

311 South 15th Street
St. Joseph
Buchanan County
Missouri

HABS No. MO-1873

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

311 SOUTH FIFTEENTH STREET

HABS No. MO-1873

Location: 311 South 15th Street
Lots 5 & 6, Block 25, Carter's Addition
St. Joseph, Buchanan County, Missouri

Present Owner: Dorothy Brown
2423 Angelique
St. Joseph, Missouri 64501

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: Although the Henry Parnall house, 311 South 15th Street, is extremely deteriorated, it is moderately significant as a contributing property in the Museum Hill National Register Historic District (listed 03-08-91) and the local Museum Hill district (designated 01-06-86). The Museum Hill District is significant in the areas of commerce and architecture during the period from ca. 1860 to 1931. The district retains its historic integrity of location and setting. Contributing buildings retain physical features indicative of period styles and design preferences. The buildings convey a sense of the historic scene when St. Joseph's economic prosperity was reflected in its robust residential growth.

The Parnall house is a representative example of the Victorian style residence property type described in the multiple-property context statement, "Historic Resources of St. Joseph, Buchanan County, Missouri." These residences are significant in the areas of commerce, industry, and architecture. The Parnall house is significant as a representation of the community's growth and wide-spread prosperity during the wholesaling period. It embodies the distinctive characteristics of the styles prevalent in Victorian America, and reflects a specific adaptation to the Museum Hill District. The house retains the architectural features identifying it as having been built during the period of significance such as roof shape, massing, wall cladding, facade arrangement and fenestration.

Part I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Date of erection: ca. 1878, 1889

Architect: Unknown

Original owner: Henry Parnall

Alterations and additions:

Physical characteristics and documentary evidence indicate that the central part of this structure was constructed in the 1870s before city building permits were required beginning in 1886. The oldest part of the structure includes a two-story central section and a rear one-story gable wing to the northeast. The residence was altered and enlarged in 1889 when the two-story front section and entrance porch were constructed giving the building its present facade. A narrow two-story rear wing to the southeast appears to be later, probably dating from the early twentieth century.

Historical Context:

In July of 1843, Joseph Robidoux filed the town plat for St. Joseph with the Clerk of Common Pleas in St. Louis. Robidoux had operated a trading post at this location, where Blacksnake Creek joins the Missouri River, for several years. At first he was an employee of the American Fur Company, but in 1830 he purchased their goods and interest in the post becoming sole proprietor. When the town plan was recorded in 1843, the population of the settlement was about 200 people. By December the population had increased to 500 as settlers learned of the establishment of a town.

The discovery of gold in California greatly benefitted St. Joseph. As the northern and westernmost point that could be reached by steamboat before embarking on the arduous overland trip, St. Joseph had an advantage over Independence, the settlement that had been the main point of departure for the Santa Fe Trail. The needs of outfitting the thousands of emigrants passing through St. Joseph led to the establishment of several outfitting and mercantile businesses. Many emigrants, in fact, chose to remain in St. Joseph to share in the fortunes that were being made. The population, which was 800 in 1846, had jumped to 3,460 by 1850. During the 1850s, nearby Fort Leavenworth was the general depot for the distribution of supplies to all forts throughout the west. Supplying the military was another lucrative economic opportunity which helped establish St. Joseph as a regional trade and outfitting center.

By 1860 the town grew to a population of 8,932 and citizens began to build residences in what was to become a more prestigious area--the hills overlooking the original town site near the Missouri River. Robidoux Hill to the north, Cathedral Hill to the northeast, and Museum Hill to the east were neighborhoods that were subdivided and developed after this time as the original town evolved into a commercial and industrial district. One more essential step in securing St. Joseph's prominence as a city and a major outfitter to the west was the completion of the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad line in 1859. St. Joseph was the westernmost railroad terminus for more than ten years until the transcontinental Union Pacific railroad was completed through Omaha and Council Bluffs in 1869.

With the beginning of the Civil War, most business and construction in St. Joseph came to a halt. Residents were divided in their sympathies, as was much of Missouri, and United States troops occupied the town. Although St. Joseph served as a military supply and mobilization center, residents were not allowed to participate in this trade. Virtually no structures were built or improvements made to the town infrastructure during this period. In general the town declined, as evidenced by a decrease in population from approximately 10,000 in 1861 to 7,500 at the close of the war.

Prosperity returned quickly to St. Joseph after hostilities actually ended. By 1870 the population had increased to 19,565 more than twice that in 1860. In the late 1860s railroad construction connected St. Joseph to Council Bluffs and Kansas City and opened a new route to Chicago and the east. In the 1880s about ten railroads built lines to St. Joseph making important connections with St. Louis, Kansas City, Chicago, Denver, and many other markets.

