

Originally the entire block was purchased by the Board of Directors of the Chicago Theological Seminary on August 1, 1864. The Board, having little use for the land, sold the tract to William Cramer and Ludwig Fries on April 24, 1865. The following day the two men entered into a deed of conveyance for the purpose of partitioning and selling the land. This deed resulted in Cramer owning the north half of the block, lots 1-4, and Fries owning the south half, lots 5-8. On December 16, 1865, George T. Meyer and wife, Louisa, purchased lot 7 from Fries for the sum of \$3,000. The following year two identical Italianate houses were constructed simultaneously, one for Meyer and one for Fries on lot 8. The social connection between Fries and Meyer is not clear, but having identical houses constructed at the same time leads one to conclude that the men were not merely business acquaintance but friends.

It is said that today two homes stand as witness to the business ability and pure courage of two pioneers. Fries and Cramer bet their entire worth on a whiskey tax and won - to the tune of over a half million dollars.

In July of 1868, the federal government imposed a tax on whiskey, an act many thought to be unconstitutional. The right to get drunk cheaply was an inalienable right like the right to breathe. No one thought the government could enforce this tax. However, Fries and Cramer were willing to gamble that the government could and would make it stick. They filled every warehouse, cellar and attic with barrels. In their distillery north of town the pair processed as much corn as they could find into more whiskey. Finally, when the tax took hold, the price rose from 25 cents a gallon to \$1.50 a gallon and their fortune was made.