

The Preservationist

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Restoring an Historic Herscher House

In September of 1898, Rausford P. Easton purchased the Herscher, Illinois, property in which the house, pictured here, now stands. It is believed that at the time of his death, December 11, 1907, that the house was not yet built. Mr. Easton's heirs sold all of the property in his estate in 1909 to a group of investors: Henry Siedentop, Jacob Reinhart and Henry Appel for \$2,500. They in turn sold a portion of that property, lots 2,3, & 6, to Mrs. Maud Lee for \$400 on January 22, 1910. After securing a loan for \$1,000 it is assumed that a house was built and then sold for \$4,000 in 1912. We therefore believe that this house at 191 N. Maple



St. was built in 1910 by Mrs. Lee. John A. Wagner (1878-1945) and his wife Mary Ellen (1883-1980), who purchased the house, called it home from 1912—1966. Mr. Wagner and his brother Adam established a car dealership

and garage in Herscher in 1910. Following Mr. Wagner's death, the family continued to operate the business until 1971 when John's son Laverne died. Robert and Bettye Evans purchased the house from the Wagner family and lived here until July 12, 1993 when Dr. Kenneth W. & Mary Jane Kirstein, present owners, purchased it. There had not been many changes made to the house until the Kirsteins purchased the house. The entry door and side lights, with beautiful beveled glass held several coats of paint. As you entered there was carpet on



Restoring an Historic Herscher House

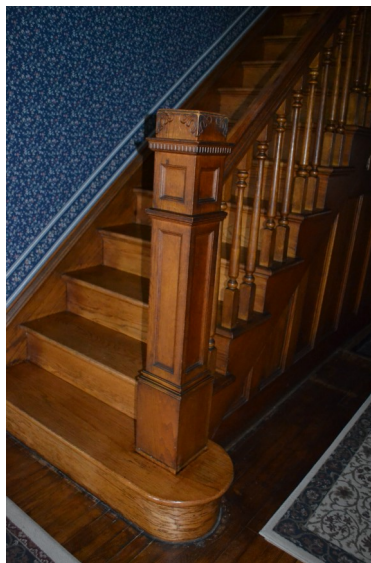
the main floor; the walls, all horsehair plaster, were painted except for one bedroom, which had several layers of wallpaper. A built-in china cabinet in the dining room services both the dining room and the kitchen with doors opening from both sides. A 70s stone fireplace, which exists today in the living room, may have replaced a heating stove. A most interesting chimney system comes from both sides of the house where it probably serviced heating and cook stoves. The chimneys join together in the attic and depart from the center of the house through the roof (see photo). Restoration work began five months prior to the Kirstein's moving in. The entire house was rewired, revealing gas pipes that once serviced the light fixtures. Unfortunately those original fixtures were not left in the house. Through the years the plastered walls

have been sanded and painted or wall-papered. A claw foot bathtub was added to the downstairs bathroom, and space was borrowed from one of the bedrooms to add a second bathroom upstairs. Ken crafted the door trim for the new bathroom from wood found in the house.

The front entry was stripped of its paint, revealing the beautiful wood of which it was constructed. Removing the carpet revealed the original oak and pine flooring. The original slate roof was removed and replaced in 2016, as there was concern that someone may be injured when the slate fell due to the deteriorating nails. Ken stripped sanded and repaired the exterior siding, rebuilt the porch and added the lattice work. As with most "old house" owners, the Kirsteins still have dreams of completing more res-



toration in the future. Top on their list is replacing the stone fireplace with a mantel of the same era as the house. A kitchen remodel will be completed when they decide on a plan and find the perfect furnishings.



Photos: Built in china cabinet, newel post and stair railing leading upstairs, and Dr. Kenneth and Mary Kirstein - proud owners.

The Vanishing Barns of Kankakee County

As we travel the countryside today, we are seeing more and more barns disappearing from the American landscape. They are either in disrepair and falling to the earth or have been torn down to save the farmer from being taxed for a structure he is no longer using. The early farmers built barns to fulfill a function, but today so many of the small farms have been swallowed up. Farming has become a big family business as the families purchase additional land to expand their farming enterprise. The land is valuable to them, but the structures on the land are no longer efficient while others are too expensive to repair.

