

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**

1. Name of Property

historic name Plaza Square Apartments Historic District
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number Bounded by Fifteenth, Olive, Seventeenth and Chestnut streets [n/a] not for publication
city or town St. Louis [n/a] vicinity
state Missouri code MO county St. Louis (Independent City) code 510 zip code 63103

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 [])

Mark A. Miles May 31, 2007
Signature of certifying official/Title Mark A. Miles / 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

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
I hereby certify that the property is:		
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register See continuation sheet [] .	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register See continuation sheet [] .	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other, explain see continuation sheet [] .		

5. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		contributing	noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	8	0
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district		
<input type="checkbox"/> public-state	<input type="checkbox"/> site		
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure		
	<input type="checkbox"/> object		
			building
			sites
			structures
			objects
		8	0
			total

Name of related multiple property listing.
 N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register. 1

6. Function or Use

Historic Function

DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling
RELIGION/religious facility

Current Functions

DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling
RELIGION/religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification

MODERN MOVEMENT
LATE VICTORIAN/Gothic Revival
LATE VICTORIAN/Romanesque Revival

Materials

foundation Concrete
Limestone
 walls Brick
Metal
Limestone
Concrete
 roof Asphalt
 other _____

see continuation sheet | |.

see continuation sheet { }.

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

See continuation sheet [x]

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.

Areas of Significance

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND
DEVELOPMENT
ARCHITECTURE

Periods of Significance

1956-1961

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person(s)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Hellmuth, Obata & Kassabaum, arch.
Armstrong, Harris, arch.
Walsh, Patrick, arch.
Dixon, Thomas, arch.
Murphy & Mackey, arch.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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

Primary location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State Agency

Federal Agency

Local Government

University

Other:

Name of repository: Landmarks Assoc. of St. Louis

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form
Plaza Square Apartments
St. Louis (Independent City), MO

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 4 acres

UTM References

A. Zone 15	Easting 743 360	Northing 4279 520	B. Zone 15	Easting 743 580	Northing 4279 480
C. Zone 15	Easting 743 560	Northing 4279 320	D. Zone 15	Easting 743 340	Northing 4279 380

[] 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 Carolyn Toft/Executive Director and Michael Allen/Research Associate

organization Landmarks Association of St. Louis date January 26, 2007

street & number 917 Locust Street, 7th floor telephone 314-421-6474

city or town St. Louis state MO zip code 63101

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 FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

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

name Multiple (see continuation sheet)

street & number _____ Telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 1

Plaza Square Apartments
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Summary

The Plaza Square Apartments Historic District consists of six thirteen-story Modern Movement buildings and two historic churches (one with a later adjacent rectory) located on four city blocks in the west end of downtown St. Louis bounded by Fifteenth Street on the east, Chestnut Street on the south, Seventeenth Street on the west and Olive Street on the north. Constructed between 1959 and 1961 from plans by Hellmuth Obata & Kassabaum with Harris Armstrong, the apartment buildings are flat-roofed with concrete structural frameworks and walls clad in brick, white Missouri limestone and enameled sheet metal panels. With long north-south dimensions and narrow east-west dimensions and a lack of traditional base-shaft-crown division, the buildings possess a strong emphasis on mass mitigated by the generous fenestration and variations in projecting balconies. The three buildings on the southern blocks (numbered 10, 20 and 30) have a wider lateral dimension than the buildings on the northern blocks (numbered 40, 50 and 60). Built as part of an urban renewal plan, the buildings are situated in a garden-like setting with lawns, plazas and underground parking that is part of the original architectural plan (see figure #1). Except for uniformly brown-painted panels on five of the apartment buildings today instead of the original varied brightly-colored panels, the apartment buildings as a group closely match their original appearance. Centenary Methodist Church (NR 1/16/1997), completed in 1870 and designed by Thomas Dixon is a two-story limestone church in the Gothic Revival style adjoined to a three-story office wing and other smaller additions built in 1924. The red brick St. John the Apostle & Evangelist Catholic Church was completed in 1860 and designed by Patrick Walsh in the Romanesque Revival style. It was remodeled and expanded in 1956-9 according to plans by Murphy & Mackey in conjunction with the construction of Plaza Square Apartments. All buildings retain historic integrity and convey the appearance of the district during its period of significance.

Setting

The Plaza Square Apartments site occupies four city blocks (see photograph #1). Pine Street runs east-west through the site, and Sixteenth Street running north-south was vacated as part of the project. When the Plaza Square Apartments were under construction, the western end of downtown around the site was dense with multi-story wholesale warehouses, office buildings, hotels and storefront buildings. To the south of

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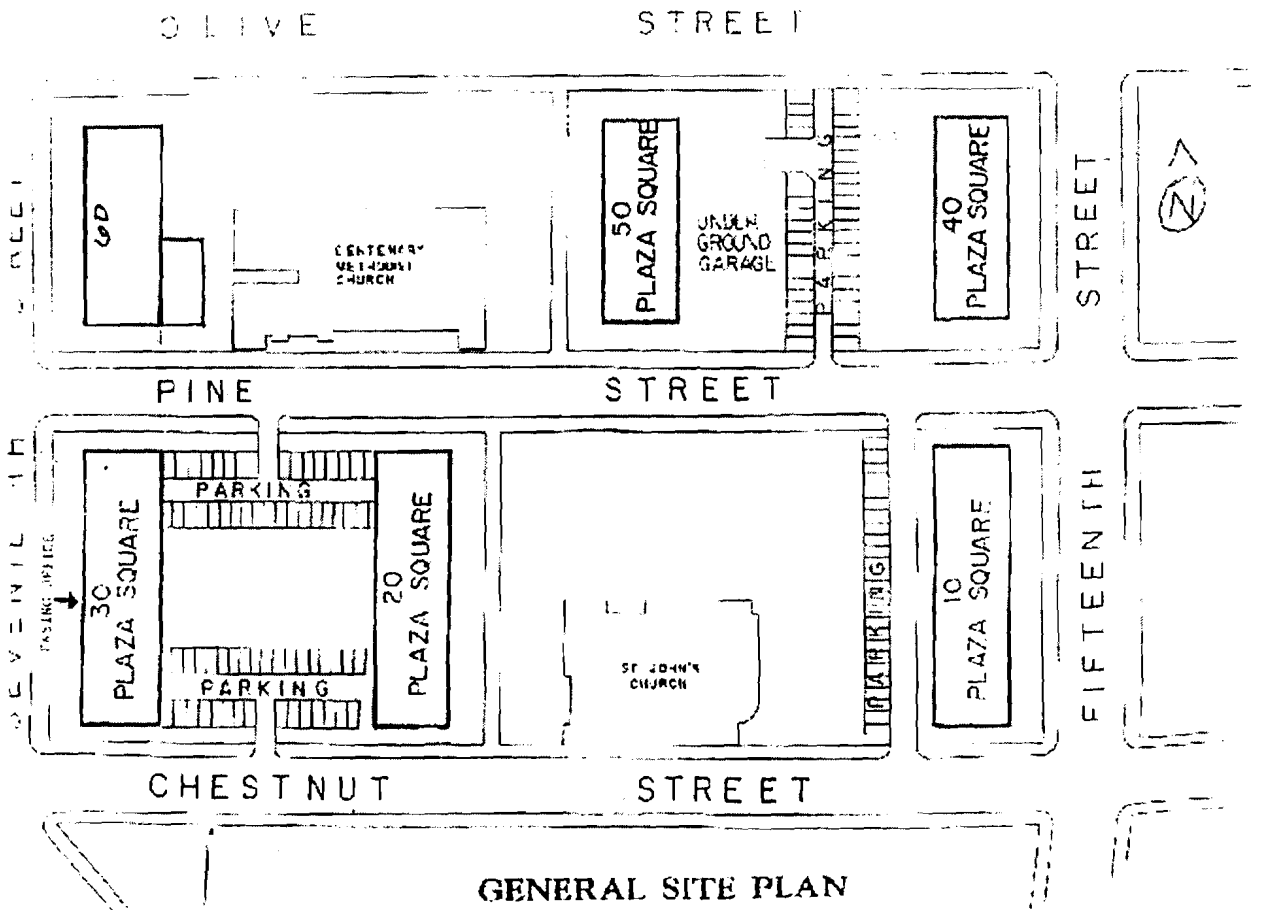
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Plaza Square Apartments
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the site lies the ribbon of parks including Memorial Plaza (later known as the Gateway Mall), part of the urban renewal plan for downtown that included projects like the Plaza Square Apartments. Since their completion, the character of this area has changed very little. Many of the surrounding buildings maintain their long-time uses, and many more have been renovated for new uses, including residential space. The area retains the density and vitality of an urban central business district.

Figure #1: The current site plan. (Source: Cohen-Hilberry Architects.)



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Plaza Square Apartments
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Plaza Square Apartments

Constructed 1958-61

Modern Movement

Hellmuth Obata Kassabaum with Harris Armstrong, architects

6 contributing

The three buildings numbered 10, 20 and 30 are located on the southern two blocks and share many common characteristics, with the location of ground-floor entrances the chief variable in their design (see photographs #2 and 3). All three have a footprint of 58' by 211' and are thirteen stories tall with a high basement. All are set back from the street with landscaping decorating the setback. Building 10 fronts onto Fifteenth Street, Building 20 fronts the vacated Sixteenth Street from the west and faces the St. John church, and Building 30 fronts Seventeenth Street (see figure #1).

Each building is clad in brown brick in an American common bond, with window bays framed with white Missouri limestone ribbons that form a grid-like pattern on each elevation through lintels and band courses. On the eastern elevation, the bays are grouped as follows: one bay at the left (south), a group of four bays, a group of two bays, a group of four bays and a single bay. The spaces between bays are clad in enameled galvanized sheet metal panels. Each bay carries groups of three openings. These openings are typically two one-over-one, double-hung aluminum windows and a single-pane fixed-sash window above a brick knee-wall and under a limestone lintel. The knee-walls contain smaller openings at one side for the placement of air conditioning units; nearly every bay has such units in these openings. Some openings contain doorways in either the leftmost or rightmost opening if connected to a balcony. The doorways mostly carry steel doors with a rectangular center pane. Two types of balconies project from the building, providing visual interest. On the even-numbered floors, flat concrete slab balconies with wrought-iron railings begin at the rightmost (north) bay in each bay group except the rightmost (north), extending across the panel-clad wall sections. On the odd-numbered floors, projecting pentagram-shaped concrete balconies with concrete railing walls are found on each outer bay of the group of four bays. The first floor, of course, has no balconies although typically those floors are well above sidewalk level. The western elevation is the obverse of the eastern elevation, with no deviation.

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Plaza Square Apartments
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On the south elevation, there are three bays all framed by a limestone band. The outermost bays contain paired windows like those on the other elevation, while the center bays contain four openings with single-pane windows at each end. The bays are separated by metal panels, with limestone ribbon bands running horizontally above each odd-numbered floor within the outer frame. The northern elevation is much like the southern elevation, except that the center bay is blind although having lintels. A narrow concrete cross-work grille is at the leftmost end of each center bay, running fully between the lintels.

First floor entrances are at the fourth bay from the south, with sets of doors on both east and west elevations opening to streets as well as to parking. The openings typically are glazed with plate glass framed in aluminum with a set of double doors; the bay to the south is usually entirely glass divided by three vertical aluminum mullions. Although most of the balcony doors and windows throughout these buildings match the original profiles, many are replacements. On the basement floor of all six buildings, each window bay carries a three-part fixed aluminum window. The center pane is narrow with two wider flanking panes. This pattern is repeated at each opening regardless of width.

