NPS Form 10-900
(Oct. 1990)

OMB No. 10024-0018

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NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1323

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x' in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Delmo Community Center [preferred]

other name/site number South Wardell Utility Building

2. Location

street & town 1 Delmo Street N/A not for publication

city or town Homestown N/A vicinity

state Missouri code MO county Pemiscot code 155 zip code 63879

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Mark A. Miles December 2, 2008
Signature of certifying official/Title Mark A. Miles/Deputy SHPO Date

Missouri Department of Natural Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

☑ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.
☐ removed from the National Register.
☐ other, (explain:)

for
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action
Edson H. Beall 1-15-09

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(check as many boxes as apply)

- ☐ private
- ☒ public-local
- ☐ public-State
- ☐ public-Federal

Category of Property
(check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
- ☐ district
- ☐ site
- ☐ structure
- ☐ object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	1	buildings
		sites
		structures
	7	objects
1	8	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Function
(Enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL/Meeting Hall

Current Function
(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT/city Hall
SOCIAL/Meeting Hall

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: Side gable utility building

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE
walls WOOD: weatherboard
roof ASPHALT
other

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

☒ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 7

8. Description

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☐ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

☐ **B** removed from its original location.

☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.

☐ **D** a cemetery.

☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

☐ **F** a commemorative property.

☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(enter categories from instructions)

Politics and Governement

Social History

Ethnic Heritage: Black

Period of Significance

1940-1954

Significant Dates

n/a

Significant Persons

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

District 111 Farm Secruity Administration Engineers

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

☒See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 8

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other Name of repository:

☒ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 9

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.84

UTM References
(Place additional boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	1/6	2/4/6/4/3/0	4/0/2/4/2/5/0
2	/	/ / / / /	/ / / / / /
3	/	/ / / / /	/ / / / / /
4	/	/ / / / /	/ / / / / /

Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Property Tax No.

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

☒See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 10

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Tiffany Patterson

organization State Historic Preservation Office date June 2008

street & number P.O. Box 176 telephone

city or town Jefferson City state MO zip code 65102

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets
Maps A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.
Photographs: Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.
Additional items: (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

name/title City of Homestown

street & number 1 Delmo St. telephone

city or town Homestown state MO zip code

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.).*

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

Summary:

The Delmo Community Center, 1 Delmo St., Homestown, Pemiscot County, is a one-story frame building on a concrete block foundation. The long, rectangular building measures approximately 56' X 26' and has a low pitched side gable roof. Clad in clapboard siding, the building is utilitarian in design and has no architectural ornamentation. The façade has asymmetrically placed fenestration, including three separate entrances and windows of varying sizes. A shed roof porch is located on the south side of the facade. The rear has a projection, likely early or original, with shed roof. The building sits in a large open lot near the center of the Homestown community. Though in deteriorated condition, the building is largely intact and reflects its c. 1940 construction date and historic function. The building sits on a 2.84 acre site that also contains a temporary gable front building on block foundation (c. 2008, NC), four large concrete pylons, and some miscellaneous playground equipment. The date of the installation of these features is unknown and, thus, are considered non-contributing to the property.

Setting:

Homestown is a small community in northern Pemiscot County located east of Highway B between Wardell and Pascola. Designed and constructed by the Farm Security Administration in 1940, the town originally consisted of 80,[1] four-room homes constructed on large lots to allow each family a garden plot. Homestown is laid out like a baseball diamond with a large, triangular, open area near the center. (See Figure 1) This center lot is flat and open, and was originally intended for social gatherings and recreation. The lot contains a small parking area on the west side in front of the Delmo Community Center and a gable roof former church building, some playground equipment, four large pylons, and a temporary building currently housing the city hall.

Elaboration:

The Delmo Community Center was constructed in 1940 as a utility building for the entire community. The building housed offices, restrooms, shower and laundry facilities as well as rooms for social gatherings and community meetings. The facade faces west and consists of three entrances separated by a variety of fenestration. To the north is an entrance door sheltered beneath a shed roof porch. Next to the porch is another entrance flanked by two square windows with wood sills. South of this third entrance is a small window, and the northernmost bay has three windows that have been boarded over. An unusually tall and thick chimney extends from

[1] Homestown, originally known as South Wardell, was the largest of 10 Delmo Farm Labor Homes communities constructed by the Farm Security Administration. The other 9 communities contained between 46 and 70 residences. Michael J. Meyer. "An Evaluation of the North Lilbourn Group, Delmo Farm labor Homes Project, On Route D in New Madrid County, Missouri." Cultural Resources Section of the Missouri Department of Transportation, 2001. On file with the Missouri State Historic Preservation Office, p. 13.

the center peak of the roof. The chimney likely connected to the building's original boiler.

The north and south elevations are the gable ends of the building. Each elevation has a vent near the peak. The north side has two square windows with wood sills, and the south has a wood panel door near the corner.

The rear of the building has a projection in the center under a shed roof. This projection is likely original and may have housed the community's laundry facility. The rear entrance and three square windows are located in the back wall of this building. To either side of the projection are windows of varying shapes and sizes.

Interior:

The interior of most Delmo buildings had knotty pine partitions, floors and trim. Some of the original pine partitions and finishes are still in place in the community center, though some drywall and paneling has been added, likely for additional insulation and to modernize the space. The multiple function interior likely had several different rooms originally, and some of the partitions have been removed to open up the space and allow for more assembly space. Despite changes, the building's interior still reflects its original purpose and retains many of its early finishes.

Other Resources:

In addition to the Delmo Community Center, the 2.84 acre lot contains four tapered concrete pylons, a propane gas tank, seesaw, jungle gym and a small parking lot. Because the date of installation of these is unknown, they are counted as non-contributing to the site. A small gable front temporary building is located at the south side of the community center. This building is also considered non-contributing to the property.

Integrity:

Based on historic photos of community buildings in other Delmo Group Labor Homes communities (see figures 2, 3, and 4), the Homestown Delmo Community Center has undergone some interior and exterior changes. At least one of the three entrances on the primary elevation was likely a window that was expanded to a door, and the current front porch is a later addition originally constructed in 1975 and replaced in 1985. A small gabled portico over an end entrance is missing, though evidence of the gable roof portico is still seen on the exterior. Despite these changes and the deterioration of the building, it still conveys its overall character and appearance and reflects its significance as a governmental attempt to alleviate poverty during the Great Depression.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3 Delmo Community Center
Pemiscot County, Missouri

Figure 1: Homestown Plat Map, Hunnicutt & Associates, on file with the Pemiscot County Assessor, 1998. The arrow points to the central location of the Delmo Community Center.

