Kansas and Missouri African American/ Black Historical Tour

We encourage our community to take some time with friends of family to learn about sites in Kansas and Missouri and their importance in black history.

1. Donald Sewing House
4118 W. 59th St., Fairway, KS

In 1966, Donald and Virginia Sewing moved to the suburbs seeking better educational opportunities for their children. They were the first African-American family in an all-white community. Donald worked as a real estate agent and helped integrate northeast Johnson County. Virginia was eventually elected to Shawnee Mission North High School’s citizens advisory board in 1971.

Troost Avenue

Troost Avenue is a major north-south thoroughfare that runs through Kansas City, MO. Troost Avenue is named for Kansas City physician and civic leader Benoist Troost.

The economic crash of 1890 paved the way for many less affluent African-Americans to afford moderate homes. Ultimately, many relocated to the area east of Paseo at 24th Street, which became known as “Negro Quality Hill.” During the 1920s, J.C. Nichols developed neighborhoods on the west side of town with racially restrictive covenants prohibiting ownership of the homes by blacks and other racial and ethnic minorities.

In 1955, the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court ruling forced the then all-white Kansas City, Missouri School District to integrate. However, members of the school board drew boundaries based on residential neighborhoods. Troost Avenue became the east-west border dividing white schools from black schools.

Today Troost Avenue remains a dividing line with most white residents of Kansas City residing west of Troost Avenue and most black residents residing to the east.

2. Historic 18th & Vine District
E. 18th St. & Vine St., Kansas City, MO

18th and Vine is the historic center of African-American life and culture in Kansas City. The neighborhood developed as a black settlement area in the 1880s and 1890s, but by 1907 white real estate brokers would only sell or rent to blacks inside the Vine Street corridor and the few other established black neighborhoods.
The area became the commercial and cultural center for black Kansas City residents, producing many notable jazz musicians in the 1930s and 1940s. The district has received more than $30 million of investment since the 1980s and holds several important locations relating to black history:

**Negro Leagues Baseball Museum**  
1616 E. 18th St., Kansas City, MO  
Founded in 1990, the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum is a privately funded, non-profit museum dedicated to preserving the history of Negro Leagues Baseball in America.

**American Jazz Museum**  
1616 East 18th Street  
Located in the Historic 18th & Vine Jazz District in Kansas City, the American Jazz Museum opened in 1997 and showcases the sights and sounds of jazz through interactive exhibitions, films, and visual arts exhibitions. Public programming for all ages and youth education enliven the history and music at the center of the American Jazz Museum, entertaining and enriching jazz audiences while nurturing the next generation of jazz musicians.

**Gem Theater**  
1615 E. 18th St., Kansas City, MO  
The Gem Theater originally opened as the Star Theater in 1912 as a vaudeville and motion picture theater and was later renamed. The theater quickly became one of the best known theaters serving the black community. The theater was again renovated in 1993 to create a 500-seat performance space.

**The Call**  
1715 E. 18th St., Kansas City, MO  
The Call was founded by Chester A. Franklin in 1919. Franklin’s father founded a newspaper serving Omaha and later, Denver. Franklin took over the paper after his father became ill and passed away. He served as editor, printer and distributor and continued to publish the paper until 1913 when he decided to pursue publishing to a larger black community in Kansas City. The start of World War I put his newspaper plans on hold, so Franklin ran a printing shop instead.

The Call has advocated to and for the Kansas City African-American community over the years. It has written about political and social issues affecting the welfare of its community and provided commentary about segregation and discrimination in education, housing, employment and public facilities. The newspaper continues to serve the black community of Kansas City.

4. **Attucks School**  
1815 Woodland Ave., Kansas City, MO  
Attucks School was established in 1893 as a black primary school with a principal and two assistant teachers. In 1905 the Kansas City, Missouri School board deemed the original location inadequate to accommodate the growing population and the school relocated to 1815 Woodland Ave. The school opened with an enrollment of several hundred students. Most students came from the Paseo District, which included the 18th and Vine neighborhood. By 1922 the black population had dramatically increased and the school was so overcrowded that the school board authorized the construction of a second wing.

