

# North Main Street Neighborhood Survey

City of Independence  
Jackson County, Missouri

Historic Preservation Fund Grant Project Number: 29-13-51932-009

## Final Survey Report

Prepared for:

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## **Scope and Scale**

The North Main Street Neighborhood survey area is bounded by the west side of Noland Road to the east, the south side of U.S. 24 Highway to the north, the west side of North Liberty Street to the west, and the north side of West White Oak to the south. The north-south corridors of North Main Street and North Liberty Street contain the majority of buildings within the survey area, though there are also some buildings along the east-west cross streets. The reconnaissance-level architectural survey recorded extant buildings and structures included within the survey boundaries along North Liberty, North Main, East and West College, East and West Farmer, West Nettleton, East St. Charles, East Waldo, North Noland, and U.S. 24 Highway (see Appendix A for address list). This survey area was modified from the original proposal in order to reduce the number of properties included in the survey area as well as more succinctly reflect the pattern of development for the North Main Street Neighborhood. As a result, some of the properties on the east and south sides of the original survey area were omitted.

The final survey area consists of approximately 55.5 acres with 164 properties total. This count does not include the structure count on each property (garages, sheds, etc.). It should also be noted that some properties have more than one building requiring several survey forms recorded with the same address followed by A, B, and C, respectively. The vast majority of the survey area includes mid-late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century buildings. As such, the period of significance was established between 1870 and 1940. The building stock includes primarily residential dwellings, although some commercial, religious, and institutional buildings also exist within the area. The remaining buildings are contemporary infill.

Architectural styles include a variety of influences, though most of the residences in the survey area exhibit a mixture of styles, forms, and details, retaining a tradition of vernacular housing that is modified to conform to contemporary trends. Therefore, housing sizes and styles vary over the period of significance reflecting the assortment of high to low incomes, influences of regional trends, and shifting development patterns. As a result, most of the properties' area of significance is related to community planning and development.

## **Historic Context**

The final survey area, located just north of the Independence Square, was included in the territory annexed by Independence in 1851. This area includes portions of Flournoy's Addition, Fanny C. Caldwell's Addition, Johnson's Addition, Kelly Heights, John Lewis' Addition, and McCoy's Addition, which were all subdivided and platted between 1852 and 1910 and developed between the 1870s and early 1900s reflecting the prosperity of the city during that period.

Prominent Independence families such as the Wallaces, the Flourneys, the Otts, and the Bundschus settled in this neighborhood creating what would be today, a middle to upper class

area filled with shopkeepers, lawyers, bankers, and prosperous landowners. Most of these houses were constructed north of Farmer Street along both sides of Main and Liberty Streets.

Properties on the southern boundary of the survey area, along West White Oak, originally reflected the expanding commercial success of the Square. This area saw several mills and some trails-related businesses forming off of North Main and North Liberty Streets during the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Growth in Independence, and Jackson County in general, also encouraged construction and transportation-related business such as wagon maker's shops and planing mills to spring up in this area of the North Main Street Neighborhood.

By the 1920s, mercantiles and mills of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were razed for the sake of the automobile and in the name of progress. Several gas stations and auto dealerships were constructed off of East and West White Oak, wiping away most traces of the earlier pioneer history. Remnants of the earlier mills can today be seen in the modest, worker's housing on North Liberty and North Main Streets near U.S. 24 Highway as well as much of North Lynn Street.

As many of the lots in the area were subdivided from the 1910s through the 1930s, smaller, one and one and a half story bungalows were constructed filling in voids found between more stately homes. This was particularly true along North Liberty and North Main Streets, north of College Street. As was typical of many of the larger homes throughout Independence, significant alterations were often introduced during both World Wars I and II, converting single family homes to multi-family rentals. Many of these rentals remained through Urban Renewal in the 1960s. It was not until the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century that many of these homes were converted back to single family. Today, this portion of the North Main Street Neighborhood still bears the legacy of absentee landlords and rental properties.

During the mid to late twentieth century, many older residences in the established central portion of Independence were demolished and newer, more contemporary infill was built on smaller, divided lots. While most retained the same setbacks as the traditional dwellings, the neighborhood began to see more unconventional footprints with L-shaped apartments, the introduction of enclosed porches, dormers, and additions, as well as non-traditional building placement on long, slender lots. This modified placement often skewed the tree-lined tradition of both North Main and North Liberty Street.

The northernmost boundary of the North Main Street Neighborhood likely saw the most dramatic impact over the last 100 years with the expansion of U.S. 24 Highway through what was previously a quiet, residential area. The creation of the highway in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century brought with it substantial automobile traffic, a diverse mix of commercial development, and the introduction of contemporary 1950s architecture to the area. While some of this development could today be considered architecturally of its own merit, the impact of U.S. 24 Highway cannot be underestimated regarding the influx of traffic and the disparity of integrity to a once intact residential neighborhood. This division, due to the construction of the roadway, is part of the

justification for not expanding the North Main Street Neighborhood further north despite a similar housing stock and period of significance to the north of 24 Highway along North Main and North Liberty Streets.

