



MANHATTAN/RILEY COUNTY PRESERVATION ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

October 2021, Vol. 27, Issue V

A Once-Grand Home Reemerges

In the early years of the 20th century, Fourteenth Street on the west side of City Park was nicknamed “Faculty Row” due to the high number of Kansas State Agricultural College (KSAC) faculty members who lived on the street. Tucked in the middle of this prestigious stretch of homes is the former home of Carl and Leeta Butler, located at 207 North Fourteenth Street. The striking home stands out due to its stucco exterior, red tile roof, porte-cochere, and carriage house in the rear.

The original owners of the house were Carl and Leeta Butler. Carl’s parents were Henry and Anne Butler, who had left Illinois and settled in Newton, KS, in 1884. Carl was born in Newton in 1892, and tragically, his father died in 1893. Not long after in 1895, Carl’s widowed mother moved to Ann Arbor, MI, where she attended law school at the Univ. of Michigan and earned a Bachelor of Laws degree. Upon completion of her studies, Anne returned to Newton where she started a business and began purchasing land, eventually becoming a large landowner. She was speculated to possibly be the largest female landowner in the state at one point (“Obituary—Mrs. Annie Butler”).

In 1905, Anne and Carl moved to Boston where Carl attended an “English high school,” which was intended to “give him every possible advantage” (“Obituary—Mrs. Annie Butler”). Living in Boston made it difficult for Anne



Above, 207 North Fourteenth Street with renovations in progress

to attend to her business and other interests in Kansas, so Anne and Carl returned to Kansas, settling in Manhattan so Carl could attend KSAC (“Obituary—Mrs. Annie Butler”).

As a young man, Carl developed an interest in cars at a time when the automobile was a new invention. He was a member of Manhattan’s Automobile Club, which had approximately 70 members in 1910. A 1910 news item noted, “Carl Butler has made a formidable looking racing car by stripping S. N. Higinbotham’s old Smith and equipping it with a big windshield, a 3-foot steering wheel, and a 10-gallon gasoline tank behind the driver’s seat” (“Carl Butler has made”).

A month later, Carl was arrested for speeding on Yuma Street in his “homemade grey devil.” The arrest notice referred to Carl as the “local Barney Oldfield.” Oldfield was a U.S. auto racer whose name was synonymous with speed. Manhattan’s maximum speed limit

at the time was 10 mph, and Carl pled guilty to the speeding charge, commenting that ten miles an hour was too slow (“Arrested for speeding”). Carl’s passion for cars continued, and he and his mother drove to California and back in 1916.

Carl graduated from KSAC with a Bachelor of Science degree, and then like his mother, he studied law at the Univ. of Kansas (“Local mention”). While in law school, Carl met Leeta McKinney, who was from Howard, KS, and also a student at the Univ. of Kansas.

Carl’s studies were interrupted by service in World War I. He was sent to Riverside, CA, where he trained at March Field in aviation. While he was in training, Leeta traveled to California to join him, and the two were married on July 1, 1918 (“Comes from Kansas”).

Anne Butler died in January 1919, and soon after, Carl’s military service ended, and he returned to Kansas with plans to resume his law studies (“Carl Butler left today”).

Carl and Leeta settled into married life at 610 North Manhattan Avenue in the home where Carl had lived with his mother. Carl was named a director of the newly organized College State Bank (“New bank organized”), and continuing his passion for cars, he purchased a new Franklin sedan. The Butlers’ young family expanded with the (*continued on pg. 2*)

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birth of their daughter Barbara Ann in 1920 (“Birth announcement”).

At some point in 1920, construction on the house at 207 North Fourteenth Street began. A news item, summarizing Manhattan happenings for the year 1920, noted its construction: “The houses built were for the most part those costing from three to six thousand dollars. A notable exception is the home of Carl Butler, almost completed and built at a cost of \$25,000” (“The closing year”).

