

HERITAGE TOURISM

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the country, and touring historic sites is the fastest growing segment of that industry. "Heritage tourism," as it is called, builds on that interest in an organized and systematic way. By marketing to travelers who are interested in our heritage, communities have found a clean industry that, in part:

1. Provides an infusion of new dollars into local economies, creating business opportunities and jobs,
2. Provides a framework for the redevelopment of older, "problem" properties,
3. Provides amenities that are available to local residents year-round.

Topeka's Heritage – A National Treasure

Topeka, as the capital of Kansas, occupies a unique position in U.S. history. As a way-point on the Oregon Trail, it provided a respite while waiting to cross the Kaw (Kansas River). After the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Topeka and the surrounding countryside



became embroiled in the murder and mayhem known to history as "Bleeding Kansas," which led directly to the Civil War. The development of the railway system opened the West to immigrants, and the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad was as instrumental as it was legendary in that movement. More recently, the dedication of Monroe School as the *Brown vs. Board of Education National Historic Site* represents, in many respects, a signal event in the development of Civil Rights in this country that began in 1854.

Charles Curtis, Cyrus K. Holliday, Carrie Nation, Alf Landon, Karl Menninger, and Coleman Hawkins are but a handful of notables who called Topeka home at some time in their lives. Their

Downtown Topeka hosts several historic sites that are popular with visitors. The Senate Hotel provides ambience in a refurbished 1926 apartment building. Monroe School (Left) figured prominently in the *Brown vs. Board of Education* desegregation case, and is maintained as a National Historic Site by the National Park Service. Other sites, such as the Capitol and the Ritchie House, make Downtown attractive to tourists.

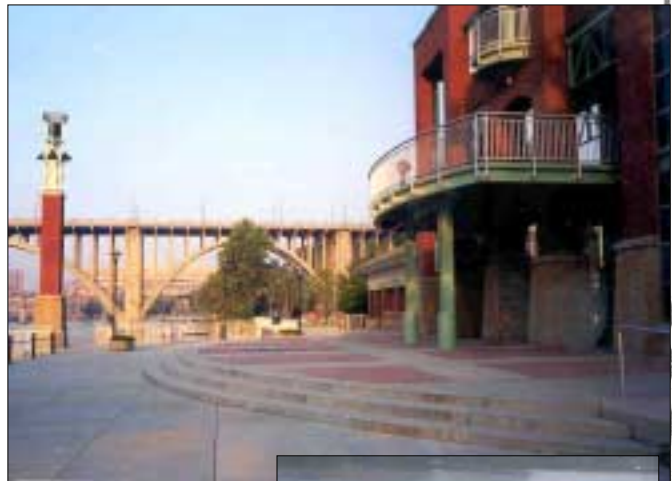
contributions to American society are undeniable, and Topeka is fortunate to be an ideal venue to tell their stories.

5 Principles of Heritage Tourism

- 1. *Focus on authenticity and quality*** – As a general rule, people will not travel to see a fake. Our history is rich enough without having to perpetuate stereotypes. Foreign visitors in particular come to this area in order to experience the real American West, and they are very unlikely to return or recommend a destination that failed the test.
- 2. *Preserve and protect resources*** – Old buildings and other artifacts from the past are non-renewable resources, as well as the initial attraction. Without their historic context, however, their value as a tourist attraction is enormously diminished.
- 3. *Make sites come alive*** – A building that just stands there, with no activity surrounding it nor explanation of its use or importance, conveys little to visitors. But by using docents, and developing interpretational exhibits, visitors can feel that they have a connection to their past, and had an experience well worth repeating.
- 4. *Find the fit between your community and tourism*** – Some cities are destinations in themselves, New York or Paris for example. Topeka, however, must develop a market. Through market analysis and targeted promotions, a base can be built, though. Bus tours, for example, provide an avenue for making

Topeka's attractions available to visitors from around the world.

- 5. *Collaborate*** – Very few great achievements are accomplished by individuals with no help at all. Even more so, developing an industry takes collaboration and coordination between many people. The Convention and Visitors Bureau, in particular, can provide important marketing tools. Also important, however, is developing a plan to create and perpetuate an image that will attract visitors, enhance Topeka's image, and provide improvements that benefit all of the region's residents all year-round.



In Knoxville, Tenn., an ambitious riverfront park makes the Tennessee River accessible to visitors. A similar approach could help to tell Topeka's story.

