

**RECONNAISSANCE HISTORIC STRUCTURE SURVEY  
CITY OF CAPE GIRARDEAU**

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**Phase I  
Downtown Redevelopment Area  
November, 1985**

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**Survey Conducted  
by the  
Center for Regional History and Cultural Heritage  
Southeast Missouri State University**

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## OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

Historian Frederick Jackson Turner suggested that the western movement in American history was accomplished in stages, with one group taking up the land to be followed by others who used the land for a different livelihood. One of the values of the study of history is to understand where we as a nation, a state or individual have come from. It gives us a sense of connection; it gives continuity; and in turn, provides a link to the past and how that past has had an imprint on the cultural landscape as well as upon the individuals who reside in the nation or city.

In 1966, the U. S. Congress passed the National Historic Preservation Act, the most comprehensive law dealing with the cultural resources of the nation up to that time. One of the mandates of this law was to "inventory" the cultural resources of the nation, to catalogue its natural and manmade heritage. The need for this inventory is almost self-explanatory--to identify those cultural resources that were significant in the history of the nation and its people, so that they could be preserved for future generations. The resources found to be of national significance were to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places as a means of bringing individual sites to public attention and to provide some protection to the site through the federal government, but also to provide a national record for those sites deemed significant.

Following the 1966 legislation, the National Park Service developed guidelines to be followed in conducting the survey and criteria for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. Each state was required, through its historic preservation officer, to survey its resources and keep a record of those sites significant to the nation as well as the individual state. To support this survey/inventory of the cultural/historical resources of the nation, the National Park Service provided individual states with matching funds to conduct the survey. Each state allocated money to projects that met state and federal guidelines, and each year new projects were started as completed ones were turned over to the state historic preservation office.

The City of Cape Girardeau received two grants to conduct a reconnaissance survey of the downtown business/residential area adjacent to the Mississippi River in 1983. The objective was to survey all of the estimated 192 buildings in the defined area as the first step in the eventual survey of the entire City of Cape Girardeau as required by the 1966 Historic Preservation Act. The area chosen for the survey was bounded on the north by Bellevue Street, on the west by Lorimier and Fountain Streets, on the south by William Street, and on the east by the Mississippi River (see enclosed map). One non-adjacent property was also included because of its potential for National Register nomination--the old International Shoe Factory. Part of the survey area lies within the Downtown Redevelopment District, and information

generated by this survey will be helpful to the City and the Downtown Redevelopment Corporation.

The reconnaissance level survey will provide historical data that could be used in applying for historic preservation tax incentives for redevelopment of specific buildings in the downtown area. Another objective of the survey was to collect data on all the structures in the survey area and identify those buildings that were initially considered locally and/or nationally significant. Finally, the project was to be the initial phase of a comprehensive survey of the entire City of Cape Girardeau.

### METHODOLOGY

To conduct the proposed reconnaissance level survey, the following guidelines and methods were followed:

- 1) Field teams inspected each structure in the survey area. This required on-site inspection of the building and completion of a preliminary survey form. Each structure in the survey area with a mailing/street address had a "historic inventory" sheet completed, regardless of the age or condition of the property. Therefore, every structure in the designated survey area was recorded.
- 2) Each structure surveyed had at least one black and white photograph taken of it. The photographs are matched to the inventory sheets to provide a visual as well as a written description of the structure. The photographic negatives will be kept in the Center for Regional History and Cultural Heritage and are available to the public.
- 3) After the inventory forms had been completed on all the structures in the survey area, they were placed in one of three categories: "A" represents potential National Register nomination, "B" possible state or local significance, and "C" no significance. The individual structures were selected for one of the categories on the basis of several factors:
  - "A" Outstanding, unique and/or well preserved examples of architectural styles; buildings associated with residents prominent in the history of the City; buildings indistinguished in themselves, although their use, proportion, period, building type and material might render them compatible with the establishment of a historic district. Does the structure have integrity?
  - "B" Notable and/or largely intact examples of architectural styles; buildings associated with residents significant to the history of the City. Part of the structure's integrity may have been

removed, but if it was better preserved and maintained, it might be in the "A" category.

