

## The Hart House: Italianate Style in Adrian



The Samuel E. Hart House at 417 State Street, from the late 1800's, courtesy of the Lenawee County Historical Museum.

In 1873, Samuel E. Hart, who was an Adrian businessman transplanted from New York, built a new brick Italianate home at 417 State Street for himself and his new wife, Hattie A. King. During this time in Adrian, the Italianate style had peaked throughout the United States, originating with the picturesque movement in England. The new home, the second one built in Adrian by Samuel E. Hart, was a symbol of the prosperity not only of Hart but of the city of Adrian, too.

Adrian was a town that held great importance to the state of Michigan during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The city's population in 1860 was 6,213, the third largest city in the state. By 1870 the population climbed even higher to 8,438 [Bonner, *idem*]. By the turn of the century, it would boast successful automobile companies, fencing industries, a major train hub, and many other well-to-do professions. With Americans wanting to push westward from the eastern seaboard, aided by growth and availability of railroad companies, settlers began to relocate to the Midwest, including Adrian, Michigan. One of these New England transplants was Samuel E. Hart, from Palmyra, New York, who landed in Adrian in 1846 [Bonner, <http://www.lenaweehistory.com/lenawee-ch31.html>].

Samuel E. Hart and his family would find themselves great fortune in Michigan. Samuel and his son, Charles, would both become successful businessmen throughout their years in Adrian. The success began with Samuel's purchase of the corner drugstore from Dr. Underwood in 1850. The purchase would bring a business into the family that would serve the Harts well for years. With the family's success in the pharmacy business, they would find themselves in the fortunate position to provide beautiful homes to live in, as well as generous contributions to the community and to Adrian.

Shortly after Samuel E. Hart's move to Adrian, the Italianate style began to overtake the popularity of the previous Gothic Revival style [McAlester, 212]. The Italianate style would be a dominating aesthetic for architects all over America. In 1856, Samuel E. Hart built his first brick home at 430 Dennis Street, it was in an Italian Villa style. Along with Hart's new home, Adrian gained several other prominent Italianate brick buildings; including a four-story, 100 room hotel built by James Brackett in 1859, and the Burnham Building at 204 East Church Street, built by George Bidwell in 1861 [Bonner, idem].

The Italianate style originated in England at the start of the century, when architect John Nash built Cronkhill in Shropshire. The popularity of the style was encouraged by the picturesque movement in paintings that depicted structures found during the Italian Renaissance [Reiff, 70]. Depictions in paintings by Claude Lorrain and Nicolas Poussin showed round-arched loggias and prominent eaves and brackets. These 17<sup>th</sup>-century painters along with the picturesque movement in England influenced architects such as Nash, and eventually those in America, and ultimately the taste and preference of Samuel E. Hart in Adrian.

Before the end of the 1830's, the United States would have its first Italianate building, the Bishop Doane House in Burlington New Jersey in 1838. The new Italianate style was becoming greatly admired for its "picturesque beauty and expression of comfortable home life and its cultural associations," as referenced in Daniel D. Reiff's book, Houses from Books. The simple brick structures were found to be perfect for "domestic purposes" [Reiff, 70]. The style's distinctly different characteristics would have made it an up-to-the-minute choice for new homebuilders, including Samuel E. Hart.

While the Italianate style was reaching its prominence by the 1870's, Samuel E. Hart was getting married. On March 11, 1872, he married Harriet "Hattie" A. King of Adrian, this marriage being the second for each of them. A year later, in 1873, Samuel completed construction on his new Italianate home at 417 State Street, and just in time for the birth of their new son, Charles G. Hart [Bonner, idem].



Charles G. Hart, photograph courtesy of the Lenawee County Historical Museum.

Samuel E. Hart, prior to his second marriage to Hattie, was married to Miss Anna D. Crissey of Long Island New York. At the time of his first marriage in New York, Samuel already had family in Adrian; his older sister had married into the Berry family, a wealthy and prominent family of the town. The heads of the Berry family, Ambrose and Langford, had already purchased a large amount of land known as Berry's Southern Addition, and also had several successful enterprises in Adrian. One such business owned and run by Langford Berry, was a pharmacy, this drugstore would be Samuel E. Hart's first job in Adrian. Through his sister's connection to the family, Samuel worked for Langford for several years, until he earned enough money to venture off on his own. Undoubtedly, Samuel's connection with the Berry family would have been the reason for his acquisition of land on State Street [Bonner, idem].

Constructed at 417 State Street, originally Plot #13 in Berry's Southern Addition, Samuel E. Hart commissioned a two story, L-shaped, brick Italianate home, which was typical for the time and style [Insurance Maps]. Also, characteristic to the style of Italianate homes, was the low pitched, hipped roof and paneled frieze with elliptical windows and brackets and dentils trimming the roof. The broadly overhanging roof and elaborately decorated brackets are the defining details of the Italianate houses and of the Hart House. Samuel's home features 1/1 windows, with carved stone hoods and decorative stone lug sills. The rear wing of the house has brick segmental arched windows. The north façade has a two story bay window with a dentil trimmed hood. The main façade features a double door entrance with a one light, one panel transom above. The main porch is made of wood with an apron balustrade, turned posts, and

brackets and dentils trimming the roof. The south and east façade also have a porch [Adrian College Survey Card].

Samuel E. Hart's new Italianate home on State Street fit perfectly into the new neighborhood. During the early 1870's, State Street was a fashionable place to live, also an interesting place to live. Considered one of the nicest places to live in all of Adrian at the time, the street featured many fine, new brick homes. Along with the high profile and successful tenants of the street, there were reports of a rogue cow that would roam up and down the street [Lindquist, 66].

Shortly after completing the house at 417 State, a financial panic hit the United States in September of 1873. The financial panic caused the discouragement of building for nearly half a decade, essentially pushing out all older architecture styles, including the Italianate style [McAlester, idem].

For the next twenty years, from 1873 to 1893, Samuel E. Hart remained an owner of S.E. Hart & Co. Pharmacy, until he passed away on October 27, 1893. After his death, Samuel's son Charles, at the young age of twenty, became part owner of what would become Hart-Shaw Drug Co. [Bonner, idem]. Charles G. Hart also became involved with Lenawee Automobile, Lenawee Telephone Co., Commercial Savings Bank, and also maintained a farm north of Adrian. Charles would remain part owner of the drugstore for 46 years until it was sold to the Cunningham Drugstore chain in 1939.

Continuing in his fathers constructive ways, Charles build a new home at 435 Dennis Street. The new house was to be for himself and his new bride to move into in 1895. Surprisingly before completion, Charles called for a meeting with a group from the Presbyterian Church. At this meeting Hart turned the newly built house over to the

church, donating it to the future pastor. The gift was left in memory of his recently deceased parents [Path, 6].

With the success in business, that both Samuel and Charles had, they were afforded the ability to build beautiful homes and, in one case for Charles, afford extravagant items. In 1901, a Detroit salesman convinced Charles to buy a “steamer” automobile for \$850, the first automobile in all of Lenawee County. Charles became somewhat of a celebrity, or terror, depending on the opinion of certain townsfolk. Driving along in his futuristic and loud automobile, people would often mistake him for a member of the traveling circus. There were also several complaints of Charles G. Hart startling the neighborhood horses [Path, idem].

Samuel E. Hart traveled to Michigan in the mid 1800's to build a successful life. The Harts found success in Adrian, leaving several beautiful homes, including the Italianate home at 417 State Street. By the 1970's, State Street in Adrian Michigan became a registered and recognized location on the national register of historic places. Sitting squarely on the historic street still to this day, is a definitive example of the Italianate style, the Hart House.

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