

423 MADISON S. E. / THE PARSONAGE INN

Hosts: Deb & Steve Koster

Celebrating its 140th birthday in 2022, this house was built in 1882 by Robert and Sarah McConnell Corson whose portraits are displayed as you enter the foyer. Robert immigrated to the U.S. from Scotland, first finding a job as a railroad agent, and then enjoying an extended career as a sales executive for the well-known Berkey and Gay Furniture Company. Sarah's well-to-do family had roots in New York and had moved to Grand Rapids when it was still a pioneer city. The family was often mentioned in the society news of the day. Her father was a successful hardware merchant and landlord in the downtown area. After attending Vassar, Sarah married Robert, she purchased the land (only her name was on the deed) on which the house was built, and the couple raised their three children here. They continued to live in the home for nearly 50 years. They shared their home at various times with members of their extended family and the third floor was reserved for their live-in domestic help.

After Sarah's death in 1929, the house was sold to William Wallace Sherwood who also was successful in the furniture business. The Sherwoods lived in the house for nearly 40 years. They invested in a major renovation of the home, including replacing the front porch, building a garage, and updating the bathrooms and kitchen. After the death of her husband in 1948, Virginia Sherwood converted the three story house into three, two-bedroom apartments, making many interior structural changes to create bedrooms, bathrooms, doorways and second and third floor kitchens. The stairway was moved and part of the foyer was enclosed.

Ownership was transferred twice more before Jonathan Wege, a grandson of one of the founders of the Steelcase Corporation, and his wife, Anna, purchased the house in 1995. Major remodeling was done at this time including the reuniting of the first two floors into one living space while maintaining the third floor apartment. They removed a kitchen on the second floor, designed a main floor gourmet kitchen, and added built-in bookshelves in what is now the media room.

The house had changed hands two more times between 1998 and 2017 when it was purchased by the current owners, Steve and Deb Koster, who have given this stately home new life as "The Parsonage Inn," a lovely bed and breakfast.

The architecture of this home is a variation of Queen Anne called the "American Shingle Style" that was popular on the East Coast in the late 1880s. Some of the distinguishing characteristics of the style found in this home include an asymmetrical facade, a gambrel roof, a combination of clapboard siding on the first story with stepped cedar shakes on the upper stories, and a Queen Anne two-story tower. The original wrap-around porch was replaced with a wide, welcoming veranda that exhibits Arts and Crafts Style details in the columns and railings.

The over 5,000 square foot home has three full, finished stories with six bedrooms and seven bathrooms. The floor plan is more open with larger rooms than homes of the previous era. The ceilings are 10 feet high, accented with crown moldings and picture rails. There are hardwood floors in all but the servants' area of the home. Exceptionally large windows are found throughout the house.

The original plumbing relied on rainwater collected in a brick cistern in the basement and the home had gas-lighted fixtures, but of course, over the years, all of the utilities have been updated to accommodate the needs of a modern family.

MAIN FLOOR

The interior is furnished throughout with beautiful antiques, many of which have been passed down to the Kosters from their families. On the first floor, a portion of the open original foyer had been walled off to create a bedroom in the 1950s. The Kosters are currently using the space as a home theater room. Unique carved details are found in sections of the painted pine, poplar, and gum woodwork.

The first of the amazing Art Deco bathrooms is on this floor. The bright yellow Mosaic Tile Company tiles cover the floor and the walls up to the ceiling.

The living room is a gathering place for the B&B, a meeting room and a perfect place for parties. The mantel has iridescent ceramic tile and 24 carat gold leaf detailing. The angled window of the tower provides a perfect view of the Frank Lloyd Wright home just down the street.

The dining room, used now as the breakfast area for the B&B guests, was divided by Mrs. Sherwood in the 1940s to create a bedroom for the first floor apartment. The back section is now used as an office/library. The woodwork is unpainted in this room.

The kitchen has gone through several renovations. The last (by the Weges in the 1990s) was extensive, incorporating the earlier Art Deco tile, the farmer's sink, and the brick chimney into the new design. Floor to ceiling cherry wood cupboards with glass doors, elegant drawer pulls, and a wood-paneled refrigerator and freezer add to the beauty of this room.

SECOND FLOOR

The most significant change to the second floor was the closing off of the large foyer in the 1950s to create the upstairs apartment. There are four bedrooms on this floor. Of the two front rooms, the first is the principal bedroom that has a fireplace with a marble face and a cherry wood mantel. The second has the continuation of the Queen Anne tower. Each of these rooms has its own private bath.

The two other bedrooms also have their own full bathrooms which have tile from floor to ceiling in striking shades of pink and green, dating back to the Sherwood era Art Deco renovations.

The back bedroom was made into a kitchen/dining area for the apartment, but has been restored to its original use.

THIRD FLOOR

The third floor has two bedrooms, a kitchen, a full bath and space for storage. It was the living space for the servants. Less expensive materials were used here and in the back part of the lower floors because only the help would be using this part of the home.