

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

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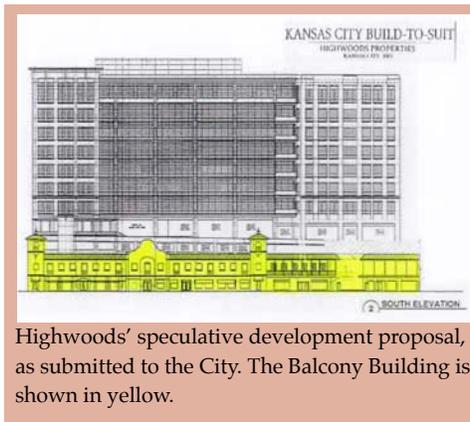
Plaza at Risk

Bad Politics Ignore Plaza Plan and Threaten Iconic Shopping District

Greg Allen
HKCF Board Member

We are now many months into a controversy, one with more lives than a cat, wherein Kansas City's leading claim to good urban design and its most iconic and revered local attraction is under threat. In August 2010, Highwoods Properties, owner of the Country Club Plaza, proposed a high rise office tower in the heart of the Plaza at 47th and Broadway. This was originally to be the new digs for the offices of lawyers Polsinelli Shughart PC.

Polsinelli has formally withdrawn from the plan, and now it may house (if built) a



Highwoods' speculative development proposal, as submitted to the City. The Balcony Building is shown in yellow.

party yet to be identified--some kind of developer's future draft pick. Even in the pretty pictures that architects trot out to slake the image and content thirst of the media, the Highwoods building is an out of scale and unsympathetic wall towering over the low-scale early structures of an inspired community development innovation. The development plan also conflicts

with long-standing city policy and will inflict highly adverse impacts. All this for the short term benefit of the developer that currently owns the Plaza.

Highwoods, an out-of-state real estate investment trust principally known for office development, has publicly said that they regard the Plaza as a great "in-fill" opportunity. Even worse, they seem joined at the wrists and ankles with those frequent facilitators and enablers for large development interests--our city politicians.

Yet, the Plaza Plan long ago ordained that this location should remain residential and should not be rezoned for more intensive uses. The Plaza Plan was unanimously adopted by the City Council in 1989, and unanimously confirmed in the mid 1990s when the FOCUS City Plan was approved. The J.C. Nichols Company, city staff and the public participated in a lengthy process producing a plan to guide future

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development on the Plaza and identify sites appropriate for redevelopment (the site in question was explicitly not recommended for rezoning). Highwoods was well aware of the restrictions on this property when they acquired the Plaza in 1997--eight years after the Plaza Plan was adopted.

What is it about Highwoods that elicits such misty-eyed sympathy from our City Council and politicians? Well, we all understand that the developers around town and their lawyers know how to throw about the campaign cash. But what can possibly warrant ruining a legacy and asset so important to our local economy and so prominent in Kansas Citians' civic sense of place?

Time and again, it seems, we have to replay this kabuki of developer trying to undo the principles and provisions of the Plaza Plan. Politicians pander, public erupts, and better outcomes somehow are attained. I hope that we will be so fortunate this time, because the incursion is at the very heart of all that is celebrated about the Plaza. Even if you could swallow the aesthetic sense of what is proposed, no one--least of all City government--has told us how the Plaza will fare with hundreds of parking places now consigned to office occupants and not available to shoppers and visitors. Nor has anyone at City Hall shown how the narrow streets north of 47th Street can handle all the traffic that an office tower will generate. The Plaza Plan called for higher density development at the edges of the area for a reason--redevelopment

opportunities remain available without doing violence to that which brings us to the Plaza in the first place.

