

HISTORIC BUILDINGS SURVEY

NORTHWEST WEBSTER
WEBSTER GROVES, MISSOURI
1985-1986

Prepared by Ann Morris
for the St. Louis County Department of Parks and Recreation
under a grant from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources

INTRODUCTION

The Historic Division of the St. Louis County Department of Parks and Recreation is undertaking a survey of Webster Groves in St. Louis County to formulate a comprehensive inventory of its historically and architecturally significant buildings and to sketch a cultural profile of its residents. It is hoped that this information will be of value to city planners for identifying and protecting historic resources and for making decisions pertaining to land use. It is hoped that the survey will help residents appreciate the importance of their historic buildings.

The community of Webster Groves was chosen to be surveyed for several reasons. It is a typical older suburb, having served commuters of St. Louis since the end of the Civil War. Older communities, within the inner ring of suburbs around a central business district, can be subject to decay or abandonment as highways and new homes are built further out. However, Webster Groves has weathered recent urban migrations with property values rising -- houses in great demand. Developers are discovering inner ring suburbs are valuable resources because of their unique building materials and atmosphere, as the conservation of other resources -- energy, fuel and farmland -- becomes imperative. Webster Groves must be surveyed because its building stock contains examples of many styles of architecture that need to be inventoried before preservation priorities can be recommended.

Webster Groves has been studied by sociologists from Washington University because of its stability during years of transition elsewhere and by CBS Television because of its outstanding schools and unusual teenagers. And there is extensive historical material available in the Webster Groves Historical Society Archives including The Kate Moody Collection of Webster Groves History which contains newspaper clippings, letters church bulletins, programs from musical, social and political affairs, speeches and photographs -- all pertaining to Webster Groves -- collected from 1880 to 1950. This makes a comprehensive survey of the community easy and interesting.

Finally, the most compelling reason for surveying Webster Groves is the interest and cooperation of the community. The city established a Historic Preservation Commission in 1983, to designate and protect historic landmarks and districts, and they are anxious to have an inventory of the age and architecture of buildings in Webster Groves. The active historical society is willing to help and at the city hall everyone is interested and cooperative, especially the mayor who is an active member of the Webster Groves Historical Society.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The city of Webster Groves, with a population of 23,000 people and 9,000 buildings, is being divided into manageable study units which reflect old neighborhoods -- areas of historic and cultural similarity. Boundaries of the study units are established along subdivision lines.

Within each study unit an intensive inventory of every building will be made and listed according to street address. The inventory will include: the present owner and the legal description of each property,

as listed in the St. Louis County Real Estate Tax Index available at the Webster Groves City Hall; a brief description of the architectural features of each building; and the date and for whom each building was built, determined from the Webster Groves Building Permits for buildings built after 1910 or 1920, from the Real Estate Tax Assessments for the City of Webster Groves for buildings built between 1896 and 1910 or 1920 and by tracing the title for buildings built before 1896.

A photograph and a State Historic Inventory Form will be included for each building which possess history or architecture that is significant to its neighborhood study unit.

A physical description of the study unit and a general history put together from materials available at the Webster Groves Historical Society Archives, in The Kate Moody Collection of Webster Groves History, in old atlases of St. Louis County and from interviews with long-time residents, will give a feeling for the ambience, the development patterns, the cultural heritage and the historic context -- the essence -- of the neighborhood and will be helpful when formulating a philosophy for preservation and for land use.

A copy of the survey of each study unit will be available at the Historic Division of the St. Louis County Department of Parks and Recreation and in the Building Commissioner's Office at the Webster Groves City Hall.

NORTHWEST WEBSTER

Physical Description:

The study unit that will here be called Northwest Webster extends to the city limits on the north and west. It includes the Webster Groves Subdivision, 187 acres laid out by John Marshall in 1860,¹ and the Alfred Lee Subdivision, 48 acres laid out in 1866,² and 17 acres that Marshall sold in small tracts in the 1860's. This land is north of Lockwood Avenue and west of Elm. Northwest Webster also includes Lot 9 of Pierre Chouteau Jr.'s Subdivision, Daniel Harper's 44 acre tract west of the Missouri Pacific Railroad.

Six blocks in the southeast part of the original Webster Groves Subdivision are a major commercial district of Webster Groves known as Old Webster and a separate study of that district was done in 1983, to help with a redevelopment plan and plans for a local historic district in the business district.

Northwest Webster is hilly and much of it is heavily wooded as older houses and large lots have provided time and space for stately trees to grow. It abounds in open spaces from the rolling hills of the Algonquin Golf Club on the south; to the fifteen salient acres of fields and woods that are Larsen Park; to the large open fields of the Edgewood Children's Center, bordered by strips of trees and underbrush; to the small, grassy Barbre Park on the corner of Elm and Kirkham; and winding back through the center of the whole northwest corner are the wooded hills along the Shady Creek where it parallels Kirkham Avenue.

The oldest streets, those in Marshall's subdivision, are influenced by the topography. The Rock Hill Military Road was laid out along the top of a ridge running north from Jefferson Barracks to Manchester Road. Kirkham, originally called Shady Avenue, followed Shady Creek along the base of a steep hill. Gore Avenue, once called Church Avenue, followed a path that early settlers, south of the railroad tracks, blazed as a short cut to the Rock Hill Presbyterian Church. Later roads follow property lines and are therefore more straight.

