

MUSEUM HILL  
ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY  
SAINT JOSEPH, MISSOURI

Saint Joseph Landmarks Commission

Susan Ide Symington

May 1985

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Objectives	Page 1
Survey Methodology	Page 2
Hierarchy of Architectural and Historical Significance in the Museum Hill Area (Key to Survey Map)	Page 3
Historical Development of the Museum Hill Area	Page 4
Recommendations for Preservation and Revitalization of the Museum Hill Survey Area	Page 9
Bibliography	Page 11

## OBJECTIVES

1. The primary objective of the Museum Hill survey was to make an intensive inventory of all 268 buildings in the predominantly 19th Century, residential area, Museum Hill. True to its name, the Museum Hill area is centered around the Saint Joseph Museum, formerly the Wyeth-Tootle mansion, and is located on the eastern Missouri River bluff that overlooks downtown Saint Joseph. Museum Hill was selected as a survey area because it is one of the earliest residential areas remaining in the city and forms an historically and topographically cohesive grouping. The survey area contains .1698 square mile and is bounded by South 15th Street on the east, Messanie Street on the south (except for the 600 and 700 blocks of South 13th Street which project south on the bluff), South 9th and 10th Streets on the west skirting the commercial area, and the City Hall complex and Faraon Street on the north.
2. Other important objectives for the documentation of the architectural and historical significance of the buildings within the Museum Hill area were: to research the information necessary for National Register and Saint Joseph City Historic District designation which will encourage preservation and provide legal protection of the cited buildings; to provide information for consideration in revitalization projects for the area; and to heighten the awareness of area residents and other citizens of Saint Joseph of the historically and architecturally significant Museum Hill structures and their potential as a national tourist attraction.

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The Museum Hill survey properties were documented in the following ways:

1. Legal descriptions and current addresses to identify properties;
2. 35mm black and white photographs;
3. On site survey of properties to examine siting, building materials and detailing, condition of property, and outbuildings;
4. Architectural analysis and description of building type, material, detailing and style to determine significance;
5. Historical research of extant records pertaining to the construction of survey buildings and their original occupants, which were: water permits; building permits; city directories dating back to 1859; title abstracts; Buchanan County land ownership records; 1877 Atlas of Buchanan County; Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of 1883, 1888, 1897, and 1956; 19th and 20th Century histories of Saint Joseph and Buchanan County; Saint Joseph Newspress and Gazette; and the historical collections of the Saint Joseph Public Library and the Missouri Historical Society; (sources used are cited at the bottom of each survey sheet);
6. Illustrated on an updated 1956 Sanborn Map of the survey area with building configurations color coded to indicate architectural and historical significance.

## HIERARCHY OF ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE IN THE MUSEUM HILL AREA

- Red* 1. National Register of Historic Places or Saint Joseph Landmark Calibre
- Green* 2. Significant Contribution to a National Register or Saint Joseph Historical District
- Orange* 3. Contribution to National Register or Saint Joseph Historical District
- Yellow* 4. Architectural Intrusion Detracting from the Cohesiveness of Historical District
- Purple* 5. Commercial Intrusion

Each category in the preceding hierarchy of significance is represented by the numbers and colors shown above. Each building in the Museum Hill survey has been placed in this hierarchy and recorded numerically on each survey sheet to the left of item #43 and colored on the map in the corresponding color.

These categories were determined in the following ways.

1. The top category represents: a) outstanding, unique and/or well preserved examples of architectural styles; b) representative works of important architects; and c) buildings associated with residents prominent in the history of the city.
2. The second category represents: a) notable and/or largely intact examples of architectural styles; and b) buildings associated with residents significant to the history of the city.
3. The third category represents: a) buildings which originally might have appeared in the two preceding categories but have been demoted because of significant alterations; and b) buildings indistinguished in themselves, although their use, proportion, period, building type and material might render them compatible with the establishment of an historic district.
4. The fourth category represents buildings incompatible in proportion, period, and/or building type and material which detract from the architectural and/or historical continuity of the predominantly 19th Century Museum Hill area.
5. The last category represents commercial properties which are incompatible in use, design, and/or period with the predominantly 19th Century, residential Museum Hill area.

## HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE MUSEUM HILL AREA

Most of the Museum Hill survey area is located within the Smith Additions platted by Frederick W. Smith, the engineer who designed the plat for the "Original Town" of Saint Joseph filed in 1843 for the city's founder, Joseph Robidoux III. The "Original Town" was bounded by the Missouri River, Messanie, Robidoux and 6th Streets. Smith pre-empted the 160 acres directly east of the "Original Town." Smith's First Addition in 1845 of 6th and 7th Streets between Messanie and Francis and his Second Addition in 1847 of 6th and 7th Streets between Francis and Robidoux are both outside the Museum Hill survey area. Smith's Third Addition in 1848 of 8th through 11th Streets between Robidoux and the south side of Angelique, and his Fourth Addition in 1855 of the rest of the area defined by 10th, 13th, Faraon and Messanie Streets comprise the heart of the Museum Hill area. In the Fourth Addition, Smith set aside land for Smith's Park, bounded by 11th, 12th, Francis and Jules, now incorporated in the City Hall Mall. Also in this addition, Smith, a devout Catholic, provided a fine bluff-top site for the Sacred Heart Institute completed in 1857. The Institute remained the major focal point and anchor of the area until it was closed in 1960.

Frederick Smith was listed in the first city directory of 1859 as residing on the southeast corner of 11th and Charles, the site of the present day centerpiece of the Museum Hill survey area, the St. Joseph Museum. Smith continued to live at this address until 1879 when the museum building, formerly the Wyeth-Tootle mansion was constructed on the site. Smith then moved a block east to 311 South 12th Street which has been demolished.

The 600 and 700 blocks of South 13th Street were part of John Patee's Addition in 1851. This part of South 13th, appropriately, was named on the plat, "Bluff Street," and was constructed sometime after 1868 because it was not shown on an 1868 map of the area. The earliest extant buildings on these blocks are three from the 1880's; the rest were built around the turn of the century.

The land east of 13th Street to 17th Street between Messanie and the north side of Faraon was platted as Carter's Addition in 1858. However, according to an 1868 map, the development of this addition was sparse and the streets east of 15th Street, named "William Street" on the plat, were not yet built.

Later "Additions" in the survey area were actually subdivisions of the larger plats cited above.

Only ten houses from the antebellum period and the years soon after the Civil War remain scattered throughout the Museum Hill area. (Please refer to the chart following this section.) Most of these buildings are of frame construction, one to one-and-a-half stories high, with gabled roofs, and symmetrically composed in vernacular, Greek or Gothic Revival styles, as exemplified by 915 Angelique. A notable exception to this building type is the William T. Harris House, 1423 Francis Street, built circa 1851 with an octagonal configuration later squared by corner additions.

Between 1870 and 1880, Saint Joseph's population took a big jump from 19,565 to 32,431. This increase, as well as the changing fortunes of the boomtown were reflected in the greater and more ambitious development of



the Museum Hill area. Many of the 23 buildings remaining from this decade tend to be built of brick, stand two stories high, and have the segmentally arched label lintels often accented by oversized keystones and decorated by Eastlake inspired motifs, hipped roofs underscored by boxed cornices sometimes lined with carved brackets, and rectangular massing that are earmarks of the dominant Italianate style. The Rectory of the Immaculate Conception at 507 South 10th Street, circa 1876. is an outstanding example of the Italianate style. Buildings of this period were built throughout the Museum Hill area.

