

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register Listed
1-20-2012

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name Harmon, John C., House
other names/site number 177-5400-00018

2. Location

street & number 915 SW Buchanan not for publication
city or town Topeka vicinity
state Kansas code KS county Shawnee code 177 zip code 66606

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this x nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property x meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide x local

SEE FILE

Signature of certifying official _____ Date _____

Title _____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government _____

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official _____ Date _____

Title _____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

 entered in the National Register determined eligible for the National Register

 determined not eligible for the National Register removed from the National Register

 other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
3	1	buildings
		district
		site
		structure
		object
3	1	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic: Single Dwelling

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic: Single Dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th & 20th Century Revivals: Neoclassical

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: Stone: Limestone

walls: Wood: Weatherboard; Shingle

roof: Asphalt Shingle

other:

Narrative Description

Summary

The John C. Harmon House is located at 915 SW Buchanan Street west of downtown Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas. The 800 and 900 blocks of Buchanan Street are lined with large late 19th and early 20th century residences, and this area was historically known as Governor's Row or Governor's Square. The east-facing house is centered on a large lot that extends west to Lincoln Street. A gravel driveway extends from Buchanan Street along the north side of the house. Other historic buildings on the property include a one-and-a-half-story carriage house at the southwest corner of the property and a circular wood-frame well house located northwest of the house. There is a non-historic two-car garage behind the residence.

Narrative Description

Residence (1905, contributing)

Exterior

The John C. Harmon House is two-and-a-half stories with a full, partially finished basement. The structural system is wood frame on an uncut stone foundation and it is sheathed in wood clapboards. It features a side-gable roof covered in asphalt shingles. There is a large full-height front entry porch flanked by a lower full-width porch. The full-height portion features a pedimented gable roof with classical columns and the low porch features a flat roof with a simple entablature and square columns. Decorative iron railings adorn both levels of the low porch.¹ The porch sits on stone piers interspersed with wood lattice. The rear of the house features a small utility room on the first floor with a cantilevered sleeping porch above. There are two arched dormers on the front of the house and three on the rear. Windows are wood double-hung (multi-light over one) or fixed, with the exception of the sleeping porch windows, which are triple-hung. Window surrounds are rectangular in profile. Gutters are integrated into the cornice.

The east (principal) elevation features Neoclassical-style symmetry with three bays on each floor. The central portion is a full-height pedimented portico with modillion blocks, entablature, cornice and Tuscan columns. The center of the pediment features a small round window. The center bay of this elevation (on the first floor) is convex curved the width of the portico. The single central front door is half glass with nine lights on the upper and a single panel on the lower. The door is hinged in the center horizontally so that the top and bottom can be opened individually. The door is accented with sidelights with a lattice muntin pattern. Next to each sidelight is an additional, larger fixed window, with the same lattice muntin pattern. The bays on either side of the front door feature a tripartite window, the center portion being wider than the sides. The second floor is also symmetrical with a door (with side lights) in the center bay that provides access to the porch and a single window in each of the side bays. There are two dormers on this elevation with arched, double-hung windows. The porch floor is wood tongue and groove and the porch ceiling is paneled wood.

The north elevation gable end is a large pediment with modillion blocks and full entablature. There are five single windows on the first level and six on the second level; a pair of windows occupies the space furthest to the west on the second floor that corresponds with the sleeping porch. The large pediment includes a tripartite Palladian window. There are three small, evenly spaced basement windows within the stone foundation wall. This elevation also features an interior stone chimney, only visible above the roofline.

The west (rear) elevation is roughly divided into three sections; on the left, an enclosed back porch with sleeping porch above form an ell; the center features a triple window at mid level that corresponds to the interior stair landing; and the right section features a large exterior rubble stone chimney. The windows on the

¹ Dan, Krepinevich, KSHS Inventory Record # 177-5400-018. 13 June 1969. The iron railing is a replacement. Historic images indicate the original railing was a wood balustrade.

sleeping porch are triple-hung and feature multi-light-over-two-over-two pattern. The windows in the center section are nine-over-nine with transoms that feature a curved decorative muntin pattern. There is a set of full glass multi-light French doors to the left of the chimney that leads to the parlor and a single window above it on the second floor. There are three arched dormers with double-hung windows on the roof.

The south elevation has two bays on the first floor and three on the second floor. The first floor has a simple bay window on the left and a single window on the right. The second floor features three, evenly spaced single windows. The gable end features the same pediment that appears on the north elevation with a centered Palladian window and a small round window above that. There are two small basement windows within the stone foundation.

Interior

The interior features a center hall plan. Overall finishes include plaster walls and carpeted floors. It is likely that there are hardwoods under the carpet. All casework and trim is painted. Interior doors are generally paneled, but the number and configuration of panels varies.

