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Property Information

Heirloom Home



102 School St W



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From The Prison to Flowers

In the earliest days of Stillwater, the area around this house at 102 West School Street was the cemetery for the city of Stillwater. In the late 1860s, Fairview Cemetery in the southwest part of the city was established. And by 1870 all the bodies--at least those they could find--were moved out of this location and into Fairview Cemetery. In 1873, a large public school, named the Lincoln School, was constructed across the street from this house, on a square bounded by Laurel, School, Third and Fourth Streets.

Because this house at 102 West School Street was built on unplatted land, it is very difficult to determine when it was built without access to the Abstract of Title for the property. We can be sure it was built between 1870 when the cemetery was emptied, and before 1877 when Oscar Comfort is listed in the Stillwater City Directory as living in the house.

It appears Oscar was born in Mineral Point, Iowa County, Wisconsin, in March of 1843 to Amrze and Eliza Comfort. Amrze was a well-to-do surveyor who was recorded in the 1850 U.S. Census as owning \$3,000 in real estate, a considerable sum in those days.

Ten years later, the family was still living in Iowa County in the town of Linden. Amrze had turned to farming along with his 18-year-old son, Thomas. Oscar was 16 at that time.

After 1860, we lose track of Oscar, but we do know that he was elected a Justice of the Peace in Stillwater in 1873 for the Ward in which this house is located. By 1880, Oscar Comfort was married to his wife, Ada, and they were living in St. Paul on Marshall Avenue along with a seven-year-old son, Harry, and Oscar's brother, Allan. Oscar was recorded in the U.S. Census as a lawyer, and his brother, a law student. According to a notice in the September 29, 1881 Stillwater newspaper, The Sun, Ada Comfort and her husband sold the house and lot on the North Hill to Frank Berry for \$2,000.

Frank Berry was born in England in October, 1850, and came to the United States when he was four years old. In the 1870s, he moved from Afton to Stillwater where he worked as a guard in the State Prison. In the summer of 1880, the U. S. Census, records Frank as a 30-year-old boarder living with Ivory McKusick at 504 North Second Street. Within months he married his wife, Esther and purchased the School Street house.

In the early 1890s, Berry established himself as a florist and nurseryman, proprietor of the Fairview Greenhouses at 1336 South Fourth Street, and a downtown retail store at 232 East Myrtle Street. It has been written that in his later years, Berry operated his florist business out of his house by converting a large cellar to a walk-in refrigerator for the fresh flowers.

Frank Berry, a widower, died in his School Street house February 25, 1929.

This stylish house is of the Gothic Revival style, noted for its steeply pitched roofs and pointed windows gesturing to the heavens, its decorative trim on the front gables (known as verge boards), its two-pane-over-two-pane windows and four-pane-over-four-pane storm windows. This style house, built in the 1870s, is relatively rare in Stillwater.

Source(s): The early cemetery is illustrated on the 1870 Bird's Eye View map of Stillwater; both the house and Lincoln School are depicted on the 1879 Bird's Eye View map of Stillwater. The U.S. Census 1850-1920 was useful for the biographical details. The Sun newspaper of September 29, 1881 published the house purchase transaction. The Stillwater City Directories were used also. Some of the information was provided by the 1994 Stillwater Historic Homes Tour brochure written by Sue Collins.

Washington County Parcel Identification Number (PIN): 2803020120075

Common Property Name: Comfort, Oscar and Ada

State Historic Preservation Office Inventory Number: [WA-SWC-1726](#)

Construction Date: [Circa 1872](#)

Builder: _

Architect: _

Architectural Style: [Gothic Revival](#)

Property information and narrative was compiled by: Donald Empson, Empson Archives - 3/28/2009

