

Register of Old Buildings
Macon County Historical Coordinating Council

1, 5' 1/2" x 19' 1/2"

Address: 591 W. William
Legal description:
William Place Second Addition
Lot 4 and W 15' of Lot 3

Date of original construction: 1913

Name of original owner: W. E. Surface

History:

1. An incomplete chain of title follows. (Source-office of Macon County recorder of deeds)
Nov. 24, 1961- Elizabeth Surface inventory.
April 10, 1972- Blanch E. Zeiss inventory.
May 19, 1972- 1st National Bank of Decatur as Executors under L/W/T of Blanche Zeiss, deceased to Rodger K. Snelson and Mary Louise Snelson.

2. Data from available city directories:
C.D. - 1914-1962 W. E. Surface and/or Elizabeth Surface.
1963-1972- Reuben C. Zeiss.
1973- Rodger K. Snelson.

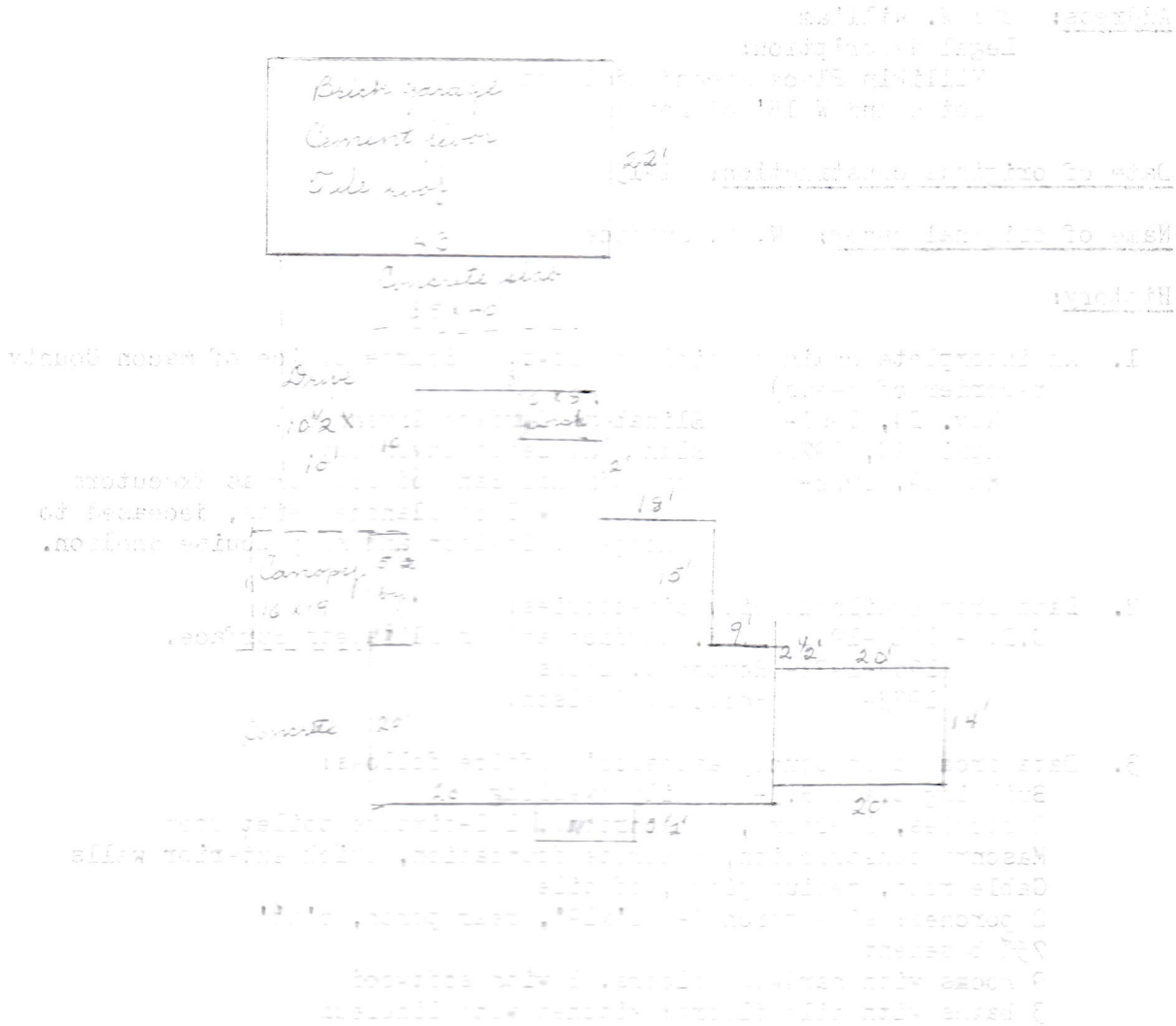
3. Data from Macon County assessor's office follows:
Building class B. - family dwelling
2 stories, 10-rooms, 2 bathrooms, 1 2-fixture toilet room
Masonry construction, concrete foundation, brick exterior walls
Gable roof, medium pitch, of tile
2 porches: side porch 5-1/2'x19', rear porch, 6'x8'
75% basement
9 rooms with hardwood floors, 1 with softwood
3 baths with tile floors; kitchen with linoleum
Brick garage with tile roof, 22'x43'; cement drive, 102'

(See sketch on next page)

Present owner: Mary Louise Snelson.

