

Historic Preservation Commission

Fall 2012 - Property of the Season

The Lantz House 196 North Adams Street

In 1907, deciding to retire from their Wheatland Township farm, John Peter and Amelia (Minnich) Lantz retained Amelia's nephew, Irvin Haines, to build a new home for them on a parcel located along what is today North Adams Street, between the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy tracks and the Fox River, in Oswego.



Haines was a skilled contractor who, either alone or in concert with his sometime-partners Lou C. Young and Ed Inman, built several Oswego homes, including the stately Clinton House, now the McKeown-Dunn Funeral Home on Madison Street.

The Lantzes chose a one and a half storey Queen Anne design of about 1,300 square feet. It featured a full basement with poured concrete walls and ornamental concrete blocks (made on-site) atop the poured portion; a steeply pitched "lifetime" asbestos-cement shingle roof (to prevent fires from the steam locomotives of the era); a bay window in the dining room with a leaded glass top panel that matched the one atop the picture window in the living room; an open front porch; and an enclosed south porch suitable for starting bedding plants in the spring.

The design was a clever optical illusion. The wider clapboard siding on the first storey and narrower siding on the second, in combination with the steep gable roof, draws the eye up, making the house seem much larger than it actually is. Fluted corner columns, front gable brackets, and shingled roof peaks completed the design.

Haines must have liked the floorplan, since he built at least two other identical homes, one in Montgomery, which still stands, and the other a farmhouse on Collins Road that was demolished to make room for the new Oswego Fire Station.

Notable features inside included an open staircase that could be closed off in winter; main floor rooms consisting of the kitchen, indoor bathroom, a back parlor, dining room, front parlor



or living room, and entry hall; and upstairs three bedrooms, all with closets, finished the design. Yellow pine woodwork throughout; built-in cabinets in the dining room and back parlor; gas lights powered

by an acetylene generator in the basement; plastered walls throughout, and a coal-fired hot water furnace.

Outside, the old house on the property was moved to the south to make way for the new home and turned into a town barn featuring stalls for the family cow and horse and a chicken house. The barn was joined by a small smokehouse, an outhouse, and a hand-dug well lined with native limestone.



The couple moved in on Oct. 2, 1908.

Fearing the house was simply too grand for them, the Lantzes refused to use the bathroom or the main floor kitchen, instead doing their cooking and eating in the basement and using the outhouse in lieu of the bathroom until their late 80s.

The Lantzes lived in the house until their deaths, his in 1942 and hers in 1943, after which ownership passed to their daughter and her husband, William and Mabel (Lantz) Holzhueter—the current owner's grandparents, and then to the current owner's parents who bought it in 1954. Roger Matile and his wife bought the house from his mother in 1976, the fourth generation to own it.

Over the years, the home's exterior has remained largely unchanged. The Lantzes added a small back entry mostly for storage of garden tools soon after the house was built. The exterior color was changed in the 1930s from the tri-color popular when it was new to white, a color retained ever since. A one-car garage was added between the house and barn in 1943.

Inside, electricity was added in the 1930s using the old gas piping for wiring conduits. The yellow pine woodwork still gleams throughout, although the owner's mother removed cornices above the doors, the plate rail in the dining room, the picture rails in the dining and living rooms and the old back parlor, and the top baseboard cap in 1954 to give it a more modern look. The kitchen has been remodeled several times, but the built-in cabinets in the dining room and back parlor and the open staircase remain unchanged, as do the cast iron radiators in each room. And after 104 years, that "lifetime" roof is still soldering on.

Today, the house remains a classic example of Oswego's Queen Anne architecture.

