

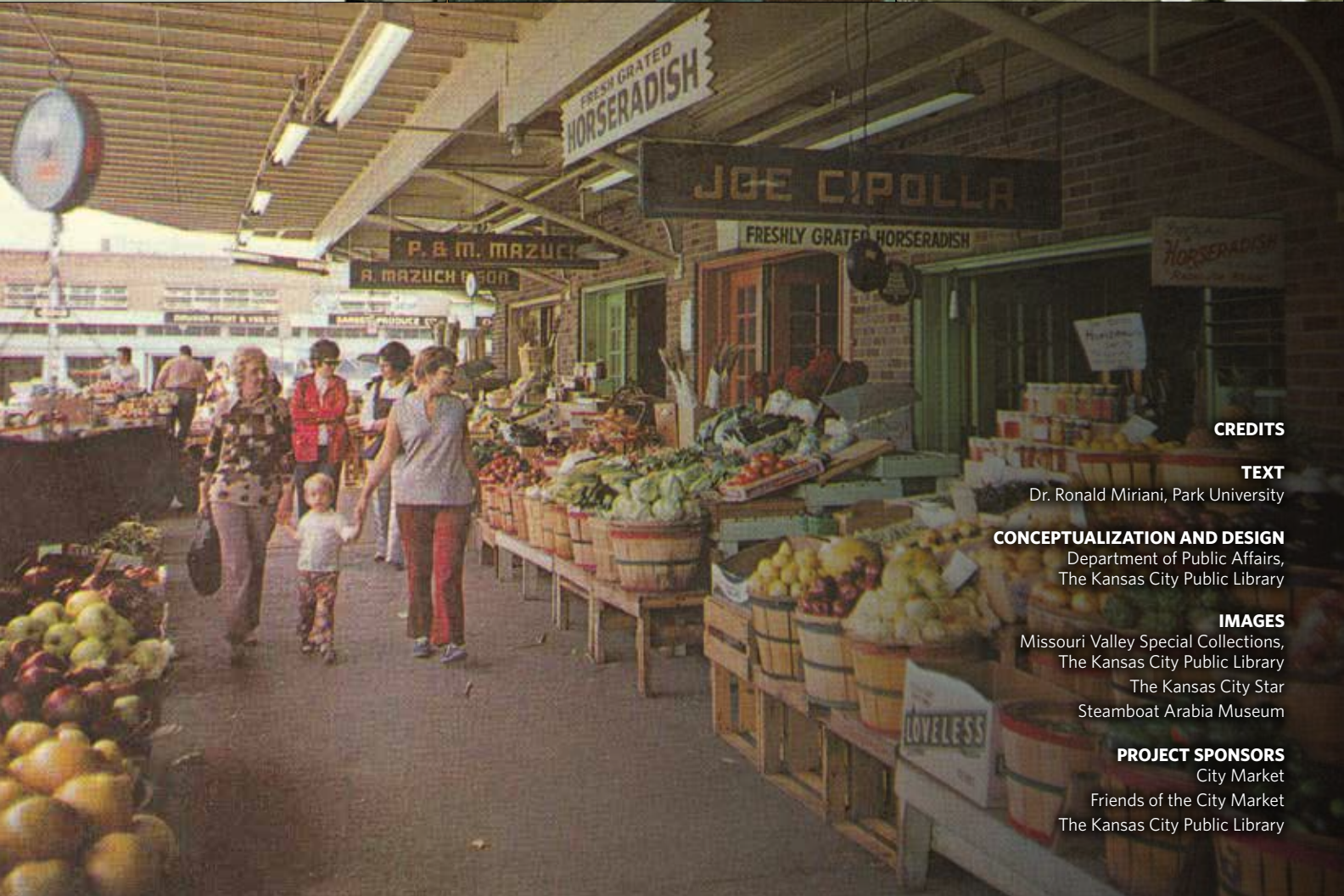


KANSAS CITY'S CITY MARKET



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The Kansas City Public Library





