

THE
HISTORY AND ARCHITECTURE
OF
131 DOYLE AVENUE
PROVIDENCE
RHODE ISLAND

Research by
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The History

Although the structure at 131 Doyle Avenue in Providence was constructed in 1875, as the following research ascertains, the history of that house and of several others in its immediate vicinity begins in the year 1824. In that year Ebenezer Knight Dexter died, leaving to the town of Providence a large portion of his land holdings, to be used philanthropically in support of the poor. Dexter's generous gift to his native town of Providence became known as the Dexter Donation. Dexter's will read in part thus: "Feeling a strong attachment to my native town, and an ardent desire to ameliorate the condition of the poor, and to contribute to their comfort and relief, I give, grant, and devise to the aforesaid town of Providence, in fee simple forever, my Neck Farm in Providence,...(and) for the use of the poor of said town, as hereinafter mentioned, all the rest, residue and remainder of my estate, both real and personal, not herein otherwise disposed of..." The Neck Farm referred to was to become the site of an asylum for the poor. The other properties of the Dexter Donation consisted of the following: The Tavern estate on North Main Street, leased to J. B. Barnaby for 40 years from November 1st, 1871; the lot and building next south of the Tavern estate, leased to Horace B. Knowles for 40 years from June 1st, 1874; the house and lot on Meeting Street, leased to William V. Wallace for 40 years from November 1st, 1871; four lots each 40 by 150 feet, fronting on Cranston Street, also 48 lots, fronting on Harrison and Hammond Streets, each 50 by 100 feet, being part of the Dexter farm, all of which are leased; the Dexter Training Field, containing 9 1/3 acres, situated west of Dexter street, reserved as public training ground by Mr. Dexter's will; a strip of land, formerly a thatch right, on the north side of the Woonasquatucket River, containing 15,344 square feet; a parcel of land on Bacon street and on the south side of Doyle Avenue, between Scott and Olney Streets, called the "Dwight lands", a greater part of which is leased to different individuals; a lot on High Street, having a front of about 78 feet, which is leased to James Hanley for 40 years from October 1st, 1868. That portion of the preceding concerning "a parcel of land...on the south side of Doyle Avenue ... a greater part of which is leased to different individuals," is that aspect of the Dexter Donation which includes the house lot of 131 Doyle Avenue, the property in question. (The above information regarding the Dexter Donation was taken from The History of Providence County Rhode Island, edited by Richard M. Bayles, assisted by a corps of writers. Vol.1., N.Y., W.W. Preston & Co., 1891.)

1875 Mr. John Gay leases from the city of Providence a house lot, part of the Dexter Donation property on Doyle Avenue. He will build on that site in the year 1875, as the following information indicates.

The letter quoted below is written by Mr. John McBain, builder of the structure at 131 Doyle Avenue, and addressed to Mr. John Gay.

"Providence, Nov. 19, 1875.

Mr. John Gay,

Dear Sir, Please make, execute, and deliver to C.H. and F.F. Carpenter or order a first mortgage for Thirty Hundred Dollars \$3,000 on house now being built by me for you, as per contract, on Doyle Avenue, and on your lease-hold interest in the lot upon which said house is situated, said

part on land now or formerly of Lulu Ross, in part on land now or formerly of John W. Saggars and Ida Saggars, and in part on land now or formerly of William J. Shine, 50 feet; thence northerly and bounding westerly on other land of this grantor, 177.88 feet to Doyle Avenue and the point and place of beginning and containing 8,898 square feet.

Attest:

Walter N. Reynolds,
Mayor, and Chairman
of the Commissioners of the Dexter Donation

November 1955"

Providence Tax Records List of Property Owners:

1871	City of Providence
1955	C. D'Errico Inc.
1957	Woodbine Realty, Inc.
1967	Barnes Realty, Inc.
1967	Woodbine Realty, Inc.
1971	Manuel R. Leca
1981	Antonio Soares

The Architecture

The structure at 131 Doyle Avenue was built in the Second Empire or Mansard style, a mode of architectural design quite popular during the decades prior to and after the American Civil War. The style became popular in the 1850's, when the French, during Napoleon III's Second Empire rule, began to experiment with new and unique forms of architectural design. According to Henry-Russell Hitchcock, "it was a consciously 'modern' movement, deriving its prestige from contemporary Paris, not from any period of the past like the Greek, the Gothic, or even the Renaissance Revivals." The style quickly reached America and retained its widespread popularity well into the 1880's.

The most conspicuous as well as the most characteristic feature of the Second Empire structure is its Mansard roof, with the ever-present dormer windows. The Mansard roof is a most practical design as it affords the structure a full extra floor of living space. The roof itself is comprised of a double slope, the lower of which is longer and steeper in pitch.

The structure in question is a somewhat large building, as it was designed as a two-family residence. The building is essentially rectangular in shape and has two smaller rectangular sections at the rear. It is clear that these two sections were built as part of the original structure, as the following observations indicate. The foundation brick work supporting all three sections is continuous in pattern and texture. The wooden window casings on the three sections are identical as well as is the plank wood work which borders the three sections of the structure. The clapboards are similar throughout, and on the largest two sections, the bracket work beneath the eaves is identical.

As we face the front facade of the structure, we see that it is a three-bay symmetrically designed building. A large, stone stairway leads from the sidewalk up to the front doorway and the two front doors of the two apartments. A canopy protects the doorway from the elements. A porch-like area with railing is formed atop the canopy. Elaborately designed brackets support the canopy and give the structure a decorative Victorian appearance. Bay windows protrude from the front facade and occupy positions on the left and right sides of both first and second stories. These three-sided bay windows are crowned with cornice overhangs supported by brackets. Side elevations are simple, with three evenly placed windows per story. The Mansard roof has three dormer windows per side. The windows are accented with side pilasters and crowned by a simple pediment. Atop the dormer is a small pitched roof. Supporting the cornice overhang are brackets, alternating in size.

Overall, the structure appears to be in good form, and does not suffer from additions or alterations which would compromise its original style.

Explanation of Photographs

1. Front facade. Note double front doors, canopy doorway, bay windows, use of brackets at eaves, Mansard roof and dormer windows.
2. Front and east facade. Note simple window placement at side, decorative brackets supporting canopy, Mansard roof and dormers.
3. Rear and west facade. Note similarity of window casings on three sections of structure. Shingle siding serves to protect clapboard in this case. Note border planking on three sections and similarity.
4. Detail of front facade. Note canopy brackets and railing. Note also bay window and brackets, small floral motif.
5. Detail of Mansard roof. Note dormer windows and brackets at cornice.