

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

### 1 Name of Property

historic name Volker, William, House

other names/site number Roselawn; Peaceful Valley

### 2 Location

street & number 3717 Bell Street [n/a] not for publication

city or town Kansas City [n/a] vicinity

state Missouri code MO county Jackson code 095 zip code 64111

### 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 [ ].)

*Claire F. Blackwell*  
Signature of certifying official/Title Claire F. Blackwell, Deputy SHPO

30 March 1993  
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

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 [ ].

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**5 Classification**

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property		
		Contributing	Noncontributing	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	3	0	buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	0	0	sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	1	0	structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	0	0	objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	4	0	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**  
 Domestic/single dwelling  
 Domestic/secondary structure  
 Landscape/street furniture/object

**Current Functions**  
 Domestic/single dwelling  
 Domestic/secondary structure  
 Landscape/street furniture/object

**7 Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
 LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS  
 Colonial Revival

**Materials**  
 foundation limestone  
 walls brick  
 shingle  
 roof asphalt  
 other n/a

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

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.

**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

# \_\_\_\_\_

**Areas of Significance**  
Social History

**Periods of Significance**  
1889-1947

**Significant Dates**  
1889

**Significant Person(s)**  
Volker, William

**Cultural Affiliation**  
n/a

**Architect/Builder**  
unknown

**Primary location of additional data:**

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  
   15                361080            4324490

B. Zone            Easting            Northing

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 see continuation sheet

organization \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

**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 FOP for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FOP.)

name \_\_\_\_\_

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 1

**Volker, William, House  
Jackson County, Missouri**

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**SUMMARY:** The William Volker House is located at 3717 Bell Street in southwestern Kansas City, Jackson County, just one block east of the Missouri-Kansas state line. The property includes three contributing buildings and one contributing structure, all of which were constructed during the period of significance and contribute to the property's historic significance. The buildings are a large, single family residence; a carriage barn which has been converted into a residence; and a summerhouse. The property occupies over half a city block and is bounded on three sides by streets: on the west by Bell, on the north by W. 37th Street, and on the east by Genessee. The main residence of brick and shingle faces west onto Bell, and has the same setback as the other houses on the block. The stone carriage barn is northeast of the main residence in the approximate center of the estate. The stone summerhouse is located southeast of the residence. The contributing structure is a low stone wall which surrounds the entire estate; three entrances are marked with the name "Roselawn" on the entry posts. The grounds have been extensively planted, and contain both mature and young specimens of a variety of plant materials. One outbuilding which is not significant in size or scale and is not related to the period or area of significance is not counted. The William Volker House, carriage barn, summerhouse, and grounds retain a high degree of all areas of integrity: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

**NARRATIVE:** Constructed in 1889, the main residence is a two and one-half story building with a steeply-pitched, asphalt shingle roof. The house exhibits some characteristics of early examples of the Colonial Revival style, especially with the hipped roof "Classic Box" form and the one-story, full-width porch with classical columns. In general however, the stylistic influence, locally referred to as "Kansas City Shirtwaist," features two differing wall materials on the first and second stories. The first story of the Volker House is clad in brick which was historically painted yellow, now painted tan. The second story features wood shingles, historically a light color, now painted dark green.

The original portion of the house features a basic rectangular plan. Later alterations to the rear (east) elevation have resulted in a rectangular addition which extends slightly beyond the north and south elevations of the original portion. A flat-roofed, one-story addition sits on a high limestone foundation, which due to the sloping site, provides a walkout from the basement level. Another addition on the southeast corner of the house is two stories high. It also features a flat roof and high limestone foundation, which in reality provides another floor of living space. The roofs of the northeast and southeast corners have simple square porch balustrades and railings.

Most of the rear additions occurred within William Volker's lifetime. None of the additions detract from the overall integrity of the building; all are sympathetic to the original building. The major change to the residence appears to be the color, as it was always referred to as a "yellow brick building."

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**Volker, William, House  
Jackson County, Missouri**

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The front (west) elevation features a full-length, one-story porch with a low-pitch hip roof. The corner supports are massive square brick piers with carved corner consoles. The interior wood columns have Ionic capitals. Other classical details on the porch include the base balustrade, the triglyph, and the modillions accenting the porch roof soffit.

The steeply-pitched, truncated hipped roof has paired, steeply-pitched gable dormers on the west and north facades, and three gable dormers on the south elevation. The rear portion of the house has a hipped roof with its roofline set slightly below the truncated roofline of the main body of the house. Three tall brick chimneys are located at the northwest and southeast eaves line, and in the center of the roof.

Fenestration configurations vary with each elevation. The front (west) facade is symmetrical, with two double-hung sashes on the first story and a centered entry door. The leaded glass front door has rectangular sidelights. The second story has four double-hung sash windows. The north elevation has a variety of window types, including double-hung sash and triple-fixed sash windows. The south elevation has regularly placed double-hung sashes. The east elevation exhibits the most variety. The foundation has three tripartite windows with fanlight transoms and two entrance doors. There are also paired fixed sash windows, and some double-hung sashes. Many windows have white painted metal storm windows, which do not detract from the overall feeling of integrity of the exterior.

The first floor plan consists of a central entrance hall with a wood panelled, half-turn staircase featuring an elegant round arch screen. A marble fireplace is south of the staircase and an "inglenook" marked by leaded glass bookcases is along the west wall. The south living room shares a common fireplace opening with the hall. The dining room has a beamed ceiling, wainscotting, and stained and leaded glass windows. The library features built-in bookcases and an ornate stained and leaded glass skylight featuring a grape motif.

The second floor has bedrooms issuing from the central hall. The northwest bedroom has a fireplace with a pink glazed tile surround and adjacent window seat. The southwest bedroom has a gray toned glazed tile fireplace surround, flanked by fluted columns crowned with rosettes. Some alterations have occurred throughout the years to accommodate various aging residents (William Volker, his parents, and his wife, Rose) or changing technologies, but the basic integrity of the interior has been retained from the period of significance.

