

1961

## ROSLYN ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY

### A Brief Survey

Roslyn is of architectural interest because of the very high survival rate of homes dating from the mid-19th century and earlier. Apparently the earliest published record identifying the locations and owners of Roslyn homes is the Walling Map of 1859, which was probably actually surveyed a year or two earlier. A large percentage of the houses and commercial buildings shown on this map are still standing.

Because research has been sketchy to date, not very much is known about the actual construction details of houses shown on the Walling map. However, much may be conjectured by evaluating the architectural concepts; the construction techniques; and the decorative details. Few, if any, of the early Roslyn houses were actually designed by individual architects. Nevertheless, each house had an architectural concept which determined its appearance and function. This concept was frequently strongly influenced by the various published architectural works of the period, as Benjamin, Hanlett, Downing and Vaux, and in other cases was simply the result of a discussion between the owner and the carpenter. Architectural concepts of Roslyn houses are usually quite reactionary as might be expected in a small country village. In general, the more ambitious the house at the time it was built, the more likely it was to have been built in a contemporary style. Less important houses, where owners were more likely to be interested in shelter than flourishes, frequently reflected the designs of earlier periods. Construction techniques are another important device in the dating of homes. Workmen trained in a country village were likely to persist in the utilization of the techniques of their apprenticeships. In sufficiently isolated communities, a workman might continue in the techniques of the early working years of the elderly man who taught him. Reactionary techniques in one trade may appear side by side with relatively modern



techniques in another, depending on the training of the man who did the work. In situations of this sort, the date of the house cannot be earlier than the introduction of the latest construction technique used, provided it may be accepted that the work is a part of the original structure. In general, framing of Roslyn houses tends to conform to contemporary standards. However, the plastering techniques of clamshells and horsehair which continued late into the 19th century, had been discontinued in cities like Boston by 1750. Masonry also was likely to be reactionary. The brickwork in at least one house of the 2nd quarter of the 19th century was laid in Flemish bond, a style which had largely disappeared elsewhere at least a century earlier. It is worthy of comment that prior to about 1860, foundations of Roslyn houses were built of large stones, arranged in such a manner that the exposed inside surfaces of the cellar became smooth, while the outer surfaces were covered by earth below grade, and were irregular. After about 1860 foundations were usually built of brick.

Decorative details, as hardware, stair railings, mouldings, etc. are also of great value in establishing the age of a house. In Roslyn the concept and construction details, and even the hardware, may antedate the mouldings by many years. In such a case, the date of the house cannot be earlier than the date of earliest appearance of the specific moulding style, provided that the mouldings may be accepted as original work, and not later alteration. Wooden decorative detail in Roslyn houses usually shows a high type of conformity to contemporary styles, probably because the presence of two lumber yards made it more convenient for carpenters, even the cheaper ones, to buy their mouldings ready made in preference to working them out with moulding planes. For the same reason, mantles and door frames were usually in style and executed with contemporary detail. On the other hand metal hardware was frequently retarded in style, as the result of availability of out-of-date stock or the re-use of early materials. "H" and "H-L" hinges and oval keyholes were used long after their use was discontinued in metropolitan centers. Prior to about 1825, locks were imported from England. After that date they were of local manufacture, some of them by A.

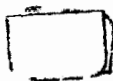


Searing of Jamaica.

The foregoing is, of course, only the briefest of resumes. Additional information will be given, when feasible, in the descriptions of the individual houses below. In all cases, estimates of construction dates have been evaluated on the basis of the architectural characteristics described above. In some instances, an individual house may have been built earlier than the attributed date, but alterations have given it the characteristics of a later period. In conclusion, it should be mentioned that the houses on exhibit have been selected to demonstrate the continuing story of Roslyn architecture, and to indicate the various interesting inconsistencies of architectural concept, construction methods, and decorative detail as they appeared in local houses. Many more equally interesting houses remain and it is hoped that they will be exhibited in future tours.

