

83 River Street — Hillsdale, Michigan Before, During and After Restoration/Renovation

The two-story central Victorian part was built on or before 1872.
The single-story Greek Revival west addition (left side in photo) probably dates from around World War I.
The east addition (right side in photo) and attached garage probably date from the 1920's. On 0.48 acre.

THE OBJECTIVE: Restore/renovate the house to bring it up to 21st century standards while preserving or replacing as many original details as possible.

BEFORE: about 1,685 square feet with additional semi-finished 350 square feet in basement.
Three bedrooms and 2 full bathrooms.

AFTER: about 2,100 square feet above grade with additional semi-finished 350 square feet in basement.
Four bedrooms (one an en suite master), 2 full bathrooms and one half bathroom.



We put the three-room master bedroom addition on the back of the Greek Revival (west) part of the house so as not to alter the façade.

CHIMNEY BEFORE: It had been "repaired" and received a capstone appropriate to a 1950's ranch house. The City of Hillsdale had condemned the chimney, the lower part of which was over a century old and about to topple.



CHIMNEY AFTER: Our contractor hired an Amish bricklayer replace the chimney. It now has a period-appropriate cap, which resembles those on houses of similar age in Hillsdale.



Banquet Hall



Every floor in the house, including the kitchen and both bathrooms (!), were covered with wall-to-wall avocado or gray blue shag carpeting. These are now in the landfill.

DINING ROOM BEFORE: The formal dining room (we're calling it the "banquet hall") is about 16' x 10'. Original oak walls and ceiling, much of it French-polished.

In the period, a modest house with pretensions had costly wall, ceiling and floor treatments added one room at a time, as the homeowners could afford it. The original owners had the "banquet hall" done first. Then came the Panic of 1873, a depression which lasted for nine years. They, or subsequent owners, never had the other rooms upgraded.



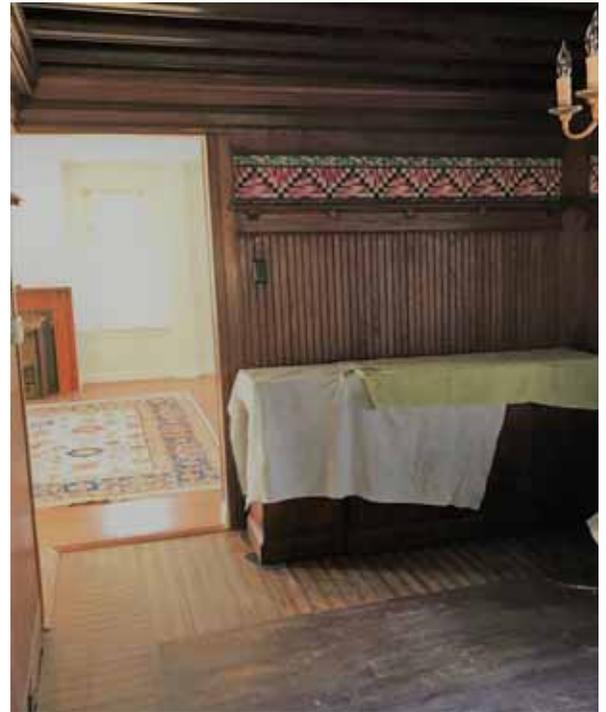
DINING ROOM AFTER: There are no real "after" pictures. I asked the contractor not to touch the banquet hall for two reasons. First, they were uncomfortable doing the persnickety, period-appropriate detail work themselves. Second, I can do this kind of work myself, and I wanted to say I had participated in the restoration.

Once we're settled in, I'll have to:

- A) Repair the floor: there's a large hole from an ancient floor vent that needs to be patched.
- B) The floor is alternating white oak and contrasting cherry planks about one inch wide. Part of the floor has sustained heavy traffic damage, especially from tracking in salt. I'll hand sand the entire floor and caulk it, then restain every plank so they match from one end to the other.
- C) Paint over that period-inappropriate Western-motif band above the plate rails.
- D) Fill, stain and refinish about a thousand little holes in the walls.



View from kitchen through the banquet hall to parlor (on left) and great hall (on right).



Fancy floors of the period had the pretty wood around the periphery of the room, then plain pine planks in the middle.

Parlor

THE PARLOR, BEFORE AND AFTER:

Before the Greek Revival addition on the west side of the house, this room likely was the living room. Then this room became the parlor. It's about 16' x 10'.

