

M.G. Gilbert House  
217 S. 13th Street  
St. Joseph  
Buchanan County  
Missouri

HABS No. MO-1887

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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

## M.G. GILBERT HOUSE

HABS No. MO-1887

**Location:** 217 South 13th Street  
West 70 feet of Lot 3, Wilson's Addition  
St. Joseph, Buchanan County, Missouri

**Present Owner:** France Williams, Mary Hill & Roberta Ewing  
1605 Jule Street  
St. Joseph, MO 64501

**Present Use:** Vacant

**Significance:** The M.G. Gilbert rental house, 217 South 13th Street, is marginally 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.

Although it is very deteriorated, the house at 217 South 13th Street is an example of the vernacular residential structures described as a distinctive property type in the multiple-property context statement, "Historic Resources of St. Joseph, Buchanan County, Missouri." The residence retains minimal integrity of association, location, design, and materials.

Vernacular residences are associated with the historical settlement patterns and economic development of St. Joseph. The city's growth required many different kinds of workers, who in turn demanded various types of housing. These included one and two-story wood-frame buildings, many adorned with inexpensive ornamentation typical of the Victorian period. By not building in brick, working people were able to afford a home which still reflected their aspirations. Constructed in 1901, this property was built in the latter part of the period of significance when this district was beginning to lose its prominence.

Part I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Date of erection: 1901

Architect: Unknown

Original owner: Mrs. M.G. Gilbert

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 59 vernacular residential structures contributing to the district. These are buildings that do not clearly reflect a particular high style designation. These properties normally became a part of St. Joseph residential districts before, and after, the city's more affluent citizens appropriated the most desirable sites; however, throughout the residential development of St. Joseph there was a consistent pattern of intermixing high-style housing with vernacular forms in residential neighborhoods. The Museum Hill district maintains properties reflecting the pattern of the city's residential development through 1860-1929, with 45% of the district's contributing vernacular residential structures built between the boom years of 1870-1909.

The Mrs. M.G. Gilbert House

Construction of this building was indicated by a building permit (\$300) issued March 4, 1901 to M.G. Gilbert and a water permit to "Mrs. Gilbert" issued March 14. Gilbert was a teacher at the nearby Robidoux School who lived at 113 South 13th Street. The first resident listed at this address was John S. Morrison, a commercial traveler for Tootle, Wheeler, and Motter, a notable St. Joseph wholesale business.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural Merit and Interest: The M. G. Gilbert rental house, 217 South 13th Street, is marginally significant as a contributing property in the Museum Hill Historic District. The building is an example of a vernacular residence based on the hall and parlor planform.

This type is characterized as a building with a two-room plan consisting of a hall somewhat larger than the parlor. The single front door provided access directly to the hall. The building type has a parallel orientation with a sidegable roof and may be one, one-and-a-half, or two stories in height. It is commonly three to five bays wide with modest, practically non-existent architectural detail. Although relationships to the hall and parlor, gable-front, and shotgun house types were all suggested in the SHPO's determination of eligibility for this property, the actual form was best described in the National Register nomination as "idiosyncratic."

2. Condition of fabric: Poor (to be demolished). The building is vacant and deteriorated. There is a substantial hole in the roof of the rear shed addition.

- B. Summary Description: The M.G. Gilbert rental house is a one-and-a-half-story wood frame building with a steep sidegable roof. The gable end faces the street to the west, but the entrance is located in the south side. There is a hipped-roof side entrance porch which has been enclosed and a rear shed-roofed kitchen wing. The main block is rectangular with the rear wing extending past to join the enclosed porch. The structure is approximately 32 feet long from east to west and 20 feet wide from north to south.

The building has a basement and brick foundation. The foundation has been parged. Exterior walls are covered with deteriorated asphalt sheathing which has been painted. The enclosed front porch enclosed is supported on square wooden posts. There is a central interior brick chimney. There are glazed paneled wooden entrance doors in the center of the south side and at the rear southeast corner. Most of the historic windows have been replaced with modern 8/8 and 6/6 double-hung sash. There are small rectangular sliding windows in the sidewalls of the second floor bedrooms. Modern exterior aluminum storm windows have been installed. The roof is covered with deteriorated asphalt shingles.

Interior. The main block of this building has two rooms on the first and second floors with a kitchen and bathroom wing attached to the rear. A winding stair to the second floor is located in the center of the north side above the stair to the basement. There are wooden floors covered with carpet. The interior walls and ceilings are lath and plaster, but the walls on the first floor have been covered with modern plywood paneling. The original wooden baseboard and casing is unornamented. The sidewalls of the second floor bedrooms are covered with wide tongue and grooved boards.

C. Site: This is a relatively level lot in a residential neighborhood with several vacant lots in the vicinity.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Bibliography:

Building Permit file: West 70 feet of Lot 3, Wilson's Addition.

Davidson, Hugh. "Museum Hill Historic District," National Register of Historic Places nomination (November, 1990). Prepared for the Missouri Historic Preservation Program.

St. Joseph City Directories: 1901.

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.

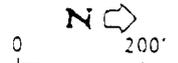
Water permit #4060 Mrs. Gilbert 03-14-1901.

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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MUSEUM HILL NRHP  
HISTORIC DISTRICT

ST. JOSEPH, BUCHANAN COUNTY, MO



c contributing  
outbuilding

▨ noncontributing

