

THE HARROWER HOUSE

CHATHAM, NEW JERSEY



BUILT C. 1890



THE ARCHITECTURE

THE VICTORIAN ERA dates from about 1840 to 1900 in the United States. During this time, the Industrial Revolution produced many new innovations and technologies. In turn, the population was growing and a wealthier, larger middle-class was emerging. Cities became overcrowded and dirty, and this new middle-class wanted to get out of the city to a healthier environment and be able to display their new wealth. Towns on the rail line were the perfect places to settle. Men could easily commute to work and their families had wonderful surroundings to live in. The countryside of sleepy towns such as Chatham began to experience an influx of people and the American landscape would be changed forever.

THE HARROWER HOUSE was built about 1890 by Henry D. Harrower and his wife Margaret. It is a Shingle Style home. The architect and contractor have not been determined.

A UNIQUELY AMERICAN design, the Shingle Style architecture was in fashion from about 1880 - 1900. Although this style of architecture was most used in seaside resorts of the north east, it made its way to the countryside as well. The style's informality was a clear expression of American individualism. Architects took inspiration from America's renewed interest in Colonial American architecture brought on from the American Centennial celebrated in 1876. It also was an escape from other ornate styles of architecture popular during the Victorian Era such as Gothic Revival and Italianate.

FEATURES ON DISPLAY in the Harrower House are a moderate pitched roof with irregular design, gabled dormers, full-width front porch and wall surface patterns. The half-timber detailing is unusual, but not unheard of. The original exterior was cedar shingles with stained half-timbers, long since painted for a more contemporary look. The original stained exterior of the Harrower House was made to blend into the landscape. The house is a massive design with a rustic, relaxed feeling of simplicity and informality, but it is not humble. Inside, a rambling floor plan with oversized rooms elegantly enhanced by hardwood floors, soaring ceilings and extensive molding detail convey a sense of power and wealth.



In Shingle Style homes, a portion of a wall was often curved out, (as shown above in this very early portrait of the home) forming a bulge to provide more interior space and additional visual complexity on the exterior. In contrast to the other Victorian-era styles, Shingle Style used a few decorative details to enhance the irregularity of the construction not to decorate it.



Freedom of design and asymmetry was preferred. The lack of balance allowed architects to design structures as if they were sculpted. Because of the complexity of the forms in a Shingle Style design, the cost of construction was often beyond that of the average homeowner. As a result, the style was never adapted to mass vernacular housing and in many ways remained a high-fashion style.

