

# A History of the Bascom House

This picturesque red brick house was built in 1879 by former Confederate Colonel Thomas William Bouldin Crews. The two-story modified Italianate-Victorian home was a center of one of the five working farms purchased by the Missouri Botanical Garden in 1925. The Crews farm comprised 320 of the original 1300 acres acquired by MBG.



The farm originally belonged to Colonel Crews' father-in-law, Cuthbert S. Jeffries. Crews moved his family to the property in 1862, after he was paroled as a prisoner during the Civil War. The family moved into a utilitarian one-story frame farm house that stood on a limestone foundation at the rear of the brick house, where a two-story semi-attached frame structure is located today.

Although four of the Crews' eight children were born in the old frame house, it was always considered a temporary residence. Colonel Crews purchased the farm from Mr. Jeffries in 1874. By then it had become a prosperous mid-sized farm. Crews was able to prosper even during the hard years when other farms failed, as his law practice provided extra financial security.



By 1879, Crews was financially able to afford a new home. Good building material, quality hand made brick, plus skilled carpenters and brick masons were all readily available. The old farm house remained until the gracious brick home was completed. The old house was then

torn down to the foundation and replaced with the semi-attached two-story frame structure you see today. The new frame structure housed the kitchen, with servant quarters above. Today it has a public restrooms and a kitchen on the lower level, with office space above.

Both the upper and lower stories of the brick house have 12 foot ceilings. High ceilings, open transoms above the doors, and tall open windows allowed rising heat to escape. Arched double sashed windows, each with four large panes of glass, could easily be opened at the top. Most of the window panes are original and can be identified by their distorted glass. The house has two bay windows. One is located at the front of the

house, west of the projecting front porch, and the other is on the east side, gracing the room that was used for dining. Excellent wood-working craftsmanship is apparent in the paneled doors, arched windows, and decorative trim, all made of white pine. Fir was used for the floors and walnut for the elaborate stairway.

The house has two elegant hand-carved Italian marble fireplaces, one in the northeast room used as a library by the Crews family, the second one in the back parlor. A wide central hall runs from front to back on both floors. Open hallway doors can take advantage of the prevailing north/south winds. The second floor hallway has openings onto the porch roofs, allowing additional breezes through the house. The porch roofs are highlighted by ornamental railings. Terne metal and copper were the materials of choice for the roofs and gutters. On both floors, the hallways are flanked by two spacious rooms on each side. The original plastered ceilings and walls can be seen on the lower level.



On the west exterior are large twin chimneys reflecting skillful, imaginative brickwork. Each has a bricked-in port hole showing Jeffersonian influence. Wood fires were used for heating and cooking. There were eleven places in the house where fires could be made in fireplaces or in wood burning or coal stoves. The breezeway between the kitchen and dining room kept cooking heat away from the main house during warm months. Shutters were used for window glass protection during storms and for shade from the hot sun. Each room could be closed off to hold heat in the winter.

The house was very modern for its time. It had a bathroom on each floor equipped with huge built-in zinc lined wooden bathtubs. An outhouse was used but the house did have gravity-fed running water. A holding tank was located in the second level over the breezeway. Water could be pumped by hand into the tank from a cistern below. The water was then gravity-fed through pipes to the upstairs bathtub and the wash basins that were situated in some of the bedrooms. The home originally had carbide gas lights.





After Colonel Crews' death in 1891, his wife Virginia Charlotte Jeffreis Crews moved to the nearby town of Pacific. The farm was sold to close friends, Elizabeth and Joseph W. North. The Norths kept the farm until 1918, at which time it was sold to Gustav and Lulu Goedeke. In 1925 it was purchased by the Missouri Botanical Garden.

The home was used for staff housing and storage until the recent restoration. Careful consideration was taken during the restoration to see that environmentally friendly materials were used. The lumber was salvaged from old St. Louis buildings that had been torn down. Extra insulation, made from recycled newspaper, was used wherever possible to conserve energy. The wood graining material was made from stale beer and ground earth colors. Replacement hardware for the doors and windows was

cast from recycled metals. The new geothermal heating and cooling system is one of the most energy-efficient systems available today.

Now known as the Bascom House in memory of a trustee of the Missouri Botanical Garden, the newly restored house opened to the public on April 5, 1996. The second floor is used for offices and a conference room. The ground floor houses the "People of the Land", a permanent exhibit, which chronicles human land use in the lower Meramec Valley. Designed to maintain the integrity of the historic old home, the exhibit was made possible through a joint effort between the Missouri Botanical Garden and the Missouri Department of Conservation.