

CENTRAL WEST END HISTORIC DISTRICT  
4200 Block of Westminster Place  
St. Louis  
St. Louis County  
Missouri

HABS No. MO-1878

HABS  
MO-1878

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
MIDWEST REGIONAL OFFICE  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1709 Jackson Street  
Omaha, NE 68102

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

Central West End Complex

I. INTRODUCTION

Location: Central West End  
Local Historic District Expansion  
St. Louis, Missouri

City Block:

Address: 4200 Block of Westminster Place  
between North Boyle Avenue and  
Whittier Street

Date of Construction: 1890-1929

Present Owner: McCormack-Baron & Associates  
1101 Lucas Avenue  
St. Louis, Missouri 63101

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The portion of the Central West End Local  
Historic District Expansion represented by  
the buildings of 4200 Westminster Place is a  
collection of residential and small  
commercial buildings that complement the  
grand-scaled residences built on the private  
streets developed in the Central West End in  
the years 1890-1910.

Historian and Date: Ralph Eglin Wafer  
April 1991

### Central West End Complex

The buildings which are the subject of this HABS documentation, The George W. Parker House (HABS No. MO- 1897) at 4216 Westminster Place and The Dr. Milton C. Marshall Building at 4262 Westminster Place/414-418 North Boyle (HABS No. MO- 1898) , are within the area of the Central West End Local Historic District Expansion in St. Louis, Missouri. The original boundaries of the Central West End Historic District, established by city ordinance in 1975, were Lindell Boulevard on the south, DeBaliviere Avenue on the west, Delmar Avenue on the north, and Boyle Avenue on the east. The Expansion, certified by the Department of the Interior in 1989, extended the boundary east of Boyle Avenue to incorporate a significant number of buildings clearly part, architecturally and historically, of the Central West End as well as filling in some other pockets omitted in the original District boundaries.

The principal differences between the buildings west of Boyle and those east of Boyle are 1) size of the building and the lot and the setting for both, 2) protection by deed restrictions, and 3) number currently remaining. The ravages of "urban decline" are far more visible east of Boyle than west of it. There are at least two reasons for this: lack of legal protection from deed restrictions and lack of economic capacity to stem the decline. As will be identified, the 4200 block of Westminster Place was greatly affected by another factor, the economic expansion of an immediately adjacent area.

What is included in the following paragraphs will tie the Central West End Complex of the 4200 block of Westminster Place and the George W. Parker House at 4216 Westminster and the Dr. Milton C. Marshall Property at 4262 Westminster/414-418 North Boyle to the general development history.

### HISTORY

#### Beginning Residential Development, 1890-1910:

Development of the Central West End neighborhood, which lies three miles directly west of downtown St. Louis, began in earnest in the last decade of the 19th century. For the most part the Central West End is a collection of fine residences of the period between 1890 and 1910 and a number of institutional, religious, commercial, and multi-family residential buildings dating from 1900 to 1929. The most opulent of the residences were built on the private streets that were platted to attract the very wealthy from the fringes of downtown then under pressure from the expanding city core. The attraction was immediate and development was rapid. Equally interested in escaping the expanding downtown were many others of quite adequate means who wanted and who could afford substantial homes.

The development of 4200 Westminster Place was designed to meet the needs of this latter group. All the residences on both sides of the street were constructed 1892-1898 and most were speculatively built. The buildings

were all of similar size, commodious, but not pretentious, save for an immense residence at 4241 Westminster whose floor area was easily twice that of any other house on the block. Three three-story apartment buildings were built at the east end of the block at 4207-4211-4215. Although their presence perhaps diluted the single-family character of the block, they housed substantial apartments. A map of the block as it appeared in 1904 is on page 7.

Nearby development included the 4300 and 4400 blocks of Westminster Place, which opened in 1892 as Fullerton Place. It was a private street development and its homes were significantly larger than the ones on the 4200 block. It was listed on the National Register in 1980.

If the evidence of the terms of occupancy of early residents at 4216 Westminster is any indication, persons perhaps did not see the 4200 block as a place of truly permanent residence. First occupied in 1896, 4216 Westminster Place was home to its third occupant by 1903. By the late 'teens the house was obviously being occupied by tenants and not by owner-occupants. Just the opposite was true of the residence at 4262 Westminster Place, which was the principal building on the lot on which 414-418 N. Boyle was later built. It was home to its original occupant, Dr. Milton C. Marshall, for thirty-eight years. Even he, though, rented space in his house to others as early as 1895, the first year of occupancy.

