

## **Alternative Housing and the Family Home in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: detailed synopsis**

### **the rise of factories in the late 18<sup>th</sup> - early 19<sup>th</sup> century**

- small scale before ca 1800; industrial buildings are almost domestic in scale and nature; after 1800, the scale changes
- England was the earliest industrialized nation and became a source of ideas about technology and the aesthetics of the machine and of industrial architecture, making this a form of architecture which will be more oriented toward utilitarian goals than most other architecture of this period
- it will also have an impact on ideas about the development of towns since early industries often developed housing for their workers but at the same time, as the separation between worker and manager increased, architecture manifests this separation
- further, there will be a changed attitude toward land, as it becomes something to be exploited for industrial development

### **Old Slater Mill, Sam Slater, in Rhode Island, 1793**

- original mill = 2 and a half storey building on a stone foundation with wood clapboard framing, a cupola, built perpendicular to the river
- overall, built on a domestic scale; similar to meeting house architecture of 18<sup>th</sup> cent
- essentially a conservative Georgian architecture, but made in wood
- interesting development here is that rather than the church as the central focus of the town, we now have a factory as the central focus; no longer a “medieval” village with that change
- the conservative nature of the architecture conveys respectability to industry, and this use of an earlier style to introduce a new idea is something we will continue to see
- the factory is a new building type and must fill three needs:
  - provide space for machines
  - provide an efficient connection to a power source
  - have a strong enough structure to contain machines
- Old Slater represents the standard type for a factory at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century:
- almost 3 stories, a light source in the attic: the windows were also trap-doors, and a long, narrow and tall silhouette

### **Lippitt Mill, RI, 1809:**

- has a clerestory window instead of the trapdoor monitor window
- a belfry on top (another religious reference)
- 4 and a half story building, and wood framed
- in both cases, as well as other factories at this time, scale is limited by the power source, which is generally a river

Industries are growing: a search for sites which will support larger buildings, and as factories become larger, they create two problems: how to appear to be bucolic and rural, and how to

house the workers, who very likely did not live near the factories and obviously could not commute in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century

Corporations begin to develop:

***Boston Manufacturing Co., 1813, Francis Cabot Lowell*** (c/w book example: *William Munson's painting of the Ely Whitney Gun Factory, 1826, figure 8.14*)

note the standardization of the houses, just as the Gun factory used standardized parts

- the prototype for the Merrimack Co., founded in 1822 by Appleton, Jackson and Boott, Lowell MA, after the kinks were worked out in the BMC
- companies like this one begin to buy larger tracts of land, including the water supply available on that land
- absentee capitalists: housing must improve in order to attract managers to live in these new corporate towns
- Lowell had studied the textile industry in England; when he returned to the US, he built a power loom based on the looms he saw in England
- the town plan: mills were built parallel to the river; dormitories were provided for the workers; executive housing for Boott, who also designed it; looked like Georgian houses, arranged in rows, designed to convey "decency" to the workers
- all workers who lived on the site were required to attend church
- some workers lived in a cabins which were not provided by the company – a shanty town which grew up close to the river and the mills
- lower level executives were also provided with houses, and these were in the second Georgian style
- Boott's own house was a Greek revival house but it had a portico, making it look more like a federal style house from the front
- significance: this was a corporate town where workers and buildings alike were owned by the company; no longer can we speak of industry on a domestic scale

### **Townhouses: or middle class housing in the city**

**Davis: Colonnade Row, NY, 1830-33**

- Greek revival townhouses: the town house idea is a row of contiguous houses, a form which clearly lends itself to repetition, as does the modules of Greek architecture
- terrace is recessed behind the columns, raised on rusticated base which contains the entrances
- colossal Corinthian columns which are two stories high with the recessed entrances created an unbroken facade, emphasizing the continuity of both the street and the housing
- at the same time that the Greek revival was influencing public buildings and the occasional house, another shift was taking place: an interest in architecture which would be more responsive to use and which would be more inventive.

Clearly the problem of housing was widespread: by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a growing middle class in this country, contributing to the need for affordable housing, with all of this happening at a time when the country was moving closer to civil war and disunity, the

work place becoming increasingly brutal and unpleasant, and the family and the home environment were seen as the solution.

As Wright observes in the chapter from her book, the pressure on the house came from many directions. On one level, people like Jefferson thought it should look more permanent; with the popularity of the picturesque aesthetic, there was pressure to look more fanciful and individual; the influence of populism contributed to the belief in the use of commonplace materials and a type of vernacular, as opposed to the more individualistic revivals. But there was almost uniform agreement that the individual family home was superior to town houses and that a country which had made individualism its founding virtue had to have houses which promoted individualism.

