

ARCHITECTURE AROUND US

By Angelique Bamberg

Frederick J. Osterling's Neighborhood: His Residential Designs in Brighton Heights

One of Pittsburgh's most illustrious architects, Frederick J. Osterling (1865-1934), enjoyed a prolific career in the region, with more than 200 known commissions. He may have done many more, but unfortunately his company's records were lost in the St. Patrick's Day flood of 1936. His most famous projects are commercial and civic works such as the Union Trust Building, the majestic Washington County Courthouse, and the Allegheny County Morgue. He also designed several early high-rise office towers in downtown Pittsburgh and a number of schools, hospitals, and institutional campuses. Osterling's most celebrated residential commission is his renovation of a conventional Italianate house in Point Breeze into Clayton, the Chateausque mansion of Henry Clay Frick and family. However, he designed many more middle-class houses, notably for himself, his

family, and his neighbors in Brighton Heights.

Brighton Heights, in the northwest reaches of Allegheny City overlooking the Ohio River, was originally known as Davisville. It was a patchwork of small garden farms and country estates when it was annexed by Allegheny City in 1872. Streetcar lines and steel girder bridges soon followed, helping Davisville develop into a suburban residential community.

In 1893, Osterling moved from Manchester to Davisville into a large Queen Anne style house he designed on California Avenue opposite Falck Street. Osterling, the

son of a German lumber mill owner, may have received some of his commissions through his connections to the town's many German settlers. In 1896, he designed a Renaissance Revival brick mansion at 4031 California Avenue for Charles Dahlinger, head of the Ridgeview Land Company. This group of local investors had formed in 1889 to purchase large tracts of farmland adjacent to California Avenue for subdivision into building lots. The Dahlinger house occupied a double lot in the company's Grande Point Plan and signaled the caliber of dwelling expected to be built there.

The Osterling family house and nearby property owned by Frederick "F.J." Osterling are shown on this excerpt from a 1925 Hopkins map of Brighton Heights.

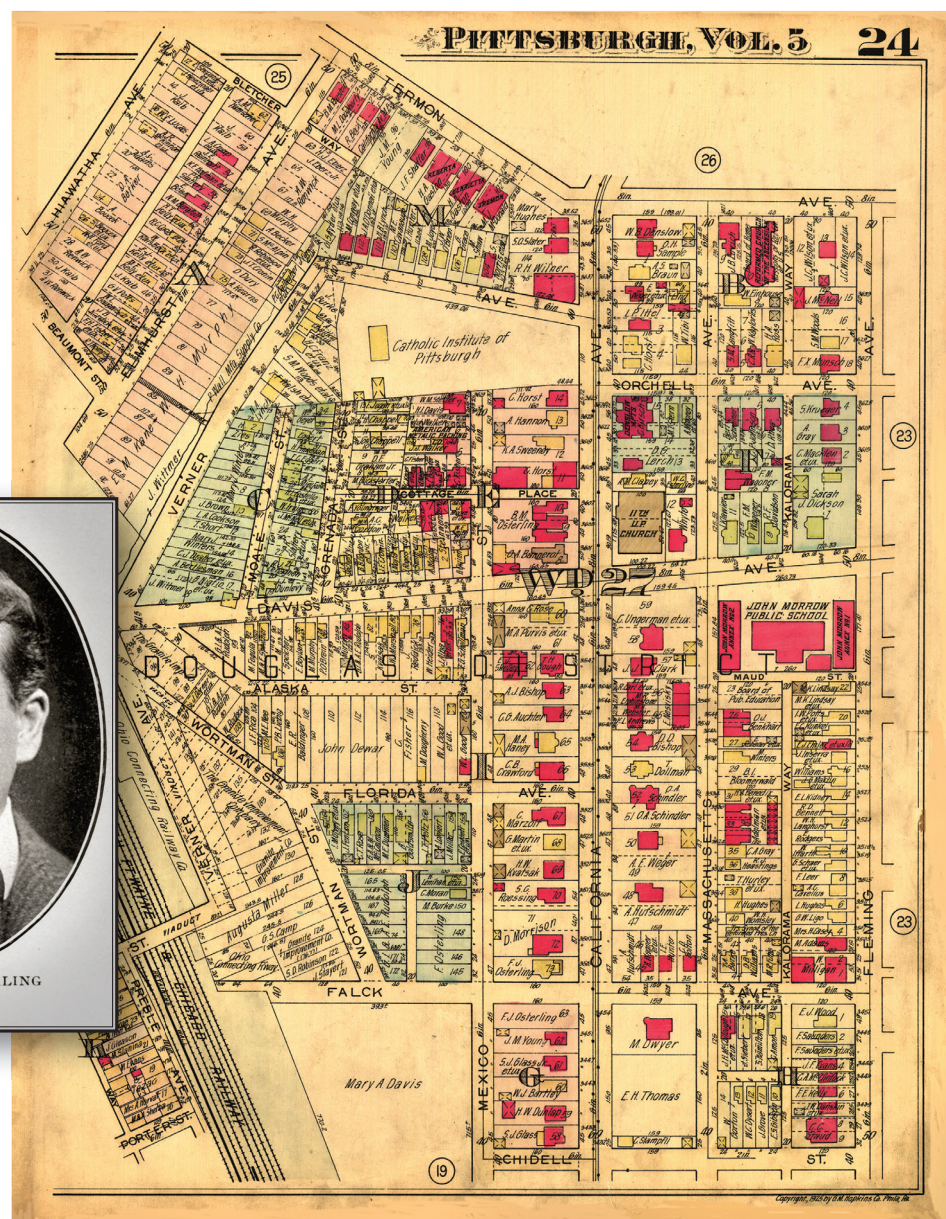
University of Pittsburgh, Archives Service Center, G.M. Hopkins Company Maps, 1872-1940.



