



Capitol Mansions

Historic District Plan

Physical Description & Boundaries

The Capitol Mansions Historic District is located within Sacramento’s original 1848 street grid between Capitol Park and Sutter’s Fort. The district consists of approximately 12 city blocks and is roughly bounded by K Street to the north, 27th Street to the east, Matsui Alley to the south, and 21st Street to the west. The district contains a mixture of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century residences, many of which have been converted into multi-family residences, offices, or businesses. The district also contains a few institutional buildings, such as churches and schools.

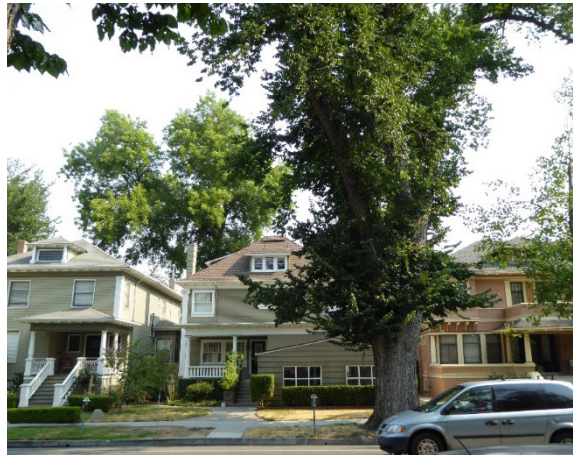


Figure 108. Large houses located on Capitol Avenue often display a variety of architectural style influences applied to a Classic Box form.



Figure 109. A variety of architectural styles are present in the district, including the Craftsman style.



Figure 110. Mature street trees planted in parking strips form a canopy over streets in the district.



Figure 111. A few civic/institutional and commercial buildings, such as the First Baptist Church (right) and this hair salon (left) on the corner of 24th and L streets are interspersed throughout the primarily residential district.

Brief Historic Context

The Capitol Mansions Historic District is so named because of the large, stately residences that line Capitol Avenue (originally M Street) and L Street. When Sacramento's street grid was laid out in 1848, M Street was designed to be the city's widest, measuring 100 feet across.¹ With the expansion of Capitol Park in 1872 and the completion of the Capitol building in 1974, M Street became the primary thoroughfare that led directly to the Capitol from the east and the west. As a result, the street was known as both M Street and Capitol Avenue throughout the late nineteenth century.²

Development in the Capitol Mansions neighborhood was limited until the last decades of the nineteenth century, when Sacramento's affluent middle- and upper-class residents began to migrate out of the increasingly overcrowded and industrialized neighborhoods near the city's waterfront embarcadero and West End business district to new neighborhoods that were emerging on undeveloped tracts to the south and east.³ Street construction and improvement projects spurred the initial period of residential development to these areas. The process of extending M Street eastward, between the Capitol grounds and the County Hospital on "the Stockton road," began in 1874, attracting some of the area's first residents.⁴ The introduction of a streetcar line down M Street between 15th and 28th streets in 1890 further accelerated development toward the end of the century by offering residents easy and efficient

1 Nathan Hallam, "The Evolution of Sacramento's Central City Street Grid," (master's thesis, Sonoma State University, 2003), 33.

2 Catherine Turrill Lupi, "Capitol Mansions Historic District Historic Home Tour," (brochure, Preservation Sacramento, 2018), 1.

3 Hallam, 63-64.

4 "City Intelligence," *Sacramento Daily Union*, October 27, 1874.

