

Marktown: a breath of fresh air amid the mills

When the Calumet Region of Indiana experienced an industrial and manufacturing boom during World War I, housing for workers was in short supply in the area. Industrialist Clayton Mark figured this plan into his plans when he expanded his Chicago-based Mark Manufacturing Company by erecting a steel mill in East Chicago in 1914.

In order to fill the need for housing and shopping facilities for his employees, Mark commissioned architect Howard Van Doren Shaw to design a model town. The result is Marktown, an area now listed as a historic district in the National Register of Historic Places.

Not many architects win the challenging opportunity of designing an entire town, and the result of Shaw's efforts inevitably expresses his views of industry and the technological advancements of the day. In contrast to his contemporaries Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright, Shaw had no interest in creating an architecture which would express the realities of twentieth-century life. Instead, his design for Marktown represents a retreat to another country and another time. He attempted to create a gracious English country village in the rising shadow of East Chicago's steel mills.

Before completing the Mark assignment Shaw studied European worker enclaves, and a strong European feeling prevails in Marktown. The architect designed houses in five basic building types, all in the Tudor Revival style.

Shaw's worker houses included six-room single cottages; four, six and seven-room duplex; and four and five-room quadruple houses. The seven-room duplex was intended to serve as a boarding house for

six to twelve workers on the second floor with the host family residing on the first floor. The architect achieved variety in the designs by alternating between hip roofs and gable roofs, and by variously orienting the gable ends.

The original plans for Marktown had everything a small country village might need: houses, stores, schools, a market square, a garage complex, boarding houses, and even natural elements. However, "industrial expansion has eliminated the fields, forests and lake that once surrounded the community," according to Marktown resident Paul A. Myers, who has spent years enthusiastically researching his community's history and Shaw's body of work.

"Because Clayton Mark sold his Indiana holdings in 1923, the plans for

Marktown were not fully realized," Myers explains. "While only ten percent of the plans were executed, 100% of what was built still exists today -- 100 buildings containing 200 housing units and 3 commercial buildings."

The units have been privately owned since 1942. Perhaps their longevity is the best testament to the continuing validity of Shaw's 1914 instincts about what makes a place truly liveable.

(continued on next page - reprinted with permission)



Hoosier oeuvre

Chicago architect Howard Van Doren Shaw (1869-1926), designer of Marktown, is particularly known for the imposing mansions he created for Midwestern industrialists and businessmen. The largest extant collection of his work may be found in Lake Forest, Illinois, a north shore suburb of Chicago.

Shaw's work in Indiana is not limited to Marktown, however. His 1912 design for the Fairbanks Mansion at 20th and Meridian Streets in Indianapolis strongly resembles the larger Lake Forest home he built for Clayton Mark in 1913. The home of Charles Warren Fairbanks, U.S. Vice President from 1905-1909, is now the headquarters for the Indianapolis Life Insurance Co., a corporate member of Historic Landmarks.

According to Marktown resident Paul Myers, other fine Indiana examples of Shaw's work include: Houseman Residence (1908), 3148 North Pennsylvania Street in Indianapolis; Schaffer Residence (1920) and Borely Residence (1926) at 1237 and 1329 East Jefferson Boulevard respectively in South Bend; Bell Plain Residence (1922), 7109 Knickerbocker in Hammond.

▼ Unlike some of his innovative contemporaries, Shaw preferred quieter, more traditional designs. His fundamental conservatism is reflected in houses such as the Fairbanks Mansion in Indianapolis, which he created for U.S. Vice President Charles Warren Fairbanks in 1912



Houseman Estate - Indianapolis, Indiana



Schaffer Estate - South Bend, Indiana



Del Plain Residence - Hammond, Indiana



Erskine Estate - South Bend, Indiana



The view from Cline Avenue Bridge in northern Lake County affords a feast for the eyes of those who recognize the importance of the Calumet Region's industrial heritage. Steel mills and oil refineries dominate the vistas, but nestled amidst the mighty expanse of industry is the fragile, almost precious, residential community of Marktown

Marktown is the partially realized vision of Chicago industrialist Clayton Mark, whose goal was to provide a humane and progressive quality of life for employees of the adjacent steel plant operated by the Mark Manufacturing Company. Mark hired prominent Chicago-based architect Howard Van Doren Shaw to design housing and public buildings for what was intended to be a largely self-contained community.

