

NEWS FOR THE PRESERVATION COMMUNITY

preservation issues

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

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Organizing for Power: Edna Gellhorn and the Equal Suffrage League

PHOTOGRAPH BY LYNN JOSSE



The Gellhorn House is one of at least nine dwellings on the 4300 block of McPherson, in the Central West End neighborhood of St. Louis, constructed by local builder O. F. Humphrey between 1898 – 1901. In addition to its significance as the home of Edna Fischel Gellhorn, there is also a direct association with the St. Louis Equal Suffrage League. Several meetings were held at this address soon after the Gellhorns purchased the house in 1911. Edna Gellhorn owned the house until 1948.

The Equal Suffrage League of St. Louis (ESL), founded in 1910, brought together women from diverse backgrounds and social strata to fight for the common cause of women's suffrage (see "The Women of the Clubs: 1890-1920" *Preservation Issues* vol. 6, no.2). Although the initial membership was culled from elite members of the city's Central West End clubs, aggressive expansion efforts resulted in a number of affiliate organizations for business women, Jewish women and even in one of the city's poorest immigrant neighborhoods.

One of the most interesting and inspiring stories of the ESL and its successor organization, the League of Women Voters, is that of former president Edna Fischel Gellhorn. As Edna Fischel, she was a char-

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March/April 1997

ter member and first president of the College Club of St. Louis. The College Club was formed in 1901 as a social club for educated women, a counterpart to the male-only University Club. Like many society women of that era, Edna Fischel viewed the notion of women voting with a certain amount of unease. Even after her marriage to George Gellhorn, a German immigrant who believed that women's status as citizens included the right to vote and participate in politics, she was uncertain if she herself should join the movement.

But join she did, and soon she was devoting the same energy and intelligence to the ESL that she did to every cause she espoused. In 1919, Gellhorn was named Chair of Local Arrangements for the 1919 jubilee convention of the National American Women's Suffrage Association, hosted by the ESL of St. Louis at the new Hotel Statler.

By March of 1919, women's right to vote had been approved in many states, and patient suffragists finally anticipated an end to their hard-fought struggles. The annual National American Women's Suffrage Association convention that year was both a victory celebration and a turning point, as 600 delegates from all states planned the next steps for their newly enfranchised organizations. The convention included dinners and speeches, reports and meetings. With the exception of two mass meetings held at the Odeon Theater (razed in 1936), all of the official convention program appears to have been held at the Hotel Statler. The hotel ballroom, an early and significant example of an upper-story ballroom suitable for year-round use, was

transformed into a convention hall for the delegates and guests. A capacity crowd estimated at 1,200-1,300 people (overwhelmingly female) attended Carrie Chapman Catt's opening address, and newspapers reported that several hundred

hedge around the foot of the platform." The convention also spread into the dining rooms and the lobby (where an informational kiosk and a branch post office were specially set up).

The most significant development at the March 1919 convention was the resolution to direct the suffrage movement's members into an alliance of voting women. Proposed and approved in the Statler ballroom, this alliance was formally realized as the National League of Women Voters in 1920. Not all local suffrage leagues waited for the national group, however. St. Louis delegates began discussing local organization the day after the convention and by fall had a "Colored Division" and organizations in almost every ward. The last annual convention of the Missouri Woman Suffrage Association, held in October 1919 at the Hotel Statler, included the new local Leagues of Women Voters in the program.

Edna Fischel Gellhorn, who assumed the position of president of the Equal Suffrage League of St. Louis in 1919, became the first president of the Missouri League of Women Voters. In that capacity, she "rode milk trains all over the state persuading women to learn how to use their new power." In St. Louis, she organized citizenship schools, raised money, and promoted

numerous civic causes. Her position as a director of the national league was won not only by her decades of service and hard work but also by an immense personal charm and power of persuasion that she used on behalf of all her causes.

Edna Gellhorn's hard work and commitment made her without doubt one of the

PHOTOGRAPH BY LYNN JOSSE



The Hotel Statler (1917) is listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a significant example of the innovative designs of George B. Post & Sons, the New York firm that set the standard for modern hotel design. Although currently vacant and threatened by possible sale for demolition and new construction, the Statler appears to be in good condition and remains highly intact.

more milled about in the hallways or turned back when they were unable to gain admission. The St. Louis Republic described the room's appearance at this session: "Patriotic bunting and flags entwined gracefully with festooned pennants of the suffrage yellow. Pots of narcissi, the suffrage flower, formed a vivid

most important St. Louis women of the first half of the 20th century. She lived to be over 90 years old, remaining an energetic citizen until the end of her life. To this day, the League of Women Voters has remained an active force in American politics. Although it has moved away from early activities such as citizenship schools, the non-partisan organization continues to educate the American public on important issues.

