

A Walk Through the North Washington Historic District

Historic Tour Guide No. 3



City of Bloomington, Indiana



North Washington Street District

At the turn of the century, Bloomington boasted a small but growing university, a healthy limestone industry, and most importantly, the Showers Brothers Furniture Factory (“the world’s largest”)—which produced catalogue furniture for the nation. In the 1890s the Showers brothers had matured enough as business men to enter real estate speculation. They partnered to develop a two-block area adjacent to their Walnut Street homes as a residential district for their families and friends. Although the land was platted in 1889 by the Bollman family, the Showers family built or owned at least thirteen of the homes. Unfortunately, the original Walnut Street homes of the Showers brothers, James N. and William S. are lost. In contrast, the area developed along Washington Street itself remains relatively protected from commercial encroachment.

Showers family history begins in Bloomington in 1856, when Charles Showers began his furniture-making career. With his partner, James Hendrix, he opened a bedstead and chair shop on the east side of the square in 1862. Later, the successful Showers family also developed land and members are responsible for several subdivisions in Prospect Hill as well as purchases in the Bollman Addition which became the North Washington Street Historic District. From 1878-1884 the furniture factory was located on the east side of town at Ninth and Grant Streets. A devastating fire forced the relocation of the business to Eighth and Morton. This move, as well as the decision of Indiana University to move from Seminary Square to Dunn’s Woods after yet another tragic fire, created a market for high style homes on this side of town. In the early twentieth century the corridors along College and North Walnut were lined with gracious homes



separated by boulevard-like medians. This vista is gone from the city forever, but remnants can be seen in the mature trees, walled gardens, stone steps and carved limestone railings on North Washington Street.

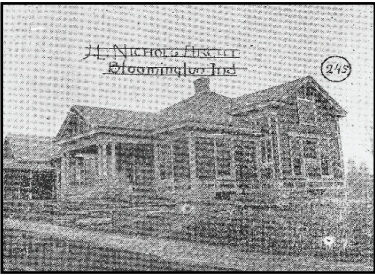
With the loss of so many early homes, Washington Street is the best remaining example of a neighborhood built for Bloomington’s entrepreneurial classes. The Buskirks, Grahams and Matthews, who were influential businessmen, and Nellie Showers Teter and Dr. Burton Myers, who were prominent names at the university, also lived there. An 1892 article in the *Bloomington Telephone* called this district the “Showers building boom.” Interestingly, city directory research proves that this urban neighborhood also was home to chauffeurs and school teachers living among the Bloomington barons of industry.

The Queen Anne buildings erected by W.N. Showers and J.D. Showers, and the Eclectic and Classical Revival buildings erected by their children, remain a remarkable collection of residences in a neighborhood of great architectural integrity. While few buildings are identical, there is a repetition of elements such as porch columns, beveled corners, gable height, roof pitch and shingle and clapboard patterning, that give a visual rhythm and harmony to the streetscape. Two definite architectural styles predominate: Queen Anne with its complex massing, patterned framing and gable ornaments and the Free Classic style which mirrors the massing but recalls classical details through grouped Tuscan columns and pedimented gables. The Free Classic style was popularized by John Nichols, an early local architect and it has several excellent examples along the Washington Street.

“The Morgan House,” located at the corner of 10th and Walnut, is now believed to be patterned on the designs of George Barber and strongly resembles his catalogue’s House Plan #41. In 1981, this house became the first federally funded preservation project attempted by the

Nichols (418 N. Washington). By the mid-twentieth century these large homes were being converted into boarding houses for students. Years of hard use left their toll. In the early 1990s, a slow steady revitalization began, encouraged at first by a few resident owners, and then investor owners.

During a recent restoration of the house at 418 North Washington, the owner uncovered proof that the house was a Nichols design, and looking in the catalogue, could identify not only the house he owned but also an early image of the Seward property next door.



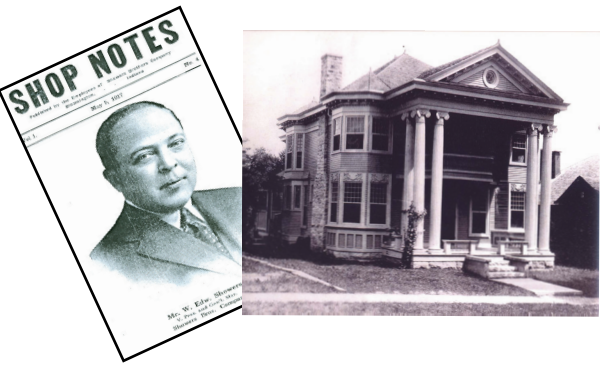
The caption reads, “If you want a cozy cottage with sleeping rooms above, here it is: hard wood floors and finish, brick mantel, cut glass: Basement under entire house. Hot water heat, first class plumbing. Prices complete \$1900. ‘Eight rooms.’ Working plans and specifications \$19.00.”

