

Adams houses were pacesetters in building

By the turn of the century, Monroe County men with ingenuity and, yes, sometimes a bit of luck, were beginning to exhibit signs of great prosperity. Many years earlier, the crude log cabins of the earliest settlers had given way to cottages and middle class houses.

But it was the more successful businessmen who built a generation of houses that were symbols of wealth. The Adams houses — 100 years old this year — are a case in point.

The Adams family were among the earliest settlers in Monroe County, having migrated to Indiana from Maryland. Their first home was a “dog-trot” house in Indian Creek Township, where they were engaged in farming.

A later generation of the family operated a store on the Bloomington square, known as the Adams Brothers store. Its letterhead explained what kind of business they were in — dry goods and notions, carpets and draperies, boots and shoes.

Meanwhile, the Adams family was engaged in another enterprise, one that was to play a vital role in the county’s history — limestone. The firm — located in the Sanders area — was called The Monroe County Oolitic Stone Company.

Limestone as a building material had caught on in the 1880s, and business was booming for almost all of the stone company owners who had any expertise. The Adams family was no exception.

Were the brothers, Ben and Will, tempted to display their prosperity by building impressive houses? Perhaps. It is more likely that they both wanted to demonstrate what splendid and stately houses could be built from limestone.

The brothers owned the land between



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

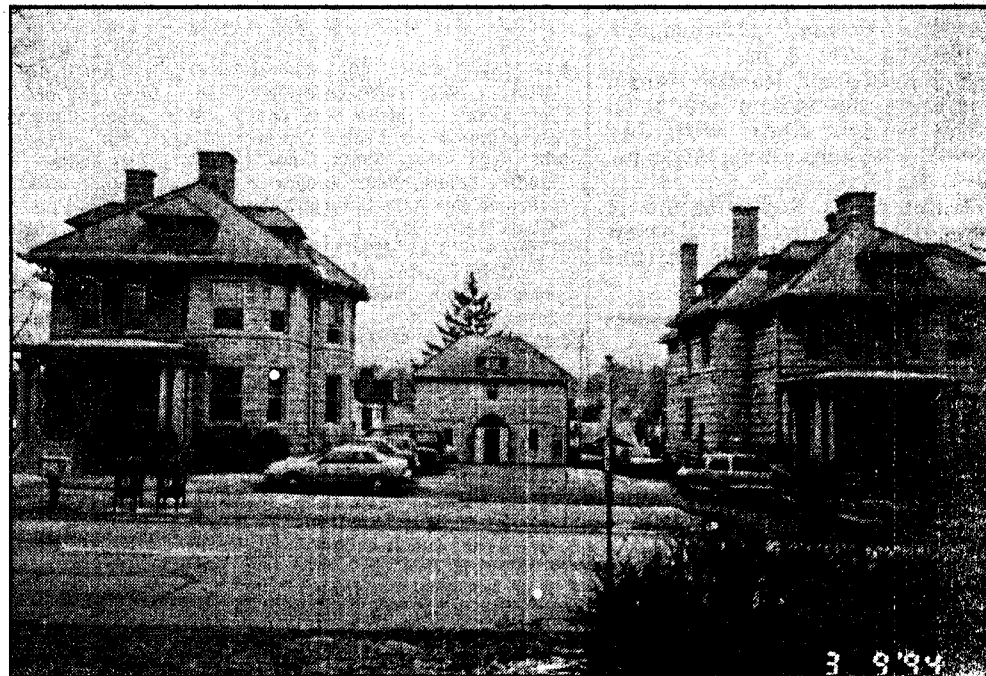
Walnut and College along Second Street and northward to the alley — in effect a quarter block. They hired a Chicago architectural firm of Holabird and Roche to come up with a design. The two architects had some pretty impressive buildings in their portfolio — the Cook County (Ill.) Building, City Hall, Marquette Building and the University Club on the University of Chicago campus, to name a few.

There were several styles popular in the United States at the turn of the century, Queen Anne being the most popular one for stately houses. The Chicago architects came up with another style also in use — Free Classic.

That particular design had its advantages. In contrast to Queen Anne with its very busy turrets and extra roof projections, the classic touch was one of clean, practical lines with the elegance of columns.

Basically the same plan was drawn up for both houses, but they were built in such a way that they did not look exactly alike. The two houses shared a driveway between them and the coachhouse at the rear of the property. They shared a gas plant to pump gas to both houses. The walls were 24 inches thick at the basement level and 14 up by the eaves.

There were also differences in internal decoration. The woodwork had quarter



The Adams brothers had these near identical houses built out of limestone — for about \$13,000 each — in 1893-94.

sawed oak, and the walls were papered. The plumbing was an innovation — 2½ baths in each house.

The cost of each house was around \$13,000, a great sum in those days. Begun in 1893, the houses were finished by August of 1894.

Considering the stately turn-of-the-century houses that have survived, the Adams brother set the pace for their prosperous fellow businessmen. A lot of it may have been a question of “keeping up with the

Jones, or in this case the Adamases.

Some of the subsequent mansions were not made of stone, but were nevertheless stately and impressive — the Buskirk/Showers house on North Walnut (1897); Showers/Myers house (1900); Showers/Smith/Matthews house (1895); Showers/Graham house (1905); and the Batman house (1895).

All of them are art of the heritage of Monroe County.

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