The three buildings numbered 40, 50 and 60 are located on the northern two blocks and share many common characteristics with the location of ground-floor entrances the chief variable in their design (see photographs #4 and 5). All three have a footprint of 58' by 153' and are thirteen stories tall with a high basement. (Building 60 has experienced alterations to its basement and first floor, but otherwise retains the traits of the other two buildings.) Their placement almost mirrors that of the buildings on the southern blocks, except that the center building, Building 50, is placed on the east side of the vacated Sixteenth Street facing Centenary Methodist Church (see figure #1).

Each building is clad in brown brick in an American common bond, with window bays framed with limestone ribbons that form a grid-like pattern on each elevation. The eastern elevation of each building is divided into eight window bays. The bays are grouped as follows: a single bay at the south, a group of two bays, a group of four bays, and a single bay. The spaces between bays and within the outer limestone ribbon are clad in enameled galvanized steel panels. The bays are articulated the same as with the other building type, and the same types of balconies are used. On the even-numbered floors,

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flat concrete slab balconies with wrought-iron railings begin at the leftmost (south) bay in each bay group except the leftmost (south), extending across the panel-clad wall sections. On the odd-numbered floors, projecting concrete balconies with concrete railing walls are found on the leftmost (south) bay and each outer bay of the group of four bays.

On the northern elevation, there are three bays all framed by a limestone band. The outermost bays contain paired windows like those on the other elevation, while the center bays contain four openings with single-pane windows at each end. The bays are separated by metal panels, with limestone ribbon bands running horizontally above each odd-numbered floor within the outer frame. As on the other elevations, each window group has a limestone lintel. The western elevation is the obverse of the eastern elevation, with no major differences. The southern elevation is much like the northern elevation, except that the center bay is blind although having lintels. A narrow concrete cross-work grille is at the leftmost end of each center bay, running fully between the lintels. The first-floor entrances are located in the fourth bay from the north on both the west and east elevations to allow access from the street and parking areas. The openings typically are glazed with plate glass framed in aluminum with a set of double doors; the bay to the south is usually entirely glass divided by three vertical aluminum mullions.

As with the exteriors, the chief differences between the interiors of each building type are due to the different lateral dimension and fenestration. All buildings have the same basic first floor entrance plan, with entrance into a large foyer leading back to an elevator lobby that is suspended below the first floor level. These lobbies are mostly clad in travertine marble with tile floors and brass light fixtures; there are varying degrees of original appearance from building to building (see photograph #6). In Building 60, the first floor elevator lobby floor has been raised to the level of the first floor; the original marble is retained. In Building 60, there also is a large first-floor addition on the east side of the building as well as a finished basement cafeteria space. In the other buildings, the basements are not finished spaces. Facing the elevator doors on each upper floor is a grid of cast concrete panels. Otherwise, the corridors are minimally ornamented with plaster walls and ceilings (there are dropped ceilings added later in some buildings) and carpeting. This reflects their original appearance (see photograph #7).

Buildings 10, 20 and 30 have 16 units on each floor. This includes four studio units, ten one-bedroom units and two two-bedroom units. Buildings 40, 50 and 60 have 12 units

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on each floor. This includes four studio units, six one-bedroom units and two two-bedroom units paired at each end of the building (see figure #2). The finishes in the units are simple, leaving the character similar to original condition (see photograph #8). Carpeting covers the concrete floors, except in the bathrooms and kitchens where the flooring is linoleum or tile. The walls are plaster on metal lath, and the plaster is mostly in good condition. The floor plans are intact, as are interior and exterior door and window openings. Over the years, many interior doors have been replaced throughout the buildings. Simple wooden and metal baseboards and door casements abound in the complex, with many replacement pieces. Some of the kitchens retain original sheet steel cabinets. The original heating was provided through a steam radiator system, and air conditioning through room units as mentioned in the exterior description.

Overall, the Plaza Square Apartments clearly retain integrity. The site plan remains mostly unaltered, although some changes in landscaping and recreational features have been made. Most doors and windows throughout these buildings match their original profiles, although many are replacements. The notable exception among these three buildings is Building 60, which had complete window replacement at some point. The replacement windows on Building 60 maintain a one-over-one division, but the sash division is lower and the single-pane sashes were replaced by one-over-one sashes. However, the opening sizes remain the same on that building. Originally, each building's enameled panels were painted a different solid color on the east and west elevations, with the panels on the north and south elevations painted white. Specifications and early color photographs are at odds, and conclusive assignments of original colors for three of the buildings have yet to be made. However, evidence shows that Building 20 has orange paint underneath the current coat, Building 30 has green and Building 60 was originally the same blue that it is today. The distinct colors differentiated the individual buildings from each other; this effect was an important balance to the uniform appearances of the buildings. Today, all of the buildings' panels are repainted brown except for Building 60. The original architectural impact of colorful panels and differentiated is notably dulled by the current painting, which uses a color close to the tone of the brick. The owner of Building 60 is retaining the original color in the current rehabilitation, and using the name "Blu" to market the building.

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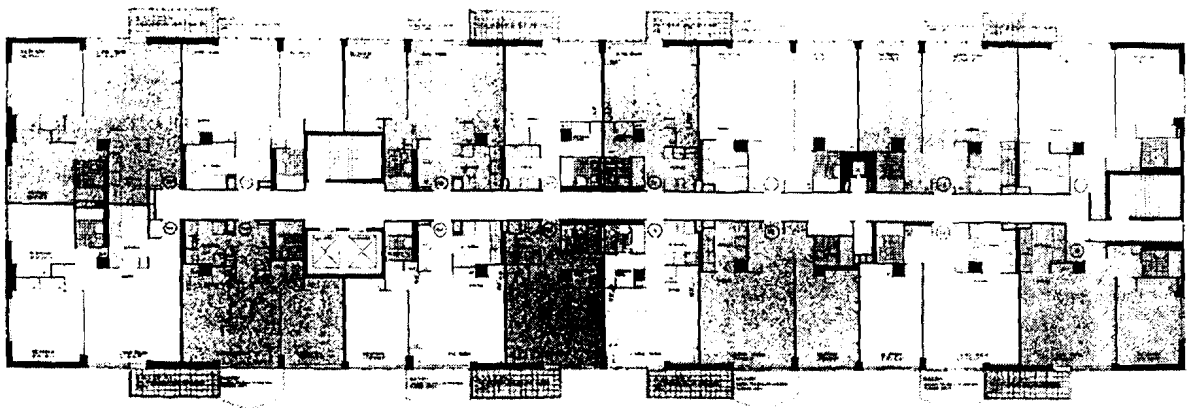
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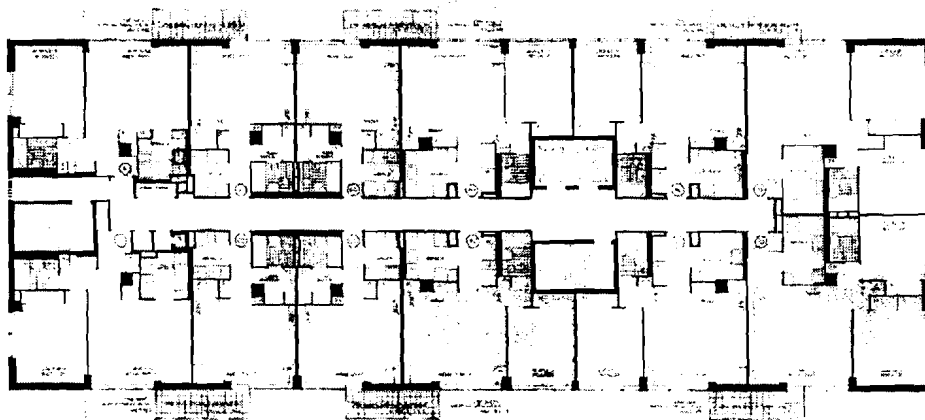
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Figure #2: Typical floor plans for the building types. (Source: The Dolan Company.)

Plan for Buildings 10, 20 and 30:



Plan for Buildings 40, 50 and 60:



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The original floor plans are intact throughout the complex, except in Building 60 where a few changes were made in a 1969 remodeling. During that remodeling, the first floor lobby's floor raised the elevator lobby floor to provide elevator access from the entrance level at to the first floor level for easier use by the elderly. The basement was finished as a dining area, with deeper a light well dug around the northwestern end of the building. New, taller windows were installed in the basement at this light well. An addition to the first floor on the eastern elevation was also built for this remodeling (see photograph #5). Throughout Building 60 and others, suspended acoustical tile ceilings have been installed in hallway ceilings. Some lobbies have had wooden paneling applied, and many original light fixtures in public spaces have been replaced. However, the basic appearance of the interior remains. The Plaza Square Apartments substantially retains integrity of location, setting, materials, feeling, workmanship and association and reflects its historic appearance.

St. John the Apostle and the Evangelist Roman Catholic Church and Rectory

Church: Constructed 1859-60 with alterations, 1956-9; Romanesque Revival; Patrick Walsh and Thomas Mitchell, architects (1859-60) and Murphy & Mackey, architects (1956-59).

Rectory: Constructed, 1958; Modern Movement; Murphy & Mackey, architects.
2 contributing

Twin corner towers accentuate the red brick Romanesque Revival St. John the Apostle and Evangelist Roman Catholic Church, which has been considerably remodeled. Sitting on a water table of white limestone, the church is rectilinear with a front gable and a curved apse on the otherwise blind east elevation. The roof is clad with standing-seam copper sheeting. The symmetrical primary elevation is on the west side, consisting of recessed gabled section between the towers. Bands of solid courses mark the locations of projecting limestone cornices and stringcourses removed during remodeling. On the first floor of this section, three door openings, with the center being taller and wider, are headed by limestone hood molds connected by cornices; this is close to the original appearance. The openings are transparent, with glass double doors and transoms featuring minimal painted steel framing and light dividers that are markedly different from the original solid wooden doors and ornate fanlights that originally filled these

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openings. Torch lamps with glass globes between the door openings are not original. Centered on the second floor, an oculus with projecting limestone surround is flanked by two arched window openings divided into a circular header above two arched windows; all openings are glazed with decorative stained glass. The oculus originally had a hood mold rather than a full surround, and the original hood molds for the arched openings are now replaced by flat doubled solid courses. At the third floor in the gable is an arcade of openings now infilled with jack-on-jack brick and stripped of hood molds. A statue projects from the center arch, two rectangular recesses now flank the arcade and a continuous limestone sill course replaces the original continuous wooden dentillated cornice that wrapped around three sides of the church. An original wooden dentillated cornice at the roofline is intact.

On the towers, the second through fifth floors feature recessed sections topped by dentils. Originally, the first and second floors were arched windows with hood molds like those of other openings on the church. Now, the first floor openings are infilled to form narrow, short windows while the second floor openings are infilled completely. The cornice line of the first floor doors originally wrapped around the exposed sides of the towers but was replaced in the remodeling by a flat limestone belt. On the third floor on the exposed sides are inset crosses in brick. On the fourth level on all sides, round openings with soldier course surrounds bear louvers; at the fifth level on all sides, paired tall arched openings also bear louvers. A projecting balcony supported by large brackets runs around all sides at the fifth floor; the original wooden rail was replaced with a simple wrought iron rail during the remodeling. At the top of each tower is a hipped roof supporting a tall metal cross; the original wooden dentillated cornice on each tower was removed in the remodeling.

