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## HOUSES of the ST. CROIX VALLEY

ROGER G. KENNEDY

AS EARLY as the seventeenth century trappers and explorers passed through the St. Croix Valley, but it was not until 1837 that Indian treaties were negotiated which allowed settlers to enter the area. Most of those who came at first were ax bearers from New England. They opened spaces in the forest, put together log shelters, and marked the spots where the best white pine timber stood. For more than half a century they supplied lumber to build farms, towns, and cities across the prairies of the Middle West. And, along the St. Croix, they continued their own architectural tradition.

Although finished lumber was manufactured in the valley from the earliest days of settlement, it was available only to those who could afford it and who lived close to the river or to a road on which lumber wagons could travel. Others managed without it, building of limestone or of logs. Two log cabins dating from the mid-nineteenth century have been moved into Marine on St. Croix from its hinterland. One, now used as a carpenter's shop, stands next to a Shell oil station; the other is near the old stone Town House.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Except where otherwise noted, material used in this article came from town records (obligingly disinterred by registrars and attorneys), newspapers, family documents, and from many personal interviews with occupants of houses and with descendants of those who built them.

Such structures provided shelter in the simple, physical sense. They afforded a warm place to sleep, cook, and eat, but additional means and time were required to meet more subtle needs. Primary among these was shelter in an emotional sense: a feeling of belonging to a tradition, an assurance of continuity between the New England towns with their houses of white pine lumber and the raw new towns being built on the frontier from the same kind of wood. Loggers and lumbermen reconstructed in the Northwestern wilderness the homes they remembered. That is why there are many communities along the St. Croix that seem a century older than they really are.

Such an area is the cluster of houses around the site of the old Bolles Mill in Valley Creek, northwest of Afton. There, in 1856, Erastus Bolles, a silversmith who had followed his uncle Lemuel into the valley and adopted the more profitable frontier profession of miller, built a simple white house like those of his native Oxford, Massachusetts. Around it grew a little village with conservative tastes. When Silas Geer bought some land across from Bolles and built his house in 1874, he avoided the use of any decoration, although the picturesque revivals were well under way elsewhere. These two houses, the first owned in 1963 by Bolles's granddaughter, Mrs. Jay M. Grant, and the



*THE house built by William H. C. Folsom of Taylors Falls in 1856*

second by Mr. Dawson Bradshaw, are much like a house built before 1850 by Cornelius Lyman of Vermont just north of Stillwater on the Arcola Road. It, too, is free of any picturesque detail, and bears the imprint of firm puritan taste. It is now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. George V. Bancroft.

William H. C. Folsom, who was among the earliest of many lumbermen from Maine to settle in the valley, completed his home in the same year as Erastus Bolles. On a dramatic site high above Taylors Falls, it occupies a small plateau where Government Road struggles over a granite outcrop. From it Folsom could watch his many enterprises prospering below. Merchant, millowner, and lawmaker, he enraged some of his peers by pushing through the legislature the allocation of a portion of Minnesota's timberlands for the support of the state's educational system, and he capped his career by writing the first ambitious history of the valley, published in 1888. His respect for the past is shown in his house, which his

grandson still maintains with care and pride. There are Federal touches around its doors and windows, and porch detail of a Mozartean delicacy and grace. But the new taste for the Grecian style appears in the horizontal molding which runs across the gable. It conveys the vaguest suggestion of the "temple" portico which was coming into vogue.

A few miles down the river, between Marine and Stillwater, the brothers John E. and Martin Mower had built in 1847 the first large house on the St. Croix at the center of their barony of Arcola. Like Folsom, the Mowers were from Maine and became leaders in the politics of Minnesota Territory and later of the state. They added more Grecian elements to their house than did Folsom: pilasters suggesting pillars at the corners, a heavy entablature board around the eaves, and a doorway with Grecian detail. Additions made in the 1870s have cluttered the lines of the structure somewhat, but the severe, powerful character given to it by the Mowers is still present. On the floor of their

