



MCHS BUILDING HISTORY

814 St. Louis Street - Edwardsville, IL

By Cindy Reinhardt, 2016

The Keshner House

The beautiful Georgian Revival brick home at 814 St. Louis St. was built in 1924-25 for the Joseph and Edith Keshner family. It was designed by one of Edwardsville's best and most creative architects, Michael B. Kane, and the general contractor was John Schwager.

This wasn't the first house built on this lot. A previous house was given a house number of 812. It was a beautiful Victorian mansion built for John S. Trares in 1891. That house was razed when it was only 27 years old. The Shaffer family, who owned the house at the time, had it torn down and used the salvage to build two new bungalows, also designed by Michael B. Kane, on Rose Avenue. That left an empty lot on St. Louis Street that was purchased by Joseph Keshner in July 1924.

Prior to building this house, the Keshner family built a house at 216 East Park St. in 1909. Located across the street from City Park, it was a stately home with beautiful woodwork and stained glass. Before being torn down when the Madison Mutual building was constructed, many area residents may remember it as home to The Framery.

Construction of the Keshner house was delayed, so when new owners arrived at the East Park Street house, the Keshner family temporarily moved to the recently vacated William Barnsback house at 810 St. Louis St., next door to their new house.

A week before Christmas 1925, the Keshner family moved into their new home. The *Edwardsville Intelligencer* provided a description: "It is surrounded by spacious lawns which set off the beauty of the architecture to advantage, and in the rear of the residence is a pergola which adds greatly to the beauty of the place. The house contains ten rooms, and the interior

work is beautiful in its design. As a whole, the place is one of the most attractive dwelling places in the city."

Having built two very impressive homes in less than 20 years, it's clear that the Keshners were financially advantaged. Joseph Keshner was born in Carlyle, Illinois, in 1873. At age 13 he was apprenticed to a banking



This 1954 photo was taken when the William and Dolores Rohrkaste family lived in the house at 814 St. Louis Street. Local photographer Albert Strebler was hired to create a portfolio of photographs featuring Dolores Rohrkaste, 30, the newly elected president of the Chamber of Commerce. Notice that the garage doors on the left have not yet been converted to windows. (Dolores Rohrkaste)



The original house on this lot was built for John S. Trares in 1891. It was razed in 1918. (MCHS)



This picture of the Schwarz Sisters Orchestra was taken in 1899, three years before Edith married Joseph Keshner. All of the girls were the daughters of Charles and Frances Schwarz of Edwardsville. Pictured from left are Jessie (trombone), Etta (coronet), Minnie (clarinet), Catherine (drum), Ruth (bass drum), Edith and Estella (violin), and Irene (bass violin). Jessie's husband, musician William Thomas, was the director. Another Schwarz sister, Mary, who played violin, is not pictured. The Schwarz family had one son, Paul, but he did not play an instrument. (MCHS)

firm in Carlyle and 11 years later moved to Edwardsville where he was hired as an assistant cashier at the First National Bank. He moved rapidly up the ranks, then went into the life insurance and investment business where he was again successful.

In November 1902, he married Edith Schwarz, a native of Edwardsville. Edith was one of nine daughters of Charles and Frances Schwarz who made up the Schwarz Sisters Orchestra. She played violin in the orchestra that booked concert dates all over the St. Louis region and sometimes beyond.

Joseph and Edith's home was the site of many social events. When they moved into their new St. Louis Street house in 1925, four of their five children were still at home. Their oldest daughter, Mary, moved to Wood River after her marriage to Alvin Stolze in 1922. The Keshners only stayed on St. Louis Street for five years before moving to St. Louis. Joseph Keshner died within a year.

The house was then purchased by the Michael Wise family who stayed about a decade before selling it to Mary Keshner Stolze's brother-in-law, John Stolze, Jr. John Stolze was the third Stolze brother on St. Louis Street, the others being Edward Stolze at 900, and Albert Stolze at 1029. The Stolze brothers all worked in the lumber business founded by their father. Another family connection to St. Louis Street was Lester Baird who married Helen Keshner. Lester grew up at 821 St. Louis St.

In 1957, John Stolze sold the house to William and Dolores Rohrkaste. Many in Edwardsville remember them as the owners of Rohrkaste Dairy, a business they built in 1947 at 1003 N. Main St. That building is now home to the Main Street Community Center.

Dolores was a woman who was very good at breaking the glass ceiling. She worked as a draftsman at Kane Architecture during WW II when there was a shortage of men. In May 1953, at the age of 30, she became the first woman president of the Edwardsville Chamber of Commerce. During her tenure the



*Joe De Laurenti hands the Chamber of Commerce president's gavel to Dolores Rohrkaste in 1954.
(Dolores Rohrkaste)*



View of the house at 814 St. Louis Street in the 1990s after the garage on the east side of the house had been converted to a family room. (Dolores Rohrkaste)

Chamber led the charge to bring SIUE to Edwardsville, and she was one of the people wielding spades at the groundbreaking of the SIUE campus. She was also one of the organizers of the Edwardsville League of Women Voters when it was founded in 1954. In 1966, she was appointed to the Governor's Commission on the Status of Women. She co-founded a Clayton, Missouri, real estate appraisal business, becoming president in 1999. So many firsts for women in this area, cracks in the glass ceiling, many of them while she was living in this house.

The Rohrkaste family lived at 814 St. Louis St. until 1975. Since then, there have been numerous owners who all have been good caretakers. The only notable change to the house is that it no longer has an attached garage. Originally, the ground floor windows on the front left side of the house were garage doors. In about 1980, an owner had it enclosed and matched to the right side of the house to create a family room. It is also likely that the garage was no longer suitable for modern vehicles that are much larger than 1925 automobiles. A new garage was built behind the house with complimentary architectural style.

In 1925, this house was called "one of the most attractive dwelling places in the city." It's nice to know that, at least in this instance, the old saying, "some things never change," is completely appropriate.