

DOCENT INFORMATION  
COHEN / BRAY HOUSE  
ARCHITECTURE & INTERIORS

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**HISTORY:**

The house was build by the contractor / builder George W. Frick who began the plans in 1882. Emma Bray and Alfred Henry Cohen moved into the house February 28, 1884. The house was a wedding present to Emma Bray and Alfred Henry Cohen. The Bray family provided the land, part of their estate "Oak Tree Farm", and built the house while the A. A. Cohen family provided the furnishings and perhaps the fittings that is the interior moldings, fireplaces, wallpaper etc. It was common in the 19th century to have two contracts with builders one for building the house and one for doing the interior finishing or fittings. To date no reference to an architect has been found.

**ARCHITECTURE:**

The exterior of the house is typical of the American Stick Style.

This style grew out of the Gothic Revival Style which came to America from Europe primarily England. There were other medieval influences as well. The Stick Style is an American Style. The exterior also has influences of what is known as Eastlake details. -- more about this below.

Typical of the Stick Style is the over all vertical emphasis of the building. On this house the massing of the building and the vertical elements are more important then the horizontal elements. In details this verticality is found in the pairs of thin turned columns of the front porch, or the vertical moldings at both sides of the windows. These vertical moldings contain the decoration above and below the windows which is also vertical . Also, corner moldings of the building follow the vertical pattern. Again the siding of the building at the cornice and in the triangular pediments are vertical emphasizing this idea at the top of the buildings and under eaves at the edge of the roof. Of course the tower is vertical.

The paint colors of the building have been restored to the original colors and are typical of this period.

Charles Locke Eastlake was author of "Hints on Household Taste" a book which popularized the philosophic teachings of the English Reform or early Arts and Crafts Movement. Many of these ideas came from the English Gothic Revival movement and the writings and teachings of John Ruskin and William Morris et. all. It is important to note Eastlake although trained as an architect did not design any buildings. He designed furniture which was much changed when manufactured. He has been described as " the oracle of domestic taste". and his book was more influential in America then England. The term Eastlake has been applied to furniture, decoration, architecture etc. which resembles the ideas expressed in his book. In the later additions of his book he decried the furniture being made in America and called Eastlake as it did not follow his ideas.

One of the important ideas in the book is that the construction of an object-- furniture in his case-- should be expressed in the way the object is built. An example of this on the exterior of the building is the tops [capitals] of the porch columns where the cut wood is built up as layers to form the capital.

The same is true on the moldings around the windows and at the corners of the building. The decorative siding above and below the windows as well as the building cornice also expressed this idea where each piece of wood is expressed as an individual piece of wood grooved and put together.

Another idea found in Eastlake's book was that decoration should express how it was made. The capitals of the columns as noted or the turned rings of the columns or porch banister. What Eastlake objected to was wood carved to look like fruit or leaves or classical decoration. There will be other examples of this "Eastlake" decoration on the interior.

#### INTERIORS:

The interior of this house presents a number of different themes and stylistic trends found in the latter 19th Century.

First is the idea of separate public and private living spaces. Here you will see the public rooms --entry hall, parlor, library, dinning room and intermediate hall -- are all high styled rooms for show. The balance of the house was the private spaces and are modest-middle-of-the-road interiors, furnishings and fittings typical of the period.

The interior style is a excellent example of the Aesthetic Movement. This style was popular in the latter part of the 19th century say from the late 1860's to the early 1890's. Incorporated in this style are other stylistic fads of the later 19th century. They are Modern Gothic, "Eastlake" and the AngloJapanese fad. It is not uncommon to find these stylistic elements combined at this time period.

#### THE ENTRY HALL:

The aesthetic:

HOW TO BUILD FURNISH & DECORATE; a 1883 book by Robert W. Shappell, Co-operative Building Plan Association. No 24 Beekman Street, New York. 1883 book # 8660. Chapter 2 page 1. A nineteenth century book says the following about entry halls "The hall or vestibule, as the first division of a house that meets the eye on entering, should either be of a quiet and undemonstrative nature, or else it should give the key-note to the entire house" This house follows that attitude in both cases. The use of curly redwood paneling and a wood floor set the undemonstrative tone. Most likely the sliding doors to the parlor would have been kept closed in the 19th century.

