

Victoria

1600 The Plaza

1891



This essay is extracted from Victoria's documentation submitted for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

Tucked in among tall trees behind a cast-iron fence on a narrow residential lot is Victoria, a late nineteenth century frame house. Moved to its present location in the early twentieth century, it was previously located on North Tryon Street, once one of the finest residential streets of the city, now the main street of the commercial section. The asymmetrical structure appears strongly vertical as a result of the tall front end gable and the engaged two-and-one-half story tower, circular in section with a conical roof. The exterior wall covering is narrow horizontal siding, except on the tower and attic gables where fish scale shingles are used. The roof is slate.

Windows are two-over-two double hung sash with flat board architraves with molded tops.

In plan, the front two-story section of the house is T-shaped with the stem of the T-towards the street. To the rear are kitchen and bedroom wings. A one-story shed porch having a low rail, a geometric screen-like balustrade, turned posts, and sawn sunburst brackets supporting a row of spindles, wraps around the advanced bay beginning at the recessed entry on the left and curving around the base of the tower terminating against the front of the cross gable on the right. The doors to the entrance vestibule on the left are set in a heavy flat board chamfered architrave which is slightly ramped at the base. Applied panels scalloped at the bottom occur where the architrave is ramped as well as at the upper corners and center. Beneath the beveled glass transom (a replacement) are nicely carved natural oak double screen doors that have recently been filled in with glass.

To the left of center on the front gable end in both the first and second stories is slightly wider than a normal window. The centrally placed attic window contains a central louvered panel surrounded on the top and sides by small square stained glass panes. At the peak, the eaves are decorated with alternating rectangular faceted panels and roundels. The bargeboard has a carved curvilinear decoration. The corner tower has three windows at each level. The third level, slightly narrower than the first two, has single pane casement windows. Above these is a band of square wood panels encircling the tower.

The blank bay wall on the right side of the house to the rear of the tower on the second floor is adorned with a shield set in a gabled frame. The projecting cross gable end has double windows on all three levels. At the peak, the bargeboard is ornamented with a trellis motif; on the opposite side, the left side of the house, the gable is treated in a similar fashion except that the trellis is diagonal. A window is placed on this facade midway between the first and second level. To the rear of the cross gable the roof continues down to shelter the back rooms onto which the one-story gable roof kitchen and flat roof back porch and bathroom are attached.

The interior of Victoria is characterized by a free flowing yet compact plan and exuberant detail typical for the late nineteenth century. In the stem of the T there is a side hall on the left side of the house containing a closed string stair rising on the outside wall. To the right are front and rear parlors entered through single and sliding double doors respectively and connected by sliding double doors. Across the rear, forming the crosspiece of the T, are two large rooms flanking a narrow hall. The kitchen wing is enclosed on two sides by a porch. The second floor plan resembles that of the first.

One of the most interesting features of the house is the extensive use of handsome ornamental tiles. The main stair has square cream colored tiles set in the square carved newel on the exposed sides of the cap and base; and these tiles also occur between every second baluster, being framed by the square balusters and interrupting the turned ones. The tiles, said to have come from Italy, are variations of a circle of swirl motif, either abstract such as a circle set in field of diagonal squares of realistic such as the profile of a Roman soldier set within a circle. Tiles are also used to decorate the fireplace hearths and surrounds. In the front parlor, the hearth has a geometric pattern, the surround features a floral pattern, but the individual tiles are subtly modeled to compose large figures in low relief extending across several tiles--standing figures on the sides and a reclining figure across the top. The rear parlor and dining room fireplaces have figure and floral designs respectively in higher relief.

Also of note in the interior is the treatment of wood details. Window and door architraves are symmetrically molded with roundel corner blocks topped with a flat peaked finial with an incised half sunburst. Doors have seven panels, usually with chamfered rails and styles (the wainscot in the hall is done in a similar fashion). The original hardware, which is silverplate, is extant to a large degree. Delicate bent wood and spindle-work screens decorate the upper openings of the parlors' double doors and the opening into the bay formed by the tower off the front porch.

Well executed mantels demonstrate a variety of woodworking techniques. In the front parlors, freestanding truncated colonnettes with floral pattern gougework support a low arch with faceted pattern in the spandrel which in turn carries the mantel shelf. An elaborate overmantel containing a faceted mirror is decorated with the same faceted pattern and carries a spindle-work canopy. An mantel similar in form but with no overmantel occurs in the rear parlor. The dining room mantel is the most elaborate, having spindle-work shelves, two glazed cabinets, a gougework panel and three beveled mirrors. The second floor mantels and trim are simpler.

Victoria is said to have been built about 1895 by R. M. Miller as a wedding gift for his son, R. M. Miller, Jr. Miller and his sons were substantial members of the Charlotte business community. He was an alderman for Ward One, president of the North State Club, and shared business interests with his sons in wholesale groceries, grains, cotton, tobacco, and was president of the D. A. Tompkins Company (consulting and contracting engineers and dealers in machinery), as well as a member of the board of directors of the Commercial National Bank. Victoria was owned by the brother of R.M. Miller Jr., John Walter Miller.

Originally one of two identical houses, Victoria stood beside its mate, located at the corner of Tryon and Seventh Streets. Soon this central urban location was usurped by downtown commercial expansion and Victoria was moved to its present, quiet,

residential site and the other house was demolished. This was believed to have taken place between 1910 and 1920. During the first half of the twentieth century the house served a variety of owners and purposes; the property was a boarding house for a period of time. The current owners have enthusiastic, long range plans for the restoration and preservation of the structure.

Note: In August, 2012, Victoria was re-painted, see below photographs for before and after.





