

## A HISTORICAL LOOK AT ARCHITECTURE IN IOWA

*The following is a continuance of the Architectural Studies presented in the Winter issue of the Annals. The studies were selected from a large number of similar studies done by undergraduate students at Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa. The Department of Architecture at I. S. U. has given these reports to the Iowa Historical Library, Des Moines, in memory of the late Leonard Wolf of Ames, Head of the Department of Architecture from 1953 to 1962. The complete Leonard Wolf Collection is now filed in the Historical Library for availability to the public. It is hoped that these studies will awaken a public interest in the preservation of Iowa's historical structures and that further action will be taken in the research, recording and preservation of Iowa's old buildings.*

### ST. IRENAEUS CHURCH, CLINTON, IOWA

Study by James M. Hamill

Situated on one of the hills which overlook the narrows of the Mississippi at Clinton is the stone church of St. Irenaeus built in the Gothic style nearly a century ago. Being the oldest Catholic church in the county it exists today much the same as when it was opened in 1871.

To get the full picture we must first go back beyond the actual construction and trace some of the events which led up to the building of the church, the early beginnings of Catholicism in the county, and the strong French influence which was responsible for the name and style of the church.

The section of the city where St. Irenaeus is located is known as Lyons and prior to 1898 existed as an independent city. Founded in 1835 by a Frenchman, Elijah Buell, it was so named because the Mississippi reminded him of the Rhône at Lyons, France.

The Catholic church in Iowa had its beginning at about this same time when in 1833 Bishop Mathias Loras founded the mission at Dubuque which was the first Catholic mission in Iowa. Here again the French influence is evident as Bishop

Loras was a native of Lyons, France. Just 15 years later in the autumn of 1848, Bishop Loras traveled to Lyons, Iowa, and established the first Catholic mission in Clinton county. The first mass heard in Clinton was said by Bishop Loras at a log home located at the corner of 32nd Avenue North and North 2nd Street.

Between 1848 and 1851 the Catholic mission existed at Lyons adjunct to Dubuque. During this time masses were said by priests who traveled to the mission on horseback. One of the priests who regularly made the trip to Lyons was Father Cyrillus Jean who was then pastor of the Catholic parish at Bellevue situated on the river some 40 miles to the north. Father Jean was also a Frenchman, being born at Bayns in 1827. Thus in 1851 when the Catholic population of Lyons had grown to about 300 people, Bishop Loras assigned Father Jean the task of organizing a permanent parish. Father Jean began at once and the following year (1852) a brick church was constructed at the corner of what is now Garfield Street and 25th Avenue North. The construction was directed by Father Jean and carried out by the parishoners at a total cost of \$1,500. A school was also established with Father Jean as the instructor and had an initial enrollment of 12 children.

As the population of the city began to expand rapidly it was necessary to construct a larger church. Therefore a frame building was constructed in 1856 on the site of the present church. This was followed in 1860 by an even larger frame church located on the same site.

This rapid growth in the Catholic population may be attributed in a large part to Edward Gillon who wrote a series for the *Boston Pilot* between 1849 and 1850 describing this area and urging emigration.

As it was obvious that the frame church would soon be inadequate, plans were laid for a large permanent church. The church was to be named St. Irenaeus after the martyr St. Irenaeus (Irenée) who was the First Bishop of Lyons, France. The new church was designed by Father Jean who tried to pattern his church after the church of St. Irenée located in Lyons, France.



**St. Irenaeus Church entrance.**

Construction began in 1864 when the cornerstone was laid by Bishop Clement Smyth, then Bishop of the Diocese of Dubuque. Included in the cornerstone were two silver coins, a copy of the *Lyons Mirror*, and the names of the leaders of



church and state, Pope Pius IX, Bishop Smyth, Abraham Lincoln, Governor Kirkwood, and Mayor Heinrich.

The construction took seven years to complete and cost a total of \$45,000. All of the work is said to have been voluntarily contributed by the parishioners. If this is correct there must have been a number of fine stonemasons in the parish for the stonework is by no means amateurish. The stone used in the construction is all native sandstone, most of which was hewn from quarries within the city and hauled to the site by horse drawn carts while the remainder was quarried near Sabula and brought down the river by barge. The stone is a yellow sandstone which is typical in this area and gives the exterior a pleasant, mellow surface. The stone is also of an excellent quality for at the present date it shows no signs of deterioration.

