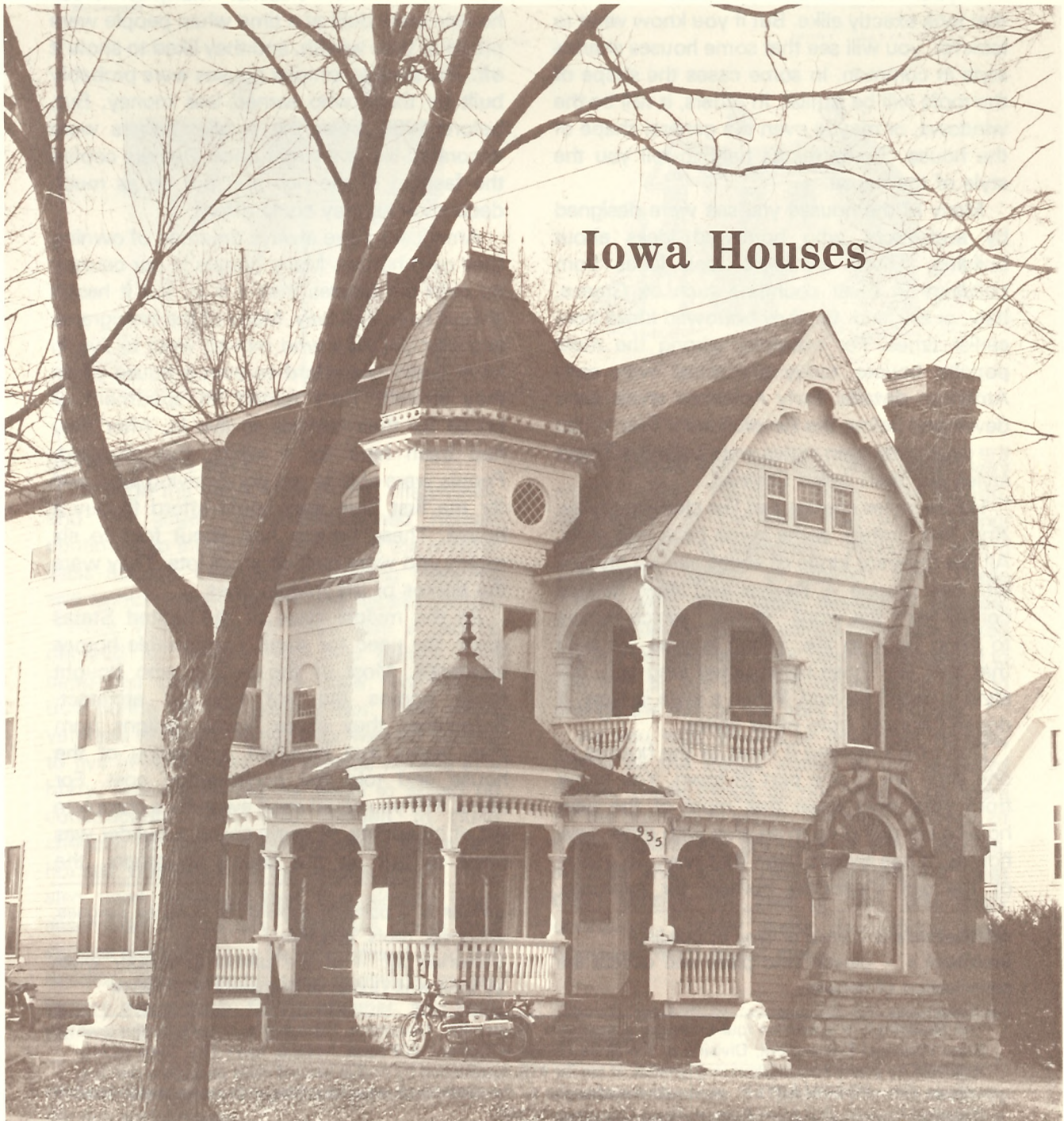


# THE GOLDFINCH

Vol. 2, No. 4

Margaret Atherton Bonney, Editor

September 1981



## Iowa Houses

The Iowa History Magazine for Young People



Ever since the first people began to settle in Iowa they have built many styles of houses — some fancy, some plain, some big, some small. The town you live in, or near, probably has examples of many styles. With a little reading, and a lot of looking, you can learn quite a bit about houses and the people who lived in them. Travelling to other towns or just going to school will be more interesting if you know about the **architecture** you see along the way.

In your town there may not be two houses that look exactly alike. But if you know what to look for, you will see that some houses share a style in common. In some cases the shape of the roofs will be similar. In others, it will be the windows, or maybe even the general shape of the house. These things help to tell you the style of the house.

Many of the houses you see were designed by **architects** who borrowed ideas about building. These architects took ideas from buildings in other countries such as Greece, Italy, or England. Or, they borrowed ideas from earlier times. For example, among the most popular houses today are those with early American **details**. Early American styles were developed before the Revolutionary War, when the original thirteen states were colonies. These styles are often called Colonial.