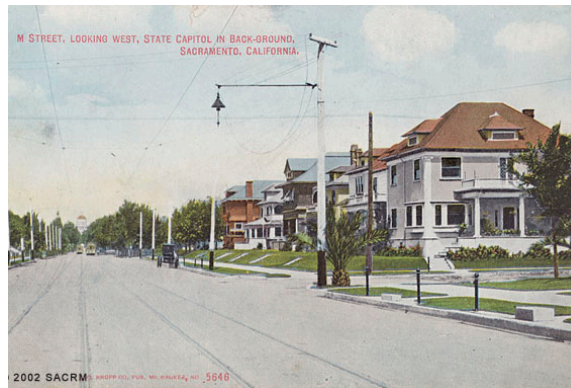


Figure 112. A postcard showing a view of M Street, looking west (1907). Source: Special Collections of the Sacramento Public Library.

transportation to the businesses and workplaces downtown.⁵ In 1895 the neighborhood was a patchwork of undeveloped parcels and generously-sized, wood frame dwellings, many with stables and small cottages for working-class residents located along the alleys that bisected each city block.⁶ By the start of the twentieth century, M Street had become one of "the very best streets in Sacramento," praised by the *Sacramento Union* newspaper for its "many handsome residences," "improved transportation facilities," and "best type of pavement."⁷

Meanwhile, Sacramento's eastward growth had

5 William Burg, "Sacramento's Streetcar Suburbs, Part 4: East Sacramento and Elmhurst," *Sacramento History* (blog), September 5, 2007, <http://sacramentohistory.blogspot.com/2007/09/sacramentos-streetcar-suburbs-part-4.html>.

6 Sanborn-Perris Map Company Ltd., Sacramento, California [map], vol. 1, 1895.

7 Evaluation Committee of Sacramento Heritage, Inc., "Phase I: Central City Historic Resources Inventory, New Identified Historic Resources" (Planning Division, Sacramento Community Development Department, 2000), 323; "A Meeting and a Moral," *Sacramento Union*, July 25, 1906.

begun to encroach upon the ruins of Sutter's Fort, the settlement where the city had begun in the 1840s. By the 1880s, the fort had been abandoned and neglected for several decades, and the majority of the complex had severely deteriorated or collapsed. While the parcels in the Capitol Mansions neighborhood to the west were filling up with new residences, the lots to the south of the fort remained vacant fields. The city's street grid, which had been laid out in 1848, seemed to anticipate the fort's demise, cutting headlong through the fort's footprint so that its southwest corner protruded into L Street.

The Native Sons of the Golden West, a fraternal organization founded by early California settlers and their children, recognized Sutter's Fort's significance to the state's history and began to raise funds to purchase the blocks on which the fort stood in order to reconstruct it to its appearance during the



Figure 113. Sutter's Fort prior to restoration (1879). Source: California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento, California.

Gold Rush. The Sacramento Chamber of Commerce supported the plan, recognizing its value as a means of attracting homebuyers to the area and establishing a much-needed park for the new neighborhoods that were forming nearby. In 1907, the state purchased the blocks between L, 26th, M, and 28th streets and rerouted L Street around the fort's reconstructed southwest corner.⁸

By 1915, the large, single-family dwellings that had characterized the neighborhood's first period of development had been joined by multi-family apartment buildings and flats. Automobile service and repair garages also appeared, a sign of the automobile's growing popularity. As the city's population grew over the subsequent decades and middle- and upper-class residents continued to move further east, many of the large residences were converted to commercial uses, such as boarding houses, bed and breakfasts, and offices, while others were subdivided into apartments.⁹ More recently, new office and apartment buildings have been constructed within the district as infill developments.

⁸ Hallam, 70-73.

⁹ "2018 Preservation Sacramento Historic Home Tour," Preservation Sacramento, accessed July 20, 2018. <http://www.preservationsacramento.org/hometour>.

Significance

The Capitol Mansions Historic District was designated for listing on the Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Resources by the City Preservation Commission in 2004 in Ordinance #2004-009. At that time, it was determined to meet all of the requirements and factors for listing as defined by Sacramento City Code.

The following table provides a current evaluation of significance under the requirements and considers the factors based on the above historic district context and the 2018 historic district survey. Additionally, this historic district relates to the Railroad Context Statement of the city’s General Plan Technical Background Report.

