

HISTORIC BUILDINGS SURVEY

EASTERN LADUE

LADUE, MISSOURI

1987

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**for the St. Louis County Department of Parks and Recreation
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RESEARCH DESIGN

The City of Ladue is located in the central part of St. Louis County west of the county seat of Clayton. It covers 8.6 square miles and has a population of about ten thousand people. Its 4,300 buildings include 1,147 built by 1946. Institutions include five country clubs, five churches, five major private schools, five public schools (part of the Ladue School District and the Special School District), one city park, one county park, and a monastery.

The survey area was selected as corresponding to the former Village of McKnight, one of the three villages that joined to form the City of Ladue in 1936. It includes some of the most conspicuous old houses in Ladue, those on Clayton, McKnight and Price Roads, as well as some of the largest and finest houses in the city, particularly on Dromara, Edgewood and Ridgewood. The fact that many of the builders and early occupants of these houses were also pioneers in the incorporation of the village and city governments gave the area a special interest. The western boundary of this survey area is the eastern boundary of the survey of Central Ladue conducted in 1986. The survey area includes many architect-designed houses of the 1920's and 1930's, many of which are distinguished in execution, and all of which contribute greatly to our understanding of trends and accomplishments at the top of the architectural profession during that time.

Since its incorporation in 1936, the City of Ladue has kept excellent records of building activities. These are, however, keyed to the names of present owners, and one goal of the present survey was to provide references to these records by street address. Because of the continuing employment in Ladue of architects of distinction, these names have been included wherever possible. The Village of McKnight, the predecessor of the City in this survey area, began to issue building permits in 1930, and these have also been retained in part, with one gap in 1933. Prior to 1930 and beginning in 1907, the County government issued building permits for the survey area. These documents have been destroyed, but they were reported in summary by the legal publication, the St. Louis Daily Record, which survives in microfilm. The reports of the Daily Record did not always note the architect, however, nor are the descriptions of location always sufficient to identify the building described. Since the Daily Record is not indexed, permits can only be found by a day-by-day search. Even at that, permits do not always appear, particularly for houses in the mid-1920's. Where building permits have not been found, buildings have been approximately dated by comparing land ownership records (contained in deeds) with city and county directories and the Social Register.

The handful of buildings in the survey area constructed prior to 1907 has been dated by locating deeds for the property. Since 1878 deeds have been recorded by the St. Louis County Recorder in Clayton. Prior to that time St. Louis City and County were in the same county jurisdiction, and those deeds remain in the St. Louis City Hall. Frequently deeds can be more easily located by reference to wills and other probate records, and St. Louis County is fortunate in having excellent probate records on microfiche. Atlases of St. Louis County were prepared periodically throughout the nineteenth century, and these provide benchmarks to land ownership. Atlases date from 1838, 1847, 1862, 1870, 1878, 1893, and 1909. The 1878 and 1909 atlases include indications for buildings.

Most of the residents of Ladue over the years have been distinguished by their high positions in St. Louis business, and many have been members of old and prominent families. For purposes of this survey, however, biographical references have for the most part been limited to the builders of the houses. St. Louis is fortunate in having an extensive biographical resource in the necrology file of the Missouri Historical Society. It is primarily an index of newspaper obituaries but also includes biographical information from many other sources. Where such data were not available, an indication of professional association was obtained from city and county directories.

Ladue is poor in printed historical references, and the recent fiftieth-anniversary celebration of the incorporation of the city has been the occasion for an effort to collect historical data. A major publication should be forthcoming later in 1987. This survey is greatly indebted to the book committee for sharing its information, which includes transcribed interviews, privately owned photographs, newspaper references, and municipal documents. In particular, Charlene Bry and Mayor Edith Spink were unstinting in their generosity.

The survey that follows is arranged by street name and address. Basic information is listed for each building, beginning with the name of the present owner and the 9-digit locator number. This number is assigned by the county tax assessor and provides a ready means of access to such data as the current deed, owner's address, and assessed valuation. The legal description of the property is given where it can be concisely stated. A few properties in the survey area are described solely in terms of their location in the section. The survey area is entirely within sections 8, 9, 16 and 17. Township 45 North Range 6 East. Other properties are defined by land grant: Survey 2496, which was the McKnight and later McKittrick Jones estate; and Survey 2799, which was later subdivided as the Ferguson Farm. In addition to the Ferguson Farm, the area encompasses two other old subdivisions which were later further subdivided: the Summit Tract along Clayton Road, and the West Clayton Subdivision, at the southeast corner of Ladue and McKnight Roads. Where known, the house is dated, and the contractor and architect are named. Finally available building permits are given. Individual inventory forms have been prepared for the more significant buildings, and in three districts where the entire district appeared to be significant, inventory forms have been prepared for all the buildings in the district. These are Dromara, Edgewood, and Ridgewood.

