

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name Ball-Essen Farmstead Historic District

other names/site number Ball, James and Mary, Farmstead; Essen, John and Mary, Farmstead

2. Location

street & number 749 Babler Park Drive [N/A] not for publication

city or town Wildwood [N/A] vicinity

state Missouri code MO county St. Louis code 189 zip code 63005

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 [])

31 October 01

Signature of certifying official/Title Claire F. Blackwell/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

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

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:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

**Ball-Essen Farmstead Historic District
St. Louis, Missouri**

5. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources Within Property		
		Contributing	Non-contributing	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	6	0	buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	0	0	sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	2	0	structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	0	0	objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	8	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing.

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register.

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling
DOMESTIC: Secondary Structure
AGRICULTURE: Animal Facility
AGRICULTURE: Storage
AGRICULTURE: Agricultural Outbuilding

Current Functions

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling
DOMESTIC: Secondary Structure
AGRICULTURE: Storage
WORK IN PROGRESS

7. Description

Architectural Classification

Other: I-house

Materials

foundation Concrete
 walls WOOD/Weatherboard
WOOD
 roof METAL
 other STONE

Narrative Description See continuation sheet [x].

See continuation sheet [x]

**Ball-Essen Farmstead Historic District
St. Louis, Missouri**

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.

Narrative Statement of Significance

See continuation sheet [x].

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography

See continuation sheet [x].

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
- # _____

Areas of Significance

 AGRICULTURE
 ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

ca. 1870-1951

Significant Dates

ca. 1871;
 ca. 1905

Significant Person(s)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other:

Name of repository:

**Ball-Essen Farmstead Historic District
St. Louis, Missouri**

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 3.9 acres more or less

UTM References

A. Zone	Easting	Northing	B. Zone	Easting	Northing
15	702480	4277835	15	702610	4277745
C. Zone	Easting	Northing	D. Zone	Easting	Northing
15	702540	4277620	15	702475	4277670

[] 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 Debbie Sheals
 organization Private Contractor date May 22, 2001
 street & number 406 West Broadway telephone 573-874-3779
 city or town Columbia state Missouri zip code 65203

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 FOP for any additional items)

Property Owner

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

name Busch-Strutman, L.L.C. (Contact: Lauren Strutman)
 street & number 16676 Chesterfield Airport Road telephone (636)-537-0880
 city or town Chesterfield state MO zip code 63017

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Ball-Essen Farmstead Historic District
St. Louis County, Missouri

Materials, cont.

foundation STONE

Summary: The Ball-Essen Farmstead Historic District is located at 749 Babler Park Drive, less than a mile north of the main entrance to Babler State Park. The historic district is west and slightly south of Chesterfield, on the western edge of St. Louis County. The boundaries of the approximately 3.8 acre district encompass the main farmhouse and all of the support buildings which are still associated with it. Part of the farmhouse dates to the early 1870s; the house took its current form around 1905. The house is a five bay frame I-house with weatherboard sheathing, two-over-two wood windows, and a tin roof. The other resources of the district were built between ca. 1870 and the 1930s. Contributing resources include the farmhouse, (ca. 1871 with ca. 1905 alterations) a frame tenant house, (ca. 1930), a barn (ca. 1871, with later additions), a garden shed (ca. 1905), blacksmith shop (ca. 1938), and poultry house (ca. 1920s), a stone box culvert, (ca. 1870) and a spring site with cut stone facing. There are no non-contributing resources. All of the resources are highly intact, although in poor to good condition. The farmstead is currently undergoing a comprehensive rehabilitation, which will preserve the integrity of the resources while greatly improving their physical condition.

Elaboration: The farmstead sits near Babler Park drive, which is also State Highway BA (formerly known as Highway 109), on the northwest side of the road. Highway 109 is a relatively late addition to the area; the house actually faces away from it, toward what was Pond Road. (See Figure One, Site Plan.) Pond Road, which was established in the late 1860s, was rerouted to the current path of Highway 109 in the 1930s.

The part of the district south of the early path of Pond Road is relatively level and open, with a few mature trees around the house and along the old roadway. The land on the other side of the old road consists of a wooded hillside which rises steeply just a few yards from the roadway. The resources of the district are spread along both sides of the original road; most are on the south side.

The box culvert is located on the northeast edge of the property, at the early track of Pond Road. A creek, which is fed by the spring, runs through the culvert. The spring encasement is set into the hillside about 80 feet west of the box culvert, north of the road. A concrete garage foundation sits next to the spring, it was built for a frame garage which was moved from another part of the yard after the new road came through. (The garage itself is gone.) The only other resource on the west part of the road is a small frame shed which was used as a blacksmith shop; that building is close to the roadway, southwest of the garage foundation, directly across the roadway from the barn.

The rest of the resources in the district are located between the old and new roadways. The easternmost building is the horse and mule barn, which is also the largest outbuilding in the district. A frame poultry house sits just a few feet southwest of the barn.

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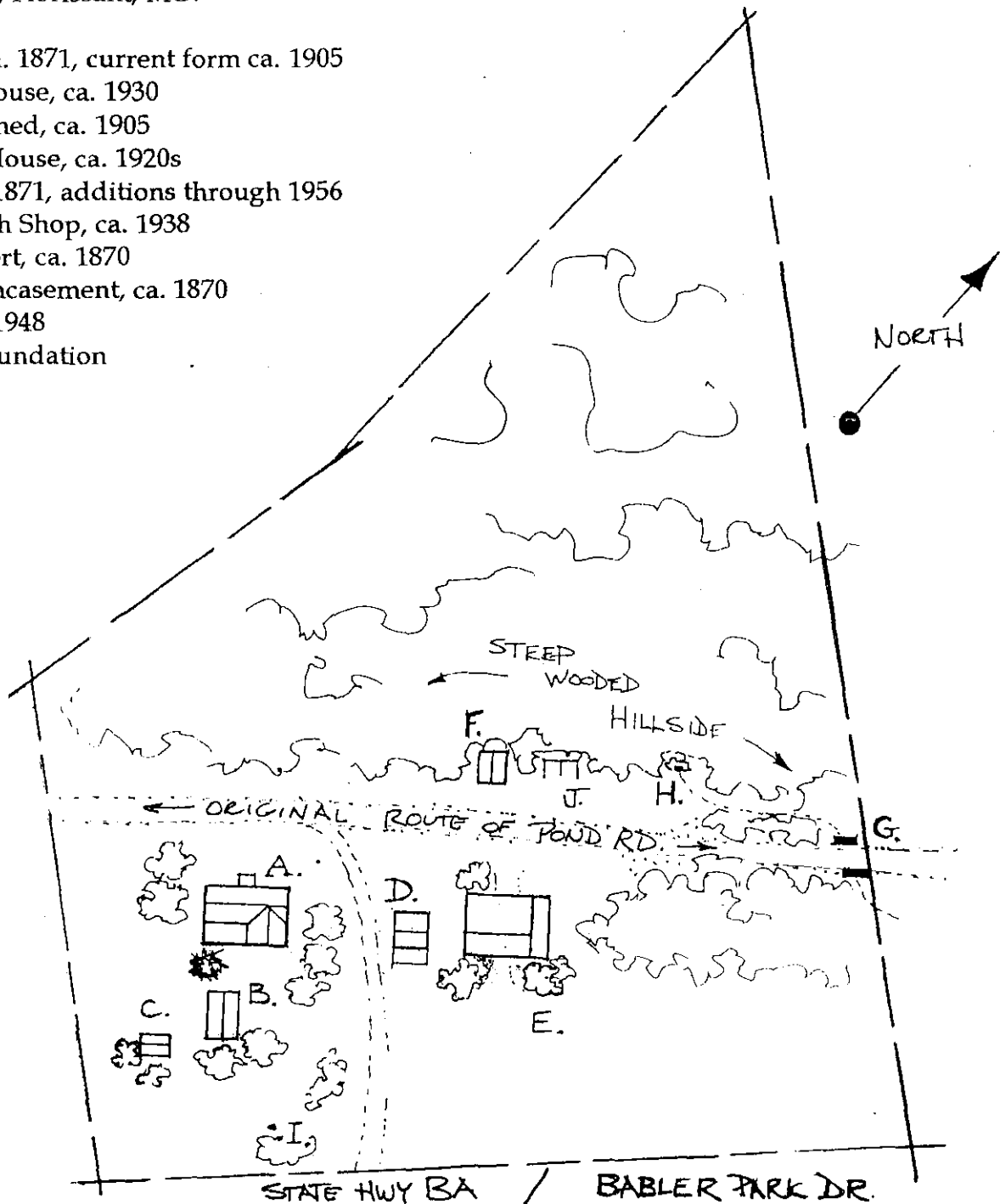
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Ball-Essen Farmstead Historic District
St. Louis County, Missouri

