

The Architectural Change in Santa Clara between 1850 and 1960

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***ARCHITECTURAL CHANGE IN SANTA CLARA
BETWEEN 1850 AND 1960***

From Greek Revival to Ranch Style, immense architectural changes have taken place in the lives of Santa Clara homes between the time of California's statehood in 1850 and 1960. Many transformations in architectural taste paralleled historical economical and social conversions. Each consecutive style possessed unique features that distinguished that form from those of any other era.

Between 1777 and 1840, Spain progressively settled parts of California. The Franciscan father came into what California now calls the Santa Clara Valley, then inhabited only by Ohlone Indians, to establish the Mission Santa Clara de Asis. The Mexican Governor began making large land grants and great ranches thrived for a time. The Mexicans never made any attempt to complicate their construction with ornamentation because they believed that beauty equaled adaptability. On these expansive lots of land, the Mexican people built adobe houses and cottages with the intent to create comfort and convenience.

Unfortunately for the Mexicans, the American frontier had expanded by 1845 to California and Yankee immigrants began arriving. The Mexican-American War of 1846 saw the annexation of California by the United States and in 1850, California had acquired statehood. When "promises of great wealth" failed to materialize during the Gold rush era, an influx of settlers arrived in Santa Clara, marking the actual beginnings of the town of Santa Clara under an American government. But at the same time, selected historical styles became linked with certain building functions. Industrialization produced new materials and techniques-iron, plate, glass, wire nails, and mass produced machine-sawn lumber.

Historical styles such as Greek Revival created a new era of architecture all its own for California. Usually rather formal, by interpreting the Greek temple form in the Ionic, Corinthian, and Doric orders, the usually formal style of interpreting the Greek temple form became popular in home building. "The boldness of the Grecian Doric," Asher Benjamin wrote in 1827, "attracts the attention of the spectator by the grandeur and fine proportion of its parts, the form of its mouldings, and the beautiful variety of light and shade on their surfaces, which greatly relieves them from each other, and renders there contour distinct to the eye."² Each order had a style all its own. The Ionic order was of a Greek style of architecture characterized by ornamental scrolls on the capitals. The Corinthian order was the most elaborate order of classical Greek architecture, distinguished by a slender, fluted column and a bell-shaped capital decorated with a design of acanthus leaves. Finally, the oldest and plainest order of classical Greek architecture, the Doric, was characterized by fluted, heavy columns.

Over time distinct variant forms developed in the Northern and Southern regions of the United States, making no two homes exactly alike. Northern houses had a rather prim and proper look, while those of the South appeared more open and inviting. Almost all Greek Revival residences do share some characteristic features. These features included a low-pitched roof, frieze³ or pierced grille⁴ windows at the attic level below the architrave⁵ band, traverse⁶ trim around doors and windows, and columned entryways with a rectangular transom⁷ and sidelights. Typically, Greek Revival style homes had a basic tall featureless, box-like shape with vertically symmetrical windows on each consecutive floor. The only fault found in the style, was its lack of originality, relying on the ancient Greek style.

The first model of this designer epoch found in Santa Clara, sailed in two pre-cut sections around Cape Horn from New England. Samuel Johnson, the owner of the "pre-fab" half and half house, built his home on Main Street between Fremont and Benton.

Around 1860, a new style of architectural design arrived in Santa Clara, "The Italianate," which expressed itself in the non-Gothic sort which first appeared in the

Northeast. Often the two names, Tuscan or Anglo-Italian, are interchangeable with Italianate. William H. Ranlett, architect of the time period, argued that the Anglo-Italian "might with greater propriety be called the American-Italian, for it is more purely American than Italian in character, and hardly at all resembles the English style of villas."³ Italianate houses built in America lacked the elaborate decoration and appointments of the Old World.

