

Chapter 8

SERVICES PROVIDED BY OTHERS

The Cities of Northeast Johnson County Kansas are unique in that many municipal functions. Normally a city's responsibility, are provided by independent districts and agencies or by private businesses.

DISTRICTS AND AGENCIES PROVIDING SERVICES

Districts and agencies providing services to the City of Roeland Park, and its residents, include:

- Consolidated School District No. 512
- Johnson County Consolidated Fire District No. 2
- Johnson County Library System
- Johnson County Water District No. 1
- Johnson County Wastewater
- Johnson County Parks and Recreation
- Johnson County Transportation System

The history and background of Consolidated School District No. 512 have been covered in Chapter 4 - Our Schools.

Johnson County Consolidated Fire District No. 2

Fire protection for the City of Roeland Park is provided by Johnson County Consolidated Fire District No. 2. The District provides both fire protection and emergency rescue and medical response. The District is led by Chief Ron Graham and employs 63 full time firemen and support personnel. Twelve full time emergency response personnel are located at the 63rd and Mission Road Station. The 911 Emergency Call Center is located in the Johnson County Branch office at Martway and Lamar Avenue. The District is supported by twelve volunteer firemen. The District responds to an average of 300 calls annually within the City of Roeland Park.

The District is the outgrowth of the former Mission Fire Department, a volunteer force. The Mission Fire Department was founded in 1939 when the Mission Hill Acres Civic Club (later known as the Mission Chamber of Commerce) raised sufficient money to help buy the first truck. Other necessary equipment purchases were paid for with money raised by the Department's fund raising activities. Operating expense money was raised by public subscription. The first station was a rented garage on Maple, north of Johnson Drive. In 1944, a new fire station was built at Johnson Drive and Outlook. This station was used for ten years until a new station was constructed on Beverly, south of Johnson Drive. The present station was built by the Fire District in 1976 and is located on Martway just west of Lamar Avenue.

From the beginning the Mission Fire Department was owned and operated by firemen themselves. In 1952 the Department was chartered as a nonprofit corporation. It is interesting to note that the Beverly Street station is still owned by the corporation and houses memorabilia of the early years of firefighting in the northeast part of Mission Township.

The Mission Fire Department was several years old before tax funds were made available for operating expenses. Money for truck purchases were raised through donations. When Mission Township was dissolved in 1960, the Department contracted annually with the cities it served.

A common problem of all volunteer departments is notifying the volunteers of an alarm. For many years the dispatchers of the Plainfield Cab Company would phone the volunteers when the station siren

would sound. This system was replaced with telephone bells installed in each volunteer's home. The bells would ring when the station circuit phone would ring. This system was used until tone-activated radios were placed in service.

Mission Fire District No. 1 was formed in 1973 with both paid and volunteer firemen. This was achieved after a petition drive by the fire department, the Mission Chamber of Commerce and officials of the affected cities. District No. 1's area of responsibility included the City of Roeland Park, west of Neosho to Nall. During this period, protection east of Neosho to Mission Road was provided by Johnson County Consolidated Fire District No. 2. District No. 2 operated from a station near 63rd and Mission Road. In August 1988 the departments were merged by the County Commissioners.

In addition to providing response to fires, Mission Fire District No. 1 organized Mission Rescue in 1974. Previously the area had been served by Griffith Ambulance and Claybrook's Ambulance. The latter worked out of a private residence in the 5200 block of Roe Avenue, just south of the Osco Drug Store. In 1975, Mission Rescue and Med-Act, a Johnson County ambulance service, began working together to give the best care possible.

Johnson County Library System

Library service for the City of Roeland Park is provided by the Johnson County Library System and libraries located in the schools within the City. The Johnson County Library System was authorized by a vote of the people in 1952. However, no funds were provided until 1955. The original central library, at Antioch Street and Shawnee-Mission Parkway, was opened in 1956.

Prior to that time volunteer libraries existed at various locations. Sometimes referred to as storefront libraries, they were located in schools, stores and even barber shops. One such library that served the Roeland Park area was located in Mission. It was succeeded on June 2, 1969 with the dedication of the Cedar-Roe Library at Cedar and Sycamore streets.

In 1995 the Johnson County Library System constructed a new central library at 9875 West 87th Street. In addition to the central library, ten branch libraries were in service.

