

The Historic Dimension Series

A student publication series by the UNCG Department of Interior Architecture



"Everything made by man's hand has a form which must be either beautiful or ugly; beautiful if it is in accord with nature and helps her; ugly if it is discordant with nature, and thwarts her. It cannot be indifferent."

-William Morris

In Harmony with Nature: The Arts & Crafts Style in the 'Land of the Sky'

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From time immemorial, people have been drawn to the sweeping beauty and bountiful resources of the mountains of western North Carolina. Native Americans had long been hunting amidst the high peaks and deep valleys when land-hungry and adventurous residents of the Piedmont climbed the mountains in the 18th century, disregarding royal proclamations forbidding such actions. Despite the remoteness of the region, increasing numbers of settlers braved the harsh living conditions, which often separated them from events and movements in the civilized world.

During the 19th century, droves of city-weary urbanites began traveling to the mountains, where they sought a refuge from the ills of modern society and the touted healing effects of the thin atmosphere. The rugged mountains and their equally rugged residents became the subjects of travel writers in early magazines like *Harper's Weekly* and *The Atlantic Monthly*, encouraging more industrialists to escape to growing resort villages like Brevard, Hot Springs, Blowing Rock, and Asheville. When they arrived, they found an anachronistic "strange land and peculiar people" that seemed to be frozen in a time past (Harney).

By the mid-1800s, western North Carolina was a top destination for middle- and upper-class families from the East Coast. Architects were commissioned to build hotels and communities to accommodate the growing tourism industry, and they found

the Arts and Crafts style, with its appreciation for and incorporation of the landscape and native materials, a good fit for the area. The powerful presence of the natural environment, combined with the influence of crafts communities and schools, like Biltmore Village, Allenstand, and Penland School of Craft, resulted in the perseverance of Arts and Crafts influence in mountain retreats, even as the style faded from national prominence after World War I. In the city of Asheville, one of the only urban centers in the region, architects and builders continued to incorporate elements of Arts and Crafts design even as new, more modern styles such as Art Deco and Beaux Arts became popular as well. The style continues to flourish in new construction today.

Origins of the Movement

The Arts and Crafts movement emerged in England out of the Victorian social conscience. A multitude of reform movements aimed to relieve 19th-century Britain from the many troubles related to industrialization. The mostly middle-class reformers were divided in their opinions on how to address the rising rates of poverty, disease, and substance abuse in working-class neighborhoods. Some targeted the people who made up the working class, encouraging education, temperance, and church attendance. Others believed that it was the nature of work that had become corrupt and alienating, proposing ways to return to workers a sense of pride and investment in the products of their labor. Over time, the Arts and Crafts philosophy merged these



Fig. 2: William Morris's Red House, built in 1860, often believed to be the first Arts and Crafts style building. Photo by Steve Cadman.

two approaches. Its appreciation of handmade materials reunited the designer with the product while crafts communities and settlement schools, like Toynbee Hall in London, provided educational opportunities for members of the lower class and circulated the movement's values.

The roots of the Arts and Crafts style can be traced to British theorists and artists A.W.N. Pugin (1812-1852), John Ruskin (1819-1900), and William Morris (1819-1896), whose writings make up the foundation of the style's ruling principles. Rejecting what they saw as the impractical devotion to perfect symmetry by popular neo-Classical designers, they were inspired by the utility and artistic expression of the medieval Gothic style. Morris's own Red House, completed in 1860, is considered to be the first Arts and Crafts structure. It sets the standard for the style, which is identified by the common principles of unified, simplistic design; practical layout; individualism; joy in labor; and adherence to local traditions and materials (Kardon, 111).

Ruskin and Morris saw in the Gothic tradition an opportunity to reform the nature of work, which the Industrial Revolution had so drastically altered, "transform[ing] this anxiety over loss of control by celebrating the autonomy and independence of the past" (Kardon, 35). By the middle of the 19th century, reformers acknowledged that workers had become estranged from both their labor and the products that they created, the quality of which, many believed, was degraded as a result. The proponents of the burgeoning Arts and Crafts movement believed that the return to traditional styles and methods would "re-establish a harmony between architect, designer, and craftsman and ... bring handcraftsmanship to the production of well-designed, affordable, everyday objects" (Cumming & Kaplan, 6).

In order to achieve these goals, Arts and Crafts designers looked to nature and the surrounding built envi-



Fig. 3: Left, Ruskin by John Everett Millais, 1853-54.

