Fall 2017

The Post and Lintel, Fall 2017

Preservation Eastern

Eastern Michigan University

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Letter from the Director

Katie Beck, 2017–2018
PE Director

Dear Reader,

As EMU’s Historic Preservation Program begins another great academic year, we are pleased to present to you the Fall 2017 Post and Lintel. Inside this edition, readers will find articles representing the wide range of interests, internships and talents of our members. I hope you’ll agree that these articles provide insight into the opportunities available to you as students, or perhaps you’ll find research on topics rarely discussed in class. Regardless, I hope this issue piques your curiosity and inspires you to reach out to those involved to submit your own works in the future.

The new PE board is excited to make this semester great by bringing you a variety of events. We began the semester by hosting the HP new student orientation on the rooftop of Sherzer Hall. We lucked out with beautiful weather which provided outstanding views of the city, paired with some delicious appetizers and good company. It was wonderful to meet the new students and catch up with those returning. For those who were able to attend, thank you for making it a successful, fun night.

Later in September we held the 2nd annual Matt Cook-Out where we yet again enjoyed the warm weather and good food. Thank you to Dr. Ted and Nancy for providing the hot dogs and hamburgers and to Dr. Matt and Karen for opening up their beautiful mid-century modern home to us for the evening. Thanks to those who were able to attend and provide side dishes and desserts, the Matt Cook-out is quickly becoming an anticipated tradition.

In November we have an incredible opportunity to look forward to, our Fall Networking mixer. We are excited to bring to you professionals and alumni from across the state to give insight on

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what they do and the kinds of opportunities and internships available to you as HP students. Dinner will be provided and students will have the chance to mingle with professionals so be prepared and don’t be afraid to put yourself out there.

There will be an end of the semester Holiday part to look forward to as you finish up finals and final papers. What a great way to celebrate the end of the semester and for some of you, your first semester of graduate school! Stay tuned for additional, informal events and field trips and don’t hesitate to make suggestions! We’d love to hear from you and see you at the meetings. We also encourage you to join our Facebook group at Facebook.com/Groups/PEEMU to keep up with meetings times, events and other great information.

The 2017/2018 board is excited to keep this year going with rewarding experiences and new ideas! On behalf of Selina, Tim, Kyle, and Taylor, thank you for your continued support and enthusiasm as we begin this new year! Now grab your favorite cup of coffee or tea and happy reading!

Sincerely,
Katie Beck

Welcome to the Historic Preservation Program’s 38th Year!

Dr. Ted’s Corner

WELCOME NEW STUDENTS FOR FALL 2017

We admitted 13 new students into the Historic Preservation Program for the Fall 2017 term! Join us in welcoming Master’s students Rachel Burns, Nadine Duchaine, Christopher Fuerstnau, Kenneth Gergely, Akshata Hiremath, Mille Latack, Ari Mccaskell, Daniel Poehling, Lisa Powell, Blake Swhart, and Christopher Yelonek; and HP Minors Jessica Lopez and Lizz Wilkinson.

We also want to acknowledge students who graduated and became alumni in the winter and summer 2017 terms. These include: Courtney Bishop, Rachel Ellenson*, Janessa Giddings, Michael Gute*, Franklin Haywood Jr*, Sophia Kloc, Jackie Matheny, Geraurd Paschal, Nicole Pickeral*, Yasmin Ruiz*, and Rebecca Schmitt. (Those with an asterisk by their name are known to already have accepted or continued positions in the field.) Congratulations to them all…well done!

THE MOVE

You are aware by now that the Historic Preservation Program and all of the Geography & Geology Department moved out of Strong Hall over the summer in order to make way for major renovations to the building. We have relocated to King Hall where we will be for the next 18 months or so. Next time you walk by

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Architect’s rendering of the renovated Strong Hall, as presented on Clark Construction Company’s website (https://www.clarkcc.com/portfolio-item/eastern-university-strong-hall-renovation).
what’s left of Strong, take a look as it is wide open to the elements already. (It may interest you to know that one of your recently graduated colleagues, Jackie Matheny, digitally documented the hand-painted murals in the building as her Final Project before they were destroyed.)

