

Historic Meriwether - Millett House

Circa 1890-1895*



Offered for Auction to the highest bidder

<http://auctionbymayo.com/>

Then:



Now:



This is your opportunity to own and enjoy a beautiful 19th century home with a rich history, that was for most of its early life, kept within just a limited number of influential Kansas City families. Historic Meriwether-Millett House was completed circa 1890-1895. Some documents suggest the earlier and some the latter with many buildings of this period taking multiple years to complete after groundbreaking. This beautiful Victorian lady was designed in the Richardsonian Romanesque style of architecture made famous by architect H. H. (Henry Hobson) Richardson during the 19th century. The tall central segmental relieving red brick arched window flanked on both sides by a smaller arched window shows influences of the "Palladian" style window grouping at the top of the front elevation further contributing to this historic architectural style. The lovely parapeted front and back gables also support this architectural influence present at the time of construction.

Architectural influences of HH Richardson

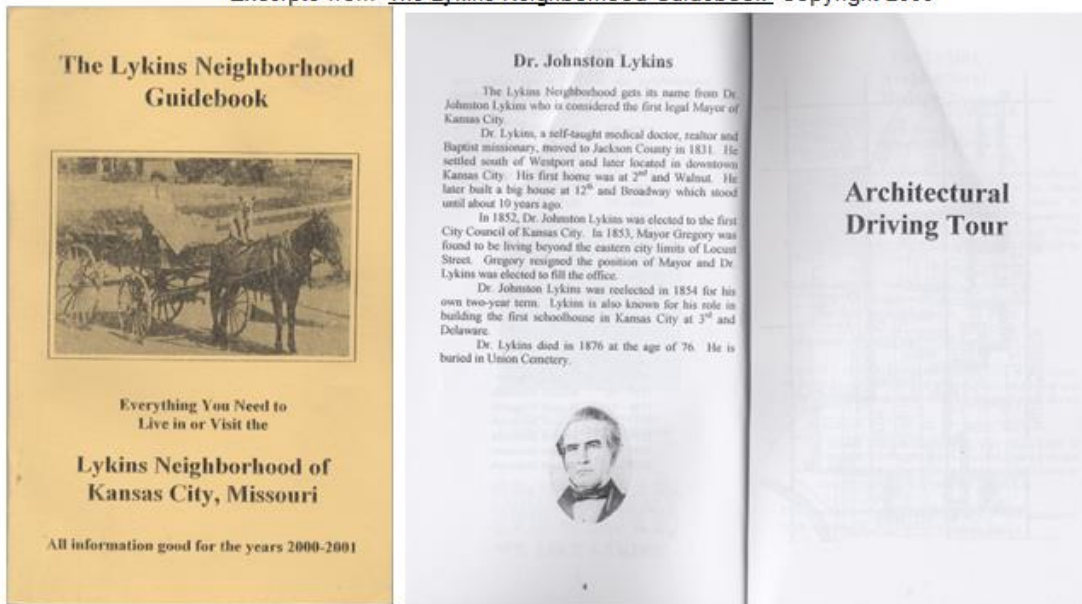
Sample of Richardson's work: New York State Asylum, Buffalo, NY, 1869 – notice the similarities in the parapeted gables and hipped dormers