The most noticeable trend in the neighborhood is the loss of houses due to deferred maintenance, institutional expansion, and fire resulting in the creation of many vacant lots, open space, and parking lots that once housed single family homes. Though this did not occur overnight, this gradual alteration has made an impact on the overall integrity of the neighborhood that can be readily viewed today.

## **Property Types**

The North Main Street Neighborhood has a diverse, often eclectic, mix of architectural styles, influences, and plans. The majority of property types is vernacular in nature and mainly includes front facing gable and/or hipped roofs as well as gable and wing plans, bungalows, and Foursquares that date from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through the 1930s.

High styles of architecture in the North Main Street Neighborhood include Kansas City Shirtwaists, Gothic Revival, and Queen Annes that date mainly from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These can predominantly be found in the 700 block of Liberty Street and the 700 and 800 blocks of North Main Street.

The presence of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century architecture such as Mid-Century Modern (the result of infill and redevelopment of divided lots) is prominent on St. Mary's campus in the 600 blocks of Liberty and Main Streets as well as some Minimal Traditional architecture, also on Liberty and Main Streets, but north of College Street.

Several dwellings, ranging in dates from the 1850s through about 1930, feature the influences of Gothic and Classical Revival, Victorian, Tudor, Craftsman, and Italianate style architecture. These can be seen scattered throughout the area and do not necessarily reflect a dominant development pattern. As is often the case, most are indicative of national or regional trends and personal taste.

Mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century infill, noted as non-contributing based upon the established period of significance, reflects the construction and influence of U.S. 24 Highway on the neighborhood as well as the introduction of some multi-family and rental units. The highway was re-routed from College Street to its current location in the mid-1920s. This development trend introduced numerous Commercial Block storefronts, a strip mall, and various ranch style homes into what is otherwise predominantly a late to early 20<sup>th</sup> century area. It also ended the stretch of commercial properties that were once prevalent along College Street.

Also of note is the impact of transportation and its transition from horses and carts to automobiles. The construction and infill of gas stations and car dealerships off of Truman Road

just west of Noland Road also influenced commercial development and encroachment into the North Main Street Neighborhood where numerous Commercial Block buildings still exist.

## Methodology for Evaluation

The methodology for the North Main Street Neighborhood Survey follows the procedures for a reconnaissance survey outlined in *National Register Bulletin 24: Guidelines for Local Surveys: A Basis for Preservation Planning* (1985, rev.) and the Missouri State Historic Preservation Office's (MO SHPO) "Standards for Professional Architectural and Historic Surveys" (2012). The survey includes a detailed inventory of all of the buildings and structures within the project area. The survey was conducted by the Historic Preservation Manager for the City of Independence, who is qualified as an architectural historian under 36CFR61.

The original project area was chosen to simplify the survey boundaries by creating a rectangular pattern using the grid of the streets. However, in re-evaluating the original proposal, it was noted that the area exceeded the original number of survey properties proposed in the grant submission. In order to reduce that number and to include the most significant properties within the North Main Street Neighborhood, the southeast corner of the proposed survey area was omitted. This included properties along West and East White Oak leading east to Noland Road and north to East College Street.

Contributing properties (80 total) consisted of a broad range of architectural styles and ages. The majority of contributing resources were constructed from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These predominantly consisted of Victorian influenced homes such as Queen Anne, Folk Victorian, and one or two story gable front homes, as well as Foursquares and bungalows.

Assessment of each property was conducted based upon the architectural integrity of each resource. Where the historic form and materials of the building were retained, the resource was noted as contributing. However, if most of the building's original historic materials were documented as either replaced or missing, the property was noted as non-contributing. This was particularly true of buildings with vinyl, asbestos, or composite siding as well as vinyl or metal windows. While many of these houses could be restored or the original materials uncovered in situ, their current state did not qualify them for contributing status according to the assessment of the surveyor. This is not to say that future rehabilitation or restoration efforts could not alter the resource's status. Exceptions to this were properties that retained a high level of architectural integrity based upon the retention of original masonry, form, and trimwork. For instance, a Foursquare that had vinyl siding on the second floor or some vinyl windows but exposed brick or stone as cladding on the first floor exterior and displaying an open front porch was still noted as contributing.

As was noted in the early grant submittal, one of the greatest challenges of the survey was conducting neighborhood and property research. In addition to the use of Sanborn Fire Insurance

maps, city directories, plat maps, books on Independence and Jackson County history, property specific web sites, newspaper articles, as well as interviews with local historians and property owners were utilized. These sources were accessed to fill in where additional documentation was lacking. Where factual information could not be corroborated using any reliable resource, it was simply omitted.