Over the next several decades, Attucks School was one of the primary grade schools for black students in Kansas City. In 1950, Attucks School had an enrollment of nearly 1,000, making it one of the largest black schools in the...
city. The school continued to be used as a grade school for all races following integration of public schools in the 1960s until it closed in 2007 due to low enrollment in the Kansas City School District.

5. Historic Site of Municipal Stadium
2123 Brooklyn Ave., Kansas City, MO

Opened in 1923, Municipal Stadium hosted the minor-league Kansas City Blues and Kansas City Monarchs of the Negro Leagues. The stadium was renovated prior to the 1955 baseball season and hosted baseball teams Kansas City Athletics from 1955 to 1967, and Kansas City Royals from 1969 to 1972, as well football’s Kansas City Chiefs from 1963 to 1971.

After the 1972 baseball season, the stadium was replaced by the Truman Sports Complex and was demolished in 1976. Though public discussion was limited, there was a perception of discomfort among the predominantly white, middle-class fan base with a stadium located in a poor, black neighborhood.

6. Mutual Musicians Foundation
1823 Highland Avenue, Kansas City, MO

Established in 1917, Local 627, then known as the "Colored Musicians Union," operated as a social center, a clearinghouse for engagements, and as a vehicle for grievances against unfair practices by booking agents and band leaders. The jazz style pioneered and fostered by the members of Local 627 developed along original lines influenced by, yet unique from, the traditions of New Orleans, Chicago and New York.

7. Paseo YMCA
1822 Paseo, Kansas City, MO

In 1900, the growing African American population of Kansas City led to the formation of a local YMCA by both African American and white civic leaders. Organization of the African American YMCA branch occurred two years later with headquarters at 914 E. 12th Street. A building campaign was begun in 1907 with a goal of $10,000 to construct a modern facility, and property was purchased in the 1800 block of The Paseo, a major thoroughfare one block west of the intersection of 18th and Vine Streets. This location was in the Paseo District, the most densely populated area of African American residents in the city.

8. General Hospital #2
22nd and Kenwood, Kansas City, MO

General Hospital #2 served Kansas City’s African American population, especially the poor, for decades. The hospital existed in various forms at the corner of 22nd Street and Kenwood Avenue from its opening as the “colored division” of the city hospital in 1908 until the City’s consolidation of public hospitals in 1959.

Not unlike many city services to African Americans, the Hospital’s segregated facilities periodically lacked adequate resources, but its stewardship of black professionals in government employment and construction of a state-of-the-art facility in 1930 rendered the institution representative to the African American community both as a center of professionalism and education and as a symbol of their expanding political clout.

9. Freedom Trail Memorial
751 Madison, Kansas City, MO

The West Bottoms Freedom Trail Memorial serves as the trail-head for the Riverfront Heritage Trail, a 15-mile bike/pedestrian pathway that traverses 2 major rivers, 2 states, 3 counties and 3 cities. The Freedom Memorial highlights two important historical periods in Kansas City. Its location as a former escape route for runaway slaves attempting to cross the Missouri River in search of freedom and how the construction of Kansas City’s railroad began.
in the West Bottoms in 1863, the height of the Civil War. It was a critical escape route due to the new state of Kansas entering the union as a free state in 1861.

Missouri on the other hand was a slave state and slaves both in Missouri and surrounding states saw the West Bottoms location as their only opportunity for freedom. Unfortunately, not all succeeded in crossing and many drowned while trying to swim across the river.

