

A Driving Tour of The South Side of Valley Center: Historical and Current Scenes of Interest.-----Presented by the Valley Center Historical Society----researched and written by Vince Marshall.

This self-driving tour is about 10 miles in length and should take about 30 minutes to drive and to view various roadside points of interest. (See enclosed map displaying the driving route.....) Note: The driving route does include some referenced trail crossings, historical points and contemporary scenes outside of Valley Center's southern city limits.

A suggested way to drive this tour route would be to have one person driving and focusing on road navigation (and hazards) and at least one rider reading the following guide and directing attention to points of interest. Roadside parking should only be done when not impeding passing traffic. Please respect private property, and do not drive or walk on such property without the owner's permission.

If you have a vehicle that allows you to set 'trip mileage' to zero, do so at the start site at the Valley Center Historical Society Museum. This procedure would enable you to better locate and identify roadside scenes and historical events based on the mileage references provided in this guide for each site.

The author has often ridden the tour route on his bicycle, an exercising alternative for nice weather. He has taken approximately 1 to 1.5 hours bike-riding time to complete this tour route. Others may want to use this mode of travel in good weather.

Most old trails and routes, traversed by Indians, early settlers and old steam engines pulling rail cars, and which crossed this recommended driving route, do not have visible traces today. Their existence and location have been verified through research of old maps and historical writings, as well as verified by a dowsing search by the author.

Now crank up that old touring car, load it up with friends and family and start your journey!



Questions ? call Vince Marshall at 680-9669.....and visit the Valley Center Historical Museum to view photos and memorabilia about Valley Center's history.

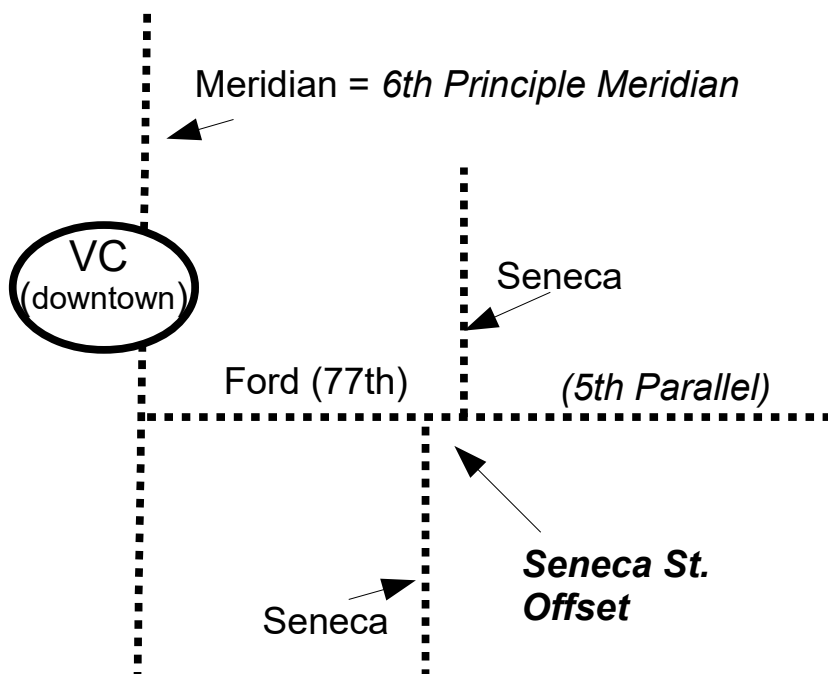
[Mileage = 0.0] - Start at the Historical Society Museum. The Museum was established in 1976. The museum house, originally a residence, was built in 1879. The nearby Bishop Building with its classroom and display of large items, was built in the 1980s. The museum maintains a significant collection of memorabilia, photos, maps and old documents, as well as other interesting historical items that reflect much of Valley Center's early history. These items date from the early days of the 1870s.

Begin your tour by driving east on Main Street past the post office, Colby & Burns Streets to Dexter Street, then south on Dexter to the intersection of Ford St. (or 77th St.)

[Mileage = 0.7] (Intersection of Dexter and Ford) Ford, or 77th St. also follows the '5th Parallel'. The 5th Parallel was surveyed in the 1850s. An old trail called the '5th Parallel Trail' followed the surveyors piles of rocks set at intervals to designate this east-west line. Homesteaders on the move in the 1870s and 1880s, followed portions of the the 5th parallel by traveling via horses and wagons from Missouri and other eastern U.S. states to south-central Kansas.

