

Register of Old Buildings  
Macon County Historical Coordinating Council

Address: 746 W. Harrison.

Date of original construction: 1839. (In an "About Town" article by L. C. Trow, Decatur Review, the date is given as 1844. See explanation of the discrepancy (date as given by Edith McNabb)

Name of the original owner: \*Levi Gulick.  
\*Home of John Sawyer for over 40 years.

History: "It was built in 1839", Dr. McNabb said, "and is the oldest house in Decatur still used for the purpose for which it was built - a home.

"It was built as a wedding gift to Mrs. Levi Gulick when she was a bride of 16. The architects who designed it came up the Lincoln Trail from Kentucky and Virginia and brought the influence of those states with them. They patterned the house after those in Virginia and brought the influence of those states with them..... The style is a modified Virginia farm home of two stories with eight windows in front and columns across the front of the porch. There are very few homes of this style in Illinois.

"Mrs. Gulick lived in the house for fourteen or fifteen years", Dr. McNabb said, "until her husband died of cholera. A few years after her husband's death, she married John Sawyer, who had come to Decatur in the 1830's with a bride from Indiana. She had died earlier and after he and Mrs. Gulick were married, the house became known as the Sawyer house.

"After John Sawyer's death in the 1890's the next tenants modernized the house by removing the paned windows and modifying the stairway.

"Dr. McNabb removed shelves and used the wood to build bookcases for the library, and he is understandably proud of his handiwork."

"Enjoy Retirement, L. C. McNabb's  
Take Pleasure, Pride in Home"  
Sunday, June 3, 1962, Decatur  
Herald & Review

"In 1853 she (Mrs. Gulick) married a second time to John Sawyer.... A crooked road that ran from Water St. to Oakland Ave. was known for many years as Sawyer's Lane. Then the lane was straightened and improved during President Harrison's administration and the name was changed to Harrison Avenue.

"The house was originally heated by fireplaces. Two large chimneys were built flush with the outside walls. One chimney on the east side had two fireplaces, one on the first and one on the second floor. The one on the west had a fireplace on the first floor and one in the basement. The one in the basement was used to heat water and furnish comfort for the regular Saturday night baths.

(Continued on reverse side)

Present owner's name: Mrs. L. C. (Edith) McNabb.

\*From the Centennial History of Macon County.

"The floors in the house are made of oak and ash lumber, not all are of equal width. The story has come down with many others.....that the carpenter in making grooves attached a horse to his plane and cut them out by horse power.

"As things became more modern a wooden pump was installed on the back porch to furnish water from a larger cistern. Off to the north was a commodious smoke house in which hams and bacon sides were smoked with corn cobs or hickory wood to the taste of the owner. There is not a window or opening of any kind on the east side of the house."

L. C. Trow, "About Town"

"In the 1890's the house was purchased by the Wallace family. Mr. Wallace was interested in race horses and built a race track in the area. He "modernized" the house by substituting a "picture window" for one of the paned ones in the front and built an elaborate oak stairway.

"The house was later sold to Walter and Bernice Smith from whom it was purchased in 1943 by LeRoy and Edith McNabb, members of the faculty at Millikin University. In the restoration of the house the McNabbs attempted to retain the flavor of the original design while at the same time modernizing it. The three fireplaces on the first and second floors were made functional. In the east bedroom on both sides of the chimney were floor-to ceiling closets made of inch-thick walnut. These were removed and the lumber used for bookcases in the library. The paned windows were restored. The ornate oak was removed from the stairway.

"The house has two parts: the front is two-storied and of solid brick construction; the rear has one story and is made of wood. According to Frank Sawyer, grandson of John Sawyer, the rear section was built prior to the front section and in 1839. (This may account for some of the discrepancy in dates.)

"One beam extends through the center of the house for the entire length."

The above was written and submitted by Edith McNabb (Mrs. L. C.) December 27, 1973.

(Mrs. McNabb was in her thirtieth year of living at 746 W. Harrison at the time. (1943-1973))

Owners of the home at 746 W. Harrison:

Levi Gulick	-	1839.
John Sawyer	-	1853.
The Wallace Family	-	1890's.
Dr. & Mrs. L. C. McNabb	-	1943.

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746 West Harrison Avenue



Photos by Margaret Meyer  
1974

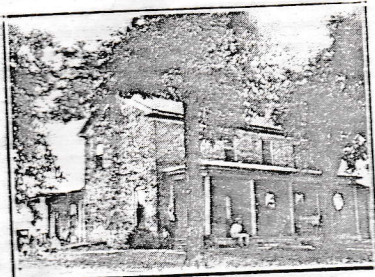
746 West Harrison



TOWNSHIP HISTORIES

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When Macon county was divided into townships in 1860, Henry B. Durfee was named as the first supervisor from Decatur township. He also was chosen as chairman of the Board. Decatur township at first had one supervisor and one assistant supervisor. As the population increased, the number of assistant supervisors increased until now the township has eighteen assistant representatives on the board.



