

The living room furniture was chosen to fit in with the home's heritage. The original room was doubled in size early in the 1900s, so it now has two bay windows.

## Past perfect

Looking back to home's Victorian glory days

STORY BY SUSAN DOWN  
PHOTOS BY JOHN MCKAY  
Times Colonist staff

A vision of the past foretold the future for two Vic West homeowners who, through years of renovations, kept in sight their rosy concept of what their 1890 house could be.

"I've always seen it finished — maybe in technicolour — but finished," said Margaret Narain, who has owned the Victorian cottage for over two decades. The house has been restored so lovingly that Narain and partner Susan Nickum received a Hallmark Society Award in 1988 for their years of effort.

A proper rose garden and exuberant perennial border grace the area that once held fireweed and

brambles. Inside, velvet settees and antique gas lamps put the finishing touches on the tall, spacious rooms with their gleaming fir floors and wood trim. "When families with children come into this house, they are all mesmerized," said Nickum. "Every room is a bit of a discovery. They see a different style of living, a different way in which to order your possessions."

Originally built for a master mariner, the home was sold to saloon owner Henry Siebenbaum at the turn of the century. It was Siebenbaum who in 1905 hired architects Hooper and Watkins to completely change the front of the house by widening it. The expansion doubled the size of the front rooms, adding a second bay window to the parlour, and the new design added a narrow balcony.

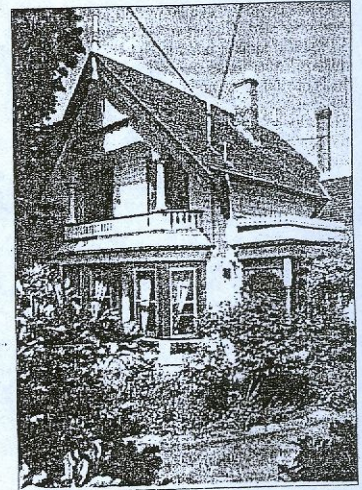
The hours of scraping, stripping and staining, like the hours of labour in childbirth, didn't seem as bad afterward as they did at the time. "As soon as the rooms were finished I would say 'Gee, it didn't take that much to do,'" Narain said.

She may take it lightly now, but by any standards, the work required was considerable. Former owners had installed sheets of drywall over the old plaster, with the added thickness obscuring some of the fluted door and window trim. After Narain bought it, she removed lath and plaster, insulated the walls, added a vapour barrier and applied new drywall rather than plastering. "I opted to drywall because we live in an earthquake zone. Drywall will crack, but not as much (as plaster)," she said.

Please see SURPRISES, Page F2



The breakfast room leads directly into the kitchen, which is dominated by a black, cast iron, solid fuel stove.



Roses and annuals crowd around the house while broad-leaf evergreens enhance the view from the indoors looking out.

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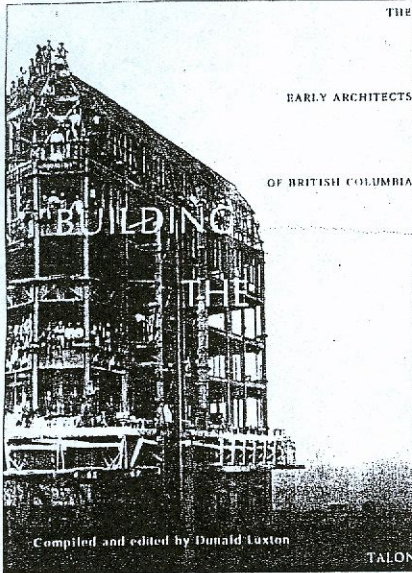
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Like a high rise that starts out from a hole in the ground, this book kept on growing as a research team learned more and more about B.C.'s past.

# Building up

Small-scale project blossomed into an important architecture reference

*Buildings the West* edited by Donald Luxton; Talonbooks; \$60

BY SUSAN DOWN  
*Times Colonist staff*

Architects who wanted to practise their profession in 19th-century British Columbia had to hustle, supplementing their incomes with other work.

"No one could make a living full time as an architect on the frontier," said Vancouver writer and editor Donald Luxton. "You had to have other jobs. Often they were surveyors or builders." Many other architects chose extra jobs that weren't quite as obviously compatible, a favourite being work as an undertaker.

The story goes that having colleagues as undertakers caused one Victoria architect, Richard Lewis, to maintain his health a little longer, says Luxton. "He took to his bed, sure that he was dying," said Luxton of Lewis, who designed blocks of commercial buildings along Wharf Street. "He rallied miraculously when he realized that if he did die, his competition would end up burying him."

Then there's the early career of Henry Bell-Irving, patriarch of a B.C. dynasty, who rowed three miles each morning to his architectural office in Gastown and who made sockeye salmon famous by shipping cans of it to U.S. soldiers.

