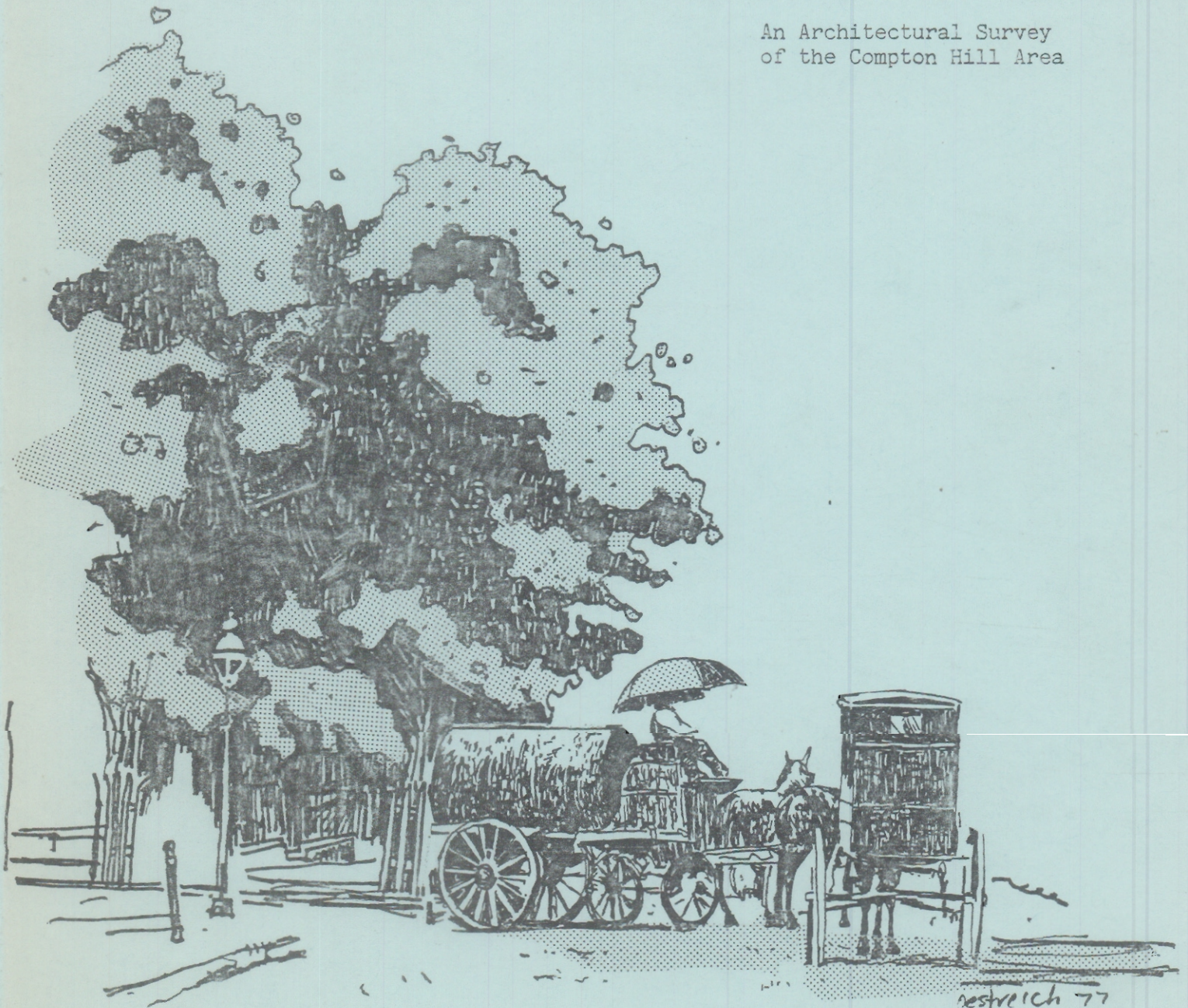


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An Architectural Survey
of the Compton Hill Area



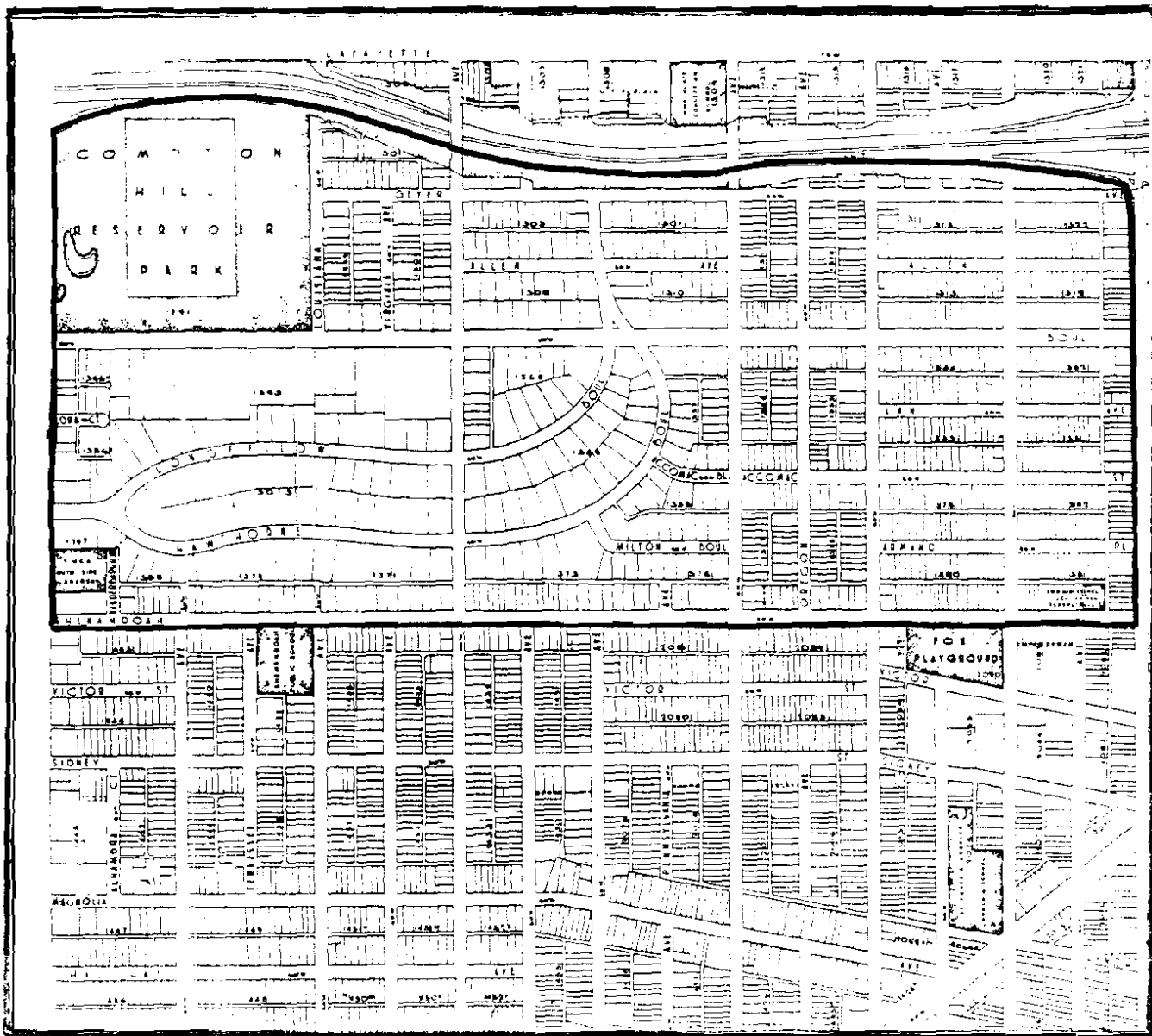
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KENNETH D. OESTREICH

