

Register of Old Buildings  
Macon County Historical Coordinating Council

Address: 464 W. North St.

Western Addition Plat H103  
S 1/2 of Lot 3  
except E 3', Block 1

Date of original construction: C 1871 on the basis of (2) below.

- (1) Estimate, Assessor's Office 1880.
- (2) 1871-72 City Directory lists E. A. Gastman's address as W. North & College.

Name of original owner: E. A. Gastman.

History:

1. The following is an incomplete chain of title changes for the property at 464 W. North, which in the earliest two City Directories is given as 34 W. North.
  - 1864 - Deed January 28, 1864.  
James Simpson to Diantha G. Barnes.
  - 1865 - Deed October 7, 1865.  
Diantha Barnes to Enoch A. Gastman.
  - 1973 - Deed October, 1973.  
Earl B. Davis to E. M. Hopper.
2. Enoch A. Gastman came to Decatur in 1860, and married Frances Peterson in July, 1862. She died seven months later. In August, 1864, he married Caroline S. Sargent, a Decatur teacher who was from New Hampshire. They had five children; however, only two lived to adulthood. Mrs. Caroline Gastman died in April, 1904, and on Christmas Day, 1905 he married Miss Belle Hobbs in Bloomington who survived him, living until 1946. Other personal items regarding Mr. Gastman, including reference to his interest in gardening and in bees, and the cause of his lameness, are to be found in the obituary taken from the August 4, 1907 Decatur Review, a copy of which is attached.
3. Professionally Mr. Gastman was nationally known, in part because of his record of forty-five years as superintendent of schools in one community, (so far as is known only one in the nation surpassed it), and in part for his leadership in many professional activities. These, too, are listed in part in the attached obituary.

(See reverse side)

Present owner's name: E. M. Hopper.

4. Mr. Gastman is listed in the 1871-72 Decatur City Directory as living at 34 West North, corner College, which it is presumed was later re-numbered as 464 W. North. He had secured title to the property in 1865. This does not mean that there was necessarily a house on the property however; it seems likely that having been married in 1862, he would have had a house on the land he bought, at least by 1871. The Assessor's Office lists the following data about the house in 1973:

11 rooms - In 1973, 2 apartments

Wood exterior.

Gable roof - medium pitch.

Basement - dirt floor.

Pine floors in 10 rooms.

Hardwood floors in 1 room.

Softwood trim.

Warm air, gas heat.

*Note: The above was compiled in February, 1974.  
The house was demolished June 13, 1974.*

ENOCH A. GASTMAN IS DEAD IN BOSTON  
NEWS RECEIVED SATURDAY MORNING SHOCKS AND SADDENS DECATUR  
ACUTE BRONCHITIS CAUSE  
WIDOW EXPECTED TO ARRIVE IN CITY WITH BODY THIS EVENING

Enoch A. Gastman, late superintendent of the public schools of Decatur, died Saturday, August 3, at the Parker House, Boston, Massachusetts. His death was entirely unexpected by his Decatur friends. When he left home about two weeks ago he was as well, apparently, as he had been for several years.

Several friends of the family received telegrams announcing his death. These messages came from Mrs. Gastman, who was with her husband at the time.

Later in the day a message was received saying that Mrs. Gastman would leave Boston Saturday noon for Decatur. The expectation is that she will arrive here this evening on the Wabash Continental train. No announcement of the time of the funeral has been made.

Superintendent and Mrs. Gastman left Decatur two weeks ago for a pleasure trip through the east. They visited a week in New Hampshire and then went to Boston, arriving there on Monday last. They had planned to return to their home the first of the current week.

DEATH DUE TO BRONCHITIS

Mr. Gastman's death was due to bronchitis, with which he had frequently been troubled. Friday he was not well and remained at his hotel all day. In the evening he felt much better and went out for a walk, believing that the exercise would do him good. Between two and three o'clock Saturday morning Mrs. Gastman was awakened by the illness of her husband and at once summoned a physician, but death came before medical aid arrived. A weakened heart hastened the death.

