

Chapter 1

BEFORE WE WERE A CITY

Who were our predecessors? Who lived where we now live? Let's go back in time. It is now generally accepted that the great plains were mostly uninhabited at the time of Columbus. Peoples lived on the fringes but were fairly sedentary and lived mainly by growing maize, beans and squash. They hunted small game. Their only draft animals were dogs that pulled travois.

Archaeologists exploring our region have determined that a group, known as the Hopewellian people, lived in the Kansas City area from 122 BC to AD 800. Around AD 1000 these people gave way to a culture based on hunting, fishing and rudimentary agriculture. The first people to be identified living in the general area that is now Roeland Park, were the Kansa Indians. The Kansa Indians are believed to be members of a group of Siouan Indians that splintered off a main group and initially settled near the mouth of the Kaw River in Wyandotte County, probably before AD 1800. The tribe also established villages in other locations north of Leavenworth and west of Lawrence. Continued pressures on this group resulted in its moving westward until eventually it, along with other tribes, were relocated to Indian Territory.

The first identifiable residents of what is now the City of Roeland Park were the Shawnee Indians. In 1829 the United States government granted the Shawnee Indians a reservation that extended along the Kaw River from what is now the Kansas-Missouri state line, westward into Douglas County. The Shawnee Indians initially lived in bark huts or wigwams (Not the tepees of the Plains Indians). They arrived in Kansas in two groups. One group of about 100 arrived in 1829 and the balance of about 900 arrived in 1832. In 1830 the Rev Thomas Johnson attempted to establish a mission for the Shawnee Indians near what is now Turner, Kansas. This proved unsuitable and the mission was relocated and opened in 1839 at its present location. Many of the Shawnee Indians located near the Shawnee Indian Mission. The Shawnees were moved to Indian Territory in 1862, although some individuals stayed on as part of the general population of Johnson County.

An interesting sidelight of "what might have been" is that Joseph Smith and a deputation of Mormons visited Johnson County in 1832. After a careful survey they selected Shawnee Township as the future home of Mormondom. This was not to be. For once, the government had some scruples and refused to break the treaty with the Shawnee. The Mormons then settled near Independence, Missouri.

The first owner of land that is now part of the City of Roeland Park was Sim-e-to, also known as John Denny. He received 160 acres of land on November 7, 1858. This tract was located in the area between what is now 51st Street to 55th Street and Nall Avenue to about Sherwood. The land was preempted and reissued to Mary Pinner, a widow of a War of 1812 soldier. She assigned the land to Alexander Johnson, the son of Rev. Thomas Johnson. Just why the land was taken from Sim-e-to is not known. One report suggests this may have happened because John Denny was part of a gang of horse thieves. He is reported to have been hanged for stealing horses. He is buried in an unmarked grave in an unmarked cemetery located at what is now 55th and Queal Streets in western Merriam, Kansas.

On April 16, 1865 the United States issued a land patent to the Reverend Thomas Johnson for about 1,800 acres of land. Generally this land consisted of all or parts of Sections 3 and 4,

and the North half of Sections 9 and 10, Township 12 South, Range 25 East in Johnson County, Kansas. Reverend Johnson was murdered before the patent was completed and title to the land was vested in his widow and children, each of whom received a portion of the land or other assets. The area that is now the City of Roeland Park is all located on land granted to Reverend Johnson, or acquired from Mrs. Pinner.

Between 1865 and 1875 various sales and transfers of the property were made. Property owners in 1875 were: Alexander S. Johnson, Andrew M. Johnson and Edna Johnson who were children of Rev. Thomas Johnson; F. A. Waterman, whose wife was the former Laura Johnson, daughter of Thomas Johnson; John B. Wornall whose wife was Eliza S. Johnson; Moses Greno, who owned the Indian Mission site; and J. Chandler, G. W. Fincke, H. Hall, and F. T. Scruggs.

By 1875 Johnson County had several incorporated towns including Shawnee Town, located about five miles west of the Shawnee Indian Mission; Campbellton, located in what is now Merriam, and Glenwood, located four miles southwest of the Mission. Other Johnson County towns included Olathe, Eudora and others. However, only a school, the Shawnee Indian Mission, and farmsteads were in the area in which the City of Roeland Park is now located.

