

Storydwelling

Rosa Leff



Rosa Leff, Mamie's House, 2024



Afro House, 10th St & Rhode Island St.

To look at Afro House in this moment is to see a lawn full of leaves, trash cans sitting haphazardly at the edge of the driveway, cracked pavement and siding in need of replacing. Only in searching for beauty here, and knowing the history of this place, can we find a sort of sad poetry that hints at its past. The cracks call to mind the heartbreak Rick "Tiger" Dowdell's family must have felt when he was killed just steps from here. The dry leaves covering every inch of lawn remind us to consider the chaos of students and residents pouring out into the streets to riot. The peeling paint and rotting siding remind us that this was a place that gave so much it was left with little for itself. The soft blue of the papercut echoes how memories soften over time. How ultimately a house is just a house.

On June 26th, Afro House, funded in part by the KU Student Senate, was opened on Tenth and Rhode Island Streets; its goal was to help Black people

'achieve total liberation in this white society.' Like the Black Panther Party elsewhere, Afro House offered breakfast for children in the Lawrence community, a Big Brother- Big Sister Program, and a Liberation School. (--From KU's Tumultuous Years: Thirty Years of Student Activism, 1965-1995 by William M. Tuttle Jr. in Embattled Lawrence: The Enduring Struggle for Freedom by Dennis Domer)

At about 10:30 on a hot summer night on this date [July 16] in 1970, former KU freshman Rick "Tiger" Dowdell, 19, a local African-American youth, was shot and killed while fleeing police in downtown Lawrence. The incident marked the beginning of five days of violence that represented a flashpoint in the long simmering confrontation between student antiwar activists and civil rights advocates on the one hand, and law enforcement authorities on the other. Before it was over, a white KU freshman named Harry Nicholas "Nick" Rice would also be killed, two policemen and numerous others would be injured, and the situation in Lawrence and on the KU campus would be approaching that of a battle zone. (From <https://union.ku.edu/rick-tiger-dowdell>)

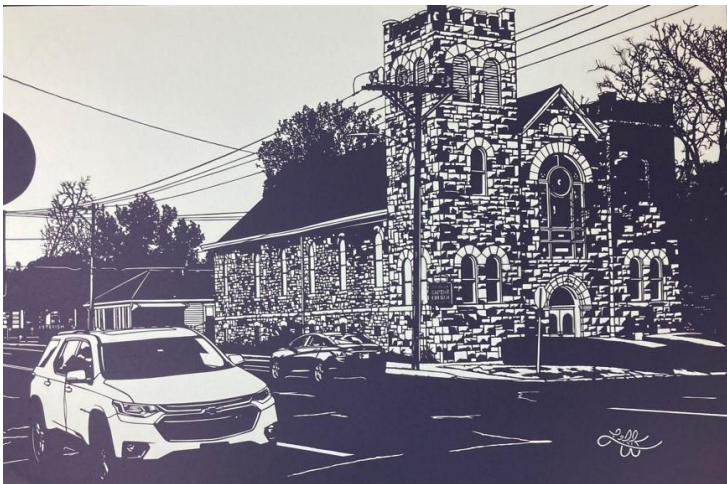


Jefferson's, 734 Massachusetts St.

When I think about historical sites, burger joints are pretty much the last thing that comes to mind. It's highly unlikely that anyone who visits Jefferson's for a beer and some wings is stopping to reflect on the history of the Harris family. Leroy E. Harris, a WWI veteran and attorney, was murdered here at his office in 1954. Leroy's wife, Bertie, was the daughter of a Quantrill's Raid survivor. She was a registered nurse, the founder of the first Black Girl Scout Troop, and active in several charitable groups. For them this site would have been a source of pride, a symbol of Leroy's hard work and the security it provided, before becoming a place of mourning. The high contrast of the cut paper lends a severity to this work not often

associated with a family-friendly bar and grill. The heavy shadows remind us that something dark happened here.

