

Hart-Cavallero House: Italian Villa Style in Adrian



The Hart-Cavallero House located at 430 Dennis Street in Adrian, Michigan

Samuel E. Hart, a prominent businessman in Adrian with ties to the family that originally platted and developed Adrian's Historic District, built a typical though impressive Italian Villa-style home there in 1856. Even though the house at 430 Dennis Street has had only three owners since its construction, it has undergone many changes, from a private home, to a doctor's office, to apartments. Recently it has been restored to its original design through the efforts of Carol and Richard Newell.

Samuel Hart was born in Albion, New York, August 13th, 1823. He arrived in Adrian, Michigan, in May of 1840 because of a business opportunity offered by his brother in-law, Langford G. Berry. He acted as a clerk in Mr. Berry's dry good store for about three years until returning back home to Albion to visit his parents. While back in Albion, he worked for two years for his brother, Dr. B. K. Hart, in his drugstore. In 1848, Samuel returned to Adrian permanently and two years later purchased the established drug store of Dr. Underwood.¹ He established his own business S.E. Hart & Co.

¹ *Portrait and Biographical Album of Lenawee County*. Chicago: Chapman Brothers, 1888.

Pharmacy in downtown Adrian on the south west corner of Maumee and Main Street. He remained there in the pharmaceutical drug business until his death in 1893.

The importance of railroads at this time explain the rising population of Adrian and suggests reasons why Mr. Hart may have been optimistic about the future and business opportunities in Adrian. Charles Lindquist, in his book *Adrian: The City that Worked*, has noted that, “In looking for reasons for Adrian’s growth in the 1850’s everything leads back to several decisions made in the late 1840’s by the Michigan southern railroad.”² Because of the railroads and the location of Adrian, this meant a rise of industry and made trade and traveling more accessible.

Hart also had another connection both to Adrian and to Dennis Street, where he built his first home, through marriage. In October of 1852, Samuel Hart married Miss Annie D. Berry, who was the sister of Langford and Ambrose Berry.³ In 1844, the Berry brothers had purchased most of the original 80 acres from Elias and Adeline Dennis's heirs. The brothers used this land to plot the “Berry's Southern Addition,” which is known today as the Dennis Street/State Street Historic District.⁴ In 1856, Mr. Hart built his first home on plot 34 of the Berry brother’s purchase.

This beautiful Italian Villa is known today as the Hart-Cavallero House. It is one of the most noticeable and striking houses in Adrian’s Historic District. It is an irregular, two and one-half story red brick structure on a rock-faced concrete foundation.⁵ The

² Charles Lindquist, *Adrian, The City that Worked: A History of Adrian Michigan 1825-2000*. Adrian, MI: Lenawee County Historical Society, 2004.

³ *Portrait and Biographical Album of Lenawee County*. Chicago: Chapman Brothers, 1888.

⁴ Peter Barr, “Nineteenth-Century Adrian Architecture.” Available Online: <http://www.sienaheights.edu/personal/pbarr/index.html>.

⁵ *Insurance Maps of Adrian, Lenawee County, Michigan*. Sanborn Map Company. July 1908.

special features of this house include its tower (with spiral staircase inside), imported fireplace and arch-shaped windows.⁶ These windows stretch from floor to ceiling and are capped with elegant, semi-circular, carved crowns. The most noticeable features of the exterior of the house are its bright white, highly decorated brackets, which continue around the whole house, and prominent second story porch connected to the tower, enclosed with wrought iron fencing, and held up by massive, highly decorated brackets.



Original imported Italian Marble Fireplace

The Italian Villa style first appeared in England in 1802 and was made popular by a series of publications starting in 1842 with Andrew Jackson Downing's book, *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, Adapted to North America*.⁷ In Downing's book he talked about the styles of the Italian Villa and Italianate. These styles are very similar, but the Italian Villa has some distinguishing features different from the Italianate. The key features of the Italian Villa are its distinctive tower and irregular floor plan. Both styles feature shallow pitched roofs with broad overhangs decorated with carved brackets. There are many tall windows, often with rounded tops and prominent

⁶ "430 Dennis Street." Adrian Survey Cards. 1981. Lenawee County Historical Museum Archives.

