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George Barber Homes Trolley Tour
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Trolley Tour
George Barber, a Brief History

A self-taught architect, George Barber’s mail-order business was likely inspired by the Bridgeport, Connecticut, firm of Palliser & Palliser, the pioneers of mail-order architecture. Barber purchased Palliser’s American Cottage Homes while working as a carpenter in Fort Scott, Kansas. Later, working as an architect in Dekalb, Illinois, Barber produced a small publication of his own: The Cottage Souvenir, containing 18 plans and bound by a yarn tied through a hole punched in the corner.

Barber arrived in Knoxville in 1888 on the advice of his physician to seek a warmer climate. Among his earliest Knoxville work was a partnership with J.C. White, a descendant of Knoxville founder James White, to subdivide and develop property in Park City along Washington and Jefferson avenues. However, Barber’s business also looked far outside of Knoxville for clients, starting with the publication of The Cottage Souvenir #2 — A Repository of Artistic Cottage Architecture in 1891 — containing 70 different plans. Other catalogs followed as the business thrived, including a monthly magazine (Barber’s printer, S. B. Newman, was also a client—522 Scott Ave.). By the turn of the century, Barber’s was the largest architectural firm in the state. The office occupied an entire floor of the French and Roberts Building (now destroyed) at the corner of Gay and Depot and housed as many as 30 draftsmen.

More than willing to customize, most catalogs contained questionnaires and sketch pages for prospective clients to flesh out their own ideas. “Keep writing until you get what you want. Don’t be afraid of writing too often. We are not easily offended,” instructed the copy in one catalog. It is estimated that the firm sold more than 20,000 sets of plans over its 20-year history — some as far away as the Philippines and South Africa.

Barber’s designs ran the entire gamut from small three- and four-room cottages to huge mansions worthy of Robber Baron industrialists. (Tobacco magnate R.J. Reynolds was a Barber client). His earliest and most famous designs were exuberant examples of the late Victorian Eastlake and Queen Anne styles (816 N. Fourth Avenue or 241 E. Scott Avenue). Many later designs reflected the balanced proportions of the Beaux-Arts and Colonial Revival styles (The Tyson House on the University of Tennessee campus or 941 and 1003 Eleanor Street) or Neoclassical details such as Greek order porch columns and Palladian windows (1614 Washington Avenue). A handful of Barber’s late designs show hints of bungalow influence (516 Lovenia Street), which Barber referred to as “Chalet Style.”

When Barber died in 1915, professionally trained architects were more common than a generation previously, and retail giants like Sears and Montgomery Ward had begun selling entire prefabricated houses via mail order (something Barber never did). Today, Barber’s legacy lives on in hundreds of houses scattered across the country, including at least 35 that still stand in Knoxville. Most of the identified houses are in the old streetcar suburbs of north and east Knoxville — Fourth and Gill, Old North Knoxville, and Lincoln Park. But, by far, the largest concentration of Barber houses in Knoxville, perhaps the country, are the 17 houses in the Park City historic district. Many of these houses date from Barber’s initial collaboration with J.C. White in 1889 — including Barber’s own home, 1635 Washington Avenue.

George Barber died in Knoxville on February 17, 1915, and at his death he was thought to be an architect of considerable importance and influence. Barber houses were built in every state in the Union and also abroad in Japan, China, Canada, and the Philippines.

For more information about George Barber, or to look at his plan catalogs, please visit:

the McClung Collection on the third floor of the East Tennessee History Center
601 S. Gay Street
Knoxville, TN 37902
(865) 215-8801
522 E. Scott Avenue—The S.B. Newman House

This house, Design #561 in Art in Architecture, was built for Samuel Baker Newman, the founder and president of Newman Printing Company. At his death in December of 1930, Newman was the most well-known and oldest printing company in Knoxville, having been in business for 52 years. Newman’s printing firm was described on the inside cover of Barber’s 1891 Cottage Souvenir #2 as “S.B. Newman & Co., Steam Book and Job Printers.” It is said that Newman printed many of the early George Barber mail order catalogs. Newman built his house in 1892 and the plan and photo of the house was published in a later catalog, Art in Architecture, with the title “Newman.” Very soon after the house was built there was an attic fire, which left the house a roofless shell. When the house was rebuilt, the roof line was altered and another room was added to the second story altering the original plan and exterior look of the house. This house boasts an impressive full two-story front porch and has round, fluted wood columns with Ionic capitals. The most notable exterior architectural element is the exterior side brick chimney adorned with stone embellishment and stained glass window.

