

Cultural Resources Survey of

Messick-Buntyn and Orange Mound East

Memphis, TN

Census Tracts 67, 70, 79, 80

**Conducted by Memphis Heritage, Inc. for the Memphis Landmarks
Commission**

July 2003

Written by Susan M. Mascolino

I. Introduction

Messick-Buntyn is the historic neighborhood situated south of the Southern Railroad tracks and the East Buntyn area. It is bound by Southern Avenue and the railroad tracks to Highland Street to Park Avenue and Pendleton Street through Josephine Street. Major roads running east and west in the survey area include Spottswood Avenue, Carnes Avenue, Douglass Avenue, and Chisca Avenue. Many streets run north and south in this area including Brower Street, Greer Street, Semmes Street, Carson Street, Goodwyn Street, and Josephine Street. Orange Mound East is a name applied to the area south of Messick Buntyn between Orange Mound and Sherwood Forest. This section is south of Park Avenue bound by Pendleton Street, Kimball Road through Philsdale Road, and Robin Hood Lane. Major roads running through Orange Mound East include Haynes Street, Semmes Street, Greer Street, Brower Street, Parkland Road, Prescott Road, and Highland Road, running north and south. Major streets running east and west include Carrington Road, Radford Road, Hoskins Road, Barron Avenue, Standard Drive, and Rhodes Avenue. The architecture of this entire area generally consists of bungalows and minimal traditional houses representing building trends from the 1920's and post-WWII years. Several earlier examples of houses from the turn of the 20th century still stand that represent this area's years as farm land. However, much of the historic housing stock of this neighborhood has been altered over the years, including the extensive use of synthetic siding.

Messick-Buntyn took its name from Buntyn's Station, a stop along the Memphis and Charleston Railroad (now the Southern Railroad) from the 1850s to the 1960s. Buntyn's Station covered a large area that was generally defined as Buntyn Street to Highland and Park Avenue to Central Avenue. Buntyn's Station was named for Geraldus Buntyn, who moved from North Carolina after receiving a land grant from service in the War of 1812. He moved to the frontier of West Tennessee after a brief period in Alabama. After first living on Adams Avenue, Buntyn began acquiring land not only downtown but also in Shelby County and he eventually built a home six miles out of the city along the Memphis and Charleston Railroad line that became known as Buntyn's Station. At his death in 1865, he bequeathed over 1405 acres including 520 acres of his homeplace that would eventually become the Memphis Country Club and the surrounding neighborhoods. Buntyn's home was the clubhouse until it burned in 1910.^{1[1]} His will stated that upon the death of his wife this land would be subdivided into three to ten acre lots, which began the subdivision of the land in this area.^{2[2]}

Another landowner in this area was David. S. Greer, who purchased property east and south of Buntyn's Station. Greer became a successful planter and built two homes in the area, one of which stood south of the railroad at Carnes and Prescott, where the Prescott Circle subdivision stands today. The other stood on Kimball Avenue south of Park Avenue in the Nonconnah Bottoms, which is in the Orange Mound East portion of the survey area.^{3[3]} Greer also donated the land on which Messick School was built, and Greer Street was named for him.^{4[4]}

John George Deaderick owned 5,000 acres in this area of Shelby County, which was known as the Orange Mound plantation, extending eastward from Airways to Semmes Street. The farm was named for the osage orange hedge found on its borders. A portion of this land was purchased from the Deadericks to develop as an African-American subdivision, today known as Orange Mound.^{5[5]} According to a neighborhood history, Buntyn Street, just west of the survey area, was once the unofficial boundary between Messick Buntyn and Orange Mound.^{6[6]} Several of the street names running through this area can be traced back to the Deaderick family. Mike Deaderick,

^{1[1]} Tilly, Bette B., *A Visit to Buntyn*. (Memphis, TN: Metropolitan Inter-Faith Association, 1979) p. 1-2.

^{2[2]} Magness, Perre. *Past Times: Stories of Early Memphis*. (Memphis, TN: Parkway Press, 1994), p. 240.

^{3[3]} Tilly, p. 3.

^{4[4]} Meeks, Ann. "Streetscapes: Greer." *Commercial Appeal*. 2/7/91.

^{5[5]} Magness, Perre. *Elmwood 2002*. (Memphis, TN: Elmwood Cemetary, 2001) p. 296.

^{6[6]} Tilly, p. 20.

the son of John George Deaderick, gave the county the right-of-way through his land for the road and was able to name these roads. Deadrick Avenue was a misspelling of the Deaderick name. Park Avenue came from Jane Park, who was the wife of Mike Deaderick. Barron Avenue was named for his mother's family, and Spottswood Avenue came from a cousin.^{7[7]}

II. Methodology

The Messick-Buntyn and Orange Mound East survey area was chosen by Memphis Landmarks to determine how many contributing buildings were in this historic neighborhood. Surveyors did not include structures obviously built after 1956. Excluded structures were noted on maps as non-contributing structures but were not always comprehensively surveyed. Black and white prints, color slides, and digital photos were taken of each surveyed building.

