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The
MELODRAMA
of
WOLHURST



Gay Colorado Show Place

by

CAROLINE BANCROFT

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Introducing the Author

Caroline Bancroft, grand-daughter of the founder of the Colorado Historical Society, has an enormous enthusiasm for her native state. She lives in Denver in the house she was born in and spends most of her



Jetay Photo

summers in the historic mining camp, Central City, where she owns an early-day brick house.

For twenty years, as a charter member of The Central City Opera House Association, she has published articles on the various aspects of the movement to turn that town into a summer festival spot. Even earlier, her historical features were appearing in *The Denver Post* through the encouragement of its owner, Frederick G. Bonfils.

In recent years she has been devoting her energies to what is colloquially known as a "Bancroft Booklet"—a popular presentation of a bit of Colorado history but backed by meticulous research.

Others in the series are "Silver Queen: The Fabulous Story of Baby Doe Tabor," "Historical Central City," "Famous Aspen" and "Mile High Denver."

Julie Riche Bennett,

Former Owner of Wolhurst

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THE MELODRAMA OF WOLHURST

Celebrated Colorado Show Place

by

CAROLINE BANCROFT

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Illustrated with Photographs
from
The Western History Collection
of
The Denver Public Library

◆ ◆ ◆

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EAST FACE OF WOLCOTT'S WOLHURST, 1902



When the ex-senator finished his last addition with its connecting octagonal tower, the building looked like this. The circular road coming from the left was intended to lead to the front entrance, but this method of approaching was almost never used. The northwest door, later knocked at by the Grand Jury, was preferred and is now replaced since the 1951 fire.

NEARLY THE SAME VIEW IN 1906

After the Thomas F. Walshes had finished with their alterations, including a carriage entrance at the right and a lily pool at the left, the east face looked like this. Walsh employed Harry Rhoads to take pictures of the newly acquired and recently re-built estate and was so pleased with the results that he sent the now veteran News photographer a case of rare champagne.



Prologue

"You lead too gay a life! That's the trouble with you—you ought to get out in the country more."

That was 1889 and Edward Oliver Wolcott, dashing blond giant and bachelor Beau Brummell of Denver, brilliant, moody and eloquent, pushed his full underlip out from beneath its draping moustache as he listened. With a pugnacious upthrust to his round soft chin, he queried:

"And leave my bottle and my poker games behind—not to mention the ladies?"

"Well now, Ed," Dr. F. J. Bancroft replied in a slow drawl familiar to most of the pioneer town, "you could take them with you. But a little fresh air and exercise would do you a world of good—get you over those black depressions."

"Maybe you're right."

Attorney Wolcott, soon to be Senator Wolcott, and the mammoth doctor had been associated for years through the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad, Wolcott as assistant, later general counsel and Bancroft as surgeon. They could talk frankly.

"Hop in my buggy and I'll show you some nice country beyond my farm—out south. There's good valley land on Bear Creek and along the Platte. You could get yourself a nice place."

FORMER OWNERS OF WOLHURST

EDWARD OLIVER WOLCOTT



1890-1905

As a bachelor-senator in 1890

THOMAS FRANCIS WALSH



1906-1910

Entertaining a president, 1909

HORACE WILSON BENNETT



1910-1941

In the year he bought Wolhurst

OVA ELIJAH STEPHENS



1944-1946

The police liked this picture

Act 1

(1890-1905)

Following the inception of Colorado's frequently headlined show place, Wolhurst, very soon the stage was set for bizarre and long-continuing melodrama whose final chapters are yet to be written. Wolcott, fired with the idea of a country residence, found a large grove of cottonwood trees lying along the Platte, three miles south of Littleton and fourteen miles from Denver, on a plot of two hundred acres that had been homesteaded by Jesse Eszlack in 1859. Because of the great-girthed trees, he bought the land and later added an adjoining three hundred acres so that the estate lay in the two counties of Douglas and Arapahoe.

Wolcott loved trees and wanted more. After some delay, since he was sent to Washington shortly afterwards on the first of two six-year terms as senator, he had artesian wells dug for a seventeen-acre lake (about a mile in circumference) and started in to have landscaping done. A spruce and poplar lined driveway from the entrance gate was begun. But the trees thrived so that this lane had to be altered in a few years to a footpath and another entry way constructed. Twelve hundred trees were transplanted for beautification, one of every variety indigenous to Colorado. These included some exceptionally fine blue spruce trees at fifty dollars apiece from the lawn of the old H. A. W. Tabor residence at 17th and Lincoln Streets. Lombardy poplars lined the highway while shrubbery and flowering plants were gathered for the whole estate from near and far, some from as great a distance as Japan.

He also imported swans for the lake and four dozen Mongolian, or Chinese, pheasants to stroll beneath the trees where their gay plumage might glisten in the Colorado sunshine. Through the years the pheasants prospered and multiplied so that now their descendants are found the length of the South Platte valley.

Soon the magnetic senator was not alone in executing plans for his country place. For a number of years previous to this, his name had been linked with the wife of his associate, Lyman K. Bass, general

counsel of the D.&R.G. railroad, who died in 1889. The Besses had lived in Colorado Springs, and the three friends frequently traveled together. A trans-continental trip and another to Cuba were described in "Heritage of Years," the memoirs which the lady in question wrote in 1932 after her eightieth birthday.

"Mr. Wolcott was of boundless energy and always got what he wanted when he wanted it," she recalled.

In 1890 the forty-seven-year-old bachelor wanted to marry the tall, handsome Mrs. Bass, who was then thirty-nine. He achieved his wish that May at an elaborate society wedding in Buffalo, New York, where her family, the Metcalfes, were among the wealthiest residents. Afterwards, the senator took his bride to Washington in a special car 'garlanded in roses, cherry blossoms and palms,' according to the *Denver Republican*, 'which gave the whole an air of a moving conservatory.'

By June of the next year, Mrs. Wolcott was superintending the building of a twelve-room summer home on the Platte Valley acreage. It had a small village of outlying stables, servant houses, and barns, duplicating the slab and leaded-window construction of the main house. This place, the first slab-sided version, was completed in 1891 and became the talk of Denver.