—Lynn Josse

Lynn Josse joined Landmarks Association of St. Louis in 1996. She holds an M. S. degree in Historic Preservation from the University of Oregon.

Between 1994 – 1996, Landmarks Association of St. Louis conducted a survey of sites connected with St. Louis women's clubs and organizations from 1890 – 1920. Resources associated with the ESL include two branch libraries where ESL branches met and the downtown building in which they had offices, as well as the home of Edna Fischel Gellhorn and the Statler Hotel. The survey was funded by a matching Historic Preservation Fund grant from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources' Historic Preservation Program.

Historic Preservation Program **UPDATES**

Public Comments Requested...

FY 1998 State Historic Preservation Program Activities and Priorities

The Department of Natural Resources' Historic Preservation Program (HPP) is developing its annual work program for fiscal year 1998. Over the next few months, the program will be developing priorities for allocation of staff resources and for distribution of federal Historic Preservation Fund monies. The HPP expects to receive approximately \$690,000 from the Historic Preservation Fund this year. Ten percent of that amount must be provided to Certified Local Governments (CLGs) to carry out historic preservation activities at the local level. Including the monies awarded to CLGs, HPP expects to award approximately \$200,000 in matching grants to local governments, organizations and individuals.

Suggestions from the public have been important in developing programs and priorities in the past. Your help is needed again this year as difficult decisions are made concerning the allocation of scarce resources. HPP is particularly interested in your comments on the following:

- What are the greatest threats to historic and archaeological resources in your community?
- What types of properties are at greatest risk?
- What areas in Missouri should be priorities for survey of historic or archaeological resources?

- What types of properties should be priorities for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places?
- What types of properties should be priorities for planning and development grants?
- What types of technical assistance from the HPP would benefit your community?
- Are there special projects that should be initiated or developed?

The HPP expects to carry out or fund activities in the areas of statewide survey and inventory; nominations to the National Register of Historic Places; review and compliance; rehabilitation and restoration of historic buildings; Historic Preservation Revolving Fund assistance; Missouri Main Street Program design assistance; unmarked human burial assistance; planning; and preservation awareness and education. Special emphasis will be given to the goals, objectives and recommendations identified in the statewide preservation plan.

Your comments and suggestions are welcome. Contact Assistant Program Director Mark Miles at (573)751-7761 or write to the return address.

The Cyprians of Sedalia

In 1940, *Life* magazine reported that Sedalia, Mo., had "one of the midland's most notorious red-light districts." Most Sedalians were aware that prostitution existed in Sedalia, but few realized how pervasive and open prostitution had been, especially in Sedalia's early years. That prostitution thrived should not have been surprising, since Sedalia was a rail head, a federal military post during the Civil War, the end of the cattle drives out of Texas in 1866 and 1867, and a rapidly growing industrial and mercantile center in the 1870s and 1880s. As Sedalia developed from a frontier boomtown to become a prosperous, settled city, however, prostitution would have been expected either to decrease or to be hidden. Neither happened.

The 1870 census identified seven women who listed prostitution as their occupation. During the next three decades, the church condemned "fallen women," the press railed against the "social evil," and city administrators swore to rid the city of "infamous resorts." Despite their vigorous efforts, prostitution increased. By 1900, the number of prostitutes listed in the census had risen to 22. A partial review of newspapers, court documents, and graffiti on brothel walls identified, by name, more than 500 prostitutes who worked in Sedalia between 1868 and 1900.

The presence of a large population of young, transient single men in a frontier community provided an obvious, but simplistic, explanation for the presence of large numbers of prostitutes. A better explanation included the ambivalent attitude toward sexuality, the social structures that mandated the roles of men and women, and the widespread poverty and the virulent racism that plagued Sedalia.

An ambivalent attitude toward gender underscored the double standard of sexuality apparent in 19th century attitudes. The "true woman" was pure, pious and restrained, "a little lower than the angels." Men, however, were to control the "animal passions" that governed them, and to direct any strong feelings into their work. Good women were to stifle their own sexuality and be pure enough to restrain any immoral impulses a man might feel. Prostitutes, who openly flouted the 19th century moral standards, were blamed for men's failure to exhibit the proper degree of self-control required for the "blameless life."

