

Johnson House

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architecture

1476 Hampshire Street • Queen Anne style • 1872 • architect unknown

The Johnson House at 1476 Hampshire Street was built in the Queen Anne style in 1872. Like so many of its contemporaries, the house, while following a general style, was designed by an architect no longer known to us.

The Queen Anne style is based historically on the work of English architect Richard Norman Shaw, active in England during the 1860's and '70's. Shaw's work was revivalist in character and he drew inspiration from the architecture of the period of Queen Anne in the Seventeenth Century. The first important buildings in the Queen Anne style constructed in the United States were the British Government buildings erected in Philadelphia for the Centennial Exhibition in 1876. These were two half-timbered buildings to provide living quarters for the British Executive Commissioner and his staff. The American Builder, which recognized that despite the accepted designation that they were "essentially Elizabethan in character", said that they were "the most interesting and by far the most conspicuous and costly buildings erected by any foreign government on the Centennial grounds." From our present-day distance we can see that the Queen Anne style -- whatever its practical advantages, actual or imagined -- represented a reaction against High Victorian "reality" and a renewed interest in picturesque qualities. It conjured up a period of the past that was just distant enough to appear rosy in the eyes of an America that had lost so much of its confidence in the future during the financial panic of 1873.

The characteristics of the Queen Anne style that are in evidence in the Johnson House emphasize the strong romantic quality of the house: the complex form of the house created by the use of the many roof forms, dormers, bay windows, balconies and chimneys, the use of several construction materials including brick, shingles and decorative wood trim used together, and the inclusion of small-scale details such as the porch columns. One of the most interesting features to be noted is the projecting bay formed by the landing of the staircase, and the fine stained glass of the landing window.

The plan of the Johnson House recalls contemporary Nineteenth Century houses in its arrangement of suites of large parlors that can be joined or separated by large sliding doors. Woodwork throughout the house is to be especially noted, each room featuring a different kind of wood.

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