

The Siggins-Smith House

315 Liberty Street



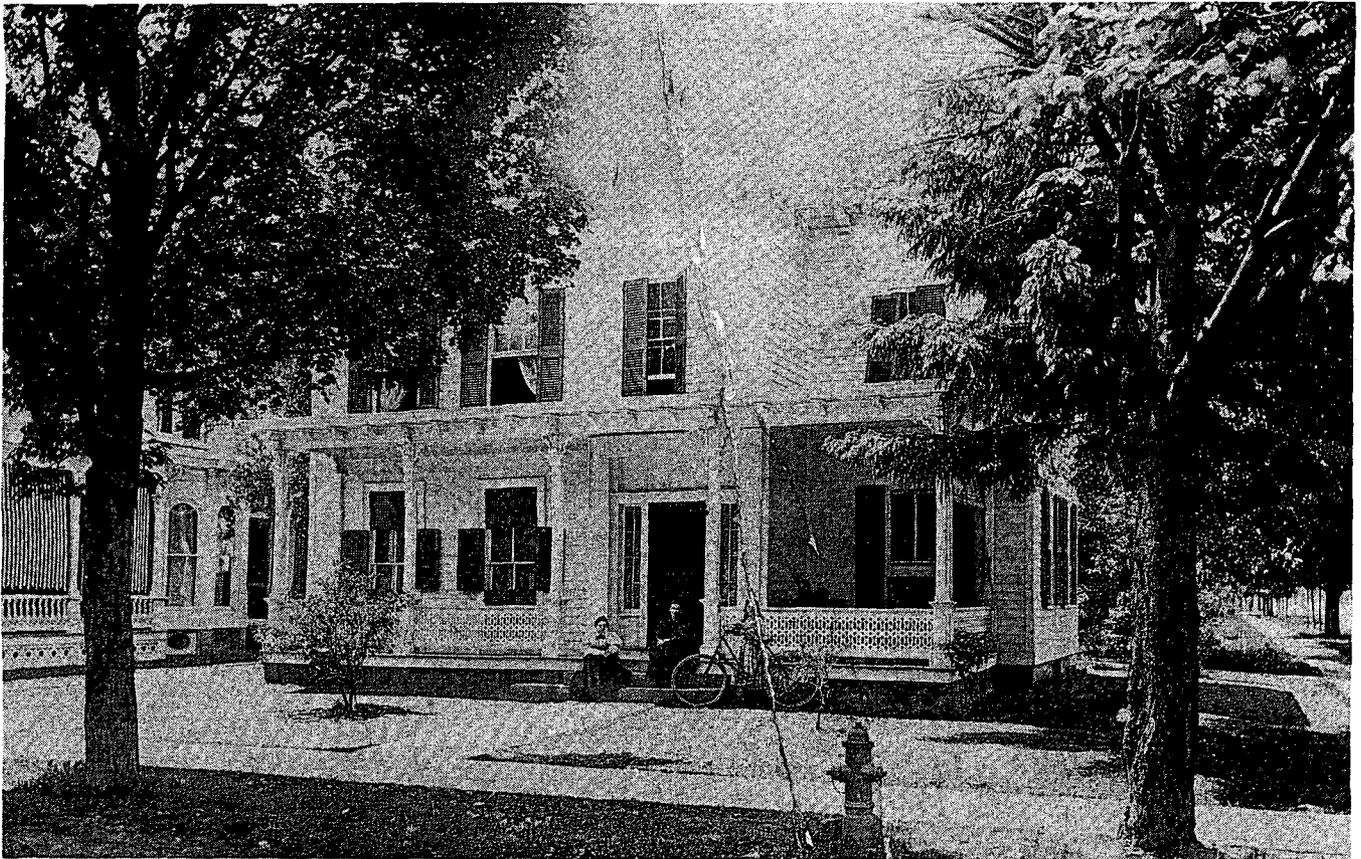
On May 24, 1893, the **Warren Mail** contained the following announcement: "President Siggins of the Warren Electric Street Railway hopes to have the cars running by the first of July so that everyone can ride on the glorious Fourth. A new track has been laid on Laurel Street and is now being extended down High Street (Fourth Avenue today) to the Railway Station. The track will be laid across the Conewango Creek into Glade as soon as the bridge can be prepared for it. The cars will soon be here and the poles and wire will soon be put up. Have patience and we will take a ride." And indeed on July 4 about 5,000 Warren citizens, to their great delight, were whisked about town on the newly-completed trolley line. The fare was five cents.

