

Fred Harvey House, pp. 1-3

Historical Highlights
vol. 10, no. 2
June, 2021

The Fred Harvey Restaurant Concept was Established in Topeka

Article by **Chris Cruz**

With an initial foundation that proved successful at his first location in Topeka, Fred Harvey's revolutionary concept for an excellent and efficient dining experience along the Santa Fe Railroad grew to include 30 Harvey Houses, hotels and newsstands in Kansas alone. A shrewd entrepreneur, the small 20 seat lunch room on the second floor of the Santa Fe depot in Topeka expanded into the Southwest and West with 84 Harvey Houses from Kansas City to California.

Why Topeka? Why the fledgling, young Santa Fe? Harvey had worked for the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad and while traveling as an employee he experienced deplorable food during their 30-minute stops. Passengers were often rushed and for those who were lucky enough to be served, the food was often of poor quality and there was insufficient time to eat it. Harvey, having established a couple of trackside restaurants at

Lawrence and Wallace, Kansas on the Kansas Pacific Railroad, had a vision for a successful venture for change and improvement. However, the CB&Q was not interested in his concept and they recommended he try pitching his idea to the upstart Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad. Harvey was acquainted with Charles Morse, the superintendent of the Santa Fe and on a handshake deal, an agreement was reached for Harvey to use a small, second floor room in the Topeka depot.

Harvey wasted no time while he, his wife, and Guy Potter, his manager from Leavenworth, scrubbed the room and replaced everything with fine quality furnishings, linen and dishes. He opened for business in January, 1876.

Harvey's first customer was Shep Smith, a 19-year-old rookie fireman. Harvey gave him a cup of coffee for his approval and Smith liked it. Smith also told Harvey about his concern with the small

room and the flight of stairs. Harvey assured him people would make the effort to be there. Smith then ordered a sandwich and a piece of cherry pie. To his surprise, the piece was a quarter of the pie.

It did not take long for Harvey's quality and service to be known to the traveling public and to the citizens of Topeka who soon became customers.

Based upon his success, Harvey purchased the former Clifton Hotel in 1878 in Florence, Kansas. Florence was a service stop for the



Santa Fe. The hotel had a 32-seat dining room and Harvey hired William Phillips, the head chef from the Palmer House in Chicago, to move to Florence. Phillips was paid very well and was free to purchase the best local food —cont., p. 2➔

—cont. from p. 1→ and game. During the first six months of 1879, over 2,300 folks stayed at the hotel and in March, Harvey enlarged the hotel and added a third story tower.

Business was good and in the early 1900's, a new two-story red brick depot was constructed in Topeka. This depot included a 45-seat lunchroom and a 110-seat dining room.

The national Depression of the 1930's had a profound impact with fewer passengers traveling by rail, less money and fewer customers for the Harvey Houses. Several locations were closed as locomotives became more powerful and no longer needed the frequent maintenance stops. Dining cars were added to the trains and the traditional Harvey Houses at many depots were no longer profitable. Thus, the Topeka Harvey House closed its doors on January 31, 1940 after serving Charles W. Roebuck the last cup of coffee just one minute before 9 p.m. when the doors were locked. Roebuck declared his second cup was just as good as his first.

During the 1960's, in an effort to adjust to the public traveling more by automobiles than by train, the Harvey Co. explored the establishment of Harvey Houses along the highways. One such location was

announced on September 29, 1964 for Topeka as a joint venture by the Harvey Restaurant Company and American Oil Company. They selected the corner of Gage and I-70 for this new Harvey House which officially opened to the public on September 12, 1966 with a 116-seat facility. The concept met with limited success as the traveling public was more interested in faster food instead of a better dining experience. Eventually the Harvey Company was dissolved and sometime in the 1970's, the building was sold to the VFW which continues to use the bright red tile facility as its headquarters.

It was the end of an era for the Fred Harvey Company in Topeka. The successful Harvey formula had been emulated by other railroads who strove to compete by also offering better quality food and services. Harvey has been credited

with creating the first restaurant chain in America and it all began



right here in Topeka where his standard of excellence propelled the Fred Harvey name to be well recognized and respected for nearly 100 years. The Harvey legacy will forever be linked to Topeka. ♪



Harvey House Photo Captions:

1. Dining room at a Harvey House along the Santa Fe Railroad Line.
2. Former Residence of Fred Harvey located at 624 Olive in Leavenworth. Tours held by appointment only.
3. Dining Room at the Topeka Harvey House.
4. Topeka Santa Fe Railroad Depot in the 1880s, with Harvey House on second floor.
5. The Harvey Girls were single women who worked for the Harvey House restaurants along the Santa Fe Railroad. The girls met high standards, leading to the success of the restaurants.
6. Former Fred Harvey Highway House Restaurant located at 115 SW Gage Blvd. in Topeka,KS. The building is currently occupied by offices for the local VFW chapter. The exterior of the building remains exceptionally intact, with its original red tiled roof and teal blue paint scheme.



