

Historic District Walking Tour

Holmes-Foster Neighborhood

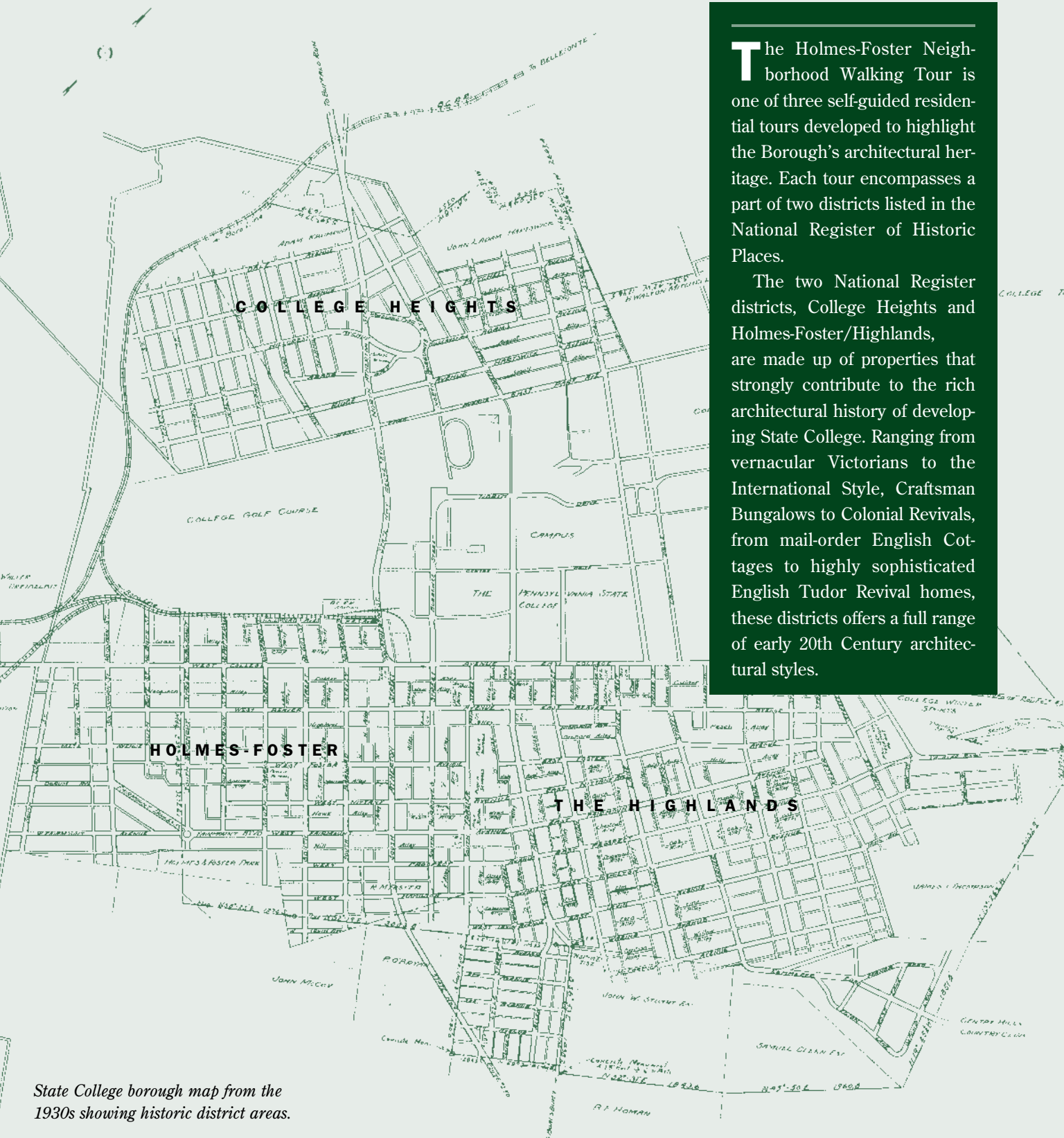
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National
Register of
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The two National Register districts, College Heights and Holmes-Foster/Highlands, are made up of properties that strongly contribute to the rich architectural history of developing State College. Ranging from vernacular Victorians to the International Style, Craftsman Bungalows to Colonial Revivals, from mail-order English Cottages to highly sophisticated English Tudor Revival homes, these districts offers a full range of early 20th Century architectural styles.

