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THE SUTTON-ELKIN HOUSE, BREEZEDALE,  
IN INDIANA, PENNSYLVANIA

A Historical and Stylistic Analysis and a  
Program for Its Restoration

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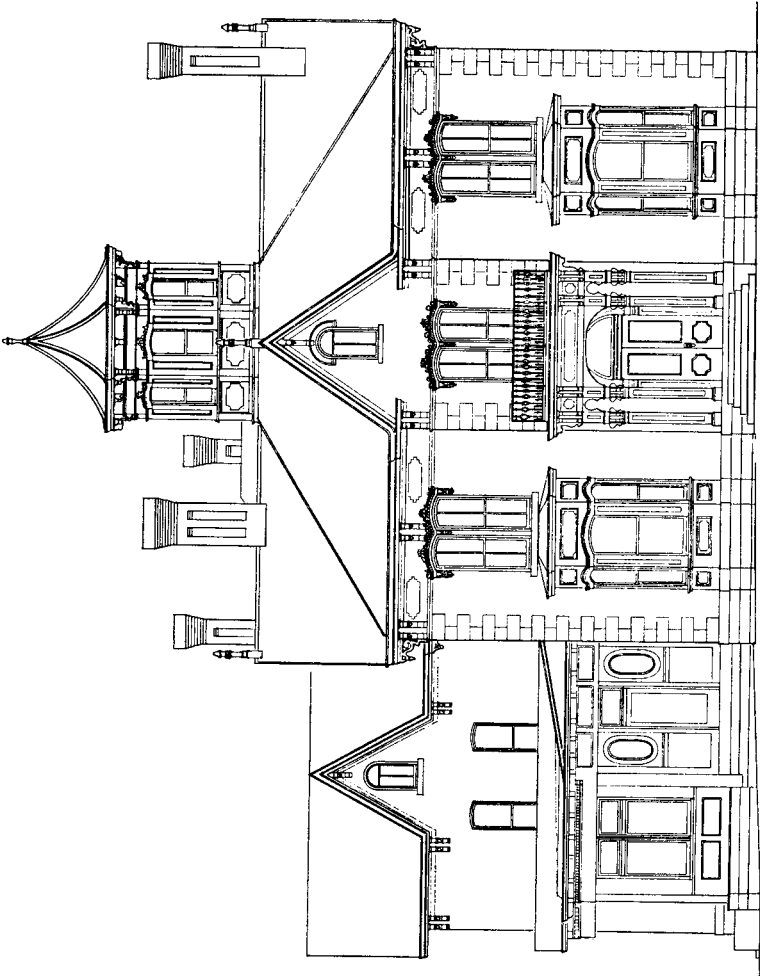
THE Sutton-Elkin house, called Breezedale by its builders, although through the years it has lost something of its former character due to the removal of its verandas, still bears in its basic form the subtly beguiling aspects of the small-town mansion, the "banker's house" — always such a necessary fixture and feature of the American small town of the last half of the nineteenth century. Now that Indiana State University, for many years its near neighbor, has completely absorbed the house into its huge and growing complex of buildings, the university has wisely decided to restore the aging house, both as a functioning unit and as a memorial of the past, and to make it a part of its contemporary academic life. In this it has shown a perspicience and a grace not usually notable among modern American universities.

The house was built shortly after the Civil War by James Sutton (1815-1870), the son of Thomas Sutton an attorney in Indiana.<sup>1</sup>

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Mr. Van Trump, vice-president and director of research of the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation and president of Landmarks Planning, Incorporated, is an authority on the architectural history of Western Pennsylvania. He and his colleagues, Arthur P. Ziegler, Jr., and Ellis Schmidlapp, have in the last few years been engaged in much preservation work in the tri-state area.  
—Editor

<sup>1</sup> J. A. Caldwell, *History of Indiana County, Pennsylvania 1745-1880* (Newark, Ohio, 1880), 329-30. Biographical data was also obtained by Mrs. George Johnson in interviews with descendants of the Sutton family.



East Elevation

James was educated in Indiana and in later life became one of its most prominent citizens. With his brother John he conducted a mercantile establishment called J. & J. Sutton Dry Goods. James was one of the organizers of the First National Bank of Indiana, and in 1864 he was its president.<sup>2</sup> In 1851, 1857, and 1858 he was an official of the borough of Indiana. He was also one of the founders in 1853 of the Indiana Paper Mill Company which was located on Philadelphia Street in Indiana. The partners in the enterprise changed over the years, but James Sutton always remained connected with it. The mill was remodeled in 1869 and at that time went by the name of Sutton and McCartney. The special product of the mill was strawboard made by the air-drying process.

In 1840, James Sutton married Sarah C. Stanbury,<sup>3</sup> and eight children were born of this marriage. Born in 1816, Sarah survived her husband by many years, dying at Breezedale the family home in 1899.

The tract of land on which James and Sarah built their house faced, like many other American Victorian mansions of the period, the railroad — in this case the Indiana branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad which had been opened through from Blairsville in 1856. The house was also to become a neighbor of the new state normal school opened in 1873.<sup>4</sup>

There was an architect and contractor, J. P. Leach, who had settled in Indiana in 1852, who designed the John Sutton house (now the Historical and Genealogical Society of Indiana County).<sup>5</sup> Since both the Sutton houses are in the Italianate style of the mid-nineteenth century, it is possible that Leach also designed Breezedale, but there is no exact documentary evidence. The house itself — of which there is a pre-1870 photograph — appears, as near as can be ascertained, to have been built between 1865 and 1868. One of the largest houses in Indiana, it was also one of the most elegant. James Sutton is said to have employed local carpenters, masons, and other artisans, possibly under the supervision of a local contractor.

In the Beers's atlas of 1871 there is a plot plan of the borough of Indiana, showing the property of Mrs. James Sutton with an ap-

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2 J. T. Stewart, *Indiana County, Pennsylvania — Her People, Past and Present* (Chicago, 1913), 1: 419.

3 The name is also variously spelled Stansberry, Stansborough, and Stansbury. The spelling used here is that of the name she signed to her will.

4 Caldwell, 325-26.

5 *Ibid.*, 259.

proximate outline of the house as it existed just after the death of James Sutton.<sup>6</sup>

The early photograph of the house shows a pleasant two-story symmetrical structure of brick — essentially the Georgian or Greek Revival center-hall house — elaborately detailed in the mid-nineteenth-century Italianate manner. The heavy eaves and bracketed cornices are Italian in origin, and the wooden bay windows with the paired narrow windows of the upper floors (the latter with ornamental lintels) are characteristic of the style. The small porch which hides the original double-doored entry has, with its small cusped arches on either side of the central opening, a vaguely oriental air; there is a delicate filigree cast-iron railing surrounding the roof of the porch. The quoins at the corners of the building again remember the Georgian period as does the octagonal cupola in the center of the rather steeply pitched slate roof, with its sharp gables. In typical mid-Victorian fashion, the gray slates are relieved here and there by ornamental patches of colored slate.