Chris Cruz is a local Topeka businessman who graduated from Pittsburg State with a Music Education degree. He has been researching various history stories in Kansas for many years, centering attention on Fred Harvey.



June Note from our Leader

“At half past ten o’clock this morning two of the large Vinewood Park cars left the corner of Eighth and Kansas avenue for the formal opening of the park...Vinewood is going to be one of the biggest summer additions Topeka ever had...”
Topeka Herald, July 25, 1903

Spring is here and with the erratic weather patterns of Kansas; gentle rains, occasional storms, and even snow as late as May. As Spring fades to Summer, schools let loose their eager pupils for their anticipated summer break and we look the possibility of gatherings with friends and family, we must not overlook the beauty and space afforded by the many parks our community has to offer. As with all things each park carries its own unique history. Many of us will visit the crown jewel of Topeka, Gage Park. With its many gardens, play grounds, the pool, Discovery Center, and Zoo Gage Park has much to offer and has throughout its long history. In 1999, Arthur Rabb recounted his fond memories of Gage Park in a 1999 Topeka Capital-Journal article and republished in the *Shawnee County Historical Bulletin no. 76* of that same year titled, “Park Was Paradise For A Boy.”

“From 1918 to 1922, my boyhood home was a 20 acre tract at what is now 3601 W. 10th, a country block east of the intersection of 10th and Gage. The Gage Park perimeter was virtually the same as now....The Park’s main attractions were the pool, zoo, greenhouse, sundial [pictured below, *SCHS Bulletin No. 76*], picnic tables, bandstand, summer houses, baseball diamond, and natural grass, bushes, and trees....Picnics at the Park were a

popular pastime. Family, church, social, club, and neighborhood groups comprised many of the picnicking folk with baskets of goodies.”

In 1903 the much-anticipated Vinewood Park opened five miles southeast of what was then Topeka. According to the July 25, 1903 Topeka Herald Vinewood Park consisted of some 432 acres—with nearly 40 acres used as an amusement park, pictured below—and was to be “lighted with 300 lights.”

Vinewood Park was connected to Topeka via a Topeka Railway Company line. The 1969 Bulletin no. 46 of the Shawnee County Historical Society’s author Louise Roote wrote, “From morning until late at night the corner of Eighth and Kansas avenue was filled with a pushing, shoving crowd, frantic to get in a car and hauled to the park.”

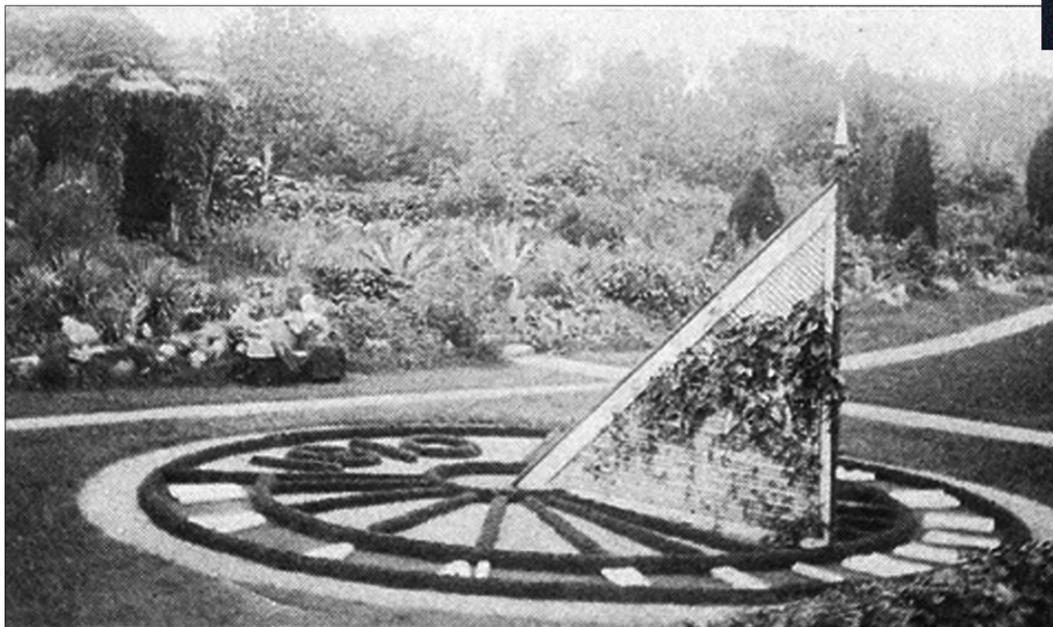
Although pushing and shoving may not be in order for this summer, many anticipate a summer full of activities as we emerge cautiously from the Covid-19 pandemic. My advice, plan your visits wisely and enjoy all that Shawnee County has to offer.



