

From Sarah Brown McCulloch's *Guilford: A Walking Guide* (2012):

Edwin A. Leete, 84 Fair Street, Octagonal Villa, 1856.

The popularization of the octagon house during the 1850s and 1860s, and in some places as late as the 1870s, was the result of one man's evangelical fervor. Orson Squire Fowler, phrenologist, successful lecturer, author of many books including two popular sex manuals, and investor in the flush toilet invented by an Englishman named Crapper, believed wholeheartedly that the octagonal shape not only provided more room for less money but was better for your health. In his book *A Home For All*, published in 1849, he described, from his own experience, how to build an octagonal house and how to live a healthier, happier life in it. Some of his ideas were decidedly odd but many were ahead of his time. (He believed, for instance, that women should wear loose clothing and get plenty of exercise.) Except for advocating the use of "piazzas . . . all around it, at each story, allowing you to choose sun or shade, breeze or shelter," Fowler had little to say about the outward appearance of the house, leaving the style to the builder. This one, with a portico typical of Henry Austin which suggests that he might have designed the house, has lost its wide eaves and decorative brackets. The monitor at the top, a miniature of the original proportions, is characteristic. Fitted with windows, it provides light and air to the central core and adjoining rooms. If Leete had followed Fowler's instructions, the house would have had the recommended porches or balconies also. In any case it was very bold of him to build the only octagon house in town and fortunate for us that it is one of the few survivors of that style.