Beginning in 1882, John Roe began to assemble his farm. The original farm was located in the area that is now 55th Street to 59th Street, Nall to Roe. In 1884 and 1893 John Roe expanded his holding northward to 51st Street and subsequently to the Johnson/Wyandotte county line. He also acquired land to the east between Neosho and Mission Road and 55th to what is now Elledge Drive.

In 1905, John Roe granted an easement to William Strang to construct a rail line for the Missouri-Kansas Railroad across the northern parts of his farm. The Missouri-Kansas Railroad, more commonly referred to as the Strang Line, ran from near Westport to Olathe. The line entered the City of Roeland Park area near 47th and Canterbury Streets, traveled southwesterly to near the site of the present City Hall, then across Roe Avenue where it went westerly on the north side of 51st Street.

Prior to 1905 the Wornall farm was divided among the children of John B. Wornall. On August 7, 1905 the Wornall children sold this land to William Strang. Strang divided the land by selling the right-of-way for the Strang Line to the Missouri-Kansas Interurban Railway Company. The remaining land was sold to the Strang Land Company. Strang owned a substantial interest in both companies. In 1907 Herman Beers acquired the area between Roe and Delmar, Elledge to County Line. Beers subdivided the land into lots. This appears to be the earliest urbanization of land in what is now the City of Roland Park.

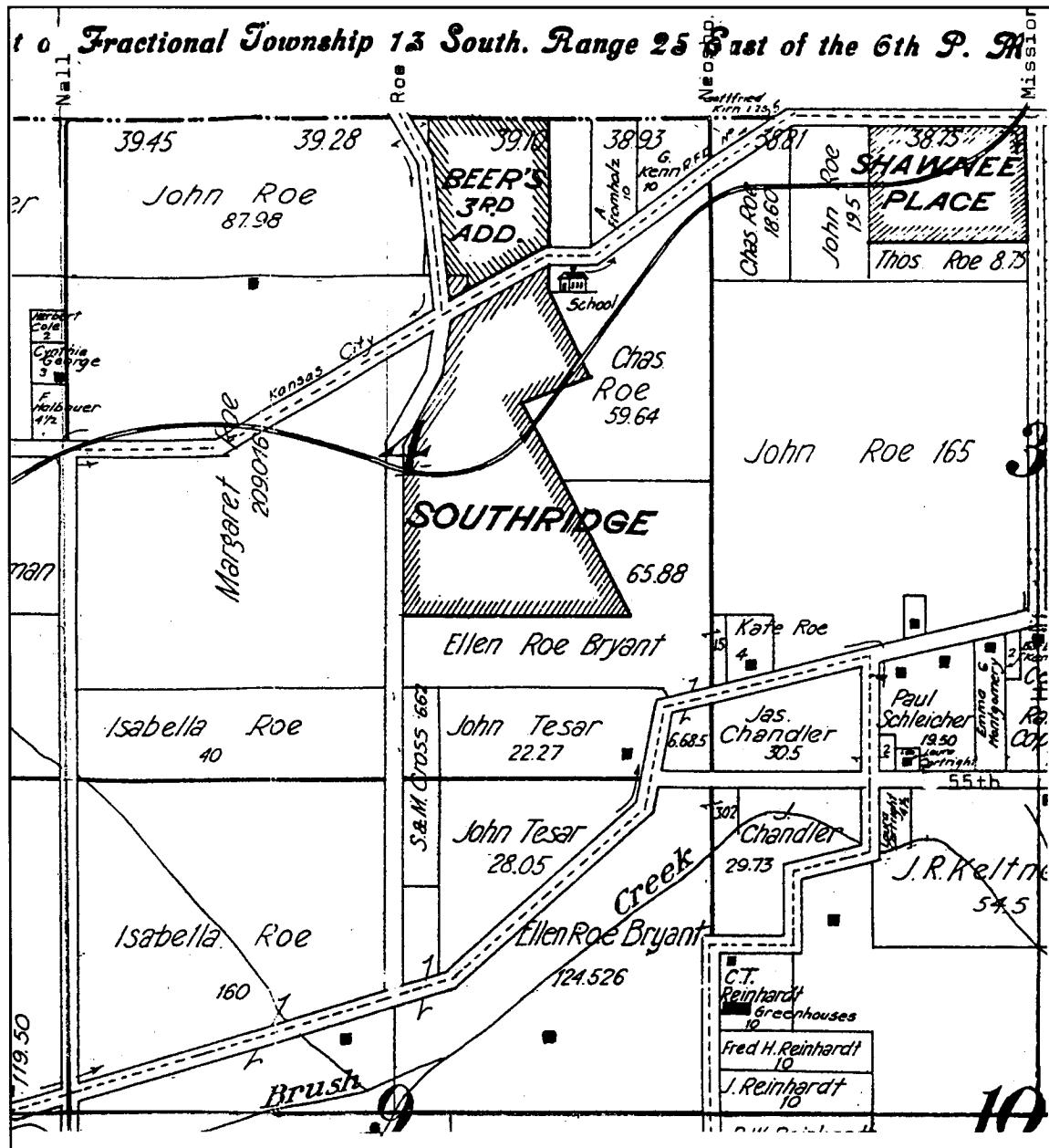
In 1909 the Strang Land Company subdivided the land that had been acquired from the Wornall family and called the area "Southridge." At about the same time, the area that is now between 47th and 48th Street, Mission Road to Reinhardt was platted and designated as "Shawnee Place."

