

ST. LOUIS COUNTY WEST

INVENTORY OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS

PHASE TWO: POND and GROVER

1989

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

The area included in the present inventory is centered on the intersection of Missouri highways 100 and 109. It encompasses a historically distinct part of St. Louis County that is now attracting rapid suburban growth. The area was selected by the St. Louis County Department of Planning for a Community Area Study, one of a series of detailed plans being produced for developing portions of the unincorporated county. The Planning Department sees the area as a "community of interest," whose residents identify themselves as sharing history, values and challenges. The study area is bounded on the east by the city limits of Ellisville, on the southwest by Rockwoods Reservation, a property of the Missouri Department of Conservation, and to the northwest by the right-of-way for a high voltage electrical transmission line owned by Union Electric. Other boundaries were selected by the Planning Department to separate varying types of suburban development. To the north, new subdivisions within the study area tend to have lot sizes of one acre or less, while those outside tend to be one to three acres. The territory just north of the study area has been studied for annexation by the neighboring city of Clarkson Valley. To the southeast, the march of subdivisions has not quite reached to Old State Road, giving the county a chance to do long-term planning for still essentially rural property.

This study follows up on a preliminary inventory of West St. Louis County, conducted in 1988. Three properties in this study area were included in that inventory, but copies are included here for ease of reference. That study observed that the old crossroads settlements of Pond and Grover retained their early-twentieth-century configurations and many of their old buildings, and the present study has provided an opportunity to document that observation in detail.

The selection of properties to be inventoried was based almost entirely on visual inspection. This technique probably excluded a few old structures whose historical integrity has been obliterated by additions and alterations, but it permitted inclusion of several notable structures that were built since the most recent county atlas was published in 1909. Most buildings in this survey had to be researched from primary sources -- deeds and probate records -- which meant that exact dating was not possible. This is a common problem in rural surveys. Dating of buildings on the basis of land records is always approximate, and this is especially true in the case of rural buildings. Farm complexes usually include buildings from several different periods, and a site in long continuous occupancy may be rebuilt piecemeal once or even twice. Such events are not detectable through land records. Building permits began to be issued by St. Louis County in 1907, but they were long ago discarded. Trace of them survives in the pages of the St. Louis Daily Record, but they require hours or even days to track down since they are not indexed in any way.

Estimates of a building's date based on stylistic considerations must also be treated with caution in rural areas, as changes in fashion are so late in reaching the country. Many rural buildings have few style-based architectural features, and alterations over the years have further disguised the original age of many of these buildings.

Even in available records, certain deficiencies became apparent in this inventory more clearly than had been the case in the preceding rural surveys. One was that many probate files have lost important pieces of information, typically either the will or the inventory. A related problem is that all court records of the present St. Louis County, that is after 1876, have been discarded. This can be particularly detrimental to historic research in cases which resulted in the partition of farms; usually the maps filed in these cases were one of a kind and can only be reconstructed, if at all, from written descriptions. To compensate for this loss of visual reference, recent descriptions of land in St. Louis County have tended to eliminate all references to earlier documents, in the process removing the clues that facilitate historic research. The newer land descriptions tend to be composed of more exact measurements (but often the obscure units of chains and links), complicated geometric angles, and references to surveyors' monuments that can only be understood on the site, and then often only by a skilled surveyor.

Another modern practice complicating the study of rural properties is the periodic change in title to avoid probate. Where properties at the turn of the century were usually recorded in the name of the husband only, now they are recorded in the name of both the husband and wife in such a way that if one dies, the property becomes the sole possession of the survivor and thus not subject to probate inventories. By adding the names of the children to the deed, or by selling the property with life estate, or alternatively by setting up a living trust, property owners can prevent the property from appearing in public probate records for generations.

The two standard histories of St. Louis County are William L. Thomas's History of St. Louis County (1911) and the History of St. Louis County published in 1920 by the Watchman-Advocate newspaper. Both have scattered references to Pond and Grover and their more prominent families. An earlier work, Walter Scharf's History of St. Louis City and County (1883), has a brief notice of Pond. One building, the Pond Hotel, was included in a 1970 publication of the St. Louis County Historic Buildings Commission, 100 Historic Building in St. Louis County, and the updated 1983 publication. Chylene Jahn Daub, in her Golden Anniversary of Ellisville (1983), included brief histories of Pond and Grover as well as separate entries on the Bethel Methodist Church, the Pond Hotel and the Big Chief Hotel. It also includes some information about pioneer families.

