

# Interim Report Enright/West Belle Survey September 14, 1998

## Objectives

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The major objectives of this survey are:

- To provide a basis for neighborhood planning based on the existing architectural fabric of Enright Avenue and West Belle Place.
- To identify and evaluate cultural resources for potential eligibility for listing in the National Register.

## Methodology

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### Phase I: Enright Avenue

- *Create survey database:* the address of each property fifty years of age or older on the 3900-4400 blocks of Enright Avenue (and properties along the adjacent half-blocks of the intersecting cross streets) was entered into the survey database.
- *Filling in the Blanks:* dates of construction, original and historic occupants, and other information were added to the inventory database. Archival sources include building permits, deed histories, *Daily Record* entries, directories, architect files, and house numbering permits. House numbering certificates are frequently referred to simply as "certificates." The field "style/design" uses styles selected from the National Register list. The field "second style" is reserved for styles defined in the local preservation plan which do not appear on the National Register list (e.g., "Shaped Parapet" or "Foursquare.")
- *Neighborhood Meeting:* Landmarks Association staff presented the draft research design at a meeting of the Enright Neighbors Association on March 14, 1998.
- *Photography:* each property in the survey database was photographed in black and white; 5x7" prints are included with the inventory sheets.
- *Other field work:* Physical characteristics of each building were described and entered into the database. Only those characteristics which are visible from the street are identified; condition is also assessed based on what is visible from the sidewalk. Secondary structures (e. g. garages) are not included in the survey.
- *Mapping:* At the end of Phase I, all building footprints in the survey area have been mapped, and dates added to those in the Enright Avenue portion of the survey area.
- *Interim Report:* This is it.

## Phase II: West Belle Place

Contingent upon continued funding, from January through September 1999 Landmarks Association will repeat the above steps for the properties on West Belle Place and conduct interviews with residents of both streets. A final survey report, map(s), inventory sheets and photographs (including streetscapes) will be turned in at the end of this period.

## Geographical Description

The survey area consists of the northern half of City Blocks 4573, 4572, 3756, 4874, and 3753; all of City Blocks 4570, 4571, 3755, 4873, and 3754; and the southern half of City Blocks 4569, 4568, 4567, 4566, and 4565 in the City of St. Louis. This includes both sides of the 3900-4400 blocks of Enright Avenue and West Belle Place as well as the intersecting north-south streets. Phase I of the survey focuses on 181 properties on Enright Avenue.

## Results: Phase I

As anticipated in the survey design, most of the 181 surveyed buildings were best evaluated for their associations with local African-American history and, to a lesser extent, for architectural merit. The 4100 block of Enright is believed to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places for its association with the Urban League's Block Unit program (this was the first of thousands of member blocks). Additional recommendations for National Register listing may be made as a result of Phase II research. Although many of the buildings surveyed are good examples of 19th and 20th century design, none appear to be individually eligible for their architectural merit.

## Description

The six blocks of Enright covered in Phase I of the survey are characterized by a variety of housing types built between approximately 1880 - 1910, with a second, smaller burst of housing appearing in the late 1920s. There is one historic school and one historic church. A few later buildings were not surveyed, including two residences (one small ranch from the 1950s or 60s and one new colonial revival house); one new row of attached brick-veneered townhouses; one school (1958) and a fire station (1960). Street trees are typically small where they are present, although there are some large sycamores, maples and oaks (many of the large old trees have lost many limbs). Setbacks vary. Enright's 80-foot right-of-way is wide for St. Louis, but not

unusual for the other parallel streets in this immediate neighborhood. (Delmar to the south and most of the other streets north to Page also are 80' wide; West Belle, immediately north, is 75' wide.) Two-way traffic is permitted on all six blocks of Enright, but both the 4300 and 4400 blocks are accessible only from the east (concrete planters block off the west ends).

## Historical Background

The information gathered below represents the results of Phase I research on the neighborhood and its historic contexts. Some gaps in the narrative are left to be resolved in the final report after Phase II investigation is complete. Biographical information on particular individuals in the neighborhood is included on inventory sheets rather than in this document.

