

Older Homes Are Rich in History

We all know that Monroe and the area towns have a huge number of century-old houses, some of which are decades older than a century. Some of the more interesting houses are featured in the booklets *Bricks, Brackets and Carpenter's Lace* that was published by E. C. Hamilton in 1976 and *Walking Tour of Monroe* published by Historic Monroe in 1990. Even though I lived in Indiana at those times, I made sure to purchase those publications about my hometown. Besides the Ludlow Mansion at 1421 Mansion Drive, my three favorite houses in Monroe are probably the Ezra Parker Treat home at 1421 14th Avenue, the Frank Chenoweth house at 2004 10th Street, and the W. E. Higley house at 1620 20th Avenue. We are fortunate that we have had so many homeowners who want to maintain these old homes for generations to come.



This photo, from the collection of Christie Wittwer Strait, shows the home of the Christian Wittwer family in the 1000-block of 22nd Street.

People who knew me when I moved back to Monroe expected that I would purchase one of the Victorian homes and maintain it for many years. I was 55 years old and knew that it wouldn't be too many years until the steps would become a problem for me. I am also not a handyman or someone who likes to paint, so am afraid I wouldn't have done a good job with a large, old house. But I do appreciate those people who are so proud and take extra care of those old homes.

I bought a ranch house in the Parkview Estates subdivision in December 2002 and moved into it full-time in June 2004. It wasn't hard to trace the history of the house since I was only the third owner. I have photographs of it being built in 1970 from Ray and Darlene Kneller. They only lived in the house four years when they exchanged their house for property along County B southwest of town owned by Wilson and Mildred Rote. They each packed up their respective houses the same day and met along the highway as they each headed to their new home.

Tracing the history of a home in Monroe can be somewhat easy using city directories. You have to remember that the Abstract of Title that was formerly drawn up with the sale of property only refers to

the land and not to any dwellings on it. City directories in Monroe are available for 1885, 1889, 1891, 1895, 1900, 1906, 1910, 1915-16, 1917-18, 1922, and for several years beyond that, through 1988. The directories will only list the property if there is a building on it. The directories from 1915 and later have a section where it lists by address each of the houses on a given street or avenue. The hardest part is when you go backward from 1930 to 1927, because the streets changed from names to numbers in 1929. If you are fortunate, the same person lived in the house in 1927 as in 1930 so you can go backwards from there. The city directories are available for searching at the Monroe Public Library.

When my nephew, Kyle, purchased a house in the 1000-block of 22nd Street in the spring of 2019, I searched the city directories and found that Christian and Rose Wittwer were listed as the homeowners and residents in the directories from 1906 through 1940. Fortunately, I knew that my friend Christie was their granddaughter. I called her to see if she might have any photos of the house from that era. She knew immediately that she did because she had been organizing items that she had inherited from her relatives. One of the photos was taken about 1910 with the grandparents and three daughters in front of the house. The other was taken in the early 1930s with a car parked beside it. The house is still one and a half stories, but the open front porch has been closed in and garages have been added.

My niece, Carissa, bought a house this spring in the 1700-block of 15th Street. When I went to research the previous occupants, I first looked at the 1930 directory. I was amazed when I found out that her great-great grandfather Charles Grant's sister, Nettie Teehan, was living in the house at that time. She was also listed as the owner in 1922. At that time she was a widow and probably had five of her children living with her as she had in the 1920 census.

The directories showed that Charles and Nora Shea lived at that address in 1933 and would remain there through 1952. Charles would be a first cousin to Carissa's great-grandmother Figi and a nephew to both Nettie and Charles. Their daughter Margaret (later Tschudy) lived with them in that house until she graduated from high school. The house now has two apartments, one upstairs and another on the ground floor. The first time that the upstairs apartment showed in the directories was in 1942, with a registered nurse working at St. Clare hospital as the tenant. One more coincidence is that Carissa's godmother's parents lived in the upstairs apartment with their two oldest children for a couple years. I have been in touch with two descendants of Nettie Teehan and hope to eventually find a photo of this house, too.

I looked at some of the earlier directories and found that Samuel and Dora Greenwald lived at this address from 1895 through 1917. They had previously lived on the southwest corner of 15th Street and 20th Avenue in 1891. This does not mean that they lived in the same house in those early years as the one standing now. It is possible that they had an older house at this address and had it torn down before building a new one.