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Refinement and Architecture in Early Ypsilanti

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Refinement and Architecture in Early Ypsilanti

by

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Thesis

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Abstract

The objective of this work is to examine refinement and architecture in nineteenth-century America with a focus on rural areas and Ypsilanti, Michigan in particular. The research utilized consists of an analysis of primary and secondary sources. Included among the primary sources are architectural style books such as those by Andrew Jackson Downing, pioneer writings such as those of Caroline Kirkland and Solon Robinson, historical buildings, and probate record inventories of Washtenaw County. Ypsilantians did not assume the genteel refinement that developed in the nineteenth century. They instead modified gentility to become a form of respectability that suited their needs. By examining one small town in which gentility was unrealistic and undesired, we can conclude that Americans in other periphery locales had differing opinions and feelings toward the movement of gentility which helped shape respectability and comfort in American society.
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Introduction

Early Americans were, according to American Historian Edward Chappell, “an ill-smelling, eye-gouging horde, squatting for want of chairs, eating communally for lack of individual utensils and vessels.” By the end of the eighteenth century, however, Americans were largely aware of elements of refinement through architecture, manners, dress, and material goods. Why did Americans transform so quickly from Chappell’s horde to a society largely aware of refinement? The introduction establishes that Americans became aware of refinement by the end of the eighteenth century because of the spread of Georgian mansions, as encouraged by architectural publications, and all their grandeur including a parlor, a sweeping staircase in an enclosed entryway, classical décor, and consumer goods. American gentility belonged exclusively to the most elite class while others shamelessly aspired to become more refined.

Chapter one addresses refinement and parlor culture at its finest. The nineteenth century saw a dramatic change in the circulation of architectural style books. Printing technology, in addition to the rise of the architectural profession, allowed for widely distributed books that counseled on style rather than the books of the eighteenth century that instructed building techniques. One of the most notable authors of stylebooks was Andrew Jackson Downing. Downing emphasized several ideals throughout his works and integrated them in his designs. Notable among them are expression of purpose, picturesqueness, simple refinement and ambiance, and that one’s home was a reflection of one’s self. He suggested the Gothic and Italianate styles specifically for their picturesque manner and discouraged the Greek style due to its white color and intricate classical décor, which were not simple or

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picturesque. With the influence of Downing and others, the barometer for gentility was raised. Consumer goods, manners, leisure activities, and cleanliness became expectations of the elite and their clearly defined parlor culture. Though the standard of living was raised, it was clear that only the gentry could afford a life of leisure activities such as entertaining in their parlors and walking their verandas. However, middling individuals were able to loosely participate in the parlor culture by maintaining a facade of elite ideals. Household refinement of the eighteenth century was evolved and polished to become nineteenth-century parlor culture as prescribed by widely distributed style books.

As non-elites began to consider parlor culture as it was given by style books, it also became clear that it was not suitable to all. Chapter two addresses the pushback to a culture of refinement that was unobtainable to the masses. Many populations, such as those who resided in rural areas or on the frontier including a multitude of farmers, saw refinement as an unrealistic and thus undesirable way of life. Here we examine a mass of middling people—those who had not the means to build extravagantly, but who did have the means to build. Some individuals felt drawn to refinement and others didn’t, but at the end of the day, a farmer had to put his farm and necessities above all else. Niceties may have been intriguing but with barriers including lack of funds and physical distance from manufacturing, they were unrealistic. What is more is that even if a person owned very refined items, they simply had no place or use for them in their lives. Rural writers addressed the issue in a number of ways. The first is the adaptation of more realistic architecture. Andrew Jackson Downing attempted to write for the rural population by providing designs for cottages and farmhouses and incorporating beauty in the structure through simplicity, but still he only wrote for the upper-crust of that group. Solon Robinson, a pioneer and agricultural writer, picked up the
slack and wrote architectural publications that addressed the needs of those living on the frontier or in rural areas by prioritizing economy and efficiency. Another way rural writers addressed refinement for the rural population is by succumbing to the fact that refinement as prescribed was unrealistic but suggesting that perhaps facets of it, such as manners, could be adapted. Authors such as Catherine Maria Sedgwick and Caroline Kirkland took the stance that manners could be practiced by anyone, regardless of location or monetary wealth. The middling people learned to disregard refinement and parlor culture and took to an alternative—respectability and comfort. Through embracing respectability, the middling folks were able to participate in mainstream culture and thus isolate only the very poor population as opposed to the very wealthy isolation at the end of the eighteenth century.

Chapter three turns to Michiganders, and Ypsilantians in particular, who mostly fell into the category of middling people, but they were quite unique: they adapted a Greek Revival style of architecture but did not also adopt a grandiose level of elite refinement. The Greek Revival style was known for being ostentatious and anything but picturesque. Michiganders, however, made their Greek Revival structures simple and respectable. In Michigan more than anywhere else, simple Greek Revival architecture thrived. The upright-and-wing, the basilica house, and the I-house were all either forms of the Greek Revival movement or adapted to it, and all were prevalent in Michigan. In homes built with respect to economy, the formal parlor was discarded for a room that was more useful—the sitting room. The sitting room lacked genteel expectations but displayed a vernacularly acceptable respectability and practicality. The estate inventories of Ypsilantians in the nineteenth century reflect their expression of respectability. Even the least valuable inventories show signs of refinement, and even the most valuable inventories show signs of modesty. Ypsilanti
is an example of one Midwestern town that selectively adapted elements of refinement and respectability, without adapting refinement and parlor culture in its entirety, to suit its needs. Ypsilantians, and other rural populations, adapted vernacular respectability in the nineteenth century rather than genteel refinement.

In the seventeenth century, homes were generally small and may have included a chimney with a large exposed interior hearth, a dirt floor, a doorway, and extremely small leaded casement windows where necessary. These small early American homes were cramped, general spaces with many occupants, typically consisting of one or two rooms that were approximately 100 – 150 sq. ft. This sharply contrasts images one may have constructed from house museums or romanticized images of pre-Revolutionary farms that were clean cut and well kept. House museums are exceptional structures and generally much larger than homes of ordinary individuals; the image of the well-kept farm is “a product of nineteenth-century improvement and twentieth-century imagination.”

Most homes were very small and sometimes nonessential elements, such as a chimney or window glass, were not included in the architecture of a home in order to save money and resources. The exterior of the typical seventeenth-century home was shingles or clapboards, hand split or sawn, which covered a timber form including wattle and daub or a similar filling technique, and a stone, mud, or brick chimney. (Figure 1) Due to weathering and their mostly wooden exteriors, the homes took on a drab, gray color that blended in with the surrounding environment. The interior

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3 Appendix, Figure 1.

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surfaces may have included raw materials but were frequently covered in whitewash.\(^4\) A single-room home known as a hall was common, and these were often expanded to a two-room home, or a hall-and-parlor. One of the very first ways in which people acted on their aspirations was by adding a parlor to their one-room home to separate private sleeping quarters from the more public space where they displayed the nicest belongings the family owned. This explains why many one-room homes were expanded to two-room homes and why the hall-and-parlor home dominated the architectural landscape in America throughout the eighteenth century and beyond.\(^5\)

Parlors were not specifically meant for work or play, but it is clear that many activities occurred in the parlor while the family was waking. The hall was where the family ate, cooked, slept, worked, and lived. In fact, it was used for purposes that would later be fulfilled by several other rooms including a kitchen, dining room, library, sitting room, and drawing room.\(^6\)

Throughout the eighteenth century, America lacked professional architects. As a result, most homes were built by craftsmen, masons, and carpenters and designs beyond the one- or two-room home required assistance from publications.\(^7\) The most important architectural design book in America, according to architectural historian Leland Roth, was *A Book of Architecture* by James Gibbs, which was published in 1728. This book was very expensive and included suggestions about homes, styles, and theories that were also

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\(^5\) Bushman, 109-110; Cummings, 27, 47, 176-178; Morrison, 54-55.


expensive. The majority of the population could not afford the Gibbs book or his suggestions, and architects with the knowledge to construct the suggested buildings were sparse. More common and widely distributed than Gibbs’ book were carpenter’s handbooks that suggested a layout and style for a home and importantly, building instructions for the inexperienced. Particularly popular for most of the eighteenth century was The City and Country Builder’s and Workman’s Treasury of Designs by Batty Langley. Langley came from humble beginnings and wrote in such a way that an average carpenter-builder would be able to comprehend and mimic his ideas in a practical manner. He published over twenty books and several had multiple editions. Handbooks such as Langley’s accelerated an increase in larger, more permanent homes that were characterized by separate rooms for specific purposes, and spaces that were cleaner and more highly stylized; the new mansions of America.

The mansions of the eighteenth century were much more abundant than the few that existed in the seventeenth century. Even among the wealthiest individuals, mansions were generally not built until a couple decades after the turn of the eighteenth century. The new mansions were typically built in the Georgian style. This style saw expedited proliferation due to a steady flow of English immigrants and the circulation of over fifty different carpenters’ handbooks that emphasized a vernacular Georgian form that came to be known as Colonial Georgian. American builders rarely followed the books exactly, but instead chose specific details to copy from one author or another. Both interior and exterior details were explained including stairways, door and window surrounds, paneling, moldings, and mantelpieces. Many dimensions, materials, layouts, and other details were changed in order

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9 Morrison, 288.
10 Chappell, 177.
to accommodate necessity or taste.\textsuperscript{11} The Colonial Georgian mansions had a presence along the coast and countryside that set them apart from the homes of the masses. The wealthy sat at the height of society in their mansions of generous space and fine décor.\textsuperscript{12}

A Georgian mansion could be spotted from a distance because it had a very distinctive stylistic character and was brightly colored: red bricks with a white sash paired with other characteristics such as a water table and thus a raised entryway, a glazed string course, quoins, a low-pitched hipped roof topped by a balustrade parallel to the facade, narrow dormers piercing the roof line, windows with their own gables, and symmetry around a central axis with an even number of bays on either side. (Figure 2)\textsuperscript{13} Classically, red brick and carved stone were used on Georgian buildings. In Colonial Georgian homes, however, other readily available materials were used in imitation of the red brick and white sash. For example, in brick scarce New England, painted wood was used, and in Pennsylvania where brick and wood were both scarce, stone was used.\textsuperscript{14} Only public buildings and the homes of the wealthiest were an exception. Wood or stucco could be carved or grooved and painted in such a way that it would appear more similar to brick or stone than to what it really was.

The layout of a Georgian home was as distinct as its exterior design. The Georgian style conformed to geometric uniformity with the front facade of the home symmetrical around a central axis and an even number of bays on either side. The layout was typically double pile—two rooms deep, usually two stories, and situated around a central hallway and stair. The entrance to these mansions was central to the facade and thus aligned with the

\textsuperscript{11} Morrison, 291-293, 307-308; Mayhew and Myers, 68-70.
\textsuperscript{12} Bushman, 5 and 113; Upton, 111.
\textsuperscript{13} Appendix: Figure 2.
\textsuperscript{14} Bushman, 133-134; Cummings, 201.
When a visitor entered a Georgian home, he found himself separated from the private living space provided by the surrounding rooms; yet admission to other rooms could only be gained by first passing through an impressive hall.

The hallway itself was monumental and symbolic, but it achieved an even greater status when paired with a broad, sweeping staircase. The width of the staircase was supposed to be directly proportionate to the importance of the inhabitants. Architectural guidebooks, such as Isaac Ware’s *A Complete Body of Architecture*, stated that the stairs of royalty were at least ten feet wide. An open-string staircase with visible step ends ornamented in scrolls or foliage and panels were among the most elegant. The most grandiose had a grand lathe-turned balustrade that extended the length of the staircase and held a handrail, perhaps molded, and led to a newel post. An elaborate, wide staircase was suitable for guests and suggested that the chambers to which it led were elegant and worthy of an introduction. However, these homes typically were only grandiose in those rooms which polite company would see and were rather simple in most of the private spaces. These two dramatically different living spaces were separated by nothing more than a doorway or staircase.

Grand entryways with broad staircases provided an entrance to a home that included a room that illustrated a new public aspiration of gentility even more clearly; usually off to one side and situated in the front of the house was the most elaborately decorated room in the home—the parlor. The parlors of Georgian mansions were significantly different than those

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15 Appendix: Figure 3 and Figure 4.
17 Morrison, 307-310; Mayhew and Myers, 39-40; Appendix: Figure 5.
18 Bushman, 119-121; Chappell, 217-218.
found in the contemporary hall and parlor home. Beds, work materials and tools, business
records, play things, and any other items that may reveal everyday activities or work were
removed from the parlor. This room was suitable exclusively for genteel entertainment and
visitors engaging in refined activities and discussion. The dedication of an entire room in
one’s home to polite entertainment revealed a dedication or aspiration to the emerging
culture of the American elite, a truly genteel culture.¹⁹

A cultural shift in America manifested itself in the form of refinement created by the
spread of Georgian homes. The human elements of life—anything that was dirty, imperfect,
or rough such as cooking, cleaning, bathing—were to be hidden or repressed in order to
maintain a genteel facade. Kitchens, washrooms, and servants’ rooms were pushed to the
back of the house or, as was popular in the south, to separate outbuildings, which were built
for each of these specific purposes.²⁰ A person’s actions were to seem easy, and the material
items of life flawless.²¹ The Georgian home allowed this by creating a clean-cut floor plan
with large rooms, high ceilings, and classical décor. There was a correct and proper way in
which to do everyday tasks; walking, eating, and speaking could be highly polished, elegant,
and graceful.²² All of this was outlined in guidebooks, such as *The Rudiments of Genteel
Behavior*, and reinforced by media, theater, and education. Smooth, polished, and refined
living spaces, manners, dress, and architecture were quickly becoming common enough for
the mass of society to be aware of and witness their growing presence.

A growing economy paired with a new standard of refinement caused an increase in
the purchase of consumer goods. Parlors were filled with niceties such as ceramics, tea

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¹⁹ Bushman, 121 and 181; Mayhew and Myers, 56-68.
²⁰ Morrison, 296-297, 302-304; Chappell, 178.
²¹ Bushman, 94-96.
²² Crowley, 147; Bushman, 98-99, Morrison, 300-302.
services, and matching sets of chairs. Chairs, even when unmatched and uncomfortable, were much more elegant than were the stools or lack of seats that may have preceded them. The purpose of a set of chairs, as well as other goods, was to demonstrate a refined lifestyle and a higher class standing.  

One of the most notable items to grace the eighteenth-century parlor was the mirror, or looking glass. In the early eighteenth century, they became significantly more common; around half of Americans living in towns had at least one mirror in their home and the wealthy had two or more. Many times, a simple mirror may have been the most refined item in a parlor. The upper class coveted more elaborate mirrors in order to further refine and beautify their homes. Mirrors did not denote monetary status, as they could be easily obtained for a very low price, but they illustrated one way in which the masses tried, and succeeded, to raise the level of gentility in their own homes and lives in the mid-eighteenth century.

Parlors provided a place for polite entertainment. Material goods that were necessary for such an event included individual utensils and a tea service. Individual forks and knives suggested slower, more carefully consumed meals that were sophisticated and were perhaps even social events where those present conversed while eating. A tea service suggested that one intends to, or was prepared to, host a gathering of others to have tea in a social setting. Niceties in an otherwise unrefined home showed an attempt to increase the level of refinement, or the level of perceived refinement, in that home.

