

Item 7 - Description

Florence MRA - Site Number 11
Harvey/Niemeyer House
Supplemental Information
Compiled by Billy G. Garrett, 1984

Summary/Context

The Harvey/Niemeyer House, constructed c. 1874, is a one-story residence located on the major street leading into the original Florence townsite. The house is set to one side and toward the front of a relatively large square lot. In plan, the building consists of a "T"-shaped adobe core with an attached front porch and rear frame addition. Based on examination of the building, it would appear that the core was originally flat-roofed. An early remodeling (1892) covered all but the rear facade with a veneer of fired brick and added a hipped roof. The only subsequent modification of comparable importance was the construction of a row of rooms across the back of the building in 1936. Structurally the house is sound although it is in need of some stabilization. Overall, the integrity of the property is high.

The house is built on a parcel of land 120 feet wide by 121 feet deep. The building is set back about ten feet from the street right-of-way, and is located in the southeast corner of the lot. An arbor covered by honeysuckle vines leads from the front gate to the entry porch. South of the house are several mature specimens of prickly pear cactus and a mixed hedge of oleander, bamboo, and cat's claw. Other noteworthy vegetation includes two large mesquite trees, a palm, two paloverde trees, and three mature china-berry trees. Based on their size and species many of these plants may be indicative of historic landscaping patterns associated with the house. A frame garage of unknown history is located in the northwest corner of the site.

Exterior

In overall plan, the building is a rectangle and measures approximately forty-two feet wide by forty-five feet deep. The front portion of the plan contains four rooms arranged in a "T"-shaped pattern. The walls of all four rooms are constructed of unfired adobe bricks approximately 18 inches thick. Three of the adobe-walled rooms are nearly square in plan. The fourth is a narrow corridor, called a zaguan (porch or entrance hall), situated between the other three rooms. North of the zaguan is the living room, to the southeast is a bedroom, and to the southwest is a dining room. Thus, the main entry to the house and communication between the main spaces in the adobe core all occur through the zaguan. On the other side of the living room there was originally either a second porch or a kitchen which completed the rectangular plan. However, all indications of this construction have been removed and the space enclosed as part of the rear addition to the building. The rear addition is roughly ten feet wide and extends across the entire back of the building. This area contains two kitchens and two bathrooms arranged so that the entire house can be subdivided into two separate residential units.

Hipped roofs of moderate pitch cover the front porch, the adobe core, and the rear addition. The most interesting and complex roof is the one over the core. This roof is composed of 2x4 rafters tied together horizontally at roughly six foot centers by 2x6 boards. The roofing consists of 16-inch shingles nailed to spaced 1x4 sheathing. The same type of shingles were used on the porch whereas roll roofing was employed on the rear addition. Vertical blocking (2x4s) extend up from the top of the adobe walls to the stringers upon which all the rafters rest. Two masonry chimneys extend through this roof structure: one from the northwest corner of the living room, the other from the wall between the bedroom and dining room. Roughly one foot below the cap, 2x8 ceiling joists are tied into the walls. These joists are covered by board sheathing

and topped with a bed of plaster 2 1/2 - 3 inches deep. The ceiling seen from within the rooms is mounted approximately two to eight inches below the attic ceiling. The original interior ceiling, however, was situated only twelve inches below the attic ceiling.

Two types of finishes are currently found on the exterior walls. The most extensive is a soft-fired common brick veneer applied to the north, south, and east facades. These bricks are similar in size, color, and hardness to the ones used in construction of the Second Pinal County Courthouse (1890-1891) and other local buildings during the last decade of the nineteenth century. On the south facade the veneer changes to a board and batten application. The only decorative features to be found on the exterior are the turned posts which support the porch roof.

