

West End North Historic District Walking Tour

1. Kenyon & Girard Streets History & Architecture

Introduction

The West End North Historic District is a fascinating story of 19th and early 20th century homes that are outstanding examples of the architectural styles popular during that period of time, including **Second Empire**, **Queen Anne**, **Shingle**, and **Colonial Revival**. There are nearly 300 buildings within the area, of which 291 contribute to the area's historic and architectural significance. Many of the homes were built between 1895 and 1910, and have features that demonstrate each of the various architectural styles.

During the decade following the Civil War, much of the west end of Hartford remained open farmland just west of the Park River and most of the land was owned by farmers and real estate investors like Sylvanus Cone, Willis Thrall, and Eugene Kenyon (1841-1902). Kenyon was a coal company executive and former first selectman of Hartford who is widely credited with the development of the entire area. His company, *People's Coal Yard*, was located on Front Street. Willis Thrall owned a hardware store named Thrall & Sons that was located downtown at 10 Central Row. Following the post-war industrial and population growth of Hartford, Kenyon and Cone subdivided several plots of land just north of Farmington Avenue and laid out and named the first three streets in the district: **Kenyon**, **Thrall** (now Girard Avenue), and **Cone Street**. The first home in the area, located at **96 Kenyon Street*** was built in 1871 and combines the **Italian Villa** and **Gothic Revival** styles and included an Italianate tower and clustered cast stone chimney pots characteristic of the Gothic Revival style. The wide front veranda, with its flat entablature and Tuscan columns is classical in style and was added by one of its first owners, Mr. & Mrs. George Burnham, in 1903.

Kenyon, Thrall, and Cone Streets would form the foundation of further development in the area. But, unfortunately, these plans were stalled during the financial panics of the 1870s, which nearly cost Kenyon his entire savings and played a major role in his leaving Hartford for the Milwaukee area in the early 1880s. As economic conditions improved during the latter part of the 1880s, the development of the West End North District began to take shape. In fact, 38 homes were constructed in the area between 1890 and 1895, with most of them concentrated on the first block of **Kenyon**, as well as **Sherman**, **Whitney**, **Oxford**, and **Cone** streets. By 1895, Hartford was booming and the demand for new housing in the area was strong. During the 15 years between 1895 and 1910, the West End North District saw 182 new homes being designed and built, and nearly all of the remaining open space in the area was gone. In 1901, **Kenyon Street** was described as "one the most fashionable locations in the city," according to a publication from that time entitled, *Connecticut Leading Citizens*.

As I mentioned earlier, many of these homes built during this period combined several different architectural styles with no one style clearly standing out. While a total of 25 architects designed most of the houses throughout the district, self-taught architects and brothers, **William** and **Albert Scoville**, were the most prolific in Hartford at the turn of the century and many of the homes in the West End, mainly on N. Beacon and Kenyon Streets, served as their canvases.

Kenyon Street History & Architecture Tour – Meet at 49 Kenyon Street

Colonial Revival, Queen Anne Victorian

The Colonial Revival residences in the West End show classical detailing and symmetrical massing and their exteriors feature clapboards, wood shingles, brick, and stucco.

