The McGowan house about 1900, with Hattie on the front porch when it was the last house on the south end of the village.
Dr. W. E. McGowan

Dr. Washington Emmet McGowan was born August 31, 1858, in the Township of Warren, Waushara County, Wisconsin. He was the youngest of six children born to Alexander Orr McGowan and Margaret McKittrick who in 1849 emigrated from Ireland during that country's potato famine.

The elder McGowans and their three oldest children settled for almost a year in Carroll County, Ohio. In the spring of 1850 they moved to Wisconsin and located on government land in Waushara County. Here other children were born: David Alexander Orr, Eliza Nessy Mary Jane, and Washington Emmet.

The future doctor's "youth was spent in his native county, and there he received such education as the schools in that vicinity afforded". On May 27, 1877, at Warren, he married Harriet "Hattie" O'Dell. The couple's first child Nessie Margaret, was born in 1878 and a son, Edward, "Ned" was born in 1881.

Washington Emmet was a working farmer at the time of his marriage, but in the spring of 1884 he received certification as a medical practitioner from the Hennemann College of Eclectic Medicine in Chicago and, the following year, moved his family to Friendship. On July 13, 1885, he delivered his second son, Washington Emmet McGowan Jr., affectionately known in later years as "Winn".

Along with his medical practice, Dr. McGowan became involved in community affairs, especially the Agricultural Society. He enjoyed racing his horses at the county fair and attended the Chicago World's Fair in 1892. He contracted typhoid fever and passed away at his home on December 3, 1893. Two months later his youngest child, Katherine, was

Hattie McGowan continued to care for her family and lived until 1946.


The McGowan Family Home is a two and one-half story, nine-room home on Main Street in Friendship. It was built in 1889 and is the best example of vernacular Gothic Revival architecture left in the community.

The site was purchased in October of 1885 by Dr. McGowan and a home was soon built. In February of 1889 this house was destroyed by fire. McGowan then hired carpenter Wilson Eddy of Easton and he built the current structure in the spring and summer of that year. Much of the restoration work on the house was done by Ernie Klicko a direct descendent of the original builder.

Most notable of the exterior features are the triple front dormers, one of which contains a quatrefoil window; the parlor bay window of colored glass saved from the original home; and the front porch with elaborate jigsaw-cut tracery which extends across the full width of the house.

The McGowan Family, 1913, (top. l-r) Nessie, friend Barbara Srb, Katherine, Hattie, Winn.
The front door, featuring the family name etched on glass, opens into a central hallway which divides the first floor in half. On the south are located the formal parlor and doctor's office, and on the north are the family sitting room currently used as the Society's gift shop, and the dining room. The kitchen is located at the end of the hall at the back of the home.

A central hallway also divides the second floor's three bedrooms and all-purpose exhibit room. The exhibit room was, no doubt, intended for another two bedrooms but remained unfinished. The attic continued to be used for storage.

Although the original fieldstone and mortar cellar was used for storing preserved food and firewood, the new lower level now contains the Society's work area and storage of its archival collection. Also on the grounds are the original horse barn and outhouse.

Much of the original 1889 home has remained intact, including exterior clapboard siding and stamped tin covering in the gable ends; original panes of glass; and interior room configurations and woodwork. Over its one hundred ten year's existence it has escaped major modernization, thus it remains an important link to the original village of Friendship, prior to its expansion after the arrival of the railroad in 1911. It is one of the few surviving and best preserved 19th Century homes in the village.

Above: The restoration included moving the house to a new foundation on the lot. As part of its plan to realign the curve on Main Street, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation purchased the house and land from Katherine McGowan and gave it to the Adams County Historical Society. The Society applied for and received a federal/state grant which covered about 75% of the $110,000 cost of restoration. Below: The south end of Friendship in what must be 1907, since lumber is stacked on the site of the John Gunning house, which was built in that year. On the east side of the street are the court house fence and the home of Andrew Holm. On the west side are the McGowan house and the homes of Frank Higbee, Stanley Hamilton and John Purves.