

# History Of Architecture

## Baltimore County, Maryland

### *ITALIANATE VILLAS*

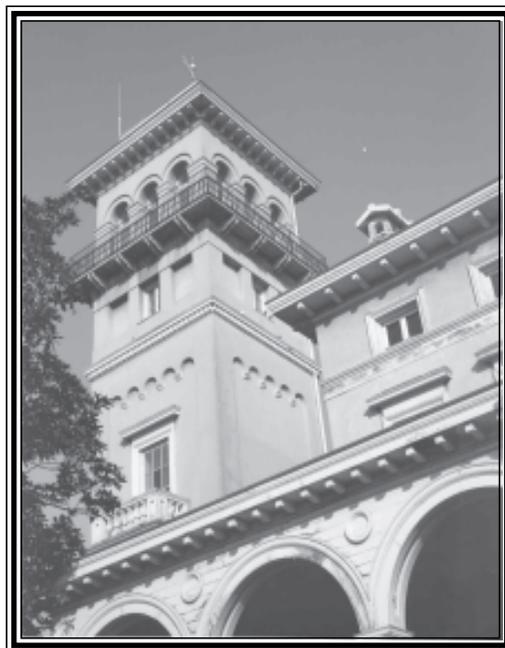
The villa, in the words of William H. Pierson, Jr., was a house designed not for farming life but purely for living. Persons who did not farm usually made their money in commerce, professions, or manufacturing. The elite of any city usually had both a town house and a villa, although with the introduction of horse cars and commuter trains, a villa close to town could serve as a principal residence. Villas were also built at some of the factory villages as the home of the owner or superintendent. Villas came in T-shaped, L-shaped, or cruciform floor plans, and often had a square tower full of windows. Villas generally had elaborate gardens and splendid trees. The frame villas were cheerfully painted in various tones prescribed by the books of A. J. Downing. A new villa would not have suggested a haunted house. Instead, the villa spoke of taste, charm, and the warmth of families. Children grew up with dogs, cats, rabbits, pigeons, and enjoyed pony carts and riding horses. Nationally published plan books scattered the form all over the county. The larger villas were individually designed and attributing the design of each local villa to the relatively few architects of any city is a never ending quest. Baltimore's firm of Niernsee and Neilson designed many villas in the 1850s and 1860s. Niernsee's papers were in Columbia, South Carolina, where he was then working on the State capital; both Columbia and the firm's records were torched by General Sherman in 1865. The *Maryland Journal* in the spring of 1898 noted that home owners were covering up all the contrasting paint schemes, "the dark, sombre colors," with pure white.

### **CLIFTON PARK**

In 1840, Johns Hopkins bought a large estate with an existing farm house and spent two decades developing a superb country seat and expanding the house into an Italianate villa of such impressive dimensions that President Ulysses S. Grant came for a visit on October 20, 1876, although Hopkins had been dead three years.

A. J. Downing in his 1859 *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscaping Gardening* stated, "Clifton Park, near Baltimore, the residence of Johns Hopkins, Esq., is unquestionably one of the most elaborate places in the country. We remember no other, where in addition to a fine and

costly house, there is so large a range of glass; with such diversified and extremely extensive grounds. The varieties of trees, shrubs, walks, lawns, large pieces of ornamental water containing numerous islands planted with rhododendrons and evergreen shrubs, and connected by appropriate and tasteful bridges, are all, certainly, much in advance of any other place we know.”



*Clifton Park*

The basic house of about 1802 owned by Baltimore merchant General Henry A. Thompson would be hard to identify from the outside of this three-story main block with its stuccoed brick walls. Inside, there are Federal elements, and General Thompson’s diary in 1812 recorded building a Federal-style octagon chamber. The main block is five bays wide with a low flat-roofed attic level with small square windows under heavy projecting cornice. The lower wing is two stories, in line with the main block. Both house segments are surrounded by a broad full-width porch with arched openings and massive square pillars forming an arcade. The square tower is five levels plus a square observation platform with finials at each corner. The fourth level of the tower has three arched windows on each side. The third level has a shallow balcony on the main facade. This work was carried out in 1852 by Niernsee and Neilson (*American*, February 3, 1853).

