

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

JUL 14 1987

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page a

RESUBMISSION WICKENBURG MRA

Wisdom House (48 Kerkes)
Maricopa County
ARIZONA

Summary

This property was returned for substantive reasons. The Register staff felt that the MRA documentation and inventory form did not adequately explain the significance of the vernacular plan. The Register stated that for this property to be listed as an example of vernacular architecture, it had to represent a specific vernacular type. The staff also noted that while the building was constructed of adobe, the form did not discuss the significance of this building material in the context of the Wickenburg MRA.

Significance

The Wisdom House is representative of the Sonoran Transitional style. This broad cross-section building tradition appeared in Arizona during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, beginning, first, with an early period of acculturation in which most Anglo and Mexican-American settlers adopted primitive, regionally congruous, Hispanic architectural and urban patterns, relying on materials immediately at hand and on Mexican adobe masons using traditional techniques. Second, it reflects a period of cultural fusion in which Hispanic adobe wall forms are combined with Anglo-American framed roofs, the latter facilitated by the availability of dimensioned lumber and Anglo carpenters. The Wisdom House is a significant example of vernacular architecture in the sense that it represents a traditional American architecture that was passed on to successive generations of builders and designers through the use of materials, shapes, textures, spatial organizations, proportions, and systems of ornamentation. It does, however, represent a specific tradition: the Sonoran Transitional style.

In order to understand best the architectural and historical significance of the Wisdom House, a discussion is required on the utilization of adobe in the early territorial architectural trends of the Sonoran style, the Early Transitional style, and the Late Transitional style. The best description of the use of adobe and these architectural styles is found in Harris Sobin's scholarly publications, Florence Townsite A. T. (1977) and Florence Townsite Historic District (1981). Much of the following discussion is based on these two exhaustive studies of architectural traditions.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

JUL 14 1987

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page b

The Sonoran Style

Buildings of the Sonoran style, characterized by single story, linear row house configurations, are usually constructed of adobe (Janus, 1984). The most basic form of a domestic building was often a square, one-room "building block", and house plans were later developed based on the use of the adobe "unit-cube". With this room as a starting point, more rooms were often added onto later as a settler became established, married, started a family, and needed more space (Sobin, 1977).

Such modular planning provided houses which from modest beginnings could be readily added on to, along with exterior [door and window openings] changes. When taken together with the fact that rooms in these early houses were not specifically designated or designed for any one use or purpose but were available for a whole range of domestic functions, it seems clear that the Sonoran tradition provided a high degree of internal [and external] planning flexibility. (Sobin, 1977)

Also notable of the Sonoran style are the earth roof and metal canales (rain spouts) and parapeted walls that conceal flat roofs (Janus, 1984). "Walls were frequently, although not always, plastered with mud on the outside to help keep out moisture" (Sobin, 1977). The facades are depicted by a rhythm of alternating door and window fenestration. Doorways are recessed into the interior surfaces of the thick adobe walls, and the windows are placed flush with the exterior wall surfaces. Door and window openings were usually spanned with paired mesquite lintels. Adequate cross-ventilation was facilitated by the simple device of placing window and door openings symmetrically opposite each other within each room.

Adobe walls provided more efficient thermal protection against heat or cold than either brick or frame construction; these buildings provided relatively good thermal comfort throughout the entire year. During the winter, the smallest adobe required only a minimal amount of heat; the logically designed fireplaces were, almost invariably, placed in room corners and formed a 45-degree angle across the corner and usually had a rectangular fire chamber with an elegant wood-cased mantelpiece above it.

An early local custom of the use of the Sonoran style is that of locating one or more walls of stables, garages, and other outbuildings directly on a street property line. The use of such "zero setback" siting, even in residential areas, helps define lot boundaries, which in turn helps to strongly reinforce adjacent street spaces (Sobin, 1981).

