



Community for Understanding and Healing

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DRAFT

Historic Overview of the Meacham Park Neighborhood and City of Kirkwood

CFUH is providing this overview in response to early requests for historical information. This is intended as background and inspiration for further dialogue and understanding, not as a complete history.

We welcome your additions and feedback.

Sources include:

Meacham Park: A History 1892 – 1989 by Lonnie R. Speer, Meacham Park: Past, Present & Future by Don Corrigan, History of J. Milton Turner Offices, Meacham Park: A Neighborhood with History and a Growing Future, Meacham Park: A History of American Change, Early Kirkwood, History of Kirkwood, MO 1851 – 1965 by J.W. Dahl

1808 –Log house at #9 Hill Drive built; the first home in Kirkwood area.

1832 –St. Peter Catholic Church organized; 1853 – Olive Chapel AME; 1854 – the Presbyterian Church; 1859 – the Episcopal Church.

1853 –Lots auctioned off for proposed town of Kirkwood; Pacific Railroad tracks built.

1864 –First school built; one 18'x 28' room.

1865 –Town of Kirkwood incorporated; the first planned suburb west of the Mississippi; to be governed by 6 trustees elected by qualified voters.
KWD School District chartered, with 6-man Board of Directors who were “free white male persons over age 21”. Section 13 required provision “for the education of the colored children that reside in the district”. (As prohibited by MO law in 1847, there had been no public schools for the “formal education of Negro children”.)

1866 – Sept. 24-the first day of school for white children. It was determined that both funds & public interest were insufficient to build, so the School Board arranged to rent the Negro church so classes could begin for colored children.

1867 –Jefferson Ave. School built.

1870 –Classes in the one room church: 82 Negro children, ages 5 – 21; by 1879, 175 Negro students

1874-75 –Pressed by persons anxious for education, night school classes for “adult colored scholars” held in the same tiny space used by children during the day.

1880 –A second room added to the Negro school. Adults, over the age of 20, were admitted to the day school. The first Negro teacher employed.

1888 –First KWD High School built on W. Adams.

Mission

This non-political, inclusive, peacemaking group of local citizens is committed to promoting respect, acceptance, and reconciliation among all citizens in our Kirkwood community through reflective dialogue and ongoing proactive initiatives.

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- 1892** – July 8, Elzey E. Meacham, a white real estate speculator from Memphis TN, purchased 158.61 acres for \$33,308.00, subdividing into 25-foot wide lots.
- 1896** –St. Louis Co. lists Sandy Spears as a farmer residing along Big Bend in Meacham Park at Kirkwood. He still has descendents in the area.
Street car service initiated to Kirkwood.
- 1900** – 1930's –Many changes in KWD: established board of Trustees, then Board of Aldermen with 3 wards.
Annexed 960 acres, the first of many annexations.
- 1903** –Telephone service available to KWD residents.
- 1904** –KWD Volunteer Fire Department organized.
- 1906**– Black children living in MP attend Booker T. Washington School on Adams near Geyer. White children living in MP attend Jefferson School.
- 1907** – First Baptist Church was established on Meacham St.
Kirkwood's sanitary sewer system completed.
- 1908** – Meacham Park School established for white children of Meacham Park. (14 white, 52 black children)

KWD residents keeping hogs must dispose of them; 1911 –Cows running in streets would be impounded; 1912 – residents required to keep poultry off streets.
- 1909** –KWD established 4 wards, each represented by 2 aldermen.
- 1911** - Meacham Park School of Negroes opened in one room house at the east end of New York.
KWD Board of Public Works created to settle problems related to the provision of light and water.
There were 80 fire hydrants within city limits.
- 1915** –KWD license granted to establish 'chain' stores, i.e. Kroger Grocery; began disappearance of home owned, family run grocery stores.
- 1920** –State law required school districts to pay tuition for black 8th grade graduates to attend HS in St. Louis.
KWD Board of Alderman approved hiring of a third policeman.
- 1920's & 1930's** – Meacham Park organizations included the Women's Community Club, Meacham Park Volunteer Fire Department, Meacham Park Police, Crusaders, Sunshine Social Club, Civic Club, Needlework Guild, and The American Legion. The Meacham Park business district near Meacham and Shelby included an outdoor theater, Powell's Grocery Store, Toledo Hall, Moses' Pool Hall, Bennie Wright's Tavern, Weaver's Confectionary, Sloppy Joe's Restaurant & Tavern.
- 1921** –“New Booker Washington School built in Meacham Park” as “a four room eighth grade school”.
- 1922** – New KWD High School built on Kirkwood Rd.
KWD City Ordinance passed prohibiting use of “outside privies”.
- 1924** –Meacham Park School opened at Saratoga and Milwaukee.
Kirkwood Public Library established.

