

THE IRON FENCES OF COLORADO CITY

Category: Hub Articles

Published: Wednesday, 25 May 2016 19:23

Written by dave

Hits: 1556

THE GAZETTE

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THURSDAY, APRIL 19, 2009

THE IRON FENCES OF COLORADO CITY

Colorado City Workers Created Beautiful Wrought Iron Fences

BY DAVE HUGHES

YOUR HUB CONTRIBUTOR

STORY ID: 578749R

Colorado City workers created beautiful wrought iron fences.

Colorado City was home to one of the most interesting “artistic” companies in all of El Paso County in the 1880s Not “art” as in Manitou’s sometime hippie Commonwheel art group. Or “art” as in the effete Broadmoor Art Colony. But art as in a smoke belching, hot-furnace iron foundry, whose anvil-wield ing, beer drinking, Colorado City ironworkers, turned out the most beautiful wrought iron fences seen west of the Mississippi The Hassell-Talcott iron foundry was across Fountain Creek in the Midland area, on Colorado City’s south 5th Street (today’s 25th Street). It was built and started operating in the early 1880s. While it also manufactured useful iron goods and wire works, shipping them by rail, it made a variety of attractive and distinctive fences and gates that can still be seen all over Old Colorado City and West- side neighborhoods. While such fences were initially more expen- sive than those made of wood, they were virtually maintenance-free, and of course, long lasting. That is why you can see so’ many Hassell Iron fences still standing 125 years ‘with their distinctive style and often the foundry’s name on their gate decorations.

The Foundry caught ?re in 1896, and burned down. The loss was calculated at \$5,000. Hassell dissolved his partnership with Talcott, and rebuilt just the Hassell Iron Works on Sierra Madre south of downtown Colorado Springs, and it shifted its emphasis to providing practical iron goods for the Cripple Creek Gold Boom. But it continued producing — and advertising — decorative iron for years to Come.

Many of the Wood Avenue and Cascade Avenue “Millionaire’s Row” mansions sported goods from Hassell Iron - urns, settees, window guards, ?ower stands and ornate castings. The original Colorado City factory went “up town!” So historically appealing were these iron gates and fences, even 35 years ago when large numbers of west-side buildings were run down and blighted, that some of us running the Pikes Peak or Bust by ‘76’ Centennial/Bicentennial Commit- tee happily endorsed and funded a project to research, photograph and document the iron fences still visible close to Old Colorado City and in the near west-side. Then we would

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make it into a self-guided walking tour. Elaine Freed, who had earlier studied and written papers about iron fences in upscale Colorado Springs for the Colorado State Historical Society, undertook, with a grant from our Centennial Committee and the Springs Beautiful Association to produce an "Iron Goods and Wire Work" walking tour handout. Less than a book, but far more than just a ?ier. ' That walking tour that describes the iron works at 33 different Old Colorado City and near west-side addresses, still exists. It has never been reprinted since the last copies of it disappeared into people's scrapbooks or school books over 30 years ago. And was never under copyright.

Now our Old Colorado City Historical Society is undertaking to reproduce it. I am posting the entire publication here on the Hub where it can be read, printed out, followed, and you can go on your own self-guided tour. Or you can visit the Old Colorado City History, Center/Museum at 1 South 24th Street, across from Bancroft Park and, for a small do- nation of any amount to our "Sesquicentennial Monument Fund" pick up a handy, folded, paper copy of the guides It's a classic and a keeper.

Of course I know that iron fences at some of the addresses shown may not exist anymore after all these 35 years. And we also know that such fences and their gates are still so historically attractive that they were stolen regularly over the years. Nobody makes such things of beauty anymore. But the guide will work for most ad- dresses. While not in the brochure, even the still standing 1890s Jacob Schmidt's brick Beer Hall at 2711 West Colorado still sports Hassell iron on the balcony and along the grassed area west of the building that now houses Mountain Sports. Jacob had good taste in architecture even during Colorado City's rip roaring Saloon Days!

