

S0497 The Ville, Collection, 1975-1990

20 Folders, 10 Tapes

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Doris Wesley, manuscript specialist for the Western Historical Manuscript Collection-St. Louis, conducted oral history interviews with former residents of the Ville from April 25, 1990 to August 1990. She donated tapes of the interviews along with research material collected as part of a class project on the history of the Ville to WHMC on April 14, 1992.

In 1850, when the Ville became one of the first Black communities west of the Mississippi, its physical boundaries were dictated by the social climate of the day. The homes built in the Ville expressed the individuality of their owners and exhibited the pride felt by the residents in their neighborhood. The Ville, originally called Elleardsville, was settled in the mid-nineteenth century as a small, semi-rural area located in the northwest suburbs of the city of St. Louis. Charles Elleards, a horticulturist, selected a location for his estate and nursery adjacent to one of the oldest and most important roads in the area, old St. Charles Rock Road. The road ran from the first capital of the State of Missouri to the city of St. Louis. Business people invested in the area, opening stores to serve the residents. The Ville thrived, maybe not by the standards of other communities, but enough to provide comfortable lifestyles for its residents. Simmons, Sumner and Stowe Schools provided true quality education. Black teachers were prohibited from working in other school districts. They could teach only at the Ville Schools, although many were qualified to teach at colleges. These teachers, many with Masters degrees and some doctors, not only provided quality education to students during the day but also as neighbors and friends during the balance of time. The community's social fabric was tightly woven with many strong ties. A high level of neighborly care high was fostered by the involvement of churches, masonic organizations, and the business community. The incorporation of Antioch Baptist Church on May 6, 1884, and the building of St. James AME Church at Pendleton and St. Ferdinand in 1885 provide some indication of institutional life in St. Louis' African American community before the turn of the century. However, from the opening of the Simmons School in 1891, originally called the Elleardsville Colored School No. 8 on Claggett (St. Louis Avenue), the Ville gradually became the magnet community for churches and colleges among black people who wished to own their homes. The importance of the Ville as a twentieth-century focus of institutional life is documented in the history of Simmons School, Sumner High School, Poro College, Velour Dry Goods Company, Whitlor Hardware & Bonded Warehouse, Lincoln Law School, Homer G. Phillips Hospital, and Stowe Teachers College. Bounded today by Dr. Martin Luther King Drive, Taylor Avenue, St. Louis Avenue, and Sarah Street, the Ville is remembered as the center of a prosperous black community in the twentieth century.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The oral histories of residents, who recall their parents' stories of the Ville, tell of the purchase of land and the building of homes by black people in the Ville before 1990. Divided

into two series: 1. Research Materials, 1975-1990, folders 1-9; 2. Oral Histories, 1990, folders 10-20.

FOLDER LIST

Box 1

Series 1 - Research Materials, 1975-1990, folders 1-9

1. The Ethnic Heritage of an Urban Neighborhood, 1975
2. "History of the Charles Sumner High School," 1975
3. The Symbolic Meaning of an Elite Black Community: "The Ville in St. Louis, " by Dr. Sandra Sohenberg and Charles Bailey, January, 1977
4. "The Ville: 1850 to Present" Resource Bibliography, 1977
5. "Research in Elderly Minority Communities: Problems and Potentials" by Linda Burton and Vern L. Bengston, 1985
6. The Ville and Adjacent North St. Louis Design Analysis, by Jack Saunders, 8/10/89; "Tandy-Sherman Neighborhood: Population & Housing Change, August 1989"
7. The Ville, The Greater Ville Redevelopment Corporation Newsletter, Vol.1, Number 1, April 1990
8. Goals for the Ville Research Project, 1990
9. Annual Living History Awards Luncheon, 11/17/90

Series 2 - Oral Histories, 1990, folders 10-20

10. T497.1 Bass, Senator John F., 7/8/90
11. T497.2 Blaine, Pierre, 7/20/90
12. T497.3 Gates, Cliffton W., 5/14/90
13. T497.4 Hudson, Ted (Sr.), 5/2/90
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