

# HISTORY OF PARKS AND RECREATION OF TOPEKA

- 1880 Land for parks was acquired by tax donations. City Park was first park created.
- 1899 Gage Park – 80 acres of land outside the city limits was donated. It took 20-30 years to develop.
- 1900 City Park Department was established.  
E.F.A. Reinisch named first Park Superintendent.  
First general park plan of Gage Park created by George Kessler  
Central Park established.
- 1901 Holliday Park purchased for \$110. from Cyrus K. Holliday.
- 1907 Willow Park purchased for \$5,190.
- 1910 Louisa Gage gives \$5,000 for Gateway Arch in Gage Park.  
Lakewood Park donated to the City of Topeka.
- 1911 7 Buffalo arrived for Gage Park.  
Shimer Park donated.
- 1912 Topeka has first public playground programs in Kansas.  
Bears arrive at Gage Park.  
Sims Park Dedicated.
- 1913 Additional 70 acres of Gage Park purchased.  
Awareness of parks and children was a priority.  
Lillie Gordon Munn gives \$50,000 for the Munn Memorial in Gage Park.
- 1915 Childrens' Park was dedicated in memory of Dr. Eva Harding.
- 1918 Ripley Park purchased for \$27,900.
- 1922 Central Park developed with \$2,200.  
Concept of amenities was added.  
Washburn Park donated to the City of Topeka.
- 1923 Garfield Park developed with \$8,000.  
Collins Parkway dedicated – annexation.
- 1925 Camp Curtis Training Center for officers and 50 soldiers established at Gage Park.  
Edgewood Park purchased for \$4,395.
- 1926 Gage Pool – concrete is poured for the sides and floor cost \$26,203.
- 1927 Gage Pool a new \$16,000 filtering system is installed.  
Additional ball fields added to Gage Park for Santa Fe and Sunday School leagues.  
Auburndale Park purchased for \$7,250.

- 1929 20 playgrounds operated during summer months.  
Westboro Park dedicated.
- 1930 Reinisch Rose Garden dedicated.  
Gage Park was a drive to the country.
- 1931 Doran Rock Garden opens.  
75,000 people a year use the Gage Park Pool and pay 10 cents for the pleasure.  
During the winter months the pool is used for ice skating.
- 1932 Big Gage shelter originally named Snyder's Cabin opens in Gage Park.  
The Reinisch Rose Garden and Rose Test Garden receives first place in the Better Homes and Garden's More Beautiful America contest.  
Cushinberry Park purchased for \$2,923.
- 1933 Zoo established; drive through to begin with. Built with assistance from WPA. It took 50 years to build. Featured a monkey island.  
Old Settlers Memorial Grounds is established in Gage Park.  
Eastlawn Park purchased for \$7,000.
- 1935 A new canoe lake 750' long replaces three old mud holes in Gage Park Zoo.  
Plans for the new Gage Park Greenhouse were completed.
- 1936 Little Oakland Park purchased \$7,850.
- 1937 Rose garden, monkey island and the swimming pool are pictured in the August 1937 issue of The National Geographic Magazine.
- 1938 Tom Mix the circus bear becomes an exhibit at Gage Park.  
The first lighted tennis courts in the city are installed at Gage Park.  
Westlake was enlarged and renovated as a WPA project.
- 1939 Three miles of dirt and cinder drives are paved with asphalt in Gage Park.
- 1940 About 10,000 attend giant Halloween party in the drained concrete Gage Park swimming pool (Last year open as a pool - 1956).  
Westlake shelter house is built.
- 1942 A new playground area for children and adults called the "Chuck Wagon Corral" opens in Gage Park.
- 1944 Fairway Park purchased for \$1,775.
- 1946 One-night-a-week youth centers in operation.  
First Wedding in the Rose Garden. Laura and Samuel Barr.  
Polio scare empties the big pool in Gage Park.
- 1948 Country Club Park purchased for \$2,300.  
Hughes Park donated from USD 501.

