

FINAL REPORT
CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT
ST. JOSEPH, MISSOURI

St. Joseph Landmarks Commission
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On September 15th, 1986 a survey was begun in the Central Business District of St. Joseph, Missouri. The survey was completed in December of 1986. A minimum of 130 forms were contracted for, though as a result of the survey there were 159 forms generated. The limits of the contracted for survey area were expanded as well to a more logical point than the arbitrary southern boundary of Messanie street ending in a more ragged edge, but more comprehensive in coverage some three to four blocks [and more at some areas] to the south of Messanie street.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

All buildings deemed by on-site evaluation to be fifty years old or older were photographed and noted on the site map. Positive identification of the site was made with the aid of the field map and a street address and legal description of the property made. With this unique site information at hand it was possible to examine the building permit record on each discreet parcel. These records extend back to 1887. The records give the name of the person taking out the permit [generally but not always the owner] the date of the permit, the type of permit [e.g. residence, place of business, repair, garage, etc.] and the dollar amount of construction. All but four of the 159 properties date to post-1887, and thus a positive date was available in most cases, though occasionally the permits were missing. The building records yielded the name of the person taking out the the permit for repair or construction. In the case of perhaps one half of the surveyed buildings the owner of record built the building but then rented or leased the building to a second party. To arrive at a meaningful early history of the building the City Directories were consulted for relevant years to determine the type of business conducted in the building in question. Sanborn Insurance maps were consulted to confirm the configuration of the existant building. Where it was necessary other record groups were consulted to create a basic historical context.

On each inventory a relevant architectural description was made of the existing condition of the building with an analysis of significant alterations and additions. A 5X7 photograph [occasionally two photographs] was attached under the written description as a seperate page to the inventory sheet.

GENERAL SURVEY RESULTS

As stated there were 159 forms generated from the survey activity. All buildings fifty or more years old were researched. Almost all of the buildings surveyed were commercial buildings-- either retail, wholesale or manufacturing. Exceptions are public buildings such as the Buchanan County Courthouse, public marketplace, Police station [2], YWCA, Post Office, Library, Churches, and Central Fire Station. There are several large apartment buildings, and a very few residential single family

dwellings in the survey area.

Almost all of the buildings surveyed are brick or masonry constructed. All but a few are multiple storied with flat roofs behind parapets. Over fifty percent are party walled, and with few exceptions all of the buildings are built to the sidewalk.

The following is a breakdown of the results by building date range:

| CONSTRUCTION DATE | NUMBER CONSTRUCTED | PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL |
|-------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1920+ | 34 | 21% |
| 1900-1919 | 78 | 49% |
| 1880-1899 | 42 | 27% |
| before 1880 | 4 | 2% |

The tabulated results of the survey are somewhat startling. Less than one third of the buildings still standing in the Central Business District date to before the turn of the century. In some cities this would not be a surprizing result, however in St. Joseph, the acknowledged "Golden Age" of the city is circa 1880-1900 which is the predominate date range for most of the cities outstanding residential building stock. There are three obvious explanations of the results. The first is a previously surveyed area in the west central portion of the downtown, and not therefore included in the above tabulation. The second, and more compelling reason is the rampant destruction of whole blocks in the name of "urban renewal" in the previous decade. Many of the older sections of the business district were the first to go. The third reason is that there was a major rebuilding of the central retail district of the business section of town at the turn of the century extending into the early 1920s.

CHARACTERIZATION OF HISTORIC BUILDING TYPES IN THE SURVEY AREA

COMMERCIAL ITALIANATE

There are no surviving Greek Revival commercial buildings within the surveyed area.* There is only one surviving Commercial Italianate from the era of the Civil War within the survey area, and it is one of the most important buildings in the Central Business District. The Missouri Valley Trust Company building dates to 1859, [see #131] a two story brick corner building, extensively remodeled in the late nineteenth century. The building and the adjacent contiguous buildings are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. A hiatus exists from the last mentioned building through the 1860s and into the 1870s with only one representative example of contemporary architecture--though it is a dramatic one--the Buchanan County Courthouse built in 1876 and listed in the National Register of Historic Places [see #60]. There are, however, a number of Commercial Italianate buildings dating from the early 1880s. Historic photographs indicate that the popular Italianate style defined the streetscapes of much of St. Joseph, built in the booming years of the 1870s and 1880s. Perhaps the most notable are the grouping known as Warehouse Row [listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a district], four buildings of multiple story party wall brick construction [see #145]. There are several architectural features which unify the Commercial Italianate style, the dominant feature of which is the cornice. Many of the cornices which survive in St. Joseph are constructed of sheet metal pressed and cut into a variety of forms and shapes, but general composed of a flat projected eave with cornice brackets and decorative frieze--all projected over the wall plane of the facade [see #145]. In one surviving case the elaborate metal cornice is joined to a polygonal projected metal oriel window at the second story [see #87]. Unfortunately, many surviving buildings have lost their cornices due to the lack of timely maintenance over the years [see #101]. Other materials were less commonly used to create the cornice. There are several examples of brick corbeled cornices from the period [see #130], and at least one wood cornice [see #86].