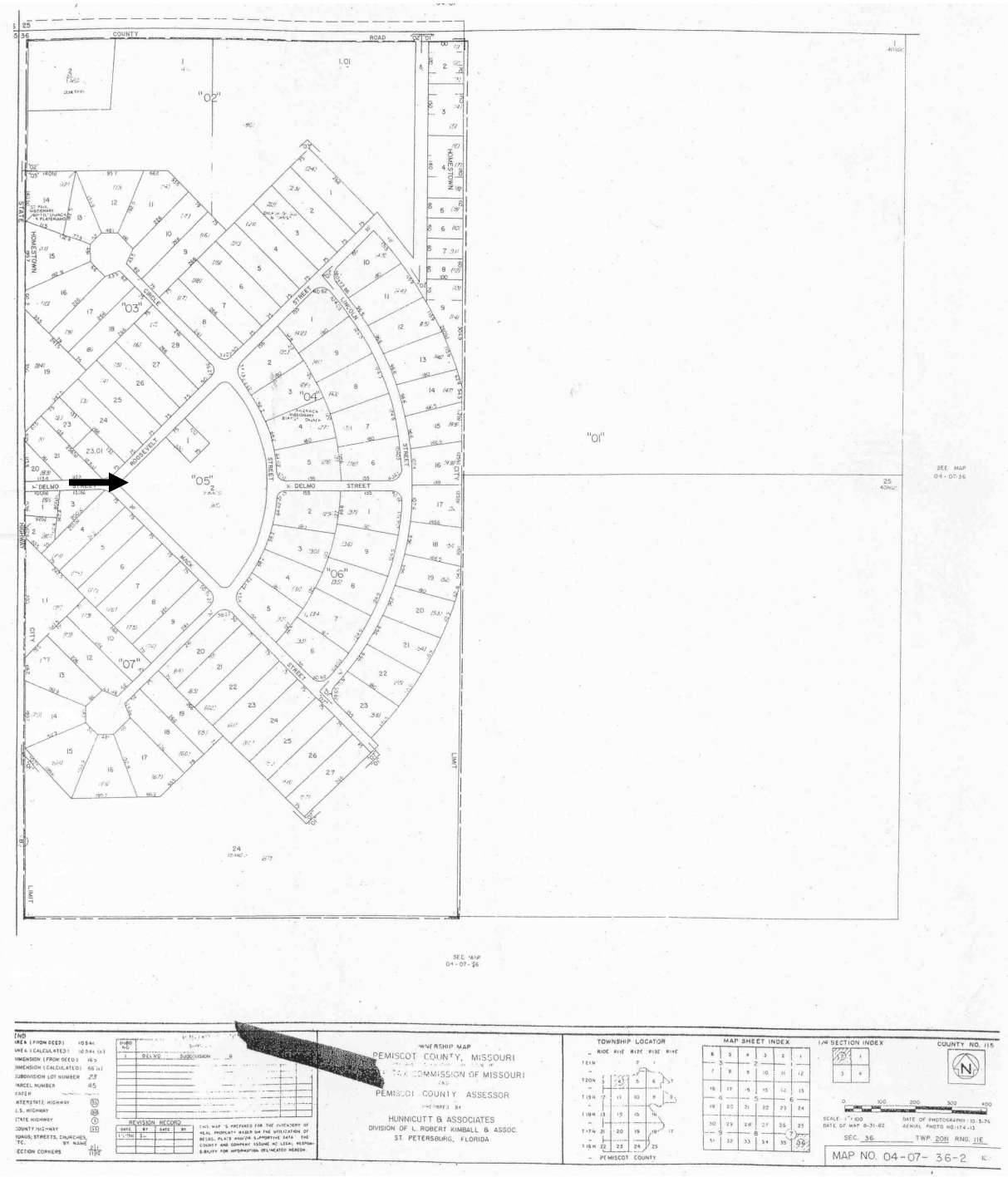

Figure 2: Front view, utility building, Wyatt unit. Southeast Missouri. John Vachon, photographer, 1941.

Though not in Homestown, the utility/community buildings in each of the 10 Delmo Group Labor Homes communities were constructed on the similar lines. This and other historic photographs in the nomination were accessed through the Library of Congress, American Memory digital gallery, http://memory.loc.gov.

Figure 3: Utility building and some of the houses at Morehouse group of labor homes. New Madrid County, Missouri. John Vachon, photographer, 1941.

Though not in Homestown, the utility/community buildings in each of the 10 Delmo Group Labor Homes communities were constructed on the similar lines. The small, four room homes, were usually constructed to face the utility building and large central green space. This and other historic photographs in the nomination were accessed through the Library of Congress, American Memory digital gallery, http://memory.loc.gov.

