



Preserving Ben's Historic Home

BY SHELDON GREEN



Lillian Lynch

The stately home stands as a monument to timely planning and an extraordinary family.

Because several concerned people in the small farming community of Hatton had a keen appreciation of history and through a combination of fortunate events, the childhood home of heroic aviation pioneer Carl Ben Eielson now stands preserved as Ben knew it.

The main floor is furnished primarily with original Eielson family furniture while the spacious second floor bedrooms are now museums holding historical displays of other prominent families or events from Traill County history.

Ben Eielson's sister, Elma Eielson Osking, lived most of her life in the house that holds Ben's flying trophies and memorabilia. She kept the home looking as it did during Ben's life and when she could no longer care for it, she hoped it somehow would be preserved.

That opportunity came last winter.

After Elma moved into a retirement home, the grand house sat unattended for the winter. That spring it was to be put up for sale.

Guy Thorson, a leader in the Hatton community and a person with a deep appreciation for history, knew the home must be preserved. Thorson had been instrumental in organizing the Hatton Eielson Museum and Historical Society for the Bicentennial in 1976.

"We were quite conscious about saving the Eielson home for history," said Thorson. "It was the one thing everyone in the community wanted to do. We tried to obtain it in 1976 but it wasn't available then."

"It would have been a shame for the community to lose this house," recalled Lillian Lynch, another founder of the Historical Society. "Ever since we organized, we wanted the house and here was our chance."

Just two days before the scheduled sheriff's sale on the property, the Historical Society closed the deal. The lot, house, main floor furnishings and the original Eielson bed and roll-top desk upstairs would be purchased as one unit, with the family retaining the remaining bedroom furnishings and some selected items. The cost would be \$53,500 which was considered a good price for a home of such value, but a figure beyond the means of the Historical Society.

At that point, the community got involved. A group of Hatton businessmen donated some money and loaned even more. A bank loan and the sale of the first Historical Society museum made the deal possible.

Eager volunteers cleaned and dusted the home and moved the other museum pieces across town. On July 26 the home was opened to the public. That Sunday afternoon 700 people toured the home and in its first summer, 1,500 people walked through the house including a former maid of the Eielson family who had traveled from the East Coast to see it again.

The crowds came for good reason.

The house is of Queen Anne style architecture listed on the registry of National Historical Sites. There are six bedrooms and a bath upstairs and five rooms with foyer downstairs. The woodwork is imported carved oak and the two fireplaces have tiles of Italian marble. The original Eielson dining room is set with Danish porcelain. Elma's baby grand piano sits near leaded and stained glass windows in a spacious, high-ceiling parlor. The library holds Ben's things: the 1928 Harmon Trophy presented to him by President Hoover; the 14 books on his life and flying exploits; the photographs from his career as a pioneer in Alaskan aviation.

Funds to maintain the home will be raised from tours each Sunday afternoon Memorial Day to Labor Day, from the annual Ice Cream Social put on by the Historical Society, from



The Library



Third Floor Turret



Eileen Osking Mark

