



AMERICA THE WAY IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE

Toledo's Old West End

BY DOUGLAS J. FORSYTH

American Bungalow readers, at least those from outside the Upper Midwest, might be unlikely to think of Toledo, Ohio, 53 miles southwest of Detroit on the western shore of Lake Erie, as the site of an important and substantial concentration of Arts and Crafts architecture. Neither Frank Lloyd Wright nor any of the other Prairie School architects built here, and during the first decade and a half of the 20th century the low-slung “California bungalow” was not yet in vogue in the city.

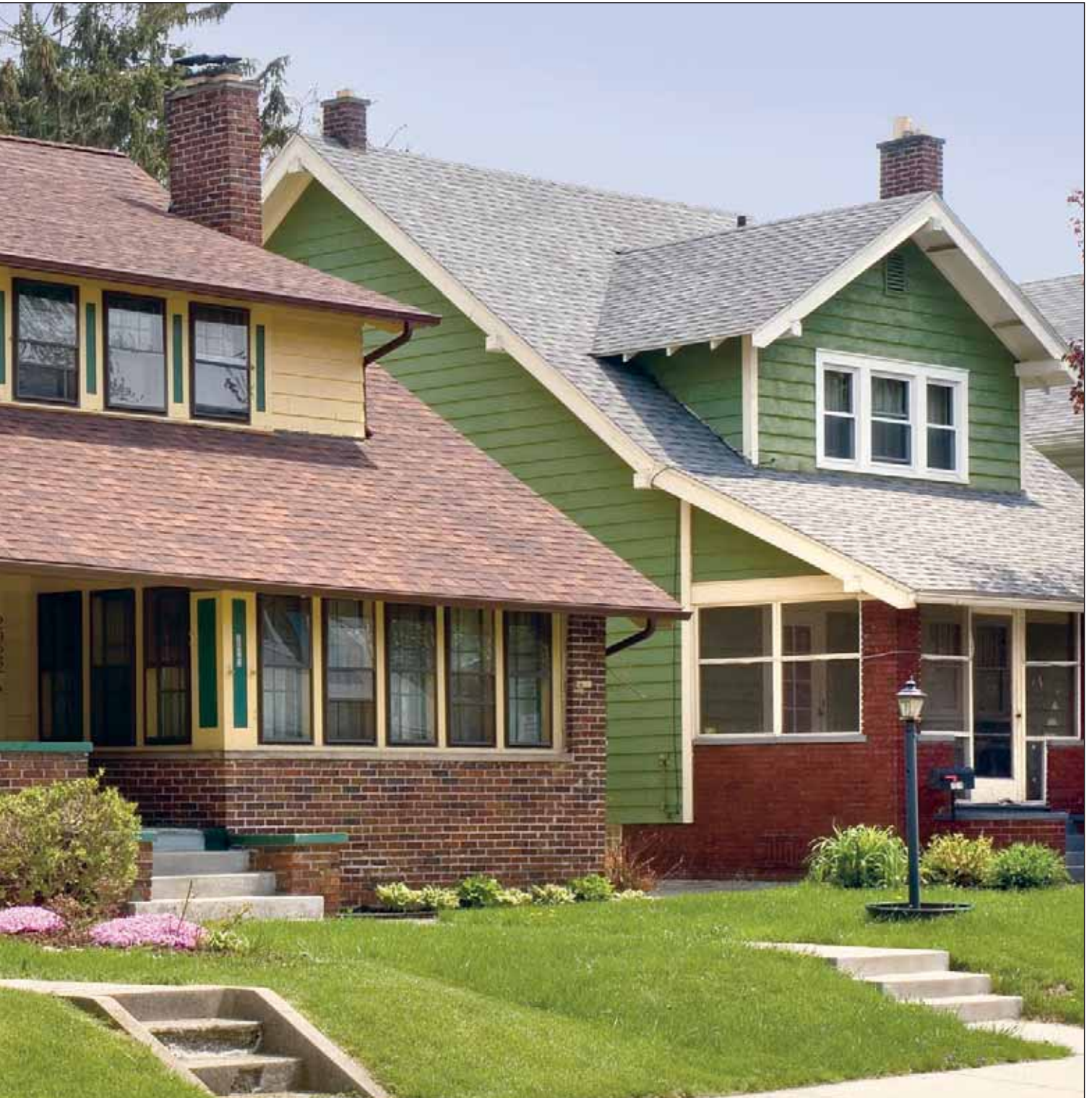
Still, Toledo, home of the Libbey Glass Co. after 1888, did enjoy extraordinary prosperity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and some of its finest residential architecture from that period, mostly concentrated in what is today the Old West End Historic District, represents an usually rich patrimony of Arts and Crafts—then considered “modernist”—residential building.