(B) Listing on the Sacramento Register – Historic districts	
(1) Requirements	
(a)	The Capitol Mansions Historic District meets requirement (a) for listing on the Sacramento Register, because it is a geographically definable area.
(b)(i)	<p>The Capitol Mansions Historic District meets requirement (b)(i) for listing on the Sacramento Register as an area that possesses “a significant concentration or continuity of buildings unified by: (A) past events or (B) aesthetically by plan or physical development.”</p> <p>The Capitol Mansions Historic District is characterized primarily by large, stately houses that were built as part of a prestigious neighborhood for Sacramento’s wealthy residents at the turn of the century. The majority of the houses were built between 1895 and 1910 as single-family residences in the multi-gabled Queen Anne, Craftsman, Classical Revival, and Colonial Revival styles. They share a similar scale, age, setback, and common design features – such as high basements, wood detailing, and elegantly developed front stairs and porches – that create an overall cohesive grouping.</p> <p>The arrangement of these houses also preserves a long-standing pattern of residential development in Sacramento, in which the homes of the city’s wealthiest residents were constructed on the east-west streets, while more modestly-sized houses were built on the north-south streets, and stables and simple cottages for laborers were built along the alleys.</p>

Period of Significance: 1874-1939

The period of significance for the Capitol Mansions Historic District coincides with its development into one of Sacramento’s most prestigious neighborhoods, beginning with the extension of M Street from Capitol Park to Stockton Boulevard in 1874 and ending in 1939 when streetcar service on M Street stopped and city’s affluent residents began migrating to new suburbs further from the original 1848 street grid.

Property Types from the Period of Significance

- Residential
- Commercial
- Civic/Institutional

Architectural Styles from the Period of Significance

- Italianate
- Stick/Eastlake
- Queen Anne
- Folk Victorian
- Shingle
- Classical Revival
- Colonial Revival
- Classic Box
- Beaux Arts
- Gothic Revival
- Prairie
- Craftsman
- Tudor

(B) Listing on the Sacramento Register – Historic districts	
(1) Requirements	
(b)(ii)	<p>The Capitol Mansions Historic District meets requirement (b)(ii) for listing on the Sacramento Register as an area “associated with an event, person, or period significant or important to city history.”</p> <p>The concentration of large, single-family residences along Capitol Avenue and L Street reflects the period of Sacramento’s history in which affluent middle- and upper-class residents began migrating away from older neighborhoods in the city center to new residential neighborhoods that were developing on the city’s eastern and southern peripheries at the turn of the century. Like many cities around the country in this period, these new neighborhoods emerged primarily along streetcar lines that radiated from the city center. The conversion of many single-family houses in the neighborhood into apartments or flats over subsequent decades reflects the growing density of the neighborhood as the city continued to expand outward. The rise of the automobile and end of streetcar service to the Capitol Mansions neighborhood in the 1930s signaled a second migration of affluent residents, this time out of Capitol Mansions and into even newer neighborhoods outside Sacramento’s original city limits.</p>
(c)	<p>The Capitol Mansions Historic District meets requirement (c) for listing on the Sacramento Register as it aligns with the goals and purposes of historic preservation in Sacramento, as well as the city’s other goals and policies. Per the Sacramento City Code, the preservation of the district enhances the “city’s economic, cultural and aesthetic standing, its identity and its livability, marketability, and urban character.”</p>

(B) Listing on the Sacramento Register – Historic districts	
(2) Factors to be considered	
(a)	<p>Factor (2)(a) states that “a historic district should have integrity of design, setting, materials, workmanship and association.” The Capitol Mansions Historic District retains sufficient integrity to meet this factor for consideration as a historic district.</p>
(b)	<p>Factor (2)(b) states that “the collective historic value of the buildings and structures in a historic district taken together may be greater than the historic value of each individual building or structure.” The Capitol Mansions Historic District meets this factor because its buildings and structures represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose collective historic value is greater when taken as a whole.</p>