The house was designed by prominent local architect Henry Winter. Henry Winter designed many buildings in Manhattan and was a dominant force in the first half of the 20th century. His designs included the Community House, the First Presbyterian Church, the senior high section of what is now MHS East Campus, the Flint Hills Job Corps complex, the Smith Scholarship House, and many buildings in Aggieville, including the former Varney’s Book Store (O’Brien).

The builder was Clarence Johnson, and his projects included the Wareham Hotel, the Chi Omega sorority, and the Charlotte Swift Hospital (O’Brien).

In the spring of 1921, the house was still under construction, and a short news item noted that Carl was personally involved with selecting every item used in the house (“Building opens up”).

The architectural style of the house is a blend of Prairie and Arts and Crafts, and the home’s interior was exquisite. The living and dining rooms featured coffered ceilings and hardwood floors laid in a concentric square pattern. The living room fireplace was constructed of large, rustic stones with a copper hood above the fire box. The dining room

walls were paneled in mahogany and above the paneling, the walls were decorated with a gold design by a special painter who worked on the house for several weeks and also completed other finishes (Seaton).

The staircase featured more paneling, and midway between the first and second floors was a sunroom above the porte-cochere with windows on three sides. The second floor included three bedrooms. The main bedroom featured a fireplace that was a smaller scale version of the living room’s fireplace, and tucked in the side of the fireplace was a small safe for valuables. The main bedroom had its own private bath. One of the other bedrooms functioned as a nursery for Barbara Ann, and there was a shared jack-and-jill bath between the second and third bedrooms.

In the basement, there was a large recreation room with a beamed ceiling and a brick fireplace with a sphinx head embedded in the brick. Beneath the front porch was a space intended for a swimming pool. The basement also had a laundry room with a tile floor (Seaton). Another feature of the house was a central vacuum system, but it’s unclear whether it was original to the house or added later.

At the rear of the property was a two-story carriage house. Given Carl’s fascination with cars, it’s not surprising that the carriage house was built with three stalls for automobiles. The second level of the carriage house provided living quarters for the Butlers’ servants (O’Brien).

The exterior was stucco with a complex brick pattern in the lower sections of the walls and porch. The roof was red tile and featured copper gutters and downspouts. The yard was surrounded on the



Top, the north side of the house with the porte-cochere. Bottom, the carriage house with three-stall garage and living quarters above. Both photos show renovations in progress.

south and west sides with a brick wall crafted in the same complex pattern as the main house (Seaton).

After accounting for all the special details, it was estimated the house had cost closer to \$35,000 to build (Seaton).

Classified ads in local newspapers show the Butlers were selling their living and dining room furniture in August 1921, and by November 1921, another family was living in their home on North Manhattan Avenue. Somewhere in the timeframe between August and November is likely when they moved into 207 North Fourteenth Street.

Social notices show the Butlers entertained in their new home, greeting guests in the sunroom while music provided by a small orchestra tucked in the den floated throughout the house.

Unfortunately, the Butlers’ happiness in their new home was (continued on pg. 3)

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short-lived. Leeta filed for divorce in September 1922 (“Files divorce action”). Not long after, a short news item indicated the Butlers’ home with all its furnishings had been sold to Warren and Bertha Womer for the bargain price of \$13,000 and the assumption of some liabilities (“Womer buys Butler residence”). Warren was the president of the First National Bank.

During the Womers’ ownership, the most dramatic changes to the house occurred when it was divided into apartments in 1938. It’s not clear what had motivated the Womers to convert their home to apartments. The conversion happened during the Depression, and perhaps the Womers were experiencing financial challenges.

The house was divided into six apartments, and the Womers continued to dwell in the apartment created from the living room. It was at this time that the north half of the front porch was enclosed to create a bedroom and bathroom for the Womers’ apartment. The dining room, the main bedroom, the other two bedrooms, and the basement all were transformed into apartments, and the sunroom above the porte-cochere became an efficiency apartment. The servants’ quarters above the carriage house were also rented (Seaton). The walls the Womers added to divide larger rooms were all trimmed in woodwork that matched the original house.

Warren Womer died in 1950, and at the time of Bertha’s death in 1966, she was still residing in the living room apartment. The Womers had owned the house for 44 years.