study are still hobnail marks left by loggers' boots, and below, along the river, remain the foundations of a half-dozen homes, a school-house, a carpenter's shop, a smithy, and a general store — all part of the Mowers' domain. The Mower and Folsom houses represent one type of eighteenth-century massing to which Greek revival details were added. Two houses in Stillwater show another. The residence of Minnesota's first lieutenant governor, William Holcombe, is scheduled for destruction during the winter of 1963 to make space for a scenic parking lot, but above it, overlooking the ravine that became Olive Street, is a house which was once its twin, built for the third warden of the state prison, John S. Proctor. Both may have been constructed as early as 1850, and the Proctor house at 220 South Fourth Street, now owned by Russell C. Gilbert, shows how fine they were. It has the shape of a number of the cottages restored at Williamsburg, Virginia, but to its white clapboards were added Greek revival pilasters at the corners and within its portico there is an austere Grecian doorway, unlike the urbane, fan-lighted openings of earlier houses. The broad dormers were probably added afterward to give more light and air in the attic, and to the rear later owners have built on a succession of appendages, but the house remains among the most graceful and engaging in Minnesota.

Asa S. Parker of Vermont created a third "transition" form when he built his mansion at Marine in 1856. He had come to the saw-mill town in 1839 as one of the partners in the Marine Lumber Company, and he celebrated his new prosperity by erecting a cubical, hip-roofed, white-pine house in the New England tradition, to which he added an ungainly portico borne by two huge, round, fluted pillars. (Most folk, like Proctor, had to be content with "box pillars" of four mitered boards.) The doorway would have looked more imposing without the beetling

balcony above, but despite its flaws the *St. Paul Advertiser* said in 1857 of the Parker house and its neighbor, the Orange Walker house, that "for style of architecture and beauty of finish" they were "not surpassed in the Northwest."<sup>2</sup> There are smaller houses in present-day Marine which better convey the conservative character of that community of New England emigrants, but the one built by Asa Parker is the grandest remaining home of its era in the valley.

The transition of earlier styles into the Greek revival has already been noted. The Grecian details which were added to older forms to mark that transition had been derived from carpenters' guides, pattern books, and handbooks of architecture which came into the hands of builders in the area long before professional architects began to have some influence in the 1880s and 1890s. These books offered models to please all tastes, facilitating choice among styles by frequent illustrations and careful instructions. Favorite themes were the Greek and Gothic revivals, which arrived simultaneously in the valley, setting off the alternation between classic and picturesque, restraint and exuberance, which has continued to this day.

#### THE Proctor-Gilbert house in Stillwater



<sup>2</sup> *St. Paul Financial, Real Estate and Railroad Advertiser*, August 15, 1857. The Orange Walker house burned in 1954.

THE TERM "Greek revival" has never been one of clinical precision. In the deep South it was applied to plantation houses which looked something like the Parthenon, but along the St. Croix large "Grecian" houses were modeled on eighteenth-century derivations from Italian Renaissance styles and from Thomas Jefferson's adaptations of the Roman buildings he had seen in France.

Greece was much admired in the first half of the nineteenth century for its struggles toward independence and for its ancient republican institutions, which were thought to provide noble precedents for Americans. In Wisconsin, towns were named Athens, Attica, Sparta, Palmyra, Ixonia, and Troy. However, Greece itself was far removed from the range of American vision, and it was Jefferson rather than Pericles whose inspiration directly affected the architecture of the St. Croix Valley. His influence is especially evident in the area's most imposing Grecian house, built by Frederick L. Darling, a dry-goods dealer, at Third and Locust streets in Hudson, Wisconsin, in 1857 or 1858. Its great white, two-story portico is backed by fine pilasters and supported by an arcade to the right, somewhat like one of

the faculty houses designated by Jefferson for the University of Virginia. Its present occupant is Mrs. Thomas J. O'Brien. Across the street is the home which Dr. Otis Hoyt, a respected pioneer physician, built between 1853 and 1856. It has a double portico similar to Jefferson's first design for Monticello. Another double portico appears on a house probably built for Theodore Cogswell in 1862 at Second and Division streets in Hudson, but this structure lacks the arcaded wing present on both the Darling and Hoyt houses.

Builders of small homes generally dispensed with pillars and porticoes, retaining only pilasters and heavy boards running around the eaves. For economy, or to permit space for windows, these boards were often discontinued just after entering the gable end of the house, thus forming a "broken pediment." Doorways were ennobled with rectangular transoms and sidelights, and the houses were turned so that the suggested portico at the gable end faced the street, thus providing increased dignity and a sensible accommodation to the narrowing lots in growing towns.

