

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1 Name of Property

historic name Vashon Community Center

other name/site number Vashon Recreational Center

2 Location

street & town 3145 Market Street N/A not for publication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 23 June, 2005  
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 Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4 National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

- entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Vashon Community Center  
Name of Property

St. Louis (Independent City), MO  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(check as many boxes as apply)

**Category of Property**  
(check only one box)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Function**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**Current Function**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: sports facility

Education: college  
RECREATION AND CULTURE: museum

**Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT: Art Deco

foundation Concrete  
walls Brick  
roof Synthetics/Vinyl  
other Granite

**Narrative Description**  
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 7

Vashon Community Center  
Name of Property

St. Louis (Independent City), MO  
County and State

**B. Description**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- 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.

**Areas of Significance**

(enter categories from instructions)

Ethnic Heritage: Black  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1936-1954  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Persons**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Osburg, Alfred A./architect  
\_\_\_\_\_

Becker, William C.E./engineer  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

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.

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 8

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

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

**C. 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:

Harris-Stowe State College  
\_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 9

Vashon Community Center  
Name of Property

St. Louis (Independent City), MO  
County and State

**III. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property 2 acres

**UTM References**

(Place additional boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

1 1/5 7/4/1/4/2/0 4/2/7/9/5/2/0  
Zone Easting Northing

2 / / / / / / / / / /  
Zone Easting Northing

3 / / / / / / / / / /  
Zone Easting Northing

4 / / / / / / / / / /  
Zone Easting Northing

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Property Tax No.

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 10

**Form Prepared By**

name/title Dr. George H. Hiram, Executive Vice President for Administration (also see continuation sheet)

organization Harris-Stowe State College date \_\_\_\_\_

street & number 3026 Laclède Avenue telephone 314-340-3519

city or town St. Louis state MO zip code 63103

**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 Type**

name/title Harris-Stowe State College

street & number 3026 Laclède Ave telephone 314-340-3519

city or town St. Louis state MO zip code 63103

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

Vashon Community Center  
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

### Summary Paragraph:

The Vashon Community Center, 3145 Market Street, St. Louis (Independent City) was designed by Albert A. Osburg and completed in 1936 (and opened in 1937) as a recreational facility for the African-American population of the Mill Creek area. The building is approximately 100 feet in width, 75 feet in depth, and 30 feet tall, with a flat roof. The building has three primary sections: a small entrance hall projecting from the south façade, a dominant center block containing the gymnasium, and a shorter one-story section that extends the length of the rear (north) wall. The building is notable for its decorative brickwork that creates vertical lines and distinctive window surrounds. The brickwork enhances the restrained Art Deco style of the building that is further denoted by carved limestone accents. The Vashon Community Center, now a part of Harris-Stowe State College, has undergone few changes since its construction and retains a high degree of physical integrity.

### Elaboration:

**Setting:** When originally constructed, the Vashon Community Center was at the heart of a densely populated urban area covered by residential, commercial, and industrial buildings. Urban renewal efforts in the 1950s forced out much of the population and allowed to waste the once densely developed neighborhoods. The building is now a part of a college campus that includes the historic Vashon High School with its associated grounds. The building is sited at grade level and occupies the western segment of the block being bordered on its west side by Compton Avenue, by the baseball field of Harris-Stowe State College to the east, by Market Street on the south, and on its north side by open space maintained by the College.

**South Elevation:** The primary (south) elevation faces Market Street. Centered in the symmetrical façade is a projecting, four-bay entrance hall. Decorative brick pilasters topped by carved limestone blocks separate the bays. The pilasters consist of stacks of projecting header bricks that create tall vertical lines. These lines are continued in the incised carving on the stone blocks. Limestone coping is laid between the blocks and tops the entire entrance hall. The two center bays of the entrance hall contain paired doors. Windows with decorative brick surrounds and limestone sills flank these two bays. The east and west sides of the entrance pavilion are embellished by three sets of vertical lines created by a stack of bricks recessed from the main wall plane.

The main block of the building, containing the gymnasium, extends above and to either side of the projecting entrance. The main block has a raised basement with evenly-spaced fenestration. A limestone waterable doubles as the lintel for the basement windows and wraps around all four sides of the building. The basement windows, currently covered by metal mesh panels, appear to be original. Above the basement windows are window openings that light the gymnasium. Decorative brick surrounds created by projecting and recessing header bricks highlight these tall, narrow windows. The brickwork extends below the windows to the waterable, creating a sense of verticality to this rather short and wide building. The window openings are currently filled, alternately, by cream-colored metal panels, to prevent vandalism,

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

Vashon Community Center  
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

and by windows filled with brick and glass blocks. The pattern of brick and glass block may well have been original to the building or an early alteration. Above the windows is a simple brick parapet wall topped by limestone coping. Centered in the parapet is a lighted sign that reads, "Harris-Stowe State College," indicating that the facility is now a part of the College.

