

Ben Drew Commission House
160 East California Street
Jacksonville
Jackson County
Oregon

HABS No. ORE-74

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PHOTOGRAPH

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY HABS No. ORE-74

BEN DREW COMMISSION HOUSE

Location: 160 East California Street, Jacksonville, Jackson County, Oregon.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Although it cannot be dated precisely, the Ben Drew Commission House is one of the oldest buildings now standing in Jacksonville. Although now a freestanding building, it was originally part of a row that included the offices of Cram, Rogers and Company--later the site of the Express Saloon--a building owned by grocer Charles Casey, and the offices of the Oregon Intelligencer, the predecessor of the Jacksonville Reveille Weekly and the Democratic Times.¹

A building stood on the lot in 1855, when Benjamin Drew mortgaged the property "between the premises of R. Dugan and Charles Casey."² The structure was used as an office building: in December 1855, County Auditor Thomas Pyle presented a bill for \$220 to the County Commissioners for office space rented from Drew for the Auditor's use.³ In 1861, the building housed Wade, Morgan and Company, express agents, who succeeded to the express business of Cram, Rogers and Company. An 1861 mechanic's lien on the adjacent property of Charles Casey describes the building as a "Brick Store House" owned by P.J. Ryan.⁴ In the late 1870s, Ryan leased the building to H.L. Webb and James McDaniel for use as a saloon. Under the lease, Webb and McDaniel were to make necessary repairs which--except for the saloon bar--would become part of the building. Ryan, for his part, agreed to provide a new awning, to repair the walks, and to build a privy.⁵ The Democratic Times reported that "a commodious cellar is now being dug under the building."⁶ In 1882, the building was leased to Caton and Garrett, who operated a saloon there until 1889.⁷

Although little is known about P.J. Ryan, he was one of the most active and successful merchants in Jacksonville. An early settler in the town, he owned the Palmetto Bowling Saloon, one of the earliest local establishments of its kind.⁸ Probably aware of the desire of merchants for safer, so-called fireproof buildings, he built several brick buildings and purchased another.⁹ In 1883, the Democratic Times reported that Ryan was building several houses for rental purposes, making him one of the few speculative residential builders in the town.¹⁰

The property is owned at present by Mr. Robertson E. Collins. It houses "The Museum Store."

FOOTNOTES

1

Jackson County Deeds, March 30, 1855; C. E. Curley /and J. S. Howard/, "Map of Jacksonville," 1864; "Map of Jacksonville," 1868.

2

Jackson County Deeds, March 30, 1855.

3

Jackson County Commissioners' Journals, December 18, 1855. The bill was disallowed because the County Auditor had been ordered in 1854 to occupy the building that housed the other county offices; the location of this building--described as being on "Church Street"--is unknown since no such street exists today.

4

Jackson County Deeds, October 26, 1861.

5

Ibid., September 16, 1878. The lease was recorded among the deed records of the County; while the recording of leases was not a standard practice, this is not a unique case either.

6

The Democratic Times, September 27, 1878.

7

Jackson County Deeds, August 17, 1882.

8

Ibid., November 20, 1853.

9

The P. J. Ryan Building on the south side of California Street was built in late 1884 or early 1885; the P. J. Ryan Building on the north side of California Street was built before 1867--probably in 1861. See HABS Nos. ORE-119 and ORE-118.

10

The Democratic Times, December 14, 1883. Other persons entered the speculative real estate market by subdividing land and selling lots that other people would then build their own houses on. This is the only example identified of someone building speculative housing.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. Description of Exterior:

1. Number of stories: The main part of the building is two stories. The rear addition is also two stories with the

main facade facing on South Third Street.

2. Number of bays: The north facade is two bays. The facade of the addition is also two bays.
3. Layout, shape: The main block is rectangular, much deeper than it is wide (eighty feet deep and twenty-five feet wide); the addition is not as deep as the main block is wide, so that the overall shape is an exaggerated L.
4. Wall construction, finish, color: The walls are brick painted white. The addition is unpainted brick. The stone cellar was dug after the building had been erected.
5. Openings:
 - a. Main block: The facade is divided into two bays by three wide piers that extend from the foundation to the cornice. The ground-floor openings are square headed and are spanned by segmental relieving arches which spring from small corbels applied to the piers. The arches are in the plane of the piers, but the tympanums are infilled with brick set back from the wall surface. Above the arches are inset panels of brick with windows broken into them; each window is spanned by a segmental arch which springs from corbels and which is set forward from the plane of the panels. The first-floor window is six-over-three-light double-hung sash. The second-floor windows are casements; each leaf contains three lights.
 - b. Addition: The west facade of the addition has a doorway in the north bay and a small window in the south bay. The openings are broken into the wall without elaboration.
6. Roof:
 - a. Shape: The roof is flat behind a parapet.
 - b. Cornice: At the top of each pier, small moldings suggest capitals; they do not span the entire pier but simply bracket each of the recessed second-floor wall panels. The moldings support a frieze band seven courses high. Two slightly projecting stepped courses support a dentil course of paired headers set on edge. A three-course band tops the dentils and is capped by a final course. The entablature returns onto the face of the facade. A plain parapet rises above in the plane of the piers below.

B. Description of Interior:

The interior is currently a single room on each floor. It may always have had such a configuration. The floors are wooden, and the walls are plastered.

C. Site and Surroundings:

The building faces north on East California Street, with the main facade built along the north property line. At one time, there were buildings attached to both sides of the present structure; at present, both side lots are vacant.

D. Original Appearance:

The building retains its original appearance. The peculiarities of the facade design may be the result of an early builder's attempts to create a sophisticated pattern of progressive and recessive planes or to provide a unified pattern of vertical elements in a two-story building.

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