State College borough map from the 1930s showing historic district areas.

State College, Pennsylvania

Incorporated in 1896

Most Pennsylvania communities had peaked and then receded in building activities when State College, enjoying the economic stability of Penn State, was in its building heyday.

As early as 1904 the *State College Times* cited a housing shortage. Even though some proportion of faculty were able to achieve home ownership, many instructors, support staff, and off-campus students sought rental space. The demand was met by alley houses at the rear of lots and by boarding houses, some with fraternity associations.

In 1912 more than seventy building tradesmen — contractors, carpenters, painters and paperhangers, plasterers, plumbers, stone and brick masons — provided their services to a town with a population of only 1,650.

Subdivisions were developed to meet this building boom for a local population with a sophisticated interest in architectural housing choices. This development also coincided with the increased availability of nationally stylish residential options provided through pattern books and by mail-order companies, and locally through faculty members with architectural design expertise.

Holmes-Foster Park, the Borough's first, has been an important neighborhood resource since it was donated in 1921. Trees in the park, some of them nearly 200 years old, include black and white oaks, maples, and hickories.

Holmes-Foster Historic Neighborhood

Holmes-Foster, part of the Highlands/Holmes-Foster Historic District, encompasses land and historic buildings associated with the residential history of State College from its incorporation in 1896 to 1941 and the beginning of World War II. It is bounded by Prospect Avenue to the south; Buckhout Street to the west; and Railroad Avenue to the north. Atherton Street is its eastern edge.

One house dates from the last half of the 19th century. The remainder provides a rich sampling of early 20th century design and construction. Included are pattern book, mail-order, and architect-designed houses with a diversity of age, style, and scale. Mature trees, many of them fifty or sixty years old and with circumferences of over sixteen feet, line and serve as a canopy to the streets in the Holmes-Foster neighborhood, reflecting the Borough's early commitment to the planting of shade trees.



Mail Order Housing

The Gordon-Van Tine Co., Aladdin Co., and Sears, Roebuck and Co. provided plans and materials to many home buyers in the new residential neighborhoods of State College.

These companies offered not only the latest in style choices to meet space needs, budgets, and specific tastes of their buyers, but total house packages with first-rate materials. Building parts arrived by railroad, precut and numbered. Sears also offered household furnishings to enhance the design, along with a mortgage plan to help owners acquire their new homes. It included a guarantee that promised satisfaction or Sears would pay all shipping costs and refund the purchase price.

Once the lots and foundations were ready, the homes were assembled by local builders or possibly even by the purchasers themselves. For the convenience of the builder, shipping dates were staggered so that materials arrived when they were needed. Materials came from several sources and were carried to State College on the Bellefonte Central Railroad. In one shipment, for example: leaded glass, moulding, paneled doors and nails came from Newark; hardware, curtain poles, and window shades arrived from Philadelphia; paint and varnish was shipped from Summerdale, Pennsylvania; radiators came from Bayonne, New Jersey; bathroom fixtures from Camden; wood shingles from Detroit; quarry tile from Kushequa; and firebrick from Bolivar, Pennsylvania.



Catalog pages showing exteriors and floor plans. Sears “Amsterdam,” a Dutch Colonial; a Gordon-Van Tine four square; and a Gordon-Van Tine bungalow.