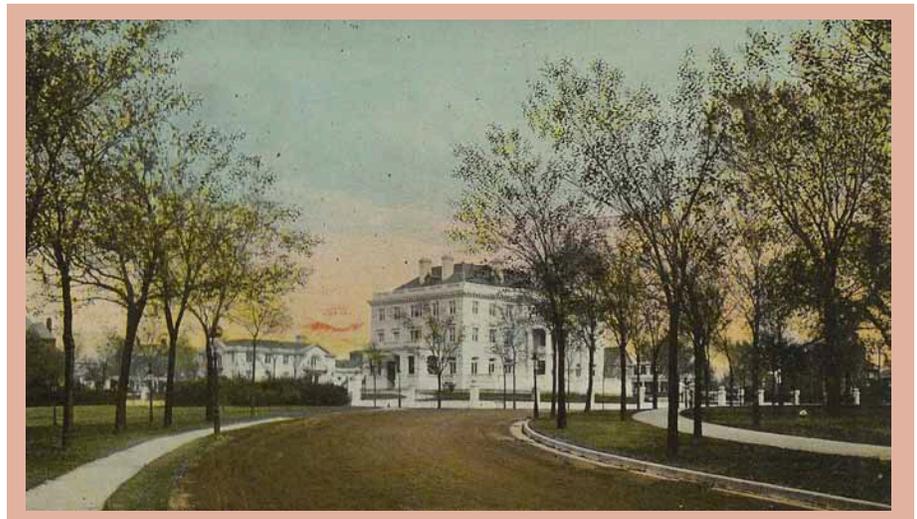
As evidenced in the formulation of the Plaza Plan, retail use is more compatible with residential than office use. Less parking and traffic conflicts are created, and residents have more comprehensive retail needs than the typical office worker's convenience purchases over lunch hour. It's no surprise that Downtown interests in Kansas City have been out of breath to encourage residential population growth. After all, decades of office presence Downtown failed to save, and later failed to resurrect, retail and other development.

It is a season of resistance to government incursions in our lives; there is a long-standing pendulum swing in American life back and forth that way. But, it must be remembered that consistent, long-range planning is a necessity and essential to the healthy preservation of our communities. Good planning produced assets like Kansas City's parks and boulevards, neighborhoods with character, historic shopping and entertainment centers like Waldo, Brookside and, most prominently, the Plaza. There are burdens in such planning systems, but there are benefits, and for each investor burdened there is an investor seeking benefit who has committed capital and other resources relying on a set of rules to promote and protect our built environment.

We must be good stewards of our significant scenic and historic assets. Once gone, they cannot be replaced, and their larger value often suffers where short-term rewards dominate in the current economic climate. J.C. Nichols' vision that produced, and has long sustained, the Country Club Plaza was not one obsessed with short-term rewards. The result is a place central to the pride we feel about our city, venerated in our minds and hearts, because the Plaza is exceptional.

Kansas City is indeed "open for business", and we don't have to junk our longstanding planning standards and area plans to prove that. To do so is self-defeating in the long run. There are many, better options for accommodating office facilities near the Plaza than trashing the Plaza Plan. That our last and our new City Councils have done the developer's bidding allegedly to prove that we are "open for business" is a red herring if there ever was one, and a tribute to the ease with which developer interests too often put our representatives at odds with the larger interests of the community. Fortunately, the voters will address this sad spectacle, but it is piteous that it is necessary. Once we have dealt with this latest altercation with Highwoods, we need to enact by popular vote even stronger measures to Save Our Plaza. It seems that politicians--again--won't be up to it, even though the popular will is evident.

Can you identify the landmark on this historic Kansas City postcard? Email hkcf@historickansascity.org with the correct answer to enter a special drawing.



MESSAGE FROM THE NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Amanda Crawley

I am very pleased and excited to be working for the Historic Kansas City Foundation and to be a leader in the preservation of our city's heritage and historic built environment. As the only nonprofit preservation organization in the City, HKCF will continue to be a major player in preservation, and continue to push to affect policy implementation and change.

However, in many ways the Historic Kansas City Foundation finds itself in a time of readjustment. The organization recently moved from a location in Westport to a downtown storefront office at the intersection of 10th and Central, and has new leadership in both in the staff and Board of Directors. Going forward, there will be a particular focus on strengthening our existing programs and outreach efforts, while developing some new programs and partnerships that will further the organization's mission.

Some specific goals are to increase membership among younger Kansas Citians; students, young professionals, and others who are the future of our city. Also, we've developed an updated look and special features for the Gazette, and are working towards a redesigned webpage with new and exciting functions.

Ultimately, this is all to support our mission of preserving greater Kansas City's heritage, neighborhoods, and historic built environment. As the landscape and future of preservation continues to shift and evolve, HKCF will be a consistent and active player—one that is not just concerned with preservation in its current practice, but always thinking critically about preservation and its place in the future. Certain topics that have our special attention are modern architecture and design of the recent past, sustainability and green design, and the preservation of everyday places important to social history and community identity.

