

**INTENSIVE LEVEL SURVEY  
OF  
CLASSEN TEN PENN**

**Submitted to:**

**City of Oklahoma City  
Neighborhood and Community Planning Department**

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## ABSTRACT OF REPORT

This is a report on an intensive level historical resource survey. This survey was conducted under a contract with the City of Oklahoma City and encompassed the Classen Ten Penn neighborhood. The Classen Ten Penn study area stretches from the south side of N.W. 16th Street to the north side of 10th Street, and from the west side of Western Avenue and Classen Boulevard and the east side of Pennsylvania Avenue. Robison Boeck Architects performed the survey under a contract with the City of Oklahoma City to: 1) train and monitor City staff for intensive level survey work performed by City staff; 2) review each survey form completed by City staff to insure that appropriate answers were provided; and 3) provide complete files of photographs, survey forms, indexes, and maps.

The survey identified one historic district, roughly coterminous with the survey boundaries (refer to map). It also identified three (3) individually eligible properties and three (3) properties which warrant further study within the survey boundaries.

## INTRODUCTION

The Classen Ten Penn study area stretches from N.W. 16th Street to N.W. 10th Street, and from Western and Classen to Pennsylvania. The history of Classen Ten Penn provides a classic case study in the role of transportation systems in the evolution of neighborhoods in Oklahoma City. The neighborhood was first developed between two street car routes. That form of transportation could thus be said to have been the catalyst of a residential pattern that was to later be identified as middle class and suburban. With the decline of street cars and the rise of the automobile, the neighborhood was changed dramatically. In the 1970s, the energy crisis gave hope that another transformation in Oklahoma City's transportation methods would revitalize the neighborhood, but those hopes have not been realized. The aesthetic quality of the neighborhood is a key to its potential for recovery because some decline has occurred and some severe deterioration exists, yet future potentials for stabilization are strong. The physical environment of the study area is very pleasant due to interesting architectural styles within older and well planned subdivisions.

## PROJECT OBJECTIVES

This project fulfills the following objectives:

1. Delineate boundaries for a potential National Register Historic District or districts within the Classen Ten Penn neighborhood.
2. Identify individual properties which, on the basis of age (over 50 years old) and integrity, contribute to a potential historic district or districts within the Classen Ten Penn neighborhood and to substantiate such assessments;
3. Record, photograph, and identify those individual properties in the project area which, on the basis of age and integrity warrant further study to determine individual eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and to substantiate such assessments;
4. Identify and characterize those properties in the project area which, on the basis of insufficient age or integrity do not contribute to a potential historic district or districts within the Classen Ten Penn neighborhood; and
5. Identify and annotate all reference material necessary for completing National Register nominations of properties located in the study areas that are determined to warrant further study.

## AREA SURVEYED

The Classen Ten Penn study area stretches from the south side of N.W. 16th Street to the north side of 10th Street, and from the west side of Western Avenue and Classen Boulevard to the east side of Pennsylvania Avenue.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The initial phase of the research centered on the social, economic, political, intellectual and cultural history of the study area. Special attention was paid to historical developments of national interest and influence, and the material lives of the residents of the area, as well as trends which contributed to the distinct culture of central Oklahoma. Historical research involved archival study, oral history, and physically walking the district in an effort to reconstruct the way that residents lived their daily lives. This research helps give meaning to the contexts of potential districts as they exist today, in addition to their cultural roots.

The architectural researcher, project historian and project architect drove and walked through the entire neighborhood to familiarize themselves with the dominant architectural styles, potentially individually eligible properties, and examples of potentially noncontributing properties. This investigation helped formulate an overall picture of the neighborhood's physical characteristics.

The architectural researcher and project architect trained and monitored the work of City staff in conducting an intensive-level survey of properties in the study area. This required at least sixteen (16) hours of training in the identification of architectural styles and elements found in the Classen-10-Penn Neighborhood. This training included a workshop consisting of a slide presentation, compilation and distribution to participating City staff of a guidebook on identifying architectural styles and elements, and training sessions out in the field with City staff.

The architectural researcher reviewed each survey form and accompanying photographs to determine whether or not each property contributes to the potential historic district, whether the property warrants further study or is individually eligible for listing in the National Register, and whether the proper justification for that status has been provided.