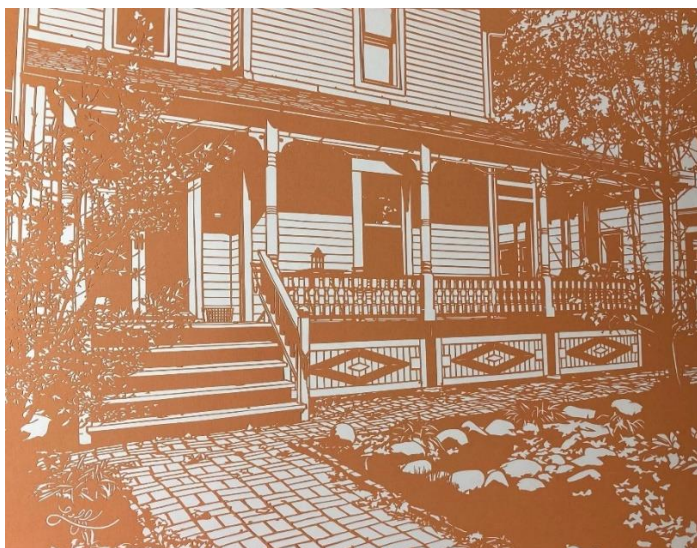
Jane (Emery) Ellis (d. 1891) raised five children here [at 1216 New Jersey St.] with her husband Ben Ellis (d. 1926), a Quantrill raid survivor, policeman, and school, church, and bank janitor. Their youngest daughter, Bertie/Birdie (Ellis) Harris (1886-1975) a registered nurse, married attorney Leroy E. Harris, a WWI veteran. Mrs. Harris founded the first Black Girl Scout Troop (1931) and joined the First Grand Independent Benevolent Society (1936→), the Sierra Leone and Self Culture Clubs (1946-59), an American Legion post (1951-62), and the League of Women Voters (1955), among other groups. Tragically, Mr. Harris was murdered by a Black client in his downtown office (743 Mass) in 1954. *(Historic Homes Walking Tour by NAACP & LPA Handout)*



Alexander's Wheelbarrow, 9th Street Baptist Church

“Alexander Gregg (1825-1904, another charter member and long-time deacon and Sunday school

superintendent of the Baptist church, was removed by his master Samuel Gregg in 1850 from Kentucky to Jackson County, Missouri, where he had many children with his wife Mary. To prevent being carried to Texas, he and his family escaped to Lawrence in 1862. When most of his belongings burned in the raid, he carried his children and all that he owned in a wheelbarrow in two trips to another residence at 901 9th street, where he practiced his trade as a shoemaker." (*African American survivors and Victims of Quantrill's Raid on Lawrence* by Jean Klein)



Mamie's House, 520 Louisiana St.

Mary Jane "Mamie" Dillard (1874-1954) became a pivotal 1st grade teacher and long-time principal of both the old and new Lincoln schools (1911-1931). Her parents Jesse and Frances Dillard, enslaved in Virginia, came to Lawrence in 1868, and later built a \$3500 home at 520 Louisiana where Mamie lived her whole life. As the sole Black LHS graduate in 1892, she spoke about her membership in the Black Women's Christian

Temperance Union, before graduating from KU (1896). Beginning in 1897, she taught at Pickney School, where she mentored young Langston Hughes (1909), and took graduate courses at KU (1909-13). She was a delegate at two Negro National Educational congresses (1916, 1925) and activated many community organizations. She is buried with her parents at Oak Hill Cemetery (Sec. 1, Lot 48). (*Good Trouble: Two Lincoln Schools in North Lawrence* by Jeanne Klein)

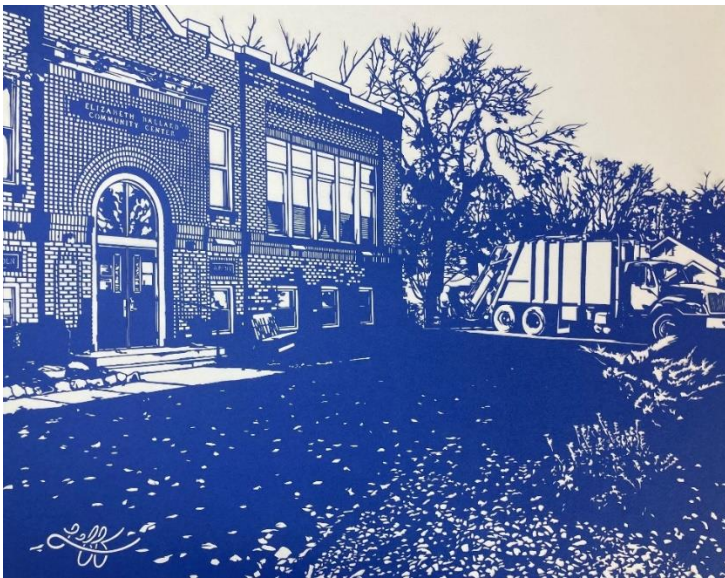


What They Say, 7th and Massachusetts St.

