Chapter 2: REPRESENTATIVE HISTORIC ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

The architecture of a building is described as a style composed of its overall form and decorative ornamentation. An architectural style reflects the prevailing needs and tastes of the time in which it was constructed, contributing to an understanding of the culture and society of that period. In respect to defining an architectural style, two primary elements should be considered: decoration and overall form. Decoration consists of ornamentation that is placed on a building. The design of the overall form involves the interplay of proportion, scale, massing, symmetry or asymmetry, as well as the relationships between solids and voids, or height, depth, and width.

There is a diverse array of architectural styles represented in the City of Fernandina Beach, giving the area its unique character. The styles found in the survey area were popular throughout the United States and particularly Florida during their periods of construction. Within the survey area, the identified historic resources can be categorized primarily as the following styles: Frame Vernacular, Masonry Vernacular, Cape Cod, Minimal Traditional, Modern Vernacular, and Ranch. The majority of the historic buildings in each of the identified Neighborhood Planning Areas reflect vernacular designs, which mean they do not exhibit distinct “high-style” features.

Frame Vernacular

Frame Vernacular buildings are one of the most common designs of structures identified during the survey. They are prevalent in each of the six identified Neighborhood Planning Areas. Like their Masonry Vernacular counterparts, Frame Vernacular buildings are designed without imitating a specific style. They are typically built by nonprofessionals and, in many cases, by the occupants themselves (McAlester 1990: 5). Vernacular can also describe "the native language or dialect of a particular region or place", and in Florida, the term "Cracker" is sometimes used to characterize frame vernacular structures (Haase 1992: 10-11). These structures tend to be simple, largely unornamented, and constructed out of readily available materials.

Generally, the Frame Vernacular resources in the survey area are one-story high, constructed of wood structural frames set on continuous concrete block foundations. Frame Vernacular residences built in the 1920s oftentimes exhibit Craftsman influences such as the exposed rafter tails and wide, overhanging roof eaves. The later Frame Vernacular residences of the 1930s and 1940s are commonly more modest than their predecessors, and display little roof overhangs and even fewer decorative elements. Frame Vernacular homes were less commonly built in the neighborhoods after World War II. Representative photos of Frame Vernacular residences in Fernandina Beach are included in Figure 4 and Figure 5.

Included within the Southside Neighborhood Planning Area are examples of Frame Vernacular structures which are commonly referred to as shotgun houses. The shotgun house is a narrow rectangular residence, one room wide, one-story tall and several rooms deep (usually three or more) and has its primary entrance in the gable end. Its perpendicular alignment breaks with the usual Euro-American pattern, in which the gables are on the sides and the entrance is on the facade or long side. Several were usually built at a time by a single builder, contributing to their relatively similar appearance and arrangement in rows along the streetscape. The examples in the Southside Neighborhood Planning Area typically feature full width front porches. Although

gable-entry houses occur in some parts of central Africa, the shotgun house is a new world hybrid that developed in the West Indies and entered the United States in the early 19th century (Vlach 1986).

The shotgun house was the most popular style of house in the Southern United States from the end of the American Civil War, through to the 1930s. Though initially as popular with the middle class as with the poor, the shotgun house became a symbol of poverty in the mid-20th century and many were demolished during urban renewal projects. Research indicates that there may have been more shotgun houses originally within the Southside Neighborhood Planning Area, but few of this type remain within the Neighborhood Planning Area today. A representative photo of a shotgun house is included in Figure 6.

Figure 4: Frame Vernacular Residences at the northwest corner of 10th Street and Alachua Street, within the North of the Downtown Historic District Neighborhood Planning Area, facing northwest

Figure 5: 229 S 5th Street (8NA1197), within the South of the Downtown Historic District Neighborhood Planning Area, facing northwest

Figure 6: Representative View of Shotgun Houses in the Southside Neighborhood Planning Area, 318-320 S 9th Street (8NA530-8NA531), facing southeast

Masonry Vernacular

Along with Frame Vernacular, Masonry Vernacular is one of the predominant styles identified within the survey area. Masonry Vernacular residences are commonly found throughout each of the six identified Neighborhood Planning Areas. The term “Masonry Vernacular style” is somewhat a misnomer as “vernacular” implies a lack of style. Masonry Vernacular buildings tend to be simple, largely unornamented, and constructed out of readily available materials. This style's guiding principle is the long tradition of simple masonry construction techniques used in Western architecture. Windows and doors are symmetrically spaced on a façade to form a regular rhythm of solids and voids called "bays." Where there is more than one floor, openings are aligned from floor to floor for structural purposes. Decoration is simple and limited usually to string courses, window and door lintels, and cornices.

The use of ready-mixed concrete revolutionized building techniques after 1920 (Rifkind 1980: 293). Buildings constructed after this time used concrete blocks which provided the same amount of strength as other traditional masonry units but were lighter and cheaper (McAlester 1990: 38). Many times, concrete block was covered in a veneer of brick, stone or stucco in order to make composite masonry walls and to enhance the exterior appearance.

Masonry Vernacular residences in Fernandina Beach are typically one- or two- stories with either concrete block or wood frame structural systems covered with stucco exterior walls (Figure 7 and Figure 8). Porches tend to be less prominent in the later residential examples.

