

Fankhanel House Was Home To Area Pioneers

By: Michael Stein

Known as the Fankhanel House, the historic home at 419 4th Ave. NE dates back 113 years with its first owner, Syver O. Solum, has also benefited from beautiful restoration work by previous owners.

Resembling a neo-classic style in its roof detailing, other aspects of the house are more “craftsman” style, including the fine stonework on the porches. Because this type of detail was quite popular during the Works Progress Administration era of the 1930s, the stonework might very well have been a later replacement for wooden columns, which were more stylish in the early part of the century.

A Clay county resident since he was three, Syver Solum was considered one of the “old settlers” of the Barnesville section of the county. He was born on a pioneer farm in Fillmore County on June 1869, the son of Ole H. And Karie (Stadum) Solum, who came over from Norway and became Clay County pioneers in 1872. They came into the Red River Valley on a covered wagon pulled by a team of oxen. Clay County has just been effected as a legal civic unit that year.

Ole H. Solum established a homestead on a quarter section of land in Tansem Township and there established his home. At the time there were no other settlers between the Solum place and Glyndon.

Ole eked out a meager existence by working as a



The Fankhanel House, built in 1907, features stonework columns on the front porch.

freighter up to Fort Abercrombie. He built up his homestead as a good farmer and manager and began to see his way clear to the development of a fine piece of farm property. He prospered, added to his holdings until he owned 340 acres.

Ole and Karie were earnest church workers and among those who organized the First North Emmanuel Church.

Syver completed his courses in the local schools and entered Willmar Seminary, attending that institution for the better part of two terms, after which, in 1890, at age 21, he began working in a Barnesville lumber yard.

In 1892 he accepted a position as bookkeeper at Barnesville State Bank. Not long after that, the bank was rechartered as the First National Bank of Barnesville. In 1895 he was made assistant cashier. In 1910 was elevated to cashier and became one of the best-known bankers in this part of the state.

Syver was also a partner in the Norby-Solum Department

Store from 1905 until 1927. He served as Barnesville’s city treasurer and city clerk in the late 1890s. He also presided over the Barnesville School Board for more than 20 years, from 1921 to 1943.

Syver and his wife, Christine (Austin) were members of the Norwegian Lutheran Church and “took a proper part in church work as well as in the general social and cultural activities of their home community.”

A brother, Peter, lived to be an incredible 110 years old. Syver didn’t quite make it that long, passing away in 1954.

In 1945, Syver and Christine sold the house to Charlie and Augusta Fankhanel. Augusta, or “Gussie” as she was known.

The Fankhanel lived in Vergas until 1916 when they moved to a farm in Atherton Township. The couple moved to town in 1945 and lived out their retirement years.

Charlie, who was born in 1887 in Barnesville to Carl and Ernestine Fankhanel, was known as an avid hunter and fisherman. Gussie, who was born in 1894 near Detroit Lakes to German immigrants, gained a following in the community as a talented seamstress.

The couple was married in 1914. Charlie and Gussie had four children: Willmer, who died in World War II, Helen Louise, LeRoy, and Lucille Theresa.

Charlie died in 1966. Gussie lived another 21 years, passing away in late 1987 while in the Barnesville Care Center.

“Gussie’s House” has seen a number of owners since her death in 1987.



While the fireplace is likely not an original feature of the home, it complemented the classic styling of the interior.



Beautiful columns and built-ins graced the Fankhanel House sitting room.



The main- to second-floor staircase.

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