Nathan McAlister



above: Topeka Zoo tiger cub



left: Sundial and hut (TPR)



Lithographs for Sale



The Shawnee County Historical Society continues to offer for sale lithographs from the 1870s. These are Birdseye views of Topeka and Tecumseh as well as a map of the plains in the early 1860’s. Copies are available for sale for only \$15 with members getting a discount. If you would like to know more about these, please call (785) 234-6097. In addition, we have many requests for past bulletins and they are being sold for \$25. Contact us also by email: shawneecountyhistory@gmail.com

June Story to Tell

Although the Ritchie House and Cox Center have been open for visitors since last May, it appears **June 1st** is the date many of our Topeka attractions will officially open following the pandemic.

That means we hope to see a lot of visitors during the hours we are open:
9 AM to 1 PM, Tuesday thru Thursday.

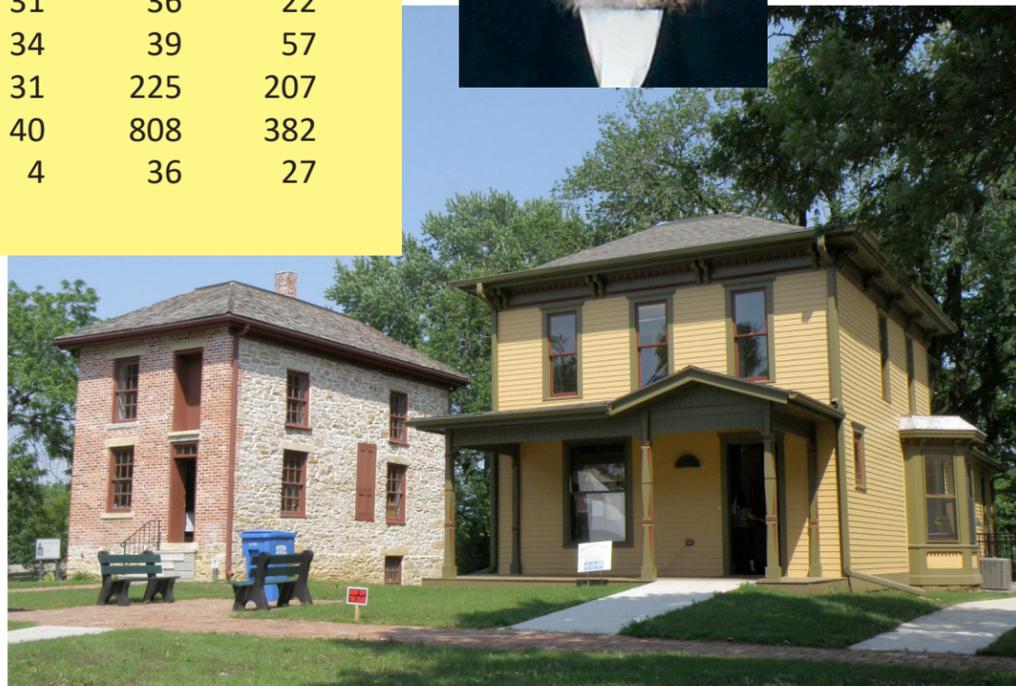
As you can imagine, our visitor count has been reduced but when compared to last year at this time, we are showing an increase.

If you have a group planning to come to Topeka...keep us in mind.

We have a story to tell!

Visitor Counts:

	2021	2020	2019	2018
January	10	25	158	34
February	14	243	160	120
March	36	19	155	468
April	40	4	185	208
May	25	0	86	234
June	—	10	272	120
July	—	60	70	144
August	—	31	36	22
September	—	34	39	57
October	—	31	225	207
November	—	40	808	382
December	—	4	36	27



Would you like to support the Shawnee County Historical Society?

Here is your opportunity. Just fill out the following information below and send it to:

Shawnee County Historical Society
PO Box 2201
Topeka, Kansas 66601

or send registration by email to shawneecountyhistory.org



I want to support:

- Heritage Education on for kids \$ _____
- Shawnee County Preservation \$ _____
- Historical Programs/Lectures \$ _____
- Bus Rental Grants for School Field Trip (to help make field trips possible) \$ _____
- Ritchie House restoration and maintenance \$ _____

I also want to renew my annual membership:

- General Membership \$35 \$ _____
- Patron Level Membership \$50 \$ _____
- Renovator Level Membership \$100 \$ _____
- Sustaining Level Membership \$150+ \$ _____

Pay by Credit Card: \$ _____
Credit Card _____ Exp. ____ / ____ Plus the code on the back of your card _____ — or use Paypal.

Zoom Seminars Keep Society Busy!

With the pandemic rescinding, the Shawnee County Historical Society will continue to hold events in which patrons can attend in person....and at the same time provide them on Zoom. It will be a challenge to keep our viewers involved but we feel it is important to provide different ways to make our presentations. Overall, the Zoom Seminars on Sunday Afternoons have been a hit.

We want to thank our program chair, Christine Steinkuehler, for her great effort in getting qualified speakers to make a presentation.

Read a draft of upcoming seminars on **Page 8.**

If you interested in joining us, either in person or on zoom, **just let us know and we will provide you a link.** Email us at shawneecountyhistory@gmail.com



