

250 West Main

RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN BY Ruth Ann Montgomery

The Moses Vervalen house at 250 West Main was built before 1858. Vervalen was a brick mason and undoubtedly built his own house with brick manufactured by Jacob West, in brick yards near Allen's Creek on East Main Street.

In the 1850s, locally made brick sold for \$5.00 per thousand if the brick was of average quality brick and \$7.00 per thousand if it was the best quality. The highest quality brick was baked in the arches of West's kiln.

Brick was a cheap building material, when lumber had to be hauled from Milwaukee, or other Lake Michigan ports. The first Evansville Seminary building, Dr. Evans' home and drug store, the Pullen bank, the Montgomery house on Montgomery Court, and other local buildings were built with West's brick during the 1850s and 1860s, according to his son, J. R. West, who worked in his father's in the brick yard. The brick from West's kiln was also used for foundations and chimneys.

When the 1860 census taker recorded families living in Evansville, he noted that Moses Vervalen was 50 years old. His wife, Eliza, was 47. They had three children living at home, Ellen M. age 15; John D., age 11, and a second daughter, Adell, age 2.

Vervalen was the only person listed as a mason in Evansville and would have been responsible for building many of the brick homes and buildings in the 1850s and 1860s. The last building he is known to have worked on in Evansville was the Methodist Church when it constructed on South Madison Street in the fall of 1866. Final work on the building was completed in the spring of 1867.

The year that he finished the church, Moses and his family decided to move to Marysville, Missouri, a new community growing alongside the junction of two railroad lines that would later be immortalized in song, The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe and the Wabash, St. Louis and Pacific.

Vervalen sold the house and ten acres of land to Henry R. Colman, principal of the Evansville Seminary in 1867. Vervalen died three years after moving out of the area. His family returned to Evansville. His daughter, Ellen, married William Morgan, a carpenter, and after building several houses in Evansville, Morgan and his family moved to Holdridge, Nebraska in the 1880s. John Dempster Vervalen moved to California. Only Eliza Vervalen and her daughter Adell remained in Evansville.

Henry Colman had taken command of the Seminary in the winter term of 1863 and remained at that post for four years. In the late 1860s, the first public high school was organized in the village and this caused a drop in enrollment in the seminary. When Colman left his post in 1867 there were 100 students in the Seminary, This dropped dramatically after the public high school opened in 1868.

When Colman decided to move to Clinton, Wisconsin and become pastor of the Methodist Church in that village, he put the house and land up for sale. "On Main Street, in the village of Evansville, a good brick house with cellar, cistern, well and other conveniences and about 10 acres of land with barn, fruit trees and shrubbery", read the advertisement in the Evansville Review.

Colman also described the house's convenient location, within a pleasant walk from the depot, post office and churches. Today, a sign would read "For sale by owner", but in the language of the day, Henry R. Colman asked interested parties to "inquire about the property on the premises".

It took several years, for Colman to find a buyer. In 1876, he finally sold the house to John N. Lange, a tailor, who mortgaged the property through L. T. Pullen's bank and then found that he could not make the payments. Just two years later, the house became the property of the bank and Pullen was looking for a renter for the house.

Pullen persuaded James Bullard, a Union township farmer to purchase the house and took Bullard's farm in trade. Bullard was not a newcomer to the Evansville business scene. He had operated an auction service with Jacob West in the late 1860s. The two men held auction sales of livestock in the stock yards near the depot.

After Bullard moved to Evansville he decided to open a new business selling farm machinery, feed and flour. He purchased a building on East Main Street and advertised the Waupun Wind Mill and "the famous Schutler wagon", as some of the farm implements available. He also placed weekly advertisements in the Evansville Review giving farmers the latest local market prices for farm products.