Today, the house’s current owner is Eric Carter, who has begun to renovate the house. As the project has progressed, he has

come to understand and appreciate the house’s fine features, many of which remain.

According to Eric, “Initially, my daughter and her friends were going to live there. As we’ve gotten into it, though, what became pretty clear was kind of the best path for this house is for it to stop being a rental property.”

As work began on the house, changes resulting from the conversion to apartments started to reveal themselves. Eric says, “I was in the front bedroom, pulling up the carpet, and I think, ‘Oh, that’s the same tile that’s on the front porch,’ and I realized I am on the front porch. It was only then that I realized that they had taken the nice, big front porch and put a bedroom and bathroom out there.” He also discovered that windows missing from the living room had been moved to the exterior wall of the enclosed porch. The north end of the porch has since been opened and the added bedroom and bathroom removed, which was no small feat.

Eric’s plan is to reverse some of these changes and restore the house to resembling the other beautiful homes on Faculty Row. His vision is to reduce the number of units and to create the feel of a single-family home. The five apartments housed on the first and second floors plus the sunroom will become a single dwelling unit with four bedrooms. The basement will remain a separate unit as will the apartment above the carriage house. He envisions a family would live in the first and second floor unit, which would essentially function as and visually appear to be a single-family home. Then, the family could choose whether to rent the other two units.

Work on the house began earlier this year, and there is much yet to accomplish. With the restoration of the porch and other changes



Top, the fireplace in the main bedroom. Bottom, the dining room, featuring mahogany paneling. Both photos are from 2020 and prior to renovations.

happening, slowly but surely the grand home it once was when Carl Butler personally selected every item is starting to reemerge.

- “Arrested for speeding.” [The Manhattan Republic](#). 21 July 1910: 1.
- “Birth announcement.” [The Manhattan Daily Nationalist](#). 11 February 1920: 1.
- “Building opens up this spring.” [The Riley County Chronicle](#). 18 March 1921: 1.
- “Carl Butler has made.” [The Daily Mercury](#). 20 June 1910: 1.
- “Carl Butler left today.” [The Manhattan Mercury](#). 24 January 1919: 6.
- “The closing year in our local history.” [The Manhattan Mercury](#). 31 December 1920: 1.
- “Comes from Kansas for soldier husband.” [The Evening Index](#). 2 July 1918: 8.
- “Files divorce action.” [The Manhattan Mercury](#). 18 September 1922: 1.
- “Local mention.” [The Manhattan Daily Nationalist](#). 24 December 1917: 1.
- “New bank organized.” [The Manhattan Mercury](#). 1 August 1919: 1.
- “Obituary--Mrs. Annie Butler.” [The Manhattan Mercury](#). 17 January 1919: 4.
- O’Brien, Dr. Patricia J. [The Architects and Buildings of Manhattan, Kansas](#). Manhattan, Kansas: Riley County Historical Society, 2008.
- Seaton, Mary. “Womer home made into apartments.” [The Morning Chronicle](#). 8 May 1938: 9.
- “Womer buys Butler residence.” [The Manhattan Tribune](#). 23 November 1922: 5.

The Tale of a Crypt: Who Were the Fortunes?

Have you heard this one: “Did you know there’s a fortune buried in Sunset Cemetery?” To those who are unfamiliar, it sounds like a yet-to-be-discovered treasure is hidden in the cemetery, but in reality, the question is referencing the Fortune crypt, which is one of the cemetery’s best-known burial sites.

William J. Fortune was born in Virginia in 1855, and by the time he was 30, he was living in Manhattan. He appears to have been skilled in the building trade. The 1885 state census lists his occupation as “stone mason,” and the 1900 U. S. Census shows his occupation as “plasterer.” Various news items show him employed to do building, carpentry, and plastering work. One of William’s more substantial projects was the construction of a two-story stone building just west of the intersection of Poyntz Avenue and First Street in 1899 (“Will Fortune has purchased”). William and a partner also operated a lunch counter in downtown Manhattan on Second Street.

