

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

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**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Architecture of John Watkins Thematic Resources

and or common

**2. Location**

street & number See individual structure/site forms not for publication

city, town vicinity of

state Utah code 049 county Utah and Wasatch code 049, 051

**3. Classification**

|   |   |   |  |   |
|---|---|---|--|---|
| <b>Category</b>                                 | <b>Ownership</b>                            | <b>Status</b>                                       | <b>Present Use</b>                     |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> district               | <input type="checkbox"/> public             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied        | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture   | <input type="checkbox"/> museum                       |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private | <input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied                 | <input type="checkbox"/> commercial    | <input type="checkbox"/> park                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> structure              | <input type="checkbox"/> both               | <input type="checkbox"/> work in progress           | <input type="checkbox"/> educational   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> site                   | <b>Public Acquisition</b>                   | <b>Accessible</b>                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> entertainment | <input type="checkbox"/> religious                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> object                 | N/A <input type="checkbox"/> in process     | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted | <input type="checkbox"/> government    | <input type="checkbox"/> scientific                   |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> being considered   | <input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted          | <input type="checkbox"/> industrial    | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation               |
|   |   | <input type="checkbox"/> no                         | <input type="checkbox"/> military      | <input type="checkbox"/> other:                       |

**4. Owner of Property**

name See individual structure/site forms

street & number

city, town vicinity of state

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Utah County Courthouse; Wasatch County Courthouse

street & number Center Street and University Avenue; 25 North Main

city, town Provo; Heber City state Utah

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Midway Block Survey; Provo Survey has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1983; 1980  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Utah State Historical Society

city, town Salt Lake City state Utah

## 7. Description

See individual structure/site forms for more detailed information

| Condition                                |                                       | Check one                                   | Check one   |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> excellent       | <input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated | <input type="checkbox"/> unaltered          | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good | <input type="checkbox"/> ruins        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered | <input type="checkbox"/> moved      date _____    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fair            | <input type="checkbox"/> unexposed    |   |   |

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

There are seven houses in the John Watkins Thematic Resource nomination. All were designed and built by John Watkins in the years between 1867 and 1880.

Two

-- Watkins' principal dwelling (known locally as the Watkins-Coleman house in reference to its two principal owners) and the house he constructed for his friend, Harvey Cluff, have previously been listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Watkins-Coleman house was listed in 1971 and the Cluff house in 1983. Six of the houses are located in Midway, Wasatch County, and one, the Cluff house, is in nearby Provo, Utah County.

Of the seven houses contained in this nomination, six are fine Utah examples of the Gothic Revival architectural style. Picturesque designs were popular in both England and America during the mid-nineteenth century and surfaced in Utah principally during the 1870s. Gothic Revival buildings are found today throughout the state, although rarely in the numbers and quality that they occur in Midway. The town of Willard in Box Elder County and Salt Lake City itself are Midway's only rivals for such picturesque buildings. The six Gothic Revival houses are the Watkins-Coleman house (1869), the George Bonner, Sr., house (1876), the William Bonner house (1877), the George Bonner, Jr., house (1877), the William Coleman house (1879), and the Harvey Cluff house (1877). Detailed descriptions and floorplan drawings for each of these houses are provided in the accompanying individual site forms.

The six Gothic Revival houses are all variants of the cross-wing vernacular house type. The cross-wing form is characterized by a forward projecting wing intersected by a perpendicular side wing in either an L- or T- arrangement. Representing a revival of an earlier Medieval English house form, the cross-wing was prominently displayed in the architectural literature of the 1840s and the 1850s and is commonly found in both England and America during the mid-nineteenth century. Watkins' houses represent three major variants of the basic cross-wing type: the basic cross-wing itself, consisting of the forward projecting wing flanked by a single side wing; the cruciform cross-wing, having wings to either side of the central projecting wing; and the double cross-wing, a house that has an extra front facing wing placed at the end of the side, or in this case, connecting, wing. The George Bonner, Jr., the William Bonner, and the William Coleman houses represent the basic cross-wing form, the George Bonner, Sr., and Harvey Cluff houses are examples of the cruciform cross-wing subtype, and the Watkins-Coleman house represents the double cross-wing form.

In addition to Gothic Revival cross-wing houses, John Watkins also built other kinds of dwellings in both Provo and Midway. Most were smaller 1 or 1 1/2 story two-room houses of the ubiquitous hall-parlor type. Such houses are found in sizeable quantities throughout Utah and undoubtedly constituted the greatest part of any nineteenth-century builder's output. Several Midway hall-parlor houses have been attributed to Watkins, yet further research will be needed to make a positive identification. When and if such information becomes available, the houses will be appended to this nomination.