JOHN SAWYER HOME

Decatur township has an area of 18,560 acres, or 29 square miles.

One of the old homes of the township, now in the city, is the John Sawyer home on West Harrison avenue. This house, which is still standing, was built about 1848 by Levi Gulick. Aiterwards it came into possession of Mr. Sawyer, and it was his home for forty years.

*Richmond, Mabel C., Centennial History of Decatur and Macon County, 1930*

# L. C. McNabbs Take Pleasure, Pride in Historic House

By Charlotte Huser  
Of the Herald and Review

Mr. and Mrs. L. C. McNabb, 746 W. Harrison Ave., have proved that the two nightmares of retirement, isolation and idleness, need not become reality. They are just as active now as they were before their retirement from teaching at Millikin University.

Dr. McNabb, before his retirement in 1952, was head of MU's speech department and was a dramatics professor. He also directed the Town and Gown productions.

Mrs. McNabb was a professor of speech at MU, later working with university's radio and television productions. She is teaching on a post-retirement contract now and produces all Millikin programming on commercial television stations besides teaching academic courses in radio and television.

The McNabbs are also a family of distinctions. Besides owning one of the oldest homes in Decatur, they are the only family in town to have two emeriti degrees. Both were made professors emeritus after their retirement.

Mrs. McNabb is something of a pioneer in college telecourses. She produced the first telecourse for college credit in the state on WTVP in 1955 and one year later began the Millikin University Telecourse which is shown on WCIA 52 weeks a year.

## Telecourse Has Distinction

"Our telecourse has the distinction of the longest consecutive period of broadcasting in the United States," she said proudly. "We broadcast every week, 52 weeks a year. The runner-up is a telecourse from western Missouri, but they broadcast only a few times a year."

Although Dr. McNabb no longer teaches, his avocation is steady employment.

"I work at the Lincoln Theater from noon to 5:30 every day," he said. "I take a few days off now and then for a little vacation, but I haven't missed a day because of illness in several years."

For exercise, he does lawn work around their home and last year undertook the job of painting the outside of the house.

One of his main interests is baseball with the Cleveland Indians as his favorite professional team. His record of being present for work at the Lincoln comes as no surprise to his students and friends, since he also set an attendance record while he was at Millikin.

## House Built in 1839

The house which the McNabbs own is outstanding on its own. "It was built in 1839," Dr. McNabb said, "and is the oldest house in Decatur still used for the purpose for which it was built -- a home."

It was built as a wedding gift to Mrs. Levi Gulick when she was a bride of 16. The architects who designed it came up the Lincoln Trail from Kentucky and Virginia and brought the influence of those states with them. They patterned the house after those in Virginia so that the style is a modified Virginia farm home of two stories with several windows in front and columns across the front of the porch. There are very few homes of this style in Illinois.

"Mrs. Gulick lived in the house for 14 or 15 years," Dr. McNabb said, "until her husband died of cholera. A few years after her husband's death, she married John Sawyer, who had come to Decatur in the 1830's with a bride from Indiana. She had died earlier and after he and Mrs. Gulick were married, the house became known as the Sawyer place."

After John Sawyer's death in the 1890's, the next tenants modernized the house by removing the paned windows and modifying the stairway.

When the McNabbs bought the house in 1938, they restored it to its original style as much as possible by reinstating the paned windows and painting the house. They divided the large kitchen which occupied the back of the house into several small rooms.

"When we moved in," Dr. McNabb said, "I discovered that the upstairs closets were shelved in solid walnut, about an inch and a half thick and 18 inches wide. I removed the shelves and used the wood to build bookcases for the library." He is understandably proud of his handiwork.