The style:

Here it is a combination. The panel detailing has overtones of both "Modern Gothick" and the "Eastlake" style along with stylized carvings of sunflowers which Charles Eastlake would approve of as you can tell they were carved into the wood. This type of carving is called incised carving. Modern Gothick is a term used in the 19th century for heavy furniture and paneling which derived its inspiration from medieval Gothic buildings and decorative arts. The stylized sun flowers, peacock feathers were so very popular in the Aesthetic Movement that they have become an identifying element of the style. The stained glass windows with hand painted insets and the gas light fixture reflect Anglo-Japanese motifs a sub style of the Aesthetic movement. These decorative elements along with the Chinese chairs and table "give the key-note to the entire house" as noted above.

It should be noted that the color schemes of all principal rooms on the ground floor are coordinated from room to room presenting a harmonious whole when all sliding doors are opened.

#### **Furnishings:**

The Chinese chairs and table along with the dinner gong and vase are Chinese export items. The fire-screen in front of the heater is American with an embroidered velvet inset. It has a ebonized or black painted finish. The tall clock was purchased by Alfred Henry Cohen for his room at Harvard and show in a picture of that room. It is a ~~clock~~ clock. The umbrella stand came into the house in 1926 at the death of Mrs. Cohen Alfred Henry's mother. It is a Herter Brother piece and family tradition is it was in Alfred Andrew Cohen - Alfred Henry's father- at his office at the Central Pacific Railroad. There are two similar stands at Stanford which were in Mark Hopkins office at the railroad also.

#### **The History:**

The entry hall and principal wood work on the ground floor of the home was milled from one log which was a wedding gift from Henry Weatherby, who owned a lumber mill in Navarro, Mendocino County, Calif. The highly figured "curly redwood" was generally found in the butt logs of California's Giant Sequoia. Family tradition is that the ceiling was constructed on the ground and then raised in place by ropes from above.

### **THE INTERMEDIATE HALL**

#### **The Style:**

The intermediate hall is the connecting link between the public - dining room, library , entry hall - and private sections of the house . At the end of this hall is a pair of 10 ft. by 4 ft. 6 in. doors. Clearly visible to visitors in the entry hall, they are part of the "key-note" effect of the entry hall itself. The doors are divided into three sections, constructed of straight grained redwood with panels of curly redwood, and carved with stylized sunflowers. The bottom section consists of diagonal cross-bracing with stylized carving over a background of V-groove paneling. The intermediate section is the most elaborate with cross-bracing, intermediate rails and stylized carving of sunflowers on both the rails and the inset panels. The top section is composed of V-groove curly redwood paneling. The casing surrounding the doors has a carved sunflower with leaves paralleling the lower section, a elaborate molding above that and a complex molding with rosettes across the top. All the doors and their surrounds in the public spaces follow this pattern of construction detail and finish. The redwood dado in the intermediate hall follows the woodwork in the entry hall. Above the dado is a patterned paper in golds topped by an extremely sophisticated frieze of fans in the Anglo-Japanese style. The whole says Aesthetic Movement.

Nowhere in the house is better illustrated the contrast between the public spaces and the private spaces than this set of swinging doors which leads to the service hall and stairs in the private section of the house. In contrast to the elaborate face of the doors the rear side consists of three sections with no carving and the simplest profiles on the panel edges. The moldings surrounding the door are of a common profile found in many contractor built homes in the Bay Area.

#### **The History:**

This part of the house has changed little since 1884. The carpet on the floor appears to be the original. The electric lighting was installed in 1987. This light illuminated the fine wallpapers and at the same time the drapery rod for

portieres between the front and rear hall. In 1987 Emelita did not remember the existence of the rod nor any portiers hanging there during her life time.

#### THE DRAWING ROOM:

The aesthetic:

"This room{the drawing or reception room} claims special attention. Here 'beauty, sweetness, and light' are to culminate. The propose of a drawing-room is relaxation and social enjoyment. Other rooms are, so to speak, work-rooms, and take their tone from the necessary pursuits to which they are more or less set apart; but in this room fancy reigns supreme, unfettered by the weightier cares of life. Whatever of poetry, of art, or of culture there is in us will manifest itself in the fittings and accessories of the withdrawing-room." Again a quotation from the 1883 book and "Fancy reigns supreme" certainly fits the unique front parlor [or reception room] of the Cohen / Bray house.

