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Birmingham, Alabama—A Progressive Southern City

BIRMINGHAM, the Pittsburg of the South, has during the past few years shaken off the lethargy that seems to retard the progress of so many Southern cities and is assuming an importance architecturally in keeping with the progressive spirit of its citizens. A comparatively new city—it was organized in 1874—it numbers now, including its main suburb, more than one hundred thousand inhabitants.

With wise forethought, the city has been laid out with a view to its future growth. It has all the proportions of a large metropolis, wide and well laid out streets, city parks where breathing spaces are most needed, and the whole city presents to the visitor the impression of a well regulated community, fully alive to its responsibilities and well prepared to cope with the various problems that the future may present.

During the past few years many pretentious business structures have been erected, including seven tall fireproof office buildings, the tallest of which is the new sixteen-story steel fireproof Empire building, by Warren and Welton, Carpenter and Blair, associated architects. This building is the most expensive of its kind

and height south of Baltimore, costing \$400,000, and entirely faced with polychrome, mat-glazed terra cotta, proving the wisdom of its owners, the Empire Improvement Co., in spending a legitimate amount of money for architectural effect; over 50 per cent. of the rental space was taken before the steel erection was completed. The next tallest building is the Brown-Marx building, by W. C. Weston.

These buildings represent the latest ideas in steel frame and concrete construction, and, as further evidence



THE BROWN-MARX BUILDING

THE EMPIRE BUILDING



PANORAMIC VIEW OF HIGHLAND AVENUE

THE PRINCIPAL RESIDENCE DISTRICT

of the business activity of Birmingham, were rented before completion. A satisfactory state of affairs.

There are many other good buildings along the main business thoroughfares, and while not as tall as those already mentioned, possess characteristics equally satisfactory from an architectural standpoint.

It is a healthy sign that the clients in Birmingham seem willing to allow their architects to have freer rein to work out their ideas and the result here, as is always the case, is shown in the class of business buildings and dwellings that have been erected during the past five years as well as those under construction.

An interesting building now in course of construction is the Chamber of Commerce, costing \$150,000, by Warren & Welton. This building is of reinforced concrete with brick and terra cotta facing, and it is expected to be completed by September 1 of this year.

It is a well proportioned structure, admirably planned and calculated to meet every requirement of a building of this character. Its location, while not part of the business center of the city, is one that is readily accessible and the correctly proportioned façade redeems its neighborhood and creates a good impression on the beholder.

With much-to-be-commended foresight, Capital Park, the principal of a number of city parks, has been located but a little outside the axial center of the city. It is approached by a gentle grade and its elevation makes it a logical civic center. Here, it is planned, will stand the group of proposed public buildings, and when these are erected Birmingham will have a city plan that will cause every succeeding generation to

commend the wise judgment of the men who initiated the scheme and carried it to successful completion.

We have no doubt that when these new public buildings are erected they will be acceptable both in scale and design, for the people of Birmingham appear to be able to learn by experience.

While the early city fathers were wise in their town planning, we must admit they erred, and to great extent in the public buildings they erected, such as school houses, the City Hall, the Court House and others, and most, if not all of these, built twenty years ago, stand as a reproach and an object lesson architecturally.

But with the architectural talent now available in Birmingham we look for better buildings when the new group is erected. The building outlook is encouraging, for we are informed that a new \$600,000 court house and a \$200,000 high school are possibilities in the near future.

As further evidence of Birmingham's progressiveness and the willingness to build good buildings, there are projected

for early erection a \$600,000 hotel, a \$100,000 Jewish synagogue, a \$60,000 Masonic hall and two department stores, each to cost half a million dollars.

In the race for tall buildings this wide-awake Southern city participates, for no sooner had the Empire Building completed its sixteen stories than local capital set about the beginning of a new building to be twenty stories in height and to cost \$800,000. In addition to the foregoing very substantial list there are to be two new bank buildings.

In these activities the local architect will play the most important part. While work has been done by



CHURCH IN HIGHLAND AVENUE DISTRICT

MR. P. THORNTON MARVE, ARCHITECT

firms in the North, it has not taken business interests long to discern that local men are competent to handle every architectural problem presented, and it may therefore be predicted that architects in Birmingham will have a busy and profitable future.

Highland avenue, the principal residence section, lies along the crest of Red Mountain and forms a splendid cornice, overlooking the city in the valley below. Here the busy toiler in the city can go at night and find rest, recreation and a complete change of air. It is but fifteen minutes away on the ubiquitous trolley car. The streets, unlike most suburbs, are laid out in curved lines, like a private park. They are wide, well paved and planted with trees whose foliage tempers the sun's heat, so strong in the South. This is truly a delightful suburb, and the character of the houses built on Highland avenue are in effect satisfactory, and mirror the tastes of the residents, who are of the well-to-do class of Birmingham's business men.

Other important resident sections are Mountain Terrace, planned by Robert Jennison, Jr.; Glen Iris Park and Norwood, all equally desirable locations for suburban homes and all presenting the same excellent features of domestic architecture.

But while Birmingham is striving for commercial supremacy and pointing with just pride to the high class of business buildings either planned or projected, it might be well to direct attention to what we feel to be an important omission. There is no adequate library building. This, we understand, is due in a large measure to local pride on the part of the citizens.

Mr. Carnegie in his scheme for the erection of libraries had included Birmingham on his list, but, we are informed, local sentiment is preventing the acceptance of Mr. Carnegie's gift. While local pride is making Birmingham a good city, it is a question if it can be properly called local pride that prevents the acceptance of a gift of this character when cities like New York,



HOUSE IN HIGHLAND AVENUE DISTRICT

MR. W. C. WESTON, ARCHITECT

Boston and other large cities east and west have not felt it beneath their dignity to avail themselves of Mr. Carnegie's generosity.

It would seem as if the city might better enjoy the advantages of a building under Mr. Carnegie's endowment than to wait an indefinite time for public spirit to reach the point where the people are willing to erect a library for themselves, which would likely be many years.

In this and succeeding issues will be presented examples of recent work in Birmingham which will show the character of its architecture.

A RECENT LEGAL DECISION

Where a landlord, under duty to make repairs, employs an independent contractor to do certain specific work needed to be done, the independent contractor may be held liable by the tenant for injuries resulting, prior to the acceptance of the work by the landlord, from the negligent manner in which the contractor has performed the work. However, if the contractor fulfils his particular contract with ordinary care and diligence, he is not liable for injuries resulting by reason of defects in the original plan of the work, or because the repairs as made prove inadequate to fulfil the landlord's duty in the matter. *Bell & Son v. Kidd & Roberts*. Court of Appeals of Georgia, 63 Southeastern 607.—*Southern Architect and Building News*.

