

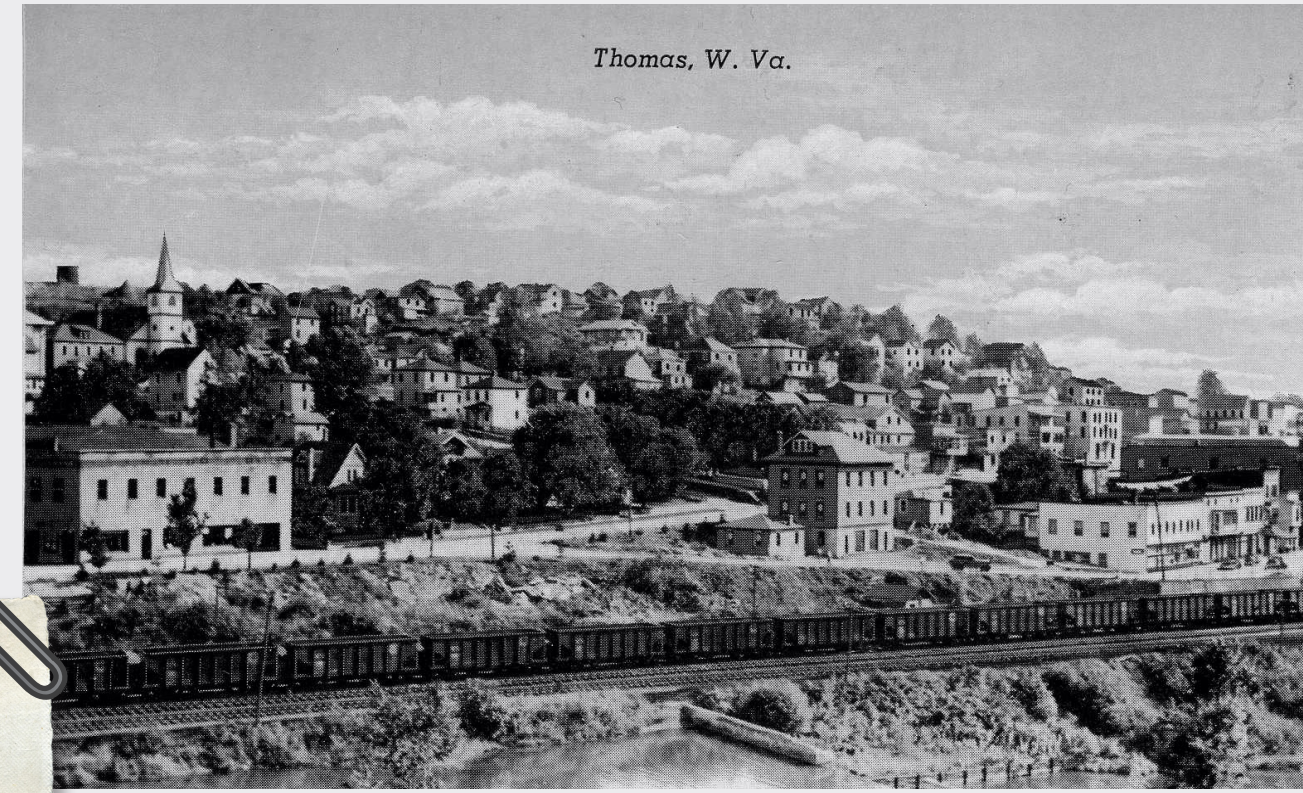
# DWELLINGS AND DESIGN

## THOMAS, WEST VIRGINIA

### Residential Architecture in Thomas

MODERN SOCIETY places value on home ownership, especially a house with land. However, families that moved from Europe or large cities such as New York in the early 20th century were not necessarily accustomed to single-family houses or large yards. In Thomas, many preferred apartment life, conveniently located right above their businesses and close to all the amenities that East Avenue had to offer. The families living in the Benedetto Building (No. 4), the DiBacco Building (No. 3) and others formed a tight-knit community and shared a common rear yard where the women washed clothes and children played together. In the days before automobile travel and improved roads, it made little sense to live any farther than necessary from the railroad depot, shops and doctors in town.

In the rapidly changing early years of the 20th century, industrialization created both more wealth for a growing middle class and a concern about the health of city life. These factors and others led to rise of the suburb and single-family homes. Soon home ownership became the American Dream. The transition between higher density apartment homes and lower-density houses is readily seen by simply looking uphill in Thomas. East Avenue contains one house (No. 14) and one duplex (No. 16). Both these houses are influenced by the Gothic Revival style that was popular beginning around 1850. Over half of the buildings located on Spruce Street today are single-family homes and generally reflect styles popular in the early 1900s such as Craftsman (No. 31) and American Foursquare (Nos. 26, 29 and 30). The streets above Spruce are almost exclusively filled with houses. Thomas's domestic architecture is a timeline of changing American values and architectural trends.



