

John S. Wolcott House (1928)

5701 Oakwood Street - Mission Hills

National Register of Historic Places



The “public” French Eclectic façade of the Wolcott Home, 5701 Oakwood Road, Mission Hills. *Johnson County Museum Collection.*

This spring, the former estate of John and Wynnogene Wolcott became the fourteenth property in Johnson County to be added to the National Register of Historic Places. Overlooking Mission Hills from its stately perch above Oakwood Road, the Wolcott House combines the architectural styles of French Eclectic and Tudor Revival to create a masterpiece in limestone. Built during

the summer of 1928 by the Wolcotts – prominent grain dealers and pillars of Kansas City society – the house is not only architecturally ambitious but boasts an impressive pedigree as well.

Like many of Kansas City’s elite families in the early part of the 20th century, the Wolcotts commissioned local architect Selby Kurfiss to build their massive two-and-a-half story home. Constructed of irregularly coursed ashlar limestone with a red tile roof, the home reflects Kurfiss’ skill and fondness for European-inspired designs. The front, or “public” façade, is formal French Eclectic and dominated by a hexagonal tower. The irregular roofline, which gives the home the appearance of being only two stories, features numerous dormers, gables, and wings. The rear façade, which is actually the main entrance to the home, is Tudor Revival with leaded glass and multi-paned windows, as well as bays, overhangs, and dormers. Stone patios, a three level fishpond, stone terraces, the original three-car garage, and many native oak and elm trees complement the overall exterior design.

The interior design, which is very much effected by the irregular shape of the exterior, continues in the Tudor Revival style with its dark woodwork, trussed ceilings, carved balustrades, and ornate paneling. Many rooms feature the original woodwork, paneling, windows, fireplaces, and flooring, while the two-story vaulted living room, entry, library, and dining room look essentially as they

did in 1928. Although some of the fixtures have been replaced over the years, many are still kept in on-site storage.

The Wolcott House owes much of its grandeur to *Kansas City Star* publisher William Rockhill Nelson's turn of the century mansion, Oak Hall. It had been Nelson's desire that upon the death of his immediate heirs, the vast Oak Hall was to be demolished, with the site at 45th and Rockhill Road used to build his Nelson Gallery of Art. And indeed in 1928 Nelson's Oak Hall was systematically disassembled and the stone and woodwork salvaged for other buildings (the home's signature "Oak Hall" room was preserved intact for inclusion in the art museum). The Wolcotts became the largest purchaser of Oak Hall materials, buying more than \$5,000 worth of its limestone, paneling, windows, stairways, stone sills and caps, and copper guttering. Selby Kurfiss incorporated these remnants of Oak Hall seamlessly into his design, including the main entry door. To honor the bond between the two mansions, the Wolcotts originally named their home "Oak Hall," residing there until Mr. Wolcott's death in 1939.

****Reprinted from the Johnson County Museum's ALBUM newsletter, Vol. XIV #3, Summer 2001. www.jocomuseum.org***

