

THE SUCCESSFUL PRESERVATION OF ROCK AND ROLL MUSIC SITES:  
PAUL McCARTNEY'S CHILDHOOD HOME IN LIVERPOOL, ENGLAND AND  
THE CHESS RECORDS OFFICE AND STUDIO IN CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

A Thesis

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Kandalyn Lu Hahn

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## ABSTRACT

Groundbreaking preservation efforts for two highly significant rock and roll music sites are examined: Paul McCartney's childhood home in Liverpool, England, under the protection of the National Trust, and the former Chess Records office and studio in Chicago, Illinois, landmarked under city ordinance.

Mid to late twentieth-century popular music sites face multiple threats of demolition, neglect, and inappropriate treatment. The lack of architectural distinction, bias against relatively recent history, and need to establish the relevance of popular culture inhibit successful preservation of rock and roll sites. Yet popular interest in such sites has exploded since the 1990s and visitation is on the rise. Increasing interest in these locations translates into more opportunities for funding and support. At the same time, it intensifies the need for preservation as popularity attracts exploitation schemes that threaten the integrity of the sites. Finally, given the difficulty of finding accurate documentation of these sites, the critical time to work on their preservation is while people who know their history firsthand are still alive.

The examination includes a review of the literature, much of it in popular media, and primary research in the form of site visitation; interviews with key people and related experts; collection of original documentation; and some observation of work in progress.

Research establishes the historic context, significance, and local preservation climate for each site. The preservation projects' processes and outcomes are documented and critiqued. Findings suggest that there are five major components necessary for successful preservation of rock and roll music sites: preservation protection through institutional purpose or legal status; funding; long-term preservation philosophy; regular observation of work and adherence to a restoration

design plan; and research. Noting that these are widely applicable components, three non-critical factors are distinguished which have special significance for this subset of historic sites: the need for significance to counter biases; public value and visitation; and support of name stars.



## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kandalyn Hahn was born and grew up in Lincoln, Nebraska. She attended Amherst College where she majored in fine arts and graduated with a B.A. in 1988. After several years in the work force, she returned to school as a graduate student at Cornell University's Historic Preservation Planning Program. She currently lives in Chicago, Illinois with her husband Richard Poemape.

To Mom for the dancing  
and to Dad for the music.

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## INTRODUCTION

### The Preservation of Rock and Roll Music Sites: Why Is It Worth Examining?

What are the key components necessary for successful preservation of rock and roll music sites? How does their absence or presence affect the outcome of such projects? Through examination of the preservation efforts for two highly significant rock and roll music sites and the results of these efforts, this thesis attempts to discover what the key components are and how their presence or absence affects the end result.

How is successful preservation defined? For the purposes of this thesis, success should be measured against generally accepted preservation principles with which the majority of the U.S. preservation community could be said to agree. As the most widely-recognized standard bearer, the Secretary of the Interior provides the starting point. The Secretary's definitions for different approaches to the treatment of historic properties are helpful but limited because they focus so specifically on the physical work of preservation. Restoration, for example, is "the act or process of accurately depicting the form, features, and character of a property as it appeared at a particular period of time by means of the removal of features from other periods in its history and reconstruction of missing features from the restoration period."<sup>1</sup> This definition provides clarity regarding the types of desirable physical changes undertaken at a site if restoration is the goal. Yet measuring success solely against such a characterization would not allow the impact of something like landmarking to

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Secretary of the Interior, "The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties, 1995, Standards for Restoration" [National Park Service website on-line]; available from <http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/secstan6.htm>; Internet; accessed 29 October 2003.

be taken into consideration in the overall evaluation of the success of a project. Given the extensive effort that the preservation movement has put toward the creation of such legal safeguards for historic properties, this omission of the most basic definition of preservation as protection<sup>2</sup> would be problematic.

To include all aspects of what the preservation community values, the Secretary's definition of preservation can be qualified as follows. For the purposes of this paper, the definition of preservation as "the act or process of applying measures necessary to sustain the existing form, integrity, and materials of an historic property"<sup>3</sup> should be understood to include not only the physical work undertaken at a site but all activity which contributes to the protection of the site such as instituting legal protection and finding a compatible use. However, the degree to which the existing form, integrity, and materials of a historic property are sustained is relative depending on the approach used. Rehabilitation involves a less stringent application of preservation standards<sup>4</sup> while restoration qualifies which era of the existing form, integrity and materials should be kept. Given the qualitative nature of this analysis, such flexibility is not only possible but helpful for a meaningful discussion. The level

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<sup>2</sup> *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (1983), s.v. "preservation."

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Secretary of the Interior, "Archeology and Historic Preservation: Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines (As Amended and Annotated), Preservation Terminology" [National Park Service website on-line]; available from [http://www.cr.nps.gov/local-law/arch\\_stnds\\_1-.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/local-law/arch_stnds_1-.htm); Internet; accessed 17 September 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Rehabilitation is defined as "the act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values." U.S. Secretary of the Interior, "The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties, 1995, Standards for Rehabilitation" [National Park Service website on-line]; available from <http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/secstan5.htm>; Internet; accessed 29 October 2003.

of success of a project will be understood as the degree to which the site's preservation, as modified above, was advanced and may include judgment as to the appropriateness of the approach (e.g. restoration versus rehabilitation) chosen.

Three fundamental issues seem to deter the successful preservation of rock and roll sites. First, sites significant in the history of rock and roll are rarely, if ever, places with extraordinary pedigree. They are more likely to be common, without architectural distinction, even unglamorous.<sup>5</sup> Second, the music which affords such sites their significance is only decades old. These landmarks are "young" and must overcome the preservation field's bias against preserving artifacts younger than fifty years as well as the general population's idea that only "really old things" are historic.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the relevance of popular music, of which rock and roll is a subcategory, has not been firmly established.<sup>7</sup>

There is evidence that interest in rock and roll sites exploded in the 1990s. There are, for example, the sites discussed in this thesis for which groundbreaking preservation efforts were mounted in the 1980s and 1990s: Paul McCartney's childhood home in Liverpool, England and the Chess Records office and studio in Chicago, Illinois. The number of people visiting musical landmarks is large and increasing. Although the site is not examined here, the data for numbers of people touring Elvis Presley's home, Graceland, in Memphis, Tennessee, are exemplary.

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Striner, "Scholarship, Strategy and Activism in Preserving the Recent Past," in *Preserving the Recent Past*, ed. Deborah Slaton and Rebecca A. Shiffer (Washington, D.C.: Historic Preservation Education Foundation, 1995), III: 17-18.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Longstreth, "I Can't See It; I Don't Understand It; and It Doesn't Look Old to Me," in *Preserving the Recent Past*, ed. Deborah Slaton and Rebecca A. Shiffer (Washington, D.C.: Historic Preservation Education Foundation, 1995), I: 17-19.

<sup>7</sup> W. Ray Luce, "Kent State, White Castles and Subdivisions: Evaluating the Recent Past," in *Preserving the Recent Past*, ed. Deborah Slaton and Rebecca A. Shiffer (Washington, D.C.: Historic Preservation Education Foundation, 1995), II: 19.

“The number of visitors making the pilgrimage to Graceland every year has climbed to three-quarters of a million--making it, as Graceland officials like to boast, the single most visited home in America, save for the White House.”<sup>8</sup>

Often the quantity of these tourists exceeds the host area’s expectations. Demand appears be growing rather than subsiding.

The examples of the Mississippi Delta suggest that work remains to be done. The blues music native to the area, as well as the literature and folk art of the region, exert a strong pull for many Americans and even more Europeans and Japanese, who in recent years have been turning up in large numbers.

Yet so far no one has quite figured out how to handle the situation...”This just sort of backed up on people,” said Robert Cogswell, the director of folk arts at the Tennessee Arts Commission. “Busloads of Japanese tourists began showing up in little towns and asking to be pointed to Robert Johnson’s gravestone.”<sup>9</sup>

These instances and others like them suggest that such popular culture destinations are coming to hold value in the popular consciousness. Entrepreneurs are beginning to take notice and create products to meet the demand. In 1996, the venerable Fodor’s, a standard setter in the travel guide publishers industry, released its first edition of *Rock & Roll Traveler USA, the Ultimate Guide to Juke Joints, Street Corners, Whiskey Bars and Hotel Rooms Where Music History Was Made*.<sup>10</sup> The introduction notes “Yet when it comes to travel guides and brochures, rock and other popular music is largely ignored--which is why it seemed obvious that we should write

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<sup>8</sup>Ron Rosenblum, “Elvis, Healer,” *New York Times Magazine*, 24 September 1995, 52.

<sup>9</sup>William Grimes, “America Realized the Arts Attract Tourists,” *New York Times*, 5 December 1995, C15.

<sup>10</sup> Tim Perry and Ed Glinert, *Rock & Roll Traveler USA, the Ultimate Guide to Juke Joints, Street Corners, Whiskey Bars and Hotel Rooms Where Music History Was Made* (New York: Fodor’s Travel Publications, Inc., 1996).

this book.” As recently as the 1980s, travel books focused specifically on rock and roll sites were few and far between. Now, a well-stocked travel book or music store will contain guides to specific cities such as Memphis, San Francisco, Los Angeles and London; for countries, typically the United States and England; for particular artists, such as the Beatles and Elvis Presley; and for specific genres, for example, jazz, blues and rock and roll.

Local response reflects the increase in tourism. In the early 1980s Liverpool’s sole nod to Beatles tourism was a humble tour bus run by the County Council Tourism Department.<sup>11</sup> Now visitors to Liverpool can easily find the privately-run Cavern City Tours bus tour of Beatles sites; touristy Matthew Street venues including Beatles-themed bars, restaurants, and stores and a recreated Cavern Club, a replica of the place the Beatles played more than any other in England; and The Beatles Story museum. There’s also an increasingly popular annual Liverpool Beatles convention. The 1999 convention began with the Liverpool City Council’s designation of August 30 as “Yellow Submarine Day” to observe the 30th anniversary re-release of the animated Beatles movie “Yellow Submarine” and accompanying re-mastered soundtrack.<sup>12</sup> One hundred fifty bands performed Beatles music throughout the city which expected over 100,000 people to attend from 35 countries. The trend has spread to London where visitors can choose from several Beatles walking tours.

Memphis’ Sun Studios, one of the pre-eminent studios for recording early rock and roll, has become popular enough as a tourist attraction to spawn an adjacent cafe.

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<sup>11</sup>Cavern City Tours Limited, “Brief History of the Beatles Industry in Liverpool” [Cavern City Tours Limited website on-line]; available at [http://www.cavern-liverpool.co.uk/company\\_profile1.htm](http://www.cavern-liverpool.co.uk/company_profile1.htm); Internet; accessed 4 January 2005.

<sup>12</sup> “Liverpool Goes Yellow,”; available from <http://webhome.idirect.com/~faab/AbbeyRoad/news.htm>; Internet; accessed 25 May 1999.



The Rock & Roll Hall of Fame opened in Cleveland in 1995 and over a million people visited during the first year.<sup>13</sup> The John Lennon Museum opened in October 2000 in suburban Tokyo and its first year attendance topped 200,000.<sup>14</sup> In Seattle, The Experience Music Project, an interactive museum dedicated to the exploration of American popular music, opened in June of the same year.<sup>15</sup> More overtly commercial venues such as Hard Rock Cafes have sprung up around the world. At the end of the twentieth century, there were 38 such derivative theme-dining-as-entertainment spots in the United States and another 63 around the world. The Motown Cafe and House of Blues chains followed in Hard Rock's footsteps with their own aggressive expansion plans.

This growth in popular music-centered tourism has not translated into increasingly sophisticated preservation of historic music sites, however. Many historic artifacts do not receive appropriate treatment as defined by the Department of the Interior. In fact, this may be true for the overwhelming majority. To illustrate the scope and nature of the problem, several examples are included here.

#### The Magical Mystery Tour Bus

According to the "Save the MMT Bus" website, in 1988, the House of Blues Corporation bought the original Magical Mystery Tour bus used in the Beatles film of the same name. After storing the vehicle for a decade, the company placed the bus on display in the courtyard of its Orlando, Florida location. Alterations to turn it into a

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<sup>13</sup>Tim Perry, *Rock & Roll Traveler*, iv.

<sup>14</sup>Jay Berman, "Everyday Items in a Life Allow Lennon Fans to Imagine," *New York Times*, 12 September 2001, sec. The Arts/Cultural Desk, E2.

<sup>15</sup>Experience Music Project, "Fact Sheet," [Experience Music Project website on-line]; available from [http://www.emplive.com/visit/press\\_room/01\\_fact\\_sheet.pdf](http://www.emplive.com/visit/press_room/01_fact_sheet.pdf); Internet; accessed 9 December 2004.

stand for sale of Hard Rock Cafe memorabilia, however, were extensive. The bus was gutted. All seats were removed and all windows were replaced. A hole was cut in the rear of the bus to accommodate an air conditioner. Continued exposure to the outdoor elements will further degrade the condition of the bus, an iconoclastic symbol of the latter part of the Beatles' career.<sup>16</sup>

### Muddy Waters' Childhood Home in the Mississippi Delta

*Blues Revue* magazine contains a regular feature called "Keys to the Highway." The February/March 1997 feature, entitled "So Much for History,"<sup>17</sup> ruefully covered news on the childhood home of Muddy Waters, one of the world's best-known blues performers. The cabin was located on the Stovall plantation near Clarksdale, Mississippi. Waters lived there from the age of three until, as a young man, he left the home and his job farming for the Stovalls to head to Chicago.

Waters became a musician while living there. As his skills grew, the cabin became a magnet for the community and especially musicians who wanted to hear Waters sing and play. It was also at this cabin that he made his legendary first recordings for the Library of Congress, giving the site national significance.<sup>18</sup>

Although neglected, the building stood on the site until 1996. The magazine observed:

Not anymore, Muddy. Your old Stovall Plantation home (or what's left of it) has been leased to Isaac Tigrett [founder of Hard Rock Cafe and House of Blues] and for the next five years will tour the world as part of yet another exhibit of "authentic" blues history presented by the House of Blues. . .

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<sup>16</sup>"Help Save the Magical Mystery Tour Bus"; available from <http://members.aol.com/Mamunia44/bus.html>; Internet; accessed 15 July 1998.

<sup>17</sup> Keri Leigh, "So Much for History," *Blues Revue*, February/March 1997, 62-64.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

Historians and preservationists have been talking for years about trying to save the battered old place and turn it into a museum. The Delta Blues Museum did its best to maintain and protect the original Stovall land--until Tigrett offered a princely sum to remove it from his property and rebuild and restore it to near its original shabby 1920s glory.<sup>19</sup>

Removing the cabin from its original location meant a complete loss of historic context. Its connection to American history as a sharecroppers' cabin on an old plantation was totally severed. As author Keri Leigh put it: "If you go to that spot now, you won't see a thing but cotton fields. That is lamentable, because it was the kind of thing you'd have to experience in context to fully understand how this man lived."<sup>20</sup>

Compounding this problem was the misinformation problem created by Tigrett's reconstruction of the cabin from a conjectural design. Abandoned and neglected, the cabin was in very poor shape by 1996. The roof was gone and planks were missing from the badly weathered walls. To prepare it for exhibition, the House of Blues company spent \$125,000 creating a whole cabin.<sup>21</sup> It appears, however, that no effort was made to construct an accurate recreation of the structure. Nor was there any effort to distinguish the original portions from the rebuilt ones.

In the summer of 1996, this historically nebulous, mobile recreation of Waters' cabin was on display at Bluesfest, Chicago's annual city-sponsored blues festival. Perched on a collection of wood blocks, stilts, and bricks and set on a concrete roadway closed off for the summer event, the cabin invited visitors to shuffle through to view a collection of albums, photographs, posters and accompanying text on Muddy

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 64.

Waters and other blues musicians. At the exit, a video showing the builders during the process of reconstruction failed to cite any historic research on the structure.

Once touring was completed, the cabin was not to be returned to its original location. Instead, plans called for it to be placed on a site near the Clarksdale Blues Museum in Clarksdale, Mississippi. Tigrett said he would have preferred to put it back on the Stovall plantation, but the museum and the Stovall estate did not agree to this.<sup>22</sup>

### Muddy Waters' Chicago Home

The case of Muddy Waters' Chicago home, located at 4339 South Lake Park Avenue, is another story of well-intentioned but poorly-executed "preservation." Originally purchased by the blues artist in 1954 with money earned while recording for Chess Records, the home was open to friends and it became a meeting point for Chicago musicians until Waters moved in 1973.<sup>23</sup>

Interviews with surviving members of Muddy Waters' family suggest that such legendary blues artists as B.B. King and Bobby Blue Bland used the basement as rehearsal space. Otis Spann and Memphis Slim recorded there. Spann also lived there for a short time as did Junior Wells, James Cotton, Howlin' Wolf and Chuck Berry. Muddy Waters personally completed alterations to the home during the time he lived there, adding paneling, installing fencing, and re-cladding portions of the exterior.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Morganfield, interview by Tim Samuelson, 31 August 1992, Chicago, written notes, personal files of Tim Samuelson, Chicago.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Buddy Guy, a successful Chicago blues guitarist who played with Muddy Waters, bought the home in the mid 1990s. A great fan of the blues master, Guy wanted to protect the home and considered restoring it and opening it to the public. His agent contacted Tim Samuelson, on staff at the Commission on Chicago Landmarks, in 1996 to share ideas for the project and to find out about landmarking and funding the restoration. Samuelson, a blues music sites enthusiast, had already begun research on the home and offered his assistance. In a 1996 letter to Guy's representative, Samuelson sketched out a plan of action and provided some practical advice:

It is somewhat troubling to learn that the house is now vacant and boarded-up. Experience has demonstrated that even the most securely boarded-up houses are routinely broken into and stripped of plumbing fixtures, copper wire, etc., damaging the historic elements of the house in the process. The sooner the house is repaired and re-occupied, the better off it will be.<sup>25</sup>

Samuelson continued to communicate with Guy's representative on the project. On one occasion, he received a phone call during which the representative happily reported that they had cleared out three dumpsters' full of furniture and junk from the site. Unfortunately, what they had cleared out was likely to have included Muddy Waters' original furnishings and possessions, as his family had continued living in the site until Guy purchased it. Samuelson tried to convey his concern and repeated a past recommendation that someone live at the site. By 1997, the house, still unoccupied, had been broken into and fully stripped. Samuelson visited the site to discover that not only had all radiators, plumbing, fixtures, and the like been ripped out of the site, but the original fireplace had been shattered, walls smashed in, and debris scattered throughout. Though Buddy Guy had had the best intentions, the

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<sup>25</sup>Tim Samuelson, Commission on Chicago Landmarks, to Scott Cameron, "RE: 4339 South Lake Park Avenue," TLS (photocopy), 25 June 1996, Tim Samuelson's personal files, Chicago.

home suffered terrible damage and loss of original historic fabric due to lack of knowledge and appropriate attention.

#### The Stax Records Site

Some sites are completely demolished. A Tennessee Historical Commission marker is the sole structure in a vacant lot in Memphis where Stax Recording Studios once stood. The sign bears this tantalizing message: “On this site stood Stax Records, Inc., which boasted such stars as Otis Redding, Rufus and Carla Thomas, Isaac Hayes, the Staple Singers, Albert King, the Bar-Kays and many others. It relied upon its deep soul roots to carry it through struggling from a back-street garage in 1957 to become a multi-million-dollar organization.”<sup>26</sup>

These varied examples demonstrate the multiple threats of demolition, neglect, and inappropriate treatment which more often than not befall mid to late twentieth-century popular music sites. Increasing interest in these locations makes the need for their preservation more urgent because, ironically, it attracts exploitation schemes and the types of inappropriate solutions previously detailed. It also provides a window of opportunity for preservation based on the funding and support which widespread popular interest can provide. Finally, given the difficulty of finding accurate documentation of these sites, the critical time to work on their preservation is while people who know their history firsthand are still alive.

#### Approach Used

This research into the preservation of rock and roll sites began with broad-based exploration to determine which sites exist and what has been lost, treatment of extant sites, level of public interest in the sites, and the scenarios involved in each site

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<sup>26</sup> In 2002, a museum was built on the site.

such as ownership, funding, and use. The process formally began in the fall of 1995 with the Lexis-Nexis on-line news service which allows for searches of over 18,000 newspapers, news wires, periodicals, journals, and television news transcriptions from around the world. A literature search for relevant books, periodicals, and documents was conducted through on-line library catalogs and bookstore inventories. On-line web sites were also reviewed.

With the discovery of appropriate sites through this research, it became clear that these resources touched upon only certain aspects of each site. Location, use, and perhaps some of the process of preservation came to light, but none in a complete enough form to provide substantial understanding of the projects. Surprisingly little information was available on this particular segment of preservation.

For all practical purposes, there is no body of literature on the subject. The topic is too new and there are too few examples of these sites which have received recognition. These factors combined with the specificity of interest in the preservation *process* meant that newspaper and magazine articles were the primary avenues of discovery. These did not contain the level of detail required for a full analysis, however.

Only a handful of books even provided listings of music sites. Those found were not in the shelves of libraries, but in the tourism and music sections of bookstores, at "Beatlefest" conventions, and in the personal libraries of preservationists. It was not until the second year of research that Fodor's published its first book on rock and roll sites in America.

This situation made case studies the preferred method for collection of information needed to discuss the topic with integrity. People knowledgeable about the work done at the sites would need to be interviewed and, if possible, site visits made. Letters were sent and telephone calls made to begin this process. The first site

targeted for this exploration was the childhood home of Paul McCartney, purchased in 1995 by England's National Trust.<sup>27</sup> Phone calls by an American graduate student wishing to discuss the Trust's recent acquisition for a master's thesis were uncommon enough that the author was able to reach the Director General of the organization in the spring of 1996. Receipt of a Michele Sicca fellowship in 1997 from Cornell University's Institute for European Studies provided some funding for a ten-week internship with the National Trust at the site in the fall of 1997.

Ten weeks in Liverpool from September through November of 1997 provided the opportunity for extensive interviews of National Trust personnel in Liverpool, Shrewsbury, and London, review of primary documents at regional headquarters, and observation of planning and work on-site while living at McCartney's childhood home at 20 Forthlin Road in Liverpool. Additional perspective was provided by discussions with members of the Quarrymen (John Lennon's band which evolved into the Beatles), Joe Flannery (a friend of the Beatles), Mike Brocken and Sara Cohen of the University of Liverpool Institute of Popular Music, Jean Catharell, President of the Liverpool Beatles fan club and The Beatles Story museum director Shelagh Johnston.

Documents and files at the Liverpool Institute of Popular Music's office library provided additional information on tourism and music-related subjects. Side trips to London in October of 1997 allowed for walking tours by and discussion with Richard Porter, President of the London Beatles fan club.

Attempts to arrange for an internship at Graceland during the summer of 1996 were less successful. Though an internship was initially offered, apparently lawyers for Elvis Presley Enterprises, Inc. were uncomfortable with the notion of a graduate preservation student's interest in Graceland, specifically in the use of information for a graduate thesis. It was likely that such hesitation stemmed from cooperation with

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<sup>27</sup> The National Trust is also referred to as the Trust.



authors in the past which had led to unflattering portraits of the star. Despite attempts to discuss legal contracts which would allow Elvis Presley Enterprises, Inc. to have final control over what was included in the final thesis, meant only for academic purposes, they ultimately declined such an arrangement.

During a summer 1996 internship with the Landmarks Division of the Chicago Department of Planning & Development, information regarding the Chess Records office and studio preservation effort came to light through conversation and work with Landmarks staff member Tim Samuelson. Research on the project continued during a second internship in the summer of 1997. Access to Landmarks Division files on the project and Samuelson's personal files, discussion of the effort with staff members, and visits to the Chess and other Chicago music sites allowed for in-depth research, followed up in 1999 with additional interviews and site visits.

Exploration of Memphis sites began with a tour of Graceland in the summer of 1996. Telephone conversations and documents forwarded by Graceland Exhibitions and Collections Department Manager Greg Howell, Graceland Registrar Carrie Stetler, and National Register Historian Kira Badamo supplemented information gleaned primarily from newspaper articles and books. In Memphis, site visits were also made to Sun Studios and Beale Street, the main commercial street of Memphis's black community in the twentieth century. Memphis Historic Preservation Coordinator Judith Johnson provided a personal tour of other notable sites including Lauderdale Courts, the public housing Elvis Presley's family lived in, and the site of Stax Records.

Relevant New York City site visits were made in February 1997. In the same month, site visits were made to the Motown Historic Museum in Detroit and the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan. Staff of both museums and the architect in charge of the work at Motown were interviewed. A historic structures report and

collection of newspaper articles on the project were provided by the architect to supplement the discussion.

Such firsthand observation of the sites (when possible) combined with information gleaned through initial interviews and secondary sources allowed for a comparative analysis of the properties. Ultimately the two sites with the most successful preservation schemes were chosen: Paul McCartney's childhood home in Liverpool and the Chess Records office and studio in Chicago. Highly in-depth case studies were then undertaken regarding these locations with a combination of field- and library-gathered documentation, extensive interviews of project personnel and related experts, site research, site visits and photographic documentation.

In examining both sites, the Standards for Restoration set forth in the 1995 U.S. Secretary of the Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties were used as the criteria against which success was judged. The level to which the Standards for Restoration were met, once public visitation was decided upon as a goal, determined the level of successful preservation ascribed to projects.

### Order and Content of Chapters

The goal of the research was to discover the historic context of the location, the preservation climate surrounding the project, the site's significance, and the purpose, comprehensive process, and outcome of the site's preservation. This provided a basis for a critique of the efforts and results at each site. The chapter on Paul McCartney's home also includes a discussion of the English system of preservation. The end result of this process allowed for exploration of the question "What are the components necessary for successful preservation of a rock and roll site?" and "How does the absence or presence of these components affect the outcome of such preservation projects?"

CHAPTER ONE  
PAUL McCARTNEY'S CHILDHOOD HOME:  
20 FORTH LIN ROAD, ALLERTON, LIVERPOOL, ENGLAND

Introduction

Twenty Forthlin Road in Liverpool, England, was the residence of Beatle Paul McCartney from 1955 to 1964. It served as a place for the young McCartney and fellow members of the Beatles to compose and rehearse many of the songs which would set the four Liverpudlians on their path to revolutionize the world of popular music.

In 1995, the English National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty purchased the home. Dubbing it the “Birthplace of the Beatles,” the organization set about to determine if and how the home should be opened to the public. An overview of historic preservation in England and Liverpool’s preservation climate provide background for the National Trust’s preservation effort. The history of Liverpool and the Mather Avenue Estate, in which the home is located, are provided for contextual understanding of the site. The site’s significance is summarized and the process of preservation undertaken by the National Trust is outlined. Finally, the outcome of the project is reviewed.

Historic Preservation Context

Historic Preservation in England

To better understand the preservation climate of Liverpool and to inform the reader who may be unfamiliar with historic preservation in England, a brief discussion of the country’s preservation system is provided here. As in America, the government, non-profits, and the private sector all play a role in preserving historic sites. English Heritage (E.H.) is the main national body responsible for the

conservation<sup>28</sup> of historic sites. E.H. is a quasi-autonomous, non-incorporated organization (known in Britain as a “Quango”) founded by Parliament in 1984 to replace the previous government department charged with similar duties. It serves as the British Government’s official adviser in England on historic preservation and takes the lead in balancing the protection of the historic environment against pressures for development or alteration.<sup>29</sup> Until the inception of the National Lottery in 1994, E.H. was the “largest grant-giving body in the conservation world and...the only source of public funding for major restoration projects.”<sup>30</sup>

Acting as a conduit for public funds is but one of several roles E.H. plays in England’s preservation scheme. E.H. is an advocate for the “continuity”<sup>31</sup> of England’s cultural heritage, spanning from ancient monuments such as Stonehenge to post-World War II buildings. It works with multiple departments of the national government, local authorities, private owners, and other preservation organizations to

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<sup>28</sup>British Standard 7913 broadly defines conservation as “action to secure the survival or preservation of buildings, cultural artifacts, natural resources, energy or any other thing of acknowledged value.” By contrast, it defines preservation in a more passive sense as “the state of survival of a building or artifact, whether by historical accident or through a combination of protection or active conservation.” This differs from the American use of the word preservation, defined by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior as “the act or process of applying measures necessary to sustain the existing form, integrity, and materials of an historic property.” Conservation is not defined by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior as it is not in as common usage in American preservation, but it is understood to convey the same active sense of application of measures. Unless otherwise stated, in this thesis, preservation terms are used to reflect their American definitions. Hence, the words conservation and preservation are used interchangeably. Jonathan Taylor, “The New British Standard”; available from <http://www.buildingconservation.com/articles/bs7913/bs7913.htm>; Internet; accessed 8 June 2001. Also U.S. Secretary of the Interior, “Preservation Terminology.”

<sup>29</sup> English Heritage, *Working in Partnership: English Heritage Annual Report and Accounts 1994/95* (London: English Heritage, 1995), 29.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 7.

provide preservation planning expertise. It also serves as a national source of preservation information, disseminating its reviews of preservation policy and conducting its own or supporting other organizations' research into materials conservation and general preservation issues. Since merging with the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England in 1999, E.H. has taken on the commission's former responsibility for maintaining the National Monuments Record, the country's archive of architectural and archeological survey records.<sup>32</sup> E.H. also owns and manages some 400 properties which are open to the public and serve as venues for E.H.'s public education programs.<sup>33</sup>

English Heritage also plays a key role in "listing," the British equivalent of landmarking. The devastation suffered by England's cities under the aerial bombardment of World War II focused public attention on the loss of ancient monuments. Recognizing public opinion, the 1944 and 1947 Town and Country Planning Acts required the government to maintain a list of buildings of "special architectural or historic interest."<sup>34</sup> The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 conveyed this responsibility on the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.<sup>35</sup> Buildings suggested for listing by the public and those identified

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<sup>32</sup> English Heritage, "About us" [English Heritage website on-line]; available from <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/about-us/index.asp>; Internet; accessed 4 June 2001.

<sup>33</sup> English Heritage, *Annual Report 1994-95*, 24.

<sup>34</sup> Robert R. Garvey, "Europe Protects Its Monuments," in *With Heritage So Rich*, U.S. Conference of Mayors, Special Committee on Historic Preservation, (New York: Random House, 1966), 151-160. Quoted in eds. Norman Williams, Jr., Edmund H. Kellogg, and Frank B. Gilbert, *Readings in Historic Preservation: Why? What? How?*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Center for Urban Policy Research, 1983), 27.

<sup>35</sup> English Heritage, "Conservation: What Does Listing Mean?" [English Heritage website on-line]; available from <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/knowledge/conservation/whylist.asp>; Internet; accessed 4 June 2001.

through E.H.'s own survey research are assessed and their candidacy debated by English Heritage. Final recommendations are submitted to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, which then makes the ultimate determination.

Listed buildings are categorized into one of three grades according to their level of architectural and historic significance. The highest is Grade I for buildings of “exceptional interest,” the next being Grade II\* (pronounced “grade two star”) for “particularly important buildings of more than special interest,” and the last is Grade II for buildings of “special interest, warranting every effort to preserve them.”<sup>36</sup> Of the roughly 500,000 listed structures,<sup>37</sup> about 92% are Grade II,<sup>38</sup> with 5.5% falling in the Grade II\* category and 2.5% given Grade I status.<sup>39</sup>

The degree of scrutiny potential changes to or demolition of listed buildings receive varies generally according to its grade categorization. Owners wishing to alter or demolish their structures are required to apply for “listed building consent.” Local governments are required to notify English Heritage upon the receipt of listed building consent applications for buildings of national significance (generally Grade I and II\* buildings) or for work on public buildings owned by the authority. Local governments may refuse listed building consent applications for any grade of building, but must refer applications proposed for approval to any changes to Grade I or Grade II\*

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Department of Culture, Media and Sport (UK), “Heritage, Libraries & Museums: Facts & Figures”; available from <http://www.culture.gov.uk/heritage/intro.html>; Internet; accessed 5 June 2001.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Elain Harwood, *England: A Guide to Post-War Listed Buildings* (London: Ellipsis, 2000), 0.7.

buildings or the substantial demolition of Grade II buildings to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Secretary of State<sup>40</sup> to allow him/her the option of making the ultimate decision.<sup>41</sup>

Should alterations or demolition be carried out on a listed building without the receipt of listed building consent, owners are subject to fines, prison sentences or the possible requirement to return the building to its former state. To offset the financial burden of caring for listed buildings, VAT (Value Added Tax) is not applied to alterations, although it is applied for routine repairs and maintenance.<sup>42</sup> E.H. also has a grant program to fund major repair projects directly or through local authorities, although funds are subject to E.H.'s grant criteria and are prioritized according to the importance, urgency, and degree of need for the repair.<sup>43</sup> Local governments also may grant funds toward the repair of listed buildings. Since the 1994 creation of the

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<sup>40</sup> The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions serves as the national government division in charge of planning and land-use policy for the United Kingdom.

<sup>41</sup> London is an exception to this law as the city's former government provided E.H. with additional controls to oversee decisions on all grades of listed building consent applications. English Heritage, "Conservation: The Control of Development Involving Listed Buildings," [English Heritage website on-line]; available from <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/knowledge/conservation/development.asp>; Internet; accessed 4 June 2001.

<sup>42</sup> English Heritage, "Conservation: Advice for Owners of Listed Buildings," [English Heritage website on-line]; available from <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/knowledge/conservation/advice.asp>; Internet; accessed 4 June 2001.

<sup>43</sup> The E.H. grant program is significant. Grants paid out in 2000 totaled £35,053,000 (roughly over \$52,000,000). Annual totals over the 1990s varied from £29,761,000 to £42,037,000 (roughly \$45,000,000 to \$63,000,000). English Heritage, *Annual Report and Accounts 1999/2000* (London: English Heritage, 2000), 60; and English Heritage, *Annual Report 1994/95*, 60.

National Lottery, a Heritage Lottery Fund<sup>44</sup> has also provided a source of funding for those historic sites, both listed and unlisted, which are not eligible for E.H. funds.<sup>45</sup>

E.H. recently completed a re-survey of England's built heritage, an effort which has contributed to the fourfold increase in the number of listed buildings since the 1970s.<sup>46</sup> In 1987, listing was expanded to include structures built after 1940. In general, buildings are not listed until a minimum of 30 years of age. Exceptions are made for buildings between 10-29 years of age only if they are "outstanding" and under threat. As of 2000, only 503 buildings and sculptures built since 1940 were listed.<sup>47</sup>

Although listing can serve to prevent inappropriate alterations and demolition, it does not insure the maintenance of structures. Where listed buildings have been allowed to fall into serious decay, local governments may take action to prompt needed repairs. If the building is unoccupied, the local authority may serve an "urgent works notice" on the owner requiring him to stabilize the structure.<sup>48</sup> If the owner

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<sup>44</sup> As of 4 May 2001, the Heritage Lottery Fund paid out a total of £1,667,631,673 since grant applications were first accepted in January 1995. Of this total, £478,940,611 (roughly over \$718,000,000) was awarded to projects in the "Historic buildings and sites" heritage area. Heritage Lottery Fund, "Facts" [Heritage Lottery Fund website on-line]; available from [http://www.nhmf.org.uk/templates/fact\\_main.html](http://www.nhmf.org.uk/templates/fact_main.html); Internet; accessed 6 June 2001.

<sup>45</sup> English Heritage, "Conservation: Grants from English Heritage" [English Heritage website on-line]; available from <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/knowledge/conservation/grants.asp>; Internet; accessed 4 June 2001.

<sup>46</sup> English Heritage, "Conservation: The English Heritage Listing Programme" [English Heritage website on-line]; available from <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/knowledge/conservation/postwar.asp>; Internet; accessed 4 June 2001.

<sup>47</sup> Harwood, 0.7-0.8.

<sup>48</sup> Jonathan Taylor, "Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas," in *The Building Conservation Directory 1999*, ed. Jonathan Taylor (Tisbury, Wiltshire, England: Cathedral Communications Ltd., 1999), 29; book on-line; available from



fails to carry out the work, the government may then step in to secure and weatherproof the building, recouping the costs from the owner. A more involved alternative is to issue a “repairs notice” for the structure which lists the work considered necessary for proper long-term preservation beyond simple stabilization.<sup>49</sup> If the owner does not respond, the local government may apply to the Secretary of State for a “compulsory purchase order,” allowing them to buy the building.<sup>50</sup> The cost and political ramifications of such moves make local governments hesitant to carry out such actions, however.<sup>51</sup> This is often where non-profit preservation organizations can play a crucial role, raising funds from private sources or applying for funds from English Heritage or the Heritage Lottery Fund.<sup>52</sup>

In contrast to the listing of individual buildings, which must be of national significance to qualify for this status, conservation areas are a tool available to local municipalities to preserve entire areas of local or regional significance.<sup>53</sup>

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<http://www.buildingconservation.com/articles/legislation/legislation.htm>; Internet; accessed 8 June 2001.

<sup>49</sup> SAVE Britain’s Heritage, “What You Can Do: A SAVE Guide to Running Your Own Campaign to Save an Historic Building” [SAVE website on-line]; available from <http://www.savebritainsheritage.org/action.htm>; Internet; accessed 8 June 2001.

<sup>50</sup> Jonathan Taylor, “The Final Sanction—A Case Study,” in *The Building Conservation Directory 1999*, ed. Jonathan Taylor (Tisbury, Wiltshire, England: Cathedral Communications Ltd., 1999), 31; available from <http://www.buildingconservation.com/articles/sker/sker.htm>; Internet; accessed 8 June 2001.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> English Heritage, “Conservation: Buildings at Risk” [English Heritage website on-line]; available from <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/knowledge/conservation/maintenance.asp>; Internet; accessed 4 June 2001.

<sup>53</sup> English Heritage has specific powers in London to designate conservation areas with approval from the Secretary of State for National Heritage. In exceptional

Conservation areas are defined as “areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.” The protection afforded to conservation areas extends beyond buildings to encompass the distinctive features which characterize the area as a whole, including streets, gardens, trees, streetscape elements, and views.<sup>54</sup> Since the first designation of a conservation area in 1967, over 8,000 such districts have been created in England.<sup>55</sup>

Demolition of a building within a conservation area requires conservation area consent from the local planning authority along the lines of listed building consent.<sup>56</sup> Local planning authorities may determine the extent to which alterations require approval, however. Normally, automatic planning approval is granted to owners of single-family dwellings making small exterior changes. For homes located in conservation areas, however, such automatic approval is limited and permission must be sought to make such changes as installation of new cladding, dormer windows, or satellite dishes. Municipalities wishing to extend control beyond these provisions can include an Article 4 direction in the constraints imposed on conservation areas,

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circumstances the Secretary of State can also designate conservation areas reflecting national significance. English Heritage, “Conservation: What is a Conservation Area?,” [English Heritage website on-line]; available from <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/knowledge/conservation/whatconservation.asp>; Internet; accessed 4 June 2001.

<sup>54</sup>SAVE, “Running Your Own Campaign to Save an Historic Building.”

<sup>55</sup>English Heritage, “Conservation: What is a Conservation Area.”

<sup>56</sup> The 1997 case of *Shimuzu v Westminster City Council* established the precedent that partial demolition, such as that of a chimney stack or porch, is considered an alteration rather than a demolition and therefore does not require conservation area consent, regardless of its importance to the unifying characteristics of the area. Taylor, “Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas.”

thereby limiting alterations to characteristic features such as doors and windows. Enforcement methods are the same as those for listed buildings.<sup>57</sup>

Major redevelopments in conservation areas are under the control of the local authority although E.H. must be notified when the conservation area is over 1,000 square meters, and the Secretary of State must grant approval when the municipality itself proposes the redevelopment.<sup>58</sup> For all work proposed in conservation areas which requires planning permission, however, municipalities are obliged to take into account the “desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.”<sup>59</sup> Larger-scale redevelopment may qualify for funding assistance through E.H. even though conservation areas may consist largely of only Grade II or unlisted buildings. Though the majority of E.H. grants are normally made only to Grade I and II\* buildings, an E.H. program targeted at revitalizing blighted, low-income areas specifically targets such Grade II and unlisted buildings, providing that a comprehensive scheme with matching funds from the municipality is in place.<sup>60</sup>

An older protective measure, begun in 1882 and most recently revised under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, provides for the “scheduling” of nationally-important monuments. This measure is used to protect archeological remains and ruins rather than structures in use. Approximately 31,400 sites are currently scheduled and include monuments as diverse as prehistoric standing

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> English Heritage, “Conservation: How is English Heritage Involved” [English Heritage website on-line]; available from <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/knowledge/conservation/ehinvolvement.asp>; Internet; accessed 4 June 2001.

<sup>59</sup> Taylor, “Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas.”

<sup>60</sup> English Heritage, “Conservation: How is English Heritage Involved?”

stones, medieval castles, and coalmines.<sup>61</sup> The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport must give consent before any work can be done which might affect a scheduled site.<sup>62</sup>

Though England's national and local governments and E.H. have crucial roles in the country's system of preservation, non-profits also play a vital role. The most widely-recognized preservation organization is The National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty (National Trust). Founded in 1894, the National Trust has over two million members and owns more than 593,000 acres in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, including over 200 buildings. Covenants accepted by the Trust protect an additional 64,000 acres against development.<sup>63</sup> The Trust is second in land holdings only to the Crown.<sup>64</sup> In 1907 Parliament voted to give the Trust the power to declare its land and buildings inalienable so that they cannot be sold or mortgaged unless such a transaction is approved by Parliament. Not all its property is declared inalienable, however. Some is held for long-term preservation ("alienable") or rented out to tenants.

There are over 200 building preservation trusts in the United Kingdom. Typically, such organizations are one of two types. The first type focuses on a single building, often coordinating the site's initial preservation and then overseeing its ongoing use. The second is composed of groups which use revolving funds to restore

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<sup>61</sup> English Heritage, "Conservation: The Schedule of Monuments" [English Heritage website on-line]; available from <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/knowledge/conservation/schedule.asp>; Internet; accessed 4 June 2001.

<sup>62</sup> English Heritage, "The Effects of Scheduling."

<sup>63</sup> National Trust, *The National Trust: Properties of the National Trust*, (London: The National Trust, 1997), iv.

<sup>64</sup> William J. Murtagh, *Keeping Time: The History and Theory of Preservation in America* (Pittstown, N.J.: Main Street Press, 1988), 89.

a property, then sell or lease the site, enabling the group to use the funds generated from this transaction toward another project. The Association of Preservation Trusts is a membership organization of these groups which provides education, training, promotion, and communication avenues for its members.<sup>65</sup>

National amenity societies address another need in the scope of England's preservation system. Such societies, which typically focus on building eras or types, have experts on the built environment and its preservation and so are consulted on appropriate listed building applications. They also serve as advocates and educators for that part of the built environment on which they focus. Among the most well-known are SAVE Britain's Heritage (SAVE), The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), The Victorian Society, The Georgian Group, and The Twentieth Century Society.

Each has a different approach or focus. SAVE was founded in 1975 to bring attention to threatened historic buildings of all types. They emphasize adaptive re-use as a viable policy and actively campaign to influence issues of preservation policy.<sup>66</sup> SPAB was begun in 1877 by William Morris to stop the destructive "restoration" of buildings then taking place as medieval structures were redesigned to Victorian standards.<sup>67</sup> SPAB continues Morris's efforts by advocating sensitive repair of

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<sup>65</sup> The Association of Preservation Trusts, "The Association of Preservation Trusts and Building Preservation Trusts: Introduction" [Association of Preservation Trusts website on-line]; available from <http://www.heritage.co.uk/apt/aptbpthomepage.html>; Internet; accessed 8 June 2001.

<sup>66</sup> SAVE Britain's Heritage, "SAVE Britain's Heritage" [SAVE website on-line]; available from <http://www.heritage.co.uk/apavilions/save.html>; Internet; accessed 8 June 2001.

<sup>67</sup> Society for Protection of Ancient Buildings, "What is the SPAB?" [SPAB website on-line]; available from <http://www.spab.org.uk/whatis.html>; Internet; accessed 8 June 2001.

historic structures through the provision of technical advice, training, publications, and support for specific sites and general preservation issues.<sup>68</sup> The Victorian Society was set up in 1958 to study and protect Victorian and Edwardian architecture and arts. The society campaigns to conserve buildings from this era and provides educational opportunities to learn about them.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, The Georgian Group, created in 1937, works to protect and promote the appreciation of Georgian buildings, monuments, parks, gardens, and town planning.<sup>70</sup> Established in 1979 as The Thirties Society, this nonprofit was formed to advocate the conservation of buildings built between the two World Wars. By the mid 1990s, the group's scope had expanded to include post-World War II design and it consequently changed its name to The Twentieth Century Society.<sup>71</sup> The group's objectives of education and conservation are undertaken "to safeguard the heritage of architecture and design in Britain from 1914 onwards."<sup>72</sup>

These and other national organizations, in concert with hundreds of regional and local preservation societies, comprise the complex network of non-profit

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<sup>68</sup> Society for Protection of Ancient Buildings, "How We Work" [SPAB website on-line]; available from [http://www.spab.org.uk/whatis\\_howwork.html](http://www.spab.org.uk/whatis_howwork.html); Internet; accessed 8 June 2001.

<sup>69</sup> Victorian Society, "The Victorian Society" [Victorian Society website on-line]; available from <http://www.victorian-society.org.uk/index.html>; Internet; accessed 8 June 2001.

<sup>70</sup> The Georgian Group, "The Georgian Group" [The Georgian Group website on-line]; available from <http://www.heritage.co.uk/georgian/index.html>; Internet; accessed 8 June 2001.

<sup>71</sup> The Twentieth Century Society, "The History of the Society," [The Twentieth Century Society website on-line]; available from <http://www.c20society.demon.co.uk/html/history.htm>; Internet; accessed 20 July 2001.

<sup>72</sup> The Twentieth Century Society, "The Aims of the Society" [The Twentieth Century Society website on-line]; available from <http://www.c20society.demon.co.uk/html/aims.htm>; Internet; accessed 20 July 2001.

preservation groups in England. The recent creation of the National Lottery has provided a large new source of funding for heritage organizations. Administered by the National Heritage Memorial Fund, charities apply for grants to fund programs or specific projects. The National Trust, for example, received funding from the National Lottery to restore 20 Forthlin Road, Beatle Paul McCartney's childhood home in Liverpool.

The direct government funding system established in England provides the largest contrast with American preservation. In the U.S., the greatest financial support for preservation from the government comes in the form of tax incentives. This "free-enterprise" approach and the relative ease with which capital may be amassed in the strongly market-driven U.S. economy allows the private sector to guide the direction of preservation much more than in Britain. Though David Lowenthal suggests that opening up decision making to "common commercial folk" is abominable to the British, who would keep such privileged work exclusively in the purview of "a handful of well-born leaders" and consequently focus on elite heritage, the acquisition of 20 Forthlin Road, an example of public housing, signifies that English preservation may be headed in a new direction.<sup>73</sup>

#### Local Historic Preservation Context

An analysis of Liverpool's efforts in historic preservation must be viewed in the context of the city's economic status. The city's population has been declining for decades, though this slowed during the 1980s and the average loss lowered to 3,000 people per year between 1993 and 1997. Unemployment is high, with joblessness at

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<sup>73</sup>David Lowenthal, "A Global Perspective on American Heritage," in *Past Meets Future: Saving America's Historic Environments*, ed. Antoinette J. Lee (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press for National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1992), 159.

15% between 1984 and 1995. In 1997 it was 15.7%, almost three times the national average of 5.5%.<sup>74</sup> It is not surprising, then, that the City of Liverpool's 1996/97 Annual Report states in its Corporate Strategy (corporate meaning the corporate body, i.e. the government) that "priority must be given to services and activities designed to develop the city's economy and to mitigate or remove poverty and disadvantage in Liverpool--through local partnerships, the anti-poverty strategy, job generation and local labour policies etc." Yet the same Report's Vision of the City includes "pride in Liverpool's people, culture and heritage" as a point under Quality of Life and "a rich and protected architectural heritage" under Land and Property.<sup>75</sup> Liverpool has 2,700 listed buildings of which 25 are Grade I, more than any other city outside London.<sup>76</sup> Resources toward their preservation appear to come largely from outside sources, however.<sup>77</sup>

At the city government level, Liverpool's preservation efforts are focused on civic buildings. The eighteenth-century Town Hall was refurbished in phases in the early 1990s. (See Figure 1a.) St. George's Hall, built 1842-54 to house civic events, is one of the city center's grandest buildings. (See Figure 1b.) Limited preservation work has been done on the structure, but a National Heritage Lottery grant was received in 1996 to devise comprehensive conservation and development plans. In

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<sup>74</sup>Liverpool, *The City of Liverpool: Annual Report 1996/97* [report on-line] (Liverpool: City of Liverpool, 1997); available from <http://ds.dial.pipex.com/liv.cpu/cspr/annual/annual.htm>; Internet; accessed 15 April 1998, 28-30.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>76</sup>Jules Stenson, "Ten Good Reasons to Go For Gold!," *Liverpool Echo*, 3 January 1994.

<sup>77</sup>"Rescue Mission," *The Economist*, 29 June 2000.



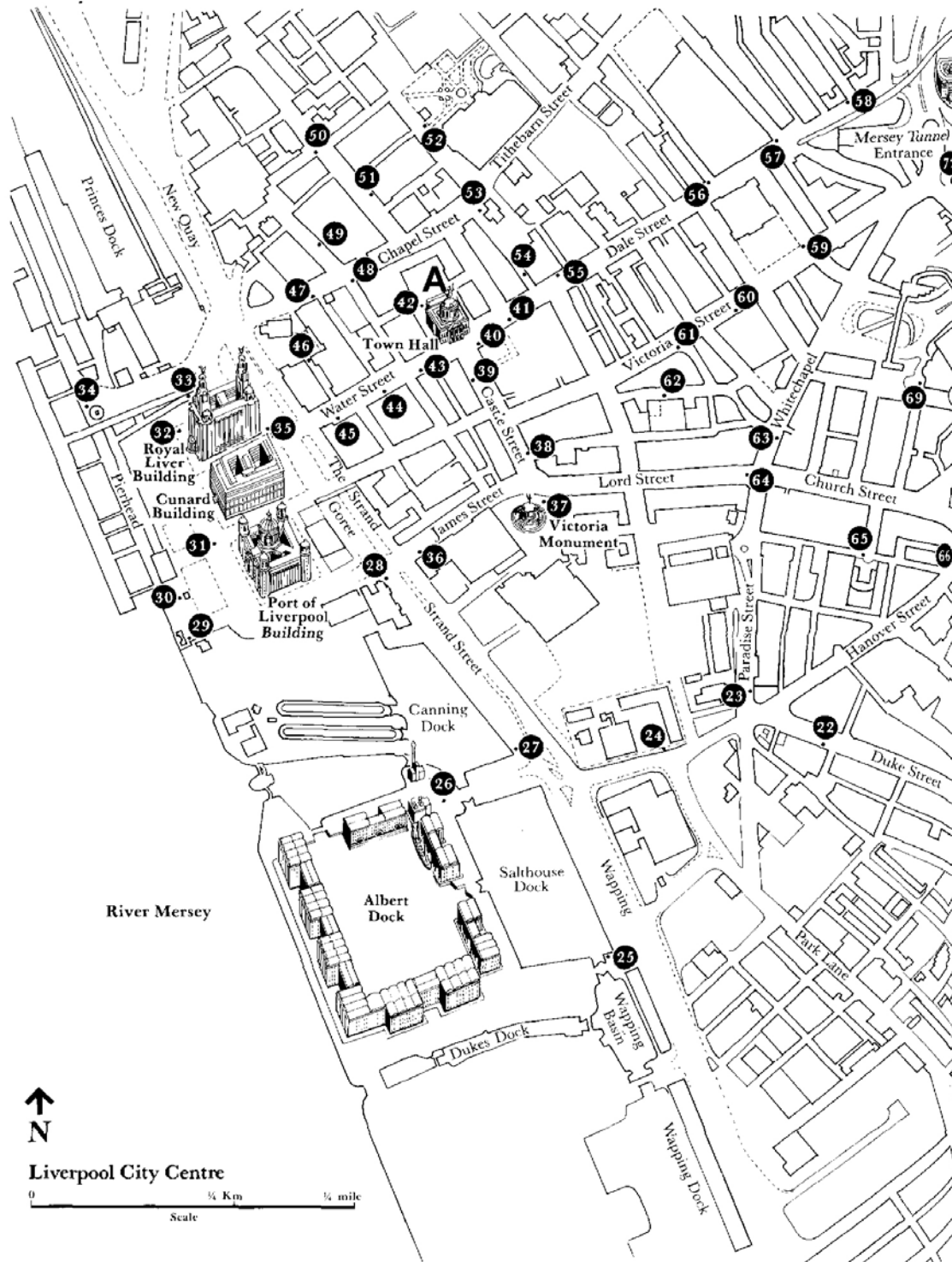


Figure 1a (left half). Liverpool City Center with (A) Town Hall.  
 Browning, *Liverpool Heritage Walk*, 6.