E. A. Gastman is survived by his wife and two daughters, Mrs. Louise Goben of Carlyle, Illinois and Mrs. Elizabeth Powell of Seattle, Washington.

HAD CLOSED HIS LIFE'S WORK

Last spring Mr. Gastman tendered his resignation as superintendent of the public schools. Before he left for his vacation trip he was busy completing his reports to the state superintendent and so far as was possible up to that time, completed the High School year book. Thus it appears that practically at the time that he had finished his work in the schools he should lay down the burden of life.

Few men have enjoyed more extensive acquaintance in Decatur than did E. A. Gastman. That was made possible by his life time of work in the public schools of this city, where for forty-seven years he was a teacher and for forty-five years of that time he was superintendent. Recently the statement was made that so far as was known there was only a single case where any man had served continuously longer than Mr. Gastman had served in that position.

#### HIS HISTORY THAT OF OUR SCHOOLS

When he came to Decatur there was a single school building. That was later known as the Church Street School and upon that site now stands a new, modern structure known as the E. A. Gastman school. In 1860, when Mr. Gastman began there as a teacher in the third grade, there were but four rooms in the building. That was afterward enlarged, but before his death the enlarged building had reached the point where it had to be torn away to make room for the more commodious structure that is the dead man's monument.

Thus he had lived to see the school system of this city grow from one building of four rooms, to eleven buildings, the greater portion of them having eight rooms and this fall there will be opened another grade school building, and in addition there is the high school building.

As the system grew in the number of buildings required, as it grew in the advantages offered the pupils and today the schools of Decatur hold high rank in the public schools of the state;

#### HIS SPIRIT DEVELOPED THEM

Much of the development of the system was due to the personal work of Mr. Gastman. He was progressive always. He was always in close touch with the teachers of the schools. He knew the details of the work and was in sympathy with the spirit that promised something better for the pupils. His enthusiasm was an inspiration to the teachers and that enthusiasm in his work never flagged. In that he was ever youthful and whatever else was said of E. A. Gastman it never was said that he failed to keep abreast of the times in his school ideals, and so far as was possible the schools were conducted according to what he believed to be the ideal, but always from the nature of things that could only be far from the mark that he would have. His close association with the board of education, practically being a part of that body, gave to him what some teachers lack, an intimate knowledge of the limitations imposed by the lack of funds, by the limits of taxation.

A few days before the last commencement when Mr. Gastman was talking to some acquaintances about his retirement from the schools, his intimate relation with the board was commented upon. Mr. Gastman then said that during his term as Superintendent he had always acted as clerk of the board that during his service in that capacity he had issued warrants for nearly two million dollars. During all of that time he did all of the bookkeeping for the school accounts.

#### REFUSED INCREASED SALARY

During the many years that E. A. Gastman served as Superintendent in Decatur, he had calls to other places. Some tempted him to resign. Once he could have gone to the state normal at Carbondale, but the board of education induced him to decline. In return for that concession they offered him an increased salary. Mr. Gastman declined the increase tendered him. Several times within the last ten years Mr. Gastman preferred to resign and spend his remaining years in quiet but each time that he suggested it the members of the board asked him to reconsider his determination.

Last fall he made the positive announcement that he would not be connected with the schools another year. What little time he said was yet his on earth he would spend in the enjoyment of quiet.

#### HIS FAME WAS NATIONAL

Mr. Gastman enjoyed an extensive acquaintance throughout the state and nation as an educator. He was a member of the state board of education for nearly forty years and for a long time was president of that board, which manages the affairs of the state normal university. Last June he sought to resign that position, but his resignation was declined.

It was while pleading the cause of another that Mr. Gastman won a place for himself on that board. The alumni association of the normal delegated Mr. Gastman to appear before Governor Palmer and ask that a member of their association be named as a member of the state board of education. Mr. Gastman suggested several persons who would be acceptable to the association, but had no thought of the place himself. When the Governor made the appointment E. A. Gastman was surprised to learn that he had been chosen for the place. Continuously since that time Mr. Gastman has been a member of the board.

