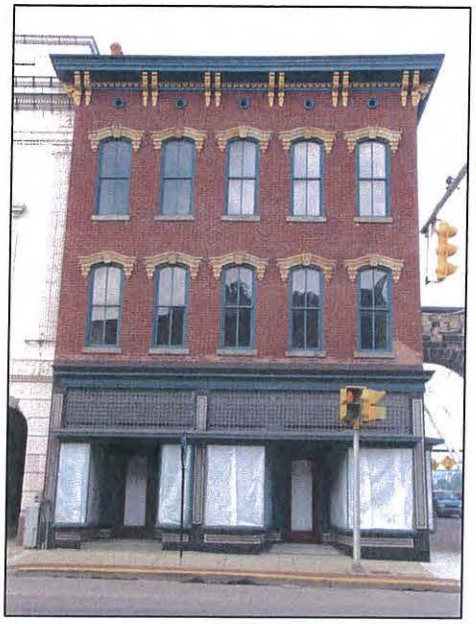
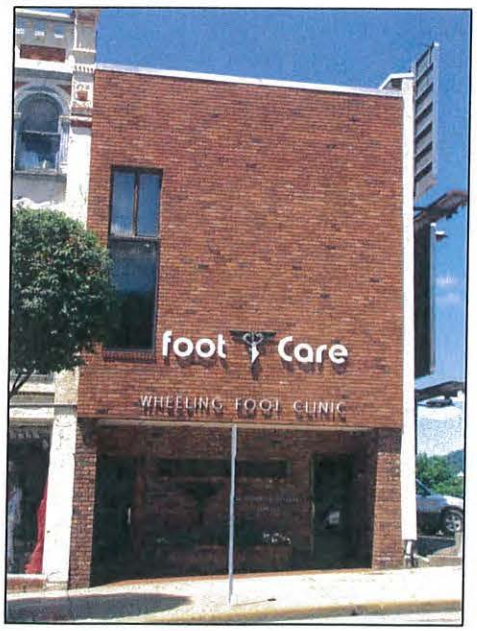
A. 1001 Main Street



B. 1015 Main Street

C. 1032 Main Street

D. 1061 Main Street



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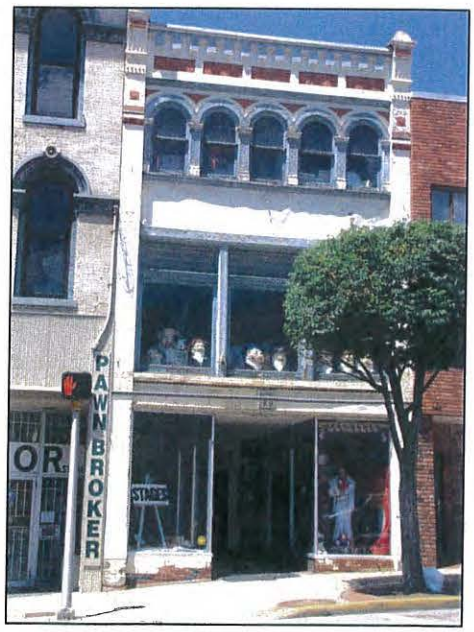

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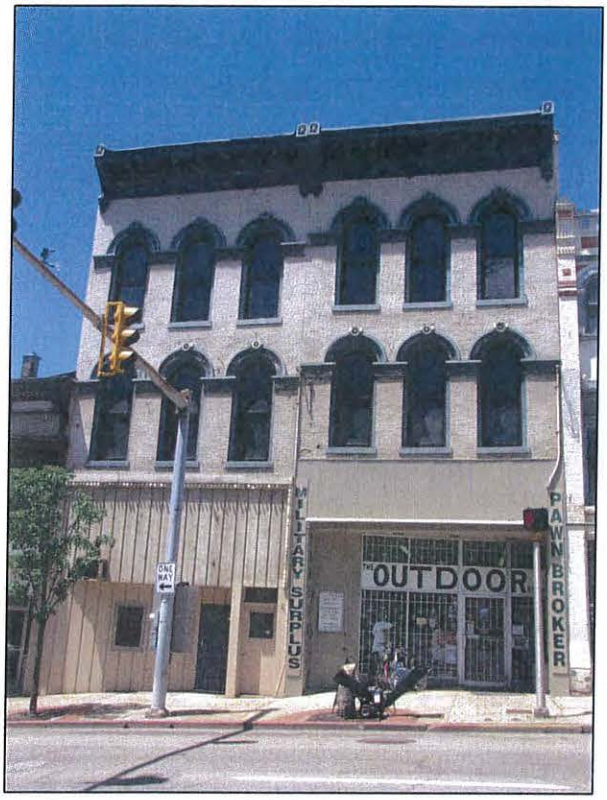