A special thanks is in order to Dr. Buford Pickens whose helpful input is greatly appreciated, and to Ms. Donna Everding responsible for the excellent typing of this difficult assignment.

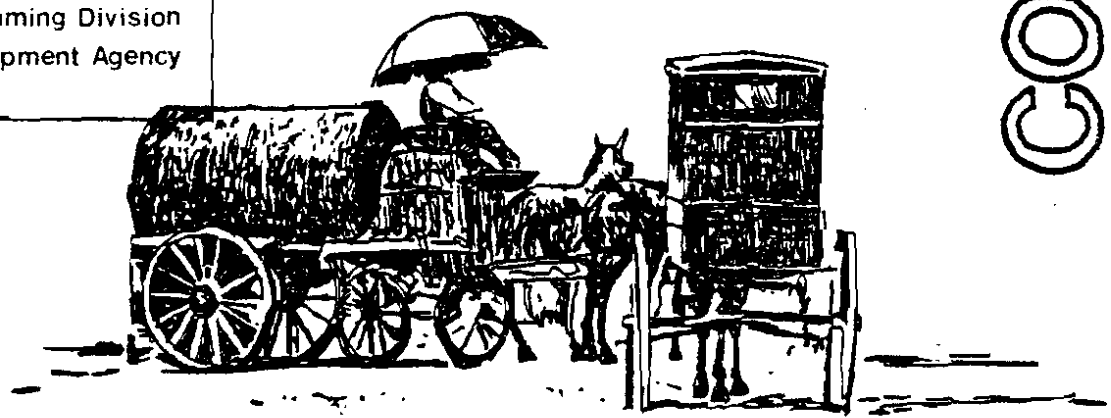
A word of caution on the use of this material is necessary. This is not intended as a published report. It is labeled "draft" and it most likely will never be put in final form. Due to various constraints, in particular, time, it contains in places material that has not been verified. Unquestionably, it contains errors. The "final word" on the architecture of Compton Heights is left to those with greater skills and much more time.



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 scale — 1" = 400'

SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI

The Planning and Programming Division
 of the Community Development Agency

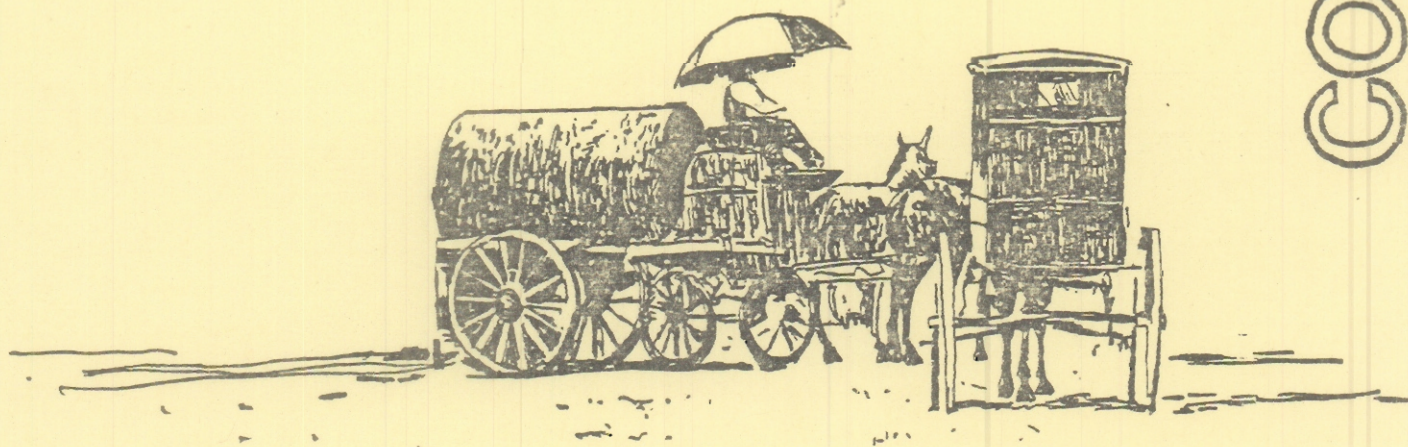


COMPTON HEIGHTS

1

Compton Heights:
Its History and
Architectural
Significance

COMPTON HEIGHTS



The Compton Hill area's first development was as part of the old St. Louis City commons, an area set aside by the City's early settlers for the communal grazing of livestock and as a source of firewood. At its largest, the commons stretched from Park Avenue to Meramec Street and from Broadway to Grand Avenue. The Compton Hill area, as referred to in this report, was the northwest corner of this vast commons; the area now bounded generally by Interstate 44 on the north, Arsenal Street on the south, Jefferson Avenue on the east and Grand Avenue on the west.