Parlors soon became an expectation, and the level of finish and refinement of one’s parlor directly reflected the affluence of the individual. A simple colonial style parlor might

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24 Crowley, 128-130; Mayhew and Myers, 36-37.
25 Shammas, 13-14.
have been found in a two-room home and may have contained a handsome bed frame, looking glass, or other nice items that the family wished to display in their best room. In homes with more space, and thus more defined spaces, the beds would be removed from the parlor leaving a space in which one was able to entertain refined company. Architecture in average homes changed very little in form or function during the eighteenth century, but rather changed in size and durability. A home may have measured sixteen feet by eighteen instead of ten by twelve, been constructed on a raised brick foundation with sawn clapboards covering the exterior and plaster covering the interior, and had larger windows of glazed glass.\(^{27}\) With the addition of more rooms, more privacy, and the necessary consumer goods to encourage such activities as relaxation and entertainment, homes facilitated a new lifestyle for individuals even at the most basic level. Though gentility was unquestionably out of reach for an overwhelming majority, a slightly higher standard of living realized through larger homes and consumer goods, was realistic for society at large.\(^ {28}\)

In the eighteenth century, the line that divided refined living and genteel culture from the rest of society was definitive—the upper-most level of society could call themselves genteel, while others could only strive to become more refined. The masses, however, were not discouraged by unobtainable gentility but were inspired to yearn for more.

In addition to homes and consumer goods, manners were a simple and relatively inexpensive way to improve oneself. Though the elite could afford classical education and dancing lessons, a common individual could easily adjust his or her behaviors to mimic those of the genteel. A change in posture, eating habits, or verbal mannerisms could dramatically

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\(^ {27}\) Chappell, 203.

\(^ {28}\) Chappell, 190-207; Bushman, 121.
change the image a person projected of him or herself to the world. A trend of continuously attempting to raise one’s level of refinement away from the depths of vulgarity and toward a higher level of cleanliness, elegance, and class could be found throughout the population through varying methods.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the magnificence of Georgian mansions introduced gentility to Americans at large. Refinement and gentility were only obtained by the wealthiest while others viewed from a distance and sought to become gradually more refined. With an understanding of elite refinement as it existed in the eighteenth century, chapter one will examine its transformation in the nineteenth century.

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29 Bushman, 27-28; Shammas, 8.
Chapter One: A Simple Kind of Refinement

Pattern books utilized in the eighteenth century were replaced by architectural style and plan books in the nineteenth century. In the new, more intricate books, a home was presented in a complete form; everything from landscape details to interior decoration was included. The high fashion represented in the books simultaneously encouraged and reflected the parlor culture that became widely popular. An integral part of the parlor culture was participation in leisure activities, such as entertaining and socializing. When this was impossible, or simply impractical, a facade of a leisurely lifestyle would suffice. In this chapter, I will examine parlor culture and gentility in the nineteenth century through the lens of architectural style books. Authors, such as Andrew Jackson Davis and Andrew Jackson Downing, played a major role in defining and encouraging refined living in America. The spread of gentility that was facilitated through stylebooks and the consequential parlor culture resulted in a new standard of living for the wealthiest individuals. Ambitions to maintain a facade of leisure became widespread because stylebooks of the nineteenth century, which expanded and emphasized the ideals of household refinement of the eighteenth century, created a distinct parlor culture and increased architectural style and plan expectations.

The nineteenth century brought with it a multitude of technological advances, many making the production and distribution of architectural stylebooks of all lengths much more affordable to produce and to purchase. Plan books of the eighteenth century had been printed on a hand set press, on hand set paper. During the 1830s and 1840s, however, printing was revolutionized. Steam powered presses made printing much more economical. More printing could be accomplished in a shorter amount of time for a smaller price. Additionally, in order
to keep up with the new presses, printing was done on continuous rolls of paper by the 1840s instead of on hand laid paper which was much more laborious to produce.\footnote{John E. Crowley, \textit{The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities and Design in Early Modern Britain and Early America} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 265.} Steam presses, stereotyping, electrotyping, and papermaking allowed publications to be mass produced. Other innovations that increased the availability of publications to the public included new railways, eyeglasses, and indoor lighting. The absence of any of these elements could very well have squelched the popularity of nineteenth-century publications, including stylebooks.\footnote{Ronald J. Zboray, “Antebellum Reading and the Ironies of Technological Innovation,” \textit{American Quarterly} 40 (1988): 67-73.}

While architectural style and plan books became widely popular and readily available in the nineteenth century due to increased production and distribution, this was also largely due to changes that occurred within the architectural profession. There were no architectural schools in the United States until the latter half of the century, yet there were enough architects in the country trying to raise awareness and respect of their vocation. These architects, who had been trained in Europe or who had entered the profession through another route, were able to capitalize on their skills despite the fact that they offered a service rather than a tangible product. To be sure, it was not without a struggle. First and foremost, it was difficult to convince the public that architects were necessary when builders and craftsmen had been successfully building without architectural assistance. The architect only wanted to design the homes, however, not build them. In this way, they would not be taking the jobs of the builders and craftsmen, but would instead be adding expertise and increasing the quality of work performed. Second, they had to ensure that only qualified architects were claiming the title. The reputation of the profession would crumble if others were to call
themselves architects without having the prior expertise necessary to do the exacting work. With this, government assistance was key. Architects were granted state licenses which gave them the recognition they needed and allowed them to maintain exclusivity of the profession. Finally, architects had a difficult time convincing their clients to grant them creative rights. Individuals were unwilling to hand over their autonomy to architects with an asset as precious as their home. Initially, architects were forced to work in partnership with their clients in order to complete a project. The public eventually came to trust the architectural profession, which allowed architects to claim it more fully. Many professional architects created workable market professions in which they sold their knowledge and skills for the first time.32

An essential element that enabled professional architects to control the field of architecture was the marriage of the advancements in paper making with advancements in printing, which allowed for widespread circulation of reading materials such as architectural design books. Architects believed that the common builder, and indeed his clients, lacked the taste and education necessary to design and create stylized architecture.33 Further, architects believed it was important for the structures that composed the built environment to positively affect the morals and beauty of the community. Andrew Jackson Downing, a contemporary architect who published very successful style books, stated in his Cottage Residences, that his motive to write was, “A hearty desire to contribute something to the improvement of the domestic architecture and the rural taste of our country.”34 By eliminating architecture

33 Upton, 120.
34 Andrew Jackson Downing, Cottage Residences or a Series of Designs for Rural Cottages and Cottage Villas, and their Gardens and Grounds Adapted to North America (New York: Wiley and Halsted, 1856 [orig. pub. 1842]), v.
without taste, and replacing it with properly designed architecture, national taste could be dramatically influenced.\textsuperscript{35} In an attempt to create a built environment in America where style dominated, architects sought a way to instruct builders who would take on the task without the assistance of a professional. Professionals were rarely an option because they were unaffordable, inaccessible, or a combination of both. The uppermost elite of society had the means to hire a professional architect to design their homes. Wealthy merchants and those of moderate means, on the other hand, could afford to build the villas as drawn in plan books, but either could not afford an architect or did not have access to one.

Architects successfully changed the face of architectural publications. Instead of manuals that instructed building techniques, architects produced booklets that counseled on architectural style. Style books were useful for builders who tried to replicate a certain style, but they were more useful in convincing the client that a particular style of domestic architecture was desirable. Where detailed architectural sketches appeared in pattern books, architectural drawings surrounded by a complete landscaped environment appeared in stylebooks. Paired with these drawings were appealing arguments supporting a specific style of architecture and its social implications. By appealing to the client’s personal values, stylebooks were able to convince individuals that domestic architectural style represented and reciprocally altered the values of the inhabitants.\textsuperscript{36} As style books became immensely popular during the nineteenth century, domestic architectural style became a necessity in refined homes in order to portray genteel values.

\textsuperscript{35} Clifford E Clark, “Domestic Architecture as an Index to Social History: The Romantic Revival and the Cult of Domesticity in America, 1840-1870,” \textit{The Journal of Interdisciplinary History} 7 (Summer, 1976): 42.
The forerunner in the popularization of architectural style books of the nineteenth century was Alexander Jackson Davis (1803 – 1892), with his *Rural Residences* in 1837. This publication included eight different architectural plans, mostly domestic, in varying styles and prices. All of them, however, were illustrated in an elegantly and elaborately landscaped environment and included only the illustration and basic floor plans save for the elevation of a school house. (Figure 6 and Figure 7)\(^{37}\) His descriptions were short and basic. Though construction descriptions were also included, they were for the sake of explanation rather than instruction. One construction description included a statement that implied that not only was this book not meant to be instructive, but that a builder would not accurately know how to construct a building of style. He states that, “Accurate detailed patterns should be furnished by an architect, as guides to the workmen.”\(^{38}\) Though his illustrations were far more intriguing than detailed architectural drawings, his descriptions lacked the eloquence needed to convince the reader that style was a necessity.\(^{39}\)

While Davis was the first major contributor to the popularization of style books in America, the writer who was most widely circulated, and therefore most widely read, was Andrew Jackson Downing. Downing went about his work in a distinctly different way than Davis. He used romantic theory and writing to sell his ideas of Gothic architecture in finely manicured landscapes. His homes were not only stylized and landscaped, but they insisted on a certain amount of refinement that would suggest social acceptability. The homes he designed placed an emphasis on leisure areas and ambiance while simultaneously hiding

\(^{37}\) Appendix: Figure 6 and Figure 7.  
\(^{39}\) Crowley, 270.
away anything that may seem unsightly, such as servants’ quarters.\footnote{Sally McMurry, \textit{Families and Farmhouses in Nineteenth-Century America: Vernacular Design and Social Change} (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 39-40.} His earliest publication, \textit{Landscape Gardening}, was first printed in 1841, closely followed by \textit{Cottage Residences} and \textit{Country Houses} in 1842 and 1850, respectfully. Downing’s theories and beliefs regarding rural domestic spaces came to be the heart and soul of household refinement in the nineteenth century because his books were readily available due to their popularity and numerous printings. \textit{Landscape Gardening} set the tone by insisting that the home should have spaces necessary for comfort and convenience for living in the country. He followed by maintaining that the home itself should blend into the surrounding landscape, an extension of the picturesque nature in which it is built.\footnote{Andrew Jackson Downing, \textit{A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening: Adapted to North America; with a View to the Improvement of Country Residences} (New York: Dumbarton Oaks, 1841); Crowley, 268.} In order to do justice to his landscape designs and to compliment his persuasive writing, he asked Davis to illustrate his later two stylebooks. Davis’ talents in graphics paired with Downing’s verbal expertise created publications that were intriguing, appealing, and largely irresistible to the reader.\footnote{Crowley, 270.} \textit{Cottage Residences} was able to better develop the landscapes surrounding the homes than was possible without the assistance of Davis.\footnote{Downing, \textit{Cottage Residences}.} Downing’s \textit{Country Houses} (1851) followed similarly. Downing’s works portrayed his definitive views on what rural architecture should be. He believed that the guiding principles should be use, design, and taste. That is to say that buildings should first be built to suit their specific purpose, they should be built to outwardly express what that purpose is, and they should express a specific architectural style.\footnote{Downing, \textit{Landscape Gardening}, 321.} Stylistically, he stated that a building should be natural to its surroundings. He encouraged shades of grey and brown.
while other colors such as the red of bricks or stark white were discouraged.\textsuperscript{45} He thought that styles such as Greek Revival, which used white for the exterior and stately columns and porticoes to create a imposing facade, had no place in the countryside. Downing believed in expression of purpose in buildings. Expression of purpose in a dwelling was displayed by those characteristics that were present in a dwelling that were not present in other structures. Downing emphasized chimney-tops and verandas as those characteristics of rural residences that differentiated them from buildings such as public places or barns where each of these would be “needless and misplaced.”\textsuperscript{46}

According to Downing, “A blind partiality for any one style in building is detrimental to the progress of improvement, both in taste and comfort.”\textsuperscript{47} Downing admitted that the Greek style was very beautiful; however, he stated it had no place in a country such as America and certainly no place in the countryside. The Greek style, which was based on the Grecian temple, left no room for expression of purpose. Neither a chimney nor a veranda would fit with this style, which would take away from the comforts of home. A Grecian temple was simply not fit to be a dwelling. Downing believed that when one builds in the Grecian style, he must sacrifice both fitness and expression of purpose to take into account details such as columns and porticoes, which do not even add beauty in the countryside to which they so starkly contrast.\textsuperscript{48} When homes were built as Greek temples, he said it would be very confusing to distinguish between different buildings—a church, a home, and a bank, for example—if they all looked like a Greek temple. Further, he thought that a home should be honest in its materials. If a home was made of stone, it should look like it is made of

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\textsuperscript{45} Downing, \textit{Cottage Residences}, 9-16.
\textsuperscript{46} Downing, \textit{Landscape Gardening}, 323-324.
\textsuperscript{47} Downing, \textit{Landscape Gardening}, 355.
\textsuperscript{48} Downing, \textit{Landscape Gardening}, 331.
\end{flushleft}
stone; if it is made of wood, it should look like it was made of wood. He took issue with the large columns of the seemingly marble palaces in the countryside that were actually made from wood and simply painted white.\textsuperscript{49} Downing did not like any aspect of the Greek Revival style, even in the height of its popularity. After writing only negatively about the Greek Revival style, he was certainly glad to see its popularity decline.\textsuperscript{50}

Downing was, however, an advocate for picturesque styles such as the Italianate style and Gothic Revival. These styles each allowed for “rural adaptation,” or buildings that seemed to be a part of the surrounding scene.\textsuperscript{51} The Italianate style and its adapted version as Downing presents in his \textit{Cottage Residences}, the “Bracketed Mode,” is adept to fulfill Downing’s three key characteristics of a residence. (Figure 8)\textsuperscript{52} First and foremost, homes built in this style allow for utility. A home may be built to suit the needs of the inhabitants. Expression of purpose is also displayed in this style. Chimney-tops are not only visible, but they are frequently decorative elements of the home. The Italianate style allows for irregularity, balconies, and a picturesque facade, all of which can be made of readily available materials such as wood and stone.\textsuperscript{53} He praised it in \textit{Landscape Gardening} as a home that a man of wealth may build to be ideal; and in \textit{Cottage Residences} as a picturesque home with character that can be easily and cheaply built.\textsuperscript{54}

The Gothic Revival, which included styles such as Carpenter Gothic, Rural Gothic, and English Cottage, was favored for its convenience and natural beauty. Many of the designs in Downing’s works utilized these styles regardless of the size of the home.
suggested. Design II in his *Cottage Residences*, for example, was “A Cottage in the English or Rural Gothic Style.” Downing states that the English Cottage style is “generally admired for the picturesqueness evinced in its tall gables ornamented by handsome verge boards and finials, its neat or fanciful chimney tops, its latticed windows, and other striking features, showing how the genius of pointed or Gothic architecture may be chastened or moulded into forms for domestic habitations.” (Figure 9)\(^5\) Downing admired and encouraged the Gothic style in cottages and any home as it would be a better expression of beauty among its surroundings. He acknowledged that it could be obtained by individuals of even moderate means, but also admitted that Gothic homes with their irregular forms could be built such that additions could be made to increase the utility of the home. Where additions on other more standard architectural forms commonly detracted from style and beauty, additions on Gothic forms increased the beauty of a home with an existing irregular footprint.\(^6\)

In Downing’s opinion, the character of the home began with its exterior. First, it was important to him that the yard should be physically separated from the nature surrounding it in order to maintain and show that the home itself was civilized as the countryside was not. A fence was the preferred method of barrier—a field fence would be suitable when a picket fence was out of the question. Either way, expression of purpose should be clear: the home was a place in which civilized humans lived, not animals. In this way, the refinement of the home was kept in, while animals were kept out.\(^7\) Similarly, the focus that Downing placed on interior rooms of the home had more to do with each room’s relationship to the rest of the home than with the room itself; the placement, view out the windows, and its separation from

\(^{55}\) Downing, *Cottage Residences*, 44-45; Appendix: Figure 9.

