

402 Hall Avenue

St. Paul, Minnesota

St. Paul Heritage Preservation Commission

Individual Property Local Designation Nomination



Address: 402 Hall Avenue, Saint Paul, Minnesota 55107

Historic Name: The Dwight and Clara Watson House and Barn

PROPERTY IDENTIFICATION

Property PIN: 072822110182

SHPO Inventory #: RA-SPC-1680

Property Type: Residence

Legal Description: West St Paul Blks 1 Thru 99 Ex S 7 Ft; Lot 2 & All Of Lot 1 Blk 32

Saint Paul Ward: 2

Saint Paul Planning District: 3

Listed on National Register: December 16, 2019

HISTORICAL ABSTRACT

Construction Date: 1886

Architect: Cass Gilbert

Builder: Hans Milsted

Moved: Barn, 1914, rotated 90 degrees “clockwise,” 50 feet “south”, to Lot 2, Block 35

Original Address: Same

Original Owner: Dwight H. Watson

Subsequent: Gustav Carlson, 1914; Clarence T. Ridge, 1914-1959; Edward Busch, 1959-1993; Mark Thomas and John Neess, 1993-2007; Mark Thomas, 2007-present

Historic Use: Private Residence

DESCRIPTION

Style: Late Victorian “eclectic.”

Building Type: Cube with south-facing gable, back wing, summer kitchen

No. of Stories: 2 +

Plan: Rectangular plan with south-facing gable, rear wing, and summer kitchen

Roof Type: hipped, with dormer

Roof Material: Asphalt shingles

Structural System: Balloon frame, wood

Foundation: Platteville Limestone

Façade Material: Drop siding beneath first-floor windows; continuous wood sill, clapboard above the sill.

Additional Materials: Cedar shakes on dormer

Outbuildings: Carriage house, 19 x 27; cedar clapboard replaced 2009; cedar shingles original second story

House

The Dwight H. and Clara Watson House is a rectangular two-and-one-half-story building with a footprint of roughly 30 feet x 40 feet. This compact, but complex and inventive structure features a distinctive dormer-oriel uniting second story and roof, a main Dutch door shifted off the front elevation, an ell, and a large gable projecting from the south elevation clad in Shingle Style elements over a half-bay with Queen Anne Style characteristics. Resting on a raised basement of locally quarried Platteville limestone, the surface treatment of pine clapboard on the south elevation unites on the west and north elevations with drop-lap siding and a continuous wooden sill running underneath first-story windows and trim running uninterrupted across the top of the second story windows.

The distinctive continuous sill running below the front window, and drop siding below, also unite the west elevation with the north side. The front porch gable, which visually reads as part of the west elevation, rests atop the front porch and eccentrically placed large Dutch door. This shifting of the front door to the right – actually under the porch roof – allowed the architect, Cass Gilbert, to shift the front stairwell behind the west elevation.

In its original construction, in conformance to the plans (extant, New York Historical Society), the continuous sill on the west elevation was also continuous with the front porch railing, uniting the elevation with both the porch and the north elevation, a theme of horizontal unification seen wrapping around all four elevations. The cellar window fenestration was centered under the front window. (The plans had brick quoins drawn in as a suggestion for the cellar window but were never executed).

An example of architect Cass Gilbert's early years as a home designer, the Watson home integrates a combination of Shingle Style and Queen Anne into a modified "four-square" shape, one of the earliest extant in St. Paul: 1) visored dormer matched below by an oriel, novel to St. Paul of 1886, mirrors drawings from Gilbert's travels in Europe in 1880; 2) front and side porches, as originally built, roughly mirror images, connected horizontally by drop siding and continuous sill, and acts to unite West and North elevations; 3) South elevation, whose jutting gable is treated with both Shingle Style and Queen Anne elements, connects visually with front elevation: these are the two sides that would have been visible to carriages on their way to the newly constructed Prospect Boulevard (1885) promenade overlooking downtown.