West College Avenue — Early properties, those built between 1900–1910 and located closest to the original core of the downtown, were mostly simply styled vernacular Victorians faced in wood siding. As prosperity grew with the success of the new college, larger and more architecturally detailed housing was added. Buildings of 2½ to 3½-stories, built or faced in locally made brick and ranging in size from 2,100 to 7,000 square feet, began to be added about 1910.

Look for classical porticos, multiple dormers, bays, towers, wrap-around porches, and other decorative details found on these early State College properties. While some have had heavy use, they still retain their residential scale and continue to be popular housing choices by Penn State students.

1 500 West College

Like several of its neighbors, this large 1910 Victorian at the corner of College and Barnard served first as a rooming house and later as a fraternity. It is one of the few remaining Queen Anne-style houses in State College, characterized by a corner turret, bay window, wrap-around porch, and an exterior combination of brick and patterned shingles over a wood frame. The house next door, the first three across the street, and two more down the block also evolved into early Penn State fraternity houses.



2 639 West College

Local businessmen demonstrated their optimism in the town's future by building fine houses for themselves along College Avenue. An example: First National Bank Chairman Newton Hess chose a brick Colonial Revival for his house in 1912. Of special note: the elaborate front porch entrance with Ionic columns.



3 701 West College

In 1919, Dr. Grover C. Glenn and his brother, Dr. William S. Glenn, converted this property from a private residence to the first hospital in State College, the Glenn Sanitarium. When they relocated in 1922, the property was sold first to Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity and later became an apartment house. It is one of several large brick buildings in this older part of the Borough with a mansard roof — a steeply pitched concave roof with dormers — characteristic of a French style called Second Empire.

4 101 North Patterson

Delta Theta Sigma is the only active fraternity still located along College Avenue — once known as fraternity row. It was built in 1925 in the Colonial Revival style and is similar in scale and detail to the houses east of Allen Street in what is now regarded as the fraternity district.

5 100 North Patterson

Merchant Morris Fromm selected a stone-faced English Tudor Revival style for his house. High-pitched gables, picturesque chimneys, an accented doorway, and decorative half-timbering enhance its English-style design.

6 **7** 121 & 124 South Patterson

Bungalows and Four-Squares were popular style choices during the first two decades of the 20th century. This bungalow, with its long, low-pitched roof extending over a large open front porch, along with (across the street), the two-story Four-Square with its pyramidal roof, are good examples.



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8 125 South Patterson

Colonial Revival became the style favorite during the 1920s and 1930s in State College and across the nation, reflecting a preference for a formal approach to symmetry and design. These houses usually have rooms on either side of a central hall and often have classical Georgian doorways with fanlights, transoms, and sidelights.

A 812 West Beaver

Amidst the Four-Squares (to the west of the South Patterson/West Beaver intersection) is a Gordon-Van Tine Co. Craftsman Bungalow, No. 613. It was built in 1924. The catalog described it as an “attractive bungalow...in a most compact and convenient floor plan,” and recommended a stucco façade. But its owners chose to use cobblestones from the West Branch of the Susquehanna River to enhance its “most inviting exterior.”

9 10 236 & 302 South Patterson

Along this street of attractive single-family homes are these two English Tudor Revival style houses, one in brick (1928) and the other in stone (1930). Both have steeply pitched roofs, gabled entrances or vestibules, and distinctive front doors. The larger of the two also has half-timbered trim and casement windows to reflect its English influence.



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B Sycamore Trees

To be noted along West Foster Avenue. These large old trees give the neighborhood a somewhat different character than those streets in the Holmes-Foster district shaded by elms, maples, and oaks.

C 905 Robin Road

In 1935, movie theater owner Maurice Baum built one of the largest and most carefully-designed single-family homes in the Borough (to the right at the South Patterson/West Fairmount intersection). Incorporating many details from early Georgian prototypes, it includes a two-story gabled entrance; doorway with pediment, fanlight and pilasters; hipped roof with balustrade; and decorative corner detail, called quoining.

