MISSOURI’S 2018 PLACES IN PERIL
- NOMINATION FORM -

DATE SUBMITTED SEPT, 14, 2018
(DUE DATE EXTENDED TO SEPT. 14, 2018)

Send completed application to: Missouri Preservation
Attn: Places in Peril
319 N. Fourth St, Rm 850
St. Louis, MO 63102
Or email missouripreservation@yahoo.com
Or preservemo10@yahoo.com

You can also call the Missouri Preservation office at (660) 882-5946

Name of Place in Peril: Sara Lou Cafe

Address 4067-69 St. Louis Avenue

City St. Louis City City Zip Code 63104

Owner of Place in Peril (If they live elsewhere than the PIP):

Owner: (LRA) Land Reutilization Authority- Northside Community Housing, Inc (1Year Option)

Owner Address

City St. Louis State MO Zip Code 63103

Phone # Email

Name and Phone number of Local Newspaper (to share press release)
St Louis Post Dispatch 314-340-8000

(Continue other side)
Person/Group Submitting this nomination
Contact person(s) ________________________________

Address ____________________________________________________________________________

City St. Louis __________________ State MO _______ Zip Code 63113

Phone # ___________________________ Email _____________________

Please identify the designation status of the endangered place:

Year Built: 1906
□ National Historic Landmark
□ National Register of Historic Places: ___ Individual Listing and/or ___ Part of Historic District
□ Locally Designated Historic District/Locally Designated Landmark
□ Other: Historic Ville Community

Attachments
On separate pages, please provide the following for each section:
A. Property Description: Describe the endangered property. Include construction date (if known) and current physical condition. (1 page or less.)
B. Property Significance: Describe the endangered place’s significance. Why is the property important? Is the property valuable to the local community/ state/ region/ nation? (2 pages or less.)
C. Property Endangerment: How is the place threatened? (e.g., fire, neglect, abandonment, development pressure, proposed insensitive alterations) How immediate is the threat? Who are the key players involved? Is there demonstrated, organized or known support for its preservation? Is there opposition to its preservation? (1 page or less.)
D. Advocacy Support: How will listing the endangered property on Missouri’s Places in Peril list help? Is there certain support the owner seeks? (ex. Funds for preservation, a buyer, etc.)

Supplemental Material: (Please provide the following with your application, *required)
• *Photos: A disk or jump drive with a minimum of 6 labeled photos, black and white or color, in jpg format of the endangered property in high resolution (at least 9 megapixels). Do not insert photos in a document or pdf. If selected, they will be used for the presentation and press release and need to be separate from the nomination document.
• Articles: Copies of pertinent newspaper articles or other pertinent information chronicling the property’s history and its endangered status.
• *Map: Location map with endangered place marked

Nomination forms must be emailed or post marked by Friday, August 31, 2018. The announcement will be made in FALL 2018 (tentative date in late October).

Signature of Nominator ___________________________ Date submitted 9/15/18

NOTE: All submitted materials become the property of Missouri Preservation and will not be returned. The nominator grants Missouri Preservation permission to reproduce the enclosed materials as needed.
Property Description: Describe the endangered property. Include construction date (if known) and current physical condition. (1 page or less.)

The building, which dates to 1906, was condemned for demolition in the year of its centennial. It is one of four two-story corner mixed-use buildings at the intersection. This is the only one that is vacant, and it also happens to be the most architecturally stunning of the group.

This two story, mixed use building is structurally sound on the interior however the exterior is in dire need of stabilization due to the un-boarded windows and deteriorating masonry wall conditions. This all brick building has an eye-catching terra cotta roof with bay windows that overlook the major street scape. The roof also highlights several chimneys which are strategically located around the lower extremities of the roof.