The Style:

This room is a good example of the American Aesthetic style. The room elements which contribute to this style are the wallpapers and wood work with its stylized carvings furnishings and accessories. A carefully coordinated Aesthetic color scheme sets the tone with walls of soft gray chroma, a frieze and ceiling papers of gray greens and golds, with accents of maroon, soft pinks, power blue and whites. An unusual feature is that the woodwork is painted to match the walls and has carved sunflowers picked out in gold leaf. The carpet of golds repeats in its border the maroon, pinks and powder blue of the ceiling papers. The silk velvet upholstery, braids, and caterpillar trims found on the seating pieces are of gold and power blue reiterating the accents of the ceiling and carpet. Even the velvet liners of the picture frames are coordinated with the color scheme although they have now changed color with age. Adding to this artistic whole are the accessories in the Aesthetic taste including many Oriental objects all coordinated to the color scheme.

The Furnishings:

The suite of wooden furniture is constructed of straight grained, curly and birds-eye maple in a rich honey color and is of top quality. Letters from Mr. Cohen in New York to Mrs. Cohen at Fernside inform us that these wooden pieces along with the settee, ladies & gentleman's chair [now in the library] and two side chairs were ordered from Pottier and Stymus of New York. The same letters note the carpet is from W. J. Sloane and workman from the San Francisco store came and measured the carpets. Also, of interests is that most of the objects in the cabinet are wedding presents to the young couple.

The History:

Most of the objects in this room have remained here since 1884. A few pictures have changes. The two important additions are the large mirror and carpet in the center of the room. Both of these pieces are from the drawing room at Fernside the grooms parents home in Alameda. The mirror was the overmantel mirror and is also a Pottier and Stymus piece. The mirror frame, mirror, mantes and grate[ both gone] cost \$1,350.00 on March 10, 1877. The carpet is only the center section of the carpet from the Fernside drawing room where the full carpet and ceiling matched that room was 20 feet wide and 40 feet long. Tradition is it took two rail road flat cars to bring it to

California. The two historic photographs show several art objects and textiles placed artistry around the room in a very Aesthetic way. The photos also show two additional chairs in this room. One the gentleman's chair is in the library and the second is in the smoking room. Both have been recovered. A child's chair also in the photo's in the attic and shows the uses of generations of children. The curtains are also replacements.

#### LIBRARY:

##### The Style:

The library follows the other "public rooms" on the ground floor as being apart of the Aesthetic movement. It also reflects the following. "...partake['s] of a mixed character, and become[s] a pleasant and useful family room" It might be thought of as a more personal room then the fount parlor. The adjoining sliding doors to the parlor / reception room would have been kept closed in the 19th century. Here the architectural wood work continuing the styles and patterns found in the entry hall. Mustard gold covers the walls and a two tone red carpet the floor again from W. J. Sloane. The ceiling frieze with its Aesthetic pattern suggesting a Egyptian theme. incorporates gold, maroon and green gray. Likely the background of this frieze was originally a bronze metallic finish. This color scheme plays off the colors of the front parlor. Again the accessories are in the Aesthetic taste with many Oriental objects

##### The Furnishings:

The mantelpiece, which dominates the room, and matching bookcases are constructed of walnut. The letters spoken of discuss these pieces and that they were expensive. Drawing from what was purchased in New York these fixtures were likely supplied by a firm in the Bay Area. They are in the American Eastlake style. Minton tiles depicting the Waverley novels [ Ivanhoe, Lady of the Lake, etc. ] of Sir Walter Scott surround the firebox.. Morah Smith the tile designer's initials appear on the tiles. These eight inch tiles were made in six inch and as plates. Of the public rooms on the ground floor the furnishings in this room have changed the most. The chair on the right side of the fireplace was originally in the front parlor. It was recovered at the time of John Kennedy's death. Emelita said she was so upset by the death of the President that she forgot to ask for the original fabric back from the upholster. When she remembered the upholster had thrown out the fabric. The chair to the left of the fireplace is from Fernside. It retains is original wood finish. The cover likely dates from the 1870's and could be the original. There are two additional chairs in this set belonging to other Cohen decedents which have been recovered and refinished. The two pedestal desk in the corner of the room has been here for many years. Whether it was part of the original furnishings of the room is not known. It originally had a red beize top. The "clerk desk" was given to the house by the Judge Crockett family. Crockett was a friend of W. A. Bray. [ see Ken Gilliland notes ] The music stand on the east wall of the room was originally in the smoking room. The two green cover chairs came from Ken Gillilands father's family. They are typical of what is know as American Eastlake style. [See also Ken Gillilands notes.] Of interest in the house are two settees which have ends cut at an angle following the west end of this room. The one historical photograph of this room shows a leg of some upholstered piece. It is not clear what his piece is.

