

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form**

**1. Name of Property.**

historic name Oehler Brick Buildings

other names/site number NA

**2. Location**

street & number 3542-48 South Broadway [ n/a ] not for publication

city or town St. Louis [n/a] vicinity

state Missouri code MO county St. Louis [Independent City] code 510 zip code 63118

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments [ ]. )



Signature of certifying official/Title

Mark A. Miles / Deputy SHPO

Date

Missouri Department of Natural Resources

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  
(See continuation sheet for additional comments [ ]. )

Signature of certifying official/Title

State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

I hereby certify that the property is:

entered in the National Register  
See continuation sheet [ ].

determined eligible for the National Register  
See continuation sheet [ ].

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register

other, explain see continuation sheet [ ].

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form**  
 Paul and Franziska Oehler/Oehler Brick Buildings  
 St. Louis (Independent City), MO

**5. Classification**

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		contributing	noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	2	0 building
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district		
<input type="checkbox"/> public-state	<input type="checkbox"/> site	0	0 sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	0	0 structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	0	0 objects
		2	0 total

Name of related multiple property listing.

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register. 0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Function**

DOMESTIC/SINGLE DWELLING  
DOMESTIC/MULTIPLE DWELLING  
COMMERCE/TRADE/SPECIALTY STORE

**Current Functions**

VACANT  
COMMERCE/TRADE/RESTAURANT

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revivals

**Materials**

**foundation** Limestone  
**walls** Brick  
**roof** Asphalt  
**other** Wood  
Cast Iron

see continuation sheet [ ].

see continuation sheet [ ].

**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION**

See continuation sheet [x]

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

Commerce

**Periods of Significance**

1887-1891

**Significant Dates**

1887

1891

**Significant Person(s)**

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Oehler, Paul (owner/builder)

Oehler, Franziska (owner)

Lemm, H. (architect)

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographic References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

# \_\_\_\_\_

- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

# \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State Agency

Federal Agency

Local Government

University

Other:

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**USD/NPS NRHP Registration Form**

Oehler Brick Buildings  
St. Louis (Independent City), MO

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** less than one acre

**UTM References**

A. Zone	Easting	Northing	B. Zone	Easting	Northing
<u>15</u>	<u>742413</u>	<u>4275100</u>			
C. Zone	Easting	Northing	D. Zone	Easting	Northing

[ ] See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Section 8: Andrew B. Weil/Researcher Section 7: Michael Allen/Assistant Director

organization Landmarks Association of St. Louis date \_\_\_\_\_

street & number 917 Locust Street, 7th floor telephone (314) 421-6474

city or town St. Louis state MO zip code 63101

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional Items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name 3542-46 S. Broadway owned by 3544 S. Broadway LLC

street & number 7525 S. Broadway 1<sup>st</sup> floor. telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town St. Louis state MO zip code 63111

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name 3548 S. Broadway (aka 3550 S. Broadway) owned by Visintines Inc.

street & number 3550 S. Broadway telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town St. Louis state MO zip code 63118

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**Oehler Brick Buildings**  
**St. Louis [Independent City], MO**

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### Summary

The Oehler Brick Buildings are located at 3542-48 S. Broadway in St. Louis, Missouri. The buildings consist of a three-story row of residences built in 1891 and a three-story corner commercial building built in 1887 (see photograph #1). The residential row is divided into three sections with staggered setbacks in response to the curve of the street. The flat-roofed residences have mansard roofs at the third floor on their primary elevation above cornices of decorative brick. The first two floors carry arched window and door openings. The flat-roofed commercial building stands to the south. That building's primary elevation features a cast iron storefront that wraps the corner below projecting brick piers. Decorative brickwork defines spandrel areas and the cornice, which consists of a striking blind arcade. On the north end of the building is a one-story flat-roofed section that is original. Some alterations to window openings and missing masonry elements are the primary issues that compromise integrity, which overall is good.

### Site

The buildings stand on South Broadway in the Marine Villa neighborhood of St. Louis. Across the street is the large complex that originally housed the Lemp Brewery. Here Broadway is lined with brick storefront and tenement buildings, mostly two or three stories tall. Interstate 55 is nearby to the east. On the streets south and east of Broadway are located many detached residences of a variety of vernacular styles dating to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The area retains a mix of modest residential streets and commercial and industrial properties around Broadway and the highway.

### Residences

The residential building is divided into three sections defined by different setbacks; the northern two sections are identical while the southern section is wider and has somewhat different fenestration (see photograph #2). The two northernmost sections are divided into three bays centered on the wall. A rusticated limestone foundation gives way to rubble stone on the sides. Smooth limestone steps lead to recessed entrances on the right (south) side of the first floor; these entrances are headed with arches featuring a solid label course and projecting archivolt. The arches are asymmetrical because they terminate at the side wall of the next section. The entrances lead to two doors; one is set straight ahead and the other is flush on the left wall of the vestibule (see photograph #3). The openings feature wooden doors and transom windows. Wooden paneling comprises the ceilings and remaining wall of the vestibules.

On the primary elevations, each window opening rests on a limestone sill with chamfered center

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section (some sills, presumably replaced, are flat plain limestone). The sills rest on brick brackets. The sills are linked by two courses of face brick a shade darker than the rest of the walls. The openings are headed by arches with a solid label course and projecting archivolt. The windows originally carried one-over-one wooden double-hung windows. Currently, vinyl double-hung one-over-one windows fill the openings.

