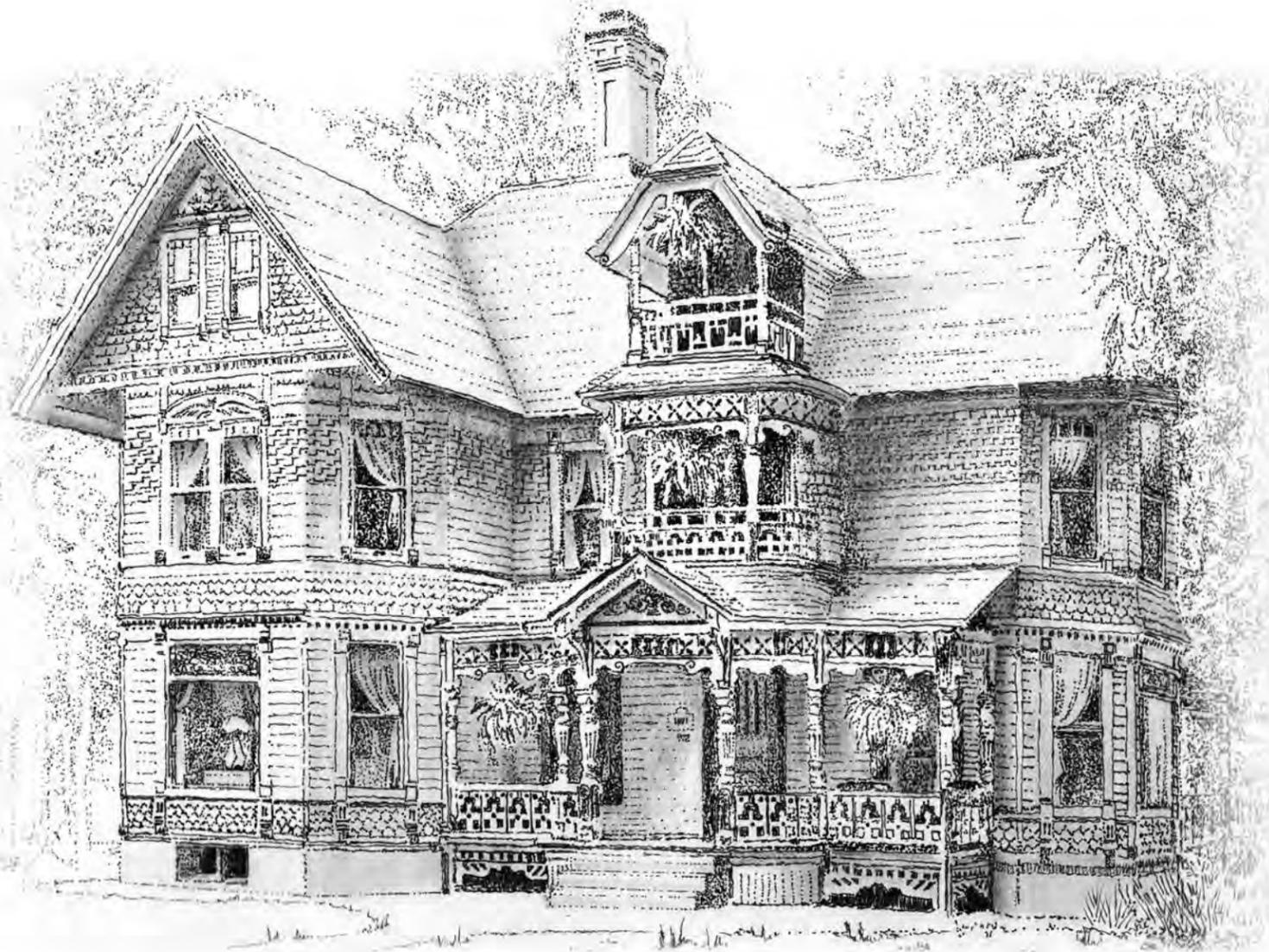




972 West Highland

1850 farmhouse. Remodeled in 1891,
Queen Anne with Eastlake influences
Maureen McWaid and Steve Thoren



Originally constructed as a farmhouse in the 1850s, this splendid home was completely remodeled in 1891 by owners William H. and Abigail C. Wing. The remodeled home featured 23 rooms, four fireplaces, stained and leaded glass, and Victorian-era light fixtures. Seven different types of wood were used, including very ornate carvings both inside and out.

