

Historic Preservation Commission

Winter 2012 - Property of the Season

267 S. Main Street



The Oswego Historic Preservation Commission is excited to announce 267 S Main Street as the Winter "Property of the Season". This home has been a labor of love for the current owners Rick and Michelle Kuhn. They have extensively renovated and restored this home over the last twelve years with care and precision, retaining and reusing many of the original period details. This clean Upright and Wing style home was built in the fall of 1908. It has a two-story main living space facing Main Street with, originally, a smaller one-and-a-half story wing with a wide sloped porch. The home's original sloped porch roof was remodeled by the Kuhn's to create a second story walk-out porch.

The exterior of the house was replaced to match the original cedar planks. While the Kuhn's believe the original house may have been yellow, they chose a different historically accurate color of their own. The trim surrounding the exterior of the house was hand-cut to match a small piece that was found on a front window. The limestone foundation was reused around the property when the home was raised several years ago to stabilize and realign the sagging wing portion of the house. Four twenty-ton jacks were brought in to lift the house while a new foundation was poured to replace the crawl space. The interior has much of the original oak trim, doors with original hardware, and a beautiful wrought iron period fireplace. Original metal floor grates used for circulating air throughout the home when an octopus furnace was used to keep the house warm are still in place. Chunks of coal were discovered during recent renovations pinpointing where the coal was stored in the original basement. A stone privy was discovered in the back yard during renovations, offering up some fascinating insight into early 20th century living. A stone well was also discovered under the front porch.

The land was originally platted as lot 5 in block 3 of Loucks and Judson's addition in May of 1846. Lewis Judson sold the original lot to William Hartwell on February 14, 1848. Hartwell owned the land for a decade until he sold it to James Durand in 1857. The home changed hands two more times when it came into the possession of Mexican War veteran John Sanders and

wife Nancy Pearce. John Sanders is no stranger to the Property of the Season readers. Another of his homes was written up as a previous Property of the Season. The property at 267 S. Main Street was sold from the widow Sanders to her daughter Nellie, who owned the property a short time before it was sold to John Ainsley Bell and wife Helen "Nellie" Hall Bell in July, 1908.

The Bells were married January 13, 1886. Nellie was the daughter of local auctioneer David Bell and wife Paulina Wagner, and John was the son of wealthy farmer and former plumbing magnate James Bell and wife Susan Ferguson. James Bell moved from Chicago to Seward Township in 1868. After their marriage, John became a well-to-do farmer in Seward Township, managing his father's 600 acres with his brother William. Nellie, who grew-up in the home next door, was probably the driving force behind the Bell's purchase of 267 S. Main Street.



The Bells quickly began the process of removing the original cottage and building their new dream home. *The Kendall County Record* Newspaper reported regularly on the construction. On August 11, 1909 the Record stated, "Clement Morrison has bought the Sanders house from Mrs. John Bell and will move it to a lot near James Morrison's". The record reported again on November 3rd that the home was nearly complete and would soon be ready for occupancy. The Bells moved into their home in the fall of 1909, with their son James Hall Bell, known around town as Jay.

The Bells enjoyed an active social life in town and were gracious entertainers. Their son Jay heeded the call of Uncle Sam and enlisted in the army during WWI. He was stationed in Bordeaux, France, before being discharged in the spring of 1919. Jay returned to Oswego and opened the Reinhart and Bell confectionary in the Gus Voss building. Reinhart quickly sold his interest back to Bell, and Jay continued to run the business for many years. Jay married Jessie Sutherland, the sister of his employee, William Sutherland in July 1923. Jessie's father Earl was a Civil War veteran with deep roots in Oswego. Jessie was bookkeeper at the firm of Wade, Lietz & Grometer of Aurora for several years prior to marrying Jay Bell. The newlyweds stayed in the home on Main Street with his father until John passed away in 1938. Mother Nellie passed away at age 58 in 1921. Jay and Jessie continued in the home raising their three daughters in the Oswego school district. Jay passed away in 1969, and Jessie died in 1986. She is buried with the rest of the Bell family just down the road in the Oswego Township Cemetery.