Museum Hill Historic District

The Museum Hill Historic District is generally associated with the development of St. Joseph in the late nineteenth century. During this period, the city's population continued to grow at a remarkable rate--to 32,431 in 1880 and 52,324 in 1890. The 1880s and 1890s became known as "the Golden Age" of St. Joseph. Expansion of wholesale trade, banking, and manufacturing created wealth which was manifested in the construction of many large and elaborate residences during this period. There was also a large market for rental properties including modest single-family residences, duplexes, and apartment buildings.

According to the National Register nomination, compared to the total of 280 properties and 246 eligible buildings, there are 76 Victorian style single-family residential structures contributing to the district. This type comprises approximately 31 per cent of the resources in the district. The Victorian style single-family residences of St. Joseph are significant in the areas of commerce, industry, and architecture. After the Civil War, the commercial growth achieved by St. Joseph was phenomenal because of its importance as a wholesale distribution center. The growing population included a large number of professionals and middle-class citizens associated with the commercial and industrial enterprises in town. Comparatively well-educated and well-to-do, this middle class aspired to obtain better stations in life, which in St. Joseph was conspicuously represented by the type of residence a person built and where it was located. Entire neighborhoods of these middle-class homes provide ample evidence of the economic boom experienced in St. Joseph, particularly in the 1880s and 1890s. These residential structures are significant as representations of the community's growth and dispersed wealth during the wholesaling period.

Victorian-style residences in the Museum Hill District embody the distinctive characteristics of the styles prevalent during the period and at the same time reflect specific adaptations to the various neighborhoods in St. Joseph. To be significant examples of architecture, they must retain the features which identify them as having been built during the period of their significance, such as roof shape, massing, wall cladding, facade arrangement and fenestration. Stylistic features such as cornice brackets for Italianate and surface texture variations for Queen Anne, should be evident.

The Henry Parnall House

Physical evidence and a chronology based on the analysis of city directories indicates that the core of this residence was constructed by 1878 and possibly as early as 1872. Henry Parnall, a grocer, was listed in 1878 as residing in this location on the east side of 15th Street between Charles and Sylvania. In 1883 and 1889 Parnall was listed as residing at 311 South 15th Street. James B. Parnall was also a resident in 1883. A building permit for this property was issued to A. Parnall [sic] January 24, 1889 to "remove res. & addn." Since the work was valued at only \$600, the permit signified alteration and addition rather than new construction. Also, there are obvious differences in the foundation, weatherboard, and interior moldings indicating that the prominent front of the building was added to an earlier central section. Henry Parnall may have initiated the addition in anticipation of marriage, but he died without much time to enjoy the results. In 1891 and 1892, Mary Parnall, Henry's widow, was the only resident recorded at 311 South 15th. Mary Panell [sic] received a building permit (\$400) for work on the residence in May, 1894.

The evidence of Henry Parnall's career supports the generalization that this property type was associated with middle class aspirations and relative success in St. Joseph. Parnall was first recorded as a resident in 1872. He was listed as a partner in the firm, Parnall and Ryan, groceries and provisions. Their store was located on the east side of 8th Street, between Messanie and Locust. Parnall resided at the same address. From 1879 until 1889, he was associated with O.A. Sandusky in the firm, Sandusky and Company, commercial merchants and fruit wholesalers. This business had two locations--116 South 3rd and 115 Market Square.

Circumstantial evidence also suggests the possible builder of this residence and a ca. 1872 construction date. It seems likely that both residences at 305 and 311 South 15th were associated with Rufus K. Allen, a carpenter and contractor. Allen was first recorded in 1872 as residing on the east side of 15th Street between Charles and Sylvania; in 1891 and 1892 the address was listed as 305 South 15th Street. Although it is substantially altered and vacant, Allen's brick residence at 305 South 15th still stands. Frederick Allen, a carpenter and probably a relative, boarded with Rufus Allen at this location in 1875. A son, Howard K. Allen, was listed as a resident in the 1880s. Howard Allen moved to a nearby residence at 318 South 15th by 1891. He was listed as a partner with his father in the planing mill business in the 1890s.

Rufus K. Allen arrived in St. Joseph in 1859 and after the Civil War he became one of the town's prominent builders and contractors. Allen moved to the 15th Street location between 1870 and 1872 so it is possible that he constructed the adjacent residence about the same time for speculation. Also in 1872, he opened a planing mill in St. Joseph which became the town's largest manufacturer of doors, sash, and blinds. Allen was the contractor for the first St. Joseph City Hall and Market House (1873) and the Union Depot (1881). As the 1881 History of Buchanan County reported, "many of the finest structures of St. Joseph, both in store edifices and residences, are specimens of his handiwork."