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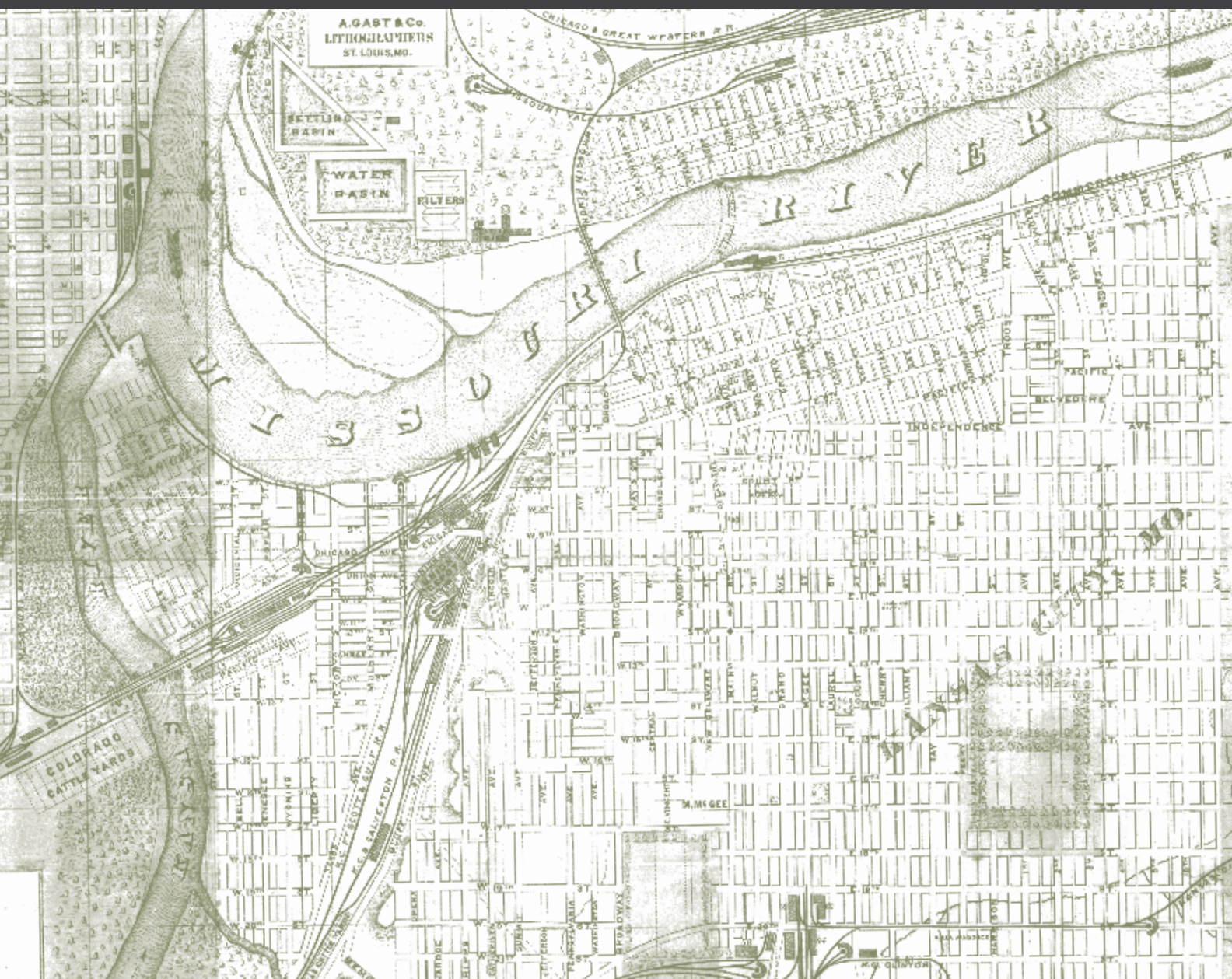
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A HISTORY AT THE HEART OF KANSAS CITY

Present-day City Market traces its formal beginnings to 1857. In that year near its current location, the pioneering residents of what would become Kansas City celebrated the erection of the first shed expressly built to house commercial activities.

This modest structure confirmed the growing importance of an informal marketplace that had already been in existence for several years. Little

more than a stone's throw from the confluence of the Missouri and Kansas rivers, it was the center for a brisk trade, a place where farmers, settlers, westward-bound emigrants, and riverboat crews bargained over foodstuffs, wood, textiles, tools, and other manufactured goods.

