

METHODOLOGY

A general historic architectural survey of Palmyra, Missouri, was undertaken in July 1988, co-sponsored by the Palmyra Chamber of Commerce and the Historic Preservation Division of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources. The objective was to inventory the historically and architecturally significant properties within the city limits of Palmyra which had been built during the period 1830 to 1940. Prior to the undertaking, an estimate of the expected number of such properties was approximately 175.

Purpose of the survey was to identify the architectural resources of Palmyra as first of the three steps necessary to preserving them (identification, evaluation, protection). Prior to agreement to sponsor the survey, the Palmyra Chamber of Commerce was made aware that a logical and necessary initiative in the preservation process that the survey might make possible would be a nomination for some of the identified properties to the National Register of Historic Places; and it was agreed that the nomination and a possible designation to the National Register were in fact the end result the Chamber was seeking.

A general spot survey was done of the Palmyra grid, with the result that by the attainment of the third threshold of the survey (the submission of some 105 inventory forms) it was obvious that the number of significant buildings in Palmyra built during the originally stated period of significance would be far in excess of original expectations (perhaps 200 more than original estimates). An assessment was done in the field at the completion of the original 175 inventory forms, and with maps and inventories findings it was agreed with Lee Gillyeard that two sizable and distinct historic districts presented themselves, one in the downtown commercial area of Palmyra and one in the more affluent south residential end of the city. It was mutually recognized that while much of the story of the history of Palmyra is represented by those two areas, there were remaining, not inventoried, at least two hundred other buildings built during the same period of significance in Palmyra history and representing chapters of considerable historic importance.

It was decided at that time to close the original survey with the

inventories of the two proposed historic districts and to prepare an interim survey report on Palmyra, which would include notations about the survey work which remains to be done in Palmyra. It also was agreed that the inventories required for the outlining of the proposed historic districts would total 225 inventory forms, instead of the originally agreed upon number of 175.

BRIEF HISTORY

In 1830, the town of Palmyra was incorporated in Marion County, consisting of portions of Sections 23, 24, 25, and 26 in Township 58, Range 6. It lies seven miles west of the Mississippi River and seven miles north of the south boundary of Marion County, sixteen miles east of the west boundary, and ten miles south of the north boundary. It also lies ten miles northwest of Hannibal, Missouri and sixteen miles southwest of Quincy, Illinois.

In 1825, Palmyra was selected as the site to have a Land Office for the sale of Missouri frontier land, and in 1826 Marion became a county. The first and most important business of the first court was to establish two roads: New London to Palmyra to Quincy (Main Street, Palmyra) and also Hannibal to Palmyra via the Mississippi bottom land and west to Philadelphia, Missouri. A secondary prescription for a network of roads led northward to what would become Lewis and Clark Counties and south to Howard County. When the General Assembly Act gave Marion its county status, the seat was established at Palmyra and the first board meetings and county court sessions took place at the home of William Massie, who had a well-known water mill for grain and lumber one mile north of what would become Palmyra on the North River.

In 1827 advertisements were run in the St. Louis newspaper and bills were posted in the Palmyra area, in Bowling Green, New London, and Troy announcing the sale of frontier lands to the north and west at the Palmyra Land Office. The population of Marion County at that time was 2,409.

Palmyra had become a settlement in 1818 during the immigrations to Missouri by all classes of Kentuckians, Tennesseans, and Virginians to the new promising lands of the frontier. The settlements during this period were developing from the Missouri River north toward the Iowa Territory; the acceleration of immigration from 1820 to 1830 was dramatic.

A spring branch rises in the town and flows west to east becoming part of North River. The spring is 100 yards northwest of the present courthouse. The first white man to discover the spring in 1817 was Giles Thompson who had settled south on Salt River; but Kentuckian Benjamin Vanlandingham, first settler in what is now Palmyra in 1818, cleaned it out and made

a reservoir for personal and cattle use. Vanlandingham was a shoemaker who found great need for his services among the early settlers in the Palmyra area.

Mound-building Indians had left "tumuli" from what is now the court-house block south to the location now occupied by the Co-op elevator, but in 1819 the town-builders came, Moses Bates, a surveyor from Hannibal and Major Obadiah Dickerson. At this time, the Palmyra and Hannibal areas were part of Pike County, which Bates and Dickerson felt would be divided, inasmuch as Pike's western boundary seemed to be the Pacific Ocean.

In 1819 the town was laid out naming the original proprietors as Samuel Caldwell, Joel Shaw, Obadiah Dickerson, and John McCune. The original town laid entirely south of the spring branch, eight blocks long east to west and five blocks long north to south. In the fall of 1819 the first store was opened, followed quickly by others, including a furniture factory, cabinet shop, spinning wheels, looms, a hotel and tavern. In 1822 the first frame house was built. The town was named Palmyra after the famous scriptural Syrian city, which like the Missouri town, was built in the wilderness and became a magnificent city.

The earliest settlers were from Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee principally, but some early Irish and Germans also added to the mix. Histories are careful to point out that while some were trappers and traders, there were also settlers with considerable sums of cash and some cultural background. Early in Palmyra's development professionals also found opportunity: doctors, lawyers, teachers, musicians, and of course, the entrepreneurial class with ready cash who opened such businesses as the frontier town needed.

By 1824, the population was 250, and in 1825 the Land Office, which had previously been at St. Charles and later at Bowling Green, was established here. At this point, Marion County extended north to the Iowa line and fast developing were the areas to the north which would later comprise Lewis and Clark Counties. The appointment of the Land Office to Palmyra was a boon to Palmyra economically, as settlers wishing to claim property at the land sales had to come to Palmyra, had to be bedded, boarded, and have their thirst slaked. As a result, inns, taverns and restaurants sprang

up, along with provisioning businesses. Additionally the water mills on North River, one mile north of Palmyra, brought hundreds of settlers' families from a large circle around Palmyra on a regular basis. These commerce-producing influences caused a variety of businesses, small industries, and retail stores quickly to develop in the new town, along with provisions for justice, always an early need on the frontier. By 1830 there were seven practicing attorneys and four doctors in Palmyra. Also, by this time there was a weekly mail into and out of Palmyra.

In 1820 there had been 150 residents in Palmyra, by 1824 there were 250, and by 1833 the population was 600.