Fig. 4: Right, Morris by William Blake Richmond, ca. 1882, National Portrait Gallery.

ronment for inspiration. Pugin, whose writings would inspire Ruskin and Morris, was the first to encourage the discerning use of materials based on the purpose and location of the building: "In pure architecture the smallest detail should have a meaning or serve a purpose," he wrote in *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* (1895), "and even the construction itself should vary with the material employed, and the designs should be adapted to the material in which they are executed" (2). This is one of the reasons that Pugin believed medieval designers to be superior to his contemporaries: "[T]he architects of the middle ages were the first who turned the natural properties of the various materials to their full account, and made their mechanism a vehicle for their art" (2).

The use of local materials in Arts and Crafts designs allowed buildings to appear as an "organic form emerging from the landscape" (Cumming & Kaplan, 41). In order to achieve the principle of harmony and balance, designers considered not only a building's exterior but also its grounds and interior space, which was "devised to cohabit with the architecture in a ... coalescent total environment" (Kardon, 31). As such, interior architectural elements included hand-hewn wood panels and joists, locally made brick, native stone, and wrought-iron elements left exposed to highlight both the materials as well as the excellent craftsmanship. Many designers were loath to imagine their creations marred by discordant accessories, and so commissioned craftsmen to create rustic furniture and accents featuring handcrafted details with clean lines and clear purpose.

Arts and Crafts in America

By the 1850s, this celebration of "vernacular materials and forms," as advanced by Pugin and further explored by writers like Ruskin and Morris, had become widely accepted in the architecture of Great Britain (Cumming & Kaplan, 31). The teachings and principles of the Arts and Crafts movement drifted across the Atlantic in the late 19th century, influencing American designers, art-

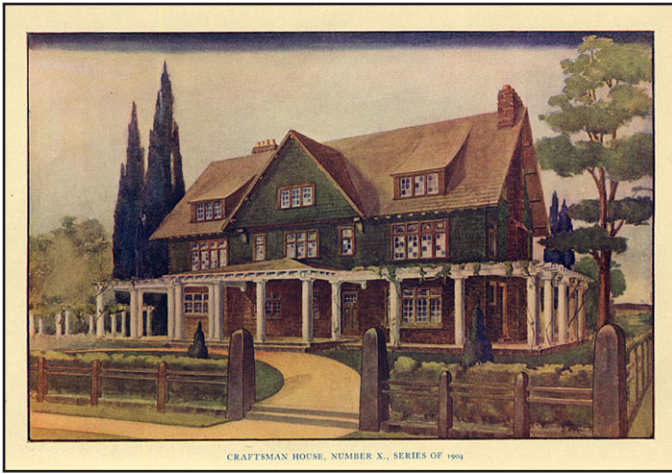


Fig. 5: First home design from *The Craftsman* (Jan. 1904). Image courtesy of Digital Library for the Decorative Arts and Material Culture, University of Wisconsin.

ists, and social reformers who were equally appalled by the quickly declining living and working conditions in their own cities. The first official Arts and Crafts societies were established in Boston and Chicago in 1897, and within only a few years, regional variations of the movement had spread across the United States.

The movement's principles were disseminated via newly formed crafts schools and professional societies and serials like *Handicraft*, *House Beautiful*, *The Ladies Home Journal*, and furniture-maker Gustav Stickley's *The Craftsman*. The latter publication was so influential that the U.S. movement is often dated from the magazine's founding in 1901 to its dissolution in 1916. The modest, affordable house plans that he published—featuring one-and-a-half stories, low-pitched roofs with overhanging eaves, and exposed stone and woodwork—became synonymous with American Arts and Crafts style.

In addition to the distinct Craftsman bungalow, which became especially popular in California, the Arts and Crafts tradition in the United States included revivals of British styles, particularly Gothic, Tudor, and Queen Anne. In their quest to find a style that captured the American spirit, however, reformers in the 19th century could find little more quintessentially American than the Revolutionary period, despite the fact that its architecture had been inherited from Great Britain. In the same way that the Middle Ages inspired Ruskin and Morris, therefore, Americans romanticized the Colonial age as one of virtuous craftsmen whose labor had not yet been denigrated by the corrupting force of industrialization. They rejected the current Victorian style in favor of colonial-inspired designs with elements inspired by the guiding principles of the Arts and Crafts movement: local materials, simple design, and sensitivity to the surrounding physical and built environment.