In time many of the items sold in the City Market would arrive by road, rail, and air. Agricultural products would come from throughout the world, not just nearby counties. But the rhythm of the market would remain much the same as it had always been.

While the City Market has changed little in its basic functions, the surrounding River Market neighborhood has changed greatly over time. When steamboats were replaced by trains, and the West Bottoms

flowed with cattle and grain, River Market provided space for warehouses and brokerage firms. It was the home base for small manufacturers and was the starting point for various Kansas City enterprises, some of which are still in existence, such as *The Kansas City Star* and St. Luke's Hospital. The neighborhood was also known for its hotels, restaurants, and entertainment options – both legal and otherwise – that included circuses, theaters, gambling halls, bars, and bordellos.

As early as 1900, some observers noted the River Market to be in a state of decline. Indeed, for much of the twentieth century, the neighborhood was considered by many to be less than desirable. That judgment began to change in the 1980s when a combination of public and private investment saved this area from what seemed to be terminal decay.

This booklet explains the 150-year saga of City Market and the surrounding River Market area – a history at the heart of Kansas City.



Top left: World War II-era rally

Left: Gillis Opera House at 5th and Walnut, circa early 1900s

Opposite page: 1871 map of Kansas City, Missouri, and Wyandotte City, Kansas

1830s-1870s



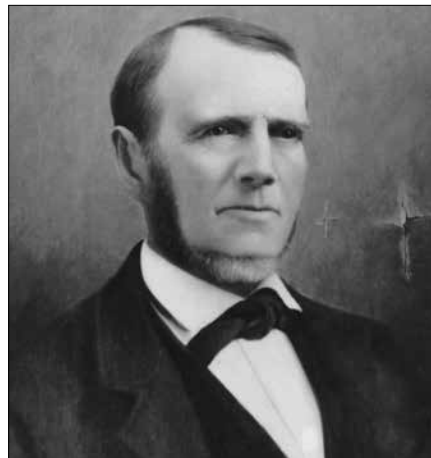
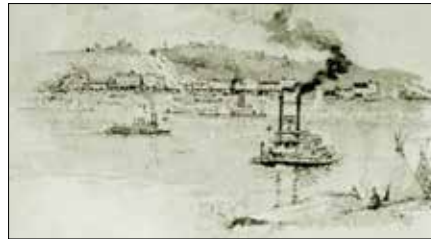
THE STEAMBOAT ERA

The development of City Market and the surrounding River Market neighborhood began in 1834 when John C. McCoy discovered a rock landing on the Missouri River at what is now the foot of Grand Avenue.

McCoy, a businessman and real estate speculator, had just platted the town of Westport, Missouri, four miles to the south. He surmised correctly that this natural landing would direct riverboat trade away from the rival town of Independence and toward his town of Westport, which McCoy hoped would become the eastern terminus of the Santa Fe Trail. For many years thereafter, this initial primacy of Westport was reflected by the fact that McCoy's Missouri River outpost – the precursor to present-day Kansas City – was known as Westport Landing.

In 1838 McCoy joined a company of men who purchased the farm of Gabriel Prudhomme, which encompassed the whole of the present-day River Market area. Real estate transactions could be extremely

complicated in those days, and it was not until 1846 that litigation over this sale was resolved. McCoy and his fellow land company partners then platted the “Town of Kansas,”



Top: Kansas City, looking south across the Missouri River, circa 1855

Above: John C. McCoy

Intro page: General Order No. 11 by George Caleb Bingham

naming it for the Kansa Indians who resided immediately to the west in what was then Indian Territory. The Town Company also set aside the land between 4th and 5th streets and Walnut and Main streets for a public square. This parcel comprises a portion of today's City Market.

The timing for establishing the new settlement was excellent. An expansionist United States had embraced the spirit of “Manifest Destiny.” Texas was admitted to the Union, a treaty with Great Britain yielded the present-day states of Oregon and Washington, and war with Mexico led to the annexation of California and the present-day Southwest. The Town of Kansas was ideally positioned to become the outfitter for wagon trains heading west on the Oregon Trail and the California Trail, the latter of which became a favorite route of the “Forty-Niners” following the discovery of gold near Sacramento. The little town became even busier in 1854 upon the creation of the territories of Kansas and Nebraska.

