

EXCERPTS FROM:

# ROCK LEDGE

The Historic Chambers House at White House Ranch

Historic Structure Report

for

Department of Park and Recreation  
1400 Glen Avenue  
Colorado Springs, Colorado 80905

by

Long Hoeft Architects  
1350 Lawrence Street #3E  
Denver, Colorado 80204  
(303) 893-9516

1989

## INTRODUCTION

Rock Ledge, the homeplace of the Chambers Ranch, now called the White House Ranch, is a fine building representing the early years of growth in Colorado Springs. Designed and built by Robert Chambers in 1875, the stone walled two-story house is a handsome asset for the interpretation of the historic ranch. The structure is presently used on the ground floor as a store and on the second floor as offices. In Colorado Springs Park and Recreation custody since 1968, the building has received good care, and the building is stable, but major work is now warranted, though not immediately necessary.

Rock Ledge is both historically and architecturally significant. The Chambers family farmed their 160 acre ranch from 1875 until the retirement of Robert Chambers in 1900. Produce from the farm supplied nearby Colorado Springs, a town platted but a few years before, in 1871. The Chambers moved to Colorado Springs from Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, for the health of Elsie Chambers, Robert's wife, who had tuberculosis. They were the advance guard of so many who would come to Colorado Springs for the recuperative powers of the climate. After her recovery the Chambers took in boarders who, like herself, suffered from T. B. Thus the Chambers family shared in many ways the growth and economic character of Colorado Springs.

Though little is known of their background in Pennsylvania, the Chambers family was well endowed for the relocation to a new territory. Robert Chambers was able to put up his family in temporary quarters first in the town, then in a small wood-framed building that he constructed on his new farm. The sterling two-story stone building that he finished the following year is architecturally significant as a proud example of the Pennsylvania building heritage that he brought with him, finished with elements designed within then-current national habit.

This Historic Structure Report includes the documentary history available on the Chambers family and on the building of Rock Ledge, and the measured drawings, physical research, and analysis accomplished by Long Hoeft Architects in the spring of 1989. The report concludes with a recommendation that both ground and second floors of the house be restored to the final years of the Chambers' habitation, 1890-1900, and that the building be interpreted with period rooms and freestanding displays illustrating the Chambers family, the historical landscape, the construction of the house, and the use of the house for the boarding of those recuperating from T.B.

## THE BUILDING OF ROCK LEDGE

The Chambers family left Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, in 1874 in search of health for the mother who suffered from tuberculosis. Robert and Elsie Chambers and their children Benjamin and Eleanor came to a brand new town, Colorado Springs, platted only three years before in 1871, served that same year by the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad. The town was close to an older town, Colorado City, founded in 1859, an erstwhile competitor to Denver as a supply depot for mining in the mountains to the west. In 1862 Colorado City sought to become the seat of the territorial capitol, but lost. By the time of the Chambers arrival the town was just holding on, already something of a ghost town.

The new town Colorado Springs was the issue of General William Jackson Palmer, builder of the Kansas and Pacific Railroad to Denver in 1870, and early developer of the Denver and Rio Grande. His was the guiding vision for a resort town, a cultured town of Eastern grace and manner, a Newport in the Rockies. Colorado College was founded the year of the Chambers' arrival. The first few years were not magic, however, and buyers for lots were few. The crash of 1873 came at a bad time. Then the rumor spread of the curative powers of Colorado and of Colorado Springs. Robert Chambers brought his wife Elsie west from Pennsylvania for just such therapy, and the therapy was abundantly successful. Elsie quickly recovered, and for the next twenty-six years the Chambers family prospered on their farm a few miles from the center of Colorado Springs.

This outline of Colorado Springs is taken from Marshall Sprague's *Newport in the Rockies*, a fine introduction to the area. His image of the new town is arresting: "The setting for Palmer's resort was anything but promising. Two small creeks, Monument and Fountain, trickled through the treeless desert of yucca and buffalo grass. The townsite was high—six thousand feet above sea level. The booming city of Denver was seventy miles to the north. But Palmer was not interested in building a boom town. What he saw at Pikes Peak was the peaceful grandeur of the mountain occupying a wilderness of spectacular beauty."

After a brief stay in Colorado Springs, the Chambers family moved to their newly purchased 160 acres across a ridge from town to the northwest in the Camp Creek valley and named it Rock Ledge Ranch. The view from the ridge down into the ranch is spectacular now, just as it was then. The historic photo, pages 6, captures Pikes Peak in the background, the pile of rocks early named Garden of the Gods to the right, and Rock Ledge Ranch in the foreground.

Robert Chambers would find reward from his land in dairy and truck crops for supplying the emerging city nearby. At his arrival in Colorado Springs there were but a few hundred resident souls. By 1880 the population stood at 4,000, and, by the time of his retirement and sale of the property in 1900, the number approached 30,000. In the twentieth century the city would begin to encroach upon the ranch, first from the south from the old town of Colorado City up Camp Creek, then from the east across the ridge. Finally, under threat of development of the ranch itself, the land was purchased by the City in 1968, and the ranch has been protected since as an element of the parks of the city.