Window lintel treatment is a definitive characteristic of the Commercial Italianate style in St. Joseph. Generally, though not always, window lintels are formed of an arch of varying shape ranging from segmental to half round, sometimes with two or more arch types used at different stories on the same facade. The lintels are most often projected with labels and keystones often incised with various decorative devices. Sometimes they are entirely formed on a cementitious material [see #101] or in combination with brick [see #145]. The 1876 Courthouse has flat pedimented lintels at the first story [see #60].

*There is one Greek Revival commercial building, a former hotel, at Francis and Main streets. However, nothing remains of the original structure except for a few stone lintels over masonry

filled openings. The building has been so extensively altered as to not warrant inclusion in the survey.

COMMERCIAL QUEEN ANNE

At the very end of the 1880s and gaining momentum in the 1890s the streetscape construction took on a new character as the new architectural style--Commercial Queen Anne--began to appear. Less reliant on the projected cornice the Queen Anne made freer use of the entire facade for decorative design statement. In three prominent cases there is no cornice at all [see #95, 91,92]. On the five story brick German-American Bank Building [constructed in 1889] a dominant feature is a fifth story deeply recessed arch loggia over repeated arch bays [#95]. There is a rich use of anthropomorphic sandstone carvings--a new feature of the Queen Anne era. There is a more eclectic repertoire of sources for architectural inspiration as seen in the 'Old Police State', built in 1887 and executed in a Medieval [though non-castellated] castle revival motif [#66].

Hydraulic pressed brick with its more uniform face and darker red color with colored mortar joints dramatically changed the facade appearance of the style. The Carby Building, erected in 1891 [see #92] is one of the better surviving examples. A more impressive example [though modern gray paint obscures the facade] is the Michau-Birk Dry Goods Building constructed in 1894 [see #99] which also exhibits another new material freely used in the late nineteenth century--terra cotta. The plastic nature of the material, and its fine grain, allowed a rich variety of treatments from easily repeated moulded patterns [see #91] to highly individualized anthropomorphic figures. Sheet metal continued to be popular, especially as a lightweight material to create overhanging oriel projections such as that found on the Michau Building constructed in 1888 [see #104]. The 1904, three story brick building at the corner of Francis and 8th streets has a metal three story oriel tower at the building corner, the last surviving of what was once a common feature in the Central Business District--the building is one of the last documented Queen Anne era buildings in the survey area and is also unusual in the survival of the first story storefront bays and corner pillared entry.

NEO-CLASSICAL

By far the most common category of architectural style, well over fifty percent of the buildings in the survey area may be lumped into the Neo-Classical typology. Most date to the turn of the century period. The earliest in the survey area is also one of the more significant examples--the Telephone Exchange Building constructed in 1895 [see #93]. The building exhibits many of the typical features of the style: The pedestaled parapet above the classically derived cornice, The near ubiquitous pillared or pillastered facade and frequent use of rusticated masonry. The 1899 Tootle-Lemon Bank Building [see #105] is a good example with its pillared entry and richly ornamental pediment projected from

the facade. Building materials vary from stone--Tootle-Lemom Bank, 1905 Free Public Library [#4], and the 1902 National Bank of St. Joseph [#135]--to a light buff colored brick masonry--the 1893 Telephone Exchange Building and the 1914 YWCA building [#38]. There is one example of red brick wall construction--the 1914 two story commercial building at the corner of Francis and N. 8th streets [see #30].

With the passage of time the style often becomes more restrained in architectural ornament, especially visible on the Townsend-Debernheim Clothing Co. Building [#96], erected in 1917, with minimal cornice and parapet and almost minimal detail in the terra cotta cladding.

Decorative elements are often found in terra cotta, though with less flamboyance than that found in the previous era though the Corby Forsee Building of 1910 belies the norm with its richly ornamental street level and top two floors and cornice [#128]. The recently rehabbed building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Ornament is of course limited to classical motifs. Cornices are generally terra cotta though there is at least one example of a deeply projected metal cornice [#30].

MEDITERANEAN REVIVAL STYLE

There are only three examples of this style in the survey area though they are highly visible and thus of some importance. All are characterized by pent roofs at the roof parapet with either green or red ceramic tiles. The most interesting is the Central Fire Station, built in 1923 with a deeply projected pent roof and highly decorative eaves. The building is somewhat curiously mixed in style with facade decoration more in keeping with Neo-Classical tenets [#63]. The building at 809-811 Francis likewise has a deeply projected pent roof with patterned polychrome brick facade [#32]. The last is different in that it has white stuccoed walls. The Leary Filling Station was built in 1927 [#127].

MISCELLANEOUS STYLES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The Missouri Theatre and attendant business block are in a class there own in St. Joseph. The rich polychrome terra cotta and brick Moorish/Assyrian Revival building, erected in 1926, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

There are only two Art Deco buildings in the survey area, both public buildings. The 1938 Post Office and Courthouse building is a severe and restrained building typical of the period [#21]. On the other hand the W.P.A. built 1939 Central Police Station is a richly ornamented multi-story building.