Compton Hill saw its first subdivision prior to 1860. Actual development, however, did not begin until the 1880's, gradually moving west from Jefferson Avenue. By the 1890's development had reached the vicinity of Nebraska Avenue. Compton Heights, the dominant subdivision of the area, dates from 1894, although most of the houses within it along Hawthorne and Longfellow Boulevards were erected after 1890, some as late as the 1950's.

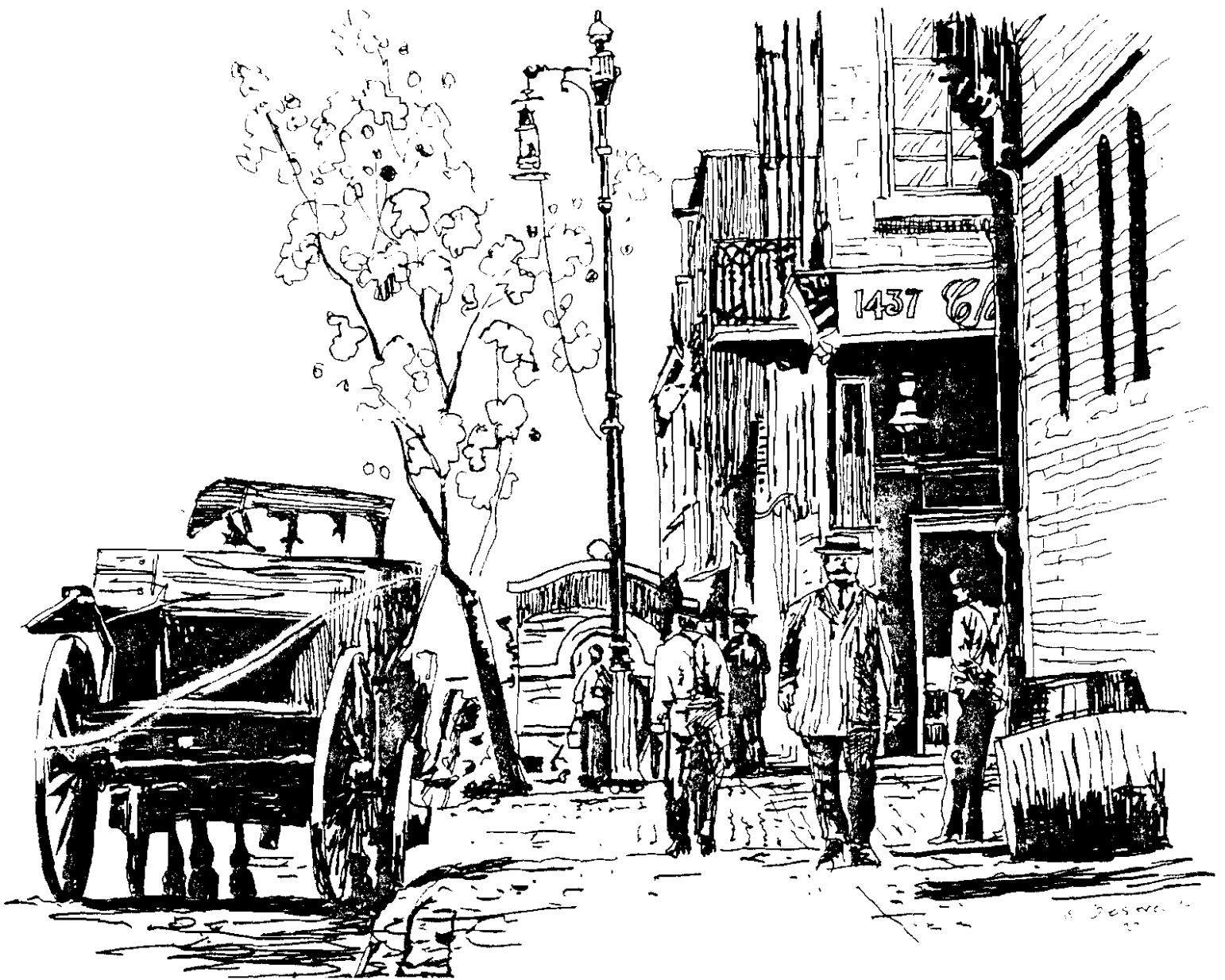
As subdivision progressed, the streets were named. The east-west streets were named after rivers; for example, Shenandoah. The north and south streets were named for states: Nebraska, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Virginia and Louisiana Avenues. Grand Avenue received its name because it was a wide or "grand" avenue. Other streets were named for prominent people: Geyer for lawyer Henry S. Geyer; Allen for Thomas Allen, also a lawyer; Ann and Russell for Allen's wife, the former Ann Russell; Compton for Sarah Compton, the wife of the then Mayor John S. Thomas; and of course, Hawthorne, Longfellow and Milton for the famous authors.

An early settler left a description of the area just north of Compton Heights in the 1870-75 era. He wrote "Lafayette Avenue was macadamized with brick sidewalks shaded with rows of trees and traversed by the 4th Street horsecar line. Large mansions on spacious grounds lined both sides of the road. The home of Governor Thomas Fletcher, when he left office, was at Delaware (now Geyer) and Minnesota (now Longfellow)." Interstate 44, at a somewhat lower elevation now runs through the site.

The earliest historical reference to Compton Hill was a notice in the St. Louis Globe-Democrat for July 10, 1872. It noted that "The Board of Water Commissioners advertised the sale at public auction of ice to be formed in the settling reservoirs at Bissell's Point and Compton Hill during the next five winters. Purchasers would be required to cut the ice as soon as it reached a thickness of six inches."