Copies of this report will be available at the St. Louis County Department of Parks & Recreation offices and at the Ladue City Hall.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The survey is bounded on the north by Ladue Road, on the south by Clayton Road, on the west by Price Road, and on the east by the Tanglewood Subdivision, a large post-war development that forms part of the eastern boundary of the City of Ladue. The boundary roads are the oldest in the survey area, along with McKnight Road, which bisects the area north to south. Along these roads, most of the lots are not clearly identified parts of subdivisions but were carved off of larger tracts. Hence the houses along them have the widest range of dates. The only commercial property in the survey area is at the northeast corner of Clayton and Price Roads, where the Ladue Market and a disused gasoline service station are located. Three properties are institutional use: the Reed School, part of the Ladue school system, on Ladue Road; the Community School, a private school, on Lay Road; and the Ethical Society on Clayton Road. Otherwise, the survey area is entirely given over to private residences.

The topography of the survey area has some interesting features. The north side of Clayton Road, which was laid out in 1827 as the Summit Tract, is indeed the summit of a ridge. At the eastern end of the survey area, the ground drops immediately north of the road, while farther to the west the drop comes several lots farther back. Along the foot of this decline flows the Black Creek, still visible between Twin Oaks Lane and Black Creek Lane. A little farther to the north and approximately paralleling Clayton Road are the remains of the right-of-way of the Public Service Company trolley line. The line ran next to Burroughs Lane, the north spur of Lay Road, and the northern property lines of Black Creek Lane, and a stone shelter still stands at the McKnight Road stop. Another creek system meanders through the northern part of the survey area, out of the St. Louis Country Club at Ladue Forest Lane, across the southern end of Brookside Drive, past the entrance to Robin Hill Lane, and through the backyards of the northernmost properties of Dromara Road.

While Dromara Road has a northern and southern entrance, and Ladue Manor forms a loop, none of the streets in the survey area except the oldest four actually traverses the area. This broken street pattern assures little through traffic and helps to maintain the quiet atmosphere on which Ladue prides itself. Most of the residential lots are spacious, many being an acre or more in size. The smallest lots are on Burroughs Lane. With the exception of Ladue Manor, most of the lots are shaded by large old trees, and a few houses are set back so far they are not visible from the road.

EASTERN LADUE SURVEY AREA

Berkley Lane

Black Creek Lane

Brookside Lane

Burroughs Lane

Clayton Road

Dromara Road

Edgewood Road

Greenbriar

Ladue Road

Ladue Forest

Ladue Manor

Lay Road

McKnight Road

McKnight Lane

Moydalgan Road and Drive

Pine Acre Road

Pointer Lane

South Price Road

Ridgewood

Robin Hill Lane

St. Mary's Knoll

Sheraton Drive

Treebrook Lane

Twin Oaks Lane

Valley View Place

Whitfield Lane

HISTORY

The City of Ladue is currently compiling a general history in celebration of its 50th anniversary. The following history has the more modest intention of providing a context for the inventory information contained in the following pages, highlighting some of the findings of our study.

Through the nineteenth century the area now encompassed by the study area was rural land of the quietest kind, a series of small and scattered farms. Only one farmhouse survives, greatly altered. It is the McKnight Farm at 8956 Moydalgan Road. Although it presently is an L-shaped white-painted structure of two stories, it was originally a one-and-a-half-story Greek Revival cottage similar to the surviving "Jarville," an 1854 house at 1723 Mason Road farther west in St. Louis County. The house was built by John McKnight, who had a colorful career as a trader in Mexico before retiring to his home farm in 1847. He died in 1875. McKnight Road was named for him and later the Village of McKnight took its name from the road. The McKnight house was transformed by Hugh McKittrick Jones about 1910 and in its present form better reflects the first stages of suburbanization in Ladue than its rural beginnings.

Suburban as opposed to farm settlement started at an early date in eastern Ladue. The Summit Tract, located along both sides of Clayton Road east of Price, was platted in 1827 by a group of St. Louis businessmen, but it remained sparsely developed until the next century. The foundation of Clayton as a new County seat in 1878 did little to stimulate development in Ladue during the nineteenth-century, as Clayton itself remained very small. The area first found itself in the path of suburban development about 1900, especially after the 04 streetcar line was extended west to the site of the present city hall along a line parallel to Clayton Road.

