

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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HISTORIC DISTRICT

21.

NAME: Garrett Historic District

*Roughly bounded by Railroad, Britton,
Warfield and Hamsher Sts. & 3rd. Ave*

LOCATION: approximately 100 blocks in the central part of Garrett, Indiana

OWNER: multiple ownership

DESCRIPTION: Garrett is situated on a gently rolling prairie in the center of Keyser Township (Photo 1). The city has a regular gridiron plan of square blocks, most of which is located to the South of the rail corridor. Although the original plat of the town extended only two blocks North of the tracks and three blocks South (Map 3), the majority of the present town had been platted by 1880, and both the population and size of Garrett have remained largely unchanged since the peak of rail activity in 1913 (Map 5). Most of the district's buildings date from no later than the first quarter of the twentieth century; the closing of the major part of the car shops in 1926 effectively marked the end of the period of historical development. The boundaries of the Garrett Historic District have been selected to define that area built up during the era (1875-1926) and containing the most physically compact, contiguous collection of structures which possess both historical associations with that period and a high level of architectural integrity, both as individual structures and as a district unit. Areas of historic fabric in which a majority of the structures have been greatly altered or which are largely composed of later development have been excluded, and isolated structures in such areas have been nominated as individual properties (see district plan, Map 6, and Garrett Quadrangle sheet).

Garrett's site was selected by the Baltimore, Pittsburgh, and Chicago Railroad on the basis of the distance a locomotive of 1875 could travel East from Chicago before needing to refill its boilers. The railroad established car repair shops there as headquarters of its Chicago Division (Map 4); by 1913 Garrett had a population of 5,000, and the shops employed 2,000 men (Photo 2). With the wane of steam power, however, the shops were gradually demolished; in 1968 the last major structure, a roundhouse, was destroyed (Photos 3,4). Two related structures, the brick passenger depot and a frame freight house, still stand along the tracks opposite the shop site, (Photo 5) and in proximity to the commercial area to the South, along either side of Randolph Street (Photo 6). Although the days when the depot and the shops were the center of community life have passed (Photo 7),

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virtually every household in Garrett has some association with the railroad, sometimes through several generations. In that sense, the District can almost be considered a thematic area.

The majority of the District is composed of residential structures (90 percent) dating from 1875 onward, with the majority built no later than the peak year of the car shops, 1913 (Photos 8,9). The edges of the District contain a scattering of Craftsman and Bungalow houses built during the 1920's (Photo 10).

The earliest structures in the District are the 1875 frame Gothic freighthouse (Property 1), and two brick structures, the 1880 passenger depot (Property 3), and the 1875 commercial block which was erected by John King, First Vice-President of the Baltimore and Ohio (Property 2). These Italianate structures, as well as the slightly later Bicknell (1885)* and Widmer (1893) Blocks (Properties 4 and 5), are characterized by smooth masonry wall planes, broken by patterns of regular fenestration and punctuated by stylized classical ornament. The galvanized iron ornament of the latter two structures was produced by George Mesker and Sons of Evansville, Indiana, and aptly illustrates the architectural sophistication which became possible with the availability of rail freight service.

Rail connections made possible not only the importation of the architectural elements themselves, but of pattern designs to be used in their local manufacture. This is particularly the case for residential structures, in which simple rectangular gabled forms derived from the earlier Federal and Greek Revival modes found generally in the area (cf. Township Properties 1 through 8) or ell- and tee-shaped forms from the cottage Gothic and Italian modes (cf. Township Properties 9 through 14) were successively given the decorative dress of later architectural styles.

The Italianate phase of this development is represented by the 1880 home of John Paul (Property 6) and the two-story bracketed cottage built by Frank Britton in 1884 (Property 7). The depressed, ogee-arched reveals in the pedimented window caps of the latter house are notable as a feature which appears on many houses in not only the district, but in the surrounding township and nearby Auburn, as well, evidence of a common authorship or, perhaps, manufacture.

* Demolished 1981

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With the exception of religious structures and isolated details, Gothic made few inroads into the classical traditions represented by the Greek Revival and Italianate architecture of that area. One domestic exception is the house built in 1886 by Emanuel Thumma, Garrett's second Mayor (Property 8); though its steeply pitched Gothic roof and the pointed head molds of the windows are unusually combined with an Italianate porch and a mansarded bay window as concessions to prevailing taste.

A continuation of classical discipline was made by the Colonial Revival style which became popular in the 1890's. The Samuel Johnston House (Property 9) demonstrates the persistence of the cottage form even to the late date of 1907, when it could be trimmed with simplified classical enframements and wrapped with a porch of Tuscan columns. Similarly, the house built in 1910 by Edward McKennan and which was home for 40 years to noted author and pre-historic archeologist Cameron Parks is a restrained classicized cottage whose porch of battered square posts standing on a cast stone base is one of the few local references to the Richardsonian Romanesque (Property 10). —

The local use of Romanesque or Queen Anne medieval references is basically limited to the forms, rather than the details, of the houses. The use of cubic masses containing pinwheel plans and crowned by steeply-pitched hipped roofs is usually seen in combination with the classical detailing of the Colonial Revival mode. Even the seemingly medieval verticality of the house built in 1899 by local baker T. A. Smith (Property 11) is, after all, a design with a Georgian gambrel roof.

