

Chapter III: Architectural Styles of South Main Street

South Main Street contains many architectural styles. This rich architectural heritage enhances the entire city, provides a strong “sense of place” and illustrates the evolution of St. Charles.

This section provides a brief overview of the various historic styles found in St. Charles. Property owners should review these descriptions carefully. In many cases the design guidelines that follow make reference to the characteristics of styles that are presented here. In some cases, specific design guidance is included in the style description.

Because of the differing nationalities of settlers--particularly French, French-Canadian, German and Anglo-American--architectural diversity flourished. As a result, the architectural heritage of St. Charles is best expressed in terms of stylistic influences rather than mainstream architectural styles, which were often based on English styles. Many buildings were built in the “vernacular,” as opposed to being of a distinct style. In fact, it has been written that “Distinct variation in architectural detail resulting from many influences is the rule rather than the exception” (Urban Renewal Project, 1970). Therefore, many buildings in the District can be categorized loosely according to common elements and forms, a summary of which follows in the next section.

Federal-influenced vernacular

• circa 1780-1820

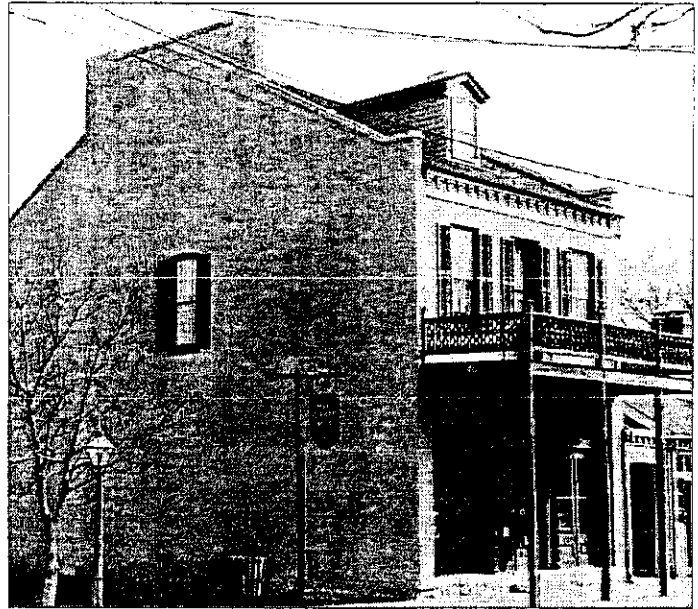
The Federal style, sometimes called Adamesque after John Adams, was the dominant style in the Americas from 1780 to 1820. During this period, the United States saw a population boom from 3 million to about 10 million. Mostly seen in port cities on the eastern seaboard, the Federal style reached as far west as St. Louis and New Orleans. However, these more western examples were more vernacular in nature, much like what is seen in St. Charles today.

Related to the popular Georgian style, buildings of the Federal style, as well as Federal-influenced vernacular structures, are most commonly a simple box, two or more rooms deep. Doors and windows were arranged with a regular symmetry to allow adequate ventilation during the hot and humid summers. Many of the buildings seen in the District were constructed according to this vernacular form; although many of these buildings were designed by early French and German settlers and therefore may have other ethnic influences. These buildings are classified simply as "Federal-influenced vernacular." Some common features include:

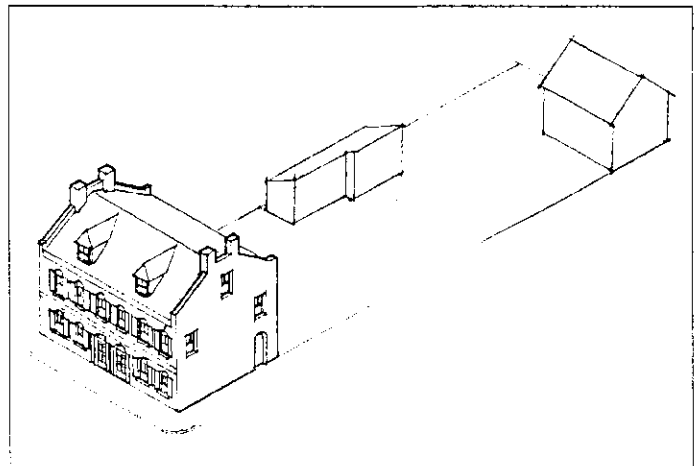
Characteristics

- Side gabled roof
- Brick or stone construction
- Joined chimney
- Parapet walls
- 6/6 double-hung windows
- Wooden shutters
- Wide doors with transom and sidelights
- Galleries
- Dormers

Many of the Federal house forms and commercial buildings were later transformed into more "stylish" structures by the application of other period detailing, then in vogue. In many cases a structure may not have been altered until many years after it was built. These changes were often based on architectural styles that were popular throughout the country at the time. In other cases, however, a building may have been constructed in the vernacular, and then high style influences were usually added later. In the South Main Street Historic District, these influences may be seen on both residential and commercial type structures.