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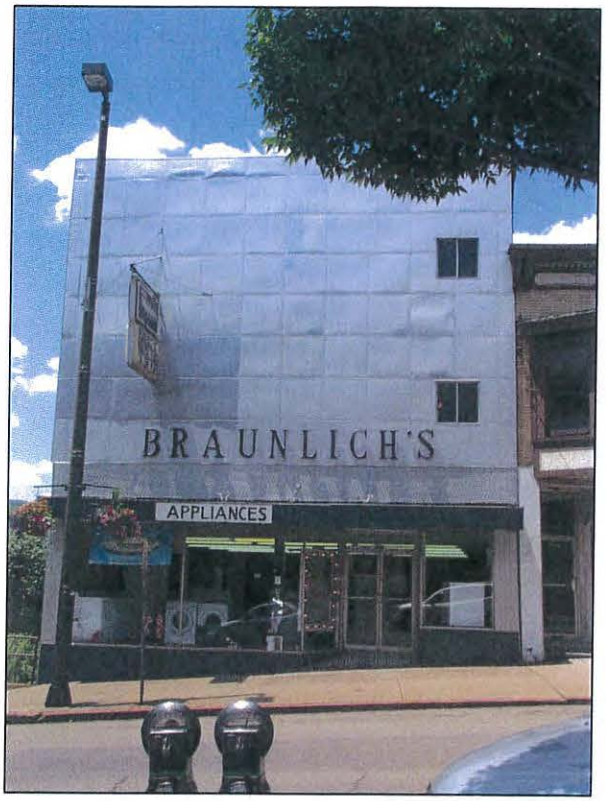

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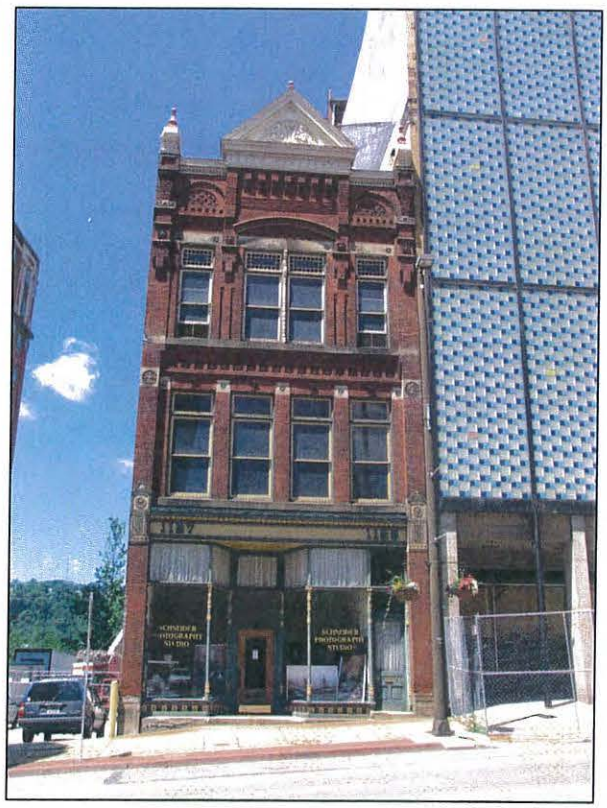

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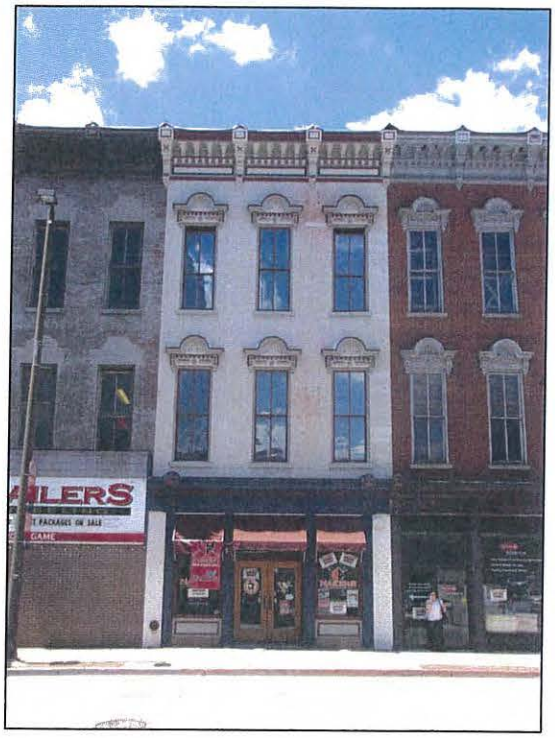
J. 1333 Main Street