An analysis of Plate 66 in the 1875, Pictorial St. Louis Atlas, by Compton and Dry, (a large "bird's eye view" isometric map of the then entire City of St. Louis), shows little development in the area. The area northeast of Grand and Shenandoah shows a few unidentified scattered houses, some fenced in plots, two small ponds and a small canyon. The "Old Settler" recalls, "In the rear of our place there was a stone quarry and a brick yard. The quarry, large and deep, consigned its output to foundation stone and the making of macadam (a surfacing for roads). Beyond the quarry to the east, was the brick yard owned by H. H. Scheer and Co." In 1905, Henry Scheer was to build a home at 3222 Hawthorne.

Returning to the Pictorial St. Louis Atlas (this time Plate 57), it is possible to see several houses standing on Russell, Compton and Geyer. Among



The Compton Hill area gradually began developing in the late 1800's. The earliest sections from Jefferson West became middle class neighborhoods with the superb brick-work common to St. Louis, while the far west end was developed with the fine residences of the wealthy.

these are the Henry Haarstick home on the south side of Russell, just west of Compton Avenue. Mr. Haarstick was one of the founders of the subdivision.

Also visible, is the home of F. Wm. Raeder at 3016 Geyer and the home of Charles Bush at 3010 Geyer. The Bush house may well be the structure currently located at that address. Also worth noting, is the Julius Pitzman house on Compton, just north of the Allen intersection. Julius Pitzman played a key role in the development of St. Louis, in general, and Compton Heights, in particular. The house, built in 1858, was later dismantled in 1913 when Pitzman built a home at 6 Kingsbury Place in the Central West End.

Pitzman was born in Prussia, but came to the United States at the time of the German Revolution in 1848. He worked at a dry goods store for \$8.00 a month for a time, but soon entered the employ of his brother-in-law who was an associate to the City Engineer of St. Louis. In 1859, Pitzman established Pitzman's Company of Surveyors and Engineers. In 1861, he joined the Union Army and was appointed First Lieutenant of Engineers by General Fremont for whom he built Fort No. 5 immediately west of Lafayette Park. Later, transferred to the command of General Halleck, Pitzman made a topographic military map of St. Louis. Following the war, Pitzman became city surveyor.

Pitzman was also deeply interested in the then infant profession of landscape architecture, and in 1874, he journeyed to Europe to study the latest European trends in landscaping. The trip was to profoundly affect both Pitzman and Compton Hill. On his return he questioned the wisdom of the then popular grid system of laying out streets insisting that "winding roadways with beautiful vistas" were preferable to the usual straight line sort of development. Pitzman was to test his theory when he surveyed and subdivided Compton Heights.

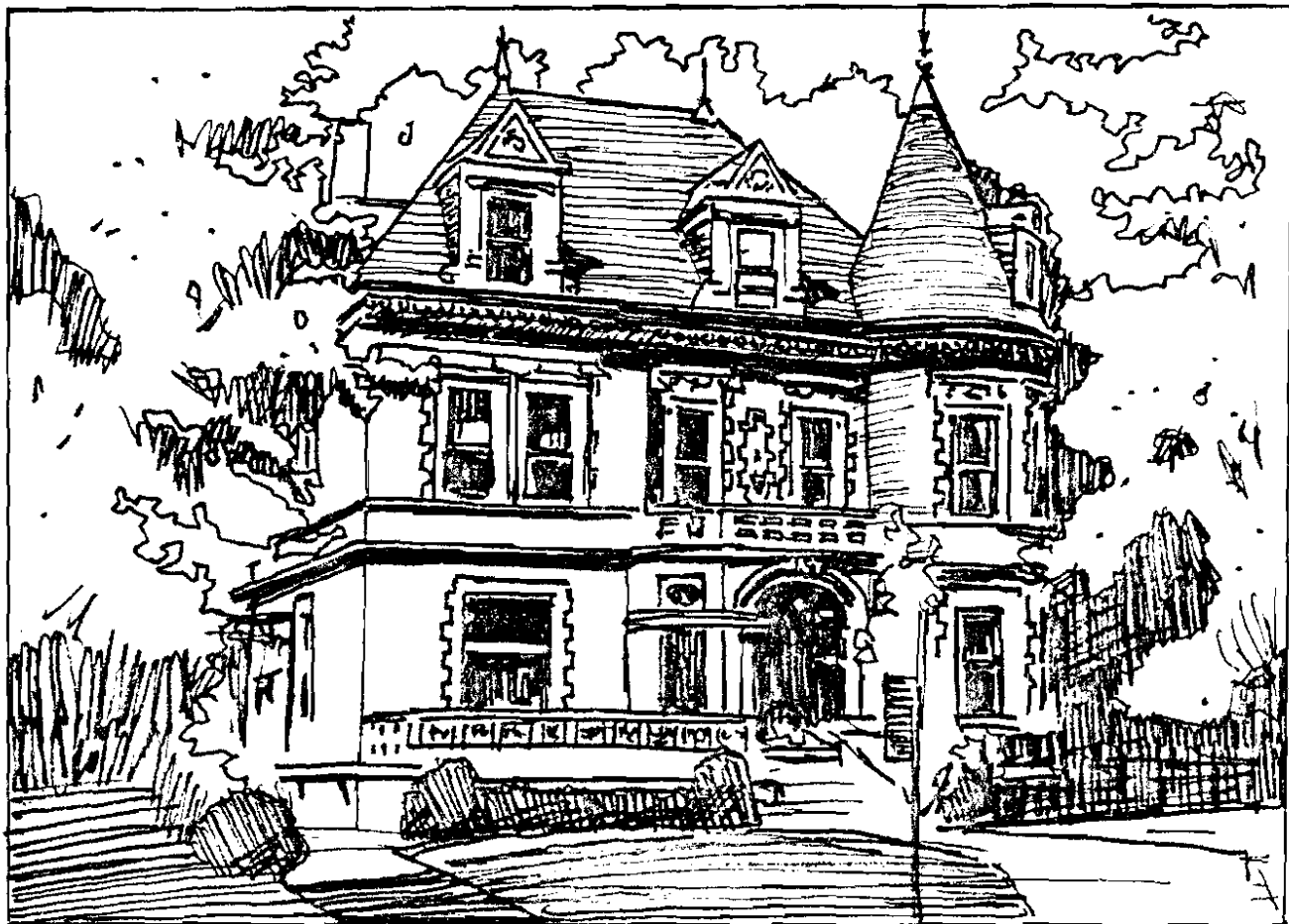
The Compton Hill Improvement Company charter was issued May 25, 1888, to run for ten years. The capital investment was \$400,000, 4,000 shares of stock were held by 33 individuals, holding 50 to 250 shares each. Twelve directors were listed.

