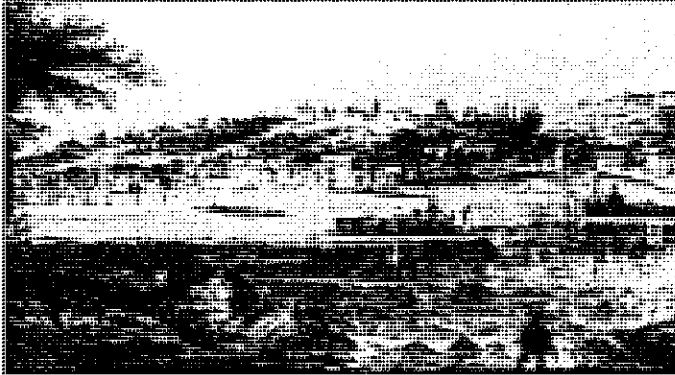


Chapter II: Historic Overview of South Main Street



Frenchman Louis Blanchene founded St. Charles as a trapping outpost. Called "Les Petits Cotes" for the surrounding hills, the settlement became an enclave of French trappers, traders and farmers.

Long inhabited by Native American tribes, including the Missouri and the Osage, the land located at the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers was first settled by Europeans in 1769, when Frenchman Louis Blanchette founded St. Charles as a trapping outpost. Called "Les Petits Cotes" for the surrounding hills, the settlement became an enclave of French trappers, traders and farmers.

The area remained under French rule until Spain took control in the late eighteenth century. The Spanish owned the Louisiana Territory for roughly thirty-five years, from 1770 until 1804. Despite their reign over the area, the Spanish did not colonize St. Charles or other regional outposts, in part due to a secret treaty giving the Louisiana Territory back to France. Napoleon forced this agreement from the King of Spain in 1800. As a part of the agreement, the French withheld retaking charge of the territory, allowing the Spaniards to appear to be in charge.

This arrangement ended, however, in 1804 when the United States government took control of the Louisiana Territory, and from this time on, St. Charles played an important role in Westward expansion. Shortly after the Louisiana Purchase, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark launched their famous journey from the settlement of St. Charles. At this time it was still a very modest community of Frenchmen, as their journals indicate:

This village Contns. about 100 houses, the most of them small and indifferent and about 450 inhabitants Chiefly French, those people appear Pore, polite and harmonious. (Bernard DeVoto, ed., The Journals of Lewis and Clark, 1953).

During this period, St. Charles boomed as an outfitting post for travelers heading west. Establishments such as mills, tanneries and exchanges opened, and bartering of furs, tobacco, beeswax, maple syrup, salt, fish, wood and feathers made for quite a lively town (Schneider, *Old St. Charles*, 5).

In addition to its role as a major river port, St. Charles also became the departure point for the Boonslick Trail, which aside from its associations with the Boone brothers (sons of Daniel Boone), is important historically because it became a route to the Santa Fe Trail. First used as a passage to the Boone's salt lick it eventually became a popular wagon trail through which thousands of settlers passed on their way out of St. Charles. Boonslick Trail's intersection with South Main Street suggests that South Main Street has been quite an important thoroughfare, even since the earliest period of settlement.

The period of statehood

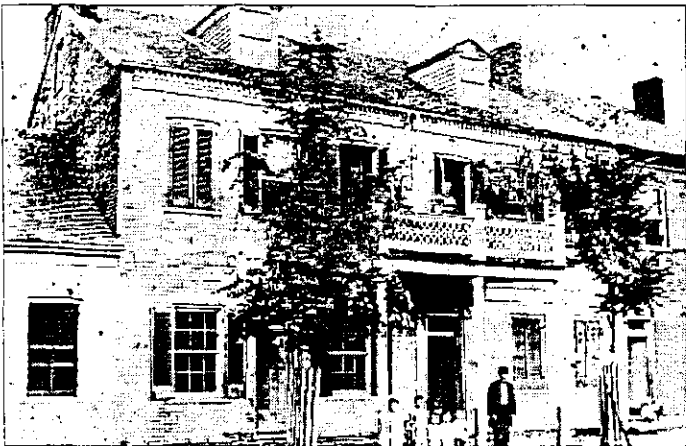
During the decades following the Louisiana Purchase, the town of St. Charles rose to such prominence that it became Missouri's first state capital in 1821. By this time, the city had gained permanence, as seen in many of the substantial businesses and structures that were established. The period of western migration, coupled with the installation of the state capital, provided opportunity for St. Charles to develop into a significant settlement with substantial buildings.

