

BACKGROUND

1

BRIEF HISTORY OF NORTHVILLE

Abundant streams made Northville an immediate destination point for the pioneering farmers and grist mill builders who founded Northville in 1827. Early slow growth led to little residential building until immediately after the Civil War, when modest homes on small lots were the norm for factory workers. The bulk of the commercial center was built at this time and seemed to satisfy the needs of those living in the village as well as those of the surrounding farmers.

The economic boom of the 1920's affected the downtown very little but the outer residential areas became an architectural hodgepodge as a result of outside influences such as the railroad and RFD.

Three large nearby government institutions and the local Ford plant supplied the locals with median wages. Modest homes continued to be the norm. There were very few empty lots, and few large home were built until the 1990's.

In 1955 the Village of Northville became a city. As the City approaches the 21st century its population is not expected to exceed the current estimated level of 7,500 residents. The City's vibrant central business district and charming historic neighborhoods continue to be the distinctive features of the community.

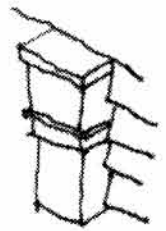
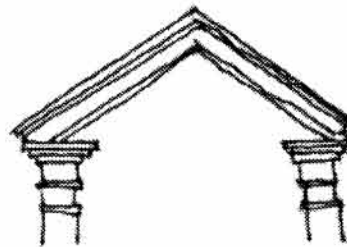
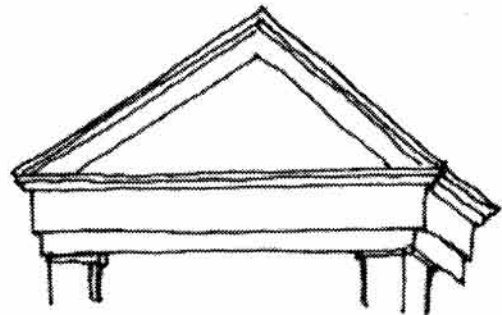
HISTORIC ARCHITECTURAL STYLES IN NORTHVILLE

The Northville Historic District includes buildings built during a period of over 150 years, from about 1835 to the present. Over so long a period, building styles changed frequently. Just as styles of clothing art and music change, some architectural styles became fashionable, disappeared, and then were revived a few decades later. In addition to historic styles, there are many commercial and residential buildings constructed in the last 30 years that are much more difficult to categorize. Style preferences in recent years have changed frequently and somewhat capriciously. All of these styles -- old and new, decorative and plain -- are what give the historic district a "sense of place." On the following pages are more detailed descriptions of some of the common historic styles found in Northville.

Greek Revival

The Greek Revival style swept the nation from 1830 to 1860, and was very popular in Michigan. Buildings of this style were designed to resemble the architecture of ancient Greece and, therefore, emphasized the simple clean lines of Greek temples. Plans and details were readily available to carpenters in pattern books. Greek Revival is primarily a residential style.

Greek Revival houses are rectangular and resemble small Greek temples with a low pitched roof, front gable, and columns. Classical details may include a colonnaded front porch, pilasters (flat columns on the walls), dentil moldings, and gables trimmed to look like pediments. A wide band of trim below the eaves represents a classical entablature. In its simplest form, Greek revival buildings may have only used the pedimented front gable. Windows are rectangular double hung windows, divided into 6 lights top and bottom. The door is in the center, and is often surrounded by a transom and sidelights.



WIDE GABLE TRIM

LOW PITCHED
ROOF

SMALL WINDOWS
IN FRIEZE BAND

COLUMNS

DOUBLE HUNG
WINDOWS, SIX-OVER-
SIX DIVIDED LIGHTS
MOST COMMON

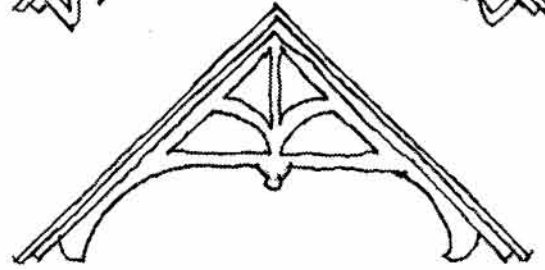
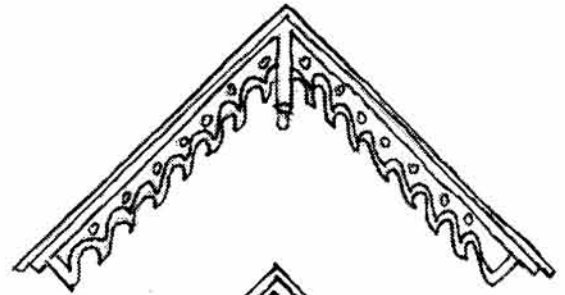


