NPS Form 10-900
(Oct. 1990)

OMB No. 10024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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NAT. REG.
NA.

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name Castle Ballroom

other names/site number Cave Hall

2. Location

street & number 2839-2845 Olive Street [n/a] not for publication

city or town St. Louis [n/a] vicinity

state Missouri code MO county St. Louis [Independent City] code 510 zip code 63103

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this [x] nomination [ ] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property [x] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [ ] nationally [ ] statewide [x] locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments [ ].)

Mark A. Miles — DECEMBER 23, 2010

Signature of certifying official/Title Mark A. Miles/Deputy SHPO — Date

Missouri Department of Natural Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments [ ].)

Signature of certifying official/Title

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

Joe — Signature of the Keeper — Date of Action

I hereby certify that the property is:

[✓] entered in the National Register
See continuation sheet [ ].
[ ] determined eligible for the National Register
See continuation sheet [ ].
[ ] determined not eligible for the National Register.
[ ] removed from the National Register
[ ] other, explain see continuation sheet [ ].

Edson H. Beall 2-18-11

5.Classification

Ownership of Property

[x] private
[] public-local
[ ] public-state
[ ] public-Federal

Category of Property

[x] building(s)
[ ] district
[ ] site
[ ] structure
[ ] object

Number of Resources within Property

contributing	noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		total

Name of related multiple property listing.

n/a

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register.

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Function

RECREATION AND CULTURE: music facility
COMMERCE/TRADE: business

Current Functions

VACANT

7. Description

Architectural Classification

Renaissance

see continuation sheet [ ].

Materials

foundation STONE: Limestone
walls BRICK
roof SYNTHETICS
other METAL
STONE: Limestone

see continuation sheet [ ].

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION
See continuation sheet [x]

8.Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

[x] **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history

[ ] **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

[ ] **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

[ ] **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

Property is:

[ ] **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

[ ] **B** removed from its original location.

[ ] **C** a birthplace or grave.

[ ] **D** a cemetery.

[ ] **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

[ ] **F** a commemorative property.

[ ] **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

ETHNIC HERITAGE: black
ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

Periods of Significance

1908 – 1952

Significant Dates

n/a

Significant Person(s)

n/a

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect/Builder

Paulus, John D.
Wagner, E. L., Construction Company

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

[ ] preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

[ ] previously listed in the National Register

[ ] previously determined eligible by the National Register

[ ] designated a National Historic Landmark

[ ] recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

#_____

[ ] recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

#_____

Primary location of additional data:

[x] State Historic Preservation Office

[ ] Other State Agency

[ ] Federal Agency

[ ] Local Government

[ ] University

[ ] Other:

Name of repository:_____

10.Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

UTM References

A. Zone	Easting	Northing	B. Zone	Easting	Northing
15	741 996	4279 904			
C. Zone	Easting	Northing	D. Zone	Easting	Northing

[ ] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Lynn Josse

organization _____ date November 29, 2010

street & number 3517 Connecticut St. telephone (314) 229-0793

city or town St. Louis state MO zip code 63118

Additional Documentation
Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional Items
(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner
(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name SAG PROPERTIES LLC

street & number 4515 MARYLAND AV STE 1-W telephone (314) 361-4486

city or town Saint Louis state MO zip code 63108

Summary

The Castle Ballroom is a three story brick building located at 2839-45 Olive Street in St. Louis, Missouri. The building is located at the northeast corner of the intersection of Olive Street and T. E. Huntley Avenue (formerly Ewing Street and 29th Street). It is adjoined by a later two-story brick building to the east and is bounded by an alley at the north. Most of the block to the south is cleared land. Both the Olive elevation and the T. E. Huntley elevation are built of face brick, long ago painted yellow, and detailed and organized in the Renaissance Revival style. The first story, built as storefront space, is almost entirely covered in corrugated metal and stuccoed panels. An added pent roof covered with composition shingle separates the altered first story from the intact second and third. Both are detailed with vertical divisions between the two-story bays and Revival features such as splayed stone lintels and rusticated-style brick. At the west elevation, two-story window openings are intact, evidencing the significant ballroom space within. The cornice is missing. The building retains integrity because its major character-defining feature, the ballroom, is intact.

Setting

This neighborhood, the Stoddard Addition, became one of the city's premiere residential districts soon after it was platted in 1851. Following the introduction of a horsecar line in the mid-1860s, Olive Street began to develop as a commercial corridor. In the 20th century, much of Locust Street immediately north was rebuilt as "Automobile Row," with many showrooms lining the street. The neighborhood is characterized by intermittently dense streetscapes with some surface parking and many new or altered buildings. In this context, the Castle Ballroom can be understood as part of a low-rise 20th century neighborhood of mixed commercial and industrial uses.

Across the street to the south is the Mill Creek Valley Urban Renewal area. This 454-acre tract was the result of a clearance project which razed one of the city's densest African American neighborhoods beginning in 1959. The low-rise community called Laclede Town was built south of the ballroom in the early 1960s; after subsequent expansions, it was closed in the 1980s and later razed. The property now belongs to the Sigma Chemical Company; most of it is open space. In this context, the Castle can be understood as one of a few remaining buildings with significant associations with the population of Mill Creek Valley.

Exterior

Both primary elevations are clad with dark brown face brick (painted yellow), detailed and organized in the Renaissance Revival style. At the south elevation, the first story is almost

entirely covered in corrugated metal and stuccoed panels. Double metal doors at the right indicate the ballroom entrance. Farther west, a single metal door to the right of two fixed display windows was used by the most recent tenant. A plastic sign indicates that the tenant was "Hats Galore and More." An added pent roof covered with composition shingle separates the altered first story from the intact second and third.

The two upper stories are organized with vertical divisions between the two-story bays. The Olive Street (south) facade is five bays wide. This elevation is organized with two formal end pavilions framing a three-bay center span. The end bays are more intricately designed. Two windows at the second and two at the third story are divided and framed by recessed vertical channels that begin at a narrow corbelled painted stone sill and continue to the cornice. Three of these channels run between vertical pilasters of brick which imitate rustication or quoining by recessing every third course. These frame the vertical one-over-one window sets. The windows have stone sills and splayed lintels, with recessed spandrel panels between stories. The third story lintels and the quoined pilasters are topped by a tracing course of projecting metal molding.

The three center bays are treated more as a unit. Below the second story windows a stone sill course provides horizontal emphasis. A second band course (ten courses up) is broken at the window pairs. Beginning near the top of the second story windows, the bays are separated by wide recessed panels on painted stone sills similar to those at the outer bays. Between them, the second and third story windows are paired, with a recessed brick spandrel panel between them. Over the third story window pairs, stylized pressed metal label molding projects strongly; their upper elements are also part of a band course around both elevations. Above this, a brick corbel table forms steps across the facade under a parged section which probably marks the location of a now-lost projecting cornice The parapet wall is parged and coped with clay tile.

The west elevation is similar to the south. It is wider than its counterpart, at eight bays instead of five. An overhead metal garage door is at the northern loading bay, left. The next bay to the south has a pair of metal double doors. Dispersed across the rest of the first story are two single metal doors with three small square fixed pane windows next to them, and two more sets of double doors. Like the south elevation, the first floor is finished with corrugated metal and with stuccoed panels. At the far left end of the first story, paint is applied directly to the brick. In addition, a section of the pent roof which wraps the two elevations over the first story has fallen off, revealing intact brown brick underneath.

The second and third stories are articulated in the same manner as the south elevation. The only major difference is that the six middle bays (between the end bays) have double-height windows instead of two pairs separated by a brick spandrel panel. Like some of the other windows, these large character-defining openings are boarded. Interior inspection reveals that some or all of the windows are intact.

The alley elevation (north) is red brick with a rubble limestone foundation. Beyond the taller front parapet wall at the west, the parapet steps gently down to the east and has clay tile coping. The door and window openings have segmental arches with rowlock brick arches (most of them three courses). Three first floor doors, roughly centered, are boarded, and a first floor window to the left is filled in with concrete block. Below it, a thick-lintelled basement opening, possibly a coal chute or window, is bricked over. There is also what looks like a closed-over half-sized door opening (either a basement door with the well now filled in or a tall window) to the right of the three doors.