East and West Elevations: The east and west elevations are nearly identical and continue the basic design motifs seen on the south façade. A limestone watertable separates the raised basement windows from the main section of the gymnasium. Four windows, similar to those on the front, help light the gymnasium. These windows are flanked by original drainpipes with large collector boxes near the roofline. A short, one-story section extends to the north of the main block. The watertable and stone coping detail is continued onto the shorter section.

North Elevation: The rear elevation, though more simply detailed, carries out the design motifs seen on the south (front) elevation. Tall, narrow windows, alternately filled with cream-colored metal panels or brick and glass blocks, are evenly-spaced across the façade and align with the windows on the south side. A limestone watertable marks the separation point between the raised basement and gymnasium level. Projecting from the center of the façade, is a one-story, with raised basement, annex. This projection is similar in size to the entrance hall on the south façade. Three evenly-spaced windows at the basement and first floor level divide the wall of this addition. The center projecting segment is flanked by two lower wings that extend across the entire rear wall of the gymnasium. These wings extend the raised basement level of the building. The stone watertable acts as the lintels for these windows.

Interior: The interior of the building is highly intact and consists primarily of a large open gymnasium space on the first floor and a series of offices and other spaces in the basement. The gymnasium space is largely open, with an original-wood basketball court. The walls are of clay tile, from the floor to the bottom of the windows, above which the wall is buff brick. The ceiling of the gym is roughly 25 feet high.

Integrity and Future Plans: The building has seen few changes since its construction in 1936. The exterior is in good condition and, with the exception of the new sign over the entrance, appears to be entirely original and in good condition. The interior, though somewhat deteriorated as a result of lack of use and some water infiltration, is also intact.

Harris-Stowe State College is planning to rehabilitate the building for museum and other spaces. Plans include the possibility of adding a mezzanine floor to the gymnasium. A sense of openness could be created by constructing a large central atrium. The mezzanine floor could, then, provide conference rooms, offices, archival storage rooms, and study rooms.

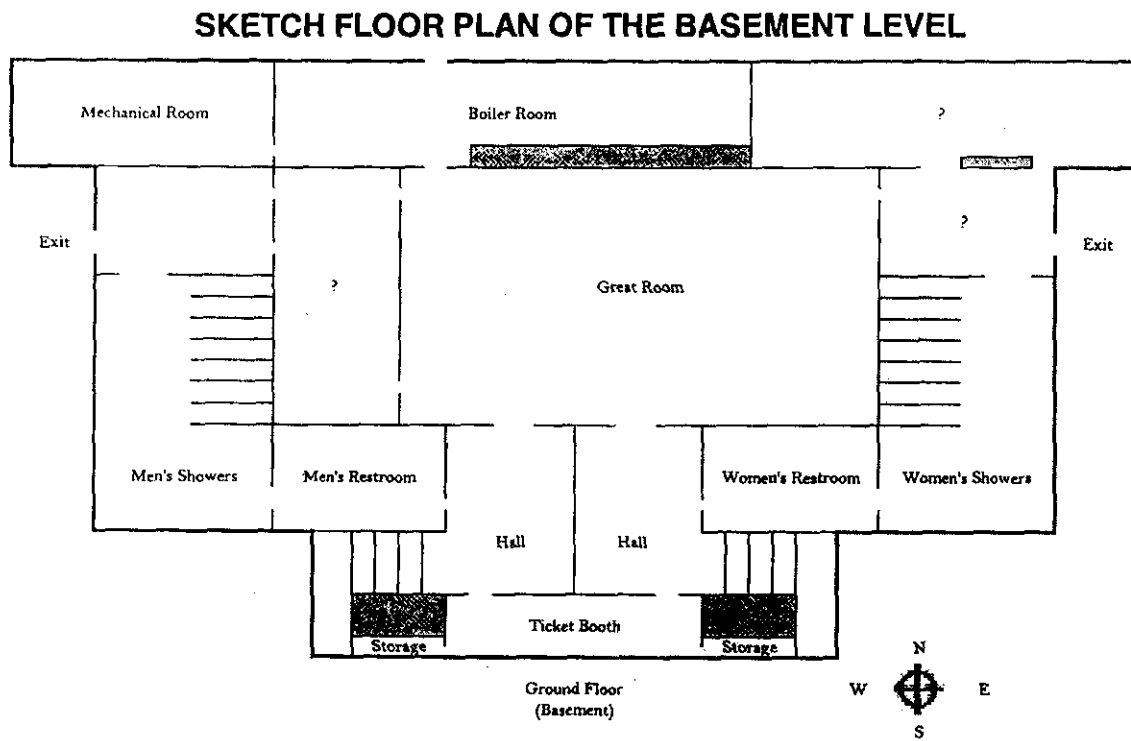
United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3

Vashon Community Center  
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Figure 1: Sketch Floorplan of Basement Level