A few of the streets in the most western part of Northwest Webster do not have sidewalks, and have a rural appearance: Bacon, Foote, Slocum, Hull, Brainard, Clairmont, Hart, Harper, Arthur and Tyler.

The Northwest Webster study unit contains 665 buildings. Many of the houses in this area are frame, over fifty years old, on large lots. Younger brick or frame ranch homes have filled in between the older houses. There are few apartment buildings in Webster Groves, and the oldest apartment, from 1918, is in this study unit at the corner of North Gore and North Rock Hill Road. There is one commercial building in Northwest Webster, at 602 W. Kirkham, and 16 units of townhouse condominiums were built across the street at 551 W. Kirkham, in 1983, on a large vacant lot where a grocery store had burned to the ground.

There are three special properties in Northwest Webster. The Old Community Baptist Church at 238 W. Kirkham, traces its history back to the end of the Civil War. It was one of the first churches for freed blacks and it housed the first public school for blacks in St. Louis County. The Edgewood Children's Center, a residence and school for children with emotional problems, occupies 19 acres at Gore and Rock Hill Road and its old stone administration building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Finally the Miriam School for Retarded Children serves kids on 4.8 acres that look like a summer camp at 501 Bacon Avenue.

History:

The northwest corner of Webster Groves, part of the Sarpy Tract that was kept by John Sarpy, was rolling hills, small prairies, woods and sink holes. In 1829, three years after Jefferson Barracks was built, a road was laid out across a high ridge from the Barracks north to the Osage Trail. The Osage Trail was the state highway from St. Louis to Springfield and is now called Manchester Road.⁴

In 1832, two brothers from Virginia, John and James Marshall, bought large tracts of land in this corner of Webster Groves and what is now Rock Hill, Missouri. Together they owned all the land from Litzsinger Road south to Lockwood Avenue and from Berry Road east to Bompert Avenue. The Deer Creek branch of the River Des Peres ran east across the north of their property and where it crosses Manchester Road they built log cabins. Each of the Marshalls owned eight slaves, and in 1839 they built frame houses. Fairfax, James Marshall's large white frame house, still stands at 9322 Manchester Road in Rock Hill, Missouri. The Marshall buildings on Manchester served as a stage coach stop, a trading post, the post office and a school, the only ones for miles.⁵

The only other landowner in this northwest corner of Webster until the 1850's was Daniel Harper who bought the northwest forty acres of Pierre Chouteau's Jr.'s subdivision of the Sarpy Tract in 1846.⁶ Harper built a log cabin⁷ and farmed his forty acres until his death in 1893. After his death his family subdivided some of the land.⁸

In 1845, the Marshall brothers gave land and leadership for the establishment of a Presbyterian church. Their slaves built the one room Federal style church from limestone quarried on the Marshall property. Artemus Bullard, the minister of the First Presbyterian Church of St. Louis, delivered the first sermon to the small congregation.⁹

Reverend Bullard, born in Northbridge, Massachusetts in 1802, and a brother-in-law of Henry Ward Beecher, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, became enamoured of the beautiful countryside around the Rock Hill Presbyterian Church and decided it would be a perfect location for the Presbyterian prep school and college which he felt St. Louis needed. The proposed route of the Pacific Railroad would make the southern part of the Marshall land accessible to the city of St. Louis. Reverend Bullard, with his dynamic personality and contagious enthusiasm, was able to purchase twenty acres from John Marshall and raise \$10,000 from Carlos Greeley to build a large, two and a half story, limestone Italianate school building. Bullard named his school Webster College for Boys in honor of Daniel Webster, the United States Senator from Massachusetts renowned for his fiery oratory on behalf of preserving the Union. Bullard attracted outstanding teachers from the east and enrolled the sons of prominent families in St. Louis.¹⁰

In 1853, the Pacific Railroad began operating as far west as Kirkwood and built a wooden platform at the Rock Hill Military Road, calling it the Webster Stop.¹¹

The college flourished for two years. In 1855, Reverend Bullard was invited to ride the inaugural train to Jefferson City with other prominent citizens of St. Louis, newspapermen, historians, a military unit and a band. As the train crossed the trestle over the Gasconade River, the scaffolding gave way and the train plunged thirty feet into the Gasconade River. Artemus Bullard and thirty other St. Louis dignitaries died.¹² After Bullard's death Edward Avery, one of the teachers, ran Webster College for Boys as a secondary boarding school. Webster College for Boys closed in 1859, with the premonition of war and the property reverted to Carlos Greeley.¹³

In 1860, John Marshall laid out a subdivision of almost 280 acres, the southwest part of his property around the railroad stop, and he called it Webster Groves. The land did not sell right away because people were preoccupied with the Civil War. But people were there. Edward Avery moved to a small cottage south of what is now Lockwood and commuted into St. Louis to teach. Stephen Gore and his family had a dry goods store on the south side of Lockwood at the head of what is now Gore Avenue. The Helfensteins, the Studleys, the Plants, the Robinsons and the Prehms lived just south of this area near the railroad before the war. In 1861 Charles Connon, from Scotland, bought four lots from Marshall and established the first greenhouses and wholesale florist company in the St. Louis area.

