

History of the Willis Ludlow Home on Argyle Road

During the past few years I've had several people ask me about the history of the blue house that stands across the street from the YMCA at 1220 2nd Street. I read in a 1947 newspaper article that the original house was built in 1862 by Levi Starr. I'll share today what else I know about that house and the property.

Arabut Ludlow, who lived around the corner, purchased the 500-acre farm from Mr. Starr in February 1875 for \$21,500. The farm consisted of prairie, timber, pasture, and more. The paper also said, Starr's "farm, which he had made one of the best and most convenient in Southern Wisconsin, is provided with first-class buildings, is well supplied with running water and never failing springs, and the purchase is said to be the largest transaction in real estate ever made in Green County."

It is unknown who lived in the home when it was first owned by the Ludlows, but after Willis Ludlow married Charlotte "Lottie" Meeker in Chicago on June 15, 1882 the newlyweds lived with his parents in the mansion for six months before moving into this home on what was then on the old Argyle Road on Christmas that year.

Plans for improvements on Will Ludlow's residence calling for an expenditure of \$3,500 to \$4,000 were announced on May 6, 1891. By the end of September, it was reported that, "The new residence is nearly completed, and it will be one of the finest in the city." Lotties' obituary said that, "The residence was the scene of many fine social gatherings and was widely known for its beautiful furnishings and appointments." It was after the remodeling that I noticed these social events mentioned in the newspapers, a few of which will be shared in next week's column.

Willis and Lottie raised their family in this home and then remained here until his death in 1938. He had served the First National Bank as a board member for more than 40 years, had been a mayor of Monroe for four years, and was a Wisconsin assemblyman. His obituary shared that, "His home life he valued as few men do and he delighted in association with the family circle, his children and later his grandchildren enjoying his company in many interesting activities."

It also said, "It was important to Mr. Ludlow that his properties be kept meticulously and to the last he personally supervised their maintenance, following rigid standards and expecting those who helped him to do the same. He knew every detail of the operations about his attractive estate and took pride in the development of trees and shrubbery that he had planned through the years."

Burton Isely suffered a severe injury to his right wrist one morning in November 1911 when the top portion of an extension ladder set up against the house slipped from its fastenings. It fell several feet and struck Isely's arm while he was holding onto one of the lower rungs of the ladder. The ligaments connecting the bones of his right wrist were torn and the cords broken. Isely and John Schnitzler were preparing to do repair work on a chimney of the house when this accident happened.

Mrs. Ludlow continued to live in this home until it was sold to the Zilmer-Riley Post 84 of the American Legion in October 1947. The Ludlows had added two wings to the residence, which was "a fine example of late 19th century architecture, has been modernized through the years. Together with the beautiful grounds, formal garden, and the towering elms, some of which were planted by Mrs. Ludlow 65 years ago, the property is one of the showplaces of southern Wisconsin."

The building committee for the Legion had worked out two deals. One was for the residence and four acres for \$18,000; the other was for the home and 47.5 acres for \$25,00. They purchased the entire parcel.

At the time of this sale, the house contained 11 rooms with a large living room, small parlor, dining room, kitchen, and large store room on the first floor. There were three main bedrooms and three bathrooms on the second floor, in addition to an apartment for the domestic help. There was a billiard and recreation room on the third floor.

Mrs. Ludlow had developed the garden and grounds into a well-planned estate. An old brick building in back of the house had been rebuilt several years before the 1947 sale to harmonize with the garden layout. The rear slope to the south was attractively landscaped with a spouting fountain and a running spring water stream. There were four springs in continual flow, one of which furnished the water plant supplying the plumbing system. There was also a modern three-car garage.



The American Legion was housed in this building for ten years before it served as White Haven Nursing Home and later an apartment building. The original part of the house was built in 1862 with two wings added to it after Willis and Lottie Ludlow purchased it.

There were two six-foot mirrors from the Arabut Ludlow mansion installed on either end of the living room. Each of the closets and powder rooms, most of them added during the early remodeling, had windows. At that time, the home was heated by oil.

Mrs. Ludlow stipulated that she would not relinquish the home until June 1948, by which time she hoped to have remodeled her newly-acquired residence at 1910 11th Street.

The new American Legion clubhouse “northwest of Monroe” officially opened on Saturday, January 22, 1949 for its 487 members after being partially remodeled. The Legion was housed here for ten years before it was sold to Dr. Charles O. Miller.

Brothers Harold J. and Paul P. Miller, with their wives, operated White Haven Nursing Home here for many years before they sold the building in April 1974 to Robert A. Collins. Collins later divided the home into five apartments.

Next week we will hear more about some of the elaborate parties hosted by the Ludlows while they owned their elegant home.