



# The Rockhill Times

## President's Letter

Summer 2019

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Why is it that even for us who do not have school age children, we feel “ugh” when hearing ads for “back to school sales.” Summer seems so carefree and more lax than the rest of the year even though we still have the same responsibilities. The days are longer and many are filled with summer's traditional celebrations like Independence Day, Royals games, picnics, boating and more. So I say we ignore all the suggestions that summer is coming to an end and enjoy every summer day to its fullest.

The neighborhood began the summer season a little early in May with our annual meeting. Having it at Andre's while listening to Steve Waterman speak about the Walking Wall made the meeting more like a party. It was a great time to meet some new neighbors and also catch up with those we haven't seen in a long time.

Our next chance to get together will be the annual picnic on September 15th, 4:00pm. Eric and Jenni Mann will chair the picnic and have some great changes in mind. The location will be different and there will be yard games for all ages. Nancy Bollier volunteered to help out with the games and would welcome others to join in organizing them. A flyer will be sent out with all the details later.

Thank you to everyone who has contacted the Board of Directors concerning exterior changes to their homes. We have met with several owners during the last few board meetings and appreciate their diligence in following Rockhill's protocol and also the Preservation Commission's requirements. We live in one of Kansas City's finest

historic neighborhoods (I think the best one) and adhering to the preservation guidelines is an important way to help keep it that way.

The Board has also heard from a few individuals concerning projects or concerns outside our neighborhood. They seek to gain our support when appearing in front of the City Planning Commission or City Council. At this time, there isn't anything that has been firmly decided on to mention.

There will not be an August Board meeting but will meet every second Tuesday all the other months. Our meetings begin at 7:00 and are at a different home every month. If you have a request or concern, please let me know and I will put you first on the agenda.

Thanks for reading, enjoy the rest of summer and see you at the picnic!

Jamie Closson  
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816-694-9409

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### Meet the Neighbors

Drs. Susan and Gerry Carlson have lived at 45<sup>th</sup> and Holmes in Rockhill for 22 years. Over the years, the Carlsons have done extensive remodeling and improvement to their home and grounds, which has been in numerous garden tours including the Master Gardeners of Greater Kansas City Garden Tour in 2015. In addition, we appreciate the Carlsons for their work in helping to create our neighborhood pocket park.

Susan is in her 20<sup>th</sup> year at KUMC in the Department of Dietetics and Nutrition. Gerry recently retired as Chair of the

Department of Chemistry and Molecular Biology at KUMC. While Susan's work has taken her to literally all parts of the globe, Gerry's kept him micro-focused on a single enzyme. When their paths cross, they enjoy cooking, playing pool, sharing a glass of wine and watching old movies. Please extend a warm Thank You to the Carlsons!



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### **New Beginnings!**

Jensen, Laura, and Grey Adams (901 Emanuel Cleaver II Blvd) welcomed Hazel to their family on Monday, July 15. Avena Hazelea Adams weighed 8 lbs, 9 oz; 21 inches. The family is healthy and joyful. They are enjoying these first weeks together, appreciating the support and warmth from family, friends, and lovely neighbors!

### **More New Beginnings!**

Neighborhood authentic mind+body practice to suit all levels - yoga, meditation, stretching, socializing. A great way to energize your body, strengthen your joints, rest your mind and soothe your nerves with asanas (poses),

pranayama (breathwork) and shavasana (final relaxation). Ramaa Bassin is a seasoned yoga teacher with years of experience with adults, seniors and children in India - California and now KC. She teaches at several studios in KC and OP. Contact: 949-439-2371 ramaabhasin@gmail.com

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### **The Bassa's Country Manor (Landhaus Bassa)**

*Reginald (Reggie) and Regina Bassa have resided at 4470 Rockhill Terrace since 1994. Following is Reggie's account of the history of their home.*

Upon returning to the US from Cambridge, England, I was interested in exploring a variety of employment opportunities in major cities such London, New York, San Diego, Seattle and Washington D.C. However, Regina kept insisting that Kansas City was the only place for us. In hindsight...he says Regina was right... aren't wives always right?

I consider Kansas City my hometown having graduated from Bishop Hogan H.S. (now Hogan Prep.) and receiving Congressional and Senatorial appointments from Missouri to attend the US Military Academy at West Point. My first assignment after graduation was a small village in Germany. There, by an amazing quirk of fate, I overheard a lovely young red headed German Fraeulein talking about Kansas City. Regina had accepted an invitation to go with a girlfriend to visit the friend's aunt who immigrated from Germany and was living in Kansas City. Yes; Regina vacationed in Kansas City from Europe and loved it! You might say the "rest is history" but the more we learn about our home in Rockhill, the more we understand that our time here is just a continuation of a truly historic journey.