But the cupola, dominant element in the structure, is especially nineteenth century, essentially the top arcaded story of the "Italian villa" tower which had since the 1840s become common in American residential construction. By mid-century the arcaded top story often detached itself from its former tower position and settled in the center of the roof of such merchant houses. Here, like the eighteenth-century cupola of certain Georgian houses, it could serve as a lookout.<sup>7</sup> These tower lanterns, or cupolas as they were more commonly called, were standard features in mid-Victorian houses of any pretensions to social grandeur. They were charming and romantic, but since many of them were as difficult of maintenance as the mansions themselves, they have survived but infrequently. That of Breezedale is still notably intact and should certainly be piously preserved as the core and feature of the restored house.

A typescript by James E. Ansley is a prime source of information concerning the state of Breezedale before 1900.<sup>8</sup> One learns from him

6 F. W. Beers, *Atlas of Indiana County* (New York, 1871), 26.

7 For cupolas on eighteenth-century American houses see Fiske Kimball, *Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic* (New York, 1922), 91-92, 194-95, 238. Shirley Place (after 1746) at Roxbury, Mass., had an octagonal cupola similar to that of Breezedale, save that it was in the Georgian style; see Kimball, fig. 67.

8 A copy of this typescript, now in the archives of the Historical and Genealogical Society of Indiana County, was provided by Mrs. George Johnson. This script of six pages bears on its title page the following: "Breezedale' by

that the seven-acre estate was surrounded by a high board fence "to afford privacy." In a wooded lane adjacent to the railroad "carriages once came to the house."<sup>9</sup> There were apparently orchards at the back of the estate, and many trees were planted at the front of the property, toward the railroad. The pre-1870 photograph shows a large ornamental cast-iron urn filled with flowering plants situated in the center of the carriage sweep before the porch. The map in the 1871 atlas shows the drive circling the house and then branching off on one side to the stables and on the other to the Pittsburgh Road — now Oakland Avenue.

From the Ansley MS it is possible to gain some idea of the interior of the Sutton house. Beyond a vestibule, the center hall divided the front portion of the house and the main staircase rose in a straight flight to a point where it met the second-floor landing. At the back was a smaller transverse hall which gave onto a side entrance having sidelights and a transom. At one side of the main hall was the large parlor with a handsome, white marble mantel in the style of the Second Empire. On the opposite side of the hall was the library and beyond it a smaller private study. In the back portion of the house was the dining room with the kitchen and its offices. According to Ansley, "back of the front stairway towered a circular stairway from the first floor to the cupola (this was probably, also, the 'back stairs' so necessary to Victorian houses). This was removed [by the Elkins] from the first and second [floors] and more room in the halls was made."<sup>10</sup>

This last statement is puzzling and leads one particularly to wonder how far one can place credence in Ansley's statements. First of all, the cupola is directly above the center of the main stairwell, so it would have been impossible for a spiral staircase to rise directly into the cupola. At one time the stairwell was open to the foot of the cupola staircase. In 1947, the third-floor landing of the main staircase was

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James Ansley, photography by Mr. T. C. Hoyt. Information was obtained from Mrs. Paul Theiss, Mrs. Laura Stewart, Mrs. Juliet White Sutton, Mrs. James Blair, Mr. James Blair, Mr. David Blair." On p. 6, the script is signed James E. Ansley. The photographs date from about 1941, so the typescript must date from about the same time.

In a letter to the writer dated Aug. 17, 1972, Ansley, now living in California, amplified the information given in the typescript and stated that it "was written in the spring of 1941 or 1942 primarily as a high school composition." At this time, he consulted the persons named above, particularly Helen Elkin Theiss "who had been living in China and had returned to Indiana 'for the duration' [WW II] and lived at Breezedale."

<sup>9</sup> Ansley, 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

enclosed, but the balustrade has survived. It is possible that a spiral back staircase which did not connect directly with the cupola could have been constructed between 1865-1868 in the back part of the house, but since this area was subject to much revision in 1900, no evidence of it exists in the present fabric. It is possible also that Ansley was merely recording someone's memory of such a structure. The present back staircase would obviously seem to belong to the Elkin remodeling.

One can gain a fair idea of the portable furnishings of the house from a list of bequests of household goods contained in the will of Mrs. Sarah S. Sutton, made four years before her death and dated February 25, 1895.<sup>11</sup> These lists of furniture, pictures, art objects, books, curtains, carpets, and even such miscellaneous items as paper knives and magnifying glasses constitute a representative inventory of the interior appointments of a typical, prosperous, upper-middle-class, American small-town mansion of the last half of the nineteenth century. That well-to-do Americans of the time were enormously peripatetic is attested to by the large number of objects brought back from Europe by Mrs. Sutton as a result of her extensive travels. Among these, again typical, was a white marble statue called *The Child's First Lesson* that is now in the possession of David H. Blair of Indiana, Mrs. Sutton's great-great-grandson.<sup>12</sup> Since all these objects were left, for the most part, to members of her family, the Sutton furniture can in some instances be traced to its present owners. Fascinating as these lists are as records of late-Victorian domestic decoration, we cannot dwell on them here, because these objects were not part of the fabric of the house and therefore not germane to this report.

In the course of the settlement of Mrs. Sutton's estate, Breeze-dale was sold on September 12, 1899, being "land in the 3rd ward, Indiana, bounded by J. H. Engle, & W. J. Wilson on the North; on the East by the Pennsylvania Railroad; on the South by Washington Street; West by Oakland Avenue and the land of Harry Earhart. Contents: about seven acres. Consideration: \$16,000. Description: Large brick dwelling house, one frame house, one frame barn and other out buildings."<sup>13</sup> The buyers were John P. Elkin and his wife Adda Prothero Elkin.

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<sup>11</sup> Registrar and Records Office, Indiana Co. Courthouse, Will Book 9: 210.

<sup>12</sup> This was photographed by T. C. Hoyt in 1941 and accompanies the Ansley typescript.

<sup>13</sup> By deed — John P. Elkin from the estate of Sarah S. Sutton, Sep. 12, 1899, Indiana Co. Courthouse, Deed Book 13: 66, 190.

With the change in ownership the estate took on a new and more expansive image consonant also with the coming of the new century. The old, essentially mid-Victorian aspect of the house and grounds was to yield to a more opulent, more modern, and more spacious way of life characteristic of the upper classes of the Edwardian period. The rather extensive changes and additions to the old domain constitute, as well, a highly interesting document in the history of American taste. Certainly, under the Elkin regime the house was to assume its fullest, if not its final form.