"The purposes for which the corporation is formed are to acquire and improve certain real estate situated within the district bounded on the north by Lafayette Avenue, east by California Avenue, south by Victor and Shenandoah Streets, and west by Grand Avenue, in the City of St. Louis, Missouri, and to erect buildings thereon, to lay out streets and avenues and other highways through said real estate, and to improve and embellish the same, and to sell and dispose of the land so improved or subdivided for pecuniary profit or gain."

Julius Pitzman's company had earlier surveyed this area. The Pitzman map has a notation: "We, the undersigned proprietors of land in City Blocks 1367, 1368, 1369, 1370, 1364 and 1365, hereby dedicate to public use forever, the strips of ground colored brown upon the above map to be used by Avenues, which Avenues are hereafter to be known as Longfellow and Hawthorne Avenues. In witness whereof, we have hereunto set our hands and attached our seals this 11th day of June, 1888. Henry C. Haarstick, Elise Haarstick."

In late June, 1888, the Haarsticks sold this land to the Compton Hills Improvement Company; the price is reported to have been \$400,988. The Compton Hills Improvement Company; Henry C. Haarstick, President; and Julius Pitzman, Secretary, reaffirmed the Haarstick restrictions, thus: "We, the undersigned proprietors of certain tracts of land, have caused the portions of the land colored 'green' to be surveyed and subdivided in the manner as shown on the above plat and which said subdivision is hereafter to be known as "Compton Heights".

Development followed quickly on the heels of this agreement, as noted in a newspaper account in the St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat, for Wednesday morning, January 23, 1889: "The Compton Hill Improvement Company reconstructing an immense tract of ground: This tract comprises 250 acres of the highest altitude within the City Limits. It takes in twelve immense City blocks, but



Otto Wilhelmi was the architect of many Compton Heights homes. 3505 Longfellow, which pleasingly combines late Victorian form with French Renaissance Decoration, is one of his best.

the streets dividing it into blocks have been vacated by the City when the scheme of the company was made known, and when it was seen, the carrying out of the plans would enhance the value of every foot of ground in the southwest portion of the City. The streets vacated are: Arkansas, Tennessee, Louisiana, Virginia, Compton, Michigan, Minnesota and Pennsylvania Avenues. Several months ago workmen under the direction of Julius Pitzman, the Civil Engineer, were put to work grading, and owing to the mild weather, they have continued without cessation up to date, and there are now 600 men and 300 teams plowing, shoveling, digging and hauling away. An idea original with the surveyor will be introduced in this plat which will add great beauty to it." The "Original Idea", of course, was the concept of curving streets.

The Globe-Democrat also notes the construction of the first Compton Hill home. Its article for Saturday morning, March 9, 1889, notes: "Among the (building) permits that denote progress is one given to the Compton Hill

Improvement Company, which will erect a dwelling to cost \$3,000 on Shenandoah Street near Michigan Avenue. The platting and grading of this tract is now about completed, and the property will soon be thrown on the market. Over \$200,000 have been spent in improving the plat, and this is the first building to grace it since the improvement has been made." This house apparently does not exist today as all of those in the general vicinity have been well documented as having been built later.

As the lots in Compton Heights were fairly expensive by the standards of their day, they sold slowly but steadily. On May 27, 1896, however, the area was devastated by a tornado that cut a long swath through the City. The damage was so severe that a book was written about it. Concerning the Compton Hill area, it reads as follows:

"Compton Heights is the name this suburb adjoining the reservoir bears. It is one of the highest points in St. Louis, having been chosen for that reason as the water distribution location for the southern half of the City. A portion of the heights has been laid off in accordance with advanced landscape gardening ideas, with curving roadways and building sites of irregular form. Compton Heights, ten blocks from north to south and six to eight blocks wide, has 300 residences which cost from \$5,000 to \$25,000. Not one of them escaped some injury and most of them show ugly gaps in their walls, demolished gables and missing sections of roofs. These houses are of recent construction, strongly made and well furnished. Through the rents which the storm cloud made, the torrents of rain poured in and drenched the interiors. The outward desolation of Compton Heights was but part of the loss sustained. Richly upholstered furniture, books, tapestries, and velvet carpets were scattered on the lawns to catch the drying sun and wind. There were streets on Compton Heights which were impassible until choppers went through them cutting and rolling out of the way the prostrate trees. Trees as large as a man's body, were torn up by the roots and when the roots came up, they broke and displaced the squares of granitoid pavement."

This account probably refers to the older established Compton Hill streets such as Russell, Allen and Geyer. Early photos of the Compton Heights subdivision show it to have been almost treeless at the time. Unquestionably, however, the damage was extensive.

In time, much of the damage caused by the tornado was repaired or replaced. In Compton Heights, much of the land was still unbuilt and only Pitzman's landscaping and damaged streets needed to be replaced. The area continued to be considered as one of the City's more desirable residential neighborhoods. Unlike in Lafayette Square, the tornado caused no large out-migration.

