

# Vaughan's Diamond Building, The Junction

Intersection of 9th, Main, and Delaware  
completed 1870, demolished 1915

by Ann McFerrin

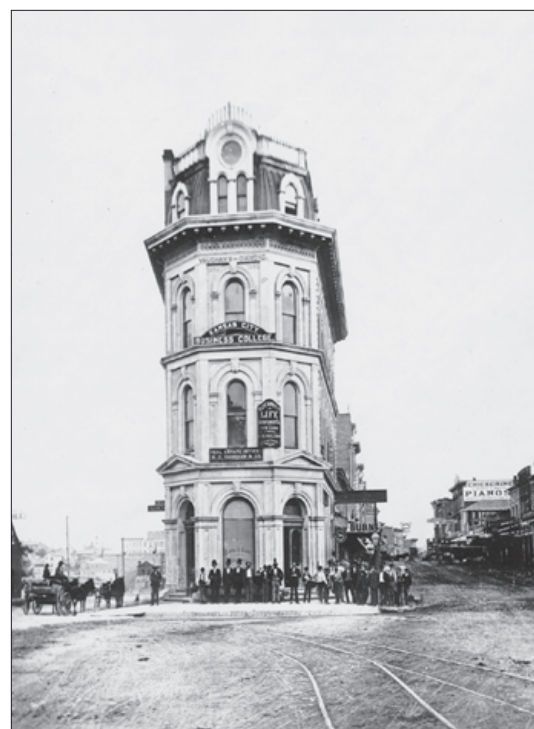
Vaughan's Diamond Building was one of the most prominent buildings in Kansas City in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was located at the intersection commonly called "The Junction" where the three streets 9<sup>th</sup>, Main, and Delaware converged.

In the 1820s and 1830s, the Town of Kansas, which later became Kansas City, grew up around the river. By the 1860s, developers had cut through big limestone bluffs that had been deterrents to southern expansion of the city from the river area. While the main portion of the population and business was still near the river, some residents and businesses had ventured further out; the southern city limit was 20<sup>th</sup> Street. More business and traffic came to the city with the opening of the Hannibal-St. Joseph Railroad Bridge in 1869.

The property at 9<sup>th</sup>, Main, and Delaware streets was plotted as Ross and Scarritt's Addition (William H. Ross and Nathan Scarritt) in 1857. Later that same year, John W. Polk purchased lots 1 and 2. He sold them to Samuel Vaughan in 1866. Vaughan, a real estate agent-investor, had previously purchased lots 3 and 4 of the same parcel from Nathan Scarritt.

The property was an odd shape; narrow and triangular because of the juxtaposition of the three unpaved streets converging at that point. Vaughan hired architect Asa Beebe Cross to design a building for him. Cross, originally from New Jersey, studied architecture in Philadelphia and St. Louis. At the time he designed Vaughan's Diamond Building, he had lived in the City of Kansas for about ten years. Unfortunately few of the buildings he designed still exist.

Cross created an office building four stories high. It cost \$30,000 to build. Photographs of the building show a Mansard Roof, French-style (Second Empire), which has a roof with two slopes on all four



sides; the lower slope is more vertical and steeper than the upper slope, which is almost horizontal. At the time the building was built, it stood out from the one- or two-story buildings nearby with its height and sophisticated style. Early tenants of the building were Vaughan's real estate company, the Kansas City Business College, the Kansas City Medical College, and the Security Life Insurance Company.

In 1872, Vaughan lost the building due to financial setbacks. Howard Holder bought the building at a sheriff's sale for \$31,790. In 1883, Holder sold the building to the newspaper company *The Kansas City Times* for \$85,000, a high price at that time. The newspaper already owned the adjoining lots 5 and 6 upon which they built a new building for their offices. In 1886, *The Times* sold both of the buildings to Nathaniel Thayer, a real estate investor from Boston. The purchase price was \$300,000. In 1886, the Diamond Building became the home of the First National Bank.

By 1890, the intersection of 9th, Main, and Delaware was probably the busiest intersection in town. A number of important Kansas City businesses were in the nearby area: Jones Department Store, Peck Dry Goods Company, and Robert Keith Furniture and Carpet Company (in a building also designed by Asa Beebe Cross.) A cable line on 9th Street, which connected with the West Bottoms area, ran right by the Diamond Building.

One of Kansas City's historical "characters" gained fame and popularity at "the Junction." East of 9th was a steep hill, and when a cable car started its descent, a man employed by the Metropolitan Cable Line as a flagman would shout, "Clear the tracks!" or "Wide awake!" to alert pedestrians and horse-drawn vehicles. The flagman, Michael Tuite (1836-1913) became known as "Wideawake." Originally from Ireland, "Wideawake" went to sea at age 10. After coming to the United States in 1860 and settling in New York, he joined a New York regiment and fought in the Civil War. After the war, he moved to Kansas City where he worked for the Missouri Pacific Railroad before being employed by Metropolitan. He retired from his post at the Junction in 1900 because of ill health.

The Williams Realty Company purchased Vaughan's Diamond Building in 1911. They tore it down in 1915 and built a hotel on the same spot. The West Gate Hotel, designed by the local architect firm McKecknie and Trask, opened in 1916 and had moderately priced rooms with baths for traveling merchants, businessmen, and cattlemen. The design of the hotel was a "flat iron" building;

the sides of the building were long and flat. A big event at the hotel in 1927 was when a flagpole sitter, "Shipwreck Kelly," climbed onto the top of the 20-foot flagpole on the roof of the hotel and stayed there for over 140 hours.

In 1939, after years of decline, the West Gate was sold to Ben Weinberg. He hired architect Clarence Kivett to remodel the hotel, and it reopened in 1940 as the Hotel Kay. It was sold again in 1945, this time to Milton Meizel for \$145,000 who sold it nine months later to Julius Firk of Chicago. Mr. Firk sold it to the Land Clearance for Redevelopment Authority of Kansas City for \$420,000. The hotel was torn down in 1954.

The streets were realigned after the hotel was torn down, leaving only 9th and Main converging at the spot. A statue, the "Muse of Missouri," now stands where the Diamond Building once stood. It was a gift to the city from Mr. and Mrs. James Kemper in honor of their son, David, who was killed in Italy during World War II. It was dedicated in 1963.

## Sources

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