Beyond the towers, the north and south elevations are articulated into six bays by false pilasters in brick with limestone bases and cornices. The pilasters terminate into an entablature divided with a projecting limestone stringcourse. Under the entablature between pilasters runs a brick dentil course. In each bay is a tall, narrow arched window on a limestone sill; the openings are glazed with stained glass windows installed in the 1956-9 remodeling. Originally, the windows on these elevations were placed higher on the wall with cast iron hood molds and a projecting sill course interrupted by the pilasters; a dentillated cornice ran under the roof overhang.

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Through the main doorways on the primary elevation is a shallow narthex with gray marble cladding the walls to door height and a red marble floor. Three doors with arched fanlights above lead into the rectangular nave with a vaulted ceiling. Original millwork surrounds doors and window openings throughout the nave and in the narthex. The plaster walls and ceiling are covered in extensive fresco work. False pilasters with Corinthian capitals run ceiling-height between and beside each of the six arched stained glass windows on the north and south walls. The floor is carpeted, and the pews are divided by a center and secondary aisles. Above the secondary aisles, simple pendant lights suspend from the ceiling; these were added in the remodeling. On the west wall of the narthex, a curved balcony projects outward, supported by a column at either end. A knee-wall runs along the balcony. On the east wall, marble steps lead to the chancel with a white marble altar sitting in an apse. In the apse, a painted border runs horizontally high on the wall; otherwise, there is no ornament. Despite the lengthening of the exterior windows and the total replacement of the stained glass, the historic qualities of the church are mostly intact in the interior. During the rehabilitation, the frescoes were carefully restored.

At the northeast corner of the church, a one-story hallway connects to the two-story rectory built in 1958. The narrow brick rectory has a side-gabled roof clad in copper, with a wide flat overhang along the perimeter on all sides. A limestone grid on all four elevations defines the floor and bay divisions, while a one-story projecting canopy on the otherwise blind west elevation provides cover for the main doorway with its double doors. The side elevations are divided into five bays, with narrow floor-to-ceiling windows at the left end of each bay; a projecting flat-roofed, glass-walled vestibule and secondary entrance stands in the second bay from the west on the north elevation. Adjoining the rectory to the east is a one-story, flat-roofed garage with openings on the north elevation.

Overall, the remodeling of St. John the Apostle and Evangelist church left the form and character of the exterior largely intact, while removing much of the exterior ornament, lengthening windows on the side elevations and filling windows on the primary elevation. The exterior changes are significant, although complementary to the Modern Movement style of the surrounding apartment buildings. The interior received small changes and largely retains its original appearance.

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Plaza Square Apartments
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Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church

Constructed 1869-70 with additions in 1912 and 1924.

Gothic Revival

Thomas Dixon, architect (1869-70) and J.B. Legg, builder; Mauran, Russell and Garden, architects (1924).

Listed NR 1/16/1997

This limestone Gothic Revival church consists of the original two-story church and a three-story addition housing offices and meeting rooms. The church itself, centered on an elevated 60 by 80 foot auditorium, has a steeply-pitched front-gabled roof with slate tiles. The main body is of gray limestone, with buff limestone trim. The auditorium is articulated through five pairs of Gothic lancet windows, plus a single lancet at the east end, while the street-level windows have flat lintels. Stone buttresses serve as divisions for exterior bays. The primary (east) elevation features a large tracery window framed by a stone relieving arch over a buff-limestone belt course in the gable. Three pointed arch doorways set within triangular pediments are the main entrances; other doors are located at the north and south corners. The buttressed south tower features a 200-foot steeple covered in asphalt shingles, while the north turret features a gabled roof; lancet and round windows provide fenestration for both. On the rear (west) elevation, the gable-roofed office wing extends from the church. Where the wing joins the church section stands a four-story square turret with wood-louvered lancet openings at the top story. Buff limestone pendant arches provide detail to the turret; an arched doorway is at the base. Adjacent to the turret is the large-arched primary entrance. Windows in the two stories above the doorway have flat lintels and U-shaped hood molding in buff limestone. West of the doorway, a projecting two-bay pavilion is topped by a front-gabled, single-bay fourth story; windows in the pavilion feature ogee arches. The final bay of the wing features flat-lintel windows at the first and third floors and a segmental stone arch on the second story. All windows are double-hung wooden sash. In 1912, the basement Sunday school was enlarged with a small one-story, flat-roofed brick addition below the auditorium on the north side of the church. The addition has small windows near the roofline and a center door.

In 1924, a three-story gray limestone addition was built at the west end of the original office wing. The flat-roofed addition projects to the sidewalk on the south side and to the alley on the west. The primary elevation consists of four bays of wooden double-hung

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windows with smooth-faced limestone sills and lintels. North of this addition is a gymnasium constructed at the same period; the flat-roofed addition is separated from the other addition by a light court and is built of painted brick. The gymnasium addition has steel-sash multi-paned windows. Another addition from 1924 is a flat-roofed, one-story kitchen built between the turret at the northeast corner of the church and the gymnasium.

The interior church auditorium has black walnut and yellow pine paneled galleries on three sides, along with black walnut wainscoting throughout. The ceiling features black walnut and oak detailing. The original wood detailing is almost completely intact; the original pews, pulpit and chancel remain in good condition. The church has received little alteration over the years, with the interior and exterior strongly displaying historic character. In 1924, the firm Mauran, Russell and Garden designed some changes made to the office wing, including conversion of the original door into a window and replacement of two windows next to the turret with the large arched doorway. The stone masonry of the changes blends seamlessly into that of the original building. During the Plaza Square project, the church did not undertake a major rehabilitation project as did nearby St. John church. Notably, the shingles on the north tower are not historic.

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Plaza Square Apartments
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Summary

The Plaza Square Apartments Historic District, located on four city blocks in the west end of downtown St. Louis bounded by Fifteenth Street on the east, Chestnut Street on the south, Seventeenth Street on the west and Olive Street on the north, is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT and under Criterion C for ARCHITECTURE. The 13-story apartment buildings also meet Criteria Consideration G for properties that have achieved significance within the past 50 years. Completed in 1961, the Plaza Square Apartments are the culmination of an urban renewal plan for the western end of downtown St. Louis and represent the conscious attempt by city leaders to integrate refined modern architecture with urban renewal. City leaders had planned a grand Memorial Plaza renewal project for western downtown as early as 1907, but the impetus for developing new housing facing out onto this civic space came in the 1940s. A 1953 bond issue sparked an ingenious financing plan assembled by Charles Farris, head of the city's new Land Clearance for Redevelopment Authority who had come to spearhead the plaza renewal project from a position at the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. The capstone achievement of the plaza renewal project was the Plaza Square Apartments, composed of six Modern Movement buildings on four city blocks designed by the newly-formed Hellmuth Obata Kassabaum (HOK) with Harris Armstrong, acclaimed leader of the Modern Movement in the Midwest. While Armstrong was at the height of his career, the principals in HOK were just beginning to establish a firm that would go on to become the world's largest. Armstrong and HOK made lasting contributions to American Modern Movement architecture as stylistic innovators, including this project. Completed in 1961, the apartment buildings provided 1,090 units of modern housing to diverse residents, including many middle class people who may otherwise have chosen suburban living. Plaza Square's innovative, colorful design distinguished it from other high-rise urban renewal housing projects in the city, establishing the importance of good design for the city's urban renewal efforts. Amid rapid suburban growth, Plaza Square Apartments demonstrated to acclaim that modern convenience could be achieved in an urban setting in the inner city. The apartment buildings retain a high level of architectural integrity. Also included in the district are two churches whose congregations agreed to become part of the renewal project: St. John the Apostle and Evangelist Roman Catholic Church, originally completed in 1860 from plans by Patrick Walsh and William Mitchell and extensively remodeled in 1956-9 as part of the Plaza Square project; and Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church, completed

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in 1870 from plans by Thomas Dixon and expanded in 1924. While Centenary closely resembles its original appearance, St. John's shows notable exterior alterations that reflect the vision of Murphy & Mackey, architects of the remodeling. The period of significance for the district is the period of construction work related to the whole project, 1956-1961.

Background

St. John the Apostle and Evangelist Roman Catholic Church, a twin-towered Lombard Romanesque Revival red brick church designed in 1859 by Patrick Walsh (St. Louis), was completed by architect Thomas Mitchell after construction problems forced Walsh's resignation. Founded in 1848 at the western edge of the city at 16th and Chestnut Streets, St. John's (the 8th Catholic parish in St. Louis) was affiliated with the Archbasilica of St. John Lateran in Rome and could thus hold ordination and consecration services.¹

Plate 42 from Compton & Dry's *Pictorial Saint Louis: 1875* documented St. John's in a fully developed residential neighborhood enhanced by the presence of the public high school, Washington University and two well-landscaped parks. (Included in the many spires and towers of sister churches and synagogues dotting the horizon was the 200-foot steeple of Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church, South, NR 1/16/97, designed in 1868 by Thomas Dixon of Baltimore.) One year later, in 1876, St. John's became the Pro-Cathedral—the residence and administrative center for Archbishop Peter Richard Kenrick and his staff.

Kenrick had left the Old Cathedral near the riverfront to escape the grime and noise of the mercantile city. But by the turn of the century, the Archdiocese had purchased a lot on Lindell Boulevard for a new Cathedral and Father James T. Coffey (pastor at St. John's) and the Rev. Dr. John Matthews of Centenary were fighting a battle for the neighborhood. Years later Father Coffey recalled the struggle: "Wine rooms and dance halls were particularly low and degrading. Mere children were admitted and liquor was sold on the floor. Hoodlums armed with guns rode through the streets, stole ballot boxes and kept decent citizens from voting."² Both clergymen enlisted help from Joseph Folk, crusading St. Louis circuit attorney who became Governor of Missouri, and conditions improved.

¹ Mary M. Stiritz, *St. Louis: Historic Churches & Synagogue*, page 29.

² Harry Wilensky, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. March 12, 1956.

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Figure 3: Plate 42, Compton & Dry (1875) with St. John's at #1 and Centenary Methodist at #2.



Although Centenary's commitment in 1900 to stay in the neighborhood was reinforced by a 1924 expenditure of \$150,000 on its physical plant, many of its 1,000 members were no longer able to support the church during the Depression. At neighboring St. John's, the church had lost all parish families and ministered exclusively to transients and travelers from nearby Union Station. But a feature story from 1933 in the *Globe-Democrat* quoted Father Sesson's comments about the future: "...we have hopes that the old church may soon be one of the showplaces of the city. It certainly is in the center of things. From my front door I can see the Memorial Plaza and the Municipal Auditorium under construction."³

A City Beautiful grouping of downtown St. Louis civic buildings enhanced by a central parkway had been envisioned as early as the 1907 Civic League Plan. Finally, in 1923, a massive bond issue included funds to acquire ten "dilapidated" blocks between 11th and

³ *St. Louis Globe-Democrat Sunday Magazine*, June 11, 1933.

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15th Streets along Market Street and a distinguished Plaza Commission was set up to prepare a master plan and schematic designs.⁴ Fifteen years later on Memorial Day 1938, Soldiers Memorial was unveiled as the last piece in the collection.

