United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name Bassett, Dr. Samuel A., Office and Residence
other names/site number n/a

2. Location

street & number 1200 South Big Bend Boulevard [n/a] not for publication
city or town Richmond Heights [n/a] vicinity
state Missouri code MO county St. Louis code 189 zip code 63117

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 [ ].)

Signature of certifying official/title Claire F. Blackwell, Deputy SHPO Date December 12, 1982
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 Date

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

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<th>Ownership of Property</th>
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Name of related multiple property listing.

n/a

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register.

0

6. Function or Use

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7. Description

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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

- [X] A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- [X] B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- A. 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

Primary location of additional data:

- [X] State Historic Preservation Office
- [ ] Other State Agency
- [ ] Federal Agency
- [ ] Local Government
- [ ] University
- [ ] Other:

Name of repository: ____________________________
Bassett, Dr. Samuel A., Office and Residence

St. Louis County, Missouri

Name of Property

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than one acre

UTM References

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[ ] 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: Ted F. Frapolli/Attorney-at-Law

organization: Law Offices of Mertz, Stern, Frapolli and Steiger
date: September 24, 1992

street & number: 1200 S. Big Bend Blvd.
telephone: 314/647-1200

city or town: Richmond Heights
state: Missouri
zip code: 63117

Additional Documentation
Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

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

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

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

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

Property Owner

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

name: Law Offices of Mertz, Stern, Frapolli and Steiger
telephone: 314/647-1200

city or town: Richmond Heights
state: Missouri
zip code: 63117
SUMMARY: The Samuel A. Bassett Office and Residence is located on the southeast corner of the intersection of Wise Avenue and Big Bend Boulevard, Richmond Heights, St. Louis County, Missouri. Built in 1938, this irregularly planned structure is an excellent example of the combination of two of the main currents of modernism, Streamline Moderne and the International style. Virtually unaltered in its exterior design, the building also retains integrity of materials, workmanship, setting, and location. The Bassett Residence and Office is also an example of the early work of the prominent St. Louis architect Edouard Jules Mutrux.

NARRATIVE: The Bassett Office and Residence is a brick masonry building of irregular plan with a flat roof. As originally designed, its one story office entrance faces west onto Big Bend Boulevard. The building then rises by half stories in two additional sections which held Doctor Bassett's offices on the lower floor and his residence on the upper floor. The family's private entrance was through a garage at the rear of the north side, and the main entrance to the residence was in the middle section on the south side. The latter entrance has remained, but the garage has been replaced by a built-up formal entrance for the current owners of the structure.

From its one story street level, the building steps back in two stages to a two story rear section. The architect took advantage of the sloping site by placing the two story central section at a halfway point between the lower and upper sections. The lower floor of the central section is thus below the ground level. The effect of this arrangement of the sections of the building is a clear separation of elements into three distinct wings. They rise at each level, and culminate in the full two story rear, east wing.

Echoing this rise is the formally arranged stairway on the south side of the building. The stairs are placed between two parapets that are stepped in three stages, just as in the building. The parapets are of the same striped brick pattern as on the walls of the main level. This stairway leads to what was originally the formal entrance to the residential section of the structure. To emphasize this entry, Mutrux completely surrounded the door.

with ten inch square glass blocks, eleven blocks across, and thirteen blocks high. (At the levels blocks where the door interrupts the pattern -- ten blocks high -- there are three blocks to either side of the door.) Directly beside this door, on the western side, is a large rectangular chimney stack. It emerges out of the wall surface, and is treated with the same striped brick pattern as noted before. The entrance area is at the rear part of the central section, and abuts the wall of the rear wing, which is about two feet wider than the central section on both sides. The doorway is fitted into the shallow niche formed by the chimney and rear wing wall.

At the street level on the west is located a door which is deeply recessed into the wall surface. The door originally was used as the entrance to Dr. Bassett's offices. This wall contains the clearest statement of the Streamlined styling of the building. Built of brick laid in a common bond, alternating courses are set slightly forward to create a horizontal banded, or striped effect. The wall is rounded at the southwest corner, and the bands continue through the turn, joining up with the bands on the stairway parapets on the south side. The brick above the doorway is stuccoed to form a smooth surface with the wide upper portion of the wall sweeping around the curve of the wall, ending at the back portion of the parapet wall. Set between the lower brick and upper stuccoed sections is a large band of glass blocks that also turn the corner of the wall. Eight blocks high, this wide strip of glass creates a large void space between the masses above and below it. The glass strongly suggests the volumetric, rounded form of the western wing. Originally, the large room behind this section served as the doctor's waiting room.

