

Allegany County is home to some of the finest examples of historical architecture in the Tri-State region. From modest dwellings of settlers in the 18th century to elaborate mansions of the Victorian era, the county's history is reflected in its buildings. The architectural styles did not occur in isolation, but rather reflect the historical development of their times and the progress of Allegany County.

Early settlers of the mid to late 18th century were resourceful and hardy individuals who used the materials at hand to construct buildings. Fieldstone, logs, limestone mortar, and axes provided the key elements for their work. Notched corners made their log structures stable, while stone fireplaces provided for cooking and warmth. Frontier builders concerned themselves with the creation of functional dwellings, so they used locally available materials and drew upon familiar architectural styles of their European backgrounds. A rectangular log cabin with a gabled roof, fireplace, and small windows provided shelter for the typical frontiersman. Typical to western Maryland were one story cabins with a single room. Sometimes the building would be divided into two rooms that would separate the kitchen from the parlor and sleeping quarters. While log cabins are closely associated with early settlers and the westward movement, they continued to be built until the end of the 19th century.

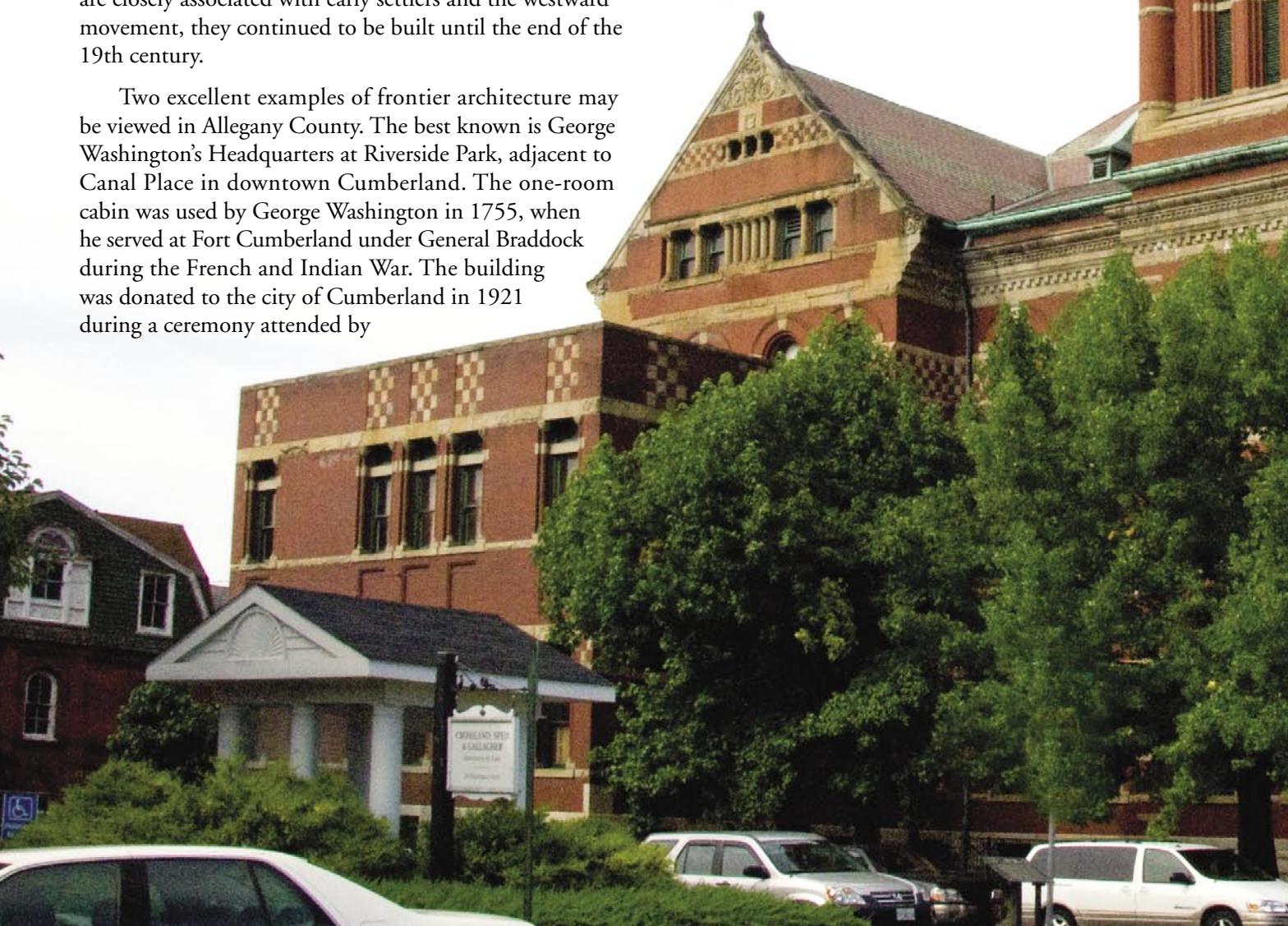
Two excellent examples of frontier architecture may be viewed in Allegany County. The best known is George Washington's Headquarters at Riverside Park, adjacent to Canal Place in downtown Cumberland. The one-room cabin was used by George Washington in 1755, when he served at Fort Cumberland under General Braddock during the French and Indian War. The building was donated to the city of Cumberland in 1921 during a ceremony attended by

General "Black Jack" Pershing. While the cabin has been moved several times and has undergone restorations, it serves as a prime example of frontier period architecture. The cabin is open during special occasions and may easily be viewed year round.