The barn, as constructed, is a pure Shingle Style construction, with clapboard below, and cedar shingles above. All four sides of the barn have been altered. In 1914, the barn was rotated 90 degrees and moved 50 feet onto Lot 2, and the north-facing elevation was reconfigured to accommodate two automobiles.

Interior features of the house and barn are not proposed for local designation.

Alterations and Additions

The exterior has been preserved and recently renovated to its original configuration with the following exceptions:

1. Front porch, consonant with Gilbert's design widened beyond the south wall. The porch was enclosed in 1936 to provide sleeping accommodations for male Ridge family members.
2. Window in stairwell added in 2010.
3. Window in family parlor closet added 2005.

HISTORIC INTEGRITY

LOCATION: The house and barn at 402 Hall Avenue were both constructed in 1886. In 1914, during the period of significance, the barn was moved and reoriented on the site by the Watson family. Both buildings retain the integrity of location.

DESIGN: The house and barn retain the integrity of design, as the historic form, plan, style, ornamentation, and materials remain unchanged.

FEELING: The house and barn retain original and early feelings of experience, as there have been minimal alterations to the design of the buildings and they can be read as products of their time (1886-1914).

ASSOCIATION: The associations with Cass Gilbert and the Watson family have been retained.

Historic integrity is the ability of a property to convey its historical associations or attributes. The property retains physical features that characterize the type, period, and method of construction the property represents. It retains design, workmanship, and materials. The exterior has been restored largely to its original condition, as determined from original plans and remnants of original surface treatment.

SIGNIFICANCE

Period of Significance: 1886

Associated Contexts:

Pioneers to the Territory, 1855: Daniel Shirter and Mary Merritt: 1856: George and Harriet Watson

Early Newspaper, 1855, Red Wing, Daniel Merritt Red Wing Republican, first issue, July 17, 1855

Early State Government, George Watson State Constitutional Convention, Republican, 1857

State Senator 1858-1861

Early State Federal Office: US Surveyor General's Office: George Watson, 1861-1874

Early Commerce: Noyes Brothers and Cutler, 1869-1919, Dwight Henderson Watson

Cass Gilbert

The Dwight and Clara Watson House and Barn is eligible for listing as a Saint Paul Heritage Site for its local significance as the work of a master architect. Its period of significance is 1886, the first year of Cass Gilbert's partnership with James Knox Taylor. Gilbert was one of the leading architects of his generation. His St. Paul designs for the Endicott Building and the Minnesota State Capitol earned him widespread accolades, the latter paving the way for his garnering of major East Coast commissions and his move to and rise to prominence in New York City. However, his early years in practice were largely devoted to designing houses of modest size and cost, and he made the most of the opportunity. For the best of these, he poured his creative resources into vigorous surface compositions and a wealth of imaginative detail, often working within the stricture of a cost-effective, basically cubical form. Three early frame residences captured with particular clarity the signature elements of his developing eclectic sensibility. The Dwight and Clara Watson house is the only one to survive.

Watson Family

The Watson family arrived in Minnesota in May 1856, in a family group of at least 9 people. George (Grove) and Harriet Chapman Watson moved from Platea, Erie County, Pennsylvania, where George was a physician. He had grown up in Ashtabula County, Ohio, the youngest of 7 children. He trained as a "township physician," and practiced there for 5 years. Harriet, the youngest of 7 children, grew up in Franklin, New London County, Connecticut. She traveled to Ashtabula County in 1842 to assist in the care of her older sister's two children. The families represented a generation of Connecticut residents who moved to the state's "Western Reserve." George and Harriet were representatives of the generation of Connecticut Yankees who settled in Minnesota before it became a state.

In 1857, George was elected a representative, from Freeborn County to the Minnesota State Constitutional Convention as a Republican: a new party endorsing the abolition of slavery and the availability of land for settlement. He subsequently was elected to the first four terms of the Minnesota State Senate before retiring and moving to Saint Paul with his family. He worked as chief clerk in the US Surveyor General's office on Pine Street in the West Seventh neighborhood until forced to resign because of ill health. His last public office was that of representative from the West Side to the Saint Paul School Board, from 1876-1880.