241 E. Scott Avenue—The James E. Fair House

This house was built in 1896 and is George Barber’s design #58B in New Model Dwellings. James E. Fair was owner of Fair Foundry on Oldham Avenue. His son, J.E. Fair, Jr., was quoted in a 1981 article in the Knoxville News-Sentinel as having lived in the home as a child, when he could remember a barn in the back, where he curried, fed, saddled, and rode his horse. The house has many impressive exterior architectural elements to include typical Victorian asymmetrical roof line, second and first story recessed porches and decorative attic dormer. Did you know that Barber not only designed plans for houses, but also commercial buildings, barns, apartment buildings, multiple family residences, and hotels?
131 E. Scott Avenue—Pinecrest

Built for William T. Lang in 1899, this house is George Barber’s design #213 in Modern Dwelling. This house must have been one of Barber’s favorites because this actual house was featured in the catalog with plans and extensive interior and exterior photos. Lang was the manager of Brookside Mills and not only worked with Clarence Brown’s father but also lived beside him on E. Scott Avenue. The Langs lived in the house until 1911 when Gustav H. Kaiser moved in with his family. Kaiser was part owner in Kaiser Brothers, a wholesale produce business located at 23 Market Square. The warehouse for the business was located at 500 McGhee Avenue. Kaiser might be best known as a well-known musician and once head of the UT music department. Kaiser lived in the house until 1946 when the house was converted into apartments until 1989, when the house had a fire. It was then purchased by the current owners in 1990 and restored. Pay attention to the impressive windows with stained-glass upper sashes and the original stained glass window within the exterior chimney.

800 Deery Street—The T.W. Fisk House

This house was built circa 1890 and is design #2 in Cottage Souvenir No. 2. Not much historical information is known about this house. This house has some interesting exterior architectural details to include original spandrels between the porch columns, grand square turret with ornamental finial.

Did you know that George Barber also was commissioned to design remodels? Barber remodeled The Kilgore House in Old North Knoxville located at 1319 Grainger Avenue. Barber also remodeled The Tyson House on the University of Tennessee campus located at 1609 Melrose Place. In 1907, its owner Lawrence D. Tyson asked Barber to remodel his home, the original house was torn down to the foundation, and a new house was built. The house is three levels with eleven main rooms, and the third floor boasts a ballroom, which was the scene of Tyson’s daughter’s debut. The University bought the house in 1954 and was occupied by the Art Department for many years. The house now houses the UT Alumni office.
821 Deery Street

This house was built circa 1890 and is George Barber design #134 in Cottage Souvenir, Revised and Enlarged. Not much historical information is known about this house. Pay close attention to the dominant front dormer on the second story and the wrap around front porch.

703 Luttrell Street—The Mrs. J. W. Taylor House

This house is George Barber design #581 in Art in Architecture and design #265 in Modern Dwellings. The house was built for Mrs. J. W. Taylor around 1902, and a picture of the house is featured in the two Barber plan books. Not much else is known about the history of this house.

Pay close attention to the typical Victorian architectural elements to include, the one story wrap front porch, dominant front gables with decorative dentil molding.
941 Eleanor Street—The Eugene Harold Wilson House

This house was built ca. 1906 and is George Barber design #205 in Modern Dwellings. It was built for Eugene Harold Wilson, secretary and cashier for the Knoxville Savings and Loan. Not much else is known about the history of this house. This house features ball swag turned porch rails and sidelights and transoms at the entrance on both the first and second floors.

The Oakwood-Lincoln Park Neighborhood also has some George Barber-designed houses; if you have time after the tour, pay a visit to these three houses: 813 Chicamauga Avenue—Design #132 in Cottage Souvenir, Revised and Enlarged; 913 Chicamauga Avenue—Design #58B in New Model Dwellings; and 705 Hiwassee Street—Design #596 in Art in Architecture.

1003 Eleanor Street

This house was built circa 1900 and is George Barber design #179 in Modern Dwellings. Not much historical information is known about this house. Exterior and interior pictures of the house are featured in the catalog, along with an extensive description of the house and its accommodations.

Pay close attention to the attic arched dormer with ocular window, full cornice returns, shaped-base decoration, and the full width front porch.

If you have time, go to 516 Lovenia Street which is George Barber design #599 in Art in Architecture, but not included in this tour booklet.
This house was built circa 1900 and is George Barber design #557 in Art in Architecture. Not much historical information is known about this house. Pay close attention to the wrap front porch and dominant front gable with wood horizontal decorative shingles and the elaborate one-story bay window.