MR. RIXFORD TO SUCCEED THE LATE NEWTON J. THARP AS CITY ARCHITECT OF SAN FRANCISCO

Mr. Loring P. Rixford has been appointed City Architect of San Francisco, to fill the place made vacant by the death of Mr. Newton J. Tharp. Mr. Rixford is an *Ecole des Beaux Arts* man, as was his close friend and predecessor in office.



A HOUSE IN THE HIGHLAND AVENUE DISTRICT



BUNGALOW OF MRS. W. L. WELTON, BIRMINGHAM, ALA.

MESSRS. WARREN & WELTON, ARCHITECTS

ORNAMENTATION IN LAKE DWELLERS' HABITATIONS

Traces of ornamentation have been found upon the remains of lake-dwellers' huts, which seem to show that these were ornamented on the outside by designs in relief. Such designs were executed upon the outer clay covering which was placed on the timbers of the structure, and they were cut or imprinted in the clay while it was still soft. However, such ornamentation is not to be found on all the lake-dwellers' habitations with which we are acquainted, and the only traces of it come from the Bourget lake in France, not far from Switzerland. Fragments of clay containing the ornamentation are now at the Chambéry museum, and they have been examined by M. L. Schaudel. According to him, they consist of lines traced by a pointed tool, forming rectangular or circular bordering which contains stamped ornaments. These latter are made up of three concentric circles and seem to have been stamped in the soft clay by a terra-cotta mold. One of such molds was found at the Gresine lake-dwelling site. It is supposed that the dwellings were covered with clay on the outside, as all these dwellings had been destroyed by fire, and the specimens were intact on the ornamented side and blackened by smoke and partly baked on the other side. Had the clay lining been placed on the inside, no doubt the whole of it would have suffered. Besides, as the only light came from the door, the inside of the dwelling must have been very dark and there would be no reason for the ornamentation. M. Schaudel brings out some other

points about such dwellings, which were determined from the remains discovered in a peat bog near Schussenried, Switzerland, by M. Frank. The dwelling was of rectangular shape, about 30 feet long and 22 feet wide, and was divided into two rooms. The walls were made of oak trunks which were split in half, the flat side being placed next the interior, the cracks being stopped by means of a thin coating of clay. The floor was formed of several layers of split wood and clay. A fireplace was found in the smaller room, which no doubt served as a kitchen, while the larger room was probably used as a sleeping room. The latter had no outside door, and the single door was placed in the smaller room. A number of main timbers or piles were sunk in the lake bottom, and also upheld the roof.—*Scientific American*.

AIR IS A REAL THING

Sir Oliver Lodge, in his new volume, "The Ether of Space," just issued by the Harpers, says that investigation of the nature and properties of the ether of space has long been for him the most fascinating branch of physics. The learned scientist is careful to make the point in his argument that the ether is not an hypothesis adopted for the convenience of science, as the man on the street sometimes thinks, but is just as real an entity as land or water.

The rapid progress now being made in aviation will doubtless establish beyond dispute that the characteristics of the air can be as accurately defined as those of the land and water.

ILLUSTRATIONS

HOUSE OF MR. J. C. MABEN, JR.
BIRMINGHAM, ALA.

The first floor contains a large two-story hall with vaulted ceiling, the living room, den, dining room, reception room, breakfast room, butler's pantry, kitchen, storerooms, etc. A special feature of the plan is the large living porch with fireplace, which is screened in summer and glazed in winter. The opposite brick paved porch with its dignified columns, copied from Washington's home at Mt. Vernon, like it, commands an excellent view of dithyrambic beauty.

The second floor is given up to a sewing room four bedrooms and three bathrooms. This house is without doubt the finest modern example of Georgian architecture in Alabama.

HOUSE OF MR. E. W. FINCH, BIRMINGHAM, ALA.

A simple little cottage on the side of Red Mountain, adjoining the house of Mrs. W. L. Melton. It is 28x32, two stories and basement, and is an excellent example of moderate priced house.

The large living room, with brick fireplace, gives individuality, and the treatment of the shingles of the exterior lends character not usual in low-cost houses.

BUNGALOW OF MRS. W. L. WELTON,
BIRMINGHAM, ALA.

This bungalow cottage, 31 by 31 feet, two stories and basement, was designed expressly to meet the conditions of a Southern climate.

Life in Alabama is essentially an outdoor existence, and, with perhaps a few weeks' exception in midwinter the people practically live on their porches.

In addition to ample porch room the architect of this bungalow has conceived the idea of designing a large, light, airy rooms that would serve the combined uses of a living room, music room, picture gallery and workroom. To this end this "studio" extends up through two stories, lined off in grey stone courses, and roofed with six timber trusses exposed to view.

The high ceiling and general shape of this room lends itself effectively to vocal and instrumental music, while the wide gallery at the upper level gives ample space for architectural work, all accomplishments of this particular household.

The gray wall spaces of the studio afford a fine setting for tapestries, copper and tile plaques, gilt, carved wood candlesticks, Italian brackets and frames, water colors, together with Oriental rugs and Persian shawls and a concrete and Moravian tile mantle, combiné to complete a most artistic collection of objets-d'art. This house in its planning meets every requirement of the Southern climate and its out-of-door sleeping rooms and well-furnished porch provide comfort for the occupants.



HOUSE OF MR. J. C. MABEN, JR., BIRMINGHAM, ALA.

MESSRS. WARREN & WELTON, ARCHITECTS



OUT-OF-DOORS SLEEPING ROOMS

In the South, where the changes of temperature do not cover so wide a range as they do in the North and West, the out-of-doors sleeping room has become a necessary part of the planning of every house.

In every one of the houses illustrated in this issue rooms of this kind form part of the plan. The above illustration shows the rear of the houses of Mrs. Welton and Mr. French, illustrated in this issue, and the method of constructing these sleeping rooms.

THE USE OF TILE WITH STUCCO

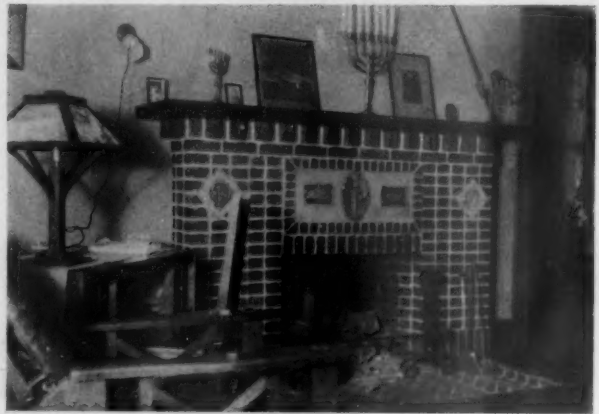
It has been felt by many designers that the large and sometimes monotonous surfaces of stucco on the ex-



terior of buildings needed some bit of color or some material of a different texture to give variety to the whole. The accompanying illustration illustrates an architect's home where he has used polychromatic terra cotta at the top of the corner pier supporting the roof of the porch.