Those are the kind of anecdotes to be found in Luxton's new book, *Building the West: The Early Architects of B.C.* (Talonbooks). Along with elegant sepia-toned photos, the book holds outlines of the lives of hundreds of architects who practised in the province before 1938. Luxton has earned a heritage achievement award from Heritage Canada for the project.

The book's foundation was laid after a 1992 phone call that Luxton had with Victoria heritage consultant Stuart Stark, both of them musing that compiling a book on B.C. architects would be a worthwhile project. They found a publisher and aimed for a short book — just over 100 pages.

But they had no idea how many architects had come through the province, usually from England via eastern Canada, made a design contribution and then moved on.

"We knew almost nothing when we started this," said Luxton. "We knew Rattenbury and Maclure, and that's who most people think of until Arthur Erickson. What we kept finding was a whole story that hadn't been told."

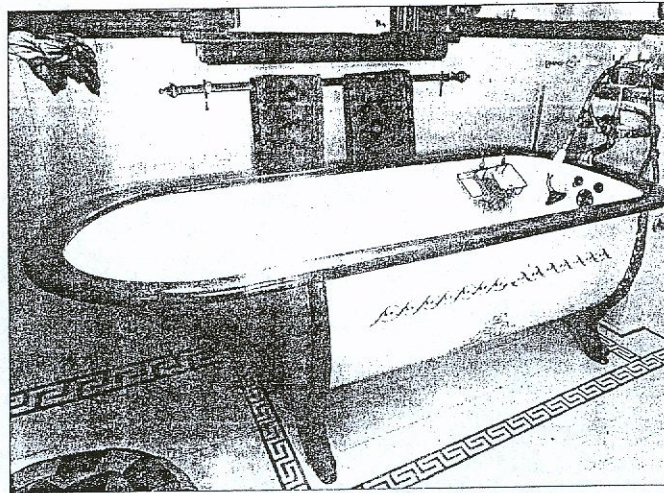
By 1997 the project was in crisis, having grown far larger than expected and suffering dead ends on much of the research. But a change in technology was a boon to the more than 50 writers and researchers.

"When we first assembled the manuscript there were more gaps than information," said Luxton. "But we picked the project back up again. It was the Internet that made it possible."

Electronic research unearthed more new facts just weeks before the book went to the printer, when a new index of California's death records came online.

Through researchers in California, Luxton and his team were able to glean more information on architects such as Wright and Sanders, whose firm designed such important Victoria buildings as Carr House and the Temple Emmanuel. The men had moved their practice to San Francisco in 1867 and gained a reputation for designing splendid Nob Hill homes, but their later exploits were here until recently.

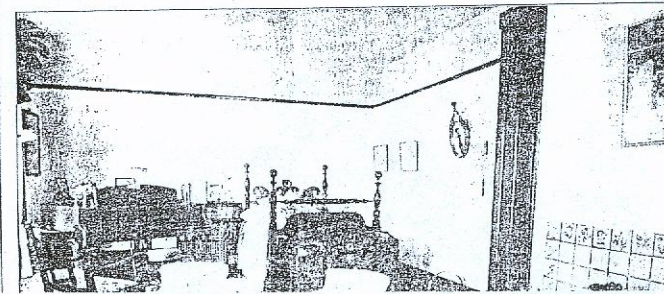
# Surprises: Lovely features were hidden under drywall



The main-floor bathroom features a most unusual tub. This style is even older than the more well known clawfoot type.



The formal dining room features a chandelier with the lights blossoming out of a basket.



• From Page F1

She also uncovered wonderful surprises, such as the elegant bannister — boxed in with drywall when Narain purchased the house. The painted woodwork took two years to strip and refinish. The women also added a conservatory in keeping with the spirit of the original house design.

Other improvements included replacing the roof using wood instead of duroid shingles, replacing the hollow core doors with old Victorian doors and repouring the perimeter foundation. On the exterior, Narain cut her own shingles in a fishscale pattern for the lower skirt of the house. The exterior palette now features light-coloured channel siding with forest green trim for the fascia boards and aprons, and deep red for the windows.

The duo took on one room at a time, using the others for storage.

"Fortunately the rooms are big so you can live in one and work in the others," said Narain, who has gradually collected authentic bits and pieces, such as the Eastlake door escutcheons and stained glass rather than settle for reproductions. "We hit every demo going for old glass, old hardware, old doors."

Not completely willing to match their design choices with another age, the women chose a creamy wall colour for the parlour based on the dusty road of a painting of Narain's native Guyana. A distinctive Caribbean Berbice chair from Guyana — like a chaise longue with a woven cane seat — holds pride of place beside the other, more formal, upholstered furnishings.