Though not technically 'historic' there are two excellent examples of the streamlined Moderne style in St. Joseph, both

built in 1950. The Trail Theatre [#23] is sheathed in white and pastel green carrara glass with a cursive neon sign and bright metal marquee with neon tubing. The Miller Chevrolet showroom [#24] with its brick banding and curvilinear glass walled corners and bright metal banded awning is a fine example of its type.

MANUFACTURING BUILDINGS

Few buildings survive relating to the development of manufacturing in St. Joseph--most have been torn down in recent decades. The two which survive are left isolated by large surrounding vacant or underused tracts. The Mohaska Manufacturing Co. building, erected in 1891, is a multiple story brick building with minimal ornament whose primary appearance is defined by the repeated patterning of the windows [#123]. The Power House of the St. Joseph Railway, Light, Heat, and Power Company, erected in 1917, is a different type of building with its low profile, double gabled main building and tall metal chimney stacks [#153].

WAREHOUSE BUILDINGS

A different class of buildings altogether, the buildings erected for the express purpose of warehousing in St. Joseph may be characterized in several ways. First, they are generally of multiple story brick construction--most four or more stories. Second, they are concentrated in a geographic band bordered by Robidoux street on the north, Messanie street on the south, Main on the west, and Fourth street on the east. Finally, most are well designed and ornamented in period style. The latter point is made in light of the overarching significance of wholesale jobbing to the historic economy of St. Joseph, which, through its location at the hub of over eleven railroad lines was in a position to capitalize on transshipments to the developing West and Northwest in the late nineteenth century. Within the survey area there are three notable warehouse buildings. The 1917 Richardson Dry Goods Company building [#147] is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The 1901 Letts-Spencer Grocery Company building was, when constructed, a striking building with repeated arched bays and diapered brick friezed sixth story. However, the massively projected metal cornice was removed in recent years [#146]. The Tootle-Campbell Dry Goods Company building, erected in 1908, is more restrained than its contemporaries, with a narrow cornice and sparse use of architectural terra cotta. The recessed entry, however, is a rich exuberant display of the possibilities of architectural terra cotta [#139].

RAILROAD RELATED BUILDINGS

In a city such as St. Joseph which owes her growth and vitality to the existence of the railroad one would expect a number of related buildings to survive whose specific purpose was directly associated with the railroad. Unfortunately, many have been lost. In the survey area are two buildings whose purpose was railroad related. The first and most notable is the impressive freight

shipping house of the Rock Island Railroad [#125], erected in 1907. The two story office has vaguely Neo-Classical overtones, while the long and low shipping bays which extend to the rear are strictly utilitarian. The second building is the Neo-Classical styled office building of the Union Pacific Railroad, built in 1906 [#20]. Unfortunately, there have been modern changes to the building, and a choice of soft architectural stone has left the ornamental entry deteriorated.

CHURCHES

There are five surviving churches in the survey area. All are imposing and well executed as befitted 'downtown' churches built for affluent congregations. Only one dates to the nineteenth century, however. Christ Episcopal Church [#43], was built in 1877, in a brick Gothic Revival style customary to the period. The 1909 First Methodist-Episcopal Church [#26] and the ca. 1925 Zion Evangelical Church [#28] are high quality, but expected examples of twentieth century interpretation of the Gothic Revival style. The 1917 First Christian is a well designed and richly ornamental Neo-Classical building. Of considerable more interest is the First Presbyterian Church, erected in 1909, and designed by the locally prominent architect, Edmond J. Eckel. The free use of classical order and ornament on the rectangular sanctuary is belied by the highly eclectic spire positioned above the main pedimented entry. The style is reminiscent of the English Baroque style as designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor.

RESIDENTIAL

There are very few residential structures surviving in the survey area. Though the entire area surveyed was once primarily residential in the pre Civil War years, subsequent development and the spread of the commercial zone swallowed up the residential pockets over the years. One pre-Civil War house, a two story Greek Revival dwelling has managed to survive, though with substantial change--This is the earliest structure of any kind to survive with any integrity in the Central Business District.

Beside the single house described above, there are only a few isolated survivals of residential free standing housing [#29 for example], though there are several large multi story brick apartment buildings within the survey area [see #47, #37, #71].

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE SURVEY AS TO NATIONAL REGISTER ELIGIBILITY

There are no definitive coherent districts which would qualify in the strictist sense for the National Register of Historic Places-- The contributing buildings are far too scattered. There are two possible approaches to appropriate recognition, however. The first would be a Multiple Resource Nomination, which could be written in such a way as to include the upper strata of buildings with group and individual significance. The rationale or context

may be well established given the relative homogeneity of the architectural groupings within the zone of the Central Business District. A second possibility would be to recognize the overarching significance of the warehouse buildings, which have been acknowledged as being the single building category which might be incorporated within a Thematic Nomination to the National Register.