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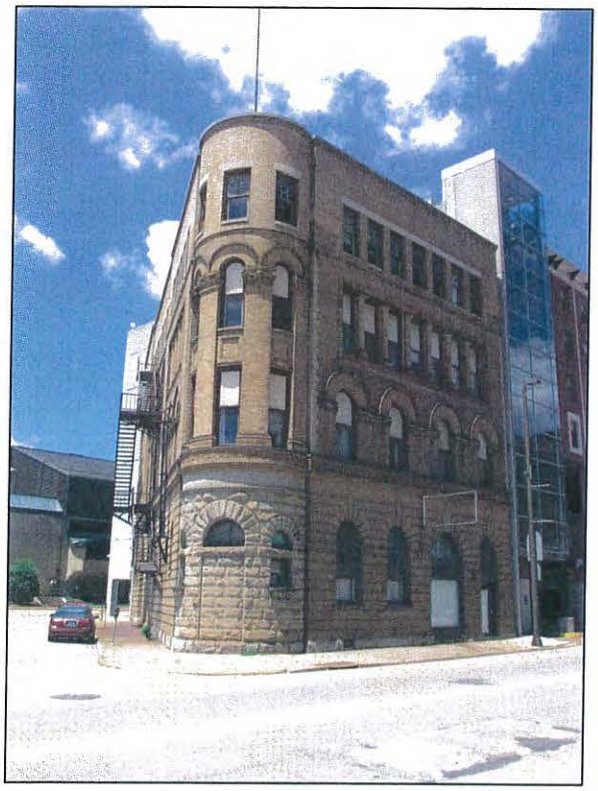
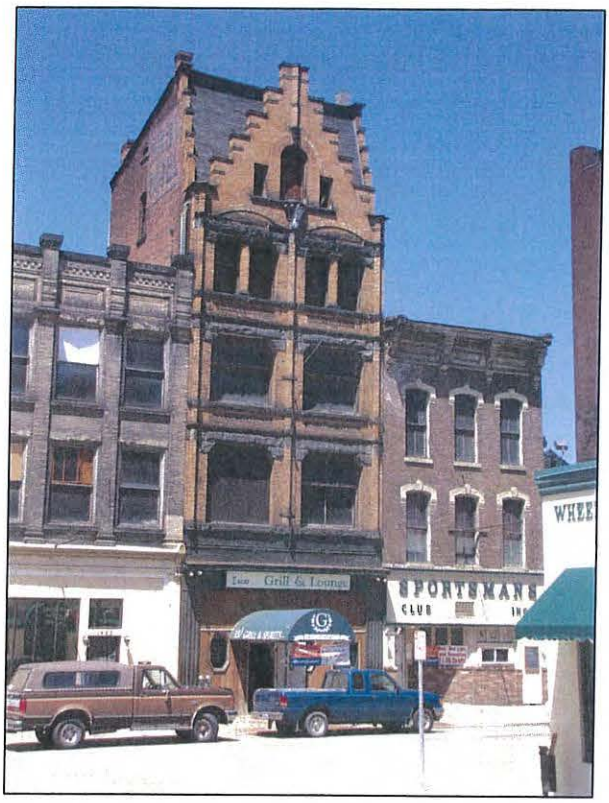