Generally speaking, the façade of the property is in surprising good condition. The interior floors are solid and or not at all water damaged. Like most properties of this caliber, the property has been stripped of copper, plumbing and most other items which are sold for scrap. The building also sports several upright columns at the entrance of the former lounge and residential quarters (four apartment units).
Property Significance: Describe the endangered place's significance. Why is the property important? Is the property valuable to the local community/state/region/nation? (2 pages or less.)

About The Ville:

The Ville is an incredible historic African-American neighborhood in St. Louis with a rich history of African-American education, business, and art. Prior to the United States Civil Rights movement, the use of restrictive covenants and other legal restrictions prevented African-Americans from finding housing in most areas of the city. As a result, the African American population of St. Louis became heavily concentrated in and around the Ville.

The Ville is a testament of the resilience of African Americans in the United States and St. Louis. Though the less than half a square-mile community was formed out of the racism, restrictions, and exclusionary policies of the St. Louis region, it grew to influence the development of black history far outside of the neighborhood’s confines and across the United States developing black doctors, entrepreneurs, educators, and entertainers. Extraordinary national icons and heroes emerged from this neighborhood, including notable figures like: Tina Turner, Arthur Ashe, Dick Gregory, Annie Malone, Homer G. Phillips, and Chuck Berry.

The neighborhood became home to a number of important cultural institutions for the black community, including Sumner High School, Poro College, Lincoln University Law School, Harris-Stowe State University, Simmons Elementary, Tandy Rec Center, Annie Malone Children's Home, and Homer G. Phillips Hospital which, at the time, was responsible for training more black doctors than any other hospital in the world. Sara-Lou Café is a key feature of this historic neighborhood.

The Sara Lou Café, located at the corner of Sarah Street and St. Louis Avenue is a historically significant landmark, gathering spot, and family restaurant in North St. Louis City.

The location marks the northern border of our neighborhood. The neighborhood is bounded by St. Louis Avenue on the North, Martin Luther King drive on the South, Sarah on the East and Taylor on the West. This project will signify hope, investment, development, dignity, pride, and restoration for the neighborhood. It will also result in a new wave of economic possibility.
Property Endangerment: How is the place threatened? (e.g., fire, neglect, abandonment, development pressure, proposed insensitive alterations) How immediate is the threat? Who are the key players involved? Is there demonstrated, organized or known support for its preservation? Is there opposition to its preservation? (1 page or less.)

In 2010, the city erected a fence around the building to protect the sidewalks from falling clay tiles. The tiles’ fall was triggered by damage caused through theft of the metal guttering. Yet the building is far from a wreck.

A look at the rear wall shows no structural problems with the masonry walls. Someone wisely demolished a sagging frame porch that had been enclosed and which provided access to the second floor. Beyond the holes in the roofs of the false gables, the roof seems sound.

The building has been abandoned for years. Its neon sign for the famous, shuttered Sara-Lou Café has attracted a great deal of attention. The sign was removed for preservation and will be added once rehabilitation is completed.

The neighborhood, long neglected and underserved, is experiencing revitalization and reinvestment at an increase pace with residential construction. With young professionals moving into urban areas, in proximity with the amenities they seek in a City, The Ville is poised to achieve a critical mass of investment, leading to potential commercial development.

The mission of Northside Community Housing, Inc. (NCHI) is to provide high quality housing that is affordable to low- and moderate-income area residents and to create opportunities for them to improve their lives and revitalize the community.

We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that has been leading community development in The Ville neighborhood since 1977.

Our model of building a mixed-income community understands the needs of the diverse demographics of residents within St. Louis City. We address the scope of economic vitality by providing an environment that is comfortable and safe, with high-quality housing and infrastructure.

We believe in empowering residents and supporting families to enable them to build their personal assets. We believe that everyone should have opportunities that allow them to attain a sense of well-being and satisfaction in their lives. We value every person and family and strive to build an inclusive, diverse community where everyone is treated fairly. As a community organization, we value fiscal responsibility and accountability in our operations.
Advocacy Support: How will listing the endangered property on Missouri’s Places in Peril list help? Is there certain support the owner seeks? (ex. Funds for preservation, a buyer, etc.)

