

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section

8

Page 1 OF 7

Adams-Kentucky District
Warren County, Kentucky

Statement of Significance

The Adams-Kentucky District meets National Register Criterion A, and it's significant within the historic context "Industrial and Academic Expansion in Bowling Green, Kentucky, 1866-1955." The Adams-Kentucky District of Bowling Green played a noteworthy role in Bowling Green's social history during this period, as it lies at the fringes of the both the L&N Railroad and Western Kentucky University. Therefore, it is being nominated under the National Register Criterion A, as the District made important contributions to the broad patterns of history in Bowling Green in regard to an economic boom and the growth of the city's state-funded University.

Date Justification

The beginning date of 1866 indicates the year that Bowling Green's industrial preeminence began after the end of the Civil War. An important date within the significance range is 1949, the year Dixie Highway (U.S. 31W) was completed. When this route came through Bowling Green, industry could rely on the freight trucks to transport cargo, which diminished the preeminence of the railroad. The focus of industry moved closer to the highway and even to points further in the city. Therefore, housing for those working in industry was no longer primarily located within a short distance of the railroad, as it had been previously.

Although 1949 saw a negative impact on the district in terms of industry, it also saw the beginning of its importance as housing for Western Kentucky University students. Previously, in 1945, the University had ordered federally-funded accommodations for ex-service men and their wives. That construction was not nearly enough. In 1946, Western's enrollment topped 1,430, and President Paul Garrett was competing with other state institutions for residence funding. This led to a spill-over of students into the surrounding community that lasted into the 1950s.

The end date of 1955, indicates the death of President Garrett, for whom President Kelly Thompson became a successor. This transition represents the beginning and end of two eras at Western. During Thompson's presidency, the University experienced mass construction that remained unprecedented until the present. Several residence halls were built, which alleviated for decades the need for students to find housing outside of the campus¹.

¹ Paul L. Garrett Papers, Western Kentucky University Archives and Lynn E. Nedermeier, "Veteran's Village," University Archive, 2007.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section

8

Page 2 OF 7

Adams-Kentucky District
Warren County, Kentucky

Adams and Kentucky Streets in the Community of Bowling Green

Bowling Green's population was 52,272 in 2005. It is the seat of Warren County, an agriculturally-based county in south central Kentucky with flat to gently-rolling terrain and major karst areas located within both the urban and rural sections. What was once described as a sleepy Victorian town began to evolve into a thriving small city at the turn of the century. This growth was a result of industry and commerce. At the beginning of the 1950s, as a result of the G.I. Bill, Bowling Green transformed from a town with a college (originally named Southern Normal School and Business College) into a college town. These two periods of transformation, which overlap one another, can be read in the construction and use of the buildings on Adams Street and Kentucky Street. This district indicates important social and economic change in Bowling Green at the turn of the 20th century and into the mid-century. Houses on these streets met the needs of Bowling Green residents during two important periods of change in Bowling Green's history.

Industry

By the 1900s, Kentucky's L&N Railroad extended nearly 3,000 miles, connecting Bowling Green to Louisville and Nashville—two important industrial and cultural centers to the north and south—and ushering in an era of prosperity. The City also benefited as a shipping point for oil, abundant in the local area. Another natural resource included a distinct white limestone that was quarried and cut in the city by Southern Cut Stone Company. This stone was used close to home, in such monuments as the Kentucky governor's mansion, and went as far as New York, for use in St. Thomas Church.

Bowling Green also relied on the railroad for shipping other local raw materials and agriculture products like lumber, rock asphalt, tobacco, livestock, and strawberries. Facilities for processing finished goods emerged to the west of the railroad, near the Adams-Kentucky District. Kentucky Street was actually referred to by the colloquial alias of Mechanic Street in 1886 Sanborn maps because of its denizens and their work.

City directories show residents and homeowners in the Adams-Kentucky district as having assorted occupations at Scott Tobacco (nominated within this district), and various positions on the L&N Railroad (brakemen, flagmen, yardmaster, etc.). The men and women of Mechanic Street also worked at places like James Woolworth's Axe Handle Factory (later Tru-Temper), Ken-Rad Tube and Lamp Cooperation (which later was absorbed by General Electric), and Union Underwear (maker of the ubiquitous union suit), Field Meat Packing, Borders Pure Milk, and HoneyKrust Bakery ².

² Sweeten, Lena L. Historic Preservation Theory and the Experience of a Community of Workers: A Case Study of Bowling Green, Kentucky. Masters Thesis: MTSU. 1998, 97-103.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section

8

Page 3 OF 7

Adams-Kentucky District
Warren County, Kentucky

These facilities for finished goods have a deep connection to Bowling Green's history. Recent publications laud Bowling Green's industries past. Jonathan Jeffery's *Bowling Green* volume of the *Images in America* series features an entire section on Bowling Green at work.³ Scott Tobacco's Mammoth Cave Twist and Warren County Twist are distinct and recognizable logos for Bowling Green residents. Even the curing baskets, which feature a particular Bowling Green tobacco warehouse's name, are favorite local collector's items. Royal Crown Cola still bottles the locally famous soft drink within this district. Because of this deep connection to industry that exists to the present, the Kentucky-Adams district reflects the experience of the worker responsible for commercial and economic growth in Bowling Green from the late 1860s into the 1950s.

