

Register of Old Buildings
Macon County Historical Coordinating Council

Address: 334 W. Macon St. (South Western Addition)
334-1/2 W. Macon St. E 71' Lot 8 and W12' Lot 9
"The old Crea house" Block 1)

Date of original construction: 1880 - Estimated date of construction
Macon County Assessor's Office.
1871 - Decatur City Directory 1871-72.
(Lists Hugh Crea at this address)

Name of original owner: Hugh Crea, Attorney.
Mr. David Stouffer, builder.

History:

1. The following is an incomplete chain of titles to the land on which the house stands. Reference: Office of Recorder of Deeds of Macon County.

1857 - Deed April 9, 1857.
Orlando Powers to Joseph Mills (All of Lots 8 & 9)
1865 - Deed December 1, 1865.
Joseph Mills to Juliet M. Gardiner (Lot 8)
1871 - Deed July 14, 1871.
Juliet M. Gardiner to Hugh Crea and wife.
1923 - Q.C. deed July 9, 1923.
Jeannette Crea, widow, to Mary Lillian Crea.
(Full legal description included as at the top of this sheet).
1923 - Deed July 9, 1923.
Mary Lillian Crea to Montford E. and Lucille Peniwell.
1950 - Deed November 2, 1950.
Lucille Peniwell, widow, to Harold L. Eyer and Mildred V. Eyer as J.T.

2. Decatur City Directories show the following residents of 334 W. Macon Street:

Hugh and Celia Crea - 1871, 1877, 1884.
Hugh and M. Lillian Crea - 1907, 1915, 1918. (Directories checked at random)
Miss M. Lillian Crea - 1919, 1920, 1923.

3. The following is a digest of several news items in the Herald-Review files: Hugh Crea was born in 1835 in Gananoqui, Canada, in the heart of the Thousand Island district. He came to Decatur in 1863, just after being admitted to law practice. He practiced alone in Decatur until 1872, when he joined C. A. Ewing to form the firm of Crea & Ewing. Mr. Ewing died in 1896. The firm became Housum & Crea in 1913.

Present owner's name: Harold & Mildred Eyer
465 S. Edward - 429-6153.
Office, 250 N. Water - 428-2188.

3, Continued.

In 1867 James Millikin and Jerome R. Gorin doing business as J. Millikin and Co., bankers, retained Hugh Crea as counsel. He was also a railroad and power company attorney.

Orlando Powers was Hugh Crea's first and lasting good friend in Decatur.

Though prominent in politics (a Republican), he never held office.

In a 50-year-as-attorney news article in 1913, reporting on a meeting of Decatur attorneys to honor him, he was described as "the greatest lawyer in this district, if not in Illinois".....He died January 31, 1918.

4. "Among other distinguished lawyers, who practiced in Decatur, were C. C. McComas, state's attorney; Hugh Crea, known particularly for his attention to railroad law....."

From the Centennial History of
Macon County, p. 109,

By Mabel Richmond, 1930

5. Mr. Crea had two children, Miss Mary Lillian Crea, a teacher of foreign languages in the Decatur High School for many years, a wide traveller and an active member of the Decatur Art Class, begun by Mrs. James Millikin, and one son, Harry Hugh Crea, wife, Jeannette.

6. The Assessor's office estimates (and they stress estimates) that the house was built in 1880. The description of the house as given on the card for 334 W. Macon in the Assessor's office is as follows:

Roof - Gable.
Medium pitch.

Originally it was a one-family dwelling. Presently - 2 stories.

Exterior - Face brick.
Veneer brick.

4 apartments.
12 rooms.
Steam heat.

Floors - Some hardwood.
Some softwood.

Doors - Softwood.

7. "Mont E. Peniwell has purchased the old Crea homestead at 334 W. Macon from Miss Lillian Crea for close to \$10,000."

50 Years Ago Today -

Newspaper files

July 16, 1973

334 W. Macon St.



Picture, courtesy of H. Lynn Bohon
Taken in 1972

Pay Fine Tribute to Memory of Hugh Crea

Attorneys from Macon and Adjoining Counties Gather for
Memorial Service in Circuit Court Room and Recall a
Wonderful Personality.

Members of the Decatur bar and others from adjoining counties gathered in the circuit court room Monday afternoon and paid tribute to the memory of the man all present had recognized not only as the greatest lawyer of Macon county or the sixth judicial district, but as one of the greatest lawyers of the central West in his time—Hugh Crea.

Atty. Hugh Housum, who for 15 years had been closely associated with Mr. Crea, read a biographical sketch with some reference to his personal characteristics as a lawyer and in closing made a motion that the resolutions adopted by the bar and a stenographic report of this meeting be spread upon the records of the circuit court and the supreme court, and that motion was approved. Judge W. K. Whitfield presided and following the paper by Atty. Housum, John R. Fitzgerald was called upon and read a splendid tribute to the worth of Atty. Hugh Crea, in closing which he said:

A Good Companion.

