Not an Accidental Form: 
The Flounder House as a Vernacular Building Type in St. Louis City

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Flounder House

An urban house form called “flounder,” “half-house,” or “half flounder” appears to be an accidental form but is actually a deliberate one with numerous examples in Old St. Louis and Alexandria, Virginia.”

Steven Holl

*Rural & Urban House Types in North America*

1982
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Summary

During 2015 the City of St. Louis Cultural Resources Office completed a survey of the vernacular house type known as a flounder throughout the City. This survey, which was limited to documenting the exterior of each property, had several objectives, including determining the number of flounders remaining standing in the City; identifying common characteristics and types; and understanding the geography and heyday period of construction of the building type in St. Louis. The survey also documented the National Register status of the flounders and how many were threatened by vacancy and deterioration.

Vernacular buildings are ordinary ones, and reflect local building practices and available materials; their use may be quite local or widespread. The origins of the flounder vernacular house type remain obscure and research for the project did not reveal many studies of the building form. The understanding of the construction of flounders in St. Louis does echo many of the conclusions made by Christopher Martin in his study of flounders in Alexandria, Virginia. This study supports the assertion that, while flounders were built in other cities, most of which are east of the Mississippi River, St. Louis City is home to one of the largest collections of the vernacular building type. The number of flounders would be much larger but for the fact that they were built in the older portions of the city, some of which have been redeveloped. The survey recorded 275 flounders; while this number is impressive, it must be noted that it is only a partial sample of the once common building type. As the remaining collection is so reduced, and without any known rationale in areas where building demolition rather than redevelopment has reduced numbers, the report avoids firm statements about the extent and prevalence of flounder types and features.

The flounders in St. Louis are best understood to represent a form that was adapted to incorporate features of other common urban building types, from the small free-standing house to the alley house, flats and townhouses. The documented flounders demonstrate the adaptability of the house form and its frequent combination with other common building elements, such as the side gallery and small dormers. Flounders were built at various locations on the city’s lots: at the alley, mid-lot, and at the building line near the street. They were erected as one- to two-and-a-half-story buildings. With all this variety, this study does not identify any quintessential flounder in form or articulation, as built in St. Louis. Indeed, its adaptability as a basic building form no doubt was part of its widespread use. Flounders were constructed in St. Louis primarily during three decades, the 1860s through the 1880s, side-by-side with other house types.

Most flounders were built prior to the issuance of building permits by the City and the documentation of the building projects with the identities of the property owners and builders is often not possible. The dominance of German immigrants in St. Louis and the likelihood that a German builder or contractor erected the building means that the German connection is too ubiquitous to be truly informative, given that the same Germans, during the same time frame, erected many other building types as well. The study suggests that one posited scenario – that flounders built near the alleys might have been the first step in a larger residential construction
project – was not supported to be a common pattern by the evidence of the remaining flounders.

The survey documented each flounder recorded on an inventory form. The forms are available at the Missouri Department of Natural Resources’ Architectural Surveys web page, where the survey report that discusses methods and results in a different manner is also posted. This report is meant to present what was learned about flounders in St. Louis.

This project relied on funding from two federal sources. The work of the Cultural Resources Office staff on the survey was funded through an allocation of Community Development Block Grant funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the City of St. Louis’ Community Development Administration. The survey project specifically was partially funded by a grant from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, State Historic Preservation Office, and the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. Grant awards do not imply an endorsement of contents by the grantor. Federal laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, religion, sex, age, handicap or ethnicity. For more information, write to the Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, DC 20240.

Cultural Resources Office staff members Andrea Gagen and Robert Bettis were instrumental in the completion of the survey and report, which were managed by Jan Cameron. Intern Larraine Nunley assisted in many facets of the project. Adona Buford kept the regular work moving forward as other staff members immersed themselves in this project.
Flounders in St. Louis: Characteristics and Types

A flounder is defined as a residential building asymmetrical in form because one side wall is noticeably higher than the other to provide loft or attic space. In nearly all cases, the taller wall is blind, or windowless, and most of the roof has a single slope, or shed, form. There are related property types – including narrow rear wings with steeply-pitched gable roofs – that were not included in this study.

This survey documents that there is no quintessential flounder form or example that displays a classic, or deterministic, set of flounder elements in the extant collection of flounders. To this point, adaptability and the combining of the form with popular features characterizes the St. Louis flounders as a group. Nevertheless, there are common elements that are character-defining features.

Dominant Characteristics of Extant Flounders

Form and Orientation
Nearly all flounders are rectangular in form and oriented with the short side facing the street – regardless of the location on the lot – as 2211 Alberta is. A few flounders are positioned with their long sides facing the street. These properties tend to be corner properties or lots on the short end of blocks adjacent to an alley. 2121 Crittenden is an example of this orientation.

Roof Form
A shed roof with its distinctive triangular silhouette is found on nearly half of the extant flounders. Its common presence in the Compton & Dry Pictorial suggests that there were once many more buildings with this roof form.

While the single-slope shed roof is a hallmark of the flounder, it was often combined with another form. Forty percent of the flounders recorded in the survey have a hipped front on the shed roof and many of these buildings have a dormer projecting from that front slope. The popularity of this form – in all areas where flounders were built and throughout the heyday period of construction – suggests that the presence of horizontal eaves that resulted from the
hipped front was important in the streetfront presentation of these dwellings. This hipped front disguises the flounder roof form when one is close to the dwelling and provides the opportunity for the use of a cornice on the façade. As the hipped front actually reduces the space available in the loft or attic level, and dormers were also located on shed roof slopes, the hipped-front roof seems to be an aesthetic, rather than a functional, choice.

A few other architectural elements were less commonly used to conceal the flounder roof form. 3955 Missouri has a low parapet extension of the façade. 2819 Winnebago has a tall false front that adds overall height to the building. 1808 S. 10th has a false mansard front to the shed roof. Less common variants of the roof form include one with a gambrel roof, 3810 Kosciusko.

The three edges of the sloping shed roofs of flounders initially were terminated with brick coping. Parapet tiles, an improvement as they were more water-resistant, appear on most flounders, either as constructed or as a later alteration. These slightly projecting forms, as well as chimneys that often rise where the shed roof meets the taller wall, add substance to the roofline.
Location on the Building Lot
Three locations on the city lot are common in addition to the nearly universal practice of positioning the flounder on a side lot line.

