

# Living With T. P.'s Ghost

One of the more beautifully preserved Healy Queen Annes is the Broom house at 3111 Second Avenue South. The present owner, Marjory Mattila, bought the house from the Broom family, which had lived there since 1892. Its fretwork, the elegant built-in furniture, the quality and variety of its hardwood millwork and paneling show that even an "ordinary" Healy Queen Anne displays an excellence of design, materials, and workmanship.

Ninety-six-year-old George Broom of Park Rapids, Minnesota, was raised in 3111, next door to the Healy family home. Broom, who left his parents' house in 1904, remembers Theron Healy as a good neighbor, but not much else. Broom does recall, however, how lovely his block looked in the days of William McKinley and Teddy Roosevelt, when the elm-shaded street was clean and quiet and the big Queen Annes were the homes of jeweler J. B. Hudson, the Sears family (of Sears and Roebuck), Edmund Pennington (general manager of the Soo Line), Judge William Lancaster, pharmacist Rufus Lane and others.

That sense of history can be almost overwhelming to those who acquire a house from its original owners. When Marjorie Mattila purchased the Broom house in 1966, it was the culmination of a four-year experience.

"I just spotted the house driving by in 1962 when my former husband and I were students," Marjory recalls. "I said then I knew I would live there. In November of 1966 we bought the house from two daughters of the original owner.

"They had the original keys for the original locks. They had kept these keys with them, wrapped in cloth, from the day they had been entrusted with them. The sisters handed these same keys over to me. They cried as they left.

"I like the house because of its squeaking doors, its wood, its glass . . . and just about everything else in it," Mattila continues. "But I also love the house because of the people who lived here; they loved the house so much."

The rediscovery of Healy and his houses has instilled a new sense of pride in homeowners on the 3100 block of Second and Third Avenues South. Carolyn MacDonald, who has lived at 3107 Second Avenue South since January 1978, has led the endeavor of organizing the block. Last year she and several other homeowners tried to have the entire block placed on the city register of historic buildings. But at this point, that hasn't happened.

It is unfortunate that so many of the Healy houses were razed for highway right-of-way. The greatest single loss was undoubtedly the grand brownstone house at 3120 Second Avenue South. Healy built it for grain dealer William Griffiths in 1892 at a cost of \$9,000—nearly twice as much as the cost of his frame houses on

the same block. Today its replacement cost would easily exceed \$1 million.

Healy was not solely a builder of Queen Anne homes. Following the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893, he and many other master builders shifted their attentions to plainer and more massive homes in the neo-classical style. A well-preserved representative of Healy's houses of this period is 1712 Dupont Avenue South, built for W. F. Wagner in 1897 at a cost of \$8,000.

A squarish, hip-roofed house with large dormers, 1712 Dupont South shows the refinement and grace of Healy's post-1893 designs. This, however, is not a true neo-classical house. The classical elements—a Palladian window in the front dormer, brackets under the soffits, Ionic columns, three-sided and rounded bays, circular garlands, a cameo window—are in effect the superficial ornament on an essentially romantic house.

In the years that followed, Healy continued to build to meet varying tastes. It seems almost incongruous that in the same year, 1901, Healy could be building a \$5,000 house of his own design at 1805 Irving Avenue South, while constructing the enormous white frame Forman mansion overlooking Lake Calhoun—a house that *Western Architect* reported to have cost \$50,000 to erect.

Apparently, Healy was at ease as a builder or designer. He put the same quality of construction into a modest family home as into a mansion. His consistently high standards are what won Healy his renown as a master builder.

In addition to the Forman house, Healy also built four of Minneapolis' most extraordinary houses. It is supremely ironic that the largest, most expensive houses—the princely mansions by which the wealthy of that era hoped to gain a measure of immortality—were the ones destroyed.

The Forman house was one of the doomed. Designed by architect Edwin P. Overmire for a well-to-do wholesaler of glass, paints, and oils, the Forman house boasted a dark, ponderous interior with a 30' x 50' living room and a bowling alley in the basement. It stood for 54 years at 3540 Irving Avenue South, the present site of St. Mary's Greek Orthodox Church.

Possibly the most romantic Minneapolis house of its day, the George Daggett house at 40 Groveland Terrace, was a Tudor Revival extravaganza, complete with square tower, half-timbering, stone arches, and castle-like ramparts. A joint production of architects Jones, McLeod, and Lamoreaux, the Daggett house was constructed by Healy in 1899 for an estimated cost of \$20,000.

In 1934 it fell to the wrecking ball.

In 1905, the year before his death, Healy built two of

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## Healy Houses

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Minneapolis' best-known Tudor Revival mansions. Minneapolis attorney and U.S. Congressman John Gilfillan's house at 218 Clifton Avenue was designed by Ernest Kennedy.

