

Home-Style HISTORY

BY JESSICA GORDON | PHOTOGRAPHS BY SCOTT NATHAN

Milton designs span centuries and architectural movements, often in the same house

Situated on the banks of the Broadkill River, Milton is not unlike most old towns. Its history is rich, and various industries — from shipping and shipbuilding to button-making and canning — shaped its demographics, culture and architecture. What is special about Milton, named after English poet John Milton in 1807, is its eclectic assortment of homes and buildings, reflecting centuries of varying architectural styles.

“We have an incredibly wide variety of architecture for such a small town,” says Allison Schell, executive director of the Milton Historical Society & Museum. “You can literally walk down the street and see two or three completely different architectural styles in one block.”

To the untrained eye, many of these structures appear to be Victorian, boasting decorative details and ornamentation commonly found in the late 19th century. But most of the original structures in Milton were Colonial; once fairly plain, these square or rectangular structures now have architectural features made popular long after the buildings’ original construction.

“A lot of buildings in Milton pre-date their architectural fashioning,” says Catherine Morrissey, a research associate for the University of Delaware’s Center for Historic Architecture and Design. “They often show stylistic evolution of 19th-century details.”

Many of the early structures in Milton, first settled by English colonists in 1672, were simple and symmetrical, featuring a central entry door with windows centered on either side. Chimneys also were centrally located (though some houses had two, at opposite ends of the building).

Kathryn Greig’s home on Union Street possesses these characteristics and, despite some Victorian influence, is a fine example of a Colonial. Built in 1790, it was originally a one-room house. Over the years numerous additions have been appended, with one previous owner erecting a front porch with fretwork (wooden ornamental design) in an attempt to make it look more Victorian.

Despite many makeovers, the house retains its Colonial bones. When Greig had work done involving the crawl space, workers told her the center support beam is an enormous log with its bark still intact.

Federal-style homes, generally constructed in the late 18th and

early 19th centuries, are also abundant in Milton, and have characteristics similar to Colonials: They are boxy, often have a center door and symmetrically placed windows, and project formality and balance. Arched dormer windows on the attic floor are a common feature.

A tour of Milton’s historic district will also introduce visitors to Gothic Revival buildings, recognized by their steeply pitched roofs, cross-gables and pointed-arch windows. These typically date to the second half of the 19th century.

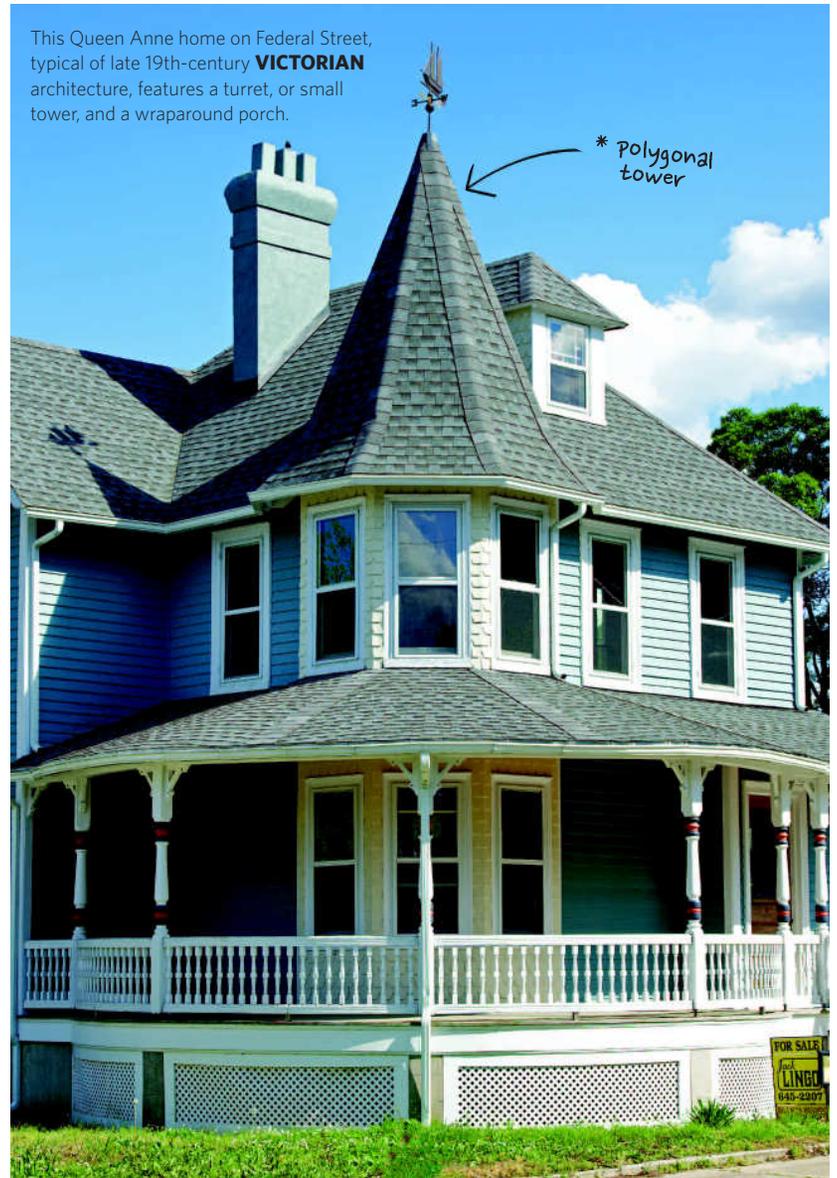
Victorian homes, built to impress during the latter part of that century, often strayed from symmetry, included towers or turrets, had a least one porch and featured a high level of decorative detail. Various sub-types stand proudly throughout the town, including the classic Queen Anne style (with turrets and wrap-around front porches) and Second Empire (a name derived from the Second French Empire of Napoleon III), distinguished by its mansard roof, with two slopes on each of its four sides.

