

# GAZETTE

The Historic Kansas City Foundation is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation of greater Kansas City's heritage, neighborhoods and historic built environment. The Gazette is the official publication of the Foundation.

A Quarterly Newsletter

Volume 36-No. 2-Fall 2011

### Feature: Two Wins for the Plaza

*One fight lasting a year, the other 2 days, preservation proponents declare two important victories.*

Page 1

### Old House Corner

*Bone up on your architectural terminology with this special feature.*

Page 2

### Message from the President

*President Scott Lane talks about the role social media can play in advocacy efforts.*

Page 3

### How to Research the History of your House

*Find the original owner, architect, style and other important facts using these tips.*

Page 3

### Seligson Receives Honor from UMKC

*Fund established in architect's honor*

### HKCF works in Green Impact Zone

*Several preservation efforts underway*

Page 5

### Get Involved!

- Upcoming Events
- Volunteer Opportunities
- Make a Contribution
- Contact Us

Page 6

## PRESERVATION EFFORTS RESULT IN TWO WINS FOR THE PLAZA

Mike Koon  
HKCF Board Member

In the space of one week in August, preservationists scored two important victories on the Country Club Plaza. One victory was the final act of a year-long struggle; the other came after just 48 hours. Both reflected the strong – and growing – commitment of Plaza fans to protect this architectural gem.

One year ago, Highwoods Properties, the east coast suburban office park developer that owns much of the Plaza, stunned Kansas Citians by announcing a plan to bulldoze the Balcony Building and



Retail space at Wornall and Ward Parkway under renovation with framing to cover the original architectural details. Seasons 52 has since decided to restore the facade, causing rejoice across the City. Photo by Mary Steeb.

94 apartment homes to build a 200,000 square foot office tower. Under this plan, the Balcony Building, a 90 year-old landmark in the core of the original Plaza, and the Neptune Apartments would be razed to make way for a bland office building that would rise the

equivalent of 15 stories above 47<sup>th</sup> Street, towering over the one and two story historic Plaza buildings. The response was immediate and resounding. The Historic Kansas City and an affiliated group, Friends of the Plaza, organized marches, phone calls, letters and social media to push back. Over the next 12 months, Plaza supporters throughout the city – and the world -- worked to preserve this unique neighborhood. They pointed out that Highwoods' plan included converting hundreds of prime parking spaces used by the public into private, restricted parking reserved for the law firm tenant of the building. Supporters publicized Highwoods' admission that the building would generate 2,200 car trips each day through already crowded Plaza streets. They observed that the combination of the parking losses, the conversion of residential land uses into office uses and the increased traffic could damage the already delicate retail environment on the Plaza. And, of course, they argued that

Continued Page 2

there were many sites on and around the Plaza that were far better suited to a large scale office building than the site selected by Highwoods, which had long ago been designated as one for which no rezoning was recommended.

In February, the City Plan Commission voted against the project. In April, the Polsinelli/Shughart law firm, the proposed tenant for the building, withdrew from the project. Highwoods, however, refused to reconsider and pushed its plan for what had by then become a speculative office building through the City Council. Days later, in one of his final acts as Mayor, Mark Funkhouser vetoed the City Council's decision to rezone the Neptune site. Two weeks after that, when a newly elected City Council convened, the Funkhouser veto was overridden.

What followed that second Council vote will be long remembered in Kansas City preservation circles. The effort began to put the Neptune rezoning to a vote of the people. Under election law, more than 7,000 valid signatures were required to put the issue on the ballot. Highwoods openly scoffed at the notion that such a large number of Kansas Citians would sign petitions to overturn the rezoning ordinance within the short time period the law required. Leaving nothing to chance, however, Highwoods spent tens of thousands of dollars on public relations

and negative advertising, and retained political consultants noted for experience in smear campaigns. They even hired "blockers" to harass petition gatherers as they worked on street corners and outside grocery stores. When the petition gathering period ended, the Plaza supporters hadn't collected the 7,000 signatures needed – they had collected more than 18,000.

On August 25, 2011 – just two months after the petition drive was certified as successful – the City Council of Kansas City voted unanimously to repeal their earlier rezoning of the Neptune site. This vote followed the announcement of an agreement between Highwoods and Plaza supporters that there would be no organized opposition to a similarly sized building if it were built west of the Neptune site, near other large scale buildings. The result was characterized by the *Kansas City Star* as a "total victory" for the opponents of this project.