Upon entering the front door there is a small, enclosed vestibule with an eighteen light door with transom that extends into the foyer. Stepping out of the vestibule into the foyer, which is mostly open to the second floor, looking west is a large central staircase. On either side of the central hall are openings that lead to the main public spaces. The living room is on the south and the dining room is on the north. The kitchen is west of the dining room. The living room spans the full depth of the house and features a large fireplace. The fireplace surround and mantle are believed to be original, however, the current finish is not. This room also features built-in casework (book shelves and cabinets) and a simple bay window. There is architrave moulding at the ceiling. The dining room is almost half the size of the living room and it features a larger concave crown moulding. The remainder of the first floor features a kitchen, butler's pantry, breakfast room, and enclosed back porch.

The central staircase has a large walnut railing with turned balusters. It ascends to a landing that spans the width of the center hall and features three large windows with lattice patterned muntins. The stair splits and continues up either side of the hall. The central hall portion of the second floor is open to the first floor with a railing surround. On either side of the hall are two bedrooms and one bath each. The southwest bedroom has a fireplace. The sleeping porch is accessed through the northwest bedroom. The ceiling is lower in the sleeping porch and it features two-thirds height windows on three elevations. Access to the third floor is through a door on the north side of the hall.

The third floor is a half story and the ceilings follow the lines of the framing. It is divided into two large rooms and includes a bathroom and a large storage area. The dormer windows as well as the Palladian windows in the gable ends provide light. The floors are hardwood. There is significant plaster damage on the walls and ceiling due to roof leaks.

Carriage House (1905, estimated; contributing)

The carriage house is one-and-a-half-stories with a side gable roof. It is clad in wood drop siding and the roof is covered in asphalt shingles. The east elevation has two sets of double doors that appear to be crude replacements. There is also a small window opening that is boarded and a single, gable-front dormer. The north elevation features two double-hung windows on the first floor and one on the second with a four-over-four light configuration. The west elevation has one small second story window that is boarded. This building is currently used for storage.

Well House (1905, estimated; contributing)

The original well house is a round mushroom-shaped structure approximately seven feet in diameter. It is clad in wood shingles with an asphalt roof. It features one full-height door opening and two fixed, two-light windows. The original wood door is half glass, half paneled.

Garage (1985, estimated; non-contributing)

The two-car garage is located behind the residence to the west. It features a gable roof and a large double garage door, is clad in vinyl siding, and has an asphalt shingle roof.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1905

Significant Dates

1905

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Edward T. Wilder & Thomas Wight (Architects)
Harry S. Douglas (Contractor)

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance is 1905 – the date of construction.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

N/A

Narrative Statement of Significance

Summary

The John C. Harmon House is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C in the area of architecture as an excellent example of an early 20th century Neoclassical-style residence. The residence was designed by the Kansas City-based architectural firm Wight and Wilder and built in 1905 for local banker John Harmon and his wife Nellie.

Elaboration

The Harmon House is located in a close-in turn-of-the-twentieth century neighborhood that is 11 blocks west of the commercial district lining Kansas Avenue, eight blocks west of the Kansas State Capitol, and just three blocks west of Topeka High School. This neighborhood first appeared in the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps in 1913. This property and the neighboring properties to the north included large residences on large lots extending west to Lincoln Street. It is in Topeka's Old Town Neighborhood, which is bounded by SW 6th Street on the north, SW 10th Street on the south, SW Topeka Boulevard to the east, and SW Summit to the west. With its proximity to the commercial, governmental, and medical districts, this area has lost many historic resources to development. Today, the neighborhood features a mixture of low- and high-density housing spanning many decades of development and re-development.²

Since the early 1900s, the west side of the Buchanan Street between 8th and 9th streets has been known as "Governor's Row" or "Governor's Square" in tribute to the house at the southwest corner of 8th and Buchanan. That residence, which was demolished in 1965, served as the home of the Kansas governor from 1901 to 1962.³ However, other architecturally impressive residences remain along the 800 and 900 blocks of Buchanan, including ones designed by the architectural firms Holland & Squires and Wight and Wilder.