Figure One. Site Plan.

Drawn by Debbie Sheals, from a survey map by Nicholas C. Pappas of Topos Surveying and Engineering, Florissant, MO.

- A. House, ca. 1871, current form ca. 1905
- B. Tenant House, ca. 1930
- C. Garden Shed, ca. 1905
- D. Poultry House, ca. 1920s
- E. Barn, ca. 1871, additions through 1956
- F. Blacksmith Shop, ca. 1938
- G. Box culvert, ca. 1870
- H. Spring Encasement, ca. 1870
- I. Flagpole, 1948
- J. Garage Foundation



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The other buildings are clustered around the house, which is about 120 feet from Highway 109. The tenant house is directly behind the main house, and there is a small frame garden shed southwest of the tenant house. A small flagpole, which is set into a concrete base, is located southeast of the house, near the highway. The concrete base is inscribed with the following: "5-28-48 JRE PME JM". (Probably for John Robert Essen, his wife Pauline M. Essen, and an unknown helper.)

Old Essen family photos show that the house was originally surrounded by a low wire fence, with at least three different gates. (See Figure Two.) One was in front of the house facing the old road, one was at the rear of the tenant house facing the new highway, and one was southwest of the house, at the end of a sidewalk which still runs between the house and the tenant house. The track of a narrow drive between the tenant house and garden shed is still visible, although it does not appear to have been used recently. The main drive from the highway runs north of the house, and there is a very new roadway to the south, which runs to a new house site northwest of the farmstead.

Figure Two.

Photo of Essen family members in front of the house, taken ca. 1930. Photo courtesy of Helen Essen James, Wildwood, MO. The man sitting in the center is probably John Robert Essen, and the woman in the light colored skirt next to him is probably his mother, Mary Essen.



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Individual Resource Descriptions

House. Contributing building, ca. 1871, with expansion to its current form ca. 1905. (See photos 1-6, 9, and Figure Three.) The house is a five bay frame I-house with a two-story rear ell. It measures 41.5 feet by 28.4 feet. Although the front door is centered on the facade, that elevation is not strictly symmetrical; the windows on the northern side of the house are more widely spaced than those on the south end. The front door is sheltered by an open porch which has heavy turned posts, a concrete floor and a shed roof. The ends of the porch roof are sheathed with the same type of narrow wooden weatherboards found on all exterior walls of the house. Small spindlework brackets adorn the tops of the porch posts. The northern end of the house has a stone foundation; the southern foundation is of concrete.

The house has an L-shaped plan, with a side-facing gable roof on the front, and a second gable roof over the rear ell. All of the walls are sheathed with early weatherboards, and there are simple flat corner boards and cornices on all elevations. The fascia boards of the gable ends all have teardrop shaped end pieces, and cornice boards which echo the curve of the fascias. (See photo 2.) The early windows are all intact, and all have their original simple flat wood trim. A second open porch shelters the back door, which faces Highway 109. That porch has a gable roof, with simple square posts and a low weatherboarded railing.

The house has a typical I-house plan—one room deep and two rooms wide, with a central stair hall and a rear ell. The rear ell has an additional room on each floor. The kitchen is on the ground floor of the ell. The central stair hall was partially enclosed sometime in the mid-1900s to allow for the installation of a bathroom. The early balustrade and newel post survived that change, and remain in place. (See photo 5.) The bathroom will be removed and the hall restored as part of the current rehabilitation project. The new bath will be located in a new two story rear addition, which will be along the back wall of the house. (See Figure Three for addition location.)

The balustrade on the second floor is also intact, and there is an early or original set of stairs to the attic. The balustrade between the first and second floors features slim tapered square balusters. The steep, winding, attic staircase is enclosed. Most of the rooms in the house have early or original hardwood flooring, and many of the original four panel doors have survived as well.

Construction details which were revealed during the rehabilitation project show that the house began as a much smaller dwelling. (Much of the plaster was removed and the walls covered with thin drywall earlier; all of the wall board and lath on the second floor has now been removed, exposing the second floor framing.) The original part of the house, which is now the northern end of the I-house, was one and one half stories tall, with a saltbox form. (The original line of the roof is visible in sheathing shown in photo 6.) It had two rooms downstairs, and one or two low-ceilinged rooms on the second floor. The ceiling of the rear part of the second floor would not have been high enough to use that space as a room, but it may have been used for storage or a sleeping loft.