The G. M. Hopkins atlas of 1877 showed Clifton as the future campus of Johns Hopkins University, but that college’s suburban site wound up on Charles Street. Baltimore City bought Clifton in 1895 for conversion into a park and later a golf course. The mansion became the pro shop and park police headquarters.

Serious repairs had to be done in 1975 and thanks to a bond issue accepted by the citizens in the 1974 election, restoration was started. Park workers claimed they had sanded through 20 layers of paint. An authentic color scheme for the exterior was provided in a painting of the 1870s from the collections of the Thom family, descendants of Johns Hopkins’ nephew, Joseph Hopkins. (Raley, 1959, p. 121. *Baltimore County Union*, October 30, 1876. *Sun*, February 5, 1852, November 11, 1906. Reher, 1975.)

## STONELEIGH ABBEY

The great brick Stoneleigh Abbey built in 1849-1852 for Robert P. Brown was designed by John Rudolph Niernsee and his partner J. Crawford Neilson and cost \$15,738.44, as recorded in an original bill still in the house when its contents were cataloged in 1953. The original Stoneleigh Abbey was a great 1710 neo-classical mansion larger than the White House that Brown had visited in Warwickshire. Brown was a city importer and brother-in-law of Frederick Harrison who had commissioned the adjoining Villa Anneslie.

The Stoneleigh Abbey in Maryland had two stories in front, three in back, a large square, not very tall tower, wrought-iron porch railings, and a low-pitched hip roof. Outer coating was stucco. Inside, there were heavy cornices in the main rooms, white marble mantels with arched openings, great gilded Empire mirrors, crystal chande-liers fitted for illuminating gas, doorways framed with oak pilasters, paneled doors in deep, white-painted frames, and a stair with slender, dark oak balusters. The *Sun Magazine* covered the house in its 101st year when it was still full of the original furnishings, voluminous draperies, gilt-framed paintings, animal heads, marble-topped tables, figurines, Empire settees, and a whole movie set of collectibles still in daily view. The house needed only a ticket-taker to become an authentic museum, but in 1955 it was demolished and its grounds, shrunken as they were from the original 130 acres, still provided 77 building lots. (Forbes, 1953; Hahn and Behm, 1977, p. 38.)

## TUSCULUM AND MONTICELLO

In 1986, a California resident sent the Maryland Historical Trust an old cabinet photograph of a villa with a three-story central tower, full-width front porch and a wealth of bracketing on both the porch roof and main roof. Some research revealed that two identical houses had been built in the county in the mid-1850s by Alfred and Adele T. Bujac, the eastern house serving as Monticello, a “school for young ladies,” and the western structure the Bujac home called Tusculum. Both houses appeared on Robert Taylor’s county map of 1857. The Bujacs, who moved to Montreal, sold the parcels to separate buyers in 1864. The 1877 G. M. Hopkins atlas showed William A. Webb as owner of Monticello, Charles Hilgenberg of Tusculum. The houses were the seed of the Windsor Hills suburban neighborhood, started in 1911 by Charles K. Swartz’s purchase of the Tusculum grounds. Monticello was acquired by Baltimore City in 1925 as the site for Windsor Hills School. Tusculum survived, but was remodeled into an A. M. E. church by filling in a number of its domestic windows and applying a layer of stucco. Yet the tower and its unmistakable brackets and finials survive today at Mondawmin and Lindhurst Avenues, a part of the city since the annexation of 1888. (*Sun Magazine*, July 29, 1956, p. 2) Eight years after starting to research the site, the author found an item in the *Sun* of August 6, 1855, that Mr. Bujac was erecting a large academy on the Windsor Mill Road

*Tusculum*



## VILLA ANNESLIE

Frederick Harrison moved the name “Anneslie” from his earlier house in the Green Spring Valley, a structure once called Summerfield. Harrison had Summerfield rebuilt from a burned-out shell into a clumsy, box-like Greek Revival city house. No doubt unsatisfied with the result, he acquired 100 acres south of Towson and about 1855 commissioned a large Italianate dwelling designed by the firm of Niernsee and Neilson, the Baltimore region’s virtuosi of villas. A former West Point student and professional surveyor of railroad routes, Harrison named the two houses for his wife Anne—their daughter Anne was not born until about 1852. Mrs. Harrison, a Wilson by birth, was an heiress in her own right. Their daughter, Anne R. Harrison, became Mrs. Lennox Birkhead and that family owned the house for decades, selling off the outlying 97 acres for development of the Anneslie subdivision in 1922. The house was vacant in 1972, the last three acres platted out into small lots, the house announced for doom by the daily papers. However, a buyer was found in the person of Roger Chylinski-Polubinski, operator of a culinary arts school, and in only four years, the house was handsomely restored.



