

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

East Spring Street Historic District

DESCRIPTION

The East Spring Street Historic District is located to the east of the Downtown New Albany Historic District. It begins at East 5th Street and continues to East 11th Street, between East Spring and East Market Streets. The district is characterized by late nineteenth and early twentieth century residential properties, with a few commercial and professional buildings interspersed. In addition, there are several churches, a fraternal building and a former hospital within the confines of the district. According to the earliest Sanborn Maps (1886), the district once included some industrial activity, including a large lumber yard and a brewery. After the turn of the century, more residences were built, and the industrial properties were changed or demolished. Otherwise the character of the district remained reasonably constant, until the latter part of the twentieth century, when conversions of some of the houses to rental units began and additional professional offices were built. The conversion to rental units has contributed to a partial decline in some of the housing stock. The growth of professional and some commercial office space has somewhat changed the character of the area, from residential to mixed use.

The land in this area of New Albany is reasonably flat, with only slight rises. Many of the streets are tree-lined and gracious. The main arteries, Market and Spring Streets, are heavy with traffic, however, especially during the rush hours.

Individual buildings whose architecture contributes to the character of the district include the Third Presbyterian Church at the northwest corner of 9th Street and E. Spring, St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church, at the corner of E. Spring and 8th Streets, as well as several notable and outstanding homes along East Spring Street. The former John Conner house, which has been converted to a Masonic lodge is also a notable example. The Italianate house at 315 E. 9th Street is one of the best examples of this style in the district.

Most of the buildings in the East Spring Historic District reflect architectural styles which were popular during the latter part of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth. In addition, this area of the city was, for the most part, home to middle class and working

people unlike the area around East Main Street, where the Mansion Row Historic District includes the grand palaces of local magnates. Thus, the single largest group of structures is classified as Victorian, Gabled Ell or Gable Front. The former are often vernacular structures known as shotgun houses. The next most common style in the district is Queen Anne. Most of these are the type which can be associated with the middle class, at the turn of the century. However, there are a number of buildings which recall the earlier eras in New Albany. For example, Federal, Greek Revival and Italianate homes, taken together comprise a larger group than either the Victorian or Queen Anne. Other architectural styles which are prevalent include the Craftsman/Bungalow and Colonial Revival. There are only a few American Foursquare buildings located within the district. Several styles have only a few representatives within the district, such as Art Deco, Classical Revival and Free Classic, however these represent some of the best workmanship in the district. In addition, only two Romanesque Revival buildings occur, but they are pivotal to the district and represent high points of its architectural assets.

The density of development within the district varies from street to street, but is generally typical of the building practices of the late nineteenth, early twentieth century. With some notable exceptions, houses are built rather closely together, but with adequate space for comfort. Streets are tree-lined and convey a sense of neighborhood (with the exception of those which have become major arteries). Only a few commercial buildings within the district fall within the period of significance and represent the neighborhood storefront development, typical of the era.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

When three adventurous brothers, Joel, Nathaniel and Abner Scribner, ventured down the Ohio in 1812-1813 on a town-site hunting trip, the area around the Falls of the Ohio River was already well-known. George Rogers Clark had established the first settlement in 1778. From his base at Corn Island, pioneers moved inland to establish Louisville, Kentucky across the Ohio River in 1780. On the Indiana side, Clarksville was the first to be settled, in 1794, after Clark and his men were awarded 150,000 acres of the Northwest Territory in return for their military service against the British. By 1802, nearby Jeffersonville had been laid out as well.

Nonetheless, the New England trio saw great potential in the land down river of the Falls, a natural barrier which forced boats to await high water before venturing up or down river. Later, a canal would be constructed on the Louisville side of the river, but the New Albany site, down river of the canal, still stood to benefit.

The brothers visited Colonel John Paul who had purchased the 822-1/2 acre site in 1807. He wanted nearly \$10 an acre for the property, an exorbitant price when undeveloped

government land was still available from the land office at \$2 an acre. The Scribners had high hopes for the place, though, and they scrimped and borrowed to meet the asking price of \$8,000 for the site.

