

ORCHARD HOUSE, HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

General William J. Palmer exhibited continuing interest in the lands surrounding the great natural formations at Garden of the Gods. In 1871 Palmer began building Glen Eyrie at nearby Queens Canyon and hired talented entrepreneurs to publicize the attractions of this area and to promote the growth of Colorado Springs. Many years later in 1900, Palmer purchased the improved 160 acre property of Robert Chambers and added it to his estate.¹ Presumably the purchase was motivated more by water rights than any real need for more land. As a result of careful land planning and cooperative reservoir and ditch construction, Chambers had established a thriving orchard, small produce farm and flower nursery.

Six years later Charlotte Seymour Mellen Stephenson Sclater and her second husband William Lutley Sclater arrived in Colorado Springs from Capetown, South Africa. Charlotte "Lottie" was the half sister of General Palmer's wife Mary Lincoln Mellen, "Queenie", Palmer. She was ten years younger than Queenie and had first come to Colorado Springs at age twelve in 1871 and spent her girlhood at Glen Eyrie as part of the extended family cared for by General Palmer.² Charlotte Sclater's return to Colorado Springs was the result of Palmer's continued generosity. In 1906 he secured for William L. Sclater the directorship of the museum at Colorado College and a post on the science faculty.³ Earlier that year Sclater had come to an impassable disagreement with his Board of Directors at the South African Museum, Capetown and was forced to resign as museum director.

The Sclaters rented a house at 1511 Wood Avenue⁴ near the college but must have begun soon to plan their new home near the Orchard of the Old Chambers' Ranch. The circumstances surrounding the commissioning, design and financing of the Sclater residence is not entirely clear. We know that in November of 1907 they moved from Wood Avenue into Orchard House.

The architects for Orchard House were Thomas MacLaren and Charles E. Thomas. MacLaren was at the height of his bright career producing villas and resort buildings for the wealthy new residents of Colorado Springs. His firm produced work in many Beaux Arts styles from Renaissance to Louis XVI to Spanish to German Baronial. He was well travelled and well respected. By March 26, 1907 he had produced a set of drawings entitled Residence for W. L. Sclater, Esq. near Garden of Gods Colorado. Detail drawings continued to be produced. The complete set of drawings included at least 21 drawings of which 14 survive and carry dates from March 26 to July 17, 1907.

On May 8, 1907 William J. Palmer contracted for the erection and completion of a two story frame residence on the Chambers Ranch, Glen Eyrie Estate. On the same day he contracted for plumbing and heating work with a different contractor for the same residence. (\$18,342 and \$2,134 totalling \$20,476).⁵ It does not appear by any records that William L. Sclater owned the property on which his house sat and he was not the contracting party apparently paying for the house construction.⁶ In general, we know that Sclater himself was not wealthy until he married Charlotte Mellon and therefore I think that we can assume that General Palmer was being typically generous in providing a suitable home for a woman he had known as a child and cared for as a daughter.⁷

From November of 1907 to May 1908, Sclater lived in the new house. He and Charlotte sailed for England with General Palmer in June of 1908 and returned with him the following November. After the death of General Palmer in March of 1909 the Sclaters left Colorado Springs for permanent residence in London.

William L. Sclater continued a career as ornithologist, lecturer and curator of the Bird Room at the British Museum. Charlotte died at the Sclater's country cottage in Marlowe, Buchinghamshire, England in 1942 and William died in 1944 when an enemy bomb destroyed the house in Slone Square, London.

Subsequent owners of Orchard House are listed in outline form in the Appendix. Much of what we know about these people is included in Emily Brown Johnson's book The White House Ranch. We do know that the Orchard was not again occupied until after settlement of William Palmer's estate, probably about 1916 or 1918. Significant ownerships or occupancies include:

Alexander Smith Cochran of New York (1918-1927), George Strake of Texas (1937 to 1942), L. L. Dent and family of Colorado Springs (1943 to 1953) and Mr. Egmont Vrooman and family (1953 to 1968). Physical evidence collected during interior investigations suggests that one or the other of the two earliest owners, Cochran or Strake were responsible for removing the breakfast room wall (room 103-104), and probably also responsible for much of the painting of woodwork white.