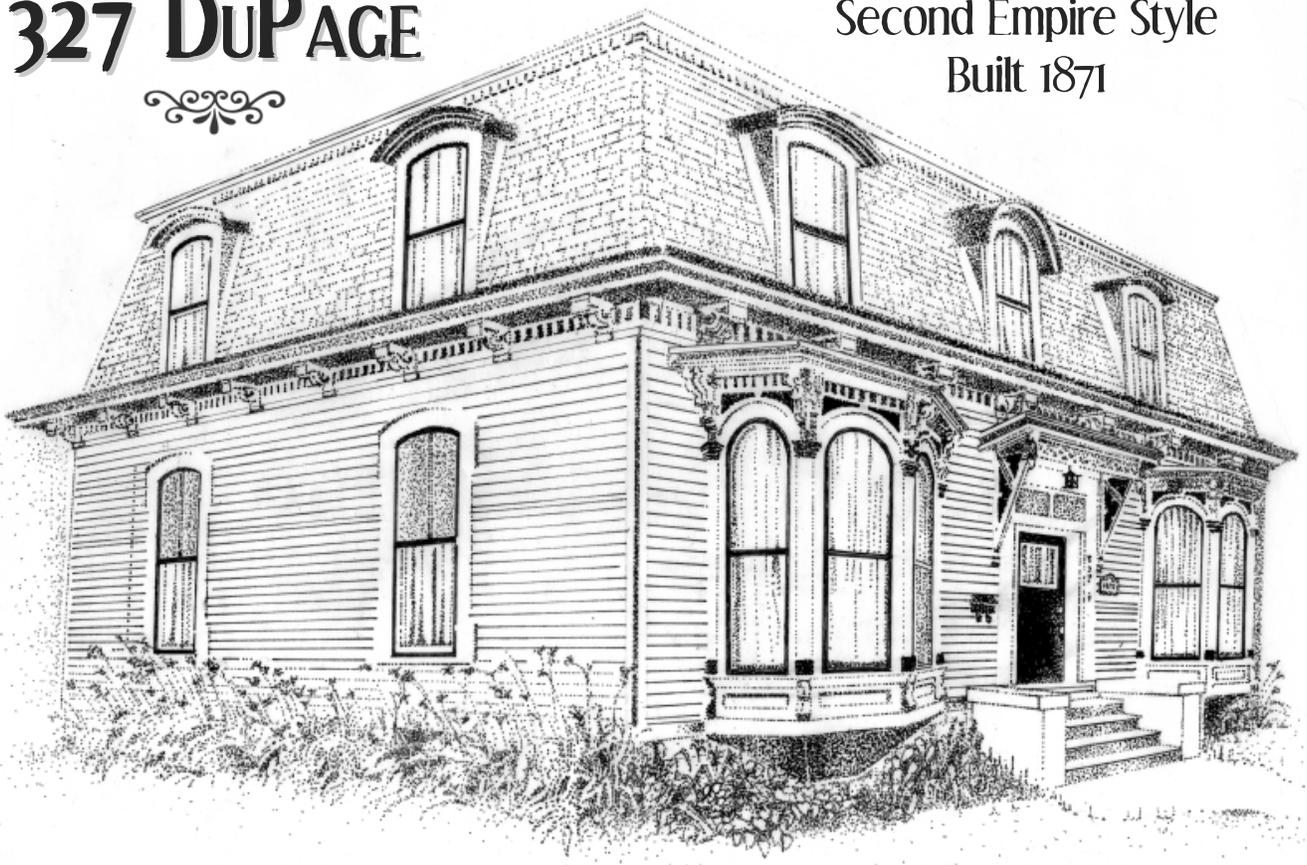


327 DuPAGE

Second Empire Style
Built 1871



This unique little gem of a Victorian was built in 1871 for John Spire, a man who had moved to Elgin in 1848 and was listed in the city directory as a “merchant, capitalist.” He died in 1882, but his widow lived there until some time in the 1890s.

In 1896, the house became home to the rather dapper and definitely fast-moving John M. Murphy, an Elgin alderman. Murphy was one of Elgin’s first car dealers. After he was appointed superintendent of streets, Murphy came up with a design for a motorized street sweeper. He sought out the financing and manufacturing facilities of the American Tower and Tank Company, a firm making water towers, to build the sweeper. The company became known as the Elgin Street Sweeper Company and is still in existence today.

In 1919, John Murphy sold the house. It remained a single-family residence under various owners until 1978, when new owners operating under the business name of Elgin Apartments converted it to a multiple unit building. That hastened the slow and steady decline of the house, which eventually held five apartments. Increasingly an eyesore, the building became a concern for city inspectors and was occasionally known as a “drug house.” Legends about the deteriorated state of the interior abound – including roaches the size of John Murphy’s cars.

In 2007, Elgin officials encouraged contractor Josh B. Harris to purchase the house. The city offered financial incentives to undertake the formidable task of converting the home back to a single-family residence and repairing its numerous code violations. It was a big job to not only repair the damage and modernize the building’s mechanical systems

but to do so in a way that would attract a buyer who would be an asset to the neighborhood. It was part of the city's strategy to stabilize key properties in a distress areas so as to encourage private investment.

Nancy Schatzeder had been looking for a new residence. One day while casually driving about and looking at houses she found herself in Elgin at Gifford Park. In a strange turn of fate, Nancy's grandfather had emigrated to Elgin from Sweden many decades ago. Her father was raised in Elgin until the age of eight. Her daughter attended Elgin Academy until the sixth grade, and Nancy had often driven by the lovely old houses of the Elgin historic district. From a block away this distinctive home caught her eye. Years ago she had been intrigued by it. Now she went up to the window and looked upon a half finished renovation. As a pastor, Nancy felt led to the house. She made an offer to purchase it even before the rehab had been completed.

That new owner helped finish off the house by selecting all of the interior paint colors, installing her own lighting fixtures and purchasing the appliances. Now decorated with beautiful, serene colors inside and out, the house at 327 DuPage is once again an attractive and respectable member of the neighborhood.



Architectural Notes

This building's distinctive roof lines, rounded windows and decorative trim place it in Second Empire style. The upper floor's merging of roof and wall surfaces is the design of 17th century French architect Francois Mansard: hence the term a mansard roof. The building style became popular in mid-19th century France, during the Second

Empire period. In the United States, these homes were in fashion from about 1860 to the 1880s.

While this house is modest in size compared to many Second Empire homes, it is rich in detail. The front bay windows are elaborately designed with pilasters, brackets, dentils and decorative trim. The front entry portico features knee braces, drop finials and lacy fretwork. The doorway is topped by a transom window. The home is ringed by two courses of dentils, one between the first and second floor and the other at the top of the roof. Note that the front center window on the second floor is rounded while the flanking windows are arched. This is a common, but subtle, design motif of Second Empire buildings. The rear portion of the house, consisting of two additions built after the initial construction, are less elaborately trimmed out but complementary to the overall design. The selection of paint colors helps bring out the richness of detailing in this home.

This is one of Elgin's most historic and architecturally significant buildings. Located on a corner lot, across from Gifford Park, the home occupies a prominent place on the street-scape and contributes to creating a sense of place in the city and neighborhood.



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