The first land division of this area was by the French founders of St. Louis, who included the survey area in the Grande Prairie common fields for the use of settlers. After 1800, some of the land was consolidated from the long strips typical of the French into more compact holdings. The first of these to be subdivided was the "home place of the late Nathaniel B. Taylor." This large estate, which included most of the western two-thirds of the survey area, was platted as Taylor Place in 1854. The size of the lots (in the survey area averaging approximately one-fourth of the modern city blocks) reflected the rural nature of the area. Pendleton, Newstead and Taylor Avenues were all in place at this time, along with two diagonal streets called Williams and Celeste which defined the edges of the Taylor estate. Enright and West Belle did not yet appear in any form.

The first still-recognizable lots in the survey area were created in 1859 by the Francis Bequette Tract Partition. This plat split the land along the north side of what is today West Belle Place into lots which varied in street frontage from approximately 25 feet to approximately 400 feet. Other subdivisions at the eastern end of the survey area south of West Belle Place include Benoit's Subdivision (1874), John Hogan's Subdivision (1875) and Shamburg Place (1881). In 1882, most of Taylor Place within the survey area (by then under at least seven different owners) and a previously undivided tract were replatted as Delmar Place. The large Taylor lots were reconfigured into up to 16 smaller city lots each.

Compton & Dry's view of 1875 indicates that most of the land in the survey area was undeveloped or in agricultural use at this date (see attached). Along the western boundary of the survey area were several sizable houses surrounded by orchards (mostly on the west side of the street and therefore not within the boundaries of the survey). None of the buildings shown on the 1875 view are extant. A diagonal fence line illustrated in the vicinity of present Enright is most likely Taylor Place's boundary line, which had been dedicated (but apparently not used) as Williams Street.

The survey area was enveloped in the massive (and final) 1876 expansion of the St. Louis city limits. From the building permit record, which begins at this time, it is evident that construction of houses began at the eastern end of the survey area shortly after Hogan's and Benoist's subdivisions were platted in 1874-75. Enright was built as an extension of Morgan Avenue; it originally extended only one block and was called Hogan. This section was renamed Morgan and pushed all the way west to Taylor in the 1882 Delmar Place plat. (The name was later changed to Enright in commemoration of a World War I hero.) The 1883 Hopkins atlas shows West Belle (then still called Bell) going all the way through from Vandeventer west to N. Taylor. Neither Sarah nor Whittier ran through the survey area; Bell was one long unbroken block between Vandeventer and Pendleton. The subsequent creation of Whittier and Sarah (which already existed farther north) would divide all of the already existing plats.

Development in this area lagged behind nearby Elleardsville (to the north) and Cote Brillante (to the northwest), which were already thriving suburbs by the late 1870s.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, city expansion from the east was pushing toward Vandeventer Avenue. Vandeventer Place, laid out in 1870, was immediately east of the survey area (although only a few of its grand mansions had been constructed by the mid-1870s); by 1875 there was also extensive development all the way west to Vandeventer along Washington Avenue, just two blocks south of present day Enright.<sup>2</sup>

Norbury Wayman's history of the area reports that the first public transportation in the Grande Prairie was a horse car line which ran west along St. Charles Road (now Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive) beginning in 1870. A steam railroad through the area had been proposed as early as 1868, but construction did not begin until 1871. By 1875, the West End Narrow Gauge Railway ran from a platform near Grand and Olive to what is now Culver Way, then headed west between present-day Enright and West Belle. The line began operations in 1875 and reached suburban Florissant in 1878.<sup>3</sup> (The railroad became one of the nation's first electric interurban railroads in 1891.<sup>4</sup> This was the forerunner of the Hodiamont streetcar line, which in 1966 was the last streetcar line in St. Louis to shut down.<sup>5</sup> The wide alley is now reserved for Bi-State buses.)

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<sup>1</sup>Norbury Lansing Wayman, *History of St. Louis Neighborhoods: Grande Prairie*, St. Louis Community Development Agency, 1979. 3-4.

