

MERRIAM HISTORIC PLAZA WALKING PATH

1 The People of the Southwind & the Coming of the Shawnee

Between 1826 and 1833, the Shawnee Indians were moved to the Kansas Territory from their original settlements in Ohio and Missouri. The Shawnee established themselves along the banks of the Kansas River and surrounding area, including tributaries such as Turkey Creek.

2 Shawnee Friends Mission

Religious missionaries of nearly all denominations were present throughout Indian settlements as early as the 1680's. Quakers had worked among the Shawnee when they still lived in the Ohio Valley. As the tribe moved to the area that would become Johnson County, the Shawnee requested that the Quakers establish a school among them, and the missionaries agreed.

In 1833, a committee of three Quakers visited the Shawnee in preparation for the mission school and was given 320 acres, most of which is within the city limits of present day Merriam.

3 The Overland Trails

Historic Frontier Trails cut through the territory now known as Merriam. Hundreds of thousands of people emigrated to the western frontiers along these trails.

Two historic trails ran directly through Merriam; the California Road and the Fort Leavenworth Military Road. The California Road ran west through Merriam, south of modern day Johnson Drive. The Fort Leavenworth Military Road crossed southeast through present day Merriam, where travelers stopped along Turkey Creek.



The Campbell family- seated are David Gee Campbell and wife America Victoria; from left are children David Edward, Nancy Alice, Reuben, James Marion, and Frederick Chouteau. Not pictured is son George Hannibal.

Photograph Source: Historic Merriam Society

4 The Founding of Campbellton

In 1864, a Tennessean, David Gee Campbell bought acreage from an Indian family and moved his house to what is now 9503 Johnson Drive.

A small settlement on the south side of Johnson Drive near Turkey Creek began to grow and the community was named Campbellton in honor of its founder.

After the first railroad station in Campbellton was built in 1870, an addition was made to the the land originally purchased by Campbell. This new section was called Merriam, after Charles Merriam, the Secretary of the Kansas City, Fort Scott and Gulf Railroad.

In time, this addition grew until it became the major portion of the town. The name of Campbellton was gradually dropped, and in the 1880's the town began to be known as Merriam.

Merriam Park - This lithograph of Merriam Park includes scenes of the lagoon, the tabernacle, the railroad entrance, and numerous roadways.

Source: Thomas R. Smith Map Collections, Kansas State Historical Society



5 Merriam Park & George Kessler

With Kansas City becoming a focal point of trade and transportation, the Fort Scott and Gulf Railroad company saw the need for an amusement park to entertain the booming population in the area. The company purchased forty acres to establish Merriam Park.

Dedicated on July 2-3, 1880 by former President Ulysses S. Grant, Merriam Park featured a large lagoon used for boating, a shelter house, a dance pavilion, zoo, and a carousel. The beauty of the park was due in large part to landscape architect George Kessler, who served as park superintendent.

6 The Trolley Line & Hocker Grove Amusement Park

A few years after the closure of Merriam Park, Richard Weaver Hocker developed the second largest amusement park in Merriam. Named Hocker Grove after its founder, the park was established in 1907 and remained in existence until 1919.

Hocker was the driving force behind the Kansas City, Lawrence and Topeka Electric Railroad that linked Merriam with Kansas City and brought many visitors to the park.

7 Education in Merriam

The early settlers of Campbellton sent their children to the Hickory Grove School, which was located near present day Shawnee Mission North High School. As the population grew, the need for a local school was widely felt.

The Merriam School District, was formed, and a new building was constructed and opened in 1872. The two-story yellow brick structure was a sophisticated model of an old time schoolhouse and included a bell tower and bell. The first school teacher, Ike Short, taught all eight grades for fifty dollars per month. The building was used for classes and as a community center until 1911.

The community gathered at the construction site of the second Merriam School building, built in 1911.

Photograph Source: Historic Merriam Society



8 The South Park Community

In 1888, Johnson County School District No. 90 was organized to serve the educational needs of the children of South Park. As new structures were built for the white students, the original one-room school building continued to serve as the schoolhouse for black children.

In 1947, a new South Park Elementary School opened for white children, only. Black parents appealed the segregation to the school board as well as the Johnson County Court. Their appeals were denied.

A group of parents, teachers, and concerned citizens then filed a lawsuit against the school district. This lawsuit, Webb v. School District No. 90, paved the way for the 1954 Brown v. the Topeka Board of Education, a landmark case influencing integration.

9 Incorporation of Merriam

Although Merriam is one of the oldest communities in the area, it was unincorporated for much of its history. In 1950, Merriam petitioned the governor to become a third class incorporated city. The petition was approved by the Board of Johnson County Commissioners on October 23, 1950. Merriam achieved city of the second class status January 13, 1957 when its population grew to 4327 citizens.



Original, acrylic mural by artist Michael Young depicting Downtown Merriam circa 1940-1950.

Source: City of Merriam

10 City of Firsts

A pioneer and leader in the development of the Johnson County area, Merriam has recorded several "firsts!" Merriam was the site of the first Bell Telephone office in Johnson County (1908); the first public library (1956); the first major park in Johnson County (Antioch Park in 1956); the first full-service hospital, Shawnee Mission Medical Center (1962); and Merriam was also the first home to Johnson County Community College (1969-1972).

11 Community of Excellence

Today, Merriam is a vibrant community boasting a mix of commercial, industrial, and residential districts. Merriam residents enjoy established neighborhoods, diverse cultures, a full range of municipal services, plentiful parks, and strong community pride.

Merriam's "live, work, and play" philosophy, packaged with the small-town spirit and friendliness found only in the Midwest, makes our city a desirable place to visit, start a business or raise a family. Merriam...Just Right!

12 The Bear Pit

The final station in the Historic Plaza Walking Path features a bronze sculpture, titled "The Bear Pit", dedicated and installed 2006.

This sculpture, by artist Kwan Wu, represents the City of Merriam's first public sculpture installation. The mother bear and cubs celebrate one of the most popular features of historic Merriam Park.