A century later, this intact architectural heritage has helped the neighborhood’s residents enliven the Old West End as a prospering multi-racial, multicultural neighborhood that has acquired modest fame as “the Bohemia of Northwest Ohio.”



THE OLD WEST END CRAFTSMAN IN THE MIDDLE WAS BUILT IN 1916.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEXANDER VERTIKOFF,
EXCEPT WHERE NOTED





A “Modernist” Fling

An early streetcar suburb, the Old West End was platted in the mid-1880s and largely developed by the end of the first World War. A good deal has been published about the neighborhood’s residential architecture, much of it tending to favor houses constructed in academic, historical-revival styles—Italianate, Renaissance Revival, Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, Georgian Revival, Neoclassical, etc. Its modernist Arts and Crafts houses have been given shorter shrift, largely because Toledo’s wealthiest residents shunned modernism, as did moneyed clients in many other cities in the Northeast and Midwest. The clients for Toledo’s most daring architects at the turn of the 20th century tended to be middle class, rather than the city’s elite.

There are a dozen or so fairly grand houses, with 5,000 square feet or more of living space and distinctly modernist features. There is another group of somewhat smaller structures, 2,500 to 5,000 square feet and with exquisite Arts and Crafts details, designed by architects working

directly with future owner-occupiers. There is a much larger group of American Foursquares, with about 2,000 square feet, also with fine Arts and Crafts features, some of them constructed from kits and some built by developers employing architects. Finally, there are townhouse complexes and two-family houses built in the Arts and Crafts style.

The photos accompanying this article feature primarily the work of two local architects: David L. Stine (1857–1941) and Harry W. Wachter (1868–1941). Stine’s work in Toledo ranges from Neocolonial, Beaux Arts, Shingle Style and Queen Anne to the buildings featured here—Spanish-Colonial Mission-style with an Arts and Crafts flair.

Wachter was the most prolific and most daring of the group of Old West End architects and the only one known to have designed extensively in the Arts and Crafts style. His early buildings are quirky Queen Annes, with whimsical, romantic features including turrets, “witch’s-hat” dormers and swooping wooden arches worked onto porches and balconies.





ARCHITECT HARRY W. WACHTER DESIGNED THE 1926 GERALD JAMES HAYES AND NORA HAYES HOUSE IN HIS MATURE TUDOR STYLE. HAYES WAS THE NOTORIOUS BOSS OF TOLEDO'S GAMBLERS; HIS BULLET-RIDDLED BODY TURNED UP IN A DETROIT ALLEY IN 1934. NEIGHBORHOOD LEGEND CLAIMS THERE IS A SECRET TUNNEL LEADING FROM THE BASEMENT OF HIS HOUSE, BUT THE CURRENT OWNERS HAVEN'T DISCOVERED IT. THE FOURSQUARE WITH MIXED TUDOR AND ARTS AND CRAFTS FEATURES, LEFT, WAS BUILT IN 1912.



His modernist buildings show Chinese and Japanese references in addition to their English vernacular touches.

Wachter began producing buildings in the Arts and Crafts style, some incorporating the flamboyance of his Queen Annes and others more restrained, after the turn of the century. Many of these houses were designed on commission for developers. Even before the outbreak of the war, however, he was also doing work in a much more traditional Tudor style, and most of his work after the war was done in historical-revival styles.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to document most of Wachter's work. His son, Horace, who entered and eventually took over his father's practice, threw away the firm's drawings in the early 1980s, ironically just as historical interest in the neigh-

borhood was reviving. In the absence of a documentary record, it is estimated that Wachter's practice designed some 800 buildings, many of them in the Old West End, but attribution for most of them is now next to impossible. (I am one of many Old West End homeowners who wonder whether Wachter designed our houses.)

In general, after the war there was a retreat from the modernist idiom in Toledo, especially in residential structures. Historicism enjoyed a resurgence after the earlier experimentation with the modernism of the time, and the Arts and Crafts style became confined largely to cheaper bungalows built by developers for an emerging mass market.

