



# MANHATTAN/RILEY COUNTY PRESERVATION ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

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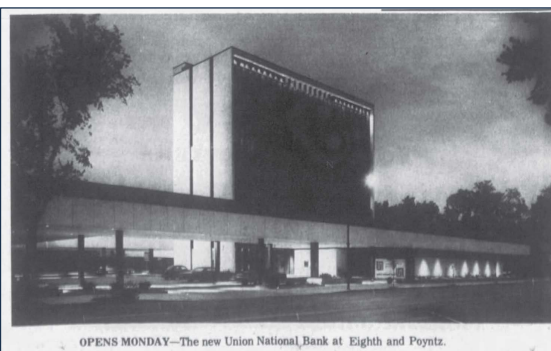
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## Faith and Confidence in the Future: The Union National Bank and Trust Tower

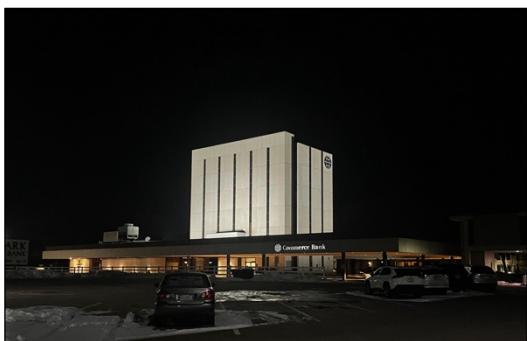
Written by Michael Grogan

Standing as a visual endcap to, and at night an illuminated beacon for, the downtown district along Poyntz Avenue, the six-story Commerce Bank building seems to have anticipated a robust downtown expansion westward that never quite materialized. This sophisticated essay on modern architecture and dynamic urban form emerged in 1970 to become the centerpiece of an urban stretch that houses a number of distinguished examples of Manhattan's postwar architectural heritage, from the 1971 Manhattan Public Library westward to the recently renovated Dawson's Conoco Service Station (now Parkside Station restaurant) dating from 1966 (see Fein and Grogan).

Accordingly, the building at 727 Poyntz Avenue stands as arguably Manhattan's most ambitious architectural expression of optimism and growth as the 1960s came to a close.



OPENS MONDAY—The new Union National Bank at Eighth and Poyntz.



Left, evening view of the Commerce Bank (formerly Union National Bank and Trust) from Houston Street.

Above, the Commerce Bank building from Poyntz Ave. shortly before opening, from a [Manhattan Mercury](#) article, and right, more recently. Photos courtesy of the [Mercury](#) and Bob Greenspan.



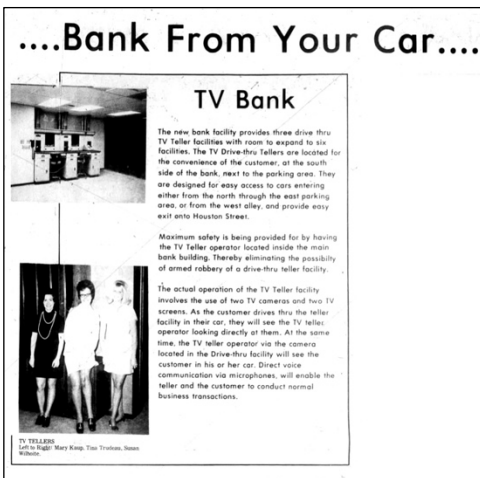
Originally the Union National Bank and Trust, this building, was designed by the Denver architecture firm of Marvin E. Knedler. Knedler designed numerous banks and other building types in Colorado and, during the same time period, was commissioned to design the Kansas State Bank in the West Loop Shopping Center. Union National had for over 80 years occupied the two-story stone building at the southwest corner of Poyntz Avenue and Fourth Street before relocating westward four blocks to its new headquarters. The new structure was built, according to the bank's then-Chairman of the Board T. J. Griffith, "as a declaration of faith and confidence in the future" ("Welcome"). The city, as Griffith added, appeared to be "facing its greatest period of growth and development," according to every study's "scientific prediction" at the time.