Although rarely articulated, preservation is first and foremost about the public good, and therefore should be about the places that matter to you!

This organization has a bright future, and with that comes opportunity and change. I look forward to your continued support as we work together to advance the Historic Kansas City Foundation into a new era of success.

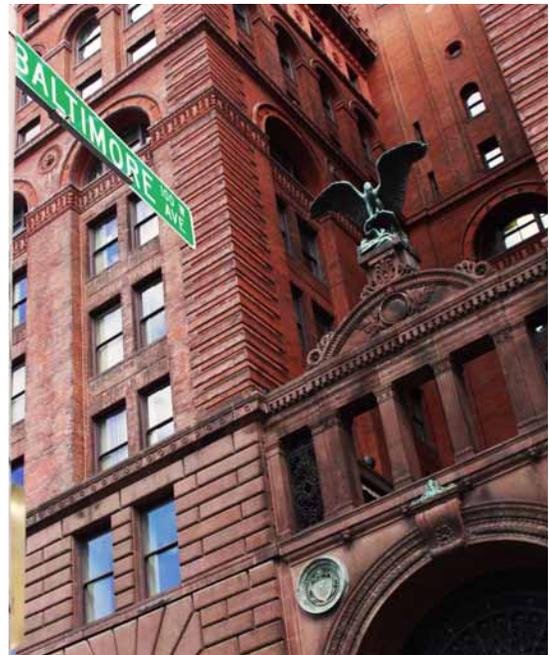
Amanda Crawley is a native of Kansas City and has her Masters in Historic Preservation from Columbia University. She has four years of professional experience in historic rehabilitation projects, historic resources surveys, advocacy and preservation planning.

Historic Kansas City Foundation's Endangered Buildings Saved

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the Historic Kansas City Foundation published its annual list of the most endangered area buildings. Here are some historic saves from these lists:

New York Life Building, 20 West 9th

Designed in 1885 by Frederick Elmer Hill and built between 1888 and 1890, Kansas City's first high rise building featured the first elevator in the area. Built in the Italianate Renaissance Revival style with an H-shaped footprint, the brick and brownstone ten story building had a center tower of twelve stories with a monumental eagle tending eaglets in a nest perched above the main entry. Its location on Quality Hill led the movement of the city south from its founding on the River and dramatically changed the Kansas City skyline. It was one of six buildings erected by the New York Life Insurance Company across the United States, and one of several important Kansas City landmarks designed by Frederick Elmer Hill. Others include the Nave of Grace Church (now Grace and Holy Trinity Episcopal Cathedral at 13th and Broadway), both of the Convention Halls built in 1899 and 1900, Westport City Hall, and Oak Hall (the private residence of William Rockhill Nelson). The Convention Halls,



The New York Life Building. Photo by Amanda McGee

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Westport City Hall, and Oak Hall no longer exist.

The building was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1970 but was abandoned in 1988. In 1996 a \$35 million restoration of the building added state of the art energy, communications, and environmental features. In 2010, the Catholic Diocese of Kansas City-Saint Joseph purchased the building for \$11.7 million and renamed it Catholic Center. The building houses its administrative offices, Catholic Charities, and is the residence of his Excellency Bishop Finn.

Muehlebach Hotel, 11th and Baltimore

George E. Muehlebach, builder of Muehlebach Field and son of the Muehlebach beer scion, built the hotel that opened in 1916. Every President from Theodore Roosevelt to Ronald Reagan visited this prestigious hotel, and it was considered the “Kansas City White House” when Harry S. Truman conducted business in the Presidential Suite in the hotel’s penthouse. A noted landmark, the Muehlebach hosted such celebrity guests as Babe Ruth, the Beatles, and Elvis Presley, and is also the legendary home of the “Blue Lady”, a thirty-something blonde ghost wearing a blue dress and wide-brimmed hat. Presumably, the ghost is the embodiment of an actress who once performed at the old Gayety Theatre and even today seeks her long lost lover.

The hotel closed in the 1980s and was placed on the endangered buildings list. In 1996 it was purchased by Marriott Hotels and, after some changes and a beautiful restoration of the original 12th and Baltimore lobby, reopened in 1998. With nearly 94,000 square feet of flexible meeting space, the hotel today proudly serves the dining, entertainment, concert, and sporting attractions of the Sprint Center and the Power and Light District.