Thus the land to the south and east is developed, but the the stately rocks of the Garden of the Gods to the west and north are also Colorado Springs parkland, and the view in the photograph is today little altered.

In the photograph the value of water is clear. Outside of the boundaries of the irrigated land in the Camp Creek bottom, the vegetation is sage and cactus, and topsoil gives way rapidly to rock outcrops. Shortly after buying the land, Chambers joined with others in building an irrigation ditch which for him served to fill the reservoir that he dammed behind his house. The reservoir is visible as a lens just above the house in the photo. The reservoir is handsomely crafted with stone work overflow pan and drainage controls. The reservoir is now dry, the water rights having long been diverted elsewhere, but the stonework of the overflow pan and drainage remains. The historic irrigation ditch serving Rock Ledge is marked on the 1989 White House Ranch Master Plan at the lower left, page 4.

We know far more about Rock Ledge from the structure itself than from written sources, but one particular paper is noteworthy in our understanding of the life of the building. "Excerpts from the Chambers Family History as told by Mary Chambers DeLong" is the name of the paper, and is apparently oral history given by Mary Chambers DeLong to her daughter Grace DeLong. Mary Chambers was born at Rock Ledge in 1875, the year after the arrival in the area by her parents Robert and Elsie Woolsey Chambers. This is her account:

My mother (Elsie Woolsey Chambers) was from a T.B. family—and about to break down. So Father (Robert Chambers) felt, as everyone else did in those days, (1874), that "to go West" was the last chance.

Father and Mother decided on Colorado since that was the place for T.B.ers, and friends

who had gone to Denver were always urging them to come.

Father started out with his sister Nettie, two children and his wife, who was expecting another baby. They all left, on the train this time, from Pennsylvania in 1874 with Father's \$10,000 from his wheat crop and Aunt Nettie's farm sale money, all in cash, with just a tiny pistol not more than eight inches long including the handle "to protect them all." However, after leaving Aunt Nettie in Wisconsin, they arrived safely in Denver without having had to "draw the pistol." On the train he would pull out a roll of money "big enough to choke a horse" and make Mother so mad. But it was common practice in those days.

They really intended to settle at Denver near Mother's school chum, Sara Wolfe, but father was persuaded to run down to Colorado Springs. He was looking for a good place for a fruit ranch with ample water. He fell in love with Colorado Springs and bought a house in town to get his family into. Shortly, he bought the ranch, a 160 acre homestead for \$1,700, with water rights, which pleased him very much. Mother named it "Rock Ledge Ranch."

The little baby Bessie was born soon after [Colorado arrived] and died at four months. Father built the long, wooden part of the old home and they moved into it. They started work on the stone house, getting the stone from the quarry on the land.

Mother kept urging them to hurry as she wanted me to be born in the new house. The house was finished enough for me to be born in Mother's bedroom (1875). No more babies after that.

There was also much tough going for Father. First, the terrible scourge of grasshoppers which lasted for three years all over the Middlewest. On account of this, he bought milk cows and ran a dairy. The grasshoppers devoured every spear of green and he had to buy feed for the cows.

The water didn't seem to be sufficient, so Father built the reservoir for flood water. He and two other men (Hardwick and Neff) had first rights to the water of Camp Creek which ran through the ranch and down the valley, but he had to bring it into the higher reservoir by way of a surveyed ditch from 'way up in Glen Arie.

When I was twenty-four, and Father was ready to quit farming, General Palmer bought the

three farms in order to get the water for his Glen Aerie (1900).

Father and Ben (his son by a first marriage) also tried a big, expensive windmill, north of the reservoir, but this was ruined by the first strong wind.

This ranch, just south of the east gate to the Garden of the Gods, prospered because of good Chambers work and enterprise. Ben invented and devised many helpful things such as a sauerkraut mill. Father, besides his fruit orchard, asparagus, etc., had two very fine heated green houses (just behind the house). He sold out-of-season produce and Mother's jams and jellies to the Antler's Hotel. They also took in summer boarders, often T.B.ers from the East.

Ben married Madge Kinney and another Robert Chambers was born there on Rock Ledge Ranch.

When Mother and Father wanted to retire from Colorado farming they sold the ranch, did some traveling and then settled in Pasadena, California, about 1903, after observing that raising oranges in California was more than "just lying under a tree and picking the fruit."

In a companion piece Grace DeLong, Mary Chambers DeLong's daughter, adds two items of interest. She notes that her uncle Ben Chambers was an accomplished plumber, and was responsible for the steam heating system for the two greenhouses. She tells also of his prowess as an inventor.

The Rock Ledge house was approached up the creek from the south. The road can be seen in the photo, page 6, arriving from the left, crossing in front of the house, and terminating in the out-buildings yard to the right of the house. With the poor quality of the photograph it is difficult to distinguish function or shape, but it appears that there are but three quite small out-buildings, and, surrounding the one nearest the house, two large haystacks. None of these remain. A dairy is mentioned as an early pursuit of the Chambers by their daughter Mary Chambers, but the size of the out-buildings is small for such enterprise.