Constructed in 1907, the carriage barn/stable is a rectangular stone building which has been converted to a residence for the current owner's father. It has a steeply pitched, asphalt shingles, hip roof with overhanging eaves and two tall stone chimneys on the south. Hipped roof dormers with multi-sash windows are centered on each of the four elevations. The walls are constructed of random coursed limestone. The windows are randomly placed and feature rock-faced limestone sills and lintels. The original paired french doors have been replaced with a wood panel "garage" door on the west facade.

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**Volker, William, House  
Jackson County, Missouri**

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The carriage barn is one-story tall on the west, but changes to two stories in height on the east elevation due to the change in ground elevation. On the south facade, the outline of the gable of the former greenhouse can still be seen in the stones. Although its function has changed, there have been minimal alterations to the exterior of the carriage barn. With the exception of some of the fenestration, the building still retains its integrity of location, design, setting, workmanship, and feeling.

Constructed circa 1907, the summerhouse/gazebo is a one-story stone and wood building featuring a low-pitched hipped roof with extremely wide overhangs. Each corner is constructed of massive, random coursed limestone columns, with low, stone-capped piers extending outward. The walls consist of nearly full-length, round arched fenestration. Rectangular in plan, the north and south elevations have three arched openings, with one serving as an entry door on the north. The other two elevations have four openings, with the west extending outward slightly to form a bay. Decorative brackets support the massive, overhanging eaves, and are accentuated with a fleur de-lis on the fascia board. The alterations to the gazebo are minimal, and include asphalt shingles replacing the former clay tile roof and louvered sash windows replacing the round arch openings. Neither of these affect the building's integrity of location, design, setting, workmanship, feeling, and association.

The estate itself is very large in comparison to the surrounding neighborhood. It consists of approximately thirteen and a half city lots, while the neighboring homes are generally sited on one lot. The grounds are enclosed with a low, random work limestone wall with a cap punctuated by regularly spaced stones placed on their sides; the wall was also constructed circa 1907. Paired stone columns flank the three entrances, with "Roselawn" carved in a dressed-face stone. Each entrance features the historic wrought iron gate. A pedestrian entrance is centered in front of the main residence on Bell, with a vehicular entrance directly north. Another vehicular entry is on Genessee, northeast of the carriage barn. The ground slopes from Bell down to Genessee. Behind the house, the yard has been graded level from the rear of the main building to the carriage barn. A curving stone wall announces the grade change, with a steep drop-off eastward from the wall. Concrete walks connect the house, carriage barn, and summerhouse. Steps lead from the curved stone wall eastward to remnants of the old orchard. A garden area is reserved along the south border of the property. Also, along the south property line is a new wood garden outbuilding, which is not visible from Bell due to extensive plantings.

The Volker family's love of horticulture is reflected in the variety of plant specimens still remaining on the site. Many of the coniferous trees evident in historic photos have matured, including specimens of pine, fir, and spruce. The remnants of the orchard are in the southeastern quarter of the grounds, as is a vegetable garden. A stone pool with concrete basin is in the northwest corner. There are several planting areas of deciduous shrubs, some of which have become quite large. These are generally focused on the Bell Street side of the estate. There are several large deciduous trees, including three which have been designated "Kansas City Champion Trees", indicating that they are the largest in the city. A particularly elegant Golden Raintree (*Koelreuteria*

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paniculata) is situated east of the summerhouse and curving stone wall. A Chinese elm (*Ulmus parvifolia*) is located north of the driveway near Genessee, and a downy hawthorne (*Crataegus mollis*) is just east of the main residence. A few old rose types remain (for which the estate was named), and the current resident has begun replanting some rose species from the historic period. Continuing the Volker's love of gardening the current resident and owner have replanted coniferous trees, as well as perennials from the historic period. A number of landscape features which date from Volker's ownership were not included in the resource count but were evaluated as part of the overall setting. One outbuilding was not included in the resource count because it is not significant in size or scale and is not related to the period or area of significance.

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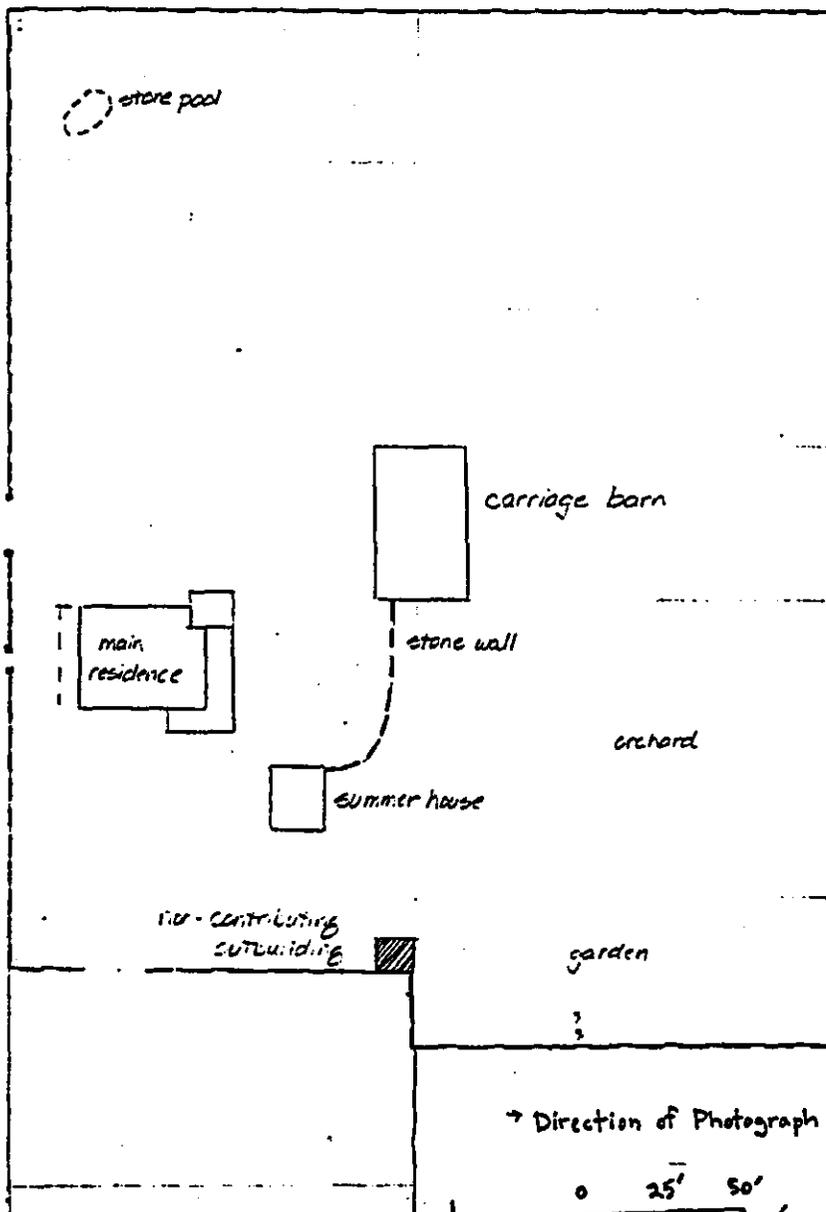
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Volker, William, House  
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37th ST.