House styles change just like clothing styles. And, like clothes, some come back into style. All the different kinds of styles can be divided into two groups — Revival and New. Revival comes from the word “revive,” which means to bring back to life. When houses are built that look like those constructed long ago, the style is called Revival. When a style is New, it doesn’t borrow from other styles.

Don’t be surprised if most of the houses of one style are in one part of town. You know from your own town that most of the new houses are going up in an area with other new homes. It has always been that way. So, many of the old **Victorian** homes, for example,

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**architecture** *n.* – style or type of building.

**architect** *n.* – person who plans and directs the construction of houses.

might be on just one or two streets in the same neighborhood. Homes that are similar were usually built about the same time.

There is another reason why houses of the same style were built near one another. In some cases the wealthy people who built larger houses bought land in the same neighborhood. Homes of a certain size were then built near one another. It worked the same way with **middle-class** homes.

Most big old houses in Iowa towns were built by wealthy citizens. Many of these houses were built at a time when people were proud of their wealth, and they liked to show it off. The smaller, simpler houses were probably built by those who earned less money. But, before 1900, even the smaller homes were decorated like the larger ones. Owners copied the fashion of the rich and put on as much decoration as they could afford.

Americans have always dreamed of owning their own homes. Many people in our country do own the houses they live in, but it hasn’t always been that way. Many of the immigrants and city dwellers who moved west to live in Iowa could not afford to own a house when they arrived. They rented an apartment or house for their families to live in. After they had been here for a while, this changed. People were able to get good-paying jobs, and for the first time they could afford to buy a house. These houses had about four to six rooms and were built on small lots. They were the homes of the middle class.

As the middle class of the United States grew, the need for small, comfortable homes increased. Most of the people who bought these homes did not hire an architect. Sometimes they chose house designs from plan books that included a drawing of the house and told the construction cost. For about \$10 you could send away for a complete set of blueprints. In some cases, a builder was hired to put up the house. In others, the

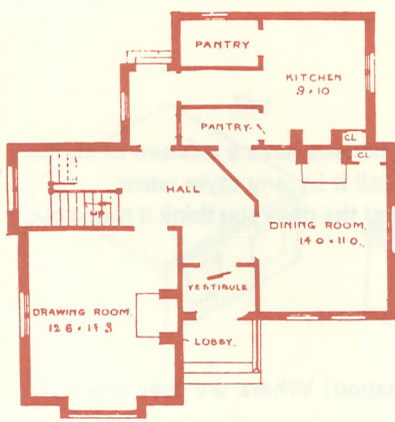
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**details** *n.* – parts of a building; such as porches, windows, roofs, and trim.

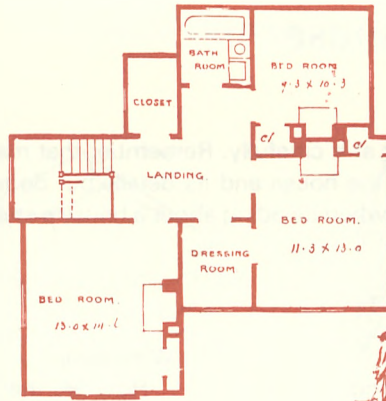
**Victorian** *adj.* – of the period in history when Victoria was Queen of England (1837-1901).

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GROUND PLAN.



2<sup>ND</sup> FLOOR PLAN.



FRONT ELEVATION



SIDE ELEVATION



PERSPECTIVE VIEW.

owners did the work.

Through the years, plan books, magazines, and the larger, architect-designed houses continued to influence the style of the middle-class houses. Changes in building materials and fashion influenced the way houses looked.

After World War II there was a greater demand for houses than ever before. This happened because there were few houses built during the four years of war. Then, when veterans returned home, they wanted houses to live in right away. To provide houses in a hurry, builders looked for ways to speed up construction. They also needed to build cheaply, so that the buyers could afford the houses. Builders kept the houses small. They also used materials that had already been assembled at a factory. Windows, doors, and sidings were built in a factory instead of at the building site. Assembly-line methods at the factory made these things cheaper, and kept the cost of the house low.

But houses built this way often looked very much alike. Houses were box-shaped, rectangular, or L-shaped; had wood siding; double-hung\* or casement\* windows; and a low-pitched, gable\* or hipped\* roof. These houses were often called **developer houses**. Because people did not want a home that looked just like the one next door, developers learned to use four or five different house plans and to change the trim on the front of the houses.

As you look around at developer houses, notice all the things added to the standard house. These things do not have to be there for the building to stand. The most common of these decorations are brick or stone facings, shutters that don't close, half-timbers\* that don't support the wall or roof, and fancy doorways. Usually these decorations were borrowed from earlier styles.

\*Words marked by an asterisk are explained on pages 4 and 5.

**middle-class** *adj.* – the group of people between the rich and the poor.

**developer houses** — houses that are built by someone who buys land, builds and sells houses on it.



# How to Look at a House

To learn about a house we must look at it carefully. Remember that many houses have a mixture of styles. When this happens we can describe the house and its details but do not call it by any style name.

There are several things to look at when deciding about a house's style and the date you think it may have been built.

## Shape —

Is it tall and narrow . . . or low and long . . . or big and square . . . or something else?

