

COMPTON HEIGHTS (26)

LOCATION

The Compton Heights neighborhood is bounded by Nebraska on the East, Shenandoah on the South, Grand Boulevard on the West, and I-44 on the North.

HISTORY

Compton Heights occupies the northwest corner of what was previously the St. Louis Commons, which was set aside by settlers for communal grazing of livestock. Its initial land partition was received in 1860 and development began a few decades later. The large homes that are most notable in Compton Heights were erected in the late 1880s and early 1890s. A majority of these homes were built by wealthy families of German descent. One of the neighborhood's most interesting features is the set of restrictions created for the land on which these homes were built. Buildings are to be set back from the street, be distanced from adjacent buildings, with further restrictions forbidding the use of any commercial business or rental flats on the property. There are fence restrictions, minimum building cost restrictions, and strict rules governing lot grade changes. These restrictions were permanently instated in the late 1880s, and continue until this day—but not without challenge. Enforcing these codes was the Compton Heights Improvement Company, which dissolved in 1899 to become the Compton Heights Improvement Association.



One of the neighborhood's most outstanding features is the Compton Hill Tower, which may be seen from distant areas within the city. Designed by architect George Mann and completed during the William McKinley presidency, the tower was built in the French Romanesque style, towering above the neighborhood at a height of 180 feet. Its construction consists of limestone, bluff brick, and terra cotta. The comparably high elevation of the area allowed the water tower and reservoir to distribute approximately 56 million gallons of water by means of gravity to the City east of Grand Boulevard. The water tower was built to accommodate the existing water delivery system as the city grew in population. Compton Hill Reservoir Park was created around the tower, which boasts Wilhelm Wandschneider's statue "The Naked Truth". The Compton Hill Tower was declared a city landmark in 1966. In 1972, the tower was added to the National Registry of Historic Places. Over the years, the tower began to experience deterioration. The steel staircase within its interior began to weather, as well as the stone work and roofing structure. Within the last few years, the Tower was restored to its original condition and continues to be a symbol of pride for Compton Heights and adjacent neighborhoods.



CHARACTERISTICS

Primarily residential in nature, Compton Heights is both rich in history and architecture. It is most notably recognized by the large homes that can be seen from the gated entrances along Grand and Russell. Laid out by John Pitzman in the 1880s, these

large homes were built with great care for aesthetics and beauty. The architectural styles offered include Tudor, Italianate, Quasi-Richardson, Chateausque, Romanesque, and Georgian. These homes are strictly governed by a set of restrictions created by the founders of the neighborhood. These restrictions, which are enforced by the Compton Heights Improvement Association, only pertain, however, to the large homes located roughly along Longfellow Boulevard and Hawthorne Boulevard.

One of the more famous mansions located within the neighborhood is the Magic Chef Mansion. A majority of the homes built around Compton Hill Reservoir Park were built in the 1860s. Over the years, many have become boarding houses. The area along Grand has been experiencing recent restoration efforts and several of the buildings have been converted back into single-family dwellings. The homes south of Reservoir Park are generally one- and two-family structures, with many of them owner-occupied. Compton Heights also offers a number of smaller single family houses and two- to four-family



units. Unfortunately, the smaller homes within the neighborhood are not represented by any neighborhood organization. These multi- and single-family dwellings are different in architecture and rather divided by boundaries, such as I-44 along the northern boarder. The single- and multi-family residences along the north side of Shenandoah are more representative of the Tower Grove East neighborhood, located just on the other side of Shenandoah.

Compton Heights is conveniently located near shopping districts, restaurants, parks, and medical facilities. It is also located near I-44 and I-40/64, allowing easy access to downtown and the Metro area. Nearby medical facilities include Compton Heights Hospital, Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital, and Saint Louis University Hospital. There is a YMCA located on Grand Boulevard, near the intersection with Shenandoah. The historic Pelican Building is located next to the YMCA. Compton Heights Reservoir Park offers a place to relax and space for recreation. Also located nearby is Tower Grove Park, which offers numerous acres for recreational activities.

Today, as in the past, its residents consist of upper- and middle-income professionals in the larger homes found along Longfellow Boulevard, Hawthorne Boulevard, Milton Boulevard, and Accomac Street. The other sections of the neighborhood, consisting of smaller single- and multifamily structures, are fairly diverse economically and racially.

Overall, the buildings within Compton Heights are in good condition. The Compton Heights Improvement Association regulates and maintains the building codes that pertain to the larger homes within the gated entrances. The remaining part of the neighborhood that is not represented by an organized group is regulated by individual property owners and, in some cases, renters. The other single- and multifamily structures are also generally in good condition. The newer multifamily units built along Geyer Avenue, facing I-44, are not as well-maintained.

INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Compton Heights offers all the conveniences that make a neighborhood both safe and comfortable. The schools located in the area include Hodgen School, Grant Middle School, Shenandoah School, Notre Dame Elementary School, and Messiah Lutheran School. Furthermore, the community offers a variety of churches, all of which help to anchor spiritual strength. These include Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, Messiah Lutheran Church, Emmaus Lutheran Church, Compton Heights Baptist Church, and Berea Temple. Recreational facilities, other than those provided by schools, include the Compton Hill Reservoir Park as well as Tower Grove Park, located nearby. Adjacent to the neighborhood is the Compton Heights Hospital. Also located nearby are Saint Louis University Hospital and Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital. As stated previously, located within or adjacent to Compton Heights are shopping markets, restaurants, and specialty shops along South Grand. There is also a YMCA located on Grand.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Within the last few years, Compton Heights has had the addition of approximately three new town houses on Compton Hill Place. The town houses occupy the previous site of the old Compton Hill Apartments, which were in poor condition. The town houses, built in an architectural style that somewhat resembles the older buildings, help attract new families and increase owner-occupancy. High proportions of owner-occupied buildings (both single- and multifamily structures) generally tend to maintain, and in some cases improve, property value and attractiveness. The building at 3201 Russell Boulevard, near the intersection of Compton Avenue, has been renovated within the last two decades. Other additions to the neighborhood include the recent construction of Sterling's Market on Grand, one block south of Shenandoah.