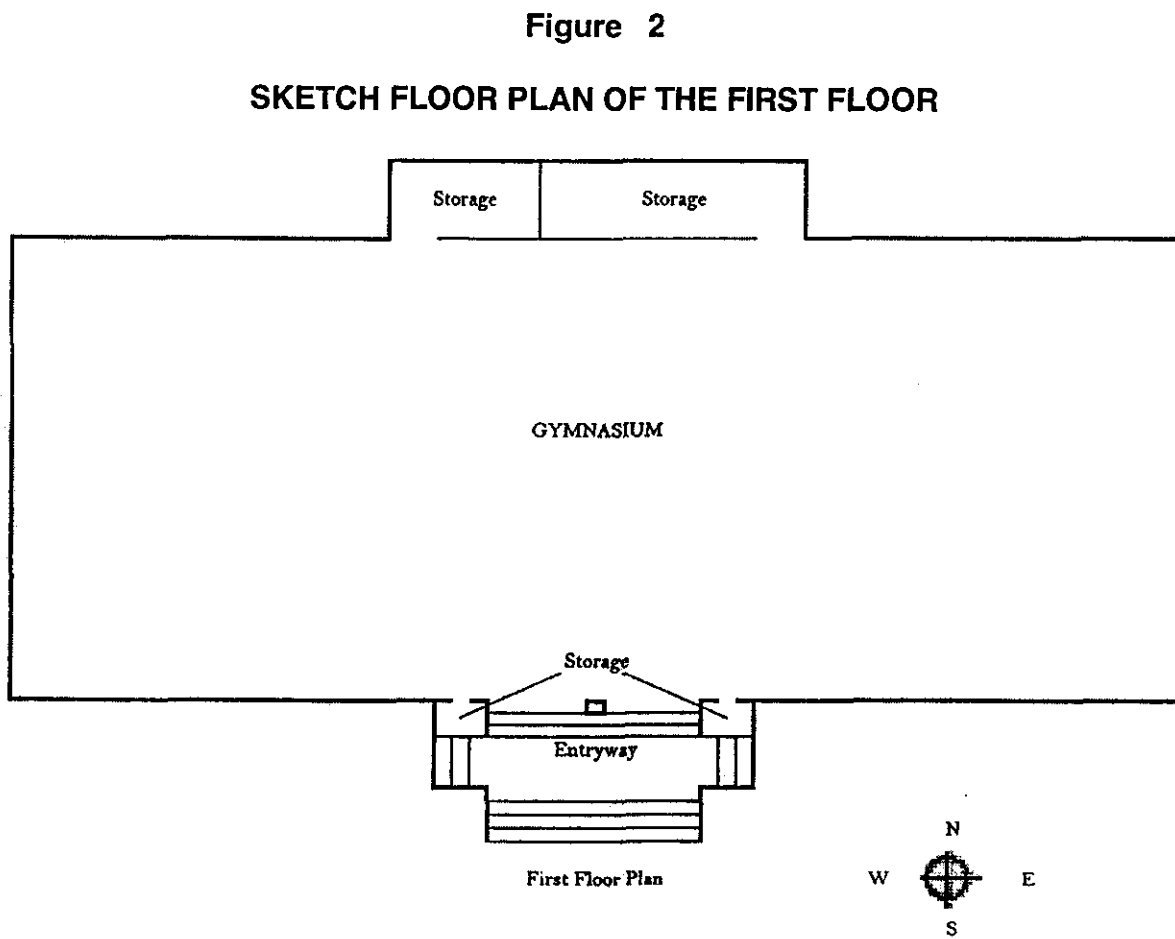
United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 4

Vashon Community Center  
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Figure 2: Sketch Plan of the First Floor





United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

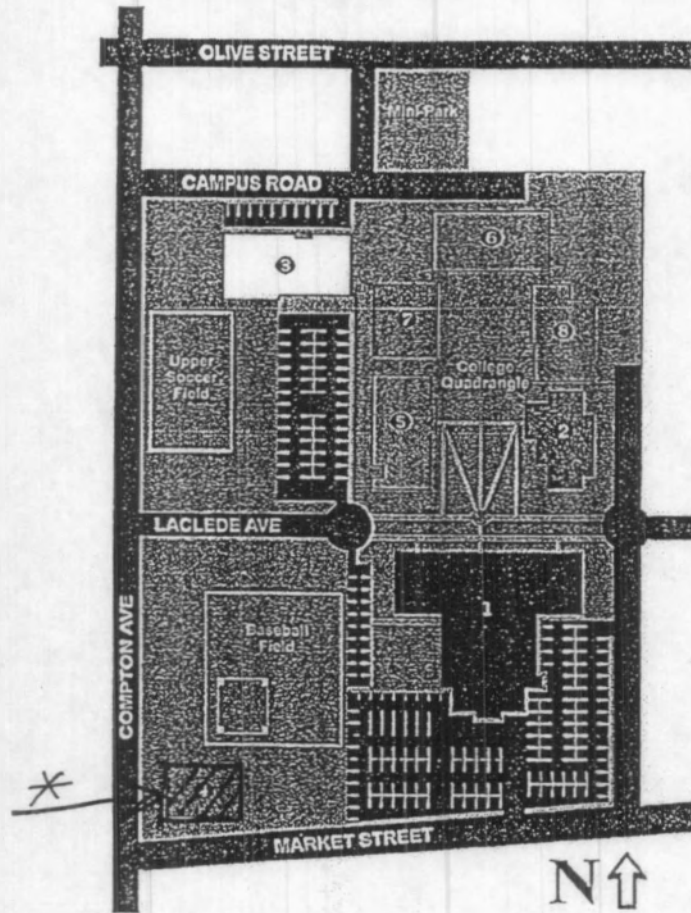
**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 5