PROFESSOR BONENBERGER ON SABBATICAL
As you may have heard, Professor Dan Bonenberger is on Sabbatical for the 2017-18 academic year. During this time he will be pursuing research toward the completion of his PhD Dissertation that will enable him to conduct research on 3D modeling of vernacular landscapes and evaluate the latest virtual reality headsets such as the Oculus Rift, Gear VR, and HTC Vive as tools to enhance heritage interpretation and promote historic preservation. This is a wonderful opportunity for him that also will further our program’s goals and expand our technological capabilities. He also will be merging his research with a grant he received from the CLG program of the City to research the earliest homes in Wheeling, West Virginia. Existing faculty and Part Time Lecturers will handle his courses. He will return to the HP faculty in Fall 2018.

ORIENTATION
The annual New Student Orientation was held on Friday, September 8th atop historic Sherzer Hall. Sponsored by Preservation Eastern (PE), a sumptuous feast was spread out on the rooftop under the stars. The Geography & Geology Department Head, all HP faculty, PE Officers, and some Alumni of the program were in attendance. Thank you especially to Professor Norbert Vance who allowed us to inhabit the Physics & Astronomy Department’s Observatory for the evening.

GRADUATE ASSISTANTS
The Historic Preservation Program has four Graduate Assistants (GAs) this year: returning GAs are Haley McAlpine, Hannah Meyer, and Judith White; Rachel Burns is a new GA and is assigned to work with the EMU Archives in Halle Library. Also, a number of students hold paying agency-sponsored GAs or Internships, including MDOT (Val Pulido); two GAs with the Ypsilanti Historical Society one of which is supported by the EMU President’s Office (Sarah Reyes and Courtney Beattie; Courtney will be graduating in December and her position will be filled by new student Millie Latack); Oakland Township Historic District Commission (available); and Ari McCaskell who is our GA with the Michigan Historical Center for the Michigan Historic Marker program. An agency-supported GA with the City of Monroe is also being created.

Should you have any questions, concerns, comments, etc., please contact me or Professors Nancy Bryk or Matt Cook.

Looking ahead to another great year...our 38th year of incomparable preservation education!  Dr. Ted
Meet the Board!
Preservation Eastern, 2017–2018

Katie Beck, Director

My name is Katie Beck and I was born and raised in Tucson, Arizona. I received my BA in Anthropology with a minor in Classics from the University of Arizona in 2009. I have lived in Michigan now for a little over a year, and this fall is my second year in the HP program with a concentration in Interpretation, Cultural Tourism and Museum Practice. I held an internship with the Wayne Historical Museum from January to September of this year and now volunteer there every week. I have worked at Starbucks for five years, and I do appreciate a good cup of coffee or latte any time of day! I live in the Ypsilanti historic district with my boyfriend and two dogs (Indiana Jones and Gatsby) and can’t get enough of the historic architecture and history. I joined PE at the beginning of my first year in the program as a way to meet people and get involved since I was new to the state. Not only have I met new friends who started the program with me, I have met current students, alumni and professionals from the events that PE provided. It has been a rewarding experience as a member, and now as director I hope to bring us together as a program and offer opportunities that will be valuable in your graduate career and beyond graduation.

Selina Fish, Assistant Director

Selina is in her third and final year in the HP graduate program and is focusing on Heritage Interpretation and Museum Practices. She completed her undergrad at Michigan State University receiving a Bachelor’s degree in Anthropology with a certificate in Museum Studies. After completing her first year in the program, she held the summer Mann House fellowship with the Michigan History Center and most recently was the summer intern at the Renstchler Farm House Museum with the Saline Historical Society. Her hobbies include shopping, traveling, camping, and gardening. Her future plans involve working at a local history museum or center in collections management or programing and education.

Kyle Whitaker, Treasurer

Kyle is a second-year HP Master’s student in the Museum Concentration. Kyle is originally from Chesterton, Indiana, but comes to EMU after earning a Bachelor’s degree in History from University of Michigan. He now works at the Bentley Historic Library in Ann Arbor. Kyle swam competitively for 20 years, which culminated in participation in the three most-recent Olympic Trials (2008, 2012, 2016).
Meet the Board!
Preservation Eastern, 2017–2018

Tim Sabo, Communications Officer

My name is Tim Sabo, and I was born at the beginning of the scandalous second term of the Nixon presidency, in Kalamazoo, Michigan. After high school, I attended Ferris State University pursuing a Business Marketing degree, but decided that was not the path I wanted to take, as it was way too boring.