FREDERICK J. OSTERLING
Architect

Frederick Osterling in
the 1890s.

From Palmer's Pictorial Pittsburgh, 107.





Designed in 1896 for a Brighton Heights real estate investor, the Dahlinger House set an elegant tone for the Grande Point plan near the border between Brighton Heights and Bellevue.

Photo by author.



Pittsburgh meets Amsterdam in this trio of narrow houses from c. 1900. One hundred years after they were built, the Brighton Heights Civic Association rehabilitated them as apartment buildings, and they are now known as the Osterling Flats.

Photo by author.

Osterling also designed a fine frame house nearby at 3917 Wilksboro Avenue.


The Ridgeview Land Company also laid out the Fleming Farms Plan over the crest of California Avenue between Davis and Falck Avenues. Osterling designed his own house there and several others in the Queen Anne style featuring steeply pitched and complex rooflines, rounded towers, and handsome brickwork.

At 3520 California Avenue stands the Goehring house, commissioned c. 1900 for John M. Goehring, an attorney and member of Allegheny City Council, and his wife, Sarah Neeb Goehring. Across the street, John Goehring's widowed sister, Annie Goehring

Steffen, built a house at 3519 California Avenue, also attributed to Osterling. He also designed an unusual house (now greatly altered) for Edward Gwinner at 3537 California Avenue featuring a large rounded front bay and conical roof. Gwinner later moved to a mansion at Fifth and Amberson Avenues in Shadyside, which he hired Osterling to renovate.

Osterling's most intriguing houses are not necessarily his grandest. On California Avenue north of Davis Avenue, he designed three narrow houses on a double lot purchased from Henry Falck in around 1900. It is not known exactly why he embellished them with the Dutch-inspired gables that both relate them to one another and set them apart from their

peers. These are shown on historic property maps as belonging to Osterling's brother Daniel in 1903 and to his sister Bertha in 1923.

Osterling's own house was demolished in the 1950s for the construction of St. George Ukrainian Catholic Church. Across the street at 3500 California Avenue stands a later work of his, designed for his secretary about 1930. This house's relatively simple yet engaging use of form and materials shows Osterling's adaptation to the ongoing, yet tempered, eclectic tastes of the early 20th century. 

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A late-in-life commission, this c. 1930 house designed by Osterling for his secretary eschewed Victorian grandeur for the cottage-inspired aesthetic of the interwar years.



These stone steps once led to the front walk of the home Osterling designed for himself on California Avenue. Unmarried, Osterling shared the house with his parents, brother, and sister at various times until his death in 1934. The site is now occupied by a church.

Photo by author.

