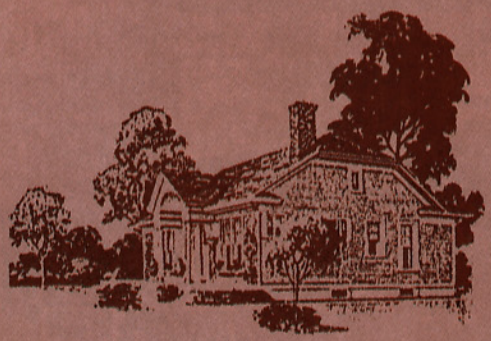
EXPLORING BUNGALOW SUBTYPES

By Rob Schweitzer

There were almost as many variations of the bungalow built as there were architects and builders, and some of the more popular styles have become their own designated sub-types. Here we take a look at the Prarie, Colonial and Swiss styles.



Writing in *Country Life in America,* Jas. M. A. Darrach presented one of the most famous articles of the early bungalow era. The October, 1906 issue contained a piece entitled "Why Not a Bungalow?" listing the reasons why his readers should consider this new form of housing. He writes of its simplicity, restful lines and general economy of construction. But one of the most important statements made by Darrach was regarding the overall definition of the bungalow itself.

"The word 'bungalow' suggests no stereotypical arrangement of parlor, dining room, kitchen, chambers and bath, and this lack of any definite architectural form has led to a great misuse of the name. It is therefore difficult to define ..."

Writing some seventy-five years later in the 1981 *Journal of Cultural Geography,* Richard Mattson agreed with Darrach's notion of the nature of the bungalow: "In contrast to architectural revivals, the American bungalow followed no comprehensive tenets of design. Typical traits were merely points of departure for architectural inspiration. Styles appeared which were far from simple, natural or unpretentious, including Spanish, Colonial, English, Japanese, Italian and Swiss bungalows." Mattson went on to call them "freakish bungalows."

Today most would no longer view these "bungalow styles" as odd or freakish. They are in fact a logical progression of the original Craftsman bungalows of Southern California. Swiss, English Tudor and even Prairie style bungalows are part of the landscape from Maine to Washington and from Texas to Michigan.

As the bungalow fad grew in the years after Darrach's article it was spurred on by a wide variety of vehicles. Magazines such as *Keith's*, a home-builders' magazine, and *Bungalow Magazine* helped spread the word each month. Books of plans were issued not only by architectural firms but also by companies that specialized in selling plans and blueprints. Ready-cut and kit bungalows were offered by such companies as Aladdin, Sears and Wards. All in all, it was not difficult to locate a bungalow plan to suit an individual's needs, desires and fantasies. An upshot of this popularity led to more and more deviations from the Craftsman styling.

Three of the "offshoots" of the standard bungalow are the Prairie, Swiss and Colonial stlye bungalows.

Prairie Bungalows

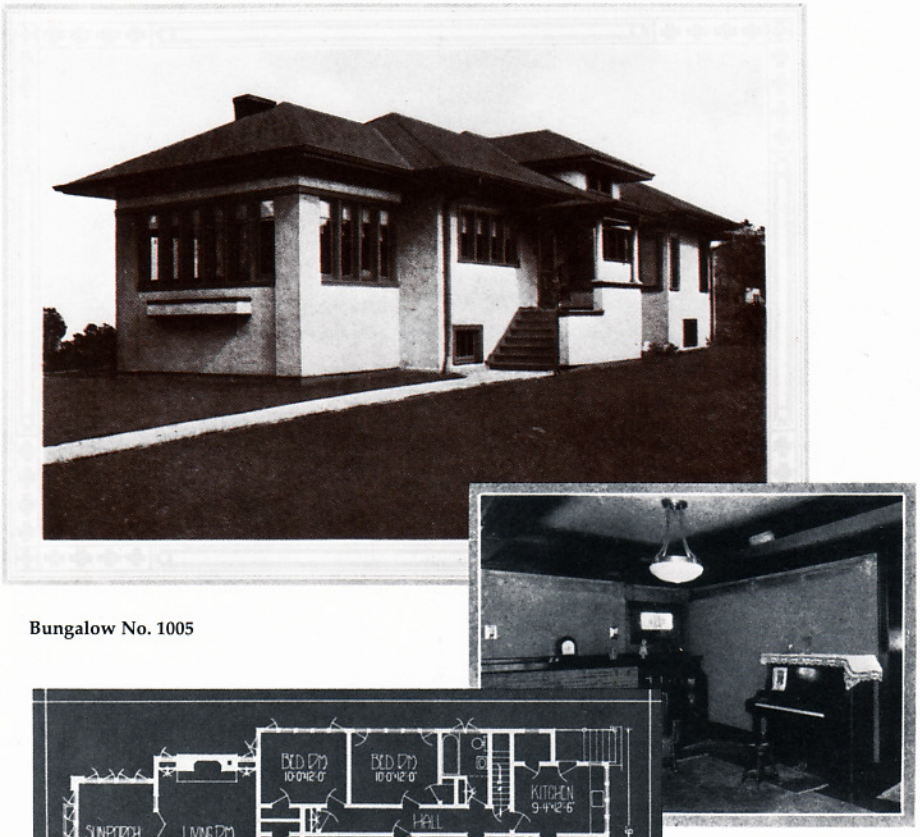
In the period just after the turn of the century, a movement developed among the architects of the Midwest, and the Chicago area in particular, led by Louis H. Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright, that sought to create a truly American style of architecture. This regional realization of a nationalistic movement began in the latter part of the prior century when America was developing into a world power. These so-called "Prairie School" architects tried to produce buildings that truly reflected their Midwestern heritage. Designs were horizontal – ground-hugging – to match a prairie vista. Roofs were low-pitched, wall surfaces were stucco or brick, without ornamentation. Windows were grouped in bands and exterior color schemes were highlighted with dark trim on light wall surfaces.

