

What's the Future for Edwin Bemis House?

The Bemis name is firmly etched in Littleton's history. Judge Fred Bemis, one of the pioneers of Littleton, moved here with his wife Elizabeth in the 1880's. They ran a dairy business, were active in local affairs, and raised three children in their home, which is now located at the Littleton Historical Museum.

As publisher of the Littleton Independent, the Bemis's son Edwin became even more prominently entrenched in Littleton. When Edwin Bemis died in 1978, he willed his home to the Littleton community he loved so much.

But unlike his parents' home, which is the showcase for the 1890's farm at the museum, the Edwin Bemis house sits neglected at the edge of Sterne Park, snarled in bureaucracy, waiting for someone or some organization to help restore it.

Ed Bemis started working as an apprentice printer at the Littleton Independent when he was 11 years old. He became publisher of the Independent in 1919 and continued for nearly 50 years. He brought the legendary editor Houstoun Waring to Littleton in 1926.

Edwin Bemis created the first Littleton Planning Commission and was its first chairman. He organized the Littleton Rotary Club. He served as town treasurer, fire department chief, and deputy sheriff. His name graces our library. But perhaps most importantly, Edwin Bemis photographed Littleton history throughout his life, and founded the Littleton His-



Edwin Bemis residence at 5890 S. Bemis St. (c. 1921)

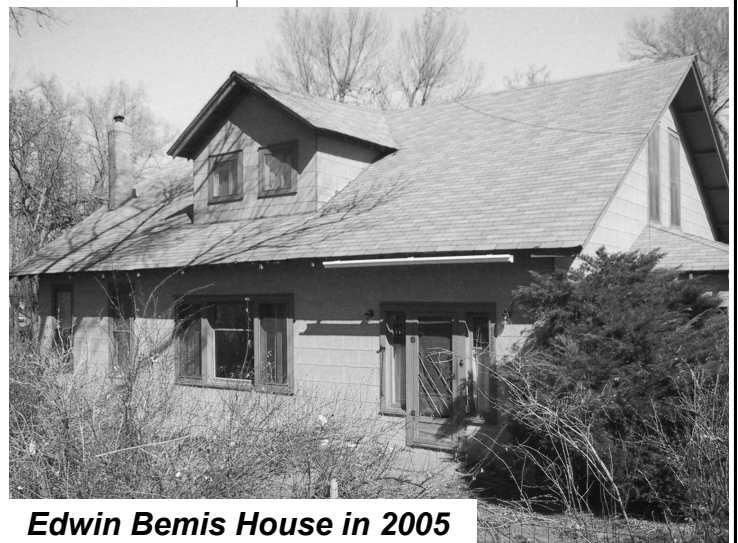
torical Society, which became the Littleton Historical Museum. The photos taken by Ed Bemis are the basis for the museum's collection.

When Ed Bemis died in 1978, his will stipulated that his home be incorporated as part of Sterne Park within 60 days. That was done, but the South Suburban board and staff were not able to decide on a use for the house. The house was determined too small for meetings or recreational purposes and it was too expensive to turn into a rental facility for weddings.

In July, 1979, the city council agreed to an "interim" use suggested by South Suburban, that the home be-

come a low income housing facility for a park caretaker family for Sterne Park. A South Suburban employee moved into the home, and his adult daughters continue to live in the house today.

The Edwin Bemis house has never been designated a Littleton historic landmark but it is listed on the city's List of Merit. *(continued on p.2)*



Edwin Bemis House in 2005

Bemis House Waits for Appropriate Use

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The house was built in 1921. Many of the original windows are intact, but the lap siding has been covered with asbestos shingles.

In February, 2003, the Littleton City Council considered the use of Bemis House at a study session. One of the ideas was to convert it into an infant and toddler center for the Village Preschool, but that was ruled out because of its size and the cost of renovation.