- 1949 Recreation services started for programs in cooperation with schools.  
The city now has 21 parks.
- 1950 The original green house located in the zoo was converted into a monkey house  
(No longer exists).
- 1951 Adams Park dedicated.  
Edgewater Parkway dedicated.  
Pinecrest Park dedicated.
- 1952 City-wide election to establish year-round recreation programs passes.  
Terra Heights Park dedicated.  
Ward Parkway dedicated.  
A 10-acre tract in the middle of Gage Park complete with a pond is acquired  
by the City of Topeka..  
Seabrook Park dedicated.  
A Washburn University student files a lawsuit against the city to allow blacks to  
swim in the pool; the case goes to the Kansas Supreme Court.  
Highland Crest Park purchased for \$500.  
Crestview Park purchased for \$19,500.
- 1954 Golf Course added, opened to the public.  
Foster Blasdell named first Recreation Director.
- 1955 Santa Fe Park purchased for \$22,500.
- 1956 Family Park purchased for \$12,400.  
Shunga Parkway acquired by the City of Topeka via Deed, Donation & Purchase.
- 1957 Pool and Recreation Center added at Garfield.  
Playgrounds become a priority.  
Burnetts' Mound purchased for \$98,500.  
Hillsdale Park donated to the City of Topeka.  
Shunga Glen Park purchased for \$17,250.
- 1958 Pool and Recreation Center added at Crestview Park.  
Greenway concept started for Crestview and Shunga Parks.
- 1959 Party House construction begins in Gage Park 1959.  
Feline houses built at the zoo. (No longer exists).  
Oakland-Billard Park purchased for \$108,692.  
Gwendolyn Brooks Park dedicated.
- 1960 Oak Parkway purchased by the City of Topeka for \$7,300.
- 1961 AnimalLand in Gage Park is completed.  
Ward-Meade Park purchased by the City of Topeka.  
Playhouse in the Park is completed.

- 1962 Gage Park pool is renamed for R. Foster Blaisdell, late superintendent of the Recreation commission. (This pool was removed in 2000).  
Palm Park dedicated in memory of Major Willard Palm.  
Danbury Park purchased from Alf Landon.  
Ritchie Cemetery acquired by abandonment.
- 1963 Work begins to fill in the old swimming pool at Gage Park; a parking lot is constructed at the location.  
Doran Park purchased for \$3,200.  
Matthews Park dedicated.  
Free pony rides were given at Gage Park, rides enden in 2010.
- 1964 A new 8<sup>th</sup> Street entrance into Gage Park is constructed of brick.  
Bishop Park purchased for \$15,000.  
Wells Park donated to the City of Topeka.
- 1965 Environmental resources became part of the system.  
Dornwood Park dedicated.  
Rice Park purchased for \$20,440.
- 1966 Gage Park Zoo opens the Animals and Man building; Zoo purchases a hippopotamus, giraffe, hydrax, mandrills, rheas and DeBraza monkeys.  
Tornado wipes out Central Park and Ripley Park on June 8th.
- 1967 Gage Park mini-train opens. Lawsuit over violation of a deed restriction.  
Charles Curtis Greenway transferred from Topeka Street Dept.  
Horne Park purchased for \$16,169.  
Medford Park transferred from Topeka Street Dept.
- 1969 Eastborough Park donated to the city.  
Keyway Park I & II donated by the Urban Renewal Agency.  
Veterans Park acquired from the City Engineering Dept.
- 1970 Greenhouse dome is constructed (no longer exists).  
New zoo entrance opens.
- 1971 The zoo is successful in the world's first captive hatching of an American golden eagle.  
Croix Park transferred from Topeka Street Dept.  
Eastgate Park donated to the city.  
Lakeside Park transferred from Topeka Street Dept.  
Oakley Park transferred from Topeka Street Dept.  
Potwin Circles transferred from Topeka Street Dept.
- 1972 Playhouse in the Park is completed.  
Romig Park donated by the United States Dept. of Interior.
- 1973 Motorcycle Park is created.