In the early 2000s, I volunteered as a Docent at the Voigt House Victorian Museum in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for a total of three years, eventually sitting on their executive board. It was a rewarding, enriching, and fantastic experience. This was a place I liked to go as a kid, and it is in the Heritage Hill neighborhood that became besotted with historic homes. I’ve lived in New York City and Chicago, though NYC is my favorite. After this is all said and done here at Eastern, I plan on packing my things and heading back to the East Coast. It’s completely idyllic! I look forward to a successful year for Preservation Eastern.

Taylor Mull, Events Coordinator

My name is Taylor Mull, and I was born in Lafayette Indiana. I graduated from Franklin College in 2016 where I majored in history and focused on nonprofit leadership and management. I actually stumbled upon the program at Eastern during an internship at Indiana Landmarks, the Indiana statewide nonprofit. I just moved to Michigan last year with my dog, Sweet Dee, and it’s my second year in the program. If you join me at a museum you’ll find I love hands on experiences and touching things. I love every interactive exhibit! I’m really excited to be a part of the board this year and make a difference.

Dr. Matthew Cook, Faculty Advisor

Dr. Matt is in his second year teaching in the Geography & Geology Department at EMU as an assistant professor. This is his first year serving as advisor to Preservation Eastern. A cultural and historical geographer, Dr. Matt earned his PhD from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville in 2016. His research focuses on race, social and spatial justice, public/critical pedagogy, popular culture, with regional interests in the United States (particularly the South). His current project seeks to understand how different types of history and cultural museums specializing in African American experiences change and adapt their narrative emphases in response to contemporary events.
We’ve Moved!

Don’t forget: The Geography & Geology Department, including the Historic Preservation Program, is no longer in Strong Hall. Temporary offices for the duration of the construction project are in King Hall.

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Rentschler Farm Internship yields many fruitful returns

By Selina Fish

Between mid-May and mid-August, 2017 I completed a 50 hour internship at the Rentschler Farm Museum in Saline, MI. During that time, I was in charge of the Living History Program and was a Saturday guide in the 12-room farmhouse. I communicated with and coordinated volunteer interpreters and second-grade students. My duties included scheduling, opening and closing the museum, and seeing that supplies were readily available.

Later, I learned how to use the Showcase database and performed object updates, as needed. My main focus was the Toy Collection, which involved identifying and updating the objects that were missing a Location and/or a Photograph in the database.

Finally, I was exposed to the accessioning process and procedure, where I had the opportunity to label a textile artifact. My time at the farm museum went by far too quickly and feel fortunate to have been able to learn so much from many of the volunteers at the Saline Historical Society in such a short period. I highly recommend that other students take advantage of this amazing opportunity in the future.
By Katie Beck

Wayne, Michigan: you might drive through it on your way to Detroit if you take Michigan Avenue; otherwise, unless you’re from this little city or work at the Ford plant you may not know that it exists. It’s a city that’s in trouble financially but despite that it has a lot to offer when it comes to its history; it has an interesting story to tell.

I didn’t know what to expect as I began a paid internship at the Wayne Historical Museum in January of 2017. It was my second semester of grad school in the Historic Preservation Program at Eastern Michigan University and I had only lived in Michigan for about five months by then. I didn’t know anything about Wayne let alone Ypsilanti, the city I lived in, but there was a museum willing to pay me so I could get the experience I needed. I was excited and nervous but had a good feeling there would be the potential to gain the type of museum experience I lacked while working on various projects.

In the previous fall semester of school, I took two museum based classes and briefly learned how to assess a museum in different aspects of operation and design. I was able to utilize these techniques at the museum to help determine its main priorities. This museum was suffering from a lack of funding and so it was (and still is) strictly a volunteer-run museum with an intern sprinkled in here and there. The first intern came from the same program as myself at EMU and he started quite the overhaul to get this museum back into shape. When he first came to the museum it didn’t look much like a museum as it did an antique store (minus the price tags). First thing’s first, sort, organize and research the objects displayed in the museum. We had to figure out what was relevant to Wayne and its history and what was just grandma’s old stuff.

Fortunately for us, the museum had quite the treasure trove of objects and archival resources despite never having museum professionals involved to manage and maintain the collection. The people who developed the collection did the right thing in teaching themselves how to accession objects and archival material using the limited resources they had. What they had put into place wasn’t perfect but it provided a starting point for us as interns and future museum professionals, a starting point that many local history museums don’t have. As a student of museum development, design and management, I discovered I could simultaneously put what I was learning in class into action in this little museum.