They foresaw a New England town along the Ohio, but much work and sacrifice would be required before their dream became a reality. Fifty years after the Scribner family traveled to the site in the spring of 1813, Joel Scribner's son remembered that they landed at the foot of Upper (East) Fifth Street, later to be a ferry landing. He recalled: "There were occupied cabins in the place . . . The first ground cleared was on the south side of Main between Pearl and Bank on which four cabins were built . . . The surface of the new town presented a very uninviting appearance. The timber was very heavy, the undergrowth very thick and the ground terribly uneven."

The Scribners named their new town New Albany after the capital of New York State, near their former home. The village was laid out on the high ground above the river, and the first plat included the area from present day East (then called "Upper") Fifth Street to West (then called "Lower") Fifth Street and from the river north to Oak Street (above Spring).

Main (High) Street and Market Street were 80 feet wide and there was a 100-foot street along the river, Water Street. State Street, then as now, bisected the plat and formed the dividing line between East and West (then Upper and Lower) streets. The surveyor was John Kennedy Graham (1783 – 1841), a native of Bedford county, Pennsylvania. In 1816 he was a delegate to the original Indiana state constitutional convention, and later served three terms as a member of the Indiana House and one in the state Senate. The area which contains the East Spring Street Historic District was part of a second wave of development, and begins just east of the original plat, on East Fifth.

In addition to the advantages of their location on the major water way of the new region, the Scribners hoped that the newly surveyed road which would connect to the old Buffalo Trace would give them an edge for travelers seeking a route to the territorial capital at Vincennes (to the northwest). While the heavily wooded site presented challenges to the developers, the ready availability of material for cabins, buildings and boats was a definite advantage. A newspaper advertisement placed by the Scribners in all the major eastern cities during the summer of 1813 boasted: "The town . . . affords a beautiful and commodious harbor . . . The bank adjoining the river is high and not subject to inundations . . . [with] an extensive view up and down the river. There is a sufficient number of excellent and never-failing springs . . . the advantages New Albany has . . . are perhaps unrivaled by any on the Ohio, as it is immediately below all the dangers which boats and ships are subject to in passing over the Falls, and is the only eligible situation for a depot for all the exports and imports of a great part of the Territory and . . . while the river is low and the markets good, as well as when the water is high. From

the vast quantity of excellent ship timber, the great abundance of iron ore, . . . and the facility with which hemp is raised, . . . this will be one of the best ports in the United States for the building of vessels as well as the loading them.”

In spite of the enthusiasm that the developers evinced for their new town, growth was slow at first, but steady. But the location was indeed strategic. For at least seven months of the year, the town was the head of navigation for the lower river, (still true in the late nineteenth century, according to an 1873 commentator). The Falls provided a barrier to navigation by steam boats except during periods of high water. During the first half of the nineteenth century, when much of Indiana was still densely forested, the rivers were the major traffic arteries.

Shipbuilding soon became an important industry along the banks of the Ohio at New Albany. As early as 1819, three steamboats were said to have been launched from the yards with three more in the stocks. One hundred and fifty houses, most of wood frame, had been built and the population was purportedly 1,000 souls, with a rapid growth projected, to meet the needs of the ship yards. Only a few brick buildings were constructed in the early years of the town, their number increasing with the town’s prosperity.

Floyd County was first organized in 1819, and New Albany became the county seat. Later adjustments to the county boundaries increased its size, but New Albany retained its distinction as the center of county government. Between 1814 and 1830, the town mushroomed and the population doubled.