In that year the Siggins family was living at 406 Liberty Street in a house which had been converted from a former church, but in 1895 they moved to the corner of Fourth and Liberty Streets into a white frame house which David Siggins purchased from Mrs. E. Fisher -- 315 Liberty Street. This old house, pleasant and dignified, with tall shuttered windows reaching to the floor of the porch, is shown in a photograph of the period with Mrs. Siggins and her daughters seated on the

steps or standing nearby, and it was here that the family lived for the next decade.

But during the opening years of the twentieth century the work of a young Buffalo architect, Edward A. Phillips, was beginning to be noticed in Warren, and, looking round him, David Siggins liked what he saw of the young man's work and was soon commissioning him to design a new home for his family. During the next two years, the old frame house of Mrs. Fisher had disappeared and in its place stood an extremely solid new mansion, as such houses were apt to be called in those days, built of brown Hummelstone imported from eastern Pennsylvania and "Bradford best number one pressed brick" in the phrase of the contractor for the masonry work, William R. Lavery. To celebrate its completion, the family invited a few friends to a preview picnic which was laid out on a trestle table in the hall with sawdust and wood shavings still lying about on the floor. The year, as carved in the cornerstone, was 1907.

In style, the new house was vaguely English though it owed nothing whatever to the fussy Victorian Age which had just ended. In any case architect Phillips was not one to be



The David Henry Siggins residence on the southwest corner of Fourth Avenue and Liberty Street [315 Liberty Street] about 1895. [The house belonged earlier to Dr. Andrew Fisher, a dentist, and afterward to his widow.] On the steps are Miss Mabel Siggins and Mrs. D. H. [Marietta] Siggins, and standing with bicycle, Miss Maude Siggins. Maude Siggins was married to Sam Q. Smith in this house in

1902. In 1907 this wooden house was replaced by D. H. S. with a brownstone and brick house designed by the architect E. A. Phillips. The same fire hydrant remains in 1975. The sidewalk is made of boards. Of this old frame house, all that was preserved in the later house were several bedroom mantelpieces and the large brass front door key. The house to the left was the O. C. Allen house.

hampered by strict adherence to any stylistic model but instead he chose freely those features which he wished to incorporate in the house, mixing, in the interior, both classical and romantic elements; for example, classical columns and archways in the hall with beamed ceilings and rough brick fireplaces in some of the living areas. In an era when architects were uninhibited by architectural dogma, Mr. Phillips achieved a nice blend of opposing qualities, of formal and informal, elegant and crude, rough and smooth, large rooms and small, new ideas and old, and the house seemed exactly designed to suit the needs and preferences of its owners, as was no doubt his aim.

It also expressed well the spirit of the new century just opening, which was a time of great optimism. And in the overhanging eaves, the decorative leaded glass, the large plate glass windows and the use of varied "natural" woods in the interior -- oak, cherry, chestnut, pine -- could be found some of the same elements used in the Craftsman houses of the period and the prairie houses of Frank Lloyd Wright. It was, and is, a comfortable house in which to live, and with its

large halls and generous-size rooms it is especially pleasant for entertaining, the top floor, as in many of Mr. Phillips' houses, being finished off for use as a ballroom. (In the early days of the Warren Players Club, many rehearsals were held there.) An abundance of ample closets, shelving and built-in storage was a feature new to the period and of great convenience in housekeeping. The furnishing and decoration of the house was done by the firm of Mitchell, Parker and Brown of Buffalo, and after seventy years some of the original furniture, floor coverings and fabrics are still in use. Some of the hand-wrought lighting fixtures incorporating the art glass of the period were said to have been made by Tiffany.

Over the years, one of the house's most endearing qualities has been its ability to adapt to the occupants' moods, at times presenting the aspect of a large small house, or again, in another light, that of a small large house, depending upon the inner or outer needs of the moment. However that may be, Mr. Phillips' architectural and decorative ideals have managed to survive, scarcely changed, in a much-changed world.