

Spanning the Gap

ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Greece on the Delaware: The Greek Revival Style in the Park



History is a direct influence on the present. People's fascination with the past is expressed in such cultural artifacts as furniture, automobiles, art -- and architecture.

Architecture today is a potpourri of components - many old, time-proven methods of design, and other new, technology-influenced techniques. The resulting transformation of forms has many causes -- by needs deeper than just variety for the eye. Perhaps the greatest cause of this type occurred here in America with its emergence as an independent nation and the effect that that had on the country's architecture.

The separation of America from Britain created a need for buildings to house the newly formed government at all levels. Our young country, eager to be identified with its new civic and political virtues, adopted many of the classical forms of ancient democratic Greece. A desire to back away from England's "Adams" style construction and a sympathy for the Greeks and their own civil war caused a tremendous construction boom in this particular mode which reached its peak in the 1840's. Towering columns and grand pediments



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(Above) The former Dutch Reformed Church, now part of the Phoenix Antiques property, in Dingmans Ferry PA. (NPS Photo by Ken Sandri)



(Above) The former Zions Evangelical Lutheran Church (Zion Church), now the recreation area's office of Historic Preservation and Design.

the new capitol in Washington D.C. and that quickly spread as the principal role model for public and private structures alike.

During this period in particular, architects were used more frequently because many citizens desired their individual homes to be built in the fashion, and carpenters were not yet capable of creating these desired characteristics. Even so, it does not require a trained eye to recognize Greek Revival architecture. Consider the innumerable government buildings or the more romantic images of the grand plantation mansions of the deep South. Their large verandas and massive support columns are features that were prevalent in the southern states where the humidity was extremely high. Large interior rooms with high ceilings opened onto these shaded outside seating areas, making the climate somewhat more tolerable and liveable. These and other adaptations to the original style were, in fact, caused by local climatic and cultural influences in various parts of the country.

The Greek Revival movement was derived from architecture that graced the ancient temples along the Mediterranean thousands of miles away. In America, the style included classical columns, entablatures and pediments, painted white to simulate the marble of the original. The movement spread quickly throughout the country to even the most remote regions of the West. Pennsylvania, which had a booming population growth during this time, and recorded the second highest concentration of the genre in the country.

Our own park here at Delaware Water Gap has some delightful examples of this very grand and fanciful expression. A leisurely drive through this scenic expanse of the Poconos will afford views of several such structures. The Dutch Reform Church, now a historic lease property, along Route 209 in Dingmans Ferry, Pennsylvania, was completed in 1850 and reflects the temple front design at its simple but beautiful best. Large Doric columns, and a gabled portico create a striking example of the



The siting of Zion Church, seen from the cemetery upslope of the church.



Zion Church, seen from Zion Church Road at River Road.



(Above) The tinsmith's shop (now the north wing of the Turn and Cook General Store building) in Bushkill PA shows Greek Revival influence on vernacular architecture.



Greek Revival House

classic order as do the Zion Lutheran Church, the photography studio in Peter's Valley Craft Center and the tinsmith's wing of the old general store in Bushkill. All of these buildings orient the gabled end to face the road, an uncommon practice before this time, but one that was carried on well into the 1900's long after the decline of the Greek Revival style. Three of the four have either classical columns or porticos running the full length of the building and two have the advantage of being in beautiful settings - Zion Church's hilltop location and the photography studio in Peters Valley resting on the top of a steep hill with steps leading up to its imposing facade. The manner in which the siting was handled brings waves of identification and similarity with the Acropolis and the Parthenon in Athens.

There has always been a fascination with classical architecture. Its breathtaking yet surprisingly simple detailing and proportions are timeless. It tends not to overwhelm the viewer with frivolous details, or bore with plainness. And while Greek Revival is not the chosen style for every building type, no one can deny the association the style has had with civilizations of the ancient past, or that it is an inspiring symbol of democracy, power, and the harmony between natural and man-made beauty. Its examples here in the park afford the visitor yet another reason to come, view, and refresh the spirit.

(Above) Detail of the facade of Zion Church PA.

(photography studio) at Peters Valley NJ, looking north. *(NPS photo by Ken Sandri)*



Greek Revival House (photography studio) at Peters Valley NJ, looking south *(NPS photo by Ken Sandri)*



View of Peters Valley on Open House Day 2006, looking south from the porch of the Greek Revival House.