The church is situated on a high hill which overlooks Roosevelt Street and the Mississippi river to the east. The plan is rectangular, being 132 feet long and 59 feet wide. The sanctuary was originally located at the east end with the entrance facing Roosevelt Street but this was reversed in 1906. The present sanctuary located at the east end is 30 feet wide and 29.5 feet deep being flanked by an auxiliary room on each side. The nave takes up the entire width of the church, being 54 feet wide and 80 feet in length. There exists seating for approximately 1,000 persons in the nave. The nave is entered from the narthex by a small vestibule which measures 8.5 by 5 feet. Beyond the vestibule is the narthex which is 26 feet by 10 feet. Two small chapels flank the narthex. These serve as mothers chapels or chapels for mothers with small children who might disturb the other parishioners during the mass. A stairway on the left of the narthex leads to the choir loft which is situated directly above.

The walls of the church are load-bearing and are of solid stone construction approximately 30 inches thick. The side walls are braced on the exterior by a series of eight shallow buttresses the same thickness as the wall and extending from the wall a distance of 30 inches at its base.

The entire width of the nave is spanned by a simple tim-

ber roof. The roof is insulated on the exterior and covered on the interior by a false ceiling.

The exterior is rather plain and except for the pointed arches, appears almost as much Romanesque as Gothic in style. The east end is flanked by two square towers (17 feet on a side) which are steepled and rise to a height of 120 feet. The only exterior ornamentation aside from the crosses on the steeples and gables are the nook shafts which were cut into the recessed east entrance. The series of flat buttresses which brace the side walls contribute to the Romanesque appearance.

The entrance to the church originally faced east toward the river and was approached by a long flight of wooden stairs and a high wooden porch. However, in 1906 this porch was removed, the entrance blocked up, and a new entrance cut into the west wall where the sanctuary had formerly been. This new entrance was framed with two flat columns in the neo-Renaissance style and covered by a round arch and pediment. Two small lancet type windows were cut in the wall flanking the entrance in order to let light into the narthex. This framing is done in gray limestone.

There were several reasons for this reversal. The primary one was that the long flight of steps was hazardous, especially for elderly parishoners, and caused a great deal of difficulty for pallbearers carrying coffins in and out of the church. Another reason was that by this time Roosevelt Street had ceased to be the main street and with the trolley line running along North Second Street service was very convenient.

The side walls of the church are pierced by a series of six high lancet type windows on each side. The stained glass in each depicts one of the 12 apostles. Directly over the altar at the back of the sanctuary (formerly the entrance) is a wheel window about 8 feet in diameter containing a scene of the Holy Family. At the rear of the choir loft (formerly the sanctuary) rises a group of three lancet windows portraying the cruxifixion scene. This group is valued at \$35,000. All of the stained glass within these windows was imported from France at the time when the church was being constructed.

They are protected from the outside by heavy metal screens which have thus far been successful in that none of the stained glasses have ever been damaged or have had to be replaced.

The interior of the church is rather plain. The only ornamentations are the plaster casts of the saints which adorn the sanctuary, the stations along the side walls, and a sanctuary lamp. The sanctuary lamp is, however, somewhat unusual in that it is a replica of the crown of France and was presented to Father Jean by a member of the Bonaparte family while he was in France for a short period during the 1860's. The altar is made of butternut wood and is presently painted the traditional white. The walls and ceiling were formerly covered with plaster and painted but in 1947 the interior was remodeled and the walls were covered with a simulated stone made from concrete. This was done in order to eliminate the cost of periodical cleaning and painting the walls. It does not, however, present a very attractive appearance and perhaps at some later date it will be removed and the natural stone underneath be repointed. This was not done at the time of the remodeling because the cost of such an operation would have been prohibitive. Other changes which were made during the remodeling were the addition of 5 foot copper and bronze Gothic style chandeliers which also contain amplifiers for the public address system. An oil furnace which supplies heat for the church was also installed replacing the coal furnace which had supplied heat since 1899. Before 1899 slab wood was used.