BELL



GENESSEE



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**SUMMARY:** The William Volker House, 3717 Bell Street, Kansas City, Jackson County, is significant under Criterion B in the area of Social History. From 1889 to 1947, the house served as the home of William Volker, acknowledged as Kansas City's leading philanthropist. Although the scale of his earliest philanthropies was relatively modest compared to his later benefices, his generosity, coupled with his aversion to publicity, earned him the nickname of "Mr. Anonymous of Bell Street." Commercial success made possible the extent and expanded range of his later philanthropies, which included substantial donations to four local hospitals, a number of educational agencies and institutions, and a wealth of social welfare programs. It was estimated that Volker gave over one-third of his annual income each year of his life for charitable purposes, and, from 1911 to his death, he expended an estimated ten million dollars on philanthropy. In 1932, he established the William Volker Charities Fund, which he continued to administer for the remainder of his life and which was to remain active for thirty years after his death. His civic activities included service on the Kansas City Board of Education; the establishment of the Board of Pardons and Paroles, of which he was the first president; and the creation of the Board of Public Welfare, the first such agency in the nation. Volker was also involved with and supportive of Progressive efforts to reform the municipal government of Kansas City. He was instrumental in the creation of the Kansas City Civic Research Institute and a member of the Citizens Charter Committee and the Charter Party, all of which fought for reforms during and after the Pendergast administration. The house at 3717 Bell Street served as Volker's home during the period of his greatest civic and philanthropic achievements, 1889-1947; it is the one property most closely associated with Volker over this entire period and, therefore, best represents the entire range and scope of his achievements. Near the end of his life, in 1943, Volker was honored by the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce with the title of "First Citizen of Kansas City" in partial recognition of his civic and philanthropic achievements. Because Volker remained active in the management of his philanthropic endeavors until his death, the period of significance for his house is extended to 1947. His significant activities continued unabated until that time, and it is, therefore, contended that the property is exceptionally significant.

**NARRATIVE:** William Volker was born in Esperke am Neustadt, Kingdom of Hanover, in 1859, and emigrated to Chicago with his parents in 1870 or 1871. He attended public schools briefly and, at the age of fourteen, began working as a clerk in a dry goods store. Three years later, he entered the employ of Charles Brachvogel, a picture frame manufacturer and jobber. In 1879, upon Brachvogel's death, Volker was promoted to manager of the plant. By 1882, Volker began searching for a location where he could start his own business without being in direct competition with his old firm. Volker selected Kansas City, at that time a busy rail center with access to an ample supply of lumber and, with its thriving packing house industry, good prospects for expansion.

In July 1882, with two partners, Volker established William Volker & Company, first located at 6 West 3rd Street. The company manufactured picture frames and molding and also sold pictures, mirrors, cabinet hardware, casters, and other hardware. In 1885, the partnership was terminated and Volker became the sole owner of the business. The same year, he brought his family from Chicago

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to Kansas City to a house at 2901 Jefferson Street. In 1887, when the solvency of the new business was assured, the assembly of window shades was also added. In 1889, Volker purchased a twelve-room brick house at 3717 Bell Street in the new Mellier Place subdivision of Roanoke, then a suburb of Kansas City, which also became home for his parents, his sister Carrie, and, on his marriage in 1911 to Rose Roebke, his wife.

Volker's business establishment changed locations a number of times. In 1885, the year Volker terminated his partnership and became sole owner of his business, the company occupied 602 Delaware; in 1887, they expanded into 604, as well. From 1891 to 1904, the company remained on Delaware but conducted business at 612-618. In 1904, Volker moved his company to 306-308 W. 8th Street, where it remained until 1914. After 1915, the business was located in four buildings at 200-220 Main Street. Volker owned only the final location; all other locations of his business were leased. The Delaware buildings were destroyed with the construction of Interstate 70. The W. 8th Street building is extant and part of the Wholesale Historic District, (NRHP 1979) and the Main Street complex is within the Old Town Historic District (NRHP 1978).

In 1891, William Volker and Company added floor oil cloth, linoleum, and straw matting to its inventory. In 1902, Volker purchased an interest in a Chicago window shade manufacturing firm, and later bought the entire firm. By 1906, branches of his companies were opened in Denver and San Francisco and, eventually, branches were also established in Houston, Memphis, Seattle, Los Angeles, Portland, Salt Lake City, Oklahoma City, Wichita, and Dallas. Volker also acquired a window shade factory in Chicago and a cotton mill in South Carolina, which supplied window shade material for his manufactures. By the turn of the century, the net worth of Volker and Company was valued at over a million dollars, and Volker personally became a millionaire in 1906. In 1917, a trust estate was formed to control operations of the company. Eventually, eleven other wholly owned corporations in strategic cities across the country sprang from Volker's parent company in Kansas City.