Community

Of course, this district is not and was never just a series of houses, but also a community of people who lived in similar circumstances and worked in similar fields. They were neighbors, and like most Bowling Green residents in the early twentieth century, they congregated in the community's unofficial center, the church. Kerr Memorial United Methodist Church (WA-B-131) at 103 12th Avenue, was originally organized and constructed as the result of grassroots movement begun by Rev. Daniel Farmer Kerr. He was traveling circuit preacher who was assigned to Bowling Green⁴. He assembled 12 original members that met first in the county court room and then later in a vacant store. At the Kentucky Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1891, Kerr asked the Speed family of Louisville (the same family as the Speed museum's namesake) for \$1100 to build the church on 12th Street. Mrs. Fannie Speed donated the needed funds.

The First Methodist Episcopal Church was named in Kerr's honor in 1939 and the church celebrated both 50th and a 100th anniversary together. The congregation helped to begin several other Methodist churches in the city⁵.

³ Jeffery, Jonathan and the Kentucky Library. *Images of America: Bowling Green*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing. 2003.

⁴ Jeffrey, Jonathan, "Church is Saved," Landmark Report, November 2001, p. 1-3.

⁵ Morris, Rebecca, "Members Gearing up for the 100th Anniversary of Kerr Methodist Church," *Park City Daily News*, September 16, 1990, p.8

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section

8

Page 4 OF 7

Adams-Kentucky District
Warren County, Kentucky

This pattern of a church being central to the neighborhood is the foundation of early growth in Bowling Green. Class-oriented neighborhoods surrounding the central downtown are the earliest settlement pattern of the city. Other neighborhoods, like the National Register District, St. Joseph, feature a church as a focus of social cohesion. Just as St. Joseph Catholic Church is credited with serving an immigrant working-class parish in Bowling Green, Kerr Methodist served the Adams-Kentucky district⁶. Although Kerr Methodist is no longer a place of worship, it still serves the community as a refuge for young victims of abuse as the Barren River Child Advocacy Center.

Progressive Domestic Architecture

The district has some interesting lessons to tell about the willingness of local residents to embrace the progressive-era commentaries as applied to the area's housing stock. Bowling Green's connection to industrial centers also put it in touch with architectural trends of the early-twentieth century, especially compact Bungalow and American Foursquare forms. These became popular for working class people in the United States, and Bowling Green was clearly no exception. These two plans came under the focus of the progressive-era writers in American politics, and became targets for commentators to pin them with upper- and middle-class values. For instance, the bungalow and foursquare were said to provide ample room for separate living and working spaces for the middle-class residents during the industrial era⁷. Of course, these idealized notions of spatial use were expressed by social theorists. Often, the homes were used for multiple families, and some spaces were let to boarders. Further partitions were applied to the original plans, disrupting the cheery prescriptions for distinct work and living spaces. To further reject progressive-era notions of work space being separate from living, several owners turned garages and carriage houses into apartments when the demand for housing became high. The dwellings at 1124 Adams Street and 1219 Kentucky Street are two examples within the district that feature these types of garage or carriage house apartments.

Adaptive Reuse

The district's importance as a regional hub for higher education began to emerge just as its industrial importance began to wane in the late 1940s. City directories show an increasing number of subdivided houses from the depression to the end of World War II.

⁶ Reagan, Stan. "Neighborhood's said to be the root of BG's beginnings," *Park City Daily News*, June 16, 1991, p.1.

⁷ King, Anthony D. *The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture*. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1984. and Lancaster, Clay. *The American Bungalow: 1880-1930*. New York: Abbeville Press Publishers. 1985.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section

8

Page 5 OF 7

Adams-Kentucky District
Warren County, Kentucky

While progressive-era analysts saw the plans of the houses as serving single families, these houses in reality were frequently pressed into service to fit the need of the local University and the city's permanent denizens. This is a reflection of a change of social patterns in the history of Bowling Green. The homes, once perfect for a working-class family or several boarders became duplexes and small apartments for college students. Based on these two kinds of use, this neighborhood played a significant role in Bowling Green's social history from the late 1940s to 1955 as well.

Residency changed permanently in the district when the enrollment of Western Kentucky State Teacher's College had plummeted to 500 in 1944, compared to the pre-war level of 1,900. The University president, Paul Garrett, signed a contract with the United States Air force to assist in the training of corpsmen. When they arrived at Western, the female students and the remaining male students were literally kicked out of their dorms in order to make room for the men. Will Hill, the University's public relations coordinator, called around town and found alternative housing for the women no less than four blocks from campus. Dean Gordon Wilson's diary contains information to corroborate this. The government contract for the air corpsmen saved the floundering University⁸. Even Western's famous alumni and president Dero Downing lived on Adams Street as a student that year, according to the 1944 directory.