##### The History:

As noted the furnishings in this room have changed the most over the years. For the best history see Ken Gilliland's account of the room. Of note here is

the clock and matching urns on the fireplace mantel. They were a gift to the bride and groom by the Peder Sather a close friend to the Brays. The Sathers also gave the gate and campanile to the University of California. Also, of note are the other objects on the shelves which appear in the historical photograph. The glass globes were originally on the gas fixture in the room.

#### THE DINING ROOM:

##### The Style:

Across the intermediate hall is the formal dining room, which continues the same architectural woodwork found in the library. Following the fashion of the time the walls are Pompeian red with a dado in gold and brown embossed floral paper and an Anglo-Japanese frieze incorporating maroon, pinks, and accents of gold, white and blue. This paper has been reproduced by Bradbury & Bradbury Art Wallpapers and is known as "Emelita's Frieze". Here again the Aesthetic Style is found in the woodwork and wallpapers. The exception to this style is the built-in sideboard.

##### The Furnishings:

For the built-in sideboard & fireplace see history.

The dining furniture is in the Modern Gothick style which has been menaced before. This heavy Gothick [ spelled with a k ] style was inspired by William Burges, Bruce Talbert, G. G. Scott and Alfred Waterhouse the building they did and books they wrote. It was popular in the latter half of the 19th Century. There are close types to the furniture which Charles Eastlake designed - he was influenced by them-- and has close association with the Aesthetic Movement. Here is a great example of substantial American walnut furniture in this style. The decorative motives of the back of the chairs come from Gothic windows while the table base for ceiling trusses. The large secretary in the southeast corner of the room came to the house from Helen Gilliland. It was missing its top cornice/pediment when it was given to Helen by her parents. This piece is typical of American Eastlake furniture. The cabinet in the southwest corner of the room came from Ken Gilliland's grandparents home in Oakland. It came to 1440 in 1971 and is a reproduction piece based upon mid 18th. century English or American furniture also known as "Chinese Chippendale". The sideboard or shelves as they were referred to in the 19th century was made to used as it is a serving and storage unit. It has been in the house as long as one can remember. Lastly the bench in the northeast corner. This is the base of the mirror in the smoking room. It is a Herter Brothers piece with a stamp on the back.. The cover is a good example of American Arts and Crafts textiles.

##### The History:

The built-in sideboard or buffet of walnut with a marble top is very different in its style than the rest of the house. In a taped interview Emelita said it was a wedding present which came around the horn on a clipper ship. Ken Gilliland does not recall his grandmother ever telling this story. Stylistic it is of the late Rococo Revival / Renaissance Revival period both periods earlier than the house. When one examines the way the sideboard was integrated into the house it does not look like it was part of the original structure. It would be interesting to know its story.

The fireplace has also had some changes. Ken Gilliland remembers it as being in the 1930's when the firebox was enclosed and the flue used for a furnace. Just when the tiles at the top of the firebox were installed is not known. They appear to be hand painted. The subjects are similar to those found in the books by Kate Greenaway's [ Marigold Garden ] or similar publications.

These illustrations were much apart of the Aesthetic Movement and often done by women.