Due to the availability of clay and limestone, which was used for making bricks, masonry structures began to replace the more temporary wood homesteads. Many very early structures, thought to be of French-Canadian inspiration, began to be replaced by buildings and dwellings of a more formal nature--those with a bit more architectural detailing and mainstream American style. It is important to note that

these buildings were still quite modest and simple, but stylistically were akin to the Federal period of architecture. This is not to say that the French heritage disappeared; however the stylistic influences of the French began to wane.

As farmers, emigrants, entrepreneurs and statesmen began to settle the town, it gained in affluence and architectural diversity. This was due in part to the influx of Germans after 1820. These settlers, skilled in various trades, provided St. Charles with coopers, tanners, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, cobblers, millwrights, gunsmiths, carpenters, masons and tinsmiths (*Urban Renewal Project*, 14). Throughout the rest of the century, German citizens would play important roles in the development of St. Charles, and they would affect almost every aspect of life there, including business, arts and religion.

The legacy of the German immigrants is still easily detected in the many buildings along South Main Street. For instance, common features such as painted or stuccoed brick, shallow setbacks and similar building heights (one and one-half and two stories) betray their German heritage. They also employed other building elements which have been identified as German influences: "The roof ridge paralleled the street and often a longer roof slope existed to the rear rather than to the front. There was usually a central entrance with one bay on each side. Wooden porches and rooms were frequently added at the rear and outside stairs were common" (*Urban Renewal Project*, 15).



This early photograph of 614-616 South Main Street illustrates the character of the masonry. Federal-style buildings in the mid-19th century. Windows on the ground floor are similar to those above and the roof slopes to the street.



Although mostly a Federally-influenced district, South Main Street did exhibit several turn-of-the-century commercial structures. This one had large plate glass windows that were typical of American storefronts of that time.

South Main Street in the modern period

As the town grew in population, the commercial spine of Main Street extended farther north. Buildings with decorative, flat parapets and large display windows were more typical in that area. Along South Main, a few of these later storefronts appeared, along with several substantial houses that reflected Victorian tastes. Residential uses had always been a part of the mix of activities along South Main, but these later houses reflected the economics of the times; northern Main was now more appealing as a place to do business, while South Main remained a desirable residential address. They also reflected the separation of uses that was emerging in building styles.

Many earlier buildings often were constructed to house commercial and residential uses combined; even those that had a single use usually looked the same as those with other types of occupancy. The later structures, however, began to more distinctly reflect differences in use in the architectural character. For example, an Italianate house from the late nineteenth century was set back from the street with a front yard that was defined by a fence. This was clearly different from the storefront of the same period with its plate glass windows built at the sidewalk edge.

In some cases, Federal-period buildings were remodeled to later tastes. A wood canopy, for example, might be replaced with a more ornate cast metal one. Or an early house might receive a porch with Italianate details.



Many earlier buildings often were constructed to house commercial and residential uses combined; even those that had a single use usually looked the same as those with other types of occupancy.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the result was a degree of architectural diversity. Historic photographs of the period show a street that had evolved over more than one hundred and twenty years. It included a rare French wood cottage or two, numerous brick Federal-era buildings of both residential and commercial uses and a collection of Victorian commercial and residential structures. While the styles of the buildings spanning this period varied, reflecting the changing socio-economic events of the city, a sense of visual continuity bound the street into a whole. This was because basic materials, forms and scale of building remained common even though the details of construction and style varied.