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural Merit and Interest: The Henry Parnall House, 311 South 15th Street, is an example of the Victorian single-family residence property type. Although it is very deteriorated, the building retains integrity of association, location, design, and materials. The facade arrangement, fenestration, and roof form remain intact. The building also retains sufficient ornamental characteristics to distinguish it as an example of the Italianate/eclectic style. A majority of the Victorian single-family residences in St. Joseph were built either in the Italianate, Queen Anne, Second Empire styles, or an eclectic combination of these three. The Italianate style featured a typical low-pitched roof with wide overhanging eaves and decorative brackets. The tall narrow windows are particularly noticeable and may feature ornamental molded crowns. Most examples are asymmetrical in massing and built of brick. The Parnall house is a relatively uncommon example constructed of wood frame and weatherboard.
2. Condition of fabric: Poor (to be demolished). The building is very deteriorated. The interior has been damaged by fire in the rear and stripped of most interior woodwork.

- B. Summary Description: The Henry Parnall house is a detached residence consisting of a rectangular two-story main block with a rear one-story gable wing and a two-story hipped addition. The structure has a symmetrical five-bay facade with a central entrance crowned by an ornamental front gable roof dormer. The building is approximately 38 feet wide from north to south. The south side is approximately 30 feet long from east to west and the north side including the rear wing is approximately 45 feet from east to west.

There is a brick foundation and a basement under the main block and rear wing to the northeast. The foundation on the north side of the rear wing has collapsed into the basement. This has exposed a sawn timber sill in sections joined by a half-lap joint and connected to the main block with a full-lap joint. The walls are constructed of wood frame and weatherboard.

A one-story three-bay entrance porch has a wooden floor on brick piers. There is an open railing with square posts and a molded railing. The flat porch roof is supported on wooden columns with a molded eave cornice and broad overhanging eaves. The roof had metal roofing which is extremely rusted and patched with asphalt. There are two front brick interior end chimneys and another in the rear of the main block at the northeast corner. The front chimney to the north retains an ornamental corbeled top; the others have been altered.

The main entrance is framed by multiple-pane head and sidelights. In the rear there are two side entrances in the one-story wing and an entrance in the two-story addition. Apparently, a second-story entrance in the addition once led to an exterior stair. Most exterior doors are missing, but the wing and the addition have wooden glazed paneled doors. There are the remains of 1/1 wooden double-hung window sash throughout the building. Two pairs of windows are located in the north side on the first floor.

The main block has a truncated hipped roof covered with deteriorated asphalt shingles. There is an overhanging eave with crown molding and ornamental brackets. The most prominent ornamental feature of the facade is a central roof dormer. It has three rectangular vent windows with louvers in the center opening. Ornamental vertical boards, shingles, and brackets accentuate the gable end.

Interior. In the interior there is a central stair hall flanked by two parlors with a smaller room at the end of the hall. A basement stair is located under the stair to the second floor. A similar plan is repeated on the second floor with four bedrooms and a bathroom at the end of the hall. The stair baluster had a molded curved railing with slender square spindles; only fragments remain. The one-story rear wing was a kitchen and the addition appears to have been constructed to provide kitchens and rear access for multiple apartments when the building was subdivided in the early twentieth century.

On the first floor wooden flooring has been covered with linoleum. Wooden floors are exposed on the second floor. The walls and ceilings are lath and plaster in very deteriorated condition. There were hinged paired doors between the parlors on the north side. On the south side heavy six-paneled sliding doors separated the parlors; one of these doors remains in place. The mantels have been removed from both front parlors. In the stairhall the door casing consists of a composite molding with coved casing and a raised coved and beaded frame. Although most of the ornamental woodwork in the parlors has been removed, the fragments consist of fluted moldings with medallion corner blocks. The wide baseboard is surmounted by a crown molded top. Some of the earliest trim remains in the rear parlor on the north side. The simple baseboard and door casing in this room is unornamented.

- C. Site: The site is elevated above the street. There is a smooth-cut coursed limestone retaining wall in front with concrete steps leading to the entrance porch. The building is located in a residential neighborhood of deteriorated late nineteenth and early twentieth century residences with a number of vacant lots in the vicinity.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Bibliography:

Birdsall, Williams, & Co. pub. History of Buchanan County (St. Joseph, MO: St. Joseph Steam Printing Co., 1881).

