rosa Q. Fowler. Col. Fowler was employed as a general agent for the Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company, and from 1902 to 1906 he served as U.S. Marshal for the Eastern District of Arkansas. [Marshals represent the federal government on the regional and local level and handle the business of U.S. district courts.] The Fowlers remained in the house for many years—Col. Fowler lived here until his death in 1922, and Mrs. Fowler lived here until about 1930, when she moved to a smaller home (she died about 1933).

According to city directories, the Hornibrook House was vacant from 1930 to 1938. From 1939 to 1947, the house was occupied by a variety of tenants and was reportedly used as a rooming house for women during World War II (many of whom worked at the ordnance plant in Jacksonville).

In 1947 Miss Clare Freeman purchased the house and turned it into a nursing home (listed as the Clare Freeman Nursing Home). The nursing home remained until at least 1967, and then in 1970 Bill and Eugenia Brown purchased the house from Ms. Freeman.

In the fall of 1973, Bill and Eugenia Brown opened the house as a home for disabled adults and the elderly. In 1974 16 adults lived in the house (shared bedrooms). The Browns lived in an apartment upstairs and provided 3 meals a day, 7 days a week (cooked in-house). At some point in time (either when it was Freeman's nursing home or the Brown's boarding house), an elevator was added (has since been removed).

In December 1993 Bob Blair and Sharon Welch-Blair purchased the house and began the long restoration process with John Jarrard as restoration architect and Charles Marratt as consultant. In 1995 the Hornibrook House officially opened as the Empress of Little Rock Bed & Breakfast and continues to offer luxury accommodations to guests.

Architecture

Named after the English monarch who ruled from 1702-1714, the Queen Anne style was based on a transitional period in English architecture when designs went from more medieval forms to classically-inspired forms of the Georgian period (Queen Anne was King George I's immediate predecessor, thus her name for the pre-Georgian period). The Queen Anne style reached its height of popularity in the U.S. in the 1880s and 1890s.

The Hornibrook House is an excellent example of the Queen Anne style with its irregular form, central turret, multiple rooflines, wrap-around porch with decorative spindlework, and the use of mixed exterior materials—wood, stone, brick, stucco, terra cotta, stained glass, patterned slate shingles, etc.

Notice the blue granite foundation (quarried locally at Fourche Mountain), sunburst pattern in the brackets below the gable ends, and the washed stone in stucco in the gable ends themselves (east gable end is quartz).

Architects—Orlopp, Jr. & Kusener

Maximilian A. Orlopp, Jr., was born in 1859 in Brooklyn, New York. By 1872 his parents had moved to Little Rock, and his father, Max A. Orlopp, Sr., operated a hardware business. However, Orlopp, Jr., did not live in LR until the 1880s, after his graduation from the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland (1881). Once in Arkansas, Orlopp, Jr., worked as a civil engineer for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. He later became interested in architecture, and by 1887 he and Kasper Kusener were listed as architects at 501 Main Street in LR. In addition to his work

on the Hornibrook House, Max Orlopp, Jr., designed the 1889 Pulaski County Courthouse as well as the 1891 Dallas County Courthouse in Dallas, Texas (“Old Red”). The architectural firm of Orlopp and Kusener last appeared in LR City Directories in 1890. Little else is known about Kasper Kusener.

Interior Details

- About 7,500 square feet on 2 main floors (and has full basement and unfinished attic)
- Beautiful woodwork and fretwork
- Original brass hardware on all doors and windows
- Oak parquet floors are original; other wood floors are replacements
- Original mantles except in front formal parlor (ladies’ parlor)
- Gentlemen’s parlor mantle has hidden compartment—story about man who stopped by during restoration and showed them the compartment, saying he worked there as a boy and people hid their liquor bottles there during Prohibition
- Pocket doors
- Interior transoms
- Curved windows in turret & curved front double doors
- Stained glass windows
- Windows that open to porch on first level go from floor to ceiling so you could walk out onto porch
- Original plaster ceiling medallion in ladies’ parlor
- Light fixtures, wallpaper, and furniture are period appropriate, but not original to house
- Cherubs are not original—done by the Browns
- Divided staircase—native oak, heart of pine, cherry, and walnut (milled and assembled in St. Louis; disassembled and shipped to LR; reassembled in house)
- Stained glass skylight

Upstairs...

- Originally had 2 master suites (each with bedroom, bath, and sitting parlor), one guest room, and two children’s rooms. Now there are 6 guest rooms in the main house and 3 in the carriage house out back.
- Hornibrook Room was an original master suite—has only fireplace upstairs. Fireplace tiles painted by Mr. Hornibrook’s sister, Mary Leicester Hornibrook Wagner.

- Other large bedroom suite across the hall from Hornibrook Room—has an original clawfoot tub with mahogany railing and brass dolphin feet.
- Attic—card room for poker games; lookout at tower
- Main kitchen was detached from house originally—reportedly located in 2118 Louisiana at one time—but also have accounts of 2118 being servant's quarters. Was connected to main house by latticed breezeway. Smaller serving kitchen located on first floor of main house.
- Carriage house in back—originally had larger stables back here. Part of original stables/carriage house/auto garage may exist (the brick part that remains), but Sanborns show a larger wood-frame structure extending south toward 22nd Street as well. Was removed from brick sometime between 1939 and 1950.

Next tour Feb. 3 at Bowman House at 1415 S. Broadway, LR.

Questions?