

## Darwin D. Martin's First Real Estate Investment

Of Darwin D. Martin's many real estate investments, the most famous is the house at 125 Jewett Parkway, Buffalo, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and built between 1904 and 1906. However, Darwin's first real estate investment was made 20 years earlier on the south side of Buffalo.

On a Sunday morning in June 1883, 17-year-old Darwin D. Martin, a bookkeeper at J.D. Larkin & Co., took a walk from his boarding house on Seneca Street to a new, rapidly developing section of the city called Allendale. He wrote in his journal, "Am thinking of buying a lot out there and building and paying in installments." Former Buffalo mayor Orlando Allen had owned the land in this area, located between Seneca and Perry streets. In 1882, Allen's heirs deeded land to the city for Orlando Street and for extending Walter and Maurice Streets from Perry to Seneca



Darwin D. Martin, ca. 1883, the year he purchased the property on Maurice Street.  
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Street. Lots were then created along those streets.

By September 1883, Martin had decided to buy a lot on Maurice Street but the financing presented a problem because of his age. The lot was eventually purchased by contract between Darwin and Henry F. Allen, an executor of Orlando Allen's estate.

On October 2, Darwin delivered the contract to the County Clerk's office to be recorded. It outlined the purchase of a lot on Maurice Street, 490 feet south of Seneca Street, for \$360 with monthly payments of \$10, plus twice yearly payments of 6% interest on the unpaid balance. Once \$200 had been paid, a house would be built on the lot "similar to John O'Brien's on Orlando Street."

By May 14 the young property owner had paid \$200 toward the mortgage, and thus ordered Mr. Allen to proceed with the construction of an \$800 cottage. By mid-July the house was being painted and two weeks later Darwin had rented it for \$12 per month. By September he had paid \$360 on the property, commenting, "How glad I am that I got it."

Frequently assisted by his good friend Walter Roth, Martin made various repairs to the cottage and woodshed over the next four years, and installed a picket fence. In July 1885, Darwin recorded, "Mr. Allen brought me my city tax bill amounting to over \$11. I am appalled at the amount of money I am paying out." A year later he noted paying \$16.38 in taxes, adding, "Steep, but am glad to have [property] to be taxed."

In January 1887, Darwin paid the balance due on his Maurice Street investment and received title to the property. That April he agreed, at the tenant's request, to "wallpaper the house throughout, repair plastering and put in



The cottage at 189 Maurice St. as it appears today. ANITA MITCHELL PHOTOGRAPH, 2014

water, an expense of \$50 or more" and the following year he decided to finish the upstairs.

It was Martin's plan to begin his married life with Isabelle Reidpath in this cottage on Maurice Street, but she rejected living in Allendale. He tried to find a property for which he could trade his cottage but was unsuccessful. Eventually the couple decided to build in the newly developing Highland Parkside area of Buffalo, on a lot that Darwin had acquired as an investment. The Maurice Street cottage was mortgaged to help pay for that house, where the couple lived until moving into the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed house on Jewett Parkway.

The April 25, 1890 entry in Darwin Martin's *Autobiography* reads, "Sold Maurice St. cottage for \$1,560 net. After paying for painting and title search I cleared about \$250 above expenses and 6% for 6½ years. Not bad for my first real estate deal." 🏠

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