NOTE: A few blocks west of this intersection of Dexter & Ford, is Meridian Avenue, so named for the 6th Principle Meridian that runs through Kansas in a north-south direction. The 6th Principle Meridian has been an important starting point for land surveys in Kansas that are located both east and west of this line. (see drawing below)

While on the topic of meridians and parallels, there are road offsets at intersections where north-south roads cross a major parallel. Early surveyors created this offset as their method for establishing a flat mapping system adjusted to a curved planet.....that is, the further north the surveyors worked, the meridians (north-south lines) tend to converge so their mapping had to reflect this reality by making corrections at the major parallels. (see following drawing)



[Mileage or M = 0.9] Cross the bridge over the drainage ditch. This drainage channel is part of the Wichita-Valley Center Floodway system that was completed in 1958-59. There are 40 miles of similar channels (or larger) in this flood control system. The total system is often called the 'Big Ditch' (or 'Mitch's Ditch'). A major section of of the Big Ditch begins at a diversion dam on the Little Arkansas River located northwest of Valley Center. The flood control system has kept the Valley Center area from experiencing flooding from the Little Arkansas River and Jester Creek as those often flooding streams had plagued the City in the past. (below photo - floodwaters on Valley Center' Main Street in the early 1900s.)



[M=1.2] The next location is just east of the north-south property line of the Brookfield Apartment complex. The old Ft. Harker to Ft. Gibson Army Supply Trail crossed here in 1867, and was in use until about 1872. It generally followed the Arkansas Rivers (Big and Little) from Ft. Harker, located in present day Kanopolis, KS, through Wichita and to Ft. Gibson, OK.

[M=1.4] - Turn south on Seneca.

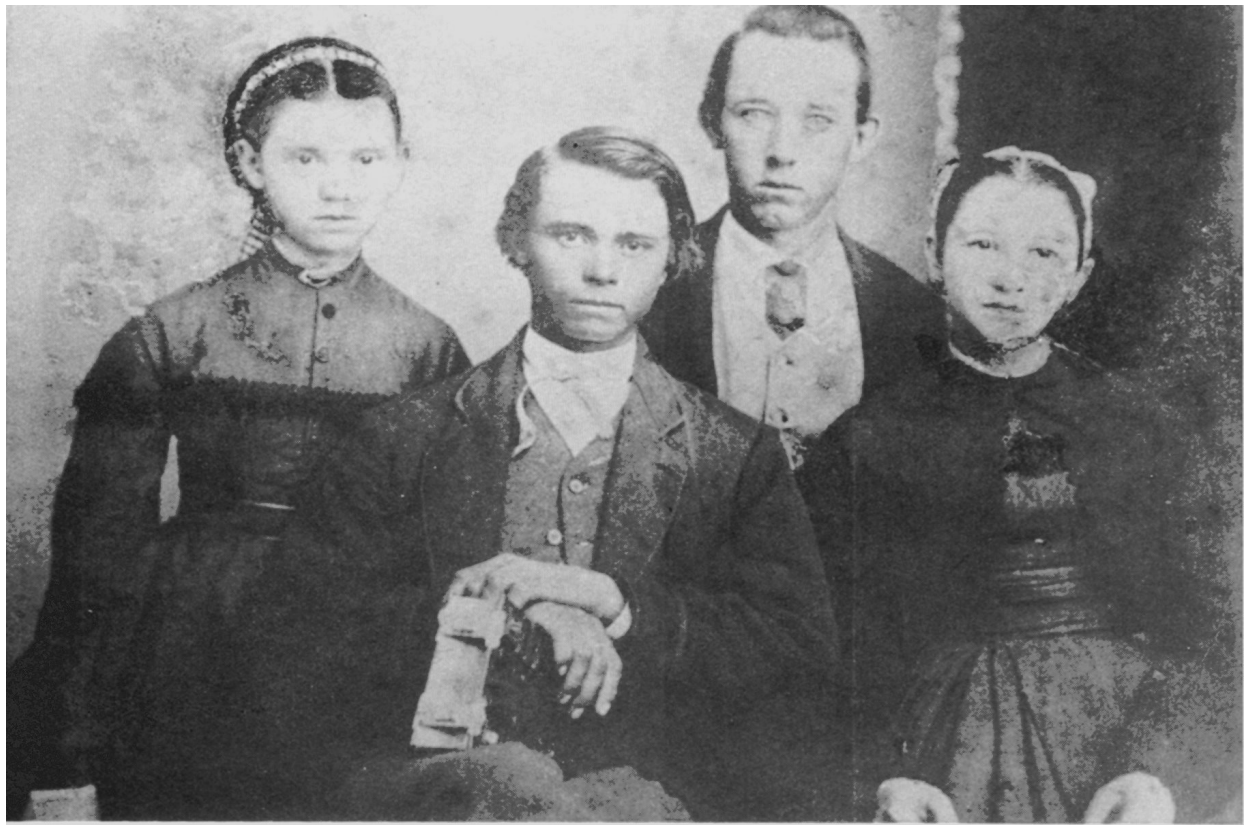
[M=1.7] In this area, the Chisholm Trail was active from around 1867 to 1871. Texas longhorn cattle were driven up a corridor of trails, and in this area, trails mostly lying between the Little Arkansas River valley and the Broadway roadway. Thousands of longhorn cattle were driven to Abilene and later to Newton, over this trail to supply needed meat for markets in central and eastern U.S. Some cattle carried a tick-borne fever that occasionally infected locally owned cattle, hence one of the reasons that the cattle trail was moved further west.