Above the second floor, a band of decorative brick forms a frieze under a dentillated cornice. At the left (south) of each section, large corbels rise and are capped with rounded metal. Above the cornices are the mansard roof sections, originally clad with slate but now clad in shingles (southernmost residence) and horizontal vinyl siding (northernmost). Centered on the mansard roofs are two brick dormers with tapered bases and projecting courses forming plinths and impostes around arched window openings that still carry wooden one-over-one windows. Each gable contains decorative brick and is clad in metal coping. Metal finials can be seen at the crest of two dormers; likely, all dormers in the row had such finials originally.

The southernmost section is similar to the other two, except that it is wider with more spacing between its three bays. Also, its entrance is at left with a fully-formed arch. Originally, this section was a single-family residence and the recessed entrance had a single door. Currently, the vestibule leads to paired door openings with wooden doors and transom windows; the side walls are clad with paneling.

The north elevation is divided into three bays toward the east side (see photograph # 4). At the east side, the building becomes two stories and the easternmost bay is in the two-story section. The bays include small basement window openings and centered window openings on each of the other floors. Chimneys are located to the left (east) of the easternmost bay and at the western end of the building. All window openings carry one-over-one vinyl replacement windows.

The southern elevation features five bays on the three-story section which feature centered openings on all floors, including the basement. Three chimneys rise above the parapet on this wall section. At the two-story section, the building forms an ell that is covered by the roof. In the ell on the second and first floors are door openings on both the east and north walls; these are covered in vinyl siding.

The eastern elevation features paired window openings distributed symmetrically across the second floor. Below these are a group of three door openings (toward the south) and a group of two door openings (toward the north) separated and flanked by single window openings. The basement, which is largely revealed due to the decline of the grade toward the rear of the house, has fenestration that matches the first floor. No original doors or windows remain on this elevation; all openings bear steel doors and vinyl windows. All of the transoms and some of the

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basement window openings are clad in plywood siding. Although originally bearing many window openings, the east side of the third floor now bears only a doorway near the center of the building. This wall is clad in composite shingles.

The interior spaces of the residences have been reconfigured but retain many elements of their original plans. Original millwork abounds throughout all of the units of the buildings (see photograph #5). Many original doors and transom windows remain, some with original hinges, mortise locks, knobs and latches. In the former single family residence, the entrance hall retains a decorated staircase with balustrade. A wall paneled on both sides divides the staircase from the original side hall so that the second and first floors are now separate dwellings (see photograph #6). In the front parlors on both the first and second floors, wooden mantels remain. Above the stairwell in the former single-family residence is an original wood-lined water closet with raised platform floor. Now converted to a closet, the space retains wood walls and the raised floor.

### **Commercial Building**

The primary elevation of the commercial building is divided into five bays (see photograph #7). The outer brick piers project from the foundation, forming banded pilasters to the third floor sill line, where the articulation changes to form fluted pilasters. These piers originally terminated with simple columns, now missing from the front elevation. The corner pier featured the same detailing on its southern side, where all elements are intact. On the first floor, the storefront opening is framed by cast iron columns with the end columns being half-columns. Each column features a rounded base, turned braiding and a Corinthian capital. Above the capitals, iron forms taper outward to create five vault openings along the front. The center opening is the entrance, although it is now filled with plywood and a replacement door. The outer openings are glazed with replacement windows that appear as paired doors with three panes in each door. Above these windows are multi-pane art glass transoms that are not original.

Above the storefront, piers taper outward between each of the middle bays. The bases are supported by four dentils under each pier. The pier corners are notched and rounded. Above an architrave over the storefront, the wall plane projects somewhat to define a band where decorative spandrels appear under the second floor windows. These spandrels feature masonry pattern work in brick and stucco. Above the spandrels, the second floor sills run continuously between piers although the windows are not as wide. The wall plane slightly recesses. The windows are large openings with round arch headers, currently containing one-over-one vinyl replacement windows and aluminum-wrapped wood in the arches. At the third floor, the wall plane projects again to form a band of spandrels that have a different pattern. Sills run between piers under small paired window openings divided by a brick mullion. Currently, these openings carry one-over-one vinyl replacement windows. At the heads of these openings, the original arch

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tops of the windows and cornice are missing and replaced by a flat plane of brick. Details seen on the south elevation suggest that the third floor windows had arched tops and fit inside another blind arch, and that the piers around the windows rose to support a blind arcade that formed the building's cornice.

The side elevation consists of five bays, with the fifth bay (on the east) descending to two stories (see photograph #8). The westernmost bay continues the storefront, pier and cornice of the primary elevation. Here we see the original configuration of the masonry detailing of the piers, cornice and third floor windows of the primary elevation. The cornice is essentially a blind arcade formed by stepped-out corbels. East of this bay, the parapet height decreases and a blind arcade cornice continues, interrupted at each pier by pier capitals. Beginning at the fourth bay from the west, the cornice (and parapet wall) is partly missing. Piers between the remaining bays project upward from the first floor; their bases are paired brackets that form arches, under projecting bases that support projecting center pilasters. At the third floor line, the piers become flat. All window openings on the second and third floors are topped with round arches and have limestone sills. All window openings contain flat-topped one-over-one vinyl windows; the arches above are filled with wood wrapped in aluminum. In the second bay from the west, two windows are centered over a small window high on the first floor. The third bay features two columns of centered windows in the same configuration, with the first floor windows bricked in. The fourth bay features two columns, except there are no window openings on the first floor in the first column and on the third floor in the second column. The opening on the first floor in the second column is a doorway carrying a steel door with the transom infilled. The last (easternmost) bay features two columns of openings on the first and second floors. The first column features a basement window (filled with plywood) below windows on each floor. The second column features a window above a doorway; there is a steel door and the transom is infilled. On the south end of the east elevation is a blind brick wall; on the north, a wall of horizontal vinyl siding with one small vinyl window on the second floor. The third floor wall is brick and features two centered window openings with segmental arches; these are boarded.