When new land sales opened in the Dakota territories, Bullard decided to try his hand at homesteading. He purchased land near Bridgewater, Dakota and moved his family, including his wife and daughter, Minnie, to the new land. He rented his property to a Mr. Crummy and settled in the Dakotas. When it became apparent to him, that he would stay in the Dakotas, Bullard advertised his Main Street property, "for sale cheap" in the December 1884 issues of the Evansville Review.

The house and land sold quickly. Ashbel Charles Thorpe, a local grocery store owner, purchased the house for \$1,800. The additional ten acres of land that had been part of the original property owned by Moses Vervalin was sold to a Mr. Rodd for \$500.

Thorpe and his wife, Hannah, decided that the house needed some improvements and he gave Mr. Crummy until March, 1885 to vacate the house. In the next three years, Thorpe made several changes. He removed an old porch and in its place had smaller porches, called porticos, placed over the doors. He also put on a new roof.

Thorpe was born in Warsaw, New York in 1839. He moved to Sharon, Wisconsin with his parents in 1845 and when he was eleven years old, his parents died. He came to Evansville to live with his sister who had married John Mc Millan, an early settler in the area. John's father, Charles McMillan, was credited with building the first log cabin near Union in 1839 and John's sister, Hannah, who would later become A. C. Thorpe's wife, was said to have been the first girl baby born to pioneer parents living in the part of Rock County west of the Rock River.

During the 1860s, Thorpe left his sister and brother-in-law's home and moved to California. He was in California when the Civil War broke out and he joined the Second California cavalry. During the war, the Northern leaders feared that California would become a slave state and secede from the Union. Thorpe was assigned to secret service duty to prevent agitation from those interest in having California join the Confederacy. His commanding officer gave him credit for halting an uprising of a rebellious company of soldiers at the California state capitol in Sacramento, where secession agitators were especially active.

After the war, he returned to the Evansville area and married Hannah Mc Millan in 1870. A. C. Thorpe was active in a number of businesses. He was in the grocery business until 1883 when he sold his store and made plans to move to Dakota. However, he decided not to live there and remained in Evansville.

Thorpe purchased the house on West Main Street in 1885. During the time that he and Hannah lived in the home at 250 West Main, he operated a livestock business with David Stevens, buying livestock from farmers in the Evansville area and shipping them to Chicago's Stock Yards.

Thorpe and his wife lived in the house until her death due to cancer in 1890. They had no children. He married Antoinette C. Porter in 1891 and they continued to live in the house until 1902 when they moved to Janesville where Thorpe once again went into the grocery business.

In 1902, Bert Baker, a partner in the hardware store. F. A. Baker & Co., purchased the house. Bert Baker was an Evansville native. He was born in 1878 and after attending Evansville schools went to work in his father's hardware business as a clerk. He was 18 years old when he joined his father, Francis A. Baker in the hardware business.

In 1899, Bert had married Rissa Tuller, but their marriage lasted only a few years. After the marriage was dissolved, Rissa kept the house and in 1914 she married Ray Hyne, who owned a local automobile dealership. Hyne had one of the first car dealerships in the city. He and his partner, Bruce Townsend, sold Ford cars that arrived in pieces that had to be assembled in their garage. Hyne and his father bought out Townsend and changed their business to a Buick dealership, known as Frank Hyne and Son.

When Rissa and Ray Hyne moved out of the house is not known. In the 1930s and early 1940s it was a rental property. In the 1930s, the Edward Johnson family lived in the house and in the 1940's the Bernhard J. Bakke family lived at 250 West Main.

The Bakke children were very talented musicians. They were active in the high school band and also in musical activities at St. John's Lutheran Church. Colette Bakke played tenor saxophone, bass clarinet and piano and Sigrid, played trombone, baritone and piano. Their little brother, Bernhard, played saxophone.

Edward Krebs, a local pharmacist owned the house in the 1950s. A large barn that was on the property was torn down and a smaller garage was built after the Krebs family moved into the house.