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1929 – A 6th ward created for Kirkwood, now a city of 4051 acres.

1930 – Kirkwood changed to commission form of government; Mayor, 2 councilmen elected by entire city.

1938 – New brick Turner Junior High School completed. The original wood-frame building remained in use by the elementary grades.

1940 – With Kirkwood population increase, a third councilman elected.

1942 – Present Kirkwood City Hall built.

1946 – Kirkwood Chamber of Commerce formed.

1950's – Population of Meacham Park totals 1,365 people including 300 whites. Kirkwood Population: 18,600

All black students in KWD district attending Turner School after the Washington School closed.
Crestwood Shopping Center opens, impacting Kirkwood businesses.
New KWD High School, North Middle School opened.
Streetcar service discontinued; bus service initiated.

Meacham Park Organizations include the Women's Community Club, Meacham Park Improvement Association, Legionnaires, Volunteer Fire Department, Republican Club, YMCA, six churches: The First Baptist Church, The Church of God, The Church of God in Christ, The Blessed Martin Catholic Mission, C.M.E. and St. Mary and the Pentecostal. Black owned businesses include 5 grocery stores, 5 beauty shops, 2 service stations, a cleaners, an auto repair service, a radio & TV repair shop, and a trash disposal service.

1951 – Club 44 founded by Mr. Joe Cole, with help from Kirkwood YMCA.

1953 – The U.S. Marine Hospital, founded in 1939, sold to Srs. of St. Joseph of Carondelet to create St. Joseph's Hospital of Kirkwood.

1954 – Supreme Court decision to end segregation in the schools; Kirkwood School District became the first in the county to accept black students.
New Kirkwood High School opened on W. Essex.

1957 – City of Kirkwood annexed a 100-foot strip of commercial property along Kirkwood Rd. & Big Bend.

1960's – Kirkwood population: 29,400

Meacham Park AMVET Post #69 established, located on Big Bend near Kirkwood Rd.
Meramec College and Vianney HS opened; Coyle High School closed.
Highway 44 opened through Meacham Park and Kirkwood.

Meacham Park citizens formed the Meacham Park Executive Council to work for educational opportunities and a better living environment for Meacham Park residents.
Kirkwood Community Center and Ice Rink opened.

1965 – Kirkwood governing body now consists of Mayor and 4 councilmen.

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1966 - Total number of Meacham Park residents is 1,501 of which 113 were white. Of the 396 homes in the community, 222 had outhouses as their only facilities. Roads were wide dirt trails.

Five MP children perished in house fire. The MP volunteer fire department disbanded. The community contracted fire protection service through the City of Kirkwood.

Kirkwood Mayor Robert Reim wrote in his Plan of Action: "The City of Kirkwood has been equally guilty with the surrounding cities and St. Louis County in creating a ghetto-like effect in existence in Meacham Park through neglect, discrimination and annexations over the years which have included valuable commercial and industrial areas, but which have avoided the Meacham Park area."

1967 – St. John Meacham Park Health Center, operated by the Sisters of Mercy, opened in the remodeled firehouse at Electric and Milwaukee.

1968 –The Sponsors Program (SPROG) was initiated to help the area's youth.
MSD and the St. Louis Co. Water Company installed water and sewer lines in Meacham Park.

1970's – Kirkwood School District closed several schools (Des Peres, Hough, Osage Hills, Pitman, Rose Hill and Turner).
Recycling Center opened on South Taylor.
Target Store and Farmers Market opened in downtown Kirkwood.

1970 – The Meacham Park Development Corporation formed; approved building 80-unit, 400 resident housing complex and 30 small family homes.

1977 – St. Louis County and Kirkwood commissioned a study to look at annexation of the area by Kirkwood. Team Four concluded that if the main portion of MP (north of 44) is to be annexed by an adjacent municipality, the most appropriate jurisdiction to do so is the City of Kirkwood."

1980's – Woodbine Center opened.
Over 300 new homes built in KWD.
Lutheran Missouri Synod Offices opened.

1982 – Meacham Park: St. Louis County reported that since 1972, all occupied housing units are connected to sanitary sewers and contain adequate plumbing. New sidewalks, paved streets and storm sewers constructed.
After 100+ demolitions, 62 single-family homes, 52-unit multi-family housing built.
St. Louis County had invested in excess of \$3,800,000, approximately \$10,000 per dwelling unit.

1987 – Mayor Herb Jones met with Meacham Park residents to explore the possibility of annexation. Interest continues but no action taken; remains unincorporated.