The architectural researcher then compiled and submitted the following materials: completed survey forms; field notes and documentation used in form preparation; computer survey data recorded on a double-sided double-density 5 1/4 inch magnetic floppy diskette; and photographs of each property, which have been labeled and filed with completed survey forms; and photograph negatives and contact sheets which have been indexed and stored in binders. A map was also completed which delineated the boundaries of the eligible historic district; and which graphically depicted all properties within the district in terms of whether they were noncontributing, contributing, properties which warrant further study, properties which were individually eligible for listing in the National Register.

## HISTORY OF THE CLASSEN TEN PENN NEIGHBORHOOD

The Classen Ten Penn study area stretches from N.W. 16th Street to N.W. 10th Street, and from Western and Classen to Pennsylvania. The history of Classen Ten Penn provides a classic case study in the role of transportation systems in the evolution of neighborhoods in Oklahoma City. The neighborhood was first developed between two street car routes. That form of transportation could thus be said to have been the catalyst of a residential pattern that was to later be identified as "middle class" and "suburban". With the decline of street cars and the rise of the automobile, the neighborhood was changed dramatically. In the 1970s, the energy crisis gave hope that another transformation in Oklahoma City's transportation methods would revitalize the neighborhood, but those hopes have not been realized.

The Classen Ten Penn neighborhood was developed in the first decade of the 20th Century, as the Oklahoma Railway Company extended a street car line along Blackwelder Avenue to N.W. 16th Street. The key impetus for this development was the founding of Epworth University in 1904. A cooperative effort involving entrepreneurs, such as John Shartel and Anton Classen, and city officials successfully recruited the Methodist University to the outskirts of the city. The University's original location was two blocks to the north of the survey area. In 1919, it was moved to Northwest 23rd Street and Blackwelder and renamed Oklahoma City University. Even so, the close proximity of an institution of higher learning helped form the character of the survey area.<sup>1</sup>

Street cars prompted many civic leaders to move from the city center and near the terminus of these lines, even though they could afford any method of transportation. Today, many would recoil from a loud clanging of a massive street car engine. Evidently, such a seeming drawback was secondary to the thrill of being near this modern method of transportation.

Street car routes allowed developers to guide Oklahoma City's growth pattern of affluent residential construction to the northwest. The Works Project Administration's Oklahoma: A Guide to the Sooner State described this pattern:

The northwest quarter of the city spreads fanwise, street after street, mile after mile of residences, occasional apartment houses, schools, Oklahoma City University, hospitals, local business centers, outlying movie houses, and an impressive high school stadium. It is this area that you will find at their best homekeeping Oklahomans, from the clerk paying installments on a low-priced car and a five room bungalow to an oil-enriched millionaire ...just beyond the city limits.<sup>2</sup>



A similar analysis was represented in Oklahoma City 1890 to 1930: Platted, Parked, and Populated. It described the area's "charming one-and two-story clapboard houses with ample front porches and decorative windows" as being developed between 1905 and 1920 "for people who provided support services for the developing Central District - clerks, tradesmen, and proprietors..."<sup>3</sup>

A study of one thousand residents using the 1930 City Directory confirmed this pattern by demonstrating that "about 80% of the business people lived north of Tenth Street."<sup>4</sup> Classen Ten Penn thus represented the southern and eastern boundary of this residential system which would come to be known as suburbia.

A survey of residents living in 1920 and 1940 on Blackwelder from Linwood (just to the south of the study unit) to N.W. 16th Street adds further confirmation to this pattern. Blackwelder was next to the street car tracks in the center of the study unit. In 1920, the residents on the southern portion of the street tended to be laborers and skilled workers. Occupations included a bricklayer, two plumbers, and a rate clerk for the Oklahoma Railway Company. There was a transition area from 11th to 12th Streets where a jeweler and an advertising manager lived, as well as an empty block. Residents in the northern portion included a produce clerk who worked on the northwestern outskirts of the city and another unskilled laborer; three skilled tradesmen; and two persons who were presidents of their own small businesses.