The Honorable John Pratt Elkin was born in 1860 in Mahoning Township, Indiana County, and received his early schooling in Swicksburg, Pennsylvania, and Wellsville, Ohio, where his family moved in 1873. The family moved back to Swicksburg where John taught school while attending the Indiana Normal School from which he graduated in 1880. He graduated from the law school of the University of Michigan in 1884 and in the same year married Adda P. Prothero who was the daughter of the president of the First National Bank of Indiana. They had three children: Helen P. born in 1886, Laura L. in 1892, and Stanley in 1898.<sup>14</sup>

John Elkin was admitted to the bar in 1885, but he had already been elected to the Pennsylvania state legislature, conducting his campaign from Michigan where he was still a student. In 1885, he was elected to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives and reelected in 1886, serving two terms.

He was appointed deputy attorney general of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1895, and in 1902 he was appointed to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court for four years. He assumed judicial duties in Indiana from 1905 until his retirement from political life in 1910. He was a member of the board of trustees of the Indiana Normal School for a number of years. He was involved in many of the civic affairs of the area and took an interest in the development of the coal fields of Indiana County. He died in 1915 at Indiana.<sup>15</sup>

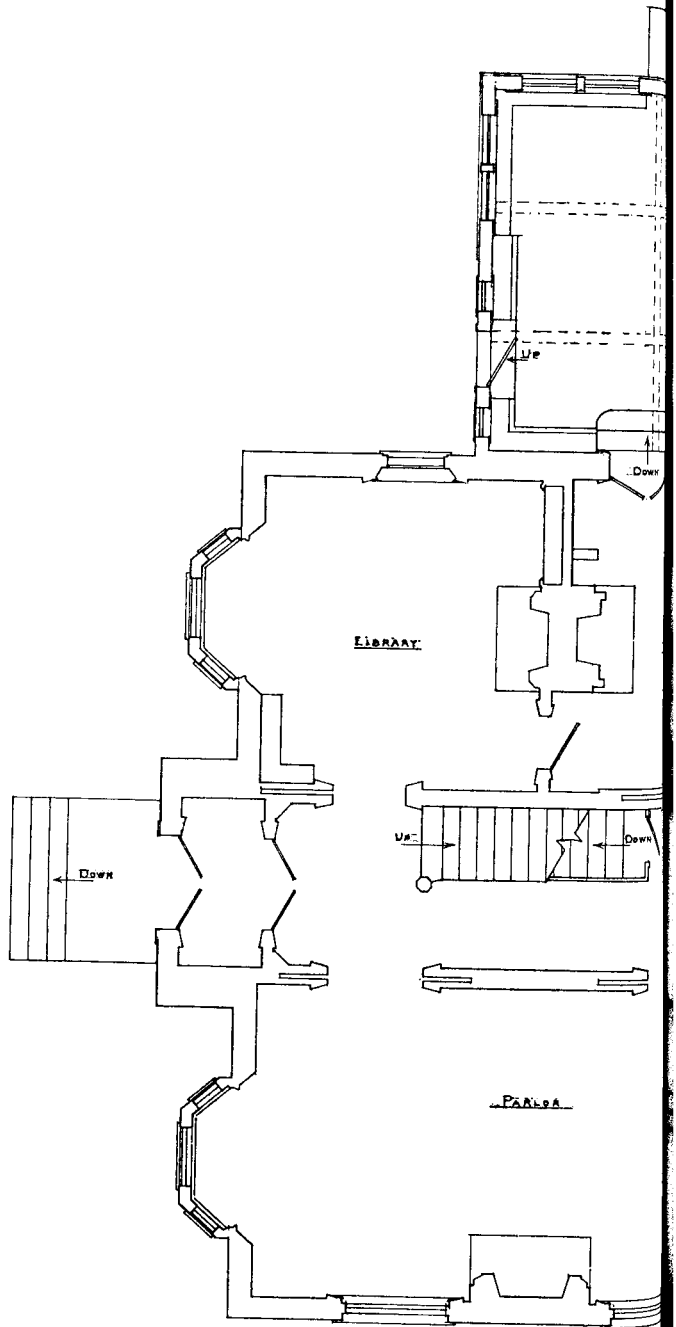
Breezedale was destined to be a house of even more importance in the community than it had already been. It was to extend itself, to blossom, to shine, more brightly than it had.

Of the transformation from Sutton to Elkin, Ansley again is the

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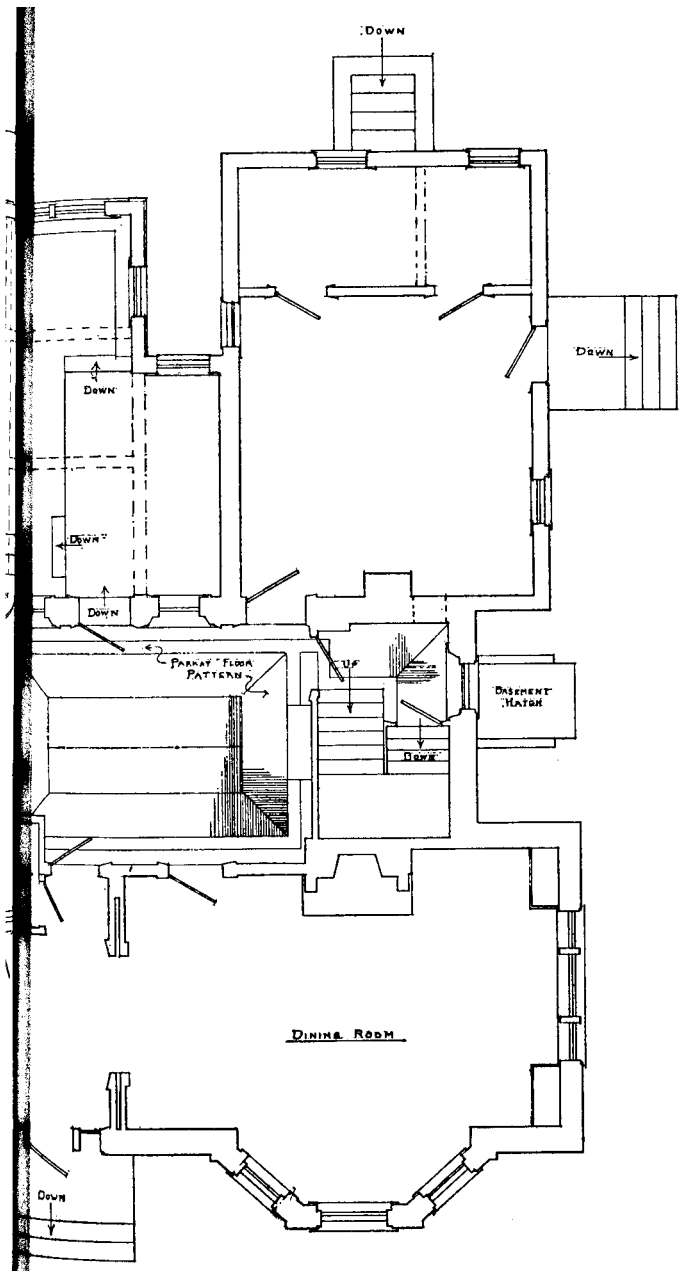
14 Stewart, 1: 392, 590-93. Biographical information was also obtained from surviving members of the family and friends by Mrs. George Johnson.

