

The Housley tradition lives on

By Amanda Swanson

There was a decade when Richard Andrew Housley served in the military, went through the civil war, lost his young wife and infant child as he traveled west doing railroad work, and his father passed away. It was a difficult time for the hardworking man in his thirties, and he could have easily continued traveling west alone and fallen to despair. Instead, Housley returned to Wood County and became one of the most successful and interesting residents of Grand Rapids since the first settlers arrived in the 1820's.

R.A. Housley was born in Medina in 1844, and had six brothers and sisters (Daniel P., Henry, George, Susan, Sophia, Rebecca, and Catherine). Housley did farm work until he enlisted in 1862, and he served until 1865. After the war he went west, doing railroad contract work. He married Anna Friend in Illinois on January 15 1867. While still in Illinois their two daughters were born. In 1870, Housley, wife Anna, 3 year old Flora and 10 month old Harriet moved to Liberty, Missouri. Then tragedy struck and Housley lose both his wife and their youngest daughter, Harriet. Housley may have realized then that along with pain and suffering, his world also had infinite possibilities, because he married again. This time he headed home to Wood County.

The year Housley married his second wife, Mary, was 1877. It was an exciting time in the United States of America. The President of the United States was Ohio-born Republican Rutherford B. Hayes. There were 38 states in the union. Reconstruction had ended, and the last federal occupation troops were withdrawn from the South. Flag Day had become a nationally celebrated day on June 14. The first commercial telephone exchange in the US had just opened in Connecticut. Thomas Edison invented the phonograph (to be followed in 1879 by his invention of the electric light). The best-selling book of the day was "Black Beauty" by Anna Sewell. The first black cadet graduated from West Point military academy, and then in 1878 the woman suffrage amendment was proposed in the United States Congress for the first time.

This was an exciting time in Wood County as well. It was the beginning of the big oil boom in southern Wood County, and money was starting to flow into the region. The railroad was complete, goods were easily shipped in and out, and travel was suddenly easier also. The governor of Ohio was Charles Foster, the mayor of Grand Rapids was B.L. Ashley, the area newspapers available were The Sentinel, The Toledo Blade and the Daily Bee. A beautiful brand-new brick school house, complete with a 220 pound bell purchased by the town, was ready to welcome 12 year old Flora Housley.

Housley's father had left him a sizeable inheritance, which may have come in handy as he opened a Grocery and Meat Market on Front Street. Within walking distance he built a spacious, elegant home for his family. Housley's sister Catherine had married into the prominent Avery family, and Housley took on Thomas Avery in 1880 to assist him.

Housley's market had everything in the line of provisions, tobaccos, cigars, confections, queensware, glassware, foreign and domestic fruits, and with a specialty of fresh meats, such as steaks, roasts, and cutlets.

The same year Housley became a town councilman, along with H.B. Pike and J.L. Peugh, and he went on to serve many years. He was named treasurer of The Grand Rapids Natural Gas & Oil Co., and became a member of Turkeyfoot Lodge, Rapids Encampment, No. 240, I.O.O.F.

After a little more than ten years, Housley bought the Peugh planning mill. He added a saw mill, and bending works, and soon had the largest plant of its kind in Northwest Ohio. He also owned several hundred acres of good farm land, and was named treasurer of the Grand Rapids Amusement Co in 1896.

In 1897 Housley sold his grocery store to the Katon brothers, and went on to become the first President of The Grand Rapids Banking company, a state bank which was incorporated in 1900.

In January of 1926, after 49 years of marriage his beloved wife Mary died. Later that year Housley revised his will, and in August of 1927 at the age of 83 he passed away, and left the family home and everything in it to his granddaughter Vivian Smart, writing in his will "for the kindness and care she has bestowed upon me." His estate was also divided among all his grandchildren, Helen Cole Lewis of Baltimore Maryland, Ralph Rader of Cleveland Ohio, Harry Rader of Toledo, Howard Rader of Toledo Ohio, and Fred Rader of Cleveland. Eventually Housley's many descendants went off on their own adventures, and the Front Street home became the property of many others including the Boulton family, Richard Dyke, the Hartman family,

the Entenman family, the Dillin family, and the to the Williams family.

Just as everything old is new again, as the house turns 125 years old it has returned to its original splendor with the opening of The Housley House Bed & Breakfast.

The opening of the historic Housley House Bed & Breakfast is a culmination of events begun by Don and Audrey Entenman. The Entenman's purchased the home in 1987, painstakingly restored the home with historical accuracy, and in 1996 they received certification that the Housley house had been placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Entenman's later sold the home to Larry Dillin.

Meanwhile, Don and Teresa Marie Williams were driving by, looking at, and loving the majestic manor of Front Street for 34 years. Mr. Williams, a football coach, even had occasion to peek over the fence longingly at the English garden. When the house went up for sale by Dillin in 2997, though it was an improbable long shot the Williams put an offer on the home. To their surprise, the offer was accepted and Christmas 2007 the wonderful home became theirs.

But the Williams did not intend to keep the 3,800 square feet of incredible beauty and history to themselves. Mrs. Williams had a successful background of operating historic bed & breakfasts, and they had high hopes for the future. In September 2008 they received their permit and began operation of The Housley House Bed & Breakfast. With great delight and joy the two aspire to share with everyone the home created by Richard Housley, now modernized to accommodate present-day needs with Wi-Fi, TV, DVD, central air and more.

Don and Teresa Marie Williams have made it possible for the first time in nearly 100 years for Richard Andrew Housley to welcome visitors into his elegant home again. Guests enjoy the simplicity and beauty of a lone-gone era, and after their stay they have Housley's inspiration to accompany them as they greet the day, step out the door onto Front Street and stroll ahead, along the river, in Grand Rapids Ohio.