L. 1509 Main Street

M. 1508 Market Street

N. 1425 Market Street



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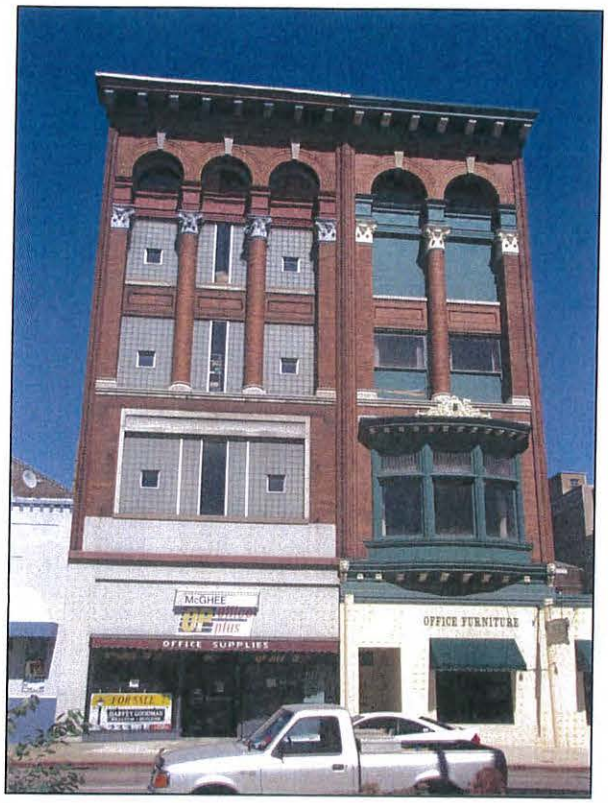

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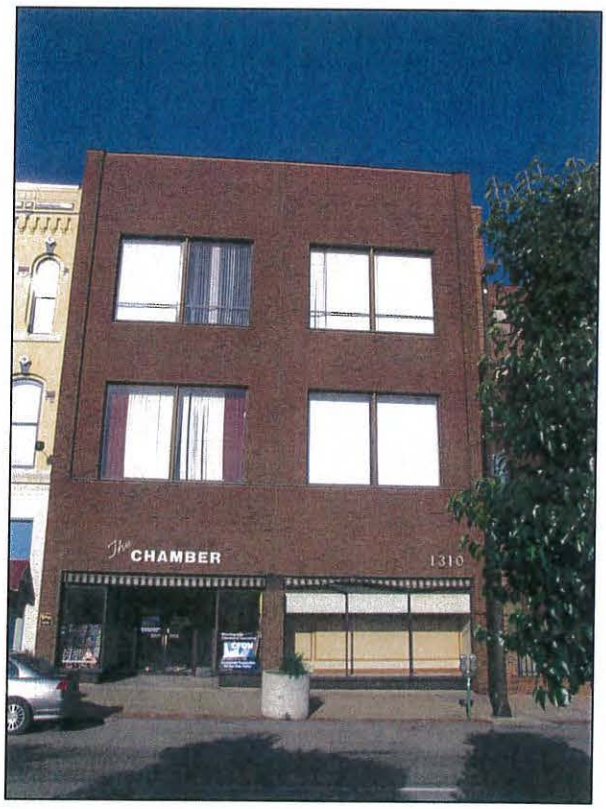
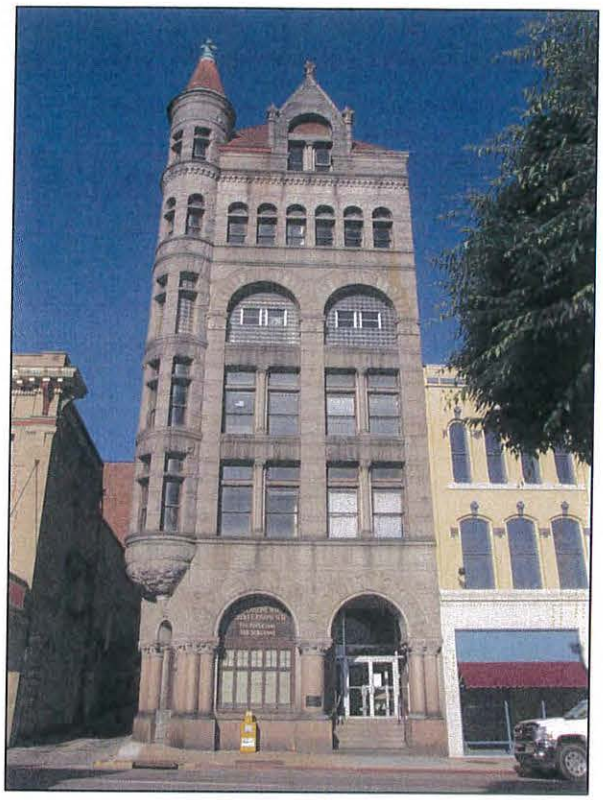
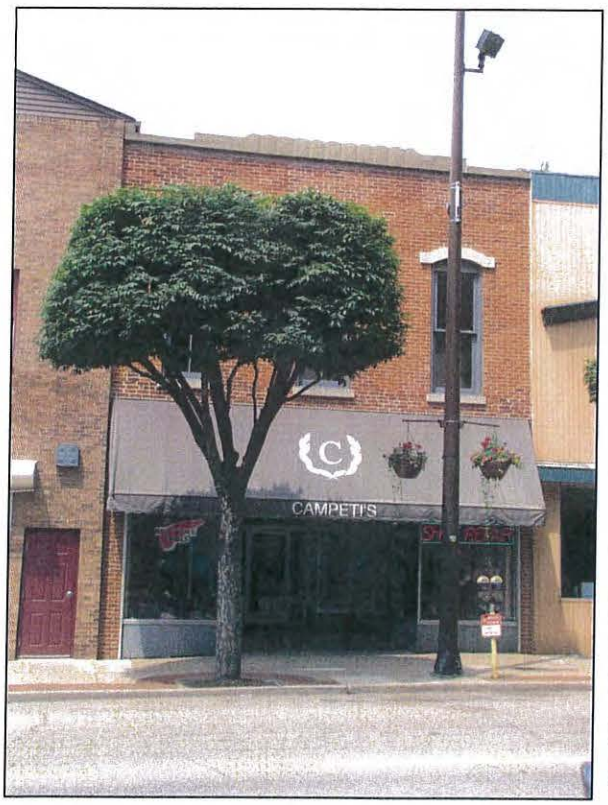