- 1974 Tropical Rain Forest at the Zoo opened.  
Curtis Cemetery transferred to Parks Dept. (abandonment).
- 1975 Recreation Commission becomes part of Parks.  
Austin Park dedicated.  
Bentley Park dedicated.  
Woodall Park acquired from the Urban Renewal Agency.
- 1976 Bicentennial amphitheatre opens.  
Grant-Bradbury Park donated.  
Oakland-Billard Recreational center under construction.
- 1977 Gage Park mini-train purchased by the City from McCall Amusements, Inc.  
Central Park Recreational center under construction.  
Zoo administration building opens. (no longer exists).  
Hillcrest Recreational center under construction.  
Oakwood Hills dedicated.
- 1978 Reinisch Rose Garden renovated in 1978.  
Flintstone Park in Gage Park created by horticulturist Robert Foster.
- 1979 Zoo animal health center is built 1979.  
Felker Park dedicated, donation from the United States Dept. of Interior.  
Welton Grove Park purchased for \$36,000.
- 1980 First year of the Kansas River Valley Art Fair in Gage Park 1980.  
McKinley Park purchased \$21,050.  
Southboro Park dedicated.  
Warren Park leased from the State of Kansas.
- 1981 All open space and NRPA standards met or exceeded.  
Discovering Apes building is completed.  
Helen Hocker Theatre in the old bathhouse, is renovated.  
Creative Play is started.  
Giles Park dedicated, donation Federal Highway Admin.
- 1982 Six independent departments combined.  
First Parks and Recreation Director hired.  
Change of legislation for how Parks was operated.  
Playhouse in the Park changes name to Helen Hocker Theater Nov.
- 1983 City-wide five year capital improvement plan developed.  
Public/Private partnerships began.  
Suburban group established relationship with the City of Topeka.  
City sponsored special events became prominent.

- 1984 Topeka Parks and Recreation Foundation was established.  
A.T.& S.F. Railway caboose No. 647 is moved from the Santa Fe shops to Gage Park to serve as a ticket booth for the miniature train and as a concession stand.  
Djakarta Jim an 18-year old orangutan dies; know for his finger painting.  
Freedom Valley Park dedicated.
- 1985 New city form of government changed from commission to strong Mayor/Council.  
Loss of representative for parks.  
Gorilla Encounter opens at the Topeka Zoo.
- 1986 Carousel was purchased from Boyles Joyland.
- 1987 Kossover Tennis Center opens in Felker Park.  
Construction on Lion's Pride, at the Topeka Zoo, begins costing \$400,000.  
Shunga Trail construction from Fairlawn Rd. to Gage Blvd. – Phase 1 ( 1.5 miles ).
- 1988 Lean years with cutbacks made; participation in recreation programs was on the upswing.  
Aquarian Acres Park dedicated via donation.  
Shunga Trail extended from Gage Blvd. to Washburn Ave.- Phase 2 ( 2.13 miles ).  
Less available resources to finance projects.
- 1989 FLSA, ADA, federal guidelines come into place, EEOC, AA.  
Meadowood Park purchased for \$1.00.  
Carousel opened to the public in Gage Park.  
Lion's Pride exhibit opened at the zoo.  
The bronze lion statue named "Genesis" is completed.  
Grand opening for the 'Carousel in the Park', May 27<sup>th</sup>.  
Tudor Park acquired from the Kansas Dept. of Transportation.  
Brookfield Park purchased for \$55,000.
- 1990 Clarion Woods Park purchased for \$110,400.
- 1991 Zoo has a summer robotic dinosaur exhibit "Dinomation" 1991.  
Boswell Park dedicated, from USD 501.  
Shunga Trail extension from Washburn Ave. to Topeka Blvd. ( 1.5 miles ).  
Westboro Baptist starts picketing at Gage Park.
- 1992 Mulvane General Store and Lingo Livery Stable dedicated at Ward-Meade Park.  
A dozen animals were lost due to a fire in the Tropical Rain Forest Building.  
Children's petting zoo is completed within the main zoo grounds.
- 1994 Construction begins on new softball complex on Kansas National Guard property.  
First Barrier-Free Park, Hughes Play-For-All opens.
- 1995 Indian Hills Park dedicated.  
Mount Auburn Cemetery acquired by abandonment.