Dwight Henderson Watson, George, and Harriet's son was born in Platea, Pennsylvania, and came to Minnesota as a two-year-old on a steamer from Rock Island, in 1856. He began work in the young firm of Noyes Brothers and Cutler, formed in 1869. He worked there until his retirement in 1916. He became the chief buyer for the firm in 1895. He was the only non-family member of the board of the company when it became a public corporation, in 1916. Clara Merritt, Dwight's wife, was born in Red Wing, in 1863, one of 7 children of Daniel Shirter Merritt and Mary Arminda Millard. Merritt, trained as

a printer in Manhattan, traveled through Michigan and Illinois, where he founded 3 papers. In 1855, along with Alexis Bailey, he brought his printing press to Red Wing, where he published the first paper, the Red Wing Republican, in the same month as the founding of the Republican Party in Ripon, Wisconsin. He subsequently created the Delano paper in 1872.

Architecture

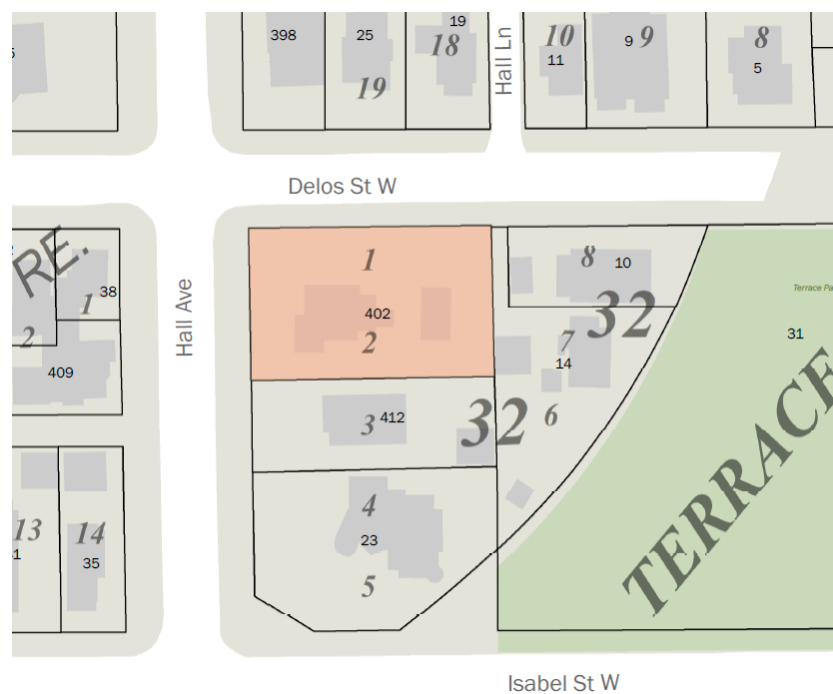
The Watson home departed from Gilbert's pattern: the Watson home was a modest project (estimated cost \$2,600); the location was on the West Side, where he had no other projects; the design of the house was unlike previous ones: a box-like construction with details that referenced both Shingle Style elements and Queen Anne; elements that harked back to Gilbert's time with McKim, Mead, and White – a series of three small windows in the south gable- and to the heritage of the Watsons – the large Dutch front door, the beaded trim throughout the interior, and the Colonial style front hallway and stairwell.

The Watson barn is the first of Gilbert's twelve barn designs. It has many of the earmarks of his early work: tiered siding (in this case, clapboard, and shingles), a gable pediment suggested by a slight projection of the shingle course bridging the base of the gable, and a novel interpretation of the Palladian gable triptych—in this case, two small windows flanking a hay door. Gilbert's dozen barn and stable commissions between 1886 and 1894, four of them not associated with houses of his design, show his keen interest in that genre of building during his partnership with James Knox Taylor (1886-1891) and the early years of his return to solo practice.

BOUNDARY

Boundary encompasses the property historically associated with the Watson House.

From the SE corner of Hall Av. and Delos St., east 150 feet, then south 93 feet, then west to Hall Av., then north to Delos St. the place of the beginning.



