



The Rockhill Times

President's Letter

Autumn 2023

Appraisal of the Rockhill Appraisals

On August 22 I sent a note to the neighborhood asking 3 simple questions: When did you move to Rockhill; why did you choose Rockhill; and what are your biggest fears or concerns about Rockhill's future? I asked for no more than 3 answers to each of the last 2 questions and I received responses from 34 different individuals. So, first, I can say that Rockhillians are remarkably involved with their neighborhood, as that is an outstanding response rate to an unsolicited email questionnaire! The reason for the first question was to see if how long a person had lived here might result in different answers to the other two questions, particularly the last.

To achieve similarly sized groups based on time of residency in the neighborhood, I divided the respondents into two groups: residents who moved here after 2014 ("new"), and before 2015 ("old"). This resulted in 17 respondents in each group. To reassure the last group that their assigned terminology isn't necessarily meant to be pejorative, it might be noted that we are blessed with some mature "new" residents. Finally, although it is doubtless unnecessary by this point in my report to confess that because I am neither a pollster nor a survey designer, my grouping criterion is totally arbitrary. Indeed, there may be more informative grouping criteria for allowing comparison of respondents' answers, such as sex, location in neighborhood, etc. With this caveat in mind, what follows is my best overview of the results from the questionnaire.

The reasons given for why people moved into Rockhill have remained unchanged over the years, i.e., old and new residents gave similar reasons. For each group, the location of our neighborhood was the major reason: 65% for both groups. People cited closeness to jobs, to downtown, to the Plaza, to museums, to restaurants, etc. If you read the President's Letter in the Summer edition of *The Rockhill Times (RHT)*, you will recognize this reason, and those to follow, as being key components in defining what makes a good neighborhood. Closely behind location came the salient features of our neighborhood itself: historic, stately, well-kept homes in a diversity of styles on peaceful, walkable streets – cited by 59% (new) and 53% (old) of the respondents. Also specifically mentioned in this neighborhood category were Rockhill's wide streets and mature trees. One person cited our quirkiness as an important reason for moving here; although I wasn't that person, I do appreciate that charming sentiment. The only significant difference between the two groups was that 47% of the new residents and marginally only 6% of the old said that they had fallen in love with the specific house that they ended up purchasing. I don't want to believe that we old owners have forgotten the intensity of our first love for our residence, letting decades of maintenance tarnish the purity and excitement of our first love. Please say it ain't so!

Several potential reasons for moving to Rockhill surprised me by their absence of being mentioned at all. For example, no one brought up the great diversity in nationalities among our residents or the initial acceptance of anyone as a neighbor simply because of their desire to become one. Perhaps these are not features that are immediately obvious

when looking for a home? By far the biggest surprise to me was that not a single person mentioned our beautiful, iconic rock walls! Have we become jaded to the point of taking for granted these Rockhill landmarks, these landmarks that are often praised by many Kansas Citians who do not live here? Again, please say.....!

The question concerning fears or concerns about Rockhill's future resulted in a broader range of responses and an overall greater difference between the two groups. The greatest concern was the perception of an increase in crime or a decrease in safety, listed by 38% of the respondents (59% new, but only 18% old). For whatever reason, our residents apparently become more sanguine about the potential negative effects of the outside world on Rockhill the longer they live here. Further evidence supporting this notion comes from the fact that whereas 41% of the old group either did not list a specific concern or explicitly wrote that they had no concerns whatsoever, 100% of the new group voiced concerns, usually multiple. The second most common concern (32%) was about traffic, its volume, speed, racing, and noise (motorcycles and sirens). This concern was roughly equivalent in both groups and was definitely not confined to those residents who live near Cleaver Blvd. One respondent also noted that there was not a single crosswalk to cross Cleaver between Troost and Rockhill Road, thus further enhancing Cleaver's bi-sectioning of our neighborhood. The third most commonly raised concern (24%, also nearly equivalently shared between groups) was deterioration of the areas surrounding us: the closing of businesses on Troost near Cleaver; the number of squatters discovered in Rockhill and the persistency of vagrants on North Rockhill Rd.; and vacancies, turnovers and financial problems troubling the Country Club Plaza. This perceived decay to the east, north and west of us was linked by some respondents with increased litter, foot traffic and petty crime. If such a linkage is valid, our own increased occupancy of our streets via walking, talking and hanging out would seem to be a positive step.

