

Butchertown

Preservation District

A Brief History

Adapted from the Encyclopedia of Louisville

The Butchertown neighborhood is located just east of the downtown area, bordered by the Ohio River to the north, Interstate 65 to the west, Main Street to the south, and Mellwood Avenue and Beargrass Creek to the east. Butchertown's history can be traced to the year 1796 when Henry Fait established one of Jefferson County's first gristmills in the area.

In 1802 Col. Frederick Geiger purchased 2000 acres extending from Beargrass Creek to the Ohio River, and was given a license by the Kentucky Legislature to operate a ferry between his property and Jeffersonville in the Northwest Territory. Geiger built brick buildings on the Ohio River for the operation of the ferry service near present day Towhead Island, a house (Linden Hill) near the southern boundary of his 2000 acres at Beargrass Creek, and two mills. In September of 1811, "Col. Geiger, under a call from Governor Harrison, at once raised a company who encamped on his land in an apple orchard on the left bank of Beargrass Creek..." These were the Kentucky Riflemen who fought under Geiger's command at the Battle of Tippecanoe. In

1815 Col. Geiger conscripted the limestone bridge across Beargrass Creek extending Frankfort Avenue in front of his house. Col. Geiger "accumulated a fortune, and died August 28, 1832, leaving many decedents." (*The Battle of Tippecanoe", Captain Alfred Pirtle, *Filson Club Quarterly*, 1900)

It was not until 1827 that Butchertown began taking on its urban character. In that year, Louisville annexed parts of the area. Shortly thereafter, the first wave of German immigrants arrived and many became butchers. Butchering animals had been banned from the city core early on, but this did not present a problem because the city's eastern reaches were more practical for the task. The land sat astride a major turnpike from the east (now Frankfort and Story Avenues), and Beargrass Creek was useful for dumping animal wastes. To accommodate the growing industry, the Bourbon Stock Yards was established in 1834. Other related businesses such as tanneries, cooperages, soap makers, agricultural supply dealers, and blacksmiths soon sprang up. Breweries and distilleries were built to satisfy German thirsts.



The neighborhood's present street system took shape on April 16, 1841, when city surveyor John Tunstall platted the area. Most of the present street names date from that time. For years, local historians have held that street names such as Washington, Adams, Franklin, and Webster were chosen out of patriotic fervor, but that is not quite so. Two early Butchertown landowners, George Buchanan (for whom Buchanan St. is named) and Isaac Stewart, were Whigs. When it came time to name streets on their land, Federalist or Whig names were chosen. Except for Calhoun (named for a renegade southern Democrat), no Democratic names were picked.

For most of the nineteenth century, Butchertown remained a thriving, petit bourgeois neighborhood, with a continental flavor still hinted at today. Other Louisvillians often professed shock at the Sunday gatherings at Woodland Garden, where



beer drinking and bowling took place without regard for the Sabbath.

The Butchertown culture began to fade as large meatpacking plants moved into the area toward the end of the nineteenth century. The next few decades witnessed even more dramatic changes. In 1931, the city's new zoning laws designated the entire neighborhood industrial. After the devastating flood of 1937, many homes were pulled down. Housing stock deteriorated as homeowners moved to the suburbs in the 1950s. The 1960s saw an interstate highway built through the area. Through it all, St. Joseph Catholic Church and its impressive spires have been a center of much activity.

Faced with even further encroachment by industry, a few remaining homeowners finally banded together in the mid-1960s to fight for neighborhood preservation. Their first success came in 1966 when they persuaded the city to switch the neighborhood's zoning to partial residential. A new corporation, Butchertown, Inc., began buying dilapidated structures to renovate for resale. The result was a more stabilized community that was quieter, yet energetic. Butchertown's remarkable preservation movement was inspired by the revitalization efforts of Old Louisville, and its success led to further renewal in other areas. *See Courier-Journal, Dec. 9, 1973; George Yater, Two Hundred Years at the Falls of the Ohio (Louisville 1979). David Williams*

Did You Know?

This section is incomplete. Some suggestions for items follow. Any additional suggestions are welcome.

- Spires on St. Joseph's Church are tallest in the city?
- Relocation of Beargrass Creek
- Construction of floodwall
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“Reading” Your Building— A Crash Course

Property owners planning to make exterior changes to a historic building should start by identifying the features and materials that give their structure its unique character, as well as its historic and non-historic elements. By taking the time to recognize and understand significant features, you will be much more likely to plan a project that is compatible with the original style of the building.