15 His will, in which he left his entire estate to his wife, is dated Sep. 16, 1915. See Registrar and Recorders Office, Indiana Co. Courthouse, Will Book 15: 546.



Breeze  
Indiana U





FIRST FLOOR PLAN  
SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"



House  
 Pennsylvania

chief chronicler, and we can begin with him in describing the metamorphosis of the estate and of the house. On the grounds themselves, the carriage entrance toward the railroad at College Avenue was abandoned and a new entrance drive made to School Street near its junction with Oakland Avenue. "The old board fence with barbed wire was removed and a hedge was planted. By this time the house was almost hidden by trees which were removed from the front lawn. In the rear eighty fruit trees were cut down. . . . The entire landscape which had been covered with trees, flower beds, and shrubs, was converted into lawn."

The Ansley MS also chronicles quite extensively the changes in the exterior of the house — one assumes with a fair degree of accuracy — although a certain ambiguity of phrasing does creep into an account which attempts to be at once popular and yet preserve a certain nicety of diction. For instance, on page 5 of the MS is the statement: "One outstanding item of the mid-Victorian period was the large front porch. . . ."

Aside from the quality or the accuracy of the prose, the last statement above does bring us to a major change in the house — the addition of the veranda and the porte-cochère initiated when the Elkins took over. Ansley's further description of the Elkin porch does convey the impression that he actually saw and moved along it — "The long verandah extended from the law library [also an Elkin addition] to the Oakland Avenue entrance. It has a high ceiling and is open to the summer breeze [this undoubtedly an echo of the house's name]. The pillars are wooden of Corinthian style and it has decorative balusters and cornice. A high porte-cochère was erected inside this porch to provide a covered drive. Later part of the long verandah was enclosed into [*sic*] a solarium. Unlike most sunporches this one has natural brick walls" (as a student of sunporches of the early twentieth century, the writer finds the last sentence almost meaningless).<sup>16</sup>

Fortunately, Ansley's statement is supplemented by some visual evidence — a postcard of about 1906. Breezedale was by this time of sufficient importance to the town of Indiana that it achieved postcard status — that invariable index of municipal fame in the early twentieth century. Here is the Victorian "banker's house" lifted into a higher sphere — that of being an "estate," a recognized landmark, eminent, among the local sights. Of course, the great house was "known," was "intimate" only to the friends of the family that inhabited it, but

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<sup>16</sup> Ansley, 4.

the great mansion was cherished, looked upon proudly, if perhaps a little enviously, by the citizens of Indiana.

Here, among the ordered foliage of the trees that were left by the 1900 rearrangement of the grounds, is still the high, narrow, "tight," central bulk of Victorian Breezedale with its quoins; its sharp gables and thin chimneys; its narrow, paired windows; and its overriding, many-windowed cupola. The silhouette of the main body of the house is thus unmistakably mid-Victorian, but it is as if the main structure had divided itself like an amoeba, spread out, and expanded in its swelling, rim-like veranda and its still further-flung porte-cochère. The "old house" is still "the old house," but it has also very grandly become the Edwardian estate, the setting for a much larger, more expensive, "smarter" social life. To achieve the new image, the tight, small front porch of the sixties had to be removed. It was, indeed, removed, most definitely, and then the new century girdled the house as it were, at least on the front and side elevations.

The cult, and one can only call it such, of the porch reached in the 1890s and the 1900s such proportions that it could only diminish as the century wore on. In this ultimate expansion of the living quarters of the parent body of the house is reflected the luxury and the confidence of the era that indulged a sure sense that the outside of the house was as safe as the inside (alas, that confidence in open and utterly undefended spaces such as this seems now in these uneasy days to mock us). Those of us who can remember the amplitude, the extensive and detailed furnishment of these summer living rooms, can only realize now, with a pang, the folly of such social assurance. For that certitude has vanished along with the porches. These porches with their classical cornices and balustrades and their Corinthian columns were architectural and had thus, a large air of establishment and permanence; over against them the modern patio seems something provisional — one has the feeling that the latter could, if things got really bad, vanish quickly within barricaded windows.

The outdoor porch or, as it was known in New England, the piazza, began to appear in the late eighteenth century in American houses and by the middle of the nineteenth century was fairly well established.<sup>17</sup> However, Breezedale's original porch was little more than a small covered portico shielding the main entrance of the house; the family could sit here in summer either in chairs or on the steps, but

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17 For the development of the veranda, or porch, in eighteenth-century American houses, see Kimball, 98-99, 222-23.

such seasonal outdoor living had hardly as yet become a commonplace in American social life. Mid-century Victorian verandas, which were increasingly incorporated into houses designed in the Italianate manner, tended always to be rather high and narrow. It was not until the asymmetrical, romantic houses of the late 1870s and the 1880s, that expansive porches became common. By 1900, the porch had reached its apogee in American residential construction.

Consequently, one of the first things that the new owners did when they bought the house was to remove the small, outmoded entrance portico of the Suttons and build a really fashionable, wide front porch that began about the middle of the south elevation and continued around the north side to the former carriage door where it branched outward into a truly expansive porte-cochère. The 1906 postcard shows this porch and the porte-cochère, but it gives no hint of the furnishings of the former, which were probably extensive. Although the Breezedale porch of 1900 has vanished, there are many illustrations of this kind of thing in books and magazines, and so we can have no difficulty in reconstructing the veranda as it once was.

The chairs, settees, tables of wickerwork or rattan, the straw rugs, the cushioned swings, the potted plants and vases of flowers, and the electric lamps with flowered cretonne shades would have created an outdoor living space of considerable luxury.

The porte-cochère, as the French name implies, was once a door by which one entered a house from one's coach or carriage; needless to say, such a method of entry would imply a house of some consequence. Sometimes, in noble houses in eighteenth-century France where there was a courtyard, the coach could pass through an arch from the street and deposit its passengers at the door before proceeding into the courtyard.<sup>18</sup> The entry was thus protected from the weather, as were those who entered or left their coaches. Also, the term could be used to indicate an arched entry by which a coach entered a courtyard.