What made the Italianate distinction was the use of projecting eaves and heavy supporting brackets. Ranlett again explained the difference between the new and old:

The pure Italian villas and palatial residences have a monumental character, imparted by their regular proportioned tabulator, which our so-called Anglo-Italian villas with their bracketed eaves must lack. These projecting eaves so becoming in our sunny climate, and their supporting brackets impart to a country house an aspect of cheerfulness and comfort which more than compensates for the lack of classic beauty occasioned by the absence of the regularly proportioned cornice of the Italian villa.⁴

The Italianate style did not alter the basic rectangular profile of the American home, although some early designers used the "L" or "T" shaped floor plan. Later homes of the era assumed a standard box like shape. Almost all made use of broad eaves and brackets, the latter often in pairs. The roofs were generally of the low hip variety and slope subtly. Much narrower windows than those found in houses of an earlier style adorned these homes in pairs or grouped in threes. Some architects also chose to use circular headed windows. A three-story tower or campanile⁵ usually sat angled at the corner of the structure or set to one side of the main part of the facade. Other qualities such as the use of a balcony, veranda loggia,⁶ cupola,⁷ belvedere,⁸ and bay windows further accentuated the style. The most common feature of Italianate design, its arrangement of picturesque details, separated the style from others of the era. The James Lick Mansion located at 305 Montague Expressway, holds the name as the most notable Italianate style home in Santa Clara. Built between 1855 and 1860, the two story mansion cost over \$300,000 to construct. "The pillared front veranda and pediment on the roof are slightly reminiscent of

plantation houses, but the general aspect of Lick's mansion is distinctly Italianate with round arches, consoled 'blind' pilasters¹⁵ and a true balustrade¹⁶ above the regular pillars of the veranda."¹⁷

After a depression in 1857, building activity in Santa Clara considerably slowed until 1866. During the break, numerous changes effected architectural theory and in the technology of building. So when building resumed, the fashionable structure of 1866 had significant differences from those of 1856. The boundless energy that pervaded all aspects of American culture distinguished the period from 1865 to 1885.

During the two decades after the Civil War, two major styles dominated architecture; "Second Empire" and "High Victorian Gothic." Both Second Empire and High Victorian Gothic adapted to a wide variety of uses and personal tastes. Vibrating with color, the homes had bold features without the overwhelming detail of former eras. "The Gothic style cottage in America was a simple, democratic, and pleasantly livable building form that suited the needs of a people seeking change from the formal and aristocratic Greek Revival styles." Many simple domestic dwellings were often termed "Carpenter Gothic" and were the work of carpenters rather than architects. These homes displayed fancy woodwork called "gingerbread finials",¹⁸ verge,¹⁹ brackets, and canopies.²⁰ The use of vertical board walls, a steep gable roof,²¹ diamond paned sashes,²² a bay window, finished chimney tops, and brackets over windows and doors. As an example of the Gothic style, this Santa Clara home was constructed in 1861 by pioneer carpenter, Calvin Russell, the Russell-Robinson House stands at 1184 Washington Avenue. With a gable roof, louvered shutters, vaulted ceilings and two fireplaces, it exemplifies the Carpenter Gothic style home.

During the Gilded Age of 1860-1880, the next style of architecture, Second Empire or Mansard style gained popularity. The design of the extension to the Louvre in Paris(1852-1857) influenced many American architects. As the central architectural landmark of the Second Empire of Napoleon III, many architects first copied the style in England and later

in America. Designers gave the French name "Mansarde", meaning a garret or attic in French, to the type of home with an extra top floor. While the beauty of the Mansard style emerged mainly in scale, ornamentation and somewhat top-heavy, lumbering structure, other areas exhibited a refreshing degree of imaginative eclecticism. The use of sweeping porches or piazzas, the positioning of a towering center pavilion against the mass of Mansard structure, the generous display of various building materials such as slate, tin and wood are the elements worthy of study and preservation. The pitch of the average mansard roof allowed for greater use of attic space for living purposes. The slope of almost every mansard roof, was broken by dormer²³ windows. The majority of roofs formed straight angles, but others curved convexly or concavely. In most cases, a bracketed cornice outlined the roof from the mass of the building. Prominent chimneys capped in a highly ornamental fashion served for heat as well as decoration. Usually paired, curved or rectilinear windows were decorated with curved heads described as "eye-brow."