Firestone Building, 2001

Grand
Built in 1915 as the largest single investment of the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, the Firestone Building was nominated to the National Register in 1986 because of its early use of reinforced concrete construction and its significance in the area of transportation. Locating the building near the new Union Station, Harvey Firestone said in 1915, “Kansas City is going to be a great city. It has the location, the spirit, the enterprise, the transportation facilities and the great warehouse of resources on which to feed and grow. Even better than that, it is the ardent desire all over the Kansas City territory for good roads. Good roads are an economic as well as a social necessity” (as cited in the National Register Nomination). His belief encouraged the use of trucks for transportation of food,



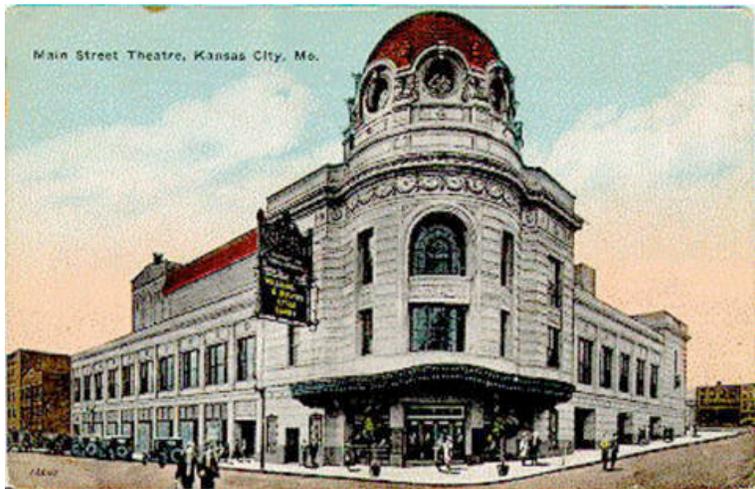
Firestone Building, 1989. Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri

machinery, and other goods and led to the “Good Roads” movement in 1918.

A private owner has stabilized the building. Plans today are to renovate the historic building into 90 condo units within walking distance of the Freight House District, Crown Center, and Union Station.

Empire Theater, 14th and Main

Designed by Rapp & Rapp in the Beaux Arts style, the 3,200 seat theater opened in 1921 as the Mainstreet Missouri. Immediately a popular vaudeville and movie house—the largest in Kansas City at the time—the theater featured an interior in the French Baroque style, a nursery for children, a tunnel to the nearby President Hotel, and spaces in the basement and sub-basement for animals (including elephants and seals) used in the vaudeville shows.



Postcard of the Empire Theater, c. 1921. Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri

In 1941 the name was changed to the RKO Missouri Theater. Purchased by AMC Theaters in the late 1950s, the theater was updated with more modern amenities and technology upgrades, and the seating capacity was decreased to 1,260. In 1967 it was split into two parts and, in 1980, was split into four theaters. The Empire closed in 1985 and was sold a year later.

Between 1985 and 2005 the Empire was at risk for demolition. Even actor and comedian George Burns joined the efforts to save the building by writing a letter urging that it be declared a historic landmark. In 2004 the Kansas City Chapter of the American Institute of Architects listed it as the most endangered building of the top 25 buildings worth saving in the Central Business District. Fortunately, the City reached an agreement to purchase the theater that year as part of the future Power and Light District. Restored on the exterior, the renewed building reopened as the AMC Mainstreet Theater on May 1, 2009 with six theater auditoriums on two floors and a lobby-area restaurant.

Blossom House, 1032 Pennsylvania

Designed by Henry Van Brunt and built in 1888, the Blossom House was once the crowning gem of the Quality Hill District,

named to the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. By the year 2002, however, the mansion and its 1926 neighbor were uninhabitable. A local benefactor bought the buildings and saved them through a creative renovation that bridged the two buildings with walls of windows. Today the Blossom House and Girls Club is a mini-campus of not-for-profit offices where numerous institutions share functions and amenities.

