

Historic Homes  
303 S. Mears Avenue

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This attractive Queen Anne style house located at 303 South Mears Avenue in Whitehall was built sometime around 1884. At over 3500 sq feet, it has five bedrooms and now has 5 bathrooms. Charles E. Covell and his wife Jessie raised their family in the house. The carriage house in the back was home to Barney, "the fastest horse in town."

Charles Ellery Covell was one of twelve children born to Calvin T. Covell (1809-1879) and Elizabeth Coleman (1890-1857). He was born in Bradford County, Pennsylvania on 25 April 1845, and worked on his father's farm until January 1863 when he came to Whitehall, where he completed his schooling. His older brothers Andrew J. came to Whitehall in 1856 followed by Lyman T. in 1859. He began working at the Thompson & Covell mill and afterwards worked at Hinchman & Covell. In 1870 he became joint owner with his brother in the mill of A. J. and C. E. Covell, one of the best on the lake.

Charles married Jessie Hedges on 27 January 1877 in Whitehall. They had five children: Calvin T. Covell II (1879-1894), Guy Sidney (1881-1952), Blanche (1884-1955), Bessie (1886-1985), and Dora (1891-1982).

In addition to his lumber mill, he was township treasurer for many years; supervisor for 6 years; member of the village school board for 33 years; chairman of the county board of supervisors for 1 year, county road commissioner for 3 years and village trustee for several years.

Charles died at his home on 25 Oct 1924, at the age of 79. His wife Jessie remained in the house until her death on 11 February 1938, at the age of 81. They are both buried in the Covell family plot in Oakhurst Cemetery

The next to occupy the house were Ferdinand "Fred" and Elizabeth (ne Barrett) Walter. Fred was born in England in 1886 as well as his wife Elizabeth (1890). They had two children: Joseph Fredrick (1914-1923) and Kathleen Mary (1915-1994) They arrived in the United States on 13 October 1921 and proceeded to the Grand Haven-Spring Lake area where Elizabeth's sister, Mrs. Porter, was living at the time.

By the 1930 census they were listed as living on Livingston Street in Whitehall, and Fred was working in a foundry.

Kathleen attended Whitehall High School where she graduated on 6 June 1933. She was one of 26 members of the largest Senior class to graduate in the history of the school. It would take several years to meet and surpass that number.

Prior to 1940 they were living in the Covell house on Mears. Around 1936 Kathleen converted the front parlor into a beauty shop from which she operated for many years. The 1950 census shows them living in White River Township. Kathleen is still operating her beauty shop. Fred died in 1954. It appears that Kathleen married a gentleman with the last name of Busch around 1962. Elizabeth Walter died in a nursing facility in Roosevelt Park on 27 January 1985. Kathleen died in Whitehall on 9 March 1994. They are all buried in Spring Lake Cemetery.

The William Clark family purchased the house in the early 1970s and gave the house its distinctive green color.

In June 1988, Michael and Marjorie Bronsink purchased the house and by August opened a Bed and Breakfast called The Timekeepers Inn and Clock Shop, converting the front parlor to a clock repair shop. Three of the five bedrooms were converted to guest rooms each with names pertaining to clocks. For example, one room was named Ansonia. Another room was named Black Forest in honor of Germany's Black Forest, made famous for producing cuckoo clocks. Fortunately for the guests, the three cuckoo clocks in the room do not announce the house. The third room was named Seth Thomas for Seth Thomas clocks, and like the other rooms contains a clock for which it is named.

Upstairs also contained a small cozy sitting area, complete with books and magazines. Continental breakfasts were served in a breakfast room also located upstairs.

Michael had his clock shop on the first floor. He specialized in repairing and restoring clocks of all kinds, in addition, to selling clocks. Marjorie also sold her pen and ink drawing which featured historic scenes and nautical themes.

In September 1995 saw another change in ownership when Ron & Cathy Russell purchased the house. They changed the name to the White Swan Inn in honor of the many swans that inhabited the area waters. The front parlor was changed once again and became a gift shop for the B&B guests. In 2021, after 26 years as owners of the White Swan Inn, Ron and Cathy Russell retired.