The rest of the fenestration across the rear wall is irregular. Three windows line up vertically at the left end of the elevation, and two more at the second and third stories are next to them over the ground floor concrete blocked window. At the right end of the elevation there is a window opening midway up the wall, with a half-intact fire escape ladder to its right. To its left is a non-historic exterior brick chimney. Towards the center of the wall, it appears that a third story window has been bricked in. All of the remaining openings at this elevation are covered over with boards, corrugated metal, or other materials.

Close inspection of the east elevation reveals that the building's footprint is not a perfect rectangle. While the southern third of the building (facing Olive) is built at the lot lines, the rear two thirds is recessed a few feet to the west, leaving a long and very narrow unbuilt strip along the property line. When the adjacent two-story building was constructed, it abutted the Castle Ballroom at the south end, but this unbuilt strip provided a minimal light well at the north. Like the rear wall, sections of the east wall are spalling. Segmental arched window openings at the second and third stories are boarded or partially boarded. Clay tile coping runs along the parapet wall.

Interior: First story

The Castle Ballroom's first story was originally divided into nine storefronts, a loading dock, and an entrance to the ballroom itself (see Figure 2). The Sanborn map of 1909 indicates that the partitions between first floor spaces were plaster over metal lath, allowing flexibility in the disposition of spaces.

Currently, the four storefronts facing Olive have been consolidated into a single space. The large room has two separate tin ceiling patterns, indicating that at one time there were at least two separate storefronts. Iron columns with utilitarian flanged tops support north-south beams. The non-historic flooring includes carpet and ceramic tile.

Throughout the first floor, original lath walls have been removed and the spaces reconfigured. The next double storefront space to the north contains the only operable door and is used as storage and as a temporary hallway. The north wall of this space appears to be gypsum blocks.

This next storefront north is divided into drywalled office space with two individual small offices, most recently used as campaign space for public officials. The next space appears to have been used for loading by the previous tenant, a hat company; a conveyor cuts through the ceiling from the second floor and double doors lead to the street. The final space at the north end of the building is a loading dock, with an overhead garage door to the west.

Along the east end of the building, the original main entrance to the ballroom itself is at the easternmost bay facing Olive Street. From the street, double doors lead to a vestibule space. The new metal double doors are within a much larger opening covered with plywood. Within the vestibule, the floor is patterned hex tile, the walls are lined with white and gray marble wainscoting under a paneled wood upper walls, and the tin ceiling is partially intact. Through a set of paneled wood and glass double doors there is a wide flight of stairs leading to the second floor. The stairs themselves are newly surfaced with plywood for structural support. The wainscot is a synthetic imitation marble; wood handrails are intact. At the left side of the vestibule, three steps lead up to the rear of the building. Here, the floor is concrete or terrazzo, and walls are plastered. Through a series of rooms (formerly one large room serving the storefronts) one reaches the back (northeast) corner of the first story. Here, a door opens into the partial basement, but the steps are deteriorated and basement access is not currently possible. In the same space along the north wall, a wood staircase provides stage access to the second story ballroom.

Second and third stories

Climbing the wide stairs from the southeast corner of the building, the visitor reaches the ballroom itself. At the top of the stairs, a smaller staircase leads to the east balcony. At the east wall, a rollup metal door closes a doorway into the building to the east. [1]

To the left, the ballroom itself covers almost the entire floorplate of the building. The walls and ceilings are plastered. The plaster is failing at the east wall, exposing brick, and in sections across the ceiling, exposing wood lath. Portions of the ceiling retain a glued canvas-like covering, which is peeling off in large damp sheets. Most of the room is painted white.

The quality of the dance floor was a major selling point in early advertisements and interviews, and this floor appears to be intact under a layer of plywood. The dance floor is 1 ½" hardwood,

[1] The building to the east was constructed by the Castle Amusement Company in 1925-26, and the opening is shown on a 1932 Sanborn map. The reason for the connection is unknown. No evidence has been located in directories or other sources to indicate that the second building ever shared a use with the Castle Ballroom. The door is padlocked shut, and current owners do not have a key or know if there is still an opening behind it. The buildings have been under separate ownership for decades.

laid in a concentric hexagonal pattern During or before the tenancy of the hat company, a hole was cut into the north end of the dance floor and a conveyor belt added into one of the back storefronts at the first floor (Photos 8 – 10). Under the eastern balcony, the surface is 3 1/2" hardwood. Based on a souvenir image (Figure 6), it appears that some section under the balcony, either here or at the south elevation, was further divided to create auxilliary spaces such as the Ladies' Lounge that is pictured. There is a hole in the floor midway along the eastern wall, apparently caused by moisture from the outside. Where the plywood covering ends at the south end of the dance floor, the floor has been marked out as a tennis court. (This may lend credence to the as-yet unverified stories that a young Arthur Ashe played in this space).

Exterior windows are at the east, south and west walls. Many of these are boarded, including intact windows with boards on their outer sides. The two-story windows of the west elevation are set in three parts: a nine-light upper sash is separated by a wood mullion from what appears to be a large three-over-one double hung window. The wall between them is lined with mirrors (almost all of which are still present), adding to the room's sense of spaciousness.

At the north end of the ballroom, a proscenium stage is elevated from the dance floor. The stage is about 15 feet deep with a rounded plan. The proscenium arch features gold stenciled patterns; at the upper half, light bulb sockets are spaced throughout, centering portions of the pattern. A foliated stencil pattern is hinted at above the stage arch, but much of it has been blotted out by paint (which leaves a crenellated trace on the wall, indicating the addition of a now-lost "castle" frame in front of the arch). High in the wall at either side of the stage is a wide plaster medallion.

To the left of the stage, a door leads into a dressing room area; a narrow enclosed wood stair offers access to the stage and to a single upper room. To the right of the stage, double doors lead to a staircase which runs downstairs. Partitioned at the northeast corner is another room with two separate wood paneled doors.

The ballroom is lined with a balcony on the south and east walls, supported on marbleized plaster columns. Figures 5 and 6 indicate that the plaster columns are a later (but still historic) addition over the original cast iron columns. Both balconies have turned spindles and wood railings. At the upper story the columns are boxed, with crossed wood lath used to frame the openings. A walled off space at the southeast corner of the second story includes a large restroom space and a narrow stairway up to the third story residential space. The east balcony extends all the way to the outer wall, with a cloakroom at the far north end. At the south side of the room, the balcony is narrow. Beyond it is a series of rooms which appear to have been living quarters. A series of connected rooms along the outer wall would have been living space, with a bathroom and kitchen at the corner and on the east wall.

Integrity

The Castle Ballroom's exterior shows many alterations, some of which appear to be reversible. The most damaging is the removal of the original cornice, a common fate for the city's vacant brick buildings when such cornices were seen as a public safety hazard. The painted brick is not a serious problem; although it changes the color of the exterior, it is not thick or glossy, and mortar lines show clearly. The date of painting is unknown. The pent roof over the first story is clearly reversible; parts of it have already been reversed by the forces of nature and gravity with no ill effects to the façade underneath. The state of the storefronts underneath the metal and stuccoed siding is not determined; this is probably the greatest unknown in the design of an exterior restoration.

The commercial first floor interior is greatly altered, but such alterations are in accordance with the flexible design of the space. Interior partitions were removed and perhaps replaced during the period of significance, as seen in period Sanborn maps. This activity continued sporadically through the early 2000s as uses came and went.

For the purposes of the National Register, the most significant space in the building is the ballroom, which retains integrity. The dance floor, balcony, stage, even much of the plaster and woodwork are largely intact. Although some of the elements may not reflect the 1908 appearance, nearly all are original to the period of significance.