## Roof —

What shape is it? Is there decoration at the cornice\* or on top? Are there dormer\* windows?

## Siding —

What materials are used? Is it all the same?

## Windows —

How are they shaped? Where are they placed?

## Porches (verandas) —

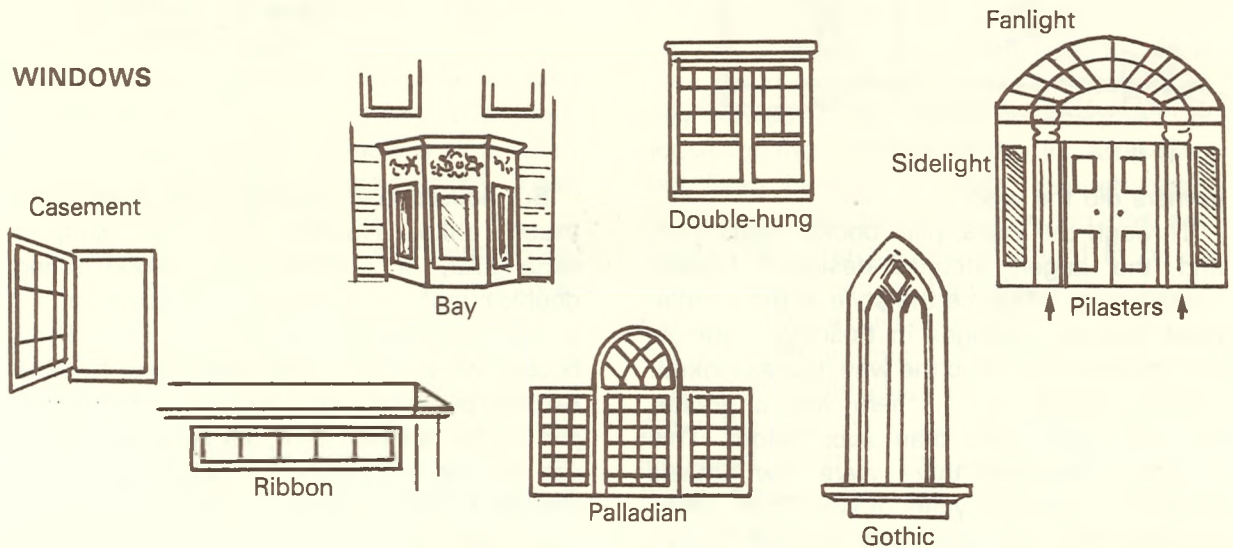
Where are they located? Are they large or small?

## Height of building off the ground —

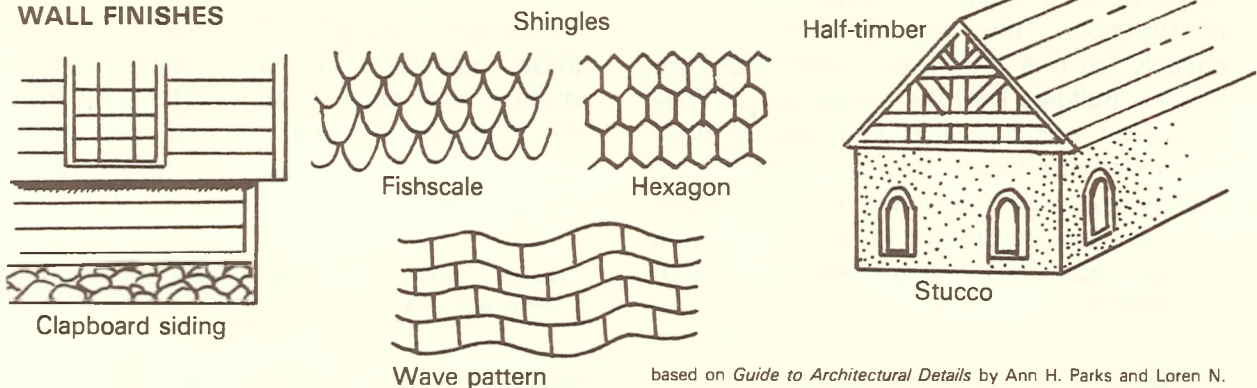
Is it high, low, or on the ground?

Drawings by Christine Marme Thompson

## WINDOWS

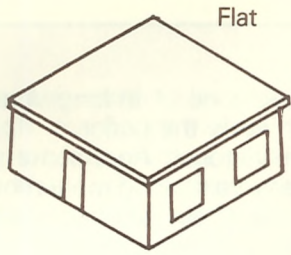


## WALL FINISHES

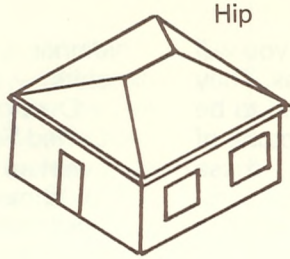


based on *Guide to Architectural Details* by Ann H. Parks and Loren N. Horton. Technical Sheet No. 8 published by the Division of the State Historical Society, Iowa City, Iowa.