A stunning accomplishment of public will and architectural collaboration, completion of the plaza was nonetheless overshadowed by the continuing Depression and growing slums. Late 1930s studies by the energetic City Plan Commission pinpointed “obsolete” areas within fifteen blocks of the core Central Business District where urban ills (infant mortality, illegitimate children, tuberculosis and delinquency) were statistically over-represented. Demolition of substandard housing and construction of large-scale, low-cost housing projects were offered as solutions.⁵ Released in December of 1942, *Saint Louis After World War II* cited additional grim housing statistics and determined that: “The oldest buildings are in the most centrally located areas of St. Louis.” “Obsolete Areas must be reconstructed by large-scale methods.” After summarizing the Federal role in producing essential low-cost housing, the Plan Commission suggested that middle-class families could be retained or enticed to the central city “...if good accommodations and pleasant neighborhood conditions could be provided.”⁶

In July of 1945, a *Post-Dispatch* feature story quoted James L. Ford, Jr., Chair of the Anti-Slum Commission:

Our citizens will never go back to the desolation of the blighted area....
Something must be done about it—something so radical and impressive that it must be revolutionary even to the extent of tearing down and rebuilding large sections of St. Louis.... Our Plaza should be greatly enlarged and faced with decent and attractive multiple dwelling places located there by public or private

⁴ Members of the Plaza Commission, Inc. included: Architects George D. Barnett, Preston J. Bradshaw; Helfensteller, Hirsch & Watson; William B. Ittner; Klipstein & Rathmann, LaBeaume & Klein; Mauran, Russell & Crowell. Engineers: Brussel & Viterbo; F. C. Taxis.

⁵ In 1939, the city embarked upon its first federally assisted, low-rent housing projects. Carr Square Village just north of downtown and Clinton-Peabody on the south near City Hospital (NR 2/2/2001) were completed in 1942.

⁶ *Saint Louis After World War I*, St. Louis City Plan Commission, page 2. St. Louis had compelling reasons to be concerned about middle-class flight; in the decade between 1930 and 1949, the first net loss (almost 6,000 residents) accompanied a decline to eighth in national rank order.

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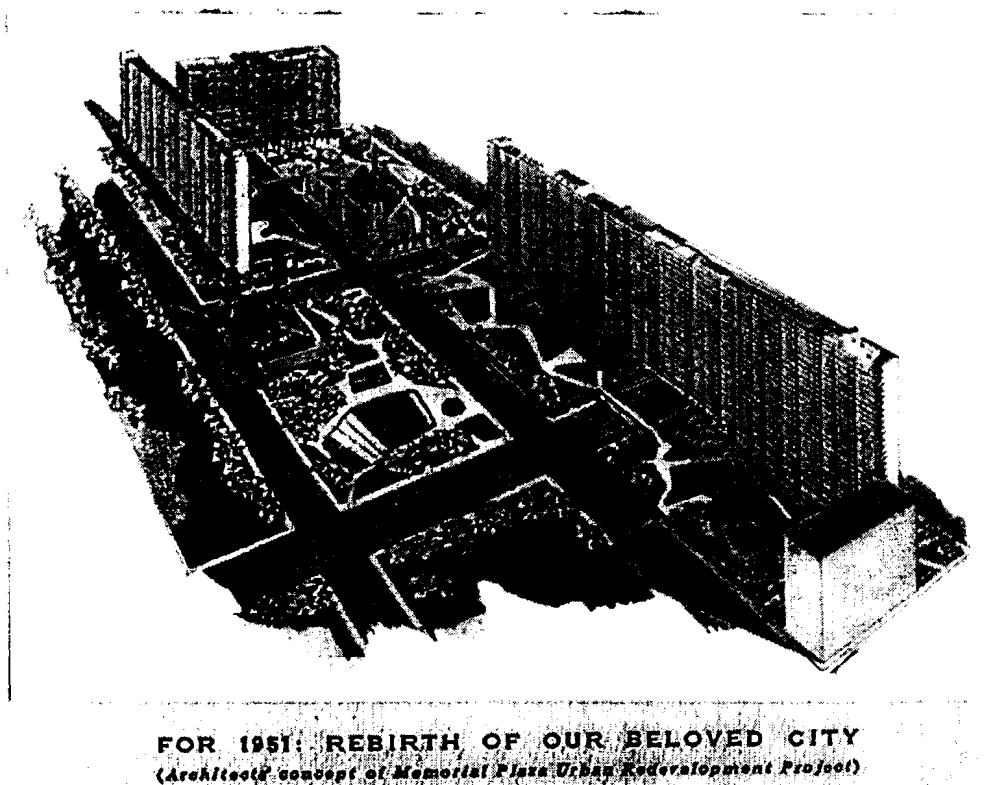
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funds [which] would offer an irresistible appeal because of its improvement over the old and its convenience to the life of the city.⁷

Figure 4: Plaza Square Master Plan Rendering from 1950. (Source: Andrew Raimist.)



In early 1948, Ford held a press conference to announce the “first actual undertaking.” At a ceremony in naming the Ford Apartments (NR 1/26/05), the Mayor observed that this would be only the first of many buildings to surround the plaza. Robust tools to create a new community alongside the plaza had just been enacted. 1.) The Federal Housing Act of 1949 featured a \$1 billion loan fund paying cities two-thirds of the cost to acquire land, demolish existing buildings and then sell the land (at a loss) to a private

⁷ “St. Louis Shrinking from Blight So Rapidly that Revolutionary Action is Needed, Says James L. Ford, Jr.,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 9, 1945.

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corporation. 2.) The Missouri Redevelopment Act authorized local redevelopment authorities to purchase or condemn real estate with the developer liable for taxes only on the land for the first 10 years and for only 50% of assessed value during the next fifteen years.

Elaboration

St. Louis interests moved rapidly. The private part of the collaboration came together in the Urban Redevelopment Corporation (URC), a cumbersome coalition of almost seventy shareholders that boasted membership from the highest echelons of business leaders.⁸ By December 1950, a rendering that retained two mid-19th century churches dwarfed by three, twenty-four story buildings designed by Hellmuth, Yamasaki & Leinweber with Harris Armstrong was printed on Mayor Darst's official Christmas card and published in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (see Figure 4).⁹

Establishing a potent public partner came next. Governed by a five-person board appointed by the Mayor, the Land Clearance for Redevelopment Authority (LCRA) was established in 1951 "to undertake the acquisition, relocation, demolition, and site improvements of the urban renewal areas. . . which needed Federal assistance." The last challenge was to find the city's share. Could \$825,000 in leftover funds from the Memorial Plaza bond issue be diverted to this project or was that money restricted to the boundaries voted on? After lawyers decided that a new bond issue was needed, the Board of Aldermen was urged to give prompt approval to the preliminary plaza plan before voters went to the polls on March 13. The new \$1.5 million bond issue would be spent to acquire a three-block park to connect Memorial and Aloe Plazas, an integral part of the proposed housing renewal project; a companion proposal would rescind city authority to issue \$825,000 in bonds no longer needed for Memorial plaza. Thus, if both proposals were accepted, the net debt increase would be only \$675,000 with the ensuing park credited against the city's required one-third share.

⁸ Officers of the Urban Redevelopment Corporation: Fred Z. Salomon (Chairman of the Board), Russell E. Gardner (President) Jr., Aloys P. Kaufmann, Preston Estep (Treasurer), Alfred Fleishman (Secretary), Robert B. Smith (Chairman Executive Committee) with Richard A. Hetlage, Assistant Secretary and Counsel. There were also twelve Directors, seventeen Trustees and an Executive Committee of seven!

⁹ "Plaza Development Envisioned on Mayor's Christmas Card," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, December 1, 1950.

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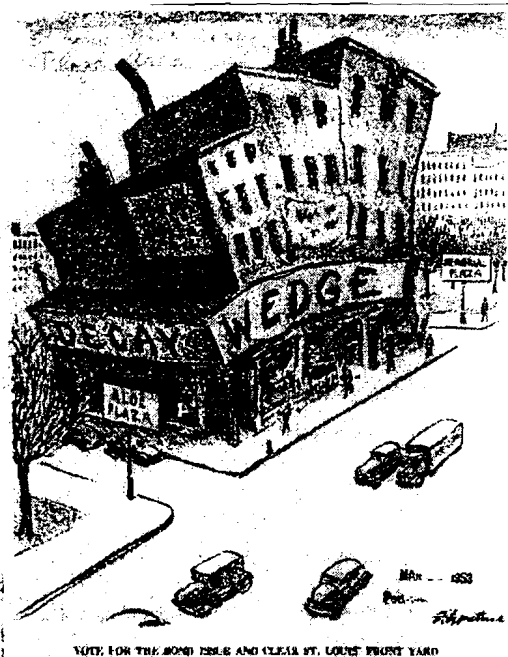
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A *Post-Dispatch* editorial supporting the bond issue (March 11, 1953) noted that URC shareholders had pledged \$2 million toward the housing project. An article in the same edition reported that the Federal Home & Housing Finance Authority had given tentative approval to a \$2.6 million loan and accompanying \$1.3 federal grant contingent upon passage of the bond issue. A follow-up article in the *Post-Dispatch* reporting strong support from a citizens' committee (including the Most Rev. John P. Cody representing St. John's and the Rev. Dr. Franck C. Tucker from Centenary Methodist) and a good-government cartoon reminder appeared the next day.¹⁰

Figure 5: "Vote for Bond Issue and Clear St. Louis' Front Yard" drawn by Fitzpatrick for the March 12, 1953 edition of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.



On Election Day a prominently placed *Post-Dispatch* article, "Plaza Project Hailed as One of the Best in Nation by Planning Expert," quoted Carl Feiss of the Federal Housing & Home Finance Agency. Feiss had come to St. Louis from Washington D.C. to speak at

¹⁰ "Bond Issue Called Key to Future Progress," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 12, 1953.

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a joint meeting of the local AIA Chapter and the Engineer's Club.¹¹ But enthusiastic support from both political parties, from the outside planning expert and the local press was not enough. The bond issue needed two-thirds to pass; it was defeated by a small margin. More than 13,000 who voted in the hotly contested Mayoral primary did not vote on the bond issues, perhaps because it was recorded too late to be printed in sample ballots. Within days of the loss, proponents put together a special election. It passed on Sept. 29, 1953.

The cover in the January 20, 1954 issue of *St. Louis Commerce* attracted readers to "Urban Redevelopment in St. Louis" written by forty-two-year-old Charles L. Farris, the new Executive Director of LCRA who had just taken office on Dec. 28, 1953. The former Deputy Director of the Federal Slum Clearance and Urban Redevelopment program, Housing and Home Finance Agency, Washington D.C., Farris (a life-long bureaucrat) was appointed by LCRA Board of Commissioners on the recommendation of new Mayor Raymond R. Tucker.¹²

By May 23, 1954, a Plaza prospectus prepared by LCRA for potential bidders set an estimated cost of \$10,610,500 to acquire the land and build 1141 units (reduced from the original 1350) of middle-income apartments plus 100,000 square feet of commercial space. With some fanfare, Charlie Farris set off to peddle the package to three Washington and five New York developers. But only the St. Louis-based URC would respond. It countered with a discordant proposal to pay only \$450,000 for the 6.65-acre site, then construct five, fifteen-story apartment buildings with 300 efficiencies, 637 one-bedroom and 150 two-bedroom units. Air-conditioning would be optional; off-street parking would be reduced to only 544 spaces, one for every other apartment. In spite of the wide gap between the prospectus and the actual proposal, the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* celebrated transfer of the first five pieces of real estate to LCRA as Mayor Tucker handed checks to the apparently willing owners in December of 1954.¹³ Demolition got under way in earnest by April of 1955, but the project was clearly in trouble.

¹¹ "Plaza Project Hailed as One of the Best in the Nation by Planning Expert," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 13, 1953.

¹² His former boss, James W. Follin, would conveniently be entrusted with federal approval of St. Louis' \$6,143,500 loan-and-grant application for the Plaza redevelopment project. August A. Busch, chair of the newly established Civic Progress, hosted an introductory lunch for Follin at the brewery.

¹³ "Plaza Start at Last," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, December 13, 1954.