The early part of the house has balloon framing, with circular-sawn studs and laths, and wide thick sheathing boards, attached to the outsides of the studs on a diagonal. There is a full basement beneath the front north room, and a crawl space under the back north room. Both rooms sit on stone

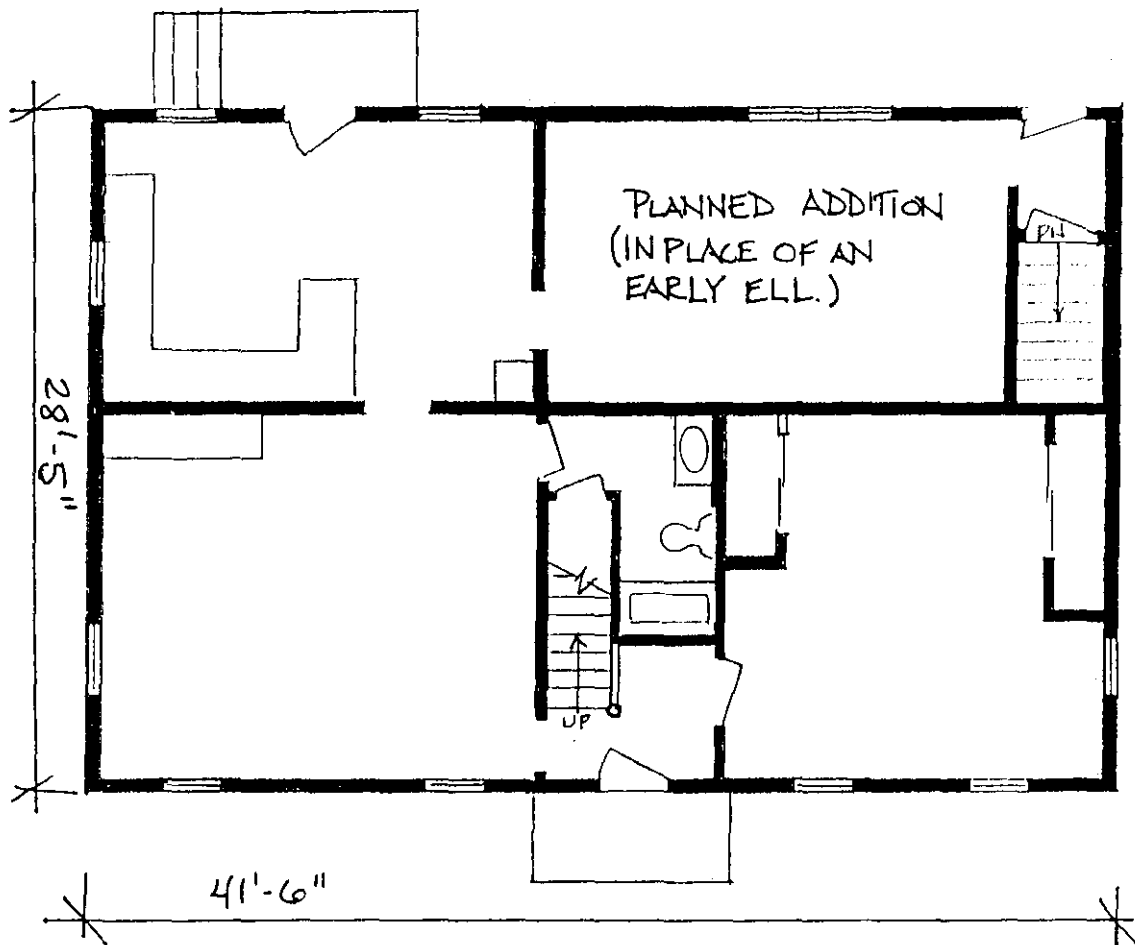
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foundations.

Figure Three:
First Floor Plan, Main House.



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The house was greatly expanded sometime after the turn of the century, probably shortly after the farm was purchased by John and Mary Essen in 1904. That remodeling job, which brought the house to its current form, roughly doubled its size.

The expansion included the addition of a central stair hall, with two new rooms to the south of it, one on each floor. Those rooms sit on a concrete foundation, and have horizontal board sheathing on the outsides of the wall studs. The rear second floor room of the original house was also greatly enlarged, and the ceilings of both early second floor rooms were raised. The new framing rests on top of the old plate in the front rooms, and the newer wall studs are sistered to the older ones in the back room.

The entire roof framing system, including the existing tin sheathing, also appears to have been added at that time. Although the attic is unfinished, the treads of the attic stairs are especially worn; it is possible that they were moved to that location from the original house during the remodeling project. Exterior features which appear to have been installed at that time include all of the weatherboards and exterior trim, the exterior porches, and all or most of the two-over-two windows.

The house appears today much as it did when the early remodeling was completed. Only the early shutters have been lost. All of the early exterior woodwork, including windows, weatherboards, and door and window trim, are intact and in good condition. A comparison of the house today with an Essen family photo of it which was taken sometime before 1930 shows that there have been no changes of note since that time. (See Figure Two.)

Tenant house. Contributing Building, ca. 1930. (See photos 4,7,8.) This small frame dwelling has a front-facing gable roof, a concrete foundation and bullnose weatherboards. It measures 12.3 feet by 26.3 feet, and is in good condition. The tenant house is located very close to the rear of the main house. It is sheathed with overlapping weatherboards which have two bullnose edges milled onto each board, resulting in the appearance of much narrower, rounded, weatherboards. The roof is sheathed with corrugated tin, and has early or original half-round gutters. The front door is sheltered by a small shed-roofed front porch which has slender turned posts and a concrete floor. The windows, which are early or original, are the same type of two-over-two wood windows found in the main house.

The house has two rooms, each with an outside door. The front door opens to one room, and a door on the west wall opens to the back room of the house. There is also an interior doorway between the rooms. There was once a stove chimney in the wall between the two rooms. Both rooms have ten-foot tall ceilings which are covered with ornamental stamped metal panels. Most original interior woodwork is in place and in good condition. The door trim has simple molded plinth blocks at the floor line, and both rooms have tall beaded baseboards, and wood floors.

Garden Shed, Contributing building, ca. 1905. (See photos 4,8.) This frame shed has a front facing gable roof, board and batten wall sheathing and a concrete foundation. It measures 12 feet by 14 feet, and is in fair to good condition. A shed-roofed addition on the west side of the building had

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collapsed, and has recently been removed. The roof is covered with corrugated tin which is early or original. The building has one door in the north gable end, and one window sized hinged wooden door in the north side wall. It was used for garden supplies during the period of significance, and may have occasionally functioned as a smokehouse as well.

Poultry House. Contributing building, ca. 1920s. (See photos 9, 10, 12.) The poultry house is a frame building with board and batten wall sheathing, a standing seam metal roof, and a concrete foundation. It is the only building in the district with a standing seam roof. The building measures 18 feet by 18.2 feet, not counting a badly deteriorated shed-roofed addition on the southeast side. The building has rectangular two-light windows on the walls not covered by the addition, and the doorway faces the main house. A small wooden hatch above the main door opens to the low loft area.

Mule and Horse Barn. Contributing Building, ca. 1871, additions through 1956. (See photos 10-12.) This frame barn began as an English barn, with a rectangular floor plan and central drive-through. It was expanded towards the northwest at one time, probably in 1945. That expansion created the second driveway, which runs parallel to the gable roof. The floor of the drive was covered with concrete around 1947. A post in the newer north doorway has the number 45 carved into it, along with the initials DE or PE. The concrete of the drive bears the inscription "JRE 1947 JM". The shed addition has the date 1956 painted in white letters high on one of the inside walls.