A fraction of Shaw's design for Marktown was completed in 1917, but World War I and the sale of steel plant to Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company in 1923 effectively curtailed the realization of Mark's vision. Even so, the community survived and continues to exhibit both tenacity and charm through its narrow streets (so narrow that cars are parked on the sidewalks), its open spaces, and the extraordinary stucco-sheathing and



multi-gabled homes which Shaw adapted from rural English and Arts and Crafts dwellings.

Visiting Marktown today, one feels a sense of disappointment that the full extent of Shaw's design for the community was never reached. And, although time has not been kind to all of the historic buildings in Marktown, all of the buildings dating from 1917 have survived, offering terrific opportunities for today's preservationists.

---- Written and photographed by Marsh Davis
Director of Community Services, State Headquarters.



Industrial legacy survives in historic company town

Jim Guelcher, Director, Calumet Region Office

Today, the idea of living in a house owned by your company, sending your children to a school built by your company, and shopping in a store run by your company seems unimaginable, if not a bit sinister. But a mere 100 years ago, several company towns existed on Chicago's south side and in northwest Indiana. There, your co-workers were also your neighbors, your employer was also your landlord, and the codes of conduct enforced at work might also apply at home.

A remarkably preserved remnant of this time remains in the form of Marktown, a company town built in 1917 in East Chicago, Indiana.

Chicago industrialist Clayton Mark Sr., owner of Mark Manufacturing, saw the need for employee housing when he built a steel plant in a largely underdeveloped area of northwest Indiana. He hired Howard Van Doren Shaw, a well-

known architect of both residential and commercial structures. Shaw had established a reputation building stately and elegant homes for wealthy clients in Chicago's northern suburbs, and he carried many of the same architectural styles over into the much smaller workers' homes, shops, and community centers of Marktown.

Marktown's original plan called for housing for 8,000 employees as well as a grade school, high school, post office, theater, and large park that would buffer the residential enclave from surrounding industries. America's entry into World War I prevented the full realization of the plan, but four of the 32 planned sections were completed. These included three commercial buildings, three supervisor homes, and 97 stucco

Marktown's narrow roads and graceful structures situated close together evoke the aesthetic of an English village despite the hulking steel mills and other signs of heavy industrialization that surround it. For more information, contact Paul Myers, president of the Marktown Preservation Society, 219-397-2239.

structures divided into single, duplex, and quadruple family homes.

Although, Marktown comprises nearly 200 units in five floor plans and 11 different exterior designs, creating a vibrant and varied streetscape. Shaw designed the community on an intimate scale virtually nonexistent in modern neighborhood design, where homes turn inward and focus on the desires of their occupants. Marktown's homes facilitated external communication and contact, creating a compact and vibrant mixed-use community.

Remarkably preserved -- all the buildings erected in 1917 survive -- Marktown entered the National Register of Historic Places in 1975, but it faces significant challenges. Mark Manufacturing sold Marktown to Youngstown Sheet & Tube CO. in 1923, which divested itself of the neighborhood in the midst of World War II, giving tenants the option to buy the homes they rented. Then, beginning in the 1970s, many area steel mills closed or downsized, causing an economic downturn in the Calumet Region. No longer a company town, many of Marktown's homes need

repair. Stucco is cracking and falling off in some places, and many houses need a level of reinvestment that residents cannot afford. But for now at least, Marktown sits just as it was built, a rare example of American social and architectural History.



Photo courtesy of the Howard Van Doren Shaw Society

Some industrialists built company towns out of a desire to create ideal communities, where they hoped physically clean living conditions would yield morally clean --- and productive --- workers. In the 1920s, Marktown was a model of neatness and architectural harmony.