In time, however, the character of South Main changed more dramatically, in part because of alterations that occurred to accommodate new needs and in part because of a decline in activity. By the mid-twentieth century, although many of the earlier structures still survived, the area reflected the challenges it had faced along with other traditional downtowns of that time. In many cases, building fronts had been covered with other materials that obscured the original character; in others, entire first floors had been removed to install more “modern” designs. Early balconies and canopies also had been removed on many of the Federal-period buildings.

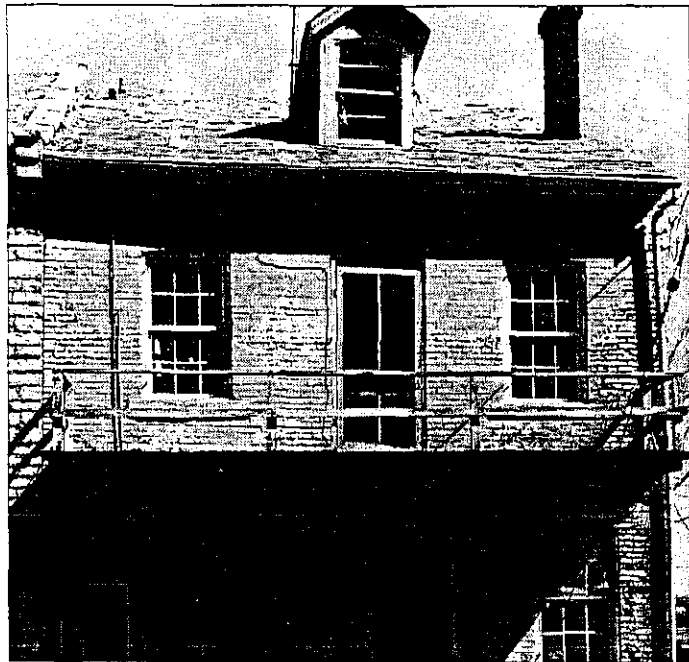


In time, however, the character of South Main changed more dramatically, in part because of alterations that occurred to accommodate new needs and in part because of a decline in activity.

Some buildings were replaced with newer structures that were designed to fit more with highway commercial developments that were then popular than they did with South Main. Newer gas stations, warehouses and light industrial buildings disrupted the visual continuity that once had given the street its distinct character. Nonetheless, South Main retained much of its early building fabric that helped to convey its character during its early, important history and it began to attract new residents who valued its history and quality of life.

In recognition of its historic significance, South Main was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1970. The city then launched an Urban Renewal project which resulted in documentation and restoration efforts in the District. Using the federal urban renewal program as a tool for preservation was highly unusual. While many cities used these funds to demolish their heritage, St. Charles pioneered redevelopment in a historic context. Each building was photographed and restoration drawings were prepared. Inappropriate alterations were removed and details of the Federal era were reconstructed.

Some of the newer, "non-contributing," buildings such, as the gas stations, were removed as a part of the restoration effort. In some places, new buildings were constructed to be compatible with the historic context. On selected sites, small parks were created and cross streets were developed