The basement of the church originally housed the parish school but in 1892 a separate building was constructed. These basement rooms were unused until 1933 when they were turned into recreation rooms.

The most recent improvements were made in 1963 when stone exterior was repointed and a number of stones in one of the buttresses were replaced.



## THE HARKER RESIDENCE OF STORM LAKE

By W. D. Lee



The original owners of the Harker residence, James and Mary, left a mercantile business at Jefferson, Iowa, and purchased the First National Bank at Storm Lake, Iowa, from Horton and Sutfin. This bank had been organized in 1881-1882. James Harker was its president.

The family Bible is a forceful reminder of the infant mortality of the times, for of the eleven births recorded there to Mary Harker, only five survived infancy; in addition the Harkers raised three Civil War orphans to "an age where they were able to care for themselves."<sup>1</sup>

The Harker Mansion as it was locally known, was begun in 1874 and completed the following year. It stands today outwardly virtually unchanged from its original appearance, thanks to a thoughtful renovation by the present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet Marshall. (Mrs. Marshall, formerly Miss Nora Marie Harker, is the granddaughter of the builder.) The

house reposes grandly on a double corner lot surrounded by large elms and evergreens—a deep red brick structure with white trim and yellow shingles on the flanks of its Mansard roof.

It is the only residence at an intersection which also boasts of three churches. At the time of its construction there were no other buildings between the house and the lake shore to the south.

The building was constructed by Mr. James Russell. The original check, written to Mr. Russell covering the construction cost was in the possession of his descendants until quite recently and was written for the amount of \$500. It is believed that a Mr. Lambert from Fort Dodge designed the house. The basement walls are of local lakeshore stone and the brick was the first fired by a local short-lived brickyard. According to records in the possession of the present owner, the millwork came from a Dubuque firm.

According to Mr. Harker's granddaughter, a James Hill, railroad magnate, and James Harker leased 10,000 acres of land from the Railroad. This writer presumes that the house might have been built on some of the same ground, especially considering the buildings proximity to the railroad right-of-way. It is a matter of record that James Harker ordered 19 carloads of horses with a corresponding amount of implements for breaking ground by his land purchasers.



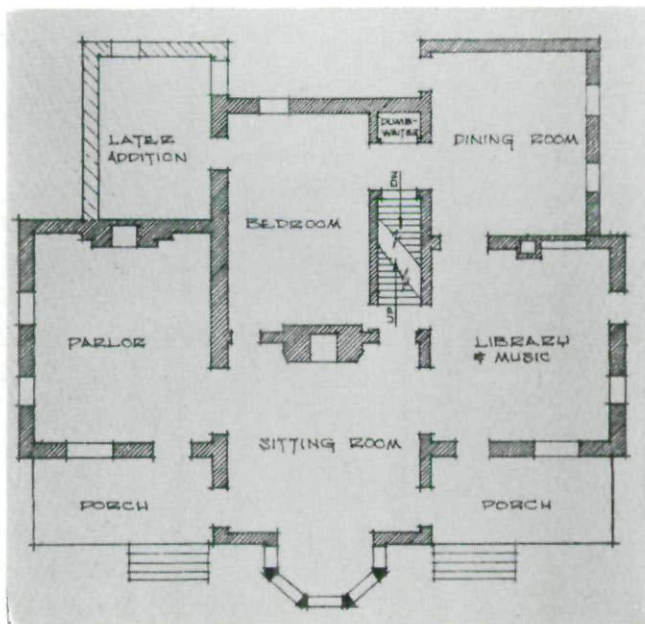
Sketch of original structure by W. D. Lee.



Furnishings for the house were ordered from Chicago and made the journey west on the first freight train between Dubuque and Sioux City. According to a ledger kept by Mr. Harker the cost of the furnishings (and the family horse) cost a grand total of \$840 of which \$100 was spent for books and paintings!

The house sports another "first" . . . the first furnace in Buena Vista County was installed in the basement in 1879, probably in the dirt floored section. The parts of the basement that were used for kitchen, etc. were covered with six inch pine. The storage rooms for vegetables, etc. were dirt floors.

James Harker continued as president of the First National Bank of Storm Lake until his death July 5, 1883. Mrs. Harker continued to live in the house until her own passing in 1927. After that time a daughter, May, used the house as a summer residence, her visits becoming shorter and shorter until her death when it passed into the hands of its present owner who undertook its extensive renovation in 1951 and 1952.