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Utah builders generally followed national trends in architecture and while particular local conditions certainly contributed to the creation of a distinctive regional architecture, for the most part Utah and Mormon domestic buildings remain in their style and form typical of the country as whole. For one group of buildings, however, this is not true. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints practiced polygamy -- the taking of one or more wives by a husband -- during the entire period of Utah's settlement and growth. Before it was officially disavowed in 1890, polygamy was practiced by a percentage of Mormon men ranging from 10 to 50 percent, depending on the community. Most plural wives were housed separately, but in some instances all lived under the same roof. In cases of cohabitation, builders were confronted with the basic design problem of having to create living spaces that treated each wife equally. Clearly many early Utah builders struggled with this problem, yet to date their solutions remain little understood. One visible example is John Watkins' first house in Midway, built for his three wives, Harriet, Mary Ann, and Margaret. Under a long low-pitched gable roof Watkins placed three roughly equal-sized rooms, each opening out upon an indented entrance porch, thereby giving each wife direct access into her apartment. The house has been remodeled and the porch closed up, but the plan remains basically intact and contributes significantly to the broader understanding of Utah's early architectural and social history.

The seven houses included in the Architecture of John Watkins Thematic Resource nomination are listed below.

1. John and Margaret Watkins House  
22 W. 100 South  
Midway, Utah
2. George Bonner, Sr., House  
103 E. Main  
Midway, Utah
3. George Bonner, Jr., House  
110 E. Main  
Midway, Utah
4. William Bonner House  
90 E. Main  
Midway, Utah
5. William Coleman House  
188 N. Center  
Midway, Utah
6. Watkins-Coleman House      Listed in the National Register 1971  
5 E. Main  
Midway, Utah

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7. Harvey Cluff House                      Listed in the National Register 1983  
174 N. 100 East  
Provo, Utah

## 8. Significance

| Period  | Areas of Significance—Check and justify below    |   |   |  |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric          | <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric  | <input type="checkbox"/> community planning     | <input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> religion                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499            | <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic     | <input type="checkbox"/> conservation           | <input type="checkbox"/> law                    | <input type="checkbox"/> science                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599            | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> economics              | <input type="checkbox"/> literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> sculpture               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> education              | <input type="checkbox"/> military               | <input type="checkbox"/> social/<br>humanitarian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799            | <input type="checkbox"/> art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> engineering            | <input type="checkbox"/> music                  | <input type="checkbox"/> theater                 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899 | <input type="checkbox"/> commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement | <input type="checkbox"/> philosophy             | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1900-                | <input type="checkbox"/> communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> industry               | <input type="checkbox"/> politics/government    | <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)         |
|   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> invention              |   |  |

Specific dates 1867-1879

Builder/Architect John Watkins

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The seven houses contained in the ARCHITECTURE OF JOHN WATKINS THEMATIC RESOURCE NOMINATION were designed and built by John Watkins, an accomplished early Utah builder. Located in Provo, Utah County, and Midway, Wasatch County, these houses are primarily significant under Criteria C for their association with John Watkins, whose work effectively illustrates the dynamic role the professional builder played in shaping Utah's early architectural landscape. While it has been customary for historians to explain Utah architecture from the time of first settlement in 1847 up to about 1890 as the simple extension of eastern folk styles or the replication of popular pattern-book designs, John Watkins' houses suggest a more generous appraisal. Slave to neither tradition nor pattern-book, Watkins found useful ideas in both, ideas that formed the basis of essentially new if nevertheless familiar designs. From two-room cottages to elaborate Gothic Revival houses to houses intended for multi-family polygamous living, Watkins drew upon his broad building experience to create, not copies of other houses, but new ones designed to meet his client's functional, aesthetic, and symbolic needs. Although builders were found in virtually every nineteenth-century Utah community, there are few whose work can be so specifically identified, thus allowing Watkins and his houses to become the best available sources for documenting this important facet of Utah's architectural history. It should be noted that two of the seven houses included in this thematic nomination, the Watkins-Coleman and Harvey Cluff houses, have already been listed in the National Register.

During the decade after 1868, John Watkins, an English immigrant convert to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, designed and built several Gothic Revival houses in the towns of Midway in Wasatch County and Provo in Utah County. These houses are generally considered among Utah's finest historic buildings, yet beyond the fact that they are fine examples of the Gothic Revival style little is known of them or their builder.<sup>1</sup> Recent research, however, shows that John Watkins not only built Gothic Revival houses but other kinds as well, and by including in this thematic nomination all of the well preserved examples of his work, it is possible to demonstrate the dimensions of his talent and to document a largely unstudied but nevertheless important facet of early Utah architecture, namely the role of the professional builder. Like all architects, Watkins' task was to construct houses appropriate to the needs, desires, and pocketbooks of his client-neighbors. He succeeded in this work by drawing upon a range of designs drawn from both his experience with older traditional building practices and his knowledge of contemporary fashion. The result was a great diversity of actual houses. Some were small and typical of folk housing forms found through the state. Others were folk house types dressed in fashionable

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garb. And finally, there were the large Gothic Revival houses, houses as fancy and up-to-date as any in the capital city of Salt Lake City. The John Watkins houses are historically important, for not only do they provide a rare opportunity to document the work of a single builder, but they also shed light on the nature architectural design itself in early Utah.