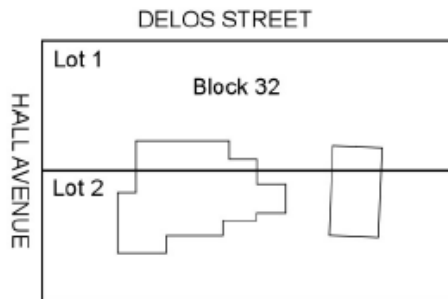


Fig 1. 2018 Plat of 402 Hall Avenue
Ramsey County GIS

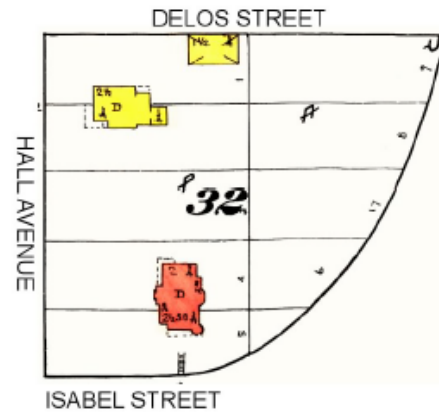
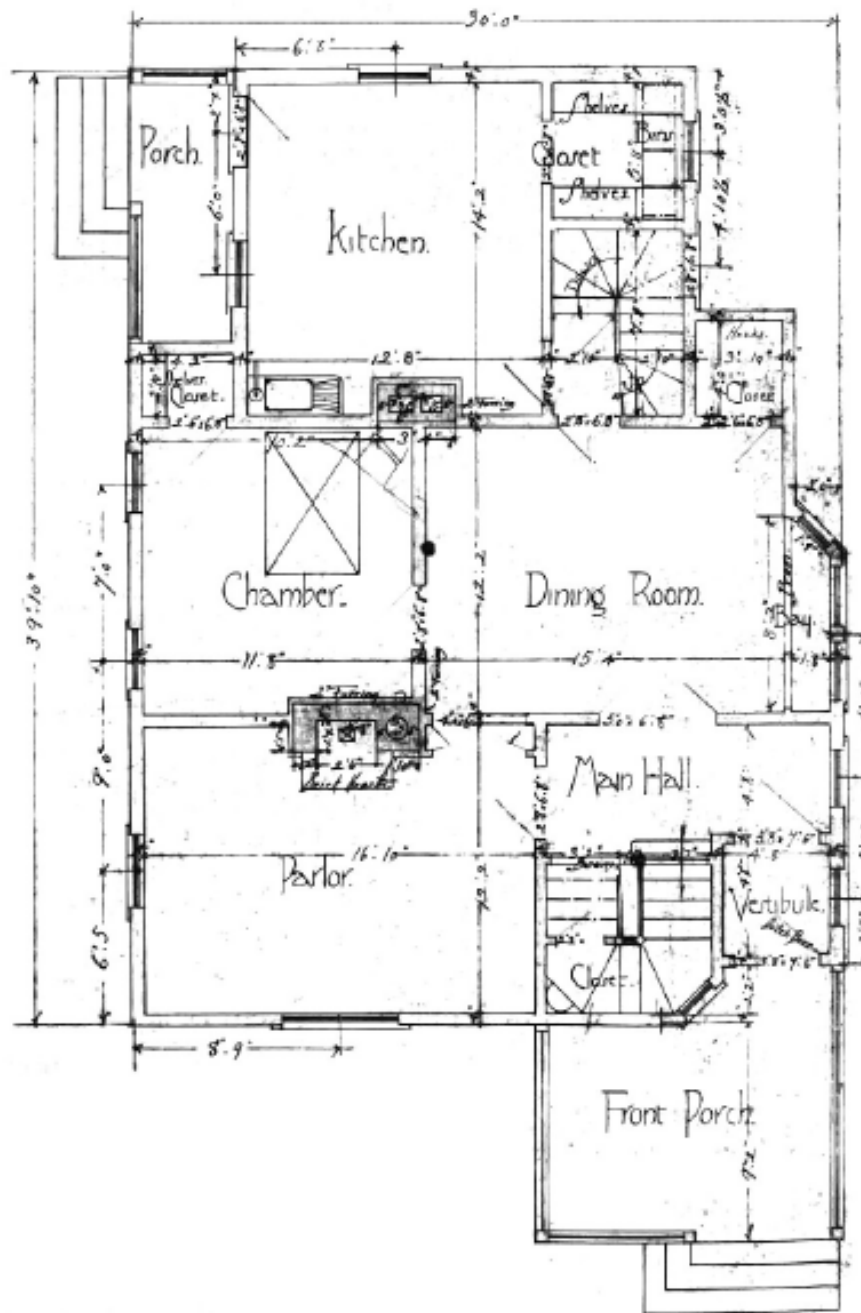