First floor plan.

The interior has a feeling of greater spaciousness than the exterior would indicate primarily due to the 11-foot ceilings. A great share of the furnishings in the house are the original pieces, as is much of the silver, paintings, and some of the books.

Originally a dumbwaiter led from the basement kitchen to the first-floor dining room. In the dirt-floored room next to the kitchen was a storeroom where "oysters and apples were kept." Sleeping quarters for two maids were provided in the basement southeast room. The room was partitioned through the center, its six-inch pine boards over the dirt floor remained until the 1952 renovation.

In the present arrangement the dining room is now a kitchen, the music room a dining room, the parlor a music room containing two pianos (one a piece from the original furnishings), the dumbwaiter has become a closet and the stair to the basement blanked off (access is provided through the newer garage addition).

At one time the house had an interesting wooden front walk composed of 1½-inch wood strips spaced ½-inch apart, laid at right angles to the axis of the walk and painted white. It was shaped differently than the existing walk in that it consisted of an arc connecting the two entrances with a short connection to the front walk.



North elevation of home.

An interesting painted design in soft-gray, blue, rose and yellow came to light along the north stair wall during the course of the 1951-1952 renovation as did another in the north bedroom during the process of stripping wallpaper.

Some interesting original picture molding from the center bedroom was salvaged and is now in place as a cove-mold in the southwest room on the first floor.

The square nails used in the construction are readily seen in the attic particularly in the trap to the "Widow's Walk." The original hanging light fixture for the living room is still stored in the attic.

Mrs. Marshall has a great quantity of material associated with the house, the review of which can give an excellent insight into early Iowa.

<sup>1</sup>*Des Moines Register*; Sept. 18, 1922.

### TERRACE HILL

By George M. Wagoner



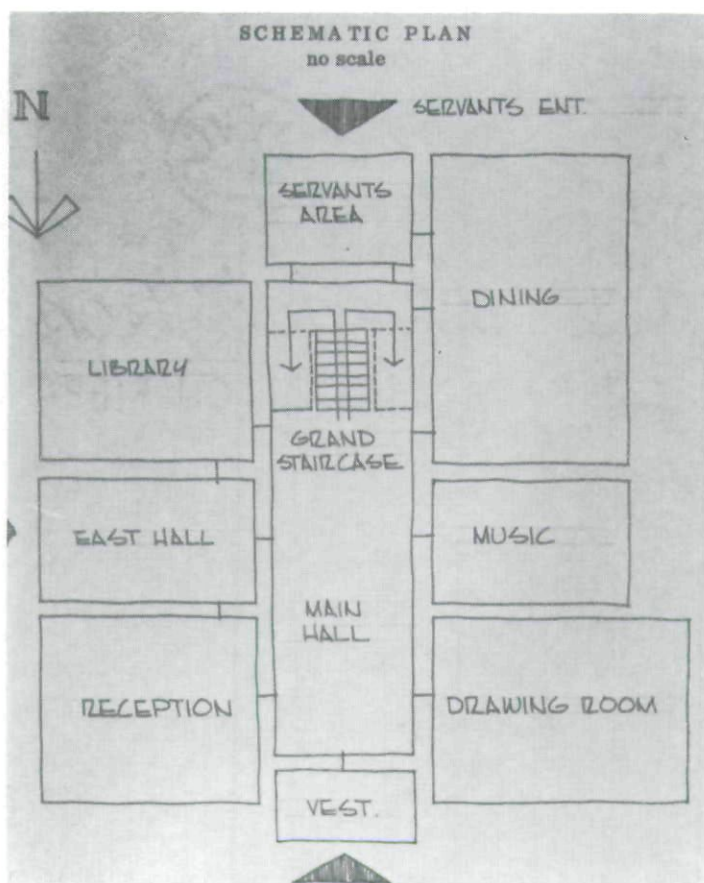


The great house known as Terrace Hill in Des Moines, Iowa, is considered by architects and historians to be one of America's finest examples of Victorian architecture. When this structure was completed in 1869, this "Prairie Palace of the West" was the hub of a 30 acre suburban estate which swept from Sycamore Road (now Grand Avenue) down to the Raccoon River. Des Moines was barely a frontier town at the time, with a population of only 7,500.