This house was built ca. 1890 and is design #36 in The Cottage Souvenir No. 2. The house has been owned by many loving owners and still has its same basic floor plan and other original exterior architectural elements, ornamented with a multitude of brackets, turned spindles and bay windows. It is thought by many to be one of the finest examples anywhere of design #36. The house's most distinctive feature, not seen in the basic pattern book design, is the keyhole-shaped, beveled glass window in the staircase.

The Fourth and Gill Neighborhood is an excellent example of the communities that flourished in Knoxville during the last quarter of the 19th century and first quarter of the 20th century. This was a time of economic boom in the city, fueled by manufacturing and the railroads. The architectural styles in the neighborhood are a good representation of the residential architecture popular in America between the 1880's and the 1940's. The southern portion of the district was developed in the late 19th c. and the north section in the 20th c.
This house is George Barber design #60B in New Model Dwellings and was built ca. 1895. This house has a twin, located at 1803 Washington Avenue. Rev. Isaac A. Martin and his wife lived in the house from 1905 until 1920. In 1925, Alex and Hassie Lawson lived in the house; Lawson was a traveling salesman for Drummond Fruit Company. This house still retains its typical asymmetrical roof line and a second story recessed porch with decorative spindle work porch supports.

The neighborhood now known as Parkridge was originally the northeastern corner of what used to be Park City. Development in the area began in 1890 with the establishment of two streetcar lines, along Washington Avenue and Magnolia Avenue (then Park Avenue). The Magnolia line terminated at Chilhowee Park, which was developed as an amusement park by the streetcar company in order to boost use of the line. Much of Park City was annexed into the City of Knoxville in 1891, but by 1893, public outcry over the City’s failure to deliver promised services resulted in the City relinquishing its annexation. Park City remained its own incorporated town from 1907 until 1917 when it was again annexed.

The Edgewood Land and Improvement Company, a partnership between George Barber and J. C. White (a descendant of Knoxville founder James White), originally platted this section of the neighborhood in 1889. As a result, these few blocks of Washington Avenue (1600, 1700, and 1800) and Jefferson Avenue (1600, 1700, and 1800) contain what may be the highest concentration of Barber designs in the country!

This house is George Barber design #264 in Modern Dwellings. John B. Bailey lived in the house from 1919 until the late 1920s. Bailey was superintendent of Standard Knitting Mill. At one time the house was converted into apartments and the wrap-around porch was enclosed to create more living space for the apartments. In 2005 the house was bought by the current owners, and over the past two years has been restored. This house boasts a prominent second story turret and asymmetrical wrap front porch.
This two-story Victorian house was built in 1893 and is George Barber design #60B in New Model Dwellings. This house was originally built for Joshua Deaver, a traveling salesman, and has been restored by the current owners, Laura and Randy Perry, who has lived in the house since 1994. This design has a twin, located at 1603 Jefferson Avenue. This design was very popular and was described by Barber as “always giving satisfaction.” Pay attention to the typical Victorian details, including a steeply pitched roof of irregular shapes, an impressive partial asymmetrical one-story porch, and a recessed second-story porch.

Other George Barber-designed houses in Parkridge include:
1810 Glenwood Avenue—Design #9 in Cottage Souvenir No. 2; 1708 Jefferson Avenue—Design #39 in Cottage Souvenir No. 2; 2039 Jefferson Avenue—Design #125, plan #2 in Cottage Souvenir, Revised and Enlarged, and 1704 Washington Avenue—37B in New Model Dwellings. These are not included in this tour booklet.
This house was built ca. 1890. No specific Barber design has been attributed to it, but many designs are similar. George Trotter lived in the house from about 1905 until 1912. Trotter was a Knox County judge from 1916 until 1926. His career in local politics started in 1908 when he was elected county tax assessor. Trotter held that post until 1916 when he was elected county judge. Dr. G.C. Hutson lived in the house from 1912 until about 1919; Hutson was a physician and surgeon with offices in the Holston National Bank Building. This house, while at first glance looks abandoned and condemned, is actually a fairly well-kept structure. Because the house has not been painted in many years, you can really see the incredible detail of the wood siding and wood exterior architectural embellishments. The house still retains its incredible two story bay window with decorative windows and extensive spindle work on the front and side porches.