"C" Buildings which originally might have appeared in the two preceding categories but which have been affected by significant alterations, or buildings incompatible in proportion, period and/or building type which detract from the architectural and/or historical continuity of the area.

4) After the individual inventory sheets were completed, the information recorded was entered on a computer disk program--PFS:FILE. While this step required additional time and careful attention to the individual forms, the end result allows the Center of Regional History and Cultural Heritage and the City of Cape Girardeau to access the survey material in a variety of ways:

- a. It allows the use of data in a format that permits easy access to individual sheets. Rather than looking through 200 plus forms for a single sheet by hand, the computer will retrieve any of the forms in 30 seconds.
- b. The format allows the use of the material in a printed mode as well. The individual form can be printed and carried into the field, while the master remains secure in the office.
- c. The format allows the forms to be updated and changed without rewriting the entire form. Because this survey was at the reconnaissance level, little historical or other documentation was gathered on the individual properties. When such becomes available, however, new forms will not have to be typed as information is added. Each form can be called up and changes and/or additions made without the time-consuming process of searching and typing a new one that includes the latest information.
- d. Using this program, several different search formats can be generated. It can list by owner-related properties, style of architecture, street address, or all the buildings locally designated "A" or "B".

One copy of the disk with the data has been furnished to the City of Cape Girardeau, and as additional information on properties is available, the disk will be updated. A copy of the disk will be furnished to the Southeast Missouri Regional Planning Commission in Perryville, and one will be offered to the Office of Historic Preservation in Jefferson City, Missouri.

5) A video tape of all the "A" structures will be provided to the City of Cape Girardeau for its use. The color tape will show the buildings from the front and side to give perspectives on the structure. The neighborhood setting will be included through a long

view down the street showing the building's relationship to the block.

- 6) A final report will be submitted to the City of Cape Girardeau that includes a brief narrative of the project, methodology, copies of the inventory sheets for all the structures, a computer disk containing the inventory sheets, identification of the "A" and "B" structures with photographs, a map locating the "A" and "B" structures according to address, and recommendations for future historic preservation activity in Cape Girardeau.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Cape Girardeau is located at the very foothills of the Ozark Highlands. South of the City lies the delta built up by years of overflow of the Mississippi River. The first recorded occupants of the region were the so-called "Mound Builders" who were characterized by the mounds they erected. French explorers (Jacques Marquette, Louis Joliet, and Robert Cavalier de la Salle) traveled the Mississippi River passing the future town site, and France claimed the region in 1682, naming it Louisiana in honor of Louis XVI of France.

The first recorded white settler was Sieur Jean B. Girardot, former French marine at the garrison of Kaskaskia. Turned trapper and trader, he established a trading post on a rock promontory that reached out into the Mississippi River. Trader Girardot provided the name, but the honor of founding the settlement belongs to Louis Lorimier, a French Canadian. In January, 1793, Lorimier received permission from the Spanish to establish a trading post near the rocky bluff on the Mississippi River. He erected a large building (at the present site of St. Vincent's Catholic Church, between Main and Spanish Streets within the survey area) known locally as the "Red House." There is no surface evidence of this structure today.

To the west of Lorimier's house was a spring that was used by the Indians for camping and council meetings (William and Fountain Streets, the southwest boundary of the survey area). Today, this site is known as Indian Park. There is no record of any archaeological survey work to determine if it was an Indian camping site.

In addition to Lorimier, there were others trading from the post at Cape Girardeau (Barthelemi Cousin at the corner of Main and Themis, the trading houses of Steinbach and Reinecke, Michael Quinn, and gunsmith Solomon Thorn) or using the Mississippi River as an avenue to reach the frontier (Captains Merriwether Lewis and William Clark stopped on their way to St. Louis, and David Crockett tried to recruit men for frontier service).