Vashon Community Center  
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

**Figure 3: Sketch Plan of Harris-Stowe State College North Campus**

**SKETCH MAP OF THE NORTH CAMPUS**



1. Main Building
2. Southwest Bell Library and Technical Resource Center
3. Emerson Center for Performing Arts and Physical Education
- \*4. Former Vashon Community Center Building
5. Projected Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education Center
6. Projected Business Administration Degree Program Building
7. Projected Student Union and Dormitory combination
8. Projected Teacher Education Building

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 6

Vashon Community Center  
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

---

### Summary Paragraph:

The Vashon Community Center, at 3145 Market Street, St. Louis (Independent City), MO., is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of ETHNIC HERITAGE: BLACK. Funded through a City bond issue, and with a grant from the U.S. Public Works Administration (PWA), this property is an excellent example of the Art Deco motif applied to a functional modern building. It also represents the attempt, through federal "New Deal" spending, to assist the Nation's recovery from the Depression. PWA grants were aimed at projects that would improve public welfare through the funding of public buildings and increasing employment in the construction trades. The Vashon Community Center also demonstrates, as a building constructed for African-Americans, the desire of the Roosevelt Administration to assist the poor (black as well as white) and to comply with Missouri's "separate, but equal" policy in the segregation of the races. The period of significance for this building is 1936, the date of construction, through 1954, the arbitrary 50 year cut-off date.

### Elaboration:

Opened in 1937, the Vashon Community Center, was the second largest of the City of St. Louis' four recreational centers for African-American citizens. Funded with grants from the PWA, the four centers were located in densely-populated African-American neighborhoods, usually close to established schools. The Vashon Community Center was sited near the Vashon High School and the Waring Elementary School, underscoring that neighborhood as the center of African-American life in the Mill Creek area. Other than the two public schools, just noted, a number of very old churches, and the Pine Street YMCA, the Vashon Community Center was the only recreational outlet for African-Americans in the Mill Creek area. All other nearby recreational facilities were for "whites only."

The Mill Creek Valley area of St. Louis was historically a mixed-use area, dominated by industrial buildings and closely-packed residential tenements. Parts of the area had, at one time, been affluent, but this changed as the area became more polluted and better transportation allowed the wealthy to move further from the City's center. The area, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, became the home of the working poor that needed to live close to their places of work. During the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the area increasingly became a center of African-American culture, as zoning laws and restrictive covenants limited the neighborhoods in which African-Americans could live and own property.

Mill Creek Valley contained numerous residential, industrial, and commercial districts, primarily inhabited by the working poor. The area was very congested and polluted and offered few opportunities for recreation. St. Louis, in the 1920s, attempted to improve the quality of life in the City as a whole, by passing zoning laws that restricted the location of industrial and commercial property in relation to residential neighborhoods. The laws helped reduce pollution in some areas, but the Mill Creek Valley was zoned primarily as an industrial area and was

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 7

Vashon Community Center  
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

---

unrestricted along the Mississippi River and along the west belt of the terminal railroad.<sup>1</sup>

The availability of jobs in the industrial Mill Creek Valley, and the need to live close to the work place, made this area attractive to the working poor of all races and ethnicities. The area had always had a substantial African-American population that expanded rapidly from 1910 through 1920, slackened during the 1930s and 40s and picked up significantly during many subsequent decades.

The City of St. Louis was one of the major points reached by African-Americans in their exodus from the South to the North, seeking a better life. Many saw St. Louis as a temporary base from which further northward migration could be made. Many others chose the St. Louis as their more or less new permanent home. As noted above, many of those who chose the City as their new home remained in the Mill Creek Valley area for some time before moving farther westward within the City or continuing on to other urban areas.

The table below, titled, **Changes in the African-American Population of the City of St. Louis** (based on U.S. Census data) presents the figures that show both the numbers and the percentages in the increase of the City of St. Louis' black population during the period 1910 - 1960. These population figures show that the number of African-American's living in the City of St. Louis and their percent of the City's total population increased almost five-fold during this 50-year period. In fact, by the mid-1930's – the time when the Vashon Community Center was built – there were upwards of 100,000 African-Americans living in the City, comprising nearly 14% of the total population. Of this number, during the early 1900s, perhaps 3/4 of the total number of African-Americans lived in the downtown area of the City.