Hotel President, 1329 Baltimore

Built in 1926 during a downtown construction boom, the Hotel President featured 453 rooms and rose early to prominence in Kansas City. In 1928 it served as the headquarters for the Republican National Convention. The Drum Room, known for its drum-shaped bar area, opened within the hotel in 1941 and in 1955 launched the career of Marilyn Maye. Over the years it featured many notable entertainers from across the country, including Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis, Jr., the Marx Brothers, the Great Houdini, Patsy Kline, Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey, and Benny Goodman. Other noted meeting places within the hotel were the Walnut Room, the Aztec Room, and the top floor Congress Ballroom, with floor-to-ceiling windows providing breathtaking views of Kansas City.

The hotel closed in 1980. In 1983 it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places as a first effort towards preservation and renovation. In May 2002 plans were announced to renovate the building into a 225 unit apartment building, but this quickly fell through. By 2003 plans were underway for a \$45 million renovation of the President Hotel into a 214 room "boutique hotel" as part of the "Kansas City Live" development by the Cordish Company of Baltimore. The

renovated **Hilton President Kansas City** officially opened on January 5, 2006 adjacent to the (now named) Power and Light District. The lobby and 12th floor Congress Ballroom were both restored to their 1941 appearance.

The Poindexter Drygoods Building, 801 Grand

The seven story timber-masonry Poindexter Drygoods Building was built in 1901, and its neighbor, the seven-story cast-in-place reinforced concrete Gatlin Building was built in 1910. Both were in poor shape by the 1990s when they were combined and renovated, at a cost of \$12 million, into a modern office complex that is now the home of DST Realty, Inc. The project, completed in 1997 and comprising a full city block, helped to stabilize the historic Wholesale (or Garment) District that had been named to the National Register in 1979. The District, roughly between 6th and 11th Streets, Washington to Wyandotte Streets, is 204 acres with 61 buildings, some of which date back to the 1870s.

Today the Poindexter Office Building is host to the **Kansas City Garment District Museum** at 801 Grand, celebrating what was the second largest industry (by number of employees) in Kansas City by the 1940s. The manufacturing of coats, suits, dresses, hats, and children's wear started on the upper floors of the wholesale dry goods buildings in the 1920s, and at its height the industry employed over 4,000 workers. At that time, one out of every seven women in the United States had purchased a garment made in Kansas City.

Written by Peggy Bashkiroff and Walter Guth, Ph.D., HKCF Board Member

Sally Fullerton Schwenk Receives State's Highest Award

Sally Fullerton Schwenk was presented the Rozier Award on March 2nd, 2011 at Missouri Preservation's annual statewide awards. This award is Missouri Preservation's highest honor, awarded for lifetime achievements in Historic Preservation.

Sally grew up in Independence, Missouri just blocks from downtown, witnessing the evolution of preservation issues firsthand that have affected our communities. Over the past three decades, Sally has worn innumerable preservation hats. From her first preservation position as the Director of the 1859 Jail Museum in Independence, to her current role as a preservation consultant, she has been a tireless advocate for the resources that define our shared heritage.

She was instrumental in efforts to pass the historic tax credit legislation in 1998, and testified dozens of times in support of the then shuttered President Hotel. Kansas City's FOCUS Preservation Plan owes much of its depth and value to her voice and her vision.

Sally has added numerous buildings, including the state's largest district of approximately 7,000 buildings in St. Louis, to the National Register of Historic Places, and guided dozens of property owners through the historic tax credit process. The National Park Service heralds her nomination for the Crestwood Historic District and the Multiple Property Documentation Form for Kansas City's colonnade apartments and for working class apartment buildings.

She believes that preservation is never a single effort, but takes an interdisciplinary team of dedicated and talented professionals and volunteers. Sally's love of history and her talent as a poised and passionate public speaker have made her a forceful advocate for preservation.

*Written by Lucinda Rice-Petrie
HKCF Board Member*



Sally Fullerton Schwenk

Upcoming Events

Plaza Library Series on Antebellum

Homes: *The Harris-Kearney Home of 1855 at 4000 Baltimore*

Time and Location: 7/24/11, 2pm,
Plaza Library at 4801 Main, Truman
Forum Room

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

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

The Legacy of Hare and Hare: Library exhibit celebrating the 100-year legacy of Hare and Hare

Time and Location: 3/31/11 -
3/31/12, Plaza Library at 4801 Main

HKCF will also be planning the annual Preservation Awards for the Fall. Please check our website for additional details!

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

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We've Moved!

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