The barn now has a dual pitched gable roof, board and batten walls, and both stone and concrete foundations. It measures 34 feet by 32.5 feet, not counting an open shed addition along the northeast side. The shed addition is about 12 feet wide, and runs along the entire northeast end wall. The barn was built in several stages; it started out as a small English barn around 1871, and came to its current form in 1956. The core of the building, which has a stone foundation, was probably built about the same time as the original house, ca. 1871. (The 1876 Atlas map of the property shows both a barn and house.) With the exception of the central driveway, the ground floor spaces have dirt floors.

The barn has an off center drive-through passage which runs perpendicular to the gable, with horse and mule pens and a newer second drive to one side, and an open crib on the other. Ladders along the side of the stock pens lead to the hay loft above. The stock pens have swinging exterior doors, and the drives both have wagon-sized double swinging doors. The older cross drive has wide doors on both ends. The wagon doors all have wide heavy hand made hinges.

Blacksmith Shop. Contributing building, ca. 1938. (See photo 13.) This small frame shed has a concrete foundation, board and batten walls, and a gable roof covered with corrugated tin. It measures 14 feet by 15 feet, and is in fair to poor condition. There is a simple board door in the front gable end, which faces southeast, to the barn. Each of the side walls has a six-light window sash that appears to be part of a salvaged double-hung window. A workbench runs along one inside wall. The building is tucked between the steep hillside and the old roadway, which runs between it and the barn.

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Box culvert. Contributing structure, ca. 1870. (See photo 14.) The box culvert is of stone, with squared stone walls running parallel to the road at each end. The walls rise a few feet above the surface of the roadway. The culvert is built entirely of massive limestone blocks, with raked mortar joints. The blocks are all highly finished, with straight even edges, and rock-faced surfaces. The opening beneath the roadway is as highly finished as the side walls, with smooth squared sides all the way through. Pond Road was laid out between 1862 and 1871, and it has been assumed that the box culvert was built when the road came in.¹ It should be noted, however, that the type of raked joints found on the culvert are more typical of early 20th century stonework than of work done in the 1870s; the structure there now may have replaced an earlier culvert or bridge, or simply have been repointed at a later date. It is, in any event, clearly more than fifty years old.

Spring encasement. Contributing structure, ca. 1870. (See photo 15.) The mouth of the spring is located at the base of the steep hill northeast of the house. The place where the spring comes out of the hillside is surrounded by roughly worked stones which form a small rectangular opening. Small metal straps set into the stonework on either side of the opening originally held some sort of gate or grillwork, presumably to keep animals out of the spring and the milk or butter which were stored there. (At least one Essen family history noted that they kept butter at the spring.²) The creek created by the spring runs east along the base of the hillside to the box culvert. Although it is possible that the cut stone spring encasement is considerably older than the other resources of the district, it was surely there by the time the box culvert was built, and has therefore been assigned the same approximate construction date.

The Ball-Essen farmstead is little changed from the period of significance. None of the resources found there today have seen significant alterations in the last half century, and all clearly reflect their original agricultural functions. The district exhibits a very high level of integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The current rehabilitation project will ensure that it continues to do so well into the twenty-first century. ◊

¹ The dates for the road are based upon county atlas maps.

² "Essen Family History" Home movies and still photos on video, loaned from Helen Essen James.

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Ball-Essen Farmstead Historic District
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Significance

The Ball-Essen Farmstead Historic District, at 749 Babler Park Drive, St. Louis County, Missouri, is significant under Criterion C, in the area of ARCHITECTURE, and Criterion A, in the area of AGRICULTURE. The district, which covers just under 4 acres, contains six contributing buildings, two contributing structures, and no non-contributing resources. Contributing historic resources within the proposed district boundaries include: the farmhouse, (ca. 1871; current form ca. 1905), a small tenant house, (ca. 1930), a frame barn (ca. 1871 with later additions), a small stone box culvert, (ca. 1870), a spring site with cut stone facing, and three other early twentieth century agricultural outbuildings. The period of significance thus runs from ca. 1870 to 1951, the standard fifty year cut-off point. The forms and locations of the buildings in the district were influenced by common vernacular building trends, as well as the manner in which the farm operated over the years. The district is therefore significant in the areas of Architecture and Agriculture, as a representative example of a modest Missouri family farmstead. The farmhouse is an I-house, a vernacular house type which was popular in agricultural settings in Missouri for nearly a century. The outbuildings around the house reflect the diverse functions typical of early Missouri family farms. The buildings closest to the two dwellings, the garden shed and the poultry house, were used for domestic types of functions, while those further away, the blacksmith shop and mule barn, reflect heavier work and more commercial activities. All of the resources are highly intact, and as a group, they reflect the property's long history of agricultural use.

Elaboration

The Ball Family 1866-1886: Establishment of the farmstead and early development.

European settlement in the area which is now the Meramec township of St. Louis County predated its status as American territory. In the last years of the eighteenth century, the area was the edge of the frontier. As one history of the county said of the township, it "was a locality of great importance, owing to the fact that it was the frontier of advancing civilization....From it the upper Missouri country was explored, and in it a citizen's guard was formed to repress the Indians and the no less to be dreaded white marauders...Great encouragement was given by the French and Spanish governments, and subsequently by that of the United States, to the formation of volunteer companies", the actions of which were rewarded with "liberal grants of land."³ The various governments also used land grants to encourage permanent settlement. That practice left an enduring mark; historic maps of the area show the irregular outlines of individual surveys over nearly half the township. The Ball-Essen farmstead is located within one of those early surveys.

³ J. Thomas J. Scharf, History of Saint Louis City and County. (St. Louis, 1883) p. 1917.

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of individual surveys over nearly half the township. The Ball-Essen farmstead is located within one of those early surveys.

The farmstead is in Survey 414, which began as a Spanish land grant to George McFall, and was confirmed after the Louisiana Purchase as Survey 414.⁴ Like many of the early surveys in the area, Survey 414 follows a waterway. Bonhomme Creek runs along the eastern edge of most of the survey. The farmstead, which is located in the northern end of the Survey, is just west of the creek.

McFall sold the north part of the Survey to Samuel Graham in 1806; Graham sold the same tract just four years later to Langston Bacon, for \$500. Bacon and his heirs owed the property for the next sixty years, and it was under their ownership that the farm was expanded westward, a move which greatly increased access to the creek and the rich bottom land around it.⁵ With the possible exception of the spring encasement, however, none of the historic resources on the farm today go back to the years of Bacon's ownership.

In 1866, Samuel Bacon's heirs sold the property to Frederick and Mary J. Eickermann, for \$2,675. That sale included 132.36 acres in Survey 414, plus the 40.88 acres added by Bacon. Fred Eickermann was involved with the flour milling business, first as a mill builder, and later as a mill operator. About the time that he owned this property, Eickermann was involved with the construction of a very large mill in the nearby town of Orrville.⁶ Later, he went into the mill business for himself, running the Camp Spring Mill on the present site of Union Station in St. Louis.⁷

The Bacon farm may have been a speculative property for the Eickermanns. Eickermann's name appears on a large number of deeds from this period, which suggest that he was involved with land speculation as well as milling. The Eickermanns owned the Bacon property only until the fall of 1870, and were living in another township when the population census was taken that summer. The property did not really leave the family when it was sold, however, as the Eickermanns sold 138.88 acres of the farm to James Ball, who was Mary Eickermann's brother. (The farm remained at that 138.88 acre size until 1961.)

