

ST. LOUIS COUNTY SOUTH

INVENTORY OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS

PHASE TWO: MATTESE to SUNSET HILLS

1989

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

The area included in the present inventory is today partly in the municipality of Sunset Hills and partly in unincorporated St. Louis County. Historically the southern part of the area was called Mattese after the creek that flows through it. Mattis Road perpetuates a variant of the name. Tesson Ferry Road, today a major north-south artery connecting St. Louis County with Jefferson County, ended in fields and forest considerably north of the Meramec River until well into this century. Northwest of Tesson Ferry Road, farmers tended to look north toward the Concord neighborhood, marked today by Concord Plaza at Lindbergh Boulevard and Baptist Church Road and toward Sappington, another rural district focusing on the intersection of Sappington Road and Gravois Road. These areas, located to the north of Interstate 270, are now almost fully urbanized, but would still probably be fruitful subjects for a future inventory.

Of these areas, only Sunset Hills has ever been the subject of a publication. The History of Sunset Hills was published by the Sunset Hills Bi-Centennial Commission in 1976. That small book suggested several properties for further investigation. Brian Kolde, a native of Sunset Hills, is currently writing a preservation plan for the city as part of a degree program at the University of Illinois. Mr. Kolde was helpful in suggesting properties to inventory, and it is hoped that the Sunset Hills portion of this inventory will contribute to his plan, one of the first to be prepared for any municipality in St. Louis County.

Apart from this, however, 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 since the most recent county atlas was published in 1909. Most buildings in this survey had to be researched from primary sources -- deeds and probate records -- which meant that exact dating was not possible. This is a common problem in rural surveys. Dating of buildings on the basis of land records is always approximate, and this is especially true in the case of rural buildings. Farm complexes usually included buildings from several different periods, and a site in long continuous occupancy may be rebuilt piecemeal once or even twice. Such events are not detectable through land records. Building permits began to be issued by St. Louis County in 1907, but they were long ago discarded. Trace of them survives in the pages of the St. Louis Daily Record, but they require hours or even days to track down since they are not indexed in any way.

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

The usual secondary sources were surprisingly little help in this district, which was so remote from both downtown St. Louis and Clayton. Few if any references were found in Walter L. Thomas's History of St. Louis County

published in 1911 or in the History of St. Louis County published in 1920 by the Watchman-Advocate newspaper. No buildings from this area were included in the 1965 survey of historic buildings conducted by Kenneth Coombs and Robert Elgin in 1965. "Alswel," the William Lemp estate at 12696 Alswell Lane, was included in the county's 1983 publication Historic Buildings in St. Louis County and subsequently listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The following inventory forms have been arranged according to the street addresses of the properties, alphabetically and numerically. Maps for many of the properties are taken from the records of the St. Louis County Department of Revenue. They show property lines and subdivision outlines as well as building outlines.

Inventory forms have been numbered according to St. Louis County's locator system. This nine-digit system is based on a coordinated grid that covers the entire county and gives each parcel of land a unique identification. Most county records are keyed to this system, and it is hoped that inclusion of it on these inventory forms will facilitate further research. All photographic negatives are in the files of the St. Louis County Department of Parks and Recreation. Roll and frame numbers have been included on the inventory forms under item three. The roll numbers are assigned by the photo processing companies. Roll and frame numbers have also been marked on the backs of the inventory photos.

"Alswel," an important feature of this district, has been omitted from this inventory as it has already been the subject of a detailed National Register nomination.

## PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The area included in the present inventory is in the south part of St. Louis County but at angles to the cardinal points. Three sides are bounded by interstate highways: I-55 to the southeast, I-270 to the northeast, and I-44 to the northwest. The long and winding southwest boundary is the Meramec River, which is also the primary determinant of the area's topography. Fairly steep hills border the river along its entire length, but as it meanders it has created broad alluvial plains, particularly at the southern end of the district where it is marked by Meramec Bottom Road and at the lower ends of West Watson Road and Butler Hill Road. The hills along the river create a dramatic and varied topography that is now proving attractive to suburban development.