Henry Hobson Richardson

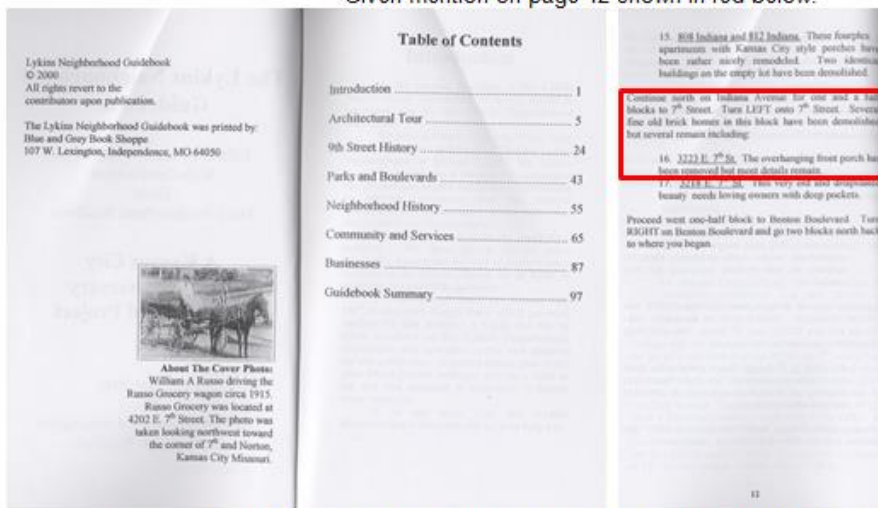


Although the exact architect has not yet been discovered during the historical research, many agree that the best overall description for the home style would reflect this Victorian Romanesque assumption. Many passerby's ask, "is it a church?" The home truly commands a strong presence on the modest street in which it sits where many of its sisters have long been lost to the wrecking ball. The home is recognized as architecturally significant and pictured in the "Lykins Neighborhood Book" written in 2000 and edited by local historian Harold Dellinger as one to be seen on a walking/driving tour of Historic Northeast Lykins Neighborhood. This unique, rare and hard-to-find book was a Kansas City 150th Anniversary Legacy Fund Project, Copyright 2000 by Lykins Neighborhood Association (see excerpts below). Upon request at closing, the winning bidder is welcome to ask for the seller's copy of this book for their personal collection. Research completed to date has yet to locate a similar design that remains standing in the Kansas City metropolitan area. This is one of those rare styles that deserves to stand as an icon of American architecture of the period.

Excerpts from "The Lykins Neighborhood Guidebook" Copyright 2000



Given mention on page 12 shown in red below:



Shown in this picture at the top of page 21 as "Number 16" on the Architectural Driving Tour:



16. 3223 E. 7th Street

Sources of data compiled in this narrative include but are not limited to UMKC Western Historical Manuscript Collection – University Archives, where some very knowledgeable professionals steered research to findings in their archives describing the home as the Hunter M. Meriwether residence. Other resources included the Kansas City Public Library – Central Branch in the Missouri Valley Room where birth and death records can also be found alongside City Directories of the period. U. S. Census archives also provided data collected for this informational brochure.

In the beginning, a lovely wrap around porch graced the front of the home as shown in the tax photo (for the historian, notice tax assessor in suit and hat to right of home) from the early to mid-20th century tax assessor archives (speculation around 1940 so some modifications and/or simplification may have been done to modernize the appearance prior to this photo which is the earliest found to date). Contact was made with a descendant of the Millett family to seek earlier photos that might reveal additional detail with no success. Although this Millett descendant was thrilled to learn that the home was still in existence, she was unaware of any pictures available within her immediate family. Speculation has it that the owners removed the porch for restoration activities sometime around the 1980's and it was never replaced although a long-term goal.



Although the existing porch has only floorboards present, this porch could be reconstructed to bring back the original charm seen in the tax photo above. One of the original brick porch support columns still stands in the yard to the east side of the house that originally supported the wraparound feature and shadows of the roofline are still present on the brick wall to help with the design and building of a reproduction porch should the new homeowner choose to take on that project. Today, the home appears on a lovely and generous sized mature tree covered lot with ample space for gardening or other outdoor activities and some enclosed areas for children and/or pets. In contrast to today's current building conventions, this is most certainly an anomaly, especially in comparison to other large older homes this close in to downtown, making it a highly coveted asset for any homeowner who enjoys trees, yard space and gardening with ample outdoor space for children and/or pets to play with tons of secure off street parking which is rare in the urban core. If you search county records, you will discover that a vacant lot alone recently sold on this block for \$18,000!

