

Nineteenth Century Revivals, part 1

The 19th century sees the emergence of several trends:

- wider range of styles, many of which are “revivals”
- more academic styles although there will always be vernaculars and the vernacular will be influenced by the increasing number of styles
- emergence of professional architects
- the use of style to communicate taste and the desire to keep up with the latest fashions

The popularity of Greek revival: this can also be called classical revival and neoclassical, but many historians reserve the term “neoclassical” for the 20th century in order to suggest that there is a difference between the earlier 19th century use of Greek styles and the 20th century use. However, it is important to note that when the term “neoclassical” is used, it refers to the revival of ancient Greek and ancient Roman ideas. The use of Renaissance architectural models is relevant when those models also revived classical ideals. The Greek revival raises certain questions:

- Was the Greek style popular because it had already been used in the Capitol?
- Did it make political associations?
- Or did it contribute to the stature of the architect (carpenter-builders would not have been able to work in stone, and the Greek style was a masonry style)?

Regardless of the reason, we do begin to see an abstract, classical style used by the new professional architects and the gentlemen-architects, and it is often used for banks and government buildings.

Benjamin Latrobe:

- he was not the only immigrant architect to come to this country; nor was he the only one to be imperious in his relationships with clients, to be inconsistent in his practices, to fail to bring some of this work to a successful conclusion – but this last characteristic was far less common in his case, and he made sure that people knew he was a professional architect.
- Compared to his contemporaries, such as Samuel McIntire or Charles Bulfinch or Asher Benjamin, Latrobe rejected a conservative image; he was not attracted to the Federalist style which was dominant in the north or the conventional Georgian style of the south; like Jefferson he was attracted to the pure geometric forms of neoclassicism and also like Jefferson, his tastes tended to be eclectic or synthetic

The Bank of Pennsylvania was his second major building in this country. It suggests a reference to the same Roman temple which had influenced Jefferson in his design of the VA capitol but the resemblance is superficial, the more so when the plan is considered:

- the rectangular plan contains a large circular space in the center which is the primary banking area, surrounded by offices and smaller rooms
- the interior vaulting is masonry while the domed interior space is brick
- the Ionic columns were true to the Greek order, which makes him the first architect in this country to use true, Greek orders

Bank of Pennsylvania, 1798

- Ionic portico with true Ionic capitals on the columns
- low dome (tends to characterize Latrobe's work)
- rotunda in center of rectangular plan
- masonry vaulting on interior

Baltimore Cathedral, 1804-21

- Latrobe planned two versions: Roman and Gothic
- the client chose the Roman version
- again, uses a shallow dome and Ionic columns
- the decision to create two versions and allow the client to select one is an important sign of Latrobe's professionalism as an architect and a major shift away from the emphasis on pattern book design. Pattern books will continue to be used, because there will always be builders who are not architects, but their use in buildings which are not houses, begins to decline.

We also looked at Nicholas Biddle's Greek revival mansion, 1836, which uses the same Greek Doric facade that we see on a bank, although it is actually not Latrobe's bank which is the model but a bank designed by a student of Latrobe:

the 2nd Bank of the U.S., in Philadelphia, 1818-24. Strickland, one of Latrobe's students, beat Latrobe in the contest for this bank. The bank is modeled on the Pantheon with a severe Doric facade; many people credit Strickland with initiating a true Greek revival with this building.

Although we didn't look at other examples this week, the Greek or classical revival is not limited to banks and the occasional single family home. It was also used in one of the earliest projects for townhouses (Ithiel Town and A.J. Davis: Lafayette Terrace (Colonnade Row), NY, 1830-33) and would have been used in a Tontine Crescent, designed by Bulfinch, but it was never completed.

Simultaneous with these developments, another revival was taking place: the Gothic/picturesque. Examples of this revival come up in the next chapters we'll be covering in class. The key buildings we will look at include:

Lyndhurst, Tarrytown, in NY and Kingscote, Rhode Island. Both of these were mansions for wealthy owners and both speak to a new interest in creating more varied interior spaces and more asymmetric effects on the exterior. These images will be in Artstor image groups.