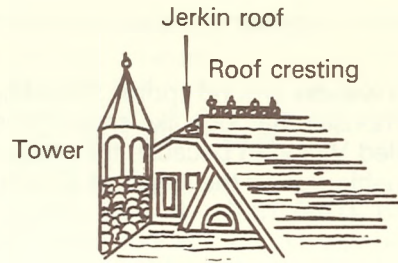
# ROOF DETAILS



Flat



Hip



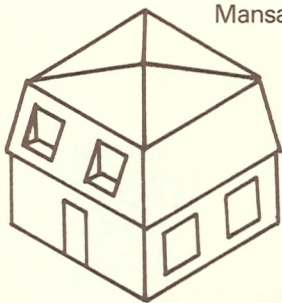
Jerkin roof

Roof cresting

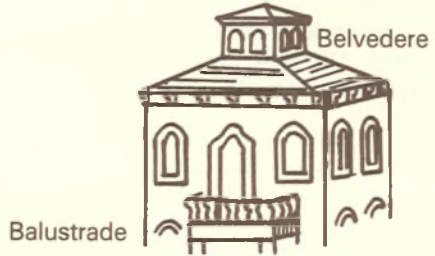
Tower



Gable

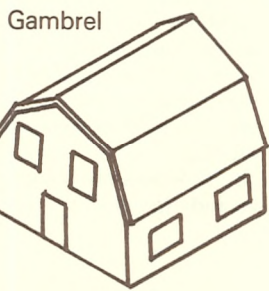


Mansard

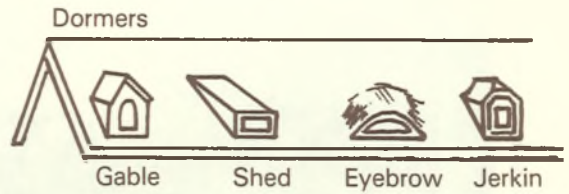


Belvedere

Balustrade



Gambrel



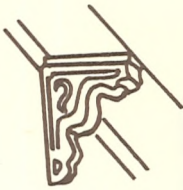
Dormers

Gable

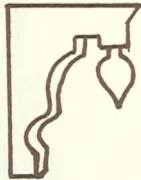
Shed

Eyebrow

Jerkin



Brackets



Finial

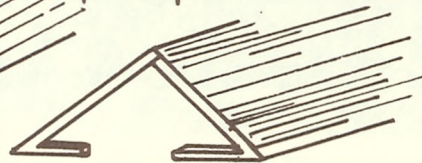
Bargeboard



Pediment

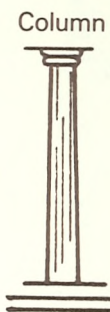
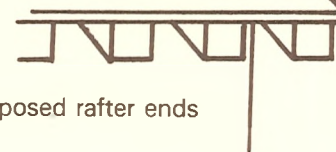
Dentils

Cornice

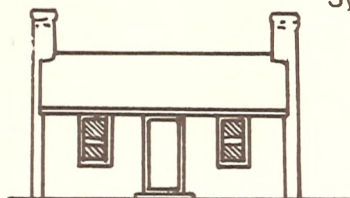


Exposed rafter ends

Eave

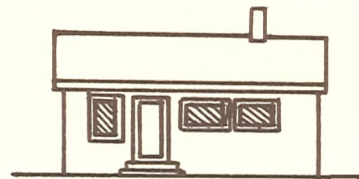


Column



Symmetrical

Symmetry



Asymmetrical



# Gingerbread Houses

As you wander around spotting buildings, you will notice houses that look like small mansions. They are called Victorian because they happened to be fashionable during the reign of Queen Victoria of England (1837-1901). If well cared for, these hundred-year-old houses look like wedding cakes. If not kept up, they look like the old haunted houses in the movies.

As you walk by, you can almost see the horse and carriage pull up. Inside, the servants are clearing the china and silver from the table after

dinner, and everyone — in long dresses and dark suits — is sitting in the parlor.

During the Victorian Age, some people in the United States were making more money than they ever had before. Their Victorian houses were built to show off the owner's new wealth. New machines, such as power jigsaws and lathes, could turn out fancy woodwork at lower prices than the hand-made way. People used it all over their new houses. Even middle-class people put on as much trim as they could afford. All this

## Italianate (1855-1880)

University of Iowa Libraries



*This Italianate home was built in the 1850s.*

### Characteristics and Details

- box-shaped, often with box-shaped additions
- low-pitched, hipped or gable roof
- wide eaves, supported by brackets
- belvedere
- tall, thin windows usually rounded at the top
- bay windows are common
- veranda (porch)

Division of the State Historical Society



*This home is an example of a smaller house decorated with the Italianate style. What Italianate details can you find on this attractive house?*



## Gothic Revival (1855-1890)

decoration has come to be called "gingerbread."

Although many are white today, Victorian houses were first painted with as many as five colors to show off the fancy woodwork. Often there are colorful stained-glass windows. These houses were designed to look nice from the ground up, so no bushes hid their **foundations**.

There were several styles of Victorian houses. You probably have more than one style in your town. On the following pages you will learn about four that are the most common in Iowa.

