

The Early Years of the Twining Family Home

The house that has been known as the Twining home, located at 1423 15th Avenue, for more than a century has a sign in front that states it was built in 1866. However, the Walking Tour booklet put out by Historic Monroe in 1990 states that it was built in 1900. In this column (and the next one), we'll explore why the house is historically important and look at when the house might have been built. As with all buildings, improvements need to be made frequently for them to maintain functionality. Therefore, they might have a much different look than they originally did.

It appears that the house might actually pre-date 1866 as it stated in the obituary of Louise Rittenhouse Barber (1845 - 1936) that she married Joseph Barber in that home on January 25, 1866. That is where the Barber children were born and raised, including their daughter Mary "Mazie" who was born the following year. Mrs. Barber remained in the home after her husband passed away in September 1880. It was on September 30, 1886 that Mazie married Walter C. [C. W.] Twining in that house with more than 100 guests present.

According to the city directories of 1889 and 1891 the Twinings must have lived with her mother until 1891 when Mrs. Barber had a new house built next door for the Twinings. The Twinings later moved back to the corner house by 1895. A short article in the Sentinel on June 12 stated, "C. W. Twining's residence improvements are about completed, and one would hardly recognize the place except for its location. Surely a great improvement." This would have been shortly after Robert Twining, the couple's fifth child, was born on March 7. The couple had three more children born in the recently remodeled house.

During this time, Mr. Twining worked many years as a cashier at the First National Bank until he was hired to organize the Commercial & Savings Bank in 1903. He was also involved in the community as a member of the board of education. He also promoted the organization of the city's telephone company, eventually becoming president of the Monroe telephone company.

Unfortunately, Mazie became sick in 1904 and after receiving treatments in Freeport for three months, was taken to her mother's home on June 13. A stretcher had to be used because she was so weak. "She stood the trip well and was exceedingly happy to get home. It is thought that the change will be beneficial and there is strong hope of steady improvement. Miss Hattie Newman is in charge of the case as nurse." After two years of growing weaker, Mazie passed away at the family home in the same house where she was born on November 21, 1905. "The transition came as she slept and the pain of death was mercifully put aside. She had suffered so long and patiently that when death came it took her gently without waking." The funeral was held from the house at 3:15 on the second day afterwards. Mr. Twining was left with eight children ranging from three years old to 18.

Mr. Twining was married to Miss Frances M. Staver on the morning of May 6, 1909 in a simple ceremony. After breakfast the newlyweds departed for Evansville where they then took a train to Lake Mills. They spent a few weeks at their summer home, the "House on the Hill," before returning to the Twining home. All of the children were still living at home with the couple in 1910.

An unfortunate accident happened in the basement of the house in May 1912 while son Clarence was lighting the water heater that had blown out during the night. The accumulated gas in the metal casing ignited and the force of the explosion threw him across the laundry room. Clarence was severely burned in his eyes and received other injuries. A physician was summoned who didn't think the young man's sight would be impaired. "The detonation shook the house and the report [sic] frightened the family who were upstairs. The door of the range in the kitchen on the floor above was knocked off by the concussion and soot was scattered over the kitchen."

After Mr. Twining accepted a new job in Portland, Oregon, the house was put up for sale. I found that the description of the home that appeared in the Monroe Evening Times on December 11, 1912 was quite interesting, much different from today's descriptions. It mentioned that the property was "very close to the geographical center of the city." The lot measured 62.5 feet on the east and 125 feet on the south and was bordered on the west with a 16-foot alley. "There is cement curb and gutter on street sides and cement curb in alley. Also cement sidewalks on streets and in yard."

It also mentioned that it was 4.5 blocks southwest of the public square and "just one block removed from the main traffic street to the St. Paul Railway station, being therefore quite free from the noise and dust incident to heavy traffic."

It mentioned that the house was “frame and roomy, partly new and partly old but in good condition throughout.” This must have been a reference to the remodeling that had been done a few years earlier. The first floor contained a living room with a coal or wood burning fireplace, dining room, library, kitchen, pantry, bedroom with a gas fireplace, and three porches. Two of the porches were enclosed with storm windows in winter. The second floor contained five bedrooms, a hallway, bathroom, and attic. The basement, which had both inside and outside entrances, was comprised of a furnace and fuel room, laundry, vegetable room, and workshop, all with cement floors.

The rest of the description of the house will be shared next week and we’ll explore what was so special about the Twining family.



This photo of the Twining family house at 1423 15th Avenue was copied from The Monroe Evening Times of September 21, 1914 when it was “for sale.” There is a lot of history in this old house, part of which dates back to the 1860s.