

Tower Grove Park Superintendent's House
(Park Structure Twenty-nine)
4274 Magnolia Avenue
Tower Grove Park
4255 Arsenal Street
St. Louis
Missouri

HABS No. MO-1137-F

HABS
MO,
96-5ALU,
46F-

PHOTOGRAPHS
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

TOWER GROVE PARK SUPERINTENDENT'S HOUSE
(Park Structure Twenty-Nine)

HABS
MO,
96-SALU,
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Location:

4274 Magnolia Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri.
(Park headquarters at 4255 Arsenal St., St. Louis, Missouri)
and Magnolia Avenues, within 200' of the Magnolia Avenue
boundary and inside of Tower Grove Park.

USGS Webster Groves Quadrangle, Universal Transverse
Mercator Coordinates: 15.738820.4276680

Present Owner:

City of St. Louis.

Present Occupant:

Park Superintendent, Miss Bernice E. Gurney, and family.
This well-preserved and finely proportioned dwelling has
classical revival features combined with an irregular
towered silhouette characteristic of the Italianate villa
style popular in the United States in the mid-nineteenth
century.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1868-1869 (Shaw's Synopsis; Tower Grove Park Receipts Vouchers 6/1869-11/1869).
2. Architect: Probably Francis Tunica. Though the house is commonly attributed to George I. Barnett, there is no listing of payment to Barnett for the design, in 1867 or thereafter, in Henry Shaw's meticulous accounting books. Tunica supervised the dwelling's construction and received payment as an architect in Shaw's ledger (Tower Grove Park Comptroller's Report 1868, p.72, 10/5/70). He also signed the drawings for the park police office, now removed, constructed a few dozen yards south of the superintendent's house, in a style similar to this. For biographical information, see the HABS report on Tower Grove Park. (MO-1137).
3. Original and subsequent owners: City of St. Louis. For further description, see the HABS report on Tower Grove Park (MO-1137).
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Construction was supervised by Francis Tunica. The bricks were laid by John Meiser for \$679.68 (Comp. 1868, p.20, 9/24/69); mason's work was performed by Anton Suda for \$199.62 (Comp. 1868, p.10, 5/31/69). Carpentry was probably done by Joel McFern, who was on the general Park payroll (Comp. 1868 p.16, 8/3/69); glazing was the work of S.H. Clawson for a \$20 fee (Comp. 1868, p.18, 9/11/69). William Simpson and Co. worked on the plumbing for \$133.55 (TGP check book April-Oct. 1869, TGP Box III). Bricks were supplied by H.S. Parker for \$1330 (Comp. 1868, p.11, 7/6/79); cast iron girders by Excelsior (TGP Receipts and Vouchers,

6/69-11/69, 5/24/69); iron anchors by Pawly and Bro. (Comp. 1868, p.10, 6/9/69); lumber by Chapman and Thorp (Comp. 1868, p.12, 6/14/69); and glass by Ed. Voigt Co. (Comp. 1868, p.20, 9/23/69).

5. Original plans, construction, etc.: According to Henry Shaw, Founder, Commissioner, and Comptroller of the Park, the Superintendent's house cost about \$11,000 to build (Shaw Synopsis). It was the only one of a series of villas proposed to skirt the Park. The scheme was modeled on the practice at Regent's Park in London, with the income garnered from leasing them to flow to the Missouri Botanical Garden. The plan was ill-suited to American taste and was abandoned.
6. Alterations and additions: In 1905, the ornamental iron fence was added to the property (Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners, 1913, 1/16/14, p.9). The railing on the east porch was removed, the kitchen dumbwaiter was converted to a closet in the east wall, and the second floor west balcony was converted to a bathroom at about the same time (Gurney interview).

During James Gurney, Jr.'s time, the stained glass panels symbolizing his father's devotion to water lilies were added to the staircase hall, and the major changes to the house were also made. Electric lighting fixtures were added, closets made in the south bedrooms, taken from the west wall of the southeast room on the second floor, and the south dining room on the first floor was divided between its former porch door on the south wall and the southeast window, thereby creating the pantry corridor and office space on the east. The east porch was also converted to an office space, and later the alcove in the east wall of the northwest parlor was converted to a bookshelf (Gurney Interview).

The numerous blind "windows" in the house do not indicate any alteration, but rather a part of the original construction and have to do with a local tax ordinance based upon the number of windows in a dwelling (Gurney Interview).

7. Historical persons associated with the building: Since 1895, three generations of the Gurney family have lived in the house during their service as Park Superintendents. James Gurney, Sr. was brought by Henry Shaw from the Royal Botanic Garden in Regent's Park, London to the Missouri Botanical Garden as Chief Gardener in 1867 (Layton, p.27). He supervised work in the Park as well, eventually assuming command there upon Shaw's death in 1889. He made valuable contributions to nymphaean botany; he contributed to the development of the Victoria Regia, and in his later years grew an immense collection of seedling nymphaeas, out of which he developed two or three other valuable varieties. ("James Gurney," MBG Bulletin, 2/1920, p.29).