*Villa Anneslie*

Anneslie has a brick core but was covered with the clapboard cladding. It is L-shaped in plan. The most notable feature is a three-story square tower. On the right (south) of the tower is a two-story, gable-roofed pavilion which further projects into a shallow two-story bay fitted with clusters of three windows at each story. The house originally faced the York Road, although it was probably too far inside the estate to be seen by travelers. Annes-lie’s park was once the starting point for fox-hunts. George Andreve in describing the house for the *National Register*, noted that the architects had carefully executed a ready-made elevation and floor plan provided in one of Andrew Jackson Downing’s pattern books. The house resembles “Design XX” in Downing’s *Country Houses* and also resembles Albert C. Greene’s house in Frostburg, Maryland (Lane, 1991, p. 225). The house can be glimpsed from the sidewalk in the 500 block of Dunkirk Road.

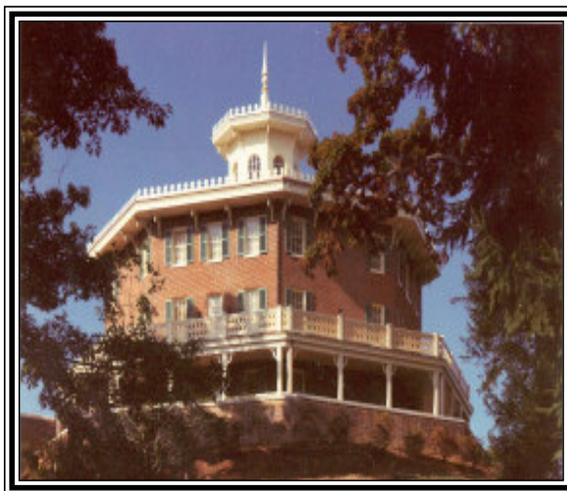
## BELLE GROVE

H. Howell’s house first appeared on the Rogerson map of ca. 1855 and again on the Catonsville portion of Martenet’s 1860 map of Howard County. Since the house did not appear on James Slade’s 1853 water supply map, it probably dates from about 1853 to 1855. A detailed drawing of the D. C. Howell villa appeared in Scharf’s 1881 county history as a large T-shaped, hip-roofed frame Italianate structure of three full stories, built in clapboard, with a central tower and unusually large brackets around the eaves. The square tower rose to four levels with a small hip-roofed cupola or lantern at the very top. The 1915 atlas showed the estate as Belle Grove, property of H. Preston. Today the house survives, one of the three or four square-towered dwellings left in the county, but the lantern has vanished. The full-width front porch and its wrap-around extensions survive. The woodcut in Scharf’s history showed formal gardens, paths, hedges, urns, and classic statuary. The estate is much shrunken and the house stands on a cul-de-sac called Hillview Road south of Frederick Avenue just west of the city line.

## MT. WASHINGTON OCTAGON

About the same age as Lutherville's poured concrete octagon house, the larger one at the present USF&G Company's corporate campus was built of brick in 1855 for the Mount Washington Female College, an academy founded by the Rev. Elias Heisner of the German Reformed Church. The date, January 25, 1856, can be found inscribed on a window pane by a diamond ring belonging to one of the prosperous students. This octagon was four levels, with Italianate embellishments, bracketing under the eaves, two levels of wrap-around porches, and a cupola topped by wooden, lace-like trim and a finial. A central stairway circulated air into the cupola. All rooms were served by hot-air flues. There were bathrooms, water closets, and gas lights. The building was depicted in the margin illustrations on Robert Taylor's 1857 county map. In 1867, the campus was acquired by the Sisters of Mercy, who founded and operated both Mount St. Agnes High School and College there until 1971 when the college merged with Loyola. The octagon was superbly restored in 1984 as a computer training center by the USF&G Company of Baltimore. John Dorsey and James J. Dilts attributed the design to James and Thomas Dixon, who planned many of the great suburban houses at Mount Washington and also acted as developers of Dixon's Hill. (Dorsey & Dilts, 1981, pp. 241-242. *Sun*, April 28, 1856.)

