

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The St. Joseph Historic District contains 99 buildings which comprises the Mississippi River levee town of St. Joseph as it existed 50 years ago. The district boundaries encompass the town as far as it extended at that time with one exception. The area east of Second Street, which consists of 7 lots (see maps), was excluded because in the last ten years it has been redeveloped with a group of brick ranch houses and a large modern brick church and parish house.

The district consists of 3 main elements:

1. The Main Street Corridor: This is St. Joseph's major thoroughfare. It runs back from the levee and is flanked by 2 tightly packed rows of 1 and 2 story, mainly turn-of-the-century commercial buildings. One block in these commercial buildings gives way to residences on large treed lots.

2. The Courthouse Green: The classical style, domed Courthouse (#99) is set at the head of a broad axial green avenue (now somewhat overgrown in parts) which has an approach road to the Courthouse on each side. The green is flanked mainly by residences on large well treed lots. Opposite the Courthouse on the northwest corner of the green is the graceful Carpenter Gothic Episcopal Church (#16). At the opposite end of the green to the Courthouse is the 2 story pedimented Masonic Hall.

3. Second Street: These two areas are linked by a late nineteenth and early twentieth century residential area which presents an almost continuous streetscape along the west side of Second Street (see maps).

## **COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS**

Although the handsome 3 bay Greek Revival Post Office (#43) dates from circa 1850, most of the 22 commercial buildings in the Main Street corridor date from the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. Nine of them are set in an impressive continuous row along the north side of Main Street (#s 18-26). For the most part these are simple parapeted brick buildings with corbel tables and unornamented iron galleries. The fire house (#20) with its hood molded arches and elaborate blind arcaded parapet is the only exception. Although 5 of the buildings on the south side of Main Street are intrusions, they are low in scale and innocuous. The impressive buildings across the street and the 2 story parish library (#36), which is an 1850 plantation house, easily dominate them.

Most of the old commercial buildings have undergone some replacement of glass, but for the most part their fenestration patterns are intact.

## **RESIDENCES**

The residential areas have a suburban scale and density with much foliage. Aside from a handful of 2 story houses and bungalows, the residences are predominantly raised cottages of 3 or 5 bays with pitched roofs. Most early examples have simple Greek Revival details (#71). Later examples often have some Queen Anne appliqué, a bay window or a gable, a curving gallery, or a turreted form (#4, #95). Turn of the century examples tend to be more regular in massing and some have Colonial Revival details (#69).

## **INVENTORY BREAKDOWN ACCORDING TO PERIODS**

|             |                     |     |
|-------------|---------------------|-----|
| 1830 - 1860 | 8 buildings         | 8%  |
| 1860 - 1900 | 44 buildings        | 44% |
| 1900 - 1930 | 20 buildings        | 20% |
| intrusions  | <u>27 buildings</u> | 27% |
|             | 99 buildings        |     |

## INVENTORY OF BUILDINGS

- 1 c.1890. One story hip roof frame house with semi-octagonal bay. Front and side galleries with Eastlake turned posts.
- 2 c.1900. One story hip roof frame house. Square post front and side galleries.
- 3 c.1900. One story raised frame house. Queen Anne-Colonial Revival style-center hall plan. Hip roof broken by pediment with semi-circular window, Interior chimneys. Doric columns on front and side galleries.
- 4 c.1900. 5 bay center hall raised frame house. Square posts on gallery.
- 5 c.1900. One story frame cottage.
- 6 Brick ranch style intrusion.
- 7 c.1918. One story frame house. Bungalow style with square post porches.
- 8 c.1890. One story frame cottage. Turned Eastlake style porch posts.
- 9 1920's frame bungalow.
- 10 c.1890. One story center hall house. Front and side porches have square posts with jigsaw scroll brackets.
- 11 Story and half center hall brick house c.1850. Modified in 1940's.
- 12 Small commercial intrusion-filling station.
- 13 Brick intrusion-Post office.
- 14 30's Art Deco style commercial building. Former bank.
- 15 Two commercial intrusions.
- 16
- 17 Commercial intrusion.
- 18 1920's brick store buildings.
- 19 Brick office intrusion.
- 20 c.1880. Stuccoed brick two story building with good cornice detailing. Beautiful cast iron exterior staircase. First bank building in St. Joseph.
- 21 Row of late 19th century brick store buildings. 21 has a set
- 22 back second story. 22 is two story with an upstairs gallery.
- 23 23, 24, and 25 feature some cast iron pilasters on the facades.
- 24
- 25
- 26