#### ACTIVE IN STATE MEETINGS

Mr. Gastman was said to have attended more meetings of the state teachers' association than any one now living. Since 1856 he had been a member of that organization, which he had served in several official capacities. He was one of the pioneers in the state teachers' reading circle and it was due to his work in that organization in an early day that much of its popularity and success was due. Mr. Gastman was a member of the board of directors in the National Education Association and one of the active men in the board.

When the commencement exercises were held in Decatur last June Mr. Gastman made his public farewell as Superintendent of the school system. At that time he said that he had given the best years of his life to the service which began when he was twenty-six and ended now when he was seventy-five years of age. During his service as superintendent there had been graduated

from the Decatur high schools 1,478 pupils. At that time Mr. Gastman formally introduced his successor, H. B. Wilson.

In token of their appreciation of his efforts in behalf of the schools, the first week in June the teachers of the public schools gave Mr. Gastman a reception at the school building which bears his name.

#### NATIVE OF NEW YORK CITY

E. A. Gastman was a native of New York City, where he was born June 15, 1834, and when he was four years of age his parents removed to Illinois. They were a part of what was then known as the Hudson colony, a large party of which came from the east and settled in McLean County in and about the place where the village of Hudson is now located. There on a prairie farm his boyhood days were spent.

His experience was the experience of all of the sons of pioneers. His opportunities and advantages were few. He had no opportunity to go to school until he was eleven years old and then for only a few months each year. But he read much, at least for those times, for books were scarce. He read all that he could get hold of. But he had no thought of any life except that of a farmer.

When he was a young man an accident crippled him so that he feared that he could never do the heavy work required on the farm in those days and he turned his attention to the duties of a school master. The accident occurred when he was splitting rails. A misdirected blow of the ax struck his ankle and caused a wound which for a time threatened his life. He was always somewhat lame because of that accident, but soon after it occurred he was badly lamed. He felt that he was compelled to teach. Then he profitted by his devotion to books.

#### SECURES FIRST SCHOOL

When he was twenty years of age he secured his first school. That was in Cheney's Grove, near what is now the village of Saybrook. There he taught three months in a log house. He always said that his effort as a school teacher was a failure. He felt it because he was not invited to take the school for another term and he was not certain that he would have accepted the invitation if it had been extended. Then he attended the Wesleyan university for a term and later went to Eureka college. Then the state normal school was opened in 1857 and he was the first pupil enrolled and from that institution he was graduated in 1860. That fall he came to Decatur and began his work in the public schools. He was first a teacher in the third grade. For two years he held that position and then he became Superintendent. When the high school was organized he was made principal and held both positions until 1870, when the position of principal was made an individual one and he continued as Superintendent until his retirement last spring.

### HIS FAMILY LIFE

E. A. Gastman was married to Frances A. Peterson in 1862. They had been school mates at Normal. She died in less than a year after their marriage and in 1864 he married Miss Caroline S. Sargent of Clearmont, N. H. To this union were born five children, of whom two survive, Mrs. Goben and Mrs. Powell. Mrs. Gastman died in April, 1904, and on Christmas day, 1905, he was married at Bloomington to Miss Belle W. Hobbs, who survives him. Also he is survived by George Gastman, a brother, living in McLean county, but he is in feeble health and the expectation is that he will be unable to attend the funeral in this city.

Mr. Gastman's recreation was gardening and farming. His delight was working in the garden with his flowers and his vegetables. He was fond of bees and at one time was nationally considered an authority on that subject.

### LIFE WORK HAS FEW PARALLELS

The record of a life work of E. A. Gastman stands almost without a parallel in the history of the country. Forty-five years as the head of the educational system in a city the size of Decatur is short of marvelous. When he came to retire it was a voluntary act on his part. There was to him no intimation that he had outlived his usefulness in that position. So much had the members of the board of education grown to depend upon him that they would have preferred him to remain.