Side Lot Line
Nearly all flounders recorded in the survey are positioned with the taller blind, or windowless, wall at the side lot line. As this wall typically had no openings, it could become a party wall. Alternatively, it offered privacy to the neighboring property on that side. This pattern persisted with most windows placed in one side of closely spaced houses through the early 20th century in St. Louis. The side lot line position also afforded a wider – yet still narrow – side yard on the other side of the property, another pattern that remained in use for some time in St. Louis.

Building Line
Many of the extant flounders are positioned at or near the building line – the distance from the sidewalk at which most of the buildings on the block are positioned – as the main or front residential building on a parcel. These flounders often have a street-front presence as a townhouse with a hipped roof and horizontal cornice.

Mid-Lot Location
Some of the extant flounders were built near the middle of the lot. This location seems to have allowed for more than one possibility in the future with additional construction or the provision of front and rear yards. Most of the mid-lot flounders remain free-standing, not connected to front or rear structures. They have both shed roofs and hipped-front roofs and vary in architectural presence from simple to more elaborate designs. 2014 S. 11th, a flounder in a mid-lot location, stands immediately behind a flounder positioned at the building line.
A mid-lot flounder could become a rear wing for a front house, yet the survey did not document this as a common pattern except in the Patch area of the Carondelet neighborhood. In contrast to the strongest pattern that mid-lot flounders remained as built, mid-lot flounders were adapted by their owners in various ways. 2729 Howard is an example of a small mid-lot flounder that received a rear addition (pictured on Page 12). A Second Empire style building was built in front of the mid-lot flounder at 2340 Menard and a similar scenario took place at 1213 Monroe. 2719 James Cool Papa Bell, which had a mid-lot location, received a commercial front addition during the early 20th century. 3533 Missouri was expanded from a mid-lot flounder with a second, larger flounder form with a basement constructed at the alley.

**Alley Location.**

Flounders stand at the edge of alleys in two conditions on the lot: as the only building on the property and as a rear building, behind another one. Flounders were commonly built at the alley with a side entrance through a gallery or side porch, leaving a façade with window openings but no door facing the alley. Rear flounders behind another residence are extant in several areas, although they are most common in the densely developed Soulard neighborhood; 913 Geyer, rear building, is an example of a Soulard alley flounder. Flounders positioned at the alley as the only building were not limited to certain areas.

The possibility that an alley flounder was intended to be the rear wing for a larger house was not supported by the extant flounders. The survey documented a very limited sample of a larger front house added to an alley flounder. The alley flounder at 4048 Nebraska was clearly the first of a two-stage building project. This 1 ½-story flounder has a side gallery with two entrances. A 2 ½-story dwelling was later constructed in front of the flounder. Foundations of different heights and stonework confirm the rear wing as a flounder as defined in this study, rather than a flounder-shaped rear ell constructed at the same time as the front portion of the house. This progression of development occurred before 1883. A two-stage construction project also took place at 1905 Obear.
Building Materials

**Stone Foundations**
As with most brick buildings in St. Louis, extant flounders have foundations of limestone that extend above grade. The stone masonry ranges from roughly cut and uncoursed rubble walls to more carefully cut, dressed and coursed work. A small number of foundations have a band of smooth ashlar stone at the top edge. Another uncommon condition is a flounder built with a minimal foundation only a course or two above grade or without any stone above grade. Many of the flounders have foundations tall enough to allow for some or all of the basement windows to be above grade. Exterior entrances to basements with pitched bulkhead doors above grade are not uncommon and position the staircase access on the exterior of the building, thereby not taking up space in the basement.

![Typical foundation height 2308 S. 12th Street](image1)

![No stone foundation above grade 2110 S. 11th Street](image2)

**Brick Construction**
In a city where brick construction is dominant, it is not surprising that 91 percent of the extant flounders are load-bearing brick construction. The brick is usually a consistent red brick and the brick on the façade is the same as that on the side and rear walls, as opposed to being face brick. Brick flounders typically display two common methods of building in brick. Most openings have segmentally-arched heads. This form of arch is stronger than a round arch form and does not require a lintel, and thus is very common on brick buildings. The presence of segmental arched openings should be considered to be more of a building construction practice than an aesthetic choice. A corbelled or denticulated cornice of brick, a stepped out form that makes the brick wall wider at the top of the feature to receive roof framing members, is also very common on brick buildings, including flounders. 4408 Blair Avenue has a modest corbelled brick...
cornice with dentils; both the Blair flounder and 2511 Benton, rear building, flounder have segmentally-arched openings.

**Frame Construction**
Wood-framed construction – representing only nine percent of the extant flounders – was used for small 1 ½-story flounders to larger and taller residences. 3533 Missouri is an example of the former and layers of later sheathing cover its original lapped wood siding. 1507 E. Gano is a later example, built circa 1895; here the flounder form is combined with amenities provided on other houses of the time, including a full front porch and a bay window on each side. Its original siding is also concealed under later materials.
Articulation

Regular bays
Most flounders present two or three bays to the street, as the rectangular forms usually are positioned with the short side to the street. If there is an attic window it is usually aligned with a bay below it. Many of the images in this section show this condition.

Where the wall meets the roof
The juncture of the walls and roof edge is a location where common building practices meet opportunities for embellishment – even on relatively plain flounders. Most of the brick flounders have a minimal denticulated brick cornice where the eaves are horizontal, as a means to terminate the wall and provide additional thickness to support roof framing members. Others have a more developed corbelled cornice for the same reason. A few brick flounders that have a more fully articulated aesthetic have prominent wood cornices that may include brackets and dentils.
**Entrances**

Front entrances to flounders are typically modest. Steps leading right to the threshold, or a small stoop, are common. Many entrances are merely an elongation of a window opening with a door and transom window above set into it. Entrance porches are not common on flounders but do appear at front and side entrances. Side entrances, when not through a gallery, are often as unassuming as a flounder front entrance. Full front porches are less common and may be an addition. A flounder with a front porch is depicted on Page 8.
Lighting the loft or attic space

Both lofts with little headroom and taller attic spaces of flounders are provided with light and ventilation. Many flounders have loft or attic windows in one or both end walls. Small gabled dormers are common on the front slopes of hip-fronted shed roofs and appear on the side slopes of shed roofs. This provision of light and ventilation suggests that these small spaces were used for storage or occupancy. As wood dormers deteriorate without maintenance and many may have been removed when roof sheathing was replaced, it is difficult to determine the number of occupiable stories of some of the flounders. 2121 Menard has a typical small dormer that lights and ventilates the loft. The small window in the upper wall of 3154 Pennsylvania serves the same purposes for the attic.
Galleries
As the term is used in St. Louis to refer to side porches, there are two main types commonly combined with the flounder form: galleries that project from the main building and galleries with masonry wing walls at the street end and sheltered by an extension of the main roof. Some galleries without wing walls are also sheltered by the main roof.