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The original plan (see Figure #4) by Hellmuth, Yamasaki & Leinweber with Harris Armstrong called for elevating the project one story above the street with overpasses spanning Pine Street. The revised version for URC by Hellmuth, Obata & Kassabaum with Harris Armstrong eliminated the overpass and substituted an office building for one of the apartments. In early May of 1956, St. John's at 16th and Chestnut Streets and Centenary Methodist at 16th and Pine Streets voted to join the team and conform to the 40/60 Plaza Square project ration of building footprint to landscaped open space. St. John's agreed to pay \$105,000 for a 30,726-square-foot tract adjoining the church to the north plus a section of 16th Street to be vacated. (A new parish house, not built, was envisioned for the tract.) Centenary Methodist agreed to pay \$100,000 for 26,743 square feet of land fronting on Olive where it might erect a Methodist district administration center.¹⁴

But the first step in the approval process hit a major snag: The St. Louis City Plan Commission rejected the request to close Pine Street, contending that it would be needed to handle downtown traffic heading to the new freeways.¹⁵ This obstacle along with URC's low offer on the land and the reduced number of parking spaces caused LCRA to grant a series of bid extensions stretching to January 15, 1957. Nonetheless, St. John's elected to begin work on its "refurbishing" and expansion project. A building permit issued on August 21, 1956 for \$50,000 to alter the church was followed closely by a September 13, 1956 permit to demolish the brick rectory. Joseph Murphy, designer for the St. Louis architectural firm selected for the job, had already completed a number of new church commissions for the Archdiocese including St. Peters in Kirkwood (1950), St. Ann's in Normandy (1951), St. Patrick's in University City and the outstanding Modernist Resurrection Church (1952) at 3900 Meramec in south St. Louis. In 1960, the firm would receive commissions to remodel the Old Cathedral and St. Bridget's.

Joseph D. Murphy, FAIA (1907-95) was born in Kansas City where he attended Rockhurst High School and Rockhurst College. During high school and college, he gained encouragement and experience in the office of Boillot & Lauck, Kansas City. He then entered the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and l'Ecole des Beaux-Arts (Fontainebleau). In 1929, the Society of Beaux-Arts Architects awarded its 22nd Paris

¹⁴ "Churches Agree on Property Use of Plaza Area," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, May 4, 1956. The proposed administration building was not constructed.

¹⁵ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, December 9, 1956.

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Prize to twenty-three-year old Murphy for "A Memorial to the Spirit of the West." The young architect's portrait was carried in *Pencil Points* along with a three-page spread featuring his winning drawings.¹⁶ This award allowed him to study for the next two years at l'Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. Upon returning to Kansas City, he worked on designs for the Kansas City civic auditorium and the Jackson County Courthouse. (His only private project from the Depression era, St. Peter's Church and Rectory in Kansas City, was not built.)¹⁷

In 1935, Murphy moved to St. Louis and joined the faculty at Washington University's School of Architecture. In 1938, he entered into a partnership with University colleague and MIT-trained Kenneth W. Wischmeyer to prepare what turned out to be the winning entry to design the "Muny" (Municipal) open air theatre in Forest Park. Neither architect was yet thirty years old. The young firm, along with Rathman & Koelle, was also responsible for the 1939 design for Carr Square—St. Louis' first housing project. The partnership dissolved when both principals left for service in WWII.¹⁸

Named acting Dean at Washington University in 1948, Murphy continued as Dean from 1949 until 1952 when he left to enter a partnership with Eugene Mackey Sr. Among that firm's first projects were Bishop DuBourg High School and Convent (1954), St. Pius X High School (1955) and Chaminade College Faculty Residence and Student Dormitory (1956). Murphy became president of AIA St. Louis in 1957, the same year he was awarded a national fellowship and local progress was reported at St. John's. A photo comparing the church's front elevation circa 1956 with a perspective by Murphy & Mackey of the completed renovation appeared in the June 16, 1957 edition of the *Post-Dispatch*, apparently alongside an article by art/architecture critic George McCue.¹⁹

Although the building was partially hidden behind a network of scaffolding, dingy paint covering all exterior brick had already been removed. McCue explained that the renovation was "... intended to strip away some of the excess ornamentation and to bring into clearer view the essence of its handsome architecture. Another purpose, of course, is

¹⁶ "Paris Prize Awarded," *Pencil Points*. No date.

¹⁷ "Architect returns to teaching to build students' futures," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, March 1, 1980.

¹⁸ Notes in Landmarks' files from Cynthia Hill Longwish phone conversations with both Murphy and Wischmeyer, February 24, 1988.

¹⁹ George McCue, "Refurbishing of Old St. John's: Plaza Church is Gradually Taking on a Clear-Cut New Style," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 16, 1957.

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to put the church in good physical condition for its expected influx of new parishioners when new apartment buildings go up in the Plaza area." McCue then enumerated the apparently objectionable "composite" elements of the original design: a Romanesque barrel vault ceiling, Renaissance ornamental moldings and cornices, Lombardy towers, mid-19th century American cast iron half-circle hood moldings placed above exterior windows and doors.

Murphy and Mackey's renovation of St. John's removed all of the parts that McCue listed as objectionable. The exterior was streamlined through the removal of the hood molds and many cornices, infill of windows and removal of the wooden entrance doors in favor of glass doors. The side windows were lengthened and glazed with modern stained glass. The elaborate wooden dentillated, wrapped cornice at the roof level was complement removed, along with the balcony rails on the towers (replaced by angular wrought iron rails). A two-story Modern Movement rectory was built to the north of the church. The historic appearance of St. John's exterior was significantly changed according to a modern interpretive renovation that combined restoration of key historic elements and introduction of modern, minimal ones. Perhaps somewhat incongruous with the scope of exterior alteration was the careful restoration of the interior that involved cleaning and conserving the extensive frescoes on the walls and ceilings. While a few details, such as the light fixtures and the new stained glass windows on the side walls, were changed inside, the historic appearance was substantially enhanced under Murphy & Mackey's plans.

Meanwhile, with all eight blocks cleared and no activity except at St. John's, the press began to investigate. The January 9, 1957 *Post-Dispatch* story, "The Plaza on Dead Center," noted that three years had slipped by since passage of the bond issue. Allowing that the local redevelopers had bid only \$450,000 for a site valued by the federal government at \$920,000, the *Post* opined that it was not fair to blame the redevelopment corporation. Instead, the paper assigned blame to LCRA, which held the title to the land and should have been able to force a decision. On January 18, the Board of Aldermen established a committee inquiry set to start work on February 1, 1957 if URC did not meet yet another extension.

On January 19, the Plan Commission accepted yet another modified plan calling for six apartment buildings with 1087 units, expansion of parking facilities and the retention of Pine as a through street. Suddenly, the project faced scrutiny from unexpected new

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sources—the two historic churches slated to remain within the Plaza boundaries. Centenary Methodist had agreed to buy project land for \$3.75 a square foot; St. John's Roman Catholic Church, having agreed to \$3.20, was already well underway with its renovation. The developers proposed to pay only \$1.56. This uncomfortable information was found in a report from the Federal Housing & Home Finance Agency prepared in response to a formal request by Missouri Senator Stuart Symington. Immediately, both Centenary and St. John's expressed reservations about their commitments, noting that LCRA had been "rather ungenerous" and "most unsympathetic" in its negotiations.

The federal report also expressed concern about delays driving up costs. URC finally capitulated. On January 29, 1957 it submitted a new bid of \$920,000 and issued a press release: "...we wish to call attention to the fact that this is the highest price placed upon any similar project for land by the authorities anywhere in the country, outside New York City, so far as we know. Why this situation prevails for St. Louis, we do not know. The higher price which we are required to pay for the land will increase the cost of the project and the apartments, restrict our equity money, working capital and other planned recreational use of the area. However, our corporation is a limited profit-civic group, with only one objective—and that is to build and develop this Plaza area so that it will be one of the greatest assets to the city in helping to renew and stabilize this important central area to the community."²⁰

Four new conditions were included in the URC bid: 1.) Assurance of a \$920,000 government loan with interest not to exceed three ¼ percent. 2.) Commitment of mortgage insurance from the Federal Housing Administration. 3.) The right to erect an office tower in the block bounded by 14th, 15th, Pine and Olive Streets after 1078 apartments were developed. 4.) Assurance that the project could be satisfactorily financed. The lead sentence in the *Post's* February 19th story reporting that the bid had been quickly approved noted that architects would soon draft plans and specifications for the apartments.²¹ After a short delay in the mortgage application process, construction of the Plaza Square Apartments finally got underway on June 1, 1958.

Virtually the entire Sunday June 1, 1958 *Globe-Democrat* magazine was given over to "A New Face for Downtown St. Louis." Hellmuth, Obata & Kassabaum's principal Gyo Obata stated that the exterior elevation was worked out so that the buildings will "present

²⁰ "Developers Offer \$920,000; Meet Price Set on Plaza Land," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 28, 1957.

²¹ "U.S. Agency OK's \$920,000 Plaza Housing Site Bid," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 19, 1957.

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a gay, happy appearance” and noted that three elements would be used to achieve this effect: two-story color panels, open balconies alternating with closed balconies. The combination will achieve an effect of “light, shade, color and shape,” added partner George Hellmuth. “Anyone coming into downtown St. Louis will be struck by the appearance of the Plaza.” Harris Armstrong was credited with bringing in industrial colorist Alexander Girard of Santa Fe, N. M., as a project consultant on the color schemes.²²

Figure #6: Plaza Square Apartments under construction, viewed from the Central Library at 14th and Olive streets. (Source: Landmarks Association Collection.)



²² Carolyn Toft interview with HOK’s Plaza Square project manager Chester Roehmer, November 15, 2006.

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The Dolan Real Estate Company, with a rental office in Building 60 at 17th and Pine, reported that more than 240 units (about 25%) had been rented in advance. Public inspection of the first sixteen apartments in Building 60 on January 2, 1960 was timed to coincide with a ceremony presenting a gold key to the first tenants to move in—Mr. and Mrs. Carl M. Bacoa, formerly of 854 Victoria Place in Glendale. (He was employed as manager of the budget section of Ralston-Purina.) A few other early tenants also came from St. Louis County but more had been living in apartments along Kingshighway and Lindell Boulevards in the Central West End.

The model apartments at Building 60 were decorated and furnished by seven of St. Louis' leading furniture and department stores in styles ranging from contemporary to a jarring Early American. Clearly, the revision-weary architects had finally relinquished design control. But how did they get the job to start with? The answer probably is sparkplug George Hellmuth, whose political acumen along with his carefully maintained local connections had positioned his new St. Louis firm in the forefront of a post-war building boom.

George Hellmuth (1907-1999) graduated in 1931 from Washington University's School of Architecture with a coveted year-in-Europe fellowship in hand. Returning to St. Louis in 1932, Hellmuth could not even find work in his father's office and settled for a city job dolling out working drawings for police and comfort stations. After seven years of this tedium, Hellmuth, by now thirty-two years old, again approached his father who advised him to find a position with a big out-of-town office. In 1939, George moved to Detroit as a draftsman for Smith, Hinchman & Grylls where his "engaging manner" soon elevated him to the "solicitations" department.²³ During his many trips home to St. Louis, however, Hellmuth continued to nurture his City Hall friendships hoping (without success) to take work back to Detroit.

In 1945, thirty-three-year old Minoru Yamasaki joined Hellmuth in Detroit as chief of design for Smith, Hinchman & Grylls. Yamasaki's impressive portfolio included work with the two top New York firms responsible for the Empire State Building and Rockefeller Center. Four years later in 1949, Hellmuth, Yamasaki and Joseph Leinweber left Smith, Hinchman & Grylls to form two partnerships: Leinweber, Yamasaki & Hellmuth based in Detroit and Hellmuth, Yamasaki & Leinweber based in St. Louis.

