

TRULife



Allergic Annoyance

Seasonal and year-round allergies force students to find solutions

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Designed By Lindsay Koski/Index

Future Architectural Tours:

- Sept. 23: Medical Space
- Oct. 7: Commercial Space
- March 26: Religious Space
- April 23: Segregated Space

Living in History

Professor leads tours of old Kirksville

Maggie Wolcott
Staff Reporter

Few of the original houses constructed after Kirksville was founded in 1842 remain today, but those still standing are packed with a rich history of the city.

The Kirksville Arts Association sponsored the Domestic Space Tour on Sept. 11, which was the first in a five-part series. The tours are led by Cole Woodcox, professor of English, who said his lifelong interest in architecture compelled him to do it.

He said people frequently ask where all the big old houses are.

"The urban myth is they were taken out with the 1899 tornado," Woodcox said.

No matter how spectacular the tornado, what actually leveled many of the houses were the economic forces that moved into Kirksville, Woodcox said.

Some of the largest houses of the city were located on sites that are now Crumbles and Cream, the Grim-Smith Hospital and the A.T. Still University of Health Sciences parking lot, he said.

Woodcox said the historical aspects of the town are what make Kirksville unique. After Kirksville was constructed at the geographic center of Adair County, businesses and houses began creeping up around it.

He said the houses located east of the Square along Washington and Harrison

streets are some of the oldest remaining in the area.

The George Edward McGovern House, constructed in 1875, is known today as the Alpha Big House. For many years members of social sorority Alpha Sigma Alpha have rented the house.

The McGovern House is one of the three oldest documented houses in Kirksville, Woodcox said.

He said McGovern was a wealthy merchant, and the house was constructed during a period of economic growth.

The house today still provides a good representation of the architectural detailing of the time period, Woodcox said. The interior is in good condition and still has the original walnut staircase and plaster medallions in the ceiling.

There are a number of interesting things going on with the house, Woodcox said.

"[The McGovern house is] no more than an eye house with a great deal of style that has been added to it," Woodcox said.

Junior Laine Armstrong lives in the house this year and said she likes living in the large house with her roommates. She said it has been fun bonding with them and

figuring out how to work things in the house.

"It has its ups and downs, like it's old, so obviously not everything works very well," Armstrong said.

Armstrong said she and her roommates

have problems with the plumbing, and the house doesn't have air conditioning, but it comes with the experience of living in an old house.

The house has six bedrooms, four bathrooms and two kitchens. The staircase, fireplaces, wood floors and architectural detailing on the ceilings make the house unique, Armstrong said.

"I like the big architectural features that we have all over the house," Armstrong said.

Armstrong said she has heard a lot of stories about the house.

"People tell us it is haunted ... but so far, no hauntings," Armstrong said.

She said it is important the house is kept and restored so it doesn't fall apart.

Woodcox said because the house is large, students will have parties there, but it still could affect the citizens.

"It still attracts people ... even if you know nothing about the house," Woodcox said. "You can still walk in, and it demands a certain degree of, 'We can't trash the house completely.'"

Woodcox teaches a JINS course on architecture. He said at the beginning of the course, there always is someone who will say, "There is no architecture in Kirksville."

"We sort of immediately equate architecture with immense amounts of money, as really a social class indicator, that if you have a million-dollar house, you have architecture," Woodcox said.

This misconception leads to false ideas about architecture, Woodcox said.

He said he tries to steer away from only studying buildings, he said.

"Space is something more than the



Chris Waller/Index

The George Edward McGovern House at 415 E. Washington St., also known as the Alpha Big House, built c. 1875, (bottom) and the A.T. Still House on Osteopathy (top) are examples of the old architecture of Kirksville.

buildings, but how the buildings relate to the environment surrounding them," Woodcox said.

Studying the concept space when looking at architecture leads to a more holistic approach, Woodcox said. Space relates information about the time period, the value of the structure, the demographics and economic system of the area when the buildings were constructed.

Graduate student Maggie Mayhan went on the tour, and she said she had never looked at a particular house or

space to see how it fit within the city.

"To be able to look at architectural spaces within Kirksville, I thought, would be really interesting," Mayhan said. "Especially because I don't know very much about the history of this town."

The tour touched on the layout of houses. Houses were set up depending on the family's socioeconomic level. Woodcox said in the early days, having a hallway in the house was considered a luxurious commodity.

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