In American houses of the later nineteenth century, this carriage entrance was often attached to the developing Victorian veranda and formed a certain extension of it. That of Breezedale, constructed to connect with the new porch in front of the old carriage entrance, really constituted a kind of open-arched peninsula of the house thrust out into the surrounding landscape. Although carriages first stopped

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18 There is a good illustration of this type of thing in Michel Gallet, *Demeures Parisiennes. L'Époque de Louis XVI* (Paris, 1964), plate 77.

under its wide, sheltering roof, it was not long before it became the chief motorcar entrance to the house.

Although the porch and porte-cochère contributed notably to the grand Edwardian image of the house, they were removed completely after Indiana State University bought the house in 1947, and it is not recommended as a part of the historical restoration that they be reconstructed. First of all, these large outdoor living rooms tended to exclude sunlight and consequently to darken the rooms of the house against which they were built. Second, and more important, if they were constructed of wood they tended to become, as they aged, a constant maintenance problem. The removal of porches from Victorian houses, if they were designed as part of the overall composition of the house, often produces a certain shorn, impoverished look in the surviving fabric. But, since the Breezedale verandas were later additions, their loss is not felt architecturally. It is strongly recommended, however, that the small, original entrance portico of the house be reconstructed to restore the correct architectural proportions of the main facade, as well as to give shelter to the front door.

The Elkins' most extensive structural addition to the house was that room constructed of timber and glass on the south side of the house which was known, again according to Ansley, as Judge Elkin's law library. "Paneled from floor to ceiling, book cases line every inch of the lower walls which are not taken by doors or windows. The library was arranged so that a large window on the south side gave a commanding view of the college. With this view, book lined walls and wood paneling, it must have been a pleasure for Mr. Elkin, who was a Supreme Court Judge to study his cases."

This structure from the exterior is rather provincial and awkward; its form is that of an Edwardian solarium. There is a great deal of glass. On either side of the central door facing south is a pair of large plate-glass windows with transoms having leaded clear and colored glass. The door between them once had a panel of similar glass, but it was removed in 1947 and plywood substituted — this also happened, unfortunately, with the leaded glass of the bookcase doors. Another door was flanked by a pair of plate-glass windows and low, oval, bull's-eye leaded windows; the panel of this door has been filled with plywood. There is also a heavily beamed ceiling in oak with, in the center, a skylight of art nouveau (but linear and geometric) leaded glass. Inscribed in the design are the names of famous lawgivers — Solon, Marshall, Gibson, and Blackstone — as well as the de-

vices of four Renaissance printers — Aldus Manutius (1502), the St. Albans Printer (1483), Johann Treschel (1493), and Johann Weissenburg (1506). Five square, rather “mission,” lighting fixtures, each having four pendants of square, clouded-glass globes, depend from these beams.

In the western half of the room is a kind of dais — one step high — which has a mission-style dado and bookcases surrounding it, as does the rest of the room. In the wall above the platform is a stained-glass window in colored opalescent glass showing blindfolded Justice as a robed female figure holding a scales and a book and standing on a serpent. This opulently and expansively completes the legal symbolism of the room.

From the dais, where possibly the judge’s desk stood, a door with a leaded transom leads to the old dining room. Another similar door, the actual leaf of which has some interesting paneling in the Eastlake manner of the early 1880s, is up two steps and connects with the Turkish Room, the former study of the Suttons.

This sanctum of Judge Elkin, this Edwardian solarium with its legal and literary symbolism and its connotations of luxurious judicial establishment is, despite its rather heavy-handed, colonial revival form, a highly interesting document of the eclectic taste of the turn of the century. As regards restoration it should not be handled too archaeologically. Its former use should not be too piously remembered; its surviving features and fixtures should be cleaned and refurbished. Properly curtained against the southern light, easily but elegantly furnished, and with the addition of books and periodicals it could become a really handsome academic lounge.

To return to the front door of the house we also return to Ansley: “When other remodeling was being done, the entrance was no exception. The first set of double doors was replaced with large oak doors with heavy cut glass lights and the second set was replaced with mahogany doors with frosted etched lights. The vestibule was refinished with hexagon shaped white tile with black mortar lines.” This entry has not been changed much since the Elkins’ day, and all it needs in the way of restoration is some painting and refurbishing.

Once one has passed through the second set of doors with the semicircular transom above, one can see straight through the house to the embrasured dining-room window on the west side of the house. The staircase rises at one side but the ascent is fairly easy. The newel post is of the Italianate pedestal type, as are the balusters. Octagonal newel

posts of this type were extremely common in Italianate houses of the 1860s and '70s, but this example displays a kind of curlicue pastry-work edging that defines each panel. At the side of the staircase, where the open string meets the baseboard of the wall, there is a small, triangular painted panel depicting fruit and flowers.

All the doors opening into the hall — two of them into the parlor, one into the library, another into the Turkish Room — were replaced with sliding doors by the Elkins, which meant the reconstruction of the partitions. All the mouldings of the doorway and of the segmental archway leading to the back hall are heavily Italianate in style.

In the back hall, past the archway, the north wall is entirely occupied by the original carriage door which has sidelights and a large transom filled with both colored and etched clear glass — all of it dating from the 1860s. The wide doorway of the dining room in the west wall again has sliding doors dating from the Elkin regime. In the south wall is a door leading to the old dining room.

To the right of the vestibule as you enter is the chief room of the original structure — the parlor, which runs the full width of the house at this point. In the center of the north wall is a fireplace with a magnificent, white-marble chimney piece in the Second Empire style. The Elkins also removed the old, narrow paired windows that flanked the fireplace and substituted wide Edwardian plate-glass windows with leaded and beveled clear-glass transoms. The three-sided bay window in the front wall is original, as is the sash window with narrow sidelights in the rear wall. This triple window recalls, as does the old carriage door, structural elements much used in the Greek Revival style — here they are interpreted in the later Italianate manner. The floor of this room, like that of the hall and the old library with their wide floor boards, was probably always intended to be carpeted in the mid-Victorian manner.

The parlor still has its elaborate floral plaster "rosette" in the center of the ceiling from which the chandelier (now vanished) was pendant.

To the left of the entrance door, near the foot of the stairs, is the door to the old library which is also at the front of the house. Like the parlor it has a matching bay window in front and a pair of the original narrow windows in the south wall. In the west wall is a grate with a black marble, or possibly a painted slate, chimney piece in the Second Empire style. There is a vaguely Eastlake dado with asymmetrical paneling and some built-in bookcases in walnut.