More important than these was his delightful but unique personality. His strong common sense combined with tact, urbanity of temper, and a rich wit and humor which made him a good companion and preserved friendships even in the midst of heated lawsuits. No lawyer could dishearten Hugh Crea. When asked for a favor or a professional courtesy, such was the characteristic of his temperament, and disposition that he granted it in a manner as if he were the one obliged. If unable to grant a request, which was rare, he explained truthfully and frankly why he could not. He was uniformly respectful to the courts, and fully conscious of the rights of others. As we pay these last tributes of honor and respect to his memory, let us emulate and imitate these, his splendid qualities. For the deceased, the morning and noonday sun is passed and is set—the shadows are cast in the Western sky.

"No higher encomium could be paid to any lawyer than to say: 'He was honest, he was able, he was courteous, he was fair.' These things we can truthfully say of the illustrious dead. Throughout our professional life we shall ever revere his name and respect his memory."

Met Equal.

Mr. Fitzgerald referred to the fact that during the many years of his active practice Mr. Crea had met as equal such men as Robert G. Ingersoll then of Teoria; Daniel W. Voorhees of Indiana; Anthony Thornton of Shelbyville; Horace Clark of Mattoon; John R. Eden of Sullivan; and Richard Lemon of Canton, and commented upon the fact that Mr. Crea had nullified all of those celebrated contemporaries.

Hugh Crea Busy Lawyer

Had Cases From All Over
the State.

1917-18

A FINE PERSONALITY

Judge Davidson Writes His Impressions.

(Fourteenth in series of articles on
early members of the Decatur bar.)

Thirty or forty years ago one of
the leading law firms in Decatur was
Crea & Ewing—Hugh Crea and
Charles A. Ewing. The partnership
continued till the death of Mr. Ewing
in 1898. Mr. Crea continued the
practice for many years after the
death of his partner. Never were two
partners of more widely different
personalities. They were not in agree-
ment in politics or religion, but nei-
ther was a bone of contention in
their association as lawyers. They
were both scholarly, polished, courtly
gentlemen and able lawyers. I. D.
Walker, who had previously prac-
ticed law in Decatur for a number of
years, was taken into the firm, but
he died soon after.

DAVIDSON'S ARTICLE.

Judge Davidson writes chiefly of
Hugh Crea in this chapter of his me-
moirs:

HUGH CREAs.

Many living persons know some-
thing of the character of the person
of this sketch. I have no data of his
age or place of his birth, but an un-
der the impression he was a Cana-
dian, but of this I may be wrong. I
can well remember him when he be-
gan the practice of law in Decatur.
Like most all young lawyers he had
to accept cases that had little pay
in them in order to demonstrate his
ability to take care of a client, so to
see him wending his way to some
justice shop to try a case was a
usual sight.

He had a fine personality. Tall,
straight as an arrow, wore a long red
beard, nose slightly Roman, and with
a steel gray, piercing eye, he was a
man whom the passers-by would turn
to look at after he had passed. After
being in law for a time, he asso-
ciated with himself Charles A. Ew-

ing and the firm name was Crea and
Ewing.

IN IMPORTANT CASES.

This firm enjoyed a large and ex-
tended practice, and was engaged in
some of the most important cases
ever tried by a court or jury in Ma-
con county. Mr. Crea appeared for
the city in the celebrated Fisher vs.
Decatur case spoken of in other ar-
ticles of this series of recollections of
the early bar. He assisted M. B.
Thompson in the trial of Forest and
Walton, charged with the murder of
the man at the door of the Garver
church, which case was defended by
Brower Bunn and Hon. John R. Eden.
He appeared for the defendant in
the Gordon case in which Mrs. Ethel
Gordon sought to have a separate
maintenance from her spouse. He
defended Clayborn Jones in the cele-
brated Buffalo-Bull case brought by
Eli Ulery.

GOT WITNESS IN TANGLE.

The Fisher-Decatur case was one
long to be remembered because of the
character of the evidence and wit-
nesses in the case. It seems to me
the trial the writer heard was the
second jury trial of the case. Miss
Fisher was a young lady who fell and
injured herself because of a defec-
tive sidewalk in Decatur. Mr. Bunn,
bound to win his case, spared neither
time nor expense in preparing his
case for trial. He had a noted sur-
geon of St. Louis make an examina-
tion of Miss Fisher to determine the
extent of her injury. It was claimed
that the accident had caused Prolap-
sus Uteri. The St. Louis doctor as-
sumed a very important air, as he
gave in his direct testimony, and was
finally passed over to Attorney Crea
for cross-examination. People who
heard this cross-examination will
never forget, perhaps, the tangle that
Mr. Crea got him into. He sweat
great drops that ran off his chin, as
Mr. Crea charged on his medical
knowledge and skill as an expert wit-
ness.

KNOWN OVER STATE.

As long as he lived he was a busy
lawyer, and had cases all over the
state. He was personally known to
all the lawyers in the Sixth Judicial
circuit of Illinois, in which he lived
and practiced most. In politics he
was a Republican, but I don't think
he ever asked his party to elect him
to an office. He died a few years
ago, and the bar held a memorial
service in his honor. Most all the
present members of the Macon coun-
ty bar were acquainted with him,
and know of his activities in practice
in later years. He was a man loved
by his friends and feared by his ad-
versaries in a legal contest.