

Two Hundred Years on Troost: *Finding the 'Precious in the Worthless'*

1808

The land along present-day Troost Avenue was the site of one of the main trails commonly used by the Osage Indians during the late 18th century and early 19th century.



Osage Chief

From these trails, they would hunt in the forests or carry their canoes to the Missouri River. Their ancestral village was known as the "Place of Many Swans", currently near the southwest Missouri town of Rich Hill (DeAngelo, 1995, pp. 14-15). In 1808, the Osage Nation surrendered over 52.5 million acres of land to the United States of America. Thus began the modern era of Troost Avenue.

1848

In 1848 the area between 31st St. (then called Springfield Avenue) and 23rd Streets, and from Locust to Vine was the Porter Slave Plantation.

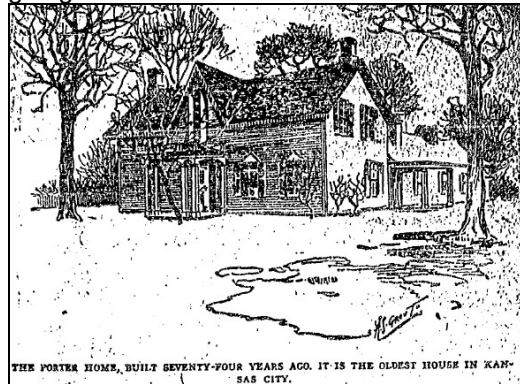
Earlier, in 1832, Rev. James Porter left Franklin, Tennessee (near Nashville) with his wife, son, mother and 40 slaves en route to what would become Kansas City. In 1833, they purchased 80 acres at 27th and Troost Avenue, which soon grew to 365 acres. Between 1833 and 1835, the Porter slaves cleared walnut and oak trees with axes and saws, removed Missouri limestone and rocks from the soil, and constructed living quarters. One of the known slaves was "Simon", purchased in 1829. Aunt Ann and "Fiddlin' Dick" Porter are both buried in the

Union Cemetery along with the Porter family.



Missouri Slaves: 1858

The "big house" was at 2709 Tracy, with slave cabins built across the street on Tracy, going west in a semi-circle.



THE PORTER HOME, BUILT SEVENTY-FOUR YEARS AGO. IT IS THE OLDEST HOUSE IN KANSAS CITY.

1911 KC Star Drawing of original "Big House" of Rev. James Porter

A fruit orchard was planted between 27th and 28th, and between Forest and Troost Avenues. The family cemetery was at 24th and Troost, later to become the Troost Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church. A cornfield was planted between 30th and 31st along Troost. Cattle and horses grazed in pasture north of 27th Street. The water source was a natural spring that later would become "Troost Lake" at 28th Street, between Paseo Boulevard and Vine Street.

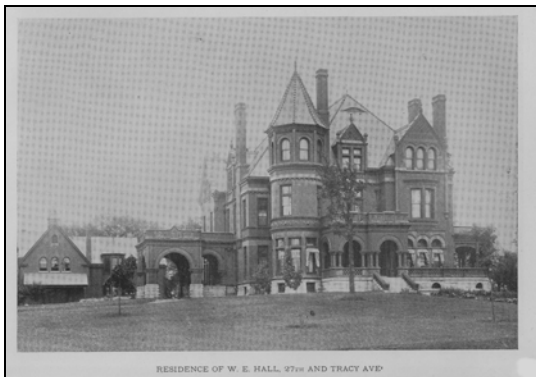


**Dr. Benoist Troost,
by George Caleb Bingham**

In 1846, Dr. Benoist Troost, one of the original fathers of Kansas City, purchased five lots from the Town Company of Kansas. This land would be joined with other lots to later become the “Town of Kansas”, now known as Kansas City, Missouri. Troost Avenue and Troost Lake both bear his name, and that of his wife, Mary Ann Troost.

1888

Due to a real estate boom in the 1880s, the previously cleared land on the Porter Plantation made ideal real estate investment.



**Home of Mrs. W. E. Hall,
of Porter Family at 2709 Tracy**

As a result, much of it was developed from 26th to Linwood resulting in “Millionaires’ Row”. The granddaughter of Rev. James Porter, Mrs. W. Ewing Hall, owned a

mansion at the previous site of the big house on 27th and Tracy.

On the southeast corner of 26th and Troost lived former Missouri Governor Thomas T. Crittenden (1881-85, of Jesse James fame). Others that lived in this area were William T. Kemper, Sr. (the banker and real estate developer), Dr. Flavel Tiffany, Webster Withers, and, L.V Harkness, who in 1890 was reputed to be the richest man in Kansas City.

1928

Due to the worldwide depression of the 1890s, much of the real estate market along Troost collapsed.



31st and Troost: December 6, 1929

By 1912, it gave way to the beginning of a significant business district.

- In the early 1920s Walt Disney began his animation career at Laugh-o-grams Studios at 31st and Forest, and displayed his films at the Isis Theater at 31st and Troost.
- Kansas City broadcaster Walt Bodine would enjoy a malt at his father’s *Bodine Drugs* at Linwood and Troost.
- Duke Ellington and others would have all-night “Battle of the Bands” around the corner at *El Torreon* on 31st and Gillham Rd.
- This area became a “city within a city”.
- In 1922, there existed 186 businesses within 2 blocks of 31st and Troost!

1968

People still talk about the shopping they did at J.C. Penney's, Jones, Woolworth's and Katz Drugs in the 1960s.



Students Arrested during riots in April, 1968

Yet, following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968, riots broke out. Martial law included tanks begin driven down 31st and Troost. Although racial tensions exploded, dialogue groups on both sides of Troost provided a hopeful model for a new vision on Troost. Its fulfillment would wait until a generation later.

2008

On April 19, 2008 the 4th Annual "Troost Avenue Festival" is held. Dedicated to "Porter Slave Plantation Remembrance Day", the Troost community seeks to honor the slaves that worked the Porter Plantation. Indeed, due to their labors the Porter land rose in value to become "Millionaires' Row".



Friendship Dance: 2nd Annual Troost Festival 2006

A grass roots group called "Troost Folks" has called for ongoing dialogue and practical steps to restore a sense of village that brings together both sides of Troost Avenue

into, what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called, a "beloved community." Now it is up to you and me.

References

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- A "shut in" farm: business buildings now entirely surround a country home of 29 years ago. (1912a, April 14) *The Kansas City Star, Editorial Section*.
- A "shut in" farm: business buildings now entirely surround a country home of 29 years ago. (1912b, April 14) Diagram of the land revealing the layout on 31st and Forest. *The Kansas City Star, Editorial Section*.
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Illustrations

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- Claremore-Osage Indian (2006, May 23) Courtesy of Osage Nation in Pawhuska, OK.
- Troost, Dr. Benoist and Mrs. Mary: Nelson-Atkins Art Gallery retrieved on April 8, 2008 from <http://www.nelson-atkins.org/art/CollectionDatabase.cfm?id=28964&theme=American> .
- Troost Avenue Festival (2006) Courtesy of St. Mary of Egypt Orthodox Church retrieved on April 10, 2008 from http://www.gallery.stmaryofegypt.net/main.php?q2_itemId=24 .