The bank's 1970 relocation to the western edge of downtown may be seen in historical parallel to its former location. The original building's site housed a predecessor bank nicknamed "the little bank out in the country," reflecting the building's position then (dating back to at least 1885) as a block or more west from the downtown core ("Union National" and Lowell). Over the ensuing decades, the Union National Bank's staff grew to over 60 employees, reflecting an expanding scope of services and necessitating a move to larger accommodations. Securing a site a few blocks west was logical in maintaining a downtown presence while also acquiring a larger site to accommodate the base. *(continued on p. 2)*

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The building also needed to house the various services increasingly expected by customers and required of newer banking facilities: covered parking; secure night deposit box access; sit-down banking; specialized departments handling trusts, real estate and commercial loans, and customer service; a “Proof and Transit Department” for processing transactions; and, finally, a computer department. As for the latter, according to Griffith in a Manhattan Mercury interview, Union National offered “one of the most up to date computer systems in the entire region” (“Union National”). In 1969 the bank could boast that it was the only such facility in the world possessing a computerized, “Central Information File” system for data processing. This drew into Manhattan visiting bankers, “from all four corners of the United States,” and Japan.

which it could engage a wider community. Included was a community meeting space, a lounge served by vending machines, and a lobby exhibition area. From the south, the exhibit space could be accessed through doors large enough to enable automobiles and even boats. The space was generally used for art exhibitions such as a venue for the Manhattan Arts Council and American Watercolor Society (“Water”). Generally, the ground floor consists of a large, wood-paneled banking hall bounded on three sides by perimeter offices and, at the corners, meeting or communal spaces with large expanses of glazing to better engage the exterior. The banking hall’s simple white ceiling is defined by a spaced grid of large, square light fixtures. Four columns supporting the tower above further define the hall and are shaped in a cruciform profile composed of alternating wood panels and mirrors.



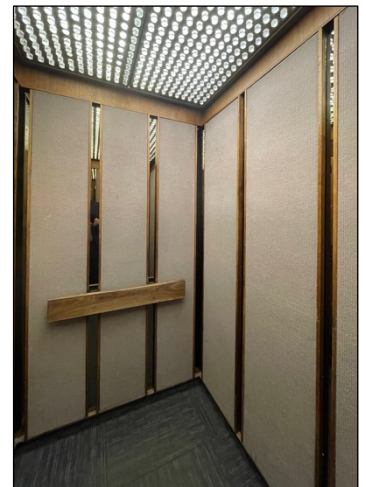
Left, Union National Bank and Trust’s “TV Bank.” Used by customers when visiting drive-through lanes, a teller inside the building would be visible from a TV screen. Image courtesy of The Manhattan Mercury. Below, the detached structure’s roof was designed to cover up to six drive-through lanes.



Of course, drive-through teller lanes had increasingly shaped bank designs and here Union National incorporated a “TV Bank.” This, with three drive-through lanes (and a roof structure designed to cover up to six), was located in a detached structure at the southwest corner of the main parking lot. Customers could interact via TV screens from their cars with a teller housed in the main building, and thus, protected from the risk of drive-through armed robberies (see “Welcome”).

In addition to banking operations, the structure was conceived with a wider programmatic role through

Right, the elevators’ wall paneling detail (in carpet) evokes the concrete paneled exterior walls of the tower. The ceiling contains a dense array of backlit, transparent discs. Below, the banking hall is a large, wood-paneled space defined by four columns supporting the tower, here given cruciform profiles in wood and mirror glass. Offices and meeting rooms are arrayed along three sides of the hall’s perimeter.



The bank’s various programs, which also occupied a basement level, were coupled with the leasable office floors, totaling 16,032 sq. ft., that formed most of the tower portion, giving the structure a visual presence from blocks away (“Union”). The elevators servicing these floors still maintain their original design: the spectacular ceiling panels hold a dense array of backlit, transparent discs and the elevator walls are cleverly detailed with wood trimmed carpeted panels separated by recessed and mirrored vertical slots, echoing the (continued on p. 3)

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details found on three of the tower's exterior walls. Capping the tower, a residential penthouse floor was long occupied by Griffith and, into the 1990s, by his widow and is now part of the Sink Gordon Accountants & Advisors LLP offices, the primary tenant in recent years. Much of the penthouse interior detail remains intact, including the kitchen with avocado green double ovens, green-stained wood cabinets, and decorative maroon wallpaper and valance curtains. A centered, recessed balcony runs about one-third the length of the south elevation. The exterior vertical fin elements run uninterrupted, somewhat concealing the terrace from street views.



The former top floor penthouse, now used for office space, maintains much of its original detail. Top two photos, the 1970 kitchen is mostly intact with green double ovens and dishwasher integrated into the green stained cabinetry. Lower left, the living area. Lower right, a shallow terrace is centered on and inset behind the south façade glazing system.