Also in the south wall of the library is a door that leads into the Turkish Room, formerly the study of the Sutton house. Ansley says: "After a trip to Europe, Mrs. Elkin decided that she wanted a Turkish Room."<sup>19</sup> This may have been so, but she need not necessarily have gone to Europe to get the idea. Oriental rooms, or nooks, or corners, were enormously popular in America during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the houses of the wealthy these Turkish Rooms were often used as places for smoking in the days before smoking became common, particularly among women. But, even more than that, they were evidences of that passion for romantic or exotic decor so characteristic of the nineteenth century. Toward the end of the century the vogue became widespread and even quite modest homes had their Turkish or "cozy" corners.

Definitely in the luxurious category, Breezedale's Turkish Room, if it cannot be praised for the purity of its style, is at least notable for the richness of its architectural materials. The dimensions of the room are small — the intent, always, in these exotic creations was to suggest a secluded alcove or grotto. An elaborate marquetry dado with a repeated star pattern surrounds the wall (the pattern is also repeated in the marquetry floor), and it extends out into the room, in one corner, in a kind of three-sided alcove seat. This alcove was connected with the ceiling by colonnettes and lattices, but these latter embellishments were removed in 1947, although the alcove seat remains. In the south wall a door, flanked by small cabinets with leaded windows above, opens into the judge's law library.

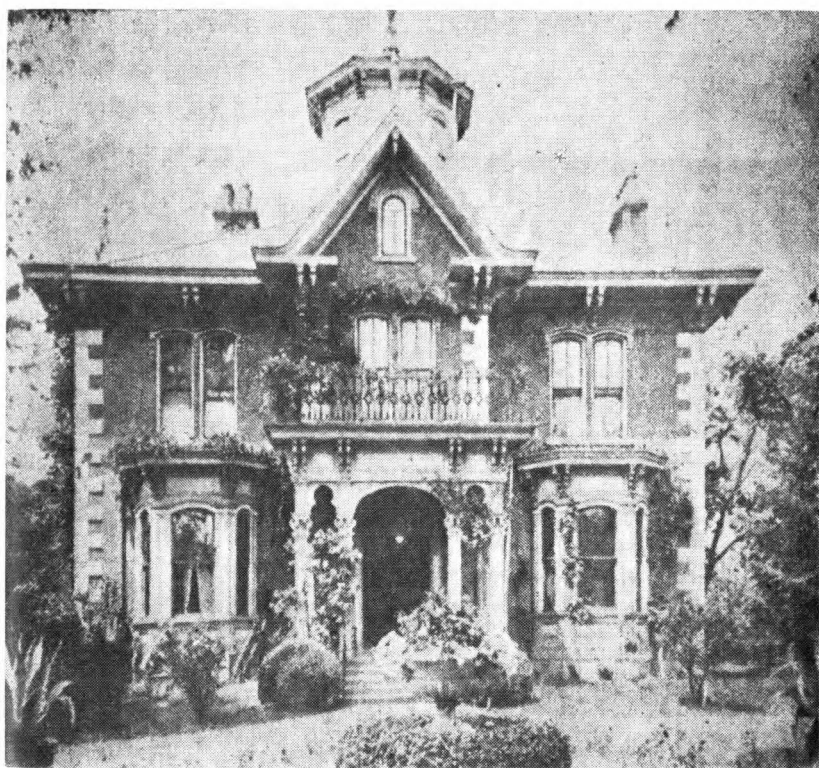
The carved, mahogany chimney piece of the fireplace strikes resoundingly the eclectic note, because it is rather indefinably Renaissance in style, although the tiles of the grate repeat the star motif of the marquetry. Above the mantel a large plate-glass mirror is installed; it must have once reflected the rich, quasi-oriental furnishings of the little room — although this is only a surmise. One can almost reconstruct the decorations in the absence of any photograph or description because so much documentation on other rooms of this type in America has survived.<sup>20</sup> There would have been many cush-

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<sup>19</sup> Ansley, 4-5.

<sup>20</sup> The writer had gathered, at one time, considerable material for an article on oriental rooms of this type, but the references are so numerous that here the footnotes, if they were included, would overburden the text. As an example, a very elegant specimen of the type, with its contemporary furnishings intact, still exists in the Phipps-Braun house in Pittsburgh; see J. D. Van Trump, "A Pittsburgh Palazzo, the House of Arthur E.

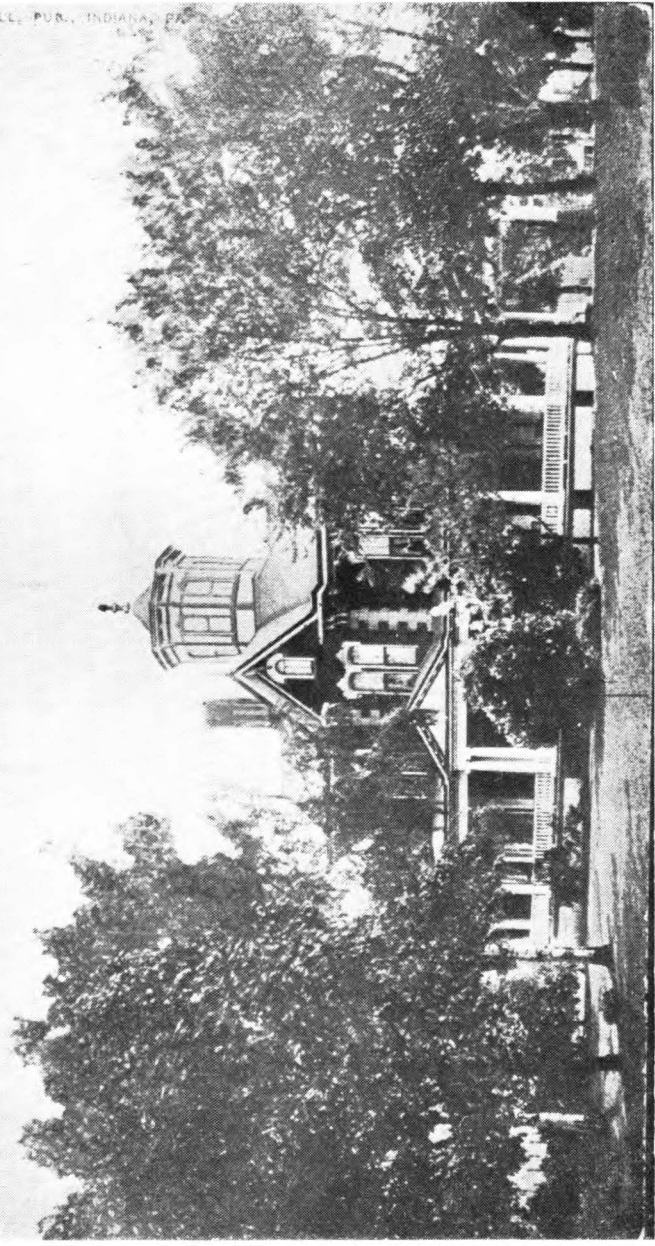




C. 1870

"BREEZEDALE," RESIDENCE OF HON. JOHN P. ELKIN, INDIANA, PA.