In the last nine months, we have been able to give the museum a theme and purpose by researching the history of Wayne through the objects in the collection and interpreting it for the public. We gave the museum a chronological flow to show why Wayne was formed and the changes and challenges it has overcome throughout the years. We developed an ongoing lecture series and multiple museum events to promote our work and the treasure trove of history this city has to offer. The events also offered the community a place and time to get together and share common interests and family history. We have worked with the historical society and dedicated volunteers to research, re-organize and de-clutter a growing collection. There has been an increase in visitors to the museum since last year, of which many who stop in say they have lived in Wayne their whole life and didn’t know this museum existed. It has been so rewarding to hear locals’ stories and family histories as they have visited the museum for the first time and discovered their great grandfather’s/mother’s photo or name in the exhibit.

It has been challenging work and it is far from finished. It is not perfect nor does it reach its potential yet, but with little resources, a trained (or in training) museum eye and local support it has transformed in no time. It is a place people can go to get a glimpse of where this city began and how it has grown and adapted to what it is today. There are many questions still as to where the museum will be in a year with the city in a troubling financial situation and a museum without permanent paid employees. There is no guarantee that our work will continue or that it will stay put. It is up to the community and dedicated volunteers to do the best that we can do to protect and give life to a museum with an unknown future.
During the Fall 2016–Winter 2017 academic year, I applied for and received a Summer Research/ Creative Activity Award (SRA), one of EMU’s internal competitive grant programs. Using the award, I began a new project researching how museums around the country respond to expanding geographies of racism and racial violence in the U.S. Focusing specifically on African American historical and cultural narratives, the proposed project is the first stage of research in a larger planned study that asks, “What is the role of the museum in the 21st century?” and “How do American museums change and adapt their narrative emphases in response to contemporary events?”

Along with research assistants Hannah Meyer (HP Master’s student) and Karen Cook (my wife, and this year a Master’s student in Voval Performance), I conducted museum exhibit observations at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit, the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., the Missouri History Museum in St. Louis, the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, and the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia in Big Rapids, MI.

I also conducted interviews with 14 museum curators, educators, and managers, and used part of the funds to attend the annual conference of the Association of African American Museums in Washington, D.C. to network and learn more about the ongoing work of African American museums. From here, I plan to use this pilot data to write external grant proposals to national funding agencies to scale up the research to the next level. I will also be presenting my initial research findings at the East Lakes and Southeastern regional geography meetings of the American Association of Geographers (AAG) this fall and the national annual AAG meeting in April.
By Haley McAlpine

While the kitchen pantry may appear as a staple in the modern American home, its popularity in middle class housing has long been susceptible to changing social and economic trends. Once praised as a crucial workspace in the 1880s, the pantry would fall sharply out of fashion by the 1930s. By 2005, however, the pantry made a stunning comeback as a crucial component in the ideal kitchen. How, then, did the kitchen pantry evolve from a utilitarian work space for storing kitchen goods in the late nineteenth century to a display of wealth and status by the early twenty-first century? Why did it seemingly disappear from popular American floor plans by the 1930s? Prescriptive literature, like women’s magazines, trade publications, published floor plans, and advertisements helps develop the interesting history of the pantry. Whether glorifying the pantry as a storage and workspace in the 1890s, criticizing it as inefficient and wasteful in the 1920s, or calling for its beautification in the 2000s, women’s prescriptive literature has greatly influenced the ideal American pantry. The popularity of the pantry and its inclusion in the ideal American kitchen has fluctuated with the social and economic trends of the last 150 years. This fluctuation can be attributed to the rise of specialized goods and domestic service in the late 1800s, a new emphasis on efficiency and convenience in the 1920s and 1930s, and a trend towards sprawl and space in the late 1980s through the 2000s.

The Rise of the American Pantry

By the mid to late nineteenth century, reform movements and prescriptive literature positioned the pantry as a staple in the ideal American house. Social reforms in the early nineteenth century contributed to housing reforms by the 1850s, when plan-book writers, architects, and women’s magazines began integrating Victorian ideals into floor plans. These ideals called for a distinct separation of work and home, and “encouraged specialization of individual sex roles.”¹ By equating “the benefits of the material world with moral excellence,” authors of prescriptive literature placed the burden of maintaining the ideal home on the housewife.² As a result, the kitchen and its storage facilities were distinctly within the woman’s domain. Magazines and advice manuals, like those from authors Catherine E. Beecher and Maria Parloa, defined the ideal layout of a kitchen pantry.