From the beginning of its development and for many years following, the 4200 block of Westminster was indeed an address with some distinction attached to it. Almost every resident on the block was listed in the local social register: Gould's Blue Book. Each of the families who lived at 4216 Westminster was listed through 1914. Dr. Marshall was listed continuously from 1895 until 1916 when publication of the register ceased.

#### Commercial and Multi-Family Development, 1920-1930:

A natural event in 1927 may have been the trigger that precipitated visual evidence of change in the neighborhood. In that year a devastating tornado moved across the eastern half of the Central West End. Although permit records do not show that buildings in the 4200 block of Westminster Place specifically were being repaired in 1927 or 1928, there was heavy damage in the vicinity.

The tornado may have contributed to Dr. Marshall's decision in 1928 to construct a commercial building in the rear yard of his house at 4262 Westminster Place. Other likely reasons were to provide himself with additional income and to meet a perceived neighborhood need. In terms of the latter, it appears that Dr. Marshall was correct. For the thirty-one years following following its initial occupancy in 1929, the building at 414-16-18 North Boyle was a model of commercial stability. Each of the three spaces was occupied by the same tenant or used for the same purpose (if the actual proprietor changed) for 26, 27, and 31 years respectively. The businesses housed in the building; shoe repair, barber, and beauty parlor, were obviously well-suited to serve the neighborhood's then growing population.

In 1928 two large three-story buildings of efficiency apartments were built one block south of Westminster at 4220 and 4228 McPherson in a block theretofore very similar to the single-family character of the 4200 block of Westminster Place. Smaller apartment buildings had also been built in 1923 at the corner of Boyle and McPherson on lots which had not been used for houses in the 1890-1910 building period.

War-Time Residential Overcrowding, 1940-1950:

The population of St. Louis by 1940 was 816,048, actually a decline of 6,000 from the pre-war peak in 1930. During World War II, though, it grew by 85,000 according to the Chamber of Commerce and the Census Bureau (St. Louis Globe-Democrat, August 12, 1945) as thousands flocked there to find employment in the city's many defense industries. The population was little diminished after the war as St. Louis' manufacturing base expanded to fulfill post-war consumer and industry demands.

To accommodate the tremendous increase in population, large homes were converted to rooming houses. This occurred in those Central West End blocks where there were no deed restrictions to hamper such a change in use. The 4200 block of Westminster Place was such a block. Its fifty year old houses no longer had the prestige they had once had and the potential income that conversion to a rooming house offered was attractive. The same pressures were felt in the next block west, the 4300 block of Westminster, part of Fullerton Place, but were better withstood because the more substantial homes were owned by families able to afford their upkeep and because of the protection of deed restrictions.

The effects that such a large transient population had on a residential building stock not designed to house it can be well imagined. It is evident from the short terms of residence and the caption "furn. rms." next to the Directory listing for 4216 Westminster Place plus a separately numbered apartment, 420 N. Boyle, being incorporated into the house at 4262 Westminster Place that the block was beginning to serve a different housing role than it had at the turn of the century.

Effect of Adjacent Commercial Area Expansion, 1950-1970:

Another sequence of events that began in the 1950's and continued well into the 1960's had a profound impact on the 4200 block of Westminster and the 400 block of North Boyle. Olive Street lies one block north of Westminster. From the outset of neighborhood development in the 1890's, the entire 4200 and 4300 blocks of Olive served as a commercial center. These "carriage trade" businesses catered to the neighborhood's many upper income residents. Notable among the buildings was the three-story Musical Arts Building at Olive and Boyle which for many years housed the studios of many music teachers plus a theatre for recitals. On the north side of 4200 Olive, the two-story buildings, many of which remain, were set well back from the street which lent a graciousness to the setting.

Although the number of music teacher-tenants had begun to dwindle by the 1930's and 40's, the Musical Arts Building retained prominence by being

the site of first performances of plays by Tennessee Williams and William Inge. These were before each playwright attained national prominence. The service retail spaces on the street began to give way to antique shops and delicatessens. The retail needs of the neighborhood residents in those decades were better met by the barber, beautician, and shoe repairman at 414-18 North Boyle.