The last two decades have witnessed sweeping changes in the study of American architectural history. While once narrowly focused upon a small number of architect designed buildings, the scope of architectural history has in recent years been expanded to include a wide range of vernacular buildings, with vernacular being defined primarily as the common buildings of a particular community or region.<sup>2</sup> At the heart of this new architectural history is the recognition that all buildings -- plain and fancy -- must be viewed from the perspective of design. Vernacular buildings, whether they be derived from folk or popular sources, are not simply copies of other buildings, but rather the result of a specific design process in which ideas, some old and some new, are constantly being redefined within the context of particular local cultural, social, aesthetic, and environmental conditions. Such designs are inherently timid and familiar formal concepts are often repeated, yet individual expression is not stifled and innovation, albeit often of a conservative nature, is possible.<sup>3</sup>

The first important breakthrough in the study of vernacular architecture came in the area of folk building, where folklorist Henry Glassie was able to show that what might outwardly appear to be simple houses were in fact the products of deep and sophisticated cognitive structures.<sup>4</sup> More recently, historians such as Catherine Bishir and Dell Upton have looked into the architecture of the nineteenth century and found the persisting use of older design systems despite the presence of an ever-increasing number of popular architectural pattern books.<sup>5</sup> In Utah, while several studies have addressed the subject of folk design, little attention has been directed toward other aspects of early building.<sup>6</sup> Most notable in this regard is the lack of detailed knowledge concerning the nature of architectural change in the 1860s and 1870s as such styles as the Gothic Revival and Italianate became popular, and an understanding of the specific part the professional builder played in such change. The prevailing notion is that such styles were introduced into the state via pattern books, and that local builders simply replicated what they saw in the books. A systematic appraisal of the work of John Watkins in the light of recent studies of vernacular design can aid in the reevaluation of this important period in Utah's architectural development.

John Watkins was born in 1834 in the town of Maidstone, Kent, England.<sup>7</sup> His father, Thomas J.E. Watkins was a house builder and it was this trade that John learned as a youth. Married in 1851 to Maraget Ackhurst and with a first child born the following year, Watkins left the family business and moved to London where he went into "building and contracting" on his own. In London he met missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Mormons, and was converted to this faith, being baptised along with his wife late in 1852. English converts to Mormonism were expected by their church

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leaders to immediately emigrate to Utah, where the faithful were being gathered in expectation of the Second Coming of Christ. Watkins initially declined the move, "having two gentleman's houses to build in Tuffnell Park, near the Caledonian Road." The call of Zion in Utah remained strong, however, and in 1856 the Watkins family embarked for America. Crossing the plains in the Edward Martin Handcart company they experienced great hardships due to a late start and early winter storms that choked the mountain passes. Many of the Saints perished before relief parties arrived to carry the survivors, the Watkins' included, to Great Salt Lake City.<sup>8</sup>

By the fall of 1856 John and Margaret Watkins had found a home in Provo, a community located about 45 miles south of the Mormon capital. Here he found his skill as architect and builder much in demand and during the first winter he helped supervise work on the LDS Tabernacle (1856-1867, demolished 1919). In late December, Watkins took a contract to build an opera house for a Provo civic leader and entrepreneur, Harvey H. Cluff. "Plans and specifications" were drafted and "Cluff's Hall" (now demolished) was completed early in the spring of 1857. The following year Watkins designed and built a large store for Andrew J. Stewart on the west end of Provo's Center Street commercial district (also demolished). In addition to his work on these large projects, Watkins also built residential architecture and local tradition labeled him the "man who could build a house in a day."<sup>9</sup> Provo was in its initial settlement phase and most people were looking to build small 1 or 1 1/2 story adobe houses. Judging from present-day surveys in Provo, most of these early houses were two-room hall-parlor dwellings, a common traditional form in both the eastern United States and England.<sup>10</sup> Watkins' early Provo residential buildings probably took the hall-parlor form, although surviving examples of his work have not been located to date.

In 1858, according to the prevailing belief and practice of the Mormon Church, John Watkins married a second wife, Harriet Steel. Harriet, a "good looking and attractive woman," moved in with John and Margaret. In the years between 1858 and 1860, Watkins constructed a new house for his two wives. While this house, located at Second South and Seventh West, is no longer standing, it is described in Mary A. Schaer's Brief History of John Watkins:

The house faced east and had two large rooms with a deep alcove in the center partition of each room for the beds. When a curtain was hung across the front of these they closed off the bed to itself or the curtains could be drawn to enlarge the rooms. The south room had a large fireplace in the south end for cooking and warmth. There was a built-in cupboard on the east of the fireplace and a built-in bookcase on the west, one window and one door facing the west and one window and one door on the east. The north room had one window in the east; on the north there was a built-in cupboard for clothes and linens and a very deep window about three feet in depth used to keep milk and butter cool (fig. 1).<sup>11</sup>

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The house was comfortable and practical and served the family well until 1863 when Watkins married a third wife, Mary Ann Sawyer. In a short time there were 3 wives and 8 children in the small house.

