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## **THE BUNGALOW: A HISTORY OF THE MOST PREDOMINANT STYLE OF TAMPA BAY**

By James M. Ricci

By 1929 the “Bungalow Era” of home building was drawing to a conclusion. In that same year, Charles E. White published a critical work entitled *The Bungalow Book*. Lamenting the misconception of the term *bungalow*, that is, the misapplication of the term to styles not necessarily bungalow in concept, White began his book with the popular line from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*: “All that glitters is not gold.” With respect to architecture, the metaphor was appropriate, not only to the nation as a whole, but especially to the State of Florida, where the craftsman ideal of homebuilding was rapidly evolving into other forms. Accordingly, White echoed the Bard’s warning, and rephrased it to read “All that bungles is not a bungalow.”<sup>1</sup>

The bungalow style of architecture was born in the early years of the twentieth century. The complicated roots of its conception, however, are entwined in the social and architectural histories of the late nineteenth century. This span, from 1865 to 1900, is a difficult period to understand. The complexity of the era is seen by the two epithets most popularly applied: “The Gilded Age,” and “The Brown Decades.”<sup>2</sup> It was a time when productivity increased dramatically. Technologically, the Industrial Revolution, with its increased mechanization, lessened the backbreaking chores of sustaining life. The city, with its abundant opportunities, became a mecca. However, many of the qualities deemed necessary to live a simple life disappeared. Against this background of rapid change, the bungalow style of architecture developed.

The generation that matured in the post Civil War era and subscribed to the notion that urban, industrial growth was creating a sore on the moral fiber of the country sought to improve their lives by various methods. Each method, however, was based on the idea of returning to the time they felt was conducive to nurturing a simple existence. The time period they yearned to reconstruct invariably was that which they knew best—the immediate past. To foster these beliefs, three movements arose: the “Suburban Movement,” the “Back to Nature Movement,” and the “Craftsman Movement.”

The people who adhered to the philosophies of these movements were essentially agreeing on two points: the corrosive effects of the city, and the dehumanization of the machine. Fleeing to the suburbs, communicating with nature, and returning to craftsmanship were three ways to help reestablish a simple and good life. Architecturally, the bungalow ideal of homebuilding, which was a part as well as a result of these three movements, fulfilled all three requirements.

Architecture is often “the ledger of one cultural debt after another owed to previous cultures and civilizations.”<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, the bungalow is deeply indebted. The first debt is owed to Andrew Jackson Downing, the critic Vincent J. Scully, Jr. credits “with starting American domestic architecture along a new path.”<sup>4</sup> In the 1840s, Downing originated a style for residential cottages that brought out such essential architectural elements as the harmonization of building and landscape, the convenient arrangement of rooms, the truthfulness revealed in the purpose of a building, (for instance, a house should look like a house, a church like a church), the effect of good color and the economy of simplicity.<sup>5</sup> Each of Downing’s precepts would be

carefully and religiously practiced by the men most responsible for the birth of the bungalow style.

The World Columbian Exposition of 1893 also greatly influenced the bungalow style. Contradicting Louis Sullivan's statement "that the damage wrought by the fair will last a century from its date, if not longer," the Japanese entry—The Phoenix Villa—impressed many of the up-and-coming architects who viewed it.<sup>6</sup> Juxtaposed against the grandiosity of the borrowed Roman and Greek styles, which were the target of Sullivan's scorn, the Nippon structure stood as a testament to the beauty of architecture. The Japanese demonstrated to emerging American architects "the stark geometry of post and beam, and the free and sensuous rhythms of the rock and tree," as well as the sensitive treatment and texture of wood.<sup>7</sup> Charles S. and Henry M. Greene, two such young architects, were greatly influenced.

The Greenes were the progenitors of the bungalow style in America. In addition to the influence of the aforementioned movements, the Greenes' background is revealing. The Manual Training School at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, where they became familiar with the basic concepts of the craftsman's tools; the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where they furthered their studies; Boston itself, where they viewed some of the finest Japanese treasures brought back to its museums by Ralph Adams Cram, Ernest Fenollosa, and Edward S. Morse; the Phoenix Villa; and their eventual move to Pasadena, California, in 1893, each contributed to the maturation of the style they formulated.