Mary Eickerman and James Ball were members of one of the county's most prominent early families. The nearby city of Ballwin was founded in 1836 by their father, John Ball, who had owned land in the area since before the Louisiana Purchase. James Ball claimed 400 acres in 1800; that

⁴ Esley Hamilton, "Notes on 749 Babler Park Drive, Wildwood, MO," (Typescript, based on St. Louis County Deed records, St. Louis, MO, 2000) p. 1.

⁵ Thomas Bacon added 40.88 acres in the adjacent Section 22 directly from the U.S. government, via Patent #10235.)

⁶ Scharf, p. 1919. That mill burned after only a year, and was not rebuilt.

⁷ Caverly Scott Wallace, A History of Ballwin Missouri, (Ballwin: The City of Ballwin, 1979) p. 14.

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parcel was later recorded as Survey 1908. Ball's land was on one of the oldest and most important roads in the area, a route which connected St. Louis to Jefferson City, and was often called the "state road." It was there that he laid out the town of Ballwin, and there that both James and Mary Ball were born and raised.

James Ball spent his early adulthood as a teamster, transporting freight by heavy wagons which were pulled by oxen. One of his early jobs was to haul salt overland to St. Joseph, and he later drove a large team of oxen from Ballwin to California, in search of gold. He did not get rich in California, and returned to Missouri after a couple of years. He was apparently ready to settle down after his travels. One local history of the Ball family noted that he married soon after his return and later moved from the "Ballwin area to the neighborhood of the present Babler Park. Here he raised a family of three girls and five boys" and "lived to a hale and hearty old age."⁸

Ball and his wife Martha apparently lived on the farm for a while before buying it from his sister and brother-in-law. The 1870 population census, which was taken in the summer, shows that James Ball, his wife Martha, and eight children between the ages of 4 and 26, were already living on the farmstead. (Neighboring property owners match those shown on the 1871 county atlas map.) They officially bought the property that fall, for \$1,900. The 138.88 acres the Balls bought at that time continued to serve as the same farm for most of the next century, and it was by or for the Ball family that the oldest of the existing resources on the property were constructed. Those early resources include the box culvert, part of the existing house, and the core of the mule and horse barn.

Pond Road, which originally ran through the farmstead, came into existence about the time the Balls moved to the farm. (It is possible that the Ball family had enough local influence to have the route established so as to go through this property.) The road is not shown on 1847 or 1862 Atlas maps, but does appear in the 1871 Atlas. The map shows a sharp right turn in the road just before the north edge of the Survey, presumably to gain access to the crossing at the box culvert. (See Figure Four, 1878 Atlas Map.) It appears, therefore, that the box culvert on the farmstead was built by Eickermann or James Ball when the road was developed, ca. 1870. It is also extremely likely that the spring encasement was in place by that time as well. The spring would have been an important feature of the farm, especially in the early years, and the stone surround and gate hardware may well be the oldest resources on the farmstead.

The Balls apparently began work on a house and barn soon after moving to the farm, and both have been assigned a construction date of ca. 1871. The 1878 County Atlas map of the property shows a house and one other building on the farmstead, in the same approximate locations as the house and mule barn found there today. The north side of the current house, and the mule barn are the only buildings of the farmstead old enough to have been in place since then, and it has been assumed that they are the buildings mapped in 1878. (Although there must have been other

⁸ Wallace, p. 14.

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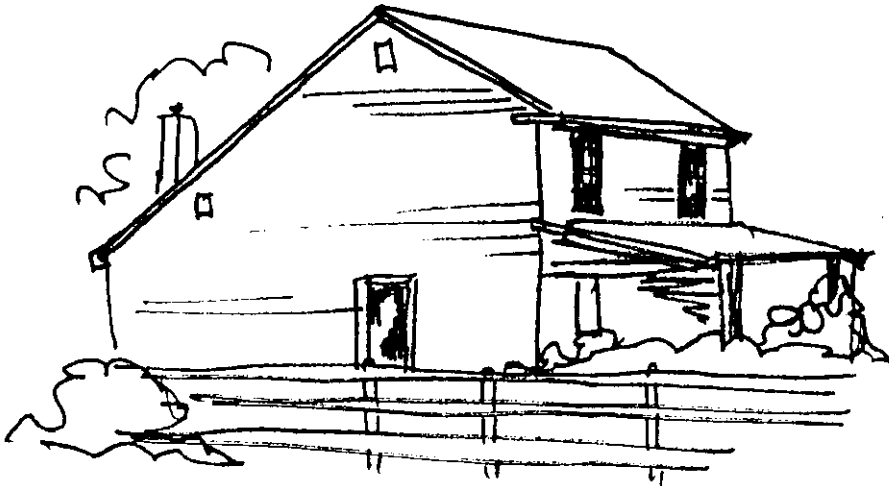
Ball-Essen Farmstead Historic District
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The house built in the 1870s had a saltbox form, one room wide and two rooms deep on the ground floor, with one room and possibly a loft on the second floor. The side-facing gable roof was centered over the front rooms, and extended rearward to cover the wide back part of the house. Although the saltbox form is not extremely common in Missouri, it certainly was not unheard-of in the area. At least one early saltbox remains standing in the nearby village of Orrville, less than two miles north of the farmstead. It is very likely that the Ball house looked much like that one when it was new.

The barn erected by Ball was an English barn, sometimes called a three-bay threshing barn. English barns are typically three bays wide, with a central drive through and a side-facing gable

Figure Five. Sketch from a photo of the Andrew Bacon House in Orrville, MO.

From Dan A. Rothwell, *A Guide To Chesterfield's Architectural Treasures*, (Chesterfield: The City of Chesterfield/ Chesterfield Historical Commission, 1998) p. 39. Andrew Bacon was not directly related to the Langston Bacon family.



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The barn erected by Ball was an English barn, sometimes called a three-bay threshing barn. English barns are typically three bays wide, with a central drive through and a side-facing gable roof.⁹ As the name implies, the type was introduced quite early to the United States by English and continental European settlers. It was especially popular in New England, and as one source put it "advanced westward virtually unchanged."¹⁰ English barns were built throughout the Midwest into the late 1800s, especially in the northern parts of the region.

Figure Six.

From Barns of the Midwest, p. 44.