- 27 c.1910. Story and half Queen Anne bungalow. Semi-circular, arched balcony over front porch. .
- 28 c.1900. One story center hall frame house. Semi-octagonal bay. Gallery has square posts.
- 29 Modern brick residence. intrusion.
- 30 c.1840. One story 5 bay center hall frame house. Square Doric post gallery with paneled wainscot.
- 31 c.1870. L shaped one story frame house. Abundant jigsaw scrollwork trim. Italianate columns.
- 32 Modern brick residential-style commercial intrusion.
- 33 c.1850. One story 5 bay center hall frame house. Simplified Ionic columns on gallery and Ionic pilasters on doorway.
- 34 c.1890. Large one story raised frame house. Elaborate Queen Anne "stick-style" galleries with several kinds of turned trim. Shingled tower with weathervane.
- 35 c.1930. Brick store building.
- 36 c.1850. Large two and half story 5 bay center hall frame building. Elaborate Renaissance Revival Gallery with paneled wainscot.
- 37 Small frame office intrusion.
- 38 Small brick office intrusion.
- 39 Small brick office intrusion.
- 40 Large modern store building. Intrusion.
- 41 Intrusion. Stuccoed brick filling station.
- 42 c.1920. One story frame building. Typical World War I era "pattern book." Elizabethan facade.
- 43 c.1850. One story 3 bay hip roof frame clapboard building. Doric post gallery. Unusual paneled facade. Once served as Post Office. Presently attached to later addition #42.
- 44 Mid 19th century log cabin much remodeled. Most extant features late 19th century including Renaissance Revival gallery and turreted dormers. Shallow arch fenestration. Scrolled volutes with onion hangers. Rusticated wood facade.
- 45 c.1880. 2 room frame clapboard building with porch. Servant's house for #44.
- 46 c.1880. 5 bay center hall raised frame house. Story and half with interior chimneys. Simplified Renaissance Revival gallery.
- 47 1920's frame bungalows.
- 48
- 49
- 50 Frame residence. intrusion.
- 51 c.1900. One story frame house. Square post gallery.
- 52 c.1890. One story frame cottage. Originally servant's house for #34.
- 53 Modern frame residence. Intrusion.
- 54 1920's frame bungalows.
- 55
- 56 c.1900. One story frame house with pyramid roof. Jigsaw banister and turned Eastlake columns.

- 57 Small frame residential intrusion.
- 58 1920's frame bungalow.
- 59 c.1890. Two story frame house. Two story semi-octagonal bay. Eastlake porch.
- 60 Small frame intrusion.
- 61 c.1890. L shaped frame house. Semi-octagonal bay with stained glass trim.
- 62 Brick ranch style intrusion.
- 63 Small frame intrusion.
- 64 c.1900. Row of 3 rental houses. One story frame construction.
- 65 Porches have Eastlake turned posts.
- 66
- 67 Brick ranch style intrusion.
- 68 c.1885. Simple frame construction with clapboard siding. Catholic Church.
- 69 c.1900. One story raised Queen Anne-Colonial Revival style frame house. Pyramid roof, semi-octagonal bay. Doric columns.
- 70 c.1895. Late 19th century double shotgun frame house with Eastlake porch posts.
- 71 1852. Present house is upper frame story of 1852 plantation house. Moved to present site in 1881. 5 bay center hall. Greek Revival gallery. Windows on gallery have Gibb doors.
- 72 c.1880. L shaped frame house, clapboard siding. Galley has chamfered columns.
- 73 Brick ranch style intrusion.
- 74 c.1880. Originally a frame store building on stilts. Moved from levee in date 19th century. Raised frame house. Colonial Revival roofline and portico added in early 1900's.
- 75 Small frame residential intrusion.
- 76 Late 19th century L shaped frame cottage.
- 77 Brick ranch intrusion
- 78 Frame ranch style intrusion.
- 79 Brick residential-style office intrusion.
- 80 c.1890. Frame clapboard building. Built as and still an attorney's office. Chamfered columns on gallery.
- 81 1905. Presbyterian church. Queen Anne revival frame church with Gothic details. Square plan hall, auditorium-like with sloping floor and featuring a corner platform. Impressive 3 part lancet windows, Corner tower and side gables.
- 82 c.1900. One story 5 bay frame house. Hip roof. Eastlake columns on gallery.
- 83 c.1890. Small frame cottage. Eastlake turned post porch.
- 84 1878. Story and half raised frame house. Clapboard siding and rusticated facade. 5 bay center hallplan. Gallery has Italianate columns with a wealth of jigsaw trim featuring a Maltese cross motif.
- 85 c.1880. Original out-building for #84. Small frame building, vertical board and batten construction with slate roof. Housed gas plant for residence.