There were other concerns listed less frequently, but still meriting consideration. One person was concerned about both the age of our residents and of our housing stock,

concerns that I personally share, as it's getting progressively challenging for my aging body to perform even simple maintenance chores on our aging house. Actually, several respondents were concerned about our abilities to continue to adequately maintain our homes. This concern becomes more prominent when one reflects on the fees they charge and the advanced age and increasing rarity of the workmen who actually know how to fix our homes when something is seriously wrong with them, e.g., think belching boiler! A handful of respondents were concerned that rising property taxes might force them from their homes, but perhaps our Missouri legislature might really step-up next year and alleviate this concern, at least for many of us.

Continuing in this happy vein, I will close by quoting two concerns from respondents. The first is: "I hope Rockhill does not lose its weirdness. It's a terrific place to live." It does seem to me that we may, indeed, have lost some of the storied eccentricity of our Rockhill forebears. So, if you do happen to sense a bubble of weirdness trying to burst through to your buttoned-down surface, go ahead and embrace it! The second concern I will quote is: "I think a big concern is that people continue to care about and covet this neighborhood, like so many fabulous neighbors who have been here much longer than we newbies, thus keeping the love of Rockhill alive. Because as we all know, it is the best place to live!" Out of the mouths of babes (Matthew 21:16).

One final concern, actually more of a desire, voiced by several will be the topic of the President's Letter in the next edition of the *RHT*.

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ONE STOP SHOP FOR RHA NEWS

If you like the Rockhill "Times", you will love the new and vastly improved RHA website: <https://rockhillkc.org>. Neighbor Tom Winter manages the site where you can find current events, links to neighborhood news, and shortcuts for City services. It's great. Check it out.

Trees

Rockhill Homes and Gardens Club

In response to the inquiry that was sent to neighbors recently, several neighbors mentioned our mature trees as one of the reasons they love Rockhill. Trees do fill us with wonder and their long lives inspire awe. Many of the trees in Rockhill were planted by former neighbors who are no longer with us, yet who left behind trees for us to enjoy as part of their legacy. The Homes and Gardens Club planted 22 trees on Rockhill Road on October 31, 2023. Our mission is to plant more trees on the east side of Rockhill Road and on the north and south side of Brush Creek Blvd between Charlotte and Harrison Streets (near the pillars at Harrison Street). We will plant more trees this fall with money donated by the Kauffman Foundation and some Rockhill neighbors. If you would like to contribute to the tree fund, please send a check made out to Midtown Kansas City Stewards Limited to Barry Nickell at 4500 Rockhill Terrace.

In addition, we have partnered with the Heartland Tree Alliance in a proposal to PIAC requesting an additional 35 trees to be planted in 2024. We won't know until next year if the funds will be awarded, so please cross your fingers.

The following quote is from Joe Wheelock, Program Manager of Heartland Tree Alliance, His words perfectly capture why we are on the mission to increase the number of trees surrounding Rockhill. "We recognize that trees should be a preferred green infrastructure to maintain and increase community resilience to storms, urban heat, and other environmental/health impacts. Increasing tree canopy in target areas provides more than the environmental benefits of reduced flooding and improved water quality. It improves public health by creating access to nature and outdoor recreation, improving air and water quality, and reducing the urban heat island effect." And he adds, "...with the current age of our urban forest, the canopy is decreasing at a rate that we are unable to replace 1:1. Increased planting efforts as well as

associated maintenance are crucial for the longevity of our urban forest."

Tree maintenance will be the subject of a future article.

Garden & Lawn Tips to Make Our Rockhill Neighborhood Shine

Rockhill Homes and Gardens Club

As we transition into the autumn months, here are a few tips to help rejuvenate your lawn. With early fall being the best time of year to reseed your lawn, this task is one of the most important for making your yard beautiful next spring and summer.

Prior to reseeding and fertilizing your lawn it is always best to first remove the ugly weeds that tend to invade our lawn during the summer months. The two main types of weeds that are prevalent in our neighborhood, as well as most of the city, are crab grass (also referred to as watergrass) and nutsedge. Both can be removed by pulling them out but will grow back the next year if all of the roots are not removed. This is especially true with nutsedge. If you have a batch of nutsedge, it is important to dig down 3-4 inches with a hoe or shovel to completely remove the root system before filling in the area with a good quality topsoil. Scotts Turf Builder Lawn Soil works great as it contains fertilizer, peat and compost so new grass seed will grow better and result in a thicker healthier turf.

