

Good Morning!

MILWAUKEE SENTINEL

Saturday, May 6, 1978

Page 1, Part 3

'House detective' traces pedigrees

By DEAN JENSEN
Sentinel Art Critic

Anyone who has ever walked, jogged, cycled or driven through the sylvan East Side residential area just south of Water Tower Park must have wondered at the stories those stately homes could tell if they could only speak.

Soon they will be speaking — through Shirley McArthur.

They will tell of the men who designed and built them. They will reveal the names of the prominent families who lived in them in the last 70, 80 and more years.

Five years ago, Mrs. McArthur moved here from Lombard, Ill., with her husband and two children and settled into one of those grand houses herself.

"I guess it took me all of 15 minutes to adjust," she said.

Almost from the minute that quarter hour passed, she has been hard at work on a project.

It began when she started digging into the past of her own home at 2405 E. Wyoming Pl. By going through records at the Building Inspector's office and poring over old history books and newspapers, she ferreted out information about when the home was built, the architect who designed it, the craftsmen who erected it and the families who lived in it over the years.

She enjoyed the detective work so much that when she completed the research on her own house, she decided to dig into the history of the other houses on the block. She finished that research and then started spading up data on the houses in the neighboring blocks.

When she had completed her task recently, she found that she had established pedigrees for 117 houses in a 15 block area.

The results of her research will soon be released in the form of a book titled "North Point South" for which she did the writing and her husband, Peter, did the photography.

Two nonprofit groups concerned with preservation — Land Ethics, Inc., and Water Tower Landmark Trust — are underwriting publication of the book, which is being printed by C. W. Brown Printing of Oconomowoc.

The groups had hoped the book would be released in time for Preservation Week in America, which starts Sunday, but the book is still in production.

Most of the homes still standing in the area were built in the late 19th Century or early 20th Century, according to Mrs. McArthur.

Any listing of their original owners would read like a *Who's Who* of Milwaukee's haut monde at the turn of the century. On the list would be names like Blatz, Pabst, Allis, Cudahy, Falk, Vogel, Quarles and Brumder — all movers and shakers in the city's business, law and banking circles.

While Mrs. McArthur said she knew the names of all the families that owned the homes over the years, she is not naming the present owners in her book.

"I felt I had to respect the right of privacy of the current owners," she explained.

She said that she would not be receiving any royalties on the book since all proceeds will be used to pay for its production.

"I took on the project out of the sheer love for the neighborhood and Milwaukee," she said.

Residential development in the area did not start until after 1851 when two Ohio men, John Lockwood and Jefferson Glidden, bought 106 acres and started laying out the streets.

Of the 117 homes in the area for which she found documentation, 26 have been razed.

Her research has involved studying old plat maps, nosing into building inspector records, reading accounts in *The Milwaukee Sentinel* from as long ago as the 1830s and cracking such invaluable tomes on Milwaukee's history as those written by William George Bruce and John S. Gregory.

She also interviewed descendants and relatives of the prominent and moneyed citizens who lived in the homes originally.

"They described it as a very gay neighborhood around the turn of the century," she said. "It was truly a neighborhood where everyone knew one another. The families dealt with one another in their businesses and they socialized together. The children of one prominent family often would marry sons and daughters from another prominent family."

The homes described in her book are in the 15 block area, south of the Water Tower between Lake Dr. and Lake Michigan. It is an area known as the southern portion of North Point.

Mrs. McArthur, a former English teacher, said her prose style might have been a little waywardly purple in the first draft of her manuscript.

She toned it down after submitting it to Richard W. E. Perrin, former commissioner of city development and a widely published architectural historian and champion of preservation.

"He has been my adviser on this project," she said. "He told me I had been a little rapturous."

Mrs. McArthur has been active in numerous Chicago area and Milwaukee groups that are concerned with preserving buildings of historical and architectural importance.

"Homes of the type that were built in this area will never be built again," she said. "The type of craftsmen who built homes like this aren't around anymore."

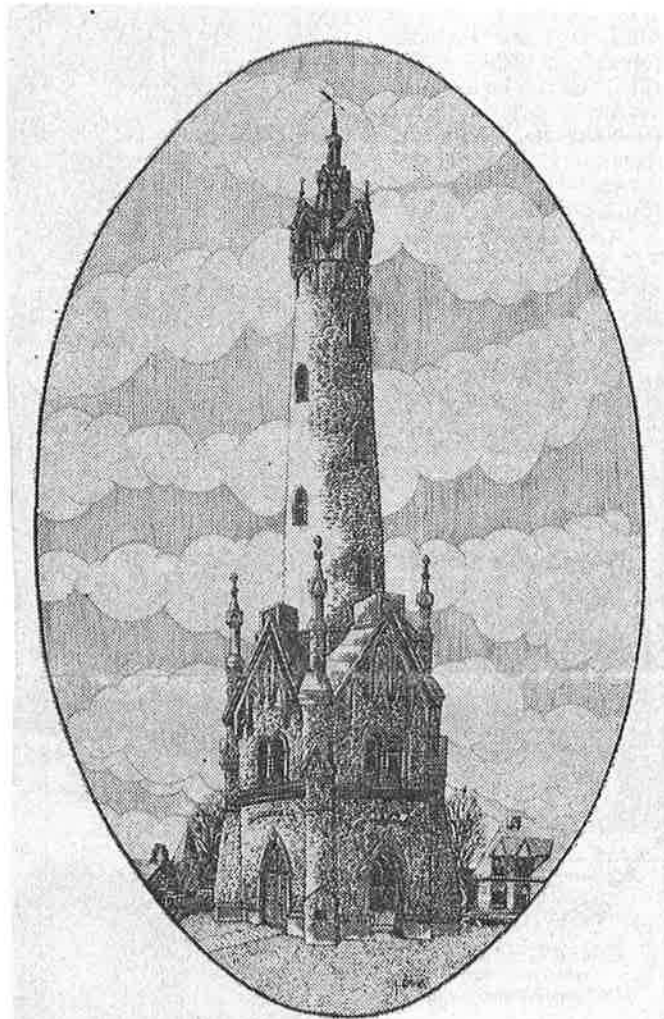
Mrs. McArthur's own home was erected in 1904 for Frank Ward Smith. It later became the residence of Michael Cudahy, son of Patrick Cudahy, owner of the large meat packing company bearing his name and one of the wealthiest men in Milwaukee. The house was designed by Alexander Chadbourne Eschweiler, a prominent Milwaukee architect who designed many of the city's finest residences.

"The carpenter for our house was a man named John Dibbink and, like all craftsmen of his day, Mr. Dibbink took real pride in his work," Mrs. McArthur said. "A while back we had to do some shoring up on the staircase. When we opened up the staircase, we found John Dibbink's name on the back of every riser."



SHIRLEY MC ARTHUR and her dog walk by the stately Emil Blatz home, designed by Ferry & Clas, architects. Built in 1910, the house is a stylized English Tudor with 16th Century half-timber and stucco accents.

— Sentinel Photo by Lynn D. Howell



THIS SKETCH of the Water Tower, by Louise Ott Van Antwerpen, will appear on the cover of Shirley McArthur's book, "North Point South."