Benjamin Franklin Allen, Iowa's first great financier and second president of the Equitable Life Insurance Company, built the imposing edifice. With a laudable desire to enjoy life, and to make a sensible use of a portion of his vast accumulations, he resolved to erect a private home. He chose the highest point on Sycamore Road, a full mile from the frontier town of Des Moines. Deer, bear and lesser wild animals roved over his 30-acre site. Such was the rural, wildly beautiful setting chosen by Mr. Allen for the magnificent home he wished to build for his wife.

Mr. Allen engaged the talents of Chicago's foremost architect of the period, W. W. Boyington. He commissioned Mr. Boyington to design "a country residence in Modern French design with Mansard roof." Boyington built the house of brick and stone, and to crown the structure he designed an imposing 90 foot tower from which the valley of both the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers and their juncture could clearly be seen.

Frank Allen poured \$250,000 into the completion of Terrace Hill—a stupendous sum for the times. The actual building of the house took about three years. Much of the material came from the East by wagon or river boat. The house was completed in time for Mr. and Mrs. Allen's 15th wedding anniversary on Jan. 29, 1869. At that time a housewarming party was held for some 600 guests. (Among the guests was Frederick M. Hubbell; little did he know at that time that he would be the next person to own Terrace Hill.) Some 1,000 invitations to the party had been issued, and it was said that the 600 guests who were present, were easily accommodated in the spacious house. This occasion was reported in several of the leading newspapers across the country.



First floor plan.

Nothing but the best was put into the "great house on the hill." After almost 100 years of exposure to Iowa's weather, the stone and brick exterior is sound and the rafters and joists are firm. The woodwork of no mansion of its era can surpass in sheer beauty that of Terrace Hill. Walnut and butternut were used for the doors, casings, panelling and trim of the foyer, halls and family sitting room. Walnut and burl walnut were employed in the drawing room, the music room, the reception room and the library. White oak with walnut was the striking combination chosen for the dining room. The grand

staircase, which rises majestically from the end of the main hall to a broad landing beneath the great stained glass window before splitting into twin staircases to the second floor, is of oak, its balusters and rails of walnut and oak, and its hand-rail of highly polished rosewood.



Series of projecting cornices to the ninety-foot tower.



Walls were panelled, papered or painted in ornate patterns and ceilings were intricately molded and richly illuminated in gold and silver. Two of the eight marble fireplaces are of pink marble, six of white; all were imported from Italy. The ceilings of the main floor are 15 feet high; all of the rooms opening off the halls are entered through massive double doors hung in great arching 12 feet above the floor, each of solid walnut more than four inches thick.

The bedrooms on the second floor were large and were furnished with hot and cold baths. The master bedroom was located over the reception room and was approximately the same size.

However, Mr. and Mrs. Allen were fated to enjoy the splendor of their mansion for but five brief years. In 1874, he felt that Des Moines was too small for his financial plans, resigned from Equitable and bought Cook County National Bank in Chicago. However, in less than a year, he went bankrupt and lost 22 of the 30 acre estate on Sycamore Road to creditors. He was forced to sell Terrace Hill at a tremendous loss and received but \$55,000. It was sold to Frederick M. Hubbell in 1884.

Mr. Hubbell renovated the house in that year. He converted to steam heat, provided a new kitchen area, and installed the present stained glass window and bought a massive chandelier for the dining room. Again in 1924 the Hubbells renovated it by providing automatic heating, wiring for electricity and installing an elevator.

This home has been passed down from one Hubbell generation to another. Upon the death of Grover Hubbell in 1956, many of the original furnishings were given to the family members in the third and fourth generations and the house closed. None of the Hubbells desired to live there in 1956.

In 1959, the Hubbell Trustees opened the house to provide tours to interested groups. Since this time, tours may be granted by special permission.



It remains to be seen what will be done with this glorious edifice of the past. It was written of this house by George S. Mills, "Homes like human beings have a life to live. They are young, reach adulthood, become middle-aged, grow old and die. That happens even in cases where a building somehow stays sound as the passing decades pile up. Each generation has its own way of living."

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