

Building a Legacy

The Construction

Construction on the Day Nursery began in 1922, when the official cornerstone was set in place. The estimated cost of the building was initially \$160,000, but the final total was closer to \$275,000. Each worker received a \$20 gold piece for their help in the construction. Mrs. Taylor wanted to avoid any "institutional" effects and envisioned a building with a "sense of whimsy." To fulfill this dream, she oversaw every detail of design and construction, alongside architects John Gray and William Stickney. The new Day Nursery was projected to be the finest building of its kind, with only the best materials, such as tile flooring imported from France; oak and walnut paneling; glass vignettes brought over from Belgium; hand-carved Vermont slate roof tiles; and 130 stained glass windows, designed by G. Owen Bonawit Inc. of NY. Inside, semicircular arches, wooden paneling, leaded windows, a tile floor, and decorative iron gates and light fixtures recall the English Gothic Tudor style.



(Right) One of the iron light fixtures that flank the hallways of the entryway to the Day Nursery (below).



The Ammenities

Since its official completion in 1924, the building has housed a library, kitchen, dining hall, and several classrooms. The second floor held dorms for 25 boys and 25 girls to stay overnight, with an outdoor napping deck for residents at risk of Tuberculosis. The third floor once accommodated matrons' quarters, a gymnasium, and an operating room. The backyard provided children with outdoor play through a jungle gym and wading pool.

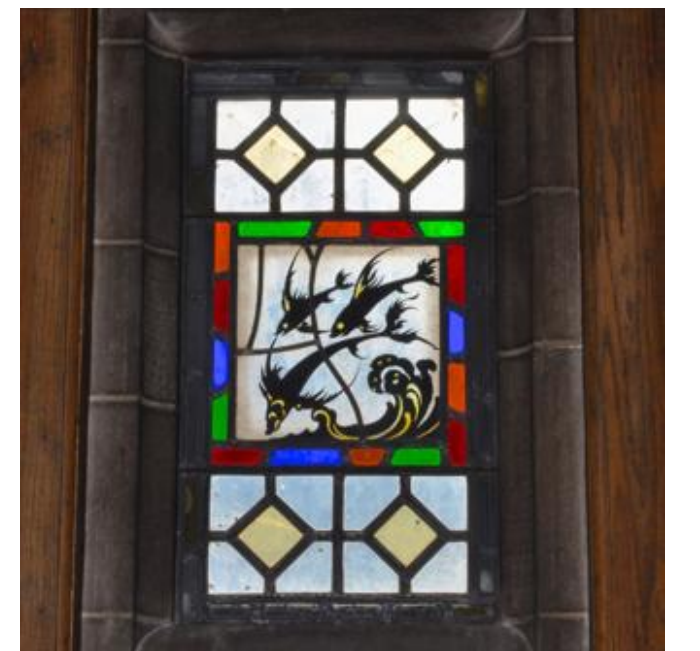


Day Nursery mural of a scene from the fairytale, "Peter Peter Pumpkin Eater," painted by Allen Tupper True.

Original furniture can still be found throughout the Day Nursery, much of which is child-sized, including the tables and benches in the dining hall and miniature sinks and toilets in the restrooms. The whimsical atmosphere continues onto the floors, ceilings, walls, hallways, and windows, which are all decorated with unique glass, plaster, and stone creatures and patterns. Beautiful painted murals by American artist Allen Tupper True (b. 1881- d. 1955) reinforce this theme of childlike wonder through colorful recreations of popular nursery rhymes, like Mother Goose.