The 1880's and 1890's are known as the "Golden Age" in Saint Joseph, and rightly so, especially in the Museum Hill area. The city's economy was going full tilt and many of the city's most prominent citizens were building fine houses here. In the Museum Hill area 81 buildings remain from the 1880's and 50 remain from the 1890's. Although the Italianate style was still employed during the early part of this period, the most popular styles were opulent versions of the Queen Anne and Victorian Eclectic styles. Many of these houses are built of brick, are two-and-a-half stories high, and have asymmetrical massing and fenestration, variegated, steeply pitched roofs with decorative chimneys, and beautiful and inventive stained and leaded glass (as at 301 S. 10th Street). Several of the most outstanding buildings constructed during these decades were designed by the Beaux Arts trained architect Edmund J. Eckel and his firm Eckel and Mann with which Harvey Ellis was affiliated from 1888 to 1892. Fine examples of Eckel's work, in addition to the Wyeth-Tootle mansion of 1879, are the J.B. Moss Residence, 906 Sylvania, 1890, and the Calvin Burnes and Joshua Motter Residence, 301 S. 10th, <sup>corner</sup> circa 1888. Buildings of this period were often built on high or prominent/sites



in proximity to the Wyeth-Tootle mansion and the Sacred Heart Institute, necessitating at times rebuilding on sites of more modest structures. An example of this is the B.R. Vineyard residence, at 1125 Charles, built in 1890 of brick and rock-faced brownstone in the Richardsonian Romanesque style, on the site directly north of the St. Joseph Museum, where Jones T. Wilson of the Second Baptist Church lived as early as 1871. This concentration of fine residences of the 1880's and 1890's is located mostly in the area bounded by 10th, 13th, Felix and Angeliqye Streets. It is this area which is being proposed as an historic district.

At the turn of the century as St. Joseph's economy began to slow and its population leveled off, the number, scale and pretense of the buildings constructed began to decline. Forty-eight buildings were constructed in the decade beginning in 1900, 17 in that beginning in 1910, and 17 in that beginning in 1920. The majority of residences constructed during this period were of undistinguished vernacular designs. The architectural high point of this period was a series of Beaux Arts Revival public buildings, such as the First Church of Christ Scientist, at 1207 Felix, built in 1905 and designed by R.F. Comstock of New York City.

Building in the Museum Hill area came to a virtual halt during the depression. Between 1930 and 1970 only nine buildings were constructed. In the decade beginning in 1970, 13 buildings were constructed, ten of which were apartment buildings for federally subsidized housing on the site of the Sacred Heart Institute. No new buildings have been constructed since 1980.

Today the Museum Hill area is in an advanced state of urban decay. Most of the large Victorian period houses have been divided into apartments and others have been left vacant or demolished. The next section will present proposals to help revitalize the area.

Construction During Decade Beginning	Number of Buildings Constructed	Vernacular	Eclectic	Romanesque, Gothic & Tudor Revivals	Italianate	Octagon & Second Empire	Queen Anne	Chateausque	Colonial Revival	Beaux Arts	Bungalow
1850	2	1				1					1
1860	8	4	2	1	1						
1870	23	6	8		9						
1880	81	17	25	1	15	2	21				
1890	50	19	11	3			13	1	3		
1900	118	34		2			1		7	2	2
1910	17	14		1					1		1
1920	17	10								6	1
1930	2	1									1
1940	1			1							
1950	4	4									
1960	2	2									
1970	13	13									
1980	0										
Total	268	125	46	9	25	3	35	1	11	8	5

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRESERVATION AND REVITALIZATION OF THE MUSEUM HILL SURVEY AREA

1) Local Historic District Designation

Designation of the Museum Hill area as an historic district, under St. Joseph City Ordinance #4750, would protect designated properties from alteration and demolition without the consent of the St. Joseph Landmarks Commission. Designation would prevent unconsidered destruction of architecturally significant buildings in the area and would help to improve the neighborhood's image by underscoring its historical and architectural importance. I recommend for designation as the initial Museum Hill historic district the area bounded by Felix, 13th, 10th and Angeliqe Streets where the architecture is particularly outstanding and many of the residents are supportive. If neighboring property owners and residents become enthused about enlarging the historic district, it could be expanded easily in any direction as it is surrounded by worthy architecture, most of which has been documented by this survey.