At the south of the building is a one-story section that was built as a feed store. The front elevation consists of a simple shaped parapet above a garage-like door opening under a segmental arch. This opening is filled at the top with brick above a steel jack-arch. Below the steel, siding fills the opening. A window is centered in the opening. On the south elevation, near the west end, is a door opening that contains an aluminum-framed door.

The interior spaces of the building and its addition are largely altered. The first-floor commercial space houses a bar and restaurant, and has been remodeled many times since the building's construction. However, the space retains its open layout and high ceiling. The upper floors originally were divided into eleven rooms and functioned as a boarding house. Over the years,



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the rooms have been configured as apartments in different ways. Currently, these floors are vacant.

### **Integrity**

The Oehler buildings demonstrate historic character. Their primary architectural feature, masonry detailing, is largely intact, with the notable exception of the alterations to the cornice and primary elevation of the commercial building. The cast iron storefront on the commercial building is completely intact and helps mitigate the missing details. Original windows are mostly missing, although replacement windows are at least somewhat sensitive to the dimensions of the original openings. The entrances to the residences are historic, although the entrance to the single family residence does not reflect original appearance. Interiors in the residences retain a substantial amount of original millwork. Overall, the buildings retain integrity of location, setting, materials, feeling, workmanship and association.

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### Summary

The Oehler Brick Buildings at 3542-48 South Broadway are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A [Commerce]. The buildings are significant for their association with Paul Oehler Brick Company, hand-made brick-manufacturer that began operation in St. Louis in 1863. Oehler's business was typical of the small manufactories primarily operated by skilled immigrant-craftsmen that dominated the brick industry until the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> Brick-makers like Oehler were the last generation to use a manufacturing method that was wiped out by the machine-made brick industry by the early 20th century.<sup>2</sup> Machine-made brick enjoyed great success in St. Louis and by 1890, the city had become the greatest brick-manufacturing city in the world.<sup>3</sup> While the nominated buildings were not part of Oehler's brick-making operation, they are the only known remaining buildings constructed with hand-made brick from the company. In addition, they represent the Oehler family's evolving commercial strategy. As traditional brick-makers were being threatened by the success of the new method of manufacturing, the Oehlers built the nominated buildings as rental properties. The building at 3548 South Broadway was built in 1887 by Paul Oehler in a successful bid to reduce the family's reliance on income from their ailing brickyard. The buildings at 3542-46 South Broadway were built by Paul's wife Franziska in 1891 (immediately following her husband's death) while preparations to close the brickyard were under way. The latter buildings were apparently built using the last bricks that Paul manufactured. The contiguous group consists of a three-story corner commercial building and a three-story, three-section residential row constructed in the Second Empire style. The buildings reflect their historic appearance. The period of significance, 1887 and 1891, reflect the construction dates of the buildings.

### Background: The St. Louis Brick Industry

The earliest buildings in colonial St. Louis were made of stone or wood, though coarse brick was occasionally used in structures such as exterior ovens or chimneys. The advent of brick buildings in the city shortly followed the large-scale arrival of American immigrants during and following the War of 1812.<sup>4</sup> However, brick did not become the dominant construction material in the city until a major fire in 1849 destroyed much of the waterfront and business district. Prior to the fire, a few small clay mines and brick kilns were scattered throughout the city. Demand for brick was not terribly great and suitable clay deposits were so common that, when brick was used, it

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<sup>1</sup> John W. Leonard, ed., *The Book of St. Louisans* (The St. Louis Republic, 1906), p. 441.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Larry Giles, President St. Louis Building Arts Foundation, St. Louis, Missouri, 14 January 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Pam Ambrose, Introduction to *Brick by Brick, building St. Louis and the Nation*, ed. Pam Ambrose (St. Louis: Samuel Cupples House St. Louis University, 2004), p.1.

<sup>4</sup> John Ruskin, "When we build, let's us think we build forever," in *Brick by Brick, Building St. Louis and the Nation*, ed. Pam Ambrose (St. Louis: Samuel Cupples House St. Louis University, 2004), p. 3.

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was often burned on the construction site from clay excavated from impromptu pits nearby. Following the conflagration, the city passed new ordinances designed to make buildings more fireproof. These laws banned exposed-wood construction in certain parts of the city, which drove a sharp increase in both production and consumption of brick.

In the early years of the St. Louis brick industry, operations were powered by human and animal labor; the furnaces were fired with wood. Miners dug clay from open pits or tunneled deep into giant seams that ran for miles under the city. The clay was then transported to various brickyards where it was dried, ground, purified, tempered, pressed into molds either by hand or with the aid of various simple mechanical devices, dried again, and fired as bricks in large beehive kilns. Though the system had been refined somewhat, and subtle variations existed, the basic process had been the same for millennia; from ancient Rome to ante-bellum Missouri, brick manufacture had seen little change.

