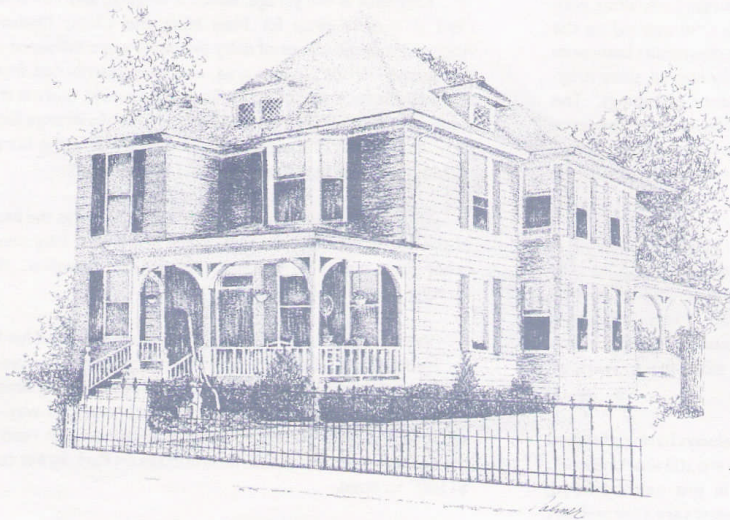


625 Lillie Street



“This is the perfect house for children . . . their imaginations can run wild here.”

Wisitors will be delighted with the character and warmth of this house -- that's probably just what Maureen and Will Alexander had in mind when they bought it. The kids are all grown, and they certainly don't need five bedrooms anymore, but there's grandchildren to consider. Maureen, who has lovingly decorated the house in her own antique eclectic style, says she even has plans for the attic to be a place where her little granddaughters can climb the stairs to a world of dress-up and make-believe. “This is the perfect house for children. With all the nooks and crannies, their imaginations can run wild here.”

This house, of Colonial Revival style, was built circa 1899. It was home to Fred and Minnie Traub, who pioneered the Traub Bros. Bakery against the advice of just about everyone in town. The bakery opened in 1889 at 61 Douglas Avenue, and ten years later, with business going strong, Edward, the first of the two Traub brothers, was born. He attended Elgin public schools, and Ellis Business College, and went straight from school into the bakery business, eventually taking it over, with

his brother Henry, when their father retired in 1924.

The bakery business was obviously very good to the Traub family. Even in the 1880s, given the choice, quite a few folks did buy their baked goods at Traub Bros. Bakery, the only bakery in Elgin. Financed by a successful business, Fred had this beautiful house on Lillie built sometime around the turn of the century. When son Edward married his wife, Hilda, they moved into the house, and lived out their lives there. Fred and Minnie may have moved nextdoor then; they also owned 619 Lillie, and you can see some similarities in the style of the houses.

Since that time, there have been just two other owners of significance: the Fowler family, of tree trimming fame, and the current owners, who have lived here since 1990, which isn't long, but they say they don't plan to ever leave. Possibly the only fault you can find with this house is its overcoat of aluminum siding, but Will & Maureen plan to strip it off as soon as it's feasible. Underneath is narrow clapboard siding, which you can see when you exit the house, since a section of siding has been removed from the back porch area.

The Colonial Revival style of the house is simple; a reaction to more complex excesses of the Victorian period of architecture. There is an emphasis on function, with a clear distinction between the formal living spaces for the owner

and those at the rear which were once for the hired help. And while things like this are obvious in an architectural sense, we modern-day people arbitrarily use the front or the rear staircase depending on which gets us to our destination faster.

Some of the original ornamentation of this house has been obscured by aluminum siding, but ornament was not as elaborate on a house of this type. Even on the interior, where most detail is intact, there is a simple, classically derived egg and dart motif on the door and window trim.

The house features a hipped roof, which was originally wood shingle, and small attic dormers with diamond mullion window patterns. The projecting wings on the north and west sides of the house flow nicely, and are well integrated with the main volume of the house. This is another example of the departure from Queen Anne style, where projections are usually styled to contrast with the main building volume.

And a verandah is always a nice touch, especially one as cozy as this one. The low slope of the roof makes the porch seem to sweep from the house in a gesture of greeting and welcome. The heavy curved porch brackets and simple columns, while reminiscent of Stick style, are probably more closely related to the Utilitarian Craftsman style.

Enter through the double door under an addressed transom, and you'll see a stunning foyer, filled with enough rich woodwork to make your head spin. All at once there's access to a quaint little sitting room, which was once the council room for the church down the street, a powder room, the parlor and dining room, not to mention a grand staircase. All the decorating in the house was done by Maureen, who teaches Junior High math when she's not working around the house.

Upstairs are five frilly rooms . . . a nursery, lace-lined bedrooms and guest rooms, and Maureen's intriguing work room, which she always wanted as a treat, so she could sit somewhere nice and grade papers. There's a lovely bay window in the white lace room, and antique radiators and fixtures throughout all the rooms. Even the insides of all the closets are trimmed out, and adorned with fancy doorknobs.

Will is a carpenter, but he hunts in his spare time, and you'll see some of his collection in the library. In the kitchen is an original rose marble sink, which matches the one upstairs. These lovely fixtures were utilitarian in their day, and although Will's got them both in operating order, they now serve more as a perfectly preserved bit of charm for this house. The stenciling in the kitchen was done by the current owner, but the faux finish wood grain on the cabinets was done by a former boarder in the house -- an art student who lived in the basement sometime in the 1950s.

There is a stunning butler's pantry, complete with antique ice door, which passes through to the back hall. Speaking of antiques, the house is filled with them, having been collected over a lifetime. And they seem to have found the perfect home here on Lillie Street.

Along *the* Way

Lillie Street is named for the daughter of Jonathan Force, who owned a nursery east of Liberty Street, and subdivided the land here. The person who subdivides land chooses names for all the streets, and he named this one after Lillie Force. There are many other streets in East Elgin named for early Elgin residents or their family members, such as Gifford Street, Walker Place, Mary Place, Tefft Avenue, Lovell Street and Hinsdell Place.

650 Lillie, at the corner of Lillie and Preston, is a rustic blue and brown frame house which dates back to the mid-19th century. The house has been changed slightly over the years with additions, but one of the most fascinating features of it is the oak hand hewn beams in the basement. These rough beams, cut by hand with an axe, place the date of this house somewhere in the 1850s -- very old indeed.

A neighbor who has lived on the street for 70 years remembers that in the 1920s, the Burns family lived in the house, and Old Man Burns was a mean old "son of a gun" who scared all the neighborhood kids. They would try to steal apples from his yard, and he would run out and chase them away. If one of the children accidentally hit a ball into his garden, he would keep it. The kids would send their father over to ask for the ball, and the men would inevitably disappear into the garage and drink beer together. Old Man Burns had an outhouse in back of his house which would get tipped over every Halloween by pranksters getting their revenge.

His son, Milton Burns, ran a drug store on Bluff City Boulevard which served up the famous "Burns malteds" for years. When the store closed, the malts were gone until Al Berg bought the recipe when he opened Al's Cafe & Creamery. Next time you have a malt at Al's, remember you're tasting a little bit of Elgin history.