The following inventory forms have been arranged according to the street addresses of the properties, alphabetically and numerically. Maps for many of the properties are taken from the records of the St. Louis County Department of Revenue. They show property lines and subdivision outlines as well as building outlines. The building outlines are in pencil and do not reproduce well, but they are more detailed and accurate than any other source.

Inventory forms have been numbered according to St. Louis County's locator system. This nine-digit system is based on a coordinated grid that covers the entire county and gives each parcel of land a unique identification. Most county records are keyed to this system, and it is hoped that inclusion of it on these inventory forms will facilitate further research. All photographic negatives are in the files of the St. Louis County Department of Parks and

Recreation. Roll and frame numbers have been included on the inventory forms under item three. The roll numbers are assigned by the photo processing companies. Roll and frame numbers have also been marked on the backs of the inventory photos.

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PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Pond and Grover occupy historic crossroads, but the recent rerouting of both Manchester Road and Eatherton Roads has reshaped the topography of this district. The new Manchester Road, Highway 100, runs nearly parallel to the old road but roughly a quarter of a mile north of it. So far, access to this highway from properties fronting it has been limited. State Route 109, which follows Eatherton Road through this district, is for much of its length a new right-of-way designed to connect the western parts of the county that were inconveniently reached by the historic road pattern. More properties open directly onto Highway 109, as it is called, although this road too is not developed to the degree it may be expected to be.

The terrain in this district is generally rolling with some more hilly portions. Manchester Road is roughly the top of a watershed. To the south Hamilton Creek flows into the Meramec River, while to the north rise the headwaters of Bonhomme Creek, which flows into the Missouri River. The southern valley is largely protected by the Rockwood Reservation, 1,898 acres owned by the Missouri Department of Conservation. The wooded, rocky topography of the Reservation continues along Woods Road to within a few feet of Manchester Road.

The tangled skein of old rural roads that crisscross this landscape is rapidly being made more complex by an infill of modern subdivisions, with their typically writhing street patterns. So far, these developments are all east of Highway 109. The most important rural roads other than Manchester and Eatherton are Pond Road, which runs north from Manchester; Strecker Road, in the northeast corner of the district; and Old State Road, which cuts through the southeast corner of the district, the old route from Ellisville to Glencoe. Clayton Road, one of the most important highways in the metropolitan area with origins east of Forest Park, comes to an ignominious end here in a modern subdivision. An extension is planned as far as State Route 109, with further extension possible to Pond Road or beyond.

Although the construction of State Route 100 has accelerated the development of the area by improving traffic flow to the west, it has had the benefit of diverting through traffic from the old crossroads communities of Pond and Grover, which are the most significant parts of the area in terms of their history and visual character. Pond, which seems to be the older, is located where Pond Road meets Christy Road at Manchester. The buildings on three of those four corners retain some historic character, as do a few others nearby. Grover grew up around the intersection of Manchester and Eatherton, where a blacksmith shop, a general store, and a saloon were built, the latter two still surviving. Pond has one old "suburban" subdivision near it dating from 1910, and Grover has two dating from the 1920's. These period streetscapes have already been compromised by some modern intrusions, and more are scheduled, including a shopping center at the northwest corner of Manchester Road and Route 109. West of Pond some glimpses of the rural landscape remain, most notably at the Bethel Methodist Church, with its large cemetery. No doubt these scenes will also vanish before the end of the century given the current pace of development.

HISTORY

The settlement of west St. Louis County was generally less intense than in the northern or southern parts of the county. Farms were larger and roads were fewer. The west county was also much slower to be settled. E. Dupre's county atlas of 1838 shows many square miles still unclaimed, and Hutawa's 1847 atlas still shows many vacant sections. The first areas to be settled were along the rivers, particularly in the Bonhomme Bottom, the bottom land along the Missouri River. Land grants also reached into the interior along Bonhomme Creek and Wild Horse Creek. Louis Courtois, Senior, was granted over 6,000 acres on the Meramec at the west end of the county in 1800, and, according to testimony later given by Benito Vasquez to the U.S. land commissioners, Courtois and his family were to be seen traveling back and forth from this property as early as 1780.