These details, learned from pattern books,

*THE Asa S. Parker mansion, built at Marine in 1855*





*THE Darling-O'Brien house in Hudson, Wisconsin*

were combined in original variations by a number of skillful carpenter-contractors. In 1852 Lenord Bullard and his brother, John S. Bullard, began building Grecian houses in Taylors Falls. Probably their first was for the Irish lumberman, Patrick Fox, on Government Road and Plateau Street. It has since been covered by gray-green shingles, but the C. A. Winslow house, built a little later a block down Government Road, shows the Bullards' style at its best. Now carefully restored by Mr. William W. Scott, it has a recessed doorway with the characteristic rectangular sidelights and transom and very fine interior trim. In proportion and craftsmanship the entablature is the valley's closest approach to the detailing of the great Grecian houses of the Eastern Seaboard. Other Bullard houses in the old residential part of Taylors Falls have been altered for the worse or allowed to fall into disrepair. The one now owned by Mr. Alford Roos, off Bench Street beside the river, is an unpainted and mournful monument to the builders' skill. Lenord Bullard was an original pew owner in the Taylors Falls Methodist Church built in 1861 and he may have designed it, for its Greek revival moldings

are very much like those of the Winslow-Scott house. This church is as beautiful as many celebrated in New England. Around it the homes of some of its parishioners form a cluster which was known as "Angels' Hill," and which remains today one of the few groups of buildings in the state surviving from this period.

The twin brothers, Ammah and Amasa Andrews, Hellenized Hudson as the Bullards had Taylors Falls, but with a difference. Each of the nine or more remaining houses built by them (six are on Vine Street) has a front porch sheltering the lower windows and the doorway—a sensible concession to a climate far from the Aegean—and on several the gable was raised to permit a full row of windows below its pediment.

The Andrews brothers worked in the late 1850s, as did other builders who created their own variations on the Grecian theme in Osceola, St. Croix Falls, and Prescott, Wisconsin. One adaptation, especially popular in houses of modest size, placed the gable to the side, and a large and distinguished doorway in the center of the front wall. Two examples can be seen on Hammond Street in Osceola, the best preserved being that built



*THIS house, built by the Andrews brothers, stands at Fifth and Vine streets in Hudson.*

*THE house built for Daniel Mears in Osceola shows a variation of the Greek revival style favored for homes of modest size.*



*THE Winslow-Scott house in Taylors Falls is a fine example of the Bullard brothers' work. It turns its gable end, with a recessed doorway and "broken pediment," toward Government Road.*



in the early 1860s for Daniel Mears. The finest house of this type in the valley was built in Franconia by Paul Munch, and is still inhabited by his descendants. It has a fine Grecian doorway obscured by a front porch, and the molding around the gables is heavier, more like sculptured stone, than that of other Greek revival houses in the area. Another variant of the small, one-story Grecian house parallel to the street was built by Andrew Mackey in 1855 on the main thoroughfare of Afton, now Highway 95. It hides its entrance in the corner of a porch cut out from beneath the gable, as did earlier houses built in the Western Reserve of Ohio.

Yet another adaptation of the Greek revival style is the residence of Newington Gilbert erected in Valley Creek in 1864 and now owned by Mr. Eric W. Steglich. There the builder surrounded the rectangular mass of the "temple" with a one-story arcaded porch, as if reducing the great columns around the Parthenon to a domestic scale. Gilbert himself may have designed the structure, for it is not unlike the houses he had known in his childhood in upstate New York.

There are probably fifty buildings showing Grecian detailing in the valley, most of them now sadly carpentered over. Two near Prescott have been abandoned. One of these, located at Hope and Hilton streets, is too fine to be allowed to collapse. What can be done to retain the dignity of the small Grecian houses is demonstrated by the restoration of several on the plateau at Taylors Falls and one at 610 South Broadway in Stillwater, a very late example (1867) owned by Mr. Gordon R. Larson.

