



121 Monroe Street

1913 Bungalow
Len Govednik



We are celebrating the centennial anniversary of this home's construction. It was built 100 years ago for Emma Bishop, widow of Thomas, a prosperous farmer and community leader. After his death in 1891, she ran the farm for five years before turning it over to her son and moving into town with her other children. Her first in-town residence, at 168 N. Commonwealth Avenue, was featured on the 2004 Historic House Tour.

In 1910 Emma's daughter and son-in-law, Flora and Arthur Smythe, built their home at 821 Larkin Avenue. That home is directly north of the house featured on today's tour. In 1913 the Smythes subdivided their lot, so that Emma could build a smaller home to serve as her residence in old age.

Following Emma's death in 1929, the house evolved into rental property and spent the next six decades hosting a series of residents. It must have been a comfortable home to live in because some of the owners and tenants resided there for several years. However, by 1988 the house was a HUD foreclosure. Boarded up and forlorn-

looking, it had no curb appeal and was easily overlooked by potential buyers. Routine maintenance had been neglected for some time and the mechanical systems were aged and out of date. Fortunately, however, almost all of the home's original details were present and the building was structurally sound.

At the time, Len Govednik was in the market to purchase his first home. After seeing several uninspiring prospects he was instantly smitten with this house, despite its condition and what would be a daunting "to-do" list.

Len had acquired many home repair skills while growing up and helping his father maintain the family home. Having watched countless episodes of *This Old House*, Len was looking for a challenge at a bargain price, and he found it. Upon seeing the house, his mother had a somewhat different assessment and quietly asked, "Is it too late to get your money back?" But for Len, there was no going back. He foresaw a five-year rehab project ahead. Now, 25 years later, he is bringing that project to a close.



Len began with a two-year effort to strip and repaint the exterior of the house. The color was white, a hue not at all in the tradition of bungalows. Len says he began with the exterior for the benefit of the neighbors, who had been living with the sad-looking building. Then his attention moved inside starting with repairing and decorating the bedrooms, followed by a complete gutting and rehabilitation of the bathroom that included replacing all of the plumbing in the house.

As the rehab progressed, Len's skill levels broadened. He went from being a competent repairman, carpenter and painter to someone with a deeper appreciation of the home's architectural style and design heritage. Redoing the dining room was a tipping point that led to a more extensive rehab, as evidenced in the stunning kitchen and decorative artistry now found in the home. The final touch was the patio installed this summer along the home's north side.

As Len points out, rehabbing an older home takes time, money and ambition—and it takes having all three at the same time. We agree, but this certainly was not a mere rehab project. Len has created a minor architectural masterpiece.

Architectural Notes

The term bungalow can be applied to several types of houses, which sometimes leads to confusion over just what a bungalow is. There are many regional variations to bungalows. Further complicating matters, bungalows are sometimes built using design elements from other architectural styles. Yet despite the differences, some features are almost always present to help classify a home as a bungalow. The most common characteristic of a bungalow is that it is one, or one-and-a-half stories high. A full-width front porch is another common characteristic.

Len Govednik's home is good example of bungalows found in the Midwest. It is patterned on the Chicago-style bungalow. These are rectangular buildings with the short side facing the street—a design well-suited for narrow city lots. The hipped roof provides wide overhanging eaves all around the building. Bungalows often feature a front-facing dormer, as with this house. Not present here are dormers on the side roofs. Dormers provide a little more headroom in the "attic" and allow the home to have one-and-a-half stories of living space.

In the city of Chicago, and many close-in suburbs, Chicago-style bungalows are frequently built of brick and embellished with art-glass windows on the front facades and doors. Wood-frame bungalows tend to be simpler and, hence, lower-cost to construct. However, the clapboard siding with its horizontal emphasis makes the house seem longer and wider. It also creates pleasing shadow lines and other details. Elgin has hundreds of bungalows of all types, but especially ones built of wood.

Bungalows often draw heavily on the Arts and Crafts Movement for inspiration in trim and hardware designs, as well as furnishings. This home's dining room, with its built-in cabinetry and beamed ceiling, is a good example. Len's furniture, stenciling, choice of colors and many other decorative elements are all in this tradition. He wants to acknowledge Susan Giugliano, of Gilded Lily Historical Finishes, for the design and craftsmanship of the stenciling and entry vestibule wall surfaces, as well as other fine decorative touches.

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