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To northeast corner of Huron Place

(Editor's note: This is the 23rd in a series of "then and now" articles on places and things of interest in Kansas City, Kan., compiled by area historian Margaret Landis in observance of the 100th birthday of KCK in 1986. Much of the information has appeared in past editions of The Kansan.)

(Transcriptions are presented without changes except to improve readability.)

For those who have been reading the series within a series of "then and now" articles, we continue the story of Huron Place and the four corners of Huron Place which were designated as "church lots."

We have covered the southeast and southwest lots. on the southeast corner there first was the St. Paul's Protestant Episcopal Church and then the Grund Hotel, which has since been torn down. The deed to the southwest corner originally went to the German Methodist Church, then to Saint James AME Church - later the First African Methodist Episcopal Church and then to Masonic organizations, with the result being the Scottish Rite Temple of today.

We now move to the northeast corner of Huron Place -- now the site of the Commercial National Bank Building -- remembering that Huron Place is bounded by Minnesota and Ann Avenues, from 6th Street to 7th Street.

In the filing of the original plat of Huron Place, the Wyandotte City Town Company dedicated the land to the Presbyterians in September 1859.

There were only a few families in the church and they were unable to take advantage of the gift. the Civil War also prevented them from using the property. The town company, assuming the lot had not been accepted by the church, sold it to the county commissioners for a county court house and jail for \$700. The county, in turn, didn't do anything with the property and the lot was surveyed by the commissioners and deeded to the Wyandotte Lumber Company.



The Portsmouth Building and the Portsmouth Annex (top), 6th Street and Minnesota Avenue, were built in 1892. The Portsmouth Building was razed to make way for the Commercial National Bank Building (bottom), which was built in 1925. Photos courtesy of the Kansas City, Kan., Public Library.



Corinthian columns

In the meantime, the First Presbyterian Church of Wyandotte was organized and a suit was filed in 1882 by the church against the county commissioners over the ownership of the lot, with the Kansas Supreme Court ruling in favor of the church based on the original plat filing.

A frame church building was built facing Sixth Street and services were held in November 1884. By 1888, a growing congregation and a street railway excavation made the location undesirable for a church. With another court decree needed, the lot was sold and the money used by the church to erect a new brick building at 7th Street and Nebraska. The cornerstone was laid April 1890. (In 1954 construction of a church was started at 4000 Victory Drive, the present location of the First United Presbyterian Church of Kansas City, Kan.).

The Huron Place property finally came into the possession of the Portsmouth Building company. The five-story brick and iron structure, was built on the western side. (The Home State Bank was located in the Portsmouth Building Company from 1907 to approximately 1925.)

George J. Twiss served as mayor of KSK from 1895 to 1897. After serving as mayor, Twiss became president of the Portsmouth Investment Co., and also served as vice president of the Portsmouth Building Company for six years.

Commercial National Bank Building

The Commercial State Bank was organized May 1, 1897 and opened for business at 5th and Minnesota Avenue. In 1902 it became a national bank and moved to 611 Minnesota. In 1905, its third home was in the Portsmouth Building. It moved again, across the street to the southeast corner of 6th and Minnesota, and was there from 1905 to 1926.

The Portsmouth Building was razed in 1925 to make way for the new Commercial National Bank building. The limestone structure was built with a two-story base to be used by the bank and a five-story shaft for office use. The main entrance was ornamented with four large Corinthian columns and two-story arcaded windows. The two-story windows were also on the 6th Street side. The building was ready for use in 1926.

During the construction of the Center City Mall on Minnesota Avenue from 6th to 8th Streets, the Commercial Building was remodeled in 1968. The Corinthian columns and other decorative features were removed and replaced with aluminum panels and tinted glass. The Portsmouth Annex adjacent on the west was added to the bank building in 1979 and enclosed to correspond with the main building.