I have scanned in the original guide and it is posted here in 8 captioned graphics. To read the text click on the pictures themselves and they will enlarge some what. But be warned some of you may - depending on your eye— sight, computer screen size and resolution — have dif?culties reading the original text online. But you can get a paper version at our center which is open 11 a.m. to 4 pm, Tuesday through Saturdays, staffed by our volunteers. Don't forget a small donation! Reproducing it was at our own cost. What was also interesting when Ms.Freed undertook the job in 1975 to produce the Iron Fence Guide, she recruited history students from the west-side's Coronado High School to help her with the "eld work?" While all their names are in very small print on the brochure, let me list them again here. Let's see, 1976 high school age students? They ought to. be 50~year~old fogies by now and their Faculty Coordinator, Dr Robert Smith, must be well retired and in his 70s or 80s. Let's see if any of you Hub readers know any of the then-students who contributed so nicely to the History of their west—side that still lives! You .can tell them their names are in Hub Print! Or comment here that you found one or more of them, and he or she remembers doing ?eld work searching out the famed Hassell Iron Fences - Beth Brooks, Becky Bliss, Tim Barbari, Dan Starch, Ann Burnett, John Cox, Erica Jessen, Regina Walter. Who said Colorado City's red- necks and shady ladies had no' art or culture? _

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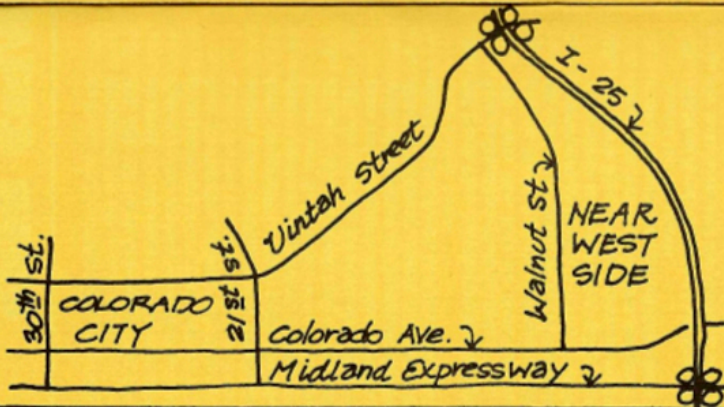
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Colorado City / Near West Side



IRON GOODS & WIRE WORK



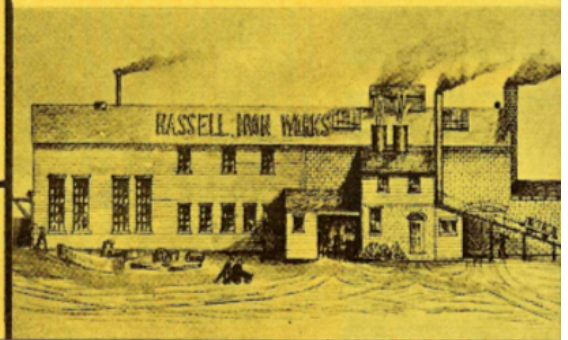
IRON FOUNDRY BURNS

Last evening shortly before 7 o'clock the western sky was a blaze of light and it was soon discovered that the burning was Hassell & Talcott's iron foundry in Colorado City south of the creek. The building was of frame and was erected about two years ago... The fire is supposed to have originated from an overheated stove. When discovered it was too late to save much of the building or its contents and the loss is estimated at \$5,000.

Evening Telegraph, January 14, 1896

HASSELL IRON WORKS, 1898

Penrose Library



Elsie Freed, Project Director, has written articles on Colorado Springs' iron fences for: *Mountain & Plain History Notes* of the State Historical Society of Colorado (October, 1974), *The Old-House Journal* (December, 1974), *Americana* (May, 1976), and *Historic Preservation* (Scheduled for early 1977). Please direct inquiries to Ms. Freed at 2111 North Tejon, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80907, (303) 636-2251.