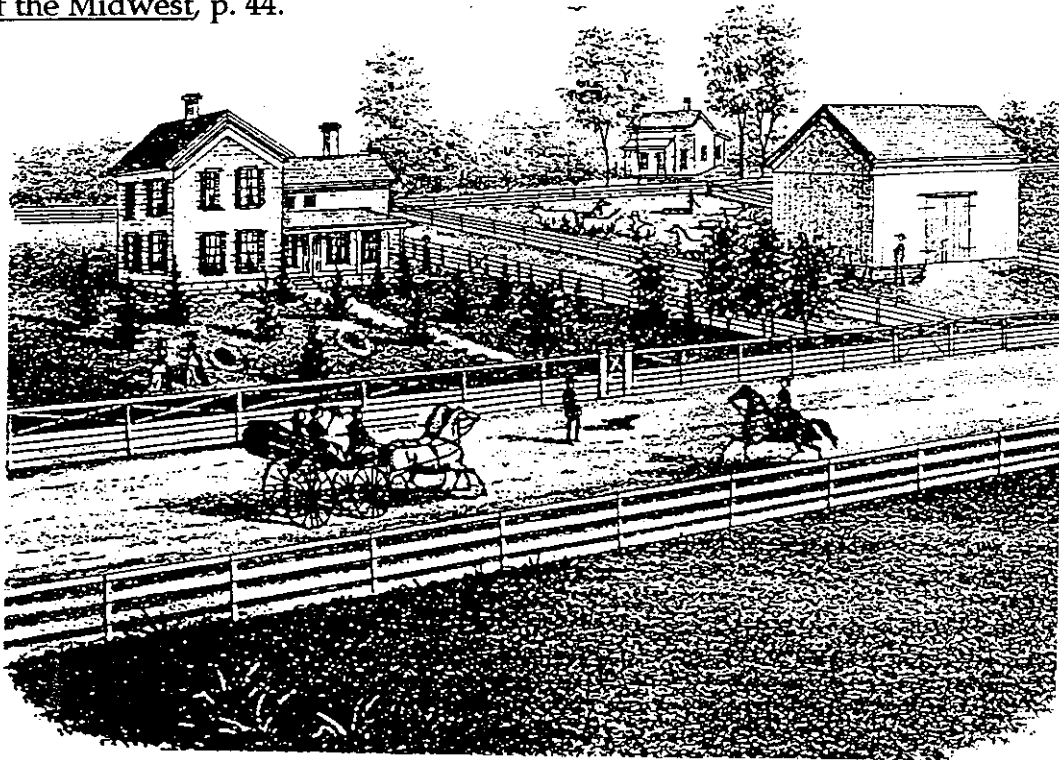


Fig. 3.3. Three-bay threshing barn in northeastern Illinois
Source: *The Combination Atlas Map of Kane County, Illinois*, 1872, p. 48

⁹Charles Calkins and Martin Perkins, "The Three-Bay Threshing Barn," in Barns of the Midwest, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1995) pp. 40-59.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 42.

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The English barn began as a single-use building, and has always been strongly associated with wheat production. The central drive through served as a threshing area, and the side bays were used to store processed and unprocessed grain. A description of the barn type from Barns of the Midwest shows that the barn on the Ball-Essen farm fits the typology quite well:

With large double doors on either end, the central unit or bay acted as a runway. It also furnished the area and environment necessary for the flailing and winnowing of grain. Originally, the side bays provided storage space for both threshed and unthreshed grain. In modified barns where livestock was sheltered in one bay, it became essential to devote some storage space to hay as well.¹²

The 1880 agricultural census entry for Ball shows that he would have had ample need for this type of barn. His largest crop that year was wheat, with a production of 390 bushels. He also raised oats and corn—50 bushels of oats and 200 bushels of corn in 1879. Much of that would have been stored and processed in the new barn.

The census entry also shows that Ball had little stock at that time—only three horses, no mules, cows, or sheep, and only 6 swine. It is likely that his few animals were sheltered elsewhere, and that the installation of stalls for mules and horses came later in the barn's history. Other products of the farm in 1879 include peaches and apples, from a one and one half acre orchard, 15 bushels of potatoes, and 50 dozen eggs.

By 1886, Martha Ball had died, and James Ball, who was in his early 70s, sold the farm to Dietrich and Katerina Von Gruben. The sales price of \$3,600, nearly twice what he had paid for it, no doubt reflected the increased value of the new house and barn. The von Grubens do not seem to have made any great physical changes, as the price of the farm increased only \$400 in the 18 years they owned it. It is known that they did not live there for that entire period, and it is possible that it was rental property for much of their tenure. They definitely rented it out at least part of the time; census records from 1900 indicate that John and Mary Essen were living on the farm then, as tenant farmers. Four years later, the von Grubens, then residents of St. Louis, sold the farm to the Essens, for \$4,000.¹³

The Essen Family. ca. 1899- 1972.: The Farmstead takes its current form.

John and Mary Essen and their family occupied the property from around 1899 to at least 1961, and the farmstead stayed in the family until 1971. John Essen (1859-1929) and Mary Schott (1853-1940) were married in 1889; by the time the census was taken in 1900, all three of their sons had been born, and all were living with them at this location. They raised the boys on the farm, and both

¹² Ibid. p. 45.

¹³ Hamilton.

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lived there the rest of their lives.

It was under Essen family ownership the farmstead took its present form, with a group of service buildings clustered around the house, and service and stock buildings located further away. All of the buildings found there today were integral, functional elements of the Essen family farm operation, and are important reflections of both common agricultural practices and traditional building trends. The farmstead, which the Essens developed around the Balls' early house and barn, served as the operational center of the Essen farm business for much of the next century.

A major expansion of the farmhouse appears to have been one of John and Mary Essen's first construction projects. The vernacular I-house form and vestigial Victorian styling of the front porch ornamentation indicate that the house took its current form soon after the turn of the century; while the concrete foundation indicates that it would not have been built much earlier. It has therefore been assumed that the I house was built soon after the Essen's took ownership of the property, ca. 1905.

The I-house is a very common house type in Missouri and elsewhere in the country, especially in rural settings. Its popularity was quite long-lived, beginning in the late 1700s and extending just into the early years of the 20th century. One study of Missouri's vernacular architecture noted "In America, the I house had become the architectural symbol of success in small town and rural regions by the late 18th century....The house type began to lose popularity by the end of the 19th century, as lumber yards and builder's guides made newly fashionable house plans more available."¹⁴

The Essen house is a classic example of an I-house. I-houses are by definition one room deep, at least two rooms wide, with the wide part of the house set parallel to the road to create the broadest possible facade. One and two story rear kitchen ells were common, either as part of the original house or a later addition. The I-house was one of the first vernacular house types to receive scholarly attention, and the type has been described as "by far the most widely distributed, notably as a rural dwelling."¹⁵ The term "I" house was coined by geographer Fred Kniffen in the 1930s, based on his observation that the builders of such houses in Louisiana often came from Illinois, Indiana, and Iowa. Also, as he noted, "the "I" seems a not inappropriate symbol in view of the tall, shallow house form it describes."¹⁶

The popularity of such houses in Missouri can be largely attributed to the fact that many of the state's earliest settlers came from Virginia and Kentucky, where I-houses were extremely common.

¹⁴ Howard Marshall, *Vernacular Architecture in Rural and Small Town Missouri: An Introduction*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Extension Service, 1994) p. 30.