As in most historic houses, small modifications were made to the house over time. In this case the front steps were moved to the front of the house, although they were clearly according to the architect’s design when the house was built, as depicted above.

The struggle to maintain these grand houses continues. Recently the house at 430 North Washington, once owned by Wm. Edward Showers and later, William Graham, was converted into a bed and breakfast. It is hoped that this commercial use may help support the costs of repairing and

restoring the house that so directly recalls Bloomington’s heyday as a major national furniture production center.

The North Washington Street Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in March 1991. The Morgan House is individually listed in the National Register. More information on



North Washington Street, and a copy of the National Register nomination, is available in the Indiana Room of the Monroe County Public Library.

In Appreciation:

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fledgling local preservation organization, Bloomington Restorations, Inc. In significant disrepair throughout the 1970s and 80s, the house was adapted for commercial use and is the gold standard for residential restoration in our community. In addition to the aforementioned styles, there are also examples of a Colonial Revival style, an Italianate house and a Craftsman Bungalow.

The district also features houses designed by Bollenbacher and Lowe (528 N. Walnut) and John



North Washington Street Tour Sites

1. Showers-Myers House
321 North Washington
ca. 1900

This house was built by J.D. Showers for his daughter Maude and her husband, Dr. Burton D. Myers, an early dean of the Indiana University medical school. The house is an eclectic combination of Colonial Revival and other styles. Note the Dutch Colonial gambrel roof, the pillars, the dentil moldings, the limestone corner towers, the leaded and beveled windows in the entry, the torch-shaped keystone in the arch of the upper balcony, and the Palladian windows. The tile roof was custom fired at the Bloomfield brick works. The house is pictured here in a ca. 1930s photograph.



2. Washington Terrace
Apartments
316 North Washington
1929

Located on the southeast corner of Eighth and Washington, the Washington Terrace Apartments are housed in a limestone building with wood trim designed by architects Ross and George Caldwell of Indianapolis. Elements of the Colonial Revival style can be seen in the palladian window that tops the entrance. The shutters feature a variety of cutout designs, including half-moons, circles and triangles.



3. Belden House
203 East Eighth Street
ca. 1870/1900

This wood frame Italianate style house appears to be earlier than most other houses in the area. The decorative wood trim and the Washington Street side bay were added in a remodeling about 1900, when it apparently became a two-family house. The Belden family lived in this house for many years.



4. 418 North Washington
ca. 1900

The beveled corners of this house reveal Queen Anne stylistic influence, but its prevailing symmetry and trim mark it as predominantly Classical Revival. Notice the cornice returns. This house is #245 in John Nichols’ *Catalogue of Artistic Designs* which includes a photograph of it in its Bloomington location showing the Seward property to the north and a vacant lot to the south.



5. 411 N. Washington
ca. 1915

This ca. 1930 photograph shows the original appearance of this large sprawling Craftsman style bungalow. Many projecting gables with knee braces, multi-paned sash and battered porch posts were typical of the style. This Arts and Crafts style home’s first resident was a bookkeeper for a stone company. The second resident, Dr. Walter W. Harris, was a prominent Monroe County physician with ties to Ellettsville. His funeral brought together the Borlands, Batmans, Hollands and Dillon Geiger from the medical community. After Harris’s widow left, their home became a rooming house housing the increasing influx of students



6. Showers-Bridwell House
419 North Washington
ca. 1890

William Showers built this Queen Anne-style structure about 1891. In 1920, Showers sold the house to the Bridwells, who one owned a dry goods store on Tenth Street and also the Tapp and Bridwell grain mill on the west side. Notice the siting on the hill, the seven gables, and the Queen Anne chimney. The steammoldings and gingerbread are recently restored.



7. Showers-Allen House
427 North Washington
ca. 1890

This wood frame, Free Classic house was occupied by Lela Showers, the young widow of J.D. Showers’ son, Charles. By 1907 the house was occupied by the family of Frank Allen, who was the nephew of J.D. Showers’ wife, Belle Allen Showers. The porch features simple columns supporting the porch roof, which is sparsely decorated with geometric woodwork designs.



8. Seward House
420 North Washington
ca. 1890

This is a charming 1890s cottage, occupied originally by the Cravens publishing family and then for many years by a member of the Seward family, one of the oldest manufacturing companies in Indiana. Notice the Queen Anne beveled corners, the little tower and the Gothic style gable on the front porch. The alternate use of curved and geometric shingles creates an interesting variety of textures on the front gables.