Building Permit file: Lots 5-6, Block 24, Carter's Addition.

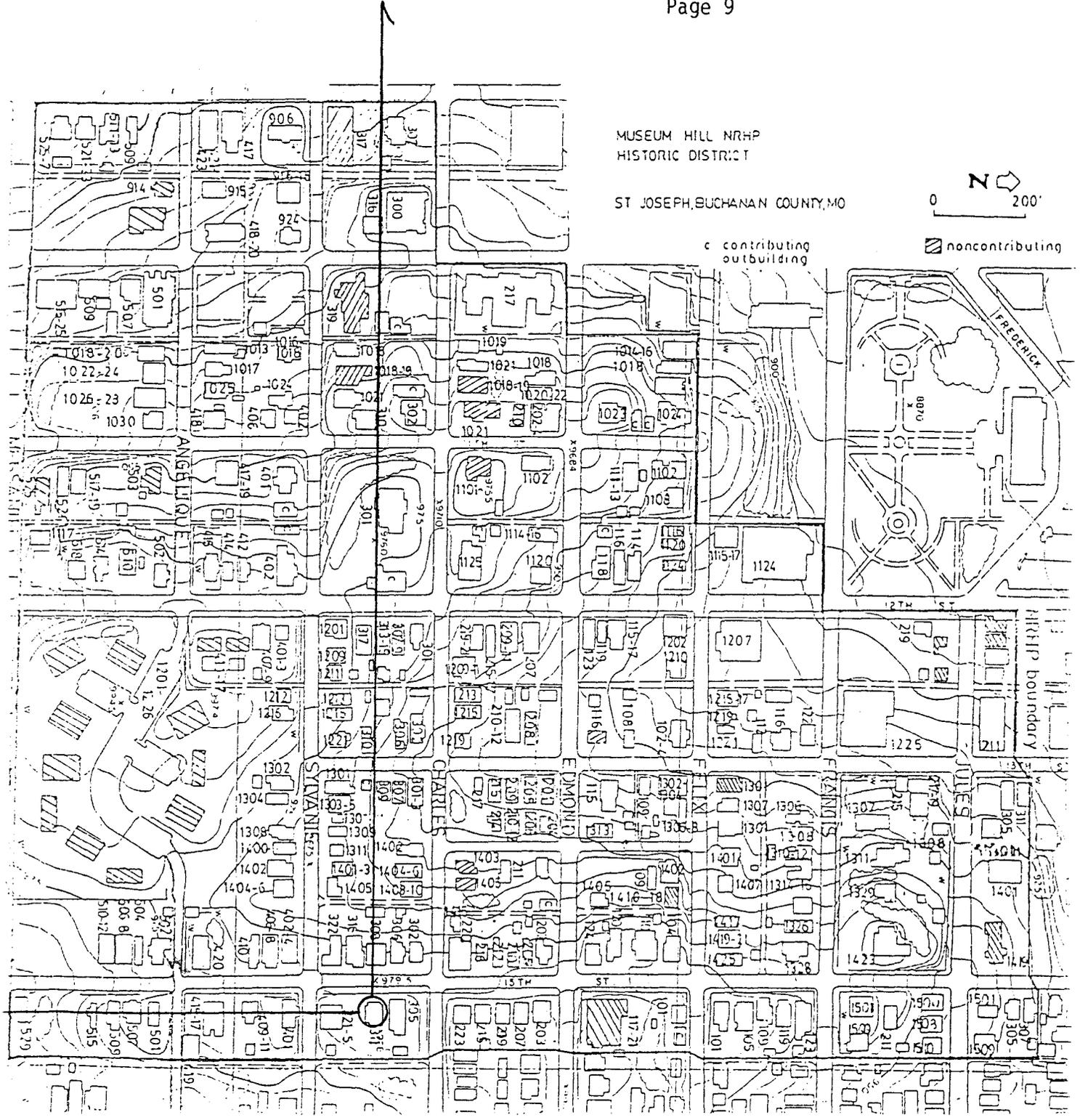
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Symington, Susan Ide. "Museum Hill Architectural Survey Report" (May, 1985). Prepared for the City of St. Joseph Community Development Department, Landmark Commission, and the Missouri Historic Preservation Program.

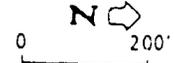
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Prepared by: Dale E. Nimz
Associate Planner for Historic Preservation
City of St. Joseph Community Development Department
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MUSEUM HILL NRHP
HISTORIC DISTRICT

ST. JOSEPH, BUCHANAN COUNTY, MO



c contributing
outbuilding

noncontributing

NRHP boundary