WHILE it remained the dominant style in the St. Croix Valley until the Civil War, the Greek revival was not unchallenged. One critic, the landscape architect Andrew Jackson Downing, called it cold, of Procrustean regularity, and unfit for domestic use.

<sup>3</sup> Both quoted in Nikolaus Pevsner, *An Outline of European Architecture*, 273 (London, 1954).

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Kenneth McKenzie Clark, *The Gothic Revival*, 87 (New York, 1962).

Instead, he advocated a "picturesque house." The Greek revival style did call for some ornamentation not needed for shelter, sheathing, or support, but its emphasis was on mass, not detail. Its critics, rejecting such severity, advanced the nineteenth-century fancy for decoration. Sir George Gilbert Scott, the most honored of Victorian architects, had said that the great principle of architecture was "to decorate construction." And John Ruskin, for many the arbiter of Victorian taste, added: "Ornamentation is the principle part of architecture."<sup>3</sup> So from the austere monumentality of the Grecian mode, there came a shift toward lavish detail and "the picturesque."

The Gothic revival, a reaction against temples, stressed instead cottages and castles and things medieval. The English novelist and man of letters William Beckford (1795-1844) instructed his architect to create "an ornamental building which should have the appearance of a convent, be partly in ruins, and contain some weatherproof apartments."<sup>4</sup> Like his better-known contemporary, Horace Walpole, Beckford helped to popularize the romantic in architecture as well as literature, and many a manor house was built in pursuit of their ideals and their example.

As early as 1800, a Gothic grange, "Sedgeley," was created outside Philadelphia. Washington Irving and Mrs. Aaron Burr lived in Gothic houses on the Hudson River, and in the 1850s Gothic styles began appearing in St. Paul and St. Anthony. The New Englanders along the St. Croix sustained their puritan preference for simplicity, but about 1865 in Hudson, lumber broker Charles H. Lewis built a great stuccoed Gothic house. Still perching on the edge of a hill at 101 South Third Street, it wears over its walls a ninety-year-old grapevine. Its bargeboards, under steep eaves, drip with wooden stalactites, and its upper windows remind one of monks, tall and hooded. On the roof lines, carpenters' pinnacles compete with lightning rods. It is a fine specimen of the architecture of romance.



THE *Charles H. Lewis House*, built in Hudson about 1865, fit setting for a novel by Horace Walpole, Sir Walter Scott, or one of the Brontës

The Lewis house, now owned by Mrs. Boyd T. Williams, is the only representative left in the valley of the large Hudson River Gothic tradition. Generally, the few in the St. Croix region who preferred Walpole's "whimsical air of novelty" expressed it in a "small capricious house."

DOORWAY of the cottage built for Amanda Baker in St. Croix Falls



In 1858 John T. Cyphers of Lakeland used a native cement and rubble (grout) for the main mass of his Gothic cottage, but capped this solid structure with carved wooden gables displaying rusticated siding (cut to look like stone) and elaborate carving under the cornices. It is now owned and carefully preserved by Mrs. Emma Johnson. In the previous year the parishioners of the First Presbyterian Church in Stillwater had built a larger Gothic house for their minister, the Reverend Henry M. Nichols, above the long flight of steps leading down to the church. It is of white pine, its design taken from a pattern book. There is a small corner porch with slender, square pillars, a prominent chimney, tall windows, and "carpenter's lace" along the eaves. Now owned by Mr. R. E. Erickson, it stands at 208 West Chestnut. The characteristics of the Gothic style are also shown in three houses within hailing distance of Pearl and Albert streets in Prescott. Two have fine tracery on their eaves, and one has at the corner a diamond-pane



window set in a tall pointed arch below a rakish finial.

Unlike the Greek style, companion of its youth, the Gothic revival survived the Civil War period and continued to provide examples of picturesque coziness until the 1880s. Two are worthy of particular note: in 1872 Mrs. Rose Spencer built her house at 205 East Walnut in Stillwater (now owned by Mrs. Marjorie McGee). It lacks scrollwork but displays double Gothic windows and deserves its picturesque setting at the base of a bluff. In 1880 or 1881 Major J. Stannard Baker built a tiny house for his maiden sister, Miss Amanda Baker, in St. Croix Falls where Georgia Street enters South Adams. Huddled below two immense pines, it has a porch like an ancient country parsonage, and before a later addition to the rear, its peaks and precipitous gables made it taller than it was deep. It is now owned by Mr. Herbert Hanson.