Summary

The Castle Ballroom, located at 2839 – 2845 Olive Street in St. Louis, Missouri, is locally significant under National Register Criterion A in the areas of Entertainment/Recreation and Ethnic Heritage: Black. Built in 1908 as Cave Hall, the venue was designed as a dance hall and dancing academy. Cave Hall became one of the major venues for social dancing and dance instruction in St. Louis prior to the dawn of the Jazz Age. By the 1930s, changing tastes in music and the nature of social dancing had transformed the city's dancing scene into one that was driven by jazz bands rather than dance orchestras, and the renamed Castle Ballroom hosted many of the most famous acts of the 1930s and 1940s. Located at the edge of St. Louis' storied Mill Creek Valley neighborhood, the Castle became one of only a few major halls that catered to an African American clientele. Since the Mill Creek Valley neighborhood was demolished almost in its entirety beginning in 1959, the Castle is one of the few extant buildings with significant associations with that community. While the exterior of the building suffers from obvious integrity issues, the major interior space, the ballroom itself, retains integrity. The period of significance is determined to begin in 1908 when the building was constructed and occupied, and ends in 1952, the date of the last identified dance and music events at the building.

Albers, Ahern, the Stoddard Addition, and Ballroom Dancing

Owners Herman Albers and Cornelius Ahern began their association long before the present building was constructed in 1908. Albers, an amateur singer, and Ahern, already an established musician, decided to begin a dancing academy after they met in 1895. They began by holding dances in rented halls. Albers explained their success in part by saying

> At that time there wasn't much competition.... In addition, dancing was popular.... one must remember that thirty years ago public dance halls were the only places where one might dance. Hotels and roadhouses made no provision for such amusement. There were no radios nor phonographs where one might have a private orchestra in his home. It was either go to a dance hall or not dance.[2]

According to Albers, Ahern continued at his day job as a shoe laster until the success of their Eclipse Dancing Academy allowed him to take on dance instruction full-time. By the time they moved the dancing academy to Uhrig's Cave, Albers had become proficient enough to teach as well. "Uhrig's Cave is no doubt well remembered," he wrote. "Our dance hall - and sometimes we converted it into a roller skating rink - was on the main floor, facing Jefferson avenue with the entrance on Washington avenue. It was a place where joy reigned supreme."[3]

[2] "The Old Steps Were the Best," *The Globe-Democrat Magazine*, December 22, 1929, p 15.
[3] Ibid

Their success led the partners to open a second dance hall, Harmony or Harmonie Hall, a few blocks away at Eighteenth and Olive. The *St. Louis Star* described the partnership:

> Mr. Ahern, who is in charge of this hall, is a Southern gentleman, possessed of all the chivalrous bearing of the natives of the Sunny South, and in addition to this his ability as a dancing master has never been questioned. He numbers among his pupils representatives of the best families of the city and takes a pardonable pride in his work. Mr. Albers, his partner, is in charge of the dancing hall at Eighteenth and Olive, known as Harmony Hall. This hall is about the same size as the one under Mr. Ahern's charge and is as well patronized. Classes are taught three nights each week, Tuesday and Friday nights at the Cave and Monday night at the Eighteenth street hall. [4]

The 1906 demolition of the Exposition Hall for the new Central Library building left the city without a large-scale entertainment venue, and the site of Uhrig's Cave was chosen to replace it.[5] Construction of the Coliseum less than two years later forced Albers and Ahern to look for a new location. They found one just three blocks south and two blocks west. Ahern purchased three lots from the St. Louis Bible Society in April, 1908, and took out a building permit less than a month later. With their new location in hand, the proprietors ran a classified ad: "THE [sic] old cave closes forever next Thursday evening, April 30; new one opens at Olive and 29th st. about Aug. 29; everyone invited."[6]

The new building, designed by John D. Paulus and built by the E. L. Wagner Construction Company, was handsome and up-to-date. The owners had a double-height ballroom constructed over a commercial first story. The *Post-Dispatch* reported the construction of a "business building of 10 stores on the first floor and one of the finest dancing academies in the west on the second floor."[7]

The choice of the Stoddard Addition location was an interesting one. The area was filled with large houses and gracious churches, lending part of the neighborhood the name "Piety Hill." By 1908 its place as the premiere residential neighborhood of St. Louis had been long ceded to the much newer subdivisions and private places of the Central West End. Map evidence indicates that when the Castle was constructed, its neighborhood was still one of two and three story single family dwellings with few flats and few industrial uses. Olive Street, with one of the city's principal streetcar lines, continued to evolve into a major commercial corridor, and some of its old residences were given storefront additions. The owners must have expected the first floor

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[4] *Inaugural Edition of the St. Louis Star*, March 13, 1904, p. 44.
[5] Mary Bartley, *St. Louis Lost*, Saint Louis: Virginia Publishing, 1994. p. 68.
[6] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* April 30, 1908. p. 22.
[7] "Sales of Realty for Week as Reported by Agents," *St. Louis Post – Dispatch,* May 10, 1908. p. A15B.

rental space to bring good income. Proximity to transit, to downtown and Midtown, and to their previous location must also have been considerations for Albers and Ahern.

Indeed, the new commercial space quickly filled up with tenants. The 1909 directory shows a dry goods shop, photographer, shoes, drug store, barber, tailor, coffee merchant or shop, and a restaurant. By 1910 the corner space was taken by a pharmacy operated by Dr. John Brennan, who was still listed at this address in 1930.

The ballroom opened on schedule, with a dance on August 29, 1908. The classified advertisement announcing its opening merely stated "NEW CAVE HALL opens Saturday evening; parties and classes as usual."[8] A quick news item a few days after the opening reported:

> The feature of the academy is the dancing floor, which was laid and dressed by the St. Louis Machine Floor Surfacing Co. of 2634 Olive street, and is the finest West of New York. The waiting and retiring rooms are especially well equipped and are marked by elegance. The hall will be open every night except Monday. Lessons will be given Tuesdays and Fridays and be in direct charge of Mr. and Mrs. Ahern and Mr. and Mrs. Albers. The music will be furnished by the old, popular Uhrig's Cave Orchestra.[9]

At the new location, lessons and dances proceeded much as they had before. Nightly dances continued, and special occasions were celebrated with theme parties and prizes. A historic postcard from c. 1910 (Figure 5) shows the crowd at a Mardi Gras dance assembled in the ballroom in full costume. This may have been an annual event – classified ads in 1912 and 1927 confirm that the event took place in those years as well.[10] Albers later recalled, "Those old days were interesting. I remember the masquerades we used to give when no one was allowed on the floor except in costume....Yes, we had good times in those days."[11] Prizes were given away at Wednesday evening receptions, and the hall ("the most attractive and best appointed in the country") was also offered for rental on Mondays and Wednesdays.[12] By the time Cornelius Ahern died in 1918, Cave Hall may have been the second largest public dancing hall in the City.[13]

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[8] Classified advertisements: "Dancing". *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* August 17, 1908. p. 11.
[9] "The New Cave Hall," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 3, 1908. p. 9. Herman Albers was in fact the president of the St. Louis Machine Surfacing Floor Company, and 2634 Olive was his listed as his home address at the time.
[10] Classified advertisements: "Dancing". *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 18, 1912. p. A7B. "Dancing," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 1, 1927.
[11] "The Old Steps Were the Best," *The Globe-Democrat Magazine*, December 22, 1929, p 15.
[12] Classified advertisements: "Coming Events". *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 10, 1912. p.A1B
[13] "Supervision of Dancing Schools is Advocated," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 8, 1921. p. 8. The Arcadia (one of four ballrooms in a national chain) was listed at 10,000 square feet; Cave Hall at 7,000, Trimp's at 6,000, and Westminster Hall at 5,000.

