

HISTORY OF PARK VIEW APARTMENTS

1674-80 Steele Street, Denver Colorado 80206

Though we generally think of mansions as private quarters for an isolated elite, Park View's mansion-style apartments offers evidence of a slightly altered tradition. In the late nineteenth century, London architects adapted the form for high-class urban living, designing distinctive facades in central locations for discerning city dwellers. Such buildings were often constructed around private gardens and employed Classical Revival style, affecting an air of special repose within the bustling city.

So it was with Park View Apartments, whose owners followed Classical Revival's grandiose plans, striving to remain a cut above the rest of Denver's dwellings.



Bates Court Apartments

Since the architectural style was born in England, it is only fitting that the founder of this property was also a British import. In 1863, Mary Jones immigrated to the US at the age of 2. She made her way across the plains to Denver, where she ultimately married Emmanuel Bates, an Illinois farm boy who had set off in the construction business. For quite some time, the couple lived outside Denver, including a small railroad town known as Broadway Junction, but moved into the city in the early years of the twentieth century.

At the time, Denver was growing rapidly, with nearly 80,000 new residents to raise the city's population to 213,381. The city's built environment continued to expand, and the 1600 block of Steele was soon transformed from an empty streetscape into one of the more coveted residential spaces in the city.

The Bates' weren't as prominent or posh as their stylish apartment house. Unrelated to the two famous Mary Bates's in town (one a famous suffragette and the other a pioneering doctor), Emmanuel and Mary Bates tended to focus on construction work and garagetending while living in modest homes. But they were also ambitious, as witnessed by Emmanuel's 1913 proprietorship in the Auto Livery Company, which provided motorized taxicabs just a few years into the auto age.

Because the building permit for the property is missing, we cannot confirm the architect and can only assume that Emmanuel was the project's general contractor. It is clear, however, that Mrs Bates was closely involved in much of the construction. Not only was the plot purchased in her name, but it was she who financed part of the construction in January 1911 by selling a few southerly lots to the Bilbrough-Jones Hardware Company. Her hand also signed the March 1911 tap record, which indicated a structure's near-readiness for inhabitation.

The founders named the new building after themselves, providing units for well-heeled clients in these self-styled "Bates Court Apartments." Surprisingly, however, they didn't retain the building very long. On March 29, 1912, they sold the building to Henry Van Buskirk for \$30,000.

Auspicious Beginnings

Buskirk was a railroad man, serving as superintendent of motive power for the Colorado & Southern Railway. It is perhaps fitting, therefore, that he was frequently on the move. A native of Illinois, Buskirk only spent a few years in Denver. He divorced his first wife, Annie, in Denver, and moved out to California, where he remarried a younger woman named Elizabeth, and lived out his days on a citrus farm in Riverside.

The apartment's residents during Buskirk's tenure were more settled. Dentists could be found in apartments B-5, and A-1, with Milton Rabinowitz in one and Richardson Taylor in the other. Real estate men inhabited apartments D-5 and A-5: the president of Speigleman Realty in the former, and brokerage owner Robert Mitchell in the latter. Apartment D-4 housed doctors, including Dr R R Daniels (physician, surgeon, and editor of *Hygienist* magazine) in 1924 and Dr William Haggart in 1926.

Most of these professionals were married. The most numerous of the single renters were widows, who comprised roughly one out of every 10 residents. Indeed, several widows set records for longevity at Bates Court, including Emma Wolf. She lived several years in apartment C-3, spent a dozen more in D-4, and then rounded out her residency with five more years in apartment A-4. Mrs Clara Makeever, meanwhile, remained in apartment C-6 from at least 1924 to 1940, even after her husband Melville (a former mine broker) passed away.

Show of the Town

Sam and Bertha Flax had taken over ownership in 1921, and were ambitious in their plans. After having owned and managed a 73-unit hotel at 20th & Lincoln for several years, they were used to working day and night. They bought the apartments as a more suitable place to raise their growing clan.

The Flaxes were pioneers. Each had come to America from



Sam & Bertha Flax, 1909

Russia, and quickly settled out West. Sam made his way to Cripple Creek, where he worked as a bartender for many years. He was friendly and popular, as was Bertha, who enjoyed many different suitors. Sam was her favorite, though, because he could recite orthodox Jewish prayers, which she considered important to her life and religion.