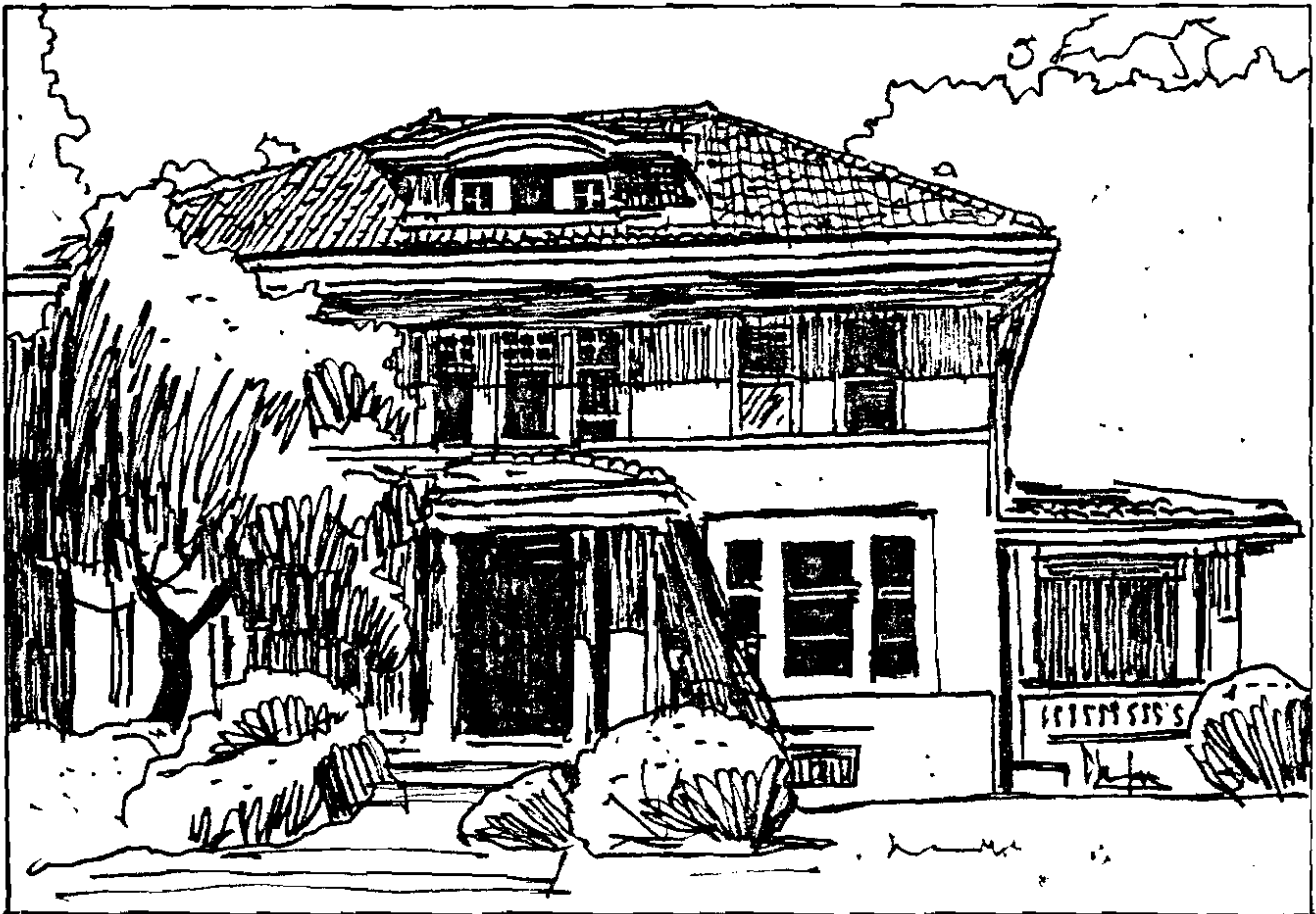
Pitzman's landscaping and street design was only one of the two innovations incorporated into the Compton Heights design. The second was a set of restrictive covenants or deed restrictions. These restrictions were written into the original deed for each piece of property and thereafter, ran permanently with the property. Specifically, these restrictions required that:

- 1) The building line be established individually for each building as it fronted from the street. This building line would be consistent. Only the structure's front porch and steps could extend over this line and they by no more than eight feet.

- 2) Only one building, and that a private residence, could be built on any lot (discounting a stable or garage for that residence). All flats and commercial businesses were expressly forbidden.
- 3) The building, with the exception of the porte cochere, may not be closer to the side of the lot than ten feet.
- 4) Any building costing less than \$7,000 must submit its plan for approval by the improvement company. No fence or wall can be put on the side lines for 30' back from the building line. The existing grade of the lot cannot be changed more than 12' without the consent of the owner of the neighboring lot.
- 5) All future owners will be bound by the same restrictions.

Haarstick and his company did not acquire all of the land that was in Compton Heights. Some of it remained individually owned. Only property sold by the company contains these restrictions.

While the Compton Hill Improvement Company was in existence, it was in their interest to see that these restrictions were enforced. Following the company's eventual liquidation, it was left for the property owners to band together to enforce the restrictions. To this end, a number of "pro-



Frederick Windman designed 3545 Longfellow, an excellent example of the Prairie School Style.

protective associations" came into being. Records are poor, but there is some evidence that these associations existed even prior to 1921. Judge Julius Muench recalled that he was president of a group organized to fight the threat of conversion to boarding houses. "At the time we organized", he states, "there was already in existence a sort of protective association for the upper end of the heights, the part west of Compton Avenue. The purpose of this organization as I understood it was more or less aesthetic. Its purpose was to keep up the appearance of the district up to its original standards."

This group was followed by others interested in seeing that the original covenants be enforced. And, of course, in recent years by a number of neighborhood organizations devoted to much broader neighborhood improvement goals.

Architecturally, the Compton Hill area contains nearly every style of residential structure ever built within the St. Louis City Limits. Generally, this architecture falls in three general categories: 1) the Grand Victorian and Beaux Arts architecture of Compton Heights in its many styles and forms; 2) the more modest yet substantial townhouses along Russell, Copelin and other streets also developed at the turn of the century; and 3) the earlier brick row and townhouses ranging west from Jefferson.