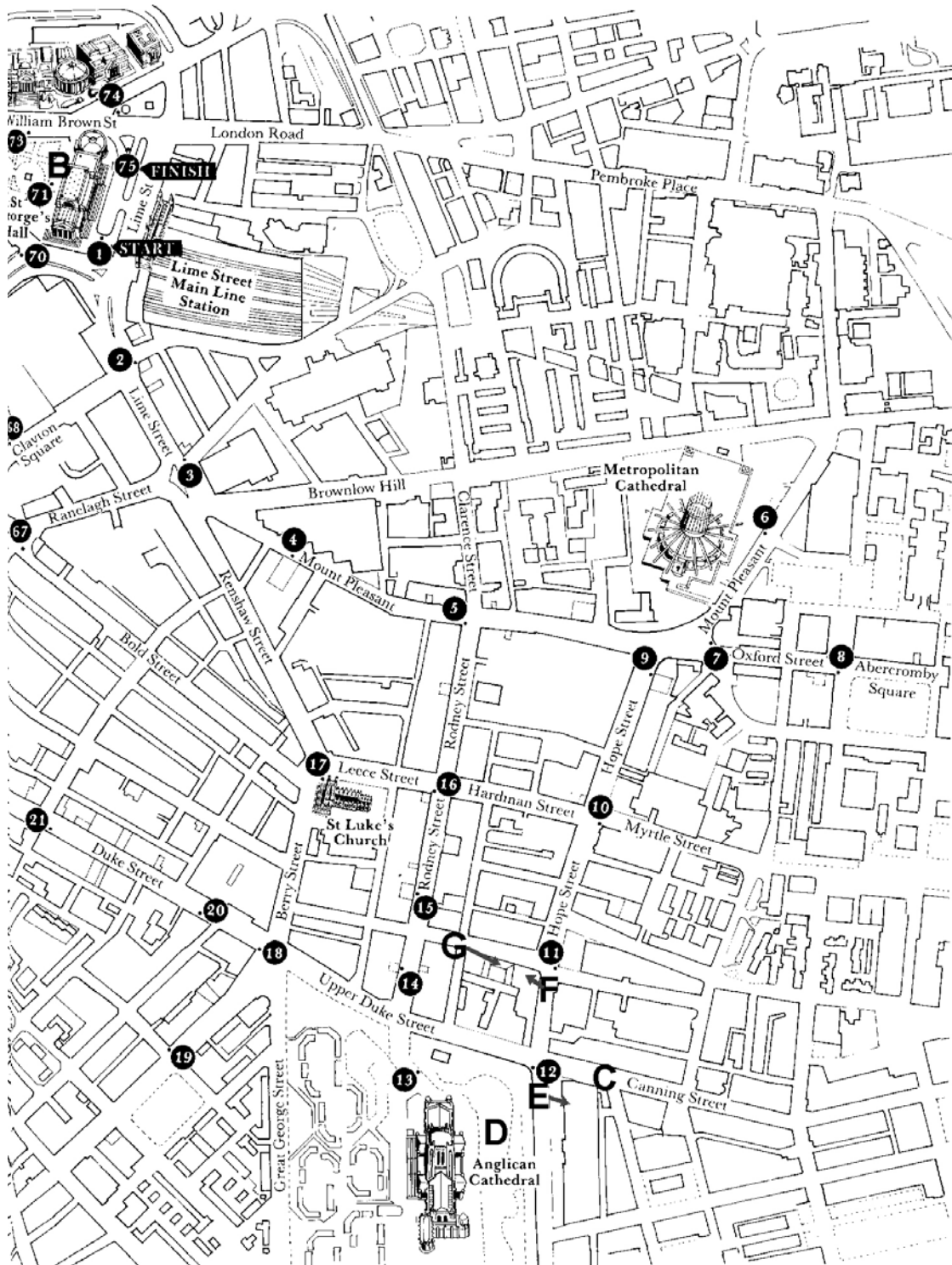


Figure 1b (right half). Liverpool City Center with (B) St. George's Hall, (C) Canning Street, (D) Anglican Cathedral, (E) 3 Gambier Terrace, (F) Liverpool Polytechnic (former Liverpool College of Art), and (G) Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts (former Liverpool Institute). Browning, *Liverpool Heritage Walk*, 7.

1997, a second application to the Heritage Lottery was being written to carry out these plans.

The annual report also notes that “progress with the Canning Street Conservation Area Partnership brought the total number of properties restored to 36, involving £1.2 million of external grant aid together with environmental enhancements valued at £235,000.” Canning Street is located near the city’s landmark Anglican Cathedral, about a mile southeast of the city center. (See Figure 1b.) The dominant building type of the area is the three-storied, terraced home built in the Georgian style (circa 1830s). By the 1960s, the neighborhood had become relatively unfashionable and dilapidated to the point where the likes of art students John Lennon and Stu Sutcliffe, members of the Beatles, could afford to share a flat at 3 Gambier Terrace, just off Canning Street. (See Figure 1b.) The city’s investment in this district constitutes a renewed valuation of such housing, reflecting a broader appreciation best exemplified by The Georgian Group, the national group formed to protect architecture of this era. Featured as a setting in television and movies, a small but growing industry in the city, the area’s architecture has received national attention.

Turning north off Canning onto Hope Street, the next cross-street is Mount Street where the former Liverpool College of Art (Beatle John Lennon’s college), now part of Liverpool Polytechnic, sits next to the former Liverpool Institute (Beatles Paul McCartney and George Harrison’s alma mater), now the Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts. (See Figure 1b) The Liverpool Institute, built in the Victorian era, had been closed and was sitting unused by the mid-1980s. McCartney wanted to see something made of his former school and joined forces with the School for the Performing Arts Trust to develop a scholastic program and gain financial support for the project. The renovation of the school and construction of an annex cost £15 million (about \$23 million). Aid was secured from multiple sources. The government

provided grants via the National Lottery. With Merseyside (Liverpool and its surrounding suburbs and villages) a high priority area for funding under the European Union's regional aid program, the project received £1.3 million (about \$2 million) in support.<sup>78</sup> Private sources included corporations like Grundig. Individuals contributing to the project included many high profile names, including Queen Elizabeth, lead patron Paul McCartney, who donated £1 million (about \$1.5 million) of his own money, and American celebrities Jane Fonda, Ralph Lauren, and Eddie Murphy.<sup>79</sup>

The school, the first of its kind in the United Kingdom, offers university-level, inter-disciplinary degree courses in all aspects of the entertainment industry, from music, drama, and dance to design, management, and business skills, with an emphasis on entrepreneurial empowerment. One hundred ninety-six students from Britain, Europe, Japan, and America began studies there in January of 1996. On 30 January 1996, Paul McCartney arrived amid much fanfare for an opening celebration. The Queen visited in June to officially open the school.<sup>80</sup>

This sort of high profile adaptive re-use is unusual. Another as yet unsuccessful effort to save a church hall may be more instructive as an example. On 6 July 1957, a band of schoolboy musicians known as the Quarrymen played at a local church fete in Woolton, a village about seven miles southwest of the Liverpool city center. After the afternoon's performance a mutual friend introduced the lead singer to a guitar player whose ability to tune the instrument, write out the lyrics to Eddie

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<sup>78</sup>“EU Funds renovation of Paul McCartney's Old School,” *Agence France Press*, 30 January 1996.

<sup>79</sup>*St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 31 January 1996.

<sup>80</sup>Robert Yates, “Paul or Nothing,” *Observer* (London), 28 January 1996.

Cochran's "Twenty Flight Rock" and Gene Vincent's "Be-Bop-a-Lula", and sing "Long Tall Sally" in a Little Richard-inspired voice suitably impressed the untutored band leader. This was the first meeting of the Quarrymen's John Lennon and Paul McCartney. A week later, McCartney was asked to join the Quarrymen.<sup>81</sup>

The setting for this "milestone in Beatles' history"<sup>82</sup> was St. Peter's Church Hall in Woolton. Today, the Church Hall, located across the street from the church, is used by St. Peter's for Sunday school and by community groups including the Guides and the Brownies. Tourists, in ever-greater numbers, and often by busload, visit the Church Hall and the graveyard opposite to see the Rigby family gravestone which subconsciously may have inspired the Beatles' song "Eleanor Rigby." In 1995, a local newspaper reported that the condition of the Church Hall had deteriorated to the point that St. Peter's was considering tearing it down. Following years without proper maintenance, the church had discovered evidence of wet and dry rot in the Hall, and the estimate for repairs added up to £250,000.

The story of Jean Catharell and her friends' efforts to raise money for the restoration of the church hall is a troubling one. When Jean Catharell, head of the Liverpool Beatlescene International Fan Club, learned of the threat to this Beatles landmark, she was alarmed. She joined with Kathleen and George Gumby, fellow Beatles fans, to see what could be done to save the structure. They met with leaders of the church, who desired to tear down the hall and build a new one, linking it to a smaller, more modern structure located in front of the present hall. However, they did not have the money to proceed with their demolition and construction plans. When Catharell and the Gumbys appealed to them to allow for fundraising activities to help

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<sup>81</sup>Allan Kozinn, *The Beatles* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1995), 21.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

pay for restoration of the Hall, the church grudgingly agreed to their request. Not only did this conflict with the church leaders' vision for the building, but it also became apparent that the church council and the vicar were not appreciative of the site's link to Beatles history. Indeed, conservative church members were dismayed by the church's historic ties to John Lennon, a figure they associated with radical activities like taking drugs.<sup>83</sup>

This uneasy relationship led to many problems. The church was not in a position to reject the offer of money, yet its disdain for the project led to meetings which verged on open hostility. The church officials were insistent upon taking in any money raised for the restoration and on controlling all events that were planned for the effort. When an application was made to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a grant toward the restoration, the Church Council remarked that it didn't want the "gambling money." This turned out not to be a problem, however, as this application and another to English Heritage were turned down. Neither organization considered the building important enough.<sup>84</sup>

Reverend John Roberts, the church vicar, was clear that the church would not be providing funds toward the effort, despite the fact that a restored hall would still be used by St. Peter's for its church and community work. "If it is going to be saved, then the Beatles fans must provide the cash," he stated in a 1996 article in the *Daily Post*. Indicative of his attitude, he added the following statement regarding the church's request to Paul McCartney for help, which resulted in the receipt of two songbooks as raffle prizes:

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<sup>83</sup>Jean Catharell, Head of Liverpool Beatlescene Fan Club, interview by author, written notes, Liverpool, England, 7 November 1997.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*

“They were of no use to anyone because they weren’t even signed. I think he should do a concert for the hall. He can spend £1 million on setting up the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, yet here is a building which is one of the few left in Liverpool with Beatles connections.”<sup>85</sup>

Jean Catharell and the Gumbys proceeded to plan a large fundraising event for the restoration fund. On 6 July 1997, 40 years after the historic fete where Lennon met McCartney, the Woolton fete was recreated. The Quarrymen, minus the deceased John Lennon, re-formed and played for the event. The group was hauled on a flatbed through the streets of Woolton to the Church Hall by the same truck driver that had driven them 40 years before. Fundraising T-shirts, buttons, and programs were sold. Messages of support were read from Queen Elizabeth, Prime Minister Tony Blair, Yoko Ono (Lennon’s widow), and Sir Paul McCartney. Three thousand people attended the event, which had typically drawn only hundreds before. On the following day, the remaining Quarrymen unveiled a plaque on the Church Hall exterior, made from red sandstone from the Woolton quarry, which commemorated the meeting of John Lennon and Paul McCartney.<sup>86</sup>

The receipts from the day were collected by the church officials. In an article published November 1997, the Reverend John Roberts was asked about the proceeds from the event and responded that only a few hundred pounds were raised for the restoration. Jean Catharell was astounded by this news. Though they had agreed to share the profits of the 40th anniversary event with the church’s Bishop Martin School, which had been holding the annual event over the years, this number was far below what she had expected, given the extensive donation of services for the event. She fears that money raised for the restoration may have been used solely to refurbish

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<sup>85</sup>*Daily Post* (Liverpool), 7 October 1996.

<sup>86</sup>Chris Raisin, *Woolton Fete 1997: “What a Sweet Celebration!”* (Liverpool: ‘Yesterday Once More’ Publication, 1997), i, 3, 6, 12.

the Bishop Martin School. The critical decision to allow the church to control all funds raised for the restoration was proving to be a major problem, given the seemingly uncooperative nature of the institution. It has also proved to be a “stumbling block” for additional fundraising as people said they were hesitant to give funds to the church when they wished them to be used strictly for the restoration of the Hall. Even today some believe fundraising opportunities are being lost by the church’s unwillingness to request donations from the tourists who visit the site, a logical source for contributions.<sup>87</sup>

Jean Catharell planned to meet with church officials to discuss the issue of funds from the event, but confessed to great frustration with the turn of events. The people who had been working to save the Church Hall had donated immense amounts of time to fundraising efforts, but found the credit for their work was routinely being handed to Reverend Roberts<sup>88</sup>. Their attempts at preserving the historic site were largely a negative experience. This scenario is probably more typical of efforts to preserve relatively new historic sites than that taking place at the Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts or at 20 Forthlin Road.

Given the value of the Church Hall as a tourist attraction, it is curious that the city is not a ready ally in the preservation of such sites. Of the £73 million income the city makes annually from tourism, 92% is estimated to be from Beatles tourists.<sup>89</sup> In spite of this, the city has had a major blind spot when it comes to appreciating its four

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<sup>87</sup>Catharell, interview by author.

<sup>88</sup>Articles continually credit Roberts as the person trying to save the Hall. The National Trust met with Roberts when they wanted to discuss a possible connection between 20 Forthlin Road and St. Peter’s Church Hall.

<sup>89</sup>Alan Jackson, “A Splendid Time is Guaranteed for All?,” *Times* (London), 7 February 1996, 39.



now most famous sons. According to Mike Wilkinson, Liverpool's head of tourism, arts, and heritage: "It's my belief that we've previously undervalued—and underutilised—the impact that the Beatles in particular had."<sup>90</sup>

Mr. Wilkinson's post was created in 1993, further evidence that Liverpool has only recently begun to make a commitment to promoting itself along these lines. Liverpool Beatles contemporary pop star Gerry Marsden explains how this lack of commitment allowed the demolition of the city's most prominent historical music site: "I don't think the city ever really appreciated quite how big it was internationally. If it had, it would never have allowed anything so lunatic to happen as the demolition of its ultimate attraction, the original Cavern Club."<sup>91</sup>

Not only was the Cavern Club the best-known venue of the Beatles, who played there an estimated 274 times, but a list of the performers who played there would rival the best of rock concert halls. In its seventeen years, the cellar club that began as a jazz hall featured blues greats such as John Lee Hooker, Sonny Boy Williamson, and Little Walter, and, after rock had overtaken the club, the Rolling Stones, the Yardbirds, the Kinks, the Animals, the Hollies, the Who, Queen, and David Bowie.<sup>92</sup> In 1973, the Liverpool Corporation approved a plan to construct an air duct on the site for the expansion of the Liverpool underground rail loop and the Cavern was forced to close. The site was filled in and a parking lot was constructed at ground level. In 1982, in combination with a Beatles-themed redevelopment project entitled Cavern Walks, attempts were made to excavate the site, with hopes of finding

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

<sup>92</sup>Phil Thompson, *The Best of Cellars: The Story of the World Famous Cavern Club* (Liverpool: Bluecoat Press, 1994), 119.

it intact. Though the arches of the club were still extant, the barrel ceilings had totally collapsed and plans were scrapped to re-open the original Cavern Club.<sup>93</sup>

### Historical Overview

#### Liverpool History

With a population of over half a million people, Liverpool is one of the major cities of North West England.<sup>94</sup> It was officially established in 1207 with a charter from King John.<sup>95</sup> This port city stretches roughly 13 miles north-south along the River Mersey. It sits in the county of Merseyside and the city, surrounding suburbs, and villages are referred to as Merseyside.<sup>96</sup> (See Figure 2.)

Liverpool's wealth came, not surprisingly, from its prominence as a port. During the 18th century, ships left Liverpool with cotton goods and hardware for West Africa where these were traded for slaves. Ships then carried this human cargo to the West Indies and America where they were exchanged for sugar, rum, tobacco, and raw cotton, which was returned to Liverpool.

In the early 19th century trade expanded rapidly with India and China. The Liverpool and Manchester Railway, opened in the 1830s, allowed the city access to all parts of the country and spurred ever greater movement of goods through the port. In 1840 Samuel Cunard established the first shipping line between North America and Liverpool to carry passengers and mail. Others followed and Liverpool became a

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 97.

<sup>94</sup>Bryn Thomas et al., *Britain: A Lonely Planet Travel Survival Kit*, 2nd ed., (Vic, Australia: Lonely Planet Publ., 1997), 546.

<sup>95</sup>Philip Browning, Liverpool City Planning Department, *Liverpool Heritage Walk* (Liverpool: Bluecoat Press, 1990), 3.

<sup>96</sup>Thomas, 546.

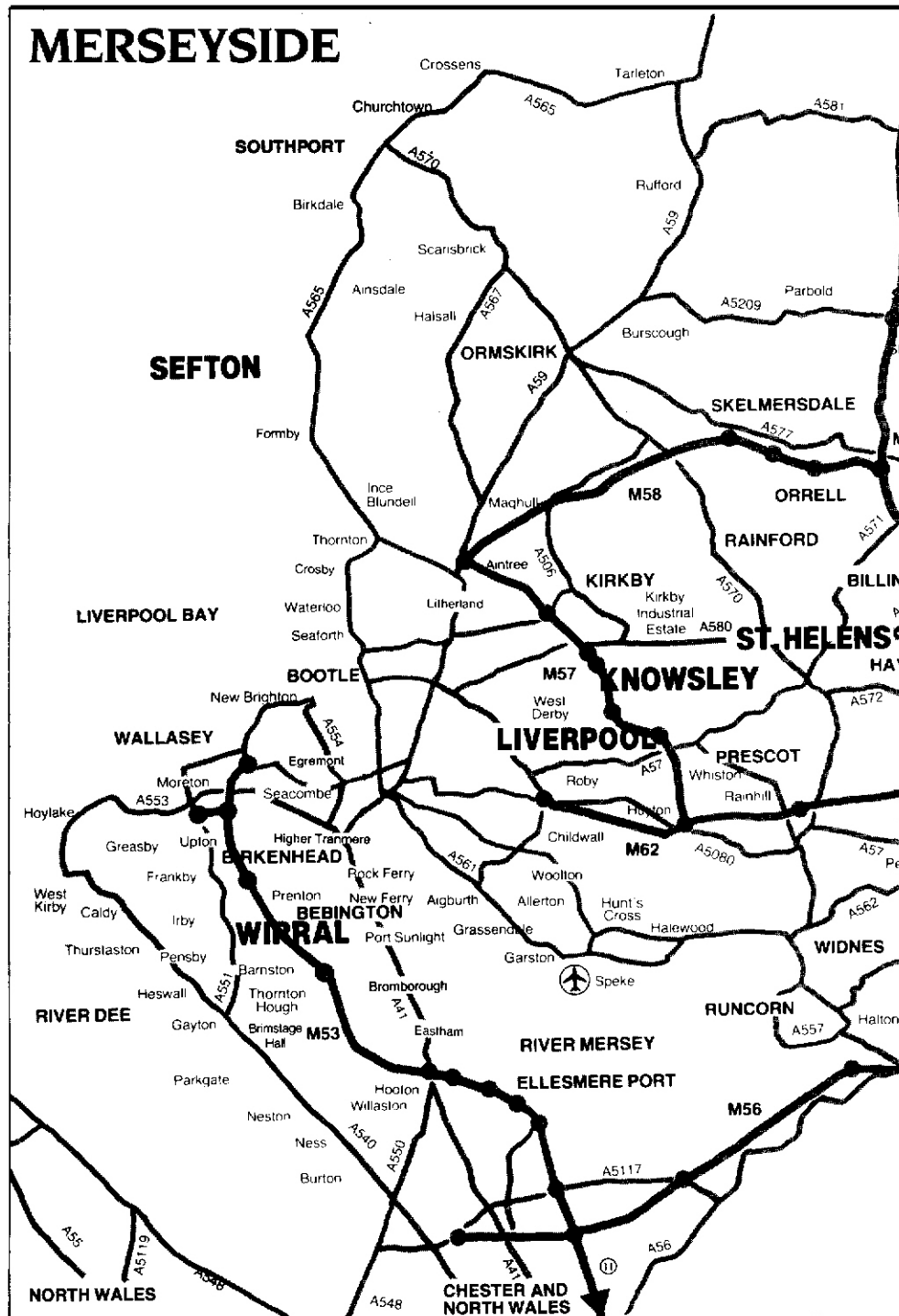


Figure 2. Map of Merseyside.  
Jones, *The Beatles' Liverpool*, 49.

major point of emigration for English, Irish, Scottish, and northern Europeans for the New World.<sup>97</sup>

In the 20th century, World War I helped to bring about the end of Liverpool's prominence as a great shipping port. Enemy attacks led to the loss of over one million tons of shipping and the city would never again be able to compete as successfully with the ports of countries that had remained neutral. The declining Lancashire textile industry and the establishment of growth industries in the South and the Midlands made the cost of transporting goods to the North West less practical. This changing industrial geography and the eventual rise of air travel cemented Liverpool's fate.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, when World War II took hold, Liverpool served as a vital gateway for troops and supplies from across the Atlantic. The Combined Headquarters of the Western Approaches was established in Liverpool to coordinate the fight against German U-boats to allow for transatlantic convoys. As a consequence, however, the city became a prime target for substantial bombing throughout the war.<sup>99</sup>

The city is decidedly cosmopolitan due to the influence of the diverse nationalities of people who both traveled through and settled there. The choice to stay in Liverpool was not always voluntary and the city's history holds many stories of people terribly impoverished, having journeyed to Liverpool only to see their hopes of

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<sup>97</sup>Browning, 3.

<sup>98</sup>Robert Woodside, "The National Trust Archaeological Survey: 20, Forthlin Road, Liverpool, Mercia Sites and Monument Record 54700" (Shrewsbury, England: The National Trust Files, 1996), photocopy, 4. An outline of Liverpool's history was included in this survey written for the National Trust to establish the design and construction dates, architect, and housing type name for the home. Plans, surveys, and maps were included. Brief histories of Liverpool's public housing and the development of the area in which the home is located were also included.

<sup>99</sup>Thomas, 547.

setting sail for distant shores vanish as their money did. The Irish Potato Famine of 1845-47 alone is thought to have brought 300,000 starving people to the city.<sup>100</sup>

Between 1801 and 1841 the city's population quadrupled. This increased population led to some of the worst slum conditions in all of England. People were crowding into cellars and back-to-back houses built around tiny courts entered through a lone archway. The local government seemed only to respond to the worst of the slum conditions, as when an outbreak of cholera or typhoid worsened conditions to insufferable levels, and then with only minimal zoning-type restrictions on certain types of housing. An 1881 typhus epidemic led the city to undertake its first program of slum clearance, and tenements were built in the city center on land cleared of back-to-back housing. The high cost of land made such projects expensive, yet the city felt that expanding housing to surrounding suburbs was not feasible given the casual nature of employment in the shipping industries which meant workers needed to live as close to their work as possible. Only after the turn of the century, with an upswing in the shipbuilding industry and a Conservative administration perhaps wishing to attract the working class vote, did the city expand its municipal housing program. By 1914, Liverpool's City Council, the democratically elected local governing body, had built some 2,900 new dwellings, demolishing 8,000 unfit buildings.<sup>101</sup>

#### Allerton and Mather Avenue Estate History

Though the national Housing & Town Planning Act of 1919 made local authorities responsible for providing housing for low income people, a lack of funding and the effects of the Depression led to the continued construction of tenements, the

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<sup>100</sup>Woodside, 4.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid.

most affordable housing option to build. Liverpool's leaders were still reluctant to expand public housing into the suburbs as the larger costs of supplying transportation and other infrastructure overwhelmed the cost savings of cheaper, undeveloped land. Private building had been expanding into the suburbs since the late 19th century, however, and parkways were built to connect suburbs with the city center and the city's primary ring road, Queen's Drive.<sup>102</sup> (See Figure 3.)

Allerton was a township about 4 miles southeast of the Liverpool city center. Liverpool was steadily growing up to its boundaries and in 1913 an Act of the Local Government Board was passed to include Allerton and surrounding districts in the city limits. In 1924 tramlines were laid along Mather Avenue, a newly built main artery through Allerton, to carry passengers from the Garston terminal (at the southern edge of Allerton) circa two miles to Penny Lane, and from there on in to the city center. (See Figure 4.)

Allerton had remained relatively undeveloped compared to its neighboring districts until this time, maintaining previous centuries' landscape of open fields with scattered private residences and farms. The City Corporation had been buying land from private owners since the 1920s. New roads were set into this open land. The city then built semi-detached homes along the roads, creating a "heavily developed garden suburb" by the late 1930s.<sup>103</sup> In 1939 a Police Training College was built on the largest open space along Mather Avenue.

At the end of World War II, the loss of housing due to bomb damage and slum clearance created a huge demand for inexpensive municipal housing. Planning to meet this need was shaped by the national Ministry of Local Government and

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<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 9.

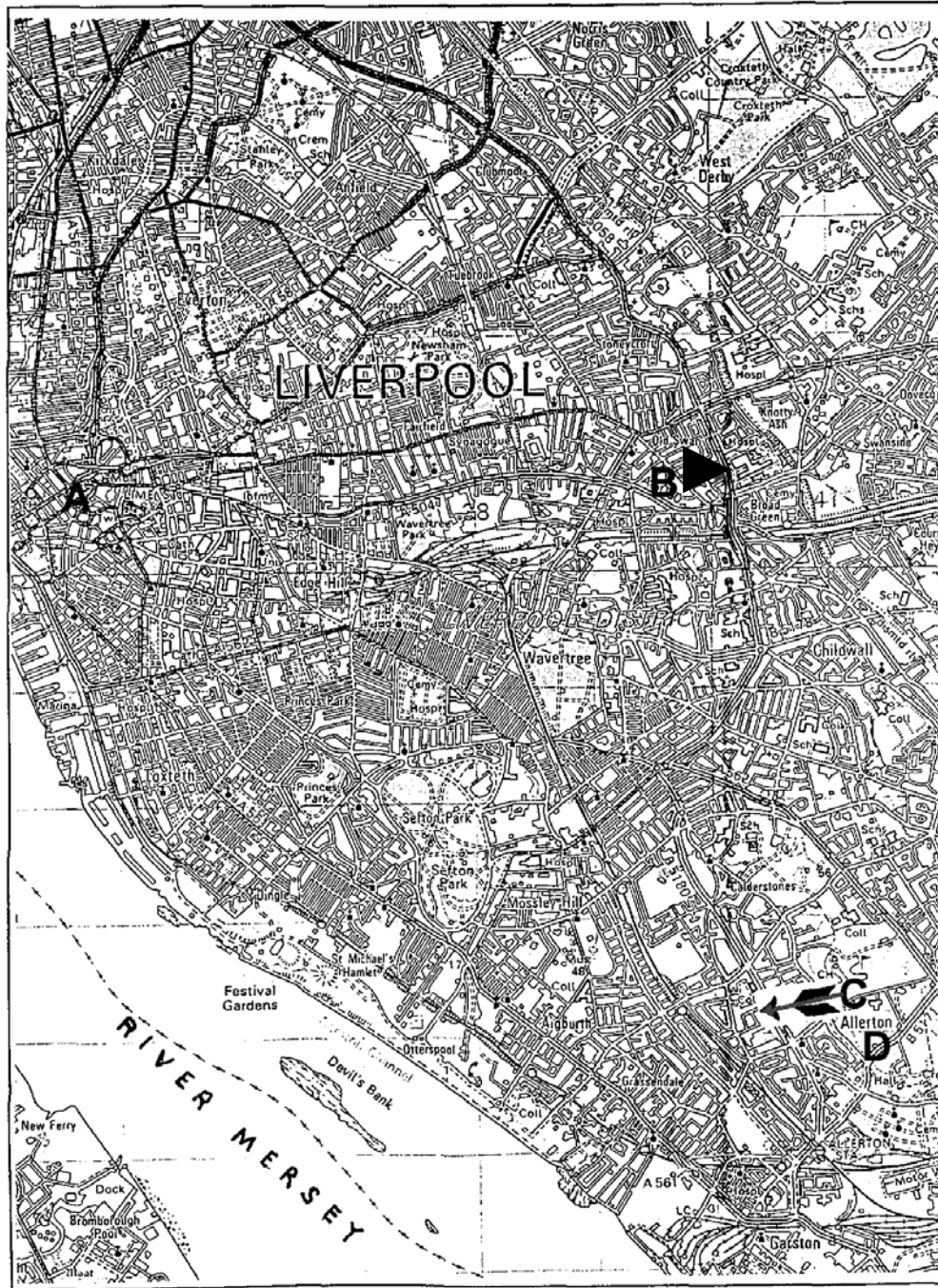


Figure 3. Liverpool's (A) city center, (B) Queen's Drive, (C) 20 Forthlin Road, (D) suburb of Allerton. Woodside, "The National Trust Archaeological Survey: 20, Forthlin Road, Liverpool," fig. 1.

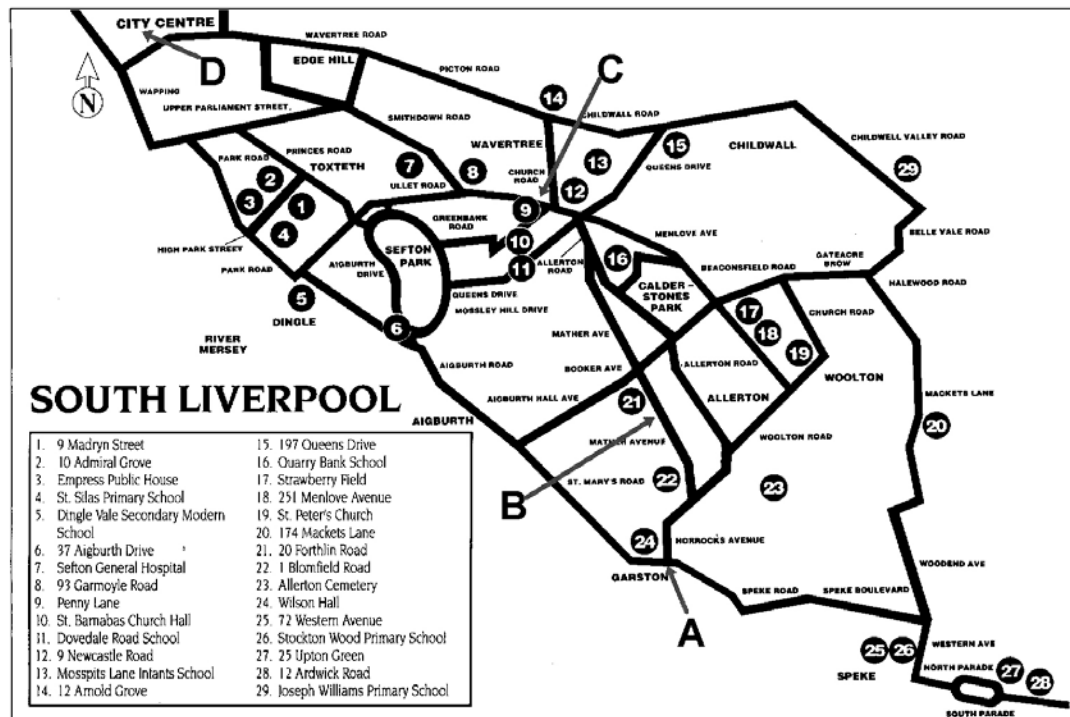


Figure 4. From Allerton to City Center: (A) Garston terminal, (B) Mather Avenue, (C) Penny Lane, and (D) City Center.  
Jones, *The Beatles' Liverpool*, 51.

Planning which produced housing manuals advising local governments on such issues as construction standards, sizes of apartments and details of fittings. Homogenous designs were the result throughout the country with only minor regional variation.

The City Architect and Director of Housing, Sir Lancelot Keay, had developed standard building types for use in the Speke estate, a housing estate about three miles south of Allerton. The design for Paul McCartney's childhood home, 20 Forthlin Road, an Intermediate Type S.B.5 (Standard Building 5), was taken from this group of styles. (See Figures 5a and 5b.) These "terraced," or row, houses were built in symmetric pairs divided by a common passageway leading to the back gardens. Multiple sets of these paired, terraced homes were built along either side of Forthlin Road, creating a uniform streetscape.



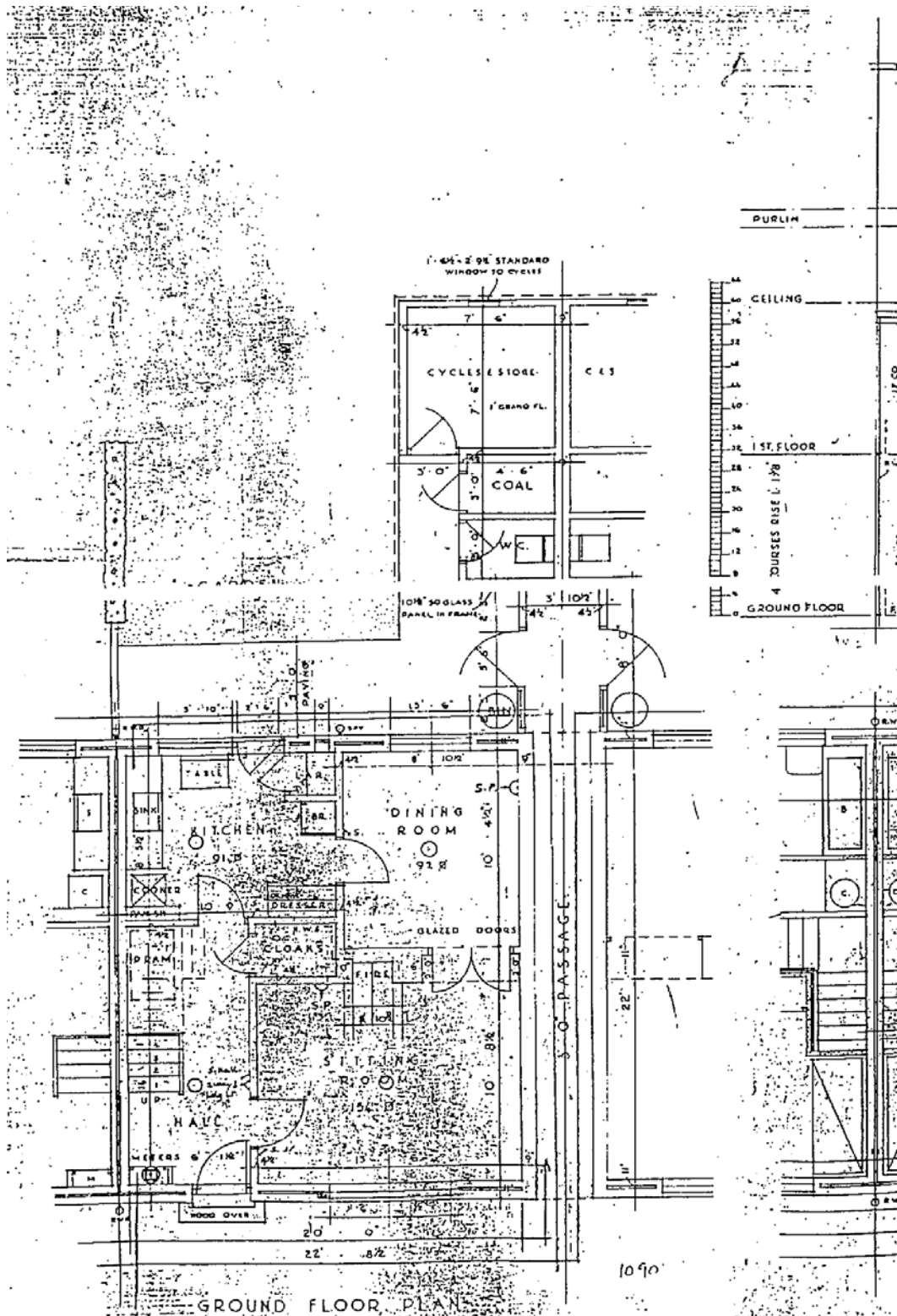


Figure 5a (left half). Intermediate Type S.B.5 dwelling plan and elevation. Woodside, "The National Trust Archaeological Survey: 20, Forthlin Road, Liverpool," figure 3.

20, Forthlin Road, Liverpool," fig. 3.

Plans for the Mather Avenue estate were submitted to the Ministry for approval in 1949 by Dr. Ronald Bradbury, then Liverpool City Architect and Director of Housing. These plans were approved by the Local Council and the Local Housing Committee. R. Constains & Sons won the contract to build the development of 204 two-story homes and apartment buildings and 126 three-story apartment buildings on the grounds around the Police College as well as access roads and services including water, sewage, gas and electricity. Work began on the estate in 1950 and was completed by 1952.<sup>104</sup>

### 20 Forthlin Road's Significance

After the Cavern Club, it can be argued that the homes where the Beatles learned to play their instruments, practiced, and wrote songs are the next most significant sites in the story of the Beatles. Beatle Paul McCartney's family lived at 20 Forthlin Road from 1955 to 1964. In this home, McCartney learned to play trumpet, piano, guitar, and drums. By 1957, McCartney had joined the Quarrymen and began to compose with John Lennon, his newfound collaborator. Forthlin Road was one of the places their group would practice and where McCartney and Lennon would try out their new songs. In 1958, when the group needed a new guitarist, McCartney invited his schoolmate George Harrison to join them. As the group's members and name changed, Johnny and the Moondogs, the Silver Beats, and the Silver Beatles continued to use the home as a rehearsal space to practice for gigs around Merseyside.

By 1960, the group had made a short tour of Scotland, and had come to the attention of a local Liverpool promoter, Allan Williams, who hired the band to play in his club. In August of that year, Williams arranged for the Beatles to play in

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

Hamburg, Germany, and the group enlisted Pete Best as their drummer shortly before departing. As documented in photographs taken by Paul McCartney's younger brother Michael, Forthlin Road remained a place to write and practice as this group gained popularity and an ever greater audience throughout England. Making a final shift in personnel by ousting Pete Best for Ringo Starr in August 1962, the group was signed to EMI's Parlophone label. Their first single, "Love Me Do"/"P.S. I Love You" reached number 17 in the British charts that October. By February of 1963, their second single, "Please Please Me"/"Ask Me Why," topped the British charts. A non-stop touring schedule combined with well-received radio and television appearances made the Beatles a household name in Britain by mid-1963 and Beatlemania was born. By the time the Beatles arrived at New York City's Kennedy Airport in February of 1964, their music was at the top of the U.S. charts. The Beatles, who broke the mold of pop music by composing their own unique brand of songs, went on to achieve worldwide fame in a way no popular music performers before them had. Their ability to reinvent their musical style as the 1960s progressed, reflecting the changes of their generation, secured their place as one of the twentieth-century's most phenomenally popular music groups.

Though it is true that the young Beatles composed and rehearsed at many locations, the evidence of their time at that site, captured so remarkably in the photographs of Michael McCartney, gives the McCartney home the advantage of documentation of the process. Not only are there Beatles shots of Lennon and McCartney composing "I Saw Her Standing There" in the living room circa 1962 (see Figure 6), there are shots of a younger Paul McCartney learning his instrument. One, circa 1956, just after his mother had died of breast cancer, captures a sullen Paul McCartney, unaware of the camera while learning to play on his first guitar in the back garden. (See Figure 7.) Another shows Paul McCartney in his teddy

boy/Quarrymen phase circa 1958, with “Tony Curtis” (a.k.a. “duck’s arse”) coif, leaning up against the living room fireplace, guitar in hand. (See Figure 8.)<sup>105</sup>

Additional visual documentation of the site is found in the photographs of Dezo Hoffman. A large number of 20 Forthlin Road photographs which include deliberately posed shots such as Paul McCartney ironing in the dining room or Ringo Starr putting a milk bottle out at the front door, were taken in an extensive session with Hoffman. (See Figure 9.) Hoffman, on staff with the *Record Mirror* newspaper, began photographing the Beatles just after Starr joined the group in 1962, and would continue capturing their images through 1965.<sup>106</sup>

There is also written documentation of rehearsals and song composition taking place at 20 Forthlin Road. Quarrymen member Len Garry’s *John, Paul & Me: Before the Beatles* begins with a passage describing the home:

Saturday 12th of October 1957:

Early this particular Sunday afternoon on a small council estate in the quiet suburb of Allerton in South Liverpool, a group of teenage friends had arranged to meet. The meeting place’s official address was No. 20 Forthlin Road, Liverpool, 18. It was the home of Jim McCartney and his two young sons, Paul McCartney and his younger brother Michael.

It was a small unassuming residence, identical in appearance to the rest of the small terraced row of properties. It had a small front garden surrounded by a low wall against which were leaning two or three drop handled bicycles, parked in a rather haphazard manner. As one entered the house from the road, after passing along a narrow path that skirted the right hand side of the small garden one entered from the front door directly into a small circulation area. From this area arose a steep flight of stairs leading up to the first floor.

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<sup>105</sup>Published photographs taken by Michael McCartney at 20 Forthlin Road can be found in the following: Mike McCartney, *Mike Mac’s White and Blacks Plus One Color* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 1, 11, 13-15, 31, 33, 36-39, 51, 54, 55, 65, 67-69, 71; and Mike McCartney, *Remember: Recollections and Photographs of the Beatles by Michael McCartney* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1992), 4, 7, 17, 22, 26-29, 32, 33, 39, 57-61, 64-67, 78, 107, 112-115, 132.

<sup>106</sup>Pierce Marchbank, ed., *With the Beatles: The Historic Photographs of Dezo Hoffman* (New York: Omnibus Press, 1982), 2, 10.



Figure 6. Paul McCartney & John Lennon composing “I Saw Her Standing There” in the 20 Forthlin Road living room circa 1962.  
McCartney, Michael, *Mike Mac’s White and Blacks*, 70.



Figure 7. Paul McCartney in the garden of 20 Forthlin Road circa 1956.  
McCartney, Michael, *Mike Mac's White and Blacks*, 67.



Figure 8. Paul McCartney in the living room of 20 Forthlin Road, circa 1958.  
McCartney, Michael, *Remember*, 27.





Figure 9. Posed photographs of the Beatles at 20 Forthlin Road by Dezo Hoffman, 1963. Clockwise starting at upper left: Beatles in the garden, second shot of same, Paul ironing in the dining room, Ringo putting bottles at the front doorstep, and George digging in the garden. Marchbank, Pierce, ed., *With the Beatles*, 10.

Turning directly left one entered the front sitting room that spanned virtually the whole width of the property. On entering the front room, directly facing you was an old upright piano. Immediately to the right was a fairly modern tiled fireplace. Either side of the fireplace were two armchairs and there was a three seater settee placed under the lounge's "picture style" window...

...Paul McCartney was still in the kitchen--he had been there for about 15 minutes making toast for his friends. John Lennon was slouched over an armchair with his legs perched over the side strumming away on his guitar. Len Garry and Nigel Whalley were discussing ways to get to Clubmoor and Eric Griffiths was falling asleep on the settee.<sup>107</sup>

In a recently released biography of Paul McCartney there are numerous references to the use of the home:

Paul's father allowed the Quarry Men<sup>108</sup> to rehearse at Forthlin Road...Since rehearsals were held in the evenings when Jim McCartney was at home, they would take place in the dining room, where Paul and John would write if they wanted to work in the evening...There were a number of songs written in this early phase of the Lennon and McCartney partnership that didn't get completed until years later. One of these was "I'll Follow the Sun" on the *Beatles for Sale* album.

Paul: I remember writing that in our front living room at Forthlin Road...<sup>109</sup>

The photographic and written record of 20 Forthlin Road lend credence to the National Trust's characterization of the site as "The Birthplace of the Beatles."

For the purposes of the National Trust, the home also serves as an example of post-war public housing in Liverpool. Since Paul McCartney's birth in 1942, the McCartney family had lived in six different locations before moving to 20 Forthlin Road, their most permanent home, in 1955.<sup>110</sup> The story of the family's upward

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<sup>107</sup>Len Garry, *John, Paul & Me: Before the Beatles* (London: CG Publishing, 1997), 8-9.

<sup>108</sup>The group's name is spelled either Quarry Men or Quarrymen, depending upon the source consulted and it is likely that the group itself used both forms.

<sup>109</sup>Barry Miles, *Paul McCartney: Many Years From Now* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1997), 38.

<sup>110</sup>Ron Jones, *The Beatles' Liverpool* (Liverpool: Ron Jones, 1991), 73-5, 80.

mobility through public housing in Liverpool reflects the experience of thousands like them.

Applicants for public housing were registered on a waiting list. To create a system which awarded available housing to those most deserving and in need, a points system was created to reflect the applicants' wartime and post-war employment (ex-service, civilian, key workers), current housing status (bombed out of home, sub-standard or overcrowded housing), health, and size of family. Before and during the war, the McCartneys lived in homes and apartments generally closer to the city center. After the war, in 1947, the family's position on the waiting list allowed them to move to the large, suburban, public housing estate in Speke, an example of the expansion of municipal housing into the suburbs. Though the homes that the McCartneys lived in on the Speke Estate (they moved from 72 Western Avenue to 12 Ardwick Road while there) were similar to those in Forthlin Road, the Speke Estate would come to be viewed as a failure and an unpleasant place to live within years of its completion and the McCartneys sought to leave.<sup>111</sup> Mary McCartney's work as a Health Visitor and later as a District Midwife put the family in a better position to move out of the Speke Estate to the new Mather Avenue estate by 1955.

One of the more recent developments in the history of council housing is also reflected in 20 Forthlin Road. In the 1980s, Liverpool allowed tenants in the Mather Avenue Estate to purchase their homes and the family residing there, the Jones family,

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<sup>111</sup> "Louise Harrison, mother of George, moved to Speke in 1950 (25 Upton Green), but soon became disillusioned as children began stealing her flowers." Woodside, 11. George's sister, also named Louise Harrison, asked at the 2000 Chicago Beatlefest whether she would support the idea of preserving the home the Harrison family lived in at the Speke Estate, replied that she was definitely against the idea. She relayed anecdotes of her neighbors who failed to bathe and generally considered it an embarrassment in her family's history. Louise Harrison, interview by author, 5 August 2000, written notes, Chicago.

bought 20 Forthlin Road in 1981. Subsequently, the Joneses invested in improvements such as window replacement and interior redecoration, typical of many such homes now in private ownership.<sup>112</sup>

### How Preserved

When the McCartneys moved out of 20 Forthlin Road in 1964, Ashley and Sheila Jones' family moved in. Over the years, Mrs. Jones served as an unofficial ambassador for the home, tolerating frequent visitors and allowing an occasional few inside. By 1995, Mrs. Jones desired to move closer to her daughter and put the home up for sale. According to news reports, Cavern City Tours Ltd., the company which offered daily "Magical Mystery Tour" bus tours of Liverpool Beatles sites, and which owned several Beatles-themed sites in the city center, considered purchasing the home to use it as a profit-making tourist site. Cavern City then declined to proceed.<sup>113</sup> It was also reported that buyers from around the world were showing interest in the site. Speculations about their motivations pointed to inappropriate exploitation of the home.

On one of the daily Magical Mystery Tours in 1995 was Mr. John Birt, Liverpool-born BBC Director General and Beatles fan. Mr. Birt was also a friend of Martin Drury, Director-General designate of the National Trust. Upon hearing from the tour guide that the site was up for sale, Birt wrote Drury, suggesting that the Trust might be interested in acquiring the site.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>Woodside, 11-12.

<sup>113</sup>"For Sale: Paul's Old House," *Liverpool Echo*, 1 February 1995.

<sup>114</sup>John Birt, BBC Director General, London, to Martin Drury, National Trust Director-General Designate, London, TLS (photocopy), 5 October 1995, National Trust Files, Shrewsbury, England. In an interview with Martin Drury by the author, Drury, who was then taking over the position as Director-General from Sir Angus Stirling, found Sir Angus somewhat uncertain about the proposal. Martin Drury, National Trust Director General, interview by author, written notes, London, 14

Indeed, the Trust was interested. This century-old institution, with its holdings of hundreds of country estates, castles, and formal gardens, has a reputation which imperils its continued survival. In an *Independent* interview in January 1996, Drury acknowledged this, noting “‘Our country houses are very important and I’m very proud of them, but they do fuel the false impression that the Trust is very rich,’ he says. ‘In fact most of the big country houses run at a loss and the Trust’s financial position is precarious. It needs more members.’”<sup>115</sup>

Twenty Forthlin Road offered an opportunity to own a site famous for its associations with some of England's and the world's most beloved figures of twentieth-century popular culture. Drury saw the opportunity as “‘an immediate link with the creation of music which touched millions.’”<sup>116</sup> By stewarding such a site, the Trust could take an important step toward appealing to all the classes of membership it needs to survive.

When asked by the author during an interview if he was the champion of the Trust's acquisition of 20 Forthlin Road, Martin Drury replied that initiator was a more apt title. If the Mercia Regional Office reaction had been half-hearted, he would have had doubts, but they were quite positive as was the Executive Committee appointed by the National Trust Council. Drury pointed out that the Trust had been blessed with a simple definition for the organization: the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty. To him, questions about acquiring 20 Forthlin Road were not about it being an example of twentieth-century architecture or a semi-detached

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October 1997.

<sup>115</sup>Patricia Cleveland-Peck, “There’s more to the National Trust than country piles, says the new head man. There’s 20 Forthlin Road, for a start,” *Independent* (London), 2 March 1996.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*

home, but about whether it was timely to judge the contribution of the Beatles to twentieth-century popular culture.