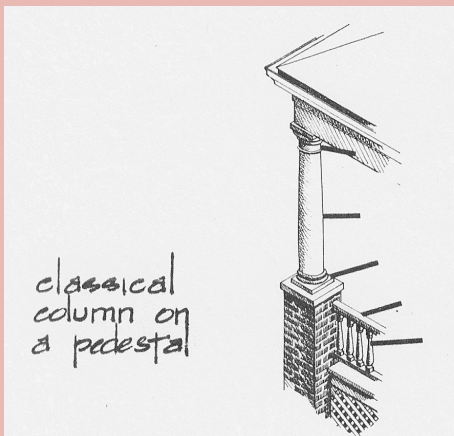
The same day the Council voted to repeal the Neptune rezoning, Seasons 52, a new restaurant tenant on the Plaza, abandoned its plans to replace the graceful façade of the former Woolf Brothers store with a contemporary stone and glass entry. Alarms had been sounded by Plaza supporters when roof tiles and gables were removed from the building, which marks the entry to the

Plaza from Wornall Road. The next day, metal framing was erected over the building entry, obliterating the lighted star and graceful ornamentation that had become a Plaza landmark. Historic Kansas City Foundation obtained drawings from the City of the restaurant's plans for the building and posted them online. Seasons 52 was inundated with outraged calls, emails and entries on social media sites. Within 48 hours, Seasons 52 announced it would restore the original appearance of the building. The following day, the star which had shown for decades over the courtyard fountain was visible again.

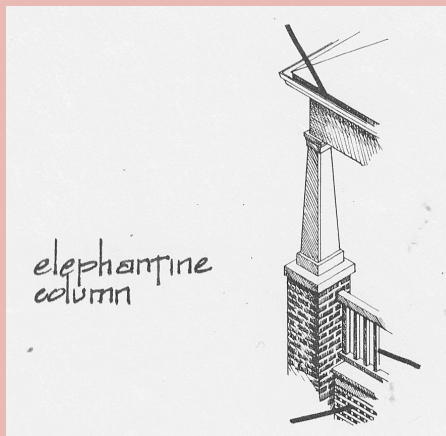
As August closed, there was more good news for the Plaza. The Polsinelli/Shughart law firm agreed to relocate to the long moribund West Edge site, ensuring that their lawyers and staff will remain close to the Plaza, but in an area developed for and appropriate to large scale commercial buildings.

The Historic Kansas City Foundation is grateful for the support of the community in its efforts to preserve the Country Club Plaza. However, the continued vitality of the Plaza cannot be assumed; our ability to share the Plaza with our children and grandchildren depends on our own efforts and our willingness to take a stand.

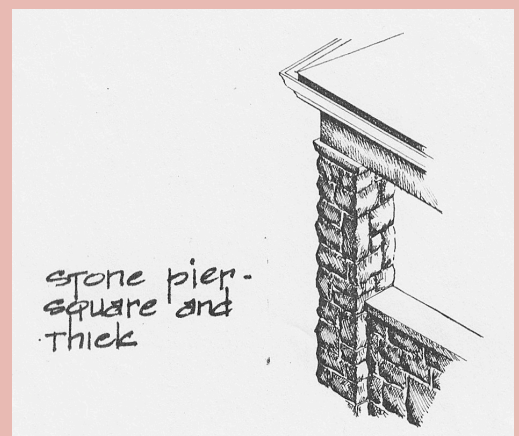
# OLD HOUSE CORNER



classical column on a pedestal



elephantine column



stone pier-square and thick

Correction: In the last issue of the Gazette, the New York Life building design was credited to Frederick Elmer Hill without mentioning the firm he worked for, McKim Mead and White.

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT: THE POWER AND INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Historic Preservation is alive in Kansas City! The past month has brought us a number of victories: the hopeful “restoration” of the Cosby Hotel, a redesigned restaurant façade on the Country Club Plaza, and the victory over the rezoning for a high rise office tower on the Plaza. The people have stood up and made their voices heard. A major player that had changed the way these voices are heard--very quickly and in real time--is social media.

