



*Hawthorne Place
Neighborhood Association*

March 1, 2012

Life in Historic Hawthorne



Contractor John Jordan & homeowner Mark Mahoney are in top left photo.

**Under the Aluminum Siding:
Rediscovering the Original House at 1520 Lowell**

Tin Men came to Hawthorne Place about a half-century ago. They promoted a maintenance-free, paint-free exterior for homeowners. Older houses, across the country, were re-sided in aluminum. Neighbors would notice the new and shiny cosmetic make-over next door and want the same for their property. Of course, future residents didn't have to paint – or fix – what they couldn't see. Occasionally, someone would wonder what the original house looked like under the covers. The aluminum was peeled away to take a peek. This is a story about restoration, historical restoration, and it begins on page 4.

The following neighborhood activities are scheduled for the next three months. A flyer will be distributed at each front door with more details. If there are questions that remain, you can always call your block captain listed on the last page of this newsletter.



HPNA Annual Meeting

Wednesday, March 21, 6:00 PM
Laurel Methodist Church

There will be a potluck dinner again for this year's Hawthorne Place annual meeting. Please bring a covered dish. Ward 6 Alderman Cory Jobe and Public Works Director Mark Mahoney will give updates about city services. There will be sign-up sheets for neighborhood activities. There will also be tables for neighbors to renew their Hawthorne memberships and for Lowell residents to contribute to the boulevard mowing fund. Baby-sitting will be offered.



Easter Egg Hunt

Saturday, March 31

Beth Faulkner is organizing this year's Easter Egg Hunt – again. She is becoming a pro. The activities will take place at the north end of the Lowell boulevard for our young neighbors of Hawthorne Place. Beth will have more information about this event and she will be looking for volunteer help.

WE CARE NEIGHBORHOOD CLEAN UP



OUR COMMUNITY LET'S MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Neighborhood Clean-Up

Saturday, April 21, 9 AM to Noon

Each year our neighbors gather for a clean-up in the public spaces of Hawthorne: the boulevard, streets and sidewalks. Much of the focus is on the boulevard because neighborhood activities are scheduled there throughout the year. Last year, more than one hundred yard-waste bags were filled by volunteers. We especially want the neighborhood to look its best for The Big Event (the annual Hawthorne Place garage sale). Volunteer. You are needed for this very important community effort. Bring rakes, gloves, wheelbarrels, loppers – and energy.

A rain date for the clean-up will be April 28.

Ward 6 Revitalization & Rehabilitation Fund

Submission date: Monday, April 2

Grant applications will be due on Monday, April 2 at 5:30 PM. The fund is available to neighborhoods seeking to improve or beautify public spaces. Each neighborhood can submit one application. Neighborhood associations must provide a matching fund of ten percent of their requests.



The Big Event

Saturday, May 5, 8 AM – Noon

“The Big Event” is Hawthorne’s annual neighborhood-wide garage sale. It’s an opportunity to showcase the neighborhood that day. We want to look our best and we hope that visitors will be attracted to an older neighborhood as a place to live.

Ideally, there will be garage and yard sales throughout Hawthorne. If you do not have enough items for a sale of your own, consider joining with other neighbors.

The Big Event is also a fundraiser for the Hawthorne Place Neighborhood Association. Tables will be set on the boulevard green for food and plants where donations will be taken. Please contribute baked goods and potted garden plants for this fundraiser. Volunteers are needed at the association tables. There will be sign-up sheets for these activities at the annual meeting on March 21.

Tom Irwin in Hawthorne

Tom Irwin is one of the new residents of Hawthorne Place. He now resides at 1608 Holmes. He is best known for his column in the *Illinois Times* and especially for his contributions to the Springfield music scene for the past four decades as musician and commentator. His new CD is titled *Sangamon Song* and it was inspired by a late 19th-century diary that he discovered in the Irwin family farmhouse.

There is a cover story on Tom Irwin and his musical journey in the January 19, 2012, issue of the *Illinois Times*.

Leaf Pick-Up

The city leaf pick-up program is scheduled for the month of April. Yard waste bags should be put out curbside on Monday mornings. There will be a weekly pick-up. Check the newspaper, the city’s webpage, or channel 18, the Access Channel, as details are announced.

