HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The City of Shawnee is named for the Shawnee Indians relocated here in the late 1850s. The westward push of white settlement had weakened and geographically divided the Shawnee by 1825 when the first of three treaties forced them to relocate to Kansas.

Shawnee Indian farmers proved Kansas land was fertile, and their success made white settlers covet their land. In 1854, the Shawnees ceded most of their 1,900,000 acres to the United States and settlers flowed into Kansas Territory. The town of Shawnee grew rapidly but still host the county seat to Ottawa. Conflict between pro- and anti-slavery factions plagued the new town, nearly ending its life.

After the Civil War, Shawnee and the surrounding countryside settled down to peaceful farming. Many area farmers specialized in growing choice foods and vegetables that they drove, first by horse-drawn wagon and then by truck, to the city market in Kansas City, Shawnee excelled as a farm town, providing farmers with commercial, educational, and recreational services.

Shawnee remained a stable farm center well into the 1950s, varying little in size but accommodating business changes, the arrival and demise of the trolley line, and the initial surge of the automobile. Street names have changed and buildings have been replaced, but traces of the past remain if you look carefully.

Downtown AND Around the Corner

Community history is enlivened when photos, memories, and family stories are shared. If you remember what it was like to be a child in Shawnee in the 1920s or 1930s, or if you worked for a locally-owned business, please call Shawnee Town at 913-248-2360 to explore ways your history can be shared.

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Historical content was researched by Shawnee Town staff.

Design and layout were created by Clifton Alexander of Reactor Studio.
On the west side of Barton, facing the Square, stood Jim Keenan’s Machine Shop. “Mr. Keenan owned the first garage in Shawnee,” which had to be erected on the side. He always got it started and went out driving it, but always had to be pulled back by horses.” [Gilbert Garrett, 1934]

**West Along Johnson Drive from Barton to Flint Streets**

Shawnee Public School – As was the case here, schools were typically located prominently along roads indicative of their importance, local pride, and the sense of prosperity and stability they promoted. Shawnee’s first public school was a wood frame building with three rooms upstairs and two downstairs. The west, first floor room was solely for African American students. The frame building was later replaced by a much larger stone building and African American students were moved to Durbin School a few blocks east.

**57th Street from Coby to King**

Shawnee Town is an open-air museum that began with the need to save a jail. In 1940, the old jail building on the north side of 58th St., was in the way of Vita Caste’s planned expansion. Citizens rallied, forming the Shawnee Historical Society which dismantled and reconstructed the jail here. By 1995, 19 original or replicated buildings were added to the site. Today, plans are underway to shift interpretation toward Shawnee life in the 1930s. The site will be known as Shawnee Town 1929.

Late in the 1800s, Pantee’s Mill operated along the creek on the eastern edge of Shawnee Town. This steam operated mill ground corn meal and whole wheat flour.

Wonderscope Children’s Museum now enlivens the former Pilot School offering hands-on, interactive exhibits and programs for children 6 months to 12 years.

**58th Street from Barton to Nieman**

This block was known as “choked broadwalk” by hot, keep walkers out of the mud.

From 1854 until the early 1900s, the Masonic Lodge building, with its upstairs meeting room, was on this block.

Hollenbach General Store – Benjamin Hollenbach worked and lived here from 1866 to 1906. His business housed the post office during Republican administration and provided court space for the justice of the peace, Judge Hinton.

**Nieman Road, from 58th Street to Johnson Drive**

1866: Thomas Archer Dry Goods & Groceries sold cloth, buttons, needles, shoes, and personal accessories.

Other businesses on this block at the turn of the century were Homer Bousman’s Barber Shop and the town’s first telephone exchange. Dan & Donnie Bousman’s Butcher Shop, Let’s Bike and Hobby Shop, and A.J. Blattman’s Dry Goods and Clothing Store.

In 1945, Clarence Hartman purchased Al Pierson’s hardware business. The Masonic Lodge met on the 2nd floor until 1955 when the space was remodeled into fixing quarters for Hartman’s family.