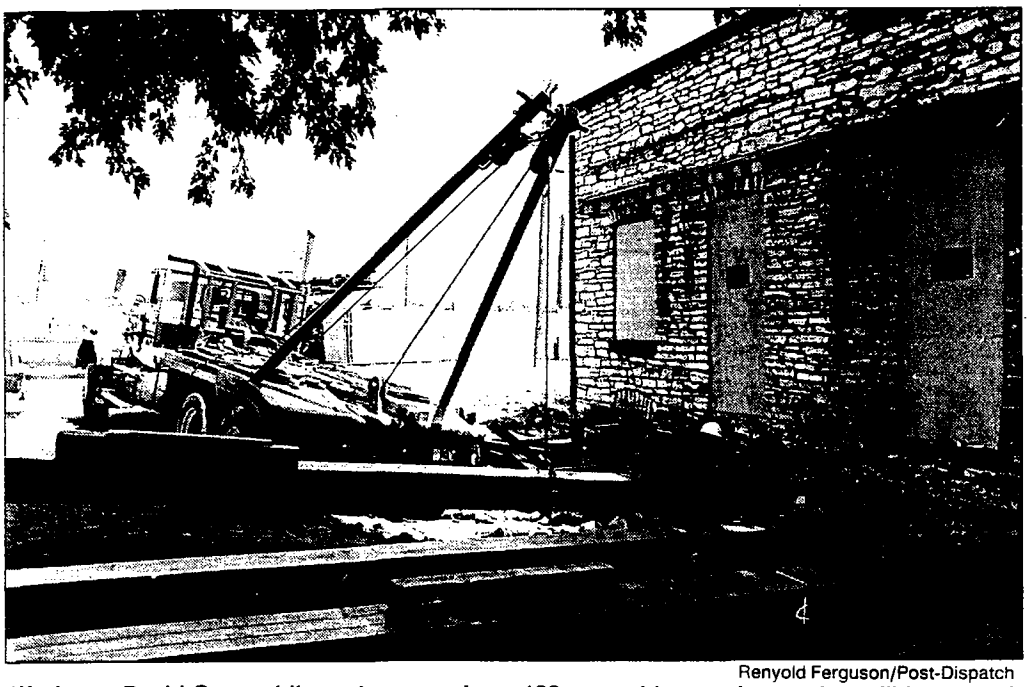

Renyold Ferguson/Post-Dispatch

Workman David Carr guiding a beam under a 133-year-old stone house that will be moved from the Carondelet plant of Monsanto Co. to South St. Louis Square Park.

Stone House Built In 1859 To Get New Home In Park

By Raymond W. Vodicka
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

Moving a two-story stone house from the Carondelet plant of Monsanto Co. to a park on South Broadway in the next few days will turn a page in the history of the Carondelet area.

"It is pretty delicate," said Jerry Dahl, who is overseeing the move, "although the instruments used are sledgehammers and chisels."

The 133-year-old Monsanto/-Schmitt House, said Dahl, is well-constructed and tight.

"It's a solid building," said Dahl, vice president of operations of Washington University Technology Associates.

To prepare the building for the move, Dahl said, pockets were opened in the wall. "We basically constructed a steel-ladder frame, and that supports all the exterior walls and the one interior wall," he said.

Lowering the 350- to 400-ton house at the park will be a little more difficult.

With that in place, the building, weighing 350 to 400 tons, will be jacked up about four feet onto house-moving dollies that will go under the house and be attached to the frame. A special truck, crawling along in second gear, will pull the house from Alaska Avenue and Weber Road east to Alabama Avenue, then south on Alabama to Davis Street, where it will be hauled east to South Broadway and then north to South St. Louis Square Park at the corner of Courtois street.

But lowering the house at the park, where another contractor will build a foundation, will be a little more difficult, he said.

Tentatively, the building will be moved next Monday, Aug. 31, from its site at 8000-8004 Alaska.

Research by Landmarks Association of Saint Louis Inc. shows that in April 1859, a laborer named Anton Schmitt, 38, who had been born in Bavaria, bought three lots in a new subdivision of Carondelet and built the two-family stone house for his wife, Caroline Schmitt, two children and other family members. It was the only stone house on the block. In Carondelet, where Germans owned several quarries and many of them were stonemasons, between 1860 and 1863 the number of stone houses increased to 52 from 40.

Some years after Carondelet became a part of St. Louis in 1870, industry began to spread into the area where the Schmitts lived, and Provident Chemical Co. opened a plant just east of the Schmitts' house. Records also show that by 1883 branch tracks of the Missouri Pacific Railroad already ran within a few feet of the house, which had been built near the banks of the River Des Peres.

Heirs of the Schmitt family sold the property in 1909, and by 1935, when the plant was sold to Monsanto, most of the adjacent area had become part of the plant site, so that the stone house was isolated.

Monsanto, which is giving the building to the city and paying about $70,000 in moving costs, had at one time planned to raze it but was persuaded by the Heritage and Urban Design Commission to move the building. The house was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in April as the Monsanto/Schmitt House.

Alderman Dan Gruen, D-11th Ward, is working to obtain about $50,000 from the Community Development Agency to rehabilitate the house after it is moved to the park. Only about 20 such houses remain in the area, he said, and, "We want to preserve it. The problem with moving the building to a private piece of property was that there was no guarantee that the building would not be torn down in the future. That's why we moved it to the park, where it will further complement the South Broadway redevelopment."

Mary Lopinot, an officer of the South Broadway Merchants Association, said, "We're looking forward to it — hoping it will be an attraction that ties into redevelopment of our business district."

Carolyn Hewes Toft of Landmarks said, "Carondelet is a section of the city that has a treasure trove of this architecture" and moving the building to the park is "a real success story."

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