

Chapter 8: The Spaulding houses

A quartet of Victorian homes was built in one block of Grinnell at the turn of the century by members of the Spaulding family, owners of the Spaulding Manufacturing Company, maker of carriages and later of automobiles. Family members built four homes on the west side of Main Street between Sixth and Seventh Avenues, occupying two of them and renting out the other two. A fifth house on the block, built in 1877, also was occupied by a member of the Spaulding family.

The house that is the most remarkable on the block, the majestic buff brick home on the northwest corner of Sixth Avenue and Main Street, known to many in Grinnell as the Spaulding mansion, had a vivid fortune: built for \$15,000, the elegant high-ceilinged home later was sold for \$7,000.

Still later, after the family's business went sour, it was turned into an inn by the widow of one of the Spaulding Company's heirs, when the days in which the family members lived and played and socialized together in their own one-block neighborhood were but a memory.

Built by Vermont native

The original home, in the center of the block at 1121 Main Street, now the Roger McMullin home, was built by Henry W. Spaulding, a native of Vermont who came to Grinnell in 1876 and set up a blacksmithing and buggy-making shop on the east side of Main Street between Fourth and Fifth Avenues. After the buggy shop was destroyed by fire in 1891, Spaulding in 1899 erected the handsome corniced red brick building in that location which came to be known as the Spaulding Block, now housing Rags to Riches and the Lifeline bookstore. The building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and marked by a plaque.

As his enterprise grew and became the Spaulding Manufacturing Company, it moved to the sprawling complex at Fourth Avenue and Spring Streets.

A community-minded man who pioneered the sales technique of "trailing," hitching buggies in sequence, selling and delivering them as they went, H.W. Spaulding was a trustee and generous contributor to Grinnell College, mayor of Grinnell, president of the Citizens National

Bank, and was elected as a senator to the Iowa legislature.

Referred to in the centennial book "Grinnell, A Century of Progress" as one of the builders of Grinnell, he also suffered heavy financial loss and severe personal injuries in the cyclone of 1882 and another substantial financial loss in a disastrous fire in 1893, as well as the decline of his business as he attempted unsuccessfully to meet the demands of his time by manufacturing a distinguished but short-lived line of automobiles to replace the buggy.

Also built two other houses

In the residential block in which he built his home, Henry Spaulding also built a house on the corner at the north end of the block to rent out, leaving a vacant lot in between, and built a second rental property immediately south of his home.

As his sons Ernest Heywood Spaulding and Frederick Elliott Spaulding became active in the business in 1900, they employed the Des Moines architectural firm of Hallett and Rawson to design a headquarters building for their firm built in 1903 at the southwest corner of Fourth and Spring, now on the National Register of Historic Places, and also in 1906 the building at 913 Main Street, long the home of Spurgeon's Department Store and now site of Van Ersvelde Decorating.

In the residential block farther north on Main Street, Frederick Spaulding and his family occupied the second home from the south end of the block at 1109 Main Street. In 1905 Ernest Spaulding retained the firm of Hallett and Rawson to design the buff-colored brick home at 1103 Main Street, built during the 1906 building season at a reported cost of \$15,000. It is this home that is now the residence of Montie and Betty Hammond, who have in their possession what are probably the detailed original architectural plans for the house.

Families socialized in block

Miriam Spaulding Smith Simms, now of Conrad, who was born and married in the home of her parents, Ernest and Irma Towne Spaulding, recalls the good times family members had while socializing back and forth in that block. Events centered around occasions in the home of her grandparents every Sunday night and especially at Christmases in their home.



The Ernest Spaulding home. The circular sign at right identifies it as the "Wayside Inn," and the white lettering on the photo describes it as "a

comfortable place to stay" in Grinnell, dating the photo to the era in which it was an inn run by the widow of one of the Spaulding company's heirs.