To accommodate all of the travelers, tradesmen, drifters, and potential settlers of the West, over 300 steamboats a year plied the Missouri River by the 1850s. One of them was the Arabia, which sank before reaching Parkville in 1856. A visit to the Steamboat Arabia Museum here at City Market, provides tremendous insight into the lifestyles of the people who settled the West in the 1850s.

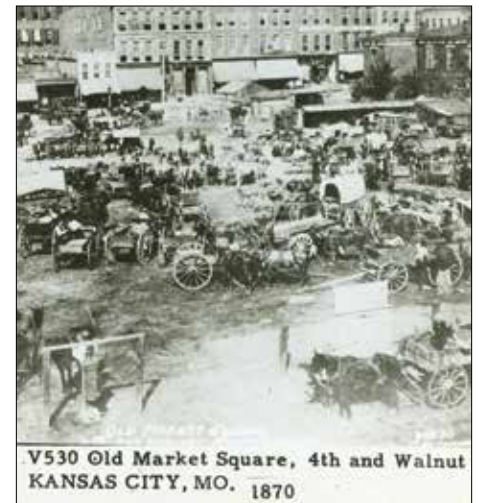
Without doubt, each of these boats was met by Jackson County farmers who had surplus poultry, meat and dairy products, besides seasonal fruits, vegetables, and grains. And, without doubt, the farmers purchased goods resembling those now displayed in the Steamboat Arabia Museum.

In 1857, the city leased the west portion of this land to the Scheibel Brothers, who constructed the first market building. Photographs show, however, that most of the marketing and sales took place directly from farm wagons surrounding the town square. On the east portion of the square, the town built a modest brick city hall.

A huge problem for the emerging city was the bluffs that rose up to 100 feet just south of the Missouri floodplain and levee. Where there were breaks in the bluffs the town builders penciled in streets like Market (Grand), Main, Delaware, and Broadway. Financing

gained through bond issues in the late 1850s provided for leveling these bluffs. The height of the area surrounding City Market did, at least, keep the neighborhood safe from the floods that washed away the original French settlements along the river and in the present-day West Bottoms area.

After reaching a population exceeding 4,500 by the early 1860s, Kansas City nearly collapsed under the stress of the Civil War. A low-intensity Missouri-Kansas border war had been underway since the mid-1850s, but following William Clarke Quantrill's raid on Lawrence in August 1863, Union General Thomas Ewing issued Order No. 11, which banished all Southern sympathizers from western Missouri and temporarily brought Kansas City's growth to a standstill.



Top right: Rooftop view of Kansas City looking east from 3rd and Main, circa 1870

Center right: Market Square at 4th and Walnut, circa 1870

Bottom right: The Steamboat Arabia by Gary Lucy



1870s-1920s



THE COMING OF THE RAILROADS

The Hannibal Bridge, the first railway span across the Missouri River, was completed in 1869. Almost overnight it made Kansas City a leading gateway to the West and Southwest. Within just a few years, the city hosted 13 railroad companies. The population of Kansas City exploded, exceeding 200,000 by 1909 and sprawling south to 79th Street.

From Kansas and beyond, cattle were brought for slaughter, and grain, especially winter wheat, was brought for milling. Kansas City's Union Depot, built in 1878,

brought thousands of people into the West Bottoms daily, and most of them found their way up to what had been merely a market but was now a vigorous "downtown," with hotels, restaurants, shops, and entertainment of all sorts, much of it illegal.

The City Market, which had been largely a farmers' market became one

of the great agricultural emporiums of the United States, if not the world. Grain and cattle firms employed thousands.

Wholesale became more important than retail, though local farmers from places like Lenexa, Parkville, Grandview, and rural Wyandotte County and their individual customers from throughout metropolitan Kansas City never stopped coming.

