

Bainbridge Bunting, Assoc. Professor of Art
University of New Mexico

Prior to its demolition in the spring of 1955, Huning Castle had stood on Albuquerque's West Central Avenue for some sixty-eight years. Undoubtedly the most pretentious and architecturally one of the most interesting residences built in New Mexico during the whole nineteenth century, this structure constituted an important milestone in the history of the Southwest. The loss of this handsome old mansion is irreparable and no amount of progress in the form of motel, filling station or supermarket built upon the vacated site can compensate for its destruction. Later generations of Albuquerque citizens can deplore our demolition of this monument.

Showplace of the Territory in the 1880's, Huning Castle comprised a farm of 700 acres, a mansion of fourteen rooms together with outlying service structures, a park-like garden complete with aviary, running fountains and a family burial plot. Adjacent to the farm was the owner's flour mill. The whole establishment occupied a strategic location mid-way between Albuquerque's rising New Town of the railroad era and her traditional Old Town centered about its plaza. Before considering the architecture of this unusual edifice a few remarks might be in order concerning its builder and about the extraordinary changes that were taking place in Albuquerque in the 1880's. Franz Huning was born in Melle, Germany in 1827. One of many Germans to leave the mother country during the troubled days of 1848, Mr. Huning voyaged by sailing ship from Hamburg to New Orleans and thence he traveled up the Mississippi to St. Louis. Following eighteen months' residence there, he set out with a party for the gold fields of California but stopped short of that goal to settle in Santa Fe. In the mid-fifties Mr. Huning moved to Albuquerque where by 1859 he was proprietor of a general merchandise store. He prospered here and soon became one of the leading citizens. In addition to the store he had other commercial interests. His steam-powered Glorieta Flour Mill "recently refitted with new machinery" could advertise in the local newspaper that it "now turned out as good a brand of flour as can be made anywhere in this country." Mr. Huning was president of the Albuquerque Publishing Company which issued the first newspaper, the *Albuquerque Daily Journal*. He organized a company to manufacture illuminating gas, and he was particularly active in the real estate boom occasioned by the building of two railroads to the city. The second issue of the *Journal* noted in its column of "Local News" that "Franz Huning, between his mills and large merchandise store, is the busiest man in town."

As a final preliminary, one might say something of the general prosperity and optimism that prevailed in this period. Files of the *Albuquerque Daily Journal* established on October 14, 1880, give an excellent picture of the situation. Frequent editorials expressed the conviction that Albuquerque's location at the intersection of north-south and east-west railroad lines would surely ensure the dominant role for the city in all the Territory. A half page ad entitled "Let Your Light Shine" admonished Albuquerque citizens each day of the week to spread abroad the good word of New Mexico's commercial advantages and her superior climate. The highest of hopes were entertained for the region's copper and silver mines. The Socorro area was booming with mines while nearer home, promising copper finds had been made in Tijeras Canyon and coal deposits had been sited not far southeast of the city. Editors of the *Journal* constantly advised of the need to attract industry to the city if new inhabitants were to be attracted to Albuquerque, and there was rejoicing when a new planing mill or machine shop were projected. Add to this the substantial railroad prosperity. Traffic on the Santa Fe line was so heavy in December of 1880 that there were rumors, later unsupported, that the acceptance of goods for shipment would have to be suspended for two weeks. In January of '81 regular rail service extended as far west as Prescott, Arizona, while the Santa Fe's cash receipts in Albuquerque for the single month

were above \$90,000. The newspaper gloated in an editorial of February 18 that "ALBUQUERQUE IS FIXED."

