

WEISS HALL---98 South River Street. The Dobson Building was donated to Wilkes College by Mr. and Mrs. Aaron Dobson in 1957. The building was renamed Weiss Hall after the founder of Triangle Shoe Company and a trustee at Wilkes College. The building is used as a women's dormitory.

Can you find the Victorian on your street?

Consultant
and tour book
offer advice and
tips for
identifying
distinctive,
historical
homes.

By MARQUES G. HARPER
mharper@leader.net

TL
10-4-03

Sprinkled throughout the Wyoming Valley are Victorian-style homes, or some variation on the theme, built generations ago. Stopping to study them raises the age-old question: What makes a Victorian a Victorian?

The term refers to homes built between 1860 and 1900 during part of the reign of Queen Victoria of England, said Larry Newman, an urban planning consultant for the Urban Workshop in Wilkes-Barre.

The style is a prime example of industrialization in the 19th century, when new technology allowed people to go from build-

ing boxy-style homes to designing ones with elaborate roofs, turrets and patterns.

"Within that very loose term, there are a whole bunch of different styles," said Newman, who lives in a Victorian-style home on South Franklin Street in Wilkes-Barre.

In many cases, architects of the time mixed and matched varying Victorian styles with other styles, giving the homes distinct looks, he said.

Some Victorian themes to pop up in the area included **Queen Anne**, **High Victorian Gothic** and **Second Empire**. And these days, a walk around downtown Wilkes-Barre can give you the opportunity

to take in a few of these distinctive buildings.

On Wilkes University's campus, **Rifkin Hall**, which was once the mansion of the Murray Reynolds family, is an example of **High Victorian Gothic**. The South River Street property was designed by architect Bruce Price, according to the self-guided tour book of Wilkes-Barre.

Another Wilkes property fitting the bill is **Weiss Hall** on South River Street, which was transformed from Greek Revival to **Queen Anne** in late 1800s. The new look was created by architect Albert Kipp.

See FIND, Page 9D

FIND

Continued from Page 1D

Another striking example of Victorian-inspired architecture is **Bishop Memorial Library** on South Franklin Street. The building, which dates to 1875, is in the Italian Villa style with **Queen Anne** revisions.

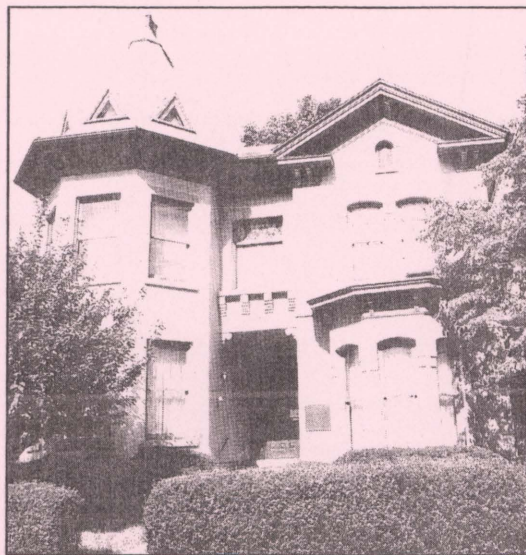
While these buildings helped establish the architecture landscape of the downtown in the 1800s, other parts of the city were booming with Victorian-style homes.

A primary spot to look is along Park Avenue. Decades ago, after the Civil War, new ethnic groups came to the area and settled along Park Avenue or in the neighborhood through which the street runs.

"Park Avenue is one of the city's quintessential Victorian streetscapes," said Newman, who has studied local architecture styles.

Casual observers who walk through downtown or the Heights section of the city should be able to recognize the beauty and detail of Victorians even if they can't identify the exact style.

Because of their detailed designs, Victorians are truly hard work to maintain, Newman said. Over the years, several in the area have been left with pockmarks and blem-



TIMES LEADER STAFF PHOTOS/DON CAREY

Bishop Memorial Library on South Franklin Street in Wilkes-Barre is an example of an Italian Villa style with Queen Anne revisions.

ishes, while others are being restored for a second life in the 21st century.

"There are a lot of Victorian houses that haven't been treated well by successive owners," Newman said. To maintain one, a homeowner might need to spend a decade or so working on the intricate details and patterns, he added.

Newman said he and his wife, Marisue Elias Newman,

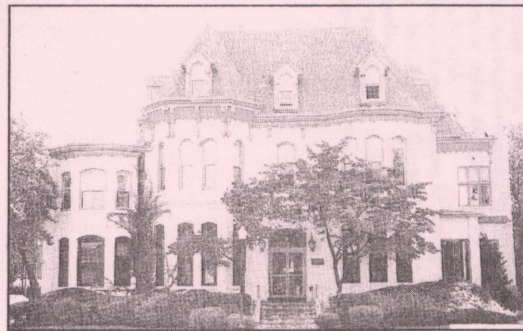
don't expect to finish their home for quite a number of years.