11 700 Block, West Fairmount

Baum also introduced the only boulevard into State College. Originally called Baum Boulevard, the center island of this divided roadway has been planted with trees, shrubs, and flowers and is tended by residents who live along the street.

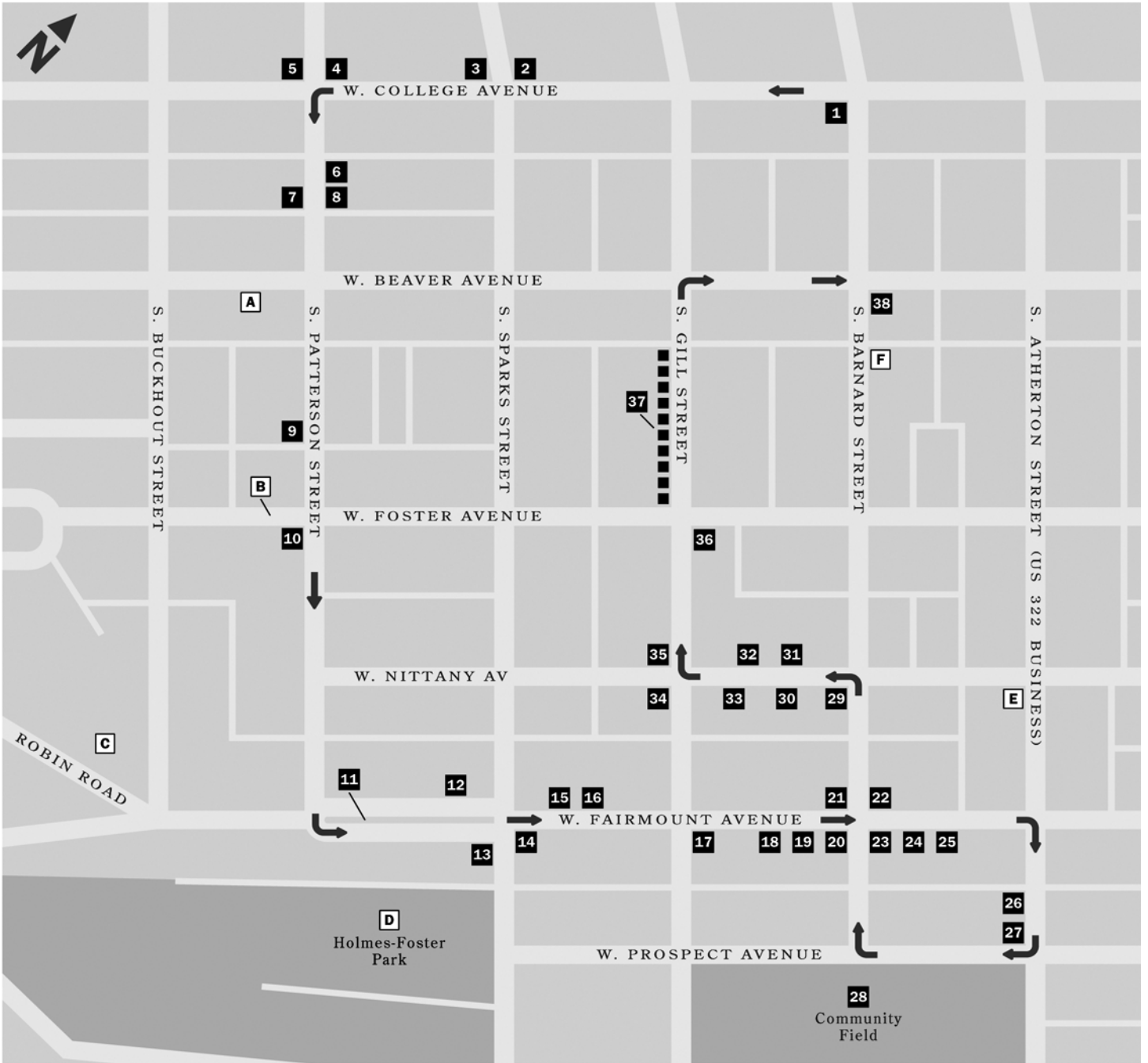
With faculty talents to draw from and with the financial stability provided by Penn State, many residents used local architects and designers to acquire the home of their dreams.