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Hurry, hurry! Get your



selfguiding tour of historic



Decorative iron fences ranked high in 19th century tastes, combining as they did the qualities of utility and elegance so special to Victorians. Homeowners of that era, seeking both style and strength in a residential fence, pounced on the new foundry-fashioned ironwork. Outlasting wood by generations and requiring almost no maintenance, iron fencing was a bargain despite its initial expense. Best of all, ornamental ironwork offered a heady choice of design, ranging from Gothic tracery to modern floral motifs, with a few Egyptian patterns thrown in for variety.

Improvements in iron technology guaranteed a ready supply of fence material: wire, malleable iron and steel rods, and ornate castings. Invariably labeled "wrought iron," most fences were actually a composite of several factory-processed materials.

Fences were only a small and highly visible part of the new iron explosion. Urns, settees, window guards, boot scrapers, flower stands—the offering of iron goods seemed endless. Late 19th century foundries offered cradle to grave services, making everything from baby carriages to cemetery railings—ironwork was an immensely popular decorative item.

By the late 1880s Colorado City had its own foundry, the Hassell-Talcott Iron Works on South 25th Street, specializing in ornamental iron. "H-T" sold fences all over the region, competing with the Midwestern foundries which did a brisk business by mail order, selling iron and wire work from illustrated catalogs and then shipping the orders by rail. The local firm's rivals included the Stewart Iron Works of Cincinnati and several other Ohio foundries.

Photo: E. Freed

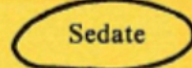
Hassell acted as agent for other firms, thus augmenting his already impressive selection of ironwork. He advertised woven steel fencing from the Hartman Company and iron fences of the Barbee Iron & Wire Works of Chicago.

When the Colorado City foundry burned in early 1896, Hassell dissolved his partnership with Talcott and rebuilt the Hassell Iron Works on Sierra Madre, south of Colorado Springs' downtown area. By this time, Hassell had shifted the foundry's emphasis to the production of structural iron, railroad and mining equipment, capitalizing on the big gold boom in Cripple Creek. Ornamental iron remained a bread-and-butter line throughout, however, and was featured regularly in the firm's advertising.



Colorado Springs is a bright, lively little town, which, during the last five years, has risen from the wild prairie land, and has now a population of three thousand residents. There are...other delightful resorts in the neighborhood—the old Colorado City, sedate, solemn, and picturesque...

Lady Duffus Hardy in *Through Cities and Prairie Lands*, London, 1881

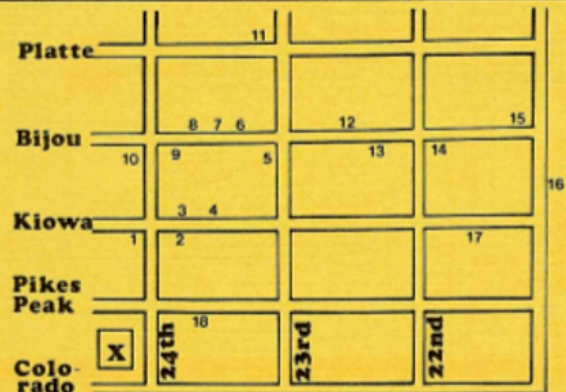


iron and wire fences!

Old Colorado City

Step right up for a first-hand look at Colorado Springs' historic iron fences. And as you enjoy these fine specimens of 19th century ironwork, take time to examine the decorative details on the houses: brackets, spindles, and, especially, the great variety of pattern in shingle siding. In mid-summer you'll have an extra bonus in the exuberant display of rambler roses bursting forth in great cascades of pink and red.