1724 Washington Avenue—The W.O. Haworth House

This two-story Victorian house was built in 1889 for W.O. Haworth, but he never actually lived in the house. This house is design #35 in The Cottage Souvenir No. 2. The house originally had a wrap-around front porch and an Eastlake style second story balcony. In 1907, the house was remodeled to include a Colonial Revival columned porch, side entry and additional rooms. Other individuals that lived in the house include John O. Sehorn, who lived in the house in 1895 and was a bookkeeper at George and Murphy; Richard S. Worthington, a superintendent of lights at the Knox Electric L & P Company who lived in the house in 1900; and Raymond and Mary Edwards, who lived in the house from 1925 until 1929. Edwards was an employee at May Upholstery and Furniture Company. Former owners Matt and Kristi Edens, along with Kristi’s mother and stepfather, restored most of the house to its current state. The house has some nice architectural details, such as French doors and elaborate window and door casings with different bulls-eye patterns.
1712 Washington Avenue—The Alonzo Cash House

This two-story Victorian was built in 1889 for grocer Alonzo F. Cash, a department manager for the M.M. Newcomer Company. Cash lived in the house from 1889 until 1919. John C. Africa, the secretary/treasurer for the Federal Real Estate Company lived in the house from 1920 until 1925. This house is George Barber design #3 and is featured in his Cottage Souvenir #1. The house was divided into four apartments and later condemned and has been renovated by a partnership of Parkridge residents and other preservationists. The house is now three units of affordable housing. Pay close attention to the wrap front porch with Doric columns that were added in 1912. Also note the front entrance flanked by sidelights.

1635 Washington Avenue—The George Barber House

This two-story Victorian was built in 1889 and is listed as Design #60 in Barber’s Cottage Souvenir #2. The house is also the first house George Barber built for himself in the neighborhood. He lived in the house from 1889 until 1895 when he moved a few blocks away to a new house named Rosemont (no longer standing). Manley D. Barber, George’s brother, lived in the house from 1903 until 1914. Early on, Manley worked as a draftsman for his brother’s architecture firm. Later in his life he was a well-known contractor and builder. Manley was mostly known for his collection of shells and fossils, of which he had a large variety. He found many new specimens which were sent to the Smithsonian Institution to be cataloged and named. Three new specimens were named after him, and at his death in 1928 his collection was said to be the largest in the United States. The house was restored in 2003 by its current owners. Originally the house had a grand turret on the second floor, but the house still retains some impressive architectural detailing. Pay close attention to the recessed upper porch and the decorative wood shingles in the gables. Also the front asymmetrical first story porch, with decorative spindle work, is rather impressive.
This house was built in 1905 for Manley Dewitt Barber, George Barber’s brother. It is a variation of the Barber design #239 in Modern Dwellings. A more accurate plan was found in a publication entitled Keith’s Magazine from January 1905 and is given the design #A71. Manley owned the house from 1905 until 1911, but never lived in the house according to Knoxville City Directories. While the house was under construction Manley lived across the street in his George’s former home, 1635 Washington Avenue. After moving to Knoxville in 1903, Manley worked with George in the architectural firm of Barber & Klintz, and also spent time working as a contractor and builder. Manley was best known as a collector of shells and fossils. He found many new specimens which he sent to the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC to be named; three specimens were named after him and his collection is said to have been the largest in the United States in 1928. In later years the house was split into eight apartments and was condemned by the City of Knoxville. Knox Heritage purchased the house in October 2006 and with its neighbor, 1618 Washington, is part of Knox Heritage’s Restore America Project, funded in part by HGTB and The National Trust for Historic Preservation. The house is being returned its single-family residence and to its original look and feel. Although the house is currently under construction you can still see the impressive gambrel side gable roof, symmetrical dormers, and full width recessed porch.

This house was built in 1890 for D. D. Remer, a real estate investor, and he lived in the house until 1903. The house is George Barber design #65B in New Model Dwellings. P. Steiner Mason lived in the house from 1903 until 1921; Mason was a well known contractor. In later years the house was split into seven apartments and was condemned by the City of Knoxville. Knox Heritage purchased the house in October 2006 and the house, together with 1620 Washington Avenue, is part of the Restore America Project, funded in part by HGTB and The National Trust for Historic Preservation. The house is being returned to a single-family residence and is being restored to its original look and feel. With the current construction you can see the re-birth of the impressive turret, recessed front porch, and elaborate front dormer with decorative elements such as the round stained glass window.