\(^{56}\) Downing, *Landscape Gardening*, 349-351.

other rooms were key factors in Downing’s plans. The arrangement of the home, each room in respect to the others, was what Downing considered to be the most important element to ensure comfort. He explains this concept at length in his works, and other times he mentions it in passing as though it is so obvious that he should not have to address the matter: “The advantages of an ingeniously arranged and nicely adapted plan, over one carelessly and ill-contrived, are so obvious to everyone, that they are self-evident.” How the home was viewed and presented was much more important to Downing than any particular decoration or detail.

Downing promoted an unparalleled level of countryside refinement. Refined homes, in his view, included impressive features such as a pristine parlor and a beautiful veranda—both of which indicated a leisurely lifestyle and gentility. He believed that beauty in a home showed that the inhabitants lived and participated in refined society. His books all show his support for a simple kind of refinement. Instead of focusing on intricacies in décor or woodwork, he focused on the ambiance of the home as a whole. He believed that elegant simplicity displayed good taste. Instead of adding embellishments that would diminish the character of the home itself, he suggested drawing beauty from the most pleasing attributes the home has to offer. He suggests that beauty should be emphasized without taking attention away from the building itself.

Though the exterior of the home created the nature of the home even before entry, the interior was not unimportant. In fact, throughout the nineteenth century, the importance of

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58 Crowley, 283.
59 Downing, Cottage Residences, v, 3, 27.
60 Downing, Cottage Residences, 14.
61 Crowley, 266-270; Downing, Landscape Gardening; Downing, Cottage Residences; Andrew Jackson Downing, The Architecture of Country Houses, Including Designs for Cottages, and Farm-Houses, and Villas, with Remarks on Interiors, Furniture, and the Best Modes of Warming and Ventilating (New York, 1969 [orig. pub. 1850]).
62 Downing, Cottage Residences, 24.
the formal parlor grew to the extent that parlor culture came to dominate refined society and
gentility in America. The genteel parlor of the nineteenth century was completely devoid of
personal items such as the master bed, but was filled with the most refined items of a
leisurely life. Decorations such as moldings and mantelpieces usually matched the style of
the home while other decoration, such as furniture, followed the fashion of the day. Downing
dictated that furniture should be simple yet stylish. Both décor and furniture were
representations of the monetary wealth of the family and their social standing. Another item
that represented gentility in the home was the presence of literature. With the technological
advancements in printing, books could be found with more frequency as the century wore on.
Some books that may have been found in family parlors could have been illustrated books,
fictional books, or religious texts such as the Bible. Further, the parlor was a distinct area of
the home that usually had its own entrance from the street or porch. This allowed the family
to entertain without admitting others into the other parts of their home. A non-genteel wife of
moderate means could maintain family privacy while also maintaining genteel status simply
by the existence of her well-kept parlor. Though the parlor may have been used for other
things when it was not being used to entertain, its importance was drawn from the social
implications it carried. Stylebooks supported gentility and the display of social status; it
became rare to find a house pattern without a parlor that was prominently located within the
home. Downing’s work fell in line with, and supported, these social assumptions. He
emphasized the importance of the parlor to the social standing of homeowners as well. He
believed that the parlor should be placed within the home such that it beheld the most

63 McMurry, 136.
64 McMurry, 140-144; Clark, 51.
65 Bushman, 251-252.
beautiful view from its windows.\textsuperscript{66} This suggests that the guests who would be entertained in
the parlor should be considered before any of the family and rooms they might frequent more
regularly. In his opinion, a parlor was crucial to displaying and claiming one’s level of
gentility.

Parlor culture of the nineteenth century created increasingly high standards of
refinement for the upper class to maintain and others to aspire. The gentry had a new level of
income at their disposal with which they were able to show their monetary worth and
establish their gentility through material items. They were able to create a new level of
opulence that would have been unfathomable a century earlier.\textsuperscript{67} This display of opulence
was elevated by the level of cleanliness. During the turn of the century, a farmer in Hadley,
Massachusetts by the name of Levi Dickinson began making brooms from a type of corn that
was useful for little else. He began by making a few brooms and selling them locally and
continued to expand his business in the following seasons by planting more and selling more.
His brooms became sweepingly popular, and he sold to an increasingly larger audience. Corn
brooms were commonplace by the mid-nineteenth century and revolutionized the acceptable
level of cleanliness in a refined home. Where twig brooms would simply remove large
objects, corn brooms would remove all dust and leave an unparalleled clean floor.\textsuperscript{68}

The exterior of the most grandiose homes in Downing’s works were distinguished by
their grounds that pointedly included porches or verandas where the inhabitants could relax
and enjoy their manicured lawns from the safety of their home. Preferably of simple design,
the porch—by any name—was a place for comfort and leisure, which added dignity and

\textsuperscript{66} Downing, \textit{Cottage Residences}, 5.
\textsuperscript{67} Bushman, 239.
\textsuperscript{68} Gregory H. Nobles, “Commerce and Community: A Case Study of the Rural Broommaking Business in
importance to the entrance.\textsuperscript{69} It was a British architectural detail that came to be popular in America during the nineteenth century. Though a porch was not a necessity in any particular place, it came to symbolize comfort throughout the countryside.\textsuperscript{70} Additionally, it made a home superior to its similar counterparts that did not have a porch, veranda, or piazza.\textsuperscript{71} To Downing, it was not whether a home should have a porch, but rather what shape or location it would take and if there would be multiple porch areas around the exterior of the home. Downing stated that, “The porch, the veranda, or the piazza, are highly characteristic features, and no dwelling-house can be considered complete without one or more of them.”\textsuperscript{72} The veranda or piazza provided a place to promenade while additionally providing protection from the elements in inclement weather—both sun and rain were kept out by low roofs while wind was allowed to permeate the boundaries.\textsuperscript{73} To Downing, it was the general character of the home, defined by the presence of architectural traits such as a veranda, which allowed it to claim a place in refined society.

The standard of sophistication and the barometer of genteel culture for all levels of society were higher than they had ever been. Where purchasing small items such as silver utensils had symbolized the recognition of polite society in the eighteenth century, such minute gestures would not have passed in a world of nicer goods that appeared more abundantly. In order to escape vulgarity, people’s perceptions and the barometer for gentility changed, and consistent improvement became necessary.\textsuperscript{74} By the turn of the century, comfortable living was an engrained cultural value that was illustrative of the middling folks.

\textsuperscript{69} Downing, \textit{Landscape Gardening}, 325.  
\textsuperscript{70} Crowley, 230.  
\textsuperscript{71} Downing, \textit{Cottage Residences}, 30.  
\textsuperscript{72} Downing, \textit{Cottage Residences}, 13.  
\textsuperscript{73} Downing, \textit{Landscape Gardening}, 326.  
\textsuperscript{74} Bushman, 251.
Thus, comfort, in addition to increased consumption, was an essential way to escape the grasp of vulgarity.\textsuperscript{75} More domestic items became expectations. Everything from small kitchen appliances to toilets, furnaces, and furniture all went through technological advancements. Downing went so far as to suggest the best brands of some products to his readers, which helped to cement materialistic values in the public.\textsuperscript{76} Refinement at this time was centered on good taste, which was characterized by change rather than tradition.\textsuperscript{77} The ever-increasing level of gentility set a new standard that Americans had to meet in order to belong to any social class that was not crude.

Striving to meet new standards was more important than it was to actually achieve it. A concrete example of this comes from floor coverings and the transformation they experienced between the end of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth—namely, rugs and carpeting. In 1750, carpets were essentially unknown items, but by 1850, they could be found in all levels of American houses. Many individuals in the lower levels of society had correspondingly inexpensive carpets. It was not the monetary value of the carpet that made it significant, but the simple idea of the carpet and its presence in the home.\textsuperscript{78} It was possible for the wealthy who did not quite belong to the gentry to pass for gentility by assuming a facade of genteel style, manners, and representations.

Downing stressed the importance of showing throughout a home that efforts were made to be refined and to live a leisurely lifestyle. Though a leisurely home was more often than not the outcome of hard work, it was important to suppress the image of work from the portions of the home that were visible. The front of the home was maintained as a place to

\textsuperscript{75} Crowley, 292.
\textsuperscript{76} Crowley, 263-264.
\textsuperscript{77} Upton, 129.
\textsuperscript{78} Bushman, 230.
entertain or to take part in refined activities, such as sewing or reading. From the exterior, the home should show only pleasant features and should not display any space that was less than idyllic. Attic windows, for example, had no place on the front of the home as they portrayed an image of small, cramped, and dim spaces. The entryway door, flanked by a porch or veranda, was to be the center of attention. The entryway door, flanked by a porch or veranda, was to be the center of attention. Work, particularly anything that was dirty or unbecoming, was to completed out of sight or in the back of the house. Similarly, simply having architectural structures such as a veranda was enough to show that the homeowners had a commitment to a leisurely lifestyle. Carpets, verandas, and refined parlor activities did not necessarily make a person refined but instead, allowed them to pass as a person of a higher social class.

The gentry of the nineteenth century were able to attain a level of refinement that would have been out of the question a century earlier; the rest of the population was able to attain a solidly non-vulgar status more easily as well. The most affluent were exclusively the elites. Their homes physically manifested this status unquestionably. A small and manageable way that the middling folks could show their commitment to elite values was by adapting small features to their homes that showed that they were aware of the style of the day. Downing insisted that the home reflected the values of the family. Each different style of home, as well as other attributes, reflected the sentiment and character of the inhabitants. The home, he believed, reflected and therefore revealed much of the family’s character; the family should correspondingly think of their home as such and outwardly display the values

80 Crowley, 267; Bushman, 256-263.
81 Bushman, 242.
82 Upton, 149.
83 Downing, Cottage Residences, 17-87.
they wish to portray.\textsuperscript{84} As a result of these beliefs, and in combination with new methods of mass manufacturing of the 1830s, new avenues were created to escape vulgarity. Fine items were produced en masse and were therefore more affordable. Those who could afford it could purchase a larger quantity of increasingly nice items and thus display their ideals in a physical form.\textsuperscript{85} Architectural details and consumer products showed that the family was committed to becoming members of a higher class and that they shared values with the elites they were emulating.

Genteel values spread throughout the lower levels of society, causing the gentry to no longer be isolated at the top of the social stratification ladder. As more of the population had access to more disposable income, they were able to consume correspondingly. The ability to purchase items that had previously belonged exclusively to the gentry caused the line between the most elite in society and the middling people to blur.\textsuperscript{86} Rather than the isolated instances of gentrification that occurred in the eighteenth century, gentility spread gradually in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{87} Instead of mansions standing alone in their gentility, the more abundant mansions set an example for their aspiring neighbors who were able to share in their lifestyle by adapting taste. In this way, precisely the genteel practices that the elites adapted in order to mark themselves as such became so widespread that the masses were able to blur the line of differentiation by adapting the genteel practices for everyday use.\textsuperscript{88} Andrew Jackson Downing emphasized beauty above all else; according to him, it could be incorporated in all of the other values he supported. Beauty should be obtained within every aspect of each home regardless of size or cost. He claimed that if nothing else, a house and

\textsuperscript{84} Smith, 178-182.  
\textsuperscript{85} Smith, 176.  
\textsuperscript{86} Crowley, 143.  
\textsuperscript{87} Bushman, 208.  
\textsuperscript{88} Bushman, 28-29, 242.
grounds should be beautiful.\textsuperscript{89} Commitment to beautification of the home in addition to the commitment to the material culture of the elite, enabled the middling people to claim genteel culture as their own. Parlor culture, and leisure activities, such as holding or attending a dinner strictly for social purposes, became acceptable for classes from whom it had previously been restricted.\textsuperscript{90} Thus, genteel values became middling expectations.

In the nineteenth century, the standard of living among the American gentility was raised. A leisurely lifestyle symbolized gentility and parlor culture in the nineteenth century. For the masses, leisure was an unreasonable way to spend time. Therefore, having a home and parlor that seemed as though it was used for these activities allowed the middling people to pass and participate in the parlor culture of the gentility. Parlor culture was partially created, and reinforced, by high-style architectural stylebooks that dictated to every aspect of the home—inside and out.

Now that we have examined parlor culture and gentility as prescribed by stylebooks, let us turn to the masses in America. In rural areas, such as Michigan, the ideas of gentility and parlor culture were challenged and ultimately, modified.

\textsuperscript{89} Downing, \textit{Cottage Residences}, vi – 17.
\textsuperscript{90} Bushman, 227-228, 242-243, 273; Crowley, 168.
Chapter Two: Who is a Gentleman?

The parlor culture of the nineteenth century, as laid out by Downing and others, was impractical and unrealistic for many farmers and others who lived in rural areas, such as the frontier. In many rural areas, the infrastructure to obtain the niceties prescribed was nonexistent, as were the funds to purchase such things. Transportation between back east, where these items were produced, and the frontier was unreliable at best. Writers, such as Andrew Jackson Downing and Solon Robinson, realized this and wrote for the middling masses of people who simply could not achieve an elaborate level of refinement. The middling masses referred to here do not include the very wealthy and refined or the very vulgar and poor. The middling people were building homes but certainly nothing grand by contemporary standards. Included in this group, and most discussed here, are the rural populations such as those who migrated to the frontier, many of whom were farmers. By suggesting that farmers and others prioritize economy, efficiency, and practicality above pomp and show, they outlined a level of respectability to which farmers could reasonably subscribe. An alternative to prescribed refinement and parlor culture, respectability, allowed the middling masses to shift the class isolation from the elite in the eighteenth century to the vulgar in the nineteenth. Maintaining manners and cleanliness and choosing basic education over extravagant goods, allowed the rural populations to escape vulgarity and join in mainstream practices.

In this chapter, I examine the writings of Andrew Jackson Downing and Solon Robinson as they suggest architectural options for farmers, middling people, and rural populations. Furthermore, I look at writings of authors, such as Catherine Maria Sedgwick and Caroline Kirkland, who agree that parlor culture is unrealistic for most. Each of these
authors suggest ways in which refinement can be modified to suit the needs of non-genteel populations. Throughout the chapter, I examine the ways in which these ideals are applicable to Ypsilanti, Michigan.