Drury recalled a visit to a village in the Carpathian Mountains a few years earlier when he had witnessed loud speakers installed about the town blasting Beatles music. For him, this example illustrated that in terms of breadth of communication, more people had probably heard Beatles music than had heard Mozart's music or read Shakespeare's plays. To Drury, it was clear that the Beatles' contributions were established, widespread and lasting. Some 20,000 people a year passed by 20 Forthlin Road, making it something of an icon already. The Trust was inspired to take on the 20 Forthlin Road project not so much out of a desire to find a popular music site as much as it was looking in larger terms for the things that people value.<sup>117</sup>

This fact reflected

In commenting on the reactions of the membership, Drury acknowledged that some older members had written negatively about the Beatles' perceived connections to drugs. In general, however, it was not possible to isolate a particular reaction to a particular sector of the Trust's membership. Reactions were mixed across the north and south of England as well as the old and young, and they varied from truly enthusiastic to puzzlement and anger. The Trust's internal reaction was positive, though Drury added that if it had been a home associated with the Rolling Stones, the organization might have questioned its involvement.

Drury was clear to point out that, as someone who had turned 21 before 1960, not only the Beatles but also the Rolling Stones and others had made a big impression on him. He considered himself a Beatles fan. His children, in their twenties, also

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<sup>117</sup>Drury, interview by author.

listened to the Beatles. Looking back in time to one of the Trust's original founders, Drury stated that Octavia Hill, whose efforts to preserve homes included those with associations to historical figures, would have understood why people would want to stand in the room where the Beatles played and wrote.<sup>118</sup>

Keith Halstead, who was appointed Managing Agent for the 20 Forthlin Road property, concurred with Drury's comments about an image problem with the Trust. The organization was in the process of re-defining what is of historic interest by moving from a focus on country homes and buildings, to looking at recent political and social history with its ownership of the homes of Winston Churchill and Thomas Hardy. Though the Trust had a long history of preserving the homes of famous individuals, they were now specifically including popular culture as worthy of preservation. This re-examination was not unique to the Trust, but reflected preservation's shifting priorities.<sup>119</sup>

Mrs. Jones had already received an offer from a Japanese investor, but was concerned about leaving the property in the hands of someone who would possibly cause problems for her neighbors by inappropriate use of the home.<sup>120</sup> Peter Nixon, Regional Director for the Mercia Region, approached Mrs. Jones' family in October 1995 to express the Trust's interest in purchasing the property and its intentions to preserve the home in a way that would minimize disruption to people living in the area. At the same time, the Trust contacted Michael McCartney and explained its

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<sup>118</sup>Ibid.

<sup>119</sup>Keith Halstead, National Trust Mercia Regional Co-ordinator, interview by author, 29 September 1997, Shrewsbury, England, written notes.

<sup>120</sup> Peter J.L. Nixon, "20, Forthlin Road, Liverpool - the 'Birthplace' of the Beatles. A Report by the Regional Director for Mercia, Dated 3rd November 1995, to the Properties Committee and Executive Committee," D (photocopy), National Trust Files, Shrewsbury, England, 1-2.

plans and desire to insure that his family was in support of its proposal. Peter Nixon arranged a meeting with Mrs. Jones, her daughter, and Michael McCartney at 20 Forthlin Road during the week of October 16. At the gathering, Michael shared his photographs of the home, and the Trust's interest was met with enthusiasm. On October 21, the Trust phoned Mrs. Jones' daughter with an offer on the home, specifying that it was contingent upon receiving Paul McCartney's full support, and she accepted on behalf of her mother.<sup>121</sup>

After Michael McCartney contacted his brother, the Trust wrote to discuss his support. On November 8, the Trust received confirmation of his approval. Though later discussions even involved the idea of Paul purchasing the property for the Trust, the decision was made that the need for quick action meant the Trust would move forward with its purchase option.<sup>122</sup>

Given the high profile of the site, the Trust felt it needed to move swiftly. There had been little marketing of the home. Given the upcoming release of the Beatles *Anthology*, a resurgence of interest in the Beatles could result in attention to the home that could raise the asking price and prompt interest from people who would not properly preserve it.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Peter J.L. Nixon, Shrewsbury, England, to Mrs. Sheila Easton, Heswall, England, 23 October 1995, TLS (photocopy), National Trust Files, Shrewsbury, England.

<sup>122</sup> By May of 1996, after news of the Trust's purchase had been well-publicized, MPL Productions' Director Paul Winn responded to discussions of financial support from Paul McCartney: "However, as you have mentioned, and the National Trust's magazine confirms, the purchase is controversial. In the circumstances, we do not believe that the status of the house should be secured by a direct contribution from Paul as one of the Group who created the interest. Accordingly, I think that it is inappropriate to make a donation at this time." Paul B. Winn, London, to Peter J. L. Nixon, Shrewsbury, TLS (photocopy), 15 May 1996, National Trust Files, Shrewsbury, England.

<sup>123</sup> Julian Gibbs, National Trust Historic Buildings Representative, "Draft, The Birthplace of the Beatles, 20 Forthlin Road, Allerton, Liverpool 18," D (photocopy),



The Trust had an independent valuation of the home undertaken and found its worth was around £45,000 (roughly \$67,000). Adding a premium of £25,000 (roughly \$37,000; 56% value added) for the Beatles connection, the Trust was able to match the offer Mrs. Jones had already received from the Japanese entrepreneur and she decided to sell the home to them.<sup>124</sup> With approval of the Trust's Executive Committee and an arrangement to secure funding from the creation of a temporary "fighting fund," the transaction was completed by November 1995. With the site safely in its possession, held alienably, the Trust now would take the time to consider its next move.

This acquisition was a bold move by the Trust, for no other preservation organization of equivalent size and stature, either in England or elsewhere, had moved to preserve a site connected with such recent popular culture. The Trust was aware that this would be regarded as a revolutionary new direction for the organization, but the idea that "popular culture deserves preservation alongside high art, and the kinds of buildings the Trust normally conserves" was now part of its outlook.<sup>125</sup> Entering into such uncharted territory, unsure of the reaction of its membership and the country at large, and rightfully anxious about acceptance by the local community without which use of the site in such tight quarters would likely be infeasible, the Trust adopted a very cautious, open-ended policy regarding its treatment of the site. They maintained that there were three options. First was the opening of the site to the public with carefully constructed limits on access. Second was retaining ownership of the site and renting it out to a tenant without any public access. Third was selling the site.

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15 November 1995, National Trust Files, Shrewsbury, England, 5.

<sup>124</sup>Nixon, "20, Forthlin Road, Liverpool - the 'Birthplace' of the Beatles," 1.

<sup>125</sup>Gibbs, "Draft - The Birthplace of the Beatles," 6.

The option chosen would depend on the local planning commission's requirements and the reaction of the membership and surrounding community. Before going to the local planning body with a proposal, the Trust set about to contact people on the street where the home was located, their ward councillors, relevant city directorates, the city's tourism organization, private groups involved in Beatles tourism, and the planning commission itself to hear all of the various concerns about granting public access to the site.

In a November 1995 press release, the Trust clarified that 20 Forthlin Road had been acquired on a holding basis to provide the time needed to consult with the community and city about options for preserving and presenting the home to the public. The group stressed its desire to avoid creating additional nuisance for local residents who already had to deal with tourist groups viewing the home from outside. The home would not be open to the public in the near future and the ultimate decision about whether to open the home on a permanent basis would only be made after widespread discussion with concerned parties.<sup>126</sup>

On the day this was released, the Trust contacted neighbors in the early morning to tell them of its purchase of the house in an effort to illustrate its intentions of keeping neighbors well-informed of its actions and plans.<sup>127</sup> Other letters to residents requesting their comments followed in December and March. On 3 April 1996, the Trust invited the Area Manager for the Housing and Consumer Services Directorate and neighbors along Forthlin Road to number 20 to discuss the ideas under consideration for management of the property and to find out their concerns. The

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<sup>126</sup>National Trust, "National Trust Acquires the 'Birthplace of the Beatles,'" press release (photocopy), 20 November 1995, National Trust files, Shrewsbury, England, 2.

<sup>127</sup>Tony Berry, "Acquisition of 20 Forthlin Road: Media Strategy," D (photocopy), 13 November 1995, National Trust Files, Shrewsbury, England, 4.

current Magical Mystery Tour's incorporation of daily stops at the house via tour bus, twice daily on weekends, as well as occasional independent bus tours, had given the neighbors' experience with large-scale visitation. Though overall disruption was minimal, occasional problems arose with litter, using gardens as lavatories, and vendors who gathered to cater to the crowds. In envisioning the Trust's plans, concerns were voiced about large groups and the way in which people would be managed and given access to the site. The neighbors who shared the walkway with number 20 wanted to maintain privacy by keeping people out of this side passage and did not wish to be disturbed by visitors wanting to use their lavatory. They also expressed their strong belief that the house should be lived in and cared for by someone, continuing to keep the home a normal part of the street.

When the Trust explained its proposal to limit visitors to small groups whose access would be carefully managed, residents were reassured and a consensus was reached that such methods would be acceptable. The Trust also promised that there would be no loud music coming from the home. At the conclusion of the meeting, the neighbors said that further formal consultation would not be necessary and that they simply wished to be kept informed of the plans as they progressed. Later, informal talks by the tenant occupying 20 Forthlin Road with neighbors revealed additional concerns that no intrusive shopfront development or commercial activities take place in Forthlin Road. The Trust made ongoing efforts to keep residents updated. At key points in the development of plans for 20 Forthlin Road, newsletters detailing progress and anticipated next steps were delivered along the street, including two in 1996 and three in 1997.

In March of 1996, the Trust met with City Council officers responsible for Planning and Transportation; Housing and Consumer Services; and Tourism, Arts & Heritage to ascertain and encourage support for the project by showing how its plans

were in line with local policies concerning planning, employment, and tourism. The National Trust was able to use Speke Hall, the fifteenth-century, half-timber manor home bequeathed to them in 1943, to good advantage in designing the logistical solutions they presented. Fortuitously, Speke Hall, the only other property owned and managed by the National Trust in Liverpool, was located approximately 3 miles southeast of 20 Forthlin Road. Traffic and parking problems along Forthlin Road would be minimized by providing for parking at Speke Hall with a mini-van ferrying people back and forth. Three new jobs (caretaker of Forthlin Road, mini-bus driver, and relief driver/custodian) would be created and those at Speke Hall would be safeguarded by virtue of increased traffic to the estate from 20 Forthlin Road guests. Beatles tourism would increase due to the opening of a new site for visitors. Although many of the politicians' concerns were addressed, the Head of Planning & Transportation followed up the meeting with a stern letter stating that the Local Planning Authority had strong concerns about the effects on the residential area of opening up the home to the public and specifying the detailed information they would require in a planning application for such a change of use.

Over the course of 1996, Trust officers met individually with elected representatives and directors of organizations with a vested interest in its project. These included the six ward councillors for the area, the Merseyside Tourist and Conference Bureau, the Beatles Story Museum, Cavern City Tours, Ltd. (the company which runs the Magical Mystery Tour and owns Beatles-themed restaurants and clubs in the city center), and the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside.

Although Liverpool's planning department was strongly supportive of the project, it was apprehensive about the potential of establishing a negative precedent by granting permission for regular visitation in such a residential neighborhood. The Trust set about to craft a visitation scheme which would convince the department that

the interior of the home could be opened to the public in a way which addressed the concerns of the neighbours and community.<sup>128</sup> The planning proposal document that was drafted was therefore carefully constructed to reflect the concerns which had been voiced to the Trust. A tenant would live at the home full-time. Access would be limited to 127 days per year (April through October open Wednesdays through Saturdays; November through December Saturdays only). The actual annual visitors would be expected to number 9,525. People wishing to visit the home would have to pre-book tickets. They would gather at Speke Hall where parking and convenience facilities would be provided. A mini-van would then hourly take groups of a maximum fifteen people to the end of Forthlin Road and drop them off. They would walk to number 20 to be greeted by the Custodian. After entering the home, they would be given a brief introduction and then given headsets for a pre-recorded tour. After a set time, the group would then walk back to the end of Forthlin Road to be picked up by the mini-van that dropped off the next set of visitors.

The Trust's application documented the meetings that had taken place since its purchase of the home in 1995, reaffirmed the project's contributions to local tourism and job creation, and noted that fundraising for restoration and presentation of the site would be undertaken after planning approval had been received. The application was submitted 1 October 1996 and permission was granted 3 December 1996.

At the time consultations were taking place in Liverpool, the Trust was receiving feedback from its membership and the public at large. The Trust's purchase of 20 Forthlin Road in mid-November 1995 had allowed them to issue a public announcement of the purchase which coincided with the 21 November 1995 release of

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<sup>128</sup>P.J.L. Nixon, National Trust Mercia Regional Director, "20, Forthlin Road, Liverpool," D (photocopy), 2 May 1996, National Trust Files, Shrewsbury, England.

the long-awaited and well-publicized *Beatles Anthology* LP/CD.<sup>129</sup> This fortunate turn of events led most newspapers to link the two events in their write-ups and thereby increased visibility of the Trust's new site.

In addition to this general media coverage, the Trust included an article in its Spring 1996 Mercia regional newsletter and in its national member magazine. With over two million members, it was not feasible to invite comment, but a close eye was kept on the reaction. Not surprisingly, the purchase of 20 Forthlin Road outraged some members, even leading a handful to resign from the organization. Generally their complaints centered on the lack of cultural value they imputed to the Beatles' music and terraced council homes, and that money would have been better spent on more traditional Trust sites. As is standard with correspondence received by the Trust, all who wrote were sent a response explaining the significance of the site and the reasoning behind the Trust's decision. The Correspondence Register covering responses received from 1 November 1995 through 31 March 1996 showed 168 letters received regarding the Trust's purchase of 20 Forthlin Road, the great majority of which were negative. In membership categories, Pensioners sent in the most letters of disagreement.<sup>130</sup>

Of the general public who wrote into newspapers with their opinions, the majority of letters printed contained complaints about money being better spent on the houses of people more important than the Beatles. A 25 November 1995 letter to the *Daily Telegraph* sent by the Cambridge lecturer in classical architectural history David Watkin suggested the Trust was betraying its origins: "Without wishing to give

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<sup>129</sup>Berry, "Acquisition of 20 Forthlin Road: Media Strategy," 3.

<sup>130</sup>National Trust Membership Assistant, "Correspondence Register," D (photocopy), 23 April 1996, National Trust Files, Shrewsbury, England, 1.

offence, it must be said that this is a mean and architecturally worthless terrace property, typical of hundreds of other built in 1952 to the lowered specification for public building permitted by the then Housing Minister Harold Macmillan.” His comments reflected the general tone of snobbery most writers did not bother to hide: “Are the interiors to be preserved as they are, or is it to become a lovingly created museum of working-class taste in interior design in the early 1960s.”<sup>131</sup>

This letter received a reply from the outgoing Director-General of the Trust, Sir Angus Stirling, who reiterated the Trust's belief in the significance of the Beatle's place in twentieth-century popular culture: “The terraced house in Liverpool whence the Beatles embarked upon their epoch-making career may not be a gem of classical architecture (letter, Nov. 25). It is, however, without doubt a place of enduring historic interest.” He went on to note the financial aspect: “Far from being a retreat from the Trust’s founding ideals, the decision to secure the future of a modest house which was the birthplace of resounding lyrical invention is precisely what the Trust should be prepared to do, especially when, as in this case, the cost is relatively low.”<sup>132</sup> Sir Angus’s successor Martin Drury continued his public support of the Trust’s move and, according to an interview published in the 31 January 1996 *Guardian*, he pointed out to at least one elderly member who regarded McCartney as a transient pop singer “that in his day Mozart was not always appreciated.”<sup>133</sup>

While response was being gauged, discussions about the way in which the

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<sup>131</sup>David Watkin, “Letter to the Editor: Unsuitable Home for the Trust,” *Daily Telegraph* (London), 25 November 1995, 18.

<sup>132</sup>Sir Angus Stirling, National Trust Director General, “Letter to the Editor: A Sound Decision by the Mersey,” *Daily Telegraph* (London), 29 November 1995, 20.

<sup>133</sup>Paul Brown, “Environment: Trusting Sort,” *Guardian* (London), 31 January 1996, 4.

house would be treated were also undertaken. In the Forthlin Road property, the layout and original construction were largely intact. No interior walls had been moved and the original exterior, stretcher bond brick cavity walls with a course of damp proof slate, the concrete tiled roof, and concrete floors were all in place.<sup>134</sup>

The property had been modernized in many ways, however. The original wood-frame, single-glazing windows had all been removed and double-glazed vinyl replacements installed. All doors, exterior and interior, had been replaced, but the home's original joinery was in place. In the living room, the original "Zenith" fireplace had been removed and a fitted gas fire with a new tiled surround and hearth put in its place. Pine paneling was added over the remainder of the fireplace wall. The ceilings of two rooms remained painted but all others had been covered in Artex (a plaster compound applied to create a stucco texture). Artex was also applied to almost all wall surfaces, with a few walls (bedrooms and kitchen) covered with woodchip or patterned wallpaper. Though the kitchen floor had had new linoleum installed, the remainder of floors had carpeting tacked over original linoleum. Preliminary investigations beneath the carpet showed that in some areas, linoleum had been removed, and overall the remaining linoleum was in varying states of repair. The only original fittings which appeared to be in place were the coat hooks in the ground floor hall closet.<sup>135</sup>

The upper floor fireplace, located in the master bedroom, had been removed and the wall opening covered over. A large boiler had been installed on the second floor between the toilet and bathroom which heated the home via modern, wall-mounted radiators. The kitchen, toilet, and bathroom fixtures and appliances had all

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<sup>134</sup>Woodside, 3.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.



been replaced. Wood fencing in front and back had been added to the reinforced concrete posts and metal bars previously in place.<sup>136</sup> In the rear garden, a three-room shed, with the first room containing a toilet, the other two serving as fuel and garden supplies storage areas, and its felted flat reinforced concrete roof were unaltered.<sup>137</sup>

Given the fame of the former occupants, the prospect of locating the original items which had been removed with the originals presented some unique challenges and advantages. For example, a letter was received by the Trust from a dealer in Beatles memorabilia offering the upstairs interior doors and kitchen sink for sale. The dealer did, in fact, have all the upstairs doors save one (five single doors and two paired closet doors), each of them with a photograph and a signed statement from the previous owner that they were indeed from 20 Forthlin Road. The missing door, formerly on the bedroom occupied by Paul McCartney, had been sold to the Hard Rock Cafe restaurant chain and was on display in London. The Historic Buildings Representative purchased the available doors from the dealer for re-installation at the site, though he chose not to purchase the sink as the decision had not been made to replace the modern fixtures presently in place. Obviously, the doors had been kept track of due to the fame of the former occupants, but the purchase price was at a premium and the missing door might likely remain well beyond the capacity of a non-profit's purse given its numerous obligations.

Unfortunately, this instance was an exception and no other original pieces presented themselves (furniture or architectural elements). Given this and the likelihood that any original pieces which might be located would likely come with a heavy premium, the Trust had to decide whether they would attempt an exact

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<sup>136</sup> The National Trust workmen at the site discovered that the upstairs fireplace had been removed and the wall covered over. The remainder was observed by the author.

<sup>137</sup> Woodside, 3.

recreation of the interior as it was while the McCartneys lived there. Financially, this option would be quite feasible, especially in comparison to the cost of furnishings for almost any other Trust site, most of which date from previous centuries. Availability would not be a problem either, given the ordinary nature of the furniture the McCartneys had possessed. It would even be relatively easy to research the appropriate items as photographic documentation of the site was quite good and the McCartney brothers could be contacted for their input.

Yet, the decision was made not to create a house museum with exact reproductions of the original contents. Several factors were involved in this decision. First, the Trust did not have the original furnishings, although they did have the photographs of Mike McCartney which tell the story of the home. Then there was the basic size of the space. Of the eight rooms, two would not hold more than three people. Of the remaining six, the largest, even without any furnishings, would feel cramped with 20 people. Adding furniture would further diminish the capacity of these already petite spaces. As it became clear that there would need to be a full-time, live-in person at the site, the prospect of asking someone to live here without modern appliances and systems also became problematic. That person's need for private space, off limits to the public, further reduced the total space available.

The lack of original furnishings meant that the use of similar pieces would require communication to the public that they were not original furnishings owned by the McCartneys. As Julian Gibbs, the Historic Buildings Representative, put it, if they had a piano similar to the McCartney's piano, they would have to put a sign on it saying "This is not Paul's piano." Consensus was that such an approach missed the central concept that it was the person with which the home was associated that interested visitors. The era was secondary in importance and to emphasize it over the story of the Beatles was inappropriate. Gibbs said their intent was to preserve the

concept, the idea, the place where someone lived, not to create a show house or an aesthetic object, and that they did not want to be “too intellectual” about it. Inevitably, he acknowledged that it would be a museum somewhat, but someone would be living there. Ideas about the presentation would be an evolving process.<sup>138</sup>

The alternative chosen was centered around the display of Michael McCartney's photographs. These images, rather than objects, would be used to illustrate the McCartney family's habitation. Michael McCartney had agreed to lend his photographs so this was feasible. The other critical presentation element would be the tape-recorded tour, which the Trust hoped to produce with interviews from Paul and Mike and other people significant in the story of the home. Decorating would be genuine, of the period, and meant to evoke the period, rather than reproduce it piece by piece. Gibbs would seek to create the right atmosphere at the home, avoiding a faked feeling of the place. Donations of furnishings and fixtures would be evaluated for their appropriateness. Gibbs stated that it was likely the Trust would be given items that were too “smart,” pieces which, though of the period, would not likely have been in the working-class McCartney home. It was a difficult proposition to show the “nicely scruffy” atmosphere of the home and balance that against expectations that the Trust would present a nice place, not to mention that the McCartneys would be unlikely to appreciate the presentation of a shabby home.<sup>139</sup>

Tony Berry, Regional Public Affairs Manager for the Mercia Region, commented about the approach that the Trust was trying to impose as little of its presence on the site as possible. If it filled the home with objects that the McCartneys

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<sup>138</sup> Julian Gibbs, interview by author, written notes, Shrewsbury, England, 29 September 1997.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

might have had, it would be adding a layer of interpretation. This was a change in approach now being tried rather than a comprehensive or formal policy change for the Trust.<sup>140</sup>

Alterations made to the site over the last decade were assessed in terms of their visual impact on the home. Those that had the greatest effect were to be removed, but a significant proportion of improvements were to be left. The front and back facades would be given maximum attention. The vinyl windows would be removed and replaced with wood windows in the same style as the original, preferably ones from the same era taken from another council house in the process of modernizing. Original exterior doors would also be sought, replacements to be made in none were found. This process would begin with the rear facade so that the Trust could experiment with how best to do the work on the less visible side of the home. The original, upstairs bedroom and closet doors which had been purchased would be re-installed. Those interior doorways for which the original doors had not been found would have similar replacements installed. Exceptions were made for the doors and window of the dining room as the Trust had chosen this room for display of memorabilia which was potentially quite valuable. Security-designed doors and windows, thicker than the originals, with additional security hardware would be placed into the openings of this room to protect its contents. A display case designed in a 1950s style would hold the objects in the room.

The Artex covering the downstairs walls would be removed as would the woodchip and velvet-patterned wallpaper covering the upstairs walls. Careful attention was to be given to this process as the Trust hoped to uncover "Beatles graffiti" which Michael McCartney stated had been left on various walls throughout the house when the McCartneys moved out. This would be achieved by carefully

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<sup>140</sup>Tony Berry, interview by author, written notes, Liverpool, 23 September 1997.

steaming off the paper and Artex, rather than by a potentially more damaging scraping method. If workmen uncovered anything, they were instructed to stop work on that area until Trust staff could examine it and confer on the best method to proceed. The only other wall covering, the wood paneling on the wall into which the central fireplace was set, would be removed to reveal the plaster underneath which was in view when the McCartneys lived there.<sup>141</sup> After all wall coverings were removed, decisions would be made as to how to treat the walls.<sup>142</sup> Options considered included all combinations of leaving or removing original decoration or graffiti found, leaving the walls as bare plaster, re-wallpapering, painting the walls with copies of the original wallpaper, or painting them with a color appropriate to the era.<sup>143</sup> (See Figures 10-13.)

The newer fireplace was to be removed if one like the original could be found. An older fireplace might not be able to provide sufficient heat, however, and this problem would have to be addressed. The gas boiler upstairs was to be removed and one installed downstairs as per the original design. An interior/exterior alarm system put in after the Trust purchased the site was to remain intact and in use. In front and back, the non-original fencing would be removed. As per the original design, a privet hedge would be planted in front in place of the fence, and railings and curbs originally

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<sup>141</sup>Upon removing this paneling, a cream, patterned wallpaper was found underneath, with an inscription including a date of 1970. This was not a McCartney-era paper. The Trust removed a small portion of the top papers to expose a section of the faux brick design paper in place from the earlier era. This was left exposed for display to the public. On the far (east) wall of the living room, no McCartney-era Chinese-style wallpaper was found to exist. Julian Gibbs decided to paint this wall cream, one of the colors used by the council for internal walls when the Estate was built. Reported by Hunter Davies, "All Our Yesterdays," *Mail on Sunday* (London), 24 May 1998, 67.

<sup>142</sup>Unfortunately, no Beatles graffiti was uncovered in the restoration process.

<sup>143</sup>Julian Gibbs, "Draft, 20 Forthlin Road: Proposals for Restoration and Presentation," D (photocopy), 21 June 1996, National Trust Files, Shrewsbury, England, 2.



Figure 10. John Lennon and Paul McCartney in the living room of 20 Forthlin Road circa 1962. Mike McCartney, *Remember*, 4.



Figure 11. Modernized living room of 20 Forthlin Road, 1997.  
Photograph by author.



Figure 12. Keith Halstead of the National Trust gestures to the chimney wall in 20 Forthlin Road just after removal of wood paneling, 1997. Photograph by author.





Figure 13. Restored living room of 20 Forthlin Road, 1998.

Photograph courtesy of the National Trust from Ray Connolly, "The Home Where the Sixties Were Born," *Daily Mail*, 22 July 1998.

in place would be re-installed. The non-original number plaque would be removed from beside the front door.

Choices regarding other items were more uncertain. The Trust staff lifted the modern carpeting to find "lino" (linoleum) underneath in most rooms. A piece was removed and sent to the Kirchaldy Museum to be analyzed to determine its date. The Congoleum linoleum was likely from the McCartney era. This would need to be confirmed by speaking with the McCartneys, and if it was not original, it could be removed. If it was from that era, the damage done to it with the installation of carpeting directly on top, its overall condition, and the extent to which it covered the floor surfaces would be more closely examined to determine if it could be displayed. The likely outcome was that they would simply leave the carpet down to protect the Congoleum regardless.

The home's wiring had been replaced and would be left intact, though '50s Bakelite light fittings and switches would be installed. The modern kitchen, toilet, and bathroom were also to be left as is, giving the caretaker maximum convenience, except



for the reinstatement of a slate slab to the larder. However, in the course of discussions between the new Mercia Regional Director Simon Murray, Regional Coordinator Keith Halstead, and the Regional Buildings Manager Graham Dench during a site visit on 12 September 1997, it became apparent that such decisions could still be challenged. Simon Murray felt that replacing modern bath and kitchen fixtures would add to the authenticity of the site and yet still be functional for the Custodian. The extent to which this could be undertaken, however, was limited by the funding already secured for the work. Murray expressed his frustration that such work had not been included in the grant request, but Dench pointed out that such work could be carried out in the future and did not necessarily need to be carried out in concert with the present work.<sup>144</sup> (See Figure 14.)

Murray was also emphatic in his opinion that original '50s windows should be found rather than reproductions made. Dench and Halstead explained the problems with locating such windows. Although asked, the City Housing Department had not offered help. Mercia Regional Trust staff were also reluctant to get involved in removing windows from a similar terraced house in the neighborhood. They did not want to be put in a position of having to install the double-glazed windows from 20 Forthlin Road into another house because of possible complications with timing, the conditions of the windows, and unrealistic expectations of the homeowner. In addition, they felt it would be inappropriate for the Trust to encourage the removal of original windows from another home. It would be preferable to find a set of windows already displaced which could be installed readily at 20 Forthlin Road. Murray's suggestion to advertise for windows was honored later in the form of a press release

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<sup>144</sup> Simon Murray, National Trust Mercia Regional Director, Keith Halstead, National Trust Mercia Regional Co-ordinator, and Graham Dench, National Trust Mercia Regional Buildings Manager, notes made by author during site visit to 20 Forthlin Road, 12 September 1997, Liverpool, written notes.

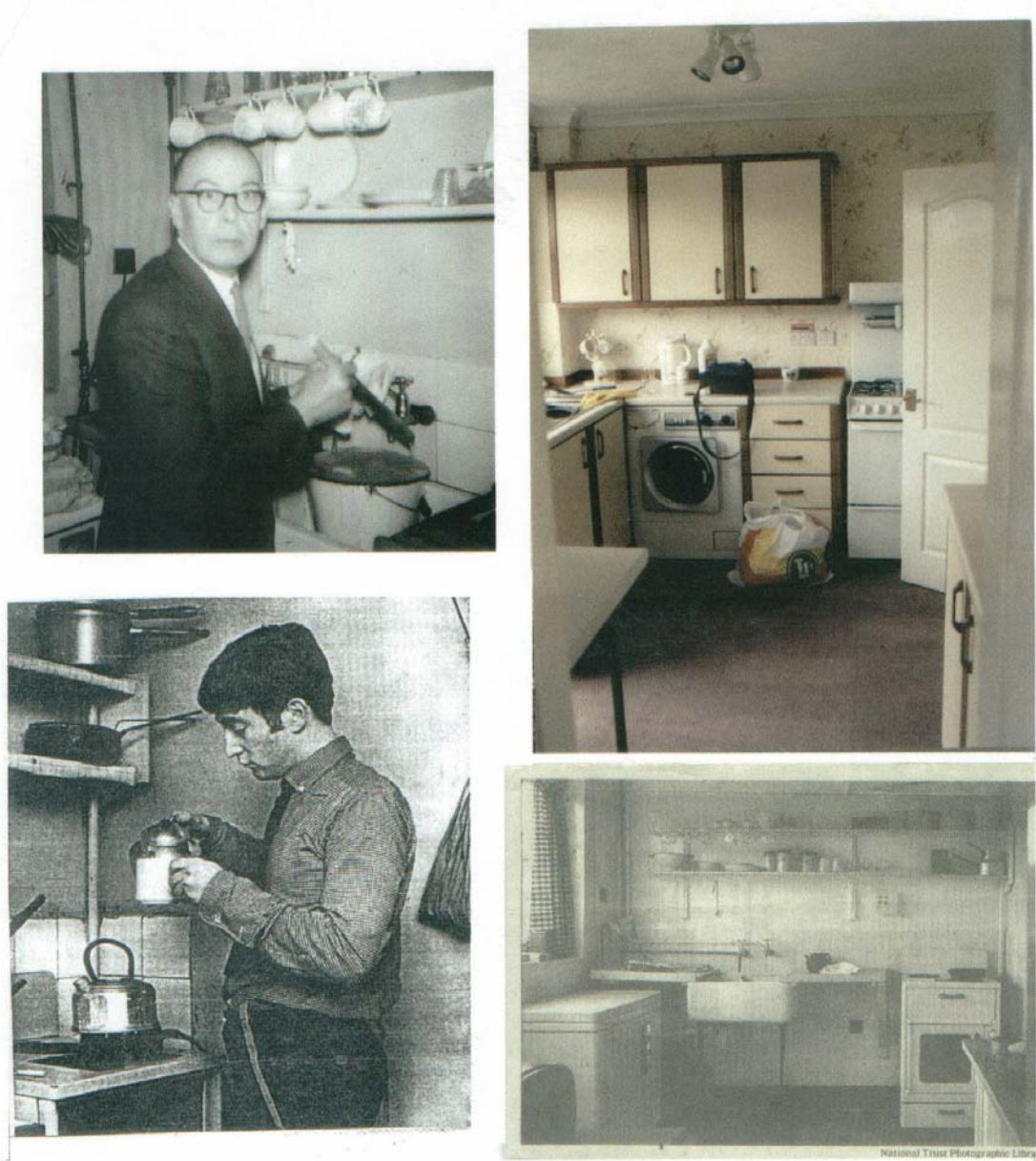


Figure 14. Images of the kitchen at 20 Forthlin Road. *Upper left*, Jim McCartney washing clothes in the kitchen sink circa 1956. (Mike McCartney, *Remember*, 17.)

*Lower Left*, staged shot of John Lennon at the stove for Dezo Hoffman, 1963. (Unidentified Beatles fanzine circa 1963.) *Upper right*, modernized kitchen before restoration, 1997. (Photograph by author.) *Lower right*, restored kitchen, 1998, suggesting Murray's approach was adopted. (Photograph courtesy of the National Trust Photographic Library as published in Warren Hoge, "Britain's Shrine to the Beatles," *New York Times*, 23 July 1998.)

and a newsletter, distributed to homes of a similar design in the neighborhood.

Murray also challenged the plans for installing a 1950s-era lead "Property of the National Trust" plaque on the front facade by the door. He felt that this was the McCartney house and that the Trust's presence should be invisible, making the installation of such a plaque inappropriate. Halstead and Dench countered that such plaques were in place at other Trust sites. Murray concluded that these were ideas which should be discussed further.

In its focus on cosmetic alterations, the Trust chose to ignore more fundamental and already quite serious roof and wall repair problems. At the front facade, water penetration into the masonry routinely caused a shower of brick particles onto the walk. Spalling was most severe along the upper courses of brickwork under the roofline and around the front door where large sections of damaged brick appeared pink in comparison to the surrounding, red, intact bricks. (See Figures 15-17.)

At the rear facade, water infiltrated the wall above the kitchen window, dripping and puddling on the interior window sill. A small gap was apparent between the rear kitchen window and door openings and the brick wall. (See Figure 18.) Spalling was also apparent in the brickwork by the side passage gate to the rear garden. Problems were also found in the rear sheds where visible reinforcement bars of the flat concrete roof were rusting and extensive spalling was evident in the brickwork. (See Figures 19-20.) The Regional Building Manager Graham Dench noted this in a 28 August 1996 memo to the Regional Coordinator:

I have had only a very brief look at the house and there are a number of areas which cause concern, eg [*sic*] there is reinforcement corrosion on the concrete to the flat roof of the outhouses and in the brickwork over the rear gate. This is causing cracking and spalling. If it is not dealt with in the initial repairs then



Figure 15. Paul McCartney at the front door of 20 Forthlin Road circa 1962. Brick around door is fully intact. McCartney, Michael, *Remember*, 29.



Figure 16. Author at the doorway of 20 Forthlin Road, 1997. Glazed face missing from bricks at upper left side of doorway. Photograph by Carol Eley.





Figure 17. Front of 20 Forthlin Road post-restoration, 2000.  
Lighter bricks in upper courses under the roofline and at left side of doorway missing  
glazed fronts due to spalling. Photograph by Margaret Martin.



Figure 18. Rear of 20 Forthlin Road before restoration, 1997.  
Photograph by author.

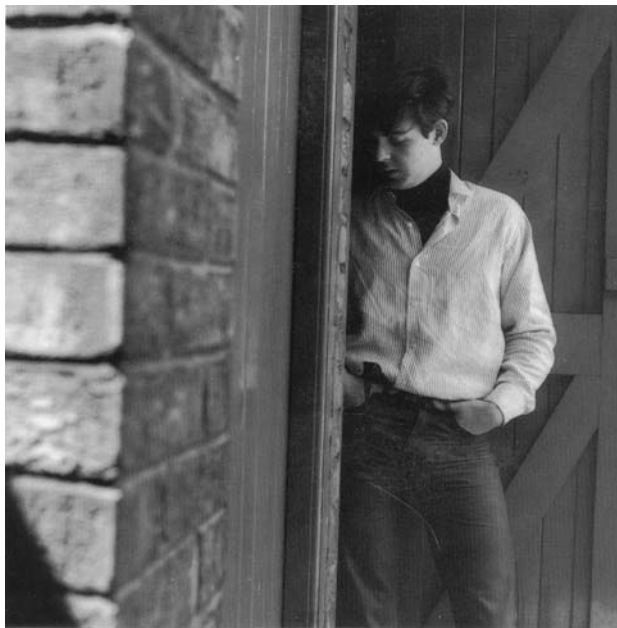


Figure 19. Paul McCartney poses at the outside shed/toilet circa 1962.  
Michael McCartney, *Remember*, 28.



Figure 20. Author poses at outside shed/toilet, 1997. Arrows point to corroded reinforcement bars in the shed roof. Photograph by Carol Eley.

allowance has to be made for it in the not too distant future. Similarly, there are repairs required to the roof.<sup>145</sup>

When asked to create a budget for proposed architectural work to submit for a grant, Dench provided two versions which met target financial goals of £20,000 and £30,000. However, he felt compelled to note his concerns:

I am concerned about both of these proposals as they are driven by a target figure rather than recognising the real costs. These concerns include, inter alia:

1. There are several liabilities that are not funded (eg [*sic*] the repairs to the outhouses and rear gate brickwork). These costs will need to be incurred in the future and, unless alternative funding is provided, will be a drain on the general fund.
2. These budget costs are very likely to result in either a finished job with which no-one is satisfied or additional costs being incurred during the course of the work (eg [*sic*] there is very little allowance for decoration other than straightforward modern redecoration, there is also no funding for work to the front bedroom).
3. The preliminaries (which cover supervision, clearing up, skips, rubbish disposal, plant and equipment, scaffolding, health and safety, general overheads, etc [*sic*]) are very low at 10%.
4. With no contingency and cuts in other figures there is no margin for error, alteration or any additional unforeseen work and, therefore, a considerable increase in the risk associated with project.
5. The reduced budgets will mean greater costs in regional staff time and an extension to the programme for the work.<sup>146</sup>

The considerations Dench raised would be decided by the Mercia Regional Committee which was entrusted with setting policy for projects in the region. At its 2 December 1996 meeting, 20 Forthlin Road was discussed. The Regional Committee Chairman, Mr. Algernon Heber-Percy, summarized their discussion in the minutes: “...the cost of the building related work should be within the £20,000 - £30,000

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<sup>145</sup>Graham Dench, Memorandum to Keith Halstead (photocopy), 28 August 1996, National Trust Files, Shrewsbury, England, 3.

<sup>146</sup>Graham Dench, Memorandum to Keith Halstead (photocopy), 27 November 1996, National Trust Files, Shrewsbury, England, 3-4.

bracket in order for this to be as acceptable as possible to the public at large.”<sup>147</sup> The Committee voted to approve the submission of grant requests reflecting this cost Range despite the fact that the sum was so modest in comparison to the grants routinely requested for other properties.

To cover the restoration and presentation expenses, the Trust sought a Heritage Lottery Grant. In February 1997, the Trust applied to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for £47,500: £24,500 for building work and £23,000 for presentation and interpretation (audio equipment, display showcase, furniture, signage, McCartney photography presentation, transportation, and volunteer expenses). In its application, the Trust put forth its philosophy regarding permanent preservation of the site:

It is our intention at this stage not to declare 20 Forthlin Road inalienable. Such a decision should be taken with mature reflection and based on a significant period of experience of the Trust’s management of the property, and, on the local community’s and the public at large’s perception of this. Also, such perceptions are likely to change over time. By holding the property alienably the Trust reserves the option to declare it inalienable at a later date.<sup>148</sup>

The Trust continued by spelling out its reasoning for requesting the minimal amount it did:

3.5 The Trust proposes that...the cost of the building related work should be as low as is practicably possible in view of the restoration philosophy.

3.6 Obviously it will be our long term aim to restore more of the house, its original form and furnishings. But this will be [sic] dependant on gifts and fundraising.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup>National Trust, ”The National Trust, Minutes of the Sixty-seventh Meeting of the Regional Committee for Mercia held at Attingham Park on Monday 2nd December 1996,” D (photocopy), National Trust Files, Shrewsbury, England, 2.

<sup>148</sup>National Trust, “Application to the Heritage Lottery Fund by the National Trust for No. 20 Forthlin Road Liverpool L18, February 1997,” D (photocopy), National Trust Files, Shrewsbury, England, 4.

<sup>149</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.



In the Financial Assessment section, these thoughts are detailed further and future work given a cost figure:

The capital costs of restoration and presentation of the house are based on the philosophy of holding the property alienably for preservation in the short to medium term, as described in section 3. Most of the building work is associated with the presentation of the property. If it is decided at a later date to hold 20 Forthlin Road inalienably, then further building repairs for permanent preservation would have to be carried out at an estimated cost of £12,000.<sup>150</sup>

This estimate for future work was not included in the request amount, as it was part of the long-term vision. The operating income and expenditure budget estimates included in the application also made clear that such an amount would need to be raised independent of monies taken in from ticket and related retail and catering income at Speke Hall. Based on 84% potential visitor capacity, these activities are estimated to generate only £39,062 annually versus operating expenses for the same period of £38,862 (after management charges of 27% are applied), leaving only an annual surplus of £200 (roughly \$300).<sup>151</sup>

After the grant application was submitted, the Trust issued a press release announcing that it had received planning permission from the City of Liverpool to allow visitation to the home and that it was now attempting to secure funding for needed restoration work. According to Sarah Collins, Regional Communications Officer, the intent of the press release was to show that progress was being made regarding opening the home to the public but that it would still be some time before this happened.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 14, 29-33.

<sup>152</sup>Sarah Collins, National Trust Mercia Regional Communications Officer, interview by author, 29 September 1997, Shrewsbury, England, written notes.

Speaking with Trust personnel about the amount requested from the Heritage Lottery Fund, it was apparent there was not a consensus of opinion. Keith Halstead commented that the Trust did not wish to be seen as spending any money on 20 Forthlin Road, a statement which likely reflected sensitivity about the initially controversial nature of acquiring the home.<sup>153</sup> Yet, when the same question was put to Martin Drury, he responded emphatically that the amount was not low and that the Trust had been very honest with the HLF.<sup>154</sup>

Though not explicitly stated in its grant application, the Trust's decision to hold the home alienably for the immediate future allowed it to maintain the three original options set out for the home when it initially purchased the site: opening it to the public, maintaining it as a private residence to be rented out, or reselling it. In an early 1996 planning meeting, Managing Agent Keith Halstead articulated the Trust's strategy and financial concerns: "Our hope of proceeding with restoration and opening is not in conflict with deferring a decision re inalienability, providing an excessive amount is not spent that may not be recouped in the event of an eventual sale or through fundraising."<sup>155</sup> The Trust's application did spell out the factors which would guide its ultimate decision:

Although permanent preservation is the long term aim our immediate objective is to hold the property alienably until:

-The trial opening of the house to the public establishes the financial credentials of the property, which will be a quantifiable reflection of the public's support for it; and

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<sup>153</sup>Halstead, interview by author.

<sup>154</sup>Drury, interview by author.

<sup>155</sup>Keith Halstead, "Notes Arising from a Planning Meeting on 20, Forthlin Road Held in the Regional Office on Friday 23 February 1996," D (photocopy), National Trust Files, Shrewsbury, England, 2.

-The perception within the Trust and at large is that irreversible permanent preservation is right.<sup>156</sup>

By pursuing an HLF grant toward restoration and presentation expenses, however, the Trust was putting itself in a situation which would require its goals to be reconciled with the grantor's.

On 7 May 1997, the Trust received notification from the Heritage Lottery Fund that its request had been approved. Articles announcing the award followed in major national publications, though coverage was considerably less than the announcement of the original acquisition. Critical letters to editors were also correspondingly less profuse, but again contained predictable complaints about the money being better spent on hospitals or education or that the Beatles should pay for the restoration themselves.

The Trust received contract documents regarding the grant in September 1997, but they arrived with an unexpected requirement. Earlier decisions about the restoration philosophy and funding amount may have helped the Trust minimize chances of being refused, but they also may have led the HLF to insist that the Trust make a decision on whether the property was to receive inalienable status much earlier than the Trust had intended. The HLF contract stipulated that the grant was dependent upon the Trust making a decision on the status of the site in six months and if it chose not to retain ownership of the property, the HLF might require that the grant amount be repaid.<sup>157</sup> In discussions regarding this point, the Trust attempted to stress the need for perspective to make a proper decision about declaring the property inalienable.

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<sup>156</sup> National Trust, "Application to the Heritage Lottery Fund," 4.

<sup>157</sup> National Heritage Memorial Fund, "Dated 22nd October 1997, The Trustees of the National Heritage Memorial Fund and The National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty, Contract" D (photocopy), National Trust Files, Shrewsbury, England, 3, 9.

Only after experience of managing the site for an acceptable amount of time would the Trust be able to evaluate the success of the site in both financial and public perception terms.

In light of this, the Trust put forth the proposal that a minimum of a five-year period would be required.<sup>158</sup> The HLF was only somewhat responsive, stating that it would not be possible to amend the clause requiring the Trust to maintain possession of the property or forfeit the grant and that they would only be willing to extend the decision period to one year.<sup>159</sup> The Trust continued negotiations and was able to arrive at a more acceptable compromise of twenty-four months from the date of the contract, thereby allowing for sixteen months' experience in operating the site, assuming it was able to open the home on 1 July 1998. With these amendments in place, the contract was signed 22 October 1997, meaning that a decision on the site's alienability status would need to be made by 22 October 1999.<sup>160</sup>

Contract discussions had delayed the start of work by a month. With contracts in place, restoration work was given the go-ahead and, on 10 November 1997, workers started the first phase of the restoration, scheduled to last from six to eight weeks. This involved window and door replacement, steaming off of Artex and wallpaper, removal of the timber panel from around the fireplace, and removal of the fire

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<sup>158</sup>Keith Halstead, National Trust Managing Agent for 20 Forthlin Road, Shrewsbury, England, to The Solicitor for the National Trust, Queen Anne's Gate, London, "20 Forthlin Road, Liverpool: Contract with the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)," TLS (photocopy), 25 September 1997, National Trust Files, Shrewsbury, England.

<sup>159</sup>Deborah Drummond, Heritage Lottery Fund Contracts Officer, London, to Keith Halstead, National Trust Managing Agent for 20 Forthlin Road, Shrewsbury, 17 October 1997, "20 Forthlin Road, Liverpool," TLS (photocopy), National Trust Files, Shrewsbury, England.

<sup>160</sup>National Heritage Memorial Fund, "Contract," 9.

surround. The second phase, beginning in 1998, would include re-plastering, re-decoration, and finishes. Before starting, the surfaces uncovered would be analyzed and decisions then made regarding materials, colors, and styles to use.

Also requiring coordination was filming of the work in progress. Though the Trust media personnel had originally wanted to film discussions and events in the process of planning for the restoration as well as the work itself, a lack of funding and the exclusion of this work from the HLF grant request meant that such extensive documentation would not be possible.<sup>161</sup> A modest amount of funds was allocated for archival filming (£3,000) and the key points of the building work were to be recorded. This footage might allow for future production of a television program or a program to be shown at Speke Hall.<sup>162</sup>

The Trust had, however, been able to work with BBC's Director General John Birt (who had initially tipped off the organization that the home was for sale) to create a show about the restoration of 20 Forthlin Road for BBC's *One Foot in the Past* series. BBC and Trust Film crews were in place as the timber wall was torn down from the living room wall, as Artex was being steamed off the walls, and at various points throughout the restoration process. In order for the work to be properly viewed and lighted as well as the sound recorded, workmen became quasi-actors, stopping, starting, and often repeating the action as required. It was during this phase of the project that neighbors several homes up and across the street had decided to modernize their home by replacing their original windows. The head of the restoration crew

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<sup>161</sup>Keith Halstead, "Forthlin Road: Filming," D (photocopy), 14 October 1996, National Trust Files, Shrewsbury, England.

<sup>162</sup>Keith Halstead, "Forthlin Road: Notes of Project Management Team Meeting on Wednesday 9 July (1997) at the Regional Office," D (photocopy), National Trust Files, Shrewsbury, England, 2.

approached the owners to ask if the Trust could aid in the work to be able to take the windows which were being removed.<sup>163</sup> With their approval, this process was filmed, adding an unexpected twist to the story of the restoration.

In the fall of 1997, three companies were interviewed to produce the taped audio tour of the home. Space limitations made the creation of a linear tour difficult, because few rooms could comfortably hold the fifteen people possible with each tour group. Instead, the format was likely to involve a preliminary introduction for all the guests at the beginning of the tour in the living room. Then, people would be free to explore the home on their own, using an audio wand with pre-recorded segments accessible at the press of a button. Numbers posted throughout the home would cue people to the appropriate audio section. The Trust would interview Paul and Michael McCartney, the former occupant Sheila Jones, the Beatles' biographer Hunter Davies, and others who figured in the story of the home. Others included perhaps the Beatles, relatives, neighbors, and people who knew Mary and Jim McCartney. Beatles music might be included, although arrangements would have to be made through Apple Corps Ltd.

A souvenir booklet would also be created for sale to those visiting the home. It would place the site in its historical and social housing context and discuss the McCartney family and the Beatles at Forthlin Road. It would also review the Trust's reasons for acquiring the home and its restoration philosophy. The booklet would be written in a series of essays by journalists and its design would be innovative rather than the "usual NT house-style."<sup>164</sup> Paul McCartney agreed to write an introduction

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<sup>163</sup>Though the homeowners had been delivered the newsletter requesting help in locating original 1950s windows, they had not responded to the request.

<sup>164</sup>Keith Halstead, "Forthlin Road: Notes of Project Management Team Meeting on Thursday 8 May (1997) at the Regional Office," D (photocopy), National Trust Files, Shrewsbury, England, 3.

for the guidebook and approved the use of some family photographs. The use of album covers would require agreements with Apples Corps, Ltd.<sup>165</sup> Other than the guidebook, only a postcard with an image of the home's exterior would be offered for sale. These would be displayed at the National Trust gift shop at Speke Hall because room was very limited at 20 Forthlin Road.

Before the public opening, scheduled for July 1998, several projects would need to be completed. Michael McCartney had agreed to the display of his photographs in the home. Prints would need to be chosen, enlarged, readied for display, and mounted in appropriate points throughout the site. Hunter Davies had offered several items from his collection of Beatles memorabilia and a special case with appropriate security hardware would need to be made to hold them. Furnishings purchased or received through donation would need to be moved into the home, as well as all of the equipment required to charge the audio wands for the tour.

Though the audio tour production and equipment were one of the major unsponsored presentation expenses, the Trust was able to secure the donation of £10,000 from Railtrack for a minibus to transport groups to and from Speke Hall. Other pieces of the project were tagged as items for which sponsors should be sought, but without such sponsorship the Trust would need to locate existing funds to ready the site. The Trust identified the Parkin Bequest for properties in the region. By September 1997, Keith Halstead had contacted the executors of the Bequest and secured initial approval that up to £14,000 could be allocated from the bequest for use toward project expenses. The filming, guidebook, telephone line, photography, and a

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<sup>165</sup>Halstead, "Project Management Team Meeting on Thursday 8 May (1997)," 3.

sum to meet the first-year operating deficit were identified as initial expenses for use by the funds.<sup>166</sup>

Opening festivities would need to be arranged for different groups. To attract media coverage, it was likely that one opening would be planned for celebrities, among which the Trust hoped would be Paul McCartney. A separate function might be held for funders, another for the Forthlin road neighbors and Liverpool dignitaries, and finally, one for the public.

The Trust hoped to use the advertisement for the position of resident Custodian as a means of attracting further press coverage. This was successfully achieved and attracted many applicants. By May 1998, the Trust had chosen John Halliday of Lowton for the position. The date to open the home to the public was set for 29 July 1998.