In 1864, Connon's brother-in-law, Augustus Moody, bought a lot by the railroad tracks and built a large frame grocery and dry goods store attached to his house. It served as the post office until Augustus Moody was killed by a mailbag thrown from a train in 1870.¹⁴

During the Civil War the center for all social activity was the Rock Hill Presbyterian Church. The church housed and pacified many tense feelings as most of the residents of Webster Groves, near the railroad were from New England and sympathized with the North, while the Marshalls, who had built and endowed the church, sympathized with the South. The war was seldom discussed at church.¹⁵

Carlos Greeley, a partner of Greeley and Gale wholesale grocery in St. Louis and the owner of the Webster College for Boys building, helped to establish the Western Sanitary Commission in 1861, for the relief of sick and wounded soldiers of the Civil War.¹⁶ He let the Sanitary Commission use the old school to assemble bandages and hospital supplies, and there are rumors that it may have served as a hospital during the war. The Enrolled Militia of Webster Groves met in the basement of the old school and Henry Prehn drilled the would-be soldiers.¹⁷ In 1864, the Western Sanitary Commission purchased the old rock Webster College from Carlos Greeley to use as a Soldiers' Orphans' Home. Women of the community served on the Visiting Committee to inspect the orphanage.¹⁸

In 1865, Nathan D. Allen, a real estate developer, purchased two large lots on Lockwood Avenue in the Webster Groves Subdivision and built his frame Italianate house.¹⁹ The end of the war allowed men to think of the future, and in 1866 others began to follow Allen's example, building frame Victorian houses in the healthy country atmosphere. The healthy atmosphere was important because the city of St. Louis was plagued with cholera every summer. Even after the war people did not realize that cholera was transmitted by sewage and contaminated drinking water.²⁰ Alfred and Sarah Lee had nine children, and six of them died before they were six years old, one every summer, until they moved to Webster Groves. Alfred Lee, a partner in the Shapleigh Hardware Company, bought 48 acres from John Marshall in 1865, and built a large Italianate mansion on Lee Avenue in 1866. He subdivided the 48 acres into four or five acre lots and sold six of them.²¹

The railroad made it possible for men to commute to St. Louis from Webster Groves and John Marshall sold lots that were small enough to be economic for non-farmers.

The firm of Bigelow and Griffin financed and built many of the early houses in Webster Groves in the 1860's. Peers Griffin was an architect and his cousin, Jotham Bigelow, was a builder. They built two-story and two-and-a-half-story, frame, Victorian homes, some having interior chimneys with fireplaces opening into three or four rooms. For themselves, Bigelow and Griffin bought Lot 41 of the Webster Groves Subdivision and divided it down the middle. Griffin built a house of federal proportions and symmetry and behind him Bigelow built an Italianate house.²²

A few houses went up on Marshall Place and on Foote and Lee.²³ Henry Prehn bought the northwest corner of Gore and the Pacific railroad

tracks where he built a frame house for his large family and a grocery and dry goods store that handled a little bit of everything.²⁴ Some time in the 1860's a board and batten railroad station was built at Gore Avenue on the north side of the tracks next to Prehn's. The intersection of Gore and the railroad tracks was becoming the nucleus of a commercial district, the heart of Webster Groves.

With the war over and the community growing, four churches were organized in 1866: Emmanuel Episcopal down on Old Orchard and First Congregational, Webster Groves Presbyterian and the First Baptist churches in the Webster Groves Subdivision.²⁵

The freed blacks established the First Baptist Church on Shady Avenue, now called Kirkham. Emmanuel Cartwright was one of the early ministers of the First Baptist Church and he built a frame home on Shady Avenue west of the church. Cartwright had carried on the work of John Berry Meachum -- the African Baptist Church in St. Louis and the school for blacks -- when Meachum died in 1854. The school was conducted on a riverboat in the middle of the Mississippi because teaching blacks was against the law in Missouri before the Civil War. Cartwright also helped to establish the Rose Hill Baptist Church in Kirkwood and was the leading spirit of the Union Baptist Association, an association of black Baptist churches in eastern Missouri.²⁶

Reverend William Porter, a retired minister, and editor of the Journal of Agriculture, sold land to the First Baptist Church on Shady Avenue. He laid out a subdivision on the hill above Shady Avenue up by the railroad tracks and named the streets Lincoln and Sherman.²⁷ He sold lots to black families, many of them from other states, looking for relatives, jobs and homes in the confusion after the war. The first school for blacks in St. Louis County was conducted at the First Baptist Church by a Miss Dotwell in 1866. Miss Dotwell worked for J. Milton Turner, the black educator who started schools for black all over Missouri when the Civil War was over.²⁸

In 1868, citizens of Webster Groves met at the Missouri Pacific Railway depot to organize the School District of Webster Groves. They established a school for the 225 white children and took over the one for the thirty black children. T. L. Slocum, who lived at the top of Slocum Avenue in the northwest corner, became the principal and teacher for the white children with Augusta Murfelt as his assistant. Emma Babcock donated her time to teach the black children in a small cabin next to the First Baptist Church on Shady Avenue.²⁹

When Sumner High School was founded in St. Louis in 1875, -- the first high school for blacks in the country -- the principal for the first four years was a white man named Alvah C. Clayton who lived in Northwest Webster at the top of St. John Avenue off of Kirkham.³⁰