Large windows also emphasize the southwest corners of the two upper wings. The windows are made of large clear panes and are recessed nine inches from the wall surface. This treatment repeats the solid/void/solid character of the lower southwest wall, but with regular, right-angled corners.

The north side of the building contains the same elements as the other sides, but is treated in a more planar manner. Instead of rounded corners, the effect here is of intersecting flat wall surfaces. The lower, originally-office level of the structure is emphasized by a long striped wall that unifies the lower and middle wings into one unit. This wall is almost entirely enclosed in glass blocks, five blocks high, with the long bands in the brick treatment above them. The center wing emerges out of this wall to form a second story. A prominent porthole window is centered between a window...
of large clear panes, and a combination large panned/glass block window. The different treatments of the fenestration and wall surfaces on this side of the building clearly delineate the separate office and residential functions of the building as it was originally used.

The upper portion of the rear wing on this side is treated in a similar fashion as it is on the south side. The same type of large panned windows are recessed around the corner of the wall. The lower part of this wall has been changed, however. Originally, there was a garage door at this level. The garage door served as a private entrance for the doctor and his family. The garage door was removed in the late 1960's and early 1970's and replaced by a simple wall that was not harmonious with the rest of the structure. The garage had become unusable by 1988 so the dead space of the garage was converted into the new reception area for the current occupants of the building. A shallow, curving bay with a small entrance porch, as the new formal entrance, was added to the exterior. Enclosed in glass blocks, the wall echoes the curving surface of the southwest corner of the lower wing. The addition of this bay is, in fact, a marked improvement over the garage door in the overall design of the building. The renovations were designed by the Lawrence Group, a firm with a great deal of experience in renovating historic structures.

The interior of the building was renovated and, in some areas, redesigned in a conservative and compatible manner to the original appearance of the structure. This was necessary to accommodate the needs of the law firm that purchased the structure. The entire building was converted into office space for the firm. The two areas that were largely redesigned in the conversion were the original residential areas and the original garage and maintenance room areas. Yet, the conversion was made so as to retain as much of the unique spaces of the original as possible. The ground floor for instance, retains the central hall and general room layout of the original plan. Most importantly, the dramatic effects of the glass blocks were retained. The space behind the curving, southwest wall was converted into the firm's library, and the south entrance's split-level effect was kept. During the renovation, all of the original glass blocks were replaced with new, double-paned ones of almost the same dimensions. The older blocks were in need of repair, and the new blocks increased the insulation values of the walls.

In keeping with the original character of the building, the new interior spaces retain the benefits of natural light that is made possible with the
abundant use of glass blocks. This is especially true of the area around the doorway on the south side, where the light flows around and down the staircase connecting the two levels. Also in keeping with the original character of the building, the owners have taken care to decorate the offices with furnishings, carpets, and wall treatments that complement the exterior.

The other major change that has occurred to the building is the treatment of the exterior wall surfaces. At some point after the 1960's, the brick walls were painted white. During the renovations by the present occupants, when the thought was that they had always been white, a new coat of paint was applied. Sometime in the late 1940's or early 1950's, large metal bars were attached to the west wall, on which attached awnings to shade the afternoon sun. These bars were removed before the current owners purchased the building.
Bassett, Dr. Samuel A., Office and Residence

St. Louis County, Missouri

county and State
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 6

Bassett, Dr. Samuel A., Office and Residence
St. Louis County, Missouri

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SUMMARY: The Dr. Samuel A. Bassett Office and Residence, 1200 South Big Bend Boulevard, Richmond Heights, St. Louis County, is significant under Criteria C in the area of ARCHITECTURE. Constructed in 1938 as the residence and office of physician Samuel A. Bassett, the building was designed by St. Louis architect Edouard Jules Mutrux. The Bassett Residence and Office is an essentially unaltered example of the combination of two of the main currents of architectural modernism, the Streamline Moderne and the International style.

NARRATIVE: Featured in the July, 1939 issue of the Architectural Record, the Dr. Samuel A. Bassett Office and Residence was one of the first buildings in the St. Louis region to utilize features of the International style, such as recessed bands of windows that wrap around the corners of the squared-off walls on the upper level of the building, a decorative porthole window, a flat roof, and a dynamic balance of unlike parts. Some of these elements, such as the porthole window, are also features of the Art Deco style, but the building does not contain a great deal of the added decorations associated with that style. The lower block of the building also conveys the influence of the Streamline Moderne, with its curved surfaces and use of glass blocks. Setbacks, common to the Streamline Moderne, were used to conform to an irregular lot grade and to distinguish the separate functions of the building's various levels; the setbacks also implied cantilevered blocks, a common feature of the International style. In common with both styles, the overall form of the building is horizontal and the smooth wall surfaces contain little ornamentation.

