

Welcome to the Molly Brown House Museum. During the course of the tour, we'll be talking about two people: the mythical Molly Brown of Broadway musicals and movies, and the woman, Margaret Tobin Brown, whose interest in helping others, even when on a sinking ship, has made her an important person in the history of Colorado and the nation. Although most people today know her as Molly Brown, she did not go by this nickname during her life. As a child she was called Maggie, and later Margaret. The world knew her as Mrs. J.J. Brown.

As part of Denver's upper echelon, the Brown family displayed treasures from their travels and entertained guests from around the world in their Pennsylvania Avenue home. The house was often boisterously full as extended family members were also invited to live here including Margaret's parents, Margaret's three nieces from her brother Daniel, and often her sister Helen.

History of Margaret and J.J.:

Margaret was born in 1867 in Hannibal, Missouri, the daughter of Irish immigrants. Education was incredibly important to her parents, and they ensured that all 6 of their children received an 8th grade education. Considering that theirs was a working class family, this was quite an accomplishment. Shortly after completing her education, Margaret began working in the tobacco factories in Hannibal.

Colorado, as a territory and then as a state, was known for its mining and attracted thousands of people who hoped to strike it rich. In 1885 Margaret's brother Daniel went to Leadville to make a new life and Margaret soon followed him. Margaret quickly found work in the Daniels and Fisher Dry Goods Store, in the drapery department. Shortly after arriving in Leadville she met James Joseph (J.J) Brown at a church picnic. J.J. was a mine superintendent when he and Margaret met; he had a high school education, was Irish-Catholic like Margaret, and had taught himself mining engineering. After a short courtship Margaret married J.J. Brown in 1886, when she was 19 and he was 31. The couple had two children, Lawrence (Larry) and Catherine Ellen (Helen.)

Wealth:

In 1893 the price of silver crashed when the US Government repealed their subsidy of silver following the shift from the silver to gold standard. The subsidy had kept the price of silver high artificially; gold was the most profitable mineral. Because of this the value of silver fell while the price of gold remained high. For Leadville, a town of silver mines this meant that 90% of the community was out of work. Timing was on J.J.'s side and the Ibex mining company (who J.J. worked for) found the richest source of gold and high-grade of copper at that time. J.J. was given shares in the Ibex mining company, and a seat on the board. Overnight, the Browns were millionaires!

Moved to Denver:

Shortly after becoming millionaires, the Browns moved to Denver. They moved for better education opportunities for their children, a more progressive social scene, and greater ease of travel. In 1894 they purchased this house for \$30,000. It was designed and built by William Lang in 1889 out of rhyolite and sandstone, both quarried locally. Although the home was 5 years old when they purchased it from Isaac and Mary Large, it had several features that made it quite advanced for the time. It was built with electricity, indoor plumbing (with hot and cold water), and central heat.

Mrs. Brown owned this house until she died in 1932, at which time her children auctioned the house and its contents. It was used as a home for wayward girls, a boarding house, an eventually turned into apartments. In 1970 the house was in danger of being torn down; concerned citizens formed Historic Denver, Inc. in order to save it, and began restoration work almost immediately. The house was changed between 1932 and 1970, but thanks to photographs Margaret had taken of the house in 1910, the restoration was able to make the house feel like a time capsule from when the Brown family was living here.

Entryway:

The function of the entryway was for guests to be greeted and gather when they waited to either leave their calling card, or visit with the Browns in the parlor. The entryway was the first

room a guest saw so it was often very elaborately decorated and showed the guests what the family was like.

The Brown's entryway suggests that they were wealthy, stylish, modern and well-traveled. This is the only room in house that still has its original light fixture and wall covering. The walls are made of a thick embossed paper called anaglypta which Mrs. Brown painted gold. Mrs. Brown's love of travel is evidenced by the Turkish corner, the Blackamoor statue which once held a calling card tray and the brass whale oil lamps from India.

Parlor:

This room was strictly for formal entertaining and visiting. It is the most formal room in the house, no controversial talk or children under 12 were allowed in the formal parlor. This space may have been used for weddings and funerals as well.