Central to the Arts and Crafts philosophy in America and elsewhere was the idea of reform. Not only did



Fig. 6: Roycrofters working in East Aurora, New York, c. 1900. Photo by Frances Benjamin Johnston (LOC).

a return to pre-industrial work ethics promise to better both the worker and the product, but a responsibly built home also conveyed values that the advocates of reform felt were necessary for a stable, moral, and prosperous society. Educated men and women across the United States were inspired by London's Toynbee Hall to establish crafts schools and societies that would teach members of the lower classes traditional skills like woodworking, bookbinding, weaving, and pottery-making. Reformers like Jane Addams, who founded her Hull House in Chicago in 1889, believed that the work not only had a purifying effect in and of itself but also gave less fortunate citizens practical skills with which they could earn a living.

Many cities—including Cincinnati, Boston, and New York—had institutions similar to the Hull House, though the movement was not limited to cities. Rural areas, especially those with strong traditions of folk crafts, were popular because they offered a retreat from the cities, which corrupted both labor and the morals of its residents. Rose Valley near Philadelphia and the New York communities of Byrdcliffe in Woodstock and the Roycrofters in East Aurora were all attempts at establishing arts and crafts utopias.

Byrdcliffe and Rose Valley were far more idealistic than the Roycroft community, due in part to its founder. Elbert Hubbard (1856-1915), often credited as the first to employ mass-marketing techniques such as attractive packaging and direct mail sales, started the community in 1895 and used his background in marketing to promote the furnishings crafted by his workers. Unlike in other communities, Roycrofters did not directly profit from the products of their labor, instead working for minimum wage just like in factories. That being said,



Fig. 7: An early 20th century map drawn by John Campbell. Photo courtesy of the Craft Revival Project, Hunter Library, Special Collections, Western Carolina University.

Hubbard had a reputation for benevolence and generosity, and the quality of life in the community greatly surpassed that of the crowded, disease-ridden tenements.

Thanks to Hubbard's marketing prowess, aided by the advertisements in publications like *The Craftsman*, Roycroft furnishings became popular with upper- and middle-class Americans, whose desire for hand-made goods was more about style than morals. His practices often led to criticism that he was cheapening the standards of the Arts and Crafts. Though he never stopped claiming the Roycroft community was socialist in its principles, it was his ability to find a commercial market for the community's products that allowed it to survive for more than 40 years, far longer than other, less successful models.

Ultimately, the Arts and Crafts movement failed in its efforts to improve working-class lives. Goods made by hand, though higher in quality, were far more expensive than machine-made ones. The products of craftsmen, therefore, could only be enjoyed by people with plenty of disposable income, though the California bungalows proved to be an exception to this rule.

As these wealthy families began utilizing the nation's growing transportation networks to escape the cities to remote coastal and mountain retreats, they found the Arts and Crafts style fitting for their bucolic surroundings in rural destinations across the country. Western travelers often chose the Rocky Mountains as their destinations, while on the East Coast, wealthy urbanites looking for a vacation spot closer to home preferred the Appalachian Mountains of western North Carolina. The sweeping resorts built to accommodate their needs featured rugged details that offered links to both nature and the past.

The Arts and Crafts movement faded in national significance by 1920, as the post-war economic boom led to the fixture of consumerism in the American psyche. The turn of the tide was marked by the bankruptcy of movement's icon *The Craftsman* in 1915. That same year, Elbert Hubbard and his wife died as passengers of the *Lusitania*, and though the Roycroft community remained open until 1938, it suffered from the death of the market-

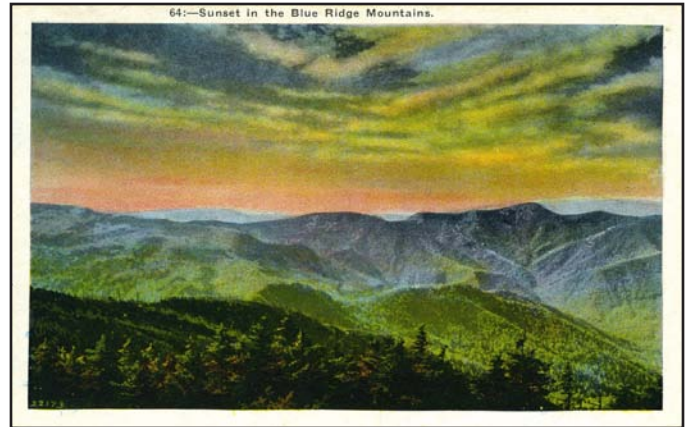


Fig. 8: A postcard promoting the Blue Ridge Mountains. Photo courtesy of LeCompte Postcard Collection, D.H. Ramsey Special Collections, UNC-Asheville.

ing genius along with the popular decline of the style. The ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement did not completely disappear, however. With the onset of the Great Depression in the 1930s, the U.S. government rekindled the glorification of the skilled craftsman with its New Deal construction projects and craft societies that were reminiscent of the turn-of-the-century settlement houses. In southern Appalachia, where the Arts and Crafts style had persevered due to the vacation resorts and communities, this resulted in what has been called by Anna Fariello a "third wave" of the Arts and Crafts movement, which brought an increased awareness of the local residents and folk traditions of the region.

