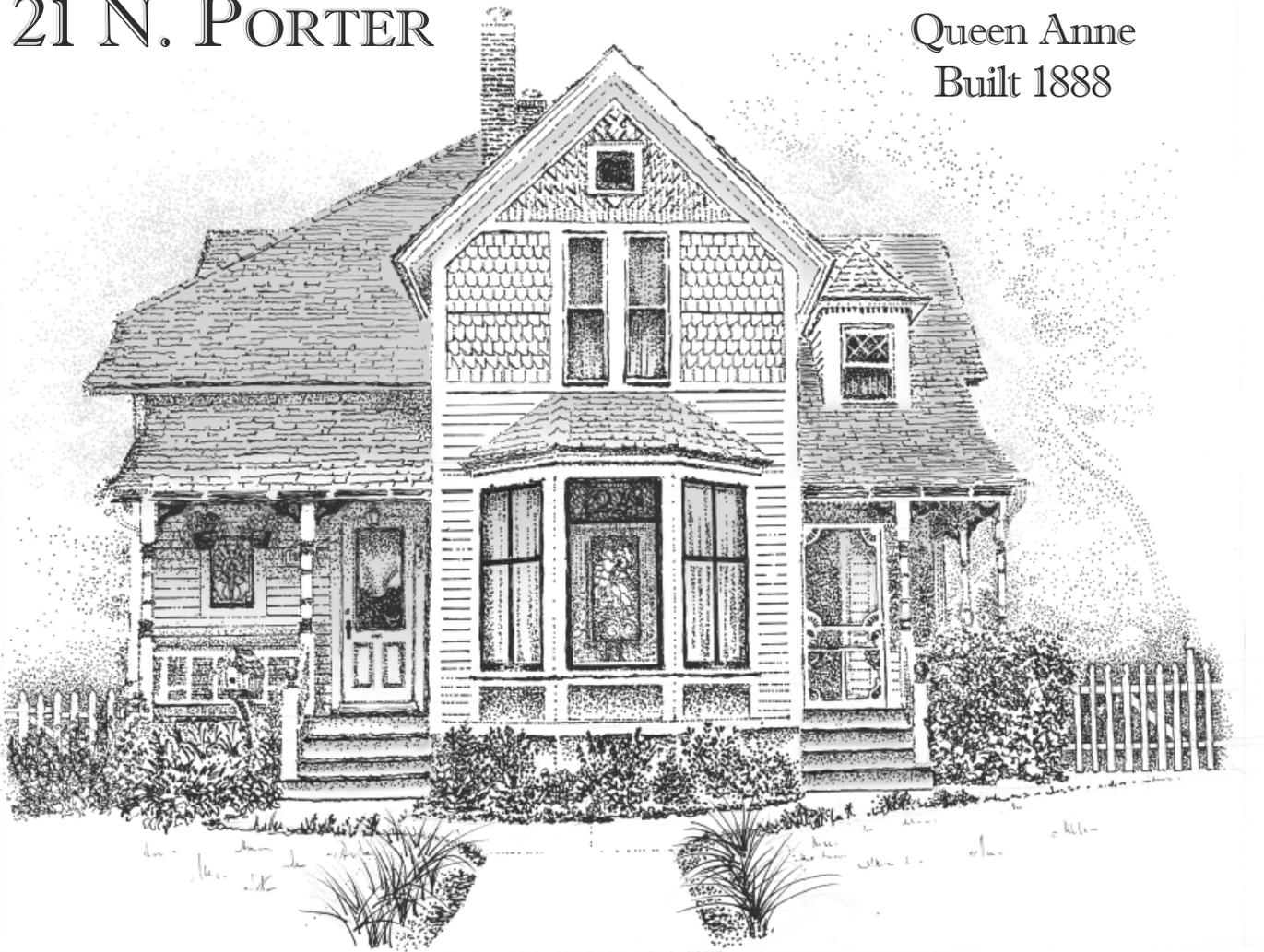


21 N. PORTER

Queen Anne
Built 1888



If you think you have visited this house before on the Gifford Park Association house tour, you're probably right. It has been featured in 1987, 1988 and 2003, but changes since 1987 have made it worthwhile for 21 N. Porter to be a house tour "frequent flier."