The senator wondered what to call his country estate and finally decided that since his own name meant Wol (or Will's) cot or cottage, he would choose Wol (or Will's) hurst. 'Hurst' means a grove or wood and, since trees were the distinguishing feature of the place, it was formally named Wolhurst.

A house-warming weekend party was held, the first of many during the '90s, when fashionable Denver houseguests were asked to meet in English country style from Fridays to Mondays, at such periods as the Wolcotts were in residence. The regulars of this group are shown in the accompanying photograph, which Miss Edith Thomas, daughter of the Charles S. Thomases, says was taken on the occasion of the house-warming.

As the '90s wore on, the Wolcotts felt the need for a more pretentious home, not just a summer cottage. The senator particularly wanted greater space to house his extensive library as he was a prodigious reader. He loved books so much that he kept a standing order for the best and latest at a Boston bookstore. Mrs. Wolcott was fond of entertaining in the grand manner, contrary to the senator, and wanted a more elaborate setting for large parties and special functions.

Always spectacular and profligate in his manner of doing things, Wolcott sent for Denver's society architect, Terry (Theodore) D. Boal, and took his friend abroad to study English country houses, commanding Boal to design a building similar to a half-timbered manor house of the

Tudor period. Wolcott had come far since those first bleak autumn months of 1871 in Blackhawk when he had taught school for a living and later eked out a meager existence as combination lawyer and editor in Georgetown.

On returning to Colorado, his dream house was remodelled along exactly drawn plans by Boal (also architect for the J. B. Grants and Crawford Hills). Boal changed the main walls from slab to brick and used the old structure as the core of extensive additions. But Wolcott had insisted no tree should be chopped down. Consequently, the building was like a half-moon whose kitchen extension was at a right angle so as to avoid one of the great cottonwoods.

The new building comprised thirty rooms. On its first floor, in addition to the culinary wing, was Senator Wolcott's library, sixty feet long, a great fireplace and a carved mantel dominating one end. His study was prominently adjoined by a billiard room and next was a combination living and dining room that could be divided by curtains, and off of which were two enclosed porches, one serving as a breakfast room.

Ornate, heavy mahogany furniture and overstuffed chairs were used throughout the rooms. The walls were hung with paintings gathered by the Wolcotts on their European travels, notable examples of the French impressionists and English reproductions from the Tate Gallery in London. They also collected medallions and bas reliefs in Italy and Spain for wall decorations and, at the *Maison Blanc* in Paris, had their rich, damask linen embroidered with the Wolcott bull's head crest, coat-of-arms and motto.

ARTIFICIAL LAKE AND BOAT HOUSE

The rectangular designed slab-sided construction, illustrated here, was used in all the early buildings and may still be seen on a tour of the grounds.



The senator's niece, Mrs. Francis E. Bouck of Denver, later inherited these furnishings and was kind enough to show all that she has kept to the writer. For the beholder, the embroidered over-size napkins particularly evoked the grandeur of those lost days; but their accompanying enormous banquet cloths, Mrs. Bouck no longer owns. She gave them to the armed forces' reception room at the Union Station during the war. There they still are, dyed, and made into wall draperies.

Both the Wolcotts had been accounted extremely well-off. Then during the early '90s, two mines in which the senator had invested, the Little Annie at Aspen and the Last Chance at Creede, poured forth silver until his fortune amounted to twelve million dollars. After the Silver Panic of 1893 he turned to Wall Street for a variety of ballooning investments.

In addition to fashionable Denverites, the Wolhurst guest lists included many celebrated persons from afar. Moreton Frewen, Lord Dunraven's rich English friend who was a cattle baron on a 100,000-acre Wyoming ranch in the '80s and in the twentieth century became an M.P. and wrote a book, "Moreton Mowbray and Other Memories," was one of these. The Grand Duke Michael—that Grand Duke Michael whom his first cousin, Czar Alexander III, had exiled to England in 1891 because of hismorganatic marriage—spent the day there with Terry Boal when the Wolcotts were away. The two men ate a simple country meal in the foreman's stone house (now Blakeland) served by his wife, Mrs. Matt Plews, and did a little shooting, surreptitiously, since the senator did not permit the killing of birds or game on Wolhurst lands. One old-timer recalls that the nobleman returned delighted with what he thought was a prize bag. It proved to be a domestic pussy cat.

In general, entertaining at Wolhurst was in the English country style—informal and casual by day followed by formal dinner at night. Then the houseguests assembled from their various individual pursuits and conversation during the meal was sprightly and diverse, led by the wit and wide knowledge of their host.

Wolhurst's most elaborate occasion under the Wolcott regime was the fete given August 27, 1898, as a benefit for the soldiers of the Spanish American war. (It was written up with a whole page of pictures in *Harpers Weekly* for September 17 of that year.) Mrs. Wolcott felt very deeply about the Cuban trouble as her only child, Lyman K. Bass, Jr., now twenty-four years old, was being sent to Cuba where he later served as well as in Puerto Rico. Some ten thousand people attended the prodigious fete. These crowds were transported from Denver on trains running at fifteen minute intervals all afternoon and evening.

The grounds were decorated with flags, banners, Chinese lanterns, and innumerable festooned tents and elaborate booths (one candy booth being in the shape of the U.S.S. "Colorado"). The coach house was turned



WOLCOTT'S SUN ROOM AND POLITICAL HALL

The furniture in this picture belonged to Mrs. Walsh and was later used by the Bennetts; but the architecture and style were the senator's own.

into a theatre; the barns into restaurants where French chefs served Parisian dishes. A dancing pavilion was added. Several orchestras played while a band of Robin Hood robbers stole purses from people who were not generous enough in their buying.

Vaudeville acts of trained animals, boat rides on the \$12,000 lake, fortune telling, a horse race, a tub race, and a minstrel show directed by Mrs. Elitch and T. D. Long, enlivened the intervals between purchases. The great spectacle of the afternoon took place on a mock battlefield where the 15th regular infantry, stationed in Denver, routed a much larger force of imitation Spaniards. In all, \$9,000 was made while the cost, defrayed by the Wolcotts, was said to be \$10,000. The senator and his wife, although assisted by a committee of friends who were listed in an elaborate brochure, were responsible for the main organization. During the day they strolled about in order to supervise, the senator's portly form bowing graciously, from time to time, to his political constituents.

