

Matters of Style: Like the many countries where Unitarian Universalist missionaries have spread their teachings, The Walker Center complex is really a hodgepodge of styles. They run the range of Victorian styles from Italianate to Arts & Crafts, and into the twentieth century. While popular trends in each period shined through, the center's complex, nevertheless held to tradition. Periods do not necessarily reflect styles. This is New England, a flinty corner of the country, where serviceability often supersedes fashion. What may look to you like a house from the time of John and Abigail Adams, may be a farmhouse from the time of Bronson and Louisa May Alcott. In Boston, fashion was necessary to complement the tastes of commerce, but in the towns (now the suburbs), vernacular traditions held firm. The builders of these houses did not know it, but they were keeping a regional tradition alive. Let's look at a few examples:



The original Walker house, built by Rev. Sewall Harding circa 1860 in a mixture of the Italianate fashion (marked by the piazza, with slender posts and arches), and the up-and-coming Second Empire style, making its way across the Atlantic from Louis Napoleon's France. The Mansart roof was named for François Mansart, an architect of 17<sup>th</sup> Century France, but it has mid-16<sup>th</sup> century precedents. The projecting bays, known as oriels (Think bay window, only hanging) hold windows like close twins, a feature of both the Italianate and Second Empire.



The Walker Center of today. Built in 1912, after the fire, by architects Coolidge & Carlson. The style is an admixture of Colonial Revival, and Arts & Crafts. The broad roof with double turn is called a Dutch gambrel. The upper center dormer has another gambrel. The end chimneys, porch upheld by classical columns, pronounced dormers, sidelights flanking the door, and brick first story round out the Colonial Revival features. However, the more modern Arts & Crafts makes its incursion in the choice of slate for the roof - in keeping with the wholesomeness of honest materials - and in the protruding squared bay windows. The Arts & Crafts style, started in Britain in the 1850s, and appeared in America Bungalow homes by 1900.



Vestibule of Walker Center. The leaded tracery sidelights are Colonial Revival, yet the effect is modern in that these and the door panel windows open the interior space to the exterior, blurring something of the separation of inside with outside.





Barton House, originally "The Cottage," circa 1860. While the casual observer might surmise this to be an 18<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse with additions, it is actually from the Victorian period. It belies its own times and does not really try to convey any definable style. The white color scheme, black shutters, mullioned sash windows, and gable all carry Georgian tradition. However, the side bay window is Victorian. The hood over the entrance, and larger dormers added in 1911 reveal more modern times. The sleeping porch, added in 1914-15, was popular around the turn of the last century following the publication of Lister's germ theory. Residents found sleeping in the screened-in porches to be cooler, easier on the lungs, and healthier than sleeping indoors, where tuberculosis was thought to be lurking. The original 1860 house sustained the nine lives of the New England farmhouse.



Howard House, built in 1927. A Georgian Revival with Queen Anne bays. Again, period is one thing; style is another. Howard is in the modern period, yet traditions from two previous centuries hold on for dear life.



Late sleeping "porches"/sun rooms admitting more light and air in as well as the tenets of Modernism. They also take the rear of Howard out of the older styles of the front façade. You can say this house in a way transitions through three centuries.



Hume House, called "The Barnacle," as it was the original barn for Harding House, but renovated in 1927 into a cottage. The building dates to 1847 while referencing older New England periods, namely, the First Period of the 1600s, with the slender door and asymmetrical window placement; and the Georgian, with its six-over-six sash windows. Being far removed from either, this is really a vernacular house.



The rear of Hume with Colonial Revival porch and Queen Anne oriel. As Vincent Scully remarked in his landmark book, *The Shingle Style and the Stick Style* (examples found in the neighborhood), the 1876 Centennial in Philadelphia displayed both the indigenous American and the new English styles to the States. He said, "A growing revival, half colonial and half Queen Anne, was in the making." Here the attempt is earlier than the fair, not as conscious style-making, but simply out of folksy frugality. The connecting passage, also called a loggia, is to Yeo house and dates to 1927. As in the sunrooms of Howard House, it complements the Colonial Revival, with its clapboards, mullioned windows, and hipped roof, while embracing Modernism in its use of uninterrupted window banks.





Yeo House (formerly Harding and prior to that Thomas Scott Williams House), built in 1847, is in the Italianate style, marked by the Ell - actually in the shape of the letter 'L.' The windows are paired and are surmounted by raised lintels. The pediment is wide and broken, and corbels (the members holding the eaves and pediment) are widely-spaced. Verandahs provide welcome shade but also a sitting area in a time when some leisure was available for middle class families. Elements creating shadow are in keeping with the nineteenth century mood of Romanticism...and gloominess.





Above photos are of the reception hall in Walker Center. The vertical posts intersect beams, which derive from the *kamoi* in Japanese houses. The horizontal panels refer to the *ramma*, which was filled with rice paper in Japan. But here white-painted plaster lends a Western touch. In some cases the *rammas* present spindled screens, as in the Newport Casino and many Queen Anne structures. The play of solid against void and penetration versus reflection is noteworthy and shows the persistence of Victorian complexity into the first few years of the new century.





Above shots look from the hall into the living room. The spindled room divider opens up space to make a visual connection between the two, which reflects the blurring of distinctions between spaces in Modernism and houses leading up to Modernism. The beam and spindles also complement the structural box beams beyond, with an inflection toward revealing structure. The screened room dividers have the added perk of providing more light and air to the sitting room on the right, and stairwell on the left (photo below). The screens are formally decorative yet utilitarian. Utility is a tenet of Modernism.





Above is the rear side of Walker. The basement story is surfaced in pebble-filled concrete, a craft material favored by Arts & Crafts builders. The string courses (decorative lines of single bricks), and the broken voussiors (wedge-shaped pieces forming the arches) are also Arts & Crafts in nature.



Side view of Walker Center. According to Patrick Powers, recent M.A. in Preservation Studies at Boston University, the "double chimney stacks joined by small 'parapet-type' constructions..." on either end are a Colonial Revival interpretation of a Georgian form. This curious feature seems to have been favored in Medford, such as in the Isaac Royall House. Perhaps the parapet reinforced the chimney stacks from toppling. The reception area/offices on Hancock Street join the dining room wing at an obtuse angle, while the back wing dialogs with the dining hall at a right angle. In the rear the reverse is true. As the Colonial Revival period gave us symmetrical buildings, this is instead an Arts & Crafts feature. That period did not seek perfection but honored the casual and the crafted.

We cannot say the physical plant of The Walker Center embodies a unity of aesthetics. It pulls together a fruit salad from various centuries and styles. Nonetheless, the overlapping of aesthetics, persistence of tradition, and the way in which older styles informed contemporary ones tie the campus into New England architectural values.