

Main Street Momence Receives Design Award During State Conference

Award Nomination

Project Background:

The City of Momence purchased this unique property in the summer of 1973. The modest Victorian home was built in 1869 by William Graham, a successful Livery owner in downtown Momence.

At the time, the house seemed destined to be demolished by the city and the land to become a downtown parking lot. Some high spirited members of the Momence Women's Club approached then Mayor Rex Rowe and the City Council with a proposal to preserve the house in order to create a small house museum, as testament to its location and historical significance. By December of 1974, the Historical House renovations, including fresh exterior painting, landscaping, and interior decorating were complete and a grand opening took place.

Since that time basic maintenance, such as exterior paint and a badly needed roof were completed during Mayor Jim "Pierre" Saindon's administration approximately 12 years ago. Major needs for the restoration of the home were the following: plaster restoration(due to extensive water damage), sinking floors needed to be restored and or replaced, plumbing, heating & air conditioning were in need of repair or replacement, chipping & peeling paint on the interior as well as exterior of the house needed to be addressed, deteriorating original wood siding needed to be replaced, cracked and broken windows (11) were in need of replacement, and there were also electrical & lighting issues.

Project Description:

In 2013, Mayor Porter who had just began his 2nd term in office, appointed a new board for the Historic House Museum. The home was renamed the "Graham Historic House & Museum" and a new enthusiasm for the preservation and restoration of this gem of Momence was born. Located on Dixie Highway in the heart of the downtown and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the importance of preserving this lovely 19th Century home was a must. The funds needed for the restoration were not available, so the new board began exploring their options. Fortunately, Nancy Liberty Porter, a passionate preservationist, local historian, and Main Street Momence volunteer mentioned the project to her employer-Kevin Van Drunen of Van Drunen Farms. As a result, Kevin Van Drunen offered to fund the majority of the restoration.

The Graham Historic House & Museum Restoration took place between May of 2013 and was completed in December of 2014. With volunteer Nancy Liberty Porter leading the way and chairing the project, an amazing transformation took place.

Over 20 volunteers and nearly 10 respected contractors contributed to the final product.

Volunteers included Mayor Porter , Graham Historic House & Museum Board Members, Van Drunen Farm employees, Main Street Momence staff & volunteers, Glad Fest Association, Momence Theater Friends and caring citizens of the community.

The total cost of the restoration and rehabilitation of the property was nearly \$50,000. The majority of the funding, over \$40,000 was donated by Van Drunen Farms and the remaining balance was made up with Graham Historic House & Museum fundraisers to include the sale of Historic Momence Calendars. Major donations were also made by Mayor Porter, Nancy Liberty Porter, Silva International, Momence Pallet Corporation, Schmidt Trucking, PPC, Team Eagle, Bordertown Pub, the Momence General Store and other caring citizens of Momence.

Special Design Considerations

Extensive research was completed prior to restoring, decorating and furnishing the (7 room) Graham House. The authentication of the property was the focus (mid 19th Century to late 19th Century period). The following considerations were made prior and during the restoration.

- *Every effort was made to research all the historic elements of the Graham Home and consider all options with the central focus on preserving all features of the home if possible
- * Researched historic homes and museums regionally and nationally
- * Utilized suppliers of period renovation items
- * Collaborated with the Kankakee County Museum staff & board
- * Consulted with the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency
- * Researched and utilized period palettes for paint colors and wall paper
- *Researched Graham Family & displayed photos and other info on family history
- *Displayed historic Momence photos, furniture, antiques and other Momence items
- *Momence history displays are on exhibit and changed periodically

The following is a detailed list of work completed

Exterior Restoration & Rehabilitation

- *Rotten wood siding was replaced with new siding only when necessary
- *Eleven broken windows were replaced with new single paned glass
- *The entire home was primed, caulked and painted with period colors
- *Two new signs were installed "Graham Historic House & Museum"
- *Picket fence & arbor were primed and painted

Interior Restoration & Rehabilitation

Kitchen

- *Walls & Ceiling-1970's wall paper removed, plaster restored, painted in period color, wainscoting stripped and repainted to period color
- *Floors-pine floor installed in the 1970's was removed and original wood floor was sanded and stained
- *Chimney was restored

Parlor

- *Walls & Ceiling-period wall paper was preserved, plaster restored
- *Floor-carpet removed, sinking floor was raised and due to extensive damage, a new pine floor was installed
- *Porch door could not be salvaged and had been nailed shut, replica door and hardware was ordered-the door was made by an Amish Company

Hallway

- *Walls & Ceiling-period wall paper was preserved, plaster ceiling restored
- *Floor-carpet removed, historic floor had been removed, new pine floor installed and stained
- *Front door was replicated due to extensive damage to original and replica hardware was used
- *Staircase- was painted, sanded and repainted

Front Room

- *Walls & Ceiling- plaster restored, and painted
- *Floors-sanded and stained

Master Bedroom

- *Walls & Ceiling-1970's wall paper removed, plaster restored, new period wall paper installed
- *Floor-floor which was painted was repainted

Child's Bedroom

- *Walls & Ceiling-wall paper removed, plaster restored, new period wall paper installed
- *Floor-original wood floor which was painted was repainted

Bathroom

- *Walls & Ceiling-plaster restored, painted
- *Plumbing & Fixtures-plumbing repaired, non historic toilet removed and replaced with replica historic toilet with pull chain and replica sink installed, historic tub refinished

Decorative Decor

- *19th Century style curtains, rugs & blinds were purchased and installed
- *Historic vent covers were purchased and installed
- *Historic museum proper and mannequins were purchased
- *Museum display cases were purchased

Project Impact:

The impact of the project is evident in several ways. The restoration of the Graham Historic House & Museum exemplifies the need **for public & private partnerships**. This project would not have been possible without the philanthropic spirit of Van Drunen Farms, the City of Momence's commitment to preservation, and the spirit of the volunteers. Nancy Liberty Porter volunteered hundreds of hours to this worthy project.

The Graham House will also prove to be a showcase and example to others of the importance of preserving Momence's Architectural Heritage. The Graham Historic House & Museum's Open House took place during Main Street Momence's 14th Annual Christmas Gathering in 2014. Over 200 visitors toured the home and enjoyed the displays. Those present were in awe of the home's make over.

The Graham Historic House & Museum is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was the 2014 recipient of Main Street Momence's Les Du Montelle Award for Excellence in Downtown Building Restoration, is featured in the Kankakee County Convention & Visitor's Guide as a destination, and is listed on the Kankakee County Museum's and the Historic House Museums of Illinois's websites. This recognition is invaluable to the preservation movement and recognizes Momence's commitment to its historic buildings.