Branch Pick-up

The branch pick-up will begin in May. Every month, with a four to five week cycle, city trucks will come through neighborhoods for branches. Again, the branches must be placed curbside (never in the boulevard). Curb piles are not to exceed 4x8 feet. Check the city’s webpage to follow the routes and to know when to expect a pick-up.



Sweet Gum Trees

There has been a recent proposal (see *SJ-R*, February 10, 2012, page 14) from Public Works in regard to the city’s many sweet gum trees. Each tree annually drops hundreds of hard prickly balls. They are a hazard to joggers, they block city drainage, and they cover lawns, sidewalks and public streets.

The proposed program will be a limited offer. The city can only remove so many of the thousands of these trees on public property. The key word here is public. The program only pertains to those trees on the city right of way. Homeowners wanting the removal of a sweet gum tree must be willing to pay \$250 for a replacement tree.



The Unwrapping



1520 Lowell in 1996. Looks great.

When Mark and Grainne Mahoney moved to 1520 Lowell in 2008 they immediately discussed the possibility of removing the aluminum siding. The entire structure looked fine but it was wrapped – mummified – in wide white siding that was out of proportion to the original clapboard. The house had so much character – inside and out – that they could only wonder about how the exterior looked when the home was built in 1905.



Brad Swanson in 2002 with a 1923 photograph of 1520 Lowell.

Old photographs are hard to come by, but here – in the photo above – is Brad Swanson (the previous owner) standing beside a photo from 1923. The photo is taken from the same angle and reveals the south side of 1520. It is clear from the photo that the extension of the east end of the house occurred before 1923. There are clapboard, shingles, details around the windows, and brackets under the eaves.

But what remained? It's the question that is the daunting dilemma for any homeowner. What's underneath the siding? How much of the original detail would be there? What was the condition of the wood? If much of it had to be replaced, how would the costs escalate?

In 2011, Mark decided to strip away the siding that surrounded a first floor window on the north side. The wood looked great but the trim around the window had been removed when the siding was installed. For the most part, it was an encouraging sign.

Next, the Mahoneys had the siding on the back of the house (the east side) removed. If there had been damage, it might be most apparent on the east and south sides. Again, the wood looked terrific for any house, let alone one that had been built 105 years ago. The window trim had been removed along with the central band board as well as the bracketing under the eaves. (When aluminum siding was used the installers wanted a flat surface.) They also discovered evidence of a long-gone side porch at the northeast side corner. They then hired John Jordan to restore the exterior.



Water damage under the eaves on the south side.

With summer coming to a close and fall approaching, John Jordan and his assistant began removing the siding on the south side and then from the front of the house. It all looked in remarkably good shape. The most visible decay was in the eaves on the south side where water had backed up and overflowed the gutters. This damage had been concealed by the aluminum siding.

It was like peeling away the decades of time, looking back through the history of a house. There, underneath the wrapping, was the original house with shingle siding on the second floor and clapboard on the first.

It's previous colors, when last painted, perhaps sixty years ago, had been dark gray on the shingles and white on the clapboard. The Mahoneys choose similar colors from the Benjamin Moore Historical Colors collection. They chose light blue for the shingles, light gray for the clapboard and white on the trim.

John Jordan had some wonderful advice about the windows. He freed open some of the windows that were jammed. But he also told the Mahoneys that the windows had been there for a hundred years. No replacement window would last that long. However, they did replace the storm windows which were not original to the house.

The deck at the back of the house was replaced with a landing.

Now, all that remains, is to remove the siding and paint the north side of the house. That, it is hoped, is the plan for next spring.

Mark and Grainne Mahoney found a contractor who was in sync with their desire to restore 1520 to its original exterior. John Jordan would say that every project is different, perhaps requiring different solutions. But, personally, he prefers original wood siding whenever it can be saved and preserved with a fresh coat of paint.



1400 Lowell

Older houses, according to John, were built to last and designed with more functionality than today's homes. The shame is that so often when a house is re-sided much of the character is stripped away. Installers want a flat palette with which to work and, as a consequence, much of the ornamentation is removed. But the biggest problem is that new – replacement – siding may hide a plethora of problems including rot and moisture.

