

Scenes from the Past

photos from about 1900 taken by Frances B. Johnson—courtesy, Frances B. Johnson Photographic Collection, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

Most homeowners wait several decades after a house is built to consider a major makeover or serious renovation. However, when your last name is Hearst, this general rule does not

apply. George and Phoebe Hearst moved to Washington, DC in 1886 and rented several houses until they purchased a large, brick Colonial Revival-styled house at 1400 New Hampshire Avenue, just

south of Dupont Circle. It had been built just three years prior. Nevertheless, the Hearst's hired architect Harvey L. Page to completely reconfigure the house into a Romanesque Revival style, often signified

by low round arches at the entryway.

The Hearst family fortune began in the very early 1800s, when William Hearst tended a farm in Missouri. His son George (1830-1891) provided provisions to lead miners about 15 miles from the farm, and studied the mine's operation for years. Like many his age, George left to join the California gold rush in 1849, but remained impoverished for the following nine years. Then, in 1859, Hearst discovered a large silver vein in Nevada which would become known as the Comstock Lode. It eventually produced \$15 million in profits.

Hearst eventually purchased 3,000 acres of mining properties in South Dakota, on which he soon discovered the largest gold vein ever found in the United States. It produced an annual average profit of \$4 million. His luck continued when he discovered the world's richest vein of copper in Montana. He and his wife, the former Phoebe Appersont, began to spend and live lavishly.

George Hearst was appointed a Senator from California in 1886 to fill a seat left vacant by an incumbent's death. Like many who made their fortunes in the wild west, his social graces left much to be desired in a formal setting like Washington, DC, but his gracious wife made up for that aspect. The house they purchased at 1400 New Hampshire Avenue had been designed by Robert I. Fleming and built in 1883 for owner John W. Field, a retired Philadelphia merchant. He died just a year later, however, and the house was sold to Charles S. Fairchild, then the Secretary of the Treasury.

Fairchild sold the house to the Hearst's in 1886, and they spent the next three years completely transforming it into the style known as Richardson Romanesque – both on the interior and the exterior.

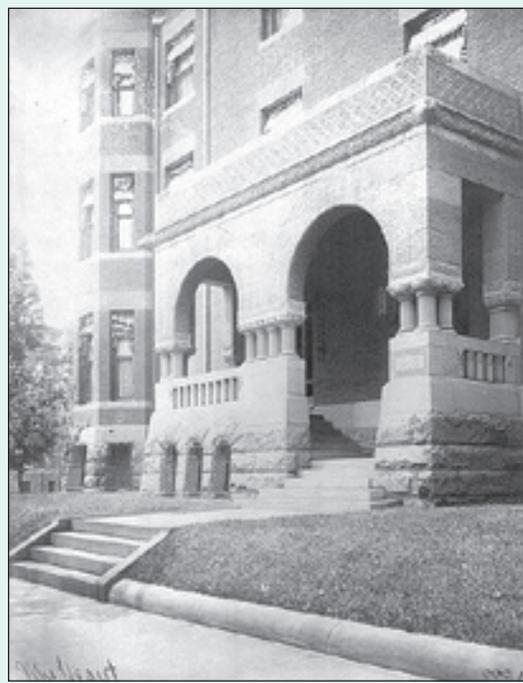
It occupied a triangular shaped lot at the intersection of New Hampshire Avenue, 20th and O Streets. Phoebe Hearst (1842-1919) lived in the house following her husband's death in 1891, and is perhaps best known for her having created the Parent-Teacher Association in the 1880s.

Phoebe moved back to their 40,000 acre ranch in California in 1902, and sold 1400 New Hampshire Avenue to the Italian government for its embassy. By the time of her death in 1919, she had given away \$21 million to charities, and left \$11 million to her son William Randolph

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Redesigned and rebuilt.



Original house.