This home was the GPA's first project house. In 1987 the group used funds raised through earlier house tours, along with financial help from the City of Elgin, to buy the then-neglected house with the idea to improve and resell it. Many neighborhood improvement-minded people contributed their professional services to renovate 21 N. Porter; the work was done and the association was able to sell the home for a small profit. Volunteers removed aluminum siding, revealing, among other features, clapboard in excellent condition. They painted the house in several colors to be historically accurate and show off long-hidden architectural features; demolished an unsound rear addition; and de-converted it into a single-family home.

The house was built in 1888 for Almina Tuck, widow of George Tuck, a coal and wood dealer. George died in 1883. Almina bought the land from Grote & Waldron for \$1,000 and commissioned Gilbert Turnbull to build the house. A Dec. 13, 1890, newspaper story noted that Almina had a "pretty frame house built at a cost of \$1,882." Eight years later, the Elgin Advocate announced Almina was remodeling the house, and that "about \$2,000 will be expended."

Almina lived here with her two surviving daughters, Myrtle and Bertha, and later Myrtle and son-in-law Melvin Walker, who was an Elgin National Watch Co. employee. Almina died intestate in 1911 and her daughters were awarded the house and lot, valued then at \$7,000.

The sisters sold it to the William Martin family in 1913, and this family owned the home until 1954. William was employed by the Illinois Iron & Bolt Co. He and wife Pearl had two daugh-

ters, Margaret and Kathryn. Margaret was an artist for David C. Cook Publishing Co., a large Elgin employer and publisher of Sunday school materials. Kathryn became a registered nurse and worked at Sherman Hospital. After William's death, Pearl worked at Ackemann's, a longtime Elgin department store, from 1929 to 1944.

James and Mary Backstrom bought 21 N. Porter from GPA. Though they had moved in only two weeks before, they allowed the home to be on the 1987 and 1988 GPA house tours.

The last time 21 N. Porter was on the house tour, it was owned by Robin and Vivian Leabhart; they bought it in 1993, and relocated from an Arlington Heights high-rise in 1994.

Vivian, logistics manager for Lions Clubs International, grew up in Arlington Heights and loved high-rises and old houses. A friend from St. Charles introduced she and Robin, a field engineer for an endoscopy equipment company, to the Fox Valley and they fell in love with the house and yard.

Vivian especially loves the house's abundant space and the kitchen; the Leabharts often host a family Thanksgiving.

The couple launched into projects quickly: landscaping; a new cedar roof and gutters; a new boiler and wood stove; had plumbing redone; gutted and remodeled a second-floor bathroom; remodeled the kitchen; repainted "everything"; added new carpet and window treatments; and had bookshelves built.

Robin designed the back porch, pushed the fence back, and now would like a bigger garden. The Leabharts may change the front-yard landscaping, replace windows and update the electrical system.

Architectural Notes

This house is designed in the Queen Anne style. It possesses some elements of the Stick style, evident through the configuration and ornamentation of the porches. Primary Queen Anne-style characteristics are the multiple, steeply pitched, irregularly shaped roofs, sometimes in a cross-gabled configuration; the use

of wall surfaces as the main decorative elements; and highly ornamental front porches with spindle work and skirting.

The house is dominated by the front-facing gable with the large first-story bay window, a very wide and dominant element on that portion of the elevation. The remaining portion of the front-facing gable is broken up into four sections separated by wooden trim, almost giving it a half-timbered look typical of the Stick style. Wood siding is present in the lower two sections of the elevations, while the upper sections are clad in wood shingle painted two colors. The fancy cut-in designs make the elevation more interesting. The symmetry of the gable-ended façade is topped off with a small attic window trimmed in ornamental detail.

The front-facing gable is flanked by the two porches. Both lead to separate entrances to the house, suggesting it could have been built with more than one family in mind. The ornamentation on both porches is similar – turned columns and fretwork railing. The skirting is very elaborate, in the form of sawn skirting boards.

The roof of the northern porch is a simple shed roof. The southern porch roof, however, is a continuation of the graceful curving arc of the house's roof, almost giving the home a Shingle-style appearance on that side. This portion of the roof is also interrupted by a hipped dormer, unusual for this style.

laura marie sanchez

mobile: 312.810.5202

studio: 773.282.4860

lm523@comcast.net

architectural portraiture

**production design
& management**

graphic design

**presentation
media**

**creative
direction**