**Andrew Jackson Downing and Catherine Beecher** were contemporaries, living in mid-19th century America. As contemporaries, it is inevitable that they would have shared certain ideas about home life. And they did: they both viewed the interior spaces of a house as utilitarian envelopes, or distinct spaces related to distinct functions. And they both believed that the enhancement of differences between men and women would help to avert or overcome racial conflicts. Surprisingly, they both had a goal of increasing efficiency in the use of space. Finally, neither was trained as an architect. But the similarities end there.

#### **Downing's pattern books:**

His aesthetic preferences were influenced by the English picturesque landscape, a landscape which would be characterized by irregularity, freedom, imperfections rather than classical balance and order. His houses, in contrast, were more likely to be characterized by symmetry, making his use of the Gothic Revival somewhat unconventional.

As his interest in the aesthetic becomes less important, he never gets rid of the rather "fixed" or rigid interior which may dictate its use to the inhabitants, rather than the other way around. In addition to the preference for the symmetric, his interiors are another departure from the Gothic revival. But Downing was trying to promote a position which, somewhat like Renaissance architecture, believed that the house should reflect its purpose, with that purpose in large part having to do with communication of a message about the family who lived there.

Downing defined morality in the house or more generally in architecture as something which does not hide its purpose and which facilitates doing what it's supposed to do. It is also part of the house in a more symbolic sense. If the style reflected the "touch" of the female hand and heart, it would be moral and beautiful. Downing was important because he promoted an aesthetic vision of the American home but one which was not attached to a particular revival. More problematic, he showed much less interest in how the home functioned on the inside. He talks about function but it's not clear that he really considers function as an independent factor; one feels as though he believes that function will follow from the expression of purpose and fitness and beauty.

**Catherine Beecher** was a "material feminist" – a form of feminism in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup>

century which was concerned with economic arrangements and living arrangements and how they affected women. Unlike many of the material feminists, she did not call for cooperative or collective living arrangements. And unlike the utopian feminists, she did not look for ways to move the kitchen out of the house. She did not reject the role of housewife; her argument was that it was as important as any profession held by a man, needed to be recognized as such, and if women were to perform their role adequately, they should be educated to do so.

Beecher organized her book in much the same way that she directs the woman to organize her house. Hierarchy is an important part of Beecher's model of domesticity: there is an order and hierarchy for tasks; in the home, the woman is queen. Because of her hierarchy which places spiritual needs at the top, and because she equates sensory gratification with a spiritual need, the woman's role in the house is a moral role in a way that the man's role is not.

*The American Woman's Home* was published for the first time in 1869; before that, she had written the exceedingly influential *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, a book which had been reprinted at least 14 times before the *American Woman's Home*. The earlier book, if possible, was even more comprehensive than the later one. What made it so important was the fact that she pulled together the many, disparate functions which women were expected to engage in but if they wanted instruction, they would have had to go to a wide range of separate manuals. Unlike these earlier books which had been written for English audiences, Beecher wrote for Americans and the American environment. Finally, not only did she pull together a wide range of tasks; she united them in political, social, religious and psychological terms.

The political role of her book deserves some mention. Beecher did not contest the difference between gender roles in the country; instead, she tried to find some way to justify gender inequality in a democratic country. She argued that the restriction of women's roles to the domestic sphere removed them from the arena of competition, and that by doing this, the risk of warfare was reduced. She also argued that the difference between genders was the only difference which should be recognized in a democracy—class and racial differences should not be. The importance of this argument comes from the belief that slavery had been created by domestic needs. Beecher argues that by making the household into an efficient economic system, slavery is unnecessary and not justified by racial differences. Women, therefore, submitted to their subordinate role in the interest of social and national welfare which, she went on to argue, was necessary not only to the future of America but to the world.

But she did envision the role of the woman in the house as being equal in value and importance and responsibility to the role of the man in the workplace. Her argument was based on the belief that new domestic environments would eventually support new roles for women in the industrial society that the United States was becoming. Although this was a similar position to that of the cooperative movement, Beecher was committed to the private house, within which the woman would be in total control. As she wrote in her book, she wanted to portray every sphere of the woman's profession as housekeeper and care-taker of the family with as much detail and respect as that given to the professions chosen by men.