This view of Thomas shows the progression of building types from the commercial structures on East Avenue (including Tour Nos. 38, 39, 40, 41 and 1) at lower right to single-family detached homes on Spruce Street and up the hill. The Milkint Garage (No. 33) and houses No. 31 and No. 32 appear at left. (Courtesy Joseph Sagace)



The metal balconies of the DiBacco (No. 3, center left) and Benedetto (No. 4, center right) buildings evoke the street-centered life of urban Europe. Apartment living, convenient to work, shopping and entertainment, was common in Thomas. (Courtesy Joseph Sagace)

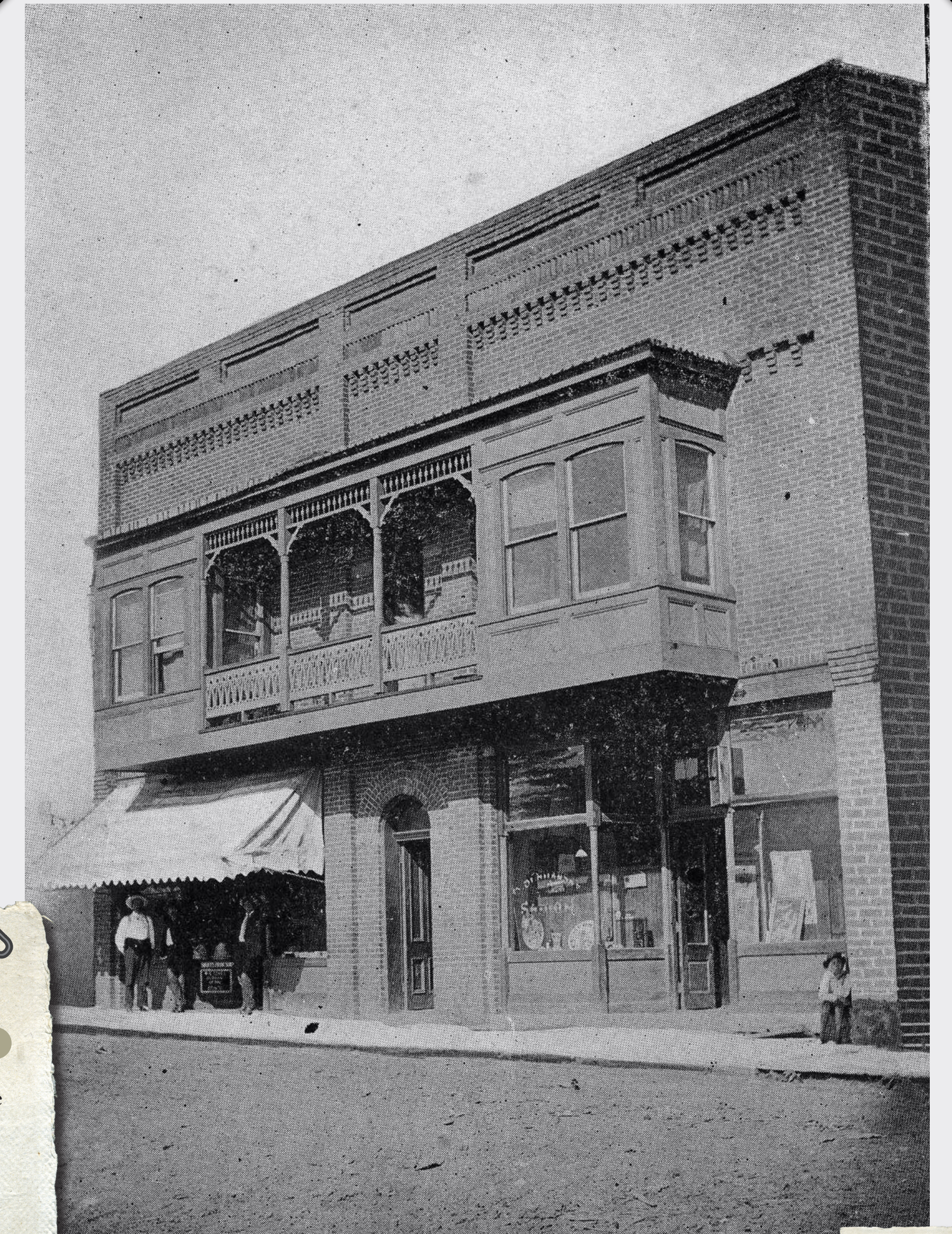


Mrs. James T. Daughenbaugh's home (Tour No. 24) is of the folk Victorian/Queen Anne style, as typified by its end-gabled roof orientation, steeply-pitched roof with carved detail at the peak and spindlework porch. (Source: Thomas WV 1906 by T. Nutter, Courtesy Miners and Merchants Bank)

### Choices in Housing

Two of the original Jewish families to settle in Thomas demonstrate two different approaches to residential architecture. Barney Schilansky immigrated from Russia to New York in the 1870 with his wife Sarah. He traveled throughout the Southeastern United States selling goods as a pack peddler and after visiting Thomas, decided it was a promising place to move his wife and daughter Celia. They arrived in 1886 and Barney continued door-to-door peddling until he had saved enough to build a general store. Sarah's sister Annie and her husband Victor Rubenstein, who had met in New York in the 1870s, joined the Schilanskys in Thomas in 1894, and the two families formed a close-knit association. Barney's daughter Celia married Victor's son Ruby and the two families operated various businesses including meat markets, grocery stores and clothing shops. The Schilansky-Rubenstein Building (No. 6) housed both families in two large apartments, as large as any single-family house. The home became the center of the Jewish community in Thomas, hosting weddings, worship and holy day observances.

The Schatz brothers, George and Harry, also arrived as peddlers in 1886 and were later joined by their brother Isaac. The 1909 Schatz home on Spruce Street (No. 28) is one of the largest houses in the historic district. The style of the house is folk Victorian, with a cross-gabled roof, large wraparound porch and fine interior woodwork. Though the Schilansky/Rubenstein and Schatz families had much in common and undoubtedly were well-acquainted, they each chose different building types to house their families.



The Schilansky-Rubenstein building (Tour No. 6) shows Romanesque influences in its central arched doorway and strong castle-like brick cornice. (Source: Thomas WV 1906 by T. Nutter, Courtesy Miners and Merchants Bank)