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This site sketch of a Federally-influenced structure is very typical of the District. Primary commercial buildings were located at the sidewalk's edge and outbuildings and carriage houses were located towards the rear of the site, commonly on the lot line or the alley's edge.

Greek Revival influences

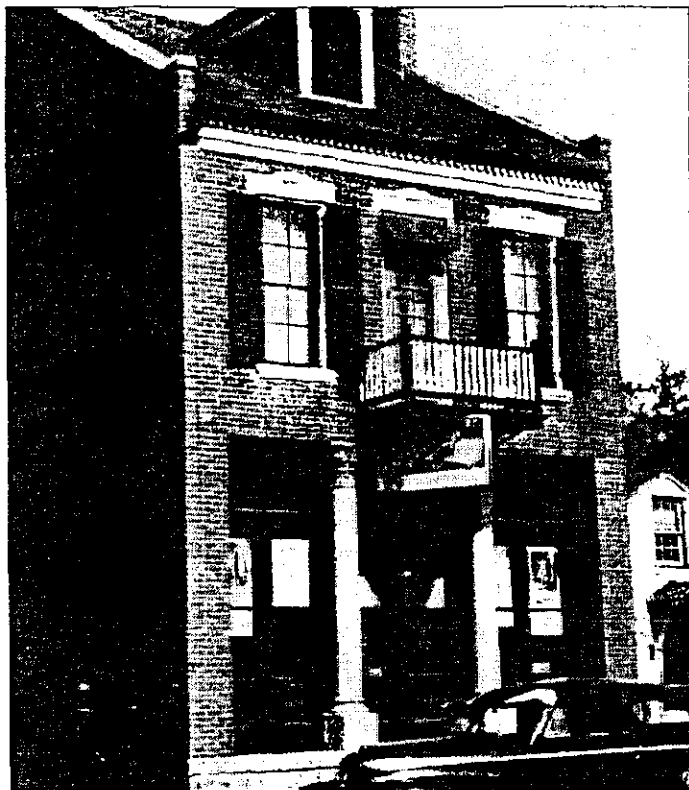
• circa 1825-1860

The end of the 18th century brought about great interest in classical building styles throughout the United States and Europe. The Greek Revival style became quite popular during the middle of the nineteenth century. By 1850, it was seen in almost all settled areas in the nation, gaining a presence in Missouri at that time.

Based on classical detailing that originated in ancient Greece, these buildings are known primarily for columns with Doric, Ionic or Corinthian capitals. Other Greek Revival detailing includes classical entablatures, simple window surrounds and door surrounds consisting of transom and sidelights.

Characteristics

- Rounded columns
- Pediment roof
- Tall first floor windows
- Entablature
- Doors with transom, side and corner lights
- Gabled or hipped roof
- Frieze band windows



Once Joseph May's monument business, this building at 337 South Main Street shows how the Federal style was jointly influenced by the Greek Revival style. Note the Corinthian columns made by Mr. May himself.

Italianate influences

• circa 1840-1885

The Italianate Style, along with other styles of the Picturesque Movement such as Gothic Revival and the Victorian Era, were a reaction to the formal classicism of the Greek Revival. Popularized by Andrew Jackson Downing's pattern books published in the 1840s and 1850s, the Italianate was seen more commonly in the expanding towns and cities of the Midwest. This style began to introduce more exuberant detailing to structures; such as rounded windows (often paired), decorative brackets and elaborate window hoods.

Characteristics

- Two or three stories
- Low pitch hipped roof
- Overhanging eaves
- Decorative paired brackets
- Tall narrow windows
- Arched or curved windows
- Double doors with glass panels
- Rusticated quoins



The "Mother-in-Law" house, at 500 South Main Street, serves as a good example of the Italianate style on a once residential structure.

