

National Register of Historic Places

Kirk House Anderson Co., Kansas

Excerpts taken from the application for the National Register of Historic Places written by Dale E. Nimz , 2005.

Chronology

A banker for more than half a century, Sennett Kirk was cashier of the Garnett State Savings Bank from the time his father, Lester K. Kirk, opened it on September 6, 1889 until Sennett Kirk became bank vice-president in 1947. Sennett Kirk also served as secretary of the Garnett Mutual Loan and Savings Association organized in October 1894. The Garnett State Savings Bank moved into the northwest room of the Kirk Building in 1901.

Sennett Kirk married Bertha Mellen of Garnett on June 12, 1904 and they lived on Fourth Avenue their entire married life. Bertha was born January 11, 1873 in Greeley, Kansas, the daughter of William and Emma Mellen. She attended the University of Kansas and graduated from the Tulton and Trueblood School of Oratory in Kansas City, Missouri. She taught in the State School for the Deaf in Jacksonville, Illinois and then in the Kansas School for the Deaf in Olathe. Bertha Mellen Kirk was a member of the Congregational Church. Sennett and Bertha Kirk's first child, Leta was born January 4, 1906. Another daughter, Bertha, was born a few years later. A son, Sennett Kirk, Jr., was born September 17, 1909.

Because of their wealth, education, and social connections, the Kirks were influential in the local Garnett community. Sennett Kirk's father, the Hon. Lester K. Kirk, was elected in April 4, 1870 to be the first mayor of the city of Garnett when it was granted third class status. When Lester Kirk died on July 4, 1902, he was known as a prominent attorney and "one of the foremost citizens of Anderson County." He also served as county attorney, state representative and state senator. A long-time friend Manford Schoonover wrote in Kirk's obituary, "there are a score or more of men in Anderson County who owe their start in life to his help financially, and by council and friendship." Martha Lindsay Kirk, wife of L. K. Kirk, died April 7, 1908. She was well known in Garnett and Anderson County and had been prominent in social and church circles since the early days of settlement.

Bertha Kirk's father was William H. Mellen, one of the oldest and best known businessmen of Garnett and Anderson County. He taught school at Greeley in 1871 and was elected Register of Deeds of Anderson County. Mellen then finished an unexpired term as County Treasurer. His wife died in 1889, and after that time he lived with his three daughters. In an obituary September 29, 1899, William Mellen was described as "a highly educated man, a poet of merit, and a progressive man in business circles."

On July 8, 1913, the Garnett Evening Review reported, "Sennett Kirk has a force of men at work preparing to move his house to the rear of the premises preparatory to building a handsome new house of modern style and appointments." A few days later on July 16, the Review noted, "Ground was broken today for Sennett Kirk's new house. Jake Barnett and George Ashburn and their men are preparing to put in the foundations." In a front page notice July 31, "A Fine Residence," the newspaper reprinted a report from the Ottawa Herald. "George P. Washburn & Son, architects, have drawn the plans for a \$15,000 residence at Garnett for Sennett Kirk of the State Savings Bank. The building will be the finest in Garnett and will be a three story structure with basement. The building will be of wood, and the plans are drawn for the most modern residence in eastern Kansas. The location will be at Fourth and Walnut, in the principal residence district of the city."

Construction of the Kirk House was associated with the development of municipal services in Garnett. The town began to supply water in 1890-1891. Streets first were paved in 1898. Gas service was developed for cooking, heating, and lighting in 1904-05 and the town began producing electricity in 1914. With the installation of electric streetlights, Fourth Avenue in front of the Kirk House became the "great white way" of Garnett and Anderson County.

After the family moved into the new house, the large and stately Colonial Revival residence became a gathering place for the community. According to local reminiscences, the Kirks often entertained high school students in their home on significant occasions with refreshments followed by entertainment such as dancing or music in the top-floor "ballroom."

Bertha Kirk the younger married Claron Payne on September 5, 1931. In 1949 Bertha Payne lived in Allentown, PA. Leta Kirk married Jack Wagoner Hardy of Los Angeles, California, in August, 1933 at her parents' home. In 1949 Leta Hardy Rhymer lived in Washington, D.C. Sennett Kirk, Jr. married Kathryn Jones and lived in Garnett.

Sennett Kirk died at the age of 79 on November 7, 1949. Born in Garnett, he remained a lifelong resident. A few years after the elder Kirk's death, his son Sennett Kirk, Jr. announced in September 1954 the sale of controlling interest in the Garnett State Savings Bank to C. H. Goppert of Kansas City, Missouri.