At 82 feet in height, the bank building has, from certain vantage points, a visual dialogue with the 1927 Wareham Building, also six stories tall. Whereas the Wareham, completed just before the Great Depression as a hotel, seems to have anticipated a future of taller

buildings downtown that failed to materialize, Knedler's tower design also seems to portend a more densely developed downtown expansion of taller structures to the west than what ultimately came to pass. Urbanistically, the formal nature of the building was intended to negotiate between the more densely-packed infill buildings of the older downtown and the new suburban typologies popping up at Manhattan's peripheries – many isolated "object" type buildings surrounded by surface parking lots and landscape.



Above, the tower gives the bank a presence for many blocks on Poyntz Ave. while the lower roof canopy structure grounds the building visually and relates to the pedestrian scale. Photo courtesy of Bob Greenspan.

To define the street and pedestrian realm of the sidewalk (as the older buildings downtown tended to do), yet also respond to the established dominance of automobile use, the building is generally composed of two parts. The setback tower enables the building to read as an object, a visual marker in the landscape (even if it were to eventually be joined by other tall buildings). The tower is visually grounded by a horizontal roof band that extends to the property lines, covering much of the main level and extending beyond as a dramatic canopy covering portions of the entrance walkway, driveway, and parking spaces. This horizontal band is clad in precast concrete panels with a vertically striated anodized bronze metal paneling above, which materially matches the supporting columns and glazing system mullions and vertical fins of the tower. The horizontal band also more or less aligns with the heights of the neighboring bank buildings designed by prolific Manhattan architect Floyd O. Wolfenbarger, which are themselves at the height of many buildings in the historic downtown (see "Manhattan's"). The detached "TV Bank" building is also topped by a similar roof and canopy element. (continued on p. 4)

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Left, the Lever House office building in New York City, here shown in a 1959 photograph by Julius Shulman, appears an obvious precedent for Knedler's two-part design on Poyntz Ave. Photograph © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004.R.10).

This two-part scheme clearly draws its architectural inspiration from the 1952 Lever House office building in New York City, designed by one of the preeminent architectural practices of the era, Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill (SOM). For the Lever House, a lower canopy element defines the perimeter of the Park Avenue and East 53<sup>rd</sup> Street site. This version houses an elevated occupiable floor, which bounds a courtyard and serves as a visual podium for a thin, twenty-two story tower clad completely in glass. As Knedler's design was smaller in scope and designed many years later, the building in the smaller Manhattan clearly takes inspiration from its New York predecessor but is distinct in many ways. Namely, the concrete paneling here is more informed by architectural trends of the mid-late 1960s, eschewing the mostly-glass solution that emerged with projects such as the Lever House and the widely influential work of German-American architect Mies van der Rohe. This approach frequently resulted in thermal and water infiltration problems as the early buildings necessarily utilized experimental and less developed systems than common today, often with single-pane glazing.

Right, the south, east, and west walls of the tower are clad in precast concrete panels with inset vertical slots of glazing. The lower roof and the canopy element also continue along the south face. Photo courtesy of Bob Green-span.



The tower on Poyntz Avenue, on the other hand, is developed with solar orientation in mind, resulting in the mostly opaque façades on the south, east, and west sides. These fields of panels are relieved by evenly-spaced, vertical slots of recessed glass and anodized bronze metal panels, and relate to many buildings of that era in the U. S. and abroad (including the National Bank of Denmark, designed by noted Swedish architect and designer Arne Jacobsen, which was completed in phases from 1965 to 1978). This work by Knedler thus successfully synthesizes characteristics of chronologically distant modernist precedents.



Above, the Commerce Bank and three other banking buildings designed by Floyd O. Wolfenbarger date from 1957 (the Manhattan Mutual Life Insurance Company, now Arthur Green, LLC, on the right) until 1974 (the Manhattan Federal Savings and Loan, now the Trust Company of Manhattan, on the left). Wolfenbarger's 1967 Landmark Bank building is barely visible beyond.

The now-Commerce Bank building is the centerpiece in a cluster of three modernist bank buildings designed by Wolfenbarger. These four modernist gems date back to the 1957 Manhattan Mutual Life Insurance Company (now Arthur Green, LLC, a former tenant of the bank tower) that resides across South Eighth Street from the Commerce Building (for more on these and modernist works downtown see "Manhattan Modernism." Union National became Commerce Bank after a merger in 1993, see "Notice" and "Stolzer"). The construction of these four buildings evolved in parallel with changing national and international architectural trends within the general modern movement.