In 1830 Palmyra became incorporated; in 1831 the courthouse was built, and in 1832 the first newspaper was published, and Palmyra was in full stride. While several newspapers started up in Palmyra between 1832 and 1837, it was in 1839 that the Missouri Whig was first published under Jacob Sosey. That paper, later to be re-named the Spectator, survives today as the oldest weekly newspaper in Missouri - and only left ownership of the Sosey family in the 1960s.

Palmyra's school system began in 1821 in a log house on South River, slightly southeast of Palmyra. The earliest church in the area was also established on South River, also in 1821.

In 1833 and again in 1835, cholera hit Palmyra, devastating many families. Persons of all ages died quickly and were ignominiously buried in a common cholera graveyard. In 1833, 105 persons died (50 white, 55 black). In 1835 deaths numbered 22.

The dream of a railroad to cross Missouri from the Mississippi westward began to form during the 1830s and 1840s. In 1837 a railroad company formed in Hannibal to connect Hannibal to St. Joseph on the Missouri River. Palmyra, it was decided, would be included on the road; and in 1853 the building of the road began between Hannibal and Palmyra, including a 320-foot bridge. The first train made the trip in June 1856. The track was being laid simultaneously from St. Joseph toward the east, and the last spike was driven in Chillicothe in February 1859.

A Palmyra-to-Quincy railroad was also begun in September 1857 with the prospect that Palmyra would thus have connections with Chicago. In

recent years the two rail systems have become the Burlington-Northern system. It was during the railroad building period in Palmyra history that a new cultural influence was introduced to Palmyra: the migrant railroad worker, a rough, illiterate, frequently immigrant class. Some of them remained in Palmyra, bought land, and became a strong influence in particularly the northwest quadrant of present Palmyra. Some building forms, such as are found on Jackson, Suter, North Spring, and North Bradley Streets reflect forms brought with these workers from their previous work stations further east and south.

The earliest meetings of the Marion County Board were held in Frye's Tavern, across the street east of the present courthouse block, but in 1827 it was decided to build the first courthouse, on the same site as today's courthouse. The first proper courthouse was completed in 1835. The second, executed in Greek Revival style, was erected in 1854, and the present one was completed, set back to the center of the courthouse block in 1900.

Of considerable impact on the cultural and economic development of Palmyra was its establishment of a diverse group of schools of varying sponsorships and persuasions, both public and private. While the public school system of Palmyra was virtually non-existent until 1835, the one room school on South River was public, taught by a veteran of the War of 1812, and was located some two miles south of the city. Sentiment was for private schools. In 1843, Palmyra established a public school system. By 1843 Palmyra had six teachers, four of whom taught in the public schools, one for a private white school, and one for a private black school.

In 1874, a large new two-story building, Washington Free School, was completed, but a separate black school was maintained. In 1913 a high school, separate from Washington, was established in the building of the old Centenary Academy, just south of Palmyra. A Catholic school was established in 1864 which continued for 105 years. Zion Luthern School, established in 1866, has continued for 120 years, demonstrating the influence of the descending generations of early German settlers in Palmyra.

The best known of Palmyra's schools was St. Paul's College in the northeast corner of the city. It was opened in 1848 taking the place of a

former parochial school on the same site. It operated as an Episcopal seminary until the Civil War, when the headmaster refused to take the oath of allegiance to the United States. It was taken over by the Union, and troops were quartered around the school during the war. After the war the school was sold to the former headmaster and became a correctional operation for unruly boys. In 1877 it was sold again and became a co-educational college. For twelve years the school enjoyed a widespread fine reputation.

In 1852 a Baptist male and female seminary was also established at 400 South Main, across the street from the Baptist Church, which still stands. The school came to be operated under the names of Bethel College and later Ingleside College.

In 1852 an evangelist for the Christian Church opened the Palmyra Academy of Christian College, to prepare girls for admission to Christian College in Canton, Missouri (now Culver-Stockton College). The school of 110 pupils flourished in a three-story building on the southeast corner of Lane and Olive Streets until a smallpox epidemic in 1857 closed the doors permanently.

In 1884 Centennial High School (Methodist) was founded just south of the city limits, in 1892 to become Centennary College, which was later absorbed into the Missouri College Union.

A degree of sophistication and educational fervor had been established by the advent of various educational institutions in Palmyra. Musical training was a highly developed offering at all the academies. A literary tradition had been firmly implanted into Palmyra culture by the editorial excellence of the Spectator. As early as the mid-1830s, Palmyra had enjoyed the offerings of a local men's Thespian Society, as well as traveling entertainments and cultural events at the Hanley Opera House, widely regarded as an outstanding site for musicals, plays, lectures, concerts, readings, etc. by some renowned personages, such as Champ Clark and William Jennings Bryant.

Perhaps Palmyra's strongest identification from without and within is its place in the history of the Civil War. Equally divided before the War politically, the local population was subjected to numerous minor skirmishes

and occupations by the Union Army during the course of the War. On October 18, 1862, ten men were executed in Palmyra in what became known as the "Palmyra Massacre". Five of the men were Confederate prisoners who had been imprisoned in Hannibal, and five were civilians in jail in Palmyra, at the Federal prison, still used as Marion County's jail. They were loaded onto wagons, where they were ordered to sit on their own coffins on the journey to the Palmyra fairgrounds, ordered to sit on their coffins on the ground, and were executed.

The men had been condemned by General John McNeil, commander of the Northeast Missouri Union troops, in retaliation for the suspected capture by Confederate Colonel Porter of a Union informer, a Palmyran named Allsman, who reportedly gave continuous troop movement information to McNeil.

The selection process of the condemned men, the cruelty of the pre-execution events, the amateurish and brutal acts of execution, and the basic concept, all were reputed to have been the subject of discussion of at least one Lincoln Cabinet meeting and rumored to have been characterized by Lincoln as one of the most indefensible acts of the War.

The years following the advent of the railroads through the city saw Palmyra reach its zenith as a business-industrial center. Through the receiving of such staples as coal, farm machinery, lumber, agricultural chemicals, feeds and supplements and oil products - and the exporting of grain, livestock, shoes, and finally farm chemicals, Palmyra kept pace with the socio-economic advances of eastern Missouri specifically, and the rural Midwest in general, despite its central location between the business centers of Hannibal and Quincy.