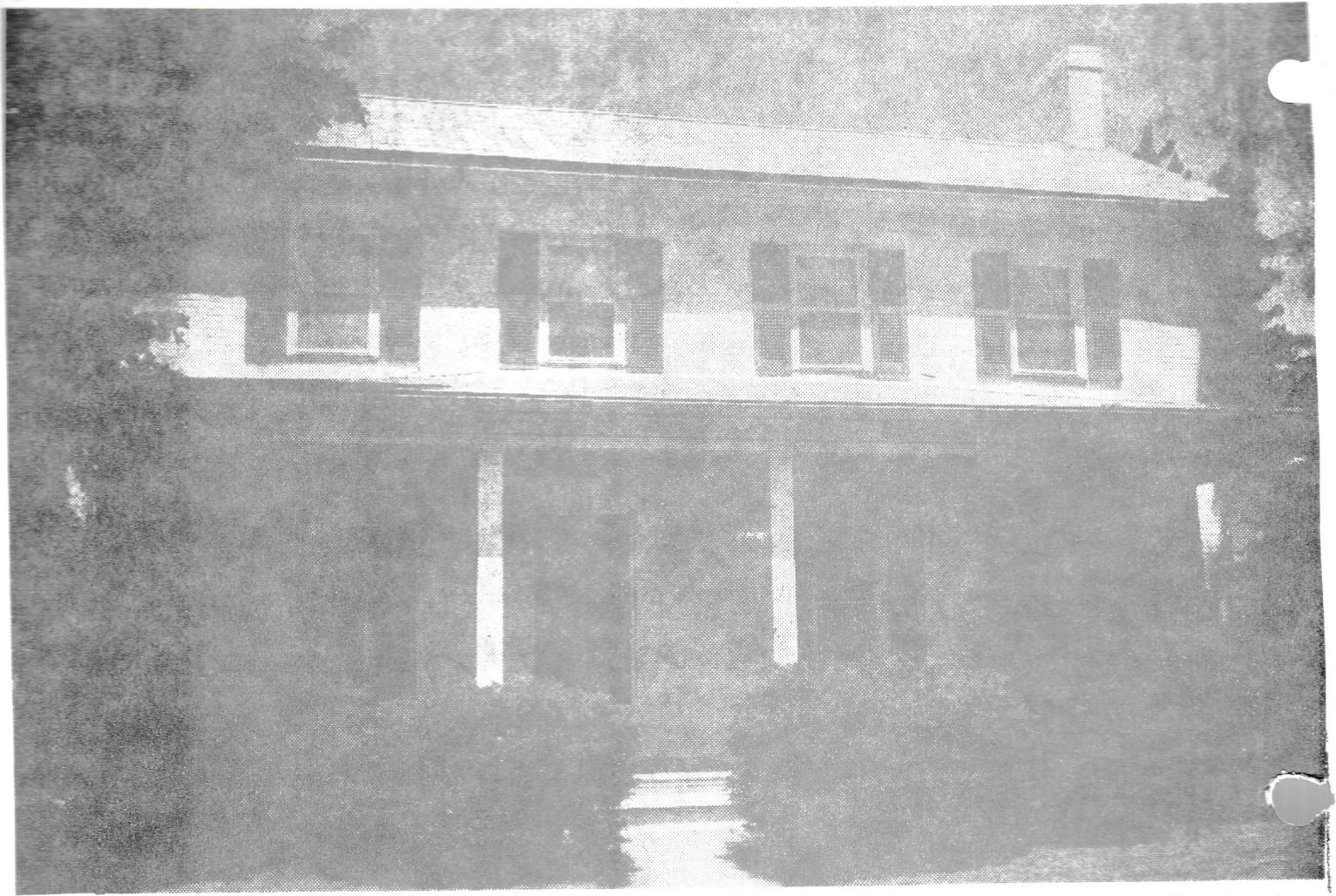
"We have no extensive plans for the future," Mrs. McNabb said, "as far as traveling or anything along that line is concerned. We've never been to Europe and don't plan to go."

"We feel we have enough here in our home and in Decatur to keep us busy. We both enjoy good health and we're satisfied and happy with our activities at home."

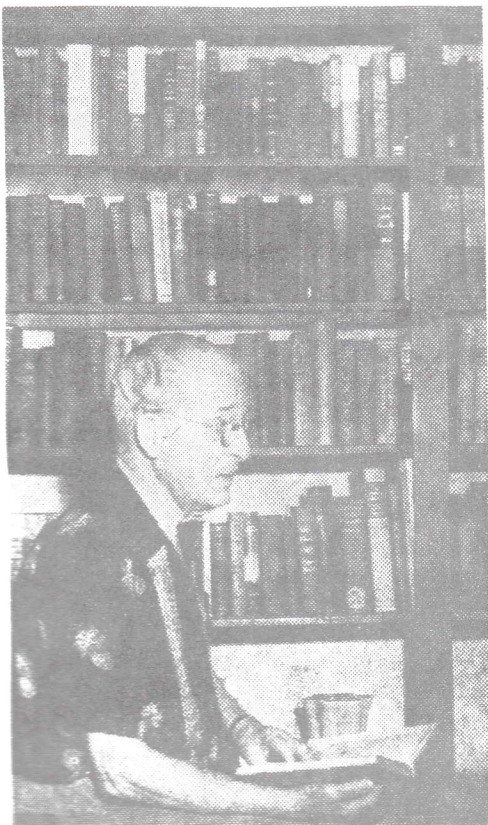
"I never missed an inning of a home baseball game of the Millikin team while I was teaching," he said. "I guess I set some sort of record, so they tell me."

Another of the McNabb's interests is their cat family. "Our cats both have definite personalities," Mrs. McNabb laughed. "Calico, the mother, is the fiery-tempered one, but her daughter, Junior Miss, is a gentle-natured cat. They both have one trait in common. They're obsessively afraid of strangers."

*Decatur Sunday Herald and Review*  
June 3, 1962



Modified Virginia architecture gives McNabb house quiet dignity and a touch of Southern beauty. It is oldest house in Decatur still used as a home.



Left, Mr. McNabb displays bookshelves he built from solid walnut, and, right, McNabb spends a quiet moment.