Women's place was rigidly defined during the 19th century. Women were expected to remain chaste until marriage; they were expected to marry, and their husbands were to provide for them. The woman who allowed herself to be seduced and abandoned was viewed as "ruined";

Missouri has recently listed a historic Sedalia brothel in the National Register of Historic Places. The well-preserved graffiti in the second-floor "sleeping rooms" includes names, off-color comments, poetry and illustrations like the woman in 19th century style corset and stockings.

the term itself suggested the extent to which the options of marriage and respectability were denied to her. When some Sedalia prostitutes spoke in an interview with the *Sedalia Bazoo*, they told of "broken vows, trust misplaced, seduction, desertion, crime."

Unmarried women had no real place in 19th-century America. Never-married women could remain at home under the care of a father or brother, pitied or scorned as an "old maid." A widowed or deserted woman might return to her family's home with her children, pitied if she were widowed, and scorned if she had been deserted. If living with relatives were neither possible nor tolerable, a woman could try to earn a living at the few jobs open to her.

However, the unmarried woman had few options for work. If she was educated, she might teach school, but teaching paid poorly — \$30 to \$50 per month in 1868 and \$60 to \$80 in 1890 — with lower wages being paid to African-American teachers. Other women sewed, trimmed hats, did laundry or worked as domestic servants. None of these occupations paid adequately, however, prompting *Sedalia Bazoo* editor J. West Goodwin to lament that women's "every hope is smothered, every aspiration crushed back in the bitter fight between penury in honor or shame in luxury."

It is not surprising then, that many poor women turned to prostitution for a prostitute could earn enough to provide food, clothing and shelter. That a woman

might offer her sexuality in the marketplace violated both the moral standards and the gender expectations of the time. As a result, public condemnation was added to the stresses of an unpleasant, even dangerous life.

"Woman's history is the primary tool of women's emancipation." — Gerda Lerner

Most prostitutes were young, between 16 and 20, though girls as young as 13 and women as old as 45 were described in newspaper accounts. Drugs were also a problem; many prostitutes, like Lizzie Cook, used chloroform or opium. Others, like Lillie Allen and Belle Burke, used alcohol to excess. "Loathsome" venereal diseases were common, as were consumption and unspecified fevers. Death caused by the use of abortifacients occurred occasionally. Many prostitutes committed suicide.

In addition, the loneliness brought on by public humiliation isolated the prostitute from most of society. Good women scorned prostitutes, in part because propriety demanded that good women separate themselves from any contact with evil. An undercurrent of fear marked the hostility toward prostitutes as well. Wives feared the venereal diseases that could be brought to them by husbands who patronized prostitutes. It is possible also that women understood the precariousness of their own economic situation and projected scorn onto the prostitutes rather than acknowledge their own fear of potential poverty.

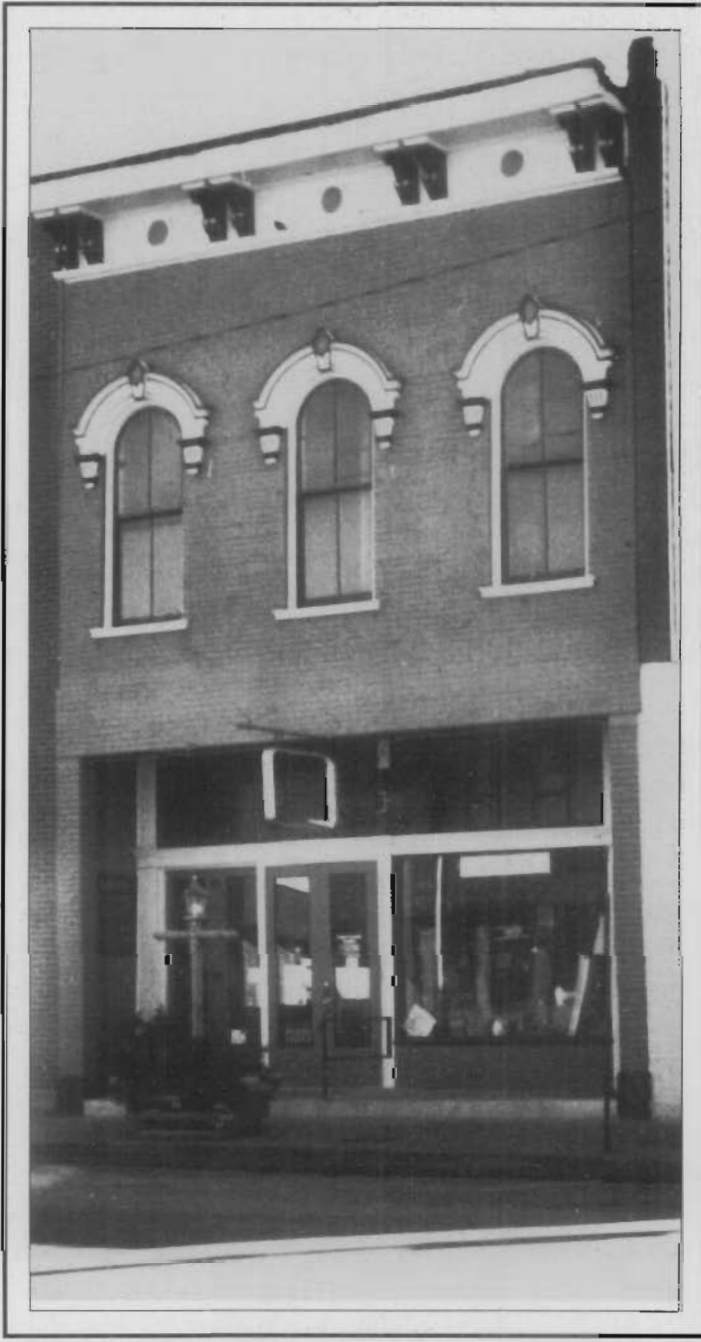
In Sedalia's early years, houses of prostitution were scattered throughout the city. Specific locations include the area near 18th Street and Ohio Avenue, north of the gas plant, in a residential