The early lifeline to and from Palmyra consisted of the New London to Quincy road through Palmyra, which also included Massie's mill on North River. The road also passed in front of the Courthouse, City Hall, and was straddled by the buildings of the commercial development of Palmyra. The history is reflected in the architecture from the south tip of Palmyra to the north tip. Along the road (Main Street) grew the earliest and most significant of the homes and commercial buildings of the community, as well as its seats of government and learning. Although most of the original

buildings have been replaced by second- and third-growth buildings, the patterns, and some of the original stock, remain. While this is true of much of North Main, as well as Downtown (100-400 South Main) and 500-1500 South Main, it is the latter two areas which have been the principal subject of this survey. The density of more significant structures from the period 1830 to 1920 on Main Street falls off markedly north of Main Cross Street.

In Downtown Palmyra (200-300 blocks of South Main) there are several early 1840 Federal commercial buildings still serving commercial functions. Buildings numbered 314 South Main, 312 South Main, 310 South Main, retain their facade massing, fenestration, and gabled roofs. The building at 206 South Main has its facade massing, fenestration and gabled roof intact, but hidden behind aluminium. In the same downtown area Sanborn maps of 1889, 1893, and 1909 corroborate the existence of these buildings, as well as their footprints, virtually unchanged today.

Sanborn maps of the same dates also support inventoried data on the significant buildings in the north portion of the potential residential South Main/South Dickerson historic area.

The readily apparent mixed use of South Main from the Courthouse to the south city limits indicates the historic mixed use of a frontier town developing for both its residential needs and commercial needs, frequently in juxtaposition, viz. the buggy shop beside the buggy-builder's residence. The co-op feed store on the New London Road (South Main) near the south end of town is where the trading and general store always was. The first Hannibal-St. Joseph railroad station stood on South Main near the present elevator and lumber yard, both of which developed there because of the railroad and New London road, side-by-side. Along the same stretch of South Main, also within a block, are to be found some of the very finest of residences from pre-Civil War through the turn of the century, with original ownerships indicating early purchases of land adjoining the principal road to and from the south. The mixed-used pattern continues north to the 400 block of South Main where the preponderance of buildings becomes commercial, with only second floors used as residences, and where residential building set-back gives way to sidewalk-deep setbacks.



204 - 206 South Main



312 South Main



314 South Main



310 South Main

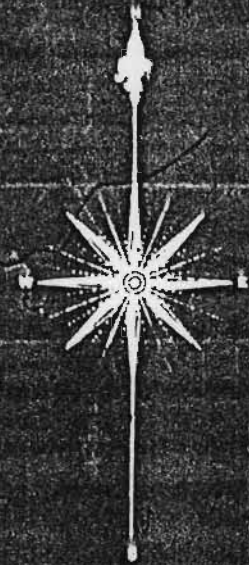
Note fenestration match, original cornice.

MISSOURI

OR

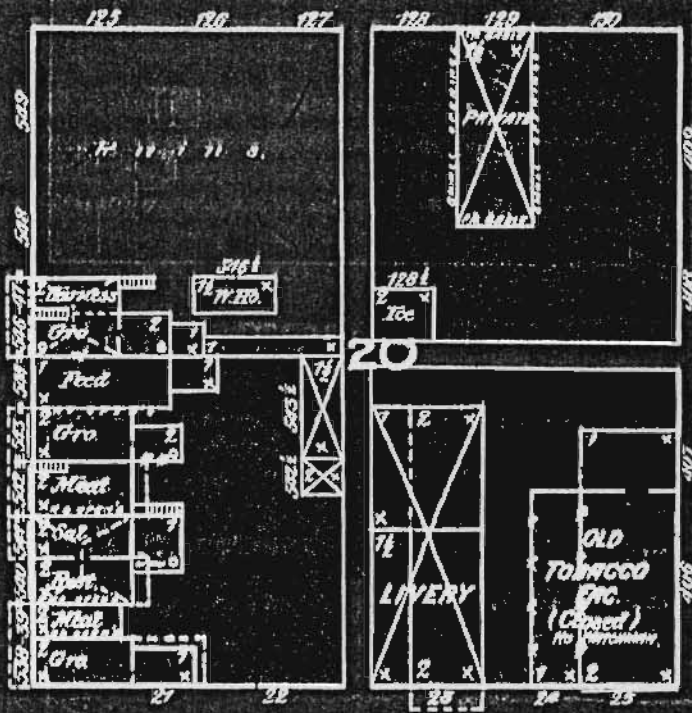
MAIN CROSS

26



COURT NO.

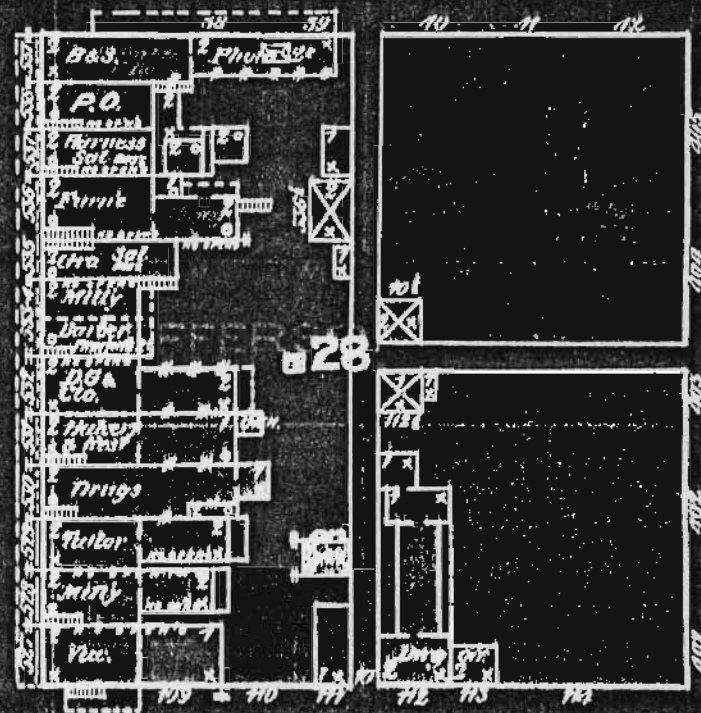
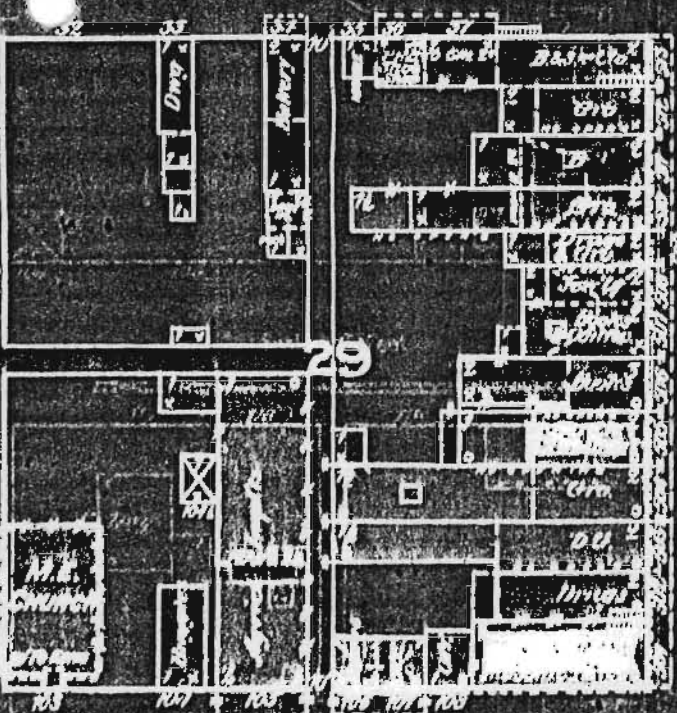
MAIN



