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Kansas Pleasure Grounds: The History of Kansas Parks (1850-1920)

Abstract

Though parks of the 19th century, also known as "pleasure grounds," were seen at the time an antidote to unhealthy high-density urban living in cities such as New York City, they were embraced by small towns and cities that experienced none of the issues associated with big city living. Instead, parks were seen as sophisticated and a sign of modernity. Kansas, for example, surprisingly was listed third for the most newspaper articles using the keyword "pleasure ground" (after New York and Pennsylvania) in the Historical Newspaper Archive. When Europeans arrived in what would become the state of Kansas, they encountered vast plains, the home of the Kaw people. Kansas became the 34th state on January 29, 1861. Its new settlers made great efforts to develop their new home by creating public parks, or "pleasure grounds," for their communities.

This study investigates the story of shaping and developing *pleasure grounds* of Kansas between 1850 to 1920 and the attitudes that people had about them. The primary research question focuses on why and how the early parks or pleasure grounds were introduced to Kansas communities between 1850 to 1920. Preliminary investigations show that the cities who put extensive effort into developing pleasure grounds are Topeka, Kansas City, Wichita, Junction City, and Lawrence. There are also more than forty other smaller cities which embraced the idea of improving their man-made landscape through developing pleasure grounds.

Keywords: Kansas; Kansans; Park; Pleasure Ground.