---

<sup>1</sup> James Neal Primm. *Lion of the Valley: St. Louis, Missouri, 1764-1980*. (St. Louis, Missouri Historical Society Press, 1998), 421.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 8

Vashon Community Center  
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

### Changes in the African-American Population of the City of St. Louis<sup>2</sup> (From 1910 through 1960 – 5 decades)

Census Year (a)	Total Population (b)	Black Population (c)	Black Population Increase over Previous Decade (d)	Black Population % of Total Population (e)	Black Population % of Increase (f)
(1) 1910	687,029	43,900	--	6.4%	--
(2) 1920	772,897	69,854	25,894	9.1%	59.0%
(3) 1930	821,960	93,580	23,726	11.4%	34.0%
(4) 1940	816,048	108,765	15,185	13.4%	16.3%
(5) 1950	856,796	153,766	45,001	18.0%	41.4%
(6) 1960	750,026	214,377	60,611	28.6%	39.4%

#### COMMENTS:

- As shown in the table above, during the five decades (from 1910 to 1960), the total black population in the City of St. Louis increased from 43,900 (in 1910) to 214,377 (in 1960) – almost a five-fold increase.
- However, after 1950 the City's white population began to significantly decrease, while the black population made significantly larger increases, until, at present, the black population is about one-half (or a little over) of the City's total population.

Despite the growing African-American population and the construction of the city's second African-American high school in the Mill Creek area in 1927, the neighborhood, and African-American population of the city as a whole, lacked the recreational facilities and other institutions available to white citizens. According to the report of the Missouri Historical Society on African-American historic sites in the city, "Organized recreation was at a very low ebb for Negroes in St. Louis until 1919 when [the] Pine Street YMCA was built."<sup>3</sup> The report tells us

<sup>2</sup> The figures presented in the Table below are from the U.S. Census reports for the years indicated. These data were obtained from the Geostat Center: Collections, at the University of Virginia Library. They are available on <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/>.  
<sup>3</sup> John Wright. *Discovering African American St. Louis: A guide to Historic Sites: St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1994.*

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 9

Vashon Community Center  
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

that, under the leadership of a trained athletic leader in this organization, athletic leagues were organized for African-American juveniles and adults, but that no further strides were made to provide recreational facilities for blacks until the early 1930s. At that time, four St. Louis playgrounds were "turned over" to African-Americans. These playgrounds were: the Gamble, the Vashon, the Carver, and the Tandy. Each of these recreational facilities organized teams in softball, hand tennis, volleyball, track and field events, and crafts. The local playground athletic teams soon gave rise to citywide athletic team play-offs among the black playgrounds. But, for reasons not reported in the records, these highly-popular playground play-offs were discontinued.

Despite initial strides in providing recreational activities for the city's African-American youth, no concerted effort to provide facilities for minorities on par with those for whites occurred until the 1930s. A group of civic-minded citizens, headed by J. M. Gerant, C. M. Evans, C. B. Broussard, William H. J. Beckett, and Oral S. McClellan, petitioned Mayor Bernard F. Dickmann to float a bond issue for the construction of recreational facilities for the city's black youth. Though most the group lived in the "Ville," the city's primary African-American neighborhood, the bond issue provided funding for recreational facilities in the Ville as well as the Mill Creek area. The bond issue, which included funds for four African-American recreational centers as well as several other public facilities, passed in 1934. The money raised by bonds was later supplemented by grants from the PWA.

The Vashon Community Center, the Gamble Community Center, the Carver House, and the Tandy Community Center (NR listed 1999, located in the Ville), were just four of dozens of building projects in the St. Louis area that were subsidized by the PWA. Indeed, from the time of the PWA's authorization in 1933 until these St. Louis area projects were completed in 1940, millions of dollars in building program assistance had been distributed in the form of grants and loans. During the first four years of the program, the PWA reports that it spent well over \$72 million in the State of Missouri. About \$8.5 million of this sum was spent in the St. Louis area alone.<sup>4</sup> The funds spent in St. Louis supported the construction of the Civil Courts Building, Kiel Auditorium, the Soldiers Memorial, Homer G. Phillips Hospital, the community centers, and others.

In 1936, the Mayor of the City of St. Louis, Bernard F. Dickmann, authorized the construction of community centers on each of the four playgrounds that had been earlier turned over to blacks. These community centers were designed to provide recreational and cultural opportunities for African-American youth and adults living in neighborhoods served by the four named playgrounds. The first two community centers were constructed in 1936 on the Gamble and Vashon Playgrounds. However, according to the *St. Louis Star-Times*, the Vashon Community Center, although completely constructed in 1936 – as is clearly shown on its cornerstone – remained unfurnished, unequipped, and unopened for some eight more months – even though its director, assistant director, activities coordinator, and janitor had been appointed.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> "PWA Here spent \$72 Million in 4 Years," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, June 16, 1937.

<sup>5</sup> "Vashon Center Built 8 Months Ago, Still Idle," *St. Louis Star-Times*, Oct. 20, 1937.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 10

Vashon Community Center  
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Needless to say, this eight-month period of non-occupancy and non-operation generated scathing criticism from African-American leaders and the downtown black community in general. The delay was widely seen as the result of blatant indifference, created by racism – as is very much evidenced in a strong denunciation by John T. Clark, the Executive Secretary of the Urban League of St. Louis, quoted in the *St. Louis Star-Times* Newspaper.