Original plat maps for the subdivisions were viewed from the Shelby County Register's Office. Tax maps were obtained through the Shelby County Assessor of Property and used as survey maps. Census briefs and City Directories were used to research the population of the area. Newspaper accounts stored at the Memphis and Shelby County Public Library and the University of Memphis Special Collections aided in historical research.

Dates of construction for houses in the Messick-Buntyn and Orange Mound East District were obtained from the Shelby County Assessor of Property. Though this is generally the most complete and reliable source available, it should be noted that the construction dates listed for a small number of houses occasionally conflicts with primary historical records. In such cases, the construction date provided should serve as a close approximation. The dates of institutional and commercial structures were obtained through secondary resources or by approximation.

For a property to be considered as a contributing structure in a potential district, the survey team used their knowledge of historic architecture to determine how closely each house resembled its original form. Rear additions were usually permissible, but major front alterations were not.

III. Patterns made evident by the survey

The historic identity of this neighborhood came from two places, the railroad and Messick School. As stated previously, the Memphis and Charleston Railroad, which became the Southern Railroad in 1898, runs through the Buntyn neighborhood and divides East Buntyn on the north from Messick-Buntyn on the south. Buntyn's Station caused the original development of this area. The railroad station made farming especially profitable for landowners as it was easy to quickly transport their goods into

^{7[7]} "Park Avenue Name Traced to Source." *Commercial Appeal*, 11/25/55.

Memphis.^{8[8]} One of the oldest homes still existing in Messick-Buntyn, Maxwellton of the late 1860s, stands along Southern Avenue and the railroad. Also, historic commercial buildings that once housed thriving neighborhood businesses can be found at Southern and Semmes alongside the railroad. Several of the homes within Messick-Buntyn that were built around 1900 also date from this agricultural period such as the Thompson House, c. 1910, at the northwest corner of Carnes and Semmes.

The name of this community also draws from the Messick School, first opened in 1908 covering a seven-square mile area. The school was named for Elizabeth Messick, county school superintendent from 1904-1908. The earliest students were transported by mule-drawn wagonettes.^{9[9]} By the 1920s, a high school building had been added and the school grades went from 1-12 with a senior graduating class in 1924.^{10[10]}

Several subdivisions in the 1920's reflect the influence of Messick school on the neighborhood and the popularity of bungalows as the architectural style of this period. Messick School Place was platted in the January of 1922 by J.W. Pumphrey and George W. Person. This large subdivision ran from Carnes all the way south to Seminole, crossing Park Avenue, between Maxey and Greer. Messick Heights was another subdivision platted in April of 1924 by E.L. Rogers. This neighborhood was east of Highland and south of Park, including Vanuys, Wilshire, and Allandale (then called Lafayette). Other subdivisions from 1924 include Park Ave Terrace, subdivided in March 1924 and included 120 lots between Semmes and Maxey north of Park, Highland Park in May 1924 between Prescott and Highland south of Park, and J.H. Stuart's Normal Heights Subdivision east of Highland in 1924, which included Stuart and Allandale.^{11[11]}

The post-WWII building boom in the 1940's was another great influence on the shaping of this area of Memphis. The renewed burst of development in the Messick Buntyn and Orange Mound East District after WWII reflects the greater trend of the automobile suburb and post-WWII development in the United States. Development along streetcar lines dominated the 1920's. People began to rely more on their automobiles than streetcars, and subdivisions moved further from public transportation lines. The building boom after WWII reflected the availability of FHA and VA loans for home buying and the baby boom as soldiers returned home. Memphis had a surge in

^{8[8]} Tilly, p. 7.

^{9[9]} Lauderdale, Vance. *Ask Vance*. (Memphis, TN: Bluff City Books, 2003), p. 20.

^{10[10]} Tilly, p. 12.

^{11[11]} Plat maps, Shelby County Register's Office.

population from 292,942 residents in 1940 to 396,000 in 1950.^{12[12]} Developers brought many new subdivisions to Memphis in order to take advantage of this demand.

As shown by the many subdivisions of agricultural land within Orange Mound East in the 1940's, this area also reflected these trends. William C. Chandler and Charles K. Chandler, who had a hand in many post-WWII subdivision in Memphis, also platted the Parkhaven Subdivision beginning in 1944 with 20 acres of the W.M. Lawrence tract of 145 acres. This subdivision is south of Park in the eastern section of the survey area. Chandler and Chandler were also responsible for platting the Dunmoor Subdivision, which had several additional sections starting in May 1948. This neighborhood is in the western section of the survey area, off of Pendleton between Dearth and Barron to Haynes. Another large subdivision was Park Grove, platted by J.F. Inman. This neighborhood also had several phases starting in 1947 and covered the area bound by Barron between Brower and Prescott to Carrington. This subdivision was platted from David Greer's original 264 acres. Messick Gardens was another subdivision platted in 1941 by Kimborough & Greer along Greer and Parkland crossing Hoskins. Semmesdale was subdivided in 1946 by Van Court Realty, running along North and South Radford between Haynes and Semmes.^{13[13]} Among these post-WWII subdivisions, one finds examples of a few Tudor Revival and many Minimal Traditional and Ranch, which are architectural styles that came into popularity during the late 1930's through the early 1950's.