In 1922 Frank Hodges purchased the land now described as Mission Ridge and Mission Grove. Mission Grove had been sub divided in 1921 by Charles Roe, a son of John Roe. Frank Hodges subdivided the Mission Ridge area in 1923 but no substantial development occurred in the area until after World War II.

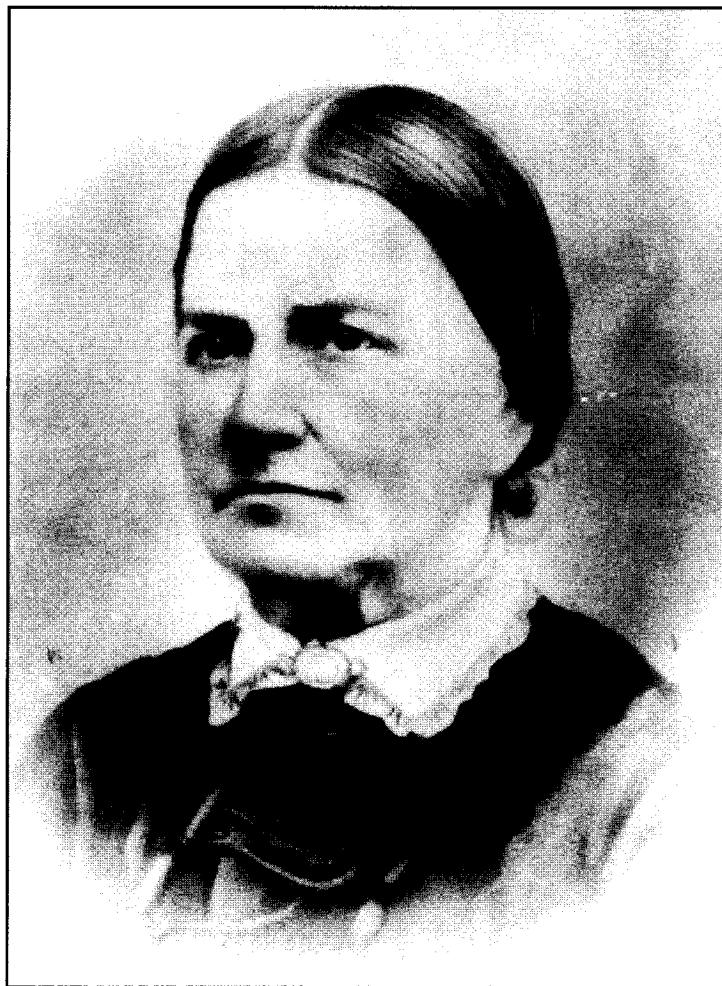
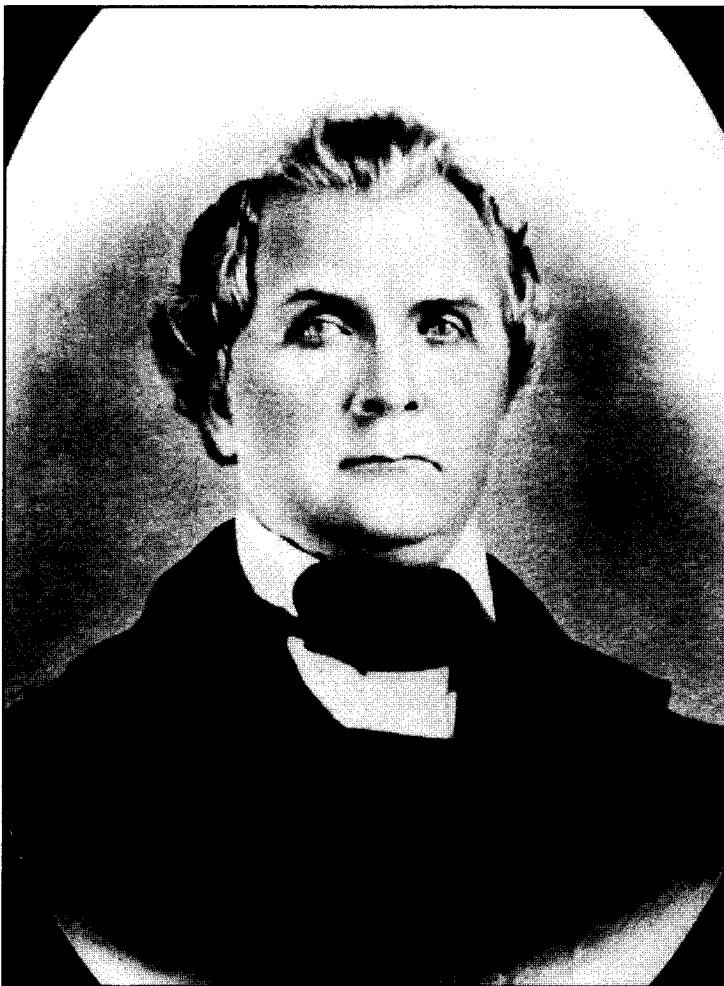
In 1937, construction was started in the northwest part of the area. Between 1937 and 1940 six houses were constructed in the Pemland Heights area, north of 49th Street and east of Nall. By far the larger area in which development began was the construction by Charles E. Vawter in the areas he named Roe Manor Heights, Roeland Park and Roe Highlands. Initial construction was in the Roe Manor Heights area and along Nall and 51st Street. Construction