AN ARTISTIC MANTEL AND FIREPLACE

The employment of common brick and Moravian tile, as used by Messrs. Warren & Welton in the mantel illustrated below has resulted in a most artistic and desirable decorative treatment of a necessary feature of the living room in a house recently erected at Birmingham.



ATHENS TO BE REMODELED

Athens, historic capital of grace and beauty, is to be remade in Germany. Herr Ludwig Hoffmann, architect of the city of Berlin, has been commissioned to map out a scheme for the architectural regeneration of the ancient Greek metropolis. He has just returned from a visit of inspection to Athens.

The local authorities, with whom he conferred there, appear to desire to remodel their city upon modern European lines, with a system of parks, boulevards, public buildings, which will combine to make it more attractive as a tourist center. This Herr Hoffmann hopes to accomplish, while still retaining the best examples of ancient classic architecture, of which Athens contains a multitude.

One of the projects upon which the Berlin builder frowned was what he describes as a "bizarre, fantastic creation, designed to perpetuate Greek heroism"—a design for a monumental statute submitted by an Italian sculptor. Although the design has already received first prize from the Athens municipal council, Herr Hoffmann hopes to induce them to abandon the idea of erecting it.

ALASKA-YUKON EXPOSITION

The Alaska-Yukon Exposition, recently opened at Seattle with appropriate ceremonies, was described and illustrated as to its principal architectural features in the AMERICAN ARCHITECT of November 16, 1908, No. 1716.

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The Practical Side of Municipal Improvement.
The Right of a City to Limit Building Heights.

ILLUSTRATIONS:

Four Houses at Birmingham, Ala., by Messrs. Warren
& Welton, Architects.

Frontispiece:

Detail in Courtyard, Hotel Ponce de Leon, St. Augustine, Florida.

AN enormous amount of material has been published in the technical and non-technical press within the last few years relating to the large subject of municipal improvement. A retrospective glance over this brings the impression that the esthetic side of the matter has received the emphasis up to the present time, and that the more practical and constructive suggestions have been few and far between. It is perhaps just as well that the introduction of the idea itself has been made in this way, since the esthetic side lends itself more readily to an impressive and attractive form of presentation. It is interesting to note, however, that the proceedings of the City Planning Congress, recently held in Washington, have been marked by an emphasis on the broadly economical rather than upon the side of beauty alone.

ONE of the ideas that found expression in the City Planning Congress is that one of the main features responsible for most of the ills resulting from congested living in the big cities is the present system of taxation. Instead of having private land owners take the unearned increment in land values as private profits, it was suggested that the city itself should take at least a part of the increased values of land and use these for public improvements—parks, schools, streets, and perhaps for the building of municipal tenements and dwelling houses for workingmen. It was the sentiment of at least a part of the Convention that slums exist because there are

profits for somebody in compelling people to live in slums. So long as the individual makes a profit out of unsanitary tenements, it was pointed out, the rest of the community bears the burden of the sickness, disease, pauperism, crime and degeneracy born and bred in the tenements and hovels, to say nothing of the wretchedness brought upon the victims who have to live there. It does seem rather hopeless to carry on an elaborate campaign in the attempt to stamp out tuberculosis and other diseases bred of bad air and squalid conditions, while the slums and sweatshops are permitted to go on manufacturing diseases faster than the hospitals can take care of them.

THE idea of having cities appropriate to public uses the increase in land values through taxation is not a new one. The scheme has been practiced in European countries—notably in Germany—for some years. The justification of this plan lies in the assumption that since the city has given the property its increased value, the city has a perfect right to acquire a part of this value in taxation. It would seem that since the rate increases only with the rising value of the land there could be no real danger threatening the soundness of the original investment. An interesting feature along this same line, is that American cities do not often take advantage of their opportunities in acquiring land for municipal buildings. In English cities, if five acres of land is needed for public buildings, the city buys fifteen acres, uses five of it for the building site, and holds the remainder as city property until its increased value makes possible a sale at a price high enough to pay for the whole tract, and perhaps for the buildings that have been erected. The trouble in this country seems to be that municipal officials will not look far enough ahead to accept, for the city, the benefits that are practically sure to follow in time.

AN important and far-reaching decision of the Supreme Court has just been handed down in the case of a building owner against the Building Commissioner of Boston. The court's decree upholds absolutely the right of a State, under its police powers, to limit the height of buildings in an arbitrarily determined section of a city, without offering compensation to property owners. In 1904, the Massachusetts Legislature divided the City of Boston into two sections, business and residential, and limited the height of buildings in the former to 125 feet, and in the latter to 80 feet. The plaintiff, in the case mentioned, contended that the law was unconstitutional, being unelastic, unreasonable, and not a proper exercise of the State's police power. For a number of years this point has come up in one form or another, but never until now, to the best of our knowledge, has it been carried to the final court. In Chicago, for instance, an ordinance was passed at one time limiting the heights of buildings. Real estate operators openly questioned the legality of this provision and threatened to disobey it whenever it interfered with any serious plan for improvement. Before anyone carried through a test case, however, the ordinance was repealed. In fact, this familiar ghost has for long stalked abroad in the land, leaving doubt and uncertainty in his trail. It is cause for satisfaction that he has at last been laid low.

COMMUNICATIONS

The following letter, written by an old and valued subscriber, a leading architect in one of the Southern cities, needs no comment from us, as it speaks for itself: "Editors of THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT:

"In your issue of May 12 you have some editorial comment upon architectural conditions in the South. You have truthfully stated these conditions as far as you went, but you have only gone part way. Personally, I have never seen the 'bill board' advertisement of 'ready-to-wear' plans, but in the Sunday issue of one of our daily papers they are advertising plans for sale by the paper itself; in other words, the daily press is going into the 'architectural business.'