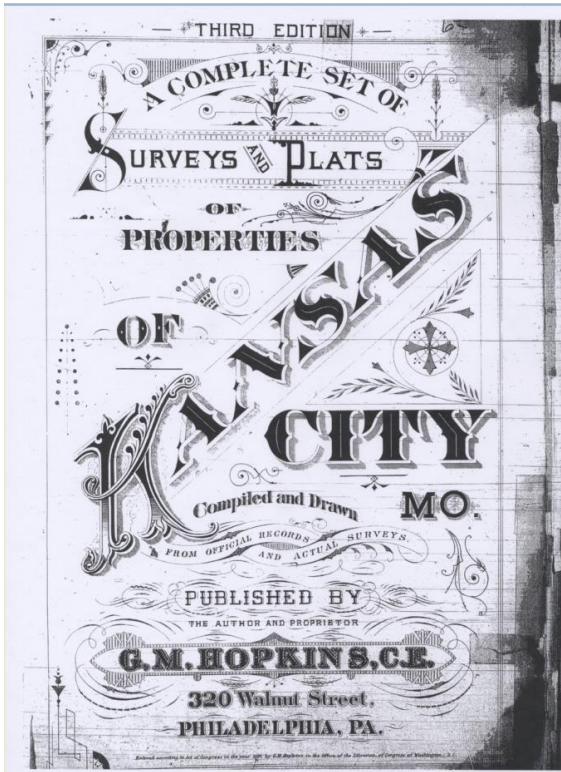
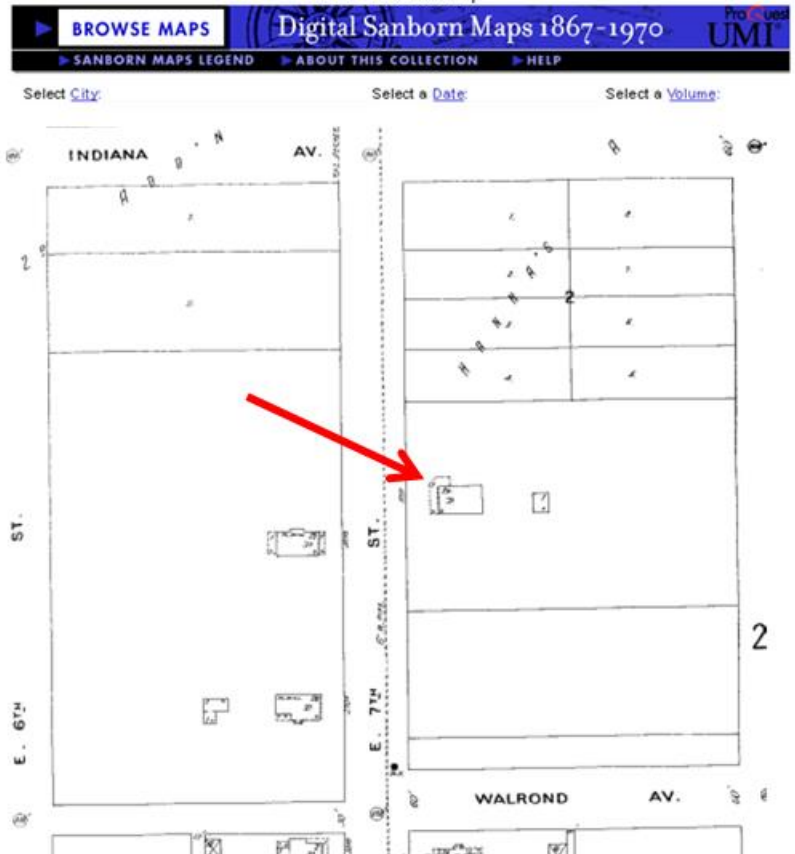
Much research was done to learn more about the ownership history and findings hint that a prominent real estate attorney named Hunter Mackeand Meriwether and his wife Lucy commissioned the building of this unique style of architecture atypical of other homes of this period in the up-and-coming eastern suburb of downtown Kansas City, Missouri (now known as the Historic Northeast Lykins Neighborhood) where prominent figures such as doctors and lawyers had started to build homes. At the time, the downtown area had become less desirable due to pollution and unpleasant smells that radiated from the Westbottoms stockyards and manufacturing pollution that inundated the downtown area. This distance provided some relief and fresh air while being convenient to the commerce of the central business district for these prominent residents.



