

STATE OF VERMONT Division for Historic Preservation Montpelier, VT 05602 HISTORIC SITES & STRUCTURES SURVEY Historic District Survey Form	SURVEY NUMBER: LISTED ON THE STATE REGISTER: Y CRITERIA: A ☒ B ☐ C ☒ D ☐ LISTED ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER: Y
DISTRICT NAME: St. Albans Historic District	NEGATIVE FILE NUMBERS:
COUNTY: Franklin	SIGNIFICANCE:
TOWN: St. Albans City	Architectural ☒ Historic ☒ Archeological ☐ Engineering ☒
VILLAGE:	LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE:
LOCATION:	Local ☐ State ☐ National ☐ HISTORIC CONTEXTS: Commercial Development (urban); Early Settlement (to 1800); Railroad Junctions; Good Example-Architectural Type; Good Example-Architectural Style; Immigration-First Phase; Immigration-Second Phase; Physical Patterns of Communities
TYPE OF DISTRICT: Downtown District	
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE: The St. Albans Historic District defines an area of buildings of outstanding architectural cohesiveness which are centered on a large open space, Taylor Park. The park has been the center of the city since its creation in 1792 and has been respected and complemented by the commercial, religious, and residential buildings surrounding it because the structures are of excellent quality. This district further reflects St. Albans' growth as a major commercial and governmental center in northern Vermont and the prosperity brought by the Central Vermont Railroad in the 1850's. As a concentrated urban environment, St. Albans is typical of cities which flourished during the 19th century because of railroads, yet it is particularly note worthy because so much of this commercial core remains intact today. The district consists of a wide variety of styles and has only eight intrusions out of 111 buildings and structures. The buildings are similar in scale, materials, fenestration, rhythm, and architectural detailing, and produce an almost continuous facade in section, changing only direction and levels. Ranging in date from 1812-1932, the buildings within the Historic District are harmonious and stylish and combine to form remarkably intact and coherent streetscapes. Three major periods of construction are represented in the Historic District. Numerous buildings are included which were erected before the 1850's and exhibit the Greek Revival style which prevailed during that era. Buildings constructed between the 1850's and 1880's reflect the commercial, industrial, and religious growth brought about by the presence of the Central Vermont Railroad Headquarters and which established St. Albans as one of the major towns in Vermont. The styles representing this period are of an eclectic variety, consisting primarily of the Italianate, Gothic Revival, Romanesque Revival, and Queen Anne styles. During this time, public zeal also prompted erection of several outstanding and grandiose buildings such as the Franklin County Courthouse (#7). Subjected to numerous fires during the last 30 years of the 19th century, St. Albans affected a resurgence of building after each disaster, most of which was commercial. Chartered as a town six miles to a side (actual measurements after it was surveyed turned out to be 9 x 5 miles) by New Hampshire governor Benning Wentworth in 1763, St. Albans established itself early as a town of importance. Major settlement of the town began after the Revolutionary War, though none of the original 64 grantees ever settled in St. Albans, having either sold or transferred their rights to Ira and Levi Allen who in turn profited from the resale of these properties. Settlers were initially attracted to St. Albans because of the rich farmland the area had to offer. In 1793, with a population of about 250, it was proclaimed the county seat of Franklin County promising a considerable future as a place of trade and settlement. By 1801, with a populace of about 950, St. Albans was prospering enough to warrant the establishment of a Post Office by the Federal government. The location of the village was determined by the charter that stipulated the common be situated as near to the center of the town as the physical characteristics of the land would permit. This site, now known as Taylor Park, was selected and staked out in 1792 on land owned and subsequently donated by Colonel Holloway Taylor. In 1792 Ira Allen surveyed a stage route through St. ...(see continuation page)	

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

COORDINATES:

UTM (Zone 18)

State Plane Coordinates:

E911 Identifiers:

REFERENCES:

RECORDED BY:

C. Richard Morsback

ORGANIZATION:

VT Division for Historic Preservation

DATE RECORDED:

February 18, 1980

LAST UPDATED:

October 18, 2009

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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In 1792 Ira Allen surveyed a stage route through St. Albans as part of a road running from Boston to Montreal.

This transportation route, the present U.S. 7, afforded easy access for settlement and St. Albans also became a way stop for travelers. The major intersection created by Lake Street (Vt. 36), a road to the village of St. Albans Bay on Lake Champlain, was a natural site for the establishment of the first hotel, The Phoenix House, later known as the Bliss house and then the American Hotel (#65)

The most significant event to St. Alban development was the routing of the Central Vermont Railroad (CVRR) through the city in 1850 and the subsequent relocation of the CVRR shops and offices from Northfield, Vt. (see Central Vermont Railway Depot, Northfield, Vt., entered on the National Register April 1, 1975). J. Gregory Smith, a St. Albans resident, a member of Congress at the time (later governor of Vermont, 1863-65) and on the board of the CVRR, was instrumental in making certain the railroad would be routed through St. Albans.

This relocation increased the population, creating the need for services which spawned commercial, industrial and residential development. It increased the importance of St. Albans as a county seat and as a major transportation and economic center in Vermont. Existing industries such as the St. Albans Foundry (#s 70, 79, 80, 81, 82, 106) were bolstered by the move and expanded to produce castings for the railroad. The Foundry was owned and operated by J. Gregory Smith and his brother C. Worthington Smith who purchased the concern in 1850. The Foundry is the only industry that was located in the district with the exception of a granary on Catherine Street (#105). From 1850 through the 1890's, the city's greatest period of development, twelve major industries were established in St. Albans.