Mr. Clark bitterly stated:

“Every time a city administration has set out to do anything for the Negro population in St. Louis, that particular project remains unfinished until the *Star-Times* takes a hand. Administration heads may be kindly, sympathetic, and sincere, but somewhere along the line, the work is blocked by officials who do not give a hoot for us, and actually hate to see Negroes get anything to which they are rightfully entitled.”<sup>6</sup>

The news article went on to point out that blame for the 8-month delay was passed from one City official to another, and that City officials promised that immediate action would be taken. Thus, on October 22, 1937, according to an article that appeared in the *St. Louis Argus* – a black newspaper – the Vashon Community Center finally opened. Below is an excerpt from the *Argus*, giving a brief description of the dedication ceremony:

“The new \$70,000 [actually, the cost was \$100,000] Vashon Community Center at Compton Avenue and Market Street will be formally opened to the public this Friday [October 22, 1937], with a public dance from 7:30 to 11:30 p.m., Superintendent Robert D. Turner [head of public recreation in the City’s Park Department] has announced. The staff of the new building will be Ralph Young, director; Mildred P. Franklin, directress; Jane Hemmingway, instructor; and Manuel Champion, custodian. They will conduct usual indoor athletic activities and soft ball and soccer outside. Volleyball, basketball, craft work activities will be expanded as fast as time and space permit. The Center will be opened daily, except Sunday, from 2:00 until 10:00 p.m. The younger children will be given the afternoon hours, while children above 12 years and adults will have the evening hours.”<sup>7</sup>

Above the article is a very attractive architectural rendering of the Center, showing both its front and west elevations.

Both the *St. Louis Star-Times* and the *St. Louis Argus* newspapers reported that the Vashon Community Center was planned to be “the center” of a model playground extending eastward along Market Street from Compton Avenue to Cardinal Avenue and would have within it a football field, a soccer field, a baseball field, and athletic equipment. Located beyond the Center’s eastern boundary (Cardinal Avenue) was Vashon High School -- the second public high school in the City of St. Louis for African-Americans -- that had been constructed some ten years earlier.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> “\$70,000 Center to have Formal Opening this Friday.” *St. Louis Argus*, October 22, 1937.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 11

Vashon Community Center  
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

As might be surmised from the strong complaints lodged by many African-American St. Louisans about the delay of the opening of the Vashon Community Center, that new facility was looked forward to with great expectations and anticipation. After its opening in 1937, it became a real source of recreation, cultural events, and community gatherings. Below is an excerpt from an autobiographical sketch of Alice Lovelace, a well-known poet and native of St. Louis, who now lives and works in Atlanta, GA. In this sketch, she speaks very warmly of the tremendous importance of the Vashon Community Center to her, as a young girl. Here is how she described it:

“Actually, I was born and reared in St. Louis. My parents came to live in St. Louis by way of Ripley, Tennessee and Pine Bluff, Arkansas. My childhood was an unorthodox blend of European, Southern Black, Native, and Ozark cultures. My favorite memories are of great art and grand architecture which came to me through those cultures.

My childhood hangouts included Forest Park for cookouts, then on to the zoo, the Botanical Gardens, the Jefferson Memorial, and the Art Museum. But, the Vashon Community Center was my main hangout – really, more than a second home.

The Vashon Community Recreation Center sat on two square city blocks directly across the street from my house. It was fronted by Market Street, a great man-made highway of traffic and commerce. You could walk out of my front door into the doors of the Vashon Community Center. For me, crossing that one street was like a journey to a New World.

At the Vashon Community Recreation Center, Miss Helen, Mr. Bailey, and Mr. Westbrook taught me how to crochet, weave a rug, and sew by hand. I learned how to swim, to build a lamp, and to tumble. I was encouraged to join the drill team, the rifle club, and take boxing lessons. They also provided acting classes and the opportunity to perform in productions that toured other community recreation centers.

Over the years, I studied jazz, soft-shoe tap, ballroom dancing, and ballet. My dance ambitions died after my first class on point – in those incredible shoes with steel in the toes. Thereafter I concentrated on square dance competitions and the drama club.

All this was mine. Every day after school and all day during the summer. They never mentioned money. All that was required was my time and attention.<sup>8</sup>

Still another vivid memory of the importance of that facility to the young people living in the Mill Creek Valley area during the 1940s and beyond is that of one of the contributing writers of this Nomination Document. Here's how he describes that importance:

As a teacher in the Waring Elementary School (which was just across Compton Avenue

<sup>8</sup> Alice Lovelace. "Building Artistic Communities." *In Motion Magazine*. November 25, 2002. Published on the web at: [http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/ac/al\\_build.html](http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/ac/al_build.html). Accessed 12/6/2004.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 12

Vashon Community Center  
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

and facing the Vashon Community Center) I saw, first-hand, and on a daily basis, how much the Center contributed to the lives and families living within the area served by the Waring School and the Vashon Community Center. Often, many of my students would tell me about their after-school experiences there and about the many opportunities that facility gave them for a fuller social, cultural, and recreational life. I even have a photograph of some of my students who swam in the Center's outdoor swimming pool during the summers. As I see it, this center -- now a part of Harris-Stowe State College's north campus -- must be preserved because of the never-to-be-forgotten opportunities it provided for so many African-American youth who, otherwise, would have been left out! Thus, I am reminded of the words of a remarkably insightful philosopher, poet, and literary and cultural critic, George Santayana, who cautioned us in these very telling words: 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.' Stated, somewhat differently, one might say: 'Those who do not know, or remember, or are not constantly reminded of history, are doomed to repeat its errors and mistakes.'"