All three of these efforts had Facebook pages dedicated to the effort. Mary Steeb and some friends set up the “Save the Plaza 2010” Facebook page last August when the proposed demolition of the Balcony Building was announced to enable construction of an office building. Compounding weekly, the page garnered over 9,000 passionate followers into a loud “voice” of people able to communicate daily, receive updates, and coordinate efforts.

This same Facebook page was used, very effectively, to inform people of the proposed contemporary and out of character changes to a lovely Spanish style building on the Plaza. People quickly made their voices heard by calling, emailing, and flooding the restaurant tenant’s Facebook page and customer complaints center with pleas to restore the facade. Just 48 hours later, the restaurant company altered course and decided not to make the already underway changes, all because the strong message was delivered so quickly.

This is a new age of technology with tools that have significant power. One gentleman active in preservation battles told me, “You gained and accomplished more in a week than we could in a year”. I salute the passionate people that have made their voices heard--and Seasons 52 for listening!



HKCF President Scott Lane in front of the Balcony Building. Photo by Amanda Crawley.

## How to Research the History of Your House

*This information first appeared in a 1980 issue of the Gazette, but today is still relevant and provides valuable tips on primary source research. Luckily, in 2011 many of these collections can be searched online, and we also have Google!*

**Water Permits:** Water permits give the date when the water line was laid and/or the fixtures were installed and the water turned on in a particular building. Sometimes the floor plan and construction material are included. The water permit can be helpful too, in determining the number of rooms in a structure, as the number of fixtures often indicates the number of suites. The water permit is a starting point and can determine the approximate date of construction and perhaps the owner, architect, builder real estate company or neighbor. Look for names to reappear on other documents.  
Location: City Hall

**Building Permits:** Building Permits which were issued from 1905 on, provide accurate construction dates and other pertinent information: names of owners, architect/engineer, contractor/builder, description of house and cost of construction. Alterations--their date and cost will be listed on separate cards. Location: City Hall  
*2011 Update: Many more recent building permits can be searched online using KivaNet on the City of Kansas City, MO website.*

**Property Abstract/Plat Searching:** These can be helpful if no building permit exists for a property. Plat abstract books trace the ownership of a building from the date of construction to the present time. This information can be obtained from deeds or maps at county offices. Using the date or approximate date of construction, go back to the earliest

record of a house on your property and work toward the present. Check with previous owners for the abstract title with complete ownership record. Location and steps in this process: 1) Assessors Office: City Hall, give address and acquire legal description 2) Recorder of Deeds: Jackson County Courthouse. Give legal description--trace deed to the house yourself or have a title company do it for you. Deeds date back to 1800s 3) Local banks may hold abstracts.  
*2011 Update: The Jackson County Historical Society also has an extensive collection of title abstracts.*

**Trade Magazine:** The Midwest Contractor is a builder’s trade magazine. It lists construction dates, owners, architects, etc. for some properties. Often, drawings and photographs are included. This bi-weekly publication lists contract awards, bid notices, etc. This



publication dates from the turn of the century. Location: Kansas City Downtown Library, Missouri Valley Special Collections

**Maps:**

- A) Sanborn Maps (also called Sanborn-Perris Maps): These insurance maps can be helpful in determining the approximate date of construction for a specific property. They show what existed on the street at a certain time and can give you a building's age within 10 years. The original shape of the building is illustrated and color coding shows the original building material. It is possible to trace the development of an entire neighborhood. Location: Kansas City Downtown Library, Missouri Valley Special Collections.
- B) Birds Eye View Maps: These maps offer a panoramic rendering of a city. Individual homes, businesses, important public buildings, etc. are included. They can be helpful in locating and dating structures, but beware of artistic license! Location: Kansas City Downtown Library, Missouri Valley Special Collections.  
*2011 Update: Sanborns and other maps can be searched on viewed online through the MO Valley Special Collections website*

**Directories:**

- A) City Directories (forerunner of telephone directories) list people at their home addresses. Information such as a person's occupation and spouse's name are often included. Later, city directories were organized according to street address. Check all names gathered in research to find owner, resident, architect, builder, developer, etc. Don't hesitate to look up names on the water or building permit. Location: Kansas City Downtown Library, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

