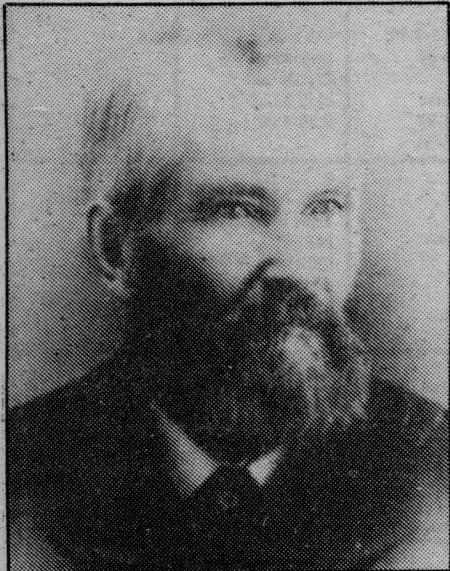


Letters from the Octagon House:

Turn-of-the-century Barrington comes alive



When Joseph Putnam Brown (above left), the probable builder of Barrington's historic Octagon House, married Emaline Hawley (above right) in 1857, he was marrying into what was already an old-time Barrington family. Emaline's grandparents had arrived about 22 years earlier as one of the original settler families in the area. One of the couple's grandsons, Roscoe Irving Nightingale (right), was photographed in the back of the house in the early 1900s. The other boy is unidentified.

(Editor's note: Through diligent research and extraordinary luck, two talented people, Barb Benson and Bob Kosin, have uncovered 700 letters that bring turn-of-the-century Barrington back to life again. All of the letters were written by a pioneer Barrington family living in the Octagon House, now an historical landmark. So join us now and once a month hereafter on the Octagon porch, have a seat and learn with us what late 19th Century Barrington was like. In addition, hear about the mystery and charm of this special house, and, of course, get to know the family.)

By BARBARA BENSON

Barrington, Ill.
Friday, Oct. 11, 1889

"Dearest Laura,
We are having lovely weather, just right for housecleaning, but the nasty flies are here yet, they have made terrible work with our porch, the posts are black with fly specks, if we ever built another house, I would not have much of a porch, it is such a job to keep them clean."

Thus wrote Harriet Emaline Hawley Brown, from Barrington's Octagon House on West Main Street, to her daughter Laura Ann Nightingale who had recently moved to Fairmont, Minn. Who built this

unique home? Apart from a title search, which places the property in the ownership of Emaline's husband, Joseph Putnam Brown, in 1882, the above letter is the closest evidence found so far that Joseph Brown did actually build the Octagon House. Correspondence with the Nightingale Family is quite positive in two directions, that he built the house and that he added the second level to an already existing structure. Whatever the truth, this whimsical, eight-sided structure is now the only property in the Barrington area to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

For the first time in 100 years, this cozy gem of an octagonal cottage is no longer in the ownership of the Brown, Hawley, or Nightingale families. (See genealogical table). However, just as a certain vision and creative dream must have played a part in its original evolution, a new owner, Barrington businessman H. Parker Sharpe, with a new vision of what may have been, has taken its history in his hands. He has set about preserving and restoring "this grand old place."

Sharpe's renovation of the house is but a new chapter to a story filled with romance, mystery, local history, and personal views of life in late 19th and early 20th century Barrington. Romance is justified, for