- 1. 49 Kenyon Street (1896) Colonial Revival.** The front entry porch and decorative Palladian and elliptical windows are the outstanding features of this building.
- 2. 55 Kenyon Street (1890) Queen Anne Victorian.** Notice the surface texture of the clapboards and patterned shingles. The Queen Anne style is often characterized by the use of an asymmetrical façade; overhanging eaves; round, square or polygonal towers; and classical columns. As a side note, in 1933, during the height of the Depression, this home was offered for sale for \$7,500 in cash, which is equivalent to about \$172K today.
- 3. 56 Kenyon Street (1899) Shingle/Colonial Revival.** This is a Scoville-designed house that features a gambrel roof with Palladian windows, elliptical windows, and dentilled cornices. This home has an interesting story to tell. For many years it was owned by Ms. Jane Tuttle, a renowned opera singer and philanthropist. Her father, William F. Tuttle, served on the Board of Directors of the Aetna starting in 1850. Future Connecticut governor, US senator, and Baseball Hall of Famer Morgan Bulkeley and financier J.P. Morgan Sr. were among his contemporaries during his long tenure with Aetna. When Ms. Tuttle passed away in August 1939 at the age of 91, she donated \$3.2 million to 13 different charitable institutions.
- 4. 65 Kenyon Street (1900) Colonial Revival.** But notice the Queen Anne style influences and rich detailing. This site, along with five other adjacent land sites was originally owned by Mr. & Mrs. Edward Howes Smiley. The Smileys then sold the land in May 1897 to Mr. Charles Atkins, who built the home that we're looking at today. Mr. Atkins owned a lumber yard and was a prominent member of the Republican Party, who was frequently mentioned as a potential candidate for governor of Connecticut. Unfortunately Mr. Atkins endured substantial financial losses during the economic downturn of 1907 and the property was foreclosed upon in April 1909. James Henry Cook purchased the property later that year and lived there for the next 23 years. He was the president of Hartford Sand & Stone Company and one of the primary developers of the quarries in New Britain and Plainville.

5. **96 Kenyon Street (1871). Gothic Revival and Italianate Villa.** As I mentioned during the introduction, this was the first home built in the district. Its first owner was a woman named Maria Stanley, who also owned a property on Thrall Street. Take note of the wide front veranda, with its flat entablature and classical columns. The veranda was added in 1903 by its later owners, Mr. and Mrs. George Burnham.
6. **95 Kenyon Street (1875). Stick Style.** Notice the pierced porch braces and linear “stick-work” on the exterior and Gothic Revival (see the frieze on the side ell.) The Stick style was popular in the late 19th century and preceded the popularity of the Queen Anne style. The stick style did have several characteristics similar to the later Queen Anne style namely, the porch.

Shingle Style/Colonial Revival

Many of the Shingle Style/Colonial Revival houses in the area were designed by **William Scoville**. Again, his designs often showed a combination of architectural elements that include flared roofs, oriel-style windows (a type of Bay window), dormer peaks, and oversized detailing. Several examples of his designs can also be found on Lorraine Street, a few blocks over.

7. **127 Kenyon Street (1898) Shingle/Colonial Revival.** Note the windows under the flared, shingled roof pents and the unusual tower; also, notice the wide friezes with large Adamesque garlands and the two-sided, diagonal gable peak.
8. **129 Kenyon Street (1898) Shingle/Colonial Revival.** This house is notable due to its elliptical window with elongated, bracket-like keystones and crenelated tower, which conjures up images of a medieval castle. In November 1930, this house was listed for \$12,500 (about \$223K in today’s dollars) following a foreclosure.

William H. Scoville and Albert W. Scoville, Architects

The Scoville brothers were the most prolific designers in Hartford at the turn of the 20th century, and the West End of Hartford is a lasting product of their efforts. The interesting thing about the brothers is that neither of them had any formal training in architecture. William was a carpenter by trade and a draftsman. As he became more successful, he became active in Hartford civic affairs, serving a few terms on the city council and on the building committees for the construction of Weaver High School and the expansion of the first Hartford Public High School.

Girard Avenue - Queen Anne; Shingle style; Shingle/Colonial Revival

9. **79 Girard Avenue (1897) Shingle style.** The most common Shingle style characteristics among the 28 houses in the district in this style are a gambrel roof and an asymmetrical plan with a corner tower and polygonal dormer. Notice the diamond-shaped glazing pattern in the upper sash which is a common feature to this style as well as some of the Queen Anne and Colonial Revival homes throughout the district.

10.39 Girard Avenue (1886) Queen Anne. Take note of the beautiful porch detailing of this Queen Anne-style house with its intricate front gable screen and the sunburst design over the front steps.

Questions/Wrap-up