If, after looking over these guidelines, you would still like more information, the staff will be happy to arrange a pre-application meeting. Staff members can provide additional advice on the character of your building and how it relates to your upcoming project.

Learning to read a building and identify its significant elements is not complicated. Begin by thinking about and answering the questions below.

STEP ONE

Identify the overall visual aspects of a building. Do not focus on the details, but on the setting and architectural context. Begin by working through the checklist below.

SHAPE

What is there about the form or shape of the building that gives the building its identity? Is it short and squat, or tall and narrow?

ROOF AND ROOF FEATURES

How does the roof shape or pitch contribute to the building’s character? Are there unique features like weathervanes, cresting, or cupolas?

OPENINGS

What rhythm or pattern does the arrangement of window or door openings create? Are there unusually-shaped window openings or distinctive entryways?



PROJECTIONS

Are there parts of the building that are character-defining because they project from the walls of the building like porches, cornices, bay windows, or balconies? Are there turrets, or widely overhanging eaves, projecting pediments, or chimneys?

TRIM AND SECONDARY FEATURES

How does window and door trim contribute to the character of the building? Be sure to consider the decoration, color, or patterning of the trim. What about secondary features like shutters, decorative gables, and railings?

MATERIALS

From a distance, what contribution do the color, texture, and combination of exterior materials make to the overall character of the building?

SETTING

What aspects of the setting are important in establishing the visual character of the site? Think about the building’s setback, alignment with adjacent buildings, plantings, fencing, terracing, and outbuildings, and its relationship to the street and alley.

STEP TWO

Identify the character of the building at close range. Assess the color and texture of the building materials as they convey the craftsmanship and age that gives the building its unique appearance. Begin by working through the checklist below.

MATERIALS AT CLOSE INSPECTION

Are there one or more materials that have an inherent texture that contribute to the close-range character, such as stucco, exposed aggregate concrete, or brick textured with vertical grooves?

CRAFT DETAILS

Is there high-quality brickwork with narrow mortar joints, or hand-tooled or patterned stonework? Are there hand-split or hand-dressed clapboards or machine-smoothed beveled siding? Craft details, whether handmade or machine-made, contribute to the character of a building because they are manifestations of the time in which the work was done and of the tools and processes that were used.

Butchertown – A Working Class Neighborhood

Butchertown is a patchwork, a working-class neighborhood co-existing with industrial and commercial buildings that trace their origins almost to the very beginning of Louisville. While that diversity makes it hard to pigeon-hole the place architecturally, there is a quirky cohesion of materials, scale and spatial arrangement that makes Butchertown identifiable and unique.

The district is the product of varied (sometimes competing) influences covering a long period of time. Parts of the district were laid out as some of the first "enlargements" of the city of Louisville in the second quarter of the 19th Century, at a time when standards for setbacks, materials and the like were far less uniform and urbane than what shaped later neighborhoods. Butchertown quickly gained a reputation as a convenient, working-class place to live for many or a place of business for some, capitalizing on the land's proximity to the city, to nearby waterways and to the railroad.



Butchertown kept its low-scale, well-built working-class reputation as it grew through the 19th and into the 20th centuries. Each successive, independently added real estate development spread the neighborhood eastward, looking a lot like the developments before it but without slavish copying.

The result was an architectural diversity within a well-established, *de facto* template. For example, while the prevailing materials in Butchertown are (red) brick and wood frame, there's no rigid pattern. Wooden and brick buildings are freely intermixed in seemingly random arrangements.

The same is true of the neighborhood's spatial character. Front yards, for example, may vary in size slightly, but they're all small.



The stylistic choices made in the neighborhood followed this pattern of limited diversity. While most homes were built in the city's simple vernacular often with Eastlake details commonly known as Victorian brick-a-brack, many (or most) blocks have a handful of more high-style homes mixed in, boasting a Queen Anne or Greek Revival that might look more suited to the Cherokee Triangle or Old Louisville.

The diversity of uses encountered make Butchertown unique among Louisville's historic districts. Clusters (largely intact) of 19th-century houses are punctuated by stretches of commercial or industrial buildings from the same period, many intact. That's because Butchertown was so attractive to businesses seeking proximity to the Ohio River and Beargrass Creek, to their workforce, and to the highway system connecting the community and its commerce to the east.