was halted during World War II due to shortage of materials. Never-the-less, homes under construction were permitted to be completed when Mr. Vawter agreed to rent the houses to war workers.

Charles Vawter purchased the land he developed from Misses Isabella, Catherine, and Margaret Roe, and Mrs. Ellen Roe Bryant, daughters of John Roe. In naming his subdivision for the Roe family, Mr. Vawter established the name for the City of Roeland Park.



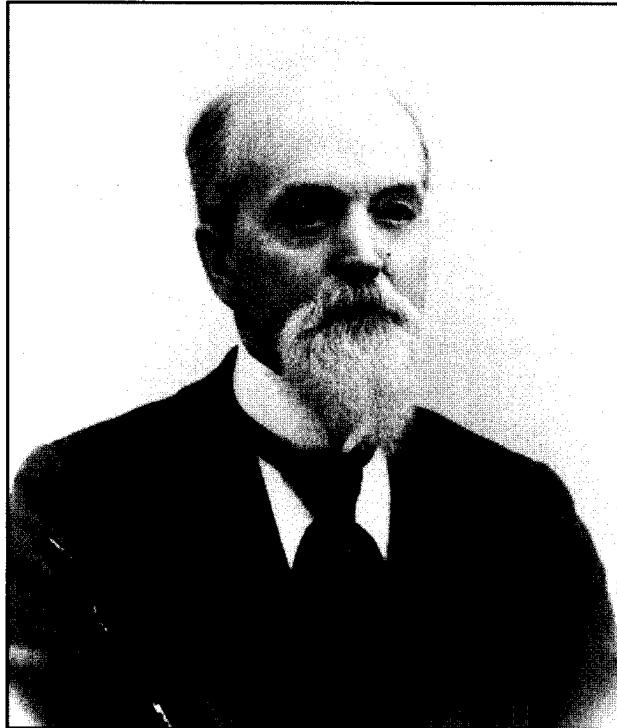
Map showing the 1922 property owners of the area that is now the city of Roeland Park, Kansas



Reverend and Mrs. Thomas Johnson

Reverend Johnson founded the Shawnee Indian Mission. In 1865 he was granted 1,800 acres of land. He was murdered prior to the patenting of this land and title was awarded to his heirs who owned all of the area of the City of Roeland Park.