[M=2.4 then 2.5] - Where Seneca intersects with 69th St. turn right (west) and drive over the bridge crossing the drainage ditch.....then turn left on Seneca and drive south again.

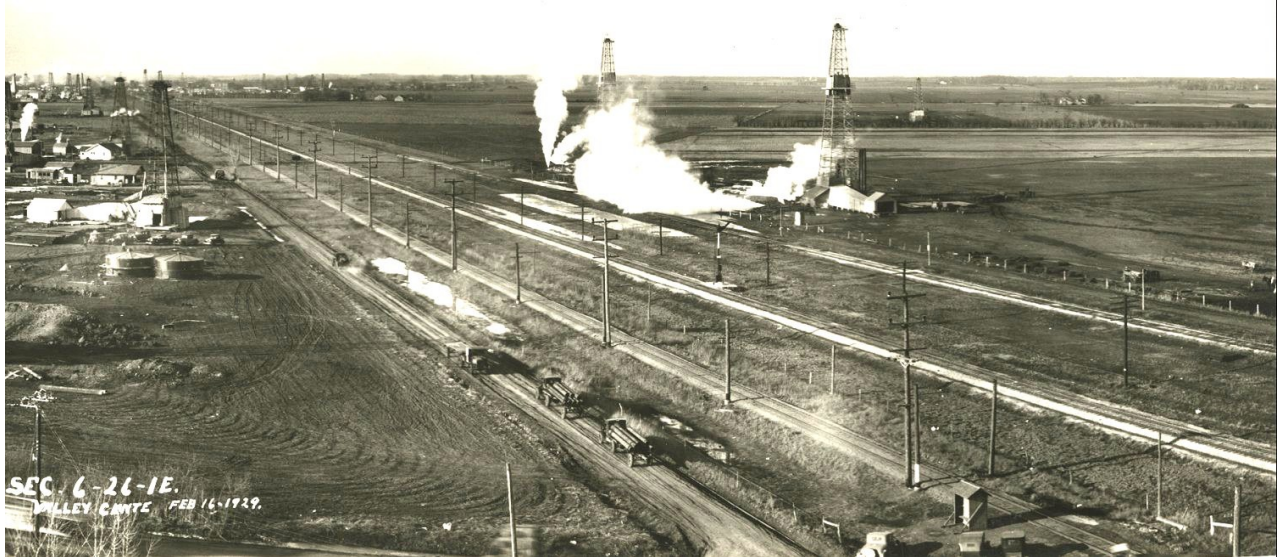
[M=3.0] This photo shown below, was taken in Illinois in 1869, and shows a group of early Valley Center area settlers. They traveled in horse-drawn wagons from Illinois through Missouri, and thence on the 5th Parallel Trail in eastern Kansas to this area in 1870. The two men are Dwight Beach and Hubert Dewing and are shown with their 16 year-old wives. Pyor Beach and Ednor Dewing.

