

Albert Ott House (1894)

401 S. Harrison - Olathe
National Register of Historic Places

Olathe has some of the finest late 19th century homes in Johnson County. The Ott house at 201 S. Harrison Street is especially noteworthy. Constructed in 1894, the Ott house is not only an excellent example of the Queen Anne style of architecture. It is also significant for its connection with two of Olathe's founding families.



The Ott's daughter, Alberta, has her picture taken in her room of the Queen Anne style home. *Johnson County Museum Collection.*

Albert Ott was the son of Christian Martin Ott, the first mill owner in Olathe. C.M. Ott established the mill in 1868, when Albert was a small boy. The Ott mill was the most prosperous mill in Johnson County for many years. In 1891, when Albert was 29 years old, he and his brother Charles purchased a dry goods and grocery store on the Olathe square. In addition, Albert and Charles assumed management of the family's mill in 1892.

Albert married Helena Hyer on June 28, 1893, in Kankakee,

Illinois. The Kanakee Daily Times reported the grand event, noting that the bride "was attired in cream silk and orange blossoms" and that "many handsome and valuable presents were left by the friends of the young couple as reminder of the happy occasion." Helena was a member of another early and prominent Olathe family. She was the sister of C.H. Hyer, owner of the Hyer Boot Factory.

Albert and Helena built their home on the same tract of land on which the Ott Mill stood, where C. M. and Charles had also built their homes. When the house was completed in spring 1894, the Olathe Mirror reported, "Mr. and Mrs. Albert Ott have moved into their new and handsome house near the Central School building. The house is built in the 'modern' style and ranks among the best structures in the city."

Olathe was the social and economic center of Johnson County in the 19th century. Olathe boasted many amenities not found in other area towns, such as a race track, numerous churches, hotels, social clubs, and even an opera house. Like most Americans, Olatheans were eager to stay abreast of the latest trends and styles. How they built their homes was no exception.

In the 1880s and 1890s, the Queen Anne style was the latest style in home design. The new style was popularized through architectural mail order catalogues, and fashionable people in all income brackets raced to construct homes in this style, ranging from modest cottages to mansions. The Queen Anne style reflected the growing affluence and stability that most midwestern towns were experiencing in the late 19th century. Queen Anne homes were characterized by asymmetrical facades, irregular rooflines, stained glass windows, and ornamented raised porches, many of which wrapped around the front of the building.



Albert and Helena Ott stand on the front porch of their home, completed in 1894 and today part of the Central School grounds. *Johnson County Museum Collection.*

Albert Ott continued to work and live in Olathe. The family sold the mill in 1895, when C.M. retired. Albert sold the grocery in 1910. He moved into banking and became director and later president of the Olathe State Bank. He and Helena had one daughter, Alberta. In 1988, a granddaughter recalled, "My grandparents' house was like a second home to my brother and me. Our family spent many happy times in Olathe." The Ott family land is now part of the Central School grounds. Albert and Helena's home is the only home still standing.