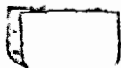
For convenience in classifying the various architectural styles and periods in the United States, a list of these classifications, with approximate dates, is given below. In actual practice "high styles" in each category rarely reached localities which were not in close contact with metropolitan centers. For this reason definite architectural styles do not appear to be in evidence in Roslyn until the Federal period. However, for the convenience of the reader some classification must be given. This one is appended for whatever information it may provide:

- 1700-1750 Queen Anne
- 1730-1780 Georgian
- 1770-1825 Federal
- 1830-1865 Classic Revival (Greek, Tuscan and Babylon Revival)
- 1810-1900 Gothic Revival
- 1835-1920 Victorian Eclectic (Roman, Classic, Gothic, Flemish, Italianate and Swiss, components in same building)



THE STORY HOUSE  
95 E. Broadway

The Story House is one of the few remaining in Roslyn which may be almost certainly placed in the latter part of the 18th century. It is shown on the Walling Map as belonging to "Losee" and on the Beers, Comatock Map (1874) as belonging to H. W. Eastman and B. D. Hicks. The Walling Map is possibly incorrect in this instance as the Losee house is still standing opposite the Bryant Library, some distance south of its mapped location. The Story House may have belonged to R. Seaman in 1859 and shown as the misplaced house on the Walling Map. The house itself is mid-18th century in concept, i.e. deep roof angle, very large fireplace used for cooking, central chimney, exposed beams, unplastered ceiling, and enclosed stairway which is little more than a ladder. The planed board sheathing is also mid-18th century in concept, but the fine beaded-edge is a late 18th century detail. The house itself was probably built during the last quarter of that century. The original house may have consisted of an unheated attic, where the children slept, and the present living room which was a true "family room" and was used for all living purposes. If this was true, the chimney was on an outside wall. So far as we now know, this is the only surviving Roslyn house which originally had exposed beams and an unplastered ceiling. Exposed beams always had beveled (chamfered) edges to prevent head injuries. The present "summer beam" is new, but replaces a near-by original. Cooking was originally done in the present living room, but a separate kitchen building was built during the 19th century. The rear door of the house is quite Dutch in concept and indicates the persistence of early building principles. The bay window was added, the roof extended, and eave brackets applied after the Civil War. The house contains a number of interesting artifacts, as 18th century provincial furniture from northern New England, early 19th century portraits and some Victorian chairs made in 1853.



THE SMITH HOUSE  
106 Main Street

This house is a typical New York "Village House" of the early 19th century; although it may be an earlier house which later alteration has given an architectural flavor of this period. The house has been in the family of the present owner since 1856 and is listed on both the Walling and Beers-Comstock maps as belonging to W. H. Smith. In a photograph of about 1870 it has the profile of a "salt box." However, the kitchen was removed in the late 19th century to permit the construction of the present ell which provides for a full second storey. The present front porch, bay window and extended eaves with brackets are also later additions. It is definitely far more sophisticated than the Story House, although some of its mouldings are similar to and in period with, those of the Story House. However, its rooms were designed for specific uses as parlors, bedrooms, etc.

The doorway, in the Federal style, is typically New York and would be considered to be a fine example even in a New York City house of the period. It is worthy of careful examination. It should be noted that the fine carved framing of the glass side and over-door windows are made of wood, not metal. The small ornaments are lead. Originally the doorway was completely exposed and there was only a small "stoop." The front door lock is of British manufacture. It has an open, panelled stairway in the Federal style. The cherry stair rail is 18th century in concept and has simple, square balusters. However, the newell which is usually the most stylish part of a stair-rail is quite definitely early 19th century in character. The house originally had a central chimney which is usually characteristic of an 18th century floor plan. This feature suggests the possibility that the house may have been built earlier than its present appearance. The mantle in the rear parlor is original, except perhaps for its shelf, and is a charming example of a small Roslyn mantle of about 1825.

The kitchen is also worthy of comment, as its appearance has



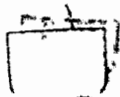
scarcely changed since it was built in the late 19th century. It still retains its original furniture, cabinets, and wood-burning range. Since many of the Landmark Society members may never have had the pleasure of the abundance of a kitchen of this sort, light refreshments will be served in this room. The fine bootscraper at the kitchen entrance may be the work of G. H. Baxter, a local blacksmith, who lived in the house prior to 1856.