In 1869, with only twelve soldiers' orphans left, the Western Sanitary Commission merged its Soldiers' Orphans' Home with the St. Louis Protestant Orphans' Asylum from the city and the St. Louis Protestant Orphans' Asylum moved out to the old rock house in Webster Groves. The orphanage added classroom facilities behind the rock house and raised much of its own food on the property. The children enjoyed the experience of farm chores. Residents of Webster Groves served on the

board of directors of the orphanage, and Dr. Bristol supervised the health care of the children. The children attended Sunday school at the Webster Groves Presbyterian Church.³¹

The Pitzman Atlas of St. Louis City and County of 1878, indicates that there were twelve large irregular houses, in 1878, that no longer exist. Built right after the Civil War, these were probably Italianate mansions. Alfred Lee's Italianate mansion on Lee Avenue was torn down in the 1940's, and the land was subdivided to accommodate thirteen smaller houses.³² Others were torn down or burned except for the one owned by Rebecca Mack at the corner of N. Gore and Rock Hill Road. It was incorporated into an apartment building there in 1918.³³

Italianate houses which do survive in Northwest Webster are Jotham Bigelow's at 1 Clairborne, John Fulton's brick mansion at 300 N. Gore, M. L. Gerould's at 25 Marshall Place, Calvin Hunn's at 140 N. Rock Hill Road, and Daniel Waldo Wood's at 168 Parsons Avenue.³⁴

Jotham Bigelow sold his large Italianate house to Colonel Nathaniel Claiborne, from Sweet Springs Virginia, in the late 1870's. Claiborne's daughter, Jennie, married Robert McCormick Adams, grandson of the inventor of the reaper, and their wedding was a social event of national prominence. Robert and Jennie inherited the house and raised a large family there -- a center of Webster Groves society.³⁵

An economic depression swept across the country in the 1870's but two factors caused particular hardship in Webster Groves. Jane Morrison, Gregoire Sarpy's daughter, contested the Sarpy land grant. People could not buy property with a clear title so property values plummeted. In addition, the Missouri Pacific Railroad decided it was more profitable to handle only freight and for ten years the Missouri Pacific waged a railroad war against commuters, sometimes changing schedules and sometimes stopping only in Kirkwood so that Webster residents had to hire a horse in Kirkwood to get home. The Congregational Church suffered from the depression and had to let its minister go. The Presbyterian church and the Baptist church helped the Congregational church pay its debts.³⁶

The 1880's brought an end to the depression. The Morrison suit was settled, people could buy land with a clear title, and the Missouri Pacific Railroad decided to cooperate with commuters. A housing boom began. All over Webster Groves, frame Victorian houses were built for commuters.³⁷ Two beautiful mansions were built on the north side of Lockwood, one for Benjamin Lippincott who owned a soda water company and one for Charles Ferguson, the vice president of the Collier White Lead Company.³⁸ Demetrius Jannopoulos, the owner of the Missouri Tent and Awning Company and the Greek Consul in St. Louis, built a fabulous home in the shape of a Greek cross at the end of Lee Avenue.³⁹ But more often than for wealthy commuters, this northwest part of Webster Groves was home for local craftsmen and merchants: carpenters, contractors, plumbers, shoemakers, blacksmiths, tailors, butchers, dry goods merchants, grocery men, saloonkeepers, liverymen, a grain and feed merchant, a buggy-maker, three wholesale florists and a dairyman. There were also several teachers, two newspaper men and a conductor and a crossing guard for the railroad. Most families did a little farming raising fruit, vegetables and chickens.⁴⁰

The northwest corner of Webster Groves has been integrated since the Civil War. Black families owned houses along Shady Avenue and on Slocum, Foote and Parsons and in Porter's Subdivision. An outstanding landmark was Hester Foster's house at the corner of Kirkham and Parsons. Hester was a former slave who did the laundry for the finest families in Webster Groves. Once a year she held a barbecue for her customers, and it was a mark of social distinction to be invited and to be seen at Hester Foster's barbecue. The house sat in the middle of two acres of fabulous flowers until it burned to the ground.⁴¹

The architecture built in the northwest corner of Webster Groves in the 1880's was simple frame Victorian. It was common, vernacular, homemade. John Prehn, a carpenter from Germany lived on Parsons and built several simple houses with gable roofs in Northwest Webster, for himself, his six children, and to rent or sell. He had a son who became a plumber, but John Prehn's house, lived in by his daughter, did not get indoor plumbing until the 1950's.⁴² John Berg, a German contractor who lived on Kirkham near Larson Park, built vernacular buildings in Webster Groves -- many in the business district. William Kerruish, a carpenter from Scotland, lived on Lee Avenue, and he and his son George built vernacular and American Foursquare houses in Webster Groves.⁴⁴

In 1884, Jubal Early, the Confederate General famous for his leadership during Sheridan's ride through the Shenandoah Valley and for his raids on the forts around Washington, D.C., had a large frame house built, 115 N. Rock Hill Road, and he gave it to his nieces, Betty and Ruth Early. Jubal Early never married or lived in Webster Groves but his nieces lived here for over forty years. They raised a niece and nephew here and they had an orchard and elaborate flower garden leading down to Kirkham Avenue. The front of the house faced Kirkham. In the 1930's the house was converted into apartments.⁴⁵

In 1886, the St. Louis Protestant Orphans' Asylum had 110 children living in the old rock house and the brick classroom addition was in unsafe condition. The board of directors decided to build two, frame, Queen Ann houses according to the new, English and German cottage system. Progressive for this country, the cottages proved very successful, creating an atmosphere almost like home.⁴⁶