This early construction followed a wide variety of styles and construction. Among the earliest, is a scattering of modest brick homes with gable roofs and narrow dormers similar to those in Soulard and other early City neighborhoods. The homes at 1900-1902 Oregon are among the best Compton Hill examples of this vernacular style. Also fairly common, are homes in the Second Empire style. These structures are generally easily identifiable with their distinctive Mansard roofs and ornately carved and bracketed cornices. Generally, they are in brick or brick with a dressed limestone front facade. These homes are similar to the structures of the Lafayette Square area of the City. In Compton Hill, they appear in both a townhouse and a row house version. Located at 1823 California, is one of the best examples of these early townhouses, while 2846 thru 2854 Accomac is a surviving example of a completely intact row. All of these are among the area's earlier architectural styles, and as such are for the most part located east of Nebraska Avenue.

Also fitting into this 1875-1890's timeframe are a number of distinctly St. Louis vernacular styles. These buildings clearly demonstrate that the art of brick construction and craftsmanship in St. Louis was second to none. Pressed brick is used lavishly, often with five or six styles of brick in a single cornice. The pressed brick also often appears outlining windows and entries. A good example of this style with the addition of a cast iron cornice can be seen at 3452-54 or 3456-58 Shenandoah. A four-family flat at 2815-2817 Shenandoah is another example of this exuberant brick craftsmanship, this time combined with the lavish use of terra cotta. Clearly, in St. Louis even the poor man's home was architecturally fit for a King.

Nationally, the Second Empire style was followed by the Richardsonian Romanesque style. Features of the style repeatedly appearing in Compton Hill homes include the prominent use of towers whenever affordable and large Romanesque arches to house either windows or entry. Often these arches are enhanced with the usual excellent pressed brick. Although rough stone is the usual Richardsonian construction material, most Compton Hill Richardsonian

buildings are St. Louis red brick. Occasionally, however, the front facade will be in stone; 2903 Russell being one example of this.

West of Nebraska, many of the homes built were generally in the 1900-1910 time frame. These townhouses are so consistent as to produce another St. Louis construction style. These buildings are generally in a cube plan, red brick or rough limestone with a hipped slate roof and dormers. Art glass windows and intricate woodwork are common features. Porches vary greatly, but most are classical in their design and detailing.

The grand homes of Compton Heights, Hawthorne and Longfellow, of course, are the architectural centerpiece of Compton Hill. They range through a variety of styles and the diversity is one of the many reasons for the area's importance. They range from the purely Victorian mansions of the 1890's to the growing Prairie School movement of the 1920's.

Among the best of the Victorian homes is 3522 Hawthorne, a strongly vertical Victorian building with good consistent detailing. Hoopengabers on the dormers, a German innovation, remind us that Compton Heights was among the most sought after of residential neighborhoods for St. Louis' wealthy Germans. This is also demonstrated in the choice of architects for these homes. Prussian born, Otto Wilhelmi, designed thirteen, and German-American Ernest C. Janssen followed with seven.

Another building of national importance (one of nine listed as having national importance on the Landmarks St. Louis Compton Hill map) is 3419 Hawthorne by Janssen and E.P. Maulls. This building can perhaps be described as the Victorian grandfather of the Chicago School. There is nothing else like it in St. Louis. Janssen also designed 3463 Longfellow. Again, the building is of national significance. This time the style is Queen Anne; one of the few true Queen Ann buildings in the City.

Janssen's best building, however, is the German Renaissance Stockstrom House at 3400 Russell. He modeled the building after the Schloss (castle) at Schwerin, Germany. The building is unquestionably one of the last of the truly grand mansions with remarkable terra cotta detailing.

The home at 3439 Longfellow is another of the best of the early Compton Heights homes. It was designed for Charles Wulfinf and while the building permit lists no architect, its sophistication of design and solid geometry suggests William B. Ittner as the architect. Ittner ranks among the top two or three architects to practice in St. Louis.

Other structures of unusual quality among the progression of fine homes on Longfellow and Hawthorne include:

3545 Longfellow: built in 1908 by Frederick Widman in the Prairie School style. It closely follows the development of the Chicago School, showing influences from both Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Sullivan. Features include a wide overhanging tile-hipped roof with strong horizontal cornice and dormers.

3455 Longfellow: built in 1909, the architect is unknown, but it is still a pleasing combination of Victorian geometry and classical French ornamentation. Features include a red slate gable roof and a buff brick facade. A Palladian window graces the gable.

3409 Longfellow: built in 1911, A.H. Haeseler was the builder and perhaps the designer as well. It is one of the best Chicago School structures in the City. The roof is the main design element; the wide cornice and long overhang giving the building a strong horizontal push.

3401 Longfellow: built in 1907, by E.L. Wagner Construction Company (architect uncertain), 3401 Longfellow is a good example of the Arts and Crafts movement in American architecture. The end gable is stucco and half timber supported by projecting brackets.

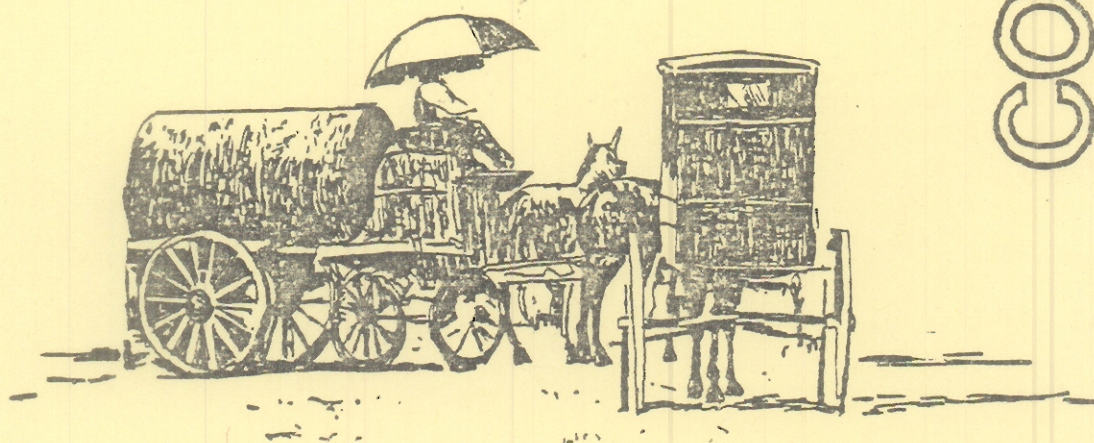
3250 Hawthorne: built in 1895, by an unknown architect, the house is a good example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style, or at least a brick St. Louis version of the style. Features include a tall pointed gable with Palladian window, coupled Richardsonian windows and an eyebrow dormer on the slate roof.

