



# The Rockhill Times

## President's Letter

Spring 2020

Dear Rockhill Neighbors,

It is only the middle of March and so much has happened in 2020 so far. The year started out fantastically with the Chief's winning the Super Bowl! What a great time for Kansas City! Now the presidential primaries are in full swing and then the unimaginable happened. I truly hope that the summer newsletter will say that COVID-19 has passed and everything was overblown.

I know all our plans are on hold but please mark your calendars for May 12th, 7:00 pm for our general meeting. Rene and Nancy Bollier have graciously invited us back to Andres for our annual meeting. Last year was one of the most fun meetings I can remember. We plan to invite a guest speaker and will let you know soon who that will be. It is also the time we vote for new officers and board members.

Everything is going well in our neighborhood and good things are happening around us. As mentioned in a recent email, the old tennis club parking lot will be removed very soon. The Nelson's future Sculpture Park East has no definite plans right now, but we have been told that the plans will have neighborhood involvement. For now, we will enjoy the beauty of a park-like setting surrounding the former Kirkwood home and tennis club, now the Caster's home.

Our other good neighbor, The Kansas City Art Institute, has informed us that they are selling a couple of their properties. The old J&G Market, 324 E. 43rd St. is for sale as well as 4320 Oak. The house on Oak was used as office space but is now marketed a

single family home. The Cafe Nerman and Wylie Dining Center are temporarily closed but hopefully when life is back to normal, some neighbors might run over for a quick meal.

Finally, I sent out an email yesterday from the Mann's and Don and I saying that if anyone needs anything during this pandemic, please don't hesitate to call. Immediately afterwards, I received numerous replies of "I can help too!" So please know that you can call on any of your neighbors for assistance of any kind. We live in a little village consisting of many caring people. I feel it is our "Rockhill Family" and am most grateful.

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President, Rockhill Homes Association  
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## Meet the Neighbors



Lisa Merrill Hickok joined Rockhill in October of 2019 at 45<sup>th</sup> and Rockhill Terrace. As a fourth generation Kansas Citian, she brings with her a long history and great appreciation for historic homes and historic neighborhoods. Yet Rockhill appeals to Lisa for another reason as well. “In all of my years of living in Kansas City, I’ve never before experienced such a wonderful welcome when moving into a new neighborhood.”

Lisa adds to Rockhill’s pool of artistic talent through her work with the Kansas City Ballet as former dancer, Director and archivist. She recently received the Pirouette Award from the Ballet. Her enthusiasm for philanthropy has been put to good use with a variety of Kansas City originals including the American Royal, the UMKC Conservatory, the Women’s Foundation and the Heartland Men’s Chorus. She currently serves as a consultant for the Park International Center for Music in Parkville, Missouri.

Please welcome the thoroughly Kansas Citian, Lisa Hickok along with Charlie and Snoopy!

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## Rockhill Read

Thanks to the efforts of Ramaa Bhasin and Jamie Closson, our neighborhood can claim a newly formed book club. Rockhill Read meets on the third Wednesday of the month at members’ homes. The book under discussion for the inaugural meeting is Tara Westover’s “Educated.”

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## Rockhill Proud

The recent announcements by the Nelson to remove the parking lot at the old Kirkwood property and the return of residential properties to private ownership by the Art Institute should be noted with considerable pride in our neighborhood. What seems like straight-forward decisions from leaders of these two great institutions, their actions reflect countless hours of neighborhood participation over several years. As a small neighborhood with consistently great leadership, we have helped shaped these decisions that have ramifications for decades to come. At City Hall and throughout Midtown we have a reputation of an engaged committed neighborhood that creates positive collaborations, identifying compromise and solutions that protect our historic neighborhood while supporting the growth and evolution of our great institutions. We appreciate the constructive open dialogue and mutual respect that has been established with the Nelson and KCAI, and look forward to our continued partnership in keeping our neighborhood one of Kansas City's greatest.