Changing uses: Ragtime and Jazz

Over the course of the first decade of operation, ballroom dancing and the traditional dance orchestra found competition. The "ragtime" dances (or "animal dances") which swept the nation in the early teens were well documented in St. Louis, although their reception at the Cave Hall is unknown. A reporter accompanied the three detectives of the city's new Morality Squad on patrol one Monday in December 1911, charged to enforce regulations outlawing " 'ragger' and grizzly bear dancing." Expecting to find "much gayety" at the Cave, the detectives "suddenly remembered that the hall did not hold dance sessions on Monday nights."[14] Any further Morality Squad visits to Cave Hall apparently went undocumented.

Based on Albers' later account, Cave Hall maintained its sense of propriety during this period. Albers later stated that Prohibition had no effect on business, because they had never served alcohol at this location. "There was no money in it," he said, "not enough to justify the worry it caused us."[15] Through World War I, the hall continued its regular dance schedule. On a day when only six classified advertisements for Dancing were run, the Cave Hall had two, including this one:

> Now open every Sunday afternoon and every evening except Mondays; lessons every Tuesday and Friday evening; admission (including war tax) , gentlemen 40c, ladies 20c; no extra charge for dancing instructions or check room privileges; best orchestra and latest music; finest ball room floor and accommodations. Cave Dancing Academy, Olive and 29th. H. Albers, manager.[16]

By early 1921, camel walks and jazz music had replaced turkey trots and ragtime as the newest craze. The *Post-Dispatch* picked up on the latest controversy by conducting a series of interviews on the new music and its effects. "It produces in me only a sense of irritation," Archbishop Glennon was quoted as saying. "I want it to end. I have a sense of expectancy that it will end, but it does not end."[17] More importantly, the music's effects on young people was of concern. Urged by groups of clergy and a coalition of dancing instructors, the City passed an ordinance to license and regulate dance halls that year (1921). The leader of the dance instructors said, "This ordinance should especially reach the irresponsible dancing teachers who,

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[14] "Morality Squad, Hunting Revelry, Fails to Find It," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* December 12, 1911. p. 8. The generally sarcastic tone of the article was repeated in an editorial the following November, reminding the stately ladies who condemned modern dancing that "when they were young and tender and dancing the waltz, there were at that time some great aunts and other venerable ladies who complained of the tame little waltz in the same prurient terms in which the terrible turkey trot is denounced today." "Grandma and the Turkey Trot," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* November 12, 1912.

[15] "The Old Steps Were the Best," *The Globe-Democrat Magazine*, December 22, 1929, p 15.

[16] Classified advertisement. *St. Louis Post - Dispatch (1879-1922);* Jan 31, 1919; pg. 15.

[17] "Condemnation and Praise for Jazz Music," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* February 14, 1922. p. 28.

because of the money there is in it, will teach any sort of wiggle."[18]

As with the previous decade's dance controversy, Cave Hall and its instructors seem to have stayed away from the media spotlight. A possible clue to their attitude may be found in the 1922 name change from Cave Hall to the Castle Ballroom. Vernon and Irene Castle were the greatest dance stars of the 1910s, known internationally as the epitome of grace and style. One of their accomplishments was infusing the latest dances with such propriety and elegance that they could meet with no objection. At their home ballroom in New York, they had separate rooms for jazz and tango dancing, and they were among the first white performers to travel with black musicians. Invoking the name of Castle could be viewed as a signal that the renamed ballroom welcomed the latest music and dances – so long as they were danced properly.

By the end of the decade, Herman Albers had retired from teaching, although he continued to manage the ballroom. Looking back on the early days of his career, he noted some of the changes he'd seen:

> In those days the dancers were concerned with the condition of the floor, whether it had springs, whether it was highly polished. The orchestra was of minor importance. But now the public demands a jazz band and cares little about the floor because with the prevalent steps an even surface is not absolutely essential.... Today with dancing to be found in almost every place where meals are served, the public dance halls are not so numerous. I have also noticed that the average age of our patrons is much younger now than it was years ago, for the reason that the adults who, presumably have the money for such things, go to a hotel or roadhouse to dance now and leave the dancing academies for the younger generation. And I might add that because of this situation, the dancers are more strictly regulated by us than they are in the other places.[19]

Dancers at the Castle may have been under a closer eye than those at hotels such as the Coronado or at nightclubs, but a display advertisement from 1929 seems to indicate that a decent distance between partners was no longer enforced. (Figure 7.)

Although connections to the Castle Ballroom are indirect, it can be inferred that the dawn of the Jazz Age spelled the end of the great ballroom dancing academies of St. Louis. As early as 1922, dance instructor Alice Martin claimed to have "practically given up teaching ballroom dancing" because of the "vulgar extremes of these times...."[20] By 1930, most teachers of

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[18] "Supervision of Dancing Schools is Advocated," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* February 8, 1921. p. 8.
[19] "The Old Steps Were the Best," *The Globe-Democrat Magazine*, December 22, 1929, p 15.
[20] "Condemnation and Praise for Jazz Music," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* February 14, 1922. p. 28. For more on Alice Martin's dance studio, see Lynn Josse, "Turner-Olive Building" National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, listed 12/12/2002.

ballroom dancing had stopped advertising. The Castle's newspaper advertisements increasingly emphasized the hall's availability for rental. [21]

In 1934, Herman Albers closed the Castle and filed for personal bankruptcy.[22] Business had dropped, his attorney said, due to a variety of factors: "hard times, the widening of Olive Street, and the fact the [sic] street cars no longer stop at that corner." The end of Prohibition had also played a role, he said, since people now danced at cafes where liquor was sold. By the end, the hall was operating only three days a week.

Among his assets, Albers included stock in the Castle Amusement Company. It was considered worthless.

The Castle Ballroom as an entertainment venue for African American Saint Louis

When Albers and Ahern chose the Olive Street location, they must have known they were gambling on a neighborhood in transition. Sanborn maps offer a snapshot of the vicinity in 1909. Most of the neighborhood was still occupied by white St. Louisans, but an African American congregation had moved into a large church structure two blocks north. By 1920, the next block to the east counted at least 2 black households, both boarding houses.[23]

In 1932 (the date of the next available Sanborn map), a major demographic shift is evident. All of the churches in the neighborhood were now operated by African American congregations, and the local public schools had become "colored" schools.[24] One of the city's most important African American institutions, the Pine Street YMCA, was located a block to the south, and the inadequate public hospital for black residents was another block south and west of that.

Much has been written about the ghettoization of St. Louis' growing black population in the early 20th century and the real estate practices which were instituted to enforce segregation. Newly platted subdivisions often had strict restrictions against people of different ethnic backgrounds. White citizen groups enacted covenants to prevent residents from selling to African Americans, and owners placed restrictions on the future sale of their own property. Members of the white realtors association were threatened with professional sanctions if they sold property in well-defined "restricted" neighborhoods to any non-Caucasian.

With most of the city effectively off-limits to African American purchasers and renters, the increasing black population was forced into well-defined dense neighborhoods. Limits of the

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[21] Classified advertisements: "Dancing". *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 2, 1930. p. 2E.
[22] "Operator of Castle Ballroom Bankrupt," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, March 28, 1934.
[23] Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920. Saint Louis Missouri: Ward 17, enumeration district 346, sheet 6b.
[24] Stoddard School became Banneker and Pope became Waring.

"restricted" neighborhoods were constantly tested, and the battle was fought from block to block. By the onset of the Great Depression, the Castle Ballroom was part of the extended Mill Creek Valley district, the city's largest African American neighborhood.