Construction and brick production in the city stalled to a certain extent during the Civil War, though city directories indicate a large and decentralized landscape of producers who nominally operated during the war years. From the post-bellum period through early 20<sup>th</sup> century, production and consumption of brick mirrored the city's rapid growth. Between 1850 and 1900, the city's population increased more than seven fold, and at least 53 different clay mines and brick-making facilities operated.<sup>5</sup> At any given time, an average of about 30 brick-makers plied their trade, providing the materials that dominate the city's built environment to this day. Though the number of brick-producers remained relatively steady during this period, the business of brick-manufacture changed drastically.

In the 1860's, when Paul Oehler Brick began operation in St. Louis, the industry was dominated by family-run enterprises and the brick-makers were primarily skilled German immigrants. When Paul Oehler's business finally found its way into the city directory in 1867, 80% of the brick-makers listed were of German extraction.<sup>6</sup> Many brick-makers were also contractors or had long-standing relationships with architects and contractors, and thus maintained a reliable outlet for their products. Craftsmen in the various building trades worked in relay to produce materials, generate plans, and complete construction projects. Though this pattern continued into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a significant change occurred with the emergence of brick-making technologies that allowed producers a high level of standardization and an exponential increase in output. In 1865, the first hydraulic-press brick machine arrived in St. Louis with cousins E.C. and T.W. Sterling. Though few people recognized it at the time, the trajectory of the St. Louis brick industry had changed forever. By 1890, the rapid mechanization of the brick-making process resulted in production and distribution that could not have been imagined just 30 years before; annual production at individual yards jumped from hundreds of thousands to tens of millions. No longer

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 6.; *Gould's St. Louis (Missouri) Directory*. St. Louis: Polk-Gould Directory Co., 1850 -1894.

<sup>6</sup> Calculated from *Gould's St. Louis Directory*, 1867.

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did architects and contractors have to deal with the limitations of hand-made brick, and the craftsmen that produced it. Though small-scale producers still found business, first the local and swiftly thereafter the national landscape of brick-production was overawed by several gigantic St. Louis-based brick-makers.

At the local and regional level, manufacturers like Anthony Ittner Brick Company, the National Brick & Quarry Company, and the Illinois Supply & Construction Company were each producing tens of millions of machine-made bricks a year by the early 1890s.<sup>7</sup> At the national level, The St. Louis Hydraulic Press Brick Company [HPB], the direct descendent of the Sterling's upstart company, had become the largest manufacturer of brick in the world.<sup>8</sup>

While HPB enjoyed unprecedented success in St. Louis, their machine-driven process encountered decades of (diminishing) opposition. At first, the new technology was regarded as a threat not only to structurally-sound buildings (people questioned the safety of the product), but also to the time-honored traditions of craftsmen brick-makers. Many of the small-scale brick-makers in St. Louis, and across the country, had roots in the trade that were generations deep; many had carried their skills with them to America and resented the mechanization of their art. The close relationships they had always enjoyed with the various building trades ensured a frosty (if swiftly melting) reception for the pioneering HPB company.

Despite initial distrust of machine-made brick, scientific testing quickly discredited popular criticisms. Experiments carried out by the U.S. Army and engineer James Eads in preparation for construction of the first bridge over the Mississippi River demonstrated that the hydraulic-press product was in fact vastly superior to traditionally-made brick. Their work proved that the new process created brick that possessed great advantages in terms of uniformity and compression strength. In addition, the speed with which the bricks could be made, and the cost-reductions afforded by the economy of scale, were major advantages for large construction projects. As time went on, architects and their clients found these factors increasingly difficult to ignore. While critics like historian J. Thomas Scharf, who wrote a history of St. Louis in 1883, continued to opine that machine-made brick was created too rapidly to "be made perfect and solid in every respect..." many important members of the building trades had come to disagree.<sup>9</sup> The year before Scharf's volume hit the shelves, HPB and its partner the Union Press Brick Works had turned out a combined 62 million bricks from their St. Louis yards, by far the largest production in the city.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, almost a decade later, the small, hand-made brick-producer Paul Oehler

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<sup>7</sup> St. Louis Star-Sayings, *The City of St. Louis and its Resources* ( St. Louis: St. Louis Star, 1893), p. 67.

<sup>8</sup> Mimi Stiritz, "Hydraulic Brick Company: The Early Years," in *Brick by Brick, building St. Louis and the Nation*, ed. Pam Ambrose (St. Louis: Samuel Cupples House St. Louis University, 2004), p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

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### Oehler Brick Buildings St. Louis, [Independent City], MO

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had an inventory of just over 400,000 finished bricks in his yard.<sup>11</sup>

Though the superiority of the machine-made product could no longer be debated in terms of its physical properties and economic advantages, detractors found other grounds on which to object. While an increasing number of architects and contractors with massive building projects were enamored of the uniformity and unceasing availability of the machine-made product, others insisted that they preferred the craftsmanship and the aesthetic qualities of traditional materials like hand-made stock brick.<sup>12</sup> Others rejected machine-made brick based on a fear that machines were too rapidly replacing people in the workforce. As historian Mimi Stiritz points out, the “debate” regarding the merits of machine-made versus hand-made brick that existed in St. Louis “echoed the wider, on-going debate of the Industrial Revolution.”<sup>13</sup> These factors, philosophical though they were, resulted in limited resistance to the use of machine-made brick by numbers of builders in St. Louis even as the city gained national attention for the phenomenal success of the industry.<sup>14</sup> While these preferences supported an attenuating market for traditionally-made brick, the die had been cast. The limited production capacities of the craftsmen manufacturers, the relative inferiority of their product, and the economic disadvantages associated with their methods, would prove to be too much to overcome.