### How Successful

It can be said that the best possible owner for 20 Forthlin Road was the National Trust. This organization not only possessed the financial resources and reputation to obtain further funding to properly care for the site, but also treated the home with a preservation sensitivity that most likely would have been lacking from purchasers interested in using the site for purely profit-oriented purposes. Its preservation-driven mission provided the motivation to move forward with a project where revenue estimates, constrained by limited visitation numbers and hours, were small enough to make the venture too risky for a purely profit-driven entity.

This preservation mission was not the only factor which uniquely positioned the Trust to successfully open 20 Forthlin Road to the public. Given the wariness of

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<sup>166</sup>Keith Halstead, "Forthlin Road, Notes of Project Management Team Meeting on Wednesday 10 September 1997 at the Regional Office," D (photocopy), National Trust Files, Shrewsbury, England, 5.



the local community and planning department, the creation of a management plan which minimized tourist visitation impact was key to receiving planning approval for the project. With nearby Speke Hall as one of its properties, the Trust had in place a facility to resolve visitor intake and parking issues. The organization's respected standing, strengthened by its local presence at Speke Hall, no doubt provided an additional level of reassurance to the neighbors and planning department in their consideration of this precedent-setting project.

The Trust also had the foresight to make the purchase of the home contingent upon the approval of the McCartney family. By seeking this alliance at the very beginning of the project, critical allies were established. Without Mike's photographs or Paul's support, the project would have lacked vital presentation and publicity tools. Here, too, the Trust's name played a major part in obtaining cooperation, for the McCartneys, rightfully fearful of people willing to exploit them at every turn, had faith that the organization would treat the home and their involvement with utmost respect.

The credence lent to the value of preserving a 1950s council house was greatly aided by the stature of this century-old institution. Though criticized in editorials and by a small portion of its membership, the Trust defended its action repeatedly and further established the legitimacy of focusing preservation resources on vernacular, 20th-century architecture and popular culture. The Trust was aided in this by the National Heritage Memorial Fund's award of a grant via the Heritage Lottery Fund, adding a second layer of national-level approval. It is worthwhile to note that English Heritage moved in the same direction in 1997 by installing a "blue plaque" on the exterior wall of the apartment Jimi Hendrix lived in while establishing his musical career in London.<sup>167</sup> No doubt the precedent established by the National Trust figured

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<sup>167</sup>"Blue plaques" are the round, blue, ceramic plaques about the size of a dinner plate which English Heritage installs primarily on the façades of former homes of nationally famous people who have contributed significantly to their field. Only after the person

in this decision to venture beyond typical plaque recipients of statesmen and scientists to include rock music legends and will likely continue to be a point of reference in the acknowledgment of sites significant for their connection to famous popular musicians.

Though it was at the urging of local residents that someone live at the home, the Trust chose to honor this suggestion and maintain its original use as a residence, thereby minimizing changes needed for adaptive reuse. The Trust also was inspired to establish an audio tour format and photographic displays to meet the needs of sophisticated visitors who want to have audio and visual information readily at hand and in a very immediate form. This set-up stands in vivid contrast to the majority of Trust sites, such as Speke Hall, where visitors may purchase written guides or read information sheets posted in rooms along the route. Typically, volunteer docents posted in various rooms stand ready to answer questions, but do not actively lead participants through a tour.

The Trust's efforts to create an audio tour with the voices of Paul and Mike McCartney, Hunter Davies, McCartney relatives and others who had firsthand knowledge of the site and the Beatles' story combined with the use of Mike McCartney's photographs show the staff's awareness of the need to create visual and audio narrative which appeals directly to visitors' inspiration for visiting the site--the

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in question has been dead 20 years can a blue plaque be installed. The plaque includes a brief statement about the person who lived at the home but does not provide any form of protection for the site. The program, begun in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the Royal Society of the Arts, focused solely on London until 1998 when E.H. started to commemorate sites outside the capital. In 2000 they focused on the Merseyside region and John Lennon's Menlove Avenue home received a blue plaque. English Heritage, "Selection Criteria" [English Heritage website on-line]; available from [http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/default.asp?wci=mainframe&URL1=/ie/SearchResultsTitle.asp%3Fsearchtext%3Dblue%20plaque%26site\\_id%3D4%26nodes%3D83%2C7282%2C108%2C161%2C107%2C142%2C130%2C125%2C6965%2C6744%2C6443%2C146%2C190%2C191%2C4997%26searchtype%3Dsite%26searchkeyphrase%3Dboth](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/default.asp?wci=mainframe&URL1=/ie/SearchResultsTitle.asp%3Fsearchtext%3Dblue%20plaque%26site_id%3D4%26nodes%3D83%2C7282%2C108%2C161%2C107%2C142%2C130%2C125%2C6965%2C6744%2C6443%2C146%2C190%2C191%2C4997%26searchtype%3Dsite%26searchkeyphrase%3Dboth); Internet; accessed 10 December 2004.

people who made it significant. By capturing the words of these individuals, not possible at other sites where such figures are long gone, the Trust is also creating a historic archive through this work. This approach is not necessarily taken at other historic music sites. Graceland achieved it by creating a tour of the mansion narrated by Priscilla Presley, giving the experience a personal feel. But at Sun Studios in Memphis, Chess Records in Chicago, and the Motown Historic Museum in Detroit, tours are led by a guide who relates the information, supplemented by a video detailing history or by an audiotape of music created at the location. Though informative, such a format lacks the immediacy of firsthand narration possible only by using those people who were part of the site's history.

#### How Not Successful

The National Trust has staff expert in paintings, furnishings, wallpaper, and other facets of preservation one would expect with its holdings of sites from centuries past, but it does not have a Beatles expert. Nor did it plan to contract with one. This left the organization at a disadvantage in locating and assessing certain resources for the project.

Such topic-specific expertise would have been helpful in advising the Trust in 1996 when they were approached by John "Duff" Lowe, whom the Trust believed to be one of the Quarrymen, the group begun by John Lennon which eventually transformed into the Beatles. Though the Trust generally had a healthy dose of skepticism when contacted by people purporting Beatles connections, they failed to research Mr. Lowe's full story. Mr. Lowe had been an "occasional pianist"<sup>168</sup> with the Quarrymen and his possession of a 1958 recording by Lennon, McCartney, Harrison

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<sup>168</sup>Kozinn, 22.

and Lowe of ‘That’ll Be the Day’ and ‘In Spite of All the Danger’ had earlier led Paul McCartney to enter into a legal suit against Mr. Lowe to obtain it at a cost of \$10,000. Given the Trust’s careful protection of its relationship with the McCartneys, the oversight of involving someone unlikely to be on good terms with Paul would have been better avoided.

The Trust’s lack of familiarity with the Beatles allowed them to overlook people who would have been able to provide perspective on the Liverpool era of the group’s history and 20 Forthlin Road in particular. As cited earlier in this chapter, Len Garry’s book documents one of many of the Quarrymen’s visits to 20 Forthlin Road. Yet, at the November 1997 project management meeting, the suggestion to interview members of the Quarrymen was met with a lack of interest. Not only did the Trust miss the chance to involve people who, as direct contemporaries, fellow musicians, and friends of the young Beatles, would have been able to evoke the time and place the Trust wished to capture at Forthlin Road, but they also missed an opportunity to distinguish the site in the world of Beatles scholarship by recording a part of the Beatles’ story which is under documented.<sup>169</sup> In terms of visitor appeal, weaving the Quarrymen’s perspectives into the story of 20 Forthlin Road would have provided fans with a welcome change from the usual fare of Beatles history. Fans who go all the way to Liverpool are likely to be even more intensely interested in the early lives of the Beatles and hence the story of the Quarrymen.

Oversights also occurred with the Trust’s research into the history of the physical structure. The Trust contracted an “archaeological survey” of the site which

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<sup>169</sup> Until Len Garry’s 1997 book, Quarrymen member Pete Shotton had written the only other book which included a detailed history of this group. In 2001, Hunter Davies, the Beatles’ only official biographer, considered their story important enough to write a profile of the group, *The Quarrymen* (London: Omnibus Press, 2001).

established the building's type, construction date, and architect as well as history on the development of the area and its social housing context. However, Trust staff did not undertake comprehensive research on photographic documentation of the site to provide as much information as possible on the building's interior, exterior, and furnishings during the McCartney inhabitation. Given the relative ease with which such photographs could be found, such an omission was surprising. The Trust seemed content to rely on Michael McCartney's photographs and accompanying descriptions, rather than conduct a larger search to verify this information and find supplementary documentation. Given that Michael McCartney's images did not document all portions of the home, such research would have been understandably justified by the need for historical accuracy. Certainly the Trust's choice not to do an exact recreation of the interior meant that knowledge of every furnishing and architectural detail was not crucial, but in replacing windows, doors, and other fixtures, and in making decisions on what furnishings offered them would be accepted, such photographic proof would have helped the staff to make more informed decisions.

When it came to work on the actual structure, the Trust neglected the water leakage problems with the roof and walls of both the home and the rear garden shed. Without a long-term commitment to the property, the Trust was not willing to commit the funds needed for such work. Unfortunately, the problems in question were actively damaging original materials, and the initial reluctance to secure funding for repairs will allow further disintegration of the original fabric and likely greater expense in the future.

In terms of administration, the National Trust is a very large organization with a strongly hierarchical approach to decision-making. Actions are taken only after approval has been received from those in higher positions of authority, often a lengthy process which does not easily accommodate timely response. For example, when

neighbors offered doors and furniture for use in 20 Forthlin Road, this offer had to be passed up the chain of command to the Historic Buildings Representative to consider a response. A definite response had yet to be given a few years into the project.

Though initially such delay was due to a need for research, even after this had been conducted, no immediate action was taken when a similar offer was made in the fall of 1997. To its credit, this type of considered response protected the Trust from potentially awkward situations posed by accepting inappropriate furniture. At the same time, it was likely puzzling and perhaps frustrating for people who sincerely wanted to assist with the project.

When a newsletter went out to people in Forthlin Road asking for help in locating original 1950s windows, doors, and a fireplace, it listed a staff telephone number in Shrewsbury to call rather than a local contact.<sup>170</sup> When it was pointed out to the Trust that this might prevent Liverpoolians from making such a call, no change was made. Control over the project was closely held by Shrewsbury staff and this allowed for arguably necessary regulation of all aspects of the project. It did not, however, encourage individuals to take initiative at other locations or levels.

Had local Liverpoolian staff, such as those at the Speke estate, been in direct contact with Forthlin Road residents, perhaps their proximity and greater likelihood of

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<sup>170</sup> In 1996, the National Trust had sixteen regional offices. Presumably this set-up allowed for the most effective fundraising and management of properties. The Mercia Regional Office (including the counties of Cheshire, Merseyside, Shropshire, Greater Manchester, most of Staffordshire, and part of the West Midlands) was located in Shrewsbury, approximately 65 miles from Liverpool. Although Liverpool is second only to London in number of listed buildings, the National Trust had only one building in Liverpool (two with the addition of 20 Forthlin Road) out of the twenty or so staffed properties in the region, so it was not a natural choice for the region's headquarters. Shropshire County, in which Shrewsbury was located, contained six Trust buildings and was more centrally located for the region as a whole. National Trust, *The National Trust Handbook for Members and Visitors 1996* (London: The National Trust, 1996), 24-25, 178-180, 206-210.

community connections would have allowed them to be more effective in establishing relationships than Shrewsbury staff. The neighbors who were in the process of taking out their windows down the street from 20 Forthlin Road in November 1997 obviously had not responded to the Trust's newsletter request. When the local head workman for 20 Forthlin Road went to the home and spoke with them, they agreed to donate the windows. Establishing such direct contact beforehand might have helped to prevent the need for such reactive measures. Though homeowners who had attended earlier Trust meetings had indicated they did not feel a need for regular meetings, perhaps occasional meetings including local staff who were working on the project would have been productive in this respect. Such occurrences would have been difficult to predict, however, so it is difficult to criticize the Trust for this omission.

Trust staff did appear to be more aware of potential sensitivity to class issues, however. The media strategy outlined by Tony Berry in November 1995, though primarily dealing with the Trust image regarding a perceived change in direction by the organization, undoubtedly reflected such issues: "We have to be aware that Forthlin Road is taking the Trust boldly into areas it has never gone before, and that there could be a perceived clash between its traditional image and the material we are presenting. We have to be aware of this, and all participants should dress as neutrally as possible--tweed is out, sober single-breasted lounge suits are in!"<sup>171</sup> There were, nevertheless, some gaffes by Trust personnel. In one instance, Trust staff referred to the living room of Forthlin Road as a "parlour" in an article, a comment which led to criticism.

The initial decision not to extensively recreate the interior furnishings of 20

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<sup>171</sup>Berry, "Acquisition of 20 Forthlin Road: Media Strategy," 4.

Forthlin Road was overturned. Given the nature of extensively-appointed interiors at other Trust sites, people likely would have been terribly disappointed by 20 Forthlin Road and negative reaction could have spread to hurt the number of visitors at the site.<sup>172</sup> Perhaps the initial public response was too important in determining the future of this site and they were not ready to take that big a risk. Instead they maintained a compromise, leaving some post-McCartney elements in place such as the fireplace and the existing wallpaper.

The tight schedule forced upon the Trust by the National Heritage Memorial Fund for reviewing public response and corresponding financial success may give such short-term indicators an unduly significant role in its decision regarding the holding status of the site. This unfortunate requirement will pose a difficult decision upon the Trust. One hopes that the great deal of good work undertaken in so many respects by the Trust will lead to a positive response and allow this organization to protect this significant site forever.

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<sup>172</sup>Gibbs, interview by author.



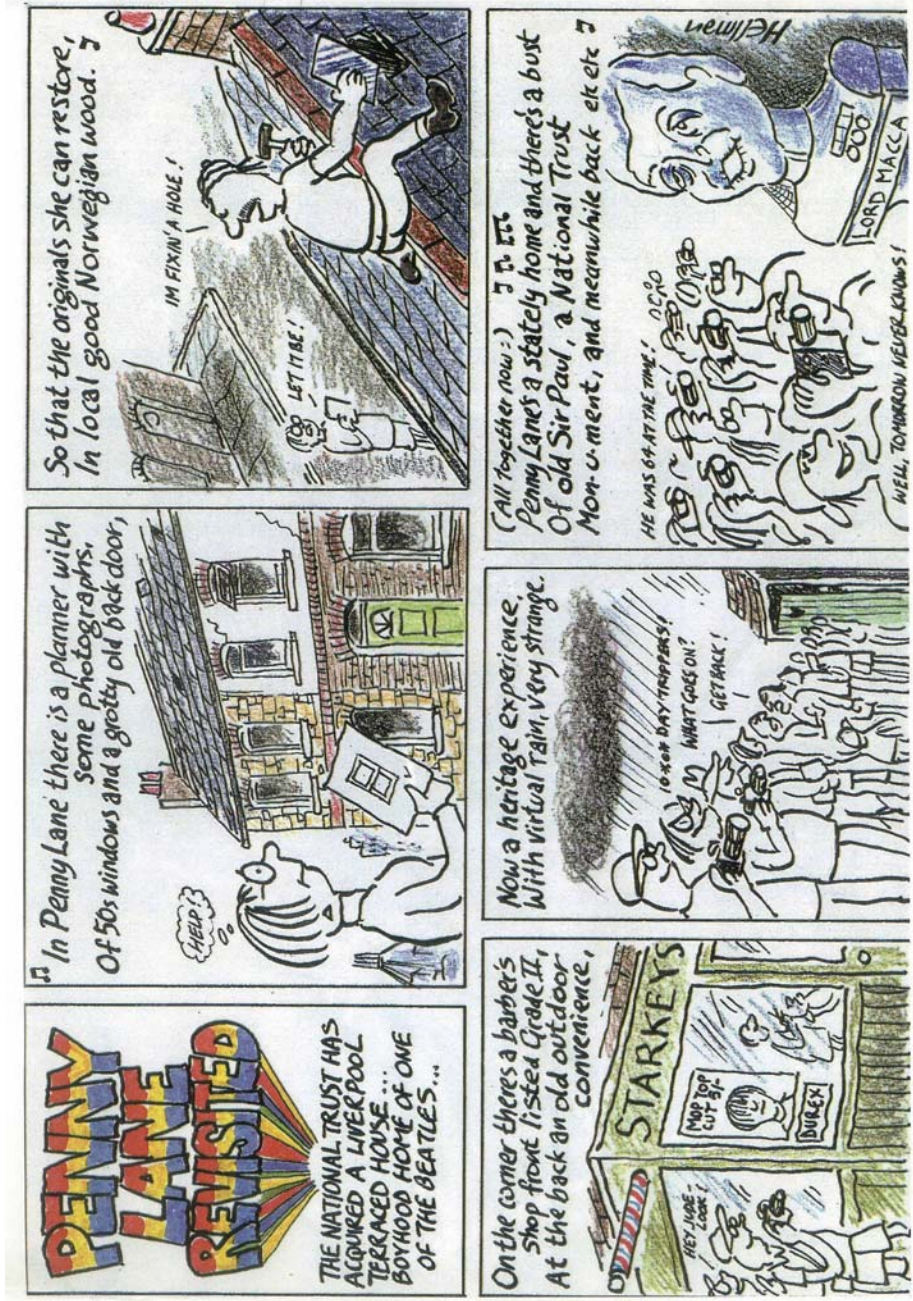


Figure 21. Cartoon about the National Trust & 20 Forthlin Road. Hellman, "Penny Lane Revisited," *Architects' Journal*, 6 November 1997.

CHAPTER TWO  
CHESS RECORDS OFFICE AND STUDIO:  
2120 SOUTH MICHIGAN AVENUE, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Introduction

Most likely, the two-story building at number 2120 South Michigan Avenue in Chicago, Illinois would have continued to house unremarkable light manufacturing businesses. But between 1957 and 1967, after the Chess brothers bought and rehabbed the structure into offices and a recording studio for their fledgling music firm, out of it came some of the recordings most responsible for defining blues and rock and roll for America and the world. Muddy Waters, Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, and Howlin' Wolf are some of the artists who recorded at 2120<sup>173</sup> and whose music influenced upcoming generations of musicians and the very direction of popular music.

The site was accorded landmark status by the City of Chicago in 1990. In 1992, it was purchased and donated to the Blues Heaven Foundation for use as the non-profit foundation's headquarters. The Commission on Chicago Landmarks (CCL) staff worked with the Blues Heaven Foundation for the remainder of the decade to guide the site's rehabilitation.

By examining the history of Chicago and specifically its South Side, the confluence of players in the Chess Records story takes on greater significance in its reflection of this larger sweep of events. The chapter begins with this discussion and then details the city's current preservation climate to place the project in local context. Next, the site's significance is reviewed and the key elements of the preservation effort, landmarking and rehabilitation, are outlined. Finally, the outcome of the project is evaluated.

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<sup>173</sup> "2120" will be used throughout this chapter to refer to 2120 South Michigan Avenue.

## Historical Overview

### Chicago History

Chicago sits at the western edge of the southern tip of Lake Michigan, one of the five Great Lakes along which people and goods were transported across the country before railroads provided an alternative. Jean Baptiste Point Du Sable, a black trader, built a cabin near the mouth of the Chicago River around 1779, becoming the area's first permanent resident.<sup>174</sup> The city, chartered in 1837, was founded along the banks of this river which extends westward from Lake Michigan.<sup>175</sup>

By the 1850s, progress of the railroad to Chicago and beyond secured the city's place in the nation as a transportation hub. Farm products and timber were shipped around the United States via its rail and water highways.<sup>176</sup> The Civil War fueled the city's industries, including slaughtering for which the Union Stock Yards were opened in 1865, making Chicago the leading pork-packing city.<sup>177</sup>

In 1871, a third of the city was consumed by a fire which made its way from south of downtown upward along the Lake to the northern edge of town, destroying over 17,000 structures.<sup>178</sup> Chicago went to work re-building. Overcrowding and the pollution of inner-city factories in the following decades contributed to the exodus of middle and upper classes to outer sections of the city and suburbs now serviced by expanding horse car lines or commuter railways.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> American Institute of Architects Chicago and others, *AIA Guide to Chicago* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1993), 4.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 6.

As communities outside the city's edges built up, Chicago annexed them, spiking the population to 300,000 in 1870 and over a million in 1890.<sup>180</sup> The latter effort also quadrupled the city's square footage overnight, making it second in size only to New York City.<sup>181</sup> The city's cultural life also developed, its most visible jump culminating in the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893, for which many of the country's best architects were recruited to create a model city thereby demonstrating to the world the sophistication of this once isolated western outpost.

Daniel H. Burnham's privately-sponsored 1909 *Plan of Chicago* called for orderly transportation networks, more open space, and strict land use planning.<sup>182</sup> Though never fully realized, much of the lakefront was successfully reserved for recreation, and Chicago's first comprehensive zoning law of 1923 grew out of the plan.<sup>183</sup> Its setback requirements for skyscrapers and the creation of business districts at major transit intersections throughout the city echoed Burnham's push for controlled density.<sup>184</sup>

One problem not touched by Burnham's plan was the slum areas surrounding the downtown area. Property owners chose not to invest in these areas abandoned by middle and upper classes and yet kept them as potential sites for downtown expansion.<sup>185</sup> This was where immigrants could afford housing, most of it

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 17.

substandard, decrepit, and without modern conveniences of heat or lighting in every room. Political bosses found these areas a ready breeding ground for profit-making vice and used connections to keep reformers from making significant progress for the people living there.<sup>186</sup>

During the Depression, construction of large-scale buildings ceased. New Deal money fed public works projects: bridges, sidewalks, viaducts, public housing, and a subway system.<sup>187</sup> World War II helped Chicago resume its prominence as an industrial powerhouse, though large plants were now built at the outer sections of the city and in the suburbs.<sup>188</sup>

By the 1950s, superhighways were being constructed to facilitate movement toward the suburbs. Mall developments, television, and increasing dependence on the automobile led to the disintegration of neighborhoods' business and entertainment centers. Chicago's population peaked in 1950 at 3.6 million and has been steadily losing to the growing metro population numbers ever since.<sup>189</sup>

Chicago remains a leading industrial center, but manufacturing has taken second place to the service sector.<sup>190</sup> At the same time, companies founded in the heart of the city such as Sears have abandoned downtown for industrial parks in the suburbs and a tension exists between the pull of these easy access areas and the center city.<sup>191</sup> Spurred by the Tax Reform Act of 1981, renovation of historic downtown

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 22.

structures brought new interest to the area.<sup>192</sup> Under Mayor Richard M. Daley, using tools such as Tax Increment Financing, both the downtown and Chicago's neighborhoods are seeking to become more competitive with their suburban counterparts.

### South Side Chicago History

The Chicago River heads straight west from Lake Michigan through the city center and then forks northwest and southeast. These natural lines of demarcation helped define three broad groupings of Chicago's neighborhoods—the North, South, and West Sides. (See Figure 22.) Chess Records was founded on the South Side where the majority of the city's black and Jewish populations were anchored. This region's concentration of ethnic and racial populations created the culture out of which Chess Records was born. An overview of the South Side's history is therefore relevant.

Though the majority of Chicago's black population initially clustered on the South Side of Chicago living on the same blocks as whites, the decades leading up to 1900 saw their concentration into the "Black Belt."<sup>193</sup> This long, thin band, a few blocks wide, grew from south of the downtown to 39<sup>th</sup> Street, hemmed in on the west by the factories and rail yards west of Wentworth Avenue and on the east by the wealthy white enclaves beyond Wabash Avenue.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>193</sup> Mike Rowe, *Chicago Blues: The City & the Music* (Originally published *Chicago Breakdown*. London: Eddison Press, 1973; New York: Da Capo Press, 1975.), 34.

<sup>194</sup> Commission on Chicago Landmarks, "Black Metropolis Historic District, Submitted to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks on March 7, 1984, Revised in December 1994" (Chicago: Commission on Chicago Landmarks, 1994), 2.



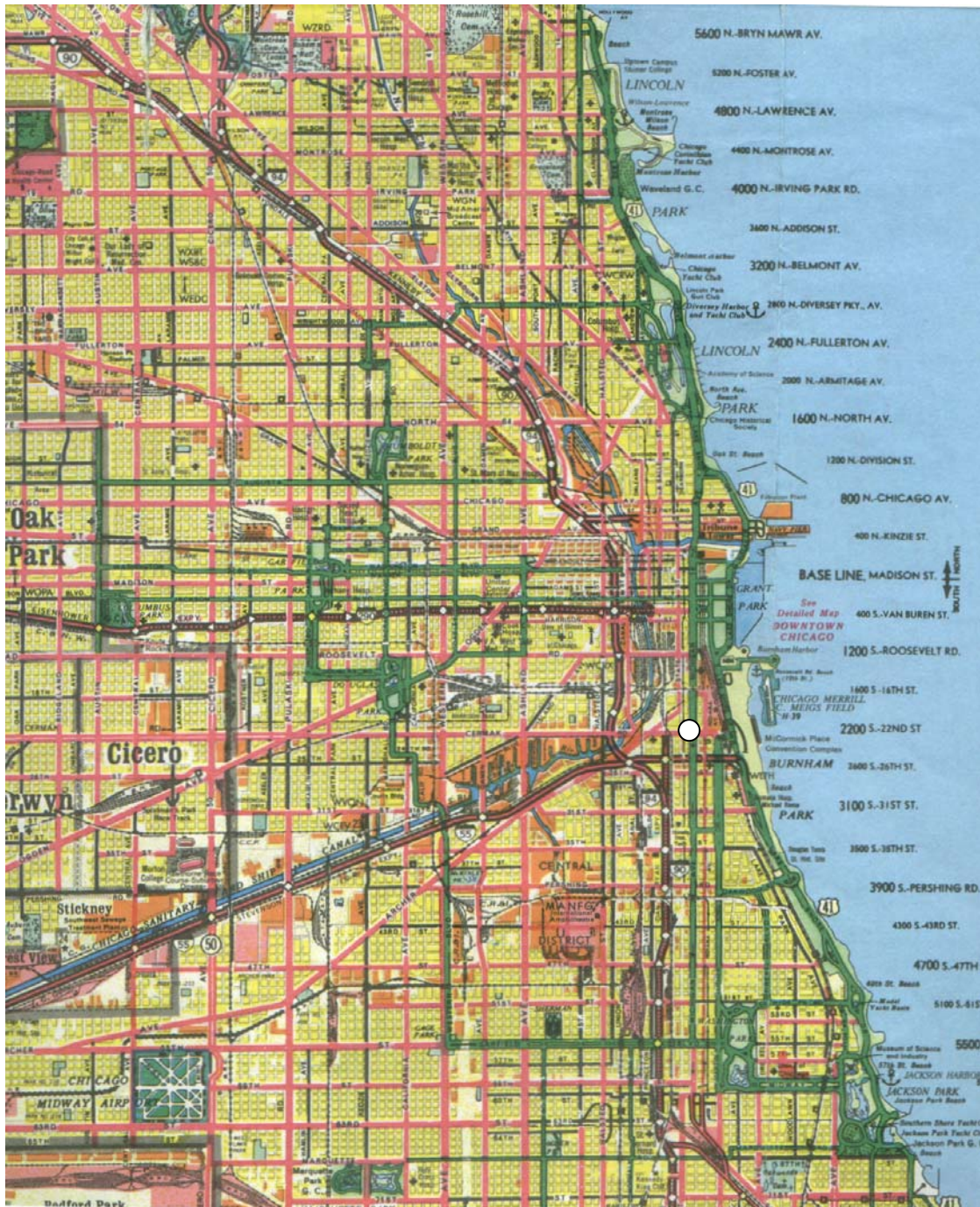


Figure 22. Map of Chicago with Lake Michigan and the Chicago River in blue.  
 The white dot denotes the location of the Chess Records office and studio.  
 Rand McNally, Chicagoland Map, 1996.

The disparity in wages between blacks and whites contributed to this segregation. With the large labor pool created by extensive immigration of European settlers into Chicago, better-paying industrial jobs were closed to blacks before World War I. Typical jobs available to blacks included work as janitors, servants or porters.<sup>195</sup>

When World War I cut off the steady supply of European labor and the draft called many men into service, the need for rapid expansion of industry provided blacks with their first opportunities to work in Chicago's burgeoning steel, meat-packing, and equipment-manufacturing firms.<sup>196</sup> While northern industries were increasing production to meet the needs of the war effort, the Delta and other cotton-producing areas were suffering from crop failures due to parasite invasions and heavy flooding.<sup>197</sup> Southern blacks who had depended on sharecropping for their living left in droves for northern cities. Between 1910 and 1920, Chicago's black population increased by 148%.<sup>198</sup>

Despite increasing economic means, however, racial discrimination kept blacks trapped within overcrowded areas.<sup>199</sup> The continuing decline of slums south of the downtown<sup>200</sup> combined with the drastic need for more housing led black families to venture into previously all-white neighborhoods. The Irish to the west and Jews to

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<sup>195</sup> Robert Palmer, *Deep Blues* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 138.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> American Institute of Architects Chicago and others, 18.

<sup>200</sup> Rowe, 34.



the east near Lake Michigan<sup>201</sup> served as buffers between blacks and better off whites.<sup>202</sup> Housing was limited on the west by the rail yards and factories, so the greatest expansion took place southward and eastward. Cottage Grove became the new eastern boundary with the major concentration of residences starting at Thirty-first Street and extending south to Sixty-Third Street.<sup>203</sup> In spite of the expansion of the Black Belt, overcrowding remained a problem. Market demand allowed rents to remain high even though the majority of dwellings were poorly-maintained, old, frame houses, sometimes lacking modern heating and electricity or indoor plumbing.<sup>204</sup>

Most of the blacks who moved to Chicago were from the deep South. The *Chicago Defender*, then the most popular black newspaper in the country, actively encouraged migration there during World War I. As the world's busiest railroad terminal, many of the country's lines led to the city, providing a direct route to this new home.<sup>205</sup>

In 1930, blacks made up seven percent of the city's population at almost 234,000.<sup>206</sup> The migration of blacks to Chicago slowed between the wars, but between 1940 and 1950, the black population increased 77%<sup>207</sup> from 278,000 to

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<sup>201</sup> Nadine Cohodas, *Spinning Blues Into Gold* (St. Martin's Press: New York, 2000), 16-17.

<sup>202</sup> Palmer, 139.

<sup>203</sup> Cohodas, 16.

<sup>204</sup> Palmer, 139.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>206</sup> Rowe, 34.

<sup>207</sup> Palmer, 140.

492,000.<sup>208</sup> In spite of the inequalities experienced by blacks in their new home, conditions for many were better than living in the South. Better education, living areas, wages, health care, and treatment from the law were cited as reasons so many stayed in their new home.<sup>209</sup> Another reason was undoubtedly the social and cultural opportunities the city provided. During Prohibition, a lively club scene became well-established on the South Side as well as a few spots on the west and north sides of the city.<sup>210</sup> In these clubs, black patrons could hear the music they knew from their Southern homes as many black musicians from the South had migrated along with their audiences.

Entertainment was just one draw of Bronzeville, centered around State and 35th Streets. In this district, which began to take shape around the turn of the century and experienced its heyday during the 1920s, the city's first black-owned businesses were founded and prospered. From insurance to newspapers to nightclubs, these firms served the city's and the nation's black clientele, acting as a self-contained "city-within-a-city."<sup>211</sup>

Noting the success of Bronzeville, white businessmen began to see the potential of catering to the black market. Local and out-of-town white entrepreneurs eventually created a competing business district just twelve blocks south of

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<sup>208</sup> Cohodas, 19.

<sup>209</sup> Palmer, 141.

<sup>210</sup> Rowe, 41.

<sup>211</sup> Commission on Chicago Landmarks, "Black Metropolis Historic District," 1-8.

Bronzeville along 47<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>212</sup> A department store, theater, ballroom, and apartments built for black clientele drew them to this new district.<sup>213</sup>

It was in the area between these two business districts that Leonard Chess would open his first bar. During the thirties, the area had remained mostly white and its blocks of small retail stores served as a racial boundary line. The racial dynamic changed in the early 1940s when some white businessmen bought and renovated a former brothel into a hotel for blacks. The DuSable Hotel was instantly well-received and became known for its high-profile clients such as black entertainers Fats Waller and Louis Armstrong, performers who could not stay at the hotels where they performed in the “white downtown.”<sup>214</sup> The establishment’s success prompted others to open night spots nearby and by the mid-forties the area between 3800 and 4000 South Cottage Grove was a lively business and entertainment scene.<sup>215</sup>

The preceding historic context provides the means to see how the story of Chess Records reflects the larger turn of events in Chicago during the middle of the twentieth century. It should also give some insight into the racial dynamics at play as two Jewish immigrants founded a company to record music primarily by and for African-Americans. The effort required to protect the Chess Records site likewise is better understood with a grasp of the historic preservation atmosphere of Chicago.

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>213</sup> Cohodas, 17-18.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

### Local Historic Preservation Context

Chicago's historic preservation ordinance requires all permit applications for alteration or demolition of pending or approved landmarks to be reviewed by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks. This body has the political strength to deny most of the inappropriate ones. As of February 1998, Chicago had 141 individual landmarks and 30 historic districts for a total of over 7,000 buildings receiving some level of protection.<sup>216</sup>

In 1997, the preservation ordinance was strengthened by the reversal of a provision to deny landmark status for buildings whose status had not been voted on by the City Council within one year from their approval by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks. In the same year, the city passed a law waiving permit fees for landmark owners and the county approved a tax abatement measure for income-producing, landmarked buildings undergoing renovation. Support for these changes came from Mayor Richard M. Daley. He has proved to be a remarkably active proponent of preservation, pushing aldermen to pass improvements to Chicago's preservation ordinance and intervening on behalf of certain structures threatened with demolition or obsolescence.

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<sup>216</sup>For comparison, here are the number of designated landmarks in some other major U.S. cities as of June 1996:

	<u>Individual Landmarks</u>	<u>Historic Districts</u>	<u>Total Structures</u>
Atlanta	*	*	2500
Boston	67	7	*
Chicago	124	30	7,000+
New York	1,100	[18,900 buildings]	20,000
Philadelphia	*	*	8,500
Seattle	200	7	*

\*This information not obtained.

These statistics are from Kandilyn Hahn, "Final Report on a Survey of Selected City Preservation Ordinances" for Commission on Chicago Landmarks, 1996, author's personal files, Chicago, Appendix C.

This is a relatively recent phenomenon. As recently as 1987 the Mayor sided with developers to de-designate a downtown landmark, the McCarthy Building, so it could be demolished to make way for a new development, thereby establishing a chilling precedent.<sup>217</sup> Overall, Chicago is known for such pro-development support. Though currently under review thanks to Mayor Daley, the 1957 zoning code still used by the city has allowed this tradition to continue. This has meant the loss of some of America's richest architectural treasures, including buildings by H.H. Richardson, Dankmar Adler and Louis Sullivan, and Frank Lloyd Wright, to name but a few.<sup>218</sup>

Another factor contributing to pro-development practice is the power of aldermen to determine what projects take place in their wards.<sup>219</sup> This system has allowed private deal-making to decide outcomes more readily than public debate. Exceptions occur when the community creates a body large enough and strong enough to insist on a voice in the process, such as in Old Town, one of the first neighborhoods to become a local historic district in the 1970s, where the Old Town Triangle

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<sup>217</sup> The McCarthy Building, designed by John Mills Van Osdel, was built in 1872. Van Osdel established the city's first architectural firm in the 1841 and was the city's most well-known architect of the pre-fire (pre-1871) period. The building was one of a handful of his structures still in existence and one of only two remaining cast-iron fronted buildings in the city. "John Mills Van Osdel,"; available from <http://www.chicagotribute.org/Markers/Osdel.htm>; Internet; accessed 10 December 2004.

The entire block was demolished including two theaters. Ironically, this area is now promoted by the city as Chicago's Theater District. Financing fell through for the proposed development and the city has been unsuccessful in putting together a deal to rebuild on the site ever since. The entire block, known as Block 37, remains vacant as of 2004.

<sup>218</sup> Richard Cahan, *They All Fall Down: Richard Nickel's Struggle to Save America's Architecture* (Washington, D.C: Preservation Press, 1994), 114, 127-136.

<sup>219</sup> Patrick T. Reardon and Blair Kamin, "The City that Wrecks," *Chicago Tribune*, 14 January 2003, sec. 5(C), 5.

Association is routinely consulted regarding zoning and development issues.

Broader preservation constituencies have been created via a handful of non-profits. Begun in 1971, the best-known is the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois (LPCI), a statewide group based in Chicago. This membership organization serves as a vocal advocate for preservation, provides assistance for specific projects, and carries out a host of educational and awareness programs. Over its three decades, the organization has held easements, undertaken restoration projects, filed lawsuits and pushed for legislation and tax incentives, all in the name of preserving Illinois' historic assets.<sup>220</sup> Other Chicago nonprofits have a specific focus, such as Inspired Partnerships (working to preserve religious structures), Friends of the Parks, and Friends of the Chicago River.

National preservation efforts also have a presence in the city with the National Trust's Midwest Regional Office located there. The Trust has served as a partner with other non-profits, joining in litigation with LPCI, providing guidance and expertise for specific projects, and, more recently, providing direct assistance to the city's planning staff on issues such as design guidelines.

Overall, Chicago's preservation community is organized and has tools at its disposal to protect structures. On the flip side, the city's laws and practices favor the power of those with economic means to build what they want where they want. Saving the city's historic sites remains a constant challenge.

### 2120 South Michigan's Significance

Given the pro-development tradition of Chicago, buildings nominated for

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<sup>220</sup> Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois, "About LPCI" [Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois website on-line]; available from [http://www.landmarks.org/about\\_lpci.htm](http://www.landmarks.org/about_lpci.htm); Internet; accessed 18 January 2003.

landmark status need a solid case for significance. To explore the importance of 2120 South Michigan Avenue's history, we begin with a look at the business which made the location famous—the music business. Specifically, we focus on the recording of blues.

Increasing competition within the industry and the increasing presence and income of blacks within large cities led large record companies like Paramount, Okeh, Victor, and Columbia to begin creating lines of “race” records, made by and for blacks, in the 1920s.<sup>221</sup> These companies were headquartered in the northeast and initially recorded artists in local studios. When demand for these records became evident, companies brought some musicians north but teams were also sent to Chicago, Detroit, Memphis, New Orleans and throughout the Mississippi Delta to find and record black artists. Outside of large cities where no studio was available, they would set up electrical recording systems in a hotel, church, or other available space.<sup>222</sup>

When the Depression led a number of these companies to close, merge, or limit their releases, race records slowed to a trickle.<sup>223</sup> Mississippi-born Delta blues in particular had never had wide appeal, selling mostly in the deep South, and companies discontinued their practice of sending recording units south to find new artists.<sup>224</sup>

By the mid to late 1930s, blues recordings once again increased, but now the artists on record were almost exclusively located in the urban blues centers of Chicago

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<sup>221</sup> Andre Millard, *America on Record: A History of Recorded Sound* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 75-6, 245-6. In *Deep Blues*, Robert Palmer notes that the *Billboard* rhythm and blues chart was called the “Race Records” chart until 1949 and was a weekly tabulation of records blacks were buying. Palmer, 98.

<sup>222</sup> Palmer, 109 and Rowe, 12.

<sup>223</sup> Rowe, 14.

<sup>224</sup> Palmer, 122-3.

and New York.<sup>225</sup> The Columbia and Bluebird labels dominated the market, both of which used Lester Melrose to scout for artists and produce their work. Melrose preferred artists with a track record. Instead of searching for artists of varying styles, Melrose's stable of artists recorded several types of music to appeal to the different tastes of urban audiences. In the 1930s, this included jazz, which had been popular with black audiences since the 1920s. Small bands were commonly heard backing up name singers and players. By the 1940s bands were bigger and louder with bass and drum moving the music, often featuring the new swing sound, the pre-cursor of what would become rhythm and blues.<sup>226</sup>

Melrose's "Bluebird Beat," as the label's sound was known, dominated not only the recording industry but also the Chicago clubs, leaving little room for new artists who were not part of this clique. However, the World War II era, with its influx of blacks from the South into Chicago, saw a shift in preference back to country blues.<sup>227</sup> This was not the same country blues of a few decades earlier, though. Amplified and with drummers added for the music to be heard during live performances in Chicago's clubs, Delta blues had evolved into Chicago blues. Muddy Waters was one of the artists who changed to shape this sound:

When I went into the clubs, the first thing I wanted was an amplifier. Couldn't nobody hear you with an acoustic. Wherever you've got booze, you're going to get a little fight. You get more of a pure thing out of an acoustic, but you get more noise out of an amplifier.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>225</sup>Rowe, 16.

<sup>226</sup>Palmer, 134-135.

<sup>227</sup>Ibid., 145.

<sup>228</sup>Alan Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1993), 418.



Small, independent record companies sprung up across the U.S. after World War II to meet the demand for new and different music.<sup>229</sup>

In Chicago, entertainment venues for black clientele were centered in South Side neighborhoods. Not surprisingly, many of the musicians who were popular in these clubs played the country-influenced blues their patrons had heard in the South. The musicians, many of them from the Mississippi Delta, had followed the same route north to Chicago.

One such South Side club was the Macomba Lounge. The Macomba was owned by two Polish immigrants, Phil and Leonard Chess. The Chess brothers had emigrated with their mother and sister to America in 1928, to join their father in Chicago. The Czyz family, having changed their name to Chess upon arriving in America, settled in a Jewish neighborhood bordering the South Side. After attending public school, the boys worked in a variety of non-music-related jobs, including their father's Chess & Sons Junk Shop. While Phil served in the army during World War II, Leonard, ineligible for service due to childhood polio, moved into the more lucrative business venture of liquor distribution.<sup>230</sup> This led him to purchase and run a number of taverns on Chicago's South Side. Phil joined his brother after returning from the war in 1946.<sup>231</sup>

In 1947 while working at his bar, the Macomba, Leonard Chess observed a Hollywood record scout talking to the house band's lead singer Andrew Tibbs about

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<sup>229</sup>Rowe, 49.

<sup>230</sup>Commission on Chicago Landmarks, "Chess Records Office and Studio: 2120 South Michigan Avenue, Preliminary Staff Summary of Information Submitted to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks July 1989" (Chicago: Commission on Chicago Landmarks, 1989), 2. Phil Chess was born in 1922, 5 years after his brother Leonard.

<sup>231</sup>Cohodas, 14-16.

cutting a record. The entrepreneurial drive that had led Leonard to purchase the club kicked into action, only this time in a new direction. Leonard made arrangements with Tibbs and booked recording time at Universal Recording Service studios west of the Loop.<sup>232</sup>

Pursuing this venture further, Leonard Chess expanded beyond Tibbs to launch Aristocrat Records. In 1947, Leonard and brother Phil partnered with Evelyn Aron, who had just started Aristocrat records with her husband to record jazz, R&B, and blues.<sup>233</sup> Establishing a small office at 2300 E. 71st Street, Leonard arranged for recording sessions for other Chicago musicians he knew through the entertainment connections of the Macomba. After the music was recorded onto a master disc, Leonard had records reproduced from the master and distributed these locally through a record broker.<sup>234</sup> By August 1947 *Billboard* was detailing the forthcoming releases of Aristocrat records.<sup>235</sup>

Leonard Chess, familiar with the entertainment world of South Side Chicago, soon took over the distribution work.<sup>236</sup> He would pack records into the trunk of his car and make the rounds to some 180 outlets which included records shops, barber and beauty shops, and variety stores.<sup>237</sup> At the same time, the Chesses operated a small

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<sup>232</sup>Clarence Petersen, "The Chicago Sound," *Chicago Tribune Magazine*, 11 May 1969, 51; cited in Commission on Chicago Landmarks, "Chess Records Office and Studio," 3.

<sup>233</sup>Robert Pruter, *Chicago Soul* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 97.

<sup>234</sup>Commission on Chicago Landmarks, "Chess Records Office and Studio," 3-4.

<sup>235</sup>Rowe, 63.

<sup>236</sup>*Billboard*, 24 June 1967, sec. 2, 20; cited in Peter Golkin, "Chess Records, Chicago: Blacks, Whites, and Blues" (Senior Thesis, Program in American Culture, Northwestern University, 1988), 8.

outlet from the Aristocrat office where they also sold other labels' records. In 1948 they moved to a storefront location at 5249 S. Cottage Grove.<sup>238</sup>

Always looking to expand the business, Leonard Chess moved beyond Chicago to find markets in the Midwest and South. Such travel allowed him to scout for new talent, but it left him little time to run his nightclub. At first he had Phil manage the club, but it became apparent he needed Phil's help more in managing Aristocrat's operations while he was on the road. So, in 1950, he and Phil sold the bar and then bought out Aristocrat partner Evelyn Aron. Phil began to work full-time at managing the office.<sup>239</sup> Taking the suggestion of a record presser in Memphis, Leonard changed the family business name to Chess Records.<sup>240</sup>

The timing couldn't have been better. With their full attention turned toward finding new talent to record, Chess Records was poised to take the lead in the Chicago music scene:

1950 was a year of many changes on the blues scene. The only major labels that had been recording Chicago blues, RCA's Bluebird label and Columbia's 80000 series, both ceased activity that year . . . As smaller labels like Premium, Parkway, and Parrot folded or were sold, the Chess brothers found themselves with a gradually increasing monopoly on the blues recording scene in Chicago, and a corresponding increase in the number of musicians lined up for a chance to wax for them. They took on practically all comers.<sup>241</sup>

Chess, like Aristocrat, put out mostly jazz, gospel, and blues, music genres for which the audience was initially mostly black. The first release on their new blue-and-

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<sup>237</sup>Palmer, 159.

<sup>238</sup>Commission on Chicago Landmarks, "Chess Records Office and Studio," 3-4.

<sup>239</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>240</sup>*Chicago Tribune Magazine*, 11 May 1969, 52; cited in Golkin, 11.

<sup>241</sup>MCA Records, *Chess Blues*, booklet accompanying 4-compact disc set "Chess Blues," MCA/Chess CHD/C 4-9340, 1992, 18.

white label with Chessboard motif was “My Foolish Heart” by jazz saxophonist Gene Ammons. It made the *Billboard* Top Ten that year.<sup>242</sup>

The Chess brothers were not musicians, nor were they well versed in the stylistic variations within different genres. They also were not familiar with the way major music companies chose or shaped artists to appeal to a broader audience. They were aware that their patrons responded to the energetic performances of the Delta bluesmen and encouraged their artists to reproduce that feel in recording sessions.<sup>243</sup>

The blues that was being recorded was evolving as Chicago’s community of musicians grew and interacted. The introduction of amplification to blues music and the heavy emphasis on the beat which allowed artists to be heard above the din of crowded venues gave a distinctly urban feel to the music.<sup>244</sup> When put to Delta blues music, this combination came to be called “Chicago blues.”<sup>245</sup> Recordings of this distinctive sound began Chess Records’ ascent to a place of distinction in the history of American music.

The people assembled at Chess are important for the sound they each produced. Muddy Waters (1915-1983), who had moved to Chicago from his native Mississippi in 1943, first recorded for Aristocrat in 1947 accompanying Sunnyland Slim.<sup>246</sup> Muddy Waters would become the most influential and best known of Chess’s

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<sup>242</sup>Rowe, 79, 217.

<sup>243</sup>Commission on Chicago Landmarks, “Chess Records Office and Studio,” 4-5.

<sup>244</sup>Rowe notes that Muddy Waters started playing amplified guitar in 1944, but in an interview decades later Waters proclaimed “I still like the plain guitar better than I do the amplified one--better sound, everything. But if everybody’s using them what you gonna do?” Rowe, 71-2.

<sup>245</sup>Palmer, 16.

<sup>246</sup>Palmer, 12-13.

blues performers and continued his work for the label throughout its existence. His powerful guitar-playing and singing became quintessential to the Chicago Blues sound heard round the world, a sound that will forever be associated with 2120 South Michigan Avenue.

Muddy Waters had been recorded by Library of Congress researchers Alan Lomax and John Work in Mississippi in 1941.<sup>247</sup> After moving to Chicago, Muddy Waters made a living playing music at clubs during the night while keeping a succession of day jobs. His 1946 recording for blues magnate Lester Melrose was never released by Columbia Records and his initial work for Aristocrat had only mediocre sales. Leonard's partner Evelyn Aron and their talent scout Sammy Goldstein were likely the ones responsible for giving Muddy Waters another chance to record for Aristocrat. An unimpressed Leonard Chess is reputed to have said "What's he singing? I can't understand what he's singing," at the session in April of 1948.<sup>248</sup>

Muddy Waters' choice to return to his old Delta numbers using his bottleneck slide was one of the reasons this recording stood out from the R&B-glutted market of the time, but it was not the only reason.<sup>249</sup> In his previous recording for Aristocrat, Muddy Waters had been backed up by piano and bass, very much in line with the dominant pre-World War II blues sound of Chicago a la Tampa Red.<sup>250</sup> But that effort had not succeeded, so they tried something different. Muddy Waters would be backed up only by bass. And the sound would be recorded in a way to give it maximum

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<sup>247</sup> Palmer, 2-6.

<sup>248</sup> Palmer, 155-9 and Cohodas, 43.

<sup>249</sup> Palmer, 159-61.

<sup>250</sup> Robert Palmer, *Rock & Roll: An Unruly History* (New York: Harmony Books, 1995), 200.

intensity. This directness of sound was not created by simply turning up the volume on Muddy Waters' amplifier. Such an approach would have been limited by the distortion that occurred with the guitar's sound in an attempt to record the varying volumes at a satisfactory level. Rather, they achieved "a sound that consciously creates the illusion of a juke-joint guitar cranked up to ten but is actually recorded at a lower volume, with effects created through judicious manipulation of room acoustics and recording technology."<sup>251</sup>

The stunningly brisk sales of the resulting record told Chess that they were onto something and by that fall its popularity had earned the young company its first national recognition in trade magazines *Billboard* and *Cash Box*.<sup>252</sup> The experimental techniques used to capture Muddy Waters' sound were the foundation of what set Chess apart from its contemporaries and therefore made 2120 South Michigan a significant site in the development of American blues. The methods employed to get the best recorded sound for this and other popular musical idioms would grow to include using tiled bathrooms for additional resonance, placing microphones to pick up both directly amplified and ambient room sounds, and recording lead lines just shy of the point where distortion would occur.<sup>253</sup>

Muddy Waters' ability to continue producing work which made the top of the charts was also due to his ongoing search for new ways to express the blues. His concerns went beyond just his own singing and guitar-playing and covered the whole sound. For example, in 1954, he and his band came up with the idea to use stop-time riffs (dah *dah* dah dat) as the foundation of their three 1954 hits. Though long used in

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Cohodas 44-5.