"Each Sunday they print perspective views and plans of two or three houses, and state that anyone wishing to build a house like any of them can get full working blue prints and specifications at the newspaper's office for \$10. There is a planing mill here which maintains a regular draughting-room force which will furnish you plans while you wait, 'free of cost' if you will buy your materials of them, and this concern does not confine its work to small cottages by any means, but will undertake anything of a wood construction up to a million-dollar hotel. All this does not cut much figure in the larger cities, but, on account of it, very little country work finds its way into the architects' offices. The result is plainly apparent, and to find a building of any architectural interest in a country town would be a remarkably agreeable surprise. The cause of this state of affairs is not, in my opinion, chiefly, as you seem to suggest, in the large number of men of the 'architect and builder' type; in fact this type is largely a symptom of the disease itself. 'Lack of capital' may cut some figure, although I am loth to admit this, as it seriously conflicts with a proposition I have always maintained, viz., that it costs no more to build a building of a given size and capacity on good artistic lines than on bad, and that from a money point of view the 'saving' of an architect's fees is a financial mistake.

"'Lack of appreciation and understanding on the part of clients' is certainly one of the causes, but here again the cause is more or less symptomatic. Speaking generally, and the conditions here in the South are really not so very different from elsewhere outside of the great architectural centers, it seems to me that the cause is mainly with the profession itself. In any community where a profession is so little known and appreciated that anyone is permitted to practice it regardless of qualifications, where the work of many of the 'architects' offices is so little better, and frequently worse, than that turned out by the 'Architect and Builder' type it would be very strange indeed if the average grocer, baker and candle-stick maker flocked in any great numbers to the architects' offices when in need of a building. In such a community, where frequently two-thirds of the contractors 'make plans,' any concerted action on the part of the architects to prevent such contractors bidding on the work of their offices would be ineffective (even if possible where not a few of the architects are themselves graduates of the bench), because many of these contractors are financially the most reliable, and frequently the most capable, builders in the field. As

to the remedy, as you say, it must come from the architects themselves, but I doubt very much if 'affiliation' along the lines of a close 'union' will be in itself effective.

"I really believe the situation demands a purgative. I think the 'architect's license' is a step in the right direction, and yet what have we to hope when even in the great State of New York—surely the architectural center—the architects have never been able to get closer to legislative recognition than the passage of a very meagre bill which was vetoed by the Governor on account of the political pull of the 'Architect and Builder' class. The red and white stripes of the barber's pole no longer suggest to the public the surgical profession, the three balls of Lambardy have ceased to represent our banking institutions and, although no longer a kid, I hope to live to see the day when a jack plane will not be looked upon by the public as a fitting emblem for an architect's shingle."

ARCHITECTURE; ITS TRUE PRINCIPLES

SYMMETRY OF PARTS IN ASYMMETRICAL WHOLE

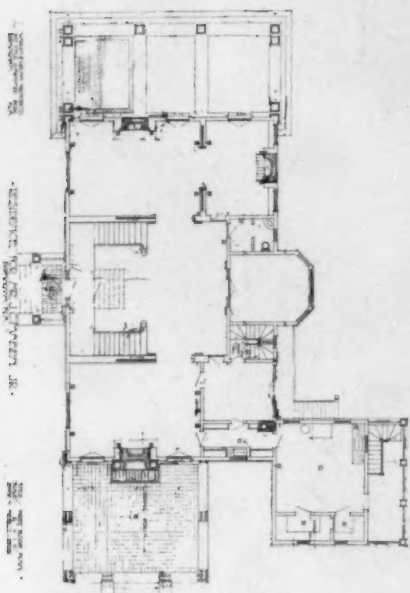
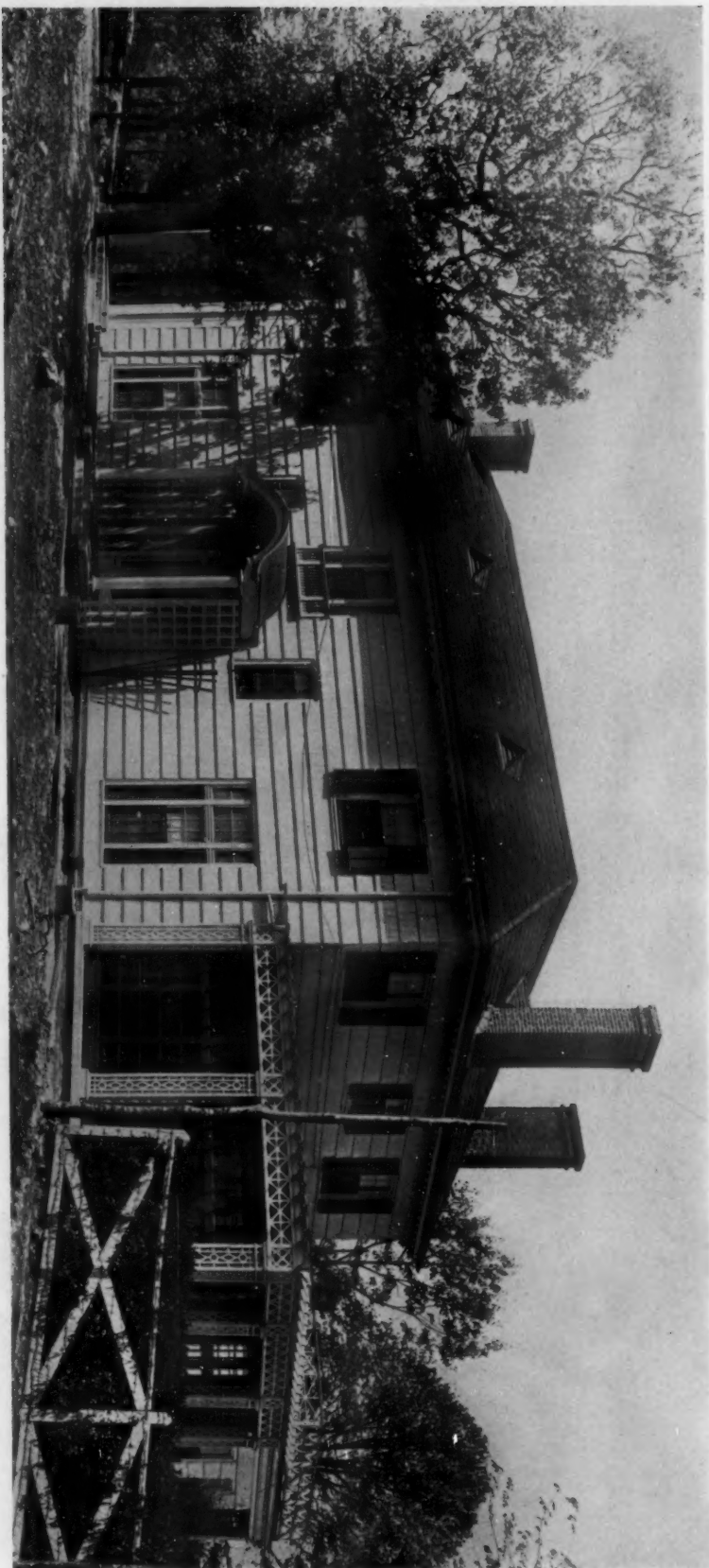
From the critical observation of various satisfactorily executed works of architecture we may deduce a general rule that though symmetrifying long elevations is a vain and objectionable practice, the smaller parts—especially the ends of wings and projections—should be rigidly symmetrical. The bad "one-sided" effect of the transepts at Salisbury are an instance of the effect of neglecting this rule. And a further safe guide is to enhance by centre-and-wing principle (or other suitable means) the symmetry of such minor parts of a composition. Where exact symmetry is intended it should be complete and thorough in all details. The opposite to symmetry being asymmetry, the effect of bipartite design is to enhance—increase in value—by contrast, that which has not this regularity. In the instance of undesirable asymmetry that we have given—the ends of Salisbury transepts—we can see that this principle is just; for the want of regularity in the transepts agrees with that of the long side of the cathedral, and no contrast is afforded. That which is embraced in the easy angle of vision (it might be suggested) should be symmetrical, hence the reasonableness of aiming at true (rigid) symmetry in the part.