In 1888, Hans Bredall subdivided land along North Elm at the end of Marshall Place.⁴⁷ It became known as Danes Row as several carpenters, plasterers and contractors from Denmark built houses there.⁴⁸

Three major subdivisions were created in Northwest Webster in the 1890's. In 1891, Mr. Helfenstein subdivided all of his land west of the Missouri Pacific Railroad, creating the Oak Grove Addition to Webster Groves.⁴⁹ Frame foursquare houses went up, three before 1900, seven before 1910, six before 1920 and twenty-three in the 1920's.⁵⁰ Daniel Harper died in 1893, and his family subdivided the farm.⁵¹ Houses were built on Harper's farm for two contractors and a wholesale nurseryman with greenhouses.⁵² In 1896, B. F. Shields further subdivided a large part of the Harper property into very small lots on which small, inexpensive houses were gradually pasted together.⁵³

A significant event in Webster Groves history took place in 1896 in the northwest part of Webster Groves when Bertram Atwater, a commercial artist from Chicago, came to visit. Three boys, hanging around Brannon's Saloon, decided to hold him up as he walked from the station to his sweetheart's home on Lee Avenue. The boys hid in some bushes next to a board sidewalk over a small ravine on Lee, but when they jumped out Atwater pulled a gun and shot one of them. One of the boys shot and killed Atwater. The townspeople of Webster Groves were horrified, aghast, that such a thing could happen in their idyllic community. They caught the three boys and planned to lynch them. The quick thinking constable was able to spirit the boys away to the Clayton jail and a fair trial. Two of the boys were hung and the third went to prison. The citizens of Webster Groves decided it was time to incorporate in order to get rid of the saloons and hire a full time policeman.⁵⁴

A committee appointed William Fleming, a pharmacist who lived on Marshall Place, to be the first mayor. The first city hall was a room rented from S. A. Moody in his two-story frame real estate office on the northwest corner of Gore and Lockwood. The Board of Aldermen established such a high fee for the licensing of saloons that the saloons were all gone from Webster before the end of the year.⁵⁵ For the next ten years the city government concerned itself with bond elections, taxes and franchises to bring water, sewers, gas, electricity and granitoid sidewalks to the residents of Webster Groves. The town was a sea of mud in those days.⁵⁶ And the Kirkwood Ferguson Street Car Line was laid through the northwest corner of Webster following Kirkham Avenue from Rock Hill Road east and following the Deer Creek through fields and woods west to Kirkwood. The Kirkwood Ferguson Street Car was a popular commuter system straight to the 1904 World's Fair and Washington University. The street cars ran until the late 1950's; and now the right of way is part of Larson Park and a woods behind homes on Clairmont and then it crosses a bridge into the Algonquin Golf Club.⁵⁷

The turn of the century was a time of optimism in Webster Groves. One or two frame houses were built on each of the streets in Northwest Webster, sometimes for a son or daughter of the family across the street and sometimes to rent.⁵⁸

Alfred Lee built a frame foursquare house for his wife and daughter and sold his Italianate mansion to Louis Bry in 1900.⁵⁹ The Brys, a Jewish family, owned a department store in St. Louis and a summer home near the west end of Bacon Avenue. They gave their summer home property to the Sommers Jewish Day Nursery as a summer camp for disadvantaged children.⁶⁰

During the decade before 1920 the commercial district at Gore and Lockwood continued to grow. Leonard Nagel, who lived at 177 Slocum, built a one-story, commercial brick building on the southeast corner of Gore and Kirkham in 1913. Nagel had helped to build the Singer Building, the first skyscraper in St. Louis in 1872 and then in 1923 he helped to tear it down to build the Federal Reserve Bank.⁶¹

In 1916, the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company built a two-story, Classical Revival, brick building on Lockwood at Elm where the Lippincott

mansion had stood. Elm did not go north at that time. The north side of Lockwood was all large frame houses. Dr. H. C. Creveling bought the old Lippincott mansion from the phone company and had it moved around to Farm Avenue. He had his doctor's office in the house and during the Depression the Davis family ran a tearoom in the house.⁶²

About fifty houses were built in Northwest Webster from 1910 to 1920. Many were of the style the Old House Journal has named American Foursquare. On Hillside Avenue several homes were built for the Cramer family. Charles Cramer was a plasterer and built the plaster buildings for the 1904 World's Fair. During this decade and the 1920's he covered some of the old frame houses in Webster with plaster.⁶³ The stucco look was fashionable.

John Massengale, owner of the St. Louis and Tennessee River Packet Company, a steamboat line, brought his large family to Webster Groves in 1910, to see about buying the old Lee mansion from the Brys. But since the Lee mansion did not have indoor plumbing the Massengales decided to buy the big, ten-year-old, Queen Ann house at 537 Lee Avenue from Mrs. Harris, Mrs. Bry's sister. Massengale bought the property across the street for his three married children, remodelling the old Kerriush farmhouse for one daughter and building two new houses for other children. The youngest son, George, built a house next to his parents' in 1930.⁶⁴

When the Brys and the Harrises moved into the city the Brys rented their summer camp to Miriam No. 17, United Order True Sisters, a philanthropic organization of Jewish women, to use as a convalescent home during the non-camping months. In 1917, a second building was built and the Rosa Bry Convalescent Home operated year round, the day camp continuing in the summer.⁶⁵

