

## ST. LOUIS PLACE (60)

### LOCATION

This near Northside neighborhood is bounded by Palm Street on the North, Cass Avenue on the South, North Florissant on the East, and North Jefferson on the West.

### HISTORY

In 1850, John O’Fallon and others platted out St. Louis Place, a portion of the Union Addition. They left a strip of land for public use down the center of the subdivision, creating St. Louis Place Park. The park was enclosed and extensive improvements were made in the 1860s. In 1887, a City Ordinance extended the park southward through the old site of the city reservoir to Maiden Lane. A decade later, a statue of Friedrich Von Schiller, donated by brewer Charles Stifel, was erected in the park. (It was later removed and relocated to Memorial Plaza in 1975.)

Most of the large Victorian style residences around the park were built in the 1880s. By late last century, St. Louis Place and the streets west of it, particularly St. Louis Avenue, had become fashionable areas of the city to live.



During the 1840s, German and Irish immigrants established communities in the area north of downtown. A group of Irish from County Kerry settled in the western portion of present-day Carr Square, an area that became known as “Kerry Patch.” During the same period, a number of Germans settled north of Carr in what is now the southeastern corner of the St. Louis Place neighborhood. The area was referred to as “Little Paderhorn.” The influence of these immigrant communities can still be seen today in some of the churches of the area. St. Liborius, on 19th Street, was built in 1889–90 and named for the patron saint of a section of Westphalia, Germany. St. Stanilaus Kostka Polish Church was the first of its kind in the city. The parish was organized in 1879 for Polish Catholics then residing in the Kerry Patch area.

### CHARACTERISTICS

St. Louis Place Park sets at the neighborhood’s core. While it separates the area into east and west, the park acts as connecting axis in the neighborhood. It serves as a magnet for residents and many institutions by providing for recreational, congregational and aesthetic needs.

The St. Louis Place neighborhood is named for the fashionable nineteenth-century residential district surrounding the park. Homes within the neighborhood include Romanesque, French Second Empire and Federal architectural styles, and exhibit fine 19th century craftsmanship. These architectural features were instrumental in enabling portions of the area to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Columbia Brewery, Blair School, Clemens House, and St. Liborius are significant buildings within the historic district. Columbia Brewery and the Blair School were restored by McCormack Baron during the 1980s and converted into contemporary apartments. 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 and is in great need of repair and restoration. St. Liborius, a masterful Gothic Revival Church, was listed on the

Landmarks Association's 1998 Ten Buildings Most in Danger List. Thus, there are many historic assets in the neighborhood but with varying degrees of use and preservation.



The different lifestyles of the earliest inhabitants in the area can be seen today in the range of housing stock in the St. Louis Place neighborhood. Today, one can still find today large Victorian houses around the park, first designed as a carriage run, and old mansions along St. Louis Avenue, an area once known as “millionaire’s row.” In the areas to the south, originally built up as poorer immigrant communities, there are more modest abodes and multifamily units. “Kerry Patch,” now a part of the Carr Square neighborhood and the southeasternmost section of the St. Louis Place district, became the site of the Pruitt-Igoe Public Housing Project during the 1950s. With the implosion of Pruitt-Igoe in 1976, the neighborhood has provided housing for those of low incomes.

Thus, over the years, the neighborhood has drawn people of a range of different backgrounds and incomes. The large single-family homes, described above, have attracted people of moderate income who have rehabbed and become homeowners in the community. Along St. Louis Avenue and in the area of the park, there exists a mixture some elegant homes that have been beautifully restored and others lying vacant and deteriorating. The areas that contained predominately smaller single units and multifamily dwellings have suffered considerably from larger social and economic forces that affected the city in the latter half of the twentieth century. Loss of economic base, loss of population, and absentee landlords led to deterioration of the housing stock and eventually massive amounts of abandonment and demolition. Today, there are large tracts of vacant and Land Reutilization Authority(LRA)-owned land in the neighborhood, particularly along parts of North 23rd Street.

Nonetheless, in recent years, the neighborhood has seen the addition of more than 30 new homes as part of the Mullaphy Square development. Judy Wulverton, a private developer, has had great success with this project, selling these single family homes at market rates. Also, neighborhood leaders have noted that the area has stabilized a lot in the last five years, due to efforts by residents and neighborhood organizations. They report less activity on the streets and fewer complaints by residents.