Unlike the pantry of the twenty-first century, pantries in the 1870s and 1880s were designed not only as storage spaces, but also as utilitarian workspaces. The pantry often stored tableware and certain foodstuffs but also included a worktable and sometimes a sink for dish and clothes washing.³ While Beecher’s highly influential work The American Woman’s Home, published in 1869, detailed the efficient and convenient kitchen, other publications offered diagrams and details of the ideal pantry. Miss Parloa’s Kitchen Companion of 1887 also offered a diagram of the ideal pantry (see Figure 1).⁴ It featured “a large, strong table, containing two drawers,” at which to prepare food. Publications like these were common in the late 1800s and worked to define the idealized pantry with floor plans, diagrams, and advice.

While prescriptive literature began to define the ideal kitchen and pantry, the Industrial Revolution further contributed to the evolution of the pantry. The invention of the refrigerator and other household appliances in the late 1800s allowed for the consolidation of food storage into a single space, away from the stove and cooking area. This trend continued into the early 1900s, as families began to move away from the kitchen as the central hub of the home. However, by the mid-2000s, the pantry started making a comeback as homeowners sought to maximize their living space and create a more functional kitchen design.

Revolution also played an important role in further dictating the size and usage of the pantry. The industrialization of American production meant more goods for American consumers. Processed food production also grew increasingly popular throughout the late nineteenth century, and by 1900 “food processing accounted for 20 percent of industrial production in the United States.\(^5\) Pantries thus needed to be larger and well organized. Publications of women like Beecher and Parloa offered solutions and design plans to ensure that every specialized kitchen gadget and ingredient would find a space of its own in the pantry.

The Industrial Revolution again impacted the design of the American kitchen and pantry with its effects on the field of domestic service. In many instances during the nineteenth century, the availability of domestic servants dictated the size of a kitchen and its storage facilities. Many women in the late nineteenth century employed domestic help to mitigate the “immense…burdens” of maintaining the ideal, Victorian household.\(^6\) Thus, kitchens were large and spacious with ample pantries for storage of utensils and essential ingredients.\(^7\) By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the field of domestic service began to dwindle. As Scott Roper notes, “industrialization opened new, more desirable employment opportunities to young women.”\(^8\) For many, “factory work was preferable to housework.”\(^9\) This decline in domestic service would ultimately contribute to the gradual elimination of the pantry from popular American floor plans.

The Fall of the American Pantry

The absence of hired help greatly impacted kitchen design and pantry arrangement in the first decades for the twentieth century. Ruth Schwartz Cowan notes that servants had disappeared from illustrations in women’s magazines by the 1920s, leaving all of the work to be done by housewives.\(^10\) Women were calling for smaller, more compact kitchens that required minimal effort and maximum convenience. The rising field of domestic science echoed this concern for kitchen efficiency and careful household planning. Emerging in the 1890s, this field of study introduced new prescriptive literature that emphasized ways to minimize steps in the kitchen with strategic layouts and new “labor-saving devices.”\(^11\) Although later studies proved that these devices and layouts did not actually save women time or energy, the idealized efficient kitchen had a resounding impact on the design of American kitchens in the twentieth century.\(^12\)

By the 1920s, women were taking note of their inefficient kitchens. Frederick W. Taylor’s system of scientific management in industrial trades was translated into the design of the efficient kitchen by the early twentieth century.\(^13\) Prescriptive literature praising the efficient kitchen stated that the pantry was a source of many wasted steps. A 1921 letter to the editor of American Builder offers a suggestion:

…eliminate the pantry and put that space into the kitchen and use it for cupboards. You know, we of this city of small homes, have buried the pantry and forgotten where the grave is, as we found that on an average our wives, mothers, and sweethearts travel 22 miles a day from pantry to sink, sink to range, and range to pantry, and so we bundled our pantry off the map, or to be correct, off the plans. We endeavor to so arrange our kitchens as to give the maximum of efficiency with the minimum of work.\(^14\)