*Submitted by Jim Wanser*

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## Safety First

With approximately half of the homes in Rockhill heating with boilers, safety is a concern for these 100-year-old apparatuses. Be sure that you have installed carbon monoxide detectors. Carbon monoxide is an issue for gas heating systems of any kind.

For more information, see:  
<https://www.thespruce.com/install-carbon-monoxide-detector-1908092>.

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## Honoring the Past in the Present

*submitted by Don Closson, a grateful owner of 627 E. 46<sup>th</sup> St.*



We are lucky to have the original abstract from Union Abstract & Guaranty Co. where I found much of our home's history. I found it interesting to discover that our lot, along with others in the Rockhill neighborhood prior to 1905, was in a subdivision called Fair Oaks, part of an area that was first called Emerson Place in the early 1800s. Part of where Rockhill Road is now located in our neighborhood was originally Cherry Street. On July 8, 1838 President Martin Van Buren deeded the land to Charles L. Kues of Jackson County. In 1903 the land owner at the time sold 40 acres to William Rockhill Nelson, the co-founder of *The Kansas City Star*. In 1905, Rockhill Realty & Improvement Company was formed. It was declared and approved by the Common Council and Mayor that "all land shall be known as 'Rockhill'."

After our Rockhill neighborhood was incorporated into the city of Kansas City, Alice and James L. DeLong purchased the lot that our house stands on from William Rockhill Nelson for \$5,000 on April 6, 1911. It has been rumored that Stanford B. White, a famous New York architect, designed the house but in an article published by *The Kansas City Star* in 1911

it notes that John W. McKecknie was the architect. He designed 120 commercial buildings, residences and apartment blocks in Kansas City such as the house where The National Toy and Miniature Museum is now, the Gumbel Building, Kansas City Southern Building and The Kansas City Club.

In the same article it states that the \$22,000 stucco residence being built by the DeLongs was of the Connecticut Colonial type with seventeen rooms. When the Guild of the Chicago Historical Society conducted "an Evening in Rockhill" tour in the 1980s it stated that the front entrance was copied from a doorway in Salem, Massachusetts.

From another article published by *The Kansas City Star* in 1983 about our house, we learned that the DeLong's son, Edmund, a future newspaperman, who was to cover the 1932 Lindbergh kidnapping for the *The New York Sun*, "brought his teenage friends home after dancing school for fancy footwork to Victrola music in our reception hall which was originally furnished as a living room."

A fun fact found in another article said the house had eighteen doors to get outside. We can only count 16 now.

When the house was originally constructed there was not a garage area extending from the south side of the basement. At that time only enough space was needed to disembark from the carriages used for transportation. There is still evidence permanently embedded on the concrete floor of our "inner garage" that marks the turning wheel used for rotating the carriage 180 degrees after dis-embarking. This allowed the horses to exit the garage with the carriage so that they could return it to the horse barn located in the vicinity of the land currently occupied by the Kaufmann gardens.

Another unique aspect to our basement is the bank size walk-in vault. It makes me wonder what valuables were kept in there. We keep the large round dial lock in the locked position with the door open for fear of someone becoming trapped inside.

It is still fascinating to envision that era when there were servant quarters in many of our homes. Remnants of those quarters still exist in our house with a chauffeur quarters situated adjacent to the “inner garage” area. Even after 26 years in our home we still have never used the WC that has a water tank positioned high above the toilet with a pull chain. We do however use the chauffeur’s “bedroom” as our food and storage pantry as well as the shower room for cleaning various outdoor items.

After Fred and Susan Vincent purchased the property from the DeLongs in 1932, it was sold to John and Phoebe Horn in 1938 who then sold it to St. John’s Catholic Seminary in 1943. During their short ownership of the property, one of the third floor rooms was subdivided into several small bedrooms to accommodate the seminarians who occupied the house. When Jamie and I pulled up the carpet, we could see evidence of where those rooms were divided and the doors to them are still stored in the basement.