Tellingly, the Westmoreland neighborhood, to which developers of houses aimed at middle- and

upper-middle-class buyers turned their attention in the 1920s after the Old West End had largely been built up, contained a covenant *requiring* construction in historical-revival styles.

The Tipping Point

As the decades passed and construction migrated to newer neighborhoods and ultimately to suburbs west and south of Toledo, the Old West End gradually lost its identity as the premier residential address in the region. Some of the largest houses were demolished; others were divided up into apartments or turned into offices. The construction of interstate highways in the 1960s exacted a toll on the housing stock. Toledo experienced urban disturbances in the wake of the Detroit riots of 1967, and middle-class flight from older neighborhoods accelerated as crime rates rose.



THE THREE GRAND RESIDENCES AT LEFT ARE ON COLLINGWOOD BLVD. THE TWO SPANISH COLONIALS WERE DESIGNED BY HARRY W. WACHTER (FAR LEFT, SOMETIME BEFORE 1895) AND DAVID L. STINE (IN 1907). THE SHINGLE STYLE HOME WAS BUILT IN 1892. BELOW, BAND MEMBERS PARADE PAST THESE HOUSES DURING AN OLD WEST END FESTIVAL WEEKEND.



DENNIS HICKS



DAN GROVE

ROBERTA ALLEN AND HER BROTHER, DERICO, KEEP THE BBQ TRADITION ALIVE AND WELL IN THE OLD WEST END. THE FOURSQUARES SHOWN BELOW AND OPPOSITE WERE BUILT BETWEEN 1907 AND 1911.