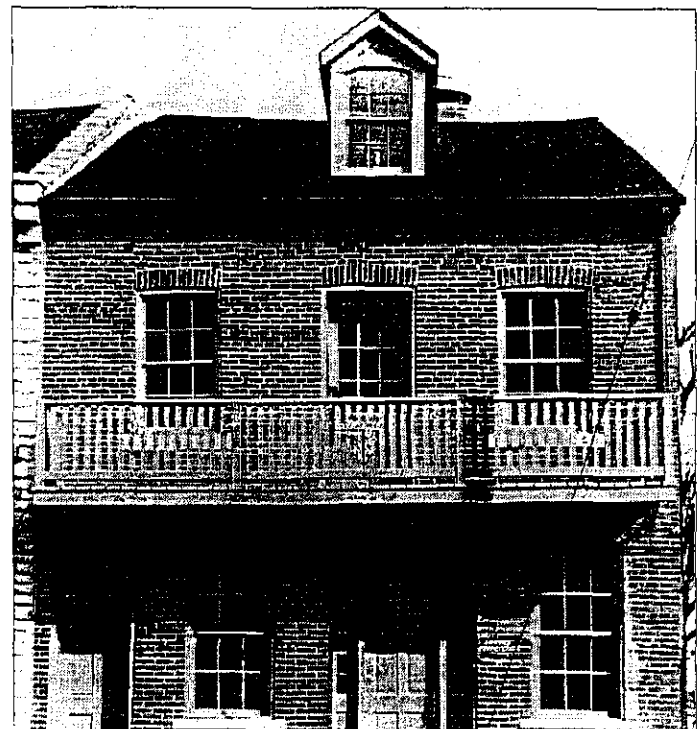
Before: The city launched an Urban Renewal project which resulted in restoration efforts in the District. Each building was photographed and restoration drawings were prepared.

as pedestrian ways. This renewal project sparked the revitalization of South Main such that, by the 1990s, the District was one of the most popular settings in metropolitan St. Louis area and one of the most widely-recognized historic districts in the state of Missouri.

The period of historic significance

The period of historic significance for the South Main Street District begins with its settlement in 1769 and continues until 1920. This spans approximately 150 years and covers the time during which the area developed and prospered as the center of the community. This period encompasses French settlement, German immigration and early American influences. It is associated with early development in Missouri, exploration and settlement of the west, the Civil War, Restoration and later prosperity. The mix of architecture in the District reflects much of this broad time span.

At the same time, preservation activities have focused on a narrower time span, roughly from about 1790 through 1920. This period of "historic focus" includes what are thought to be the oldest surviving buildings and a concentration of Federal-period architecture from around the 1820s. Many restoration efforts in the District concentrate on this time of historic focus.



After: Inappropriate alterations were removed and details of the Federal era were reconstructed.

Choosing a Preservation Approach

South Main Street Historic District has a wealth of architecture remaining from its period of significance. It is crucial that character-defining features of the buildings be preserved. Such preservation projects may include a range of activities, including maintenance of existing historic elements, repairs to deteriorated historic elements, replacement of missing features and construction of new additions. When planning a rehabilitation approach, consider the definitions of the following terms:

1. **Adaptive use.** Converting a building to a new use that is different from that which its design reflects is considered an “adaptive use.” For example, converting a residential structure to offices is adaptive use. A good adaptive use project retains the historic character of the building, while accommodating the new functions.
2. **Maintenance.** Some work focuses on keeping the property in good working condition by repairing features as soon as deterioration becomes apparent, using procedures that retain the original character and finish of the features. In some cases, preventive maintenance is executed prior to noticeable deterioration. No alteration or reconstruction is involved. Such work is considered “maintenance.” Property owners are strongly encouraged to maintain their properties in good condition such that more aggressive measures of rehabilitation, restoration or reconstruction are not needed. Maintenance of a property does not need approval from the HLPARB unless it will change the exterior appearance.
3. **Preservation.** The act or process of applying measures to sustain the existing form, integrity and material of a building or structure, as well as the existing form and vegetative cover of a site is defined as “preservation.” It may include initial stabilization work, where necessary, as well as ongoing maintenance of the historic building materials. Essentially, the property is kept in its current good condition.
4. **Rehabilitation.** Rehabilitation is the process of returning a property to a state which makes a contemporary use possible while still preserving those portions or features of the property that are significant to its historic, architectural and cultural values. Rehabilitation may include the adaptive reuse of the building and major or minor additions may also occur. Most good preservation projects may be considered rehabilitation projects.
5. **Renovation.** To “renovate” means to improve by repair, to revive. In renovation, the usefulness and appearance of the building is enhanced. The basic character and significant details are respected and preserved, but some sympathetic alterations may also occur. Alterations are reversible, such that future owners may restore the building to its original design, should they wish to do so.
6. **Restoration.** To “restore,” one reproduces the appearance of a building exactly as it looked at a particular moment in time; to reproduce a pure style—either interior or exterior. This process may include the removal of later work or the replacement of missing historic features. One should use a restoration approach for replacing missing details or features of an historic building when the features are determined to be particularly significant to the character of the structure and when the original configuration is accurately documented.
7. **Remodeling.** To remake or to make over the design image of a building is to “remodel” it. The appearance is changed by removing original detail and by adding new features that are out of character with the original. Remodeling is inappropriate for historic buildings.