Fig 2. 1891 Plat Map of Block 32, West St. Paul Addition
Rascher's Atlas of St. Paul



Fig 3 1887 map of St. Paul West Side, Block 32 outlined in red
Curtice's Standard Atlas of the City of St. Paul



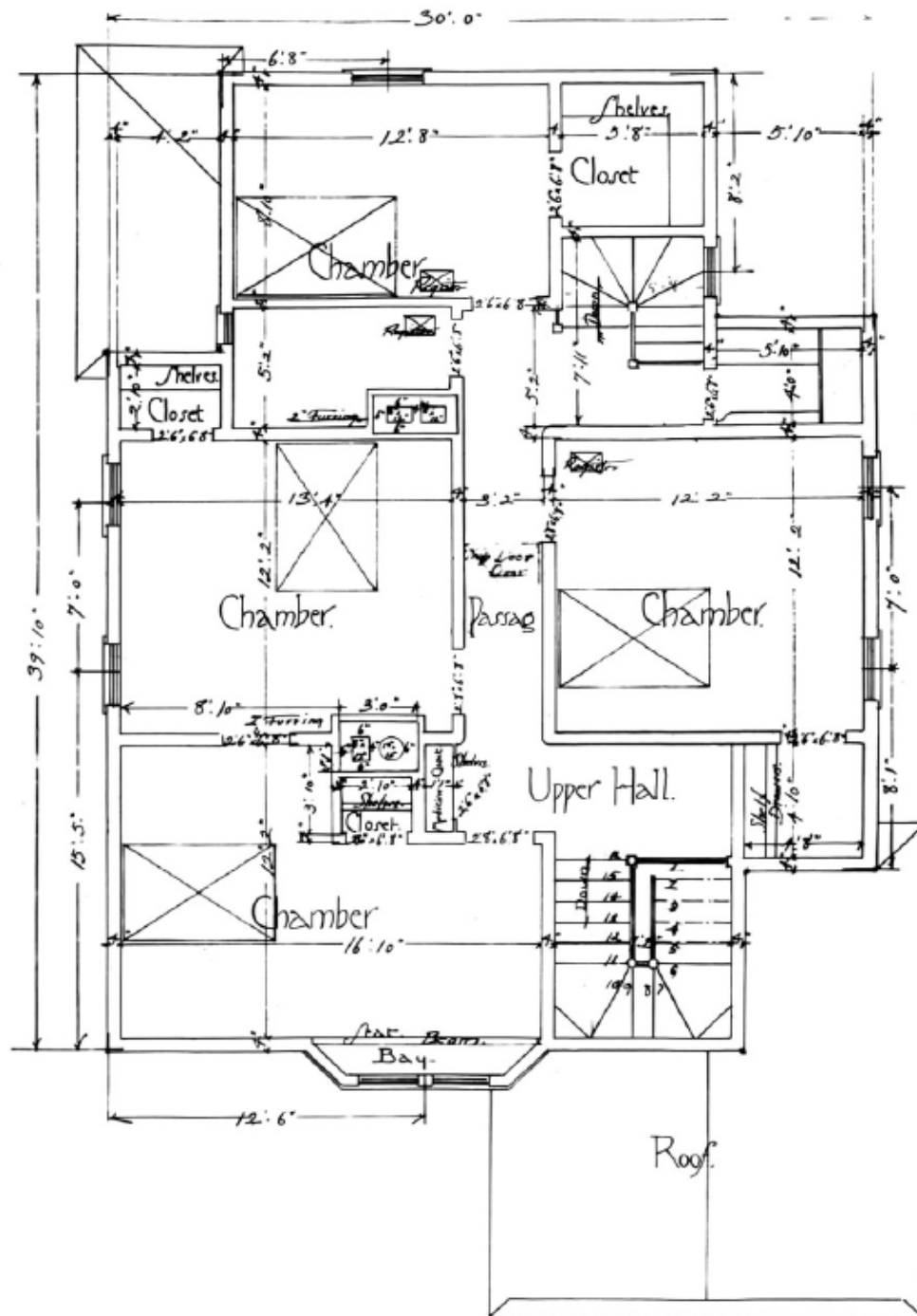
First Floor Plan.