Greek Revival house in Ann Arbor, Michigan

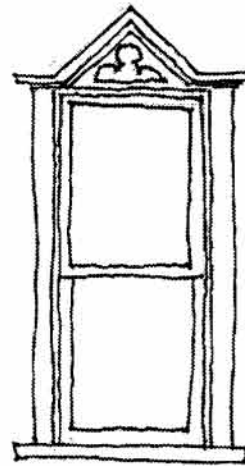
Carpenter Gothic

Carpenter Gothic was almost exclusively a residential style that was made popular by Andrew Jackson Downing's pattern book, *Cottage Residences*, published in 1842. The style was marketed as an appropriate rural style, compatible with the wild and romantic landscape, and is not usually seen in such quality and quantity as the Northville examples. Variations of the Gothic style continued into 1880, generally becoming more ornamental and asymmetrical during the Victorian years.

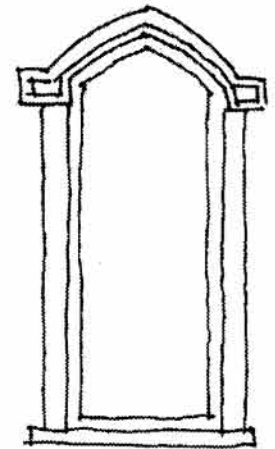
Carpenter Gothic architecture is the most prominent architectural style in the historic district. The unusual density of this style was the basis for listing the district on the National Register. Most Gothic revival buildings were constructed between 1840 and 1880 and only vaguely resemble medieval architecture. "Carpenter Gothic," refers to a type of Gothic Revival architecture in which Gothic details are replicated in wood. Manufacturing techniques and tools (the scroll saw) were perfected and used to mass produce the wood tracery so prevalent in the style. Roofs are steeply pitched with gables. Tracery trim boards called "vergeboards" are located along the gable eaves. Tracery is also commonly found over porches. Porch roofs are supported by columns and flat pointed arches. Windows are tall and narrow and often have lancet (pointed) tops.



Verge boards



*Narrow window
with window hood*



Lancet Window



STEEP ROOF

WINDOW HOODS

VERGEBOARD

TRACERY

SHALLOW
POINTED ARCH

Italianate

In the 1860's the pendulum swung away from simplicity and toward ornamentation. Most styles that flourished during the next fifty years were increasingly decorative. Collectively these styles are referred to as "Victorian."

The first of the Victorian styles to find its way to Northville was the stately Italianate. This style looked to Italian Renaissance architecture for inspiration. The earlier examples date from about 1855, but variations continued to be built through the 1880's. Many of Northville's historic commercial buildings are Italianate.

There are many good examples of Italianate homes within the district. The style was very popular from approximately 1850-1880. The buildings are loosely modeled after Italian villa architecture. The homes are usually tall—two or three stories. The most recognizable Italianate features are a low pitched roof, overhanging eaves, and ornamental eave brackets. A square cupola or tower is another common feature. Windows are tall, narrow, and often arched on the upper levels. Corbelled brick or wood window "hoods" are common. Porches are relatively small, but the entrance is framed with wood trim similar to the window hoods. Brick is the most typical wall material, but wood siding is also seen.

The Italianate style was frequently used for commercial buildings between 1855 and 1885. The most prominent identifying feature is a large projecting cornice, or cap, along the building front. The cornice is almost always decorated with brackets. Later cornices were sometimes made of pressed metal, and earlier cornices were made of wood. Upper story windows are tall, narrow, double hung, and usually arched. A common decorative element is corbelled brickwork, which means that bricks are stepped out in three dimensional patterns over window heads and under the cornice.