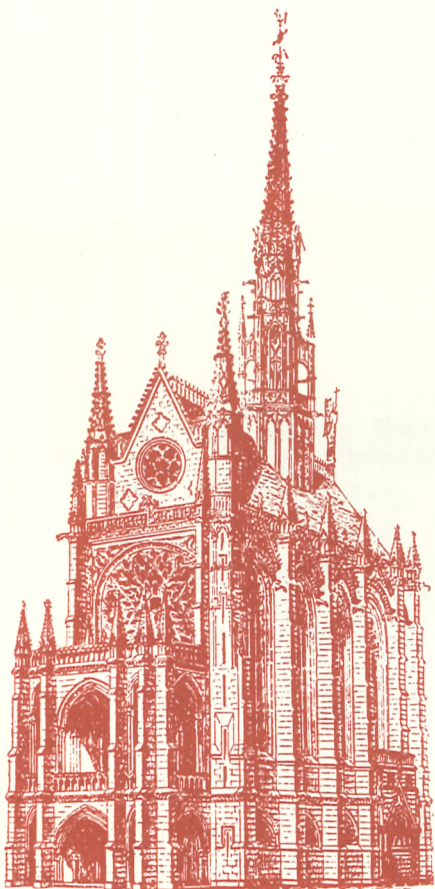
### Characteristics and Details

- asymmetrical shape
- strong vertical lines
- steep, sloping gable roof
- much decoration at the eaves (bargeboards)
- tall, pointed windows
- trim that hangs down or stands up
- verandas

University of Iowa Libraries



*This highly decorated Gothic Revival house or cottage seems to drip with carved wooden ornaments. This style borrowed details from the European Gothic churches of the Middle Ages. The idea was that the architectural lines should point toward heaven. If the gingerbread on this house were removed, only a basic midwestern frame house with a porch would remain. The window of this house is not pointed at the top. When this was the case, the wood trim over the window was pointed instead.*



A Gothic Cathedral.

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**reign** *n.* – period of time when a person is king or queen.

**foundation** *n.* – the base of a house.

## French Second Empire (1865-1885)

The French Second Empire style is named for the period in France when Napoleon III ruled the country. Apartment buildings in Paris at that time were designed with a mansard roof so that the top floor would have more usable space than those with hipped or gable roofs.

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*This two-story house has a mansard roof with dormer windows, brackets under the eaves, and tall first-floor windows. Some French Second Empire houses have more decoration than this one. This house has no iron roof cresting now, although it may be that at some time it was removed by an owner.*

### Characteristics and Details

- two or three stories, symmetrical, square
- mansard roof
- iron roof cresting
- dormer windows
- brackets supporting the eaves
- tall first floor windows, sometimes arched at the top



# Queen Anne (1880-1895)

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*This Queen Anne style house was built from mail-order plans that cost \$5. It is decorated with a little bit of everything. The walls are covered with stone, brick, fish-scale-shaped shingles, and wood siding. How many different types of windows can you find?*

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## Characteristics and Details

- asymmetrical
- two or three stories
- steep roof
- many different window styles
- bay windows are common
- turrets
- large chimneys
- many different siding materials

*This is the ad for house plans that appeared in an 1885 Harper's Weekly magazine.*

## Early Twentieth Century (1900-1945)

As the twentieth century arrived, Iowans, along with people in the rest of the nation, began to change their minds about the fashion in houses. They wanted a simpler-looking place to live in, without all the fancy trim. The different house styles of the twentieth century clearly show this attitude.

### Prairie (1900-1915)

The only truly American style of architecture is the Prairie style. It all began in Chicago, where a group of architects wanted to break away from styles of the past.

Their leader was Louis Sullivan. He thought Americans copied too much from Europe. He wanted America to have its own style of architecture. The Chicago fire of 1871 gave him his chance. Because of the fire, many new buildings had to be built. Many young architects, including Sullivan, went to Chicago to work.

Sullivan's ideas were not well accepted. Although he built some important buildings, he did not convince enough people he was right. He was too different for most. It was Sullivan's students who would show the nation how well his ideas could work.

His most famous student was Frank Lloyd Wright. Wright became famous for his creative use of materials and unusual house designs. Another Prairie architect, Walter Burley Griffin, planned an eighteen-acre community project in Mason City. He also planned a neighborhood in Grinnell. Houses designed by Griffin still remain in those towns.

Prairie style houses have flat or gently-sloping roofs. They are often made of materials found near the building site. This helps them blend into their surroundings as part of nature.

Revival architects believed that old ideas are the best. Prairie style architects tried to show that people should live in the present, not the past. The Prairie style architects believed that each building should be a new beginning. This style gave architects a new chance to be creative. They planned houses for a twentieth century way of life.

The Prairie style was praised in the popular magazines of its day. But, after 1914, the magazine writers began to change their minds. The Prairie style slowly went out of fashion. The magazines began to suggest that people should look to the past for house designs. Even people in the Midwest turned their backs on their own Prairie style. But later, architects did use some of the best ideas from the Prairie style.



