

325 NORTH LIBERTY



Bungalow Built 1910



325 N. Liberty - Elgin

msanchez
2009

The house at 325 N. Liberty St. was also part of Eliza Vail's land. As several homes on this year's historic house tour do, it has a connection to one of the primary Elgin industries, the making of watches.

The earliest reference to this bungalow was in the 1911-12 Elgin City Directory, where it's listed as belonging to Frank and Marie Knabusch. Frank was an employee of the Illinois Watch Case Company in Elgin. The couple owned the house at least through World War I, though there's no city directory for 1919.

The 1920 city directory lists Ralph T. and Mabel Fowler as owners. Ralph was an Elgin National Watch Company employee for nearly 40 years. According to an article noting his retirement in the December 1953 *Watch Word*, the company's newsletter, he began working in 1912 in the Escape room, where the parts for a watch's escape mecha-

nism were made. His last few years were spent in the Train room, where there were machines that cut teeth into watch gears, or wheels as they are known, polished pinions and pivots and carried out other watch-making operations. A photo accompanying the story shows Ralph "at an automatic machine."

Ralph and his family apparently were photogenic and lively characters. The December 1923 issue of the *Watch Word* features a photo of a party at the Fowler house with the heading, "Hard Times, What?" The 10 partygoers are shown attending a "very jolly character party." The group appears to be dressed as vagabonds, perhaps to contrast with the prosperity of most of the 1920s. Bunco was played, costume prizes were awarded and "delicious refreshments were served," the caption notes. A 1930 *Watch Word*, features a photo of Ralph Jr. at about age 3, in which he is "enjoying a wade in the lake."

The Fowlers owned 325 N. Liberty for 56 years. Ralph Fowler apparently died about 1969, because Mabel alone is listed as owning the house in the 1970 directory.

In 1984, Cheryl Layman (now Bacon) bought the house. Cheryl, who grew up in Carpentersville, said she purchased the home because it was in “fairly good shape” and she “fell in love with the wood-work.”

She married James Bacon in March 1993. He was, until recently, Vision Investments’ senior vice president and chief compliance officer. Cheryl is a consumer loan officer with Harris Bank.

Cheryl attests to both the house’s good construction and the traffic of Liberty Street, because in late 1991, James’ son was sleeping in the house and didn’t feel it when the porch was hit by a van in the middle of the night. Then, the porch was on pylons, but after that the Bacons built a foundation for it.

The Bacons have added blown insulation to the house, as well as replacing galvanized plumbing pipes with copper, remodeling the kitchen and bath, repairing plaster and adding a deck and brick patio.

Cheryl and James enjoy the tranquility and “great view” from their backyard, which has the Elgin Academy football and playing fields to the east, as well as Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church and Lords Park.



Architectural Notes

Bungalow-style homes were built around the country in the first few decades of the 20th century. There are regional differences in the style and this home is commonly referred to as Chicago-style. The design was intended for narrow city lots so the

house is usually two or three times as long as it is wide. The narrow side faces the street with the front entrance. A full-width front porch, as evident here, is typical. The buildings are one or one and a half stories tall with hipped roofs. Dormers were commonly used to create more living and storage space in the attic. Most bungalows, like their close cousins the Craftsman-style homes, have small touches of fine carpentry work. In this case the narrow-exposure clapboard siding not only has mitered corners but flares out as it approaches the ground. Inside, the woodwork is simple, precisely joined and amply displayed.



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