Letters like this demonstrate the appeals of women to architects and builders to integrate the step-saving theories into kitchen design. An article from a 1922 American Builder described the departure of the modern kitchen from the awkward “old kitchen of twenty years ago.” It argued that the “revolutionary improvement” of “permanent built-in fixtures” like kitchen cabinets and breakfast nooks saved wasted steps and construction costs. These improvements created a modern, efficient kitchen in which there “was no need for a pantry which occupies space.”\(^15\) Although the ideal efficient and compact kitchen was mentioned frequently from the 1900s through the 1920s, American floor plans did not reflect these changes until the 1930s.\(^16\) These “modern” homes ditched the old-fashioned, step-wasting pantry. In its place emerged kitchen cabinets and breakfast nooks. Cabinetry in the average American kitchen was a crucial component for efficiency and step-saving by the 1930. Freestanding cabinets, like the well-established Hoosier Cabinet, became increasingly popular after the turn of the century. These all-in-one cabinets featured a large
hutch-like top with storage for a wide variety of kitchen utensils. These large, freestanding cabinets had a “systematic and ergonomic design” that “expedited meal preparation and consolidated kitchen storage.” The Hoosier Manufacturing Company of Newcastle, Indiana, was incorporated by 1899 and sold over 2 million cabinets by 1920.

Unlike the pantry, the Hoosier Cabinet had a specific space for every utensil while keeping it all within arm’s reach of the housewife. It saved steps, time, and space in the smaller, more “modern” American kitchen. A 1911 article from House Beautiful entitled “My Escape from Kitchen Drudgery,” described the “hundreds of steps” required when baking a cake in an “old fashioned kitchen.” The pantry, as part of this outdated kitchen, was refed to as the “dark… dingy old closet” (see Figure 2). The Hoosier Cabinet would offer relief from these wasted steps by holding all the necessary items in a convenient location for the busy housewife. However, by 1930 freestanding cabinets were “cast as outdated” and were “rapidly supplanted in American kitchens by built-in cabinets.”

Although the built-in cabinet did not reach its popularity until the 1930s, advertisements in 1922 claim that built-ins could “save very materially in the cost of the home or apartment by eliminating the pantry…” thus conserving “…money, space and steps” (see Figure 3). These cabinets allowed for smaller, more efficient kitchens that took up less square footage than the bulky, freestanding Hoosier Cabinet. As writer Nancy Hiller notes, cabinets were certainly not new inventions of the twentieth century and were featured in many wealthier homes during the nineteenth century. These cabinets, however, were “site built into the fabric of the house by carpenters” and “were absolutely fixed in place and could not be removed.” Improvements in building materials and the adoption of the “unit idea” meant that twentieth century built-in cabinets were more flexible in suiting specific household needs. They could be interchanged or added to for more storage and could be produced at lower costs.

The popularity of the built-in cabinet was such that standardized industry measurements were adopted by 1938 and by the end of World War II, built-in cabinets were fundamental parts of the “modern” American kitchen.

As built-in cabinets grew in popularity, the pantry began to disappear from published floor plans and prescriptive literature. In its place emerged the highly convenient and much discussed breakfast nook. These compact, eat-in spaces were carved out of kitchens and often featured “permanent furniture” like a table and two bench-like seats in “a space not more than 6 feet wide.” The breakfast nook was highly popular by the 1920s and was a common feature in many bungalow floor plans and plan books for compact housing. The breakfast room was becoming a common feature of Aladdin kit home floor plans, as it saved steps and minimized work. “It is a housewife’s friend,” boasted an advertisement for the Aladdinette Dining Alcove (see Figure 4). Breakfast nooks continued to replace pantries in popular in postwar housing and through the 1970s. It was designed to be “open to but physically divided from the kitchen,” allowing kitchens to functionally as work and living spaces while remaining distinctly separate.

With the growing popularity of breakfast nooks and built-in cabinetry, American kitchens relied less on the pantry for storage. By the 1950s, pantries were essentially absent from popular
The Rise, Fall, and Rise (again) of the American Pantry


The Rise, Fall, and Rise (again) of the American Pantry

Floorplans. A 1954 Aladdin catalog featured dozens of floorplans but not one of them showed a kitchen pantry. Instead, these Aladdin kitchens featured “modern” cabinets that a housewife could “point with pride to” when showing off her fashionable kitchen. Copyright laws and the end of public domain in the 1920s make it difficult to say with certainty that the pantry was absent from every published American floorplan. However, research does suggest that pantries remained out of fashion in American kitchens from the 1920s until the 1990s when they reemerged in what society has affectionately named “The McMansion.”

