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It's history, one house at a time

19th Ward tour allows hundreds of visitors to take a step back in time.

Matthew Daneman, Staff writer

The five-bedroom house at 374 Wellington Ave. was built in 1915.

And today much of it looks like it did nearly a century ago, from the gas lighting fixtures still on the walls and the foot washing basin in the second-floor washroom to stenciling on part of the ground floor walls that matches stencils the residents, the Morehouses, found under old wallpaper upstairs.



Susan Morehouse in her 19th Ward home, one of those that will be on the house tour. "We feel the Lord wanted us to be in this neighborhood," she said. She and her husband Bill have lived there 31 years.

The house, in Rochester's 19th Ward, will see a few hundred visitors Oct. 6 for the 32nd 19th Ward Community Association House Tour. The tour will include seven homes in the southwest Rochester neighborhood, as well as St. Monica School and a historic cemetery.

Neighborhood home tours are common in many parts of the city, from downtown to Corn Hill. The hallmark of the 19th Ward tour, and the homes there, is their accessibility, said Barbara Sullivan, a Chili Avenue resident and member of the house tour committee.

"Our houses aren't mansions, they're reasonable sizes," Sullivan said. "Our houses are reasonably priced. You can get a house still for under \$100,000 in the 19th Ward. (But) you can get a house with gumwood, oak trim, spectacular features."

The 19th Ward, bounded by West Avenue, Genesee Valley Park, Genesee Street, the Genesee River and the Erie Canal, began near the start of the 19th century with a tavern and store near what is known today as Brooks Landing. By 1818, the area was a shipping hub for goods brought north on the Genesee River and then transferred to wagons or sleds for the rest of the distance to Lake Ontario.

Many of the homes in the 19th Ward date back to before the Depression, Sullivan said.

Getting homes for the tour is usually a mix of networking – hitting up people you know, particularly those whose homes have been toured in the past – and pounding the pavement, Sullivan said.

"I've been known to knock on a door – 'I love your house,'" she said. "We've done cold calls."

This year's tour covers homes mostly in the heart of the 19th Ward in the blocks just west of Rochester School District's Wilson Magnet High. The homes were chosen to show a variety of architectural styles, from colonials to Tudors, Sullivan said, as well as a diversity of homeowners.

People are advised to wear comfortable shoes for the tour. Foot covers will be provided at each home.

For the tourists, the home tour means spending anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes at each home, hearing a little history, seeing the architectural features and silently critiquing the décor.

For the toured, "It's like having about 300 mothers-in-law come to visit," Sullivan said. "You want your house to sparkle. You want your house to look good. It's a lot of work. (But) it is rewarding to meet so many people."

And sometimes people with connections to the homes, such as people who lived there decades ago, show up for tours, she said.

Susan and Bill Morehouse moved into their home 31 years ago, shortly after they wed. Bill Morehouse's doctor's office, where he sees numerous area residents, is a short walk away on Arnett Boulevard. And three of their now-grown children were born in the house.

"We felt the Lord wanted us to be in this neighborhood," Susan Morehouse said.

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If you go

The 19th Ward Community Association home tour will be from noon to 5 p.m. Oct. 6. Tickets, including the guide book, are \$10 each and are available at the association office, 216 Thurston Road; at Hunt's Hardware, 390 Thurston Road; at Parkleigh, 215 Park Ave.; and at Creator's Hands, 81 Browns Race. Area Wegmans also are selling vouchers that can be redeemed at the association office for a ticket and guide book. For more on the tour, go to www.19wca.org.