A study done by architect Chris Sibilia said the furnace and electrical system are extremely old and need replacing. The walls are lath and plaster, which would make

any remodeling difficult and costly. The house has asbestos siding and duct work; the existing windows are single pane and damaged in places. The structure would have to be upgraded to code and made handicapped accessible before it could be used by the public.

But because the house is part of Sterne Park, it can't be sold to a private owner without a vote of Littleton citizens.

The council asked the city staff to try to find a use for the Bemis House. City Manager Jim Woods put out an official Request for Proposals for the Renovation and Use of Bemis House in 2004, but no one responded.

Woods said, "I have to be really honest. We've really scratched our heads over this. The house is in very poor condition. It will take a lot of money to fix it up."

Deputy City Manager Phil Cortese added, "We don't have the money to put into this building at this time."

So Bemis House waits for someone or some organization in the community to step up and find a suitable use for the home of a man who helped make Littleton into the special community it is today.

Downtown Historic District Proposed

Three Main Street businessmen and property owners, Rick Acres, Kal Murib and Dick Valore, have submitted an application for a historic district for downtown Littleton.

The proposed district includes several blocks of Main Street. The application will first be reviewed by the Historical Preservation Board. The Littleton City Council will hold a public hearing on the district sometime in May, according to Andrea Mimnaugh, the city's Historic Preservation Planner. All property owners in the proposed district will be notified by mail of the public hearings.

According to a city memo on frequently asked questions about Littleton's proposed Historic District, the purpose of a downtown historic district is to preserve and enhance the character of the City's historic core, to encourage redevelopment

that complements the historical distinctive quality of Downtown Littleton, and to provide a vision for the future of Downtown Littleton.

Historic district designation does not restrict zoning or land use. Changes to the exterior of a historic building (other than maintenance such as painting) would require a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Historical Preservation Board. Historic districts place no restrictions on a building's interior.

The Littleton City Council recently agreed to a \$25,000 fund for property-owners in the downtown historic district for such things as architectural design assistance, façade work, maintenance, graffiti removal and reimbursement of insurance deductibles. Other incentives will be considered as well.

For more information on the downtown historic district contact

city staff member Andrea Mimnaugh at 303-795-3719 or property-owner Kal Murib, 303-794-8037.

CALENDAR

May 14—Bus Tour of Littleton's Historic Ditches, 8:30 a.m.—1 p.m.

May 18—Water History Lecture at Littleton Historical Museum, 7 p.m.

(More information on both events will be in the next newsletter.)

It's Time to Renew Your Historic Littleton Inc. Membership for 2005!

For 15 years Historic Littleton Inc. (formerly the Second Century Fund) has been active in fostering a positive spirit towards historic preservation in Littleton. Historic Littleton members receive a periodic newsletter, are invited to participate in special tours and activities, and are directly involved in promoting historic preservation.

In 2005, HLI will explore Littleton's connection with water. Since the days when Richard Little moved here to survey the City Ditch, water has played an important role in our town's history. Join with us for a bus tour and a lecture at the Littleton Historical Museum as we learn more about the irrigation ditches which have flowed through Littleton for over 120 years. Our next newsletter will have more information on these two events.

We look forward to seeing you at our upcoming events and thank you for your support!

Sincerely, The Board of Directors of Historic Littleton Inc.

Rebecca Kast, President; Barb Eaton, Vice President; Sonya Ellingboe, Secretary; Ron Richards, Treasurer; and Directors Karen Arras, Jack Ballard, Charlie Carroll, Lorena Donohue, Vern Hendrickson, Doris Hulse, Mike Massey, Bernard Small and Bruce Wolf.

Members of Historic Littleton, Inc. need to renew their memberships for 2005.
Please send your \$25 membership fee to:

Historic Littleton Inc.
P.O. Box 1004
Littleton, CO 80160-1004

Name _____

Address _____

City, Zip _____

Phone _____

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- I'd like to help with:
- Membership Committee
 - Newsletter
 - Special Events
 - Educational Programs