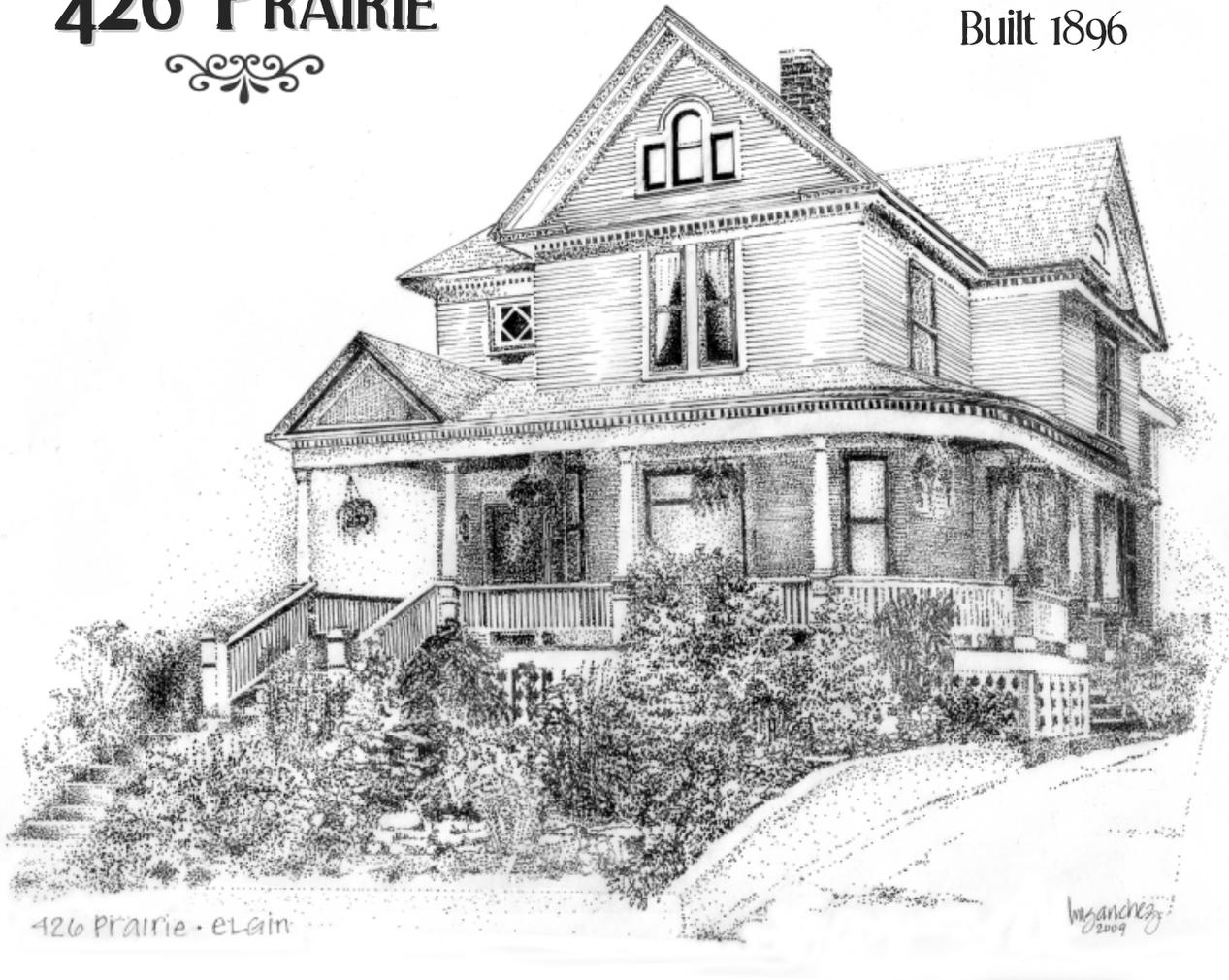


426 PRAIRIE

Queen Anne
Built 1896



This elegant yet livable house was built in 1896 by James H. Baker. He had emigrated from England with his family in 1847 and settled in rural DuPage County to farm. When James retired he built this house on Prairie Street, where several other family members had also built homes among them his uncle, James Baker, at 376 Prairie.

As economic fortunes rose and fell in Elgin, so did the fate of this Victorian with its lovely wraparound porch. It survived the hard times of the Great Depression as the residence of two widows. Records indicate that the house was probably converted to a two-flat in the 1940s. The decades saw many different residents come and go.

By 1984, the neighborhood and house were looking a bit worn. That was the year Jim and Terri Koko purchased the house. Because of its condition, work had to be done just to get an FHA mortgage. Their first big task was removing the asphalt siding and rebuilding the rotting porch. During the interior rehab, Jim discovered pocket doors that had remained hidden but were in pristine condition. By February of 1985, the house was ready to host Jim and Terri's wedding. They were married in the front parlor. The two continued to rehab the interior, added a deck in back and installed new electrical wiring. As a reward, the Kokos were given an American flag from 1896, the year the home was built. The 45-star flag remains with the house.

Brian and Mary Stark, the next owners, came close to losing the house when a fire burned the garage next door. The blaze damaged the Stark's backyard, but inspired them to create the lovely landscape retaining wall and garden. The current owners have added to this with eight themed mini-gardens around the house.

Craig Dresant and Joe Drozd, bought the house in 2006. Formerly of Oak Park, they were attracted to Elgin's many beautiful houses with reasonable price tags. Craig had worked at Judson University in Elgin 20 years earlier and was surprised to see the improvements downtown. The great city parks and the bicycle path along the river were amenities that clinched the deal for them.

Avid art collectors, Craig and Joe have filled the house with beautiful paintings, including the works of Ruth VanSickle Ford, who was Walt Disney's art teacher. They made several enhancements to the kitchen and completely re-did the upstairs bathroom leaving the original claw-foot tub as a centerpiece. While stripping the upstairs pine floors they discovered original built-in hiding places for valuables beneath the boards.

Just this summer, they commissioned Dan Miller to finish the porch latticework, newel posts and stairs based on an 1890s photo of the house. Apparently, the home was much-loved, because several former residents have stopped by and chatted with Craig and Joe. In fact, as they were planting a cherry tree, a woman who had lived there in the 1950s and 1960s told them that there had always been a cherry tree in that very spot.

So, the circle nears completion on the revival of this great American home.



Architectural Notes

This home is a variant of the Queen Anne Style known as a Free Classic. Queen Annes are easily recognized by their asymmetrical facades, prominent front-facing gables, a variety of window types, large porches, steeply pitched roofs and abundant trim detail. About one third of Queen Annes are of the Free Classic subtype. These homes feature classical columns rather than turned posts with spindle-work detailing. Other Free Classic features are the dentils along the cornice lines and the Palladian window in the attic.

This home uses clapboard siding throughout while many Queen Annes feature a mix of clapboards, shingles, stonework and, sometimes half timbering to give the wall surfaces variety and texture. The clapboards on this house have a very narrow width, or exposure, to the weather. They are also mitered at the corners rather than ending with a vertical trim board, as used on the house to the west. This is an extra level of craftsmanship.



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