

Owners of historic Seven Oaks Receive Griffin Award

When Robert and Caroline Rodier purchased the Seven Oaks, next to their home, in May of 2014, their main concern was to protect the West Asheville house. Since then, they have thoroughly rehabbed the property, retaining significant, character-defining features, vacated the boundary line between it and their house next door, converted Seven Oaks to a bed and breakfast (www.innonwestwood.com), and received a preservation award for their efforts.

Constructed circa 1875, Seven Oaks is significant in the architectural history of Asheville because of its transitional character. It represents fully neither the earlier nor later expressions of Italianate architecture in Asheville. The building's overall form, exterior brickwork, segmental-arched windows, and original detached kitchen are elements comparable to the extant dwellings of the 1840s through the 1860s, but its unusual three-room plan is not found in these earlier houses, or indeed, in the later Italianate houses, with their irregular plans. The scale and flair of the interior woodwork and ornament relate more closely to local expressions of the Italianate architecture dating from the 1880s in Asheville. Furthermore, it is one of only a handful of extant buildings that date to the pre-railroad era of Asheville's development. As the city's population increased, newer buildings replaced the numerous structures that represented earlier periods of growth. Seven Oaks is a rare surviving example of this period of the city's evolution.

The dwelling's earliest history has yet to be unraveled, but documentary evidence suggests that it was built in the 1870s by prominent West Asheville businessman James Love Henry, who owned the 150-acre property from 1869 to 1883. The property was then transferred several times until it was acquired by traveling salesman Walter Bennett in 1940. The Bennett family improved the house according to then-popular interior decorating trends that favored the Colonial Revival style. Over time, the large property, which encompassed much of West Asheville and extended all the way to the French Broad River, was gradually subdivided, leaving the 1.35-acre parcel with the house.

Ultimately vacant, Seven Oaks fell into disrepair and gradually deteriorated through the turn of the twenty-first century. Windows were broken out by vandals, squatters repeatedly broke into the house, and the building materials gradually failed. The building lacked systems, the dining room ceiling collapsed, and finishes aged dramatically. The building was condemned as unsafe by the local building inspector in 2013.

Having watched the decline of Seven Oaks from next door, Robert and Caroline Rodier acquired the property and quickly stabilized the structure, hiring general contractor Joe Curro for the rehabilitation work. The interior layout of the earliest portion of the building was retained, historic materials were repaired rather than replaced, and all new systems were installed. Two kitchens and baths were completely updated and sympathetic porches added to the rear elevation, while the front porch and more highly visible elevations were preserved. For this work, the Preservation Society of Asheville and Buncombe County awarded the Rodiers a Griffin Award in the category of rehabilitation. Their National Register nomination, prepared by consultant Clay Griffith, is pending approval by the National Park Service.

Seven Oaks, 2013 (pre-rehab)





Seven Oaks, 2015, post-rehab