By the 1890s and early 20<sup>th</sup> century the old craftsmen like Paul Oehler who had been making brick in St. Louis since the Civil War began to die out. So too did the old builders who preferred the traditional way of doing things. At the same time, various revival styles and later the Craftsman aesthetic came to dominate American vernacular architecture. These styles required extensive variation in bricks. Different colors, different finishes, different sizes, and various decorative designs were all desired by the public and the architectural and building-trades communities. The mechanical producers with their advanced technology, large-budgets, machine-shops, catalogues and advertising, adapted quickly to these capricious demands; traditional brick-makers were dealt another serious blow. Though it is difficult to determine exactly when the last hand-made brick-maker in St. Louis closed, their industry was essentially obsolete by the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup>

#### **Elaboration: The Oehler Family In St. Louis**

Paul and Franziska Oehler appear to have come to St. Louis from Germany by 1861. They are recorded in the somewhat unreliable city directory for the first time in 1864 where Paul is listed

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Oehler Probate Inventory, April 7 1891, St. Louis, Missouri Probate Records 1802-1900, viewed at <http://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/stlprobate/>

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Larry Giles, President St. Louis Building Arts Foundation, St. Louis, Missouri, 14 January 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Mimi Stiritz, 26.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Larry Giles, 14 January 2008.

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as a brick-molder living on Wyoming Street in south city. His sons remembered that he started his brickyard on South Broadway in 1863, though the business is not listed in the directory until 1867.<sup>16</sup> The brickyard was bounded by current President Street, 4<sup>th</sup> Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Street (Broadway) and the former grounds of the U.S. Marine Hospital (Figure: 1).<sup>17</sup> At the time, there were 30 brickyards and dealers supplying a booming, post-war St. Louis, which would become (arguably) the fourth largest city in the country by 1870.<sup>18</sup> In 1865, the Oehlers acquired three lots embedded within Paul's brickyard lease where they built a home (demolished) at 3621 Cleon Street.<sup>19</sup> This purchase was the first of many properties that they acquired in the immediate vicinity, eventually coming to own 23 lots of varying sizes by 1891. It is likely that these properties were held primarily as speculation, though they may have been used for functions related to brick manufacture as well. This area of St. Louis, (today located at the western edge of the Marine Villa neighborhood near the eastern border of Soulard and Benton Park) was dominated by German immigrants in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and was a hotbed of German culture and entrepreneurial ventures. Many brewers set up shop in the area to take advantage of the caves and springs along the Mississippi bluff-line, and brick-makers flourished in the deep clay deposits of the bottomlands that gradually sloped east from Broadway to the Mississippi River.

A measure of the Oehler family's quick adaptation to their new life in St. Louis can be found in the speed with which they set up their business, purchased land, and built a home. Considering their access to building materials and the money that could be made with real-estate in the booming St. Louis economy, it is not surprising that they quickly began to speculate in land. No doubt the apparent ease with which the Oehlers adapted to their new life in Missouri can be attributed in part to the well-established German community in the city, and the clannishness of its members. At the time, the Germans of St. Louis largely retained their linguistic and cultural traditions and created a society that hinged upon reciprocity. The strength of the community was anchored in identity, and reaffirmed by mutually beneficial business and social relationships. An indication that the Oehlers were involved in this system is that Paul was a founding member, officer, and stockholder of the Concordia Turnverein, a German social and athletic club that organized in 1875. The Concordia Turners built a hall near the Oehler home at the corner of 13<sup>th</sup> and Arsenal in 1877 (demolished) (Figure: 2).<sup>20</sup> In the tradition of the cooperative community action that underpinned these societies, it is quite likely that Oehler furnished brick for the construction of the building.

A pictorial map of St. Louis that was completed in 1875, contains a representation of the area

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<sup>16</sup> John W. Leonard, ed., *Book of St. Louisans*, vol. 1 (St. Louis: The St. Louis Republic, 1906), p. 441.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Oehler Probate Inventory.

<sup>18</sup> James Neal Primm, *The Lion of the Valley*, (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1998), p.272.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Oehler Probate Inventory.

<sup>20</sup> Concordia Turnverein, *Golden Jubilee of the Concordia Turnverein, 1875-1925* (St. Louis: Concordia Turnverein, 1925), pp. 5-11.

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where the Oehler's home and business were located, as well as the future site of the buildings at 3542-48 South Broadway (Figure: 1).<sup>21</sup> The immediate vicinity is shown as a thinly-settled, mixed manufacturing and residential area between the Mississippi River and the densely populated German neighborhoods immediately to the west. The land was pockmarked with sinkholes and dissected by drainages; the roads devolved into rough tracks and modest homes were clustered among small-scale operations such as lumber and brickyards.

