

This Old House

November 2003

The Kensington Apartments - 180 North Main Street
by Nelson Knight

Sprawl. Suburbs. High-rise apartments. All these things seem like relatively new concepts to us in Salt Lake City, but this month's building shows that they have been around a long time. The Kensington apartments at 180 North Main Street were just one of over 180 large apartment buildings that were constructed in Salt Lake City between 1900 and 1930. The city experienced a huge surge of growth during that time as the city matured to a major metropolitan area. Between 1900 and 1910, Salt Lake City's population surged from 53,531 to 92,777. There had to be somewhere to put all of these people. Many went to the new suburbs, such as Highland Park (in Sugar House) and Federal Heights, but for those of more transient lifestyle or personal preference, apartment buildings were the answer.



Historian Roger Roper, in his 1999 Utah Historical Quarterly article, "Homemakers in Transition," notes that many of the occupants of these apartments were women who were at crossroads in their lives - young working women and older widows. Apartments such as the Kensington were well-built (the Kensington had gas and electric appliances and central heat) and well-maintained (work crews at the Kensington washed the walls and refurbished the wood floors of each apartment on an annual basis.) The builders of the Kensington, the Covey Investment Company, marketed their apartments to middle- and upper-class women.

The Covey Investment Company was the largest of the many companies that owned apartment buildings in Salt Lake City. The Company, headed by Stephen M. Covey, built many apartments similar to the Kensington, such as the Covey and Hillcrest complexes in the lower Avenues. The Kensington, constructed in 1906, is a good example of the historic "walk-up"-type apartment building in which each apartment is accessed from a central stairway. The Kensington's brick construction, flat roof, parapet walls, and balconies are typical features for apartments of this type and age in Salt Lake City. The building's neoclassical architectural detailing is most apparent on its balconies, with classical columns and entablatures.

The Kensington remained owned by its original owners for decades. It has remained a well-maintained apartment complex, even though the work crews no longer wash the walls annually. The building, and the many other turn-of-the-century apartments in the city, serve as a good model for future housing at the next turn-of-the-century.