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Burnham Historical Building as it appears in the early 21st century

The Burnham Historical Building is a fine example of an Italianate home and an important part of Adrian's history. Surrounded by an environment rich with an assortment of trees and placed within a lovely lawn of green grass, this exquisite home stands at 204 East Church Street, a prominent spot now as well as in the nineteenth century. Built in 1863, the home reflects Adrian's remarkable wealth in the middle of the nineteenth century. Subsequently, the home would see a multitude of changes and a string of prosperous owners until the middle of the twentieth century, when the home

became vacant. In the 1950s, it was converted into an office building in order to guarantee its preservation.

The largest and wealthiest Italianate home in Adrian, the Burnham Building is characterized by distinctive features that came to be known as the Italianate style. The two-story home features a low, hipped roof and wide over-hanging eaves supported by singly spaced decorative brackets, one of the most distinctive characteristics of this style. Upon the roof sits two symmetrically adjacent, prolonged chimneys. The small, covered entry porch is of single story height, supported by double fluted Corinthian columns and a set of pilasters. A finely carved line of balustrades runs along the top of the porch. The home has a distinct Italianate square plan with double brick walls between twelve and twenty inches thick, sixteen inches on the second floor.

Another essential characteristic of the Italianate style, the home's tall, narrow two pane glazed windows are arched above with U-shaped hooded crowns and decorative surrounds. Four windows on the façade are placed on the first level, while five are on the second level. Additionally, a Palladian window with decorated carved stone crowns reside below the centered, arched gable. Paired front doors, containing six window panes is gorgeously and delicately carved in black walnut. In addition, the door is similarly shaped like that of the home's windows, narrow and arched. On the sides of the home, bay windows protrude from its brick surface. Atop, balustrades run along its edge, resembling the balcony-like feature above the porch.

Its interior is rich with black walnut woodwork and an elegant, exquisite semi-spiral staircase. An original elaborate marble fireplace with reflective mirror cabinets on each side can be found in the current owner's office to the left upon entrance. In the

interior, windows are equipped with shutters that fold into the jamb. To the right of the entrance is the former living room, and directly behind it is the library, which is in its exact condition as it was when the third owner lived here, William H. Burnham, with the exception of the hidden florescent lighting. The library features a curved inward ceiling with elaborate decorative motif wood designs. The second floor is where the bedrooms were located. The servant's quarters were in the rear of the building and are unoccupied today.

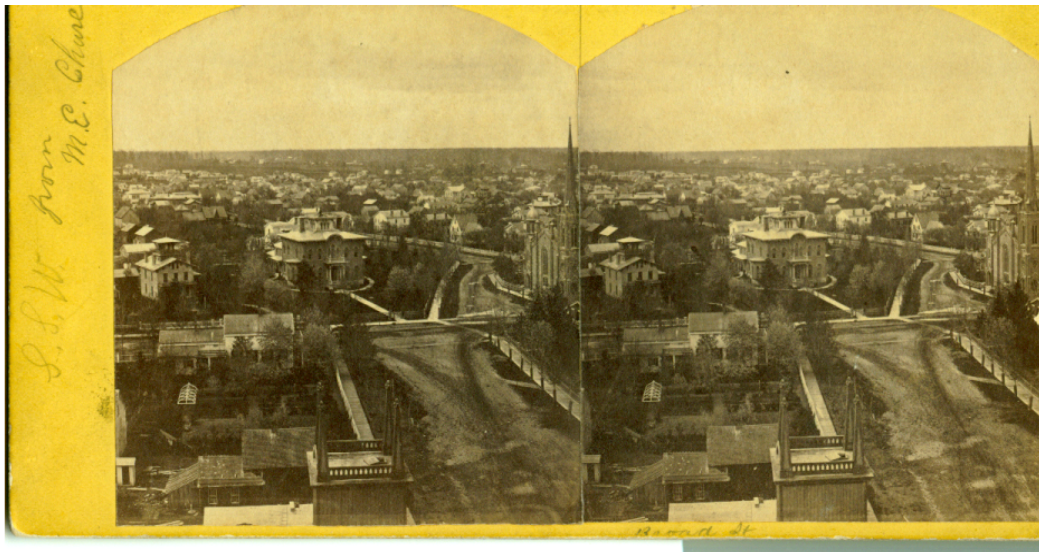
The American suburban ideal of the mid nineteenth-century required substantial land ownership to place the home within a garden setting. The idea was influenced by Andrew Jackson Downing in his book, *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, Adapted to North America*. This explains why the Burnham Building was located so far away from other homes. As Daniel Reiff explains in his book *Houses from Books*, Downing believed that this style was suitable as a domestic home.¹ Downing was a key figure to introduce the Italianate style to Americans, which dominated American homes for decades. Renowned architect, Alexander Jackson Davis, illustrated his books. The Italianate style, which came out in the 1840's and 50's, dominated American homes for decades.²

Several architectural historians have described the origins and development of the Italianate style. Reiff traces the development of the Italianate aesthetics from rural depictions of buildings in the works of French painters, Nicolas Poussin and Claude

¹ Reiff, Daniel D. *Houses from Books: Treatises, Pattern Books, and Catalogs in American Architecture, 1738-1950: A History and Guide*. University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000.

² McAlester, Virginia and Lee. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1998.

