



# Hale House: Upper Middle Class Victorian Lifestyle

A Historical Design Analysis

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Imagine an optimistic time. A time of aesthetic abundance and affordable decadence, of manners and etiquette, carved wood and lace. This was the Victorian Era, inspired by the reign of Queen Victoria in England (1837 – 1901) and made attainable for everyone in the Western World by the products of the Industrial Revolution. This was an era of style revivals, culture and details, from the layered clothing people wore to the ornate houses they built. The Victorian style of architecture and interior design spanned the United States, and in Los Angeles, California, in the year 1906, James and Bessie Hale moved into their Victorian home, later dubbed Hale House.



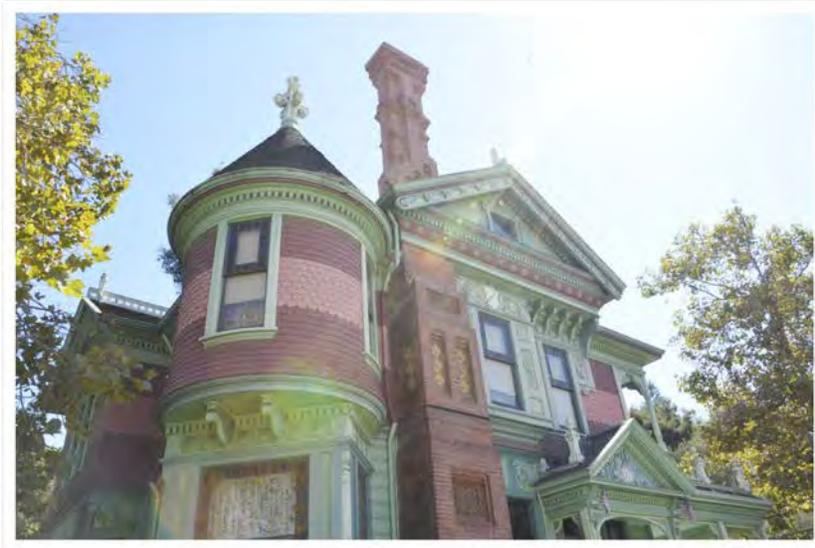
Hale House and me (2011)

In 1887, a general contractor and real estate developer, by the name of George Washington Morgan, built what would later be James and Bessie Hale's house in the Highland Park area of Los Angeles. Morgan incorporated the Victorian exterior and interior design styles

of the time, namely Queen Anne and Eastlake styles, that had made their way to the West Coast from the East Coast. The exterior, facade and trims are well balanced and impressive. The interior is cozy yet stylish with abundant cedar wood and 11 foot ceilings. With its roughly \$2000 construction cost price tag, Morgan created a large family home and kept costs down by using the factory made finishings of the time. Hale House is a perfect example of an upper middle class Victorian era home. There were various owners of Hale House, and it even changed addresses in 1904, when Archibald Douglas moved it across Pasadena Avenue, so he could use the land for other purposes. Then, in 1906, James and Bessie Hale moved in however, their marriage did not last long, so James moved out and Bessie stayed until her death in 1960. A modern Victorian woman living in her two-story, modern Victorian home.

The exterior of Hale House is delicious. Mint green paint, mauve and pink trim and scalloped fish-scale shingles, make the two story, plus attic, house look like a decadent cupcake. The robust brick chimneys bring a masculine edge and the stained glass windows beckon you inside. The front door itself has large panels of textured, red glass and all of the windows have block, tile borders made from blue, yellow, red and green glass. The exterior color palette of Hale House is a wonderful example of the abundant use of color in Victorian design. The Victorian peoples' love for color showcases the optimistic nature of the period. Being around bright colors seems to make people inherently optimistic and stimulated, just think of the modern design applications of color in babies' rooms. The more pastel hues of Hale House, do not conjure a childlike tone, on the contrary, Hale House looks composed and elegant. The stained glass is an example of the revival themes in Victorian design as it was influenced by Greek, Italian and even Renaissance themes (Clark, *The Era of Victorian Architecture*, FredBecker.org). The Dentil moldings running under the rooflines of the second story, turret and front porch is a style

first seen on the ancient tomb of Darius, c. 500 BC (*Dentil*, Wikipedia.org). Multiple historical styles inspired Victorian design and subsequently George Washington Morgan in his design and construction of Hale House.



Exterior Hale House



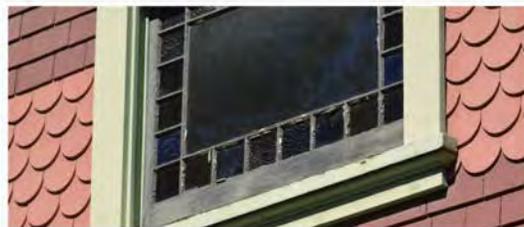
Wood Carving



Colored/Stained Glass



Dentil Molding



Fishscale Shingles

Even though there may be some revival details in the exterior design of Hale House, it is predominantly Queen Anne and Eastlake in style. Queen Anne was the most “...varied, and

decoratively rich architectural style...Queen Anne's were fairly original because they didn't incorporate historical architecture in their design.” (Clark, *The Era of Victorian Architecture*, FredBecker.org). Hale House is certainly original and rich with exterior and interior details. The varied roofline, elaborate chimneys, balcony, porch, turret and asymmetry of Hale House are all indicative of the Queen Anne style, while the bay window and interior finishings are characteristically Eastlake. The pride Morgan had in Hale House and his country is evident in the ornamental crest with his initials over a second story window and the stars and stripes painted crest over the front entrance. The carved wood panels that flank the windows on the exterior are ornate with scrolls and leaves. If hand done, wood carvings like these would have been unattainable by Morgan and his budget for Hale House. However, with the Industrial Revolution, carved wood building supplies could be mass produced and affordable for the middle class. Victorian design celebrated the machine age with its copious use of machine-made supplies and Hale House demonstrates this magnificently.