All window and doors are single units--typically with tall, narrow proportions and well surrounded by wall mass. The room in the adobe core, including the zaguan, have either a door or a window in each of their four sides. The doors are four-panel units with two large vertical panels over two smaller ones. Windows are six over six double-hung units. Two similar double-hung windows are located in the exterior walls of the rear addition. These windows may have been moved from the south facade of the adobe core when the rear addition was made.

Interior

The interior of the house is as plain as the exterior. Ceilings are typically soft particle board with narrow batten installed over the joints and nailing lines to create a grid pattern. Walls inside the adobe core are all plastered. On the outside of the core (originally the south facade) and in the rear addition, walls are either paneled or covered with vertical tongue-and-groove boards. The tongue-and-groove on the south wall of the core is distinctive: 5 1/2-inch wide pieces milled with a bead at one edge and in the center. A picture molding caps this installation approximately eighteen inches from the ceiling. Another picture molding is located in the living room. Floors are tongue-and-groove in the core and plywood in the addition.

The major interior feature of distinction is the corner fireplace in the living room. This fireplace is faced with fired brick and topped with a wood mantel. Another fireplace between the bedroom and dining room has been filled in leaving only the hearth as evidence inside the rooms. Lighting fixtures are of various vintages and styles. The earliest original fixture may be the chandelier in the bedroom. No specific date is known for this feature. Portions of a knob-and-tube electrical system are still in place in the attic.

Integrity

The overall structural condition of the building appears to be quite good. There is no evidence of deterioration in the roof framing members and the walls show no evidence of severe settlement problems. However, in an effort to control leaks in the roof, a variety of patches have been applied; all are reversible. Water damage inside the house is most noticeable in the ceilings and on several walls. All of the adobe walls contain cracks--usually over door and window openings. Wall movement may be due to rising damp in the masonry. The close proximity of plantings to the building and use of a concrete apron on the bottom of the walls are strong indications of this condition. Some of the cracks in the brick veneer have been patched with portland cement and sections of the face are in need of repointing. However, the veneer would seem to be well attached to the adobe and in no danger of separating from it.

Item 8 - Statement of Significance

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Summary

The Harvey/Niemeyer House is an outstanding example of a local architectural type known as "Early Transitional." Early Transitional buildings manifest characteristics of both Sonoran and American Victorian styles. The building is also associated with two locally significant individuals: Dr. William Harvey, M.D., and Charles H. Niemeyer. Because this property is located outside the Florence townsite, it is not part of the Florence Townsite Historic District (NR) and has not been included in any survey reports for that area. It is, however, comparable with the best examples of its style in the district and has locally significant historic associations equal to any other residence in the area.

Historic Background/Context

The history of the house begins in obscurity. One source identifies 1874 as the initial year of construction but there is no corroboration for that date. The first indisputable reference to the building is in a deed dated February 11, 1880, whereby Rollin C. Brown sold the property to Carmen A. Simpson. After several other transfers, the property was acquired in 1883 by Dr. William Harvey. He lived in the house until 1890 when he died of dropsy. In keeping with the practice of the time, he may have used part of the building as his medical office in addition to its basic residential function. Roughly a year and half after Harvey's death, the property was purchased by Charles H. Niemeyer. The house stayed in the hands of the Niemeyer family until 1953. For the next nineteen years the house was owned by George Bozovich and his heirs. The present occupants took possession of the house in 1972.

Development of the house is directly related to its ownership. From its inception during the 1870s through its occupancy by Dr. Harvey, the building was almost certainly a structure in the "Sonoran Tradition." In his book, Florence Townsite, A.T., Harris Sobin defines the "Sonoran Tradition" as an integration of Indian, Hispanic, and Anglo influences. Buildings of this type have simple plans based on geometric combinations of relatively small rectangular or square rooms: "U," "L," and square plans are common. Sonoran style buildings often started as a single room to which other rooms were later added. Additions were made easy by the use of locally available materials for most of the construction: sun-dried adobe bricks for the walls, cottonwood beams for the roof, and a roof covering of mud, river reeds, ocotillo, and manure. Hardware, window glass and milled wood were often the only "imported" building elements. Although the "T"-shaped plan of the Harvey/Niemeyer House is somewhat unusual for the Sonoran Tradition, its date of construction (pre-1880), proportions, and wall construction argue for its inclusion in that style. (No material is known to have survived from the original roof.) The form of the plan could be partially explained by the fact that only individuals of Anglo-American descent owned the building during its initial phase of development.

