

TO: Columbia City Manager De'Carlton Seewood, Mayor Barbara Buffaloe and City Council Members
RE: Possible plans for the Henry Kirklin property on Switzer Street

FROM: Advocates for the preservation of the Kirklin property

May 15, 2024

Our ad hoc group is eagerly interested in seeing the historic home and grounds of Black horticulturalist Henry Kirklin preserved and protected.

Because you have received information about Kirklin himself and the importance of his property, we will not repeat it in this document but welcome your requests for any additional information. This communication is intended to identify future potential uses of the property.

Assuming the city acquires the property as we've requested, we recognize and endorse the need for a more comprehensive planning process that is much broader-based.

Regardless of which plans are ultimately adopted for the house, we believe the surrounding yard, because of its historic connection to Henry Kirklin and the gardening and horticultural empire he founded and operated there for most of his life, deserves its own plan. According to our research, Mr. Kirklin began gardening on a 60 ft. x 100 ft. plot of land next to his house in the early 1880s and, by the early 1900s, he had acquired adjacent property and was actively farming 3.5 acres of land in the same area. We have heard consistent support for partnering with the Columbia Center for Urban Agriculture, the Columbia Community Garden Coalition, local garden clubs and / or the Mizzou horticulture department to create vegetable, fruit and flower beds that might mirror what Kirklin established there 100+ years ago. This demonstration garden would be open to the public.

Such a garden would pay tribute to Kirklin in a variety of ways. He was generous of spirit and a teacher at heart. He lectured at the university when Black people were not allowed inside academic buildings. From the steps of Switzer Hall, he taught ag students. He also invited them to his gardens to demonstrate his award-winning grafting techniques and results. He was well known for sharing his knowledge with community members and, speaking before many groups. He was a predecessor to CCUA for demonstration gardens, finding spots of unused ground around town and creating little gardens for community enjoyment. And he was a conservationist. For example, he built a water collection pool from which he irrigated his beds.

Generally, our group agrees the house, which is more than 150 years old, needs considerable attention. Further, we recognize that the best path forward can't be defined without some invasive exploration and analysis. It is our collective goal that the house be restored as faithfully as possible but we don't yet know how much demolition might be required before restoration could start or how thoroughly the restoration could represent the original home.

In any scenario, we strongly support preserving what's possible from the house and incorporating all useable artifacts in the restoration.

In a worst-case scenario, the house might need to be fully gutted. If that's the case, an important decision will have to be made about what type of restoration would be best. The original house, built by Kirklin's mother in about 1871, was smaller than today's version.

Additions later made by Kirklin included electricity and indoor plumbing, of course, and perhaps a kitchen and other rooms.

If the goal of restoration is to faithfully return the house to its original footprint, it will not accommodate many people for gatherings and might not have plumbing.

Ideas for future uses of the house include:

- Restore the house to its original version, which could serve as a small museum that focuses on Kirklin and agriculture. It would be a unique-to-Columbia representation of a modest nineteenth century home. That and period-appropriate gardens would become an educational asset and a small, park-like respite within this older section of north central Columbia.
- Or, restore the home to better accommodate public events, creating a partnership akin to the operation of the Blind Boone home, which would allow a variety of uses. This would require plumbing and other modern amenities.
- Restore the house to serve as an office or incubator for community-centered nonprofits while using the land for a community teaching garden.

Much of Henry Kirklin's gardening and farming was done within walking distance of his life-long, two-bedroom home on Switzer, and his self-determined course of study was carried out in this home through gardening books and seed catalogs. Because of the importance of Kirklin to Black history, to Columbia history, to Boone County history, and to the development and refinement of horticultural practices, we believe that an appropriate future use of his former home and garden will need to involve community agriculture, Black history, teaching and education, and community involvement. Our group is dedicated to charting a path forward with these uses and outcomes in mind, and we are willing to offer our help, guidance, financial support and community voices if they are useful in achieving this goal.

So far, we have been able to secure more than \$50,000 in donations for acquisition and restoration.

We thank you for considering this matter carefully and stand ready to assist as needed.

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