GOthic scrollwork on the eaves of the Erickson house in Stillwater

THE ENGLISH romanticists of the eighteenth century who initiated the Gothic revival extended their search for the "picturesque and affecting" from literary to pictorial models, finding a new stimulus in the mossy Italian ruins depicted in the land-

scapes of Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lorrain. Like no Italy that ever was, these designs traveled westward in the pattern books and arrived in the St. Croix Valley during the 1850s, appearing first in Prescott, then the most sophisticated of the area's

JOHN T. Cyphers' cottage in Lakeland, known locally as the "grout house"





THE Magee house in Prescott, the valley's finest example of the "palazzo" style

towns. There passengers and produce from the valley entered the stream of commerce on the Mississippi, and travelers bound for towns on the St. Croix often changed boats. Prescott chroniclers have pictured early citizens such as "landshark" Hilton Doe wearing diamond studs, top hats, and Prince Alberts, and spinning gold-topped canes, as they supervised the construction of houses built in the latest Italian style. In Prescott this was the "palazzo" version. The "villa" came later, in Stillwater.<sup>5</sup>

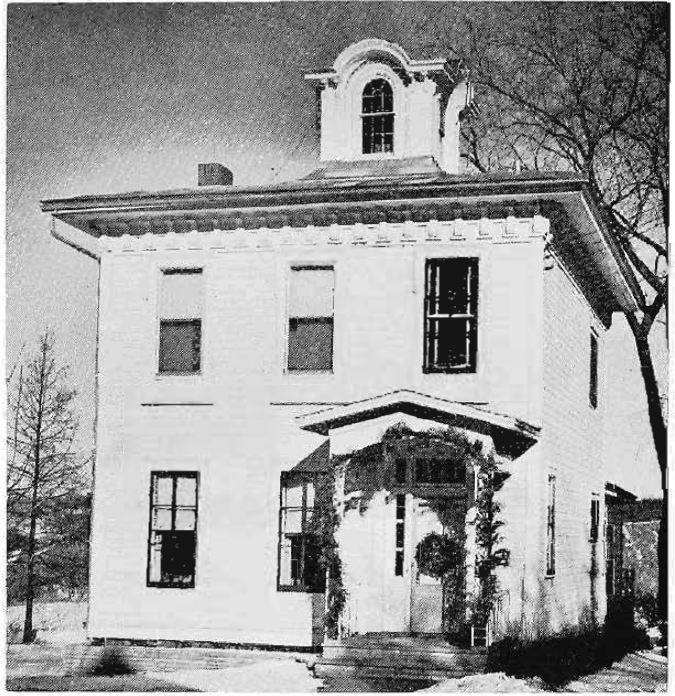
The palazzi were squat cubes with low-pitched roofs extended beyond the walls and supported by ornate brackets. Their windows and doors were rounded arches. Grave and sedate, they occasionally wore a bay window to one side. Their classic restraint distinguished them from their "picturesque" cousins, the villas.

In the 1850s Prescott was a town of many white palazzi. The finest was built of brick in 1854, commanding wide lawns fronting on Pearl and Ellen streets. It has a high

arched doorway guarded by shutters, and its interior has been sustained in the dignity of a great nineteenth-century house by its present owner, Mrs. Irwin E. Magee. Prescott has six more houses of the palazzo style in the same vicinity. One of several variants of this style is illustrated in a house built in 1876 by Joel F. Nason at South Adams and Illinois streets in St. Croix Falls, and its near twin built two years later by A. A. Heald, on Highway 35 a half mile north of the center of Osceola. These are of orange-red brick, with a bay on one side and a small portico that probably replaced an earlier porch which ran across the entire front.

<sup>5</sup> These are not the conventional terms of architectural history but are employed here to suggest the differences between two quite distinct styles which happened simultaneously to wear "Italianate" brackets and windows set in rounded arches. Almost all such houses were called "villas" by nineteenth-century Americans. Some were rather like villas in the Italian sense of a capricious country house, but most bore a greater resemblance to the urban palazzi of the early Renaissance.

