



The Rockhill Times

President's Letter

Winter 2023

A Timely Remembrance of Our House

Looking back at our lives, we codgers take note of our arcs, of course, but some isolated events stand out sufficiently to be featured in our eulogies. Our houses are no different. Many Rockhillians know a lot about previous owners of and modifications to their homes, but some of you may also know about noteworthy events in your house: perhaps a famous or infamous guest, a memorable wild party, a juicy felony, or alas, an untimely calamity. Such an event that stands out for our house is unfortunately of the last variety. It happened seventy-four years ago during the holiday season that just ended.

(Verbatim Kansas City Star Article of January 2, 1949)

Mr. and Mrs. LeRoy Daniel MacMorris returned to their Rockhill home at 4501 Holmes street at 2 o'clock this morning (1), and found a ruin of fire inside its red brick walls.

It was ironic, MacMorris, a veteran portrait painter and muralist, said today – he had been talking about the fire and bomb ruins of Europe at a New Year's eve gathering in the Arthur B. Church home, 5519 Mission drive, just about the time his own house was burning.

DAMAGE OF \$30,000

MacMorris's portraits, screens and other paintings, worth maybe \$15,000 or \$20,000, were destroyed. Damage to the structure and furnishings of his home were estimated at \$11,000 by firemen.

One of the ruined portraits was of Arthur B. Church, who is president of the Midland Broadcasting company. The picture, in a fine gold frame, was made for hanging in the company's office.

Mr. and Mrs. MacMorris left their home about 8:30 o'clock last night. They formerly lived in New York, and friends from that city, Mr. and Mrs. Renton Haney, who are stopping at the Hotel Muehlebach, had visited briefly at the MacMorris home and went with them to the Church home.

"We snuffed out the candles in the dining room, left several lights on, and departed," Mrs. MacMorris said. "Everything was all right.

"At 2 o'clock we came back and I noticed a policeman outside with a flashlight. I thought at first he was a telegraph man with a holiday message, and asked if he was looking for us.

BAD NEW YEAR START

"Lady, he said, 'something terrible has happened to your home; you certainly have had bad luck to start the new year.'

"The house seemed alright from the outside, but when I stepped in this is what I saw,"

With a sweep of her arms, Mrs. MacMorris indicated the charred or scorched ruins of the big living room, dining room, and side rooms on the first floor.

A half-dozen bedrooms upstairs took lesser scorching. The intense heat affected even rooms on the third floor, where Mr. and Mrs. Homer Shaw live. They left the home at

9:30 o'clock and got back after the MacMorrises had returned.



Caption under photo. PORTRAITS AND STERLING SILVER were among the valuable furnishings destroyed last night in a fire at the LeRoy Daniel MacMorris home, 4501 Holmes street, where the damage was estimated at \$30,000 or more. MacMorris is a painter and muralist. Decorative screens, statues and art objects, and a grand piano were ruined in the fire that centered in the dining room while Mr. and Mrs. MacMorris were away on a New Year's eve visit. The artist views one of many ruined paintings, and on the charred side-board are parts of a sterling silver tea set that melted from the heat.

WOMAN DISCOVERS FIRE

The fire apparently was discovered by a woman motorist who rang the doorbell at 641 East Fortyfifth street (2), the home of J. D. Bowersock III. A nurse, Miss Lorene Czeschin, came to the door and called the fire department after the woman pointed to smoke and flames pouring out of the dining room window of the MacMorris home.

Firemen said the blaze centered in the dining room (3). The heat was so intense it melted much of a sterling silver tea set on a side-board, destroyed the dining room table and swept through other rooms. Oriental rugs were ruined, and a grand piano in the living room was partly charred.

On one dining room wall a 3 by 5-foot portrait by MacMorris of Marcel Duchamp, French artist, was destroyed. The

background of this portrait showed a "Nude Descending the Stairs," in the modernist style (4).

OTHER PORTRAITS RUINED

Other portraits of New York and Kansas City persons, in the living and dining rooms, were ruined, and three large screens, one of them with a butterfly theme and the other depicting the archaeological background of Paris, burned (5).

Small statues and other art objects were destroyed. In an upstairs room, intricate colored sketches by MacMorris of a World War I mural for the Liberty Memorial fortunately escaped damage.