Oral histories indicate that at the dawn of the Great Depression, the Castle Ballroom still featured one of the few white dance bands in town.[25] This changed in 1932, when Dewey Jackson's band "became the first Negro band to play at the Castle Ballroom." [26]

In 1934, the property was purchased by the Laret Investment Company, a holding company. When the Castle reopened in 1935, it was under the management of Jesse Johnson, who was frequently referred to in the *Saint Louis Argus* as the city's top black promoter. The advertisement for opening weekend described the Castle as "THE MILLION DOLLAR DANCE PALACE – Exclusively for the Best Colored People of St. Louis." (Figure 9) The hall again held dances on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday nights, but they were advertised to a different clientele.[27]

By the end of the 1930s, the band most often associated with the Castle was Eddie Randle's St. Louis Blue Devils. They were a popular band for special engagements, and had a long-standing Tuesday evening engagement at the Castle. Dennis Owsley describes Randle's band as "the incubator for many St. Louis musicians who went on to national and international careers."[28] The most important of these was an East St. Louis teenager named Miles Davis, who became one of the most influential jazz musicians of the 20th century. Biographer John Szwed describes the scene:

> Randle's band was often compared to Al Cooper's Savoy Sultans of Harlem, a group with rhythmic drive and a great feeling for the blues. The Blue Devils also had a history of fine musicians passing though on their way to national acclaim – Jimmy Forrest and Ernie Wilkins, for example, and some exceptional trumpet players, such as Clark Terry and the legendary Levi Madison – and Randle himself was a trumpet player who had come up playing on the riverboats.... Finally, early in 1943, he [Miles Davis] made the call, and Randle agreed to a tryout. When the night came for his audition, Irene carried his trumpet to make sure he would go through with it. Together, they went over to the Castle

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[25] "Interview with Eddie Johnson, Elijah Shaw, Chick Finney and Eddie Randle interviewed by Irene Cortinvois," August 20, 1971. Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri – St. Louis, Jazzman Project Oral History T-010. Also Owsley.

[26] "Dewey Jackson Rites to be Held Today," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat.* March 30, 1966. and Cunningham, Lyn Driggs and Jimmy Jones *Sweet, Hot, and Blue: St. Louis' Musical Heritage.* Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 1989. p. 90.

[27] Advertisements. *St. Louis Argus.* November 15, 1935. p. 3.

[28] Owsley, 80.

Ballroom in St. Louis where Randle's band was appearing, and Miles auditioned in front of the evening's audience.[29]

During this period, the newspapers only indicate a handful of large-scale venues where African Americans could dance to live music in St. Louis. Clubs like Jordan Chambers' Riviera and the West End Waiters Hall were black-owned clubs which could accommodate sizable events. A scan of the advertising in the *St. Louis Argus* reveals the Castle as part of the small group of major venues which welcomed black business.

In an oral history conducted in 2006, 95-year-old Julia Jones remembered the clientele in the late 1930s as "predominantly black." As a waitress there, Jones recalled meeting Ella Fitzgerald and "Fats" Domino. Suggesting a later change in promoters or management, she stated, "all the big bands, those Jewish people brought them to the Castle Ballroom."[30]

In the late 1930s and into the early 1950s, under several different managements, the hall attracted national headliners for special concerts. Black promoter Jesse Johnson welcomed Duke Ellington to the Castle in November 1939.[31] In 1943, booker Sam D'Agostino brought in Fletcher Henderson for a two-night engagement.[32] *Billboard* magazine ran an item in 1946 celebrating manager Nathan Block's return and his trip to New York and Chicago "to arrange bookings" for one-night band attractions.[33] Count Basie remembered playing here in the late 1940s.[34]

Decline of the Ballroom

After World War II, a variety of factors made it more difficult for the large dance venues to stay in business. Dennis Owsley and others cite a new entertainment tax which "began to cause the decline of the big band genre" in St. Louis.[35] The tax was reportedly so harsh that "dance halls that hired musicians were forced to close." According to Owsley, the Plantation[36] and the Riviera

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[29] John Szwed, *So What: The Life of Miles Davis.* New York : Simon & Schuster, 2004, p. 24. This account is derived from the story of his then-girlfriend Irene; in an alternate version his tryout took place at the Rhumboogie Club.

[30] Loren McLane, "Oral History Interview with Julia Jones: Accompanied by her daughter Vanessa Branch." Scott Joplin Community Outreach program, University of Missouri - St. Louis 2006. Transcript in collection of the author. 22-23.

[31] Advertisements *St. Louis Argus.* November 10, 1939 and November 3, 1939, p. 7.

[32] "Fletcher Henderson Here Two Nites." *St. Louis Argus* September 17, 1943. p.14.

[33] "Block Back at St. Louis Castle," *Billboard Magazine* v.58 no. 39, September 28, 1946. p.18.

[34] Count Basie, *Good Morning Blues : the Autobiography of Count Basie as told to Albert Murray.* New York : Random House, 1985. p.237.

[35] Owsley, 100.

[36] Perhaps the top nightclub in St. Louis, the Plantation typically hired black entertainers for an all-white audience. It first opened to a black group in March 1932; later in the same year it opened for African Americans on Sunday evenings only. (*Saint Louis Argus* March 4 1932 p. 3, and subsequent editions.)

both closed in 1947. At that time the Castle was boasting of a new renovation, no doubt bolstered by its status as a top rental hall. But the Castle could not hold out, and it closed in 1949 or 1950.

Under new management, the Castle was replaced by the Mocambo Club. The original incarnation of the Mocambo was as a hot spot which regularly hosted after-hours entertainment. This club lasted barely a month before a dispute at the bar turned into a sensational shootout which claimed the life of the owner and a local underworld figure. The *Globe-Democrat* reported that there were thirty people present but only one witness.[37] Later that month, the club was forced to close after it was revealed that the liquor license was held in the name of a former police detective and not the (now-deceased) owner, who had a history of criminal activity.

The final years of the club are not well-documented, but the Mocambo reopened in 1951 or 1952 and continued the tradition of bringing in top national talent for special events. Louis Armstrong and the Ink Spots played for local audiences in 1952.[38] An advertisement for a veteran's dance in December 1952 is the last notice concerning the Mocambo found in a survey of local newspapers.

After the period of significance

By 1954, the ballroom space was occupied by the St. Louis Silent Club, a social organization for the deaf. Little is known about this club, but they do appear to have carried on at least some of the spirit of the previous management. In October of that year, after a raid which found "about 40 persons drinking beer and highballs" at one in the morning, the president of the club was arrested for selling liquor and operating a pool hall without a license.[39]

After 1959, the ballroom stood vacant for decades, interrupted only by the brief tenancy of "Hats Galore and More" in the early 2000s.

The final days of the Castle Ballroom coincided with a civic effort toward slum clearance. Mill Creek Valley at this time retained the unupdated housing stock of the 19th century, densely packed with African Americans who were given few other living options The neighborhood had a high crime rate, high infant mortality rate, and low indoor plumbing rate. One planning document described the neighborhood as "100 blocks of hopeless, rat-infested, residential

[37] The St. Louis Mercantile Library has collected much of the *Globe-Democrat* coverage of the incident, chronicling over a period of months the efforts of police to solve the case. Owner Sam Morfia and patron Bennie Greenberg died in the gun battle, but police believed that a third man shot Greenberg after Greenberg killed the owner. The only person who claimed to witness the two men shooting each other was suspected of being the third gunman. St. Louis Mercantile Library, St. Louis Globe-Democrat collection, Box 122/130.

[38] *St. Louis Argus,* May 2 1952 p. 22 and November 14, 1952 p. 22.

[39] "Deaf Mute Arrested for Selling Liquor," *Saint Louis Globe-Democrat*, October 25, 1954.

slums."[40]

A bond issue for clearance and redevelopment failed in 1948. Amendments to federal law in 1954 allowed the Mill Creek Valley to become an urban renewal project, and voters approved matching local funding in 1955. Original plans called for 4200 families to be relocated from a 454-block area. Roughly 2100 buildings plus accessory structures were to be demolished.[41]

The northern boundary of the clearance area was Olive Street. Beginning in 1959, nearly every home, church, and business in Mill Creek was demolished. Thriving commercial districts, significant institutional buildings (including the Pine Street YMCA) and untold homes were knocked to rubble and sent to the landfill. The vast majority of Mill Creek residents were not resettled in the new housing that was built across from the Castle.[42] In little more than a decade, the Castle Ballroom had lost its financial viability due to the entertainment tax and the destruction of the adjacent residential community. Now, the building is one of the last survivors in the area to retain a strong association with the African American community that once surrounded it.