In the area of Pond and Grover, most of the land along Manchester Road had been claimed by 1838, but the rest of township 44 range 3 was almost entirely vacant. Most of the early claimants settled here briefly if at all, selling their land to later settlers, particularly the incoming Germans. The exception was Cyrus Speers, who acquired a tract of 160 acres east of Pond Road and straddling Manchester Road about 1835 and opened a store there. (He also bought 40 adjacent acres from John Brockman, but that was not the site of the store, contrary to what Scharf wrote in 1883). The name Pond is said to come from a pond Speers had on his property, but it is not the pond that can currently be seen on the west side of Pond Road north of Manchester Road; that is on ground originally owned by Philip Tippet. Speers sold his land in 1846, so he couldn't have operated this store for many years. The most prominent resident of Pond was Frederick Essen, who took over Speer's store in 1853. His widow and children later operated a hotel there.

The primary reason for the location of Pond, and later of Grover, was the presence of Manchester Road, which was for years the most important road to the west in St. Louis County. Although stories of settlement along western Manchester Road go back to before 1820, the road was not officially authorized by the state legislature until 1835. It was intended to provide a route to the state capital in Jefferson City. Ballwin was laid out in 1837, about the same time as Cyrus Speers opened his store. When the railroads began to come into the county in the 1850's however, they followed routes closer to the Missouri and Meramec Rivers, leaving Manchester, Ballwin, Ellisville, Grover and Pond as backwaters, dependent on the much less important highway traffic and on trade with farmers in the immediate vicinity. Pond and Grover did have post offices from time to time, but often residents of the vicinity got their mail from rural routes based in Glencoe in the south or Centaur in the north.

By 1911, when William L. Thomas wrote his history of St. Louis County, Pond (presumably including environs) had a population of about seventy. In addition to the hotel, then run by Frederick Essen's daughter Emma, the settlement included two general stores, two blacksmith shops, and a whip manufactory. One of the blacksmith shops was Peter Blum's, on the south side of Manchester Road just east of Maple. Blum earlier had built the house at 2550 Pond Road. The other was John A. Kern's at 17300 Manchester Road, which

is still standing in the in the form of a gasoline service station, to which it was converted in the 1920's.

Grover in 1911 had a population of about forty. All three of its key businesses survive in somewhat altered form. Fred Rettker's general store at 16962 Manchester was then operated by Louis C. Fick. Fick also managed the switchboard of the Grover Mutual Telephone Company, which moved to a new building in Pond in 1920. The blacksmith shop at 16957 Manchester Road had been established as early as 1865 by Fridoline Wetterer and was owned at this time by his successor August Wiedner. The saloon, on the west side of the Eatherton Road intersection, was owned by Christian von Gruben, who, Thomas reported, "will not countenance anything approaching vulgarity, expecting his patrons always to conduct themselves in an orderly and gentlemanly manner." Christian's son Edward later took over the business.

The arrival of the automobile made Pond and Grover for the first time logical places of residence for people who didn't also work there. William and Emilie Poertner laid out a subdivision just west of the Pond Hotel in 1910, while Louis J. and Louisa Funk platted Grover Heights in 1925. Lindy Lane in Grover was privately subdivided by Caroline Paubel beginning in 1927. None of these subdivisions grew rapidly, however. When U.S. Route 66 was originally designated in 1926, the route from Chicago to Santa Monica went down Manchester Road. This brought another spurt of growth, recalled today by the former Big Chief Hotel, actually an early motel, located in Pond. Suburbanization of the west county may be said to begin with the incorporation of Ellisville in 1932. More extensive suburbanization, however, has occurred only within the past twenty years, and the recent state highway improvements to state routes 100 and 109 portend much more extensive development in the near future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The historic resources identified in this study are in need of better local protection. As the rest of the west county becomes increasingly built up with anonymous-looking subdivisions, the older historic buildings that give Pond and Grover their distinctive character are going to become more and more important to the community. They should be protected now, not only against unnecessary demolition, but against inappropriate alterations which could destroy their visual and historical value. The unincorporated parts of St. Louis County currently have recourse to only one form of historic preservation legislation, the LPA or Landmark and Preservation Area. This is a zoning category, and designation requires an application by the owner and a substantial filing fee ranging in price from \$300 to \$800. This procedure virtually precludes designation of those historic buildings which it would most serve the public interest to save: those whose marginal productivity has kept them fairly free of alterations over the years, or those situated where redevelopment seems tempting. The county needs an ordinance like those of most progressive metropolitan counties enabling an historic commission to designate historic landmarks and districts with or without owner consent, and to prohibit (not merely delay) the demolition of such buildings.

