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Cabell County Architectural Guide, Tour G: Barboursville

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CABELL COUNTY
ARCHITECTURAL
GUIDE

TOUR G
BARBOURSVILLE

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Some Suggestions for Using this Guide

The Architectural Guide of Cabell County is divided in the following tours (or sections):

- A. Huntington Downtown Section.
- B. Huntington Central Section.
- C. Huntington West Section.
- D. Huntington Northeast Section
- E. Huntington Southeast Section
- F. Guyandotte
- G. Barboursville
- H. Milton

If you are visiting for the city of Huntington for the first time, you probably would like to get a short, initial tour that would enable you to see the main downtown buildings. In that case, choose Tour A. This tour has a predetermined route, explained in the attached Map 1. It is designed to be a walking-tour that should take no more than two hours.

Then, you may be interested in visiting either all, or some other selected buildings that are scattered throughout the rest of the city. For this a longer, second tour is recommended, Tour B. This tour does have not a predetermined route, and it must be taken by car, since distances are long, and some locations are on hills too steep to walk comfortably. This same criteria has been adopted for Tours C, D and E.

The buildings of other Cabell County communities are included in Tours F, G and H.

If you are interested in a particular building, please consult the alphabetical table of entries for each tour, where you will find the page giving the location of its description.

Last, but not least, please do not trespass on the owners' property, no matter how eager you are to see and appreciate the architectural, historic, and artistic value of the buildings described here.

Main Sources

The author recognizes that he owes much of the information in this Guide to several scholars that were interested in Huntington and Cabell County buildings. Their work constitutes thorough antecedents to this Guide, and he desires to acknowledge each of them in a clear, explicit manner.

In the Guide quotes from the following works are placed in italics, followed by a number between brackets that correspond to the following sources:

- (1) D. Daniel McMillian, IV, *Spaces of Splendour*, Folio edition, 100th Anniversary Commemorative Edition, 1997.
- (2) Dr. Mack H. Gillenwater, (editor), *et al.*, *A Survey of Downtown Huntington, West Virginia*, Phase II, a report submitted to The Cabell County Landmarks Commission. Edited by the Department of Geography, Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia, 1985.
- (3) Kathryn Davis, Tom Davis, S. Allen Chambers, Jr. and Susan M. Pierce, editors, *Historic West Virginia*, The National Register of Historic Places, Charleston, WV, 2000
- (4) Virginia McAlester and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1984 and 1996.

Tour G — Barboursville

**Tour G
Barboursville**

List of buildings:

1. John Thornburg House
2. Methodist Episcopal Church
3. Miller Thornburg Store
4. Dirton House
5. William Clendenin Miller House
6. George Mc. Comas House
7. Miller Stowasser House
8. Old Toll House
9. George Thornburg House
10. Fortifications Hill Veteran's Home
11. James Brown House
12. U.S. Post Office

Tour G — Barboursville

1 John Thornburg House

Location: 635 Water Street
Designer: Miller & Thornburg Hardware
Completed: 1845-1850



This home, built in 1862, ... is one of about eight or ten antebellum structures still in active use. John Thornburg was a grandson of Thomas Thornburg, and early merchant and politically active resident of Barboursville. (5)

The window sash and surrounds, entrance doors, and one story porch are all typical of later 19th Century details. The L shaped two story structure is covered by a gable roof with boxed eaves and a wide plain fascia. The exterior consist of original clapboard. The single level roof of the front porch is supported by molded columns above which is situated a dentilian fascia. There exists an even distribution and proportion in the horizontal placement of two over two sash light windows on both levels. All windows contain original wooden surrounds with wooden sills and lintels. The front door is covered by an etched glass transom. (4)

Because of its authentic quality and fine design, the building deserves an urgent preservation course of action.

Tour G — Barboursville

2 Methodist Episcopal Church

Location: Main Street & Water street, North corner

Designer: Unknown

Completed: 1921



As several American churches (See, Tour A, No. 37, Huntington Downtown Section), it consists of a rectangular hall, front gabled and with a low pitched roof, with an imposing full height classical porch, detached from the main façade.

A wrap-around flat entablature, with a simple cornice is supported by red brick pilasters at the sides of the aisle, and pairs of pilasters at its corners. Windows are regularly spaced all around the second floor, and are composed with two round arched glass panels, with a medallion in their spandrels. A traditional square tower stands in the front, supporting a smaller octagonal belfry and a pointed, tall spire with a cross finial. Above the doorway is a cornice supported by consoles or brackets, enriched with acanthus leaves.