Character-Defining Features

Element	Character of Historic District
Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Historically single-family residences, some converted into multi-family units Interspersed churches and apartment buildings dating from the period of significance Parking and auxiliary uses located along alleys
Mass & Form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Varying building heights ranging from one- to four- stories tall with Delta-style high basements and raised first story Horizontal or square massing of homes facing lettered streets, particularly Capitol Avenue Smaller homes located on numbered streets
Cladding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Predominately wood siding, typically wide and narrow channel rustic, wood lap, and shingles of varying shapes; brick; and stucco Brick or clinker brick foundations, column bases, and chimneys
Roofs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prominent front-facing gabled or hipped roofs, often with a centrally placed dormer
Entries & Doors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delta-style configuration with staircases leading to primary entrances above a high basement Wood, brick, or terrazzo steps Paneled wood doors, often with a transom above, or integrated glazing
Windows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wood-frame double-hung, casement, paired, ribbon, cottage, and leaded glass windows Single- and multi-story bay windows in semi-hexagonal, squared, and rounded forms
Porches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prominent full- or half-width porches accessed by a staircase

Element	Character of Historic District
Ornamentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Typical ornamentation for the various architectural styles listed in the section above A wide selection of column types, including squared, tapered, turned, Egyptian, and Tuscan Classical Revival details, including fluted pilasters, scrolls, dentils, and garlands
Property Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wrought iron fences with brick piers or low brick retaining walls around small front lawns or gardens Brick patios with decorative bond patterns
Streetscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uniform setback for single-family houses, tending to be widest on Capitol Avenue Narrower setback on numbered streets Rows of mature, evenly spaced, deciduous street trees—most often elms and sycamores interspersed with rows of palms—planted in a parking strip Iron hitching posts with horseheads and evidence of removed hitching posts in the form of L-shaped concrete strips next to street curbs Some concrete upping blocks engraved with family names Varying sidewalk widths to accommodate street trees

Boundaries & Location

The following map shows the boundaries and location of the Capitol Mansions Historic District.

To view the statuses of individual properties as contributing or non-contributing resources to the historic district, refer to the Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Resources.

