



## The Old Clayton Hotel

The Clayton Hotel today is a professional office. But in its heyday, it was home to railroad men, mill workers, jockeys and gamblers. Some real characters. Built in 1908, it is one of the oldest buildings in the city.

One of the oldest buildings in North Kansas City is the former Clayton Hotel at 20th and Clay. Built in 1908, the building was designated a Clay County Historic Landmark in 1978.

The structure was originally the Northern Hotel, so named because it

was north of the river. When it opened, there was no North Kansas City. A few houses were in the general vicinity, but the only true settlements at that time were Harlem and Midway.

There was no bridge except the Hannibal Bridge, and most people came

across the river by ferry. The main road that led north from the landing was the old Fairground Boulevard, later dubbed the Parkville Road and then Swift Avenue. Clay Street, which was called Oak back then, got a little traffic, too.

The hotel did a brisk business at times because the fairgrounds, right there off the boulevard, was an active place back then. But mostly the hotel was booked by railroad workers and by those who labored at the budding industries that were popping up in Northtown.

The hotel had two floors of rooms and a dining hall that served family style meals. In summer, when no rooms were available, cots were set up outside under a canvas tent north of the building.

Helen Marshall Brenton, long-time resident of the city, said that when she was a child, the men of her family worked on the mills and helped build the hotel. She remembers washing dishes there to help pay the family's rent.

In 1929, the hotel was renamed the Clayton to reflect the county it was in and the street it found itself on after North Kansas City renamed every thoroughfare in town.

Back in those days, there were speakeasies in the Northland, dog tracks and horse racing, too. During the heyday of



the tracks and the betting parlors, the hotel housed jockeys and high rollers, not to mention those who were trying to relocate the shirts they'd lost.

After the fairgrounds had faded and the days of the racetracks had passed, the clientele, perhaps, became a little less colorful, but business wasn't really hurt. The hotel changed hands a couple of times, a third floor was added, and then Emma J. Pratt purchased it in 1946. She would run the place for about 40

years and in 1981 received a Chamber of Commerce plaque honoring her for being the oldest member still in business.

Marvin Ferguson owns the building today, and it houses a consulting firm and a CPA's office. But if those walls could speak, they probably wouldn't be telling tales of accounting and business deals. They'd be spinning yarns of the old days, when in every room there was a colorful character.