

Workingmen's Houses,
John H. Kelly House
274 Southern Avenue
Dubuque
Dubuque County
Iowa

HABS No. IA-159-W

HABS
IOWA,
31 DUBU,
14-W

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

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Site Location: 274 Southern Avenue
Dubuque, Dubuque County, Iowa
DOT designation: Resource Site No. 1.5
Cadastral grid : NE1/4 NE1/4 T89N R2E
USGS quadrangle: Dubuque South Iowa 7.5'
UTM coordinates: 15.691880.4705840
Lot dimensions : 30'x 30'; 60'x 177': .26 acre

Present Owner: Delbert Daugherty
Present Usage: single family residence
Present Condition: fair / good
Significance : Built about 1855 by laborer John H. Kelly, this two story stone/frame house is one of the most prominent of the vernacular workingmen's structures built in the 19th century along Southern Avenue at the periphery of Dubuque. Widely touted (and individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places) as an example of Steamboat Gothic architecture, however, the Kelly House is actually the result of at least two major additions, and its ornamented front porch is a later manifestation of style, applied to what had evidently started as a simply detailed dwelling. Nevertheless, the building is important to the interpretation of Dubuque's history as perhaps the oldest standing structure along Southern Avenue. Additionally, John H. Kelly is significant as one of the first of the Kelly clan to settle in the area, eventually forming a family enclave along Southern Avenue. Finally, the building is noteworthy for its continuity of ownership. While similar nearby dwellings have changed hands fairly regularly, this house was held by the Kelly family for about eighty years from its construction in 1855 until 1936, and has had only two owners since.

Part I. Historical Information

A. PHYSICAL HISTORY

1. **Construction Date:** c.1855
2. **Architect/Builder:** unknown
3. **Original and Subsequent Owners:** The John H. Kelly House is sited on a tract of land legally described as Lot 1 of Lot 1 of Lot 2 of Lot 4 of a Subdivision of Mineral Lot 37 of the City of Dubuque. The following references are taken from the abstract

for the property, presently held by the Iowa Department of Transportation, Ames Iowa.

- 1848 Plat Book of Entries, 25 February 1848; Recorded on 19 July 1848 in Book L, p. 208.
United States of America to George L. Nightingale. "The east fractional half of the northeast 1/4 of Section 36 in Township 89 North of Range 2 East of the 5th P.M. in the district of lands subject to sale at Dubuque, Iowa," (Mineral Lot 37).
- 1847 Quit Claim Deed, 27 September 1847; Recorded in Book O, p. 357.
George and Martha A. Nightingale to James Fanning. (Fanning had paid Nightingale \$23.86 in March 1847 to purchase Mineral Lot 37 from the government).
- 1855 Warranty Deed, 15 May 1855; Recorded in Book O), p. 359.
James and Catherine Fanning to John Kelly
[consideration: \$100 for Lot 4 of Mineral Lot 37.]
- 1892 Warranty Deed, 4 January 1892; Recorded in Book 49TL, p. 211.
Joseph B. and Kate Kelly, Mary E. Kelly (single), William H. Kelly (single), Michael K. Kelly (single) and Julia A. Kelly Carter and William Carter to Mary Kelly, widow.
[consideration: \$1 for Lot 2 of subdivision of Lot 4 of Mineral Lot 37.]
- 1930 Quit Claim Deed, 30 September 1930; Recorded in Book 100TL, p. 413.
Frank and Emeline Kelly to Michael Kelly, single. (Mary Kelly had died on 2 January 1904, and the land was further subdivided by Michael and Mary E. Kelly on 19 December 1922; Mary E. Kelly died on 15 January 1927. This transaction was for the purpose of consolidating Michael Kelly's ownership of the property from another Kelly heir.)
[consideration: \$1.]
- 1936 Warranty Deed, 22 July 1936; Recorded in Book 106, p. 472.
Michael Kelly (single) to Demedrio and Josefa Murillo
[consideration: \$1 and other sufficient consideration.]
- 1958 Warranty Deed, 8 October 1958; Recorded in Book 202, p. 55.
Demedrio Murillo to Joseph P. Murillo, son. (Josefa Murillo had died on 8 July 1956.)
[consideration: \$1 plus love and affection.]

1980 Court Officer Deed, 31 July 1980; Recorded in Instrument #4802-1980.

Joseph Behnke, Administrator, to Delbert Daugherty. (Joseph Murillo had died on 24 February 1980).

[consideration: \$8,700.]

4. **Original Plans, Construction:** The John H. Kelly House has changed substantially since its original construction through a number of enlargements. Evidently the building as originally constructed consisted of a single pen structure, two stories in height, that currently constitutes the west corner. Probably built by Kelly himself using traditional configuration and construction techniques, it is unlikely that an architect was involved in the house's design, and no original construction documents are known to exist.
5. **Alterations and Additions:** The house has evidently undergone a series of additions over an extended period of time, although a paucity of records and extensive recent alterations makes it impossible to trace them with certainty. These have been, in probable order of occurrence, construction of a two-story extension onto the north of the original block (the full-length front porch with the decorative scroll-sawn bargeboard was probably built contemporaneously with this); construction of a two-story rear stone/frame addition (probably as a single full-length structure, but perhaps in two half-length phases, depending upon its temporal relationship with the side addition); and construction of a single-story frame side addition on the north (including enclosure of the second-floor porch stairway). No dates for any of these changes have been located.

