

Preserving Historic Flavor and Architecture A Popular Trend Despite Modern Changes,

By FRED ROSSI
Specially Written for This Is Westfield

Where else in Union County, besides Westfield, can one take a walking tour and be able to observe and appreciate such a variety of historic architecture, not only in the downtown business district but also in many residential neighborhoods?

While some towns have successfully preserved or restored the from-another-era look and feel of their downtown areas, their residential areas often consist primarily of homes built within the past half century, when massive cookie-cutter developments were the norm.

The Town of Westfield is fortunate in that it has not only managed to maintain the look and the charm of not only its downtown business area, but also, especially recently, many of its older neighborhoods.

A journey around town will quickly make plain that an increasing number of homeowners, rather than moving to a bigger residence, are staying

put and refurbishing their present home, often in styles that preserve or restore its original appearance.

The focal point of Westfield's historic architecture is, of course, its downtown, seemingly marked by the towering steeple, which can be seen from some distance, of The Presbyterian Church in Westfield at the corner



Westfield Fire Station

of East Broad Street and Mountain Avenue.

Moving west into the heart of the business district, a number of older buildings—and architectural styles—not only remain standing, but also

house active businesses and residential apartments.

At the main intersection of East Broad and Elm Streets stands the 106-year old Arcanum Hall building. Originally located a block down, at the corner of Prospect Street, the previous Arcanum Hall structure was destroyed, along with much of that area, by a fire in 1892; two years later, a new three-story building, employing Queen Anne-style architecture with turrets and circular open-air balconies on the building's corner, was constructed at its present site.

Within the past few years, the building that now houses the Ann Taylor and Nine West retail establishments was refurbished with a New Orleans-style facade that includes verandas with wrought-iron fencing for those living in the apartments overlooking East Broad Street.

Other revamping of some of the other buildings on East Broad is currently in the works.

At the western end of downtown, at the corner of East Broad Street and North Avenue stands the World War I Memorial, dedicated on Armistice Day 1923. A tall granite shaft topped by a bronze monument of the goddess Clio, the Memorial is the focal point of Westfield's annual Memorial Day commemoration, and



Ingrid McKinley for This Is Westfield

HISTORY AMONG MODERN TIMES...Arcanum Hall stands proudly on the corner of East Broad Street and Elm Street as a testament to its historic flavor despite the modern surroundings. The building features Queen Anne-style architecture with turrets and circular open-air balconies.

is easily visible to persons both in the downtown area and riding past on the train as they arrive or depart Westfield Station.

The north side Train Station was built in the early 1890s and is done in what is officially termed the Richardson Romanesque architectural style. The large alcoves on either side are among the features of this type of architecture, and the building itself faces directly down Elm Street into the heart of downtown.

Throughout Westfield Remains Buildings Constructed Around Us

Adjacent to the Train Station stands one of the local buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the State of New Jersey's own such registry.

The North Side Fire House, built in 1911, is an example of Spanish, Italian and Mediterranean architecture.

Its distinctive tower, which is visible from the south side of town, was actually used for drying hoses at one point in time. The Fire House was placed on both the national and state lists of historic places in 1980.

It's interesting to note that, despite the changes to the downtown area over the past several decades, much of the area in and around the intersection of East Broad and Elm Streets looks very similar to the way it appeared a century ago.

There are several other non-residential buildings in Westfield whose architecture embodies the times in which they were constructed. The Rahway Avenue Field House, across from Edison Middle School, reflects the architectural style of many structures built across the country in the 1930s by the Works Progress Administration.

The Colonial-era Miller-Cory House on Mountain Avenue, another entry in both the national and state historic registers, was built in 1740 and turned into a working museum in the early 1970s. The Varleth-Sipp House in the Wychwood neighborhood still stands, more than 330 years after it was built as a residence for the Varleths, a prominent New Jersey family of that time.

Fortunately, Westfield has also been



Cheri Rogowsky for This Is Westfield

THAT NEW ORLEANS FEELING...The apartments located above the Ann Taylor and Nine West establishments offer a unique architecture reminiscent of New Orleans. Verandas and wrought-iron fencing are special appointments to these structures.

of a number of its residential neighborhoods, and has, in many instances, avoided the post-World War II type of housing development that, in countless suburban communities, produced street after street of seemingly identical homes on similar-size lots.

A walk down Boulevard on the south side of town, Kimball Avenue on the north side, the Wychwood neighborhood at the eastern end of town or some of the neighborhoods around Mountain Avenue bears this out.

Todd Evans, a resident of the Boulevard area who's active in home restoration in his neighborhood, stated that many homeowners in Westfield are choosing to renovate or add on to their homes rather than move elsewhere.

"It's well worth it because of property values," he said, adding that, "since the housing stock in Westfield isn't that good, it's become very profitable" and, lately, relatively inexpensive, for homeowners to refurbish the home in which they're living.

Residents now seem to be striving to preserve the original look and feel of their homes, Mr. Evans said, although this wasn't always the case, at least in his neighborhood, where many of the older homes are more than a century old.

"Boulevard was one of the nicest streets in town. It had a nice view of town. It was wide. The houses were huge. But over the years," he said, "styles changed and people didn't appreciate old houses."

But, in recent years, the tide has shifted and Mr. Evans said he sees "a big difference," although he maintained that "there are a lot of houses still waiting to be discovered."



Ingrid McKinley for This Is Westfield

The Presbyterian Church in Westfield

He said that, despite the references by many to "Colonial Westfield," much of the architecture in town "is really Victorian" in nature, especially in the downtown business district and on streets such as Boulevard.

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What Do You Like About Westfield?

"It's a nice town with nice stores and there's a lot more mall stores here." - Greg Buntain, a 10th grade student

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