It was amidst such optimism and prosperity as this that Franz Huning decided to build a mansion in character with the promise of his community. Sometime in the spring of 1881 work got under way on the dwelling; it was completed in the autumn of 1883, an event officially celebrated by a large Christmas party attended by guests from widely distant parts. Now, just as he was caught up in so many aspects of the town's life, Mr. Huning became involved in the construction of his home. According to information from Mr. W. H. Keleher and Miss Erna Fergusson, granddaughter of the builder, Huning was his own contractor and designer. We also learn that the house was built of "terriones" which were cut in the owner's meadows. (Terriones are a kind of adobe brick cut from turf with a spade. Equal in size to the usual adobe brick, the sides of the terrone are curved but the narrow ends vertical. The natural root system of the turf acts as a binder and an aid to even drying just as does straw which is sometimes added to the usual adobe mud). These terriones cost \$2.50 per hundred; the cost of the adobe masonry set in the wall was \$11.00 per thousand brick; a total of 250,000 terriones were used. Additional information on the total cost of the mansion may exist somewhere in Huning family papers, but these were unavailable at the time of writing.

The same authorities tell us that the doors and windows for the Castle were brought from Chicago. This is interesting in light of the fact that Albuquerque got its own sash and door factory in the spring of 1881. On the other hand we know from advertisements for Huning's store in the *Journal* that it stocked doors and windows. Presumably Mr. Huning was also prepared to act as his own distributor for mill work.

Old pictorial maps of Albuquerque give an idea of the way the Huning property was arranged. To the west, where today Laguna Blvd. intersects Central Avenue, stood Huning's Glorieta Mill, equipped with machinery brought to New Mexico prior to the completion of the railroad. Next to the mill and just east of present Laguna Blvd. was the Castle itself. (fig. 1) This establishment consisted of several buildings: the main house with its two towers, adjacent service buildings, a windmill and a long arbor-covered walk leading from the house to an octagonal aviary. A pool with a running fountain interrupted the front walk which led from the street to the main entrance. At the property's extreme eastern limits, and approached by a small bridge over the irrigation canal, was located the family burial plot. Always interested in horticulture, Mr. Huning had brought specimens of bushes and trees from various parts of New Mexico for his gardens. Behind the house to the southwest and thus occupying the greater part of today's Country Club district lay the remainder of the 700 acre estate.

Huning Castle created an imposing impression as one approached it from Central Avenue—or Railroad Avenue as it was then known. A two story edifice with a flat roof, the entrance was marked by a three story tower. Each level of the tower's vertical mass was interrupted by markedly projecting horizontal balconies while the whole was crowned by a strong cornice and balustrade. (fig. 3) A deep set arch emphasized the main door while a similar recess at the second level repeated the entrance arch on a smaller scale. Well behind the tower facade rose the main block of the building: flat-roofed, deeply corniced and enlivened by a lacy iron cresting. To the tower's right was a narrow wooden veranda; to the left, a bay window that went through two stories. At the further end of the left wing was an open porch of two stories, the lower of which was glazed at a later time. Although constructed of substantial adobe walls two or in some instances three feet thick, the exterior of Huning Castle



fig. 1—exterior: front (photo—W. K. Keller)

was veneered in wood. Vertical wood siding was used over most of the exterior surface but this was enframed at the corners by wooden boards shaped and bevelled to resemble stone quoins. Wooden architrave moldings encased doors and windows while string courses and a substantial wooden cornice completed the design. (fig. 6) The building tried desperately hard to look like an edifice built of stone. These wooden veneers, cornice and window trim were employed uniformly on all sides of the house except that flush siding was replaced by lapped vertical siding on the south (rear) elevation. Running around the one story kitchen wing and along the entire south facade was a twelve foot wide, wood floored portal. (fig. 5). A small enframed plaque in wood on the east face of the main tower gave the date of the dwelling's completion, 1883.

