

E.W. Grove & Grove Arcade

A BRIEF HISTORY



Postcard of the old Battery Park Hotel

Excavation for the Grove Arcade in front of the new Battery Park Hotel



Edwin Wiley Grove

All photographs this page courtesy of North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library, Asheville, North Carolina.

Who was Edwin Grove? Not a great deal is known about his early life. He was born in Whiteville, Tennessee, in 1850. It is still a mystery why Grove and his family moved to the plantation town of Paris, Tennessee.

When Edwin reached adult age, he went to work in Dr. S.H. Caldwell's drugstore in Paris, Tennessee. He took over the business at age 29 and concocted his first big seller, "Grove's Tasteless Chill Tonic." Riding the wave of the emerging pharmaceutical industry (Bayer introduced aspirin in 1899), Grove produced additional medicines, enabling him to turn his \$50,000 Tennessee enterprise into the million dollar Paris Medicine Company. The company eventually relocated to St. Louis to accommodate its growth.

Edwin Wiley Grove became a multi-millionaire by attending to the health of others. His Paris Medicine Company manufactured popular remedies for malaria and the common cold. Grove suffered from bronchitis and insomnia; and when he came to Asheville in 1898, it was on doctor's orders. Asheville was, according to doctors throughout the nation, a magic mountain.

Grove became enamored with the city and considered building a factory here. He had experience with holiday destinations in Florida and decided instead to build a resort. Partnering with his son-in-law, Fred Seely, he constructed the Grove Park Inn in 1913. He engaged in several other local projects including many that still bear his name: Grovestone, a quarry and gravel factory; Grove Park, a subdivision near the Inn; and Grovemont, a community in Swannanoa. The Grove Arcade would be his final project and he would die before seeing it completed.

Grove purchased the property for the Arcade from the Coxe family. Daniel Coxe III, King Charles II's physician, received a grant, in the 1680s, to what later became all of North and South Carolina. A descendant, Colonel Frank Coxe, developed the old Battery Park Hotel, which once stood on Battery Hill, the site of the Arcade. The hill served as a Cherokee hunters' camp, overlooking the French Broad River and providing stone for arrowheads. During the Civil War, the Confederacy established the site as one of two major defenses in Asheville, thus giving the hill its name, "Battery."

The old Battery Park Hotel, built in 1887, epitomized the many resorts in the region that housed summer-long vacationers. By the 1920s, trends had shifted from resorts to tourist establishments, real estate and retail centers; the automobile culture had arrived. The Coxes' wooden structure fell into disrepair, and as plans for the Arcade took shape in 1924, the manorial, old hotel was demolished and the three-block hill on which it stood was leveled.

Grove engaged architect Charles Parker to design a city within walls. He was conscious, as were the pioneering Parisian arcade builders, of offering an alternative to what were considered by some seedy downtowns. Parker's design program was simple and exhilarating: create a palace of commercial enchantment. His Arcade project included a new commercial hotel, built in 1924 and also called the Battery Park, and he had plans for nearby retail and public buildings.

Grove's project became part of what has been called the Golden Age in Asheville, which brought its Art Deco City Hall and many idyllic suburbs. The Victorian and Romanesque burg that local author Thomas Wolfe so eloquently described in his novels seemed like the Dark Ages.

Early on, Grove was interested in the needs of women — the new consumers. His Chill Tonic combated malaria (the disease for which Maria Louisa Vanderbilt visited Asheville in 1887, accompanied by her property-scouting son, George), but the elixir required indelicate sipping. So, Grove's company invented a tablet form that women could carry discretely in their purses. The result was Grove's Bromo Quinine, the world's first cold tablets. It was Grove's son-in-law Fred Seely who invented the machine to form, count and sort the cold tablets.



Grove's Tasteless Chill Tonic Advertisement

Perhaps Grove's concern for women related to his mother's influence and to a household filled with sisters. He later doted on his daughter, Evelyn, with whom he corresponded frequently. Many of the streets in the Grove Park neighborhood bear the names of women in Grove's family.

Women don't sufficiently explain Grove's drive and business sense, however. "All my business life I have acted on my own judgment without consulting my family," he explained to Fred Seely in 1921. "I suppose it is because my own judgment controls and directs a willpower that must act."

Once Grove expanded to Asheville, he entered his most visionary, skillful and willful stage. His Arcade was not the beginning of malls, but the last in a trend of arcades, only a few of which survive in the United States. "I stated more than twenty years ago," he noted in 1923 at the dedication of the Bon Marché department store, where the Haywood Park Hotel is now, "that Asheville could be made a great playground for eastern and western tourists and...could be to the east and south what Los Angeles is to the west."



Vintage Grove Arcade Postcard



The Grove Arcade nears completion. Photograph by Herbert Pelton, 1927.
 Courtesy of North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library, Asheville, North Carolina.

Celebrated author F. Scott Fitzgerald patronized the Arcade in the 1930s while staying at the new Battery Park Hotel and the Grove Park Inn. His jazz age novel, *The Great Gatsby*, confirmed Asheville's status. Its narrator says of a celebrity he spots, "I knew why her face was familiar — its pleasing contemptuous expression had looked out at me from many rotogravure pictures of the sporting life at Asheville and Hot Springs and Palm Beach."

During the Arcade-planning stage, when the public clamored for a public park on the Arcade site, Grove promised a park with inspirational views on the Arcade roof, at the center of which he would place a tower housing a private men's club. Architecturally, Grove had Parker employ a wide vocabulary of features and styles to create an American fantasia in the Arcade. A palazzo body accommodated Gothic decoration. Steel and glass married marble. The never-built tower would have asserted the Arcade's neo-Gothic thrust. Terra cotta, easily carved and the era's best fireproof material, was employed.

Regarding the Arcade, Grove said, "I will locate stores of every kind of merchandising business in Asheville...so that a lady can park her car anywhere in this place and can let it remain just as long as she pleases, and do all of her trading in that one vicinity, so that she will not have to run around in the narrow streets of the old part of the business section to do her trading."

Grove managed dozens of projects and ideas at once — and was very controlling, according to his son-in-law. He suffered from anxiety, insomnia and hiccoughs, and died in 1927 while residing at the Battery Park Hotel overlooking the half-constructed Arcade.

Walter P. Taylor completed the Arcade in 1929. Money ran out and he had to dispense with the 14-story tower for which an appropriately strong base had been constructed. At 269,000 square-feet, the Arcade established itself as the largest building in the region. When it opened, it became home to a fine collection of local shops and services. For 13 years, it contributed to the region's commercial and civic life; and then came to serve a different cause.

In 1942, the Federal Government took over the building to relocate offices displaced in Washington D.C. by departments created to win World War II. Nearly 2,000 Postal Accounts employees voted for Asheville as their new home. Consequently, the Arcade's 74 shops and 127 offices were evicted with less than one month's notice.

The building eventually housed the National Climatic Data Center. The building's distinctive windows were bricked over and for decades its public face turned private. But as Asheville began to revive in the late 1970s, public support grew for a return to the Arcade's original function. A Mayor's Task Force was established in 1985. City leaders negotiated a deal to restore the Arcade. After undergoing extensive renovations, the Grove Arcade reopened in 2002 as a market with restaurants, fresh and prepared food vendors, and craft and specialty shops.

— Researched & Written by Rob Neufeld — Many thanks to Lynne Poirier-Wilson & David W. Webb