

Heritage Square Audio Tour: The Rosson House

The Rosson House was built in 1895 and is a Victorian-Era Queen Anne style home. The Queen Anne style is very decorative and dynamic. Homes built in this style had asymmetrical facades, wide porches that wrapped around the exterior, and a pitched, irregular roof. The house also has elements of the Eastlake Style, which emphasized more geometric characteristics - the ironwork along the roof; the wooden, table leg-like spindles; and the scrolling corner details inside triangular gables are hallmarks of that style. Possibly built according to Design No. 1 from the book of house plans by architect George F. Barber, the Rosson's hired well-known architect Alexander Petit to customize it to their needs.

It took 6 months and cost Roland and Flora Rosson \$7500 to have this house built, upgrading from the smaller, adobe home that they lived in on Block 14 for the previous 13 years. The Rosson's took advantage of the advancements made with railroad access and ordered pieces of their home from mail-order catalogs including beautiful inlaid parquet floors, windows, hardware, and a grand staircase. It also was incredibly state-of-the-art for the time period, and featured electricity, hot and cold running water, an indoor bathroom, and a telephone!

Over the years, the home has been owned by 4 different families- the Rosson's, the Goldberg's, the Higley's, and then the Gammel's. By the 1940's, the house had transformed into a rooming house and remained that way for 30 years.

Fast-forwarding to the 1970s, the home had been added to, subdivided, and was very run-down and surrounded by a rapidly modernizing downtown Phoenix; the city was in the midst of a massive redevelopment craze, with many older buildings meeting an end to make way for newer developments and parking lots. In fact, the Rosson House was meant to be knocked down to make room for parking for the emerging convention center.

Thankfully those plans did not come to fruition, due in large part to former Mayor of Phoenix John Driggs and a national focus on historic preservation leading up to the 1976 American Bicentennial. Driggs felt that the house should be restored and given back to the community as a museum of turn-of-the-century Phoenix, and that Block 14 and the other buildings should be preserved, as well. Through his passion for this project and his advocacy, the House and the Square weren't demolished, but instead preserved and transformed.

The Rosson House is on the National Register of Historic Places, and has been a museum since 1980 - longer than any single family lived there. It is now a destination in Downtown Phoenix, a tangible connection to the past in a city where fewer historic buildings survive year after year.