

347 West Main St.
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It was not unusual for a house built in the 1850s to go through many transformations, especially if that house belonged to a carpenter-builder. The house at 347 West Main, owned for many years by the Snashall family is an example of a simple house, remodeled and enlarged.

An exact building date for the original house is difficult to determine, but was probably near 1855, when David Mills owned the property. Mills was born in Rensselaer County, New York in March 1816. He studied law in Rome, New York and Stanford, Kentucky, before moving to Wisconsin in 1845. His first home was in Dane County where he taught school for a few months. The following year he moved to Fulton in Rock County and began to practice law.

While living in Fulton, David L. Mills was elected to represent Rock County at the State Constitutional Convention held in Madison in 1846. This attempt to establish organize the State of Wisconsin was not successful. In 1848, he ran on the Locofoco party ticket against Alanson B. Vaughn, a Whig candidate for the state assembly. Mills lost to Vaughn, but he continued to pursue other political offices.

In 1850, D. L. Mills was listed in the Union township census as a hotelkeeper. The following year, he was appointed as a director of the Milwaukee & Mississippi Railroad.

In 1852, he returned to New York to marry Lucia S. Parker and the young couple returned to Wisconsin. David and Lucia moved to Evansville in 1854.

David Mills shifted careers again in 1855. When the Beloit & Madison railroad began building a line from Beloit to Madison, Mills was hired to sell stock for the company (later named the Chicago & Northwestern). Many area landowners gave right-of-ways through their land for the building of the railroad.

Another of Mill's important contributions to the growth and development of Evansville was the organization of the Evansville Seminary. David L. Mill's name appears on many of the documents for this important institution.

In August 1855, Mills and O. F. Comfort called a meeting of town leaders to promote a seminary that would educate both men and women. Mills was elected to the first Board of Trustees of the Evansville Seminary, operated by the Methodist Church.

Both Comfort and Mills owned land adjacent to the site for the new school. Mills' land was nearly square and resembled the village square areas common to New England. Mills designated this land as the Seminary grounds and donated two acres of the land for building the Seminary.

According to Rock County Court House deed records, Mills also owned lots 1 and 2 in Block 5 of Evansville's original plat in 1855. He and his wife lived in the house built on this land for about five years.

One son was born in the house in January 1857, but little Jesse died before he reached his third birthday. A year after the boy died, David Mills sold the house. It was purchased by John and Nelson Winston for \$1,700.

The Winstons already owned property on the opposite side of West Main Street and used the house that Mills had owned as a rental property. In September 1863, they sold the house to Mary Murphy for \$1,400 and the Winstons continued to hold a mortgage on the property for \$500.

Mary's husband, S. G. Murphy was a physician. He placed ads in Evansville's first newspaper, the Citizen, announcing that his office was in his residence at the west end of Main Street. The Murphys did not stay in Evansville long, probably because there were so many others practicing medicine here in the late 1860s.

In April 1867, Mary Murphy sold the property to John W. Hazeltine. Hazeltine owned a house on South Madison Street and probably purchased the Murphy house for rental property. Local hardware merchant Caleb Snashall rented the house from Hazeltine for several years and then decided to purchase it.

Snashall had come to the United States from Kent County, England when he was 9 years old. His father, James Snashall, brought his family to the United States and settled in Newburg, New York. There he and his wife, Elizabeth, raised a family of three sons and two daughters. Caleb was the oldest.

In 1864, Caleb emigrated to Wisconsin. He was a young bachelor and he went into the hardware business in Evansville with Stillman Parker that same year.

Caleb's success encouraged the rest of his family to move to the Evansville area five years later. James Snashall purchased a farm near the city. One of Caleb's brothers, Jabez, was ordained a minister of the First Baptist Church and served as the Evansville church's pastor for a brief period of time.

His brother, Albert, was a house carpenter. Caleb also pursued this occupation occasionally. It was common practice for the early settlers to pursue more than one type of work during their lifetimes. One of the attributes that marked Evansville's financially successful men was their ability to meet the challenge of difficult economic times by shifting careers.

Caleb trained with his father as a carpenter, but when he came to Evansville went into business with Stillman Parker in the hardware store. A few years later, Parker sold his interest in the business to Albert Adams.

