

The Baerresen Brothers

(Biography created for History of the 2100 Block of Lafayette Street, 1987)

The Baerresen Brothers (H.W. and V.E.) were the sons of a Danish maritime architect. They emigrated to the United States with their two brothers who were contractors. Their firm was established in 1887 in Denver with a Cheyenne office opened in the 1890's. They designed a wide variety of buildings, many of which are still standing. They were founding members of the Rocky Mountain Association of Architects and the Colorado Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Generally speaking, they were considered to be intelligent eclectics who modeled their buildings after widely accepted types by other architects. Their tendency was to simplify the eclectic exuberance of others, resulting in the restrained elegance and distinguished lines of their building in the 2100 block of Lafayette designed for Denver builder John Cooke.

Harold W Baerresen was born January 20, 1846 in Copenhagen, Denmark where his father was a noted designer of shipyards and ships. After receiving his education in Denmark schools, Harold Baerresen enlisted in the Danish Navy. Although only eighteen years old, young Baerresen participated in the May 9, 1864 battle of Helgoland, the last sea battle involving wooden ships. After Denmark lost this war with Austria and Germany, young Baerresen entered the Danish Merchant marines as a ship's carpenter. After his ship was wrecked in a violent storm, the rescue ship sought shelter and repairs in New York City in 1869, where he was cared for by family friends from Denmark. This shipwreck was ultimately the reason why the four brothers came to the United States.

After various business experiences in New York City, Baerresen moved to Louisville, Kentucky where he put his carpentry skills to use by establishing a baby buggy manufacturing business. In 1872 Harold Baerresen was married to Miss Rosa M. Kern. Soon after the wedding his wife's sister and her husband, who was ill with tuberculosis, moved to Denver, Colorado for his health and persuaded the Baerresens to move also.

Harold arrived in Denver in March 1879 and went to work as a carpenter and also began calling himself an architect and builder. Harold's wife felt that the family name, then spelled Boerresen, needed to be anglicized so the family changed the name to the present spelling of Baerresen. In 1884, Viggio Baerresen came to Denver and he and Harold formed the architectural firm of Baerresen Brothers. Albert T. and William J. Baerresen came to America and joined Harold and Viggio around 1887. Viggio became a full partner in the architectural business and Albert took over the construction company business. Harold's son, Albert A., joined the family firm in 1896. Harold was appointed the Danish Vice-Consul in Denver in 1892.

Viggio Egede Baerresen), was born in Copenhagen, Denmark on March 13, 1858. After teaching in the secondary schools in Denmark, he came to Denver in 1884 to join his brother Harold. Viggio retained direct ties with his native country, Denmark, and his wife's native country, Norway, by serving as their Denver Vice-Consul. He and his wife, Mary, hosted dignitaries from all over the world at a time when travelers still considered Denver, Colorado, a wild, country town. Emigrants from Denmark and Norway sought out the Baerresens for help in finding jobs and homes. King Christian of Denmark decorated Viggio with the Cross of Dannebrog and he was honored by the Norwegian Order of St. Olaf.

A sense of ethics usually kept the Baerresen construction firm from bidding on projects of Baerresen Brothers, Architects. All of the Baerresens, however, were members of the Augustana Swedish Lutheran Church and worked together with parishioners to design and build the old Augustana Church on the S.E. corner of 23rd and Logan in 1890. Harold designed and built his own home, now a National Register Property, at 1718 Gaylord Street.

From the beginning, the Baerresens were caught up in the building boom of the late 1880s. Many of the firm's buildings remain. Residences include the Charles O. Johnson Park Hill Residence (1906), the George P. Lingerfelter residence at 300 Marion, the E. Palmer, 12-room frame house at Pine Ridge, the Hammond residence at 9th and 10th streets on Humboldt, the Ephenia Johnson house in Littleton, Colorado, the Carrie Kinport house at 921 Acoma, and the one-and-one-half story Golden home for Mrs. Adolph Coors (1903). Three Baerresen Brothers houses are in the Humboldt Street historic District: Thompson-Henry (1905) 1070 Humboldt, Schleter-Parks-Cobb (1907) 1110 Humboldt and Schaeffer House (1903) 1131 Humboldt. Apartment buildings include the Melrose, located on Sherman Street, an apartment building on Tremont between 15th and 16th for D.K. Hall in 1906, the Chapman Apartment Building, and the Kingsford Apartment Building. Larger buildings include Engelbach building at 1451-1455 California Street, the Reo Hotel at 13th and Broadway, the first St. Joseph's Hospital (built by the Cookes of the 2100 block of Lafayette and now demolished), the Tivoli Opera House and Tower, buildings in the Romeo Block, a four-story hotel in Pueblo (1903), and the Ernest and Cranmer Building 17th and Curtis (built by the Cookes of the 2100 block Lafayette and now demolished). They also built the El Jebel Shrine at 18th and Sherman under the direction of William Chamberlain of 2159 Lafayette Street.