Parlor culture, including the associated furnishings and practices, was simply impractical and therefore, undesirable to the rural farmer who preferred a more casual home. The parlor, when present in rural farming communities, was distinctively the nicest room in the home and was thus used exclusively for events rather than for everyday purposes. The parlor traditionally held funerals, weddings, and parties. Otherwise, it remained unused and commonly closed off from the rest of the house and sunlight in order to preserve its refined aspects.91 An unused room in a farm home was an unreasonable waste of resources. To have a defined space that would likely only be used once every few years squandered away money from the farmer that could otherwise be used productively. Not only did the parlor remain empty and costly, but it was a place in which the farmer felt unwelcome—even in his own home. When coming in from the field, for example, the farmer would understandably not want to walk his muddy boots through the front of his house if it was nicely carpeted or perfectly swept, nor would he sit at the finely carved mahogany furniture after a long day of work in the barn. He would, instead, avoid his own front door and use the back, regularly entering through his kitchen. The furnishings of a parlor were too proper and refined; they were too nice to feel comfortable using regularly. Furthermore, the relative flamboyance or modesty of a home was not actually of notable importance to the inhabitants of rural farming communities. Attention was paid to events, people, and their general way of life, rather than

their homes or possessions. Given these preferences, it was only logical that the farmer would prefer to not conform to the prescribed parlor culture. Rural writers made consistently negative commentary regarding the proliferation of refinement and parlors. Arguments against pricey furnishings found their way into agricultural periodicals.

One article in the *Ohio Cultivator: A Semi-Monthly Journal Devoted to the Improvement of Agriculture and Horticulture and the Promotion of Domestic Industry*, titled “Rooms and Their Ornaments,” suggests that rooms should be ornamented, “no one is so poor that he cannot provide some little thing suggestive of beauty.” In the summer, for example, fresh flowers can be taken from the garden and brought inside consistently such that a room should not be without. Likewise, rooms should be decorated such that they reflect the individuality of the person decorating. A hunter may display his weapons or his prey, while a scholar may display cases of books. These, according to the “Country Gentleman” author, are appropriate decoration choices, while “costly paintings, statues in marble and bronze” and “would be baskets of fruit, done in plaster… add nothing to the effect of the room, while they lead one to an unfavorable impression of the person who placed them there.”

The farmer focused on economizing his farm, first and foremost, and therefore, could not reason spending so much of his resources on rarely used space in his home that was filled with particularly nice and conspicuously expensive furnishings. The economy of the farm also dictated such happenings as meals. Meals were usually prepared very large and hearty so that the farmer and field hands, if present, could put in a decent day’s work. Furthermore, the

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food prepared and served on a farm was, more frequently than not, the fruits of the farmer’s own labor. In this respect, tea was out of the question as was other relatively exotic fare. An item such as tea, though encouraged by publications promoting parlor culture, was neither readily available nor filling—a farmer would not ideally work day to day on a breakfast of tea and bread. The parlor culture that flourished in many other locales just did not work on the farm. A room set aside for special occasions and filled with costly items was inherently against the economical nature and needs of the farm household.

Where ostentation was unnecessary and unwelcome, comfort was desirable. Comfort in the nineteenth century had a very different meaning than it does in the twenty-first century. Rather than describing a level of ease with which one completes a task or spends his time, it referred to taking pleasure in household life without the decorum and pretension of the upper class. It was not dazzling as an aristocratic life may be, but it was to embrace the physical comfort and relaxing arena of the home. By embracing comfort, the middling folks could lay claim to a respectable and civil life that was enviable when considered in juxtaposition to the parlor culture of the aristocracy.

One way we can determine that rural settlements lacked refinement is through the lens of authors who wrote about their experiences on the frontier. Caroline Stansbury, for example, was born and raised in New York City and moved to upstate New York to teach in her early twenties. She married a man named William Kirkland. It was with him that she and their children moved to Detroit, Michigan in 1835. In 1837, the Kirklands founded the town of Pinckney. Caroline Kirkland wrote two books about life in Michigan before moving back to New York in 1843 due to the unprofitable nature of their endeavors in Michigan. The first

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95 Bushman, 267-269.
of which was *A New Home; Who'll Follow?*, which is quite descriptive regarding life on the frontier as well as ideas of refinement, cleanliness, and necessity that dominated the minds of settlers.

Kirkland’s fictionalized account of her life on the frontier is told through the character of Mary Clavers, a woman of the upper class who travelled from the well-established East Coast to Michigan with her husband. Her travels began in a fashionable buggy. During her travels she encountered many obstacles that her genteel mode of travel simply could not withstand. Mud, rivers, and stones all caused problems for the lightweight buggy. In one instance, a woodsman came to help them cross a large mud puddle. He assisted them, and then he politely refused when they offered to pay him for his troubles and went on his way. Mrs. Clavers learned very quickly that the frontier was no place for a buggy and wished she had chosen to travel by means of a heavy lumber-waggon [sic] instead.\footnote{Caroline M. Kirkland, *A New Home--Who'll Follow?: Glimpses of Western Life*, ed. William S. Osborne, (Schenectady, NY: The New College University Press, 1965[originally published New York: C.S. Francis & Co, 1855]), 36-37.}

Once the Clavers’ had reached Michigan, it did not take long for Mary to notice the abundance of log structures in the area. A log home was built very differently than the frame structures with which Mrs. Clavers had become familiar. Log homes were typically built with little or no foundation. This left them unprotected from the earth that lay beneath the logs and thus, the weather and resulting fungi that could cause the logs to rot.\footnote{Laura Smith, “Reconfiguring Frontier Architecture in Caroline Kirkland’s Western Sketches,” *Women’s Studies* 35 (2006): 188-189.} Log homes were typically built to be one- or two-pen homes with an earth floor and a gabled roof covered in split-shingles.\footnote{Leland M. Roth, *American Architecture: A History* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001), 143.} Chimneys were only sometimes present in these structures. When they did exist, they were usually on the end or ends of a one-pen home and could be on the
end or in the middle of a two-pen home. Two types of log construction were commonly found in the Great Lakes Region. The first is of French origin and utilizes vertical log construction either *poteaux en terre* or *poteaux sur sole*. *Poteaux en terre* construction consisted of shavepened poles that were driven into the ground. The space between the poles was filled with daub. Clay and grass or stones and mortar daub were most common. *Poteaux sur sole* construction, alternatively, refers to a similar method where the poles were placed on a sill rather than into the ground. The other type of log construction that was prevalent in the Great Lakes Region utilized horizontal logs and "false" corner-timbering. False corner-timbering is of European origin, likely English, and came to the Great Lakes from New England and upstate New York. Corner-timbering is a type of interlocking system where the logs are secured at the corner through notching that holds each log in place, from top to bottom. "False" corner-timbering, on the other hand, is a system where interlocking happens only on one horizontal layer, but the layers are not systematically connected to one another. This could be achieved through one of three types of joints: a lap or rebated joint, a tongue and groove joint, or a butt joint.

Regardless of the type of construction method utilized, log cabins on the frontier used logs that were typically stripped of their bark and left unprotected. The log wall was a very inefficient barrier between the inhabitants of the cabin and the weathering of the outside world. Still, the log cabin was a popular choice because it could be erected rather quickly without architectural design or complicated tools, and it was made of materials that were

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101 Kniffen and Glassie, 167-169.
abundant on the frontier. Unfortunately, despite the amount of money or refined belongings one could claim, they were worth very little in Michigan. Money could not buy goods that were unavailable, and belongings were almost communal. Everything from a horse to kitchen utensils to food were shared with those in the community. Clavers’ experience led her to believe that not sharing would expose an air of superiority your neighbors would not soon forget.

Unfortunately, when Mary viewed the log cabins she saw them neither for their convenience nor for their utility; rather, she saw them for what they were not. Mary Clavers was accustomed to the frame-houses that were prevalent back East. The frame-house represented refinement and desires of middling people to obtain a higher status and a greater wealth of consumer goods. It was a permanent home that outwardly displayed that the inhabitants participated in the culture of refinement and betterment. Conversely, the log cabin showed none of this. Clavers viewed the cabin as a symbol of impermanence. She viewed the population of Michigan as one that was unsettled and unrefined. Not only was the log home lacking a foundation, and thus durability, but it lacked the necessary aspects of a home that allowed for proper living arrangements.

Frame homes provided for many amenities and comforts that a log cabin simply did not. In one room, for example, there was no privacy or separation of space. Men and women could not keep a respectable distance in a home that had no place to which one or the other may retreat or work. Likewise, the log cabin lacked the sanitary measures to which Mary Clavers prescribed. Cleanliness was not to the people she met as it was to her. Mrs. Clavers and her husband stayed with a family called Danforth on their way to their new home. The

\[102\] Smith, 188-190.
\[103\] Kirkland, 159.
Danforth’s home was everything Mrs. Clavers viewed as unsatisfactory, unsanitary, and immodest. A simple wash bin placed under a tree outdoors, a stick ladder led to a sleeping apartment where “sundry old quilts were fastened by forks to the rafters in such a way as to serve as a partial screen.”

Clavers soon noticed that Michigan lacked something else entirely—the ability to obtain necessary building materials, the facilities to produce proper materials, and the skilled individuals to put them together. She was first struck by how very many carpenters there were living in such a very small area. She wrote that, “I have since learned that a plane, a chisel, and two dollars a day make a carpenter in Michigan.” There were no architects or builders in Michigan who would erect the types of homes she was used to, nor were there sawmills to facilitate this type of construction. Kirkland, and her character Mary Clavers, viewed the log cabin dwelling people as uncivilized beings who reeked of vulgarity.

Through Mrs. Clavers’ experiences, Kirkland implies that people who live in log cabins were offensive to those who embraced the nineteenth-century notions of cleanliness, modesty, and refinement. Living in a log cabin meant that men and women, regardless of their relation to one another, lived in close quarters without privacy. It also meant that all the activities and work that occurred on a daily basis took place in the same room. The food was prepared right next to where the wash was completed, which was also where sewing was done. This left no room for contemporary ideas of gender roles, sanitation, or polite manners. Furthermore, they could not engage in familial activities such as polite family dinners. Not only would their dwellings fall short of the task, but the people themselves would not have participated in such an affair. Eating was a necessity, not an occasion in Michigan; the

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104 Smith 173-190; Kirkland, 38-40.
105 Kirkland, 80.
settlers would not have thought of dressing for a meal during which they consumed relatively
exotic foods and held polite conversation around a placed table in an adorned room. Mrs.
Clavers noted that the people certainly work hard and are nice enough, but they are dirty,
dress poorly, and have no idea of polite societal norms that she has come to expect. Western
culture offends her eastern-based sensibilities.

Mrs. Clavers’ first, and temporary, home consisted of a chimney with a reflector for
baking biscuits, an array of random cookery on shelves on the walls, a flour barrel, odd
pieces of furniture, and a floor with holes large enough for snakes to come in from the earth
below. After a time of living in a temporary home, a small, unfinished log cabin, Mrs.
Clavers sets in to her permanent home. She was enthusiastic that her permanent home was to
be a “framed” home. She did not anticipate living in a log home for more than six to eight
weeks. It did not take long for Mrs. Clavers to realize that “framing” was just the word that
those in Michigan used to refer to cutting the logs in preparation for “raising” them.
Additionally, materials for building, other than logs, were scarce. Bricks had to be brought in, but the deliveries were not reliable. Building a home of anything that was not readily
available was impractical if not impossible. Nonetheless, when she moved into her
permanent home, she made it a point to display her fine furniture which she brought with her to Michigan. Specifically, she had a set of delicate ornamental tables that could only exist in
refined society and required that the owner was gentle with them and treated them with the
respect they deserved. She believed that her neighbors would see such things and be envious
of them. They would learn, through her example, that fine items were desirable and

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106 Kirkland, 98-99.
107 Kirkland, 80-82.
108 Kirkland, 74.
109 Kirkland, 81.
distinguished individuals who were refined, from those who were not. She sought to socialize the inhabitants of Michigan by exposing them to the world of consumer goods, which they had not yet discovered or become a part of. Through these goods, Clavers hoped that other refined ideals would soon be adopted as well, and the physical presence of them would change the ways in which the owners acted. One could not treat her decorative tables in the way that they could treat a rough or unfinished table, for example.\textsuperscript{110} Her home would be an example for her neighbors.

She learned soon enough that the air of superiority and East Coast elitism she carried around was really of no use on the frontier. Her neighbors certainly did not think her display was enviable as the delicate tables would have no place in their rough homes. She wished to impress upon her neighbors the same social aspirations which she held, rather than to have them view her with distaste or disrespect. Though still critical of her neighbors, she now empathized with them and began acculturating to western-based sensibility. She could not ignore that many of her items could not even fit in her home and had to remain outside. A tall cupboard, for example, was kept in the yard to hold corn. Choosing to adapt to the environment, she stored away her fancy tables until a time when she lived in a place where they would be more appropriate.\textsuperscript{111} Kirkland realized that her furniture really was impractical in her cabin, and she began to understand her neighbors more. She stated that, “truth began to dawn upon me that the common sense was all on their side.”\textsuperscript{112} The homes that very respectable people lived in on the frontier were often nothing more than a log constructed cabin with a earthen floor and small fire in the middle, maybe on a few stones, and not even a

\textsuperscript{111} Kirkland, 76-78, 228-229.
\textsuperscript{112} Kirkland, 76.

McCarron 39
chimney but simply a hole in the roof to release the smoke from the fire below. One refined gentleman who the Clavers’ met in Michigan had come to the same realization. He traded his watch, “for who needs a time-piece in the woods, where there is nothing to do but watch the shadows all day?” This gentleman’s realization of the uselessness of his watch shows that Michiganders were very unique in their disregard for refinement not because they were uninterested or repelled by it, but because it was simply so unrealistic due to their isolation that they found it appropriate to reject the notion altogether.

The permanent home into which the Clavers’ moved seemed “sumptuous” to them after the temporary home they had inhabited. Though it was undeniably still a log cabin, it had a shanty kitchen and carpet. Twenty by thirty feet, it was simply luxurious in the midst of the frontier. Even those who claimed gentility of the town, Mrs. Clavers states, “scarce claimed rank elsewhere.” Homes that Mrs. Clavers came across and considered a “mansion” were still all log houses. They still had windows without glass, and sheets hung from the ceiling to separate space. She came to understand the relativity of respectability. She admitted that Mrs. Danforth, with her rudimentary wash bin yet welcoming breakfast table, was actually quite comfortable on the frontier. After feeling foolish for pompously displaying her niceties, Mrs. Clavers realized that one must consider the definition of what exactly is refined or comfortable to be relative: “Every thing is relative.”