In the 1950's bars and entertainment establishments began to share the street with the antique shops along Olive. The area began to become well known for the quality and originality of its entertainment and adopted the name "Greenwich Corners." The original retail focus had already shifted from serving a local clientele to that of a much wider audience, but the orientation toward night-time entertainment created by the new establishments produced a different set of dynamics for the surrounding residential area.

The Crystal Palace, a night club-theatre, which moved to the south side of the 4200 block of Olive Street in 1958, became one of best known and most popular of the Greenwich Corners night spots. Its owner, Jay Landesman, is credited with launching many successful show business careers among them those of Jack Nicholls and Elaine May and the The Smothers Brothers.

An obvious need for the crowds drawn to the Olive/Boyle Greenwich Corners area to patronize the restaurants, night clubs, and bars that opened there, though, was parking. Almost every inch of ground fronting on Olive Street was occupied by buildings housing the various clubs and businesses. The Crystal Palace, for example, solved its parking problem by constructing a parking lot on the large lot directly behind it formerly occupied by 4241 Westminster Place which had been demolished in 1941.

In February 1959 another tornado passed through the eastern Central West End and right over the the Olive/Boyle intersection. Major damage resulted to almost every building. Proceeds from insurance claims, though, presented an opportunity to many Greenwich Corners building owners to make changes that would better accommodate entertainment use in their buildings. The tornado thus precipitated not only a geographic expansion of this entertainment district but led businesses to make more intensive use of the buildings to take advantage of the area's immense popularity.

Following the tornado and the massive investment that went into rebuilding and improving the buildings the area took on even more of the character of an entertainment district. It adopted a new name, "Gaslight Square," taken from the Gaslight Bar, a venerable establishment in the Musical Arts Building. The popularity of Gaslight Square became so great that tour buses included it on their itineraries. The principal attractions were the jazz clubs and the novel entertainment offered by the creative night club managers.

The physical growth and increasing popularity of Gaslight Square most certainly had a negative effect of the stability and vitality of the surrounding residential area including the 4200 block of Westminster Place. In addition to the parking lot in the middle of the block one can imagine the noise and disruption that large throngs of bar and night club patrons would create in a residential environment so near to the entertainment district.

The granting in 1961 of a full drink liquor license for the space at 416-18 North Boyle is undoubtedly an example of the overflow into the surrounding neighborhood that resulted from the success of Gaslight Square. There is probably also a correlation between this spillover and the lack of occupants during the 1960's in the building at 4262 Westminster Place/420 North Boyle.

Just as rapidly as the meteor of Gaslight Square rose, it also fell. By the middle of the 1960's it was burning out and was virtually extinguished by the end of the decade. In 1972 the last establishment that had been there at the apex of the Square's popularity, a popular restaurant, moved away. Uncontrolled growth, dilution of the jazz/artistic theme with discotheques, and fear of crime all contributed to the demise. The crime fear came from the now largely uninhabited residential areas around Gaslight Square, of which 4200 Westminster Place was one.

#### Abandonment and Disinvestment, 1970-1980:

The ravages of urban decline felt in many cities during the 1960's and 70's were certainly apparent in the eastern Central West End of St. Louis. The additional burden of the rapid rise and fall of Gaslight Square was especially devastating to the 4200 block of Westminster. By the 1970's the lack of upkeep caused by the vacancies of the previous decade and the social ills which made it necessary to establish a narcotics counseling office in the building at 414-18 N. Boyle made the future of the neighborhood bleak. City-initiated demolitions throughout the 1970's were the culmination of the inexorable effects of disinvestment, neglect and abandonment.

#### Renewal and Reinvestment, 1980-1991:

The impact of reinvestment in and the renewal of large tracts elsewhere in the Central West End began to show in the 4200 block of Westminster and its immediate vicinity during the 1980's. Several ambitious redevelopment plans for the eastern Central West End were drafted. They went through a series of starts and stops with little progress to show for the effort until gathered under the umbrella of McCormack-Baron & Associates, a company with the financial capability and development experience to bring the plans to fruition. Significant residential and commercial redevelopment then took place during the mid and late 1980's on blocks to the east of 4200 Westminster Place. Most of the activity involved construction of new low-rise multi-family residential, for-sale homes, and a large retail shopping center. The redevelopment included a limited amount of residential rehabilitation as those blocks had largely been cleared of existing buildings by the same forces of neglect and abandonment that affected 4200 Westminster Place.

