

This Old House:

The Peter and Mary Ann Sorenson home—676 North 300 West (Author Unknown)

Sometimes, even when things aren't quite fair, there is a silver lining. The one story brick period cottage at 674 and 676 North 300 West, built in Tudor Revival style, is a typical example of many period cottages built on Capitol Hill in the late 1920s. Peter Sorenson emigrated from Denmark as a young boy in the early 1870s to Cache Valley, grew up there, met and married his wife, Mary Ann Thain, and became a railroad engineer for Union Pacific. They eventually settled in Salt Lake City on this corner, and in 1929 tore down the old home and moved across the street while this home was built. Their elder daughter, Naoma, was talented at drafting and designed the floor plan for the home.



The house's gabled roof, steep gabled porch, round arched openings, a massive chimney with curvilinear side and decorative masonry, are all characteristic of this style and period. This house is slightly larger than the typical period cottages, and the basement was converted into an apartment, with separate outside entrance, in 1949. Like many of the old homes on Capitol Hill, its coal chute door is still intact and visible near the rear entrance. Peter and Mary Ann lived in the home for the rest of their lives, and their daughter Naoma stayed on until her death in 1989.

As it turned out, this was the only floor plan Naoma ever designed. As a high school and college student, she was bright, ahead of her time, good at math and drafting, and wanted to be an architect. Her more-traditional parents felt, however, that this was not a field for women and, acceding to their wishes, she graduated from the University of Utah in 1918 with a teacher's certificate and began teaching first grade at Franklin School in the Central City area for \$600 a year.

Forty-five years later, as she neared retirement, she was named Utah's Teacher of the Year and was first runner-up for the national Teacher of the Year award. She remained at Franklin for all those years. Her principal wrote that she was the first one in school in the morning and the last to leave in the evening. "She spends a lot of money on her first grade pupils, her own money. If she needs new books or equipment and our budget is tight, she buys what she needs out of her own pocket. If a poor child comes to school, without a lunch basket, Naoma feeds him... She's been doing this for years and she never tells anyone about it."

So the beautiful buildings she might have built were replaced by the young lives she shaped. The reporter from *Look* magazine who wrote about her nomination said, "In that classroom, I watched Naoma Sorenson build sturdy little characters block by block on an unshakable foundation. From her rich experience she knew every inch of the road each child would take. It was a happy journey for all... She gave each pupil a sense of sharing in the day's adventures [and] each pupil had the joy that came from having one's efforts appreciated and praised. She left her mark on every child she taught. Memories of her will last a lifetime." (W. J. Burke, *Not for Glory*, Cowles Publishing, 1967, pp. 89-90).