Johnson County Water District No 1

At the time the Roesland School was constructed in 1912, water for the school was obtained from a well. Just when public water service to homes became generally available in the area that is now the City of Roeland Park is not known. However by 1930 a public water supply was available at the home in which Mr. Carl Johnson lived.

What is known is that, at some time prior to 1941, water service to the area was provided by the Shawnee-Mission Water Company, owned by Walter T. Brooks. The water was obtained from Kansas City, Missouri at a connection near 48th and State Line. The supply main went west, and more or less paralleled the Strang Line Right of Way.

In 1941 the Shawnee-Mission Water Company was purchased by the Kansas City Suburban Water Company. The Kansas City Suburban Water Company completed the extension of pipe into the Roeland Park subdivisions and into areas east of Roe Avenue that were being developed immediately after the end of World War II. It also constructed the elevated water tank near 48th Street and Wells Drive.

The Kansas City Suburban Water Company obtained its water from several connections with Kansas City, Missouri and from the 14th Street reservoir in Kansas City, Kansas. Water from the Kansas City, Kansas connection was delivered through a 24-inch main located generally along the extension of Nall Avenue, to a reservoir at 53rd and Woodson Streets in Mission, Kansas. Water was pumped from there into the Roeland Park area. In 1951, recognizing the need for additional supply, the Kansas City Suburban Water Company developed a well field and water treatment plant in the Holiday area of Kansas City, Kansas.

This, and other construction, prompted the Company to request rate relief from the Kansas Corporation Commission. Rates were raised. This created controversy in the Company's service area. Because of this controversy, in the mid 1950's, the City of Roeland Park considered purchasing the water distribution system serving the community. The plan was subsequently abandoned.

Because of the rate controversy, legislation was passed in the early 1950's, which, provided for the establishment of a public water district in Northeast Johnson County, Kansas. In 1957, Water District No. 1 of Johnson County was formed and purchased the water system. Water District No. 1 has been responsible, since that time, for providing water service to the growing Northeast Johnson County area, including the area that is now the City of Roeland Park.

Johnson County Wastewater District

Wastewater service in the City of Roeland Park is provided by the Johnson County Wastewater District. This district, originally known as the Mission Main Sewer District, was authorized in 1945. In 1949 the district constructed its first treatment facility near 48th Street and Nall Avenue. That facility was designed to serve a population of about 15,000.

In the portion of the City of Roeland Park that was constructed by Charles E. Vawter, sewers were installed as the residential area was developed. Mr. Myron Nelson, who managed the Johnson County Wastewater District, recalls that there were no inspection or requirements to meet State specifications in the area sewered by Vawter. However, with the exception of some manhole locations and some problems with depth of sewers, the sewers installed by Vawter were adequate for the community.

The Vawter Company installed some type of small treatment facility to handle wastes in the Roeland Park subdivisions. With the completion of the Nall Avenue Wastewater Treatment Plant in 1949, the small treatment facilities were abandoned. Sewers were connected to trunk sewers that carried waste to the new treatment plant.

In the City area, east of Roe Avenue, homes constructed prior to 1949 required septic tanks for waste disposal. After 1949, a program was initiated to eliminate septic tanks. Mr. Nelson recalls that in 1951, about the time of the big Kaw River and Missouri River floods, a decision was made to install a sanitary sewer on 51st Street, near the site of the present City of Roeland Park City Hall. There was some resistance to this installation until Mr. Nelson showed the protesters a picture of water in the street and ducks in the water.

At the time of the original construction of homes in the Roeland Park area, connection of roof and foundation drains to sanitary sewers were acceptable. As the area reached saturation development these connections created surcharges in many of the sanitary sewers, and many basements were flooded with sanitary waste during periods of wet weather.

Two things occurred to relieve this problem. Roof and foundation connections were ruled unacceptable. A program was initiated to locate the connections and eliminate them. The second action was to initiate the installation of storm sewers in the Roeland Park area.

Installation of storm sewers met mixed reaction. Those in low areas were pleased to be relieved of the threat of flooding. Others were opposed to the installation because of costs involved. One of the first areas relieved was a special district that, basically, paralleled Roeland Drive from 55th Street to Johnson Drive. The problems in this district were caused by excessive storm water flow from the City of Mission.