<sup>2</sup>The terminus of the Missouri Railway Company's Olive Street Line, just southeast at Grand and Olive, spurred the early development south of the survey area.

<sup>3</sup>Andrew D. Young, *The St. Louis Streetcar Story* (Glendale, California: Interurban Press, 1988), 26-27.

<sup>4</sup>Andrew D. Young, *St. Louis and Its Streetcars: The Way It Was* St. Louis: Archway Publishing, 1996), 11.

<sup>5</sup>*The St. Louis Streetcar Story*, 198.

## **Context: Architecture**

The families that settled this area most likely followed migration patterns common among the middle and upper class, as urban pressures from the east encouraged families to continue west in search of land, clean air, and an escape from the problems of the city. They built in the prevailing revival, American and vernacular styles of the time.

Although the permit record shows that a number of houses were built on Enright in the 1870s, none of the extant buildings appears to have been built prior to the 1880s. Many of the earliest houses in the area, which were concentrated at the east end of the survey area, were destroyed or damaged beyond recognition in the tornado of 1927. Of the 45 buildings in the survey area dating from the 1880s, about a dozen (all at the eastern end of the street) received new facades following the cyclone. The extant body of architecture from the 1880s period includes good examples of the contemporary Italianate and Second Empire styles from the first half of the decade, with more examples in the Queen Anne style in the second half of the decade. Integrity varies from high to low.

The 1890s are the best-represented decade among the buildings surveyed in Phase I, representing well over half of the properties studied (108 out of 181). Built in an eclectic variety of contemporary revival styles, many of these buildings are best described as foursquares (about half) which may display the trappings of castles of Europe, Georgian manors, and Renaissance villas, or any combination of applied ornamentation. Of the 15 buildings from the 1890s classified as Queen Anne style, 13 were built in 1890-1891. There are a few fairly good examples of the Richardsonian Romanesque style.

By the turn of the century only a few lots were left vacant on each block. Only ten primary structures remain from this period of decreased building activity. The first part of the decade continued revival traditions established in the 1890s, while the latter part saw the introduction of the first Craftsman style buildings to the neighborhood.

While there were no buildings constructed in the decade following 1910, late variations of the Craftsman style continued to dominate in the 1920s. Most of the seventeen buildings recorded from this decade were constructed at the eastern end of the survey area after the devastating 1927 tornado. The 1920s also saw the introduction of a new property type: the low-rise apartment building. Built up to four stories high for an increasingly dense population in what was by now the central city, there are four of these buildings in the surveyed section of Enright.

The tornado which swept through St. Louis on September 29, 1927 devastated the neighborhood. Maps showing the path of the storm (see attached) reveal that while its

full force was visited on the 3900 through 4100 blocks of Enright and West Belle, all of the survey area was affected. It appears that many of the frame houses in the neighborhood were destroyed at this time. The permit record shows extensive repairs to brick dwellings, some totalling thousands of dollars. About a dozen of the existing 19th century dwellings have rebuilt facades, and about the same number of new buildings were constructed to replace demolished or condemned structures. The Art Deco style Cole School at 3931 Enright was constructed in 1930 (the only building from that decade surveyed) to replace temporary buildings destroyed by the tornado.

## Context: Ethnic History

Initial settlement in the survey area was by white St. Louisans (as described in the Background section). But just six blocks north of the survey area in the neighborhood known as the Ville, the small black population had grown enough by 1873 to merit its own elementary school, Colored School #8<sup>6</sup> (renamed Simmons Colored School in 1891). The first two black churches in the Ville were founded in 1878 (Antioch Baptist) and 1885 (St. James African Methodist Episcopal).

By 1910, 13 percent of the Ville's ward population was black (3,108 of 23,253 residents). This was more than double the citywide concentration of blacks, which was closer to six percent.<sup>7</sup> More significantly, a 1912 study reported that "most of the home owning negro population live in this section [Elleardsville]."<sup>8</sup> Research suggests that the growing black population of the Ville, encouraged by the relocation of Sumner High School to a site on Cottage Avenue, pushed south of Easton (now Dr. Martin Luther King Drive, the boundary of the Ville neighborhood) at an early date. By the time the 1910 census was taken, residential streets south of the Ville were heavily segregated by race. Enright (still known as Morgan) was white; West Belle was also almost completely white. Just north of West Belle, Fairfax and Finney were largely white at the western end of the survey area and black in the 3900-4100 blocks. There were also two Chinese households, one on Sarah and one on Taylor.