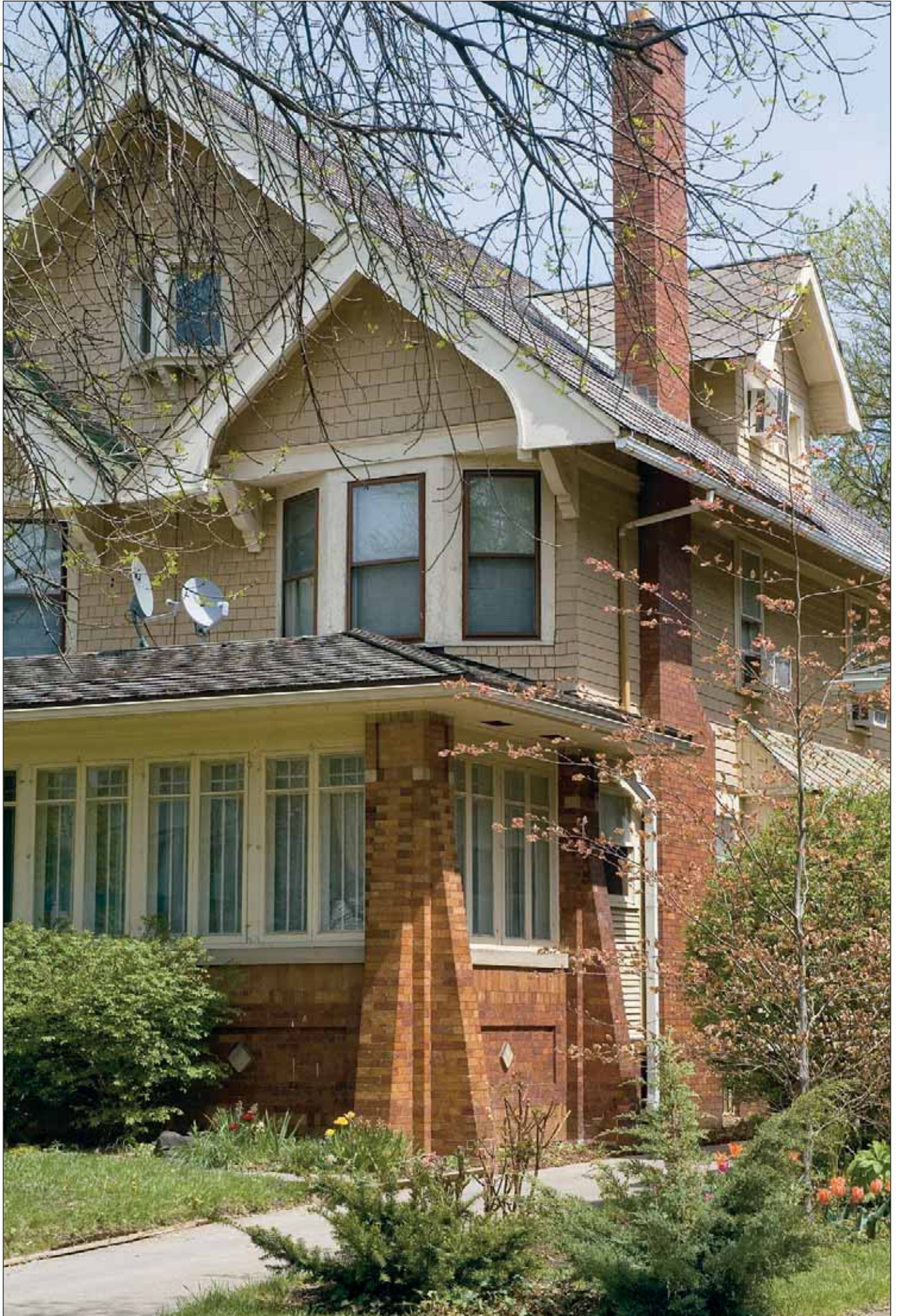


The low point, in the memory of many longtime residents, was the 1979 firebombing—during a strike by municipal workers, including police and firefighters, as part of a dispute between union workers and nonunion contractors—of the Plaza Hotel and Apartments, a once elegant complex built between 1903 and 1931. The neighborhood had reached a tipping point; irrevocable decline and wholesale destruction were in the cards.

Even before the bombing, though, residents had begun fighting back, as they did in cities all over the country in the wake of the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and other federal legislation strengthening recognition of the need for historic preservation. The Old West End earned Historic District status in 1973, thanks to the efforts of resident volunteers. The Old West End Association, which dates back to 1941, acquired renewed importance as new neighbors joined and its activities expanded. Old West End Security was founded as another voluntary association in 1981.

In 1984, thanks to the research and lobbying of Association members, the boundaries of the Historic District were extended significantly, incorporating many of the Arts and Crafts structures built between 1900 and 1915.

During that era, neighbors banded together to fight a crime wave, sometimes chasing burglars down the streets and calling local judges in the middle of the night, demanding that they sign search warrants so that stolen property could be recovered quickly. They sent T-shirts to convicts, imprinted with slogans like “Crime in the Old West End doesn’t pay, pass it on.” A local bank, facing a class-action lawsuit brought against it for redlining in the neighborhood, settled out of court, freeing up credit







DESPITE THE FENESTRATION ON THE OTHERWISE TYPICAL FOURSQUARE BUILT IN 1911 (OPPOSITE), THIRD-STORY ATTICS TYPICALLY WERE UNFINISHED. THE ELEGANT FOURSQUARE (LEFT) BUILT FOR DIAMOND IMPORTER AND MINOR-LEAGUE BASEBALL PLAYER IRVING S. FRANK IN 1912 IS AN INTERPRETATION OF HOUSE NO. 95, PUBLISHED IN GUSTAV STICKLEY'S THE CRAFTSMAN IN AUGUST 1910. THE WILLIAM H. CURRIER "BUNGALOW," DESIGNED BY ARCHITECT DAVID L. STINE, COVERS SEVERAL CITY LOTS AND FEATURES A 90-FOOT CENTER HALL AND A 41-FOOT ENCLOSED VERANDA.

for prospective homebuyers, especially African-Americans.

Like nearby Detroit, Toledo had once been a highly segregated city. When the first African-American homeowners moved into the Old West End in the 1960s, consternation stirred among long-time white residents, some of whom moved away.

Those who stayed, however, and those who came later, embraced living in a racially integrated neighborhood, and an unlikely coalition emerged of Old West End family members, middle- and working-class African-Americans, and new urban homesteaders, including northwest Ohio's most visible concentration of gays.

Sandra Alexander, whose parents were early African-American homebuyers in the Old West End in 1964, recalls an idyllic childhood: "Some cities in the north and south fought integration with intimidation and violence. They fought against school desegregation and the fair housing laws... Unlike them, Toledo's Old West End community was welcoming."