The wood-framed gallery attached to a small brick flounder served more than one purpose. For very small two-story flounders, the gallery enabled positioning the circulation system outside of the brick walls and access to various rooms of the upper story when the dwelling was occupied by more than one family. An example of this arrangement is 2729 Howard. A gallery also provided sheltered outdoor space during the milder months of the year.

The gallery with brick wing wall(s) was often used in a two-story townhouse flounder; 2107 Menard is an example of this form. Its provision of both privacy and circulation outside of the brick walls seem to explain its popularity. A central bay variant of this form, seen at 2816 Indiana and 2711 Indiana, is the flanking of an open gallery with enclosed brick bays at both ends.

Rear galleries or porches were often amenities of a flounder when a full-length gallery was not provided. The rear gallery typically flanks a rear wing that is narrower than the main block of the house. These galleries, as do those at 2814 and 2816 Arsenal, often incorporated staircases.
2107 Menard Street
Typical brick wing wall in front of gallery

2816 Indiana Avenue
Central bay gallery variant

2814 and 1826 Arsenal Street
Rear wing galleries

2711 Indiana Avenue
Central bay gallery variant
Additions

Most extant flounders appear to have been built at one time and do not have additions. Two-story houses were often built with rear wings that were usually narrower than the main block of the house. Not surprisingly, variants to this pattern exist. The rear flounder at 1901 Dodier appears to have been built in three stages, all of which are of approximately the same size and maintain the flounder form. The flounder at 3533 Missouri consists of two flounders, the second of which is larger than the original building.

Flounders of all heights have received additions to the rear. These additions are usually secondary in scale and have a shorter shed roof or a flat roof. Most additions do not obscure or envelop the flounder form. Some flounders have received small additions on the street side; some examples on alley flounders consist of a room-sized addition with an entrance that faces the street. A few additions provided commercial space in front of the flounder.

Some of the smallest flounders have received several additions, as 2206 Gaine demonstrates.
Common Flounder Types

While the extant flounders in St. Louis vary extensively, there are some types that represent common building practices. Some of the types are based on form, architectural features and overall presence; others on the building’s use. It is impossible to know how common these types were initially, and therefore the current number of each extant type is an artificial indicator of the relative popularity of the type historically. Also, many flounders do not fit exactly into one of these categories and certainly referring to any building that fits the definition as provided herein as a flounder is sufficient for identification. The offering of types is intended more to establish a vocabulary for discussion than to strictly categorize the buildings.

The Freestanding Flounder

While this type of flounder has many variations, the important fact that the dwelling was initially free-standing is defining. These flounders are located at the building line, at mid-lot, and at alleys. Many of them have a hipped-front roof; many of them have a side entrance and a gallery is not unusual. Despite the dense development in the city where most extant flounders were built, the free-standing house was clearly one of the preferred forms of housing.
The No-Longer Freestanding Flounder
Flounders that have been incorporated into larger buildings are not as common as one might expect. Most of the examples noted are rear wings that clearly do not have the typical form of the rear flounder ell and can be documented to have been originally freestanding. The rear building at 736 S. Broadway has been connected to the front building with small wings, but was initially a freestanding building. Evidence on the building indicates that the flounder at the rear of 1231 Allen Market was built first. 4048 Nebraska and 1905 Obear (pictured on Page 6) are additional examples of this type.

In the Patch neighborhood at the extreme south of the city, many of the earliest extant flounders are now incorporated into larger buildings. A discernable pattern has been identified where the first building on the property is a small flounder — usually frame — sited on the parcel in such a way as to allow future construction of a front block at the street. A few years later, a 1 or 1-1/2 story, 2-room house was attached at the front. 215 E. Schirmer is an example. It appears on the Hopkins 1883 Atlas without its front addition, which was constructed c. 1890.
The Townhouse Flounder
The townhouse flounder is two stories in height, likely with a loft or attic, and is usually brick and positioned at the building line and may have a front or side entrance. This type of flounder is often set close to or abuts other buildings and has a regular façade that presents only windows to the street. Their shed roofs have hipped fronts, providing the horizontal eaves for a corbelled brick or wood cornice. Many of these buildings have a single small gabled dormer above the bay near the taller windowless wall. With the regular bays and arched window heads and stone sills, these buildings have the overall presence of a townhouse and typically fill the entire width of the lot or are separated by narrow gangways. Some galleries of townhouses serve also as access to the rear yard when buildings are abutting. 1041 Allen is an example of a townhouse with a variant on the gallery wherein the lower story is an internal walkway only as the building is abutted by its neighbor. Other townhouses in Soulard have narrower passageways to the rear of the lot and buildings located there, locally known as “mouseholes.” A row of townhouses clearly identifiable on S. 11th on the Compton & Dry Pictorial plate shown below, most of which is intact, is an important example of the presence of the townhouse flounder in the Soulard neighborhood.
The history and use of these buildings has suggested that “townhouse” better describes their appearance than their use as dwellings, as a townhouse was typically occupied initially as a single-family dwelling. The common occurrence of this property type in the Soulard neighborhood prompted the study of one block on which several examples still stand. City directories indicate that at least during the 1880s and later, this small sample of flounders was occupied by several individuals or families. The directories indicate that the occupants moved frequently, suggesting that what appear to be townhouses were actually low-cost rental properties soon after they were constructed. The presence of galleries on many of these buildings, exterior stairs, and doors at both stories accessing the galleries, no doubt accommodated the occupants in access to various portions of the buildings.
The Raised Basement Flounder
A distinct type of flounder, yet one not particularly common in the extant group, is the flounder with a nearly full-height, or raised, basement. While it is common in St. Louis for the basement windows to be above grade, those windows are set high in basement walls. The raised basement flounder has a significantly taller basement above grade. Some of the raised basement flounders are quite small, suggesting that the basement needed to be more than an ancillary portion of the building. It is known that the raised basement of 2121 Crittenden (pictured on Page 19) was historically the kitchen,¹ and that use likely occurred elsewhere as well.