All compositions wanting absolutely in symmetry of whole are bad unless upon a large scale—i. e., such as the eye cannot examine except by moving the position of the spectator. It must be said that for small buildings complete asymmetrical elevations are akin to patchwork composition. No effort of the architect can remedy completely the want of natural balance. The smaller the building the more desirable the symmetry, because we can so easily take in the whole in the normal usual angle at ordinary distances—even close at hand. Hence the poor effect of the average loosely-planned, scrappily composed suburban house. While the large building suffers somewhere, if unnaturally symmetrified, the small one suffers from lack of symmetry. The cause is clear enough—the smallness of the object.—R. Owen Allsop, in *The Architect and Contract Reporter*.



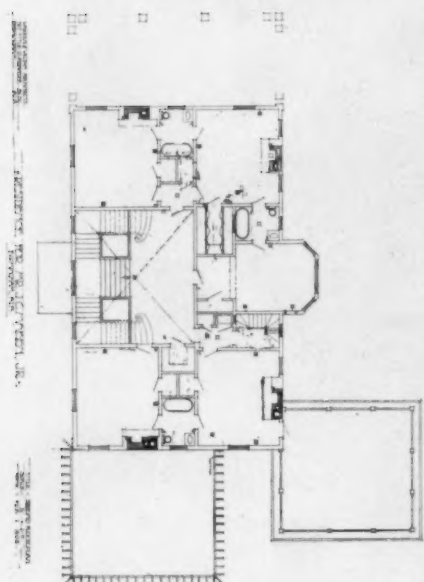
HOUSE OF MR. J. C. MABEN, JR.
BIRMINGHAM, ALA.

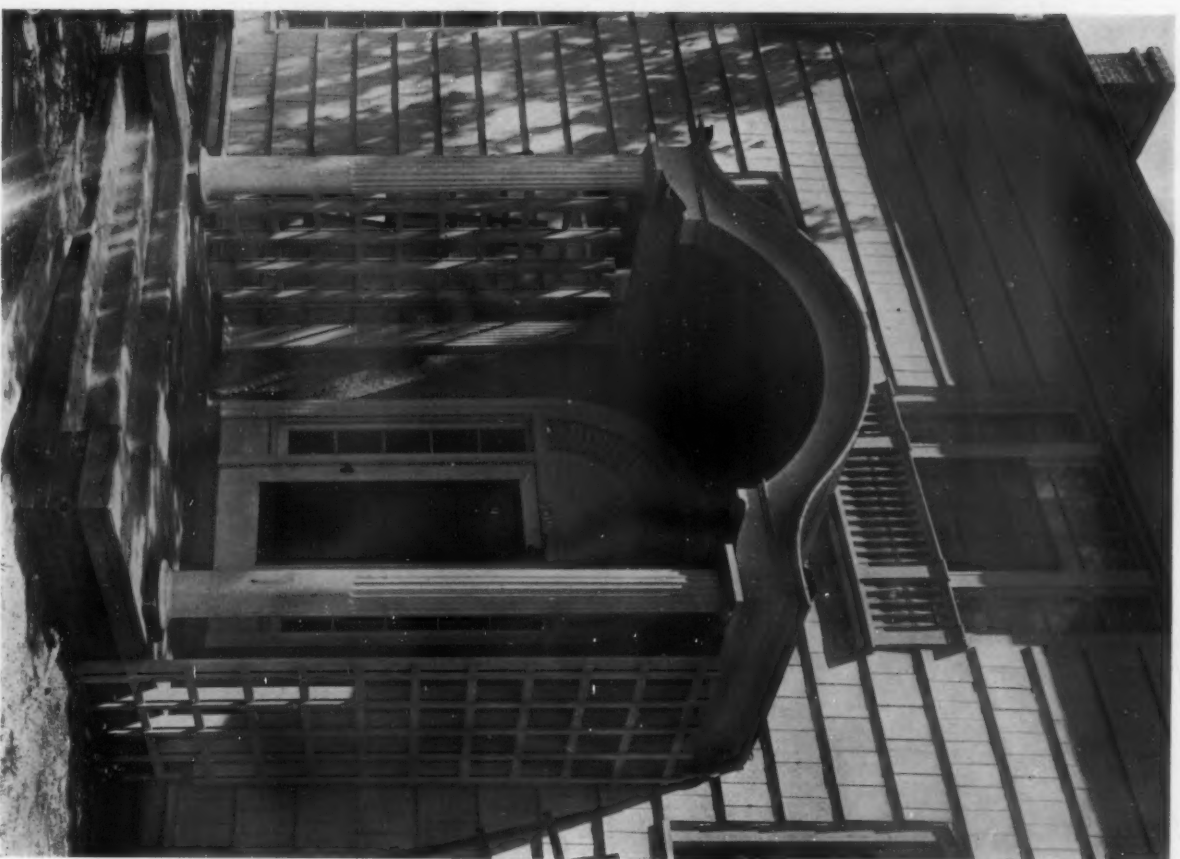
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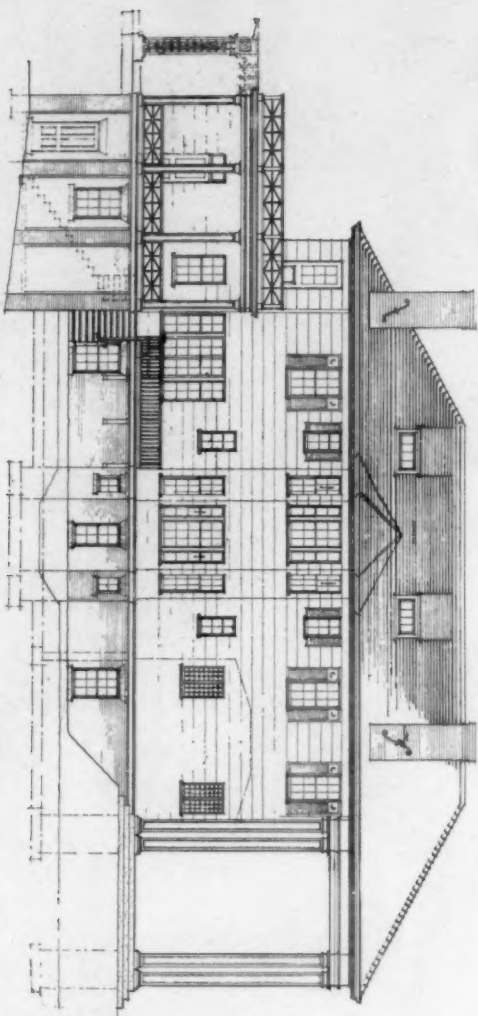
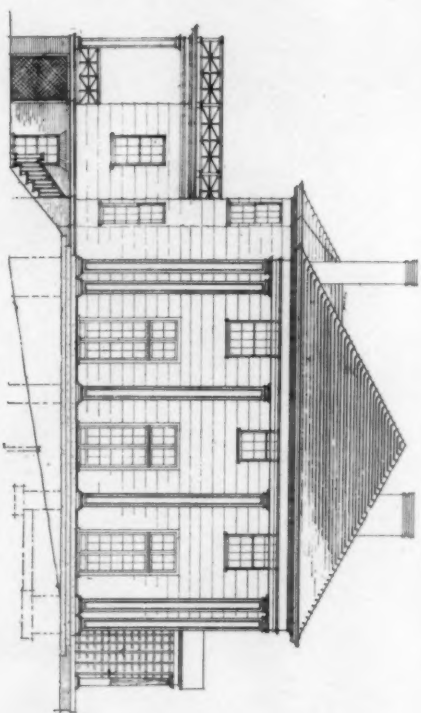
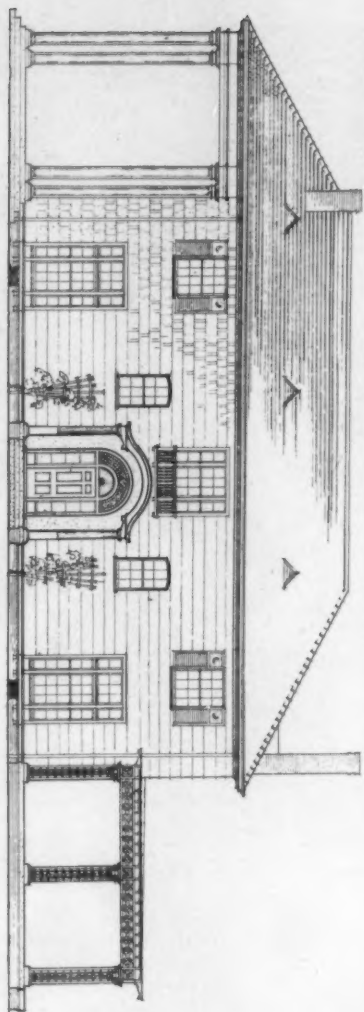