Between 1830 and 1867, the shipbuilding industry in New Albany fueled the town’s growth, along with the increased economic activity generated by its shipping industry. The town had a bustling Market House during this era, with stalls leased from \$10 up. Steamboat traffic along the Ohio generated considerable business for the farmers as well as for other various merchants who had built stores in the downtown area. Boat building was in full swing, with 32 steamboats credited to the yards at New Albany up to the year 1836 (compared to 33 for Louisville and 10 for Jeffersonville during the same period). The foundry of Morton & Cox was located near the shipyards to repair engines. The original establishment dated back to 1825. By 1843, it had been taken over by Lent, South and Shipman (later to be known as the “Phoenix”). Later, in the 1850s, this foundry turned out two steamboat engines every month, as well as other types of iron equipment. During the period of steamboat building, other foundries also prospered along the Ohio at New Albany. The City Directory of 1856 indicated that 33 steamboats were built at the town between 1835 and 1840 (compared to 17 during the previous five years). Between 1840 and 1845, 54 were built; the five years to 1850 saw 69 constructed and 59 between 1850 and 1854, with an additional 37 in the two years to June of

1856. While virtually no fabric of these boat yards remains today, the ripple effect on the town of such activity was surely intense.

New Albany in 1845 had two fire companies and a hook and ladder company. City Hall was located on Main (High) Street between State and Pearl, the Courthouse on State between Spring & Market. There were eight churches (including two African-American churches), a Masonic lodge and Odd Fellows, several banks and institutions of higher learning. By 1858, when the first St. Mary's German Church was built, the town had five fire houses plus a hook and ladder company. Two daily and weekly newspapers served the community.

As the century passed from mid to late, the little city below the Falls of the Ohio continued to prosper and grow, even in the shadow of sprawling Louisville across the river. It survived the Panic of 1837, the nation's first major economic crisis, as well as several cholera episodes which had devastated other river towns. Incorporated in 1839, by 1850 it had become among the first 100 cities in America, according to some sources. The same year, with a population of over 8,000 people it was the largest city in the state. The area which encompasses the East Spring Historic District was probably sparsely populated, however, since only two properties date to this era. After mid-century, in 1853, members of the First Presbyterian Church of New Albany were called to form a third church in the community, recognizing the growth of a "new" suburb in the area. They met at a small house of worship on East 9th between Oak and Culbertson until the new church was built. The present structure at East 9th and East Spring Streets was dedicated as the Third Presbyterian Church in 1868. The building was sold to the First Baptist Church in 1919, who are the present owners.

One of Indiana's first railroads, the New Albany and Salem (later part of the Monon Line) was completed from the town in 1851. Railroad shops for service and construction were located in the community. Plank roads linked Corydon to the west and Jeffersonville to the east and the road over the hills to the northwest was macadamized.

While the city limits nearly doubled, the downtown continued to be the focus of commercial enterprise. The New Albany and Salem Railroad had been completed to Lake Michigan by 1856 and work on a direct line to Ohio was underway. The wharves and streets were paved and ship yards, foundries, mills and other manufacturing activities were thriving.

Although shipbuilding declined after the Civil War, New Albany's railroad connections and active shipping continued its economic development. New industries were founded. One of the most interesting was an early plate glass factory, the New Albany Glass Works, founded by John B. Ford and later purchased by a rival, the Star Glass Works owned by Washington C. DePauw. Mr. Ford moved to Pittsburgh and founded a company there which later became known as the Libbey-Owens-Ford Glass Company. But New Albany retained the distinction of

having the first large plate glass installed in a show window at 318 Pearl Street, in the downtown commercial sector. The plant in New Albany continued to grow along the river bank, under DePauw's direction.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, the city of New Albany continued to grow. In 1873, a promotional booklet declared that the dollar value of the river trade at New Albany could be estimated at about seventeen million dollars (for 1872). In addition, the city could count railroad, manufacturing, mechanical, mercantile, livestock and produce as well as coal, minerals and other general trade among its economic assets. At this time New Albany was the terminus for three railroads, with several more granted right-of-way or under construction. The population had grown to 20,000, many employed in the busy manufacturing sector which prospered thanks to the ready market access provided by easy river and rail transport. The city promoters touted the low taxes, reasonable rents and healthful climate as good reasons to locate in New Albany. The latter was the result, according to the promoters, of the absence of "ponds, swamps and stagnant water, the diversity of the soil, the high hills, open timber and living streams of pure water, and the generally equitable climate."

