



MCHS BUILDING HISTORY

312 South Fillmore Street - Edwardsville, IL

By Cindy Reinhardt, 2026

The Schwarz Home

The charming Victorian house at 312 S. Fillmore St. was built for George C. Schwarz and his bride, Ella Fisher Schwarz in 1895. They married in January, and a contract was signed with local builder Joel Waters to begin construction in July.

The house is located on a large triangle of lots bordered roughly by Schwarz Street on the north, Fillmore Street on the west, with the railroad tracks completing the triangle. More than a century ago, except for the Sehnert Hotel on the south end of that block of Fillmore Street, members of the Schwarz family owned nearly all of the houses on the 300 block of Fillmore and the 400 block of Schwarz Street.

The Schwarz family has a fascinating history in Edwardsville. George Schwarz's grandparents, Adam and Catherina Klaus Schwarz, came to America from Prussia in 1844 with five children. Two more were born after they arrived. Their seven children, and roughly 25 grandchildren, married into dozens of different Madison County families. Most of them remained in Madison County.

Although Adam purchased his first farmland in 1846, farming was not his only vocation. He was also an extraordinary musician and composer, a talent he passed down to his children and grandchildren.

Adam and Catherina's son Christian, George's father, became a local band leader, the founder of the Enterprise Band which became the Edwardsville Municipal Band we know today. Their son William was also a band director as was their son Charles who turned his nine daughters into the Schwarz Sisters Orchestra. Many families played music for entertainment in their homes in those days, but the Schwarz family musicians played professionally and were in demand for performances in surrounding communities. Despite this, most had a separate career to earn a living, and George was no different. After graduating from the Missouri Dental School in St. Louis, he opened a dental practice in Edwardsville in 1890.

George's wife, Ella, grew up in Marine, Illinois, where her father, Peter Fisher, was a physician. He moved his family to Edwardsville in 1890 so he could have a larger pool of patients and his children would have the advantages of "city schools." Dr. Fisher established his home and offices on the corner of East Park and South Buchanan Streets, across from Edwardsville City Park. His advertisements promoted him as a "Surgeon and Oculist." An oculist specialized in the care of eyes.

George Schwarz was a man of curiosities. Although he was a dentist, he attended medical lectures. He tried his hand at flying hot air balloons and tried to establish an "aero club" in Edwardsville. He published a brochure entitled, "Hypnotism



This is a recent photograph of 312 S. Fillmore. (Reinhardt)



At left is a picture taken by Tom Maloney in April 1978 as part of Betty Maloney's house survey. The beautiful Victorian architectural accents are gone, but the house still catches the eye as drivers pass by on Fillmore Street.

and Suggestive Therapeutics." With Ella, he often travelled around the country, making what were considered long automobile trips for that time. He made many property investments and had an interest in finance, serving on the board of numerous banks.

George and Ella had two sons, Harvey and Verdi. Harvey became one of the designers of the Decca- Navigator radio-navigation system which successfully guided minesweepers and landing craft during WWII's D-Day invasion. George never knew of his son's celebrity as he died in 1926, but Ella later moved to England where she lived with her son until her death in 1952.

By then, George and Ella were long gone from their cottage on South Fillmore Street. In 1915, there was a game of

musical chairs with houses in the Schwarz family. Ella's father died, so George and Ella moved to her parents' house, and her mother moved to a cottage at 316 S. Fillmore St., next door to 312 S. Fillmore St. which George sold to his brother Elmer.

Elmer Schwarz, born in 1877, was 14 years younger than George, but they had much in common. Both, of course, were musicians, and Elmer also became a dentist, graduating 10 years after George. When Elmer graduated from dental school in 1900, the brothers opened Schwarz and Schwarz, a dental practice on North Main Street.

In 1903, Elmer married Edna Donoho of Troy, Illinois, and following their honeymoon they made their home at 408 South Fillmore, next door to his brother. Elmer and

Edna would have one daughter, Dorothy, who was born in 1905.

Elmer was by all accounts a good dentist, but also a mechanical and musical genius. He had one of the first, if not the first, automobile in Edwardsville and was his own mechanic. When the Intelligencer set up a telegram to connect to Carpenter for news, they asked Elmer to do the electrical wiring because he was "a local electrical genius."

In 1908, while still living at 308 S. Fillmore, Elmer had his workshop rigged with an electrical alarm that set off a loud gong when tripped. It prevented the loss of tools and equipment on at least one occasion. Even before his marriage, when still living with his parents at 412 E. Schwarz St., Elmer had wired the house and strung electric lights across the back yard to make a pretty setting for outdoor entertainments. This was long before most houses had electricity.

Elmer's musical talents were equally impressive. He was a composer and band leader, who played multiple instruments including the cello and the clarinet. He also occasionally performed as a vocalist. He was much in demand. Although he grew up in the house on Schwarz Street, the family had a farm on Schwarz Road, both thoroughfares named for the family.



Three generations of women, sometimes sharing the same household, include from left standing, Dorothy "Dot" Schwarz Blackmore and her mother Edna Donoho Schwarz. Seated is Edna's mother, Nancy Willoughby Donoho.

(All Schwarz family photographs courtesy of Nancy Hoffman)



The Schwarz Orchestra circa 1895: From left, Henry Wolf, Chris Schwarz, Henry Trares Sr., Charles Schwarz, William Schwarz, Henry Trares, Jr., Casper Vorwald, Elmer Schwarz, Edward Overbeck, George Schwarz. (MCHS)

The Schwarz farm had a one-acre pond that was often the setting for picnics and concerts.

Elmer, like his brother George, died at a young age. George was 61 and Elmer only 53 when he died in 1930. Elmer's daughter Dorothy married Joseph Blackmore in 1934 and continued to live in the house on South Fillmore Street. In 1945, with five children in the household, they purchased a larger house in the country. It took two years to modernize and remodel, and then the Blackmores left the house on South Fillmore Street. A few years later, Edna joined them in the country, and the Fillmore Street house became a rental property. The Schwarz/Blackmore family leased the Fillmore Street house until it was sold to Lyndell and Lois Schutz in 1979. It remains a rental property today.

As for the Schwarz family's musical legacy, Elmer Schwarz's granddaughter, Nancy Hoffman, has been playing in the Edwardsville Municipal Band for 65 years. She's one of many Schwarz descendants in the band. Those musicians include Nancy's granddaughter, Anna Weigand, who is a member of the band founded by her great-great-great-grandfather, Christian Schwarz. That's tradition.

Note: Many older residents may remember the Christian Schwarz home where George and Elmer's parents lived at 412 E. Schwarz St. I remember Christmas caroling there in the 1970s after it was converted into a rehabilitation center called House of Hope. It was a beautiful house but sadly was torn down some time ago.



Elmer Schwarz in his motorized boat out at Schwarz farm. The motorized boat was his invention.