



MCHS BUILDING HISTORY

614 North Buchanan Street - Edwardsville, IL

By Cindy Reinhardt, 2026

The Walker Handlon House

In 1893, when Walker and Elizabeth Handlon retired from farming, they built a beautiful, large Victorian house at 614 Fairview Ave. in Edwardsville. In the 1930s, the address changed to 614 N. Buchanan St. Such a large home might seem unusual for retirees, but when the Handlons retired, four of their eight children were still living at home, their youngest only 13 years old. They kept their Pin Oak Township farm, renting it first to their oldest son, John Henry, and later to others.

A Handlon family photo, labeled “Handlon family home” and taken circa 1900, shows the house had a Victorian porch with elaborate filigree. Some time later, the Victorian porch was removed and an arched cover placed over the front doorway, just enough to shield one person from the rain as they unlocked the door. The arch was in place when Tom and Betty Maloney did their survey of historic homes in 1988. Today there is a small porch. This is still a beautiful home, but the Victorian details are gone from the exterior.

Walker Handlon, born in 1827, was the son of Madison County pioneers Mathias and Harriet Handlon. Walker’s father was born in Virginia and married Harriet Walker in Kentucky before coming to Madison County, Illinois, in 1820. As was often the custom at that time, Walker Handlon was given his mother’s maiden name. The Handlon farms, both father’s and son’s, were just north of Troy, Illinois, in Pin Oak Township.

In 1861, Walker married Elizabeth Baird, 15 years younger, who also grew up in Pin Oak Township. They were successful farmers, providing for a family of eight children in addition to an orphaned nephew who grew up in the Handlon



614 N. Buchanan Street as it appears today. (Reinhardt)

household. Walker was a longtime member of the Masonic Lodge in Troy and served 30 years on the school board for Maple Grove School where the Handlon children received their early education.

Elizabeth Baird Handlon, born in 1842, was the daughter of Irish immigrants. Her parents, John and Mary Ann Baird, came to America in 1836 with the first four of their 12 children in tow. In 1840, her father obtained his first 40 acres of land in Pin Oak Township. It should have been an exciting time for the family, but in 1840-41, the Bairds, who by then had six young children, lost four of them, likely to disease. Their daughter, Elizabeth, the future Mrs. Handlon and the seventh of the Baird children, was born in 1842.

Walker Handlon died in 1902, at the age of 74. When Elizabeth died twenty years later, her obituary noted that she and her father, John Baird, linked three centuries. “Mr. Baird was born in 1794 and lived until 1880. Mrs. Handlon was born in 1842 and lived until 1922.”

Her obituary went on to say, “Her charities were not always known, for they were quietly given, but she helped many a poor person in Edwardsville, not only with food, clothing, etc., but with kind and encouraging words that came from a big, warm, sympathetic heart. Her ears were never closed to the cry of distress.” Hers was a legacy of kindness.

By the time of her death in 1922, three of Elizabeth’s children had died, four had married and established their own households, and only one remained at the homeplace. Margaret, known as Maggie, never married. She continued to



Undated portraits of Walker and Elizabeth (Baird) Handlon.
(Courtesy of Michael Handlon)



This 1904 Handlon family portrait shows Elizabeth Handlon and six of her eight children. Her husband Walker died in 1902 and a son, John Henry, died in 1903; Notes on back of the picture identify from left, Amy Handlon Wood, Minnie Handlon Snyder, George Handlon, Margaret Handlon, and unknown ; Front row: Edwin Handlon and Elizabeth (Baird) Handlon. The unknown person is either Mollie or Fannie Handlon. (Courtesy of Michelle Corlew)

live in the big house at 614 N. Buchanan St. until 1945. She occasionally advertised sleeping rooms available, but she mostly lived alone. Then, at the age of 70, she sold the house to John and Wilma Schirmer.

Maggie moved just two blocks away to a rooming house at 422 N. Buchanan Street. It was owned by a widow, Eva Davis, who rented suites of rooms or single rooms (women preferred). For Maggie, this provided a much simpler lifestyle than maintaining a large house. Maggie died in 1955, outliving the last of her Handlon siblings by 11 years. She was survived by many nieces and nephews.

The Schirmers owned the house for about 20 years, and there followed a series of owners, including one who divided the house into apartments with an exterior staircase in the back leading to the second floor. The house was renovated a few years ago, removing the upstairs apartment.

The current owners of the house, Aaron and Emily Brakhane, haven't been there long. However, they have a special connection to the neighborhood. In 1955, Aaron's grandparents, Marvin and Shirley Brakhane, bought the new house directly behind the Handlon house. The Brakhane home was located on one of several lots originally purchased by Walker and Elizabeth Handlon.

When the Handlons moved to Edwardsville in 1893, they initially bought only their building lot. Over the next few years, they purchased additional lots in close proximity. This included empty lots on the east side of the 600 block of Fairview Avenue (now North Buchanan) and lots on the west side of the 600 block of North Fillmore Street, directly behind their home.

When Walker and Elizabeth's youngest son, George Allen Handlon, married Jessie Johnson in 1913, the couple moved to a new house at the corner of Orchard and Fairview Avenues,



Julia Ross and George A. Handlon circa 1900 at the "Handlon home," assumed to be 614 N. Buchanan Street since that was George's home at the time.. This photo shows that there was once a Victorian porch on the house, probably removed nearly a century ago. They were first cousins." Julia Baird Ross was the daughter of Elizabeth Baird Walker's brother, Henry Clay Baird. (Courtesy of Michael Handlon)

three doors down from his mother's house. The address of their Victorian home today is 600 N. Buchanan Street. George and Jessie were both community leaders in Edwardsville, whose elopement was headline news in the *Edwardsville Intelligencer*. George was an alderman and a leader in the Democratic party. He was General Manager of the Litchfield and Madison Railroad when he died in 1946.

Family lore says George and Jessie had a long courtship because she didn't want to give up her career. She was assistant principal at Edwardsville High School and taught English as well. During those times, teachers were automatically fired when they married. Although she had to leave her job, Jessie didn't lose interest in education when she married. In 1924, she was the first woman elected to the Edwardsville School Board.

George and Jessie's son, George Walker Handlon, built a house on another of the family lots, located at 611 N. Fillmore



Street. Generations of Handlons lived on the 600 blocks of North Buchanan and North Fillmore Streets.

Aaron Brakhane's father, Terry, has many memories of growing up in the neighborhood. He remembers "Granny Handlon" (Jessie, George A. Handlon's wife) who lived on the corner at 600 N. Buchanan St. when he was young. She lived to be 96 years old. He was friends with Granny Handlon's grandchildren, including Susan Handlon, who grew up at 611 N. Fillmore St. It was a community of neighbors where everyone knew each other, and many, like the Handlons, lived near relatives.

Family homes offer glimpses of the past and bring memories to light that we haven't thought of in many years. Aaron and Emily Brakhane are now making new memories on the block Aaron's grandparents moved to more than 70 years ago. It is in the same neighborhood, in the same house, where the Handlon family put down roots at Christmas time 132 years ago.



At left is a daughter of Walker and Elizabeth Handlon, Margaret Alberta Handlon, who was born in 1875. Known as Maggie, she never married, and so far as is recorded in census and city directories, she was never employed outside the home. She lived at 814 N. Buchanan Street from 1893-1945. (Courtesy of Michelle Corlew)