Several of the individual resources recognized by this survey were originally highlighted in a 1975 Independence Historical Survey conducted throughout the city by M.A. Solomon/R.J. Claybaugh, Architects, Inc. and Bernd Foerster, A.I.A. for the Independence Heritage Commission. They include: St. Mary's Catholic Church (611B North Liberty Street), 815 North Liberty Street, 424 North Main Street, 714 North Main Street, the Flourney-Wallace House (825 North Main Street), and two buildings that have since been razed (500 North Main Street and 801 North Liberty Street). The survey sought to identify outstanding historic buildings that represented a unique style of architecture or were representative of early development in Independence. Data collected on each property was minimal, providing a date of construction, a building type, a brief description of the exterior, and at least one to two photos. The survey provided little in the way of detailed building or site descriptions, conditional reports, or recommendations for the preservation of the property. Despite this, the survey provides an invaluable tool to identify community-wide resources, regardless of status. Particularly useful are the photos recording the appearance of the buildings and surrounding landscaping at that time.

The final survey project deliverables include this final report, research design, survey forms, maps, and black and white, archival quality 5"x7" photographs. Digital image files, saved in a JPEG format, are labeled by survey number and provided on CD-ROM.

## **Recommendations**

As with many established neighborhoods, the North Main Street Neighborhood is challenged with commercial encroachment to its north and south boundaries, inappropriate infill, demolition-by-neglect, and deferred maintenance. While the area does boast many long-term, home owning residents, it also suffers from a high number of rental properties with absentee landlords and foreclosures. Conditional assessments collected in the survey data, as well as the documentation of the area's historic context and development patterns, will assist the City with ensuring appropriate growth while maintaining the area's historic integrity through preservation advocacy and comprehensive planning.



Mentioned above, the original boundaries of the North Main Street Neighborhood survey area were reduced early on in this project in order to maintain the number of resources that were proposed in the original grant application and to more directly reflect the early development patterns of this area. The survey area that remains is a

good representation of the North Main Street Neighborhood, revealing the early development north of the Independence Square. The final results of this survey document 80 “contributing” resources to a potential district, 82 “non-contributing” resources, one “undetermined” due to relocation (105 E. St. Charles Avenue), and one property already listed on the National Register of Historic Places (Trinity Episcopal Church). Though a relatively low “contributing” count, it is recommended that a potential National Register district for the North Main Street Neighborhood parallel the boundaries established for the North Main Street Neighborhood survey based on the inherent development pattern the boundaries reflect as well as the neighborhood’s historical affiliation with early Independence families.

During the survey process, several properties were noted as potentially eligible for individual listing on the National Register, in addition to the pursuit of a district nomination. They include: 611B North Liberty Street, 622A North Main Street, 501 North Main Street, 714 North Main Street, 823 North Main Street, and 825 North Main Street. A synopsis of their eligibility follows:

St. Mary’s Catholic Church and School boast two potentially individually eligible resources in the North Main Street Neighborhood: 611B North Liberty Street and 622A North Main Street.

St. Mary’s Parish began in 1828. A small brick shop became the first Catholic Church in this territory, located on the land where the present church stands today. The current brick church was constructed between 1860 and 1865. Construction of the Gothic Revival style church was overseen by the Randall Construction Company. After sustaining damage by a tornado in the late 1880s, reconstruction began in 1890 when the 110’ tall steeple and rear addition were added. The church was once again renovated in 1961 to include window



St. Mary’s Catholic Church

repairs, construction of new altars and confessionals, re-painting, construction of a new ceiling, and re-plastering. Based on both its affiliation with the historic parish, its age, and Gothic Revival architecture, the church is considered individually eligible for listing on the National Register



St. Mary’s High School, 622A North Main Street

of Historic Places.

Also associated with St. Mary's Parish is the high school building known as St. Mary's Bundschu Memorial High School located at 622A North Main Street, a part of the larger school complex that includes a free-standing classroom building (622B North Main Street) and gymnasium (622C North Main Street). Facing North Main Street, the high school building was constructed in 1947 as a replacement for the school and convent originally constructed in 1878. This school was previously oriented towards North Liberty Street. The current mid-century brick building is noted for its association with the Late 19th & Early 20th Century American Movements with its linear construction and emphasis on horizontality. Though considered ineligible for inclusion in a potential North Main Street Neighborhood District based upon its age, the building would be eligible for consideration as an individual resource in the National Register of Historic Places as a good representation of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century architecture.