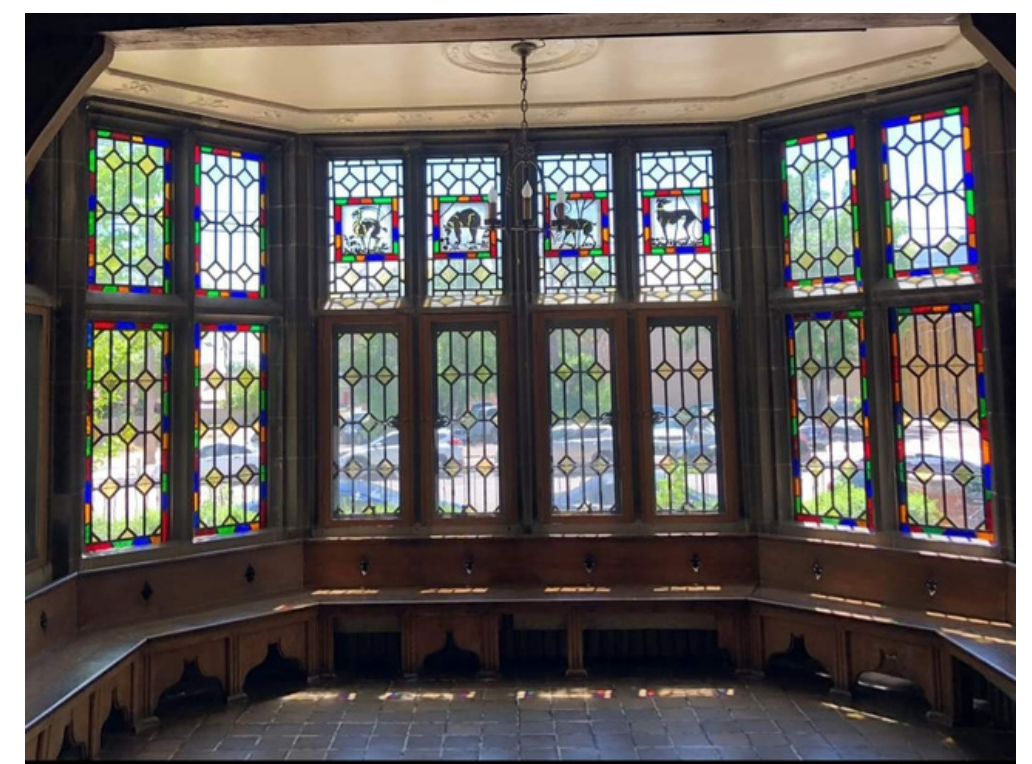


Child-sized sinks and toilets in the Day Nursery bathroom (above). Dachshund log holders and carved embellishments on the great stone fireplace in the dining hall (left).



The Preservation

The Day Nursery building was added to the National Register of Historic Places on Feb. 23, 1990. Today, Early Connections refers to a preservation plan to continue caring for many of the building's original furnishings. But "preserving history demands rare skills" (Colorado Springs reporter, John Hazelhurst). In the 1990s, plexiglass panes were added to the windows to protect from storms and vandalism. In 2015, Early Connections began a window and door rehabilitation project to restore and protect the exterior facades of the building. Work is being completed in phases, with the final phase to begin Spring 2023. The entire project will cost \$1.5 million. In 2008, the Day Nursery roof of asphalt shingles was replaced with the original material of Vermont slate roof tiles at a cost of almost \$500,000.



Stained glass vignettes in the library and dining hall (upper left and right). The old wading pool in the Day Nursery backyard and results of a massive restoration project on the windows (lower left and right).

Serving the Community

In the Beginning

Although construction was not quite finished, the Day Nursery opened its doors on Dec. 20, 1923, as an early Christmas gift to the children. Because of Alice Bemis Taylor's philanthropic ambitions, the building was a refuge for about 47 sick and malnourished children from needy, working families, especially after the spread of Influenza and Tuberculosis in Colorado Springs. This also helped Taylor form positive relationships with the working classes. The Association sought to assist working women in the education of their children and to procure employment for these mothers. In addition, Taylor and the founders wanted to provide a home for children whose families were unable to care for them and prevent the permanent separation of these families.

The third floor, with its infirmary and isolation wards, is a reminder of the original offerings of the Day Nursery. Although today the upper level is mainly offices and classrooms, it used to function as an operating room and medical ward, where doctors would perform basic exams, tonsillectomies, and appendectomies. Two dorms originally housed children overnight but now are only used for daytime care. Board members were kind and took children on field trips. People in the community allowed the children to visit their businesses, such as Cave of the Winds, Seven Falls, and the Broadmoor Zoo.



A young boy sits in the old gymnasium on the third floor of the Day Nursery building.



Students on a field trip to the COS Fine Arts Center (also founded by Alice Bemis Taylor).



School children eating a meal in the Day Nursery dining hall. All the original furnishings are still there!

Expanding Services

In the 1930s, the Day Nursery started expanding its services and accepting more children. Decades later, in the 1960s, approval for a special license increased their capacity to care for up to 122 kids. In the 21st century, Early Connections facilities look after nearly 375 children! In 1937, the Colorado Springs Day Nursery Association merged with the Child Day Care Center and Toddler Center from First United Methodist Church to form Colorado Springs Child Nursery Centers. A third site, the Gregg Bemis Center, opened in 1974 and was relocated in 1984 to a building shared with the Boys and Girls Club. A few years later, the Sand Creek Center opened in 1995. In 200, Early Connections launched the Home Network, a quality-building initiative for family child care home providers. In 2010, the Colorado Springs Child Nursery Centers officially changed its name to Early Connections Learning Centers. Since its beginnings in 1897, Early Connections has become a network of centers that continues the Day Nursery Association's goal of service to ALL and Alice Bemis Taylor's philanthropic aspirations through several different locations in the Pikes Peak region.

Looking Forward

Early Connections offers a wealth of invaluable resources for parents *and* children in Colorado Springs. A Behavioral Health Team can consult with parents regarding their child's social and emotional development. On-site Center Directors can also refer families to appropriate community agencies for assistance with housing, food, transportation, employment, clothing, medical and dental care, language translation, legal services, vehicle repair, and more. Regarding the children, Early Connections' care and education program uses a unique, "whole child" approach that develops social, emotional, communication, physical and cognitive skills for kids ages 6 weeks to 14 years old. Their nationally accredited programs include a literacy-based curriculum, family activities, nutritious meals and snacks, physical and behavioral health support, and professional staff. The Books at Home program gifts each child 10 new books to help them build a home library and extend learning beyond the classroom

Honorary plaque in remembrance of Alice Bemis Taylor's legacy (on the wall of the Day Nursery library).

