



THE ACADEMIC REVIVAL STYLES

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NOTE: Words marked with an asterisk () are discussed briefly in the glossary on p. 6.*

According to many historians, the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 heralded the end of the Victorian era. Held in Chicago, the Exposition brought together the talents of architects from across the country to create the "White City," hundreds of acres of exposition halls, pavilions, sculpture gardens and promenades—all linked by a man-made canal system. As was the case with the Centennial Exposition 17 years earlier, the Columbian Exposition's promoters regarded it as an event that would popularize the "cutting edge" of taste and design. When the scale, expense and impact of the Columbian Exposition are considered in comparison with previous—as well as later—expositions or fairs, it may be considered to have had the greatest impact on society of all the others up to the present day. (See sidebar.)

The architectural styles that rose to popularity as a result of the Columbian Exposition are described briefly below.

- The Neo-Classic Revival style, which was based upon the architecture of ancient Greece and Rome.
- The Medieval Revival style harkened back to the English and Norman architecture of the Pre-Renaissance period (1100-1300).
- The Renaissance Revival style drew inspiration from Italian architecture of the Renaissance period (1400-1600).
- The Colonial/Georgian Revival looked to early American buildings of the 1600s and early 1700s.
- The American Foursquare style was based on farmhouse architecture of the Midwest.
- The roots of the Spanish Colonial Revival style were in the Spanish colonial period of the 1700s and early 1800s.

The theme of the Exposition originated in the École Des Beaux Arts in Paris, the world's leading school of architecture. The École's curriculum was founded upon the art and architecture of Classical Greece and Rome and of the Renaissance in Italy and Europe. The École mandated "recording from life"

as a necessary part of each student's education, and aspiring architects ventured throughout Europe and Britain to fill sketch books with details from antiquity. With the aid of modern technology and materials, these details were translated into contemporary building designs. Hence, the resulting styles came to be called "Academic" Revivals. They remained popular through the 1930s until World War II.

Neo-Classic Revival

The Neo-Classic Revival style is noted for its monumental scale, colonnaded porticoes and classical ornament, used in public buildings and residences alike. The influence of the Beaux Arts movement is

A Few Facts about the Columbian Exposition of 1893

The event ultimately cost more than \$28 million, and during its six-month life span—from May 1 to Oct. 30, 1893—it attracted more than 27 million visitors. It occupied 633 acres in Jackson Park on south Chicago's lakefront, where the Museum of Science and Industry now stands. It was a model for many succeeding expositions and fairs, and gave us the first Ferris Wheel, a 263-foot-high, \$300,000 marvel with 36 cars, each of which could carry 60 passengers. (Source: *The Vanishing City, A Photographic Encyclopedia of the World's Columbian Exposition*. Chicago, Laird & Lee Publishers, 1893.)



The Statue of the Republic looks down the Court of Honor lagoon toward the exposition's administration building. Lake Michigan lies beyond the administration building.

This is the fourth in a series of five Tech Talk articles on Minnesota's architectural styles. The next one is scheduled for the Jan. 2000 issue of *The Interpreter*.

Editor's note:

TECH TALK is a bimonthly column offering technical assistance on management, preservation and conservation matters that affect historical societies and museums of all sizes and interests. Comments and suggestions for future topics are welcome.



Continued from p. 3

evident in the use of sculpture as an integral element in the building design. Buildings in this style are usually rectangular in plan; if wings are used, they are most often symmetrically positioned to accent the central building mass. Symmetry in design of the building facade and its components is critical. When the classical orders are used, preference is given to the Doric, Ionic and Corinthian orders, and they often reach a height of two or more stories.

The portico roofs are usually gabled and have prominent pediments or cornices adorned with dentils or modillions*. (See the glossary on p. 6.) In more elaborate examples, pediments are embellished with sculptural elements such as figures, garlands and swags*, or medallions. Neo-Classic public buildings are usually of masonry construction, veneered with a polished or bush-hammered stone. (Rusticated surfaces are not used).

The most elaborate of the Neo-Classic Revival style buildings are given the distinction of being labeled Beaux Arts Classic. Ornamentation is extremely important and often includes a raised

portico with a formal entry, monumental staircases, paired columns, domes, sculptural finials* or acroteria*, balustrades, garlands and swags, and statuary. Corners are accentuated by slightly projecting rectangular stones called quoins.