¹⁵ Fred Kniffen, "Folk Housing: Key to Diffusion." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 55, No. 4, Dec. 1965, p. 553.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 553.

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In a now-classic study of material folk culture, Henry Glassie noted that in the "source area of the Chesapeake Tidewater....the folk houses are one room deep..." and "...the most common type is the two story I-house."¹⁷

A more locally specific study of vernacular architecture was done in the "Little Dixie" region of Missouri by Howard Marshall in the 1970s. According to Marshall, "the most telling house type in Little Dixie is the I house, which developed in lowland areas and the Kentucky Bluegrass (though it has clear antecedents in Britain) and was carried to Missouri and planted firmly as the main farmhouse of the successful settler."¹⁸

The term "farmhouse" is not casually applied there; the I-house has been strongly identified with agricultural settings throughout its history. Kniffen wrote that "the 'I' house became symbolic of economic attainment by agriculturists and remained so associated throughout the Upland South and its peripheral extensions," and that it had an "almost exclusive association with economic attainment in an agricultural society."¹⁹ Marshall put it more simply when he referred to the I-house as "the Farmer's Mansion."²⁰

Although there are many variations in the plans of individual I-houses, central hall plans were extremely popular in Missouri, and Marshall referred to them as "the ultimate subtype" in the Little Dixie region. Glassie noted in his study that the formal central stair hall which became common in later I-houses of the Tidewater region was "after the Georgian fashion," referring to the emphasis on symmetry and formality found in houses of the Georgian era. The use of a central hall in the Essen house reflects both its relatively late date of construction, and that desire for symmetry. The central hall and new, nearly symmetrical, facade are much more formal than the modest saltbox around which the I-house was built.

Although it is the largest surviving resource, the house is far from the only building constructed or modified under Essen ownership. The Essens expanded the barn built by Ball, and erected a garden shed, poultry house, blacksmith shop and a second dwelling. The varied architectural resources found in the district today reflect the varied functions typical of a family farm, and the Essen farm was definitely a family operation. Census records show that all three of John and Mary's sons worked on the farm for wages from the time they were teenagers until they

¹⁷ Henry Glassie, Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968) pp. 65-66.

¹⁸ Howard Marshall, Folk Architecture in Little Dixie, (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1981) p. 32. St. Louis County is not in the Little Dixie region as defined by Marshall, but does have many of the same vernacular house types.

¹⁹ "Folk Housing: Key to Diffusion," p. 555.

²⁰ Folk Architecture in Little Dixie, p. 62.

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were well into their twenties. Their oldest son, John Robert Essen, took over running the farm when his father died in 1929, and it was under his control that many of the outbuildings were constructed.

The garden shed, poultry house and second dwelling were all part of the "houseyard", and were most strongly associated with household activities. The garden shed was probably one of the first Essen projects; it appears to be about the same age as the house. Family members recall that it housed garden tools and apple butter equipment, and was sometimes used as a smokehouse. The apples for the apple butter no doubt came from the orchard established by the Balls in the late 1800s.

The poultry house appears to be a bit newer than the shed, possibly dating to the 1920s. This building in all likelihood replaced an earlier poultry house, as chickens were raised by the Balls and were a common element of farm life in Missouri.²¹ The placement of that building near the house, with its door facing the back door of the farmhouse, made it easy for the housewife to collect the eggs. On the Essen farm, as on most others, the chickens were the wife's responsibility. One Essen family member recalls that Pauline Essen, John Robert Essen's second wife, routinely collected the eggs, and often sold them to passersby, many of whom may have been headed just down the road to Babler State Park.²²

The small house set near the back door of the main house was probably built for Mary Essen around 1930. Family members remember that she was living in the house when she died in 1940. Her husband John died in 1929, and she may have decided to move out of the main house at that time. It would be unusual to build the house on that side of the main house if the roadway had already changed, so it is likely that the tenant house was built between John Essens' death in 1929, and the change of the roadway in the mid-1930s. It continued to function as a family dwelling after Mary Essen's death, serving as home to her half sister, Sophie Heidi, for many years.²³

Pond Road, which ran right in front of the house, was rerouted not long after the small dwelling was built.²⁴ The road change has been linked to the creation of Babler State Park, which is south and west of the district. The development of the park began in 1930, with the donation of 868 acres of land. The land was donated by Jacob L. and Henry Babler, to create a park in the memory of their father, Edmund A. Babler, a noted local physician. The brothers continued to acquire and

²¹ One study done in 1919 found that the average number of hens per Missouri farm was 125, with a related yearly income of \$695. From Missouri Year Book of Agriculture, (Jefferson City, MO: Hugh Stephens Publishing, 1921) State Board of Agriculture. p. 107.

²² "Essen Family History," Home movies and still photos on video, loaned from Helen Essen James.

²³ Interview with Helen Essen James, 4-16-01.

²⁴ It was still following its original route in 1930, and had changed routes, but not names, as of 1947. "A System of Major Highways for St. Louis County," (St. Louis: Harland Bartholomew and Associates, 1930.), and Street Guide of St. Louis County, (St. Louis: H. E. Gross, 1947.)

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donate land through 1936, after which they lobbied for federal funds with which to develop the park. Two Civilian Conservation Camps were established to help develop the property, and the park was officially dedicated in the fall of 1938.²⁵ The route change would most likely have occurred while the park land was being developed, about 1936.

The blacksmith shop, which is the only building on the farmstead which is northwest of the old roadway, appears to have been built after the road changed course. The proximity of the front door to the old roadway indicates that the shop was built after the road became a private lane rather than a busy public thoroughfare. The building functioned as a blacksmith shop for much of its early history. In it, James Robert Essen made shoes for his mules and horses, repaired miscellaneous farm equipment, and even forged items such as hinges for the barn doors.²⁶

The additions to the barn were the last major changes to be made to the surviving resources. The barn was expanded at least twice by the Essens; both additions were probably the work of James Robert Essen. The first addition was to the northwest, no doubt to create space for wagons and/or tractors. It may also have been the Essens who installed the stock pens and related doors in the southeast end. The final shed addition to the barn would have accommodated a tractor or other vehicles. Surviving family members recall both mules and horses being kept in the barn.

The changes which took place on the farmstead over the first third of the 20th century reflect the ongoing agricultural role of the property. The farmstead was the center of a fully functioning farm throughout the period of significance, and it operated in much the same way throughout that period. Essen farm products were similar to those produced by the Balls decades earlier. Corn and wheat continued to be the main crops well into the twentieth century. Dave Essen, the nephew of John Robert Essen, recalls that his uncle was a corn and wheat farmer, who also raised cows. County statistics show that those crops were usually the main crops in St. Louis County as well. Contrary to statewide trends, county wheat production actually increased between 1904 and 1921.²⁷

The Essens kept a variety of livestock. An adjacent property which was once part of the farm had a fairly large dairy barn on it until just a few months ago, and family members recall that the Essen cows were kept in that building. Hogs were also present; family photos include a least one view of butchering day. Horses and mules were also an important part of farm life. An early family photo, taken in a nearby field around 1918, documents the use of both animal and machine power. The photo shows a team of mules between a pair of tractors; the mules appear to have been doing

²⁵ "Dr. Edmund A. Babler Memorial State Park," (Historical account provided by the Babler State Park Office. Typescript, 1998.)