² Jan Cameron’s personal inspection.
The Semi-Detached Flounder
There are enough extant pairs of flounders to identify the semi-detached flounder as a type that appears throughout the areas where flounders were commonly built. Some pairs were built at the same time, but are slightly different. Both the wood-framed pair on Gaine and the brick pair on Pennsylvania have the same variation in the attached flounders: one unit has a side gallery and the other does not. Some of the attached pairs are nearly identical flounders that have hipped fronts on shed roofs. The taller blind walls are the party walls that extend above the roofline with a curb-height fire wall. Other pairs do not appear to have been built at the same time but are quite similar, such as the alley houses at 915 and 917 Geyer (pictured on Page 5). Other semi-detached flounders terminate a group of rowhouses and abut other buildings. A group of three rowhouses facing N. 13th Street on a lot with a Warren address are identical except that the one at the edge of the alley is a hipped front flounder and the other two have a side-gabled roof.
The High Style Flounder
Few of the extant flounders have the architectural presence to take them out of a vernacular building type. Yet when a flounder exhibits a style, it is likely to be the Federal or Italianate style. 2007 E. College has a fully-developed, Federal style five-bay façade facing the side yard, rather than the street, in a common flounder orientation. The entrance is located in the central bay; a replacement porch reveals the ghost lines of a gabled entrance porch. The prominent wood cornice is bracketed on the side façade only; an intersecting gable in the roofline allows space for an oculus window at the center bay. Hipped ends to the shed roof continue the horizontal eaves across the front and rear walls. Window openings have prominent flat stone lintels and sills. A similar house at 2719 James Cool Papa Bell was almost as grand; window alterations and an addition to the front of the building have diminished its ability to convey its original presence. Other flounders of this type, including 1923 Compton, have elements of Italianate and other late 19th century house types and styles, such as bay windows.
The Commercial Block Flounder
A small number of extant flounders were built for mixed use and otherwise have the common attributes of two-story commercial blocks in St. Louis. Located at corners, they provide one or more storefronts on the ground story and residential space above. The flounder version of this common building type differs mainly in roof form. The example at 2300 Menard Street dates from the 1870s while the commercial blocks at 2901 Salena and 2348 McNair, built just a few years later, have larger storefronts.
The Outbuilding Flounder
The survey documented a few flounders that due to their size and location may be non-residential in function, or outbuildings, on a lot with a main building. A small brick flounder, labeled as a smoke house on a 1909 Sanborn map, stands as part of a larger alley complex of buildings at the rear of a N. Florissant property. Another small flounder, one that stands in a rear yard, was also identified as a smoke house on a historic map. Some of these flounders have a door and windows, suggesting use that requires light and ventilation. The 1909 Sanborn map for 2203 Rear Menard notes that the small flounder was used as a cigar factory.
The Complex Massing Flounder
This is a less common flounder type, but one that shows the popularity and adaptability of the flounder form. The flounder at 3919 Nebraska, built with a narrow two-bay façade facing the street, was enlarged with a second flounder form positioned to form an L-plan dwelling and doubling the width of the façade. Map evidence suggests that 2907 Crittenden was built in its current form. The bays projecting from the flounder form at 4128 Michigan form another example of unusual massing.

2907 Crittenden Street
3919 Nebraska Avenue rear
4128 Michigan Avenue
3919 Nebraska Avenue
The Heyday of Flounders in the Walking City: Where and When Flounders Were Built in the City of St. Louis

Residential Development in St. Louis, 1850-1900

An overview of residential development in St. Louis provides some context for the time and places where flounders were built. The periods of interest are the mid-19th century “Walking City” era and the expanding city served by streetcars.

The Pre-1870 Walking City

Most historians agree that the oldest extant residential buildings in St. Louis were constructed about 1830 and few of those remain.\(^2\) Reconstruction of the riverfront during the heyday of riverboat commerce, changing use of the city center, as well as the growth of industry and population have eliminated nearly all evidence of the city founded in 1764.

The early village of St. Louis on the west bank of the Mississippi River had a low density and residential parcels were large with small dwellings, outbuildings and gardens. By the second decade of the 19th century, St. Louis was beginning to take on an urban character. The size of its population increased dramatically in the late territorial period, as did its manufacturing and marketing capacity. Immigrants from the east and south arrived, and brought with them additional house forms, which were combined with earlier French types. The town’s founders began subdividing the original blocks into narrow lots, thus accommodating many more buildings. The physical size of St. Louis, however, remained small. This period of St. Louis history is referred to as “The Walking City” because its extent could be traversed on foot in a short time.

The village of Old North St. Louis was established in 1816 north of the city’s present-day central business district. By the time the village was absorbed into the City of St. Louis in 1841, some of the area had been subdivided for development. After that time, the neighborhood became densely developed with rowhouses and dwellings at both the streets and alleys.

Carondelet, founded as a separate village south of St. Louis, expanded significantly in size and population during the late 1850s. As industries located in the area during the 1860s, both the population and building construction continued to increase. The village was annexed into the City of St. Louis in 1870. As an outlying area, many of the earlier houses were small and were of both frame and brick construction.

\(^2\) This summary relies heavily on A Preservation Plan for St. Louis, Historic Contexts (Jeffrey E. Smith, Janus Applied History Group, 1995), Architecture section, available at https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/planning/cultural-resources/preservation-plan/St-Louis-Preservation-Plan-TOC.cfm. This document does not have reference notes.
The Rise of Density and Scale of the City with Streetcar Suburbs
St. Louis’ physical development, like most cities, began with a compact urban core of residential, commercial and industrial buildings, with dependent rural farming activities in the surrounding countryside. Prominent city families had country estates in the outlying areas near the common fields — shared agricultural lands — in addition to their homes in the town. Urban and rural housing were mostly distinct in form and character, and evolved from different architectural roots. Most of the city which today appears to be very urban, was farmland until the later 19th century. As St. Louis expanded, existing rural housing types were absorbed into denser urban fabric. Occasionally an older building would influence the alignment of a street or the setback of a block.

In 1870, most of the land west of Grand Avenue was not subdivided. The development of the city recorded in the Compton & Dry Pictorial of 1875 conveys many patterns, including the development that occurred along the historic roads extending away from the city such as Gravois Road (later Avenue), Manchester Road (later Avenue) and St. Charles Rock Road (later Easton Avenue; now Dr. Martin Luther King Drive). Industrial operations, from manufacturing to brick making, were interspersed with residential development. In the partially developed areas — particularly between Jefferson and Grand Avenues — houses stood on solid ground near sink holes, quarries and ponds. Urban density, with virtually every lot occupied, extended from the Soulard neighborhood on the south, through downtown and north to Old North St. Louis. The Hyde Park neighborhood was the northern concentration of development. The N. Garrison - Jefferson Avenues intersection area of Midtown was the western concentration.