The wall coverings turned out not to be original and made the room as bright as the inside of a closed casket. The rug on top of avocado green shag carpeting didn't help, either. The previous owner took the rug; the carpeting wound up in the landfill.

We had the paneling join the carpeting in the landfill and the walls sheet-rocked.

We also had beams added to the ceiling to correspond with those in the banquet hall.

As is the case in the great hall and first-floor master bedroom, the floor is new red oak lumber flooring.



The TV nook becomes a place for a Victorian-era desk that's been in my family since the late 1800's. In our opinion, televisions don't belong in living rooms or parlors. The coat closet remains.

Upstairs South Bedroom and Half Bath



UPSTAIRS SOUTH BEDROOM, BEFORE AND AFTER:

The avocado green shag carpeting went to the landfill.

Unfortunately, the original pine planking was its own underflooring and had too many large knotholes to plug. So it became the underflooring, over which we had broad-plank pine engineered wood laid. Stark-white walls lighten up the room considerably.

The room is about 16' x 11', not counting the closet.

UPSTAIRS BATHROOM: In the days when the privy was outside, this room had been a closet. Then it became a cramped full bath with a shower. But for us, it made more sense as a decent sized half bath. Every surface in the half bath is new: walls and ceiling, wainscoting and beadboard, and tile floor.

I have no photo of it "before": it was just too ugly to take pictures.



Upstairs North Bedroom and Balcony



NORTH SECOND-FLOOR BEDROOM AND BALCONY:

No "before" pictures.

This bedroom will become a combination library and music room, with lots of bookcases and a small but killer sound system.

There is a second closet, which is the right size for a small refrigerator for stowing munchies and cold drinks, and a microwave. The microwave is for warming up munchies and heating water for coffee or tea.

The sliding doors open onto a rebuilt balcony large enough to accommodate two adults comfortably.

The bottom half of the walls had been painted in a scab color. We added wainscoting plus beadboard and had the walls painted stark white.

The shag carpeting went to 1970's hell. The new flooring is wide-pine engineered lumber planks.



THE GREAT ROOM BEFORE

The great room is about 17' x 25', the square footage of a two-car garage and unusually large for a home of these periods. So we had a lot to work with.

The former owner took the skull and pool table with him.

The windows are interesting. When the addition was built, the windows on the west side of the original two-story building were salvaged and reused in the great room.

The fireplace surround may be original. But we're going to replace it eventually; we just have to decide what we'll replace it with. There are lots of choices out there.

The fireplace did come with an ornate brass summer cover from the 1890's-1910's. A summer cover was a device to keep warm air from escaping up the chimney in the winter and keep cooler air in the house in the summer. Summer covers are scarce, since so many were donated for the war effort during World War II. It's a keeper for sure.

The fireplace itself was designed to burn coal only (a common practice in the period). Unavoidable black coal dust is a nuisance to clean all the time. So we had the firebox plumbed for a gas insert in the future.



"Before" photos of the great room. Dull avocado shag carpeting plus a ceiling painted dark forest green lent a foreboding ambience.

Great Room



"Before" and "after" shots of the great room, facing south, from roughly the same angle. Red oak floors and stark white walls and ceiling brighten the room.



"Before" and "after" shots of the stairway, facing east. Incredibly, those two skinny pillars held up that broad beam! The contractor engineered it so that the beam could be eliminated and the structure made much more solid. While he was at it, he altered the first step to reduce the possibility of tripping.



We finally found a runner for the stairs.

THE KITCHEN, BEFORE AND AFTER

The kitchen, 18' x 12', was a back-to-the-studs gut job: new everything, from ceiling to tile floor.

New cabinets with twice the capacity of the old. Quartz counters. Rewired. Replumbed. New underflooring to take the weight of the tiled floor. Gas line for the stove.

The refrigerator moved from the south wall to the north so we could have a larger one. An extra pantry shares the north wall with the refrigerator.

And our real estate agent took a big chunk of the Grace Slick wallpaper to frame as a memento of the follies of the 1970's.



Kitchen

BEFORE AND AFTER: There are no longer low-hanging cabinets over the kitchen to banquet hall pass-through. I also get a large extra counter for food preparation.



One of the two pantries and the hallway to patio outside banquet hall.