Scale 1/4" per Foot.

Gilbert and Taylor, Architects.

House for D.H. Watson Esq.
West Saint Paul, Minnesota.

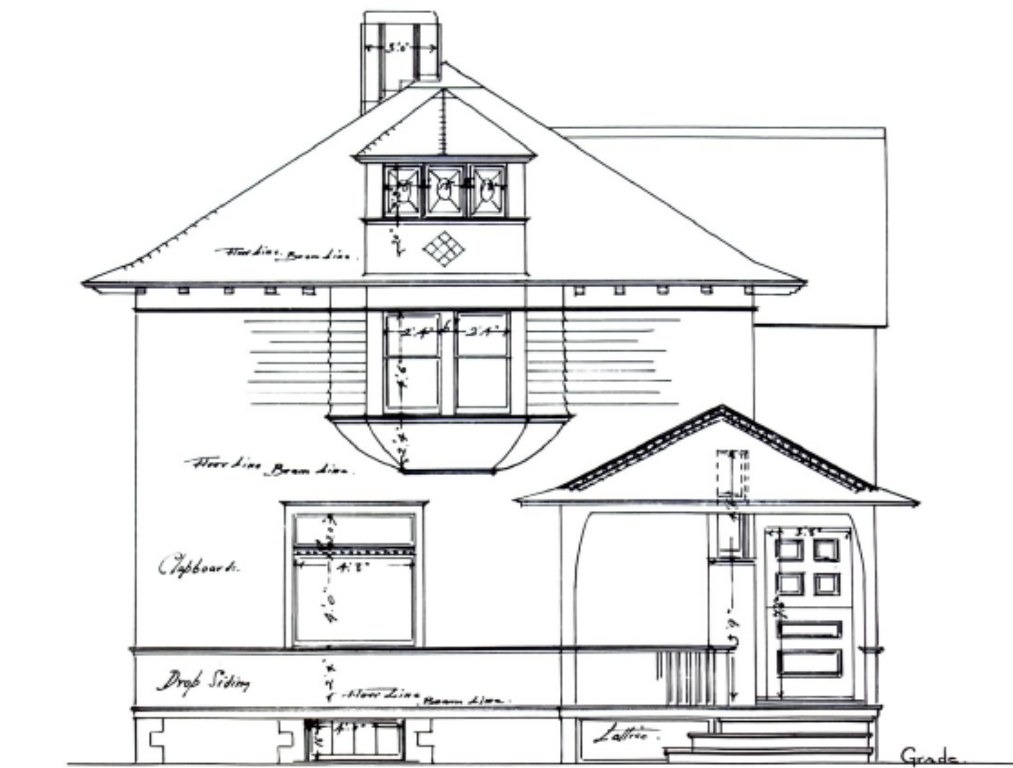
First Floor Plan of Dwight and Clara Watson House
Cass Gilbert Collection, New York Historical Society



Second Floor Plan. Scale $\frac{1}{4}$ " per Foot.
House for D.H. Watson Esq.
West Saint Paul, Minnesota.

Second Floor Plan of Dwight and Clara Watson House

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West Elevation. Front
House for Mr. D. H. Watson. St. Paul.
Gilbert & Taylor Architects.