Fescue and blue grass blends work well in our climate and their proportions are adjusted for shade or sunny areas. You can find several good blends at stores like Soil Service, Home Depot, Lowes, Ace Hardware or Sutherlands. Avoid buying the cheapest seed you can find as these will often have seeds from weeds and other unwanted grasses mixed in. Fall seeding is best done when the daytime temperatures are above 60 degrees as this will help the seed germinate more quickly. Daily watering (2-3 times per day) is a must until the seeds do germinate, which can take 7-10 days. Covering the seed with straw will help retain the moisture and prevent the soil from drying out, which is key to fast germination. The straw will eventually be almost unnoticeable as the new grass starts to grow so it is best to leave it in

place as removing it will also result in removing some of the new blades of grass.

If you need to reseed a larger area or an entire lawn it may be easier to hire someone with the equipment that can do the project for you.

The second key to a beautiful year-round lawn is fertilization. Applying fertilizers such as Scotts Winterguard Fall Lawn Food will help ensure that your grass will develop good roots during the winter and be better prepared for the next summer's heat.

In addition to rejuvenating your lawn, autumn is also a great time of year to fertilize the plants and bushes in your yard. If you have acid loving plants and bushes such as hydrangeas, hollies, azaleas, rhododendrons and other evergreens then Espoma Holly Tone organic fertilizer works great.

4511 HOLMES - A VERY BRIEF HISTORY

Bill Session

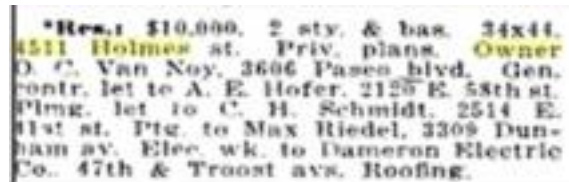
Uncovering the history of the place one sleeps in every night, over a century after it was built, is an enticing challenge. Who doesn't want to know "how it looked back then" and "what happened to that family?" Unfortunately, that archeological challenge most often goes unmet. For some, it's just a passing thought. For others taken with the task, it soon becomes clear that easily accessible resources either don't exist or aren't always enough to tell a complete story. It really is a job for professionals.

So, for 4511 Holmes, I am waving an early flag of surrender. I readily admit that I have been able to put together precious few pieces of this house's centuries old past. I don't know who designed it. I don't know if some famous politician or movie star ever lived at 4511. I don't know what brand of refrigerator or icebox they used. But knowing something is better than knowing nothing ... right? So here goes...

I believe 4511 was constructed in 1911 at the behest of one O.C. Van Noy. "O.C." stands for Orville Clinton. That first tidbit came from a 1911 copy of the Kansas City Contractor's

Almanac. The estimated construction cost for 4511 Holmes was a hefty (for 1911) \$10,000.00. For that grand sum Orville got a handsome two-story dwelling . . . with a basement. His home was near other more grand, more stately and more expensive homes. But it did sit on a nice lot . . . I think we saw pretty much what Orville saw.

Through a City Business Directory from early Kansas City days, we learned that the general contractor for 4511 was a A.E. Hofer, who operated his business from 629 W. 39th Street. The painting contractor was Max Riedel, who operated his business from 55th and Troost, and the electrical contractor, Dameron Electric, was based somewhere near 47th and Troost. It seems lots of nearby businesses were involved in the building of 4511.



*Res. \$10,000. 2 sty. & bas. 34x44. 4511 Holmes st. Priv. plans. Owner D. C. Van Noy, 3606 Paseo Blvd. Gen. Contr. let to A. E. Hofer, 2125 E. 58th st. Plng. let to C. H. Schmidt, 2514 E. 81st st. Plng. to Max Riedel, 3309 Dunham av. Elec. wk. to Dameron Electric Co. 47th & Troost av. Roofing.

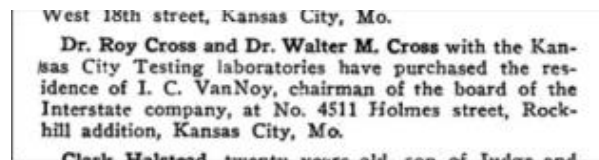
As to the owner, O.C. Van Noy, the back story is a little more interesting. The surname, Van Noy, will be familiar to Kansas City history buffs. The Van Noy family, as many of you likely know, was one of the wealthiest families in Kansas City in the early 1900's. The Van Noy's founded and operated the once famous, and very, very successful Van Noy Railway News and Hotel Company.¹ Orville's father was Charles S. Van Noy who, with his brothers, founded a retail and services empire of newsstands, restaurants and hotels that spanned the entirety of the 7,500-mile Missouri Pacific railway system.²

Orville was only 21 years old when 4511 was built. His "starter house" was understandably less grandiose than his father's and uncle's mansions given his job title in the family business in 1911 was "Clerk" (probably not too high up the organization chart). Still, it was enough of a launching pad such that, while still living at 4511, Orville married and sometime thereafter,



left the family business to become manager of Midwest Haynes Auto Company at 1600 Grand Boulevard.