It's **REMARKABLE** Marktown was already a surprising place -- an English-style village of 218 homes designed in 1917 by Chicago architect Howard Van Doren Shaw in East Chicago. A recent project made the noteworthy area even more distinctive. World Changers, a youth ministry sponsored by the Southern Baptist Convention, enlisted high school students from across the nation to work with residents in painting 10 of the 22 homes on Prospect street. Impressed by the transfor-

mation, the East Chicago Redevelopment Commission pledged \$16,000 for the restoration of the English garden wall fences and streetside gardens, with labor supplied by the residents. Like all Marktown streets, Prospect is a narrow lane where cars park on the sidewalk and people walk in the street. This old-world convention helps make Marktown a time- and place-bending oasis in the shadow of East Chicago's steel mills and oil refineries.

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410-412 Prospect Street - A Work In Progress



402-402 Prospect Street - A World Changers Project



New fence and garden installed at 402 Prospect Street.



New fence and garden installed at 404-406 Prospect Street.

The two bottom photos were taken in the Spring of 2005 before the World Changers paint project. This is the style of fence and gardens that will be installed on Prospect Street in 2006.

Photographs by Marsh Davis

Text by Bill Shaw



99
HISTORIC
HOMES
OF *Indiana* A Look Inside

Paul Myers

City: EAST CHICAGO

County: LAKE

Date of Construction: 1917

Architect: HOWARD VAN DOREN SHAW

Architectural Style: ARTS AND CRAFTS

LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES, Marktown Historic District

Growing up in the Marktown section of East Chicago, Paul Myers thought snow was supposed to be pink. Marktown snow was tinted pink by iron oxide spewing from the towering smokestacks of the massive steel mills that surround the tiny community like canyon walls.

When Lake Michigan froze solid from one end to the other, the Indiana Harbor Ship Canal, which borders Marktown, never froze. Pollution control devices have since stopped the pink snow, but the canal still steams and never freezes and the mighty blast furnaces roar twenty-four hours a day.

“I love it. I know everyone in every house,” says Paul of this unique forty-acre enclave built in 1917 to resemble an English Tudor village. Nearly a hundred buildings --- small single-family homes and duplexes --- were designed by noted architect Howard Van Doren Shaw, who was hired by industrialist Clayton Mark to build housing for his Lake County steel-plant workers. It’s the old company town concept, but with an emphasis on tasteful housing in a humane environment.

The narrow street require that the cars park on the sidewalks and the people walk in the streets. There is





nothing else like it in Indiana, or possibly even the country: a tiny residential island dwarfed and isolated by one of the densest industrial complexes in the world.

“I couldn’t live anywhere else,” says Paul, whose great-great-grandfather, a steelworker, lived in one of the first homes built in Marktown. Each succeeding generation of his family has also lived in Marktown and worked in the steel mills. Paul worked in the mill after graduating from Purdue University Calumet in 1976 and is now a business manager for a Chicago industrial design company.

In 1976 he bought home one-thousand-square-foot Marktown duplex, which he has decorated with Japanese calligraphy, antique swords, and a bust of architect Howard Van Doren Shaw. Paul is director of the Howard Van Doren Shaw Society, an organization dedicated to preserving his architecture, which includes a few Indianapolis homes and the famed Quadrangle Club at the University of Chicago.

Paul is a delightful character, an energetic eccentric who works tirelessly to preserve, protect, and promote his beloved Marktown. He knows every resident by name, their family, their dogs and cats, the troubles and triumphs.

“I could live in a nicer place and never help anyone but myself,” says Paul, who patrols the streets, notes broken street lamps, potholes, junk cars, uncollected

garbage, and other problems and notifies the East Chicago authorities.

It is a blue-collar, low-income community where small homes and duplexes sell in the \$12,000 to \$15,000 range. The location tends to depress prices. There are about a hundred homes and no businesses within the sixteen-square-block island known at the Marktown Historic District.

“It takes a certain kind of person to live here,” says the irrepressible Paul. “My family’s always been here,” he notes proudly. “I still see the potential.”

Web Note: *99 Historic Homes of Indiana: A Look Inside* was photographed by Marsh Davis with the text written by Bill Shaw. The book was more about the people that save historic homes than the homes themselves.