During the summer of 1864, John Watkins had occasion to visit the upper Provo River Valley as a band leader in the company of the LDS Church President, Brigham Young. This promising mountain valley just east of Provo had been occupied by the Mormons in 1859, with settlements established at Fort Heber and at several locations on nearby Snake Creek. Watkins found the location appealing and in 1865 he moved his growing family to Mound City, one of the Snake Creek communities. They were not to live here long, however, as their arrival was greeted by an outbreak of Indian hostilities. Displeased with the extent of Mormon intrusion into their country, the local Ute-Shoshone people rose up against the Mormon settlers in 1866. The ensuing Black Hawk War forced the Provo Valley Mormons to abandon the two Snake Creek communities and gather at a point midway between them for protection. Here, in a town appropriately called Midway, 75 log cabins were arranged fort-like around a 6 acre central enclosure. The Midway fort was maintained until the war ended in 1867. In that year the town was platted in gridiron arrangement according to Mormon custom, and a permanent village site was founded.<sup>12</sup> People immediately began moving out to their new city lots and more commodious dwellings of the local "pot rock" quickly sprang up.

John Watkins acquired two city lots. On the first lot, located one block south and east of the fort, he built a rock house for his family's immediate needs (see the John and Margaret Watkins house nomination form). Like many in town, the house was built "pot rock" and was designed specifically to accommodate his three wives' needs. Again, a description of the house is found in Schaer's Brief History of John Watkins:

Each wife had a large room with a mantle, a built-in fireplace, built-in cupboards, and deep windows. One large room ran along the north side of the house. This served as a joint kitchen and dining room for the whole family.<sup>13</sup>

While its tripartite internal arrangement was designed to facilitate life in the multi-family household, the house also had an indented front porch that allowed each wife a separate front door. It should be mentioned that in its basic plan, Watkins' first house bears strong resemblance to a distinctive three-room wide house type built in Utah by Scandinavian immigrants. This house, called for convenience a "Pair house" after the Swedish "parstuga," has three rooms arranged axially under a gable roof, and one variant of the pair house type has an indented porch.<sup>14</sup> Pair houses have been recorded in Provo and the possibility exists that they provided a useful model for Watkins' design in Midway.<sup>15</sup> An equally strong argument can be made, however, for the form growing from its function. The distinctive three-room plan could in fact be the product of Watkins' peculiar need for a three-apartment house with separate and therefore equal entrances. In any case, while the first rock house was under construction, Watkins was already making plans for a new and more fashionable brick house to go on his other city lot.

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Completed in 1869, John Watkins new house must have seemed out-of-place in the frontier community of Midway (fig. 2). Not only was it the largest house in town, but it was also quite different in its appearance. Rather than the more typical plain and box-like house associated with the prevailing classical tradition,<sup>16</sup> the new house was a veritable tangle of gables, balconies, spires, and scroll-work. In short, Watkins' had designed and built a fashionable new house for himself in the picturesque Gothic Revival mode. It was 1 1/2 stories high and had a steeply pitched roof graced by fancy wooden cresting along the ridge. Composed symmetrically of intersecting gabled wings in a H-like configuration, the house's five main gables had intricate scroll-cut bargeboards and the front porch was adorned by fancy turned and cut balusters and posts. The three-room with rear kitchen plan of the earlier rock house is again in evidence here, although a passage containing the staircase has been added. The internal arrangement again suggests the traditional pair-house form, and Watkins' interest in such houses may have influenced his thinking.<sup>17</sup> Intended use, however, also remained a factor in design for the house was to be the residence of Watkins' two younger wives, Harriet and Mary Ann (the first wife, Margaret remained in the original rock house). The symmetrical double gable facade may have been conceived as a symbolic gesture of equal treatment, visually denoting the presence of two identical internal bedroom-apartments.<sup>18</sup> Whatever Watkins' intention may have been, the house must be considered extremely fashionable for the Territory of Utah during the 1860s and one could not fail to make an impression on the local citizenry. It is not surprising that within the decade, as the town prospered and people had more money to devote to housing, Watkins received commissions to build at least five more Gothic Revival style houses, four of which would be in Midway and one in Provo.

Two of the first houses Watkins built were for his neighbor, George Bonner, and his old Provo friend, Harvey Cluff, constructed in 1876 and 1877 respectively. In designing these houses, Watkins again eschewed the self-contained geometric block and turned to the use of juxtaposed intersecting wings, this time with the principal section in the center and wings placed to either side (see the George Bonner nomination form). Watkins built two other houses in 1877 for the sons of George Bonner, George Bonner, Jr., and William Bonner, and in 1879 he built a house for William Coleman. These three houses were generally similar in appearance and had the requisite steep gables, fancy bargeboards, decorative porches, and roof cresting. They also utilized the angled, cross-wing plan, although all were generally smaller and had only one side wing (see the individual nomination forms for these houses). While primarily known for these six Gothic Revival houses, Watkins appears to have been active in other aspects of the local building trade as well.

The decade after 1870 marked a period of rapid development in Midway, and a great many brick dwellings were constructed at that time. Most of these houses were smaller 1 and 1 1/2 story two-room hall-parlor type houses and while current research has not positively identified examples of such houses built by John Watkins, many in fact display distinct similarities to his designs, particularly in the use of cut-sandstone quoins, pedimented window

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heads, and steeply pitched roofs with applied finials (fig. 3). If not actually built by him, these houses nevertheless betray his design influence in the community. Continued research in Midway may in the future reveal the full extent of Watkins' contribution to the town's architectural history and as new evidence is compiled it will be appended to this thematic nomination.

