

The Historic Dr. Small Memorial Home



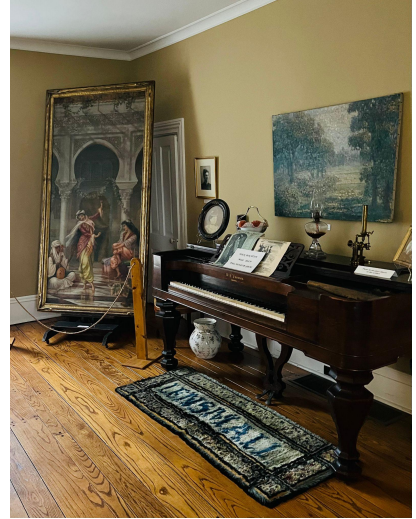
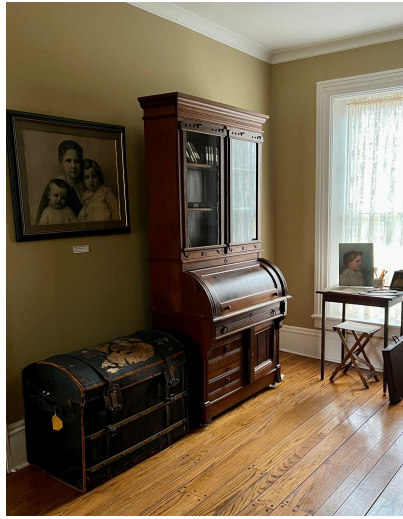
In 1855 Dr. Small purchased forty-seven acres of prairie land southwest of the newly incorporated City of Kankakee. Shortly thereafter he began construction of this house built of native limestone and faced with finished concrete to create a more formal appearance. The original house consisted of five rooms, with a kitchen, dining room, and sitting room on the first floor and two bedrooms on the second floor. In 1870 an addition was made to the house. Two bedrooms were added upstairs. The two new front rooms became the formal parlor and Dr. Small's consulting office. The old sitting room was altered into a studio. Between 1872 and 1875 five small additional rooms were added upstairs. The Dr. A.L. Small house is currently shown as it was about 1900.



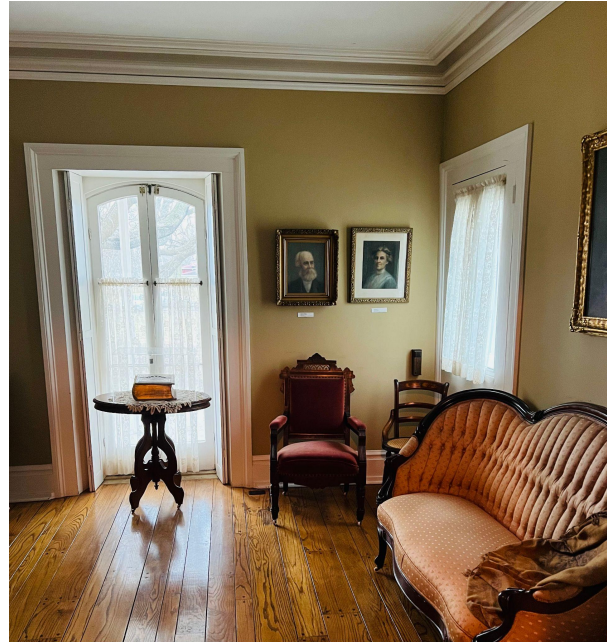
The kitchen as it appears now is the second one built for the home. The Kankakee Valley Park District and the Kankakee County Historical Society restored it in 1972 to its appearance at the turn of the century. The blue enamel cook stove with its warming ovens and nickel-plated hardware replaced an earlier black cast iron stove. Cooking required that a fire be kept in the blue enamel stove year-round. Other domestic chores, such as the family washing was done here as well. There was no indoor plumbing. Water was carried from the well located at the northwest corner of the house to the zinc-lined walnut dry sink. The dry sink was used for all activities in the kitchen requiring water.



The dining room was the place where the family assembled for their three daily meals. The main meal of the day for fashionable members of society was dinner served in the early afternoon, followed by supper in the early evening. Sunday dinner was generally a formal affair. The family considered mealtimes as social events. The dining table, walnut china cabinet, and wicker rocking chair are furnishings original to the Dr. Small family. The painted finish to the china cabinet is not original.