The two heated greenhouses also mentioned by Mary Chambers are more obvious. These can be seen as a white element just south and behind the house to the left. The chimney for the boiler for the greenhouses is probably the stack which can be seen at the right rear of the house. This stack

conceivably could also be explained as a chimney serving the original frame house, but it is higher than usual, and seems to be further back, at or near the root cellar. That area is now paved, and foundation evidence is covered. Portions of the foundations for the greenhouses, on the other hand, are clearly visible in the yard as surface irregularities. Removal of the top soil at these locations should quickly reveal rubble stone foundations, an exposure useful for immediate interpretation of the historic landscape. The other two historic photographs, pages 12 and 15 show additional views of the greenhouse.

The photograph page 12 shows the asparagus field and two girls, perhaps the Chambers daughters Eleanor and Mary, with orchard trees and a horse-drawn vehicle in the background. The girls appear to be teenagers or close to it, and, if they are the Chambers girls, this would put the date of the photo in the mid or late 1880s.

General Palmer, whose famed homeplace Glen Eyrie lies north of Rock Ledge, purchased Rock Ledge Ranch in 1900 allegedly to control its water rights. At that time the historic ranch ceased farming operations. Other buildings were later added to the ranch, most notably Orchard House, built by General Palmer in 1907 for his wife's half-sister Charlotte and her husband William Sclater. Existing buildings on the ranch are located on the White House Ranch Master Plan, page 4. There is no reason to believe that any existing building other than the Rock Ledge Ranch House and its nearby root cellar was in place at the time of sale in 1900.

In addition to Orchard House, there are now on the site a caretakers' house converted from the Orchard House garage, a large one story service building behind the Rock Ledge Ranch House to the west, a large one-story building near the ranch house on the north and east presently used as a day-care facility, a two story barn adjacent to the day-care facility, and a large two story barn further down the service road to the north.

The office/cottage building is circa 1930. The service building behind the Rock Ledge Ranch House is of recent vintage. The south portion of the day-care building appears to be of approximately the same vintage as Orchard House; its shingles are wood, painted the same red as the Ranch House, and the foundation visible on the east side of the building is early concrete. The two barns belong to the White House Ranch era of the 1940s: their foundations are concrete block and their roofs are the same three layers of asphalt shingles. The paint analyses of these buildings, along with that for the Rock Ledge Ranch House, are included in the appendix, II.



Excerpts From:

## ROCK LEDGE

The Historic Chambers House

### INTERIOR FINISHES STUDY

for

Department of Parks and Recreation  
1401 Recreation Way  
Colorado Springs, Colorado 80905

by

Long Hoefft Architects  
921 Rose Street  
P.O. Box 1047  
Georgetown, Colorado 80444  
(303) 893-9516

1995



## INTRODUCTION

This Furnishings Plan forms the third study in a series prepared to enable the restoration and furnishing of Rock Ledge as a historic house museum. The Historic Structure Report, completed in 1989, described the physical history of the house and provided options for interpretation. From that report and from subsequent research by Rock Ledge staff, the decision has been made to restore the house to the period mid to late 1880s. Most changes to the house during the Chambers period took place before 1885, and their farm was most productive in the latter of that decade. In 1995, a Finishes Study confirmed that there was adequate information to restore the house with a fair degree of accuracy to this period. Only remnants of wallpaper were found in the parlors, and none in the first floor bedroom, but the taste of the family is clearly established with papers found elsewhere in the house.

Unlike the more factual Historic Structure Report and the Finishes Study, the information developed in this report is purely hypothetical with respect to the Chambers family possessions. We have no remaining pieces of family furniture, no descriptions by the family of how the house was furnished, no interior photographs. We presently have only an 1881 tax schedule that lists clocks and an organ, and a cow---which would suggest kitchen milk processing operations. We have developed an assumed profile of the family in 1885 and have proposed furnishings typical of a family in their situation.

Robert and Elsie Chambers, with their young family, moved to Colorado Springs from Pennsylvania in 1874. They came by train, and moved into temporary quarters while they built their house. Presumably, they brought no furniture with them. A family history states that they came with \$10,000 in cash, giving them the means to purchase land, build a house and begin a business. New furniture might have been purchased in Colorado Springs, but since the town was founded but three years before, furniture more likely was purchased in Denver. Furniture might also have been ordered by mail from companies advertising in Denver's Rocky Mountain News. Or used furniture could have been obtained from those moving away from the area.

The Chambers moved into their house in 1875 and lived there until their move to Colorado Springs in 1896. The Chambers sold their house and farm in 1900. The wall and trim finishes and decorations in both upper and lower halls remained unchanged either until very late or fully throughout their ownership. Evidence in other rooms is not as definitive, but restoration of the first layer is a reasonable option. Certainly, they were not frivolous about changing often to stay in the highest of style. Similarly, the assumption is made that they purchased the

basics of their furniture all at once in 1875, and then made only minor changes and additions as needs and circumstances arose. Minor decorative objects would probably have been purchased over a longer period and room layouts altered to suit family changes.

In 1885, the beginning of the Rock Ledge restoration period, the Chambers had two daughters, Eleanor, age 12, and Mary, age 10, and an older son, Ben, all living at home. As was not uncommon, and perhaps because Elsie Chambers had once been afflicted with tuberculosis, the family took in boarders who were also ill with tuberculosis.