The Commerce Bank is unique in style and scale and is one of Manhattan's more conspicuous and sophisticated works of modern architecture. It is an elegant, complex design that is simultaneously minimalist and expressive, urbane yet reflective of the post-war, automobile-dominated paradigm in the U. S. The building is unique in fusing formal characteristics of the 1950s with material choices typical of the late 1960s. It also stands as one of the later representatives of modernist architecture in the city, a movement which had (continued on p. 5)

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a valuable and lasting impact on Manhattan. After 1970 there was generally a slowing down of the previously bustling building campaigns throughout the U. S. and, paralleling that, architectural sensibilities began to change rapidly. After a period of generally unsympathetic opinion, a consciousness of and reverence for modernist architecture has resurfaced in recent decades, especially as these works have almost all cleared the 50-year age threshold that opens the possibility of historical listing. As the building has long been for sale and the tenant Sink Gordon is soon to decamp to a new office building, its future is unknown (see Note). It is hoped that a buyer with good architectural sensibilities and intentions will surface and protect this valuable contribution to Manhattan's city center.

Soon after completion, the building avoided an alleged bomb plot ("Authorities") and subsequently survived the vicissitudes of architectural tastes. Now that there is generally strong interest in and perceived value of modern architecture, it is hoped that the Commerce Bank building will continue to exist well into the future as one of the most important works of architecture in the city. This is an exemplary masterpiece by the architect who, along with Wolfenbarger and Patricia and William Eidson, greatly enriched the 20th century architectural heritage of Manhattan.

*Michael Grogan is an associate professor of architecture at Kansas State University. His current research focuses on post-World War II modernist architecture through the lens of preservation and building adaptation issues and histories. Grogan is a cofounder and the vice president of Plains Modern, a Kansas-focused modern architecture preservation advocacy and educational organization.*



Above, detail view of the east tower elevation.

*Correction statement:*

*The author apologizes for making an error in misattributing the bank building's design to Wolfenbarger and McCulley in the first version of this article. BBN Architects, Inc., subsequently shared the original drawings of Denver architect M. (Marvin) E. Knedler with the author, and as a result, the article has been corrected to reflect this. No architect was mentioned in any found sources for the building, and the author formerly relied on word-of-mouth attribution without adequate base sources. The author regrets this mistake and thanks the M/RCPA for its understanding and patience and for allowing for this correction. The author would also like to thank Aaron Dyke with BBN Architects for sharing the original documents.*

"Authorities Foil Extortion Plot Here on T. J. Griffith; One Man Charged." The Manhattan Mercury. 18 December 1970.

Fein, Christopher and Michael Grogan. "Manhattan Modernism: Postwar Development Downtown." Manhattan/Riley County Preservation Alliance Newsletter. October 2022. Vol 28: 5. 1-5.

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"Stolzer to Direct Commerce Bank." The Manhattan Mercury. 14 February 1993.

"Union National Heading West." The Manhattan Mercury. 16 October 1970.

"Water Works." The Manhattan Mercury. 13 November 1993.

"Welcome to the New Union National Bank and Trust." The Manhattan Mercury. 01 November 1970.

Note: The building was most recently listed for sale in 2021. Though currently not listed, the author was advised that interested buyers will be considered. Longtime tenant Sink Gordon – formerly Valkenburgh, Yonning and Sink, and then around 1970 renamed Sink and Gillmore – also leased space in the previous Union National Bank building at 401 Poyntz Avenue.

## The Legacies of the Masonic Temple and Lucinda Harris

Written by Kathy Dzewaltowski

For over a century, the impressive limestone building at 530 Poyntz Avenue with its imposing stone columns has occupied a prominent place on Poyntz Avenue and long been a part of Manhattan's history. Most recently known as the Harris Activity Center, the building has been used for church activities for the past 85 years and owned by iterations of the Methodist Church. Originally, the grand stone building was a Masonic Temple, constructed in 1921 for use by local Masonic organizations.

Masonic organizations were active in Manhattan going back to its earliest days; the Lafayette Lodge No. 16 organized in the fall of 1859 ("Masons to celebrate"). For several years, the Masons met in various locations until 1882 when they leased the third floor of the Manhattan Grange Building, 431 Poyntz Avenue, which became their regular meeting place for the next 40 years ("Dedicatory program"). Then, in 1914, representatives of the three local Masonic groups organized a committee to identify a site to erect a building. Committee members considered both residential and downtown locations before settling on lots at the northeast corner of Sixth Street and Poyntz Avenue, which were purchased from S. N. Higginbotham, though how soon a structure would be built was to be determined later ("They select site").