*Mt. Washington Octagon*



## WYMAN VILLA

In 1853, Samuel Wyman commissioned one of the most solid of the rural brick villas at Homewood, now the Johns Hopkins University campus, then the former home of Charles Carroll, Jr., where a small brick house in Federal style had been built in 1801-1803. The Wyman Villa was a second-hand design, the 1845 plan for Edward King's home at Newport, Rhode Island, by Richard Upjohn of New York, an architect whose most visible work is Trinity Church in the Wall Street financial district. The villa plan was published in A. J. Downing's 1850 edition of *Rural Residences* (p. 317), where Downing highly recommended Upjohn's design. The prototype King House itself outlasted the Wyman copy and became the People's Library in Newport. The Baltimore County version was superintended by local architects, Niernsee and Neilson, who rendered it as a mirror image of King's residence. The tall square tower, on the left in the Wyman version, was raised by one story. Wyman's tower featured a small balcony sheltered by a decorated-pent roof. There were porches at ground level; between the taller tower and a short tower on the right were porches at two levels. The standing seam gable roofing on the main structure and the hip roofing on the towers were visible from the ground, and provided surfaces for displaying paint in festive colors. The eaves of the towers were decorated with regularly spaced brackets. Upjohn's designs were noted for their "dignity", and the villa was both cheerful and dignified, not tainted by excess or overkill. The family made the villa their main residence, moving out of the small Homewood. The family prosperity derived from a commission merchant business founded by Samuel Wyman, first called Tiffany,

Wyman & Company, later Wyman, Byrd & Company. Samuel Wyman lived until 1865 and his heir, also Samuel Wyman lived at the villa until 1894 when the university trustees acquired the property. By that time, the house had been taken within the city lines of 1888. As the university buildings flourished, the mansion fell into decay and by 1953, its doom was certain. The great house was demolished in 1955 to provide parking spaces.

## **KIMBERLY HOUSE**

The Kimberly House was a square-towered villa in the Downing tradition locally designed by Thomas and James M. Dixon of Baltimore. The house appears as a woodcut with both its elevation and floor plans on the front page of the *Baltimore County Advocate* of December 2, 1859. Probably a paid advertisement in the never-illustrated weekly, the design was accompanied by text that revealed that the client was Edward Kimberly and that the site was to be barely inside the county somewhere on Northern Avenue. The tower was to enclose three stories and to provide an observatory on top of its conical roof four levels above the street. Title searching revealed that the first two owners of the house became insolvent; when the property was advertised at auction, it was said to command a view of Fort Carroll. With that clue, the house was found just east of Zenus Barnum's place on the north side of North Avenue, just east of Broadway, on Plate Q of G. M. Hopkins' city atlas of 1876, Margaret Roberts shown as owner. The house was perched right on a ridge line, a full 7.9 miles from Fort Carroll. Ultimately, the villa was replaced by Harford Heights Elementary School.

## **THE ALHAMBRA**

Built for John Ellicott of Elias in 1858 or 1859, this great towered and balconied Italianate villa, was once credited to Eben Faxon, but further research undermined that theory. The house is of brick, disguised by clapboard cladding, set on a massive granite foundation of remarkably large blocks. Before the structure was ever occupied, Ellicott died and the property was advertised in detail in the *Sun* of April 26, 1861. The house was fitted with marble mantels and "water fixtures," and closets. It enjoyed a fine view of the river valley and appeared in Sachse's 1859 lithograph of the Patapsco region and also as a vignette on the 1860 Martinet map of Howard County. Alhambra is a wide but shallow house and its main facade consists of a pedimented pavilion at the north end with a two-deck porch stretching to the south where the end-bay rises three stories, forming a low tower with broadly overhanging eaves. Porch pillars are square posts on the first story, round columns—all of wood—on the second story. The house is three bays wide, but the bays contain clusters of windows at the ends and in the center there are double doors at both levels of the porch where transoms and sidelights provide additional glass area. Painted white, The Alhambra stands out as a cheerful and festive design. Its present owner sanded down in places to discover that the original paint was yellow. A series of owners have worked toward the restoration of this house that was allowed to stand untenanted in the 1940s. The first phase was carried out by Francis X. Gibbons, an experienced church restorationist in the 1960s. In the main parlor, the fireplace is flanked by free-standing square columns that taper in the Egyptian style and are also fluted.