Of similar style was the brick and terra cotta William Dunwoody mansion at 104 Groveland Terrace, designed by William Channing Whitney. With its 40 rooms, 10 baths, and three kitchens, flour miller Dunwoody's house was built to heroic scale. It was demolished in 1967; the Gilfillan residence was razed for free-way construction in 1960.

Only one Healy-built mansion has survived, the Charles Martin house at 1300 Mount Curve. Martin, secretary-treasurer of the Washburn-Crosby milling company, chose Whitney to design his Italian Renaissance palace in buff-colored brick and stone. Healy began building the house in 1904.

The austere classicism of its exterior belies the romantic luxury of its interior. Splendid hardwoods of various cuts and finishes adorn virtually every room on the main floor. Its carriage house is the size of a typical family house of its day. St. Paul historian Ernest Sandeen has called it "the best example of the grandeur of old Mount Curve."

But there are other forms of grandeur aside from scale. Judged by the meticulousness of its preservation, the Jennison house at 2546 Portland Avenue is the grandest surviving Healy-built house.

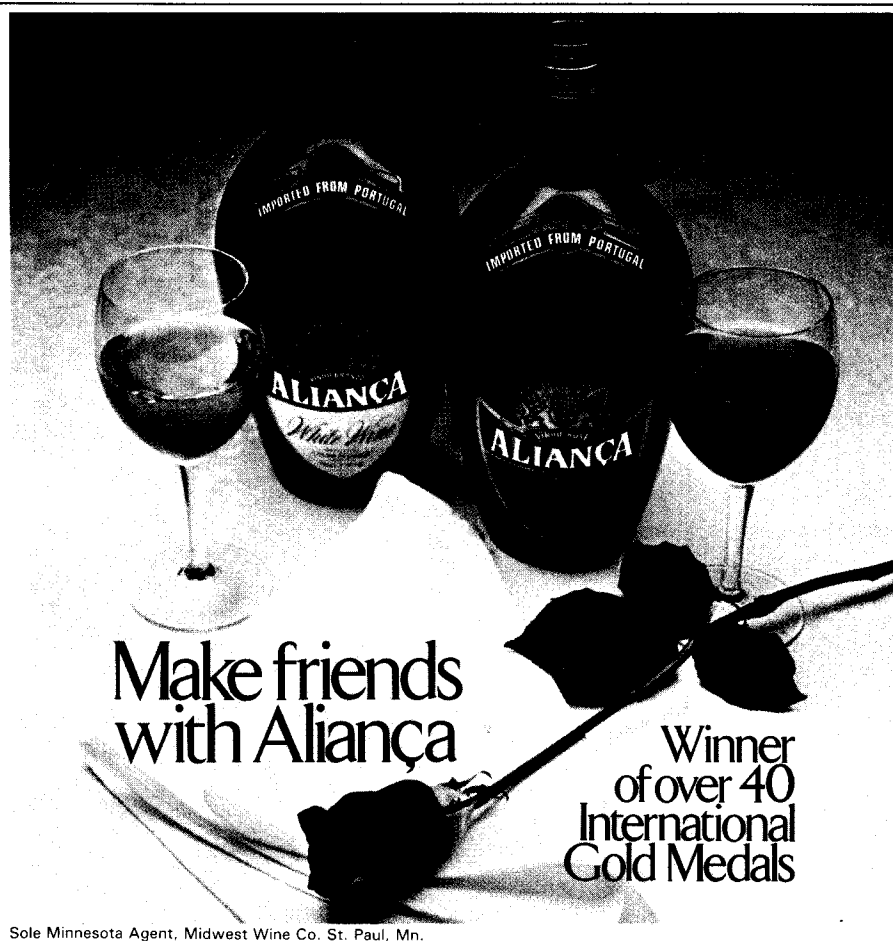
Designed by Edwin Overmire, grain broker Jennison's house is a mini-chateau in brick and stone. Outside, its gable-crests, finials, and chimneys rise irrepressibly skyward; inside, the sumptuousness of its 1900 decor remains unsullied. The stencilled ceilings, the handcarved Corinthian capitals, the silk cut-velvet wall-coverings, the gilded foyer ceiling dome—these and many other original details give a good impression of what these houses felt and looked like when first built.

In 1964 when Clifford and Martha

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Trudell bought the house to carry on the Lee family's photographic studio, they lived in Edina. After several years of commuting to work, the Trudells decided they had had enough. In 1968 after remodeling the upper floors to serve as living quarters, the Trudell family moved into the Jennison house.