James Sr. died at the age of eighty-nine, on January 15, 1920, and was succeeded by his son, James Jr., who was in turn, succeeded upon his death in 1943 by his daughter, present superintendent, Miss Bernice E. Gurney.

B. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: Excellent views of the superintendent's house from the earliest dates of erection can be found in the Missouri Historical Society Historic Photo File on Tower Grove Park.

View taken from the northwest published in MacAdam, 1883, copied. View 1906 from southwest, copied, original in Tower Grove Park Misc. photo file, c/o Park Superintendent, to be transferred to Lehmann Library.

2. Bibliography:

- a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Manuscripts, etc.: The Tower Grove Park Miscellaneous file; Henry Shaw's Synopsis of Work done in Park from 1868-1872; his Comptroller Report Books 1868, 1875, 1882, and 1888; Tower Grove Park Checks Receipts, and Vouchers for 1867-1889; and the Reports of the Board of Commissioners for 1869-1898 are in the custody of the Park Superintendent, Miss Bernice E. Gurney and probably will be transferred from her office at 4274 Magnolia Avenue to the Shaw Manuscript Collection at the John S. Lehmann Library in the Missouri Botanical Garden, 2345 Tower Grove Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri, by the end of the summer of 1974.

The Master Plan Report of March, 1960, by Layton, Layton, and Rohrbach, is also in the Lehmann Library.

Deed Books: City, Hall, Market Street, St. Louis, Missouri.

Interviews: August 5/19/74, 4274 Magnolia Avenue, St. Louis; Miss Bernice E. Gurney enumerated changes made to dwelling during the superintendencies of her family.

- b. Secondary Sources:

Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners, Tower Grove Park. St. Louis: Nixon-Jones Printing, 1899-1919.

_____. St. Louis: Arcade Print Shop, 1920.

_____. St. Louis: Mound City Press, 1921-1942.

_____. St. Louis: Allied Printing, 1943-1959.

"James Gurney," Missouri Botanical Garden Bulletin, VIII, #2, (February, 1920), pp. 28-30.

MacAdam, David H. Tower Grove Park. St. Louis: F.P. Studley and Co., 1883.

Prepared by: Carolyn Hamm
Field Historian
National Park Service
St. Louis, Missouri
August, 1974

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The superintendent's house is located in a strategic position in Tower Grove Park with access to Magnolia Avenue, surveillance of the north gate, and within a short distance of the planhouses, sailboat pond, music stand pavilion, and main east-west drive. The finely proportioned dwelling has classical revival features combined with an irregular, towered silhouette characteristic of the Italianate style.

B. Exterior description:

1. Over-all dimensions: Irregular shape, resembling an "L" with corner tower and south wing, over-all 76'-5" by 38'-11" (north front); tower 46'-0" high to roof peak. The main part of the building is two stories, four bays (north front) by six bays. The south wing and porch are one story high.
2. Foundations: Stone masonry, 1'-10" thick. There is a full basement under the entire house.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The main section is built of red brick painted white. The walls are 1'-2" thick. The south porch and southeast office are wood frame with weather boards painted white. The pediments on the projecting bays of the north and west facades have louvered semi-circular openings. Below them are projecting window bays on the first floor, rectangular on the west, semi-hexagonal on the north, which have wooden 2'-6" high parapets, consisting of a central circular motif flanked by rectangular panels.
4. Structural system: The brick walls are load bearing; the porch and office are of post and beam wooden frame construction.
5. Porches, stoops and bulkheads.
 - a. The northwest porch leading to the front main entrance has steps, plain straight balusters, and square posts. The porch roof is hipped and covered with green asphalt shingles. A straight entablature with a strip of molding runs between bays. The porch curves around the corner.

- b. The southwest porch has segmental arches, and a hipped roof. The south porch has five bays and an arcade of wooden posts with bases and capital moldings of the same design as those of the southwest porch.
 - c. The kitchen stoop on the east side is roofed over by an open porch which has a frieze of vertical wooden slats. There is a bulkhead adjacent to it to the south.
 - d. The southeast business entrance consists of steps and a stoop rising to a door on the southernmost face of a half hexagonal projecting bay.
6. Chimneys: There are two brick chimneys on the south side of the main brick portion of the building which have serrated-edge chimney pots, and a third chimney on the ridge of the roof of the north wing has corbelled brick necking.
7. Openings:
- a. Doorways and doors: There are four main exterior doors:
 1. The main entrance on the northeast has double doors with four curve-edged panels, rectangles above squares, all surrounded with decorative molding. The doors are surmounted by a segmental transom.
 2. The south entrance, reached by the porch, has French doors and the same design as the main entrance.
 3. The kitchen door on the east is painted red, and has double panels and arched panes.
 4. The southeast office door is painted green, is unpaneled, and has a row of three vertical panes at the top.
 - b. Windows: Segmental windows with two-over-two vertical pane sash predominate. The two flanking the south door have louvered shutters. There are circular windows in the stairhall of the first story, on the east facade, and on the north and west sides of the tower above the second story level. The top level of the tower and the center stairhall bay of the east facade at the second story have round-headed windows. Those in the tower are two-over-two, the other, one-over-one, sash. There are rectangular lights in the basement, composed of three square panes.
8. Roof:
- a. Shape: There is a cross gable roof of green asphalt shingles on the main portion of the residence, the gable ends at the west and north sides. The dining room, porch, and offices on the south wing are covered by a low hip roof, sloping three ways, and made

of built-up tar and gravel. The porches and the southeast bay window are covered with hip roofs of green asphalt shingles.