Over the years storm sewers have been installed in many areas of the City of Roeland Park. One area that has consistently resisted the installation of storm sewers is the drainage area that runs from about 51st and Nall, southeasterly, to near 54th and Roe, continuing to the southeast. Residents in this area have repeatedly demanded that no storm sewers be constructed.

By late 1995, storm sewers had been constructed in several subdistricts in the City, both east and west of Roe Avenue. The purpose of this construction was to relieve wet basement problems in the areas. The financial impact of this construction is not known. It is expected that there will be consid-

erable resentment if the residents of the areas involved are assessed for the cost without adequate preliminary notice.

Johnson County Parks and Recreation

The Johnson County Parks and Recreation Department does not operate any parks in the City of Roeland Park. Never-the-less, the Department does serve the City through the services provided at the Roeland Park Community Center.

The Roeland Park Community Center began operations in January 1985 as a facility to sponsor activities and provide services for the residents of Roeland Park and Northeast Johnson County. The Center is located in the former Skyline School building near 48th and Rosewood Drive. The building was purchased and renovated by the City. The City maintains the building and grounds and rents office space to Johnson County agencies that administer the facility.

The Johnson County Human Resources and Aging Department and the Johnson County Park and Recreation Departments have permanent, full time, offices in the Center. These agencies seek to fill the needs of area residents and to provide a convenient location for services.

These services include the Johnson County Energy Office, which provides utility assistance for low income households experiencing difficulty in paying electric, gas and water bills. Other services provided at the Center include voter registration, nutritious noon meals, legal assistance for those not able to afford it, exercise classes, art and craft classes, and a wide variety of leisure and educational activities for adults, 55 years old and older.

Located on the grounds of the Community Center is an air supported "gymnasium" which was installed by the Johnson County Parks and Recreation Department. The "gym" has basketball goals and volleyball courts for individual, team, league and tournament use. In the winter, a walking program for senior citizens is conducted in the "gym."

Johnson County Transportation System

Limited bus service is provided to the City of Roeland Park by the Johnson County Transit Department. Two routes serve the City: The Roe Avenue Route and the Nall /Roeland Park Route. The Roe Avenue Route transverses the City along Roe Avenue, having originated near 95th and Nall. The Nall/Roeland Park Route enters the City near 55th and Nall and travels, more or less, diagonally northeasterly, until leaving the City at 47th and Mission Road. Both routes provide only limited service in the morning and evening. No service is provided during the day or after 6:00 P.M..

PRIVATE BUSINESSES PROVIDING SERVICES

As the area that is now the City of Roeland Park was developing, a substantial amount of infrastructure support was provided by individuals and corporate service organizations. These included:

- Transportation
- Electric Service
- Natural Gas Service
- Telephone Service
- Solid Waste Disposal
- Recreational Facilities

Transportation Service

In the developing years of the area that is now the City of Roeland Park, public transportation was provided by the Strang Line, by Argentine Transit and the Missouri Pacific Bus Company. Taxi service was provided by Plainfield Cab Company, Johnson County Taxi, and by Yellow Cab Company. Bus service in the 1980s and 1990s was provided by Johnson County Transit, as previously discussed in this Chapter.

The Strang Line

Remembered with affection by those old enough to have ridden on it, from 1906 to 1940 the “Trolley through the countryside,” as the Strang Line was known, served the area, a part of which is now in the City of Roeland Park.

The Strang Line, properly known as the Missouri & Kansas Interurban Railway, was the concept of William B. Strang, Jr. of New York City. His concept was that an area of homes and small farms near Kansas City could be connected with the metropolis by a short-line, electric, inter-urban railway.

Strang was born in Syracuse, New York in 1857. At age of 15 years he began to assist his father in constructing and opening sections of steam line railroads. By early 1905, Strang had organized two separate projects: The Strang Land Company and the Kansas City, Olathe, Lawrence & Topeka Electric Railway. The idea was to acquire considerable acreage in the northeast corner of Johnson County, Kansas, and to serve this area with public transportation.

This area was to be located wholly on high ground, not far from the commercial areas of Kansas City, yet ideal for residents wishing to breathe the invigorating country air after a hard days work at the office or factory. The role of the interurban was to furnish a means of frequent and rapid transit from the heart of Kansas City.