LANE

LA FAYETTE

23



OLIVE

25

Scale of Feet

500

SHEET

No. 2.

SHEET

No. 1

OLIVE

DUDLEY'S HOTEL

35

CHURCH

27

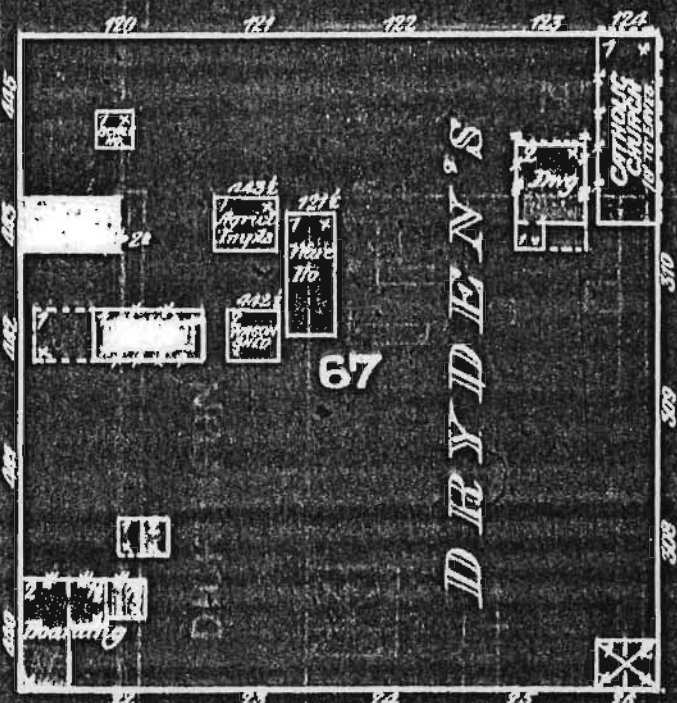
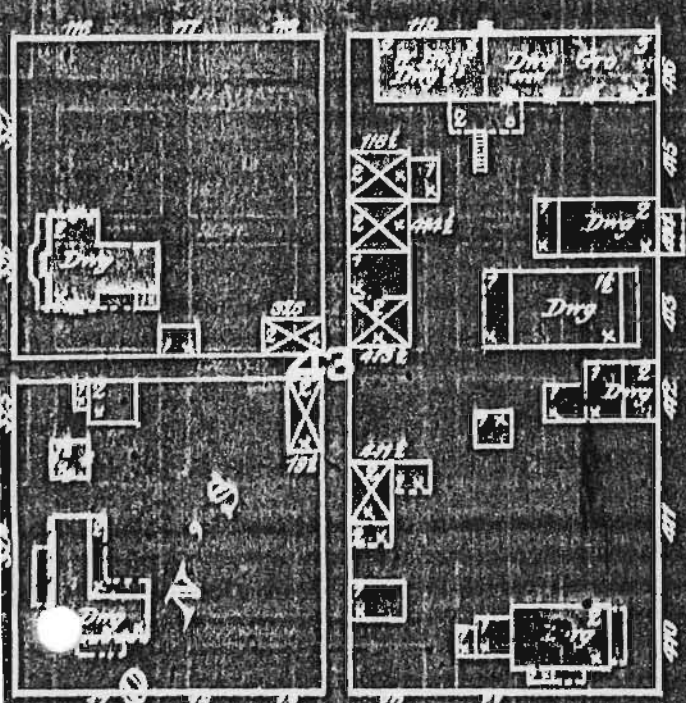
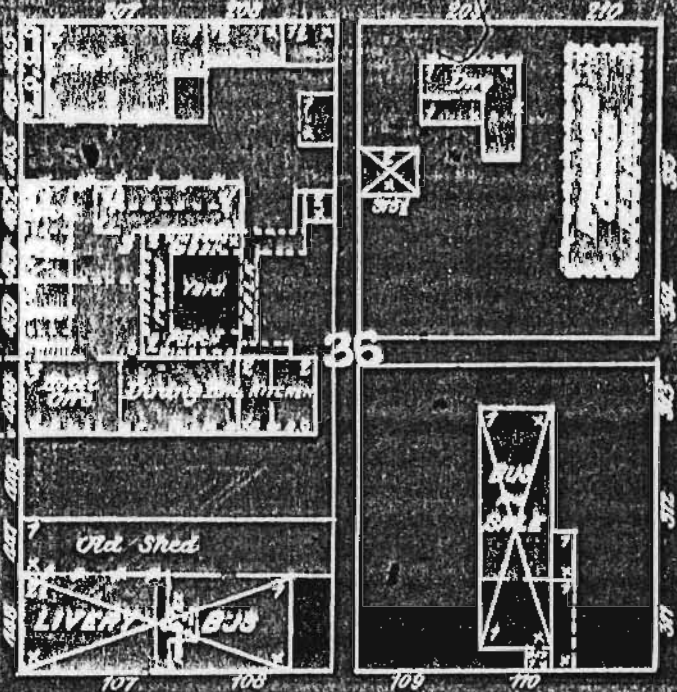
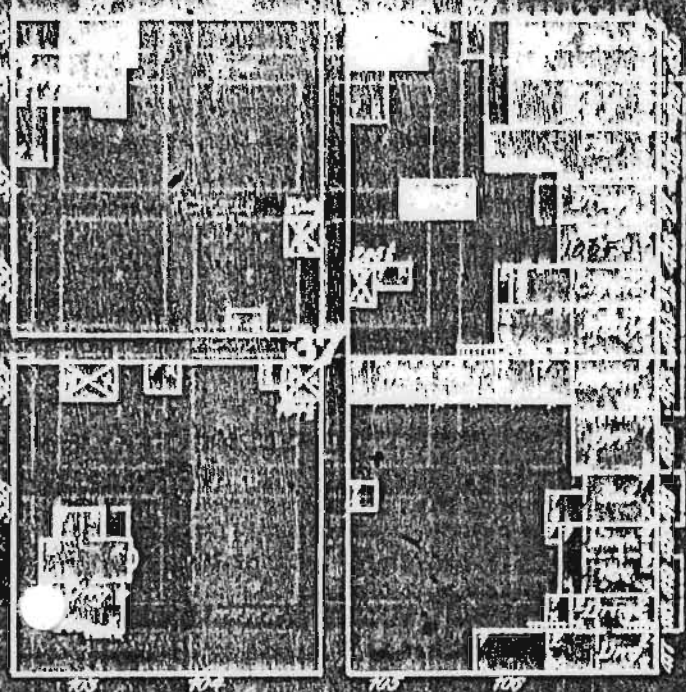
67