Since moving into the house three months ago MacMorris has had a studio built to the north wall. The studio was not damaged. The home was purchased from Norman L. Spelman (6), and for many years prior to his ownership the spacious house was the home of Raymond T. Demsey, lumber company official. **(End of KC Star article)**

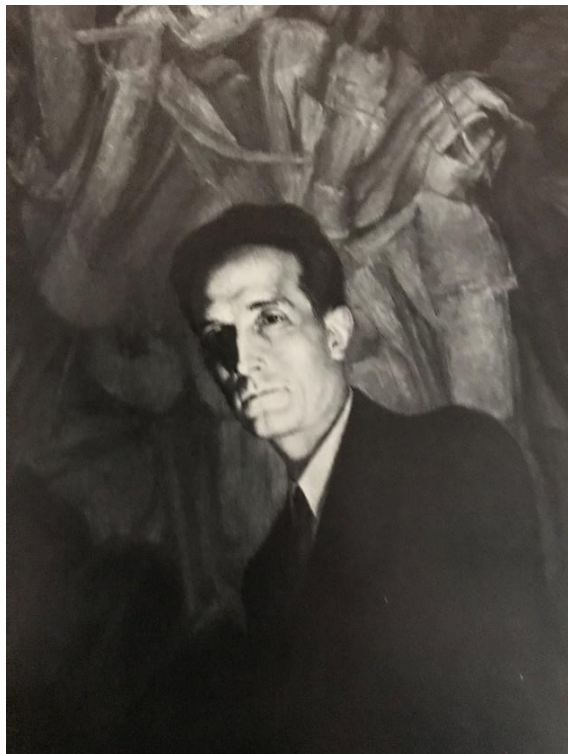
Twenty-five years after the fire, MacMorris remembered that day as follows. "In the last hours of Dec. 31, 1948, or the first hours of 1949, there was a disastrous fire at 4501 Holmes in Kansas City, where I was just getting settled and building a new studio to connect with the house. The house was gutted, but the connection to the addition of the studio had not been cut through and fire fighters saved the half-finished studio. However, many pictures and painted screens were destroyed at that time, which set me back very badly. But I had much to do and deadlines to meet and could not stop to argue with Fate and her vigors" (7).

Numerous memorable events have undoubtedly occurred in our neighborhood since it was founded more than a hundred years ago. Perhaps there is a noteworthy event associated with your house that you would like to share with your Rockhill neighbors in a future edition of our newsletter.

Footnotes:

1. They more likely returned on January 1.

2. This is now the Martinovic's home.
3. The wood floors in the adjacent dining and living rooms are obviously different, and the living room floor, which is apparently the original, has scorch marks where it adjoins the dining room.
4. The destroyed oil painting of Duchamp is shown below. He and MacMorris became friends after they had rented adjacent studios in Carnegie Hall during the summer of 1937, the year in which MacMorris painted this portrait.



5. Ironically, the third of the three screens was entitled 'Danse Rituelle de Feu' or 'Dance of Fire.' Upon moving into our house in 1997, we found behind the mural wall in the studio a badly scorched three-panel screen. The right panel of the triptych screen was signed by MacMorris, who was an advocate for the use of screens in home decorating. An article in the February 24, 1929 edition of the 'New York City Times' stated that, "LeRoy Daniel MacMorris's subjects are so inextricably French that in preparing the catalogue for his exhibition of screens and paintings at the Durand-Ruel Galleries he has seen fit just to lift the titles from the French catalogue covering a recent appearance in Paris." An article about

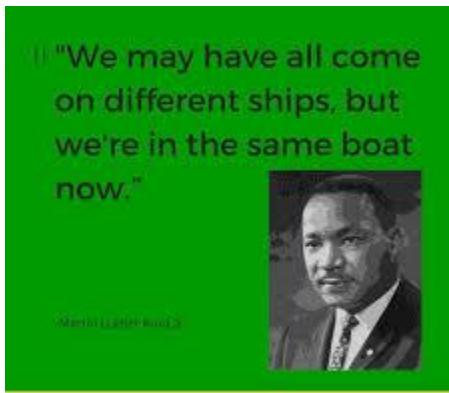
MacMorris in another periodical of that era described our scorched painting as "barbaric, powerful in movement, and arresting in its colorings of silver and gold, yellow and henna, and brilliant blue. MacMorris's 'Dance of Fire' was inspired by the musical composition of that name by the Spaniard, Manuel de Falla." All the colors mentioned are still clear, as are the dancers.