The main block of the house was connected by means of a one story wing to the east with a second tower. Though but two stories in height, this tower echoed the massing of the entrance tower. Behind the smaller tower a short distance stood a windmill sheathed in a wood facing in order to relate it to the architecture of the house. Nevertheless the battered walls and top railing seen in the old photograph of 1883-85 clearly reveal a characteristic windmill shape. We might speak of this second tower and windmill before we go inside the house as these elements collapsed about 1913, long before the house itself was demolished. The tower contained some kind of water storage tank at the level of the second story while an elaborate bath room occupied the first floor. Legend has it that this was the first bath room with running water to be built in New Mexico. Water

fig. 3—first floor plan

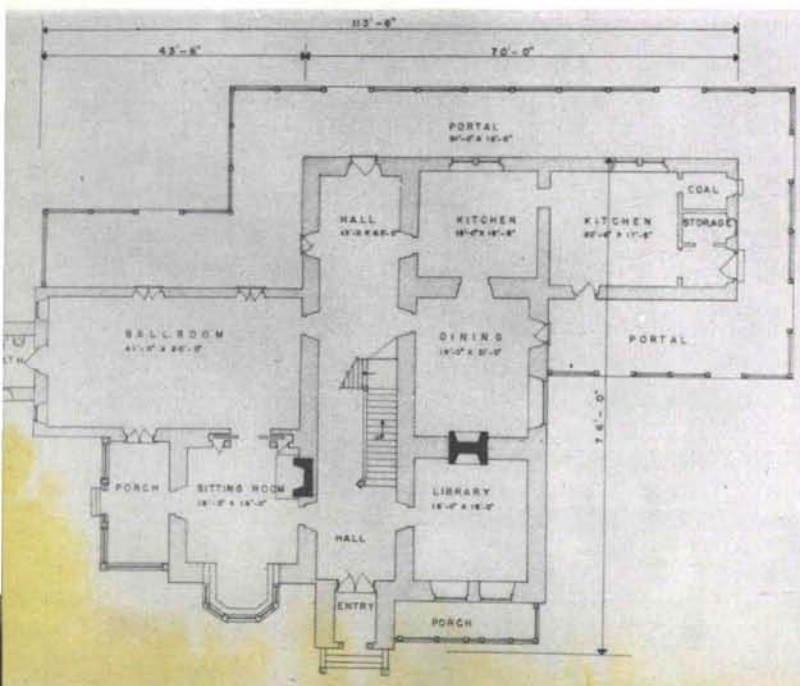
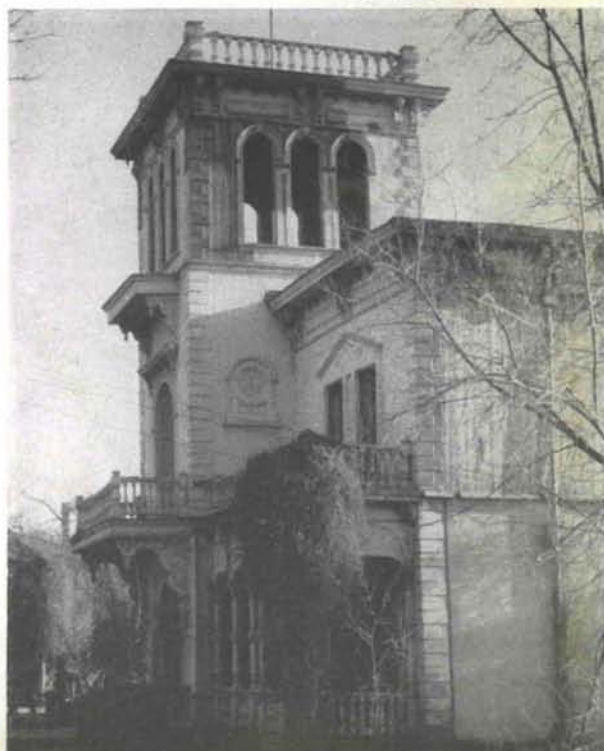


