Souvenirs of Hill Mansions Await New Campus Homes

In the city of Syracuse, as in most cities, many of the first large homes were built on hills, especially University Hill, and the James Street hill on the city's northeast side. Many of those first large homes, built in the middle to late 19th century, have been demolished in the 20th century. But at least two of University Hill's finer old homes, demolished in the last 30 years, have not vanished entirely. For preserved in SU's warehouse on Ainsley Drive and waiting to be used again in some new capacity, are the paneling from the living room of Huntington Beard Crouse's Comstock Avenue home, and the front doors and second-floor mirror from Yates Castle, which was on Irving Avenue.

Both buildings were originally private homes and were later obtained by the University, which used them for classrooms, offices and meeting spaces.

The Yates Castle, built in the period of 1852 to 1855, was designed by James Renwick, who also designed St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

From 1867 to 1898, the Castle was home of the Alonso Chester Yates family, who developed a reputation for throwing lavish parties there.

SU purchased the property during the winter of 1905-06 and used the castle for education, music, fine arts and finally, journalism programs.

When plans to demolish the building were announced, to make way for a new wing for the State University of New York's medical college, protests were many and vehement, but ultimately unsuccessful. Some friends of the School of Journalism, however, did succeed in persuading University officials to preserve the Yates mirrors and doors for the school's envisioned new building.

When Newhouse I was being designed in the early 1960's, however, the pieces weren't considered appropriate to the style of the building, so they weren't included in it, according to Virginia R. Denton, assistant director of facilities planning, who has been working here ever since she graduated from SU in 1960.

The Crouse House, built around the turn of the century, "wasn't very ostentatious, but it had very nice spaces" both inside the house and out in the yard, Mrs. Denton said. It also commanded a tremendous view of the city, she said.

For many years it was the home of Huntington B. Crouse, one of the co-founders of the Crouse-Hinds Company of Syracuse, which manufactures electrical equipment. H.B. Crouse Hall on the Main Quad is named for him, and the Crouse-Hinds Company last fall made the naming gift for the School of Management building construction project, scheduled to begin this spring.

Huntington Crouse died in 1943 and his widow lived in the house until 1955, when she gave the building to SU. From then until its demolition in 1965, it was used mainly by the School of Social Work. University officials decided to preserve the walnut paneling of the Crouse living room to use in a new School of Social Work building that was planned for but never built.

The room was also considered for use in Bird Library, Mrs. Denton said. The Yates pieces and Crouse paneling may still be used, she said, possibly in the proposed addition to E.I. White Hall, in the proposed student union building or in the management building, for which feasibility studies are now being conducted.

For the pieces and paneling to be installed somewhere, they must be wanted by the building's users, they must physically fit the building's space, and they must be appropriate to the architectural style and proposed uses of the building, Mrs. Denton said.

"I would rather see them in a crate than used inappropriately," she said. But she expects they will be used sometime, if not in an immediate project, then in some future one. "There will be other things," she said. —K.C.R.

Also stored in SU's warehouse at Ainsley Drive are Yates Castle's oak mirror (about 13 feet high), which stood at the second-floor landing, and H.B. Crouse's living room (about 26 by 46 feet and 12 feet high), which is now taken apart, numbered and crated. Standing next to the mirror is Samuel (Jack) Lane, who works in the warehouse.