6. From our records, it appears that MacMorris did not, in fact, buy this house from Spelman. Instead, it seems that MacMorris and Spelman simply traded houses. MacMorris had been living for several years at E. 704 47th St. (Cleaver), the current home of the Abrahams, when the trade occurred earlier in 1948. To gain sufficient space to build his studio on the north side of the house, MacMorris immediately purchased from The William Rockhill Nelson Trust a long, narrow pie-shaped piece of land with its apex at a spot on the N.W. where Holmes curves into 45th Street. Without this land, the north extension of the studio would have extended past the original property line. Then in 1952, he purchased from the Nelson Trust an additional larger pie-shaped plot with the same apex as the previous lot, which gave the entire lot its current shape and size. To access the studio from the house, it was necessary to create holes in both the basement and 1st floor walls of the house. Fortunately, those holes had yet to be created when the fire occurred, thus sparing the newly built studio from damage.

7. MacMorris, D. (1974) *60 Years MacMorris*, Jeanne R. Simpson of Fine Art, Ltd., pg. 48.

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In Honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day:



Keepinspiring.me

Rockhill and KC's Historic Preservation Commission: A Primer by Jim Wanser

Greetings Neighbors,
One of the greatest assets of our neighborhood is the wonderful diversity of historic homes set in a beautiful midtown area. Rockhill was the first neighborhood in Kansas City to be listed on both the National Registry of Historic Places, as well as the Kansas City Registry of Historic Places.

For several decades Rockhill has had a positive and productive relationship with the Kansas City Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) which is charged with oversight responsibility for historic buildings and areas in Kansas City. Part of their charge is to review and approve changes to the exterior of historic properties that are visible from the street. As part of the process, they ask homeowners to do two things. First, they ask that you discuss your plans with adjacent neighbors and solicit their support and secondly, present exterior plans to their homes association for feedback. That feedback is provided to the HPC as part of their deliberation process. Throughout the years, what homeowners have presented to the Rockhill Board about their proposed project has varied considerably. In an effort to streamline and standardize the process, the Board would like to ask homeowners to use the informational guidelines established by the HPC when presenting their project to the Rockhill Board. The matrix, known as the Certificate of Appropriate Submission

Materials (COFA) is rather detailed and the Rockhill Board review process is interested in helping you with significant changes such as window modifications, roof and paint changes, fencing, rock wall modifications, new structures or additions and any exterior demolition. The COFA is on the Rockhill Homes Association website <http://rockhillkc.org/>. Simply identify your project and note the related information that will help facilitate the process.

The goal is to help you get the approval needed, simplify and expedite the process. As a Board, we understand that historic properties need changes and updates and are very appreciative of homeowners who utilize the process outlined by the Historic Preservation Commission of Kansas City and the Rockhill Homes Association. Thank you...

Former Rockhill Neighbor Ron Labinski Changed the Way We Watch Sporting Events (thank you to Russell Baker)

The January 7th weekend edition of the Wall Street Journal published an obituary for architect Ron Labinski. Kansas City is famous for architectural firms that have designed many of the most well-known sports stadiums around the world over the last 50 years. Mr. Labinski and his wife, Lee, lived at 4521 Kenwood for many years. He is credited as being the man most responsible for these accomplishments.



Rockhill Homes and Gardens Club by Susan Carlson

The Rockhill Homes and Gardens Club is a newly reactivated club open to all interested neighbors. We intend to contribute a column to each quarterly RHA newsletter. In 2005, the Rockhill Homes and Gardens Club hosted a tour of our homes and gardens for the 100th Anniversary of the neighborhood. Other informal efforts of Club members developed the pocket part on 45th Street and raised money to restack the rock walls around the former Rockhill Tennis Club, which had fallen.

The goals of the reactivated Club (so far) are to enhance the appearance to our neighborhood at entry points; to care for the Pocket Park and the Narrows on our east side; to be a resource for timely information on planting, garden and tree care; and to share information in the RHA newsletter related to the history of our neighborhood and homes. A longer-term goal is a 2025 repeat of a Homes and Gardens tour.

Our first activity was to address the west side of our neighborhood where most of the trees on the median of Rockhill Road had died. On October 31, 2022, we planted 21 trees on the median between 45th Street and Cleaver II. An arborist from Parks and Rec provided guidance and approval for the trees that were selected. We agreed to ensure trees are watered and mulched until they are established.

