

The Beacon Hill neighborhood is located on the southeast edge of downtown Kansas City. It spans from 22nd St. on the north, 31st St. on the south, Troost Ave. on the west and Paseo Blvd. on the east.



A view of downtown Kansas City from 24th St. in Beacon Hill.



sell that home to the City. Signs of blight, drugs and prostitution began to appear in the neighborhood. A lawsuit to stop construction of the highway was filed in 1973, but after a 10-year legal battle, construction continued. (The highway was ultimately completed in 2001.) Along the 12-mile stretch of Highway 71, ten thousand people were relocated.

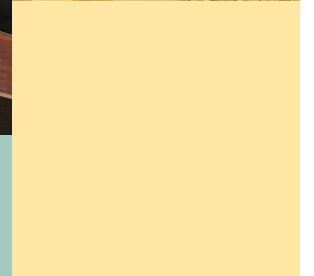
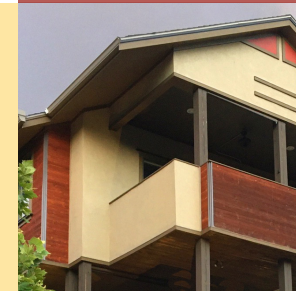
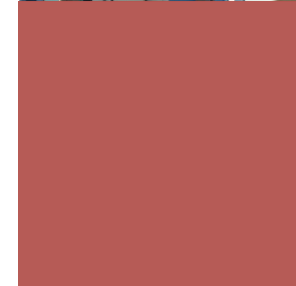
But strong and committed Beacon Hill neighbors persevered, and in 1974 the Beacon Hill Community Council was created (later renamed the Beacon Hill McFeders Community Council in honor of its first president, Theodore McFeders).

In 1998, Kansas City Mayor Emanuel Cleaver II was instrumental in envisioning a redevelopment strategy for Beacon Hill. To guide the initiative, Cleaver formed the Beacon Hill Task Force. It included neighborhood representatives, elected officials, as well as other city officials, bankers, real estate agents, and federal representatives.

Redevelopment of the neighborhood north of 27th St. has been a significant goal of the fifth phase of Beacon Hill's history. Since the early 2000's, new homes have been built on empty parcels, and many existing homes have been renovated. Beacon Hill is a diverse mixture of newcomers and families who have lived here for multiple generations. It's a successful urban renaissance where neighbors continually strive to build community through unity.



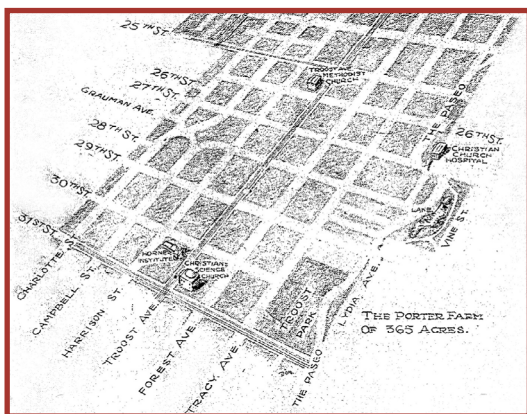
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A Short History

Kansas City's Beacon Hill neighborhood developed in five distinct phases.

The first developed use of Beacon Hill land was as a slave plantation. In 1834, the Rev. James Porter arrived from Tennessee with his wife, son, mother and 40 slaves. He wanted to make a new start on the 365-acre piece of land he had acquired by land grant from the United States. The Porters (or more likely their slaves) built a five-room, black walnut log home between 27th and 28th east of Tracy and facing north. Log cabins for slaves were placed adjacent to the Porter "big house." The plantation had a natural water supply from a spring at the corner of 28th and Paseo and included an orchard, a pasture with nearby hay field and a corn field. The family burial grounds were at what today is 25th and Troost, although Porter himself is buried nearby at Union Cemetery in Union Hill (and the oldest public cemetery in Kansas City, Missouri). After the Civil War, Rev. Porter was required to free his slaves, and he and subsequent generations sold off portions of the plantation land. Today's Beacon Hill was a subset of the Porter acreage.