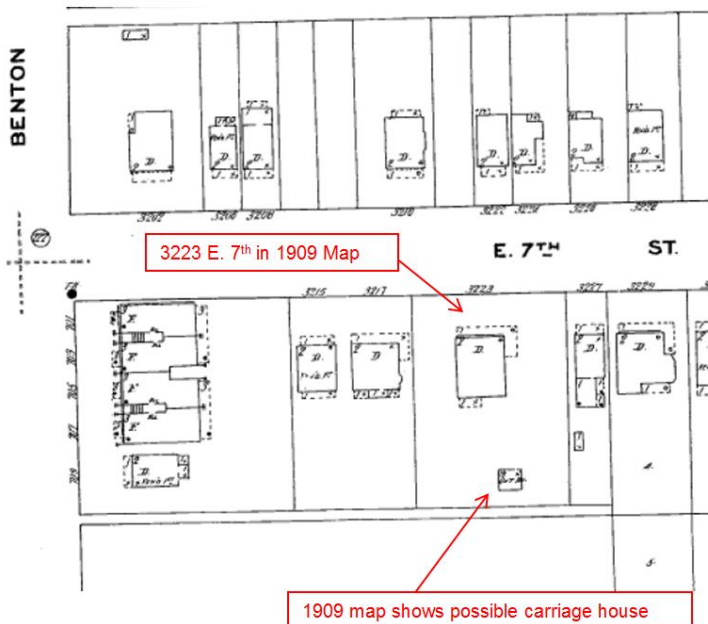
Hunter Mackeand Meriwether

It is thought that Hunter and Lucy found this lovely estate that appears to have originally covered a much larger land area based on findings in the historic Sanborn Map collection (see 1896 map below) from the Kansas City Public Library. Theory has it that at one time, there was a large carriage house/stable in the back portion of the property from which transportation was made convenient to other areas of town. Speculation is that as economic conditions necessitated, parcels may have been sold off to maintain ownership of only the land on which the house currently sits, although still the most generous parcel on the block.

1896 Sanborn Map



1909 Sanborn Map



This lovely three-story mini-mansion originally featured a third floor living quarters for the butlers and the butler's staircase still exists in what is assumed to be its original orientation. Many of the homes of this era have destroyed these small staircases and repurposed them for more modern conveniences so it is always a nice surprise to discover one still intact in a home of this period. Another unique feature of this home is that it features a staircase that is fully open from the first floor to the top of the third floor with two separate and distinct landings, one between the first and second floor and a second between the second and third floor. One can look from the first floor up to the third floor or from the third floor down to the first floor when gazing over the winding balustrade. Huge windows at each landing pour an abundance of light into this lovely feature of the home that adds to its grandness of scale.

Although ownership history remains vague after the Meriwether's, research suggests that it was acquired at some point in the late 19th to early 20th century by Henry Shirley and Elizabeth M. (Lizzie) (Ferguson) Millett who were two of Kansas City's first settlers. Henry was a printer and owned and operated a family printing business in Kansas City that eventually came to be known as Ramsey, Millett and Hudson before a couple of subsequent name changes. Research suggests that Lizzie was a local religious leader in the Methodist Church and she also invested heavily in local real estate. Their graves can be found in the Union Hill Cemetery.

Although it remains unclear, research hints that the Millett family home was owned and/or occupied at various times by two of Henry and Lizzie's sons, George Van Millett and Dr. Shirley Sexton (S. S.) Millett. Census data leads one to assume that George Van Millett (most often referred to as Van) may have possibly occupied and/or had ownership interest in the family home with his wife Mary at some point during its history. He was a prominent Kansas City Artist-Painter. Van was influential in the creation of what is now known as the Kansas City Art Institute (with beginnings based in what was known as the Sketch Club around the mid 1880's). After completing training at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, it is said that Van studied for a time in Paris prior to returning to Kansas City. Although George Van Millett is sometimes less familiar to the arts community, he was among the founding teachers who helped to create the core of the Kansas City Art Institute and research suggests that he played a significant role in laying the groundwork for the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City. Dr. Shirley Sexton (S.S.) Millett (and his wife Jane Millett) are also assumed to have resided at the home within the first decade of the twentieth century according to Census records. Dr. Millett was a prominent dentist with offices at the Rialto Building in Kansas City.