There can be no question that working-class and middle-class

African-Americans have made an essential contribution to saving and stabilizing the neighborhood, and the same is true of gays. As conditions have continued to improve, new residents have been drawn in, including professors from the University of Toledo and Bowling Green State University, members of the Toledo Symphony Orchestra, artists (including glassblowers, who use the famous studios at the nearby Toledo

Museum of Art, founded by glassmaker Edward Drummond Libbey in 1901), museum staff members, and a sprinkling of other professionals, including creative people from Toledo's leading corporations.

Racial integration and acceptance of same-sex couples have diffused across the city of Toledo, of course, but the Old West End remains the most diverse neighborhood in the region, with a roughly 60/40 Afri-

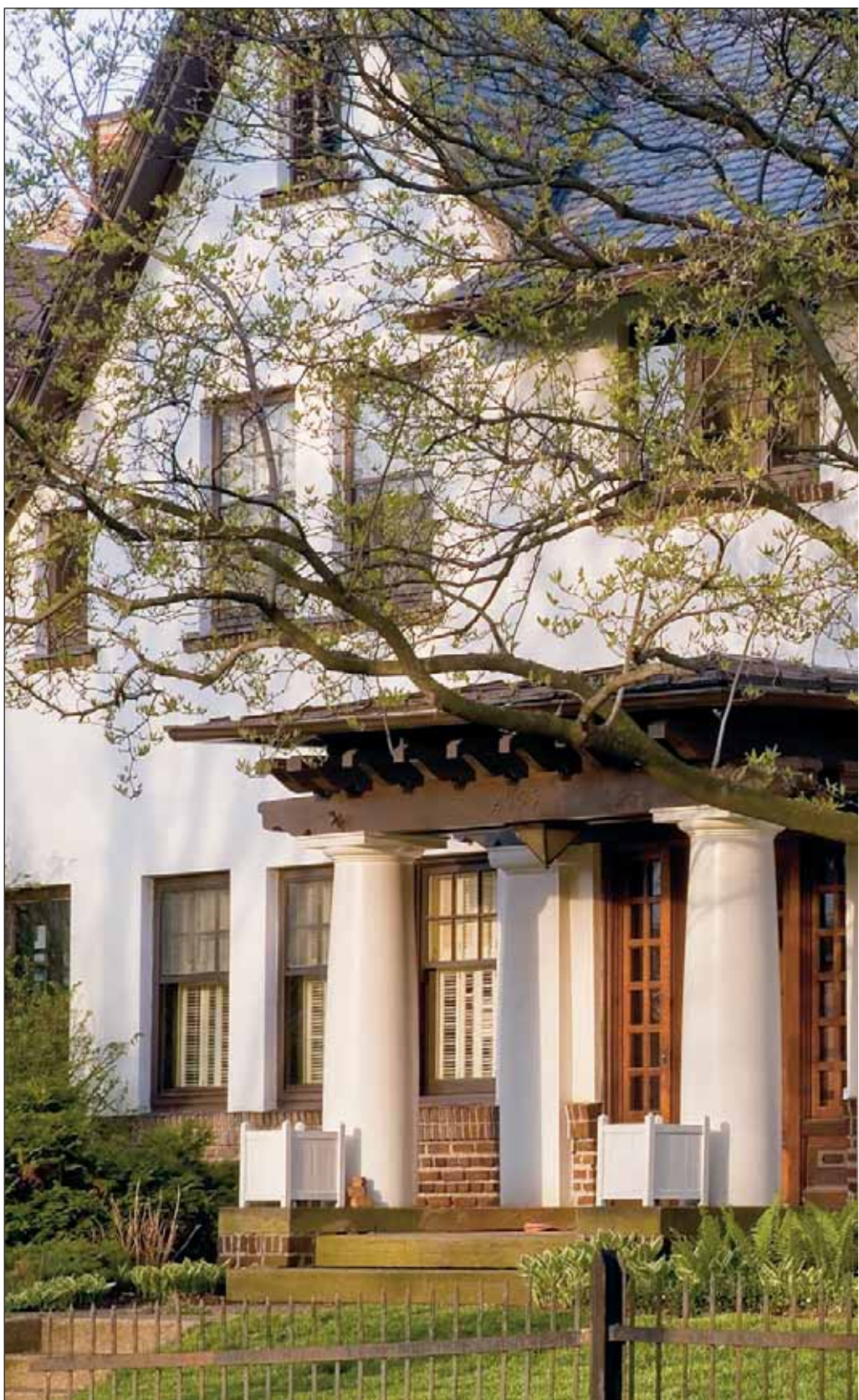




can-American majority population, the second-highest percentage of mixed-race households in the city, and just over two percent of households with same-sex partners—not West Hollywood, to be sure, but almost five times the figure for Toledo as a whole.