The few African-American families who had moved to West Belle prior to 1910 must have paved the way for many to follow. The 1920 census shows that the streetcar right-of-way between Enright and West Belle was a demarcation line, with the population north almost exclusively black (and mulatto, a distinction recorded by

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<sup>6</sup>Colored School #8 was the eighth elementary school built for blacks in post-Civil War St. Louis. The southern boundary of the neighborhood known as the Ville is six blocks north of West Belle.

<sup>7</sup>Carolyn H. Toft, ed. *The Ville* (St. Louis: n.p., 1975), p. 6.

<sup>8</sup>Schoenberg and Bailey, 95; quoting William August Crossland, "The Occupations of Negroes in St. Louis," (unpublished master's thesis, Washington University, 1913).

census takers). Only a few white families remained on West Belle.<sup>9</sup> Enright, on the other hand, had no black families listed in the survey area in 1920 with the exception of one couple living in a rear unit.

When the Newstead Avenue United Presbyterian Church sold its church building at 4371 Enright in 1920, it cited the westward migration of its congregation as the reason. No reason was reported in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* for the westward migration of the congregation, but it seems reasonable to postulate that as black families moved into the streets north of Enright, white Presbyterians went west. The white population which was holding fast on Enright was distressed to find that the new owner of the Newstead Avenue church was Lane Tabernacle C. M. E. Church, a black congregation. At about the same time, reports surfaced that black buyers had acquired homes in the western section of the Enright survey area.

At a January 23, 1920 meeting of white residents of the 4100 block of Enright (as reported in *The St. Louis Globe-Democrat*), neighbors met "to discuss reports that negroes had purchased property further west on that avenue and to agree that no property owner should sell any tract in that block to negro purchasers." Speakers suggested that the streetcar tracks between Enright and West Belle should be the southern boundary for black residences in the area.<sup>10</sup> About a month later, the *St. Louis Argus* reported that the Real Estate Exchange had resolved to prohibit its members from selling to African-Americans in a broad section of the city bounded on the north by the DeHodiamont streetcar tracks.

The preventive measures taken by neighborhood residents and white realtors did not succeed. By mid-1920, the *Argus* "Society and Local Notes" column was running items on families moving to (or already located on) Enright. In the 1921 *Gould's Red-Blue Book*, at least ten black households were located in the survey area. It is likely that there were more.

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<sup>9</sup> One of the remaining white households on West Belle was the Evangelical Deaconess Home and Hospital, which in 1920 had 49 nurse-sisters (most of whom were American-born of German parents) and a staff of 23, all of whom were white.

<sup>10</sup> One of the neighbors mentioned in the *Globe* article as a speaker at the meeting was Walter Stork, a local grocer who served a mostly black clientele. His alleged presence at the meeting led to a boycott instigated by the black West End Business Men's Association. Stork denied that he was present and sued the newspaper. Within two months, Stork was forced to sell his business to a black organization; the *Argus* called the boycott the first successful action of its kind in St. Louis. A few days before Stork turned over the property, another black organization (the Central Civic League) released its findings that Stork had not been at the white property owners' meeting after all. The Business Men's Association did not accept this conclusion, and noted that Stork was also accused of being unfair to his black clientele. The store, located at 1041 Sarah, was apparently among the buildings destroyed in the 1927 tornado.

A comparison of the 1920 white residents of Enright and black residents on West Belle indicates that the white residents represented a wider range of white-collar occupations such as clerks, stenographers, and retailers. The African-American population on West Belle included a higher percentage of laborers; it also included occupations almost unseen among the Enright group, such as chauffeurs and janitors. This disparity may reflect the gap in the types of jobs available to African-Americans during this period. Based on the 1920 census data, it appears that the black residents of this area had more of an opportunity (perhaps an enforced opportunity imposed by residential segregation) to live with members of different classes and income groups (within their own race) than their white counterparts.