In 1940, the similar pattern held. To the South were: two dressmakers, two salesmen, two clerks, and a dishwasher. In the transition area were: a jeweler, a foreman, a grocery store and vacant space. To the north were: numerous skilled workers, two "oil operators", two managers, and two businessmen who worked in real estate and insurance. This basic pattern persisted despite a remarkable turnover of residents; only one person in this area could be definitely established as a continuous resident in both 1920 and 1940.<sup>5</sup>

A comparable pattern documented in Oklahoma City 1890 to 1930 on the southern and eastern borders of Classen Ten Penn. From 1910 to 1930, Park Place, on the south of the area, was developed into "the Bungalow Street." The study referred to the street as "a catalog of variations of the bungalow theme." The basic bungalow in this area was "a functional one story house that was built for economy, energy efficiency, and spacious interior arrangements." Their prices ranged "from \$2,815 to \$8,600 for five to eight room houses that were 'practical, artistic, and desirable for large families.'"<sup>6</sup>

On the eastern border of Classen Ten Penn was the Summer's Place addition. The northern two-thirds of the area stretching from Western to Ellison was the home of several prominent architects, builders, and owners of construction companies.

The history of African-Americans in the survey area has been lost because officially no person of "African Descent" were permitted to reside in the area. Even so, the novelist

Ralph Ellison lived on the northeast border of Classen Ten Penn. His mother was a housekeeper, and she lived above the garage of her white employer. Ellison enjoyed living in that forbidden area because it gave him easy access to excellent music instructors who were further north on Classen Avenue.<sup>7</sup>

During the Depression, the Classen Ten Penn Neighborhood was the site of two federal projects. In 1936, the WPA laid concrete streets and driveway entrances in the southern portion of Classen Tenn Penn. In 1931 McKinley Park was constructed. Both projects were labeled as "make work" by the city manager, but both endure.

The construction of McKinley Park was particularly interesting. It was constructed on the site of an old brick yard, which was described as an eyesore. The excavation, from which clay was dug for red bricks, provided a pleasing slope into the park. It also provided sandstone which was used for skillfully constructed entrances and rock buildings. The result is an enchanting park, which is now home to the McKinley Park Head Start center.<sup>8</sup>

After World War II, the stockholders of the Oklahoma Railway Company reluctantly dismantled the street car system. Except during wartime, they had never made a profit from the street car. They profited from developing neighborhoods which were served by the railway. They fervently believed, however, that by improving the quality of life in the city the streetcar system fulfilled an important social need. Consequently, the directors of the company sought to sell it to the city. Oklahoma City's business leadership was more interested in the outer suburbs, however, and the street cars were abandoned.<sup>9</sup>

The tracks can still be seen as they curve west from Blackwelder, across Northwest 12th Street. At Northwest 13th Street and Gatewood a physical legacy of the street car reveals a glimpse of the attitude which once accompanied that method of transportation. Within a few feet of the tracks was constructed one of the most unusual and rare examples of a Moderne residence in Oklahoma City, at 1717 Northwest 13th Street. Rather than being built at a distance from the streetcar, this fine house was built "so you could almost reach out and shake hands with the conductor."

One block to the south, on the corner of Gatewood and Northwest 12th Street, three rows of apartment houses, with garages built into the structures, give a glimpse at the scale of the first generation of automobiles and neighborhoods that were designed around them. To the modern eye, they are tiny. The apartments are less than 1000 square feet a piece, including garages that are approximately 50% of the total living area. Just as the placement of excellent architecture within a few feet of the streetcar reveals the excitement that residents felt about that method of transportation, the design of that apartment complex is testimony about a comparable feeling toward the automobile.

A similar artifact of the excitement felt by the first generations of automobile owners toward the automobile survives on the eastern boundary, along Classen Boulevard. The boulevard was once a street car route, lined with dignified apartment houses and fashionable homes in the Summers Place addition, which paid appropriate tribute to the transportation system. After World War II, Classen became a significant traffic artery. It could be argued that the attractive, modern office building on the east border of the study unit, at Northwest 14th Street and Classen Avenue, was the 1950s tribute to the automobile route.

Classen Ten Penn, as have many first generation middle class neighborhoods, suffered from the move to the suburbs in the 1960s. With the oil shocks of the 1970s, however, the area showed renewed promise as young professionals contemplated a return toward central cities. The old Eugene Fields Elementary School was replaced by a modern building. The neighborhood thus seemed to be a prime candidate for "gentrification." A number of houses with solar panels are legacies of that seemingly lost possibility. Another physical manifestation of the area's potential is a charming bed and breakfast, "The Grandison," at 1841 Northwest 15th Street.