REVIEW THRESHOLDS

The historic development pattern of Butchertown resulted in two distinct character areas – Residential and Industrial. These areas are delineated on the map on Page 7. A description of each character area follows this table. Use this table to determine when review is required and which guidelines are applicable to your property.

Proposed Work	INDUSTRIAL CHARACTER AREA	RESIDENTIAL CHARACTER AREA
Demolition of non-contributing structures as identified on designation map	<i>No review required</i>	Staff Level Review Required (Use Economic Hardship Exemption and Guidelines for Demolition)
Changes to sides and rear of a structure or yard that do not abut a residential or commercial use or zoning and are less than 25% of assessed value of structure	<i>No review required</i>	Staff Level Review Required (Use standard Landmarks Guidelines)
Changes to a front façade or yard that faces the street or abuts a residential or commercial use or zoning, less than 25% of assessed value of structure	Staff Level Review Required (Use Industrial Character Area Guidelines)	Staff Level Review Required (Use standard Landmarks Guidelines)
Demolition of contributing structures	Review Required Committee Level (Use Economic Hardship Exemption and Guidelines for Demolition)	Review Required Committee Level (Use Economic Hardship Exemption and Guidelines for Demolition)
Changes, including additions, more than 25% of assessed value of structure	Committee Level Review Required (Use Industrial Character Area Guidelines)	Committee Level Review Required (Use standard Landmarks Guidelines)
NEW CONSTRUCTION	Committee Level Review Required (Use Industrial Character Area Guidelines)	Committee Level Review Required (Use standard Landmarks Guidelines)



CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES

RESIDENTIAL

SITE AND INFRASTRUCTURE

- exhibits an urban grid-street pattern; has relatively narrow lots with small front yards;
- setback patterns vary by block, most are relatively consistent but others exhibit more variation;
- many front yards have wrought iron fences and gates at the sidewalk edge, some also incorporate low curbs and retaining walls
- alleys represent an important and historic feature of the district's transportation network

BRICK

- is used in a wide range of building styles including Greek Revival, Victorian and more modest Shotgun houses.
- is often in combination with carved limestone and stucco; and
- enhances architectural character through color, texture, and bonding patterns.

WOOD

- articulates stylistic features in cornices, eaves, porch elements, and decorative trim, some of which incorporate symbols of the butcher's trade;
- most commonly used on the many shotgun houses;

WINDOWS

- are generally double hung, wooden sash;
- are generally vertically proportioned

DOORS

- vary from the simple masonry opening of a brick townhouse to the cornices and door hoods and frames of Italianate structures;
- are typically raised panel wood and include both single and double varieties; and
- stand alone or are accompanied by sidelights and transoms.

ROOFS

- are most commonly gable and hip roof forms, or a combination of the two;
- exhibit a wide range of configurations based on housing type and size - some complex and some simple.

INDUSTRIAL

SITE AND INFRASTRUCTURE

- setback patterns vary by site, some are built to the street, others are set back on lot
- many sites include a large open storage and loading areas
- large tracts of land located along major roads, creek, and railroad tracks

MATERIALS

- brick is used extensively for historic structures and enhances architectural character through its color, texture, dimensionality, and bonding patterns.
- Metal siding and concrete block are more commonly used on non-historic structures
- Large planes of wall area of similar materials are used, often creating box forms

WINDOWS

- Range from double-hung, vertically-oriented wood windows to steel casement windows featuring prominent grid patterns
- Are large and represent the need for natural day lighting

DOORS

- Large, overhead or sliding doors, often in a series, are typical for loading areas