Tour G — Barboursville

3 Miller Thornburg Store

Location: Main street & Central Avenue
Designer: Unknown
Completed: 1854, with later refurbishments.



A masonry block of two stories, covered by a side gable roof, built with locally manufactured bricks, this edifice is now the result of several renovations.

The upper part of it seems to be mostly close to its original shape. The gable side has a stepped parapet, and windows are regularly spaced, with double hung sash, 12x12 panes. The side has a central, big composed window, with two windows on each side. Lintels and sills are of soft stone, with no decorative detailing. There are no hints about the appearance of the original first floor, but is reasonable to assume it had the same unpretentious simple forms linked to Adam or Georgian style. Currently the first floor has a classic entablature that supports a wrap-around cornice, and a false roof eave, covered with copper plate. The cornice is quite elaborate, with brackets and dentils. The main entrance, on the Central Avenue side, has wide paneled windows flanked by pairs of Corinthian pilasters, while the other side has two wide windows, at the extremes, and blind red brick wall in the center.

Tour G — Barboursville

4

Dirton Home

Location: 848 Main Street
Designer: Unknown
Completed: 1870



The design of this house is a simpler, stripped-down version of a Greek Revival romantic house, in fashion from 1825 to 1860. It has a full façade porch, supported by four Doric columns. There is no entablature, as the eaves of the side gabled roof are right above the columns. The main entrance is simple as well, only marked by a pedimented frontispiece and an architrave trim. The house is made of timber, and walls are clad with drop horizontal boards.

This building has been probably designed under the same circumstances of the Johnson Farm (see Tour C, West Huntington Section): an early developing town, before the arrival of the railroad, without several technical advancements, but having in mind many images of Greek Revival residences already built in greater cities. Elizabeth Merritt Dirton was the first owner of this house. She was the daughter of William Merritt, the village founder.

Tour G — Barboursville

5 William Clendenin Miller House

Location: 1112 Main Street

Designer: Clendenin, Miller & Thornburg Hardware/Lumber

Completed: 1852



This example of Federal style, fashionable in most of the United States until 1830, is a late, simpler version (1852), found in West Virginia, a region only recently settled at that time.

It is a simple rectangular block, with five bays of windows, aligned horizontally and vertically in symmetrical rows. The main doorway is a small, hooded entrance, with brick surrounds. It has a wood porch supported by four molded columns that protect three of the bays. The moldings and brackets that support the beams have been delicately crafted. Windows are all equal, and have a flat stone lintel, and a thin sill. They are single-hung, 2x2, and have Venetian shutters. The walls are all of coursed red brick, and the roof-wall junction is also made of brick, with rows of advancing diagonal coursed bricks which mimic the tooth dentils of a classical entablature.

The building appears without any additional or alien elements, which increases its historical and architectural value.

Tour G — Barboursville

6 George McComas House

Location: 1118 Main Street

Designer: Sears Roebuck Company pre-fabricated home

Completed: 1895



This house is a ... eight room dwelling, with asymmetrical plan, irregular massing of components, exhibits several combinations of building forms and decorations. The front facing, rear facing gabled tin roof contains boxed cornices and a pronounced fascia. The roof of the porch follows the same pattern. The front facing gables as well as the turret are covered with fish scale shingles. The roof of the turret is tent shaped with an octagonal base. The exterior of the structure has been covered with aluminium siding of a horizontal weatherboard design, consistent with the original wooden weatherboard design.

A wrap around veranda, typical of Queen Anne statement, is covered by a tin roof supported by a tin roof supported by relatively new Doric columns. A wrought iron fence surrounds the structure. (2).

George McComas was the grandson of General Elisha McComas, who was active in the Cabell County Militia during the 1812 War. P. A. Vallangham was the builder

Tour G — Barboursville

7

Miller Stowasser House

Location: 849 Main Street
Designer: George Frederick Miller, builder
Completed: 1865



Another old example, which has several traits of Federal Style (or Adam style): a side gabled building; two floors, with gentle pitched roof; odd number of window bays; double hung sashes, in this case 5, with louvered shutters; and a three bays portico that protect the entrance. However, this is even a simpler example, since it lack the usual cornices.

Since window panes and muntins are easily modified, current windows have 1x1, but probably the original windows were 6x6. As this building was built before the arrival of the railroad line, its structure is of 12 feet by 12 feet, hand hewn oak beams.