The only major waterway within the district is Mattese Creek, which rises near the northeast corner of the district and turns southeast under Interstate 55 to flow into the Meramec close to its mouth. St. Louis County operates two parks in the southeastern part of the district. Suson Park, which is entered from the west side of Wells Road, is known for its animal farm. It has 98.5 acres. South County Park covers 269.3 acres stretching along the east side of Wells Road opposite Suson. It is one of three regional recreation complexes in the county park system and includes a swimming pool, ice rink and public golf course. Much of the bottomland between South County Park and the Meramec River has been acquired by the county but remains in agricultural use. It is intended as part of a larger Lower Meramec Park. A second undeveloped park site is located on the river at the foot of Bauer Road. It has 114.35 acres of varied and rugged terrain. Six acres at the northwest corner of Gravois Road and Interstate 270 remain from Grandview Park, which was obliterated by the construction of the interstate highway. The park system once hoped to acquire a greenbelt running the length of the Meramec, but escalating land values have made this goal less attainable.

The topography of this district has contributed to the winding and discontinuous character of many of the principle roads. The most important arteries have all been rebuilt on new rights-of-way since the war. Gravois Road, designated Missouri 30, has been rebuilt just north of the original right-of-way, which was one of the oldest roads in the region. Tesson Ferry Road, which is Missouri 21, originally terminated on top of the bluffs far to the north of the Meramec. It was not a direct route, as it made a right-angled jog onto Mattis Road. It has been straightened and widened into a major artery leading south into Jefferson County. The new right-of-way unfortunately cuts both Butler Hill Road and Hagemann Road into two discontinuous parts. Interstate 270 is a new right-of-way paralleling Lindbergh Boulevard, the older regional artery to the north which was created from existing roads in the 1920's.

Several roads in this district turn from east-west to north-south or otherwise radically change direction. Many, especially those extending west from Tesson Ferry Road and Kennerly Road, dead-end some distance short of Meramec. In the Sunset Hills area Rott Road unexpectedly terminates at West Watson Road, which makes a nearly right-angle turn at that point. West Watson Road has been truncated by I-270; another section of it lies east of the

highway, while East Watson Road is an extension of Rott Road east of Lindbergh. West Watson Road is not to be confused with Watson Road, a separate right-of-way north of this area; it was originally U.S. 66, created in the early 1930's. Another important early road virtually obliterated by the Interstate system is Fuchs Road. Divided by I-55, it is now Ronalene Drive to the east of the highway and Lilacridge Lane to the west.

While several large early land grants in this district were subdivided at an early date, no suburban subdivision of any note took place here until well into the twentieth century. The rural crossroads settlements typical of rural St. Louis county were located somewhat outside this district. Mehlville centered on Lemay Ferry Road and Butler Hill Road; Concord was the area near Lindbergh Boulevard and Baptist Church Road; while Sappington focused on Gravois and Sappington Roads. The most important church serving the German population of the area was also slightly outside it, St. John's Evangelical Church at Lindbergh (then Sappington Barracks Road) and St. John's Church Road. More intensive development came to the area after World War II, at first concentrated in the southeast portion closest to major highways. The construction of Interstate 270 opened the rest of the district to development, which is taking place at a rapid pace now. Most of the older rural structures in this district have survived because they have been left in place by surrounding developments. Buildings on large lots remain threatened by subdivisions. The generally high cost of new houses in the district ironically threatens the smaller older houses by making them less desirable to the new context.



## HISTORY

The south portion of St. Louis County between Interstate Highways 44 and 55 was never a defined locale with its own identity. Rather, it was the hinterland for several rural communities located farther inland: Mattese or Mehlville, Concord and Sappington. At time went on these rural crossroads were replaced as focuses by more urbanized areas farther afield: Jefferson Barracks and Lemay in the eastern part of the district and Kirkwood in the northern part.