History Cont'd.:

3. Sketch:



4. On Saturday, March 15, 1975, Roy O. Schilling talked with Mr. Reuben Zeiss at the Decatur Holiday Inn, gleaning the following information:

a. Mr. Zeiss, the son-in-law of W. E. Surface, the original owner of the house, said:

- (1) The architects were Aschauer and Waggoner. Knight was the contractor.
- (2) The house was finished in 1914.
11 rooms
Upstairs woodwork - mahogany veneer
Downstairs woodwork - solid oak, with very heavy doors
27 wooden fluted columns, now worth about \$500 each
- (3) The garage, located about 50' behind the house, had a basement where the furnace was located. Hot water heat was used in the house.

Later (1922-See 12/29/74 clipping. (10 families -see same clipping) 25 people in the area contributed \$1,000 each for a central heating plant located at the end of West North Street. When union rules required more men to operate it, thus increasing the costs, it was abandoned.

History Cont'd.:

4. Interview with Mr. Reuben Zeiss continued:

- b. Mr. Zeiss called attention to the fact that there is a brick pavement in front of the house.
- c. The following data was secured by M. M. Meyer:
 - Occupant of Wm. E. Surface (source-city directories)
 - 1884 - Wm. E. Surface, machinist, Faries Mfg. Co.
 - 1901 - Wm. E. Surface, VP & Sup't., Faries Mfg. Co.
 - 1920 - Wm. E. Surface, VP, Faries Mfg. Co.
 - 1925 - Wm. E. Surface, President, Faries Mfg. Co.
- d. The following data was secured by M. M. Meyer regarding occupation of Reuban Zeiss (source - city directories):
 - 1918 - Reuben Zeiss - auditor.
 - 1919 - Cashier, Walrus Mfg. Company.
 - 1933-1945 - Treasurer, Walrus Mfg. Co.
 - (No occupation shown after that)

Surface-Snelson house
891 W. William

Personal visit January 11, 1976

The twenty plus fluted wood columns mentioned by Mr. Zeiss are the columns all around the house; in front there are four at the entrance and six at the porte-cochere: I could also see some near the sunroom, and Mr. Snelson said they are also at the back of the house.

Glass doors and partition between living and dining rooms give the illusion of much open space. Dining room furniture ^{originally} in the home was purchased by the Snelsons. Mrs. Snelson said the host chair is a replica of chairs she saw in the House of Burgesses in Williamsburg, Va.

All light fixtures are original, and the wall ~~XXXXXX~~ ^{sconces} are fitted with both gas and electricity.

Three fireplaces; livingroom one has four tiles inset above the mantle; the one in the sunroom has a raised hearth; the one in the bedroom is of white glazed brick.

Woodwork downstairs is oak, and the living room has a low dado, with wide strips near the ceiling. Woodwork upstairs is mahogany, but all frames are painted; Mr. Zeiss told Mrs. Snelson that this was always true, so the only mahogany showing is in the doors.

The wall between butler's pantry and kitchen was removed, but built-in cabinets in both have been retained.

Handrail on the stairway is stepped, and the balusters are square, appearing to be the same shape but larger than the pieces used in wood screens concealing radiators. There is a window seat on the stair landing.

There are two baths upstairs, and a lavatory downstairs. Plumbing fixtures are original.

The foyer has a mosaic tile floor and a built-in bench. Floor of the sunroom is quarry tile.

One window at the rear of the living room has etched panels on either side.

The furnace is now in the basement of the house. Mr. Snelson has found that there are ten inch hollow tiles inside the exterior brick walls.

Margaret Meyer

The Surface-Snelson home was built in 1913. Its long rectangular shape with few projections give this home a Spanish Colonial appearance. Features which carry out the style include the tiled roof with wide, projecting eaves, ornamental plaques and use of verandas. The homes were usually constructed of brick, or stone covered with stucco or a combination of both. Bold designs, vigorously indicated by broad bands of a deeper or contrasting hue were incorporated into the facade as is the case in this home. The style belonging mainly to the newly rich was very popular.

