

Fries-Kespohl House

331 College - Italian villa style - 1868 - architect unknown

Today two homes in Quincy stand as witness to the business ability and pure courage of two pioneers. Ludwig Fries and William 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 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, Ludwig Fries and William Cramer were willing to gamble that the government could and would make it stick. They sunk every penny they had into whiskey. They filled every warehouse, cellar, and attic with the 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 and their fortune was made.

Fries and Cramer decided to spend a portion of their profits on fine new homes to match their new wealth. North Fourth Street was the center of high fashion in the 1860's and 1870's with its lovely view the the Mississippi. It was no wonder that William Cramer chose to build on the southeast corner of Fourth and Elm with his partner, Ludwig Fries, right behind him on Fourth and Vine, now College Avenue. Both houses today are much as they were then.

Unfortunately, Ludwig Fries did not live long enough to enjoy either his money or his new home. He died in 1869 leaving a wealthy widow. She married Henry A. Kespohl later that same year, and the couple continued to live in the Home at 331 Vine. Kespohl came to this country from Prussia and worked with a grocery firm in St. Louis until he came to Quincy. When Kespohl arrived in 1865 he continued in his trade, buying out several grocers in the area. Later Kespohl took on a partner in business, George T. Meyer, who built a twin home just west of the Kespohl residence which still stands today.

Members of the Kespohl family remained in the home at 331 College until 1963. That may be part of the reason that the home has come through the years virtually unchanged. The carriage house at the north end of the property is approached by a covered walkway leading from the house. The wide porches catch the breezes across the bluffs.

Inside the home one is struck by the grand scale of the rooms, the open feeling created by the floor-to-ceiling windows, and the massive woodwork. The gaslight fixtures on the wall still work. The floral wallpaper in one of the upstairs bedrooms was brought from England by the Kespohl sisters in 1930 and is reputed to be the same print as was used in one of the bedrooms of Buckingham Palace in London during the reign of King George V.

The current owners, the Robert Andersons, have had the Fries-Kespohl house for nearly four years. They are involved in preservation work and are currently restoring and refurbishing their lovely home.

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