1988 – Population of Meacham Park estimated at 980.

1989 - Survey by St. Louis County Urban League found Meacham Park residents favored both annexation & redevelopment of the neighborhood. Frequently referenced was a desire for better law enforcement & police protection. Opponents cited higher taxes, distrust of Kirkwood, loss of community identity, and fear of racial prejudice.

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1990 – County Executive H.C. Milford created the Meacham Park Advisory Committee with 18 members, the majority MP residents; met monthly to identify neighborhood problems, to design & prioritize solutions. The Committee proposed commercial development on South Kirkwood Road, home sites, and community service locations; highest priority given to housing for the elderly. (The Rose Hill House, built about this time for elderly in the Kirkwood area, met this need.) Annexation was expected to improve police protection, deficiencies in street maintenance, sanitary services, derelict properties, and high unemployment.

In the spring of 1990, the Committee invited Kirkwood to participate in its planning and discussions. October 1990, the Committee formally requested that Kirkwood file the application for annexation with the St. Louis County Boundary Commission.

1991- St. Louis County agreed to help finance some services to MP for 10 years. Hearings were held.

Kirkwood Planning & Zoning created an 8-member subcommittee to study the Meacham Park Community Study, including 3 members of the MP Advisory Committee.

November 1991: 72% of Kirkwood voters, and 83% of Meacham Park voters approved annexation.

1992 – Kirkwood Planning & Zoning commission adopted the Meacham Park Community Study as part of the Kirkwood Comprehensive Plan.

1994 – In response to the RFP (Request for Proposal), seven proposals were received from developers. 10-12 meetings were held with residents to receive feedback. The committee recommended that OPUS Corp. be given the contract because it “supported the main goals for the Meacham Park plan, the economic integration of the neighborhood with emphasis on single family home ownership, including a unique approach to revitalize the neighborhood”. It sought to develop a large commercial complex and use TIF financing.

July 21, City Council established a nine member TIF Committee; 6 City Council, 2 Kirkwood R-7 School District, 1 from another taxing district.

The 9-member TIF Committee held a 6-hour hearing, 200+ in attendance. The TIF recommendation (5 in favor, 1 opposed, 2 abstentions, 1 absence) was adopted. Elements were acquisition of homeowner, rental, commercial, & vacant properties. Relocation costs would be paid displaced businesses and residents; “A \$40,000 premium over acquisition costs to homeowners being displaced, and \$6000 relocation money to renters”.

November - The Kirkwood City Council approved the TIF recommendation.

“Citizens for Responsible Kirkwood Government” formed; worked for a referendum petition to give KWD voters the opportunity to rescind the Redevelopment Plan & Agreement. “The petition was found to be insufficient to warrant reconsideration of the TIF Plan.”

1995 – Unable to meet its development agreement, OPUS withdrew. Another RFP was released. Desco Group was the only respondent; Kirkwood designated it as the developer.

City Council appointed a new commission to guide implementation of the TIF Plan. TIF Commission included MP residents, Neighborhood Redevelopment Steering Committee members, Chamber of Commerce members, R-7 School District members.

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Financing included: Desco commitment of \$56 M, TIF revenues, St. Louis County Housing Authority, interest and sale of property.

Programs utilized: Homeowners Rehabilitation Program, Supplemental Homeowners Rehab Program, Hope 1 from HUD, taxes, Municipal Parks Grant, TIF.

Work included: Homes relocated and/or bought out, homes built, homes rehabbed, lots and streetscape improved, landscaping & demolition.

2000's – Kirkwood population is 29,000.

Station Plaza opened in downtown Kirkwood; Kirkwood Commons opened on South Kirkwood Rd.

Over 45 trains pass through Kirkwood daily.

Kirkwood School District operates 5 elementary schools (Westchester, Tillman, North Glendale, Robinson, Keysor), 2 middle schools (Nipher and North) and Kirkwood High School.

2007 – St. Louis County distributes Real Estate taxes to communities, schools and the state of Missouri.

Kirkwood receives 8.5% annually, which totaled \$121,250.

The salary for Kirkwood City Council: Councilperson - \$200 per month, Mayor - \$300 per month.

Kirkwood's share of the annual sales tax from Kirkwood Commons was \$210,000, 6.5% of the city's total sales tax income of \$3,200,000. Kirkwood received \$115,000 due to unpaid bonds.

2008 – April- The bonds sold to help finance the Meacham Park Improvements and the Kirkwood Commons were paid off, several years ahead of schedule. Kirkwood's share of the annual sales tax will now be \$210,000.