Mrs. Clavers found that she very quickly appreciated the small comforts of the well-kept cabin in Michigan. She stated after about two weeks that, “My ideas of comfort were by

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113 Kirkland, 70.
114 Kirkland, 202.
115 Kirkland, 186.
116 Kirkland, 141.
117 Kirkland, 43 and 69-70.
118 Kirkland, 27.
119 Kirkland, 45.
this time narrowed down to a well-swept room with a bed in one corner, and cooking-apparatus in another.”\textsuperscript{120} She learned to appreciate things such as a ladder with “board-steps” after having to use a “stick-ladder.”\textsuperscript{121}

Though Mrs. Clavers concedes to some of the practices of living on the frontier, she holds tight to other forms of refinement that she thinks the Michiganders can reasonably adopt. Though there may be no room for decorative furniture, manners could be adopted. For Clavers, this ranges from the proper use of items to the separation of work of others. She recalls a story, for example, of a man who had travelled to Michigan before. When he asked for a wash dish, he was instructed to use the stream outside. Similarly, when he requested a towel, his host was taken aback and stated that the man should just use his pocket handkerchief.\textsuperscript{122} To Clavers, a towel had a purpose that was distinctly different from that of a handkerchief; one was used for personal grooming, while the other was used to blow one’s nose. Similarly, items such as table utensils had distinct purposes and should be used correctly. A fork, for example, should be used for eating. What’s more, a fork should either be designated as a serving fork or an eating fork—one should not use the same utensil for both purposes. It was very common for individuals to use their personal utensils to help themselves to serving dishes. Table manners could also be adopted rather easily despite the conditions of the frontier. While having a meal, for example, other tasks, such as grooming, should not take place.\textsuperscript{123} Kirkland, and her character Mary Clavers, realized the reality of life on the frontier in that refinement could not be transplanted in whole, but there was room for adaptations in some ways.

\textsuperscript{120} Kirkland, 78.
\textsuperscript{121} Kirkland, 79.
\textsuperscript{122} Kirkland, 40 and 85.
\textsuperscript{123} Merish, 495-497.
Kirkland, in her writing to her readers back East, advised them of what she had learned on her move to Michigan. She rebuked the romantic literature about the frontier that most easterners, herself included, had come to take as truth. She wrote of her laborious trip out to the frontier on her buggy and advises the use of a heavier built lumber-waggon [sic] if her friends are to travel westward.124 She also admits that she brought the wrong possessions with her during her move.

Other writers, such as Solon Robinson, sent similar messages to the east regarding the move to the frontier as Kirkland did. Robinson counseled, “Instead, then, of bringing with you many cumbrous articles of furniture that will be almost useless in such a residence as you must necessarily inhabit in a new country; or at any rate, such as you can well dispense with in a ‘log cabin;’ let me honestly advise you to bring the worth of it in ‘Berkshire pigs,’ ‘Durham bulls,’ ‘Leicester sheep,’ and other improved machinery that will add much more to your wealth and comfort, than mahogany side-boards, tables and chairs, and gilt looking glasses.”125 The misconception regarding the level of attainable refinement on the frontier was not uncommon. The population of people who lived in crude dwellings, such as log cabins, was the same population that the middling folks were trying to distinguish themselves from in order to attain a respectable level of refinement and were therefore viewed with the highest levels of distaste.

Kirkland, along with other agricultural writers, believed it was necessary and appropriate to redefine the lines of refinement such that refinement may be obtained from

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124 Kirkland, 12.
anywhere in the country and at any socio-economic level. A post in the *Michigan Farmer* addressed the concern, “Who is a gentleman?”:

Not he who displays the latest fashion-dresses in extravagance, with gold rings and chains to display. Not he who talks the loudest, and makes constant use of profane and vulgar word. Not he who is proud and overbearing—who oppresses the poor and looks with contempt on honest industry. Not he who can not control his passions, and humble himself as a child. No; none of these are real gentlemen. It is he who is kind and obliging, who is ready to do you favor, with no hope of reward, who visits the poor, and assists those who are in need, who is more careful of the state of his heart than the dress of his person, who is humble and sociable, not irascible and revengeful, who always speaks the truth without resorting to profane or indecent words. Such a man is a gentleman, wherever he may be found. Rich or poor, high or low, he is entitled to the application.126

The character in Kirkland’s story, Mary Clavers, decided that she would go about introducing civilization to her neighbors in a different way. She would meet them at their level of refinement, in their comfort zone, and gradually introduce practices that would eventually make them a more polite people. By avoiding both confrontation and belittling the people with whom she was trying to connect, she established a level of trust from which she could advise them without her intentions being known. This way, she would get her neighbors to seek refinement instead of disliking it.127 The thought that refinement could be taught and should be shared with the lower levels of society in order to bring about equality was not unique to Kirkland. While actual gentility could not be gained by the masses, refinement could. Simple niceties that were obtainable, such as carpets, were used by the Claverses. Eventually, Mary noted that her neighbors were “beginning to perceive that

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127 Kirkland.
carpets ‘save trouble’.”

Clavers views change in her neighbors as they begin to accept the practicality of small aspects of refinement that are useful on the frontier: those which are reasonable to adopt, increase quality of life, and are not prohibitively expensive or nearly impossible to obtain. Many realized that refinement could be used to create a culture that was not stratified based on money but was stratified based on who embraced refinement—indeed, “Who is a gentleman.”

Catherine Maria Sedgwick was a novelist who was born into an affluent family in Massachusetts in 1789. Sedgwick wrote about topics such as religious tolerance and stories of women who behaved in more bold ways than was typical of women in the period. One particular publication, however, is revealing in her views regarding the correlation between wealth and refinement. In Sedgwick’s *The Poor Rich Man, and the Rich Poor Man*, Sedgwick uses her characters to illustrate that money and refinement were not necessarily synonymous. The Aiken family serves as a prime example of a poor family who aspired to a class higher than their budget should have allowed. Though they had very little space and few belongings, they were sure to do all they could to refine themselves. They had a “parlor,” though the room also served as their kitchen and bedroom and was thus not a parlor as nineteenth-century ideals called for. In this room, where many activities took place, they set aside the space and the money to place a bookshelf with which they could “cultivate their own and their children’s minds.”

Another of Sedgwick’s characters, Mr. Barclay, believed that the word “genteel” should be eliminated from vocabulary. Though he believed that gentility was something that should not be given recognition, he also believed that manners

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128 Kirkland, 186.
129 Bushman, 276-278.
were essential to American society and societal norms. Sedgwick’s characters shed light on her impulses, which were to spread gentility to all.

Unfortunately, though her intentions were not such, Sedgwick inadvertently suggests that because manners can be obtained by any and all, that if one does not embrace the manners she believes to be necessary, it is his or her own fault. By trying to suggest that a stratified society need not exist, she makes it so that those who have not been exposed to refined culture are at fault. As such, they are in a lower class, and thus, the society is once again stratified—this time based on ignorance rather than money. This is precisely what happened. The movement to bring up and refine the poor masses caused a shift in the way the lower classes were viewed. The outcome was that instead of the middling classes viewing the poor as a class that should be assisted or taught refinement, they began to view them as shameful because they did not embrace the culture of refinement that the middling classes valued and clung to.\(^\text{131}\)

Despite this, refinement did spread. The general population of those who were exposed to polite manners without coercion took to them easily. Beauty and taste could be extended to many, though the standards of such were relative to the specific situation.\(^\text{132}\) Mary Clavers goes on with her crusade and decides that she has done well when she sees small instances of changed behavior among her neighbors. A woman who begins to use a separate spoon for serving than the one she eats with, for example, lets Mary know that she has had an effect on the level of refinement expectations in the area.

Many of the items Caroline Kirkland identifies as essential to recognizing and appreciating the basic elements of refinement were found in the homes in Ypsilanti,

\(^\text{131}\) Bushman, 276-279.
\(^\text{132}\) Upton, 125.
Michigan. As early as 1833 a modest home may have had flannel and linen sheets, towels and handkerchiefs, and multiple sets of tea dishes and knives and forks.\textsuperscript{133} The material items found in Ypsilanti homes changed dramatically in the decades that followed. By 1848, the items found in one home of a farmer could include multiple tea plates, dining plates, and platters; cotton, linen, and flannel sheets; towels, table clothes, and multiple carpets; and many chairs including a rocking chair and an arm chair.\textsuperscript{134} The increase in goods can be contributed to better infrastructure to transport goods made in factories back East and to the awareness of the elements of refinement. Though the goods in the farmer’s home are not genteel, they are indicative of a place that is aware of refinement but lives in respectability and comfort. Gentility is a dedication to an elite lifestyle while respectability or comfort can be selectively adapted to suit the wants or needs of individuals, families, or even towns.

Andrew Jackson Downing made an important contribution to the spread of parlor culture throughout the country. However, he embraced the notion that refinement could be shared by those who did not live a leisurely lifestyle as well by adopting comfort. His writings about rural architecture were split into three distinctive strata. He gave designs for villas for men of easy income, farmhouses for the farmer, and cottages for the workman or mechanic. He identified that what was suitable for one person or profession may not be so for another, and thus his home should reflect this. However, each of Downing’s designs were tasteful and beautiful in its own way; he believed no home should be without beauty.\textsuperscript{135} Downing was practical to the homeowner in that he distinguished between classes of men and designed homes for each. He did not believe that a man should build or live in a home

\textsuperscript{133} Probate Inventory of Harry and Olive Towsley, Washtenaw County Probate Case Files 1828-1889 – Box 2, File 59, Archives of Michigan, Lansing, Michigan.
\textsuperscript{134} Probate Inventory of Robert Macy, Washtenaw County Probate Case Files 1828-1889 – Box 1, File 6, Archives of Michigan, Lansing, Michigan.
\textsuperscript{135} Bushman, 273; Upton, 126.
that he could not afford. Thus, each man’s home should be a reflection of his life and income while also maintaining a level of beauty.\textsuperscript{136} He allowed for whole sections of his publications to be allocated to designs for farm houses of different values and with different conveniences. These particular designs are much simpler than the villas he presents and usually more simple than the cottages as well.\textsuperscript{137} Farmhouse plans were designed such that they were practical for the farmer and his family. The plans considered different needs such as spaces for storing food products of the farm and many bedrooms for rural families that may be large, include extended family, or housing for field hands.\textsuperscript{138} Many of his designs in his publications differ widely from other authors in that he instructs less on the architectural elements and building tips and focused instead on the ways in which to live a tasteful life in such a house as each one he presented.

The cottage was designed as a comfortable house and the farmhouse was made to be convenient. In fact, architectural writers, including Downing, not only greatly contributed to the image of a cottage being comfortable, but planted the idea. By calling their designs for cottages comfortable, they created the image that a cottage was such. It was not until the turn of the nineteenth century that publications began to use the word comfort, and still then it was only in reference to cottages.\textsuperscript{139} Downing, through his many publications, drew an association between cottages and comfort. Cottages were not inherently comfortable; they were comfortable because he created them as such. He even instilled a desire to attain comfort in all homes, cottages or otherwise. Downing’s comfortable cottages were not only


\textsuperscript{138} Peterson, 414.

attractive and sought-after, but they were reasonably affordable. Cottage designs varied in price, size, and elaborate embellishments, but some were listed with low prices, which made them accessible to those who were on a limited budget.\textsuperscript{140} Downing had a way of creating designs that would apply to all manner of folk. He considered factors that others may have ignored. In one cottage design, for example, he placed a bedroom on the same floor as the kitchen and living room. He stated that this was for the purpose of “internal convenience,” such that the family that included elderly or disabled individuals might have a plan for a home that does not require the use of stairs for most of the home’s uses. (Figure 10)\textsuperscript{141}

Downing’s work was also focused around beauty in all levels and styles of home, often through the application and appreciation of simplicity. Downing believed that all people should be able to have a tasteful home rather than the rich exclusively claiming taste in their structures.\textsuperscript{142} Richard Bushman claims that architectural writers thought just as much of their modest designs as they did of their grand villas. Furthermore, he claims that the plans participate “in a single culture” as the writers saw fit to place them in the same volume.\textsuperscript{143} Each type of home, small or large, simple or elaborate, modest or ornate, affordable or expensive, should allow the dweller to live within beauty and taste. In an article that he wrote in the \textit{Horticulturalist} in 1848, he explained that, “Uncouth, mean, ragged, dirty houses, constitution the body of any town, will regularly be accompanied by coarse, groveling manners. The dress, the furniture, the mode of living, and the manners, will all correspond with the appearance of the buildings, and will universally be, in every such case, of a vulgar

\textsuperscript{140} Mayhew and Myers, 160.
\textsuperscript{141} Andrew Jackson Downing, \textit{Cottage Residences or a Series of Designs for Rural Cottages and Cottage Villas, and their Gardens and Grounds Adapted to North America} (New York: Wiley and Halsted, 1856 [orig. pub. 1842]), 50; Appendix: Figure 10.
\textsuperscript{142} John E. Crowley, \textit{The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities and Design in Early Modern Britain and Early America} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 263.
\textsuperscript{143} Bushman, 274.
and debased nature.” Through this he is implying that the home one lives in will affect the character of oneself. He is still promoting refinement, as he did in the very elaborate designs he published which included refined parlors and verandas for lounging, but he did so in such a way that it was accessible to the masses rather than kept exclusively for the very wealthy. In one design of a farm house, Downing explained that, “There is no reason why the dwelling houses of our respectable farmers should not display some evidences of taste, as well as those of professional men, or persons in more affluent circumstances.” Downing’s designs truly emphasized taste and beauty, regardless of size or cost of the home.

One of the key ways in which Downing established simplistic beauty in his designs was to create homes that were true to their purpose rather than creating homes that were trying to imitate something larger or greater. In his article in the Horticulturalist, he addressed this issue extensively. He urged his readers to build their dwellings as such, rather than try to build them as a temple, church, or cathedral. Furthermore, he stated, “always let their individuality of purpose be fairly avowed; let the cottage be a cottage—the farm-house a farm-house—the villa a villa, and the mansion a mansion.” In his work, The Architecture of Country Homes, he addresses these concerns again. He states that it is important that a home, such as a farmhouse, should be honest—it should not only look like a farm house, but it should express “the peculiar wants and comforts of that life.” It should be honest to its purposes, and should thus be strong. The strength of a farmer should be evident in his home where it may not appear in a cottage or villa. Where a villa may be extravagant and delicate, and a cottage may be adorned, a farm house should be simple and sturdy. When a farmhouse

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145 Downing, Cottage Residences, 88.
147 Downing, Country Homes, 137.
did utilize style, it should be only style that is intrinsically useful. For this reason, Downing would sometimes suggest the Rural Gothic style above others. The Rural Gothic style could provide beauty, which Downing stated should be present in even the simplest dwellings, in its structure.\textsuperscript{148} The steep gables, for example, were useful and, without any further embellishments, were also picturesque.