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[40] *History of Renewal Technical Report*, City of St. Louis Development program, c. 1970. Typescript. p. 10.
[41] Land Clearance for Redevelopment Agency. "Redevelopment Plan for Mill Creek Valley." St. Louis, Missouri Project MO R-1. February 19, 1958. On file at Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.
[42] The Laclede Town housing experiment across the street was utopian in vision and its early days are remembered fondly, but all of the housing was demolished in the 1990s.

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"Uhrig's Cave and the Eclipse Dancing Academy." *Inaugural Edition of the St. Louis Star*, March 13, 1904, p. 44.

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property is:
80 FT 3 IN X 134 FT 8 IN
STODDARD ADDN
BLOCK 27 LOT 17-18-19

Boundary Justification

The proposed boundaries are those historically associated with the Castle Ballroom. These are the same lots purchased by Cornelius Ahern in 1908, and the parcel is very nearly the same as the footprint of the building.

Figure 1: location map (source: St. Louis Community Information Network)

Figure 2: Site map with photo locations, after Sanborn map, 1950

Figure 3: First floor plan by Melinda Stewart with photo key

Figure 4: Second floor plan by Melinda Stewart with photo key

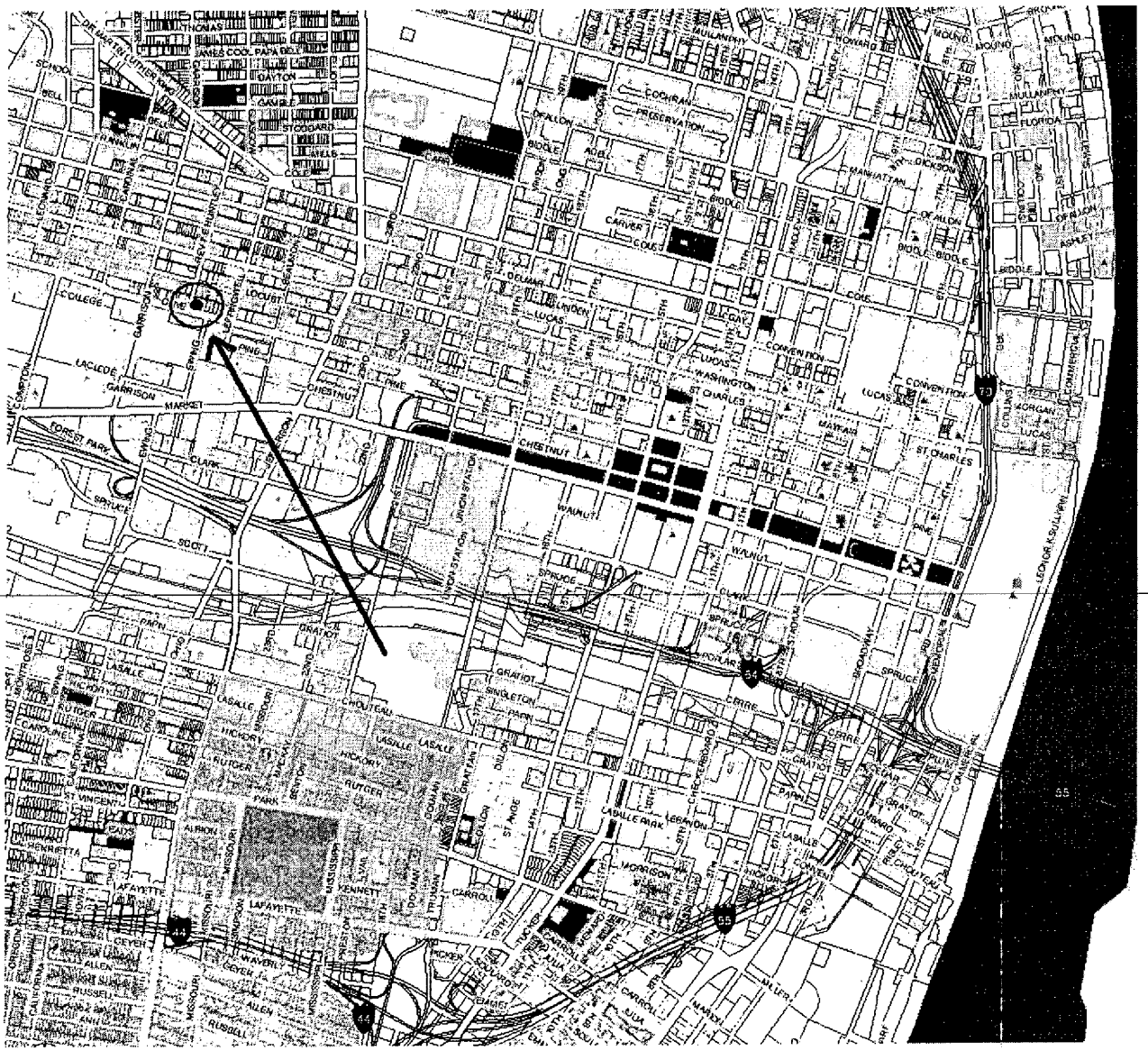
Figure 5: Third floor plan by Melinda Stewart with photo key

Figure 6: postcard c. 1910. Source: http://www.usgennet.org/usa/mo/county/stlouis/postcards/undated2cavecancingacademy.jpg accessed 7/23/2010. This postcard appears on the internet in several places; this version is credited to the Roland Vogt collection at History's Time Portal to Old St. Louis web site.

Figure 7: souvenir image. Source: http://www.hakes.com/item.asp?ListID=139&ItemNo=85387, accessed July 20, 2010.

Figure 8: Advertisement. *Saint Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 10, 1929.

Figure 9: Advertisement. *Saint Louis Argus*, October 25 1935, p. 3.



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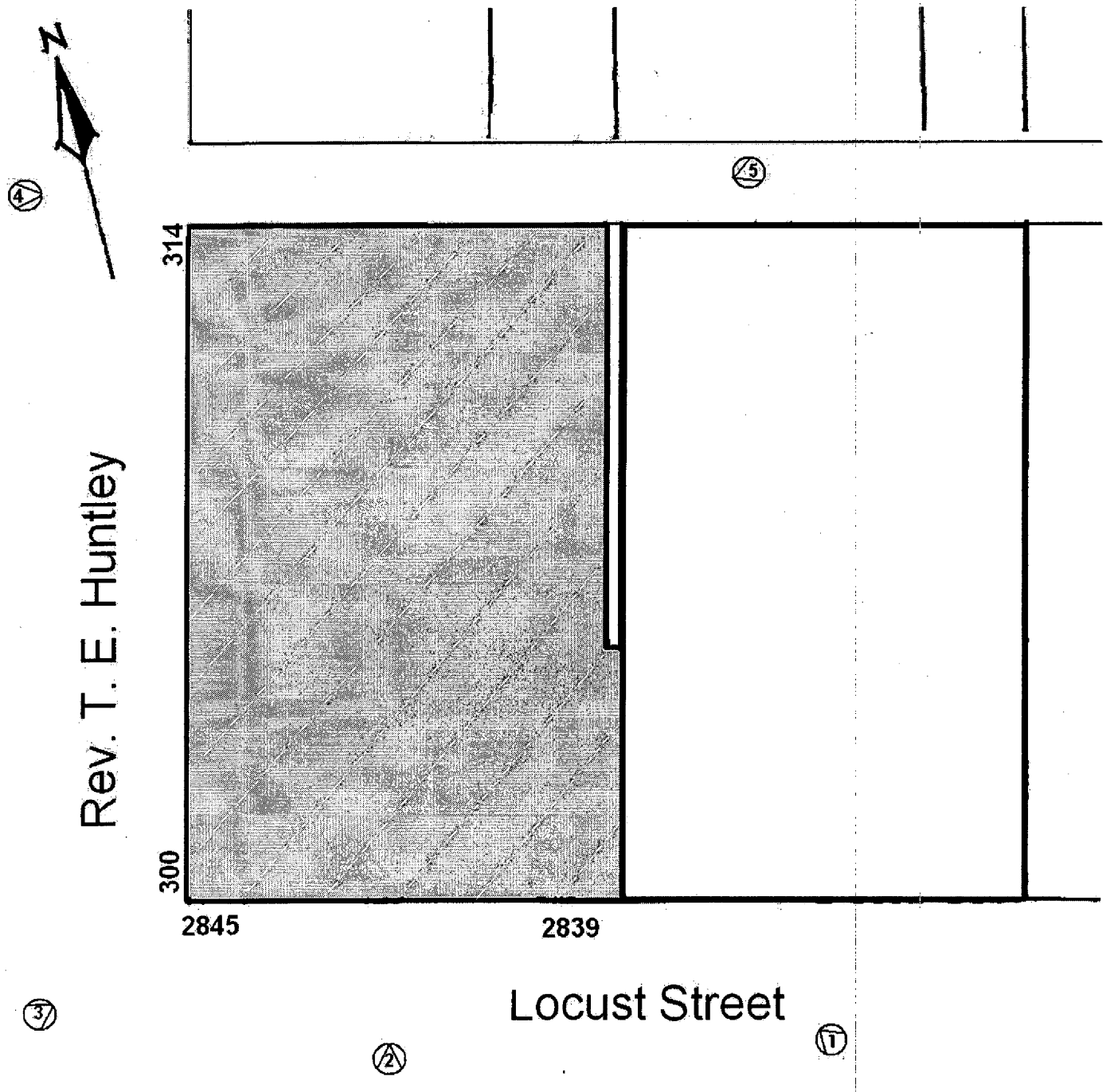