The house also had to function as the central focus for a large farming operation. The 1880 census showed a 23 year old servant, Mary Horton, and three men, aged 22 through 24, two of whom were listed as gardeners. Most likely servant Mary stayed in the northwest bedroom with its direct stair to the kitchen. While we do not have later information that either Mary or another female servant remained through the 1880s, this report assumes that this was so.

The men employees slept elsewhere, but family notes indicate that they ate in the house. It was not uncommon at the time for all who worked together to eat together. The folding doors that separate the dining room from the back hall allowed expansion of the dining area when such large groups gathered for meals. Records indicate that jams and jellies were made by Elsie Chambers and sold to the Antlers Hotel; the large expanded dining area was probably also a center of operations for such canning production.

## FURNISHINGS AVAILABILITY

When the Chambers family arrived in Colorado they were able to purchase locally everything they needed to furnish and decorate their house. If what they wanted was not available in Colorado Springs they could purchase it in Denver, and if Denver did not have it, there were eastern companies advertising in Denver that would send photos and prices of their wares on request.

A scan of the 1875 Rocky Mountain News indicates for the Chambers many possible furniture sources.

Henry Thompson's Furniture Parlor at 337 Larimer Street in Denve was regularly listed in the paper. Thompson's sold Chamber and Parlor Suits, Kitchen and Dining-room Furniture, Brackets, Baby Carriages, Mattresses, Pillows, Lounges, and more. In smaller print, the company offered to "buy for CASH anything in my line...." which suggests that they sold both new and used furnishings. They had a separate wholesale outlet in another location. (RMN 2.18.75)

An option to Thompson's was the Mitchell & Rammelsberg Furniture Company of Cincinnati, a manufacturer which encouraged direct order, claiming in their advertisement to be the largest manufacturer in the United States. They sold Parlor, Library, Chamber and Dining Room Suits "from the plainest to the most elegant and fashionable," walnut and gilt mirrors, bedding and lace curtains. (RMN 1.5.75)

For non-essentials, the family could have purchased birds, cages, and Colorado curiosities from Achert & Taylor at 337-1/2 Larimer. (RMN 1.17.75) For pianos, there were at least two choices. Schormoyer & Orvis at 282 15th Street sold Weber pianos and were Territorial Agents for the Mason and Hamlin Organ Company. They also advertised piano stools; piano covers; violin, cello and zither strings; and sheet music and music books. (RMN 4.17.75) Their competitor, H.H. Hamilton & Company at 412 Larimer Street sold Chickering & Sons Pianos, Grand, Square and Upright. ( RMN 1.5.75 )

At The Carpet House of Daniels, Fisher & Company, it was possible to purchase Wiltons, Axminsters, Velvets, English Body Brussels, Tapestry Brussels, Three-Ply and Ingrain Carpets. They also sold upholstery material, shades, shade cloths, fixtures and window cornices as well as lace curtains and window drapery, including wrought lace curtains, tambour curtains, Swiss curtains, ecru guipure curtains, Nottingham laces, vestibule lace, lace lamberquins, lace

lambrquin lace by the yard, cretonne lambrquins, new and nobby. And they provided skilled workmen to design and fabricate window coverings. They stated "We do not propose to give the most fastidious trade an excuse for purchasing these goods outside of Denver." (RMN 6.5.75)

Parlor, heating and cooking stoves could be purchased from J.H. Grout in the Tappan Block in Denve (RMN 1.5.75) or George Tritch at the corner of 15th and Wazce (500 heating stoves, 300 cooking stoves), (RMN 1.5.75) or ordered from Wm. Resor & Co. of Cincinnati. (RMN 1.5.75) Douglas & Co., 383 Larimer, sold refrigerators, as well as crockery, china, glassware, cutlery, Britannia and plated ware, and lamps. (RMN 6.6.75)

Assuming the Chambers would have continued to add to their furnishings, in March of 1883, they could have traveled to Denver to the special sale the Hax, Gartner Furniture Co. which advertised in the Rocky Mountain News "the Largest, the Finest and the Best stock" of rattan furniture ever brought to Denver. The store had rattan rockers, patent rockers, easy chairs, children's rockers, children's cabinet chairs, misses' rockers, tables, sofas, lounges, music racks, paper holders and work stands. The furniture was finished in the "latest" colorings of mahogany, cocobola, ebony, cherry, gilt, bronzed and natural rattan. (RMN 3.11.83)

The late nineteenth century brought many people to Colorado for health, for riches, or just for new opportunities. Many of those did not find what they were looking for, leaving acquired goods behind for resale. Whole households were auctioned as exemplified by, in 1883, a 9-room house containing parlor, dining room, and bedroom furniture in modern style, lace curtains, lambrequins, brussels and ingrain carpets, fancy articles, pictures and mirrors. (RMN 3.11.83)

We can assume generally that whatever furniture, carpeting, window dressing and lighting that we see in nineteenth century catalogues or photographs, more often taken in the East than in this part of the country, would have been available to the Chambers in Colorado. Further, their tastes would not have varied materially from those of the family they left behind in Pennsylvania. Books and magazines establishing household trends would have been available to them and were probably read.

