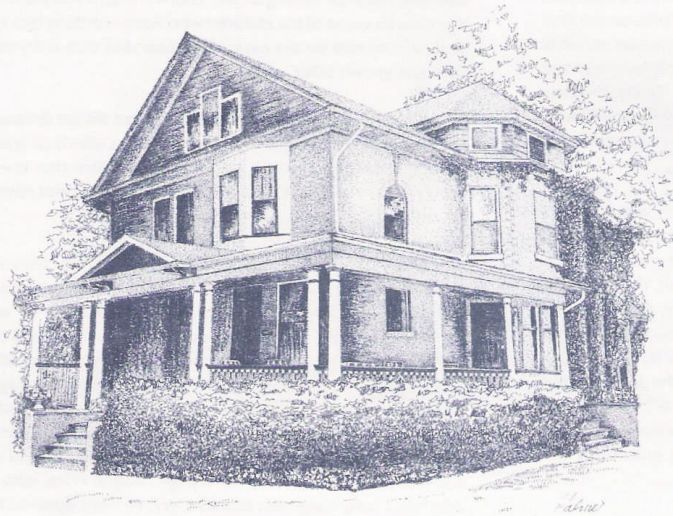


636 Park Street



Yuletide Treasure



In a picturesque corner, with a spacious lot and a canopy of mature trees, sits the brick house built in 1903 for Emma and Thomas P. Matters.

The Matters family resided in Elgin since 1885, and were the founders of the Matters Tubular Wells Company. The business was apparently located on the same property as the house -- perhaps out of the barn -- since the barn precedes the house. The main section of the original barn is still standing, in fact. The garage, as you see it now, has a full second story.

The house itself sports a mixture of styles, from a Queen Anne wrap-around porch, to Greek Revival rooflines to the Italianate 2-story square turret, and round-headed windows. It is very large, both inside and out, and with five bedrooms, was once used as a rooming house for Elgin Watch Factory workers.

The current owners, Peter and Judy Browne, are empty nesters, believe it or not. They have always loved old houses, though, and had already renovated one in

Bloomington, Illinois. With the kids are grown, they wanted something finished that they could just enjoy. This house fit the bill. Judy says they have no intention of ever moving again -- they are, "potted here."

However, even with a finished house, they have a few projects in mind. Judy is re-working the perennial garden and adding other landscaping touches, and still wants to do some more redecorating inside. They also will remodel the kitchen at some point, and that job will be "significant" since both she and Peter love to cook.

The house is quite impressive, with an abundance of egg and dart wood trim, ornate doorknobs and hardware, and birdseye maple flooring. The Brownes didn't realize when they first looked at the house that there was no fireplace in it. The fireplace you see in the parlor was salvaged from a mansion in Blair, Nebraska, for 25¢.

With the help of some neighbors who lived in the house 50 years ago, Judy and Peter have been able to guess at the original layout of the first floor, before the sitting room was put in. Where you see the built-ins in the dining room, there was originally a door to the kitchen, and the Brownes plan to replace it. In the basement oil room, they found all the cabinetry for a butlers pantry, but had a hard time guessing where it would have been located. But then one day, Judy

discovered an exterior window that had been walled over on the interior, and figured it must have been the pantry window. Now that they know where to put it, they can replace the butlers pantry.

It's something old house enthusiasts can't seem to escape -- buying a house because it is finished, but then still coming up with a substantial list of things that need to be done. When they do take a break from working on their finished house, though, Judy and Peter can enjoy their screened-in front porch, overlooking a quiet street, complete with two old hitching posts out front, to remind them of days gone by.

And if you're already dreaming of a White Christmas, you'll especially enjoy this since Judy has "decked the walls" of her perfect Christmas house, just for the House Tour. "This house decorates for Christmas like you wouldn't believe," she says, and decided to get out the tinsel and holly early this year and treat us to a bonus holiday spread.

Along the Way

55 N. Liberty is a restrained Italian Villa style home characterized by its tower, long narrow windows with hood moulding, projecting gable roof, and irregular plan. Note the Palladian window in the tower. This home was built in the 1880s for H. Walter Pixley, an employee of the Elgin National Watch Factory.

54-56 N. Liberty is a Prairie School design, identified by a strong horizontal emphasis and wide overhanging eaves. The residence was constructed in 1903 by architect and owner, David Postle.

3 N. Liberty, known as the Townsend Flats, was designed by Turnbull and Postle in 1893 for A.K. Townsend. It has served as both a residence and a business, since a grocery was run from the first floor storefront.

600 East Chicago, a prominent landmark home, was built in 1892 for George Richardson, an employee of the David C. Cook Publishing Company. This Queen Anne style house was designed by Turnbull and Postle, and features a combination of shingle and clapboard siding, and a prominent "witch's cap" tower. It was built for a cost of \$6,500.00.

552 East Chicago is an example of Flemish Renaissance architecture, characterized by the stepped brick gable and tower. Note the ornamental brick window hoods and Gothic windows in the tower. It was built in 1891 for Christian Wuestenfeld, the superintendent of the Elgin City Railway Company. Before moving to Elgin, Christian Wuestenfeld worked for Thomas Edison.

470 E. Chicago was the home of six-term Elgin mayor Arwin E. Price, known as the drunken mayor. Built in 1887,

this Stick style house is characterized by a steeply pitched projecting gable, projecting bay, and diagonal decoration.

Rugby Place and Warwick Place (south of Chicago Street) are names reminiscent of England, birthplace of John Webb. He was a foreman of the dial department at the Watch Factory who platted the lots along these streets. Coventry, in the county of Warwickshire, was a center of the English hand-finished watch industry which suffered from competition with cheaper, American machine-made movements. Many of the displaced craftsman migrated to jobs in Elgin.

467 East Chicago, the Walter and Hattie Hemmens house, was erected in the 1870s. The dominant style is Italianate, as seen in the heavy segmental arched window hoods and the paired brackets under the eave. Note the twisted rope colonettes which divide the front windows. This house has recently been given a multi-colored exterior paint job. Hattie Hemmens donated the funds used to construct the Hemmens Auditorium in downtown Elgin.

443 East Chicago is the only structure in Elgin listed in the "Historic American Buildings Survey" and Rev. Newcomb's Architecture of the Old Northwest Territory. Built in 1848, the Asahel Bemis Hinsdell house is the finest example of Greek Revival architecture found in the city.

