

Moore House
Article by Suzanne Bolten
745 Oakland Avenue
lot dimensions: 141/136 and 145/138
Glendale Park Subdivision
Lot Pts 1 & 17: E Pt Lot 1 & W Pt Lot 17



The house at 745 Oakland Avenue was the first of nine houses in Oakland designed by world-renowned architect Harris Armstrong. The original owner was Miss Katherine Moore, a teacher at Lafayette elementary school. According to the 1930 federal census, she lived in Webster Groves with her parents and younger sister at 714 Laclede Station Road. Katherine was twenty-four years old.

Esley Hamilton, noted preservationist and architectural historian, commented on the significance of the Moore House: “The house at 745 Oakland Avenue is one of a small number in the St. Louis area to reflect the progressive architectural movement of the 1930s variously known as Art Deco or Moderne. It consciously rejects any details that could be associated with the popular period revival styles of the period and instead creates an asymmetrical but balanced façade with some windows brought to the corners of the walls, with broad horizontal bands and other abstract patterns created by raised brickwork, and with the characteristic chevron or inverted “V” pattern above the front door. As the austere International modern style succeeded the Moderne in popularity,

many houses in this transitional style were made to conform by being painted white, and this house is one of the few to retain its rich natural brick color.”

Architect Andrew Raimist is writing a biography of Harris Armstrong and estimates that the house at 745 Oakland Avenue was built in 1934, perhaps because of its stylistic similarity to the Cori House in Glendale, built in 1935. According to Raimist, Armstrong referred to the house on Oakland Avenue as “a small house in Glendale.” Since the house is in Oakland, this has caused some confusion. However, Oakland was once part of Glendale and seceded in 1920. The original Glendale business district was along Berry Road, not far from its intersection with Oakland Avenue. Furthermore, the house is in the Glendale Park subdivision. Raimist writes: “With its very shallow hipped roof and horizontally grouped casement windows, it’s a close relative of his Cori House, which exhibits some similar characteristics, such as the second floor balcony with the chimney, brick masonry construction, and the cantilevered overhang over the main entry.”

Current owner, Ellen Edwards, was told by a previous owner, Dr. H. James Pierce, that Armstrong drew the plans for the house in the late 1920’s for a banker and charged a fee of \$25. The contractor was named Quick. The source of Dr. Pierce’s information was Armstrong’s widow, Louise, whom Dr. Pierce interviewed by phone in 1982.

This anecdotal information has not been verified by historical records. The house is situated on the eastern part of lot 1 and the western part of lot 17 in block 9 of Glendale Park. According to the deeds at St. Louis County Department of Revenue, Katherine Moore bought lot 1 on January 15, 1930 and the western half of lot 17 on December 26, 1930, when she took out a mortgage for \$4,000. She applied for a building permit from St. Louis County on September 22, 1931, as published in the *St. Louis Daily Record*. The estimated cost for construction was \$4,000. Real Estate tax records for the Village of Oakland confirm that the property was owned by Katherine E. Moore. The taxes on Miss Moore’s property increased in 1933 due to “improvements.” The assessment done in 1932 placed the value of the house at \$2,850. Based on this data, the house was most likely built in 1932. No links between Miss Moore and a banker have been established. No previous owners of lots 1 and 17 were bankers. Minutes from the Oakland Board of Trustees do mention a contractor named Parnell Quick who was involved in construction along Oakland Avenue.

Construction methods and details on both interior and exterior are elaborate and costly for a middle class house built during the Depression. According to Dr. Pierce, the floors are reinforced concrete covered with wood and the walls have an inner layer of firebrick. There are two ogival archways, one leading to the dining room and the other one in the entry; the other two arched doorways are traditional. Harris Armstrong must have used some salvaged materials in the construction of the Moore house. The hand-hewn black walnut beams in the living room and dining room are much older than the house, probably dating to the 1800s. The ceiling slats also pre-date the house. Mr. Armstrong may have scavenged the stone flooring used in the entryway and hall closet as well as the marble pieces forming the hearth. The interior doors are yellow pine. The current owner

stripped away years of paint and restored their rich color. The oak flooring dates from the same period as the house.

The house overlooks Gravois Creek and the landscaping includes large boulders and native woodland species which provide refuge for migrating birds. Dr. Pierce identified 46 avian species in the yard when he lived there.

The Moore house has been well maintained. Dr. Pierce had the original windows rebuilt and added special storm windows to protect them. The walk-out basement has recently been finished. There are two garages at ground level, accessible at the east side. Over the years, owners have updated the bathroom and kitchen and added a half-bath on the landing leading to the basement. However, the house has had only one major exterior modification. The balcony along the southwest caused major water leakage during rains and was enclosed by Ellen Edwards in 1990. The design by architect Robert Radley blends well with the original structure. The color selected for the wood trim by Ms. Edwards is "Cherokee Red", said to be Frank Lloyd Wright's personal favorite which he used at "Fallingwater." Wrought iron fencing was added along the front porch for safety and a wooden deck was built at the rear of the house.

In 1893, the area between Sappington and Berry Road bordered on the north by the Missouri Pacific tracks and on the south by the Union Pacific tracks was platted for Glendale Park Subdivision. Three of the nine houses in Oakland designed by Harris Armstrong are in Glendale Park Subdivision.

Acknowledgements:

Thanks to Esley Hamilton for finding the information on the property ownership for 745 Oakland Avenue by searching the deeds index at the St. Louis County Department of Revenue. Thanks also for his enlightening comment on the significance of the Moore house from an architectural standpoint.