'The Land of the Sky'

Southerners had been escaping to the southern Appalachian Mountains since before the Civil War, but by the 1870s, political leaders and entrepreneurs began actively promoting the region to northern industrialists as well. Dubbed "The Land of the Sky" and "The Switzerland of America," small communities like Hot Springs, Brevard, Montreat, Lake Junaluska, and Blowing Rock encouraged tourists to visit the mountains to restore both their physical and mental health. By far the largest city in western North Carolina, Asheville—the population of which grew from 1,400 in 1880 to 10,000 in 1890—was attractive because it offered many of the same benefits with a bit more "civilization" than the more remote, less sophisticated destinations.

As such, it became a playground of some of America's wealthiest denizens, including George Washington Vanderbilt (1862-1914), who visited the area with his mother in 1888 and immediately acquired 125,000 acres of land and began plans to build a summer retreat for his family. The youngest son of William Henry Vanderbilt and grandson of the railroad magnate Cornelius Vanderbilt, George Vanderbilt "had little interest in the family's shipping and railroad empire and the New York social whirl, preferring instead agrarian pursuits, esoteric liter-



Fig. 9: The front of the French chateau-inspired Biltmore Estate. Photo by Angi English (Flickr).

ary interests, hunting, and travel” (NRHP 1979). The resulting mansion, which he called Biltmore, provided him the luxury to which he was accustomed while giving him access to the natural beauty and outdoor recreation of the mountains. It was completed in 1895 and was expansive, featuring four acres of floor space, 250 rooms (including 34 bedrooms), an electrically lighted swimming pool, and a bowling alley. Vanderbilt commissioned some of the nation’s most talented and well-known architects—led by Richard Morris Hunt (1827-1895) and Central Park designer Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903)—and craftsmen to design the mansion and its grounds. Not only did the presence of such a prominent socialite increase the city’s attractiveness to wealthy travelers but the designers and artisans who came to the region to work on Biltmore often stayed after it was finished, establishing in Asheville a reputation for high-quality craftsmanship and architecture. Among these was Richard Sharp Smith, the British supervising architect at Biltmore, who would go on to design and build a number of Arts and Crafts-inspired homes in the area.

Arts & Crafts in Asheville

Throughout its history, Asheville’s built environment has been shaped by its landscape. Though the downtown features a number of modernist buildings added in the 1920s and 1930s, *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina* notes that many of the buildings in the city include “lively variations on the romantic and naturalistic motifs deemed suitable to the mountain setting” ranging from picturesque cottages; Queen Anne, Swiss chalet and Tudor revival styles; romantic chateaus (like the Biltmore); English manor houses featuring half-timbering and the rough stucco called pebbledash; and Adirondack-style homes with log and native stone. Use of native materials made each of these styles unique to the region: “Conventional ... architectural ideas ... took on a different character when rendered in smooth, round river rocks, irregular fieldstone, or rough-cut quarried blocks. Local stonework in a variety of colors and textures gave individuality to otherwise standard building forms ...” (59). Today, the historic districts of Biltmore

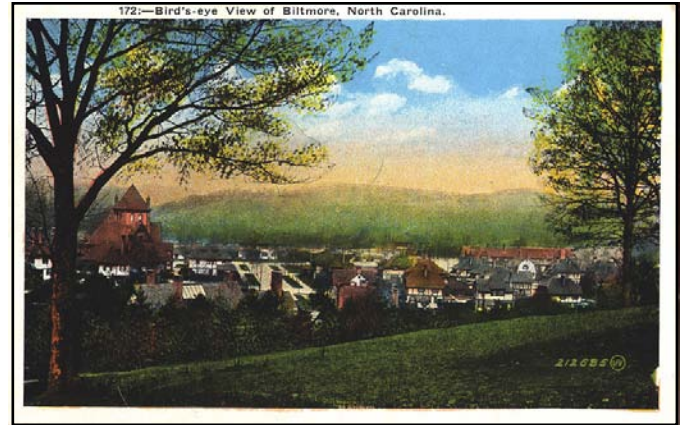


Fig. 10: A postcard offering a “Bird’s Eye View of Biltmore, North Carolina.” Photo courtesy of LeCompte Postcard Collection, D.H. Ramsey Special Collections, UNC-Asheville.

