

268 Seneca Street

The 1880s and early '90s were years of tremendous growth for the city of Elgin. The Covey Brothers, Merrels and Herbert, were in the construction business and built many houses in the area north of Kimball Street and west of Dundee Avenue, known as Phineas J. Kimball Jr.'s 3rd Addition. Merrels lived in an exquisite home built in the 1880s at 421 Prospect Street; his business partner/brother Herbert lived in a less exquisite but still charming house at 411 Prospect. Minnie Covey Schoonhoven lived at 458 Prospect. In her backyard, the Coveys built the 2-story house at 268 Seneca Street as income property. In 1932, the bank foreclosed on it and the property fell into disrepair over the years.

The current owners purchased the house in 1989. They were people with a vision. 268 Seneca was abandoned and left for dead except for an occasional intruder or vagrant who used the house. Miraculously, most of the treasured details -- decorative interior mouldings and stained glass windows -- were intact. The renovation required all the usual things like new wiring and plumbing, new ceilings and windows, insulation, floor-refinishing, wall skim-coating, and a lot of cleaning. The 11-color exterior paint job won first place in the Chicago's Finest

Painted Ladies contest, and the couple also won the 1991 Home Improvement Award from the Elgin Courier News, as well as a 1992 Mayor's Award for their contribution to beautifying the city.

The house is a "working man's" Queen Anne, featuring a cross-gable roof with a cutaway bay on the east wing. The richness of variety in detail



is very well captured by the composition of the porches, also rebuilt by the current owners, the bay ornamentation, and the imaginative use of color to emphasize and highlight each feature of the house.

You can truly appreciate this house when you see what it looked like before George and Jo Ellen Doscher breathed life back into it, and it is a story of vision and preservation that is sure to inspire all who see it. ❧