

CHERRY PLACE

BY HALLA RHODE

Cherry Place is one of the oldest landmarks in East Des Moines. The house is situated on the northeast corner of East Grand Avenue and East Twelfth Street and is well preserved although almost fifty years old.

The present house is the second one to be built on the same grounds and known by the name of Cherry Place. The first one was built in the new Lyon addition, a tract of land that was laid out in lots in 1856 by Harrison Lyon. At that time, Des Moines or rather Fort Des Moines was ten years old, with a population of 3,830. A part of the street now known by the name of East Grand Avenue that lay between East Twelfth and Dean streets was known by the name of Keokuk Street, later it was changed to Sycamore and still later to East Grand Avenue.¹ It was really only a narrow road cut through the woods. At the corner of East Thirteenth and Keokuk streets was a deep wide ravine with some logs thrown over it. The stage coach and other conveyances frequently mired down in it.

Isaac Brandt, a young man from near Columbus, Ohio, came to Des Moines in 1856 to look over the town as a possible location. He did not like the looks of the town and so went on to Council Bluffs, but he did not like Council Bluffs for a location, although he invested in lots there, so he walked back to Des Moines and decided to locate here. After staying in Des Moines a short time he returned to Ohio for his wife and family.

He came with them to Des Moines in the spring of 1858 and decided to locate on the east side of the Des Moines River because of its closeness to the new Capitol. The offices of state government had been moved from Iowa City in the fall of 1857, and were occupying the newly erected building located on the site where now stands the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument. In looking about for a home he saw the house he later named

¹Index to grade ordinance, office of city engineer, Municipal Building, Des Moines, Iowa. C. C. Green, office engineer, states that the location of Dean Street is lost, that it is not the present Dean Avenue.

Cherry Place. It was small and almost surrounded by native timber. There was an abundance of wild cherry trees, wild plums, oak and walnut, and wild grape vines grew in great profusion. But best of all it was close to what was then the new Capitol building, and this fact is what made Isaac Brandt decide to buy the place.

While Mr. Brandt waited for possession of his new home, he lived in a small two-roomed house which he rented on East Seventh between East Walnut and Locust. This house was afterwards occupied by Mr. Nathan Mills who operated a private school there which the Brandt children attended. Mr. Mills had a high reputation as a penman and was considered an excellent teacher of an art that was highly prized at that time, penmanship.

Mr. Brandt established his business of merchandising on East Fourth and became a prominent east-side business man. He commenced at once to fell the trees and clear the land around his new place. He had purchased from Mr. Harrison Lyon most of the lots that made up the entire block between East Twelfth and Thirteenth streets immediately north of Keokuk Street with the exception of a few lots now occupied by the Capitol Hill Church of Christ.

This house purchased by Isaac Brandt was small, being a story and a half high, but with a good basement that contained a dining room, kitchen and laundry room. Mr. Brandt added to the house until he had seven rooms on the main floor and these, together with the one large bedroom on the second floor as it had been in the original house, and the basement rooms made ample space for his family. The ceilings were all low, but the rooms were large, and with plenty of windows they were airy. The house was finished throughout in white and black walnut. There was a cistern and a well of cold pure water, the supply of which was abundant. Mr. Brandt trained some of the wild grape vines over the side porch, making an attractive shade and adding much to the beauty of the place.

He planted an orchard of cherry, pear and apple trees, and carefully preserved some of the wild cherry and plum. Some of the older people have told me that the cherry trees were

especially beautiful in blossom time and that the place was noted because of them. Mr. Brandt gave the name Cherry Place to his new home.

Isaac Brandt was a man of pronounced views on most public questions. The subject of abolition was a burning one and Mr. Brandt was an ardent exponent of it. He not only talked it, but he helped any stray Negroes he could to escape to their freedom. Cherry Place became one of the "stations" of the "Underground Railroad."

He was a friend of John Brown who perhaps made more than one trip to Cherry Place. At least John Brown was entertained once at Cherry Place by Isaac Brandt. John Brown came to Cherry Place very early one morning in a wagon filled with corn fodder which covered four Negroes. He stopped and visited with Mr. Brandt and had breakfast. When he left Mr. Brandt accompanied him as far as the little picket gate in the front yard and bade John Brown good-bye, shaking hands across this gate. The truth of this story is vouched for by Miss Olive Brandt, the youngest daughter of Isaac Brandt.² Her memory of her own experiences at Cherry Place and her recollections of the early times as told by her father are vivid and accurate. We are indebted to her for most of the facts in this article.

Along in the early part of the eighties, Mr. Brandt decided to build a new house. The new Capitol was being constructed and one of the head carpenters, Mr. William Crawshaw, had moved near the Brandts while he was engaged in work on the new Capitol. Mr. Brandt secured him to take charge of building his new house.

It took Mr. Crawshaw two years to assemble the lumber for the house. He bought only the best, being especially careful of the mahogany, walnut and oak he was going to use for finishing. He sent south for most of the lumber.

In March, they moved the old house back and started work on the construction of the new one. A deep basement was dug which enclosed the well of good drinking water of which Isaac Brandt was so fond. The stone mason work was done by William and George Van Dyke who had worked on the Capitol.

²"He also told me that, and from the front steps of the Historical Building pointed out the site of the circumstance."—E. R. Harlan.

