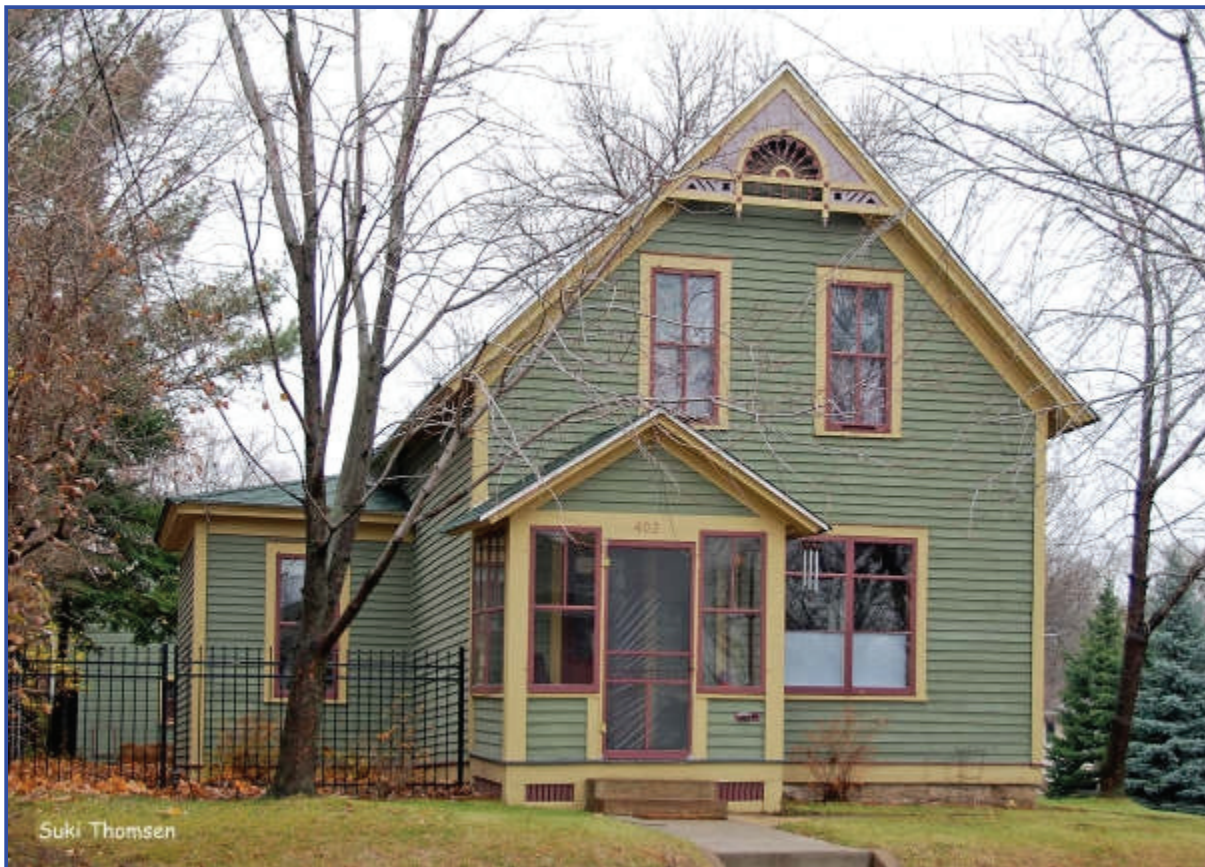




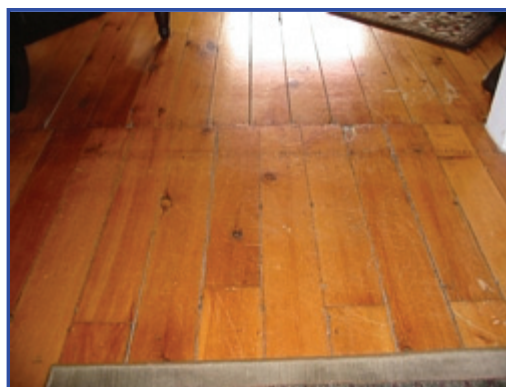
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Property Information

Heirloom Home



402 Wilkins St W



Original pine floor boards



Built in telephone booth

The Military Road

In 1853, before Minnesota became a state, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers surveyed and had built a military road funded by the War Department between Stillwater and Marine on St. Croix. The road rose out of downtown on what is today North Second Street. At Laurel Street the road turned west two blocks, and then set off diagonally across the countryside to intersect Brown's Creek at the stone bridge. In today's geography, the road would have crossed Staples Field heading northwest.

Four years later, in 1857, when the military road was still in daily use, William Hall, age 32, and Sarah Hall, age 25, purchased a lot on the corner of Wilkin and Martha Streets in Wilkin's Addition within a short distance of the road. Although Alexander Wilkin had mapped out his development on paper, including streets to access the lots, there was, in fact, nothing but lonely prairie. The nearest neighbors were outside of shouting range. When William and Sarah journeyed to downtown Stillwater, almost a mile away, they used the military road.

By 1861, the Halls had a small house on this lot, one of the first houses in this part of the city. What William did for a living in the early years of his residence here is uncertain. However, because he was born in New Brunswick, William, like many of his countrymen in

Stillwater, had probably followed the lumbering industry as it moved west.

The first reference to William's occupation is in the 1877 Stillwater City Directory where he is listed as a guard at the Minnesota State Prison at the foot of the Elm Street hill. By 1880, William and Sarah are listed in the U.S. Census as having six children, ages 3 to 19. By this time, the population of Stillwater had increased ten times over, and the area around the Hall's house was rapidly becoming a booming suburb. The military road had been abandoned and the city streets we know today had been graded and opened.

The family lived in the house for over forty years until Sarah's death in October, 1904. The house that had once stood alone on the prairie is now in a city neighborhood.

The original house was probably quite small, no more than two rooms with maybe a lean-to kitchen. The second story might have been added later. According to a building permit, the rear one-story addition was added as a kitchen in 1896. The picture window with its piece of colored glass was added in the 1890s or 1900s, along with other inside improvements including a stylish newel post at the base of the stairs.

Around 2002, the house was totally rehabilitated and the barn converted to a double garage. Fortunately the two men doing the rehabilitation had great respect for the history of the house, and almost all the original elements, including the old windows and original floor, were preserved. The present owner, Tracy McGrorty, purchased the house in 2006 precisely because she wanted an historic house, and she has no intention of "modernizing." The house remains an excellent example of an early vernacular style house, very common in the Midwest and in Stillwater.

Source(s): A house on the lot is evidenced by the 1863-1884 original annual tax assessors' rolls (on microfilm in the St. Croix Collection, Stillwater Public Library). The date of purchase is in Book I of Deeds, page 133. The 1860, 1870, 1880 U.S. Census lists the Halls, although some of the information is contradictory. The 1879 Bird's Eye View map of Stillwater displays the house and the route of the military road. The City of Stillwater building permit application #878. The 1924 Sanborn Insurance Atlas shows the house. Sarah's death is indexed in Fairview Cemetery Interments by Nancy Bader and Duane Thein for the Washington County Historical Society. For more information on the military road, see Tracing Minnesota's Old Government Roads by Grover Singley, 1974.

Washington County Parcel Identification Number (PIN): 2103020340120

Common Property Name: Hall, William & Sarah

State Historic Preservation Office Inventory Number: [WA-SWC-1714](#)

Construction Date: [1857](#)

Builder: _

Architect: _

Architectural Style: [Vernacular](#)

Property information and narrative was compiled by: Donald Empson, Empson Archives - 12/17/2008