The new interurban was to follow, to the extent possible, the old Santa Fe Trail. Further, the route was to be established so there were no bridges, trestles or culverts. The line, skirted the northwest edge of Brush Creek and the southeast edge of Turkey Creek, keeping to the ridges by means of sweeping curves.

In 1905, William Strang obtained a right-of-way from John Roe and others for his line through the area that is now the City of Roeland Park. This right-of-way entered the area at what is now 47th Street, between Mission Road and Canterbury. It then followed a reverse “S” curve to 51st Street and Buena Vista Drive. From there it followed 51st Street across what is now the shopping center parking lot and ran to the City’s western boundary on the north side of 51st Street. The line continued through Mission, Lenexa and Overland Park to Olathe.

The interurban trolley cars originally used a gasoline-electric system. This system consisted of a gasoline engine which generated electricity to make the cars run. Maintenance became such a problem that the line was electrified in about 1908.

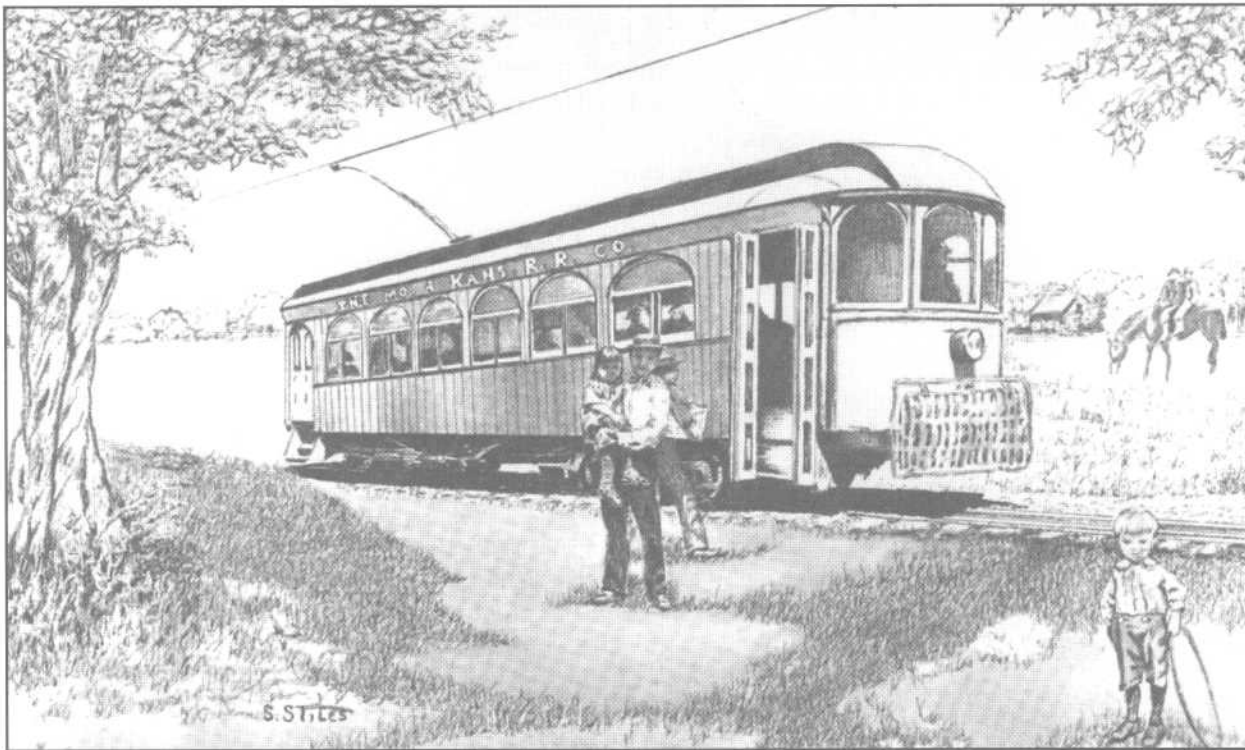
Mrs. Ilie Talbert, whose home is at 47th and Canterbury, recalls that a trolley car was parked near her home to take the children from the area to the newly constructed Roesland School. She recalls that, originally, this was a free service. But eventually the children had to pay to ride. Many children then found that it was cheaper, and nearly as easy, to use the trolley line road bed as a path to the school.