But the outward happy picture of Senator and Mrs. Wolcott as the grand seigniors of the manorial Wolhurst was a pretense. Mrs. Wolcott liked poker but did not like politics. Neither did she care for the senator's excessive drinking nor his wandering eye and for seven years their intimate



"SILVER-TONGUED ED'S" BALCONY

Today, where the couch was, there is a horseshoe-shaped bar but the balcony is just the same, having survived a bizarre half-century undamaged.

marital life had been a stormy affair. While the seeming emphasis of life at Wolhurst had been on tea and crumpets, there had also been rum and strumpets. By March of the next year, 1899, while the eloquent senator was being seen in the company of another woman in Washington, Mrs. Wolcott was to be found at the Brown Palace Hotel in Denver, giving out indignant interviews and daily removing her personal belongings from Wolhurst.

She took up residence in Colorado Springs soon after while the senator continued to occupy their Washington residence on Connecticut Avenue. The following year on March 5, 1900, the couple were divorced, Mrs. Wolcott received \$7,500 annual alimony. The other lady, Daisy Gordon, changed her mind and married Dan R. Hanna, son of Senator Mark Hanna, before Wolcott's final decree was granted.

For the next six years the great place frequently stood lonely and uninhabited except for caretakers or occasional visits when the senator returned to Colorado to take part in a political campaign or to entertain some notable.

The first of these visits was in September, 1900. Wolcott headed the Colorado Republican delegation which went by special train to Cheyenne to meet Theodore Roosevelt, candidate for vice-president (an office for which Senator Wolcott, himself, because of his silver-tongued oratory had been seriously considered). The delegation planned to escort "T.R." to Denver. In the senator's private car were also his houseguests,

Senator and Mrs. Henry Cabot Lodge of Boston, who had been staying a week at Wolhurst and who had been entertained a few days before with a large reception at the Brown Palace given by the Republican Ladies.

The next day, after a number of rear platform appearances and three political meetings in Denver where Roosevelt spoke, Wolcott's private car was detached, run out to Wolhurst and left on the senator's special D.&R.G. siding. Roosevelt's personal party spent the night at Wolhurst. No reception was held because of the exhausting day they had all had, but "T.R." was up at dawn, demanding a horse. Wolcott gave the colonel a spirited animal and offered to help him mount.

"Get out of here," was the laughing reply, according to the *Denver Times*, which added that "T.R." bounded into the saddle in regular plains style and was soon hitting the road at breakneck speed." Roosevelt returned just in time for breakfast and to catch the train, explaining to the reporters that he loved 'the sun in Colorado, the free mountain air and the snow-capped peaks.' After the senator's private car was again coupled on to the Roosevelt Special which had spent the night in Denver, the whole party, including Wolcott and the Lodges, chugged away from Wolhurst to Colorado Springs. A mountain tour followed and then the train went East by way of Pueblo.

In November of that year, the senator failed of re-election, the result of numerous factors—his arrogance, his drinking scandals and his siding with the gold-standard McKinley faction against the silver sentiment in Colorado. He was in Washington until his term finished, March, 1901, when he went directly abroad and did not return to Wolhurst until the following autumn. Back in Colorado, he decided he wanted to mend his political fences and he called on Terry Boal to build him a large hall at Wolhurst where he could gather together loyal Republican followers.

The plans for a handsome new room, in the manner of an English banquet hall, had already been projected for Mrs. Wolcott before the divorce. She had wanted a wing where she could have refreshment tables and chairs for garden parties and hold summer dances on moonlit evenings. She had called it a 'sun porch.' In its original conception, the hall was to have a musician's balcony and to be almost half glass so that its many windows could be thrown open to the out-of-doors. The senator looked over the old plans, ordered the dimensions of the fireplace at the opposite end from the balcony increased for better heating facilities, and told Boal to go ahead.

The sun room and its accompanying octagonal tower, built in 1901, are all that remain of the original building. Today, it is the Wolcott Bar, sometimes erroneously called the Cathedral Room or Chapel Bar. It had vaulting beams and a small balcony constructed of California redwood shining against a background of beige walls. When it was finished the



DINING-ROOM WING AND SUN ROOM

Looking northeast, this early view shows the top of the octagonal tower that survived the fire and the urn which still stands on the county line.

ex-senator held a stag houseparty at Wolhurst, and the sun room was the scene of a legendary three-day poker game. The players alternated in sleeping, drinking, eating and playing and from time to time, when alcoholic loquacity overcame him, Silver-Tongued Ed would ask to be dealt out in order to declaim from the balcony. But the poker game never ceased.

Distinguished visitors continued to come to Wolhurst. One of these occasions was in January, 1902, when Lord and Lady Algernon Gordon-Lennox arrived to spend a month. His lordship was the second son of the Duke of Richmond and Gordon and had been to Colorado before, in 1878, on a hunting trip. She was the tall, graceful "Best Dressed Woman of London." During their stay no large parties were staged, much to the lament of the society editors, but Wolcott gave a series of dinners when either his sister, Miss Anna Wolcott, or the French Mrs. Terry Boal or Mrs. A. A. Blow acted as hostess. The cost of these dinners was reputed to be seventy-five dollars a plate because of the vintage wines that were served. Wolcott also took his titled guests on a trip to the mountains in his private car, where they invested in some oil lands near De Beque.

Admiral Winfield Scott Schley, hero of the Battle of Santiago in the Spanish-American War, and later author of "Forty-Five Years under the Flag," was also received at Wolhurst about this time, according to a later account by Damon Runyon in the *Denver News* of 1909. But a contemporary record has not yet been found.

For the summer season of 1903 Wolcott rented a cottage at Newport where the Countess Minto and her daughter, Lady Elliott, visited him. Forgotten Wolhurst stood idle at home. That same year, Wolcott again failed of re-election and in dismay he went abroad for a year. He chose to stay at Carlsbad for a long period while he took the waters for his gout and soothed his melancholia, aggravated by the rancors and reverses in far-away Colorado.

Not until the autumn of 1904 did he come home. It was then, in October, that he paid his beloved country place a final visit. The once spectacular senator had continued to burn the candle at both ends and his former sparkling light was sputtering and gutted. He was increasingly unpopular and he shrank from the thought that the Denver press might again refer to him contemptuously as "Edward of Navarre" (the Navarre restaurant had a fast reputation in those days) or as "Baron of Wolhurst."