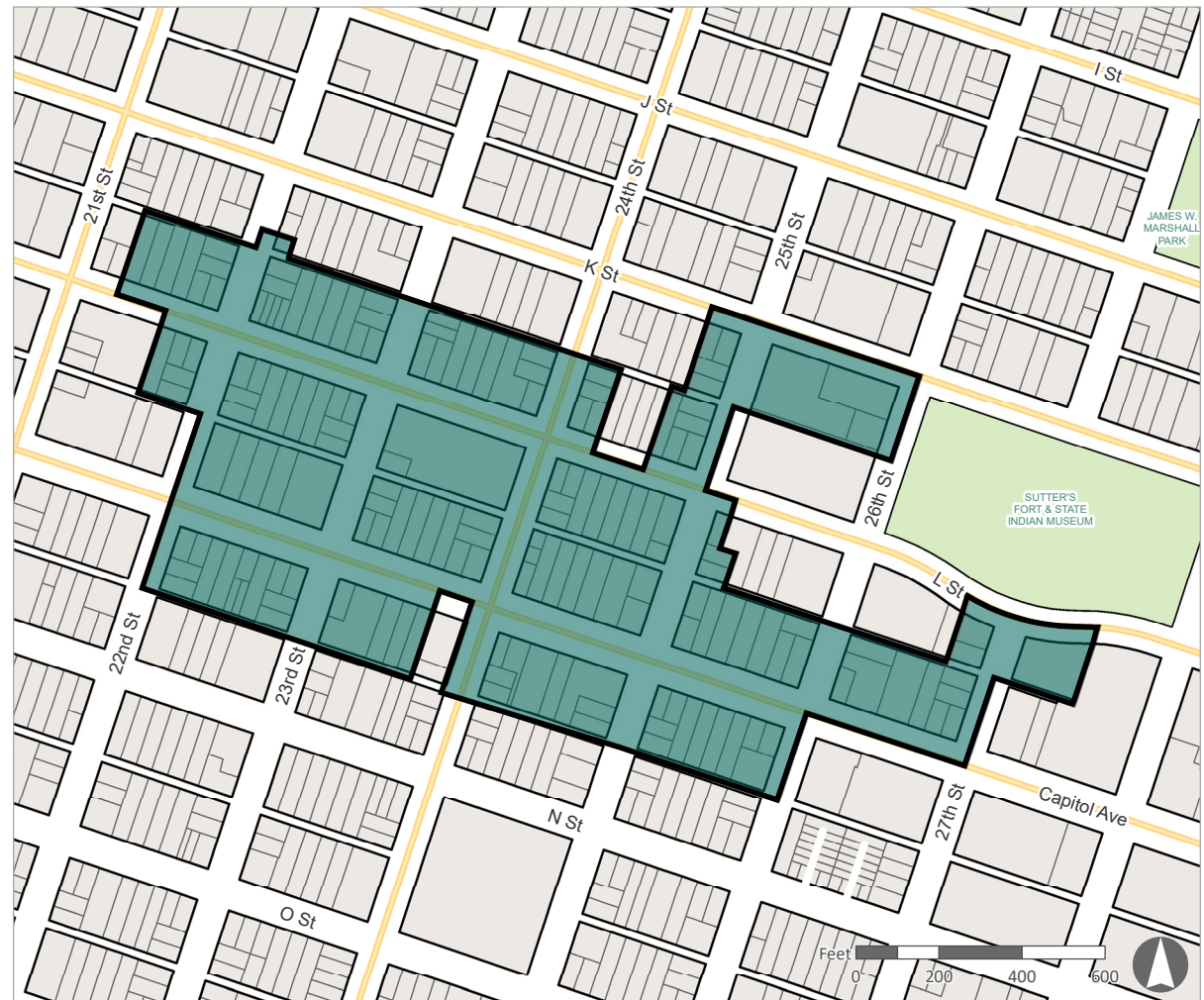
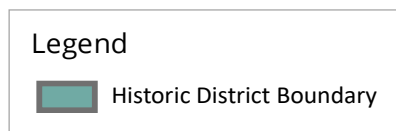


Figure 114. Map of the Capitol Mansions Historic District. Source: City of Sacramento and Page & Turnbull, 2019.

District-Specific Standards & Criteria

Design Principle

Treatment of contributing resources and new development in the Capitol Mansions Historic District must respect and draw inspiration from the precedents of scale, massing, setback, materials, and landscaping set by the contributing historic buildings in the district.

Rationale

The collection of large, Classic Box style houses that line Capitol Avenue are the most well-known feature of the Capitol Mansions Historic District. However, the district also contains a mixture of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century houses and a few historic churches and apartment buildings that add to the variety of architectural styles, heights, and massing in the district. In spite of the differences between individual properties, the district maintains a feeling of cohesiveness due to overall similarities in scale, setback, common design features, and landscaping.

In addition to the Standards & Criteria Common to Sacramento's Historic Districts in Section 1, the following district-specific standards and criteria apply when planning a project in the Capitol Mansions Historic District.

1. Rehabilitation of Contributing Resources

- 1.1 Protect carved, turned, or shaped wood treatments that are important features to the resource's architectural style.
- 1.2 Maintain, preserve, and, where necessary, repair and restore historic elements associated with the Delta style of residential architecture, especially historic staircases, porches, bay windows, and doors.



Figure 115. Rows of Classic Box style houses of similar height, scale, and massing on Capitol Avenue contribute to the district's cohesive streetscapes.

2. Additions & Accessory Structures for Contributing Resources

- 2.1 Avoid additions that make contributing buildings constructed in horizontally massed or box shape architectural styles, such as Prairie or Classic Box, more vertical or that make vertically massed Victorian-era buildings more horizontal.
- 2.2 Avoid additions that cause a building's height to exceed 150% of the height of surrounding contributing buildings.
 - Use step backs to maintain the existing street façade height.

