

Willis Ludlow Home - Update

I am still amazed at the fantastic feedback I continue to get about these historical columns. I greatly appreciate each time that anyone goes out of their way to call or email feedback to me. I know that everyone is not going to like each column, but I am grateful that all comments so far have been positive.

I shared a brief history of the former Willis Ludlow house in a column in June and then followed it with a column that highlighted a few of the parties that Lottie hosted in the home that was known as Sunnyside more than a century ago. About a week after the second column was printed, I received an email from Marilyn Ludlow Gundermann. JoAnn Esser had sent the clipping to her Edgewood classmate, Judy Ludlow, who then shared it with her sister, Marilyn.



This photo, from the collection of Marilyn Ludlow Gunderson, shows the view of the back of the former Willis Ludlow family home at 1220 2nd St here in Monroe. It was taken in 1947 before Lottie moved to her “new home” on 11th Street. The basement had not yet been exposed to the outside at this time.

Marilyn wrote, “I enjoyed it very much (and also learned from it).” Marilyn, one of six children who has lived her entire life in Madison, shared that her father, Harris, “made frequent visits to see his mother and would take two of his children each time.” So Marilyn remembers visiting her grandmother in the beautiful home many times as a young girl.

Marilyn said that her grandmother could no longer get help to keep up the property so she moved to the smaller house on 11th Street. Before Lottie left “The Elms” in 1947, she hired a photographer to take photos of the home where she had lived for almost 65 years. She made an album for each of her

grandchildren with a dozen of those 8" by 10" photographs, which were taken both inside and outside. Marilyn and her son, Rick, made a trip to Monroe three weeks later where she shared the album with me.

The biggest surprise in the album was seeing that there had been a long barn immediately to the west of the house where the houses at 1204 and 1214 2nd Street are now located. By the time the photo was taken, there were three garage doors on the barn. Another photo was simply a large elm tree, which Marilyn was told was the largest elm tree in the county. The photos of the inside focused on the living room with a view of the open stairway just inside the front door and a small nook that might have been considered a library. There was also a photo of Lottie sitting in a chair with a portion of a Tiffany lamp showing. Marilyn mentioned that she had that lamp and several other artifacts shown in the photos in her home now. One of the other items that Marilyn has in her home is a photo of Gertrude, the daughter who passed away in 1900 at the age of 13. Whenever Marilyn asked about Gertrude, her grandmother replied, "I don't want to talk about it. You never get over the loss of a child."

There was one outside photo of the front of the house, one each taken from the southeast and the southwest showing the back, and then a view taken from the living room looking to the south. Monroe Lumber and Fuel Company can be seen in the distance. Also seen there is a fountain in the Ludlow back yard, which Lottie was able to turn on and off from the living room. There was a picket fence along the back of the yard. It had to be very peaceful to sit back there with the stream flowing not far beyond their property.

Another amenity in the house was a button in the dining room that Lottie could press when she needed to call the help. Each of the federal census records shows that there was help living in the home. In 1900 there was only a farmhand of Swiss decent living with the family. In 1910 there were two female servants of Norwegian decent. There were two servants, a farm hand and a waitress, living with them in 1920. In 1930 the children were all gone from home; there was a farm hand and a female Swiss immigrant living there as well as a lodger. By 1940, the last census taken while she lived in the house, Lottie was a widow and had a farm hand and a housekeeper living with her. Marilyn remembered that Lottie told the children not to visit with the help as they were the help.

Evelyn, a foster daughter, appeared for the first time in 1910 and was listed as an adopted daughter in 1920. I have been in touch with some of Evelyn's family for several years and they said that she had been adopted from an orphan train. The census said that her father was born in Switzerland and her mother England. Marilyn remembers Evelyn and her family as she received hand-me-downs from them.

Marilyn's father, Harris, who grew up in the house, always loved the circus as it was often set up in the Bingham fields that are now part of Twining Park. He would have been able to see the tent from the house and easily walk there.

According to Lottie's obituary, she was a delegate to the 43rd Continental Congress of the DAR in Washington in 1934 and was a guest of Eleanor Roosevelt at a White House reception. Marilyn remembered that her grandmother resigned from the organization when the DAR barred black singer Marian Anderson from performing under a "white performers only" policy in 1939. Mrs. Roosevelt also resigned from the organization and then arranged for Anderson to sing at the Lincoln Memorial to which 75,000 people attended.

I was surprised to learn that Marilyn was never in the Idle Hour Mansion as a child until I realized that she was raised in Madison and wasn't born until almost 20 years after her great-grandmother, Caroline, passed away.