Unlike the horizontal Greek Revival or Italianate, the Second Empire essentially embodied a vertical style, meaning that the houses extended upwards rather than outwards. An amazing number of rooms fit into a narrow building on a small lot by making maximum use of attic and second floor space with a mansard roof and dormers. Between 1860 and 1880, urban property became increasingly expensive and building "up" rather than across a plot of land made economic sense.

Beginning in the 1880s, a new era of urbanism came to life. Industries such as the steel, electric, and railroad branches began to grow. Many Americans began earning success in the affairs of the industrial market place and sought comfortable, fashionable dwellings worthy of their new prosperity. Suburban estates closer to the city replaced smaller rural homes. At first these urban homes imitated the Stick Style and Jacobethan style country houses but by the 1880s, a more American form-the Shingle Style-emerged.

Most commonly imagined upon hearing the phrase "Victorian," the Queen Anne style, gained the most popularity in North America. Beginning in the 1880's, the Queen Anne paralleled the Elizabethan (Jacobethan), Stick Style and Eastlake styles. Elizabethan or Jacobethan refer to parapeted roofs, towers and turrets, and pseudo strapwork ornamentation. Eastlake refers to the lavish use of machine-turned architectural elements such as balusters and posts.

A true Queen Anne house had a strong symmetrical appearance with steep gables, high chimneys, and used a diverse mixture of construction materials-wood, brick, terra cotta, stone, and shingling. Attic and second story gables often projected well beyond the lower floors. Architects often added a tower or turret to the side of the home. Iron finials and cresting appeared at critical peaks in the home that made the look of the home. In the Stick Style, Porches and verandas sweep around several sides of the building. A number of homes representing the Queen Anne style were built in Santa Clara.

The Dr. Paul House at 1116 Washington Avenue displays many of the above features. Built in the 1890's, his gracious and lovely home exemplified the mentioned Eastlake style. Now recognized as a historical landmark (#904), the Morse Mansion at 981 Fremont Avenue was built in the Queen Anne style in 1897. A beautifully ornate building with faceted glass windows, fireplaces a full basement, and a glassed-in porch. The Morse home embellishes the Queen Anne style with its cornered turret, paired windows, chimney, and shingled exterior. Another local home, the Robert Menzel House at 1191 Benton Avenue again reveals the traits of the Queen Anne style architecture. The predominant architectural feature is the "Witch's tower" and the many windows all along the home. One of the most interesting late nineteenth century houses in the city, the "Dutch" Queen Anne located at 610 Monroe Avenue was built circa 1890-1895. A Dutch gambrel tops off the roof, a bell capped turret snuggles on the side of the house, and a second story bay with a false balcony crown gives an elegant effect. Built in 1886, the Dr. Warburton House

displays the features of a stick-style Victorian homes. The spacious home is located at 714-716 Main in Santa Clara.

Horizontal shingling replaced clapboard¹⁴ on the exterior surface. Elements of seventeenth century Colonial American style came into reuse-the gambrel roof; simple building materials such as wood shingles; a snug close-to-the earth profile. The elements of the angled gambles define the structure in every respect. Many types of windows decorate the house-double-sash windows, bay windows, Paladin windows, and diamond shaped windows. Usually the house had several massive chimneys and a wrap around veranda.

