

.HISTORY

The home at 2408 Van Buren Avenue was constructed in 1915 for Mr. and Mrs. Gustav L. Becker. Gustav Lorenz Becker was born in Winona, Minnesota, on April 7, 1868. His father, John S. Becker, had left his native Baden, Germany, in 1845 at the age of 16 because of his opposition to Prussian militarism. Arriving in Minnesota, the elder Becker was one of the early settlers of Winona. Gustav Becker attended high school in Winona, then graduated from Lambert's College in his home town. Following his graduation he entered the business world and in 1890 moved to Ogden where he helped establish the Becker Brewing and Malting Company. The Brewery was begun by William Shellhas, a partner of John S. Becker, but in 1890 Becker moved to Ogden to operate the business with the assistance of his two sons Gustav and Albert.

In 1892 Gus Becker married Thekla Bohn, a native of Winona whose father, also a German emigrant, operated the Bohn Lumber Company. Two daughters, Thekla Katherine and Helen Eugenia, were born to the couple.

Gustav Becker served as president of the company while his brother, Alfred, filled the office of vice-president and his father that of secretary. The Ogden Brewery prospered during its first quarter century and became one of the most important distributors in the West. However, during the mid-1910's, the issue of prohibition threatened to close the brewery. As resourceful businessmen, the Becker Brothers were able to meet the new situation by changing their production to soft drinks and a non-alcoholic cereal beverage known as Becco. In June 1933 when the consumption of 3.2 beer was permitted surrounding states, although not in Utah, the Becker Brothers were able to secure passage of a state law which permitted the manufacture of beer in Utah for sale in "wet" states. The justification for this measure was the number of jobs which could be provided during the difficult days of the depression.

The importance of Gustav Becker in the national brewing business is evident in his appointment as President of the United States Brewers Association in 1939. Prior to that time he had served as Chairman of the Association's executive committee, grains committee, and hops committee.

In addition to the brewery business, Gustav Becker was active in several other Utah businesses. He served as director of the Amalgamated Sugar Company, Ogden State Bank, the Utah-Idaho Central Railway Company, the Superior Rock Springs Coal Company, the Ogden Morning Examiner, the Tintic Standard Mining Company, and Lion Coal Company.

As a second generation German-American businessman during the First World War, Gustav Becker was sensitive to potential charges of disloyalty. In 1918, at the age of fifty, he rejoined the Utah National Guard and worked strenuously to promote the interest of America's fighting forces. His efforts were not unrewarded. He was one of twelve persons in the world elected to be awarded the American Legion medal for distinguished service aid was made E.71 honorary life-time member of the Baker-Merrill post of the American Legion in appreciation for his work in behalf of the veterans of World War I and the development of the Ogden American Legion Post.

Although well-known for his business activities, Gustav Becker was equally known as a sportsman. Recognized as one of the world's best trapshooters, he held the trapshooting handicap championship of America and won the Globe trophy of the Sportsmen's Association of the Northwest three times. One of his most publicized accomplishments was the shooting of clay targets while standing in a motor boat as it skimmed across PineView Reservoir at speeds approaching sixty miles an hour. Another popular feat was to play "My Old Kentucky Home", with a .22 calibre rifle on a chime target built for him by John Moses Browning, the world famous inventor of firearms. (Browning's Ogden home is a National Register site.) In praise of Browning and Becker, one newspaper writer observed, "Ogden has the unique distinction of being the home of two men who became known to all the world for their proficiency with firearms--John M. Browning, who developed them to a point of convenience and accuracy never before deemed possible, and Gus Becker, who demonstrated the art of shooting speedily and surely against all challengers.