The sitting room was originally used by the family as a place to gather in the evenings and on Sunday afternoons. After the first addition was made to the house in 1870 this room was used as an artist's studio, by Susanne Small (1856-1931), the family's second child. Susanne spent 1908-1909 in France and Spain studying art and is said to have been greatly influenced by Monet, as her landscapes reflect. Her portrait work is considered outstanding and reveals her fascination with faces of all ages. On the north wall, the charcoal drawing is of her younger sister Mable, and nephews Budd and Leslie Small. On the west wall, there is a photographic collection of the family. The piano, Regina music box, and walnut bookcase are all original furnishings of the room.



The parlor built with the 1870 addition was the most formal room in the house. The furniture is all original to the Dr. Small family and was purchased in 1871 for the new room. The deep plaster moldings around the perimeter and a center medallion for a chandelier were added for a more formal look. The parlor was used to entertain company and to receive individuals making formal calls when the family was home. Prominent families would have the hours they were receiving visitors printed in the local paper. This room was also used as a waiting room for the Doctor's office. The paintings hung in this room are by Susanne Small. They include portraits of her mother and father.



Dr. Small's office was used for patient consultations in the northeast corner of the house. He would interview patients here, but aside from giving a written prescription all serious examinations and other medical work would have been done at the hospital. Doctor Small first practiced medicine in Rockville Township after studying in LaPorte, Indiana. After moving to Kankakee, he studied medicine at Rush Medical College in Chicago, graduating in 1863. The furniture is original to the Dr. Small family. While some of the medical material in the room also belonged to Dr. Small the remainder is typical for 1900.



The upstairs of the home was remodeled in 2015. Though we can't be certain of the specific original use of each room, we have staged the rooms with artifacts from the Museum's collections to help visitors imagine the Small family's life in these upstairs rooms.



On the grounds, the stone chicken house or chicken coop behind the home housed domestic fowl for many years. It is believed that young Len Small used the upper section for pigeons. It is now used for storage. Plans are underway to raise funds and obtain grants to repair and remodel the space as an exhibit as a chicken coop exhibit. Near the present day-day circle drive there was also a large barn for animals and buggies.

The land around the house was used for raising rhubarb and asparagus. The doctor believed in the medicinal properties of the pie plant, and asparagus is a good companion plant for rhubarb. Doctor Small is believed to be the first man to develop the forcing of pie plants during the winter months. Forcing rhubarb required it to grow in a dark room, allowing the stalks to grow much larger than the leaves. He first used the home's cellar, but later built separate "forcing houses." Twenty-five percent of the property was used to raise rhubarb. Dr. Small also had a nursery and shipped trees and shrubs all over the country.



Dr. Abram Lennington Small 1830 – 1914

Abram Small studied medicine at LaPorte Medical College in Indiana, before coming to Kankakee County in 1850 to assist in a smallpox epidemic. He completed his medical studies at Rush Medical College in Chicago by 1863. Dr. Small practiced medicine in Kankakee County for nearly fifty years. Very civic-minded, he helped organize county fairs and participated at many levels of local government.

Dr. Small was intensely interested in horticulture. He became convinced of the commercial and medicinal value of rhubarb or "pieplant." Finding a method to grow the plant indoors during the winter months, by 1900 he was operating a large rhubarb farm on his property under the title "Small Small and Small, Largest Growers of Pieplant in the Country." Dr. Small's interest in pieplant is celebrated every year by the Kankakee County Historical Society with a "Rhubarb Festival" held in May.



Calista Currier was born in New Hampshire and through her mother was related to the prominent Choate family. Her father took the family to the middle west in search of better land. Receiving a better-than-average education, for her day, at Crown Point Academy and in Chicago, Calista Currier taught school in northern Indiana. She married Abram Small, a young physician, on November 17, 1853.

Mrs. Small was well known for her charitable work throughout Kankakee County. She was an active member of the Congregational Church and many other local organizations.

The Smalls had six children. Their fourth child, Lennington Small was born in 1862 in what is now shown as the formal parlor of the home. Lennington Small became the twenty-third governor of Illinois between 1921 and 1929. He died in 1936.