Semi-circular forms are introduced in window and door openings and loggias with arcades and vaulted ceilings. Minnesota's current State Capitol, begun in 1895, is a premier example of Beaux Arts Classicism.

Renaissance Revival

Incorporating many of the characteristics of the Neo-Classical style is the Renaissance Revival, inspired by the Italian Renaissance palazzo. Although the style is usually associated with large-scale buildings such as libraries, city halls, hotels, offices and museums, many wealthy individuals chose the style for their urban "palaces." The plan and massing of Renaissance Revival buildings are usually rectangular. Facades are arranged symmetrically, and



The George Peavey residence, 2210 Park Avenue in Minneapolis, was built in 1903. It is an example of the Renaissance Revival style of architecture.

the roof is either flat or a low hip, concealed by a balustrade or parapet. An elaborate bracketed cornice defines the transition between the facade and roof. Ornamental treatments include classical columns and pilasters, arched windows and entries, corner quoins, prominent window surrounds, and urn-shaped balusters. They are usually constructed of masonry with facades sheathed in brick, stone or stucco, or combinations thereof.

Medieval Revival

The Medieval Revival drew its inspiration from the architecture of Elizabethan and Jacobean England and from northern Europe. As was the case with the academic styles, elements from various eras or building types were often merged within a single building. Recognizing this, architectural historian Marcus Whiffen labels the result "Jacobethan." These buildings are characterized by irregular plans, high-pitched roofs and a combination of brick and stucco wall surfaces. A mock half-timber detailing is often employed, most often in upper stories and gables. Roofs are prominent features, being either gabled



The Henry S. Plummer house (1917) on Quarry Hill in Rochester, Minn., is an example of the Medieval Revival style. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Above: The Cottonwood County Courthouse in Windom (1904) is an example of the Neo-Classic Revival style. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Continued from p. 4

or a combination of gables, hips and jerkins*. It is common for a roof to sweep from the uppermost gable to the first floor and to incorporate a catenary curve*. Chimneys are massive and ornamental, often incorporating patterned brick or stonework and ceramic chimney pots. Windows are either of the double-hung or casement type, and in any case, they have small panes of glass set either in wooden muntins* or lead comes*.

Colonial/Georgian Revival

The Colonial/Georgian Revival was an attempt to recognize an American, rather than European, architectural heritage. It focused on the building styles of the period from the mid-1600s through the mid-1700s, as found in New England and through Virginia and Pennsylvania. The simpler designs were called Colonial, as they were reminiscent of the earlier, clapboard structures with small windows, large chimneys and sparse ornament, that appealed to those

seeking a “rustic charm.” The Georgian, on the other hand, was rather refined in proportion and its use of building materials and ornament, and conveyed a more classical inspiration and proportions.

This style, in

particular, was widely promoted in pattern books as “truly American” architecture. This building type was adaptable to a broad range of costs and lifestyles, ranging from small city lots to expansive country estates. The style was universally accepted for its ability to fit in anywhere. It remained popular for nearly 40 years, until World War II, and experienced another revival in the 1990s.

General characteristics of the style include a rectangular plan, often with wings of smaller rectangles, and a two- or three-story massing. (The wings are often lower, being one- to one-and-a-half story in height, and would function as porches or sunrooms, garages or utility areas.) Roofs may be either gabled, hipped or gambrel, most often with narrow, pedimented dormers. Windows are typically multi-pane and double-hung. In the case of the Colonial Revival buildings, the siding is usually wooden clapboard or shingles, whereas the Georgian Revival employs brick or a combination of brick and

wood. The principal facades are symmetrically arranged into an odd number of bays (three, five, seven, etc.); emphasis is placed on a formal central entry that may be embellished with a fanlight transom and sidelights. Ornamental treatments, when used, include small porticoes, shutters, Palladian windows*, eave brackets or modillions, and classical columns and pilasters. The ornament is typically mass-produced and available from millwork catalogues.

American Foursquare

A building type from this era that can be classified under several styles, according to the use of ornament, is the American Foursquare, or “Cornbelt Cube.” It is typically square in plan, two stories in height, and has a prominent dormered hip roof and a full front porch. The facade arrangement is not necessarily symmetrical, but the overall composition is one of order. When classical columns are employed on the porch and on corner pilasters, the Foursquare becomes Neo-Classic; when “Gothic”-inspired bargeboards are found on dormers and polygonal columns with foliate capitals are used on porches, the Foursquare becomes Medieval Revival; and when a



Photo (of drawing) by Charles Nelson

Above: A drawing of the O.H. Freeman residence in Minneapolis (1888), designed by Harry W. Jones, prominent Minnesota architect. It is an example of the Colonial /Georgian Revival style; note the Palladian window in the center of the second floor.



