

July 15, 1987

REVISED FINAL REPORT--CITYWIDE CONCRETE BLOCK SURVEY: RECONNAISSANCE LEVEL

OBJECTIVES

Heralded as a revolutionary new building material at the beginning of the 20th century, concrete blocks were promoted by manufacturers to architects for high-style dwellings as well as to developers of more modest buildings. Demonstrations of block manufacture and construction at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis increased public exposure to the new product but secondary sources (including the recently published Houses by Mail: a Guide to Houses from Sears, Roebuck & Company) indicate that countrywide interest in concrete block houses was short-lived. Although no previous survey work or registration activities had disclosed early concrete block construction in St. Louis, a survey team from Landmarks Association accidentally located a concentration of architecturally significant early concrete block houses (Oakherst Place) while driving to another survey site. The objectives of the ensuing thematic survey were to identify all extant buildings in St. Louis constructed of concrete blocks before World War I and to evaluate the resources identified as to their eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

AREA SURVEYED

In order to have a complete data base for this previously unexplored resource, the reconnaissance survey area included the entire City of St. Louis.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS USED

Landmarks Association owns a complete set of bound Sanborn Insurance maps. These volumes cover the entire City of St. Louis. Although various volumes have different dates for the original base maps therein, subsequent changes to all base maps appear as paste-overs on the original vacant lot or earlier building. Some approximate dates of construction may thus be gleaned from the Sanborn maps. In contrast to the Sanborn maps available at City Offices that are black line on white, the bound Sanborns in Landmarks' possession show all buildings color-coded as to materials. Blue is reserved for stone or concrete/concrete block construction with a symbol for either material superimposed on each building or group of similar buildings.

The first step in the research design was to note all buildings shown as concrete block in the bound Sanborn volumes and then transfer that information to a series

of field maps. Field work indicated that a number of potential resources were in fact buildings constructed later than the period of significance and/or concrete block buildings initially and still faced with brick veneer. Those buildings were not inventoried. The remaining resources were photographed. Sample building permits were obtained for scattered resources; all building permits and an occasional deed were researched for three concentrated areas of resources. Additional archival work included a thorough reading of relevant contemporary publications about concrete block construction as well as an investigation of the holdings at the Portland Cement Company archives in Chicago, Illinois. Local newspapers on microfilm were also reviewed for any announcements of early 20th century St. Louis concrete block projects or buildings.

RESULTS

In total, the survey identified 103 sites. All but four (one church and three stores) were residential. Forty-six of the residential buildings were single family, two-story dwellings; thirty-six were single family, one-story dwellings; five were single family, one-and-a-half story dwellings and eleven were multi-family, two-story units--seven of which were duplexes. The resources were compared and analyzed based upon what is known of Statewide and countrywide resources in the same thematic category. Boundaries were then established for the most architecturally significant concentration of resources and a nomination to the National Register was prepared for the Oakherst Place Concrete Block District. (That District has subsequently been listed in the National Register.) Boundaries were then drawn for a concentration exhibiting a transitional phase in the development of a design vocabulary based directly on the properties of concrete block that can be seen as a direct predecessor of the Oakherst Place Districts. (That District, the Goodfellow/Julian District, has been approved by the Missouri Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and is currently at the National Register office for final review.)

In order to more fully document the context and identify the resources of the third concentration identified by the survey (located on Lowell Street and Lowell Lane), a neighborhood map at a scale of 1:100 has been prepared and is included with this final report. These cottages do not exhibit any evidence that their design was in fact affected by the choice of materials. They are, however, quite early. A better understanding of Statewide resources plus an intensive level survey of these buildings might well establish significance meeting National Register criteria for these modest vernacular houses.

As to the single sites scattered throughout much of the City, few, if any, appear to meet National Register criteria for individual listing. The house at 4247 Flad (Inventory #17) may well have been the first concrete block house constructed in Missouri. (See St. Louis Realty Record and Builder, June 1902.) That house, however, is already located within the boundaries of a local, certified historic district--The Shaw Neighborhood District. The house at 5233 Lansdowne Avenue (Inventory #7) is indeed relatively substantial but as an isolated example exhibiting a more traditional four-square massing with Classical Revival detailing, it does not appear to meet criteria. Inventory #10 at 3711 Utah Street is another isolated but substantial house of concrete block construction. It, however, evokes the architectural vocabulary of the late 19th rather than the early 20th century and does not appear to be a candidate for single site listing based

merely on the materials employed. The multi-family building at 3528-26 Pestalozzi Street (Inventory #11) retains its original tile roof and displays an interesting front gable and stepped side parapets. Although illustrated in the St. Louis Realty Record and Builder in January of 1906, this flat is not related to the design development exhibited in the Goodfellow/Julian or Oakherst Place districts but is instead an isolated example of the use of concrete blocks--an example that probably does not meet National Register criteria as a single site. The one-and-a-half story house at 5470 Gilmore (Inventory #75) was built in late 1904. Although the house does retain its retardataire Victorian ornament, it is indeed a traditional house using new materials. That fact in itself would not constitute eligibility nor does the survey indicate that it was a prototype for any other houses built in St. Louis. Perhaps a Statewide survey of concrete block houses would link this building to other resources in Missouri.

