

Honoring the city's architectural beauty

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In the beginning

The new book "No Place Like Home" gets off to a brisk start with an account of the log cabin that jibes with common sense.

The homes hastily made by pioneers simply trying to survive in the elements were "highly perishable and transitory at best," author **George H. Berkhofer** tells us. They were more like the dugout homes found in Kansas than Lincoln Log or modern kit home productions.

Only more settled settlers had the time to produce something "closer to the classic form of cabin familiar to the modern mind," writes **Berkhofer**.

With indoor niceties such as lath and plaster walls and wooden mantels, the cabins may have been as warm in winter as the area's first stone houses, which could be constantly damp and drafty unless expertly built.

"The needful thing," **Berkhofer** writes, "was for the settlement of new people with a background in the necessary building trades and skills."

The arrival of brick-makers ensured "the tradition made by Jonathan Donnel of building homes out of the limestone which lines the cliffs along Buck Creek and Mad River ... a short lived one," **Berkhofer** writes.

Slower going

Chapter four opens a series of three chapters that, although perhaps appropriate for an architecture course, will slow the course of the narrative for the general reader.

Five pages of text on Greek architecture pass by before we're introduced to Dr. Berkley Gillett, whose Star Cottage appears to have been the first local home influenced by the trend.

We learn Gillett's cottage was "quaint and charming" but also a "sham." Even Wittenberg University's poster child building, Myers Hall, is a kind of architectural mutt - "a late Federal Vernacular style building with a Greek Revival porch."

Chapter six leads us through an eight-page thicket on the history of Gothic Revival before we learn the form had "moderate popularity" in Springfield. John Ludlow's Oakfield home was the Gothic revival building truest to the popular A.J. Downing style.

The most "goth" part of the chapter is the shocking contrast between two pictures of the John H. Thomas home on East High Street, the first with the original wooden "gingerbread" trimming, the second without.

All over the city, the author notes "decay and remodeling have taken their toll," and on that point, the Thomas house is the architectural equivalent of a virgin forest freshly clear cut.

Revival

Greek and Gothic revivals yielded to Italianate architecture and houses with more gradually pitched roofs.

The expansive, open Italianate style lent itself to doubles that were popular in Springfield, and Italianate trim was popular enough that it began showing up on houses of other styles.

Italianate windows accentuated with wood trim decorate O.S. Kelly's striking house at 403 S. Fountain Ave. - a house built with a distinctly non-Italianate steeply pitched roof.

A chapter titled "Garbled Italian," gives us a look at both the purest and most adulterated specimens of Italianate Renaissance houses in town.

The former includes the classic John Foos and Rinehart-Bowman mansions, which Berkhofer describes as "the equal of anything (in the style) built elsewhere in the United States"

Berkhofer then speaks to the social foundation on which the architecture was built. "Unlike pre-(civil)war days when a wealthy man might live next door to a middle class or poor man, (in the 1870s) the wealthy now tended to segregate themselves, building, if at all possible on a knoll or hill. If that were not possible, then at the very least, they tried to construct on double or triple lots to effect separation."

The bone thrown to the lower classes?

"Contractors had to have workmen who could execute fine stonework and superlative carpentry," **Berkhofer** writes.

Elegant and chaste

The author finds just the right blend of local and architectural history in a chapter cleverly titled "French Curves," in which he introduces us to the mansard roof that architectural neophytes will recognize as Addams Family architecture.

Just as he informs us earlier that the term "gingerbread" when applied to houses, is a corruption of vergeboard, the former classics instructor points out that mansard is an Anglicization of the name of French architect Mansart.

Berkhofer waxes poetic and nostalgic over the original form of the Elijah C. Middleton home (now the Jones-Kenney-Zechman Funeral home), calling it "elegant and very chaste.

In contrast to this restraint the opulent Francis Bookwalter Home built in 1875 on South Fountain Avenue, which **Berkhofer** calls "one of the two truly pretentious Second Empire homes constructed in the city," and as such, "the virtual paradigm of what a 'High Victorian' house is supposed to be."

