

703 NORTH TWELFTH STREET (HOUSE)  
St. Joseph  
Buchanan County  
Missouri

HABS No. MO-1890

HABS  
MO - 1890

**PHOTOGRAPHS**

**WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA**

**HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
MIDWEST REGIONAL OFFICE  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1709 Jackson Street  
Omaha, NE 68102**

# HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

## 703 NORTH TWELFTH STREET (HOUSE)

HABS No. MO-1890

Location: 703 North 12th Street  
North 26 feet of South 1/2 Lots 21-24, Block 29,  
St. Joseph Improvement Addition  
St. Joseph, Buchanan County, Missouri

Present Owner: Pat Conway, Trustee  
Buchanan County Courthouse  
5th & Jule  
St. Joseph, Missouri 64501

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: This building has moderate architectural significance as a representative example of the Victorian style single-family residential property type. Most examples were built either in the Italianate, Second Empire, Queen Anne, or an eclectic combination of these three styles. The residence at 703 North 12th Street evidences a combination of Italianate and Queen Anne features. Residences of this type are significant in the area of architecture because they embody the distinctive characteristics of the styles prevalent in the late nineteenth century, and at the same time, reflect specific adaptations to the various neighborhoods in St. Joseph. These residences also are historically significant in the area of commerce as representations of the community's growth and widespread prosperity during the peak of the wholesaling period from ca. 1880 to 1910.

The property is eligible for National Register listing as a contributing property in the potential Cathedral Hill Historic District. Although it is very deteriorated, the structure retains sufficient integrity of design and association to demonstrate a sense of time and place associated with the historic context, "Wholesale Distribution in St. Joseph, 1866-1914."

### Part I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Dates of erection: ca. 1888

Architect: Unknown

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 and became 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.

#### The Victorian Style Residence Property Type in St. Joseph

The William E. Sherwood property at 703 North 12th Street is 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. Presumably, 703 North 12th was an income/investment property for Sherwood who lived next door from 1889 until the mid-1920s.

When the residential neighborhoods on the hills surrounding St. Joseph's commercial district began to be developed, members of the wealthy upper class were not the only ones able to afford an exodus from the center of town. A large, aspiring middle and professional class population also flourished in St. Joseph, drawn by the number of well-paying jobs associated with the many commercial ventures in town. While these residents could not afford as large a lot or house as their wealthy neighbors, they did build more modest versions of the elaborate mansions. These houses were generally built fairly close to the street and occupy most of the width of the lot, giving an urban appearance to the neighborhoods where these properties are found. This group of property owners included a wide cross-section of St. Joseph's population during the late nineteenth century. Junior partners in wholesale firms and banks, railroad executives, lawyers, doctors (drawn by the establishment of a teaching hospital), builders, and accountants were some of the professions represented in this group.

Although generally built without the services of an architect, these properties are nonetheless good representations of the styles prevalent in the Victorian age. Architectural styles popular throughout the nation were built in St. Joseph during this period as regional and ethnic forms of architecture became less important. The majority of the examples of this property type were built either in the Italianate, Queen Anne, Second Empire, or an eclectic combination of elements from these three styles.

The Italianate style featured a typical low-pitched roof with wide, overhanging eaves and decorative brackets at the cornice. Most examples are asymmetrically massed and built of brick masonry, although there are a few extant wood frame examples. The tall narrow windows are particularly noticeable, and may feature molded crowns or ornamental brick lintels. The building at 703 North 12th Street is an example of the Victorian single-family residence property type with Italianate and Queen Anne features.

#### 703 North 12th Street

Although there is no building permit record for this property, the residence was constructed between 1883 and 1888 when it was recorded in the Sanborn Insurance Map of that year. In 1889 William E. Sherwood was the resident next door and probable owner. Sherwood's occupation was listed as a prosecuting attorney with his office in the Buchanan County Courthouse. By 1897 Sherwood was a partner (Sherwood & Allen) in private practice with an downtown office in the Michau Building at 6th and Felix. Sherwood lived at 701 North 12th until he died in the mid-1920s. His widow, Jennie Sherwood, was listed as the resident in 1928 and the resident-owner in 1933.

It appears that 703 North 12th was a income/investment property for William Sherwood. This was a common pattern in late nineteenth century St. Joseph because other forms of investment were not as secure or had not developed at this time. No resident was listed at this address in 1899. In 1907 Thomas Brennan (no occupation listed) and his children: Lillie, a librarian at the Christian Science Reading Room, L. Moye, a bookkeeper, and Tracy, a metalworker lived at 703 North 12th. By 1917 the property was recorded as two apartments with John W. Emerson, an upholsterer, and Abraham L. Davis, a janitor at the Corby-Forsee Building as residents. In 1928 Thomas Newton, who worked at the Auto Electric Service, was the downstairs resident while the upper unit was vacant. Mrs. Margaret Blum was the resident in 1933. The property was listed as vacant in 1939.