Another area that might well have had more flounders is the area west of Jefferson Avenue extending to Compton Avenue, from the railroad through the east-west central corridor of the city south to Chippewa Street. This seems likely due to delayed development, as in 1875 this area was a combination of forbidding topography with many sink holes and larger estates. The 1883 Hopkins Atlas shows platted blocks and streets forming a grid through the large area, yet many blocks were entirely undeveloped.

Some flounders were built in the areas of what is now St. Louis City which were essentially rural in 1875, indicating that the sense of what were rural and urban house forms at that time was not rigid. Two exceptions to the sense that flounders are an urban vernacular house form are the Abeln flounder at 3466 Grace Avenue (Pictured on Page 37), the home of a farmer, and the house at 3919 Nebraska that is depicted in the 1875 Compton &Dry Pictorial as a small agricultural property that includes grape vines.

Nevertheless, the survey of the areas west of Grand Avenue, including the Oak Hill neighborhood south of Arsenal Street, suggests that beyond the urban core, other types of small residences were built more often than flounders. A close study of the Compton & Dry Pictorial would likely reveal additional documentation of mid-nineteenth-century rural and edge-of-the-city house forms.
During the 1880s, the area west of Grand Avenue experienced some development: streetcar suburbs appeared in both the north and south areas of the city east of Grand. Few flounders stand in this part of the city, where multi-family buildings dominated in an area served by streetcars.³

By 1900, however, only the most western and southwestern portions of the city had yet to be platted. The expansion of the built environment in St. Louis during the decades prior to the turn of the century was intense and transforming. St. Louis' population rose from 160,773 in 1860 to 350,518 in 1880 and 575,238 in 1900.⁴ The growth of the built environment was commensurate with the rise in population. House construction patterns were marked by larger size, more sophisticated dwelling design and construction of groups of buildings by developers. The current city limits were set in 1876, and were assumed to be all the space it would ever need; but twenty-five years later, its population had expanded to such an extent that there were no longer any rural areas within the boundaries of St. Louis.


The Construction of Flounders within this Development Pattern

Most of the remaining flounders in St. Louis were built during a heyday period of the 1860s through the 1880s. As the map of the existing flounders shows, a vast majority of the flounders are located in the older portion of the City, east of Jefferson Avenue. However, a group of flounders was built west of Jefferson, in the vicinity of Cass; and several others were built west of Jefferson on both sides of Gravois Avenue. Another cluster appears west of Jefferson, between Miami on the north and Meramec on the south. Another large cluster is located in the southernmost area of the city, in the Patch neighborhood. The outliers are sometimes representative of early development in an area, and in other cases seem to be atypical building choices for the area.

While the geographic distribution of flounders in the older portions of the city was broad, and included Carondelet at the far south, flounders are noticeably absent from a few areas. No flounders were found in Baden, which was a small town with a German population until it was included in the City’s boundary in 1876. Residential construction in Baden during the decades after 1876, when flounders were built in many other areas of the city, did not include any buildings that are still standing. Like Carondelet to the far south, this area was not included in the Compton & Dry Pictorial.

With the absence of firm construction dates for many of the flounders, dates of construction for extant flounders were estimated, based on historic maps of the city. Table 1 summarizes properties by eras of construction and some common characteristics. Nearly 90 percent of the extant flounders were built prior to 1883; approximately two-thirds, some 180 flounders, were built prior to 1875. The ratio of less-than-two-story flounders to two- and two-and-one-half story flounders is approximately one-third to two-thirds; about half of the remaining flounders built between 1876 and 1883 are less than two-stories, suggesting that the less-than-two-stories form was more popular during that time frame although many more two-and-one-half story-flounders remain from the 1884-1909 period. The use of the hipped-front shed roof seems to have become more common after 1875; almost one-third of the pre-1876 flounders have this roof form while at least one-half of the flounders extant from the two later periods have roofs of this type. Overall, 40 percent of the remaining flounders have hipped front roofs, making this an important variant in roof shape.
Figure 2. Map showing all extant flounders in the City of St. Louis, 2015.
While it is more likely that brick, more so than frame buildings, remain standing over the long term in St. Louis, 90 percent of the remaining flounders are of brick construction while 10 percent are of frame construction. The percentage of frame construction flounders built and remaining from the 1884-1909 period is quite low, likely due to the preference for fire-resistant masonry construction in brick — widely manufactured in St. Louis — and the city’s expanding “fire limits.” Like other cities, St. Louis set “fire limits” that severely limited the construction of frame buildings within the most densely developed area of the city. The “fire limits” in 1856 extended as far north as Howard Street, west to 17th Street, and south to Chouteau and Park Avenues.\(^5\) It was expanded over time as the city grew, and by 1911, the “fire limits” extended from the Mississippi River on E. Carrie Avenue, N. Newstead Avenue and Natural Bridge on the north, jogging down on N. Union to Easton (Dr. Martin Luther King Drive) and west to the city boundary, along the north edge of Forest Park east to Kingshighway, south on that street to Arsenal and remaining west of Grand Avenue or on Grand, south to Loughborough, turning south on S. 8th Street and running along Marceau Street to the Mississippi River.\(^6\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME PERIOD</th>
<th>1, 1-1/2 STORIES</th>
<th>2, 2-1/2 STORIES</th>
<th>HIPPED FRONT ROOF</th>
<th>BRICK</th>
<th>FRAME</th>
<th>TOTAL PER PERIOD</th>
<th>NOTES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1875 &amp; earlier</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>1 three-story building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876-1883</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884-1909</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1 concrete block building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-1909</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 concrete block building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL FLOUNDERS</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>Total includes the 2 buildings noted above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Percentage of Total | 36.8% | 62.8% | 39.7% | 90.6% | 9.0% | 100.0% |

Table 1. Summary of dates of construction and common features\(^7\)

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\(^5\) City of St. Louis, *The Ordinances of the City of St. Louis, State of Missouri: Digested and Revised by the City Council of Said City in the Years 1855-56* (St. Louis, 1856), p. 429.

\(^6\) Commissioner of Public Buildings of the City of St Louis, *Building Laws of the City of St Louis: Comprising and Embracing the Revised Building Ordinances,* … (St. Louis, 1911), p. 29.

\(^7\) This table is compiled from the inventory forms completed as part of the City of St. Louis survey of extant flounders completed in 2015.
Temporal Trends
As so many of the still-standing flounders were built during the 30 year period prior to 1883, there are few observations that can be made about changes over time in flounder form and elements. A review of the properties built later, however, indicates that full-length side galleries are less common and that roof slopes seem to be lower-pitched than those of many of the pre-1883 flounders.