## HOUSE HYGIENE FOR THE CONSUMPTIVE

There is not a great deal of difference between nineteenth century houses for people with tuberculosis and people fortunate enough to have escaped the disease. Still, studies suggested certain environmental features that would be advantageous for those who were ill with the disease. Gardiner's work is illustrative.

Dr. Charles Fox Gardiner practiced in the Colorado Springs area for 16 years prior to the 1900 publication of his book *The Care of the Consumptive*. The Chambers house was built well before he wrote and, in many regards, the house did not conform to his recommendations. But his suggestion that "windows should be large, and numerous enough to permit light to enter the room even to excess" might be represented in the alteration of the east windows to French doors. His further assertion that "a porch or piazza on the south side of the house, to serve as a living room, is almost a necessity"<sup>17</sup> fitted reasonably with the Chambers' eastern two story porch. (Gardiner, p. 14)

While the Chambers, if they were aware of Dr. Gardiner's work and beliefs, ignored some of them, we might assume that he indeed had certain influence. Rock Ledge had wallpapered rooms, something he advised against unless varnished (theirs were not). But his advice can be considered in the refurnishing of the house in that it offers opportunity for the interpretation of the treatment of tuberculosis in Colorado Springs. Gardiner makes the following suggestions:

Curtains, although dear to the feminine mind, must be sacrificed, unless it be small sash curtains that can be easily detached and washed, and which, if made of some white material, do not intercept much light. Windows may be fitted with frames covered with cheesecloth, which intercepts dust and allows air-interchange. The better plan is to open all the windows, protect the bed by its situation and by means of screens from direct currents, and increase the heat so as to compensate, except in very cold weather, for the lowered temperature; over-ventilation must be the aim. (Gardiner, p.17)

Simple furniture is advisable; an iron or brass bed, with a down quilt and new blankets for warmth without weight; a steamer-chair, with cushions, is a sensible lounging chair. Floors should be oiled, waxed, or covered with linoleum, with a rug that can be beaten daily; such a floor is much to be preferred to any carpet. (Gardiner, p.18)

Following are photographs from an advertisement for the Agnes Memorial Sanatorium in Denver showing rooms decorated in accordance with the recommendations of Dr. Gardiner.

## BACK HALL AND DINING ROOM

The back hall is somewhat of a mystery space. Perhaps, the double doors that separate it from the dining room were installed merely to keep that space warmer in the winter time. But it is a large enough space that it is assumed to have some function, possibly ranch operations office. Thus, a desk and chair are placed along the south wall. An extra chair is placed against the wall between the two doors from the front hall.

The dining room table is placed perpendicular to the north paired windows, allowing for its expansion into the adjacent back hall. It is placed on a rug only large enough to go under the unexpanded version. Six chairs are placed around the table for times when there are no boarders or ranch hands. Five more chairs are located around the room. The extra chair in the back hall can also be pulled up.

The only dining room location for the sideboard is in the southwest corner. To fit in this location, the west double doors have to be placed in a half closed position. An option is to place a sideboard in the back hall in lieu of the desk, but there is no obvious alternate location for the desk. The final decision on the use of these pieces of furniture will lie in the manner in which the house is to be interpreted and the availability of museum furnishings.

Because of the often utilitarian use of this space, and because the windows are immediately adjacent to the fireplace, curtains need to be simple. While they should be fancier than the gathered muslin that might be expected in a kitchen, they may either be stopped at the sill or draped only to the west.

The mantel can be expected to be decorated similarly to that in the parlor, but with less personal objects. And because of the often times unique informality of this room, a lambrequin should not be used.

## BEDROOMS

All of the bedrooms at Rock Ledge are very small and, with the exception of the downstairs bedroom which is assumed to be that of Robert and Elsie Chambers, were used interchangeably by either family, boarders or staff. The northwest bedroom is assumed to be the maid's room, furnished somewhat less expensively or elaborately than the others, but probably no more exclusively the maid's than the other rooms were considered exclusively those of the individual children.

All the rooms had at a minimum a bed, dresser and washstand. The bigger bedrooms probably had double beds for maximum use. Smaller rooms are shown with single beds, but could have had three-quarter or doubles.

Where there is space, a chair or two or a small table is included. In the downstairs bedroom and in the southwest bedroom upstairs, this is a side chair. In the front upstairs bedrooms, a folding chair is recommended for each on the assumption that these portable pieces might be carried out onto the front porch on sunny warm days. In these same two rooms, screens are shown to block breezes when the windows are left open.

The idea of a bedside table as we know it today was not part of a typical small bedroom of the Rock Ledge period. Where there was space enough, a table might have been placed at the foot of the bed, as is shown in the upstairs northeast bedroom, or in the center of a large open space.

The two small west bedrooms have no closets. We have assumed that they each have a hook board mounted on the wall just inside their entry door.

Small rag rugs are recommended for the floors in each of the rooms. An option would be small sections of matting or ingrain carpet.