The earliest settlement of the district occurred along the Meramec River where a series of narrow land grants stretched back from the river in typical French fashion. Where the river twisted from south to east, these grants overlapped, creating difficult problems of claim adjustment for the U.S. Land Commission appointed by President Jefferson after the Louisiana Purchase. Originally granted to Frenchmen, these grants were soon taken up by the incoming Anglos, including Jacob Wickerham, who acquired Surveys 403 and 1341, John Mullanphy, who obtained Survey 2022, and Philip Fine, who purchased Survey 2992, a large inland tract of 1361 acres on the headwaters of Mattese Creek. Fine had another tract at the southernmost point of the county where he attempted to establish Finestown. Mullanphy was a St. Louis businessman with large interests in the Florissant area. Inland from the original riverside grants, much of the area remained unclaimed into the 1840's, and no historic buildings have been identified in this survey from that early period.

An important turning point in the history of the area came with the arrival of the Germans. The first German Evangelical Church was organized in St. Louis, and St. John's Evangelical Church was founded in Mehlville four years later. It soon became both a focus for the small existing German population and a magnet attracting other Germans to the neighborhood. German settlers bought up increasing amounts of land, and today most of the surviving historic structures can be traced to German builders.

The Germans did not practice primogeniture; children are instructed in most wills to "share and share alike," which usually meant that the family farm had to be sold. In spite of this, a number of properties have remained in one family's ownership. Most notable of these is the Frederick Homestead in Sunset Hills, which has been in the same family since 1857. Peter Porta, a native of France, settled on Meramec Bottom Road in the early 1870's; his homestead there has been sold, but another house on the property is owned by Porta's great-grandson. Similarly, the subdivision of farms among descendants led to the new construction. The house at 4437 Lilacridge Lane was built as the result of the subdivision of the Andreas Fuchs estate, as the house at 4812 Theiss Road is of the John Hermann Von Talge estate. The sons of John Schuetz built nearly identical, mirror-image houses at 5739 Wells Road and 13271 Tesson Ferry Road, on the parts of his farm they had inherited. The brothers Charles Theodore and George Philip Dauernheim bought adjacent tracts of land from the Mullanphy Emigrant Relief Association in 1893 and built similar houses at 6098 Hageman Road and 5816 Wells Road (the Relief Association was the heir of John Mullanphy's son Bryan).

Two of the most attractive rural properties identified in this inventory

are newer than the others: the Edward Weidlich House at 10700 Kennerly Road, built about 1900, and the Meyer House at 4608 Mattis Road, built about 1905. Both of these houses were built by children of farmers on part of the family farm, but neither house appears to have been intended to be a farmhouse. By this time, other houses were also being built along the major rural roads by people who were retired, provided services to the rural population, or simply worked elsewhere. A good example of this trend is the home Dr. Wallace Sappington built about 1893 at the prominent corner where Tesson Ferry Road once turned past Mattis Road.

Wealthier St. Louisans began coming into the district in the last years of the nineteenth century as well, drawn by the picturesque topography and beautiful views of the Meramec River. Joseph Griesedieck, the brewer, and Louis Stockstrom, the stove manufacturer, came in 1892, and William Lemp, another brewer, twenty years later. All these men were part of the German-American industrial aristocracy concentrated on the south side of St. Louis. The whole region was by then fairly accessible by means of the roads radiating out from the central city: Tesson Ferry Road, Gravois Road, and winding Watson Road (the last an extension of Chippewa Street). Griesedieck's house, called "Rock Alva," was fairly modest in scale, but the stone tower he built next to it was a real landmark. Lemp far outdid him with his estate, "Alswel," a complex of main house, guest houses, and farm buildings all in a coordinated Swiss chalet style.