Brad Cantrell,
Architectural Consultant
January, 1976

891 West William Street.



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Decatur Cereal company mill, Mueller plant on Curo Gordo, Shellabarger mill additions, Pugh, H. B. Durfee, Oakland and Warren schools, the beginning of the Wabash and Illinois Central stations,

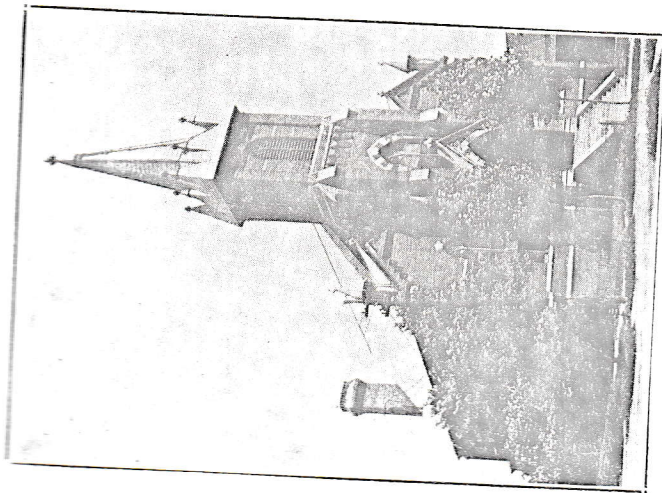
Faries factory, Library block (first and second), Bohon block, Guards Armory, Temple block, Wingate block, Mueller Plumbing and Heating company building, new St. Nicholas hotel, Parke and Sons warehouse and court house. New churches included the Congregational, St. Johannes' Lutheran, Cumberland Presbyterian, Christian tabernacle, East Park Baptist, First Presbyterian and St. John's Episcopal.

In 1895 occurred the fire which destroyed the Powers block on South Water street, and the rebuilding of that block and the Powers Opera house.

ST. JOHANNES' LUTHERAN CHURCH, 1892

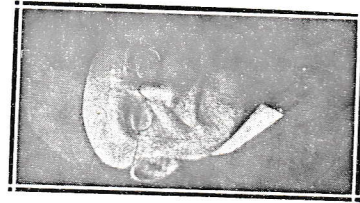
in Decatur today had their start during this period, among them the Gushard, Stewart and H. S. Gebhart dry goods companies. Other stores started then and still in business are the Bell drug store, the Folrath shoe store and the Decatur drug company store. Wholesale firms beginning business were D. F. Riddell company, Stadler and McClelland company, and Mueller, Platt and Wheeland company.

The Faries Manufacturing company was organized in 1894. Robert Faries had started years before as a workman, then opened a small shop on Herkimer street, as East Grand avenue was then called. Additions were made from time to time. When the Faries Manufacturing Company was organized, he



STORES AND INDUSTRIES

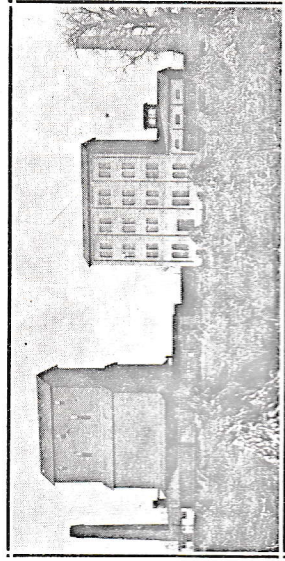
Some of the big stores



ROBERT FARIES

became the president, W. E. Surface vice-president and superintendent, and E. P. Irving secretary treasurer. Many of the articles manufactured by this company were inventions of Mr. Faries.

Fixtures of various kinds, lamp holders, boiler tube cleaners, gun cleaning rods, check tower wire, and various other articles were made by the firm.



PRATT CEREAL MILL.
(Later site of Staley plant.)

The Decatur Cereal mill, which in later years became the nucleus of the Staley Manufacturing company's plant, was erected in 1895. It had a capacity of grinding ten car loads of corn a day.

The mill was built by the Pratts. F. M. Pratt and R. E. Pratt had been in the grain business in Decatur since 1880. In 1891 they organized the Decatur Union Elevator company, the name being changed later to the Decatur Cereal Mill company. The Pratts had branch offices in a number of cities in the middle west.

W. H. Sufferin moved his grain business from Pierson to Decatur in 1891, and was joined in 1892 by Robert I. Hunt. The company, incorporated as Sufferin, Hunt & Co., erected a mill later at Union street and the Wabash. The same men in 1907 built a cereal mill at Eldorado and Van Dyke. It burned in 1909.

The U. S. Wire Mat company was incorporated in 1892. Frank P. Wells was general manager and treasurer, and C. M. Hurst secretary. It developed a business which has extended all over the world. It now is the U. S. Manufacturing corporation, with J. L. Bennett as president.

