

JAZZ HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT (Proposed)
THE PASEO BOULEVARD, KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI
Submitted for An Eligibility Assessment for listing on the National Register of Historic Places

I. INTRODUCTION

The Jazz Hill Historic District is proposed for listing on the National Register under Criterion A based on its association with a pattern of events that made a significant contribution to the development of Kansas City.

The redevelopment of the north end of the Paseo in the late 19th and early 20th century to eliminate blight through demolition of dilapidated houses resulted in the construction of high-quality residences and apartment buildings. Several of the apartment buildings fit the typical construction type and style of the colonnaded apartment buildings which were common in Kansas City in the first three decades of the twentieth century.¹

The Study of the Colonnaded Kansas City Apartment Building in May of 1990 concluded that "those buildings which appear to eligible for National Register nomination fall into two basic categories: 1) Multiples or clusters of colonnaded/sub-types apartments and 2) Individual property types. Both groups are potentially eligible under criteria A and C listed below: ...Colonnaded/sub-type apartment buildings that meet this criterion ("C") might include: buildings associated with specific events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history...."²

At the turn of the century, The Paseo was known for its fashionable apartments and residences. The apartments in the proposed district were constructed between 1901 - 1913, the period immediately following the development of The Paseo as one of Kansas City's first boulevards. The Paseo resulted from Kansas City's 1893 Plan for Parks and Boulevards, a nationally recognized example of City Beautiful planning and considered by many to be George Kessler's finest work.

The apartment buildings comprising the proposed district are historically significant as representative examples of the quality housing that developed along The Paseo following the removal of blight that occurred in conjunction with the construction of The Paseo at the turn of the century.

II. HISTORIC CONTEXT

A. Early Apartment Building in Kansas City

Kansas City...experienced a drastic increase in population beginning in 1870. After the Civil War, Kansas City's population rose from 25,000 in 1870 to 55,000 in 1880. Then in just five years from 1880 to 1885, the population increased to 100,000. Thus housing, especially in the city, was of immediate concern. Many families in Kansas City that could not afford to purchase a residence in the city lived in boarding houses, or rented large homes and then sub-let rooms. Although Kansas Citians "had demonstrated a clear preference for the detached house", apartment construction slowly became a popular trend. In contrast to New York City, the apartment high-rise did not develop in Kansas City until the 1920s. Instead, two and three-story apartments with some form of porch at the primary elevation became the norm.³

The typical apartment house found in Kansas City from the late 1880s through the first decade of the twentieth century was generally narrow in scale (to fit existing lots) and unadorned. Porches, ..., were often added to the structure at a later date, yet there were many apartments that featured prominent multi-decked verandas as part of their original design. Some were modest in scale, while others such as the three-story New York Apartments [12th and Paseo] (built in 1902-03;demolished)

¹Linda F. Becker and Cydney E. Millstein, "Colonnaded Kansas City Apartment Building (Phase 1) A Study," May, 1990.

² Ibid, p. 32.

³ Ibid, p. 6.

featured a prominent, curved primary elevation embellished with multiple colossal columns that supported twelve porches.⁴

Although the local builder William H. Collins [1866-1941] must be credited for developing the original, "full-blown" colonnaded porch style apartment - a style that appears to be indigenous to Kansas City, John W. McKecknie, a prominent local architect, practicing at the turn-of-the century is certainly responsible for contributing to that early porch style design. His ideas about the benefits of exterior porches were expressed in an article that appeared in the Kansas City Star, May 26, 1900. McKecknie said of his design that "the porches, which of a necessity are a dominating feature of the modern flat in this climate, are adapted from an old palace at Bruges." This design philosophy was clearly illustrated in McKecknie's 1902-1903 Pergola Apartment, located at 1008 The Paseo, now demolished. Each apartment had its own deep porch supported by Doric-styled columns that ran the height of the individual porch unit.⁵

The popularity of the colonnaded-type apartment in Kansas City steadily climbed through the 1920s. "Correctly detailed and proportioned columns were definitely used for apartment houses in Kansas City in the very early years of the twentieth century and they were still popular in the 1920s."⁶

Apartment living in Kansas City when it was first developed (like every other city across the U.S.), was considered to be a "necessity of life for the poorer classes." These tenement flats as they were called were box-like in design, poorly-lighted and ventilated, while their tenants suffered from the effects of ill-equipped plumbing and electricity. Yet as early as 1886, the term "flat" took on a new meaning in Kansas City. Bernard Donnelly, an active real-estate man, constructed the European-inspired Connelly Flats for \$30,000 at 8th and Oak Streets. It appears it was these ornately decorated three-story Donnelly Flats, the forerunner of the modern apartment in Kansas City, that changed the course of apartment design and the subsequent acceptance by the wealthier class for apartment living.⁷