- 16 North 24th Street** The Hassell Iron Works sold hundreds of fences with this simple design of overlapping arches. Corner posts, decorated with classic acanthus leaves, add a touch of elegance.
- 2327 West Kiowa** The Stewart Iron Works of Ohio frequently used the spearhead featured in this handsome fence. The gate is further embellished with medallions.
- 2330 West Kiowa** Another popular design from the Hassell Works, the double-daisy pickethead added a jaunty aspect to traditional ironwork and was often used with acanthus-leaf posts.
- 2326 West Kiowa** This Hassell fence of overlapping arches has "ram's head" line posts, used by several foundries during the ironwork era.
- 116 North 23rd Street** Metal connectors give added strength to this wire fence. Notice the inscription atop the line posts: "Pat(ent). Int'l. Steel Post Co., St. Louis, Mo." Hassell made the iron gate, adding little braces at the cross bars.
- 2310 West Bijou** Overlapping arches again, this is a simple fence for a fancy house: carved and sawn bargeboards decorating the gables and an exquisite pattern in the shingle-siding.
- 2314 West Bijou** These wire pickets were shaped like the decorative sawn-wood pickets popular at the time. In this age of invention, new technology often appeared in familiar old forms. The automobile, for example, is described as a "horseless carriage." Hence, we have here a "woodless picket fence."
- 2318 West Bijou** Foundry unknown. The spearhead effect on the picket is gained simply by flattening and cutting the round rod. Notice the lovely beveled glass in the front window of this shingle house.
- 2327 West Bijou** Hassell probably made this ornate, Gothic fence remnant.
- 116 North 24th Street** You've already seen this graceful ironwork design (No. 2). In midsummer a Victorian garden grows behind the fence: poppies, clematis, day lilies, daisies, baby's breath.
- 2302 West Platte** Another simple fence for a grand house; this one has a mansard roof with iron cresting. In vogue during the late 19th century, cresting tended to be removed later by homeowners when the roof needed reshingling.



- 2228 West Bijou** A leaf and berry pickethead decorates the gate. Notice again the ram's head line post top, and also the woven wire fence along the side yard.
- 2215 West Bijou** A wire and steel post fence similar to No. 5, but this one has a matching gate.
- 2131 West Bijou** Hassell very likely bought these wire pickets ready-made from other companies. This little cottage, with its sawn-wood porch brackets, was a common style in Colorado City.
- 2106, 2110 West Bijou** A fancy fence *and* a fancy house! The corner house combines picturesque elements (shingles, turrets, gable caps) with classic details (return cornices, brackets under the eaves, decorative molding.)
- 2032 West Kiowa** At the rear of this property is an iron picket fence—probably a remnant—set into a river-stone pedestal, attached to a garage of the same material. Foundry unknown.
- 2123 West Kiowa** Hassell's overlapping arches in front of a graceful shingle and wood siding cottage. The wire side fence is from the St. Louis steel company mentioned earlier.
- 2311 Pikes Peak** Leaf and berry picketheads, ram's head line post tops, and decorative braces. The gate is missing but notice a disk in the gate post inscribed: "Hassell & Ward," a brief partnership in 1890.

MORE, MORE, MORE At these addresses on Colorado Avenue, between Old Colorado City and the Near West Side, you will find additional ornamental iron fences: 1901 and 1903, 1816, 1804, 1643, 1637, 1228, 1224 (made by the Rogers Iron Company of Springfield, Ohio), 1005 and 1003.

Photo: E. Freed

Photo: C. Taylor



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The Near West Side



ences of the Near West Side, being scattered over a large area, are most comfortably viewed from an automobile or bicycle. This small collection includes a variety of styles from several different foundries, and boasts two of the most lavish designs in the entire region, certainly too good to miss.

1. **516 West Pikes Peak** An elegant gate, indeed, with scrolls in profusion and an overlay of medallions. Notice the picket top: a variation on the popular spearhead, dressed up with a stylized leaf pattern, and a petal pattern at the base. No foundry identification.
2. **520 West Pikes Peak** A shingle and wood siding cottage with traditional iron pickets set in concrete.
3. **602 West Pikes Peak** This pleasant story-and-a-half shingle house is typical of Colorado residences in the late 90's. Hassell made the gate along the side, separating the hedge sections. The front fence, from a different foundry, uses sheet

metal for pickets, cut and notched to imitate cast and wrought ironwork.