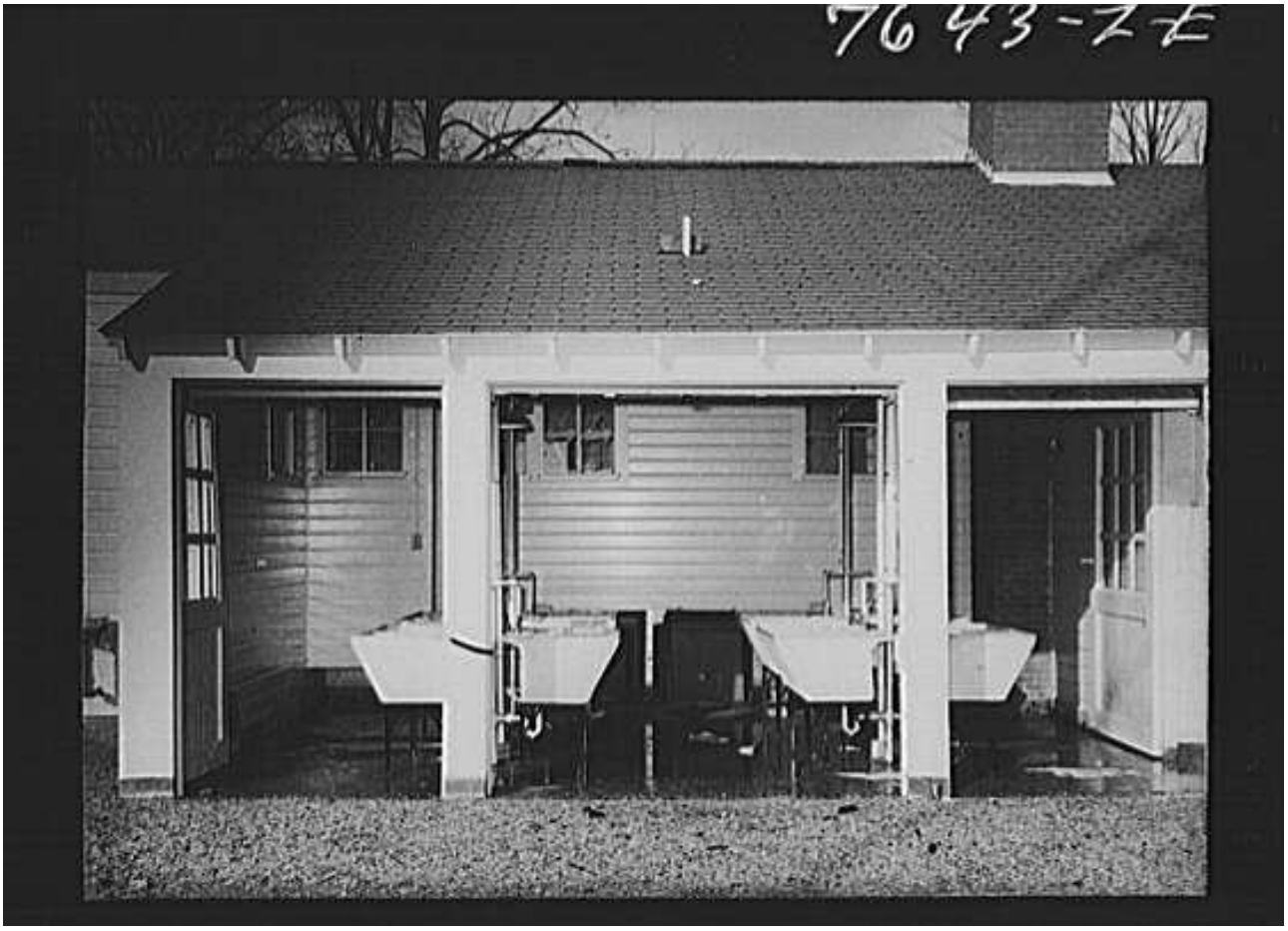

Figure 4: Laundry room, utility building. Southeast Missouri. John Vachon, photographer, 1941.

The rear projection of the Homestown Community Center likely housed a laundry facility similar to the one shown above. This and other historic photographs in the nomination were accessed through the Library of Congress, American Memory digital gallery, http://memory.loc.gov.

Summary:

The Delmo Community Center, 1 Delmo St., Homestown, Pemiscot County is of statewide significance under Criterion A in the areas of Politics/Government, Social History, and Ethnic Heritage: Black. The community center was the historic social and political center of Homestown, originally known as South Wardell, one of ten communities constructed by the Farm Security Administration for displaced sharecroppers and tenant farmers following the January 1939 roadside sharecropper demonstration in Southeast Missouri. The demonstration brought national attention to the plight of sharecroppers, and the construction of 10 Group Labor Home communities (6 for whites and 4 for blacks) was part of compromise reached between federal and state governments, local planters and sharecroppers, and representatives from the Southern Tenant Farmers Union to alleviate poverty and unemployment among Southeast Missouri sharecroppers and farm laborers. Homestown, was the largest of the communities and was designated for use by African Americans. When in 1945, Congress demanded the liquidation of all FSA properties, Delmo tenants and a group of St. Louis philanthropists organized the Delmo Housing Corporation to purchase the communities, and make the housing units available for sale to occupants. Though 8 of the 10 original Delmo communities are readily identifiable by their layout, most of the original 595 residential units have been demolished or extensively altered, and several of the communities have lost their original utility buildings/community centers. Though deteriorated, Homestown's Delmo Community Center continues to be an important feature of Southeast Missouri's Delmo communities, and represents an era of community building and social experimentation sponsored by the Federal government. The period of significance for the building is 1940 to 1954, the date of construction through the year that the Delmo Housing Corporation and residences retired mortgages for the purchase of the community center and residential units from the federal government.

Elaboration:

Sharecropping in Southeast Missouri and the Depression

Decreasing forests and the draining of the swamps in Southeast Missouri in the early 20th Century opened this area for agriculture and led to a staggering increase in cotton production. Between 1919 and 1924, acreage in the Bootheel[2] devoted to cotton expanded from 110,027 acres to 476,234.[3] This labor intensive crop also demanded an increased labor force drawing

[2] The "Bootheel" is the southeasternmost section of the state. Though some historians narrowly define this area as the counties of Dunklin, Pemiscot, and New Madrid, three other counties--Mississippi, Scott, and Stoddard--are often considered part of the Bootheel. In this nomination, the "Bootheel" and "Southeast Missouri" references the seven counties that were historically the most productive cotton producing counties in the state, all clustered in the southeast region. These are: Butler, Dunklin, Pemiscot, Mississippi, New Madrid, Scott and Stoddard counties.
[3] Richard S. Kirkendall. *A History of Missouri, 1919 to 1953*, Vol. 5. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986, p. 54.

many, notably African Americans, to the region. African American population in Southeast Missouri alone increased from 9,000 in 1920 to 25,000 just ten years later.[4] Like their cotton growing neighbors to the south, cotton acreage in Southeast Missouri was controlled by large planters who used day laborers and tenant farmers to produce crops. Though farm tenancy was not uncommon in Missouri in the 1920s and 1930s, tenancy was prevalent in Southeast Missouri. In New Madrid County, just north of Pemiscot County, 91% of farms were operated by tenants in 1930, well above the statewide percentage of 34.8%.[5]

This high rate of tenancy contributed to the significant negative impact that the Depression had on the region. In addition to overall economic decline, Southeast Missouri farmers were also plagued by drought, floods, and in the mid-to-late 1930s, falling cotton prices.[6] Increased mechanization also played a role, with tractors and other machinery replacing the need for farm workers. Ironically, some of the very New Deal farm policies developed to alleviate the plight of tenant farmers and sharecroppers actually exacerbated their problems. The Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) is cited as a catalyst that harmed the livelihood of tenant farmers and spurred them to action.

The AAA was initially passed in 1933 as a measure to increase farm prices by reducing agricultural surplus. The Act established the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and focused on several major farm commodities, including cotton, set marketing quotas for these commodities and made parity payments to farmers to take land devoted to raising certain commodities out of production.[7] Initially parity payments came from additional taxes on manufacturers. Citing unfair taxation issues, the Supreme Court declared the AAA unconstitutional in 1936, but an amended Act was introduced to Congress and passed in 1938.[8]

Concerns about the administration of the AAA during its first three years became a rallying point for sharecroppers and organizations such as the Southern Tenant Farmers Union (STFU). Created in 1934 by a group of white and African American sharecroppers in Tyronza, Arkansas, the STFU grew to be one of the most successful agricultural unions in the United States. The group represented sharecroppers and tenants in Arkansas, Missouri, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Oklahoma.[9] The STFU became the "voice" of the sharecropper and "sought written tenure contracts, better educational opportunities, public welfare benefits, and the right to grow home gardens"[10] for tenant farmers. They also defended the rights of sharecroppers to a share of the