It should be mentioned that the Mahoneys had a small group of Hawthorne homeowners who preceded them with this project. The Yoders at 1409 Whittier, the Lobmasters at 1425 Whittier, and the Haasises at 1415 Lowell had already set the example. They boldly removed the old aluminum siding from their homes, discovered the original wood with its many architectural details, and painted.

1520 Lowell now looks like a new house, just one that was built more than one hundred years ago.

The Mahoneys also had one more source of inspiration. It was just up the street at 1400 Lowell. That home, owned by Stan Black & Keri Luly, has the same design, the same layout, the same porch. It was never re-sided. The Mahoneys only had to look at it to know how their house at 1520 might appear once the aluminum siding was removed.

Below left is 1400 Lowell. Below right is 1520.



1520 Lowell today

The Families of 1520 Lowell



William B. Jess

On October 31, 1905, William B. Jess (1875-1935) and his wife, Louise (1876-1942), signed a contract with William Conkling and John Pierik, the two men who created Hawthorne Place. They acquired Lot 29 and the south ½ of Lot 30 in Block 7. The house was built and William and Louise moved to it in 1906. It was their home for the next thirty years, a time during which their two children were born: Katherine (1908-2001) and William, Jr. (1911-1998).

William Sr. had entered the coal mining business with his father at an early age. He had been educated at Lawrenceville Academy and Princeton and he was a civil engineer by profession. When the Peabody Coal Company acquired many of the mines owned by the Jess family, William was retained as a district manager, a position he held for many years.

Both of the Jess children graduated from Springfield High School: Katherine in 1927, William Jr. in 1930.



Four generations: Louise Jess is at the far left with her daughter, Katherine, beside her. In the center is Louise's mother with her grandmother on the right. (circa: 1911)



William Jr. & his sister, Katherine (early 1920s)

Sometime after the death of William Jess in 1935, the house at 1520 became the home of William's brother, Alvey Jess. Alvey had been blind from childhood but it appears he lived alone at 1520, with the assistance of hired help, until his death in 1975. He was 89.

While his extended family certainly looked after him, one of the sad realities of Alvey's age and affliction was the possible isolation from his neighbors. From his later years, surviving residents only remembered that a blind man lived on the property, one with a housekeeper, one who could be seen sitting on the porch, one who was taken on brisk walks to the corner and back.

Carolyn Daniels who moved to 1505 Lowell in 1965 also remembers a special detail about the house. It was used for voting. A man would come out onto the front yard at 6 AM and yell: "Hear Ye! Hear Ye! Hear Ye! The polling station is now open." Voters would enter 1520 Lowell through the north side door and vote in the basement. Carolyn would always vote. But she never met Alvey.

Brad & Carolyn Swanson knew of 1520 because they lived on Lowell in the 1970s. Brad would go for his morning run and notice the "for sale" sign. 1520 had not been a family dwelling for decades, and once the Swansons stepped inside they realized the work that awaited them. The house was still heated by the original furnace. It had the knob and tube wiring that had been common from the 1880s to the 1930s. The rooms were wallpapered including the ceilings. There were no cupboards in the kitchen. (The cupboards were in the pantry.) The kitchen had just a stove and sink. The aluminum siding on the exterior had been installed years earlier. But, as Carolyn remarked, once she had stepped into the front hall she knew she was home. She fell in love with the house from the beginning.

When the Swansons moved to 1520 in 1975, they brought their one-year-old daughter, Meridith. Their son, Gregory, was born in 1978. Their master bedroom was their retreat as they worked on updating and restoring the interior.

In short time, the house became a mecca for family gatherings, for friends finding refuge and welcome. After four decades, it was, once again, a bustling, vibrant center of activity.

The Swansons lived at 1520 for more than thirty years. But once Meridith and Greg were grown and on with their adult lives, Brad & Carolyn had a choice to make. Their unique situation was that they had two houses – theirs and that of Carolyn's late parents. They resided, back and forth, in two houses for two years.

In the meantime, Mark & Grainne Mahoney were looking for a larger home for their growing family.



2008: Meridith, Brad, Carolyn & Greg Swanson on the front steps of 1520 Lowell. The dog is Abie.

The Mahoneys had seen other houses in Hawthorne Place. There were other large homes on the market. They decided to wait and see what the Swansons would decide. As with Carolyn's experience three decades earlier, the Mahoneys felt they had found their ideal home.