From the earliest settlement, the Mississippi River played a vital role in the life of the community. It was a natural avenue of travel, it provided traders with access to New Orleans and the sea, and many businesses and homes were built near its banks. While no structures dating from the 18th century have survived, the Mississippi River remains and forms a historical tie to that earlier settlement.

Cape Girardeau became the most American district along the Mississippi River, but the French were in a majority elsewhere. In 1803, the United States purchased the Louisiana Territory from France, and Cape Girardeau became American territory. In the spring of 1806, the town of Cape Girardeau was laid out by Barthelemi Cousin. The early growth of Cape Girardeau under the United States' administration was clouded by the uncertainty of land titles, as the U. S. failed to recognize the Spanish titles in spite of an agreement to the contrary. However, in July, 1826, all valid Spanish grants were recognized, and Cape Girardeau abstracts today are based on Lorimier's original grants. The clearing of land titles helped Cape Girardeau grow and eventually pass Jackson, which had experienced rapid development due to the establishment of the county seat at that location and the land title question in Cape Girardeau. The principal commercial growth of Cape Girardeau occurred after 1835 as steamboat traffic increased, according to Goodspeed's History of Southeast Missouri.

Two mid-19th century buildings reflect Cape Girardeau's commercial and residential growth: construction of St. Vincent's Catholic Church, finished in 1852 (adjacent to homes and near the waterfront businesses on the southeastern edge of the survey area) and the Common Pleas Courthouse and jail completed in 1855 (on a hill overlooking the commercial district). Both buildings remain and are within the defined area of the current survey. St. Vincent's is on the National Register, and the Common Pleas Courthouse is an excellent candidate for the Register (both are indicated on the accompanying map).

Fur trading was the first commercial activity of the white men in the area, but agriculture soon replaced the furs as the major commercial industry. Agriculture in the area of Cape Girardeau has also changed over the years. Cotton grew well, and at one time, Cape Girardeau had two cotton gins, and the merchants along the riverfront shipped more cotton than any other point in the state. For years, tobacco was also an important crop, and several local factories processed it. Wheat, then as now, was a major crop, and in the late 19th century and early 20th century, there were several flour mills along the riverfront. Barthelemi Cousin designed a mill mounted on two flatboats in the river. This unusual mill operated from 1812 to 1836 according to Snider and Collins, Cape Girardeau: Biography of a City. A wind-powered grist mill was built on the bluff at the end of Bellevue Street where Civil War Fort A was later constructed (northern boundary of the current survey).

Factories that manufactured barrels and staves of white oak flourished at the turn of the century. In the mid-1870's, limestone process for quick lime was a major export item from the Cape Girardeau riverfront, with one of the largest kiln's located above Broadway near the river.

Beginning in the mid-1830's, Cape Girardeau enjoyed an expansion of business, due largely to the steamboat trade, that continued until the arrival of the railroad. The only interruption in this growth was during the Civil War years (1861-1865). Cape Girardeau, by the mid-19th century, was a river-oriented town. It was the distribution point for a hinterland that extended into the Ozarks and south into the swamps. Wagons brought cotton, wheat and other farm and forest products to the riverfront merchants. These wholesale dealers sold to other merchants in the hinterland, making Cape Girardeau the hub of transportation, merchandise, and industry for the southeastern section of Missouri. This growth and market location were reflected in the construction of commercial buildings near the waterfront, as well as the building of fine residences by some of the merchants along Spanish, Lorimier, and Merriwether Streets.

The first railroad came to Cape Girardeau in 1881, and eventually the City was served by two railroads--the Missouri-Pacific and the Frisco. Nationally, railroads competed with river transportation and, in that respect, caused a decline in the river traffic and less business for the downtown. However, the commercial district in the downtown continued to thrive into the 20th century in spite of this transportation and commercial shift.