Originally the nineteenth-century farmer wanted to make sure that the things important to his work were protected—his tools, animals, and the grain he raised to feed his animals. So, he built a shelter. Most often he used local material following the methods that he had learned from his father or possibly brought from out east or from a European country. In Kankakee County the oldest barn foundations were quite often built from native limestone and the frames from local timbers. Since the styles in Kankakee County vary, there could be an interesting study of them by someone in the future.

The Barn, A Vanishing Landmark in North America, by Eric Arthur and Dudley Witney tells us about the majesty of the old

barns.

“The old barn interiors are to be admired for the majesty of its timbers, both horizontal and vertical, but more important is the vision of the interior ex-

posed as a room, in which the eye is drawn from the comparative lowness of one area to the more spectacular height of the central space. Other things that contribute to the barn interior are the rhythm of bays formed by tall timbers, the colour of well-worn boards, and the awareness of the miracle of the framing held together by mortise and tenon and dowels of oak or hickory.”

The early farmer was proud of his barn. One specific barn in Kankakee County’s Limestone Township was known as “The Limestone Opera House.” It was a gathering place for the residents of that area and those with talent would entertain. The farmer’s granddaughter is quoted as saying, “My grandpa used to sit in the kitchen during a storm with a bucket of sand and a bucket of water, just in case the barn should be struck by lightning and catch fire.”



The gambrel roof with vertical walls appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century as a solution to the need for greater storage space.



The stately Kankakee County barn, pictured here, no longer exists. It was in disrepair and the new owners of the property had no use for it. It does however give us a pictorial view of the interior of a barn.



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Early Stone Quarries

On August 1, 1867 the Kankakee Gazette published an article entitled "Our Wealth of Stone". It was in Limestone Township where the first limestone was quarried c. 1852-1853. The Illinois Central Railroad was building its road from Chicago through Kankakee County, continuing to Southern Illinois. When they reached the Kankakee River, it was necessary to build a bridge. The railroad crew opened a quarry near Wiley Creek in Limestone Township, cut large stone blocks for the bridge and hauled those five miles to the bridge site. The bridge was completed in July of 1853. The stone from that quarry was also used for the Court Street bridge, the first Courthouse (built in 1855) and for culverts and bridges up and down the railroad line. Little did they know at the time that stone of superior quality and quantity existed but a few feet below the surface of the earth in the vicinity of Kankakee's

Soldier Creek. Other quarries were later opened within the Kankakee city limits, with many along Soldier Creek. In 1856 the Kankakee Stone and Lime Company was opened. Through the years immense quantities of stone not only filled the demand here at home, but it was also shipped by rail to various distant locations. A large quarry at the mouth of Soldier Creek was owned by Davis Woodward. That quarry supplied light-colored, fine grained, compact limestone and produced the stone for Kankakee's M.E. Church (now Asbury United Methodist Church). Solon Knight who operated a Kankakee quarry donated stone for the First Baptist Church (1863-1866). Its members cut and hauled the stone during construction. Local limestone was also used for Kankakee County's earliest industries. A Flax Oil Mill constructed by Asa H. Moore on West Avenue, near the river; a Woolen Mill; the Dickson & McGrew Flour Mill; and several elegant

stone mansions. The article described the abundance of beautiful stone in our midst and how fortunate the Kankakee area was to have it. They predicted that "other quarries will open in the future due to the choice blue limestone, cropping out in many directions, especially along the banks of the river and almost every stream in the vicinity". It was the "Three-I's" (Indiana, Illinois and Iowa) railroad that made the establishment of the county's largest quarry possible. It began after the railroad line was built in 1881-1882 running across the northern part of Pilot Township. Joseph Carrow, Jr. opened a quarry on his land in 1883. In 1906 Michael Edgeworth and W.R. Sanborn purchased 13 acres near Carrow and went into the quarry business. Ten years later they moved the quarry to a new and more productive site just a mile southeast, in Limestone Township. Today the Lehigh Stone Quarry is one of the largest producers in Illinois of crushed stone for use in concrete, asphalt, and highway construction.