

ANATOMY OF A MAIN STREET BUILDING



Upper Building Façade

- ← Pediment - triangular upper part of a building
- ← Cornice/Parapet - visual element completing top of a building of made usually of metal, brick or wood
- ← Bay Window - large window projecting from outer wall
- ← Window Lintel - structural member allowing for window and supporting weight above
- ← Window Sash - glazed framework often operable
- ← Window Sill - lower horizontal part of window

Storefront Façade

- ← Transom - horizontal band of windows allowing for increased daylight and sometimes ventilation for interior spaces
- ← Display Window - large panes of glass for merchandising
- ← Pilaster - structural column projecting from wall
- ← Bulkhead - area below display windows protecting the glass directly above sidewalk

Historic commercial buildings in New Mexico Main Street districts are easily characterized as those built before the railroad arrived in New Mexico in 1880 and those built after. Only a few communities can boast surviving pre-railroad buildings (usually built of adobe), and so Railroad era and modern buildings are easy to identify.

For any commercial building, the most important features are those on the street level called the “storefront.” With the exception of some public buildings such as city halls or courthouses, any commercial building is designed for optimum pedestrian appeal, offering large picture windows to display merchandise or printed advertising

materials. The classic three-part storefront of display window-entry-display window was created to lure the customer inside. Sometimes storefront windows were complex designs incorporating transoms, leaded glass, and occasionally stained glass accents. Entryways could be flush with the street or indented to offer more window area and shelter from the elements.

Prosperity sometimes enabled the design or addition of a second story where the merchant’s living quarters were often located. Railroad materials such as brick, cast iron, and stamped architectural ornamental metal (such as ceilings) could be crafted in

handsome and elaborate designs. Crowning the building up top is a decorative feature, sometimes a modest parapet or in older Victorian style buildings, a magnificent cornice with corbels, scrollwork, dentils, brackets, moldings, or other decorative elements that give the building an elegant profile against the sky.



For New Mexico Main Street By Elmo Baca and William Powell

