

History of the Sainte Marie Foundation House

The Kirts House, as it is commonly known, has long been a fixture in the town of Sainte Marie. It is located in one of the older parts of town, in close proximity to St. Mary's Church. Based on the ages of homes close to it and comments made by Lena Kirts, a longtime resident of the home, it is has been determined that the original part of the house (the front two rooms) is almost 140 years old.

Many people owned the property throughout the years. The following is a listing of the owners and the dates they owned the property (taken from the abstract owned by Gina Mullinax Fox).

1837 – Joseph Picquet buys the land from the U. S. government

1847 – Lots are laid out for the town of Sainte Marie

1848 – sells property to Phillippine Willien (sister of the elder Theodore Hartrich)

1856 – sold to Marie Schifferstein

1864 – sold to Martha Marrs It was during this time period the house was thought to be built.

1871 – sold to Joseph and Caroline Picquet

1899 – sold to Eugene Hartrich, widower Eugene was the Sheriff of Jasper County in 1879.

1904 – Eugene Hartrich dies and wills the property to his son, Edwin.

1908 – House is sold to Theodore and Christina Hartrich and then several days later to

William Reis. It was thought that Mr. Reis built at least part of the house.

1917 – Reis (widowed in 1913) sells the home to Paul and Monica Hartrich

1928 – Mrs. Hartrich (widowed in 1927) sells to Lena and Harley Kirts

1998 – Mrs. Kirts passes away days after celebrating her 100th birthday. She had lived in the house for 70 years. The house is sold to Don Albers of Breeze, IL -- for housing his DCA construction crews, builders of farm buildings throughout southern and central Illinois.

2008 – The house is given to the Sainte Marie Foundation by Mr. Albers on May 1, 2008. Work begins on returning the home to its former glory.

The home has changed over the years, with several additions being made. Mr. and Mrs. Kirts added a screened-in porch off of the dining room and then closed it and the rest of the side porch and made it into a sunroom in the late 1940's. The house was originally white clapboard and at some point changed

to brown siding. The Kirts' changed the siding in the late 1960's from brown to the present day white. Mrs. Joan Heneberry, who grew up in the house remembered a coal stove in the small room off of the kitchen. Her mother, Lena Kirts, would press her hair ribbons on the flue each morning. Other memories she has of the interior include there being a Hoosier cabinet in the kitchen with the refrigerator being in the small pink dining room. The more formal eating area was called the "blue dining room" (current Redbud Room next to the dining room) and used only on very special occasions. There was also a play room in the back of the house that Mrs. Kirts and her sister, Christine Alblinger, decorated with fairy tale silhouettes (some are still there). Harley and Lena also wired the entire house when they moved in. Mrs. Kirts told the story that one evening while working on the wiring she heard a knock at the door. It was the undertaker asking where the body was. Wrong house!

Ownership under DCA

DCA Construction used the house for a number of years when they had farm construction jobs in the area. They did little upkeep, other than hiring a cleaning lady to change beds and clean at the end of the week when they went back to Breeze, IL. By 2006, no one had used the house for some time and a pipe broke (the house had hot water heat) in an upstairs bedroom, flooding the house with water for an indeterminate amount of time. Wood floors were ruined, and ceiling plaster on the first floor was badly damaged. Shortly after, DCA put in a hot air furnace with air conditioning and also covered ALL the floors with new plywood and sheet vinyl. The house again sat empty.

Sainte Marie Foundation Takes over the House

In May 2008, DCA gave the house to the Sainte Marie Foundation, with the condition that the construction company could use it for their workers for five years, whenever they had a job in the area.

By that time, the deterioration was severe. Outside, foundation blocks were cracked or missing. That was the first major renovation – to hire a masonry company to shore up the foundation. They also removed the two chimneys on the roof. Both had old bricks that wicked water into the house during every rain. A new pipe had to be installed to vent the furnace, but we solved a major dampness problem within the house.

Then the rotten front porch floor was replaced, along with the five columns (two of the old ones did not match).

Finally, the repairs moved inside. We hired professionals to replace/repair ceilings and other major work (mostly repairing plaster and covering heating vents that ran from ceiling to floor in each room), but volunteers did such jobs as wallpaper removal (sometimes up to 6 layers), painting, and small repairs as well as cleaning, cleaning, cleaning. We removed years of dirt and grime, it seems. It is amazing what 10-15 volunteers could do.

**If you look behind the door in the upstairs bathroom, you will see a portion of wall (and old chimney) that we have kept for education purposes – to show people how old houses were constructed (handmade brick and mortar), lath and plaster (sometimes mixed with horsehair to make it sturdy). The area also shows how the old plaster was buckled and crumbling – something that we encountered in almost every room.

The Foundation intends to use the house as a museum and as a place where former residents, their families and friends can stay while visiting Ste. Marie. It can also be used for gatherings (Christmas parties for local businesses, etc.). Since the Foundation is a charitable organization, we do not charge for the use of the house – relying instead on donations to meet our expenses.

How To Book the House for a Visit

Call Sandy Hartrich at 618-455-3575 if you have questions or wish to book the Foundation House.



Esther Hartrich Leinhart with Bertha, Frances, Paul, and Paul “Pork” Hartrich (circa 1917) on the steps of the front porch.



Above, the Paul and Monica Hartrich (owners 1917-1928) family pose for a family photo near the front porch.



Larry and Ron Kirts stand outside on the side porch. (circa 1942) It was later converted to a sunroom.



The house as it looked from Washington Street. Circa 1930



Ron Kirts standing in front of the house. Circa 1943