The Decatur Trunk factory was started in 1890.

The Home Manufacturing company, garment makers, was organized about 1896 by C. M. Allison and Fred H. Benham. The latter did not remain in the business long. It is now run by Allison's son-in-law, John H. McEvoy.

The Macon County Farmers' institute was started in 1895.

The present transfer house was built in 1895, costing \$2,700. It was paid for by subscriptions from merchants and property owners

Community Heating Plant Built To Escape Coal Inconvenience

In the fall of 1922, a group of Decatur neighbors joined together and formed an unusual system — a community heating plant.

The idea was born of mutual dislikes, such as firing a furnace, disposing of ashes, and coping with all the dirty conditions in general that accompany burning coal.

So the neighbors pooled their funds and set about to enjoy the ease and convenience of steam heat piped directly into their homes.

H.S. Gebhart and F. W. Cruikshank were the two men who headed up the group of neighbors living between Millikin Place and North Street west of Pine Street.

Construction on the plant was begun that same fall by W. E. Adams, a Decatur plumber, and the steam was turned on

for the first time on January 1, 1923.

There were 10 families in the heating pool when it began. Each family unit paid \$1,000 at the outset of the plan to pay for building the plant. After the initial fee, each family received its heat at cost, paying for the proportion of the total heat they used.

An additional 10 per cent was charged each family, which went into a sinking fund for repairs. The original cost of the plant was about \$22,000.

When the plant was in operation, the twin boilers used about a ton and a half of coal a day to maintain the steam needed by the homes. At that time, coal cost \$1.65 a ton.

The families who owned the plant during the three decades of its operation expressed great satisfaction, both from the standpoint of economy and convenience.

Costs varied according to the size of the dwelling heated, but ranged between \$100 and \$200 each year per family.

Some of the small homes the plant serviced were heated for as little as \$68 a year. The costs included the salaries for a day and a night fireman, a meter

reader, a bookkeeper and a plant engineer.

The heat was transmitted from the plant to the nearby homes by a series of mains which ran up the alley between North and William streets to the center of Pine Street, then south to the alley between Prairie Avenue and William Street west through Millikin Place to Hawthorth Street.

A great deal of interest was expressed in the plant during its early days, and in 1926 an effort was made to organize a group to construct a similar plant in the area between Sunset Avenue and West Main Street and McClellan Street and Demis Avenue.

However, the plan was abandoned because the homes in that area were too far apart and would have required excessively long steam mains.

Steadily rising costs during the 1940s and 1950s forced the owners of the community heating plant to turn to individual heating units. Gas heat became more readily available, was cheaper, cleaner and more individual.

So in 1952, the system was sold, along with the site the plant occupied at the dead end of West North Street and the Railroad intersection, to K. L. Scheffler, who converted the building into a four-room house.



A community heating plant provided steam to 25 homes from 1923 to 1952.

Decatur Herald

ZEISS 11/17/75

Reuben C. Zeiss, 92, of the Hotel Orlando died 8:30 a.m. Sunday in Decatur Memorial Hospital.

Funeral services will be 3 p.m. Wednesday in Dawson & Wikoff Funeral Home.

There will be no visitation. Burial will be in Fairlawn Mausoleum.

Mr. Zeiss was born in Mount Pulaski, a son of George P. and Carrie D. Busher Zeiss.

He was a member of First Presbyterian Church and the Decatur Club.

He married Blanche Surface in 1917. She died in 1972.

YWCA, YMCA to Receive Bulk of Zeiss Estate

Decatur Herald Dec. 5, 1975

The bulk of the estimated \$300,000 estate of an elderly Decatur man who died last month will go to the YMCA and the YWCA.

The Decatur Park District also receives a bequest under the will of Reuben C. Zeiss, who died Nov. 16 at the age of 92, as does the First Presbyterian Church.

Mr. Zeiss' will has been filed for probate, with the First National Bank of Decatur named as executor.

After specific bequests totaling about \$40,000 to several relatives and friends, and one of \$5,000 to the First Presbyterian Church, Mr. Zeiss in his will directs that the balance be distributed among the Decatur Park District and the YMCA and YWCA.

The Decatur Park District

will receive 10 per cent of the residue, under Mr. Zeiss' direction that it be used "for making the retired life of senior citizens in the Park District more comfortable and pleasant."

The YMCA and YWCA will each receive 45 per cent of the residue, with no specific instructions for their use of their shares included in the will.

Harold J. Blankenship, director of administration for the park district, said its share of the bequest probably wouldn't be available until late 1976.

"The board probably will decide what to do with it closer to the time the money will be available," he said. "They have no plans now, but there's no question we're going to be very glad to get it."