In 1903, the Greenes designed what would later be recognized as the first bungalow. Reminiscent of the modern ranch style, the home was most praised for its use of natural materials and simple arrangement. The house utilized a simple "U" plan. By the time the Greenes' work appeared, however, there were other examples of the fledgling style already in existence. In 1885, A. Page Brown built several in San Francisco,<sup>8</sup> and in 1888, A. W. Putnum published others in the *California Architect and Building News*.<sup>9</sup> These received little fanfare and acclaim. It was the Greenes' work that brought the bungalow popularity and vitality; and from this humble beginning, the bungalow style in America advanced.

Between 1893 and 1922, the firm of Greene and Greene designed nearly 400 buildings, most of which were residences in California. Generally they tried to adhere to certain ideals of craftsmanship, striving to embody the owner's personality and needs in the design. They also gave "much thought and study to all parts and details, often [designed] the grounds and interior furnishings as well as the building itself. . . ."<sup>10</sup> Out of this philosophy and background grew an architectural phenomenon on the Pacific Coast known as the California Bungalow.

Yet, because of the great attention the Greenes paid to each detail, and the expensive nature of fine craftsmanship, their structures were affordable only by the upper middle class. It required an extensive campaign by Gustav Stickley, the furniture maker, to bring the bungalow to the middleclass.<sup>11</sup>

Greatly influenced by John Ruskin and William Morris, Stickley designed furniture with the belief that simple was more likely to be right and good than was complex. He saw the need to apply this philosophy to architecture and residential homebuilding, calling for a more democratic

mode of homebuilding. From 1901 to 1916, to bring his message to the people, Stickley published *The Crafts*, a monthly magazine in which he showed examples of houses that could be both charming and economical. Quickly becoming a “tastemaker,” he published two design books, *Craftsman Homes*, in 1909, and *More Craftsman Homes*, in 1912 which promoted these ideals. The bungalow style, as evidenced in the work of Greene and Greene, but on a lesser scale, was one which Stickley greatly admired and consequently advocated to satisfy the residential needs of a growing contingent of middle class Americans.

During Stickley’s period of influence the popularity of craftsman bungalows rapidly increased. Other magazines such as *The Ladies’ Home Journal*, *House Beautiful*, and *The Building Age*, followed Stickley’s lead and promoted the bungalow as the most desirable of styles. Laced with such superlatives as “charming” and “picturesque,” they brought the bungalow much acclaim. The publications convinced Americans of the desirability of such homes, and the many who could not afford the fine craftsmanship settled for homes which captured the style through ornamental rather than structural techniques.

Architects soon published plan books of bungalow design from which the prospective buyer could choose. These appeared in cities from Seattle to Providence. Lumber mills, such as one from Bay City, Michigan, which billed their product as “The Alladin House,” and mail order houses, such as Sears-Roebuck, also recognized an opportunity and sold bungalows via mail order. Yet, regardless of whether they were individually constructed or sold *en masse*, the bungalow built before the Great Depression retained most of the qualities and elements of the original style. However, tract developers, who built bungalows with assembly line techniques totally perverted the basic tenets of the style. This dealt the style its final blow by utilizing a method contrary to the philosophy of the original. Soon the term erroneously meant just one story homes. A half decade after the nation emerged victoriously from World War I, the bungalow movement was on the wane. By the Great Crash, when American life styles and values drastically changed, bungalow architecture evolved into the ranch style.

At this point in 1929, White wrote his warning. By that time the word *bungalow* was becoming pejorative. Because of the many diverse forms of construction and disparate styles incorporated into the term, *bungalow* connoted many images to many people. Indeed, it was becoming easier to say what a bungalow was not, than what a bungalow was.<sup>12</sup> Some tried to pin it down to a structure with all rooms on one floor. Others limited it to one and one-half story dwellings. And still, to some the word was all inclusive. So, not only was Whites' warning appropriate, it was also necessary; for although many people thought they knew to what architectural style the bungalow applied, each had a different view.

With the benefit of hindsight, though, it is possible to identify certain characteristic elements of the bungalow style. A typical bungalow was a building constructed during the first quarter of the twentieth century, and was characterized by a low sweeping roof line, with parallel gable angles, overhanging eaves, exposed structural members, conveniently organized floor plans, numerous windows (usually casement), massive fireplaces, and broad masonried and wood porches leading to graceful entrances adorned with sidelights and transoms. These buildings often employed the use of built-in furniture, built-in light fixtures of the “Tiffany” style, exposed ceiling beams in the living and dining rooms, hardwood floors, and breakfast nooks, keeping the relationship

between indoors and outdoors unobtrusive. Other elements such as *porte-cocheres* and indigenous materials were often, though not always, employed.