John Watkins may have continued building houses into the 1880s, but evidence suggests that he increasingly turned his attention to his family-run lumber business. He also reportedly operated a photography business on his property for a time. He died in 1902, leaving behind an enduring legacy of some of Utah's finest Gothic Revival architecture. These buildings are clearly significant for their aesthetic merit, but they are also important for the light they shed on the history of building in Territorial Utah and, by extension, the social history of the state's early Mormon communities.

While the quality of John Watkins' architecture in Midway has long been recognized by architectural historians, it is also true that he has often been typecast as a "book" designer. That is, because the picturesque Gothic Revival style was prominently featured in the popular architectural stylebooks of the mid-nineteenth century -- books that contained plates with drawings of plans and elevations, it has been widely thought that Watkins simply copied designs from the stylebooks for his houses. As one historian has written:

The works of no other pioneer architect can be more closely related to book architecture than those of John Watkins. Seventeen years of service as a Mormon bishop may have encouraged Watkins' favor of proven patterns over the time-consuming procedure of designing each building individually.<sup>19</sup>

While it is true that stylebooks such as A.J. Davis' Rural Residences (1837), William Ranlett's The Architect (1847-1849), and Andrew Jackson Downing's Architecture of Country Houses (1850) were popular at the time, and that the authors freely expounded on the advantages of the picturesque, and that the books presented stylized drawings of favored designs, it is also true that these were not true "pattern books" in the sense that they provided prospective builders with detailed building plans and specifications.<sup>20</sup> Instead of plans, the stylebooks gave builders ideas -- ideas about how buildings should be built, how they should look, and how their rooms should be arranged. Several recent articles are useful in understanding better the role the stylebooks played in picturesque design.

In an extended essay dealing with rise of architectural professionalism in the first half of the nineteenth century, architectural historian Dell Upton has carefully described both the content and rationale of the stylebooks. The stylebook writer's primary purpose, Upton argues, was to advance the cause of the professional architect in the marketplace, to make, that is, the general public aware that good taste and an understanding of the principles of architecture were services that the architect alone could provide, and not, as is often thought, to provide architectural information directly and cheaply to

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the building community.<sup>21</sup> By supporting their arguments with examples of "well-suited" designs, the stylebooks certainly helped popularize picturesque styles like the Gothic Revival and the Italianate, yet there is no evidence that the books spawned a generation of slavish imitators. Indeed, for the most part it appears that builders in the nineteenth century were highly selective, taking from the published materials only those design ideas and those architectural features that proved compatible with existing vernacular building practices. The North Carolina builder Jacob Holt is a good example. In a seminal essay, Catherine Bishir notes that although Holt's work was directly influenced by the popular architectural literature, he used the books "selectively," and "rather than reproducing for his client the glamorous villas of the plates, he chose a collection of appealing details, such as mantels, pinwheels, brackets, arches, trefoils, and the like, that he applied enthusiastically and repeatedly to his accustomed house form without substantially disturbing the basics."<sup>22</sup>

Like Jacob Holt and countless other American builders, John Watkins walked the fine line between fashion and tradition, between his own understanding of building design and the needs and wishes of his clients. His Gothic houses certainly bear an affinity to the stylebook plates. At first glance, his own house appears to be a replication of Gervase Wheeler's "Plain Timber Cottage-Villa" published by A.J. Downing in 1852 (fig. 4)<sup>23</sup> The other houses, too, resemble particular stylebook examples, yet rather than being mere copies of the published plates, Watkins houses, in their composition and decoration, reflect instead a comfortable familiarity with the basic ideas contained in the books and of the picturesque in general. To understand the building process in early Utah, it is useful to see Watkins, not bending over a stylebook, but applying to specific individual house designs concepts that he knew well. His ideas may well have come from the stylebooks, or they could have come from his experience with picturesque designs in his native England, for the Gothic Revival in America was merely an off-shoot of the romantic impulse that had earlier gripped England.<sup>24</sup>

From an early essay on folk art by Henry Glassie, Catherine Bishir extracted the essence of the vernacular designing process. Bishir writes:

Holt's approach embodied many characteristics considered to define the "folk" or vernacular artisan. Folklorist Henry Glassie points out that the folk artisan, consciously or unconsciously, extracts from his tradition a few basic forms that are old at the time of his use and different from those promoted by popular culture. Working in his tradition he defines for himself a minimal concept of the essentials of the object and arrives at a 'small set of rules that define the limits within which he can modify the concept according to his taste and talent and the taste and pocketbook of his clientele.' Within the the concept thus defined the artisan can work freely, varying nonessential details as he chooses.<sup>25</sup>

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On his smaller buildings --the decorative hall-parlor houses he built in Midway-- Watkins' work fits well into this definition of the vernacular craftsman. Here it is possible to see older traditional house forms in new fashionable outfits. In the larger Gothic Revival houses, however, Watkins proved more adventuresome and adopted both the form and the external features of the new popular architecture. At the same time, the way he worked with these concepts harkened back to the older vernacular model.