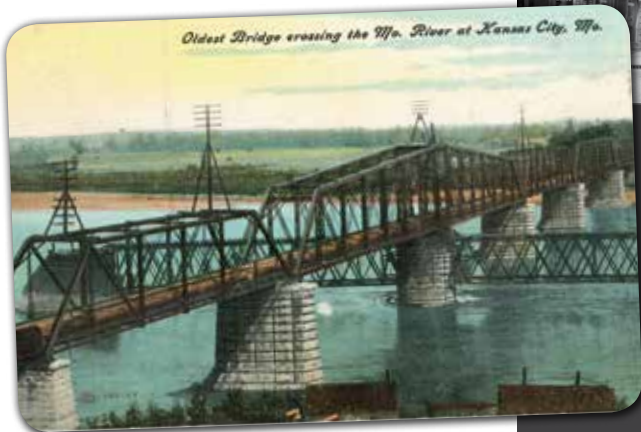
In 1888 Kansas City constructed an elegant brick market building with 56 stalls along Walnut near 5th Street. Immediately to the west of this structure, Kansas City also built an ornate Gothic-style City Hall. Articles in *The Kansas City Star* pointed out that the market stalls were soon inadequate as refrigerated rail cars carrying food products from Colorado, Mexico, and even South America greatly expanded what was available in the wholesale and retail markets of Kansas City. In 1910 the city accommodated the new demand by purchasing the land between 3rd and 4th streets, doubling the size of City Market.



Top: "Battle Row" on Main Street, 1885

Left: Hannibal Bridge

Intro page: Union Depot in West Bottoms, 1890



Oldest Bridge crossing the Mo. River at Kansas City, Mo.

Nearly all of the buildings of the present-day River Market area that we still prize were constructed in this period. Most structures were of practical brick, often featuring a tall first story with large glass windows to attract retail customers. Upper stories were used for storage, or were rented to working-class residents. The most notable architectural detail was (and still is) the painted wrought and molded iron, used primarily to frame doorways and windows.

From horse-drawn public transportation, the area embraced cable cars by 1880, and then streetcars by 1900, linking the City Market area with the growing commercial and residential developments to the south and east. However, horse-drawn produce wagons retailing local farm crops to housewives remained a daily presence at City Market until well into the 1920s.

The blocks surrounding City Market were also the center for Kansas City's booming vice trade. Much of this illegal activity took place on a portion of Main Street, often called "Battle Row," that, ironically, was just across the street from City Hall and police headquarters. Gambling and prostitution violated Missouri law, of course, but the entrepreneurs who were engaged in these businesses were let off with meager monthly fines.

Right: City Market, circa 1913

Below: Interior hallway entrance to the house of prostitution at 300 Wyandotte owned and operated by Annie Chambers from the 1870s to the 1920s



At this time, it is said that there were 40 gambling dens and an equal number of bawdy houses within walking distance of City Market. Annie Chambers established the most lavish and more enduring of these bordellos in 1872. Legendary figures like Frank and Jesse James, Doc Holliday, Bat Masterson, and "Wild Bill" Hickok were seen frequently here in the 1870s, but these were merely the most famous visitors among a host of other transients and local residents.

The hospitality and entertainment businesses of the City Market area were hit hard by the flood of 1903. Although City Market itself was not inundated by flood waters, the devastation to the West Bottoms and Union Depot became a factor in the ongoing relocation of retail

commerce to Kansas City's "new" downtown south of 7th Street. The narrow streets and buildings of the City Market area would not allow expansion of businesses that had started here, such as *The Kansas City Star* and St. Luke's Hospital. Nonetheless, City Market held on to most of its wholesale and retail grocery business because it was so well supported by railroads and cold storage (refrigeration) facilities, and because its costs were low. Another significant wholesaling activity that remained in the City Market area was the hardware business. Two large companies - Townley and Richards & Conover - shipped wholesale hardware items from Kansas City throughout the Southwest. In addition, the William Volker Company carried on a major trade in home furnishings.

1920s-1940s



THE INTERWAR ERA

During the period between World War I and World War II, Kansas City became one of the most popular travel destinations in America, thanks in part to the vice industries that thrived under the rule of “Boss” Tom Pendergast.

Although the City Market area had been famous as a location for gambling, prostitution, and the consumption of alcohol, by the 1920s these activities were more likely to be found downtown and in the African American neighborhoods on Vine Street east of The Paseo. The later vicinity was also where black musicians created Kansas City’s unique style in jazz and black entrepreneurs developed the city’s signature style barbecue.