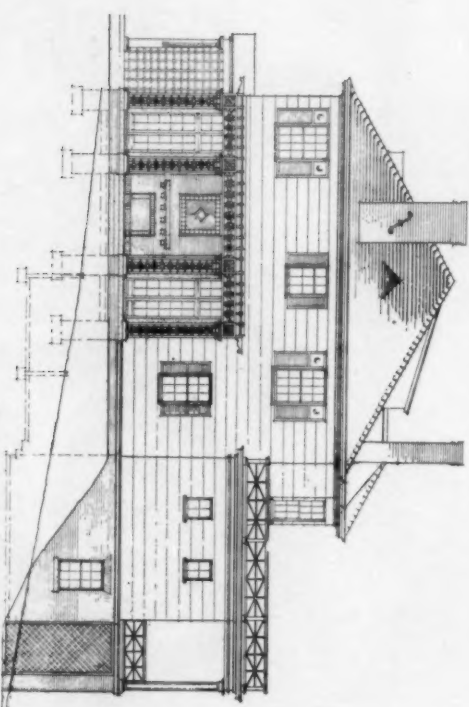
DETAILS, HOUSE OF MR. J. C. MABEN, JR.
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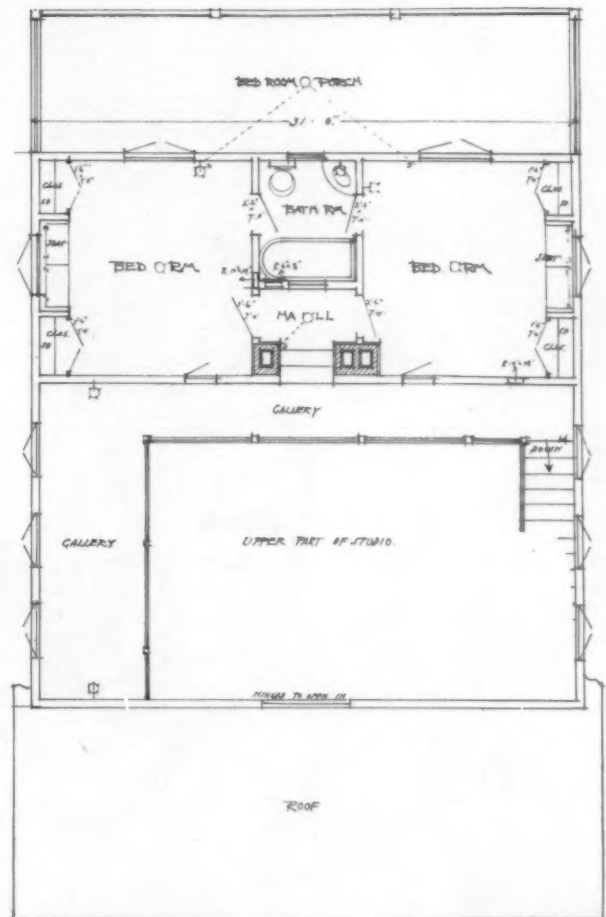
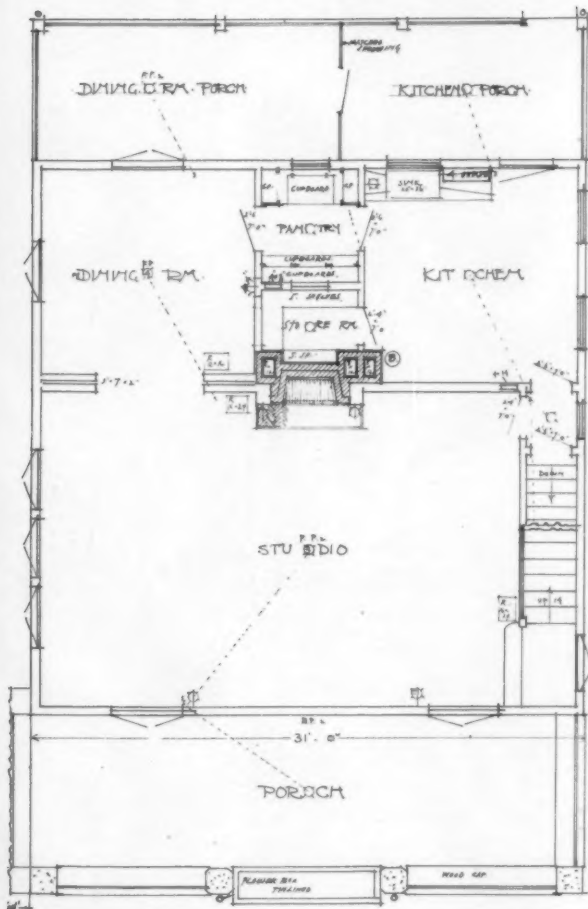
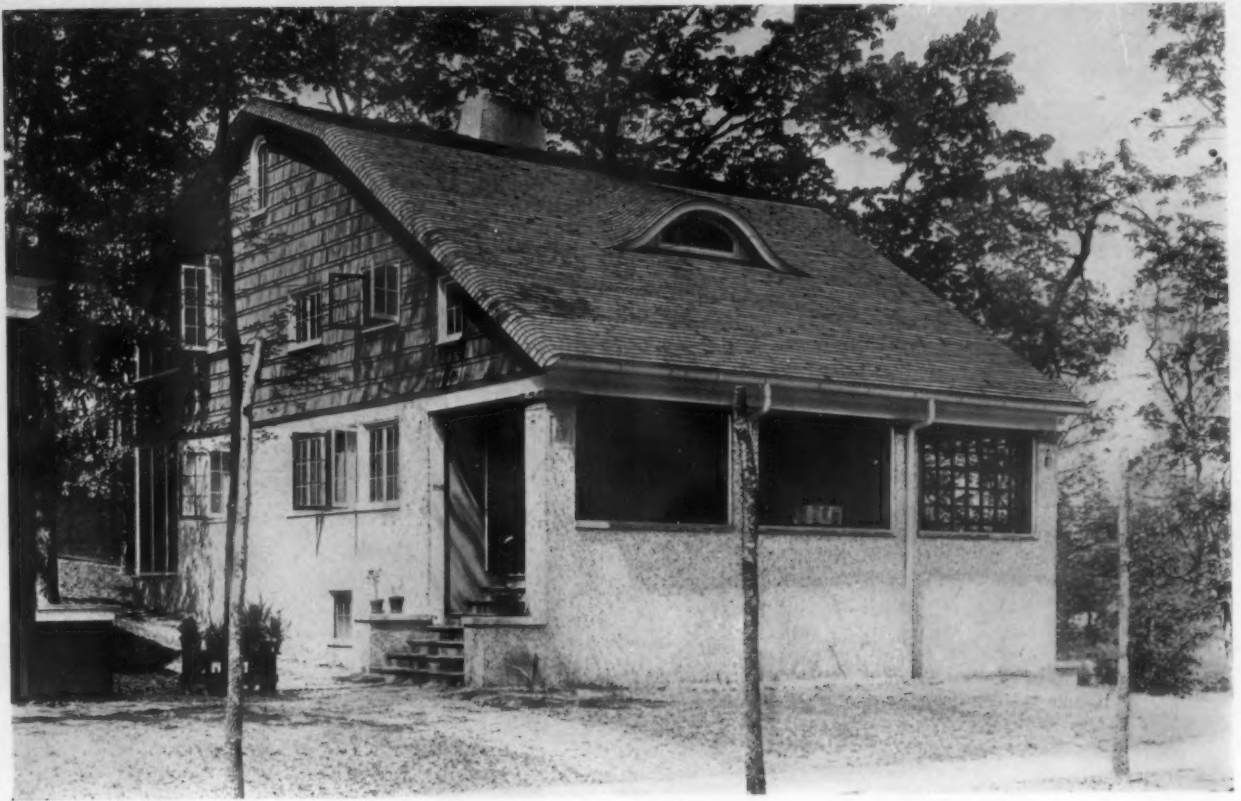
ELEVATIONS