Jacob Larson, a professional horticulturist, moved to the Oak Grove Addition in 1912. He bought some of the Daniel Harper land, built greenhouses and introduced hardy azaleas to this area. During World War I the National Guard used Larson's Field as a drill field. After the war the sewer department asked to purchase Larson's Field for septic tanks and Larson agreed if the sewer department would develop a playground for children over the septic tanks. Larson and his sons maintained the playground, spending from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. mowing the whole field by hand.⁶⁶ The city officially dedicated Larson Park, consisting of the field and additional property purchased from the Berg family in 1963. It has tennis courts, a picnic pavilion, a baseball diamond, a creek and a jogging par course.⁶⁷

On the hill above Jacob Larson, on Daniel Harper's old farm, several subdivisions were laid out before 1920 -- W. A. Harper's Subdivision of Lot 5 of Harper's Subdivision, Pocahontas Park, and H. C. Ames Subdivision.⁶⁸ The houses that were built on Harper's Hill are mostly bungalows and their modest value and the way they are hidden in the woods on narrow, winding, dead end roads -- some less than ten feet wide -- creates the feeling of a Chatuaqua summer camp ground.

In the twenties a little commercial area grew up in Northwest Webster around the Comfort stores. Frank Comfort and his large family moved to Shields Addition to Webster on Kirkham Avenue in 1916. One of his older

sons, Will, had severe asthma and could not work regular hours; so Frank decided to establish a grocery store. In a small board and batten building with a gasoline pump in front they sold staples, gasoline and coal oil. They ran a typical country store and lived across the street. Will died in the flu epidemic of 1918, and Earl and Ray came home from the army to help their father run the store. An older brother, Ed, was a contractor and built a larger store for the family on the northeast corner of Kirkham and Hull. This became Comfort's Grocery, selling staples, meat and produce, delivering and extending credit, thriving through the twenties, struggling through the Depression, giving food to many out of work, and finally closing in 1942, when Earl went back to war. That store was torn down and became the site of Jansen's IGA in the fifties, sixties and seventies.

But back in the twenties when bootleggers lived across the Kirkwood Ferguson Streetcar tracks, when the Webster Blues played baseball in Larson Field and contractors were making a suburb out of the rural fields of Northwest Webster, another son, Harry, took over the original location on the south side of Kirkham, selling gasoline, tires, oil, hardware, dishes, tobacco, candy and ice cream. In 1926, Harry tore down the one room store and built the two-story brick store that is 602 Kirkham. Comfort's General Merchandise was open from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. catering to contractors and kids. The family lived upstairs and if Harry tried to sleep late on Sunday a motorist heading for an outing in the country would pull up to the pump before seven and honk his horn for service. Harry would stick his head out of the window and yell, "Be right down." He had a ping pong table in the store that was always in use and all summer the play-by-play broadcasts of baseball games floated out the windows and through the screen door.

In the thirties, as the Depression deepened, it hit Comfort's General Merchandise harder than it hit Comfort's Grocery. Neighbors out of work did not buy non-essentials like tobacco, ice cream or gasoline. Several contractors in the neighborhood who had been buying all of their paint and hardware from Harry Comfort were caught in the crash and could not pay their large bills. Some just went to Florida. Finally in 1935, the building and loan company on Gore foreclosed on Harry's store. Harry moved to Cuba, Missouri, and opened a successful motel on Route 66. When he retired he moved back to Iola Drive in Webster.⁶⁹

During the boom of the twenties all of Webster prospered. In Northwest Webster over one hundred houses, most of them frame bungalows, were built with building permits and some were built without. Contractors and developers built houses speculatively, before they had buyers. In an attempt to preserve the suburban, country atmosphere the city of Webster Groves passed the first zoning ordinance in the St. Louis area in 1923.⁷⁰ It insured that Webster Groves would be a residential community of single family houses except in the few areas already commercial. The ordinance provided that apartments could only be located in areas zoned commercial. Residents of Webster Groves have always opposed apartments fearing that apartments attract undesirable transients.

The earliest apartments in Webster Groves were located in Northwest Webster. John Berg, the contractor, built the apartments at Gore and

Rock Hill for Cyrus Peterson in 1918, before zoning.⁷¹ The western unit is constructed around an old frame house. All eight units differ from each other. They are like two-story townhouses and have a Mediterranean flavor because of their stucco exterior, red tile roof and casement windows. The present residents think of themselves as artists, philosophers and writers in a European atmosphere.⁷²

With thoughts about the quality of life and preserving green spaces, the city plan commission proposed creating a park along Shady Avenue (now Kirkham) in 1926. The plan meant condemning homes of black families. People living on Shady wrote letters to the editor published in the Webster News Times, and the bond election failed. There were no city parks in Webster Groves until the 1940's.⁷³

By 1924, the First Baptist Church had outgrown its little building on Shady Avenue. The church built a bigger brick building farther east on Kirkham. Roscoe James, a member of First Baptist Church and a resident of North Webster, was the contractor who built the new church. Some of the members of First Baptist Church could not bear to leave the little old church by the Deer Creek so they formed a separate congregation called the Old Community Baptist Church and still meet at the old church. The old church has had many facelifts but the foundations of the building and the congregation are 117 years old.⁷⁴

The Depression settled quietly over Northwest Webster. Only twenty-one houses were built in Northwest Webster in the thirties.⁷⁵ The St. Louis Protestant Orphans' Asylum had to turn away some of the children whose parents wanted to leave them at the orphanage and look for work.⁷⁶