While these elements expressed artistic and philosophic beliefs, the bungalow style of architecture derived importance for the role it played in shaping demographic and geographic patterns of many American cities. The bungalow arrived when many American cities were rapidly expanding and the suburbs were receiving a large percentage of disenfranchised urbanites. Prior to the bungalow, there was not a suitable architectural style to house these suburbs. The Cottage, Queen Anne, and Victorian styles were each too elaborate and expensive for the majority of Americans to afford. The bungalow made the suburbs affordable to middle-class Americans, and the result was significant. The growing city of Tampa is a microcosm of this early twentieth century American phenomenon.

Like hundreds of other American cities, the population of Tampa increased enormously between 1880 and 1900.<sup>13</sup> In 1880, Tampa contained a population of 720.<sup>14</sup> By 1900, it boasted a citizenry of 26,000, “cosmopolitan in nature.”<sup>15</sup> Bolstered by the cigar, rail, shipping, tourist, citrus, and phosphate industries, the former garrison town evolved into a vital port center. The majority of people, however, still lived in close proximity to Tampa’s urban core. The elite neighborhoods of Tampa Heights and upper-Hyde Park provided suburban communities for only the well-to-do. The bungalow, along with improved mass transportation, and later the automobile, combined to open these neighborhoods to Tampa’s middle income families.

The role of the bungalow in satisfying suburban aspiration is evidenced in the statistics. Between 1910 and 1930, approximately four thousand bungalows were built to satisfy individual owners' wants and needs, and reflect the beauty and care of individual attention. These were built in the finest sections of Tampa’s early suburbs, and were more kin to the Greenes’ homes than to Stickley’s. But, as more and more land was subdivided, the democratic nature of the style became evident. Shortly, bungalows were built in virtually every new neighborhood in town. The developers and promoters of these new subdivisions capitalized on the popularity of the style to sell their suburban lots. Thus, a large portion of Tampa bungalows were mainly the result of speculation. Built by local contractors, and promoted by local developers, bungalows provided Tampa’s middle-class with a desirable, yet affordable, housing mode.

Bungalows in Tampa varied in price. The more elaborate sold for around \$8,000.00, but the average price ranged between \$3,000.00 and \$5,000.00. Still, many were found on the Building Permit Ledger for as low as \$500.00. Most retained the qualities and philosophies of the original California Bungalow. Others, though, employed ornamental substitutes, such as turned porch piers and non-functional supports.

Along with the national publications, Tampa newspapers played a role of “tastemaker” by whetting the public's appetite for bungalow homes. Daily, the pages of the *Morning Tribune* were filled with notices of bungalows. The promoters and developers of the infant subdivisions of West Hyde Park, Seminole Heights, Suwanee Heights, Virginia Park, Palma Ceia Park, and Edgewater Park advertised the advantages of bungalow architecture. The Tampa Bay Land Company went so far as to enter an advertisement entitled “Why California?” in which it enumerated bungalow qualities. The ad drew the conclusion that the bungalows built in Florida



**South Florida Fair of 1920, Quickbuilt Bungalow exterior**

(courtesy of Tampa/Hillsborough County Public Library System).

were “sufficiently distinctive to be named after our own State.”<sup>16</sup> Accompanying such promoters, local furniture merchants, such as The R. H. Tarr Company and Rhodes-Pearce-Mahoney Furniture Company, stocked, sold, and advertised furniture and accessories especially for bungalows. These ads featured “craftsman” furniture, “Tiffany” style glass, roll-away wall beds, porch screens, and other typical bungalow features. Tampanans, then, were well aware of the bungalow style. By 1930, as elsewhere, it was on the wane.

Before the bungalow style of architecture evolved into other modes, one atypical pattern which began to appeal to builders who sought to maximize profits was the bungalow court idea. These “community courts” consisted of bungalows arranged around a central court or parking area. Designed to eliminate the excessive cost of constructing apartment complexes while offering the occupant the benefits of the bungalow philosophy, each house was built close enough to afford a feeling of protection, but far enough apart to provide for little grass plots. Windows were “placed with the idea of affording as much privacy as possible.”<sup>17</sup> However, the court idea required a larger plot of ground in proportion to its housing possibilities, and this resulted in a limited amount of bungalow court development. Yet, examples of the court idea and variations of it may still be found in many cities. Bungalow Terrace in Tampa stands as one such adaptation.