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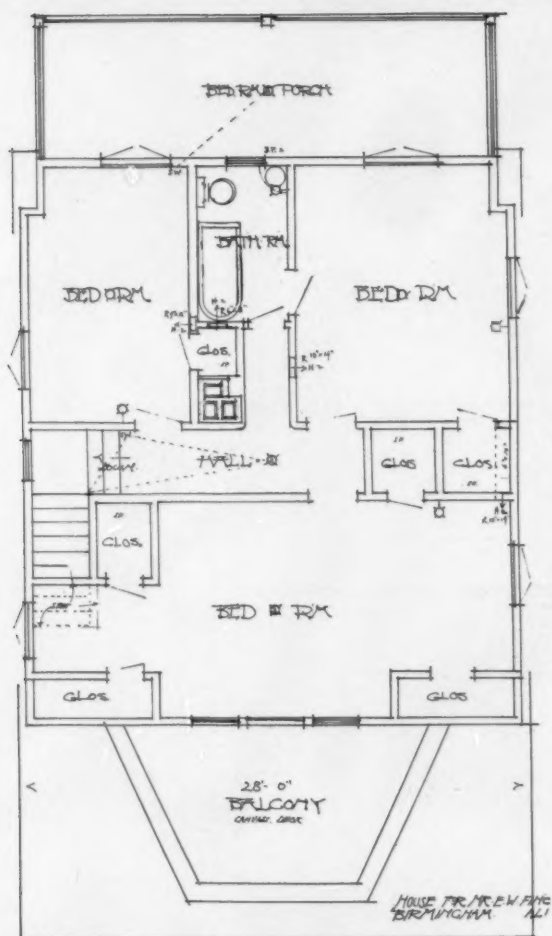
MESSRS. WARREN & WELTON
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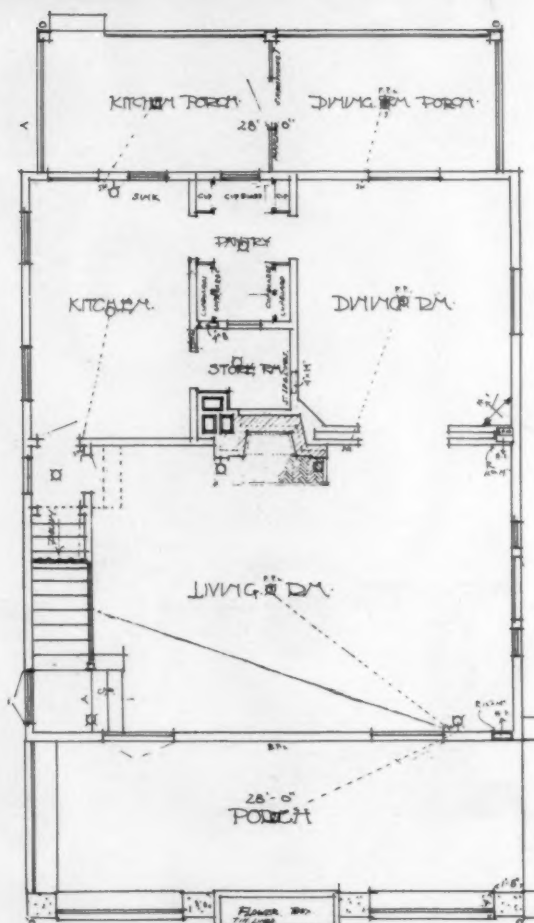