Victorian era commercial buildings

• circa 1840-1900

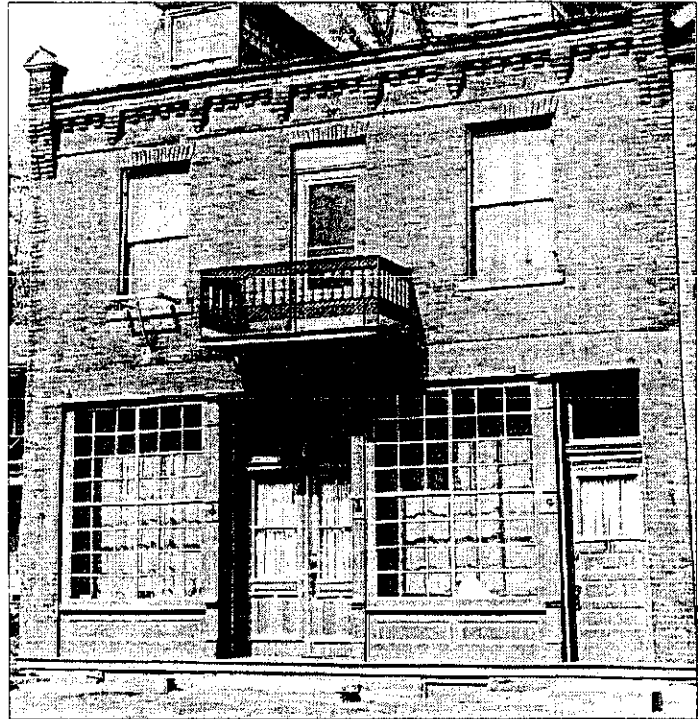
With the abandonment of the early shop house commercial block in the 1840s and 1850s, came the Victorian version of the commercial strip. These Victorian commercial buildings became individual structures per individual business. Unlike the long continuous storefront typical to the Federal style commercial structures.

The new Victorian style began to focus more on the business use of the building by providing a larger expanse of glass for product display. These structures were also more ornate than their earlier predecessors, accentuating the cornice to serve as a terminus for the whole building.

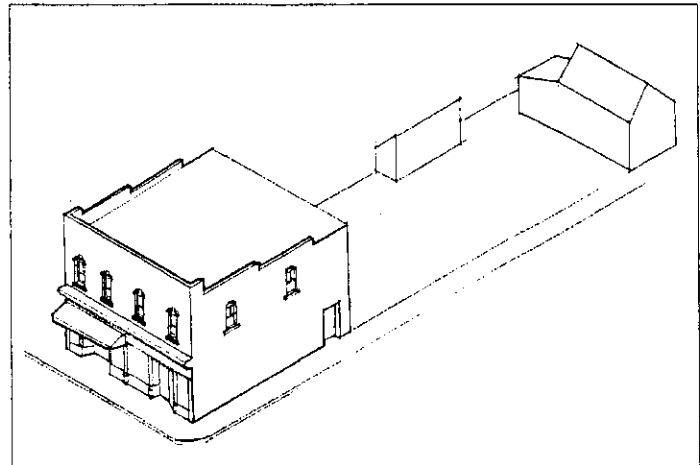
As this building type evolved towards the turn-of-the century so to did the amount of ornamentation and high-style influences. The cornice and midbelt cornice lines became more prominent, more elaborate window and door openings were used and much of the facade was covered with varying degrees of applied ornamentation. With the introduction of cast-iron, the weight of second and third stories of these Victorian commercial structures was able to be carried over larger expanses of glass on the first floor. This new type was the 20th century commercial storefront (discussed later in this chapter). Note the many differences between the two.

Characteristics

- Large display windows
- Transom lights
- Kickplate
- Recessed entry
- Double doors
- Tall second story windows
- Cornice



311 South Main Street is a prime example of the heightened degree of ornamentation and the larger expanses of glass seen on Victorian commercial buildings.



A typical site for a Victorian commercial structure sees the primary building located at the sidewalk's edge with out buildings located to the rear.