Because of this precedent, the houses then served spillover students from Western vet's village. The University simply did not have enough housing to accommodate the number of married former service men or their wives that were attending college after WWII. Many sought small apartments off campus in close proximity. Because of the alteration evident in these houses as a direct result of changes in the demographics of the district after WWII, this district further demonstrates important episodes of social change in Bowling in the 1940s and 1950s.

The Legacy of Adaptation

By the 20th century, the railroad had become a mixed blessing. It ushered in economic opportunities in Bowling Green, while simultaneously led to the creation of zones of differing residential desirability. A neighborhood in the midst of a University has a similar mix of benefits and liabilities. Higher education is the key to economic success in the post-industrial era, but young students are often credited with the diminished integrity of once beautiful homes.

⁸ Paul L. Garrett Papers and Gordon Wilson Diary, Western Kentucky University Archives

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section

8

Page 6 OF 7

Adams-Kentucky District
Warren County, Kentucky

The Adams-Kentucky District is not alone in its struggle to maintain integrity on the edge of academics and industry. On the opposite end of campus, the much more suburban neighborhood of Cedar Ridge rests against the L&N and the Northwest side of Western Kentucky University's campus. Many of the homes of Cedar Ridge were built in the 1920s in the craftsman style and bungalow form, only on larger tracts. Like Adams-Kentucky, the land originally belonged to two larger farms—in this case, the Sumpter and Craig families—that were gradually partitioned. Building in this neighborhood continued into the 1960s, and the neighborhood features a more architecturally diverse low-density landscape. Several of the homes were designed by James Ingram, a locally prominent architect who made his mark in Bowling Green and across Kentucky in the 1930s and 1940s. The homes attracted professors, civil servants, and other professions from class echelons higher than that of the residents of Adams-Kentucky. Yet the presence of Gunnison homes and homes partitioned with garage apartments closer to the railroad in this neighborhood indicates a working class and college student presence, as it does in the Adams-Kentucky District. It would be difficult to ignore the encroachment of the University on Cedar Ridge which features a large parking lot, and a student living apartment development at Creason Street. While Adams-Kentucky welcomed the students with open arms, Cedar Ridge residents developed organizations like SOON (Save Our Old Neighborhood) and CRANA (Cedar Ridge Neighborhood Association) to hinder the movement of multiple family homes and college students.⁹

This preservationist sentiment has been echoed at the other side of the college hill, in earlier eras. Irene Moss Sumpter, a writer of several books on Bowling Green architectural history, sardonically described the Adams-Kentucky District as “a once prominent neighborhood.” When lamenting about a demolished historic home on Adams Street once occupied by Civil War General Albert Sidney Johnston, she wrote, “...the beautiful and historic Blackburn mansion was razed to make way for what the modern man refers to as ‘progress’.”¹⁰ With all snide meaning aside, her statement is true. The then-newer Adams-Kentucky neighborhood was built in the name of progress, at a time when Bowling Green was emerging from the dislocation of Civil War. The burgeoning city also surfaced with an identity formed by the working people who rebuilt the city, and not men of stature who once simply passed through the sleepy town. This district in Bowling Green represents a unique case of city “on the grow,” as well as the national trends in economy and housing patterns occurring simultaneously.

⁹ Dillard, Sue, “The Cedar Ridge Neighborhood,” *The Landmark Report*, July 2005, p. 1-6.

¹⁰ Sumpter, Irene Moss. *Our Heritage: An Album of Early Bowling Green, Kentucky Landmarks*. Bowling Green, KY: American Bank and Trust. 1978, 13.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section

8

Page 7 OF 7

Adams-Kentucky District
Warren County, Kentucky

In direct opposition of the views of Mrs. Sumpter, narrative scholar Kent Ryden describes this type of landscape as a palimpsest. The Adams-Kentucky neighborhood was like a fresh animal skin before the Civil War. In the same way a palimpsest was written on and the surface scraped off over and over to make room for new ideas and transactions, the land was built upon, the buildings were readapted for changing needs, and they were rebuilt or modified. The homes have compromised integrity, like a skin that becomes ragged with use. It can, however, offer more stories to the insightful historian than an unblemished neighborhood could. Pristine documents only reveal the text written on them, just as pristine houses only reveal information about the era that created them. Like a palimpsest, this neighborhood reveals multiple layers on one canvas when shown in certain light. This examination reveals that the Adams-Kentucky District has played a significant and multi-faceted role in Bowling Green's social history for almost one hundred years, from 1866-1955.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8

Page 8 OF 7

Adams-Kentucky District
Warren County, Kentucky