Listing will help to add credibility to the case for support and help to build momentum and legitimacy for efforts to raise philanthropic dollars to rehabilitate the landmark.

In-line with its strategic plan, NCHI executes its mission focusing on four pillars of activity:

1. Housing – preserving and growing the housing stock of North St. Louis and providing long-term housing opportunities for residents.
2. Supporting Services – Connecting residents with resources and opportunities available within and beyond the neighborhood.
3. Collaboration, Quality of Life, and Community Engagement – Collaborating with partners to engage residents in advancing the community and improving their quality of life.
4. Organizational Stability – Developing systems that will strengthen the capacity of the organization to be a continued resource to the neighborhood.

- To date, NCHI has raised $32 million dollars to develop 248 homes for low-and-moderate income families.
- 123 single family homes have been developed, 10 of which have been sold to owner-occupants.
- 40 Owner-occupied homes have been repaired.
- NCHI launched the first lease-purchase LIHTC program in the State.
- 11 vacant lots turned into community gardens.
- Supports four major community events per year.
- NCHI collaborates with other organizations in the community, including:
  - 4theVille, a partnership between Northside Community Housing and multi-generational Ville residents to celebrate and share the rich history of the Ville.
  - Ville Collaborative.
  - RISE.
  - St. Matthew the Apostle Church.
  - Incarnate Word Foundation.
  - Young Professionals Organization Volunteers.
The following pages include scans of news stories with more information on the nominated place.

These images were sent in with the nomination as separate files.
James "Jimmy" Owens Jr., the owner of the historical St. Louis landmarks Sarah Lou Restaurant and the Golden Slipper Lounge, departed this life on January 17, 2011.

Sarah Lou sat at the northeast corner of St. Louis and Sarah avenues and was a mainstay in St. Louis city for more than 30 years. Most remembered the establishment, which closed in 2002, for its one-of-a-kind "Sarah Lou Shrimp" and tartar sauce. Many have attempted to replicate the recipe and some have come close, family members said, but there will only be one Sarah Lou.
"The restaurant was renowned," said Joe Lewis, a friend and regular customer who attended the wake on Jan. 25 at the Ozella Foster Funeral Service. "There was nothing like it. And I have not had anything like it since."

Jimmy Owens is survived by his children: Janet Horton of St. Louis, Joyce Ferguson and her husband, John, of Los Angeles; Jerard Owens and his wife, Adria, of Arlington, Va.; and Byron Owens of St. Louis. His son James Owens III has passed away, but his wife Doris Owens attended the services. Owens had 18 grandchildren, 17 great grandchildren and three great, great grandchildren.

In 1972, Jimmy bought the Sarah Lou restaurant, which had been shut down under the previous owner, with his late wife Erma Jean Owens. However in the late 1950s, Jimmy had opened the Golden Slipper Lounge with his first wife, Earline Carrin, who also has passed. At that time, Jimmy was working for the Advance Vending company, fixing jukeboxes and vending machines. He would drive around town repairing the machines and stocking the jukeboxes with all the latest records. His good friends and children remember riding around with him to the various businesses.

"We were able to go into places where blacks weren't allowed because it was during the time of segregation," said Janet Horton, his daughter.

The owners then of Advance Vending were Italian, Horton said, and they helped Jimmy get past much of the red tape that black business owners faced during that time. Through regularly frequenting bars and restaurants with the vending business, Jimmy befriended many people in the industry. These relationships, along with his jovial, "big talker" manner, helped his businesses flourish, Horton said. He continued working for Advance Vending for more than 20 years.
The name "Golden Slipper" came from one of the first regular customers who always wore gold stilettos. Later the woman gave the shoes to Jimmy, and he mounted them in the bar.