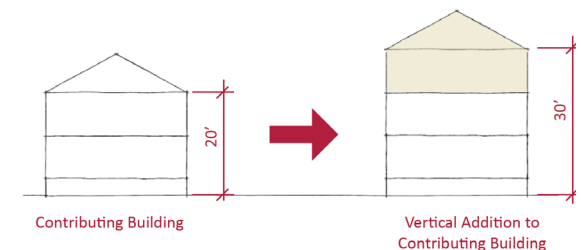


Figure 116. Additions should not cause a building's height to exceed 150% of its historic height.

3. New (Infill) Construction & Alterations to Non-Contributing Resources

- 3.1 Design building proportions on Capitol Avenue to be compatible with the uniform scale and box-like massing of contributing buildings along the street.
- 3.2 Where additional height is considered, the height of new buildings should be no more than 150% of the height of surrounding contributing buildings.
 - Consider using step backs for taller buildings to maintain the existing street façade height of adjacent contributing buildings.
- 3.3 Maintain the visibility of varying building profiles, shapes, and forms on streets surrounding Capitol Avenue.
 - Avoid designs that result in rows of identical new buildings.
- 3.4 Design new non-residential construction to be as compatible with the scale, height, massing, orientation, materials, architectural character, and pedestrian-oriented landscaping of the historic district as possible.
 - Break larger masses down into smaller modules that relate to the massing of surrounding contributing buildings.
- 3.5 Maintaining the deep, uniform setbacks and wide front lawns along Capitol Avenue.

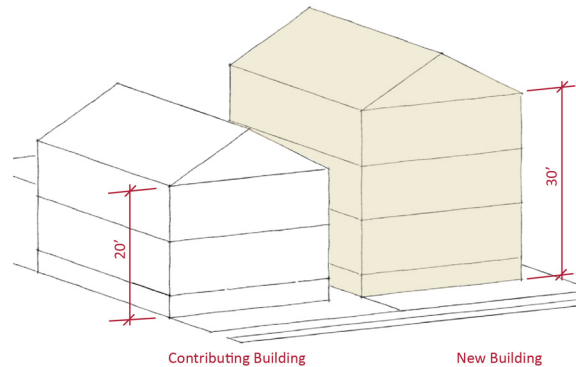


Figure 119. The height of new buildings should be no more than 150% of the height of surrounding contributing buildings.



Figure 117. Although Classic Box style houses are prevalent on Capitol Avenue, houses that exhibit other architectural styles and forms add to the district’s visual richness.



Figure 118. Uniform, deep setbacks allow for open, planted lawns in front of houses on Capitol Avenue.

- 3.6 Preserve the historic pattern and articulation of long, narrow 40' x 160' parcels, wherever possible.
- Consider breaking down the massing of large infill developments into smaller masses that reflect the historic lot pattern.
- 3.7 Consider providing covered front porches or entries at new infill development to preserve the historic district's visual pattern of porches, wherever possible.

4. Site Features, Streetscape, & Landscaping

- 4.1 Preserve and maintain the historic open, planted character, size, and grade of front yards.
- Avoid paving front yards to create parking pads.
- 4.2 Avoid adding fences or screening features in front of properties along Capitol Avenue.
- 4.3 Avoid creating new curb cuts on Capitol Avenue.
- Locate parking and service access along alleys, and use landscaping features to screen it from the public right-of-way, wherever possible.
- 4.4 Preserve and maintain historic hitching posts, upping stones, and carriage barns in their historic locations.



Figure 120. Paving front yards is discouraged.



Figure 121. The historic hitching posts and upping stones remain in some locations in the district.

5. Alley Infill

- 5.1 On a typical unsplit parcel, set back alley infill buildings a minimum of 30 feet from the primary building on the parcel. If a parcel is split, set back alley infill buildings a minimum of 15 feet from the lot split.
- 5.2 Aim to locate alley infill so that it is a minimum of 10 feet from contributing buildings on adjacent parcels.
- 5.3 The height of alley infill should be no more than 150% of the height of surrounding contributing buildings.