With the aid of the Abstract compiled by the Kansas City Title and Trust Company; we were able to document nearly all of the

history of the property beginning in the mid-1880's. Early documents show a large swath of land which would eventually become the Rockhill neighborhood exchanging hands quite frequently but largely intact. However, in 1875, a widower named Catharin (Enders) Fritz purchased the entire 40 acres for \$1,150. When Catharin passed away in 1886 there was a protracted probate battle among her heirs (as Catharin and her deceased husband, Joseph, had no children). There were 35 claimants to the probate hearing from as far away as Los Angeles and Frankfurt, Germany. A judge ordered the land be divided into prorated parcels and sold for \$750.00 per acre or preferably to the highest bidder for the entire property. The public notice of the auction for the property to be held on the steps of the Jackson County Court House was posted in the Kansas City Times (the newspaper William Rockhill Nelson would soon acquire). Nelson was looking for a location for a new type of residential neighborhood however at this time he was purportedly focused on a river view property overlooking the East Bottoms. The highest bidder in April 1886 was another William (William R. Bernard, a judge, Westport store owner and Santa Fe Trail pioneer). His winning bid was \$30,000 for the entire property. He paid \$10,000 down with additional payments over the next two years. The inheritance now seemed to be straight forward with each of the heirs receiving portions from the sale. However, a surprise claimant suddenly came forward and brought a new legal challenge against the estate. The person coming forward claimed to be Joseph Fritz (the supposed deceased husband of Catharin Fritz). A court date was set with a number of witnesses prepared to testify that this person was not the real Joseph Fritz but rather a fraud. In fact, there was evidence that this person attended the auction itself and did not object to the auction. In any case, the Plaintiff Joseph Fritz did not appear in court. The Judge dismissed the law suit and ordered Plaintiff to pay all court costs. The final wrinkle came when the land auction winner could not make the final payment. As fate would

have it, by this time, William Rockhill Nelson felt the asking price in the Highland overlooking the East Bottoms and properties in Gladstone areas were wholly unreasonable. He started looking south of Kansas City and offered the astounding sum of \$188,200 for all the property then known as "Lansdowne." While the historical twists and turns and legal battles to acquire the constituent land of the Rockhill Neighborhood are fascinating, for Regina the most noteworthy aspect of this period of Rockhill history is that Catharin Fritz immigrated with her husband, Joseph, to Kansas City from Prussia Germany. Prussia Germany is the historic home of Regina's ancestors. Indeed, her maiden name is Pruess which literally means "Prussian." Therefore, Regina feels she has a special bond and shared history with the widower Catharin Fritz.

Another widower, Margret Yates, was the first owner of 4470 Rockhill Terrace, purchasing the land and customized home for \$20,000 in 1916-17. She created a flowing home with outdoor living areas on three sides of the house. Margret also included large walk-in closets in every bedroom which was extraordinary for the time.



In 1919, the house was sold for \$22,500 to Lawrence Newton Wylder and his wife Ethel. (See photo above) Wylder was a prominent attorney and founding partner of the law firm Morrison, Nugent, Wylder and

Berger. The Morrison Law Firm continued until 2002. The present-day firm is known as Stinson, Munson, Morrison and Hecker LLP. In September 2011 we received correspondence from Earl Wylder (the youngest son of L. Newton and Ethel Wylder). He was passing through Kansas City and requested to meet and possibly view the house. Earl's older sister (Jane Ellen Wylder), also contacted us to arrange a visit for her family. We were naturally interested in getting more historic information about the house and its prior residents. From Earl, we learned that his father was quite accomplished. L. Newton graduated from Harvard Law School in 1908. He became the youngest Kansas City Bar Association President. He had several appointments, most notably to the Kansas City Park Board and the Missouri Highway Commission. Also, L. Newton and a few friends started the Mission Hills Country Club. Additionally, L. Newton (from his own money) funded higher education expenses for a number of individual employees at his law firm. From Jane Ellen we learned about how the house was occupied and enjoyed. Jane indicated that during parties at the home, the women would gather in the downstairs living room and the men would meet in the upstairs living room/library (which we now employ as the master bedroom). I was intrigued with the prospect of an upstairs "man cave," however Regina was not so intrigued. Despite the historical precedence, to date the master bedroom remains intact. Sadly, L. Newton died prematurely at the age of 52 in 1935. As a result, Ethel decided it was financially untenable for the family to remain. Earl was only two years old at the time so he really didn't remember the house, but his mother always showed him pictures and reiterated that the family's happiest days were at 4470 Rockhill Terrace in the "Historic Rockhill Neighborhood."