12 711 West Fairmount

Architecture professor Clarence Bauchspies designed at least two fine residential properties in the Holmes-Foster District and more than a dozen in College Heights. Bauchspies used roughly-coursed stone facing and half-timbering for this






Holmes-Foster Neighborhood Walking Tour Map



There is additional parking off street and in reserved lots.

Parts of the tour are on steep hills, especially between Nittany and Prospect Avenues.

-  Tour route
-  3 Noted property along main route
-  C Noted property off main route

Tudor Revival, designed for chemistry professor Gustaf Cohen in 1938.

Department of Landscape Architecture head John Bracken provided the landscape plan. Of special note is the magnificent copper beech in the front yard. Bracken, head of the department from 1926 to 1957, designed several residential landscapes, and also added his expertise to the appearance of State College as a longtime member of the Shade Tree Commission.

D Holmes-Foster Park

A half-block south from Fairmount Avenue, off Sparks Street, is Holmes-Foster Park. Given to the Borough in 1921 by businessman J. Laird Holmes and French professor I.P. Foster, it was described as “one of the prettiest groves of trees in the vicinity of State College.” It was the only park in the Borough for many years and was used by children from more distant parts of town until other parks were developed.

13 704 West Fairmount

In 1933, Joseph Fosa, a professor of Spanish, and his family chose a Sears mail-order house, the *Ellison*, for their home at the northeast corner of the park. A brick veneer finish was recommended by Sears, but the Fosas personalized their home by facing it with locally available ganister rock, from Bald Eagle Mountain near Port Matilda.

14 634 West Fairmount

Other outstanding stone houses built in 1929 and the early 1930s along Fairmount Avenue include this one in the French Colonial Revival style. A tall, steeply pitched, hipped roof, arched-top roof dormers, casement windows, and cut stone trim around a heavy wooden door are some of the characteristics of this style.

15 627 West Fairmount

Education professor Carroll D. Champlin and his family combined stucco with stone for their English-style house. A matching garage is tucked behind and to the left of this handsome property.

16 617 West Fairmount

When engineering professor Leland Rhodes and his wife, Christine, were selecting their house design in 1929, they worked with Wilkes-Barre architect Thomas A. Foster and local contractor Dowe Lowe. The result is an excellent example in the English Tudor style. Features include elaborate chimneys, decorative half-timbering, roof gables, casement windows, a large first floor bay, and carved stone around a Tudor-arched doorway. John Bracken was the landscape architect for this outstanding borough property.



The period from the early 1900s up until World War II was one of enormous growth for Penn State's College of Engineering. During at least some of the period, three-fourths of all students were in the engineering curriculum. This strong emphasis, particularly in architectural engineering, influenced the contributions made to State College's built environment. Faculty members, such as Leland Rhodes, had the necessary skills to specify details; others drew up original plans. In some cases “a desire to have some particular widget built in” caused them to take on the project.

17 534 West Fairmount

Engineering Professor Earl Stavely, associate dean of the college, appears to have chosen a pattern-book house, in 1925, offered by the J.D. Loizeaux Co. of Plainfield, New Jersey. Along with the full-width shed dormer and Georgian-style entrance porch common to the Dutch Colonial style, *The Cuthbert* has a high, steeply flared roof, rather than a more typical gambrel design. The Stavely

home was built at the very edge of developing State College, with farmlands to the south.

18 520 West Fairmount

A few years later, another neighbor, A. Harris Forbes, modified a *Good Housekeeping* plan. He incorporated several electrical “innovations”, including an automatic garage door opener he fashioned out of lawn-mower parts, using his skills as a professor of electrical engineering.