Pictures courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society.



Colonel Alexander Soule Johnson

Colonel Alexander Johnson was the second white child born at the Shawnee Indian Mission. He owned most of the land that later became the John Roe farm.

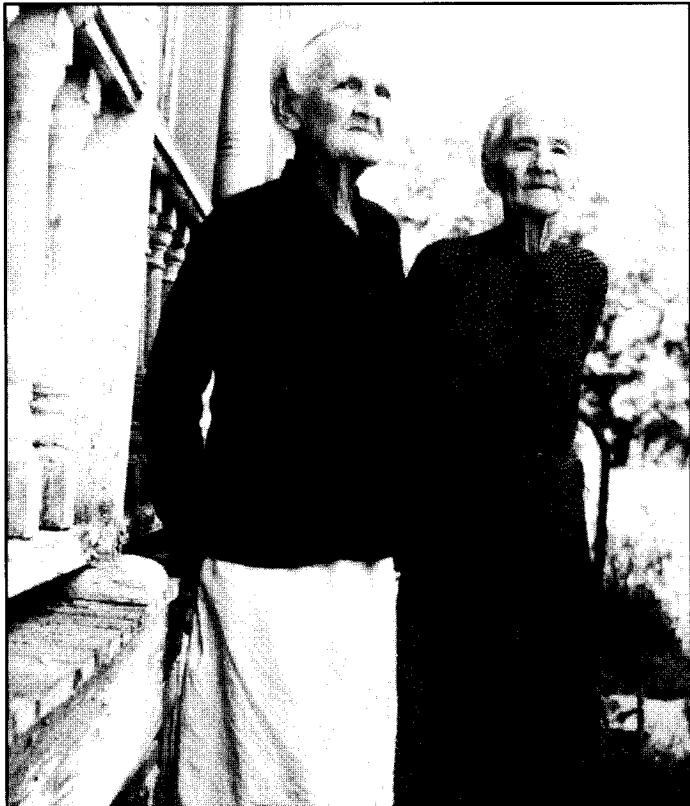
*Picture courtesy of the
Kansas State Historical Society.*



John and Lisa Wornall

Lisa Wornall was the daughter of the Rev. Thomas Johnson. The Wornall farm was subsequently acquired by William Strang and became known as the Southridge area.

*Picture courtesy of the
Jackson County Historical Society.*



Misses Isabella and Margaret Roe, daughters of John Roe.

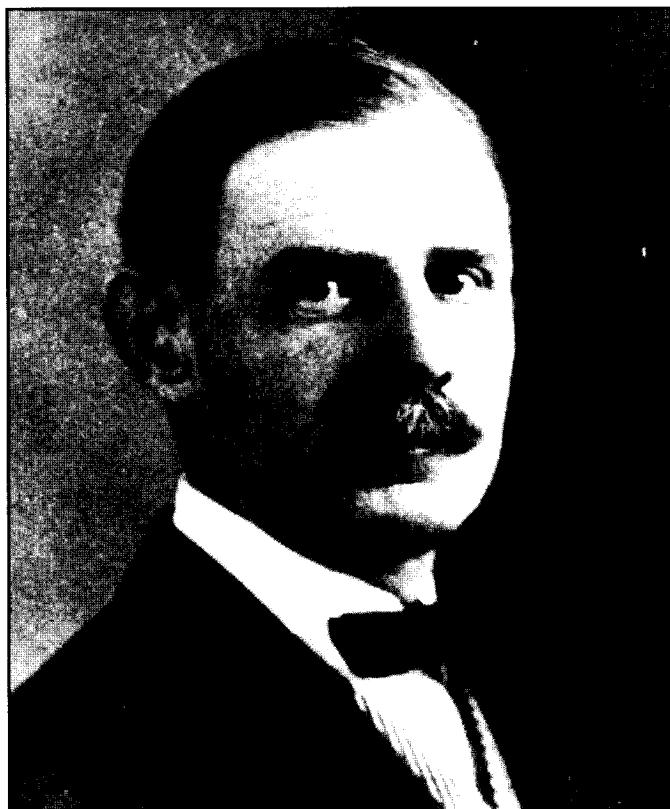
This picture was taken in 1957 at their home located near Johnson Drive and Roe Avenue. The home was removed to make way for the Roe-Johnson Drive cloverleaf.