- B) Kansas City Blue Book and Kansas City Social Register: These books provide listings of prominent Kansas City families and their addresses. They are useful for reconfirming names, dates and addresses and they provide socio-economic information. Location: Kansas City Downtown Library, Missouri Valley Special Collections

**Lithographs and Prints:**

- A) Paintings, watercolors, prints, postcards, and sketches offer clues to the interior and exterior appearance of the building. Furnishings, fixtures and decorative details are often illustrated. Garden and landscaping features are sometimes included. Again, beware the artist!
- B) Architectural renderings offer the most detailed, accurate and reliable account of a structure. Shape, size, use of rooms and essentials about construction are shown. Double check to make sure these are working drawings and alterations are marked.

*2011 Update: Lithographs, prints and postcards can be searched and viewed online through the MO Valley Special Collections website. The Western Historical Manuscript Collection on the UMKC campus has an impressive collection of architectural plans.*

**Photographs:** Old photographs of your home, its residents and your neighborhood are helpful in research. Accurate accounts of interior and exterior spaces are depicted. Photographs of streetscapes give an impression of an entire neighborhood. And, photos give hidden clues: What is in the background? Homes? Outbuildings? Activity? What is written on signs? Old photos can be found at local historical societies, libraries and universities. Previous owners, neighbors or relatives may have old snapshots. If all efforts are fruitless, look for examples of similar homes

from similar time periods. Location: Kansas City Downtown Library, Missouri Valley Special Collections. *2011 Update: Photographs can be searched and viewed online through the MO Valley Special Collections website. The Landmarks Commission also has a collection of 1940s tax assessor photographs.*

**Biographical Data:** Once the names of the owner, resident, architect, etc. have been secured, further biographical information may be needed.

- A) Manuscripts--letters, diaries, or personal financial accounts may include descriptions of a house and its furnishings. Memorabilia may even yield useful information!
- B) Periodicals, newspapers, books, etc. are excellent resources. Location: Kansas City Downtown Library, Missouri Valley Special Collections

**Oral Evidence:** Information from longtime neighbors or friends. Take written checklists along to guide the interview. Double-check everything! Past owners or relatives associated with the house may be tracked down through local telephone directories. Give these people a call or send them a questionnaire for information.

**Other Ideas for Further Research:** Wills and estate records indicate which family member owned a particular lot, house or personal property. Personal inventories provide a complete list of home furnishings and enable the researcher to reconstruct the lifestyle of the property owner and his family. Architectural journals, builder's catalogues and popular magazines illustrate popular architectural and furnishing styles, construction materials and colors for interior and exterior. Old company sample books of paints, varnishes, and wallpapers also show styles that were in vogue during a particular period.

**HKCF BOARD OF DIRECTORS:**

- President: Scott Lane
- Vice-President: Jake Wagner, Ph.D.
- Treasurer: Michael Jantsch
- Secretary: Pete B. Browne

- Greg Allen
- Sylvia R. Augustus
- Brian Ball, AIA
- Jan Bentley
- Walter Guth, Ph.D.

- Mike Koon
- Nancy Powell
- Lucinda Rice-Petrie
- Katheryn Shields

## HKCF Uses Historic Resources Survey to Guide Preservation Efforts in the Green Impact Zone



Historic Integrity by Block, Graphic by UMKC Dept. of Urban Planning and Design.

The Historic Kansas City Foundation partnered with the UMKC Department of Urban Planning + Design, the Mid America Regional Council and the Green Impact Zone to fund and complete a comprehensive historic resources survey of the Green Impact Zone. The report was completed in 2010 and some of the survey information is available on the Green Impact Zone website.

HKCF is also using this report to inform and promote preservation in the Green Impact Zone. A weatherization guide to historic houses is nearing completion, and the survey results have been used to determine which houses on the city's dangerous buildings list should be deconstructed, and those that should be mothballed for rehabilitation. The weatherization guide will be made widely available and was funded by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The Historic Kansas City Foundation plans to continue to use this valuable information in future Green Zone efforts, and looks forward to a continued partnership with the various parties involved.