THE Webster house,  
perched on a  
bluff above the St. Croix  
River at Stillwater



For nearly twenty years the Italian style dominated the architecture of the valley. Two smaller houses might be mentioned to show its application to structures far from palatial in scale. Mortimer Webster, a Stillwater housebuilder, created a graceful home for himself between 1865 and 1870 at 435 South Broadway. It sports a fine Italian cupola like that of the older Burbank-Griggs stone mansion on Summit Avenue in St. Paul, and the builder attempted to achieve something of the same granite monumentality by cutting the pine siding to look like stone.<sup>6</sup> In Lakeland, at the corner of Minnesota and Commercial streets, now almost overwhelmed by the embankment of Highway 12, is the smallest of the St. Croix palazzi, owned by Mr. Charles Trost. It is probably a little younger than the Webster house.

While this study concentrates on domestic architecture, a postscript must be added: the Italian palazzo style affected more com-

mercial and official buildings in the valley than any other. Second Street in Hudson was rebuilt in a series of arcades after a fire destroyed most of it in 1866. Only the Williams Block and a few remnants survive to suggest its original strength and unity. The

FRONT of the Trost house in Lakeland



<sup>6</sup> The Burbank-Griggs house was built by James C. Burbank in 1865. It is now owned by Mrs. Theodore W. Griggs.

Staples-Hersey Block, on the main business street of Stillwater, vaunts a façade of grandeur and finesse matched only by the Washington County Courthouse on the plateau above. Set in a park amid great trees, the courthouse was built between 1866 and 1870. Its dome evokes all the cupolas, its arcades all the rows of rounded arches, and its brackets all the grandiloquent roof lines of a confident era.

The last of the Italian styles to reach the valley was the Tuscan villa. It, too, carried brackets and featured doors and windows set in rounded arches, but it took from the Gothic style a steeply pitched roof, and inserted a square tower or "campanile" where two wings met at right angles. The best example in the valley is a house derived from a handbook and built for Captain Austin T. Jenks in 1871 at Fifth and Pine streets in Stillwater. Captain Jenks was a colorful character who owned a fine 110-foot stern-wheel steamer, the "Brother Jonathan," and with it towed log rafts on the St. Croix and the upper Mississippi. As he progressed from river pilot to captain to shipowner to financier, his reputation grew, and his red brick villa set a fashion for the 1870s.<sup>7</sup> The

style was carried to a higher pitch in another brick house with campanile a few miles west of Stillwater, on Highway 96, now owned by Mr. George M. Riedesel. The picturesque villa reached its peak of frenzy in the 1880s in a wooden mansion built for David C. Fulton at Sixth and Orange streets in Hudson.

BY THE 1880s two new architectural epidemics had passed through the valley. The first, the octagon style, has left only one residential example, the Italianate version built for Judge John S. Moffat in 1855 at Myrtle and Third streets in Hudson. Others exist in Red Wing, Winona, Hastings, Clearwater, and Eyota, and an octagonal barn stands west of Afton. An octagonal Baptist church built in Lakeland in 1868 has recently become the town hall. All these buildings pay tribute to the persuasiveness of Orson Squire Fowler of Fishkill, New York, the Buckminster Fuller of the last century. An apostle of "scientific principles in architecture," he grew rich as a lecturer on phrenology and

<sup>7</sup> Augustus B. Easton, ed., *History of the Saint Croix Valley*, 1:187 (Chicago, 1909).



THE Ivory E.  
McKusick house  
in Stillwater

CUPOLA and roof  
lines of the  
Washington County  
Courthouse



then turned his mind to the development of houses, emphasizing a service core, much window space, and maximum convenience.<sup>8</sup> Although he recommended the use of concrete for ease of maintenance, all his St. Croix devotees employed their customary white pine.

Fowler's ideas were too radical and lacking in support from European precedent to survive in the 1860s and 1870s. They were submerged by new fashions brought back from Paris by architects who had studied at the *École des beaux-arts*. The French imperial style, in particular, soon engaged the enthusiasm of men seeking novelty. The success of the new wings added to the Louvre and the Hotel de Ville by Napoleon III's architects — especially the acclaim accorded the heavy, high-pitched roofs they borrowed from the glories of sixteenth-century French architecture — made a deep impression on visiting Americans. These "mansard" roofs were employed in St. Paul soon after the Civil War and became the

last word in elegance. In Stillwater, Ivory E. McKusick, who had done well on government contracts during the war, adopted the mansard style at its heaviest when in 1866 he built a new house at 504 North Second Street.