The first road between St. Louis and New Madrid was named El Camino Real, or the King's Road. It is recognized as one of the oldest roads in the Mississippi River Valley and extended through Ste. Genevieve, Cape Girardeau (passing Lorimier's trading post on Spanish Street) across the Big Swamp and followed the Sikeston ridge to New Madrid. The advent of the gasoline engine brought long-term changes to the nation and Cape Girardeau. Immediately, it gave individuals greater freedom to move about, fostering suburbs and all-weather roads. By 1915, a federal highway system had been designated through Cape Girardeau. In 1920, a movement began to "Get Missouri out of the Mud" through a bond issue to construct a basic system of all-weather roads. The automobile and its effects would eventually have a major impact on downtown Cape Girardeau.

In the 1950's, the Mississippi River was a major problem for the businesses along the river. To stop the annual flooding, a concrete "sea" wall was built. It stopped the river water from getting into the downtown businesses, but it also blocked the view of the Mississippi River, a major attraction in the area. Other forces were at work in the 1950's besides the flooding which threatened its commercial existence.

Following the development of all-weather roads, the public was attracted by new merchandising plans that introduced the shopping center. The first center came to Cape Girardeau in the late 1950's and

posed new competition to the "old" downtown, but it still was a viable alternative. In 1956, the United States began a major national program of interstate highways. By 1980, Interstate 55 (the new El Camino Real and Mississippi River) linked Cape Girardeau with St. Louis to the north and Memphis to the south. This new transportation avenue became the new "river," and business sprang up along its "banks." In the 1980's, a new shopping mall was constructed near I-55, and the commercial area in downtown Cape Girardeau began to decline. Can the old historic riverfront commercial district survive the competition of a new shopping center? This is a question many communities in the midwest have had to face. Some have found solutions; others have not. How will Cape Girardeau respond?

### RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Seek additional funds from the National Park Service to continue reconnaissance and intensive level surveys. There needs to be an intensive level survey of the area surveyed in this study to determine if there are National Register nomination buildings. The reconnaissance level survey also needs to be broadened to include other areas in Cape Girardeau.
2. A historic district should be considered by the City of Cape Girardeau for a part of the survey area. This district would not include all the surveyed buildings, but would include certain blocks and structures that may not be contiguous.
3. Local certification for the City of Cape Girardeau as a Certified Local Government. The two major advantages of becoming a certified government are:
  - a) having responsibility to review and approve nominations of properties to the National Register; and,
  - b) being eligible to apply to the State Historic Preservation Officer for matching funds earmarked for "certified local governments."
4. National Register research and nominations for the buildings identified in this reconnaissance survey that might be eligible for nomination. Individual property owners should consider having the research and nomination papers completed in order to take advantage of current tax laws.

There are two general types of historic properties found in the surveyed area. Regarding commercial structures, the number and variety of buildings was surprising. The historic (from a reconnaissance survey) buildings date from before the Civil War (117-119 Independence)

to commercial structures erected in the first two decades of the 20th century (several along Main Street). Commercial buildings in the survey area clearly indicate the long-standing business activity in the area--first with the river, then the railroad, and followed by the streetcar and later the automobile. The commercial buildings reflect the changing business emphasis from manufacturing, wholesale and retail, to a dominance by the retail outlets with no manufacturing by 1985. Architecturally, the significance of each of the identified buildings will have to await future intensive surveys and/or private financing of individual private surveys. Clearly, the surveyed area was a long-term important business area that reflected the changes taking place in a society moving through various economic and transportation changes.

Private residences represented the second general category of historic structures found in the survey area. These homes, like the commercial structures, represent a lifestyle that was based on a society centered around first the river and gradually changed as the automobile became more important. Most of the historic (based on reconnaissance) homes were associated with individuals who were active in the commercial activities of the riverfront and downtown business district. From the earliest days of Louis Lorimier's "Red House," merchants lived in the immediate proximity of their businesses. Today, the remaining residences reflect this neighborhood-business connection. As the methods of local, as well as national, transportation improved, some of these individuals and businesses moved to the west (suburbs). These historic houses passed through several owners, and many of them today are being used as apartments, with their former beauty and craftsmanship barely visible through the structural changes.