"In 1856, Kansas' first abolitionist newspaper The Herald of Freedom occupied the corner of 7th and Massachusetts, where Liberty Hall stands. A large fire started by the pro-slavery Douglas County Sheriff Samuel Jones during the Sack of Lawrence burned the Herald to the ground. Samuel Edwin Poole would rebuild a new structure that same year, one that was to become a gathering spot for debates, town

meetings and political speeches. In 1882 J.D. Bowersock purchased and renovated the building, adding another floor. It soon became a theatrically themed opera house and well-known entertainment destination."

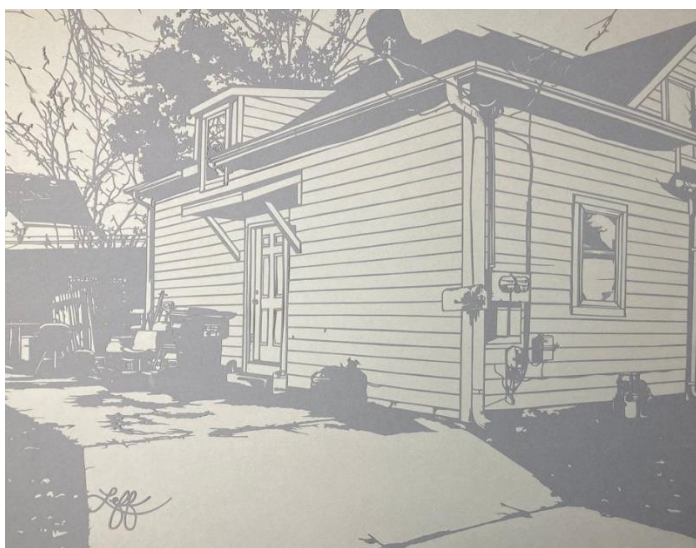
"Though, the structure has stood on the corner of 7th and Massachusetts for just over a century, the ethos of Liberty Hall dates back to the Pre-Civil War era of Bleeding Kansas and is heavily tied to the shaping of Lawrence as an essential hub for the anti-slavery movement. The building's original name Liberty Hall comes from an Abraham Lincoln quote where he called Lawrence, KS, "the cradle of Liberty." (From: <https://www.libertyhall.net/about/history>)



Still Learning, 708 Elm St.

"In 1914, 350 north side residents petitioned the school board 'not to build additions to the Woodlawn School under the guise of repairs' but to build a new Lincoln elementary school for Black students in both wards.

....The new Lincoln School opened in September 1915 at 708 Elm with three teachers for around 70 first through sixth graders (and kindergarteners). At the school's dedication in 1916, Mary Dillard accepted donated pictures of both Abraham Lincoln and Booker T. Washington. In February 1926, students celebrated other major figures for the first International Negro History Week (now Black History Month)."



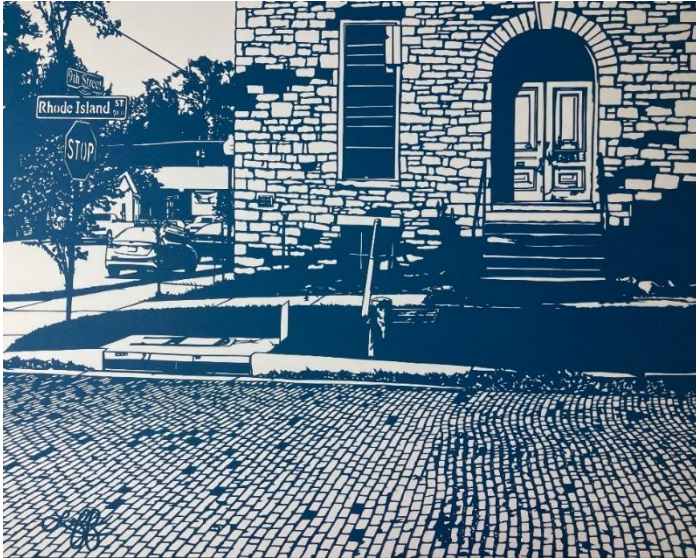
Get Milk, 1300 New York St.