Fortunately for the progress of architecture, there was a lady in the same city whose sense of humor was equal to mid-nineteenth-century pomposity. Her husband, Jacob Bean, had grown rich in the lumber business, but he was a busy man and kept deferring the erection of an appropriate palace. His wife could not wait and built for her own amusement a cottage which is the apotheosis of the mansard style. It came to be known as "Grandma Bean's playhouse," and it now stands at 1224 South Third Street, where it continues to parody the architectural pretensions of the lesser Napoleon as Offenbach parodied his politics.

While these exotic fashions ran their course, the traditions of the eighteenth century and New England remained powerful in the valley. Simple, high, rectangular residences of white-painted pine (or occasionally, of brick) may have acquired brackets under extended eaves. But in a haze or at twilight, those built as late as 1885 look

<sup>8</sup> *Dictionary of American Biography*, 6:565 (New York, 1931). For a statement of Fowler's architectural ideas, see his *A Home for All, or the Gravel Wall and Octagon Mode of Building* (New York, 1857).



much like the town houses of Salem, Kittery, Portsmouth, or Marblehead. They retain typical Federal characteristics: low-pitched hip roofs, an odd number of openings (usually three windows above, two and a door below), a fanlight or an arched doorway, and elegant restraint in trim. A beautiful late example, built of brick in 1881, is the home and office of Dr. Henry Van Meier at 226 East Myrtle Street in Stillwater. Other Stillwater houses with only a slight Italian accent stand at 122 West Linden (1856), 220

LATE Victorian "campanile" of the Fulton mansion in Hudson



Chestnut (1871), and 107 East Laurel (1875). Another serene white house of the same character can be seen in Marine, across the street from the stone Town House.

BUT a new passion for the exotic and picturesque was well under way by the time these houses were finished. The style has been variously described as "carpenter's frenzy," Queen Anne, Eastlake, Neo-Jacobean, or, resignedly, as "Victorian." Each of these titles may have some application to particular details or fleeting phases, but no one of them is adequate to cover the whole exuberant period. Perhaps it is best called the "Nonsuch style," after Henry VIII's Nonsuch Palace in Surrey, which displayed all the elements of the transition from medieval to Renaissance style: pavilions, pennons, bulbs, variegated windows, projections, turrets, bays, and decorated surfaces of wood, plaster, and stone—in general, cheerful disorder. There are good examples in all the larger St. Croix Valley towns. The Fulton mansion in Hudson has already been mentioned. While created from a basically Italian design, it partakes fully of the Nonsuch spirit. Also in Hudson is the home of Miss Helene Denniston at 405 Locust Street, built by Dr. Samuel Johnson in the late 1880s. It adds to a tossed salad of detail a West Indian veranda with a gazebo at the end. The great red Albert J. Lammers mansion at Marsh and Third streets in Stillwater combines the usual Nonsuch elements and adds superb woodworking on its proud gables. Scandinavian carpenters did much of this work in the 1880s, and it may be to one of these that the roof line owes its Viking ornaments. The Lammers house is worth careful study for the richness and originality of its detail, as is a smaller structure, which began in 1864 as a Gothic cottage built for pioneer surveyor Royal C. Gray, in Taylors Falls. Later owners during the Nonsuch period exploded the house into projections, bays, and extravagances. Now owned by Mr. Leland R. Tangen, it stands at Government Road and Plateau Street.