Of historic interest in the room are the photographs of the family members. Ken Gilliland describes them best. " The group photograph of Emma, her sister Julia and her brothers Edward, Augustus and Howard has hung on the dining room wall as long as I can remember. the oval framed childhood pictures of Mary, Julia, Edward and Augustus and also the portrait photographs of W. A. Bray and his wife Junia Ann Bray, have had a place on these walls too. However, I think the latter named pictures may have come from Uncle Ed's home early in the 1940's after he passed away. All the other pictures of family members now hanging on the walls were placed there by Emelita various times after her mother died. ...." The steel engravings of barnyard scenes have always hung in the dining room. In the 19th century food related pictures were thought proper for the dining room.

Lastly many of the porcelain and silver objects displayed in this room are in the Aesthetic style. To date it has not been establish which are wedding presents and which arrived later. Of interest is the three pieces of "Limoge" enamel ware over copper. Likely these were a wedding gift.

The moldings surrounding the door are of a common profile found in many contractor built homes in the Bay Area. The same simple moldings and panel doors are found in the dish pantry, kitchen and laundry room on this floor. [12] The walls of this area are covered with a two-tone pattern suggesting 4" ceramic tiles. A small pinwheel freeze is also used. [13] As note earlier the second floor also is divided into front and rear sections.[ see figure=====] The front section of the house consists of the hall, three chambers with closets and a bathroom. One chamber also has a sitting alcove. The other two have fireplaces. The rear section of the house consists of the rear hall and service stair, two bedrooms, a bathroom, linen room and closet. There are also indications that the upper hall and major bedrooms originally were wallpapered.

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"Simplicity in the furniture of a bedroom is desirable, rather than richness or profuse ornamentation".[14] The furnishings on this floor follow this advise. They are in the Aesthetic Style or what today is commonly called "Eastlake". Constructed of walnut primary and soft secondary woods they are of middling quality. [figure=====]

Continuing the advice of simple private bedrooms " The floor of this room [bedroom] should certainly never be carpeted to the walls; a broad margin should be left all round, which may be covered with matting, or any of the soft, warm floor-coverings made of cork and India-rubber. A center carpet of Brussels, Kidderminster, or felt can then be thrown down." [15] Unlike the first floor, it is apparent that the entire floor was meant to be private. The architectural detailing is the same front and rear, and it is the same as that in private areas on the lower floor. The wood flooring is of inexpensive fir with no fancy borders as found in wood floors of the public areas on the first floor. Area rugs were used as advised above. Neither the architectural details nor the furniture express the "show" which is so apparent in the public rooms of the first floor.

"... the first interior spaces visitors saw, played important roles in shaping first impressions and in framing and manipulating Victorians' perceptions of themselves and their relationships to others." [16] This quotation sums up well the concept of the public "image forming" face and the private face found in 19Th. Century homes. The Cohen / Bray House by having such exaggerated contrasts between the public and private rooms illustrates this idea well. As you, the readers of Hope & Glory have the opportunities to examine 19Th Century houses across the U. S. you will see how the concept of public and private faces manifests itself in architecture, interiors and the use of decorative arts. Further you will observe how this idea was affected by social, economic, educational and even ethnic differences as well as regional changes. Also observe how the ideas of the public and private faces changes from the middle of the 19Th. Century into the early 20Th. Century.

This simple Stick Style house { figure 1} built in 1882 / 84 was a wedding present to Emma Bray and Alfred Henry Cohen. The Bray family provided the land, part of their estate "Oak Tree Farm", and built the house while the A. A. Cohen family provided the fittings and furnishings. The contractor G. W. Flick, provided the plans dated 1882 [3] {figure 2}. To date no reference to an architect has been found. Study of the floor plans [figure 2} show a pair of doors leading to the rear hall and a single door to the dish pantry that provide the separation between public and private rooms on the ground floor. A division also exists on the second floor between the front and rear bedrooms.

Further examination of the house reveals a distinct difference between the public spaces and the private spaces; a greater distinction between the public and private spaces than in most homes of its size found in the United States. The public rooms on the ground floor consist of the entry hall and main stairs, parlor, library / sitting room, a intermediate hall, and the dining room. The private areas are service hall and stairs, pantries, kitchen, laundry, smoking room, and conservatory.

HOW TO BUILD FURNISH & DECORATE; a 1883 book by Robert W. Shappell, Co-operative Building Plan Association. No 24 Beekman Street, New York. 1883 book # 8660. Chapter 2 page 1.

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