Village, Montford, Albermarle Park (today known as the Manor and Cottages), and Grove Park are excellent examples of the unique way the Arts and Crafts movement evolved in Asheville.

Biltmore Village. When George Vanderbilt purchased his land in the mountains of North Carolina in 1888, his master plan included more than just his French chateau-inspired mansion. Not only did he hire the great American landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted to create for Biltmore a beautiful network of manicured gardens and an expansive arboretum (establishing the nation’s first forestry school in the process), but he also was inspired by the English manorial village tradition to build a nearby community for his employees and their families. Two architects from the Biltmore project—Richard Morris Hunt and his employee Richard Sharp Smith—worked with Olmsted to design what would become known as Biltmore Village, which today includes a number of historic structures dating from its founding in 1892 through the 1930s.

Vanderbilt located his community on the site of the existing village of Best, named after its founder and owner of the Western North Carolina Railroad William J. Best. In 1896, the original train station—the first to service Asheville when it opened in 1880—was demolished and replaced by the Southern Railway Passenger Depot, one of the four buildings in the village designed by Richard Morris Hunt. The Biltmore’s leading architect also designed the All Souls Episcopal Church and Parish House (1896) directly south of the depot; the two buildings, now connected, make up the tallest and largest structure in the village. The rest of the village, which includes the Hunt-designed Biltmore Estate Office (1896)—his fourth and final contribution to the community—to the west and the Richard Sharp Smith-designed cottage district (1896-1900) to the east, spreads out like a fan along this north-south axis.



Fig. 11: All Souls Episcopal Church, Biltmore Village, Asheville, NC. Photo by David Torcivia (Flickr).

Though the village has not remained totally intact, Hunt's four structures, Smith's original 14 cottages, the hospital (1907), and seven other buildings have been preserved. Each features unique components, but prevailing common themes—such as half-timbering, steeply pitched roofs, and pebbledash (which he might have actually introduced to the area)—are evident throughout the district. This became the Biltmore Village vernacular style, the result of Vanderbilt's vision of an English-style mountain manor and the British influence of Hunt and Smith (both of whom were born in England). Smith became one of Asheville's most successful architects during the crucial period between the 1880s and 1920s—when the city's population grew from 2,600 to 50,200—and was responsible for making the style a dominant and recognizable part of the city's built environment. Asheville architectural historian Clay Griffith has noted Smith's importance:

“[H]e worked in a wide range of styles including Tudor Revival, Colonial Revival, Classical Revival, and Craftsman modes. In the period from 1900 to 1920, [he] was responsible for virtually every major structure in downtown Asheville. ... The influence of Richard Sharp

UNCG The Historic Dimension Series: 6



Fig. 12: An original cottage by Richard Sharp Smith, today a shoe store, in Biltmore Village. Photo by “Teemu008” (Flickr).

Smith's architecture in Asheville and western North Carolina during the first quarter of the 20th century cannot be overstated.”

Smith often combined the English-influenced style—with its prominent pebbledash and half-timbering—along with various features associated with the Arts and Crafts movement—such as shingle siding, unenclosed eave overhangs with exposed roof rafters, and decorative beams in gable ends—into other residential communities that emerged in Asheville, such as Montford and Grove Park, during its early-20th century boom (NRHP 1979 & 2008). His design was “simple and unaffected, in keeping with the informal and unpretentious customs and lifestyle of the mountain region” (NRHP 1977b). Because there was no dominant architectural tradition that had been established in the area, Smith's motifs, often adopted by other architects, represent a local vernacular and today are considered part of the traditional Asheville style (NRHP 1977b).

The National Register of Historic Places nomination for Biltmore Village notes that the community began to lose its cohesiveness after Vanderbilt's death in 1913, as the heirs to the Vanderbilt estate dealt with financial pressures and new construction was built with little concern for the existing fabric. Between the 1930s and 1970s, a number of the original buildings were lost to development, including Smith's shopping block and school, a number of the most substantial cottages, and an entire section of smaller cottages (NRHP 1979). Preservation efforts began in earnest in the 1970s. Today, Biltmore Village houses a wide variety of upscale shops and cafés, many of which are located in buildings original to the community.

