Queen Anne Style

The last English queen of the Stuart line, Queen Anne (1664–1714), had nothing to do with the style that bears her name. In fact, scholars note that the design elements of the Queen Anne style of architecture are drawn from Elizabeth I’s reign, 1558–1603, rather than Anne’s reign 1702–1714. Most architectural historians trace the origins of the style to a Scottish-born English architect named Richard Norman Shaw (1831–1912), who developed his interest in medieval vernacular English buildings into large estate houses that were warmer and more welcoming than the Gothic Revival and classical facades, then popular. At Leyswood (1868) in Sussex he used horizontal casement windows, varied brickwork, mullioned bay windows, half-timbering, and prominent chimneys as ornament, rather than statuary and elaborate carving. Ironically, while Shaw’s work drew from the Elizabethan era, it was named for the Queen who reigned over the transition in architecture to the Classical and Baroque.

In the United States, the style transformed itself. Rather than brick, half-timbering, and terra cotta, American architects built in wood using the new balloon frame construction and chose ornamentation from catalogues of machine-made design elements shipped to the construction site by train. The American version of the Queen Anne style, prevalent from about 1880 to 1910, is characterized by a profusion of decoration that fits together like a crazy quilt. A Queen Anne house normally has a decorated porch, wooden detailing like shingling or wavy clapboards, and at least one turret, tower, pavilion, or porte cochere. Noted for its asymmetry, authors describe the style as exuberant, textured, and picturesque. Montgomery Schuyler (1843–1914) architectural critic and founder of the Architectural Record magazine wrote that...
using the title “Queen Anne” covers “a multitude of incongruities … which otherwise defy classification, and there is a convenient vagueness about the term, which fits it for that use.”

While there are fine examples of the style in Pittsburgh and many surrounding cities from Washington, Washington County, to Titusville, Crawford County, those pictured here are in relatively isolated locations, a fact that further illustrates the style’s portability. Even the most elaborate architectural plans for Queen Anne houses were available in catalogues—their parts shipped and then constructed by local contractors. One house of this type built in a small town often led to a raft of imitators, and the style proliferated across the United States. In Sheffield, Warren County, northeast of Pittsburgh, George Horton, owner of several local tanneries, admired a house by architect Alfred Smith (1841–1898) while on one of his hide-buying trips to Chicago. Smith, known for his Episcopal churches, apartment buildings, and residences, supplied the design for this 38-room house, and possibly also for the summerhouse, carriage house, garage, and greenhouse built on the grounds. Although Horton died in 1893, his family kept the house until 1941. The interior is fitted with oak trim and parquet floors. The power is supplied by a gas well on the property.

The James Cochran House in Dawson, Fayette County, was commissioned in 1890.

James Cochran House, Main and Railroad streets, Dawson, Fayette County.
In 1997, the Forest County Historical Society purchased the 1873 George W. Robinson House at 206 Elm Street, Tionesta, for use as its History Center. It could technically be labeled “Stick Style” due to the corner boards outlining it, but the curving decorative boards also place it in the Queen Anne family. Note the “shut” sign indicating the museum is closed.

In one of the state’s smallest counties, Cameron, in north central Pennsylvania, the town of Emporium has several large Queen Anne houses, including this gaily decorated house in the 100 block of West Fourth Street.


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The 100 Block of West Fourth Street, Emporium, Cameron County.