#### **INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS**

There are four separate neighborhood organizations in St. Louis Place, each representing different sections and interests within the community. These include La Place Restoration Group, St. Louis Place Neighborhood Organization, St. Louis Block Unit, and Greater Pruitt-Igoe II Community Organization. In 1978, a group of homeowners formed La Place Restoration Group. The organization has restored two houses on St. Louis Avenue and focuses on stabilizing the neighborhood through restoration of property and improvements. The St. Louis Block Unit is sponsored by the Urban League and made up of long-term residents of the St. Louis Avenue area. When Pruitt-Igoe was demolished, some of the residents moved into public housing in nearby Carr Square and Columbus Square, but many made their home in St. Louis Place. Although the housing project is long since gone, former residents of Pruitt-Igoe still live and have a stake in the

surrounding area. Greater Pruitt-Igoe II Community Organization represents the vested interests of these residents and the needs of low-income people in the St. Louis Place neighborhood. They work to incorporate existing residents into development by providing affordable housing and opportunities for employment, while minimizing displacement.

Although the different neighborhood organizations represent a range of areas and interests in the community, many of them have come together as members of the Near Northside Neighborhood Council. This organization works to coordinate groups in neighborhoods of the 5th and 19th Wards in an effort to create a unified strategy to benefit residents of these neighborhoods.

Landmarks such as Zion Lutheran, the Polish Falcons, and St. Louis Place Park have formed a physical and cultural continuum. Newer institutions such as the Black World History Wax Museum, Greeley Community Center, and the Youth and Family Center have added to the area's stability and richness. Children in the neighborhood attend Jackson Elementary and Blewitt Middle School. Young people are served



by a patchwork of Zion Lutheran Community Center, Greeley Community Center, and the Youth and Family Center, providing recreation, mentoring, Head Start, and afterschool programs. Greeley Community Center also has a senior recreation program and a social service program, providing for the basic needs of residents in emergencies.

### **PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

In the recent past, development projects have seen varied levels of success in the neighborhood. During the 1980s, McCormack Baron successfully converted the Falstaff/Columbia Brewery and Blair School into apartments, although there was some disagreement among the different community organizations over the merits of the project. Earlier this decade, St. Louis Housing Incentive Project (SHIP) had plans to build 200 plant-built houses in partnership with the Carpenters Union. The initial "Madison Acres" site was on the east side of the St. Louis Place Park. SHIP is no longer involved in the project. Of the 200 new homes originally proposed, three houses were constructed along a block of Benton Street east of 19th Street, an area now referred to as "Betty's Walk." More recently, Judy Wulverton has been very successful in her development of Mullaphy Square. These single-family homes, constructed along the blocks of Hogan Street and North 18th Street south of Madison, have sold particularly well even with market rate prices. There have been a variety of approaches taken towards development in St. Louis Place. Among others, Gateway Village, a large golf course and adjacent housing development, was proposed several years ago, creating much debate and controversy. Of all the different plans and projects, one key issue has arisen: the importance of adequate communication between planners, developers, and people within the neighborhood and the critical need for gaining community support if development is to be a success.

An effort is just getting underway to begin planning as part of the Sustainable Neighborhoods Initiative. St. Louis Place is part of a cluster of neighborhoods, including Carr Square, Columbus Square, and Old North St. Louis that have been designated as Sustainable Neighborhoods by St. Louis 2004. Recently, the City began a comprehensive planning effort for the 5th Ward. A consultant team has been assembled and is in the process of creating a guide for development in the neighborhood so that projects can take place in a coordinated manner. Creating a dialogue with the neighbors of St. Louis Place may be a unique challenge with its five different neighborhood organizations. Fortunately, however, the majority of these groups are also a part of the Near Northside Neighborhood Council. This partnership should allow for better coordination of planning within the neighborhood as well as giving planners a clearer picture of what work has been done by organizations up to the present. Greater Pruitt-Igoe II Community Organization has taken a particularly active role in planning and development in the area. In 1990, the group worked with an architecture student at Washington University to create an Urban Town Plan, comprising the southern portion of St. Louis Place and the former Pruitt-Igoe tract. In addition, since initiating the plan, Greater Pruitt-Igoe II Community Organization has assisted residents with major and minor repairs, as well as rehabbing several homes on 20th Street and along the 1900 block of Helen Street. In the future, the group plans to obtain vacant lots in the neighborhood and build new homes for very low- to moderate-income residents.