Montford Area Historic District. Before Asheville experienced its boom at the turn of the 20th century, Montford



Fig. 13: 288 Montford Avenue (the Otis Green House) in the Montford Area Historic District in Asheville, NC. Designed by Richard Sharp Smith around 1900, “it embodies the eclecticism characteristic of Smith’s work, combining flourishes of the Shingle style, Queen Anne and Colonial Revival styles of architecture.” Photo by Jonathan Carnwright (Flickr).

was an independent, small community north of Asheville. With its boom in the late 1800s, however, developers bought up surrounding land for new suburbs to house the quickly expanding population (which grew 400 percent between 1880 and 1890, then continued to increase by 25 to 40 percent until 1930). The Asheville Loan, Construction, and Improvement Company purchased acreage around the existing Montford community with these intentions, but it was only after lumber tycoon George Willis Pack acquired the land that the development began to take off. According to the National Register nomination material, the district’s growth patterns echoed the city’s, growing rapidly between 1889 and 1920. By 1892, the streetcar line extended into the area, and Montford was incorporated in 1893. Its population doubled between 1896 and 1900 and then doubled again over the following decade, during which it became part of the city of Asheville. The area continued to grow until 1930, when the effects of the Great Depression eliminated the demand for new house construction.

Today, more than 600 buildings of various architectural styles make up the Montford Area Historic District, which was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 1977. It was the city’s leading middle-class neighborhood at its height, though it would be eclipsed by the Biltmore Village and Grove Park in the 1930s. Most of the residents in the community were not native to Asheville; some came from other cities in the state, but many others were transplants from the southern, midwestern, and northwestern United States as well as foreign countries (particularly Great Britain). Initially working-class African Americans lived amongst white residents, though that tradition did not hold. Eventually, blacks were pushed to the fringes or out of the neighborhood altogether (NHRP 1977b).



Figure 14: 144 Montford Avenue in the Montford Area Historic District in Asheville, NC (c. 1907). Possibly designed by Richard Sharp Smith. Photo by Jonathan Carnwright (Flickr).

Montford homes—which range from small, modest cottages to larger, more impressive structures—often feature a blend of motifs from a variety of styles, including Queen Anne, Shingle, Bungalow, and Colonial Revival. The neighborhood offers few individually significant structures, but “as a body reflect in a range of ways Asheville’s cosmopolitan architectural sensibilities” (NHRP 1977b).

Given Montford’s period of significance, it is unsurprising that Biltmore architect Richard Sharp Smith—who ran the city’s largest architectural firm in the early 20th century—was heavily involved in its development. Though it cannot be confirmed, it is widely assumed that he or his firm designed as many as 30 of the homes in the neighborhood and his “picturesque and informal” style is well represented. Regardless of the size or complexity of the design, Sharp’s use of “natural materials like stone, stucco, and shingles, earth colors, and informal composition became an established vernacular” and was mirrored throughout the district (NRHP 1977b). The National Register nomination notes that “the recurrence of many of the motifs throughout the district weaves a fabric of neighborhood tradition that was picked up in the work of other architects and builders,” further spreading Smith’s influence throughout the city (NRHP 1977b).

Manor and Cottages (formerly Albermarle Park). The Manor and Cottages of Albermarle Park were built between 1897 and 1970, though the bulk of the construction took place before 1920, during the city’s “dramatic turn-of-the-century resort town boom era” (Swain, 199). William Green Raoul, another railroad tycoon, purchased the 32-acre tract in 1886, but was unable to build his planned retreat due to ill health. After his son, Thomas



Fig. 15: *The Manor House in the area formerly called Albermarle Park. Photo by Jonathan Carnwright (Flickr).*

Raoul, moved to Asheville to recover from tuberculosis, he began work on a 25-room, English-style country manor (Figure 9), which he planned to rent out as a boarding house, and surrounding cottages. Raoul worked with New York architect Bradford Gilbert to design the picturesque retreat, which was “strongly characteristic of the resorts of America from the New England Coast to California” (NRHP 1978).

The Manor and two cottages, which were accessible from Asheville via street car, opened to the public in 1899, with 16 more added by 1914. The Manor and Cottages feature fine materials and quality craftsmanship, executed by many of the same master craftsmen (particularly the Italian woodworkers) brought from Europe to Asheville to work on Vanderbilt’s mansion. The promotional material promised visitors that they could find no greater accommodations anywhere in the country:

“The rooms on the west and south open upon a fine view of the Blue Ridge Mountains in the distance ... The rooms are well furnished and have beds which are not surpassed by the finest hotels in the large cities. The building is lighted throughout by electricity and thoroughly heated by steam” (NRHP 1977a).

