

R.W. Hocker Subdivision, Lot K Spec House (Walker House) 1910
5532 Knox Avenue – Merriam
Register of Historic Kansas Places

The Walker House is one of two original, single-family dwelling houses built in the 40-acre R.W. Hocker Subdivision in Merriam, Kansas. The exact date of construction is not known, but records indicate that the house was built between 1906 and 1911 (the Kansas State Historical Society estimated erection as 1910). The home was built as a “speculative house,” essentially a model for the neighborhood’s development. It originally sat on a 5-acre lot, but today occupies just .31-acres, and is named in the Register for its current owner.

The home’s architecture is listed as part of the Prairie Movement, and of the Shirtwaist Style, specifically. The style refers to ladies fashion at the beginning of the 20th century: shirtwaist dresses included a seam at the waist where material often changed. The Shirtwaist influence is evident here in the single floor limestone exterior, with the upper floor and a half being of 3-inch cedar clapboard. The gable eaves along the front (east) face are bellcast (or flared), typical of Shirtwaist style homes, as are the eaves on the front, one-story porch. On the southern exterior, a two-floor porch (originally a first-



The Walker House was listed on the State Register of Historical Places in 2017. The neighborhood is an example of early suburban development connected to street car lines in Johnson County.

floor sunporch and a second-floor sleeping porch) have been enclosed. On the northern exterior there is a box bay and a dormer in the roofline. The home has a single limestone chimney on the south façade. The east façade of the home features a historic one-over-one window.

The Walker House’s interior features hardwood floors on both levels—oak on the main floor, and pine on the second level. Walls and ceilings are lath-and-plaster, and the home has historic five-panel doors throughout. On the main floor there is a receiving foyer with a staircase featuring oak wainscot on the walls. The living room is highlighted by a rustic stone fireplace, flanked by windows. The dining room has a three-window bay. The home’s kitchen has been completely remodeled, and what

was originally a back staircase turned into a powder room. The sunporch was enclosed, but still contains the original southern exterior limestone wall. On the second level there are three bedrooms. The sleeping porch, now enclosed, contains historic beadboard ceilings. The one original bathroom remains, while a small bedroom was converted into a bathroom/laundry combination. A switchback staircase leads to a partially finished attic, which contains two finished bedrooms.

The first recorded purchaser was Mrs. Azubah Squier Denham (sometimes recorded as “Dunham”). Mrs. Denham was a native of Illinois, as was her husband, the Rev. Benjamin Quinn “B.Q.” Denham. Rev.

Denham was pastor in 1890-92 of Olathe's Christian Church, and editor of the *Christian Endeavor Monitor* in 1890. After sixteen months in Olathe, Rev. Denham worked for four-and-a-half years at the Central Christian Church in Kansas City, Kansas, before moving to a church near Buffalo, New York. The reverend was well-known in Johnson County during the time of his residence here. It is not clear if Mrs. Denham remained in the Kansas City area, or if the couple subsequently moved back to Kansas. In either case, the house was purchased in her name in 1911.

Richard Weaver (R.W.) Hocker's Subdivision was platted in 1910, for eight 5-acre lots, of which only two were originally built on (5644 Knox is a similar house from the period). Azubah S. Dunham [Denham] purchased the Walker House in 1911 for \$5500 (\$133,697 in 2016). This price illustrates the intended upper-middle-class nature of the Hocker Subdivision. Hocker also platted Hocker's Grove in 1915, although this neighborhood contained 1-acre lots for modest Craftsman bungalow homes (17 were originally constructed). Both neighborhoods were within a five- to ten-minute walk from the "Hocker Line." This interurban, electric trolley was called the Kansas City & Olathe Electric Rail Road, and the seven-and-a-half miles between Kansas City, Missouri, and Merriam, were completed by 1907. Residents could reach downtown Kansas City within an hour. Both neighborhoods were also near Hocker's amusement park, Hocker Grove Park, developed in 1908. Because of the nearby improvements, increased real estate competition in Merriam at the time of Hocker's developments may have limited the actual construction there, and the Hocker Line closed in 1927 after the automobile became more populous in Johnson County.



Article written by Johnson County Museum staff, and based on original research and the full nomination for the property which can be accessed here:

https://www.kshs.org/resource/national_register/nominationsNRDB/JohnsonCounty_RWHockerSubdivisionLotKSpecHouseNR.pdf