The future of the St. Mary's campus is presently unknown since the local diocese vacated many of the buildings in early 2013. While designation would not protect the buildings from demolition, it would bring attention to the both the history of the site as well as the significance of the resources. It is therefore recommended that a dialogue with the diocese, promoting retention and reuse of the buildings, is arranged and that designation is strongly encouraged.

Another eligible property located just south of St. Mary's campus is the dwelling at 501 North



Main Street. This one-story house reflects a Craftsman-style Influence. Constructed c.1916, the building's stone exterior, Craftsman-inspired square and radial patterned wood windows, wood entry door, stone pilasters, and open front porch all reflect the style of architecture made famous with the American Arts and Crafts movement popularized in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Based upon its high level of architectural integrity and age of construction, the house is considered individually eligible for local as well as National Register listing, in addition to being

considered contributing to a potential district.

A particularly fine example of Victorian-influenced architecture is the 700 block of North Main Street. Though several of the Queen Anne houses within this block have been too severely altered to be individually eligible for listing, the house at 714 North Main is considered a good example with a high level of both architectural and historical integrity.

The two-and-a-half story dwelling was constructed c.1885. The multi-plane roof, wraparound porch, varied siding, turned posts, bay windows, and stepped brick chimney all reflect common, high





style Victorian traits making this house a good example of late 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture. The house was purchased by F.H.H. and Caroline Knoepker from Christian Ott, Jr. in 1910. Both the Ott and Knoepker families were active and well-respected citizens of Independence. Ott, Jr. later became the mayor of Independence, while the Knoepkers owned a large department store on the Independence Square, named for the family.

Though broken up into apartments in the 1950s, the house is once again a single family home. Based on its history as well as its architectural integrity, the house is considered individually eligible for the listing on the National Register.

Several homes in the North Main Street Neighborhood survey area date to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (815 N. Liberty Street, 105 E. St. Charles Avenue and 823 & 825 N. Main Street). Relocation of one (105 E. St. Charles Avenue) precludes it from being considered individually eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. In lieu of national consideration, the city should consider pursuing local designation of this historic treasure.

Both 823 and 825 North Main Street were constructed in the Greek Revival style of architecture. According to the book by Bill Curtis, *The Truman Neighborhood: From Elegant Mansion to the Neck*, the house at 823 North Main Street was originally one of three houses in a row owned by the Wallace brothers: Reuben, Benjamin F., and J. Stamper. Being the middle of the three houses, the house was affectionately labeled by locals as the "Middle Wallace House." This house was originally occupied by J. Stamper Wallace. The Wallaces are considered early settlers of the City of Independence and are ancestors of Bess Wallace, wife of President Harry S Truman.



According to early Sanborn maps, this two-story dwelling had several ell additions added to the rear of the house dating from 1907 through 1926. By 1949, the additions were removed creating the current rectangular shape of the house. Based upon its Greek Revival architecture, age of construction, and affiliation with the Wallace family, the house is considered individually eligible for listing on the National Register.



The house at 825 North Main Street is known as

the Flourney-Wallace House. The original portion of this house is one of the oldest in Independence. It was built by Solomon Flourney, early Independence pioneer, around 1830, just prior to his death. This original portion of the house sits at the rear (east of) of the current home facing North Main Street. The North Main portion was constructed sometime around 1855 by Reuben Wallace, also a relative of Bess Wallace. Reuben Wallace was a renowned cabinetmaker.

Despite some modifications to the dwelling, including the replacement of the original windows, the Flourney-Wallace home is still considered a fine example of early to mid-19th century architecture and is considered eligible for both local and national designation, individually and as part of a potential district.

Currently, based on the findings within this survey, contributing properties make up almost 49% of the resources that would be included within a North Main Street Neighborhood district. While this proportion does not preclude the North Main Street Neighborhood from becoming a National Register, or even a local district, a neighborhood with a higher concentration of historic resources may garner stronger support with residents and public officials. Properties within the survey area that are documented as contributing (80) are thought to reflect a high level of architectural integrity. Though the period of significance is broad (1870-1940), the extant building stock does reflect the growth and development patterns of one of the most significant and oldest areas of Independence. As a result, it is highly recommended that, at a minimum, these findings be incorporated into the city's comprehensive plan reflecting both the potential for local as well as national designation as a district.

Further, it is strongly recommended that those properties that were excluded from the original survey proposal be documented within the next few years. These include resources on East White Oak, East Farmer, East Waldo and the east side of Noland Road from Truman Road north to, and including, the 700 block. Though the housing stock in this expanded area is younger and reflects a more vernacular collection of architecture than those included within this survey, they are no less important to narrating the growth and development of Independence in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In conclusion, despite a potential lack of support to establish a district, it was imperative to document the current status of the resources in the North Main Street Neighborhood for the purposes of long range planning, development of sound redevelopment policies, and community preservation efforts. Therefore, the importance of this survey cannot be underestimated.

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