A contractor himself, the building's most recent owner, Delbert Daugherty constructed a frame garage immediately in front of the house in 1984 and completely renovated the house's interior in 1981-82. This last alteration is unfortunate, because in updating the interior, Daugherty has destroyed or covered virtually all of the original interior fabric with insensitive wall changes, removal of all interior trim, pouring a new concrete slab in the rear rooms, replacement of all doors and window sash, replacement of the electrical, plumbing and mechanical systems, and installation of painted sheetrock on the walls and ceiling throughout.

B. HISTORICAL PERSONS AND EVENTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE HOUSE

John H. Kelly purchased this property on Southern Avenue from developer James Fanning in 1855, and he built this two-story stone/frame house on the south side of the road soon thereafter. Variousy listed as a laborer (1857, 1876), miner (1859-1867), watchman for the Illinois Central Railroad (1870), teamster for Job Randall's sawmill (1878-1886), and yard worker for the C.W. Robison lumber company (1890), Kelly lived here with his wife Mary and their five children (Joseph, Mary, William, Michael and Julia) until his death in 1891. Mary, continued to occupy the house until she, too, died in 1904. The house then passed to the children, and Michael, a bachelor, occupied it for over thirty years before selling the property to Demedrio [Demetrio] and Josefa Murillo. The Murillos lived here until their deaths: Josefa in 1958 and Demedrio in the mid-1960s. Their son then lived here before he also died in 1980. The house has most recently been occupied by Delbert Daugherty, a Dubuque paint contractor. None of the house's occupants appear to have played a formative role in the city's development.

C. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Dubuque City Directories: 1857 - 1970.

Sanborn Insurance Maps: 1879, 1884, 1891, 1909, 1972.

Dubuque County Assessment Record: 3-32-3-14.

Iowa Department of Transportation, "Draft Environmental Impact Statement - Cultural Resources Assessment."

Land Title Abstract (located at Iowa Department of Transportation, Ames Iowa).

Lawrence J. Sommer, *The Heritage of Dubuque: An Architectural View* (East Dubuque, Illinois: Tel Graphics, 1975), pages 41-43.

Part II. Architectural Information

A. GENERAL STATEMENT

1. **Architectural Character:** Its two-story side-gabled configuration typifies the John H. Kelly House among the similarly scaled workingmen's dwellings along Southern Avenue. Its full-length, galleried front porch with decorative bargeboard, however, distinguishes the building architecturally among its peers and presents the appearance of the Steamboat Gothic style. This latter aspect is the result of at least one major alteration to the original form of the house and probably is not indicative of any Mississippi French vernacular tradition in the predominantly Irish Kelly family.
2. **Condition of Fabric:** exterior: fair; interior: original fabric obscured or destroyed in major recent renovation.

B. DESCRIPTION OF EXTERIOR

1. **Overall Dimensions:** 2-story main block: 21'7"x 34'2"; front porch: 4'0"x 34'2".
 2. **Foundations:** stuccoed limestone rubble perimeter walls with concrete floor slab.
 3. **Ext. Walls:** painted stuccoed stone on lower level; narrow exposure, painted wood beveled siding with plain corner boards on second floor.
 4. **Roofs:** moderately pitched gable with slightly more shallowly pitched shed extensions over main block and front porch; moderately pitched shed over single-story north side addition; asphalt roll roofing throughout.
 5. **Chimneys:** straddle-roof brick interior chimney with slightly corbeled cap.
 6. **Dormers:** one small wall dormer on north side addition.
 7. **Windows:** (all original sash removed) painted wood 2/2 double-hung throughout, with plain board casings and slip sills in frame section of building.
- B. **Openings:** single-leaf, ground-floor primary entrance located in west corner, under porch; original door recently replaced with

current panel/light door; (replacement) doors on first floor north and second floor east and west; all with plain casings and sills.

9. Porches: two-story, full-length open porch, or gallery, on west front; supported by six plain square columns, with closely spaced plain square balusters on upper level front and side; decoratively scroll-sawn, cusped bargeboard across front; exterior stair at north end now covered by shed roof of north side addition.

C. DESCRIPTION OF INTERIOR

1. Floor plans: The building is simply laid out: a kitchen and living room are located in the first floor of the main block, with a partial length storage room at the rear; the one-story north addition houses a bathroom. Two bedrooms are located in the second floor of the main block, with a bathroom and three smaller storage rooms under the rear shed addition.
2. Interior finishes: All original interior finishes and trim have either been removed or covered over recently with sheetrock on the walls and ceilings and carpet over plywood over the floors.

D. DESCRIPTION OF SITE

1. General setting and orientation: The Kelly House is located in the peripheral neighborhood setting at the south edge of Dubuque. Nestled in a shallow valley, the area is characterized by modest frame 1-2-story workingmen's houses situated on both sides of the street, with a variety of setbacks, indicating the extended period of construction for the neighborhood. The Kelly House is set back further than most of the others, pushed against a limestone bluff in a sidehill orientation.
2. Outbuildings: One gable-roofed frame shed is situated north of and is contemporaneous with the house. A metal garage (1984) is situated west of the house.

Compiler: Clayton S. Fraser, Fraserdesign, Loveland Colorado.
August 1988.