Caleb married his partner's daughter, Emeline Adams, in November 1866. She had been a resident of the Evansville area since 1856 when her parents came west from Ludlow, Vermont. Emeline graduated from the Evansville Seminary and was an active member of the school's alumni group.

The couple had three children, Arthur, born in 1869; Bert, born in 1872; and Claude born in 1873. When Claude was less than two years old, the family was quarantined for several weeks when several members of the family had small pox. All survived the disease that frequently caused death, especially among small children.

With three lively boys in the house, Emeline and Caleb decided they needed more space for their family. In March 1876, they purchased the home that they had been renting for several years from John Hazeltine. The Snashall's paid \$1,600 for the two lots and buildings.

They immediately started remodeling and enlarging the house. In August, the Evansville Review reported that Albert Snashall, Caleb's brother, had "thoroughly overhauled, enlarged, repainted and put in the most complete and convenient condition", the residence of Caleb and Emeline and their family.

Albert was an experienced house builder, also having learned his trade from his father. He had spent a number of years in Chicago, working as a carpenter and the house that he remodeled for his brother, was the first of many homes Albert built or remodeled in Evansville.

The entire grounds of the Snashall home also underwent a transformation. Besides remodeling the house, Caleb ordered a fence made of iron and wood. The new fence was placed in front of the house. It was the first iron fence in Evansville, "a model of neatness and durability", according to the reporter for the Evansville Review. Behind the house was a stable. Both house and stable were painted by Evansville's popular artist, George Backenstoe.

Caleb may have helped his brother with the remodeling. Occasionally, Caleb would pursue the carpenter trade but he was also adventurous in organizing new businesses. There were several new Evansville industries that were successful because he took an interest in them. The most successful was the development of an engine and windmill factory. In 1873, Caleb was one of six original investors in the Baker Manufacturing Company.

Caleb served as the first president of Baker's in 1873 and was reelected to that post every year until 1885. He also became one of the first traveling salesmen, taking the popular monitor windmill to Iowa and other western states where new settlers were homesteading on land where the only source of water for the farm was the well, with a pump powered by the windmill.

Relatives in the newly opened Western states provided business contacts for Caleb. Emeline's sister and her husband had settled at Ames, Iowa and Caleb's sister and her husband had settled in Bertrand, Dakota Territory. The Snashall's often combined family visits with Caleb's sales trips to the west to sell the Baker Manufacturing Company products.

Caleb once again shifted occupations in 1883 when he invested in the Evansville Manufacturing Company, often referred to as the tack and match factory. The site of the new firm was south of the Baker Manufacturing Company buildings on Enterprise street.

The tack and match business was never entirely successful, but Caleb did his best to keep the firm in operation. In April 1888, he personally took charge of the company and became the superintendent of the day-to-day operation of the firm.

Caleb announced the tack factory would market its product directly to hardware merchants, cutting out any middlemen who were taking profits from the manufacturer. However, there was too much competition and orders did not come in on a regular basis. The Evansville Manufacturing Company survived less than ten years.

Caleb moved on to other investments. He and Alonzo C. Gray purchased several building lots in Chicago and Caleb turned once again to his carpenter skills. In 1890, Caleb built several tenement buildings on his property and learned new skills from other carpenter-builders working in the city.

His building projects continued for several years. Caleb combined his talents for business and carpentry to take advantage of the building boom in Chicago. Rental properties brought high prices, especially during the time of the Chicago World's Fair in 1893.

The railroad connections between Evansville and Chicago allowed Caleb to spend several weeks in Chicago working on his buildings, then return to Evansville and his family. During his absence Emeline managed the household in Evansville on her own.

In the spring of 1893, Caleb made plans to spend the summer in Evansville. Using the new skills and materials he had built with in Chicago, he decided to remodel and modernize his own residence on Main Street.

Caleb's skills now included drawing house plans and he showed the design for his house to the reporter for the Evansville Review. The drawings showed "a very elaborate and convenient, modern city residence", according to a news article about the Snashall house.

In addition to his own home remodeling, he also was the superintendent of the construction of a house for his former partner, Lansing Mygatt, at the northwest corner of West Main and Second Streets.

By the 1890s, the Snashall sons had finished high school and were ready to pursue careers. Arthur went into the furniture business in Evansville. The firm was known as Snashall & Boyd.