Many successful rehabilitation projects that involve historic structures may include a combination of “preservation,” “restoration,” and other appropriate treatments. For example, a house may be adapted to use as a restaurant, and in the process missing porch brackets may be replicated in order to restore the original appearance, while existing original dormers may be preserved.

Planning a Preservation Project

The first step in planning a preservation project is to identify any significant features and materials. Retaining such details will greatly enhance to overall quality of the preservation project. If these features and materials are in good condition, then selecting an appropriate treatment mechanism will provide for proper preservation. In making the selection follow this sequence:

1. If a feature is intact and in good condition, maintain it as such.
2. If the feature is deteriorated or damaged, repair it to its original condition.
3. If it is not feasible to repair the feature, then replace it with one that is the same or similar in character (materials, detail, finish) to the original one. Replace only that portion which is beyond repair.
4. If the feature is missing entirely, reconstruct it from appropriate evidence.
5. If a new feature or addition is necessary, design it in such a way as to minimize the impact on original features.

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards are general rehabilitation guidelines established by the National Park Service. These standards are policies that normally serve as a basis for more detailed rehabilitation standards. With the exception of one provision concerning new additions and new construction, the City of St. Charles has adopted the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings as a basis for its rehabilitation guidelines. The Secretary's Standards state that:

1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.
2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.
3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such

as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.

4. Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of the structure, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.
8. Significant archeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

Design for alternations and additions to existing properties should not be discouraged when such alterations and additions do not destroy significant historical, architectural, or cultural material. Such design should be compatible with the size, scale, color, material, and character of the property, neighborhood and environment.

Appropriateness of Use

While the Commission does not review use, selecting a function similar to that for which a building was designed minimizes the need for substantial modification.

Seek uses that are compatible with the historic character of the building.

- a. In most cases, the historic use will be allowed by current zoning. Additionally, retaining the current use provides greater flexibility in meeting building and safety codes.

A change in use should not alter the historic character of a building.

- a. Building uses that are closely related to the original use are preferred.
- b. A compatible use that requires minimal alteration to the original building is preferred.
- c. Some uses are more compatible than others because they require less alteration to the original character of the building. For example, connecting a commercial storefront to an office should not require alteration of character-defining features of the historic building.
- d. When a more radical change in use is necessary to keep the building in active service, then those uses that require the least alteration to significant elements are preferred. Radical alteration for a new use must be carefully evaluated because the adaptation may prove to be too costly or destroy too many significant features. Experience has shown, however, that in most cases designs can be developed that respect the historic integrity of the building while also accommodating new functions.

When adapting a residence to a commercial use, preserve the original design character of the building.

- a. When converted to a new use, a house should retain its residential image.

Significance and Benefits of the Historic District Today

Across the nation, thousands of communities promote historic preservation because doing so contributes to neighborhood livability and quality of life, minimizes negative impacts on the environment and yields economic rewards. Many property owners are also drawn to historic resources because the quality of construction is typically quite high and the buildings are readily adaptable to contemporary needs. These same reasons apply in St. Charles.

