



Old Sixth Ward District

History & Architecture

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The Sixth Ward's "golden age" lasted until the 1920's when the advent of the automobile led to the rapid growth of new subdivisions along the city outskirts.

The Golden Age

Home to approximately 2,000 Houstonians, the Old Sixth Ward was originally part of a two-league Mexican land grant issued in 1824 to John Austin, a close friend of Stephen F. Austin. It had been assumed they were cousins but Stephen Austin's last will and testament referred to John Austin as my friend and old companion. These new subdivisions featured inexpensive homes complete with garages, modern bathrooms, and financing packages which attracted many people from the Sixth Ward and other older neighborhoods. By that time, the original generation of homeowners had passed on and their heirs were eager to download these properties. The Sixth Ward then entered an 80 year phase when most of her homes were used as multi-tenant rentals owned/managed by

absentee landlords. The country's bicentennial in 1976 ushered in a newfound enthusiasm in the nation's history and historic preservation. The Sixth Ward was designated Houston's first National Registered Historic District in 1978.

A century after the 1895 ordinance, Old Sixth Ward saw a rebirth of its Golden Age when many of its rental properties were restored as single-family homes resplendent in their original glory. Some of its restored homes won local and national awards. Recognizing the Old Sixth Ward's efforts to preserve her history, the Mary Kay Inc donated \$20,000 to the neighborhood association in honor of its founder, Mary Kay Wagner-Ash, who grew up in the neighborhood. The neighborhood also

[On August 1, 2007, the Houston city council granted the protections for the Old Sixth Ward.]

won recognition from the city and state. Many of the neighborhood's earliest homes were built as 'Sunday Homes' in keeping with the German tradition where farmers needed a place near town so they could attend church, sell their produce downtown, or pick up supplies. The founding family of Spring Branch, Texas, the Kolbes built a Sunday House at 2204 Decatur. Vollmers of Vollmer, Texas, also held a Sunday House in the neighborhood as well. The Telschows and Hillendahl families of White Oak now the Rosslyn area each held Sunday Houses on Kane Street.

History & Housing

Two years after the Allen Brothers purchased the grant from Mr. Austin's estate in 1836 to establish the city of Houston, Mr. S.P. Hollingsworth filed a survey of the western environs of downtown Houston which included today's Old Sixth Ward which he divided into large, narrow tracts that ran northward from Buffalo Bayou. By January 1839, several tracts within the Hollingsworth survey had been sold to several prominent Houstonians, including W.R. Baker, James S. Holman, Archibald Wynns, Nathan Kempton and Henry Allen.

By 1858, Mr. Baker and his colleagues owned or held mortgages on most of the land in this area. In that same year Mr. Baker engaged the County Surveyor, Mr. Samuel West, to restructure

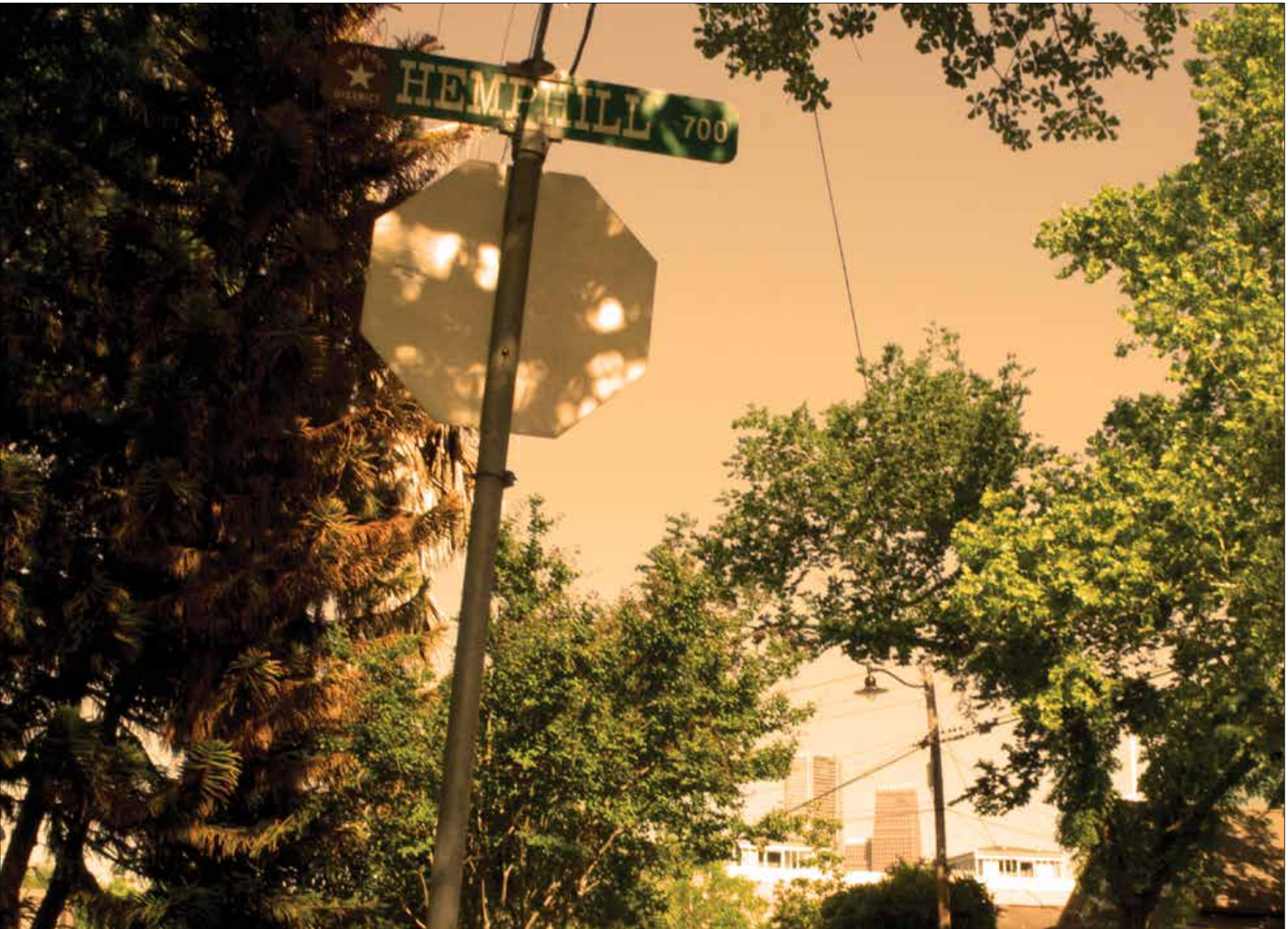
his holdings by replanting them into a lot and block system that defines today's Old Sixth Ward. The new survey was laid out to the true north as opposed to downtown which was platted at a 45 degree angle to true north.