Curtains would be simple, possibly roller shades would have been sufficient. Options would include lace, lightweight white or off-white cottons, sheer fabrics, or muslins.

Each of the rooms was heated with a small stove, probably visually utilitarian in nature.

It is assumed that none of the bedrooms, with the possible exception of downstairs had fixed kerosene lighting, either ceiling or bracket, but that each had a table lamp that sat on the dresser or on a small table.





## ELSIE CHAMBERS AND THE WOMAN'S CHRISTIAN TEMPERANCE UNION

Carol Kennis, Historic Site Coordinator

It has long been my opinion that Robert and Elsie Chambers were just the sort of folks General Palmer wanted to attract to his new town. They were hard working, educated, had middle class sensibilities, and they were teetotalers. Best of all they did not passively reside in the Pikes Peak region, they were active citizens, participating in the social, spiritual, and educational life of the area. We know this from brief references in our documentation of the family. One reference in particular has prompted me to do additional research. In a 1969 letter to Rhoda Wilcox, (a local historian who helped preserve the Rock Ledge Ranch, and LHA member) Robert and Elsie's granddaughter Grace Delong wrote that "Elsie liked to write" and contributed to WCTU publications until her death in 1923. This statement tells us that most likely the Chambers abstained from alcohol consumption and that other writings by Mrs. Chambers exist which may convey more information about her personality and the Chambers' life in the Camp Creek valley. Her involvement with the WCTU also suggests that Mrs. Chambers was a forward thinking woman. After all she was an active member of one of the most influential women's organizations of the late nineteenth century.

Mrs. Chambers was probably unaware that at the same time she was building a new home next to the Garden of the Gods for herself and her family, a national organization was being founded that would not only affect her life but the lives of thousands of women. As a response to the growing concern for alcoholism and its effects on the family, especially women and children, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union was founded in Cleveland, Ohio in 1874. This organization tapped the energy of women who, at the time were expected to conform to society's ideal female role. This ideal required that women limit their energies to caring for life in the domestic sphere leaving public activities to their husbands, fathers, and brothers. Women were taught that they were the guardians of the home and family. It was their role to create a home in which religion, culture, virtue, and health

were cultivated. The home was to serve as a place to which men could withdraw for renewal after their battles in the public marketplace. For instance, in the domestic manual Our Home written for women in 1885 the reader is told;

What home is, society will be. ...The ministry of home consists not alone in its fond memories and hallowed associations. It is the great conservator of good, the "seeding place of virtue." It is the origin of all civilization. <sup>1</sup>

This same manual warned against the dangers of alcohol and the mother's role in protecting her family from them. It continues,

All that is necessary to make a drunkard is, first, a good healthy boy as material; and second, plenty of candy, pastry, pickles, and medicine as tools. Any mother with such an outfit can manufacture a drunkard. The process is extremely simple...<sup>2</sup>

Organizers of the WCTU used society's ideal of women as guardians of home, family, and morality as its justification for organizing thousands of women to fight against the sale and consumption of alcohol because they saw it as the prime threat to the family. During a period when women were denied suffrage the WCTU taught them organizational, public speaking, financial management, and political action skills. Whereas society discouraged women from public activity, the church based nature of the WCTU gave the organization respectability.

Although the WCTU attracted snickers in the 1880s, and still does today, alcohol abuse was a major problem in the nineteenth century. The national per capita consumption of alcohol rose from eight gallons in 1878 to seventeen gallons in 1898.<sup>3</sup> There were no social agencies to help the alcoholic and many working class families were pushed into poverty and hopelessness as a result of the rent and grocery money being swallowed away in demon rum. During this period alcoholism was considered to be the major cause of spouse and child abuse. Because women were dependent on their husbands for economic support and had few legal rights or welfare agencies to turn to for help they

chose to fight against the sale and consumption of alcohol which they linked to poverty, social corruption, and the degradation of family life.<sup>4</sup>

By 1879 the WCTU elected Francis Willard as their national president. She was an educated and strong-willed woman, who in her twenty years as president, developed the organization into the largest women's organization of the nineteenth century and a leader in progressive reform. In addition to its fight against liquor the WCTU promoted prison reform, public kindergartens, child care for working mothers, and facilities for neglected and dependent children. They also supported women's suffrage, industrial job training for young women, and organized labor in their fight for an eight hour day.<sup>5</sup> The historical importance of the WCTU lies not so much in its fight against alcohol as in its role in bringing women into the marketplace of ideas. As a result of their activities in the WCTU women not only gained skills, they gained confidence in their ability to organize and to affect the political process.