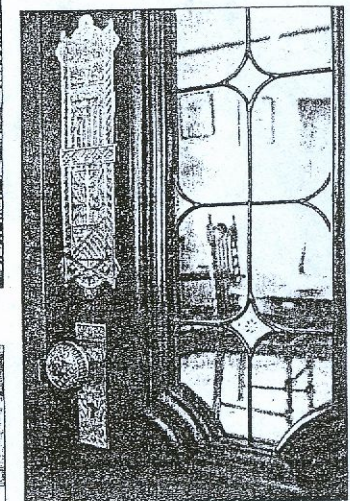
These details — a kind of va-voom vintage — give the house a signature ambience: a French chandelier with metal woven like a basket of flowers, dark green anaglypta (embossed wallpaper), barley twist chairs, an antique "rope" bed. In the bathroom is an antique enameled tin tub sitting in a cradle topped by a varnished wood rim. The precursor to the cast-iron clawfoot, it is just one step away from the metal wash-tub.

Since the owners are gardeners who spend a great deal of time outside, the exterior layout and design is as important as the interior choices. "One of the joys of the property is that there are so many different garden rooms," said Nickum.

On one side is a vegetable garden in raised beds, with pathways to a pond and shade garden, as well as a brick patio and covered garden house for use in inclement weather.

Even the woodshed has some Victorian cachet with its eyebrow window, wooden bull's eye mouldings and roof cresting.

Suitably called Rose Cottage since it was built, the house is a testament to the rosy vision of all its owners.



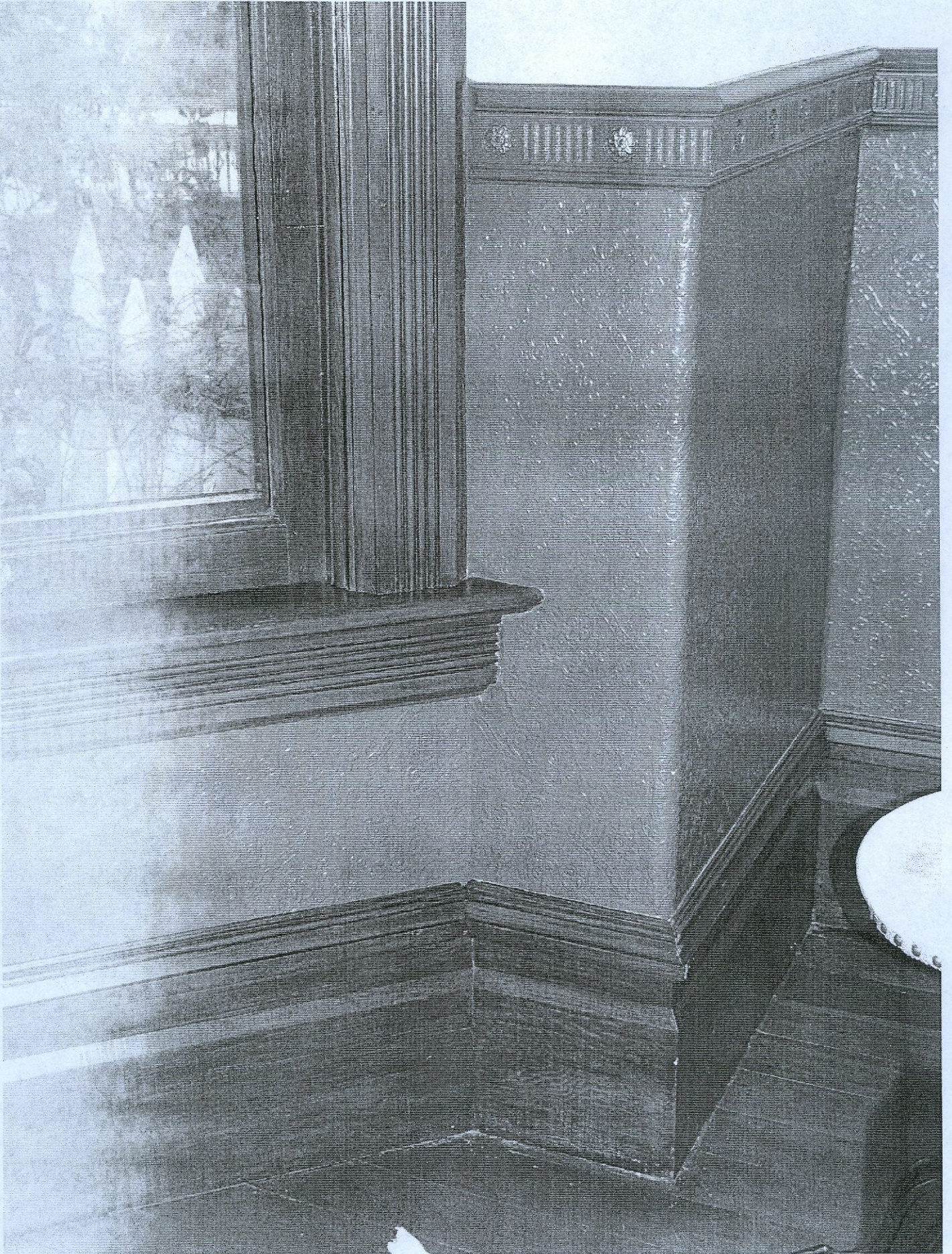
The glass door and the brass hardware are not reproductions — the home owners combed demolition sales to find accessories to suit the age of the home.