The first sale after the re-platting took place on January 31, 1859, when Mr. Baker sold several blocks to Mr. W.W. Leeland. The original boundaries of the Old Sixth Ward were the Houston and Texas Central Railroad on the north side, Mr. Wynns' plantation—now Glenwood Cemetery—on the west side, the Buffalo Bayou on the south, and Stanley Street—now Houston Avenue—on the east. Mr. W.R. Baker was the president of the Houston and Texas Central

[Sixth Ward once contained 12 churches, three schools, 9 stores, and an infirmary.]

Railroad and encouraged many of his employees to purchase lots in the Sixth Ward. Due to its location immediately west of downtown, it also became popular with German immigrant families who held farms northwest and west of Houston.

These families built "in-town houses" for them to live while trading their farm produce downtown, and during holidays or festivities. Most of these homes were built with timber harvested from the owners' farmlands. There was a park on the south side of Buffalo Bayou west of Sabine Street, where today's Eleanor Tinsley Park sits, called Vauxhall Gardens which was considered one of the city's first parks. It was a very popular recreation spot for Houstonians and many traditional German





Sixth Ward was known as Fourth Ward North until December 9, 1895 when it was formally recognized by the city government as a separate neighborhood.

festivities were hosted there. By 1885 the Fourth Ward North, as Sixth Ward was originally called became well established, was home to people of various descents, especially those of northern European ancestry. It had no socioeconomic structure and it was not unusual to see an owner of an oil mill living next door to a railroad laborer, and a Baptist minister next to a saloon keeper. The neighborhood grew southbound from Center Street and the streets extended all the way to the bayou, including Richmond, Nelson and Bow Streets. The entire southern tier of the neighborhood was removed to make way for the construction of Memorial Drive in the 1950'S. Prior to the development of the Houston Heights in 1893, Center Street enjoyed the highest elevation in the city, and the Fourth Ward North's elite set up housekeeping along that street which was acknowledged in those days as the uptown's silk-stocking district.

Center Street enjoyed its own streetcar service, however sadly only two out of roughly 80 houses built along that street survive today with one remaining at the SW corner of Sabine and Center Streets, and the other relocated to Kane Street. After the death of Mr. Wynns in 1858, his plantation

became the site of a short-lived brick quarry. A group of investors purchased the property and re-opened it as the Glenwood Cemetery on May 1871. It provided a natural protective barrier along the west side of the Fourth Ward North that still exists to this day.

During the 1890's the Houston Chronicle newspaper lauded Fourth Ward North as one of the finest and 'healthful' places to live in Houston. The area enjoyed the highest elevation in Houston and abundant artesian water, fed by the same aquifer that fed the Beauchamp Springs nearby. Residents enjoyed close proximity to downtown, the Vauxhall Gardens, and the Highland Park resort located nearly a mile north at the corner of Houston Ave and White Oak Drive which was one of the city's earliest amusement parks. So popular was Fourth Ward North, the Chronicle ran a weekly section on it for several years documenting its daily happenings. Desiring to have greater representation in Houston 's city council, residents of the Fourth Ward North petition to have their neighborhood separated from the Fourth Ward to the south and rename it as the Sixth Ward. The Houston city council voted to recognize Sixth Ward on January 1, 1877 but

the voter's representation did not change. A new ordinance formally creating the Sixth Ward as a separate voting precinct was passed on December 9th, 1895. Immediately afterwards property values skyrocketed which ushered in the Golden Age of Sixth Ward's history. For the first time the neighborhood was connected to the city's network of running water and electricity. Larger and more elegant homes complete with indoor plumbing were built on the remaining vacant lots, and in other instances older houses were pushed back to become the rear wings of brand-new sections in front. Some of the former German immigrant 'in-town' houses were also joined together to become larger homes.