By the fall of 1919, the Masons had \$30,000 on hand to put toward a building and began preliminary design discussions. The possibility that lower floors could be leased as office or commercial space was considered ("Plan big temple"), but in the end, the decision was made to construct a building solely for Masonic organizations to use ("Votes for Masonic temple").

W. E. Glover from Topeka was hired as the architect to develop the

plans ("Architect is chosen"), C. R. Ward of Hunter's Island was awarded the excavation contract ("C. R. Ward gets contract"), and Clarence Johnson of Manhattan was selected as the construction contractor ("Masonic Temple"), and Johnson had also built the Riley County Courthouse. The building was to be made of stone, and the front façade would feature four large stone pillars. It would be two stories with a basement and include a banquet room, a library, a locker room, reception rooms, recreation rooms, a kitchen, and two lodge rooms, one of which would have a stage. Anticipated to cost \$125,000, the price tag was more than the combined costs of the Riley County Courthouse; the City Hall building, which was on Third Street at the time; the Carnegie Library; and the Community House ("Boom!"). A ground-breaking ceremony was held in Aug. 1920 with reportedly a large crowd in attendance ("Break ground for temple").

Construction moved forward, and the foundation was completed in Nov. 1920 before winter set in. Work continued when the weather warmed in the spring, and a ceremony was planned for placing the cornerstone. The cornerstone placement was a grand affair with local newspapers describing the event as a "red letter day" for Masons. Numerous speeches were made during the ceremony, which included special guests from Masonic organizations in neighboring communities as well as state-level Masonic dignitaries. Following the ceremony, a banquet was held, which was followed by a reception at the Community House ("Manhattan Masonry").

The cornerstone is located on the southwest corner of the building.



Above, an undated photo of the Masonic Temple. The photo is courtesy of the Riley County Historical Society and Museum.

Items placed in the cornerstone during the ceremony included a history of the Lafayette Lodge No. 16; a complete roster of the members of the Royal Arch Masons, Oriental Commandery No. 48, the Order of the Eastern Star, and the DeMolays; a program of the 1921 Past Masters' Night; Bylaws of the Order; a "Let's Get It Done" booster button; a chapter penny; a Blue Book; and copies of local newspapers ("Manhattan Masonry"). The Masonic symbols of the compass, square, and letter "G" are carved on the west face of the cornerstone, and the words "Temple of Masonry, erected 1921" are engraved on the south side.

Construction continued in 1921 in the months that followed. Reinforced concrete floors were poured, stonework was completed, windows and doors were installed, and light fixtures were purchased as the focus turned to finishing the interior when the weather turned colder. By March 1922, the building was sufficiently completed such that the Masons moved in and held their first meeting on March 17, 1922 ("Dedicatory program").

Though some of the interior finishes were still in progress, an elaborate dedication program was held on May 29, 1922. Following the program, the newly completed banquet room hosted 500 guests, and (*continued on p. 7*)

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numerous toasts were made to the fine Masonic building (“Masonic banquet”).

Masonic organizations enjoyed the building for the next decade until financial struggles led the Standard Life Association to file suit in district court to recover over \$32,000 and foreclose the mortgage on the Masonic building. The Masons had received a \$40,000 loan for the building and apparently had not been making payments for the previous six months (“Masonic lodge”). The foreclosure proceedings were sought in Oct. 1933, which was during the Great Depression when many Americans were struggling financially, and the Masons likely were, too.

The Standard Life Association won a judgment by default of more than \$40,000, which included interest, and foreclosure of the mortgage (“District court hears”). The Masons were permitted to continue to use the building during the redemption period, which ended in July 1935.

Guessing it would be unlikely the Masons would be able to redeem the property and there would eventually be a foreclosure sale, the city clerk suggested city commissioners should consider purchasing the building to function as the city hall. The Masons and other organizations might rent rooms, and the rental income coupled with a levy would cover the purchase price. At the time, City Hall and a fire station were located on North Third Street. The City Hall building was approximately 30 years old, and the clerk anticipated the building would need repairs in a few years (“Public hearing”). In the months that followed, the City Commission considered the possibility of acquiring the Masonic Temple but took no action. As it happens, a flood in 1935 forced the fire department from its Third Street location, and it temporarily moved to the Masonic Temple.