West Belle during this period was one of the most fashionable streets a black St. Louisan could choose to live on. By 1920, West Belle and the streets immediately north (Finney and Fairfax in particular) were favorite addresses for mention in the *Argus* "Society and Local Notes" column. Enright would soon join the ranks of most frequently mentioned streets. By the time the devastating tornado of 1927 struck, the district was recognized as the home of the city's black upper class. The first report of the cyclone in the *Argus* stated:

The aristocratic Negro residential district of the city received the brunt of the terrific Tornado . . . . Along Cook avenue, Finney avenue, West Belle Pl. and Enright avenue nearly every home sustained damage and many were completely destroyed. Some of the leading Race businesses, and professional men live on these streets and some of the oldest and best known colored families of St. Louis.

While the devastation wrought by the tornado in the African-American community was terrible, the *Argus* was able within a few weeks to report on the opportunities for change which had come about as a result. If the availability of housing for blacks was bad before the storm, it was even worse after; one result of the tornado was a call for the construction of more high-density housing. This was portrayed as a service to the Race, since housing was hard to come by because of limitations on where blacks could live (see below) as well as the destruction of so many homes. Of the four low-rise apartment buildings in the neighborhood, three were constructed immediately after the tornado.

#### *The Urban League's Block Unit Program*

Part of the survey area's historic significance is due to the 4100 block of Enright's place as the first block unit in the Urban League's nationwide Federation of Block Units. This program was initiated in 1932 by the St. Louis Urban League, an affiliate of the national organization founded to improve the living conditions of black people. Block Unit #2 was formed in the 4200 block shortly thereafter. The idea of the block units was:

to promote self-help by organizing cooperative efforts among neighbors. Clark [John T. Clark, Executive Director of the St. Louis Urban League from 1926-49], who called the block units "educational cells," saw them as a way to "help make Negroes themselves more responsive to their duties [and] their opportunities." He also hoped that successful block units, which eventually engaged in everything from neighborhood beautification projects and youth activities to creating buying cooperatives and conducting voter registration drives, would "help blacks gain acceptance and become more widely integrated into society."<sup>11</sup>

The main objectives of the block unit program, as stated by the Urban League in 1938, were:

- to improve neighborhood appearance and maintenance;
- to work with other organizations and inform residents to improve health, education, recreation, housing, and cultural standards;
- encouraging good citizenship;
- developing the spirit of teamwork;
- developing grass roots leaders.<sup>12</sup>

In 1998, the St. Louis Federation of Block Units still strives for these objectives. Three staff members of the Urban League administrate the program, which counts over 1400 member units. As the first block in a program which sparked a nationwide movement, the 4100 block of Enright is the most historically significant block identified in the survey area. Block Units #1 and #2 remain active forces in the community.

#### *Restrictions on Available Housing for African-Americans*

Two practices prevented African-American residents of St. Louis from moving into predominantly white neighborhoods in the 1910s through the 1940s. The use of restrictive deeds and covenants prohibiting the sale of property to non-white owners was common throughout St. Louis. Such covenants were tested in the courts on various occasions. A 1931 case resulted in a Missouri Supreme Court ruling upholding the Cote Brillante restrictive covenant. The *St. Louis Argus* reported that black residents who had already moved to the restricted area were given 60 days to vacate.

It took seventeen more years for another St. Louis restrictive covenant, also upheld by the Missouri high court, to reach the U. S. Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of a black family which purchased a house (with the help of a white buyer) in a

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<sup>11</sup>Priscilla Dowden, " 'Over This Point We Are Determined to Fight:' The Urban League of St. Louis in Historical Perspective." *Gateway Heritage* (Spring 1993). 34-36.

