

Site Inspection  
Jayne House  
1402 Mulberry Avenue  
Muscatine, Iowa  
December 4, 2008

At the invitation of Dan Clark, David Arbogast, architectural conservator, of Davenport, Iowa joined a small group of interested individuals to inspect the Jayne House at 1402 Mulberry Avenue in Muscatine, Iowa on the morning of Thursday, December 3, 2008. The house is adjacent to the Muscatine Art Center which recently purchased it. The purpose of the inspection was to assess the condition of the house relative to possible preservation, either on its present site or moved to another location.

The house is a relatively large (four-bedroom) two story, frame residence constructed in 1900 in the Queen Anne Revival style. Hallmarks of the style include a round corner tower in the southeast corner, asymmetrical massing, steeply pitched gable roofs, a front veranda wrapping around the tower, and decorative finishes such as stained glass and woodwork. The exterior is clad in narrow, wood clapboards on the first and second stories with cut wood shingles on the gable ends. The foundation is brick masonry. On the north side a relatively light porte cochere was added later in the twentieth century and on the rear (west) side the rear porch was replaced probably at a similar time. With very minor exceptions (the basement shower room) the interior plan is fully intact with its original walls.

The first floor plan of the house contains a stair hall in the northeast corner. To its south is a wide opening into a large living room which incorporates the round base of the tower. In the west wall of the living room is a simple brick fireplace which probably replaced the original fireplace. It is flanked by built-in bookcases also dating from the modification of the fireplace. At the south end of that wall a doorway opens into a large dining with original built-in cabinetry in the north and west walls. A large, open kitchen which appears to have been entirely remodeled ca. 1970 occupies the rear of the plan with a bathroom between it and the stair hall. The bathroom was probably a pantry in the original construction. There is a narrow servant's stair adjacent to the kitchen running from the basement to the attic.

The second story contains four spacious bedrooms of which two have generous dressing rooms. There is also a bathroom which, like the first-floor bathroom, appears to have been installed ca. 1960. A central hallway on the second floor connects the front stair with the rear stair.

The attic, which was originally unfinished is now semi-finished with rooms in the central area and the front (east) and an unfinished lower area at the rear (west).

The basement is also semi-finished and is entered at grade through a doorway in the rear (west) wall. Two of the rooms retain original brick floors. A shower room was added on the south side of the basement.

The overall condition of the house is very good. It is in better condition than most houses of its age. It is structurally quite sound with no evidence of settlement. The roof peaks are quite straight and there is no evidence of any water infiltration from the roof. In a few isolated interior walls there are hairline cracks in the plaster which is typical of plaster as it ages and dries. Although plaster ceilings of this age typically crack and fall, none of the ceilings showed any evidence of cracking, much less falling.

There are some areas of deterioration which prevent the house from being in excellent condition. Some of these are cosmetic, as in severe failure of the exterior paint. Some are localized as in the failure of the portions of the veranda ceiling, failure of portions of its eaves, rotting of some

window sills, deterioration of roof flashing in contact with clapboard walls, failure of the rear retaining wall, and evidence of past water problems in the foundation. Some of these things are on-going, but others are less evidently so, as in the moisture problems of the foundation.

There do not appear to be any systemic problems. The house retains remarkable structural integrity. Its forced-air heating system, which was not in use at the time of the site visit, appears to be relatively new and functional. The plumbing system, likewise, appears to have been functioning properly prior to its current ownership. The electrical system appears to contain a large amount of knob-and-tube wiring which, although it fails to meet current electrical codes, has not posed a threat to the safety of the house or its occupants.

The interior doors were removed, for the most part, by the current owner and are said to retain original hardware. The doors and interior woodwork show signs of wear and tear. This is particularly evident in the front staircase where significant elements such as balusters and nosings are missing. On the other hand, the stained glass window at the front stair landing is perfectly intact and in surprisingly very good condition. The floors are all of hardwood throughout the entire house, except the basement. This is unusual because second-story floors in 1900 were typically constructed of softwoods such as fir. The result is that the floors are in very good condition with very little settlement.

The window openings typically contain wood double-hung sash with original interior and exterior casings and exterior aluminum combination screen and storm sash.. The condition of the windows ranges from fair to poor. The window sashes of the rear bedroom have been recently replaced and are in excellent condition. All of the original wood sashes are repairable. It might be more cost effective to replace a few sash such those in the attic.

There are several conclusions which can be reached, as follow:

1. For all its shabbiness, the house is far from near the end of a reasonable service life. If it is repaired and maintained properly, it would not be at all unreasonable to see another fifty years of service life from the building.
2. At this point in time repairs to the house are not significant either in scope or in cost. As a first step, the clutter should be removed from the interior and the interior should receive a thorough cleaning. Needed repairs include chimney restoration, veranda restoration, probable removal of the porte cochere, rear porch restoration, exterior repainting, reflashing the interface between the roof and the clapboard walls, repair of areas of rotting mentioned above, and some window restoration.
3. Desirable, but not necessary, repairs include restoration of the front staircase, restoration of the windows, upgrades of the bathrooms and kitchen, refinishing of the floors and interior wall and ceiling surfaces, and refinishing of the doors and woodwork.
4. If the house were to be restored to an original appearance attention should be focused, as well, on items such as replacing the aluminum combination storm and screen sash with wooden storm and screen sash, reconstructing the fireplace and adjacent bookcases, restoring the interior woodwork such as the front staircase and dining room woodwork, bathroom and kitchen renovations (it is unlikely that most people would seriously consider a 1900 kitchen or bathroom), lighting fixtures, and exterior color schemes.
5. The house could be restored on its present site or it could be move to another site and restored with a new foundation and basement. If the latter course of action is pursued it is recommended that the Art Center either give the house to a new owner who would be able to move it, or, better yet, pay the next owner of the building a sum equal to or less than the cost of demolition.
6. If the house is moved, it should be moved intact, if possible, but without its appendages such as the veranda, porte cochere, or rear porch. The chimney should be removed to the roof level to avoid collapse.

Finally, thanks should be given to the Muscatine Art Center and the City of Muscatine in their willingness to consider saving the house at this late point in their deliberations.