It was obvious that the expansion of population would lead to increased housing, moving out from the central, original plat which included streets as far east as East 7th. East Spring Street was one of the first areas that saw this development. While approximately twelve properties can be dated to the 1850-1875 era, a whopping 46 were probably built in the next quarter century, up to 1900. By the 1880s, New Albany was experiencing a "building boom". The New Albany Daily Ledger of March 3, 1887, enthused: "There is a genuine building boom in New Albany . . . and piles of lumber and brick are scattered along the streets in all parts of the city." An 1886 Sanborn Map of the city shows the lumber yard of B. F. Cline, located between East (or Upper) 7th and 8th, on the north side of East (or Upper) Market Street. On East 10th Street, between Market and Spring Streets, the same map shows a large brewery installation of J. Gebhard and Company, also within the East Spring Historic District. This complex included an Ice House, Fermenting Cellar, Storage and Grain Room, Wood House, Mash, Brew and Wash Room, and surprisingly, a Dance Hall. By 1891, Gebhard's had been replaced by Nevian's Ice Company and by 1905 Cline's lumber company was replaced by homes. Today both industrial sites are occupied by residential buildings.

The wholesale business in the city was estimated at about six million dollars a year in 1873 and the retail trade at about 3 million dollars. Thanks to steam and street cars, and improved river crossings, New Albany was becoming a commuter home to those whose business interests were in Louisville, a practice which continues to this day.

New Albany's population during these bustling years at the end of the nineteenth century welcomed German, Irish, African-American and other ethnic groups. East Spring Street Historic

District appears to have been a center of such diversity, with a population of German families in particular. Nearby, the German Methodist Church on E. Fourth Street had been constructed in 1861. The First Universalist Church had a building on the south side of Spring Street, between E. Third and E. Fourth during this era, which later would be purchased and remodeled by the New Albany Maennerchor Society. An 1873-74 City Directory lists a Turner Hall on the north side of Market Street between Upper 9th and 10th. Adjacent to the district, at this time was the Independent German-American School, located on the south side of East Market Street between Upper 8th and 9th.

The establishment of St. Mary's German Catholic Church, on East 8th and Spring Streets at the heart of the district, was probably reflective of the second wave of German immigration. This influx came in the 1850s, after the unsuccessful revolution of 1848 in Germany. In 1850 an attempt was made to establish a German language newspaper in New Albany, but it was short-lived. By 1875, the Deutsche Zeitung had become a successful local newspaper for the German citizens of the city. While Floyd County was not the largest center for German settlement in Indiana, at approximately this time it had a respectable population of 1,649, the largest from Germany (942), then Baden and Bavaria (each had 143), then Prussia (142) with the balance from the many other German-speaking countries of Europe. The peak of German immigration into the U.S. came during 1882, when 250,000 persons arrived.

The founding of a German Catholic Church in New Albany during the 1850s was the result of additional migration to the area and also reflected their desire for unity in the face of difficulty. The "Know Nothing" movement was active in Louisville in the 1850s, encouraging violence against Catholics of foreign birth. On "Bloody Monday", August 6, 1855, more than 20 were killed. The idea for a German-speaking church was probably approved about this time, when local parishioners, Joseph J. Terstegge and Anton Koetter petitioned the Bishop. The Germans used the old Holy Trinity Catholic frame church at East 7th and East Spring Streets until a new church on E. Spring and 8th Streets was erected in 1858. The first priest was Father Alphons Munchina, followed by Father Joseph Weutz. By 1857, the energetic Father Eduard Maria Faller had arrived. He would later be important in the founding of St. Edward's Hospital nearby. Even this early, they established a brick school house near the future church. After the existing debts had been reduced, the parish, under the guidance of Father Faller, hired the architect, who had "directed the construction of the beautiful German Church in Hamilton, Ohio". The church would be "built in the Byzantine style, 120' long, 54' wide, and 32' high." It would have a massive limestone foundation, and the highest bell tower in New Albany, at 135 feet. The distinguished architect, Ludwig Reidinger, a brother of Canon Reidinger of the Cathedral of Speyer, the new church was built in the Romanesque Style. Eventually, the German Catholics of New Albany owned the entire block, and part of the adjacent block. They constructed a five-story academy for girls, operated by the Sisters of St. Francis of Oldenberg, a masonry rectory,

and a school for boys. Today, the Church, enlarged and faced with cast stone block, and the rectory survive within the District.