Mr. Arthur Johnson recalls that his father often used the Strang Line to deliver hardware and related materials. He would load the Strang Line car as it passed through the Rosedale area in Wyandotte County, unload in Lenexa and then catch the returning car back to Rosedale.

Bus Service

In the years following the demise of the Strang Line, bus service was provided to the Roeland Park area by privately owned transit systems. One of these was the W. L. Chowings and Sons Bus Lines, later known as the Argentine Transit Lines, Inc. This service was affectionately referred to as the “Blue Bus” by riders. It operated from about 1939 until 1969.

The bus route began and ended in Shawnee. It entered the City of Roeland Park area at 55th and Nall, went north on Nall to Sycamore, east on Sycamore to Rosewood Drive, and north on Rosewood Drive to 51st Street. From 51st and Rosewood Drive, the route went east on 51st to Buena Vista, north on Buena Vista to 47th Street, and east on 47th where it left the City’s area. The route ended at 8th and Main Streets in Kansas City, Missouri where the bus was turned around for its return trip.



The Strang Line Trolley ran from May 20, 1906 until August 10, 1940, carrying passengers from Westport to Olathe through areas which are now known as Roeland Park, Overland Park, and Lenexa. The first cars were gasoline powered electric engines, the first of their kind ever built. In 1908 the line converted to the electric trolley as shown here. The people catcher on the front was made of bed springs and was lowered for city travel, to keep people from falling under the wheels.

The buses and drivers were not always reliable. With standing room crowds, it was common for passengers to have to disembark and push the bus up part of the Rainbow Street hill from Southwest Blvd. to 39th Street. Drivers were known to deviate from the scheduled route and deliver a passenger to his or her door. One driver would often stop to assist a child or pretty girl across a busy street.

In addition to service provided by the Argentine Transit Lines, Inc., the Missouri-Pacific Bus Line served the southern part of the Roeland Park area. This service was along Johnson Drive into Kansas City, Missouri, to the bus terminal at 10th and McGee Streets in Kansas City.

Taxi Service

Taxi service has been available in the Roeland Park area from a variety of organizations. As this history is being written, service is available from the Yellow Cab Company, and Johnson County Taxi. At one time Yellow Cab could pick up a passenger in Johnson County but had to deliver the passenger to a Missouri address. Similarly, a Yellow Cab passenger could be delivered to a Johnson County address only if the passenger had been picked up in Missouri.

Johnson County Taxi was preceded by the Plainfield Taxi service. Long term residents recall "Danny" and his taxis. Danny had trouble keeping drivers. As a result those that drove for him often kept long hours. This sometimes resulted in a driver nodding while delivering a passenger to a destination. No information has been found to indicate when taxi service first became available in the Roeland Park area. Nor is there information available related to ownership of the several companies that have provided taxi service to residents of the City over the years.

Electric Service

No information has been developed as to when electric service was brought into the area that is now the City of Roeland Park. Mr. Carl Johnson, who has lived in the Southridge area since 1921, has no recollection of not having electric lights. In developing the Roeland Park subdivisions, west of Roe Avenue, beginning in 1937, Charles Vawter provided for electric service rights-of-way for the area, indicating that electric service was available to the area.

When questioned about the timing of original service to the area, a representative of the Kansas City Power and Light Company stated that records available to him start in the mid 1930s when the Company came under the regulation of the Kansas Corporation Commission. At the date of this history, electric service continues to be provided by the Kansas City Power and Light Company whose headquarters is in Kansas City, Missouri.

Natural Gas Service

Natural gas service in the Roeland Park area was first obtained by William Strang who contracted with the Kansas Gas Company to provide gas to the area, and to pipe out the Southridge subdivision. Mrs. Ilie Talbert, who has lived in the Shawnee Place subdivision since 1912, recalls that originally gas service was available on the south side of the Strang Line but did not reach her home for many years.

A successor of the Kansas Gas Company was the Gas Service Company. The Gas Service Company was the principal agency for expanding gas service into the area west of Roe Avenue as the Vawter Investment Company constructed the homes in the Roeland Park subdivisions.

The Kansas Power and Light Company purchased the Gas Service Company in October 1983. It continued to operate Gas Service Company, as a separate organization until July 1, 1985 when it was merged with, and became known as, the Kansas Power and Light Company, or KPL. KPL is owned by Western Resources Company, located in Topeka, Kansas.