The Oehlers prospered between the time the map was drawn and the census of 1880. Prosperity for them would have been predicated on a steady market for Paul's bricks. In the manner of the time, Paul cultivated relationships with other members of the building trades through both ethnic/social networks like the turnverein and professional networks like the St. Louis Building Exchange. These relationships would have ensured him a place in the construction food-chain that kept brick-makers, sawyers, carpenters, masons, and a host of other related trades in business. By 1880 the Oehlers were well established and the census found Paul and his wife Franziska living with their children Minnie (19), Emma (18), Otto (16), Emil (14), Bertha (12), Rosa (10), Flora (7), Ella (5); all the children were born in St. Louis and both Otto and Emil were working in the family brickyard with their father.<sup>22</sup>

In 1882 Paul Oehler acquired two lots in city block (CB) 1773 and constructed a one-story brick house (demolished) which the family rented to tenants.<sup>23</sup> It is logical that this building would have been constructed with brick from the Oehler's brickyard. From a financial standpoint, it makes perfect sense for a brick-maker to both sell bricks and use them to construct income-producing buildings. Through the construction of this first rental house, the Oehlers were able to liquidate a portion of their brick inventory while simultaneously diversifying their income. The \$84.00 a year they earned in rent from the house was the financial equivalent of selling 1000 bricks a month at the time.<sup>24</sup> While it is not possible to determine how important this income was to the Oehlers, building and managing the house was an important step in diversifying and securing their financial situation. This minor foray into the world of real-estate development and management appears to have been formative in the later decisions the family made regarding their commercial and financial future.

### 3542-48 South Broadway And The Last Days Of Oehler Brick

As the machine-made brick-manufacturers in the city grew more powerful, the Oehler family continued purchasing property in the vicinity of their home and business. In 1885 they purchased

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<sup>21</sup> Camille N. Dry and Rich J. Compton, *Pictorial St. Louis*, (St. Louis: Western Engraving Company, 1875; reprint ed., St. Louis, MO.: Harry M. Hagen, 1971), p.28.

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States, 1880*.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Oehler Probate Inventory; *St. Louis Building Trades Journal*, 5 (January 1888): 16.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*: *Ibid.*

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several commercially viable lots on the southwest corner of CB 1780, adjacent to the brickyard. With frontage along the busy thoroughfare of South Broadway, this land was admirably situated for the construction of rental property. Two years later, Paul took out a building permit for a three-story storefront building with residences on the upper floors (the nominated building at 3548 S. Broadway) on what was then an unoccupied, but prominent corner.<sup>25</sup> According to Paul's 1891 probate inventory, the building contained a spacious first-floor retail space and an attached feed store as well as 11 rooms for rent; a significant commercial venture. The building at 3548 S. Broadway and the little attached feed-store retain much of its historic character today with largely intact brickwork and an original cast-iron storefront.

By the time he built 3548 South Broadway in 1887, Oehler must have been wondering about his future in the brick business. For several years at that point, machine-made brick producers in St. Louis like Union Press and HPB had counted their annual production in the tens of millions. Though Oehler's annual production is not known, it is safe to place it far below these levels. He was getting to be an old man and, at the time, his sons had both left the family brickyard for other industries.<sup>26</sup> While Oehler's brickyard had been noted in the limited index of the 1875 pictorial map of St. Louis, the large booster publications of the 1880s like J.M. Elstner's *The Industries of St. Louis*, and the Western Traveler's Association's *The St. Louis of Today* ignored him in favor of the much larger companies.<sup>27</sup> If he was starting to get the sense that the industry was passing him by, the logical decision was to decrease his reliance on the industry. The decision to construct 3548 South Broadway (such a large commercial/residential building) marked a turning point in the family's commercial evolution. No longer were the bricks made in the brickyard simply a commodity to be sold. Rather, the Oehlers used their bricks to implement a new commercial strategy. Whether it was intentional or not, this new strategy went far beyond decreasing the family's reliance on the production of brick. Within four years, the surviving members of the family were no longer reliant on Paul's brickyard at all.

Paul's probate indicates that by 1891, the building at 3548 South Broadway was accounting for a significant amount of the family's income. It commanded about 60 dollars a month in rent, which, when coupled with the seven dollars a month earned from the little rental house they had built several decades earlier, brought the family 804 dollars annually.<sup>28</sup> It is not known how much money the brickyard was making at the time, but considering that the average manufacturing laborer earned 427 dollars a year in 1890, the Oehler's would have been financially stable with no brickyard income at all.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> G.M. Hopkins, *Atlas of the City of St. Louis, Missouri*. (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: G.M. Hopkins, 1883).

<sup>26</sup> John W. Leonard, p. 441.

<sup>27</sup> Andrew Morrison, *The Industries of St. Louis*, (St. Louis, J.M. Elstner & Co, 1885), p.29.; Western Traveler's Association, *The St. Louis of Today; an Artistic and Illustrated Presentation of Her Business Interests*, (St. Louis, Western Traveler's Association, 1888).

<sup>28</sup> Paul Oehler Probate Inventory.