fig. 2—exterior: entrance and front porch



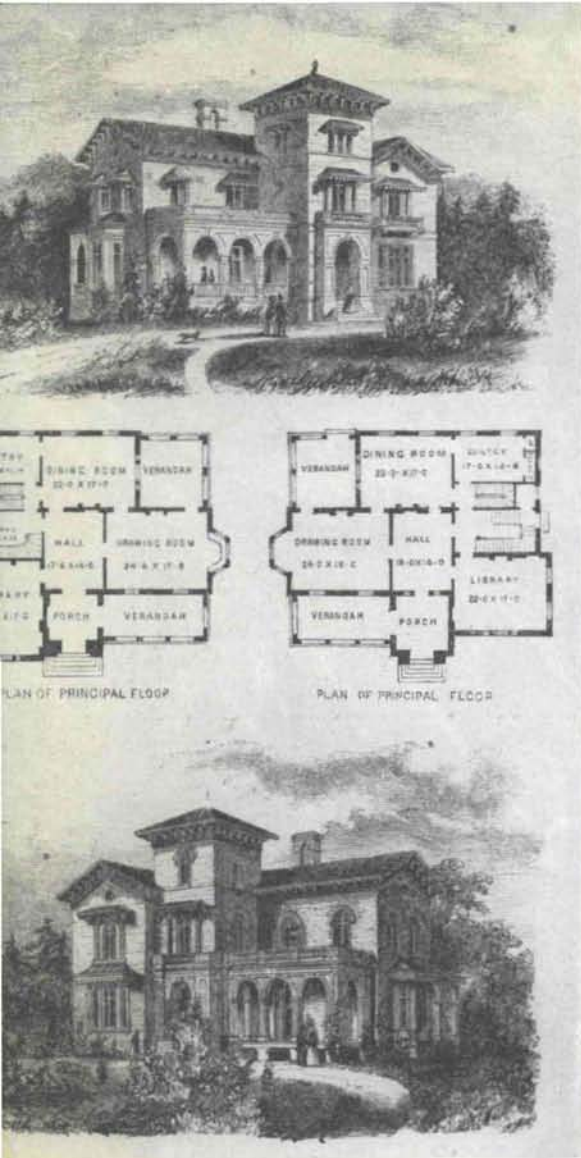


fig. 4—an Italian Villa design from Calvert Vaux's VILLAS AND COTTAGES, 1887



fig. 6—exterior: front bay window detail



fig. 7—interior: stairs at second floor landing

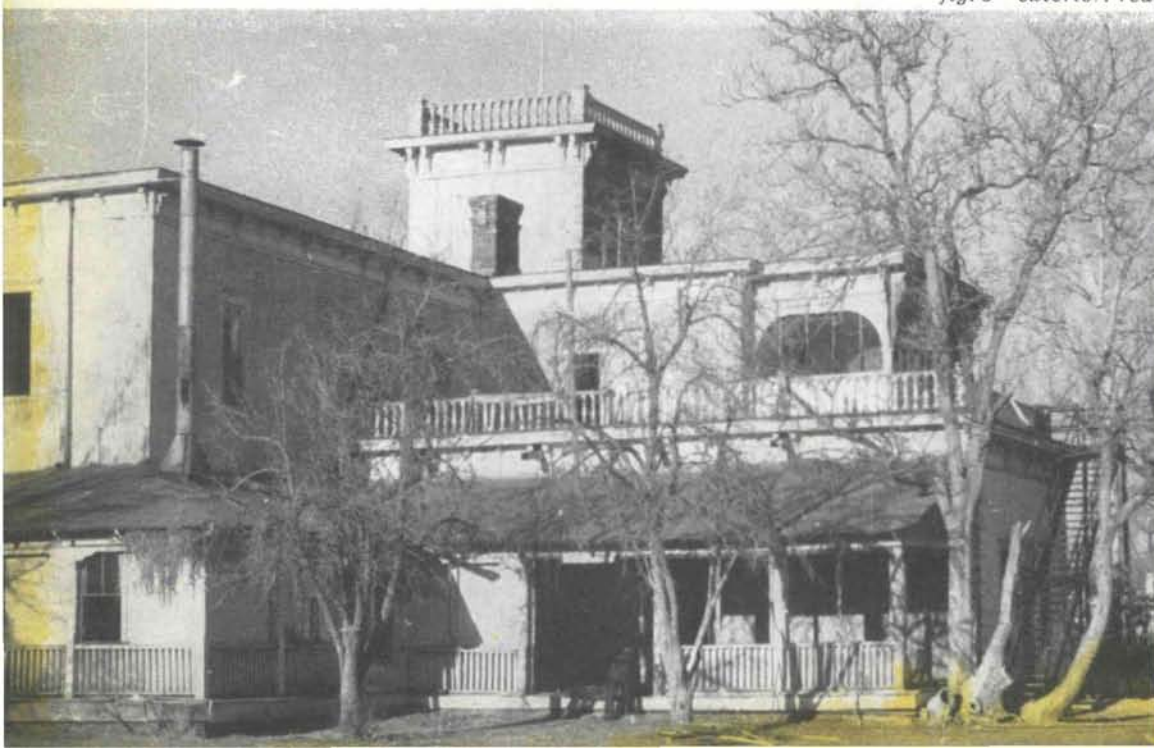


fig. 5—exterior: rear

pressure from this tank provided for the garden fountains as well as the bath itself.

It is unfortunate that no good pictures of the Castle's interior have been preserved, though, in point of fact, the interior was considerably less distinguished than the exterior. Dominant feature of the plan was the sixty foot hall which was approached directly from the deep entrance vestibule. Despite the imposing dimensions of this area, its visual effect was diminished by the awkward arrangement of the stair which hacked this space in two (fig. 2). Nor did the far end of the hall possess any inviting architectural feature such as a bay window or fireplace which might draw the spectator into this area. Despite its length and fourteen foot width, it remained a dark "back hall."

To the left of the hall were two rooms. A front sitting room with pleasant fireplace and five-sided bay window was the residence's lightest and most cheerful room and the natural gathering place for the family. Behind this sitting room and connecting with it by double sliding doors was a room slightly larger than 20 by 40 feet. Although the impressive sliding doors and dimensions would suggest that it was designed for more formal functions, this chamber was long used as the principal bed room. Immediately off this bed room to the east was the afore mentioned tower bath room whose only entrance was through the bed room. Not until the era of the First World War did a later generation of Hunings convert this chamber into a ball room. Only then was a hard wood floor put down and the ball room inaugurated with a party for one of the daughter's sixteenth birthday.