While the redevelopment and new construction was occurring to its east, the 4200 block of Westminster Place found a certain stability. Of the original thirty-seven residential buildings standing in 1900, the number had dwindled in 1988 to nine houses plus the commercial building on Boyle that Dr. Marshall built in 1928. All of the remaining houses were owner-occupied and showed

some evidence of reinvestment. The commercial building was occupied by a small church congregation. A fire gutted the house at 4216 Westminster Place in 1989 rendering it uninhabitable.

The redevelopment plan for 4200 Westminster Place by McCormack, Baron & Associates calls for twenty-seven new single-family houses and the continued renovation of the eight houses remaining from the original development. The project is being supported by an Urban Development Action Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The fire-damaged house at 4216 and the commercial building are to be demolished as part of the plan. A map of the proposed plan for 4200 Westminster Place is on page eight.

Sources:

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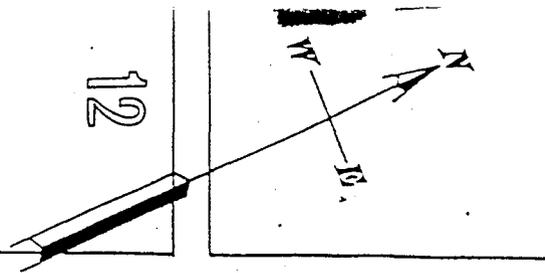
Wood, Sue Ann. "The Winds of Change." St. Louis Post-Dispatch Magazine, 17 February 1991, 6-10.

Other Information:

George W. Parker House, HABS No. MO-1878-A; Dr. Milton C. Marshall Property, HABS No. MO-1878-B.

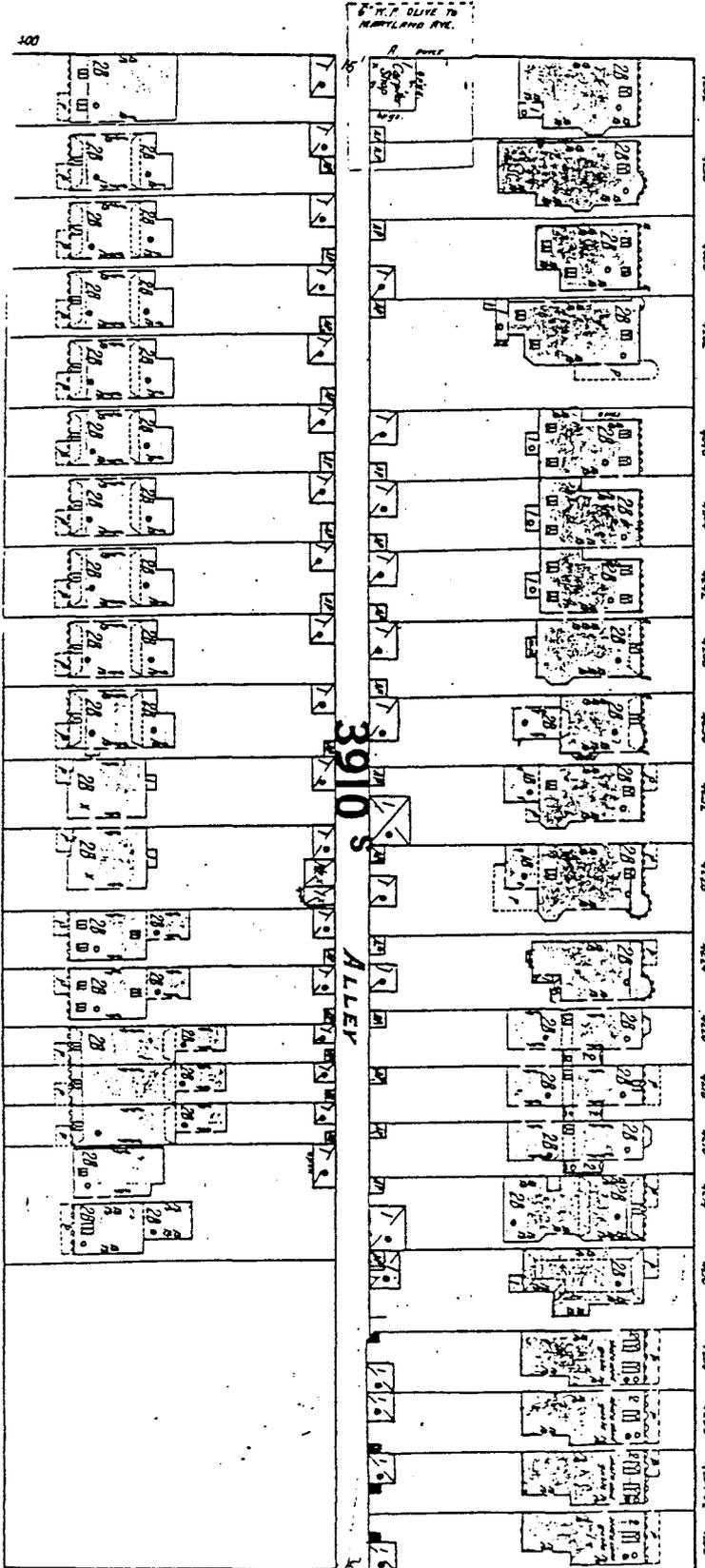
Historian: Ralph Eglin Wafer, Architect; 22 April 1991