The results of this survey have exceeded the anticipated objectives. Two districts comprising a total of 35 contributing buildings were identified and nominations were prepared. Although the third concentration of identified resources cannot be associated with the brief evolution of specific design for concrete block properties in St. Louis, the mere presence of the grouping lends a gestalt or sense of time and place not evidenced in the single sites. As previously noted, this concentration could be the subject of an intensive level survey.

DAVID HICKEY PARK



N. BROADWAY 1729

HALL

HALL

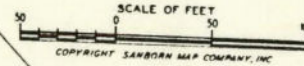
WATER MAIN CONDUIT



PRE-WORLD WAR I
CONCRETE BLOCK
HOUSES

86 INVENTORY NUMBER

4275



6019

TRANS YARD
UNION ELECTRIC CO. OF
MISSOURI SUB STATION
VAC. EXPOSED STEEL MEMBERS
CONC. FLOOR BY PULLER
WELLS

LOWELL ST.

1732

GIMBLIN RD.

98 97 96 95 94 93 92 91 90 89 88 87 86
85 84 83 82

4293

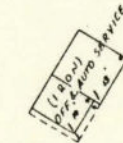
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DODDRIDGE

LOWELL LA.

4293A

N. BROADWAY 1730



USED AUTO SALES



DAY CARE



917 Locust
7th-Floor
St. Louis, Missouri 63101
(314) 421-6474

July 27, 1987

Beverly Fleming
Historic Preservation Program
Missouri Department of Natural Resources
PO Box 176
Jefferson City, MO 65102

Dear Beverly:

I have enclosed a revised final report and additional site map for the citywide pre-World War I Concrete Block survey. Our citywide survey of Ittner-designed schools will follow in the next week or so.

Best regards,

Carolyn H. Toft

enc.

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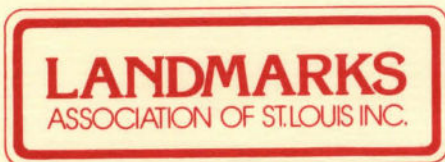
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Carolyn Hewes Toft

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JUL 29 1987

HISTORIC PRESERVATION
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FINAL REPORT - ST. LOUIS CONCRETE BLOCK SURVEY

RESEARCH DESIGN

A group of concrete block houses in northwest St. Louis (now known as the Oakherst Place Concrete Block District, nominated to the National Register) came to our attention. Because no previous survey work had disclosed information on early concrete block construction in St. Louis, it was decided that a citywide survey of pre-WW I concrete block buildings was indicated. The objective of the survey was to identify and catalog all pre-WW I concrete block buildings (excluding outbuildings) in the city of St. Louis, possibly identifying potential National Register districts.

METHODOLOGY

The initial step in conducting this survey was to locate buildings constructed of concrete block within the city limits of St. Louis, Missouri (an area comprising 61.37 square miles). Insurance maps made by the Sanborn Company indicating building material allowed for ready identification of structures by material. These maps were checked systematically, providing the source for lists of concrete block buildings compiled by City Block number and organized spatially.

Field work consisted of using the lists to locate, photograph and map all pre-WW I concrete block buildings, with the exception of garages and outbuildings. All buildings coded as concrete block construction on the maps were investigated; newer buildings were not inventoried. One hundred two sites were identified in this manner. Some archival work was completed on selected buildings; building permits were the primary source of information, used to obtain pertinent dates, original owner, builder and architect. Additionally, deed searches and city directory research were completed for buildings in the areas of greatest concentration.

RESULTS

Of the 102 sites, all but four (one church and three stores) were residential: 46 were single family two-story dwellings; 36 were single family one-story dwellings; 5 were single family 1½-story dwellings; and 11 were multi-family two-story units, 7 of which were duplexes.

While the concrete block buildings were scattered widely throughout the city (see Survey Map), three areas of major concentration were identified; as a result of the survey, two of these (Oakherst Place Concrete Block District and the nearby Goodfellow/Julian Concrete Block District) in the northwest quadrant of the city have been nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. A third concentration in the northern part of the city on Lowell Lane and Lowell Street consists of modest one-story cottages.