Therefore, those artifacts, such as buildings, works of art and literature, and other tangibles, relating to human actions of years past -- whether those artifacts were instruments of good or evil -- should be preserved and, if possible, modified to other more edifying uses in the present, lest we forget the shameful and evil actions and events of the past and repeat them in the present or future. The Vashon Community Center clearly served a good and greatly-needed purpose during the last days of the evil of racial segregation in the City of St. Louis. Therefore, let us now preserve that facility and enhance it for important and edifying service to generations yet to come!"

– Observations of a former Waring Elementary School Teacher

Given the fact that African-Americans living in the City of St. Louis had been so long without access to public recreational and other facilities, the construction of community centers, in the "Ville" and Mill Creek Valley area, of the four public playgrounds that had been turned over to this population was looked upon with great anticipation. After the opening in 1937 of the Vashon Community Center, this facility became a highly-valued source of recreation and cultural events, as well as a place for community gatherings. Little wonder, then, that Alice Lovelace wrote glowingly of what the Vashon Community Center had meant to her, as she was growing up in the Mill Creek Valley area.

Though primarily significant as a center of recreation and culture for the African-American population of St. Louis, the building is also a good example of New Deal era institutional architecture. The Vashon Community Center, like its sister community centers, and many other public buildings constructed in St. Louis during this era, was influenced by Art Deco or "Modern" architecture. Modern architectural design elements were especially popular during the New Deal for government funded construction projects. According to the publication, *Public Buildings: Architecture Under the Public Works Administration, 1933-1939*, "Modern" design predominates and the largest quantity of the best work is in Missouri where many of the public



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 13

Vashon Community Center  
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

---

buildings are outstandingly successful. In general, the best work has been done in courthouses, penal buildings, recreational projects, and municipal auditoriums."<sup>9</sup> St. Louis has several examples of 'Modern' public facilities funded through the PWA and other New Deal agencies, among these are the Homer G. Phillips Hospital (NR listed 9/23/82), the Tandy Community Center (NR listed 9/17/99), and the Vashon Community Center. All three of these buildings were funded through the same bond issue and through a PWA grant.

"Modern" was a term often applied to what is now known as the Art Deco style. The name "art deco" came into common use in the 1960s and is derived from the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs Industriels et Modernes*. Art Deco buildings can be highly decorative with geometric patterns, floral designs, and other bas relief ornamentation. The style can also be applied in a more restrained fashion that stresses form and geometric patterns in the building fabric as opposed to applied detail. The lack of classical references and its rather severe angles and lines, makes the Vashon a good example of restrained Art Deco architecture. The vertical lines and geometric patterns created by recessed bricks and the incised stone details are also characteristic of the style.

---

<sup>9</sup> C.W. Short and R. Stanley-Brown. *Public Buildings: Architecture Under the Public Works Administration, 1933-1939*, vo. 1. Reprint, New York: DeCapo Press, 1986, p. xii.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 14

Vashon Community Center  
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

---

### Bibliography

"\$2,522,000 Grant Made by PWA for City Institutions," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*,  
July 20, 1934.

"City Officials checking Over Bond Projects," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 22, 1934.

"Mayor Dickmann," *St. Louis Argus*, June 20, 1938.

Primm, James Neal. *Lion of the Valley: St. Louis, Missouri, 1764-1980*. Missouri  
Historical Society Press, 1998.

"PWA Here spent \$72 Million in 4 Years," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, June 16, 1937.

Lovelace, Alice. "Building Artistic Communities." *In Motion Magazine*. November 25, 2002. Published on  
the web at: [http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/ac/al\\_build.html](http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/ac/al_build.html). Accessed 12/6/2004.

Short, C. W. And R. Stanley-Brown. *Public Buildings: Architecture Under the Public  
Works Administration, 1933-1939*, vol. 1. Reprint, New York: De Capo Press, Inc., 1986.

Wright, John. *Discovering African American St. Louis: A Guide to Historic Sites*.  
St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1994.

"Vashon Center Built 8 Months Ago, Still Idle," *St. Louis Star-Times*, vol. 52, no. 16.  
Oct. 20, 1937.

"\$100,000 'Forgotten' Building," *St. Louis Star-Times*, vol. 52, no. 17, 1937.

"\$70,000 Center To Have Formal Opening This Friday," *St. Louis Argus*, Oct. 22, 1937.

*Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, "Art Deco," <http://www.britanica.com/ebc/article>

"What is Art Deco?" About/Miami Beech Fl, <http://miami.about.com/cs/arts>

"Art Deco Architecture," <http://architecture.about.com>

"Art Deco, Part 2, 'Echoes from the Tomb,'" <http://architecture/about.com/library/weekly>

"Art Deco, Part 3, 'King Tut Goes Mod,'" (same website)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10/photo log Page 15

Vashon Community Center  
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

---

### Verbal Boundary Description:

The quotation below is a legal description of the boundary of the Vashon Community Center.