In an article in the \textit{Cultivator}, entitled “Hints on the Construction of Farm Houses,” Downing urged farmers to build their homes in such a way that décor was not an additional feature, but that it was built in to the forms of their houses. He suggested high roofs, verandas rather than porticoes, climbing plants for embellishments, and truth behind each aspect of the home. He said that such inappropriate decorations as those that could be found on a Greek styled structure—porticoes, colonnades, and friezes—were untrue to the use of the structure and to its inhabitants. The farmer should not borrow from a home with stylized architectural design but should reflect the purpose of the home; it should look at home amongst the fields and valleys. The farmhouse should convey utility and function and thus, the beauty of the structure should be present in the form of the home rather than in extraneous embellishments. A sloping roof and a chimney, indicating a home or dwelling rather than a shed or barn, were structures that could be used to beautify even a simple farmer’s home.\textsuperscript{149}

Another contemporary writer, Solon Robinson, also suggested that the farmer should not live in the way recommended by nineteenth-century parlor culture. Though he was primarily an agricultural writer, he included architecture in his works. He believed that farmers should put economy and efficiency before all other matters in the case of their homes. Robinson had a unique viewpoint in comparison to many other writers, including

\textsuperscript{148} Andrew Jackson Downing, \textit{Cottage Residences}, 91.
\textsuperscript{149} Andrew Jackson Downing, “Hints on the Construction of Farm Houses,” \textit{The Cultivator} (June 1846): 184-185.
Downing. He was a pioneer who lived in Indiana in the 1830s. Living the life of the pioneer gave him insight that others had not. He wrote articles for several architectural journals that gave suggestions for people that Downing had really not considered. He stated that Downing’s suggestions, even those for the working man or the farmer, were conceivable for the “upper ten thousand,” which left the lower “ten hundred thousand” of the rural population overlooked. Robinson wrote for those ten hundred thousand. The lives of the pioneering population were dominated by factors that Downing did not take into consideration. Pioneers lived in isolation from those who favored the ideals of popular design and refined culture. Necessity monopolized every aspect of their lives, including their homes. Experience showed them what was a necessary, not external factors such as publications of modern style. If pioneers adapted anything beyond basic necessity, it was to improve their standard of living—standardized lumber and nails that allowed them to build in the balloon frame is one such reasonable adaptation. Robinson suggested other uses for a farmer’s resources than extraneous architectural adaptations. In 1865, for example, he stated that the farmer should be sure that his son is educated in *Facts for Farmers*. He wrote that a farmer’s son should be taught at least the basic skills of such subjects as bookkeeping, caring for animals, mending and making and using tools, and botany. He found that fundamental knowledge in useful subjects was a more worthy investment for the farmer than was an ornamented home.

Robinson was gave rather specific suggestions and instructions regarding how a farmer should go about keeping his home a manageable price to build and to maintain. First, he maintained that a farmer should not build using the mortice and tenon system as Downing suggested but rather using the balloon frame method. The balloon frame was much lighter

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151 Peterson, 420.
and far more economic, thus making it ideal for the efficient farmer.\textsuperscript{153} Furthermore, Robinson suggested building a home in stages such that “each part [be] complete in itself.” In this way, the farmer could build a small home, maybe a one- or two-room layout, and then add to it as he had the means to do so. He could continually add to his home, all the while having a completed and functional home that suited both his needs and his budget.\textsuperscript{154} However, Robinson dictated that the farmer should stop at a reasonable size. A farmer should never build a home to be so large that “they cannot live in it, nor so good that when done they cannot use it.”\textsuperscript{155} Utility and economy were essentials that came hand in hand.

Though a house should maintain fundamental usefulness and value, it could incorporate conveniences that would make living in the home a bit more enjoyable. One such way a home could be built conveniently is to have the home facing the north if possible. This would allow the kitchen to receive an ample amount of sunlight, which would evaporate moisture more effectively than if the sun was not as present. Furthermore, the kitchen, where the woman of the home could be found during much of the day while the man would be working outside, would be heated naturally by the sun and thus, require less heat from other sources, reserving those resources for another time.\textsuperscript{156} Another suggestion of Robinson’s that would make the farm home more efficient was to build a one-story, rather than a two-story, farm home. Though many would say that this would require more roofing and would thus be more costly, Robinson states that the roofing is worth the extra money in several ways. First, the woman of the home need not manage more than one level of a house; she can avoid carrying large loads up or down staircases, and therefore, she can maintain her health.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{153}Peterson, 416-418.
\item \textsuperscript{154}McMurry, 30-31.
\item \textsuperscript{155}Robinson, Selected Writings Vol. I, 114.
\item \textsuperscript{156}Solon Robinson, How to Live: Saving and Wasting (New York, Fowler & Wells, 1880), 175.
\end{itemize}
Second, the frame of the home would not have to hold as much weight and would not have to be built quite as strong. This should be taken into consideration particularly in the plains regions where there are frequently strong gusts of wind. A two-story farmhouse may look nicer, but “comfort and convenience never should be dispensed with by a farmer for show.”  

Robinson was one of the first to consider women in his house plans. He considered the farmer’s wife an invaluable resource regarding the convenience of the home, which she spent considerably more time in than the farmer because her work was in the home. In 1839 the Cultivator held a contest “To improve our farm dwelling-houses, to render them convenient, economize the cost, and lessen the burden of female labor.” Robinson commented, “I hope your readers whose wife thinks he has a convenient house, will furnish you at least the plan.” Some women submitted their own plans, while other plans were obviously advised by a woman or at least considered the hardships of a woman’s day. The wife’s suggestions and preferences for house design were not based around style or show but were simply to increase efficiency within her realm.

By creating a culture of farmers who were respectable but not necessarily refined by the nineteenth-century definition of the word, a shift in class began to occur. In the eighteenth century, the upper-most levels of society were isolated because they lived in such grandeur that others could only aspire to their way of living. By the end of the nineteenth century, the elite were not nearly as isolated as many middling folks had gained varying levels of refinement and were, at the very least, respectable people who lived a clean, semi-educated life. The class of individuals who became isolated were, instead, the vulgar.

158 Albany Cultivator 6 (August, 1839): 117.
people at the very bottom of society, such as those who Mary Clavers encountered when she first arrived in Michigan, those who did not bathe, those who did not use separate utensils for serving and eating, and those who did not have separate spaces to allow for privacy, were isolated because they simply did not live the way others did and were often ignorant of their vulgarity.

Claiming respectability allowed those who lived in farming communities or on the frontier to live in such a way that they participated in the mainstream culture and thus, isolated the vulgar in their own way of living. Cleanliness, manners, and education were commodities that could be gained and maintained with very little money and by anyone who wished to do so. Thus, it was available to the masses in a way that parlor culture never could be. Efficiency and economy could go hand in hand with respectability, unlike refinement which required extravagance. The writings of authors such as Kirkland, Downing, and Robinson helped the farming community realize a level of respectability that was feasibly adaptable to their lives. The parlor culture of the nineteenth century was simply unrealistic to the many who did not live in cities and with money to spare.

Now that we have examined ways in which middling people adjusted refinement to meet their needs, let us turn to a Midwestern town—Ypsilanti, Michigan. Ypsilanti is one example of a locale where gentility and refinement were discarded in favor of vernacular respectability.
Chapter Three: Respectability in Ypsilanti

In this chapter we look at Ypsilanti, Michigan and its mid-nineteenth century residents. Woodruff’s Grove was settled in 1824 and was renamed Ypsilanti in 1829. Ypsilanti saw its first frame building and sawmill in 1827, its first frame house in 1829, and its first brick house in 1830. It was a frontier settlement dominated by log structures through 1830, much as Caroline Kirkland experienced in Pinckney when she arrived, and transformed into a village throughout the decade. Michigan gained statehood in 1837 and in the 1830s, Ypsilanti saw a school, several churches, a dry-goods store, a post office, and a railway. The 1840s brought cheaply built frame buildings lining the streets of town for retail and trade and similarly built homes. Though the village was undoubtedly growing, it was not a village that adapted genteel refinement. By examining one periphery village where middling people dominated and gentility was unrealistic, we can see some of the unique ways in which individual locales chose to maintain respectability. Furthermore, we can conclude that Americans as a whole had many differing feelings and opinions about refinement that changed the course of American society as a whole.

The Greek Revival style of architecture flourished in Ypsilanti, Michigan in the mid-nineteenth century. This style was not utilitarian, as Andrew Jackson Downing pointed out, primarily due to its architectural embellishments that were nonessential to the structure and form of the building. Residents of Ypsilanti simultaneously chose to move away from nineteenth-century parlor culture and parlors themselves and instead, adapted a convenient and informal way of life and corresponding material culture. Why did Ypsilanti residents embrace respectability rather than refinement inside their homes while embracing classical architectural forms? Ypsilanti embraced and adapted the Greek Revival style of architecture.
not because of its ostentatious classicism but because of the democratic ideals it represented. Grandiose material culture was not found in the Greek Revival structures because Ypsilantians rejected the refinement culture of the nineteenth-century gentility and adapted vernacular respectability in its stead.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, America was searching for an architectural style that would be symbolic of American values and would display America’s growth and prosperity to the world.\(^{159}\) An international movement of romanticism saw classical styles of architecture being adapted not only in America but throughout Western Europe. Ancient models were viewed as idyllic—models of perfection.\(^{160}\) American ideology placed antiquity upon a pedestal from where it could be easily and regularly imitated.\(^{161}\) Grecian models became the American choice for a multitude of reasons, among them the War of 1812. This conflict with the British caused Americans to actively create cultural differences with the British where similarities once existed.\(^{162}\) Included in the change was the rejection of English traditions such as names, architecture, and styles. Additionally, Americans sympathized with the Greek during their war for independence in the 1820s. Americans thought of Greek democracy as a predecessor to their own, and they thus felt the responsibility of ownership of the political system. The Grecian fight for independence, in concert with their history of democracy, gave Americans reason to romanticize Greek culture. The residents of Ypsilanti, formerly named Woodruff’s Grove, felt so strongly about the matter that they changed the name of their town to reflect their ideals. They were viewed

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\(^{161}\) Morrison, 572.

as perfectors of politics, morals, and culture. Because it was believed that the home one lived in would have an influence on the people who lived in it, and vice versa, the Greek Revival structure of a home would influence the inhabitants to strive for Grecian democracy and morality.\textsuperscript{163} The Greek Revival became the new American style of architecture.\textsuperscript{164}

Greek Revival architecture was the American architectural style of choice between 1830 and 1860 because of the Greek form of democracy it represented.\textsuperscript{165} It was widely adapted in public buildings throughout the country and as the design for plantation houses in the south. Though many well-known examples are available, William Strickland’s Second National Bank of the United States in Philadelphia was one of the most notable. (Figure 11)\textsuperscript{166} This building was built from 1818 through 1824 after Strickland won a competition that called for Grecian designs for the new bank. The building was a scale replica of the Parthenon, including the proportion of the pediment, and was not transparent in that it did not reveal that the interior was a barrel-vaulted banking room. One notable change Strickland made in order to create a functional building was the extraction of the side colonnades and the addition of windows. He did, however, have the exterior of the building landscaped such that trees were planted alongside the building in order to hide this inconsistency with antiquity. This building was the start of Greek Revival architecture in America.\textsuperscript{167}

The Greek Revival style spread most rapidly and thoroughly, however, in the New England countryside. Other styles were suggested and adopted, such as the Gothic Revival as suggested by Downing, but in the countryside of New England, the Greek Revival flourished.

\textsuperscript{163} Smith, 197; Edgar Mayhew and Minor Myers Jr., A Documentary History of American Interiors: From the Colonial Era to 1915, (New York: Schribner, 1980), 100-104.
\textsuperscript{164} McAlester, 184; Morrison, 575.
\textsuperscript{165} McAlester, 177.
\textsuperscript{166} Appendix: Figure 11.
most completely.\textsuperscript{168} It was from New England that a majority of Michigan settlers hailed, and thus, from where Greek Revival architecture was transplanted.\textsuperscript{169} The most common house forms in Michigan not only reflect the New England and New York influence but also the Greek Revival movement that occurred in these areas in the 1820s. Many homes, particularly in rural areas, lacked stylistic embellishments or were sparsely embellished. That is not to say that the homes existed with no style whatsoever. A plain home would have been little more than a box or a cube. Though homes such as these were shown in plan books, they were actually an exaggeration used by the authors to make the stylized homes look more grand in comparison. Rural homes were commonly designed with style placed into the structure rather than in addition to the structure. A gabled roof, for example, is a functional sloping roof which can also be used to imitate a Greek facade.\textsuperscript{170} Stylized buildings occurred in Michigan only as public buildings or the homes of the very wealthy until after the Civil War. Even then, style was not a primary contributing factor for rural homes until after 1930.\textsuperscript{171}

Several house forms dominated Michigan in the mid-nineteenth century. The most common form was the upright and wing, which reflects the settlement of farmers from New England and upstate New York throughout the Great Lakes region.\textsuperscript{172} The upright and wing house consists of a one-and-a-half to two-and-a-half story segment with a front facing gable that is placed beside a one- to two-story segment that has a side facing gable perpendicular to

\textsuperscript{171} McLennan, 8.
\textsuperscript{172} Robert W. Bastian, “Indiana Folk Architecture: A Lower Midwestern Index,” \textit{Pioneer America} 9 (December 1, 1977): 117; Glassie, 129.
the first. The first segment comprises the upright portion of the home while the second is a wing. The two portions of the structure are situated such that they create a T or L shape. This type of home proved to be ideal for the Greek Revival style because the upright segment had a front facing gable that allowed for a pediment that resembled a temple form. The Greek Revival movement actually caused the gable end of houses to be moved to the front if possible, or for the front of the house to be reoriented to align with the gable. This way, the house with a gable front resembled a temple form and would be referred to as a temple house.173 The upright and wing house is a prime example of this reorientation. This was an existing folk form that was adapted by the Greek Revival movement. Thus, the popularity of this form can be attributed to the Greek Revival movement. This form specifically proliferated in New England, a region where the Greek Revival movement actually penetrated the cultural landscape more completely than it did anywhere else, except perhaps the Great Lakes region to where many New Englanders migrated.174

Another house form that was popular in Michigan was the basilica house, also known as the hen and chicks house. It is a temple house with small wings on either side. It is sometimes referred to as a hen and chicks house because it is said to look like a hen protecting chicks at her sides. The basilica house was more common in Michigan than anywhere else. This form was a product of the Greek Revival movement; it was truly a Greek Revival form.175

One other house form that could be found within the Michigan landscape in the mid-nineteenth century was the I-house. An I-house is usually a two-story single pile home that is two rooms wide. The facade usually has five bays, though three is also common, with a

173 McLennan, 13.
174 McLennan, 10; Mayhew and Myers, 100-102.
175 McLennan, 11; Glassie, 132-134.
doorway in the center. Though the I-house traditionally had a central chimney in New England, this placement shifted with the move to a central hallway in the eighteenth century, and thus, the chimney placement in I-houses in Michigan is inconsistent.\textsuperscript{176} It is clear, however, that this house form is indicative of the settlement of New Englanders to the Great Lakes region.\textsuperscript{177} This house type adapted to the Greek Revival style, though it was not specifically linked to it as the upright and wing and basilica house forms were. The I-house could easily become a Greek Revival form by the addition of a row of six columns on a five-bay facade, a portico, a cornice, a frieze, or classically shaped and angled window hoods. The most common way, and the least ostentatious choice, was to simply build the structure with a low-pitched roof and a boxed cornice with returns.\textsuperscript{178} This form could use the form itself to adapt the Greek Revival structure, but it also could adapt stylistic elements that were not essential to the structure.