The second phase of Beacon Hill's history saw significant development. Troost Park, an amusement park, was opened in 1889 to promote trade for the Kansas City Cable Company. The entrance to the park was at the end of the cable line at 24th and Troost. There were wooded spots where families could picnic and boat and several concessions.

Also at this time, a section of Troost Avenue from 26th to 31st Street was known as "Millionaire's Row." The New York Herald published a list of millionaires living in Kansas City in 1901, and 6 of the 23 cited lived here. One was George F. Winter, who bought the entire block of Troost Avenue between 30th and 31st and over to Harrison Street. His house at 3000 Troost was later purchased in 1890 by William J. Smith, president of the Kansas City Cable Railroad Company, for \$110,000. The mansion at 3000 Troost had three floors, all carpeted, and on each one was a large hall with a huge fireplace. The first floor included a drawing room with satinwood panels and gold hardware and a library with over two thousand books. The mansion, which had two ballrooms, a billiard room, and ping pong rooms on the third floor and a bowling alley in the basement, was known for parties held almost every weekend. During the summer, the house was cooled as air went through a tunnel.



The Smith family home at 3000 Troost Ave, shown in 1900 when Troost was known as Millionaire's Row. It was one of the first homes with air-conditioning in Kansas City. Photo credit: midtownkcpost.com

Eventually, Millionaire's Row transformed into a commercial corridor. A major streetcar line along Troost attracted shoppers and residents, promoting the growth of surrounding neighborhoods like Beacon Hill.

In the early years of the 20th century and well into the 1950's, Beacon Hill entered its third phase of history as a segregated black neighborhood. In racially biased Kansas City, black citizens were pushed north of 27th and east of Troost. J.C. Nichols introduced restrictive covenants which precluded the selling of homes to black families in other parts of the city. In 1900, 25% of the Vine Street Economic Development district was African American. By 1920 that had grown to 75%.

Beacon Hill became a lovely and desirable black neighborhood with homeowners who were doctors, dentists, lawyers, preachers and teachers. One example is Leona Pouncey Thurman who lived in the 2400 block of West Paseo and was Kansas City's first African American woman lawyer. She worked as a secretary for attorney James D.



Leona Pouncey Thurman, who lived on West Paseo, practiced law out of an office on 18th St. She served as president of the Southwest Bar Association and was the first African American woman to argue before the Supreme Court. Photo credit: kchistory.org.

Pouncey, whom she married. After his death, she entered Howard University Law School, earned her law degree and practiced in Kansas City for 34 years.

During this period, there were more than 600 flourishing businesses, hotels, restaurants, and stores in or adjacent to Beacon Hill. Lincoln High School had opened in 1890 at a building located at 19th and Tracy, the first KC high school dedicated to black students. Today the school is located in a building just east of Beacon Hill and has been renamed Lincoln College Preparatory Academy. Because of its high standards of education, it remains one of the top-ranked high schools in the United States.

This thriving, self-contained economy began to change in the fourth phase of Beacon Hill's history. In 1951 a proposal was made for the "South Midtown Freeway" (later called Highway 71). The two potential locations for the freeway were the streetcar tracks along Brookside Blvd. or east of Troost. The decision was made to build the freeway through the east side, and Beacon Hill was one of several neighborhoods impacted. The City and MODOT began to buy properties, leaving them vacant. Many grand old homes in good repair were demolished to make room for the highway. Beacon Hill began to change. In some cases, younger generations inherited family homes but chose to

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Built in 1896, this home along West Paseo was spared from demolition during construction of Highway 71. It once belonged to Leon Jordan, a three-term member of the Missouri House of Representatives and the first African American to obtain the rank of lieutenant in the KCPD.