Commencing at the point of intersection of the southern line of Laclede Avenue, 60' wide, with the western line of former Cardinal Avenue 60' wide, vacated by Ordinance 51357, said point also being the northeastern corner of Mill Creek Valley, Subdivision Track 34, recorded in Plat Book 33, page 7, City of St. Louis Recorder's Office; thence, north 75 degrees 09' 07" west 499.36' along the southern line of said Laclede Avenue to a point of curve; hence southwestwardly, 31.44' along a curve to the left, having a radius of 20.00' to a point of tangency in the eastern line of Compton Avenue, 80' wide; thence, south 14 degrees 47' 34", west 43.4' along the southern prolongation of the eastern line of said Compton Avenue, being also the western line of property described in the deed to the Board of Regents of Harris-Stowe State College of the City of St. Louis, State of Missouri, recorded in Book 229-M, page 152, City of St. Louis, Recorder's Office, to a southern line of said Harris Stowe College property; thence, south 75 degrees 12' 26" east 201.44' along said southern line of said Harris-Stowe College property to angle point therein; thence south 14 degrees 47' 34" west 384.45' along a western line of said Harris College property said its southern prolongation to a line distant 100' north of, measured at right angles thereto, and parallel with the south line of Market Street, as dedicated on Plat of Mill Creek Valley Subdivision Tracks 35 and 36-A, recorded in Survey Record 13, page 8, City of St. Louis Recorder's Office; thence, south 89 degrees 31' 36" west 219.17' along said line 100' north of the south line of Market Street to the eastern line of Compton Avenue 75' wide; thence, north 14 degrees 47' 34" east 485.02' along the eastern line of said Compton Avenue to an offset therein; thence, south 78 degrees 12' 53" east 10.01' along said offset to the eastern line of the aforesaid Compton Avenue 80' wide and the Point of Beginning, and containing 87,819 square feet or 2,0160 acres. Assessor's Parcel 1D2243-000-0200.

### Boundary Justification:

The boundaries encompass the building as well as grounds historically associated with the Vashon Community Center. The parcel includes all property associated with the building as was given to the College by the City of St. Louis in 2000.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10/photo log Page 16

Vashon Community Center  
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

---

### Photo Log:

The following is true for all photographs:

Vashon Community Center  
St. Louis [Independent City, MO]

Photographer:

Location of negatives: Harris-Stowe State College, 3026 Laclede Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63103

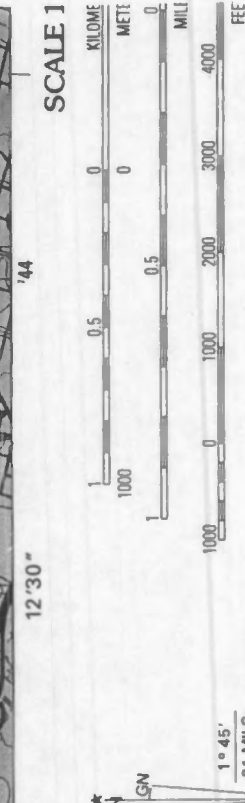
Date:

1. Front elevation, seen from southwest
2. East elevation, seen from southeast
3. East and north elevations, seen from northeast
4. North elevation, seen from north
5. East elevation, seen from east
6. Interior, first floor (gymnasium) looking west
7. Interior, first floor (gymnasium) looking northwest

### 11. Form Prepared By (con't):

Edits and revisions made by:

Tiffany Patterson  
National Register Coordinator  
Missouri State Historic Preservation Office  
P.O. Box 176  
Jefferson City, MO 65102  
573-751-7800



CONTOUR INT  
 SUPPLEMENTARY CONT  
 NATIONAL GEODETIC VE  
 TO CONVERT FROM FEET TO M  
 THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATION  
 FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, P.  
 AND ILLINOIS GEOLOGICAL SURVI  
 AND DIVISION OF GEOLO  
 MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL R  
 A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS /

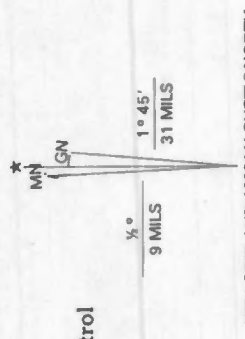
Produced by the United States Geological Survey

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

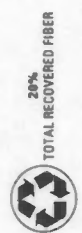
North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83). Projection and 1000-meter grid: Universal Transverse Mercator, zone 15 10 000-foot ticks: Illinois (west zone) and Missouri (east zone) Coordinate Systems of 1983

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

Contours that conflict with revised planimetry are dashed There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of the National or State reservations shown on this map



UTM GRID AND 1999 MAGNETIC NORTH DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET



ASHION COMMUNITY CENTER  
 corner of Market Street  
 and Compton Avenue  
 St. Louis (Independent City), Missouri  
 5/741420/4279520

USGS TOPOGRAPHICAL MAP