MAIN

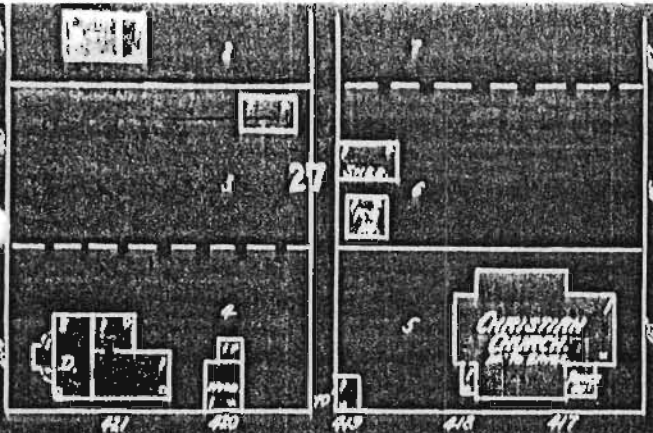
DRYDEN'S

LANE

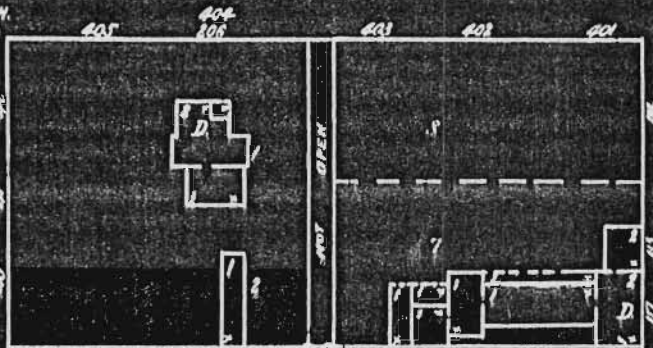
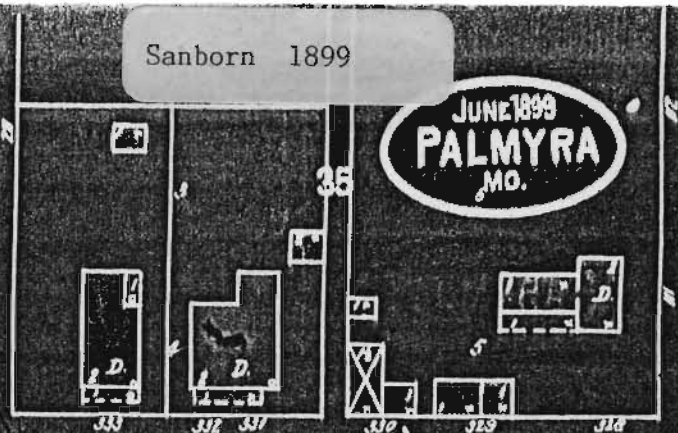
HAMILTON



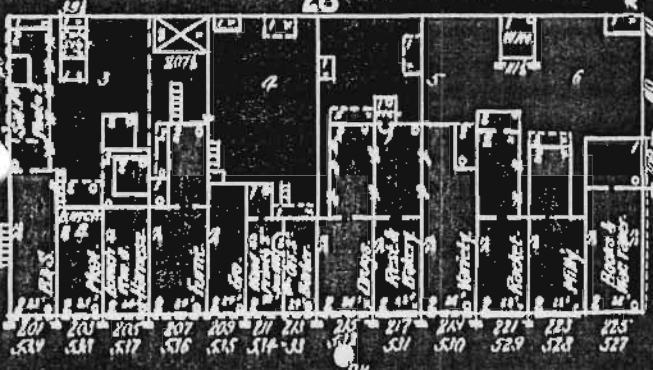
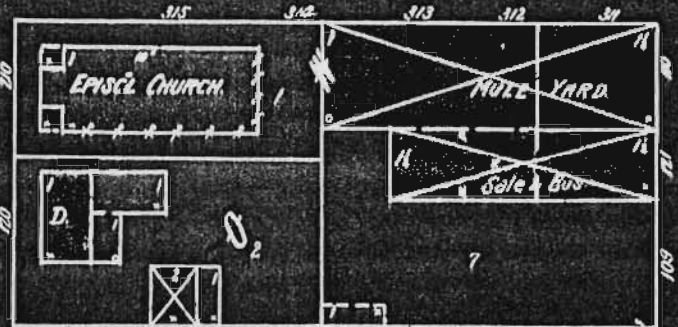
JUNE 1899
PALMYRA
MO.



