

The Dana-Thomas House Foundation supports and promotes the Dana-Thomas House and sponsors programs and events. Visit us on Facebook or at [www.dana-thomas.org](http://www.dana-thomas.org). We welcome your membership.

This booklet was made possible by a grant from the Sangamon County Historical Society to the Education Committee of the Dana-Thomas House Foundation.

Many thanks to Curtis Mann and his staff at the Sangamon Valley Collection for historic pictures.

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Printed by the Illinois Education Association Print Shop.  
(June, 2021)

# Historic Dana-Thomas House Neighborhood Walking Tour



Enjoy a one mile self-guided tour that takes you past many interesting historic sites. No interior tours are included.

Begin at the Dana-Thomas House Foundation office – 302 E. Lawrence across the street from the spectacular Dana-Thomas House, which was designed by architect Frank Lloyd Wright.



Lawrence Home, 1900



Construction begins, 1902



1

**Dana-Thomas House** – Standing in front of the Foundation office, look across the street to the Dana-Thomas House, site of the original Rheuna Lawrence home, rebuilt by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1902-1904. Socialite **Susan Lawrence Dana** lived here from 1904 to the late 1920s and entertained often, with as many as 1000 guests. Later the home became the headquarters of the **Charles Thomas Publishing Company** from 1944-1981 and was purchased by the State of Illinois in 1981. The home is one of the most intact of all the Frank Lloyd Wright designs with 103 pieces of furniture designed by Wright exclusively for the house.

The Dana-Thomas House is a National Historic Landmark and on the Register of National Historic Places.



Rheuna  
Lawrence



Susan  
Lawrence

Susan Lawrence, called “Susie,” was born in 1862. Her father, Rheuna, a prominent citizen of Springfield, served as mayor and as president of the school board. Her mother Mary was active in charitable work. Susie was often listed on the society pages of the newspaper, even after she married Edwin Dana in 1883 and moved to Minneapolis. Tragedy followed them: two children died – one lived only 12 days, the other only 2 months, and Edwin’s real estate business failed. After a few years back in Springfield, Edwin went into Rheuna’s mining business in the West. Edwin was killed in 1900 in a mining accident. Susan’s father died in 1901, leaving her an heiress.

Susan pursued community work, was active in the Women’s Club, Daughters of the American Revolution, and lobbied for education and women’s rights. She met architect Frank Lloyd Wright in 1901 and hired him to build a new home, stipulating he keep the original parlor fireplace in the Lawrence home. Construction began in 1902 and was completed in 1904. Susan called it the Lawrence House; her mother and cousin Flora lived with her. Gala events were held often. Susan traveled extensively.

At the age of 49 in 1912, Susan married 26-year-old Joergen Dahl, a professional singer from Chicago. On their honeymoon in Paris, Susan purchased a baby’s christening gown in hopes of having a child. Again, tragedy struck in 1913 when Dahl died.

Susan supported women’s rights and practiced spiritualism. A third marriage to Charles Gerhmann in 1915 ended in divorce in 1930.





2



3

**Cottage and Eva McDonald House** – Facing the Dana-Thomas House, notice the cottage west of the railroad tracks. The cottage once stood on the original land of the Lawrence home and was moved across the railroad tracks in 1902 during the construction. Frank Lloyd Wright designed the basement area. Susan moved into the cottage in the late 1920s, and as she aged, she often ate dinner at Eva McDonald's boarding house across the street. Look across the street at the white house next to the tracks.

Now look at the three houses across from the Dana-Thomas House. This block changed dramatically on Oct. 3, 1916, when a fire wiped out the entire block. People fled in the night; although no one was hurt, the houses were destroyed. The current structures (302, 306 and 308 E. Lawrence) were built 10-15 years later. The Foundation purchased the houses in 2016 as part of a neighborhood improvement project.



4 5 6

The fire started in a partially finished 3-story flat at 308 E. Lawrence that Etna Atwood was building. She woke up to the flames; her hair and eyebrows were singed. Flames spread quickly in the night, causing the residents to flee "in their bedclothes" as the newspaper reported. Living at 302 was Fred Rauth, a druggist who owned his own drug store. Living

at 306 was Henry Harris whose wife helped Mrs. Atwood escape off her porch. Men along Lawrence and 4<sup>th</sup> Street formed a bucket brigade; the firemen were delayed due to the telephone operator mistakenly reporting the fire was at 4<sup>th</sup> and Monroe instead of 4<sup>th</sup> and Lawrence. The glare from the fire could be seen all over the city. All of the houses were burned to the ground; several houses on 4<sup>th</sup> St. sustained damage. It was reported 10,000 people walked past the site the next day. This block remained vacant for over a decade. Houses were finally built in 1925, 1926 and 1930. The fire changed the neighborhood as most of the new structures had many turnovers of residents.



Paving the Street - circa 1904  
The Dana-Thomas House is on the left.