Front Porch



Stars and Stripes and Wood Carving Details



George W. Morgan's Initials

Upon passing through the red glass paneled front doors of Hale House, you find yourself in the entrance parlor. Guests would have been asked to wait in the entrance parlor while the owner of the house was notified of their presence. There is a small sink just off of the entrance parlor where the guests would be politely encouraged to wash off the dirt from traveling. The entrance parlor of Hale House has a beautiful fireplace with a carved, cedar wood mantle and surround. The staircase leading to the second floor creates a half wall and the visitors parlor is right off to the left with pocket doors that may be shut in order to prep the room for company. Characteristic of many Victorian homes and indicative of societal norms, the visitors parlor is in the front of the house, as this was the only room most people, outside the immediate family, would ever see. Pocket doors also separate the family parlor, which is right off of the visitors parlor. When opened, the pocket doors store within the wall, and the carved wood columns between the rooms act as an architectural delineation of what becomes a more open space of the two connected parlors. But those doors would have never been opened when Bessie had company, she would have received her guests in the visitors parlor where they would politely drink tea at the table in the center of the room and warm themselves by the fireplace. The Victorian era people protected their privacy. To them the functions of the home and family were not meant to be perceived by the public or guests. It was a time of "...high morals, modesty and proper decorum, as inspired by the Queen (Victoria) and her husband, Prince Albert." (*The Victorian Era*, ErasOfElegance.com). Although Bessie was upper middle class, she would have exhibited the manners and etiquette characteristic of royalty.

The interior design details of Hale House are exuberant. No detail is overlooked down to the hinges on each of the doors which, feature metal etchings of leaves and scrolls. The ceilings are 11 feet high and the dining room, off of the family parlor, features 1 foot baseboard moldings

of solid wood. The walls are decorated with a variety of wall coverings. There is ornate wallpaper in every room and the dining room boasts a wainscoting of Lincrusta below the chair-rail. Lincrusta is a stamped linoleum, created in 1877 (*The History of Lincrusta*, Lincrusta.com), and made the embossed leather look, found in more opulent homes, affordable for the middle class. Lincrusta is also used in the entrance parlor of Hale House in accent panels along the stairway, mantle and front door. Charles Locke Eastlake (1836 - 1906) was a British architect, furniture designer and arbiter of taste (*Charles Eastlake*, Wikipedia.org). Eastlake was so influential, a design style was named after him and Hale House has details such as the Lincrusta of which Eastlake was partial.



Carved Wood Mantle



Lincrusta Wainscoting



Victorian Wallpaper



Victorian Hinges



Interior Hale House

In all of the interior rooms of Hale House there are picture rail moldings, which were customary of Victorian design. In order to hang artwork, hooks were mounted to the picture rail and art was suspended on rope or ribbon. These picture rails served both aesthetic form as well as function, since the walls were made out of lath and plaster, a building process used mainly in the US until the 1950's (*Lath and Plaster*, Wikipedia.org). The lath and plaster could not withstand the weight of a wall hanging so the picture rails were secured to the studs, at doorway height, on each wall. Above the chair rail in each room in Hale House is another decorative wallpaper border and then finally crown molding is the icing on the cake before the ceiling.



Ceiling Medallions

Electric and Gas Lighting

Of course, the ceilings could not be left without detail in Victorian interior design. The dining room ceiling in Hale House has a very unique wallpaper with a cosmic pattern of

constellation connect-the-dots and starbursts, which are oddly very reminiscent of mid-century modern décor. As highlighted previously, the Victorian era was one of appreciation of the old (revival) and the new (Industrial age) as well as celebrating form and function. The ceiling medallions of Hale House are beautiful ornaments as well as statements of function, as they were used to protect the ceilings from the soot of the gas lamps beneath. Most of the light fixtures in Hale House are both electric and gas. This was customary of Victorian design because electricity was still a new utility and therefore, was unreliable. Thus, when the electricity went out, they resorted to the reliable, albeit sooty, gas lamps.

Hale House is a tangible example of Victorian culture. Form, function and elegant-excess characterize this period of design. Victorian people dressed their houses like they dressed themselves; layered, frilly, and elaborate. It was a time to indulge in the fruits of the industrial revolution, to enjoy good health that modern medicine was affording and to have the leisure time to be meticulously social. The exterior design of one's house displayed your cultural prowess and the interior, compartmentalized your life for privacy and hosting purposes. Bessie Hale lived a long life in Hale House, never changing it from its Victorian style to fit the changing trends. It was a design and lifestyle that suited her, and her era, beautifully.



Me and my docent Natalie Meyer on the grounds of Heritage Square

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All other facts and information were noted by me via my docent Natalie Meyer during my guided tour on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011.

### Images:

All exterior images of Hale House were taken by me on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011.

No interior photos were allowed so interior photos featured are via the internet through Google images. Web. 2 Oct. 2011



Me and my docent Natalie Meyer in front of Perry House