

Uncle Ab From Abington — March 17, 1976

By Jim Jones

We have always liked old houses and of the three homes we have owned over the years, two have been big rambling old places that impart a distinct charm and nostalgia. Our present place, a large white building, was built back in 1887, and was originally the home of Thomas Clevenger, a pioneer Centerville banker. This is not the first house that stood on the property but replaced an old so-called row house that stood right out on the street facing north, when Walnut Street was the main throughfare thru town.

This place has its modern features such as inside plumbing and electricity, but many items recall its glorious past, such as the front entry hall with its open staircase, the stained glass windows, the huge old cast iron hot water radiators which still do a fine job of heating, the sliding doors that close the parlor and dining room off from the sitting room, the maze of piping used years ago for gas lights, the Victorian fireplace in the parlor with its green tile hearth wood columns and mirror overhead, the old claw-foot bathtub my wife despises, the two unused cisterns in the yard.

This house, while not famous by any means, is listed in the state register of architecturally prominent homes as being a prime example of neo-Jacobean architecture. Don't know just what that means but its nice to know somebody else liked it. Structurally, the place has an interesting background.

My father-in-law who was a prominent builder and cabinet maker in the Middletown area for many years, presented my then-wife-to-be a book of old house plans dated in the very early part of this century. She was only 7 years old, but he instructed her to take good care of the book--it would be valuable some day. We looked at it occasionally during the years of our marriage and remarked about the ridiculous cost of houses then. When we bought this place, we found the identical house in Dad's book of old drawings and confirmed it by locating the blueprints in a closet with the same architectural company's name and design number on them. She had been carrying around all these years the drawing of the Clevenger-McConaha house in Centerville and didn't even know it!

Further research showed this house was actually sawed in Chicago, all lumber cut to size and numbered, and hauled to Centerville in 1887. Don't know if Sears, Roebuck sold it or not, but have heard rumors to the affirmative. At any rate, it caused quite a stir when built because it was not sawed on the spot.

Little change has really taken place over the years. Aluminum siding has been applied but the slate roof is still solid and leakfree, The inside walls have been panelled and a tile ceiling hung, but the fine old woodwork still looks good, the wooden stormsash is the best there is and the fireplace does a grand job, Barring disaster, the old house will probably be here another 50 years or so, and we hope to be around most of that time too. The wide front porch along the east and north sides are pleasant on summer evenings and the little porch off the dining room adds a touch of Victorian charm. Not a bad place to call home for one who likes old houses!