Mrs. Chambers was an early and active member of the Colorado City WCTU. (In the 1896 Colorado Springs City Directory Mrs. Chambers is listed as President of the WCTU.) We do not know if Mrs. Chambers was present when it was formed on October 28th, 1887, but her good friend and neighbor in the Camp Creek valley, Mrs. A. A. Finley, was elected treasurer during this inaugural meeting. Realizing there was no place in Colorado City for men to spend their evenings except the saloons and houses of ill repute, the Union decided their goal would be to open a free reading room, a place where men could go for a "quiet hour free from temptation." By this time the Midland Railroad was building shops and hiring more men. As a result "every sin that goes with a booming western town" was flourishing in Colorado City.<sup>6</sup>

The next sixteen years saw the organization working hard to raise money, first to provide rent for a building and secondly to pay off the costs of building a structure of their own. In 1888 Mrs. Chambers began working on the project and the following year she headed a committee to raise funds

in Colorado Springs. By 1890 the group had run out of cash to finish construction so they took out a loan for \$2,500.00. With their debt and interest payments amounting to \$250.00 a year however, it took all the Union could raise by renting the building to others to pay it. The burden of this debt caused dissension in the organization and several members left. For awhile the whole business looked shaky for which the women were ridiculed. "Saloon men said that a bunch of women never could pay off their mortgage and that they would have a saloon in the building some day." <sup>7</sup> Finally, in June, 1903 the Union had enough money to pay off the mortgage and the women's pride in their success is evident in a statement from a brief history of the local Union.

Many worthy corporations and individuals who had money and influence, succumbed to the pressure of hard times, while we without financial backing and few friends to our cause and only our willing hands and implicit faith in the righteousness of our case, weathered the storm.<sup>8</sup>

Research on Mrs. Chambers' involvement in the WCTU is continuing. We know that the late 1880s were busy years for the Chambers as they remodeled their house, doubled their orchard acreage from three acres to six and more than tripled the harvest of their small fruit acreage by 1892, and started the first school in the Camp Creek valley in their home in 1888, with Mrs. Chambers working as teacher and Mr. Chambers president of the school board. Indeed, with Mrs. Chambers' participation in the WCTU we can understand why she closed her memoir by writing, "the enterprises... within the past decade have brought modern ways, and all the aspirations for the opportunities of eastern city life, including business, educational and religious life....We are a modern people, at least in our own eyes."<sup>9</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> C. E. Sargent, Our Home or the Key to a Nobler Life. (Springfield, Mass.: W.C. King, 1885), pp. v., 19.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

3. Otto Bettmann, The Good Old Days They Were Terrible! (New York: Random House, 1974), p.132.

4. Francis Willard, How I Learned to Ride a Bicycle: Reflections of and Influential 19th Century Woman, (Sunnyvale, California: Fair Oaks Publishers, 1991), p. 6. Revised edition of A Wheel within a Wheel, 1895.

5. Ibid., p. 8.

6. Lou Musser, "History of Colorado City Woman's Christian Temperance Union," manuscript, Starsmore Center for Research, Colorado Springs Museum. nd.

7. Ibid., p. 6.

8. Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Elsie Chambers, "What Happened While the Cabin Lived," Rock Ledge Ranch Historic Site collection. nd.

## What if these Walls Could Talk?

*Annunciator* 1994-5

By Carol Kennis, Manager

The aroma of musty plaster, the stealthy movements of dusty, masked and gloved detectives, and the occasional exclamation of determined but sometimes mystified voices would have greeted you this spring if you had visited Rock Ledge House in February and March. Site caretaker, Robb McCann, and myself became the dusty detectives as we embarked on the unfamiliar but intriguing path of “destructive analysis” of the house interior. This first step in the restoration coincided with the preparation of detailed drawings by Michael Collins Architects that will guide the rest of the work.

The road of “destructive analysis” is filled with blind curves, confusing signs and mysterious clues that lead the architectural detectives toward their destination –the original house structure. Our mission was to carefully uncover and record these clues to gain as much information about the original construction and early remodeling of the house before much of the evidence was obliterated by restoration crews.

What we discovered was captivating. Original layers of wallpaper, carefully applied by the Chambers on both walls and ceiling were discovered in all of the second floor rooms as well as the first floor hallway. Our first major discovery though, was made by Robb McCann when he removed wall board in the first floor center room revealing intact, a door, suspected but covered over for more than sixty years. Most beguiling of all, though, was the discovery of an unsuspected narrow and steep staircase which, although removed before 1935, connected the original kitchen and a second floor storage area. A significant reward for this painstaking work was the retrieval of a receipt made out to the Chamber’s for purchase of 2000 pounds of coal dated November 26, 1883.

As a result of this early phase many of our questions about the details of the upcoming restoration were answered. Undoubtedly more riddles will be solved as the process continues. One thing above all else is clear, however; that the walls in Rock Ledge House *can* talk and they have told us much.



## Victorian Parlor Furnishings for Rock Ledge House

By Stacy Wilhite, 1998

To the late 19th century Victorian family, the front parlor of their home served as the border area between the family and the outside world. The Victorian woman decorated the parlor to demonstrate her artistic tastes and moral concerns, as well as the economic status of the family, to outside visitors. Typical furniture for the front parlor included an upholstered parlor suite made up of a sofa and several chairs of various sizes (to indicate the different social ranks of the chair's occupants) and a center table on which the family Bible and other objects would be displayed. Because the parlor set was the most prominent item in the parlor, the upholstery fabric and color set the tone for the parlor.

One of the more popular styles of seating furniture was a factory-manufactured style known as Eastlake. Except for its name, this American-made furniture bore little resemblance to the furniture designs proposed by Charles Eastlake in his classic decorating book, *Hints on Household Taste*. Instead of the rigid geometric lines and imitation of medieval designs Mr. Eastlake promoted, American Eastlake furniture was more curvilinear and was inspired by modern design and the capabilities of recently-invented machinery.

