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## LANDMARKS

### *Style reflects best of classical and picturesque worlds*

#### Geoffrey Castle

The Italianate style of architecture was most popular in 19th-century Victoria. It was familiar in England, the United States and other places from 1830 onward and was prevalent in British Columbia between 1860 and 1890. The style evolved into the High Victorian Italianate with sharper, more angular details.

This style reflects the best of two worlds, one reflecting classical order, the other representing the picturesque. Sources of inspiration are varied but are found mainly in 18th-century paintings depicting the landscape of northern Italy, and through the work of English artist John Nash.

Characteristics of the style include angular bays and tall, narrow windows with arched or flat lintels, quoined corners of the building, low-pitched roof, classic spindled balustrades, slender brick chimneys, balconies with wrought iron railings, and sometimes a widow's walk or tower. The emphasis is on verticality in design.

Well-known examples in Victoria are the Spencer House (forming part of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria), Dingle House on Gorge Road, Regent's Park on Fort Street, Fairholme on Rockland Place, and The Priory on Pemberton Road. Architect John Teague designed many of Victoria's Italianate-style homes.

Not all such houses are large. There is a noteworthy group of smaller versions on the east side of Amelia Street, north of Pandora near Blanshard. Each building has emphasis on different features and their lower cost attracted owners with lower incomes.

S.T. Styles, the builder, constructed them in the late 1880s. The two-storey structures, unusually close together, are constructed of brick. Occupations of the original owners consisted of a locksmith, bricklayer, carpenter, shoemaker and a mechanic. Styles lived in one of them for several years. Two nearby houses on Cormorant Street are also part of this interesting cluster.

Eventually, after nearly 100 years, the group fell into disrepair through neglect and it seemed inevitable they would be demolished. Instead, they proved to be a challenging restoration project and, after much time and effort, the houses were once more as good, if not better than they were originally. They assumed a new lease on life as dwelling units and quality offices.

The grouping won special recognition from the Hallmark Society which is dedicated to encouraging the preservation of historical and architectural landmarks.

Geoffrey Castle is president of the Victoria Historical Society.



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