²³ Walter McQuade, *Architecture in the Real World: the Work of HOK*, page 14.

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The early Plaza Square Master Plan rendering from 1950 (see Figure 4) was apparently drafted as a pro bono investment on future St. Louis work.

A partial list of works credited to Yamasaki, the firm's initial designer, opened with a 1952 urban redevelopment plan for St. Louis.²⁴ The only other St. Louis projects listed are the Pruitt-Igoe Public Housing project (opened in 1955 and imploded as a national failure in 1976) and the 1956 main terminal at Lambert-St. Louis International Airport—considered his first signature building and a model expression of flight in architecture. But finding time for competing projects in the St. Louis and Detroit offices put a terrible strain on Yamasaki. The result was an almost fatal attack of ulcers in 1954.²⁵

Both partnerships split in 1955. Hellmuth chose to regroup only in St. Louis, retaining 50% of that partnership while offering 25% to Gyo Obato (Yamasaki's St. Louis deputy of design) and 25% to George Kassabaum, Leinweber's St. Louis production manager. The three partners managed to open HOK doors with a sizable staff of twenty-four. After recuperating, Yamasaki continued in Detroit with Leinweber until 1959.

A biographical stretch of Harris Armstrong (1899-1973) in the AIA archives at the Octagon includes the following observations: "Harris Armstrong was a well-read and largely self-taught modern architect revered for his masterful application of strikingly colorful, innovative and spacious structures for every conceivable use.... Highly sought after for his daring designs and known for his flamboyant and engaging disposition, Armstrong was equally successful in procuring residential and commercial contracts."²⁶ Surviving colleagues in 2006 also recall that he had a colossal ego.²⁷

Although his obituary indicated that Armstrong graduated from Ohio State University after attending night school at Washington University, other sources state that he did not graduate from college and maybe not even from high school. Armstrong did work as a draftsman for several firms in St. Louis and New York from 1924 to the early 1930s including a few months experience in Raymond Hood's office during the Rockefeller Center project, where he could have met Yamasaki. In the mid 1930s, he opened his own

²⁴ Vivian M. Baulch, "Minoru Yamaski, World-Class Architect," *The Detroit News*, no date.
<http://info.detnews.com/history/story/index.cfm?id=206&category=people>

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ "Armstrong Finding Aid Compiled by JMK 02 August 1999." Online.

²⁷ *Op. cit.*, Toft interview with Chester Roehmer.

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Plaza Square Apartments
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

practice in suburban Kirkwood, Missouri. Within a short few years Armstrong had established himself as the foremost St. Louis modernist, receiving the Silver Medal at the 1937 Paris Exposition for his International-Style Clayton office for Dr. Leo Shanley. Prestigious residential commissions, which kept the office open during WWII, continued to be a staple throughout his career. The *Architectural Record* devoted eleven pages to the Shanley Building in 1936, beginning annual appearances of Armstrong's work in the journal for the duration of his career.²⁸ In 1945, Armstrong's recent work was surveyed in *Architectural Forum*; *Pencil Points* published a biographical sketch the next year.²⁹ Armstrong rose to become the leader of the Modern Movement in the Midwest, experimenting with the International Style and Prairie School movements ahead of his peers as he created his own idiosyncratic modern style.

Figure 7: Portrait of Harris Armstrong, c. 1930. (Source: Andrew Raimist.)



His American Stove (later Magic Chef) Building from 1947 with Isamu Noguchi brought national attention in the architecture journals to the first Modernist high rise in St. Louis. More national attention followed in 1948 when Armstrong, with a one-man submission, emerged in fourth place out of five finalists for the international Jefferson Memorial competition. Armstrong was the only St. Louis architect to place in the competition. At the point in 1950 when he joined forces with Hellmuth, Yamasaki & Leinweber for the Plaza urban renewal project, Armstrong was supervising construction of a new Cancer

²⁸ Esley Hamilton, *National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Shanley Building* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of the Interior, 1981.).

²⁹ *Ibid.*

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Plaza Square Apartments
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Research Building at Washington University and a home for Magic Chef's Arthur Stockstrom. He was also the only St. Louis architect to have achieved an international reputation, according to a recent comment by the *Post-Dispatch*'s visual arts critic.³⁰ Just when Armstrong brought Alexander Girard into the Plaza Square mix is not known.³¹ The final plan for the Plaza Square Apartments called for six Modern Movement apartment buildings and the two existing churches set amid landscaped open space and some parking (see figure #6). Sixteenth Street running north-south through the site was closed, while Pine Street running east-west remained open. The buildings' lateral sides were to face east and west, rather than north and south. The six buildings would have very similar execution except that there would be two different types based on different lateral dimensions. The wider buildings (numbered 10, 20 and 30 Plaza Square) were located on the southern blocks, while the narrower ones (numbers 40, 50 and 60 Plaza Square) were on the northern blocks. Unlike other urban renewal projects of the time, the main entrances to each building faced straight out upon public streets or vacated ones, thus creating a firm connection with downtown. Rear entrances led to parking areas, with an underground garage between buildings 40 and 50.

While remaining angular, sleek modern buildings, each of the Plaza Square Apartment buildings was an exploration in variations in shape, color and materials. Rather than emphasize the unity of each building to the point of dullness, the architects broke up the mass with plenty of windows, large expanses of brightly-colored enameled panels (each building had a different color, as mentioned in Section 7) and projecting balconies of two types alternating from floor to floor. The execution was simple, deliberate and thoughtful; the architects took the modern box and gave it a range of expression unseen in St. Louis up to that point. The form of the building was not an abstract proposition since the exterior articulation corresponded exactly to the arrangement of the public and living spaces inside. The landscaping responded to the expected path of residents, providing formal transitions between the buildings and the sidewalks and parking areas. Overall, the plan and design opened up to the city rather than away from it; the buildings emphasized their connection with the downtown area in which they were situated.

³⁰ David Bonetti, "Midcentury Modernism in Crisis," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 21 January 2007.

³¹ Harris Armstrong became a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects in 1955; in 1957, he received a State Department commission to design the Consulate at Basra, Iraq. During his 1960 tenure as President of the St. Louis AIA Chapter, Mayor Raymond Tucker was anointed Honorary AIA by the National organization.

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Plaza Square Apartments
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Especially notable was that this design was being employed for a large-scale inner city housing project, establishing the importance of good design in urban renewal efforts.

Figure 8: An aerial rendering of the Plaza Square Apartments. (Source: Cover of the *Plaza Square* brochure by the Urban Redevelopment Corporation, 1958.)



Construction of Plaza Square also marked one of the first uses in the city of St. Louis of exterior metal panels without backing masonry. In 1960, the Board of Aldermen revised the city building code for the first time in fifteen years. Leading up to the change, there was extensive debate among architects and builders as to whether or not the new code should allow metal panels and veneer masonry without backing masonry walls.³² Such

³² Carolyn Hewes Toft, Esley Hamilton and Mary Henderson Gass, *The Way We Came: A Century of the AIA in St. Louis* (St. Louis, Mo.: The Patrice Press, 1991), p. 95.

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Plaza Square Apartments
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installation was already allowed under many building codes in the St. Louis suburbs, where new construction was booming. Successful proponents of changed to the city's code thought that the change was crucial to urban renewal efforts.³³

The interior spaces were similarly refined. Expansive lobbies with large glass entries and windows were clad in travertine marble and given terrazzo floors. These light spaces led to elevators arriving at stark, minimally-decorated hallways. The apartments came in different types, with 16 units per floor in the larger building type and 12 in the smaller. There was a one-room efficiency, suitable for a single person. There was a spacious two-room unit where one room was the private bedroom. Then there was the three-room unit where two rooms were private bedrooms; these were located at the corners to provide for maximum natural light in the spaces. The units all had full bathrooms and small but efficient kitchen areas. Steam heat and individual air conditioning units provided comfort. The apartments featured carpeting, plaster walls and incredible views of the central city. While not ostentatious, the units exhibited a level of privacy, convenience and urbanity missing from contemporary local projects. In short, the apartments were well-suited for the purpose of attracting middle-class residents.

After construction started, *Architectural Record* published the short notice in its July 1958 issue, "New Face for Large Area of Downtown St. Louis." The article reported on the intent of the project to "lure back to urbanity those who have deserted it for a suburban development that so often fails to measure up to the dream that originally sold it."³⁴ In this regard, the Plaza Square Apartments were indeed unique among urban renewal projects in the nation; not only was the project aiming to clear a supposed slum, but also it was aiming to lure suburbanites back to a city they had only recently left. The unrealized goal of Plaza Square Apartments was to promote a return to a city remade with modern housing. This was a much different goal than the mass workers' housing projects going up in St. Louis in the postwar era, which aimed to more simply remove slum dwellings and place existing residents in modern vertical housing. Early government-built and operated efforts in the downtown area, like Cochran Gardens (completed in 1953 and designed by Hellmuth) and the Pruitt-Igoe homes (completed by 1957 and designed by Yamasaki) addressed the housing needs of the economically immobile and ended up self-contained communities. Architecturally, the designs of these buildings were severe and unornamented. In contrast, the target resident of Plaza Square

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ "New Face for a Large Area in Downtown St. Louis," *Architectural Record*, July 1958.

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Plaza Square Apartments
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Apartment residents were making a conscious choice to remain in or return to the city, and would live connected with the abundant cultural and economic activities of the downtown area. The design offered in return for the choice was colorful and lively. The Dolan Company made extensive use of advertising to attract residents, ensuring that a wide range of the public would be aware of the new apartments.

As residents moved in, the new apartment buildings received favorable local press. "Probably nothing built in St. Louis since the airport terminal has captured the public fancy and been the subject of so much conversation," began an article in the August 7, 1960 issue of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.³⁵ The article noted that occupants of the first three buildings to be completed already had launched a monthly newsletter, called themselves "residents" rather than "tenants" and were enjoying the amenities of downtown living. Plaza Square Apartments attracted a mix of residents more economically diverse than other urban renewal projects in the city. Especially notable was the number of middle-class residents lured to living in the inner city, an aspect missing from other housing projects aimed exclusively at working-class people. The first residents ranged from Missouri Historical Society Director Charles van Ravenswaay to downtown office workers.³⁶ The *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* lauded Plaza Square Apartments as "smart city living" and suggested that the apartments could be adapted to lifestyles of sophisticates, businessmen and retirees alike.³⁷

Around the time of completion, architect Obata published an article entitled "Some Suggestions For Urban Housing" in the March 1961 issue of *Architectural Record*. Although largely a manifesto, Obata's essay contained sections analyzing various examples of his work, including Plaza Square. Obata started the article by stating boldly: "Formula will not solve the urban housing problem."³⁸ He examined different new housing models, including the subdivision of single-family homes, before suggesting that either horizontally- or vertically- connected units, supplemented by recreational spaces, provide the best models for urban renewal. Obata stressed that such arrangements provide greater densities and use less land than alternatives, and thus are more conducive to providing the amenities only found in densely-settled urban areas while conserving open space. Obata made two other suggestions central to his vision: that architects

³⁵ "Happy Pioneers of Plaza Square," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 7, 1960.

³⁶ "Praise Far Outnumbers Gripes by Plaza Square Dwellers," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, June 26, 1960.

³⁷ *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, May 15, 1960.

³⁸ Gyo Obata, "Some Suggestions for Urban Housing," *Architectural Record*, March 1961, p. 191.

