

THE SMITH RESIDENCE

11243 - 58 Street

Big brown house returned to character of Edwardian gentility after years of work

Stroll north on 60th/58th Street from 112th Avenue and you'll notice a house that seems to be out of place in a sea of post-Second World War residences.

The home was built in 1912, but apparently sat vacant until Clyde and Minnie Smith bought it in 1918. A photo taken in the 1940s shows it to be not so much out of place, as pretty well out of town.

To the north and east the photo shows a wall of poplar and willow bush with no sign of neighbors. (The closest were at 61st Street and 113th Avenue.)

There's a small barn hidden away in the back, and a large vegetable garden. The Smiths kept a cow named Buttercup and a flock of chickens. The "spread" eventually became known as Buttercup Farm.

Clyde Smith held Edmonton's #1 auctioneer's licence for many years.

Francis, one of the Smith's daughters, still lives close by, at 11227 - 61 St. (The other children were Doris, Olive and Walter, nicknamed Benny.) And Francis' son, Clyde Martell, lives with wife Maureen and son Scott at 11136 - 61 St.

Francis left the area in 1939 when she married policeman Henry Martell. But they moved back in 1942 into a suite in the Magrath Mansion coachhouse on 111th Avenue while they built their new home at 11227 - 61 Street. Officer Martell later became the first full-time golf pro at the Highlands course. Francis says that her grandparents, Gillan and Mary Armstrong also arrived in the Highlands in 1918 and resided at 11216 - 60 Street, the present home of Jack Thomas and family.

When Clyde and Minnie Smith moved out of the big brown house at 11243 - 58 Street in 1942, the Craig family - Herb and Bessie, with daughters Jean, Phyllis and Carol - moved right in. The girls attended nearby Highlands and Eastwood schools. Phyllis still lives in Edmonton, Carol resides in St. Albert, and Jean lives in Grenada, in the West Indies. Bessie Craig lives in a highrise on Saskatchewan Drive, with a distant view of her former neighborhood.

The Wheeler family bought the house in 1962. Gordon Wheeler was 13 years old at the time. He later acquired the family home, and lives there with wife Vicki and daughters Chelsea and Brianne.

Over the past few years, the Wheelers have been up to their necks in renovation work, including all new plumbing and wiring. Gordon notes that one of the original fuses controlled just one outlet, while an adjacent one handled 24!

Water in the early days came from an outside well. And a large cistern in the basement collected the rainwa-



Winter's stillness at the Smith house, left, in the 1940s, before the invasion of new homes.

Clyde S. Smith, auctioneer, in the early 1940s.

Front view, the Smith house during the 1920s.

ter from the downspouts, which was then hand-pumped to the kitchen sink.

The Wheelers have done much scraping to

remove layers of enamel paint from fine old fir casings and other woodwork.

The house interior today would feel very much like the original "Buttercup Farm" of the Smiths: the dark stained fir window casings and ceiling beams in the dining room, the immaculate dark oak fireplace mantle and surround, and the precisely balanced sliding panel doors between dining and living rooms all maintain the original character of Edwardian gentility in the house.



The buttressed brick foundation walls appear as sound as they were in the summer of 1912, and if you proceed through the door in the south wall, you'll find yourself in a short stairwell right inside the attached garage with the family van hovering just above your head!

The present exterior of the house is very little changed when compared with early photos. The old shed-roofed garage is gone, replaced by one in keeping with the character and detailing of the original house.

The big brown house has been home to just three families in its 81 years, but the methods of escape employed by the children are similar.

On warm summer nights, Gordon Wheeler sometimes went out through the back bedroom balcony and down the clothesline pole for an evening of freedom. The Craig girls left via the south bedroom windows, climbed onto the old shed-garage roof and then made a short jump to the ground - and a night on the town!

David Brookes

It is a truly rare experience to be able to talk with family members who can recount 80 years of living in the same house. The author sincerely thanks the Martells, senior and junior, the Craig family, and the Wheelers, for the photos and reminiscences.