In 1908, George W. Schell (a white man) put up this one-story grocery store, operated with his wife Sarah. Two years later, he moved his barn and built a two-story, five- to six-room cottage for their residence. Like other grocers, Schell's Grocery donated items to the Douglas County Home and (Poor) Farm during the Depression. After Schell's death in 1951, Fred Fergus operated this grocery store until 1972. (*NAACP Walking Tour Handout*)



Nothing to See Here, 702 New Hampshire St.

“At the Donnelly brother’s livery stable and barn (702 New Hampshire), Jacob Pike, a white typesetter, heard one raider call out to his companions: “Up, up, there lays fifteen hundred dollars. G__ d__ our brave hearts! Where are the red legs [Jayhawkers] now?” and finished with a war whoop. The fifteen hundred dollars consisted of the lifeless body of an aged colored man, Nathaniel Holmes, past seventy years of age, which they had shot. The body lay on the street.” (*African American Survivors and Victims of Quantrill’s Raid on Lawrence* by Jeanne Klein)



Outnumbered, 9th and Rhode Island St.

"Germans were attractive settlers, because they were usually anti-slavery. By 1869 the German community was big and vibrant enough to build a new Turnverein at Warren (9th) and Rhode Island Streets." (P.14 *Embattled Lawrence Volume 2*)

By 1857 German settlers in East Lawrence had formed a Turnverein, a social organization that promoted moral, intellectual, and physical improvement. Several charter members of the organization--Henry Martin, Carl Wyler, Charles Achning, Julius Fischer, Simon and Leo Steinberg, and Fred Deichmann--lived in East Lawrence and were influential members of the German community. When forty-four of its forty-eight members enlisted in the Union Army in 1862, the club dissolved and sold its first meeting hall at Tenth and New York Streets. A new Turnverein was founded in 1866. Three years later its members completed the Turnhalle, a stone building at 900 Rhode Island

Street. The first floor of the building served as a gymnasium and as a stage for theatrical productions. The basement housed a bar and restaurant, gaming tables, and two bowling alleys. One the east side of the building was a fenced-in (for privacy) beer garden. (*East Lawrence Historic Resources Reconnaissance Survey: Survey Summary Report*)



The McWilliams', 1300/1304 & 1306 New Jersey St.

The McWilliams family lived at three addresses here. Doc McWilliams (1844-1910) was a prominent civil rights leader with Charles H. Langston (res. 732 Alabama) and C. C. James in North Lawrence among others. The Sons of Union Veterans dedicated his new Civil War headstone on September 30, located in Section 1, Lot 4, at Oak Hill Cemetery. He supported his wife Malinda and large family by working as a common laborer, an elected constable (1881-82), and a janitor at local schools (1886-94) and at the

statehouse in Topeka (1895). Malinda could not read or write, but all ten surviving children—7 daughters and 3 sons--went to school. The eldest daughters, Clara, Laura, Sadie, and Lillie, worked as domestics or cooks. Like Clara and Sadie, the youngest daughters, Frances, Gertrude, Pearl, all married; Frances worked as a registered nurse at Douglass Hospital in KCK beginning in 1904. Robert practiced law after graduating from KU in 1896; Thomas taught science at the University of Monrovia in Liberia (1903-05) (where he died); and James worked as a laborer. (NAACP Walking Tour Handout)



Kappa Alpha Psi, 1346 New Jersey St.

Kappa Alpha Psi, a Black fraternity chartered in March 1920, lived in this 7-room house from around 1924 to

1933. They tried to obtain a state tax exemption on their property in 1924, but ended up owing local taxes on two lots in 1925 and 1928. In June 1933, they lost this property to the (infamous) Lawrence Building and Loan Association in a mortgage foreclosure—along with defendants Henry T. Stone (NAACP VP in 1921) and Hattie Grice (*NAACP founding member*)



To The Happy Couple, 933 Ohio St.