Two flounders west of where most flounders were built demonstrate these trends. The circa 1888 flounder at 6857 Southwest Avenue was built as one of the first houses on “Old Manchester Road,” now Southwest Avenue, near the west boundary of the City. The 1909 Sanborn Map shows a row of five brick houses and four frame ones. As all of these buildings remain standing, the group demonstrates that one of the brick houses was a flounder, suggesting that in circa 1890 a modest flounder might still be built. The flounder, with a hipped-front roof, is quite similar to earlier one-story flounders except that it has a front entrance and has a small recessed rear corner porch rather than a full side gallery. 1127 Kentucky Avenue, built in what is now the Forest Park Southeast neighborhood (south of I-64 and east of S. Kingshighway, southeast of the city’s Forest Park), is also west of most of the flounders recorded in the city. This circa 1890 one-story flounder has a side entrance, no gallery, and a low-pitched hipped-front roof.
The Flounder as an Urban Vernacular Building Type

The presence of the flounder vernacular house type in Alexandria, Virginia and St. Louis, Missouri has fascinated many observers of residential buildings. Christopher Martin studied the extant flounders in Alexandria during the 1980s. The presence of flounders in other cities has been briefly noted, but is not known to be well documented. This study of the collection of flounders in St. Louis adds to our knowledge of this building type. Nevertheless, the answer to “why the flounder form?” remains somewhat a mystery although this project supports some theories more than others.

Architects and architectural historians became interested in this vernacular building type by the mid-twentieth century. Architect Steven Holl included the flounder as an urban house type in his *Rural & Urban House Types in North America* (1982) about the same time that Martin was studying the building type in Alexandria. Holl’s introduction pays homage to Fred Kniffer’s typological approach to studying American vernacular buildings, adopting that approach conditioned by an interest in presenting those types having a “simplicity and integrity of construction and expression which link them to modern architecture” and as being thought-provoking. Holl studied urban house forms in the context of “the individual building and the larger pattern of the city,” mainly through attention to the definition of a public street or place, the use of public street façades, party or blind walls, and walls internal to the block in relation to overall city form and structure. The brief text relies on images to convey many of these concepts. Holl’s publication places the flounder in a group that included the much more commonly known shotgun house and rowhouse.

Holl offers some explanations for the building form. He suggests that the use of the blind wall and positioning it at the property line was a means to emphasize the dividing wall and that it might be a “variation on builder’s row houses, intended for continuous repetition.” Holl quotes a St. Louis Heritage report that “the intent of the form was to shed rainwater to one side of the property” and reports as explanation for the form the (unverified) avoidance of taxes.

The Alexandria Study

Christopher Martin’s examination of flounder houses in Alexandria, Virginia, summarized in the 1986 article, “‘Hope Deferred’: The Origins and Development of Alexandria’s Flounder House,” was based on an extensive folklore-inspired study of 17 surviving buildings of the known 30 examples of the house type in that city. Martin reviewed three common folklore explanations of the flounder form in attempting to understand the origins of these houses in Alexandria, which he dates to the 1830s: (1) a building ordinance that required construction on a lot within

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9 Holl, Introduction and pp. 5-6
10 Holl, p. 38
11 Ibid. The report is not identified.
a prescribed time in order to limit land speculation; (2) that the absence of windows in the
taller wall was a means to limit the amount of taxes paid on window glass; and (3) that the
easy-to-build flounder was erected inexpensively as a rear ell of a projected eventual larger
residence. Martin found no evidence to support the first two assumptions and notes that of the
remaining examples of flounders in Alexandria, only seven are far enough from the front of the
lot to support the rear ell theory. More of the remaining flounders stood at the street or in mid-
block locations.

Martin finds a “half-house” theory to have some merit, which explains the windowless taller
wall as a possible party wall if the construction of an adjacent building resulted in a semi-
detached pair of dwellings. His survey of the surviving examples notes that most of the taller,
windowless walls were positioned at a side lot line and concludes that there were two intents in
this placement: maximizing the other side yard’s width and preparing for a semi-detached
relationship with an adjacent building. However, Martin finds the most compelling support for
the half-roof form in building construction methods; he suggests that the single-slope roof
reflected ease of construction by eliminating rafter-to-rafter joinery, more so than a savings of
roof-framing materials. This explanation, based on the assertion that flounders were
inexpensive, small urban houses, correlates with evidence that they were erected by a builder
for small business owners and skilled craftsmen.

Martin understands a flounder house to be a traditional single-room-deep building plan rotated
to present a short end to the street with several other adaptions, including replacing a gable
end wall window with a door that faces the street. Martin concludes that the roof shape is an
urban adaptation and that flounders, built during a 90-year period in Alexandria, constituted
only a small percentage of the buildings in Alexandria.

Martin notes the presence of flounders in other cities: Fredericksburg, VA; Newcastle, DE;
Charleston, SC; Cincinnati, OH; Pittsburg, PA; Boston, MA, as well as St. Louis. He suggests this
spread of the half-roof form confirms the form as an urban one that adapts local rural house
plans for city use as a practical way of building. Consequently, rather than expressing deferred
plans to erect a larger house, the flounder was a modest house type of its own, placed
intentionally on a lot, and inexpensively constructed for working-class occupants.

The Flounder as a St. Louis Vernacular House Type
In St. Louis, the flounder was discussed in the Soulard Neighborhood National Register District
nomination of 1972. The nomination noted the common occurrence of the “pre-Victorian”
house type and noted how the “rear to front” sloping half-gable roof of 1812 S. 8th (pictured on
Page 4) suggested “that the home was intended to be twice the actual size” and had an
“unfinished appearance.” The suggested reason for the form was “supposedly to elude the tax
assessor.”13 The half-finished appearance may be evident in both the rear to front sloping roof
mentioned in the nomination and the more common single side-sloping roof. The tax avoidance
explanation for the flounder is unsupported by evidence in St. Louis.