Things changed slowly, however, in the City Market area. The wholesale market remained more important than the retail business, which was slipping away to neighborhood grocery stores in the suburbs. Improved highways, improved

packaging, and refrigerated trucks all helped to bring produce to the market faster and in better condition.

Farmers, some from as far away as Colorado, would show up at 4 A.M. when the market bell rang, disposing of an infinite variety of fruits, vegetables, poultry, and plants to Kansas City’s independent grocers like Wolferman’s and Muehlbach

and to local wholesalers. On an annual basis, 30,000 rail cars of produce came through Kansas City, only a third of which was purchased for local distribution.

Although the neighborhood district around the City Market was in decline at this time, many of the area’s traditional legitimate businesses continued to prosper. U.S. Cold Storage, a national company, built the largest refrigeration facility in Kansas City devoted principally to the preservation of produce. Chase Bag Company built a plant for the production of burlap bags necessary to the produce market. The last bank building to go into the City Market area, Merchants Bank, was erected. Additionally, two iconic businesses of the City Market were started in this era: the Pisciotta family built a wholesale company that carried fruits and vegetables in trucks painted with a memorable logo until the year 2000. And Henry Wertheim started Planters, which originally served the needs of farmers.



Above: Annie Chambers in her later years

Intro page: Men eating at the Helping Hand Institute, 523 Grand, circa 1930s

Still, the area deteriorated. Kansas City's Ten Year Plan of 1931 called for the transfer of city and county offices to 12th and Oak Sts., downtown, a move that further signaled the neighborhood's decreasing significance as a center of public life. By the end of the decade, there was little reason for ordinary people to visit this area, and suburbanites did not consider it a safe place.

William Volker and others raised \$85,000 for a new large building on Grand that included a kitchen, an auditorium for lectures, a library, and sleeping accommodations for 500. It was a poor man's YMCA. During the Great Depression in the 1930s, the Institute served as many as 50,000 men each year. Other less elegant nearby buildings were turned into "flophouses."



Homeless people had always frequented the City Market area. Often, they were poor men who had hopped trains from the rural south bound for what they hoped would be a life of prosperity in Kansas City. One attempt to aid these men was the Helping Hand Institute, which opened in 1894 in a former bar on Main Street. During World War I,

Emblematic of the great change that struck the neighborhood was the decision by Annie Chambers to accept Christianity and her bequest of her former grand bawdy house to the City Union Mission. Poverty had settled in.



Top right: U.S. Cold Storage Building, circa 1930

Middle right: East side of Walnut between 5th and 6th, 1940

Bottom right: Harmony Lunch Restaurant, 4th and Grand, 1941



1940s-1950s



THE FIRST REDEVELOPMENT

January 1940 saw a totally new City Market.

As compensation for the deterioration this area had suffered since the First World War, the Ten Year Plan of 1931 provided \$500,000 for improvements in the City Market. Like any good plan, the city's bond money was merely seed capital to encourage additional investment. The federal Works Progress Administration of the New Deal made a contribution, private investors added more, and railroad

companies spent at least a million dollars building a perishable foods terminal that brought the produce market up to date.

Following the plan, everything in the old City Market area was bulldozed, along with the old city hall, police station and fire station. Architect Fred Gunn applied a moderate Art Deco design for a large group of new utilitarian buildings. A small retail market would face south along 5th Street while three "pavilions" for the sale of farm products were laid out

as they are now in the middle of the square. The rest of the market, facing Main and 3rd streets, was earmarked for wholesale. The plan called for an administration building on the northeast corner of 3rd and Main. It would have rest rooms, a restaurant, offices, and a belfry to accommodate the old market bell. Perhaps for lack of money it was never constructed.

Since people were now driving to the City Market instead of taking streetcars, a large lot west of Main Street was set aside for parking.



Above: River Market area looking north toward Missouri River, circa 1940

Right: Nighttime rally during World War II

Intro page: City Market retail buildings facing 5th Street, circa 1945



The new buildings were sanitary. When an old building went down, newspapers advertised that citizens should bring their “rat dogs” to enjoy a chase as the dogs hunted the rats. These events usually drew huge crowds.