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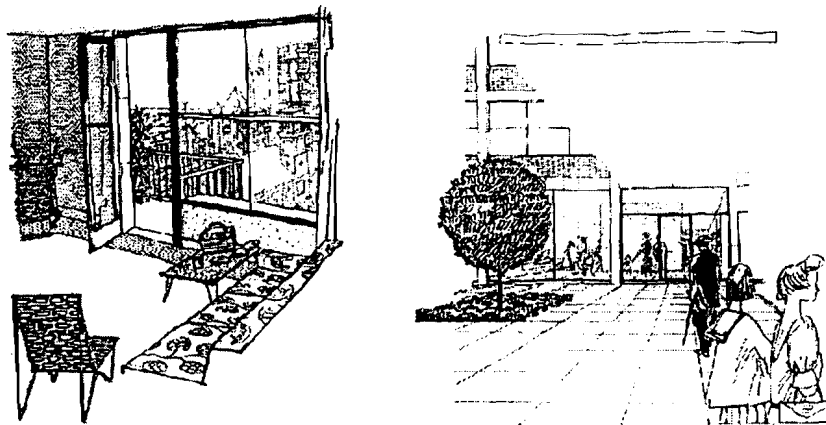
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Plaza Square Apartments
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“differentiate spaces by function” and that they “provide for use sequence of spaces” from street to lobby to apartment.³⁹ Obata also called for concrete flat-slab construction, use of as few different materials as possible in construction, and placement of largest units at the corners of apartment buildings. All principles were fully implemented at Plaza Square, showing a mutual impact between Obata and the Plaza Square project at the early part of Obata’s long and distinguished career.

Figure 9: Line drawings showing scenes from Plaza Square Apartments. (Source: *Architectural Record*, July 1958).



At Plaza Square, the application of Obata’s theory was evident. The order of spaces from apartment outward through the corridors and lobbies to the street or parking spaces showed sharply differentiated spaces. In the article’s section on Plaza Square, Obata outlined the effect of moving through the buildings:

From public street approaches one proceeds to semi-public between-buildings spaces to the semi-privacy of entries and corridors to the privacy of the apartment. From there a new set of views relate to the spaces between the buildings, the other buildings, the streets, the two park areas across bounding streets, and the downtown area beyond.⁴⁰

³⁹ Obata, p. 193.

⁴⁰ Obata, p. 197.

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Plaza Square Apartments
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Along with other factors, the balance of differentiated spaces and a connected total experience set Plaza Square Apartments apart from other large-scale renewal projects in St. Louis. The concern for both quantity and quality of spaces was in sharp contrast to the nature of contemporary large-scale urban apartment projects like Yamasaki's notorious Pruitt-Igoe project, where the sheer number of voluminous buildings dominated an otherwise mostly-open site. The visual effect of the design at housing projects like Pruitt-Igoe was one of too sharply distinguished spaces that failed to make a harmonious balance. By maintaining a high regard for natural light and balance of spaces, the architects of Plaza Square Apartments avoided common pitfalls of the time.

However noted a model it was, the success at Plaza Square could not stem the flight to suburbia. In 1960, during construction, the U.S. Census reported a total population of 750,026 for the city of St. Louis. By 1970, the census reported that the city had 622,236 residents. Meanwhile, St. Louis County's population went from 703,532 in 1960 to 951,671 in 1970—overtaking the city's population.

Within a few years of construction, Plaza Square mortgages initially held by the Manufacturers Trust Company of New York had passed to the Federal National Mortgage Association, a secondary market facility authorized to supplement private lending in financing FHA-insured mortgages. By September of 1963, when occupancy at Plaza Square hovered at just 73%, the corporation was in default. The attorney for the URC attempted to reassure the press as did Michael Galli, the regional director of the FHA, who stated: "FHA knows that the sponsors are not taking a cent out of this development and so believes it better to go along with them until the problems can be worked out rather than institute foreclosure proceedings."⁴¹

Although the overall occupancy rate had risen to almost 80% by 1965, #60 Plaza Square, the building located furthest from the Plaza, limped along with only 61%. In April of that year, Bethesda General Hospital announced its plans to convert that building into an elderly housing project named the Town House. Current tenants were to be given first choice of any vacant unit in the other five buildings. After the FHA approved the transaction, Bethesda paid \$2,185,000 for all stock in the Fourth Plaza Redevelopment Corporation (a subsidiary of Urban Redevelopment Corporation). A spokesman for Bethesda Board president John M. Wolff

⁴¹ "FHA Takes Over Mortgages on Plaza Square: Technical Default Cited—Apartment Difficulty Denied," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Sept. 27, 1963.

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Plaza Square Apartments
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(Vice President of Western Printing and Lithograph) reported that Wolff had made a personal contribution of \$100,000 toward the addition of a lounge, recreation area, nursing station and administration offices on the first floor and a lower level dining room and kitchen.⁴² A proposed roof top garden at the newly named Town House did not materialize.

The 1967 edition of George McCue's *The Building Art in St. Louis: Two Centuries*, a guide sponsored and published by St. Louis AIA, devoted over a page to the Plaza Square project, noting that the urban design scheme "...admits light to all apartments, and lets passersby see through the development. Sand-colored brick walls are enlivened by colored porcelain panels and by an alternation of balconies overlooking patios." McCue also included short descriptions of the two churches and mentioned a subsequent growth in membership at Centenary Methodist.⁴³ (Both Centenary Methodist and St. John's were designated official city landmarks by the St. Louis Landmarks & Urban Design Commission in March 1971.)

Dolan Realtors continued to manage the remaining five Plaza Square buildings until January 1981 when Love Management purchased them from the Urban Redevelopment Corporation. Encouraged by an occupancy rate of 90%, Love invested about \$3 million in 1987. Two years later, however, Plaza Renaissance (a limited partnership of New Jersey and New York investors) acquired the landmark complex.⁴⁴ Next came Plaza Square Partners LLC, an investment group based in Illinois which surprised local real estate observers by paying \$23,429 per unit given that only 620 of the almost 1,000 units were occupied. In spite of an apparent \$6 million upgrade, HUD in November of 2003 expressed concern about conditions at Plaza Square.⁴⁵

Meanwhile, Bethesda had shut down its Town House operations that summer. In a circular and appropriate twist of fate, widower Charles Farris (executive director of the Land Clearance for Redevelopment Authority when it spearheaded the project) was among the last elderly residents to live there. By the summer of 2004 when HUD, holding the \$27 million loan on the other five buildings, announced a foreclosure sale,

⁴² "Plaza Square Unit South as Aged Residence, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 4, 1965.

⁴³ George McCue, *The Building Art in St. Louis: Two Centuries*, pp. 42-43.

⁴⁴ Tim McLaughlin, "Investors pay \$22 million for Plaza Square Apartments," *St. Louis Business Journal*, April 1-7, 1996.

⁴⁵ Linda Tucci, "HUD wants to shake things up at Plaza Square Apartments," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 13, 2003.

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Plaza Square Apartments
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

occupancy stood at only 40%.⁴⁶ Today, a new owner is adapting the former Bethesda Town House property (# 60 Plaza Square) to plans by Cohen Hilberry (St. Louis) designed to appeal to its original market: moderate-income urbanites of all ages. This project, dubbed BLU CitySpaces, may well encourage historically correct reinvestment in the other five Plaza Square buildings.

⁴⁶ Heather Cole, "Plaza Square Apartments going on auction block after sale falls through," *St. Louis Business Journal*, July 23, 2004.

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St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

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Plaza Square Apartments
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Plaza Square Apartments
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Tucci, Linda. "HUD wants to shake things up at Plaza Square Apartments," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 13 November 2003.

"U.S. Agency OK's \$920,000 Plaza Housing Site Bid." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 19 February 1957.

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Section 10 Page 40

Plaza Square Apartments
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

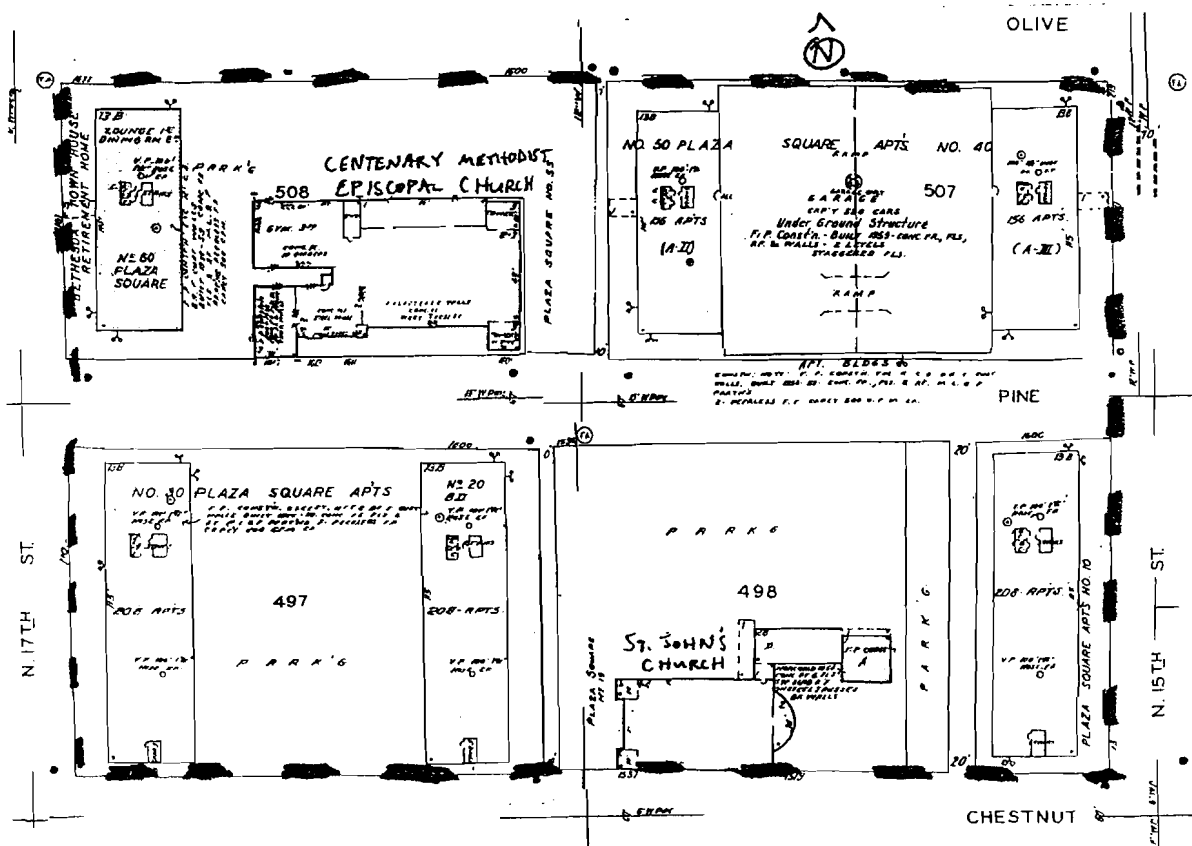
Boundary Description

The nominated parcel is located at on city blocks 497, 498, 507 and 508 in St. Louis, Missouri. The site is legally known by the assessor's office as parcel numbers 04970000200, 04980000300, 05070000200 and 05080000200. The nominated property is indicated by a dashed line on the accompanying map entitled "Plaza Square Apartments Boundary Map."

Boundary Justification

The nominated parcel includes all of the property historically associated with the Plaza Square Apartments located on city blocks 497, 498, 507 and 508.

Plaza Square Apartments Boundary Map
Source: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, c. 1968.