Greek Revival Style

The Greek Revival Style began with public buildings in Philadelphia in 1820, and quickly became popular for residences. With its symmetrical shape, low roof lines, columns and pediments, the style mimicked Greek temples, and was thought by Americans at the time to embody the concept of Democracy. From 1830 to 1850 nearly every new public or private building incorporated some Greek Revival elements.

More modest than many Greek Revival homes, this home is unusual in its one and a half story construction that incorporates many features of the larger temples, including square columns, triple sash windows downstairs and a portico. The style was adopted in most areas of the country, with regional differences. In warm southern climates,

piazas and porticoes were popular. Austere farmhouses with understated pilasters were built further north. The style has two variations, "temple" which incorporates most of the Greek themes with pilasters, columns, pediments, wide friezes and porticoes. The other variation is more modest, incorporating the simple, rectangular Greek building shape and few embellishments. These houses are usually five bay cottages with a full-length front porch tucked under the main roof line.

This style of house is predominantly found along the Gulf coast from Florida to Texas. The style represents an adaptation of the antebellum Greek Revival architecture popular in the northeast to the semi-tropical climate. Greek Revival architecture began in the United States with public buildings

[An early Sixth Ward homeowner, Rosalind Brosius, co-founded the Forum of Civics, now the River Oaks Garden Club.]

erected in Philadelphia. Exteriors were most commonly painted white or gray to imitate the marble of the Greek temples, although some exteriors were unpainted brick or stone.

Greek Revival style houses were built in all settled areas by 1860. It became the first "national style" in the United States. The style evolved over time and geographic regions. Early on as the rich man's "Greek Revival temple" with prominent two-story porticos to the middle class scaled down versions with smaller porches. A strong influence for the popularity of this style was due to American's waning interest of British styles during the War of 1812, as well as the dominant sentiment favoring the Greeks in their fight for independence in the 1820's. Identifying features include low-pitched







gable or hip roof; front-facing triangular pediment; wide-band trim at cornice line of the roof; porticos, entry porches, or full-width porches supported by prominent square or rounded columns; facade pilasters; front door accented by line of rectangular transom lights above the door and sidelights; elaborate door surround; symmetrically arranged 6-over-6 windows although later 2-over-2 became popular; frieze windows along the roof edge. The white clapboard house with dark green louvered blinds shutters became popular during this period.

In the mid-19th century, many prosperous Americans believed that ancient Greece represented the spirit of democracy. Interest in British styles had waned during the bitter War of 1812. Many Americans sympathized with Greece's own struggles for independence in the 1820s. Greek Revival architecture began with public buildings in Philadelphia. Many European-trained architects designed in the popular Grecian style, and the fashion spread via carpenter's guides and pattern books. Colon-naded Greek Revival mansions—sometimes called Southern Colonial houses—sprang up throughout the American south. With its classic clapboard exterior and bold, simple lines, Greek Revival architecture became the most predominant housing style in the United States. During the second half of the 19th century, Gothic Revival and Italianate styles captured the American imagination. Grecian ideas faded from popularity. You will notice the classic front-gable design in simple "National Style" farm houses throughout the United States.

HEMPSTEAD-WAGNER HOUSE

One of the few raised houses in the neighborhood, this circa 1880 Gulf Coast Colonial retains it's original shutters and turned porch railings.

Folk Victorian Style

The spread of Folk Victorian—and other late 19th century styles—was made possible by railroads expanding into smaller towns and cities. Mass-produced wood features could be transported quickly and cheaply almost anywhere. Home builders often simply added trim and ornament to traditional folk houses. Older folk homes were often updated with new ornamentation, now available everywhere due to pattern books and mass production and sale of wood features. A very common style found in turn-of-the-century western towns settled during that time.

The Folk Victorian was a humbler version of the more elaborate Victorian house styles, including the Italianate and the Romanesque. They were built by middle-class Americans, or “just folks”,