THE *Lammers*  
house in  
Stillwater



In the St. Croix Valley the Nonsuch style was a celebration by lumbermen of the structural and decorative value of white pine. One cannot find there the round stone towers bearing battlements or conical caps characteristic of the Romanesque revival, which elsewhere competed with the Nonsuch. This was essentially a masonry style, and the St. Croix County Courthouse in Hudson built in 1902 is its only major example in the area. Men who had grown wealthy by cutting and marketing lumber still preferred to use it, however great their wealth. This combination of theme and material found the peak of its expression in 1902 when William Saunty, a colorful Stillwater lumber operator who had a brief success in iron ore speculation, built a Moorish recreation hall behind his Nonsuch mansion at Maple and Hickory streets. It flaunted the uses of painted wood: its interior had a vast dance floor, wildly Alhambran in decor, like a motion picture set for Rudolph Valentino. This was flanked by a bowling alley and a swimming pool. Even in its present state, domesticated into apartments, it has a gaudy grandeur.

<sup>9</sup> Henry Van Brunt, one of the creators of the style, quoted in Christopher Tunnard and Henry Hope Reed, *The American Skyline*, 143 (New York, 1953).

By the time this house was built a new spirit of caution was entering the valley; the raw, confident frontier era was over. After 1895, the peak year for lumber production on the St. Croix, the great pinelands were soon logged out. The decline of lumbering coincided with the arrival of a new fashion for the classic in architecture. "A uniform and ceremonious style . . . [not] medieval or any other form of romantic, archeological or picturesque art" had been set as an ideal by the developers of the Chicago Columbian Exposition of 1893.<sup>9</sup> America's most respectable architects created there a dazzling Xanadu of enormous white pillars and porticoes and shimmering lagoons surrounding titanic statuary. Formal Roman grandeur was reinstated as the model for architecture. Gentlemen and ladies returning from Chicago abandoned the careless freedom of the Nonsuch era, and for twenty years they asked their architects for large white structures employing magnified classic motifs. This mode of building bore the same resemblance to the classic as Hellenistic art does to the Hellenic: it might be called "classistic." It produced comfortable and cheerful interior space, and at its best, it could be impressive. A good example is the James D. Bronson house built in 1905 at 1309 South Third Street in Stillwater, and now owned

by Mr. James J. Brooksbank. The effect of the Columbian Exposition can be seen by comparing the Bronson residence with the Lammers' house across the street — and the effect of a half century of prosperity by setting beside them the little classic house a few blocks away at 610 South Broadway.

The classic style inaugurated a period of arid convention in American architecture, broken only occasionally by the rebels who were scornfully labeled "picturesque secessionists." Whimsey was still alive in the St. Croix Valley, when "Helvetia," a carved wooden cottage in the Tyrolean style, with a tree growing through the roof, was built by Mr. Glen E. Millard in Franconia, and when Mr. Leo Capser assembled his stone "Villa St. Croix" from exotic components a few miles north of Prescott. The playful tradition initiated by "Grandma" Bean and carried forward by William Sauntry was recently continued in a family-sized tree house designed for Dr. John B. Coleman by St. Paul architect W. Brooks Cavin.

But many years passed before serious architectural creation of a high order returned to the valley. Five miles west of Stillwater is a house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1955 for Mr. Donald Lovness. Like the limestone structures built on the prairie a century earlier, its walls seem to be outcrops of the hillside. But respect for "natural materials" did not preclude their being shaped and sculptured. Wright designed for the Lovness house woodcarv-

ing in the same tradition as that of the Lammers house two generations earlier. Although it is more subtle, it proclaims the same joy in the potentialities of wood.

The concept of the Lovness house goes much further back, to an idea shared by John Mower and William Folsom: it is as concerned with its scene as with its setting, as interested in what it sees as how it appears. It looks out, as did the Mower, Folsom, and Proctor houses, at the spacious and varied landscape of the valley. Where the earlier builders had placed broad porches facing the river, Wright used wide expanses of glass, but the purpose is the same. For two generations houses had turned their backs to the river, and their builders, taking designs from books, had been indifferent to the relationship of structure and scene. But in recent years the valley has once again attracted talent adequate to its settings. One of the finest of the new houses was designed by Michael J. McGuire and built on Highway 35 south of Houlton for Mr. A. L. Warren. "A"-shaped rafters frame the view down the river, and carefully laid native stone walls around the entrance and enclosing the lower floor create a sense of shelter. It is both a retreat and an affirmation of the natural beauty of a scene worthy of the best that architecture can do.

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*THE Lovness house near Stillwater, designed in 1955 by Frank Lloyd Wright*





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