The East Spring Street Historic District was a busy combination of enterprise and domestic activity during the last decades of the nineteenth century and into the first of the twentieth. An 1884-5 City Directory lists a number of commercial enterprises within its small boundary, including Alois Miller's Saloon and another operated by A. Scharf. Frank Fenger sold cigars in his shop at the corner of East Spring and East 7th Streets. A local butcher was Charles Treser, and W. and J. T. Banes, along with Craig Gifford advertised carpentering skills. Gerhard Brown had a bakery at 124 East Market as well as Mrs. Margaret Heimberger at East Market and East 9th Streets. Four retail grocers included Sylvester Bir, Thomas Dowd, Frederick Platt and John Scharf (adjacent to the edge of the district). Mrs. Mary Copeland sold notions on East Market between 10th and 11th Streets, and Herley & Schmitt advertised marble and stone work at East Spring and East 6th Streets. Professional offices were also present at this time, with three physicians and surgeons located within the district.

By 1885, the parishioners of St. Mary's Catholic Church had decided to enlarge the facility. Their schools were active and an enlargement was appropriate. The foundation for the enlargement was finished by the end of the year under the guidance of their priest, Father Klein. But Father Klein was killed in a tragic accident in June of the following year. His replacement was the parish's former beloved priest, Father Faller, who returned to guide the congregation in July of 1886. He saw the renovation and enlargement completed and by November, had personally paid off the debt, so that the church could be consecrated. The renovated church was now 164 feet long, 56 feet wide and 38 feet high. Sermons at the consecration, which lasted four hours, were delivered in both English and German.

Father Faller, returning to the community at the age of 62, would prove a boon to its institutions, and would be instrumental in establishing St. Edward's Hospital, which operated for many years within the East Spring Street Historic District. Although there had been various attempts at founding a hospital in New Albany, none had proved permanently successful until the intervention of Father Edward M. Faller in 1901. The priest donated some of his own funds to get the project underway. Other citizens, societies and physicians raised the hospital funds and in grateful appreciation, named the institution after Father Faller's patron, St. Edward, King and Confessor. The cornerstone was laid in May of 1901 and the completed building was dedicated in April of 1902. It had 61 private rooms, and twelve wards, accommodating 100 patients. Father Faller's contribution was truly instrumental. Local doctors and citizens had been able to raise only \$3,000 for the hospital. A local physician, Dr. John H. Lemmon, had purchased a brick house on the Spring Street and East 7th Street site for \$15,000. Later he sold it to the Sisters of St. Francis for the purpose of operating a hospital for \$9,000. The latter

amount had been donated to the cause by Father Faller. In order to meet the construction needs, Father Faller also donated \$20,000. Soon after 1903, Floyd County began to contribute \$1,500 yearly to help support the hospital. This continued until changes in the welfare system replaced this funding with individual reimbursements. Over the years, the hospital would be enlarged, including additions in 1921 and 1930.

At the close of the century, New Albany continued to prosper, but not as dramatically. The American Plate Glass Works employed over 1,200 workers and covered 30 acres along the river, but the discovery of natural gas in the east-central part of the state had begun to erode its business. While there was a slight increase of the population in 1890, by 1900 it had reverted to about 20,000. Seven plywood and veneer industries replaced the depleted glass works, to provide employment and economic vitality for the city between 1898 and 1923. With the still abundant sources of natural timber close by and excellent water and rail transportation, this growth was not surprising.