William was married to Florence Allen Fortune, who was born in Ohio in 1856. The 1885 state census shows she was a dressmaker. The Fortunes had two children, and the family lived at 426 Laramie Street.

In April 1889, an adventurous William with three friends headed for Oklahoma in hopes of staking claims in what would become known as the Oklahoma Land Rush. Whether William was able to secure a claim is unclear. A news item a month later indicated the men had returned and reported they didn’t like the land in Oklahoma, but no mention was made of a homestead claim (“H. O. Tennant”).

In 1891, William made a second trip to Oklahoma for another attempt to stake a homestead claim. He returned to Manhattan a few days



All three photos are of the Fortune crypt in Sunset Cemetery.

later, disgusted by the proceedings. He reported seeing much suffering by families who had been waiting for months for the legal opening of the land. Those in most need of land were forced back by speculators in the rush to stake claims, and the speculators took every possible advantage. Food was scarce, and those with water to spare were charging five cents a pint (“W. J. Fortune who went to Oklahoma”).

The Fortunes didn’t abandon the idea of acquiring land in Oklahoma.

A news item in 1901 showed Florence had traveled to the state to look for a location where they might relocate (“Mrs. Will Fortune returned Saturday”). A 1903 news item indicated the Fortunes had finally made a successful claim in Oklahoma. Subsequent notices show the Fortunes traveling to Oklahoma to look after their claim near Lawton, OK (“Mrs. Will Fortune left for Lawton”). The Fortunes’ interest in homestead claims continued, and William traveled to South Dakota in 1904 to participate in the Rosebud Land Drawing, but it’s unclear whether he was successful (“About forty tickets were sold.”)

Around 1904-05, the Fortunes moved to Kansas City, and their house on Laramie Street was sold. William continued to work in the Manhattan area, including working on barracks at Fort Riley (“Will Fortune of Kansas City”).

In 1912, Florence died in Kansas City, and her body was brought to Manhattan for burial. A brief funeral service was held in Sunset Cemetery (“Mrs. Will Fortune died yesterday”). It’s speculated that the Fortune crypt was established with Florence’s death.

Did a grieving William construct the crypt for his beloved wife? Given William’s building skills, it’s certainly possible that he built the crypt himself, but the specific details of the crypt’s construction remain a mystery.

William died in 1924, and he is entombed in the crypt with Florence along with their daughter Maude Fortune Bredberg, who died in 1944.

Part of the fascination with the Fortune crypt is its uniqueness, as (*continued on pg. 5*)

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it's the only burial of its type in Sunset Cemetery. The crypt is built into the ravine that traverses the center of the cemetery, allowing it to be partially below ground. The crypt's arched entrance is framed by rough-cut stone retaining walls and features an iron gate. Above the entrance is a name plaque that reads "W. J. Fortune," which is crafted from black tiles set in a white tile background. Additional stone forms a shallow-gabled roof, which has a thin concrete overhang with shells set in it. Sod covers the entire crypt structure, and in years past, irises grew atop the crypt. Inside, there are three vaults, which have a smooth stone surface, and the names of the three Fortune family members are engraved on them.

When William passed away, he left instructions for the ongoing care of the crypt in his will: "Except I desire that one thousand dollars of my personal property or money be set aside for the maintenance and upkeep of the vault in the cemetery at

Manhattan, Kansas, said one thousand dollars to be invested and the interest used for said maintenance, and further it is my request that my remains be brought to Manhattan, Kansas and placed in said vault for burial" (Fortune, W. J.). One thousand dollars in 1924 is equivalent to approximately \$16,000 in 2021.

With a name such as "Fortune," it's natural to wonder if William J. Fortune did, in fact, accumulate a fortune. His will provides a few clues. William's will indicates he had real estate holdings, which he directed not to be sold for ten years and for his children to receive the rent from the properties during the ten years. Probate information also shows the estimated value of his estate was \$16,300, which would be approximately \$261,000 in 2021 dollars. While a nice sum, the value of William's estate is not what most would consider to be a "fortune."