HENRP HALL, PUB., INDIANA, PA.



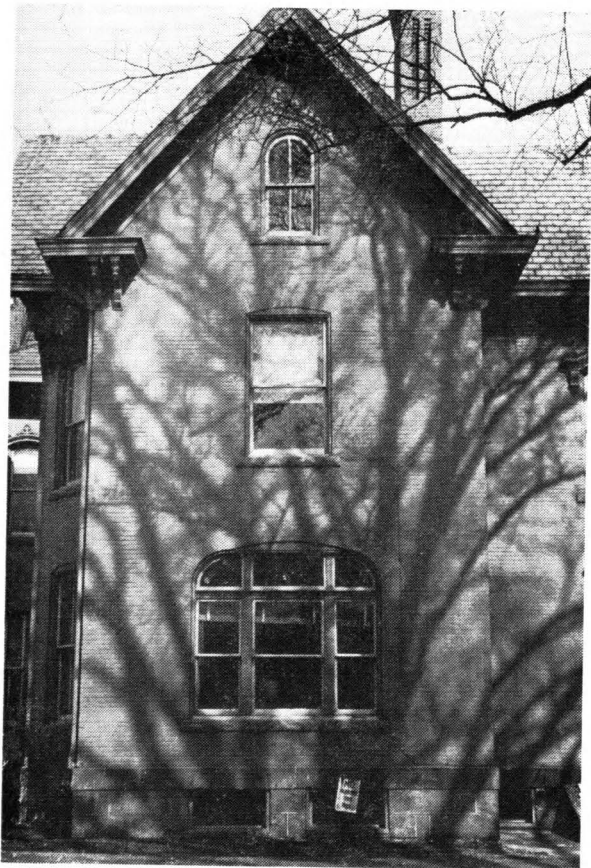
C. 1906



Breezedale from the North



View from the Southeast



West Elevation  
Dining Room on Ground Floor

ions, oriental rugs, tabourets inlaid with ivory, Damascene brass, perhaps a narghile or waterpipe. It would have brought to a small town in Western Pennsylvania hints of the remote and romantic East. Perhaps someone read here the *Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyám,<sup>21</sup> but it is doubtful if any colloquies held within this Eastern corner were in the least oriental.

This room is the one, high exotic note in the house, and it would surely be an act of archaeological piety to recreate, to the degree that it can be done, this former oriental glamour. So often we lack nowadays just this touch of half-solemn, half-playful fantasy in our contemporary interiors. It could be a delightful, saving bit in the restored house.

The only other "room of state" in the house is the large dining room which Ansley calls "the old banquet room" at the end of the hall.<sup>22</sup> There is definite surviving evidence that most of this room was an actual structural addition to the house, although the general high, narrow silhouette of the original house has been adhered to in the addition. It is possible that part of the old Sutton dining room may have been incorporated into this room when the Elkins made their extensive renovations. The architectural decoration of this room has the same dense richness, the complex eclecticism, evident in the other Elkin portions of the house.

The carved, oak chimney piece, partly Richardsonian Romanesque, partly classical, has a beveled plate-glass mirror on the chimney breast, with wide and heavy classical columns below the mantel shelf; above are foliated consoles which support pedestals. All around the room is a classical paneled dado echoed by an elaborately beamed and paneled ceiling, and on all openings — windows and doors — there are classical architraves with pilasters and decorated entablatures above. The long north wall has a rather shallow, three-sided bay window in the center, and the back wall is treated with considerable architectural elaboration. A large, triple plate-glass, double-sashed window with stained-glass transoms is flanked by two built-in china closets lined with mirrors and semicircular transoms of leaded glass. There is also an extremely

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Braun," *Carnegie Magazine*, 33 (Jan. 1959): 23-30. At one time, however, there were other examples of the same sort in Pittsburgh.

21 It is no accident that Omar's poetry, known in English through the translation of Edward Fitzgerald (1809-83), was at the height of its popularity in the 1890s. Its hedonistic, agnostic, fatalistic philosophy appealed strongly to the artistic, intellectual temper of the time.

22 Ansley, 2.

ornate parquet floor. There is scarcely a surface in the room that's not ornamented.

Between this room and the kitchen is another smaller room having no chimney piece and very little architectural ornamentation except another ornate parquet floor. This was probably the old Sutton dining room, but it was the Elkins' breakfast room. The door leading to the law library dais with the two small cabinets on each side, echoes the one in the Turkish Room. The glass panel of the door itself was replaced by plywood in 1947, but the transom and the windows above the cabinets still retain their leaded glass.

In one corner of this room a lavatory has been built. In the west wall a door gives onto the landing of the back staircase; this landing also has a parquet floor. There is a serving hatch built into the kitchen wall, which supports the theory that the Elkins used this room as a family dining room or a breakfast room. It is curious also that there is no evidence of a butler's pantry, a room which was usual in large houses of this period. Possibly, this room could have been used for service when dinner parties were held in the banquet room.

Very little is left of the installations of the old kitchen. There is a small room beyond it which could have been used for storing food, etc. The two dining rooms and the kitchen, provided they were properly refurbished, could be used in the restored house for the provision of food.

The main hall on the second floor has at the front of the house an alcove with what were once cupboards at the sides — the doors have been removed, leaving the shelves exposed. The bedrooms are not remarkable in their mid-century Italianate starkness; although the Elkins did add a few 1900 touches above stairs, their remodeling zeal seems to have exhausted itself on the first floor.

The bedrooms are lighted by pairs of long, narrow sash windows, although on the side elevation the windows are single, surrounded by the inevitable, heavy Italianate mouldings; the closets are shallow and poorly finished. The southeast bedroom has a 1900 mantelpiece, but the northwest and northeast rooms have the original Second Empire mantels of slate painted to represent brown marble.

Like similar arrangements in many Victorian houses, the second-floor level of the back building is three steps below that of the main house. The back hall is entered under a wide arch and then follows a skewed course to the back stairs. This portion of the house was much remodeled by the Elkins but not nearly so elegantly; in fact, the tone

here was, for the most part, not much better than servants' quarters. But perhaps the judgment is too severe; one is dealing here with the simpler milieu of a small, Western Pennsylvania country town. Let us say — more justly — that this is what a prominent first family of the time deemed proper and sufficient, even seemly.

