



#### 426 PRAIRIE

##### HISTORY

James H. Baker, the man who built 426, came from England in 1847 in the company of a number of relatives, including an uncle named James. All settled in DuPage County, where they bought extensive tracts of land and made farms/orchards for themselves.

Thirty-five years later, Uncle James retired to Elgin, purchased land on Prairie Street and built 376. Following him were his nephew John—who built a similar home directly across the street at 368—and his niece, Mary Baker Battin, who settled at 380. Joining them in June of 1896 was their brother James H, who purchased property in the next block from Vincent and Edward Lovell for \$1,000. Working as a non-licensed contractor/builder, James H., most certainly with help from his family, began building the home on tour today.

In the years that followed, 426 suffered the fate of many of the old homes in the neighborhood: it was carved up into a 2-flat and rented out. By 1984, when the current owners rented it with option to buy, it was a deteriorating home in a deteriorated neighborhood. Nevertheless, they began investing the dollars and hours required to return it to the single-family home it once was. Nor, since they purchased it in 1985, have they stopped. And as is so often the case, others are following suit. Last summer, for example, the badly peeling gray and white house next door became a compatably painted lady.

## EXTERIOR

Style Neo-Colonial (See Glossary)

Victorian/Queen Anne Features Clearly a reflection of Queen Anne architecture in this 1896 house is its wrap-around porch with machine-turned columns.

Although not Queen Anne in design, also still present in the bays is stained glass, a Victorian rather than Adams/Georgian touch.

As is true of the 2 Victorian homes on tour, the entries of this house are asymmetrical, not even aligned with each other.

Transitional Features With the exception of the curve created by its front porch and its 3-sided front bay, 426 Prairie is rectangular in shape. Barely protruding from the house, for example, is the east-side bay, and it does so in a 90-degree angle to the wall.

Interestingly, the balustrades that originally supported the curving rail of the porch were 1 x 1s rather than turned spindles.

Classical Detailing A Palladian window is in the front gable.

A pediment caps the section of the porch in line with the left-side entry.

The tooth-like dentils run horizontally across the cornice of the porch as well as across the cornice banding the second story.

The Mystery The second-story dentilled cornice stops, strangely, just after turning the corners at the rear of the house. Even odder is the fact that when it stops, the ends are not in line with each other. A walk around the back and sides reveals how it works. The reason for it, however, almost defies explanation.

Siding Three-inch beveled boards which are mitred at the corners side the house.

Gone are the gray, asphalt shingles that for so long hid the second story. And hot-platted and handscrapped off has been much of the peeling and alligatored paint.

Color Scheme Those who assured the owners that the gold/red/gray-green color scheme they finally chose was appropriate for an 1896 Neo-Colonial house knew whereof they spoke: as scraping later revealed, these were the original colors of it.

Structural Soundness Although the wrap-around porch was literally hanging from the house, so rotten was the wood, so well-built was the house that the added stress had little effect: carpenters found the house only 1/8th-inch off plumb from corner to corner.

Porch Restoration All that remains of the original porch are the columns. Yet with the exception of the balusters, which were originally 1 x 1s, all has been faithfully reproduced, including the 45-degree angle of the balusters to the stair rail. Thus "sensitively restored has been the essence of the porch."

The lattice around the bottom is temporary. The owners have tracings of the ornamental vertical boards that were originally used and plan to reproduce them.

Half-circle windows appear in the gables on the sides of the house.

Foundation The front half of the stone foundation has a beaded mortar joint. That it gave a more finished look is evident when compared with the mortar work toward the back of the house.

#### INTERIOR

Entry Doors The 2 doors, of cypress, are matching ones.

Detailing is applied rather than carved into them.

In addition to an ornate flower, the dentils banding the house are repeated in the doors.

The brass mail slots between the lower, recessed panels are thought to be original.

Floor Plan When converted to a 2-flat, completely walled up were the doorways from 1) the foyer to the front parlor, 2) the foyer to the kitchen and 3) the second parlor to the dining room. Reduced to a standard 36-inch opening had been the doorway between the 2 parlors. By reopening these doors, the original circular floor plan has been restored.

Pocket Door Found in the walls when restoration was underway was the pocket door between the foyer and front parlor. Of cypress, on the parlor side, it is handgrained to appear more exotic.

Woodwork throughout the house is cypress. Coated with paint, all has had to be stripped.

The door trim and mop boards that were removed when doorways were closed off or reduced is being reproduced. Most should be in place for the tour.

Staircase With the exception of the floors, the staircase's newel post, rail and balusters—of oak—is the only wood in the house that is not cypress.

The square newel post is of the Doric Order of Greek architecture. It is trimmed with wood beading and alternating patterns of egg and dart. The cap of the post was so coated with paint that completely hidden were the stylized leaves in the corners.

Floors The floors in both parlors, the dining room and the foyer are oak.

The walnut banding in the foyer, which for many years was covered with linoleum, reappears as a border in the dining room floor.

Flooring in the other first floor rooms is maple.

Upstairs, except for the oak in the hallway, 8-inch pine planks were used.

Front Parlor The Eastlake and black laquer Oriental furniture in this room as well as the other details recreate the room as it might have appeared when the house was built.

Second Parlor The brackets under the window seat in the bay are repetitions of the brackets that appear under this bay on the exterior wall.

The brick wall is really the exposed brick of the chimney. Eventually, a wood-burning stove will be installed here.

As there was no evidence that pocket doors had separated the 2 parlors, the owners added the French doors, which is what the room might originally have had.

Dining Room The hole in the wall is thought to have been a China cabinet. The owners are waiting to find the right piece to put there in its place.

Kitchen & Back Hall The kitchen is currently being remodeled. Removed from it was the old pump in the corner which was used to bring rainwater in from the cistern.

The wainscot that appears in the back hall was also in the kitchen and will be reproduced for it.

In the back hall was a wall-mounted bench with coat hooks. Missing, the owners intend to reproduce it.