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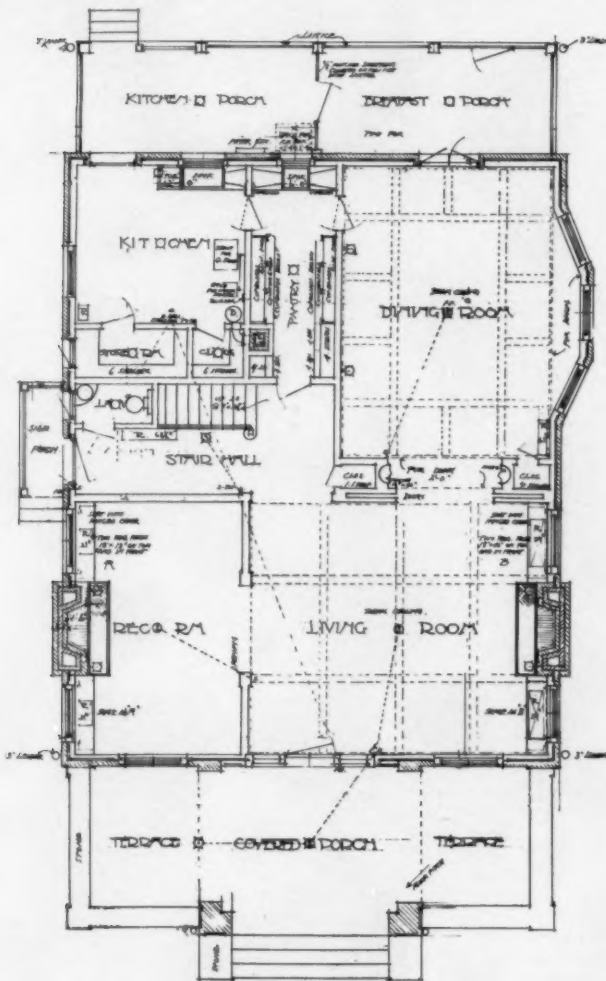
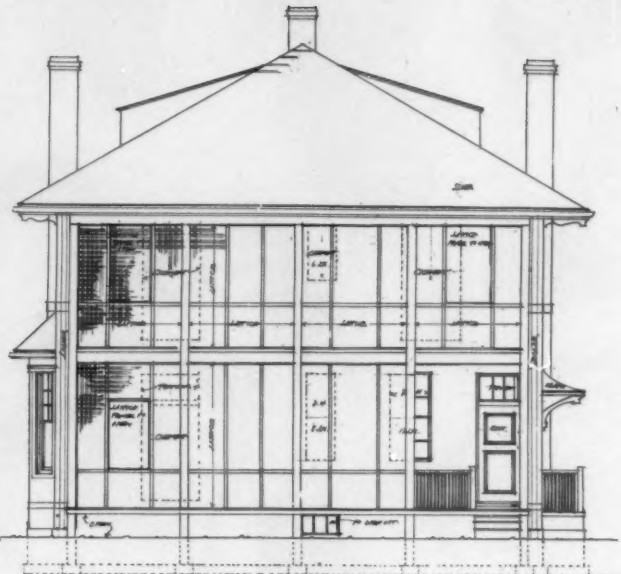
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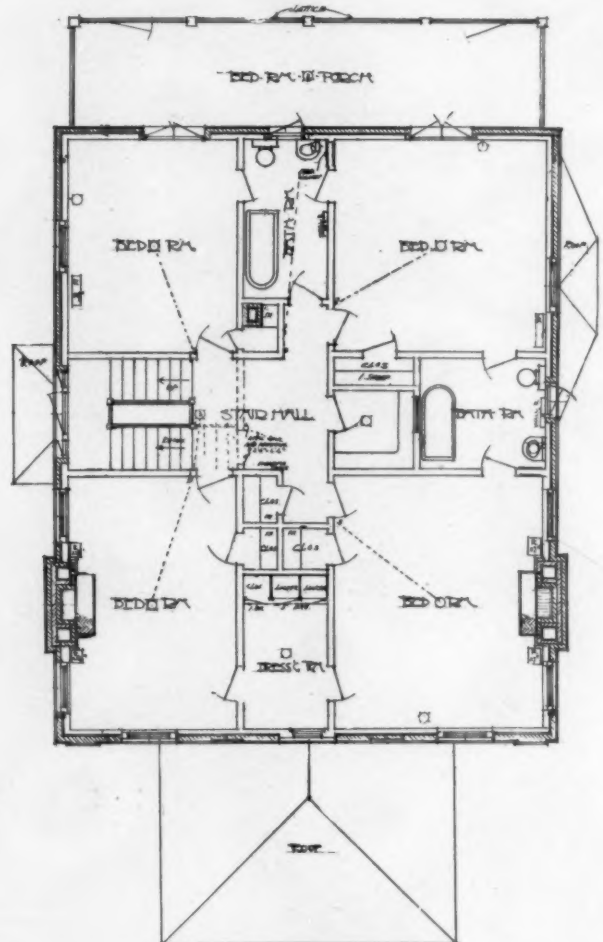
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FIRST FLOOR PLAN



SECOND FLOOR PLAN

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