

5053 Westminster Place, 1920s and 1930s

On 2 November 1993 I had a pleasant telephone conversation with Mrs. Martha Lyter Engler, who lived at 5053 Westminster Place from 1922 through 1938. Her father was Dr. Lyter, the owner.

Mrs. Engler relates that in 1925 the Gladney family lived next door at 5057 Westminster. Frank Gladney started the *7-Up* soft drink company. One door west of them, at 5063, lived Col. Robertson and his family. Robertson and a businessman, Major Albert Lambert, were both enthusiasts of flying; and there was once a "Robertson Field" in what is now Kinloch, MO. Of course, Lambert International Airport still exists, and is located in Robertson Township in unincorporated St. Louis County.

The Robertsons had a son named Dan who was even more a flying enthusiast than his father, and gave flying lessons at the airport. He was building an airplane and soon gained the assistance of one Charlie Lindbergh, who was employed as a mechanic at Robertson Field. They had no place to assemble the wings of their biplane and asked Dr. Lyter if they could use his hayloft. Dr. Lyter agreed, and in about 1925 the two assembled the aircraft wings in what is now the living room of the carriage house at 5053 Westminster. After assembly, a crane was hired to lower the wings through the doors of the hayloft onto a truck in the alley behind the building.

Mrs. Engler does not know if the biplane was ever flown. It was not, of course, the famous Ryan monoplane that Charles Lindbergh flew solo non-stop from New York to Paris two years later. She fondly remembers the days she and her girlfriends from next door, including Lucianna Gladney (Ross) and Katherine Gladney (Wells), teased Dan Robertson and Charlie Lindbergh about their flying machine. The boys apparently had to chase them from the carriage house with great regularity.

Martha Engler also remembers that the former living room and dining room of the house at 5053 were combined into one large room in 1930. The doorway between that dining room and the butler's pantry was sealed, and the first-floor bathroom built in its space. The former sitting room became the new dining room. The same year bookshelves were built in the grand second floor hallway. The back porch and sleeping porch were added in 1932. The room on the third floor with more bookshelves was Dr. Lyter's medical library, and the large room with two window seats was Martha's play room — her favorite in the whole house. The room in the northeast corner of the third floor was used as a sewing room.

----- Dan Landiss, 3 November 1993

(In 2012 I was informed of a conversation held with a neighbor who was a friend of Lucianna Gladney Ross. She said that for a while Charlie Lindbergh lived on the third floor of 5063.)