<sup>12</sup>Lawrence Harvey Boxerman, "St. Louis Urban League: History and Activities." Saint Louis University Ph.D. dissertation, 1968. 52.

restricted white neighborhood only one mile from the survey area (and only a few blocks outside of the Ville, the heart of middle-class black St. Louis during this period). The 1948 Shelley v. Kraemer decision broke the barrier of deed restrictions, although they continued to be enforced in St. Louis for some years afterwards.<sup>13</sup>

A second factor which kept blacks from purchasing property outside of a few selected neighborhoods was the policy of the local white realtors' association, which threatened its members with expulsion for selling to blacks in certain neighborhoods. For example, in 1937 it was discovered that a restrictive covenant thought to be in effect on the 4300 block of Page Boulevard ( four blocks north of West Belle) was never filed. Within a few months after the first black family moved in, approximately 20 others followed. The executive secretary of the St. Louis Real Estate Exchange was quoted in newspaper accounts as saying that any member renting or selling to blacks in that area would "face possible expulsion from the exchange."<sup>14</sup> The "Delmar District," which apparently included the 3900-4400 blocks of Delmar (just south of Enright), was apparently subject to the same restrictions in the early 1940s.

All of the prohibitions against widespread black settlement had the effect of driving up real estate prices in the areas where they were allowed to purchase or rent. Black publications as well as newspaper accounts made the argument over and over that opening areas to blacks actually increased property values rather than decreasing them. This perspective from the 1937 "Your St. Louis and Mine" publication could easily apply to the mansions typical of Enright and West Belle:

This R. E. E. (Real Estate Exchange) set up a glorified ghetto system of exploitation of Negro home owners. It fixed it so that the old "too big" castles of the '80s and '90s would be sold to Negroes at exorbitant prices and beyond that line no Negro could buy. But the same type of house on an adjacent street would be sold to whites from two to three thousand dollars cheaper, and then these same Real Estate barons declare on their oaths in Court that 'Negroes DEPRECIATE property values.'<sup>15</sup>

#### *Enright and West Belle in the 1940s and beyond*

By 1940, the population of Enright and West Belle was almost exclusively black. A comparison of 1943 residents of West Belle Place to those of 1920 indicates that the neighborhood had assumed a more middle-class aspect, with higher concentrations of

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<sup>13</sup>Richard S. Kirkendall, *A History of Missouri*, v. 5. (1919-1953) (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1986) 368.

<sup>14</sup>"Negroes Seek to Buy Synagogue on Page," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, November 10 1937.

<sup>15</sup>"What's Wrong" from *Your St. Louis and Mine*, ed. Nathan B. Young (St. Louis: 1937), 66.

professionals such as teachers. The following table for listings of teachers in the 1943 *Metropolitan Negro Directory* shows that over a quarter of the 651 teacher listings were within the survey area. An additional concentration of black teachers (not shown on the table) was found just west of the Ville limits.

Area	Number of listings	% of total
Survey area (12 blocks)	168	26
The Ville (37 blocks)	129	20
Five streets between the Ville and the survey area (30 blocks); all but 5 (102 out of 107) lived on the three streets just south of the Ville	107	16
TOTAL	404	62

The opportunities for black settlement outside of the confines of the Ville and nearby residential streets such as Enright and West Belle expanded in the 1940s and 1950s. In 1943, the first black family purchased a house on Lewis Place, one of the private streets just northwest of the survey area. National Register documentation relates that only two white families remained in Lewis Place by 1946. As other neighborhoods opened to blacks, the concentration of middle-class residents in the Ville and on Enright and West Belle declined. By the 1960s, demolition was a common fate of the housing stock (more so along West Belle than Enright), and the Sanborn maps noted additional vacant buildings.

Despite vacancies, demolition, and a higher crime rate, parts of the two streets of the survey area retain their historic middle-class professional character. A number of prominent African-American individuals and families, including business people and community leaders, have chosen to remain in or move to the neighborhood. This is particularly true of the western blocks of Enright, where residents continue to organize for community improvement in Block Units #1 and #2 and the Enright Neighbors Association.