Bert and Claude both attended the Chicago School of Dentistry. Claude graduated in 1896 and opened an office in his father's building on East Main Street. He continued to live at home.

Bert graduated in 1898 and the entire family went to Chicago to attend the graduation ceremonies. He set up his office in Delavan.

The Snashalls had been active members of the local First Baptist Church and in 1903, Caleb Snashall agreed to design and superintend the work of rebuilding the church. He took pride in making it a model church but a few months before it was complete, Caleb Snashall died.

On a Sunday morning in February, Caleb attended Sunday School and Church and spent time after the services talking with the building committee. A light snow had fallen and when he got home, Caleb decided to sweep the snow from the walk. While he was sweeping, he had a stroke and collapsed to the sidewalk.

A passerby found Caleb and he was carried into the house. Dr. Fred Colony was called to his aid and later, Dr. Jackson of Madison, but they could do nothing for him. For several days, he lay unconscious and then died on Thursday, February 11, 1904.

His funeral was held at the home on West Main Street. The four local newspapers carried lengthy obituaries of his work in the community. They noted his "restless, energetic disposition" and his active pursuit of many occupations. There were many regrets that Caleb had not lived to see the first services and dedication of the new church.

His wife, Emeline and son, Claude continued to live in the house at 347 West Main Street. Emeline's life had been devoted to raising her sons, but after they were grown, she took part in many of the educational and social programs offered in the city.

In May 1905, Emeline invited all of the former Seminary students to meet at her residence to plan the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the school. The alumni planned a celebration that lasted several days and raised funds to help keep the school in operation.

Emeline was a charter member of the Evansville Woman's Literary Club and the Afternoon Club. She remained active in those organizations until her death in 1917. Her funeral services were held at the home on West Main Street where she had lived for over forty years. She was buried next to her husband, in Maple Hill Cemetery.

Claude continued to own the house until November 1919. He had decided to settle in California to practice dentistry and the house was sold to H. Fred Brunsell. However, H. Fred found another house on the market, that he liked even better than the Snashall house. He sold the Snashall house to his grandfather and grandmother, Frederick and Kaisir Brunsell.

Fred and Kaisir lived in the house only three years. They were natives of Sweden and had come to America in 1883, settling in Porter township. Of their thirteen children, seven had died. They retired to Evansville in 1920, after they purchased the house from their grandson.

Both Fred and Kaisir died in March 1923, within three days of each other. The funeral services were held at their home on West Main Street and they were buried in the Cooksville cemetery.

A year later, the Brunsell children sold the house to Ferdinand and Gusta Lange. Ferdinand had come to the United States from Germany with his parents when he was 10 years old.

Ferdinand married Gusta Popanz and they farmed west of Evansville, in Green County, until 1924, when they moved to Evansville. They had eight children, four sons and four daughters.

Their stay in the house was rather uneventful until April 1943, when there was a fire in the attic of the house. Gusta heard something fall when she was working in the kitchen and she hurried upstairs to find the room above the kitchen engulfed in flames.

She immediately called the Evansville fire department and they were able to put out the fire. Afterwards, they determined that the fire had started from a kitchen stovepipe that overheated and started the fire in the attic. There was fire, smoke and water damage to furniture and other things stored in the attic. The roof and ceilings in the area of the fire were also damaged.

Ferdinand died in 1951 and Gusta in 1956. The Lange heirs sold the house to Byrl and Thelma Rowley in June 1959. The following year, in October 1960, they remodeled the upstairs into an apartment for their daughter and son-in-law, Karen and Louis Harnack.

The Rowley's had been married in 1930 and celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in 1980.

The Rowley's sided the house and covered much of the decorative shingling that had been placed on house during Caleb Snashall's last major remodeling in the 1890s.

Thelma Rowley died in 1992 and the house was sold In 1996, the new owners started a major restoration and remodeling project on the house. Propst Builders did the carpentry work and removed the siding, restoring the beautiful decorative shingles. The large porch was restored and a sunburst design in the gables of the house, once covered by wide shingles was restored and repainted to highlight its beauty.



The house is now restored to its former glory and 347 West Main is once again one of the grand show places in the historic district on West Main Street.