*A Prairie style house in Mason City.*

#### Characteristics and Details

- strong horizontal lines
- low roofs, flat or hipped
- overhanging roofs
- carport or porch at one end
- windows grouped in a row
- wood stripping along roof edge and around windows
- stucco or brick or wide, horizontal wood siding



## Basic Midwestern (1900-1920)

One of the most popular kinds of houses built in Iowa and the Midwest in the early twentieth century was a large, square building with a porch across the front. Popular in town and on farms, it was just right for the midwestern way of life. The large porch was an important feature. It served as an outdoor room in the summer, used by all members of the family. If you look closely at these houses, you will discover that there are many different decorations on this basic house. From these two examples, you can see that builders and homeowners often began with a basic shape and added touches that showed their own preferences. Most of these houses are white today, but when first built they were often painted in two or three colors.

Daniel K. Thompson



*The dormer on this house has a flat top and a row of windows inside the dormer. This detail shows a Prairie style influence.*

### Characteristics and Details

- large, square
- two or three stories
- hipped or gable roof
- dormers are common
- clapboard siding
- large, single-pane double windows
- wide, long, covered porches

Daniel K. Thompson



*This basic house has a pointed Gothic window inside a pointed dormer. This is a detail borrowed from the past.*

## Colonial Revival (1900-1940)

While the Prairie architects worked to create a new, simpler architecture by forgetting the past, Revival architects looked to the past for styles with simple lines and shapes.

After many years of popularity, Victorian homes, with all their decoration, went out of fashion quickly. People wanted simpler, plainer houses. In fact, some people took the decoration off their Victorian houses to become part of this fashion trend.

The styles the Revival architects copied most were American Colonial and English Tudor. Some historians believe that the return to Colonial architecture was a part of the strong **nationalism** in the United States at this time. Many people believed that Colonial was the truly American architecture. Americans wanted to preserve part of their national heritage, so they built homes that reminded them of their country's early beginnings.

This nationalism increased during World War I (1917-1918) and became even stronger when, in 1928, the **restoration** of Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia began.

---

**restoration** *n.* – to fix something so that it is as it was when new.

**nationalism** *n.* – strong belief in one's own nation; patriotism.

### Characteristics and Details

- symmetrical
- rectangular, usually two stories
- hipped, gambrel, or gable roof
- dormers are common
- windows with small panes
- brick or clapboard siding
- chimney, usually on one side
- shutters
- doorways with pediments, pilasters, fanlights, or sidelights

University of Iowa Libraries



*The Colonial Revival house often combines details from several different Colonial styles.*

## Tudor Revival (1910-1935)

### Characteristics and Details

- irregular shape
- steep gable or hipped roof
- half-timber on outside walls
- chimneys are often decorated with a pattern in the brickwork
- windows with small panes

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*An English Tudor Revival house. The name Tudor came from the English royal family that reigned from 1485 to 1603. During that time this half-timbered style was popular.*



## Bungalow (1910-1930)

### Characteristics and Details

- square
- small, one or one and one-half stories
- overhanging gable roof
- exposed rafter ends are common
- one or two large porches
- siding is often of stucco or shingle
- chimney of brick or stone

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*A bungalow in Dubuque.*

The word bungalow comes from the houses built by the British in India. Indian bungalows were one story high. They had a front porch called a veranda, and were topped with a thatched roof. Unlike American bungalows, they were not intended to last a long time. Americans began building bungalows about 1900 and continued to build them until the 1930s.

Designed with low, simple lines, bungalows were not showy places with fancy woodwork and trim. They were practical, easy-to-live-in homes for practical, hard-working people.

Most bungalows have an overhanging roof to protect the house from the summer sun. Bungalows are easy to spot and can be found in almost any town.

## Craftsman (1920-1939)

A fashionable smaller house of the period from 1920 to 1940 is the Craftsman. These houses sometimes used details from the past for some of their trim.

Daniel K. Thompson



*This Craftsman house is brown with white trim.*

### Characteristics and Details

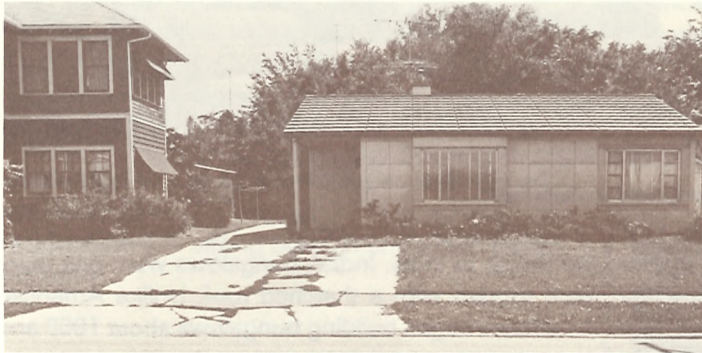
- small, compact
- one and one-half stories, or two stories
- pointed, steep, multi-gable roof
- dominant chimney
- dormers are common
- siding of brick, clapboard, or shingles
- windows with small panes
- Colonial or English Tudor details as trim
- no porch

## Post World War II (1946-Present)

Houses became longer and lower after World War II. Most were built by developers using variations on a rectangle or square. The importance of cars in people's lives moved garages out of the backyard to become a part of the house. Attached garages are still fashionable.