The couple's marriage in 1909 [image above] was the first Orthodox ceremony

held in Cripple Creek. A year later, they moved to Denver. Sam's oral history at the University of Denver recounts these stories, of jobs, city floods, and personal recollections of Bates Court Apartments. He described the site as "the show of the town":

We had a beautiful yard...People would come and drive in the City Park. They would stop and look at it. We had a roof garden upstairs at that time. It was a beautiful place at that time. The place was filled all the time.

Tumultuous Times

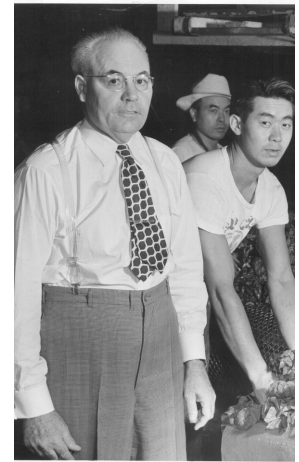
The Flaxes didn't particularly want to sell, but an investor named Ira Meierly was persistent. He told Sam that he could name his price, and for \$45,000 in 1924, the "show of the town" changed hands.

Meierly (sometimes spelled "Mierly") was in charge of a large and thriving medical clinic at 1510 York that kept him very busy. In 1926 alone, the doctor performed more than 900 operations. But there were questions about his practice, and the State Board of Medical Examiners brought a malpractice suit against him in 1928, which became one of the most sensational licensing cases in the history of the state. The board found him guilty, but the proceedings seemed to many to be a "frame-up." 700 supporters signed a petition in defense of the doctor, but it was in vain. He lost his license, and soon thereafter, much of his money in the Great Depression.

In 1935, for the bargain price of about \$30,000, business magnate Elmer Hartner took control of the property. Hartner had established the Western Seed Company, which made him a millionaire. His keen sense of social responsibility and business opportunity led him to hire Japanese-Americans from Colorado internment camps during World War II. He even praised them

publicly for their "marvelous, tireless jobs to help this country" including working all night to save food threatened by spoilage.

Just a few years later, however, Hartner was convicted of federal tax evasion, and was sentenced to \$875,000 in fines plus time in jail. "I hope I may be of some help there," he told friends. "It will make the time pass faster and I will be of some service to humanity." After one year and one day, he emerged from prison. In 1951, President Truman gave him a full pardon.



Elmer Hartner, 1943

Resident Owners

The apartment complex had reverted to the friendly hands of Sam and Bertha Flax in 1939, and they kept the building for more than 20 years. Their children achieved success, with son Leo becoming chief of staff at Children's Hospital and son Herman inspiring an award which the International Rehabilitation Medicine Association named in his honor. Residents in the 1950s and 60s were in the middle class, with well-represented occupations such as teacher, salesman, clerk, insurance agent, field auditor, stenographer, and engineer.

New owners in 1969, Robert & Nondus Rutledge, encountered a rather different set of circumstances. Neighborhood fears over the increasing numbers of black and Hispanic residents, plus financial unrest from Denver's "energy economy," had led to more vacancies and deteriorating conditions. City assessors noted the declining conditions of the Bates Court interiors, and indicated a need for a plumbing overhaul as well as better use of the space. Still, its estimated value in 1976 was a solid \$80,000.

In that year, building inspectors were alarmed, finding "certain conditions which are a hazard to life, health and property" in the apartments, including the lack of fire-resistant doors and exit lights. It took the owners nearly a year and a half to fix the problems, but the certificate of occupancy was never revoked.

Today

In 2002, the Rutledges were ready to sell. They hired the Frederick Ross Company to effect a transfer. They were proud to note that "from the time of the listing to close, this unique turn-of-the-century building traded in under 60 days."

The new owners, Classic Properties of Denver, saw the building as a long-term investment. Specializing in the management of Denver's finest historic apartment buildings, the company has acquired and restored over 232 individual apartments since 1999. They pride themselves on providing sophisticated urban living in historical surroundings, with exceptional residents who appreciate the splendor of the past.

These mansion-style apartments are in good hands. Indeed, the word "mansion" is a derivation of the Latin term *manere*, meaning "to keep hold, or to remain." Under Classic Properties

of Denver's care, Park View Apartments is sure to enjoy a lasting presence in Denver.

This building remains because folks have cared for it, and saw something in it special to Denver. It was, and remains, the "show of the town."