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[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., 54-55. Duane Meyer. *The Heritage of Missouri: A History*. St. Louis: State Publishing CO., Inc., 1973, p. 635.
[7] "Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938." http://agriculture.senate.gov/Legislation/Compilations/AgCom/Ag38.pdf. Accessed June 12, 2008.
[8] Meyer, p. 6.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Jess Gilbert and Steve Brown. "Alternative Land Reform Proposals in the 1930s: The Nashville Agrarians and

parity payments under the AAA. Though the AAA made provisions for sharecroppers in the Cotton Acreage Reduction Contract[11], many, such as Howard University Professor, Dr. E.E. Lewis, decried the "complete exclusion of the farm laborer from the program and the highly unsatisfactory provisions affecting share-croppers."[12] Studies conducted by the League for Industrial Democracy found that the AAA and Cotton Acreage Reduction Contract did not adequately address the needs of tenants and allowed "many plantation owners [to] eliminate the share-cropping system . . . forcing . . . croppers to accept day labor instead."[13] Duke University professor and investigator for the Department of Agriculture, Dr. Calvin Hoover, also reported that the program "creates a motive for reducing the number of tenants on farms."[14]

It was in this environment of evictions and loss or reduction of income in the cotton growing region of the Mississippi Delta that the STFU was able to grow from a meeting of 7 black and 11 white men in Sunnyside School, to a Union of over 35,000 members.[15] The growth of the organization was not without conflict and violence against union members was common. At a rally in Gilmore, Arkansas, four armed men threatened African American attendees with lynching, and others were beaten. Organizers and some members were also hauled to the county seat where authorities threatened their lives and threw them out of the county.[16] Despite opposition, the STFU had some success in calling attention to the condition of sharecroppers. The union was called "most effective" in its role of leading strikes to raise wages of field laborers.[17] The group lead strikes in 1935, 1936 and 1938. However, it was the STFU-organized Missouri sharecropper roadside demonstration of 1939 that drew nation-wide attention and lead to the construction of the Delmo communities including the Homestown Community Center.

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the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union." *Agricultural History*, October 1981, p. 353.

[11]William R. Amberson. "The New Deal for Share-Croppers," The Nation, Vol. 140, No. 3632, p. 185. Published online by the New Deal Network at http://www.newdeal.feri.org/texts/26.htm. Accessed June 13, 2008. The contract for the years 1934 and 1935 required, in part, that land owners maintain the "normal number of tenants and other employees," to continue occupancy in houses, be allowed access to fuel, and to have land to grow crops for home consumption. Tenants were also given a percentage of parity payments.

[12] E.E. Lewis, "Black Farmers and the AAA," *Opportunity, Journal of Negro Life,* vol. 13, No. 3, p. 72, March 1935. Published online by the New Deal Network at http://newdeal.feri.org/texts/133.htm. Accessed June 12, 2008.

[13] Quoted in Amberson.

[14] Ibid.

[15] William H. Cobb. "Southern Tenant Farmers Union," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture.* Published online at: http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=35. Accessed June 13, 2008.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Louis Cantor. A Prologue to the Protest Movement: The Missouri Sharecropper Roadside Demonstration of 1939. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1969, p. 35.

Missouri Sharecropper Roadside Demonstration of 1939

As in other cotton growing areas, Southeast Missouri sharecroppers felt the effects of the Depression and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration's cotton acreage reduction measures. The year 1938, however, appears to be a watershed period for sharecroppers in the Missouri Bootheel. It was during that time that sharecroppers had seen the completion and growing success of the Resettlement Administration's LaForge Farm Project, a cooperative farming endeavor that had constructed 100 small farms (70 for whites, 30 for blacks) for former sharecroppers in New Madrid County. That same year, the STFU won a concession with the Department of Agriculture to require that the AAA issue parity checks *directly* to cotton producers--including tenants and sharecroppers.[18] According to STFU co-founder Harry L. Mitchell, it was this very victory that may have precipitated the 1939 roadside demonstration. Not wanting to share parity payments, many landowners in Southeast Missouri planned to make the switch from sharecropping to wage labor and issued eviction notices to their tenants.[19] Tenants were given until January 10, 1939 to move out.

In the wake of the eviction notices, Owen H. Whitfiled, STFU vice president, African American minister, and resident in the New Madrid County LaForge Farms project, worked with STFU locals to organize a mass demonstration. Though in December of 1938, Whitfield notified union leadership of his plans for a road side demonstration, the letter was misfiled. Despite more than 100 meetings of STFU local members and non-union sharecroppers held near New Madrid in December 1938 and January 1939, the roadside seemed to be a spontaneous outpouring of protest to STFU president Harry Mitchell.[20]

Though counts vary, between 251 and 450 evicted sharecropper families (1,161 to 1,700 individuals), many not even members of the STFU, began to move to the sides of Highways 60 and 61 in Southeast Missouri on the night of January 9, 1939. Small encampments of demonstrators were spread over 38 miles of Highway 60, and 70 miles of Highway 61 with Sikeston as the rough center point.[21] Booker T. Clark, one of the leaders of the demonstration wrote:

> Before morning there were more than 1,500 out on the highways from Charleston and Wyatt, and between New Madrid and Lilbourn. The snow was deep when we started. We made rag tents, and quilt tents, all makeshifts. The newspapers sent men to take pictures. They took my mother's picture trying to cook with snow on the stove out on

[18] H.L. Mitchell. Mean Things Happening in this Land: The Life and Times of H.L. Mitchell Cofounder of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union. Montclair, NJ: Allanheld, Osmun & Co. Publishers, Inc., 1979, p. 171.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid., 172-173.
[21] Arvahr E. Strickland. He Plight of the People in the Sharecroppers' Demonstration in Southeast Missouri." Missouri Historical Review, vo. 81 (4), July 1987, p. 405.

the roadside. It was a pitiful looking sight.[22]

The demonstration captured the attention of newspapers across the country. Though the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* forewarned the public of the planned demonstration in its Sunday, January 8 issue,[23] few took heed until papers reported and photographed protesters along the highways. STFU president, Harry L. Mitchell, read the news of the demonstration in the January 11, 1939 *New York Times* and took immediate action, traveling from New York to Washington the same day, to seek help for the sharecroppers from the National Youth Administration (NYA) and Farm Security Administration (FSA).[24]

While demonstrators did not lack attention and support in the media, they suffered greatly from lack of assistance. Despite Mitchell's connections with leaders of the NYA and FSA, neither federal or state assistance for the evicted sharecroppers was forthcoming. Even the Red Cross refused to assist, claiming that the problem of the sharecroppers along the highways was a "man made" disaster. Individuals and private organizations rallied to assist demonstrators, but assistance did little to alleviate the immediate needs of demonstrators.