With the rise of the suburbs and the continuing of the expansion eastward of Memphis, the neighborhood began to lose young residents and its aging population was not replaced. By the late 1970s, the Messick School only contained grades 7-12 and enrollment was declining. The City School Board voted to close it so as not to have to maintain the historic and aging buildings, however the residents fought to keep it open, as the school was seen as a stabilizing influence within the community.^{14[14]} The Messick School won a reprieve only to lose out once again in 1980, with the school board again arguing costs.^{15[15]} The historic main building was demolished in 1982 with little notice to the neighborhood.^{16[16]} Now, an adult vocational school is housed in the remaining auditorium built around 1955 and other buildings constructed in the 1970s.

^{12[12]} United States Census Bureau. *Census tract statistics, Memphis, Tennessee--1940, 1950.*

^{13[13]} Plat maps, Shelby County Register's Office.

^{14[14]} Tilly, p. 20.

^{15[15]} Horton, Tommy. "Memories remain as time runs out on Messick High." *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, 4/19/80.

^{16[16]} McClain, Kathleen. "Demolition ordered for historic Messick." *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, 6/21/82.

The fate of the historic Messick School reflects the deterioration of this neighborhood over the last few decades. In the 1970s, the streets nearest Highland, Southern, Park, and Barron became increasingly commercial and led to traffic and density issues. Historic homes with large lots of one to two acres were bought for the land, and the houses were demolished to be replaced by new apartment complexes and townhouses. A more transient population of students and renters entered the neighborhood. While East Buntyn north of the tracks, remained relatively stable with single-family homes, Messick-Buntyn and Orange Mound East saw more changes to apartment zoning and with less owner occupation of homes.

The racial affiliation of this neighborhood has also seen much change over the last few decades. As stated previously, Orange Mound just west of Messick-Buntyn was a historically African-American community. Buntyn Street was an unofficial division between white and black residents during segregation. Most of the post-WWII subdivisions contained covenants, which restricted ownership by race. With the end of segregation in the 1960s and the reversal of discriminatory covenants, the racial makeup of Messick-Buntyn and Orange Mound East changed from white to black further east in the neighborhood to Semmes Street.^{17[17]} Today, most of the neighborhood is at least racially diverse if not completely African-American. This shift in demographics is also shown in the architecture as many of the houses were altered in the 1960's and 1970's, with the influx of new residents into the neighborhood. Many of the houses were built in the 1940s and early 1950s but were unrecognizable as examples of those periods due to addition of brick or stone veneers over the original weatherboard, carports, wrought iron porch supports, or side and rear additions. These changes made the houses more contemporary but also meant that they lost much of their original, historic materials.

IV. Recommendations

The Messick-Buntyn and Orange Mound East area of Memphis has a majority of its housing stock over fifty years old with much of it from the post-WWII period. However, many of the buildings have been compromised with alterations including the use of synthetic siding, replacement windows, and other additions. With a total of 3567 surveyed structures, the area was split between contributing and non-contributing, with over 54.5% falling into the non-contributing category. With only 45.5% contributing, the survey area falls short of the 80% necessary for it to be considered as a historic district for the National Register of Historic Places. There are streets within the area that could be singled out for having more contributing buildings especially within the Messick-Buntyn neighborhood. The eastern ends of Spottswood, Carnes, and Douglass with cross-streets of Newell, Greer, Brower, Ellsworth, and Prescott Circle all tend to have more of a majority of contributing structures. Perhaps with neighborhood interest, this area could pursue local designation to prevent further loss of historic fabric.

^{17[17]} Tilly, p. 20.

Bibliography

Horton, Tommy. "Memories remain as time runs out on Messick High." *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, 4/19/80.

Lauderdale, Vance. *Ask Vance*. Memphis, TN: Bluff City Books, 2003

Magness, Perre. *Elmwood 2002*. Memphis, TN: Elmwood Cemetary, 2001

Magness, Perre. *Past Times: Stories of Early Memphis*. Memphis, TN: Parkway Press, 1994

McClain, Kathleen. "Demolition ordered for historic Messick." *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, 6/21/82.

Meeks, Ann. "Streetscapes: Greer." *Commercial Appeal*. 2/7/91

"Park Avenue Name Traced to Source." *Commercial Appeal*, 11/25/55.

Plat maps. Shelby County Register's Office

Tilly, Bette B. *A Visit to Buntyn*. Memphis, TN: Metropolitan Inter-Faith Association, 1979.

United States Census Bureau. *Census tract statistics, Memphis, Tennessee--1940, 1950*.