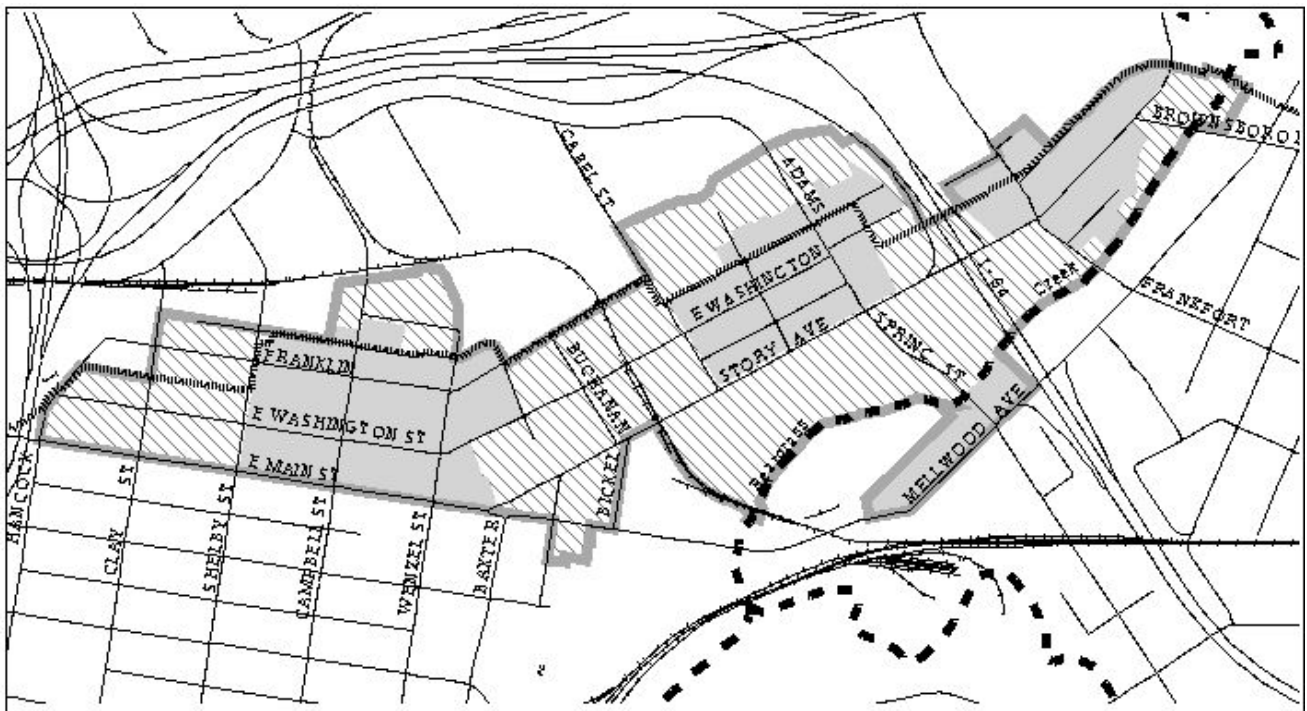
ROOFS

- are most commonly gable and shed roof forms, some incorporate a stepped parapet
- saw-tooth skylights and mechanical penthouses give rooftops variety
- smokestacks and chimneys are visible on many structures



Map of Butchertown Preservation District

Heavy outline delineates edge of district. Heavy dashed line denotes Beargrass Creek. Dotted line denotes floodwall.
Residential Character Area – Grey Shading **Industrial Character Area - Crosshatched**



Preservation Principles

A number of guiding preservation principles modeled after the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation are outlined below. Reading through these principles will help you begin to think about how you can carry out your upcoming project in a way that both enhances your historic building or site and preserves its character-defining features.



RELATIONSHIPS

When evaluating the appropriateness of a given project, the structure, the site, and their relationship to the rest of the district should be given careful consideration.

USE

Historic structures within a local preservation district should be used for their originally intended purpose or for an alternate purpose that requires minimal alteration to the building and site.

ALTERATIONS

Repair is always preferred over replacement. When replacement is necessary, materials should replicate or match the visual appearance of the original.

A high level of craftsmanship distinguishes structures within local preservation districts. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques should be preserved whenever possible.

Removal or alteration of historic fabric compromises the original character of a building or site and should be avoided.

Properties, however, do change over time. Those alterations that have become historic in their own right should be maintained as a record of a resource's physical evolution.

NEW CONSTRUCTION AND ADDITIONS

Additions should be designed to minimize impact to historic fabric and should be compatible with the main structure in massing, size, and scale.

New, infill construction should be designed so that it is compatible with its neighbors in size, massing, scale, setback, facade organization, and roof form.

New construction and additions should also draw upon established stylistic elements to create a sympathetic design that is clearly of its own era.

FALSE-HISTORICISM

Additions that use new or salvaged material to create a conjectural or falsely historical appearance are inappropriate.

TREATMENTS

Chemical and physical treatments should always be as gentle as possible, since harsh methods like sandblasting can irreversibly damage historic fabric.

ARCHEOLOGY

Historic sites often contain archeological resources, which should be protected and preserved whenever possible. If artifacts are found, contact the Landmarks Commission for an assessment



G: urban design/landmarks/butchertown district designation/guideline drafting
subcommittee/intro