**Progressivism and the Gospel of Wealth**

Volker purchased the house on Bell Street in 1889, the same year Andrew Carnegie's Gospel of Wealth was published. The two part essay, originally entitled "Wealth," appeared in the June and December 1889 issues of North American Review. In the essay, Carnegie asserted the only responsible method by which a wealthy man could dispose of his fortune was to "administer it during his lifetime for public benefit" (Wall, p. 806). According to Carnegie,

This . . . is held to be the duty of the man of wealth: To set an example of modest, unostentatious living, shunning display or extravagance; to provide moderately for the legitimate wants of those dependent upon him; and, after doing so, to consider all surplus revenues which come to him simply as trust funds which he is called upon to administer . . . --the man of wealth thus becoming the mere trustee and agent for his poorer brethren, bringing to their service his superior wisdom, experience, and

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ability to administer, doing for them better than they would or could do for themselves (Wall, p. 807).

Volker echoed Carnegie with his statement that "'my conception of life' . . . 'is that we are here to perform certain duties . . . The rich man is merely the custodian of his money and . . . the real reason he has it is so he may use it for the benefit of others'" (Brown and Dorsett, pp. 153-155). Volker attributed his own philanthropic promptings to his early upbringing. He recalled that a motto above the doorway of his home in Hanover counseled "'Work and Pray'" and his mother's favorite saying was "'Idle time only leads to mischief.'"

In many respects, William Volker embodied the ideal of the Progressive reformer. According to Samuel P. Hays, many of the Progressives were the most successful business or professional men, who attempted to transpose proven techniques of management to the problems facing the new metropolitan areas. Few of the reformers came from earlier industrial and mercantile families, but had risen to prominence with wealth created after 1870 in new industries. They generally lived in new areas of their cities rather than the older fashionable ones. The reformers were dissatisfied with the existing systems of municipal government which allowed control by particularistic and local interests (Hays, pp. 92-94).

**Volker as a Philanthropist**

Volker's earliest Progressive reforms were instituted within his own business. In 1889, he inaugurated a system of profit sharing for his employees, and, following the panic of 1893, he created an informal savings system for his employees, as well, paying 6% interest on money deposited with him.

Many of Volker's gifts and donations were made anonymously, and his early philanthropies were rendered on an individual basis, as opposed to later ones, which were more institutional in nature, again echoing Carnegie's own philanthropic career. For example, when he heard of the financial troubles of the widow of a former partner who had caused him much difficulty, Volker sent her a check for fifty dollars and continued to send the same amount monthly for the remainder of her life. Eventually many others were added to his list of monthly payments. Examples of his gifts range from surgical instruments for a promising young physician, a graduation dress for a poverty-stricken girl, dentures for a crippled elevator operator, the lifting of mortgages on the homes of several of Kansas City's destitute, and food and rooming expenses for those unable to get relief elsewhere. By 1937, a list which showed regular monthly payments to individuals by Volker included over one hundred names.

Along with a number of other members of St. Peter's Evangelical Church, Volker funded the establishment of a pastor's retirement home, associated with the German Evangelical Synod of North America, in 1906. This fourteen building complex, located in Blue Springs, Missouri, today, a suburb of Kansas City, was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1988. Volker also purchased a single-family house for St. Peter's Evangelical Church, to use at

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its new location (3115 Linwood Blvd.) as a parsonage and contributed indirectly to the building fund for the new church. (He purchased the old church on Irving Place and donated it to the Good Will Industries in 1923; the purchase price went into the building fund for the new church.)

By 1907, Volker had extended his gifts to institutional recipients. In that year, he donated the land and funds for a tuberculosis treatment center at Kansas City's General Hospital (the hospital was demolished 1991-1992). At least three other hospitals received his donations. Other aid to local hospitals included the donation of land, and along with Frank Niles, funds for the construction of an addition to the Wheatley Provident Hospital for Negroes (extant), the only private hospital for African-Americans in Kansas City. He also partially funded a new building for the Florence Home for Negro Girls (no longer extant). The founder of Children's Mercy Hospital, Dr. Katherine Richardson, called Volker her "rock of Gibraltar" because of his donations to that facility.

Volker gave nearly half a million dollars to Research Hospital (formerly called the German Hospital), including a Laboratory Building and equipment in 1917, a Diagnostic Clinic in 1924 (both demolished) and a \$200,000 nurses' home in 1926 (currently the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Health Sciences, 2210 Holmes). His anonymous gifts to Research Hospital became public in 1927 when the hospital dedicated a shrine in its lobby to William Volker, "Benefactor of Research Hospital" in a ceremony which Volker did not attend. A 1946 photograph of the Laboratory Building showed the name "William Volker Research Laboratory" carved in stone over the entrance, the only building known to be identified with his name.

Also in 1907, Volker served on his first public civic committee, formed to address the increased crime rate which accompanied the city's high unemployment rate and depressed business conditions. Jacob Billiskopf, superintendent of the United Jewish Charities, persuaded Volker to join himself and lawyer Frank P. Walsh on the committee. The committee included in its investigation the circumstances which attended the pardons and paroles of city prisoners and the sordid conditions in the local workhouse. Their report recommended the establishment of a Board of Pardons and Paroles to supervise the correctional institutions and handle pardons and paroles of inmates. The following year, the city established the board, and William Volker was appointed its first president. Under his leadership, the Board acquired a 130-acre farm to supplement the workhouse. When the city was reluctant to fund the superintendent's salary, Volker paid it himself. He recommended the establishment of a separate reformatory for women, and then purchased sewing machines and paid for an instructor to teach the women their operation. He employed an investigator whose job was to find jobs for parolees, since his rule was that no prisoner should be paroled who did not have a job waiting. Volker also instituted a program in which a paroled prisoner was obliged to sign an agreement allowing his employer to deduct an amount from his wages for a savings account.

