

Morris-Burnett Block
302-306 Edmond
St. Joseph
Buchanan County
Missouri

HABS No. MO-1877-

HABS
MO-1877

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

Morris-Burnett Block
HABS No. MO-1877
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Location: 302-306 Edmond Street
Lot 6, Block 39, Original Town
St. Joseph, Buchanan County, Missouri

Present Owner: The Glaze Partnership
P.O. Box 428
St. Joseph, Missouri 64502

Present Use: Vacant. This building is scheduled for demolition in 1990. A redevelopment plan for the entire block, beginning with the north half has been proposed.

Significance: Although the historic commercial building located at 302-306 Edmond Street has been altered, it is a potential contributing element of the Historic Resources of St. Joseph Multiple Property nomination. This structure is a good example of the small-scale commercial block property type. It possesses the distinct characteristics of the commercial building type. Chief among these is the well-defined storefront space with a distinction between public and private uses. The block also exemplifies the Classical Revival style of architecture and exhibits sufficient integrity of design, materials and workmanship to be considered contributing. The original fenestration pattern, exterior wall cladding and formal entry features are also still in evidence.

Part I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Date of Erection: 1897

Architect: Unknown

Original Owners: G.W. Morris; Charles and Thomas Burnett

Historical Narrative:

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. In the original town plan, Joseph Robidoux reserved the west half of Block 31 for a public market place which was designated "Market Square." Only two blocks from the Missouri River landing, Market Square became a center of commercial activity in the frontier settlement. Early merchants built retail establishments near the Square with stores located on the first floor and professional offices or residential apartments on the upper floors. Eventually in 1897, the Morris-Burnett Block, 302-306 Edmond, was constructed south of this historic district.

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 thousands of emigrants passing through St. Joseph led to the establishment of several mercantile businesses. Merchandise stocks were valued at \$400,000 and in eight months during 1849 123 buildings were erected--64 of them of brick. 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 the original town site began to evolve 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. 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 more railroad construction connected St. Joseph to Council Bluffs and Kansas City and opened a new route to Chicago and the east. During the 1880s about ten railroads built lines to St. Joseph making important connections with St. Louis, Kansas City, Chicago, Denver, and many other markets.

Commercial success, particularly in the wholesale/distribution business, was predominant in the history of St. Joseph. With a national (and in some cases, international) reputation as a distribution center, the city progressed steadily from frontier days through the industrialization period to the early twentieth century, serving as one of the largest and most profitable commercial centers in the country. The city's location and transportation advantages earned it the name "Queen City of the West" by the 1880s. 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.

At the turn of the century, the wholesale millinery business had annual sales of over one million dollars and employed more than 500 people. Sheridan-Clayton Paper Company was the largest supplier of tablets, and one of the largest paper supply houses in America. The C.D. Smith Drug Company and the Van Natta-Lynds Drug Company included seven states and territories in their trade area, with a volume of business nearing \$2,000,000. Produce also was a substantial business with receipts increasing from \$150,000 in 1868 to nearly \$9,000,000 in 1903. By 1904 St. Joseph had the fourth largest wholesale dry goods market on the continent. Four large dry goods houses employed over 200 traveling men, and made annual sales of \$20,000,000. The trade market of these companies extended over the whole territory west of the Missouri River, the British possessions, Alaska, Mexico, and the Pacific Islands.

Associated with the thriving wholesale and manufacturing endeavors were the supporting smaller retail establishments, banks, hotels, and entertainment facilities. Hotels dotted the city, but were concentrated near the railroad depot and the crowded wholesale sections to the south of the central business district. By the turn of the century, the central business district was densely built-up with large and small-scale commercial blocks, manufacturing, warehouse, and service buildings.

From awnings to art glass to vinegar and welding machines, St. Joseph retained over 400 factories through the 1920s, turning out more than 100 products with an annual manufactured value of nearly \$260,000,000. The nation's largest makers of school and writing tablets, ice cream cones, winter wheat flour, alfalfa feed, pancake flour, and near beer were located in St. Joseph at the time. The city was also the third largest (in volume) wholesale dry goods center in the country in the late 1920s. Over fifty wholesale business houses were located in St. Joseph, generating nearly 200 million dollars in activity in 1927.

Building and commercial activity began to decline in St. Joseph with the stock market crash of 1929 and the Depression. The once congested retail center of the downtown and the adjoining concentration of wholesale, manufacturing, and distribution facilities suffered greatly from demolition in the 1970s, including the destruction of most of the Market Square district in 1973. The remaining buildings are but a limited illustration of the prosperity that made St. Joseph "Queen City of the West."

