

A Brief Guide to our History

One of the interesting features of both our street and neighborhood is its history – not especially long by international, or even east coast standards, but substantial in comparison with much of the country. This short guide references and builds on the detailed research found at <http://westminsterplace.info/>. Those with additional insight are encouraged to contribute.

Most of our homes were built in the 1890s. An appreciation for Central West End living, and the extent of the city overall before that time can be gained from **Compton and Dry's survey Pictorial Saint Louis – 1875** <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g4164sm.gpm00001> as contained on the Library of Congress site. (Click on the image at the upper left of the American Memory page and then on frame 100.) Once enlarged, you can make out a large dwelling at Lindell and Taylor, and another at Maryland on the west side of Kingshighway. Beside these buildings there was not much beside pastures, orchards and, a little further southwest, woods.

However, 1875-76 turned out to be an important time for St. Louis. Forest Park formally opened after four years of controversy involving the initial legislation declared illegal by the Missouri Supreme Court. What turned out to be 1372 acres were purchased for \$800,000. The City expanded to its current 61 square miles, adopted a Home Rule Charter and separated from St. Louis County. More details can be found in two documents written by Norbury Wayman, long-time employee of the City Plan Commission. See the Central West End in his “**History of St. Louis Neighborhoods**” <http://www.stlouis-mo.gov/archive/neighborhood-histories-norbury-wayman/> and “**The Physical Growth of the City of St. Louis**” <http://www.stlouis-mo.gov/archive/history-physical-growth-stlouis/#chrono>.

Westminster Place was developed over a dozen years at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. An 1890 map <http://westminsterplace.info/maps/map4.htm> shows no evidence of the street which was developed a few years later. Some details per house are contained in the architectural survey prepared by Landmarks Association in advance of the creation of the Central West End Historic District. The Map can be found on the internet by going to the Missouri Certified Local Districts <http://www.dnr.mo.gov/shpo/cld.htm>. (Certified Local Districts are not technically on the National Historic Register, but they have been deemed to contain many buildings that meet National Register standards and hence to qualify for historic rehabilitation tax credits.) Scroll down half way and click on the western map for the Central West End. You can now zoom in on our and adjoining streets in order to see the estimated date of construction and the architect for each building. You will see that almost all residential construction occurred between 1893 and 1906. Similarly, institutions like the New City School (originally Mary Institute - 1901), Christian Science Church (1903) and Tuscan Lodge (1907) were built in the same time frame. This same map can also be found at <http://westminsterplace.info/maps/map1928.html>.

Only a few of the architects are included on the Landmarks Web Site <http://landmarks-stl.org/>. Those who would like to learn more about the specific architect associated with their house are

encouraged to visit the Missouri History Museum Library <<http://mohistory.org/>> on Skinker Boulevard. There Ms. Emily Jaycox or an associate can help with not just architects, but, using reverse directories, previous occupants of individual homes.

Perhaps the most well know developer at this time was Julius Pitzman <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julius_Pitzman> who platted most of the private streets – Westmoreland and Portland in 1888, and Washington Terrace and Kingsbury Place in 1902. By contrast Westminster Place was a public street and remained so until the late 1950s.

In 1939, the Westminster Place Association was established. The original charter was amended in 1955 <http://westminsterplace.info/documents/WPA_Charter.jpg>. The nature of the amendment is not clear, however, lovers of literature, history, science and “intellectual culture,” not to mention temperance, will appreciate the language.

In 1957, a Deed of Restrictions was entered into between the owners of property on the 5000 and 5100 blocks of Westminster Place and the Trustees (Robert A.E. Smith, David Wells and H. Sam Priest). This indenture was put in place to restrict the use of all properties to that of single family dwellings (Two structures, 5097 and 5106, were used as apartments and continue in that capacity). The document also conveyed power to the Trustees to review and approve structural alterations and spelled out what would happen if and when the street was converted by City ordinance to be a private, not public street.

In 1959, the Board of Aldermen passed an ordinance that officially vacated the street. A copy of the Westminster Chimes making the announcement can be seen at <<http://westminsterplace.info/documents/chimes5905.htm>>.

The 1950s and 60s were characterized by considerable disinvestment on some Central West End streets. This was the time when upscale retail stores like Montaldo’s and Saks Fifth Avenue on Maryland closed, and homes on Waterman and Washington converted to smaller apartments or rooming houses. For example, the 5000 – 5200 blocks of Washington Boulevard to our north by 1975 were reported to have 11 single family homes; the other 56 properties were licensed rooming houses (20), illegal rooming houses (11), nursing facilities (3), juvenile shelters (3), contained extended families (11) or were vacant (4).

One of the reasons for becoming a private street, as explained by former resident Margaret Priest, was that traffic, often headed to the Chase Park Plaza from the airport, would avoid the Kingshighway-Delmar intersection by going south on Lake and east on Westminster. More general terms were used in the 1957 Deed of Restrictions to explain its purpose – “to resist and prevent the encroachment and incidence of blight and decay; to preserve the exclusive residential character of the area in general, and particularly of their respective parcels as a desirable place of residence; to provide for the health, welfare, safety of the residents in said area; and to maintain the value of their property by prohibiting undesirable, objectionable, dangerous and deleterious uses.”

