

THE JOHN SMART HOUSE AND THE PEOPLE WHO LIVED THERE

The John Smart House is a Victorian Queen Anne style home. This was a popular design in the 1880s and 1890s, and is characterized by an irregular form. It has bay windows, a two story tower, a second story airing porch, and an irregular roof line. Even the surface is irregular. There are scalloped shingles and clapboards, cornices and boards that define the different floor levels. The porches are not original, but they are a duplication of what was there based on early photographs of the house. The original slate roof has been replaced with a shingle that simulates shingles. The foundation is a formed concrete called ashlar, made to look like natural stone.

John Smart built the house in 1886-1887. That is, construction began in 1886, but the family did not move in until April 1887. It is not certain who built the house, but it has many signature features used by George Gruninger, Medina's leading house builder at that time (curved hallway in the foyer). For Medina it was a grand house, built at a time when many people still lived in simple Greek Revival homes. It sits on its original lot.

John Smart came to Medina from New York State about 1871 and built an iron foundry on the west side of town, north of the A.I. Root Company (Foundry Street). The first railroad had just been built through town, and Medina was going through a major re-building period after the 1870 fire. The foundry was called the Holloware Foundry and they made iron skillets, kettles, and general household goods. (There are 2 kettles from the foundry; one on the kitchen stove and one in the large display room case) During the economic depression after 1873, the foundry closed, was purchased by W.H. Bradway, and John Smart became the manager.

The Smart family consisted of John, his wife Julia and their daughters Anna and Maud. A son was born after they arrived in Medina, but died at the age of 3 in 1878. Both daughters were married in the house. In 1900, John and his wife moved to Cleveland to be closer to a daughter and took all the furnishings with them. There is nothing in the house original to the Smart family.

Orlo and Adelaide (Addie) Jackson purchased the house from the Smart family. Addie had a millinery shop and was one of Medina's early business women. Her shop was in different locations, but generally on the west side of the square, in the old courthouse on the corner of Court and Liberty Streets. Orlo was a carpenter and one of the founding members of Medina's Fire Department in 1877. Orlo died soon after they moved here, but Addie stayed on until her death in 1913. Their wakes were most likely held in the front parlor.

William Benson Baldwin purchased the house from the estate. He was owner and editor of the Medina County Gazette. His wife, Leonora was noted for her musical talent and civic activities. They had three children: Martin, Neal and James. Both Martin and James were later involved with the Gazette. James later told stories of sliding down the banister as a boy, and pouring water on trick-o-treat children from the second story balcony. His mother gave music lessons to Medina children in the downstairs library.

The William Hammerschmidt family purchased the house in 1926. The Hammerschmidt greenhouse was at the east end of the block. They specialized in hybrid geraniums and other plants. William and his wife Pearle had four children: Andy, Will, Sara, and Joan. All four were very accomplished in their field. Andy was very interested in electronics and as a boy he rigged up radios, climbing on to the roof by way of the back porch to the kitchen and on up to string up his antenna. The table in the dining room to the left of the door is Andy's work table. Later Andy was very successful at RCA and helped develop colored television. Will rose to a high rank in the FBI. Sara Hammerschmidt Ritter lived in Medina and was a noted concert organist. It was the four Hammerschmidt children who came back

to the museum when the Historical Society acquired the house in 1984 and helped with the restoration work. They remembered the house very well because they were forced to leave during the depression, which left a lasting impression on them. It was their family photos that helped the Historical Society restore the exterior porches.

In the 1930's and 1940's, the house was at times a rental and for some time the Eagle's Lodge. It is said the bar was in the library. About 1950 the county acquired the house. For some years it served as offices for the county Board of Education. In later years, Community Action and the Crisis Center used the space.

In 1984, the county was interested in the Munson House owned by the Historical Society. Located in the first block of East Washington, the county wanted the lot for additional courthouse parking. At the same time, the county was interested in getting rid of the John Smart House. The county and Historical Society traded properties. The Community Design Committee then purchased the Munson House for \$1 and moved it to S. Prospect Street with money from the Letha E. House Foundation. It now serves as their office and meeting space. The Historical Society restored the exterior of the John Smart House with funds from the Letha E. House Foundation and decorated the interior with funds earlier acquired from an estate. Fortunately, in spite of its history, the interior had not gone through too many changes. Any alterations are covered in the following sections which deal with each room and its contents.