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13 Soulard Neighborhood Historic District Nomination, p. 7.3.
Several vernacular house types were used in St. Louis during the mid- and late-19th century at the time that flounders were built and the city was attaining its predominantly brick city character. Those from the earliest period, when St. Louis was a “walking city,” include small houses with several features commonly found on flounders, in particular a side entrance and a side porch, or gallery. The gallery, typically a two-story side porch that incorporated a staircase to provide access to the upper level, is the dominant feature for the early vernacular house type called a “Side Gallery House” and is also a defining feature of what has been known as the “Charleston House” type in St. Louis. The typical Side Gallery House was a frame, one-and-a-half-story-building with a gallery extending along one side, where the door or doors are located. The Charleston House term is used in St. Louis for a brick dwelling where a brick “wing wall” extends by one bay to front a side gallery. The “wing wall” provides additional privacy for the gallery and adds to the street presence of the dwelling by making it appear to be a bay wider than it is. The entrances to these houses were typically from the galleries, leaving the street façade as a public wall with windows only. Alternately, there is an entrance through the wing wall into the gallery.

Flounders have been considered to be a separate and important vernacular house type in St. Louis. Those with only shed roofs were associated with the city’s older working-class neighborhoods and exhibited a limited amount of ornamentation and might well be sited at an alley. The characteristics and varieties of flounders in the city, as now understood, are presented in another section of this document.

As more townhouses were built in the city after 1870, flounders tended to share characteristics with both Federal-style townhouses and more vernacular ones. Flounders as townhouses at the building line – as opposed to mid-parcel or alley locations – are two or three bays wide and usually 2 ½ stories in height. The use of regular bays and openings with arched heads and prominent sills of stone or wood was a very common characteristic and similar to that of other townhouses.

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15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
Documenting Flounders

Building permit research did not yield information for any flounders, although not all properties in the survey were researched in this way. As a large percentage of the flounders were built prior to 1883, building permits as a source of original owner and builder were known not to be available. When permits were researched for post-1883 buildings, the buildings could not be identified, as many pre-1900 permits do not have street addresses and owner and builder names did not match any known owner of a flounder.

Newly available digital resources were used in this research, primarily digitized city directories. The directories were searched in a manner similar to a reverse directory, via street name or number. This strategy was most effective with the 1890 city directory available at Washington University in St. Louis’ Unreal City website. Earlier directories were searched by name associated with the property – both using the search function as well as reading the pages for variants on spelling. This research yielded firm results during the 1880s as addresses were in use by then, as opposed to descriptions such as “east side of Nebraska near Gasconade.” Also, by that time, most current street names had been adopted.

Searches of deed indexes at the City of St. Louis Assessor’s Office yielded varying results. Sometimes the indexes did not indicate the next earlier conveyance and the search could not be continued. This research was particularly time-consuming as each property had to be traced from the most current transaction. The project did not include searching grantor/grantee indexes when the indexes did not further the search.

The concentration of flounders in the Soulard neighborhood and the desire to understand who built them prompted the scrutiny of one block in the neighborhood on which several extant flounders stand. These buildings are townhouse flounders originally thought to be single-family residences. Plat maps from the 1884-1886 period indicated that these blocks were part of a larger Allen family holding. Individuals holding leases, “lessees” were indicated for most lots and were posited to be likely occupants of the properties. However, city directories indicated otherwise and that the properties during the 1870s and 1880s were not single-family residences and housed various working-class tenants.

Census records available through the Ancestry.com website were also used. They were consulted primarily to identify occupations and country of origin. Evidence of this type suggests that flounders were occupied during the late 19th century by skilled craftsmen and small business owners in owner-occupied situations. Many of the flounders in Soulard appear to have been used as rooming houses and occupants were more typically laborers who frequently changed residences.

In addition to researching individual properties, CRO staff members attempted to address the “tax on windows” and building ordinance explanations for the form of the flounder. Digital full-text versions of St. Louis City ordinances for the years 1850, 1855-56 and 1860-61, during the era prior to and during when the first flounders were constructed were reviewed. Neither searching indexes for references to taxation and building codes, nor searching the texts for keywords such as assessment, building, and construction yielded any pertinent ordinances. The appropriate pages did not make any references to half-houses (flounders) or assessments being
based on factors other than the value of the property or the frontage of the lot. The search did not reveal any reference to anything in the building codes which would relate to the building of flounders, or an incentive for using the flounder form.18

**Visual Evidence of Flounders in St. Louis: The Compton & Dry Pictorial, 1875**

The best evidence of the number and variety in flounder houses is Richard J. Compton and Camille N. Dry’s 1875 *Pictorial Atlas of St. Louis* (referred to as *Compton & Dry Pictorial*); it is the earliest of the documentary sources used in the study and proved to be an accurate and invaluable aid to dating the construction of extant flounders.19 The pictorial encompasses a significant portion of what is now the City of St. Louis in a bird’s-eye view format that depicts the form of each building. The plates have a high degree of accuracy when the drawings are compared to existing buildings, and can be relied on to indicate number of stories, bays of windows, and roof shape. As the view is from an elevated position to the east of the city, primarily the east sides of buildings are drawn. The necessary foreshortening and overlapping buildings in areas of dense development obscure the detail of many buildings and sometimes only a building’s presence or absence can be determined.

Many flounders are easy to pick out because the single-slope roof was accurately depicted, either as a single-plane or with a triangular silhouette. The renderings in the pictorial include number of bays, and hence, convey relative scale of the buildings, as well as the presence of galleries. Some blocks in Soulard and other older neighborhoods are so dense with buildings the individual forms cannot be differentiated.

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18 Andrea Gagen conducted this research using the digital library at the Hathi Trust website, www.hathitrust.org.

19 *Pictorial St. Louis, the great metropolis of the Mississippi valley; a topographical survey drawn in perspective A.D. 1875*, by Camille N. Dry; designed & edited by Rich. J. Compton.
One pattern the *Compton & Dry Pictorial* confirms is that flounders were often included in the first development in an outlying area. These groups of buildings include several building types, not just flounders. Clusters of buildings along Gravois Road (now Avenue), including one at the intersection with Grand Avenue, depict a flounder that remains standing. This building is on the property acquired by John Abeln, a farmer, in 1871. The Abeln flounder, 3466 Grace Avenue, and others depicted in the vicinity, complicate the notion that flounders were an urban vernacular building type, as they show that the lines between rural and urban areas were not clearly drawn in rapidly expanding cities.
The *Compton & Dry Pictorial* clearly conveys that flounders were built amongst other building types. The view of Lemp Avenue in Benton Park displays this variety as well as the number of bays of flounders included in the survey, which the arrows point to. A flounder with a gallery on the street side and one with a gallery on the yard side on N. 13th Street are shown in a view of the southern portion of the Old North St. Louis neighborhood. Several alley buildings on the block have a flounder form.
Assessment of Significance

Thinking about Flounders

This survey of St. Louis flounders, despite the fact that it was a documentation of exterior form only and did not include the study of floor plans and roof framing, nevertheless indicates that the flounders in St. Louis are similar to those in Alexandria in many attributes. They may well have been built for the same reason: ease of roof framing. Also, the explanations that have been offered, but not substantiated, concerning taxes and building ordinances as the reasons for the flounder form, flourished in St. Louis as well as in Alexandria. The flounder house type appears to be one that was built in some cities, with unknown frequency, at least in the eastern United States. Until other studies and surveys are completed, St. Louis does seem to have the largest collection of extant flounders.