While the Prairie style never was widespread outside of the Midwest, it did adapt very well to bungalow architecture. After all, bungalows were already long and low, had low-pitched roofs and they had lots of windows to group into bands.

C. F. Mohr of Portage, Wisconsin published a plans book in 1920 entitled *Architectural Economy*. In it he illustrated over eighty home designs, including a perfect adaptation of Prairie style to bungalow. The house was stucco finished in an off-white with olive green trim and roof. The windows were grouped together and there was almost no exterior ornamentation. The home was 30 feet wide and 73 feet long.

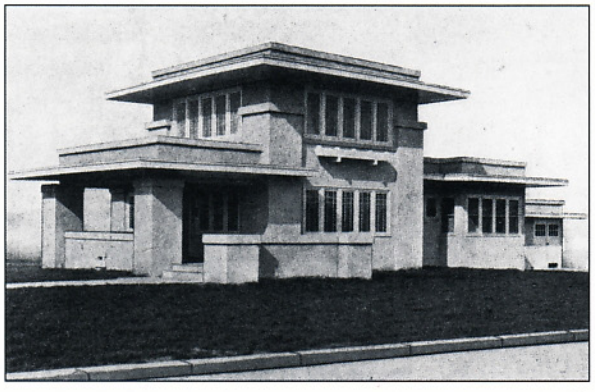
The Aurelius-Swanson Co., Inc. of Oklahoma City likewise published a booklet of plans about 1915. Their design No. 724 could have been based on the famous "airplane" type bungalows and added the equivalent of a dormered second story to the plan. Some observers at the time called this a semi-bungalow.

As with the larger full-sized Prairie homes, the bungalow version had a short life span in plans books and disappeared by the mid-twenties. The displeasure for the style could possibly have had to do with its above-average cost, harsh exterior "feel" and oftentimes unusual or unworkable floor plans.



Bungalow No. 1005

Plan No. 724

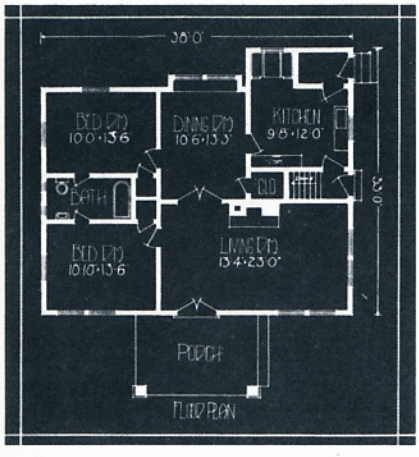


Colonial Bungalows

America's fascination with its colonial past began after the Civil War, as conflict-weary citizens looked to a calmer, less complicated time for inspiration. Today we would call this the "good old days" syndrome. Fascination was heightened by the 1876 Centennial celebrations in Philadelphia which recalled the one hundredth year of independence. The World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, which celebrated the discovery of America four hundred years earlier, also added to the colonial mystique. Motifs that are considered colonial, such as shingle siding, swags and classical columns, began appearing on Queen Anne style buildings in the late 1870s. A full-fledged "Colonial Revival"– with modern reproductions of Georgian, Gambrel-Dutch and Saltbox type houses – was popular at the turn of the century. It is no wonder then that the bungalow craze would be "colonialized" in the late teens and gained popularity into the 1920s. In fact, it could be argued that Colonial bungalows were the forefathers of what we today call Cape Cod and Williamsburg revival houses built in the late 1920s and into the post World War II period.