In giving the facts in this article, Miss Brandt laughingly related the following incident: "When they got the large furnace chimney up and the timbers for the framework of the house, two enterprising insurance men got after my father to insure the house as it stood against accident. Pa finally took out insurance to get rid of them. On the Fourth of July a heavy electric storm struck the large furnace chimney, completely demolishing it. It did little or no damage to the rest of the house. Of course the five hundred dollars took care of the damage with some to spare." The house was finished so they could move in and have their Thanksgiving dinner in it.

It was a commodious house, there were six rooms besides the large hall, vestibule, two pantries, bathroom and alcove to the library on the first floor. The second floor contained seven rooms and two baths, and the third floor was finished in one large room with the floor waxed for dancing. The basement contained a suite of two rooms for the houseman, also laundry, furnace, coal, vegetable and fruit rooms.

As late as the eighties, furnaces were rare in Des Moines and Mr. Brandt had a man come from New York City to install a huge hot air furnace in the new house. There were eight fireplaces in Cherry Place, four upstairs and four downstairs. Miss Brandt says they did their cooking on a large coal stove in winter, but in summer they cooked on gas. The house was lighted by gas.

The woodwork in Cherry Place is still fine after almost half a century. It was hand carved and has been beautifully finished. The work was done by men who knew their craft well. Some of them worked on the new Capitol which was then nearing completion. The resemblance of the carving on the woodwork in the Capitol to that of Cherry Place is quite noticeable.

The variety of woods in the different rooms is interesting. The drawing room and library are finished in mahogany, the north-west and north rooms are in oak, the east room, which was a bedroom, in bird's-eye maple.

Isaac Brandt's love for the trees grown on his place is shown in the unusual wainscoting which is in the vestibule. The panels are small, and are made of oak, walnut, wild cherry, tame cherry,

pear and apple. These first three species are made from native timber cut from the place, the last three from trees which he had planted and cultivated. Its beautiful finish added distinction and interest to the entire house. The floors were all carpeted to the baseboard, the carpet in the drawing room woven in one piece, with a border. The walls were papered. Lace curtains were at the windows and drapes of various colors were used in the different rooms. The blinds were Venetian and many of them are still in use. The original color of the house on the outside was a very light green with trimmings of a darker shade of the same color.

The wide porch on the front, another on the west side and a smaller one on the north gave it an air of hospitality that was usually apparent in houses of the eighties.

Isaac Brandt was a contemporary of a group of distinguished Des Moines men who obtained public recognition both national and international. They were his devoted friends and frequent guests at Cherry Place. Among this group were John A. Kasson and Edwin H. Conger.

However, Mrs. Brandt did not care for social life and preferred charitable and church work to society. Instead of small selected parties she held open house about three times a year, to which she invited every one, rich and poor, alike.

In the eighties and nineties there was no organized charity work in Des Moines, but Mrs. Brandt was always interested in people who needed help. One of her store rooms was used for discarded clothing, bedding and anything and everything, including all kinds of food supplies that were needed by poor families. These were regularly sent out to the poor by Mrs. Brandt and carried to them by Olive Brandt who had a pony and cart (known as a dog cart) that she often used for this purpose. Miss Brandt says that her mother regularly cared for six families.

Isaac Brandt was as zealous an advocate of temperance as he had been of abolition. During this period there was a great deal of temperance agitation and many apostles of this cause were in Des Moines. Many nationally known lecturers spoke here, among others, John B. Gough, and were entertained at Cherry Place.

Mrs. Brandt with her family were members of the Wesley Methodist Episcopal Church. The present edifice was dedicated April 20, 1884, by Bishop Cyrus B. Foss of New York City.³ Mrs. Brandt was asked to entertain Bishop Foss since they had so much room in the new home. Miss Brandt recalls his visit with keen pleasure, remarking that he possessed an attractive, genial personality, making friends with all. After he had gone they found he had left his autographed photograph for them.

The history of Cherry Place is interwoven with that of the growth and development of Des Moines.

TELEGRAPH MOVEMENTS

The Great Western Telegraph Company has reached Des Moines. Its workmen entered Walnut Street near the dwelling of Mr. Redhead, crossed the bridge and continued on the street until in the vicinity of Mr. Allen's residence. They thence propose to follow the railroad to Avoca where they leave the track and proceed to the Bluffs by a more direct route than the road. At present the company are extending a wire of peculiar construction. It is about the thickness of a stout darning needle, but it compensates for the reduction in size by the increase of strength. It is a strip of steel coated with tin and enclosed in copper, the outer surface of which is also galvanized with tin. The textile strength of this steel wire is greater than the old-fashioned iron wire, and its peculiar construction gives to it six times the conductive force. It will not oxydize and will carry lightning as well in damp weather as in dry.

In connection with this, the Hawkeye Telegraph Company are pushing forward to completion. They are the only independent company in Iowa, and have about fifty miles in operation from Marshalltown northward. This season they will extend their lines northward to the Minnesota border, and through this city to the Missouri line. They are live, active and enterprising, with a live, active and enterprising man for President, Mr. R. W. McBride, of the *Eldora Ledger*.—*Daily Iowa State Register*, Des Moines, Iowa, March 31, 1870. (In the Newspaper Division of the Historical, Memorial and Art Department of Iowa.)

³Records of Wesley Methodist Episcopal Church, Des Moines, Iowa.

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