<sup>253</sup> Palmer, *Rock & Roll*, 200.

jazz, this new pairing to blues caught the ears of the public and the pattern would find its way into future blues, R&B, and rock and roll.<sup>254</sup> Another rhythmic innovation of Muddy Waters' was the extensive use of the backbeat (heavy emphasis on the second and fourth beat). By weaving this dramatic beat into his sound, Muddy Waters again led the way to a new sound for blues and beyond.<sup>255</sup>

Muddy Waters would not only continue to produce a long string of hits for Chess, achieving national hits (which included "Rollin' Stone," "Mannish Boy," and "She Moves Me") in all but two of the years from 1950-58, but he would collaborate with other bluesmen who added national hits to the Chess portfolio. One was harmonica player Little Walter, part of Muddy Waters' core group of musicians, whose 1952 session with Muddy Waters produced the number one hit "Juke," and who continued to churn out national hits for Chess every year save one from 1952 through 1959. In 1955, Muddy Waters played with another harmonica man, Sonny Boy Williamson (aka Rice Miller), a session which produced a *Billboard* Top Ten record, "Don't Start Me to Talkin'." Sonny Boy would follow up the next year with a national hit and continue to record blues classics for Chess through the 1960s.<sup>256</sup>

Also influential to the Chess catalog and sound was Willie Dixon, not only for his musicianship but for his talent-scouting, songwriting, arranging, and producing. Willie Dixon (1915-1992) was another Mississippian who in 1936 found his way to Chicago. A big, imposing man who had built up strength from manual labor, Willie began training as a boxer and won the Golden Gloves heavyweight division for Illinois in 1937. After a brawl in the boxing commissioner's office which got him suspended

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<sup>254</sup> Palmer, *Deep Blues*, 167.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>256</sup> Palmer, *Deep Blues*, 210-11, 215 and Rowe, 218.

from competition, Willie turned to his other love, music. Willie played the streets and clubs, singing and playing string bass, finding the pay better than that from regular jobs. His musical career was briefly stopped during 1941 when Willie served a jail term for refusing to be drafted on the basis of his ill treatment as a black in America. After his release, he formed groups with various musicians, first the Four Jumps of Jive and, by 1946, the Big Three Trio, touring the Midwest and recording with some success for Bluebird, Mercury, Bullet, and Columbia in the early to mid 1940s.<sup>257</sup>

The Chess brothers met Willie when he was playing jam sessions at their Macomba Club. Impressed by his recording experience for Melrose, Leonard Chess occasionally called Willie in to play for Aristocrat recording sessions beginning in 1948 with Robert Nighthawk. By the time his Big Three Trio dissolved in 1951, Dixon's studio work had made him an integral figure in Chess Records and he was hired full-time. He had expanded his role from musician to producer and arranger. In Dixon's words, "That was my job--to restyle people into a different feeling."<sup>258</sup> But Dixon was also a songwriter and had a number of songs in reserve from his earlier work as a performer. In 1954, the value of his songwriting talent became evident when Muddy Waters recorded Dixon's "I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man," "Just Make Love to Me" (better known as "I Just Want to Make Love to You"), and "I'm Ready" and all three became Top Ten R&B hits.<sup>259</sup>

During the next few years, Dixon became even more valuable to Leonard Chess, who later described Willie as "my right arm," not only running recording

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<sup>257</sup>Willie Dixon and Don Snowden, *I Am the Blues: The Willie Dixon Story* (London: Quartet Books, 1989; Da Capo Press, 1989), 24, 43-44, 51, 54, 59-60 and Rowe, 171.

<sup>258</sup>Dave Hoekstra, "Willie Dixon, Celebrating the Genius of Chicago Blues," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 2 February 1992.

<sup>259</sup>Dixon, 60, 70, 81, 83 and Palmer, *Deep Blues*, 166-67.



sessions but at times contributing the tunes which made Chess a national success. Dixon provided songs for bluesmen Willie Mabon, Lowell Fulson, Jimmy Witherspoon, and Sonny Boy Williamson, and *Billboard* Top Ten hit songs for Eddie Boyd, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Little Walter, Koko Taylor, and even for himself. Dixon was also adept at other styles, working with vocal groups like the Dells and the Moonglows as well as rock and roll icons Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley, for whom Dixon even penned some songs.<sup>260</sup>

Despite the tremendous success of his work at Chess, Dixon was not entirely happy there. The Chess brothers' unwillingness to allow more artists to record Dixon's songs or to create and promote his own releases combined with growing tension over his level of compensation left Dixon frustrated. By the end of 1956, Dixon left Chess to work for competitor Cobra Records.<sup>261</sup>

In spite of Dixon's bringing in and creating hit-makers out of Otis Rush and Buddy Guy, Cobra met the fate of many other small, short-lived labels in Chicago and was going out of business by 1959. While at Cobra, Dixon had maintained ties with Chess, playing for Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Little Walter, and Sonny Boy Williamson. He had also moved beyond Chicago, teaming with Memphis Slim to tour and play for a new, chiefly white audience who wanted to hear folk blues music. The duo played West and East Coast gigs including the Newport Blues Festival, and eventually made their way across the Atlantic to find a new and appreciative audience in Europe.<sup>262</sup>

Dixon returned to work for Chess in 1959, bringing Otis Rush and Buddy Guy

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<sup>260</sup>Dixon, 81-82, 247-249 and Rowe, 217-218.

<sup>261</sup>Dixon, 82-83.

<sup>262</sup>Ibid., 103-5.

with him. He was put in charge of the blues division and also oversaw much of the gospel being put out by the label. Many of his compositions recorded during this period became classics that provided the inspiration for a future generation of blues-rock artists: “Back Door Man,” “Spoonful,” “Little Red Rooster,” “I Ain’t Superstitious,” “You Shook Me,” “You Need Love,” and “You Can’t Judge A Book By Its Cover.”<sup>263</sup> As the popularity of blues waned in the 1960s, so, too, did the need for Willie Dixon’s skills at Chess. In 1966, Koko Taylor recorded Dixon’s “Wang Dang Doodle” and scored Chess’s last Top Ten blues hit.<sup>264</sup> He recorded his last session for the company in 1970.<sup>265</sup>

Dixon was one of many artists who would add his voice to the chorus of musicians unhappy with Leonard and Phil Chess’s treatment regarding money.<sup>266</sup> The breadth of criticism aimed at the Chess brothers is difficult to ignore. Books on Chicago blues are full of anecdotes of enraged artists arriving at Chess, demanding to see Leonard and receive payment they believed was due them. Incidents were common enough that the effects were noticed outside the company by his peers.<sup>267</sup>

The issue of publishing is probably the greatest area of contention artists have had with the Chesses. Leonard and Phil formed Arc Music with Gene and Harry Goodman, brothers of Benny Goodman, as the in-house publishing unit of Chess in

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<sup>263</sup>Ibid., 143.

<sup>264</sup>Dixon, 167 and Rowe, 218.

<sup>265</sup>Dixon, 169-171.

<sup>266</sup>Ibid., 99.

<sup>267</sup>Charlie Gillett, *Making Tracks: Atlantic Records and the Growth of a Multi-Billion Dollar Industry* (London: W.H. Allen, 1975), 68; quoted in Peter Golkin, “Chess Records, Chicago: Blacks, Whites, and Blues” (Senior Thesis, Program in American Culture, Northwestern University, 1988), 22.

1953. As with many other independent companies, Chess did this to control the copyright of the music they released. Most artists were untutored in the intricacies of the publishing business and gladly signed over their publishing rights for the chance to record and earn money performing live, if their records sold well. This left Arc Music with the power to attribute the songwriting credits to whomever it wished, and left the musicians at the mercy of the tight-lipped Chesses to provide information regarding sales and royalty payments due them.

The legal and bookkeeping requirements to oversee publishing rights were beyond the capacity of even those musicians who eventually learned about this aspect of the business. Willie Dixon, for example, who formed his own publishing unit in 1957, eventually transferred the administration rights back to Arc Music in the mid-1960s when the time required to oversee contracts and tabulate results was too much for a performing artist.<sup>268</sup>

Industry practices of the Chesses were also criticized, from buying songs on the cheap to side-stepping union scale wages. When placed in context, the Chess brothers were not so unusual except, perhaps, for the level of success they managed to achieve.<sup>269</sup> Some actions would capture the attention of the federal government, however. Leonard Chess admitted he used payola, even stating with pride that he, at least, was honest about it, declaring payments on 1099 forms. When the Chesses later bought radio stations, regulations were not yet in place to prevent such practices. In neither instance were the Chesses convicted of crimes.<sup>270</sup>

The questionable aspects of the Chess family's business practices do not

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<sup>268</sup>Dixon, 185.

<sup>269</sup>Golkin, 19.

<sup>270</sup>Cohodas, 174-82, 212-16.

diminish the sacrifices they made to make their business a success. In the early days, Phil stayed in Chicago to manage the business while Leonard made innumerable trips south, his car loaded with records to sell while on the look-out for artists and contacts that would help the business. As the business grew, both Leonard and Phil would travel all over the United States, wherever they needed to go to meet the business owners, deejays and record distributors who could promote their artists.<sup>271</sup>

The Chess brothers also worked hard in Chicago, trying to get the best music they could out of their artists. Leonard took an active role in recording sessions, making sure the musicians rehearsed songs enough times to get a good sound and directing them to change certain aspects if he thought it would make for a better product.<sup>272</sup> He was such a hands-on producer that he even took over for a drummer in a 1951 Muddy Waters recording session when the musician wasn't up to par.<sup>273</sup>

The company's success led to the establishment of Checker Records in 1952, the subsidiary which would specialize in blues recordings. By 1954, ten Chess records had made the national rhythm and blues hit charts. All the while, Chess remained a small business operating out of a storefront at 750 E. 49th Street from 1951 to 1954, and a double storefront at 4750-52 South Cottage Grove from 1954 to 1957.<sup>274</sup>

The company's relatively well-established distribution networks led to work with other studios like Memphis Recording Service, later Sun Records, in Memphis, owned and run by Sam Phillips. Music recorded in Memphis would be released with the Chess label. One of the most successful examples was a single released by Chess

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<sup>271</sup>Rowe, 126, 148-9.

<sup>272</sup>Ibid., 87.

<sup>273</sup>Palmer, *Deep Blues*, 164-5.

<sup>274</sup>Commission on Chicago Landmarks, "Chess Records Office and Studio," 6.

in April 1951, “Rocket 88,” credited to Jackie Brenston but actually by the Ike Turner band. This record, one of many in the running for honor of being the first rock and roll record, reached number one in the R&B charts by June. Though other Memphis-generated Chess recordings were only modestly successful, Sun Records would go on to bring rock and roll into being with artists like Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins, and Jerry Lee Lewis.<sup>275</sup>

Sam Phillips also brought Chess another of its biggest blues stars, Howlin’ Wolf (1910-1976). Born Chester Burnett in Mississippi, 6’6” Howlin’ Wolf had been a farmer, soldier, radio deejay, and traveling performer by the time he first recorded at Phillips’s Memphis Recording Service in 1951. Phillips sent acetates of “How Many More Years” and “Moanin’ at Midnight” from this session to Chess. They were released as a single and made the *Billboard* Top Ten. By 1952 Howlin’ Wolf had signed an exclusive contract with the Chess Brothers and moved to Chicago.<sup>276</sup>

Howlin’ Wolf had first learned guitar from the seminal Delta artist Charley Patton, one of Muddy Waters’ teachers, and harmonica from Sonny Boy Williamson No. 2 (Rice Miller). During his travels as a musician he worked with numerous Delta musicians, including the legendary Robert Johnson. Playing with larger bands mixing a number of styles, his music had developed a “free-ranging, almost jazzy flavour” into which Howlin’ Wolf would put traditional lyrics.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>275</sup>Colin Escott with Martin Hawkins, *Good Rockin’ Tonight: Sun Records and the Birth of Rock ‘n’ Roll* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 24-25; and Jim Miller, ed., *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll* (New York: Random House/Rolling Stone Press, 1980), 11.

<sup>276</sup>Escott, 30-32; Palmer, *Rock & Roll*, 203; and Rowe, 134-135, 217.

<sup>277</sup>Rowe, 135-7.

In spite of his first 1951 hit, Howlin' Wolf's career was slow to progress. He did no recording during his first year in Chicago and when he went back to the studio, his releases met with only regional success. Yet Howlin' Wolf was growing as a musician. Backed by a much tighter-sounding Chess house band, he was freed to explore his vocal abilities even more aggressively. And his voice, exciting, powerful, trance-like, soulful, and raw, was what set him apart.<sup>278</sup>

By 1955, Howlin' Wolf was making his way into the national R&B charts again with "Who Will Be Next." The next years' hits included "Smokestack Lightning," "I Asked for Water," and "Sitting on Top of the World." By 1960, Howlin' Wolf was performing material by Willie Dixon, moving from traditional Delta stylings to more urban-influenced, rocking sounds with an emphasis on "a massive, jangling and exciting beat."<sup>279</sup> These songs--"Wang Dang Doodle," "Back Door Man," "Spoonful," "The Red Rooster," "I Ain't Superstitious," and "Goin' Down Slow" among them--would become Howlin' Wolf classics that gave him legendary status amongst the next generation of blues-influenced rock stars.<sup>280</sup>

Throughout the 1950s, the Chess brothers were open to unproven sounds and willing to experiment to find music which would reach greater audiences.<sup>281</sup> By the middle of the decade, the openness that had led them to become leaders in recording distinctive blues led them to another style of music the popularity of which would far surpass that of blues. This new music was rock and roll. One of the first artists in this new vein, brought to the attention of Leonard Chess by Howlin' Wolf, was Bo

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<sup>278</sup>Ibid., 138-9.

<sup>279</sup>Ibid., 170.

<sup>280</sup>Ibid., 170, 218.

<sup>281</sup>Palmer, *Rock & Roll*, 30.

Diddley, who first recorded for Chess in 1955. Mississippi-born, but raised in Chicago, Diddley gave blues a twist with his trademark rhythmic strumming (hitting the accents of the phrase “shave and a hair cut, two bits”), donned the “Diddliesh” beat. This sound appealed to a growing market of teenagers and Diddley found almost instant national success.<sup>282</sup>

Also to appeal to this market was St. Louisan Chuck Berry, sent to Chess by Muddy Waters. Berry combined country and western influences with light blues and layered his music with jazz beats via the rhythm section, piano and his crowning electric guitar. When combined with lyrics aimed at the daily subjects of teenage life, the result was a long string of hits which proved to be landmarks in the evolution of rock and roll. He began with “Maybelline” in 1955 and would follow up with numbers including “Sweet Little Sixteen,” “School Days,” “Johnny B. Goode,” and “Rock and Roll Music,” most of which were recorded at 2120 South Michigan Avenue.<sup>283</sup>

The success of these rock and roll artists put Chess in direct competition with the industry giants. To meet increasing demand, the company felt the need to find larger headquarters. In 1956, Chess bought 2120 South Michigan Avenue, a narrow (25’), two-story, commercial building erected for an auto parts dealer which had most recently been leased to a firm dealing in neckties and a slipcover manufacturer.<sup>284</sup> (See Figures 23-24.)

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<sup>282</sup> Commission on Chicago Landmarks, “Chess Records Office and Studio.” 6.

<sup>283</sup> Palmer, *Rock & Roll*, 30-31.

<sup>284</sup> Tim Samuelson and Jim Peters, “Landmarks of Chicago Blues and Gospel: Chess Records and First Church of Deliverance,” in *Preserving the Recent Past*, ed. Deborah Slaton and Rebecca A. Shiffer (Washington, D.C.: Historic Preservation Education Foundation, 1995), II-120.



Figure 23. 2120 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, 1999.  
East facade. Photograph by author.



Figure 24. 2120 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, 2004. South and east facades.  
Fence south of 2120 encloses the Willie Dixon Blues Garden. Photograph by author.





Figure 25. Michigan Avenue looking south from the middle of the 1500 South block, Chicago, 1996. Photograph by author.



Figure 26. Ford Motor Company Showroom, Michigan Avenue, Chicago, 1910. Photograph courtesy Chicago Landmarks Commission.



Figure 27. Prairie Avenue (2 blocks east of Michigan Avenue) circa 1880s. View southeast from 18<sup>th</sup> Street. Photograph courtesy Chicago Landmarks Commission.

The white terra cotta-clad commercial property had been built in 1911, designed by architect Horatio Wilson (1857-1917) for real estate broker Matson Hill.<sup>285</sup> It was located in a strip of Michigan Avenue below the Loop which had been known as Automobile Row in the early part of the century due to the preponderance of repair shops, car dealerships, parts stores, and other auto-manufacturing related businesses from 12<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> Streets. (See Figures 25-26.) Previous to this, the thoroughfare had been one of the western streets of the exclusive “Prairie Avenue Section” of Chicago in which the city’s most rich and powerful resided from the 1870s through the 1890s.<sup>286</sup> (See Figure 27.)

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<sup>285</sup>Commission on Chicago Landmarks, “Chess Records Office and Studio,” 7.

<sup>286</sup> Pruter, 3.

When numerous automobile rows sprouted throughout the city by the 1940s, Chicago's record companies and distributors began to move into this semi-industrial strip, taking advantage of the site's proximity to the Loop and its low rents. Initially only the major labels Decca, Capitol, and Mercury, with their distribution branches, were so far north. Independent record companies Chess, King, Vee Jay, Chance, and Parrot, and distributors like United and Bronzeville were headquartered around Cottage Grove from 47th to 50th Streets. From the mid 1950s, these growing companies moved northward to Michigan Avenue and, by the 1960s, the area was firmly established as Record Row, home to a bewildering number of record studios, pressers, and distributors, amidst various light manufacturing entities. The casual observer would have been hard-pressed to identify this area as a vital link to the nation's record industry, however, for without need to directly promote their locations to the public, most buildings only identified themselves with modest lettering on the door.<sup>287</sup>

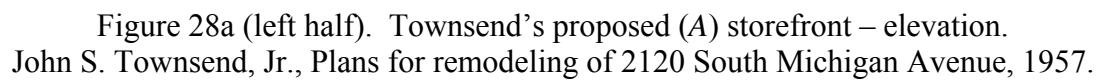
John S. Townsend, Jr., the architect hired by Chess to remodel 2120 South Michigan, went in a different direction. He envisioned a facade which would attract attention by promoting the latest Chess records on redwood and glass display shelving visible behind a modern storefront.<sup>288</sup> (See Figure 28a-b.) A stock, recessed, brushed-aluminum storefront was installed, but the shelving, indicated on his drawings, was never built.<sup>289</sup> (See Figures 29 and 30.) Remaining, original, granite and terra cotta

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 3-5.

<sup>288</sup> Commission on Chicago Landmarks, "Chess Records Office and Studio," 7.

<sup>289</sup> Though Commission on Chicago Landmarks, "Chess Records Office and Studio," 7, suggests the shelving was built, Samuelson would later discover through interviews with Chess personnel that it never had been constructed.



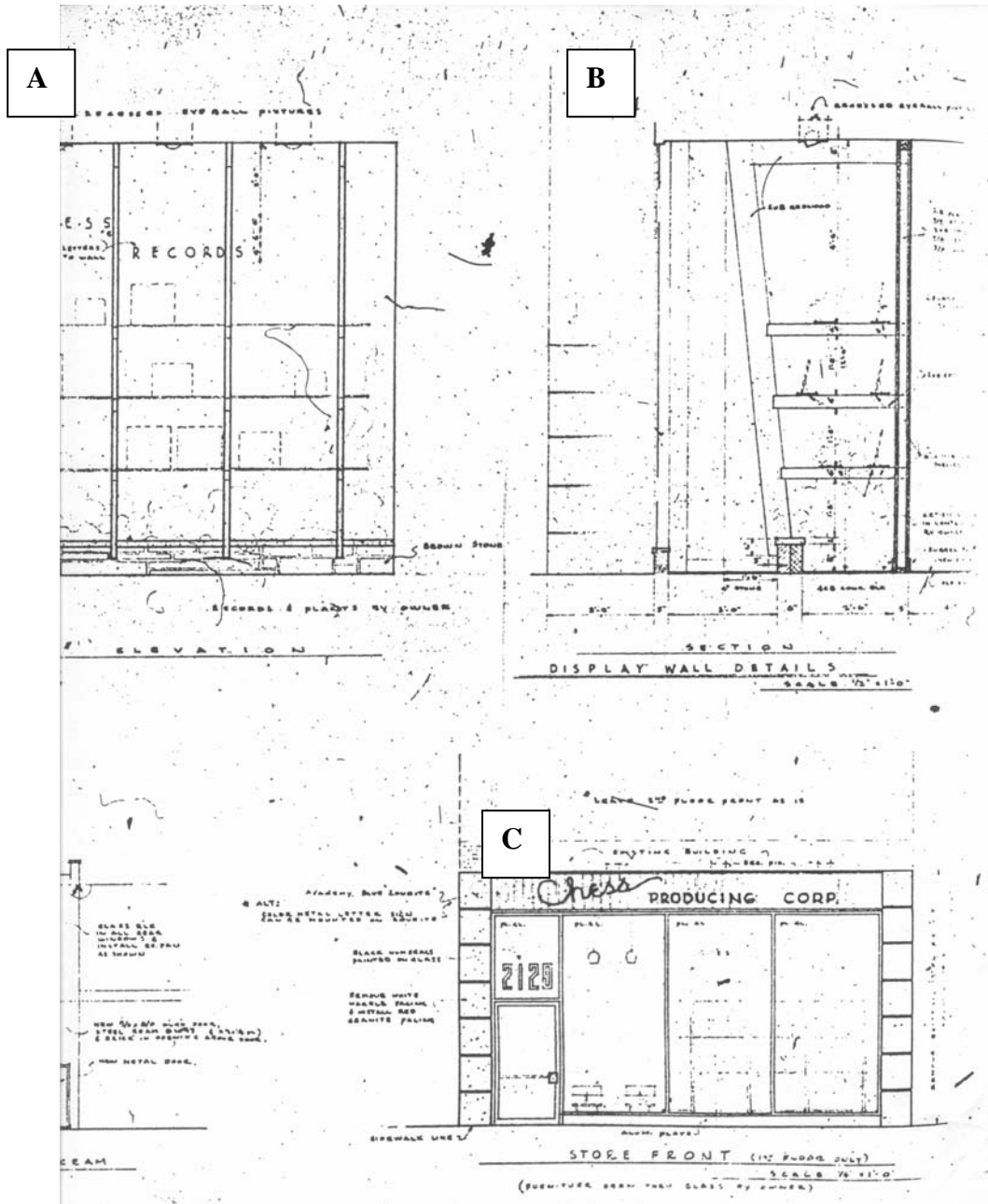


Figure 28b (right half). Townsend's proposed (A) storefront - elevation; (B) display wall - section; (C) storefront - elevation. John S. Townsend, Jr., Plans for remodeling of 2120 South Michigan Avenue, 1957.



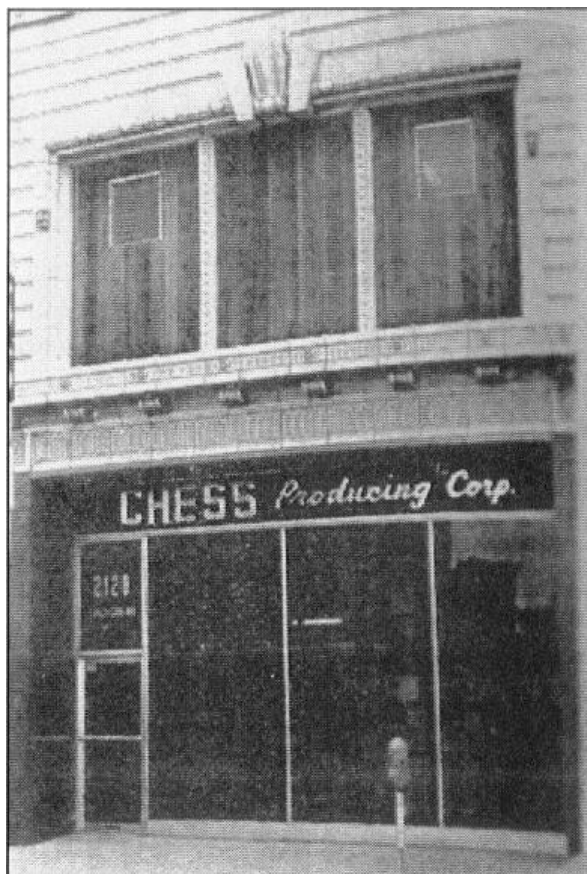


Figure 29. The Chess building at 2120 South Michigan Avenue, circa 1957.  
Photograph from Cohodas, *Spinning Blues into Gold*, 216j.



Figure 30. Storefront, 2120 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, 2000.  
Photograph by author.



Figure 31. South wall and storefront, 2120 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, 2000. Light terra cotta cladding was replaced in 1957 by dark Granitex on the first floor, as seen in this side view of the east facade.

Photograph by author.

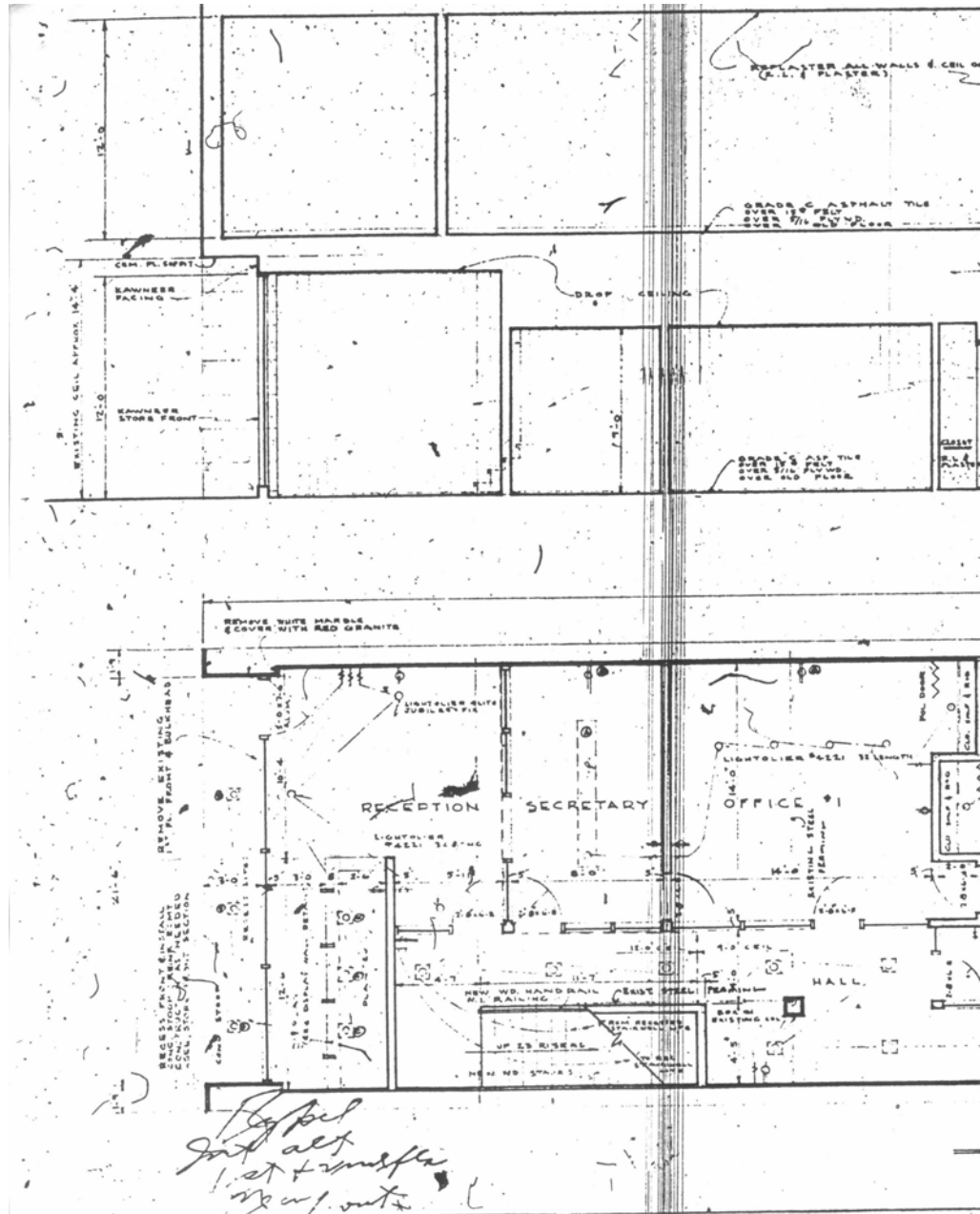


Figure 32a (left third). First floor plan, 2120 South Michigan Avenue.  
John S. Townsend, Jr., Plans for remodeling of 2120 South Michigan Avenue, 1957.



Figure 32b (middle third). First floor plan, 2120 South Michigan Avenue.  
John S. Townsend, Jr., Plans for remodeling of 2120 South Michigan Avenue, 1957.

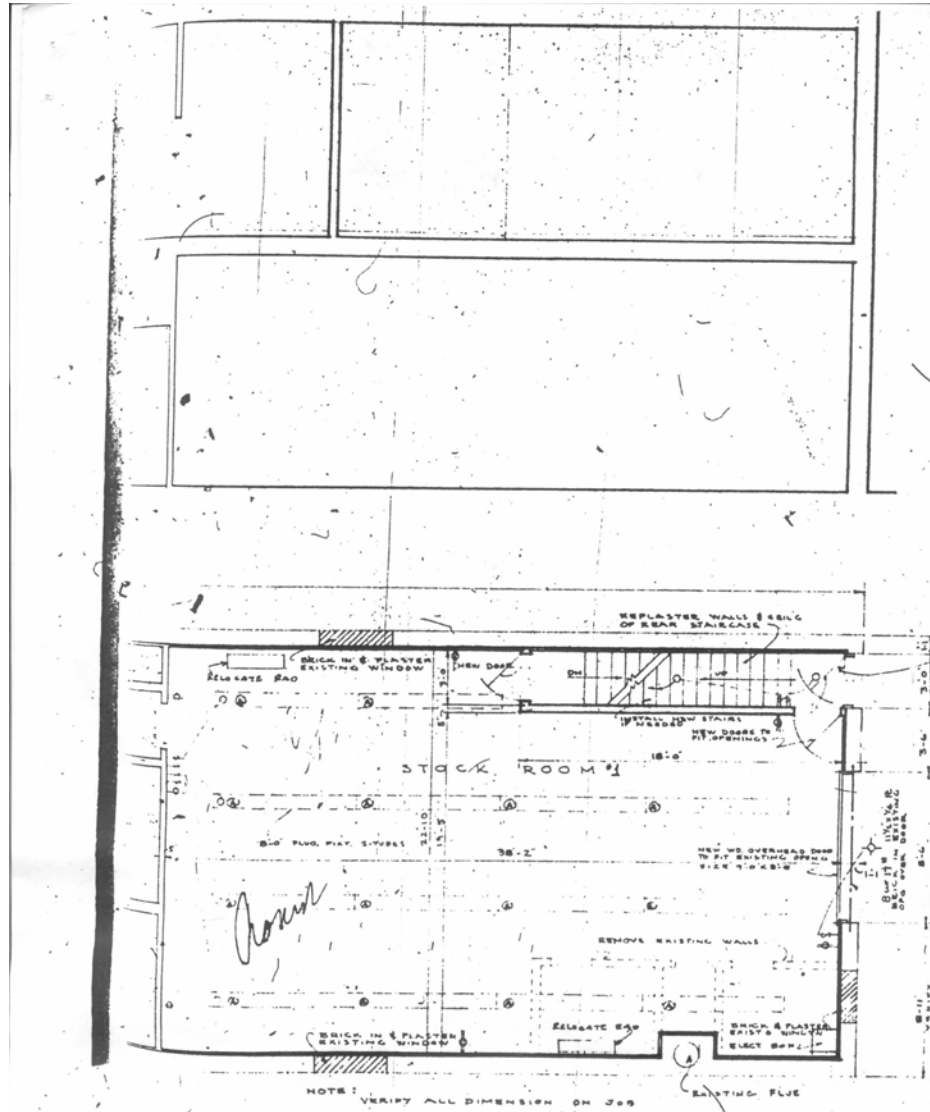


Figure 32c (right third). First floor plan, 2120 South Michigan Avenue.  
John S. Townsend, Jr., Plans for remodeling of 2120 South Michigan Avenue, 1957.

Figure 33. First floor – hall elevation, 2120 South Michigan Avenue.  
John S. Townsend, Jr., Plans for remodeling of 2120 South Michigan Avenue, 1957.

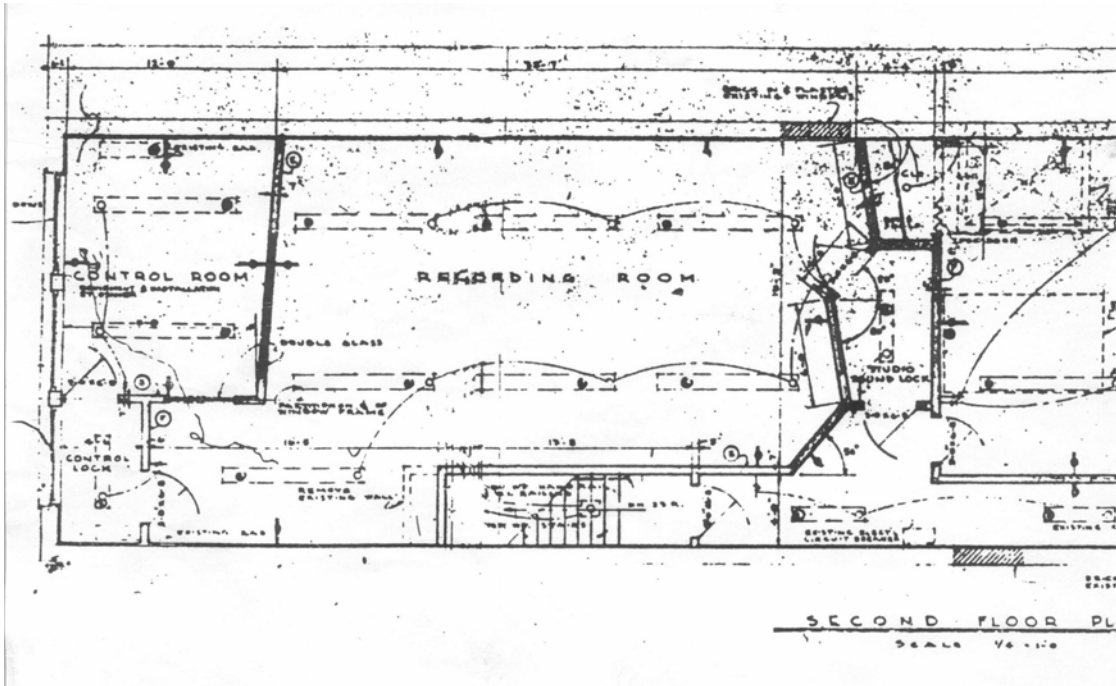


Figure 34a (left half). Second floor plan, 2120 South Michigan Avenue.  
John S. Townsend, Jr., Plans for remodeling of 2120 South Michigan Avenue, 1957.

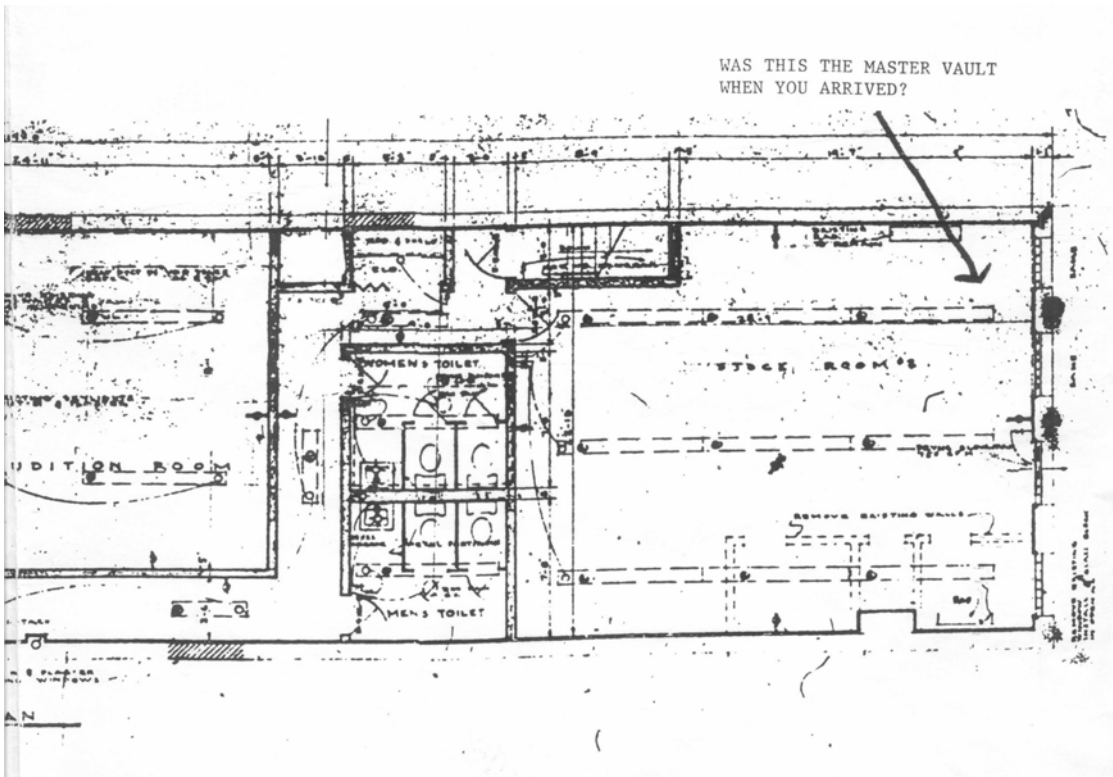


Figure 34b (right half). Second floor plan, 2120 South Michigan Avenue.  
Note at upper right (a question for Willie Dixon) added by Tim Samuelson.  
John S. Townsend, Jr., Plans for remodeling of 2120 South Michigan Avenue, 1957.

cladding on the first floor was replaced by Granitex<sup>290</sup>, a composition stone cladding, to frame the storefront.<sup>291</sup> (See Figure 31.)

Townsend's make-over was recorded with the city permit offices as \$20,000 worth of improvements. On the first floor, this included executive offices with redwood paneling. Corridors of wood and glass partitions led to a large stock room at the rear accessible to the alley. (See Figures 32a-c and 33.) Second floor space included recording and audition rooms. (See Figures 34a-b.) Additional practical alterations were made to the second floor beyond the design plans, including boarding over the front windows to reduce street noise (see Figure 29) and the creation of a concrete-lined vault at the rear for storage of recording masters.<sup>292</sup>

In 1957 Chess moved its operations to this building. This was the first time the company had had all of its administrative, recording, and distribution operations under one roof. Records with the Chess label and its subsidiary labels Checker, Argo, and, eventually, Cadet would be produced at this location.<sup>293</sup>

The Chess Brothers were intimately involved in running the business, but their soaring success allowed them to add about fifteen people to the payroll around this time, not many considering the company's national status. The talented people which they brought in used the critical in-house studio and mixing facilities to oversee Chess recordings from beginning to end. Emphasizing an informal atmosphere, the producers and technicians were open to new ideas.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Though Commission on Chicago Landmarks, "Chess Records Office and Studio," 7 states that the new storefront was framed by *granite*, Samuelson corrected this in a later write-up: Samuelson, "Landmarks of Chicago Blues and Gospel," II-120.

<sup>291</sup> Samuelson, "Landmarks of Chicago Blues and Gospel," II-120.

<sup>292</sup> Commission on Chicago Landmarks, "Chess Records Office and Studio," 7.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

Though not as well known as their blues and rock and roll releases, Chess also produced gospel, vocal groups, spoken word, jazz, and comedy. The Evangelist Singers of Alabama were the first gospel group to record for Chess in 1951. In the mid-1950s, vocal groups the Moonglows (“Sincerely” and “Ten Commandments of Love”) and the Flamingos had numerous hits, some reaching the *Billboard* Top Ten. Detroit preacher Reverend C.L. Franklin (whose daughter Aretha recorded an album of gospel standards for Chess in 1956) recorded sermons which became the core of Chess’s spoken word efforts.<sup>295</sup> The Argo label (later Cadet), created in 1954, was Chess’s primary jazz label for a catalogue of artists which included Ahmad Jamal, Sonny Stitt, and the Ramsey Lewis Trio.<sup>296</sup> In 1962, Chess even experimented with comedy albums, giving black comedians Moms Mabley and Pigmeat Markham greater recognition.<sup>297</sup>

The staff Chess added helped the company to continue its growth as a major independent. In 1961, Detroit-born Billy Davis, former Four Tops member and songwriter, was brought on as new A&R director and staff producer. His association with Chess had begun in 1956 when two songs he had written were recorded by Chess groups the Moonglows and the Flamingos and subsequently became big hits. Davis would help Chess adapt to the changing tastes of the sixties as soul music became more popular.

Believing in the market potential for soul music, Davis brought in Ralph Bass to take charge of A&R for gospel and blues performers. This left him free to focus on

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<sup>294</sup>Pruter, 97-98.

<sup>295</sup>Dixon, 80-1.

<sup>296</sup>Pruter, 124.

<sup>297</sup>Dixon, 143.

soul music. He strengthened the company's arranging and writing staff<sup>298</sup> and brought together a "house band" of session musicians to complete the collaborative process. With this staff in place, Chess Records made a name for itself in the soul music market with performers including Billy Stewart, Etta James, and Fontella Bass.<sup>299</sup>

The first and most successful of these soul stars was Etta James (1938 - ). With a few hits under her belt from the mid 1950s, the Los Angeles native had joined Chess in 1959. Between 1960 and 1962 James had a number of Top Ten R&B hits in the ballad style including "Something's Got A Hold on Me" in 1962.<sup>300</sup>

The heavily-orchestrated works were foreign to Leonard Chess, a sign of the new directions Davis and his colleagues were taking the company. Etta described Leonard's reaction: "He said, 'Oh my God, is this going to be a symphony or something?' 'Cause really, his true thinking wasn't beyond Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf and them, that was the bag he loved.'"<sup>301</sup>

By 1963, James had launched into a more aggressive, hard soul style. Horns replaced the strings and the beat became stronger. She achieved a few hits in 1964, but they did not make the Top Ten. Drug problems interrupted her career, but Leonard Chess reached out to find her the help she needed to get back on track. As he had with other soul artists whose potential was not being reached at the Chess studio, Billy Davis sent Etta James to work with Rick Lake in Muscle Shoals, Alabama. There, Etta was to create some of her best work with southern soul style hits including "I'd Rather Go Blind" in 1967, one of the first singles released on the Cadet

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<sup>298</sup>Pruter, 99.

<sup>299</sup>Palmer, *Rock & Roll*, 89.

<sup>300</sup>Ibid., 99-101.

<sup>301</sup>Pruter, 101.

subsidiary. Though Etta remained with the company until its demise in the mid-1970s, the loss of Billy Davis and others at the end of the sixties meant the majority of her work continued to be done with outside producers.<sup>302</sup>

While Chess sought to diversify its recordings with artists like James to appeal to new tastes, it was Chess Records' earlier blues and rock and roll that secured the company's international stature. In Europe, this distinctively American music found an appreciative audience throughout the continent. In England, younger musicians eagerly sought out Chess imports. They listened and learned the structure, progressions and phrasing of blues and rock and roll. The Beatles, the Yardbirds, Eric Clapton, and countless others found creative inspiration in Chess recordings. Many recorded songs first released on the Chess label. Mick Jagger and Keith Richards even took their band's name from Muddy Water's 1950 recording "Rollin' Stone."<sup>303</sup>

The Rolling Stones attribute not only their inspiration but their sound directly to Chess Records. Mick Jagger taught himself harmonica by listening to Little Walter records. Keith Richards memorized the guitar parts of Chuck Berry's hits, many of them recorded at the Chess Records studio at 2120 S. Michigan Ave. Brian Jones loved Howlin' Wolf and Jimmy Reed.<sup>304</sup>

In 1964, Jagger, Richards, and Jones with band mates Bill Wyman and Charlie Watts, made a pilgrimage to 2120 South Michigan Avenue during their first tour of America. Their manager had even arranged for a recording session at the studio.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>302</sup>Pruter, 101, 128-9.

<sup>303</sup>Commission on Chicago Landmarks, "Chess Records Office and Studio," 10.

<sup>304</sup>Greg Kot, "Born in Britain, Bred in the Blues: Rolling Stones Found Their Sound in Chicago," *Chicago Tribune*, 21 September 1997, sec. News, p 1.

<sup>305</sup>Cohodas, 242.



The group was thrilled to meet the men who made the music that inspired their careers, including Willie Dixon<sup>306</sup> and Muddy Waters.<sup>307</sup>

The Stones spent just two days at 2120 on their first visit, but their time in the studio had a lasting impact on the group. Ron Malo, Chess's sound engineer since 1960, was at the boards. The group has since credited him with attaining for them the straightforward, powerful sound which became their standard. The sessions produced a cover of Bobby Womack's "It's All Over Now" which became one of their first North American hits. Also recorded was an instrumental, later called "2120 South Michigan Avenue," which appeared on "12 X 5," their second album.<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>306</sup>Dixon, 162. Dixon's biography relates the following story on page 62 from Chess's then executive vice president of sales and promotion. It includes relevant details about the lay-out and use of the first floor:

DICK LAPALM: 2120 Michigan Avenue was a storefront. You walk into a little, tiny lobby with curtains and Chess Producing Corp. on the window. At the desk was Minnie Riperton, who might have been 16 or 17 and was taking the regular girl's place for a couple of hours. My office is the next one and the final one, of course, is Leonard.

We had this sliding glass thing and I hear *tap, tap, tap*. I don't pay attention but I see this white guy who doesn't look familiar. Finally, Minnie comes in and said, "Do you know where Willie's at?"

"He's not upstairs. It's kind of early."

"This man is just driving me crazy. He keeps tapping. 'Is he here yet? Is he here yet? He's got to see Willie.'"

From that lobby, you could see who was going into the Studio. There were two doors and Willie came walking down the corridor about to go up to the studio and this kid almost went crazy. It was like he had seen God. It turned out to be Brian Jones and later one of the Stones came walking down into the same area and he was so proud to be able to say, "This is Willie Dixon."

<sup>307</sup> Kot, 1. Given the frequency of its repetition, it is also worth noting Keith Richards' recollection that the Stones first saw Muddy Waters up on a ladder painting the studio walls at Chess. Ibid. Cohodas, 243-44, quotes Dick LaPalm and Billy Davis saying that this was a total fabrication and nothing of the sort would ever have happened at Chess.

<sup>308</sup> Kot, 1. The Rolling Stones were not the only English group to take advantage of

Such attention made 2120 something of a landmark while it was still fully in operation. Increasing business led to the purchase of an eight-story factory building at 320 East 21st Street in 1966, however. This became the new Chess headquarters as operations began to be moved there from 2120 by the end of the year. The majority of the move-out was completed by 1967 and only a skeleton staff remained in 2120 until all activity was phased out by 1969. The move to a larger space allowed for company growth, but the informal creative process that was made possible with more intimate space was lost.<sup>309</sup>

Though the company was doing well enough to prompt a move to larger facilities, it was around this time that Leonard Chess began to feel out of touch with popular musical tastes and turned more responsibilities over to his son Marshall and brother Phil. He became increasingly involved in managing WVON, the radio station he had purchased in 1963 and successfully built into one of Chicago's most successful media outlets serving the local black community.<sup>310</sup>

In January 1969, after over two decades of owning and managing Chess records, Phil and Leonard made the decision to sell the company to California

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2120's recording studios. The next year, the Yardbirds made Chicago their home base during their American tour and recorded the single "Shapes of Things" at Chess. Dixon, 144.

<sup>309</sup>Commission on Chicago Landmarks, "Chess Records Office and Studio," 10-11.

<sup>310</sup>Cohodas, 215-221. In March 1963, Leonard Chess purchased AM station WHFC for one million dollars and changed the call letters to WVON for "Voice of the Negro." This 24-hour station with a staff of community-based deejays broadcast gospel, R&B classics, blues, soul, talk shows, and church services. By devoting all its programming to black interests rather than targeting multiple ethnicities, WVON led the way for transformation of radio in Chicago. These radio stations, with deejays and owners involved in the local record and entertainment business, devoted a third of their time to promoting local acts and releases. The Chesses' station was no exception and the radio station provided another substantial venue to promote the company's line of recordings, although this was limited to no more than 10% by the FCC. Pruter, 12-19.

magnetic tape manufacturer GRT for \$6.5 million plus 20,000 shares of GRT common stock.<sup>311</sup> Though the three Chess men continued on in managerial positions, the death of Leonard Chess in October 1969 was a final blow to the family orientation of the business. Marshall Chess was appointed president of the company, but was replaced in 1970 by a record industry executive who relocated Chess executive offices to New York City, leaving only a branch office in Chicago. Phil, who had been serving as Vice President, left the company at the end of 1971.

GRT may have known about the tape business, but they did not know how to run a successful record label. Producers, writers, and artists began to leave Chess by the droves and the company was left with little chance to succeed as morale of the remaining few went into a downward spiral. Lack of investment left the remaining studio with second-rate equipment and only a handful of employees by 1972.<sup>312</sup>

By 1975 GRT began dismantling Chess and Ralph Bass, a former Chess producer, was left to move all the master tapes to a GRT storage vault in Nashville. In August 1975 Chess was sold to a New Jersey firm called All Platinum for \$950,000. Short of money to operate the company as an active label, the firm lost the last successful group, the Dells, and became a reissues company, only sporadically releasing albums with the Sugar Hill label.<sup>313</sup> The last sale of the Chess catalogue was in 1986 to MCA.<sup>314</sup> This corporation has reissued many of the Chess recordings and most recently has issued a Chess 50th anniversary edition of earlier releases.

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<sup>311</sup>Pruter, 129. According to Andre Millard, Chess sold the company in 1968. Millard, 334.

<sup>312</sup>Pruter, 130-132 and Golkin, 41.

<sup>313</sup>Pruter, 130-132.

<sup>314</sup>Commission on Chicago Landmarks, "Chess Records Office and Studio," 11.

The 2120 building continued to be used after Chess Records moved out. It was leased to employee Ralph Bass and remodeled for use by the South Side theater and dance school to which Mr. Bass's wife was connected, the Sammy Dyer School of the Theater. The school remained there until the 1970s.<sup>315</sup>

In 1980, the building was sold to Gerald Sims, a former Chess musician. In time, he re-equipped the upper story as a recording studio and leased the first floor.<sup>316</sup> Inspired by widespread interest in the historic value of the site, he hoped to turn it into a museum and began remodeling work to incorporate displays into the site. Sims even began to collect memorabilia appropriate for his museum, but the idea never came to fruition. The building, both inside and out, remained in much the same form as when Chess Records occupied it.<sup>317</sup>

For the Chess Record Corporation, 2120 was the most significant site in its story. Not only was it the corporation's most permanent home (from 1957 to 1967), but its remodeling specifically for Chess incorporated all aspects of the business from the technical (recording, mixing, mastering) and creative (music making, sound manipulating, innovating) to the logistical (packaging, packing, shipping) and the managerial (administrating, decision making, supervising). None of this would have mattered much to the world, of course, if the music coming out of 2120 hadn't altered the course of popular music. It did and the list of artists who recorded there includes some of the most notable in blues and rock 'n roll. In a purely local context, 2120 reflects the history of Chicago's South Side and the intersection of people from its

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<sup>315</sup>Tim Samuelson, interview by author, written notes, Chicago, 27 September 1996.

<sup>316</sup>Thomas Washington, "2120," *Chicago New City*, 23 September 1989, 32.

<sup>317</sup>Samuelson, interview by author, 27 September 1996.

diverse ethnic and racial communities.

Despite these claims, the effort to create protection for the site was an uphill battle. The reasons behind this are discussed in the next section. Also explained are the particular approaches taken to create the safeguards now in place.