Whereas Downing drew pictures of the exteriors of houses, differentiating between an exterior

which lacked the touch of the female hand and therefore was uninviting and unfriendly as opposed to an exterior which displayed feminine decorative touches, and was hospitable and warm in its appearance, Beecher included only one exterior view in her book. Her focus was on the interior and its detail. She drew pictures of moveable screens which could divide interior space more flexibly and which would be both decorative (on one side) and functional (a closet on the other side), a new ventilation system to replace the fireplace, and other innovative forms of technology for the house. The screen might allow a large parlor to be used as a sleeping area at night. Instructions were provided for making everything she described. She even included two water-closets, an innovative idea at that time. If women were going to be the "ministers" of home religion, then she wanted them to have the means for doing their jobs efficiently. (Of course, she could not anticipate that the invention of modern technology would turn efficiency into a negative trait, since it meant not only that women could spend more time than ever before creating the perfect home, but that they would be less valued for doing so.) Because she believed that the home was integral to society, she believed that the values promoted by the mainstream American culture had to be reflected in the house. If industrial society promoted efficiency, then the design of the house and its functioning should also promote efficiency.

### **Alternative communities**

But the reality is that in the 19th century, America was still a society of migrants, of people who moved often, and the vision of a private home was not shared by utopian Marxists or feminists who believed that living situations which reinforced the isolation of the family unit contributed to the subjugation of women. Nor was it shared by the communitarian socialists who believed that an ideal community could serve as a model for the transformation of the world. Numerous experimental communities were started in the U.S. in the 18th and 19th centuries, but the generators of these ideas were largely French and English theorists, so in a certain sense, the idea of a utopian community was another action in the invention of America as paradise and metaphorically, perhaps, another expression of the belief that revolutionary change in America would save humanity.

### **Robert Owen and New Harmony**

Scottish industrialist who founded New Lanark, came to the US in 1825; some communities based on his ideas were later founded. Basing his ideas somewhat on the Shakers, he developed plans for ideal communities in the early 1800s. His communities were to be marked by collective kitchens and dining rooms and nurseries. In his idea for nurseries, he called for education while the children were just learning to walk, and he argued that not only would this free the mothers to earn more money and therefore better support their children, but the children would not have a chance to acquire any bad habits. Owen based his claim on the belief that the environment shaped character. In the U.S., Owen started a community in New Harmony, Indiana which in its plan was to include multi-family housing. The housing designs were not built but the community did include community kitchens and a child care center.

Summary:

- collective kitchens and dining rooms and nurseries

- nurseries were important in Owen's system because of his belief that the environment shaped character
- started a community in New Harmony, Indiana which would have included multi-family housing
- the housing designs were not built but the community but they did build some community kitchens and a child care center

### **Charles Fourier, a French utopianist**

Charles Fourier, a French utopianist, considered the private dwelling the greatest obstacle to women's rights. About 15 model communities were founded in the U.S. based on the ideas of Owens and about 30 were based on the ideas of Fourier. Fourier's community was more explicitly linked to a particular architectural form than was Owen's. The Phalanstery, as it was called, was a model village in the sense that it contained multiple functions, but it was more often a unitary building than a true village. Within the dwelling there would be a communal kitchen and laundry as well as kitchenless apartments and dormitory areas. In a few cases, the phalanstery was a network of buildings, some of which might be private houses, but as a rule, the phalanstery can not be seen as a model for suburban development. In terms of U.S. communities, it would seem to have no descendants.

summary:

- linked to a particular architectural form: the Phalanstery
- a model village in the sense that it contained multiple functions, but it was more often a unitary building than a true village
- contained a communal kitchen and laundry as well as kitchenless apartments and dormitory areas
- the phalanstery might also be a network of buildings, some of which might be private houses

As alternative communities go, Shaker communities and other religious communal experiments were more successful. Hayden has a brief discussion on type of community in her article; you might also refer to her book, *The Grand Domestic Revolution* (Cambridge, 1983), ch. 2, for more information (in McConnell: HQ1426.H33, level 5).

### **The Shakers:**

- founded by Ann Lee, had worked in textile mills as a young girl; she left Manchester England in the belief that she was the female counterpart of Christ and she was destined to found a millennial church in the new world
- chastity is one of the founding principles; hence, conversion is an important part of the faith
- they believed in communal property and in living apart from the world

In the 50 years which elapsed since Mother Lee's arrival, more than 25 Shaker settlements were founded, primarily in the northeast and near midwest. Despite their extreme decline in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – a decline which is explained by the change from a rural

society to an industrial one – they were actually very successful and one of the most successful models of communal living in this country when they were in existence.

It has not been easy to explain their success and the explanations range from the theory that their goals of using architecture to shape behavior were consistent with other reform movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to theories which say that they were less interested in any particular design than in the way a design and building process encouraged certain social behaviors.