At the turn-of-the-century when Kansas City gained a foothold on mass transportation and the parks and boulevard system, inspired by the City Beautiful Movement, became a reality, more and more people were drawn to the city as an appealing place to live. Then, "as the increase in the city's population accelerated, apartment houses must have seemed more attractive housing options to both the developer and the resident."⁸

To satisfy the needs of this oncoming trend, developers and other speculators took advantage of the market climate and provided more livable apartments within the city. Reflecting early twentieth century aesthetics spurred on by the Worlds Columbian Exposition, and by a penchant in architecture for the Colonial Revival, the colonnaded apartment featuring multi-decked verandas became a popular design. For the most part, construction of the colonnaded apartment was focused in proximity to street-car lines. More the rule than the exception, the colonnaded apartment building was constructed in multiples; in some cases, depending on availability of land, clusters of colonnaded apartment building[s] stretched from one city block to another. The overall surge in apartment construction peaked in the mid-1920s when a record number of units were built in Kansas City. It was also during this period that the popularity of the colonnaded apartment reached its limit. With the development of the high-rise, the increase in popularity of the automobile and mass marketing of the air-conditioner, porches were no longer a major consideration in either apartment or single-family home design. By the 1940s, porches had all but disappeared.⁹

⁴ Ibid, p. 8.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid, p. 14.

⁷ Ibid, p. 14.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

B. Kansas City's 1893 Plan for Parks and Boulevards

The Paseo Boulevard resulted from the *1893 Plan for Parks and Boulevards*, an ambitious and progressive scheme that launched the idea of a comprehensive city parks and boulevards system to guide and coordinate urban growth.¹⁰

Kansas City was established in 1850. From the 1870's local efforts were underway to develop a framework for planning a park system. The Board of Park Commissioners was formed in 1892 by Mayor Ben Holmes. August R. Meyer (1851-1905) was named the first president of the Board and served in that role from 1892 - 1901. Meyer roused public interest in parks. He researched parks and parks systems, especially those in nearby Midwestern cities such as St. Louis and Chicago, arguing that "other cities have them" and "Kansas City needs them."¹¹ One of his ambitions was construction of a grand boulevard equal to the Paseo in Mexico City.¹²

In 1882, Meyer supported the hiring of George Edward Kessler (1862-1923) as the first secretary of the Park Board. When Kessler was hired by the Park Board, Kansas City had virtually no parks and his first task was to develop a master plan. As landscape architect and Park Board Secretary, Kessler helped to shape the development of Kansas City.¹³

The 1893 plan established three major parks (North Terrace, West Terrace, and Penn Valley), several community parks (The Parade, The Grove, and Budd Park), and also proposed several smaller neighborhood parks. The plan initiated two cross-town boulevards (Independence and Armour/Linwood Boulevards) and two north-south ones (The Paseo and East Boulevard, now Benton Boulevard).¹⁴

Kessler's plan of public parks and interconnecting boulevards became the yardstick for city planning nationwide. Distinctive features of Kessler's Plan included:

- It outlined a connected system of parks and boulevards that serviced all parts of the expanding city;
- It joined old and new neighborhood, enhanced communities, and sustained property values;
- It was backward-looking in acknowledging the need for urban renewal: in older areas, acquisitions were made with the intent to clean up blight, remove slums, reclaim disturbed landscapes, and protect natural features; and
- It was primarily oriented toward residential needs, with commercial traffic excluded from the boulevards.¹⁵

In 1922 a city planning expert for Philadelphia stated the following in an article entitled "Park and Boulevard System has made Kansas City Famous":

Of all the actual accomplishments that American cities can boast within the last twenty years, non surpass the park and parkways systems of Kansas City. That system, by and of itself, is making that city world famous. It is in its completeness, its pervasiveness, in the way it reaches every quarter and section of the city, that it surpasses the park systems of other cities in the world.¹⁶

¹⁰ Janice Lee, David Boutros, Charlotte R. White, and Deon Wolfenbarger ed. *Legacy of Design: An Historical Survey of the Kansas City Missouri Parks and Boulevards System, 1893-1940* (Kansas City, Missouri: Kansas City Center for Design Education and Research in cooperation with the Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City, 1995), p. xi.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Kansas City Times*, May 18, 1968.

¹³ Wilda Sandy, "Kessler Biography," Special Collections, Kansas City Library.