Krebs also made an addition to the east of the original structure. He had found grape iron work that he liked while the family was on a trip to the south. He took a picture of it so that when they had the addition made, the builder could duplicate the design on the new addition and the front porch. Mrs. Krebs had grapes on her good china and some other antique dishes and the idea for the grape work on the exterior was an extension of her love for the grape design.

The builder removed a porch on the east end of the house and added the addition which included large glass windows and a fireplace. The addition was built in 1955 and Edward Krebs had only a few months to enjoy the new addition. He died in December 1955, his widow put the house up for sale. In November 1956, the house was sold to Tom Rennels who operated an insurance office out of an area converted to office space in the garage that Krebs had built to the west of the house.

In 1979, the house was up for sale and Rennels sold it in the early 1980s to Burton and Donna Wheeler. The Wheeler family lived in the house until the mid 1990s when it was sold to Eric J. Knudtson and Erik R. Gye, the current occupants of the house.

Moses Vervalin's house has stood the test of time. The brick made of local clay has been covered with white paint to protect it from the elements and an addition has been made to the east side of the house and a date for that addition has yet to be determined.

#### NEWS ITEMS

Mrs. Vervalin and daughter old residents of Evansville, and who spent a few weeks here the first of the winter, returning to their home in Marysville, Mo., and having sold their property there, return to Evansville with the expectation of making it their permanent home.

April 7, 1875, Evansville Review, p. 3, col. 2, Evansville, Wisconsin

## Letter from California.

FREENDALE, HUMBOLDT Co. CAL.

April, 21st, 1876.

*Editor Citizen-Review:*

'Tis Spring there, 'tis Summer here.

Flowers of all kinds, roses, lilies, pansies, fuchsias, violets etc. have been in bloom here, in the door yards through all of the Winter months. Several feet of rain have fallen, during that time. Straw hats and umbrellas are in equal demand in winter, and yet, snow on the mountains is in plain sight. Some fields of grass are ready to be cut.

Two great questions—that you in Rock County scarcely think, or hear of—are agitating the people throughout this state. The silver question and the Chinese.

The discount on silver and the rise and fall of the silver coin are creating quite a disturbance in business circles.

“Ye heathen Chinese” creates the great furore the two. One-sixth of the inhabitants of this state are Chinese and they are coming across the ocean at the rate of one or two thousand per month.

Unlike Europeans the Chinese never become Americanized.

They stay here long enough to get \$200 or \$300, a sum which is a princely fortune in China—and then go back to lord it over the poor heathen who have never traveled. The high-toned airs of one such grandee induces a dozen others to come and do likewise. China can spare enough of her people, without noticeably diminishing their population to quadruple the total population of the U. S. We don't wish them to do it; hence the trouble.

Our neighbor with the queue “washee muchee cheapee” and does all kinds of work cheaper than white men can possibly do it. Their food costs them but little. They lodge in dozens in a room that will accommodate but one white man.

They bought a hotel in San Francisco, that had accommodated 200 persons: 1500 Chinese live in that hotel now.

Though this part of California may seem out of the world to you, yet treat us with respect, for we furnished you with a President. U. S. Grant passed several years of his life here.

D. VERVALIN.

## Letter from California.

FERNDALE, HUMBOLDT Co., CAL.

June 7th, 1876.

*Editor Citizen-Review:—*

Only a week is needed here, to change the mud and rain of winter, to the dust of summer.

The change was made some time since, and it is dusty now. Yet but few days last winter were colder than to day is.

Our winter weather is your September, with some more rain added; our summer weather is September without any of the rain and with some fog.

Farming here and farming in Rock County are two different things. No corn is grown here, save a little for table use. Large quantities of peas are raised. Wheat, oats, rye, barley and vetches are extensively raised.

A low average of the oat crop in this valley is 100 bushels to the acre. Owing to the lack of warm weather in summer it takes several months longer for crops to mature here, than there, yet some kinds of vegetables, peas etc. several crops can be grown in one year.