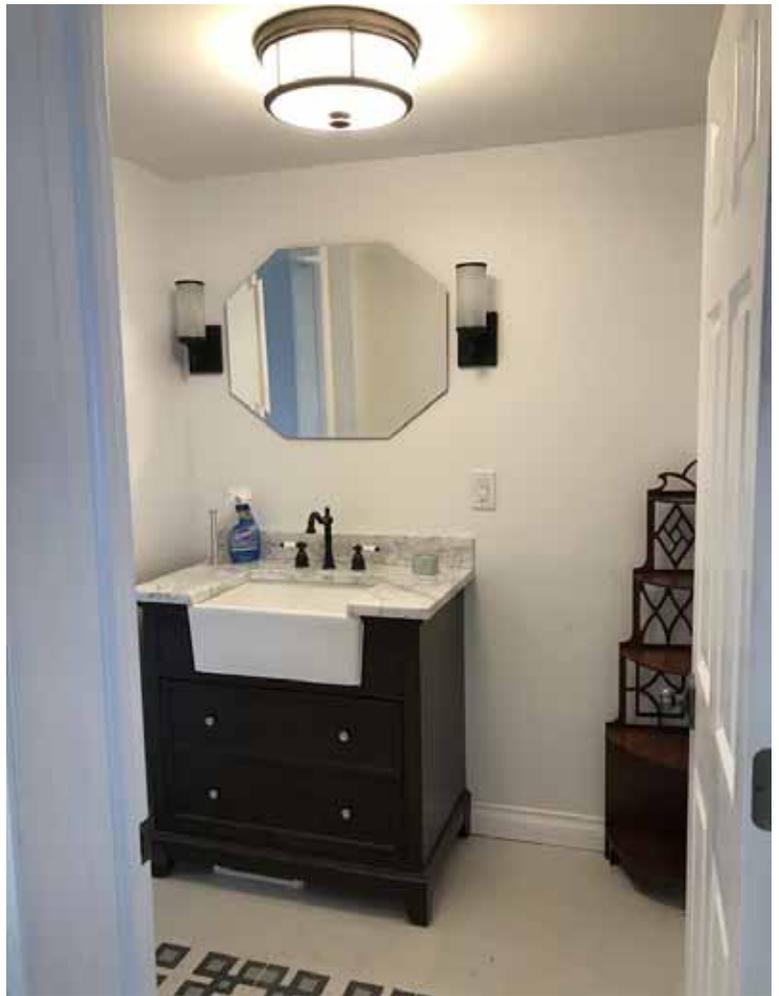


"Before" and "after" sight-lines from the kitchen through the banquet hall to the great room.

Bathroom off Kitchen

I have no "before" pictures of this full bathroom: both rooms had avocado green wall-to-wall shag carpet. In addition, the antechamber had a mirror and sink that would do Motel 6 proud.

The contractor gutted everything except the walls surrounding the bathtub. He judged the underflooring strong enough to support the tiles, which continue from the kitchen.



The pocket door to the toilet/tub room is original.

Addition

Obviously, there are no "before" pictures: this is the addition. There are three rooms: master bedroom, full bathroom and laundry room. The last has door to the patio. Pocket doors to bathroom, laundry room and great room.

Pocket doors are great space-savers. They're also about the same price as standard doors when designed for in new construction. I'm surprised I don't see them used more often.

We would have liked to have a cathedral ceiling in the great room, but the 2-story original Victorian part of the building relies in part on the structural strength of the Greek Revival addition to maintain integrity.

We have rugs all over the floors to convince them to lie flat.



The master bedroom.

Below are the bathroom and laundry room.



Den/TV Room



No "before" pictures. This room adjoins the kitchen. Theoretically, it's the fourth bedroom, but we decided to use it as a den/TV room. Instead of a hardwood floor, we chose wall-to-wall carpeting to accommodate rug-rats.



The North Side



The patio, facing south. There is some damage to the paint on the right of the banquet hall windows, thanks to decades of no gutters. We have full gutters now. Despite being a century old, the wood is in good shape: it's yellow spruce. They built things to last, back in the day.



The view from the balcony, facing north. The back yard had a slope going straight into the house. We had the ground to about 12 feet north of the house leveled and a boulder wall built. The level part becomes a garden; part of the north end of the lot may become a small orchard.



Approximate lot lines.



We have a nest of these in the northeast corner of the back yard. Periodically, Hillsdale has a bow-hunting season within town to get rid of these pests.



Looking north from the patio, before we got the retaining wall.