The Srnka House

By Jill James

Among all the beautiful houses in Adair County there is one in particular that stands out in my mind. This is the home presently located at 904 E. Harrison, owned by Mr. and Mrs. Al Srnka.

If I had to pick out one definite quality about this house it would have to be the originality of the architecture. No other house in Kirksville even comes close to having the distinct dimensions this house displays so richly.

Another rather unique fact about this house is that it has had only four owners. They are T. J. Dockery, Dr. George A. Still, Dr. and Mrs. Paul Hilton, and the present owners.

The first owner and builder, T. J. Dockery, came to Adair County with his parents in July 1855. On Sept. 26, 1867, he was married to Miss Julia E. Hinder. He owned 2,400 acres of land. He also built and owned several of the most substantial businesses in Kirksville, including the Dockery Hotel, which is still standing. Mr. Dockery also taught school and lived on a farm until 1876; then he was elected County Surveyor. He served eight years as surveyor and Bridge Commissioner, helping with the construction of the Chariton River bridges near Youngstown and Connelsville. For thirty years he was engaged in real estate and abstract business.

The second owner, Dr. George A. Still, married Miss Ardella Dockery, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. T. J. Dockery, in 1906. In the early 1900’s, Miss Dockery inherited her father’s home.

During this time there was a fire. The fire destroyed most of the upper level, but was contained before reaching downstairs.

In the late 1930’s a Kirksville architect, Irwin Dunbar, remodeled the house to its present appearance. The wrought iron fence that presently surrounds the house is the original. However, a dent was acquired last year from a storm. When Mr. Dockery owned the house the fence extended the complete length of the lot.

The third owners, Dr. and Mrs. Paul Hilton, lived in the house around the 1960’s.

The Srnka house currently consists of nine rooms, four upstairs and five downstairs. All of the upstairs rooms were redone after the fire. Downstairs, however, all of the rooms are original, excluding the kitchen and bathroom.

Modern conveniences have been added to the old house, but many of the original features of interest remain unchanged. In addition to the walnut woodwork and doors, the original stairway and two beautiful bay windows on the east and west sides of the home remain as they were years ago.

The Srnkas and their two sons have occupied the house for nine years.
When Irwin Dunbar remodeled the old Dockery residence, he followed this sketch (top photo) of how the house would look with a facelift. The upstairs rooms were remodeled after a fire, but the downstairs remains the same as it was years ago. Left, the original staircase in the home is an example of the rich walnut finishings found throughout the house. Most of the pictures on the walls are original paintings by John W. Tinsman, a Kirksville artist, displaying the Srnkas' avid interest in fine antiques. Above, this is how the Srnka home appears today. The wrought iron fence is part of the original estate.