Registering Sin

Between 1874 and 1940, Sallie Todd, Birdie Sissler, Hattie Longan, and scores of other women plied their trade as prostitutes in the narrow, dim back rooms on the second floor of the building at 217 West Main St., Sedalia. The building, which at various times housed on its ground floor the more respectable enterprises of grocery store, carriage shop, patent medicine store, and restaurant, was one of at least a half a dozen other buildings that harbored brothels along West Main Street in the frequently rowdy railroad town. The building at 217 West Main St. is especially significant because of the variety and volume of graffiti scrawled on its upstairs walls by the customers. This graffiti, which has largely survived beneath peeling wallpaper, included the names of prostitutes who worked in the building and the names and professions of many of the clients; poetry and drawings, much of which was crude and frequently obscene, also adorned the walls and provided an index of attitudes toward the women who practiced their shadowy profession there.

On Oct. 24, 1996, the "Building at 217 West Main Street" was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is intended to acknowledge significant aspects of our nation's history. Generally, properties that represent positive aspects of that history or progressive accomplishments are honored with the designation. However, the 217 West Main St. building reflects the more ambiguous aspects of our nation's history, including society's attitudes toward women and sex, the tensions between upper and under classes, and the complicity of society's guardians with the corrupting forces they professed to oppose. Although the history recognized by the Sedalia building does not conveniently meet the expectations that usually accompany National Register listing, its inclusion recognizes that historical events and trends may be evaluated without applying subjective biases. It also furthers efforts to construct a more complete picture of our past.

— Steve Mitchell



The best-preserved building in Sedalia's once "notorious red light district," 217 West Main was recently listed in the National Register for its significance to the area's social history.

neighborhood on Sixth Street, in Happy Hollow, and on Washington Street just north of the railroad tracks. By the turn of the century, however, Sedalia's red-light district had coalesced in the "dives" along West Main Street where at least eight brothels operated in a two-block section. The typical brothel was on the second floor of a legitimate business — a saloon, a store or a restaurant. A series of small

rooms, generally numbered, opened off a long hallway. Some brothels had back stairways opening on to alleys; some had peepholes in the doors at the top of the stairs.

Prostitution continued in Sedalia largely because it was profitable, not only to the women like Lizzie Cook who "scooped in the money and grew rich," but to the more respectable elements in the city as well. Prostitutes were consumers who borrowed money at local banks, spent money in local shops, paid taxes on any real estate they owned and contributed regularly to the city treasury. Under an established system of regular payments of fines, a madam and her employees appeared in a special

court session monthly to pay a predetermined fine; if fines were paid, the house would not be raided. If even two of 20 prostitutes paid a monthly fine of \$10, the city could realize \$2400 per year.

Prostitution remained a part of Sedalia until the early 1970s. The double standard of sexual behavior became a part of the economic structure for women with no other options for employment, while also

enriching the city through repeated fines or bribes. Despite the efforts of the law, the press and the church, Sedalia was indeed "notorious."

— Rhonda Chalfant

Rhonda Chalfant was the preparer of the National Register nomination for the Building at 217 West Main Street in Sedalia. She is currently an instructor of English at State Fair Community College, a Ph.D. candidate in history at the University of Missouri-Columbia and the president of the Pettis County Historical Society.