THE AALUND HOUSE #1  
1629 Northern Boulevard

The Aalund #1 house is shown on the Beers-Corstock map as belonging to C. H. Pearsall. It is probably the "Mrs. Pearsall" house of the Walling map. This house is more primitive than the Smith House and is earlier in concept. However, its mouldings date it in a later period, and it may be assumed to have been built within a few years of the Gerry and Moreland houses.

It retains much 18th century flavor with its steep, enclosed stairway, placed opposite the entrance door. The west chamber has a vertically sheathed wall with built-in cabinets in the mid-18th century manner, but with the fine beading of 1790 and later. There is a bolection moulding around the fireplace, an early 18th century detail, but the moulding itself is executed in the Greek Revival style of the second quarter of the 19th century. The dentilled cornice of the exterior facade is in the Federal style of the late 18th - early 19th century. The house is a remarkable example of the survival of architectural concepts and construction techniques extending over the period of a century or longer. However, the decorative detail provides the clue to dating. The Greek Revival mouldings cannot be later alterations as they are an integral part of the original design. However, they cannot have been made prior to the second quarter of the 19th century.

Incidentally, the window sill motif used in the principle rooms



of this house may be unique to Roslyn houses. It may possibly identify the work of a specific shop or carpenter. It appears also in the Moreland House and others and will be described in detail below.

THE GERRY HOUSE  
105 Main Street

Like the Aalund House #1 and the Moreland House, the Gerry House may be placed in the second quarter of the 19th century, the period during which most of the surviving Roslyn houses were built. It is shown on the Walling map as belonging to W. Valentine, whose family owned most of what is now Roslyn Park. It is the most sophisticated of the houses reviewed thus far. Its interior decorative detail in the Greek Revival manner was in high style when it was installed, and the mouldings themselves show subtle differences from room to room, depending on their importance. It is the first of the houses described to have cornice mouldings, panelling under the windows in the more important rooms. The second, or street floor, is in almost original condition. The front and rear door locks were made by A. Searing of Jamaica, prior to 1840, when the name of the firm changed. Almost all the windows, throughout the house, are original. The main staircase, with its handsome mahogany rail, extends from the second to the originally unimportant third floor. There are definite front and rear parlors, kitchen and dining rooms, although the bedrooms probably had movable board interior walls and doors as does the rear chamber today. Notwithstanding its stylish interior, the exterior is quite reactionary. The Cape Cod profile has survived, and by this time one would have expected the gable end of the house to have faced the street. The roof has been raised with two dormers but the original roof line is easily seen. The brick walls of the first storey are laid in Flemish bond, a 17th century technique. Inside, "the closed end" secondary stairway is an early detail which may have once been completely enclosed. The house shows, for the first time in this group, the problem

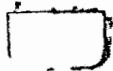


the second floor from the street, and the principle staircase starts opposite a window on the second floor and ascends to the relatively unimportant third storey. Originally this treatment made a little more sense than it does today, as there was a garden entrance to the rear of the second floor, which was eliminated when the present rear wing was built. Part of the original doorway, with its over-door window may still be seen. It is likely that visitors arriving by horseback or vehicle used this entrance. Like the Gerry house also, it was panelled under the principle stairway, and under some of the principle windows, in the Greek Revival style. The secondary stairway was originally "closed end" and may have even been completely enclosed. Important windows which are not fully panelled under the sills have the same deeply incised triple sill panels as the first Aalund house. Since the Greek Revival mouldings in the Moreland house are similar to some of those in both the first Aalund and Gerry houses, a cross-section diagram has not been included. In its place is shown a drawing of its window sill treatment which may be unique to some Roslyn houses and may actually be a "trademark" of a specific carpenter.

The house is furnished throughout in 18th and early 19th century country furniture, much of it from Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

BYCAMORE LODGE  
THE FAHNSTOCK HOUSE  
Bryant Avenue

The last two houses of our group represent a departure from the other houses. All the others are, in one way or another, some form of modification of the basic Cape Cod cottage, a distinct American type. While some are called Greek Revival, etc., these characteristics are merely decorative appendages, and the fundamental shapes of the houses are quite similar. This does not imply that only one type of house was built in the United States prior to the mid-19th century, as the large country homes and the more pretentious of the town houses were built in






true Queen Anne, Georgian, or Federal styles. However, apart from the houses of the rich, especially in New England and the neighboring states, the homes of all classes of Americans were likely to be some form of Cape Cod cottage.