Top, the former Masonic Temple in Jan. 2024. Middle, the chapel. Bottom, a close-up of the stained-glass window that features the *Hartford*.

After the foreclosure redemption period ended, Masons continued to lease the building from the mortgage holder for their use. An editorial in a June 1938 local newspaper suggested the city should apply for funds from the Works Progress Administration to purchase the building, which was believed could be accomplished for a bargain, and then use additional funds to convert the building to a city hall, which was also estimated to be a modest expense. The Masonic Temple was de-

scribed as a well-constructed, beautiful building that the city would be proud of if it were to become the city hall.

A month later in July 1938 it was suddenly announced the First Methodist Episcopal Church (FMEC), which is now the First United Methodist Church, had purchased the Masonic Temple with the plan to use the building for Sunday school classes. The FMEC paid \$20,000 for the building with half the funds coming from a trust fund established by Lucinda Harris’ estate (“Sunday school improved”).

Lucinda Harris was born in 1850 in New York, and she was described as an “enthusiastic philanthropist” and a “tireless social worker.” When she was 25, she was the president of her local Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. She came to Manhattan in 1908 and was an active member of FMEC. She was also a member of the Grange, the Order of the Eastern Star, and the Rebekahs (“In memoriam”). She was a founding trustee of the Woman’s Club and was instrumental in paying off the debt of the club house at 900 Poyntz Avenue (“Miss Lucinda Harris dies”).

On July 2, 1920, Harris had traveled to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN, and doctors there determined whatever was ailing her wasn’t serious and allowed her to return to Manhattan. Less than two weeks later she was dead at age 70, dying on July 15, 1920, of a stroke and shocking all who knew her with her sudden death (“In memoriam”).

Harris’ will left a portion of her estate to FMEC, which amounted to \$25,000. Her will noted the funds for FMEC were for “its use and purpose of maintaining and furthering its work in home and foreign missions” (Harris). The church used the funds for various expenses, and as the years passed, others had contributed to the Harris fund. It contained \$18,500 at the time of the purchase of the Masonic Temple. Harris’ sister, (continued on p. 8)

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Florence Harris, wanted to see the trust funds used to improve the Sunday school facilities and secure a parsonage for the pastor. Florence's wishes motivated church leaders to consider acquiring the Masonic Temple, and a deal was struck with the mortgage holder ("Sunday school improved").

In the spring of 1939, FMEC held a dedication ceremony to rename the former Masonic Temple the "Lucinda Harris Memorial Temple of Christian Education." The ceremony was held on the building's front steps, and adjacent streets were blocked off to accommodate the large crowd in attendance. A plaque was added to the exterior that said, "Lucinda Harris Memorial Temple of Christian Education. Dedicated April 23, 1939. First M. E. Church" ("Will dedicate temple").

The church continued to use the building for its activities for the next several years, and then made updates, which were completed in 1982. The renovations were designed by Richard Hill and were intended to maintain the building's original character. Improvements included updates to the plumbing, electrical, air conditioning, plaster work, kitchen, auditorium and stage, classrooms, youth activity rooms, a bride's room, office space, and creating a new chapel and parlor. A lift to improve accessibility was also added to the north side. Memorial funds and contributions from members and friends funded the improvements ("Methodist Church").

The 1982 improvements included the addition of six stained-glass windows created by local resident Bob Lindsey. Four of the windows depicted the four feasts of the church, and the other two represented local history. One of the windows was of a circuit rider, commemorating the days when preachers traveled by horseback to serve a designated geographic area to minister to settlers and organize congregations. The other window, described as a favorite of church members, was of the

steamship *Hartford*, which brought a group of Methodists to Manhattan in 1855 ("Methodist Church").

The renovations were honored by the Kansas Preservation Alliance with an award of excellence in 1986 ("Awards presented").

Over the past two years, the First United Methodist Church (FUMC) congregation engaged in a planning process regarding its facilities, its ministries, and how best to meet the congregation's needs moving forward. According to information provided to congregation members, two options emerged for consideration: renovating and expanding the Harris Activity Center (HAC), as it's commonly known, or building a multipurpose addition and selling the HAC. It was estimated a project to renovate and expand the HAC would cost \$10.7-12.3 million, and a project for a multipurpose addition would cost \$6.6-7.2 million. Other factors about the HAC for the congregation's consideration included the costs of utilities and maintenance, the building's poor insulation, accessibility issues, and safety concerns caused by crossing Sixth Street to access the HAC from the main church building. The options were voted on by the congregation in the fall of 2023, and 83% of those who voted favored selling the HAC and building a new multipurpose addition.