The re-built City Market was an exciting commercial success. Within a few years it could not meet the demand for retail and wholesale markets, and the City purchased the property between Grand and Walnut, where the Steamboat Arabia

Museum is now located, to extend the market. The Kansas City Star reported in 1941 that the wholesale market did \$25 million in business annually and was responsible for 1,000 jobs. The City Market had the advantage of being within the vicinity of the stockyards in the West Bottoms, where the cattle business reached a peak during the Second World War.

The new City Market was also a popular success...for a time. The number of stalls doubled and so

did the number of shoppers. There were regularly scheduled jazz dances at night, taking advantage of an extensive system of street lights that created what the newspapers called “a white way.” During the war years, many rallies were held, even at night, in the market square, reminiscent of the old days. Nonetheless, the City Market was still surrounded by a dying River Market neighborhood.



Left: Man examining fruit at City Market vendor stall with produce, circa late 1940s

Below: Rooftop view of City Market looking south-east from 3rd and Main, circa 1940



1950s-1970s



YEARS OF DECLINE AND RENEWAL

City Market continued to a fairly quiet but steady beat in the immediate post-war era. There was little new construction. The Broadway Bridge replaced the Hannibal in 1956, which might have brought more visitors from the growing Northland, but the construction of the I-35 loop and the reconstruction and extension of the Intercity Viaduct made getting into City Market even more difficult than it had been before.

“White flight” from the urban core was a major national trend in Kansas City and throughout the country. The suburban movement reduced congestion in downtown as well as in the old neighborhoods, but this put the regular City Market customers at a greater distance from it. Visiting City Market became a special weekend activity. And nearly every home now had a refrigerator, which made the frequent purchasing of fresh fruits and vegetables unnecessary. Perhaps as important was the growing wealth and education of Americans generally.

Was it worth a trip to City Market to save a few dollars on groceries? Were there not other ways to be entertained?

As other ethnic groups fled the city, Sicilians claimed what seemed to be a monopoly of the produce business in Kansas City. Most Sicilian families had come to Kansas City between 1890 and 1930. Large families of Sicilians formed a tight community in the Kansas City’s north end, numbering perhaps 12,000 by the 1940s. Jobs in the City Market may not have paid much, but it was agreeable work and convenient to home.

Meanwhile, City Market’s wholesale business also faded as large national grocery chains like A & P and Kroger developed their own wholesale purchasing systems. Railroads were used less as truck transportation rose in significance and rail centers like Kansas City became less important.

In 1958, Kansas City replaced its last remaining streetcars with buses, and public transportation into and out of the River Market neighborhood faded. City Market lost the cool cachet it had taken on in the 1940s and ceased being a popular destination. Even the Helping Hand Institute closed and the City Union Mission moved out.

By the 1970s, the River Market neighborhood surrounding City Market had become one of Kansas City’s least desirable areas. Light manufacturing and transportation service companies were taking advantage of the low rents, but the citizens of Kansas City were coming to City Market mainly on Saturday mornings.



Top: Outdoor City Market stalls, circa 1960

Intro page: City Market circa 1970s

Then a change occurred, part of an urban redevelopment revolution that was sweeping the United States. Many Americans rebelled against modernism and the mass manufactured goods for sale at the department store chains.

Nostalgia for America as it used-to-be, for a slower pace of life, for smaller buildings, for craftsmanship, took hold among many people. Old was in. Aging brick buildings needing repair found investors and renters. Young craftsman found markets for their textiles, glassware, metalwork, woodwork, and paintings. Antique stores became attractive to shoppers.

In Kansas City the movement coalesced around Marion Trozzolo, who had started a business engaged in applying the Teflon coating to frying pans in the old Board of Trade building at 5th and Delaware. A man of vision, Trozzolo in 1972 secured the support of other property owners, especially along Delaware, to create the River

Quay (pronounced “Key”) Association. Their goal was to restore the exterior of the old buildings and rent them to individuals who would create an arts, entertainment, and shopping district. Trozzolo, a religious man, wanted the district to be family friendly.

Initially, the River Quay was a great success. The frequent festivals and happy visitors, however, created a problem. The River Market had never been designed for auto traffic and its attendant parking. Shops, restaurants, and bars drew too many people, too many autos, for the area to hold.