### How Preserved

The preservation of 2120 South Michigan has more than one component. The first is its city landmark status, ideally protecting the site from inappropriate physical changes in the future. This protection is only as strong as the people who enforce it, however, and provides no guarantee that the building will not suffer from poor diligence or decisions based on bad judgment or political pressure. There is also no provision in Chicago's ordinance for required maintenance, so outright neglect could also threaten the site. The second element to viable preservation, then, is ownership of the building by sympathetic and capable people who use the structure in an appropriate, enlightened manner. Tim Samuelson set out to make both of these happen for 2120. The initial research phase and the process of landmarking the structure are discussed first below. Then the efforts to provide guidance and aid the owners are outlined.

### Research

At about the same time the building went up for sale in 1980, Chicago architectural historian Tim Samuelson began to research the history of Chess Records and its Chicago locations. This was not an easy proposal. Because the corporation had remained private, there was minimal public documentation of its affairs. A number of authors had written about Chess Records, but the majority of published

materials focused on the music rather than the business itself. Samuelson went to original sources, focusing on city records, telephone directories, trade publications, and city newspapers, and pieced together the story of the Chicago locations the company occupied. These sources, however, provided almost no detailed information on the set-up and use of the sites themselves. Despite an earnest search, photographic documentation was for all purposes non-existent.

Though he had pieced this information together over the course of the decade, it was not until 1988 that Samuelson made further research a priority. Five years earlier he had joined the staff of the Commission on Chicago Landmarks and was now in a position to submit his findings to the Commission for its consideration of landmark status for 2120, the site he believed most relevant in Chess Record's story. To prepare as complete a site history as possible, Samuelson sought to document the lay-out and functions of the interior spaces. Locating the 1957 building permit for alterations to 2120 provided him with accompanying drawings of the interior.<sup>318</sup> He gained access to the site in the early part of 1989 to further search for clues.<sup>319</sup>

Without historic photographs to document the interior, Samuelson contacted people involved with Chess for their recollections of the lay-out. His questions included: what spaces were occupied by the corporation, what facilities for various purposes were located at the different sites, what work was done at outside recording studios, and how many staff were employed.

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<sup>318</sup> Having located the January 7, 1957 permit for \$20,000 worth of "Interior alterations to 1st and 2nd fls. and new store front" of 2120, Samuelson was able to obtain Xerox black-line prints of the eleven accompanying project drawings early in 1989. He had also located the March 25, 1969 permit and drawings for \$2,000 of "interior alterations to existing music studio & dancing school." Samuelson focused on the 1957 drawings, preferring to determine the lay-out of the space during Chess's initial occupation.

<sup>319</sup> Tim Samuelson, interview by author, written notes, Chicago, 16 July 1999.

Samuelson had been able to speak with Leonard's son Marshall in 1988.<sup>320</sup> Others he contacted by mail. Responses from Willie Dixon<sup>321</sup> and Ralph Bass<sup>322</sup> were extremely helpful. Though these firsthand accounts provided information otherwise likely unobtainable, Samuelson was careful to cross-check such observations with other available evidence.<sup>323</sup>

With the permit drawings as a starting point, Samuelson coupled the insights of Chess personnel with his observations of the contemporary interior to sketch out a circa 1957 plan of the first and second floors. He came to the conclusion that 2120 had "retained the general form of the original spaces."<sup>324</sup> Given the relevance of the

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<sup>320</sup>Tim Samuelson, "Questions for Marshall Chess," D (Photocopy), Tim Samuelson's personal files, Chicago.

<sup>321</sup>In March 1989 Samuelson sent the first letter to the personal manager of Willie Dixon. Tim Samuelson, to Nancy Meyer, The Cameron Organization Inc., Letter (photocopy), 13 March 1989, Tim Samuelson's personal files, Chicago.

Willie responded through his manager, even adding his own drawing of the 49th and Cottage Grove headquarters. Scott A. Cameron, to Tim Samuelson, Letter (photocopy), 10 April 1989, Tim Samuelson's personal files, Chicago.

<sup>322</sup>Samuelson sent questions to Ralph Bass, the A&R Manager for Chess from 1958 until the studio shuts its Chicago doors. Tim Samuelson, to Ralph Bass, The Sammy Dyer School of the Theater, Letter (photocopy), 16 March 1989, Tim Samuelson's personal files, Chicago.

Bass responded to questions about 2120, clarifying issues about the extent of operations there, dates of alterations, number of staff, and use of spaces. Ralph Bass, "Questions Regarding the Chess Records Corporation and 2120 S. Michigan Avenue," Completed questionnaire returned to Tim Samuelson (photocopy), received 27 March 1989, Tim Samuelson's personal files, Chicago.

<sup>323</sup>As he noted in his written recommendations to 2120 owner Gerald Sims: "While personal recollections are extremely useful, they can often be misleading, as people will often have differing recollections or interpretation of a site. For restoration purposes, personal recollections should always be backed up with site evidence and historical materials." Tim Samuelson, "Recommendations for the Restoration of Chess Records Office and Studio - 2120 South Michigan," D (photocopy), Tim Samuelson's personal files, Chicago.

interior to the business style and story of Chess Records, the “interior configurations of the first and second floor” were included as critical features in the landmark designation ordinance considered by the Landmarks Commission.

Research was put on hold from August 1989 to July 1990 while Samuelson took a one-year leave of absence from the Landmarks Commission as a Loeb Fellow at Harvard University. The site was successfully landmarked during this time. Given that all permits for work would thereafter have to be reviewed by the Commission, Samuelson picked up where his research had left off to establish the details of the interior build-out by the Chess Corporation.

He resumed efforts to contact people who might know something of the site’s lay-out.<sup>325</sup> John S. Townsend, Jr., the architect who first remodeled 2120 for Chess, had only “vague memories” of the job and could not be of assistance.<sup>326</sup> Christian Samuel, the architect listed in the 1969 city permit for alterations to 2120, could not be located.

Site visits continued to provide information. Comparison with a photograph of the Chess-era facade made clear that the storefront’s three original glass panels had been replaced with six panels. On the interior, many alterations had occurred either for the purposes of the dance school or by Gerald Sims.<sup>327</sup> Seventies-era dropped

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<sup>324</sup> Commission on Chicago Landmarks, “Chess Records Office and Studio,” 12.

<sup>325</sup> Tim Samuelson, to John S. Townsend, Jr., Letter (photocopy), 25 July 1990, Tim Samuelson’s personal files, Chicago.

<sup>326</sup> John S. Townsend, to Tim Samuelson, Letter (photocopy), 1 September 1990, Tim Samuelson’s personal files, Chicago.

<sup>327</sup> Gerald Sims had been making changes to 2120 during his decade of ownership. Interest generated in the site through the landmarking process appeared to have inspired Sims to accelerate the modifications he was making to the site. Sims spoke to Samuelson of his idea to create a blues museum and revamped recording studio at the site. Tim Samuelson, interview by author, written notes, Chicago, Summer 1996.



ceilings had been installed and paneling put up on most walls. Several changes had also been made to the second floor studio: a disco ball hung from its ceiling; the control room had been dismantled and its configuration altered; and the west wall had been taken out and a new one built. Changes to the studio were especially regrettable, given that the particular materials and configuration of this room had been part of what gave Chess recordings their distinctive sound.

Several features of the site differed from the 1957 drawings. The front staircase, shown as a single staircase in the drawings, split at the first landing to an awkward double stair. A vault at the rear of the second floor, built for storage of master tapes, was in place, though not indicated in the construction drawings. Such changes suggested that either major work had been done by later owners or that the interior work done in 1957 had not necessarily adhered strictly to permit drawings.

Clarification on this point came from Jack Wiener, one of Chess's first engineers. In a deal with the Chess brothers noted in trade journals at the time, Wiener had set up his recording facility, Sheldon Recording Studios, in the newly acquired 2120 building. He designed and custom-built the studio, equipping it with double mono systems so recording could be done in mono or stereo.<sup>328</sup> In exchange

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<sup>328</sup>“A Young Man's Fancy,” *Downbeat*, 19 September 1957, 22, 35.

Wiener was quoted in this article:

“I don't like the gimmick effect so often obtained on stereo, those definitely split systems, with the horns here and the rhythm section there. I'm going to strive for actual, full-dimensional sound.

“Stereo will lose its allure as a gimmick in time, but it has validity. Eventually, I feel, it will replace most of today's big-band recordings. It seems to me that its effect is limited in small-group recording, but it is extremely effective with large orchestras, where there is genuine depth to be achieved.”

It is interesting that Wiener provided for stereo recording despite his feeling that it would not be effective in small groups. Certainly, the 31' x 20' studio in 2120 precluded large orchestras. Likely, it was his desire to offer the cutting edge of recording technology which prompted this decision.

for this, he recorded Chess's masters. Wiener had not only designed and built the 2120 recording studios himself, but he had overseen the entire 1956-57 renovation, making his insights immensely valuable. Through conversations and site visits accompanying the Chicago-area engineer, Samuelson learned that plans filed with the 1957 permit were almost totally ignored when the remodeling was done, especially for the second floor studio. Careful investigation showed that more of the existing walls dated from the 1957 remodeling than previously had been thought. Wiener's recollections turned out to be very reliable and helped to fill in a number of gaps.<sup>329</sup> Questions continued to be answered in this manner throughout the rehabilitation process as Samuelson continued to contact and meet with Chess personnel including Phil Chess and Malcolm Chisolm.

#### Landmark Designation

The list of sites to be considered for landmark designation by the Commission during a given year was generally based on staff recommendations formally approved by a nominating subcommittee. In late 1988, staff debated whether to include 2120 South Michigan as one of their suggestions. A number of questions were discussed. First, because Chess Records was the most recent site ever to be proposed for designation, it was unclear whether there would be sufficient voting support. Second, a site designated for its importance in musical history was rare. Third, the building might be considered historically important, but the architectural merit of the terra cotta facade and industrial interior seemed very limited.<sup>330</sup> Samuelson argued that with a careful review of the site's history, commission members would see that 2120's

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<sup>329</sup>Samuelson, "Landmarks of Chicago Blues and Gospel," II-121.

<sup>330</sup>Ibid., II-119 - II-120.

historic relevance outweighed all these factors. The team agreed to include this site in their list of suggestions put to the Commission's nominating subcommittee for review.

The subcommittee, too, decided to keep Chess Records as one of the sites they proposed to the full Commission, but one of the member's initial questions, "What's a Chess Records,"<sup>331</sup> made clear the degree to which Commissioners would need to be filled in on the site's history. Samuelson found help in his efforts from Lori Rotenberg, a reporter at the *Chicago Sun-Times*. In her 8 January 1989 article<sup>332</sup> she sought out some of Chess's stars for their comments: Willie Dixon said, "It would be beautiful to keep it, wouldn't it? It is part of the history of America. Remember, all rock is the blues by rearrangement. And the blues should have a place, a home, so the world knows where they came from." Chuck Berry stated "Saving it [the 2120 building] would be a wonderful idea not only for Chicago but for the Chess Brothers and the Chess artists."<sup>333</sup> This positive coverage of 2120 caught the attention of the Commissioners and helped to raise their understanding of the potential public interest in seeing the site landmarked. They agreed it was worthy of further investigation and approved 2120 as one of the sites to be reviewed for possible landmark designation that year.

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<sup>331</sup>Ibid., II-121.

<sup>332</sup>Lori Rotenberg, "Sweet Home, Chicago; Chess Records, Blues Shrine," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 8 January 1989, 4.

<sup>333</sup>Ibid. According to Tim Samuelson, Lori found Berry's number under Berry, Chuck in the White Pages. When she called and asked if Chuck Berry was there, the man who answered said, "No, who is it?" She said she was a reporter from the *Sun-Times* doing research on 2120. The man asked if the fucker was for sale and said he wanted to buy it. He then said Chuck would be there if she called back later in the day. Lori asked if she called back in one and one-half minutes, would he be there. "Maybe," he answered. She called back in one and one-half minutes, the same man answered, and this time said, yes, it was Chuck. Tim Samuelson, interview by author, written notes, Chicago, 20 June 1997.

News of the proposed nomination soon found its way to singer/songwriter John Mellencamp and Westwood One Radio Network's host Timothy White. White contacted Samuelson who supported the idea of appealing for designation support on air. Arrangements were made with the owner and on 31 May 1989, *Playin' Chess: John Cougar Mellencamp*, a special edition of Timothy White's Rock Stars show, was broadcast live from 2120. In a press release for the show, White indicated the intent was to attract international attention so that listeners would write to the Commission in support of landmark status.<sup>334</sup>

Mellencamp and his band performed special material for the broadcast including Willie Dixon's "Seventh Son," which was later released as a single with all proceeds going to the Blues Heaven Foundation toward preservation of the building.<sup>335</sup> He cited the profound influence Chess music had had on him and his contemporaries and proclaimed his support for landmarking the site: " 'Chicago is a great place, and it'd be a shame if it lost Chess. It's kind of a sad statement on the way we treat our old, you know what I'm saying? 'Oh this place is old, worn-out, who needs it?' I think that's horrible,' Mellencamp said.'<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>334</sup>Westwood One Companies, "Playin' Chess: John Cougar Mellencamp Featured in Next Edition of Timothy White's Rock Stars," Press release, 17 May 1989, Tim Samuelson's personal files, Chicago, 2.

<sup>335</sup>At this point Dixon did not own 2120 but hoped to buy it for use as the foundation's headquarters per Lori Rotenberk, "Mellencamp a Blues Angel," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 15 June 1989, 16.

<sup>336</sup>Westwood One Companies, 4. Mellencamp's quote continued: " 'Just sitting here looking around, there's so many things you could do with this place--as a museum and things. Think of all the people who've recorded here, and the great music that's come from here! All it takes is for someone to have a little heart and a little soul and a little vision.' Mellencamp concluded, 'I'd like to be optimistic about this place. To preserve the past is so important. We have to have places like this or we don't understand the future.' " Ibid.

Two months later, more letters had been received in support of landmarking 2120 than for any structure ever considered. If there were any doubts on the part of the Commissioners, Samuelson's dumping of over 140 letters onto the boardroom table the day of their vote made a dramatic point about the national scope of this structure's historic appeal.<sup>337</sup> The Commission voted unanimously to adopt a resolution that the site met criteria for designation at its 2 August 1989 meeting.

The Department of Planning reviewed the proposal in August and gave its approval, citing the proposed landmarking's contribution to the revitalization of the area and its encouragement of international tourism. The report also suggested that a blues/rock museum would be desirable at the site and would serve as a cultural asset to the city. When the owner signed a consent form on November 3, the need for a public hearing was negated, and by December 6 the Commission voted unanimously to recommend landmark status to the City Council. On 16 May 1990 the City Council voted 2120 South Michigan Avenue an official Chicago landmark, specifying the critical features receiving protection as the entire Michigan Avenue facade, the roof of the structure, and the interior configurations of the first and second floors. Samuelson later noted in a summary of this final vote: "It turned out that a mere mention of the

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<sup>337</sup>In a memorandum to the Commission Members before the meeting, Samuelson wrote: "In considering the merits of this property as a proposed landmark, the Commission should be made aware of the fact that over 140 cards and letters from across the country have been received supporting the nomination, and that the proposed designation has been the subject of newspaper articles and radio and television broadcasts. In terms of written response with letters and cards, this is the largest public reaction to any single designation project." Tim Samuelson, to Commission Members, Chicago, 31 July 1989, "Subject: Chess Records Office and Studio," Memorandum, Commission on Chicago Landmarks "Chess Records" file, Chicago. Samuelson noted in an interview by the author that previous proposed nominations of buildings even by the likes of Louis Sullivan produced at most fifteen letters to the Commission. Samuelson, interview by author, 20 June 1997.

song ‘Johnny B. Goode,’ recorded by Chuck Berry at the Chess studios in 1958, was an immediate touchstone to most of those involved. At one City Council meeting, an alderman - in fact, an oft-time foe of landmarks - noted, ‘Yeah, I always liked that song,’ and voted for designation.”<sup>338</sup>

### Ownership

In January 1989, *Chicago Sun-Times* reporter Lori Rotenberg had phoned Willie Dixon to ask his opinion on the proposed landmarking of the 2120 site. If Dixon had not already had the thought, this call may have prompted him to contemplate the location of his Blues Heaven Foundation in the building, for his desire was to move the headquarters to Chicago. The foundation, begun in 1981, was then pursuing its mission in California, where Dixon and his family were living. The nonprofit’s goals included educating people, especially children, about the blues; helping musicians receive the royalties due them for their work; educating blues artists about copyrighting, publishing, and practices of the music industry; encouraging appreciation, awareness, and a positive image of the blues tradition; and funding emergency medical treatment for blues musicians.<sup>339</sup>

By mid-1989, Dixon had begun talking publicly about his hopes to purchase 2120 S. Michigan.<sup>340</sup> In 1990 he had occasion to visit the site. On June 7, Dixon

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<sup>338</sup>Samuelson, “Landmarks of Chicago Blues and Gospel,” II-121.

<sup>339</sup> Blues Heaven Foundation. “A Celebration of Blues and Black History, February 1997.” Brochure. Author’s personal files, Chicago.

<sup>340</sup>In Rotenberg’s June 15, 1989 article on John Cougar Mellencamp’s May radio broadcast from Chess Studios, she noted that “Mellencamp, 37, said he did the program at Chess to support landmark status for the building, which Dixon hopes to buy to use as headquarters for his Blues Heaven Foundation.” Mellencamp’s donation of royalties from two songs recorded at the Chess studios (“Jackie Brown” and

joined Phil and Marshall Chess, Buddy Guy, Sunnyland Slim, and a host of other former Chess artists, engineers, and co-workers in a ceremony at 2120 in honor of the building's new landmark status. The evening had been organized by Friends of 2120, a not-for-profit foundation organized by Gerald Sims to help turn the site into a " 'living museum where artists can record, where the public can hear lectures on the blues, and where tourists can visit.' " <sup>341</sup> The initiative proved difficult to sustain, however.

By 1992, Dixon had approached Sims with the idea of purchasing the site, but Sims did not want to sell. Dixon had also looked into locating his foundation in the Harold Washington Library Center, but the Library's restricted hours of access combined with their requirement that he donate his historic material to the Library upon his death led him to look elsewhere. <sup>342</sup> Willie Dixon's search ended with his death on 29 January 1992. <sup>343</sup>

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Dixon's "Seventh Son") to the Blues Heaven Foundation indicated his desire to see the building purchased by the foundation. Lori Rotenberk, "Mellencamp a Blues Angel."

A December 17, 1993 article in the *Chicago Tribune* reported that Mellencamp also wrote a matching check to the Blues Heaven Foundation in the amount of the single's proceeds and *that* spurred the Dixon family to inquire about the purchase of 2120 S. Michigan. Greg Kot, "Willie Dixon's Heavenly Legacy, Blues Heaven Aims to Smooth the Road for Other Blues Artists," *Chicago Tribune*, 17 December 1993, sec. Friday, 5.

<sup>341</sup>The evening included Phil Chess's acceptance of an award from the Chicago chapter of the National Academy of Recording Artists for the Chess brothers' contribution to the city's heritage and the music industry. Lori Rotenberk, "Chess Studio Site Being Recorded--As Landmark," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 7 June 1990, 8; and Judy Hevrdejs, "Chess Records Brings 'Family' Back Together," *Chicago Tribune*, 8 June 1990.

<sup>342</sup>Dave Hoekstra, Contributing: Lori Rotenberk, "Dixon Family to Locate his Blues Heaven Here," *Chicago Sun Times*, 3 February 1992.

<sup>343</sup>According to Willie's widow Marie Dixon, " 'Before he passed, he'd heard the owner of 2120 South Michigan wanted to sell,' " and had tried to negotiate a purchase.

Determined to carry on his legacy, his family continued looking for a Chicago location and by 1993 they had chosen a different site for the Blues Heaven Foundation headquarters. By that time, though, Sims's financial situation had changed and he was willing to put 2120 up for sale.<sup>344</sup> When 2120 became available, Marie Dixon, Willie's widow, negotiated with Sims and purchased the building in 1993.<sup>345</sup> She then donated it the Blues Heaven Foundation.<sup>346</sup>

Intended as headquarters for the Blues Heaven Foundation, plans for the building included a recording studio and possibly a radio station to air blues music. The Dixon family did not consider using the site as a museum space, but envisioned buying a parcel of land nearby where they could construct a new museum building.<sup>347</sup>

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“ ‘When Willie passed in 1992, Gerald Sims came to me and said that he would share the building with me. I went back to Chicago in February of last year [1993] and was scouting around for a place to house Blues Heaven.’ “ ‘Willie Dixon's Blues Heaven Foundation Set to Open in Chicago,’ *Goldmine*, 4 February 1994, sec. Grapevine.

<sup>344</sup>In a *New City* article of November 25, 1993 recounting competing groups' efforts to establish a blues museum in Chicago, David Witter explained the lack of progress of Friends of 2120 to reach their goal: “Located at a musical shrine known to blues fans throughout the world and supported by almost everyone in the blues community, a Chicago blues museum at 2120 South Michigan seemed like a done deal. Yet after a very auspicious beginning on that June [7, 1990] evening, the proposed museum/studio at Chess has experienced a number of setbacks. Sims' efforts with the building stalled, apparently from a lack of resources and the driving desire to make the project work... ‘Gerald Sims didn't want to sell the building, and only offered the first floor for a museum, which was not adequate,’ says Shirley [*sic*] Dixon-Nelson, daughter of the blues legend. ‘Then we began talking with the planning commission, which was supposed to come up with a new site, but politics seemed to stall that effort, so we finally ended up buying the Chess building...’ ” David Witter, “Welcome to Mojoworld, Chicago's Battle of the Blues Museums,” *Chicago New City*, 25 November 1993, 9-12, 10.

<sup>345</sup>Kot, “Willie Dixon's Heavenly Legacy.”

<sup>346</sup>Blues Heaven Foundation, “A Celebration of Blues and Black History,” 3.

<sup>347</sup>Lori Rotenberk, “Blues Legend's Family Keeps his Dream Alive,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, 10 March 1993, 10. In a 1993 newsletter from the Blues Heaven Foundation,



The prescribed uses for the 2120 site noted in Blues Heaven Foundation newsletters and newspaper articles changed from 1993 through 1997. This uncertainty, particularly with regard to creating a museum at the site, likely stemmed from Willie Dixon's original indecision.<sup>348</sup> With the wide-ranging set of goals set forth in Blues Heaven Foundation's mission, the Dixons were pulled in many directions. Moving cross-country, there were many unknowns, including what help would be offered from the city or other sources, and for what purpose.

Tim Samuelson was someone who offered that help and direction, including efforts to raise the funds to make the work happen. Samuelson had been trying to work with Sims, giving tours for Friends of 2120 and providing guidelines for appropriate treatment of the site, though much of the work Sims had already done was not in line with a preservation philosophy. After Marie had purchased 2120, her attorney phoned the Commission on Chicago Landmarks to discuss the implications of the site's landmark status. Introducing himself as a representative of the new owners, the attorney asked the Landmarks staff to explain what the owners' legal obligations were. The attorney responded with negative criticism at the restrictions he felt were burdensome to the property owners. Despite this, staff encouraged the attorney to

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this idea was echoed: "The Chess Building will be used as an office for the Foundation as well as an educational center to assist blues artists with copyright and royalty protection. Mrs. Dixon says the search continues for a site to house the Foundation's ambitious plans for an extensive Blues Heaven museum in the Chicago area." Blues Heaven Foundation, "Foundation Secures Chicago Home at Landmark Chess Records Building," Newsletter [1993], Tim Samuelson's personal files, Chicago, 1.

<sup>348</sup>Rotenberk, "Sweet Home Chicago." In Rotenberk's 1989 article with an interview of Dixon, she wrote that "Legendary bluesman Willie Dixon says he would like to make the building the national headquarters for his Blues Heaven Foundation and perhaps a museum of the blues."

have the new owners consult with them regarding their plans for the space.<sup>349</sup>

Samuelson was invited to a party thrown at 2120 in 1993 where he first met the Dixons.<sup>350</sup> He took them through the building, sharing his knowledge of the site and the Chess Records company. Samuelson learned of their plans to house the foundation headquarters in the building, though they did not speak of restoring the space. “Being in the building was good enough for them,” according to Samuelson. Initially the Dixons planned to leave the interior chiefly as they found it, with post-Chess paneling and disco ball in place. Their focus was on creating working offices for the foundation.<sup>351</sup> Efforts to create a space for the public were tied in to the idea of purchasing an adjoining site and constructing a new museum there.

Samuelson continued to stay in touch with the Dixons and shared his conviction that restoring the site would add to its value. He explained that restoration should be easy, that the basic form and materials were mostly in place. The extent to which the site would attract public interest was dependent upon its restoration to the period of historic interest when the Chess Company occupied the building, he added. By preserving existing original fabric and carefully creating elements removed in subsequent remodeling they could generate media and public attention.

The Dixons wanted visibility for their foundation and the argument that a restored site would provide this was eventually taken to heart. Marie understood the value of preserving the site and came to feel that this was the right approach. Restoring 2120 to reflect the era of its significance was something she came to feel she

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<sup>349</sup>Samuelson, interview by author, 16 July 1999.

<sup>350</sup>Shirli Dixon-Nelson said that Gerald Sims had recommended they speak with Samuelson. Shirli Dixon-Nelson, interview by author, written notes, Chicago, 27 September 1999.

<sup>351</sup>Samuelson, interview by author, 20 June 1997.

had to do.<sup>352</sup>

Samuelson's assistance was undoubtedly one of the reasons the Dixons agreed to the idea of restoring 2120. Without cost<sup>353</sup>, he was willing to assist in coordinating the preservation work needing to be undertaken, share his knowledge of the site's history, continue research as his time allowed, and directly assist in obtaining needed funding and capable personnel. When combined with his preservation expertise and experience, the Dixons' decision to work with Samuelson is easily understood.

Proof of his dedication began to take shape for the Dixons during the summer of 1993. One of the most critical needs of the building was repair of the parapet. It had begun to lean out over the sidewalk and the terra cotta ornament at its southern end was loose. Given the freeze-thaw cycle occasioned by Chicago winters, this section of ornament was most vulnerable. In a bravado act to insure that it was not lost, Samuelson got two colleagues to climb up to the roof of 2120 with him. Using clothesline, they fastened one end around the loose polychrome-accented terra cotta piece at the south end of the parapet and secured the other end solidly to the roof.<sup>354</sup> This was far from the preferred method of using nylon netting to manipulate terra cotta as lines and cords can introduce further problems. It was unknown if the Dixons were going to be doing any repair in the near future, however, and Samuelson felt that

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<sup>352</sup>Samuelson, interview by author, Summer 1996.

<sup>353</sup>Samuelson did not charge the Dixons for his assistance. This assistance was made possible, in large part, by Tim's role as a staff member of the Commission on Chicago Landmarks. Samuelson would also volunteer his own time for the effort.

<sup>354</sup>Samuelson's recollection was that he, Bill Latoza, and Norman Weiss (of Columbia University) were on the roof securing the terra cotta ornament. Samuelson, interview by author, 16 July 1999. However, Bill Latoza recalls that it was just himself and Samuelson while Joe Leonardi, board member of the Blues Heaven Foundation, waited below. Bill Latoza, interview by author, written notes, Chicago, 9 August 1999.

the risk of losing the terra cotta to breakage was greater than any introduced by this method.

This very temporary solution required more serious help and the Dixons applied for a facade rebate grant from the Chicago Department of Planning & Development. Located in a low-income neighborhood, this project was eligible for Community Development Block Grant facade renovation funds. Because these are federal dollars, federal regulations, i.e. Section 106 review, applied, and the urgently needed funds met a string of delays.

The Dixons' lawyer completed the application form and Samuelson wrote up an addendum noting the significance of the site, the crucial need for repairs, and the scope of work. Ten areas requiring attention were included: disassembly and re-setting of the parapet, repointing the facade, cleaning the facade, repair and restoration of the aluminum storefront, installation of signs, repair of exterior lighting, replacement of the sidewalk, repair and repointing of the south wall (facing vacant lot), re-flashing and repairs to roofing resulting from parapet repairs on south and east elevations, and restoration of the inner show-window areas as a 24-hour interpretive display.

By the end of 1993, the three bids required with the application had been obtained and the completed paperwork was submitted.<sup>355</sup> The Commission on Chicago Landmarks (CCL) enlisted the Department of Planning & Development (DPD) Commissioner's help to permit maximum assistance for the project due to its landmark status. Given the urgency of the needed repairs, the DPD Commissioner also requested emergency environmental review by the Dept. of Environment

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<sup>355</sup>Commission on Chicago Landmarks, "Facade Rebate Application to Chicago Dept. of Planning & Development, Revised July 16, 1993, Received December 6, 1993" from Marie Dixon, CCL file on "Chess Records," Chicago.

(DoE).<sup>356</sup> The DoE redirected the application to the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA) to determine if the site was National Register-eligible.<sup>357</sup>

By January 1994, the IHPA determined 2120 was National Register-eligible and that the proposed work met “Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings” pending review of preliminary, 35%, and final specifications and plans.<sup>358</sup> DoE advanced the application with its approval to the federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP).<sup>359</sup> By February 1994, the ACHP returned its opinion that the proposed undertaking would “have no adverse effect” upon the property and that Section 106 requirements were met as per conditions of working with the IHPA.<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>356</sup>Logan A. Burnett, Chicago Dept. of Planning & Development, to Gregory Tataara, Chicago Dept. of the Environment, “Re: Emergency Environmental Review Request for 2120 S. Michigan,” Memorandum, 6 December 1993, Tim Samuelson’s personal files, Chicago.

<sup>357</sup>Henry L. Henderson, Commissioner, Chicago Dept. of the Environment, to Theodore W. Hild, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, “Re: CDBG Facade Rebate Program,” Letter, 7 December 1993, Tim Samuelson’s personal files, Chicago.

<sup>358</sup>Theodore W. Hild, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, to Henry L. Henderson, Chicago Department of the Environment, “Re: CDBG - Facade Rebate, 2120 S. Michigan Ave., IHPA Log #12121093,” Letter, 11 January 1994, Tim Samuelson’s personal files, Chicago.

<sup>359</sup>Henry L. Henderson, Commissioner, Chicago Department of the Environment, to Don L. Klima, Director, Eastern Office of Review, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), “Re: CDBG Business Facade Rebate Project, Former Chess Records Office and Studio, 2120 S. Michigan Avenue,” Letter, 19 January 1994, Tim Samuelson’s personal files, Chicago.

<sup>360</sup>Don L. Klima, Director, Eastern Office of Review, ACHP, to Henry Henderson, Commissioner, Chicago Dept. of the Environment, “Re: Proposed Facade Renovation Project, 2120 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois,” Letter, 8 February 1994, Tim Samuelson’s personal files, Chicago.

The DoE forwarded all specs and estimates to the IHPA with a clarification that the scope of the work would not warrant preparation of project drawings, and thereby requesting that the enclosed specifications and estimates would be sufficient to meet IHPA standards.<sup>361</sup> After DPD staff clarified for the IHPA that no interior work was included in the project, IHPA gave its approval for the project to proceed without further review. Finally, by June, DoE sent a letter to DPD saying that the environmental review was complete and that the project could commence.<sup>362</sup>

Granting of funding was further complicated by the need to start work on the parapet repair on an emergency basis. The city's facade rebate program required a process which started with approval of the project. After approval is received, a permit for the proposed work must be submitted. After reviewing the permit, DPD then issues a letter to proceed. No work is allowed to start before this letter is issued. In the case of 2120, work was begun on the parapet before this crucial letter was received, making the project ineligible. However, parapet repair was not the only facade work necessary for the project. Landmarks staff took advantage of this fact to transfer the allocation of rebate funds to other work on the facade, such as window replacement, repair and refurbishment of facade elements, and creation of the display area visible to the exterior. The Bauer Latoza Studio prepared drawings in March 1995 for this work. Funding of \$40,000 was eventually received by the Blues Heaven Foundation upon submittal of payment documentation for the work for which a permit

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<sup>361</sup>Henry L. Henderson, Commissioner, Chicago Dept. of the Environment, to Anne E. Haaker, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, "Re: CDBG Facade Rebate Program, Former Chess Records Office & Studio Project, 2120 S. Michigan, IHPA Log #12121093," Letter, 31 March 1994, Tim Samuelson's personal files, Chicago.

<sup>362</sup>Henry L. Henderson, Commissioner, Chicago Dept. of the Environment, to Valerie Jarrett, Commissioner, Chicago Dept. of Planning & Development, "Re: CDBG Facade Rebate Program Project, Former Chess Records Bldg., 2120 SMA," Letter, 14 June 1994, Tim Samuelson's personal files, Chicago.

was approved in March of 1996.<sup>363</sup>

The delays in moving forward with work were noted in a *Chicago Reader* article which began “Chicago is the home of the blues, and of bureaucracy as well.”<sup>364</sup> Noting the Blues Heaven Foundation had hoped to renovate the site by June in time for the city’s Bluesfest, the opening appeared to be delayed until the fall.<sup>365</sup> Concerned that the article sounded disparaging<sup>366</sup>, both the Dixons (Marie and Shirli) and the Blues Heaven Foundation’s media representative wrote letters of apology for the tone of the article to Tim Samuelson. The letters expressed gratitude to the CCL: “As we have often stated your input and assistance has provided us with details that would have been an enormous burden on the foundation.”<sup>367</sup>

Though these letters expressed cordial relations, doubtless the Dixons and CCL staff felt frustration at the length of time securing funding was taking. At the same time, however, the Dixons had been working with an architect to lay out the space for the Blues Heaven Foundation. As a landmark, all permits for work would have to be

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<sup>363</sup>Jim Peters, Commission on Chicago Landmarks, interview by author, written notes, Chicago, 30 July 1999.

<sup>364</sup>Bill Wyman, “Our Blues Heaven,” *Chicago Reader*, 13 May 1994, sec. Hitsville.

<sup>365</sup>Wyman had likely gotten the June date from an earlier article which stated that “Now the foundation is in the midst of its first major fund drive as it seeks to convert its newest property, the landmark Chess building at 2120 South Michigan Ave., into the Blues Heaven headquarters by June 1.” Kot, “Willie Dixon’s Heavenly Legacy,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 1993.

<sup>366</sup>Wyman quoted Shirli Dixon-Nelson: “‘Whew!’ says daughter Shirli Dixon, a blues singer herself, diplomatically. ‘That’s all I’m going to say about it. We’re very appreciative of the landmark status, and the site is deserving of it, but it’s been quite a challenge for us.’”

<sup>367</sup>Marie Dixon, Blues Heaven Foundation President, and Shirli Dixon-Nelson, BHF V.P./Acting Executive Director, to Tim Samuelson, Chicago Landmarks Commission, Letter, 18 May 1994. Tim Samuelson’s personal files, Chicago.

approved by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks. Ideally, Landmarks staff suggest that proposed plans be discussed with them so as to avoid problems approving work later on. Samuelson offered his help to the Dixons to review their architect's plans. He arranged for a walk-through of the space in 1994 with the architect to review the work proposed.

During the walk-through, it became clear that the Dixons' architect did not approach the project with a preservation philosophy. He proposed complex changes which did not respect the historic associations of the site. The work would also be very costly. After this meeting, an Illinois SHPO staff member and architect Bill Latoza, who had both gone on the tour, expressed concerns to Samuelson. Latoza said he would be interested in making a proposal for restoration of the site to the Dixons.

Samuelson shared his reactions with the Dixons and his perspective on the cost of the work proposed. Samuelson also mentioned the conversation he had had with Latoza, though he was careful not to advocate for him, as this would have been inappropriate on the part of a city employee. It turned out that the Dixons were interested in finding out more from Latoza whose firm had an extensive record of preservation work. After meeting with him, the Dixons chose not to pursue the plans that had been drawn up but to work with Latoza's firm to fashion a more sensitive solution.<sup>368</sup>

### Period of Significance

The work done on 2120 would contain elements of both restoration and rehabilitation. The idea proposed by Samuelson was to bring as much of the site as possible in line with how it functioned and looked during the period in Chess's history when their most significant music was being recorded. Insofar as existing materials

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<sup>368</sup>Samuelson, interview by author, 16 July 1999.



from later historic periods would be removed, and missing features determined to have existed in that time would be re-introduced, the project resembled a restoration. Certainly this was the case with the facade.

This restoration philosophy was not strictly adhered to by the Dixons, however. First and foremost they wanted the site to serve as the BHF headquarters and some of the decisions made along the way to accommodate this compromised historic materials and accurate representation. In addition, the intended use deviated from that of the property's restoration period. Although it could be argued that the use of much of the first floor for offices continued the original use of the space, the absence of a working recording studio on the second floor and the dedication of first floor rooms to a gift shop and small theater constituted a more significant change in the primary function of the site, namely to that of a museum. Strictly speaking, then, this project should be considered a rehabilitation and adaptive re-use.

Although a full restoration was not proposed, the preservation of extant features and sensitive rehabilitation of the remainder of the site would first require the determination of its specific period of historic significance. Though the Chess company's occupancy was only for a period of ten years, from 1957-67, changes occurred during that time, most significantly in the studio set-up. The initial scheme was determined by Jack Wiener, Chess's first chief engineer at 2120 until 1958. His custom-built, twelve-channel mixing console allowed for twelve "plug-in units" (microphones) which were fed onto a single track.<sup>369</sup>

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<sup>369</sup>“Willie Dixon's Blues Heaven Foundation Set to Open in Chicago,” *Goldmine*, 4 February 1994, sec. Grapevine. An excerpt from Chuck Berry's biography referenced in Millard, 294, provides perspective on the equipment used at Chess: “When he [Chuck Berry] got to their studio in Chicago, he found it equipped with an Ampex professional recorder and a mixing console that could handle twelve microphones--an indication of the growing technical sophistication of the independents.”

Upon Wiener's departure, Malcolm Chisolm stepped into the role as Chess Records took over the studio for sole use of its labels. By the early 1960s Ron Malo had replaced him and re-engineered the studio to provide for multi-track recording, a technological advance which thenceforth altered the process and products of recording at the 2120 studio.<sup>370</sup> In the field of popular music, Buddy Holly and Phil Spector had been among the first to utilize double-tracking. This was soon replaced by four-track recording on a wide-spread scale. The freedom of being able to record several tracks independently and then to combine (overdub) and layer them at will exponentially expanded the possible combinations one could produce.<sup>371</sup>

Using this technological advance as a line of demarcation, an argument could then be made that the studio's most important music was recorded in the period before it took place or roughly pre-1960. As Chess Records' significance was due primarily to its prominence in recording Chicago blues and seminal rock and roll, this pre-1960 era was the correct time frame. Muddy Waters' national hits continued through 1958;

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<sup>370</sup>Tim Samuelson, "Control Room," Tour information sheet for display in 2120, Tim Samuelson's personal files, Chicago.

<sup>371</sup>Millard, 297-8. The following passage taken from these pages explains the nature and significance of the technological advances:

"The Beatles' recording career coincided with the rapid advance of recording technology. Four-track recording was introduced soon after their 1962 debut. It made re-recording much easier. Recording heads could now lay several tracks of magnetized sound on the 1-inch-wide strip of magnetic tape. Improved tape and advanced noise-reduction systems, which were based on the techniques of equalization and compression, made it possible to re-record many times over without losing sound quality in a sea of background noise.

Once the studio engineer had only been able to manipulate the amplitude of sound coming in from the microphones. Now he could also increase or diminish any band of frequencies, and do it during and after the recording--blending tracks of sound in the mixer and recording it onto multi-tracked tape. He could then record these tracks any way he pleased, drawing upon a vast reservoir of editing techniques developed in the film industry."

Little Walter's through 1959; Sonny Boy Williamson's from 1955 through the 1960s; Howlin' Wolf's predominately Delta-style hits from 1955 through 1960; Bo Diddley and Chuck Berry's 1955 through the 1960s. The period of overlap in these two categories is clearly pre-1960. Samuelson used the studio changes as a cut-off point and defined the period of significance for the site as pre-1960.

### Weighing Alternatives

With the period of significance established, the next step was to determine rehabilitation plans for the site which met the needs of the Blues Heaven Foundation and yet maintained as much historic fabric as possible. In the collection of newspaper articles and Blues Heaven Foundation publications discussing possible uses of 2120, there is no firm scheme or constant favorite: office space and education center<sup>372</sup>, recording studio and radio station<sup>373</sup>, mini-theater and archives.<sup>374</sup> This is probably due to a combination of factors: inaccuracy on the part of reporting, evolving ideas by the Dixons about proper and feasible uses for the site, changes reflecting funding restrictions and obligations, the effect of additional land acquisition efforts by the Dixons, and the lack of funding to do a market analysis. But a reading of the newsletters of the Blues Heaven Foundation suggests that an inability to fix on one vision for the site may have been the major impediment to a single sound plan.

Initially, too, the Dixons did not envision opening 2120 to the public. They

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<sup>372</sup>Blues Heaven Foundation, "Foundation Secures Chicago Home."

<sup>373</sup> Rotenberk, "Blues Legend's Family."

<sup>374</sup> Bill Dahl, "Friends Gather to Fuel a Blues Museum in Landmark Digs," *Chicago Tribune*, 30 May 1993.

were searching for another site to establish a museum.<sup>375</sup> Samuelson, in his work with the Dixons, continued to share his conviction that people were not going to go out of their way to visit offices of the foundation, but that a restored site would draw people and thus be the engine that drove the foundation's efforts to meet the goals of its mission. Slowly the Dixons came to agree with Samuelson.

By the end of 1993, Shirli Dixon-Nelson indicated the renovation would begin in the spring of 1994 with a gallery for songs and instruments, a studio theater, foundation offices and an archive of Dixon's "between 8,000 and 9,000" personal records.<sup>376</sup> She said the recreation of a working studio would include space for the equipment essential to the creation of the "Chess" sound, such as vintage tube-amps.<sup>377</sup> General accessibility became a part of the plan as the gallery was envisioned as open to the public.

Funding determined when and if these uses were realized. Marie Dixon had been shocked by initial estimates of \$600,000 to refurbish and bring the structure up to code. She indicated the family had pledged \$50,000 and that she intended to raise another \$550,000.<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>375</sup>Blues Heaven Foundation, "Foundation Secures Chicago Home."

<sup>376</sup> Witter, 10-11.

<sup>377</sup> Samuelson discovered that Jack Wiener still possessed some of the equipment used in his set-up for Sheldon Recording Studios. Samuelson, interview by author, 20 June 1997. Latoza shared Wiener's comment that he still had the vacuum used to siphon off etching debris from the master lathe. Wiener had removed it and given it to his brother-in-law for installation in the central vacuum system in his home, where it remains today. Bill Latoza, interview by author, written notes, Chicago, 31 August 1999.

<sup>378</sup>"Willie Dixon's Blues Heaven Foundation Set to Open in Chicago," *Goldmine*, 4 February 1994, sec. Grapevine.

By 1994, architect Bill Latoza had shaved the figure to \$450,000 with changes in the scope of work.<sup>379</sup> Fundraising for the work began and it was believed that work on the site would begin by the summer of 1994. A three-stage project had been devised. The first stage was restoration of the exterior facade. Stage two would be rehabilitation of the first floor for foundation offices, an educational center, gift shop and gallery while in the basement the famous echo chamber where the Chess sound had come of age would be recreated. The third stage would involve renovation of the second floor, including the recording studio, engineers' mixing area and green rooms.<sup>380</sup>

By August 1997, the detailing and plaster work was reported done. The Blues Heaven Foundation expected to occupy the building by the fall.<sup>381</sup> When the grand opening ceremony took place the following month, the gift store and archive had indeed begun to take shape but the recording studio had not been set up and it did not appear that it would be in the near future.<sup>382</sup>

#### Actual Chess Build-Out and Changes Made In Intervening Years

To what extent did these uses respect the integrity of the property? The landmark status required that not only the Michigan facade remain unaltered, but also

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<sup>379</sup>Latoza, interview by author, 31 August 1999.

<sup>380</sup>Blues Heaven Foundation, "Blues Heaven Foundation Dixonary," 1995, brochure, author's personal files, Chicago.

<sup>381</sup>Dave Hoekstra, "Chess Renews Its Big Blues," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 6 August 1997, 43.

<sup>382</sup>Flynn McRoberts, "It's the Rebirth of Blues Landmark," 17 September 1997, *Chicago Tribune*, 1.

the interior configuration of spaces remain intact. With such a tight restriction on the interior, it seemed the most sensible path was to look to original uses of the space and fit new uses as closely as possible into them. Simply put—the original use is the best use.

Use of the original plans, however, proved more difficult than hoped as Samuelson discovered that the 1957 remodeling varied considerably from the approved plan.<sup>383</sup> Using the drawings submitted to the city for Chess's 1957 remodeling of the building, Samuelson interviewed key company personnel for their recollections. He combined this information with his on-site investigation and additional historic research to create a series of first and second floor plans with notations on probable changes. The notations included unanswered questions, confirmed assumptions and information sources such as "as per Phil Chess<sup>384</sup> in conversation with Shirley [*sic*] Dixon 8-93 (verified also by Ralph Bass)."<sup>385</sup> (See Figures 35a-b.)

To some extent variation from the drawn plans was the norm, not the exception as these observations transcribed from the first floor plans illustrate:

"Display shelving and planter box [in front display area] not executed; Stair [front stair to second floor] not built as shown; reception window may have been relocated in execution to this position due to relocation of wall adjoining hall; Glass wall [north wall of Office #1]...was probably built further south to

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<sup>383</sup>Samuelson, "Landmarks of Chicago Blues and Gospel," II-121.

<sup>384</sup>Samuelson found Phil Chess reticent to discuss the site when he attempted to contact him in the late 1980s during the landmarking process. When Phil Chess visited 2120 for a fundraising event in 1993, Samuelson took advantage of the opportunity to walk him through the site and pose specific questions to him about the site's appearance and lay-out when Phil had worked there. Samuelson also spoke to Malcolm Chisolm during the event. Samuelson, interview by author, 16 July 1999.

<sup>385</sup>Tim Samuelson, "Research Notes 9-21-93" (photocopy), Tim Samuelson's personal files, Chicago.

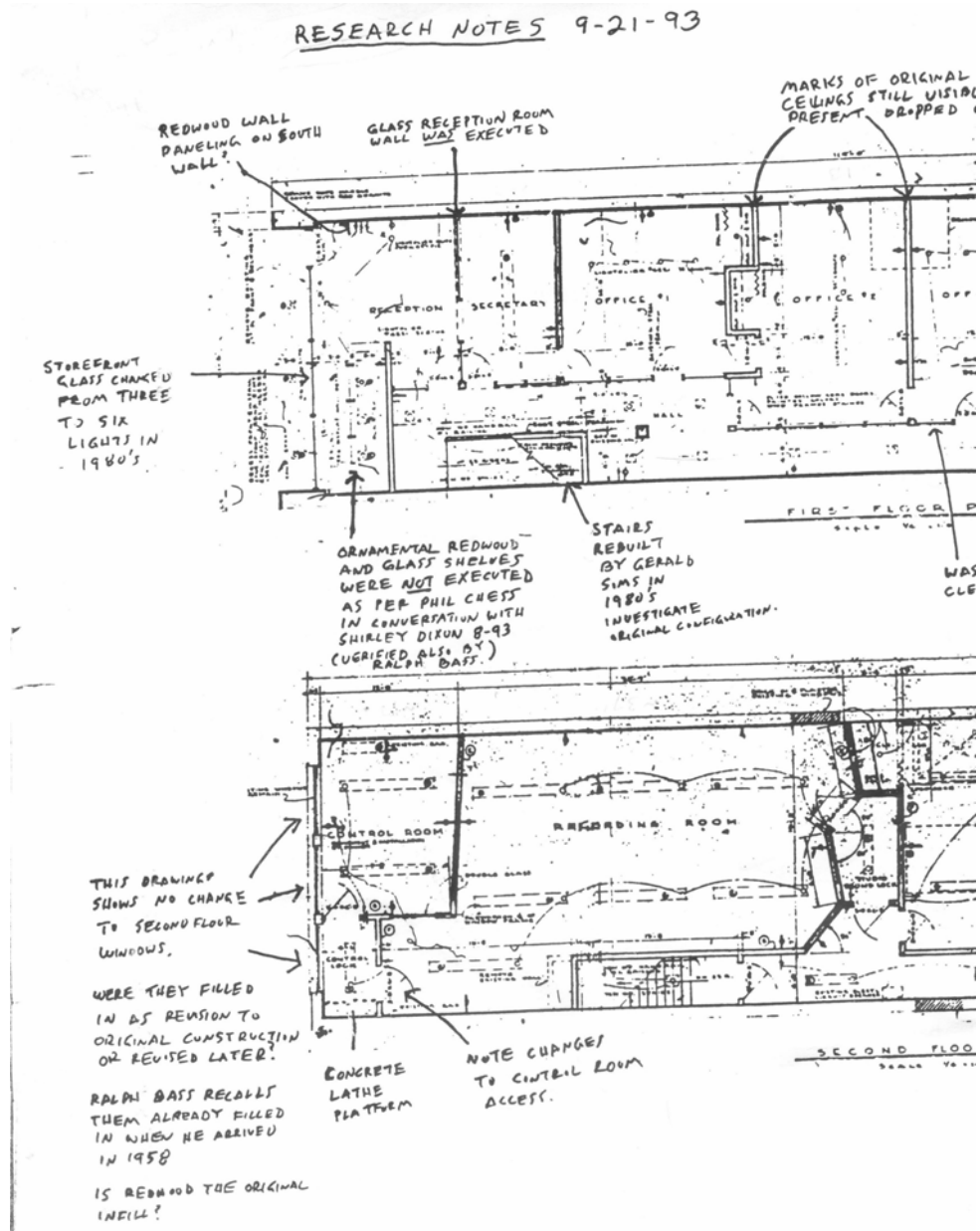


Figure 35a (left half). Remodeling plans from 1957 with Samuelson's notes. Samuelson, "Research Notes 9-21-93."