When Mrs. Bertha M. Kirk died intestate on September 14, 1951, the three Kirk children inherited the Kirk House. On June 15, 1957, the heirs sold the property to Herman G. and Emma S. Brandenburg. The Brandenburgs sold to Effie M. Graham on November 28, 1960. Mrs. Graham died at Kansas City, Missouri on October 23, 1970 and her son, William S. Graham inherited the property. In March, 1988 Robert Logan and Robert Cugno purchased the property. They lived in the house and ran a successful bed and breakfast for 11 years until selling to present owners Mike and Eileen Burns. Since that time, Mike and Eileen have been diligent to restoring this historical icon to its original grandeur. The Graham family has generously loaned many antiques, once owned by third owner of the house Effie Graham, back to The Kirk House. Rich, colorful, period wall coverings and décor in the Arts & Crafts motif have been used to continue to evoke a "walking back into the past" atmosphere. The Burns thank Sennett Kirk, III and Mike Kirk for their visits, guidance and sharing of family memories. Their information has been invaluable during the restoration process. Previous owners, Robert Cugno and Robert Logan, have donated several pieces of art that are much appreciated. They would also like to thank the many sub-contractors, too numerous to name, for their attention to detail and quality work. Mike and Eileen have named many rooms in the house after previous occupants in an effort to teach their guests and community more about not only the people who have resided in it, but also about their significance to the town's history. Although several renovations remain, Mike and Eileen are pleased to have the privilege of restoring The Kirk House for another generation to enjoy.

Architectural History

The Kirk House has excellent historic architectural integrity. Because its original location, contemporary setting, well-preserved design, materials, and workmanship convey a sense of the past.

The Kirk House may be the last house superintended by notable Kansas architect George P. Washburn. Presumably, George Washburn collaborated with his son, Clarence, on the design and construction of the Kirk House. The design and quality of construction for the Kirk House expressed the Kirk family's prominent social standing in the community. According to local tradition, Bertha Mellen Kirk was familiar with Washburn's work in Garnett and throughout eastern Kansas. Therefore, she wanted the "best" architect in Kansas to design her new house. Reportedly, Mrs. Kirk wanted a more elaborate porch than originally designed so, in order to satisfy the client, the architects added metal columns with ornamental terra cotta capitals to enhance the square stone piers which actually supported the porch roof. According to another traditional story, the contractor was unable to order new quarter-sawn oak lumber for the interior paneling and instead acquired and reused paneling from a Chicago mansion being demolished.

The DeWolf Furniture Company with Harry Barnard as superintendent built the Kirk House. Because of their experience manufacturing store, bank, and church fixtures, the company's workers were prepared for the fine woodwork that distinguished the Kirk House. Charles Wesley Devolve established the first furniture factory in Garnett in 1887. He came to Garnett in 1872 with his two sons George and Harry Devolve and engaged in the furniture and hardware business. Charles DeWolf had a furniture store in downtown Garnett in 1885. Then on February 11, 1887, the local board of trade voted to build the walls of a building to be used as a furniture factory and production work started by July 22. Charles DeWolf left Garnett for Kansas City in 1897. When George

DeWolf died in 1924, he also was credited with the development of the furniture manufacturing business in Garnett. "As a draftsman and designer of special furniture, he was an artist."

Soon after constructing the Kirk House, the DeWolf Furniture Company was sold to the Garnett Church Furniture Company. Harry Barnard became the new manager and George DeWolf remained as traveling salesman. On October 30, 1919, the old DeWolf factory building was sold by Harry Barnard. The Garnett Church Furniture Company purchased the old McAfee factory building with plans to rebuild the section which had been destroyed by fire in 1912. The Garnett Church Furniture Company was established by J. Q. McAfee to build fixtures for churches, banks, and schools. Since the 1930s, however, the company built only church furnishings. The company remained an important business in Garnett until it closed its doors in May 2006.

Local artist Paul Nordstrum painted the naturalistic murals in the Kirk House dining room. According to local tradition, these paintings were based on sketches of Anderson County landscapes suggested by Mrs. Bertha Kirk. In the April 24, 1914 Garnett Review, Nordstrum was described as an accomplished artist who had been praised in a Vernon, Missouri newspaper article for his decoration of the county courthouse. The report said, "the decorative skill of the artist is shown admirably, both in the harmonies and pleasing combination of colors ... throughout the building, all done in what is technically known as the New Art style, . . . The two long panels on the east and west walls, at the head of the grand stairway, are filled with beautiful Missouri landscape scenes, the one on the west wall representing a landscape before civilization, and that on the east wall, the more newly-developed country."