In the meantime, Andrew McDonnell, the police chief, who lived on Moody Avenue, organized activities for boys, especially on Halloween nights. And he confiscated pinball machines because he believed pinball machines lead to gambling and moral decay. He was a local hero.⁷⁷

Lesser heroes of the thirties were Mr. and Mrs. Grant Simpson Ward of Marshall Place. Mr. Ward was a detective for the Wabash Railroad, and the neighborhood children loved to meet his train and walk home hearing his stories of capturing kidnapers and murderers and going to Canada to guard King George and Queen Elizabeth. Mrs. Ward served hot dinners to hoboes who jumped the train in Webster. She never let them in the house but she served dinner on the back porch on a tray with her best linen and silver.⁷⁸

In the residential area, a Northwest Webster Improvement Association was organized in 1957 to enhance the area and to provide social opportunities for neighborhood spirit. It included all of the residential area of this study unit and sponsored activities such as clearing and landscaping a vacant lot on Kirkham and Gore and one at Tyler and Harper, holding country fairs to raise money for a playground, having a neighborhood hot line to call for helpers and tools to build a fence or a garage, and plain old parties. In the early sixties many older communities were in a state of flux as new highways spawned new communities and people moved west to avoid school integration. The Northwest Webster Improvement Association contributed to the

stability of its integrated community by welcoming blacks members and fostering the good feelings of neighborhood spirit.⁷⁹

In the 1940's fifty-nine new houses were built in Northwest Webster, predominantly one-story, brick and frame ranch houses.⁸⁰ The St. Louis Protestant Orphans' Asylum was sending its children to the public schools and, at the request of the children, changed its name to Edgewood Children's Center to soften the stigma of an orphanage.⁸¹

In the 1950's Tedford Lewis of Kirkham Avenue in Northwest Webster built two unique, modern houses on Daniel Harper's hill for Edward Boccia and Rudi Turini, St. Louis artists on the faculty at Washington University.⁸² In other parts of Northwest Webster the housing boom of the 1950's induced developers to fill in remaining large pieces of land with 120 small, one-story, tract houses, looking very much alike.

The automobile was king. Trolleys and commuter trains stopped running. Albert Jansen built a modern IGA supermarket on Kirkham where Comfort's Grocery Store had been, in 1950.⁸³ It was very popular until it burned to the ground, in 1977.⁹⁴

Also in the 1950's Clarissa Start, who lived in John Fulton's beautiful, brick, Italianate mansion at 300 N. Gore, began writing a popular feature column for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch about Motherhood, Apple Pie and Webster Groves. Start wrote a history of Webster Groves for the Bicentennial which was published by the city. She has since moved to the country and writes less frequently.⁸⁵

During the 1960's and 1970's all of the homes in William Porter's Subdivision, the early black neighborhood, were torn down. The kids and dogs and spontaneous porches have been completely replaced by concrete block or aluminum warehouses.⁸⁶

Today

The woodsy, rural northwest part of Webster Groves shelters artists, sculptors, craftsmen, writers, educators, musicians, theologians, professional people, merchants and a world renowned entomologist. There are skylights and sculptures and studios in Northwest Webster that make one think of an artist colony. Creative free spirits have constructed new barns or two-story carriage houses on Marshall Place, Thompson Place, Foote Avenue and a glass barn attached to a house on Slocum. The glass barn was used to raise rabbits and sheep until the neighbors complained about the sheep.

A two-story log cabin was built from a kit at 140 Parsons Avenue in 1979, and a solar house was built at 105 Parsons Avenue in 1979.⁸⁷ In 1983 sixteen townhouse condominium units were built on the corner of Kirkham and Hull on the vacant lot where Jansen's IGA burned.⁸⁸ And the Algonquin Golf Club on the south and west borders of Daniel Harper's original 40 acres is trying to purchase every property along its borders to tear down the houses and expand the golf course.⁸⁹

Developers are trying hard to find places to build in Webster Groves. There is a need for apartments for older residents. There have been six proposed multifamily projects in the last year or two in Webster Groves and most have met with opposition. Sooner or later developers are

bound to discover the open spaces and the modest property values in Northwest Webster.

The home of T. L. Slocum, the first principal and teacher in Webster Groves, had a devastating fire this summer and is vacant now. It stands alone on an entire block. John Fulton's Italianate mansion on North Gore, where Clarissa Start used to live, has been for sale and vacant for over a year. It is sadly neglected yet it is a landmark worthy of National Register status.

As changes come to Northwest Webster it is imperative that efforts be made to preserve the heritage of the area -- especially the black heritage -- ephemeral when old and unrecorded, as it is along Kirkham Avenue. And efforts should be made to appreciate and enhance the atmosphere of wilderness and open space, of park and flood plain and very special institutions, that makes this area unique to Webster Groves.

