

# GREAT HOMES

## A Beautiful Antique House

It is rare to find a house in this region dating back to the 1880s which represents so well the historical impact of its occupants. Such a house is Mathilda Gage's home, located in a beautiful wooded setting in Aberdeen, South Dakota.

Her family has played an important role in the development of the nation. Her grandmother, Mathilda Joslyn Gage, was an important theoretician and activist in the radical element of the 19th century American women's movement. An uncle, L. Frank Baum, has delighted the world with his wonderful Wizard of Oz books.

Miss Gage's house in Aberdeen embodies some of the furnishings and spirit of those two vital persons—and more. Not only does she have a collection of all the letters and other belongings of Mathilda Joslyn Gage and many mementoes of L. Frank Baum, but, in addition, the house contains an extensive collection of Aberdeen's early history and also the history of St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Aberdeen. Antique photos, scrapbooks, newspaper clippings—along with beautiful paintings and furniture once belonging to the Aberdeen woman's ancestors—make a visit to her home a charming, enlightening experience.

The house was built in 1887 by A.

Eugene Sykes, a pioneer builder and contractor of early Aberdeen. Mathilda Gage and her parents didn't purchase the house until 1920. "I remember driving by the house with its many, many elms and cottonwoods," she said. "It looked like a forest. I used to think, 'Thank goodness, I don't have to live in that house!'" Later, when her family did move into the house, many of the trees were cut down, but enough were spared to still leave a pleasant park-like setting.

**L**ike many other houses in the neighborhood, the Gage home has three interesting features: stained glass windows, a tower, and a garage reconverted from an old barn. At the time the Gage house was built, it—along with many of its contemporaries—had a barn in which its owner kept horses and cows. In the 1890s, it was a common sight to see a boy go walking down the Aberdeen streets, taking the cows out to pasture in the morning and bringing them back again at night.

Mathilda Gage confesses to a keen interest in genealogies, and has devoted considerable effort to re-trace some of the experiences of her forebears. Most of her furniture, for

example, are her family's most treasured pieces, some dating as far back as to a great-grandfather who came to New York from Scotland in 1794. One is an antiquated parchment, ivory with age, grandiloquently stating that Sir George Leslie is permitted by the city of Edinburgh to sell merchandise. The date on the parchment reads 1764. Another parchment, which is framed, explains that the same Leslie is a member of "the Links of Leith Golf House, issued by The Honorable Company of Golfers of Edinburgh." It's dated February 7, 1785.

One enters the Gage house through a small foyer opening onto the living room. Two large portraits, painted in 1832, dominate the room. One is of Dr. Parson Genet Shipman and the other is of his wife, Sarah—great-grandparents of Miss Gage. The living room also contains a loveseat belonging to another ancestor, the Jewells. The loveseat is Victorian in style, and is upholstered in rose-colored velours. On the other side of the living room are a cherry table and an ornately carved walnut chair, wedding gifts of her parents.

**A** tilt-top card table, made of rosewood, was brought from Scotland by



House built in 1887 is owned by Mathilda Gage of Aberdeen, South Dakota. A tower is one of the house's crowning features. The house is painted a creamy gold. The gingerbread trim is painted a dark brown for contrast. Part of the porch (to the left) was enclosed to form a downstairs office, which partially contains extensive collections of early Aberdeen lore.



Much of the charm of the Gage house is that it contains so many antiques once owned by the ancestors of Mathilda Gage. Thus, the furnishings project an intimate, highly personal ambiance. Paintings, furnishings and other memorabilia date as far back as the 1760s. The portrait in the living room (top photograph) is of Miss Gage's great-grandfather, Dr. Parson Genet Shipman, who had a medical practice in Rochester, New York. The portrait was painted in 1832 by I. Parks.

**BOTTOM PHOTOGRAPH:** A portrait of Shipman's wife, Sarah, was also painted by the same artist and hangs on another wall in the living room. Mathilda Gage stands by a five-legged tilt-top card table made of rosewood, brought from Scotland in 1794. The two candlesticks are embellished with crystal prisms, and were Miss Gage's grandmother's wedding gifts.



Another view of the living room, with staircase in the background. At one time the house featured a circular staircase, which was torn out during a "remodeling" before the house was purchased by the Gages. Said Mathilda Gage: "My mother and I just grieved that the circular staircase had been removed. I suppose it took up too much floor space from the living room, and that is why it was taken out." The room has a dark red oriental carpet. Antique chairs are upholstered with dark rose material.



