

ST. LOUIS COUNTY NORTH
INVENTORY OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS
PHASE I
1988

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RESEARCH METHODS

Some of the historic resources of the northern part of St. Louis County have long been known. The so-called Powder House on the site of Fort Bellefontaine was surveyed by the Historic American Buildings Survey in 1940, and other properties have been included in surveys and publications produced by the St. Louis County Historic Buildings Commission in 1965, 1970, 1983 and 1985. Never has a methodical survey been undertaken in this area, however, and the present survey discovered buildings of interest in such quantity that the area has had to be divided into two parts. Phase I, which this now becomes, concentrates on two contiguous areas: the area north of Interstate 270 and east of Lewis and Clark Boulevard (Missouri 367); and the area east of New Halls Ferry Road and north of Lindbergh Boulevard (U.S. 67). Phase II will fill in the area north of Interstate 270, east of New Halls Ferry Road, south of Lindbergh Boulevard, and west of Lewis and Clark Boulevard. A large portion of the Phase II area was incorporated in 1970 as the City of Black Jack, but as early as the middle of the nineteenth century it was an important crossroads community serving the entire survey area.

The primary means of identifying structures for inclusion in the present survey was visual inspection. This probably excluded a few old structures whose historical integrity has been obliterated by additions and alterations, but it permitted inclusion of several notable structures that were built after the most recent county atlas (1909). Most buildings in this survey had to be researched from primary sources, deeds and probate records, which meant that exact dating was not possible. This is a common problem in rural surveys, particularly where land was held by one family for a long period of time. The existing house may have replaced an earlier one decades into the tenure of the land by the family, and only a family reminiscence can pinpoint the date of construction. Where educated guesses have been necessary in this survey, available documentation has been described as fully as possible, even where it might be somewhat earlier or later than the buildings themselves.

Among published sources, Walter R. Thomas's History of St. Louis County (1911) proved to be surprisingly useful. Thomas himself lived in Maplewood, in the south central part of the county, but he seems to have known some of the most prominent of the German-born farmers of this district, and he included their biographies in Volume II. The 1920 History of St. Louis County published by the Watchman-Advocate newspaper provided some assistance, including an early photograph of Barlbort's Market.

The Spanish Lake Historical Society and its archivist Carol Sneed were invaluable in providing the resources of their own collections and in suggesting additional references, including current owners and descendants of original builders. It is hoped that this survey will in turn form a basis for further research by that organization.

The following inventory forms have been arranged according to the street addresses of the properties, alphabetically and numerically. Users should keep in mind that one important property has been omitted from this survey: the Wilson Larimore House at 11510 Larimore Road already nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The survey area includes some of the most picturesque scenery in St. Louis County. The eastern boundary is the Mississippi River. A line of hills once paralleled the river, but as the river has shifted toward the Illinois shore, a large area of alluvial soil called the Columbia Bottoms was formed. Historically this area, which balloons to the northeast toward the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers, was the site of many prosperous farms, but in 1946 the entire area was purchased by the City of St. Louis in anticipation of a new airport. Still farmed under contract, the Bottoms are now almost entirely devoid of buildings. The Recreation and Retirement Center of Pipefitters Local 562 occupies 325 acres, the entire upland corner of the district, bounded by Strodtman, Larimore, and Columbia Bottom Roads. Another notable institution on this bluff is Villa Gesu, on Riverview Drive (the southern extension of Columbia Bottom Road) at Prigge Road.

The Missouri River frontage of this survey area is even more dramatic. The land of the survey area rises gradually from south to north until it reaches the river, when it drops precipitously about 200 feet to the water. Beginning in the 1920's, this frontage became coveted as a location for suburban residences, and it is still largely given over to upper-income private subdivisions. Notable houses of this type are found at the north end of Spanish Pond Road, on Portage Road, and in Jamestown Acres. St. Louis County protects a portion of this frontage at Sioux Passage Park (188 acres) and Coldwater Creek Park (over 300 acres). The latter park also protects the most picturesque portion of Coldwater Creek as it drops from the highland area to empty into the Missouri. Within the park is a tract still owned by the City of St. Louis and operated until recently as the Missouri Hills Home for Boys. It is the site of Fort Bellefontaine, the earliest military establishment in the region. The road north to Alton, Illinois, with its two high-level bridges, also passes through this area. On both sides of the bridge approach is a quarry covering a total of 343 acres. A second quarry is located at the north end of New Halls Ferry Road. These are the only major industrial activities in the survey area.