Several of the Club members are in the process of starting a charity. The goal of that charity is to seek funding to support the Clubs efforts for future tree planting and maintenance of the Pocket Park and Narrows. Another 30 or 35 trees are still needed on the median south of Cleaver II and on the east side of Rockhill Road and to visually widen the space at the Narrows. We hope to accomplish these additional plantings in 2023.

Regarding the Narrows, we have solicited assistance from Sue Gottlieb, who designed the Pocket Park, and are now developing a plan for planting in that area.

We are just getting started and open to suggestions from you. We will have our next meeting in February so please let Susan Carlson know if you would like to be invited (scarlson@kumc.edu).

Editor's NOTE: Susan's article is a great example of how neighbors can become better acquainted, have fun and enrich the neighborhood. If you have ideas for other such groups – book club, wine tasting, cooking, dinner club – you name it, let me know and I'll connect like-minded neighbors. Galen

**“Hello – I Must Be Going”
A Time to Say Goodbye and
Congratulations! (Ed Straley)**

Our neighbors Jamie Cumby and Saskia Nislow at 703 Emanuel Cleaver will soon be moving back to New York after two years in Kansas City.

Jamie came to Kansas City to work at the Linda Hall Library and has accepted a position as Head Librarian at the prestigious Grolier Club, a private club and society of bibliophiles in New York City, founded in 1884. Word has it that Linda Hall Library is very sorry to see you go but very happy for your success!

Their home at 703 Emanuel Cleaver will be on the market in February.

Welcome to Neighbors Jen & Derek Elder from Welcome Chairman Ed Straley

Jen and Derek Elder moved in at 4700 Rockhill Rd in the summer of 2021. The Elders became Kansas Citians after Derek was transferred here. They relocated to Kansas City, from North Carolina which was close to Jen’s family. Derek’s family lives in central Illinois. They met in January of 2002 in Russian class at the University of Illinois. Jen inadvertently gave Derek her phone number during a class exercise not thinking he might call. Derek played rugby at U of I, and occasionally still practices with the Kansas City Blues. Since moving to KC Jen has become a diehard Chiefs fan and both are loyal Cubs fans.

Derek is an Army officer stationed at Fort Leavenworth. Jen works from home where she directs the Federal Government’s Homeless and Housing Resource Center for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Soon after moving into the Crossroads District the Elders began exploring the metro area and were awestruck by the history and feel of the Rockhill Neighborhood. Rockhill stood out in contrast to many other parts of the city. They have really enjoyed meeting such a great collection of residents and a

neighborhood with a real sense of community!

Jen and Derek enjoy the performing arts at the KC Rep, the Kauffman and the Music Hall.

Welcome Jen and Derek we are happy to have as a part of our unique community!



USEFUL INFORMATION FOR ALL NEIGHBORS (thank you Ed Straley)

It's a New Year and that means there's a new holiday trash schedule for Kansas City residents to remember. There are nine holidays the city's trash schedule will observe for 2023.

Trash pickup will be delayed by a day on the following holidays in 2023 in KCMO.

Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Monday, Jan. 16

Presidents Day. Monday, Feb. 20

Memorial Day. Monday, May 29

Juneteenth. Monday June, 19

Independence Day. Tuesday, July 4

Labor Day. Monday, Sept. 4

Thanksgiving Day. Thursday, Nov. 23

Christmas. Monday, Dec 25

New Year's Day. Monday, Jan 1, 2024

AMNESTY WEEKS HAPPEN TWICE EACH YEAR

Residents are allowed to put out up to 12 trash bags without tags, as long as each bag is less than 40 lbs. Those weeks are July 5 thru July 10 and Dec 26 thru Dec. 30.

Hazardous waste, bulky items and leaves/brush will not be picked up during amnesty week.

Call 311 if your trash is not picked up.

WHAT WILL THE CITY PICK UP?

Please place the following items in trash bags and the city will pick them up:

Food waste; packaging; small appliances, toys, and tools, but it is recommended that you donate these items.

Waste associated with normal home maintenance; small car parts, such as spark plugs, brake shoes and shock absorbers that can be put in bags.

Building materials that are bundled with twine or wire to include wood, wood products, plaster, or wallboard.

Boxes of shingles, empty paint cans and small items used when you're maintaining your home.

WHAT THE CITY WILL NOT PICK UP:

Items over 40 pounds, call 311 for bulky trash pickup, items longer than 4 feet, large amounts of construction debris, Hazardous liquids and car batteries need to be picked up by setting up an appointment with city's Household Hazardous Waste Program, there is a similar program for vehicle tires.

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