Dining room opens from living room. It has the same wallpaper of small black patterns on cream background to unify the two rooms. To the right are silver-plate vases and serving sets.



Watercolor painting of apple branches in dining room is by Mathilda Joslyn Gage, who was an important national leader in the women's rights movement in the 19th century. A photograph of Mathilda Joslyn Gage is inserted in the frame at lower left. Photographer was L. Frank Baum, the author of the delightful Wizard of Oz books.



A silver-plated water tankard sets on sewing table in a corner of the dining room. Much of the family's furniture was brought from Fayetteville, New York, where both Mathilda Gage's father and mother once lived. In 1881, T. Clarkson Gage moved out west to Aberdeen. He started a general merchandise store with two other friends. The store was located at the present site of Feinstein's Bootery.



**TOP PHOTOGRAPH:** Mathilda Gage, 92, looks at delicate Japanese picture painted on rice paper. She also has two Japanese bird pictures painted on rice paper which were brought to her family in 1870. The colors of the bird pictures, extremely fragile, still contain a bright luminosity. "The pictures were old when they were given to my family," said the Aberdeen woman.

**BELOW:** An upstairs bedroom turned into a study.



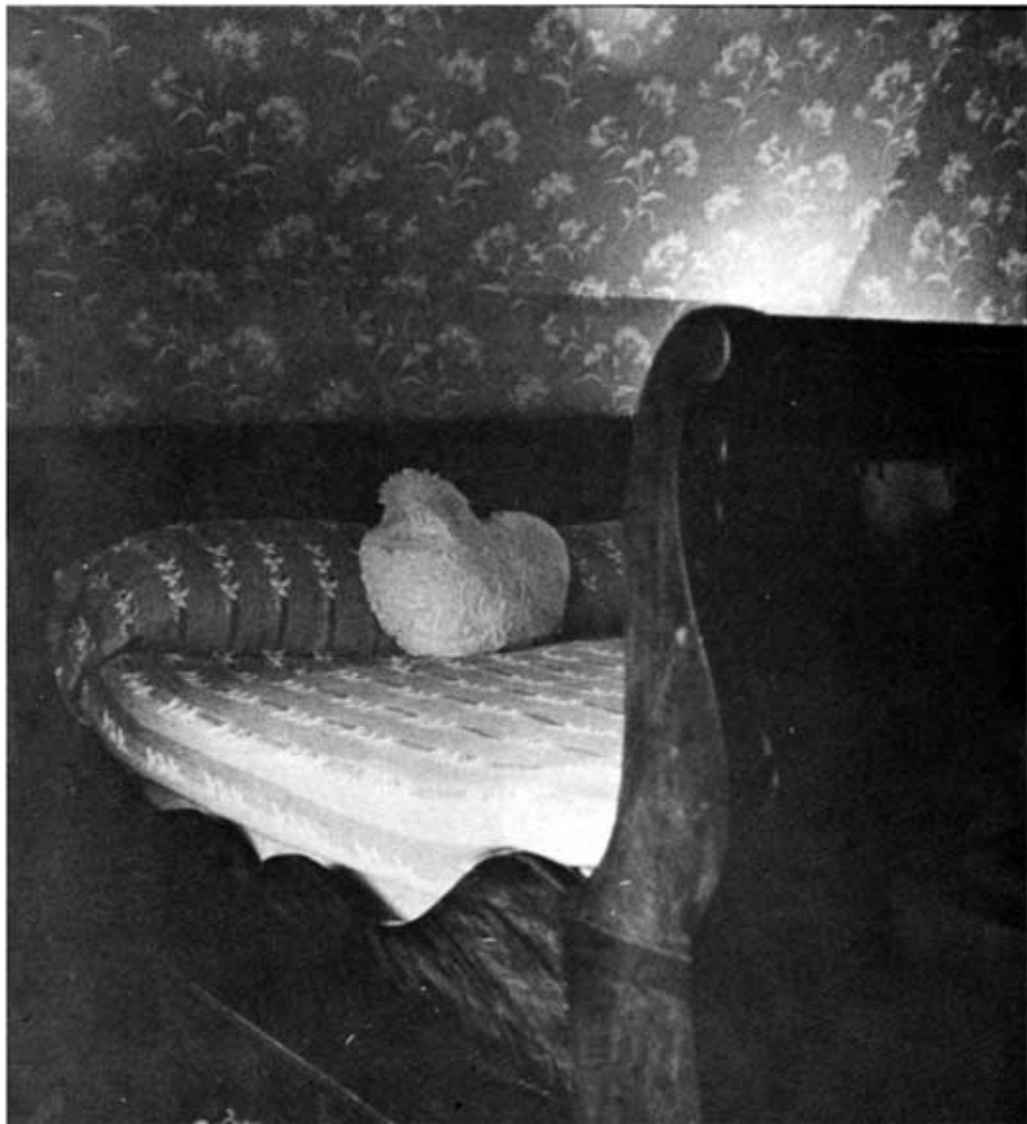


Photo above is one of the bedrooms upstairs. Each bedroom's wallpaper features intricate designs of flowers.



