

Then & Now on Main Street: 115 Main Street

(and properties in this section of Main Street to 87 Main Street)

By Karen Ferguson, Town of Kirkwood Historian

Continuing with the series “Then & Now on Main Street”, this month’s article is about one of the original farms located in Lot 8 of the Thomas Patent.

The farm consisted of approximately 60 acres and was originally owned by C. Ensign as stated in the deed. Upon further research, I was able to locate this house on both the maps from 1855 and 1866 listing C. Ensign as the owner. Charles Ensign appears on the 1835 Census records and it lists 4 males and 6 females living in the house with only 1 male of voting age. On the 1850 Census there are 2 Ensign families listed. Charles, age 61; Salina, age 59, Elisha D., age 22; and Elizabeth L., age 18. All from Connecticut with farming listed as the occupation. The second Ensign family includes Charles Jr., age 30, from Connecticut with farming listed as occupation. Along with him are Sarah, age 30, from NY; Edward C., age 10 months from NY; and Ann Evans age 40 from New York. This is the only time Charles Jr. is counted in the Census. Per the 1860 Census, there were 4 people counted as living in the house: Charles Ensign, age 71; his wife, Selina, age 68; Elisha, age 32 and Margarita; age 27. Charles, Selina and Elisha are listed as coming from Connecticut while Margarita is from N.J. Their occupation was farming. There was another Census taken 5 years later in 1865. This time Elisha D. Ensign is considered head of household, age 36 listing Margaret, age 32, as his wife and them having 1 child. There is a young son named Emery, age 3-8/12 on the record. Charles is 76 years old and his wife’s name was listed as Tripheus, age 73 and listing them as having 9 children. This was the last time the Ensign family is listed on the Census so I then researched our Kirkwood Village Cemetery records. Margaretta K, wife of Elisha D. Ensign, died September 12, 1865 (*shortly after the Census was taken*) at age 32, 2 months and 12 days. Charles Ensign died 6 months later on March 14, 1866 at age 77 years. A third grave in the cemetery is that of Selina T, wife of Charles. She died in June 1881. Since there is no other mention of this family living in Kirkwood after the 1865 census, it is assumed that the sons moved out of the area following their father’s death.

The next owner of this 60-acre property then became Collier. Collier is listed as the owner on the 1876 plat map. The deed records show that John I. Collier and wife had a survey done and recorded on this property on the 1st day of April, 1892. The current owner found a stone on the property with a date of 1873 etched on it. That very well could signify when the Collier family took possession of this land.

The next owner is listed as the Henry Talmadge. His name appears on the 1908 plat but he died that same year and his widow then deeded the house on May 21, 1908 to the Baker Family – Gilbert S. Baker and Flora E. Baker, husband and wife. I am wondering if the Talmadge family took possession of the property in 1892 when it was surveyed by the Collier family.

Gilbert Baker was responsible for first starting to subdivide the land and granting easements through the farm. In December 1917, the first easement was for the New York telephone company for telephone and telegraph lines, poles, tree removal and trimming, as well as any maintenance associated with such an endeavor. In July 1924, he subdivided and deeded another 3 acres to his son Vernon and his wife Anita along the railroad track. In September 1925 he deeded another 1.44 acres to Broome County for the development of the “River County Highway” (a/k/a/ Route 11).

Gilbert Baker maintained the farm until his death on April 23, 1930. His wife, Flora, preceded him in death in 1927. Therefore, the property was left as an inheritance for his daughter Ethel F. Peryea and son Vernon Baker. Ethel didn’t want the property and deeded her interest to Vernon and his wife Anita on July 2, 1932.

Vernon and Anita continued to subdivide the remaining acres making way for many of the houses that were built in that section of the Village. He sold 25 acres to Frank Tylka and Anna Tylka in October of 1945; he sold 1 acre to Andrew & Doris Decker in January 1946; he sold another .62 acres to Roy & Gladys Williams in 1952; and an unknown amount of land to Tracey Wilmarth & John Gulino in December 1955. Art Shafer recalled buying the property from Baker for his house in 1970. He also told the story that while Art was Town Supervisory, Vernon really wanted him to develop Kirkwood Gardens as the park along Main Street, rather than Veterans River Park.

Now back to the original farm house on 115 Main Street. While Vernon & Anita Baker owned the original house, the barn that once stood beside the house was moved to its current location to make room for the house at 109 Main Street in which they would reside. The main house was then rented out. Bev Osterhout’s family rented the house in the late 1930s when she was a little girl. The barn was already in the back of the house and her father used it for their cows. She recalls being in the house during the 1935 flood and her father having to rescue the cows because water surrounded the barn.

What is interesting and what I don’t know is when the house was divided into two separate houses during a family dispute. Bev says the back of the house was still attached when they lived there. However, the house that stands at 87 Main Street is what was once attached to the main house. GIS records date it being there in the 1940s.

The main house was sold to Harry & Esther Jones in 1956. Mrs. Jones used to rent the house to teachers and classes were held here as well. Upon Esther's death in 1987, her executors Mary Louise O'Brien (daughter) and Henry M Jones (son) deeded the property to Esther's granddaughter, Lucinda O'Brien (Fitzgibbons) who then deeded it to the current owner Holly Gibson Bond (Finch) in 1996.

Holly graciously gave me a tour of this beautiful house explaining the various changes that have taken place throughout the years. The front living room was once two rooms and they took down the center wall to make it a larger space. The side door off the front porch entered into what they are using as a dining room. There were 2 doors out of that room. One smaller door led to the hall with access to the basement stairs and the main staircase. A larger opening led into the living room area where they now have French doors. There were 2 very large bathrooms that they made smaller to create additional closets. The beautiful pine floors remain as does some gorgeous woodwork underneath the upstairs bedroom windows. Speaking of upstairs bedrooms, Holly explained that the Master bedroom used to be smaller and divided into two rooms. Bev Osterhout told me that when she used to sleep in that bedroom with her sisters it was one large room. Holly also has on display three pictures, old skeleton keys and a primitive bench that were found in the house. Outside, only a portion of the original porch remains. At the edge of the road, a small part of the hitching post is visible. The 1873 stone that was mentioned earlier is laying in the flowerbed near the house.

With so many different owners and tenants, it is amazing that this house still has various architectural elements from its original state.