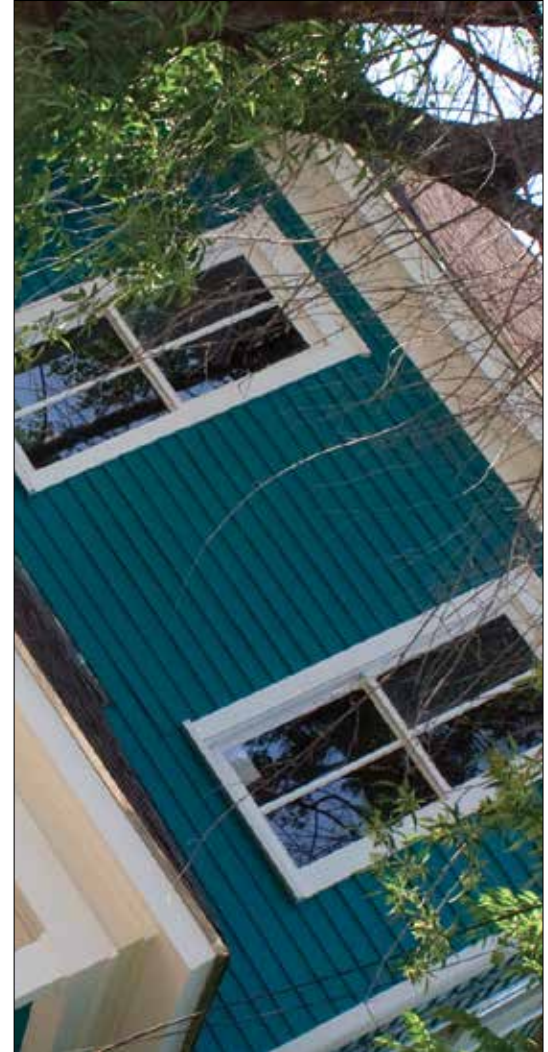
who wanted to emulate the style of the moneyed class, but couldn't afford an architect. It is a whimsical, yet simple style, whose chief characteristic is the presence of decorative detailing—primarily on the porch and cornice line—on simple folk-house forms. The new railways distributed these materials throughout the states.

This meant that local builders could trek down to their local lumberyard, pick up a crate of scrolled brackets or gingerbread decoration and graft them lovingly onto a traditional house, one that was familiar to the local carpenter. Thus the Folk Victorian Style was born. Like the Italianate, the Folk Victorian has various plans, a central-hall I-house form, an L or T-shaped plan and a side-passage townhouse plan. It is covered by wooden

The Washington Avenue area was known as Houston's first Uptown area, the predecessor of today's Galleria area.

clapboards and usually features metal hipped or gable roofs. The Queen Anne Victorian is often confused with the Folk Victorian. While the two styles do have similar spindle work detailing, unlike the Queen Anne style, the Folk Victorian is symmetrical and orderly. It does not have towers, elaborate moldings or textured and varied wall surfaces that are characteristic of the Queen Anne. The Folk Victorian has its own delightful yet no-nonsense, style. Because of this, it has managed to endure longer than many of the other Victorian styles.





FOLK VICTORIAN STYLE

These houses represent a vernacular attempt to adapt the Victorian architecture to the gulf coast climate. The houses featured locally milled porch posts and gingerbread. In many instances the Folk Victorian house was actually a Gulf Coast Colonial cottage altered with later Victorian elements.

Queen Anne Style

Popular from about 1860 to 1890 in England and somewhat later in the US, the Queen Anne style lent itself to the excesses of the Victorian age with its turrets, oriel windows, and medieval influences. Beloved by lumber barons and railroad maggots alike, many of the largest and most spectacular homes of the early 20th century were built in this style. As a result of the Industrial Revolution, building construction evolved dramatically with the advent of balloon framing and mass production of complex house components like doors, windows, roofing, and decorative details.

Balloon construction facilitated the design of much more elaborate footprints with a host of irregular plans, overhangs, extensions, and the like. Instead

of heavy box construction necessitated by timber framing, the new, light 2"x4" walls were liberated from their previous constraints making embellished, ornate design common.

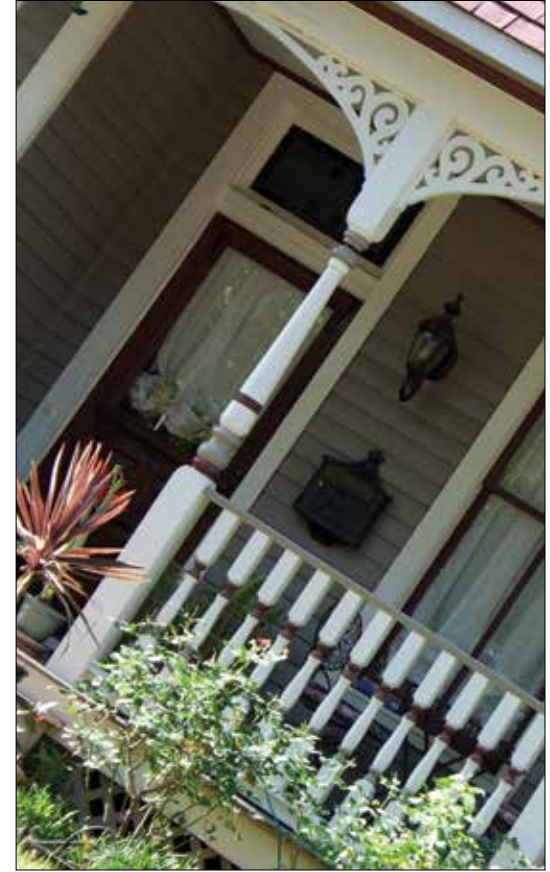
Queen Anne houses most frequently have steeply pitched roofs that may have irregular shapes as well as a prominent forward facing gable. Roof pitch declines in slope as the end of the 19th century nears attaining a much shallower slope after 1900. Fish scale shingle siding is often employed in various patterns and cuts, as well as spindle work, bay windows and bump outs. Towers are often used with imaginatively shaped roofs ranging from cones and bell shapes to octagons and domes with decorative finials. Interestingly, towers placed