2) Historic District in the National Register of Historic Places

National Register designation of a Museum Hill district would not provide the physical protection of its historic structures that local designation would provide. However, it would greatly boost the neighborhood's image by verifying its national architectural and historical significance, as well as entitling the owners of designated properties to take 25% tax credits for substantial rehabilitation of income-producing buildings.

3) Zoning Change

There is a serious zoning handicap for many of the historic areas in St. Joseph. These areas, including the Museum Hill district, have been zoned R-4, entitled "Apartment Residential District", which is essentially a zoning "free-for-all" allowing many uses incompatible with family residential living- such as mental health facilities and alcohol detoxification centers. R-3 zoning, entitled

"Garden Apartment Residential District", is limited to modern apartment complexes by parking and spatial requirements. and it does not permit such incompatible uses. The older areas in the city are penalized by this inequitable zoning, because investors are reluctant to buy and rent property which cannot be protected from incompatible uses. These incompatible uses have had a devastating impact on the Museum Hill area. To correct this problem, a new zoning status, R-6, for locally designated and National Register historic districts, could be established with use restrictions similar to those of R-3. This new status might permit also limited commercial activities such as "bed and breakfast" type hostelries, restaurants or professional offices with unobtrusive signage, which would be appropriate reuses of large Victorian period buildings.

#### 4) Tax Exempt Neighborhood Association

The establishment of tax exempt status for the existing neighborhood association in the Museum Hill area would make the group eligible to apply for financial assistance through such programs as the Missouri Housing Development Commission's Neighborhood Loan Program to make homeowner loans, the Missouri State Council for the Humanities to fund projects like an historical brochure on the Museum Hill district, and the federal Community Development grants to pay for improved services in the neighborhood like the historically designed street lighting similar to that in the Hall Street district. The neighborhood association also could unify support for the area and facilitate cohesive development of the area through public and private initiatives. The existing Heritage 1776, Inc., a "not for profit" corporation which owns the historic Horton House in the heart of the Museum Hill area, with the consent of the corporation's board of directors could merge with the current neighborhood association to provide it immediately with the important tax exempt status.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1) Abstracts of Title; cited individually on survey forms
- 2) Architecture of Saint Joseph, Albrecht Art Museum, St. Joseph, Missouri, 1976
- 3) Building Permits, City Hall, St. Joseph, Missouri
- 4) City Directories of St. Joseph; 1859- present, St. Joseph Public Library
- 5) History of Buchanan County, Birdsall, Williams & Co., Saint Joseph Steam Printing Co., 1881
- 6) An Illustrated Historical Map of Buchanan County, Missouri, Brink, McDonough and Company, 1877
- 7) Johnson, Johnson and Roy, Inc., Historic Preservation Inventory, St. Joseph, Missouri, September 1972
- 8) Logan, Sheridan A., Old Saint Jo. Gateway to the West, 1799-1932, John Sublett Logan Foundation, 1979, St. Joseph, Missouri
- 9) National Register Nomination of the William T. Harris Neighborhood Historic District, Tom Carneal and Nancy Sandehn, 1983
- 10) Rutt, Chris L., History of Buchanan County and the City of St. Joseph and Representative Citizens, Chicago, Illinois, Biographical Publishing Co., 1904
- 11) Saint Joseph Gazette, St. Joseph, Missouri
- 12) Saint Joseph Newpress, St. Joseph, Missouri
- 13) Saint Joseph City Zoning Code, City Hall, Saint Joseph, Missouri
- 14) Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps: 1883, 1888, 1897 and 1956
- 15) Steen, Laurie G., Reuse of a Central City Neighborhood: Museum Hill, St. Joseph, Missouri, Thesis submitted for Master of Architecture Degree, University of Kansas
- 16) Smith, Larry, and Company, Ltd., Midgley, Shaughnessy, Fickel and Scott Architects, Inc., Downtown Development and Neighborhood Commercial Study; Saint Joseph, Missouri, 27 February 1981
- 17) Water Permits, Missouri-American Water Company, Saint Joseph, Missouri