The Rise (again) of the American Pantry

By the 2000s the pantry was no longer a source of wasted steps or inconvenience. In fact, the walk-in pantry was described as the most desired feature in new homes by a 2005 National Association of Home Builders survey. How did the pantry make such a comeback in popular American architecture after 60 years of absence in published floor plans? The most important vehicle for the return of the pantry was the McMansion. Defined as “a very large house built in usually a suburban neighborhood or development” and often regarded as “oversized and ostentatious,” the McMansion sprung up in developments across the county during the late 1980s and the 1990s. Some writers suggest that rapidly increasing post-World War II consumerism, combined with changing economic tides in the 1980s and extreme affluence in the 1990s, gave rise to the McMansion. Referred to as the “fast-food version of the American dream,” the McMansion’s most distinguishing feature was its square footage. These sprawling “cookie-cutter” homes of 3,000 to 5,000 square feet would undoubtedly contain a “monster granite kitchen” with the newest appliances and ample storage. Enter: the walk-in pantry.

The pantry would become an essential component of the McMansion of the 1990s and into the 2000s. Its popularity would further increase with the expanding field of organization professionals and a growing interest in household storage. In the last three decades, a variety of television shows, magazines, articles, and stores emerged that specialize in the problems of home storage. The pantry has become a shining star of the organization movement. One merely has to type “pantry organization” into popular websites like Pinterest to yield hundreds of results on how to best arrange a kitchen pantry. From decorative labels to color coordinated storage bins, the modern pantry is efficient, organized, and colorful.

Another idea that may contribute to the modern pantry’s popularity is the growing notion of the kitchen as a presentation of self. As Witold Rybczynski notes, by the 1990s “the locale for self-presentation” shifted from the formal parlor or front room to the kitchen and bathrooms. Once strictly utilitarian, “backstage” spaces, the kitchen and bathrooms now function as a “portable-façade” or demonstration of wealth and status in American architecture. The pantry, too, has become a presentation of self and wealth. A 2015 article suggests that “a gorgeous pantry is like an invitation to cook and entertain,” and that one should strike a balance by “putting your beautiful items on display and creating a neat arrangement of your daily essentials.” Far from the utilitarian workspace described by Maria Parloa in 1887, the pantries of the 2010s are areas of not just storage, but display.

The presence of the pantry in popular American floor plans was determined by the changing social and economic climates from the late nineteenth century through the early twenty-first century. The rise of the pantry in the late 1800s can be attributed to an influx of new material goods and the popularity of domestic service in middle class homes. By the 1920s, the study of domestic science and kitchen efficiency, combined with the dwindling servant class, defined the modern kitchen as small, compact, and pantry-less. Built-in cabinets and breakfast nooks took the place of kitchen pantries in popular American floor plans from the 1930s until the late 1980s and early 1990s. The emerging trend of suburban sprawl and consumerism called for McMansions with larger kitchens and more storage. By 2016, pantry organization and design are frequently discussed topics in popular women’s magazines and websites. The popularity of the American kitchen pantry has ebbed and flowed since the late nineteenth century.
The Rise, Fall, and Rise (again) of the American Pantry

Endnotes


24) Beecher, “Promoting the ‘Unit Idea’,” 34.

25) Ibid.

26) The terms breakfast nook, breakfast room, and breakfast alcove are used interchangeably in advertisements and literature to describe a compact eating area carved out of the kitchen space. For the sake of continuity, this paper will refer to this space as the breakfast nook.


28) For several examples of early 20th century floor plans that feature a breakfast nook, see Bungalowcraft Company, Bungalowcraft: Compact Eating Area Carved Out of the Kitchen Space. For the sake of continuity, this paper will refer to this space as the breakfast nook.


36) Frank, “Let Them Eat McMansions!”


By Tim Sabo

The now defunct local company, the Ypsilanti Underwear Company, was situated on the banks of the Huron River at Forest Avenue. It specialized in undergarments for women, men, and children. In the beginning Hay & Todd Woolen Mill as it was known, produced fine yarn, knitted hosiery, leggings, and “Nubia’s” (a lightweight knitted head scarf). The factory stood six stories tall and was powered by water, a common source of energy for businesses in the 19th century.