A classical portico brings a shelter near the entrance, supported by four thin, classical columns, and a flat entablature. The main doorway has a pedimented frontispiece and two sidelights.

Tour G — Barboursville

8 Old Toll House

Location: 801 Main Street
Designer: Unknown
Completed: ca.1837



Architecturally and historically, this structure is significant in that it is one of the few original log buildings left in the area that dates from the 1830's.

This log-house is a typical midland pre-railroad building, and this one was at the side of a toll road, (and later moved to its present location), when the chief manner of surface transportation was by horse drawn wagons. The interior is divided in two rooms (hall and parlor) by stairs, with a chimney at the right side. It has an added shed porch, supported by thin molded wood poles. At the back stands single-story addition. Windows have double hung sash, with 6x6 panes.

This log cabin was originally located close to the junction of the Mud River and Guyandotte River, and it was moved to the present location in the late 1940's by the Daughters of the American Revolution.

William Dirton was the toll collector from 1837.

Tour G — Barboursville

9 George Thornburg House

Location: 700 Main Street
Designer: J. B. Stewart, Architect
Completed: 1901
National Register of Historic Places (4.25.1991)



It is an excellent example of the Queen Anne style. Built of red brick and boasting a tower with conical roof, the house is graced by a wrap around porch and an abundance of ornamental detailing. (4)

The Queen Anne style often features a cylindrical tower topped by a conical roof. In this case it is located at the corner of the building, as a turning bolt that resolves the union of the two adjacent façades. Note how the wrap-around cornice runs along the façades and around the tower, echoed by the horizontal edge of the porch. Thus, horizontal and vertical drives are steadily balanced.

The house was built by George E. Thornburg, son of a prominent Cabell County family, who later served in the Virginia General Assembly and as one of the county's first school superintendents. (4)

Tour G — Barboursville

10 Fortification Hill Veterans Home

Location: Main Street between Water St. and Central Ave.

Designer: Edwin N. Alger, Architect

Completed: 1901 and later additions.



This group of buildings stands on a hill which *rises about 300 ft. above the village, providing a commanding view in all directions.*(5) Originally there was a Courthouse (1814), and a middle School and a Methodist Chapel. Civil War combat took place here twice in 1861 and 1862.

Most of the present buildings were constructed after 1901, when Morris Harvey, a coal wealthy businessman endowed the school with \$10,000, then the Barboursville High School. In 1935 it was converted in a mental health facility until 1981, *when the upper buildings were turned into the first and only State Veterans Home.* (5)

Most of the buildings have an Eclectic Colonial Revival look, with parapeted gables and doorways with Renaissance frontispieces and other classical detailing and window surrounds.

Tour G — Barboursville

11 James Brown Residence

Location: 624 McClung Avenue
Designer: Sears Roebuck Company pre-fabricated home
Completed: 1900



The actual age of this dwelling is unknown, but the present occupant possesses documents that indicate the house dates to at least 1900. This structure contains elements of Gothic revival, which was popular in the Eastern US in the later 1800.

A unique feature of the dwelling includes one front facing and two end facing high pitched gables, characteristic of Gothic revival. The roof and porch are covered by original metal and the exterior is covered by original clapboard. Fishscale shingles are situated at the apex of the gables. Windows are mid 20th century alterations, two over two replicas. The porch is supported by four decorated columns, topped by a simple undecorated fascia with ornate border brackets and supports. (4)

A beautiful spindlework could be seen in the decorated capitals of the columns. Rare semicircular lace-like brackets adds a note of delicacy to this house.

Tour G — Barboursville

12 U.S. Post Office

Location: Central Ave. between Slaughter & Musgrave Ct.

Designer: Unknown

Completed: Ca. 1980



The United States Postal Service has designed and built several typical, medium size facilities for small towns like the one in Barboursville. In this case, a simple, bare brick masonry symmetrical box, well proportioned, emphasizes its mass while also making it lighter. Several openings in the ground floor achieves this outcome. A detached portico, made in concrete, protects the entrance.

Older governmental buildings used classical styles, especially Roman Revival or Beaux Arts to express their official and enduring institutional importance. An emphasis on mass and the control of wall surfaces through classical orders were included in these designs (See the Old Post Office included in Tour A, Huntington downtown section).

When Modern and Late-Modern architecture became popular styles for state buildings, neither historical styles nor orders were used. However, mass still remained an appropriate concept to be emphasized, as in this case.