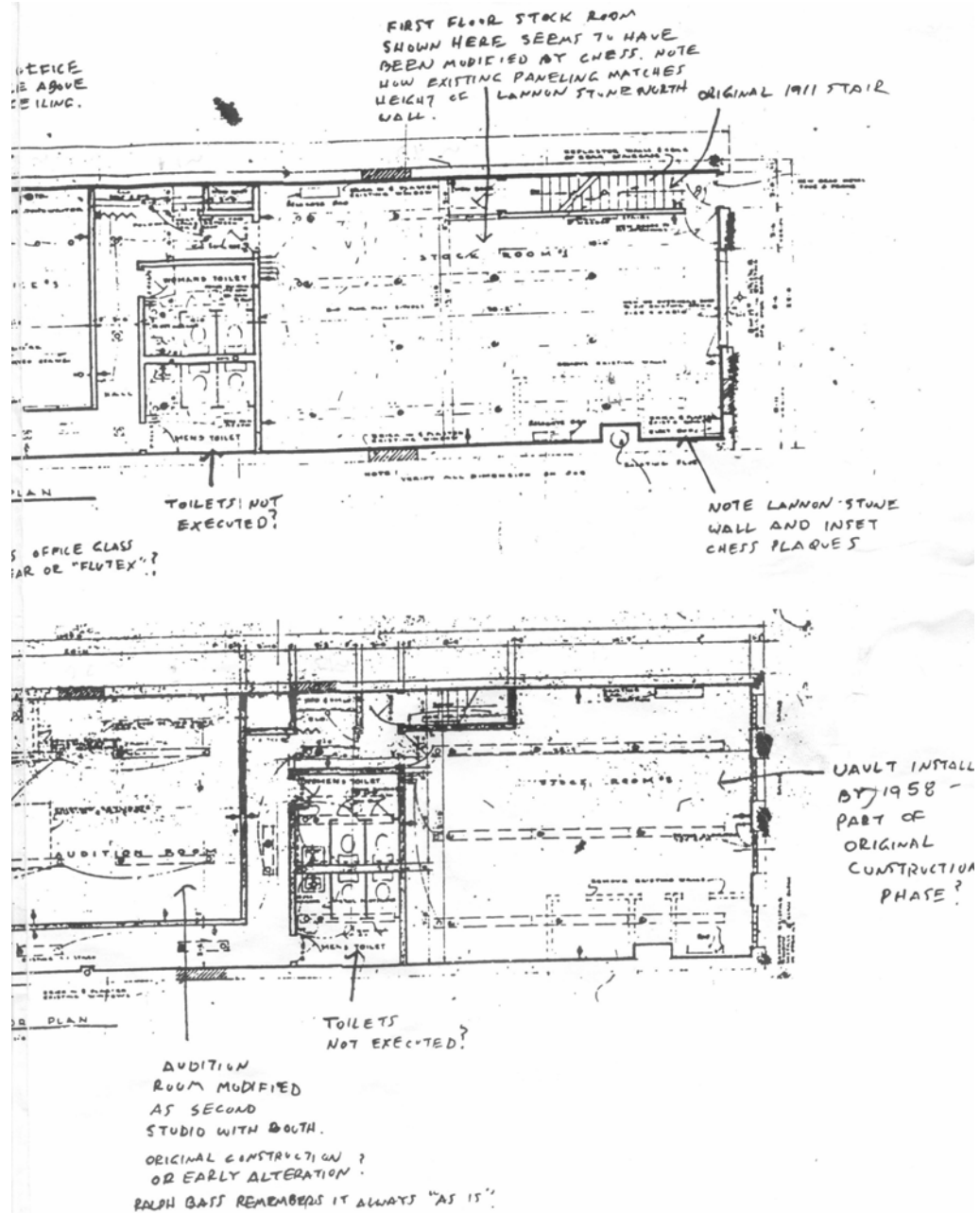


Figure 35b (right half). Remodeling plans from 1957 with Samuelson's notes.  
Samuelson, "Research Notes 9-21-93."



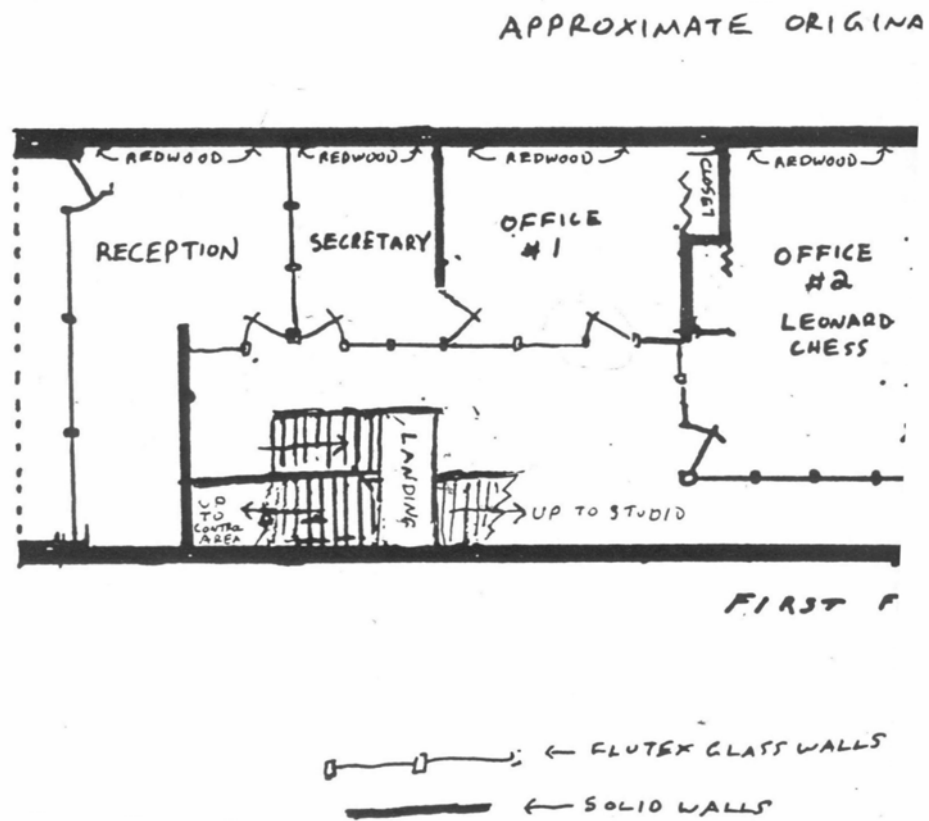


Figure 36a (left half). First floor as-built per research.  
 Samuelson, "Approximate Original Plan of First Floor," circa 1994.

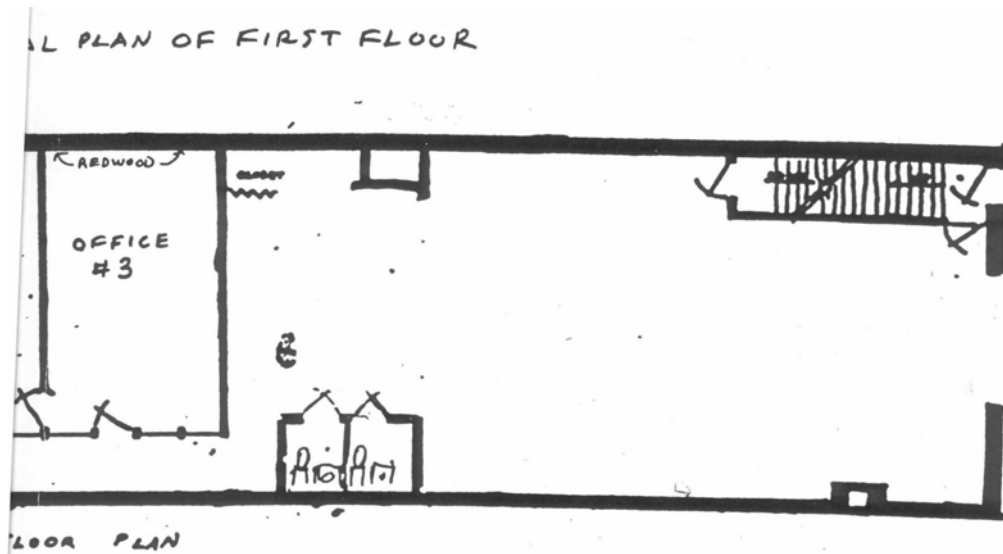


Figure 36b (right half). First Floor As-built per Research.  
 Samuelson, "Approximate Original Plan of First Floor," ca. 1994.

accommodate reused stair; Toilets not executed; Date and function of Lannon stone wall and Chess plaques [north wall of stock room] is unknown; Does wood paneling in rest of room date from same period?”<sup>386</sup> Samuelson’s revision of the plans attempted to get as close as possible to the as-built scheme. He illustrated this with plan sketches that noted the locations and details of materials used, such as redwood paneling or clear versus Flutex<sup>387</sup> glass walls. (See Figures 36a-b.) Such detailed information enabled a more accurate restoration of the site.

Not all questions were answered by the time rehabilitation work began on the site. Further clues would need to be sought out during demolition and interviews would need to be conducted with any additional personnel whose memories had not already been captured. The Bauer Latoza Studio requested historic photographs of the site in Blues Heaven Foundation’s newsletter and through an on-line appeal to Chicago Blues-related web sites. Unfortunately neither of these produced helpful information.

Latoza contacted musicians Ramsey Lewis and Detroit Junior, but neither was able to contribute recollections to assist in the rehabilitation. The occasional photographs that did surface in the course of Latoza’s attempts to speak with former musicians and personnel were focused on people and did not show enough of the background to be of much assistance.

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<sup>386</sup>Tim Samuelson, First and second floor plans of 2120 with notes (photocopy), Tim Samuelson’s personal files, Chicago. Although undated, this version appears to be later than the research notes dated 9-21-93. Notations on the second floor plan included: “Windows [at east facade] probably originally retained from original 1911 building. Later blocked by Chess--date unknown; Toilets [twin men’s and women’s facilities at north wall] not executed; Existing vault area [at west end] probably not part of the 1957 build-out, but added at an early date; Angled wall on south wall of studio is original.”

<sup>387</sup>Flutex is a brand name for a type of fluted or ribbed glass.

As clues were uncovered in demolition, Latoza called Samuelson to discuss what had been found, arranging site visits as necessary. Although Latoza said his firm was documenting the process with photographs and drawings<sup>388</sup>, none were available for the researcher's review. Samuelson incorporated additional information into his notes regarding the Chess Corporation's use of the site.

Samuelson also tried to engage former engineer Jack Wiener as a consultant on the project because he had done all of the original studio and related build-out himself. In fact, Wiener told Latoza that he had paid for much of the work himself in order to get the right materials for the studio and echo chambers.<sup>389</sup> But Wiener would not provide assistance *gratis*. Samuelson wrote four grant requests to underwrite the cost of Wiener's services but each was turned down.

Without the full assistance of those involved in the 1957 buildout, it became all the more important to manage and observe any demolition work if original materials were to be maintained and evidence documented. However, this was not a priority for the Dixons and the lack of an on-site overseeing consultant looking out for this aspect of the project was a critical problem from a preservation perspective.

Though Samuelson might have been impelled to serve in this capacity, the demands of his position with the Commission on Chicago Landmarks required him to spend less time than was optimal at the site during construction work. Staff from the Bauer Latoza Studio were called to the site when contractors found something they felt might be significant<sup>390</sup>, but the construction crew was not trained in or paid to undertake preservation work and on more than one occasion they removed significant

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<sup>388</sup>Latoza, interview by author, 31 August 1999.

<sup>389</sup>Latoza, interview by author, 9 August 1999.

<sup>390</sup>Latoza, interview by author, 9 August 1999.

materials without documenting what they had found.<sup>391</sup>

Evidence which could have helped to explain the lay-out and use of the space disappeared permanently. Understanding these details about the site helped to explain the factors that made the Chess sound so distinctive, the very heart of what made the site important. The conclusions Samuelson and Latoza were able to make about the build-out of the space as it actually occurred helped to fill in this picture and are therefore important information.

### The Basement

Clues found in the basement, for example, point to a recording technique which added depth to the sound. Other than instruction to plaster the ceiling, the two diagrammatic drawings of the basement made in 1957 showed only HVAC equipment. They did not indicate the two echo chambers Jack Wiener had ingeniously constructed for the studio.<sup>392</sup>

Music from the second-floor recording studio was sent via wire to a speaker at the head of a large, irregularly-shaped acoustical tunnel at the southeast corner of the basement. A microphone at the opposite end picked up the sound which was then relayed back up to the second floor for recording. Samuelson and Latoza discovered that both chambers, built with the same spring clip wall construction used in the second floor studio, had been removed by later owners, leaving only the rubber-edged,

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<sup>391</sup>Samuelson, interview by author, 20 June 1997.

<sup>392</sup>According to Samuelson, he discovered in conversations with engineers that only one of the echo chambers was used, though the reasons for this were not clear. Samuelson, interview by author, 16 July 1999. In speaking with Malcolm Chisolm, Latoza learned that prior to use of the echo chamber for recording sessions, the engineer would go down to the basement and cover the area with bug spray to rid the area of crickets which would add unwanted noise. Latoza, interview by author, 9 August 1999.

soundproofed entrance-door frame and plastered surface on the east wall. Further proof was the discovery of the pipes which acted as conduits for wires between the floor still in place in the ceiling. Now they had physical evidence of what they only had been told about before.<sup>393</sup>

### The First Floor

On the first floor, the build-out diverged again from the 1957 architectural drawings. Although the main staircase had been shown as a single stair along the north wall leading westward up to the second floor, Wiener had devised a unique stair in its place. The first half of the staircase was set several feet south of the north wall and rose westward to a landing at the mid-point where one staircase continued east and another west along the wall. Sound engineers would take the staircase to the right (east) to reach the mastering and control rooms while musicians would take the staircase to the left to reach the hallway along the north leading to the recording and rehearsal studios.<sup>394</sup> The architect and the preservationist noted that in order to accommodate the stair's location further south than originally planned, the north wall of the reception area, secretary's office and Office # 1 was moved further south than seen in the plan. (See Figures 35a-b and 36a-b.)

Later when the theater and dance school renovated the space, the fire code had required them to enclose the staircase. In the process, they demolished portions of it,

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<sup>393</sup>Tim Samuelson, "Echo Chamber," Tour information sheet for display in 2120, Tim Samuelson's personal files, Chicago. They found the original stairs were in place at the southwest corner leading up to the stock room on the first floor. Evidence in the basement ceiling showed that there had been a staircase leading up to the first floor on the east end along the north wall, but it had been removed. Latoza, interview by author, 9 August 1999.

<sup>394</sup>Tim Samuelson, "Double Studio Staircase," Tour information sheet for display in 2120, Tim Samuelson's personal files, Chicago.

including the upper stairs leading east to the control room. Gerald Sims, who had been in 2120 as a musician for Chess Records, remembered the original staircase and made an attempt to reconstruct it after purchasing the building. The reconstruction, however, was inadequately designed and the eastern upper half of the stairs was ill-proportioned, with a collection of different-sized steps.

The remaining portions of the first floor were built much like they were shown on Townsend's drawings. However, in the intervening years, walls between the offices on the first floor had been demolished and paneling installed along the walls to create a larger, unified space for the theater and dance school. When the layers of paneling were removed, the original redwood paneling of the offices was discovered with marks indicating the location of perpendicular walls.

Further evidence of the offices' locations was made possible with removal of the dropped ceiling and layers of floor coverings. At the ceiling, marks indicating the position of light fixtures were revealed. On the floor, gaps in floor covering indicated wall placement.<sup>395</sup>

After paneling was removed in the stock room, an unusual discovery was made. Across approximately three-fourths of the north wall, from a height of four to eight feet, Lannon stone<sup>396</sup> had been installed. The remainder of the wall was covered in dark, rough, inexpensive wood paneling. Inserted into the Lannon stone were two diamond-shaped plaques bearing images of chess playing pieces. (See Figure 37.) Samuelson had asked different Chess personnel about this area and discovered that

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<sup>395</sup> Samuelson, interview by author, 16 July 1999.

<sup>396</sup> Lannon stone refers to the dolomitic limestone quarried from the area around the village of Lannon in Waukesha County, Wisconsin. Ruth Schmidt, "Lannon and Its Quarries," [Sussex-Lisbon Area Historical Society, Inc. website on-line]; available from [http://www.slahs.org/history/local/lannon/history/stone\\_quarry.htm](http://www.slahs.org/history/local/lannon/history/stone_quarry.htm); Internet; accessed 3 January 2005.



Figure 37. North wall of stock room, 1997. Two square sections remain exposed after the room's rehabilitation so Lannon stone and plaques are visible.  
Photograph by author.

Leonard and Phil Chess had shared a common office along the northern section of the stock room during the 1960s, though no one remembered the plaques. In the same room, Samuelson was told, there had also been a “listening space” with stereo equipment to play the latest Chess releases for visiting music industry people.<sup>397</sup>

Typical of the fate of all architectural detectives on historic sites of any age, neither Samuelson nor Latoza were able to solve the mystery of the redwood paneling discovered along the south wall of the stock room several feet beyond the western wall of the third office. Looking at the history of sites in more recent history has its

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<sup>397</sup> Samuelson, interview by author, 16 July 1999. Also intact in the rear of the building was the staircase and handrails along the building's southern wall leading up to the second floor.

advantages, however, in the form of photographic images. At 2120, for example, photographs of the exterior made it easy to see that at the front facade, the three large glass panels of the original storefront had been replaced with six glass panels.<sup>398</sup>

### The Second Floor

On the second floor, the build-out had been significantly different than the plan of the permit request. Again, Wiener was largely responsible and the information he shared was invaluable. Architect Townsend had placed the control room against the eastern, front wall of the structure so that two of the second-floor windows opened directly into the control room. Unfortunately, this design allowed for easy infiltration of street noise into the recording process. In remedy, Wiener reorganized the space. Along the east facade wall, he built a mastering room at the north end and an office at the south end. To deter vibrations, a concrete base had been poured at the north end of the mastering room and the master lathe had been installed into the base. A metal tube protruded from the base through which etching debris was sucked to a vacuum in the basement.<sup>399</sup>

Directly west of the office was the control room, carefully constructed with sound-absorbing walls and ceilings to exclude outside noise. The floor sloped gently

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<sup>398</sup> In 1999, Samuelson located a photograph of the exterior of 2120 from the mid-1960s which shows the windows boarded over at this point. “Nevertheless, evidence clearly indicates that the windows were still the original 1911 design during the early years of the studio operation, which constitutes the period-of-significance of the restoration. It appears that the ‘CHESS Corp’ metal letters still extant at later 320 E. 21st Street studios may have been relocated from the black sign panel above the first floor show windows at 2120.” Tim Samuelson, e-mail to Kandilyn Hahn, 29 September 1999, author’s personal files, Chicago.

<sup>399</sup> Tim Samuelson, “Mastering Room,” Tour information sheet for display in 2120, Tim Samuelson’s personal files, Chicago. After Wiener left, this equipment was removed and masters were made henceforth at outside locations.



up at the west wall of the control room, probably in order to provide a more vibration-proof base for recording equipment. To gain access to the studio, engineers exited a soundproof door on the eastern end of the north wall of the control room and walked a few steps west to a soundproof door that opened into the studio. Malcolm Chisolm told Latoza that when the studio was packed with personnel and equipment, the door to the studio could be blocked and engineers had to run down and up the staircase along the north wall to get to the studio via the door along the corridor.<sup>400</sup> (See Figures 38a-c and 39.)

Visible through the double glass of the control room was the large recording studio to the west with its purposely non-perpendicular walls and sloping south wall to prevent echo. Lighting from industrial-style fluorescent fixtures hung in two parallel strips from the ceiling. The studio walls were “composed of a sandwich of ‘Pyrobar blocks’<sup>401</sup> inside and a slightly suspended outer layer of plasterboard [held in place by spring clips], with an airspace in between”<sup>402</sup> to provide a resonant quality. (See

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<sup>400</sup>Latoza, interview by author, 9 August 1999.

<sup>401</sup> Pyrobar was a trade name for gypsum block wall.

<sup>402</sup> Tim Samuelson, “Studio Plan and Acoustics,” Tour information sheet for display in 2120, Tim Samuelson’s personal files, Chicago.

Latoza adds that this wall construction was partly prompted by Wiener’s desire to avoid the use of any metal in the walls, except for the spring clips. In the 1950s, metal lathe was used to accept plaster at wall surfaces. Wiener did not want any metal coming loose and rattling in the walls, so he minimized the use of metal by using board with holes (imagine pegboard-sized holes 10 times bigger) at the outer surface of the walls to which plaster was then applied. Latoza, interview by author, 31 August 1999.

Ron Malo’s comments provide perspective on the studio: “ ‘My first Chess session was with Wolf, and I’m setting up the equipment. You know, the studio at 2120 was an exceptional piece of engineering. It was a room within a room, adjustable walls, state of the art microphones, and so on.’ --Ron Malo, Chess Engineer from 1959 to 1970.” MCA Records, 40.

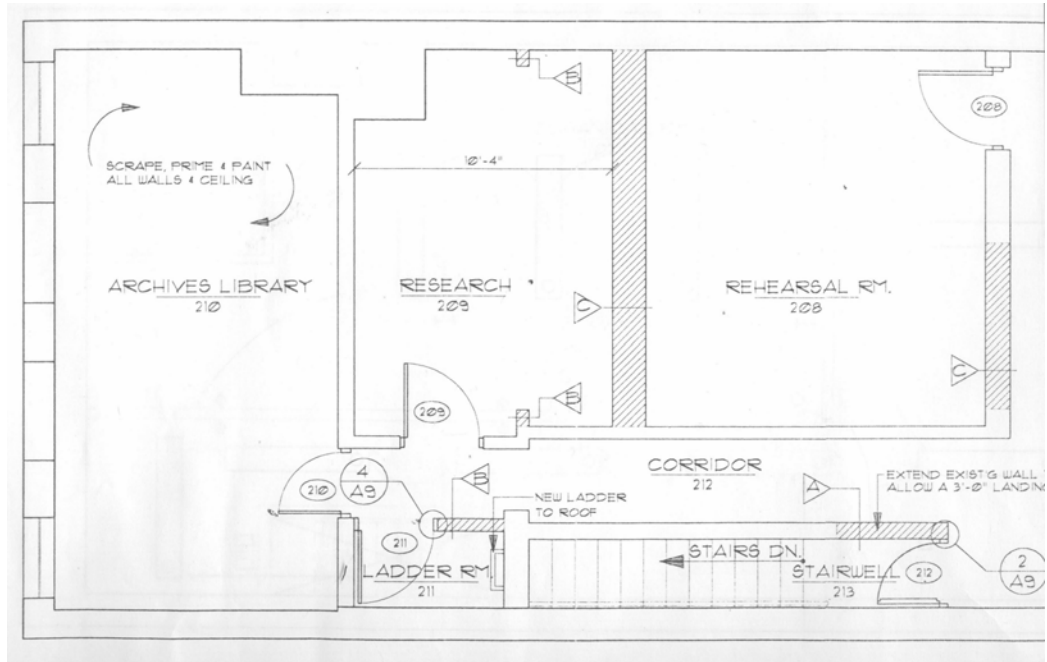


Figure 38a (left third). Second floor rehab plan. Bauer Latoza Studio, “Blues Heaven Foundation,” construction documents 9-11-95, A3.

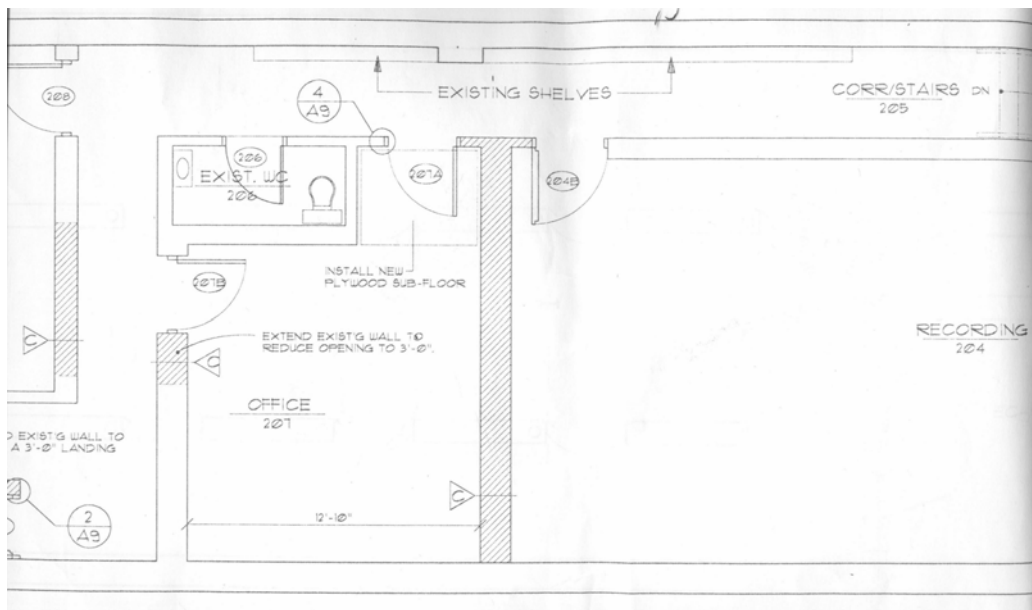


Figure 38b (middle third). Second Floor Rehab Plan. Bauer Latoza Studio, “Blues Heaven Foundation,” Construction documents 9-11-95, A3.

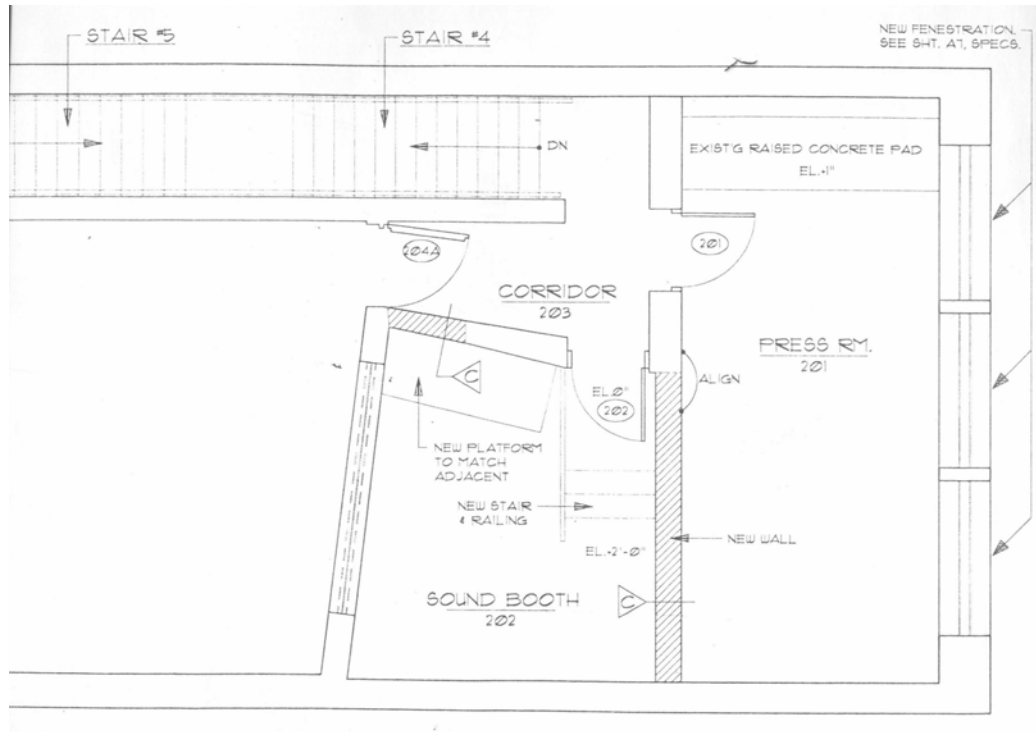


Figure 38c (right third). Second Floor Rehab Plan. This configuration of the sound booth, corridor, stairs and recording studio reflect the actual 1957 build-out. Bauer Latoza Studio, “Blues Heaven Foundation,” Construction documents 9-11-95, A3.

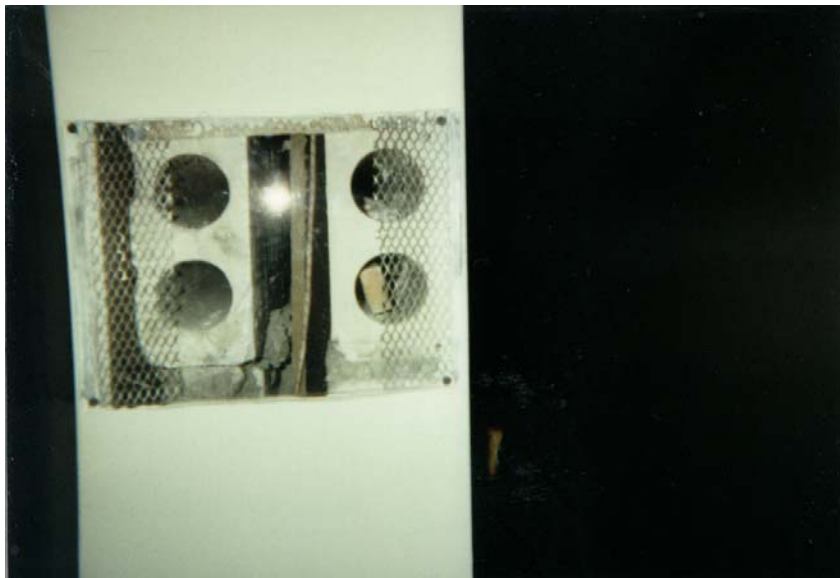


Figure 39. Section of original studio wall, 1997.  
Photograph by author.

Figure 39.) Vertical panels on the south wall originally contained adjustable louvers to further alter the room's dynamics.<sup>403</sup> For those taking the western set of stairs to the second floor, a soundproof Weldwood door (the same type used elsewhere) to the recording studio opened off the north wall corridor.

It appeared that Wiener's reorganization of the rehearsal room space had also been an improvement over the original proposal. Townsend had placed the rehearsal studio directly west of the recording studio. Given that two different groups might be performing at the same time, an expensive sound-lock system of doors created along the shared wall would have been needed to prevent the transfer of sound between the two rooms. Wiener had devised a more practical and less expensive alternative. Instead of placing the rehearsal room directly west of the recording studio, he built in its place an office at the south end and a bathroom at the north end. The rehearsal room was built along the north wall several feet west of these rooms on the opposite side of the corridor. This design put enough distance between the recording studio and rehearsal room that soundproof doors were unnecessary.

The corridor continued westward just north of the rear staircase and ended at the rear storage room. Though not built in 1957, within a year or two, a concrete-lined vault was built in the western end of the storage room to provide storage for master tapes and discs. Wiener had fitted out the rehearsal room with soundproofing materials less expensive and sophisticated than those in the control room and recording studio. He filled the cavities in between studs with mineral wool batting and placed inexpensive pegboard, similar in look to acoustic tile--though with much less insulating capability--along the walls to finish out the space.

Several changes had taken place to this floor over the intervening years. Most of the rooms on the second floor now had raised floors of differing heights. The

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<sup>403</sup>Ibid.

highest was four feet, built by the theater and dance school as a viewing platform in the southeast corner office space. The east wall of the control room was demolished to allow people to sit on the viewing platform and observe performers in the recording studio space through the glass panel of the control room's west wall. The control room floor was elevated to a height of two feet with two sets of stairs up to the viewing platform. The recording studio floor was raised two inches. There was a large section in the center of the room with parquet flooring and a platform had been built in the southeast corner. This configuration, combined with the disco ball in the ceiling, suggests that Gerald Sims may have been preparing the space for use as a dance club.<sup>404</sup>

To accommodate the steps up to the viewing platform, the door to the control room had been moved west of its original location. The original Weldwood soundproof doors had been removed from the recording studio and control room and replaced cheaper chipboard doors. The recording studio's western wall had been demolished and rebuilt, enlarging the studio space and leaving it without one of the original custom-built walls. Also gone from the recording studio were the louvers along the southern wall.

Sims had enlarged the original rehearsal room by knocking out the west wall and adding a control room at that end of the space. On top of the stud and pegboard wall in the original rehearsal room, he had constructed a second layer of studs covered with pegboard. Paneling and dropped ceilings had been added throughout the second floor. Underneath the suspended ceilings in the studio, the original rough plaster, slightly concave ceiling was still in place and a few of the original fluorescent light fixtures remained. A large number of acoustical tiles were still in place in the

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<sup>404</sup>Samuelson, interview by author, 20 June 1997.

rehearsal room and the corridor's ceiling. The vault at the west end remained intact, including an original light fixture.<sup>405</sup>

### Rehabilitation Plans

Before proceeding with plans for the space, a selective color analysis was made of the site. The many layers of paint used in a relatively short period of time during the Chess years made the analysis difficult. After initial test results proved inconclusive, rather than continuing the analysis, Latoza focused his attention on an article in a music trade magazine which spoke of gleaming white walls at Chess. Having found a layer of semi-gloss white under layers of browns and oranges, Latoza felt comfortable deferring to the article. This scheme was acceptable to the Dixons though it had never been determined conclusively what paint had been used at what point.<sup>406</sup>

### The Facades

The Bauer Latoza Studio was asked in March 1995 to prepare drawings for work on the east and south facades. Photographs of the exterior walls and detail areas were used to create a bid document, adding specs to indicate work required. Work focused on crucial repair needs. On the east facade, parapet repair, terra cotta ornament re-installation, cleaning, and tuckpointing were included. The south facade required removal of loose mortar, masonry replacement as necessary, and parging or tuckpointing as needed. Windows which had been blocked out with insufficient masonry or wood were to be blocked out again with proper masonry construction.<sup>407</sup>

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<sup>405</sup>Samuelson, interview by author, 16 July 1999.

<sup>406</sup>Latoza, interview by author, 9 August 1999.

The Bauer Latoza Studio continued work with preparation of as-built drawings for the entire building and these were completed by the end of March. The firm was then asked to prepare bid documents for the basement, first and second floors, roof, and remainder of work required on the east facade. Latoza conferred (1) with Samuelson to propose the best restoration plan elements for the space and (2) with the Dixons to try to determine the space needs and plans of the Blues Heaven Foundation.

### The First Floor

By June, Bauer Latoza Studio had completed a full set of bid drawings and proceeded to solicit bids for the work. The first floor demolition plan called for the following:

- All walls and objects (doors, fixtures, pipes) not part of the 1957 build-out were to be removed.
- Wallpaper and paneling were to be removed from all wall surfaces down to the original plaster finish or Chess-era redwood paneling where it existed along the south wall.
- The portion of redwood paneling which continued into the western workroom beyond the offices was to be removed and used to repair missing pieces from the remainder of redwood paneling in the office spaces.
- Carpeting and vinyl tile were to be removed from all floors.
- At ceilings, the mix of textured plaster, layers of drywall, suspended ceiling systems, light fixtures, fans, remnants of gypsum and lath, and loose plaster were to be removed.
- In the offices, non-original plate glass panels were to be carefully removed from interior walls so as not to destroy existing wood frames.

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<sup>407</sup> Latoza, interview by author, 31 August 1999.

- Original Flutex glass transom lights were to be revealed in the upper portion of interior walls by removing the paneling and drywall covering them.<sup>408</sup>

The plan for the first floor used the original front display area visible from the street for a display area for the Blues Heaven Foundation with the following features:

- A redwood and glass shelving system, like that specified by Townsend, would be built for this area.
- New vinyl tile was to be installed on all floors.
- Plaster on all ceilings was to be patched, primed, and painted.
- All redwood paneling was to be refurbished.
- At the west wall of the reception area, a new wall and shelf unit with Flutex and clear glass window panels to match original was to be installed.<sup>409</sup>

The wall enclosing the main stair was to be demolished. The lower half of the main stair and the split staircase portion above and to the east of the landing were to be demolished and reconstructed to match the original. An additional staircase was to be built along the north wall under the main stair to provide a second means of egress to the basement space in the same position as the original.

Acoustical tile in the ceiling of the second floor showed the number and placement of original spindles, though during their removal the holes had been enlarged and no longer would serve as a sturdy point of attachment. Wood blocks were to be added at the base and top of the new spindles to allow them to be placed in the same configuration as the original with structural security.

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<sup>408</sup>The Bauer Latoza Studio, "Blues Heaven Foundation," architectural blueprints, 11 September 1995, The Bauer Latoza Studio, Chicago, D2. Transom lights refer to the glazed light above the transom bar of a door. These were fixed transoms rather than the more modern understanding of a window built on and hinged to a transom which may be opened to provide for additional ventilation.

<sup>409</sup>Ibid., A2, A10.



The secretary's office and Office # 1 had originally been west of the reception area. The division between these two offices would not be recreated, but all other walls and closets were to be reconstructed to the Chess-era configuration in concert with the refurbishment of those wall portions which remained. At the west wall of Office # 1 and at the south wall of the corridor, remaining existing wall sections were to be fitted with new Flutex glass to match extant transom lights.<sup>410</sup>

In the westernmost room, a new overhead storage area was to be created and an attic ladder installed to provide access. The two existing toilets along the north wall of this room were to be retained, though research had not confirmed if this was their original location. The double door at the west facade was to be reinstated, providing direct access to the alley. The door at the southern end of this wall was also to be reinstated to provide direct access to the stairs from outside.<sup>411</sup>

Along the northern wall, the 1960s Lannon stone and plywood paneling were to be covered over except for small square sections around the two diamond-shaped plaques decorated with images of chess playing pieces.<sup>412</sup> Stairs to the basement at the southwest corner were to be replaced in-kind, while the original staircase directly above, leading to the second floor, was to be left in place.

The drawings did not include the treatment of the diamond-shaped plaques as they were not discovered until paneling had been removed from the north wall of the stock room. Rather, as items like this surfaced, Latoza and Samuelson would discuss

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<sup>410</sup>Ibid., D-2, A2.

<sup>411</sup>According to Latoza, the door in place bore graffiti written in pencil by Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones. The door was removed and put in storage for safe-keeping.

<sup>412</sup>Initially the Dixons wanted the entire wall plastered over. Latoza and Samuelson shared their conviction that the Chess pieces were an unusual feature which would add to the story of the site and the Dixons agreed to leave them exposed. Latoza, interview by author, 9 August 1999.

options with the Dixons and relay appropriate instructions to the contractor.

### The Second Floor

Upstairs, all raised floors were to be demolished, including the substructures of the higher platforms. Bid documents specified the heights of existing raised floors:

- The four-foot viewing platform in the southeast corner with supporting structure
- The two-foot control room floor
- The two-inch floor of the recording studio with sections of parquet flooring and an additional platform in the southeast corner
- The seven-and-a-half-inch floor in what had been the original office west of the recording studio (In this area a ramp and handrails in the northwest corner led down through a double door in the west wall to the floor raised one inch. This elevated floor extended across the corridor into the rehearsal room and second control booth constructed by Sims.)

There were two exceptions in the demolition of raised floors:

- In the control room, the raised floor would remain except for a five-foot, ten-inch by four foot section in the northeast corner to allow for installation of a new door in the original position. Presumably, the raised floor was left in this space to allow for easier viewing down into the recording studio.
- The raised concrete pad on which the master cutting lathe had been placed was to remain.

Carpeting, vinyl tile, and linoleum were to be removed from all floors. Both non-original sets of steps in the control room and the ramp with railings in the office were also to be removed. The tile of the bathroom floor was to be removed down to

the sub-floor.<sup>413</sup>

The second floor ceilings had a large variety of treatments and the bid documents called for the following treatments:

- Ceilings were to be left as found in the northeast corner room, the hall north of the control room, and the corridors.
- Suspended ceiling systems, lights, fans, soffits, new acoustical tiles, loose plaster, flaking paint, and a glitter ball were to be removed from the remainder of ceilings, except for the original fluorescent light fixtures in the recording studio.
- “Acoustical treatment” was to be removed from the ceilings of the original control room and the second one built by Sims.<sup>414</sup>

The bid document called for the demolition of certain walls and portions of walls:

- The wall separating the dance school viewing room from the space to the north, the non-original west wall of the recording studio and the west, east, and south walls of the second sound booth built by Sims
- In the control room, a section at the east end of the north wall, to allow insertion of a new door in the original position
- The air conditioner closet in the northeast corner of the reconfigured office space (east of the bathroom) including the drywall and studs built into the original Chess-era door opening (to provide for re-installation of a door)
- A section at the north end of the east wall of the rehearsal room (to provide for

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<sup>413</sup> The Bauer Latoza Studio, D-3.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

re- installation of a door at the original location).<sup>415</sup>

Other significant requirements included in the bid document were the removal of:

- All doors except the door leading into the room in the northwest corner, the doors at the north and east walls of the recording studio, and the door in the north bathroom wall
- The set of stairs constructed by Sims, leading east from the landing to the second floor
- Handrails on the north and south walls along the main stairway
- Infill at the eastern facade wall (to allow restoration of windows to their original size)
- Wood panels with vents on the exterior side of the window openings
- Window vents at the rear facade wall
- On the walls, all paneling and textured plaster above the original plaster finish, except for perforated paneling on the north wall of the easternmost room
- Acoustical treatment on the walls of the control room, recording studio, rehearsal room and second control booth
- Tiles and wallpaper in the bathroom
- Loose plaster and flaking paint in the vault, corridor, and on the south wall of the recording studio.

Demolition notes for the rehearsal room specify “Remove acoustical treatment to original plaster wall surface.”<sup>416</sup> This suggests that selective demolition had not been conducted on the walls in this room. Thus Latoza was not alerted to the fact that there was no plaster wall surface underneath the layer of pegboard Gerald Sims had

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<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid.

added on top of the original layer of same.<sup>417</sup>

Plans for the second floor provided for the construction presupposed by the demolition plans. Walls constructed by Wiener with the Pyrobar and spring clip technology were to be reconstructed with the same materials:

- the control room's east wall and section along the north wall which had contained the relocated door opening
- the west wall of the recording studio.

The same was true for walls Wiener had built using studs with mineral wool insulation and a pegboard surface:

- the rehearsal room's west wall and portion of the east wall into which double doors had been installed
- the portion of the west wall of the office needed to provide for a reduced door opening.

Such historic recreation was not specified for the other walls. They were constructed with contemporary materials such as 5/8-inch gypsum board, including an extension of the wall enclosing the rear staircase as it opened into the second floor, a change required by the fire code. To the west of the rear stair, a ladder room was to be created for a ladder to provide access to the roof.<sup>418</sup>

Since the Dixons proposed to move all of Willie Dixon's record and memorabilia collection into the former vault space, plans for 2120 required that all entrances be secured. The door to access the small ladder room could only be opened from the interior of the second floor, not from inside the room. Further security measures were taken by specifying removal of all skylights from the roof.<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>417</sup> Samuelson, interview by author, 16 July 1999.

<sup>418</sup> The Bauer Latoza Studio, A-3.

The plans disclosed in the bid document required a new stair and railing in the control room to provide for steps up to the raised floor from the reconfigured entrance. Also specified was a new platform section in the northwest corner to extend the raised floor all the way to the north wall, as per Wiener's original design. Acoustical tiles were to be patched, primed, and painted.

#### Ceilings and Floors

The bid plan specified new acoustical tile to match existing in the ceilings of the rehearsal room and the office west of it. Again the tile would be primed and painted. Elsewhere, all ceilings were to be patched as needed, primed, and painted. Also specified was new vinyl tile on all floor surfaces along with new doors for all remaining and re-established door openings. The upper, eastern portion of the main stairway was to be rebuilt to match original.<sup>420</sup>

Reflected ceiling plans specified fixtures throughout the building. In the basement, only commercial fluorescent lights would be used. For the stairs at the northeast corner, single-light fixtures were to be installed. These were also used for the two bathrooms on the first floor. Elsewhere on the first floor, industrial fluorescent fixtures were to be used for the corridor and Stock Room, as well as in the front half of the office/gift store space. Recessed eyeball fixtures (adjustable spotlights) were to be restored in the soffit of the exterior facade and the ceiling of the display area. New recessed can fixtures were to be installed in the rear and front stairwells and in the front corridor south of the staircase. A new "Lightolier, 4-lite

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid., A-8.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid., A-3.

‘Jubilee’ fixture”<sup>421</sup> was to be installed directly opposite the entrance door as indicated in original Townsend drawings. New Lightolier #4221 fixtures, flat square boxes with an opaque lower surface and containing six small, parallel fluorescent tubes, were to be hung in the original positions, two each in Office #2 and Office #3, and one in the rear half of the new office/gift shop space. At the second floor, industrial fluorescent fixtures were to be hung in each of the rooms and single-bulb fixtures were to be placed throughout the corridor, in the stairwells, and in the bathroom. In the vault, plans specified “salvage existing fixtures and replace with new fluorescents.”<sup>422</sup>

### The Facade

Plans for the front (east) elevation specified the remainder of restoration work required. The storefront was to be restored to three large glass panels and a smaller fourth panel at the south end which contained the entrance door as per the original Chess-era design. The original aluminum band above the panels was to be repaired while the plaster soffit directly above it was to be patched, primed, and painted. At the second story, windows with upper fixed panes and center pivot panes were to be installed within the original window openings.<sup>423</sup>

### From Plans to Work

Upon completion of the drawings in June 1995, Bauer Latoza solicited bids from contractors. After responses had been received, a meeting was arranged with the

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<sup>421</sup> Ibid., A-5.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., A-4, A-5, A-6.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., A-7.

Dixons. The Dixons were surprised and dismayed at the price tag of the proposed work. They were not prepared to fund the scope of work proposed. Instead, they asked Latoza to create a second set of drawings which reduced the scope of work to only those essentials which would create office headquarters for the foundation. The Bauer Latoza Studio responded with a set of “construction drawings” by August 1995. This set of drawings was prepared by making corrections to the original set of drawings. In order to preserve the entire plan, work which was not to be undertaken was cross-hatched in the illustrations and crossed out in the summary portion outlining the work.

Samuelson and Latoza continued discussion with the Dixons and a set of revision drawings which included additional work consented to by the Dixons was created by March of 1996. Again, to preserve the optimal plan, the original bid documents were used and work which was not to be undertaken was circled in cloud-shaped bubbles. These annotated drawings were used to prepare a set of permit drawings for submission with permit requests later that month.

#### Rehabilitation Plans Are Changed by Work Discoveries

Despite laborious detective work and negotiations with the Dixons, work did not go exactly as envisioned in the plan. Though tedious, study of the difference between the plans and the actual work documents the generally uneven flow of work and the difficulties encountered in trying to impose preservation standards on a rehabilitation project. Most interesting may be the examination of choices made in reaction to surprise discoveries in the course of planned work.

According to reports in the Blues Heaven Foundation’s 1995 newsletter, interior and facade work was organized into three stages. Funding, urgency of needed repair, foundation need and visual impact all affected priorities. Restoration of the



exterior facade came first for several reasons. First, funding was available for this work through the City's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Facade Rebate Program. Second, repairs to the terra cotta cladding, particularly the parapet, were needed to prevent loss of original fabric. Finally, improvements visible from the public way would provide maximum impact. Accordingly, the first permit reviewed and approved by CCL staff on 2 June 1995 was for rebuilding the parapet to original condition. The cost was estimated at \$39,887 and the masonry contractor was Sourlis Masonry Restoration.<sup>424</sup>

Second was the installation of new second-story windows and restoration of the first floor storefront which would provide an improved display space for Blues Heaven Foundation to announce its presence and purpose. The next permit approved by the CCL on 19 March 1996, included this work and discrete portions of the Stage 2 and Stage 3 rehabilitation of the first floor, second floor, and basement as follows: "remove non-bearing glass partition, remove paneling, patch plaster walls, new tile floor."<sup>425</sup> With The Bauer Latoza Studio as architect and Firehouse Construction, Inc. as general contractor, estimated cost of the work was listed as \$58,000. Shortly thereafter, on 10 April 1996, the CCL staff approved a permit for installation of heating and ventilation equipment on the roof not visible from the street. The subcontractor listed on the permit, Total Aire, estimated cost of this work at \$45,000 to \$50,000.<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>424</sup>Commission on Chicago Landmarks, "Permit Review Log, Date Received CCL: 6-2-95, Review Number 1995.123," and attached documentation, CCL permit file on "Chess Records," Chicago.

<sup>425</sup>Commission on Chicago Landmarks, "Permit Review Log, Date Received CCL: 3-19-96, Review Number 1996.079," and attached documentation, CCL permit file on "Chess Records," Chicago.

<sup>426</sup>Commission on Chicago Landmarks, "Permit Review Log, Date Received CCL: 4-10-96, Review Number 1996.127," and attached documentation, CCL permit file on

The final permit, for replacement of the rear stair between the first floor and the basement to the same location as existing stair, was approved by CCL staff on 19 April 1996. The cost was estimated at \$4,500 by Bush Construction Co., Inc. Stage 3 restoration of the second floor including recording studio, engineers mixing area and green rooms (“green rooms” was the term used to describe the rehearsal studio where musicians would warm up and prepare to record), was put on hold until funding was found.

The March 1996 set of permit drawings on file at the CCL provide a fairly accurate record of the work carried out at the site, though they do not reflect all aspects of the space as built out. Some additional work has been carried out since then and a site visit in September 1999 provided for a description of the site at that point. At the east facade, the parapet was repaired and decorative terra cotta re-installed. All original terra cotta was retained, including broken and cracked pieces. Cracks and chips remained visible, either not repaired or repaired using mortar darker than original. At the first floor, gaps between the Granitex panels and the underlying masonry had been filled with mortar. The display window was changed to three large glass panels with the door at the south end. At the second floor, three large, fixed, single-pane windows and upper pivot windows were installed.

Occupying the north two-thirds of the first few feet of the entry space is a display area. Samuelson had discovered from interviews that the redwood shelving unit specified by Townsend was never executed, so a plain partition was used for this space. A modest metal plaque with the stylized words “Willie Dixon’s Blues Heaven Foundation” installed on the display wall serves as signage for the site. Two contemporary chairs, a table, photograph displays, and a free-standing, life-sized, metal silhouette of Willie Dixon playing the bass complete the decor. (See Figure

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“Chess Records,” Chicago.

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Several feet west of the entry door is the reception area wall, reconstructed with a double band of framed Flutex panes, all fixed except for one sliding window. (See Figure 40.) A door at the north end of the reception area leads to the first main room containing an office area at the east end and gift shop in the west end. At the north end of this open space is the main staircase. The portion of wall below the stair contains two built-in television sets. (See Figure 41.) The staircase was rebuilt to its original double-return form with simple round balusters secured at the top and base into exposed wood planks. (See Figure 42.) Further north against the wall an enclosed staircase was built to access the basement. Presumably this provided a second means of egress should the basement space be opened to the public.

Redwood paneling covers the south wall of reception/gift shop room. At the west wall a closet is in place at the south end; a door to Office #2 is located in the center; and the northern third of the wall is composed of framed Flutex panels consisting of replacement panels from the floor to the top of the door and original fixed Flutex transoms above. A door in this section also leads into the office formerly used by Leonard Chess (Office #2). (See Figures 43 and 44.)

North of this office is a corridor leading to the former stock room. The north wall of the corridor has a plain plaster surface. The original south wall was retained with new Flutex panels installed into the existing frame to match extant Flutex transom panels. A door in the second set of four Flutex panels opens into the office formerly used by Phil Chess (Office #3). (See Figure 45.)

In the former Stock Room, an upper storage area with disappearing steps was built at the east end. A wall partition with an open, framed section was built west of the storage area. Multiple television sets and miscellaneous memorabilia are on display in the framed section. The television sets are used to show a video about the



Figure 40. Tour guide at the reception area wall, view from inside looking east, 1999.  
Photograph by author.



Figure 41. Stairs at north side of office/shop, 1999.  
Photograph by author.





Figure 42. Stair balusters secured into wood planks at ceiling and base, 1999.  
Photograph by author.



Figure 43. Gift shop with redwood paneling on south wall, 1999.  
Door to Office #2 is just south of Flutex panels. Photograph by author.



Figure 44. Office #2, 1999. Blues Heaven Foundation employees in front of redwood paneling on south wall. Photograph by author.



Figure 45. Tour guide in first floor corridor, view looking west, 1999. Door opens into Office #3. Photograph by author.

site and the Blues Heaven Foundation to visitors. Restrooms are located at the east end of the north wall. West of this is a kitchenette. All walls are plain plaster except for the two square panels on the north wall which allow for the original diamond-shaped plaques with Chess pieces and Lannon stone wall behind to be viewed. (See Figure 37.) At the west wall, the double doors and single door at the southern end were reinstated. (See Figure 46.)

The original back staircase to the second floor is still in place. (See Figure 47.) At the second floor, the rear portion of the corridor north of the enclosed stair area leads to the concrete vault still in place at the west end. (See Figure 48.) The original metal fireproof door and sliding apparatus are in place at the entry to this room. East of the vault is a small room used for storage. At the south wall, pegboard panels are in place. The east wall contains the glass control room window installed by Gerald Sims.