- b. Cornice, eaves: The eaves and cornice of the gable roof are wood with built-on gutters with downspouts. The porch roofs have beveled cornices.
- c. Tower: The tower is almost 50' high, with a low pitched pyramidal roof of green asphalt shingles and a lightning rod on top. The third-story level of the tower is a belvedere with double round arched windows on all four sides set inside a brick arcade.

C. Description of interior:

1. Floor plans: Coming in the front door off the northwest porch one enters the vestibule which leads straight south to the 15'-9" by 17'-1" living room, 20'-0" by 12'-11" dining room, and back porch. Left of the vestibule is the stairhall leading to the second floor bedrooms, or to the basement below. Left of the stairhall, in the north wing of the residence, is the 20'-0" by 15'-11" music room; right of the stairhall is the kitchen which leads straight through the pantry to the southeast corner of the house, used as offices for the superintendent. The back porch is accessible from the offices and the dining room. The second floor has three bedrooms - at the southwest, southeast, and north corners; in the tower room is a bathroom, with stairs leading through a hatch to the belvedere above.
room
2. Stairways: The half turn stairs have a curved landing midway to the second floor; the newel post and balusters are carved walnut. "Wall stringers" along the stairs are painted white. Along the curved wall of the landing are two "coffin corners," niched alcoves flanking the arched colored glass windows. At the top of the stairs is a sliding gate.
3. Flooring: The vestibule floor is tile, the kitchen, black and white linoleum. The rest of the house has hardwood tongue and groove polished flooring.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: All walls and ceilings are plastered and painted. The following rooms have wallpaper coverings; living room, dining room, stairhall, southeast and southwest bedrooms.
5. Doorways and doors: All doors are paneled; there are double doors at the main entrance, the vestibule leading to the stairhall, and the dining room leading to the porch. The vestibule doors are arched and are flanked by sidelights, themselves bracketed by fluted pilasters and surmounted by a transom containing circular colored lights.
6. Special decorative features:
 - a. The fireplace in the living room has a polished marble rose colored mantelpiece.

- b. Trim: There are pinewood baseboards, picture moldings, window moldings; and cornices in all rooms of the house. The main staircase has a tapered, paneled octagonal newel post and tapered octagonal balusters.
 - c. Windows are equipped with folding blinds of northern white pine.
 - d. There is an arched window in the stairhall at the landing, with colored glass in floral designs.
 - e. In the living room, east wall, is an arched alcove for books. This molded arch is walnut, as is the rest of the trim in the living room. It is flanked by fluted pilasters. The lower sections have round-edged rectangular, vertical panes. The top has lozenge-shaped panes, and is surmounted by a paneled fan.
- D. Site: The house faces north with the entrance on the north side of the tower corner off the northwest porch. The property is surrounded by a cast iron spearpoint fence on the south and north sides and a wire fence on the west and south sides. Southeast of the house is a two-car garage and driveway from the maintenance buildings (the planhouses) which leads past the house through the property to the north street entrance on Magnolia Avenue.

Prepared by: Peter Dessauer
Field Historian
National Park Service
St. Louis, Missouri
August, 1975

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Tower Grove Park and Missouri Botanical Garden Project was jointly sponsored by the Historic American Buildings Survey of the National Park Service, the Board of Commissioners of Tower Grove Park, and the Board of Trustees of the Missouri Botanical Gardens.

Recorded under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, and Kenneth L. Anderson, HABS Principal Architect, the project was conducted during the summer of 1974 and 1975 at the Historic American Buildings Survey field office at the Missouri Botanical Garden, St. Louis.

1974 Team: Robert Harvey, Project Supervisor, (Landscape Architect); Steven Bauer, Project Foreman, (Architect, University of Kansas); Carolyn Hamm, project historian, (Washington University); Suzanne Fauber, student assistant landscape architect, (University of Virginia); and Carol Macht, student assistant landscape architect, (University of Michigan).

1975 Team: Stuart Mertz, A.S.L.A., project supervisor, (landscape architect); Steven Bauer, project foreman, (Columbia University); Peter Dessauer, project historian, (Clemson University); Lennard A. Roberts, student assistant architect, (Cornell University); John R. Temmink, student assistant architect, (University of Virginia); and Theodore Torpy, landscape architect, (WASO).

The drawings were revised by HABS architect Paul Dolinsky, and the written data were edited by HABS Architectural Historian Denys Peter Myers, in the HABS Washington office in 1983. The photographs were taken by HABS/HAER Photographer Jet Lowe in 1983.