

Victorian Age is revisited

By Suzanne Perry

Of the News-Tribune Staff

When Cecil Elmgreen was traveling in Mississippi about five years ago, she visited an historic house that she says was "full of pathos."

It was a huge, octagonal house named Longwood in the Natchez countryside. "They started building it just before the Civil War," explains Mrs. Elmgreen, who lives at 817-7th Ave. E., Superior. "Then the artisans from the North had to go back and fight the war and only the bottom floor was finished."

By the time the war was over, the home's owner had died. His widow and eight children, unable to finish the work, lived in the basement. And so it stands today, the completed exterior — with its pillars, parapet and ornate designs — a splendid example of the Victorian age of houses.

Longwood sparked Mrs. Elmgreen's interest and, she says, "Since then I have studied the architecture of houses all over the country. Every time we go somewhere, we look for houses. I get everybody to look for me, too."

Mrs. Elmgreen has collected articles about and photographs of American houses that have windows, porches, trim or carvings that reflect what she calls "the battle of styles" of Victorian homes. Several years ago she worked up a presentation for the Superior Public Library "Friends of the Library" group that she gives every so often to local organizations.

She focuses on the architecture during the reign of Queen Victoria, 1837 to 1901, also the years of the Industrial Revolution, "when architecture was undergoing considerable change," she says. And she loves to point out the homes in Superior that exemplify the ornate style of the period.

The Victorian age has also been called "The Gingerbread Age" of homes, Mrs. Elmgreen says. English gingerbread is a cake flavored with ginger and cut into fancy shapes. The term was originally

applied to the carved and gilded decorations on sailing ships, later to architectural ornament. Victorian homes are notable for columns, bargeboards (decorative covers in front of gables), brackets (wooden pieces that appeared as supports under eaves) and pilasters (wooden strips on the corners of buildings), she explains.

Mrs. Elmgreen calls the age a "battle of styles" because "anything went." They got ideas from the Italians, the Assyrians, the Greeks — anybody's style was acceptable." The invention of the jigsaw influenced styling, allowing carpenters to cut and carve wooden trim. Also popular during this era was the "mansard roof," a steep, squared-off roof that doubled as a third floor. She notes that homeowners used to call it a roof, not a floor, at tax time to avoid a third-floor tax.

One feature of the Victorian age that most people would recognize is the "turret" — a round, castle-like room with a pointed roof. The turret was originally designed as a game room but was added to later homes just "to give the notion of the old homes," says Mrs. Elmgreen.

Then there is the "widow's walk." Borrowed from homes on the Eastern seaboard, a widow's walk is a small upper-story porch where women have legendarily watched for their men to come home from sea.

Mrs. Elmgreen has several favorite Superior homes. One is a structure at 702 E. 7th St. known as the Kimball house, which features ionic columns, gables and a widow's walk. It is also a perfect example of what is known as "carpenter gothic" — the wooden gothic styling of the day.

The Benjamin Kreiner home, 2002 Banks Ave., displays a beautiful turret, as well as a gazebo, pilasters and back porch carvings. And a home at 66 Laurel Ave. owned by Everette Orvald is of rare octagonal shape, just like Mrs. Elmgreen's special favorite, Longwood.



(Staff photo)

The staircase in the Edward Orvald home is a highlight of the Victorian decor of the home. It is located at 66 Laurel St. in Superior.

From here and there

Golden wedding

Mr. and Mrs. Arvid Laurila, 520 E. 7th St., will observe their 50th anniversary at an open house reception from 2 to 4 p.m. next Sunday in their home. The event will be hosted by their two daughters, Mrs. Arthur Maunu, Chandler, Ariz., and Mrs. Ernest Lahti, Minneapolis. The couple has four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Out-of-town birth

From Gladstone, Ore., comes word of the birth of a son, Charles Martin, to Mr. and Mrs. Glen R. Amborn. The paternal grandparents are Mr. and Mrs. T.R. Amborn, Saginaw.

College students in the news

Thomas Boman, a sophomore from Duluth majoring in mathematics and political science at Hamline University, St. Paul, has been studying at California Lutheran College, Thousand Oaks, Calif., during January in an exchange interim program. He is the son of Mrs. Elizabeth Boman, 4219 W. 8th St. Also participating in the interim program is Janette L. Hansen, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Irving Hansen, Lutsen, who is at Colby-Sawyer College in New London, N.H. She is a junior majoring in chemistry at Hamline.



MR. AND MRS. LAURILA

We welcome your news about former residents, golden wedding observances, college news and other items for the Here and There column. Please send your written information, with a telephone number where you can be reached during the day to the Family and Home Department, Duluth News-Tribune, Duluth, Minn. 55801. The editor reserves the right to condense or reject material.



(Staff photo)

The Edward Orvald home in Superior