The form of these sliding doors was most unusual; flanking the main opening were small hinged doors which opened to the same recesses into which the sliding doors were pushed when open. Did these small recesses entered by the hinged doors serve as shallow closets or were they for access in case the sliding doors got hung up in some way? The main doors had frosted glass panels and the frames were quite elaborate. As stated before, Mr. Huning is supposed to have brought the doors from Chicago, but the name of the mill or dealer supplying them is not known. The openings of this ball room are placed symmetrically except for the wide hall door which was located off axis in order to align with the door to the dining room on the opposite side of the hall.

To the right of the main hall was the library in front and dining room behind. Each room contained a fireplace and the library had two large and handsome double hung windows. No direct access, however, was provided to the small veranda to the right of the entrance (fig. 3). In order to get to this porch one had to manage to step over the sill and duck through the library's double hung windows. This porch, therefore, could hardly have been of much usefulness. Behind the dining room were two kitchens, referred to as the summer and winter kitchens. Surrounding the kitchens and along the south front ran the wooden porch mentioned once before.

The rooms of the second floor did not extend over the entire first floor. Here were four large bed rooms, another large hall and a small tower room. This latter contained a ladder in one corner which communicated with the tower room of the third story. As on the ground floor the chamber to the east of the hall had a pleasant bay window as well as access to the open porch. Up a couple of steps from the floor of this room was a small door which gave on to the roof above the ball room. These second floor chambers had less architectural interest than the rooms of the first floor. Mill work throughout the house was machine surfaced and decorated with various kinds of machine-made ornamentation. This trim is characteristic of work produced generally during the eighties in this country; it does not have the pre-Civil War quality which characterizes the exterior trim.

