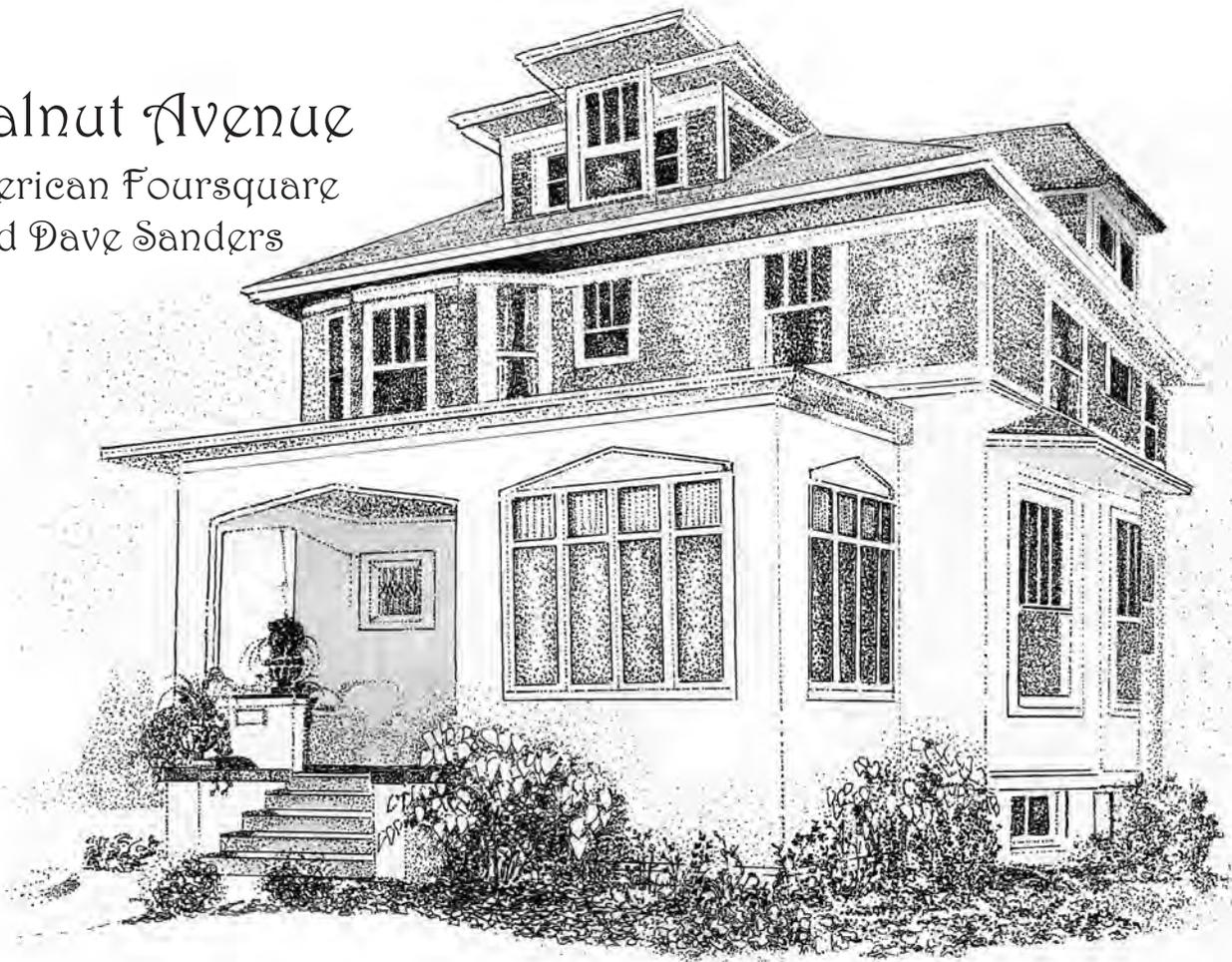




## 400 Walnut Avenue c. 1912 American Foursquare Debbie and Dave Sanders



A pedestrian standing on the corner of Walnut Avenue and Elm Street in 1910 could gaze off to the southwest and see block after block of newly created streets dotted with houses, interspersed with hundreds of vacant lots. The first decade of the 20th century had been a promising one for Elgin. The two decades that would follow turned out to be very prosperous for most citizens. The city's near southwest side was to become the evidence of that economic boom. Factory hands and blue-collar workers now had an unprecedented opportunity to purchase a single-family home. Right alongside their modest but well-built houses would rise the slightly larger and more embellished homes of successful businessmen, managers and professionals—the house at 400 Walnut Avenue being among them.