Telephone Service

It is believed that telephone service was first provided in the Roeland Park area by the Kansas Telephone Company. It was succeeded by Southwestern Bell Telephone Company which began business in Kansas in 1918. In early years, service was through a central exchange with operators receiving a number and connecting the callers. Subsequently, automated telephone service was initiated and continues today.

Southwestern Bell Telephone Company was spun off of its parent company, American Telephone and Telegraph, in 1984 and has operated since that time as a separate corporate business. Nevertheless, telephone service throughout the United States, indeed throughout the world, is interconnected and most connections are now made by direct dialing.

At the time telephone service was extended into the Roeland Park area, wires were all overhead, using poles common for both telephone service and for electric service. As circumstances have permitted, the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company has been converting from overhead lines to buried telephone cable. At the end of 1995, a date for complete burial of telephone lines in the Roeland Park area had not been determined.

Solid Waste Disposal

Prior to the incorporation of the City of Roeland Park, trash and garbage pick up in that part of Roeland Park west of Roe Avenue was a function of the Roeland Park Home Owners Association. Residents east of Roe contracted individually for this service.

With the incorporation, an effort was made by the City to contract for trash and garbage service. This effort was not successful. As previously discussed in Chapter 3, Mayor Lambader took it upon himself to form a trash and garbage collection company. He placed his father in charge of this company and

executed a contract between the City and the company for service. This was subsequently ruled invalid. As a result home owners had to contract individually for this service. Most continued to use Mayor Lambader's company.

Lambader sold his company to Birch Disposal Company which was followed by Deffenbaugh Disposal Service. At mid 1996, Deffenbaugh continues to provide service to most of the residents. A Roeland Park resident, A & A Disposal, provides limited trash and garbage pick up in the Roeland Park area.

Recreational Facilities

The Old Mission Golf Course

For twenty-four years a golf course was located in the area of the City of Roeland Park generally referred to as Fairway Manor. Originally a twenty-seven hole course, The Old Mission Golf Course, was established in 1930. It was located between Mission Road and Neosho, 48th to 53rd Streets.

This area was originally part of the Johnson family properties. It was acquired by John Roe as part of his farm. The land was leased by heirs of John Roe to the Golf Club. The area now includes St. Agnes Church, St. Agnes Elementary School, Bishop Miege High School, the Old Mission Junior High building and the Fairway Manor subdivision.