Paul Nordstrum studied in the Chicago Art Institute and the Detroit Museum of Arts School. He was curator and instructor at the Detroit Arts School, and, according to the Evening Review, had decorated a number of large building interiors, notably the Priscilla theatre in Cleveland, Ohio. As the local newspaper concluded, "Garnett has a reason to be proud of having such an artist." The Congregational Church had some of his handiwork just above the entrance to the lecture room. Reportedly, Nordstrum also painted murals and stencil ornamentation for the Masonic and Odd Fellows Lodge rooms in Garnett.

The Kirk House is a well-preserved example of the Colonial Revival architectural style. This was "a dominant style for domestic building throughout the country during the first half of this century." During the first decade of the twentieth century, the expression of Colonial Revival design shifted toward carefully researched copies with more correct proportions and details. This was encouraged by new methods of printing that permitted wide dissemination of photographs in books and periodicals. The style was based on the simple dwellings of the colonial period, but included interesting building forms with large porches as well as expansive interiors with flexible plans. Typically, the interior features a traditional center hall with curving stair handrails and ornamental fireplaces. Colonial Revival residences were constructed of one, or at most, two building materials. Doorways were the focal point of the main facade with side porches extending from gable ends.²

The distinguishing architectural features of the Kirk House are representative of the Colonial Revival style and details of the interior ornamentation express the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement. The Kirk House is an excellent example of the rectangular side-gabled Colonial Revival building subtype. This sub-type was built throughout the period of popularity, but predominated after about 1910.

Washburn and Son, Architects, designed the Kirk House. The senior partner was George P. Washburn, who lived and worked in Ottawa, Franklin County, from 1879 until his death in 1922. Washburn designed and supervised the construction of many public buildings and residences in Kansas. For example, he designed the Anderson County Courthouse, Garnett, built in 1901. From 1891 to 1917, George Washburn designed courthouses in twelve Kansas counties: Anderson, Atchison, Butler, Doniphan, Franklin, Johnson, Harper, Kingman, Miami, Neosho, Pratt, and Woodson. The Johnson and Neosho County courthouses have been demolished.

George Washburn was born March 21, 1847 in Brown County, Ohio. The family moved to a farm in dark County, Missouri in 1857. Washburn served in the 21st Missouri Infantry from 1863 to 1866. He learned carpentry at Quincy, Illinois in 1868 which studying drawing and architecture at Bryant & Stratum's Commercial College. In 1870 George Washburn married Alice Sponsler, settled in Mt. Pulaski, Illinois, and formed a partnership with contractor L.A. Fuller. By 1878 Washburn was listed in the Kansas City, Missouri city directory as a carpenter. One

year later, he moved his family from Mt. Pulaski to Ottawa, Kansas where he worked as a carpenter, architect, and contractor. In 1880 Washburn began working for Cross and Taylor, architects in Kansas City. He supervised the construction of railroad depots in Atchison, Kansas, Denver, Colorado, and Peoria, Illinois. After two years, Washburn opened an architectural office in Ottawa. For six years, he served as the architect for the State Board of Charities and designed several state buildings.

Washburn's career as one of the leading architects in Kansas was established in 1891 when he was selected to design and build, the •Johnson County, Kansas, courthouse. He followed with the Franklin County courthouse in Ottawa in 1893. -These notable commissions were followed by the Atchison County courthouse, Atchison, in 1896; Miami County courthouse, Paola, in 1898; Woodson County, Yates Center, in 1899; Anderson County, Garnett, in 1901; Neosho County Courthouse, Erie, in 1904; Doniphan County Courthouse, Troy, in 1905; Kingman County courthouse, Kingman, in 1907; Butler County Courthouse, El Dorado, and Harper County Courthouse, Harper, in 1908.

Washburn also designed the Beaver County, Oklahoma, courthouse and supervised the construction of the Pittsfield, Pike County, Illinois, Courthouse. He designed school buildings for Ottawa and Baker Universities and many residences. As reported in 1899, "many of the finest business blocks and residences in the state have been erected under his superintendence." Later, the letterhead stationery from the firm of Geo. P. Washburn and son dated 1909 listed forty-four major commissions as references as well as "hundreds of residences and other buildings." George P. Washburn was a member of the American Institute of Architects from 1885.

In 1910 Miss Hazel Washburn married Roy Stookey. While the newly-weds were on their wedding trip, Mrs. George Washburn died suddenly. Disheartened by this shock, George P. Washburn went into semi-retirement at the age of 63. Then son-in-law Roy Stookey joined Clarence Washburn, George's eldest son, in the firm. Design and construction of the Kirk House in Garnett, one of the hundreds of residences produced by the firm, came in 1913. The company built the Chautauqua County Courthouse, Sedan, in 1917. After a productive career that left a memorable architectural legacy in eastern Kansas, George P. Washburn died May 16, 1922. The architectural firm continued as Washburn and Stookey until 1936.