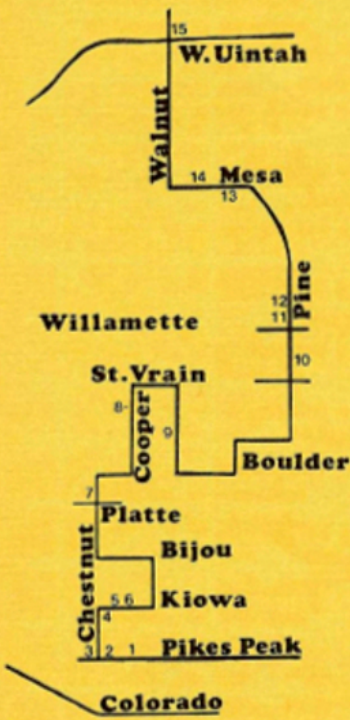
4. **529 West Kiowa** Though very similar, there are two different fences here. The Hassell Works surely made the overlapping arches on the left but the large corner section of arches and pointed pickets very likely came from the Stewart Works. Line posts are topped with the ram's head.

5. **528 West Kiowa** The same fence, with fluted spearhead line post tops. Notice the tulip tops on the gate posts: the Stewart Works commonly used this motif.

6. **522 West Kiowa** Hassell's fan-shaped lotus pickethead is used here under an

arch—a lovely combination and one frequently seen throughout the city.

7. **304, 308, 312 North Chestnut** A trio of iron fences, almost identical, set into a stone pedestal across three adjoining lots. Had there been no local foundry, we probably would not see these joint-effort fences throughout the city. As it was, neighbors got together, agreed on a fence size and design, and shared the cost to create a marvelous continuity of pattern in several fences joined together. There's one small variation here: the neighbor on the north chose a fluted spearhead picket top; the other two went with a lotus design. All three fences share the little decorative braces along the cross bars.
8. **427, 435, 439, 443 North Cooper** Throughout the spring of 1897 *The Evening Telegraph* ran a Hassell ad for these iron gates and wire fences. The Hassel Works advertised several styles of wire fence all through the 1890's.
9. **424 North Walnut** Simple fluted spearheads, alternating slightly in length, are an appropriate match for this handsome shingle house.
10. **507 North Pine** Acanthus posts and lotus spearheads combine in this classic Hassell fence.
11. **704 North Pine** Both the Hassell foundry and the Ohio Stewart Works used the design components featured here; the open-work corner posts and elaborate gate suggest the latter firm made this fence. Notice two different picketheads: a fleur-de-lis at the top and a traditional cross at mid-level.
12. **708 North Pine** The Champion Fence Company of Kenton, Ohio, manufactured this fence, and just to make sure no one missed the name, they included five large foundry markers! Acorns top the pickets.
13. **315 Mesa Road** Decorated from top to bottom, this is one of the most lavish cast-iron fences in the city. Acanthus posts and double-daisy picketheads join scrolls, arches, and other bits of tracery for an eye-catching example of Victorian ironwork.
14. **340 Mesa Road** Fleur-de-lis spearheads decorate this arched picket fence by Hassell.
15. **450 West Uintah** To top it all, this large and elegant corner fence seems to use every pattern made by Hassell: lotus and double-daisy picketheads, acanthus posts, inverted crosses, stars, and connecting tracery. The ornate ironwork creates a lovely frame for the shingled Queen Anne cottage, bedecked with turrets and verandahs.



A recent inventory of ornamental iron fences was made possible by a grant from the Springs Area Beautiful Association and the Pikes Peak or Bust Bicentennial Committee. The following students from CORONADO High School participated in the inventory field work: Beth Brooks, Becky Bliss, Tim Barbari, Dan Starch, Ann Burnett, John Cox, Erica Jessen, Regina Walter. Faculty Coordinator: Dr. Robert Smith.

Photo: C. Taylor

Photo: E. Freed

