

Wishing Bench History

Some documents hint that the Bench began its life in 2007 as a KU student project with ties to Hurricane Katrina recovery. It is also said that the object that would become the Wishing Bench just appeared one day near 9th and Delaware somewhere around 2010. Previous articles about our beautiful Wishing Bench posit that she emerged from the River, fully formed and self-possessed like the Venus on her half shell, her pylons glistening with the waters of the muddy Kaw. (Wishing Bench fans can decide which origin story to believe.) We know for sure that KT Walsh hand painted the “Make a Wish” sign, and the Bench became the improvised, funky, fragile, unique public work of art we love. Ownership is a difficult term to apply to a Bench Who Belongs to Herself, to a place of hope and contemplation that belongs to Everyone, but, ELNA assumed the role of “owner” in 2017 when neighbors let ELNA know that the Wishing Bench base was unsafe, and required repair. At that time, ELNA raised money and engaged Struct ReStruct to rebuild the damaged base. The safer and improved Wishing Bench base was in place by May of 2018. The Wishing Bench starred in a film by Marlo Angell in 2020! In addition to the numerous daily wishers and decorators, the Wishing Bench has had many guardians and caretakers over the years, most notably neighbor and local artist Catherine Reed who lovingly attended to it before she passed away this May.