

CARR SQUARE (61)

LOCATION

This near Northside neighborhood is bounded by Cass Avenue on the North, Cole Street on the South, North Tucker Boulevard and North 13th Street on the East, and North Jefferson on the West.

HISTORY

Carr Square historically provided housing for successive waves of immigrants to the area. German Protestants first inhabited the area, settling around Carr Square itself.

About 1842, a group of Irish immigrants from County Kerry settled to the northeast near 18th Street and O’Fallon, an area that later became known as “Kerry Patch.” The Irish immigrants built one-room shacks, claiming the land as squatter’s rights. Fortunately, an empathetic party, the Mullaphy, family owned much of the land and accepted their presence. After 1870, growing numbers of Polish immigrants made their home in “Kerry Patch,” supplanting the Irish. By the 1880s, many German Protestants made an outward migration from Carr Square, succeeded in the area by Orthodox Jews. By 1920, the communities north and west of downtown assumed a polyglot character of mixed nationalities, including immigrants from Russia and the Balkan countries.



The depression and World War II brought large numbers of African-American migrants to the central portions of the city. They came in search of a better existence from rural areas of the South. For most, however, their new urban home came with harsh realities. They often lived in decrepit buildings erected before the days of indoor plumbing and central heating, many of which had been “remodeled” by landlords into even smaller units. It was partially in response to such overcrowded and unsanitary housing conditions that public housing emerged.

Carr Square and adjacent Columbus Square became testing grounds of public housing projects for St. Louis and for the country as a whole. The earliest housing project in the neighborhood was Carr Square Village, a low-rise development built in 1942 for poor, largely migrant African Americans. Nonetheless, the area became better known for the leviathan Pruitt-Igoe, begun in 1954. With the urban renewal slum-clearance—by some called “Negro-removal”—of Mill Creek Valley, 35 high-rise towers were built to house the large group of African Americans displaced. Also during this time period, when modern high-rise public housing projects were in vogue, Vaughn Family Apartments was built to the east of Pruitt-Igoe. In contrast to the glut of negative connotations surrounding high-rise housing projects today, it is useful to remember some of the ethos surrounding these projects. By modernizing the conditions of the poorest dwellers, urban planners hoped the lives of people might change. Nevertheless, the lives of people who were moved into Pruitt-Igoe did not change for the better; the condition of the housing project changed for the worst. Pruitt-Igoe was memorialized in history as the ultimate modernist failure with its implosion in 1976.

With the destruction of what had been one of the earliest and largest high-rise housing projects in the country, the movement away from large high-rise public housing began. By the 1980s, the same projects noted for their progressive vision became known for crime, drug wars, and poor conditions. Nevertheless, during this same period of disillusionment, another model for public housing arose. Carr Square Village became one of the first public housing projects to convert from management by the Local Housing Authority to a program of tenant management.



CHARACTERISTICS

Today, the neighborhood is home to Carr Square Village, Vaughn, Murphy Park, and O'Fallon Place. Still a center of public housing, much of Carr Square today reflects these larger changes in public housing as a whole.

Under the tenant management program at Carr Square Village, social service programs were implemented and development projects begun. In the early 1990s, a project was begun to renovate Carr Square and convert to tenant-ownership. Phase I of

the project concentrated on half of the original 658 units. Densities were lowered by demolition of certain units, renovation of others, and the construction of new units. The Housing Authority transferred ownership of the land on which the new construction was built to the Carr Square Tenant Management Corporation. Phase II of the project involved replacement of the other half of the units with new single-family homes. These homes were to create vital stability through home ownership within Carr Square Village.

In October 1997, HUD stripped the Housing Authority of its contract authority, citing improprieties in the awarding of contracts. By November, Executive Director Janice Washington resigned. Her replacement, Thomas Costello, trimmed more than a fifth of his staff, and announced plans to improve efficiency by privatizing some of the management functions. During the same period, tenant management ended at Cochran Gardens in adjacent Columbus Square. As part of the development project mentioned above, Carr Square Tenant Management Corporation became owners of the newly constructed units, making it difficult for the Housing Authority to take management away from them as partial owners of the project. Today, Carr Square TMC is the last public housing project under tenant management and still waiting for Phase II of the project to materialize. In the meantime, the units awaiting demolition have deteriorated and become an eyesore, detracting from improvements made on the rest of Carr Square Village.

The most recent trend to arise in public housing is the movement towards smaller mixed-income semicommercial units. McCormack Baron, a local developer, has been a lead player both in the Carr Square neighborhood and on a national level, first with O'Fallon Place and more recently with the Murphy Park development. O'Fallon Place consists of 675 apartments, of which 275 are Section 8 and the rest are market-rate. The first phase of Murphy Park opened in June 1997. Most of the Vaughn high-rise public housing was demolished; the remaining towers are senior housing. Thus, Murphy Park was built to replace high-rise public housing with lower-density mixed-income townhouses. Of the more than 400 units, roughly 55 percent were set aside for low-income households who

qualify for public housing. More affluent households, paying market rates, occupy the remainder. To make the development more attractive to middle-income residents, McCormack Baron took the lead in renovating Jefferson School. Over \$2 million in corporate funds were raised to install air-conditioning and façade improvements.

INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Although a large portion of the Pruitt-Igoe site still lies vacant and may remind many of past failure, it has also made possible opportunities for new development in the Carr Square neighborhood. In recent years, the area has become a hub of specialized educational facilities such as Carr Lane Visual and Performing Arts Middle School, Pruitt Military Academy, and the Gateway School Complex. The Gateway School Complex holds great promises for the future of the area. The complex is made up of an elementary school, a middle school, and Michael School for disabled students; each focuses on science, math, and technology curricula. In addition, the complex includes a windmill, aquatic life pond, hydraulic lab, a math and science playground, and four gardens.

Still a vital part of Carr Square Village, Carr Square Tenant Management provides a variety of social services to its tenants. They provide infant and day care. Transportation is available to elderly residents. In response to the strong need articulated by tenants for role models and activities for young black males in the area, the T.O.O.L.S. program was developed. This program, Taking On Our Life Skills, provides afterschool tutoring and on-the-job training for teenagers, as well as field trips and summer recreation. Another active program at Carr Square Village, the Arts in Every Household program is designed to improve awareness of the arts by encouraging residents to participate in a variety of activities. These include design and creation of murals, crafts making and performing arts workshops.



In 1997, McCormack Baron & Associates founded COVAM (Carr Square, O'Fallon Place, Vaughn And Murphy Park) Community Development Corporation, with the idea of creating an improved system of supports and services for residents in the community. COVAM was instrumental in the Jefferson School Project. In the past, children had attended schools all over the city due to the court-ordered desegregation. Under the project, St. Louis Public Schools approved the conversion of Jefferson Elementary School into a neighborhood school for children in the immediate community. In addition to the physical improvements mentioned previously, the school received from Southwestern Bell a fiber-optic network, a 32-inch television/VCR, and two computers for each classroom. Another COVAM Community-Building Project is The Phoenix Group, a welfare-to-work project. With the support of the Missouri Department of Social Services, Phoenix provides assessment, training, support and sustained employment to COVAM residents.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

The St. Louis 2004 Sustainable Neighborhoods Initiative grouped together Carr Square, Columbus Square, St. Louis Place, and Old North St. Louis as a Sustainable Neighborhood cluster. Efforts are just getting underway to create a comprehensive plan for these neighborhoods in the 5th Ward. A consultant team has been hired by the City and is in the process of creating a development guide for the neighborhoods.

The Carr Square neighborhood contains several sites with great potential for development but also presents significant challenges. The large amount of consolidated vacant land still existing at the former Pruitt-Igoe site invites the possibility of large-scale development. Nevertheless, the task remains of determining the land use most beneficial to the surrounding area. Restoration of Carr Lane School and Clemens House would help preserve historic aspects of the neighborhood. Clemens House, a beautiful old mansion hidden behind a slightly crumbling wall and lattice gate, was built by Mark Twain's uncle for his wife. The structure is a striking physical reminder of the distant past in neighborhood that for the most part has been completely transformed by modern development. Carr Lane School was built in 1908 and was one of several famous school structures designed by William Ittner and Rockwell Milligan for the St. Louis Board of Education. The Landmarks Association has placed the building on their endangered list and completed the research necessary to nominate it for the National Register of Historic Places. The school lies just east of Carr Square Village, and many had hoped that it would be incorporated into the renovation project begun there in 1994. Nevertheless, another question that comprehensive planning for the area will need to resolve is how to complete Phase II of that project, the Carr Square renovation. The only recreation facility in the area, Desoto Recreation Center, lay unused and in disrepair for many years. Some attempts were made to restore the center, but it was eventually leveled. Since that time, no others have been built. The area is still in dire need of a recreation facility. A dialogue between members of the 5th Ward Comprehensive Plan team and neighborhood leaders and residents is essential to assess the needs of the community in relation to different possibilities for development.

The majority of the community organizations in Carr Square are members of the Near Northside Neighborhood Council (NNNC). As members, many have begun their own planning and defined specific goals for the neighborhood, which have then been compiled by the NNNC. Therefore, current efforts should benefit greatly from this local vision for the neighborhood. Carr Square Tenant Management proposes the restoration of historic Carr Lane School and conversion to housing units and small-scale commercial use. They also express the need for an elderly extended care facility. COVAM Community Group suggests transforming Clemens House into a museum with meeting space for the community. Their vision of Carr Square includes more single-family homes and commercial development, such as clothing stores and gas stations.