### The Cathedral Hill Neighborhood

This area was not part of the initial settlement of St. Joseph during the period before and immediately after the Civil War. During the settlement period, this was farmland overlooking Frederick Avenue, the main overland route into St. Joseph from the east. However, the neighborhood, like others in an incomplete ring on the hills around the original town, began to develop rapidly in the early 1880s. The building phase lasted about 35 years until the neighborhood was completely developed and new construction moved further to the east in other districts. Almost all the architectural styles popular during the late nineteenth century are represented in Cathedral Hill. There are a number of Italianate buildings, but the predominant style is Queen Anne. The Catholic Cathedral at 525 North 10th Street with an associated convent and school was a major institution influencing the character of the neighborhood.

In the first phase of the historic preservation survey performed in 1987, buildings north of Frederick Avenue between 9th and 13th Streets up to Ridenbaugh were evaluated. The survey consultant concluded that a potential historic district existed, but the boundaries extended to the north and east. In the second phase of the survey performed in 1988, another consultant agreed that the strongest potential district would include the properties within the boundaries of the first survey and properties on the north side of Ridenbaugh Street. This potential district includes the two similar residences at 701 and 703 North 12th Street. The significant buildings in this district are representative of upper-middle and upper class residences and the characteristics of the buildings help define a sense of the important period in St. Joseph's historical development during which they were constructed.

The residence at 703 North 12th Street was considered a contributing element of the potential historic district called Cathedral Hill because it is narrow in form and built close to the street following the location pattern of its property type. The form follows the common Italianate style, but the mixture of architectural details is eclectic.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural Merit and Interest: 703 North 12th Street is an example of the Italianate/eclectic architectural style and the Victorian single-family residence property type. The building is moderately significant as a contributing element in a potential historic district.
2. Condition of fabric: Poor (to be demolished). The building is very deteriorated and there is fire damage in the rear of the second story.

- B. Summary Description: This is a detached two-story brick residence with a three-bay front. It is rectangular in form with the rear block indented on the north side. The building is approximately 20 feet wide from north to south and 50 feet long from east to west. There is a basement and brick foundation. The walls are constructed of brick masonry with the front wall laid in running bond and the other walls laid in common bond. Ornamental features include a projecting brick water table, vertical stepped brick belt courses at the top of the first and second floor windows, and segmental brick arches capped with a header course over the masonry openings. The ornamental belt courses in the front wall extend along the north side of the building. There are smooth-cut stone sills.

The main side entrance to the north has a pedimented stoop supported on ornamental curved brackets. There are three interior brick chimneys--one on the north side of the rear block and two on the south side of the main block. The north chimney retains a full corbeled top, but the south chimneys have been shortened. The main entrance has been altered and a modern door installed. It appears that originally the opening had a door flanked by sidelights and surmounted by a transom. The massive smooth-cut stone entrance sill remains. There is a glazed wooden paneled door in the first floor rear entrance and a solid four-panel door in the second floor rear entrance. Most of the windows are 2/2 wooden double-hung units, but the first floor front windows have 1/1 sashes. The arched window openings have wooden head moldings with pierced scrollwork decoration. There is a truncated hipped roof covered with deteriorated asphalt roll roofing. Although the eave cornice is very deteriorated, it is ornamented with a slender molded fascia and crown molding.

Interior. The first floor interior of this residence has an entrance stair hall to the north with two rooms including a bathroom in the rear. As indicated by the flooring and trim, there was a vestibule, but the doors have been removed. The middle room appears to be a modern alteration. A basement stair underneath the main second floor stairway opens from this room. There are two parlors, a dining room and kitchen to the south. Both parlors have entrances from the hall. The second floor interior has a long stair hall and landing with a small front bedroom and two small rooms including a bathroom to the north. There are two large front bedrooms to the south and two small rooms in the rear. The room to the rear has been converted into a kitchen. It has an rear entrance leading to a exterior stairway, but the stairway has been removed.

The interior stair has a heavy square newel post with missing cap, a molded hand railing, and slender turned spindles. There is tongue and groove pine flooring. The walls and ceiling are lath and plaster. Ceilings on the second floor are very deteriorated because of water damage. On the first floor, the second doorway to the front parlor has been altered and a modern door installed. The other doorways have wooden four-panel doors. The opening between the two parlors has been altered. It has been reduced to a simple finished passage without doors. Interior decorative features include baseboard with a molding cap, ornamental base blocks, simple casing with a rounded inner edge, and projecting window head moldings. The first floor kitchen has beaded casing and medallion corner blocks. On the second floor the baseboard has a beveled cap with a beaded edge.

- C. Site: This residence is located in a residential neighborhood of primarily late nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings. The street in front rises gently to the north and the lot slopes downhill to the east.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Bibliography:

Denman, David. "Cathedral Hill Survey I Interim Report" (July, 1987). Prepared for the City of St. Joseph Community Development Department, Landmark Commission, and the Missouri Historic Preservation Program.

St. Joseph City Directories: 1889, 1897, 1899, 1907, 1917, 1921, 1928, 1933, 1939.

Sanborn Insurance Company Map: 1883, 1888.

Winder, Mary Jo. "Cathedral Hill II Survey Report" (June 10, 1988). Prepared for the City of St. Joseph, Landmark Commission, and the Missouri Historic Preservation Program.

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, Landmark Commission, and the Missouri Historic Preservation Program.

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