Perhaps recognizing the political and social benefits of living in this up-and-coming neighborhood west of downtown Topeka, John C. Harmon commissioned the Kansas City-based architectural firm of Wilder and Wight to design a residence. He may have known Edward T. Wilder, who was from Topeka.⁴ Wilder had attended Cornell University and began his impressive career with Jenny and Mundie architects of Chicago. He came to Kansas City, Missouri and partnered with Thomas Wight in 1904. Thomas Wight, who was born in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1874, began his career with a 10-year apprenticeship with the internationally-known architectural firm McKim, Mead & White, working in both Boston and New York. He moved to Kansas City, Missouri and partnered with Edward T. Wilder in 1904. Wight's brother William, who also trained with McKim, Mead & White, joined the firm and Wilder retired in 1912. The firm became Wight and Wight.⁵

The firm Wilder and Wight was rather short-lived compared to its successor firm Wight and Wight, which designed such prominent Kansas City landmarks as the City Hall, U.S. Courthouse, Kansas City Life Insurance building, Nelson Art Museum, and the Wyandotte County Courthouse. Extant designs attributed to

² "Old Town Neighborhood Plan," (Topeka, KS: Old Town Neighborhood Improvement Association and Topeka-Shawnee County Metropolitan Planning Department, 2003), 3. Accessed online at: www.topkea.org/pdfs/mp_Old_Town_Plan_Final_web.pdf.

³ Ibid., 4.

⁴ His father, Edward Wilder, was secretary-treasurer of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad.

⁵ Katherine Baxter, *Notable Kansas Citizens of 1915-1918* (Kansas City, MO: Kellog-Baxter Printing Co., 1925), 23-24; Henry F. Withey and Elsie Rathburn Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)* (Los Angeles: New Age Publishing Co., 1956), 658; *Kansas City Star*, 26 April 1931.

Wilder and Wight are much fewer in comparison, but include the National Register-listed Brown Mansion in Coffeyville, Kansas.⁶ William D. Wight designed Topeka's Cedar Crest, which has served as the residence of the Kansas governor since 1962.

John Harmon, a local mortgage banker with Merriam Mortgage Company, commissioned the design and construction of this house in 1904 and 1905. A March 27, 1905 newspaper article noted Harmon's plan to erect this \$10,000 residence on Governor's Square:

The residence of 10 rooms will be constructed of frame with large verandas running around the entire house, a great hall 16 feet wide running through the center of the house and its entire width of 35 feet. The hall will be open to the second floor and the stairway will be at the extreme end. The rooms upon the second floor will lead out from a balcony running around the edge of the hall, something after the pattern of the Jefferson home at Monticello. The chimneys will be constructed from stone and will be built from the outside. The weather boarding to be used will be entirely different from that in use here and will be laid 8 inches to the weather. The dimensions of the house are 55 by 35 feet. Wilder and Wight of Kansas City, Mo. are the architects. Mr. Wilder is a son of Edward Wilder of this city. The residence will be completed by September 1. H. S. Douglas has been awarded the contract.⁷

H. S. Douglas is likely Harry S. Douglas, who was a locally well-known contractor of his time.⁸

The house was built in the Neoclassical style during a period defined by the American architectural movements that also included Prairie and Craftsman as well as Tudor and Colonial revivals. The 1893 World's Columbian Exposition sparked a revival in classical models that was the impetus for the Neoclassical style of building. Neoclassical includes such character-defining features as a monumental portico, symmetry, elaborate columns, porch and roofline balustrades, decorative window and door surrounds, multi-light windows, and overhanging eaves with dentils. Through the first half of the 20th century, Neoclassical was a dominant building style for monumental residential architecture.⁹ The Harmon House was constructed during the first phase of the style's popularity (1900-1920) and is an example of a somewhat less common subtype defined by a central full-height entry porch with lower full-width porch.

The 1910 federal census records the 50-year-old Harmon living at 915 SW Buchanan Street with his 50-year-old wife Nellie and their live-in hired help Anna Motifeldt, who immigrated to the United States in 1909. According to this census, the Harmons had no children.¹⁰

In 1919, Archibald and Adeline Catlin acquired the property and lived there two decades. Archibald Catlin was the secretary-treasurer of Pioneer Mortgage Company. The 1920 federal census records four people living in the residence at that time including the 50-year-old Arch, 40-year-old Adeline, their eight-year-old daughter Catherine, and Adeline's 15-year-old daughter Muriel Barnes. Muriel had left the residence by the recording of the 1930 federal census.¹¹

⁶ "Brown Mansion," National Register of Historic Places nomination (Topeka: Kansas Historical Society, 1976), 8-2.

⁷ *Topeka State Journal*, 27 March 1905.

⁸ *Topeka Daily State Journal*, 23 April 1918 (obituary).

⁹ Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 344.

¹⁰ Ancestry.com, *1910 United States Federal Census* [database on-line] (Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2006).

¹¹ Ancestry.com, *1920 United States Federal Census* [database on-line] (Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2006); Ancestry.com, *1930 United States Federal Census* [database on-line] (Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2006).