Despite the work of the pardons and paroles board, in the winter of 1909-1910 Kansas City's burgeoning unemployment problem reached a crisis. Following a

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march of thousands of unemployed men on City Hall, the mayor appointed a commission which consisted of Volker, then president of the Board of Pardon and Paroles, and Gus Pearson, city comptroller, to investigate and make recommendations to the city council to alleviate the hardships of the unemployed and other needy persons. In the 1910 report, Volker cited "the city's duties toward the unemployed, the poor, the sick, and delinquents" and expanded on his philosophy of civic responsibility: "In this land of plenty there should be no lack of food, clothing or shelter for the industrious poor; no lack of care for the sick, but the chronic idler or the delinquent must ever be shown the error of his way." (Ellis, p. 183).

Their report recommended the appointment of a large committee of business, civic, and professional citizens to recommend a plan designed to address the problems. In April 1910, as a result of the committee recommendations, the City Council adopted an ordinance, drafted by Volker, establishing the Board of Public Welfare, regarded as the first such body in the nation (Ellis, pp. 183-184). The Board of Public Welfare replaced the old pardons and paroles board and exercised expanded responsibilities. It was charged with regulating all city penal and correctional institutions and relief appropriations, investigating private charitable groups, superintending employment service, and collecting data on social conditions in the community.

Although the City appropriated some funds for the new agency, there were many operations for which the city council was reluctant to provide the monies. Often Volker would privately support or assist projects he regarded as worthy. For example, the Welfare Board created a municipal loan agency, described by one newspaper as a "death blow to the loan sharks"; it \$50,000 working capital was provided by Volker. He also funded the legal aid bureau which was established to provide free counsel for the indigent, as well as a social service library, a child welfare exhibit, social workers' travel to national conventions, a school for training welfare personnel, and the annual meeting of the National Conference of Social Work held in Kansas City.

One of the agencies with the longest history of support by Volker was the Helping Hand Institute in Kansas City. Both Volker and the Institute proffered a philosophy of helping the underprivileged so that they would eventually reach a point where they would no longer require charity, and the Institute was dedicated to assisting in the rehabilitation of unemployed individuals. The Institute itself, however, was often in need of assistance from Volker. In 1909, he arranged for the City to purchase rock quarried by the men from the Helping Hand Institute. Throughout the years, he donated several buildings for the Institute's related activities (none are extant); a facility for women, the Jefferson Home for Women and Children (308 Garfield, currently being restored to a single-family house); two farms, and several thousand dollars to assist with operating expenses.

On his marriage in 1911, Volker put one million dollars in his wife's name and announced his intention to give the rest of his fortune away. Over the next thirty-six years, he expended an estimated ten million dollars on philanthropy. It was estimated that, throughout his life, he gave over one-third of his yearly income for charitable purposes.

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Volker, William, House  
Jackson County, Missouri

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In 1912, Volker was selected to fill a vacancy on the Kansas City Board of Education. During his fourteen-year tenure, he promoted extended vocational training, health and physical training, introducing regular health examinations, open-air classrooms, providing milk for the undernourished, a nurse plan for all schools, the Child Guidance Clinic, encouraging the establishment of schools for the handicapped, a visiting teacher program, and the inclusions of gymnasiums and auditoriums in schools. He privately financed curriculum surveys, teachers' professional conferences, acquisition of athletic equipment, the salaries of additional physical education teachers, and established the teacher's retirement fund with a nucleus contribution of \$100,000. At his final Board meeting in 1926, numerous testimonials recounted Volker's more personal efforts in educational philanthropy. A number of teachers received funds enabling them to continue university study, a teacher forced to retire early had been paid her salary until her death, and word was left at the Board of Education office that any student requiring help to continue school would be aided by Volker.

Volker was actively involved in Progressive efforts to wrest control of city government from the political machine of Boss Tom Pendergast. One of Volker's enduring public contributions to social reform in Kansas City was the instigation and funding of the nonpartisan Civic Research Institute in 1917. Hays noted that the leading business groups and the professional men allied with them in the cities he studied initiated and, eventually dominated municipal reform movements. One part of these reform movements was the establishment of municipal research bureaus. These bureaus, created as centers for research in municipal affairs, served as a conduit for political influence. The first such center, the Bureau of Municipal Research of New York City, was founded in 1906 and financed largely by Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller (Hays, p. 91). The Kansas City Civic Research Institute played a leadership role in securing the 1926 City Charter and determined irregularities in city accounts during the 1930s, particularly after the passage of bonds for Kansas City's Ten Year Program. Volker was the Civic Research Institute's principal backer, contributing approximately 80% of its budget throughout the 1930s, and annually making up any deficit.

Volker was also a member of the Citizens Charter Committee, established in 1925 to gain control of water bonds from city political bosses. After Pendergast was ousted in June 1939, Volker was one of the founders of the Charter Party, which called for recall elections and reduction of terms of city elected officials.

Volker's interest in education included support of higher education in Kansas City. In 1930, he provided \$100,000 to purchase a forty-acre campus, south of Brush Creek, for the proposed University of Kansas City. The following year he donated an additional 10 acres and associated buildings valued at \$75,000. He contributed \$100,000 for a Science Building in 1935. In 1936, he gave \$75,000 for the library, and also purchased a residence for the University President. Other gifts that year alone included a collection of rare architectural books and a 500 volume set on sociology. He gave a large gift to help maintain monies in the Student Aid Loan Fund, donated \$250,000 in 1939 for a second science building, and made several other large gifts which

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Jackson County, Missouri**

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eventually brought the total of his donations to the University of Kansas City to more than \$2,600,000.

His joint interest in education and better government led to gifts to other universities. In 1940, a \$1,000,000 gift to Wayne University established the National Training School for Public Service, with a goal of training leaders in civic education who would, in turn, work towards citizen participation in government. Also launched in Detroit was a five-year Citizenship Education Study to experiment with fostering good citizenship among youngsters attending the Detroit public school system. A \$200,000 grant in 1944 went to Kansas State College to set up a four-year college course in citizenship. Volker also contributed to the creation of the Andrew Drumm Institute for Boys in neighboring Independence.