TOWER WITH
MANSARD ROOF

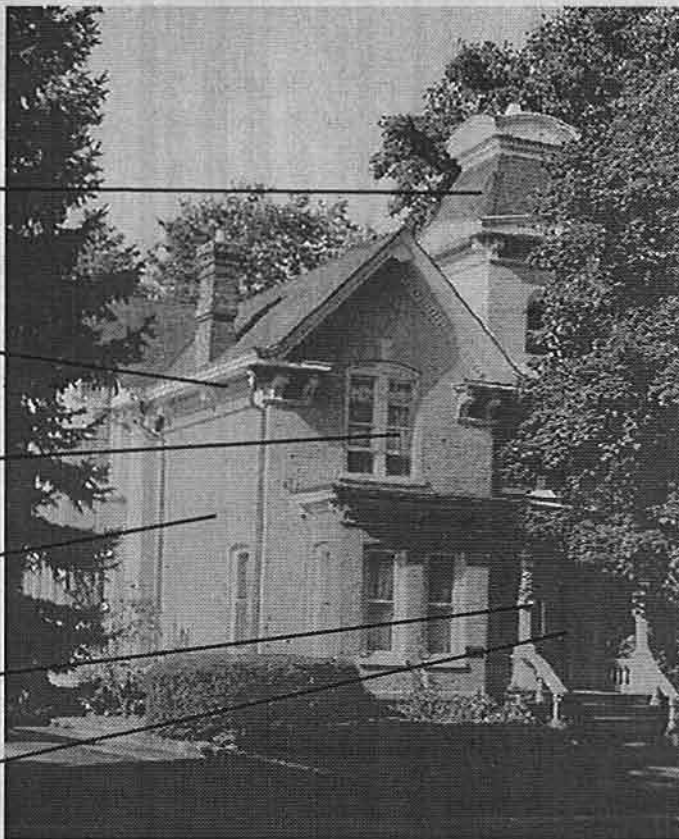
OVERHANG
WITH BRACKETS

TALL, NARROW,
ARCHED
WINDOWS

BRICK CONSTRUCTION

SINGLE STORY PORCH

DOUBLE DOORS

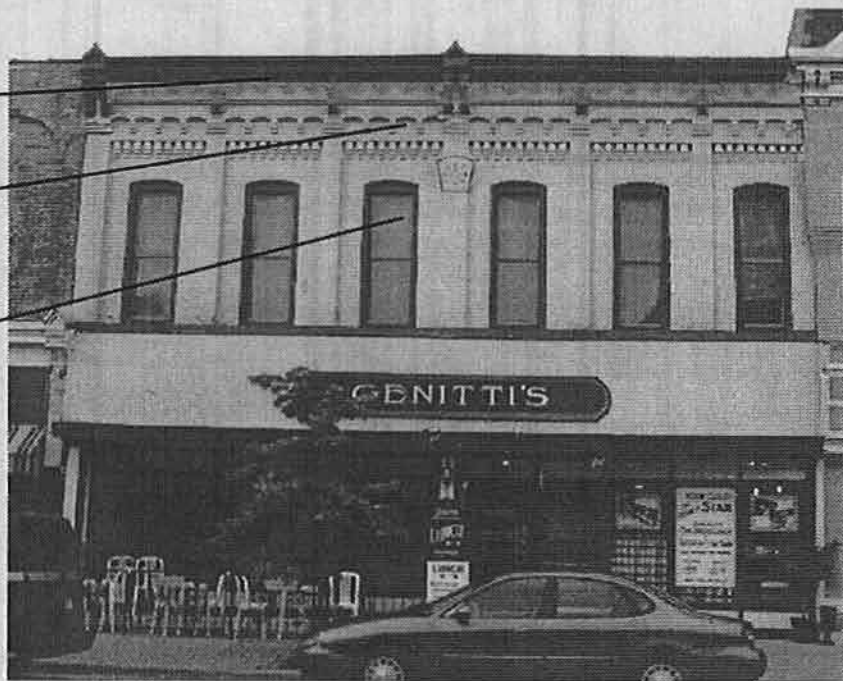


Italianate house at 512 Dunlap

PROJECTING CORNICE

CORBELLED BRICK

TALL, NARROW,
ARCHED
WINDOWS



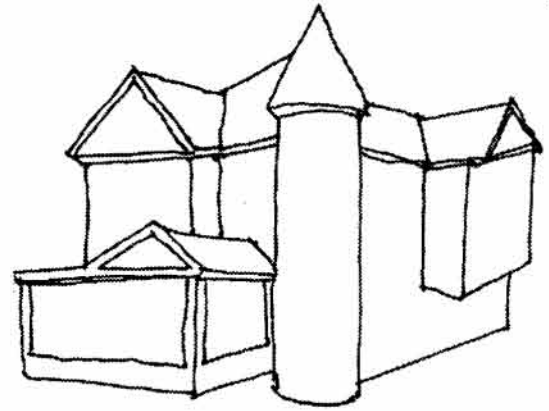
Italianate commercial building at 108 Main

Queen Anne

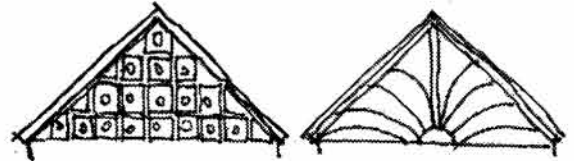
Queen Anne is a very elaborate and decorative style, common between 1875 and 1900, overlapping with Italianate. The buildings are often asymmetrical, with corner towers, wrap around porches, bay windows, gables, and irregular roof shapes. At the end of the 19th century, new tools and manufacturing process made typical Queen Anne decorative features such as fish scale shingles, turned columns, gable fans, and colored and cut glass readily available.

