

## **Narrative Description of Property**

### **Neighborhood Development Sixth and Seventh Streets District Charleston, Illinois**

The Sixth and Seventh Street District, nominated under the City of Charleston's Historic Preservation Ordinance, meets the following criteria for designation as set forth in the ordinance:

2. A significant number of structures meeting any of the standards under Landmark Designation Criteria, and;
3. Establishing a sense of time and place unique to the City of Charleston, and;
4. Exemplifying or reflecting the cultural, social, economic, political or architectural history of the city.

The District demonstrates the tremendous urban development that occurred in Charleston during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Of the buildings on Sixth and Seventh Streets, only one dates from before 1860, even though by that time Charleston had been a community for nearly 30 years. The earliest construction on Sixth and Seventh streets first took place on the northern end, closest to the Courthouse Square, because the people building the homes were also the financially successful professionals working on the Square. When the Eastern State Normal School opened in 1899 at the southern end of these streets, both streets experienced a housing boom that caused more houses to be built closer to the school.

Before Sixth and Seventh streets were developed, much of the land was owned by two people: Christian Coon, who owned 640 acres around the Sixth Street area, and Albert Compton, who owned land across from him in the Seventh Street area, known as Compton's Woods. The 1869 Coles County Atlas shows that both Coon and Compton were living on their property, in houses no longer standing.<sup>1</sup> The Atlas also shows that Sixth Street had been divided into lots prior to 1869, and at least thirteen people built homes on these lots.<sup>2</sup> Today, only two of these original homes are still standing, making

---

<sup>1</sup> Nancy Easter Shick, and Douglas K. Meyer. *Pictorial Landscape History of Charleston, Illinois*. (Charleston, IL: Rardin Graphics, 1985.) 112.

<sup>2</sup> Nancy Easter Shick, *Pictorial Landscape History of Charleston, Illinois*. 112.

them the oldest in the entire district being nominated: the J.M. Alvey House built in 1854, at 820 6<sup>th</sup> Street, and the J.A. Connelly house built in 1864, at 948 6<sup>th</sup> Street.

The area known as “Compton’s Woods” on Seventh Street was platted in 1889. On Seventh Street, the 1878-1879 Coles County City Directory lists four homes built at that time, only one of which is still standing.<sup>3</sup> This is the home at 1061 7<sup>th</sup> Street, built in 1871. Contrary to local legend, this is the oldest house in existence within our district on Seventh Street. According to this story, the first two homes to be built on Seventh Street were in the area known as Compton’s Woods, by Albert Compton himself, and by his daughter and son-in-law. As a wedding present, Albert Compton let his daughter, Mary Compton, and her husband, Felix Johnston, have first pick of the lots on which to build their house.<sup>4</sup> This house is still standing today, at 875 7<sup>th</sup> Street, built circa 1893. Albert Compton’s new house, also still standing at 829 7<sup>th</sup> Street, was built soon after, circa 1894. The legend says that these homes are the two oldest ones on the street, which research shows is not entirely true. Though the Johnston and Compton homes may have been the first two built in a small section of Seventh Street, there were already at least seventeen other homes on this street by the time their homes were built, including another one owned by Compton himself.<sup>5</sup>

As Seventh Street developed, the same pattern formed. Those with businesses and jobs on the square built on the northern end of the street. Seventh Street did not really see a building boom until the 1880s, so the 1878-1879 City Directory shows only four homes built prior to this date.<sup>6</sup> Of these four home owners, only two occupations are known, and only one owned a business on the square.

Though Sixth Street had been paved by 1897 while Seventh Street had not, Seventh Street soon became a major road in Charleston and was widened in 1900. One man, W.E. Hill, even saw Seventh Street as being so much more significant than Sixth Street that he had his entire house turned to face Seventh Street instead of staying in its original position facing Sixth Street. The house at 804 7<sup>th</sup> Street was originally owned

---

<sup>3</sup> Charles Emerson & Co.’s *Mattoon and Charleston Illinois City Directories, 1878 -1879*. (Danville, Illinois: Commercial Company Steam Printers, 1878.)

<sup>4</sup> Nancy Easter Shick, *Round the Square*, (Easter-Chick Publishing, Charleston, IL 1999) 161-62.

<sup>5</sup> See Sixth and Seventh Streets Historic District spreadsheet included in packet for exact dates homes were built.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Emerson & Co.’s *Mattoon and Charleston Illinois City Directories, 1878 -1879*.

and built by W.E. Stoddert in 1887. In 1892, W.E. Hill purchased the home, and in 1902 after Seventh Street was widened, he had the house turned 180 degrees to face Seventh Street.<sup>7</sup>

Around the time the Eastern State Normal School began construction and opened, the southern end of this district began to rapidly expand. Between 1896 and 1907, fifteen houses were built on Sixth Street, and twenty-five on Seventh Street. This building rate was higher between these years than at any other time. Of the homes still standing today, only nine on Sixth Street and twenty-two on Seventh Street were built prior to 1896. Most people living on the southern end of these streets were connected to the school. The first president of the Normal School, Livingston Lord, lived at 838 Seventh Street; and located at 1041 Seventh Street, there was a boarding house for the female faculty members of the school.<sup>8</sup>

Non-residential buildings in the district include one hospital and two churches. At one time, one beauty parlor (at 1109 6<sup>th</sup> Street in a private residence) and one grocery store (in a structure at 1139 6<sup>th</sup> Street) were present.<sup>9</sup> The hospital, located at 1041 7<sup>th</sup> Street was first the Old Wright Creamery, and then became the hospital opened by Dr. John W. Alexander.<sup>10</sup> By 1921, the hospital had been turned into a boarding house for members of the Eastern State Normal School faculty.<sup>11</sup> The 1947 Charleston City Directory shows that by this time, the building had been converted into a nursing home.<sup>12</sup> As it exists today, the structure is an apartment building. The two churches in the district are the Heartland Family Worship Center, originally built as the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in 1904 at Seventh and Harrison, and the Brethren Church, built between 1912 and 1919 at Sixth and Harrison. These churches are in the northern part of the district, close to the Courthouse Square. The location of the two churches, in the midst of a wealthy residential area, may hint at the congregations' demographics. Located on the busy Sixth and Seventh Streets, the churches would be very convenient

---

<sup>7</sup> Nancy Easter Shick, *Pictorial Landscape History of Charleston, Illinois*. 118

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>9</sup> Hoffman's *City Directory of Charleston, Illinois, 1947*. (Quincy, Illinois: Hoffman Directories, 1947).

<sup>10</sup> Nancy Easter Shick, *Round the Square*, 151.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>12</sup> Hoffman's *City Directory of Charleston, Illinois, 1947*.

for their neighbors. To have two large churches within one block of each other is also telling of the importance of religion to the area.

The development of Sixth and Seventh streets reflects the development of the town. Housing patterns were first influenced by the economic center of town, and later by the collegiate part. Though built over several decades, the houses on these streets still retain architectural integrity, significance, and coherence, making this district a good candidate for designation as a Historic District under the City of Charleston's Historic Preservation Ordinance.