Ypsilanti was a place where the Greek Revival style flourished. Several extant structures illustrate the Greek Revival style as it was built in the mid-nineteenth century. One of the extant structures is one of the older houses in Ypsilanti—303 North Huron Street—commonly referred to as the Towner House. (Figure 12)\textsuperscript{179} The Towner Home was built in 1837 by Marcus Lane, a pioneer attorney. The house was purchased by Nancy Towner in 1851 and was continually owned by her family for a century—thus the house was named. At the time the home was built, there were 121 homes in the village of Ypsilanti including many log structures, and framed homes of stone, brick, and wood. In the nineteenth century, the

\textsuperscript{177} Bastian, 123-133.
\textsuperscript{178} McLennan, 15.
\textsuperscript{179} The archival information indicates that this house is the oldest, but it is not. 202 S Huron, for example, was the first brick house to be built in Ypsilanti for Judge Larzelere in 1830 is still standing. Appendix: Figure 12.
address of the Towner Home was 33 North Huron Street.\textsuperscript{180} The Towner Home is located on the northwest corner of the intersection of Huron Street and Emmet Street, facing east. It is a one-and-a-half story, three bay gable front home with a low-pitched roof and a boxed cornice with returns to imitate the Greek lines of a triangular pediment. It also has a colonnade with a non-recessed porch, but the columns are distinctly not of a classical order. Though many vernacular colonnades were not round and fluted but rather square, so they could be made of boards, this colonnade is actually carved. The carved vergeboard is reminiscent of the Gothic Revival style rather than the Greek Revival style because the porch is not original to the structure. It is believed to have been an addition in 1850.\textsuperscript{181} Another stylistic inconsistency is the color of the home. Though the home is now blue, it was painted white prior to its renovation in 1975. Additionally, the home is now back to its original size as several rear additions were removed during a renovation in 1999.\textsuperscript{182}

Two other examples of extant Greek Revival architecture in Ypsilanti are rather exceptional in contrast to the Towner Home. Both of these houses are attributed to Mr. Arden H. Ballard, a miller and a merchant. The house at 218 North Washington has a low pitched gabled roof. Below the roof line is an emphasized wide band of trim including a frieze and an architrave. It has a full-height entry porch supported by square Doric columns. (Figure 13)\textsuperscript{183} Though classical elements such as an elaborate door surround including transom or sidelights is wanting, this building displays several classical elements that decidedly make it a Greek Revival. It can be categorized into a subtype that is very common: the upright and wing.

\textsuperscript{180} “Towner House History,” 303 North Huron, Location-Street Files (Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives, Ypsilanti, MI).
\textsuperscript{181} “Foundation Aids Early House,” \textit{Ypsilanti Press}, November 23, 1975, 303 North Huron, Location-Street Files (Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives, Ypsilanti, MI).
\textsuperscript{182} “Future bright for 137-year-old Towner House,” \textit{Ypsilanti Press}, November 17, 1974, 303 North Huron, Location-Street Files (Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives, Ypsilanti, MI); “Foundation Aids Early House.”
\textsuperscript{183} Appendix: Figure 13.
gable front and wing has a front-gabled roof as the principle facade with a side wing that is usually lower than the main portion.\textsuperscript{184} The prominent cornice line is also a classical element that can be attributed to the Greek Revival style. The heights of the ceilings in this building are very common of vernacular versions of Greek Revival buildings, particularly those that are temple styled. The first floor is high ceilinged with full length windows, and the second floor is short with small windows due to the gabled roof and portico.\textsuperscript{185} Additionally, the columns that front the house on both the dominate and the subordinate porches are vernacular versions of classical elements. (Figure 14)\textsuperscript{186} Classical columns are round and fluted. Vernacular columns are frequently square as are the columns on this house. Square columns are much less expensive to construct because they can be made of wooden boards rather than stone, marble, or solid wood.\textsuperscript{187} The columns present here are loosely based on Doric columns and have squared capitals that represent the Doric version. They also have moldings that might suggest fluting. These columns are meant to suggest the classical version rather than duplicate them.\textsuperscript{188} The interior is accented with wood and has wood paneling.\textsuperscript{189} Very important to note is that the entire house is painted white. Actual Greek temples were very colorful. However, when they were discovered, all that was found was pure white marble. The color white was also very appealing because it has been known to represent purity and truth, seemingly reinforcing the ideal of Grecian democracy.\textsuperscript{190}

Also important is that this building has other classical attributes that cannot be identified with the Greek Revival style. The wooden carved vergeboard that is found on both

\textsuperscript{184} McAlester, 179-180.
\textsuperscript{185} Stokstad, 52.
\textsuperscript{186} Appendix: Figure 14.
\textsuperscript{187} McAlester, 182.
\textsuperscript{188} Buildings of Ypsilanti, Location-Street Files (Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives, Ypsilanti, MI), 8.
\textsuperscript{189} Stokstad, 52.
the main and secondary facade on the southern side can be attributed to the Gothic Revival style. (Figure 13, Figure 14, and Figure 15)\textsuperscript{191} Similarly, the bay window on the western side of the building is not Greek. Bay windows are common in several styles that were prominent after the Greek Revival style, such as the Gothic and Italianate Revivals. The window also includes brackets, which are not common in classical Greek Revival. (Figure 16)\textsuperscript{192} Each of these stylistic anomalies can easily be explained. They are later additions, rather than original intentions. The vergeboard that appears as additional décor was not yet common in 1842 in Michigan, when the structure was originally erected.\textsuperscript{193} The bay window seems to have been built at the same time as the structure which it is abutted against, which is not a portion of the original building. Though bay windows were prevalent in several building styles, the brackets point to the Italianate style. As this section of the house was a later addition, it is reasonable to assume that the bay window was simply built contemporaneously to, or later than, the occurrence of the Italianate style. These stylistic incongruities do not alter the style of the house, but rather they illuminate the continued architectural improvements to a Greek Revival building.

Another building that is attributed to Ballard is 125 North Huron Street. This extant structure is worth comparing to 218 North Washington. This building is often referred to as the Ballard-Breakey House, or simply the Breakey House. This simple, brick, unadorned, two-story building was erected by 1832 and purchased by Ballard in 1840. Ballard added the Grecian porch and décor to the home.\textsuperscript{194} The porch has a projecting portico topped by a

\textsuperscript{191} Appendix: Figure 13, Figure 14, and Figure 15.
\textsuperscript{192} Appendix: Figure 16.
\textsuperscript{193} McAlester, 200. The Gothic Revival style appeared from 1840-1870, but started in the East and gradually made its way to the Midwest; Buildings of Ypsilanti, 8.
\textsuperscript{194} “Arden Ballard,” 125 N. Huron, Location-Street Files, (Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives, Ypsilanti, Michigan).
triangular pediment that is unadorned but has one small window in the center. (Figure 17) The porch is supported by four large columns that are fluted and resemble the Doric order. The columns on this home are much more true to classical style than those that are found on the Ballard House. They are round, rather than square, and are fluted. This suggests that these columns were more costly than the square columns that were built from wooden boards. Additionally, the fluting on the columns found on North Huron is more accurate than the milling work done on the columns on North Washington. The capitals are more true to classical form as well, namely because they are round rather than square. The entire porch, the columns, entablature, and pediment are made of wood. The entryway of the Breakey House is also accented with smaller versions of the columns that are used in the porch. Other ornamentation is lacking. The Breakey House is two stories, rather than the one and half that the Ballard House displays. One-and-a-half story Greek Revivals are more common in the region, but the inconsistency is illustrative of the fact that the Breakey House was not originally built in this style.

The Towner Home, Ballard house, and Breakey house are all fine examples of Greek Revival architecture. All three homes are vernacular versions of the Grecian Temple and were even painted white to resemble Grecian Temples, but all are lacking specific features that are common to the Greek Revival style. Included in the missing features are side lights, triglyphs, and metopes. Finally, because the Grecian details were added on the Breakey house after this building was erected, it is demonstrative of the fact that Greek Revival architecture is one of the first styles in America in which the décor can be separable from the structure. Conversely, because the Towner Home was built in a Grecian manner but without décor, this shows that the Greek Revival style is also one that can, indeed, be stylized without

195 Appendix: Figure 17.
added decorative elements. The simplicity displayed in these homes illustrate that the buildings in the village of Ypsilanti shared the simplicity preferred by farmers. The Gothic Revival and Italianate styles do become popular in Ypsilanti but not until after mid-century.

Farmhouses in Michigan also can trace their forms and styles back to New England in the 1820s, but they were based on more than simply regional folk and vernacular forms. It is clear that pattern books played a role in influencing the architecture in Michigan as well. More frequently than not, however, house forms and layouts can be traced to more than one source. Pattern books were designed in such a way that the houses described in them were to be one comprehensive unit. Downing’s works are a perfect example. He explained the layout, style, ornamental stylistic elements, landscape, and the suggested use of the house, including use of places within the house and what class of person the house would suit best. A vernacular builder, on the other hand, usually did not follow all of the described suggestions from a pattern book. Instead, he would take bits and pieces from different designs, an idea from one source and a form from another, and combine it with vernacular forms with which he was familiar and further consider what the homeowners wished for their future abode. Instead of creating a carbon copy of a preconceived artistic design put together by a professional architectural writer, he would stitch together varying forms and elements in order to create the rural farmhouse. To be sure, pattern books left a definitive mark on housing in America, Michigan included. The most permanent pattern book inspired element of American housing is the Georgian form that became popular in the eighteenth century. It lasted in form despite many stylistic trends due to its widespread popularity and use. Other

196 Sally McMurry, Families and Farmhouses in Nineteenth-Century America: Vernacular Design and Social Change (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 32;
197 Upton, 144-145.
forms and stylistic elements from pattern books were adapted inconsistently and thus, did not leave as lasting of a mark on the landscape of American architecture.

While many of the widespread house forms in Michigan can be traced directly to New England and the Greek Revival movement, the farmer’s reaction to nineteenth-century refinement caused Michiganders to organize their homes differently than those who subscribed to the movement. Recall, for example, that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, American refinement dictated that dirty work should be performed in the back of the house. Activities such as cooking had no place in a refined environment, and thus, kitchens were either moved to the back of the home, or they were constructed there. Farmers in Michigan, and in other rural areas, rejected this particular specification of household refinement. As convenience, utility, economy, and comfort became the dominant concerns of farmers in their homes; the kitchen was moved to accommodate these concerns. The kitchen is a place where a farmer’s wife spent many hours preparing food for the family and the field hands. This is where she spent most of her day and where she completed most of her chores. It was believed that if the woman’s day could be more pleasant, it would increase her productivity and her quality of life. A contributor to the *Genesee Farmer*, for example, records the complaint of a farmer’s wife who longs for a “cheery kitchen.” She illustrates her point by juxtaposing the expectations of a parlor—to be “cool, airy, and sunshiny,” with those of a kitchen—“no paint or carpet on the floor, no paper on the walls, furnished with chairs and tables, and also with clothes-frames, and wash-tubs, a line of dish-towels over the stove, and a row of old hats, coats and frocks for ornaments.”  

The kitchen would be moved to a new position such that it maximized the efficiency of the work while simultaneously increasing the positivity of the environment for the farmer’s wife. A common move for the

kitchen would be to the side of the house so that the sun shone through the windows or the road was within view. This is a clear reflection of the Michigan farmers disregard to architectural refinement.

The homes built by Michiganders in the mid-nineteenth century, though having adapted from pattern books forms and contemporary stylistic patterns, were built around efficiency, economy, convenience, and comfort. Publications in agricultural and rural journals contained contributions by farmers who clearly articulated that the most important consideration in building, particularly on the frontier or newly settled area, was economy. Farmhouses were built in ways that were distinctive to those who valued economic factors above all else. First, farmhouses could be built one portion at a time. In this way the farmer could build a small home that would serve all purposes immediately necessary while preserving the resources he had available. Money, materials, and labor were particularly important in building a home in an economical manner. Later, when the farm economy allowed, he could build one or more additions that would enlarge his home until he was satisfied with the final size. Second, and in congruence with an additive building process, was that farmers rarely built such that form followed function. Spaces were built and their functions were later defined. A room could, for example, be built and serve several different purposes over time depending on necessity. Homes were built to suit the needs of the farmer; the farmer’s first and foremost priority was the economy and livelihood of his family. Homes in agricultural areas such as Michigan were built to efficiently utilize the resources available to the farmer.

199 McMurry, 89-118.
200 Peterson, 416-418.
201 Peterson, 424-425.
202 McMurry, 88.
203 Peterson, 424.
Farmers had logical complaints about parlors and parlor culture. Their lives were dominated by efficiency and economy, not show or leisure. In Michigan, and other rural areas, the parlor underwent a transformation in name and purpose. Farmer designers and architectural writers not only wrote about the uselessness of a parlor in the countryside, but they also gave alternative suggestions for more practical architectural planning in their writing. Some suggestions included making parlors less important in the home by moving them to a different location or decreasing their size. Instead of organizing the home such that the parlor was prominently displayed in the foremost position, it could be deemphasized by situating it in a smaller less prestigious location. Refinement ideals were put aside when farmer planners and writers finally decided that it was best to simply not include parlors in house plans at all. Parlors were largely discarded by the rural community.

With the abandonment of the parlor, other rooms were adopted—the sitting room, living room, or family room gradually took place of the parlor in house designs. A rarely used rural parlor could be replaced by a room that was suitable to be used by the whole family on a more regular basis and still fulfill necessary functions. A sitting room could serve the same purposes as the parlor did to the rural community, a place to meet with friends and family or a place to use for ceremonial purposes, all while maintaining a more realistic level of refinement if they so chose. The sitting room or living room did not have to live up to refinement expectations that were tied to the parlor. The new room was more friendly, accessible, and inviting and was thus used by more people more frequently. By the mid-nineteenth century, exchanging parlors for a room that would be more regularly used in a way that suited the needs of the farmer and his family was standard. The rural population

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204 McMurry, 135-163.
205 McMurry, 152-163.
replaced the formal parlor with a more useful room decades before most other American began to abandon it.

The country sitting room was much less formal than its predecessor. It lacked much of the genteel notions that the parlor was based upon and adapted a lower level of respectability in its stead. Refinement expectations in the country were entirely different than elsewhere. Conspicuous consumption was traded for country luxuries. Goods, such as fruit and cider, were treats shared with friends and family instead of food goods that were not native to the area, such as tea. Items in the sitting room also corresponded with the rural world. Furnishings were not high fashion and expensive but were locally made or crafted. They allowed the family to be at ease in their home, rather than being surrounded by items that required repose. Items were sparse and simple. Decoration was simple as well. Photographs or fresh wildflowers were used where expensive décor might have been utilized in a parlor. The sitting room was utilitarian where the parlor was grandiose. The function of the room changed along with its décor and name. The sitting room could be used for the entire family to meet and participate in activities such as singing, reading, talking, or sewing. The high level gentility was extracted from the sitting room and left behind a trace of refinement in a way that was practical and economical for the farm family. Informality and comfort paired with manners and a vernacular style of gentility that presented itself as respectability presided in the new sitting room suitable for the entire family and activities that could be shared among them or with friends—the family room.