19 510 West Fairmount

H.F. Kistler became the first engineering faculty member to select the 500 block of Fairmount Avenue for his family home when, in 1922, he chose a two-story brick in the Colonial Revival style. Several of its features — a gable roof, one-story side wing, double and triple sets of windows, centrally placed entrance — are common to this style and are found in many other older borough houses.

20 500 West Fairmount

William Kennedy was a general contractor responsible for several fine borough homes, including this one. The McClure Home Building Service of New York, in announcing the arrival of their New York sales manager in a 1923 issue of the *State College Times*, listed Kennedy as, “the well-known architect and builder of State College.”

His father and his son also were involved in the architectural development of State College. Tom Kennedy was a contractor who built the Fraser Street School in 1897 and served as the first school board president. Son Dean designed several borough homes in the 1930s and 1940s.

In addition to the William Kennedy designed house at 500 West Fairmount, examples by three mail-order companies are located at this corner of West Fairmount and South Barnard.

21 501 West Fairmount

In about 1920, these property owners selected “A Beautiful Suburban Home,” Gordon-Van Tine Home No. 536. The catalog description of this Prairie-style house with its low-hipped roof and wide-eave overhang, offered, “The simplicity of good taste, the charm of fine



design, a ‘show place’ in fine residence districts in scores of cities.” Gordon-Van Tine president E.C. Roberts selected a stuccoed version for his own home in Davenport, Iowa. (This model also was built at 229 West Foster and 343 East Prospect.)

22 441 West Fairmount

The *Plaza*, from the Aladdin Co., is the style name for this corner mail-order property. With its exposed roof beams and rafters, and square wooden roof supports on stone pillars, it provides a good example of a Craftsman home. E.L. Brittingham,



“The Aladdin Man,” while staying at the nearby Bellefonte YMCA, advertised in the *State College Times* that Aladdin Ready-Cut Houses “can be built cheaper...[with] first-class materials...at half the cost of buildings put up by the usual method.”

23 444 West Fairmount

Another Sear’s *Ellison*. Both it and its *Ellison* neighbor at 704 West Fairmount have had some modifications and additions over the years, but the similarities are still evident.

24 432 West Fairmount

A Sears plan, *The New Haven*, was selected by the Henry Hammond family. The catalog described it as “an attractive home that speaks for itself...its beauty will last for years to come.” Hammond Building on campus is named for this former Dean of the College of Engineering.

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25 424 West Fairmount

The oldest house in the Holmes-Foster neighborhood, this property is believed to date from the 1860s. It was built long before the street was laid out and sits slightly askew in a line parallel to the Tussey Mountain ridge rather than Fairmount Avenue. It once had a large barn located behind it and was known to early neighborhood residents as “the old farmhouse.” Its current owners have recently enlarged it with a carefully designed addition to the left of the façade, reflecting the property’s historic character.

Three of several houses along South Atherton Street that are of particular note:

E 400 South Atherton

Auto dealer C.E. Snyder and family built a fine example of a Prairie-style bungalow for their home in the early 1920s. The large stone house has a handsome red tiled roof that extends out and over an inviting front porch. It reflects the architectural influences of Frank Lloyd Wright and other mid-western architects who were attempting to define an American residential style rather than one based on earlier European precedents.



26 518 South Atherton



This Prairie-style Four-Square was the home of engineering professor C.E. Govier and his wife, Helen Atherton Govier. She was the daughter of Penn State’s seventh president, George Washington Atherton (1882–1906).

27 524 South Atherton

The International style found favor with some State College homeowners and builders. This 1939 triplex with its simple lines and lack of ornamentation provides a good example of the newly emerging architectural tastes of the 1930s.

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28 Community Field

The field just down the hill from Fairmount Avenue, was acquired in 1937 by the State College School District to be used as a practice field, and through a WPA project, a baseball field and tennis courts were developed. Earlier, the Bellefonte Central Railroad freight service carried stone from the Hamilton Avenue quarry through the lower section of the park.

