

## 227 COLLEGE AVE. S.E. / THE KEELER HOUSE

### Hosts: Barbara Roelofs & Jason Dahlke-Butler

The Keeler house is one of the finest homes in all of Heritage Hill. It was built by Miner Spaulding Keeler who, with his father and brothers, bought out the brass hardware manufacturer in Middleville for whom they had all worked. As the sole owners, the Keelers in 1893, relocated the business to Grand Rapids where they were offered a free building site if the company could create 100 new jobs. Eventually, the company employed over 1400 people. Prominent in the business and social community, Miner served as the President of the Keeler Brass Co. until 1937 (just a year before his death), was a director of Old Kent Bank and the Michigan Trust Company, built the Keeler Furniture Exhibition Building and established the Keeler Foundation. He was also a trustee of Fountain Street Church. Miner died in 1938 and his funeral was held in this home.

Dr. Charles Roelofs and his wife Barbara bought the house from the estate of Mrs. Gertrude Keeler who had remained in the house until her death in 1964. The Roelofs were active in the community and Barbara was particularly important in the preservation of Heritage Hill, when hundreds of homes were scheduled to be demolished in the 1960's as part of an urban renewal plan. To help raise funds for the fledgling Heritage Hill Foundation, this home was included in the very first Heritage Hill Tour in 1968. Barbara has continued to support the neighborhood in countless ways ever since. Just a few years ago, she and Jayson were married and he has joined in Barbara's enthusiasm for the neighborhood.

This magnificent house, built from 1911-1913, is an excellent example of Georgian Revival architecture, with a perfectly symmetrical deep rose brick facade with terra-cotta and wooden trim. It has a two-story central pediment bordered by Ionic pilasters. A central window with an ornate scrolled pediment above sits atop a second-story portico surrounded by a delicate balustraded gallery. The pattern of the eave supports creates a geometric rhythm that emphasizes the roof line. A grand entry can be approached by steps on either side. The Keelers had asked the local architectural firm of Osgood & Osgood to create an exact copy of a mansion in Rockford, Illinois that is also very similar to the Governor's mansion in Denver, Colorado and the answer to the request was this outstanding home that still exists over one hundred years later.

Upon entering, it will become evident just why it took the builders almost two years to finish this wonderful home.

**MAIN FLOOR:** Detailed sidelight windows light the way into the vestibule that opens to the absolutely stunning foyer. Grand Rapids was known as "The Furniture City" at the turn of the century and the elaborately hand-carved quarter-sawn oak woodwork in this home is an example of the height of the industry's craftsmanship. The unique wallpaper is original. It was hand-painted by the French artist, Reveillon and commemorates the historic balloon flight of the Montgolfier brothers in 1783. The rug, as well as several others in the house, were hand-woven and designed especially for the room.

The library has floor-to-ceiling bookcases with leaded-glass doors. On the other side of the foyer is the living room, where the fireplace is definitely the focal point. It is trimmed with Italian Carrara marble and built with mantel returns on the chimney wall - a very rare and expensive feature. This room and others in the home are furnished with antique furniture from exclusive Grand Rapids companies like Berkey & Gay and Baker. The Roelofs purchased many

of the pieces with the house. The piano was once used by the Starr Recording Studios to accompany virtuosos on some of the very first recordings.

The jewel of this home is the elegant dining room, copied from a manor house in the County of Kent, England. The intricately molded gesso ceiling, a common feature of Georgian architecture, echoes the pattern in the entry sidelights. The carefully matched coffered paneling is made from the finest quality quarter-sawn oak and discretely contains several secret panels and hiding places. The chandelier is a copy of a 16th Century English design.

There is a simple, country-style kitchen and a pantry with glass-door cupboards and the original butler's sink. A unique feature of the house is the elaborate plumbing system (brass, of course) with a 300 gallon hot water tank that provides instant hot water to every tap.

From a lovely sunporch, one can view the beautiful, well-loved gardens.

**SECOND FLOOR:** At the end of the broad staircase is a bay window on the landing with a cozy seat and four large bedrooms branching off from a central hall. A bathroom that has a shower with a stained-glass door is at the center. The master bedroom has a second louvered door that provides privacy but allows for air circulation. It also has a fireplace.

**THIRD FLOOR:** A large ballroom, reached by a second fine staircase, is on the the top floor. The dormers and other windows bring in light and give the room an interesting shape. Several small ante-rooms were the servants' quarters and storage areas in the day. There is even a fireplace on the third floor! There is an original pool table and the Roelofs have added a small pipe organ.

In many ways, this is a very practical, comfortable home which is what Mr. Keeler had hoped it would be. At the same time, the attention to detail, the use of only the finest materials and the superb craftsmanship make it extraordinary. Fortunately, past and present owners have preserved this treasure for generations to come.