What types of fabrics did consumers choose for their new furniture? Since the front parlor demonstrated the wealth and good taste of the home's owners, fabrics used in the front parlor were usually the most luxurious the family could afford. Popular choices included horsehair, velvets or plush, usually with a design embossed or cut into the pile, and upholstery with ornamental needlework.

The colors chosen by Victorians for use in a parlor also promoted an image of richness and importance. Warm, rich colors, dark but vivid, were thought to give an air of importance to a room. Bottle green, gold, claret, burgundy, and deep blues were among the popular choices for parlors or dining rooms. Many of these colors were newly available to middle-class Victorians. William Perkins' discovery of coal-based (aniline) dyes in 1856 led to the development of inexpensive, stable dyes in colors that previously were only possible with the use of expensive natural dyes.

Another consideration is the pattern of the fabric. In the 1870's, small-scale, stylized designs became very popular. This was a reaction against the extremely realistic textile designs

We moved again the last of February into a four room cottage near where we roomed when we first came (?) not far from Mrs. Robert Love. She told me of Mrs. James Love being here. I never knew that family. Mrs. (?) took dinner with us at your house if I am not mistaken. Sometime when we go out walking we may call on them. When I have the (?) to do I cannot do much walking.

Write to me all about the W.C.T.U. work. I expect to have the Signal soon now and the Messenger. Mrs. Berry has been sending the Messenger to the Springs but I have not seen one since before the fall convention. It is getting towards evening and I must call the child in and talk to her. Tell Mr. Finley that Mr. Chambers is waiting for a letter.

With love and sympathy, Elsie W. Chambers

Transcription of letter from Elsie W. Chambers to Mrs. A.A. Finley

Envelope postmark: PASADENA JAN 26 6-AM 1904 CAL.

Mrs. A.A. Finley.  
Box 51  
Colorado City,  
El Paso Co.  
Colo.

Reverse side of envelope postmark:  
COLORADO CITY, COLO. JAN 28 630 PM 1904 REC'D

Handwritten in pencil:

533 Adella Ave  
Pas

No. 132. Pasadena Ave.  
Pasadena, Calif.  
Jan 24th 1904.

My Dear Friend.

I dont know what to say to comfort you but to repeat the old promises of our loving Heavenly Father. "The Lord loveth whom he chasteneth." "He is our refuge in the time of trouble." "All things work together for good to those who love the Lord." We cannot see the end. How thankful we should be that we can only see one day at a time.

One day at a time to do his will. One day nearer home from each sunrise to sunset. One day nearer the loved ones who are "watching and waiting" for us, after each days duties are over. The Master needs our love and service for him here or he would have called us home too.

My dear friend how I wish I could be with you a while if in any way I could be a comfort to you.

We only know what the paper gave of you and Edward going to Mary and of her death.

When you feel that you can, write us the particulars. Perhaps Mr. Finley will write for you.

We have been so busy since we have been here. We arrived here on Thursday Dec 6th and Mary went to work in an Art Store on Monday. We rented three rooms furnished till we found a cottage. A lady in the house had a stroke of apoplexy and Nora nursed her over the weeks, then in a few days we moved into this new cottage before a single room was finished, on the 6th of January, and the 12th a patient for Nora came into the extra room we have to rent. Her babe was born within twenty-four hours after she took the room. She hoped to be able to go back to her boarding house when her two weeks were up, that could be Tuesday but has not been so well for a few days and may have to stay longer. It has kept me busy with Mr. Chambers help, to attend to the house keeping and take care of Elsie. Don't think we will take a patient in the house again. When it comes to real work and commotion about the house I am of not much account.

We met Mrs. Robert Love at the Carnival of Roses on New Year's Day and found she lived about a block from where we were rooming then. She called before we moved but I have not returned it yet. Last Thursday I attended a Federation of Unions at South Pasadena where I met the white-ribboners for the first time. I expect to join the Central Union which has eighty members. We hear of the same lines of work with some new plans that I think I will write of to the Messenger when I get rested and have time to myself to write.

Mrs. DeLong has had a bad attack of rheumatism but is better now. She is at Pacific Grove this winter.

Christmas Afternoon we took a trolley car ride to WestLake Park in Los Angelos and New Year's afternoon Mr. Chambers, and Elsie and I went to Altedena a suburb on the north of Pasadena. That is all the going about we have done. We are not here just for pleasure this time.

The weather is delightful. Only one rain so far. Nasturtiums and heliotrope in bloom through our coolest weather. One day it was ninety. Nearly every day we can sit out on the porch. We are in a bran new cottage and have no fleas but do not like the

location only that is only a few blocks from the business centre and is better for the girls business.

We wonder who will care for Mary's little ones? Mary is at rest from life's burden's Her life ( ) was beautiful as was Grace's. You may be well assured that the world is better for their true loving lives. May you realize the comforting presence of our loving Heavenly Father.

With love and sympathy,  
Elsie W. Chambers.