10. Hell's Half Acre
8th Street, West Bottoms, Kansas City, MO

In 1867 many African Americans arriving from the South were seeking a better life. These Exodusters found employment on the bridge project and a home in the West Bottoms in modest shanties and shacks. Located in the northeast corner of the West Bottoms, north of Ninth Street and extending to the river, the neighborhood remained somewhat primitive, lacking sewers and water. But it was home to workers who provided labor to the stock and rail yards, industries at the core of the earliest commerce and industry, after the fledging city was founded in the mid-nineteenth century.

11. Kresge's Department Store
Minnesota Avenue, Kansas City, KS

Chester Owens Jr. remembers bucking the laws of Jim Crow that said a black man had no right to eat where and when he wanted.

In 1952, one of those places was a restaurant at Kresge's department store on Minnesota Avenue in Kansas City, Kansas.

“If I can go to Korea and die, I should be able to eat in the restaurant,” Owens recalls thinking. “So I put on my uniform and went up to S.S. Kresge and sat on a stool, the third stool ... (The waitress) looked at me and went and asked the lady who was in charge, who was African-American, ‘Should I serve him?’ And she said yes, and they served me.”

Owens has said he was confused why more people didn’t push back as he did. He went back to Korea to serve his country and when he came home, it only amplified his view on the impact of activism which is what led him to become one of the people who helped to desegregate Minnesota Avenue two years before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 made integration the law.

12. Quindaro Township
3507 N 27th St, Kansas City, KS

Today, we know Quindaro as a neighborhood located in north Kansas City, Kansas. Originally, Quindaro began as a town named for Nancy Brown Guthrie, whose Indian name was Quindaro.

A Wyandot Indian word meaning a bundle of sticks and interpreted as "in union there is strength, Quindaro began as a boom town a few years after Kansas became a territory of the United States in 1854. The town of Quindaro was located along the Missouri River making it a good location for steamboats to dock. Additionally, Abolitionists resided in the area and were helping slaves escape via the Underground Railroad.

Construction of the town began in 1857. However, a few years later, people began to abandon the town. Eventually, a new group of people, most of African descent, claimed the abandoned farms and buildings in the area. Nevertheless, the site on which the original town of Quindaro fell into ruins.
13. Sumner High School
1610 N 8thStreet, Kansas City, KS

In 1905, the Kansas State Legislature passed a law exempting Kansas City from the state law prohibiting racially segregated public high schools. Reluctantly, the Governor of Kansas, E. W. Hoch, signed the bill but persuaded the majority of Kansas City voters to construct a new high school building for African Americans built for no less than $40,000 and to be as well-equipped as the existing Kansas City, Kansas High School. Determined to overcome the inequities of racial segregation, the teachers, students, and community members of Sumner High School strove to develop a tradition of academic excellence. They countered the local school board’s proposals for an emphasis on manual training courses by implementing a curriculum that emphasized college preparatory classes at Sumner.

By 1914, Sumner was a member of the prestigious North Central Association of Secondary Schools. Until the 1970s, the majority of African American students attending the University of Kansas were graduates of Sumner High School. Sumner closed in 1978 under a federally mandated plan for racial integration of schools. It now operates as Sumner Academy of Arts and Sciences.

14. Rattlebone Hollow and Juniper Gardens
Parallel Parkway & 5th Street, Kansas City, KS

The coming of black people to the Kansas City area was spread over a period of twenty years following the Civil War, but the peak was reached between 1878 and 1882. In that four-year period twenty thousand are said to have landed on the city's levee. Homes were found along Jersey Creek in a settlement called Rattlebone Hollow and in old Quindaro, while many others lived along the levee in shanty towns.

Rattlebone Hollow is still in existence and part of what is now considered Juniper Gardens, the first low-rent housing development in Kansas City, Kansas.

To view the Kansas City, Kansas and Missouri google place list:

https://goo.gl/maps/EVfe9gpYd4VQbGLP7

Learn about more important people and places:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jqTM9a2iG0cH2_CSqpQtD5mhAeEFcBWt/view

https://aahtkc.org/aahtkc-sites

Black Archives of Mid America