S. LANE



E. OLIVE



CONCLUSIONS

After a general survey of all sections of Palmyra, two potential historic districts readily present themselves. These areas were discussed with Lee Gillyeard of the Department of Natural Resources, and a specific course of action seemed indicated; first, to define the two potential historic districts and then determine future survey needs in Palmyra.

The downtown area (100-300 blocks of South Main and some properties on East and West Olive) is easily identifiable as an intact district of considerable integrity and cohesiveness, as well as high density of historically significant buildings. In some cases, buildings retain the uses they were given when first built in 1860-1885. Such is the case of 211 South Main, a barbershop, and 113 West Olive, a newspaper printing shop which today prints the oldest continuous weekly in Missouri. Massing and fenestration of the buildings, and the resultant rhythm, remain the same as during the 1840-1885 period of development of Palmyra's downtown - despite the fact that some aluminium and other non-original surfaces cover parts or all of a few buildings. Ornamental detail in cornices, window hoods, some storefronts remain in meaningful volume. Some of the modern coverings are removable.

Included in the potential downtown area historic district are four governmental buildings: the courthouse (the third to stand on the same block), the 1858 Federal Jail (which now serves as the county jail), the Palmyra City Hall (in a building which was originally the Bank of Palmyra, having closed in 1930), and the police station (prior to its present use a medical clinic). Just a block south of the district is the fire station, which stands where the original city hall stood until the bank failed. Also on the southeast corner of the 300 block of South Main and outside the district boundary, stands a 1940's U.S. Post Office. The locations of these governmental buildings all reflect the early locations of the same building functions in Palmyra's downtown commercial district, which more appropriately might be termed a commercial/government district. Again, the fire insurance maps bear out the relative locations.

Two disasters changed the character of the 100 block of the east side



211 South Main



113 West Olive

of South Main, facing the courthouse. During a 1947 tornado some entire floors, most cornices, complete windows, and other major parts of all the buildings in the block were destroyed - and have never been replaced, except by inexpensive, unsympathetic masonry and small windows, only to make the buildings weather-tight and more maintenance-free. On the south corner of the block during the 1960s an explosion completely destroyed the corner building, after which a modern colonial building was built. On side streets in both directions off Main Street for the most part, either modern commercial buildings or older residences define the district boundaries. Similarly, on the west and north sides of the courthouse block, modern commercial and older residential buildings define the possible district.

Buildings in the downtown area fall into readily identifiable styles, which include Federal commercial, Italianate commercial, Neo-Classical, Italian Renaissance, and Greek Revival, all with few vernacular characteristics.

The South Palmyra potential historic district comprises the greatest concentration of high-style residences in the city. The original owners of these houses represented the professional, industrial management, and entrepreneurial class of Palmyra. The stylistic character of these residences reflect a degree of sophistication and taste generally preferred by the more affluent throughout Missouri during the development period 1835-1915. Clearly identifiable are the Italianate plan-book or architect-builder houses, as well as Queen Anne, Gothic Revival, and less stylist front-gable-and-wing houses to be found throughout every section of Palmyra, of Marion County, and of northeast Missouri.

Apparent too, are at least two types of houses not seen outside Palmyra but suggestive of the Georgian-Italianate blendings to be found from the Boonslick up into Pike County (such as the Julius Jackson House in Louisiana) and throughout Marion County, but with a particular Palmyra stamp on them. Of such a type are the houses at 910 South Main, 1425 South Main, and ⁴¹⁴South Dickerson. Modifications of this house are to be found isolated in other parts of Palmyra. Of another example are the houses at 616 South Main, 721 South Main, and 1009 South Main, combining Italianate characteristics with Queen Anne shingling, together with two story piers in the center of the house, which a corner-to-corner front porch follows.



910 South Main



Home & Jefferson Streets

This almost-exclusive-Palmyra aberration is also repeated in other Palmyra neighborhoods. A particular ante-bellum builder in Palmyra seems responsible for the former example; and, as so often happens, it is likely that a single builder building on speculation or for rental income purposes may be found to be responsible for the latter.

Present, too, are some stylistically less distinctive residences which more properly fall into housing types or folk-house types. Such a house is at 708 South Main, added to several times, but which began as a single-pen hall-and-parlor house and became a double-pen arrangement. The very important historic Palmyra Land Office at 219 West Ross has I-house characteristics, but is somewhat deeper than the norm.

Three of the corners at Ross and South Main have commercial buildings.

The fourth has a modern residence. It is important to note that Ross Street to the east is part of the original (1821) Palmyra-Hannibal road, leaving Palmyra to the east. This intersection, then, was a cross-roads intersection from Palmyra's beginnings (crossing the Hannibal Road with the Palmyra-New London Road), and Sanborn maps show that the northwest corner of the intersection was a stable and livery business. Further research may yield similar findings for the other corners of the intersection, further pointing out the residential-commercial historic mix of this portion of a possible South Palmyra historic district.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

In various sections of Palmyra are to be found identifiable pockets of historically significant residential buildings. In the 100-300 blocks of Home Street are several early Gothic Revival and Greek Revival homes; on West Main Cross, West Sloan, East Bailey and Jackson Streets (see inventory forms), are examples of some of the earliest I-houses, stack houses, and double pen brick houses in Palmyra; on Jackson Street, North Spring Street, and Suter Street are existing covered log houses; in the northeast corner of town are two remaining buildings from the Episcopalian St. Paul College and two blocks south on Lane Street is the abandoned 1875 limestone "Palmyra Calaboose"; the freed slaves section of town has its residual houses, often several times slipcovered with various materials; on North Street is an ante-bellum two-story Greek Revival house of most unusual proportions; on South Main, south of the proposed historic district, is a cluster of Italianate-Georgian houses, Queen Anne, and a large strongly Wrightian Prairie-style house, all historically as well as architecturally significant to Palmyra; the brick Sprague house on West Hamilton Street and the cemetery's sexton's limestone I-house on North Main appear as east Tennessee rural mansion houses transplanted in Palmyra; adjacent to but just outside the city limits are three of the finest houses in the Palmyra community: the Reason house, the Whaley house, and the Deering house.

