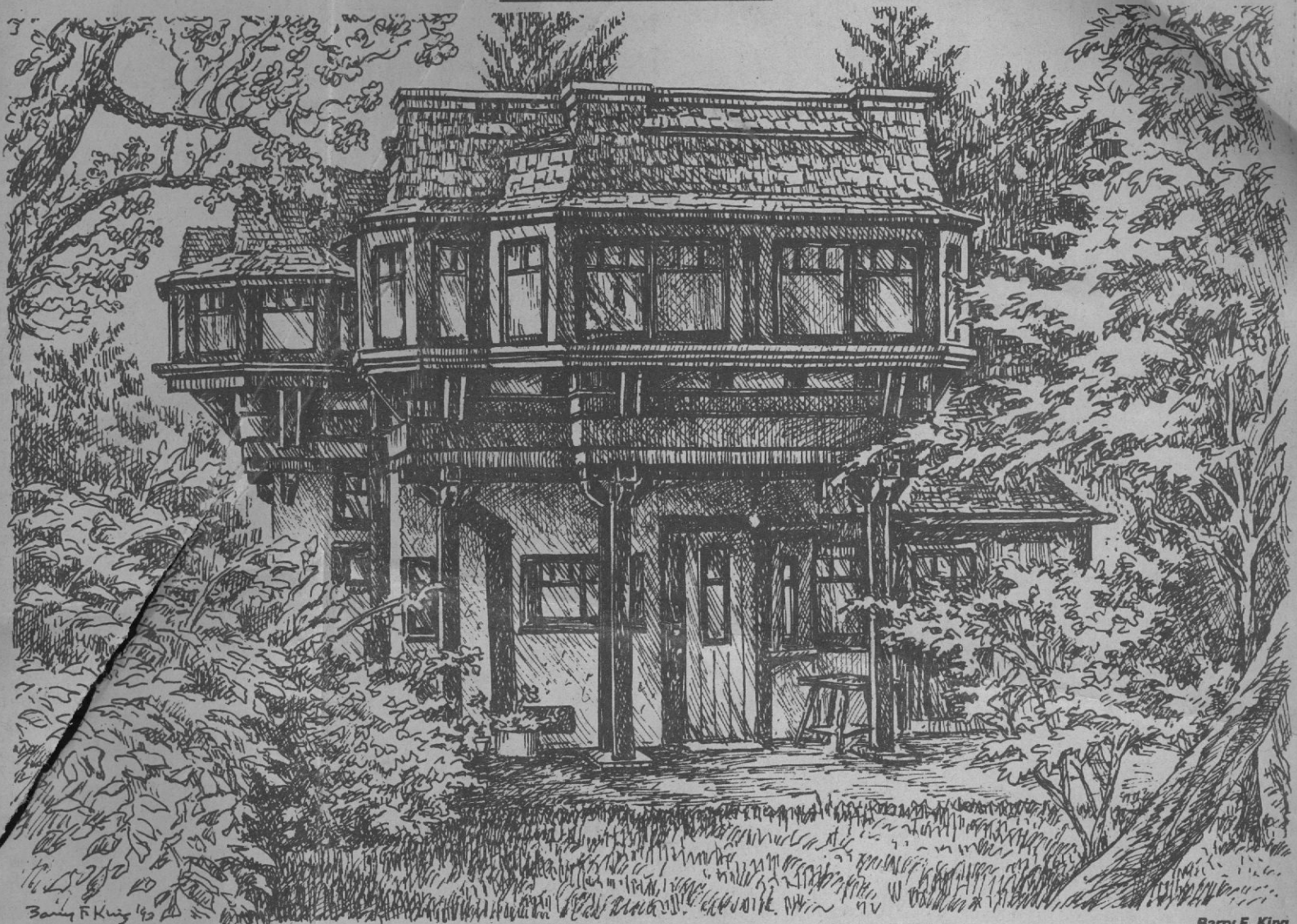


Oct 9, 1995

LANDMARKS



Barry F. King '95
1578 Ash Road

Barry F. King

Dickens-loving owner produced house with magical air

Ash Road in Gordon Head is named for Dr. John Ash, an oculist. He bought land from Henry Dodd, one of the seven children of Charles Dodd, a former master of the steamship *Beaver*. Ash used the land as a retreat from the rigors of his job as the first provincial secretary following British Columbia's entry into Confederation in 1871.

Further along Ash Road, on land owned by the pioneer Tod family since 1852, Frederick James Speed built a most unusual house in the early part of the Second World War, when lumber and other building supplies were scarce. A carpenter and cabinet maker who loved to read Charles Dickens' work, Speed revelled in his construction of a vernacular Tudor Revival house.

The walls are stuccoed with heavy, rough half-timbering on the upper storey. The roof has staggered cedar shakes, stained red, and there are several gables, roof hips and parapets. The both large and small oriel win-

Geoffrey Castle

dows have substantial moulded ledges and heavy supporting brackets. An abundance of heavy timbers and posts lend character to the structure.

Even the garage is treated in a somewhat eccentric manner — it has an oriel window, shed-roofed dormer and a square cupola with louvred vents.

The house is secluded and surrounded by trees so that there is an almost magical atmosphere to the place. It is little changed — the present owners acquired the house in 1948 — and its Dickensian appearance could easily be depicted on a traditional Christmas greeting card.

Fred Speed seems to have been an unusual man. He was born in Kent, England, and came to Canada to live and work in Edmonton, where he earned a reputation as a most colorful and singularly unsuccessful

politician.

He entered the mayoralty race seven times and was consistently at the bottom of the polls each time. He did equally badly in his one outing for alderman in the civic elections. In 1938, Speed conceived an entirely new approach to campaigning: he confined his speeches to excerpts from Shakespeare's play *Henry V*. However, he never captured more than 284 votes or about one per cent of the total votes cast.

Speed, a self-styled philosopher, poet, writer, actor, astronomer, logician and spiritual philanthropist, married and with his wife, Amy, had six sons and four daughters, who in turn gave him 30 grandchildren and 28 great-grandchildren. In retirement, the couple lived variously in Esquimalt, James Bay and Fernwood. Fred Speed died in 1975 in a Central Saanich rest home. He was 84.

Geoffrey Castle is past president of the Victoria Historical Society.