Very quietly he stole into Denver on his private car, accompanied by his brother, Henry R. Wolcott (who resided at the "Paddock," fashionable bachelors' apartment house at 1751 Glenarm) and by J. Boardman Harriman, Wall Street financier. Henry went to his own home, and the private car was switched to Wolhurst. Wolcott and Harriman planned to go on later to Salt Lake City to look over some mining interests. Harriman stayed several days at Wolhurst and was the last of Ed Wolcott's prominent houseguests.

After the ex-senator returned from Salt Lake City, he made one farewell political speech which showed some of his old eloquence and persuasive oratory. But he was blunt and caustic, and it was an ill-starred occasion for, besides adding to his enemies, he caught cold. Ill with bronchitis, he rented Wolhurst furnished to Mrs. William Cooke Daniels of the Daniels and Fisher Stores Co., and planned another extended trip to Europe with his brother, Henry, who was really the greatest love of his life. The brothers left Denver late in November and sailed from New York in January.

After some preliminary traveling, they settled down on the Riviera where the ex-senator sought health and surcease from his demons. There, at Monte Carlo, the last deed of the brilliant magnetic man who had said it cost him \$150,000 a year to live in Washington and who would bet at the drop of a hat, was to win \$30,000 at the Casino. The next afternoon he added a chill to his bronchitis. A few days later, on March 1, 1905, Wolcott died of pneumonia when he was not quite fifty-seven years old, dreaming, Henry later said, of the peaceful trees of Wolhurst.



Act 2

(1906-1910)

The magnificent estate was willed to his brother, Henry, and the furnishings to two sisters and a niece. It was vacant a year during the settling of the ex-senator's estate and was then bought in the spring of 1906 by another fabulous character, Thomas F. Walsh, who had made millions in the Camp Bird mine at Ouray. Walsh, a friendly Irishman, had already established himself in Washington, Paris and Newport as "Colorado's unofficial ambassador," having ingratiated himself with President McKinley, King Leopold of Belgium, and assorted Roosevelts, Biddles and Vanderbilts. Tom Walsh was tall, good-looking, hospitable, and oozed Irish charm, while his wife was ambitious and cultured.

The Walshes still loved the state of Colorado, from which they had been catapulted into the limelight, and wanted a summer home close to the scene of their extraordinary rise from a box car mounted on logs to a Washington mansion. They were familiar with Wolhurst since they had visited Senator Wolcott there and knew it to be admirably suited to their purposes. According to Thomas F. Dawson, they got a bargain at \$75,000 for property upon which Senator Wolcott had spent well over \$200,000. According to Evalyn Walsh McLean, they paid \$150,000 for the estate and planned to spend as much again in rebuilding Wolhurst.

Mrs. Walsh wanted the place even more ornate. She imported a New York decorator, and for a month in the spring of 1906, workmen labored inside and out. Senator Wolcott's library became a formal drawing room and the dining room took on an Italian phase with twenty-six hand-carved, walnut chairs upholstered in red cut-velvet, surrounding a long refectory table. Imported Della Robbias, a religious note, were added to the Italian and Spanish friezes hung on the walls and the English beamed ceiling was elaborated with a border of green colored glass, set in wreathing brass. A sumptuous servants' wing and several bedrooms were added to the main house.



THE LIBRARY BECAME A LIVING ROOM

A large number of the expensive furnishings used by Mrs. Walsh to redecorate Wolhurst are still there, notably the large handsome table shown above.

Outside, formal flower gardens were planted; peacocks were set to strut about the lawns and more swans to glide on the lake. A greenhouse was erected for year-round fresh cut flowers. The wooden conduits, used to carry water for the spacious grounds, were changed to concrete and sewer pipe. The two cozy little summer houses and the boat house, still with their slab sides of 1891, were refurbished and rotting timbers replaced. The lake was embellished by a new road encircling its mile circumference. Here, their madcap, nineteen-year-old daughter, Evalyn, could drive a Baker electric for health-building sunshine and recreation, since she was still recuperating from an automobile accident in Newport that had killed her brother, Vinson.

During her convalescence she had been given morphine to ease the pain in her injured back. Spoiled and wilful as she was, she developed into a "dope fiend" who secreted morphine powders around the house and bought laudanum by the quart. When her back did not mend properly, she had undergone a serious operation and the doctors undertook to heal both the injury and her drug habit. She arrived at Wolhurst, chastened briefly, but crying for liveliness.

Once again Wolhurst crackled with gaiety. Certain Republicans had intimated to Tom Walsh that the nomination for United States senator

WOLHURST



In 1891 Denver's high society crowd gathered for an opening houseparty.

Beneath the twig-embellished "Wolhurst," are Senator Wolcott and Miss Lillian Hurd with the dog of right, Miss Anna Wolcott and Henry E. Wolcott are fifth and sixth on the left. Mrs. Wolcott is in the middle, dressed in a white dress and small black hat. On the porch are J. R. P. Voorhies (who left \$140,000 for the Civic Center's Voorhies Memorial), Charles S. Thomas (later both governor and senator), Theodore Holland (father of Josiah), Ben Lawrence and Samuel N. Wood (whose niece married Charles Scottcher II). Mrs. Ruth Hurd Fraifer is standing third from right.



Thirty Republican 'powers' breakfasted with Secretary of War Taft in 1907.

Left to right are Frederick MacManis (sculptor of the Pioneer Monument at Colfax and Broadway), Franklin P. Knott, General Thomas, Lucius Culbert, Evelyn Walsh, Governor H. A. Buchtel (also chancellor of D. U.), John F. Vinton, Crawford Hill, Mrs. Thomas F. Walsh (the hostess), Lieut. Gov. E. E. Hooper, Taft, Mrs. Crawford Hill, A. M. Stevenson, a woman cousin, congressmen, legislators and their delightful host of far right. Two years later, as president, Taft was entertained again.

GATHERINGS



The trees made a scenic backdrop for a fashionable wedding in 1920.