East of this room is the original rehearsal room. A large opening in the east wall allows for direct access from the corridor. The double doors were removed from this doorway but the ramping on the floor is still in place across the corridor to the east. The door was not relocated to its original position further north. The east and south walls are covered in pegboard,<sup>427</sup> while the other walls have a plain plaster surface. (See Figure 49.) Miscellaneous recording and amplification items, perhaps original to some era of Chess Records, are on display in this room.

The corridor east of the former rehearsal room continues north along the north wall. The two upper portions of the main stair, east and west, are in this corridor, leading down to the landing. (See Figure 50.) Along a ledge at the north wall, lighted

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<sup>427</sup>Samuelson noted that the second layer of studs and pegboard added by Sims was removed from the rehearsal room and new pegboard put in. (Samuelson, interview by author, 16 July 1999). Latoza stated that the original pegboard was left in but painted. (Latoza, interview by author, 9 August 1999). Inspection of the room confirms that pegboard on the walls has been painted over, but the top paper layer of new insulation is visible through the pegboard holes.





Figure 46. Tour guide in front of west wall of former stock room with doors to exterior, 1999. Photograph by author.



Figure 47. Tour guide on original rear staircase at southwest corner of building, 1999. Photograph by author.





Figure 48. Looking west down into rear staircase and down hall toward concrete vault, 1999. Photograph by author.



Figure 49. Tour guide in southeast corner of rehearsal room with opening into corridor, 1999. Photograph by author.



Figure 50. Composite image of north wall staircase looking west to corridor, 1999. Photograph by author.



Figure 51. Looking west across recording studio into former office space, 1999. Photograph by author.



Figure 52. Looking east from corridor through former office space into recording studio. Control Room glass at right in far wall. 1999. Photograph by author.



Figure 53 (left). Southeast corner of second floor with original pipes leading to basement, 1997. Photograph by author.  
 Figure 54 (right). Tour guide pointing to same pipes now inset into wall built to separate former control room space from front office space, 1999.  
 Both photographs were taken from roughly the same spot looking toward the pipes. Photograph by author.

display boxes created by Gerald Sims featuring photographs of musicians with text were left in place. At the east end of the corridor, a small section was cut out of the end of the corridor wall to allow the interior construction of the wall to be viewed. (This was not indicated on Bauer Latoza Studio's drawings and so was likely a late revision. See Figure 39.)

South of the corridor is a single open space with an enclosed closet at the northwest corner where the bathroom was formerly located. Redwood paneling is in place at the west end of the south wall where the former office was located. No wall was constructed to separate this space from the recording studio. (See Figures 51 and 52.)

As of fall 1999, limited construction was continuing on the second floor. On the sloping south wall of the recording studio, the panels which formerly contained

louvers were open and cleared out, exposing a combination of the plastered surfaces and masonry of the original wall beneath. In the control room space, an eastern wall was constructed to separate this space from the room at the east end of the second floor. Modern standard construction was used rather than the original Wiener-designed wall construction. The wall contains a small recessed section at the floor level to allow for two open metal pipes protruding from the floor to remain visible. These pipes allowed for access to the echo chamber in the basement. (See Figures 53 and 54.) The top of this wall is angled toward the full-height ceiling. In the easternmost room, the upper portion of the north wall is covered with acoustic tiles.

On the second floor, industrial-style fluorescent lights are in place at the ceiling, including the original fixtures in the recording studio. Floors are covered in black vinyl tile with gray accents added in the corridors. Black vinyl molding outlines the floors. All walls and ceilings are painted white. Original acoustical tiles are in place in the ceiling of the corridor, but were removed from the rehearsal room. Doorways throughout the second floor remain without doors except at the east wall of the recording studio and the west wall of the front (easternmost) room.

On the first floor, black vinyl tile is used in the front display and reception areas, while gray vinyl tile covers the remainder of the floors with black accents added in the corridors. Gray vinyl molding is installed at the base of the walls. All walls and ceilings are painted white, with a hand-applied, ochre, marble pattern added to the walls of the corridor and front reception area. Square fluorescent box lights are in place in the offices and gift shop. Circular, enclosed light fixtures are used above the stairs. Industrial-style fluorescent lights are in place in the ceiling of the former stock room. Recessed adjustable spotlights remain in the display window ceiling and in the soffit of the exterior storefront.

Contemporary furniture and fixtures are used throughout the building. Framed photographs, posters, and occasional mounted and framed 45 rpm singles adorn the walls. Information sheets created by Samuelson to describe the spaces are framed and installed as clues to the history of this otherwise crisply modern-looking interior.

Much of the restoration work required to recreate spaces which more accurately reflect the Chess-era lay-out was not completed. The combined reception office and gift shop open directly onto the main staircase where Flutex partitions originally separated these offices from the corridor. On the second floor, the second control room created by Sims was left in place while an original bathroom was demolished. The west wall of the studio was never reconstructed, allowing it to flow into what would have been a separate office to the west. The current lay-out, then, does not accurately reflect the studio's configuration, arguably the most significant space in the entire building. Shirli Dixon-Nelson says that the Blues Heaven Foundation has applied for a grant which she hopes would underwrite the costs of restoring the studio area of the second floor.<sup>428</sup>

Some of the compromises made in design choices were presumably due to the expense and difficulty involved in finding or manufacturing exact materials from the Chess occupancy.<sup>429</sup> Floors were not re-covered in historically accurate rubber tile, for example, but vinyl tile. Vinyl was cheaper, readily available, and easier to maintain, so no effort was made to locate rubber tile.

Other choices were simple preferences. Rather than choose a color similar to the original, at first a white vinyl tile was chosen. Not long after its installation, however, roof workers stored tar paper in the former Stock Room which left

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<sup>428</sup>Dixon-Nelson, interview by author, 27 September 1999.

<sup>429</sup> Samuelson, "Landmarks of Chicago Blues and Gospel," II-122.

permanent black markings. At this point, the Dixons decided white was not practical and chose the black and gray colors, though again these colors were not consistent with the period of significance.<sup>430</sup>

Samuelson and Latoza had taken it upon themselves to do what they could to keep materials original and inexpensive when possible. Samuelson had salvaged 1950s-era Flutex glass from another site to use at 2120. There was not enough to fill all the panels of the rebuilt interior walls, however, so all new Flutex was ordered and the salvage tossed. Other materials which might have been kept for future replacement were discarded, including materials original to the site. For example, at one of the parties at 2120, Samuelson rescued a piece of original redwood paneling from the garbage.<sup>431</sup> Another original lighting piece located in the second floor vault disappeared during demolition.

Other opportunities to use period pieces were lost. Examining the 1957 specs, Samuelson and Latoza found that a Lightolier Company lighting fixture was indicated for the reception area. They wrote the Lightolier Company to find out details. The company responded with a photograph of the “Jubilee,” a colorful four-globe lighting fixture. In a rare stroke of luck, the very same Jubilee light was hanging from the ceiling of a vacated dentist’s office in the Reliance Building, designed by Burnham & Root and built in 1891. The fixture was due to be stripped in an upcoming restoration of the landmark building. In fact, an incredible store of period pieces was available from the Reliance Building: settees, tables, chairs and other pieces of institutional quality which would have provided furnishings appropriate to the site. Samuelson and

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<sup>430</sup> Samuelson, interview by author, 16 July 1999.

<sup>431</sup> As Phil Chess was about to leave the evening’s event, Samuelson grabbed the paneling he had found in the dumpster and asked him to sign it as a memento of Chess and Phil obliged. Samuelson remembers carrying the more-than-ten-foot piece home on public transportation. Samuelson, interview by author, 20 June 1997.

Latoza spoke to the Dixons about using the Jubilee light and the furniture that they had set aside, but the clients did not like the look of the pieces and they were never rescued from the space. When an alternative period lighting piece was offered by one of the Landmarks staff, the Dixons declined the offer and it was not installed. Although the Dixons did purchase some contemporary pieces, overall the site remains largely unfurnished.<sup>432</sup>

In addition, neither research nor inspection of the site had provided all the details needed for a “museum-quality” reproduction of the Chess-era build-out. Some of the uncertainties in restoration could conceivably have been addressed with continuing research, but this would have required serious attention and money was not put toward this end exclusively.<sup>433</sup>

There were also problems with loss of information during the demolition work. Materials and elements from the period of historic significance were demolished or removed without documentation. The basement echo chambers were one example. There had been no drawings in 1957 of the echo chambers. Rather, Jack Wiener had built them, using the same spring-clip wall construction he had used for the studio walls on the second floor. Not only had the echo chambers been demolished by post-Chess occupants of the building, but Samuelson found that there was not enough site evidence left to show how they had been constructed. One of the few remaining clues was the soundproofed entrance-door frame to the chambers. During demolition it was removed and thrown away. When little evidence is in place, it becomes all the more important to preserve what is left. Without it, everything is pure supposition.<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> Samuelson, interview by author, 16 July 1999.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid.



Original materials were also lost in the control room. Wiener's original ceiling was demolished to create a uniform ceiling height throughout the space. The raised floor with its sloping western section was demolished and rebuilt to a uniform level. Apparently, the Dixons' desire to use the eastern portion of the second floor for a conference room inspired this demolition work. In addition, the current east wall of the control room was not built of the same construction as Wiener's original and the space remains open to the full ceiling height.<sup>435</sup>

#### Issues Affecting the Outcome

At close range, a swirl of issues surrounding the project appear as accomplishments while many needs remain. It is possible to group these issues, however, as those related to changing personnel, limited funds, and competing visions.

Building permits attest to the fact that several contractors were involved in the interior work at 2120. Firehouse Construction began and carried out construction work through 1996 but Bush Construction was then used to replace the rear stairs to the basement. After dismissing both these firms the Dixons went on to work with a string of individuals rather than a construction company.

The Dixons also ended work with the Bauer Latoza Studio before the build-out was completed. Samuelson left the CCL in 1997 to become the Curator of Architecture at the Chicago Historical Society and so was no longer able to provide direct recommendations for the project as part of his work. The Dixons failed to engage him in this capacity on a volunteer level with any consistency. Without knowledgeable personnel in place to supervise work in line with restoration-oriented

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<sup>435</sup>Ibid.

plans, efforts to control the treatment of historic materials floundered and the result was the loss of original fabric.

According to evidence in the building permits, approximately \$152,000 worth of work was done, one-fourth of the \$600,000 figure most consistently reported for the entire scope of the project. Work on the second and third stages remains incomplete until more money is raised and dedicated to restoration work. Publications associated with the Dixons continually emphasize their desire to pursue the foundation's multiple missions.<sup>436</sup> Even after acquiring 2120, fundraising efforts were dominated by appeals for money to conduct Blues Heaven Foundation's programs rather than specifically toward capital improvements. Without a focus on the latter, physical work on the site will progress slowly.

Competing visions within the Blues Heaven Foundation have affected the dedication of funds to any restoration work at 2120. The desire, for instance, to construct a new blues museum competes with restoration efforts. The Dixons had expressed interest in obtaining the vacant lot immediately south of 2120 for the construction of such a museum. The city owned the property due to non-payment of taxes by a previous owner and had demolished the hotel that had previously occupied the site. The Department of Planning & Development (DPD) was in charge of the site and in 1996 Blues Heaven Foundation applied to the city for a negotiated sale of the lot. The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, now located within DPD as the "Landmarks Division," acted as a proponent of the sale within the Department. Its support was based on the idea that use of the adjoining property for an addition to 2120 would allow for the accessibility required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and expansion of programs without significant alterations to the historic

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<sup>436</sup> For example, Blues Heaven Foundation. "Willie Dixon's Blues Heaven Foundation, Inc.," brochure [1998], author's personal files, Chicago.

interior of 2120. The city originally had intended to offer the site for sale to the public and had included it on its list of available properties, attracting the interest of at least one developer.<sup>437</sup>

Land values in the neighborhood were rising due to recent investment by developers in extensive upscale housing in the South Loop, one of which even attracted Mayor Daley to move to the area. The vacant lot had doubled in value and if available on the open market, would certainly have attracted significant interest. DPD's legal staff was brought in to the project by the spring of 1998 to arrange the legalities for transfer of the property. Precedent had been established for the sale of property at below-market value for institutional uses, e.g. the Goodman Theater and the Vietnam Veterans Museum, but the city had to forgive back taxes on the property before the lot could be sold.

In 1999 the lot was sold to the Dixons for one dollar. Conferment of the property was free of use restrictions, such as a take-back arrangement should the Blues Heaven Foundation fail to construct a museum on the site. Rather, ownership of the property was tied to the property rights for 2120. The only requirements of the city were that the foundation clean up the site and landscape it, creating a garden, which could be used for outside events connected to 2120.<sup>438</sup>

The Dixons hired the original architect they had worked with for 2120, John Kelly, to design the garden. By summer 1999, the plan for the site at 2122 had been executed. Debris was cleared from the lot and concrete paths poured. Wood chips were used to cover the remaining ground with plantings scattered at the edges. A

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<sup>437</sup> Brian Goeken, Landmarks Division, Chicago Department of Planning & Development, interview by author, July 1999.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid.

black, chain link fence enclosed the lot at the western end. Eight large metal tubes were installed in front of the fence to provide a partial screen from the alley and vacant lot to the west. A black, decorative, wrought iron fence was installed at the eastern edge of the lot. Its central gate was capped with a metal arch spelling out “Willie Dixon’s Blues Garden” overhead. Silhouettes of musicians Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Albert King, and Koko Taylor were installed as decorative accents. Loud speakers installed into the masonry of buildings to the north and south play Chess music during the hours the building is open for tours.<sup>439</sup>

### Critique

The Blues Heaven Foundation’s commitment to its programmatic mission—educating people, especially children, about the blues; helping musicians receive the royalties due them for their work; educating blues artists about copyrighting, publishing, and practices of the music industry; encouraging appreciation, awareness, and a positive image of the blues tradition; and funding emergency medical treatment for blues musicians—appears to conflict with the expenditure of funds toward “restoration” of 2120. Yet, restoration and achievement of foundation goals may not be as divergent as they might appear at first glance. Samuelson’s argument remains strong: if efforts were made to focus first on a full restoration of the building, creating a historic showpiece, it could serve as the vehicle to raise funds for Blues Heaven Foundation’s program work. Money could be raised directly through entrance and tour fees and sales of Chess/Blues Heaven Foundation items in the gift store. Press and public attention brought to the site for its historic connections could help raise the organization’s profile and the increased visibility would have a positive effect on

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<sup>439</sup>Dixon-Nelson, interview by author, 27 September 1999.

fundraising from private and public sources. A restored site would also serve as a tangible piece of blues history and a direct contribution to foundation goals of educating people about the blues and encouraging appreciation, awareness, and a positive image of the blues tradition.

The front-page, full-color photograph and article in the *Chicago Tribune* on the day after the opening ceremony on 16 September 1997 lends credence to this argument. As with nearly every article on Blues Heaven Foundation's efforts, the piece focused first on the musical history of the site, tying it into the foundation's work through the Willie Dixon connection. It went on to speak of the site's potential:

The Chess building, which housed Chess Records from 1957 to 1967, could become for blues aficionados what Sun Studios in Memphis is to fans of early rock and the legends--Elvis Presley and Carl Perkins among them--who recorded at Sun.

"This may be one of those temples that pilgrims come to from all over the world to see and experience...the recording studio that was at the vanguard of the industry," said Barry Dolins, director of the Chicago Blues Festival."<sup>440</sup>

Dolins, as director of a festival that in 1998 attracted 660,000 attendees and an estimated \$10 million worth of revenue for the city, can be regarded as expert on the matter.<sup>441</sup>

The city's support of the project, as first stated in the DPD report given to the CCL when the property was designated, is based on the site's contribution to economic revitalization of the area and the encouragement of tourism.<sup>442</sup> The city has already begun working with the Dixons to use the site along such lines. In the above

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<sup>440</sup>McRoberts.

<sup>441</sup>Barry Dolins, Director, Chicago Bluesfest, Chicago Mayor's Office of Special Events, interview by author, 27 April 1999.

<sup>442</sup>David R. Mosena, Commissioner, Dept. of Planning & Development, "Report to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks," Document, September 1989, Tim Samuelson's personal files, Chicago.

article, a Department of Cultural Affairs spokesperson said 2120 would soon be the centerpiece of their “Roots of Blues in Chicago” tour, part of their Neighborhood Tours Program, which would continue with a trip through the Bronzeville community, a multiple-site district then under consideration for city landmark status.<sup>443</sup>

Although the Blues Heaven Foundation began using 2120 for its administrative offices and educational events in 1999, the organization had already begun to open the site for guided tours on a regular basis (Monday through Friday from noon to 2 p.m.). Approximately 700 visitors came to the site in 1998. A \$10 donation is requested in connection with the tour which begins with a video presentation in the former Stock Room. Visitors are then led through the site by a guide who offers prepared remarks at stops in each room. A gift store is the final stop of the tour.

The number of people visiting has surprised Shirli Dixon-Nelson, who says she knew they existed but thought they would arrive in small numbers rather than the busloads that often appear. The site is not prepared to accept large groups. Modest displays such as framed photographs and albums are not set up for viewing by more than a handful and are within reach of any visitors who might be tempted to remove them for a personal collection. Small rooms such as the former control room can only hold around fifteen. Experience has shown that such visitation is hard on the interior, requiring frequent paint touch-ups to walls. Dixon-Nelson says that they no longer allow “very large” groups to tour the site.<sup>444</sup>

Had the Dixons put more stock in Samuelson’s prediction that the site’s history would be a big draw and embraced it as a means to their end, visitation could have been planned for and managed more effectively. Their reaction reflects their

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<sup>443</sup>McRoberts. The Bronzeville Historic District was granted landmark status in 1998.

<sup>444</sup>Dixon-Nelson, interview by author, 27 September 1999.

commitment to use the site first and foremost as a center for the Blues Heaven Foundation programs.<sup>445</sup> Dixon-Nelson sees the 2120 space essentially divided into two primary uses, one on each floor. The lower floor serves as offices for the foundation, while the upper floor is the focus of tours with a restored control room and recording studio.<sup>446</sup>

Along these lines, limited work continues at the site, most recently with the construction of an east wall of the control room and clearing out of the louvers in the recording studio. Dixon-Nelson has spoken with people who say they purchased pieces of the original recording equipment from the 2120 studio. Her goal is to secure funding which would allow for purchase of this equipment and its installation into restored spaces.

The BHF has applied for a White House Millennium Council grant to fund restoration of the control room and recording studio. If the grant is received, Dixon-Nelson would like to hire Tim Samuelson to oversee the restoration with a committee of volunteers in place to help him.<sup>447</sup> Pursuit of grants is supplemented by more passive fundraising measures, including the current BHF brochure which includes a page soliciting donations. Donors can check a box to allocate the use of their donations and the first item listed is “Chess Building Restoration,” followed by other BHF programs. Both of these efforts indicate the extent to which the Dixons have come to embrace Samuelson’s idea about the power of the site to bring attention to and support foundation goals and the need to focus on funding for continuing work on

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<sup>445</sup>Kelly Kurtin, “Heaven on Earth,” *Where Chicago*, June 1999, 136.

<sup>446</sup>Dixon-Nelson, interview by author, 27 September 1999.

<sup>447</sup>*Ibid.*

the site. Still, no single, focused thrust has emerged to elevate the site's need for substantial support.

### Accomplishments

Two essential aspects of 2120's treatment over the past decade were critical to successful preservation of the site. First is the landmarking of the site which specifies critical features receiving protection as the entire Michigan Avenue facade, the roof of the structure, and the interior configurations of the first and second floors. These carefully chosen elements insure that the spaces and elements which relate the story of the site's period of significance will be retained.

Second, Blues Heaven Foundation's ownership of the space provides for sympathetic owners who respect the site's blues history. Though certain choices made in the renovation aspects of the site are not in line with preservation, the vast majority are satisfactory and future work could restore those portions which are not. Current use closely follows the use of spaces during the period of significance including the display area, reception area, and offices. The creation of an operable recording studio on the second floor, dependent upon further funding, would continue this pattern.

The Dixons' adoption of a philosophy which encompassed preservation was key to the ultimate outcome. Much to their credit, the Dixons were willing to work with proponents of preservation and to adopt many of the suggestions put forth by Samuelson and Latoza. Though landmarking provided for a certain level of protection, a different philosophy could have meant loss of much more original fabric which did not specifically receive protection by the landmark ordinance.

Involvement of the Blues Heaven Foundation has also provided an avenue for the direct support of artists and related industry professionals either part of the Chess recording legacy or inspired by it. Bo Diddley and Jack Wiener are both featured in



the video shown to tourists visiting 2120. John Cougar Mellencamp's contributions to BHF helped to make acquisition of the site possible. The Dixon family's direct connection to the site's story through Willie Dixon allows them to make relevant contributions not only in telling the story of music recorded at 2120 but also through the location of his personal archives at the site, potentially enhancing interpretation of the site with their display.

Funding was another essential factor which made preservation possible. As a non-profit, BHF became the vehicle through which monies were collected to restore the site. Marie Dixon's purchase of the building and subsequent donation to BHF was the first step. John Cougar Mellencamp's \$15,000 donation through the BHF, "the largest single donation to the foundation"<sup>448</sup> as of 1993, contributed to the effort.<sup>449</sup> The City of Chicago provided support through a \$40,000 rebate for facade improvements. MCA Records donated \$50,000 "to go toward providing a permanent home for the organization founded by the late blues legend Willie Dixon" in October 1994.<sup>450</sup> According to BHF newsletters, fundraisers organized by the Blues Heaven Foundation from 1993 onward also provided funds for the work carried out at the site.<sup>451</sup>

Research accomplished on the historic lay-out and use of 2120 is substantial and was undertaken with the kind of scrutiny and cross-verification from multiple sources which insures reasonable security in the conclusions made. Initially this

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<sup>448</sup>Kot, "Dixon's Heavenly Legacy."

<sup>449</sup>"Willie Dixon's Blues Heaven Foundation Set to Open in Chicago," *Goldmine*, 4 February 1994, sec. Grapevine.

<sup>450</sup>"MCA Makes Chess Move," *Pollstar*, 20 March 1995, 9.

<sup>451</sup>Publications of the Blues Heaven Foundation do not provide specific figures for the amount of money raised through events and donations or an accounting of their use.

research allowed the CCL staff to convey the site's significance to the Commission and overcome resistance to landmarking a site atypical of the sites usually considered for such status. The strength of the research and media coverage of the landmarking process were both crucial to the ultimate approval of the landmark ordinance by the City Council. Beyond this, ongoing research provided many of the critical answers needed to properly restore and interpret the site.

With the opening of the space to the public and the publicity which the site is receiving, further site documentation evidence may continue to surface. This can readily be combined with the solid work already done. The bulk of Samuelson's research is on file at the CCL and therefore available to the public. Latoza says the Bauer Latoza Studio has retained its work records, drawings, documentary photographs, and copies of historic plans of 2120 and made plans to donate the firm's archives to Chicago's Harold Washington Library. Compared to where Samuelson's research began in the 1980s, a significant amount of knowledge has now been amassed about 2120.

### Needs

The least successful aspect of 2120's preservation was the lack of regular observation of construction work and adherence to restoration-driven design plans throughout the entire project. The resulting undocumented removal of historic materials lessened the integrity of the site and destroyed evidence which contributed to an accurate understanding of the site's use and functions during its period of significance. Though Bauer Latoza Studio may have fragmented documentation of work undertaken and materials uncovered during its participation in the project, work continues without any consistent documentation efforts such as conservation reports, meaning any future restoration efforts will be hampered.

BHF borrowed words from Samuelson's facade application to use in a booklet announcing blues workshops at 2120 in February 1997: "This restoration will allow visitors to experience and interpret the working environment that helped shape Chess' unique contribution to international music and culture."<sup>452</sup> The site has not reached its full potential in terms of the use of accurate restoration to tell the story of Chess Records. The recording studio and control room are the most significant spaces which remain unfinished. Current efforts to obtain funding may allow for further work, but careful design based on accurate research and observation of construction work to ensure it is in line with plans must be achieved or the result will be less than satisfactory.

The use of contemporary furnishings and fixtures throughout the site also interferes with the ability of the space to capture the era of significance. Though the tour guide provides history on the space and Samuelson's write-ups posted throughout the space note Chess-era uses, overall the site fails to convey the full character of the site. A better balance could be struck between the need to provide a serviceable space for foundation needs and the use of historic elements to reflect the space as it looked and functioned during the Chess era. The ability of the site to continue to attract interest may depend on such improvements.

Dixon-Nelson speaks of the site as a "museum in progress."<sup>453</sup> Along these lines, focusing on issues regarding accommodation of visitors would be of benefit. This could be achieved in a number of ways, but solutions will likely involve instituting policies to control the size of groups and creating physical solutions to provide for protection of artifacts on display. The desire for access to the space by the public and desire to share with donors the progress achieved has led the BHF to open

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<sup>452</sup>Blues Heaven Foundation, "Blues and Black History."

<sup>453</sup> Kurtin.

the site before all such issues have been worked out.

Interpretation of the space also deserves additional attention. The video and guided tour are solid first steps in the process. Well-organized and positioned displays of memorabilia with written text or interpretation by a guide would provide additional means to relate the site's history. Especially for visitors with a limited understanding of Chess Records' story, such tools would add value to a site visit.

Additional research is required for future restoration and to further confirm or contradict conclusions made thus far. The most urgent need is that of interviewing people who have firsthand knowledge of the lay-out and use of the space. As time passes, fewer people will remain who have such knowledge. Jack Wiener, for example, is an invaluable resource and efforts should be made to document his recollections in detail.

Volunteer efforts can provide some of the resources needed to achieve these goals, but funding must be sought to provide for further restoration, improved displays and other enhancements. The itemization of programs in BHF's current brochure requesting donations suggests the straight-forward manner in which this can best be accomplished. Specific projects could be "packaged" and donors sought to meet the goals set forth for each. To encourage the widest possible donor base, monies spent need to be carefully documented and reports shared with financial supporters. With this approach, BHF may best be able to continue fundraising not only for 2120 but for its other programmatic goals.

## CONCLUSION

### Findings

This thesis is founded on a review of the literature documenting preservation of sites important to the development of the musical genre of rock and roll. The body of such literature is comparatively scant. The review was supplemented with site visits to several notable historic locations, including Graceland, the legendary home of Elvis Presley in Memphis, Tennessee, and the Hitsville U.S.A. house of the Motown Historic Museum in Detroit, Michigan, the former recording studio and headquarters of the Motown Record Corporation. Throughout, interviews were conducted with people knowledgeable about these largely undocumented preservation efforts.

This research provided the basis for positing a set of principles characterizing successful preservation of sites deemed important in the development of late twentieth-century popular musical culture. The principles became a framework for examining the efforts undertaken at the two sites which achieved the greatest overall level of preservation success. These places were the childhood home of Beatle Paul McCartney in Liverpool, England, and the former Chess Records office and studio in Chicago, Illinois, where many of the landmark recordings of blues and rock music were made.

The in-depth examination and critique of the steps taken to preserve these two structures provided the insights necessary to suggest key components of successful preservation of rock and roll sites. Contrasting the two projects helps illustrate the degree to which these components were in place and how that affected the outcomes.

What elements were present that substantially contributed to the end result such that if they were not in place, it would have significantly affected the project outcome? Five factors appear to have played fundamental roles in the success of the

endeavors: preservation protection through institutional purpose or legal status; funding; long-term preservation philosophy; regular observation of work and adherence to a restoration design plan; and research.

#### Preservation Protection through Institutional Purpose or Legal Status

Looking at the long term, it can be argued that for these projects to be considered successful, the sites need to be protected from demolition or significant alteration by some sort of preservation protection scheme. Both have a mechanism in place. For the McCartney home it came in the form of ownership by the National Trust whose mission is preservation. For the Chess Records site, it was local landmark status. Both of these approaches to long-term protection set the framework for the projects. The landmark status of 2120 prevented alteration of the interior configuration of the first and second floors and the facade, so design plans had to respect these historic elements. In contrast, the Trust's ownership provided protection not of specific components but of the entire 20 Forthlin Road site due to the intent and approach of the group. All work done at the site, whether external or internal, followed established preservation standards.

Until the home is declared inalienable, the possibility exists that the Trust could decide to sell it, leaving the property unprotected. However, this seems unlikely for several reasons. Beatles tourism is alive and well in Liverpool, suggesting the Trust is well-positioned to meet its visitor number goals. In the bigger picture, by accepting the Heritage Lottery Fund grant, the Trust put itself in a position of having to re-pay the money should it choose not to declare the site inalienable. Though a small amount of money relative to its annual budget, the Trust would have to consider the negative impression such an action might make with the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), a group that took a chance to help the National Trust by being one of the first

donors to the McCartney project. The Trust would have to weigh any potential damage to its relationship with this major funding source. Moreover, involvement of the McCartneys, substantial positive media coverage, and passage of planning obstacles have created a positive momentum that the Trust would have to be willing to take the fall-out for stopping should they change course.

The degree to which the long-term protection component was in place for both projects directly affected their outcomes. For the Chess site, the limitation of legal protection to certain elements meant that arguments had to be made to support the retention or recreation of additional elements. To a great extent this was successful, but not always. The Trust's holistic allocation of protection, in comparison, guaranteed that no intentional damage would be done to relevant historic fabric.

### Funding

Funding was essential for the acquisition of each site and the rehabilitation or restoration work carried out afterward. Both the Liverpool and the Chicago projects were modestly successful in this respect. The National Trust used existing funds for the purchase and basic operating expenses, then successfully sought a Heritage Lottery Fund grant for restoration work and presentation needs as well as a corporate sponsorship for visitor transportation. Trust decision-makers chose to limit resources focused on the site in the short-term, however, leaving the future uncertain. Potential revenue from tours has been capped due to restrictions on visitation, so this could not provide the level of funds needed for any significant future work on the site. Instead Trust fundraising specifically for the site or money from its own general funds is needed to prevent further degradation of historic materials, especially for the facades.

A mix of public and private funding sources was also involved in the Chess project although the Dixon family underwrote the majority of expenses. Marie Dixon

purchased the Chess building and donated it to the Blues Heaven Foundation. With assistance from planning department staff, the organization received a city grant to offset the cost of facade-related work, but the remainder of funds were from private sources. Rehabilitation work appears to have been funded in large part by the Dixons. A portion of the support also came from the fundraising efforts of the Blues Heaven Foundation, presumably including, among other things, the funds donated years earlier by celebrity John Mellencamp. The city provided additional support, not in the form of an outright grant but by giving the foundation the lot south of the Chess building at no cost. Further government support appears unlikely so the Blues Heaven Foundation (BHF) likely will have to foot the bill for future capital improvements. Unless a different approach is taken, income generated from tours will remain modest compared to the estimated cost of work yet to be undertaken. Regardless of the source of funds, the biggest challenge remains competition with other BHF programs. There was no indication that continuing rehabilitation work would become a priority, so future efforts, especially those aligned with restoration, such as reinstalling the recording studio, appear as if they will happen slowly.

For both the Chess and McCartney sites, funding needed to achieve full interior and exterior restoration fell short of the total needed. This was an intentional gap in the case of the McCartney home where funding was viewed not only in the context of its potential to allow for project improvements but also its potential to open the Trust up to criticism. The Trust's hesitation to spend more than what it considered a defensible amount of funds on the site reflected its uncertainty about the level of public support for the project. Although the organization was fully successful in raising the level of funds they set as a goal, from the perspective of what was needed for a totally satisfactory restoration, they were only fairly successful. Dedication of more funds to outstanding work will be a critical next step.



Funding for the Chess building rehabilitation efforts fell short of the total cost of the plan and therefore only a portion of the proposed work was carried out. In this respect, funding was more critical to the Chess project than the McCartney project where fewer alterations to the historic interior meant restoration was comparatively less expensive. On the other hand, without the critical initial funding, the Trust would not have been able to purchase the McCartney home and the structure's fate would have been uncertain. These conflicting perspectives suggest that funding took on different levels of significance at different phases of the projects due to the circumstances surrounding the sites at those times.

#### Long-term Preservation Philosophy

Whether continued rehabilitation work on 2120 would necessarily be positive from a preservation perspective is unknown and suggests the importance of the long-term philosophy component for the site. This component begins where preservation protection leaves off. At a basic level, BHF embraced a long-term preservation vision for 2120 by choosing to restore a large proportion of original features over options like gutting the space or leaving post-Chess-era alterations in place. The foundation's commitment to a preservation philosophy was less predictable than the National Trust's, however. Other concerns sometimes took precedence over historic accuracy, reflecting the somewhat conflicting visions the Dixons had for the site.

In contrast, the preservation philosophy guiding work on the McCartney home is well-established. The National Trust acquires properties solely for the purpose of protecting and restoring them. This long-term vision guides all the Trust's projects.

The degree to which the long-term preservation philosophy component was in place had a major impact on the projects' outcomes. The Trust's fixed preservation philosophy meant that all work done on the McCartney site furthered restoration and

that this will remain the goal throughout the tenure of the Trust's ownership. For the Chess site, variability in this component led to some loss of materials. However, the requirements of the landmark ordinance provided and will continue to provide a basic safety net for historic elements. Beyond the scope of those parts protected by the ordinance, future changes in attitude about preservation by the BHF or sale of the building to an unsympathetic owner are two scenarios which could lead to a much greater loss of original and restored interior features. The effect is a more uncertain future for the integrity of the site.

#### Regular Observation of Work and Adherence to A Restoration Design Plan

How the philosophy for the site was translated into action comes down to regular observation of work and adherence to a restoration design plan, another component necessary for success. Restoration is chosen as the criterion against which both projects are judged because it involves a more rigorous use of preservation standards than rehabilitation and was a viable option in both cases.

Several external and internal factors contributed to the Trust's great success with this component. The McCartney home had been built out according to plan and no major alterations had occurred, so the restoration work was relatively straightforward. In fact, no additional architectural drawings were required. Rather, using the original plan as the starting point, workers were given specific tasks and asked to stop if they found something unexpected. The tradesmen undertaking the work were full-time Trust employees, acutely aware of the preservation objectives and the care they would need to take in their work to meet them. Project managers checked with the on-site staff regularly to track progress and determine next steps.

Work at the Chess site was only partially successful in terms of observation and adherence to plan. Although the plans drawn up for the site included a large

amount of restoration work, a portion of the work prescribed was in line with rehabilitation rather than restoration standards. The use of construction workers untrained in preservation work and the lack of a restoration consultant who could commit to overseeing the entire project resulted in loss of original historic materials and information.

In terms of overall effect, this component had a moderate impact on the outcome of the Trust project given the relatively minor amount of restoration work required. For the Chess site, the impact was greater. Much of the work done at the site was positive from a preservation perspective but the remainder resulted in permanently lost historic fabric. In a way, it can never be known how crucial that information might have been so it is ultimately difficult to judge this component's importance.

Certainly this component is closely linked to the long-term philosophy and funding components. If the philosophy had been more of a priority, perhaps more money would have been spent to have trained personnel in place to oversee work at the Chess site. The design plan would have been fully restoration-driven and decisions based on preservation principles could have been made along the way as historic materials were uncovered.

## Research

Underlying the ability to make informed restoration decisions was the knowledge provided by research. Trust staff possessed a basic knowledge of the McCartney home's history, plan and interior appointments for the era of significance. It is likely more interviews and photographic research would have provided them with additional details. Armed with this information, the Trust would have been able to

respond more definitively to donations of objects for the site and to make fully fact-based decisions on details of the improvements undertaken and presentation choices made. In addition, it would have provided a greater range and depth of information to draw from for the home's interpretation scheme.

Given the relatively low level of alterations which had occurred to the McCartney site and the apparent continuity between plan and build-out, the absence of more complete research was not as crucial as it might be for other sites, however. The preservation-sensitive approach of the Trust also made it likely that historic materials discovered at the site would not be demolished or removed before it was determined they were not from the era of significance. The choice not to focus more efforts toward research was also in line with the National Trust's philosophy that a complete restoration was not the goal for this site. Changes in this philosophy suggested by reporting on the space since it opened to the public imply that more research may have taken place already.

Research played a critical role throughout the Chess project. Early on, the insights it provided into the site's uses helped determine what areas of the building should be specified in the landmark ordinance. Written documentation of the site's history and significance was a powerful, persuasive tool during the process of landmark designation. In later phases, when on-site inspections could be added to supplement research and interviews, more precise determination of the site's lay-out, look, and materials enabled a relatively accurate restoration of interior spaces and historic treatments. This greatly elevated the quality of the end product. Overall, the level of information gleaned from research was considerable.

There were gaps in the information retrieved on the Chess building, and resources could have been put toward seeking answers to specific questions. Clues provided by the site itself were lost when original building materials were removed

before researchers had a chance to inspect them. Comprehensive, formal documentation of physical details was also not a priority, meaning some facts have probably been permanently lost. On balance, these were a minor detraction from the overall positive outcome. (See Figure 55 for table summarizing these findings.)

### Summary

Is there any one component or set of components that is more critical to success than others? It does not appear that such a generalization is possible. As noted in the discussion of funding, components can take on different levels of significance at different phases in the project. Given the changing variety of circumstances surrounding extended preservation efforts, it is easy to see how the relative importance of components could be in continual flux. For example, landmark protection is not important if the owner has all the other components in place. Should the owner sell, however, protection is not assured and the formerly missing component could quite easily become the one most needed. Equally likely scenarios are easily imaginable with all components.

Another factor precluding absolute specification of the significance of one component over another is the interdependency of each to all others. For example, the National Trust's protective ownership of the McCartney home meant that the organization's long-term preservation vision and standard work methods were the *modus operandi* of the project. However, without funding, the Trust would not have been able to purchase the home in the first place. Similarly, without research, the restoration would have been founded on mere conjecture. Rather than focusing attention on any one component, such interdependency suggests that in less successful projects, weakness on the part of one of these could drastically affect the importance of each of the others. In the case of the Chess project the least successful component,

<div>Site</div> <div>Component</div>	McCartney Home	Chess Records Office & Studio
Preservation Protection through Institutional Purpose or Legal Statute	Ownership by National Trust (NT) whose mission is preservation	City landmark status
Funding	NT general funds, Heritage Lottery Fund grant, corporate sponsorship; limited in short-term	Dixon donations, city grant, Blues Heaven Foundation (BHF) funding; competition for funding with other BHF projects
Long-term Preservation Philosophy	NT mission; NT made short-term commitment via alienable status but conducted along lines of long-term preservation philosophy	BHF committed to basic preservation; landmark status provides minimum requirements for long-term preservation
Regular Observation of Work and Adherence to A Restoration Design Plan	Highly organized; well-trained workers; minimum of alterations to original design	Rehab w/ restoration components; lack of overseeing consultant for entire project made less than optimum outcome
Research	Basic knowledge; more interviews and photographic research would have provided additional details	Thorough research though loss of opportunities during demolition; additional focused effort possible

Figure 55. Table summarizing findings.

work observation and adherence to a restoration plan, appeared to stem from variability in the long-term vision and funding components.

### Additional Factors

The case can be made that components cited as requisite for success in these projects would reasonably be relevant for preservation of all types of sites and not specific to rock and roll music sites. However, other factors create special significance for this subset of sites and it might be helpful for future projects to be able to anticipate them. Further examination of the case studies suggests the following three aspects of these projects, although certainly not unique to rock and roll music sites, set them apart from the majority of preservation work. They are the need for significance to counter biases; public value and visitation; and support of name stars.

### Significance to Counter Biases

The first factor, significance to counter biases, refers to factors likely to be present in considering the preservation of historically relevant rock and roll music sites. These sites often lack architectural distinction, must overcome the preservation field's bias against preserving artifacts younger than 50 years, and prevail over a generalized notion that only "really old things" are historic. Moreover, such sites are vulnerable to the uncertainty surrounding the relevance of popular culture from which rock and roll springs. Under certain circumstances, one could ignore these issues. For example, if a building owner was dedicated to preservation and had the money and knowledge to carry it out properly, there would be no need for discussion of significance. But if the support of the larger community and specifically the preservation community were needed, this issue would likely have to be addressed.

The need to address the biases against preservation of popular music sites was

especially crucial for the groundbreaking McCartney and Chess preservation efforts. England's National Trust could not afford to alienate its membership nor could its funding from government sources survive broad-based disapprobation. The Trust met the predictable architectural and cultural challenge which surfaced by publicly establishing and continually reaffirming its conviction that the Beatles' contributions to twentieth-century culture were valued and would endure. Comments suggesting that the Trust was acting prematurely were countered by arguments that taking action now meant it could be done with only a modest investment. The organization successfully withstood the criticism, losing only a handful of members while delighting others and successfully securing a Heritage Lottery Fund grant. This approach was possible because of the phenomenal popularity of the Beatles and the Trust's willingness to put its faith in the power of the general public, the group the Trust is looking to for its long-term survival.

In the case of the Chess building, the challenge was less a justification of the relevance of popular culture than persuading decision-makers of the site's place in that realm. In fact, popular relevance, evidenced by press coverage and letters of support, encouraged the commission's approval of landmark status. Arguments about the structure's unremarkable design were countered and reversed by the staff summary which asserted that it was all the more remarkable that Chess Records was able to do what it did out of such an ordinary building. Instead of focusing on architectural history, the report emphasized Chess Records' place in history and the company's connection to the site.

In this same vein, the National Trust continued its emphasis on Paul McCartney and the Beatles through to its original presentation concept. The 20 Forthlin Road property was to be less a museum recreation of the 1950s household and more a place to focus on the person that made it famous. For both sites,



anticipation of biases clearly shaped the choices made for each site, determining what to emphasize in the argument for significance and how to present the sites.

### Public Value and Visitation

Established visitation at the McCartney and Chess sites provided tangible evidence that the public valued the structures. It is not surprising that fans would extend their adoration of musicians to the places that are associated with the artists and make an effort to see these locales. Others paying a call would include people with a more general curiosity about “famous places” they had some familiarity with via the widespread reach of popular culture. Both these types of visitors constituted perhaps the most dramatic and direct evidence needed to argue the projects’ worth.

The inclusion of 20 Forthlin Road in the “Magical Mystery Tour” bus route of Beatles sites guaranteed tourist visitation on a daily basis. The McCartney home’s proven value as an attraction not only sparked the idea for its purchase by the National Trust, but, taking it as a sign of peoples’ valuation of the site, provided the organization’s inspiration to allocate resources toward its purchase and preservation. The prospect of increasing this stream of visitors and their tourist dollars spent in Liverpool was likely the most important factor in the city’s decision to grant planning approval for public visitation of the home’s interior.

The desire to enhance tourism also prompted the Chicago Planning Department’s support of landmark status for the Chess Records office and studio.<sup>454</sup> The department’s facade improvement grant and negotiated sale of the adjoining lot to the BHF were financial incentives for property improvements the city hoped would contribute to attracting even more tourism dollars for the city. Early on, Landmarks

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<sup>454</sup> Mosen.

Commission staff used references to the visitor traffic to suggest the site's widespread fame in their profile of the site: "On any given day, tourists from around the world can be found peering into a small two-story building on South Michigan Avenue..."<sup>455</sup>

For the Chess and McCartney sites, this factor played a strategic role. It was leveraged successfully to encourage support from key partners. Without it, both projects may have faced some considerable roadblocks.

### Support of Name Stars

The third factor, support of name stars, is one few preservation projects possess. Rock and roll sites are likely to be an exception and the case studies examined show how this somewhat unique element can influence the level of success achieved. Though certain projects have included the publicity power of celebrities, such as Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis' support of the initial 1960s efforts to save New York's Grand Central Station, the involvement of stars whose life work is intermingled with the site's history is even more likely for rock and roll sites. The sites' relatively recent history improves greatly the chances that artists involved with the site are still alive. In addition to publicity, direct input from such people in the form of recollections and access to site-specific resources can improve the ultimate outcome.

The National Trust wisely placed a premium on the support of McCartney family members and purchased 20 Forthlin Road only after they had confirmed the support of both Paul and Michael McCartney. The attention that Paul McCartney was able to bring to the site by generating international publicity was one of the factors ultimately responsible for the success of the project. More people knew about it as a destination and its higher profile made it a more desirable grant recipient. The

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<sup>455</sup> Commission on Chicago Landmarks, "Chess Records Office and Studio." 1.

sanctioned use of Michael McCartney's photographs provided the basis for the site's interpretation. Paul McCartney's approval prompted the loan of highly desirable memorabilia from Beatles biographer Hunter Davies. The direct input of the McCartneys through recollections also added firsthand knowledge of the site and provided material for the site brochure.

Recollections of Chuck Berry and Willie Dixon cited by reporter Lori Rotenberg also raised the profile of press coverage of the initial landmarking efforts for Chess Studios. Publicity created by John Cougar Mellencamp prompted letters which served as further evidence of the site's popular value for the Commission on Chicago Landmarks. Mellencamp's and the Dixon family's financial support provided direct project benefits. Name stars contributed support by appearing at events on site, drawing even more attention to the work being done there. Celebrities also contributed directly to site research through interviews and by appearing in the video shown to visitors to the site. Cognizance of the value of these figures contributed toward the ultimate success of both projects in numerous ways.

### Limitations and Omissions

The most difficult limitation of this thesis was the selection of only two sites for in-depth study. Initial research efforts uncovered many more extant sites. It was not feasible to do an extensive study of more sites given the lack of preservation process documentation and the time required to establish such information. Extensive knowledge of additional sites would have provided a greater depth of perspective.

The helpfulness and open sharing of information by people interviewed for the thesis work was invaluable and without it, this research would not have been possible. Due to the sensitive nature of certain aspects of the projects, such as funding and interpersonal matters, it is unlikely that all details which had a bearing on the project

were shared, however.

The preservation efforts at these sites are ongoing. The photographs of the McCartney home published after its opening, for example, confirm that ideas about the level of restoration desirable for the site changed. It was not practical to continue to gather the same level of detailed information about such decisions when not on site. Research was conducted for only a limited period and could not extend indefinitely as the projects continued to change.

Finally, the nature of the topic precluded long-term perspective on the success of the projects. Specifically, it would have been intriguing to follow whether components key to initial success remained in place and how the sites fared over time as components such as funding and research continued or failed to mature.

Even so, with only the brief window of time since onsite research concluded at 20 Forthlin Road in 1997, there appears to have been a certain legitimacy accorded to the National Trust's efforts. This is perhaps most obvious when you look at what has occurred with John Lennon's childhood home in the neighboring village of Woolton. In 2000 the home was awarded an English Heritage blue plaque, a national level of recognition for the site. When the home unexpectedly went up for sale upon the death of the owner in 2001, Yoko Ono successfully bid for the home and the National Trust accepted the home as a donation from her the following year. It has since been restored and opened to the public, with joint tours of both McCartney and Lennon's homes established.<sup>456</sup> The National Trust would not have accepted another Beatle's former home had they not felt they had achieved a considerable level of public support for their earlier acquisition of 20 Forthlin Road.

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<sup>456</sup> BBC News World Edition, "Lennon's Childhood Home Opens,"; available at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/england/2890129.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/2890129.stm); Internet; Accessed 18 August 2003.

### Further Questions and Areas of Study

Several questions are suggested by the findings and the limitations discussed above, especially for concerned preservation advocates and rock and roll devotees. How do for-profit historic rock and roll sites fit into this picture? Can the profit motive coexist with appropriate and successful preservation or is the involvement of nonprofits a crucial factor for success from a preservation perspective? What factors should be put in place to institute a preservation-friendly environment?

Within the field of preservation, it would be worthwhile to examine the effect of these projects on the preservation movement. There seems to have been an increase in the number of blue plaques awarded to rock and roll sites in England in the years following the opening of the McCartney home. Was this a consequence of the McCartney project or simply a phenomenon of the passage of time? Are music sites treated differently than other sites? Why or why not? What has the inclusion of vernacular architecture done to the preservation movement? Did the McCartney project, for example, change people's perceptions about the National Trust or bring a different demographic to its membership? The Preserving the Recent Past conferences (Chicago, 1995; Philadelphia, 2000) have provided organized forums for discussion of such issues by academics and professionals and should continue.

Perhaps the most valuable tool which could be developed is appropriate models and quantitative data on the total economic impact of preserving rock and roll sites. With some exceptions, governments are hard-pressed to defend expending tax dollars on the preservation of popular sites. For the most part, they have not yet seen strong and quantifiable evidence of the full economic impact of tourism related to popular sites. The means exist to measure and calculate not just the primary effect of tourist expenditures but the secondary and ripple effects that affect the broader community. Yet such econometrics were not detected in any research related to this

thesis.

The need for such data is great. Even in cities where the positive economic benefit of historic sites preservation would appear to be obvious, awareness or action or both are painfully absent. For example, a visit to Memphis nowadays will likely prompt the question “Did you go to Graceland,” yet the city allows other perhaps more relevant music sites to languish or even seeks to destroy them. Memphis’s Sun Studios, where Elvis Presley first recorded and where popular music greats such as Roy Orbison, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, and Johnny Cash also recorded their music, struggles to keep its doors open. In 1997, the Memphis Housing Authority sought to demolish Lauderdale Courts, the 1930s public housing site where Elvis Presley once lived, the more or less direct equivalent of 20 Forthlin Road.<sup>457</sup>

A closely related area for study not to be overlooked is a certain human factor that may be at play when certain cities fail to recognize the historic value of sites and the people that made them famous. In both Detroit and Liverpool, interviews and written evidence suggest that a feeling of abandonment created by the departure of famous musicians and industry people plays a very real role in the decisions made regarding historic sites. The resentment it fostered colored the communities’ abilities to see the value of the historic resources in their midst.

There are also racial and socioeconomic aspects to peoples’ treatment of the sites. Many of the articles concerning the Motown Historic Museum in Detroit, for example, openly note the role race has played in the project’s long history. Both the human emotion and socioeconomic factors were fascinating aspects regarding the fate of 20 Forthlin Road. Why was it that McCartney’s former home was the first Beatles site to be preserved? Look to what Paul McCartney had been up to in the preceding

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<sup>457</sup>Tom Chesshyre, “Elvis Home May Be Demolished,” *Daily Telegraph* (London), 5 April 1997, sec. Weekend, 21.

decades for an answer. He had returned, in a way, to the city, finding his Liverpool roots, first by performing there, most notably at the huge, outdoor, free 1990 concert, and later by fixing up his old school, giving his money and publicly stating his concern for the Liverpool he loved. He even got the Queen's nod of approval with her monetary donation to the project, the type of work which earned him a knighthood in 1997 and erased all concerns about the acceptance of this working class boy into the highest echelons of British society.

Following this line of inquiry further, what exactly shifted in the minds of Liverpudlians such that John Lennon now is receiving the type of public approval Paul McCartney has? Not only is Lennon's home now protected, but in 2002 the city named its airport the Liverpool John Lennon Airport! How is it that Lennon, who never returned to Liverpool the way McCartney did, who in fact had set up his home in the United States, who was still in the Queen's bad graces for returning his M.B.E. to her in protest against the Vietnam War, is now a proudly recognized Liverpool figure?

In a similar vein, it would be worthwhile to explore why George Harrison and Ringo Starr have not found this level of local recognition. Would their homes ever be considered by the National Trust? In the case of these sites, is class the major factor? Harrison's former Beatles-era home is in the Speke public housing estate and Starr's is in the poorest of all the Beatles' neighborhoods, the Dingle. The Magical Mystery Tour doesn't stop at Starr's home and does not even include Harrison's. Are these parts of Liverpool's history that the community does not wish to have recognized?

Finally, the future of the sites discussed in this thesis remains unknown. How will the McCartney home fare when none of the Beatles remain alive? Does shifting popularity place rock and roll sites at a disadvantage when tastes change? Is this more

significant for rock and roll sites than for other types of sites? These questions should be revisited after the passage of time.



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