It was a popular and valuable site from the beginning. In 1828, a flour mill was constructed and ran operations for 12 years. The building was demolished to make way for progress. The city’s wealthiest businessmen—Daniel Quirk, Cornelius Cornwell, Isaac Conklin, and Robert Hemphill—wasted no time in developing the land.

Between 1840 and 1860 Michigan’s sheep population grew from 100,000 to ten times that amount. The woolen output increased from 153,375 pounds to nearly four million pounds and leaped again to eleven million pounds in 1880. In 1865, Michigan produced a tenth of the nation’s wool crop. Most of it was produced in the lower half of the state and was of the Spanish Merino sheep variety. At this time Michigan was still an agrarian state and produced wheat as well. There was very little capital to build the factories that could produce the wool. Farmers had to send their product out of state to be processed. Cornwell stated, “The extension of this important manufacture is of great interest to the state, the climate rendering woolen clothing necessary the greater portion of the year and because it furnishes the producer a ready home market.” He and Quirk were co-investors in establishing woolen mills that same year.

Three years later prices dropped, the markets misinterpreted pre-civil war cotton crops. Therefore, sheep farmers began to slaughter their herds. Quirk and Cornwell quickly sold the mill to Frank Todd and William Hay.

In 1885, the company moved forward in a risky decision in response to a controversial social movement of freeing women from their restrictive undergarments. It would later be addressed at the 1893 Columbian’s World Exposition in Chicago. A woman named Anna Jennes-Miller, known as the “apostle of dress reform” gave a speech on “Dress Improvement” during the Congress of Women Event. She said, “One who carefully examines the pages of fashion magazines and looks in the history of dress will find that there has never been an attempt upon the part of fashion makers to clothe the body. Consistently the body has been cramped and distorted its requirements for health and comfort disregarded according to the caprice of fashions’ arbiters”. The Dress Reform Movement sought to free women from overly restrictive clothing.

Jennes-Miller strongly approved of the Ypsilanti Underwear Companies long underwear. She pointed out, “It gives me great pleasure to state that women who are wearing Ypsilanti Union Suits are enthusiastic in its praise. The garment is perfect and I am sanguine that the day is not far distant when this form of union garment will have taken the place of all others.”

She had a Washington D.C. address but knew of the company through its aggressive marketing and far reaching advertisements. It spread nationally by 1891 from Baltimore to California and from Toronto to Texas. Harper’s Bazaar magazine gave the underwear high praise and the company slogan that became popular was, “Do not despair there’s Ypsilanti underwear!” Hay & Todd undergarments were sold in dry goods stores all over the country. Due to their overwhelming success the two men opened factories in Ann Arbor and Detroit to keep up with the demand. “Ypsilanti’s” became a generic term for long underwear.

The company was very progressive. It used curvaceous women to model its underwear in advertisements and at the height of the company’s success they had a fifteen foot mural depicting one of these women sporting their product. It was in view of passengers on the Michigan Central Railroad and was shocking to
some who would turn their heads away.

In 1905, the company was renamed the Ypsilanti Underwear Company and employed more women than any other company at the time. The female employees rode bikes to work which was another form of emancipation and forward thinking and behavior. The YUC was very pro-woman at a time when women still didn’t have the right to vote.

At the turn of the 19th century women’s dress reform was falling out of favor and “Health Underwear” was in. The tide was turning and the company began to face financial difficulties. One reason alleged the decrease in business was due in part to all the homes having central heating installed and the garment wasn’t needed anymore.

In 1906, the Ann Arbor factory was closed and Detroit soon followed. A year later the Union Trust Company began foreclosure proceedings and as a result the factory closed. A New York company, the Oak Milling Company, bought the factory but could not turn a profit and was resold. In turn it was leased to Ray Battery Company which occupied the mill for several years. Eventually, it sat empty and in 1933 the mill and all of its buildings were demolished.

Every year in August the workers would gather at Prospect Park for a reunion. They would have a pot luck and ice cream and regale each other of their days during the glory years at YUC. The last meeting was in 1941.

Today, the site is occupied by an automobile restoration firm and all that remains of the mill are a few large boulders that dammed the river at Forest Street Bridge. In the Ypsilanti Historical Museum a cream colored undergarment hangs on display—a testament to the one time pre-eminence as the place of the “Standard underwear of civilization.”

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