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MISSOURI

Historic Architecture

Colonial Revival Houses 1880 - 1955

Characteristics:

- Colonial Revival houses are characterized by their recollection of those styles that were most popular in late 18th century America, particularly Georgian and Adamesque, as well as Colonial vernacular forms, such as the Saltbox, Garrison House and Cape Cod Cottage.
- The style was very popular in domestic architecture, and excellent examples can still be seen in those suburban neighborhoods that emerged in the early 20th century.
- Roofs may be gabled, hipped or gambrel (patterned after Dutch Colonial architecture). The major difference in roof-lines from the original prototypes is in dormer size and shape. Dormers on original 18th century houses were always small and gabled, primarily serving to provide additional lighting, while the Colonial Revival style, which also used the small gabled dormer, also emphasized large, shed dormers, a type never seen in the 18th century, to expand usable living space.
- Entrances alluded to the 18th century with columns, pilasters and pediments, or moldings that simulated those features. Six-panel doors were common and were often flanked by sidelights and capped by a transom or fanlight.
- Some cornices were decorated with dentils and modillions, although these features are not as prominent as those on originals. Colonial Revival houses will also occasionally feature open eaves and rakes, as well as exposed rafters, and these features are never found on 18th century houses.
- Most fenestration consisted of symmetrical double-hung sashes. While the more accurate copies had six, eight, nine, or 12 panes in each sash, multi-over-one light was the most common 20th century version. Bay windows, paired and tripled windows are also common, and never found on the 18th century examples. Fixed wooden shutters either louvered or, more often, paneled with cut out hearts, spades, trees, etc. were very common.
- As masonry veneering techniques grew more common, brick became a very popular exterior wall treatment in the style, but

clapboard wall treatment is by far the most prevalent. A few houses were clad in shingles. Occasionally, two or three different wall treatments may be found.

- Interiors may have reflected the Colonial aesthetic, however, the Arts and Crafts motif is also often found in Colonial Revival house interiors. Early 20th century architecture is characterized by an eclectic mix of styles, and seeing Colonial Revival houses with elements of Queen Anne, Arts and Crafts, Prairie or even Rustic interiors is not odd.

— Allen Tatman

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTOPHER MERZ



The Parkview Historic District in St. Louis and University City contains many fine examples of Colonial Revival houses, including 6363 Pershing Avenue (1910) which was designed by architect Otto J. Boehmer.

Advisory Council Meeting

The Missouri Advisory Council for Historic Preservation will hold its next quarterly meeting on Friday, May 2, 1997, in Jefferson City at the Truman Building, Room 400. The council works with the Missouri Department of Natural Resources' Historic Preservation Program (HPP), which administers the National Register of Historic Places Program for the state. The council meeting, which is open to the public, will begin at 9 a.m.

The Missouri Advisory Council is a 12-member group made up of historians, architectural historians, architects, archaeologists and citizens with an interest in historic preservation and is appointed by the governor. The council meets quarterly to review proposed Missouri property nominations to the National Register of Historic Places — the nation's honor roll of historic properties. Approved nominations are forwarded to the Keeper of the National Register in Washington D.C. for final approval.

For more information about the council or the May meeting, contact Catherine Sala in the HPP at (573) 751-7858 or write to the return address and include both a day and evening phone number where you can be reached.

Landmark Listings

J. P. Lohofener House, 710 Orange, Concordia

•1872 Federal Gothic only 2 owners: Lohofener family of 12 and German Heritage museum. 6 rooms, attic, hall, original brick. Frame additions — 4 rooms, bath, hall, back porch. Partial bsm't, gas furnace, well, sandstone walks. New roof 1992

•Centers 3 60' lots, backs Main Street alley (MO23), faces residential Community Bldg, 2 blks W., I-70 10 blks. N., ("Old 40" — 8 blks.) Public & Lutheran high schools, large Lutheran nursing home. Needs some repair.

contact Lloyd or Nyla Shepard
614 Briarwood
Marshall, MO 65340
1-816-886-2629



FORMER FRATERNITY HOUSE IN HISTORIC LIBERTY

Fantastic opportunity to renovate a unique 3-story mansion in Liberty, Missouri. Property has formerly been used as the Lambda Chi Alpha Fraternity home at William Jewell College until damaged by fire in the Fall of 1996. Two-story columns frame the entrance of this brick structure. Interior floorplan includes a dramatic entry foyer with center stairway, den with beveled glass pocket doors, large living room, study, and multiple living quarters. Special price of just \$32,000. Must be renovated to specifications of the Liberty, MO Preservation Committee.

For information call John Barth
Re/Max of Kansas City
2850 Kendallwood Parkway
Gladstone, MO 64119
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