- 1996 Potwin Drug Store dedicated at Ward-Meade Park.  
Hill's Black Bear Woods exhibit opens at the Topeka Zoo.
- 1997 Hillcrest Family Aquatic Center dedicated in Hillcrest Park.  
Civitan Camp Facility opens in Gage Park.  
New parking lot completed at Ward-Meade Park.  
Expanded giraffe yard opens as does the Montjac deer yard.  
Pozez Park donated to the City of Topeka.
- 1998 The water bird lagoon renovation begins and the white tailed deer yard is completed.  
Lingo Tack Barn constructed at Ward-Meade Park.
- 1999 City entered into a contracted arrangement with the Community First entity to operate Abbott Community Center.  
Rueger Park Softball Complex dedicated on Kansas National Guard property.  
Gage Park 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration.  
Tracks for the Gage Park mini-train are laid.
- 2000 Blaisdell Family Aquatic Center dedicated in Gage Park.  
Helen Hocker Theater storage building constructed in Gage Park.  
Mouse Trap Skate Park dedicated in Oakland-Billard Park.  
"A Century of Good Time Celebration", a yearlong celebration in honor of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Topeka Parks and Recreation Department.
- 2001 Rice Community Center renovated and reopened to the public.  
A new Mini-Train tunnel is built in Gage Park.  
Ball Diamond #3, in Gage Park, converted to the "Hill's Bark Park".
- 2003 Replacement of the Mini-Train Depot dedicated in Gage Park.  
Forestry Disposal Site changes to Yard Materials Recycling Center with the acquisition of a tb grinder.  
War Veteran's memorial dedicated in Gage Park.  
New 'Horseshoe Courts' were dedicated in Gage Park.  
Soldier Trail construction from Garfield Park to NW Lyman Rd. (1.5 miles).  
Employee 'Hall of Fame' was started.
- 2004 Everest Church dedicated at Ward-Meade Park.  
New greenhouse built in Gage Park.  
Rip-On Skate Park is built in Shunga Glen Park.
- 2005 First year for Kansas State Action Sports Championship.  
New Greenhouse dedicated in Gage Park.  
Nine new tennis courts built in the Kossover Tennis Complex.  
Aaron Douglas Wall was built and mural painted.  
Highland Crest Park (Betty Phillips Park) renovated.

- 2006      Opened Barber Shop at Old Prairie Town.  
 Washburn Greenway dedicated.  
 Sherwood Park dedicated.  
 Shunga Trail extended from Topeka Blvd. to 10<sup>th</sup> St.- Phase 4 ( 1.4 miles).
- 2007      Elmhurst Green was developed.  
 WW I War Memorial was relocated in Gage Park.  
 Soldier Creek Trail was extended 1 mile.
- 2008      Civitan Camp was renovated and received a unique design award from KRPA.  
 Entrance Pavilion and stone-like walks are constructed in 'Old Prairie Town'.
- 2009      New Restroom in Gage Park and Oakland Park.  
 Horseshoe Bend Park donated to the City of Topeka.  
 Laurens Bay Park donated to the City of Topeka.
- 2010      Started construction on the Kansas Children's Discovery Center in Gage Park.  
 Shunga Trail Extension from 10<sup>th</sup> St to Golden - Phase 5 ( 1.5 miles ).  
 Deer Creek Trail construction for Golden Ave. to 6<sup>th</sup> St. ( .5 miles ).
- 2011      Renovation of PlayLand in Gage Park.  
 Accessible Ball Field constructed at Gage Park - Gage 6 site.  
 Landon Trail extension from 26<sup>th</sup> St. to 45<sup>th</sup> St. ( 2.5 miles ).  
 Concrete walks in Gage Park  
 New play structures in Horne Park and Oakland Park  
 Gaylord Kelsey, Greenhouse Horticulturist for 44 years retired.  
 Track in Central Park was asphalted and fence installed around the track and  
 football field.  
 First Spray Park in Topeka built in Samuel Jackson Park.  
 New Helen Hocker Theatre Office in Gage Park was completed.  
 Garfield Pool was torn down and replaced.  
 Acquired Lauren's Bay Park.
- Merger of Parks and Recreation of Topeka and Shawnee Parks and Recreation was  
 approved. A 111 year old City of Topeka Parks and Recreation Department comes  
 to an end.