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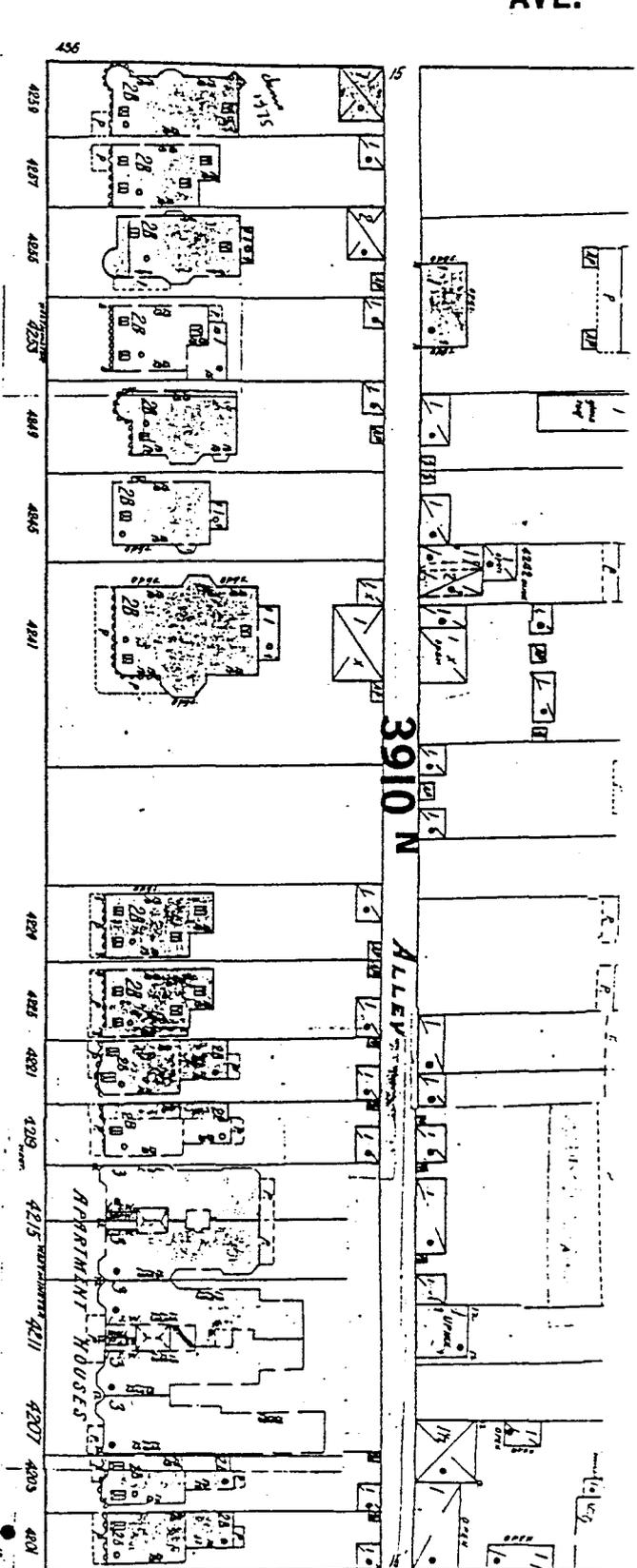


BOYLE

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