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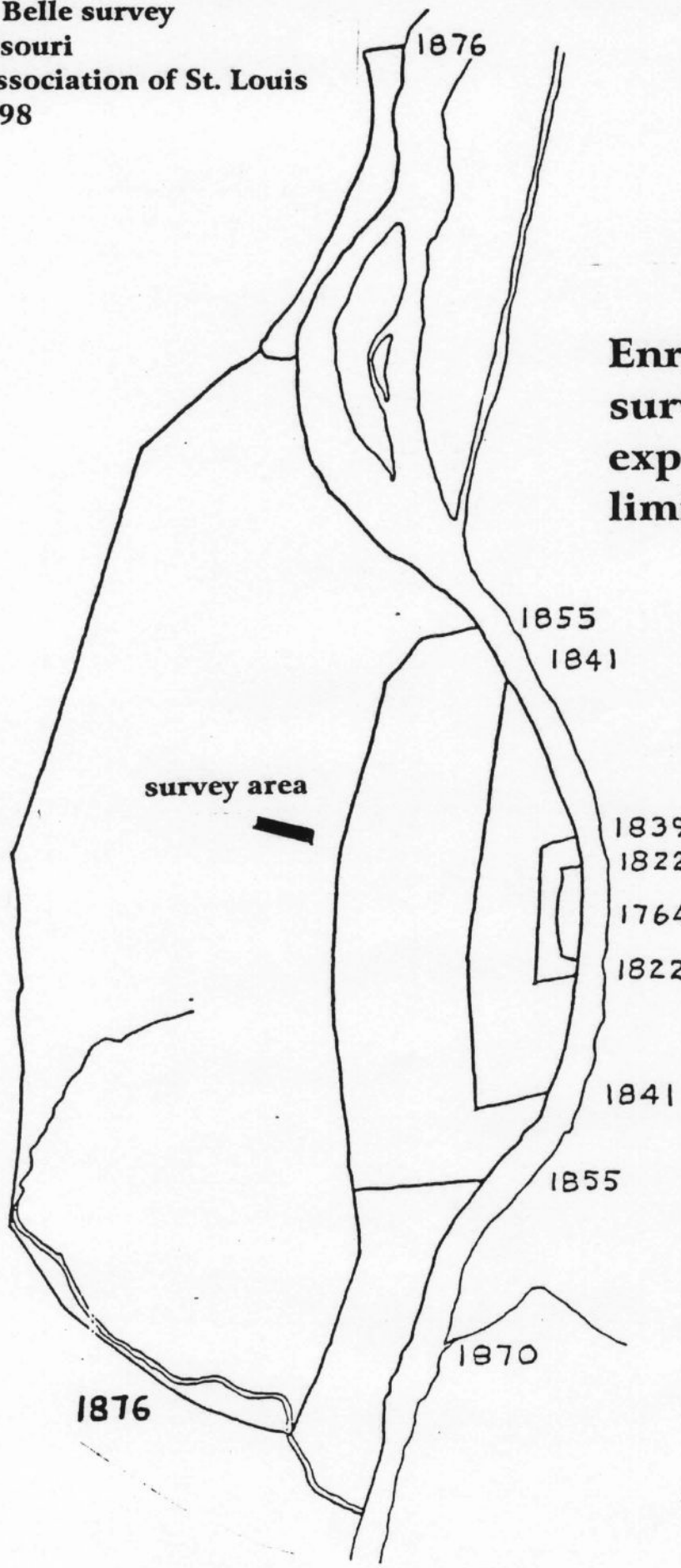
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**Enright-West Belle survey**  
**St. Louis, Missouri**  
**Landmarks Association of St. Louis**  
**September 1998**



**Enright-West Belle  
survey area and  
expanding city  
limits**

**survey area**

1876

1855

1841

1839

1822

1764

1822

1841

1855

1870

1876

**"Existing Negro School Facilities and School Population Distribution," Saint Louis City Plan Commission, 1943 (each dot represents five black elementary school children)  
source: Landmarks Association collections  
survey area is highlighted in yellow; the Ville neighborhood is highlighted in orange**



Path of the 9/29/1927 tornado  
Source: *Report of the St. Louis  
Tornado...* (1928)

Enright/West Belle survey area  
is highlighted