*"The money from the sale will be the seed money for the new building to be built. This will continue the legacy of the Harris sisters and will continue to utilize their gifts for the missions and ministries of our church."*

*Rev. Donna K. Voteau*

Since then, a sale of some of the items from the HAC occurred in Jan. 2024, and the "Harris Activity Center" sign on the south side of the building was removed as was the exterior plaque. The stained-glass windows will be removed and re-

located.

Rev. Donna K. Voteau, Senior Pastor of FUMC, provided information about the plans. Voteau wrote in an email, "I am honored to serve in a long tradition of strong and forward-thinking women at First United Methodist church such as Lucinda and Florence Harris. The parsonage I reside in has a plaque recognizing Florence for her gifts to the church, along with her sister. We have kept all the plaques and will prominently display them in the new multipurpose building since it will be named the Harris multipurpose building. The money from the sale will be the seed money for the new building to be built. This will continue the legacy of the Harris sisters and will continue to utilize their gifts for the missions and ministries of our church."

The former Masonic Temple was surveyed as part of the historic survey conducted of Manhattan's Wards 1 and 2 in 2004, and a Preliminary Site Information Questionnaire (PSIQ) was submitted by an individual in 2022 to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). The PSIQ is a short form that provides the SHPO with information about a property, which helps the SHPO evaluate whether the property meets the requirements for historic register listing. Based on the PSIQ, the SHPO determined the building is potentially eligible for inclusion in the National Register for its architecture. If the property were successfully listed on the state or national registers, it would be eligible for rehabilitation tax credits and other benefits available to registered properties, which could help new owners with the costs of any renovations they might desire.

What lies ahead for the former Masonic Temple in the hands of a new owner is unknown, but the M/RCPA hopes the iconic building will continue to be a prominent fixture on Poyntz Avenue.

*To learn more about the former (continued on p. 9)*



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*Masonic Temple, see the M/RCPA's Aug. 2010 newsletter, which is available on our website at [www.preservemanhattan.org](http://www.preservemanhattan.org).*

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 "Awards presented." The Manhattan Mercury. 5 May 1985: A2.  
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 "C. R. Ward gets contract." The Manhattan Daily Nationalist. 17 August 1920: 1.

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 "Masonic lodge in foreclosure." The Morning Chronicle. 29 October 1933: 1.  
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 "Masonic banquet." The Manhattan Daily Nationalist. 30 May 1922: 1.

- "Masons to celebrate." The Manhattan Daily Nationalist. 22 October 1919: 1.  
 "Methodist Church completes renovation." The Manhattan Mercury. 23 April 1982: B6.  
 "Miss Lucinda Harris dies suddenly at home today." The Manhattan Mercury. 15 July 1920: 1.  
 "Plan big temple." The Manhattan Daily Nationalist. 25 November 1919: 1.  
 "Public hearing on the movies." The Manhattan Mercury. 3 January 1934: 1.  
 "Sunday school improved with purchase of temple." The Manhattan Mercury. 13 July 1938: 1.  
 "They select site." The Daily Nationalist. 17 January 1914: 1.  
 "Votes for Masonic temple." The Manhattan Daily Nationalist. 13 February 1920: 1.  
 "Will dedicate temple after Sunday worship." The Morning Chronicle. 21 April 1939: 1.

## 901 Poyntz Avenue: "Lincoln" Connects the Future with the Past

Written by Kathy Dzewaltowski

With the start of the 2023-24 school year, the school building at 901 Poyntz Avenue, most recently known as MHS East Campus, no longer educated ninth grade students, who had been housed in the building since 1996. The students were moved to the main high school campus following an extensive renovation and expansion project. With students no longer using the school, the Board of Education renamed the building the "Lincoln Education Center," which honors the 16<sup>th</sup> U. S. president and is also a nod to the building's history.

The oldest portions of the school were constructed in three sections, with the oldest section dating to 1913. In 1912, overcrowding caused the school board to decide to construct a new high school. Increased college entrance requirements were another factor, and in response, the school

district increased the high school from two years to four and planned to add courses, which added to the space crunch ("Six years work").

