



414 SOUTH LIBERTY

HISTORY

The area in which this house stands was originally Bowen Heights, so named because the property was owned by George Bowen. Originally a Chicagoan who had a summer home in this area, Bowen and his family became permanent Elgin residents after the Chicago fire destroyed his family's business.

Bowen's list of accomplishments in Elgin is long. As Mayor from 1872-1876, the Elgin Public Library was founded, largely due to his efforts. Streets and parks were also improved, and "the old moss-grown cow trough in the heart of the city was removed, a public drinking fountain supplanting it." As president of the Elgin Electric Light Company, Bowen helped bring electric lighting to the city. He was also the principal organizer and builder of the Chicago and Pacific Railway and in 1873 personally raised \$150,000 for the Chicago exposition.

In 1889, Bowen sold one of the lots on his property to Levi Frasier/Frazier. Interestingly, present at the closing was John Ranstead, whose law office is on tour today.

In 1890, Frasier built 414 South Liberty and lived here, with his family, until 1903.

When the current owners bought the house late in 1985, it was in the process of being converted to a 2-flat, a process they quickly put a halt to. Then, with help from the City's Rehabilitation Rehab Program, they began giving 414 S. Liberty all the things it needed: new wiring, plumbing, storms and, as the "plugs" on the exterior show, insulation. Antique lovers, these native Elginites consider their old house by far the best antique they have collected to date.

EXTERIOR

Style Built in 1890, 414 South Liberty is a Victorian home in which Stick/Eastlake detailing has been fused. (See Glossary)

Victorian irregularity is created by the following:

- 1) a one-story bay in the front;
- 2) a two-story bay on the south side;
- 3) the circular extension of the south side porch;
- 4) the asymmetrical positioning of the entries, more pronounced here than at 18 Warwick because of the extended front porch.

Color Scheme One of Elgin's first truly "painted ladies," this home is painted in cream, burnt red and 2 shades of blue in order to draw attention to the architectural detailing. (Whether she is dressed in these colors by this time next year is uncertain. Having finished the big, unable-to-be-seen work on the interior, next on the owners' list is painting the exterior.)

Stick Detailing

The structure of the house is visible as a result of the use of vertical and horizontal boards on the exterior to outline it. Intended as decorative features, they have been painted to stand out.

Lattice work, painted cream, is above the porches. Unlike 18 Warwick's, however, it does not have bulls' eyes in between the squares created.

Eastlake Detailing

Panels of stylized flowers are under the front bay.

On the porches are the machine-turned columns and spindles used as balusters that were popularized by Eastlake.

Shingles Varying in cut from V to polygonal to square, the shingles accenting the gables of the house are set off from the clapboard siding by the darker shade of blue used for them.

Stained Glass In the attics of the north and south gables is a panel of different colored squares of leaded glass. Queen Anne in design, another such panel appears in the window of the bay on the south side of the house.

Foundation Of rough, or rusticated, stone, concrete has been applied over it.

INTERIOR

First Floor Plan The second doorway, at the end of the entry hall, made going through the front parlor, where guests were entertained, unnecessary.

The back stairway from the kitchen to the second floor also made this a convenient home in which to live.

Front Staircase Beneath the railing of oak, curved ribbons of wood run between intricate spindlework.

Hand Graining The graining in the pocket door between the foyer and front parlor and in the paneling under the stairs was brushed on by hand, often with a feather.

Woodwork Of pine throughout, on the first floor it was stained to appear walnut and then varnished.

Upstairs, it was painted with the old milk paint that defies stripping.

Most unusual are the curved corner "blocks" of the windows and doors throughout the entire house as well as in the hall window.

Molding is used as decorative trim along the ceilings of the parlors.

Fireplace Finely detailed, ribbons and stylized flowers are carved into the mantle.

On both sides of the firebox, ceramic tiles, when joined, depicted sunflowers in a pot on which a fish swims.

Glass In the front parlor's bay is an ornate panel of leaded, stained glass with inserts of clear, beveled-glass squares.

In the second parlor's bay is the Queen Anne-styled panel of leaded, stained glass that reappears in the attic gables.

Door hardware throughout the home is original.

Kitchen Where the woodburning stove now stands was a brick hearth, suggesting that a fireplace once heated this always-large room.

The bathroom off the kitchen was originally the kitchen's pantry. Its tin ceiling was added by a previous owner.

Second Floor

The double, folding door between the front and middle bedrooms is original to the house.

The pedestal sink and built-in medicine cabinet in the bath is thought to be original.