The McKittrick Jones estate, called "Moydalgan," was by far the largest of the period in acreage, but several comparable houses built at the same time survive. Two are just south of Moydalgan House: the Curtis-Semple-Funsten House at 550 South McKnight Road, and "Wallcroft," built by Ann Chisam and later owned by Nicholas Wall, originally numbered 650 South McKnight Road and now 8919 Pine Acre Road. These residents represented a wide variety of city business interests. Jones headed a cotton goods wholesale firm founded by his grandfather. Elroy Curtis was manager of a dry goods commission company, and his successor Frederick Semple was a stock broker. Anna Chisam's husband Charles was an agent of the Lackawanna Railroad, while Nicholas Wall was an insurance underwriter. At 201 South McKnight Road, a Queen Anne-style house was built by Gustave A. Milbradt, whose company manufactured Milbradt's Rolling Step Ladders. Milbradt's house has been somewhat restyled over the years, but its setting, on a hill far back from the road and surrounded by old trees, remains most evocative of that early period. On South Price Road, attorney William R. Donaldson, Jr., built Number 710 in 1911. That house is one of the first in this district for which the architect is known, Joseph Stauder, whose practice was mostly on St. Louis's south side.

The 1909 atlas shows several other residences along Price Road which cannot be identified with the houses there now, and several other houses built within the next few years have also disappeared. William T. Barron's "beautiful and commodious residence" built about 1897, was just south of

Donaldson's, while near the corner of Price Road was the home of Tom Barnett, one of St. Louis's greatest architects. Barnett's property was purchased in 1908 by John Moore, who sold fire extinguishers and automatic sprinklers.

John J. O'Gorman, a building contractor, lived north of Donaldson. Near him was the home of Harry Eugene Honeywell, well-known to St. Louisans for his exploits as a balloonist or, in the language of the time, an "aeronaut." He had made his first ascension in a tethered balloon in 1904 and competed in his first race four years later. By 1930 he had competed in thirty-six races, of which he had won first place in nine and second place in fourteen. "Aviation is one thing, and aeronautics quite another," Captain Honeywell was quoted as saying, and up to the time of Lindbergh's flight, he had never flown in a heavier-than-air craft. Afterward, however, he conceded that airplanes had become safe enough for travel.

Closer to Ladue Road, landscape architect William Mehl lived where Edgewood Lane was later built, and north of him at 130 South Price was John E. Mooney. A colorful figure in St. Louis County politics, Mooney made a name for himself crusading for clean elections and against a discriminatory sewer law. His house survived the bombs that were found near it on three different occasions but succumbed to a developer in 1967.

Some of the same people who participated in the early phase of suburban settlement of Ladue were also responsible for the first of the residential streets that, beginning in the 1920's, penetrated the hinterland behind Clayton, McKnight, Price, and Ladue Roads, the four main thoroughfares. William Mehl's widow Marie laid out Edgewood Lane in 1922. With its winding course and only eight lots, it was like living in the country. In 1927 Hugh McKittrick Jones with his neighbors Frank Mayfield and Eugene Tittman and their wives subdivided part of the Moydalgan estate as Dromara Road. Its design, a reverse C with an extra loop at its south end, was made by John Noyes (1887-1960), a leading landscape architect in St. Louis for many years. Both Edgewood and Dromara Roads attracted some of the best residential designs of the period. Edgewood Road is notable for the houses there by Study & Farrar. Benedict Farrar, who built both Number 6 and Number 8 for himself, was active in the incorporation of the Village of McKnight, and after the City of Ladue was incorporated he served as building commissioner from 1938 to 1965. Much larger houses were built on Dromara Road, particularly numbers 2, 3, 4 and 7. Frank Mayfield's house at 300 South McKnight Road was built before Dromara was laid out but included in it as lot 36. The house is one of the largest and most picturesque by Maritz and Young, a firm which dominated suburban houses design in the 1920's. Mayfield headed the department store chain Scruggs-Vandervoort-Barney and for many years was "closely identified with every major civic program here," according to St. Louis Commerce.

Another group of outstanding houses faces Ridgewood Drive, which was laid out at this time without benefit of a subdivision design. Lumberman Benjamin Van Cleave and his wife Allevia simply established street easements and building restrictions as they sold off chunks of their land. One of the best houses is at Number 8, built for Royal H. Switzler, president of a cold storage company, and designed by LaBeaume & Klein.