In both categories, business and residential, there are some examples of buildings in good repair and upkeep. But by and large, most of the historic structures (residential and commercial) are threatened. Most have been altered, some drastically. Some have been sandblasted and tuckpointed with Portland cement. Some need repair and maintenance, while others stand vacant awaiting an uncertain future.

In conducting the survey, some buildings did not "fit" into the above two categories. The old Baptist Church at Spanish and Broadway, altered, added to, sandblasted and now vacant, is a good example of a late 19th century church structure. It also reflects the presence of more families in the immediate area of the downtown. So does St. Vincent Catholic Church. While Common Pleas Courthouse, of which there are only two in the State of Missouri (Hannibal and Cape Girardeau) and both on the Mississippi River, has been altered, sandblasted and tuckpointed, it is significant architecturally and politically to the region. Finally, the Carnegie Library, constructed in the 1920's, is reportedly the last library in the United States built with Carnegie money. Architecturally, when built it represented the state of the art in library buildings. It is no longer used as a library, but for county offices.

Following is a list by street address of all the "A" and "B" structures identified in the reconnaissance survey:

"A"

220 Merriwether	6 S. Fountain
235 Merriwether	44 N. Lorimier
117 Independence	107 S. Lorimier
119 Independence	220 N. Lorimier
223 Independence	224 N. Lorimier
116 Themis	45 S. Spanish
118 Themis	151 S. Spanish
121 Broadway	101 N. Main
211 Broadway	107 N. Main
213 Broadway	700 N. Main
338 Broadway	107 S. Main
15 Water	19 Water
127 Water	

"B"

115 Themis	105 S. Spanish
120 Broadway	119 S. Spanish
200 Broadway	125 S. Spanish
14 S. Lorimier	1 N. Spanish
24 S. Lorimier	123 N. Spanish
25 S. Lorimier	125 N. Spanish
31 S. Lorimier	33 N. Main
127 S. Lorimier	35 N. Main
129 S. Lorimier	40 N. Main
133 S. Lorimier	42 N. Main
143 S. Lorimier	46 N. Main
214 N. Lorimier	109 N. Main
233 N. Lorimier	118 N. Main
1 S. Spanish	120 N. Main
7 S. Spanish	122 N. Main
9 S. Spanish	124 N. Main
11 S. Spanish	126 N. Main
36 S. Spanish	130 N. Main
117 Water	119 Themis
228 Merriwether	

All the remaining structures in the surveyed area were deemed to fall into category "C". For a variety of reasons (spelled out elsewhere), these buildings were not placed in "A" or "B" categories and, therefore, are considered, from the information on the reconnaissance survey, of no historic value. If additional information indicates a property has historic significance or lacks significance, its classification will be changed. It should be emphasized that the survey was a reconnaissance survey, and therefore, in-depth research was not performed on each property.

## POTENTIAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Residential historic district: From William on the south, follow Main Street north to Merriwether, west along Merriwether to the alley between Spanish and Lorimier, then follow the alley north to Independence, turn west on Independence, and follow it to the intersection with Fountain Street. Turn south on Fountain until it intersects with William on the south. Turn east on William and continue to intersection of Main.

Government/commercial district: Beginning at Broadway on the north, go south from the intersection with Water Street. Continue south to the intersection with Independence, then turn west on Independence to the intersection with Main Street. Then turn south on Main to the intersection with Merriwether Street, and then west on Merriwether to the alley between Spanish and Lorimier. Then turn north to the intersection with Independence, then west on Independence until it intersects Lorimier Street. Turn north on Lorimier to the intersection with Broadway, then follow Broadway to Water Street.

Commercial/residential: From Main Street on the east, go west on Broadway to the intersection with Fountain Street, then turn north on Fountain and follow it to the intersection with Bellevue. Turn east on Bellevue to Main Street, then south on Main to the intersection with Broadway.