In 1935, the the house was sold to Dr. Wilber A. Cochel and his wife, Caroline. Dr. Cochel was a professor with faculty appointments at Purdue, Penn State and Kansas State. He was a leading expert in

animal husbandry. He was a distinguished member of the Kansas City Saddle and Sirloin Club. He was also an early participant/organizer of the American Royal and Future Farmers of America Organizations.

Then in 1945, Dr. Edgar Frank Devilbiss and his wife Folsom purchased the house. Dr. Devilbiss specialized in mental and nervous diseases. Unfortunately, Dr. Devilbiss died in 1950 leaving his wife with less than a thousand dollars to her name.

In 1951 Phil Koury and family purchased the home. Mr. Koury was a very interesting person as well. He was a lawyer by trade and served as a Naval officer in World War II. When he came back from the war, he worked as a movie critic and reporter for the Kansas City Star. He authored a number of books; most notably, a book entitled "*Yes, Mr. DeMille.*" This book is "brimming with anecdotes, warmly personal insights and is an explosive study of Hollywood's most feared movie maker and director." Koury served as Mr. Cecil B. DeMille's (referred to a simply C.B.) attorney and personal representative for seven years. During this time, he got a firsthand account of the "widely acknowledged father of American Cinema." DeMille made notable films such as: Ten Commandments, Samson and Delilah, The Greatest Show on Earth and Sunset Boulevard. These films starred individuals such as Yul Brynner, Hedy Lamar and his famous wife Gloria Swanson.

While Koury's time with DeMille was certainly interesting, his exploits with a mysterious gold mine intrigued me even more. Koury was hired by Mr. and Mrs. Molton E. Noss to represent them in a lawsuit which would eventually involve a twenty-year legal battle with the US government including the Department of Treasury, Defense and even the involvement of the Office of the President. According to the client, Noss discovered a cavern near White Sands, New Mexico purportedly containing gold bars and rare coins. It was estimated that this treasure had value that approached one billion dollars. Billion

with "B"!!! The problem was that the Gold Reserve Act of 1934 prohibited private US citizens from direct trade and possession of gold (with the exception of jewelry). This lawsuit was never settled. Strangely, an unexplained explosion in the cave destroyed all the gold and permanently sealed the cavern. Koury sold his Rockhill home and took the secret details of this mystery to his grave. Every subsequent owner of the Rockhill home has been told about the gold mine and the suspicion that Koury hid a considerable amount of gold in the home. I cannot confirm if any gold has ever been found in or around the home, but I can confirm I am certainly enjoying my early retirement from the Staff/Faculty from UMKC as well as retiring early as a United States Navy Officer (Lieutenant Commander).

In 1970, Dr. Patrick and Patricia Graham purchased the house for \$51,000. The Grahams completely updated the kitchen with the renown Westport designer, Kleweno. They fitted the master bathroom with exotic fixtures imported directly from Paris, France. In 1975, the Grahams had Rosehill Gardens design the landscape including two exotic apple trees species. Unfortunately, the Grahams and the two subsequent homeowners Joseph Wagner and wife (furniture store owners) as well as Thomas (an Attorney) and wife Nancy Loughlin's marriages all ended in divorce or separation during their residence at 4470 Rockhill Terrace. This trend was a source for concern when we were considering purchasing the home. However, I am happy to say we've beat the odds of divorce AND set a record for longest residence in the home; going on 25 years.

We find this residence record somewhat ironic as the original deed: stated "the property hereby conveyed shall be restricted to the use of persons of the white race only." To this, I say: we may have come to America in different types of ships...but we are all in the same boat now! In many respects times have changed. We're amazed at how much we have in

common with all the previous owners beginning with the Prussian German historic connections, an academic owner, a Naval Officer owner, a small business owner and even one owner helping non-traditional students pursue higher education while serving on various civic/political commissions. What we all have in common is that we have loved living in Rockhill and sharing our lives with wonderful neighbors. Given the history and distinctive architecture, we fondly refer to our home as "Landhaus Bassa" a German word meaning country manor of the Bassa's.



*Pictured here;  
Mrs. Ethel and Mr.  
L. Newton Wylder,  
Lawrence, Newton  
Jr, John Mars, Jane  
Ellen and baby  
Earl.*

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*The Fall edition of the Rockhill Times will be distributed in September. If you have information to share, or notices of recognition or events, please send them to [kmoninger@gmail.com](mailto:kmoninger@gmail.com)*