At the opposite end of the prestige spectrum is Burroughs Lane off Price Road. It was laid out in 1924 as Rothwellea Subdivision by Lee Rothwell and her husband Hampton Rothwell, an attorney. They had bought the former property of Tom Barnett nearby in 1919. Burroughs Lane has very small lots, suitable for the modest bungalows which were first built there. They face the 04 trolley line, which by then was bringing students out to John Burroughs School nearby.

The Community School was also attracted to Ladue by the 04. The private school had been located in Clayton since 1916 but by 1930 saw the potential for students in this outlying part of the metropolitan area. To be on the safe side, however, Benedict Farrar designed the new school on North Lay Road so that it could be converted into a residence if necessary.

In the nineteenth century a hamlet called Price had centered on the intersection of Price and Clayton Roads. The Price School was located there and Price Post Office for a time operated in Busch's Grove Restaurant; both buildings are located just outside the survey area and are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Ladue Market, the only commercial property inside the study area, was founded in 1928 and situated to take advantage of the trade at Price. Originally called Meyer's Market, it was operated by Charles and Minnie Meyer. The Ladue Market is still owned by the same family and was cited by the City of Ladue in 1986 as its oldest continuous business.

The Village of McKnight was incorporated in 1929 following a successful court battle to prevent annexation of the area by the City of Clayton. The new village included an area somewhat larger than that of the present survey, extending north of Ladue Road to include (among other properties) Lorenzo Lane and Willow Hill and east to the city limits of Clayton, where a few industries had clustered around the railroad tracks. The first five trustees included Hugh McKittrick Jones and Benedict Farrar, as well as Alvan J. Goodbar at 679 South McKnight Road, Robert L. Jordan of 950 South McKnight Road, and William N. Matthews of 710 South Price Road.

The most pressing need of the new village was for fire protection. Already some notable properties had been destroyed because homeowners had to depend on the services of surrounding municipalities. The twenty-room home of Peter Ibsen, facing Price Road where 2 Edgewood Road now stands, burned to the ground in 1928. Ibsen, who owned a candy shop, was the nephew of playwright Henrik Ibsen. In 1930, while the village trustees waited for voluntary contributions to pay for a local fire department, the home of Lynton Block at 3 Edgewood Road was seriously damaged by fire. The house was still under construction but was already storing a collection of antique furniture. After the fire another year was required to rebuild. The Village of McKnight first contracted with the City of St. Louis for fire service, then joined the neighboring Village of Ladue in a combined fire protection system.

One of the first acts of the village was adoption of a zoning ordinance. Lying close to Clayton, McKnight Village was subject to significant development pressures, but the new ordinance took a hard line against them, requiring a minimum residential lot size of one acre in most parts of the village. This restriction led to the defeat of trustees Goodbar, Jordan,

Farrar, and Mathews in the 1930 election. The "anti-zoning faction," as the Post-Dispatch characterized the dissident voters, elected Edwin S. Pillsbury, H.E. Honeywell, and O.G. Vrana, while Frederick von Windegger, a member of the original zoning commission, was elected by the pro-zoning forces. Pillsbury, who lived at 680 South McKnight Road, was an electrical inventor who had worked with Thomas A. Edison. He developed motors suitable for running refrigerators, washing machines, and other electrical appliances and founded Century Electric Company to make them. Vrana was a realtor who rebuilt his house at 9031 Clayton Road in 1956. Von Windegger was president of the Plaza Bank. He had moved to 315 South McKnight Road in 1926 from Cella Road.

The new board immediately repealed the zoning ordinance and the next year approved the Greenbriar Subdivision, which had lots smaller than those required under the old zoning ordinance. In the election in 1931, however, the majority shifted back to strong zoning. Pillsbury, Honeywell and Vrana retired, and Goodbar and Farrar were returned to office. Carl S. Lawton was also elected. He owned an insurance agency and lived at 720 South Price Road. The zoning ordinance was reinstated, and the approval of the Greenbriar Subdivision was recinded. That left Neal S. Wood, Greenbriar's developer, in a difficult position. A compromise was struck by which the village's minimum lot size was reduced from one acre to three-fourths of an acre. Perhaps because of the controversy, only two houses were built in Greenbriar until 1940, Wood's own house at Number 16 and his sister's at Number 6. In 1935 the zoning ordinance was further modified when McKnight Lane was approved with lots of six-tenths of an acre. As a result, eastern Ladue is somewhat more densely built up than other parts of Ladue.