The attraction of the outer fringes of the county continued after World War I. The Sunset Crest subdivision, laid out in 1922, failed to sell out, but it did result in the notable period-style houses at 12250 Bird Haven, 10830 Kennerly Manor Drive, and 10822 Kennerly Road. The last of these was built by another St. Louis industrialist, Leo Phelan of the paint company. Smaller suburban houses were also erected in this period; an exceptionally good bungalow for this area is the Arthur Fromm House at 12820 Weber Hill Road. Both the Rott School and the Washington or Butler Road Schools were rebuilt after 1930 by prominent St. Louis architects.

Even by the end of World War II, development did not become general in this district, although little by little more building did take place. Three houses from that period are included in the present inventory because of their exceptional architectural interest. The Nicholas Esser House at 5320 Kerth is a good, late example of Streamline Moderne styling, while the Hummel House at 4743 Theiss Road is a Lustron house, a prefabricated metal building of a type occasionally seen in other parts of the metropolitan area. Arthur Stockstrom's house on Maple Drive, which replaced his father's summer retreat there, rises above these last two examples in its architectural quality as one of the masterworks of Harris Armstrong, the dean of modern architecture in St. Louis. Few if any of the hundreds of houses built in this district since then hold promise of the continuing architectural significance of that one.

Sunset Hills was incorporated in 1957 after the City of Kirkwood attempted to annex part of the area. The first municipal election was held in 1958. It took its name from the Sunset Hills Country Club, which had been founded north of Gravois Road just outside this district in 1913. The construction of Interstate 270 had a major impact on Sunset Hills and the adjacent area,

disrupting the familiar circulation patterns but at the same time making this edge of the metropolitan area much more accessible. In 1988 St. Louis County proposed the incorporation of all the remaining unincorporated parts of the county. In the plan that has subsequently been proposed, the whole district included in this inventory would be annexed to Sunset Hills. Many obstacles remain before this plan can become reality, but it does suggest a direction for the urban future of this fading rural district.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

The successive waves of suburbanization that have swept over this district since World War II are now lapping at the shores of the Meramec River. Most of the older buildings that have survived this inundation have done so because they have remained on parcels of land small enough to be usable as suburban properties and too small to be desirable for further subdivision. This observation suggests that the county can promote the preservation of historic rural properties through its review of proposed subdivisions and by encouraging subdivisions to be designed in such a way as to incorporate the historic buildings. Too often today, subdivisions are designed with no thought to existing structures, so that the buildings must be demolished to make way for new roads or other improvements.

Even in such cases, demolition is proceeding apace. At the Wendelin Heutel house in Sunset Hills, for example, a new house is being built immediately behind the old one, necessitating the demolition of the older one. Stronger preservation ordinances are needed to control this situation, both in Sunset Hills and in the unincorporated county. Such ordinances would be particularly valuable in protecting buildings that add richness and interest to the neighborhood but are not necessarily of National Register quality. The mirror-image Schuetz houses at 13271 Tesson Ferry Road and 5739 Wells Road, both of which appear to be doomed to redevelopment, are examples of properties which would benefit from such a policy.

The only property which appears to have immediate National Register potential is the Griesedieck estate "Rock Alva" in Sunset Hills. It is one of a group of properties on the fringes of St. Louis County that were retreats or second residences for prominent St. Louis businessmen. "Alswel" in this district, already listed on the National Register, is another example. As an institution, St. John's Evangelical Church is of paramount importance to the social and cultural history of the district, but the relatively recent date of the present church building limits its significance. Although less than fifty years old, the Arthur Strockstrom House in Sunset Hills is one of the finest modern residential buildings in the metropolitan area, and it is a high point in the career of the architect Harris Armstrong. It will certainly be eligible for the National Register if it survives long enough.

Further study of South County history is needed, and it is not likely to take place in the absence of a local historical society. A reasonable depository for photos, letters, and other family memorabilia is badly needed. Buildings whose loss is inevitable should be studied further, even during the demolition process, especially those having log and other pioneer construction techniques. This is an area in which the county government could be helpful, by establishing or assisting in the establishment of a county archives, and by providing a full-time county historian, or preferably a staff, as many jurisdictions in the east do.