Like Queen Anne residential buildings, Queen Anne commercial buildings are flamboyantly decorated. Pressed metal and wood trim were applied and sometimes painted to look like stone. Cornices are usually bracketed, but are more irregular than Italianate bracketed cornices. Gable fans and finials are often seen in the cornice. Windows and arches are wider than the Italianate examples. Many Queen Anne commercial buildings were stripped of their ornament to save on maintenance. There are few intact examples in downtown Northville.

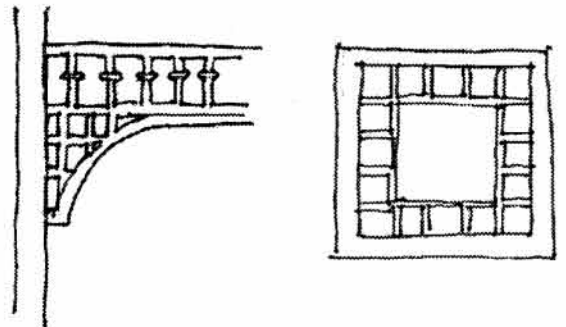
At the turn of the century, the public taste began to seek relief in simpler building styles. Commercial and residential buildings of the early twentieth century were typically modest in decoration, although they continued to use some of the forms developed in the previous era. A commercial facade might use just a touch of corbelled or tapestry brick reminiscent of Italianate or Queen Anne styles, while dispensing with cornices or fancy window caps. A residence might keep the Queen Anne asymmetry and multiple gables, but not sunbursts and bric-a-brac.