Possible sites for a new high school were discussed, and eventually the school board settled on acquiring the lots on the west end of the same block where the Avenue School was located at the southwest corner of Ninth Street and Poyntz Avenue ("West of Avenue Building"). Local architect Henry Winter was selected to design the high school in collaboration with architects Saylor and Seddon of Kansas City, MO. Winter with partner Meier had also designed Bluemont Elementary School (O'Brien, 100). The work on the senior high school was completed and the new building dedicated on Nov. 25, 1914 ("H. S. is dedicated").

Crowded conditions continued, and a new junior high school was built to help alleviate it. The junior high school, estimated to cost \$40,000, was constructed on the site of the Avenue School at Ninth and Poyntz, and the Avenue School was razed ("Building plan"). Arthur Fairman was hired as the architect for the junior high and was directed to design the building's exterior to correspond with the adjacent senior high school ("Will start right away" and "Tax payers"). The junior high school was completed in the fall of 1918.

In 1924, overcrowding again led to plans to erect a third building on the campus of the senior and junior



Top, the newly renamed Lincoln Education Center. Bottom, a close-up of the "Lincoln High School" lettering partially visible past the ongoing renovations.

high schools. An auxiliary structure would be placed south of the senior and junior high schools and would connect the two buildings. The new building would house an auditorium, gymnasium, shops and classrooms for vocational courses, and offices for the superintendent and Board of Education. T. W. Williamson of Topeka was selected as the architect, and Williamson had also designed Roosevelt and Wilson Elementary Schools ("Plan H. S. building"). Local builder Mont Green was awarded the construction contract, and Green had built Wilson Elementary. The auxiliary building was expected to be completed in time to host commencement ceremonies in 1925 ("H. S. contract").

Several months after the auxiliary building was completed, the local Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), (continued on p. 10)

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The Board of Directors meets the third Thursday of the month via Zoom. Members are welcome to participate in board meetings. Contact the M/RCPA if you would like to participate in a board meeting.

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whose members were Civil War veterans, submitted a request to the Board of Education in Sept. 1926 to name the senior and junior high school complex for Abraham Lincoln (Tippin, 44). A goal of the GAR was to have a school in every community named for Lincoln. The school board was apparently agreeable to the request as the following fall the board voted to have the Lincoln name engraved above the north auditorium entrance in the auxiliary building (Tippin, 44, 45; “High school given”), which today, is located behind the glass link that faces Poyntz Avenue and is no longer readily visible from the street.

Naming the building for Lincoln apparently wasn’t shared with students. According to the 1928 *Blue M* yearbook, students were unaware until they observed the stone mason engraving the lettering. The yearbook noted, “No one knew why this name in preference to Manhattan High School was going to appear on this entrance,” and the yearbook

went on to say the principal eventually explained to students during an assembly the school board’s decision to honor the GAR’s request (*Blue M*).

Though “Lincoln” had been engraved on the building, it doesn’t appear the name became common usage. A cursory glance through local newspapers indicates a continued reference to “Manhattan High School,” and school yearbooks did the same.

Now, nearly a century after the Lincoln name was first introduced, it’s back. A committee charged with selecting a new name for the former MHS East Campus settled on “Lincoln Education Center.” The new name coincides with a \$9.2 million renovation currently in progress. When the work is completed, the facility will house district administrative offices, a meeting room for the Board of Education, the Families in Transition (FIT) Closet, and community space to be used by the Common Table meal program. Other parts of the building will be reserved for future needs (“Committee”).

Regarding the building’s name

and the decision to reintroduce “Lincoln,” USD 383 Superintendent Eric Reid acknowledged the intentional use of the name and told *The Manhattan Mercury*, “I really thought the discussion pointed to connecting the future with the past.”

“Building plan adopted by the school board.” *The Manhattan Mercury*. 27 January 1917: 1.

*Blue M*. Ed. Lucile Correll. Manhattan, Kansas: The Senior Class, Manhattan High School, 1928.

“Committee picks new name for East Campus; board OKs angled parking for building.” *The Manhattan Mercury*. 18 August 2023.

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“H. S. contract to Mont Green.” *The Morning Chronicle*. 7 June 1924: 1.

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“Six years work.” *The Daily Nationalist*. 20 December 1920: 5.

“Tax payers vote ‘yes’ on school proposition.” *The Manhattan Republic*. 15 February 1917: 1.

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“Will start right away.” *The Manhattan Daily Nationalist*. 17 February 1917: 1.