In 1972, Jimmy and Erma Jean moved the Golden Slipper right next door to Sarah Lou. Debbie Thomas, who worked at the lounge for 15 years, said that she could always tell when Jimmy was coming because the many keys he carried jingled when he walked. He always made sure that everyone was doing okay and taken care of, she said.

The bar and restaurant were gathering places for the neighborhood, many said.

"People cared about each other," Thomas said. "It was like a family."

The lounge - a rustic-looking bar with booths that Jimmy built himself - had about 75 people come through every night and about 150 on the weekends. The restaurant potentially sold more shrimp than any other non-chain restaurant in the Midwest, said his son Jerard Owens.

Many said Jimmy was like a "godfather" in the community because he was an avid advocate for children's causes, such as Kiwanis, and he employed generations of neighborhood residents. Many people from police to politicians frequented the restaurant and bar.

"At the time, politicians would come into the bar and use the bar owners to talk with the people," Jerard said.

Although not many white people would eat at the restaurant in the early years, they would order food to go, particularly during the lunch rush. In 30 years of business, Sarah Lou only raised its prices on shrimp by 75 cents, Jerard said.

"No matter how much the market fluctuated, he always wanted it affordable for people to come and enjoy a delicacy," he said.
Jerard remembers taking trips to Brownsville, Texas to meet with people in the shrimp industry, as well as to Chicago for the National Restaurant Association shows. Many suppliers would bid for the restaurant's business because they knew of its high-volume shrimp needs.

Horton, who worked at the restaurant for a time, said the high traffic made for laborious work. After a few years, she returned to working as a hospice nurse. As a young man, Jimmy studied at Lincoln University for one semester with the intention of pursuing medicine. Because of a lack of funds, he withdrew from college and got a good-paying job at Krey Packing Company. Horton said her father always encouraged his children to get a college education.

And without fail, Jimmy would close down the restaurant for a month and take his family on vacation - mostly hunting and fishing trips. He was a member of the National Rifle Association for 20 years.

The family decided to close the business because Jimmy could no longer handle the business' many facets. The 100-year-old historical building also needed repair but the abiding by the historical-building regulations was overwhelming, Jerard said.

The restaurant had many well-known regulars, including Dennis Edwards of the Temptations, the Bosley family and many other elected officials over the years. Many will remember Jimmy's joyful presence and his favorite sayings, such as, "I don't know everything, but I know a little about all things."
If photographs of its old neon sign measured anything, the “Sarah-Lou” building at the northeast corner of St. Louis and Sarah avenues in the Greater Ville is a winner. Although the building has been abandoned for years, its sign for the famous, shuttered Sarah-Lou Cafe attracts a great deal of attention. Alas, the attention the building needs to attract is that of an owner willing to rehabilitate the fine corner mixed-use building.

The building, which dates to 1906, was condemned for demolition in the year of its centennial. This year, the city erected a fence around the building to protect the sidewalks from falling clay tiles. The tiles’ fall was triggered by
damage caused through theft of the metal guttering. Yet the privately-owned building is far from a wreck.

A look at the rear wall shows no structural problems with the masonry walls. Someone wisely demolished a sagging frame porch that had been enclosed and which provided access to the second floor. Beyond the holes in the roofs of the false gables, the roof seems sound. Hopefully someone will come along and rescue this building, which is one of four two-story corner mixed-use buildings at the intersection. This is the only one that is vacant, and it also happens to be the most architecturally stunning of the group.

This entry was posted in North St. Louis, The Ville Bookmark the permalink.

8 Responses to “Sarah-Lou” Building at Risk

Chris says:
August 5, 2010 at 1:09 pm

But if we demolished it, we could provide a much needed parking lot to serve the other three corners.

Amy B says:
August 5, 2010 at 4:31 pm

To Chris- Demolish it? The most “architecturally stunning” one of the group? Doesn’t seem what this site is all about. Otherwise it would be named “Demolition Research” 😊

Thanks for your posts Michael- I appreciate you sharing your passion with us who care as much as you.