The common bond brickwork also reflects a strong local tradition in the use of the material. The building also reflects elements of Frank Lloyd Wright's
domestic architecture, including its prominent fieldstone chimney and the horizontal banding treatment of the brick wall in certain areas. St. Louis had direct access to Wright's thinking through William Bernoudy, a pupil of Wright, and Bernoudy transformed the work of Edouard Mutrux as well. According to Mutrux explained, he was strongly influenced by the various types of architecture that he saw in the professional journals of the period.4

The architecture of the Doctor Samuel A. Bassett Office and Residence, embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Modernistic Movement 1935-1945.5 By the 1930's architects in St. Louis, like those in most other parts of the western world, had become concerned about how their art was to respond to the startling social and technological changes of the 20th Century. One solution to this problem, dubbed the International Style, was to exert a dominant influence over American taste after World War II, but it was still considered a little foreign in the 1930's. As yet unrestrained by the grip of that style, architects were free to explore other paths to modernity. Both Art Deco and Streamlined Moderne derived from the 1925 Paris Exposition des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes. The Streamlined Moderne is one of the sub-categories of the modernistic styles that appeared in the 1920's and became popular in the 1930's. In 1969, Marcus Whiffen wrote of the modernistic buildings, "today they are not so much disliked as simply disregarded. Tomorrow they will doubtless be found to have period charm."6

Just the year previously, Bevis Hillier had coined the term "Art Deco" to describe these buildings,7 and in the two decades since then the style has experienced a major revival, both in terms of the identification and the


4Telephone conversation with Edouard Mutrux, by Jeffrey Ball, March 24, 1990.

5Hamilton.


appreciation of the resources from the 1920's and the 1930's and of the creation of new designs in the style. Many scholars now limit the use of the term "Art Deco" to the more rectilinear examples of the modernistic design, decorated with zigzags, chevrons and stylistic plant and animal motifs. "Moderne" or "Streamlined Modern", by contrast, is less ornamental. Its rounded and sweeping lines were originally intended to cut down wind resistance on trains and ships, but they were applied as well to a wide variety of stationary objects.

There were few important structures built in the St. Louis area during the Depression, but as the economy slowly recovered, a few adventurous clients, especially physicians, began to commission bolder, more modern designs. Harris Armstrong is credited with introducing the new styles to the area in a series of houses he designed for St. Louis clients in 1935 and 1936. Mutrux's design for Dr. Bassett is an excellent example of the buildings that followed in the next few years of the Streamlined Moderne style. Unlike any building in the area, The Bassett Office and Residence compares with the Mutrux's building in San Francisco, Edward D. Stone's Richard Mandel House in Mt. Kisco, New York, and a residence at 5516 Auth Road in Cape Springs, Maryland, build from a design provided by the Garlinghouse Plan Service of Topeka, Kansas.

Edouard Jules Mutrux (b. 1907) is the eldest of twelve children of Louis E. Mutrux, a self-trained architect. Edouard was one of five of the children to receive architectural degrees from Washington University. He received a Master Degree in architecture in 1931. He taught in the School of Architecture at Washington University during the 1930's, while beginning his career as an architect.

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The Bassett building was his third executed design, and the last to be completed before he began to work with William Bernoudy, who had just returned to St. Louis after serving as a Taliesin Fellow for four years. Shortly after Edouard met William Bernoudy, who had just returned from study with Frank Lloyd Wright, Bernoudy converted Mutrux to Wright's design philosophy and Mutrux' style moved away from the Moderne toward a Wrightian aesthetic. Mutrux and Bernoudy began their collaboration in 1939 and began a formal partnership with the Pulitzer Pavilion of 1946. The firm of Bernoudy, Mutrux and Bauer had a distinguished practice until 1966. Mutrux then served as director of engineering for the St. Louis Board of Education until his retirement in 1977. Mutrux regarded the house and office for Dr. Bassett as the best of his pre-War work.