Construction on this handsome American Foursquare began around 1912. The house featured a few upgrades, such as three bay windows, a stucco finish, and a prominent front dormer. Inside, the dining room had a built-in china cabinet and beamed

ceiling. Upstairs were a nursery, three full bedrooms and a sleeping porch. The wide overhanging eaves and fashionable Prairie-style influences, along with placement on a corner lot, gave the two-story structure a distinguished look. The perfect house for an prosperous middle class family.

Over the years the house has had several owners, but none longer than the Albert W. Muntz family. "Bert," his wife, Henrietta, and four daughters resided here from about 1925 to 1951. The Muntz name was well-known in Elgin. Beginning with Bert's father, five generations of the extended Muntz family were associated with the livery, moving and storage business, as well as other enterprises, in town. Bert learned the business from boyhood on. He eventually served as treasurer, and later, president of the company.

The current owners, Dave and Debbie Sanders, purchased the house in the summer of 2004. They had spent more than 15 years living in Europe, where



Dave worked with youth ministries for American military families. Dave's acceptance of a professorship at Judson University brought the couple, along with one of their two daughters, to Elgin. Dave says they were attracted to this house because it had features they'd found appealing in European homes, such as being of older vintage with solid construction, and character in the detailing. The open parlor and dining room were well-suited for entertaining. The partially enclosed front porch provided a pleasant semi-private retreat.

Since moving in, Dave and Debbie have updated the kitchen, painted and papered the inside, renewed the landscaping and recently finished painting the exterior. The Sanderses have come to enjoy the "mom-and-pop" restaurants nearby, Al's Café and Creamery, the Elgin Symphony and the bike paths. Dave especially loves the Gail Borden Public Library. They have found that the neighborhood has several interesting blocks to stroll through. Stepping out the front door, they enjoy the view down Elm Street. "It's a traditional American streetscape," Dave says. Debbie, who has a Bachelor's degree in history and training in historic preservation, has been active with the Near West Neighbors Association. And, we are proud to say, she has been a six-time docent for the Historic Elgin House Tour.

The Sanderses have an interesting perspective on homes; it comes from their long association with the military and the often short-duration living arrangements that comes from moving frequently. Dave says, "A home is what you carry with you. You take your things and create pockets of hospitality where you are. This is Debbie's gift." He likes to describe their current house as a blend of old and new, of European and American influences, as expressed by the house and the many collectibles they have brought to it from the places they lived in Europe. Not surprisingly, given his professional work, he also says, "the home is a ministry place."

### Architcetural Notes

The term American Foursquare has come into widespread use over the last few decades to classify homes that were described as the "Prairie Box," or simply "Modern," when they were built. Most field guides to houses will list the foursquare as a variation of the Prairie style, rather than a distinctive style of its own.

The main characteristics of a foursquare are the two-story, box-like shape with a symmetrical arrangement of doors and windows; a front entryway; and a hipped roof with wide eaves. They often feature a full-width front porch. In the case of this house, the eastern half the porch was enclosed within a few years of it being built.

The foursquare design emerged during the early 20th century, which was a transition period between Victorian-era and Prairie-style designs. The foursquare retained the Victorians' passion for large porches. Early foursquare homes often included one or more stained- or leaded-glass windows, but the patterns tended to be more geometric and made with clear glass—as opposed to the Victorian preference for elaborate floral patterns made with colored glass.

The Prairie-style influences found on foursquare houses are the hipped roofs. These contributed to the horizontal emphasis, which was also enhanced by bands of windows and the horizontal trim. Similar to Prairie-style homes, the exterior wall cladding in a foursquare is relatively simple, without a lot of extra ornamentation. This house achieves that effect with its stucco finish, which was also a favorite material of Prairie-style architects. Inside, the trim details are simple and linear, with the natural texture of the wood grain providing a warm color. ♦

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