With the trimmings

The final chapters of the book are a delight.

Photos and text serve up the Eastlake and Queen Anne style homes with all their fanciful scroll-saw trimmings.

"The masterpiece of all Eastlake homes in Springfield, formerly owned by the late Helen Bosart Morgan, was built in 1884 by Charles Rowley at 845 E. High St.,"

Berkhofer writes. "The porch is, in every respect, perfect Eastlake, with its turned posts, quatrefoil cutouts and pediment with imitation half timbering framed by simple vergeboards."

Berkhofer then places in a time context the towers that are the towering architectural features of so many Springfield homes.

"From the 1880s on, every house that could afford one was built with a rounded tower or turret on one corner," the author explains. "If wealth allowed, the tower motif was repeated on one corner of the standard wide, front porch, then more picturesquely called a veranda or piazza."

Richardson and Cregar

What others were doing in wood, the nationally known architect H.H. Richardson was doing in stone. He executed a Romanesque style that resulted not in something that looked like a pile of rock but that "one felt instinctively that his designs represented the way real" Roman structures had been built, **Berkhofer** writes.

Berkhofer notes that Richardson himself designed the Washington, D.C., and Chicago homes of Springfield industrialists Benjamin H. Warder and J.J. Glesser. He rightly provides a sidebar story about Charles Cregar, whose work on the City Building and St. John's Lutheran and St. Raphael churches, among others, makes him the most prominent local disciple of the Richardson style.

Springfield's penchant for combining styles also found one of its greatest expressions at this time in the mansion of P.P. Mast, whom **Berkhofer** calls "the great calculator." He was a man who "made the only mistake in life": building that

mansion not on East High Street or South Fountain Avenue but at High Street and Western Avenue.

"The square tower is Eastlake, but it has Renaissance window caps and Neoclassical swags at the third floor level," **Berkhofer** notes. "One gable is filled, in Eastlake style, the other done in quasi-Stick style. The arched, triplet windows are Queen Anne ... the dome Byzantine and the open arcading Renaissance."

All over the place

Following the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1892, "architects designed homes in almost every conceivable historical mode, from German castles to Georgian mansions," **Berkhofer** writes.

During this so-called Beaux Arts period, some of Springfield's most striking homes were built: the Gus Sun Mansion, now the Sigma Kappa sorority house at Fountain and Cassilly streets; the J.S. Crowell mansion, now the Greek Orthodox Church on East High Street; the massive Luther Buchwalter House at 1845 N. Fountain Ave. The period also was the heyday of Robert Gotwald, who designed the boathouse in Snyder Park, the A.B. Graham Building and the buildings of the old Knights of Pythias Children's Home.

Berkhofer notes that it was in reaction to this opulent and stylized period that the trimmed down designs of Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright appeared, including Springfield's recently renovated Westcott House.

In contrast to the rich, those of more modest means would turn in the 1890s and early 1900s to the bungalow, which was developed in California - octagonal and yellow brick styles to add variation to a theme that featured "deep eaves and an extensive veranda," **Berkhofer** writes.

And "while the average man who was seeking a new home ran into a solid line of bungalows ... persons of wealth continued to play the game of revivalism," building massive homes of every historic style, including the massive English Tudor style Harry Kissell Built in the Ridgewood district he developed.

Built to last

The book is well-indexed, wonderfully illustrated and written with the kind of informed authority that will give it the lasting power of a Richardson Romanesque mansion. It is \$24.95.

Berkhofer writes his intention is to avoid writing a book that amounts to "a tearful architectural wake or funeral" about the city.

"On the contrary," he writes, "this book was published with a hope. The hope is that it will stir the minds and imaginations of Springfielders to love, cherish and preserve what has heretofore survived from the past."

Not only has **Berkhofer** succeeded in that mission, he has given his readers - and maybe the community - something to build on.

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