

A Peek at the Past

Dream house: Colorful history of West Water Street abode

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Attorneys, car salesmen, alleged alcoholics and society dames have all called it home, and thanks to the gentle oversight by most of these residents, the modest brick house at 111 West Water Street in Lock Haven continues to delight passersby and draw the inspiration of local artists and photographers who find its sunny appearance difficult to resist.

Today photos of the house can be found gracing the storefront window of the Clinton County Arts Council and in promotional materials for the city of Lock Haven. Local artists like Peg Johnston have reproduced the image of the house on oil and canvas and its current owner- that would be yours truly- remains completely captivated by the residence.

Indulge me a moment while I take a peek at the past of my own historic house.

In the decades before the two-story brick home was built at 111 West Water Street, the property itself was owned by some of the most prominent names in Lock Haven business and society, including Allison White, David Carskadden and J.W. Quiggle, who included the property in his 1862 addition to the town of Lock Haven and designated it as Lot 29 on the map of Ward 3.

In August of 1882 the owners, Jonathan and Mary Boynton, sold Lot 29 to Thomas F. and Rebecca McNerney. It appears the Boyntons were able to pick up the property in a sell-off of the estate of David Carskadden, who died, very suddenly, of heart disease on November 10, 1870.

(Carskadden was stepping out of a horse-drawn carriage on a trip into the woods in Wallace Run to survey some of his property when he dropped dead.)

With unseemly haste, it appears, the Boyntons purchased the property upon which 111 West Water Street now stands. The house the McNerneys built on the property, in 1883, was a combination of the Victorian Gothic and Italianate style.

McNerney was a shopkeeper who operated the Centennial Grocery store at the Flatiron building - at the intersection of Bellefonte Ave. and Church Street - where he sold "Groceries and Provisions, flour, feed, fish salt, queensware, etc." according to a 19th Century newspaper advertisement.

Sadly, it was only a few years after Thomas and Rebecca "Dolly" McNerney had their lovely home built when tragedy struck. In June of 1884, 22 year old Rebecca died at her Water Street home, according to the Clinton Democrat.

The newspaper attributed Dolly's death to "spasms," but it seems more likely to have come about as a result of complications of childbirth, as the McNerney's youngest child had been born only five days prior to her death.

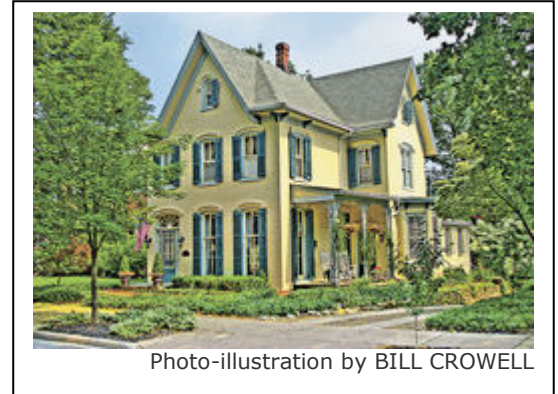
An enormously popular young woman, Dolly had a great many friends who hoped to attend her funeral, held at the house. According to the paper, "a very large gathering of friends arrived, and quite a number of them finding it impossible to secure admission to the building" due to the large crowds filling the home.

Furthermore, the paper reported, "The remains had a very natural appearance. Her features were expressive of contentment and a winning smile played about her mouth. Truly was it said of her 'she fell asleep.'" She was interred at Highland Cemetery.

What happened in the ensuing thirteen years between Mrs. McNerney's death in 1884 and the purchase of the property by one Cornelia Hatfield in 1897 appears to be a mystery. For some reason McNerney was unable to keep the property, which, was eventually sold in a Sheriff's sale.

In any case, Hatfield kept the property for five years before selling it to Susan P. Mitchell and her husband William Packer Mitchell, one of the most highly-regarded civil engineers in the state.

William Mitchell was a relative of the famous Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell, the most eminent American neurologist of his time as well as a popular author of short stories, essays, drama and verse.



Susan was born in Beech Creek to Dr. William Pettit Rothrock and the former Jane Quiggly Stewart. The Rothrocks also had a famous man in their family tree: Dr. Joseph Trimble Rothrock, the father of Pennsylvania forestry.

For the next twenty years or so, the house at 111 West Water Street was probably a center of Lock Haven society. With their prominent family trees and career accomplishments, the Mitchells were members of the town's upper crust. It was not uncommon to read mention of the them in the social pages of the local papers.

"W.P. Mitchell and wife, of West Water Street, left Saturday for Melbourne, Florida, where they will visit at the home of their son-in-law, Charles Clark," the Clinton Republican reported on February 19, 1913.

As the Mitchell children grew and matured, they soon began marrying into some of the better-known families of the day. One of the Mitchell daughters, Jane, married William M. Fredericks, an East Main Street grocer and the son of Moore Fredericks, patriarch of the lumbering and brickmaking family.

William M. Fredericks' brother, Horace E. Fredericks, married Mary Packer, one of the granddaughters of the late William F. Packer, who became governor of Pennsylvania in 1861. Mary Packer Fredericks had a daughter, Anne, from a previous marriage, and within a few years Anne would also make 111 West Water Street her home.

Still following me? Well, here's another ingredient to toss into this family soup: Anne's husband was Howard Candor, who sold Buicks at the Lock Haven Auto Company.

In 1920, after the death of William Mitchell, his widow Susan sold the house at to Anne F. Candor, thereby keeping the house in the family, so to speak. Susan was 84 when she died in New York City eight years later, in 1928. She's buried in a family plot in Beech Creek.