The Great Depression of the 1930s affected the city's economy, as it did the rest of the country. Adding to these woes was the tragedy of the 1937 flood, which caused extensive damage up and down the river. The end of December 1936 saw moderate to heavy rainfall in the Ohio valley. A slight economic upturn had begun in Southern Indiana, thanks to the efforts of the Roosevelt administration's New Deal. Factories in Evansville and Louisville were humming. But the rain continued. By January first the Wabash River was at flood stage and the Ohio River was receiving flood water from all its major tributaries. Simultaneously, a peculiar weather pattern created a stationary mass of tropical air masses, saturated with water. These fecund clouds, trapped between two walls of cold air, dropped 165,000,000,000 tons of rain before January of 1937 had run its course. The flood which resulted broke all previous records. On January 26, the Ohio River at Cincinnati crested at 80 feet, a soaring 28 feet above flood stage. The previous high of 71.1 had been recorded in 1884. In Louisville, across the river from New Albany, the flood height was greater than at any other place, up river or down. The stages were about 30 feet above flood level, and more than 11 feet above the highest ever recorded. Of the states along the river, Indiana was second only to Kentucky in the number of livestock lost and property damaged. 137 human lives lost could be either directly or indirectly related to the disaster. Nearly four-fifths of the city of New Albany was under water at the January 27th crest.

St. Edward's Hospital had survived a tornado in 1917 and the 1937 flood. The flood waters came to within four feet of the front door, but the Sisters were able to care for many flood victims who were brought in by rowboat.

New Albany and the East Spring Street District survived the economic difficulties of the Depression, which were somewhat relieved by the new jobs created by World War II production. But by the late 1950, a shortage of Sisters to staff St. Edward's Hospital and high

costs for improvements to meet the requirements of changing hospital standards created a crisis. The hospital was scheduled to close. By this time it had 135 beds, compared to the 70-bed Floyd County Memorial Hospital. By the summer of 1962, the hospital, which had operated for nearly 60 years, was closed and the front portion of the building was removed, leaving the balance of the structure which would serve until 1999 as the Providence Retirement Home operated by Catholic Sisters. The front of the building and other areas were remodeled. Plans for its reuse as affordable housing began in 1999. The building is significant as a health care facility which has operated for over 90 years, providing a variety of services as hospital and retirement center.

The institutional buildings, as well as the residential structures which complete the East Spring Street Historic District, exemplify the commercial growth of the city, and the resultant desires of the population for more gracious residential streets and homes, churches and up-to-date health care facilities. Thus the district qualifies for the National Register under Criterion A because it is an expression of the growth and development. In addition, the diverse nature of the population, including the influx of a German-speaking population, is demonstrated by the institutions which served this and other groups, and by the increased enlargements and improvements which they engendered.

ARCHITECTURE

Although it is small, the East Spring Street Historic District possesses a number of fine examples of architectural styles which were popular during the mid-late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Romanesque Revival style is demonstrated by St. Mary's Catholic Church. The original 1858 building, of brick, was sensitively enlarged in 1886 and interior decorations included several cathedral glass windows, rose windows and numerous paintings and statuary. The latter were created by artists from Chicago, by a Mr. Thien of Cincinnati, E. Humbrecht of Covington and the Mayer Art Institute in Munich. The church was remodeled some time after the turn of the century by the application of cast block veneer; however, the striking bell tower and its decorative elements have remained, as have the main entrance and windows, along with much of the interior. Thus, this building demonstrates the changing pattern of design elements, but retains a high degree of integrity and thus contributes to the architectural significance of the district.

The Third Presbyterian Church, another Romanesque Revival building, also contributes to the architectural quality of the district. This church evinces a number of Renaissance Revival details, and a high degree of craftsmanship in the stone work with which it is replete. The distinctive round arched windows with their upper rose windows are reminiscent of European

examples especially from Rome. The contemporary International Style addition is joined to the older building by a discrete link, set back from both buildings. Thus, each era has its own design statement to make, but their juncture is sensitive. They both contribute to the architectural mix which is present in the District. The spectrum of architecture is well demonstrated.