John Watkins' broad understanding of the picturesque style provided him with a set of design possibilities, i.e., a "small set of rules" (fig. 5) with which to work. The key concepts revolved principally around the use of the cross-wing house, a house composed of intersecting rectangles, or wings. The cross-wing house form is perhaps the most important contribution of the stylebooks to nineteenth-century American architecture, for it was the main innovation picked up and widely distributed by vernacular builders.<sup>26</sup> Based loosely on a Medieval English house form, the cross-wing was attractive both for its romantic connotations and for its irregular "picturesque" appearance. The basic element in the cross-wing form was the forward projecting wing which served to anchor the design. This basic form could then be elaborated, added to, and subtracted from to produce other similar yet different houses.

The basic cross-wing house consists of a single main wing, its narrow-end placed toward the street, intersected at a right angle by a side wing in either a T- or L- configuration. The arrangement effectively breaks out of the rigid symmetry associated with the old folk housing tradition, yet at the same time preserves a sense of order (conceptually the eye can add a wing to the other side of the main block and produce a symmetrical design) and internal space not radically different from prevailing hall-parlor house plans.<sup>27</sup> Watkins relied on the basic cross-wing for the George Bonner, Jr., the William Bonner, and William Coleman houses. Each house has a similar form, but external features are varied considerably, thus giving these houses a dual sense of sameness and individuality. For the George Bonner Sr., and the Harvey Cluff houses, Watkins simply took the basic cross-wing house and added another side wing, making the composition symmetrical while at the same time preserving the irregular feeling cross-wing form. With his own house, Watkins again turned to his basic repertoire and this time drew out another forward facing gable wing that was added to the end of the basic cross-wing form. Accomplished in this way, within the limited options available to him, he was able to achieve a great variety of individual house designs that could be further individualized through the use of applied ornamentation. Such features as scroll-cut bargeboards, decorative wooden porches, elaborate balconied bay windows, round arched windows, and so forth could be filled in as he desired. Watkins had no need to rely on the stylebooks for his designs. Using a few key concepts and an understanding of picturesque decoration he could easily design interesting houses for his friends and neighbors.

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Notes

<sup>1</sup>Early references to the Watkins-Coleman house are found in Peter L. Goss, "The Architectural History of Utah," Utah Historical Quarterly, 43:3 (Summer 1975), 219-220, and Paul Goeldner, Utah Catalog--Historic American Buildings Survey (Salt Lake City: Utah Heritage Foundation, 1969), 25-26. Only the stone houses of Willard (Box Elder County, National Register Historic District 1974), the Officers' Quarters at Fort Douglas in Salt Lake City (Salt Lake County, National Historic Landmark District 1970), and such isolated examples as the John Crook house in Heber City (Wasatch County, National Register 1978), the Peter Greaves house in Ephraim (Sanpete County, National Register 1980), the George Brown house in Provo (Utah County, National Register 1982), and the Thomas Judd house in St. George (Washington County, National Register 1978) rival the Watkins-built Midway houses in stylistic importance.

<sup>2</sup>Eric Mercer, English Vernacular Houses (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1975), 1.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Hubka, "Just Folks Designing" Vernacular Designers and the Generation of Form," in Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture, ed. by Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 426-432.

<sup>4</sup>Henry Glassie, Folk Housing in Middle Virginia (Knoxville, Tn.: University of Tennessee Press, 1975), 19-65.

<sup>5</sup>Catherine Bishir, "Jacob Holt: American Builder," Winterthur Portfolio, 16:1 (Spring 1981), 11-12; and Dell Upton, "Pattern Books and Professionalism," Winterthur Portfolio, 19: 2/3 (Summer/Autumn 1984), 107-150.

<sup>6</sup>See Thomas Carter, "Folk Design in Utah Architecture," in Utah Folk Art: A Catalog of Material Culture, ed. by Hal Cannon (Provo Ut.: Brigham Young University Press, 1980), 35-60, and "Folk Housing in the Mormon Settlements of Utah's Sanpete Valley" (diss.: Indiana University, 1984), 85-119. For a discussion of the architectural profession at a slightly later date, see "Utah's Architecture at the Turn-of-the-Century," ed. by Peter Goss, Utah Historical Quarterly (Winter 1986).

<sup>7</sup>This biographical sketch of John Watkins has been taken from Maria A. Schaer, A Brief History of John Watkins (Ogden, Utah: Commerical Press, 1979).

<sup>8</sup>For a detailed description of the handcart migration, see Leroy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, Handcarts to Zion (Glendale, California: Arthur H. Clark, 1976), and specifically 91-117.

<sup>9</sup>Shaer, A Brief History of John Watkins, 53.

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<sup>10</sup>The history of the hall-parlor form is discussed in Henry Glassie, Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968).

<sup>11</sup>Shaer, Brief History of John Watkins, 55-56.

<sup>12</sup>The Mormon village system of settlement is discussed in John W. Reys, Town Planning in Frontier America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 410-412), and Lowry Nelson, The Mormon Village: A Pattern and Technique of Land Settlement (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1952).