There is little variation from one Shaker village to another:

- guiding principle seems to be order and simplicity
- laid out along one main street, with buildings arranged in order of importance, and sometimes secondary rows for secondary buildings, but there were no real rules for placement other than practical convenience
- these were not grid-based towns, although grids were still being used for town planning
- recent research on Shaker communities has challenged the assumption that Shaker villages and architecture were governed by fixed and unchanging rules, and has shown how they modeled themselves on styles which were dominant in neighboring communities; thus, Shaker communities in New York were likely to look like Federal Style meeting houses
- some consistencies are required for the purpose of separating gender and status
- the house had communal space and spaces which were separated by gender; the architecture is ascetic and spare; separate entries for male and female with specially defined pathways
- there were also accepted color schemes: pale yellow for workshops and houses, white for the meeting house

#### **the community in Pleasant Hill KY:**

- the “family” house was brick, early Georgian style, chosen here because it was a regional or vernacular style and because brick was readily available in the area
- the house had communal space and spaces which were separated by gender
- the architecture is ascetic and spare:
- separate entries for male and female
- Space was generally divided into spheres for men, for women, and for family elders who occupied the center. Floor plans generally created defined pathways for each group such that the male members or brothers of the family would have to walk through a dining hall in order to reach their stair to the upper level while the female members or sisters had to walk through the kitchen in order to reach theirs.

The ascetic spartan qualities have been related in some theories to Shaker beliefs about the possibility of creating heaven on earth and the designs which then strove to do this. For example, because the Shakers believed that geographic orientation and body posture together reinforce the value of ordering life according to orthogonal plans, rules for cutting meat and bread stated that they should be cut in squares, people were told not to take

diagonal shortcuts across fields to avoid walking around a right angle, and one should sleep straight.

The Shakers not only wanted to produce a certain type of individual in their community but that they believed that architecture could be a tool in creating this desired behavior; the Shakers' architecture of surveillance emerged at a time when institutions of reform and confinement were also emerging: in their belief that architecture could shape behavior, they were not alone and were part of a reform era which included other groups, such as the Quakers, and voluntary associations which promoted moral reform in various realms of life.

For more about this, you can read: Julie Nicoletta, "The Architecture of Control: Shaker Dwelling Houses and the Reform Movement in Early-Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 62, 3 (Sept 2003) 352-387:  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/3592519.pdf>

### **Pullman, IL (1879-1885)**

1. not a communitarian experiment, but another example of a company town
2. located at a junction of rail lines and water transportation networks, south of Chicago
3. George Pullman built initially erected shops for the construction of the railroad sleeping cars named after him; then built an entire city to include housing, recreational space, shopping, places of worship, library, music hall
4. he hired both an architect and a landscape architect (Beman and Barrett) to design the town which took approx 4 years to build
5. row houses were built for workers but the styles were varied, as were the plans; the one unifying factor was that it was all built in brick
6. it was a well-designed town but the model of control was paternalist which meant that it was not a self-sufficient town with its own government

### **The octagon fad:**

Orson Fowler, the author of *A Home for All*, 1848, had planned to become a minister. In college he studied the writings of a teacher who claimed that phrenology, or the examination of skull formations, could predict character, and this changed his career path. Jefferson himself had designed an octagonal house in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Fowler believed that the octagon was the house of the future because it would be efficient, could be built in readily available materials (his own was made of concrete) and unique. It wasn't as unique as he believed; nor was it as efficient as he believed but it was unusual.

He believed that he would be able to revolutionize domestic architecture, not just in terms of style but by making homes which would be accessible to the rich and the poor. And its chief value in his eyes was that the octagon was a natural form. True, circles and squares are also natural forms, but Fowler filled his book with calculations intended to show why the octagon was superior.

Fowler's octagon was rather plain, he believed that the house should have a dumbwaiter; a

talking tube; and that the cupola was the most important form of ornamentation. He also thought that glass should be used as roofing material.

In contrast to Fowler's rejection of styles, Samuel Sloan built a rather ornate and unusual octagon for Dr. Haller Nutt of Longwood Miss, a house which became known as "Nutt's Folly." Construction started around the civil war; it was interrupted by the war and never completely finished after it ended. It has an onion dome on top, walls, verandahs, myriad materials, and is overall a very eclectic house which makes an ironic summary to the 19<sup>th</sup> century fusion of picturesque, romantic and vernacular features: a house which evokes the southern plantation style if you see it from only one view but from any other, it appears to have almost no precedents in reality.