The lure of the River Quay also attracted some of the wrong kind of investors. The Mafia, coming from the same neighborhoods as the Sicilian fruit vendors of the City Market, moved in. While many Kansas Citians didn’t notice this new presence, the arrival of organized crime brought strip joints, prostitution, drugs, gambling – and in 1976 – all-out war between rivals ostensibly seeking control over parking. For two years, there were a series of murders, fires, and bombings.

With personal safety becoming a paramount concern, the River Quay ceased to be a popular attraction. But for those who experienced the River Quay at its peak, the era is remembered fondly.



- Left: Promotional postcard for River Quay, circa 1970s
- Top right: Entrance to City Market at 5th and Walnut, 1978
- Middle right: Advertisement for River Quay on south side of building near 14th and Main, circa 1970s
- Bottom right: Remains of two River Quay bars after a suspicious explosion, 1977. Courtesy of *The Kansas City Star*.

1980s-Present



CITY MARKET REVIVED

After the collapse of the River Quay concept, yet another idea for reviving the City Market area was put forward: Could Kansas Citians, who had been in flight from the urban core for two generations, be persuaded to embrace the city again, to live in apartments and condos, close to downtown where so many people still worked? The neighborhood was attractive because of its inexpensive properties, but also because of its nineteenth-century architecture and craftsmanship, the appeal of which had been clearly demonstrated in the River Quay era.

Mel Mallin, a local businessman who had seen the success of the SoHo district in New York, where unused warehouses had been transformed into spacious loft apartments, believed something similar could take root in the River Market neighborhood. During the River Quay period, some property owners had started restoring the exteriors of buildings while leaving interiors free for renovation at some later date. Mallin would continue exterior restoration, while tearing out the interior walls of the old warehouses and factories, presenting potential renters with a lot of open space, high ceilings, large windows, and new

utilities. The goal was to provide for offices and retail on the first floor of most buildings with loft apartments and condos above.

A critical step toward this idea had already occurred when the neighborhood was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. Following this move, the city offered broad tax incentives for developers, and grants from

Right: West side of the City Market square on a busy Saturday. Image courtesy George Denniston.

Far right: Completion of the City Market glass walkways in the east building. Image courtesy Piper-Wind Architects.

Intro page: Broadway Bridge. Image courtesy Dr. Ronald Miriani, Park University



various federal and state agencies poured in. As much as \$100 million of public money may have been spent on infrastructure, which included parking garages and street improvements. Working under the umbrella of the Planned Industrial Expansion Authority, developers gained condemnation rights—a radical departure from the past. Fearing a return of the Mafia, new zoning restrictions made it unlawful to operate a bar not part of a restaurant.

The investment has been fruitful. The number of residential units in the River Market will soon reach 1,000, and total investment, mostly private, since the River Quay era may reach a billion dollars.

Small businesses, including many cozy individually owned restaurants, have moved into quarters provided for them. Some businesses are not small. The most important of these is the Steamboat Arabia Museum, which draws on average 2,000 people per week to look at artifacts of the earliest history of Kansas City and the Missouri River. A major recent coup was persuading HOK, the international sports architectural firm, to establish its headquarters in a new building at 3rd and Wyandotte. Kansas City has made many improvements in City Market,



Above: Farmers' Market under the pavilion. Image courtesy George Denniston.

Right: Completion of the City Market glass walkways in the east building. Image courtesy Mike Sinclair.



City Market has also benefited from the redevelopment of such nearby neighborhoods as River Market, Quality Hill, and downtown, and by improvements along the riverfront such as the Richard Berkley Riverfront Park.

Once again, City Market is giving downtown a soul and a vibrancy that defines urban life. Once again, area farmers fill City Market with locally grown produce. And once again, adults who themselves have fond memories of the place are bringing their children to City Market, and young people are coming here for concerts and festivals on weekends and holidays.

Once again, Kansas City's City Market has become the place to be. What was old is new again.

the most obvious of which is the installation of glass doors that protect vendors and customers alike from Kansas City's unpredictable climate, making City Market a year-long destination. With as much parking as the public needs, improvement in the quality of the produce, and more intriguing places to get a meal or beverage, shoppers are returning in increasing numbers. The eclectic retail and wholesale businesses in the market's interior spaces have prospered. Meanwhile, there is a waiting list for City Market's 180 outdoor stalls.

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