<sup>13</sup>Shaer, Brief History of John Watkins, 66.

<sup>14</sup>See The Scandinavian-American Pair House in Utah, National Register Thematic Nomination, Utah Division of State History, 1983.

<sup>15</sup>It is interesting to note that the pair-house form, although typically Scandinavian, was in several instances built in Utah by English immigrants. See the National Register nomination forms for the William Skeen house, Plain City, Weber County, and the Annie Birch house, Hoytsville, Summit County, Utah Division of State History.

<sup>16</sup>Formal considerations in folk architectural design are discussed in Henry Glassie, Folk Housing in Middle Virginia (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975), 19-40. See also, William H. Pierson, Jr., American Buildings and Their Architects: The Classical and Neo-Classical Styles (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1970), 63-65.

<sup>17</sup>The James Hansen house in Mt. Pleasant, Sanpete County, has a distinctly similar plan and multi-gabled facade arrangement. See the survey files in the Preservation Office, Utah State Historical Society.

<sup>18</sup>See Paul Goeldner, "The Architecture of Equal Comforts: Polygamists in Utah," Historic Preservation, 24:1 (January-March 1972), 14-17.

<sup>19</sup>Alan Roberts, "Utah's Pioneer Architects," Sunstone vol 1 (1976).

<sup>20</sup>Alexander Jackson Davis, Rural Residences (1837); William Ranlett, The Architect, (New York: William Graham, 1847-49)); and Andrew Jackson Downing, Architecture of Country Houses (1852; reprint ed., New York: Dover, 1964).

<sup>21</sup>Upton, "Pattern Books," 107-150.

<sup>22</sup>Bishir, "Jacob Holt," 11-12.

<sup>23</sup>Downing, Architecture of Country Houses, 300.

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<sup>24</sup>For a history of the Gothic Revival in England, see Henry Russell Hitchrode, Early Victorian Architecture in Britain, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954).

<sup>25</sup>Bishir, "Jacob Holt," 12.

<sup>26</sup>The best discussion of the cross-wing house is found in Upton, "Pattern Books," 144.

<sup>27</sup>Upton, "Pattern Books," 145.



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Figure 1: Conjectural Reconstruction of Watkins' Provo House

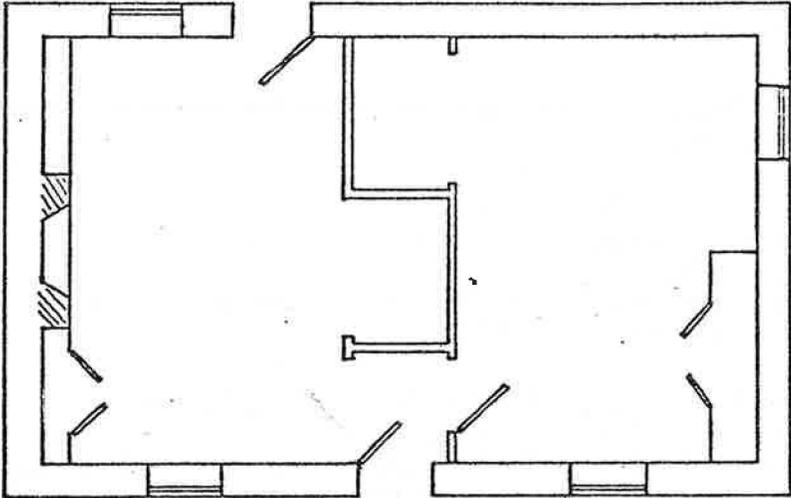


Figure 2: Watkins-Coleman House, 5 E. Main, Midway, Utah.



Figure 3: Wooton-McCarrell House, 93 W. Main, Midway, Utah.