The Village of McKnight merged with the neighboring villages of Ladue and Deer Creek in 1936 to form the City of Ladue. The immediate impetus for this change was the desire to form a citywide school district. The old Price School was the only school in the district, but it was joined in 1939 by a new building at 9060 Ladue Road. At first called the Ladue School, the building was renamed for Mamie Reed, a longtime teacher at the Price School and later the principal of this school.

By the late 1930's the effects of the Depression began to wane and the pace of development in Eastern Ladue accelerated. McKnight Lane Subdivision was laid out in 1935 and completely built by 1940, mostly by Charles Vatterott, Jr., and his McKnight Lane Development Company. Black Creek Lane, which had been laid out in 1925 as Clayton Valley Subdivision, finally began to be developed in 1936, and the last of its 28 houses was completed in 1941. Brookside was started in 1938. It has an interesting plan: the street descends a gentle grade from Ladue Road south to a cul-de-sac; a creek crosses the south end of the street so that the three southernmost houses are approached over small bridges. Robin Hill Court was laid out in 1940, Pointer Lane in 1941, and its offshoot Treebrook Lane a month later. Pointer Lane was developed by the Stealey Building Company, who had also built most of Black Creek Lane. Berkley Lane is named for its developer Robert M. Berkley. It is built over the failed subdivision of West Clayton, which had been laid out as early as 1898. All these streets have a pleasing consistency of design and materials. The houses are ample but not ostentatious and are conservatively designed in period styles.

Oliver L. Parks was one of the residents of these new streets. He moved into 7 McKnight Lane in 1937. In 1927 he had founded Parks College of Aeronautical Technology. The need for flyers in World War II brought Parks national fame, as his main campus in Cahokia, Illinois, and three other locations turned out 24,000 commissioned pilots, 10% of the total allied pilot force. After the war, he turned the college over to St. Louis University.

The post-war building boom added many new houses to Ladue but few notable for their architecture. In this district the largest development was Ladue Manor Lane, a loop road with 28 ranch houses. Ben Goldberg started the project in 1952 and finished all but two of the closely similar houses in the next two years. Burt Wenneker started the Tanglewood subdivision in 1953. Bordering the survey area on the east, it is perhaps the largest subdivision in all of Ladue, with 146 lots.

The survey area also encompasses several houses of real distinction that reflect the modern movement in architecture. The earliest of them is the house for Dr. Alfred Langenbach at 205 South McKnight Road, built in 1938. The architect has not been identified so far, and further research on this house should be a priority. William Bernoudy, a pupil of Frank Lloyd Wright, and his partner Edouard Mutrux designed a characteristic house for Dr. Lawrence Kahn at 8 Robin Hill in 1953, and Bernoudy alone did a house for Robert B. Phillips at 8970 Moydalan Road in 1968. Joseph Murphy, another respected architect of the period and a teacher of Washington University, designed 4 Twin Oaks Lane in 1953 for Alfred Fleishman. Benjamin Shapiro and Robert Tisdale produced a notable modern house at 34 Dromara in 1953 for Melvin Dubinsky. Shapiro is better known for his Art Deco-favored designs of the 1930's. The dean of modern architects in St. Louis was Harris Armstrong, and two of his best designs are here. His 1956 house at 32 Dromara was influenced by the steeply sloping site and by the enthusiasm and support of the client Louis Sachs. The Ethical Society at 9001 Clayton Road is probably Armstrong's best institutional design, with its soaring copper roof and the warm acoustics of its wood-lined auditorium. Armstrong also designed two buildings for the Community School.

Ladue's current reputation as the most prestigious residential address in the St. Louis region is based on its many large residences, its four country clubs, and the concentration of corporate presidents and other business executives living there. But the best known native son of this district in the post-war era has ironically been William Burroughs, a luminary of the Beat Generation and author of Junky, Naked Lunch, Cobble Stone Gardens, and other controversial works. He is the son of Mortimer Burroughs, who built 700 South Price Road in 1924 and was himself the son of the inventor of the Burroughs adding machine.

The historic resources of eastern Ladue which have been highlighted above are endangered primarily by the prestige and prosperity of the area. The pressure for a Ladue address means that new houses are built wherever space permits, and houses on lots larger than the zoning minimum may become targets for subdivision. The affluence of homeowners enables them to alter and add to older houses freely, as the building permits included here show, and such changes may threaten historic integrity. It is time that Ladue consider the benefits of historic preservation legislation.