When Gladys Bennett married Archibald MacNichol, the wedding party consisted of Eileen Ewing (Archibald), Dorothy Riche (Mrs. Francis O.) Phyllis Campbell (Bullock-Webster), Fredericks McKenney (Ropley), Marion Piggott, Ivar O'Connor (Morgan), Virginia Bennett (Vissman), Fredrick Bellamy (Lincoln), Elsie Adale Bailey (Moore), the bride, Marguerite Bennett Cobb, Ruth Loughridge, Helen MacNichol, Barbara Johnson (Folmer), Felice Davis and Laura MacNichol (La Forge) and in the back row, also left to right, Lindley Gayler, Montgomery Dursey, Lester Bridgman, Jack Garner, Churchill Owen, William Harris, Francis Riche, the groom, George MacNichol, Jr., Paul Loughridge, James Field, James Mulgrew (farse below) and William James. A number still live in Denver.



In 1946 the Grand Jury called at the northwest door of the main building.

After "the \$100,000 stick-up," both Arapahoe and Douglas Counties inquired into the gambling activities on the estate's premises and Douglas County instituted a long drawn-out probate.

from Colorado might come his way, and one of the first affairs the new owners gave was a luncheon to the leading Republicans of Arapahoe County. Evalyn was soon well enough for parties and dancing, not to mention startling provincial society by her harum-scarum behavior. She flirted outrageously with Bradish Johnson, gave a champagne picnic on Pikes Peak for Viscount Charles de Chambrun and kept Wolhurst vibrant with young people who stayed until the wee hours.

Years later in her book, "Father Struck It Rich," she wrote, "I was less in love with Wolhurst than Mother was."

That was probably because her heart was in the East with Ned McLean (Edward B.), son of the owner of *The Washington Post*, with whom she was in love and with whom she was repeatedly quarreling. Because of his moody indulgence in alcohol and jealous tantrums, their romance had many rifts. So Wolhurst teamed with other beaux.

Her father continued to pursue an elusive political career. The newspapers announced that "Uncle Joe" Cannon, Speaker of the House, would be a Wolhurst visitor in October, and Secretary of War William Howard Taft would arrive in November. But neither visit materialized. Tom and Mrs. Walsh did give houseparties at Wolhurst that season which judiciously mixed political and society names—former Governor and Mrs. Herick of Ohio with the P. Randolph Morris of Denver; Alan Arthur, son of former President Arthur, with Miss Lillian Hurd, perennial belle of the local scene whose beauty had won her the crown of Queen Thalia during the 1897 Festival of Mountain and Plain.

And Tom Walsh made political speeches in Denver, Ft. Collins and outlying towns. He advocated "establishing a new basis for compensating the masses left without an atom of ownership." He also demanded better roads for Colorado, to be made possible by federal aid. Such a position was considered wildly socialistic in 1906. When Walsh returned to Washington for the winter immediately after casting his ballot on election day in November, he knew the worst. The legislature met in January, 1907, and confirmed a pre-election agreement to award the senatorship to Simon Guggenheim, vice-president of the American Smelting and Refining Company, "a sound Republican."

The Walshes continued to love Colorado, and Walsh continued to hope for a turn of the political breeze. Their second season at Wolhurst was topped by a real feather in their cap. Secretary of War Taft did arrive. At six-thirty on the morning of August 27, Walsh's dashing yellow Fiat was at the Union Station in Denver to take the future president to Wolhurst for breakfast. Thirty of the most powerful Republican politicians and a spattering of Walsh friends were invited.

The breakfast, a stag affair, was held in the dining room which had been transformed for the occasion into a bower of flowers. Behind a screen trellised in blossoms, a gramophone played light operatic airs. When the



WOLHURST'S GAUDEST ROMANCE

In 1906 Evalyn Walsh was twenty when her picture was taken in Denver; two years later Ned McLean visited her and posed in Western garb.

breakfast was finished, the company was joined by the ladies, Mrs. Walsh, Evalyn, Mrs. Walsh's cousin from Chicago, Mrs. Krusemarck, and Evalyn's most intimate Denver friend, Mrs. Crawford Hill. The press was received and then, after the great visitor patted the puppy she was carrying, Evalyn showed him about the grounds while he was 'gallantly attentive.'

Later, Taft inspected Ft. Logan, was guest of honor at a luncheon and large reception at the Brown and had a private foursome dinner at the Denver Club with A. M. Stevenson, John F. Vivian and Walsh as host. Then Wolhurst's owner waved his friend off at the Union Station to proceed on a tour of Wyoming forts and sightseeing at Yellowstone.

The next year it was turn about. The Democratic politicians were feted at Wolhurst while they held their national convention in Denver in July. Walsh had already attended the Republican convention in Chicago as a Colorado delegate and enthusiastically thrown support to the nomination of William Howard Taft. But he had an equal number of friends among the Democrats and hospitably threw wide the gates of his home.

Alice Roosevelt Longworth and Nicholas Longworth came to luncheon, and an elaborate dinner was given for James A. Reed, dramatic prosecuting attorney and mayor of Kansas City (later senator from Missouri—1910-1929). The menu for this party was printed with

gold letters on fringed white satin and offered courses as elegant as Prunier's in Paris or Delmonico's in New York. The food was eaten from a forty-two piece dinner service that had cost \$500 a plate.

Wolhurst had one guest that summer who was much more exciting than any political friend. He was Evalyn's fiance, Ned McLean, who arrived for a month's stay and the formal announcement of their engagement. After having called, with Victorian correctness, upon Tom Walsh in Washington and promised to settle down to a serious view of life, he had been granted Evalyn's hand. On the Fourth of July a party of friends, including the Crawford Hills, were asked to Wolhurst, and their engagement was formally announced.

"We celebrated with champagne and firecrackers to the dismay of all the birds that Father's gentleness and no-shooting rules had induced to come there to roost," the owner of the Hope Diamond recalled. She added that in collecting material for her book she had found among her father's papers one bill for over \$700 just for birdseed.

"That seems to me a lot of birdseed!" was her comment.

Mrs. Walsh had hoped to have a stylish Washington wedding, a big society affair with attendant fanfare. But the young couple thought differently. Later that month, on the spur of the moment, they motored into Denver, were married at St. Mark's Church, had an impromptu wedding supper at Wolhurst and in the evening left for Colorado Springs and a week's honeymoon.

