

Research Note

Contact the Missouri Cultural Heritage Center for more information on historic preservation and cultural heritage studies at the University.

For information on the Conley family and Victorian architecture, see:

Wayne Andrews, *Architecture, Ambition and Americans* (New York, Free Press 1968).

Conley-Miller Family Papers, Western Historical Manuscripts Collection, State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia.

Charles L. Eastlake, *Hints on Household Taste*. . . . (Boston, James R. Osgood 1878).

James M. Fitch, *American Building* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 2 vols. 1966-72).

Alan Gowans, *Images of American Living*. . . . (New York, Lippincott 1964).

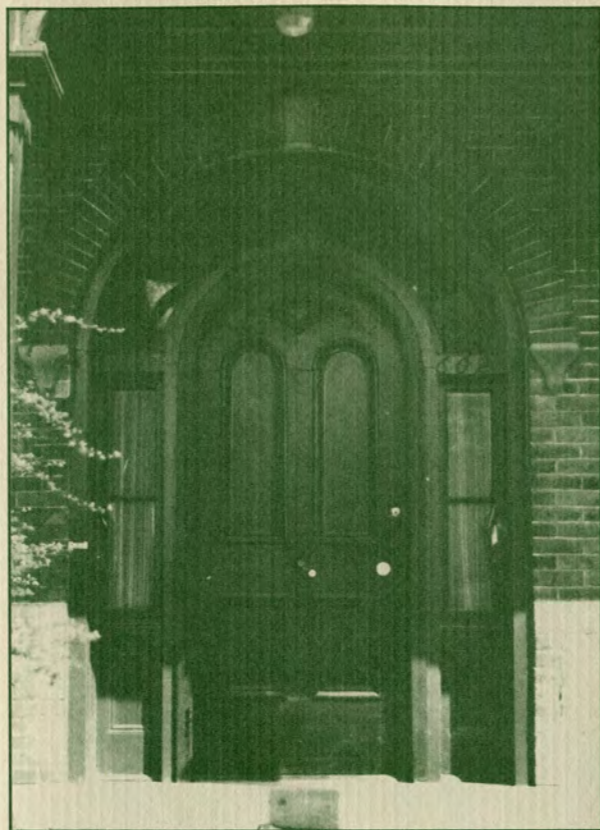
Toni M. Prawl, "The Conley House: A Promising Future for Reflecting the Past," research paper, Historic Preservation, University of Missouri-Columbia 1985.

Bruce Westbrook, "The Land and Life of Sanford F. Conley," research paper, Historic Preservation, University of Missouri-Columbia 1985.

CREDITS

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CONLEY HOUSE

*A reflection of the past;
A promise of the future*

Sanford F. Conley *Merchant-farmer typifies 19th century Missourians*

The Conley family came to Boone County in the wave of early settlement from Kentucky. Sanford Francis Conley, for whom the Conley House is named, was born in 1838 on the family farm six miles north of Columbia.

Like many young people in the pioneer days, S. F. was intrigued with the business world. He left the farm in 1853 to clerk at a drygoods store, thus beginning a successful mercantile career. In 1868, S. F. married Christian College graduate Kate Singleton, who also came from a family of transplanted Kentuckians.

After starting married life in a residence on the corner of Third and Broadway in Columbia, in 1870 the Conleys moved to their fine brick home we now call Conley House, where their six children were born.

Conley continued in the drygoods business in partnership with John S. Samuel, and also ran a Columbia sawmill. In 1884, he opened a farm implement and supply store, which he operated until his death in 1890.

As a farmer, a merchant and an active community member, Conley typified the enterprising people important in the evolution of the economy and cultural heritage of Missouri. His involvement in banking, educational reform and politics helped Columbia prosper.

Like many entrepreneurs of the time, S. F. Conley combined a relatively independent, rural lifestyle of raising fruits and vegetables in his garden, keeping laying hens for eggs and cutting his own firewood, with the emerging urban lifestyle of close neighbors and a reliance on storebought goods.

This transition from rural self-sufficiency to urban dependence on town businesses and services is illustrated by the collection of outbuildings that existed in the Conley yard. The original site included a red frame servants' quarters behind the house, a carriage shed, an ice house, a privy, a chickenhouse and other outbuildings yet to be researched.



Sanford and Kate Conley (photo courtesy of Cynthia S. Mustard)

Research on these buildings is part of an ongoing project directed by University of Missouri-Columbia archaeologists and students. Sections are being excavated each year, with selected items displayed in the Conley House gallery. Through study of the cultural landscape, we learn much about how people designed their living spaces and how they lived their lives.