### Lustron (1948)

*Some wartime manufacturing plants converted to building prefabricated homes after World War II. This is a Lustron Company prefabricated steel house in Iowa City.*



### Ranch (1945-Present)

*Ranch-style houses come in many sizes. They can be economical to build and are popular with developers and owners. The term "ranch" is used to describe most one-story houses built after World War II, including many smaller ones that at one time were called bungalows.*

#### Characteristics and Details

- long, low appearance
- one story
- rectangular shape, or rectangular with one or more wings
- low-pitched gable or hipped roof
- large picture windows
- long horizontal windows placed high on the sides
- attached garage or carport

Daniel K. Thompson



*Another popular style built by developers has a split entry. Details from many past styles are used to make one look different from another.*

### Split Entry (1960-Present)



Daniel K. Thompson

#### Characteristics and Details

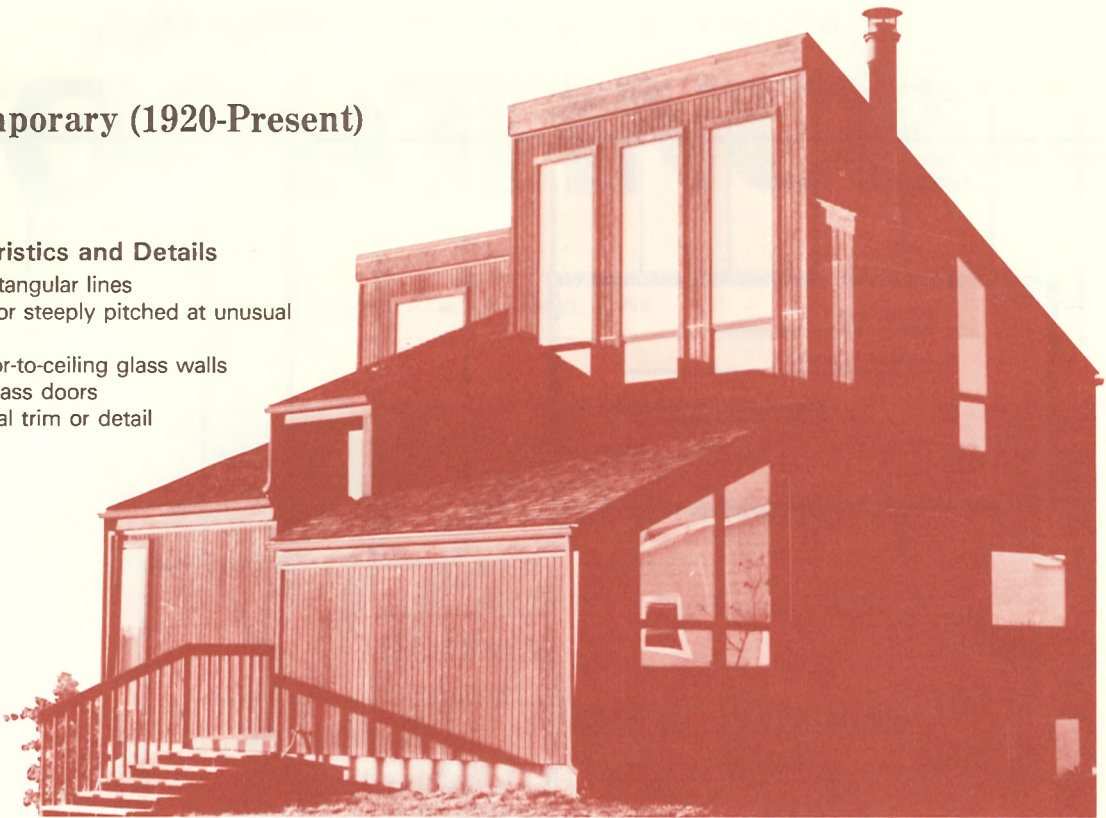
- rectangular
- two stories, with lower story partly below ground level
- low-pitched gable or hipped roof
- second floor often extends over the lower one
- attached garage is common
- Revival decoration is common



## Contemporary (1920-Present)

### Characteristics and Details

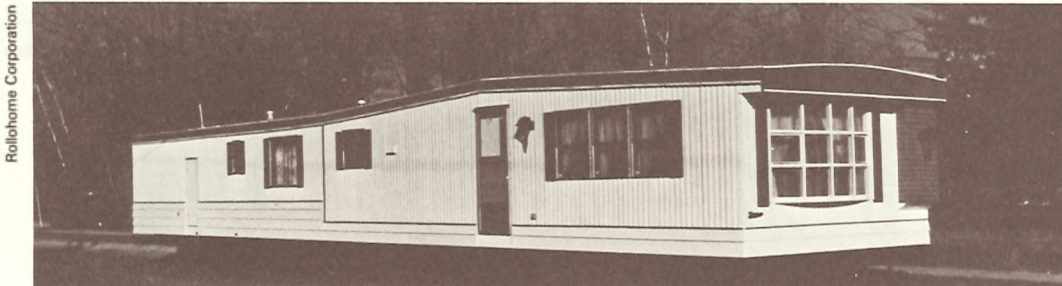
- long, rectangular lines
- roof flat or steeply pitched at unusual angles
- large floor-to-ceiling glass walls
- sliding glass doors
- no Revival trim or detail