The number of significant buildings in Palmyra is yet to be determined. It certainly exceeds four hundred and beyond the two cohesive districts outlined by this survey, it appears that a number of smaller districts could be identified by further survey activity, together with scores of individual buildings with strong local significance. The importance of each of these latter two groups in terms of federal, state, and local record and planning is inestimable.

My recommendation for future activity in Palmyra is dichotomous. For reasons of immediate planning for Palmyra, the two herein identified potential historic districts should be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. This nomination would include the properties for which inventory forms have been herewith submitted. The nominations should make reference



219 West Ross ("Land Office")



Home Street houses

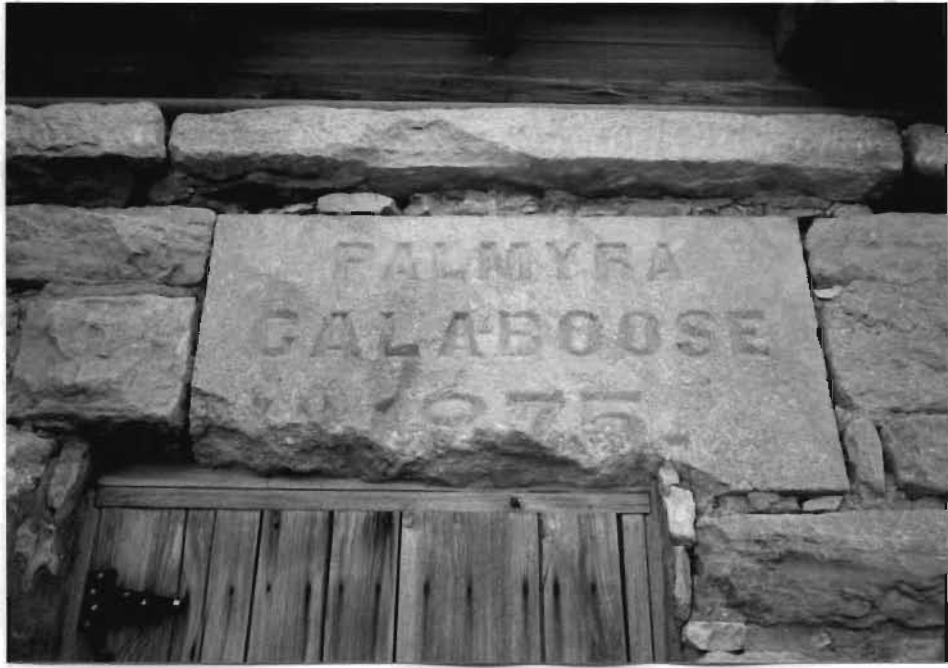


223 Jackson (above)

316 Jackson (below)



Cemetery Sexton's house (above) 418 North Main (below)



The Palmyra Calaboose



Buildings on South Main south of proposed South Palmyra Historic District



The Reason House (peripheral)



The Whaley House (peripheral)



The Deering House (peripheral)

to those other buildings throughout Palmyra (not yet surveyed) which are related to those nominated by style, vernacular features, historic event, materials, or personages (e.g. Sosey house, 406 South Dickerson and Spectator building, 113 West Olive, or Sprague building, 324 South Main and Sprague house, 321 West Hamilton).

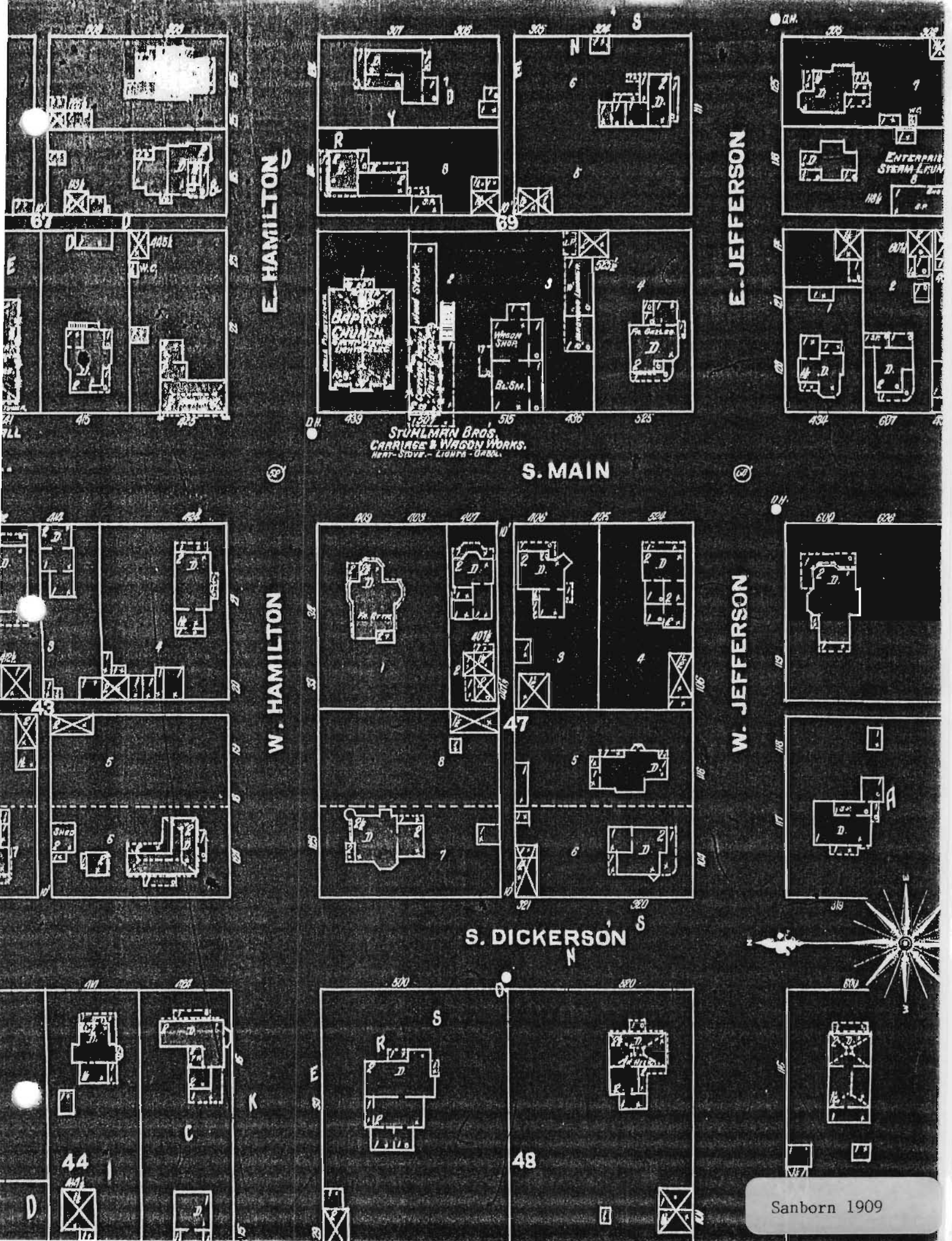
Within a year the follow-through survey should be undertaken to include all resources of Palmyra not represented in the present survey, for permanent state and local records. Undoubtedly, that survey will include some 200-plus additional inventory forms, principally of residential buildings (80 percent) with the balance encompassing commercial, governmental, religious, and educational buildings in the period 1840-1920.

