



Northport's Painted Ladies

By Anne McCarthy Strauss
Photography by Elizabeth Glasgow

AMONG THE TOWNS and villages clustered along Long Island's North Shore, the waterfront village of Northport stands out as quaint and charming as a picture postcard. Settled in the early 1600s, Northport soon became home to a number of prominent Long Islanders, many of whom built magnificent homes among the hills and along the curved roads of Northport Village.

During the later 1800s, the style selected for many of these homes was Victorian, an elaborate and flamboyant architectural style of post-Civil War America. It was new, different and never dull. Now collectively called "Victorian," the architecture was made up of several styles including Italianate, Second Empire, Stick-Eastlake and Queen Anne.

The bulk of Northport's Victorian homes were built during the halcyon days of the 1890s. This was a decade of prosperity in Northport, an extension of the Industrial Age being enjoyed throughout the country. The businesses that made Northport a boomtown during this decade included oyster farming, legal publishing, shipbuilding, real estate development, coal, lumber and politics.

During the late 1800s, Edward Thompson & Company, a publisher of legal books, brought hundreds of attorneys to the village. The publishing house was located at the foot of Woodbine Avenue. Employees included many young attorneys who migrated from the South, where the Victorian style was already enjoying popularity. Looking for homes nearby, they headed toward land that had originally been owned by Samuel Prior Hartt, a Bayview Avenue shipbuilder.

The home of Northport Village Justice Paul H. Senzer and his wife, Cheryl, (left) was carefully painted to emphasize the house's fine Victorian details. Such attention to detail, along with careful interior and exterior restorations are also evidenced in the homes of Russell and Lynn Seim (above right) and Klaus and Eve Moser (below right).



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In 1890, Mr. Hartt's ancestors sold all of what is now known as the Bayview area to the Northport Real Estate and Improvement Company. Part of the Edward Thompson Company, the real estate firm sold plots, mainly to the company's attorneys, for prices ranging from \$100 to \$1000.

The area along Long Island Sound at Northport Harbor was developed as "Highland Park," and the avenue was nicknamed "lawyers' street" because so many of the Edward Thompson attorneys lived along its periphery. A plethora of Victorian-style homes sprang up along Highland Avenue — some as boarding houses for the young attorneys, others as private residences. On Sunday afternoons, the strains of musicales rang out along the avenue, and Highland Park became an elite place to live.

The home of Roy and Celia Gordon (below) was restored by a previous owner in 1985. Wood shingles were removed to reveal the original clapboard.

Today, Highland remains a tree-shaded avenue flanked with circa 1890 to 1920 homes, lovingly maintained by owners committed to preserving the integrity of their original designs. Among these modern-day owners are Russell and Lynn Seim who took up residence here in 1975.

When they purchased their nearly 100-year-old home as newlyweds, it was in serious need of renovation. Fortunately, the Seims were able to do most of the work themselves, refurbishing the kitchen and bathrooms, laying wood flooring and adding insulation.

"It was important to us to keep the house as true to its era as possible, down to the last detail," explained Lynn Seim. "For





Photograph courtesy of Northport Historical Society.



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instance, when we enclosed the back porch to add a family room, we had the new moldings custom milled to match those in the kitchen."

The home of Klaus and Eve Moser typifies the ornate Queen Anne style of Victorian architecture, characterized by its gabled roof, shingled insets and angled bay windows. Built in 1894 by Claude Sanford for George Babcock, a principal at the Edward Thompson Publishing Company, this magnificent house overlooks Northport Harbor.

Restored from old photos to its original look, the house was totally renovated. Like every individual interviewed, Klaus Moser mentioned that previous owners had painted over the original woodwork — a faux pas for any lover of the Victorian period.

"During the restoration, we had every door and every molding removed from the house, stripped to the original wood that lay beneath layer upon layer of paint, restored them and had them reinstalled in our home," Klaus Moser recalled. "This restoration took a tremendous amount of work, but it had to be done to bring the house back to its original splendor. The house is very special. Every room is symmetrical, with a harmony distinct to its origins."

Further uphill from the harbor is the home of Mike and Tracey Riedinger. Originally built as a farmhouse in 1840, its conversion to the Victorian style in 1860 made it one of the first homes of that style in Northport. The Riedingers purchased it in 1995.

"We love living in this house," Mike Riedinger said. "It has a tremendous amount of character, as well as a bit of whimsy. Its quirks can be fun — the un-level floors, a spiral staircase to the attic and beams in the basement that look like they came from a ship. We suspect they may have been the work of a ship captain named Earnheart who lived here during the 1870s."

The Riedingers also did a lot of work in their home — stripping moldings and restoring one room that a previous owner had contemporized, complete with track lighting, chrome and globes. "We gutted that room," Riedinger explained. "It was totally out of character with the rest of the house."

Northport's restored Victorian homes look as beautiful today as the grand home (center) looked in its early days in this photo from the archives of The Northport Historical Society.

Debbie Dempster realized a long-held dream when she and husband Daniel bought the house (top left) she had admired on childhood walks to her grandmother's house.

The house (bottom) now owned by Robert and Toby Kissam has been in Robert Kissam's family since it was built for his Great-Uncle William in 1895.