- 86 c.1900. Out-building for #84. Turn of the century barn, vertical board palisade construction.
- 87 1920's frame bungalow. Now attorney's office.
- 88 c. 1920. Brick house in English medieval style.
- 89 Brick Colonial -style intrusion.
- 90 c. 1920. Brick bungalow.
- 91 c.1890. Frame house with many additions. (Scheduled for demolition).
- 92 c. 1830. 5 bay center hall one story frame house. Square post gallery. 12 over 12 windows.
- 93 1875. Masonic Hall. Two story frame building with hip roof. Dentil cornice.
- 94 Community House. One story frame community center. 1920's Colonial Revival style portico. Design influenced by the White Pine Series.
- 95 c. 1900. Queen Anne-Colonial Revival raised one story frame house. Slate roof with 2 turreted dormers and a 3rd turret over circular extension of side gallery.
- 96 1872. Episcopal Church. Excellent example of "Carpenter-Gothic" style. Gothic barge board and batten construction. Lance t windows. Central tower and corner turrets. Gothic trefoil trim around cornice.
- 97 1920's frame bungalow, now attorney's office.
- 98 Ell of late 19th century house, presently attorney's office.
- 99 1905. Court House. National Register.

Specific dates  
 Builder/Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)  
 Criteria A and C

The St. Joseph Historic District is significant in the area of architecture as probably the most intact late nineteenth-early twentieth century river levee town in Louisiana north of Natchez, Mississippi. It has a greater concentration and number of historic buildings than any other town along the Louisiana side of the river.

In addition, St. Joseph is significant in the area of city planning. The use of an axial green running from the levee to the Courthouse shows a level of Baroque city planning almost unknown in small towns in Louisiana, most of which grew on an expanding grid.

St. Joseph is significant in the area of politics/government because it has been the Tensas parish seat since the parish was created in 1843. The first parish courthouse was constructed in 1853 and is no longer extant. The present courthouse was built in 1906.

The St. Joseph Courthouse Square is significant in the area of black history because it is the site of an event which led to a nationally publicized and federally investigated race riot in nearby Waterproof in 1878. Some 36 blacks were killed as a result.

One of the initial indications that the South was truly unreconstructed was the violence and fraud that attended the autumn elections of 1878. In Louisiana United States Congressional seats, as well as various local offices, were involved. The most widely publicized of the pre-election riots occurred at Waterproof and was precipitated by a meeting of black Republicans at the St. Joseph Courthouse (not the present one).

Tensas Parish was a Republican stronghold during Reconstruction because about 90% of its population was black. After Reconstruction ended, the white Republicans of Tensas Parish, because of the ruthless tactics used by Democrats to crush opposition, either abstained from politics or deserted their party and joined the Democratic ranks. Despite the large Republican majority in the parish, no white man would accept nomination on the Republican ticket for fear of incurring Democratic wrath.

The vast majority of Tensas Republicans, however, were black and it was this group or at least a portion of it, that decided to "stand up" to the Democrats. The blacks were led by Alfred Fairfax, a black Baptist preacher, aspirant for Congress, and the leader of black Republicans in Tensas. Despite warnings from the Democratic party, Fairfax was determined to hold a parish Republican nominating convention. When the convention assembled at the St. Joseph Courthouse, it was composed entirely of blacks. The blacks who attended had been so frightened by Democratic threats that they met beforehand, armed themselves heavily, rode to the courthouse as a group, nominated their candidates, and disbanded.

This defiance and the fact that the blacks were armed produced considerable alarm among the parish's heavily outnumbered whites. Neighboring parishes and Mississippians responded to the Tensas Democrats' call for assistance in putting down this latest attempt at "Negro rule."

The first priority was to take care of Fairfax, who lived in nearby Waterproof. Conflicting stories of what happened at this point reached the U.S. Justice Department in a matter of days, and it will probably never be known exactly what transpired. Suffice it to say, that it seems as if a band of whites, led by one Captain John Peck of Sicily Island, visited Fairfax's residence in Waterproof. As Captain Peck walked onto the porch he was fatally shot, and in the ensuing violence 3 or 4 blacks were killed. This event caused further concern among area whites, and they banded together in groups to patrol the vicinity. Blacks, who were understandably frightened, also gathered together to protect themselves. Given these conditions, violence was seemingly inevitable. It erupted when a white posse spotted a group of blacks near Waterproof. It seems to be uncertain as to which group began the violence. About 36 blacks were killed as a result of these disturbances. Fairfax, who had escaped unharmed, wrote a letter to President Hayes enumerating the blacks who had been killed, the President turned the matter over to the Justice Department, and the affair was investigated.

Although the riot itself occurred at Waterproof, it was caused by events at the St. Joseph Courthouse Square. Since the courthouse itself is no longer extant, the courthouse square is being nominated as a historic site. Also, there is nothing left in Waterproof to reflect this important episode in Louisiana's turbulent racial history.

#### Major Bibliographical References

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