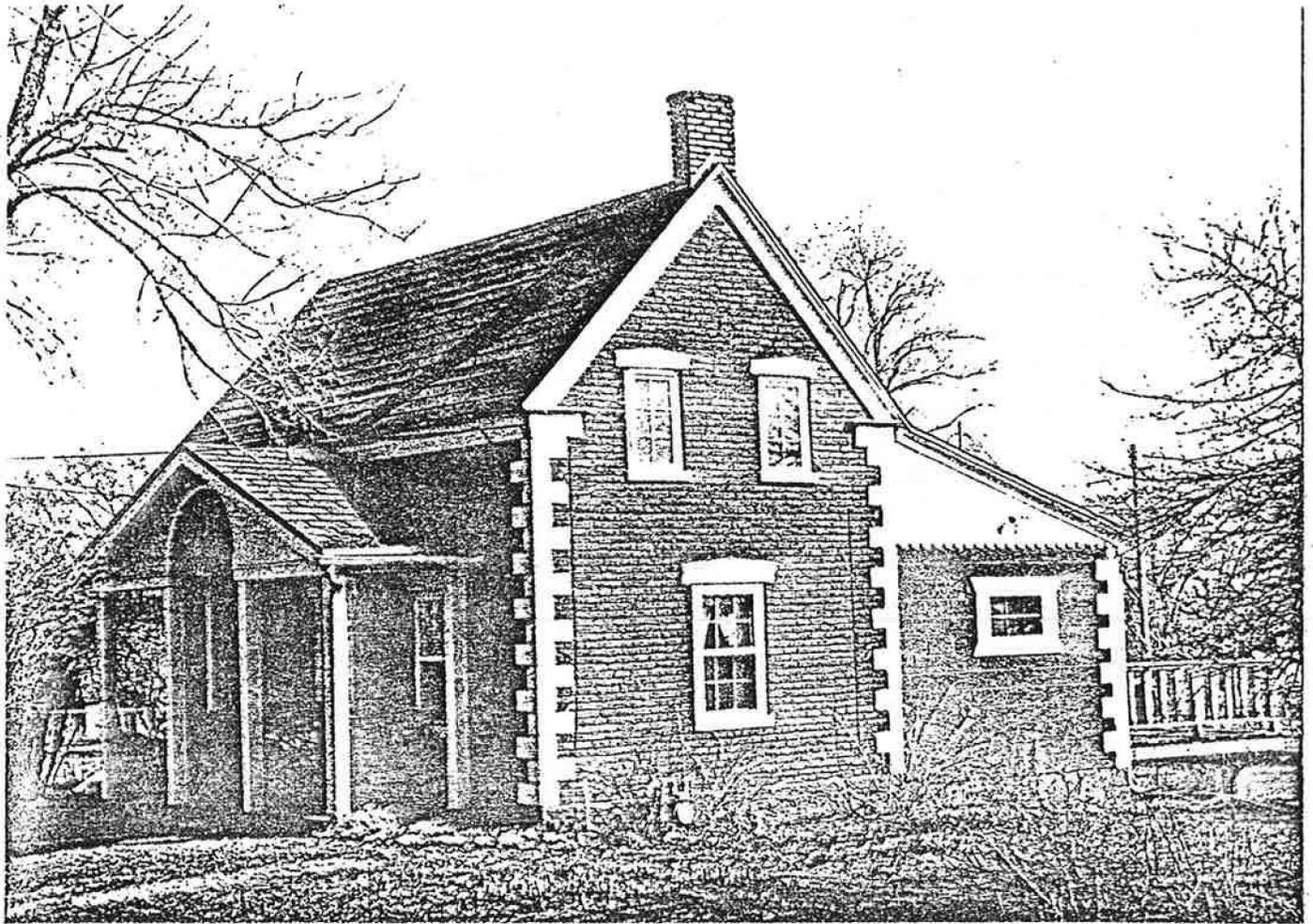


Figure 4: Wheeler's "Plain Timber Cottage-Villa"

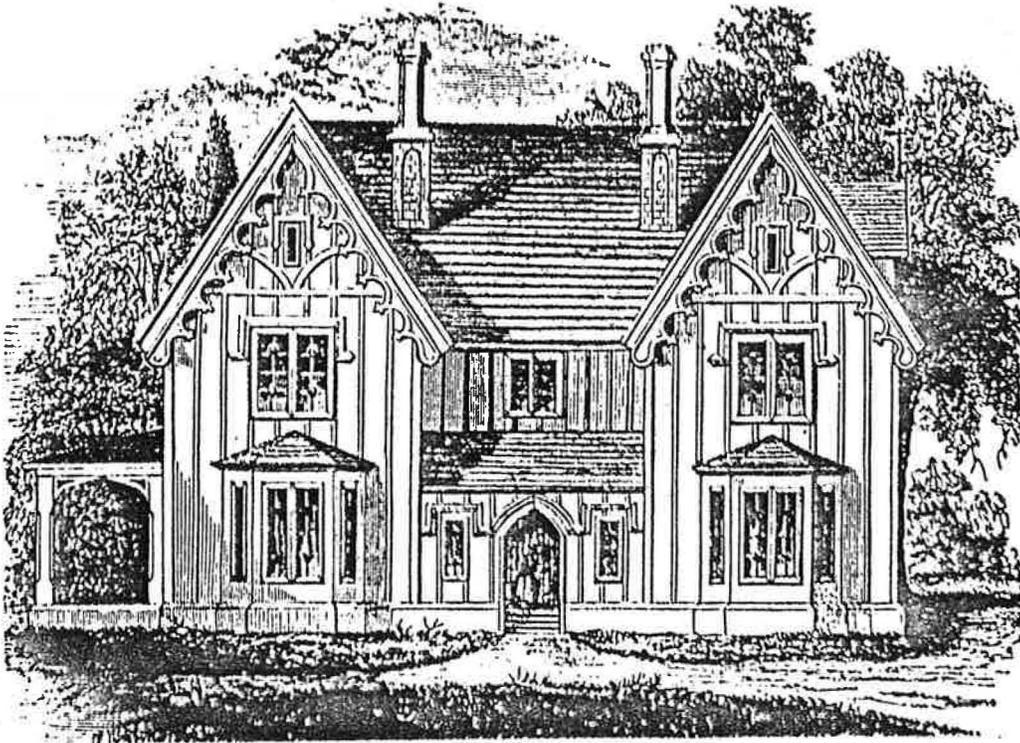


Figure 5: The Components of Cross-wing Design

