



Landmarks Commission

City of Kansas City, Missouri
Heart of America

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The 18th & Vine Street/Terminal Tracks area boundaries lie several hundred feet short of 18th Street on the north, the Terminal Tracks on the south, Brooklyn Avenue on the east and The Paseo on the west. It is within this above described area that plans for a potential project would demolish considerable property that bears known architectural/historic significance to the Black community.

While these boundaries do not actually include the extremely significant intersection of 18th & Vine, an evaluation of the plans show the potential of extreme character change of this intersection and environs that have over a long period of time been indisputably identified with the local Black community. Such concern is not reflected south of 19th Street as very little of significance remains as the modest residences that once populated the area were demolished a number of years ago. Only a few houses and apartments remain in this section which has been taken over by light industrial business. However, north of 19th Street there remains a sufficient number of original buildings which constitute a part of a commercial and residential district fabric that was once known as "The Bowery."

Shortly after the turn of the century three distinct Black population centers were in existence. Two of these areas were located north of Independence Avenue while the third, The Bowery was located between 17th and 25th Streets, and Troost to Woodland Avenues. Of the three distinct Black population centers, only what was known as The Bowery still remains. The other two fell victim to freeways and other expansions. This was a very densely populated area with its composition limited exclusively to Blacks. As the rural Blacks migrated to the cities adequate housing was not available to them, leaving as the only other alternative "moving in with others." The occupants were in large measure laborers, domestic help, railroad employees and a few professionals, such as teachers. Extremely crowded conditions were prevalent.

In 1900 the Black population in Kansas City was estimated at 17,500, and through the succeeding years grew at a frenzied pace. Segregation dictated that only three areas in the city were available for Black settlement. Thus the growing population density within The Bowery created intense overcrowding which resulted in the formation of slum conditions. In 1929 the Kansas City Call described The Bowery as having..."the highest density population in the city, the home of Swill Center, and the flyblown food, of cellar homes...and tenement houses."

The Bowery was comparable to a small town in that it was a self-contained community with both a commercial and residential fabric, including

facilities such as churches, theatres, and schools to support the population included within its boundaries.

The enforced containment which segregated the Black population into certain areas of the city, was changed through a United States Supreme Court decision in 1948, ruling that Whites could no longer refuse to sell houses to Blacks. This opened up other areas for Black occupation but it also closed a chapter in the history of The Bowery.

By 1948 commercial development in the 18th & Vine Streets area had long since ceased. It was roughly from 1890 to 1935 that the area flourished. While 18th & Vine served as the commercial hub, there radiated out from this point for six or seven blocks important commercial sections and spots that were vital to the development of Kansas City jazz. In its heyday Kansas City jazz flourished in numerous clubs and spots for jam sessions, not only at 18th & Vine, but also at 12th & Vine. Unfortunately what remains at 12th & Vine entails a little more than memories. This makes 18th & Vine even more significant for there still exists tangible evidence of what is nationally recognized in the field of music as: KANSAS CITY JAZZ.

Early issues of the Kansas City Call, a Black owned newspaper which began publishing in 1919, reflect the heavy concentration of Black commercial establishments as seen through advertisements and news reports. These businesses were supported by a sizable and growing residential population in the immediate vicinity. An examination of the City's Water and Building Permits reveal a great volume of

construction activity from around 1888 to 1930. In 1915 the emphasis on residential construction gave way to a building boom of Black owned commercial structures.

Between about 1910 and 1930 the Black business community enjoyed relatively prosperous times. There was a proliferation of substantial businesses such as an automobile agency owned by Homer Roberts, the Square Deal Realty Company, Dickerson Cleaners, Winston Holmes Music Company and, the Love Theatre. All of these were located in close proximity to the 18th & Vine intersection. Unfortunately, all that remains today is a partial legacy of commercial architecture to serve as a reminder of those affluent days. (See individual inventory sheets.)

The remaining very early residential properties include four houses located in the 1900 block of Highland and several on Vine Street. The commercial buildings of significance date between 1910 and 1925. These include the Eblon Theatre, Gem Theatre, Roberts and Lincoln Buildings (the Lincoln Building has undergone considerable alteration), Jones Recreation Parlor and the New Rialto Theatre, now known as the Armory. These are but a few of the buildings from whence comes the local Black history as recorded through commercial development.

Of probably even greater importance in evaluating the areas significance is the consideration of Kansas City jazz. Clubs that are associated with this jazz movement include the Panama, Subway, Lucille's Band Box, Elk's Rest and the Old Kentucky Barb-B-Que. All were located in and around 18th, Vine and Paseo. An exhaustive study needs to be made to determine what of these and other spots related to Kansas City jazz remains.

The remaining architecture located north of 19th Street contains sufficient elements of significance to justify a multiple resource nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. The significance will be based on both the commercial development of the area and, the jazz aspect. The exact boundaries can be determined only after the research work has been completed and evaluated. Such a nomination would include Lincoln High School, the YMCA, Centennial Methodist Church and, the Jamison Temple, all of which lie outside the 18th & Vine intersection but were critical to the history of Kansas City Blacks.

A second National Register district is apparent and recommended. This would be limited to the four native stone structures that are located in the 2000 block on Vine Street. They are: 2000, 2001, 2010 and, 2033 Vine Street.

And finally, any new development in this area must be so planned as to protect and not unfavorably impact the Mutual Musician's Foundation located at 1823 Highland. This building is listed in the National Register. The same considerations must be afforded the Kansas City Call building, 1715 East 18th Street, as a nomination to the National Register is pending in Washington, D. C.

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