

GRAYSTONE MANSION

The architecture and its size of Graystone Mansion reflect the development of the company, the community, and the family position. The house was built by Abram Francis Huston following his marriage to Alice Calley in 1889. The house is built of gray stone, thus the name.

The house was designed by the prominent Philadelphia architectural firm of Cope & Stewardson, who became known in the late 19th and early 20th centuries for the development of the American Collegiate Gothic Style of architecture. They specialized in scholastic buildings. They designed buildings for Bryn Mawr, Haverford, the University of Pennsylvania, Princeton University, and Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri.

One major reason this building has national landmark status is that it can be definitely identified as an example of the Collegiate Gothic style and a step in the development of the style for which the firm became famous.

The grounds here are rather extensive. Mr. Huston planted a wide variety of shrubbery and trees. Although most original plantings have died, you must notice this remarkable beech tree in front of the house. Feel free to walk in and look underneath the canopy. It is approximately 90 years old as determined by turn-of-the-century pictures that show no tree or a tree in its early stage. The way you see it is the way they grow, with the limbs growing down in this great gnarled fashion to the ground. They are very sensitive trees when their root system is very close to the ground. This is a superior example of this particular type of tree. The Society hopes, in time, to bring the grounds back to some semblance of their late 19th century beauty with the new plantings.

You will see an architecturally grand house with great potential in need of restoration. It has not been a residence for more than half a century.

Mr. and Mrs. Huston had three daughters; following Mr. Huston's death in 1930, his widow subsequently sold the property to the city of Coatesville. The building re-opened in 1939 as Coatesville's city hall, serving as a municipal office building for 52 years until 1992, at which time the city built a new facility.

The building was unoccupied for a few years until acquired by the Graystone Society from the city in 1995.

The Society uses the building for civic functions, public tours and social functions. The second floor houses much material for the proposed iron and steel museum, which is being planned by the Graystone Society. It is in dire need of restoration, and funds are being sought for this by the Society.



GRAYSTONE LIBRARY

Welcome to Graystone's library. We kept one door pulled out so you might see a particular feature of this house. There are two sets of pocket doors that slide back into the wall. This set leads to the library. The second set is between the Great Hall and the music room. Note the linen-fold design, which is common throughout the house, with the shield as well as the fact that the wood on either side of the door is different. The wood on the hall side is oak, to match the hall, and on the room side it is mahogany to match this room. These have, happily, survived and are in working condition.

This is the sitting room, or library. It functioned in both capacities. The woodwork, which is either chestnut or a form of mahogany (yet to be determined), is especially handsome. In this room are some of the most beautiful woodworking details of the house.

Note the handsome bookcase with the leaded glass windows. Remarkably, this survived over 50 years of office use and remained intact.

Also observe the mantelpiece on the opposite side of the room. Note the carved angels above the mantle. Pay special attention to carved shell detail. The shell pattern is repeated on both sides of the mantelpiece. Look more closely and you will find one carving is of outside shell detail and the other is of inside detail. Note also the mosaic tile fireplace surrounds and hearth with Aladdin's Lamp and a swirl of smoke worked into it.

The windows here provide a great deal of light. They are all still equipped with their handsome shutters. Victorian houses often appear dark and dreary inside because dark wood was in high fashion in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. On the other hand, this house is quite light and airy when all the windows are opened up. Despite the size of the house, there is relatively little open wall space because of the number of windows and doorways. Please follow your guide into the dining room.

The picture over this bookcase is titled "Seascape" and was left in the building when it became City Hall. It was found in bad condition and stored away in the attic. It was restored some years ago and it is now on display here. The artist, Alexander Charles Stuart, specialized in marine paintings, both seascapes and ships.

The furniture and the other paintings in this room were acquired by The Graystone Society to fit the period in which the house was built.

The Society is presently working on restoring the outside porch to the house which exited from this room. Hence the unfinished door in the far corner of the room.



Circa 1920

GRAYSTONE DINING ROOM

This is an amply proportioned dining room, with the large bay on the east side, and is a very bright room especially in the morning.

The dining room was used as an office for the city of Coatesville Treasury Department. The city removed the large window on the south side of the room which looked out onto a large porch and installed a walk in safe for their vital records. The Graystone Society has removed the safe, restored the windows, and is in the process of restoring the porch. The frame for the original window and shutters were in use in the kitchen and were used in the restoration. This is an amply proportioned dining room, with the large bay on the east side, and is a bright, bright room, especially in the morning.

The fireplace tiles are original. A number of people have suggested they are of modern design almost art deco. However, the Graystone Society has a photograph of the house, confirming that these tiles are original. Again, note the carved shell. It must have been a favorite pattern of either the Hustons or the decorator. The doors have a linen-fold pattern with a shield that is repeated in various places through the house.