Lack of food and shelter was not the only problems faced by the road side demonstrators. Local planters in New Madrid and Mississippi counties organized a response to the demonstrations on January 12. Planters claimed that the evictions were standard procedure, not meant to deprive sharecroppers of homes, but to let them know it was time to renegotiate cropping agreements for the coming year. The protest, planters claimed, was "the result of unscrupulous and scheming agitators who have been deceiving the Negro tenants and sharecroppers."[25] Missouri Governor Lloyd C. Stark supported local planters stating that media reports of the demonstration and conditions were "grossly exaggerated" and that demonstrators were not actual evicted sharecroppers, but "an organized demonstration of cotton pickers, transients, day laborers--a large portion (probably 60%) from other states, and a considerable number of town negroes [sic]."[26]

Stark and other Missouri government officials soon responded to the demonstration, but not with assistance. Health commissioner, Dr. Harry F. Parker, and Col. B. M. Casteel of the State Highway Patrol, visited the demonstrators on January 13. After a two day inspection of the scattered camp sites, Park declared the camps a health hazard and called for the forced removal of the protestors from the highway. Demonstrators unable to find places to stay would be placed in "concentration camps" where they could be vaccinated to prevent disease.[27]

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[22] Quoted in Mitchell, p. 172.
[23] Strikland, p. 407.
[24] Mitchell, p. 173.
[25] Strickland, p. 407-408.
[26] Quoted in Strickland, p. 408.
[27] Strickland, p. 411

Figure 5: Evicted Sharecropper along Highway 60, New Madrid County, Missouri. Arthur Rothstein, photographer, January 1939.

Figure 6: Evicted Sharecropper along Highway 60, New Madrid County, Missouri. Arthur Rothstein, photographer, January 1939.

Figure 7: State highway officials moving sharecroppers away from roadside to area between the levee and Mississippi River, New Madrid County, Missouri. Arthur Rothstein, photographer, January 1939.

Figure 8: New Madrid spillway between levee and Mississippi River where evicted sharecroppers were taken by state highway officials after removal from highway, New Madrid County, Missouri. Arthur Rothstein, photographer, January 1939.

After about five days of living on the sides of Highways 60 and 61, demonstrators were loaded into trucks by the State Highway Patrol and moved to other locations. While the forced move successfully hid demonstrators from public view, the removal did nothing to alleviate the desperate poverty of most of the demonstrators. Nor did it quiet the protest and ongoing lobbying to improve the lives of sharecroppers in Southeast Missouri and beyond.

Though out of sight, many in the federal government remain aware of the sharecropper situation in Missouri. Aubrey Williams of the FSA wrote the President Roosevelt that the sharecropper demonstration and their continued suffering was a

> symptom of the widespread situation existing throughout the South . . . Not only does this situation present a serious unmet relief problem, but the Missouri situation clearly demonstrates that local communities, faced with a grave economic situation which they are powerless to solve alone, will take measures toward the individuals made most desperate by the situation which ignores the civil rights and liberties our government is supposed to guarantee.[28]

The federal government took some action, and the FSA made weekly grants to evicted croppers. Grant applications had to be renewed every 7 days, and STFU representatives assisted sharecroppers with these applications.

Despite federal action, the grants did not meet the needs of demonstrators. The forced removal succeeded in scattering and dispersing some demonstrators, but many stuck together, squatting in the spillway between the Mississippi River and the flood levee in New Madrid County, in churches, and even old dance halls in Charleston and New Madrid.[29] In April 1939, Fannie Cook, and author and supporter of sharecroppers in Southeast Missouri, visited "Sharecropper country," writing:

> . . . brevity is difficult after having seen so much horror. I'll tell you first of the sharecroppers who are huddled where the state police dumped them in order to hide them from public view. I visited two batches of them in Charleston. One group occupies a second floor hall . . . without partitions and containing about a dozen beds form more than 30 men, women and children. . . . I saw several families living in pens without any light or ventilation. These were in desperate need of food. . . Many of them have collected no relief; none has had adequate relief; all relief is irregular and woefully inefficient. . . I saw a beautiful young girl . . . She and her husband and baby are trying to make $3.00 a month (their relief money) meet their needs. No, not $3.00

[28] Quote in Strickland, p. 412-413.
[29] Strickland, 414-415.

each, but $3.00 for all.[30]

Positive change for sharecroppers in Southeast Missouri did not come quickly. In the months following the demonstration, private organizations and public agencies struggled with meeting the immediate needs of evicted sharecroppers and seeking ways to improve quality of life for sharecroppers in general. Private individuals and agencies provided the most immediate help for sharecroppers. Students from Lincoln University lead by Lorenzo Greene visited displaced sharecroppers in the spring and summer of 1939, providing food, clothing, and other necessities.[31] In June 1939, the St. Louis Committee for the Rehabilitation of the Sharecroppers, with Owen Whitfield as a leader, funded the purchase of 93 acres of land near Harveil in Bulter County. The community, known as "Cropperville," was open to all homeless sharecroppers, and on June 17 more than 80 black and 15 white families moved to the camp.[32] The STFU, however, continued to agitate for a governmental solution to the sharecropper issue. A federal program to address sharecroppers need for housing, work and education were several months in the offing.

As a step toward measuring needs and conditions of sharecroppers in the Bootheel, the Employment Service developed a register of jobless tenant farmers. Completed in February 1940, the registration found in the 7 Bootheel counties, 925 sharecropping families that had been on farms in 1939 were '"not yet places'" as the 1940 planting season approached. The Governor's request of area planters to turn tenant opportunities into the Employment Service only yielded 98 openings. Following the release of the registration results, Employment Service district direct Carle Wedeking wrote that only quick action by the federal government could stave off another demonstration like that of January 1939.[33] Aware of growing unrest in Southeast Missouri, Governor Stark announced on February 15, 1940 that a committee of land owners, sharecroppers, and state and federal government representatives had developed a five point program for Bootheel sharecroppers.

The final program was a compromise between the desires of sharecroppers and cultural and political pull of local land owners. Sharecroppers, notably those settled in the Cropperville, desired a program similar to the FSA's LaForge Farm project in New Madrid County. The cooperative farming project established 100 farms to "rehabilitate" sharecroppers in the Bootheel, providing them with the opportunity to purchase the farms. The LaForge project was largely successful with families entering the program in 1937 with and average of $28 in personal posessions and increasing their average gross worth to $1400 in 1940. Additionally, payments on five year loans to LaForge Farm clients were on schedule as of 1940 with the prospect of most

[30] Quoted in Towle, p. 13-14.
[31] Lorenzo J. Greene, Gary R. Kremer, Antonio F. Holland. Missouri's Black Heritage. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993, p. 3-5
[32] Meyer, 12.
[33] Cantor, p. 140-141.

being repaid on or before schedule.[34] Though successful, the LaForge project had been met with resistance and unease by many of the Bootheel, and local planters resisted another "Socialistic" "communal living" project in the area. The compromise agreement was to be administered by the FSA and included the following five points:

1. "Rehabilitation Loan Program": Expansion of the FSA rural rehabilitation loan program that would provide loans to tenants and farm laborers to purchase farm equipment, seeds, teams of mules or horses and other subsistence farming needs.
2. "Labor Rehabilitation, Grant and Loan Program": Housing and labor rehabilitation program to give farmer workers an opportunity for substance living during slack periods. In this program the government would broker with land owners to lease property to croppers for subsistence purposes--namely to grow gardens or to house a cow, pigs or chickens for personal use.
3. "Scattered Labor Homes Program." In this program the government would assist families (200-300) to lease or purchase small tracks of land, and provide a ten-year loan for home construction.
4. "Group Labor Homes Programs": Construction of farm labor homes on FSA owned land. Homes would be provided to farm laborers at a low rent. These homes would also provide land for subsistence gardens.
5. "Security Farms incorporated": Loans to associations of farm laborers that would purchase or lease underdeveloped land, subdivide land and sublease it to members. Rent from lands would be used to pay off 45 year government loans.[35]

Delmo Group Labor Homes

Item 4, "Group Labor Homes" soon became known as the "Delmo" (a conjunction of Delta Missouri) Homes project. The Delmo group labor homes were ten communities of approximately 50 to 70 residences centered around a community building. Each home was four rooms (3 bed rooms and a larger kitchen/living room combination), and most had a small porch. The central community building contained laundry and shower facilities, meeting rooms, and office space. Ironically, though the Delmo Group Labor Homes resulted from a demonstration supported by the integrated STFU, and was notable for the coordination between black and white sharecroppers, the communities themselves were segregated. Four of the 10 communities were constructed for African American farm workers.

The ten communities were scattered across five counties and included:

[34] Cantor, 141-142.
[35] Cantor, 142-142. Names in quotes comes from the account of the compromise written by Thad Snow, a Southeast Missouri planter sympathetic to sharecroppers and the efforts of the STFU. Thad Snow. *From Missouri*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1954, p. 323-325.

- Grayridge Group (later called Circle City), Stoddard County
- North Wyatt Group (later Wilson City), Mississippi County (African American)
- East Prairie Group, Mississippi County
- Morehouse Group, New Madrid County
- North Lilbourn Group, New Madrid County (African American)
- South Lilbourn Group, New Madrid County
- Kennett Group, Dunklin County
- Gobler Group, Dunklin County (African American)
- North Wardell, Pemiscot County
- South Wardell (later Homestown), Pemiscot County (African American)

Deputy Administrator of the FSA, Robert Hudgens helped to organize and administer the construction of the ten group labor communities. In recalling time, Hudgens noted that the group labor homes part of the compromise was initially only a small part of the plan. It was only after FSA began construction of scattered homes that they realized that these types of houses would be inadequate.

> There was no provision for community facilities, no plumbing, no schools, no crossroads, nor all the other things that make a community a decent place to live. That is why we began to construct houses in groups.[36]

By May 1940, plans for the group labor homes had been submitted by government engineers with an average cost per house and lot of $1,199.83. Plans called for the construction of complete communities with roads, ditches, wells, privies, electrical systems, in addition to the houses and a community center.[37] Except for South Wardell (Homestown), most communities were laid out in a large rectangle or oval with a center green space, reminiscent of Labor Homes and Labor Camps built by the Resettlement Administration in Thornton, California.[38] Each house was 640 square feet and had built-in kitchen cabinets, a small pantry closet and screened porch. Houses were similar to prefabricated homes constructed for the LaForge Farm Project. Unlike the LaForge homes, however, the Delmo project homes were not sold to occupants. Instead, they were administered as low cost rental homes. Rent was $6.50 per month.

The FSA completed construction on the communities, including 595 residences, in 1941. The STFU and FSA tried to ensure that participants in the roadside demonstrations were selected to occupy the new housing units, though other farm laborers also benefited from the construction.[39] The FSA provided new residents with gardening tools, canning supplies, and sewing machines. Additionally, FSA social workers were assigned to each of the Delmo communities to council

[36] Quoted in Towle, p. 18.
[37] Towle, p. 18.
[38] Meyer, p. 23-24.
[39] Mitchell, 178.

residents on health, gardening and canning, sanitation, and how to develop community organizations. Residents elected a council to make decisions on the management of the individual units, and each unit sent representatives to a general council that made decisions on the management of the entire Delmo project.[40]

The relative security provided by the Delmo Project to farm laborers was to be short lived. By 1943, Congress was taking a serious look at FSA programs, and was divesting the agency of many of its responsibilities. In March of 1945, Ohio congressman Bill Hays introduced a bill that would require the sale of all FSA properties, including the 10 Delmo communities in Southeast Missouri. The acreage on which each unit was built was to be sold as a whole with individual houses to be offered separately, for cash. Purchasers were to have the homes moved from the land within 90 days.[41]

Just as they had organized to lobby for the construction of the Delmo communities, the STFU mobilized to save the communities. Working with David Burgess of the Congregational Church's Board of Home Missions, the STFU informed Delmo community members of the short time line proposed for liquidation. The FSA land liquidation bill was introduced on March 6, 1945, Burgess and others informed villages on March 8 that public auction of farm equipment would begin on March 15, and that villagers would be forced to vacate by May. Burgess organized petition drives, and most Delmo villagers signed on. Several residents spoke out, expressing despair, frustration, and even threats of a repeat of the January 1939 demonstration. A Mr. Bean stated:

> We sure do appreciate this place. The manager has been good to us. If we have to get out, it's going to be out yonder on the road -- another highway demonstration.[42]

Another commented:

> We have been maltreated elsewhere. If we have to go, I'd just as soon go back to the highway, to the ditch-bank. We want a place which we can call our own, and this project is one of those places.[43]

Political jockeying delayed the sale of the Delmo communities. A proposal by Representative Frank Hook of Michigan called for the sale of homes to current occupants, and Missouri's own Senator Frank Briggs offered a similar proposal, only to have the plan shot down by the Senate Appropriations Committee.[44] Congressional tactics, though unsuccessful in providing

[40] Towle, p. 19.
[41] Towle, p. 21.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.

opportunities to individual occupants of Delmo, did provide time for Delmo occupants, the STFU, and others to find another option for the ten communities.

In May 1945, David Burgess met with a group of concerned citizens in St. Louis to formulate a plan for residents of the Delmo communities. With assistance from the STFU, Episcopalian Bishop Scarlett of St. Louis and Episcopalian churches of St. Louis, businessmen, and others, Burgess was able to organize a group that would purchase the ten communities and offer individual buildings to occupants. Funding for the purchase came from private investment, donations, and from occupants of the Delmo communities, 200 of whom put down $100 for a down payment for there homes. This number increased to 314 by August 21, 1945. [45]

The group sent its first offer for the 10 communities to Washington on August 10, 1945. Their bid for $143,225 for the ten communities was met by a counter offer of $385,000. The group hand until October 1 to respond. Despite the reprieve offered by the FSA as the Delmo group considered the counter offer, the FSA sold 30 houses in the Wyatt community, evicting residents. The Gobler community in Dunklin County was also sold before the private group could take action. The evictions added to the pressure on the Delmo Group to save the communities, and on October 25, Burgess accepted the FSA offer to sell the Delmo properties for $285,000. On November 1, the Cooperative Foundation Inc., working on the behalf of the Delmo Housing Corporation submitted the final bid and purchased 9 of the 10 Delmo communities.