The Deed of Restrictions was updated in 1985

<<http://westminsterplace.info/documents/supplement1.htm>> allowing the amount of annual dues to increase with a two thirds majority vote, and the Deed of Restrictions to extend indefinitely, unless a majority of property owners voted to the contrary. A proposed amendment in 1997

<<http://westminsterplace.info/documents/supplement2.htm>> would have allowed future amendments to the deed to be made with approval of at least 75 percent of the subscribed lots (i.e. association participants). However, the necessary votes were not obtained

In 1987 the Association decided to build monuments at both the Kingshighway and Lake ends of the street. Passions were strong as regards the aesthetics, cost and impact on traffic; however, with the help of Architect Tom Cohen the work was accomplished to the satisfaction of most.

In 1995, a Special Taxing District was approved by voters on Westminster and Lake, allowing for more intensive anti-crime patrolling, and the partial reallocation of annual dues. In 1998,

Washington Place started sub-contracting with us. Hi-Tech provided services initially

<<http://westminsterplace.info/history/security.htm>>. The current provider is “The City’s Finest.”

Neighborhood Reinvestment. Newcomers to the street may well not appreciate the extent of Central West End investment that has occurred. The years between 1975 and 1986 were especially active as Leon Strauss formed a company named Pantheon and began a series of redevelopment efforts. To the east, Convent Garden (1975) at Taylor and Pershing, and Sherwood Courts (1976) at McPherson and Taylor were renovated, as was Maryland Plaza, under the direction of former Mayor A.J. Cervantes and former Westminster Place resident Joyce Littlefield. To the north the Roosevelt Hotel and General Van Lines buildings (1980) at Delmar and Euclid were renovated by the Union Sarah Redevelopment Corporation and a new Schnuck’s grocery store opened at Delmar and Kingshighway.

To the west the Pershing-DeBaliviere (1976), the 5200 block of Waterman (1978) and Kingsbury Square (1979) were among the major investments. Further south, east of Kingshighway, the Washington University Medical Center Redevelopment Corporation (1973) was founded. A huge investment in doctor, hospital and medical school facilities has continued until this day.

In the late 1980s residential real estate development slowed dramatically in keeping with the changes in the 1986 tax code. In 1989, the Chase Hotel closed, and a few blocks to the south, the Forest Park Hotel closed a year later. Seven years later new owners began a restoration of the Chase Park Plaza that has resulted in a reported \$250 million investment. Significant investments have continued during the last ten years – the Schlafly Library (2002), the Chess Club (2008), World Chess Hall of Fame (2011) and more. A Special Taxing District was enacted in the mid- eighties in order to raise property tax revenue for the neighborhood north of Lindell. Then, in 2010 a Central West End Business Community Improvement District <<http://www.slpl.lib.mo.us/cco/ords/data/ord8587.htm>> was passed allowing an additional sales tax to apply to commercial transaction. Together these

sources provide the area of CWE north of Lindell with a variety of security, landscaping, cleaning and other support services.

Forest Park Renewal. For many of us the proximity to Forest Park was a factor in deciding to live here. Those new to the neighborhood may not realize how lucky they are, first to have a park with institutions that are supported a dedicated property tax, and second a park that has received more than \$100 million in repair and maintenance support over the last 15 years. The Metropolitan Zoological Park and Museum District (usually called the zoo-museum district) supports the Zoo, Art Museum, the Science Center, the Missouri Historical Society and the Missouri Botanical Garden. In keeping with a master plan adopted in the mid-nineties, park reinvestment monies have come equally from individual and corporate philanthropy, through the non-profit Forest Park Forever <<http://www.forestparkforever.org/>>, and the City of St. Louis Department of Parks, Recreation and Forestry <<http://www.stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/parks/parks/Forest-Park.cfm>>.

Any long-time resident will remember issues on the street – the size of the speed bumps, dog walkers, parking, and more – but most of these have been resolved with good cheer. Few would disagree that ours is a great street in a great neighborhood in a wonderful city.

Additional Resources

Those interested in current information about Westminster Place and the Central West End may want to access Geo-St. Louis <<http://dynamic.stlouis-mo.gov/citydata/newdesign/index.cfm>> This site will allow you to find out what the City knows about your house – its appraised value, past building permits, complaints, etc. There is also a great deal of information about all of the neighborhoods in the city.

The Central West End Association history page <<http://www.thecwe.org/cwe-facts/>> provides a good list of books about the neighborhood. Two that provide a special flavor are by current resident and, until recently, long-time owner of the West End Word, Jeff Fister: The Days and Nights of the Central West End, Suzanne Goell, 1991; revised by Jeff Fister, 2007; Counting Chickens, Raising 8 Kids (and 4 hens) in the Central West End, Jeff Fister, 2009.

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