The wainscoting and other woodwork are oak. The sideboard is a remarkable piece with leaded glass, which, to the credit of the city employees who worked here, has survived intact. This is original.

These walls would have been covered with either wallpaper or damask. You can also see on the wall where there was a picture rail.

A serious water leakage problem from a small roof over the rear bay has damaged plaster in this room.

The house was originally designed and built to feature an open veranda porch which was in this corner between the dining room and sitting room. It must have been very handsome. The large double window with folding shutters overlooked the porch. Originally, shutters were located in the pantry/kitchen. In addition, a door from the library opened onto the porch.

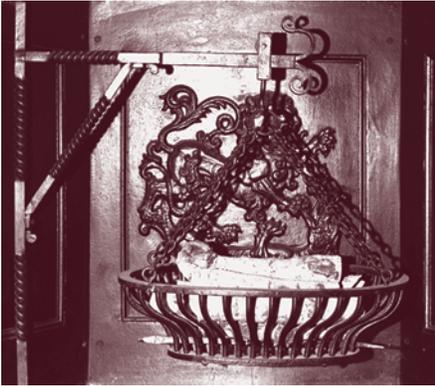
When this building became a municipal office building, the city tore down the porch and replaced it with a massive stone walk-in vault for records and storage. A good job was done of matching the stone with the original, but the vault destroyed the grace of the original building. The safe door from this room was removed by the city. Restoration of the rear bay and reconstruction of the porch will be a major undertaking for Graystone. The dining room table is on loan from the Huston family.



Circa 1920

GRAYSTONE GREAT HALL

The Great Hall served as the formal living room and reception room. Whether they came as a family guest, to attend a city council meeting, or to pay a water bill, this is the room everyone remembers. The woodwork is all oak. Note the high wainscoting and the magnificent mantelpiece which again features the linen folds with shields and the recurring shell pattern. Here, however, the carver did only inside shell detail.



The inscription is German and translates loosely as "Best West Home is Best". There is some dispute as to whether that is pure German or Pennsylvania Dutch.

Many people admire this fire basket. These are not often seen. Whether logs were actually burned in it, we don't know. We assume they were. The fire back is rather handsome, also.

Note the magnificent beam ceiling. This is all original. Graystone is enormously grateful that none of this woodwork was painted. The wood is in remarkably good condition and only needs a good cleaning.

The light fixtures are the original gas and electric fixtures. The house was built in 1880. Electricity was still not considered consistently reliable. To be on the safe side, fixtures were installed to accommodate electric and gas illumination. The gas jets point up and the light bulbs hang down. The same is true of the sconces in this room. These are still here, happily, as when the house was built over 100 years ago.

The staircase is a work of art in itself. Note the angles, the seats and the banisters, as well as the charming bookcase. It is of the same style as the bookcase in the room on the other side.

On the wall to your left is a portrait of A. J. Huston, the oldest son of Dr. Charles and Isabella Huston, who built this house. The portrait was done by Philadelphia artist, Miles Raddit. Mr. Huston had two copies made so that each of his three daughters would have a copy. Today one copy is in the lobby of the Lukens Executive Office building and family members have the third.

You will also note the Huston family Coat of Arms which is on the wall to your right as you enter Graystone from the front door.



Circa 1920

GRAYSTONE MUSIC ROOM

This pleasant sitting room was referred to by the family as the music room. It is the only room that has an elaborate plaster ceiling. All the rest of the ceilings, except in the Great Hall, are plain flat plaster. This ceiling is of acobean design. It is in rather good shape.

We also call your attention to the flanking sideboards and handsome fireplace. Again, mosaics were used for the fireplace surrounds and for the hearth. Note the attractive cast iron fire-back depicting a man with rabbits. The round circular items were part of a clean-out device. Lift the circular caps, and the ashes would fall into basement ash pits, which are still there.

The woodwork here is a little curious. This room was painted, but we don't know when. About twenty years ago, the city's mayor decided to remove the paint. It was a good job of paint removal, but unfortunately the woodwork looks a little raw. More study and work will be required for a full restoration of this room. The floors in the main part of the house are all quartered oak and can be restored to original appearance with a minimum of sanding.



Circa 1920



The turn-of-the-century upright piano had belonged to Miss Ruth Huston, sister of Stewart Huston, and was donated to the Society by the Huston family. The small parlor set is cast-iron in style and was donated by a friend of the Graystone Society.

GRAYSTONE STAIR CASE

Walk slowly up the staircase and enjoy the beauty of this rather handsome work. Notice the repetition of the basic design in the shields and the angels carved into the corners of the staircase. The turned balusters are especially handsome.

The main feature is this great window with leaded glass design. It is intact for the most part. The light fixture is one of the few surviving original light fixtures found in the house.

The black residue is from carpet glue which will be cleaned up when Graystone takes on the task of returning the wood floors to their original beauty, which even now shows through a few spots.



Circa 1960



Circa 1920