4



**302 E. Lawrence** - Currently the office of the **Dana-Thomas House Foundation**, **Dr. John A. King**, a prominent doctor, lived here from 1889-1902 and owned land along the 3<sup>rd</sup> St. railroad tracks. **Fred Rauth**, owner of a drug store, lived here until the 1916 fire destroyed the home.





Dr. John A. King House  
1889

4



Fred Rauth at his drug store.  
1912



306 E. Lawrence

5



Lavely Hats on  
Washington Street

**306 E. Lawrence** – Owners of the home turned over frequently but included **Rufus Lavely** (1902-1904), owner of a men's hats and furnishings store downtown and **Henry**



Henry Harris

**Harris** (1915-1916), bookseller and later manager of Acme Register Company in Minneapolis. He and his wife had to flee during the 1916 fire.



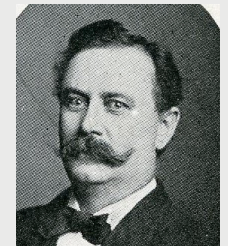
Walter Eden

6



Rebuilt after fire.

**308 E. Lawrence** – Owners have included **Walter Eden** (1902-1904) a lawyer and son of John Rice Eden who had served as U.S. Representative in 1863-1865 and unsuccessfully ran for Illinois Governor against John Palmer in 1868, and **Lansing Tiffany** (1905-1909), the State Veterinarian. The 1916 fire broke out in the 3-story flat at this location which was under construction by Etna Atwood. Walk east to the end of the block to the corner of Lawrence and 4<sup>th</sup> Street.



Mathias Bartel

7

The southwest corner was the home of **Mathias Bartel** (circa 1902-1910), now converted into apartments. Bartel owned a boot store downtown, and his five children often visited Susan. His wife Katherine was a friend of Susan's; when she died in 1906, 3-year-old Gertrude often was at Susan's house, running up and down the stairs. On one of Susan's trips to Italy, she brought each of the children a rosary.

Turn right on 4<sup>th</sup> Street, walk to the middle of the block and look at the house labeled Schempp-Conkling on the east side of the street.





William Conkling



Charles Lindbergh

8

The Schempp-Conkling house was the home of **William H. Conkling** who served as Springfield postmaster. He became friends with **Charles Lindbergh** who often delivered air mail to Springfield. Lindbergh stayed here in 1927, a few months before his famous trans-Atlantic flight.

Return back to 4<sup>th</sup> and Lawrence and continue walking north. As you walk past the Dana-Thomas House, appreciate the art glass. Wright incorporated 450 pieces - windows, doors, and lights - of art glass throughout the house.

Men living along 4<sup>th</sup> Street were lawyers, educators, and shop owners. Many of their wives were friends with Susan Lawrence Dana through the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Springfield Women's Club.



Tents that held up to 1500 chairs during the 6-day auction.

9

Stop at the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> and Cook; look at the lot on the southwest corner. **Auction site** – Twice a day for six days, from July 26-31, 1943, Susan's possessions were auctioned off to help pay the expenses at St. John's Hospital where she was living. Items included fabric, souvenirs from Susan's travels, jewelry, books, furniture, cut glass, china, pottery, unwrapped items purchased on trips, and even a coach, the same model as one used by Teddy Roosevelt in 1900. A Springfield jewelry store displayed a 70-diamond necklace designed by Tiffany. Many items sold at the auction have been reacquired through the years by the Dana-Thomas House Foundation's fundraising efforts and private donations. The late Governor James Thompson spearheaded efforts to raise money in 1988 to purchase a double pedestal lamp for \$704,001 at Christie's of New York.



9

**Interesting days at the auction:** On the 4<sup>th</sup> day, a Brink's armored car delivered the jewelry from the Illinois National Bank to the tent; 7 plainclothes detectives with machine guns resting on their hips surrounded the platform of jewels during the bidding. The Tiffany necklace – valued at \$25,000 sold for \$7000. Bridge Jewelry Co. bought it as well as a cameo with diamonds. Both pieces were broken apart, and the diamonds were sold as engagement rings. There was a rare true brown diamond, one of four in the U.S., plus diamond studs, items of topaz and black opal, and gold chains. The jewelry was reloaded and taken back to the bank where purchasers picked them up. A coach and two surreys were on display in a small tent next to the auction tent. The coach, a model of Teddy Roosevelt's, was never used. Susan once commented that it was "too ostentatious and different for Springfield." On the 5<sup>th</sup> night, an air raid blackout was planned for 30 minutes due to WWII; 1200 people sang until lights came back on. Many items sold at the auction have been reacquired by the Dana-Thomas House Foundation.



10

Look across the street to the northwest corner. **Hickox Apartments** – Developer Harris Hickox built the apartment complex, targeted for upper middle-class families, in the 1920s. Hickox employed domestic staff and lobby guards to draw wealthy clients. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



11

Continue north on 4<sup>th</sup> Street. The **John Condell House** is one of the oldest homes along the street, built in 1842 as the wing of the Methodist church, then located at the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> and Monroe. John Condell bought it and had it moved here in 1852. Condell owned a dry goods store where **Mary and Abraham Lincoln** shopped. Condell was in business later with C.M Smith who was married to Mary Todd Lincoln's sister, Ann. They lived in the home that is on this tour (#15 on the map). It was reported that Mary would look at material for a dress and would tell Mr. Condell that she would have to wait until Mr. Lincoln was successful in a certain case before she could make a purchase.