That was only the beginning. Their honeymoon spread, during a six months' mad lark, to Europe, the Riviera and the near East. It cost \$200,000. Evalyn's last act of her fabulous honeymoon was to buy a wedding present from Cartier's in Paris as a gift from her father. She smuggled her trinket past the New York customs and exhibited it to her mother-in-law, who disdainfully sniffed at her bad taste. It was an ornament for a necklace, a dangle composed of three jewels, an 'entrancing' thirty-two carat pearl from which depended a thirty-four carat six-sided emerald and from this, a ninety-two carat pear-shaped brilliant, Star of the East, known to all lapidaries. (See the accompanying photograph.) It cost Evalyn \$120,000 and Walsh footed the bill; he also told the truth and paid the customs.

If Mrs. Walsh had been disappointed in not being able to entertain for her daughter because of the hurry-up Denver wedding, she was more than compensated the next year. Her crowning success was a breakfast and reception for President Taft and his official party as they traveled through Colorado in September, 1909. This occasion focused national attention on Wolhurst.

The dining room was decorated with red dahlias and gold chrysanthemums, and the same red-and-gold color scheme was carried out on



A FORTUNE IN JEWELS AND FUR

Mrs. Walsh's twelve-strand pearl dog collar and chinchilla wrap of 1905 were nothing in 1910 beside Evalyn's Hope Diamond and Star of East (worn in her hair and on a pendant). Today, these two stones are valued by Winston Co. at one million nine hundred fifty thousand dollars.

the lawns in canopies for a reception line and tents where refreshments were served. Six hundred guests, who represented the leaders of every circle—clerical, judicial, professional, political and social—arrived on the morning of the twenty-second by special train or in their automobiles. The one bearing President Taft and Senator Charles Hughes (with whom the president had spent the night in Denver) unfortunately got stuck in the mud and the occupants had to be transferred to a second car.

At the close of the 10:30 to 12:30 reception, President Taft stood on the steps of Wolhurst and in a short ceremony rechristened the estate, Clonmel, after Walsh's birth place in Tipperary. Taft used a specially made silver hammer set with jewels to tap on the name plate (both shown in photo) and after adding a presidential blessing, departed by special train from Littleton.

During his little speech, Taft had told an Irish story which delighted Walsh. As soon as the guests had gone, Walsh sat down under the Wolhurst trees, now Clonmel, to write Evalyn all about it. Relaxing in the autumn sunshine, he found that he was unaccountably

tired but he disregarded his fatigue. He felt he must share his pleasure with his beloved daughter. Evalyn had not been able to come West for the occasion because she was six months pregnant, and her absence was Walsh's only disappointment in his great day. To dispel his slight depression, he repeated Taft's story about a Lord Justice and a man from County Tipperary and added:

"When the President told this story his vast paunch shook from something like an earthquake of merriment."

But that December in Washington all merriment was gone. When Evalyn's baby was born, her joy was over-shadowed by the tragic news that her father's increasing weariness was caused by cancer of the lung. His condition was so serious that the doctors held out no hope. Walsh would never be able to see Colorado again and once more Wollhurst, now Clonmel, was offered for sale.



WHERE TAFT BREAKFASTED

The everyday dining portion of this room was in the far end beyond the curtains, but the whole wing could be changed easily into a banquet hall.



Act 3

(1910-1944)

The estate changed hands in the spring of 1910 and the name, Clonmel, died stillborn. The new owners were Horace Wilson Bennett who had made a fortune in Cripple Creek real estate and his French father-in-law, Jerome S. Riche, a former restaurateur. By June, the Bennetts, their three small daughters, Mr. and Mrs. Riche, and Mrs. Bennett's brother, Francis G. Riche, had moved in.

Under the Bennett regime, Wollhurst became an integral part of the social and economic life of Colorado. It was turned into a dairy farm and its acreage increased gradually to fourteen hundred acres. More water rights were acquired and farming was done to help raise feed for two hundred and fifty milch cows and a new poultry yard. As the *Denver Post* put it, the cows were 'discreetly hidden from the estate' so as not to detract from Wollhurst's eclat.

The Bennetts changed the living room to a gold salon, upholstering their gold chairs in petit point, much of it embroidered by the skillful hands of Mrs. Riche. They added several bathrooms and rearranged partitions so as to permit the house to have separate apartments for the two families. The number of rooms mounted to fifty-two, and instead of being an auxiliary or summer place, Wollhurst now became a year-round residence.

In January, 1913, the first of Wollhurst's mysterious fires broke out. It completely destroyed the blacksmith shop, the paddock, the horse-barn and a \$6,000 limousine. Later the slab-sided barn was replaced with its rectangular designs as an exact replica of Wolcott's, except for the leaded windows. Bennett felt that they were far too expensive a luxury to waste on a mere barn.

But for the wedding of his second daughter, Gladys, no expense was spared, and Wollhurst became the scene of one of the most fashion-



THE NEW CHATELAINES

Mrs. Bennett and her mother, Mrs. Riche, posed for these pictures in the 'teens, the latter beside the stately urn that divides the two counties.

able weddings ever to be held in the annals of Denver society. This was in September, 1920, and the groom was a prominent Easterner, Archibald MacNichol, who received a wedding gift of a million dollars from his family. There were twelve bridesmaids, a matron of honor and two flower girls, dressed in pink and lavender and carrying matching bouquets. The actual ceremony took place under the Wolhurst trees at a specially constructed altar whose steps were carpeted in moss imported from Louisiana. The heavy foliage and spacious lawns gave the final touch to a theatric setting and an atmosphere already made melodramatic by Bennett's eldest daughter, Marguerite. She was the matron of honor, since she had eloped the year before with a man her parent's age and left the gossips gasping at her having beaten her sister to the altar with a totally unforseen choice.

In the mid '20s other events added to that special aura of glitter, mystery or melodrama which has always lurked among the flutter of leaves that hides the building from the highway. In 1925, Miss Florence Martin, Australian inheritor of the Cooke-Daniels fortune, rented Wolhurst for the winter in order to entertain her British friends, Sir Neville and Lady Wilkinson, and their two daughters. Sir Neville was a tall, slender, clear-complexioned veteran of the Boer and World I wars who had built a doll palace with his own hands for Queen Titania. Later, it toured the world for charity. When it was first exhibited, his good friend, Queen Mary, had opened it with a golden key and now a metaphorical golden key was given him to Denver. The *Denver Post* reported that Miss Martin entertained at a 'dinner party of twenty-four exalted members of smart

society' and six weeks later that 'Wolhurst has been tremendously gay since the arrival of Miss Martin's guests.'