Margaret collected the painting of the woman with the parrot, the painting above the fireplace by Helen Henderson Chain, the alabaster statue of a woman with a shawl on the piano, and she and JJ purchased the teakwood tray with faux mother of pearl inlay in Japan in 1902. Sometime during the Great Depression the ceilings in the house were covered by lower false ceilings. Intended to decrease the cost of heating the house, they served to protect many of the original ceilings in the house, and in this room the stained glass window was protected as well.

Library:

According to William Lang's plans, this room was originally intended to be the family parlor. Mrs. Brown made this room into the library prior to 1910. We think she did so to showcase her level of education, which despite what Hollywood movies would have you believe, was quite high for the time period. She received an 8th grade education; the national average was 4th grade during her youth. She loved learning and while living in Leadville and Denver she hired tutors to teach her art, music, and 5 languages.

Titanic:

Margaret was traveling with Helen in Egypt when she received a telegraph from Larry that his first son was ill. The Titanic was the fastest way to get back to America and some of her companions including the Astors were also travelling home on this ship. Helen did not travel home with her mother, and instead stayed behind in Europe with friends. Margaret was in her room reading when Titanic struck an iceberg. After dressing warmly and grabbing around \$500, Margaret headed up to the deck and began to help women and children into the lifeboats. She was eventually placed in lifeboat #6 as it was lowered into the ocean. She and 23 other people spent the night in the lifeboat, rowing to keep warm. Early the next morning the only ship to respond to Titanic's telegraph messages for help, Carpathia, arrived and rescued the 705 survivors.

Margaret helped others once on board Carpathia by using her knowledge of languages to translate for the 2nd and 3rd class passengers who had survived. She helped raise money for the women and children who had survived without their husbands and fathers. She became President of Titanic Survivors Committee and lobbied congress to change both the law that determines how many lifeboats a ship must have, and the law that had women and children board lifeboats first.

Study:

There are two original Brown paintings above the bookcase in J.J.'s study. These were given to the Browns as a wedding present. The wallpaper and border are a replica of what the Browns used to decorate this room. There are two objects in the room of historical significance. The first is the roll top desk which once belonged to Colorado's first U.S. Senator Henry Teller. The chair immediately in front of the desk once belonged to President Abraham Lincoln's Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton.

Dining room:

Many Victorian houses had a conservatory, or green house on their property. In the case of this house, the city lot was not large enough to accommodate one, so the first owners of the home added this painted ceiling to mimic a glass conservatory. The ceiling would have served as a conversation piece as all three daily meals were served here and were often very formal.

Dinner, for example, could last three hours and include 5-12 courses.

People enjoyed Mrs. Brown's dinner parties, and she often used her dinner parties as fundraisers for some of her many charities including; the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Saint Joseph's Hospital, the Denver Dumb Friends League, a local animal shelter and worker and women's rights. One of the largest known parties to be thrown in this house was a garden party with about 800 guests which was written about in the newspaper. There is a picture on the wall of Margaret at 28, dressed to attend the opera.

Second Floor

Staircase

As you walk up the golden oak staircase you will notice that the grand staircase goes to the third floor. The Browns added the second part of the staircase when they modified the 3rd floor for entertainment. Newspapers mention a ballroom, and although the architectural plans don't have any evidence of one, this space must have been what the newspapers were referring to. The back half of the third floor was the servant quarters for the women servants. We have restored the remaining servant's quarters for you to see.

Sun Room

According to family members, the sunroom was Margaret's favorite room in the house. She would have entertained close friends or family members in this room. Both the horse hair sofa and the mining table to its right belonged to the Browns in Leadville. The balcony off the Sunroom was where a small orchestra would play during her parties.

Margaret and J.J. legally separated in 1909, although they never divorce, the family struggled with the separation. After the separation, Margaret spent time traveling and rented a large home in Newport, RI. She enrolled in acting school following the Sarah Bernhardt tradition, in Paris. Margaret continued to travel and work for her various charities and J.J. oversaw his mining interests.

Helen's Room:

The canopy bed in this room is original, as well as the marble topped table. Blue silk brocade fabric covers the walls. There are some original photos in this room as well including a picture of Helen as a child on the wall.