George Van Millett

It remains unclear as to when the Millett family sold the home or to whom it was sold. After the Millett's, the only other name that has yet to be discovered as associated with the home history was on a postcard that was discovered inside one of the pocket door chambers with the house address and the name Mrs. R. T. Bean (this spelling is to best of author's knowledge). Although the postcard has been misplaced over the years, it seems as though it was sent from the War Department regarding bonds being issued to support troop's efforts during one of the wars of that period. From this postcard, it is unclear as to whether she was an owner or occupant. The buyer of this home will enjoy completing a more formal, accurate and detailed draft of the history if they choose to seek historic designation. This research represents hours and days of weeding through vast amounts of data to arrive at these brief summaries. The information is presented only as a starting point and should not be considered historically precise without further research from reliable sources.

So one might ask, with a home having this much history and being so old, is it haunted? To date, no paranormal or other unusual activity has been recorded. One might only assume that the earlier owners of this home would be delighted to know that it was rescued from potentially being demolished and forever lost to architectural history.

When discovered during a random tour of Kansas City while visiting from out-of-state, the present owner was in awe of this amazing structure that was at the time boarded and on the demolition list. With a passion for saving it from the wrecking ball, research began immediately thereafter and the owner at that time was discovered through public records. After months of failing and tedious negotiations, the property was finally purchased in late 2005. While working closely with the code officers at the time, every effort was made to bring the property off the demolition list, which took place shortly thereafter. To facilitate a project management standard, a trust called The 3223 East Seventh Street Land Trust was formed to take ownership and support restoration activities. Ownership will be transferred directly from this trust to the new buyer.

Although much improvement has been made to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars in material, labor and sweat equity, much work remains. As can often be the case with a project of this scale, energy and resources no longer exist to complete the restoration. The home needs love and attention but could be a dream for the right family or investor. For those young, energetic and looking for a project they can finish with love, this may be just the right place close to all the action of the urban core and downtown Power and Light District as well as the potential for the revitalization of the Independence Avenue Corridor only two blocks north where proposals are in the works for the new streetcar expansion that may eventually connect this area directly to the central downtown business district. For an investor, it offers a blank slate for an economical finish with inexpensive home center finishes and perhaps being divided into a multiple unit for income producing opportunities. Feel free to verify the zoning of R-2.5 which may allow for converting to multi-family use should an investor find that an appealing option.

Whether an investor or single-family purchase, having a vision of restoring it to its original glory will keep it alive for future generations to experience. You will find the current property tax very appealing and affordable compared to similar properties in other parts of town to help keep costs low.

The original floor plan is in place as best as can be determined. Many of the hardwood floors remain but some will require refinishing. Drywall is in place of most of the original plaster. Much of the staircase remains original but some parts will require reproduction and/or repair. With a few easy fixes, one could easily live on the third floor while working their way down. Most of the west exterior brick wall has been repointed with period-appropriate materials. The cut stone window sills have been replaced on that side and new custom-cut stones (included with the sale) are ready for installation on the east exterior wall where repointing was started on the lower 1/3 but not complete. Brick masons speculate that the back exterior wall was tuck-pointed within approximately the last 30 years while the front wall retains most of its original mortar. Interior brick/stone walls have been parged. A new steel beam supports alongside the original wood girder in the basement. Zoned air supports independent temperatures on the enclosed third floor suite while a separate system supports temperatures on the first and second levels with independent ductwork for each. Fabricated steel support systems link the front and back walls while trusses were commenced to support floor/ceiling joists to future star bolts (if chosen to be installed by buyer) commonly seen in structures of this age to aid in suppressing outward masonry movement. The west chimney was built-up at the top with replacement bricks to simulate how it may have originally appeared.