Photo (of catalog cut) by Charles Nelson

An example of the Foursquare style, this house was advertised as “Gordon-Van Tine Home No. 506,” probably in that company’s 1910 catalog. At the top, the catalog promises “Guaranteed Prices-No Extras.”

Palladian window graces the facade, the Foursquare becomes Georgian Revival. In its simplest form, it is, however, a Foursquare.

Spanish Colonial Revival (or “Hollywood Modern”)

While the Colonial/Georgian Revival rose to great popularity in the East and Midwest, a contemporary revival of historic American architecture germinated in the Southwest. It found its roots in the adobe buildings of the Spanish Colonial



Continued from p. 5

period of the 1700s and early 1800s. Even when translated into stucco-clad buildings with flat or low-hipped tile roofs, the Spanish Colonial Revival architecture seemed out of place in the harsh northern climate of Minnesota, and as such, found only limited popularity. The rise of the style was contemporaneous with the golden age of Hollywood and was preferred by the wealthy jet set of the time, so the style was nicknamed “Hollywood Modern.”

Its characteristics include irregular plans, one or two stories capped with low flat or hipped roofs, and construction of concrete or wood sheathed with stucco to resemble adobe. Its ornamentation consisted of terra cotta door and window surrounds made to resemble carved stone, projecting



SHPPO file photo

St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church in Morgan Park, Duluth (1918), is an example of the Spanish Colonial Revival style.

beams and rafters called “vigas,” wrought-iron grillwork, flat or arched recessed openings, and red tile roofs. Few full-blown examples of the Spanish Colonial style exist in Minnesota, though a number of buildings constructed during the late 1920s incorporate elements of Southwestern inspiration.

Academic Revival Materials

Due to the relatively recent popularity of the Academic Revival styles, materials and treatments are familiar to many in the building trades. Information on construction and decoration is readily available at libraries, bookstores and newsstands. Reproduction parts ranging from classical columns to leaded casement windows to cast stone fireplace mantles are again on the market, manufactured by companies across the country. Suppliers, as well as craftspeople, can easily be found on the Internet.

Since much of the design and ornament in Academic Revival styles is integral, the survival rate of representative buildings is high. Elements such as

balustrades, column capitals and distinctive roof treatments are most vulnerable to weathering and deterioration, but because materials of high quality were most often used in their manufacture, their lifespan can be extended indefinitely with a program of periodic maintenance. When new replacement elements are necessary, the key to success is to acquire identical substitutes for the originals and to take sufficient time in preparation and installation. Preparation may require back-priming* or moisture-proofing; replacement of flashings, crowns and coves; and also modern technology repairs, such as epoxy consolidation of rotted window stiles or column cases. Or it may require a sympathetic introduction of energy conservation measures such as weather-stripping, insulation or storm/screen units to preserve and maintain historic window sashes.

As in any project, it is imperative to understand the building before attempting to work on it. From that point on, it's Academic.

Brief Glossary

- **Acroteria:** projecting bases at the tops and ends of pediments, and the statues or ornaments that stand on top of them.
- **Back-priming:** painting the reverse side of a board or element before the board is applied to an exterior wall.
- **Comes:** strips used in leaded glass windows to support individual pieces of glass.
- **Catenary curve:** the curve made by a string hanging between two points.
- **Finial:** an ornament at the top of a gable, pinnacle, etc.
- **Garlands and swags:** festoons; carved ornaments in the form of garlands or flowers, tied at the ends with ribbons and suspended at both ends.
- **Jerkin:** the end of a roof that incorporates the forms of gable and hip; also called a “clipped gable.”
- **Modillions:** small scroll-like brackets that support the upper part of the cornice of a column.
- **Muntin:** the vertical, central part of doors, panels, etc, which butts into the horizontal parts at the top and bottom of the door.
- **Palladian:** derived from the work of Andrea Palladio (1508-1580), called the first great professional architect, who aimed to recapture the splendor of antiquity, particularly Roman. A palladian window is a three-part window, the center section of which is taller than the flanking side units. See the picture of the Freeman house, p. 5.

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