The Adams Hotel (now demolished) was a testimony to the thorough design of the Baerresen architectural firm. Before they conceptualized the design in sketches, they studied hotels in the area and traveled to several eastern United States cities to study the latest hotel technology and design. The hotel featured the first push button elevator in the area, and a telephone in every room. A giant copper dome soaring 25 feet above the floor was the main feature of the large roof-top ballroom.

Harold died in Denver on January 10, 1918. Viggo Baerresen carried on the family tradition of excellence for ten years after the death of Harold in 1918. Viggo retired in 1928 and moved to San Francisco. Although thoroughly an American, Viggo always loved his native Denmark. He died on March 22, 1940, exactly one week before his beloved country fell to the German army in World War II.

References`

Frickel, AP, Baerresen Brothers biographies in Noel, T and Norgren, B, Denver and its architecture: the city beautiful, 1893-1941, in press. She lists as her sources: Mrs. H.W. Baerresen, 2591 S. Columbine Street, Denver, Colorado; the Denver City Directories; the Denver Post, Jan. 23, 1918; The Rocky Mountain News, Oct. 31, 1880, Jan. 23, 1918 and April 23, 1909, and March 31, 1940; The Baerresen Collection at the Western History Dept., Denver Public Library; Frank V. Hall, History of Colorado (Chicago: Blakely, 1889), Vol. 4, p. 287.

Archives of the St Joseph Hospital

According to the St Joseph Hospital Archives, the cornerstone of the Baerresen designed towers was laid in 1899, the building occupied in 1900 and razed in 1964. There is a picture in their files showing the old towers on Humboldt St and the new on Franklin,

Lethem, John, Historical and descriptive review of Denver; her leading business houses and enterprising men, GM Collier 1894.

BAERRESEN BROS, architects, 16, 17, 18 Patterson & Thomas Block.--among those who have contributed much to the architectural beauty of Denver, is the firm of Baerresen Bros., both natives of Denmark. H.W Baerresen, after studying architecture in the old country, crossed the Atlantic, and landed at New York in March 1867. Remaining here until December, he then moved to Louisville, Ky., where he remained till 1871. He then took a working tour, visiting many cities, and gathering information. He finally settled at Denver in March, 1879, and opened his office. His ability and taste may be seen in the Swedish Lutheran Church, the Lowrie Building, the Sheridan Building and other fine structures, including prominent residences, and the firm have lately finished the plans for the works of the Denver Steel Rolling Mills Co., located at Sheffield, and covering ten acres of ground. Mr. Baerresen holds the Vice-Consulship of his native country, is a member of the Chamber of Commerce, and a member of the Committee of Architecture and Arts, is a K.T. of the Masonic fraternity, and has held office of Receiver for six consecutive terms of the Trinity Lodge A.O.U.W. VE Baerresen, his brother, came across the Atlantic in 1884, and then settled in Denver, and now takes an active share in the business of the firm. They occupy a commodious suite of rooms, employ several draughtsmen, and have their hands filled all the time.

Viggo Baerresen, 82, Denver architect for 40 years, dies, Denver Post March 23, 1940

Viggo E Baerresen, 82, a Denver architect for forty years died Thursday at the home of his daughter, Mrs. Julius Weiss, in San Francisco, Calif.

A native of Copenhagen, Denmark, Mr. Baerresen came to Denver in 1884. He designed many Colorado buildings, including El Jebel temple, the Adams Hotel and the main section of St Joseph's Hospital. For many years he served as vice consul here for Denmark and Norway.

In recognition of his services he was decorated with the Cross of Dannebrog by King Christian of Denmark and with the Order of St Olaf by Norway.

In addition to Mrs. Weiss he is survived by another daughter, Miss Viola Baerresen, a teacher in the Denver public schools; two sons, Harvey of Denver and George of Sacramento, Calif, and several grandchildren.

Funeral services will be held at the Olinger Mortuary at Speer boulevard and Sherman Street, at 3:30 PM, Monday. Burial will be in Fairmont cemetery.

Viggo E Baerresen, Rocky Mountain News March 22, 1940

Same basic information as Denver Post. Also he taught in secondary schools before coming to the US. He retired as an architect and moved to California 12 years before he died.

Brettell, RR, Historic Denver: the Architects and the Architecture, Historic Denver, 1973.

Baerresen Collection of Western History Department of the Denver Public Library

Morgan, DL and Hammond GP, *A guide to the manuscript collections of the Bancroft Library*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1963
No listings for Baerresens.