More locally typical combinations are the use of a steep hip roof with projecting end gables seen in the 1891 Fred Wood House (Property 12) or the broadly gabled cubic forms of the 1899 home built for the B & O Division Superintendent (Property 13), the 1896 George Novinger House (Property 14) or the house built in 1912 by Charles Searfoss (Property 15) and later owned by educator Will Franks, namesake of the elementary school. These four properties all combine cubic Queen Anne massing with such Colonial Revival devices as the use of cornices with shaped modillions, porches supported by Tuscan columns or Tuscan colonnettes on panelled dies, and simple classical enframements around both interior and exterior openings. Seldom seen are such Queen Anne features as shingled gables or wall surfaces, turned or tracery ornaments on

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porches or gables, or irregular patterns of fenestration. The finest local example of the use of the Colonial Revival for both form and details is the Sacred Heart Hospital (Property 16), which was built in 1902. Its horseshoe-shaped mass is symmetrically punctuated by projecting gabled wings which enframe Tuscan galleries above the rusticated coursing of its first two floors; the walls are crowned by a modillionated cornice beneath a low-pitched gabled roof. ✓

Definite inroads were made against this classical tradition, however, by the influence of the Craftsman and Bungalow styles in the early 20th Century, which also witnessed the peak of the community's growth in connection with the B & O shops. The first inkling of this can be seen in the plain hipped roof of the Colonial Revival design built in 1910 by B & O engineer John Cogley (Property 17). A complete expression of the Bungalow's emphasis on low-pitched gabled roofs with broad eaves superimposed on the facade can be seen in the 1913 home of Charles Abell (Property 18), who built several other houses in the development of southwest Garrett. The abandonment of this formal device in later Bungalow examples is exemplified by the house which B & O counsel H. W. Mountz built for his daughter and son-in-law George Carroll in 1922 (Property 19). Although the ridgeline is no longer perpendicular to the street, the roof with its eyebrow dormers remains the dominant formal element, embracing both the house and porch.

This geometric simplification and reduction of ornament to surface pattern and texture can be seen in several of the institutional and commercial structures. The bold rectangular mass of the City Hall (Property 20) designed in 1913 by the Elkhart, Indiana, architects Ellwood and Ellwood is made a Tudor design by the use of flat lancet arches of header coursing over openings, eave brackets which resemble hammer-beam trusses, and multi-lighted upper sash. Only the main entrance and the caps of the pilasters on the facade approach the complexity of their late medieval English sources.

A similar simplification of an Italian Renaissance device can be seen on the frontispiece of the Garrett Carnegie Library (Property 21). This 1914 building, design sketch 16 offered by the Library Board of Chicago, is a simple hip-roofed tapestry brick box made elegant by the addition of a projecting central bay whose shallow loggia of Tuscan columns supports an entablature which arches over the recessed entry.

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The 1915 Houser Block (Property 22) continues the theme of geometric ornament with its use of limestone stringcourses, pilaster caps, and bracketed cornice used on a tapestry brick wall surface to create a subtle polychrome effect enhanced by the textural richness of panelled brick coursing to define such classical elements as panelled pilasters and the frieze of the entablature. An additional, exotic reference is seen in the facade's bay windows, whose bracketed canopies covered with clay tile roofs connote the Spanish Mission style which was then current.

Two religious structures, the 1913 World Episcopal Methodist Church (Property 23) and the 1928 St. Joseph's Catholic Church (Property 24), are worthy of inclusion here for their architectural merit as further local illustrations of this eclectic trend. The Methodist Church makes reference to English Gothic with its castellated, limestone-trimmed tapestry brick form in much the same way that the City Hall refers to slightly later English precedents; the Church is the ecclesiastic equivalent of the City Hall, and it is more successful by virtue of the religious associations inherent in the use of Gothic forms; certainly, like the City Hall, the design of the Methodist Church relies upon few accurate historic details for its success. By contrast, the Italian Gothic design of St. Joseph's Catholic Church completely re-creates both the form and all the details of its historic models with almost archeological accuracy, a tangible testimony not only to the perfection of architectural knowledge, but also to the communication and transportation systems whose existence in the community are implied as well.

In the simplified classical ornament of the U. S. Post Office (Property 25), designed for Garrett in 1936 by architect Louis A. Simon, and in the formal symmetry and cubic massing of the 1939 Gala Theater (Property 26) built by Alex Kalafat, the continuation of the dialogue between form and ornament can be seen in the more recent terms of the Art Deco style. In their incorporation of ornament into their respective forms, these structures represent a culmination of development away from the use of ornament as applique freely combined with conventionalized forms, and mark the local arrival of a later variety of architectural development.