Clifford Trudell recalls the day when an ancient Swede came to the door of the house. He had been a

young man in 1900 when he and 17 other woodcarvers had sat for days whittling the leaves of the mahogany capitals of the foyer pillars. Many of these men also did woodcarving for the Swan Turnblad house, now the American Swedish Institute, being built at the same time a block away on Park Avenue.

In the minds of Clifford and Martha Trudell and their daughter Maryellen, the Jennison house and Lee

Brothers studios are inextricably linked. Over the years the studios have produced many formal photographs of people and buildings, and many of these are now being recognized as having historic importance.

"We consider ourselves fortunate to be able to preserve the house while continuing the work of the photographic studio, which is also rich historically," explains Martha Trudell.


"We are pleased to be able to maintain the historic character of the building, while enjoying it as our home," adds Maryellen. "For two weeks at Christmastime we remove the studio lights from the second parlor and transform the downstairs into what it was like in Jennison's day."

But it is rarely so easy to bring a Healy-built house back to its original appearance. More than 120 Healy houses are recorded on city permits, of which approximately 100 are still standing. The majority have been stuccoed, sided, cut up, torn apart, duplexed, or otherwise "remuddled." It is inevitable that these large, elegant houses should be adapted to changes in social values and modes of living. Some buildings have survived quite well; others have not.


Yet it is remarkable that even a poorly maintained, considerably altered Healy house can be made to function as it was originally intended to function, as a family home with the added enrichment of eight decades of history. One such house is 1801 Irving Avenue South, a spacious Neo-Classical house designed and built by Healy in 1900.

When Tom and Beth Zemek and their six children first moved into the house in 1978, the building needed much work. The exterior was stuccoed, all the leaded glass had been removed, and the entire third floor had been redesigned and expanded three years after Healy's death. Undaunted, the Zemek family spent many hours stripping and repapering walls, refinishing woodwork, repairing floors, sanding, and painting. Their efforts have been rewarded with the making of an interior that maintains much of its original elegance.

"When we bought the house, it



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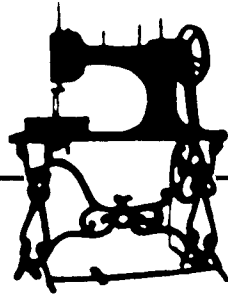
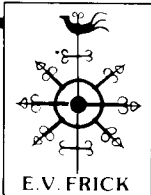
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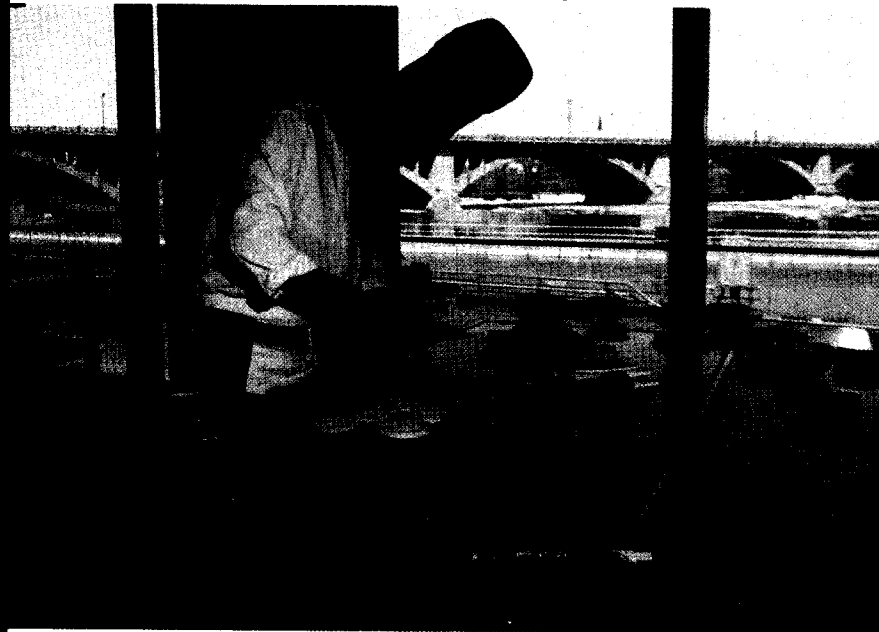
was in such bad shape that it was very reasonably priced," explains Tom Zemek. "It was solid, well-built, and we could afford it."

"I was attracted to it because it reminded me of the old houses in our home town of Quincy, Illinois," says Beth Zemek. "It is a typical turn-of-the-century house where family and visitors can comfortably come and go. There is both private space and community space. You can be alone without leaving the house."

"We have a strong historical sense. The house has ties to the past," she adds. "In it, you look both forward and backward in time. Living in the house puts you in the stream of humankind."

—Trilby Busch Christensen

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