Herbert and Augusta Laing lived in the residence from 1941 to 1962. Herbert Laing served two terms in the Kansas House of Representatives during the years Governor Edward F. Arn was his neighbor on the corner to the north. During his service as a legislator, he led support for the construction of the Kansas Turnpike. He was vice president of Security Benefit Life, from which he retired in 1962 because of an illness. He died ten years later.¹² Laing's daughter, Alicia Laing Salisbury, served in the Kansas Senate from 1984 to 2000. Topeka's Career Chapter of the American Business Women's association named her its 2004 Woman of Outstanding Achievement. Salisbury recalled living at 915 SW Buchanan and delivering Girl Scout cookies to former Governor Frank Carlson. Also, she remembered her parents hosting a charity dinner party at which Buddy Rogers, Mary Pickford, Donald O'Connor, and Danny Kaye were in attendance.¹³

The Laing family sold the property to William Nice, M.D., in 1962. Dr. Nice was an Army medical officer during the Korean War and practiced internal medicine in Topeka. The property sat vacant several years before being purchased in 2009 by the current owners Garth Combs and Joseph Walker.

¹² *Topeka Capital-Journal*, 18 December 1977.

¹³ "2004 Woman of Outstanding Achievement: Called to Serve," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, 22 February 2004.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Ancestry.com. *1910 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2006.

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Baxter, Katherine. *Notable Kansas Citizens of 1915-1918*. Kansas City, MO: Kellogg-Baxter Printing Co., 1925.

"Brown Mansion," National Register of Historic Places nomination. Topeka: Kansas Historical Society, 1976.

Kansas City Star. 26 April 1931.

Krepinevich, Dan. KSHS Inventory Record # 177-5400-018. 13 June 1969.

McAlester, Virginia and Lee. *Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.

"Old Town Neighborhood Plan." Topeka, KS: Old Town Neighborhood Improvement Association and Topeka-Shawnee County Metropolitan Planning Department, 2003. Accessed online at: www.topkea.org/pdfs/mp_Old_Town_Plan_Final_web.pdf.

Ripley, John W., and Robert W. Richmond, eds. *An Album of 19th Century Homes of Shawnee County*. Topeka, KS: Shawnee County Historical Society, 1974, reprint 1980.

Topeka Capital-Journal. 18 December 1977; 22 February 2004.

Topeka Daily State Journal. 23 April 1918.

Topeka State Journal. 27 March 1905.

Withey, Henry F., and Elsie Rathburn Withey. *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)*. Los Angeles: New Age Publishing Co., 1956.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been Requested)
 previously listed in the National Register
 previously determined eligible by the National Register
 designated a National Historic Landmark
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency
 Local government
 University
 Other
Name of repository: **Kansas Historical Society**

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____ N/A _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.9 acres
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	<u>15</u> Zone	<u>267100</u> Easting	<u>4325720</u> Northing	3	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing
2	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing	4	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (describe the boundaries of the property)

The John C. Harmon House is located at 915 SW Buchanan and occupies a lot that totals 0.9 acres and is described as follows: Section 36, Township 11, Range 15 - POB 245 NLY OF NW COR 10TH & BUCHAN AN, WLY 320.15 TO ST, NLY 122.5, EL Y 330(S) TO ST, SLY 122.5 TO POB.

Boundary Justification (explain why the boundaries were selected)

The nominated property includes the property historically associated with the Harmon House.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Sarah Martin / Kim Gant
organization Kansas Historical Society date August 2011
street & number 6425 SW 6th Avenue telephone
city or town Topeka state KS zip code 66615
e-mail

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Photographs:

Name of Property: Harmon, John C., House
City or Vicinity: 915 SW Buchanan, Topeka
County/State: Shawnee County, KS
Photographer: Sarah Martin
Date of Photos: August 17, 2011

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

- 1 of 16: East (primary) elevation, facing W
- 2 of 16: 2-story porch on east (primary) elevation, facing W
- 3 of 16: 1-story porch at north end of east elevation, facing SW
- 4 of 16: North (side) elevation, facing SW
- 5 of 16: West (rear) and south (side) elevations, facing NE
- 6 of 16: Window detail, west elevation, facing E
- 7 of 16: South (side) and east (primary) elevations, facing NW
- 8 of 16: Driveway into property stretching along north side of house, facing SW
- 9 of 16: Detail of primary entrance on east elevation, facing W
- 10 of 16: Interior of house, staircase to second story, facing W
- 11 of 16: Interior of house, living room on south side of house, facing NW
- 12 of 16: Interior of house, view from staircase landing showing primary entrance on first floor and porch door on second floor
- 13 of 16: Interior of house, attic space, facing N
- 14 of 16: Carriage House, east and north (side) elevations, facing W
- 15 of 16: Carriage House, north (side) and west elevations, facing SE
- 16 of 16: Well house, showing west-facing window and south-facing door, facing E

Property Owner:

(complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO)

name Garth Combs / Joseph Walker
street & number 915 SW Buchanan Street telephone _____
city or town Topeka state KS zip code 66606

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Figure 1: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map: 1913 (Topeka, sheet 53)