**Grand Central Avenue Bungalows, Tampa**

(courtesy of Tampa/Hillsborough County Public Library System).



**Bungalow at 713 S. Delaware Street in Tampa**

(courtesy of Tampa/Hillsborough County Public Library System).



**Bungalow of Charles E. Commander in August 4, 1925, 1212 S. Albany Street**

(courtesy of Tampa/Hillsborough County Public Library System).

Platted in 1916, Bungalow Terrace was built on one entire suburban block in what is now known as Hyde Park. It was originally laid out in thirty-six lots, upon which thirty-one homes were constructed. Save one, all were built within a few years and had residents by 1920. All but one, which was built around 1948, were bungalows. They were built in four rows with a central walkway down the middle. This walkway originally had an arbor from one stone gate to the other, but was removed in the twenties because the wood rotted and the leaves covering it dropped on the walk following rain storms. Automobiles never could pass down this central walk. Between the other rows—the back side of each home—were alleys for cars to park. Thus, autos were out of view from each of the four surrounding streets. Bungalow Terrace afforded suburbanites a chance to live in craftsman homes without the added expense of purchasing the plot of expensive land usually associated with twentieth century suburbs.

The bungalow style of architecture lasted through the Florida land “boom” and “bust,” but finally lost its vitality and popularity during the Great Depression. Before Americans became disenchanted with its folkway style, however, the bungalow played an important role in Tampa’s early twentieth century growth. At the apex of the nation’s affinity for building bungalows,

Tampa was a haven of bungalow construction. So much so, that by 1930, Tampa's suburbs resembled what Carol Kennicott, Sinclair Lewis' 1920 *Main Street* reformer, envisioned when she entertained a career in "townplanning."

She walked back through Wilmette and Evenston, discovered new forms of architecture, and remembered her desire to recreate villages. She decided that she would give up library work, and, by a miracle whose nature was not very clearly revealed to her, turn a prairie town into Georgian houses and Japanese bungalows.<sup>18</sup>

The one thing to remember, though, above all else, was that the bungalow was more than a style, it was a philosophy as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles E. White, Jr., *The Bungalow Book* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1929), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> "The Gilded Age" was a term popularized by Mark Twain to satirize the garishness of the period. The "Brown Decades" was applied to the era by Louis Mumford to describe general architectural trends.

<sup>3</sup> Karen Current and William R. Current, *Greene and Greene: Architects in the Residential Style* (Fort Worth, Texas: Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1974), p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Vincent J. Scully, Jr., *The Shining Style and the Stick Style: Architectural Theory and Design from Downing to the Origins of Wright* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1955), p. xxxi.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxx.

<sup>6</sup> Clay Lancaster, *The Japanese Influence in America* (New York: Walton E. Rawls, 1963), p. 77.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83, and Current, *Greene and Greene*, p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Janan Strand, *A Greene and Greene Guide* (Pasadena, California: Grant Dahlstrom, The Castle Press, 1974), p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Harold Kirker, *California's Architectural Frontier* (New York: Russel and Russel, 1960), p. 128.

<sup>10</sup> Strand, *A Greene and Greene Guide*, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Current, *Greene and Greene*, p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> "What Is A Bungalow?" *Arts and Decoration*, 28 (October, 1911) : p. 487.

<sup>13</sup> Stephan Thernstrom, "Urbanization, Migration, and Social Mobility in Late Nineteenth-Century America," *The City: American Experience*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg, Peter Neill and Peter C. Bunnell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 99.

<sup>14</sup> "Progress and Prosperity of the Queen of the Gulf," *Tampa Morning Tribune*, January 21, 1900, Midwinter Edition.

<sup>15</sup> "The Tribune's Past, Present and Future," *Tampa Morning Tribune*, January 21, 1900, Midwinter Edition.

<sup>16</sup> "Why California?" *Tampa Morning Tribune*, July 13 1913, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Una Nixson Hopkins, "A Picturesque Court of 30 Bungalows: A Community Idea for Women," *The Ladies' Home Journal*, 30 (April 1913): 99.

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<sup>18</sup> Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street* (New York: Harcourt Brace Company, 1929), p. 16.