

The Leonard Baldwin House

Written by Ashliegh Allen

In the 1850's, Adrian, Michigan, was growing rapidly. Several people were beginning to travel to this settlement to start their new lives. The Leonard Baldwin House at 634 Dennis Street was built around this time, as the population of Adrian was booming because of the Erie and Kalamazoo Railroad. However, the exact date of when this house was built is unknown. It is believed that it was built somewhere around 1852 to 1866. There are clues from the structure of the house and comparisons from other Greek Revivals around this area that would lead one to believe that it was built closer to 1855-58. This essay includes the history behind this house, information about the Greek revival style and the history of Adrian at that time.



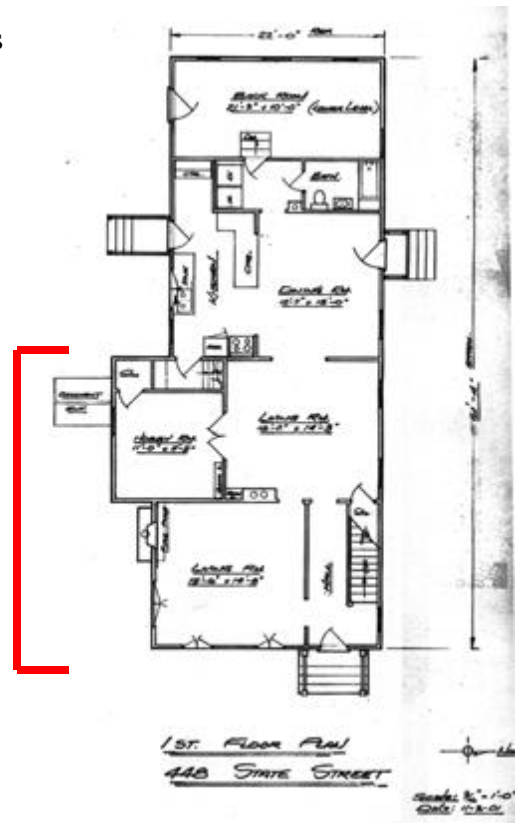
Leonard Baldwin House, Front View, Ashliegh Allen ©2010

The first Greek revival houses were built by several architects, such as, Benjamin Latrobe, and his pupils Robert Mills and William Strickland. Also designing Greek revival houses at this time were Ithiel Town, Alexander Jackson Davis, John Haviland, Alexander Parris, and Isaiah Rogers, among others (McAlester 184). Even though the style is called Greek revival, it is actually based off of Roman architecture, like the Temple of Portunus in Rome. When the style was being developed, architects, such as Town, were looking at the Roman temples because Greece was inaccessible since it was embroiled in the Greek War for Independence (1821-29), when the territory (that was Muslim) was taken over by Christians. By

the 1840's, this style was popular all over the United States and was considered by some, according to Lee and Virginia McAlester, the National Style (182). It was long lived because it was thought to embody the ideals of democracy (Walker 108). This period lasted until about 1860, when it was eventually replaced with more elaborate and decorative houses, such as the Italianate and the Second Empire styles (with the start of the Industrial Revolution). The use of a Greek or Roman temple form was first seen with public buildings, such as the Virginia State Capitol, designed by Thomas Jefferson. By the time Town designed *The Bowers House* in Northampton, Massachusetts, in 1835, in the temple form was increasingly put towards residential buildings.

Authors who have written about the style uniformly agree that the easiest way to recognize a Greek revival home would be by the frieze board around the top of the walls, near the roof line. The frieze usually has windows set into it bringing light into the attic or second level. The problem with recognizing these features now is that many of these boards have been removed through the years because people do not recognize their importance. In addition, the roofs are either gabled or hipped and have a low pitch. Typically, the gable faces the street, so the house looks more like a temple. These houses will sometimes have a front porch with columns; however, many of the porches have been removed or collapsed by now. The front door will often have side lights and transom lights (or windows) to create a more elaborate entrance. The door is balanced by symmetrically placed windows. Also, in the smaller homes, the door is usually pushed off to one side to allow more room for the parlor. Inside, smaller Greek revival homes will have one centrally located fireplace to heat the home, where larger homes will have two or more.