The major defect of a Sonoran home was the substantial amount of maintenance required on the canales and the roof to keep the home waterproof. The canales conducted water through the thickness of the parapet and projected up to two feet beyond the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

JUL 14 1987

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page c

exterior face of the wall to throw rainwater well clear of the wall surface during downpours. If these canales were not well-maintained and kept clear of obstructions, ponding would occur and lead to seepage through the mud roof, eventually causing serious leaks. In order to continue functioning as moisture-barriers, the earth roofs themselves needed careful maintenance as well (Sobin, 1977).

The Early Transitional Style

The Transitional modes mixed the best aspects of several earlier styles which were better adapted to the desert environment than the all-mud Sonoran vernacular or the brick and frame styles imported from other climates (Sobin, 1981).

The "Early Transitional" style is characterized by adobe walls topped by dimensioned timber pitched-roof structures, usually gabled and covered with wood shingles. As compared to Sonoran roof structures which required many large and heavy solid timber beams for their support, the gable-form of the Early Transitional roofs permitted much longer spans while using much less material (Sobin, 1977). This type of roof structure provided an end to the leaky roofs of the Sonoran style; it also provided attic space for these homes, which in turn gave good insulating properties in both hot and cold weather. Attics were often ventilated at gable-ends, using small openings fitted with louvered doors (Sobin, 1977). The ridge-line of the house is always parallel to the street with at least one of the long facades containing the front door.

Basic plan-types were very similar to the more linear variations of the Sonoran. The major axes of buildings were usually parallel to the streets on which they were situated. One or more facades were located directly on the property lines along those streets, allowing no space for a front yard at all; this is the case for most of the Early Transitional residential and commercial buildings in Florence. In many cases, as in the Sonoran tradition, every room of a building was equipped with a door communicating directly with the adjacent street. This allowed each space to be used as a separate rentable unit, thus providing the building considerable flexibility in actual use. As with Sonoran houses, rooms still had no fixed or "assigned" functions nor was any room of the house specially designed for a specific purpose.

The detailing and construction of foundations, floors, and door and window openings remain essentially unchanged from the Sonoran style; typically, doors and windows were built across from one another to allow for cross-ventilation within the house.

As compared to the corner placement of Sonoran fireplaces, those used in Anglo-influenced buildings (beginning with the Early Transitional) were inevitably located in the middle of one (or more) of the transverse crosswalls within the building; a center-wall location permitted flues to penetrate the roofing near or along the ridge-line, providing better draft and structural bracing for the chimney itself (Sobin, 1977).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

JUL 14 1987

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page d

Again, its adobe walls gave it more efficient thermal protection against heat or cold than either brick or frame construction.

"Balloon-frame" techniques were also used on Early Transitional style homes which provided environmental protection to exterior surfaces. These concepts were soon applied to the earlier Sonoran structures. Finally, besides the additional "new style" pitched roofs over many of the mud roofs in town, various types of verandas, arcades, and porches were added onto both old and new buildings (Sobin, 1977).

The Late Transitional Style

Structures in this Late Transitional style carried even further the combination of Sonoran and Anglo techniques. These buildings, usually houses, were frequently square on plan, with adobe walls topped by wood-frame hipped pyramidal, or mansard roofs. At first these roofs were shingled but later often roofed with sheet metal. For the first time in Florence, large set-backs began to appear. Porches were used with much greater frequency. (Sobin, 1977)

Although both forms of the Transitional tradition utilized Anglo-American "balloon-frame" technology, Late Transitional buildings made the use of wood-framed hipped, pyramidal, or mansard roof forms (Sobin, 1977). The use of sheet metal provided a more effective and less labor-intensive waterproofing than a Sonoran mud roof (Sobin, 1977).

