

# 490 Park



## Four Square and 86 Years Ago . . .

Between 1870 and 1890, Elgin's population expanded from 5,400 to 22,000 as it became the nation's center for butter and cheese trade and the manufacture of fine watches. To accommodate the burgeoning population, the need for different housing emerged. Worker's flats and cottages stood side by side amidst the grand homes of the wealthier class.

This house, while not a worker's flat or a grand mansion, epitomizes the turn-of-the-century striving for an economical and comfortable house. Such simplicity and concern for space was a reaction to the decorative exuberance

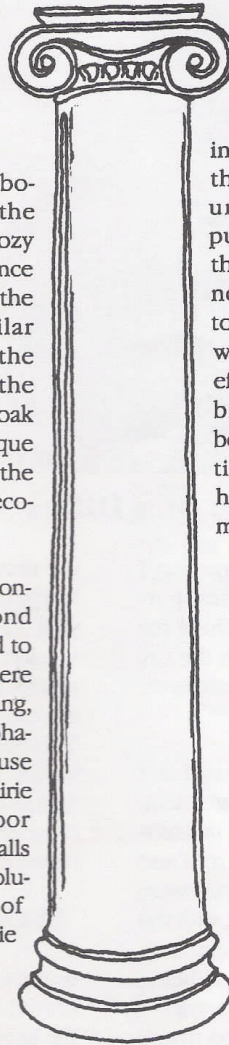
and eclecticism of the Victorian era, and answered the housing needs for the growing middle class. Oscar L. Fabrique, a long-time employee of the Elgin Watch Factory, married his next-door neighbor Kathrine McKenzie, and together they had this house built. The original cost was \$5,000.00.

This simple compact form and natural stucco cladding are characteristic of the post-Victorian American Foursquare style. The unique oversized horseshoe dormer and the half-round window marking the stairwell on the east facade suggest either a Beaux Arts or a Louis Sullivan influ-

ence. The bay forms soften the overall box form of the house and give special focus to the parlor, dining room and second floor bedrooms.

The interior features an elaborate columned enclosure at the stairwell that also creates a cozy nook for a writing desk. Evidence of a fourth column just inside the front door, indicates a similar structure was there to mark the entry and define and screen the parlor. The tapered octagonal oak columns have simple Romanesque column capitals and also recall the low-relief of Louis Sullivan's decorative geometric details.

The original continuous horizontal wood banding at the second floor window heads is scheduled to be replaced at the first floor where it had been removed. The banding, once restored, will further emphasize horizontal lines of the house which is characteristic of the Prairie Style. The relatively open floor plan, with unusual diagonal walls shows influence of the truly revolutionary spatial experiments of Frank Lloyd Wright in his Prairie Style houses in the northern and western Chicago suburbs during the same decade.



Jim and Carol Herman, the current owners, with the help of their industrious children, removed the old wall-to-wall carpeting and discovered the unique thin, quarter-sawn oak floors underneath. When they pulled up the old flooring in the kitchen though, they were not as fortunate and needed to replace the floor with new wider oak planks. The overall effect in the kitchen, with its brand new cabinets, is a beautiful room which is sensitive to the character of the house without sacrificing modern conveniences.