Many examples of Queen Anne architecture are exuberant sculptural extravaganzas of shape and ornament—literally the purple prose of late 19th century architecture.

at the corner of the front facade are most often a characteristic of the Queen Anne style, whereas placement is often elsewhere on other styles like the Victorian Stick style. Wrap around porches are very common. The smaller Queen Annes are often described as bungalows, but other than the large front porches that are typical, it is more appropriate to call them cottages. Good examples of the Queen Anne style are seen in Hodgson's *Low Cost American Homes*, which was published in 1905.



1908



THE VALENTINE HOUSE

This imposing Queen Anne Cross-Gable Victorian is one of the few remaining large residences of Old Sixth Ward. Built in 1898 The house was used as a parsonage for the Tabernacle Baptist Church for over 30 years. 1912 Decatur is a mirror image of this house. The current owners purchased the house in 1998 and had the wrap-around porch rebuilt. The house still features its original curly-pine wainscoting, trim, and mantelpieces which set it apart as having one of the most ornate interiors in Old Sixth Ward.

Classical Revival Style

Classic revival, widely diffused phase of taste known as neoclassic which influenced architecture and the arts in Europe and the United States during the last years of the 18th and the first half of the 19th cent. The period during which they were built is marked by the decline of Victorian exuberance and a newfound interest in the antiquities of Greece and Rome.

The era was characterized by enthusiasm for classical antiquity and for archaeological knowledge, stimulated by the excavations of Roman remains at Pompeii and Herculaneum and by the commencement of archaeological investigation in Greece by James Stuart and Nicholas Revett in 1751. The results were embodied in their joint work,

Antiquities of Athens, of which the first volume 1762 is considered to have been responsible for a changed direction in taste. Stuart's garden temple in Greek Doric style 1758 at Hagley, England, was the first example of Greek revival design in Western Europe; but the utilization of Greek material was generally delayed until the latter part of the revival, while the earlier phase confined itself to Roman models. In France the imitation of ancient Rome predominated in the crystallizing of the Empire style sponsored by Napoleon. In the United States, after the Revolution, this same spirit served in the formation of a style for public buildings. Thomas Jefferson's design for the Virginia state capitol 1785 at Richmond marks the return to the monumental Roman temple for inspiration. In America the

[The influence of the revival was felt everywhere in Europe and particularly in Great Britain.]

Greek phase, known as neo-Grec or Greek revival, achieved its first expression, and an exceedingly influential one, in the Bank of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia 1799; it was designed by Benjamin H. Latrobe to imitate a Greek Ionic temple. The Roman and the Greek aspects of the classic revival eventually allied themselves in a Greco-Roman form. But in no country did it dominate as in the United States, where classic colonnades were appended to state capitols and to modest farm houses throughout the land. After the Civil War its severe later phase was extinguished romantic styles of the Victorian.





WILLIAM HENRY LIGHTHOUSE

This Classical Revival inspired house has been affectionately known as the 'Queen of the Sabine' due to its distinction as the only 2-story brick dwelling in the Old Sixth Ward. The house is the lone survivor of the 'wealthiest' section of the Sixth Ward neighborhood where elegant towered Victorian houses once surrounded the intersection of Kane and Henderson Streets. It was built in 1906 as showplace home complete with formal gardens for Mr. William Henry Lighthouse, who managed two brick foundries and owned the Lighthouse Brick Company, still in business today as the Andy Cordell Brick Company. The Henry T. Lighthouse Residence was designed by Olle Lorehn, the Swedishimmigrant architect who also designed the Sacred Heart Cathedral and Dakota Lofts downtown. It is believed to be only one of two surviving residences designed by him in Houston.

Bungalow Style

What is a bungalow? It's a mushy term that could encompass any of the many small to medium-size homes built during the first half of the 20th century. Or it could be seen as a generic descendant of the American Arts & Crafts movement's most prominent designers.

The imprecision of the term does nothing to help most owners of older small houses decide whether their home is a bungalow or not. According to one definition given in the *Classic Houses of Seattle* by Caroline Swope, it's a matter of scale, not style. However, in *Classic Houses in Portland* by Hawkins and Willingham, a bungalow is described as "one facet of the Craftsman movement." Clearly, trained architects and art historians don't agree,

so some confusion is inevitable. However, if we refer to Harry Saylor's book *Bungalow* published in 1911, then we can derive our definition from him that is, open floor plans, low-pitched roofs, and the essential large front porch.