<sup>29</sup> Clarence Dickinson Long, *Wages and Earnings in the United States, 1869-1890*. (Manchester, New Hampshire:



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Despite the fact that the family no longer needed the brickyard to survive, Paul continued in operation. In an effort to raise his commercial profile, he occasionally paid for larger-than-average advertising type in the St. Louis business directories. He also entered his stock brick into various St. Louis manufacturing fairs, where his estimable skills garnered multiple first-prize awards in the hand-made category.<sup>30</sup> While he and a few other small scale-producers occasionally took out advertisements in the back of the *St. Louis Building Trades Journal*, they were modest in comparison with the large, eye-catching graphics of the machine-press manufacturers that graced the covers (Figure: 3). Like other small-scale producers, Oehler could not have afforded to purchase the necessary equipment to compete with these companies even if he had wanted to. His probate inventory demonstrated the scale and simplicity of the operation he ran at the time of his death in 1891. The equipment listed is the same as what could have been expected of a brick-maker in the 1860s. Oehler owned four horses and two mules, 59 wheel barrows, three brick kilns, five wagons, and a total of about 460,000 bricks in assorted stages of production. The inventory also noted several sheds full of scrap lumber and logs to fire the kilns. This last item stands out in marked contrast with the freight-loads of coal and coke that the major producers consumed on a daily basis.

A year before Paul Oehler's death, his eldest son Emil returned to the brick industry from a career of several years working for a commission merchant. He did not, however, return to his father's brickyard where he had learned the trade as a child. Instead, Emil took a job as a salesman for HPB. This choice on his part was financially wise, if potentially disruptive of family politics. HPB was, of course, the largest brick-manufacturer in the world and the goliath of the industrial brick-makers that were crushing traditional craftsmen like his father. In two years, Emil became president of HPB's subsidiary in Illinois and Paul was dead. Paul's other son Otto had left the family brick business to become a pattern-maker; he was working in a foundry when his father passed away. At the time, Franziska still lived in the house she had built with her husband back in 1865 on a small amount of private land within the brickyard lease; their adult daughter Bertha lived with her.

Paul's probate inventory indicated that his lease on the brickyard property was scheduled to expire in two years (1893). With no need to continue operating the business, and a significant amount of leftover inventory, Franziska Oehler took out a building permit for three dwellings adjacent to the building Paul had built several years before (the nominated buildings at 3542-46 South Broadway). One dwelling was designed as her new home; the other two were income-generating rental properties. The buildings consumed much of the brickyard's leftover inventory, and considering the conspicuous placement of Paul's distinctive stock brick in the exterior walkways and facade of the buildings ("P. Oehler" is stamped into one face), it seems that

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Ayer Publishing, 1975), p.47.

<sup>30</sup> *St. Louis Building Trades Journal*, 3 (August 1886): 27.

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Franziska may have considered the buildings a monument to her husband and his business (see photo 8). In what can be considered either an ironic slight to Paul, or a final compromise, the decorative pressed-bricks used at the cornice line of the buildings came from the catalogue of the Hydraulic Press Company, and were probably furnished by Emil Oehler. The buildings were designed by H. Lemm, an architect who frequently worked with small residential and commercial projects in the area, and who had likely designed the Oehler's storefront building on the adjacent lot.<sup>31</sup> The buildings at 3542-46 South Broadway are almost certainly the last buildings constructed with Oehler brick in the city.

Within two years of Paul's death, his son Otto had either shut down the brickyard or merged it with Enterprise Brick, a corporate, machine-made brick manufacture. Paul Oehler Brick was listed in the city directory for the last time in 1895. In the same year, the Oehler Realty Company was incorporated by the family to manage and develop their various properties. Franziska and Bertha were listed at 3546 South Broadway for the last time in 1901, though Oehler Realty controlled the buildings until 1967.

Since that time, the buildings at 3542-46 South Broadway have continued to be used as apartments. Though they have suffered periods of neglect and abandonment they largely retain their historic appearance and the brickwork still proclaims its affiliation with the Oehler's yard. These buildings are currently being re-habilitated for residential use. Through the years, the building at 3548 South Broadway has housed several businesses and the apartments above have alternately been used for residential and office purposes. For the last 14 years, the first-floor commercial space has been occupied by a tavern appropriately known as "The Brick of St. Louis."

### Conclusion

The nominated buildings at 3542-48 South Broadway represent an important component of the commercial history of St. Louis. They also represent the penultimate and ultimate chapters (respectively) of Oehler Brick. As mechanized brick manufacturers conquered the market toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the commercial landscape of brick production underwent a major change. Hand-made brick producers like the Oehler family, who had traditionally dominated the industry, were put out of business. As their commercial viability declined, the Oehlers used the products of their brickyard to construct a large rental property. The building at 3548 South Broadway, constructed in 1887, generated enough annual income that the family became insulated from the changes taking place in the brick industry. When Paul Oehler died four years later, the family closed his brickyard and Franziska Oehler used the remaining inventory to construct a new home and additional income-generating properties (the buildings at 3542-46 South Broadway). Together, these properties are the only known buildings in St. Louis

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<sup>31</sup> *St. Louis Building Trades Journal*, 5 (January 1888): 15.

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constructed with Oehler's handmade brick, and almost certainly the last. They also embody the Oehler family's struggle to adjust to changing economic and commercial pressures during a period of profound transition within the St. Louis brick industry.