⁷ Barr, "Nineteenth-Century Adrian Architecture."

crown moldings.⁸ The exterior of the Hart-Cavallero house with its irregular floor plan, red brick façade, highly decorated brackets, prominent tower, and tall arch shaped windows, fit perfectly into the description of the Italian Villa style.



Details of brackets surrounding front entrance

Details of arched windows and tower

In March of 1872, Samuel Hart was married for a second time to Mrs. Harriet G. King and, in June of 1873, their only child named Charles Hart was born. Mr. Hart decided to construct a brand new house in the Italianate style for his new wife and son. Today this house is known as the Hart House and is located at 417 State Street in Adrian, just a short distance away.⁹ His old residence located at 430 Dennis Street was purchased by the Cavallero family, which gives us the name, The Hart-Cavallero House, as we know it today.

Subsequent owners of the house have made changes to it over time to suit their needs. Mr. Cavallero was a doctor in Adrian and turned portions of the house into offices for his practice. There were many renovations that Mr. Cavallero did to the house, including blocking off doorways to rooms to contain his office and patient examination rooms, as well as turning windows into doorways for entrance into his doctors office.

⁸ Baker, John Milnes. *American House Styles: A Concise Guide*. WW Norton & Company. New York. 1994.

⁹ See: the essay about this house by John Gialanella at:
<http://www.sienaheights.edu/personal/pbarr/images/The%20Hart%20House%20John%20Gialanella.pdf>

Most of the original wood in the interior of the house, including the wooden spiral staircase, was painted over. Mr. Cavallero worked at his practice out of his house for many years until his death.

Shortly after Dr. Cavallero's death, the rest of the Cavallero family could not keep up with the bills for the house. The family decided to turn the house into an apartment complex and rent it out. There were two apartments located on the lower level of the house, each with its own entrance. As well as the two apartments on the first floor, there were two more apartments upstairs, also with their own entrances. Each apartment had its own living room, dining room, kitchen and bedroom. To keep each apartment separated, many more changes were made to the house. Walls were built to separate each apartment from the other, and doorways were provided for each apartment entrance.

In September of 1999, Carol and Richard Newell purchased the Hart-Cavallero house. They researched how the house looked back when it was originally constructed, and made changes to get the house back to its original shape. It took three years of renovations before the Newell's could move into the house. Walls were taken down that before were put up to separate the house into apartments. Also, all the painted wood in the house done by the Cavallero family was removed by the Newell's. They got the wood and the intricate carvings back to their original shape present when Mr. Hart built the house.



At the top of the 2nd floor looking down the spiral staircase

Detail of carving on staircase

In December of 2002, the Newell's were able to move into their new home. The Newell's have been attending estate auctions to pick up furniture and decorations that would have been present in the same period that the house was built. The house now includes a formal living room which includes the original white Italian marble fireplace, a music room, library, small computer room, dining room, butler's pantry, kitchen, television room, conservatory, bathroom and laundry room, all located on the first floor. There was also a porch that the Newell's enclosed to make another bedroom with a private bathroom. On the upstairs level there are now 3 bedrooms, one bathroom and upstairs living room. The upstairs master bedroom and bath are still in progress as well as the upstairs attic. The Newell's have been renovating the Hart-Cavallero house since their purchase in 1999, and are continuing to restore their home to its original condition.

Thanks to the great effort and time that Carol and Richard Newell have put into the Hart-Cavallero, it has now been closely restored to its original state. The beautiful Italian Villa built by Samuel Hart more than 150 years ago, will remain a great example of the styles, décor, and architecture that have inspired architects of the past and will continue to be an important part of Adrian's history.

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