In the 1890's, the architects moved away from the "Colonial Revival" which grew from different forms such as Spanish, New England, and Southern Colonial. These homes gained popularity for one main reason, their informality and affordability compared to homes of the previous eras. This trend has remained native to architecture to the present day. The houses built in the late 1800s and early 1900s in the Colonial style brought back to life the pre-Revolutionary design in housing. A few characteristics remained relatively constant over a long period of time, especially their publicly praised directness and honesty. Usually the dwelling stood one and one half or two stories high. The majority of the homes consisted of wood, some of stone, and a few of brick. The familiar clapboard structure covered the exterior walls of many early houses, an improvement on the broader weather boards. The most common addition to the basic two room dwelling was the lean to on the back or the addition of an ell.²⁵ Fireplaces usually were erected on the gable ends of the house.

The Luis Arguello House at 1085 Santa Clara Street is a Georgian Colonial Revival home. The exterior changed little from the original box like design. Another New England Colonial style home, the Harris-Lass House at 1889 Market, holds windows edged with shutters and walls protected by clapboard siding. Built in the 1880s, the Higgins House located at 1210 Jefferson demonstrates strong characteristics of the Georgian Revival

period. The structure includes shuttered windows and clapboard siding. The design exhibits a medium pitched gable roof with two single story medium pitched gable roofs at either end. A centered classical portico²⁶ marks the main entrance. Originally built in 1866 as a simple Pioneer style farmhouse, Samisen-Brown house at the grounds of Triton Museum, was remodeled extensively into the popular Colonial Revival style. The most notable addition, the veranda²⁷ that once belonged to the Judge Bond mansion, encircles the structure. A magnificent Victorian-age mansion, the Franck House at 1179 Washington was constructed in 1905 by F.C. Frank, Jr. Formerly an example of a California Colonial Classicism home, a Wells Fargo Bank building currently occupies its original site.

The Romanesque style did not become popular for home building until the 1890's when introduced by Henry Hobson Richardson. To the modern eye, these structures appeared cold and forbidding. Previous to the 1840s, the Romanesque style had only earned popularity in government offices, schools and railroad stations. In those structures the semicircular arch in the windows and entrances was introduced as well as the arch, brick, or stone rounded buttresses²⁸, walls enclosed by curved lines, and towers. In domestic housing, the impact of Romanesque appeared in restrained decoration and in the dependence on mass and scale. The use of colored and textured stone and brick in bands, trim, and arches decorated the exterior masonry walls. This created a diversified effect with a fortress-like appearance. Brick and terra-cotta tiles or panels emphasized structural elements such as windows, roof lines, gables, and entryways. The Romanesque style balanced ornamental detail with the everyday necessary functions of a house. By combining the vertical emphasis of the structure with the horizontal, Romanesque embellished some Gothic traits and still created a unique look. Unfortunately, paint cannot cosmetically treat stone or brickwork buildings, nor can the mass maintain erosion, making restoration difficult. In Santa Clara, the Romanesque style of architecture did not earn much popularity. Although these homes were beautiful when first built, paint can not

cosmetically treat stone or brick work buildings, nor can the mass maintain erosion. So restoring the few Romanesque homes in Santa Clara was difficult.

Around 1902/1903 Henry M. and Charles S. Greene combined elements of the Stick Style, Stickley's influence, the English Arts and Crafts movement, and, especially, Japanese techniques of joinery. This created the bungalow style of architecture. "The term bungalow, a corruption of a Hindustani word meaning 'of Bengal,' came to be applied in the early twentieth century to almost any kind of single-story house with a low sloping roof, which, more often than not, extended to form a porch or veranda."³⁰ The Greene brothers initially planned to create a home they could integrate with the outdoors. The bungalow style suited Santa Clara well because of its suitability in a warm climate and also for its creative possibilities. Architects originally intended bungalow homes to suit both outdoor and indoor living. The modest bungalow accumulated popularity quickly not only for its unique design, but also for its ability to fit on a fairly narrow lot without taking away from the spacious accommodations. Architects achieved the roomy feel by making up for the height with depth. These homes possessed similar characteristics, including large rooms clustered in seemingly random irregular patterns, and low shingle roofs, carried on elaborate brackets that formed a series of parasols shading large parts of the house. Dormer windows often protruded from the roof at the front and back of the house, allowing the use of the low upper story for at least one bedroom or a storage space. In early bungalows, two tapering columns or piers and a low balustrade or rail enclosed the sides and front of the open veranda. Unfortunately, this type of an enclosed porch became uncommon. The natural materials and colors blended the exterior with the surrounding landscape. The bungalow frame was usually built of wood, brick, or concrete blocks, and rarely clapboard, stucco, or shingle. Architects combined the structural necessities with every part of the frame to create the maximum visual effect. All the houses built along bungalow lines,³¹ had an open plan and a remarkable sense of gentleness and elegance as