¹⁴ *Legacy of Design*, p. xiv.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xvi-xvii.

¹⁶ Board of Park Commissioners, Kansas City, MO. "Report of the Park and Boulevard Commission of Kansas City, MO for the Fiscal Year ending 1922," 10.

In 1916, the British planner, C.R. Ashbee stated:

Real estate experts and builders lauded the plan's healthy influence on property values: "the most attractive headline that you can run for an advertisement is 'on a boulevard' or 'near a boulevard'," wrote J.C. Nichols in 1914.¹⁷

In *The City Beautiful Movement in Kansas City*, Wilson concluded:

Kessler and his associates accomplished more than some critics have credited City Beautiful planners with achieving. They demolished slums, unified and zoned the city, provided greatly expanded recreational facilities and replaced ugliness with beauty.¹⁸

C. The Paseo

The Paseo, one of Kansas City's first boulevards and noted for its fashionable apartments and residences at the turn of the century, remains Kansas City's longest boulevard, extending from Admiral Boulevard on the north far south past Swope Park to 79th, a distance of about 20 miles.¹⁹

Wilson identifies The Paseo as the jewel of Kansas City's developing park system.²⁰

The Paseo ("paseo" meaning "walk" or "promenade") was named for the "Paseo de la Reforma" in Mexico City, a thoroughfare which cuts diagonally across the city's street system. The Paseo in Kansas City, in contrast, follows the existing gridiron street pattern.²¹

The Paseo was from its inception considered a parkway as opposed to a boulevard. Landscape architect George Kessler considered The Paseo halfway between a boulevard and a park, and designed it to demonstrate how natural beauty could co-exist with more formal civic development. He fashioned individual parks out of the rectangular, interior lots that were formed by intersecting streets.²²

In 1893 a boulevard 0.75 miles long was proposed from 9th to 17th Streets. This stretch would provide an important link from the Parade to Independence Boulevard. A narrow block of land between Grove and Flora Avenues was to become the center of the dual boulevard. The total width included two streets of approximately 200 feet. These streets were separated by a central space of approximately 100 feet, and bordered by 30-foot-wide parking spaces.²³

The portion from 9th to 15th Streets was acquired in 1896. By April 1898 the dilapidated houses lining the roadway had been removed.²⁴ In 1898 work began on Kansas City's Paseo from 9th to 17th Street. As originally constructed, the Paseo ran north to south, dropping down a generally easy grade from 9th to 18th in the north-central section.²⁵

The following physical description and history of The Paseo is excerpted from *A Legacy of Design An Historical Survey of the Kansas City, Missouri, Parks and Boulevards System, 1893-1940*²⁶.

Today, The Paseo consists of a dual boulevard/parkway that descends gradually from 9th to 18th Street. The northbound and southbound roadways each contain three lanes of one-way traffic. Each block between 9th and 18th Streets contains a small, central park.

¹⁷ C.R. Ashbee. *Town Planning Review*, April 1916, p. 233-39.

¹⁸ William H. Wilson. *The City Beautiful Movement in Kansas City*. (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1964) p.128.

¹⁹ *Kansas City Star*, March 12, 1977.

²⁰ William H. Wilson. *The City Beautiful, Movement*. (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1994) p. 125.

²¹ *Legacy of Design*, p. 240.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *The City Beautiful Movement*, p. 125.

²⁶ *Legacy of Design*, p. 235-244.

The northernmost park features the 9th Street fountain (Women's Leadership Fountain). At the south end of the block, there is a small plaza containing the August R. Meyer Memorial. The memorial to the first president of the Board of Park Commissioners was dedicated in 1909 at the current 10th street location. New York sculptor Daniel Chester French designed the memorial, the first to be placed in a Kansas City park.

The Pergola is located on the west side of the median between 10th and 11th Streets. The limestone structure consists of three levels that descend to 11th Street. Regularly spaced, fluted columns wound with wisteria vines support the open, latticed, wood roof.

From 11th to 12th Streets, The Paseo continues to slope downward. The middle park area is level and contains The Terrace, a large, circular, retaining wall of regularly spaced, quarry-faced limestone. The William T. Fitzsimons Memorial Fountain is embedded in the south end of the terrace wall. The memorial honoring Army physician William T. Fitzsimons, the first American officer killed in World War I, was installed within the 12th Street Terrace in 1922. Kansas City architect John Van Brunt designed the limestone fountain.

A Spanish cannon (dedicated in 1899) mounted on a small, curved concrete plaza is located at the northern end of the median between 12th and 13th Streets. The cannon was used against American servicemen in the Spanish-American War and was part of the armament of guns distributed among the states in 1899. The bronze, five-foot-high cannon is supported by a wooden carriage and its barrel is engraved with the royal cipher of Queen Isabel II of Spain.