The houses were one story with tile or thatched roofs and wide, covered verandas. These houses were provided as rest houses for travelers, so the association was created early on that these were small houses for a temporary retreat. The bungalow style has its roots in the native architectural style of Bengal, India. During the late 19th century and the waning days of the British Empire, English officers had small houses built in the "Bangla" style. Once they were accepted as full time, year

In 1906, an article appeared in Stickley's "The Craftsman" magazine suggesting "Possibilities of the Bungalow as a Permanent Dwelling."

around residences, the simplicity of a summer home fused with the idealistic philosophy of the Arts & Crafts Movement. The Arts & Crafts movement inspired American architects and craftsmen like the Greene brothers in Pasadena and Frank Lloyd Wright in Chicago, Gustav Stickley in Michigan, and many others to rediscover the value in hand crafting buildings and their contents using natural materials, creating a more wholistic life style for their occupants.

At the same time, there were other notable movements, such as the first wave of nature conservancy and the establishment of national parks and social activism that was of a decidedly populist bent. The Industrial Age's backlash was



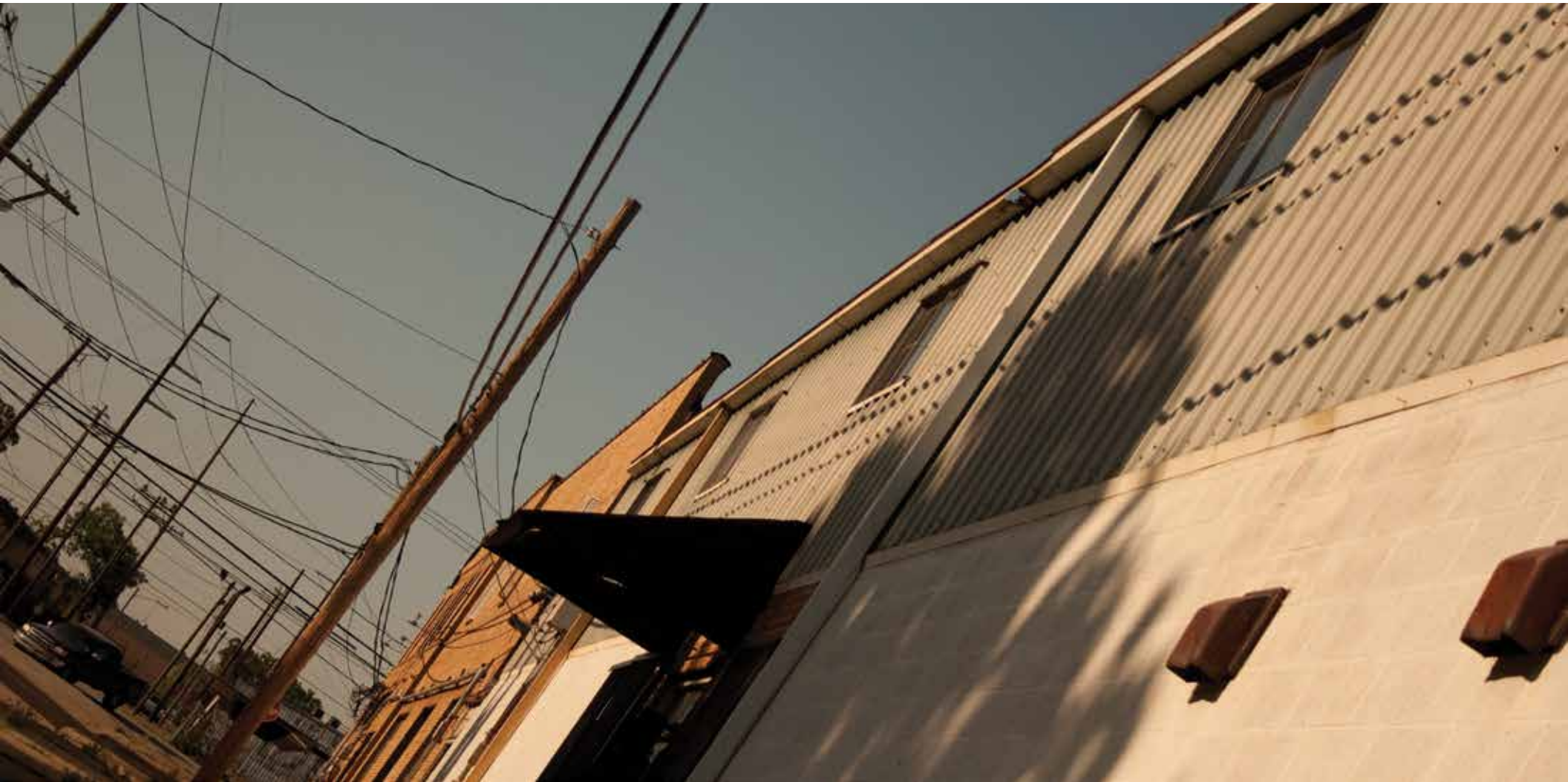




a yearning desire among many Americans to own their homes and have small gardens. The success of the bungalow was due to its providing a solution to this desire. Thus, we'll go out on a limb here and define the bungalow by its populist appeal, affordability, and easy livability and charm. The essential distinction between the Craftsman "style" and the derivative bungalow is the level of fine detail and workmanship. Once "kit" home manufacturers like Aladdin and Sears began to offer them through their catalogs, their success was assured. Prospective homeowners could have an entire home shipped to their town by train. With the help of a couple carpenters, the homeowner could build a practical, simple, attractive little home for a sum that was manageable by huge numbers of Americans. Mass production, however, meant that the fine carpentry and detailing present in the Craftsman homes were modified and distilled into more generic equivalents. Nevertheless, kit homes were generally built of good quality materials that have held up extremely well over the last century. In the province of Bengal, single-family homes were called bangla or bangala. British colonists adapted these one-story thatch-roofed huts to use as summer homes. The space-efficient floor plan of bungalow houses may have also been inspired by army tents and rural English cottages.