Samuel A. Bassett was the middle of three sons of Dr. Samuel T. Bassett. The younger Dr. Bassett bought the site for his new residence and office in August, 1936. He served as health Commissioner for Richmond Heights during the early 1940's. Dr. Samuel A. Bassett achieved the rank of Lieutenant Commander in the United States Navy as a flight surgeon serving in the South Pacific during World War II. Both of Dr. Bassett's brothers were flight surgeons in the Navy during World War II as well. Later, the building served as the Coates Medical Center from the early 1950's until 1962. The building then served a variety of office uses until January, 1989, when it was purchased by the principals of the law firm of Mertz, Stern, Frapolli and Steiger.

The original plan of the building clearly separated the two functions it served. Dr. Bassett's offices on the ground floor were marked by the large expanse of translucent glass blocks that wrap around the rounded corner of the lower level. The upper, residential section was distinguished by the recessed, International style windows, and the rectangular form of the walls.

10 Historical Buildings in St. Louis County (Clayton, MO: St. Louis County Historic Buildings Commission, St. Louis County Department of Parks and Recreation, and St. Louis County Department of Human Resources, 1983), page 40.

11 Hamilton.

12 St. Louis Globe-Democrat, November 2, 1944, Page 7A.
Each area had separate entrances, the one on the South side clearly delineated with the door framed by large glass blocks. In keeping with the design's emphasis on modernism, the original building was fully air conditioned.

Dr. Samuel A. Bassett's office is listed in St. Louis County publication entitled: Historical Buildings. It describes this building as a "widely recognized example of the International style." Until the publication of Historic Buildings in St. Louis County, in 1983, it was the Dr. Samuel A. Bassett Office and Residence which attracted the most interest and inquiries of persons calling the St. Louis County Department of Parks and Recreation. This building was also featured on the Richmond Heights Home and Garden Tour on June 7, 1992, and was one of the buildings featured prominently on the front page of the Post Dispatch Real Estate Section to announce the tour.

Major renovations were carried out by the law firm of Mertz, Stern, Frapolli and Steiger, the current owners of the building. The interior spaces on both levels were reorganized, and new double-paned glass blocks replaced the originals, which had yellowed with age and were in need of replacement. The original street casement windows were restored and new, insulated glass was added to the interior so as not to disturb the original design. A new, more formal entrance was added to the north of the building. A garage area located there was replaced by a curving bay that echoes the curving surface of the southwest wall, and retains the scale and proportions of the rest of the structure. The side yard has maintained its residential appearance and is used by both occupants and their guests. The addition and renovations were done in a complimentary manner so as to fit appropriately with the original structure. The renovation was designed by the Lawrence Group. The general contractor of the project was Knoebel Construction, Inc.

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13 Historic Buildings in St. Louis County.

14 Conversation with Esley Hamilton, Administrative Assistant for Historical Preservation with St. Louis County Department of Parks and Recreation, by Ted F. Frapolli, September 21, 1992; Historic Buildings in St. Louis County, p. 38.

15 "Richmond Heights House Tour set today, features diversity", St. Louis Post-Dispatch, June 7, 1992, Section G, Page 1.
"Dr. Sam Bassett Dies," St. Louis Globe-Democrat, November 2, 1944.

Hamilton, Esley. "Historic Buildings Survey, Art Deco and the International Style, St. Louis and St. Louis County, Missouri," 1987 (copy in the Missouri Cultural Resource Inventory, Missouri Department of Natural Resources, Jefferson City, Missouri)


Historical Buildings in St. Louis County. Clayton, MO: St. Louis County Historic Buildings Commission, St. Louis County Department of Parks and Recreation, and St. Louis County Department of Human Resources, 1983.


"Mutrux, Edouard." Vertical files. St. Louis Public Library.


Bassett, Dr. Samuel A., Office and Residence  
St. Louis County, Missouri  

Verbal Boundary Description: The west 10 feet of Lot 13 and all of Lot 14, Block 4, Forest Park Heights, City of Richmond Heights, St. Louis County.  

Boundary Justification: The boundary includes all the property historically associated with the nominated resource.
The following information is the same for all photographs:
Bassett, Dr. Samuel A., Office and Residence
1200 South Big Bend Boulevard, Richmond Heights, St. Louis County, MO
Sabian Sickles
July 1992
Sickles & Sons, Inc., 70 West Shewood Drive, St. Louis, MO 63114

1. View from the Northwest.
2. View from the Southwest.
3. View from the Northwest.
4. View from the South.
5. View from the North.
6. View from the Northeast.
7. View from the South.
8. First level, Southwest office
9. Second level, Northeast office
10. First level, Southern entryway