Downtown Columbia, circa 1900 (photo courtesy of State Historical Society of Missouri)

Italianate Revival Victorian Architecture

Revival and mix of older styles brings something new

The Conley House at 602 Sanford Place in Columbia is an example of Italianate Revival Victorian architecture in Missouri. Completed in 1870, the building is one of the last surviving houses of the period in the Columbia area.

In Missouri, most Italianate houses, which were influenced by architecture of the Italian countryside during the Renaissance, are concentrated in metropolitan neighborhoods in St. Louis and Independence. Large and pretentious examples of the Italian Villa design echo the strong economic and social positions of the owners. On the other hand, in rural settings and in towns like Columbia, the preferred version was a simple cube with eye-catching ornamentation, such as ornate painted brackets under the eaves and a small cupola on the roof. The Conley House nicely combines fashionable ingredients from both urban and rural examples of Victorian architecture.

The Italianate Revival style of the Conley House is characterized by a low-pitched, mansard roof, arched doorway with arched lights, deep bracketed eaves and rose brickwork. The principal windows feature limestone lintels, and there are small eyebrow windows giving ventilation to the attic. The exterior speaks of a "fine house for a well-off businessman," says Howard Marshall, director of the Missouri Cultural Heritage Center and professor of art history. The two false windows on the north side, the source of local legends, square up and balance out the facade.

Yet, no two Italianate townhouses were exactly alike. The owner and builder selected architectural details and personal ingredients from the carpenter's manuals and catalogs at the lumberyard.

George Miller, grandson of S. F. Conley, recalls, "The assumption is that my grandfather bought mail-order plans for the house." This would explain the home's fancy exterior and relatively plain interior. Inside the Italianate facade lies a functional Georgian side-hall house that represents a continuation of vernacular housing from an earlier time. Typical of Missouri houses of the period, the stairways and

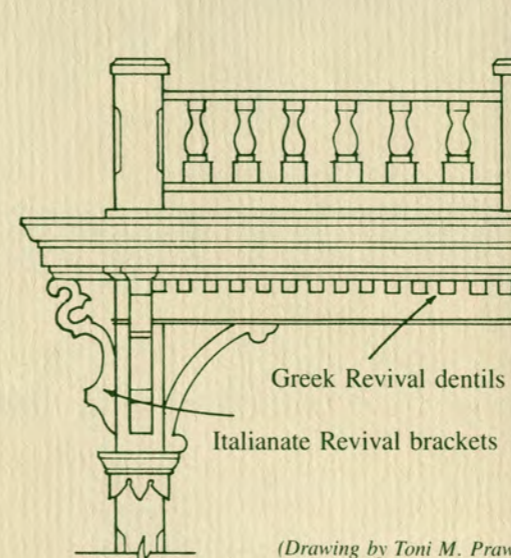


(photo courtesy University of Missouri)

mantels are made from native walnut. But the curved interior walls suggest the stylistic tastes of the Conley family.

The Conley House we see today illustrates the Victorians' tendency to mix elements from many periods in Greek, Roman and European architecture. For example, look under the eaves of the roof, where Italianate Revival brackets exist alongside the Greek Revival dentils.

Builders of houses like this sought *character*, and they achieved it. The house echoes the mood of the Victorian period when people deeply admired history and held romantic notions of daily living.



(Drawing by Toni M. Prawl)

Historic Preservation at the University

Promising future builds on historic past

The rehabilitation of the Conley House demonstrates the University's commitment to studying and preserving the heritage of Missouri. Conley House, which was placed on the *National Register of Historic Places* in 1973, is an important example of restoration planning and adaptive use of an historic building to meet modern purposes.

The University acquired the Conley House from the family in 1980. University architects and designers worked with local architect James Darrough to research the period and the house and evaluate the potential for future use. In consultation with the University Historic Preservation Committee, careful attention to detail included a search for craftsmen with such nearly-lost skills as woodgraining and plaster moulding reconstruction.

Research and preservation continue as archaeologists discover artifacts and remains of the original buildings. The historic landscape will be reconstructed, just as the house has been restored and remodelled.

The building houses the Missouri Cultural Heritage Center (Graduate School and Office of Research) and the Honors College (College of Arts and Science).

The Missouri Cultural Heritage Center and Conley House have become the focus for students pursuing studies in cultural heritage and historic preservation at the University. The Center's gallery on the second floor features changing exhibitions on Center research projects.