Her grandparents had "gobs of books," she says, and she and her youthful aunts, Alice and Henryetta Spaulding, Henry Spaulding's daughters by his second marriage, were encouraged to take advantage of the opportunity to sit and read.

Her uncle Fred kept cows in a barn behind his home and the younger members of the families had a pony and pony cart.

Spauldings entertain for college

Her parents were known for their hospitality and often held social events in their home to help raise money for Grinnell College. Because there was not a hotel, her parents also played host to college guests such as the Dibble family, whose members gave money for two dormitories at the college.

As to reports that the third floor of the house held a ballroom, that is a myth, says Simms. Although the third floor did have a wonderful floor and "Daddy loved to dance and may have danced up there once or twice," she says, "I had a slide up there built by my grandfather, so there was really no room to dance."

Simms, who graduated from Grinnell College in 1932, was one of seven members of her family to attend the college. She returned here to live during World War II and one of her daughters was born here.

When the fortunes of the Spaulding family took a downturn after the failure of their automobile business and its sale in 1929, members of the family were allowed to keep their homes. Following the death of her husband, Mrs. Ernest Spaulding turned her home into Wayside Inn, "the best tourist home in the Middlewest," on the River to River Road, an east-west route between the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers.

The buff-colored brick home was sold later to Dr. Mills, a local dentist, for \$7,000 and still later was owned by Mr. and Mrs. E.L. Rudkin, from whom the Hammonds purchased the home in 1983.

Its current occupants, the Hammonds, are only the fourth owners. All the owners of the home have retained its original character and kept it in excellent condition.

The house is distinguished by a screened semi-circular veranda on the east side and a *porte cochère* on the north side for alighting guests. Its large living room with fireplace surrounded by glassed bookcases is spacious in proportions.

Throughout the living room are china dolls made by Mrs. Hammond as a hobby and dressed in appropriate period costumes.

A central hallway with an entrance door from the south is dominated by a wide handsome oak staircase with stained glass windows at the landing.

China doll models wedding dress

On the landing is a life-sized china doll made by Mrs. Hammond dressed in the wedding gown worn by Irma Towne Spaulding at the time of her marriage to Ernest Spaulding in August, 1904, and also by Mrs. Simms at the time of her first wedding when she descended the staircase to be married before the fireplace in the living room in September, 1937. The cream-colored silk costume consists of a blouse, skirt, cummerbund, slip, long stockings and two pairs of shoes worn by the brides. The ensemble was a gift from Mrs. Simms, who deemed it fitting that the dress should be displayed in an appropriate way in its original setting.

A large south-facing dining room with wainscoting and beamed ceiling is adjacent to a spacious kitchen on the northwest side of the house. A tray from the original Spaulding dining room, a gift from Mrs. Simms to Mrs. Hammond, rests above the wainscoting in one corner.

French doors on the southwest corner of the dining room lead to an intimate porch, set by Mrs. Hammond with a miniature tea party with an antique doll tea set and more of her china dolls appropriately garbed for the occasion.

The second floor of the home includes five bedrooms with the beds covered in quilts handmade by Mrs. Hammond, a sitting room and two baths. The third floor of the house, which has been turned into an informal family living area by the Hammonds, holds Montie Hammond's pool table and is largely used for overflow guests especially at their annual Christmas open houses, and by their grandchildren.

Gives occasional tours

Because of interest in the home, Betty Hammond occasionally takes selected groups for dessert and tours of the house.

Mrs. Simms and members of her family have visited here to view her family's original home, and Betty Hammond visited Mrs. Simms last year while in Conrad to attend a family reunion.

Spaulding memorabilia, including relics from the famed River to River Road Race sponsored by the Spaulding Automobile Company, are part of the collection of the Grinnell Historical Museum, as is Mrs. Simms's Uncle Fred's bicycle and more recently a table presented by her cousin Patty.

Owning the handsome Spaulding house is like a dream come true for Betty Hammond, who says she often fantasized as a child about occupying just such a house.

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