Spanish Style, Part 1 of 2

Houses with shaped parapets, stucco walls, red-tiled roofs, and deep eaves are found occasionally in Western Pennsylvania. They indicate a Spanish influence, but where did it come from and how did it come to adorn Pittsburgh-area residences?

Historians trace the origins of this revival style to California and later Florida, and an interest in the crumbling churches built by the Spanish missionaries between 1780 and the 1820s. After the Civil War, as these abandoned mission buildings deteriorated, they became both romantic ruins and objects for the ministrations of impassioned preservationists. In 1884, Helen Hunt Jackson published the novel Ramona, intended to do for California's Indian tribes what Uncle Tom's Cabin did for slaves. Instead, the adobe walls of the ranches and missions were so vividly described that they became another character in the plot. The novel was wildly popular and inspired songs, movies, and tours of the ranch thought to be its setting.

The architectural journals of the 1880s published drawings of buildings with exotic Moorish, Spanish, and Islamic influences. Carrere and Hastings, a prominent New York architectural firm, designed the Hotel Ponce de Leon (1884-1887), now Flagler College, in St. Augustine, Florida; its covered arcades, patios, balconies, and tiled roofs captured readers' imaginations. When H. H. Richardson's successor firm, Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge, designed Leland Stanford's new university in Palo Alto, California, they adapted Flagler College in St. Augustine, Florida, once the Hotel Ponce de Leon.
the master’s architectural traditions to California’s milder climate. The partner in charge, Charles A. Coolidge, created Stanford University’s one-story quadrangle (1886-1891) surrounded by deep-eaved arcades under red-tiled roofs. Both the hotel and quadrangle caused a sensation in the architectural press, but the question remains—what brought the style northward?

The influential World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, overseen by Daniel Burnham, brought together architects from across the nation to design buildings representing their states. California’s competition had a clear mandate from Burnham that the building must be modeled after the “old Spanish mission in lower California and Mexico, [and be] symmetrical with rectangular plan.” Arthur Page Brown won the competition with a design dignified by ionic-columned pediments on two sides and Spanish elements on the other two, all topped with a tiled dome. The following year, a second world’s fair in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park was extensively covered in the American Architect and Buildings News and Inland Architect and News Record. After the notoriety of these two fairs, the Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe, and the Southern Pacific Railroads adopted the California Mission style for their railroad stations and adjacent hotels. Northerners who spent winters in the South and on the West Coast brought back a liking for these styles.

As this phenomenon grew, so too did an interest in architecture made by hand rather than machine. If some builders were comfortable using ersatz materials like concrete block, linoleum, and pressed tin to
resemble stone, rugs, and plaster ceilings, others elevated handcrafts. The Arts and Crafts movement, best represented by the furniture of Gustav Stickley, was showcased in the *Craftsman* magazine he founded in 1901. The publication was readily available in Pittsburgh and after 1904 it included articles about early California missions and buildings derived from them. The editors advocated a return to indigenous architecture and the realistic use of materials. The opening of these vacation places and the architectural impact of the Arts and Crafts movement combined to cause an escalation in the popularity of this rather arcane style.

Mission Revival houses were offered to discriminating buyers through the pattern books of the period. By the 1920s, one could buy the plans for a middle class house with Spanish elements—like a tile roof and shaped parapets—on several pages of bungalow pattern books. One had to specify the style:

California State Building, Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1890s. The expo buildings were meant to be temporary; only a few survived the end of the fair, and images of them are rare, yet they were seen by an enormous number of people and became well-known to the architects in each state who both competed for the privilege of designing them, and then followed the winning entry in the architectural journals of the day. The California building didn't simply copy the elements of an old mission, it Victorianized the style, adding the scale and plan of a late 19th-century building to mission materials and ornament.

201 Old Spanish Villa Drive, named for the houses along it, Hempfield Township, Westmoreland County. Lu Donnelly.

Pueblo Revival bungalow with smooth walls and rounded edges, or a fancier Spanish Colonial Revival house. Those whose finances were even tighter could buy a kit from Sears or Aladdin Houses. We'll see a variety of them next issue as we continue this discussion.

2 Ibid., 55.

Lu Donnelly is one of the authors of Building of Western Pennsylvania, a forthcoming book in the 58-volume series on American architecture sponsored by the Society of Architectural Historians titled Buildings of the United States. She has authored several books and National Register nominations on Allegheny County topics and organized an exhibition on the barns of Western Pennsylvania for the Heinz Architectural Center at Carnegie Museum of Art.