In the ensuing years, Anne Candor's elderly parents moved in with their daughter and son-in-law before they, too, expired in the home. But sadly, those weren't the only losses Anne suffered during her long residency at the charming Victorian Gothic-Italianate home. About 11 and a half years after she purchased the house, her husband Howard would become involved in a bizarre automobile accident and then, just a few days later, take his own life.

Late in the evening of Saturday, July 3, 1931, the 44-year-old Candor was riding in a car with two other men Girard McMann and William Saiers when the driver of the vehicle failed to make a turn properly after crossing the Jay Street Bridge.

The car went over the river bank at Lockport, overturned several times and finally came to a stop at the river's edge. The newspapers didn't say if anyone was injured in the accident, but it seems to have been Howard Candor's undoing.

Described in the Lock Haven Express as having been "in ill health with a nervous affliction for several years," Howard took a dose of a fatally toxic chemical called bichloride of mercury early on the following Sunday morning, which happened to be Independence Day.

He was admitted to Lock Haven Hospital late Sunday morning. "Antedotes" were administered, but he died two days later, on Tuesday, July 6, 1931.

His prolonged death from the self-administered toxins must have been terrible. After his demise, the Buick dealership Howard had operated fell into his brother Austin's hands. Today Austin's son, Curt, operates the Curt's Smokin' Ribs restaurant in Mill Hall. He says he has little memory of his Uncle Howard or Aunt Anne.

Anne Candor would eventually remarry, to junkyard employee Charles DeLong, but it's been speculated that she never really recovered from the loss of her parents and husband. Later owners of the house said they found the basement boiler room filled with empty booze bottles left there during the Anne Candor-DeLong tenure.

The house at 111 West Water was, like most of Lock Haven, horribly impacted by the disastrous 1936 flood, and it fell into a state of disrepair in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Photos from that period show the property wildly overgrown, with huge masses of ivy covering most of the exterior western wall.

It appears, for all intents and purposes, abandoned, but apparently Anne Candor-DeLong - said to be increasingly alcoholic - continued to make it her home there until her death in August of 1947.

She was survived by Charles DeLong; an adopted daughter, Louise Candor Russell; and four grandchildren. Charles would follow her in death a year later. He was living at the home of one Clyde J. Kaimbach at 914 East Church Street when they found him dead in his bed. The coroner said the cause of death was tuberculosis.

As the administrator of her mother's estate, Louise Candor Russell sold the house at 111 West Water to Byron and Elizabeth Brickley on Halloween, 1947, for \$12,000, twice what her mother had paid for it 27 years earlier. Brickley was the scion of ice cream king Samuel E. Brickley, and for most of his life Byron was a partner in his father's company.

Just before Christmas 1940, Byron had married Mary Elizabeth Bacon, generally referred to simply as Elizabeth. During her marriage to Byron, Elizabeth worked various jobs around town, including at the Winner Packing Plant, Clinton Paper Company, and in the offices of City Treasurer Bruce Kramer. Elizabeth was painfully thin, according to current residents who knew her during her lifetime, and many speculate that she suffered from an undiagnosed eating disorder.

Byron and Elizabeth took far greater interest in 111 West Water Street than it had seen in some decades. They managed to clean it up, take some pictures and do a little research into its past. Surviving is a tattered bit of yellowed paper with old photos of the house glued to it, along with a building permit issued to Byron.

This tattered bit of paper is accompanied by a list of the property's owners going back to Cornelias Hatfield, written in a neat cursive hand. At the bottom of the page, which is dated August 20, 1947 at 3 p.m., are the words, "Presented in Memory of Mary E. Bacon by her daughter, Elizabeth."

The Brickleys were were truly devoted to their old house, and they continued to maintain the home for the more than 20 years. But in the late 1960s Elizabeth's health began to fail. So on June 19, 1968 the Brickleys sold the house at 111 West Water Street to Ronald and Barbara Baker for \$37,500.

Instead of empty booze bottles, the Bakers would find S.E. Brickley & Sons ice cream canisters in the basement after Byron and Elizabeth moved into their new place on 337 East Church Street. Sadly, they had very little time left to enjoy their retirement. In January, 1969 Elizabeth's health was in rapid decline, and in early July she was admitted to Williamsport Hospital, where she died on Sunday, July 27, age 57.

Perhaps encouraged by Elizabeth, who had worked for the city treasurer and surely knew she was near the end of her life, Byron became Lock Haven Treasurer in January of 1969. A photo of Byron, age 60, with a pleasant smile on his face, working behind a late-1960s era calculating machine, was published in the Express during the period. He remained physically and mentally active and was frequently seen at the Clinton County Country Club.

A little over a year after Elizabeth died, in September of 1970, Byron was found dead from an apparent heart attack in his bed at his home on Church Street. A few days later the city treasurer's office was closed early to allow employees to attend his funeral.

The Bakers, too, demonstrated great affection for 111 West Water. A pilot, Ronald, along with and son Brad-now a Williamsport-area veterinarian- added a handsome family room to the rear of the home, with a large stone fireplace and vaulted ceilings that give it the appearance of a mountain lodge.

When the city proposed a dike-levy flood protection system along the bank of the Susquehanna, Ron and Barbara became leaders in the movement to protest the project. In the end, however, the dike-levy legislation was approved, and fully half of 111 West Water Street's rear property, all the way down to the river, was acquired by the Army Corps of Engineers.

Since then two floods have ravaged the Susquehanna Valley but left Lock Haven relatively unscathed thanks to the flood protection system. As the current owner of this lovely historic home at 111 West Water Street, I have to say I was not a fan of the dike-levy when it was first installed.

But I'm grateful for it now.

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