Harriet Adams Harper (1843-1939) was one of the few known freedom seekers who decided to settle in Lawrence. Having been enslaved in Virginia, she was taken to Liberty, Missouri, where abolitionists arranged for her passage to Lawrence via the Underground Railroad...Harriet met another Virginia-born employee, William Harper (1839-1932), whose

enslaved parents were freed. Although he was promised his freedom at age 21, he was sold into human bondage and taken to Jackson County, Missouri, where he escaped at the start of the Civil War and made his way to Lawrence. In February 1863 (or 1862) William and Harriet were married at the Unitarian Church (933 Ohio Street), ‘one of the first weddings solemnized among the Negro population of Lawrence.’ (*African American Survivors and Victims of Quantrill’s Raid on Lawrence* by Jeanne Klein, p.5)



Date Night, 1020 Massachusetts St.

“By World War II, white Lawrencians had established a pernicious modus vivendi with the town’s Black residents. They allowed Blacks to attend largely integrated schools and shop in most retail stores (although employees monitored them closely and

forbade them from trying on clothes), but they enforced segregation or exclusion in movie theatres, restaurants, bars, pools, and bowling alleys, among other places."

"Two Negro girls....and their dates one evening attempted to attend the Granada Theatre. They were immediately repulsed in no uncertain terms and with a great deal of unpleasantness.' In enforcing these practices, whites freely violated the state's anti-discrimination laws." (*Embattled Lawrence: Volume 2*, p.150)



Jesse & Palmyra, 1301 Pennsylvania St.

"Jesse (1840-1914) and Palmyra (Drisdorn) Green (1850-1914), both enslaved in Missouri, lived in this home with their eight children from 1883 through 1914. By 1917, Junius Pennell (1875-1940), custodian of the

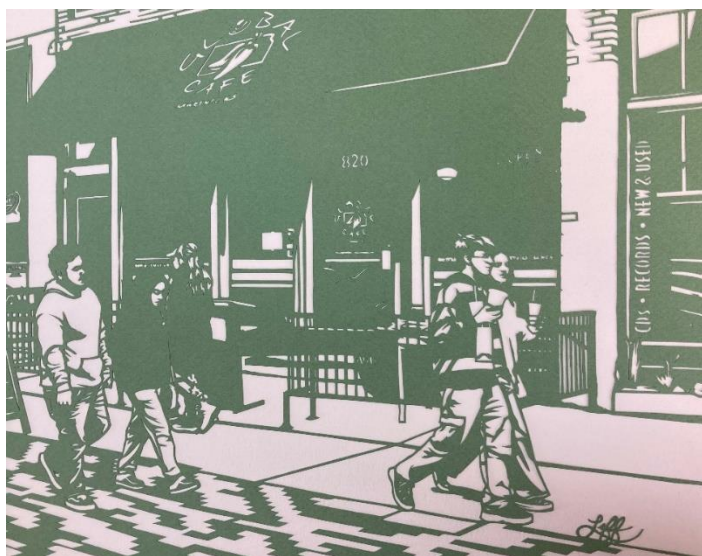
Elks building at 725 Vermont for 35 years, and his wife Lucille (1874-1944) resided here through their deaths. Their eldest son Charles F. and wife Beatrice Pennell lived at 1315 New Jersey (a 4-bedroom stucco house) (1925-1969), and their daughter Ruth E. and husband Harl R. Rogers lived at 1309 Pennsylvania (1927-1963).” (NAACP Walking Tour Handout)



Work Wife, 701 Massachusetts St.

“Harriet Adams Harper (1843-1939) was one of the few known freedom seekers who decided to settle in Lawrence. Having been enslaved in Virginia, she was taken to Liberty, Missouri, where abolitionists arranged for her passage to Lawrence via the Underground Railroad. She worked for Col. Shalor W. Eldridge, who managed Free State (Eldridge) Hotel at 701 Massachusetts. Completed but destroyed in 1856 and

rebuilt by December 1858, Harriet met another Virginia-born employee, William Harper (1839-1932), whose enslaved parents were freed. Although he was promised his freedom at age 21, he was sold into human bondage and taken to Jackson County, Missouri, where he escaped at the start of the Civil War and made his way to Lawrence. In February 1862/3 William and Harriet were married at the Unitarian Church (933 Ohio Street) in "one of the first weddings solemnized among the Negro population of Lawrence." (*African American Survivors and Victims of Quantrill's Raid on Lawrence* by Jeanne Klein, p.5)



Essentials, 820 Massachusetts St.

Charles Langston and Richard Burns had a grocery store here. The original tin ceiling is still in place. (Dr. Bob Dinsdale Walking Tour)

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