
Bowes Health Center



his residence was built in 1885 for David C. Cook, the son of a Methodist minister, a prominent Elgin publisher, born in New York in 1850.

As a young man, he worked in his father's Chicago print shop, and taught Sunday school. It was these two activities which led him down the path to founding the nation's largest interdenominational publishing house.

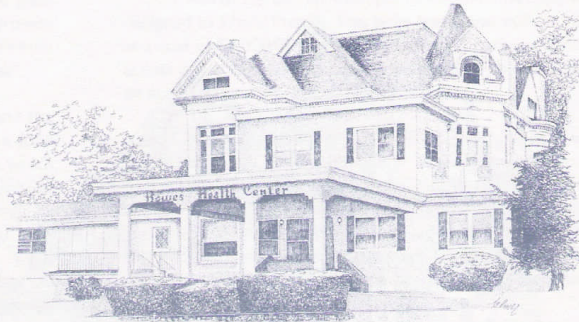
His life story is quite fascinating. His mail order sewing machine accessories business was destroyed in the Chicago fire of 1871. Undaunted, Cook started over in the business of helping the victims of the fire. He opened a mission on North Avenue in one of the city's most dangerous neighborhoods. There, he saw the need for Sunday School lesson books written at a level at which these underprivileged students could read. Cook took on the task of writing and printing "Our Sunday School Quarterly" himself. His new wife, Marguerite, helped in the venture also, and they began "Our Sunday School Gem", a 16-page magazine, definitely the most popular Sunday School paper of the day.

The business began in the Lakeview neighborhood in Chicago, but when it outgrew that spot, they moved operations to an old woolen mill in Elgin (on the river at Highland and Grove). Incorporated as the David C. Cook Publishing Company, the firm's publications soon had a circulation of 5 million copies per month, and even the Elgin Post Office had to move to bigger quarters, to accommodate the overwhelming increase in mail handling.

In 1901, with the company still growing, Cook found bigger quarters along the east bank of the Fox River on the North End. The David C. Cook Publishing Company still operates at this site, 850 North Grove, today.

Three generations of Cooks have been involved with the company operations. Today, you are touring the family residence, a 12-room mansion, where the Cook family lived until 1945. One of our favorite parts of this tour is to tell people the original cost of these houses. The price tag on this one... a mere \$10,000.

Obviously, the home has undergone extensive remodeling to accommodate its current use as a retirement/health center. The large first story additions on the north and south sides of the building obliterated the former ornate porches and balconies. Where you now look up and see an antenna, there was once an iron widow's walk. The interior of the mansion has



been preserved somewhat, however, which will be obvious as soon as you enter the front door. The mansion has a unique combination of lincrusta-covered walls, ornate mantels, encaustic tile floors, inlaid hardwood floors, and hand painted ceiling murals. Much of the original stained glass remains intact as well. This mansion is breathtaking - and possibly the most elegant example of a High Victorian interior left standing in the entire city of Elgin.

This site is only open for touring from Noon - 4 p.m., so don't miss it!

Along the Way

As you continue up Division, you may want to take a short walk down North Gifford Street. This block, between Division and Chicago Street, has been attractively transformed in the last few years, from a run-down, undesirable street, to a quaint collection of trim, well-kept workers cottages. The house at 28 N. Gifford was a GPA rehab project.

403 Division Street, built 101 years ago as the First Congregational Church Parsonage, became a rooming house for many years, and had as many as 7 kitchens inside. Five years ago, it was converted back to single-family use.

435 Division was a shambles inside and out ten years ago. This Victorian illustrates an NHS rehab loan put to good use.

439 Division is a late Victorian style home with a lovely curved porch that was once a two-flat and is now a single family home once again.