Early 20th-century Arts and Crafts construction is represented in Milton as well, ranging from California bungalows (with long, sloping roofs, wide front porches and a gabled, single dormer on the second floor) to Craftsman-style homes, with low-pitched, gabled roofs, tapered columns and multi-paned windows.

Despite Milton’s vast array of vintage homes, examples of unaltered styles are difficult to find, with the original architecture often hidden beneath centuries of structural and cosmetic changes.

“Most of those additions were added in the Victorian era, when Milton was in its heyday,” notes Libby Zando, owner of Milton-based Zando Designs, pointing out that both the original look and all subsequent iterations reflect the time period when the work was being done — what materials were available, the styles that were popular and the financial health of builders and homeowners during that time. As such, history is evident in these layers, as change came to Milton’s houses just as larger societal shifts came to the town itself. The satisfying result is that when it comes to America’s architectural and historical potpourri, there is something for everyone in this quaint coastal Delaware burg. ■

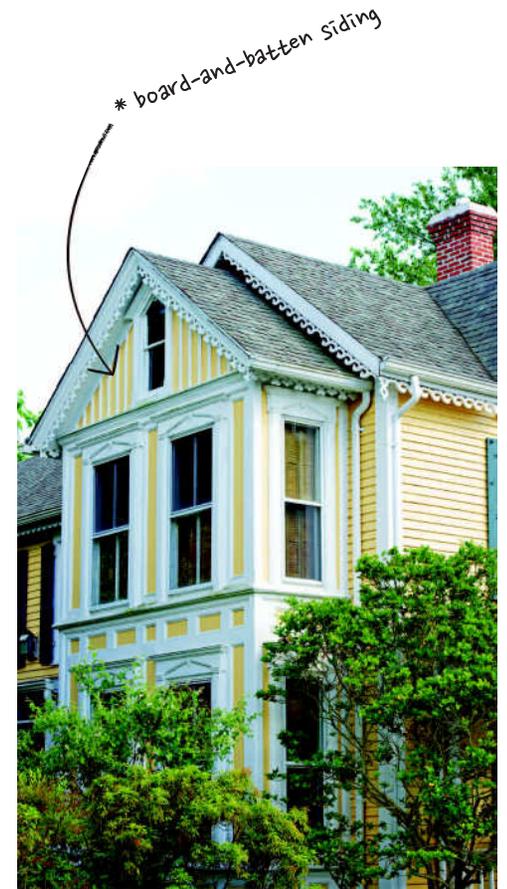
JESSICA GORDON is a regular contributor to *Delaware Beach Life*.





ANTEBELLUM (Latin for “before war”) homes such as this one on Federal Street were built before the American Civil War. They often feature gabled roofs, a symmetrical facade and evenly-spaced windows.

** flower motif trim*



Fretwork, or “gingerbread” details, seen here on the eaves of the side extension of the house at left, are wooden (sometimes iron) adornments, usually on porches or running under eaves.

The **COLONIAL** on Union Street at right, simple and symmetrical in appearance, later had Victorian details, such as a front porch and gingerbread adornment, added centuries later.