Margaret's Room:

Margaret's room has emerald green silk brocade on the walls. The daybed in front of the window was used for naps and for women, to provide some relief from the restrictive corset. J.J.

and Margaret had separate bedrooms as a sign of their wealth. Also, because of the elaborate clothing women wore, it provided a private place for a woman and her maid to change her outfit.

J.J.'s Room:

J.J.'s room has a fireplace, and a closet which passes through to Larry's room, evidence that at one point Larry's room might have been a nursery. The daybed and the brass pitcher in the center of the room are original Brown objects. The pitcher bears the seal of the Russian royal family, the Romanovs. Margaret was good friends with Princess Stephanie of Russia and the pitcher may have been a gift from her.

Larry's Room

The wallpaper in Larry's bedroom is an exact replica of what was on the walls when the Browns lived in the house. It is based on layers of wallpaper found behind the radiator during renovation. The first layer was a baby blue, suitable for a nursery. The paper you see was the second layer and we believe it to be how the room was decorated for Larry.

Tobin Bedroom:

The bedroom at the end of the hall on the right belonged to Margaret's parents, John and Joanna Tobin. They came to live with the Browns until their death, her father in 1899 and her mother in 1905. One unique object in this room is a bobbin lace maker which is used to produce lace trim for clothing and decorations.

Bathroom:

This is the bathroom the whole family would have used. Most likely the servants would have had their own restroom in the basement. All the fixtures are original except for the gravity tank toilet. The room looks small but at this time it was considered a great luxury.

Servant Stairs:

These small, narrow stairs are typical of the time period as servants were not allowed to use the main staircase. Because the steps had been removed, one step found hanging in the ceiling during restoration helped replace the steps to their original orientation.

First Floor***Kitchen:***

The kitchen was hardest room to restore. Marks on the wall from the stove pipe and sink pipes were used with the original floor plan to recreate a Victorian kitchen. This would have been a busy space with cooking, laundry and all the deliveries coming to the back door including the iceman, grocer, and butcher. You can see a Beal's Biscuit maker, a pressure cooker - invented in Denver - and a coal stove that burned 24 hours a day. The annunciator on the wall was used by the family to summon the servants.

Maids Pantry or Cooks Pantry:

This where the cook kept practical equipment and goods used for canning, meat grinding and cooking including canned goods, sugar, flour, etc.

Butler's Pantry:

This is where the fine china and silver where kept and where the butler or maid entered and exited the dining room. When the door was open, guests could see a glimpse of the china and silver owned by their hosts. Margaret's own china pattern was Haviland Clover.

Back Porch:

Our last stop on the tour is the back porch area which we have divided in to two spaces. This first space was the servants' side of the back porch which has the household icebox. Today, we also have our lift in this space allowing access to the house for those with mobility limitations.

The second area includes the family side of the back porch. But what happened to the family? J.J. Brown moved to Tucson, Arizona after his separation with Margaret. His health was suffering from many years spent mining. He passed away in 1922, while staying with his daughter Helen in New York.

Larry attended various schools including one in Paris and military schools. He served in World War One and was exposed to mustard gas which affected his health. Larry married and had two children; later divorced and married an actress. He working a variety of careers including mining, ranching, a real estate broker and a screenplay writer. Larry died in 1949.

Helen also attended various schools including boarding schools in Paris (different from the one Larry attended) and Germany. Helen married a wealthy publisher, George Benziger, and settled in New York. She had two sons. Helen died in 1970.

In April of 1932, Margaret received the French Medal of Honor for her work during World War One with the Red Cross. She died at the Barbizon Hotel in October of 1932 from a stroke caused by a brain tumor. Both Margaret and J.J. are buried in Holy Rood cemetery in Long Island, NY near the home of their daughter Helen.

Although most people only know Margaret because she survived the Titanic, we hope you learned that she accomplished so much more in her lifetime. Your admission dollars support our non-profit museum, owned and operated by Historic Denver, Inc. Consider an additional donation to support the homes continued restoration. Please visit the Museum Store, and thank you for visiting the home of the “Unsinkable” Margaret Brown!