

The Cranston Block

At times we walk down the streets of our picturesque village and scarcely comprehend the beauty and charm possessed by some of our older houses. Such is the case with the subject of this week's column, the Cranston Block on the corner of Front and Emily Streets. I interviewed the present owners, Mr. and Mrs. A. Boersma, this past week and was pleasantly surprised at the ornate Victorian style still very much in

By the 1880's, prosperity and affluence had succeeded the pioneer difficulty and growing pains of what had been basically a wilderness settlement. Descendants of early settlers left family farms and moved to the busy hamlet of Stirling swelling its population to 1000 by the year 1878. Daily stages connected Stirling with Belleville and the soon to be completed Grand Junction Railway would further improve the cultural and industrial position of the town.

A new breed of entrepreneur appeared on the scene also. They were the professionals; those who had been exposed to the Victorian delights of cities like Montreal, Toronto and Kingston. They brought with them a love for elaborate architecture and imposing grandiosity. A native son, Dr. George W. Faulkner, at the age of 27, chose to reestablish himself and began in 1872 a career of medicine and business which was to last well into the twentieth

century. He was a graduate of McGill University and had spent a year and a half in his cousin's practice in Washington, Iowa. He also had a long and distinguished career in public service as Reeve of Stirling (8 years), Warden of Hastings County in 1886, Trustee of the High School Board (30 years) and Chairman of the High School Board (4 years).

His home befitted a man of his enlightened nature and high exterior displays the newly acquired taste for the Second Empire look with its Mansard roof and accents of dressed Roman stone. The central tower encloses the entrance hall and rises impressively to just above the roof of the main part of the house. It may have sported the lacy ironwork characteristic of that period which is still in evidence on the tower of the building across the street. The sloping roof is pierced with dormer windows.

The home was laid out in three distinct sections. The stately front portion served as the family home with all three stories in use. The central section was the servants' quarters while the rear part was the stable and carriage house. The two segments fronting on Emily Street have since been converted to apartments.

Upon entering the foyer, a magnificent sight greets the eye. A grand stairway with an ornately carved bannister rises gracefully to the upper floors, and on to end at a doorway to the roof. The walls of the hall are covered with richly detailed paintings - not hanging on the walls, but applied directly to the plaster, a la Leonardo da Vinci. Unfortunately, a black and white photograph would never do these splendidly preserved scenes justice.

One wall is painted with an exciting hunting tableau. Dogs attack a stag while in the distance hunters astride galloping mounts close in on their quarry. The opposite wall holds a more pastoral scene with a "castle" set among rolling hills. Above the doorway to the dining room is a stylized beaver crouching behind a coat of arms which features the cross of St. George, Scottish thistles, lions rampant and their fanci-

ful decorations. Below these treasures on the small triangle formed by the baseboard, the door trim and the stairway is a verdant pond view with fat frogs lazing on large lily pads. At the bottom of the staircase in monogrammatic fashion appear the initials G.W.F.

Leaving this setting of earthly delights, one enters a vast dining room. Outstanding features in this room are the ornate plaster ceiling centres, the ultimate in pine woodwork which has been patiently refinished by the Boersmas.

Massive sliding doors set into a graceful arch lead into the living room which evokes the essence of Victorian style with its ten foot high ceilings, deeply recessed window sills, high baseboards and polished black marble fireplace. The finish on the pine trim has been left undisturbed for decades and hardwood floors gleam underfoot. An abundance of large green plants completes the look of a bygone era. At one time a border of hummingbirds and vines adorned the wall below the ceiling.

Mr. and Mrs. Boersma have gone to great lengths to retain the period look in the home. Door trim from doors which were sealed has been used in building closets in the master bedroom assuring a unified look.

Unusual for a house of this time, the basement has eight foot high ceilings. Constructed of stone, the foundation supports immense timbers one of which runs the width of the house according to Mr. Boersma. These houses were built to last.

Painstaking work was also done this past summer in the reconstruction of the front porch. With such quality workmanship going into its upkeep this time it should prove to be an asset to the Stirling streetscape for many years to come.

Please feel free to contact me at 122 Front Street West or by calling 395-3022 concerning any of the houses featured in this column or if you have items of interest you would be willing to share with our readers. All materials loaned to me for perusal will, of course, be returned.

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