The full story of the Fortunes and how their family's crypt came to be may have been lost to time. What is known for certain is the ongoing care and upkeep of the

crypt were important to William, and a century later, the Fortune crypt remains intact and continues to fascinate visitors to Sunset Cemetery.

"About forty tickets sold." [The Manhattan Republic](#). 21 July 1904: 7.

Fortune, W. J. "Last will and testament of W. J. Fortune, of Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri." 14 November 1924. TS. Kansas, U. S. Wills and Probate Records, 1803-1989. Provo, UT, USA: ancestry.com.

"H. O. Tennant, Will Fortune, and Will Hunter." [Manhattan Daily Republic](#). 16 May 1889: 4.

"Mrs. Will Fortune died yesterday." [The Manhattan Republic](#). 20 May 1912: 2.

"Mrs. Will Fortune left for Lawton, Okla." [Manhattan Mercury](#). 20 May 1903: 1.

"Mrs. Will Fortune returned Saturday." [The Manhattan Republic](#). 19 December 1901: 4.

"W. J. Fortune who went to Oklahoma." [The Manhattan Republic](#). 1 October 1891: 7.

"Will Fortune has purchased." [Manhattan Mercury](#). 25 January 1899: 8.

"Will Fortune of Kansas City." [Manhattan Mercury](#). 1 March 1905: 7.

First Christian Church Update

The Kansas Historic Sites Board of Review met virtually on Aug. 7 and considered a historic register nomination for the former First Christian Church located at 115 Courthouse Plaza. The M/RCPA had sponsored the register nomination, and the building was nominated for its architecture.

Members of the review board discussed the nomination and asked questions. Commissioners Kathryn Focke and Greg McKinley provided comments, as did Clancy Holeman, County Counselor, and Rich Vargo, County Clerk.

Ahead of the meeting, Riley

County sent a letter to the review board, objecting to the nomination, which was signed by Commissioners John Ford and Greg McKinley. Commissioner Focke told the review board that she did not sign the letter and supported the nomination. Additionally, Commissioner Focke commented that the previous County Commission had purchased the church sight unseen in May 2020 and had had eight months while still in office to move forward with demolition, if demolition had truly always been the plan. She believed the building could be repurposed to

meet some of the County's needs, and demolishing the building and planting grass would serve no purpose.

Clancy Holeman spoke to the condition of the building, describing the building as "guttled," which perhaps is subject to interpretation. Two M/RCPA members toured the building in May 2021, and the building had not been gutted in the sense that the interior had not been stripped down to its studs. Mr. Holeman's comments seemed to reflect that the building's mechanical systems (continued on pg. 6)

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aren't functional. The board had been provided with multiple photos of the building's current condition and could evaluate it for themselves.

Mr. Holeman said the County has been told the building's additions are propping up the original portion of the building but admitted an engineering study of the building has not been done. He asserted there has been a plan in place for the past 14 years for the County to acquire the building and demolish it. He was also concerned that the criteria for evaluating properties for registry listing were not part of Kansas' administrative regulations.

Rich Vargo asserted that past County Commissions fully intended to purchase the church and also the former Crum's Beauty College Building (currently Vetsfirst Choice, 512 Poyntz Avenue) for expansion. In order for the County's core facilities and courts to remain downtown, a larger footprint would be needed, and the intent of purchasing the church was solely for its footprint. Mr. Vargo said if the church isn't allowed to be demolished, then a future commission would be forced to buy land elsewhere to gain square footage.

Commissioner McKinley commented that the architectural styles of the additions were different from the original section of the building and felt that was worth noting.

In regards to the comment that the additions are possibly propping up the original portion of the building, Commissioner Focke said the 1961 architectural plans show that the original structure is intact and the additions were just tacked on. She added that no structural studies have been done to show the building needs to be demolished, and Brent Bowman, who had

performed space needs studies for the County in the past, had offered to do an updated study, but the other two commissioners declined.