The oil boom of the late 1970s and the bust of the 1980s led to stagnation of this area. In recent months, however, a new wave of "urban homesteaders," many of whom are Asian-Americans, are rehabilitating housing. Moreover, the efforts of the Oklahoma City Police Force Impact Unit may promise a new opportunity for Classen Ten Penn.

## POTENTIAL DISTRICT DELINEATION

### Potential District Delineation:

The entire Classen Ten Penn neighborhood can be defined as a potential historic district. The area has a high proportion of contributing structures, three individually eligible structures, three structures which warrant further study to determine individual eligibility, and less than ten percent noncontributing structures. The neighborhood is primarily composed of Bungalows; Folk Victorian residences; Tudor Revival single and multiple dwellings; a few Colonial Revival, Late Gothic Revival and Queen Anne houses, and one Moderne residence.

**INDIVIDUALLY ELIGIBLE PROPERTIES  
AND PROPERTIES WHICH WARRANT FURTHER STUDY**

**Individually Eligible Properties:**

1. **1838 N.W. 11th Street:**

This property is eligible under Criterion C, as an unusual example of the Late Gothic Revival style applied to an apartment building. It is a 2-story apartment building distinguished by unusual brick patterns; a variation of flemish bond with contrasting headers and stack bond. The building also has decorative cast stone panels and window arches. This structure was built in 1929 and is in good condition.

2. **1717 N.W. 13th Street:**

This property is eligible under Criterion C, as an unusual and rare example of Moderne architecture in Oklahoma City. It is a 2-story multiple dwelling. This building is the only example of this style in the Classen Ten Penn neighborhood. The building features dominant horizontal lines, "transparent" corners defined by large intersecting bays of multiple-light steel casement windows, and a curvilinear canopy over the front entry which links the two L-shaped wings of the floor plan. This structure was built in 1938 and is in good condition.

3. **1300 N. McKinley:**

This property was formerly assessed as being eligible by a survey of WPA buildings. The property consists of two identical buildings, the McKinley Park Bath Houses. They are Late Gothic Revival structures which were originally changing rooms for the McKinley Park swimming pool. The castles were built of red sandstone and of WPA construction. They feature crenelated parapets, "buttresses" at corners, and arrow slit windows at the second story corner towers. These were built in 1925 and are in good condition.

**Properties Which Warrant Further Study**

1. **1101 N. Indiana:**

This property warrants further study as a potentially individually eligible building under Criterion C, as an outstanding example of an early Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival service station.

2. **1212 N. Pennsylvania:**

This property warrants further study as a potentially individually eligible building under Criterion C, as an outstanding example of a Moderne movie theater in Oklahoma City.

3. **1222 N. Pennsylvania:**

This property warrants further study as a potentially individually eligible building under Criterion C, as an outstanding example of a Tudor Revival neighborhood shopping center in Oklahoma City.

## RESULTS

The Classen Ten Penn study area stretches from N.W. 16th Street to N.W. 10th Street, and from Western and Classen to Pennsylvania. The history of Classen Ten Penn provides a classic case study in the role of transportation systems in the evolution of neighborhoods in Oklahoma City. The neighborhood was first developed between two street car routes. That form of transportation could thus be said to have been the catalyst of a residential pattern that was to later be identified as middle class and suburban.

The entire Classen Ten Penn neighborhood can be defined as comprising a potential historic district. The area has a high proportion of contributing resources, three individually eligible buildings, three buildings which warrant further study, and less than ten percent noncontributing resources. The neighborhood is primarily composed of Bungalows; Folk Victorian residences; Tudor Revival single and multiple dwellings; a few Mission Revival, Colonial Revival, Late Gothic Revival and Queen Anne resources, and one Moderne resource.

Despite the beginnings of encroachment by commercial intrusions on the east and west boundaries, the Classen Ten Penn neighborhood still retains much of its architectural integrity and physical character from the period when it was first developed in the 'teens, twenties and early thirties. The neighborhood is an excellent example of an intact neighborhood from an important early era in the growth and development of Oklahoma City, and it merits the designation of an Historic District on that basis.

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