Shaving equipment was once used by Mathilda Gage's grandfather. The walnut bureau and mirror were also brought out west from New York.





Old bed was formerly in house in Fayetteville, New York where Mathilda Gage's parents once lived. Several notable people have slept in it. Susan B. Anthony, a leader in the feminist movement in the 19th century, was a frequent guest who slept in it—as did Elizabeth Cady Stanton, another women's suffragist leader. Both were co-workers of Mathilda Joslyn Gage. Miss Gage's grandmother, Bayard Taylor, noted writer of books on travel, was a guest of the Gages in New York too.

the Leslies in 1794. One leaf of the table can be lowered. The table has five legs. On it are displayed two candlesticks with crystal prisms. Said Mathilda Gage: "My mother prized them above everything else. She always used to say, 'If the house catches on fire, be sure to save my candlesticks!'"

The living room's walls are wallpapered with small black patterns set on a light cream background. The woodwork is painted white, and a dark red oriental rug sets off the rose hues of the loveseat and chairs. Pen and ink drawings decorate the walls along with a ship done in exquisite needlepoint by her grandmother, Eliza Shipman Jewell.

The dining room is equally impressive. An antique lamp features painted flowers and crystal, and hangs in the center of the room. Directly below the lamp is the dining room table, covered with a dark blue table cloth made from material Mathilda Gage bought when she was in Japan. A predominantly dark blue Chinese oriental rug picks up the shades of the table cloth. "I just love blue," she said.

Large windows flood the dining room with light, enhancing a small cherry dropleaf table. "This table has an interesting background," remarked

Mathilda Gage. "It has several holes, because on it my mother's cousin learned telegraphy in Niagra Falls, New York." On the table sets an old silver-plate water tankard. "It's so heavy! I don't know how anyone could have lifted it when it was full of water," she said. Other silver pieces, such as a vase bought for chrysanthemums Baum raised when he lived in Hollywood, and an old silver cake basket are part of the dining room's splendid decor. On one of the walls hangs a watercolor painting of apples by Mathilda Joslyn Gage. Slipped into the painting's frame is a photograph of the woman's rights leader done by L. Frank Baum in 1887 or 1888.

Baum, the creator of the delightful Oz books, lived next door to the Gage house. Baum came to Aberdeen in 1888, and started a variety store, which he ran until 1890 when he took over a newspaper, called the Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer. Poor wheat crops in the early 1890s made it tough for many fledgling businesses like the Saturday Pioneer, and so Baum eventually sold it and moved to Chicago. But the Aberdeen library has copies of Saturday Pioneer on file. "The newspaper is most amusing," said Miss Gage. "It shows characteristics which later emerge in the Oz books." Baum wrote a total of 14 Oz books and approximately 200 other books and stories.

Upstairs, Mathilda Gage has an

entire collection of the Oz books, autographed by the author, on display behind a glass-enclosed bookcase.

There are three bedrooms and a bath upstairs, one of the bedrooms which is used as a study. Old family dressing bureaus, photographs and mirrors decorate the rooms.

In one of the bedrooms is a bed which came from Fayetteville, New York where Mathilda Gage's grandparents lived. Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, both leaders in the feminist movement, were frequent guests there and slept in the bed which is now in Aberdeen. Miss Gage has pieces of the old cotton chintz material, dating back to 1798, which once formed a canopy to the bed.

There is humor in the furnishings, too. On a wall in the upstairs study is an old illustration elaborately depicting a group of puritans hanging a cat. At the bottom of the picture is engraved the following inscription: Puritans Hanging a Cat on Monday for killing a Mouse on Sunday.

Mathilda Gage has periodically loaned some of her furniture to the Dacotah Prairie Museum in Aberdeen, especially many of the items once belonging to the women's rights leader. As a house typifying fine, 19th century architecture along with furnishings of a family's long trek through history, the Gage home in Aberdeen cannot be overlooked. ■