In October of the next year, the newspapers reported that energetic Horace Bennett had sold the estate to dapper Frank E. Kistler, oil millionaire newly arrived on the Denver scene. Exactly what happened has never been made public—it is just another of Wolhurst's mysteries. Gossip said that the bill of sale included Wolhurst with all its furnishings and that, a few days later, Kistler unexpectedly drove out to the estate only to find moving vans ready to cart away the best pieces. The deal was off, except that Kistler bought part of the acreage for the show ranch he later built, Diamond K, and the Bennetts remained at Wolhurst.

During this period, entertaining was frequent and varied. From small informal picnics held under the cottonwoods when doves were cooked outdoors on spits in the French manner, to formal receptions, there was hardly a day when the beautiful iron grille-work gate was not thrown open.

During these years, because of Mrs. Bennett's connections and her French schooling, many houseguests arrived from France, notably the Baroness de la Grange and the Comte de Gabriac. The English Lord Bishop of St. Albans was the honor guest at a luncheon given to compliment sixty Episcopal bishops at the time of their church convention in Denver, September, 1931. But probably their most spectacular party was to honor the Bennetts' youngest daughter and son-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Crocker of Burlingame, California, in June, 1928.

This party was a costume ball called "A Night in Spain." Twinkling lights were hung along the avenue of spruces and cottonwoods, and huge electric "stars," the latest vagma from Paris, were suspended over the dance platform where a fifteen-piece orchestra played. Surrounding the platform were small tables set with gayly colored red-backed cloths and silver goblets, and the house itself was adorned with banners and flags to resemble a mediaeval castle.

Prizes of old carved silver were given for the best costume to be chosen by a committee of three. Fredric March, the leading man at Elich's, was chairman and made the awards to the winners—Emmy Wilson, now the proprietor of "The Glory Hole" in Central City, Era Licari, the late Sidney Sinsheimer, and Claude K. Boettcher. Among notables who attended that evening was a Russian princess who spoke no English and had been brought by Mrs. J. J. Brown (the Unsinkable).

The years were kind to Wolhurst in the next decade and the depression hardly touched it. But after Horace Bennett died in 1941, Mrs. Bennett could not, single-handed, carry on the Wolhurst tradition in the face of war shortages and strictures. She put the estate on the market



A MOTHER AND HER DAUGHTERS

This was the first picture taken in the Bennett drawing room, now the Gold Room, after Wolhurst became home for Marguerite, Virginia and Gladys.

and for the next three years there were many rumors of sale to Texas oil millionaires and other prospects. But it did not actually change hands until April, 1944, when the property consisted of seven hundred and fifty acres and the house with three-quarters of its furnishings. Its purchaser was owner of nearby Blakeland, a gambler and ex-convict who had helped arrange for his enemies to be got rid of with a time bomb. He was called Smiling Charlie, but his real name was Ova Elijah Stephens.



Act 4

(1944-1946)

Stephens left the grounds and building much as they were, but changed the name to Wolhurst Saddle Club because he was fond of horses and owned a number of racers. By day, the estate was occupied with matters of the turf; by night, it was devoted to big-time gambling. The door which had always been opened wide by uniformed butlers or maids was now shut and guarded by a henchman who peered at each new arrival suspiciously through a peep hole.

After the caller had passed the steely-eyed test directed at him through the bars, he was admitted in speak-easy manner. Then he was free to wander about the interior, altered to suit semi-public use, which now contained a lounge for members' use and to move on to the barn. This was altered to hold a 'set-up' bar downstairs where each member's bottle was labeled with his own name. Upstairs was a green-baized emporium shrouding hushed voices that mingled with the whir and click of the roulette wheel and the croupier's call of "Place Your Bets!"

Black jack and crap games were available to the patrons, in addition to roulette. Stakes were as high as if "Silver-Tongued Ed" himself were betting and, indeed, his own Wolcott crest was stamped on the chips, perhaps to encourage the guests to wager in his flamboyant fashion. One Denver dry goods business man was a frequent visitor. Sometimes he lost as much as fifteen or twenty thousand dollars in a single evening and one night his winnings were \$47,000. It was the chic thing to do—to sneak out to Wolhurst and flout the law amidst its plush surroundings.

But at two in the morning of Sunday, March 10, 1946, this era was brought to a sudden halt. Thirteen stocking-masked men drove into the grounds in three automobiles and put a gun in the back of the yard watchman. Using him as a cloak, they forced their way into the barn building and surprised a dozen guests in the bar on the first floor. While one man held a machine gun at the peep hole door, another kept the guests motionless with two pistols, covering their every move.



GAMBLER'S LANE

The Wolcott trees, the Walsh greenhouse and the re-built Bennett barn were added together to make a scandal setting.

Seven men stalked upstairs to the gaming room. One of them announced, "This is a stick-up," and walked over to Edward J. Jordan, nephew-in-law and partner of Stephens. According to the *Denver Post* the next day, the leader of this group took \$12,000 from Eddie Jordan's person and \$35,000 from the cashier's cage. His accomplices emptied the bill folds of the gambling guests into sacks and directed the victims to put their hands high and face the wall. When everyone was lined up, a man with a foreign accent said:

"Don't move for ten minutes and nothing will happen to you."

The hooded men turned abruptly, taking Eddie Jordan with them, and joined their companions downstairs. A woman was crying semi-hysterically, "Don't take my coat! Don't take my coat!"

The other men had systematically collected jewelry, wallets and fur coats from the guests in the downstairs rooms and were now ready to make their getaway. At the last moment, they decided against the mink and sable coats and dumped them in a pile by the peep-hole door. They kept Eddie Jordan guarded until, with a roar of their throttles, they vanished into the night.

Jordan returned to the gaming room and told everyone, "The stick-up's over." He began writing down a systematic list of all thefts and promised that Stephens would make good the individual losses. No one was to be concerned. But both the newspapers and the legal authorities were very concerned. "The '\$100,000 Stick-Up'" was blazoned to the world in banner headlines, and a Douglas County Grand Jury started a probe into Wolhurst's gambling activities.