Construction quality

Most of the historic structures in the city are of high quality construction. Lumber used came from mature trees and was properly seasoned and it typically was milled to “full dimensions” as well, which often yielded stronger framing. Masonry walls were carefully laid, resulting in buildings with considerable stability. These structures also were thoughtfully detailed and the finishes of materials, including fixtures, wood floors and trim were generally of high quality, all features that owners today appreciate. By comparison, in today’s new construction, materials of such quality are rarely available and comparable detailing is very expensive. The high quality of construction in historic buildings is therefore a “value” for many people.

Adaptability

Owners also recognize that the floor plans of historic buildings easily accommodate comfortable life-styles and support a diversity of populations. Rooms are frequently large, permitting a variety of uses while retaining the overall historic character of each structure and open space often exists on a lot to accommodate an addition, if needed.

Livability and quality of residential life

When groups of older buildings occur as historic districts, they create a street scene that is “pedestrian friendly,” which encourages walking and neighborly interaction. Mature trees, stone walls and decorative architectural features also contribute to a sense of identity that is unique for each historic neighborhood, an attribute that is rare and difficult to achieve in newer areas of the city. This physical sense of neighborhood can also reinforce desirable community social patterns and contribute to a sense of security.

Environmental benefits

Preserving a historic structure is also sound environmental conservation policy because “recycling” it saves energy and reduces the need for producing new construction materials. Three types of energy savings occur: First, energy is not consumed to demolish the existing building and dispose of the resulting debris. Second, energy is not used to create new building materials, transport them and assemble them on site. Finally, the “embodied” energy, that which was used to create the original building and its components, is preserved.

By “reusing” older materials as a historic building, pressure is also reduced to harvest new lumber and other materials that also may have negative effects on the environment of other locales where these materials are produced. Because older buildings are often more energy-efficient than new construction, when properly used, heating and cooling needs are reduced as well.

Economic benefits

Historic resources are finite and cannot be replaced, making them precious commodities that many buyers seek. Therefore, preservation adds value to private property. Many studies across the nation document that, where local historic districts are established, property values typically rise, or at least are stabilized. In this sense, designation of a historic district appears to help establish a climate for investment. Property owners within the district know that the time and money they spend on improving their properties will be matched with similar efforts on surrounding lots; these investments will not be undermined by inappropriate construction next door.

The condition of neighboring properties also affects the value of one’s own property: People invest in a neighborhood as much as the individual structure itself and, in historic districts where investment is attracted, property owners recognize that each one benefits from the commitment of their neighbors. An indication of the success of historic preservation is that the number of designated districts across the country has increased, due to local support, such that an estimated 1,000,000 properties, both as individual landmarks and in historic districts, are under local jurisdictions of more than 2,000 preservation commissions.

Preservation projects also contribute more to the local economy than do new building programs because each dollar spent on a preservation project has a higher percentage devoted to labor and to purchase of materials available locally. By contrast, new construction typically has a higher percentage of each dollar spent devoted to materials that are produced outside of the local economy and to special construction skills that may be imported as well. Therefore, when money is spent on rehabilitating a building, it has a higher “multiplier effect,” keeping more money circulating in the local economy.

Rehabilitating a historic building also can cost less than constructing a new one. In fact, the standards for rehabilitation of historic structures presented in this document promote cost-saving measures: They encourage smaller and simpler solutions, which in themselves provide savings. Preserving building elements that are in good repair is preferred, for example, rather than replacing them. This typically is less expensive. In some instances, appropriate restoration procedures may cost more than less sensitive treatments, however. In such cases, property owners are compensated for this extra effort, to some extent, in the added value that historic district designation provides. Special economic incentives also exist to help offset potential added costs.

Responsibility of ownership

Ownership of a historic property carries both the benefits described above and also a responsibility to respect the historic character of the property and its setting. While this responsibility does exist, it does not automatically translate into higher construction or maintenance costs. In the case of new construction, for example, these design guidelines focus on where a building should be located on a site and what its basic scale and character should be. Ultimately, residents and property owners should recognize that historic preservation is a long-range community policy that promotes economic well-being and overall viability of the city at large and that they play a vital role in helping to implement that policy through careful stewardship of the area’s historic resources.