SLP

Chris says:
August 6, 2010 at 2:27 am

I was being facetious, Amy.
Amy B says:
August 6, 2010 at 3:57 pm

oh good. 😞 that’s the hard part about not being able to hear the tone in someone’s written word.

Karen Simmons says:
August 7, 2010 at 5:12 am

Well, I agree. However, understanding the NEIGHBORHOOD must be brought to bare. Ironically, this area is pretty much populated, but it’s not in one of the most desirable areas, I can say that because I graduated from high school in this area, Sumner High. The problem lies in someone investing in an area where they might not realize a decent ROI. While I am passionate about saving these “jewels” what must go hand in hand with saving the buildings, is saving the people and establishing an improved quality of life in these core neighborhoods. None of my friends are “dying” to move in this area. Pun intended, and not too many are dying to throw the money away that it is going to take to do this building properly.

I love these old “jewels” perhaps more than you all, I rehabbled one, yet, what causes us to loose more of them everyday, is the piecemeal approach. The major reason I am for development on a large scale is because more of an impact can be made by improving entire neighborhoods and major people needs can and must be addressed. Looking at these pictures and going, “OOOOohhhhh, Ahhhhh” is noble to say the least, but responsible development must address QUALITY OF LIFE, comps in the surrounding neighborhoods, that make it economically viable for folks to invest in an undertaking of this sort. We must also be as passionate about people as we are bricks. It is indeed a diamond in the rough, one of the roughest neighborhoods around!

Yes, it can be salvaged, if the people surrounding it are salvaged as well! This is a fact we must give attention to, especially in a city that has lost more than half of it’s population in a 35 year period! Why are we loosing people that could live in these fine brick structures? A poor quality of life causing folks to head for the hills. Let’s not hug the bricks without hugging the people. Selah!!!

Karen Simmons says:
August 7, 2010 at 5:21 am

PS, for those who really care, answer the Macedonian call, “COME ON OVER to Macedonia and help us.” Help us by rehabbing and moving into some of these “jewels”. Lots to go around.

Jerome Mercurio says:
January 19, 2011 at 12:11 am

I am 74 years old, and lived at 4100 block of Labadie and remember going to the Sara Lou Cafe for calf brain sandwiches, and on Fridays fried jack salmon fish plates, fried shrimp ordered from a “walk up” window(you didn’t have to enter the tavern just to order food) because there were no drive throughs back in the day. on fridays and saturdays were the two biggest days for take home meals, this place was a landmark for many years and I am sorry the building has fallen into decay.

Sltdad says:
June 30, 2011 at 3:17 am

I lived in the 4000 block of Maffitt for years and I used to peel shrimp in the basement with the owner’s son as a summer job. Covered with shell dust and stinkin’, it was an honest buck and I loved it. Hidden in the weeds in front was the only working freight elevator in the neighborhood that I knew of; we took deliveries almost every day.
Sara Lou's Not Doing Well

Posted on January 10, 2014 by

Over three years ago, my friends and I came across one of the most architecturally harmonious intersections in the city: Sarah and St. Louis Avenue. Sara Lou Cafe, named after the intersection, was long an institution in the Ville. But with the death...
The sign, while not original to the eclectic building, is still a standout and an excellent example of Twentieth Century neon sign design.

The plywood has gone up since my first examination of the building, and it is sadly not surprising; this building is in increasingly bad shape.
Around on the Sarah side, one can see the horrible bulge out of the bay window on the second floor; I would not be surprised if it collapses this winter.

I always loved this porch; think of the time and money that went into building it originally. Someone truly had pride when they built this building.
Across Sarah is another of the buildings on the corner; it is in excellent shape, though abandoned. In fact, it seems all the four corners are now abandoned, which was not the case just a few years ago.
Zoning Map: Neighborhood Commercial

Zoning Key
- A. Single Family Residential
- B. Two Family Residential
- C. Multi Family Residential