The Architecture of Sociability

Ours is not the standard story of gentrification—the rapid appreciation of residential property values and the displacement of long-time lower-income residents—that has characterized ascendant historic neighborhoods in other American cities. In part, this is because real estate speculation has not taken hold here as it has elsewhere in the country. Toledo enjoyed modest prosperity in





THE UNKNOWN DESIGNER OF THE 1910 WILLIAM H. BOSHART HOUSE, WITH ITS DOUBLE-GABLED FRONT FACADE, WHITE STUCCO EXTERIOR AND EXQUISITE FENESTRATION, CLEARLY PAID HOMAGE TO THE WORK OF SCOTS-ENGLISH ARCHITECT M. H. BAILLIE SCOTT. THE OVERSIZED CIGAR-SHAPED COLUMNS AND ELABORATE TIMBERING ON THE PORCH EAVES ARE AN EXPRESSION OF THE DESIGNER'S OWN PERSONALITY. AT LEFT, THE TILES INSET IN THE WALL OF THE CHANCERY OF HOLY ROSARY CATHEDRAL MAY HAVE COME FROM DETROIT'S PEWABIC POTTERY.



A BUNGALOW (1911) ON STRATFORD PL., ONE OF THE EAST-WEST RUNNING LATERAL STREETS THAT INTERSECT THE OLD WEST END'S FIVE GRAND AVENUES, LAID OUT ON A NORTH-SOUTH AXIS. THE LATERAL STREETS OFTEN FEATURE MORE MODEST STRUCTURES, AND SEVERAL ARE DENSE WITH ARTS AND CRAFTS DESIGNS.



DENNIS HICKS

MUSIC IN THE PARK IS ONE OF THE OLD WEST END'S PLEASURES. GARAGES LIKE THE ONE AT RIGHT BELOW, BUILT IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY TO HOUSE MODEL TS, FIT SUBCOMPACTS HANDILY TODAY.





the 1990s, but home values never spiraled out of control, largely because our economy is dependent on the auto industry. Fabulous historic houses can be purchased here for what Californians would perceive to be a song.


Clearly, however, a crucial factor in the stabilization of the Old West End and its emergence as the bohemia of northwest Ohio—or “Lake

Erie West,” as the region is coming to be known by a new generation of young planners and boosters—has been its wonderful Arts and Crafts architecture.

The 1984 expansion of the Historic District added block after block of American Foursquares, many of them in the Arts and Crafts style. These modest structures represent more manageable restoration projects

for first-time homebuyers than the immense Victorian piles dating from the 1880s and '90s. The ubiquitous front porches foster an informal culture of sociability. Porch parties dominate social life in the spring and summer, to the point where a neighborhood walk can stretch out for hours as one encounters acquaintances and friends.

Voluntary associations sponsor a number of public events. The most important is the Old West End Festival, held the first weekend of June. The Women of the Old West End organize another round of guided house visits, the *Tours de Noel*, the first weekend in December. Other voluntary associations take care of the parks in the neighborhood and organize a series of outdoor summer concerts.

As you walk through the Old West End on a summer day, encountering children of all races playing together in the streets, as the smell of barbecue wafts through the air and boisterous laughter spills from the porches, we feel lucky to live in a place like this—all the more so since we're vividly aware of how much work has gone into getting us to this point, and how fragile our social ecology remains. It's hard not to think that this is the way America is supposed to be, but too rarely has been. 

Douglas J. Forsyth is Assistant Professor of History at Bowling Green State University. He thanks Sandra Alexander, Lillian Ashcraft-Eason, Michael and Ruth Ashford, Mary Bennett, Bob Brundage, Donna Christian, Dan Grove, Ron Gossens, Dennis Hicks, Kristy Margaret Krivickas, Toni Moore, Bill Schroeder, Chris Schroeder, Larry Stine, Judy Stone and Judy Winder for their assistance, comments and criticism.