Upon his acquisition of the property in 1891, C. H. Niemeyer undertook a major remodeling of the house. He was responsible for installation of the brick and wood exterior veneers, construction of the hipped roof, and modification of the front porch to its present condition. The four-panel doors, tongue-and-groove flooring, and double-hung windows probably date from this period as well. These additions to the adobe core produced a house which was much closer in style to the Anglo-American tradition than it was to its Hispanic origins. Sobin calls this type of building "Early" or "Late" Transitional based on the degree to which they reflect Anglo-American influence in design, site utilization, and material use. The distinguishing characteristic of an "Early" building is a dimensioned lumber roof (covered by shingles) over adobe walls. Like the Harvey/Niemeyer House, many buildings of this type were conversions of structures built in the "Sonoran Tradition." Sobin identified forty-six Early Transitional style buildings in his survey of the Florence townsite. Of these only five were rated as "architecturally and contextually irreplaceable." None of the five exemplify the residential version of the style as well as the Harvey/Niemeyer House.

During the four and half decades after its conversion to Early Transitional, the house served as the Niemeyer residence, a rental unit, and the first local telegraph office. In 1936 Niemeyer added bathrooms and kitchens to the rear of the building and converted the house to a duplex. Relocation of several early windows and doors probably occurred as part of this work. The lowered ceilings and large rear shed roof almost certainly date from this time. The only major objection which could be raised against a high evaluation of the property is that the rear addition detracts from the building's style. However, this addition is reversible and it is not generally visible from the public right-of-way.

No subsequent additions of any note have been made since 1936. In fact, for two extended periods, 1948-1953 and 1968-1972, the house stood vacant. However, during their ten-year stewardship, the present owners have made a concerted effort to preserve and rehabilitate the house.

Although the primary significance of the house is derived from its architectural qualities, the ownership and use of the property by Harvey and Niemeyer are certainly of contributing value. Dr. William Harvey, M.D., (1844-1890) arrived in Florence in 1877. A graduate of Rush Medical College, he was the only physician and surgeon in Florence during much of his stay there. He has been remembered for his dedicated efforts during a local smallpox epidemic and for his refusal to treat a man who had fatally wounded a friend of his in a gunfight.

Charles H. Niemeyer (1859-1940) has also been remembered for his efforts in the public interest. He reached Florence, A. T., in 1889 by way of Virginia City, Nevada, and Silver King, Arizona. For two decades, he evidently worked in a local mercantile business. Then in 1911, Niemeyer was appointed Clerk of the Pinal County Board of Supervisors, a position he held for the next twenty-five years. In 1891, Niemeyer married Minnie E. Flint. It is reported that she operated the first local telegraph office out of their residence 1618 Main Street.

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Sobin, Harris J. (ed.) Florence Townsite, A.T. Florence, Arizona:
Industrial Development Authority of the Town of Florence, Inc.,
1977.

Quebbeman, Frances E. Medicine in Territorial Arizona.

Newspaper files at the Arizona Historical Society, Tucson.

Biographical files at the Arizona Historical Society, Tucson.
(clippings were located including excerpts from the Arizona
Daily Star and the Arizona Blade Tribune.)

Measured drawings on the house (in plan) by Susan Frens, February 1979.

Building inspection notes by Billy Garrett from various visits (1979-1980).

Building history notes compiled by Tom Rubright based on research in city
records, deeds on file at the county courthouse, and efforts to locate
direct descendents of the Niemeyer family. (None were found.)