*The Alhambra*



## WALDECK

One of the Italianate villas truest to form and still intact is Waldeck, the two-story, five-bay, frame and clapboarded, hip-roofed house shown as John Fefill's *Stradford* in the 1877 Hopkins atlas. The house was charged to Fefill in the 1876 tax ledger, listed as "Improvements, \$3600." Fefill had owned the property since May 1875, and may have been the client for the large house. However, a "frame cottage" was advertised on this property in the *Maryland Journal*, May 30, 1874. In that instance, Dr. Adalbert J. Volck was being sued for default of a mortgage made in 1870; the Volcks had purchased the grounds in 1867. Volk was the famous anti-Union cartoonist who drew under the name of "V. Blada." A skillful illustrator, he might have been capable of architectural designs. E. G. Lind's list of commissions included a "summer house" costing \$1,000 for A. Volk in 1867.

In October 1876, John Fefill sold this large property to Gustavus Gieske for \$5,000, just what he had paid for it. The Gieske family held the house until 1932, making various enlargements. The most notable feature is a square tower projecting slightly from the center bay and rising to three stories where there is a shallow balcony attached in front. The eaves of the house and the tower roof were both decorated with large square brackets. Across the front stretched a full-width one-story porch supported by square columns, each topped by scroll-sawn decorative brackets. Windows were extra tall on the first story, and those on the upper floor were two-over-two double-hung sashes with the large panes of glass then available. Like all villas, Waldeck had vast, rambling wings in back. Today this awkwardly large house is superbly preserved and serves as the Sterling-Ashton Funeral Home at 736 Edmondson Avenue. The story is told that when Edmondson Avenue was being surveyed west of Ingleside Avenue, only the Gieske servants were at home and Dr. George Keidel who lived at Homewood on the other side of the proposed route persuaded the surveyors to slice through Waldeck rather than his own place (Orser and Arnold, 1989, p. 24).

*Waldeck*



## TOWNSEND-LAKEN HOUSE

Samuel P. Townsend built one of the most substantial of the Italianate houses and it endures to the present in Glyndon, one of the buildings that bolstered the argument for the making the town a National Register Historic District. Townsend was one of the three founders of this late Victorian village and had owned a store, meeting hall, and boarding house and was both postmaster and freight agent. The nameless village almost became Townsendville. The house site came into Townsend's hands in October 1875 but the 1877 atlas shows no house constructed at that time. The *Maryland Journal* of April 9, 1881, reported that Townsend was planning two new residences and had just put an addition on the boarding house near the depot. Possibly his large dwelling was not started until 1881, although Rodd L. Wheaton in his study of local architecture, estimated its age at about 1870-1872, noting that the house was slightly out of fashion when constructed. In 1891, a news item mentioned that the Townsends were spending the winter at their home "Brookfield." (*Baltimore County Democrat*, January 17, 1891.) The same year, the Townsends sold the mansion to Baltimore attorney Frederick H. Hack, whose family owned it until 1939.

In his village study in 1972, Rodd L. Wheaton called the Townsend House (then Broadbent's) "probably the most significant in Glyndon." Gleaming white with green shutters, it is a five-bay, two-story frame and German siding house with full-width front porch that bows out at the center in a semi-octagonal shape. The center bay is a three-story pavilion with an arched window at the top level surmounted by a heavily bracketed open pediment. The eaves of both porch and main roof are also heavily bracketed. The center entrance door is topped by a transom and flanked by sidelights. First-story windows run from floor to ceiling with large panes set in double-hung sashes.

The house is built with heavier timber than were most Victorian cottages of that period. The square Tuscan porch posts are massive and the scroll-sawn and carved decorative brackets are extra large and remarkably well crafted. Inside, the house has a center-hall plan, a sturdy stairway, and rooms with plaster cornices, good woodwork, marble fireplace mantels, and internal shutters in natural wood, never painted since the date of construction.