During the early years of the 19th century, the Romantic Revival developed. This became evident in all the arts, including architecture. Ladies wore Grecian robes, and every landscape painting had at least one dramatic weeping willow with a romantic pair beneath. Life in the U. S. became secure, and the more prosperous and better educated of its citizens could turn once more to Europe for cultural inspiration, without odium. Many Americans took trips abroad, especially to England and Italy. Horace Walpole's Gothic Revival started at Stansbury Hill during the late 18th century, and by the early 19th had spread to America. Houses were built in the Gothic and Tudor styles, so that they very closely resembled contemporary houses in England. At first only the very rich could afford such houses, as residences or as follies or garden ornaments. Originally, the Gothic style was very concentrated, but became diluted as it filtered down through the economic levels of society. In highly extenuated form it persisted until the late 19th or early 20th century.

Sycamore Lodge is a Gothic Revival house with Flemish gable ends. In stone it could have been built in England and in either case was meant to resemble an English country house of the Renaissance. It is perhaps the finest Flemish gable-end house in the U. S. It is unfortunate that its architect is not known, because it was indeed designed by an architect who was a first rate man in his time. If the Roslyn Landmark Society survives, its architect must become known. Sycamore Lodge is not shown on the Walling or Beers-Comstock maps as they do not extend this far north. It was standing in 1851, at which time it was apparently given as a wedding gift to Admiral and Mrs. William A. Emory. Local tradition credits it with having been built in 1843, and stylistically it could easily have been built in that year or even earlier. It was absolutely the last word, with great unanimity of design between the interior and exterior. The interior and exterior mouldings are rich, strong and deeply cut. They



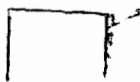
are reproductions in wood and gesso (on the cornices) of Medieval and Renaissance stone mouldings. The scenic frieze in the dining room is European and contemporary with the house.

AALUND HOUSE #2  
Railroad Avenue

The second Aalund house is a part of the same Romantic Revival movement as Sycamore Lodge, but was designed to resemble a Swiss chalet rather than a Renaissance English Country house. It is not shown on either the Walling or Beers-Comstock maps, but was photographed by George Brainard when he worked in Roslyn in 1879. Its west wing and rear addition are later.

Aalund House #2 also differs from Sycamore Lodge in that it was built primarily to be a sort of garden ornament on a country estate, and was not meant to be lived in by the owners of the property. For this reason, the greater part of the architectural effort was expended on its exterior. Its first storey of cut stone, of different types to form a pattern, is probably the only one of its sort in Roslyn. Its "flying gallery" unsupported by columns has been destroyed by vandals, but the great supporting brackets remain. Its dominant roof with its great overhang, a construction of hip over gable-ended, is the type known as "Jerkin-headed." This roof type is extremely rare in the U. S. and may be unique in Roslyn.

In comparison with the rich exterior, the interior is somewhat unpretentious, apart from the mahogany railed principle staircase. The interior detail, where it has survived, is Gothic in character. It is interesting to note that even at this late date, the architect, (and this house certainly must have been designed by one) was unable to solve the problem of what to do with the main floor, when the house is built into a hillside. In this case, as in the Moreland and Gerry houses, he placed it on the second floor. The second Aalund house is also worthy of comment for a completely different reason. Its owners have acquired it recently following more than ten years of vacancy. During this period the house



was badly vandalized. Undismayed by the monumental job ahead of them, the new owners pitched into it themselves. Merely the removal of debris was an heroic job. However, the restoration is underway now and the job has at least been analyzed and they know what they have to do. Each step of the restoration is being studied to assure that the original appearance will be restored. We hope that in the not too distant future we will be able to include this house in another Landmark Society tour and hope that at that time it will be standing in its cobbled forecourt, behind its iron gates with its gallery restored, and glistening in its new paint.