Volker belonged to only one organization besides his church, the Chamber of Commerce, where he appropriately headed the Charities Committee. In spite of his very personal approach towards giving, he also promoted and supported organized charitable foundations. Particularly worried that his interests would not be continued after his death, in 1932, he established the William Volker Charities Fund's purpose was to carry on his philanthropic work while he lived, and to continue for thirty years after his death. The only restriction placed on the applications was that none of the benefactions could bear his name or the name of any member of his family, and that the gifts be made anonymously whenever possible. When he died in 1947, the fund that year had over fifteen million dollars.

Some of his lesser known contributions to Kansas City included the purchase of the site of the Liberty Memorial for the Parks Board, the donation of a collection of archaeological relics for the Kansas City Museum, gifts to his own as well as several other churches, and service as a trustee for the William Rockhill Nelson estate. The complicated business transactions eventually led to the construction and endowment of one of the nation's finest art galleries, the Nelson-Atkins Art Museum. Whenever William Volker learned of a need, he generally fulfilled it. He provided furniture for a girls' dormitory at Central Missouri State Teachers College, contributed funds for a full season of Philharmonic Orchestra concerts, and bought camels for the Swope Park zoo. He also started an institute for the care of children's teeth, funded a small Illinois college library, and gave a large sum for a playground in New York City.

Although Volker retired in 1938, he remained active in his business by continuing to serve on the boards of his many holdings. He remained president of the William Volker Charities Fund until 1944, and afterwards stayed on the board as assistant treasurer so that he could continue to handle small appeals for help. Although eventually slowed by a heart condition, he remained active in business and charities until just a few months before his death in November 1947. Although Volker shunned public recognition and acknowledgement of his philanthropies during his lifetime, since his death his contributions and service to the civic and social welfare of the city and its institutions have been memorialized in a small measure. The City of Kansas City constructed the William Volker Fountain in memory of his accomplishments, and named the

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boulevard which runs by both the fountain and the University of Kansas City--renamed the University of Missouri-Kansas City in 1966--after him. The campus, located at 51st and Rockhill Road, was renamed the William Volker Campus in his honor.

**3717 Bell Street**

During his early years in Kansas City (1882-86) Volker lived in a series of rented rooms (1642 Pennsylvania, 213 W. 14th, 813 McGee, and 1118 E. 16th). Upon bringing his family to Kansas City in 1887, he purchased a house at 2901 Jefferson, currently part of Penn Valley Park.

In 1889, Volker purchased a twelve-room brick house at 3717 Bell Street in the new Mellier Place subdivision of Roanoke, then a suburb of Kansas City. The Bell Street house became home for Volker, his parents, his sister Carrie, and, on his marriage in 1911 to Rose Roebke, his wife. Friedrich Volker, William's father, filled the gardens with countless varieties of roses and, as a result, Volker's sister Carrie named the estate "Roselawn." Despite its hilltop location, however, Volker referred to the house and grounds, which served as his refuge, as "Peaceful Valley."

In 1907, Alexander Kinghorn constructed the stone carriage barn and greenhouse for Volker at Roselawn. The stone wall and summerhouse were probably constructed around this time as well. William Volker preferred using horses to automobiles, and continued to use a horse and buggy, or most generally his saddle horse, well after others had switched transportation modes. The stable was eventually converted to a garage, however. Although it was not an imposing residence, the house and lawn were always kept in immaculate condition. Eventually, the needs of the house and grounds grew to such proportions that Raymond Ludnow, Volker's nephew, discontinued his own business in order to devote all of his time to his uncle and Roselawn.

The Volkerrs constructed a sleeping porch adjoining the dining room for William and built a music box into the landing of the front hall stairway. Sometime after 1909, his sister, Carrie, oversaw the construction of a bowling alley and tennis court, which was near the honeysuckle-covered stone wall on the Genessee Street side. Both were gone by 1941. William's father may have been responsible for the planting of the orchard.

Although Volker always maintained an office at the various locations of William Volker and Company, even after his retirement, his civic and philanthropic activities were often conducted on the street as he traveled to other offices to solicit funds or convince other civic leaders to adopt his ideas. During his tenure on the School Board, employees at the store saw him for only an hour or two in the early morning; the remainder of his time was spent inspecting schools. Although the W. 8th Street building is extant and part of the Wholesale Historic District, (NRHP 1979) and the Main Street complex is within the Old Town Historic District (NRHP 1978), both of these locations are more reflective of his business enterprises rather than his philanthropic activities.

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Volker, William, House  
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Indirectly, Volker is associated with three other residences located near 3717 Bell Street: 3607 Bell, built for Albert Stringer, a clerk in the Volker firm; 3723 Bell, built for Henry Pieper, Volker's brother-in-law; and 3635 Belleview, built for Volker's sister, Carrie. All of these houses were paid for by Volker.

In 1968, Roselawn survived a demolition proposal. The house had been deeded to the University of Kansas Endowment Association by Mrs. Rose Roebke Volker prior to her death. The University requested a zoning change in order to construct apartments on the site. The proposal was defeated due to opposition within the neighborhood. Today, the property remains under private ownership.

Given the range, scope, and duration of his social and civic endeavors, there were a wealth of properties which were associated with one or more of Volker's charitable interests and, therefore, do not represent the full extent of his philanthropies. However, the house at 3717 Bell Street is the one property which is most closely associated with Volker for the longest period of his productive career and, therefore, best represents the entire range of his interests and accomplishments. By 1889, Volker had instituted reforms within his own business which reflected his own gospel of wealth and had begun the practice of anonymous assistance which he would continue throughout his life. The nickname bestowed on him because of his preference for anonymity--"Mr. Anonymous of Bell Street"--recognized the close association in the public mind of Volker and his long-term residence.