Q. 1310 Market Street

R. 1306 Market Street

S. 1300 Market Street





T. 1219 Market Street

U. 1110 Market Street

HISTORY OF THE DOWNTOWN WHEELING HISTORIC DISTRICT

The Wheeling Historic District contains approximately 260 buildings, the majority of which are of architectural or historical significance. The District is situated at the base of Wheeling Hill between Wheeling Creek and the Ohio River, and the buildings are representative of styles from the early 19th century to the present. While the earlier buildings within the District are generally only several stories tall with Greek Revival and/or Italianate decoration, the buildings of later periods became proportionally taller with the years at the end of the 19th century and into the early 20th with styles more closely reflecting Romantic Revivals and the Picturesque to the Neo-Classical designs of the Ecole des Beaux Arts of the early 20th century. The majority of buildings are of brick and sandstone masonry structuring, but façade appliqué of stone, marble, and cast iron are also prevalent in reflecting period design. Being largely urban in density, many buildings are of the row type design with several sharing common halls.

The district is largely commercial in character even as it was in the early and mid-19th century when many buildings contained shops on the ground levels and storage or apartments on the upper levels. However, it was during the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th that it became a dense urban commercial center with major modes of transportation terminating there and becoming surrounded by residential neighborhoods as it is still today. Although buildings within the District are all largely in good structural condition, façade alterations occurring mainly in the 1950s and 1960s are in evidence on many of the commercial buildings. However, these alterations are basically limited to the street level of most of the buildings leaving the upper story levels in nearly original conditions; some alterations have taken the form of aluminum panels covering the entire façade. Yet evidence exists that behind many of these additions the original elevations survive.

The Wheeling Historic District is an excellent example of 19th and early 20th century architecture reflecting commercial development that provided the impetus to produce a unique regional vernacular style. The District is naturally bounded by Wheeling Hill, Wheeling Creek, and the Ohio River at the east and west, and by the Wheeling Suspension Bridge together with the Interstate Highway System at the north, and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad tracks to the south. The District forms the Central Business District of modern Wheeling, and despite several intrusions in the historic area, it still retains a late 19th century ambience. This historic Central Business District contains the city's concentration of large commercial structures and is surrounded today, as it was originally, by dense residential development that is architecturally significant in its own right.

It was at the confluence of Wheeling Creek and the Ohio River that Ebenezer Zane, together with his brother Jonathan, Silas, and Andrew, staked their claim to what would become the City of Wheeling. It was not until after the economic slump during the War of 1812 that Wheeling really became the commercial business center it would enjoy for over a century. By 1818 the National Pike was completed from Wheeling to Cumberland, Maryland, and by 1825 the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal linked Cumberland to Georgetown, Maryland, on the Potomac River. This opened the main method of trade communications between East and West and thus opened the Northwest Territory to expansion. Ultimately by 1831, Wheeling was designated an inland port of entry and became the most significant city in the upper Ohio Valley. In 1849, the world's longest suspension bridge was erected across the Ohio River to Wheeling Island enabling affluent society to erect homes in the "Garden District" and ultimately providing the National Pike a method for westward expansion to the Ohio Territory. With the completion of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad to Wheeling in 1853, population growth skyrocketed as did commerce and industry which both contributed to the architectural development of the Central Business District.