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206 McMurry, 163.
207 Bushman, 270; McMurry, 135, 156.
208 Bushman, 271; McMurry, 156-157.
209 Bushman, 256.
With ostentatious goods and activities aside, the sitting room became a room of comfort, convenience, and informality rather than a room of pretension. Leisure took the place of entertainment as the primary purpose of the room and the material culture of the room shifted accordingly.\(^{210}\) One of the best examples of this comes from a particular article of furniture: the rocking chair. The rocking chair was designed to be an easy and comfortable chair for the elderly or the invalid as well as pregnant women. They were not a parlor furnishing; in fact, they could be found in bedrooms or chambers and were frequently fitted with chamber pots.\(^{211}\) Rocking chairs were shown in photographs with only the very old in them. To be seen in a rocking chair would have been a disgrace to a healthy, able-bodied person. They were explained by medical purposes until the late eighteenth century; they were even called “digestive chairs” to illustrate their purpose.\(^{212}\) In the American rural sitting room, however, the rocking chair took on a whole new life and purpose. The farmer, after a long day of work, found that the rocking chair was actually quite easy on his body and comfortable to relax in. Likewise, the farmer’s wife found that evening chores, such as sewing and mending, were easier to perform when she was situated in a chair that put her muscles and bones at rest. The rocking chair allowed the body and spine to relax, even to slump. The reclining back as well as the rounded bases that allowed the chair to rock not only allowed for resting but could be used for sitting for long periods of time or even sleeping.\(^{213}\) By the end of the nineteenth century, rockers could be found in many rooms of the house including chambers and the parlor but also in kitchens, dining rooms, and on porches. Often,

\(^{210}\) Bushman, 270.
\(^{211}\) Bushman, 272; John E. Crowley, *The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities and Design in Early Modern Britain and Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 144-146.
\(^{213}\) Bushman, 272.
the American home would have several rocking chairs. When guests were in the home, it was considered polite to offer the guest the rocking chair. When more than one rocking chair was available, it was proper to offer the best rocking chair, or the one made of the most expensive materials.\textsuperscript{214} The rocking chair is symbolic of the change the parlor underwent in order to become the sitting room in that it was comfortable and convenient rather than showy and pompous.

One way to gain insight to the interests and values of Michiganders in the mid-nineteenth century is through the examination of estate inventories in probate records. Estate inventories are detailed lists of the possessions of an individual at the time of his or her death which can be located in probate records kept by the county—in Ypsilanti’s case, Washtenaw County. The law addressing “Executors and Administrators” in the Territory of Michigan was adapted from the States of Vermont and Virginia. The law states that an appraisal of property may be taken “from time to time, according to the best of [the Register’s] judgment, and conformably to law and usage.” Additionally, “The Register in every case, in which letters testamentary or letters of administration, or of collection shall be granted” will commission the appraisal of the property.\textsuperscript{215} Unfortunately, as inventories were only taken from time to time or as requested, there are few to examine. As we examine these sources, we recognize that the items listed are surely not all brand new. Thus, we assume that estate inventories illuminate the consumption patterns of people approximately a decade before they died, rather than at time of death.\textsuperscript{216}

\textsuperscript{214} Gloag, 158.  
\textsuperscript{215} Laws of the Territory of Michigan (Lansing, MI: W.S. George & Co., Printers to the State, 1871), 166.  
The probate from the County of Washtenaw between 1830 and 1870 include the estate inventories taken by the Register. Of the existing inventories, 16 are from Ypsilanti. The inventory totals range from $143.63 to $5086.85, the value of real estate ranges from none listed to $4,200, and five of the inventories list money owed to the estate while four list debts due from the estate. What is really insightful about the inventories is that, with the exception of the very earliest, even the least valuable inventories show expression of refinement and even the most valuable show expression of modesty.

The least valuable inventory examined belongs to a Ms. Catherine Larzelere from 1853. Though her inventory of belongings is quite short, she owned some nice items: mahogany chairs, silver tea and table spoons, a silver pitcher, and a silver pot. The rest of her inventory is inconsequential, filled with items such as modest bedding and a few small photographs.

The next two least valuable inventories are comparable in value and are worth considering. The first, also the earliest record examined, is that of Harry and Olive Towsley taken in 1833 worth $441.75. The Towsley’s inventory is unique because it lists many small items that the other inventories have excluded. Most of the items are worth less than $1 and many are less than $0.50. Some examples include a pitchfork ($0.12), 23 knots of yarn ($0.18), and an old hat ($0.25). The most expensive items in this inventory, other than their land ($300), are two feather beds ($7 and $5), two hogs ($17), and a cauldron kettle ($10). This is the only inventory that does not include any elements of refinement as prescribed by

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217 Washtenaw County Probate Case Files 1828-1889 – Boxes 2-45, Archives of Michigan, Lansing, Michigan.
218 Probate Inventory of Ms. Catharine Larzelere, Washtenaw County Probate Case Files 1828-1889 – Box 15, File 60, Archives of Michigan, Lansing, Michigan.
contemporaries. A similarly valued inventory is that of a Mr. William Griffin taken in
1847 worth $444.38. Mr. Griffin’s inventory is very different from Harry and Olive
Towsley’s as it seldom lists items worth less than $0.50, and has items that are examples of
refinement. His inventory shows a debt against his total ($9.82), and only a few small items
including a coffee mill ($0.20) and one lantern and black leather trunk ($0.12). Though these
items are listed, they do not make up a bulk of his inventory the way the small items make up
the bulk of the Towsley’s inventory. Also, Mr. Griffin has similarly valued feather beds (two
at $5 each), but also owns two bedsteads ($3). The Towsley’s did not have bedsteads listed
on their inventory at all. Mr. Griffin also owned six “fancy chairs” ($4), a wood clock ($2), a
candle stand ($1.50), and a black walnut rocking chair ($3). Each of these items shows a
level of refinement in the rather modest inventory.

A look at the most valuable inventories found show elements of refinement, but not
many more than that of Mr. Griffin. A Mr. John Teshum died in 1839 and left an inventory
worth $3095.20. Of this sum, $2300 is listed as land. The bulk of Mr. Teshum’s wealth can
be found in farm goods such as wheat in the field ($91.50), two horses ($110), two cows
($38), and a wagon ($40). The remainder of the items listed include a couple very small
items, such as a coffee mill ($0.37 ½ ), and some things that show refinement such as a
cherry table ($4). He has a couple very interesting items listed as well. The first of which is
two rocking chairs ($2). This is interesting because, though Mr. Teshum’s inventory is worth
much more than Mr. Griffins, he has much less valuable rocking chairs. More importantly,
one of the least and one of the most valuable inventories examined includes rocking chairs—

219 Probate Inventory of Harry and Olive Towsley, Washtenaw County Probate Case Files 1828-1889 – Box 2,
File 59, Archives of Michigan, Lansing, Michigan.
220 Probate Inventory of Mr. William Griffin, Washtenaw County Probate Case Files 1828-1889 – Box 11, File
10, Archives of Michigan, Lansing, Michigan.
a symbol of comfort and respectability rather than parlor culture and refinement. Another interesting item on Mr. Teshum’s inventory is a slip in the Ypsilanti meeting house ($85)—almost worth as much as his wheat in the field. This is a very expensive item that listed alongside many respectable, but certainly not ostentatious, items. Mr. Teshum’s inventory is worth a significant amount more than Mr. Griffin’s, but the difference is mostly in land and farm rather than material goods.221

The most valuable inventory examined is that of a Mr. Norman Phelps who died in 1867 worth $5086.85. Mr. Phelps’ land is listed at $4200, and he too has quite a bit of his wealth in his farm: his animals equal a sum of $541, lumber wagon ($100), oats ($140), and seed ($46.50). He does have a particularly refined item listed—a watch at $18—but he doesn’t have much else listed individually. His furniture, for example, is listed in one line worth $297.75. The sum is a very large number for the total of furniture, but it is not listed more specifically to tell if it is a few expensive items or many more modest items. Similarly, Mr. Phelps does not have any very small items listed on his inventory at all. It starkly contrasts to the items listed on the Towsley’s inventory as he very probably owned some of those items—clothing, hats, and etc.—but they are not listed. This leads us to believe that these items, for one reason or another, were perhaps not as important to Mr. Phelps’ survivors as they were to the Towsley’s. Most the types of belongings listed in the Towsley’s inventory were not important enough or worth enough to even mention on Mr. Phelps’ record.222

221 Probate Inventory of Mr. John Teshum, Washtenaw County Probate Case Files 1828-1889 – Box 2, File 85, Archives of Michigan, Lansing, Michigan.
222 Probate Inventory of Mr. Norman Phelps, Washtenaw County Probate Case Files 1828-1889 – Box 39, File 7, Archives of Michigan, Lansing, Michigan.
The probate records of Ypsilanti confirm that Ypsilantians had adapted respectability rather than refinement in their homes. While they were aware of refinement as can be illustrated by refined items such as silver, watches, mahogany, and mirrors, they also held the bulk of their wealth in property and farm goods and had items of comfort such as rocking chairs.

The residents and settlers of mid-nineteenth-century Ypsilanti pursued practical levels of respectability rather than genteel refinement. The seemingly ostentatious housing style of choice, the Greek Revival style, was adapted due to the democratic principles it represented, not because it could be embellished with many classical elements; furthermore, the residents of Ypsilanti largely adapted it in vernacular forms rather than adapting ornament to existing structures. Parlors that were popularized by the nineteenth-century gentry and fueled by style books were extracted from the home, and less formal rooms were inserted in their place in order to best serve the needs of the inhabitants.
Conclusion

Rural and frontier populations were aware of genteel refinement and parlor culture in the nineteenth century, but they adapted a level of respectability and comfort that suited their needs instead. Comfort, convenience, and informality reigned where economy and practicality were more important than ostentation. By examining one small Midwestern town we can ascertain that refinement was not blindly adapted by peripheral societies. It was challenged and changed as each locale considered necessary and appropriate. The estate inventories of nineteenth-century Ypsilanti show some refined items such as mahogany furniture, but they also show elements of comfort such as rocking chairs. Items of practicality and modesty fit very well in the family room that replaced the formal parlor in rural homes. The family room represented vernacular respectability. Seemingly contrary to their non-grandiose lifestyle is the style of homes adopted by Ypsilantians: the Greek Revival style. The Greek style is known for its classicism and extravagance. However, Ypsilantians and many other Michiganders largely adapted the style by adapting the form rather than its ornate architectural embellishments. Ypsilantians embraced the Greek style in its simplest forms as a nod to the Democratic ideals it represented. When adapted in form only, it fit very well with their rejection of refinement and embracement of respectability.

Ypsilantians were not the only ones who rejected nineteenth-century parlor culture and refinement. Many who lived in rural areas saw the impracticality of parlor culture and adapted respectability in its stead. By the masses obtaining respectability, the vulgar poor were isolated from mainstream culture. Several rural writers supported the shift of view. Solon Robinson was able to capture the efficiency and economy that a farmhouse necessitated in his architectural suggestions. He even considered women, the people who
worked in the house, in his designs. Andrew Jackson Downing attempted to write about and design comfortable cottages and farmhouses for rural populations, but he still only wrote for the upper one percent according to Solon Robinson. Other writers, such as Caroline Kirkland and Catherine Maria Sedgwick, emphasized manners. As manners cost nothing and can be used by anyone, they believed that manners should be utilized by all. Those who embraced comfort and respectability largely adopted manners as well. Inadvertently, the very poor who may have been ignorant to such practices were looked down upon by those who believed them to be vital. Refinement was viewed as impractical and undesirable to rural populations who prioritized economy and viewed comfort as a preferable alternative.

Andrew Jackson Downing was an architectural writer and a major contributor to the proliferation of nineteenth-century refinement. Printing technology and the rise of the architectural profession supported the spread of architectural stylebooks in the nineteenth century, which helped to create a distinct parlor culture in the United States. Parlor culture was centered on leisure in the home. The parlor itself, for example, was used only for refined entertainment. Above all, Downing emphasized simple beauty, ambiance, expression of purpose, and picturesque qualities in a home. He believed that a home should be an extension of the surrounding environment and thus suggested the Gothic and Italianate styles but denounced the Greek style. Downing believed that these elements together created refined living and thus, social acceptability. Refinement raised expectations for the genteel. Many others aspired to participate in the parlor culture by mimicking the gentility or maintaining a facade of leisure. The standard of living was raised for all, but the leisurely lifestyle that characterized genteel culture belonged exclusively to the gentry.
The nineteenth century saw both an establishment of refinement and a rejection of refinement. Refinement as defined by writers such as Andrew Jackson Downing was appropriate only for the very wealthy. The middling masses of people for whom this was unrealistic and undesirable not only rejected it, but they adapted respectability in its stead. Respectability was the rural and farming populations’ answer to refinement and parlor culture. Ypsilanti, Michigan was part of this shift. Michigan, and Ypsilanti in particular, is distinct because it embraced the Greek style of architecture. The Greek style was not used to be pretentious or classical, but was used in its simplest forms to reflect Democratic ideals for a respectable population.
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**Secondary**


“Rooms and Their Ornaments.” *Ohio Cultivator* 9 (April 1, 1853).


Figure 1: Recreation of seventeenth-century home, Plimoth Plantation, Plymouth, MA. Photographed by: Lynda McCarron, July 22, 2012.

Figure 3: William Byrd House, Westover First Floor Plan, Charles County, VA, c. 1750.


Figure 4: William Byrd House, Westover Second Floor Plan, Charles County, VA, c. 1750.

Figure 5: William Byrd House, Westover, Charles County, VA, c. 1750. 

Figure 6: “Cottage Orné,” Alexander Jackson Davis, *Rural Residences, Etc.*, New York, 1837.
Figure 7: “Cottage Orné,” Alexander Jackson Davis, *Rural Residences, Etc.*, New York, 1837.

Figure 8: “A Villa in the Italian style,” Andrew Jackson Downing, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening: Adapted to North America; with a View to the Improvement of Country Residences* (New York: Dumbarton Oaks, 1841), 386.
Figure 9: “Design II: A Cottage in the English, or Rural Gothic Style,” Andrew Jackson Downing, *Cottage Residences or a Series of Designs for Rural Cottages and Cottage Villas, and their Gardens and Grounds Adapted to North America* (New York: Wiley and Halsted, 1856 [orig. pub. 1842]), 42.

Figure 10: “Design II: A Cottage in the English, or Rural Gothic Style,” Andrew Jackson Downing, *Cottage Residences or a Series of Designs for Rural Cottages and Cottage Villas, and their Gardens and Grounds Adapted to North America* (New York: Wiley and Halsted, 1856 [orig. pub. 1842]), 42.

Figure 12: Marcus Lane, Towner House, 303 North Huron St, Ypsilanti, MI, 1837. Photograph by Lynda McCarron: September 30, 2012.

Figure 15: Arden H. Ballard, Ladies’ Literary Club, 218 North Washington, Ypsilanti, MI, 1842.

Figure 16: Arden H. Ballard, Ladies’ Literary Club, 218 North Washington, Ypsilanti, MI, 1842.
Figure 17: The Breakey House, 125 North Huron Street, Ypsilanti, Michigan, 1832. 125 North Huron Street, Location-Street Files, Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives, Ypsilanti, MI.