* decorative vergeboard



The Governor's Bed & Breakfast on Union Street, below, is an example of **FEDERAL**-style, which features a symmetrical arrangement of doors and windows. Additions to the sides and rear of Federal homes are common. Debbie and Bill Post, owners of the B&B, take advantage of a sunny spot on the expansive porch for breakfast, bottom right.



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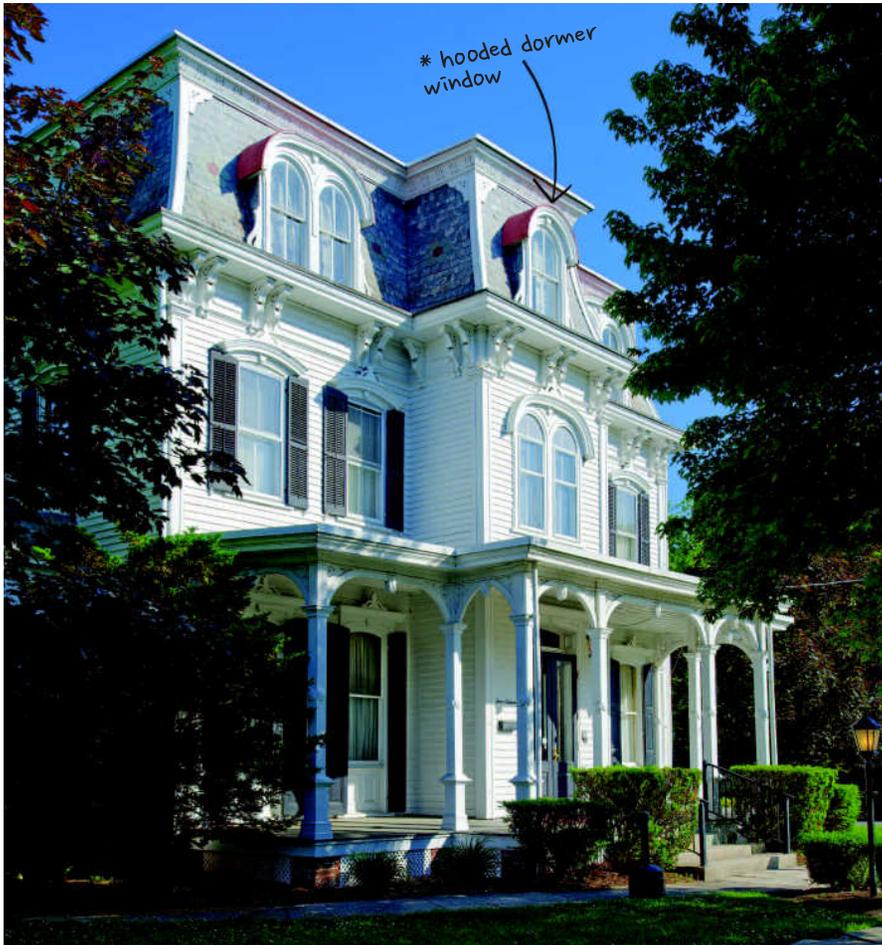
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SECOND EMPIRE architecture, seen at left on Federal Street, is often recognized by the mansard roof, a roof with two slopes on each of its four sides. This was both a fashionable and functional element, creating usable attic space.

* carved porch brackets



GOTHIC REVIVAL style often displayed intricate wooden ornamentation, or fretwork, on windows, doors and porches, as seen here on Union Street.

See for Yourself

The Milton Garden Club is hosting its 15th annual Gardens and Homes Tour, "A Walk Down Union Street," on Saturday, July 12, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. The event, held rain or shine, features 11 gardens and four homes on Union Street. Each of the houses reflects one or more time periods in Milton's architectural history, including Kathryn Greig's Colonial on page 62, dating back to 1790.

In addition, a pharmacy that has been closed for five decades will be open for viewing, and the Milton Theatre, closed to the public for the last three years, will be open as well.

Advance ticket sales are \$15 and can be purchased by calling Nancy Trask at (443) 617-0617 or by visiting one of the following locations: Hillside Florist, Pepper's Green-

houses, Salon Milton, Milton Town Hall or County Bank, all in Milton, as well as Lewes Printing. Tickets are also available at the garden club's booth at the Milton Farmers' Market, held every Friday (weather permitting) from 3 to 6 p.m. Day-of tickets can be bought for \$20 at the club's booth in front of the Milton Historical Society & Museum, 210 Union St. ■

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