9. Showers-Graham House
430 North Washington
ca. 1905

The Showers-Graham house is an early example of the Free Classic style in Bloomington and is an outstanding resource in this district. Careful restoration and painting highlight the two-story Corinthian style columns and the carved garland trim. The rear area was landscaped as a formal walled garden. Originally the home of Edward Showers, it was later occupied by Robert Graham, two of the most important business men in early 20th century Bloomington.



10. Showers-Fields House
502 North Washington
ca. 1890

This Queen Anne house was owned until the turn of the century by W.N. Showers; then it was purchased by the Fields family, members of whom lived there for many years. This home has artificial siding, but the Queen Anne details, shown in this ca. 1930s photograph, can still be seen.



11. Maude Showers House
501 North Washington
ca. 1890

This Queen Anne house was owned at the turn of the century by Maude E. Showers, daughter of J.D. Showers. The ornamentation under the eaves and at the gable on the north side of the house is elaborate but sparingly placed.



12. Demaree House
509 North Washington
ca. 1890

This Queen Anne house was owned and occupied by the Demaree family from 1892 until the mid 1900s. Only the bracketed wood lintels remain from the original design.



13. Showers-Teter-
Barrett House
508 North Washington Street
ca. 1895

William Showers deeded 508 and 514 North Washington to his two daughters, Nellie and Jennie. This house was given to Nellie, the wife of Sanford Teter. Although both houses have been altered in the rear, the floor plans were originally identical.



14. Showers-Smith-
Matthews House
514 North Washington
1895

This house belonged to Jennie Showers Smith until 1913 when it was sold to Addie Matthews, the widow of quarry owner and state senator W.N. Matthews. Note the similarity to Nellie Showers’ home next door. The diamond and fishscale shingle work are identical. Only the front porch differentiates them, this house having a rounded porch, the other having a squared one.



15. Showers-Freese House
522 North Washington
ca. 1895

This house was built between 1891 and 1898 by the Showers brothers, and was rented from the turn of the century until the First World War by the Freese family. The color scheme highlights such architectural details as the unusual shingle pattern.



16. 515 North Washington
ca. 1890

This Queen Anne style house was owned by the Showers brothers in 1892, but was soon sold. The Walnut Street Church trustees owned it from 1892-1898. Note the similarity of the shingle work to that of other houses on the block. The limestone porch with its square stone columns contrasts with the many wooden porches in the area.



17. Edwards House
521 North Washington
ca. 1890

This house was owned and occupied by the Edwards family from 1893 to about 1930. Notice the typical elements of the Queen Anne style. “gingerbread” on the gables, patterns of shingle and clapboard siding, an asymmetrical layout. These combine with the classical influence of the porch columns and railing.



18. Strain House
527 North Washington
ca. 1900

This was the residence of Dr. Homer Strain, an early Bloomington dentist. It retains some Queen Anne influence in the beveled corners and bays, but reveals elements of the Free Classic style in its columns, trim and diamond-paned sash.



19. Batman-Brown House
526 North Washington
ca. 1890

Originally built by the Batman family, this sprawling one story frame house, in the Queen Anne cottage style, became the residence of chemistry professor and researcher Oliver Brown. Note the dentil molding, the charming attic ventilator, and the importance of the roof in the design.



20. 528 North Washington
ca. 1900

Situated on the corner of 10th and North Washington Streets. this Free Classic style house once had a large wrap-around porch. The same early photograph also shows the original globed street lights with a fluted base.



21. Morgan House
532 North Walnut
1892

This house is an outstanding example of Queen Anne style in wood frame construction, with inventive use of different siding materials, carved designs, and elaborate chimneys. This large Victorian structure, was built from plans published in a catalogue by a Chicago architectural firm. The exterior of the building was restored by Bloomington Restorations, Inc, in 1981; the interior was completed by the purchaser of the property.



22. Teter House
528 North Walnut
ca. 1913

Chicago architects Lowe and Bollenbacher designed this house in 1913 for Sanford Teter, an officer of the Showers Brothers Furniture Company, and for his wife Nellie Showers Teter, who became the first female trustee of Indiana University. Note the dark headers and light stretchers in the brickwork of this Georgian Revival style house. The dormer windows are arched, and the guttering has been built into the eaves. John Carlyle Bollenbacher had roots in Bloomington having once lived at 645 North College in a large federal style white house that still stands.



23. Buskirk-Showers House
520 North Walnut
ca. 1897

This Queen Anne style house was built for Philip Buskirk, president of the First National Bank and president of the Empire Stone Company. A later owner, William Graham, apparently exchanged houses with William Showers. The exterior has been altered little since Buskirk built it. Note the floral carvings on the stone chimney and porch. The house is decorated with relief floral garlands in tinwork above the porch and windows.



Please respect the privacy of the owners by viewing all listed buildings from the street.