

355 Jefferson Avenue

The term "historic house" refers to homes that are at least fifty years old. A new group of houses has become eligible for this informal designation since the first Gifford Park Housewalk which was held in 1982. Two houses on this year's walk are relatively "young" for a historic house, and yet each was considered for the walk for unique reasons. The houses at 355 Jefferson and 110 Slade are similar in many respects, and yet each maintains a distinctive allure.

Jefferson Avenue was once considered the far north area of Elgin and was sparsely populated. On this one street are many fine examples of houses dating from the 1880's through the 1930's. The house to the east, 365 Jefferson Ave., was the Mary Mann home. Her brother, Dr. Alban Mann, was the city physician who led the fight for safer hygiene conditions within the city's water supply.

This house was built around 1930 and has been a home for several business people in Elgin such as the Whittinghams (jewelers), Baldings and Sedinaj (doctors), and Cramers (cleaners). If the home at 110 Slade is the "rich man's house", then the home at 355 Jefferson can be considered the "middle class" version of the romantic English style of architecture that was popular during the 1930's.



Technically described as an English Cotswold Cottage, this house shares the steep gables and rounded arched entryway of its cousin at 110 Slade. Other features that both houses have in common include:

- 6/1 windows
- three window banding
- leaded glass windows in front door
- sunroom (a common post-Victorian feature)
- phone niche in the sunroom
- milk and package receiver

There is a blend of formal and informal features in this home. The foyer, living room, dining room, and sunroom are textured plaster and are separated by arches with a castellated detailing that is repeated in the brickwork around the fireplace. The upstairs railing, on the other hand, has simplified Prairie style balusters. There are three bedrooms upstairs with the slanted ceilings and dormers so typical of this style which makes the most of the interior space. The steep gable rooflines play visual tricks by making the exterior of the house seem much smaller than the interior.

The current owners stripped all of the woodwork (previously painted white to "modernize" the house) in the living room, dining room, sunroom, and the two offices. A built-in corner bookcase in the front office was redesigned into present wall unit by using all of the original wood and required only a minimal amount of new wood to be added. Although the purple and green color scheme of the downstairs bathroom "had to go", the current owners kept the original black and white floor tile of the upstairs bath in a recent remodeling.

As you leave the house, note the "Majestic Milk and Package receiver" by the back door and recall (if you can!) the days of milk deliveries. "I'd like a quart of milk and a pint of cream today, please."