The Delmo Housing Corporation had 8 years to pay off their purchase of 1600 of land, 549 homes, and the chattels associated with the property. Though some expressed doubt that current occupants of the homes would be able to meet their financial commitment to purchase individual homes, the Delmo Corporation was able to meet its mortgage payments. Payments for home purchasers was set at $10.20 per month, and though many residents were occasionally delinquent on payments, due in part to the vagaries of the farm labor market, most successfully completed payment on homes in 8 years or less. All original contracts and mortgages on the properties were satisfied by 1954.[46]

Delmo Community Centers

Because of its central location, each community's utility building/community center became the defacto city hall. The building provided meeting space for community meetings and social events, and contained informal social events due to its role as the community laundry. The buildings also became a center of education for adults in the community. The FSA, and later the Delmo Housing Corporation, focused on more than just housing, seeking to improve the quality of life for residents. To accomplish this mission, community organizers sponsored canning demonstrations in the community center's kitchen, workshops on sanitation and childcare and a

[45] Towle, p. 22-23.
[46] Towle, p, 61.

variety of other topics. The buildings also housed the office for the Delmo community organizers and was often sponsored community health clinics supported by local doctors.

In 1946, the community buildings took on a commercial purpose. The Delmo Housing Corporation, with assistance from each Delmo community's women's club, established thrift shops in the community buildings. The thrift shops provided clothing and household goods at low costs to residents and others in the surrounding area, and often donated goods to people in desperate need or that had experienced fires. Funds from the thrift shops were used to make improvements to the communities such as street lighting or new water systems, or to purchase appliances or other equipment for community residences.[47] Like the continuing educational and community organization activities that were sponsored in the building, the purpose of the thrift stores was to improve the quality of life for the residents of the Delmo communities. It is unclear when some of the thrift stores closed, though many continued through the 1960s. Towle's account of the thrift shops notes that "by the end of 1965 every community had a well-equipped and adequate kitchen, Thrift Shop area and a large room for general meetings"[48] presumably housed in the original Delmo community buildings.

Due to changing demographics and deterioration, several of the original community centers have been demolished. Though a complete inventory of original Delmo buildings has not been conducted, it is know that the Gobler, Circle City, and Kennett Delmo communities have lost their community buildings.

Homestown (South Wardell)

Originally known as South Wardell, Homestown was the largest of the 10 Delmo communities with 80 houses constructed by the FSA. It was one of four designated for African Americans. Though the segregation of the communities ended with their purchase by the Delmo Housing Corporation, Homestown as of 2000 was still predominantly black, with approximately 89% of its 181 residents being African American. Most of the 10 Delmo communities were laid out in a rectangle or elongated oval shape, so the baseball field shape of the Homestown plat is unusual. While the Delmo project has been mentioned in several scholarly works, and W.Wilder Towle wrote a history of the Delmo communities and Delmo Housing Corporation, little has been written on the individual communities. Washington University in St. Louis holds the early Delmo Housing Corporation papers and this archive contains several folders on the Homestown Community. Like similar folders for the other Delmo communities, information on Homestown is limited to correspondence with residents, accounts, and other miscellaneous information.

Teresa Hursey, alderman and resident, spoke with several long-time residents of the community about the use and importance of the Homestown Community Center. The community building

[47] Towle, p. 66.
[48] Ibid.

was a social and civic center for Homestown. The community center housed a boiler that provided hot water for showers and for the attached laundry room. This laundry facility provided an opportunity for impromptu socializing for women doing their weekly washing. It also provided more formal social activities hosting women's clubs, quilting bees, and town meetings. Children also benefitted from a tutor that visited the building to assist with homework, and from a small lending library housed in the building. Once a month a Dr. Cook would also come to the building to offer a medical clinic. Additionally, the community center has had a commercial purpose, purportedly housing a small grocery run by Lewis Henry in 1944 and a thrift shop from the late 1940s into the 1970s.[49]

The community center has undergone some changes since its construction c. 1940. The interior has been rearranged to provide space for changing community needs, and to update the interior finishes. The interior, however, still retains some of its original finishes and has an open floorplan indicative of its historic mixed-use purpose. The exterior, like the interior, shows signs of deterioration. A small porch was added to the façade of the building in 1975 and this porch was replaced in 1987. Some of the windows, notably the three multi-pane casement windows originally in the northernmost bay of the façade, have been boarded over, though original material is retained underneath. The building still retains its original footprint, siding and roofline. Despite changes and deterioration, the building reflects its significance as a social and community center for Homestown and the construction techniques and styles used during the mass construction of the 10 Delmo Communities.

Conclusion

The Delmo communities were never prosperous. They were built to provide adequate housing and the prospect of some subsistence gardening for families whose income depended on the ups and downs of Southeast Missouri's agricultural economy. Though the livelihoods of the residents has changed from primarily farm labor to other types of work, the population of the communities remains low income. The Delmo Housing Corporation continues to work with the Delmo communities, and in cooperation with property owners addresses the mission Delmo Farm Labor Homes as it began under the FSA--to provide adequate housing, opportunities for education, and to improve the quality of life for low income residents of Southeast Missouri. The Homestown community is seeking ways to retain and restore their community center, so that it can remain a vital and central part of the community as a whole.

[49] Teresa Hursey, "Community Center" Historic Property Eligibility Assessment Form, October 2007. On file at the Missouri State Historic Preservation Office.