3009 Hawthorne: built in 1894, from a design by Otto Wilhelmi, 3009 Hawthorne may well be his best building. Features include a subdued symmetry with broken cornice, an impressive Dutch gable, and several handsome art glass windows. The overall Victorian feel of the building is most pronounced in its small cylindrical towers.

The list could continue, but it is sufficient to say that a wide variety of styles from Georgian Revival to French Renaissance are represented in Compton Heights and the Compton Hill area. The only residential area of St. Louis rivaling Compton Heights in terms of architectural diversity is the Central West End, and the West End largely lacks the early St. Louis vernacular styles with their exhuberant brick work so common on Compton Hill and its vicinity. Without question, the Compton Heights area is among the finest architectural masterpieces in not just St. Louis, but the entire United States.

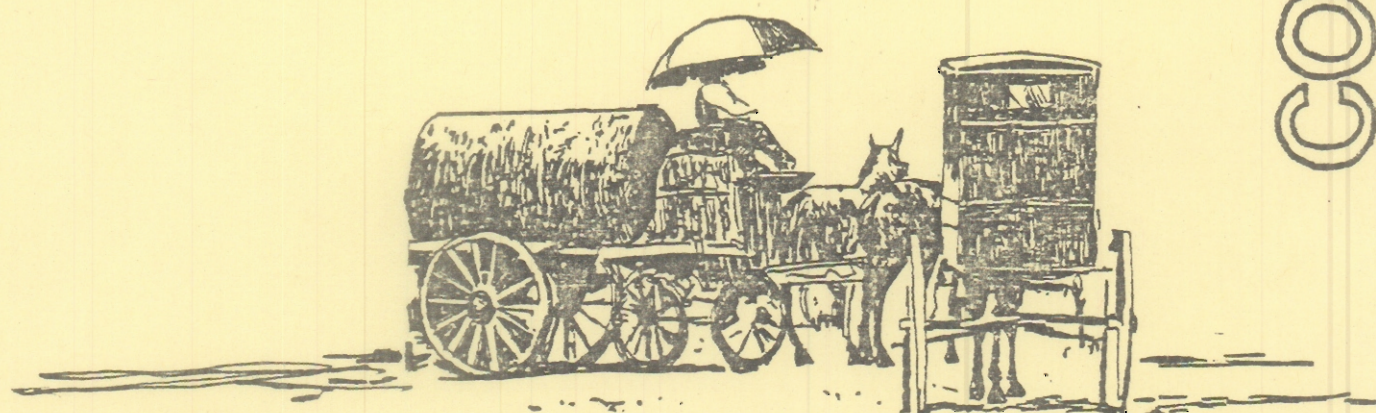
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Compton Heights:
The Architectural
Survey



COMPTON HEIGHTS

COMPTON HEIGHTS



Hawthorne

**CITY OF SAINT LOUIS
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AGENCY**

SUITE 1201 LOCUST BUILDING
1015 LOCUST STREET • SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI 63101
TELEPHONE 314-421-4700

JAMES F. CONWAY, MAYOR
DONALD L. SPAID, A.I.P., DIRECTOR

May 18, 1978

RECEIVED

MAY 19 1978

**Office of Historic
Preservation**

Mr. Gerald S. Stepenoff
Grants Analyst
State of Missouri Department of
Natural Resources
P.O. Box 176
Jefferson City, Missouri 65101

RE: Preservation Contract
File #21-13

Dear Jerry:

Enclosed is a copy of the Compton Hill Historic District legislation. It was approved by our Landmarks and Urban Design Commission on May 11 and by the Zoning Committee of CDA's Commission on May 16. It will be considered by CDA's full Commission on May 30, 1978, where it also should be favorably received. Following that, it will be introduced in the Board of Aldermen by Alderman Tom Connelly. This culminates a long involved process; the Compton Heights Survey Map, the Architectural Survey, and now more than one-hundred meetings with representatives of the three neighborhood groups within the proposed boundaries (Tower Grove East, the Compton Heights Association and Reservoir Square), as well as Aldermen and representatives of several City Agencies. The format is that required by City Ordinance. In effect this is a board bill ready for consideration by the Board of Aldermen.

Also included is the Draft Garden Tower East Plan. This was prepared in close cooperation with the Compton Hill Historic District Petition to insure that land use, zoning, street closings and public improvements would strengthen the proposed district.

This completes my work on the Compton Hill District other than appearing at the necessary public hearings. The enclosed Use, Construction and Restoration Standards will appear at a later date in a more citizen oriented and graphically illustrated format. I do, however, consider this task completed with its introduction to the Board of Aldermen.

The Marketing Posters are also substantially completed with only the reverse side text to be edited and set in type. I now consider this is my major priority as it is already house-buying season and I want to put as many persons as possible in our historic homes. I expect completion within two weeks. As the actual printing may be delayed for some time due to the necessary bid process, etc., I intend to drive up to see you as soon as the mock-ups are available.

Mr. Gerald S. Stepenoff
Grants Analyst

-2-

May 18, 1978

About the 1st of June I hope to begin the Benton Park Architectural Survey.

Our subcontract with the Landmarks Association goes to CDA's Joint Budget and Development Committee tomorrow and to the full Commission at the same time as the Compton Hill Historic District.

Yours truly,



Kenneth D. Oestreich
Preservation Planner

KDO/mmhf

Enclosures: 2