well as extraordinary craftsmanship and sensitive use of materials-in cobblestones and native plants of their setting.

In the prosperous years following World War I, the dream of owning a private home became a reality for many Americans. The range of housing plans spread from charming five-room English cottages of brick and stucco to attractive two-story shingled Colonials with six rooms, fireplace, French doors and a generous attic. None of the styles of this era differed much from previous eras until the Ranch Style of the 1950s emerged from Spanish tradition at a time when Americans wanted change.

The Western ranch house had several recognizable characteristics that set it apart from other types of homes. In its original form, the ranch house owed many of its qualities to architectural patterns that stretched back several centuries into the history of Spain. Modern builders used the same basic patterns, but substituted new structural technology.

The California ranch house...just grew, naturally, inevitably, a logical result of meeting definite needs in the most direct, workmanlike manner possible with the materials at hand. It borrowed none of the finery of other architectural styles; it sounded no blatant note of self-advertisement; it never, so far as I know, laid claim even to a name, and yet there it stands, a vernacular that is unmistakably a part of its California foothills as the stone houses of eastern Pennsylvania betoken that great treasure store of mica schist. ³²

The ground-hugging silhouette of the Western ranch house had long been considered one of its identifying marks. The limitations of the building materials then available caused the low silhouette of the early ranch house. The early houses made of adobe needed thick walls to make houses any larger than one story. The houses were also set low because they had no foundations and their walls rested directly on the soil. Usually the land that rambling ranch houses were built on had no grading done and were fitted to the contours of the land; so the structure might sit on several levels connected by steps or ramps. The gently pitched roofs did not ascend to a high ridge creating another factor that contributed to the low profile. Two reasons caused the building of a roof on a mild slope: fewer hand

made roofing tiles were needed to cover a low gable than a steep one and infrequent rainfall made steep roofs unnecessary.

Although the structural limitations no longer prevailed, still several good reasons for building low existed. A gently pitched roof and a low overhang made a house look as though it grew in its setting and gave it a cozy feeling. The low visored eave now protected sliding glass doors and large windows.

The second important feature of the ranch style house, the exterior walls, originally grew from the addition of adobe bricks. Usually builders began constructing the walls directly on the dirt floor. Timber stood in abundance in the forests of California, but ranchers lacked the knowledge of how to fell trees and transport logs.

The wooden shingle came with the Yankees, as did the now familiar board-and-batten³³ wall. The Americanized ranch houses still made abundant use of native materials: adobe bricks, stone, quarry tile, rough-sawn lumber, and hand split shakes and battens. Builders used these materials in every exterior part of the house, including the patio.

As the key feature of the Western ranch house, the patio had always relished the mixture of indoor-outdoor living. The idea of a patio originally came from the Spaniards in colonial California. A standard element in the most humble and pretentious structures, a patio belonged in the plans of every ranch style house. Publicly, the house presented a mysterious facade, but on the inside burst an oasis of trees and flowers. The arms of the house usually enclosed three sides of the court and left the fourth side open or closed with a garden wall. Smaller houses usually had only two wings, right angled into an L. Around the patio ran the *corredor*, an open air hallway and a sheltered lounging area. Later, the patio became more directly linked with the indoors because of the liberating development of the window wall and wide sliding doors.