William W. Bonney

*There are many contemporary styles. This house has details much like the Sea Ranch, a style first built on the West Coast.*

## Mobile Home (1933-Present)



Rollohome Corporation

*A new mobile home with a fireplace.*

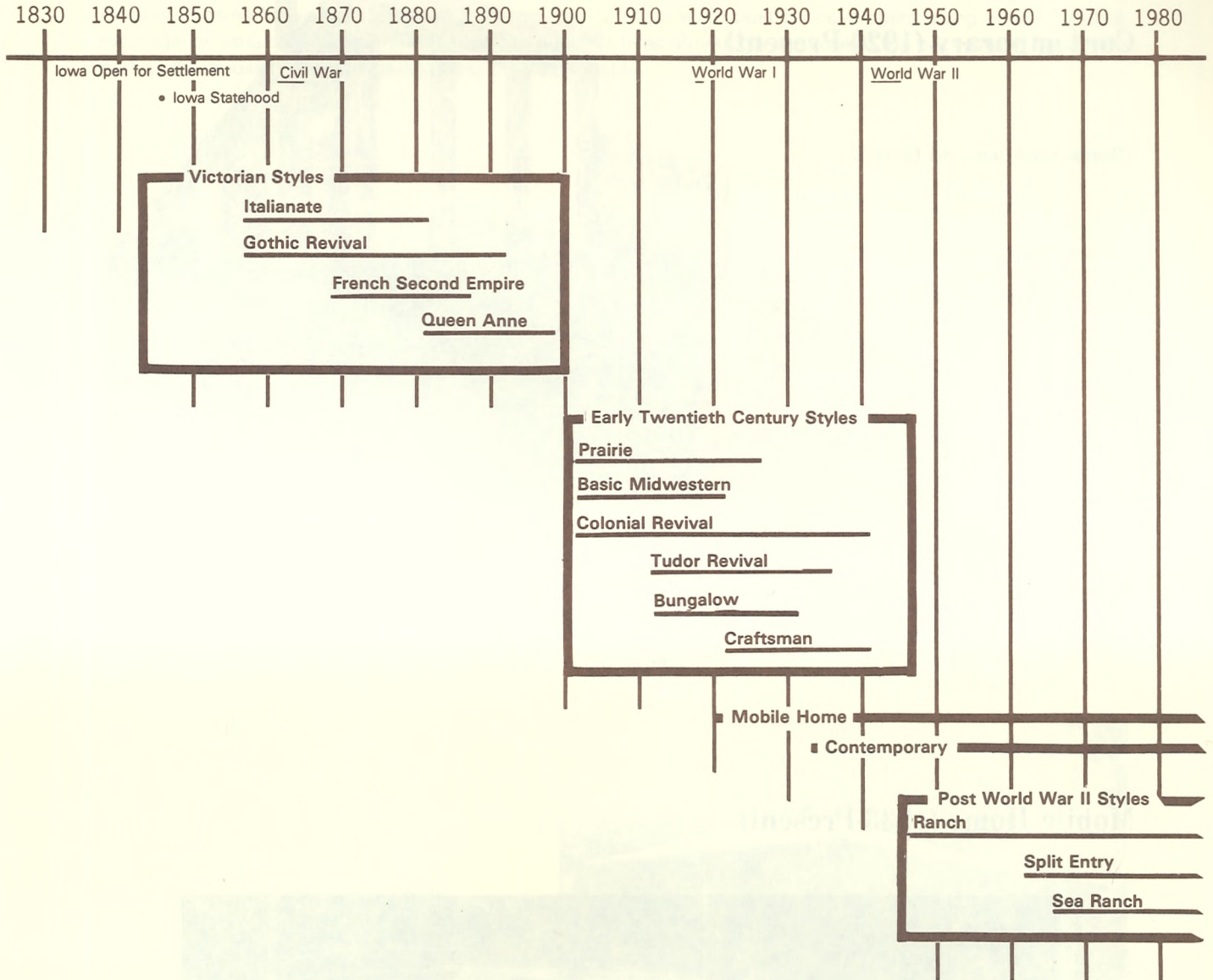
The high cost of building a house has led to the popularity of houses on wheels — mobile homes. They make up nearly one fourth of all the new housing built in the United States.

The first mobile homes were very small, but they have been getting bigger ever since. One of the first was built in Indiana, in 1933, for carnival people who needed a house they could take with them. It was only six and one-half feet wide and twelve feet long. It could sleep four people. Today, mobile homes are often twelve to fourteen feet wide and fifty to seventy-five feet long.

Mobile homes are no longer as "mobile" as they once were. The early ones were small enough to be pulled behind a car. But in 1955 mobile homes ten feet wide were introduced. These required trucks to move them from site to site.

Eventually, to meet the demand for larger, family-sized mobile homes, "double-wides" were built. These are really two halves of a large mobile home built so that they come together to form one large home.

# STYLES OF HOUSE ARCHITECTURE IN IOWA



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