

# Historic Neighborhoods

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During the early part of the 19th century, the next stylistic architectural style to sweep the nation was Greek Revival also called Grecian architecture. The wide acceptance of this style is evidenced by the many thousands of townhouses that adopted this style for government buildings, which resembled Classic Greek temples. The Granite columns topped with Doric, Ionic or Corinthian capitals and stone pillar bases can be found not only on numerous home porches, but also at many libraries, post offices and town halls.

Greek Revival deviated drastically in many respects from earlier architectural traditions. The roof slopes horizontally rather than vertically and

thick, conspicuous pillars flank the porch. The earlier Greek Revivals were cast in stucco, but later examples were wood facades usually painted white.

For much of the mid-19th century, the Greek revival style dominated residential and public architecture. It was so popular it became known as the National Style.

Some interesting examples of the Grecian influence can be found along Dudley and Prospect Avenues on the many Corinthian and Ionic capitals of pillars flanking Victorian porches.

By the mid-19th century, Greek Revival waned as Americans developed a lasting fascination for the romantic style of Gothic architecture. Most American Gothic Revival houses

were built in America between 1840 and 1870.

Sometimes called the pointed style, Gothic was characterized by austere, pointed arches resembling church steeples and by the use of features such as flying buttresses and ornamental gables. The Gothic style was most often considered more suitable for churches, but many homes also adopted this medieval design.

The two most popular styles to evolve out of the Gothic movement, the Victorian and the Queen-Anne were characterized by surface variety of the façade, with few Victorian homes being exactly alike. Richly carved decorative trim, numerous 2nd floor balconies, imposing towers and encircling verandas imbued this style with a story-book quality of fantasy and romance.

The Queen Anne, based mainly on a revival of Elizabethan designs, was also noted for incorporating stylistic elements from several cultures, including Greek, Roman, English, French and German architectural design elements. This style was also called Neo-Jacobean.

The Kimball Avenue and Boulevard Historic Districts display a rich tapestry of Gothic and Victorian variations. Conical towers, multi-gabled roofs, and a multiplicity of turrets, dormers and lattices individuate each house.

The Robert A. Fairbairn House at 230 Kimball built circa 1881, the Fairbairn-Pierson House at 237 Kimball built circa 1895, the Dohrman-Ludwig House

combination of architectural detail.

Italian architects also contributed to the evolution of building designs in America, which gave rise to several variations of Italian Renaissance palazzos. The Romano-Tuscan, Italiante or Italian Villa style, as it was sometimes called, was the dominant style in the late 1800's and was popularized by the pattern books of Architect, Andrew Jackson Downing. Italiante is considered to be a sub-set of Victorian architecture.

The most prominent feature of the Italiante style was the occurrence of large, paired eave brackets under a low-hipped roof, which prompted the name American Bracketed Villa. The façade of the Italiante and the Italian Villa was traditionally cast in stucco and the porch was frequently moved off to the side of the house.

The Italian Villa occasionally had a large, square central tower, but only about 15 percent of the Italiante houses had this tower design.

The home at 215 Dudley exhibits the central, square tower design patterned after the Italian campanile, with traditional side porch and stucco façade.

The house at 417 Prospect Street is considered Italiante-Vernacular.

Exceedingly long and narrow windows with rounded or pointed tops and iron gull, stained-glass, were also common features of this style giving these houses an elegant air, while the rich ornaments and large cube shape of the Cube Italian Villas often gave these



Kimball Avenue Home



at 242 Kimball, circa 1897, the Reverend Patton House at 243 Kimball Avenue circa 1890, the Alpers-Cowperthwaite House at 249 Kimball circa 1895, the Baker-Evans House at 257 Kimball, circa 1888, the Alpers-Sanborn House at 265 Kimball circa 1885 and the Platt house at 266 Kimball circa 1890 are various examples of houses with Queen-Anne design features.

The Boulevard neighborhood also displays a wide variety of unique Victorian and Queen-Anne design elements, each house a unique com-

sprawling mansions a wedding-cake appearance.

The Leveridge Harrison House at 227 Harrison Avenue, built in 1861, is considered to be a Cube Italiante.

Another category of architectural history found in Westfield along Prospect Avenue is the Second Empire or Mansard style house, which originated in Paris. The Second Empire is distinguished by a squared-off roof with sloping sides and flat tops. These houses often had tall, arched windows with heavy trim and eaves

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supported by richly carved brackets. Second empire was a dominant style for homes constructed between 1860 and 1880 with some construction continuing into the 1880's.

It was considered a very modern style and imitated the latest French building fashion during the reign of Napoleon III (France's Second Empire) from which the style takes one of its names. The boxy roof-line was also named after the 17th century French architect, François Mansard.

The Marsh Arnold House at 538 Lawrence Avenue exhibits the classical Mansard roof design.

There are numerous other categories of architectural styles such as Mediterranean Revival, Vernacular style or Plan Book Houses, each one a unique combination of custom design features dictated to the builders by the original owners. These styles can be found scattered throughout many neighborhoods in Westfield.

Another era of revivals popular during the later part of the 19th century were American versions of English cottages, Tudor manors, French chateaus and palaces.

Some very elaborate examples of these can be found at the edge of the Kimball Avenue Historic District on Kimball Circle. Although not desig-

nated as part of the historical district because they are relatively recent constructions, these castle-like manors incorporate facsimiles of ancient design elements used in medieval Gothic castles and European chateaus.

Numerous examples of English Tudors can be found in the neighborhood surrounding the Kimball Avenue Historic District as well as interspersed throughout Westfield. Both 921 and 940 Kimball Avenue are considered to be Tudor-eclectic style.

An interesting example of an American English Tudor is the stone house at 120 Wychwood Avenue at the corner of East Broad Street also called the South Gate House. Using a combination of indigenous stones, clay, stucco and tiles, this stately manor has a distinctly American flair.

Preserving the beauty of these historical homes is a complex issue. Local ordinances must attempt to balance local property owner's rights with the rights of the community to maintain its historical integrity and heritage.

There are three types of historic designation that can protect a property.

State or National historic designation protects a home from being

marred, modernized or demolished by being placed on these registries. The criteria for designation are complex and the process lengthy, but affords the property owners with certain benefits, such as increasing the value of the home.

On the down side of designation is a rise in taxes as well as value, which new owners may not desire.

The other type of protection afforded historic homes is by municipal historic designation or ordinance, which is different in each town. Local historic preservation ordinances establish standards and guidelines for proper maintenance and repair of privately owned structures.

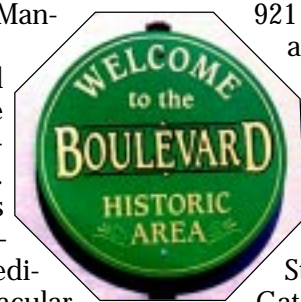
A single home receiving designa-

tion is considered a "landmark," while an entire neighborhood, becomes a "historic district."

Westfield has a historic preservation commission that determines which properties and neighborhoods are eligible for municipal historic designation.

Currently, there is only one officially designated historic district in Westfield, and that is located along Kimball Avenue between Lawrence Avenue and Elm Street.

The Boulevard neighborhood has not been officially designated an historic district, but a Boulevard Association of residents from this area is considering future designation as a possibility.



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