Victorian era residential buildings

• circa 1875-1900

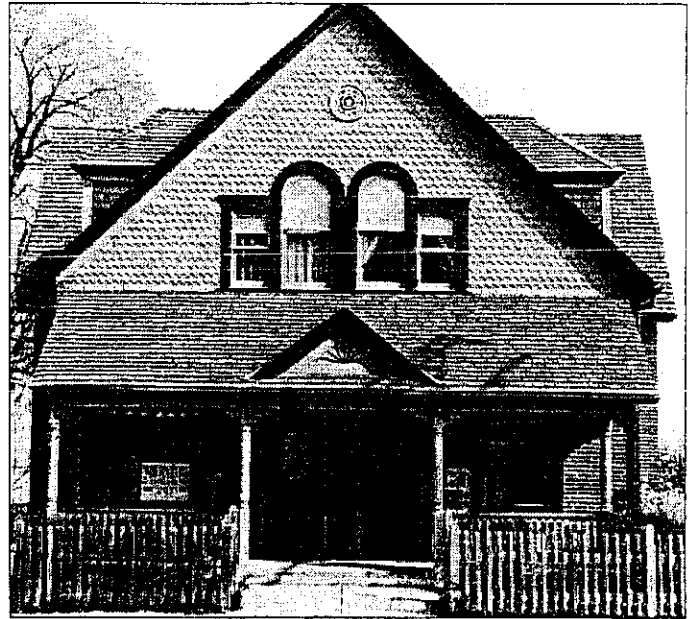
Houses dating from the Victorian era emerged during a period associated with the reign of Queen Victoria, who ruled from 1837 to 1901. During the Victorian period, advances in industrialization, transportation and construction techniques popularized this style and made it readily available.

The Victorian style homes seen in St. Charles are not atypical examples of any pure style, much like most of the buildings in the South Main Street District. The Victorian era buildings appear to be a mix of the Second Empire style (c. 1855-1885) and the Folk Victorian style (c. 1840-1910). Whereas, Second Empire structures are larger in scale with mansard roofs, high style architectural features, round-topped arched dormers, towers and are usually of masonry construction. The Folk Victorian style, however, is of a smaller residential scale of wood construction, porches are more ornate detailing (i.e. turned posts, jig-saw trim and cornice-like brackets).

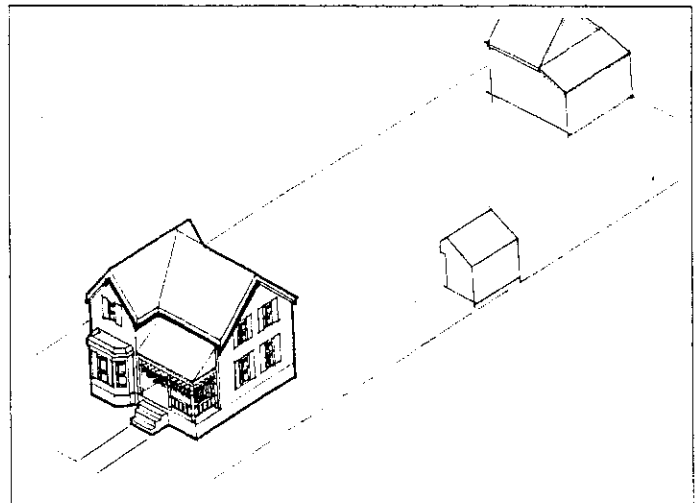
Victorian era vernacular buildings seen in St. Charles tend to combine these two styles, incorporating major elements such as the brick masonry construction, a smaller scale, porches, arched windows and elaborate wood trim elements.

Characteristics

- Wooden porches
- Turned spindles and jig-saw trim
- Round-topped arched windows
- One to two stories
- Asymmetrical or irregular massing
- Profusion of wall texture or color
- Projecting bays
- Front gabled roof



The Victorian era residential buildings in St. Charles, such as this one at 508-510 South Main Street, incorporate many simplified characteristics of the style such as the jig-saw trim, the wall textures and the round-topped windows.



The site relationships of a Victorian residential structure are similar to those of its commercial relative except the primary structure is setback from the sidewalk edge, thereby giving it a more residential feel.

Commercial storefronts

• circa 1860-1920

The commercial storefront of the late 19th and early 20th centuries is the most common type of building found today in most commercial districts throughout the country. It appears less frequently in South Main, however. Usually limited to two to four stories, this commercial building is divided into two distinct bands. The first floor is more commonly transparent, so goods can be displayed, while the second story is usually reserved for a residential or storage space. Although construction of these buildings began as early as 1850 and continued until 1950, the majority were constructed at the turn-of-the-century. Many carry Italianate detailing.

Characteristics

- Cast-iron supported storefronts
- Large display windows
- Transom lights
- Kickplate
- Recessed entry
- Double doors
- Tall second story windows
- Cornice



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