A legend which one often hears repeated in Albuquerque states that Castle Huning was copied from a castle on the Rhein River which Franz Huning had seen as a youth in Germany. (*Old Town News*, Sept. 15, 1941, brief article on Huning Castle). In actual fact, ones does not have to go as far afield as Europe for the architectural precedents of this interesting building. Our mansion clearly belongs to the so-called Italian Villa style which flourished in the eastern part of the United States between 1840-50. One need only refer to typical Italian Villa designs published in plan books prior to the Civil war to

see the relation of Huning's mansion to this style. The same features assail one in both designs: the centralizing entrance tower, an asymmetrical massing, protruding bay windows or projecting porches to reduce rigidity of massing, the emphatic cornice supported by paired brackets, abundant use of quoins and string courses and elaborate frames about all openings. It is true that the Italian Villa is often capped by a low-pitched roof. In the present example, on the contrary, the owner-builder very sensibly retained the traditional flat roof of New Mexico, but Huning Castle's consequent horizontality is completely in harmony with the Italian manner.

A word of caution should here be interposed about this term "Italian Villa" as the actual connection of this style with Italy is indeed remote. Rather, this style represents what the provincial Yankee builders of the 1840's imagined Tuscan architecture of the Renaissance to be than a reasonable facsimile.

The most salient single characteristic of the Italian Villa style is the paired bracket support for the cornices. So obtrusive is this feature that some authors have labeled this movement the "Bracket Style." The brackets used at Huning Castle would alone be sufficient to identify its design as Italianate. Despite apparent complexity and suggestion of costly carving, these brackets were cheaply and quickly produced with the aid of lathes and jig saws. Rather than being carved out of a single block of wood, they were built up of several layers of wood, each of which could be shaped separately prior to assembly. Complexity could be compounded by adding molding and lathe-turned rosettes. If the final effect is suggestive of painstaking hand-carving, closer inspection reveals the actual method of manufacture. This reliance upon the machine for inexpensive yet ingeniously elaborate decoration is, of course, not peculiar to Mr. Huning's Castle in nineteenth century America. Most elaborate of all the brackets were those which supported the balcony over the principal entrance (fig. 3). So insistently heavy and ornate are these that the modern viewer is moved more to indulgent delight rather than aesthetic indignation.

If the 1881 date for the beginning of the Castle indicates a twenty to forty year time lag behind architectural developments of the Atlantic seaboard, there are also found here some slight indications of later American building fashion. The precise linear design on the horizontal beams of the front veranda (fig. 3) suggests ornamentation found in New England after 1867. This sharp line ornamentation is cut with a jigsaw or grouted out. Ornamentation of this type is ordinarily not found in association with Italian Villa designs but more often occurs on "French Renaissance" buildings, sometimes also called the General Grant style.

Family tradition tells us that Franz Huning himself designed the house. This seems very probable in the light of certain gaucheries in design — particularly the awkward relation of the main stair to the entrance hall and the inaccessible front porch off the library. It is evident, however, that Mr. Huning had access to current plan books similar to Calvert Vaux' influential *Villas and Cottages* (1857) or Gervase Wheeler's *Homes for the People in Suburb and Country* (1867) (fig. 4). Although considerable attention has been given to the matter, no plan or elevation illustrated in such a plan book has been discovered which provides an exact model for the Castle. On the other hand, almost all of the features here employed can be found within the contents of any single book of plans. To give but one example, Plate 17 of Vaux illustrates two villas and their plans. The arrangement of the veranda adjacent to the tower and the paneling around the arched entrance are very reminiscent of the Castle. In this illustration we also discover the bracketed cornice, the combination of square and circular-headed windows, a fondness for bay windows and the ubiquitous tower.

The design process followed in the Castle is a familiar one: feature A from one page, feature B from another; General Grant line ornamentation with Italian Villa brackets. One should also note that all of the "features" are loaded on the main facade. Seen from any other elevation than the front, the design is decidedly less elaborate or well composed (fig. 5). Still it must be admitted that Mr. Huning combined these features with some skill; the old facade did possess an impressiveness and dignity as well as an harmonious balance of diverse elements.