

This Old House

A few weeks ago I received a letter from Brandi Fiester who wrote the following: 'I'm writing to tell you that in front of my house we have four stones that my Dad thinks might be left from the old sidewalk of Greene. If you ever want to check it out, I live at 57 North Chenango Street. And thank you for taking your time to read this.'

I did check it out and the stones certainly are flagstones from a local quarry. I took a photo of them in the rain and it shows them off very well. Then Brandi, 12 and her sister, Kebrina, 13, invited me in to see their house. The girls are daughters of Robert and Stephanie Fiester. Brandi wanted me to see everything and told me that when she grows up, she wants to live there. For a young girl, she was remarkably aware of the features in her house that made it special and a wonderful example of houses past: wood floors and trim throughout; wooden pocket doors that still slide effortlessly between the living room and dining room; an ornate fireplace mantle in the dining room; a tin ceiling with a tin crown molding; a curving back staircase off the kitchen, designed for the live-in "help" to disappear quietly up the back stairs to reach her back room after a hard day's work; and the lovely front entrance with the main staircase and newel post. Brandi is proud of her house.

The house was built in 1899 for Mrs. W. G. Welch. I found a photo of her taken in the garden of Mary Sherwood Blodgett in back of the house south of the Greene Community Services building. It is sometimes called the Blodgett house or in more contemporary times the Decker house. It's obvious that they were women of means. Mrs. Welch is standing on the left. There undoubtedly was a cook in HER kitchen who used the back stairs! After doing some research on the Welch family, I learned that Mrs. Welch's son, Winthrop A. Welch, was a well-known architect in New York City. He graduated from Greene High School in 1889 and went on to design the Cathedral School building at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine and also two Carnegie libraries in Manhattan. He would have been 28 years old in 1899 and it makes me wonder if he helped in the design of his widowed mother's house in Greene.

It's difficult to maintain an old house like this. It takes money and know-how. But when a child is thrilled and proud to point out all the wonderful old things about her house, you realize how important it is to preserve our heritage and make it possible for the next generation to enjoy. Thank you, Brandi, for writing me.



57 North Chenango Street