A traffic circle at 13th Street contains a diagonal sidewalk and several trees. In the early 1940s the floral beds in the center portion of 13th Street were graded over because of their high maintenance costs. Today, the block from 13th to 14th Streets contains only vegetation. In the 1960s the Highway Department built the Interstate 70 overpass bridge between 14th and 15th Streets.

At the turn of the century more postcards featured The Paseo than any other place in Kansas City. Photographs for the cards were taken from nearly every block and at all angles from 9th to 17th. On Sunday outings Kansas Citians in carriages traveled along the boulevard, viewing the colorful plantings in the sunken gardens, the fountains, pergolas and playgrounds.²⁷ The Paseo was the site of numerous parades including presidential parades featuring Theodore Roosevelt in 1903 and Warren Harding in 1923.

III. SIGNIFICANCE

The redevelopment of the north end of The Paseo in the late 19th and early 20th century to eliminate blight through demolition of dilapidated houses resulted in the construction of high-quality apartments and residences. Housing development flourished during this period of rapid population growth to meet the needs of increasing numbers of Kansas Citians.

Local builder, William H. Collins is credited with developing the colonnaded porch style apartment - a style that appears indigenous to Kansas City.²⁸ The proposed Jazz Hill historic district is comprised of eleven apartment buildings on the north end of Paseo that were clearly influenced by this building style distinguished by multi-story colonnaded porches.

²⁷ Kansas City Times, January 13, 1973.

²⁸ Colonnaded Kansas City Apartment Buildings, p. 8.

At the turn of the century, The Paseo was known for its fashionable apartments and residences. The apartments on the north end were constructed between 1901 - 1913, the period immediately following the development of The Paseo as one of Kansas City's first boulevards.

The 12th and Vine urban renewal project (extending from The Paseo east to Woodward and from 9th Street south to 12th Street) removed all of the historic structures from the east side of the northern section of The Paseo. Additionally, former apartments and residences on the west side have been lost to neglect and fire. The eleven structures in the proposed Jazz Hill historic are the only remaining buildings to demonstrate the grandeur of the elite housing developed along The Paseo in the early 1900s.

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979, the Henderson Home, located directly across from the Pergola at 1016 Paseo is one of the few remaining examples of the Second Renaissance style of architecture in Kansas City. It was designed by Rudolf, Markgraf, an early Kansas City architect in 1899 for Dr. Generous L. Henderson.²⁹ The historic home is one of the few remaining examples of the elite residences that developed along the north end of The Paseo around the turn of the century. Listing of the proposed Jazz Hill historic district, comprised of the eleven apartment buildings surrounding the listed residence, would create greater potential for appreciation of the historic character of The Paseo, known for its fashionable residences and apartments at the turn of the century.

The Paseo resulted from Kansas City's 1893 Plan for Parks and Boulevards, a nationally recognized example of City Beautiful planning and considered by many to be George Kessler's finest work. In *The City Beautiful Movement*, Wilson notes that Kansas City remains a monument to a remarkable coalition of City Beautiful activists.³⁰

Kessler's plan of public parks and interconnecting boulevards became the yardstick for city planning nationwide. Evaluating the historic significance of Kansas City's 1893 Plan for Parks and Boulevards, *Legacy of Design* states:

It is clear that the Kansas City Missouri park system is superior...Judged alongside contemporary plans, Kessler's plan was one of the best, if not the best, for its time.³¹

Substantial parts of the original design were built and are clearly identifiable today. Urbanization, highway building, and social and economic changes have radically altered the appearance of cities. Yet, it is astonishing how many Kansas City neighborhoods have retained something of their past ambience. Many historic residential districts are directly associated with the historic parks and boulevards.³²

The Paseo itself, is significant in the area of landscape architecture as the oldest, longest, and most dominant boulevard in the parks and boulevards system. The northern section of the boulevard also provides a nationally significant example of neoclassical American Parkway design [The design of the Paseo has been mentioned in a National Historic Landmark Nomination for Meridian Hill Park in Washington, D.C. The nomination compares the Paseo to Meridian Hill Park and Bryant Park in New York]. The roadway combines the straight, City Beautiful style of alignment with the curving, naturalistic, American Romantic style.

In community planning, The Paseo represents the intent of early park board to evenly distribute traffic throughout the city while providing accessible open space for all residents. The Paseo was the major north-south link in the system and crossed several significant east-west routes. The

²⁹ Linda F. Becker. "Focus on Dr. Generous L. Henderson Residence." Historic Kansas City Foundation Gazette, November/December, 1984.