The Morris-Burnett Block

The Morris-Burnett Block is associated with the development of St. Joseph in the late nineteenth century. Construction of the west section of the Morris-Burnett Block was indicated by a building permit issued to G.W. Morris August 6, 1897 for a store (\$700). Charles and Thomas Burnett received a permit August 12 for a store worth \$1850 to be constructed next to Morris. The relative values are appropriate since the Burnett building was twice as large. The Burnetts had an business at this location before 1897 because building permits in their name were recorded for a store addition (\$400, 1892) and storefront (\$300, 1896).

Apparently, G.W. Morris was a contractor or developer because he never occupied the building at 302 Edmond. The property was occupied by a series of saloonkeepers who probably rented. In 1898 Louis Winter was listed at this location as the proprietor of the Bowl House, a saloon. Winter remained in 1901, but by 1904 saloonkeeper Walter Todd was the tenant. In 1913 Allison Kinnison had a saloon at this address; in 1916 Edmond Theisen & Son were the proprietors. Saloons were also listed across the street. 302 Edmond was vacant in 1918. In 1921 the St. Joseph Gun Works was listed and in 1926 C.E. Carter operated a cafe in the building.

In 1898 Charles and Thomas Burnett were listed as pawnbrokers at 304-306 Edmond. They lived above the storefronts in that year, but moved to homes in residential neighborhoods by 1901. While the Burnett pawnshop persisted until 1909 when Thomas Burnett moved to Seattle, Washington, the upper floors of the building were occupied by other tenants such as Harry Levine, a cigar manufacturer. In 1913 the storefronts were occupied by Ariel Arthur, tailor, and Josiah Batcheller, gunsmith, and Mathew Ricketts, a colored physician, resided at 306 1/2 Edmond.

In this historic period of segregation, the presence of colored tenants may suggest a decline in status for this block after the departure of the Burnetts. In 1916 Mrs. Eliza Carriger (c) had a restaurant at 304 Edmond and Oliver Ringo, gunsmith, occupied 306 Edmond. In 1918 304 Edmond was vacant and John Shields (c) barber was listed at 306 Edmond. In 1921 Persky's Mercantile Co. as listed at 304 and locksmiths Batcheller and Shaw were listed at 306 Edmond. In 1926 the occupants were Sam Spring, clothing, and W.E. Shaw, gunsmith. Such turnover also suggests that this was not a highly marketable property. In later years, the status of the Morris-Burnett Block was affected by the decline of the St. Joseph central business district after World War II.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural Merit and Interest: The Morris-Burnett Block, 302-306 Edmond, was evaluated in the South Central Business District Survey (1985) as contributing to the establishment of a potential historic district of nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial buildings. That assessment now appears to be too optimistic since the building has been isolated by the demolition of other buildings in the vicinity. Moreover, the architectural integrity is marginal because of alterations and deterioration.
2. Condition of fabric: Poor. The building is very deteriorated. Apparently the roof is failing and noticeable cracks have opened in the side and rear walls.

- B. Summary Description: The Morris-Burnett Block is a rectangular two-story commercial block with ten first floor bays and nine second floor openings. The building is approximately 60 feet wide from east to west and 37.5 feet long from north to south. Although unified by a common design and construction treatment, the block is divided into two sections by a masonry partition wall between 302 Edmond and 304-306 Edmond. There are three recessed storefront entrances in the main facade including an oblique corner entrance. Second floor stair entrances are located at the northeast and southwest corners of the block.

This building is constructed of brick masonry with a brick foundation. To the north the main facade of glazed brick is laid in running bond. To the west a secondary facade of glazed brick is laid in common bond. There is a low front-sloping shed roof behind a parapet. Two paneled wooden entrance doors with transoms remain--one at the northeast and one at the southwest corners of the building. Two interior brick chimneys remain in the east front facade.

Decorative elements characteristic of the Neo-classical style include a tooled smooth-cut stone water table to the west, stone sills and lintels. Raised brick belt courses accent the main facades. There is a pressed metal storefront cornice, a single iron Corinthian column supporting the corner entrance, and a metal eave cornice with dentil molding. The second floor front window openings have flat brick arches and raised brick hoods. Ornamental iron eave vents are set in square openings just below the cornice.

Alterations include modern wood framing and windows in the storefront. Second floor openings are covered with wood. The rear entrance in the west facade has been filled with wood. In the rear wall a ground floor opening has been filled with brick; second floor openings are filled with wood and brick. Three flue cavities are exposed in the rear wall. The east wall of the building has been stuccoed and painted white.

C. Site

While the Sanborn map of 1911 shows that the Morris-Burnett Block was part of a row of similar two-story brick commercial buildings on Edmond Street, this is the only section that has survived out of the historic dense urban environment. To the south an adjoining three-story brick building once stood. Now the Morris-Burnett Block is the only building on the north half of this block. It faces a parking lot with a large modern building to the northwest.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Bibliography:

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City of St. Joseph Community Development Department
October 5, 1990

North End

Morris-Burnett Block
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302-306
Edward

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Maped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey

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