Another major physical feature of the survey area is Spanish Lake, originally called Spanish Pond, a natural pond that has been mentioned since the earliest years of Missouri settlement. Near it are two smaller ponds created by natural settlement in this century. All three are now included in the 230-acre Spanish Lake Park. Other county parks within the survey area range from the 2,280-acre Pelican Island, located in the Missouri River at the northeast corner of the survey area, to 23-acre Larimore Park, a neighborhood park off Larimore Road. Champ Park is 200 undeveloped acres off Vaile Road.

Another important natural feature of the survey area which is not so far protected is the concentrated area of karst topography centering on Sinks Road. This area of about four square miles is characterized by upland areas with low relief but with numerous deep surface depressions often called sinkholes scattered throughout the area. Laclede Gas Company owns over 550 acres of this topography which it uses for underground storage. Although this tract looks to be relatively undisturbed, it is actually intensively developed, and although it is a natural resource, it is not accessible to the public. It lies south of Jamestown Road on both sides of Sinks Road.

(An interesting finding of this survey is that Sinks Road may be named not for the sinkholes which border it, but for Powell Sinks, an early nineteenth-century landowner.)

This part of St. Louis County has been suburbanizing since the turn of the century, but the vast majority of suburban houses here date from after the Civil War. This decade has seen a final push to the north, and currently construction is proceeding on a grand scale in the area of Halls Ferry Road. The historic resources surveyed here are widely scattered with the exception of the Portage Road area, offering little potential for historic districts, but on the other hand most of them are not immediately subject to development pressures. Properties that seem to be targeted for development include the Kuhs Estate and the farms on Old Halls Ferry Road.

The basic network of roads remains much as it was in the nineteenth century. Lindbergh Boulevard generally follows the right-of-way of Robbins Mill Road, which used to be called the Florissant-Jamestown Road. Only Lewis and Clark Boulevard (Missouri 367) is an entirely new right-of-way, constructed in the 1930's. The unusual topography of the area, combined with the scattered pattern of the early land grants, has created a complex and confusing system of roads. Halls Ferry Road divides into Old Halls Ferry and New Halls Ferry as it heads north, and Old Halls Ferry eventually comes to a dead end. Old Jamestown Road starts in Black Jack and heads north toward the former location of James Town, then turns northwest to die out in the middle of Douglas, Shackelford and Carrico Roads. New Jamestown Road parallels the old a short distance to the east of its north-south leg; it then turns to the east, however, where it reappears in another location east of Lewis and Clark Road heading toward Bellefontaine Road. The western leg of Old Jamestown Road was originally called Accommodation Road, although what it was accommodating is unknown. The road east from the crossroads community of Spanish Lake to Columbia Bottom begins as Spanish Pond Road then becomes Strodtman Road, while Spanish Pond Road turns north to a dead-end at the gates of the Kuhs Estate. Lilac Avenue, which is a major interchange on Interstate 270, continues north only a short distance to end at Coal Bank Road. The remains of Robbins Mill Road survive in two discontinuous sections. Sinks Road, by far the most picturesque road in the survey area, winds between sinkholes and through the woods and fields of the Laclede Gas tract. But it no longer connects two main roads, ending not at Lindbergh but at one of the cut-offs of Robbins Mill Road.

For the most part this survey area has been spared the strip commercial developments that characterize much of the unincorporated county. Such development is seen at the intersections of 367 and Parker Road, at Lindbergh and New Halls Ferry, and on a smaller scale at Parker and Bellefontaine. In spite of suburbanization, North County remains a generally attractive place with an unusual wealth of scenic and historic resources.

HISTORY

The accompanying inventory forms represent a wide range of dates in the history of the northern part of the county, ranging from the early 19th century (or even possibly the late 18th century in the case of the Chitwood-Prigge House) to World War II (in the 1942 Evarts Graham House). The history of the area has been similarly varied. It was one of the first parts of the St. Louis region to be settled; the farm of Jacques St. Vrain, the brother of the last lieutenant governor under the Spanish regime, Charles DeHault DeLassus, was just northeast of Spanish Lake. Nearly all the land in this area was taken by Spanish grants later confirmed by the U.S. commissioners. Only a few of the grantees were of French or Spanish origin, however; most were Anglos from the United States across the river. They were joined after the Louisiana Purchase by others of the English-Scotch-Irish heritage. Most notable among these were the Pattersons, who were so numerous along the western stretch of the Coldwater Creek that it was called the Patterson Settlement.

Fort Bellefontaine was established on the south bank of the Missouri River in 1805, and its presence led to the establishment of the first important road in the area, Bellefontaine Road, which was an extension of Broadway in St. Louis. Halls Ferry Road began only a few blocks west of the north end of Broadway and ran out to Edward Hall's ferry across the Missouri River. The two roads spread out to embrace an area of about 40 square miles in their northern extremities, but the cultural impact of the city tended to be comparatively uniform throughout the area.