The ownership record of 4511 after Orville's departure is lost (to us, at least) for several decades. However, we learned that two other prominent brothers in Kansas City acquired 4511 in the 1950's. Those two brothers were Drs. Roy and Walter M. Cross, founders of Kansas City Testing Laboratories.³ One can only assume changes were made to the building by these successful and pioneering engineering types.



Whether it was the Cross brothers or some other owners, it does appear that a separate garage (like many homes today in Rockhill) was replaced with an attached garage to the north at some point. Another major structural change involved the enclosure of what was once the front porch and second story of the west elevation of the house, perhaps in the early '60's. An obvious clue about this aspect of the structural history of the house is its address, i.e., 4511. We don't know exactly when that renovation happened. To all who pass by, it most certainly appears that the main entry to the house faces south, or towards 45th Street . . . and not Holmes. This bit of incongruity continues to puzzle delivery drivers, first time visitors and Halloween trick or treaters (we put up signs . . . "go to the circle driveway!!").⁴

To bring things along to a more current timeframe, 4511 was purchased from Linda T. Nottberg in 2008. Though Pat and I didn't know Linda (likely many of you who are probably still friends with her), she left behind numerous sets of architectural plans. Most were carried out and resulted in a substantial remodel of most of the living areas in the house, especially the kitchen and family room areas. I am uncertain exactly when her changes were made or what things looked like at the start, but the extensive remodeling she carried out went on, presumably, between 1989 and 2009.

Linda's kitchen is pictured below.



As likely happened when Linda came to own 4511, much of her imagination, hard work and money were lost to a new owner's views about what 4511 should look like *to them* and how it should function as a home *for them*. Sooo . . . out went virtually everything in the interior, save (most) of the exterior walls and a bit of the flooring. No more formica, no nanny's quarters and no garage too shallow for modern vehicles So the house was changed a lot on the inside, at least to our thinking, to reflect more of the Midwest colonial style of the exterior.

Here is the same kitchen today.



As the photos on the next page show, much of the exterior (at least the south elevation) has changed very little over the last 80 years or so. We suspect Orville might even recognize his first house.

2009



a decade or so ago. 4511 was and remains a “stately” looking house (facing south) set far back on a corner lot. Location, location, location . . .

Pat and I have and will continue to do our best to live up to and respect the memories of “home” that Orville, Walter, Linda and so many others left for us to steward. And like all of you know, the work is never, ever done. For the next tenants though, we have only one request . . . please don’t tear out the backyard water living space!!! It took us 10 years to finish it!!! . . . but if not, oh well . . .

[If anyone reading this sees something said about 4511 that should be corrected or amended, please let us know . . .

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1940



1980



¹The company survives to this day as HMS Host, a/k/a Host Marriott Corporation, operating news and service stores in airports and highway stops across the country.

²Charles Van Noy and his brother, Ira, built two of the most impressive residential dwellings ever built in Kansas City about the time 4511 was being built. These houses are known to and viewed by many who visit Swope Park (6700-6800 Elmwood). Each, like 4511, still stands today.

³ Kansas City Testing Laboratory dates back to 1894, when the Cross family founded the company under that name. It remains active today. In fact, in my legal work, I’ve retained the company more than a few times.

These snapshots, spanning nearly 70 years, demonstrate, even with the historic neighborhood designation that only came many years later. What the many owners of 4511, for well over a century, saw and maintained is what also drew Pat and I to 4511

It became obvious when we began our renovation of 4511 in 2009 that the original "front porch" of 4511 faced Holmes (hence its postal address of 4511 Holmes and not something on East 45th Street). When sheathing of what was a library was removed, the pillars and front wall of what clearly framed the front entrance to the house were clearly visible.

ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL PICNIC

A big thank you to Ed Straley for once again arranging and organizing a very successful picnic on October 1. Thanks also to Garden Club members who cleaned the park the day before and to all who volunteered to cook, set up and tear down tables and chairs from the picnic. If anyone has pictures to share, please send them to mussmang@gmail.com and we will share them next newsletter.

The Winter edition of the Rockhill Times will be distributed in early January. If you have information to share, or notices of recognition or events, send them to mussmang@gmail.com please. Previous issues of the Times can be found at www.rockhillkc.org/archives.html