

Fuerst Farm Bungalow, Novi, Michigan

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Report on Architectural Integrity
Submitted by Robert Schweitzer

As was a common practice in the first third of the twentieth century, the original farm house on the Fuerst property was replaced by a modern structure. Aging original dwellings and the ability to acquire modern up-to-date conveniences in contemporary house plans often led to new construction on southeastern Michigan farmsteads in the decade prior to the Great Depression.

The Fuerst's replaced their Greek Revival hall and parlor plan with an Arts & Crafts, Shed-Roofed Bungalow about 1927. This particular type was popular in rural areas due to its wide front porch (a hold-over from late Victorian-Queen Anne architecture) and more extensive second floor sleeping quarters. With rural electrification programs, advances in indoor plumbing, and the introduction of many labor-saving appliances (toasters, irons, refrigerators and snap-on electric lights) after World War I, many farm families either remodeled or built new homes to take advantage of modern conveniences. Buildings of the Arts & Crafts type were favored in rural areas due to their general simplicity and straightforward expression of details much in keeping with farm-life philosophy.

EXTERIOR

The Fuerst house is identifiable architecturally as a Shed-Roof Bungalow (see attached). The home is technically a Semi-Bungalow or Bungloid as it has a large second story (traditional Bungalows were only one story). It contains typical exterior decoration for the period, but of a very high quality. The sculptured vergeboards are one example, the porch another. The Bungalow style's popularity was due to its simplicity and clear expression of architectural detailing, i.e. exposed roof rafter ends and unfinished shingle siding in this case. The house includes extensive stonework of a high quality on the chimney and on the Egyptian-style tapered porch columns. Bungalows are known for their extensive use of windows and the Fuerst home follows this trend with numerous double hung windows on each floor. The rear or back second story bedroom contains a door onto the porch that acted as a warm-weather sleeping area. The house's rural, conservative, straightforward nature is expressed in its nearly symmetrical side facades with balanced window placement as well as front and rear shed roof dormers. The large size of these dormers points to a mid-to-late twenties construction date when that category of dormer was becoming popular. The placement of the rear dormer directly on the roof edge,

creating, in effect, a "wall-dormer" is another clue of a late 20s style house. It is currently colored in a two-tone paint scheme that on inspection appears to be the original coloration. The use of color on the building is another indication of its rural, conservative image. Medium red-brown raw-cut shingles on the upper story, over a white clapboarded first floor would be considered one of the least jarring paint schemes of the era.

Overall, the exterior is a prime example of a late Arts & Crafts Bungalow style. It incorporates prominent features such as the Egyptian porch columns, dominant chimney, windows in pairs and rear sleeping porch, as well as more modern traits such as the large dormers, and mixed exterior surface materials. Upon inspection the architectural integrity of the exterior is nearly intact and provides an excellent example of a rural farm house of the nineteen twenties.