The most notorious event in St. Albans' history was a Confederate raid in 1864. St. Albans has the distinction of being the only New England town attacked during the Civil War. The raid was part of a broader scheme, never fully implemented, to harass northern towns in the hope of diverting Union troops and attention from the South. Canada was used as a base for purposes of diplomatic immunity. The essence of the plan was to rob banks and firebomb buildings. On October 19, 1864, twenty-one Confederate soldiers, led by Lt. Bennett Young, drifted incognito into St. Albans and at the prearranged time of 3:00 p.m., grouped to rob three banks while the balance of the raiders rounded up and detained passersby in Taylor Park.

The raiders were forced to flee after word spread and the militia was alerted and sent after them. Horses were

stolen from several stables in town and the raiders fled safely to Canada. Their firebombs did not ignite any buildings. Elinus J. Morrison, the contractor of the Welden Hotel construction site (located at the present site of the New England Telephone Building #16) was the only person killed.

In all, the Confederates made off with \$208,000. In what threatened to turn into a major diplomatic dispute, the U.S. protested the harboring of the raiders by Canada. The upshot of this was that \$88,000 was recouped but the raiders were not brought to trial. There was, however, no further harassment by the South. The banks that were robbed have since been torn down or destroyed by fire. A plaque on the Franklin and Lamoille Bank (#64) commemorates the raid and the original site of the Franklin County Bank.

St. Albans also grew into a resort town because of the ready transportation and the nearby water recreation St. Albans Bay could offer. In 1867 a mineral spring was discovered near the railroad depot and it was used as an added enticement to travelers who wanted to "take the waters." It was named after the town's first settler, Jesse Welden. Four large hotels, two of which are still standing (#s 65 and 103) lodged these vacationers. The largest and most opulent of these was the 200-room, five-story Welden Hotel, a finely appointed, mansard grand hotel bordering the north end of Taylor Park on the site of the present New England Telephone building (#16). It burned in 1897. A travel account from 1872 described St. Albans as being "built thick enough for convenience but open enough for health."

No history of St. Albans is complete without mention of the great fires that swept through the city in the last thirty years of the 19th century. Over this period the whole western side of Main Street bounded by Lake Street on the south, Hoyt on the north and Catherine on the west was destroyed and redeveloped except for the American House (#65) and parts of the foundry (70, 79, 80, 81, 82).

A fire on September 17, 1871, destroyed twenty-five buildings on the south side of Lake Street and part of the St. Albans Foundry. On Thanksgiving eve 1891, a fire broke out behind what is now the Prior Block (#63) and burned from the Franklin Bank to the Locke Block (now occupied by building #67) where it jumped across Taylor Park and burned down the First Congregational Church.

On May 19, 1895, the most catastrophic fire leveled 130 buildings on nearly 75 acres of land. The fire started in the paint shop and lumber yards of the W. B. Fonda Co. plant on the corner of Stebbins and Catherine streets burning all the buildings on the east side of Catherine Street as far as the St. Albans House (#103). From this point, sparks, carried by a brisk southerly breeze, carried the fire north of the St. Albans Foundry and it swept up Kingman to Main destroying everything from Main south as far as building #60. None of the stores on Main Street between Kingman and Center Streets were damaged, but everything to the north on the west side of Main Street went up in flames. All the buildings in the section bounded by Center, Federal, Hoyt and the west side of Main Street burned to the ground. All buildings on the north side of Hoyt Street with the exception of one house on the north corner of Main and Hoyt was destroyed and the fire crept up half the next block on Federal Street. Within five years this entire area was completely redeveloped, the bulk of reconstruction being completed within two years. The buildings (#s 19-24) on the east side of Main Street bounded by Congress and Bank Streets are the only remaining first generation

St. Albans' expansion and prosperity is reflected by the quality of buildings in the commercial core. Though the series of devastating fires homogenized much of the architecture into its present set of outstanding late 19th century buildings, many structures remain to document the city's development and lend diversity to this pleasing city.

The importance of this intact common to the district cannot be overstated. The buildings on Main and Church Streets that outline Taylor Park create a courtyard effect, reinforcing the aesthetic value of this open space in its downtown environment, particularly striking are the monumental buildings with their picturesque towers and buttresses that line the east side of Taylor Park on Church Street (#s 2-8). A small set of modern buildings Handy Dodge (#s 107, 108) on the corner of Fairfield and South Main helps to define the southern edge of this open space as does the Armory (#109) next to it, the Brainerd Block (#19) and the New England Telephone building. The general condition of the buildings within the historic district ranges from poor to excellent. The major changes to these structures consist of alteration to store front fenestration and the loss of architectural detailing, usually at the cornice. In only one instance has sandblasting been used to treat an exterior facade.

St. Albans escaped urban renewal basically because once the railroad began reducing operations in the 1950's, the city lost a major part of its economic base to support revitalization. Consequently, the Historic District boundaries include and reflect the integrity of an intact commercial built environment from 1812 through 1932. Because Taylor Park is the focal point of the downtown, the boundaries of the St. Albans Historic District were drawn to encompass those buildings which surround this open space and which reflect a quality of urban texture which the park seems to have inspired. Thus, the district includes the downtown commercial and civic core of the city, which is fortuitously nearly free of non-contributing structures. This "center of town" district does not extend to the east, south, or north into the residential and newer commercial areas, but does include some residences on Bank Street, since they close the Park on the north. On the west, the buildings included on Federal and Catherine Streets do not relate visually to the park but are important as representatives of St. Albans' industrial growth. The bulk of the western boundary is adjacent to the eastern boundary of the Central Vermont Railroad Headquarters (entered on the National Register January 21, 1974).