Figure 2: Site map with photo locations, after Sanborn map, 1950

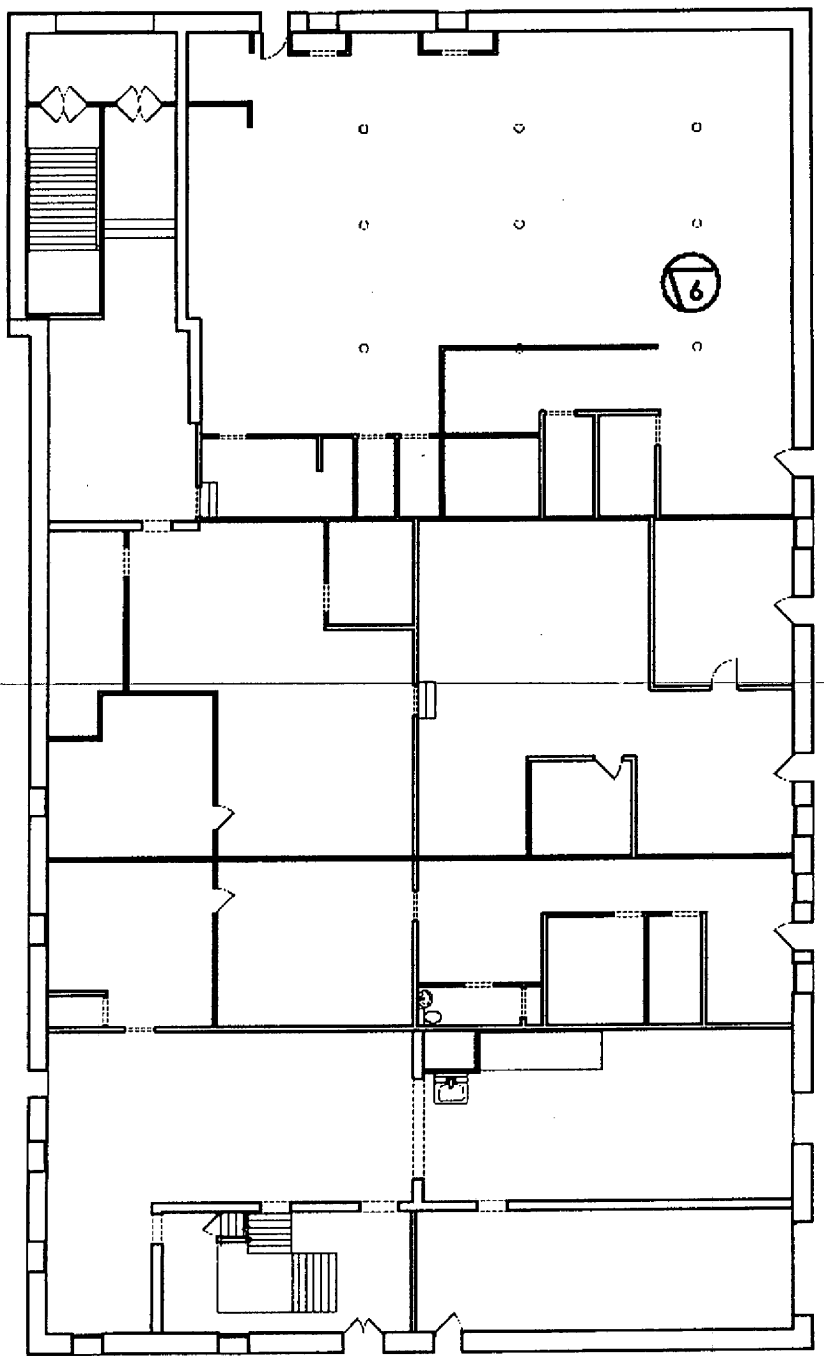

Figure 3: First floor plan by Melinda Stewart with photo key

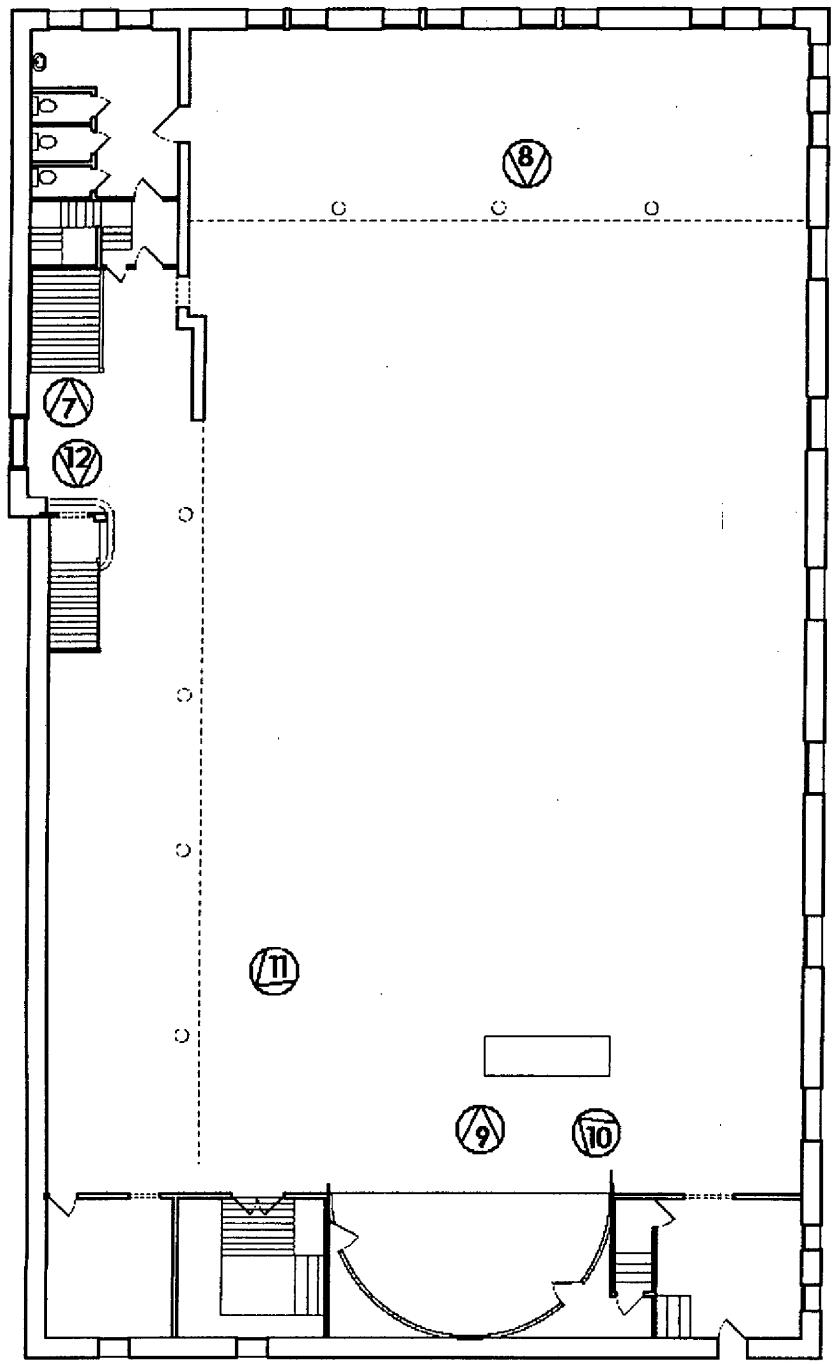

Figure 4: Second floor plan by Melinda Stewart with photo key

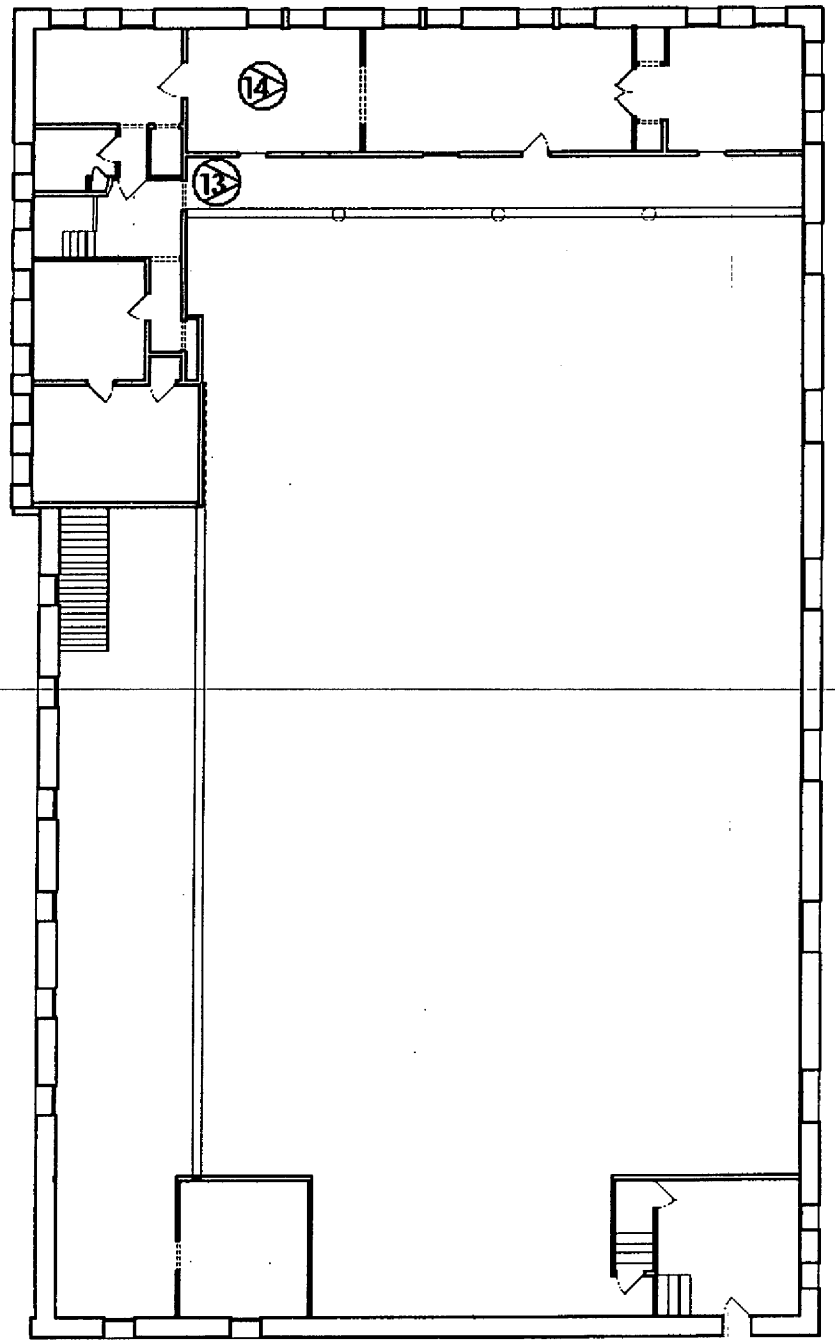

Figure 5: Third floor plan by Melinda Stewart with photo key

Figure 6: postcard c. 1910

Source:
http://www.usgennet.org/usa/mo/county/stlouis/postcards/undated2cavecancingacademy.jpg accessed 7/23/2010. This postcard appears on the internet in several places; this version is credited to the Roland Vogt collection at "History's Time Portal to Old St. Louis" web site.

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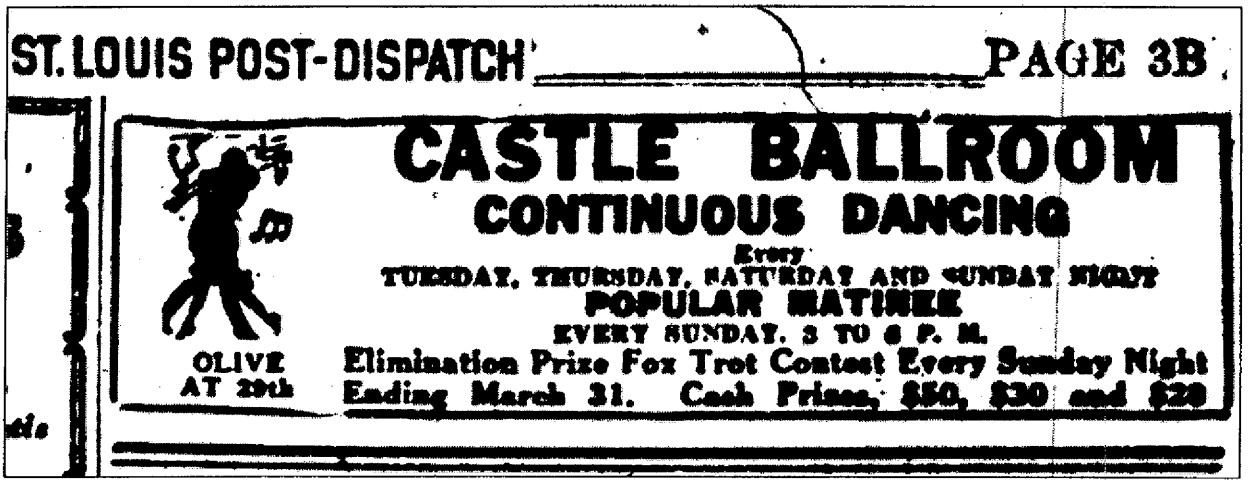
ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH PAGE 3B

CASTLE BALLROOM
CONTINUOUS DANCING
Every
TUESDAY, THURSDAY, SATURDAY AND SUNDAY NIGHT
POPULAR MATINEE
EVERY SUNDAY, 3 TO 6 P. M.
OLIVE AT 29th
Elimination Prize Fox Trot Contest Every Sunday Night
Ending March 31. Cash Prizes, $50, $30 and $20

Figure 8: March 10, 1929. One of the problems with the 1921 dance hall ordinance was a lack of specificity on what exactly constituted an objectionable or indecent dance. Couples were expected to maintain some space between them, but it appears that by 1929 even the Castle had given up.

Figure 9: St. Louis Argus, October 25 1935, p. 3.

HATS GALORE & MORE
McAuley Printing Company

HATS GALORE

HATS GALORE & MORE

at&t
PRIVATE
PROPERTY