

Alvina Schmitz Building
1014 Felix Street
St. Joseph
Buchanan County
Missouri

HABS No. MO-1882

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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

ALVINA SCHMITZ BUILDING

HABS No. MO-1882

Location: 1014 Felix Street
Lots 5 & 7, Block 41, Smith's Addition
St. Joseph, Buchanan County, Missouri

Present Owner: Howard Templeton
16767 Arrow
Cantana, CA

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The Alvina Schmitz apartment building is moderately significant as a contributing property in the Museum Hill National Register Historic District (listed 03-08-91) and the local Museum Hill Historic District (designated 01-06-86). The District is significant in the areas of commerce and architecture during the period ca. 1860-1931. The district retains its historic integrity of location and setting. Contributing buildings retain physical features indicative of period styles and design preferences. Contributing buildings convey a sense of the historic scene when St. Joseph's burgeoning economic prosperity was reflected in its equally robust residential growth.

The Schmitz building is a representative example of the four-family flat building type. This multiple-family residential property type is significant in the areas of commerce, industry, and architecture according to the context statement and description of property types entitled, "Historic Resources of St. Joseph, Buchanan County, Missouri."

Erected in 1920, this was one of the latest buildings constructed in the Museum Hill District during the historic period. The building is associated with the late stages of growth characteristic of St. Joseph's period of prosperity based on wholesale distribution. Multiple family residential structures are significant as "reflections of the city's explosive growth in population and wealth due to her position as a wholesaling center. The citizens who built multiple family structures used them as a form of investment for the wealth they earned from related industries" (Historic Resources, pp. 28-30).

Part I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

- A. Date of erection: 1920
- Architect: Unknown
- Original owner: Alvina Schmitz

B. 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 32 multiple family residences contributing to the district. "Not unlike the duplex, the multiple family residential buildings of St. Joseph resulted from the historical forces shaping real estate investment in the city in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Various subtypes of this form can be identified: rowhouses, townhouse, 2 and 4 family flats, and apartment buildings, including walk-ups and double loaded corridors, were built during St. Joseph's heyday as a mercantile capital. Interspersed among the city's residential neighborhoods and along major arteries these properties served essentially the same purpose as the duplexes, albeit with less of the status accorded duplex and single family residence owners. The multiple family residence fulfilled an important function in providing housing for the single, less affluent, traveling or transitory workers associated with the city's economy" (NR nomination, p. 11).

The Alvina Schmitz Building

A building permit for this apartment building (valued at \$5,000) was issued to Alvina Schmitz May 10, 1920. After completion Alvina Schmitz lived in one of the units. As her name suggests, Schmitz was probably of German-American heritage. The apartment building was constructed on the site of a earlier Schmitz family residence. A water permit was issued to Annie Schmitz April 14, 1887 indicating the date of construction for the original structure.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural Merit and Interest: The Alvina Schmitz Building, 1014 Felix Street, is moderately significant as a contributing property in the historic district. The structure is an example of the four-family flat apartment building type. The unusual eave cornice and finials are distinguishing features.

According to a typology provided by the Missouri Historic Preservation Program, the four-family flat is characterized as having two apartment units upstairs and two downstairs; the two units on each floor are reflections of each other. Each apartment had a shotgun floorplan of three or four major rooms deep. The building is usually two or two-and-a-half stories tall and from two to six bays wide. The building form is rectangular, although sometimes the floor incorporates rear wings. The type is often constructed of brick with stone trim. Entrances to later versions are usually a group of four adjoining doors centrally located so that the two stairwells to the second floor adjoin each other. The building often has a flat roof with parapet or false facade. The type often references architectural styles popular during the period of construction. This type is generally sited on a narrow city lot occupying the front half of the lot.

2. Condition of fabric: Poor (to be demolished). The building is deteriorated due to neglect and water damage. While the masonry walls remain sound, the roof is leaking and there is extensive interior water damage. The interior has been vandalized.

- B. Summary Description: The Alvina Schmitz Building is a two-story, flat-roofed brick apartment building with two one-story rear wings and a recessed central entrance. This is a rectangular building approximately 37.5 feet wide from east to west and 54 feet long from north to south. The foundation and walls are constructed of brick masonry. The front facade is laid in running bond which has been painted. The side and rear walls are common bond. There are flat brick arches in the front and west walls with segmental arches over the openings in the east and south walls. The sidewall parapets descend in stepped bays toward the rear of the building. Projecting belt courses ornament the front and east facades and extend for one bay only on the west facade. At the eave the main facade has a belt course and recessed brick panels accented by a projecting cornice molding crowned with finials at the ends.

The one-story flat-roofed front porch is supported by square brick posts on a concrete floor. The open railing is constructed of ornamental wire-cut brick with a stone cap. The front steps are concrete and consist of two flights and a landing. The wooden porch ceiling is constructed of narrow tongue and groove beaded board. There is a massive ornamental porch cornice with overhanging eave. A wooden railing on the porch roof has been removed. Rear second-story porches were constructed on top of the masonry wings. These have wooden wainscoting and square posts and appear to have been originally screened. A room to the southeast has been enclosed with car siding. A wooden rear stair located between the brick wings leads to the second floor.

There is a central brick chimney in the rear of the building. Most of the openings have been covered with plywood, but the doors and windows remain. The main wooden entrance door has eighteen divided lights; it is flanked by twelve-pane sidelights and surmounted by divided transoms. Exterior wooden doors on the upper floors have glazed panels above recessed solid panels. There are wooden screen doors and 1/1 double-hung windows.

The roof is nearly flat sloping to the rear. The original roofing appears to be metal which is very rusted and has been covered with asphalt roll roofing.

Because of the site on a hillside, there are several retaining walls associated with this building. In front the wall is constructed of coursed smooth-cut irregular stone. To the west most of the high sloping wall is coursed rubble stone with an iron railing on top. The north end of this wall has been rebuilt with concrete block. To the east the wall is constructed of concrete.

The interior of this building has a typical plan with a central entrance and stair hall and long connected suites of rooms on either side. There are original four-panel doors throughout framed with simple rounded-edge molding. More elaborate baseboards are beaded with a coved molding and the casing under the window sills is also ornamented with a double bead. Like the door openings, the upper window casing has a simple rounded edge. The condition of the interior lath and plaster walls is very poor; the wallpaper is peeling and much of the ceiling plaster has fallen. The floors are covered with deteriorated modern carpet.

C. Site

This property is located on a steep north-facing slope with the highest part of Museum Hill behind the building to the south and east. Smith Park and the St. Joseph City Hall are located one block north. The city's central business district is directly west of the property extending to the low-lying land near the Missouri River.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Bibliography:

Building Permit file: Lots 5 & 7, Block 41, Smith's Addition.

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Wolfenbarger, Deon. "Historic Resources of St. Joseph, Buchanan County, Missouri" (June 20, 1988). National Register Residential Property Context and Outline of Property Types. Prepared for the City of St. Joseph Community Development Department, Landmark Commission, and the Missouri Historic Preservation Program.

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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