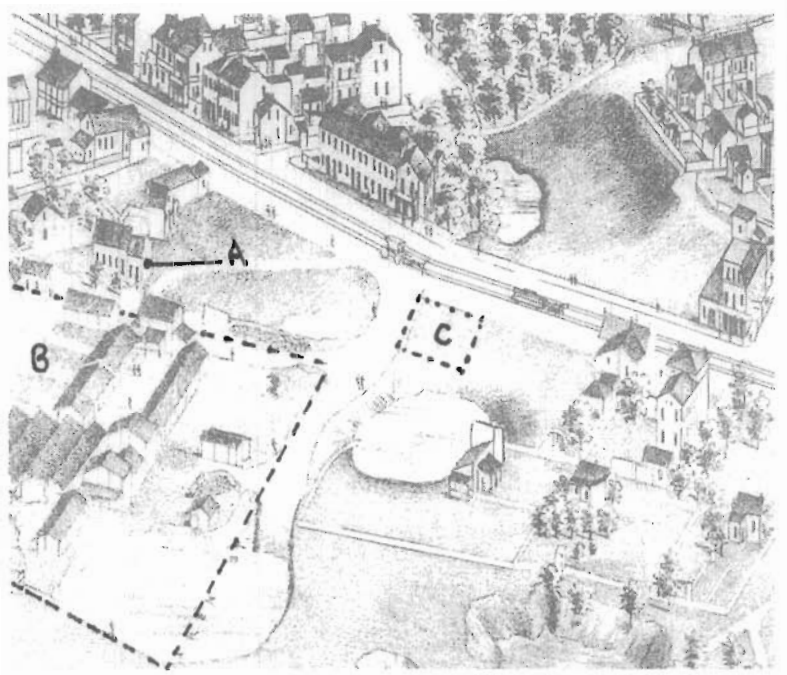
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Figure 1: Location of Oehler home, brickyard, and future site of 3542-48 S. Broadway



Source: *Compton and Dry, Pictorial St. Louis 1875*

Oehler Family Home c. 1865-1893: **A**

Paul Oehler Brick: **B**

Site of 3542-48 S. Broadway: **C**

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Figure 2: Paul Oehler as a member of the Board of Managers of the Concordia Turnverein, 1877.



Source: *Golden Jubilee of the Concordia Turnverein, 1875-1925*.

Figure 3: Advertisement for Paul Oehler Brick

**PAUL OEHLER,**  
MANUFACTURER OF  
**Hand Made Pressed and Common**  
**BRICKS**  
E. Side S. Broadway and President.  
ST. LOUIS, MO.  
First premium awarded at the St. Louis Fairs  
for the best hand made pressed bricks.

Source: *St. Louis Building Trades Journal*. 3 (August 1886): 27.

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U.S. Department of Commerce. Bureau of the Census, *9<sup>th</sup> Census of the United States, 1880.*

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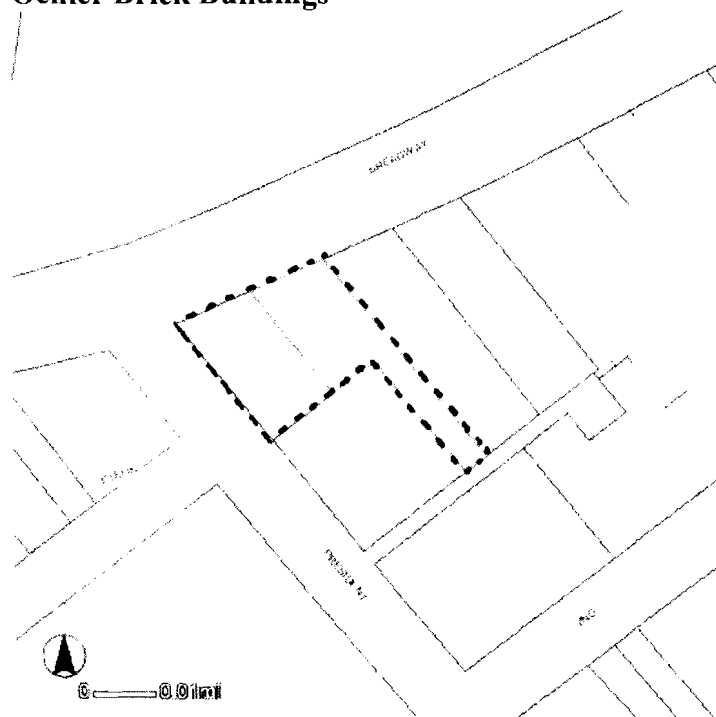
### Boundary Description

The Oehler Brick buildings are located at 3544-48 South Broadway. The two parcels occupy the southwest corner of St. Louis City Block number 1780 and are identified respectively by the nine-digit parcel identification numbers 178000015 and 178000005. The parcels and building are situated between South Broadway on the west, President Street on the South, parcel 178000020 on the north, and an unnamed alley and parcel 178000250 on the east. The boundaries of the nominated parcels are indicated with a broken line on the accompanying scaled map entitled "Oehler Brick Buildings."

### Boundary Justification

The boundaries described above encompass the parcels of land where 3542-46 South Broadway as well as 3548 South Broadway are situated

### **Oehler Brick Buildings**



Source: Planning and Urban Design  
Agency, City of St. Louis.





477  
478  
476  
35'  
474  
473  
472

DeLief Beck  
Buildings  
3542-48 S. Broadway  
St. Louis [Independent City] MO  
Zone 15  
E. 742 413  
N. 4275100







3542 A









END SCHOOL ZONE



3550

BRICK

BRICK







STOP

15



P. DEHLER