³⁰ *The City Beautiful Movement*, p.212.

³¹ *Legacy of Design*, p. xxi.

³² *Ibid.* p. xxii-xxiii.

construction of the Paseo also resulted in the removal of several blighted areas, which spurred the development of quality residential areas in their place.³³

While The Paseo Boulevard is widely recognized as a significant landscaping and planning feat, its development is credited for the successful removal of slum and blight leading to the construction of elite housing. The presence of apartments and residences along The Paseo heightened its emergence as a community gathering place. The apartments and residences are an essential element of The Paseo's character as a social setting for Sunday strolls, parades, recreation, and family outings.

A 24-page photographic brochure of "Views of Kansas City" put out by the Every-Bird-Thayer department store in 1905 pictures "Kansas City's magnificent public buildings, splendid churches, fine homes, up-to-date schools, boulevards and parks." A paragraph describing the Paseo states: "The beautiful Paseo, one of the most noted sections of the Kansas City park system, is constantly thronged with visitors and has become better known than its prototype in the City of Mexico."³⁴

The apartment buildings comprising the proposed district are historically significant as representative examples of the quality housing that developed along The Paseo following the removal of blight that occurred in conjunction with the construction of The Paseo as one of Kansas City's first boulevards at the turn of the century.

IV. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The proposed Jazz Hill Historic District is comprised of eleven apartment buildings and one National Register-listed residence on the west side of The Paseo between Ninth Street on the north and Interstate 70 (14th Street) on the south. The apartment buildings were constructed between 1901 and 1913. The apartment building at 1000 Paseo was originally constructed as a hotel. The historic residence was constructed in 1899. Several of the apartment buildings fit the typical construction type and style of the colonnaded apartment buildings which were common in Kansas City in the first three decades of the twentieth century.³⁵ Each of the apartment buildings is multi-story and constructed of brick and stone masonry. Multi-story porches with prominent columns and wide, ornate cornices are the primary exterior characteristics of the apartment buildings.

One, non-contributing structure (a liquor store) located on the northwest corner of 11th and Paseo is planned for condemnation and demolition.

The proposed district fronts The Paseo, a dual boulevard that descends gradually forming small parks in the median of each block at intersecting streets. The small parks are the location of green space and landscaping, widely recognized for their fountains, memorials, the pergola, and gardens.

V. INTEGRITY

The Jazz Hill Historic District maintains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association even though there have been a few buildings demolished, one building constructed, and several buildings modified in the nearly ninety years since the district buildings were constructed. The following changes have occurred within the proposed district.

- Buildings lost to fire, neglect, and demolition include:
 - The Pergola Apartments at 1008-10;
 - The New York Apartments at 12th and Paseo (NW corner);
 - The Austin Apartments at 1206 Paseo;
 - The Robidoux Apartments at 1208-18 Paseo;

³³ Legacy of Design, p. 243-44.

³⁴ Kansas City Times, April 17, 1971.

³⁵ Colonnaded Kansas City Apartment Buildings.

The Central Methodist Church, at 11th and Paseo; and
A residence at 1012 Paseo.

- A liquor store was constructed at 11th and Paseo.
- All eleven apartment buildings were rehabilitated under a HUD program project in 1975 included extensive interior remodeling, window replacement, addition of fire escapes, and some changes to the exterior porches required at the time for life-safety code compliance.

The Paseo Boulevard retains integrity as the setting for the apartment district. The boundaries of The Paseo date from its period of acquisition, 1896 through 1914. The setting of several historic and formerly prosperous neighborhoods has deteriorated and not all of the original, specific site detailing has survived, but the majority of the boulevard retains its historic feeling.³⁶

VI. CONCLUSION

The proposed Jazz Hill historic district is directly associated with the historically significant effort to redevelop the blighted property along the Paseo Boulevard between 9th and 14th Street through the construction of elite housing. The eleven apartment buildings were constructed between 1901 - 1913, the period immediately following the development of The Paseo as one of Kansas City's first boulevards. The apartments were clearly influenced by the type and style of the colonnaded apartment buildings which were common in Kansas City in the early twentieth century.

Resulting from the Kansas City's 1893 Plan for Parks and Boulevards, The Paseo Boulevard, is a nationally recognized example of City Beautiful planning and considered by many to be George Kessler's finest work. The Paseo was known for its fashionable apartments and residences at the turn of the century.

³⁶ Legacy of Design, p. 243.