Mesquit, orchard grass, and alfalfa are much used for pasturage. Oats, cut just before ripening, are used as hay. Beets and peas instead of corn, are fed to stock.

Your paper finds its way here in about ten days time.

The subdued roar of the ocean, five miles distant, can be heard; mountain peaks, covered with snow, forty or fifty miles distant can be seen. Small mountains (they would be called large there) commence at the southern edge of Ferndale, and climb up and away two or three miles, ere reaching the summit.

In all other directions, a level plain extends, half covered with huge evergreen trees, the remaining part, thickly dotted with orchards and farms.

part, thickly dotted with orchards and farms.

While a pleasing impression remains on your correspondent's mind of the natural beauties of the country about Evansville, yet a no less lovely landscape is spread before the admirer of nature, in this part of the Pacific coast.

D. VERVALIN.

June 28, 1876, Evansville Review, p. 2, col. 1, Evansville, Wisconsin

Mr. Dempster Vervalin, whom many of our people remember when a boy, as having lived in Evansville, went to school here and moved with his parents to Mayville, Kansas, and who afterwards married and moved to Ferndale, Humboldt county California and brother of Mrs. Wm. Morgan here, arrived from that State on Wednesday of last week, bringing with him his wife and little boy. His personalle had almost passed from the recollection of many, but a mutual recognition is soon restored with old friends and associates. He wrote some

very interesting letters to the Review, at one time, from Ferndale, and which were highly appreciated by our readers.

April 13, 1881, Evansville Review, p. 3, col. 3, Evansville, Wisconsin

Widow Vervalin and her daughter, Edith Adell, are visiting with old friends in Evansville. They came here in consequence of a telegram from her son, whose arrival is mentioned elsewhere.

April 13, 1881, Evansville Review, p. 3, col. 4, Evansville, Wisconsin

Miss Vervalin having fully recovered from her short sickness, announces herself able to give lessons on the piano or organ, at the scholars' homes, if desired.

April 1, 1890, Evansville Review, p. 1, Evansville, Wisconsin

Miss Della Ver Vallen left Thursday for Holdrege, Neb., to join her sister, Mrs. Wm. Morgan, who resides in that place. Her many friends are sorry to say good-bye to her. She is the youngest member of one of the old families of Evansville.

April 20, 1895, The Badger, p. 1, col. 4, Evansville, Wisconsin

# OLD BARNARD HOME DATES BACK TO 1860

One of the oldest residences in the Town of Porter is the Old Barnard property which was built by Elliot D. Barnard, in 1860.

Mr. Barnard was one of the earliest settlers in this locality, first buying land in the neighborhood of Cooksville. In the year 1849 he joined the great rush of gold seekers to California, and seeing an opportunity of making money by raising vegetables for the thousands who were flocking to that state, he farmed there for three years, selling garden truck for fabulous prices.

After the gold rush was over he returned to Rock County and purchased four hundred and forty acres east of this city on what is now the cement highway and built the fine brick house, just as it stands to-day, in 1860. This house was built of Milwaukee brick, the brick being hauled from Edgerton. The carpenter who built the house was a man named Boyce, the brick being laid by a man named Verbalin and another named Jack Maynard. The building of the house took two years as the interior decorations were fine and still are today, after the passage of sixty-seven years. The halls were finished in imitation marble and all the interior finished in grained pine. In the second story there was a large dance hall, where many social affairs were held in the early days.

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Soon after the house was built, Mrs. Barnard died leaving a family of five children, all of whom have made their homes in this city and community, as follows: Emma, Mrs. Rogers (recently deceased); S. E. Barnard, Flora, (Mrs. John Sperry); Maude, (Mrs. Frank Palmer); and C. D. Barnard. The latter son being the only one born in the new house.

To show the quality of the workmanship done in the early days, it may be stated that the house seems as good today as it was when built in 1860, something unusual for a brick house. The place is now owned by Mr. Ed. Horne.

November 17, 1927, Evansville