Gustav Becker died January 12, 1947, at his home in Ogden. His wife remained in the Van Buren Avenue home until her death in 1958. The Becker home was purchased in 1959 by Milton and Rita Berlin who renovated the home for use as a wedding reception center. The home was then sold to Les Stuart of Estate Investment Associates.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Gustav L. Becker home is significant as an outstanding example of the Prairie Style in residential architecture of Utah. The Becker home is also related stylistically to a group of Prairie Style homes located one block to the south which constitutes the David Eccles Subdivision (Eccles Avenue Historic District, has received National Register listing) . Architects of the building, first Eber F. Piers and later Ware and Treganza were leaders in the the Prairie Style movement which was popular between 1908 and 1920

Mrs. Thekla Bowen Becker, Wife of Gus, was a friend of Mrs. Florence Ware, wife of Walter E. Ware, senior partner of Ware and Treganza, architects who were involved as builders and designers of the home. The two women had "many strong-willed discussions" with Mr. Treganza (the main designer for Ware and Treganza) and Gus Becker regarding the "style and interior finishes of the house." The resultant building may be the product of compromises hammered out between the persons involved. The family of Eber F. Piers claims that he was initially the architect for the Becker home. Although Piers is known to have designed many Prairie Style homes in the Eccles Subdivision one block away, his official connection with the project is unknown.

Regardless of who conceived the original plan, the design appears to have been adapted from Frank. Lloyd Wright's "A Fireproof House for \$5,000" published in Ladies Home Journal, in April, 1907. The main floor plan is essentially a flipped version of Wright's plan for the William B. Greene residence built in Aurora, Illinois in 1912. The Becker home, slightly rectangular in plan, utilizes masonry rather than concrete and contains expensive detailing such as leaded glass windows and fine woodwork, negating the supposed economic advantages of Wright's cube or square houses such as the Hoyt residence (1906), Geneva, Illinois, the Hunt Residence (1907), La Grange, Illinois, and particularly the Stockman residence (1908) Mason City, Iowa. - In plan, the Becker residence differs from Wright's published design only in the larger amount of space, central fireplace, and decor.

The red clay pantile roof and perforated eaves (which serve as trillises) are contributions of Mrs. Becker and offer an interesting contrast from the otherwise pure Wrightian design.

The following description consists of excerpts from a recent article by Peter L. Goss in The Prairie School Review, Volume XII, Number 1, 1975: "One of Treganza's finest designs is the Gustav L. Becker house built c. 1918." The main entrance, under a brick arch, faces directly into the street and is protected by a porte-cochere and trellis cantilevered over the front walk. A secondary entrance behind the brick wall to the left of the main entrance like that of the "Fireproof House," provides access via a small hall to the kitchen and to the basement stairs. Diverging from the Wright design, a bay projects from the north facade off the kitchen, containing a storage room and a back entrance to the kitchen.

The burnt plum brick walls were laid with a deeply indented off-white mortar and with a concrete string course, lintel and caps. The broad eaves are pierced at the corners, repeating the trellis pattern seen in the porte-cochere. This motif reappears in the free standing trellises, one connecting the northeast corner of the house with the garage and the other located off the south facade.

The spatial arrangement of the main floor is almost identical (to Wright's "Fireproof House" design) to the left of the entrance is the kitchen and behind it the dining room which opens onto the living room. Opposite the entrance and running the full depth of the plan is the living room. The freestanding fireplace (now removed) near the front wall of the living room partitioned off a corner of the room which functioned as the library and is identical in location to Wright's William B. Greene residence. The dining room with its slightly arched ceiling is the highlight of the interior decorative features. The leaded glass doors repeat the design in the first floor windows. The walls and the wooden bands following the curve of the ceiling are of stained and varnished walnut like the rest of the interior woodwork. The window design also appears in the wooden radiator grills and the wide balustrade of the main stairway. Three simple flat, horizontal bands of walnut decorate the cream-colored walls at the floor, chair rail and just below the ceiling. The second floor plan contains as many bedrooms as the "Fireproof House" with the addition of another bath and more storage area. The hallway is perpendicular to the stairway and more closely resembles the second floor plan of the Thomas Gale House (1909), Oak Park, Illinois