Asymmetrical massing and complex roof forms

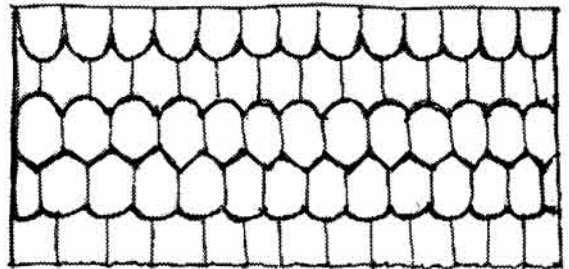


Decorative gables



Spindles and lattice

Stained or leaded glass



Fancy shingles

GABLE FAN OR
ORNAMENT

LEADED OR
STAINED GLASS

FISH SCALE
SHINGLES

ASYMMETRICAL
MASSING

BAY OR BOW
WINDOWS

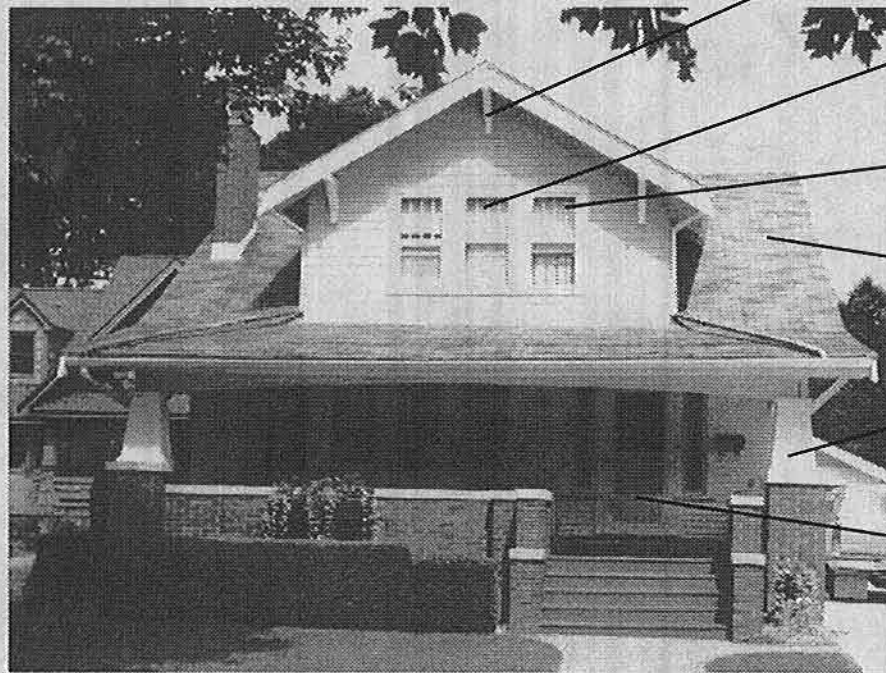
TURNED SPINDLES
OR COLUMNS



Queen Anne house at 218 Dunlap Street

Bungalow

This residential style started in California, and spread throughout the country between 1900 and 1915. The style was made popular Gustave Stickley's magazine "The Craftsman," and is sometimes labeled "Craftsman." Simplicity, harmony with nature, and quality craftsmanship are philosophies behind the Bungalow style. The roof is usually large and simple with broad overhangs and exposed rafter ends. Porches, second floor "sleeping porches," and trellises are prominent. Porch piers are chunky and sometimes battered (with slightly sloped sides). Dark wood and stone are the most common materials.



OVERHANG
WITH EXPOSED
RAFTER ENDS

WINDOWS IN
CLUSTERS

MANY LIGHTS
IN UPPER SASH

LARGE,
SIMPLE ROOF

BATTERED
PORCH
COLUMNS

LARGE, OPEN
PORCH

Bungalow at 406 Dubuar Street

20th Century Local Vernacular

In the 20th century commercial design began to be influenced by industrialization with buildings that emphasized practicality in construction. Although most designs were free of ornamentation in keeping with the no-nonsense approach of the machine age, some retained traces of previous decoration such as a small amount of patterned brickwork. In the 1940's many commercial buildings were built in a style which can be called Northville's version of 20th century vernacular. These are simple brick buildings of one or two stories with a stepped gable and simple limestone cornice. Ornament is found in basket weave brick patterns, a plain limestone cap, and sometimes a limestone date marker. Windows have narrow sash and are often arranged in horizontal bands.



LIMESTONE CAP

STEPPED
PARAPETSIMPLE
DECORATIVE
BRICKWORKBANDS OF
WINDOWS

143/147 Main

Modern

The term "Modern" holds different meanings for different people. In the 1940's and 1950's the International Style, also referred to as the Modern Style, began influencing commercial architecture with its absence of decoration.

These buildings are characterized by flat roofs and sometimes they have projecting eaves. Wall surfaces are minimized and glass area is maximized. Forms are flat, planar, clean, and rectilinear. There is no applied ornament—only the color or texture from the building materials. Common materials are brick, stucco, glass, and steel.

There are few truly Modern style houses in the District, although there are many other types of contemporary homes.

FLAT ROOF

BROAD
OVERHANGS

NO APPLIED
ORNAMENT

LARGE GLASS
AREA



143 Dunlap

Contemporary Styles

The Northville Historic District encompasses a number of buildings which are not yet historic (they are less than 50 years old) and which are not usually considered historic in the public view. There is a wide range of post 1940 styles in the district—so wide that it is impossible to categorize them all. Indeed many of the more recent styles have not yet been named. Because these buildings are in the district they will be reviewed by the Historic District Commission. It is therefore necessary to have some understanding of the identifying features of these styles. A few of the broader categories are covered below.

Ranch

The ranch house, common from 1940-1975, is a product of the "Automobile Age." These houses were conceived for larger lots available in commuter suburbs. Often they have an attached two car garage. The homes are one story with long, low pitched hip roofs. Contrary to the traditional orientation, ranch houses are sited with the long dimension of the house facing the street. Brick is the most common material, but wood siding is also used in gable ends or above a brick water table. There are few traditional details. Picture windows, casement windows, or steel windows are most common.



1-STORY,
LONG, LOW
PITCHED
ROOF

LITTLE OR NO
ORNAMENT

SITED WITH LONG
SIDE TOWARD
STREET

LARGE, FLAT
LAWN

Ranch house at 373 Linden

Neo Eclectic

This is a catch-all term for many buildings built after 1960 that incorporate traditional details from various previous revival styles. These are often “builder homes” or “developer malls” designed in response to public desires for more traditional styles after years of modernism. It is difficult to define key features because there are many combinations possible. Neo Eclectic buildings have some common themes, however. The details are often pared down. The scale or proportion is exaggerated. Traditional elements may be constructed of nontraditional materials. A mix of styles is not uncommon—for instance a mansard roof and cedar shakes. The traditional details are usually combined with modern floor plans and amenities—such as half timbered gable roof over a two car garage. Residential styles and plans are often enlarged and used for commercial purposes.

FREQUENT USE
OF CEDAR
SHAKES AND
MANSARD ROOFS

MIX OF
ARCHITECTURAL
STYLES

PARED DOWN
DETAILS



RESIDENTIAL
TYPE ENLARGED
FOR OTHER USE

TRADITIONAL
DETAILS
MULTIPLIED