### South County Phase II Inventory

|     |                               |   |
|-----|-------------------------------|---|
| 1.  | Henry Mergelkamp House        | 4966 Ambs Road                          |
| 2.  | George Ambs House             | 4971 Ambs Road                          |
| 3.  | Fred O. Schwartz House        | 12250 Bird Haven                        |
| 4.  | Vonder Haar House             | 4403 Butler Hill Road                   |
| 5.  | Butler Hill School            | 4474 Butler Hill Road                   |
| 6.  | Diel-Brellinger House         | 4748 Butler Hill Road                   |
| 7.  | Julia Fuchs House             | 4753 Butler Hill Road                   |
| 8.  | George Kraemer House          | 4940 Butler Hill Road                   |
| 9.  | George Philip Dauernheim Farm | 6098 Hageman Road                       |
| 10. | John Adam Johner House        | 6160 Hageman Road                       |
| 11. | Philipp Westermann Farm       | 6439 Hageman Road                       |
| 12. | Edward Weidlich House         | 10700 Kennerly Road                     |
| 13. | Leo M. Phelan House           | 10822 Kennerly Road                     |
| 14. | "Fair Haven"                  | 10830 Kennerly Rd. (Kennerly Manor Dr.) |
| 15. | Nicholas Esser House          | 5320 Kerth Road                         |
| 16. | Eiler-Bender House            | 6009 Kerth Road                         |
| 17. | William J. Fuchs House        | 4437 Lilacridge Lane                    |
| 18. | Henry Kissel House            | 4505 Mattis Road                        |
| 19. | M. Meyer House                | 4608 Mattis Road                        |
| 20. | Wagner-Kretz House            | 4757 Mattis Road                        |
| 21. | August P. Crecelius House     | 4948 Mattis Road                        |
| 22. | Dr. Wallace Sappington House  | 5116 Mattis Road                        |
| 23. | Porta Homestead               | 4610 Meramec Bottom Road                |
| 24. | John Porta House              | 4662 Meramec Bottom Road                |
| 25. | Katherine Kempf House         | 12704 Old Tesson Ferry Road             |
| 26. | St. John's Evangelical Church | 11333 St. John's Church Road            |
| 27. | Ferdinand Bender Farm         | 9947 Schuessler Road                    |
| 28. | George Ploesser Homestead     | 10351 Schuessler Road                   |
| 29. | William Schuetz House         | 13271 Tesson Ferry Road                 |
| 30. | Gottfried Westhaus House      | 4355 Theiss Road                        |
| 31. | Hummel Lustron House          | 4743 Theiss Road                        |
| 32. | Fred Von Talge House          | 4812 Theiss Road                        |
| 33. | F. Schuetz House              | 5739 Wells Road                         |
| 34. | Charles T. Dauernheim Farm    | 5816 Wells Road                         |
| 35. | George Studer House           | 5936 Wells Road                         |
| 36. | Becht-Koeninger Farm          | 5956 Wells Road                         |
| 37. | Henry Crecelius House         | 12536 Worthington Drive                 |

Sunset Hills Inventory  
1989

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|-----|--|------------------------|
| 1.  | Hunckler Farm  | 12535 Gravois Road     |
| 2.  | Hunckler Store   | 12535 Gravois Road     |
| 3.  | Caroline Hewitt House  | 13262 Maple Drive      |
| 4.  | "Rock Alva," Joseph Griesedieck House<br>(St. Michael's Institute) | 13270 Maple Drive      |
| 5.  | Arthur Stockstrom House  | 13290 Maple Drive      |
| 6.  | Steinegger-Maag Farm   | 9261 Rott Road         |
| 7.  | Rott School/Judevine Center  | 9455 Rott Road         |
| 8.  | Wendelin Heutel House  | 12703 Weber Hill Road  |
| 9.  | Arthur H. Fromm House  | 12820 Weber Hill Road  |
| 10. | Frederick(s) Homestead   | 13126 West Watson Road |
| 11. | Schultz Farm   | 13345 West Watson Road |