A second example of 18th century (circa 1764) architecture is the two story home of Revolutionary War officer Captain Michael Cresap. His house was built of fieldstone and logs.

Cresap's house served as a welcome respite for adventurous individuals who were heading westward during the late 1700s, and is one of only 100 listed in Colonial and Historical Homes of Maryland. Cresap's home is located on Opessa Street in Oldtown, Maryland, along Maryland Route 51, south of Cumberland. A historical marker is located adjacent to the building.

The area to become Allegany County prospered as the 18th century drew to a



# Historical Architecture OF THE AREA'S PROUD PAST

Written by **Dan Whetzel**  
Photography by **Lance C. Bell**

close. In 1787 the Maryland legislature provided for the creation of the city of Cumberland. Lots were subsequently sold and the small settlement expanded at the confluence of the Potomac River and Will's Creek, thereby creating the economic and political center for the region.

Transportation proved to be the key to Allegany County's success. Congress chose Cumberland as the starting point for the first National Highway in 1806; the B&O Railroad arrived in 1842, and the C&O Canal was extended to the city in 1850. Coal mining operations along nearby George's Creek increased economic opportunities for Cumberland, often referred to as the "Gateway to the West."



Transportation developments and the arrival of industries enabled Allegany County to become home to wealthy entrepreneurs, merchants, doctors, and political leaders. Perhaps no better place illustrates the economic prosperity of the well-to-do citizens than Washington Street, a residential neighborhood immediately west of downtown Cumberland that was named to the National Register of Historic Places in 1973. The Washington Street Historical District features many architectural styles but the most prominent are versions of Victorian. The character of the West Side neighborhood was also influenced by nationally known architects John Notam and Bruce Price, along with local architects Wright Butler, George Sansbury, and Robert Holt Hitchins, who drew inspiration from the Victorian era.

Victorian refers to the Queen of England who ascended to the throne in 1837 and continued to reign until her death in 1901. Queen Victoria's long reign meant that several distinct architectural styles evolved during her time but were loosely combined under one title. The Victorian Gothic Revival,

The Richardson Romanesque style Allegheny County Court House is located at 30 Washington Street, Cumberland.

Inset: Detail of one of the gargoyles on each corner of the Court House.



Emmanuel Episcopal Church, constructed on the site of Fort Cumberland, is one of Maryland's finest examples of early Gothic Revival architecture.

featuring pointed arches, windows, and details inspired by the massive cathedrals of the Middle Ages, is perhaps the best known style; others are Queen Anne, Second Empire or Mansard, Victorian Italianate, and Romanesque.

One of Maryland's finest examples of early Gothic Revival architecture is Emmanuel Episcopal Church. Inspiration for the church was derived from St. Paul's Brighton (1848), located in England. Constructed on the site of Fort Cumberland, a French and Indian War outpost, the building illuminates the western end of Cumberland's pedestrian mall. The church is a cruciform building with a deep chancel and orientation of the altar at the east end. English architect John Notam's original plan was later enhanced in the early 1900s when famed Art Nouveau artist Louis Comfort Tiffany designed and installed three stained glass windows and other interior features making Emmanuel Episcopal Church an architectural and aesthetic masterpiece. Adjacent to the church is Parish House, designed by Cumberland native Bruce Price, who later enjoyed a successful architectural career in New York. The house was built in the 1870s for James A. Millholland, who was the first president of the George's Creek & Cumberland Railroad. Parish House draws on elements of the Second Empire style.

Queen Anne is a reference to the late 19th century style that was inspired by an English trend that looked back to the great manor houses of the early 1700s. The Queen Anne style utilizes brick construction, asymmetrical facades, bay windows, turrets, gabled roofs and other features that are sometimes referred to as "Old English." Decorative elements include grouped chimneys, small-paned windows, and door openings with fan and side lights. Stained and leaded glass windows are also common features. Local craftsmen worked with the finest materials to create interior and exterior features that only the affluent residents of Cumberland could afford, intricate lathwork being prominent among them. The Bretz House located at 101 Washington Street (circa 1888) is an example of the Queen Anne style.

The house was built for Carl L. Bretz, who at the time was general manager of the West Virginia Central & Pittsburgh Railway between Cumberland and Elkins. After the WVC was acquired by the expanding Western Maryland Railroad in 1905, Bretz later served as general manager for the Cumberland and Pennsylvania Railroad. Distinguishing architectural features of the Bretz House include a semi-octagonal bow-front window arrangement, a semi-conical roof, closed-in sun porch, and stained glass.



The Gordon-Roberts House, 218 Washington Street, is open to the public Tuesday – Saturday, 10 am – 4 pm.



Parish House, adjacent to Emmanuel Episcopal Church, was built in the 1870s for James A. Millholland.