At the conclusion of the follow-through survey, I believe the resulting information will yield resources in Palmyra sufficient in numbers and historic and architectural significance to warrant a Multiple Resource Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

There exists in Palmyra a strong sense of place and a growing sense of time and place. There is a pride in local history and a pervasive feeling of community, which keeps local business viable. Emerging is a recognition of the built environment in Palmyra and its linkage with a colorful past.

During the course of the survey work, several meetings have been held with the Chamber of Commerce, officers and/or general membership. Other persons in positions of leadership in the Palmyra community have also been contacted individually or in groups for the purpose of discussing the survey, the National Register program, and local protection of resources by local ordinance and the Certified Local Government (CLG) program. There has always been local interest in the first two concepts; and now there seems to be an emerging interest in the possibility of a preservation ordinance and CLG status.

To that end, we will continue to hold preliminary small information meetings, and at some point will hope to involve the Missouri Department of Natural Resources personnel in outlining the benefits and significance of the Certified Local Government program.



E. HAMILTON

E. JEFFERSON

S. MAIN

W. HAMILTON

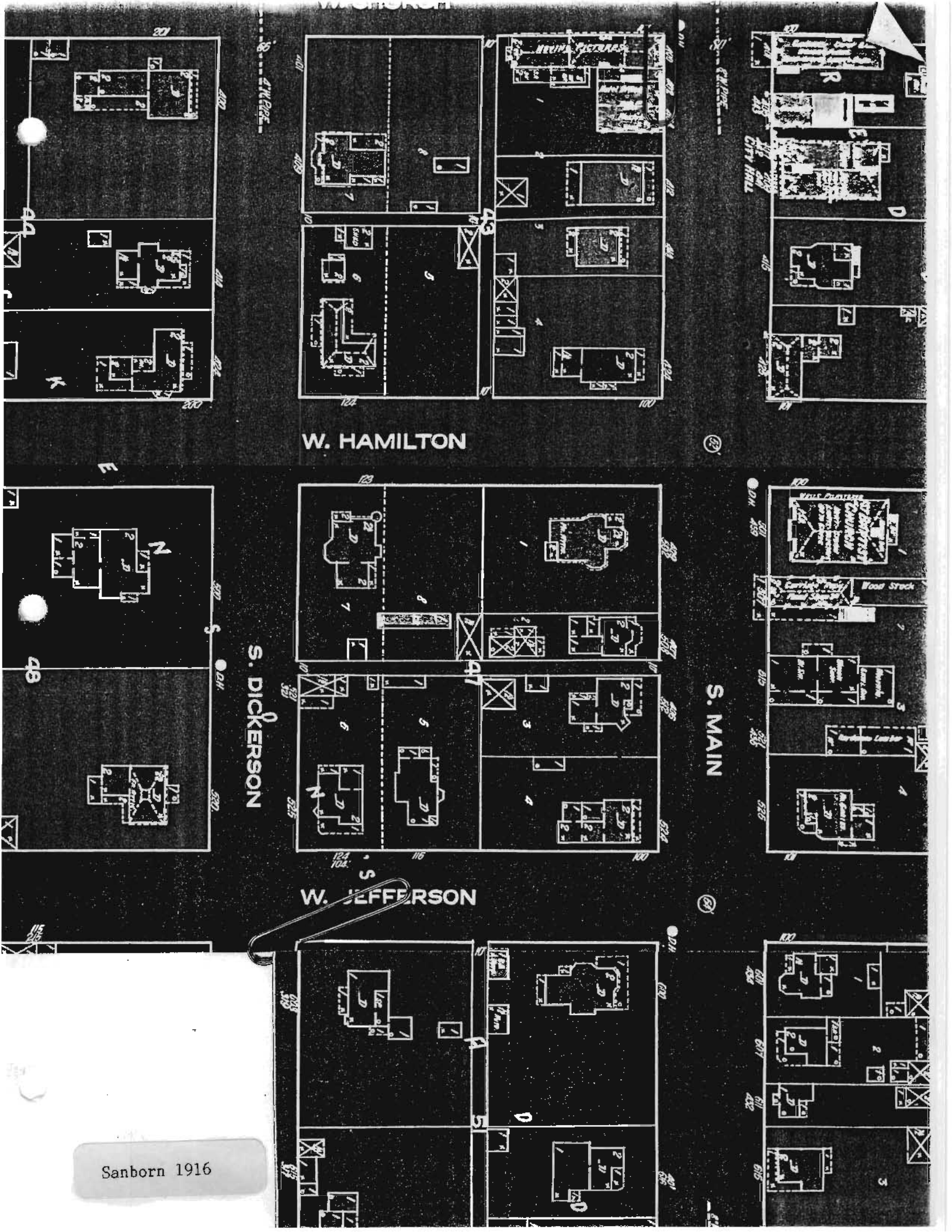
W. JEFFERSON

S. DICKERSON

STUHLMAN BROS.
CARRIAGE & WAGON WORKS.
HEAT STOVE - LUMBER - GRAB.

BAPTIST
CHURCH

ENTERPRISE
STEAM LAUNDRY



W. HAMILTON

S. DICKERSON

W. JEFFERSON

S. MAIN

Sanborn 1916



Denotes properties within a potential that are non-contributing to the character of the district.



Denotes properties which lie outside the periphery of the potential historic district and which justify the formation of boundaries of the district.