In 1944 St. John’s Catholic Seminary sold the property to Frank and Ardis Glenn, owners of Glenn Rare and Antique Books. Frank Glenn was also a publisher of several Kansas City books. Several years ago we had the pleasure of becoming acquainted with Ardis and she, along with her daughter and son, re-visited their old home. During the tour of their homestead they shared fascinating stories and pointed out some changes in our house. They described where the "ice box" was located, and that the kitchen was three small rooms instead of the one large one that it is now.

Some fun stories were shared, some to the surprise of Ardis Glenn. Her grown son told of how he and his friends shot BB guns from the third floor window and also got out onto the roof and walked around. Ardis told us about another young son who went into the basement vault where rare and uncut books were kept and cut open the bindings. We also discovered that two closets and a storage room along the east side of the house were at one time all connected by a very tiny

and narrow passageway that they used as secret hiding places. When we replaced our roof in 2018 and the passageway and the hiding places were uncovered from above, the roofers found candles and slight scorching of the wood in those secret places. The roofers also found remnants of slate shingles. Possibly there was a fire; what other reason would there be to replace a slate roof? Thank goodness their clandestine playfulness never completely burnt the house down!

Nine months after Frank Glenn died in 1960, Ardis sold the house to Donald and Sharlene Krenkel in 1961. Several years later the house was acquired by Maurice Peress, former philharmonic conductor who called it “The Mozart House,” appropriately so, for many small concerts had taken place on two grand pianos in the reception hall of our home that we now refer to as the foyer.



*The Closson's foyer*

In 1983 Mark Grant, an investment banker and bachelor at that time, purchased the house and made several changes to the outside appearance, which included erecting an iron fence on top of the stone walls surrounding the property and building an outdoor spa on top of the garage at the rear of the house. This contemporary addition was constructed with 8 foot high walls to provide privacy for the 12 person hot tub situated in the corner of the deck. Mr. Grant moved to New York and Florida and is a Chief Global Strategist and writer for Advisorhub. He has made several CNBC appearances.

The next owners, Richard Winegar and Demi Moulas who lived at 700 Brush Creek purchased the home in 1990 and moved from across the street into our house. Their major contribution was a re-stucco of the entire exterior as well as installation of the front brick courtyard.

When we purchased the home in 1994 the cedar inner walls of the “spa” were very weathered and we felt the structure was not at all in character with the classical appearance of the house. We just could not imagine having a dinner party in the formal dining room with its intricate plaster ceiling and Elizabethan dark stained mahogany paneling and having to look out through the leaded glass doors of the room at this weathered box! Tearing down and rebuilding this deck area was one of the first projects we tackled after moving in. Upon removing the hot tub and 8 foot walls, a new concrete deck was built with a tile floor, stone balustrade railings and a stairway exiting down to the yard.

With the exception of regular maintenance and minor decor updates, we have tried to keep the house as original as possible. I guess you could say we love old things!

After completion of the new deck we did a major renovation of the landscaping. The formal nature of the landscaping requires continual care throughout the growing season. But as many of you may have noticed we both enjoy gardening and working outdoors in the yard. We cannot imagine living anywhere else and hope to be caretakers of this grand home for many years to come!

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## Midtown BLIGHTED????

There is a proposal at City Hall that would designate a large portion of Midtown as blighted. The designation is being proposed by the Planned Industrial Expansion Authority (PIEA) of Kansas City and seems to have two intentions. A designation of blight permits some eligibility for federal

funding that is sought for the streetcar extension. In addition, it provides a long-term tax incentive (15%) to developers of market rate affordable housing in the designated area.

While the intent of this proposal may have merits, most Midtown neighborhoods oppose the designation. The area has seen significant growth in property values, as reflected by our property taxes and is counter-intuitive to the pride and investments that have been made by homeowners. The blight designation may just be semantics, but words have ramifications. The City has been encouraged to find a different means for their objectives.

The proposal has been passed by the City Plan Commission (CPC) and is to be heard by the Council in April. The Kansas City School Board has opposed the measure, as the tax incentive would lower their revenue. While Rockhill is not within the proposed blight zone, our Board plans to support the position of opposition with other midtown neighborhoods.

*Submitted by Jim Wanser*

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