The detailing and construction of foundations, floors, and door and window openings remain essentially unchanged from the Sonoran and Early Transitional styles; typically, doors were built across from one another to allow for cross-ventilation within the house. The two basic house plans most frequently used were the Sonoran "four-square" or zaguan (or central hall) types which provided a deep square plan in overall shape. The mansard was usually utilized as the roof form on the zaguan; both the mansard and pyramidal roof-types were both used apparently interchangeably on the simpler "four-square" houses and in re-roofing older mud-roofed Sonoran structures (Sobin, 1977).

Structural framing of a hipped, pyramidal, or mansard roof presents a much more complex problem for the builder than a gable roof. In addition to "common rafters" of standard size (as used to make a gable roof) whose length is determined by the distance from the wall-top to the ridge board, these new roof-types also required "hip-rafters" beneath each line joining two adjacent inclined planes of the roof, plus "jack-rafters" of non-standard length, which fill in the triangular areas of

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page e

roof between hip rafters and common rafters. All these elements of irregular length and cut require much care and accuracy in laying out, fabrication and assembling. Each such roof still surviving stands as testimony to the great skill and craftsmanship of Florence's early carpenters. (Sobin, 1977)

A typical Late Transitional feature was the use of full setbacks from all four property lines; buildings were located at least a porch-width (10 feet) or more back from the property lines, providing front, side, and rear yards around each structure. This was the first manifestation in Florence of the new rural "ideal" which had become a well-established major theme by 1850 in planning the newer suburbs of eastern cities (Sobin, 1977).

As in Early Transitional buildings, fireplaces were usually built in the middle of a wall of a room, but this was sometimes an exterior wall. Possibly due to the local appearance during this period of wood-burning cast iron stoves, some houses were built without a fireplace. During the earlier years of the tradition, most Late Transitional buildings were built with porches, usually on the south and west or on all four sides.

The introduction of sophisticated wood detailing and trim on homes occurred during the Late Transitional period (Sobin, 1981). The use of prefabricated double-hung or casement window sashes, louvered shutters, ornamental brackets, and bay windows was also introduced during this period (Sobin, 1977).

Late Transitional buildings often suffered from inadequate daylighting. They were also much more difficult to expand than either a Sonoran style or an Early Transitional style building. When additions were accomplished using the simplest (and typical) method of continuing the existing roof-slope of the building, additions were still naturally limited to one room in depth. Even changing to a flatter roof-pitch, builders soon ran out of usable head-room (Sobin, 1977).

Architecture in Wickenburg

Architectural trends within southern and central Arizona have generally followed the same pattern. As communities were established, virtually all early structures were constructed of adobe since it was the material most readily available and most adaptable to the hot desert climate. However, adobe walls were unusually susceptible to deterioration and required continual care. Then with the spread of western railroads in the 1880s, ready access to quantities of milled lumber was provided which led to the final decline of Hispanic building styles as adobe construction was abandoned for wood-frame houses.

When Wickenburg was established in 1864-1865, it was a tent encampment of seven residents. By 1867-1868, Wickenburg was described as an adobe village of about

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

JUL 14 1987

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page f

200 inhabitants who depended primarily on the Vulture Mine. The small mining community grew rapidly. However, by 1875 the town was in financial trouble since the Vulture Mine had been closed due to mismanagement. In order to remedy the situation, agriculture increasingly became the topic of newspaper articles about Wickenburg. Yet, by 1883 Wickenburg was described as a relic of the past with 100 houses standing empty for their owners had simply abandoned them. Disaster again dealt the small town an even greater blow; in February of 1890, the earthen fill dam that was located upstream from Wickenburg at Walnut Grove broke under pressure from heavy rains. It flooded the Hassayampa Valley and caused considerable loss of life and property, particularly to those structures constructed of adobe.

However, not all of Wickenburg's citizens were willing to abandon the town. On September 23, 1898, the plat of Wickenburg was recorded. In 1894 the railroad arrived in Wickenburg. Yet, even with the arrival of the railroad, the community dwindled to a handful of residents, and virtually no construction occurred during this period except for the Sonoran Transitional styles. [The Wisdom House, constructed circa 1895, is a rare remaining example of vernacular construction in Wickenburg during this period.]