The *corredor* still serves as a roofed outdoor room, but it has lost its major function as a hall. Within the next few decades, indoor hallways carried the traffic that once ducked in and out of doors.

The house wings, which traditionally met each other at right angles, followed a new option of being splayed to permit a view of more than the patio and the opposite wing. The old home rarely had more than two wings usually fixed in a U. The modern ranch house expanded to half a dozen wings, each fulfilling a separate living functions.

Originally the outdoor living room, the *corredor* made a compromise between the bright and open patio and dark, cave like rooms. It served as a hall for the rooms that opened on it, a casual social center and supplementary living room.

The *corredor* later served as a connecting covered walk between buildings, as an entrance into a motor court, and as a covered patio connecting the wings of a house. The *corredor* almost doubled the living area of the house at less cost than if the area were of regular house construction. The room now served a variety of functions.

The Western Ranch style house gained increasing popularity in Santa Clara roughly between 1935 and 1960. Many smaller replicas of the immense ranch style homes in the country began to decorate the growing urban city of Santa Clara. Today, a majority of the Ranch style homes still decorate the streets.

Over a time span of ninety years, various architectural styles blew through Santa Clara, leaving timeless remembrances of former social and economical eras. From the intricate Greek Revival style to the spacious living of the Ranch style home, architecture continually found a new and exciting way to express itself throughout Santa Clara.

Although each new style borrowed certain traits from former styles, no two of the finished products looked exactly alike. The many different architectural designs lent a hand in creating the diversity of architecture in Santa Clara.

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CITATION NOTES

1.
Tour of Historical Santa Clara, (Santa Clara) 1
2.
Grow, Lawrence, Classic Old House Plans (New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 1978.) 28
3.
frieze- A horizontal band between the architrave and cornice of a building.
4.
grille- An open grating of wrought iron, bronze, wood, etc. forming a screen to a door or window
5.
architrave- The lowest part of an entablature, a beam resting directly on the tops of the columns.
6.
trave- A cross beam
7.
transom- A small window or shutter like panel directly over a door.
8.
Grow, Lawrence, Classic Old House Plans, (New York: Sterling Publishing Company, Inc., 1978) 48
9.
Ibid. 28
10.
campanile- a tower
11.
veranda loggia- a roofed gallery built into or projecting from the side of a building, usually one overlooking an open court.
12.
cupola- A small dome or similar structure on a roof.

13.
belvidere- an open, roofed gallery in an upper story, built for giving a view of the scenery.
14.
pediment- A low pitched gable on the front of some buildings in the Grecian style of architecture.
15.
consolid pillar- A column supported by an ornamental bracket.
16.
balustrade- A row of small posts with a rail supporting on them.
17.
Grow, Lawrence, Classic Old House Plans (New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 1978) 42
18.
finial- An ornament at the top of a gable
19.
verge- The main, cylindrical part between the ends of a column.
20.
canopy- A roof like projection over a door.
21.
gable roof- Forming a triangular wall enclosed by the sloping ends of a ridged roof.
22.
sash- A frame for holding the glass panes of a window.
23.
dormer- A window set upright in a sloping roof.
24.
clapboard- A thin, narrow board with one edge thicker than the other, used for covering the outer walls of frame houses.
25.
ell- An extension or a wing at right angles to the main structure.
- 26.

portico- A porch or covered walk, consisting of a roof supported by columns.

27.

veranda- An open porch, usually roofed.

28.

gambrels- A roof with two slopes on each side, the lower steeper than the upper, which form the ridge.

29.

buttress-A structure built against a wall to support it.

30.

Whiffen, Marcus and Fredrick Koeper. American Architecture 1607-1976. (Massachusetts: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1981) 316

31.

Roth, Leland M. A Concise History of American Architecture. (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1979)

32.

Saylor, Henry H., Western Ranch Houses, (California, Lane, Dub., 1946) 64

33.

batten- A strip of wood put over a seam between boards as a covering.