

CHAUTAUQUA HOUSE STYLE

Our neighbourhood has an extraordinary assortment of houses of different sizes and architectural styles... but is there an identifiable Chautauqua Style?... Since its inception as a summer resort in 1886, Chautauqua has had a uniqueness about it that is difficult to describe or compare with anyplace else. Many of the houses built during the last 140 years, present features that are similar but unique in execution. What is it that makes our neighbourhood so special?

Chautauqua was not planned with streets and roads, but with avenues. Derived from the latin word “venire”, it emphasizes the “coming to” or arrival at a landscape or architectural feature. Chautauqua’s avenues focused on the Circle where a 3,000 seat amphitheatre was built. The feature that truly made the original plan of 1886 unique (in the history of urban planning) is that each avenue offered building lots that varied greatly in size and aspect that accommodated a wide variety of house styles and budgets. This was an urban planning experiment that encouraged the creation of a diverse and inclusive community. Small houses were built on small lots, large houses were built on large lots... on the same street sharing the same amenities.

Instead of encouraging uniformity and exclusion, it was an invitation to be different and inclusive.

When the Niagara Assembly planned the Chautauqua development in the 1880’s, it was during the very height of the popularity of the American Queen Anne Style of architecture. ***All the first cottages*** and the ***Strathcona Hotel***, as well as Niagara-on-the-Lake’s ***Queens Royal Hotel*** were built in the American Queen Anne Style.

Queen Anne Style buildings, unlike preceding architectural styles, were whimsical, brightly painted and used a wide assortment of materials to enhance the visual experience. New advances in milling technology meant that turned spindles could now be economically used in abundance. Expanded railroads meant a new availability of a wide assortment of materials, such as Western Red Cedar and White Pine.

The DISTINCTIVE FEATURES of the Queen Anne cottage style as it was manifested in NOTL & Chautauqua are;

- *A one or two storey frame house where the 2nd floor is a finished attic*
- *A porch covering part or all of the front facade, including the primary entrance area (often closed in at a later date)... with decorative brackets and whimsical detailing*
- *A 2nd storey porch or balcony*
- *Asymmetrical facades, bay windows, overhanging eaves*
- *Gables, often cantilevered beyond the wall below*
- *Horizontal bands of windows w/leaded multi-coloured lites, differing exterior wall finishes on each floor giving visual dominance of the 2nd floor.*
- *Interiors featuring; central fireplaces, asymmetrical rooms, interior detailing such as window and door surrounds, wainscoting and mantels, pine floors and ceilings.*

To this list must be added the specific DISTINCTIVE FEATURES that contribute to the uniqueness of the Chautauqua House Style...

- *Variation in house size to accommodate differing lot sizes.*
- *Absence of basements. Until recently, basements were not feasible and rarely built. This maintained a high water table and allowed trees to grow to full maturity. It’s the experience of houses within the towering trees that makes Chautauqua so special and unusual. How a Chautauqua Style House is built is essential.*

Architecture is a language that can be learned and the components re-interpreted to create many different styles. The language of the Chautauqua Style House consists of only a few words...

Whimsical, Porch, Balcony, Attic, Crawlpace, Wood, Windows, Detail... Trees

And these words can be spoken in a thousand ways.