Mark, Grainne, Niamh, Eamon, and the newest member of the family, Cian, moved to 1520 in 2008. In 2010, Orlaith was born. There were now six Mahoneys to enjoy the eleven rooms of their home.



2012: Eamon, Mark, Niamh, Cian, Grainne & Orlaith Mahoney on the front porch of 1520 Lowell.

Once again, as with the Jesses and the Swansons in the past, there was a young family residing in a home that has endured for so many years.

A Short History of Siding

The story of siding is as old as Hawthorne Place (1902). Steel clapboard siding was patented in 1903. Sears Roebuck offered embossed steel siding in their catalogues in the 1920s. In 1937, a process was invented using a locking joint, forming a watertight horizontal seam for metal siding designs.

Aluminum siding was introduced in the 1940s and it quickly became popular for re-siding homes because of its light weight, its ease in handling, and that it could be applied over existing siding. Still, the product could be dented and scratched. Its paint would chalk. And its cost began to escalate in the 1970s.

By that time, vinyl siding began to compete directly with aluminum. PVC was introduced for home siding in the late 1950s. But its brittleness, discoloration, and tendency to contract created an image as a cheap cover-up. There were improvements. The thicker grades of vinyl proved more durable. The color was imbedded so scratches hardly mattered. It could imitate historical features. And it could be made to look like wood – from a distance.

By the 1980s, vinyl had a price advantage over other products. By 1995, it was the dominant siding material. And, by one estimate, it now accounts for 95 percent of the re-siding market.

Of course, there are issues. The color on vinyl can be impossible to match when replacing sections of it. The product can buckle. Vinyl, like wood, is flammable and more likely to ignite in an exterior fire. Vinyl can also release toxic fumes, particularly dioxins, when burning. Since it must be installed loosely to compensate for changes in temperature, it may be a host to insects. Vinyl does need to be regularly washed to avoid stains and molds. And vinyl is hard to recycle. It never degrades in landfills.

Aluminum, on the other hand, is highly recyclable. People even steal it – from abandoned houses and houses where people are still living.

The issue of re-siding is most controversial when the discussion turns to older homes. Older homes, particularly those built before 1940, are not very amenable to a synthetic wrap. There is a lot of detail in an historic home. There may be moldings, brackets, beaded edges, fish scales, headers over windows and doors. These features are hard to duplicate and are often removed or covered with re-siding.

Paint presents its own problems. For years, lead was added to paint to speed drying, increase durability, retain a fresh appearance and resist moisture. Lead was eventually discovered to impact a variety of health issues and was considered particularly dangerous to women and children. It was banned from household paint in 1978.

Paint cracks. It peels. It discolors. Painting is labor intensive and expensive. It is important to maintain a painted surface. It is essential to prepare a surface if the paint – a good quality paint – is to last.

But wood is revered. Older homes are made with old growth wood, a precious resource. Fine wood should last. When properly maintained it should last longer than any re-siding. An historic home, many would argue, is like any antique: its greatest value and appeal is in maintaining its original appearance.

Visiting any older neighborhood, one can see the changes that have occurred over time and the different methods for dealing with restoration and maintenance. Without question, older neighborhoods look best when there is a shared interest in preserving history and highlighting the originality of these homes.

We've been very lucky in Hawthorne Place. We live in a family-oriented neighborhood that has endured for over a hundred years. There are a variety of house styles that date to a specific period – the first three decades of the 20th century. And, always, there are young families who move to Hawthorne because they want to enjoy and maintain the unique character of an older home and its neighborhood.



The Abstract

One of the most valuable documents in tracing the history of a house is the abstract. It's a condensed historical summary of ownership. It shows the recorded documents that affect the property, including transfers of ownership and claims on the land. It will identify those who hold the deed and it may identify the property's value at different periods. It's all in legalese and a lawyer may be required to interpret the language and to follow the narrative.

The photograph above is from the first page of the abstract for 1520 Lowell. Grainne Mahoney is holding the page open. That first page is a layout of Hawthorne Place with every lot identified. It traces the history of that tract of land back to 1830 when it was entered in the Auditor's Office for the State of Illinois. Over the next seventy years, the abstract identifies a variety of owners. They would include Obed Lewis (the Obed of the recently opened Obed & Isaac's) in 1843, William Wallace (a brother-in-law to Abraham Lincoln) in 1849, and William J. Conkling in 1864. William J. Conkling was the father of William H. Conkling who would acquire the land in 1902. Conkling and John Pierik would establish a new subdivision on the tract in 1902 and they would call it Hawthorne Place.