12

The area on the west side of 4<sup>th</sup> Street has changed over the years. Large mansions once housed prominent citizens. Today there is a hotel and restaurant. One house was that of **John Todd Stuart** who was Lincoln's law partner. Later **Harris Hickox** (designer of the apartments at #10 on the tour) lived here.

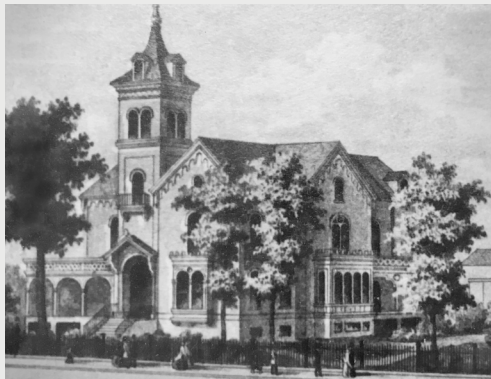




Governor's Mansion  
1889



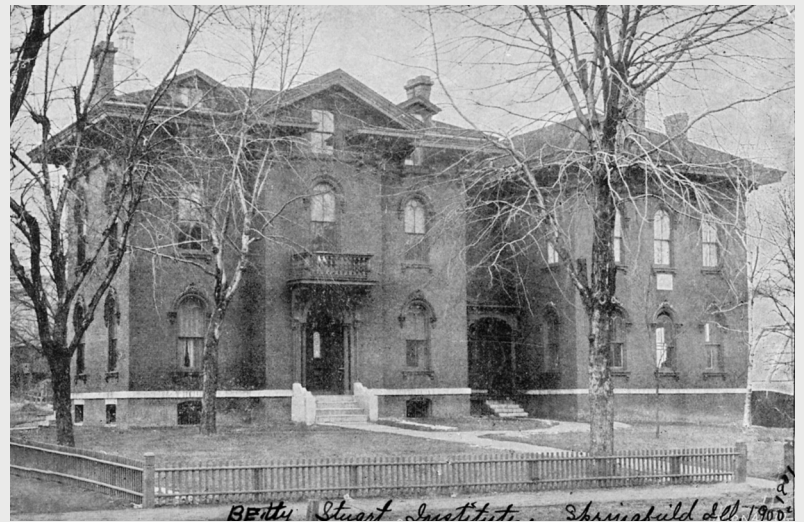
Governor's Mansion  
1900-1909



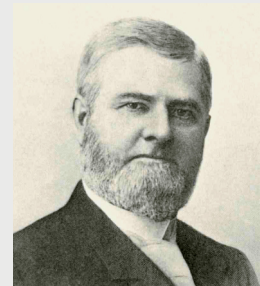
Joel Matteson Mansion  
1872

12

As you walk north on 4<sup>th</sup> Street, headed towards downtown, the **Governor's Mansion** is to your east, on the right side of the street. Governor Joel Matteson (1853-1857) convinced the State legislature to appropriate money for a Governor's Executive Mansion which was built in 1856. Matteson, though, called the home "dull and unfashionable" so when he left office in 1857, he built his own home across the street on 4<sup>th</sup>. Mary Todd Lincoln called his home a "palace." It was destroyed by fire in 1873.



The Bettie Stuart Institute, 1900



Christopher Columbus Brown

13

Another prominent citizen was **Christopher Columbus Brown** who married Bettie Stuart, daughter of John Todd Stuart. When she died in 1869, Brown turned the home (now gone) on the northwest corner into the **Bettie Stuart Institute** which operated as a boarding school and day school for 70 years. Eight-year-old Susan Lawrence enrolled in the school in 1870 and attended for two terms.

14

Walk along the front of the Mansion. The tour continues south on 5<sup>th</sup> Street (you may want to walk across 5<sup>th</sup> to the Bicentennial Plaza and read the many plaques explaining Springfield history).



**Governor's Mansion** – The third-oldest continuously occupied executive mansion in the United States was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1976. Susan Lawrence Dana was friends with several governors and hosted receptions with many of the governors' wives. She also entertained governors at her home. The mansion and grounds were restored in 2018. The grounds had been overgrown with bushes; landscapers discovered many partially-sunken kitchen sinks that had been used as stepping stones throughout the years.



Walk south on 5<sup>th</sup> Street to the end of the block. Here is the life-long home of **Vachel Lindsay** (1879-1931) who was a well-known poet of Springfield. Lindsay recited his poetry at parties at Susan's home. Prior to Lindsay, the home was occupied in the 1840s by C.M. Smith and his wife, Ann, who was Mary Todd Lincoln's sister. The home is an example of Greek Revival and is a National Historic Landmark.