This propriety and sufficiency extended to two bathrooms, one on either side of the corridor. That now labeled "Gentlemen" (it acquired this designation after 1947), with its small stained-glass window and tiled floor, is closest to appearing as it did in the early years of this century. That called "Ladies" has been changed beyond recognition. It is interesting that no attempt was made to put these bathrooms into the main body of the house where they could have connected with the principal bedrooms. It would have been impossibly expensive, however, and possibly architecturally unfeasible as well. Small-town Italianate villas of the 1860s were not built with bathrooms in mind.

The one exception to the prevailing dullness of the small rooms of this part of the second floor is the large bedroom over the main dining room. This, with its ample bay window, was obviously part of the general reconstruction. In finishing the room an attempt at smartness is evident in the curvilinear art nouveau mantelpiece.

The attic of the main part of the Sutton house was never finished, save for a hallway that leads to the cupola stair. In the back building, however, is a large attic room lighted by tall 1900 dormers. There is some evidence — cupboards, etc. — that this room could have been used for storage, but Ansley says that: "At present it is a recreation room where ping-pong is the favorite sport."<sup>23</sup> In the restoration of the house it could probably still be used for such purposes.

This room can be reached only from the main staircase, because the back stairway does not mount to the third floor, although it does descend to the basement. The basement itself, as in many country houses of its period, is notable chiefly for its lowness and meagerness; possibly, in any future revision of the house, this underground story should be relegated to mechanical equipment or the most menial offices.

Mrs. Adda Prothero Elkin, who had been left in sole possession of the Elkin estate by her husband, died on September 16, 1934, and by her will dated September 8, 1932, left her estate in trust to her heirs.<sup>24</sup> According to James Ansley's letter of August 17, 1972, the house was unoccupied after the death of Mrs. Elkin, "except for an

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>24</sup> Will Book 26: 362.

'apartment' at the rear of the house rented at most times for insurance purposes. This consisted of the dining room, breakfast room, kitchen, and the rooms above."

After Mrs. Theiss, Mrs. Elkin's daughter, returned from China about 1940, "she lived for the most part . . . in two bedrooms on the south side and also had the library, the Turkish Room, and the law library furnished for entertaining. She used the drawing room for trunks and excess furniture because a lot of plaster had come off the ceiling."

Ansley continues: "At this time the house appeared doomed. The lawn had grown into a jungle and the general appearance was that of disrepair . . . the porches were in poor condition and the Elkin trust would not repair them."

On May 20, 1947, Breezedale was sold by the trustees of the estate to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for the sum of \$65,000 with the intent of adding the property to the Indiana State University.<sup>25</sup> In April 1947, a survey was made of the property which shows it as it existed at that time. As Ansley had asserted: "It is the desire of the present owners that sometime this old mansion and seven acre estate which borders the campus of the Indiana State Teachers' College will be part of the school."<sup>26</sup> So it came to pass.

After the house had been acquired by the university, it was used for a time as a dormitory, and later it was occupied by the Art Department. When Landmarks Planning, Incorporated, a Pittsburgh organization devoted to architectural preservation and restoration, was asked in 1971 to make studies for the rehabilitation of the property, the house had been vacated, and local historians, especially Mrs. George Johnson, had made researches into the history of the place. Professor George Johnson of the Art Department was sympathetic and helpful, and Christopher Knowlton was the liaison with the Indiana University Foundation. The proposed restoration has thus been, in a real sense, a community project with Landmarks Planning as consultant.

It was proposed by the university to make of the house a social center for the faculty, a place of reception and lodging for distinguished visitors, and a center for alumni activities. As we have indicated, many changes had been made in the fabric of the building during the course of its existence, and Landmarks Planning did not feel that the struc-

<sup>25</sup> Deed Book 363 : 367.

<sup>26</sup> Ansley, 6.



ture should be restored completely to any one period. Our studies have not envisioned it as a museum or period piece but as a Victorian mansion adapted to present-day uses.

No major changes will be made to the exterior of the house as it now stands save to rebuild the original Sutton porch using surviving photographic evidence as a basis for the restoration. It is also suggested that the early two-over-two sashes be restored to the windows of the main facade.

It is also proposed to remove the paint from the exterior brickwork; after the necessary cleaning and repointing of the walls, they will be coated with a liquid waterproofing material. The wooden outside trim will also be scraped to discover the original color of the paint.<sup>27</sup> By these changes it would thus be possible to recreate, to a degree, the appearance of the Sutton house at the time it was built — at least on the front elevation.

Of the interior, the main rooms on the first floor will not be changed to any great extent, save in the breakfast room where rest rooms will be installed and the rest of the space made into a service pantry for the dining room. Otherwise, the halls and the chief living spaces will be painted, carpeted, and wallpapered to suggest their original Victorian appearance. It is suggested that wherever possible the furniture be nineteenth century, but where appropriate or necessary more modern pieces should be used. We have suggested also that the refurnishing of the Turkish Room be a real archaeological exercise in the recreation of Victorian exoticism.

On the second floor, the two bedrooms on the south side will have bathrooms built into them, but on the north, the corresponding two rooms will constitute a suite, with sitting room, bedroom, and connecting bath. On this floor, major architectural changes will be made in the back building which will be divided into offices. The cupola will also be completely refurbished inside and out.

Although the grounds have been much diminished since 1947 by the encroachment of university buildings, there is still enough land surrounding the house, particularly to the south and west to warrant a

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<sup>27</sup> There is not, at the present time, as far as we know, any readily available published material on Victorian exterior paint schemes comparable to the accounts of modern researches into their American seventeenth- and eighteenth-century counterparts, such as those accomplished at Williamsburg, Va., although the Victorian Society in America is said to have done some work along these lines. Consequently, our nineteenth-century buildings are sometimes restored with Williamsburg colors, whether or not they are appropriate.

sympathetic, adaptive Victorian landscape treatment of the area. Some such sensitive, period site-planning is absolutely necessary to tie the house into the surrounding landscape, and Landmarks Planning is presently making studies for this phase of the project.

All too often nowadays such Victorian houses are thoughtlessly demolished and become merely fading memories supported by dog-eared photographs or neglected records in public or private archives. But, happily, today's public is becoming more actively aware of our architectural past and the necessity of its inclusion in today's world. Thus, more of our building heritage is now being rescued, rehabilitated, and adapted to contemporary uses. The present chronicle bears witness to the efforts of those who are striving to preserve the physical evidences of our national historical past, even at the small-town or grass-roots level.

The restoration program for the Sutton-Elkin House will insure its continuation as a functioning artifact of the past, an evidence of now-vanished social grace in an ever more stereotyped and harried modern environment.