The Civil War saw Wheeling thrust into national significance in that in 1861 at the United States Custom House, the citizens of Wheeling declared the Acts of Secession by the Virginia Legislature in Richmond null and void, and thus established the restored government of the Dominion of Virginia housed in the Linsly Institute building as the legitimate capitol. By 1863

President Lincoln's signature created a separate state, West Virginia, with Generals Rosecrans and Fremont stationed at the new capitol of Wheeling.

It was during this period of the second half of the 19th century that industrial growth reached its pinnacle. Coal and iron were at the forefront of expansion with many buildings boasting Classical cast iron detail in the historic Central Business District attesting to the craftsmanship of the region. The Sweeney family of Wheeling, too, produced beautiful craftsmanship in superb glass and crystal, much of which may be seen today around the city. Even though Wheeling ultimately lost its capitol to Charleston, trade and commerce blossomed with merchant families like the Hess's, the Stifels producing textiles, and the Bloch's manufacturing of tobacco products. Major breweries sprang up, too, contributing to the wealth of the area with the Reymanns and Schmulbachs leading the way. Wheeling eventually became known as "Nail City" as the largest manufacturer of cut nails in the world, and by the turn of the century, the undisputed head of the upper Ohio Valley. With the coming of the street car, many families were enabled to move out on National Road and commute to the markets and commercial establishments of the District thus expanding the city to new areas. However, even though by 1925 Wheeling was the largest manufacturer of proprietary drugs, its prominence slipped away and Pittsburgh took over as leader of the region.

It was during this economic heyday of Wheeling that most of the buildings within the Central Business District were constructed. It was progressive architectural firms such as Franzheim, Giesey, and Faris that reflected their awareness of regional architecture of Henry Hobson Richardson in Pittsburgh and Louis Sullivan in Chicago in their works such as the City Bank Building and the Bank of Wheeling Building, yet local materials and craftsmen combined to form a unique style that reflects the vernacular of Wheeling. Applique of style in glass, iron, and stone form the 19th century ambience still so prevalent today. Despite insensitive modern intrusions within the District, Wheeling still retains its character, yet a serious case exists if demolition is allowed to run unchecked. However, building conditions within the District are sound and will provide excellent opportunity for future renovation.

The Wheeling Historic District contains West Virginia's most significant concentration of nineteenth century commercial architecture. The large number of brick and stone-trimmed buildings identify nationally popular architectural modes represented in the Classical and Neo-Classical Revival, the Romanesque, and in the Victorian genre and eclecticism of which the Italianate is predominate. Wheeling's prominence as a center of and gateway to the nineteenth century west is reflected in the number of prominent architects who were commissioned to aggrandize the city. In 1837 Thomas Ustick Walter designed the Greek Revival Merchants and Mechanics Bank (Exchange Bank) that stood at the corner of Main Street and Monroe Street (12th Street) until c. 1900. Ammi B. Young produced the U.S. Custom House (Wheeling Independence Hall) in 1859. The rapid nineteenth century expansion of Wheeling and its resulting building boom fostered the emergence of West Virginia's earliest professional architectural community whose leaders, by the turn-of-the-century, were Edward Bates Franzheim, Fred Faris, Millard F. Giesey, and Charles Bates.

Significant in the growth of Wheeling was the completion of the Cumberland or National Road to Wheeling in 1818. The development of the upper Ohio Valley and of large sections of the U.S. Interior was made possible by this highway over which passed thousands of passengers and tons of freight in Conestoga wagons and stagecoaches. The Wheeling Suspension Bridge, designed and built by Charles Ellet, Jr. in 1849, carried traffic of the National Road over the Ohio River from Wheeling to Wheeling Island. This bridge, whose approach forms part of the northern boundary of the Wheeling Historic District, is the most significant extant Antebellum engineering structure in the United States and, according to Professor Emory Kemp of West Virginia University, probably the oldest bridge in the New World.