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Section owners Page 41

Plaza Square Apartments
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Owners of Record:

10 -- 50 Plaza Square

Plaza Square Partners LLC
30 Plaza Square
St. Louis, MO 63103

60 Plaza Square

Olive Condominiums-St. Louis LLC or affiliated entity c/o
Hearthstone, Inc. (authorized agent for Olive Condominiums-St. Louis, LLC)
220 N. Smith Street, Suite 406
Palatine, IL 60067

St. John the Apostle and Evangelist Roman Catholic Church

Archdiocese of St. Louis
4445 Lindell Boulevard
St. Louis, MO 63108

Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church

Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church
55 Plaza Square
St. Louis, MO 63103

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Section photographs Page 42

Plaza Square Apartments
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Unless otherwise indicated, the following is true for photographs 1 through 5 submitted with this nomination:

Plaza Square Apartments
Bounded by Olive, 15th, Chestnut and 17th streets
St. Louis [Independent City]
Photographer: Michael Allen
January - February 2007
Negatives on file at: Landmarks Association of St. Louis.

Unless otherwise indicated, the following is true for photographs 6 through 8 submitted with this nomination:

Plaza Square Apartments
Bounded by Olive, 15th, Chestnut and 17th streets
St. Louis [Independent City]
Photographer: Chris Jackson
November 2006
Negatives on file at: Landmarks Association of St. Louis.

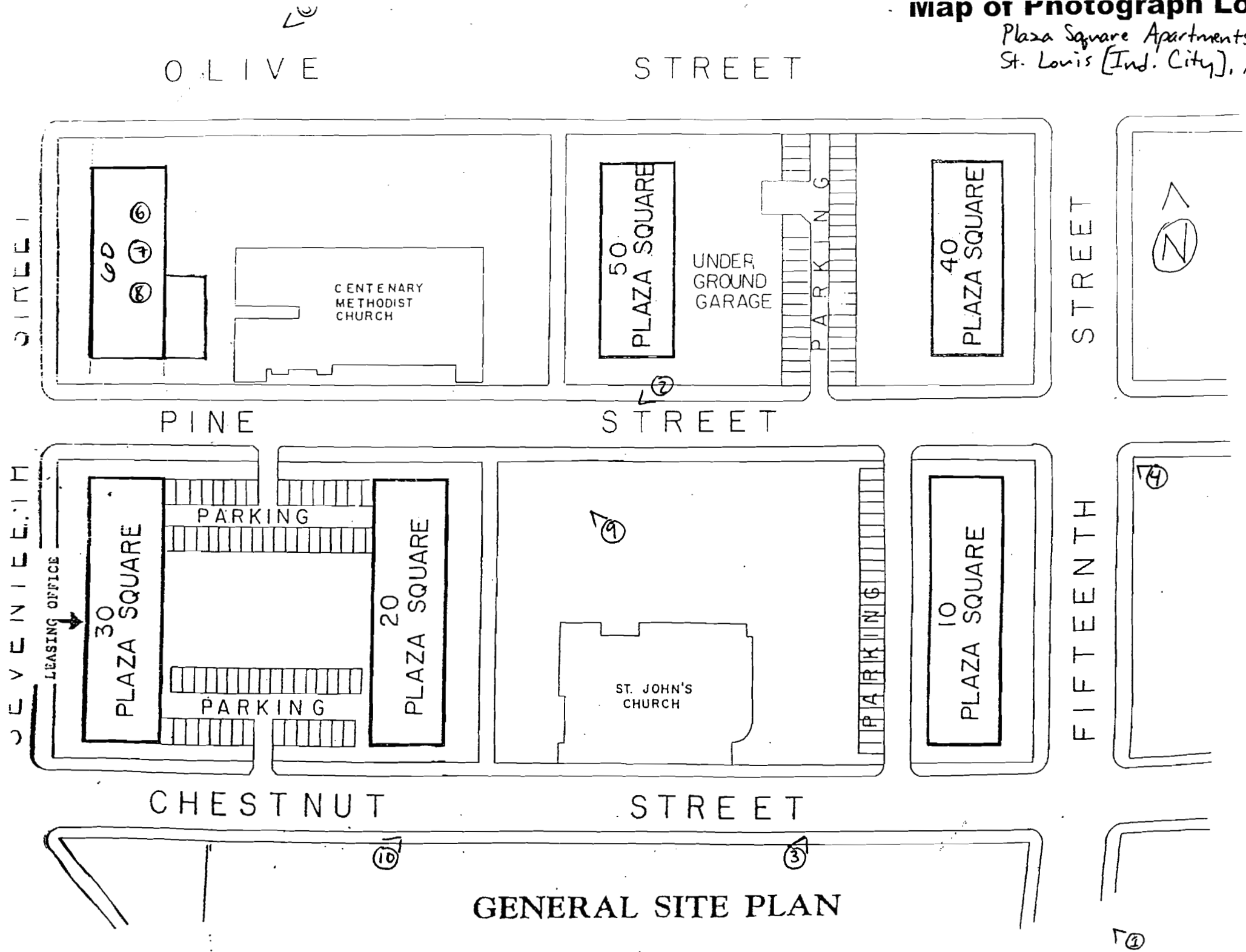
The descriptions of each photograph number are:

1. View northwest from the corner of 15th and Market streets
2. View southwest toward Building 20
3. View northeast toward Building 10
4. View northwest toward Building 40
5. View southwest toward Building 60
6. Typical lobby showing original marble wall cladding (Building 60)
7. Typical corridor on upper floor (Building 60)
8. Typical room in apartment (Building 60)
9. View northwest toward Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church
10. View northeast toward St. John the Apostle and Evangelist Roman Catholic Church

A map of photo locations is attached.

Map of Photograph Location

Plaza Square Apartments Historic I
St. Louis (Ind. City), MO



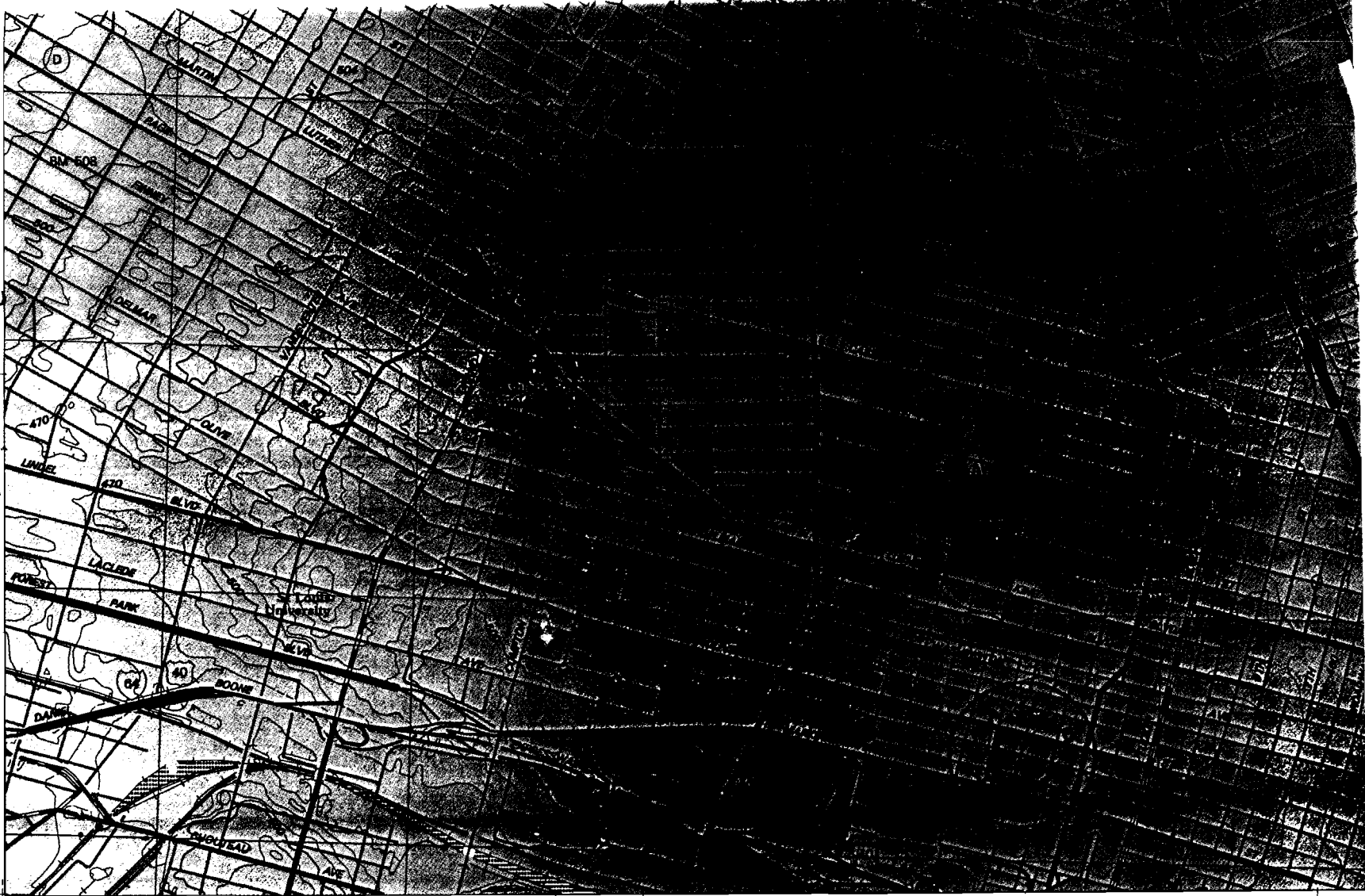
GENERAL SITE PLAN

Plaza Square
 Apartments
 Bounded by
 17th and Chestnut
 streets
 St. Louis [Ind. City]
 MO

ZONE: 15
 Easting Northing
 A 743 360 4279 520
 B 743 580 4279 480
 C 743 560 4279 320
 D 743 340 4279 380

720 000 FEET
 (IL WEST)

38°37'30"
 90°15'

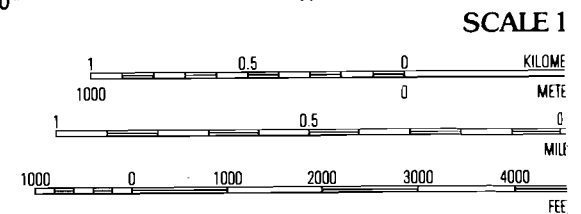
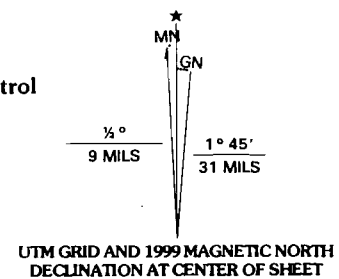


2 280 000 FEET (IL WEST)

12'30"

744

Produced by the United States Geological Survey
 Topography compiled 1952. Planimetry derived from imagery taken 1993 and other sources. Photoinspected using imagery dated 1998; no major culture or drainage changes observed. PLSS and survey control current as of 1954. Boundaries, other than corporate, verified 1999
 North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83). Projection and 1000-meter grid: Universal Transverse Mercator, zone 15
 10 000-foot ticks: Illinois (west zone) and Missouri (east zone) Coordinate Systems of 1983
 North American Datum of 1927 (NAD 27) is shown by dashed corner ticks. The values of the shift between NAD 83 and NAD 27 for 7.5-minute intersections are obtainable from National Geodetic Survey NADCON software



SCALE 1
 CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET
 SUPPLEMENTARY CONTOUR INTERVAL 20 FEET
 NATIONAL GEODETIC DATUM OF 1983
 TO CONVERT FROM FEET TO METERS
 THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACT OF 1932
 FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, PAPER 1500-A
 AND ILLINOIS GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, IGS 1500-A



EXIT



2