Quick tour

1109 Catherine St.



1109 Catherine St./ Interior / Details of Wood Window trim / Baseboards



1109 Catherine St./Interior

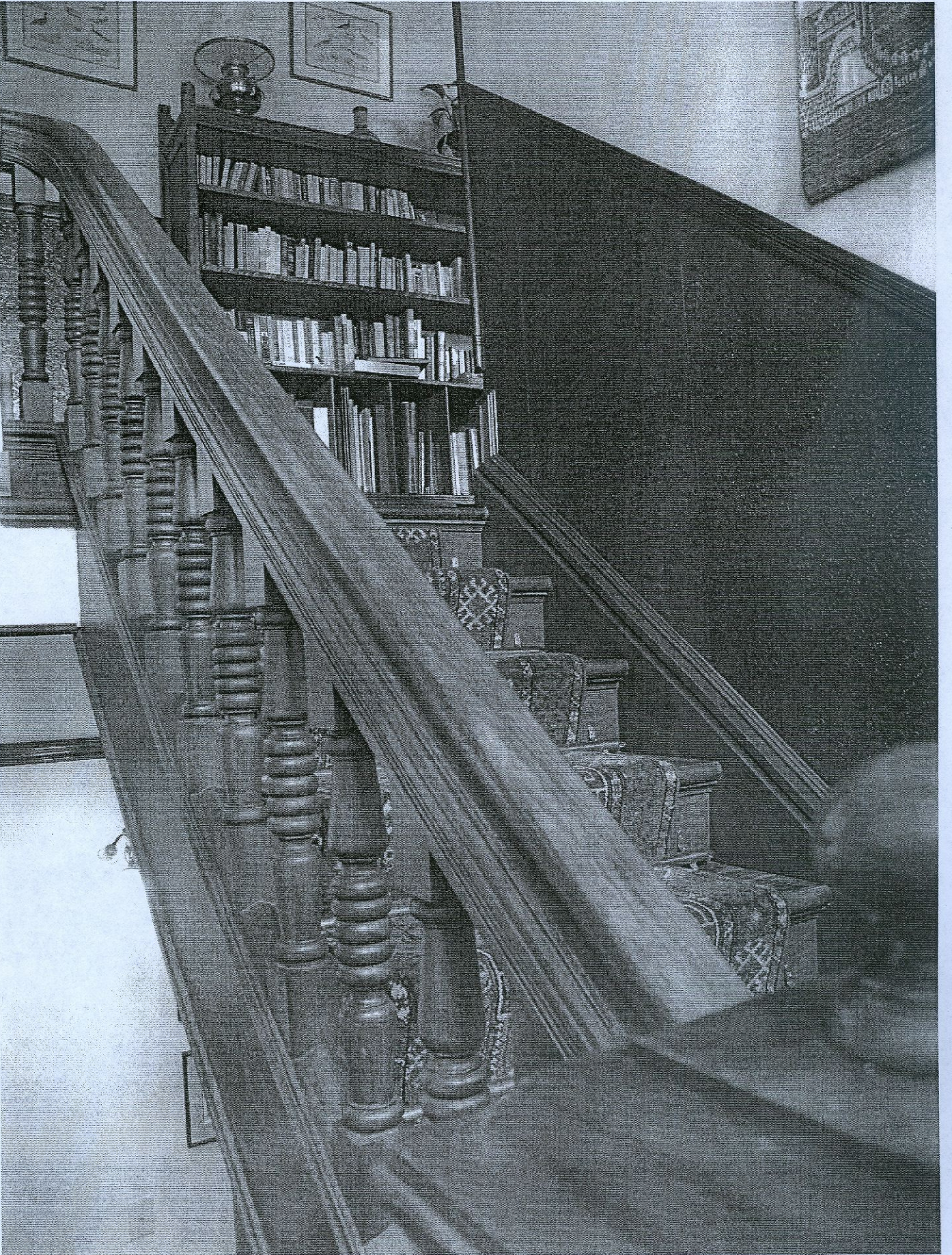


1109 Catherine St./Interior /Stairway



1109 Catherine St. / Interior Front Hall





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