DR. MOERS, HENDERSON 801

A Craftsman style "cockpit" bungalow with a belvedere atop the house. Built in the early 1920'S., look at the original stained glass windows.



First Baptist Tabernacle

Gothic Revival began in England and became the dominant style for country houses and was popular with Queen Victoria. It became the only "proper style" for English church building and was promoted as the proper style for all English buildings from 1840–1870.

This brick church with a raised basement was built to replace an earlier wooden frame church which was built in the 1890's. The high pitched stained glass windows give the church a Gothic Revival look. It was a church until recently, and is currently an architect's office. Americans liked it too, but as just one of several romantic styles to be modeled at will to Victorian American tastes. The growing middle class as a result of the economic

opportunities of the Industrial Revolution had more money to spend on housing and wanted to attractive homes outside the cities in healthful surroundings where horse drawn rail cars could bring the man of the house back and forth to work. Gas lights and indoor plumbing were becoming available and all sorts of new devices from iron cook stoves, and household machines were being invented.

Gothic style fed public fascination with the romance of the medieval past. Downing's books offered not only designs for houses but also site and landscape plans to ensure a "Happy Union. He published the first house plan book in this country. Previous publications had shown

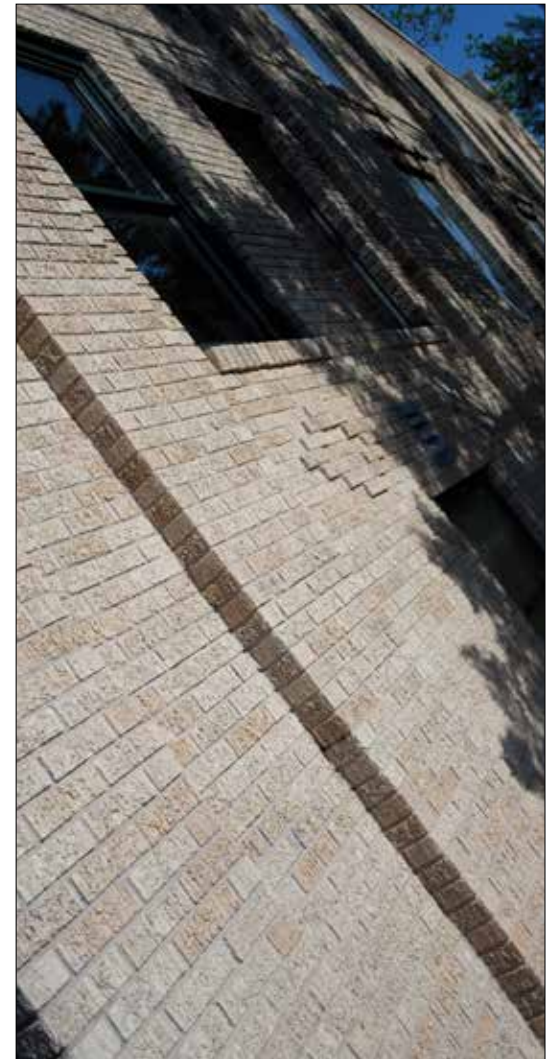
A. J. Davis was the first American architect to champion Gothic domestic buildings.

details, parts, pieces and occasional elevations of houses, but Davis's book was the first to show three dimensional views complete with floor plans. But it was his friend Andrew Jackson Downing was the champion of the Gothic Revival style and expanded it with pattern books and tireless public speaking about the virtues of the style.





Most American Gothic Revival houses were built in America between 1840 & 1870.



FIRST BAPTIST TABERNACLE

This brick church with a raised basement was built to replace an earlier wooden frame church which was built in the 1890's. The high pitched stained glass windows give the church a Gothic Revival look. It was a church until recently, and is currently an architect's office.

Justin E. Dow

The Dow School, home of MECA Houston and Urban Harvest is one of the oldest school buildings remaining in Houston. Multicultural Education and Counseling through the Arts MECA is a community based, non-profit organization whose mission is to promote the healthy social, cultural, and academic development of at-risk, inner-city youth through education in the arts.

