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Park House, 236 Dennis Street

The Park House of 236 Dennis Street in Adrian was built by Charles and Helen Park in 1920, and is a typical example of a home built in the Craftsman style. The 1920s was the heyday of the Craftsman style, and a period of the industrial prosperity in Adrian.

The style the Park House finds its origin in the British Arts & Crafts movement in 1862, when the craftsman, designer, writer, typographer, and Socialist William Morris and the artist, scientist, poet, environmentalist, philosopher, and pre-eminent art critic John Ruskin reacted against the dehumanizing impact of industry on society and the shoddy and ostentatious industrial goods displayed at the London International Exhibition. They encouraged an appreciation for hand-made products with simple designs and natural materials, which they thought would help to create a more ideal society. In America, the Arts & Crafts movement's most important spokesman was the Rochester, New York, furniture maker Gustav Stickley, who began to publish the *Craftsman* magazine in 1901 to feature pictures of his Arts & Crafts furniture designs and to express his Socialist ideals and dislike of popular Victorian taste. In 1903 Stickley established the *Craftsman Home Builders Club* to spread his ideas on domestic

architecture and worked with architect Harvey Ellis, who designed house plans for the magazine. Then, in 1909 and 1912, Stickley assembled the plans that had appeared in his magazine into two popular books titled *Craftsman Homes*, and *More Craftsman Homes*, and developed a secondary business by selling blueprints and instructions.

Stickley's design ideas were also promoted through the sale of so-called catalog homes. For more than half a century before the Craftsman era, architects had sold house plans and elevations through the mail. But in the 1910s a new method for selling house designs emerged, and several businesses began selling not only prints and instructions for building houses but also an entire package of materials that could be assembled easily, quickly and inexpensively by almost anyone who lived near enough to a train station to accept delivery. One of the best-known makers of these kits homes was Sears, which offered them through their catalog. Construction was fairly basic and depended on the fundamental structural features as design cues for the houses. These catalog homes were offered in a variety of styles, yet it was the Craftsman style—because of its association with handicraft—that dominated this market.

Most of the homes illustrated in the *Craftsman* magazine and sold through catalogs were simple bungalows, a term closely associated with the Craftsman style. The term “bungalow” predates the Craftsman movement and was adapted from the word *Bengala*, which British colonials used to describe their huts “in Bengal.” Built for a warm climate, these modest structures were very open and predominantly one story. They also had porches around them and low sweeping roofs to shade the homes from the intense heat of India. These houses gained popularity and spread throughout the British Empire and then America, taking on associations with rural and rustic cottage retreats. Today in America the term bungalow is used primarily to describe modest, generally single-story, Craftsman homes most of which would have been constructed

from catalog kit. While the term Craftsman is primarily reserved for more spacious and more elaborately designed two-story homes, such as the Park House.

Typical features of Craftsman and bungalow houses consist of either front or side gables, often with a front dormer or multiple dormers that often protrude over a dominant front porch. The large porch is consistent with the

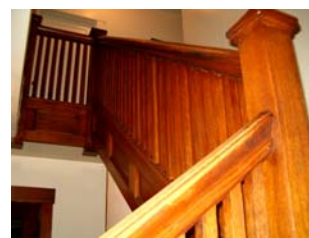


style because Craftsman designers sought to integrate their designs with nature (the antithesis of industry). Similarly, exterior finish materials are often “natural,” including rough-cut shingles, rubble stone, and/or unpainted brick. Rafter tails are almost never covered with fascia, but rather left exposed while decorative beams protrude through the side of the house under the eaves. Where necessary, simple knee braces are added. The exposure of these basic construction elements coincides with one of the main goals of the Arts & Crafts movement, to celebrate rather than conceal the means of house’s construction. They also create a decorative and unifying look to the exterior of the home.

The Park House has all of the attributes of a typical Craftsman home. The side-gabled house has a dominant front porch spanning actually longer than the width of the house. It also has exposed rafter tails, decorative beams, and a roof that extends from the main area of the house over the porch. The exterior walls are predominantly covered by neat rows of shingles. The Park House also has a large, gabled front dormer, which is also typical of the style.



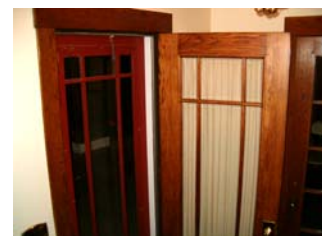
The interior of the Park House is also typically Craftsman. Stickley and other



promoters of the Arts & Crafts aesthetic emphasized large, open plans and the aesthetic beauty of natural wood. Houses in the style are designed for informal social gatherings (without the formal parlors found in Queen Anne homes) and almost always finished using richly grained oak or pine assembled in simple, rectilinear designs. Hardwood floors, covered by rugs in useful areas, extend throughout the home. Ideally, the furniture would be constructed of wood in Stickley's Craftsman style. Other, more unique style cues of the Craftsman homes include wooden built-ins, including shelves and storage areas. Also incorporated into typical Craftsman houses are nooks or special gathering places, which are called "inglenooks" when they are near the fireplace and "dining-nooks" in the kitchen. The kitchens of Craftsman style houses were meant to be bright, inviting, efficient and convenient.

The Park House's kitchen is definitely typical of Craftsman houses and has been kept very original except for the addition of some modern appliances. Other features in the Craftsman style of the Park House's include the stairway and the doors which add to the beauty of the home. The Park House is very near original and is true to the Craftsman style. The wood trimmed rooms of the Park House offer great examples of this aesthetic. Notice the simple and appealing construction of the chair.

The Parks built a beautiful house at the end of World War I, when Lenawee County's agricultural enterprises and industries were prospering. Mr. Park worked as an accountant for one of the fence companies in Adrian, which had been known as the fence capital of the world for more than a decade. The war increased demand for fencing as well as farm products, which sustained local businesses. During the 1920s, Adrian's forty factories employing 1,090 workers had grown into seventy-one factories employing 2,538 (Lindquist, *Adrian: The City that Worked*, 140). Many produced parts for automobiles, which



were quickly replacing horses. Little did Park and the rest of the community realize that the end of the war would bring hard times for American farmers and, as a consequence, the wire fence industry.



The Park House was not the first one built at 236 Dennis Street. The building lot on which the Park House was built started as government property that was sold to Elias Dennis in 1826. In 1844, Ambrose Berry purchased the land from Dennis' heirs and subdivided the land, creating what became known as Berry's Southern Addition. Three years later, in 1847, Stephen A. Main built a Greek Revival-style house that would change possession many times before being moved to the back of the lot and converted into a turnaround garage. This garage no longer stands, as it was later torn down and replaced with a new garage. The new Craftsman home was built by Charles and Helen Park in 1920. The Parks bought the land for \$1 and other considerations in 1919 and built the house the following years.

The current owners, Norma and Clarke Baldwin, bought the house in 1974 and have done an excellent job maintaining the original condition of the house. Now the Park House at 236 Dennis Street is part of the Adrian Historical District and stands as a fine example of American building history along other historic houses in the neighborhood. The Park House has been well maintained and is still very appealing example of a Craftsman style home.

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