Lorrain to designs by British and American architects.³ In his book *Houses from Books*, he describes how, in 1802, the architect John Nash introduced the style in England when he designed the Cronkhill building in Shropshire; then, in 1838-39, architect John Notman built the first American example of an Italianate home in Burlington, New Jersey called the Bishop Doane House. The style reigned in America from 1850 to 1880, and was taken over in popularity by the half-timbered architecture of the Queen Anne style in the 1870's. In addition, Jeffrey Howe describes the style as part of the Romantic Movement, a reaction to classic architectural ideas and a replacement to the Gothic or Greek Revival styles.⁴



Stereoscopic photograph of the Burnham Historical Building from the tower of the Methodist Episcopal Church, showing the home's prominent location at the intersection of Broad and Church streets. Courtesy of the Lenawee County Historical Museum.

³ Reiff, *Houses from Books*, 70.

⁴ Jeffrey Howe, *The Houses We Live In, An Identification Guide to the History and Style of American Domestic Architecture*, (London: PRC Publishing, 2002), 206.

The Burnham Building was built in the early 1860s, when Adrian was enjoying considerable prosperity as a railroad city.⁵ In 1854, *The Michigan Farmer* described Adrian as “the second city in the state for wealth, enterprise, and business” The next year, The Michigan Southern Railroad merged with the Northern Indiana Railroad to form the Michigan Southern and Northern Indiana Railroad, and by 1857, its manufacturing and repair facilities included twenty-two buildings sitting on seventeen acres of land. Adrian’s booming economy is especially evident in 1859, when James Brackett built the four-story, 100-room, brick Italianate-style Bracket House hotel at the northeast corner of Maumee and Winter streets, and downtown streets were paved for the first time with cobblestone.

The home was built by one of the beneficiaries of Adrian’s wealth, George L. Bidwell. According to information collected by current owner of the home Clarke Baldwin, Bidwell was part founder and owner of the Waldby-Clay State Bank, later known as the Bank of Lenawee. Bidwell was also a hardware and dry goods merchant, one of the four founders of Michigan Mutual Insurance, and part owner of a local fencing company.⁶ Coming from Colbrook, Connecticut, and Livingston County, New York, he arrived in Adrian in 1836. Shortly thereafter in 1853, Bidwell bought property listed as worth \$1,200. Having begun construction 1861, he completed his home in 1863 valued at \$8,500. He is listed as having no personal property or home at the time his home was built, so it is assumed that he sold all his assets and took out private loans to pay for the construction.

⁵ See Peter Barr, “Chronology” in *Adrian Architecture*
<http://www.sienaheights.edu/personal/pbarr/chronology-adrian.html>.

⁶ Samantha Guigley, *Adrian Daily Telegram*, Nov. 27, 1994. (Article in the collection of Clarke Baldwin).

According to the building's Abstract of Title, Bidwell owned the home from 1863 to 1877, when he sold it to his business partner, William H. Waldby for \$18,000. Mr. Waldby owned the home for thirty-five years, and after his death, his daughter Elizabeth Finletter obtained ownership. Unfortunately, Mrs. Finletter was unable to occupy the home full time because she lived in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Instead, she used the home as a summer residence until she could sell the home.⁷ In 1912, she sold it to a prominent local figure, William H. Burnham for \$1.00.

Mr. Burnham was Adrian's most prominent businessman at the turn of the century. Strangely, he was born the year the home was finished in 1863.⁸ He was a banker, president of Adrian's largest industry, Lamb (Peerless) Fence, chairman of the board for the Lenawee County Saving Bank, president of the Michigan Manufacturers Association. In addition, he had financial interest in The Fireside Industries, Schwarze Electric Company, the Acme Preserve Company, Bassett Foundry Company, Dyersburg Cotton Products Company of Dyersburg, Tennessee, and the Michigan Mutual Insurance Company. He also was a member of the Adrian Club, Lenawee County Club he help found, and the Detroit Athletic Association. According to information collected by Clarke Baldwin, Burnham spent about \$100,000 in the 1920s modernizing the home. The heating system was revamped, the servants quarters were extended, the bathroom on first floor was remodeled in the white tile appeal of the 1920's, he established gardens in the backyard, and put up brick fencing running along the entire property line.

⁷ Guigley, *idem*.

⁸ The details of Burnham's life are described in his obituary. See: "William H. Burnham Industrialist and Banker" in Scrapbook Berndt 9a, Lenawee County Historical Museum archives.



Portrait of William Burnham, for whom the Burnham Building is named, courtesy of the Lenawee County Historical Museum.

Upon Burnham's death in 1946, his daughter, Ethel Burnham-Lamb received his entire estate. A year later, Mr. and Mrs. Lamb invested another \$50,000 improving the property, but in 1953, they moved to Oyster Bay, New York, taking along with them two marble fireplaces and an elegant lighting fixture. During the following four years, the home became vacant, in need of owners. Fortunately, in 1957 Mrs. Lamb sold the home to the Adrian Board of Education for the sum of \$1.00.

While in the hands of the Board of Education, the home went through many modifications; for example, the old garage/carriage house was turned into an office, a brick vault was built on the south end, florescent lighting was installed, the electrical system was updated. The Board removed the gardens and greenhouse, which they were unable to maintain. Lastly, in 1978, the Adrian Board of Education sold the home to

Clarke F. Baldwin and Lawrence C. Force for \$70,100. In 1996, Clarke and Norma Baldwin obtained full ownership after the unfortunate death of business partner, Mr. Force. It is now primarily used as a law firm, although Mr. Baldwin rents out spaces for the use of other professionals.

Near downtown Adrian, close to residential suburbs and businesses, the Burnham Historical Building represents a grand example of the Italianate architectural style of the mid-nineteenth-century. The house, built in the midst of Adrian's flourishing years, became a symbol of wealth and power, several of its owners contributing a healthy portion to the city's growth. In the century and a half since it was built, the mansion witnessed the growth of a promising city, and the immense, prevalent professionalism of its several prosperous owners. The Burnham Historical Building is an example of power and a reflection of Adrian's history.

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