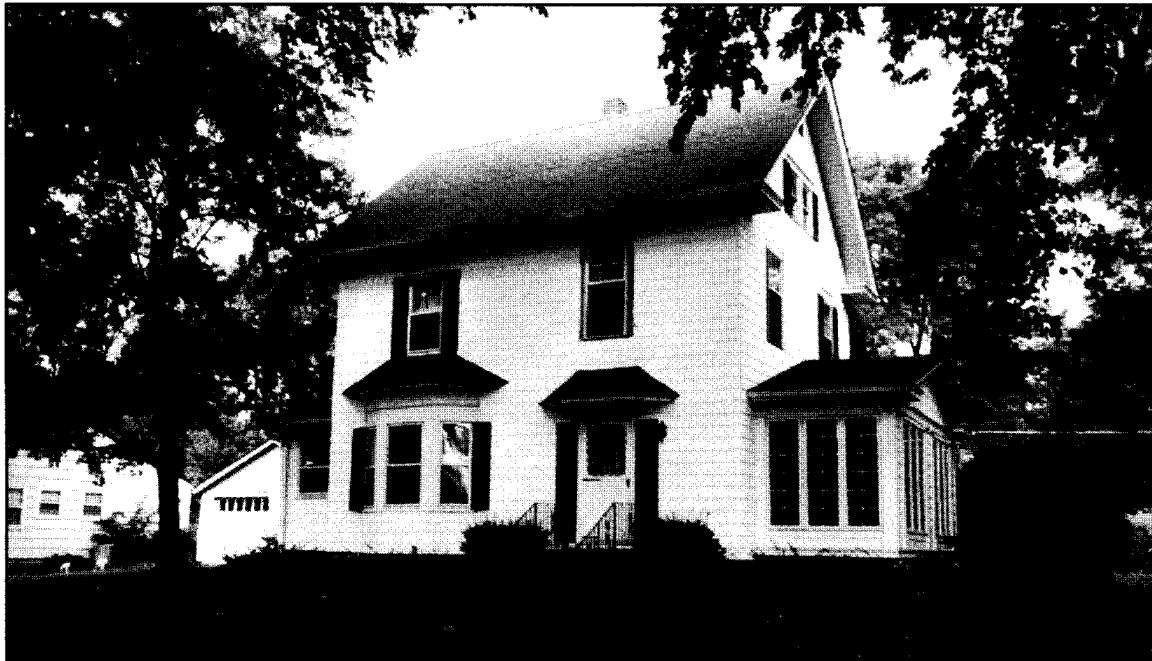
Picture courtesy of the Johnson County Historical Museum.

William Strang

William Strang, an early developer, constructed the Strang Line. He purchased the Southridge area from the Wornall Family and subdivided the area. He brought natural gas to the area.

Picture courtesy of the Johnson County Historical Museum.





The Tesar House

Constructed before 1900, the Tesar House is considered the oldest home in present day Roeland Park. The house is located near 54th Terrace and Buena Vista



A Vawter House

This house near 51st and Nall was constructed in 1937. It is believed to be the first house built by Charles E. Vawter in the Roeland Park Subdivision



The Royster House

c 1920. House is located near 47th and Reinhardt Streets in Shawnee Place



Typical Older Home in Southridge c1920.

This home is located near 51st and Buena Vista St.



Shawnee Place Home

Believed to have been constructed prior to 1920



Vawter F Type House

This house, owned by The Charles Hoskins Family is typical of many of the two bedroom homes constructed by the Charles E Vawter Company. Some modifications have been made to the windows and the garage has been converted to a family room.