

Biography of James Murdoch

From *The History of the 2100 Block Lafayette Street*, 1987

When James Murdoch arrived in Denver in 1888, he was already distinguished as an architect. He was born in March 1844 in Scotland and in 1870, at the age of 26, immigrated to the United States. He became a naturalized citizen. After moving to Denver, his offices were located in the Tabor Building from 1889 to 1895. In 1896, he became the superintendent of the Colorado State Capitol Building, returning to private practice in 1901 with offices in the Mack building.

James Murdoch was a slender, restless Scotsman with a full, fashionable beard and mustache and low-slung eyebrows jutting out over deep set eyes. He was a confirmed bachelor, comfortable with simple rooming and boarding facilities, although moving frequently for reasons now unknown. Contemporary records are ambiguous about the spelling of his name, sometimes concluding with a k and sometimes with an h. He was elected treasurer of the newly organized Rocky Mountain Association of Architects, and the Colorado Association of Architects in 1891, at which time his picture appeared in *Western Architect and Building News*.

His early Gothic Revival St. Luke's Episcopal Church at 1270 Poplar Street and High Victorian Gothic (German) Chapel of Our Merciful Savior at Thirty-second and Wyandot streets, both constructed in 1890, are designated Denver landmarks. In 1904, Murdock designed a small brick and stone Chapter House for the new location of St. John's Episcopal Church on Clarkson between 13th and 14th Avenues. When the cathedral was completed in 1911, the building (now gone) was converted to house the church's educational facilities. The Chamberlain Residence at 2159 Lafayette was probably built by Murdoch, as it is similar in all essential aspects to that built for TE Schwarz and illustrated in *Western Architect and Building News*

In 1914, Murdock, at the age of seventy, traveled to Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore for radium treatments of some unspecified cancer. He died and was buried there. His sister, Isabelle, then had the body dug up and moved to Denver for final burial. On November 16, 1914, his body was quietly interred in Fairmount Cemetery.

References

Peters, Bette E, *Biography of James Murdock*, from Noel, T and Norgren, B, *Denver and its architecture: the city beautiful, 1893-1941*. She lists as her sources the Denver City Directories; Denver Building Permits Files; *Western Architect and Building News*, May 1881; U.S. Manuscript Census, 1900 and 1910; Fairmount Cemetery Records and *Rocky Mountain News*, Nov. 15, 1914, p. 8.

Western History Collection General Index lists the following entries:

log 4 #950 1904 Grant bet 6th and 7th
log 4 #951 same
log 4 #198 1904 Clarkson bet 13th and 14th
log 4 #469 1904 Marion bet 12th and 13th
log 4 #949 1904 Grant bet 6th and 7th

Western Architect and Building News

--August 1891 James Murdock, Tabor Block, has finished plans for a 2 story residence for J.C. Gallup cor 18th and Williams, cost \$15000. (this is the Gallup whose name appears on the brass plaque at Presbyterian Hospital and is probably not related to the Gallups on Lafayette).

--Volume 2, Number 2, April 1890, " Our Illustrations, Residence of TE Swarz, Pearl St, between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues, Denver. Jas Murdock, architect, Denver. A ten-room two-story residence, with all modern improvements. stock brick, stone trimmings; interior finished in pine and hardwood.

--In the description of the formation of the Colorado Association of architects in Aug 1891, Murdock is listed as the treasurer, and his picture appears in several issues

Denver Directory entries for 1891 and 1892

-Schwarz, Theodore E., mining engineer, 4 Bank Block, 17th Cor Arapahoe, r 1065 Pearl

-TE Schwarz, Mining Engineer. Represents non-resident owners. Mine improvements planned. Examination of mines, 4 Bank Block, 17th Cor Arapahoe, Telephone 1483

Body of James Murdock to be reinterred here, Rocky Mountain News Nov 16, 1914 p4

The body of James Murdoch, Denver architect, who died in Baltimore, Md., after vainly undergoing the radium treatment for cancer at Johns Hopkins last April will be reinterred at Fairmont cemetery this afternoon. Funeral services will be held at Martin's Fenebrial Lodge at 2 o'clock and all friends are invited to attend the services. Burial was in Baltimore immediately following the death, but Murdoch's sister, Mrs. Isabelle Murdoch of Scotland, wished the body removed to Denver for permanent burial. Murdoch was a prominent architect in Denver for more than twenty-five years.[note the variable spelling of his name]

The Enoch Pratt Free Library of Baltimore, Md has searched the Sunpapers from 9-18 November 1914 and has found no entry. It now appears that he died earlier, as he was first buried in Baltimore