One of the objectives of the survey is to determine the historic significance of the vernacular property type and to develop concepts to assist in determining the historic significance of each building within the larger set and its eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (National Register). The project is sufficiently broad and deep to address character-defining features and to provide some guidance on the importance of the flounder building type in general.

One of the particular challenges to establish the eligibility of an individual flounder is that it would be difficult to document it sufficiently to support an argument for historical or architectural significance. The similarity of most flounders, with an architectural presence somewhere between strictly utilitarian and high style expression, does not support the concept that the most fully-developed Federal style flounders are the most architecturally significant even as they are certainly of interest and document the range of expression and acceptance for the flounder form. And as this survey indicates, there is no “classic” or “quintessential” flounder to be recognized with National Register eligibility. On the other hand, the comments below assert that the building type is an important one in St. Louis and are intended to help shape the consideration of eligibility of individual flounders.

Due to the many National Register-listed historic districts in St. Louis, most of the flounders in St. Louis have the status of contributing buildings in historic districts. Additional ones are in Certified Local Districts, a status that confers the benefits of National Register status along with review of exterior alterations and proposed demolitions under the local designation and individual historic district standards. Others are in local historic districts only. Consequently, approximately three-quarters of the over 275 flounders in St. Louis have been recognized as they are best understood – as one of the building types frequently erected prior ca. 1885 in residential neighborhoods.

Historical Significance Factors

The geographical spread of flounders in St. Louis complicates the relationship between location, date of construction and significance even as there are strong temporal and geographical patterns. Historic sources and the remaining flounders document a strong relationship between the portion of the City densely developed prior to 1883 and the presence of flounders. Yet the
time period during which flounders were constructed has resulted in some of them being located in what were not densely-developed areas at the time and hence are anomalies in neighborhoods developed primarily after 1885. As time of construction is a stronger pattern than location within the city, the pre-1883 flounders might be considered to have been built during the heyday of flounder construction in St. Louis, and therefore define a period of significance for the building type.

A similar question is whether some extant flounders are more representative of the building type than others due to their location in the city. The extant flounders demonstrate two patterns of development that reflect both time and place. The flounders remaining in areas where they were, and are, numerous document the pattern that the flounder was a common building type erected prior to 1883. The flounders in Soulard are particularly representative of this building pattern. Flounders built further from the dense urban development convey the pattern that the flounder was one of the building types erected at the outskirts of urban development. Both groups conform to the heyday period of flounder construction before 1883 and document the range of their use geographically. As both patterns of development can be documented, geographic location alone is not seen as determinant of historical significance.

A strong link between German builders, property owners and occupants and flounders was posited before the survey. The involvement of German ethnic builders and owners is supported by the information in existing National Register nominations and in the research completed on sample properties. While the German ethnic link is strong, it is both too common and yet not sufficiently understood to suggest that the construction of flounders is grounded in German ethnic building practice and history.

The builders and occupants of flounder houses appear to include a wide range of St. Louis residents except for the upper classes. Therefore flounders were both working- and middle-class housing in St. Louis. The small businessman and the skilled tradesmen have been identified as the first owners and occupants of flounders. A group of building tradesmen built and occupied the Howard Street group of houses. A plasterer and carpenter erected the semi-detached flounders on Gaine Street. These skilled craftsmen reflect broader groups of city residents – the many residents involved in the building trades in the quickly growing city and those who could build or purchase small homes – more so than any particular affinity for flounders.

City directories indicate that there was a shift in residents in some flounders by the later 1870s and 1880s as more flounders appear to have become rental properties with tenants that did not stay for many years. By the end of the first decade of the 20th Century, many of the flounders were “flats” buildings, likely with at least two rental units, one on each floor. This use suggests they were used as small, rental properties for working-class tenants. The sample research results suggest that, as with other factors, the builders and occupants of flounders were too varied to support a strong link with a discreet segment of the city’s population.

19th Century Flounders as a Significant Vernacular Property Type
The number of extant flounders in the City of St. Louis supports the notion of the flounder being a significant local building type. The Compton & Dry Pictorial indicates that the form was
an even more important component of streetscapes during the last half of the nineteenth century. The geographic distribution of flounders in relationship to the period of development supports the supposition that the number would be much higher if more of the older development of the city remained standing.

The St. Louis study reinforces the assertion that the flounder is a building type with a particular form: opposite walls of different heights spanned by a roof that is mainly a single slope, or shed, form. Yet, there is no “flounder style” and no readily identifiable “classic” or “quintessential” flounder, as the range of positions on lots, incorporation of common features, and use of both brick and frame construction demonstrate. The diversity within the parameter of the readily-identifiable form supports its significance, rather than dilutes it. The form was flexible in the placement of entrances and use of gallery porches and providing exterior access to the second floor. It was adaptable also in that it could be simply built or designed to have more of an architectural presence.

The flounder building form was one of the very common residential forms in pre-1900 St. Louis. It appeared not only in the free-standing houses addressed herein, but also as the very common form of rear ell. In a sense, it was a building block of the brick city prior to the common use of flat roofs. Every remaining flounder documents this important building type, particularly as variety and adaptability exemplify its character.

The understanding of vernacular buildings expands beyond that which can be firmly documented by tracing patterns of form, use, and geographic spread. The lack of consistent records on early buildings makes research challenging. The commonly-known actors who made the decisions to build a flounder – the original owner and/or builder – may not be known and therefore not available to lend structure to a narrative and argument. This survey has not revealed any designers or builders, patterns, timeframe, or architectural forms or elements that can be the basis for determining the architectural significance of an individual flounder, as is often the case for a vernacular building type. Nevertheless, it seems that every flounder that has character-defining features and meets the standards for integrity will be seen as architecturally significant in the context of St. Louis’ residential buildings.
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**Digital Resources accessed through Ancestry.com**


  *1860 United States Federal Census*
  *1870 United States Federal Census*
  *1880 United States Federal Census*
  *1900 United States Federal Census*
  *1910 United States Federal Census*
  *1920 United States Federal Census*


