

## General Dodge Builds a House

As the massive effort of building the Union Pacific came to an end, General Dodge turned his attention to realizing a dream which must have given him great pleasure in his quieter moments. The homes occupied thus far by his wife and three growing daughters had been only a prelude to the pretentious house he pictured in his mind—a house of dignity and graciousness, yet without ostentation, and where a man whose career had begun so promisingly could live in the style which increasing affluence would make possible.

Several years before, Dodge had purchased the land where such a mansion could be built. His 9-acre lot extended 200 feet along Bond Street (now Third Street) between Fairview Avenue and Story Street, and ran back 400 feet to the bluffs behind. Only one steep block separated his property from the flatland where business buildings and bustling downtown streets made a pleasing view through the trees.

General Dodge chose William W. Boyington, a distinguished Chicago architect, to submit a design. When the architect presented his interpretation of the General's instructions, Dodge went over the plans with a critical eye, making a number

of changes. An original sketch of the floor plan is still in the files of the trust department at the Council Bluffs Savings Bank.

Construction was started in 1869 and largely completed in 1870. The 14-room mansion cost \$35,000—a large sum for that day. The building was set back 100 feet on the lot, with a grassy plot sloping down to the street. Before long, however, the street was graded down several feet, and Dodge had a wall built to protect his terrace.

Originally designed to measure 56 by 42 feet, the plans called for a two-story brick structure topped by a full one-story French-style mansard roof. Foundations and exterior walls were built of limestone and brick, two feet thick. Interior supporting walls were of brick and stone one foot thick, from the basement to the ceiling level of the second floor. The red exterior brick, first of its type to be used in Council Bluffs, came upriver from St. Louis.

A generous piazza sheltered the incoming visitor from the weather. Handsome double front doors of black walnut opened into a gracious, wide entry hall with a curving staircase at the back. Black and "white" walnut (butternut) gave the woodwork a rich contrast, and cherrywood was introduced in the stair balusters.

Heavy doors, which were hung with silver-tipped bronze butts, led into the library and dining room on the right and into the double parlors on

the left. Destined to be the scene of many a gay gathering, the parlors measured together 16 by 38 feet. By virtue of the wide-arched doorway between, they became almost like one long room, yet could be separated by sliding doors. An American white marble fireplace graced each parlor. Tall pier-glass mirrors at each end of the double room made it possible for dancers to see themselves reflected again and again into infinity.

Manufactured gas had just become available in the city in 1870, so the fashionable globe chandeliers were illuminated with the new fuel. When electricity came in, the fixtures were wired.

Across the hall was the handsome library, impressive with its specially designed, glass-enclosed bookcase cabinets which almost concealed the entire wall surface. Here the contrast of the black walnut and its lighter butternut trim came pleasingly to the fore. The bay windows flooded the room with light and gave a view of the city below. Potomac shell was used for the distinctive marble fireplace frame and mantel. Off the library was a narrow glassed-in solarium.

Behind the library was the generously proportioned dining room, 16 by 24 feet, also with its own fireplace. Each of the downstairs rooms was lighted by magnificent long windows of plate glass, which could be closed for nighttime privacy by oiled pine shutters that folded into wall pockets when not in use.

In the entry hall, a door to the right of the staircase opened into a storage and service hallway leading to the kitchen. A china closet in one corner of the dining room contained a small iron safe for the silverware, with a door connecting to the kitchen. This area was later expanded to serve as a butlery with a storage space for the family's best china and crystal.

Of the kitchen, an 1870 account in the *Council Bluffs Nonpareil* revealed that "the general spared no pains or expense to provide every convenience that observation and ingenuity could suggest." The 16 by 16-foot room contained a cook stove, pumps, water reservoir, built-in storage chest, and an unusually large marble sink.

There was more storage space off the kitchen for food and cooking utensils, with the basement stair opening off this area. Of generous size and headroom, the basement was divided into rooms for vegetables and ice storage, furnace and laundry rooms, and a wine cellar.

Five bedrooms and a bathroom occupied the second floor. Although the house was heated by a furnace, each of the principal rooms and bedrooms had its own fireplace. Marble washstands, with hot and cold running water, as well as spacious closets were a feature of each bedroom. A rear stairway led to the kitchen.

On the third floor there were three large bedrooms for servants, an open central area, 24 by

38, which could serve as a ballroom, and large storage closets. At the rear was a 100-barrel tank to hold cistern water which made a gravity-fed supply for the house's plumbing. Topped with a platform, the tank served double duty during parties as a raised dais for the orchestra!

To house his blooded horses, there was a large carriage house with upstairs storage rooms, fronting on a side street with a drive down to the rear of the house. The era of the trotter and pacer was just opening in Iowa.

Several major changes were made during the house's lifetime: the piazza was extended to make a covered porch across the north side of the house; sleeping porches were added to Mrs. Lettie Montgomery's and General Dodge's bedrooms around 1913; the second bathroom was added. (The bathroom has been removed to restore the space to its original use as a closet, and it is expected that the sleeping porches will come off in due time.)

Biographer J. R. Perkins had this to say about the house in his *Trails, Rails and War*:

Perhaps no house west of the Mississippi River has a social background more interwoven with western railroad history than this old brick mansion with its architecture reminiscent of the decade that followed the Civil War, and its furnishing a page out of the past that is all but forgotten.

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