

506 Sherman Avenue

The Harry J. Daveler House

Built in 1904

Colonial Revival /
Queen Anne Style



Col. Edward C. Lovell, a distinguished Elgin resident, was a large landowner in Elgin before the turn of the century. Among his holdings was the lot that would eventually become 506 Sherman Avenue. Col. Lovell served as a two-term Kane County judge, the Elgin city attorney, president of the board of education, mayor of Elgin and a member of the State Legislature.

After Edward died in 1902 at the age of 60, Harry J. Daveler — a 37-year veteran of the Elgin National Watch Co. — purchased the property from the Lovell estate. Harry Daveler built 506 Sherman Avenue in 1904 and lived at the house only six years.

In 1910, he sold it to William W. Payne, a distinguished astronomy professor and the first director of the Elgin Observatory (see the accompanying story). Since then, the house has been the residence of eight

different Elgin families.

The Harry J. Daveler house has strong neo-colonial elements -- the front porch is a strong example -- as well as Victorian/Queen Anne architecture. Highly noticeable is the two-story, six-sided turret complete with a witch's cap, and the set of palladian windows located at the upper front gable.

The current owners of 506 Sherman Avenue purchased the property in 1987. They had been living in the lower unit of a two-flat apartment just down the street on Arlington Avenue.

"The apartment was OK when the kids were small, but eventually we needed more room," recalled the owner. "When the house at 506 Sherman became available, we decided to buy it. The house was in good shape when we moved in, and we have added central air, a new furnace, a new paint job, as well as annual routine

maintenance. This house has served us well."

The historic home also has a large backyard the owners use for gardening and some entertaining. Several years ago while replanting an area on the north part of the backyard, the owner reported finding several arrowheads and stone tools. They also found some American coins dating from the 1850s, as well as horseshoes and rusty tools. They believe that early owners of the property used that area to store horses and horse-drawn coaches. ❧

Architectural Details

Exterior

We encourage you to spend several minutes noticing the many details on this house, including the following:

- **Enclosed wrap-around porch.**

Whether the house originally was designed with an open Queen Anne porch is unknown; however, the existing porch is still full-width and offers countless hours of near year-round enjoyment. Notice the horizontal band of dentils running across the top of the porch. This is the only place where these little teeth appear on this house. The porch columns are capped with the scrolled capital of the Ionic order of Greek architecture.

- **Classical features.** Many of these details are borrowed from the Adams/Georgian colonial form of architecture. Examples of this at 506 Sherman are the gables at the front and sides formed in a pediment or triangle. This design is found in Greek temples. Also, there is a palladian window in the front bay gable. The dentils and columns on the porch are other classical features.

- **Steep hipped-shaped roof with four uniformly pitched sides.** The owners have insulated the attic and use it for storage.

- **Bays.** The house has two sets of bays. The one on the front facade is a two-story or double bay. The other is on the west side of the northwest side of the house. Both are angled.

Interior

- **Original flooring.** As is the case in many homes throughout Elgin, the first floor of this house features oak floors; the four bedrooms on the second floor are pine. An unusual feature is that the second-floor hall is also of oak. Notice the multi-colored square porcelain tiles in the front vestibule. The owners are unsure of the type of wood under the kitchen floor.

- **Three types of wood trim.** Owing to the availability and popularity of hard-

woods at the turn of the century, Harry Daveler selected fine woodtrim for his living room, including the elaborately carved fireplace mantle. The remainder of the main floor is trimmed with golden oak, while the upstairs is yellow pine. As you tour the living room, notice the modified columns fluted in classical Greek fashion framing the fireplace, as well as the carved eagle claws, leaves and alternating egg and dart motifs. The cast iron fireplace cover is original and features a pioneer wagon scene.

- **Formal staircase with an arched, art-glass window.** One of the most beautiful features of the house is the colorful stained glass window on the west side of the staircase. Following the classical detailing in other parts of the house, the square shape of the newel post is of the Doric order in Greek architecture. The flutes or grooves of the newel post and balusters supporting the rail are of the Ionic order.

- **Three sets of pocket doors.** Featuring original door hardware, the three pocket doors allow the homeowner to close off the foyer and retain heat in the living and dining rooms. Each of the doors -- one 6.5 feet across, another 4.5 feet, the other 3 feet -- is a single unit. Each one when open extends the full length of the doorway, slides neatly into a space inside the wall.

Although the placement of the pocket doors may suggest otherwise, there is no evidence the living room was divided into two parlors.

- **Other decorative windows.** Notice the beveled glass in the entry door and the beveled leaded glass in two living room windows. The upstairs leaded glass is not beveled.

- **Built-ins.** There is a small built-in china cabinet in the dining room and a six-drawer, four-shelved cupboard on the second floor.

- **Curved ceilings in the dining room and living room.**

- **Rear sleeping porch.** Visitors could use the sleeping porch off the northeast bedroom to stay cool during warm summer nights.

Quest for Accuracy Drove Director of Observatory

As Elgin residents unite to reclaim neighborhood pride, the grand homes and unique accomplishments of past citizens continue to inspire.

The examples of this are plentiful throughout the city's three historic districts, but one of the most compelling is that of Professor William W. Payne. He lived at 506 Sherman Avenue from 1910 to 1928. Once regarded as a leading authority in astronomy, Payne supervised the construction and equipping of the dome-shaped Elgin Observatory at the corner of Raymond and Watch streets "with a zeal and enthusiasm which characterized his whole life," noted *Popular Astronomy* (January, 1943) -- a publication Payne founded.

Payne was appointed the first director of the observatory at age 72. He held the title for 19 years until retiring at age 89.

Completed in 1910 and now listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the observatory was an investment for the Watch Company.

Already famous for its high quality timepieces, the company carefully selected the site and built the observatory close to the watch factory to provide watchmakers with scientifically accurate time within ten-hundredths of a second.

According to Gary Kutina, a U-46 astronomy teacher and planetarium director for the past 14 years, Payne chose a transit telescope containing a three-inch objective lens made by the Warner and Swasey Co. of Cleveland, Ohio. Just like the clocks in the observatory, the transit telescope was mounted on a concrete pier structurally independent from the building's foundation to avoid vibrations. (continued)