By 1901 mining activity was renewed in the area, and Wickenburg was in the midst of a building boom. Business activity began to pick up due to the boost from the railroad to area mining and farming. As a result of heightened communication afforded by the railroad, coupled with the new telephone service in town in 1902, construction after this time fell more in line with national tastes and fashions. Lots of \$100 to \$500 were being sold by Henry Wickenburg. Housetents were erected all over the townsite. But the adobe Sonoran Transitional style homes were being replaced by frame buildings. [Wickenburg's Neo-Colonial buildings date from this period of roughly 1901 to 1910.] [Today, all of the remaining adobe buildings from this period have been altered from their original condition and are no longer illustrative of the Sonoran Transitional style.]

Characteristics

The Wisdom House is an excellent representative of the Sonoran Transitional style, incorporating a combination of the Sonoran, Early Transitional, and the Late Transitional architectural modes.

The Wisdom House combines many characteristics of the Sonoran style. For example, its walls are made of adobe. It is a single story, linear row house configuration. Its doorways are recessed into the walls, and its windows are placed flush with the exterior walls. Most likely, its door and window openings were originally spanned with paired mesquite lintels. The specific features which make this building a good representative example of the Sonoran style include the adobe walls, the original

JUL 14 1987

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 9

linear row house configuration, its recessed doorways and flushed walls, and the original sills and lintels. Also, it reflects the unit-cube construction of the Sonoran style, and each cube has a door that communicates directly onto the adjacent street.

The Wisdom House also includes characteristics of the Early Transitional architectural style. By far, its peculiar characteristic is its gable roof, which is ventilated at the gable ends. This type of roof construction allows the home to have an attic, which a typical Sonoran style home does not. The ridge-line of the structure is parallel to the street. The south facade contains the front doors. Finally, the fireplace is located in the middle of a transverse crosswall. The specific features which make this building a good representative example of the Early Transitional style include the gabled roof, the ventilated gable ends, the ridge line which is parallel to the street, the south (main) facade that contains the front doors, and the fireplace in the middle of a transverse crosswall.

Lastly, the Wisdom House blends characteristics of the Late Transitional mode into its structure. Its major characteristic is the use of sheet metal on the gable roof; sheet metal is a dominant roof sheathing on a Late Transitional style home. The Wisdom House is located back from its four property lines, which provides a yard that surrounds the entire house. It utilizes wood windows along with an entry that is wood with wood paneling. The windows are prefabricated double-hung window sashes. The specific features which make this building a good representative example of the Late Transitional style include the sheet metal on the gable roof, the full setback, the prefabricated double-hung window sashes, and the entry that is wood with wood paneling.

Integrity

The Wisdom House is essentially unchanged from its historic appearance with the exception of a window infill on the east elevation of the house. One window has been infilled on the east elevation of the home; however, this change is easily reversible. The original sills and lintels still remain in place, and the openings remain intact. The shed addition to the rear of the home does not affect the public view of the property. Due to the fact that most of Wickenburg's adobe homes have either been lost or altered from their original condition, the Wisdom House is a rare surviving example of a Late Transitional style home. Also, the Wisdom House is located on its original site.

An important fact must be mentioned here. Any adobe homes that still remain today in Arizona reflect the state's colonial period. It was not unusual for families to construct a room or delete a door or window since these homes were made of mud. These changes reflect the growth of families and their preferences in the appearance of their homes. The transformations on these homes also reflect the transformation of the Arizona Territory over time. These changes, like those of the Wisdom House, have achieved significance.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page h

Boundary

The boundaries of the Wisdom House are identical to those of the tax parcel number (#505-53-14) for the property. This is the present and historic extent of the property and is less than one acre in extent.

Bibliography

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

15 14

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page i

I concur with the statements as presented in this resubmission:

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Shereen Akner

Title SHPO

Date 7/9/87