*Written by Amanda Crawley, HKCF Executive Director*

## UMKC Honors Nationally Known Professor and Architect; Fund Established in His Honor

Theodore Seligson, FAIA emeritus and visiting professor in the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) College of Arts and Sciences' Department of Architecture, Urban Planning + Design (AUP+D), is nationally known for his achievements in architecture, urban design and higher education in Kansas City. To honor Seligson's contributions to architecture and design, the faculty and advisory board of AUP+D and Seligson's friends recently established the Seligson Fund for AUP+D.

The fund will provide financial backing for lectures, special events and other projects that support and advance the AUP+D program. Through the endowment, AUP+D faculty hope to support a continuing dialogue on design and the built environment, which will be informative and of interest to the public and will enrich Kansas City for generations to come.

Seligson received his professional degree in Architecture and has taught at Washington University in St. Louis. He has received more than 25 national, regional and local awards for his projects.

For more than 40 years, Seligson served as principal at his Kansas City, Mo.-based architectural firm, which is known as one of the most innovative design practices in the Midwest. Before establishing his firm, he was head of design at Kivett & Myers – a well-known architecture firm recognized for many important projects in Kansas City, Mo. Kivett & Myers also was the architect for Katz Hall, which now houses AUP+D at 5005 Rockhill Rd.

Instrumental and a leader in the U.S. preservation movement, Seligson has served as president (1989), board member (1978-1994) and vice president (1988) of of the Native Sons and Daughters of Kansas City. He also served as a board member of the Historic Kansas City Foundation and Friends of Sacred Structures. He participated in the establishment of the Landmark Commission of Kansas City, Mo., and was instrumental in the designation of the first seven buildings in Kansas City, Mo. that were listed on the National Register of Historic Places. He served as president of the Missouri Valley Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians (1973-1975). He also is mentioned in the Congressional Record for his influence to save and restore the West Front of the United States Capitol.

If you wish to contribute to the Seligson Fund, contact Karen English at (816) 235-1139 or englishk@umkc.edu.

*Written by Laura Byerly, UMKC Public Relations*



Theodore Seligson in UMKC's Katz Hall.  
Photo by Kristen Hellstrom, UMKC Public Relations

## Upcoming Events

**"You are Here" HKCF and Commerce Bank Cocktail Reception:** See photographs of historic downtown KC

**Time and Location:** 10/7/11, 5-7:30pm, Box Gallery, 1000 Walnut, Suite 211. Free

**Haunted Historical Tour:** *St. Mary's Episcopal Church*

**Time and Location:** 10/16/11, 2pm, 1307 Holmes. Free

**Cemetery Tour:** *Elmwood Cemetery*

**Time and Location:** 10/30/11, 2pm, 12th and Van Brunt Blvd. Free

**Holiday Overnight Tour, Northwest**

**MO:** *Tour a restored 1857 farmhouse, overnight at Conception Abby, antebellum homes and holiday shopping in Weston*

**Time and Location:** 12/10-11/11, Call now to reserve your tickets. \$150 members, \$175 non-members. Transportation, lodging, and some meals included.

## Join HKCF or Make a Contribution!

Advocate: (student)	\$15
Friend:	\$40
Contributor:	\$100
Donor:	\$250
Benefactor:	\$500
Partner in Preservation:	\$1000

Please make you check payable to Historic Kansas City Foundation. Also include your name, address, phone number and email.

Mail to: 234 W 10th Street  
Kansas City, MO  
64105

Included in your membership is a subscription to the Gazette, invitations to special events, and discounts on publications, tours, and lectures. Your membership is tax deductible. (Discounts are not tax deductible.)

## Volunteer Opportunities

**HKCF Office Support:** Slide scanning, mailers, research, other tasks

**HKCF Events:** Tours, fundraisers, awards

**HKCF Outreach:** Give tours or join our Speaker's Bureau

**Phone:** (816) 931-8448

**Email:** [hkcf@historickansascity.org](mailto:hkcf@historickansascity.org)

## We've Moved! Contact Us At:

**Mailing:** 234 West 10th Street  
Kansas City, MO  
64105

**Phone:** (816) 931-8448

**Email:** [hkcf@historickansascity.org](mailto:hkcf@historickansascity.org)

**Web:** [www.historickansascity.org](http://www.historickansascity.org)

**Facebook:** *Historic Kansas City Foundation*