Figure 7: Masonry Vernacular residences at Broome and N. 11th Street at 121 11th Street, within the North of the Downtown Historic District Neighborhood Planning Area, facing southwest

Figure 8: Masonry Vernacular residence at 306 Cedar Street (8NA1201), within the South of the Downtown Historic District Neighborhood Planning Area, facing east

Cape Cod Revival

The Cape Cod cottage is a folk style, developed during the late 17th and 18th centuries by English settlers. It developed in response to the New England climate, practical needs of the residents, and available materials. The original form was that of a one or two room house with a loft above and often a lean-to in the rear. Early Cape Cod residences were low and broad, and designed to endure the harsh northeastern winters. They were constructed on timber sills without a foundation such that they could withstand wind, and if the soil below eroded they could easily be moved to a new location. The Cape Cod residence is typically one-story with a steeply pitched side gable roof which is often punctuated by dormers. Cape Cod residences which exhibit the influence and detailing of the Colonial Revival style were most common from the 1920s through 1940s.

Relatively few houses within the survey area are Cape Cod Revival in style. This style was only identified within the North and South of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area. A representative photo of the Cape Cod style in Fernandina Beach is included in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Cape Code Revival residence located at 2002 Atlantic Avenue, within the North and South of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area, facing northwest

Minimal Traditional

The Minimal Traditional style emerged in the 1930s, at the height of the Great Depression, as a relatively low-cost alternative to its high-style predecessors. Minimal Traditional Style residences were identified within the North of Downtown Historic District, Southside, and North and South of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Areas. The style was likely utilized as a low cost housing type which could meet the need of the area's expanding population after the City's two mills opened in the 1930s.

Minimal Traditional residences were most often constructed by local builders using architectural plan books. Most models are relatively small one-story dwellings with gable or hip roofs and sparse architectural detailing. Common attributes of the style include moderate roof slopes and eaves with minimal overhang. Some models display dentils along a narrow frieze. Entrances often convey vague Colonial or Tudor influences, and front-facing gable extensions and large end, exterior chimney stacks often appear in combination.

In Florida, Minimal Traditional architecture gained some popularity in the mid-1930s in larger cities, such as Jacksonville, Miami, Orlando, and Tampa. Architects turned to the style to help address housing needs in a constricted economy, and deal with the excesses associated with house designs of the 1920s. Architectural journals and popular magazines helped disseminate the form. The style was found to be well-suited to suburban tract-house developments, which appeared in the late 1930s and 1940s, and remained a popular building form throughout the United States into the 1950s when the Ranch gained popularity (Minimal Traditional

Architecture 2007). A representative photo of a Minimal Traditional residence in Fernandina Beach is included in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Minimal Traditional style residence at 521 9th Street, within the Southside Neighborhood Planning Area, facing northwest

Modern Vernacular

Modern Vernacular buildings are similar to Masonry Vernacular structures except they incorporate Modern details into the designs. They are typically of concrete block construction clad in stucco, and are modest in design. The most common roof forms are flat or front gable with a gentle slope. The roofs often have wide, overhanging eaves and there are sometimes multiple levels of roof planes. What differentiates Modern Vernacular architecture from Masonry Vernacular architecture is that its design incorporates one or more of the following elements: concrete screen block, cantilevered elements, beanpoles, stucco relief ornament, decorative railings, and pylons.

Modern Vernacular residences were only identified within the North and South of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area. They are likely more common here due to the later development of the area, when Modern designs were gaining popularity. In addition, many of the houses in the North and South of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area are larger and contain more ornament. Thus, the Modern Vernacular style was a logical choice, as it represents a stylistic upgrade to the more commonly found Masonry vernacular residences located throughout all of the Neighborhood Planning Areas. A representative photo of a Modern Vernacular residence in Fernandina Beach is included in Figure 11.

Figure 11: Modern Vernacular style house located at 1806 Ash Street, within the North and South of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area, facing southeast

Ranch

The Ranch style originated in California during the mid-1930s and continued to be constructed through the mid-1970s. The popularity of this style is attributed to the increased dependence on automobiles after World War II and the cheaper land prices of the Post-World War II era. For these reasons, the sprawling houses could be constructed on large lots outside the central core of the cities. Also, following the World War II, the booming economy allowed property owners to build or buy homes larger than the ones constructed during the Depression and War years.

In Florida, many Ranch houses were constructed to take advantage of the temperate climate. Sliding glass doors and rear yard patios were popular design features of post-War Florida Ranch homes. The faint influences of Spanish Colonial, Prairie, and Craftsman architecture can sometimes be seen in Ranch-style buildings. The one-story buildings generally have an asymmetrical front elevation and a horizontal emphasis. They have low-pitched roofs that typically are hipped, but sometimes are gabled. The roofs usually are sheathed in concrete or barrel tiles, and the exterior is covered in a smooth stucco veneer. Fenestration consists of various metal windows including awning, fixed, and casement types. Ranch houses have few extraneous decorative features.

The Ranch style was only identified within the North and South of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area. Like the Modern Vernacular style, Ranch houses gained popularity in the later periods of development that the Neighborhood Planning Area was primarily constructed. The Neighborhood Planning Area also contains larger lots which can

easily accommodate the sprawling designs of Ranch houses. A representative photo of the Ranch style in Fernandina Beach is included in Figure 12.

Figure 12: Ranch style house located at 101 S 18th Street, within the North and South of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area, facing southwest