INTERIOR

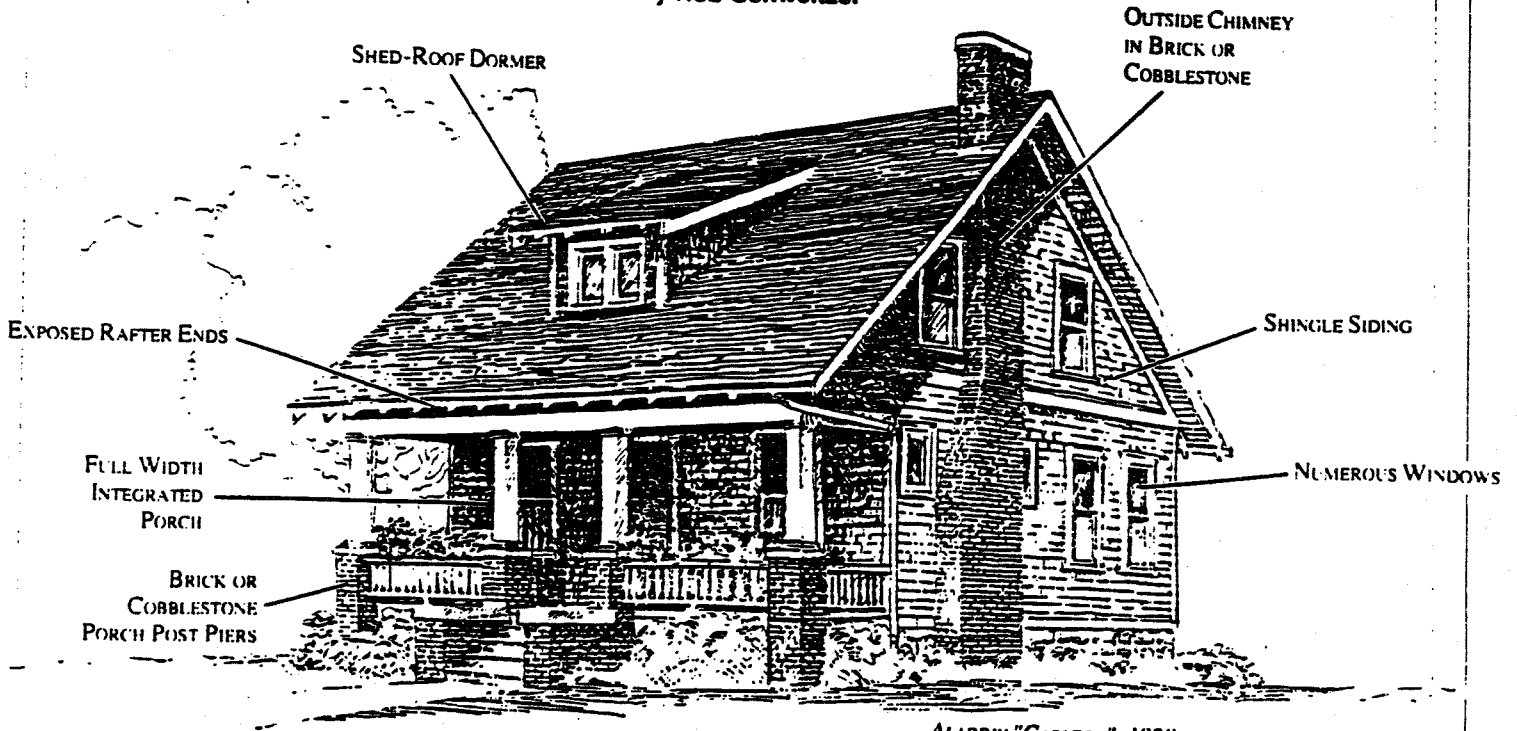
The remarkably well preserved interior features of this Bungalow only add to its historical importance. The house floor plan contains no entry hall. Visitors entered directly into the "living room" (a replacement for the Victorian era formal parlor) and were received in an informal manner, as compared to nineteenth-century conventions. Newly popularized beveled glass French doors opened into a dining room that led into a large country kitchen. This plan created the broad flowing spaces so typical of the Bungalow era. The kitchen speaks of all the modern conveniences that were just beginning to be established in America of the 20s. Built-in cabinets, a broom closet and a space for a refrigerator were all part of a trend to compartmentalize and organize the domestic work spaces. (see *American's Favorite Homes*, {Schweitzer & Davis} the "Academic Period" chapters for more details) The living room is slightly separated into two parts by a large arch with center keystone. This unusual treatment was likely a concession to the nineteenth-century convention of isolation of formal from informal parlors. The layout containing four bedrooms was somewhat unusual for the period as normally Bungalows contained only two or three sleeping rooms. A remarkable feature of the particular house is the extremely lucky fact of having nearly all the original light fixtures still in place. The living room with its numerous wall sconces of a Tudor Revival/Art Nouveau candle design and the matching dining room chandelier are extraordinary examples. The beveled glass windows in the living room next to the fireplace are a cultural holdover from the turn-of-the-century period and add a great deal of charm to the room. Beveled glass replaced colored (stained) glass as a popular "focal-point" window treatment about 1895. The divided-lights with framed-oval-star pattern in the window are quite rare. Such features as the large rustic field-stone fireplace with flanking built-in bookcases were likely designed out of the pages of Gustave Stickley's *Craftsman* magazine. While the Art-Deco door hinges illustrate the influence of modern house & home magazines such as *House Beautiful* and *Better Homes and Gardens*. The interior wood work is of very high quality with paneled

doors (in the modern-style) and Arts & Crafts wide-board moldings throughout. Original wall papers can be seen under the current 1960s layer. Except for some plaster damage the interior is in excellent shape and could easily be returned to its original condition and decoration.

Overall the Fuerst Bungalow is a well preserved example of a replacement farm dwelling from the late nineteen-twenties. Its exterior decoration is an excellent example of the stone mason's art and the philosophy of the American Arts & Crafts movement. Interior touches speak of an upper middle class farm family with a knowledge of late Victorian culture and a desire for modern conveniences such as indoor plumbing, electric lights and refrigeration. The Fuerst House is a remarkable icon in remarkable condition that, if preserved, would capture a slice of rural Southeastern farm life quickly being lost to suburban expansion.

THE SHED-ROOF BUNGALOW

By Rob Schweitzer



ALADDIN "CARLTON" 1928

TO MANY PEOPLE the term "bungalow" simply means any small house, in particular any one-story house. But the word actually describes an entire family of house design – in fact an entire culture that began in America in the early years of the 20th century, peaked in the Teens and Twenties, and lasted into the late Thirties. These we call "Bungalows" with a capital "B" to denote them as a style of architecture.

In terms of modest Bungalows our research has discovered six distinctive types. Among those types are several styles such as Colonial, Tudor, and Arts & Crafts.

One of the most popular Bungalows is the Arts & Crafts Shed-roof type. It is characterized by a side-gable plan with a sloping front roof. Above the porch is always a front roof dormer, sometimes it is small as on the Aladdin "Carlton," but it can be large as on the "Marsden" plan.

This Shed-roof Bungalow has rustic detailing: shingle, stucco or clapboard siding, cobblestone or brick chimney and porch piers. The roof has a wide overhang showing exposed rafter-ends; many times there are also brackets of simple stick

like materials. All these reflect the influence of the Arts & Crafts spokesmen such as Gustav Stickley and the Greene brothers who helped popularize the larger, more ornate versions of the style. But the more modest homes were designed for the "first time" buyer and were mass produced by ready-cut companies like Aladdin and Sears or by developers who purchased stock plans from Keith's or Garlinghouse.

Bungalows became popular because they were more efficient and less costly than the ornate, irregularly-shaped Queen Anne and Colonial Revival houses of the 1890s. They were small (sometimes only 2 bedrooms and an unfinished second story) with less woodworked detail, but still contained a large number of windows and a big front porch like their Queen Anne brethren.

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ALADDIN "MARSDEN" 1914



ALADDIN "FAIRFIELD" 1937