A variety of Arts and Crafts styles—including Craftsman bungalows, Shingle, and Tudor and Colonial Revival—are utilized throughout the district, which includes the Manor, Club House (added in 1903), and 19 cottages, some of which were built as private residences. Together they feature natural materials, exposed timber framing, rockwork, shingle siding, and the pebbledash stucco favored by Richard Sharp Smith, who earned a number of commissions in the village after the death of Gilbert in 1911. The community is recognized for its complementary relation to its steep landscape and “[t]he rich craftsmanship and informal picturesqueness of the Manor [that] are related to Biltmore Village and to much of the early-20th-century residential fabric of Asheville” (Swain, 199). The community has been bought and sold a number of times (including in 1920 by E.W. Grove, developer of Grove Park) and today most of the cottages have become private residences. The community



Fig. 16: *Clower Cottage in the area formerly called Albermarle Park, Asheville, NC. Photo by Jonathan Carnwright (Flickr)*

remains intact, however, and is a testament to Asheville’s popularity as a tourist destination in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (NPS, Manor & Cottages).

Grove Park Inn and Historic District. The Grove Park Historic District is located just to the north of the Manor and Cottages of Albermarle Park. Pharmaceutical magnate E.W. Grove began plans for the residential community in 1905, five years after he moved to Asheville from St. Louis. The first plots were sold in 1908, with sales picking up after the nearby Grove Park Inn—which became a world-renowned resort—opened in 1913. A second phase of development began in 1914 to accommodate the increased demand for the location.

The Grove Park Inn is a shining example of Arts and Crafts style in the region, though it deviates from the vernacular style established by Richard Sharp Smith. Grove was inspired to create a resort lodge “grand enough to mirror the majesty of the mountains,” reminiscent of those found in Yellowstone Park (NPS, Grove Park Inn). After finding no local architects who bought into his plan, Grove entrusted the design of the Inn to his son-in-law Fred L. Seely, who, despite his lack of formal training, achieved an “unusual and striking intimacy between the building and its natural environment” (NPS, Grove Park Inn).

Like the early Arts and Crafts advocates in England, Grove was adamant that the interior of the Inn be both high in quality and reflective of the rugged nature of the surrounding environment. He decorated the Inn with fine appointments from around the globe, including hundreds of pieces of handmade furniture and copper lighting fixtures from the Roycrofters. Today, the Grove Park Inn has maintained its reputation for fine accommodations and rustic beauty and its appeal has remained constant; the imposing stone and hand-hewn wood features, complemented by wicker furniture and iron detailing, make guests feel both close to nature as



Fig. 17: The Grove Park Inn, which anchors the surrounding residential neighborhood. Photo by David Oppenheimier (Flickr).

well as the past. Since its construction, the Inn—with its unique silhouette that juts out of a craggy foundation, topped by its distinctive red-tile roof—has been an Asheville landmark. It also features the largest collection of Arts and Crafts-era furniture, including not only the pieces made by the Roycrofters but also a significant assortment of Stickley products.

Unlike the Inn, Grove employed prominent designers for the surrounding community. Landscape architect Chauncey Beadle, who had been hired by Frederick Law Olmstead for the Biltmore project, designed the streetscape, which featured gently curving streets lined with large tree canopies and stone retaining walls. While Montford and Albermarle Park had been street-car suburbs, the National Register nomination form notes that Grove planned his neighborhood for the newest form of transportation: the automobile. This is reflected in the alleyways and garages present in Grove Park, most of which were part of the original design and construction. The Grove Park lots are large—most around one-third to one-half of an acre—and feature elements of the natural terrain, with large trees, wooded hillsides, and steep elevations. Richard Sharp Smith, of course, was among the residential designers, who utilized a wide range of architectural styles, including Colonial and Tudor Revival, Craftsman bungalow, and American Four Square. Native stone was used to construct retaining walls and staircases, an element that is also reflected throughout the neighborhood’s architectural details.

The ‘Civilizing’ Effect of Crafts Schools

At the same time that wealthy denizens were seeking luxurious but rustic accommodations in Asheville, the region’s native population became a target of reform efforts. In the cities, reformers believed that rapid industri-



Fig. 18: Fireplace in the Grove Park Inn (note the Roycroft chandelier). Photo by Jacqueline Poggi (Flickr).

alization had robbed workers of the value of their labor. However, urban observers discovered that the lack of industry in the mountains left residents backwards and uncivilized, unable to evolve because of their inability to participate in the national market economy. As a result, a number of wealthy women established crafts communities and settlement schools to teach mountain men, women, and children skills based on the folk traditions of the region, particularly basketry, woodworking, pottery-throwing, and weaving. This type of education was believed to be more practical for rural residents than traditional education and did not threaten to encourage young people to leave the family farms. Instead, “crafts education seemed to hold out the promise of an improved rural life by teaching skills needed to supplement income, to occupy leisure time during the winter, and to fill farm-life with the joy that agricultural labor could not provide” (Shapiro, 228).