"MECA offers classical and ethnic arts education and support services to approximately 1,300 students a year through our in-school, after-school, and summer arts program. Since 1977, MECA's presence has given youth a positive sense of themselves, their community, and their culture." MECA reaches another 4000 students through

workshops, performances and cultural events. Many of the children living in Houston's inner city are burdened with low academic expectations, little or no social or cultural opportunities in their public schools, limited after school activities, and no recognition of their cultural heritage and traditions. MECA programs help promote self-esteem, discipline, and academic achievement in our community's youth, while instilling a sense of direction and a commitment to cultural diversity.

Through the success of our students, the breadth of our services and the quality of our programs MECA has been a consistent contributor to the social health and cultural life of Houston for nearly 30 years. In addition to the three main programs,

The Dow School, home of MECA Houston and Urban Harvest is one of the oldest school buildings remaining in Houston.

MECA provides a wide variety of other cultural opportunities throughout the year.

MECA hosts an annual Concert Series which features a diverse line-up of performing artists, including classical, multicultural, jazz, experimental, and popular forms of music, dance and theater. MECA also hosts short and long-term artistic residencies, holds an annual Day of the Dead Festival, and we have completed several public art projects throughout the city.



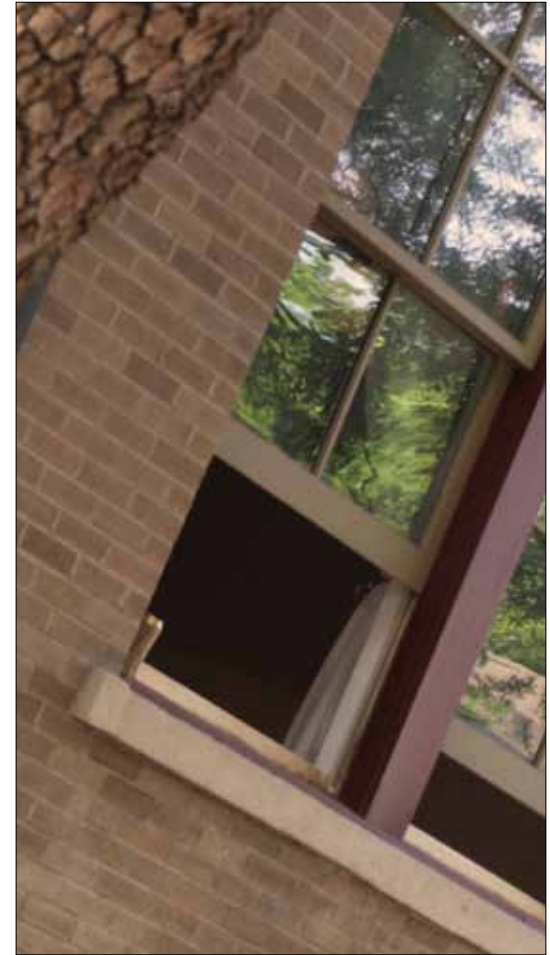
DOW SCHOOL











JUSTIN E. DOW

The school name honors Justin E. Dow, superintendent of the Houston Public Schools from 1855 to 1887. Built in 1912 as a 16-room brick structure designed by noted Texas school builder C.H. Paige, the Dow School building was enlarged to its present size in 1928. Today, the building serves as a cultural community center operated by Multicultural Education and Counseling through the Arts—MECA.

The Modern Age

Today many living in the far expanses of Houston are realizing what inner-loop "early adopters" have known for a long time; living in Houston's Wards can be downright rewarding! It has been within the last ten years that Houstonians have started to realize the value of Houston's inner loop real estate. In the face of an "empty nest" and longer commute times many are more than willing to "give up" the big back yard and 5,000 square foot house. Truth be known, you can definitely find a 5,000 square foot house inside the loop if you so desire. Houston was originally laid out in a residential pattern known as Wards. The modern equivalent in Houston would be a super-neighborhood. For the majority of Houstonians the ward classification system would only become familiar by means of sensationalism

and crime reports. In the 1970's on through the 90's the Houston real estate demands were focused on the Suburbs and some argue that these types of reports in the popular media only served to increase suburban growth. Because of expansion and development many looking for Houston real estate would be hard pressed to locate the various Houston wards on a map.

The Sixth Ward is located on the north bank of the Buffalo Bayou, right below the First Ward. The Sixth Ward is commonly referred to as "Old Sixth Ward" when mentioned in the media or by its inhabitants. Much of the attraction to moving your residence in one of the wards is more culture and better than that is to live right in the midst of it. Saying location,

Sixth Ward was originally called by several names including "North, High Fourth, Upper Fourth, Old Sabine, and of course, the Sixth."

location, location! Imagine, walk out of your house and in a few steps your at the Museum of Fine Arts. How about the Houston Zoo? Living in the Montrose or the Medical Center has proven to be profitable no commute! Next Weekend when you want to go for a drive pick one of Houston's six wards and explore! Who knows you might find residence there if you're not an Urbanite already!

By 1940 modern architecture was determined as a global style and became the dominant way to build for many a long time in the twentieth century. Modern day architects apply scientific and analytical techniques to design and style.



The alleged murder of a Sixth Ward stonecutter, Mr. Thomas Golding, was the inspiration of Ann Sloan's novel, *Murder on the Boulevard*



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