The Leonard Baldwin house has some of the features mentioned above. This house has the frieze board windows; however, the frieze board is missing. It was most likely removed by one of the previous owners. According to the Clegg family, which owned the home in the 1980s, it also used to have a front porch or portico with a slightly pitched roof similar to the roof of the house. The front door appears on the right side of the façade and has side lights and a transom window. This house also has a door on the north flank that used to have a small porch like the one on the front of the house. At the time it was built, before two later additions, the house had two rooms and a hallway that runs straight back from the front door, with stairs ascending from front to back on the first floor and two rooms on the second floor. (The kitchen and the outhouse would have been out back.) Looking at the materials used in construction (brick in some areas, clapboard in others), it is obvious that the basement, kitchen/dining room, and second floor bathroom were added first, along with another bathroom on the first floor that came second. The basement was most likely added when a coal furnace was put into the house. The addition of the furnace would have been after 1880, when houses such as this were updated with the addition of heating ducts (McAlester 28)



Floor Plans drawn to scale by Eugene Eldredge © 2001 from Jill Connaughton's online research report © 2001

There is evidence of changing construction techniques in the house. The exterior of the original house is brick—without any wooden sub-structure. The exterior walls of the original house are constructed with a layer of brick on the outside, an empty space, and then another layer

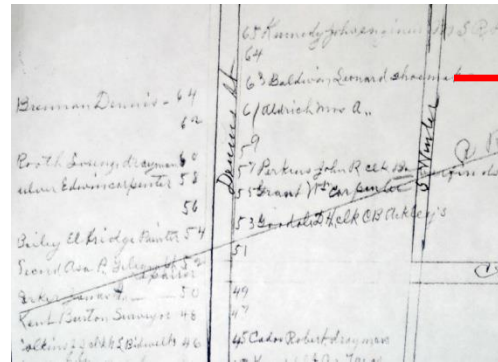
of brick. The plaster on the interior was applied right to the brick. When the current owners undertook renovations, the original post-and-beam construction was revealed. The walls separating the living area from the parlor on the interior of the house are constructed around solid oak beams that are true two by fours. There are rough saw marks on the beams from where it was cut at the mill. In addition, the nails used here are square and handmade. When the first addition was built, there was a cistern and coal room added to the basement. In the back of the lot, the Allen family, who lives in the house currently recently found evidence of a carriage house and stable, which were dug up in the early 1990s.

When this house was first built, Adrian was becoming industrialized. Charles Lindquist, in his book *Adrian: the City that Worked*, describes Adrian at this time (chapter 2). The settlement was gaining more and more residents everyday. The Erie and Kalamazoo railroad made it possible for people to travel easily to Adrian from Lake Erie, around the area of Toledo, where they would have faced swamp land. In the early 1850's there was a large number of brick buildings going up in Adrian, which would lead someone to believe that many of the residences that are brick were built right around this time. Adrian's businesses were also rapidly growing, with all the new settlers coming in, and more and more stores were opening. In 1853, Adrian got a charter from the state that allowed it to become a city. Also, Adrian was booming with new jobs being produced by the Michigan Southern railroad, which was headquarter here. Along with the new jobs provided by the railroad, the surrounding county was prosperous in agriculture. With all of this prosperity, by 1857 Adrian had 1,200 houses.

The Lenawee County Historical Museum has several records that refer to this house around the time it was built. In a map from 1866, the house at 634 Dennis Street is shown. However, it does not show up in the map from 1852. According to the map in 1866, this house is

in block 10, plot 12. Eventually, the house number will change to 63 Dennis Street in the early 20th century. The 1866 map can be found today in the Merrick Collection at the County Museum and was created by Sarah Nash in 1926 from memory.

It also indicates that the original owner of the house was Leonard Baldwin, who was a carpenter/shoemaker. The information on this map



Leonard Baldwin House

Sarah Nash Map, 1926

is confirmed by City tax records and directories—also at the Museum. There is not a lot of additional information on Baldwin except that, according to other city directories, he later moved from 63 Dennis Street to Spring Street. Also, his obituary at the Museum states that Baldwin passed away in 1896. After Mr. Baldwin, the owners of the house are unknown until the early 1980's. The current owners, Mr. and Mrs. Allen, bought their house from the Clegg family in 1990.

This house can be compared to several Greek revival houses in Adrian, such as the Governor Croswell house at 228 North Broad Street. This house is close to what the Baldwin House would have originally looked like when it had a front porch and frieze board. The Croswell house is most likely the first Greek revival home in Adrian, built around 1841-43. Another Greek revival house in Adrian that was built before the 1850's is the Holloway house at 448 State Street. This house stands one street to the east from Dennis Street in a neighborhood platted in 1845. The Holloway house was built approximately 1844;



Leonard Baldwin House, Side View, Ashliegh Allen ©2010

however, there is no record of when the house was actually built. It is a close comparison to the

house on Dennis Street, except that the Holloway house was a one and a half story home, slightly larger than the Baldwin House.

The Greek revival style was popular all throughout America and there is evidence that this style was one of the first used in Adrian to build homes. This house is an important piece in understanding Adrian's history from the mid-1800s, along with several other houses on Dennis Street and its neighboring streets, which is why these historic landmarks should be preserved.

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