

Westport Area

The heart of old Westport is that area in Kansas City, Mo. now referred to as Westport Square at Westport Road and Pennsylvania Avenue. Today Westport Road runs at an angle from Main Street on the east on past Southwest Trafficway on the West. In 1832 John McCoy build a long cabin at the northeast corner of Westport Road and Pennsylvania Avenue. He used this as a store as well as his residence. In 1834 McCoy platted the land around his store into lots and called this settlement the town of "West Port." It was to serve as a new take-off point for the Santa Fe Trail which began in Franklin, Mo. and ran through Westport.

This new settlement gained the advantage over Independence as the transfer point from river to trail. McCoy was able to persuade a steamboat captain to continue up river and deposit supplies on a limestone ledge near the foot of what is now Grand Avenue. "West Port" was not only more convenient to a river landing, but it also cut a good day off the journey westward from Independence due to the fact that there was one less river to cross, namely The Blue River.

The Mexican War of 1846-48 and the discovery of gold in California in 1849 generated a tremendous flow of traffic along the Santa Fe and Oregon Trails. With this traffic Westport grew in wealth and importance. There was enough trade to keep shopowners settled in the area. Westport became a big outfitter for this migration from the mid-1840s to mid-1850s. It was a center for the manufacturing of wagons, plows, harnesses and ox yokes. The population peaked at 5,000 in 1855 and in 1857 Westport incorporated. In the mean time, the City of Kansas had been established and also growing.

In 1857 border skirmishes heralding the Civil War infiltrated into Westport. The onset of the war curtailed the Santa Fe trade. In the spring of 1861 trade had fallen off one-fourth and by autumn ceased all together. For sometime the town of Westport was occupied by Union armies during the war.

Postwar growth came to Kansas City which now dominated business and commerce, and it superseded Westport as the primary outfitting depot. As Kansas City grew it expanded southward encompassing more and more territory. In 1897 Westport was annexed by Kansas City. By this time, the surrounding areas of what is today Westport Square, had developed as residential suburbs with a variety of housing.

Today Westport reflects its heritage in many ways. A look at a map shows that Westports' street grid is a diagonal skew from the rest of Kansas City. This reflects the original orientation which was, most likely, determined by the path of a small stream. The two streets that crossed at the heart of "West Port" still cross today; Westport Rd., originally called Main Street, and Pennsylvania Avenue, originally called Main Cross. The Albert G. Boone Store, built in the late 1840s, still stands (now Kelly's Lounge). The Harris House Restaurant sits today on the site of the original Harris House Hotel (now located at 4000 Baltimore Ave.). Both the original, commercial and residential housing would have been quite simple and practical with austere facades.

What is called Westport today is a broader area than what the original "West Port" consisted of. The area, however, referred to today as Westport

Square is one square block of old Westport's downtown. In 1972 this area was recycled into a district of restaurants and specialty shops. Exterior changes have been limited to basic upgrading of building facades. Interiors have been gutted to accommodate modern business practices. In and of themselves each of these buildings may not be historically or architecturally significant, but there is a homogeneity in the streetscape and Westport legend that makes this area unique among K.C. retail districts.

WESTPORT SURVEY

2-4-6-8-10 Westport Road
 16 Westport Road
 20 " "
 104 " "
 118 " "
 200 " "
 201 " "
 204 " "
 205 " "
 207A-209 " "
 208-210 " "
 211 " "
 301 " "
 304 " "
 309 " "
 310 " "
 311 " "
 315-317 " "
 316 " "
 316 " "
 331 " "
 401 " "
 409 " "
 411 " "
 421-423 " "
 425 " "
 427 " "
 429-431 " "
 433 " "
 435 " "
 444 " "
 500-502 " "
 501 " "
 504 " "
 535 " "
 540 " "
 543 " "
 560 " "
 601 " "
 602 " "
 605 " "
 607 " "
 624 " "
 701 " "
 706 " "
 708 " "
 709 " "
 711 " "
 715 " "
 800 " "
 808-814 " "
 821-823 " "
 822 " "
 827 " "
 900 " "
 901-903 " "
 902½-904 " "
 907 " "

#51 Westport Square

4050 Pennsylvania
 4049 "
 4058 "
 4112 "
 4116 "
 4120 "
 4130 "
 4137 "
 4139-4145 "
 4144 "
 4149 "
 4200 "
 4231-4233 "
 4059 Broadway
 4056 "