

Mikesell House

1836 Maine 1982

Few Quincyans could boast a more colorful early life than John P. Mikesell. Born in Morgan, West Virginia, in 1834, John was brought to Quincy in 1841 with his family which at that time spelled their name Maxwell. In 1849, when he was 15, John left Quincy for the great California Gold Rush, and there he worked in the mines for two years. He did not make his fortune there.

He spent the next ten years of his life seeking his fortune in Australia and South America, and when that failed, he returned to Quincy in 1861 to find a Civil War in progress. Joining the 18th Missouri Infantry (Union), he was soon elected captain of Company I. He saw action in many of the most vicious battles in the south and at the famous Battle of Shiloh was taken prisoner. The Confederacy sent him to the dreaded Libby prison and ultimately to other southern prisons.

A survivor of those ordeals, Mikesell returned to Quincy in 1863 and married Eliza Payne, daughter of a pioneer Quincy family. He joined the pork-packing firm of Adams & Sawyer which later became Sawyer & Mikesell. Fifteen years later, having established a reputation for ingenuity and industry, he was appointed superintendent of public works for the city. In 1892, he was elected mayor, and because of a rare trait-honesty-served three successive terms.

Two interesting things happened during his terms as mayor: he built his house, and he amassed a large city treasury balance with which he established a water works fund. When the new water company became established he was made a director. Also during his mayorial years, he assisted in strengthening and making more efficient several city departments.

The Mikesell house has undergone numerous changes since it was built in 1894. Its original interior butternut woodwork trimming remains, although painted for the most part. Two major additions to the rear of the house added length to the kitchen and to second floor rooms, as well as a screened porch. The front entry was changed in recent years, and a portacachere was added to the west side of the house and a block porch connecting the front entry porch with a side entry porch. Original transoms on the facade remain and landing windows retain bevelled-leaded glass panes. Some of the handsome ornate brass hinges remain, as does the marble mantel piece.

The present decorating was done by a previous owner, but the attractive artifacts and furnishings in the house have been collected by the present owners, Mr. & Mrs. Dillard Rives, on their travels to all parts of the world, especially the Far East. Chinese porcelains, earthen pickle jars, leather and lacquer chests, teak writing desks, an altar table from Jakarta, a mask from Ceylon-all go to make the Mikesell House a comfortable family home once again.

Quincy Preserves!

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