Jay Price, board chair, clarified that the board's role is to determine if the building's integrity is sufficient for registry consideration and not to determine if the building is habitable or functional. He added the intention is also not to mummify the building or force the owner to make it into a museum, but rather, registry listing simply slows the process.

Regarding Mr. Holeman's comment about a perceived lack of criteria for evaluating properties for registry listing, Patrick Zollner, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, addressed the concerns. Mr. Zollner explained that the building had been nominated to the National Register, and the criteria for listing on the National Register is spelled out by the National Park Service.

The design differences highlighted by Commissioner McKinley between the original building and the additions was also addressed. The period of significance under consideration was 1908 to 1962, the changes were described in the nomination, and they are old enough to have gained significance in their own right.

It was clarified that the board's job was to determine if the building meets the federal guidelines, and other issues, such as the county's desire to demolish the building, were outside the board's ability to consider. All board members in attendance voted in favor of registry listing, which meant the former First Christian Church was immediately added to the Register of Historic Kansas Places, and its nomination was forwarded to the Keeper of the National Register for consideration.

In addition, prior to the Aug. 7 meeting of the Kansas Historic Sites Board of Review, the County



Above, both photos are of the interior of the former First Christian Church in May 2021.

Commission had moved forward with a plan for asbestos abatement for the former church. Asbestos would need to be removed regardless of whether the building were renovated or demolished. The asbestos work had been put out for bid, and commissioners approved on Aug. 9 to establish a contract with one of the bidders. The accepted bid was for approximately \$18,000. The building's new historic registry status meant the planned asbestos work would have to be reviewed by the state before moving forward.

During the County Commission meeting on Aug. 30, commissioners discussed the asbestos abatement project. Commissioner Ford said he wanted to hold off on the asbestos project for the time being, saying he thought the funds could be better allocated elsewhere (continued on pg. 7)

M/RCPA's Annual Meeting

The M/RCPA's Annual Meeting of the membership was not held in 2020 due to the pandemic. The Board of Directors is currently planning to hold the Annual Meeting yet this fall. The ongoing pandemic and concerns about the delta variant of the virus have necessitated altering plans, and the meeting may be held outdoors. Watch for details to follow.

Would you like to be more involved with the M/RCPA? If you are interested in serving on the Board of Directors or on a committee, contact Linda Glasgow at mrcpanewsletter@gmail.com.

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“until we know specifically what we’re going to do with the property in general.” He commented that the County might sell the building and added, “I don’t think it’s the right thing to do to put that expense on the taxpayer if it’s not technically going to be our issue.” His preference was to hold off on the asbestos project until the County has a definite plan for the property.

Commissioner McKinley preferred to move forward with the asbestos project, noting that the abatement must be done. Commissioner Ford and Mr. Vargo both responded with the comment, “not if we don’t own it.” Commis-

sioner Ford added that the project could be rebid in the future.

Commissioners voted 2-1 to abstain from asbestos removal from the former First Christian Church, with Commissioner McKinley voting against the motion.

Despite testimony provided by County officials to the Kansas Historic Sites Board of Review that the County had concrete plans to demolish the church, this latest development indicates the County’s plans for the building are undecided and there may be interest in selling the building.

The M/RPCA will continue to monitor the situation.

Walking Tour

The M/RCPA partnered with residents of the Lee Elementary Neighborhood Historic District on a walking tour of Manhattan’s newest historic district. The tour was held on Sept. 25 and was entirely outdoors in keeping with pandemic

precautions, which also allowed participants to spread out and maintain distance from one another.

Tour participants learned about past owners, architectural styles, and the many unique features of the homes.

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The Board of Directors meets the second 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.

Newsletter editor: Kathy Dzewaltowski



All three photos are of the walking tour of the Lee Elementary Neighborhood Historic District.

All of the articles in the October 2021 newsletter were written by Kathy Dzewaltowski.

M/RCPA P.O. Box 1893 MANHATTAN, KS 66505-1893
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2020-21 M/RCPA Membership Roster

\$15 Student Level

Lacy Fisher, Jamie Koeppe

\$35 Historic Level

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