FOOTNOTES

1. St. Louis City Deed Book 6; pages 28-29.
2. St. Louis City Deed Book 7; page 29.
3. Julius Pitzman; Atlas of St. Louis City and County; 1878;
4. Velma Benner; Webster Groves; 1950; p. 11.
5. Celeste Wagner Blann; History of Rock Hill; 1976; p. 1.
6. Ann Morris; How to Research the History of Your Webster Groves Home; p. 12.
7. "Armstrong, Luther"; Kate Moody Collection of Webster Groves History
8. St. Louis County Recorder of Deeds Plat Book 4; p. 59.
9. Clarissa Start; Webster Groves; 1976; p. 15.
10. Ibid.; pp. 15-16.
11. Ibid; p. 18.
12. William Hyde and Howard Conard; Encyclopedia History of St. Louis; (St. Louis: The Southern History Company, 1899); p. 874.
13. Start; p. 18.
14. From The Kate Moody Collection of Webster Groves History. See individual family names.
15. "Armstrong, Luther;" The Kate Moody Collection of Webster Groves History.
16. Ann Morris; "History of the St. Louis Protestant Orphan's Asylum;" published in The Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society; January, 1980; p.86.

17. "Plant Family;" The Kate Moody Collection of Webster Groves History.
18. "History of the St. Louis Protestant Orphan's Asylum;" p. 86.
19. St. Louis County Recorder of Deeds Book 41, p. 48.
20. Ernest Kirschten; Catfish and Crystal; (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1960); pp. 158-160.
21. Conversation with Miss Sarah Booth.
22. "224 College;" Geneva Hansen's Notebook; located at the Webster Groves Historical Society Archives.
23. Pitzman Atlas; 1878.
24. Webster Groves Historical Society Cookbook; 1978; p. 82.
25. Start; p. 27.
26. Webster Groves Historical Society Newsletter; December, 1982.
27. St. Louis City Plat Book 7; p. 90.
28. The Douglass Oracle, 1935; p. 10.
29. "Schools;" The Kate Moody Collection of Webster Groves History.
30. A History of Sumner High School; published by Sumner High School; 1975.
31. "History of the St. Louis Protestant Orphan's Asylum;" p. 86.
32. Conversation with Sarah Booth.
33. Conversation with Louise Berg Rutherford.
34. See individual Missouri State Historic Inventory sheets.
35. Webster Groves Historical Society Cookbook; p. 42.
36. Sylvia Schmid; Centennial History of the First Congregational Church; 1966; pp. 8-9.
37. Ann Morris; 1977 Century Street; (Webster Groves Historical Society, 1977); p. 3.
38. "Lippincott" and "Ferguson, Charles W.;" The Kate Moody Collection of Webster Groves History.
39. The Webster Groves Historical Society Cookbook; p. 168.
40. Conversations with Louise Berg Rutherford, Esther Jones, Mrs. James McMillan, L. Ferrand Booth and John Brown.

41. Conversation with Otto Zinke.
42. Conversation with Louise Berg Rutherford.
43. Ibid.
44. "Kerruish, William;" The Kate Moody Collection of Webster Groves History.
45. The Webster Groves Historical Society Cookbook; p. 124.
46. "History of the St. Louis Protestant Orphan's Asylum;" p. 88.
47. St. Louis County Plat Book 1; p. 80.
48. Conversation with John Brown.
49. St. Louis County Plat Book 1; p. 146.
50. Real Estate Tax Assessments for the City of Webster Groves; 1896-1920 Webster Groves Building Permits.
51. St. Louis County Plat Book 4; p. 59.
52. Conversation with Louise Berg Rutherford.
53. St. Louis County Plat Book 1; p. 139.
54. Start; pp. 63-68.
55. Start; pp. 68-69.
56. "Webster Groves -- Civic Improvements;" The Kate Moody Collection of Webster Groves History.
57. Conversation with Mrs. James McMillan.
58. Real Estate Tax Assessments for the City of Webster Groves, 1896-1910.
59. Ibid; 1900.
60. "The Miriam School;" by Josephine Muchweiler and Joan Geoghegan.
61. "Nagel, Leonard;" The Kate Moody Collection of Webster Groves History.
62. Conversation with John Brown.
63. Conversations with Otto Zinke and John Brown.
64. Conversation with Jane Stussie.

65. "The Miriam School".
66. Conversation with Fred Larson.
67. Conversation with Webster Groves City Clerk, Mary Lou Miller.
68. William A. Harper's Subdivision; 1910; St. Louis County Plat Book 8; p. 106. Pocahontas Park; 1911; St. Louis County Plat Book 8; p. 24. H. C. Ames Subdivison; 1915; St. Louis County Plat Book 12; p. 32.
69. Emma Comfort Dunn; an unpublished family history.
70. Conversation with Webster Groves City Clerk, Mary Lou Miller.
71. Real Estate Tax Assessments for the City of Webster Groves, 1896-1918.
72. Conversation with Donna Charron.
73. "Webster Groves Parks;" The Kate Moody Collection of Webster Groves History.
74. "A History of First Baptist Church of Webster Groves."
75. Webster Groves Building Permits.
76. "History of the St. Louis Protestant Orphan's Asylum;" p. 89.
77. "McDonnell, Andrew;" The Kate Moody Collection of Webster Groves History.
78. 1977 Century Street; p. 27.
79. Conversation with Marshall Magner.
80. Webster Groves Building Permits.
81. "History of the St. Louis Protestant Orphan's Asylum;" p. 90.
82. Webster Groves Building Permits.
83. Webster Groves Building Permit #9187.
84. Conversation with Webster Groves City Clerk, Mary Lou Miller.
85. Conversation with Clarissa Start.
86. Webster Groves Building Permits.
87. See Missouri State Historic Inventory sheets.
88. Conversation with Webster Groves City Clerk, Mary Lou Miller.
89. Conversation with Fred Larson.