This was especially true after the northern part of St. Louis became the solidly German neighborhood of Baden. The Catholic parish of St. Aloysius in Spanish Lake was founded by, and for many years served as, a mission of Baden; the Bank of Baden played a large role in farm financing here, and many north county farmers also had business interests in Baden. The influx of Germans beginning in the 1840's was funneled into this area through Baden, and this perhaps has something to do with the fact that so many of them came from Bielefeld, a town in the region of Westphalia. So numerous were they that the crossroads community of Black Jack was originally called New Bielefeld. Salem German Lutheran Church there was a unifying force in the community; most of the non-Catholics attended either there or at St. Peter's Lutheran Church, originally on Columbia Bottom Road. The old parochial school building of Salem Church survives on Parker Road, but St. Peter's Church moved after the Second World War, and St. Aloysius replaced its old church, leaving the old 1908 rectory as its oldest surviving building.

The German dominance of the region was almost complete by the 1870's, and most of the surviving farm houses and outbuildings are associated with that era. A few houses, however, can be associated with the period of Anglo dominance before the Civil War. Most notable are those associated with the Patterson family, 14501 and 15310 Old Halls Ferry, 15505 New Halls Ferry, and 4404 Vaile Road. The Coldwater Church and Coldwater School nearby also date from this era and are associated with the family. The farmhouse at 15255 New Jamestown Road may have been built by Welcome A. Robbins, for whom Robbins Mill Road is named, and the beautiful "Locust Grove" was built by Robert Hughes, said to have been a steamboat captain.

Several towns were founded in this region in the early years, but none of them succeeded in attracting any permanent residents. James Town was intended to be near the present intersection of Old Jamestown and Fort Bellefontaine Roads. The site of Fort Bellefontaine itself was platted as the town of Belle Fontaine in 1836 but by 1844 the site was sold by the sheriff for nonpayment of taxes. Prior to the construction of the railroad bridge across the Missouri, this part of the county was essentially a dead end. Produce went either south to Baden or west to Florissant.

In the latter part of the century a few business centers developed at crossroads without the benefit of town plans. Cross Keys, at the junction of Robbins Mill and New Halls Ferry, has been totally obliterated by modern construction. Ruegg, shown as a post office in the 1909 atlas, was at the north end of New Jamestown Road. Bit by bit it has been removed by quarrying. Black Jack, or New Bielefeld, located where Parker Road joins Old Halls Ferry and Old Jamestown Roads, was the largest of these and retains many reminders of its early years. In this Phase I survey area, Spanish Lake (called Rush Valley P. O. in the 1878 atlas) still has its old blacksmith shop, probably the only one in the county, and the old general store. Both seem to have been started by Germans in the latter 19th century.

Stylistic change came very slowly to the north county, and many houses appear to be ten or twenty years older than they actually are. The Poggemoeller House, always dated to the 1840's, now seems more likely to date from the 1860's based on the documentation. The John Henry Twillmann House, dated 1870, looks like 1850. Similarly, the Casper Wehmeier house and Amanda Krueger's house, both of which must date from after the turn of the century, look like they could be from 1890 or even earlier. This conservatism makes dating buildings on stylistic grounds very risky.

More advanced architecture began to appear here with suburbanization. Several attempts were made to lay out developments around Spanish Lake, but they were unsuccessful. The effort in the 1890's to sell suburban lots along Larimore Road produced only two or three houses, and they belonged to people who already lived in the vicinity, Charles Henry Penningroth and Orie Tandy. Not until the 1920's, with the triumph of the automobile and the beginnings of highway improvement, did "country living" really become a possibility. The foremost attraction of the north county was its spectacular views, and the most significant country villas are all perched on the bluffs of the Missouri. The surviving Kuhs and Desloge estates represent the opposite poles of this trend. Edward Kuhs built a very informal house, almost like a picnic pavilion, and landscaped his grounds with folksy rock gardens. Joseph Desloge, by contrast, erected a French chateau with formal terraces and landscaping to match. More modest but still impressive houses were built by the brothers Francis and John Mesker on Portage Road in the 1930's.