"If you're determined to do it correctly," Newman said, "it has to be a labor of love or you'll drive yourself crazy. But in the end, you'll have a showpiece."

Marques G. Harper, a Times Leader staff writer, may be reached at 831-7324.



Weiss Hall on the Wilkes University campus is an example of Queen Anne architecture, a variation on the Victorian style. The former home was converted from the Greek Revival style in the late 1800s.



Rifkin Hall on the Wilkes University campus is the former mansion of the Murray Reynolds family. It is an example of High Victorian Gothic architecture.

USEFUL TO YOU

Wilkes-Barre urban planning consultant Larry Newman recommends the book "A Field Guide to American Houses" (Knopf, 1984) by Virginia and Lee McAlester. The book will allow you to identify the historical and architectural styles of houses from the 17th century to the present.

Here are definitions of a few styles related to Victorian architecture taken from the Luzerne County Historical Society's self-guided walking tour of Wilkes-Barre:

Queen Anne is defined as a late 19th-century style incorporating many different materials and colors such as a combination of brick, stone and shingles. Other common features are steeply pitched roofs, elaborate chimneys and corner turrets.

High Victorian Gothic is described as an eclectic interpretation of the Gothic Revival. It was popular during the mid-19th century and inspired by the colorful Gothic buildings of Northern Italy. High Victorian Gothic buildings combine Gothic Revival forms with extensive polychroming and ornament.

Second Empire is a style popular in the United States during the late 19th century. The style, which originated in France during the reign of Napoleon III, is characterized by the use of mansard roofs, used together with ornate window hoods and surrounds.









THE CITIZENS' VOICE
HISTORY AT HOME

The streets where you live

Walk through history in downtown Wilkes-Barre's historic corridor

By Debby Higgins
Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

Prior to Judge Jesse Fell's discovery that black "stone coal" burned with a steady, even flame in 1896 proving anthracite coal was a viable source of energy, Wilkes-Barre had already been a bustling city.

Taking its name from two British members of Parliament who supported the American cause, Wilkes-Barre was the center of civilization in the Colonial and Revolutionary War periods. John Wilkes and Col. Isaac Barre never set foot in their namesake city, but to this day, it honors their commitment to the patriots' plan for independence.

It is one of only a handful of cities in the United States with a hyphenated name. As was the plan of the time, cities were laid out around a village square with rectangular blocks running off streets that converged at the square.

While Wilkes-Barre's Public Square is referred to as a square, it really is positioned as a diamond with four main streets radiating off each point in each compass direction.

The area's first post office was located in the city as was the county seat. Public Square was the site of Luzerne County's first courthouse in addition to serving as the meeting place for visitors to the city. Today, Public Square still serves as a meeting place of sorts with holiday celebrations, the Fine Arts Fiesta and the Farmer's Market held on the same site where a fort and city jail once stood.

It is at Public Square, the focal point of the city, where we begin our walking tour of Wilkes-Barre. Actually, the city is divided into two tours, the Southern Tour, and the Northern Tour.

It is possible to do both in one day, especially if the weather cooperates. Most of Wilkes-Barre lends itself to walking because the truly hilly sections lie on the periphery of the historic districts outlined in the tours. However, it is advisable to

wear low-heeled, comfortable shoes.

The tours are designed as self-guided. A detailed brochure of the tours is available from the Luzerne County Historical Society located in the Bishop Memorial Library, 49 S. Franklin St., a stop on the tour.

The Southern Tour

Looking south on Public Square an impressive but currently vacant building immediately greets the eye.

At the turn of the 20th century, many financial institutions adopted the Neoclassical Revival style of architecture. According to the Luzerne County Historical Society, the banks apparently wanted to impress the public with their strength and strong tradition so boards of directors built buildings to reflect that firm foundation.

The First National Bank built in 1906 was designed by well-known Wilkes-Barre architect Albert H. Kipp. Called a "banking temple" the First National Bank building has been vacant for many years.

This building's exterior (despite disuse), remains a fine example of an architectural clean and classic structure.

Next door, the 1928 Luzerne National Bank building's utilitarian exterior gives little hint of the beautiful interior relief inside.

Giant telamons, sculptures that depict various occupations loom above the wide-open banking floor. While the telamons' creator is not known, the building's architect is.

New York architect Bertram Cunyngnam designed this 14-story office building. Its ground floors are in the Romanesque style. Art Deco accents are prevalent throughout.

Moving west out of the Public Square area toward the Susquehanna River takes the visitor on West Market Street. Walking past remnants of a bustling past, West Market Street today is on the verge of a renaissance. At the nucleus is Hotel Sterling.