In Asheville, one of the most prominent communities to emerge as a part of this reform effort was Biltmore Industries. For decades, Biltmore workers produced high-quality “homespun” for wealthy Americans, who found it satisfied their nostalgia for a simpler—though romanticized and nonexistent—time past. All Soul’s Church in Biltmore Village, hired Eleanor Vance and Charlotte Yale to establish Biltmore Industries, a crafts school that taught carpentry skills to the sons of Biltmore House employees. In 1905, George Vanderbilt’s wife Edith, who had become enamored with the traditional crafts of her mountain home, offered her financial support and encouraged the women to introduce classes in weaving. The resulting “Biltmore Homespun” became popular, thanks in part to ads in *Vogue* and *Harper’s Bazaar*, which touted the wool as “Soft as satin. Light as a feather . . .” For the next decade, Biltmore Village not only looked like a English manor, it operated as one (NRHP 1979).

After George Vanderbilt’s death in 1914 and the exodus of Vance and Yale in 1915, Biltmore Industries began to



Fig. 19: Top, A historic postcard of the Grove Park Inn and Biltmore Industries (to the left). Courtesy of the State Archives of North Carolina.

Fig. 20: Bottom, Biltmore Village today. Photo by “Teemu08” (Flickr).

flounder. In 1917, Edith Vanderbilt sold the organization to Fred Seely, Grove’s son-in-law, who had inherited the Inn. Seely built new facilities to house the machinery and workers. According to the National Park Service “Biltmore Industries” page, the seven buildings:

“... complimented [the Grove Park Inn’s] organic architecture. They form a compact grouping of cottage-like buildings with stuccoed walls, casement windows, and broad sloping roofs that mimic those of the inn. ... Seely further strived to accomplish Vanderbilt’s goal of providing a good living for the members of the Industries together with an education in the traditional crafts. Common to all of the buildings is the presence of folk sayings, painted on walls or carved into doors or ceiling beams, which encourage the workers to give their best. Seely himself is quoted as saying, ‘Life without industry is guilt; industry without art is brutality.’”

Biltmore Industries flourished after its move to Grove Park, becoming popular with prominent Americans, including several presidents and their wives. Eleanor Roosevelt was particularly fond of the industries’ products, and visited the shops in 1934 (NPS, Biltmore Industries). Today, the operation still utilizes the same equipment and procedures that were established when Seely purchased it in 1917. The presence of crafts communities like Biltmore Industries—as well as Allenstand,



Fig. 21: Part of the original section of E.W. Grove’s neighborhood. Photo by “mystuart” (Flickr).

which is called today the Highland Crafts Guild, and the Penland School of Craft, located about 45 minutes away from Asheville—served as “a direct link to the Arts and Crafts movement of England and America during the 19th and 20th centuries,” allowing the style to remain popular in the region into the 21st century (NPS, Biltmore Industries).

Conclusion

For more than a century, the mountains of western North Carolina have embodied a mythical past of brawny workers who lived off the land, a stereotype perpetuated by publications like Margaret Morely’s *The Carolina Mountains* (1913), Frances L. Goodrich’s *Mountain Homespun* (1935), Murial Earley Sheppard’s *Cabins in the Laurel Highlands* (1935), and Allen Eaton’s *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands* (1937). While the log cabin was the quintessential mountain structure, the features of resort architecture provided visitors the best of both worlds, the comfort to which they were accustomed and rustic design whose “materials suggested a life close to nature ... [and] a link with the distant past” (Cumming & Kaplan, 139).

This demand for the rustic and picturesque was strengthened by the influence of English architects Richard Morris Hunt and—most importantly—Richard Sharp Smith, who developed an Asheville vernacular incorporating various motifs of the Arts and Crafts style. The crafts schools and communities—emboldened by the sudden collapse of Asheville’s formerly booming economy in the 1930s—added to the mountains’ association with handmade, traditional goods. Wealthy Americans appropriated these goods and in their hands the Arts and Crafts “movement evolved into a campaign for ‘stylish rusticity’ associated with restored farmhouses and country cottages and with handcrafted furnishings, all offering temporary escape from the vicissitudes of modern, urban life” (Becker, 18).

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