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As initially noted, the Garrett Historic District boundaries have been selected to define the area possessing the highest concentration of structures which have a high degree of architectural integrity and historical associations. Although areas composed primarily of greatly altered historic structures or later development have been excluded, the district nonetheless includes most of the town. This is explained by the fact that since the present population of Garrett is little more than it was during the peak years of railroad activity, the area has been overbuilt for many years since that time, and there has been little incentive for suburban development. Most new construction has taken the form of infill in the areas developed historically (Photos 9, 10), resulting in a city with few vacant areas inside the gridiron plan. Modern intrusions into the district area have thus taken several forms which directly affect historic structures. The most serious problem has been the demolition of large buildings brought on by the loss of their original uses, and the lack of new ways to utilize them; this is exemplified by the loss of the entire car shop complex (Photos 2, 3, 4). Another aspect of this problem is illustrated by the case in which the large Colonial Revival home of Dr. Thompson at King and Cowen Streets was replaced by a new building of the same approximate size, rather than making adaptive use of the house (Photo 11). More commonly, however, losses have been characterized by a change to less intensive use of a site, as in the case of the 1875 Garrett Hotel at Randolph and Keyser Streets, which was razed for a service station (Photo 12), and several instances of houses demolished to make way for commercial structures (Photos 13, 14). However, the most common form of intrusion upon the character of the district is the unsympathetic remodelling of the historic structures themselves. Some examples, such as the rear wing added to St. Joseph's Catholic Church, may gain their own historic value in time (Photo 15). Although many, including the removal of detail during the siding of houses or the remodeling of storefronts, may not be entirely reversible (Photos 16, 17), fortunately many more are of a more superficial nature, and can in time be remedied. That the existence of these intrusions has been noted, moreover, should not be cause to see them out of proportion to their context, which is that of a still largely homogeneous group of structures, few vacant lots, and more intrusions in terms of scale and material than of usage (Photos 18, 19). Such observations also are apart from the social homogeneity of the district, which is based upon the large number of families who share a common heritage of association with the railroad over several generations. Both the Garrett Centennial of 1975 and the U.S. Bicentennial the following year did much to renew awareness of these common bonds which define the character of Garrett, and these events have also led to renewed interest in the tangible record of the railroad community.

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SIGNIFICANCE: In summary, the architectural examples to be found in the Garrett Historic District offer tangible evidence of the cultural and social development fostered by the railroad. They illustrate both the persistence of certain plan and form arrangements in a rural community, the role of the railroad as an importer of fashions through which these forms were kept of current appearance, and the resulting microcosm of the larger society which such communication created.

ACREAGE: Approximately 283 acres.

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION: The following lands and plats in the city of Garrett, Indiana:

All land South of Railroad Street and North of Quincy Street between extensions of Hamsher and Britton Streets;

Blocks 15 thru 33 of the Original Plat;

Blocks 34 thru 58 of Cowen's First Addition;

Blocks 59 thru 80 of Keyser's First Addition;

Blocks 1 thru 6 of South Park Addition;

All of Vanada's Addition;

All of Wells' First Addition;

All of Wells' Second Addition;

Lots 1 thru 8 of Hill's Addition;

Blocks 4 thru 9 of Thomas' South Addition.

QUADRANGLE SHEET: Garrett

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

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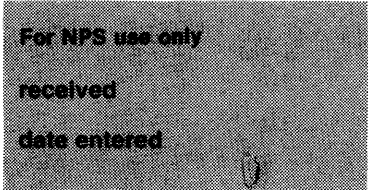
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For the most part, the boundaries of the Garrett Historic District do not include modern intrusions into the historic fabric of the town. The principal forms of intrusion within the district are the modernizations which the historic structures themselves have undergone in recent years. Because the population of the present town is little different than that of the peak years of the car shops, the town has been overbuilt for many years, and there has been little incentive for new construction. A plenitude of vacant land on the fringes of the town, particularly on the East towards Auburn, has absorbed the development of suburban housing which took place after World War II. The most significant modern intrusion within the district was the demolition of the 1875 Garrett Hotel at the Southeast corner of Randolph and Keyser Streets in the late 1960's for the construction of a gas station. Another form of intrusion has been the complete demolition of the B & O car shop structures, which began in the late Fifties and was culminated in 1968 by demolition of the 1875 roundhouse, which was the first permanent structure associated with the development of the shops. Today only the passenger depot, freight house, and knocker shops remain.

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National Park Service**

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UTM References: An irregular polygon defined by the following points:

- A. 16/655330/4579465
- B. 16/656470/4579495
- C. 16/656495/4578700
- D. 16/656290/4578690
- E. 16/656305/4578390
- F. 16/656045/4578385
- G. 16/656050/4578155
- H. 16/655880/4578155
- I. 16/655880/4578205
- J. 16/655850/4578210
- K. 16/655840/4578460
- L. 16/655360/4578450

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All photographs of individual properties and properties within the Garrett Historic District, as well as Photos 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 were taken in November, 1979, by Kenneth F. Smith; the negatives of these photographs are available at KFS Studios, 113 North Randolph Street, Garrett, Indiana, 46738.

Photographs 2, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19 were taken in June, 1982, by Craig Leonard; the negatives of these photographs are available at 521 West Market Street, Bluffton, Indiana, 46714.