

Then & Now on Main Street

297 Main Street

By Karen Ferguson, Town Historian

This is the second article of the “Then & Now on Main Street” series and gives a brief overview of 297 Main Street, which is now the location of the Kirkwood Fire Station.

Prior to the Fire Station, it was a hotel where the very first meeting of the Town of Kirkwood was held on February 14, 1860. The property was at that time the home of George Jones, which also served as a hotel and later became known as the Kirkwood House.

When looking at several different plat maps, this property seemed to change hands frequently. In 1876 the property is listed as belonging to B Schwartz and I’m assuming it is Baltis Swartz. In 1885, John Wicks is listed as owner. In 1908 the owner was CP Miller.

Upon looking at a picture of the hotel from 1912 and one from the 1920s, the structure changed to include a covered second story deck. The posts changed from being square rough-cut posts to turned posts reflecting the Victorian design that was becoming popular. There was a one-story addition put on the north end of the building that looks like 3 stalls to park carriages/surreys and repurposing the square posts.

In an excerpt from “These things I remember” written by Ethan Chandler Newberry, she recalled the hotel being next to the school. She described the school grounds as being a large level field where we played games during recess and lunch like baseball, Old Red, Prisoner’s base, etc. She further stated “. . . next to the school ground was a hotel. On that side of the school ground there was a high board fence to separate it from the school, but by peeking through the cracks we saw all sorts of things, a free show put on by the town drunks, which helped our education. Why the school was located here was a mystery.” Little did she know the school existed prior to the hotel.

Sometime in the 1920s, shortly after the picture was taken, the hotel burned down.

After the hotel burnt, the Kirkwood Volunteer Fire Department built their first firehouse there around 1935. It was a single bay structure that was used from 1937-1952 when a larger station with space for four trucks was built next door. The original structure was then rented out and used as a store and then a machine shop. Due to the nature of the highly flammable material in that machine shop, it caught on fire in 1971. The second 4-bay building was renovated in 2004 and completed in 2006 to include four more bays to accommodate larger trucks, plus extra storage and an air system for oxygen to fill the tanks. That building is what exists today.