The 500 block of West Nittany offers some excellent examples of early 20th century architectural favorites.

29 500 West Nittany

In 1917, builder William H. Homan constructed a carefully detailed, low-pitched Craftsman Bungalow for his family. It is representative of the American craftsman style — one that reflected a desire for “an honest structure” built with “honest materials” — in this case, exposed rafters, beams, and over hanging eaves in building materials of cobblestones and shingles.



30 512 West Nittany

Architectural engineering professor P. Boyd Kapp chose the Spanish Revival style and faced it in stucco for his own home and office, built in 1929. A central tower and balcony were some of the features used by Kapp to make a modern link with the architecture of the past.



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31 519 West Nittany

Kapp joined forces with partner Henley Eden, also a Penn State architectural engineering graduate, to design this fine example of an English Tudor for State College businessman W.B. Keeler in 1926.



32 529 West Nittany

Clarence Bauchspies was the architect for this three-bay Georgian Revival house built in 1935. Like its neighbor, it was faced in stone. An outstanding feature of this property is its original copper roof.



33 526 West Nittany

The copper roof on this Colonial Revival is new, but it was installed by Amish builders using traditional construction methods of the past.

The availability of local stone and good masons resulted in the use of stone throughout the Borough. Stone Valley, Sand Mountain near Bear Meadows, and a quarry behind the Hamilton Avenue Shopping Center were some of the sources.

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34 400 South Gill

In 1921, William and Mary Fye chose a stone and stucco combination for their large home at the corner of Gill and Nittany. This property, built over a period of two to three years, also includes a “gar-low” — a living unit that combined a garage and a bungalow.

35 332 South Gill

Local businessman John Laird Holmes and his family had this property built about 1925. Holmes was actively involved in the development of State College through real estate, as president of the savings and loan company, and as a bank director. Nearby Holmes-Foster Park bears his name.

36 301 South Gill

The family home of merchant J. Howard Musser, this handsome variation in the Colonial Revival style and also in stone, was built in 1923. Musser’s son, H. Clay Musser, was the first executive secretary of the American Philatelic Society. He was responsible for making State College the permanent home of this largest organization of stamp collectors in the nation.

37 200 block, South Gill (west side)

In 1920–21, the newly organized State College Chamber of Commerce determined that since “a very large number of small families were living in inadequate quarters in the larger student rooming houses,” the most pressing need was for small houses of five to six rooms. The State College Community Housing Association formed to build and sell homes without profit — their cost based on the actual cost of construction.

By the end of 1921, these ten South Gill Street homes had been completed by builder Park Homan,



based on plans designed by a New Jersey architect, N. Montgomery Woods, and advertised in *House Beautiful*. Four styles, with similar floor plans, were used — some with gabled ends facing the street and others turned to have the roof line run parallel to the street. Their total cost was \$54,750 for all ten, less than \$6,000 each. Modest down payments and good terms made them immediately popular with young faculty and staff families.

F **Orlando Apartment**

This 4-story “state-of-the-art” apartment at 221 South Barnard was built in 1930 by State College businessman and contractor O.(Orlando)W. Houts. This mansard-roofed building, with its sunrooms and fireplaces, is still a well-maintained and popular housing choice.



38 **440 West Beaver**

A favorite State College style, *The Lynnhaven*, was described in the Sears catalog as a “cheerful, well-proportioned residence with deep set door and flower boxes.”

Other examples can be found at 251 South Barnard and in both the Highlands and College Heights neighborhoods.



For additional information:

Houses By Mail

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The Holmes-Foster Historic Neighborhood brochure has been developed by the Historic Resources Commission, Borough of State College.

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Sears, Roebuck Catalog of Houses, 1926 and *117 House Designs of the Twenties* published by The Athenaeum of Philadelphia and Dover Publications, Inc.