The abstract records that William B. Jess and his wife, Louise, bought a lot and ½ in the new subdivision on October 31, 1905.

Most homeowners don't receive the abstract when they buy a home today – it's not required – but it sure is nice when you have one.



Robert Williamson Jess

A final word about the Jess family. The patriarch of the Jess family was Robert W. Jess (1842-1892). He came to America from Belfast, Ireland, when he was in his early teens. He may have been in Springfield by 1857. His older brother, John H. Jess (1838-1868), was a baker who ran a grocery store in the city. A branch of that store was opened in Riverton and Robert moved there. It was in Riverton that Robert began investing and then buying coal mines. Eventually, he became one of the largest coal mine owners in central Illinois. After his death, his widow would move back to Springfield where she built a house at 726 South Second Street in 1900. It's still there. The front porch isn't as expansive. And it's been re-sided – in vinyl!




The Alice Agee Jess home at 726 S. Second St.

Thank-you to Allison George of California who shared photos of the Jess family. She is the great-great-granddaughter of Robert and Alice Jess.

And a heart-felt thank-you to all our sponsors:

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HAWTHORNE PLACE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

What is it? – The Hawthorne Place Neighborhood Association is an organization for residents of Whittier, Lowell and Holmes between South Grand and Laurel – the boundaries of the 1902 Hawthorne Place subdivision. The organization advocates for the neighborhood, sponsors social activities, and is a forum for working on neighborhood issues.

History – The Hawthorne Place Neighborhood Association held its first meeting at Laurel Methodist Church on October 27, 1994. The organization grew out of the effort to get a stop sign installed at Holmes and Cedar. Neighbors discovered the benefits of a group effort and a group voice.

How to join – Membership is \$20 per family for a first time membership and \$10 per family for a renewing membership. To join, contact Membership chair Burnell Heinecke (522-3842). Also, let Burnell know if you do not want to be listed in the neighborhood directory.

Directories – Neighborhood directories are available to members. Contact your block captain if you need a directory.

Neighborhood Officer – Hawthorne Place is protected by the Springfield Police Department. Andy Zander, our Neighborhood Police Officer, can be reached at 741-0988. His email is andrew.zander@cwlp.com. If there is an emergency situation call 911.

Alderman – Hawthorne Place is in Ward 6. Our alderman is Cory Jobe. He can be reached by phone (622-9630) or email (cory@jobeward6.com). His webpage is www.jobeward6.com.

Webpage – www.hawthorneplace.us
The webpage is maintained by Chris Oliver.

Newsletter – The neighborhood newsletter is published quarterly. And the newsletter is self-supporting – thanks to our advertisers. Three cheers to them! Rates are \$10 per issue for a business card space or \$40 per year. Interested? Call Marty Vandiver, the HPNA treasurer, at 523-3544.

Block Captains – The neighborhood is divided into six “blocks,” with block captains elected to represent each block on the association board. The blocks consist of the north or south section of a street, separated by Cedar Street. Three block captains are elected each year to a two-year term at the annual meeting in the spring.

The following is a list of the current block captains.

N. Holmes
Beth Faulkner – 1420 Holmes (744-0295)
Karmen Goodrich – 1324 Holmes
(414-0783)
Karmen is the secretary of the HPNA.

S. Holmes
Chelsy Hopper – 1620 Holmes (528-7110)
Chelsy is the vice-president of the HPNA.

N. Lowell
Beth & Mike Trojahn - 1314 Lowell
(744-7303)
Beth is the president of the HPNA.

S. Lowell
Mark Mahoney – 1520 Lowell (544-7944)

N. Whittier
Lindsey Trojahn – 1317 Whittier (789-1315)

S. Whittier
Linda Riebling – 1500 Whittier (523-1450)
Marty Vandiver – 1528 Whittier
(523-3544)
Marty is the treasurer of the HPNA.

Jim Huston – 1524 Lowell (528-5256)
(HPNA newsletter since 2006)

Volunteer. Get involved.
Your neighborhood needs you.