Located at 47-45 W. Market St., the hotel

was at one time the premier area hostelry for visiting dignitaries, politicians and entertainers. It lies dormant and unused today, awaiting a revival that planners hope to tie into the levee-raising project in Wilkes-Barre.

The original building was designed by J.H.W. Hawkins in 1897. New York architects Warren and Wetmore added a 14-story tower addition in the 1920s.

Directly in front of the Sterling, the Market Street Bridge provides an impressive route over the Susquehanna River. Built in 1929, the bridge was designed by Carrere and Hastings.

Walking south on South River Street, visit Catlin Hall at 92 S. River.

Generations of the coal aristocracy and profits gained from area mines and railroads defined South River Street as Wilkes-Barre's own Millionaire's Row.

Catlin Hall and neighboring Weiss Hall originally were identical Greek Revival homes built by prominent members of the coal aristocracy. Wilkes University now owns both homes.

Continuing south on South River Street, stop at 288 S. River in front of Temple Israel. Recently restored to its original grandeur, the home of Wyoming Valley's Conservative Jewish congregation, the temple is designed in Byzantine Revival style.

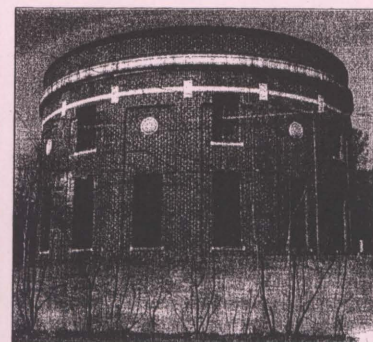
Architect Ralph M. Herr designed the house of worship with domed glass ceiling and wonderful interior woodwork.

Take a slight detour to view Good Shepherd Lutheran Church at 190 S. Main St. The Greek Revival church was built by German immigrants and is the oldest church in the city.

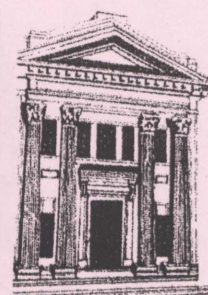
Visitors will also find in this neighborhood the Luzerne County Medical Society at 126 S. Franklin St. and the American Red Cross building at 156 S. Franklin St. Both structures are in the Colonial Revival style. In particular, the medical society's home is a 1914 Brice Hayden Long de-



Catlin Hall, 1843.



Luzerne County Medical Society, 1914.



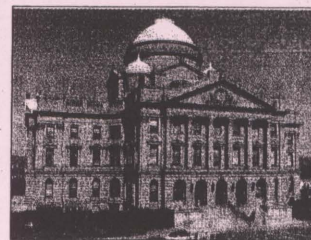
First National Bank, 1906.



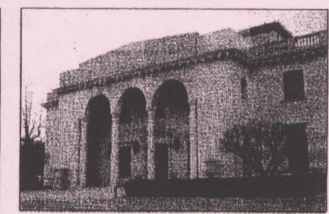
First Presbyterian Church, 1909.



Public Square, circa 1900.



Luzerne County Courthouse, 1909.



Kirby Health Center, 1930.

sign and has been referred to as "Wilkes-Barre's Pantheon." Visitors are welcomed during business hours.

Walkers can visit several more significant buildings on the South Tour. Check the brochure for more information.

The North Tour

The North Tour begins with the Neoclassical Revival PG Energy building at 30 N. Franklin St.

Built in 1910 this structure was designed by architects Welch, Sturdevant and Foggi for the Spring Brook Water Supply Co.

One of its unique features is a row of carved dolphins along the building's top. Moving up North Franklin Street, Trem Temple at 52 N. Franklin, stands out with its minarets and arched roof.

Its Moorish Revival style was the design of F. Willard Puckey. He modeled this unusual building after the Mosque of Omar and the Court of Lions of the Alhambra Palace.

The Kirby Memorial Health Center at 71 N. Franklin St. is a strikingly beautiful building both inside and out.

Designed by Thomas Atherton in 1930, it favors a classical design.

But, this impressive building's most wonderful attributes are on the inside. Stop in during business hours for a peek.

Perhaps the most recognized building in

the Wilkes-Barre skyline is the Luzerne County Courthouse.

Built in 1909 and designed by E.I. Osterling, this Beaux-Arts design was originally meant to be built on Public Square.

Later, architects McCormick and French designed the interior. For anyone who has not visited this landmark building, take the time to look at its mosaics and murals. They tell the story of Wyoming Valley's history. See how many famous personalities you can spot.

The North Tour also includes the Memorial Presbyterian Church.

Other significant buildings on this tour include the Polish Union Building, James Coughlin High School, City Hall and St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church, among many others.

Plan on spending the better part of an afternoon on this leg of the tour. For more information contact the Luzerne County Historical Society at 823-6244.







