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Clive McFarlane: Worcester strength lies right before your eyes

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It is the inhabitants that make a house a home, although a charming 131-year-old Queen Anne on Sever Street could easily convince you otherwise.

Built in 1886, when the city was merely 38 years old, this particular domicile is identified in the city's historical records as the Edward Lincoln House.

And if the Edward Lincoln in question is the same Edward Winslow Lincoln who served on the city's Park Commission from 1870 to 1896 (Preservation Worcester said it is), we could certainly say without objection that the comfort of his home did not spring entirely from within its elegant lines, but was generously drawn from the well-being of the community at-large.

The history books tell us, for example, that no other Worcester resident was more of a visionary or more influential in maintaining open spaces in the city for public enjoyment than Edward Lincoln, the son of Levi Lincoln, the city's first mayor.

"He was the backbone of the commission, and ... his intelligent direction, liberal views and practical sense of Worcester owes much of what she today possesses in the form of public parks," wrote Historian F.P. Price in his book, "The Worcester of Eighteen Hundred and Ninety Eight."

Those sentiments still resonate true, since most of the parks Worcester residents enjoy today, including Elm Park, University Park, East Park, Institute Park, Crompton Park, Newton Hill and Dodge Park all blossomed under Lincoln's leadership.

Much has changed in the city since men like Lincoln helped propel its stunningly successful growth from a fledgling town. But although challenges today may differ in specifics, the overall desire to have a city enhance the quality of our lives remain the same.

And if we are to learn anything from Edward Lincoln it would be that quality of life is not something to be bought, but something to be individually nurtured.

The Lincoln house is today in the possession of two professionals and newcomers to the city, Patrick Warner and his wife, Nicole DiCello. It is the couple's dream house, and not just because of its charm, but because of the enjoyment they get from being in the community at large, from its arts scene, its diversity and its vibrant cultural vibrations.

Shortly after arriving in the city, they felt compelled to write City Manager Edward Augustus to rave about the vibrancy of the city: "The restaurants, the colleges, the museums, the art, the history," and about the possibility of helping the city achieve its "extraordinary potential."

Mr. Augustus wrote back, sending information on several volunteer boards and commissions, and wishing them a long and happy life in their new home.

Separately, Mr. Augustus told me that the couple's outlook on the city is consistent with the perspective he generally gets from outsiders.

More Video: Matt Ward said his Colonials kept finding a way all season long en route to just the 18th unbeaten season in Mass. HS hockey history.

"I have found that newcomers are quick to appreciate what is great about the city, he said.

"It is our long-time natives that are hard to convince."

And in response to my recent call for readers to share "small acts" that help strengthen our faith in our democracy and in who we are as a nation, Patrick sent me the following email:

"When we first explored the neighborhood, we were psyched to discover, just a couple blocks from our house, Bahnan's International Marketplace, Bakery and Cafe," he wrote about the neighborhood market on Pleasant Street.

"OMG, we fell in love with their shawarma sandwiches the first time we had them and we've been going there regularly ever since.

"And every time we go, whether it's for lunch or to pick up feta cheese or olives or big packages of fresh pita bread or whatever, the place exudes good vibes. Everyone who works there is super friendly and helpful (shout out to Joseph carving that shawarma behind the cafe counter!).

"And that's my point. If you go in there during the busy lunch time, you might hear three or four different languages being spoken. There might be a Worcester policeman of Italian heritage eating a shawarma platter, a Greek truck driver delivering vegetables, a couple of Latina social workers waiting for takeout, and everybody is just being themselves and everybody just gets along. It's so heartening!

"Yet, thinking about it, it's sorta' sad that simply mingling congenially with neighbors of different ethnic & socio-economic backgrounds should be something worthy of comment. I'd like to think that such an environment of inclusion would be the norm. Except we know that's not always the case.

"So I guess my small act is patronizing Bahnan's Marketplace, and in taking ... delight in a haven of common ground where diverse cultures intersect without discord."

The Lincoln House will perhaps never be renamed for Patrick and Nicole, but that is not to say ordinary residents like them are not just as influential in helping to make the city feel like home.