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Volker, William, House  
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Volker, William, House  
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Jackson County, Missouri**

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**Verbal Boundary Description**

Lots 1 through 6, Lots 16 through 22, and the north 25 feet of Lot 7, Block 6, Mellier Place subdivision, Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri.

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary includes all the property historically associated with the nominated resource.

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1. Andrea Lazarski  
Kansas City Landmarks Commission  
414 E. 12th--City Hall  
Kansas City, MO 64106  
816/274-2555  
October 1, 1987  
Original draft nomination, items 1-11
  
2. Deon K. Wolfenbarger  
Three Gables Preservation  
9550 N.E. Cookingham  
Kansas City, MO 64157  
816/792-1275  
January 1989  
Revised draft, items 7 and 8
  
3. Beverly A. Fleming/Historic Preservation Coordinator  
Missouri Department of Natural Resources  
DEQ, Kansas City Regional Office  
3800 S. Elizabeth Avenue, Suite G  
Independence, MO 64057  
816/795-8655  
March 17, 1992  
Revised draft, item 8
  
4. Steven E. Mitchell/National Register Coordinator  
Missouri Department of Natural Resources  
Division of State Parks  
Historic Preservation Program  
P.O. Box 176  
Jefferson City, MO 65102  
314/751-5368  
March 26, 1993  
Editor, items 1-11, and revisions, items 7 and 8

Volker, William, House  
3717 Bell St., Kansas City, Jackson County Mo  
15 / 361080 / 4324490



Volker, William, House

3717 Bell St, Kansas City, Jackson County, MO

Beverly A. Fleming

May 1992

Missouri Cultural Resource Inventory

View from northwest, main residence and stair wall

71 of 11



William Volker Residence

Volker, William, House

3717 Bell St., Kansas City, Jackson County, MO

Dean K. Wolfenbarger

January 9, 1990

Missouri Cultural Resource Inventory

View from west, main residence and stone wall

# 2 of 11



Voller, William, House  
3717 Bell St., Kansas City, Jackson County, MO  
E.J. Davison  
c. 1906

Joint Collection - Western Historical Manuscript Collection  
State Historical Society of Missouri  
University of Missouri - Kansas City  
Newcomb Hall, Rm. 302  
Kansas City, MO 64110-2499

View from southwest, main residence

# 3 of 11



Volker, William, House  
3717 Bell St., Kansas City, Jackson County, Mo  
Beverly A. Fleming  
May 1992  
Missouri Cultural Resource Inventory  
view from south, main residence  
# 4 of 11