The Missouri bluffs seemed to attract distinguished physicians. Vilray Blair and Ellis Fischel were neighbors of the Meskers, while Evarts Graham built nearby in Jamestown Acres. Graham's house was designed by Harris Armstrong, later recognized as the dean of modern architects in St. Louis, and this was his finest house of the period. By that time, the north county was in reach of many more St. Louisans, and its rural and exclusive character was already starting to give way.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This survey identifies a number of valuable historic resources worthy of listing in the National Register of Historic Places and an even larger number worthy of local protection. This finding emphasizes the need for a stronger preservation ordinance than now exists for the unincorporated parts of St. Louis County. While many old farms have fallen to suburban development, several properties in the survey were preserved by being incorporated into subdivisions, including the Frederick Herman Twillmann House on Claudine, the William Buenger House on Jamestown Drive, and the Amanda Krueger House on Old Halls Ferry. A more serious problem has been the inappropriate alteration of historic structures, usually in an effort to modernize them. The house at the Koester Farm is one example of a building whose historical integrity has been lost through the application of siding. Probably other historic structures were not even identifiable for the survey because of this problem. Such erosion of historic resources can only be controlled by a local preservation ordinance, and St. Louis County should be encouraged to enact an appropriate one.

Two of the most unusual resources identified in the survey are in the crossroad business center of Spanish Lake. The Spanish Lake Blacksmith Shop and Barlbort's Market are both especially endangered structures because of the changing nature of suburban retail business. Special attention should be given to their preservation.

Further research is needed in the history of the north county area. The unpublished Twillmann family study is a model that could be used for several other North County families. The Spanish Lake Historical Society has made good progress in collecting data since its founding only a few years ago. The Society is now considering expanding its area of interest west to the city limits of Florissant, which would make it correspond more closely to the boundaries of this survey. A systematic effort to interview the many descendants of the early families still living in this vicinity should produce valuable recollections, papers, and photos.

The most important historical investigation still to be undertaken in this survey area is the search for the original hilltop location of Fort Bellefontaine. The so-called Powder House included in the survey may be part of the old fort, but other evidence suggests that the fort compound was located west of the present entrance drive. A site of this importance deserves serious and comprehensive archaeological investigation.

ST. LOUIS COUNTY NORTH
Inventory of Historic Buildings

John Henry Twillman House	11840 Bellefontaine Road	1
Barlbort's General Merchandise Store	12204 Bellefontaine Road	2
Spanish Lake Blacksmith Shop	12223 Bellefontaine Road	3
House	12336 Bellefontaine Road	4
House	12340 Bellefontaine Road	5
Powder House (Fort Bellefontaine Site)	13300 Bellefontaine Road	6
Missouri Hills Home for Boys	" "	7
Grand Staircase, Missouri Hills Home	" "	8
Frederick Herman Twillmann House	1571 Claudine Drive	9
C.H. Trampe's Columbia Bottom Road Farm	12330 Columbia Bottom Road	10
Casper H. Wehmeier House	12505 Columbia Bottom Road	11
Evarts A. Graham House	18 Jamestown Acres	12
William Buenger House	14 Jamestown Drive	13
Charles Henry Penningroth House	11306 or 11308 Larimore Road	14
Orie C. Tandy House	11339 Larimore Road	15
St. Aloysius Rectory	12122 Larimore Road	16
Old Larimore School	12125 Larimore Road	17
Henry Gerling House	3845 North Hwy. 67 (Lindbergh Blvd.)	18
Coldwater Church	15245 New Halls Ferry Road	19
Lucy Patterson House	15505 New Halls Ferry Road	20
Coldwater School	15875 New Halls Ferry Road	21
Vouziers, Joseph Desloge Estate	16825 & 16965 New Halls Ferry Road	22
Poggemoeller House	203 or 2020 New Jamestown Road	23
Robbins-Reppohl House	15255 New Jamestown Road	24
John Patterson House	14501 Old Halls Ferry Road	25
Amanda Krueger House	15205 Old Halls Ferry Road	26
Tunstall-Douglass House	15310 Old Halls Ferry Road	27
Old Brown School	19710 Old Jamestown Road	28
Mathilda Uzzell House	1934 Parker Road	29
Alice Butler Lange House	2 Portage Road	30
Francis Mesker A. House	6 Portage Road	31
Vilray P. Blair House	16 Portage Road	32
John B. G. Mesker House	19 Portage Road	33
Ellis Fischel Guest House	20 Portage Road	34
Chitwood-Prigge House	750 Prigge Road	35
Frederick Henry Jacobsmeyer House	1735 Redman Road	36
Villa Gesu	11755 Riverview Drive	37
William Lichtenberg House	4500 Robbins Mill Road	38
Meyer-Lindemann-Kahre House	6700 Robbins Mill Road	39
Koester's Mystery Hill Farm	14511 Sinks Road	40
Anneliza Smith's Tract	12912 Spanish Pond Road	41
Kuhs Estate	13080 Spanish Pond Road	42
"Locust Grove", Hughes House	11743 Talbott Court	43
Patterson-Hachmeister House	4404 & 4420 Vaile Road	44
Whyte-Carney House	840 Valencia Avenue	45