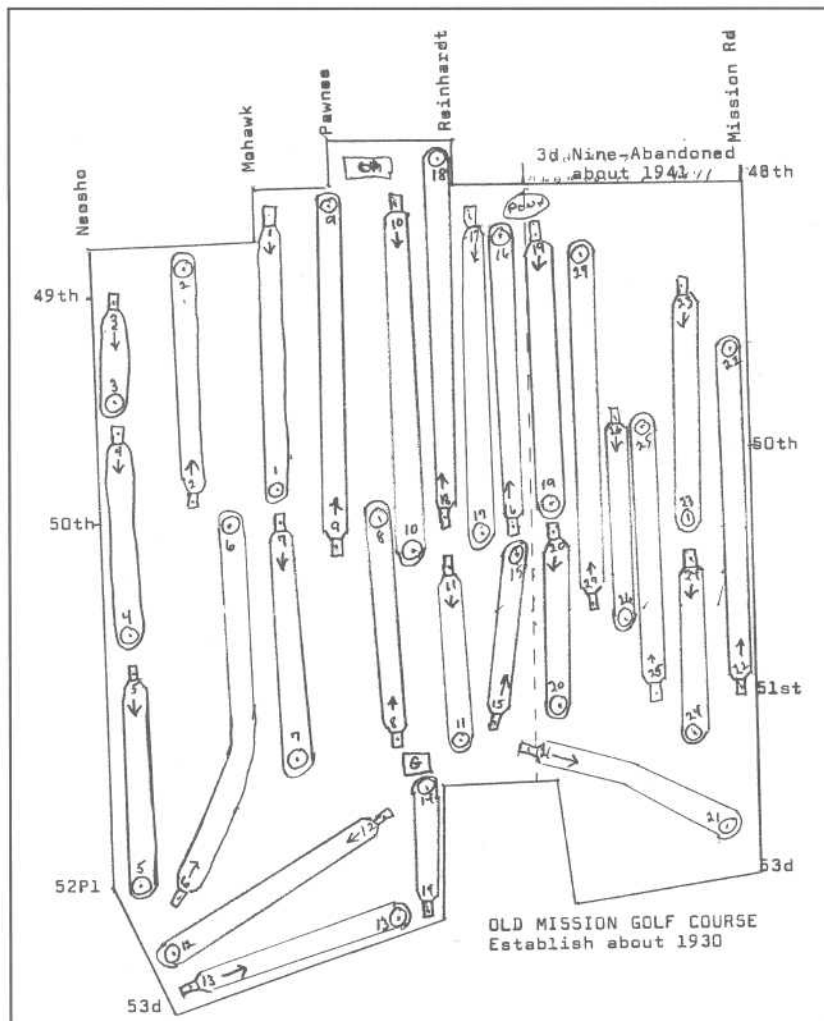


figure 8-1

It is believed that the course was reduced to 18 holes when the land for St. Agnes Church and school was donated by the Roe sisters. An old score card shows that in 1947 the remaining 18 hole course was 6,332 yards long and rated at par 73. A tentative sketch of the course is shown in Figure 8.1.

The initial professional at the Club was Bill Wotherspoon who served at the Club until 1935 when he moved to Tulsa. The course was noted for particularly fine bent grass greens and mediocre fairways. It is reported that the course was not especially difficult to play.

Beginning in 1930, the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce's weekly luncheon meetings, during the summer, were held at the Old Mission Golf Course. The meetings were followed by an afternoon of golf, which developed into a weekly tournament. This practice continued until after World War II. What is unusual about this event is that, at the time, the Chamber was strictly a Kansas City, Missouri organization.

The "Kansas Citian" of July 8, 1930 reported "Wednesday, July 2, 1930, the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce held the first Golf Tournament in its history. At 12:15 P.M. the members began assembling at the club house for luncheon."

"What a meal! Lots of fresh green vegetables, a generous lettuce and tomato salad, new beet pickles, plenty of young onions, a great slice of roast beef, hot and dripping with gravy, and mashed potatoes, accompanied by lots of butter and hot rolls and crowned with luscious green apple pie a la mode."

Mrs. George Allen, of 4700 Reinhardt recalls that her mother-in-law was a cook at the Club House and was particularly noted for the quality of the food she served. Mrs. Allen also reports that her husband was one of the better players and was able to beat the pro, Bill Wotherspoon, from time to time. Pat and Dick Schleicher recall that, as children, they collected walnuts from trees that grew on the golf course, on the west side of Mission Road. Art Johnson, who lives near 48th and Neosho, remembers riding the Strang Line to the golf club where he caddied. Jerry Harper recalls that he bought his house at 51st and Nall so that he could be near the golf course when his shift at the Post Office was completed at 8:00 A.M.. Mayor Wendel believes that her home is located at or near one of the course's greens as does Earl Clark who lives near 50th and Reinhardt.

Bowling

Even before there was a City of Roeland Park, two bowling alleys had been installed and were in operation. The first was in the basement of the St. Agnes School. It is reported that it was installed when the school was constructed because Father Allen Dixon, of the St. Agnes Parish, was an avid bowler and convinced the Parish it should install the lanes. Various leagues used these lanes over the years.

The second bowling alley to be installed was the Roe Bowl near 51st and Cedar Streets. The Roe Bowl building was the first building completed by Charles Vawter as he began the development of the 51st and Roe shopping center. The Roe Bowl was opened in 1949.

The Roe Bowl had sixteen lanes. During most of its existence, there were two leagues bowling every night, Monday through Friday, in winter months. In addition, there were daytime ladies' leagues, and juvenile leagues after school and on Saturdays.

Originally, pins were set at the Roe Bowl by "pin boys." Thomas Grey, who bowled at the Roe Bowl from its beginning until it closed, recalls that sometimes things were pretty slow if some of the pin boys failed to report for work. Eventually automatic pin setters were installed.

The Roe Bowl also contained pool and snooker tables. Mr. Grey remembers that Reverend Howland, from the Evangelical United Brethren Church, across the street from the Roe Bowl, would go to the bowling alley and play pool with the pin boys. Ostensibly, this was to discourage the boys from smoking.

The Roe Bowl Building was demolished in 1991.