Voller, William, House

3717 Bell St., Kansas City, Jackson County, MO

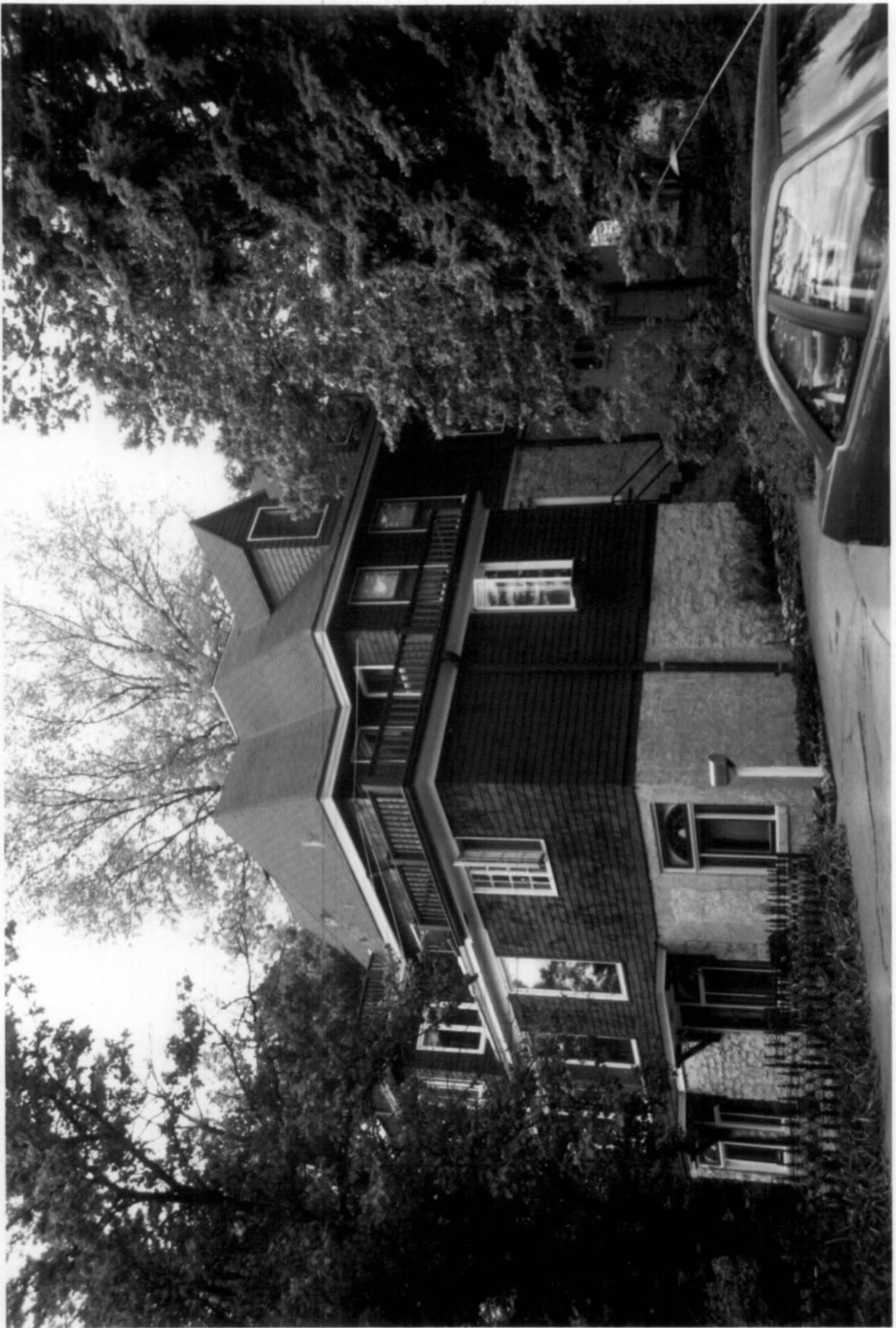
Beverly Fleming

May 1992

Missouri Cultural Resource Inventory

view from Northeast, main residence

# 5 of 11



Volker, William, House

3717 Bell St., Kansas City, Jackson County, Mo

Beverly A. Fleming

May 1952

Missouri: Cultural Resource Inventory

View from west, carriage barn

# 6 of 11



Volker, William, House  
3717 Bell St., Kansas City, Jackson County, MO  
Beverly A. Fleming  
May 1992  
Missouri Cultural Resource Inventory  
View from northeast, carriage barn  
#67 of 11



Volker, William, House

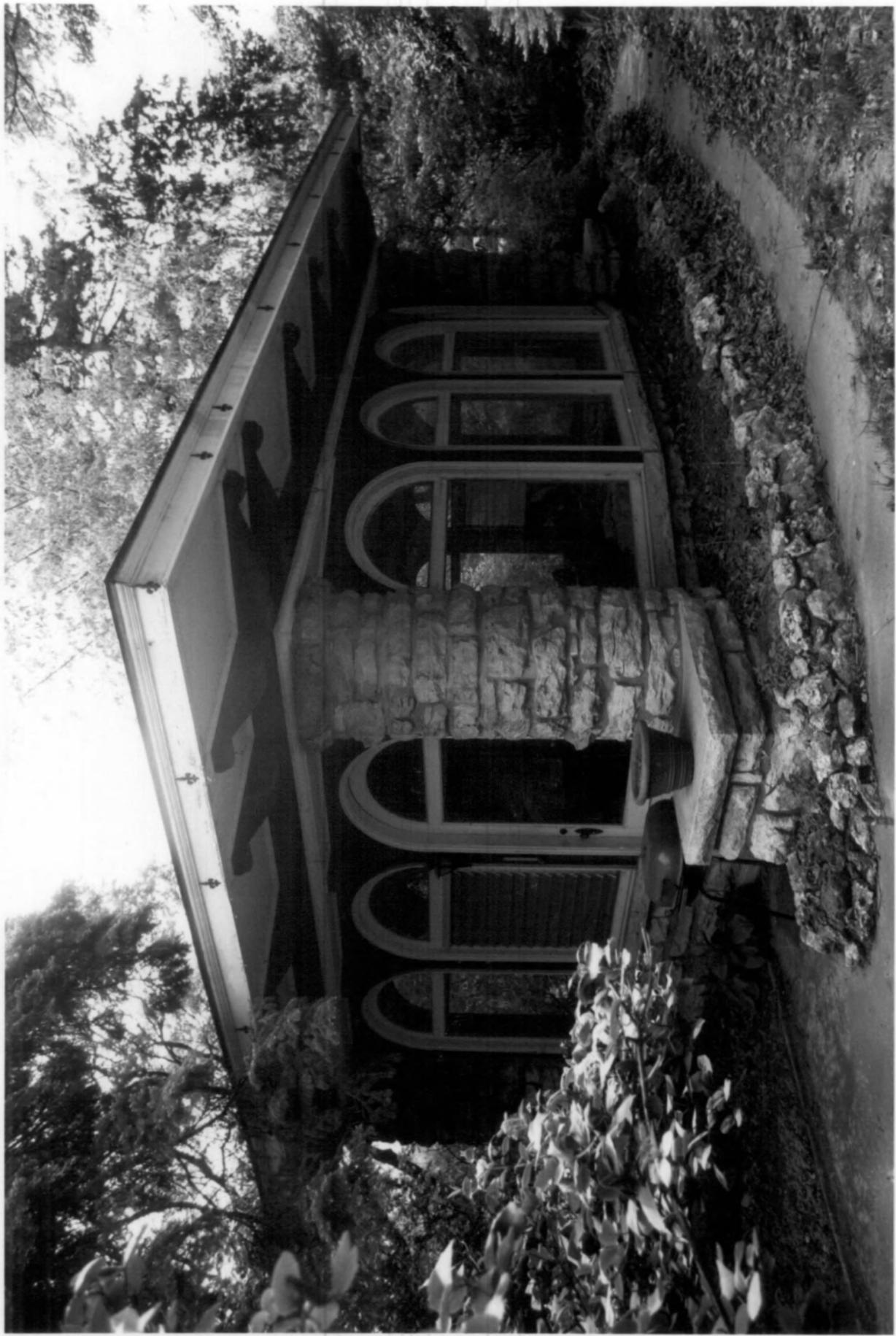
3717 Bell St., Kansas City, Jackson County, Mo

Beverly A. Fleming

May 1992

Missouri Cultural Resource Inventory  
View from Southwest, Summerhouse

# 8 of 11



Volker, William, House

3717 Bell St., Kansas City, Jackson County, MO

Bessie A. Fleming

E. J. Davison

c. 1906

Joint Collection - Western Historical Manuscript Collection

State Historical Society of Missouri

University of Missouri - Kansas City

Newcomb Hall, Rm. 302

Kansas City, MO 64110-2499

View from southwest, summerhouse

#9 of 11



William Volker Residence  
1967

Volker, William, House  
3717 Bell St., Kansas City Jackson County, MO  
Dean K. Wolfenbarger

January 9, 1990

Missouri Cultural Resource Inventory

View from southeast, wall and grounds and stone pool

# 10 of 11



Volker, William, House

3717 Bell St., Kansas City, Jackson County, MO

Beverly A. Fleming

May 1992

Missouri Cultural Resource Inventory

View from east, carriage step east of main residence

#11 of 11



PHOTO

UNAVAILABLE

EXTRA  
PHOTOS