Mohr's *Architectural Economy* from 1920 showed an early version of a Colonial bungalow in the form of No. 1002. It carried a traditional bungalow floor plan with the main entry directly into the living room. It even had the large front porch with exposed rafter-ends. However, it was painted a bright white and contained two colonial-style gabled dormers, much like the houses of old Virginia.

Perhaps the most common type of Colonial bungalow was the one pictured here by Montgomery Ward and Company of Chicago in their 1929 catalogue. It was a ready-cut kit house costing just over $2,000. Wards with their Wardway Homes Division offered modest homes for sale from 1910 to 1931. This "Mayflower," as it was aptly named, was similar to other Colonial bungalows offered by Sears Roebuck, Aladdin, Liberty and a host of other kit house companies. Its facade was symmetrical in appearance with paired windows on each side of a classical entry containing sidelights and a six-panel door. A large gabled portico with Doric columns highlighted the colonial entry that sat on a modern full-width terrace. The house is side-gabled, with the gables clipped in the cottage fashion. It was painted a light tan with white trim and a red roof. Other examples had yellow and light green siding. The ad copy stated that it was one of their most popu-



Bungalow No. 1002

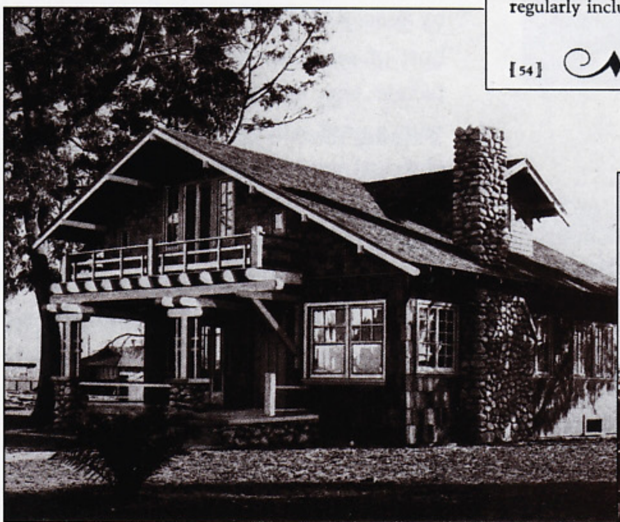
lar houses: "...they prefer the Mayflower first, because it is undeniably handsome. Everybody admits that! There is nothing freakish about it - the Colonial type is simple and in quiet good taste."

If these houses were the bridge by which the "small house" moved from Craftsman bungalow to Cape Cod, then we can say that this style has yet to go out of fashion as they are still being constructed today.

Swiss Bungalows

Unlike Colonial or Prairie bungalows the Swiss version had neither an historical association or an architectural/cultural movement to be based upon. Swiss Bungalows were like so many other "European Revival" styles that made their way onto the American architectural scene in the late nineteenth century. Queen Anne, Chateauesque, Beaux Arts and Tudor Revival were all born of a European historic design foundation. But there is no recognized Swiss Revival in our architectural heritage.

Leafing through the bungalow litera-



A Swiss Chalet Bungalow

ture of the first three decades of this century one does come across houses labeled as Swiss. The two examples shown here show just how diverse the types were and how difficult it can be to classify a bungalow as truly Swiss.

Bungalow Magazine for December 1912 (page 34) offered a plan they identified as "A Swiss Chalet Bungalow." This magazine was published by Henry Wilson from Los Angeles in 1909 and 1910, then from Seattle from 1912 to 1918. It was patterned, announced the article, "after the pretty chalets of Switzerland." The house pictured was constructed by J. L. Pidgeon of Seattle and in keeping with the bungalow philosophy contained a low-pitched roof, numerous windows, exposed rafter-ends and a good-sized porch. A siding was applied to the house that resembled the wide-spaced boards of traditional Swiss housing, and the use of large boulders on the lawn gave the landscape a mountainous look. But other than those two items, the house was a basic rectangle in the bungalow mode.

Lewis Manufacturing Company of Bay City Michigan, in comparison, offered a model in its kit house line for 1925 that more closely resembled native Swiss domestic architecture. The "Alpine," as it was called, carried a higher pitched, long sloping roof, extremely wide overhanging eaves, beamed dormer and heavily braced porch (all to protect against snow). The chimney was also carried out in larger mountain-style stonework.

These two examples while both Swiss in name offer different "looks" to achieve their appeal. This artistic license is one of the reasons for the great variety of bungalow types found throughout the first four decades of this century.

In future articles we'll explore other types of bungalows – the Tudor, Japanese, Rustic, and many more, for the style contained a multitude of offshoots. ■