*Townsend-Laken House*



*Planter's Paradise*

## PLANTER'S PARADISE

Planter's Paradise, built for beer manufacturer Frederick Bauernschmidt, is a very late example of Italianate architecture in frame and clapboard. The main block of the house is a square with a full-width and wrap-around porches. The most prominent feature is a large square hip-roofed cupola with twin round-topped windows on all four facades. The main front of the house is cross-gabled and the gable peak shelters a palladian window. The eaves are heavily bracketed and exposed rafters emerge under the gable peak eaves. The house is Italianate in style but fitted with the window types available early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, large sash windows, large panes of glass, leaded glass windows, etc. The design, credited to Robert C. Ulrich, appeared in the *Sun*, October 4, 1909.

## TRINITY P. E. CHURCH, TOWSON

From a distance, Trinity Church in Towson looks as if it is a Gothic Revival structure with its soaring spire, grey limestone walls, and tall windows, but it is really an Italianate design with round-topped windows, exposed purlins, heavy wooden bracketing on the eaves, and other non-Gothic elements of the Victorian era. The avoidance of Gothic was deliberate, because the original congregation wished to follow the low-church or Evangelical tradition rather than the High-Church tradition stemming from the Oxford Movement. So many other Baltimore County churches built by Episcopalians chose the Gothic style fostered by the theory of “Ecclesiology,” even building reasonably Gothic structures in wood when stone was unaffordable. Trinity was built on a lot acquired in 1857 from Enos Smedley’s new subdivision called “North Baltimore” by the Towson paper. The town was becoming a busy place with the Court House opened for trials in January 1857. The basic church was designed by Norris G. Starkwether, a Philadelphia architect who was specifically mentioned in the Towson paper along with William Bowen, stonemason, and Joseph Allison, carpenter (*Baltimore County Advocate*, June 20, 1857).

Completed without its spire and vestibule, Trinity measured 44 by 71 feet, had 68 pews, and seated 350. Total cost was \$20,000. The main aisle is in a bee-line with north-south corridor of the original courthouse, as if part of a planned city. Trinity was dedicated on Ascension Day, May 20, 1860. The first rector was the Rev. John Francis Hoff, D. D., a dedicated Evangelical who managed to bridge the gap between high and low church sentiments and the gulf between Northern and Southern sympathizers in a wartime period early in parish history.

Architecturally, Trinity grew somewhat more Gothic. The *Sun* of July 8, 1869, announced that the spire and porch were to be added by contractors Harrison and Shriver. Mills Lane notes an 1870 payment to Edmund G. Lind, possibly the supervising architect for the completion of the 1857 plans by his ex-employer Starkwether. The spire was finished by 1874. The interior of Trinity is not quite Gothic either, but open with a cathedral ceiling now painted a dark blue. There are no Gothic groins or ribs. The rear wall behind the altar features a fresco band depicting trumpet-blowing angels, the work of Gabrielle Clemens. (*Maryland Journal*, May 28, 1898). Transepts were added by the Wilson family architectural firm in 1891, and the chancel was extended by Laurence Hall Fowler in 1926. The restoration of 1989 was supervised by Schamu, Machowski, Doo, and Associates, Inc.

## PIMLICO CLUB HOUSE

The entire Pimlico enterprise grew out of the State fairgrounds laid out by the Maryland Agricultural and Mechanical Association starting in 1866. The 1877 Hopkins atlas showed the oval racetrack where it is today. When a county-level agricultural fair developed the Timonium site in 1879, racing became the only activity at Pimlico under a lease made in 1870 with the Maryland Jockey Club. “Pimlico” was the colonial tract name of the property and it was derived from a London neighborhood. The track’s most fanciful architectural element was its 1874 club house, a rectangular, wooden wedding cake of several layers with wrap-around porches and scroll-sawn decorations on its arcades, also a cupola, widow’s walk, and a finial topped by a weathervane that is traditionally painted for one-year spans at the end of each Preakness in the racing colors of the winner’s stable. This festive building was shown in an 1875 lithograph with yellow shutters and tan porch railings but in the 20th century it was painted white with the standing-seam tin roof in red. The architects were Niernsee & Son (*Gazette*, October 9, 1874). The structure was superbly restored in 1956 by Palmer, Fisher, Williams and Nes, repainted in its Victorian colors. The clubhouse at

“Old Hilltop” as the track came to be called, burned June 17, 1966 along with much memorabilia from the history of horsely cavalcades of equine steeds (McCauley, 1975, p. 121).