

In December 1980, the Montford Historic District was designated a local historic district by the Asheville City Council, indicating public recognition of the area's historic character and implying confidence in the future of the area. The Montford Historic District is a sprawling and irregularly shaped late nineteenth and early twentieth-century residential neighborhood developed by the Asheville Loan, Construction, and Improvement Company, chartered in 1889. Only a few contemporary houses have intruded in recent years, leaving a large homogeneous neighborhood.

Most of the district is heavily wooded and draped over an irregular saddle of land from one thousand to two thousand feet wide. It drops gently northwest from Battery Park Hill about a mile to a small promontory that marks the vicinity of the original suburban village of Montford. The Montford development lies roughly along a low ridge, which extends from downtown to the northeast. Riverside Cemetery, where Thomas Wolfe is buried, is within the Montford Historic District.

The vast majority of the 646 buildings in the district are domestic, but there is a remarkable range of sizes, shapes, and styles that gives the neighborhood its varied and lively character. Weatherboarding and German siding abound, but the important recurrent materials are wood shingles (natural or painted), rubble masonry, stucco, and pebbledash (a type of rough stucco). There are about a dozen brick houses scattered throughout. On more than half of the exteriors the builders have combined at least two materials, of which wood shingles, is usually one.

The Montford area houses of any pretension are blends of Queen Anne, shingle, bungalow, half-timbered, and especially the Colonial Revival styles. Though not trendsetters or pioneers, many of the houses are relatively sophisticated combinations of picturesque natural materials, eclectic styles, period motifs, and modern details.

Artistic influences at work in Asheville not present to the same degree in other parts of the state exist in Montford houses to varying extents. For example, details can be found from the architecture of Richard Sharp Smith, Bruce Price, Bernard Maybeck, and Frank Lloyd Wright. Though they are far from being alike, the recurrence of many of the motifs throughout the district weaves a fabric of neighborhood tradition that was picked up in the work of other architects and builders.

The houses designed by Asheville architect Richard Sharp Smith (1852-1924) early in the development of the neighborhood are among the most substantial buildings and the most stylistically influential in the neighborhood. Smith, best known as the supervising architect of George Vanderbilt's palatial Biltmore House, worked with various motifs drawn from different styles rather than the styles themselves. Among his favorite motifs were gambrel roofs, hipped gables, heavy porch brackets, pebbledash or stuccoed walls, shingles, stone

foundations, nine or twelve-over-one sash, bay windows, steeply pitched roofs, half timbering motifs, and simple Colonial Revival detail. Though only 45 are documented as his, numerous others can easily be attributed to him on stylistic grounds. R. S. Smith and his partner Albert Heath Carrier, of Smith and Carrier Architects, were surely the most preeminent firm in town at the time.

The Pack Memorial Library has a thorough Smith Collection of over 3000 drawings and plans for Montford homes, Biltmore Village, churches, institutions and resorts.