Mr. Wing was a prominent attorney and civic leader. The couple was noted for their philanthropy and humanitarianism. For example, the Wings extended a helping

hand to Anne (nee Newsome) Bosley, one of the former slaves who were resettled in Elgin during the Civil War. Anne became Mrs. Wing's personal assistant and maid.

In 1897, tragedy struck. The third floor was extensively damaged in a fire that took the life of Abby Wing. Mr. Wing immediately repaired the home, with the exception of the 1½ story tower above the third floor. He lived in the home for five more years until his death on Halloween. At the time of his death the home was situated on 270 acres, of which he bequeathed 121 acres to the city for what

became Wing Park. The family name is found today in Wing Street, Wing Park Boulevard and the former Abby Wing grade school.

William Wing left the home to his brother Orlando and it remained in the Wing family until 1982. Maureen McWaid is the third owner, having purchased it in 1987. Along with her late husband, Bill, she began an effort to restore the home to its original beauty. Today, she and her life partner, Steve Thoren, continue with that effort. Adding to the home's splendor are the beautiful Victorian wall and ceiling coverings throughout the house, as well as period furnishings.

Honoring the home's history is important to Maureen and Steve. The couple added to existing research about the house and the Wing family by searching archives at the library, the Elgin History Museum and the Elgin Fire Barn No. 5 Museum. On Sunday, March 25, 2012, they hosted a reception for local historians and dignitaries, plus two remaining Wing family descendants, to dedicate a display in the house about its past. During the ribbon-cutting ceremony Steve announced that this mini-museum would forever remain part of the home by virtue of a clause added to the property's deed. The reception was held within a few days of the anniversary of the tragic fire 115 years prior.

In May 2012, Maureen and Steve received an Elgin Heritage Commission Mayor's Award for restoration of the home. The house now sits on just under 1½ acres of beautifully landscaped gardens. Also gracing the site is the original 19th-century carriage house and barn. The looping driveway is about one-tenth of a mile long. It passes through a cluster of large pine trees to arrive at the home's main entrance. This entryway uses the largest of five porches and features double oak doors with leaded glass. The facade is a plethora of beautiful details. The Wings once drove their carriages north along a path now named Wing Park Boulevard. The route was lined with hundreds of pine and larch trees, some of which still remain today. It was once known as the Avenue of Trees.

The Wing Mansion is over 122 years old. Maureen and Steve hope it will withstand the test of time and last

another 122 years, during which thousands of visitors will see, feel and embrace this unique piece of Elgin history. The home has been featured on billboards and magazine articles, and in books, newspapers, television, radio, photographs, brochures and numerous drawings and paintings. The couple's next goal is to have the house listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Architectural Notes

This Queen Anne-Style home features Eastlake decorative elements. Virtually no surface is left unadorned, in the spirit of high-Victorian fashion. The varied roof forms are the first indication that the architect, Smith Hoag, employed nearly every tool in his design book during the 1891 remodeling. A prominent three story porch graces the south facade and draws your eye upward. Vying for attention alongside the top porch are the variously shaped cedar shingles on the third-floor gables and belt course separating the first and second floors. Typical of the style, a variety of materials are used on the facade. Noteworthy are the four ornate plaster medallions with naturalistic designs that accentuate the projecting spaces above the front stairs, and the large windows on the south and east sides. Eastlake influences are seen in the elaborate porch spindles above and below the railings in a variety of shapes, echoing the furniture-inspired design of the massive porch posts. Curvaceous brackets with incised flourishes further add to the overall fancy details of this "Painted Lady." Even the foundation was embellished with the faux-concrete block finish painted to appear as if it had a contrasting mortar color.

Architect Smith Hoag lived in Elgin from 1870 until his death in 1916. During his career he designed several grand residences and public buildings. Some of these are: the Freiler home (1887) at 653 Douglas Ave.; the E. Barclay home (1887) at 359 Park St.; (1887); the Bosworth home (1894) at 705 W. Highland Ave; and Dunham Castle in Wayne, (1894). Public buildings include: the McBride Block (1889) and Fire Barns Number 3, 4 and 5 (1896-1904) in Elgin; and the Woodstock Opera House (1890) in Woodstock, Illinois.