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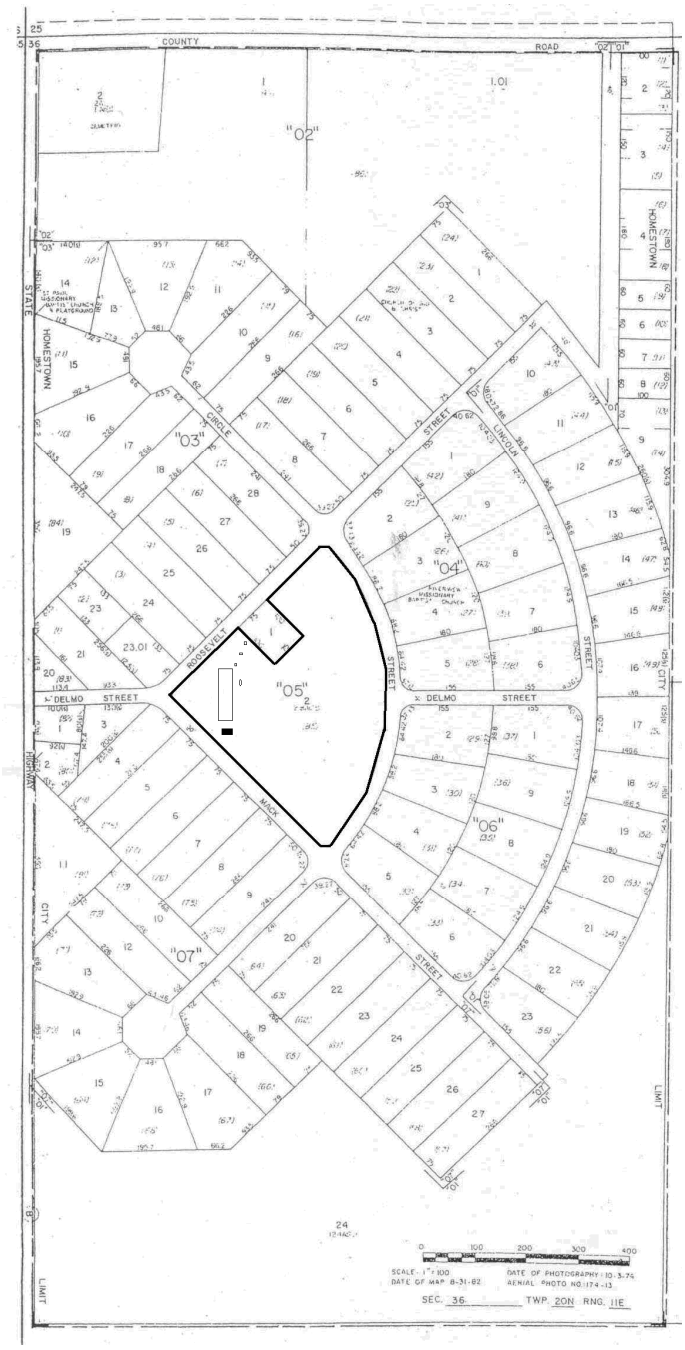
Verbal Boundary Description

Lot 85 less 100' x 75', block B, Delmo Subdivision B, Homestown, Pemiscott County. Also as shown as a dark line on the attached scale map of Homestown.



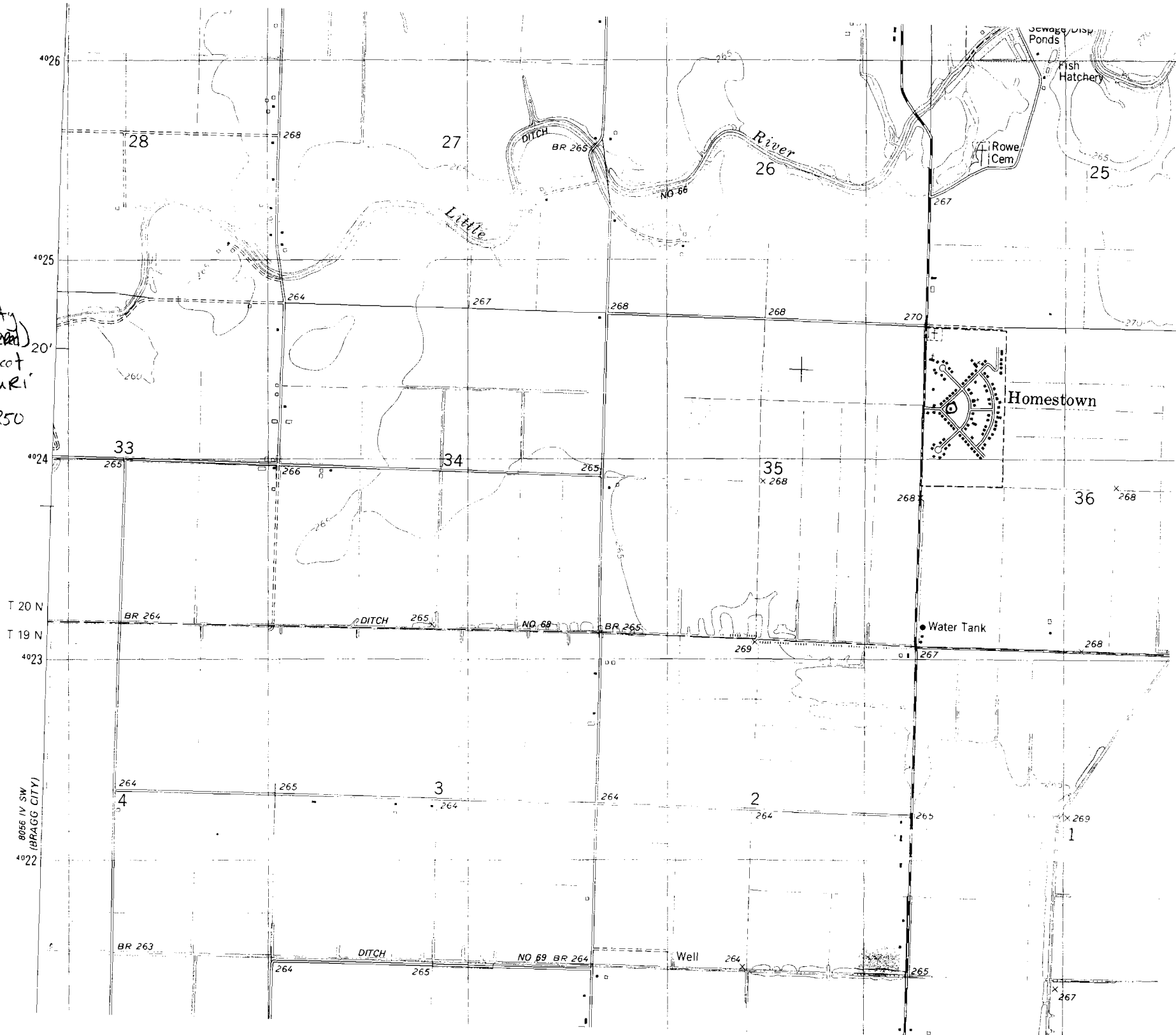
Verbal Boundary Justification

The community building sits on a 2.8 acre lot near the center of Homestown. The building and lot were originally set aside for recreational and community use. Sometime between the end of the period of significance of the property (1954) and the date of the plat mat above (1982), a 100' X 75' house lot was carved out of the central green space. This lot is excluded from the nominated property boundaries. The nominated boundaries include the community building and the original acreage associated with the building, excluding the above mentioned lot.

Photo Log:

The following is true for all photographs:

Delmo Community Center
Pemiscot County, Missouri
Photographer: Tiffany Patterson, State Historic Preservation Office
Date of Photographs: November 28, 2008
Location of Negatives: Digital Photo File

1. West and south elevations, looking northeast.
2. East and south elevations, looking northwest.
3. North elevation with concrete pylons in foreground, looking south.
4. Context photo: Community center from entrance of Homestown community, with temporary building to south and former church building to north, looking east.
5. Context photo showing portion of large community green space behind community center, looking southwest.

Delmo Community Center (Preferred)
Homestown, Pemiscot County, Missouri
e/241430/4024250