Scaffolding during west chimney top restoration



In a Northeast News article written by Leslie Collins and published October 24, 2012, former Kansas City Mayor Kay Barnes said, "I am confident the stars are aligning for Northeast". The article went on to talk about how after years of planning, Historic Northeast is on its way to establish a Community Improvement District (CID) for the Independence Avenue Corridor just two blocks to the north of this lovely home. That CID was approved and has started paving the way for transformation and gentrification of this area. Another exciting possibility for the area is the proposed Independence Avenue expansion of the new Streetcar that is under consideration and the new pedestrian-friendly intersection proposed for Benton and Independence only two blocks north. Although the area frequently holds a stigma as being high crime and poverty, much of that image is slowly transitioning and urban dwellers, urban hipsters and artists alike will appreciate the affordability of these lovely historic structures and are often willing to take a risk on an up-and-coming area within approximately two miles of the downtown business district. The Kansas City Police Department East Patrol is an amazing organization that is committed to making this an amazing place to live. There is a Community Interaction Officer that is frequently present for the neighborhood association meetings and takes suggestions back to his team. Officers are ready and willing to meet with you personally as a resident and do everything within their power to help you have a great experience as a Historic Northeast resident. Local political officials are also frequently in attendance for the neighborhood meetings. The office of Missouri Senator S. Kiki Curls is very active and an advocate for the continued improvement of life for citizens. Her Chief of Staff, Sheron Fulson has been an amazing friend to the Lykins Neighborhood Association. Support for this area is strong if you are willing to get involved in the transformation of this historic neighborhood.

In a recent radio show on KCUR, there was speculation that much of the artist community that originally started the boon in the Crossroads Arts District has been slowly moving east along the 18th Street Corridor and is now showing signs of starting to inhabit and improve the Independence Avenue Corridor so the sky is the limit for future values should all the "stars continue to align" for this area. An urban renewal plan was approved in late 2013 and this home is eligible for 10-year tax abatement on the value of certain improvements that must be reviewed and approved in advance by a special panel. As we understand it, as long as the work is started and completed within the twenty-year period that started upon its urban renewal plan approval by the City Council in 2013 so we speculate that the tax abatement can be applied for up through approximately 2033 but the length of the abatement period starts at the time the approved work is started and/or completed for a period not to exceed 10 years on the value of the approved improvements only. Be certain to research this in its entirety prior to making a choice based on this opportunity. Scott Wagner is the Councilperson that sponsored this Urban Renewal Plan so full details of the plan could be obtained by contacting his office.

Be sure to drive just one block west across Benton Boulevard, continuing along E. 7th St., and marvel at the astonishingly restored Victorian homes along this block; afterwards, travel just two more blocks north and you will discover beautifully restored Victorian mansions gracing what is known to locals as historic Gladstone Boulevard, home to many of Kansas City's early dignitaries and individuals of elite stature and upper class at the turn of the 19th century

Although it is not in a historic district, it has many qualities that may qualify it for a review by the Department of the Interior for such designation. At present, no special historic reviews are necessary for improvements or repairs but should the new owners choose to pursue historic designation, other tax benefits and grants may become available with an approved designation. For more application details see NPS Form 10-900, United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service "National Register of Historic Places Registration Form" to assist you in the nomination process. If you have a passion for historic architecture and saving it for future generations to enjoy, this may just be the opportunity you are looking for! If you are an investor, no worries about special historic commission approvals. All you need do is contact the building department for any building permits deemed necessary.

Additional photographs:



Aerial View of property just east of Benton and E. 7th St., KCMO



Although this narrative was prepared with detail based on historic research to date, the buyer is encouraged to verify all data to his/her/their satisfaction. Happy bidding!

*No warranty or guarantee is made as to the accuracy of this information as this is just a good faith attempt to provide the buyer with as much information as possible through years of ongoing research should you choose to nominate, as the trust had originally planned, for historic designation.