Preservation can also be encouraged by careful subdivision regulations. Often historic buildings on large tracts of land can be preserved when those tracts are developed more intensively simply by drawing the lot lines thoughtfully.

Another technique that can be used to preserve the distinctive character of a district is the Design District, which establishes certain desired visual elements as significant for retention and promotion in new construction regardless of historic significance. Chapel Hill, North Carolina, is one notable community using this technique.

Cemeteries in particular need more attention from the county. The Bethel Methodist Cemetery in Pond is one of the most notable historic cemeteries in the county, dating from 1873. The structure of historic inventories funded by the State Historic Preservation Program, however, usually ignores cemeteries, as they are difficult to list in the National Register of Historic Places. Nevertheless they constitute an important historic resource and one that is just as subject to the pressures of development as a building. While state legislation has recently broadened protection for cemeteries to some extent, there remains a serious need for county protection, especially to discourage the destruction of private cemeteries or at least to assure more orderly transfer of bodies and monuments than is now the case.

While many of the buildings in the present inventory are significant locally in terms of their associations and contributions to urban design, only one property in the present inventory seems to meet the more restrictive criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. This is the Pond Hotel, which has long been recognized as significant by the St. Louis County Historic Buildings Commission. It is one of a number of interesting and fairly well-preserved commercial buildings from the county's rural portions that have been identified or reidentified in recent surveys and could form part of a thematic nomination.

One other recommendation seems appropriate at this point. Representatives of many of the old families are still to be found in this area, some of them still on the old family property. In another generation this will not be true. The wealth of family history from these sources needs to be collected now, while it is still available. This is usually the work of the local historical society, but no local society is currently active in this area. One possible vehicle for this effort is the Old Trails Historical Society, which has been active primarily in Manchester and Ballwin, but which has members and some collections relating to territory farther west. A systematic effort should be made to interview descendants of the early families, several of which are still represented in the community. This should lead to genealogical and biographical studies, too few of which are currently available. Such an effort should also bring to light papers, photos and other memorabilia which could then be copied or donated to publicly-accessible collections.

Historic Inventory Pond and Grover

1.	Duffy-Lang House	1909 Eatherton Rd. (Hwy 109)
2.	Henry Knappmeyer Farm	2100 Eatherton Rd. (Hwy 109)
3.	Shotwell-Kern Farm	2310 Eatherton Road
4.	George Kern Farm	2418 Eatherton Road
5.	Second John E. Schnarr House	16941 Manchester Road
6.	First John E. Schnarr House	16943 Manchester Road
7.	Wetterer House	16955 or 16865 Manchester Road
8.	Wetterer Smith Shop	16957 Manchester Road
9.	Rettker-Fick Store	16962 Manchester Road
10.	Christian von Gruben Saloon	17005 Manchester Road
11.	Annie Rickard House	17011 Manchester Road
12.	Thomas J. Coyle House	17014 Manchester Road
13.	James Franklin House	17049 Manchester Road
14.	Pond School	17109 (?) Manchester Road
15.	Eliza Dreinhofer House	17225 Manchester Road
16.	Pond Inn	17250 Manchester Road
17.	Kern Service Station	17300 Manchester Road
18.	Pond Hotel	17301 Manchester Road
19.	Anthony Kessels House	17330 Manchester Road
20.	Big Chief Hotel	17340 (?) Manchester Road
21.	William Knappmeyer Farm	17466 Manchester Road
22.	Bethel Methodist Church	17500 Manchester Road
23.	Frederick William Stosberg	17724 Manchester Road
24.	Thomas M. Nichols House	501 Old State Road
25.	Conway-Ruwwe House	1205 Old State Road
26.	Henry Kroner House	1450 Old State Road
27.	"Overbrook," Frederick Steines Farm	1333 Pond Road
28.	August von Gruben House	2204 Pond Road
29.	Andrew J. Kern House	2541 Pond Road
30.	Peter Blum House	2550 Pond Road
31.	Henry Kempf House	145 Strecker Road
32.	Strecker-Kempf House	165 Strecker Road
33.	Ben Baumer House	246 Strecker Road