²⁶ Dave Essen, (Nephew of John Robert Essen), Interview with Lauren Strutman, 5-09-01.

²⁷ Walter Williams, Missouri: An Autobiography, (Columbia, MO: E. W. Stephens Press, 1904), p. 506, and The Missouri Year Book of Agriculture, pp. 284- 298.

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their fair share of the work. (See Figure Seven.) Mules continued to be part of Essen farm life even after tractors became standard equipment. Home movies from around the 1940s show John Robert Essen using the mules, named Jack and Sam, to plow his daughter Helen's home garden.

The continued use of mules and horses after tractors became available was not at all unusual in the state. A 1920 essay on the "Use and Production" of horses and mules in Missouri noted that government studies had shown that on farms of less than 170 acres "the practicality of a tractor is certainly questionable...and as long as we have farms the size of our farms in the state of Missouri...there will be these factors in favor of the horse and mule as compared to the tractor."²⁸

The farm was typical in the type and variety of its agricultural functions. While most of the farm products were no doubt reserved for home use, wheat and corn were cash crops, important to the commercial aspects of the farm business. By the time the Essens were running the farm, almost all farming operations of any size had evolved beyond the level of self-contained subsistence that had characterized frontier farms. By the turn of the century, most farms in the Midwest, including the Ball-Essen farm, were at least partially commercial, with a portion of their products being sold for cash. That trend began as early as the 1870s; the magazine Country Gentleman noted in 1880 that at that time, farming was "yearly becoming more of a mercantile business."²⁹ The Essen farm was, like most farms in the area, a commercial operation as well as a homestead.

Statistics from around the time the Essens bought the property show that the farm, which totaled just over 138 acres, was of above-average size for its location. The farm was only slightly larger than the statewide average, but twice the St. Louis County average. A publication of 1904 reported that the statewide average was 120 acres, while St. Louis County farms averaged only 64.8 acres.³⁰ Those proportions continued for several decades; by the 1920s the statewide average had increased to 135 acres, while the county average had decreased slightly, to just over 60 acres.³¹ The average farm size statewide continued to grow over the years; one study in 1948 recorded an average size of 187 acres per farm in the a study group located in the northern part of Missouri.³²

The presence of several outbuildings with varying functions was also typical. A 1948 study of regional variations in farmsteads in the United States found that the farmsteads of the Corn Belt region, which includes the northern half of Missouri, generally contained "an impressive array of

²⁸ Missouri Year Book of Agriculture, pp. 73-74.

²⁹ Country Gentleman, Vol 45, April 22, 1880, p. 260.

³⁰ Walter Williams, Missouri: An Autobiography, (Columbia, MO: E. W. Stephens Press, 1904) pp. 74 and 506.

³¹ Missouri Year Book of Agriculture, p. 73 and p. 283.

³² Glen Trewartha, "Some Regional Characteristics of American Farmsteads," Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Vol. 38, No. 3, Sept. 1948, p. 215.

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separate farm buildings." The study noted that only 17 percent of the Corn belt farmsteads in the study had five buildings or fewer, and the "usual number of buildings on a Corn Belt farmstead is six to nine."³³

Overall, the farmstead looks today much as it did when John Robert Essen was making shoes for his mules in the blacksmith shop by the spring. The Ball-Essen Farmstead is notable for its high level of integrity and relative rarity. Few comparable farmsteads have survived in the surrounding area, which is now largely urbanized. In vernacular architecture, especially in agricultural settings, form and function go hand in hand. The buildings found on the farmstead today are all good representative examples of vernacular agricultural architecture from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As a group, they continue to illustrate the varied early functions of this typical Missouri family farm. ◻

Figure Seven.

Essen family members and mules, taken in 1918. Photo courtesy of Helen Essen James, Wildwood, MO.



³³ Trewartha, p. 216.

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United States Census Bureau. Production of Agriculture and Population Census figures, 1870-1920. Microfilm on file with the State Historical Society of Missouri, and the State Archives of Missouri.

Interviews

Essen, Dave. (Nephew of John Robert Essen.) Interview with Lauren Strutman, 5-09-01.

James, Helen Essen. (Daughter of John Robert Essen.) Interview with Lauren Strutman, 4-16-01.

Video

"Essen Family History" Home movies and still photos on video, loaned from Helen Essen James.

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Verbal Boundary Description

All of Lot A of Essen Spring Farm, a plat recorded in Book 12924, Page 1780-1782, of the St. Louis County Deed Records. (See Figure One, Site Plan, for a scale map of the boundaries.) The property is further described as:

A tract of land in U.S. Survey 414, Township 45, North, Range 3 East, As recorded in the St. Louis County Records of Missouri, and being described as follows: Beginning at an Iron Rod in the Western Line of Missouri State (formerly Highway No. 109) known as Babler Park (125' wide public) drive distance S.37degrees03'W. 900.00' along said Western line from its intersection with the northern line of U.S. Survey 414; Thence continuing along said western line with the adopted (deeded bearing) of S.37degrees03'00"W. 306.45' to a point of curve; Thence along a curve to the right having a radius of 5,664.65', an arc distance of 103.37' to a point; Thence leaving said curve, N.57degrees08'53"W. 266.00' to a point; Thence N.02degrees51'07"E. 200.00' to a point; Thence N.07.38'23"W. 295.54' to a point on the south line of the property now or formerly Fenberg, James and Caroll as recorded in deed book 7007 page 2083 of the St. Louis County Records of Missouri; Thence along said south line S.58.11'14"E. 588.97' to the point of beginning and containing 3.8537 acres more or less.

Boundary Justification

The district boundaries encompass all of the land and resources currently associated with the farmstead.

Photographs

The following information is the same for all photographs:

Ball-Essen Farmstead Historic District.

749 Babler Park Drive

St. Louis County, MO

Photographer: Debbie Sheals

All photos taken May, 2001

Negatives on file with Debbie Sheals, 406 W. Broadway, Columbia, MO 65203

List of Photographs

See photo key for indications of camera angles.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Facade of House. | 9. House, poultry house, and barn, looking southeast. |
| 2. House, rear corner, looking west. | 10. Poultry house and barn, looking southeast. |
| 3. House, tenant house, and garden shed. | 11. Barn, looking north. |
| 4. House and tenant house, looking east. | 12. Farmstead, looking west. Left to right, flag pole, tenant house, main house, poultry house, barn. |
| 5. Newell post, house. | 13. Blacksmith shop, looking north. |
| 6. Second floor rear room. | 14. Box culvert, looking south. |
| 7. Tenant house, from back porch of main house. | 14. Spring head and creek, looking north. |
| 8. Tenant house and garden shed, looking northeast. | |





