The Bretz property is also affiliated with prominent historical residents including Roger Perry, States Attorney; George Landwehr, operator of construction businesses and organizer of the German Savings Bank; and Irving Holland, Secretary and Treasurer of Holland Furniture and Vice President of Crystal Laundry. The Bretz family became associated with the property when they purchased it in 1891 and constructed the current dwelling. Additional examples of Queen Anne architecture may be found in the 200 and 600 blocks of Washington Street.

Second Empire architecture, a reference to Napoleon III's reign (1852-1871) in France, typically has a Mansard style roof as the most distinguishing feature. The double-pitched roof with a steep lower side allows for more useable space, while prominent dormers increase light and ventilation on the top floor. It is also recognized that Second Empire came to be identified with ornamentation and elegance. The Walsh House, located at 108 Washington Street, is one of the best local examples of Second Empire style because of

its third story slate Mansard roof, twelve semi-circular dormers, and a centrally located pavilion. The building has a history that enhances its architectural importance.

The house was built in 1865 by James Walsh, an Irish immigrant. Eight years after arrival in the United States, Mr. Walsh set up a law practice that enabled him to become one of Allegany County's best known citizens and highest elected officials, serving in the United States House of Representatives from 1874-1878. His grandson, James Edward Walsh, was born at the Washington Street house in 1891 and also rose to national prominence by serving as a bishop in the Roman Catholic Church and superior general of the Maryknoll Missionaries. While on a mission to China in 1958, the communist government accused Bishop Walsh of spying and held him captive until 1970. Upon release, the bishop returned to Cumberland and attended the dedication of the school named in his honor. The Walsh House has been owned by the Board of Education of Allegany County since 1936.



Additional examples of Second Empire architecture can be found at 403, 408, 508, and 635 Washington Street.

Italianate architecture is known for its overhanging eaves with brackets and cornices, a square cupola, and low pitched roof; it became the most popular house style in the United States during the 1860s. The Will H. Lowdermilk House, located at 527 Washington Street, is characteristic of that style.

Will H. Lowdermilk was born in Cumberland and became a prominent businessman, postmaster, and historian. Mr. Lowdermilk fought in the Civil War after enlisting in a Kentucky regiment. Upon returning to Cumberland following the conflict, he

**Above: George Washington's Headquarters at Riverside Park, downtown Cumberland.**

**Right: The Queen Anne style Bretz House is located at 101 Washington Street.**

A second example of Second Empire architecture is located at 218 Washington Street. Currently home to the Allegany County Historical Society, the Gordon-Roberts House was completed in 1867. Highlighted features include twelve pedimented (triangular) dormers and a Mansard roof.



Josiah Gordon was a local attorney who had the financial means to appoint the dwelling with first class amenities. His professional duties also included a term as President of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, whose western terminus was a short distance from the Washington Street residence. The only other family to live in the house was that of W. Milnor Roberts and his descendants. Mr. Roberts and his son enjoyed international acclaim for their railroad engineering accomplishments. The Allegany County Historical Society purchased the building in 1954 and began the task of organizing it for their purposes. The Gordon-Roberts House is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

became editor and owner of the *Civilian and Telegraph* and later founded the first daily Cumberland publication called the *Daily Transcript*. It was also during the late 1860s that Lowdermilk built his residence on Washington Street. Mr. Lowdermilk was appointed postmaster of Cumberland by President Ulysses S. Grant. During his tenure as postmaster, Lowdermilk published the *History of Cumberland* (1878), the first comprehensive documentation of the city's past. He also later became editor of a newspaper in Washington, DC.

The Lowdermilk House is a private residence.

Cumberland's most noted 19th century architect, Wright Butler, designed the Richardson Romanesque style Allegany County Court House in 1893. The public building was Butler's first major commission. Located at 30 Washington Street, it is the most impressive local building of the late 19th century Romanesque style. The massive structure contains three stone belt courses between floors and stone lintels arranged in checkerboard bands. All windows have Romanesque columns with stone capitals. The building was designed to emphasize the qualities of permanence, weight, and authority. And if one looks toward the roof, a gargoyle may be seen on each corner looking menacingly down upon passersby.

While the affluent residents had the means to construct fashionable dwellings on the west side of town, working class families typically lived with extended family members in small wooden houses, double houses, or brick apartments near their places of employment toward the south side of Cumberland. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad's massive rolling mill and shop complexes fostered the development of workers' housing in the 1890-1910 time period. One historical report noted the south side of Cumberland had an "unusual concentration of double houses built for the working class of the city at the turn of the century." Maps depicting Cumberland in the 1880s indicate "tenement" buildings in the Rolling Mill district. One example of the late 19th and early 20th century tenement housing precariously remains at 126 Oldtown Road following the collapse and demolition of an adjoining structure in 2007; the cornerstone of the razed building was marked 1895. A small brick double house structure on Putnam Street also reflects the early 20th century neighborhood around the rolling mill complex.

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**Top: The Walsh House, 108 Washington Street, Cumberland, is now owned by the Allegany County Board of Education.**

**Bottom: The Lowdermilk House, a private residence, is located 527 Washington Street.**

