

# 527 Villa



## *The James Lund House*

*Built in 1919*

*American  
Foursquare Style*

The lot this property sits on is very strange indeed. A large parcel of land was owned in the 1860s by a man named Henry Sherman. Gradually, his land was sold off over a 20-year period, resulting in a very confusing jumble of lots and parcels exchanging hands. The end result was that in 1919, a man named Henry Daveler sold his lot to James Lund, who built a brick house on it. That house is 527 Villa Street, and the property which extends behind it is the jumble of real estate transactions which left James Lund with this little slice of paradise.

The property abuts that of nine different neighbors, and goes on forever in an L-shape. It is a virtual "Garden of Eden," which all began when Lund, a builder and naturalist, created it. He was very artistic, and created from stone, huge, unusual functioning stone fountains and birdhouses. Other creations seem to just have been just for fun, such as a concrete log and a tiny toadstool.

He designed a heated outdoor fish pond which ran under the original back terrace and was enclosed with glass windows at one time. He had a pigeon coop with attached planting bed starters off the side. He even made a cement picnic table for dining outdoors. An inventor of sorts, he thought through ideas like bird-baths with cavities for hot coals, which would keep the water from freezing in the winter. All around are his little gizmos and doo-dads. It's like nothing you've ever seen before.

You would never realize from viewing this property from Villa Street that all this was back there. The house is a simple, very typical brick foursquare with no embellishment whatsoever. The porch runs the full width of the house, and is very solid in construction. There is brick corbelling on the porch columns, and this motif is repeated and even carried inside and reflected in the woodwork.

After a lifetime in his original house, James Lund sold it to James and Ella Farmer, who raised their family in it, and then were forced to move when Ella became ill, and the Farmers could no longer keep up the prop-

erty. That was 1986. Jerry and Karen Reynolds had just arrived here from California. They had met in college, where he was a football player and she was a cheerleader. He became an X-ray Technician and she was hired by United Airlines right after graduation. They transferred her to Chicago, and she and Jerry had to find a house.

This was the third house they looked at and they wanted it. "We looked at houses the rest of the day, but it was a waste of time," says Jerry. The house wasn't even listed yet -- Karen just noticed it from the street because she could see the beautiful interior woodwork through the front window. They were able to get in and see it, and then came the task of convincing their families that they weren't crazy. Yes, they were fresh out of college and yes, this was their first house, and yes, it was almost 70 years old, but it was a great house with a great big yard.

One look inside and the families were also convinced. The vestibule has a terrazzo tile floor, intricate carved wood trim and a beveled mirror. Through a glass paneled door is an open plan entry hall with an abundance of Craftsman-inspired trim work. A piano is tucked in the corner, and the staircase, with square newel posts and square spindles, has a beautiful window on the landing. The living room is separated from the dining room by built-in panels featuring bookcases with multi-paned glass doors, and simple square tapering columns above. Continuing in the Craftsman look is the built-in china breakfront in the dining room with matching twin multi-paned windows on either side. Karen and Jerry have a bevy of antiques, some of which came from the Farmer family when they sold them the house. The dining room light fixture was from their collection, and is not original to the house. However, there is an original gas light fixture on the wall.

The kitchen has been updated and decorated by the Reynoldses. Karen did the stenciling on the cabinets and floor. The breakfast nook, or sun porch area has the original terrazzo floor with the star motif. This area was always an enclosed room, and presents the house with a wonderful wall of windows, projecting in a very shallow bay on the rear of the house.

The upstairs of the house is not on the tour, but follows the typical Foursquare layout. There is a third floor with a master bedroom and bath in it. Although they've been in the house ten years, Jerry and Karen have spent a bulk of the time working on their huge yard.

When they arrived, it had been neglected for a number of years, and the weeds were taller than Jerry. There were areas that were impenetrable due to the overgrowth. Jerry says he unearthed the cement picnic table from beneath a grave of overgrowth. That's how thick it was back there.

The Reynoldses have worked on hauling, clearing, and arranging ever since, using bricks found on the property to create the patios and other things. Jerry feels like he's been collecting rocks for ten years, and has ruined two car transmissions in the process. With three little ones, Charlyn, Kaylie and Jered, equal time has to be given to play. Jerry has converted part of the old pigeon coop into a kennel for the dogs, and is planning to turn the rest of it into a playhouse for the kids. In the farthest reaches of the yard is a large swimming pool, which Jerry says he had to install. "It was the only way to kill the weeds back there."

At the back of the yard is what's left of the old cement posts and iron gates which once formed the border of the property. Jerry and Karen love this house and acre of "park" and plan to continue to bring it back as best they can to what it was originally intended for. They're not on a schedule. She is still working for United, and he continues as an x-ray technician in Elgin. They spend summers tending to their yard, slowly eliminating "the pit," which is the area of the yard he is still weeding through, to be recycled at a later date.

Lester Lund, who grew up in the house and is now in his seventies, still talks about his dad's famous garden which people from miles around came to see, and the hours he spent creating it. James Lund would be happy to know that his yard and his artwork is being cared for and that, thanks to the Reynoldses agreeing to be part of the Historic Elgin House Tour, people still come from miles around just to see it.