Jordan and Stephens disappeared. So did the bandits. Who they were and where they went is as much a mystery today as it was then. One theory ascribed the deed to a Kansas City gang who staged two other

similar hold-ups of gambling casinos in Hollywood and Memphis within a few months of each other. Another theory spoke of "inside double-cross"—but no one really knew, or if they did, they kept their own counsel. It was just another Wolhurst happening.

As the crisis receded into the background and the participants felt freer about talking, it developed that Eddie Jordan had been the hero of the evening. When the bandits wanted to abduct him, he had argued that pandemonium might break out among the guests and lead to unnecessary violence. His charm and cool-spoken persuasive powers had also saved the fur coats. Public opinion was rather divided about the episode; but it was also anxious that the investigation establish the essential facts.

The authorities seized a large amount of expensive gambling equipment and padlocked the estate on the Douglas County side although the main building in Arapahoe county continued to serve meals. For months afterwards, the Wolhurst case was used as a political football to be kicked about in the headlines. Accusations against the governor and the commissioners of both Arapahoe and Douglas counties only increased the mystery of who was paying off and to whom. The prize-winning, valuable thoroughbred horses continued to munch their oats and regard the poaching investigators and general hullabaloo as beneath their notice.

In June, Eddie Jordan came out of hiding, surrendered to the sheriff at Castle Rock and posted a \$1,000 bond, pending trial. Not too long after, Stephens followed suit and, a year later, both paid \$1,000 fines resulting from the Grand Jury indictment. During the probe, testimony was presented to show that Stephens had reimbursed all the customers and that the actual loss from the stick-up was not \$100,000 but \$13,000. Everyone agreed to let bygones be gone.



Act 5

(1946-?)

The upshot of these events was that the Jordans, Eddie and his wife Beatrice, acquired complete ownership of Wolhurst by buying out Stephens' half interest. Jordan obtained a liquor license in July, 1947, and they set out to make the place a legitimate club for dining and dancing, with bingo and slot machines on the side. A building program was instituted that altered the place materially.

An ornate modern bar called the Bokaray Room was built jutting out east from the library. Senator Wolcott's sun room was changed into another bar, Victorian in mood with mahogany love-seats and sentimental roses dotting the upholstery. On the west side, a corridor led from this to new kitchens and the Talisman Room, a circular night club arrangement, even more anachronistic than the Bokaray Room. Later, a new dining room was added jutting east next to the Bokaray Room, called the Hunt Room. Unfortunately, neither the names nor the decor, with the exception of the Wolcott Bar, drew attention to the estate's unique history.

Then, once again, an early Sunday morning catastrophe, sudden and mysterious, almost ended Wolhurst's history. Before dawn on February 18, 1951, a fire broke out in the furnace room which spread rapidly. Its belching smoke routed out thirty employees, asleep in the upstairs bedrooms. They immediately fell to, trying to fight the fire and to carry out the priceless furnishings which they strewed on the lawn. Jordan's seventy-year-old mother, Mrs. Mary Jordan, was helped from the ruins in a state of shock and sent to a hospital. Two other people were trapped and died in the fire. For days, their bodies were unrecovered.

WOLHURST DESTROYED

The tragic drama of the 1951 fire was caught as a brick wall plunged.

Nearly two hundred firemen from nine suburban areas responded to the call but were hampered in their work by lack of water. They had to pump from the lake. Police patrolled the estate and refused to let anyone on the grounds, even reporters. The atmosphere was tense with mystery. One press photographer smuggled himself past the entrance in an ambulance in order to obtain pictures of the fire. A line of cars a mile long, trying to sightsee, blocked the highway and radios all across the nation carried broadcasts of the dramatic fight to save the historic show place.

By noon, the damage totalled a million dollars and Wolhurst was a smoking shell. Of the original structure, only Ed Wolcott's sun room dating from 1901 (the Wolcott Bar) and its adjoining octagonal tower remained, although much of the furniture had been carried to safety by helping hands, including those of neighbor Charley Stephens from Blake-land. Everything else on the Arapahoe County side was burned; rooms built from 1891 to 1950 were all gone. There was talk of arson and 'gangster retaliation,' but a defective flue in the furnace seemed to be the most logical explanation. On the Douglas County side, the new wing containing the corridor, kitchens and Talisman Room, was untouched and with this and the Wolcott Bar, the Jordans, showing surprising courage, decided to rebuild.

They started almost immediately, employing Charles Dunwoody Strong as architect and ordering him to draw plans for reconstruction that would duplicate the old building in many parts. They wanted to keep the old-world manorial feeling and most of the general lines, but preferred a building more convenient to run and maintain. Simultaneously with rebuilding, they continued to serve meals in the Talisman Room and drinks in the Wolcott Bar. By July, the Hunt Room and the Bokaray Room were rebuilt and reopened. In order to help finance this tremendous project, books of script that might be used at any future time were sold to the club members at \$50 each. A handsome building steadily rose.

But Wolhurst's turbulent influence continued to operate. Soon there were rumors that Beatrice Jordan would like to sell her half interest to

WOLHURST RE-BUILT

Only the chandeliers in the Bokaray Bar hint of a great past.



A FRENCH DRAWING ROOM LIVES ON

Although photographed when the Bennetts were in residence, the rugs and much of the furniture remain and are preserved today in the Gold Room.

her husband and that the quasi-separation of the Jordans might become real. Next, newspaper headlines broke the news that Wollhurst had run afoul of the law again—this time over the question of slot machines—and the club was in danger of having its liquor license revoked. But the carpenters and bricklayers worked busily on and the second story, containing twenty-six bedrooms, each with bath, was completed on schedule. The Jordans' industry and affection for the old place could be seen in every corner of the building.

A gala re-opening was held in December, the original furnishings restored as a museum in the Gold Room, and the curtain went up on another act of Wollhurst's serial story—a high society melodrama in the past—and for the future, who knows? Its aura still seems to hold something of the unhappy contradictions of its original owner, Wolcott, that unusual man who decorated his lawn with two ugly Alaskan totem poles and a graceful sun dial.

His decorations are gone now, the totem poles on each side of the Phipps Auditorium in City Park and the sun dial in a little South Denver park. But the sun dial's inscription still seems to live on, haunting the great grove of Wollhurst trees:

"What shadows we are, what shadows we pursue."

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