These young folks homesteaded land in the Valley Center area. Hubert and Dwight hunted buffalo west of Valley Center in 1870 and 1871 to help feed their families during those early, hard winter times.

Dwight also ran a freighter's ranch located less than a mile to the east of this point. It served as an early watering and feed stopover on the stage and freighter's trail between Newton to Wichita. Dwight was later a storekeeper and banker in Valley Center.



[M=3.4] - As you approach the intersection of Seneca and Interurban, you will cross a single railroad line for the Burlington Northern Santa Fe RR. Many years ago you would have crossed three railroad lines here.....one set for the St. Louis, San Francisco RR (Frisco), another set for the ATSF (Santa Fe), and the third for the Arkansas Valley Interurban RR (AVI, an electric powered RR). Note that the vehicle road diverging from Seneca St. and running northwest towards Valley Center, is named the 'Interurban' after the old electric railroad whose tracks ran parallel to this roadway. (see below photo)



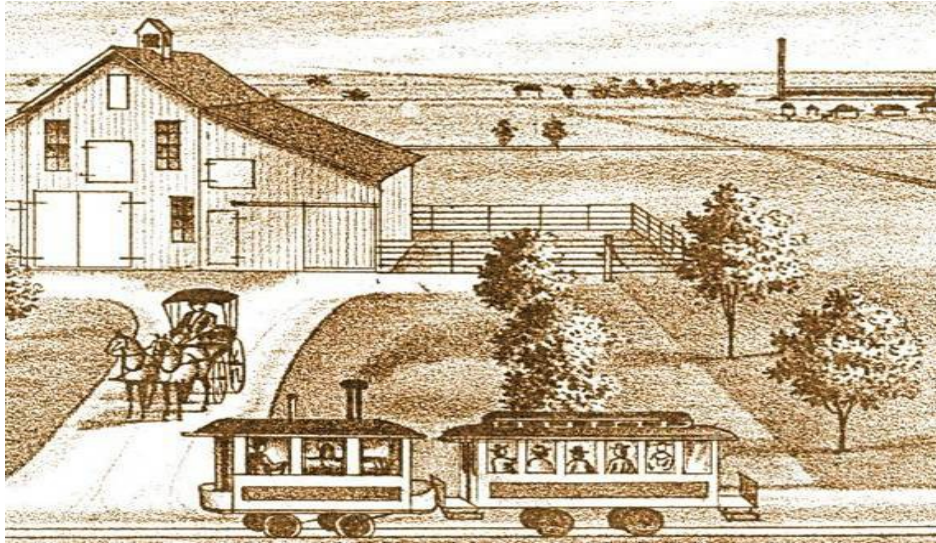
(Photo taken in 1929 during the oil boom around Valley Center. The old oil service trucks are shown driving on the road that is now named 'Interurban'. The railroad to the right of the road is the Arkansas Valley Interurban with its tall electric service poles and lines. The railroad in the center, and to the east of the AVI, is the Santa Fe. The railroad on the far right is the St. Louis, San Francisco (Frisco).

[M=3.4+] - Driving south on Seneca and before turning onto 61st St., you will cross over an old Osage Indian trail. The Osage Indians used this trail during the early 1800s and until the later 1860s to travel to and from their villages (located in southeast Kansas) to the buffalo hunting grounds in Central and Western KS.

[M=3.5] - Next, note the large stone with the plaque at the NW corner of Seneca and 61st St. This stone marks the approximate site of the Indian Treaty event of 1865. The treaty was between the United States Government and the warring and rampaging Plains Indians. Thousands of Indians and federal officials and troops participated in this treaty event including Cheyenne, Kiowa, Arapaho, Apache, and Comanche tribes (plus some Wichita and other local tribes in attendance). Some of the tribe leaders included Chief Black Kettle, Santanta, Big Mouth and Seven Bulls. Government representatives included Generals John Sanborn and William Selbey Harney, Col Leavenworth, Kit Carson, William Bent, and others. The treaty was supposedly never broken, but there were violations of its treaty provisions.

[M=3.5] - Turn right and drive west on 61st St.

[M=3.6] - About a block west of the intersection of Seneca and 61st St. you will drive past a point where there was formerly a railroad crossing for the Wichita and Valley Center Motor Line. During a short two years (1888-90), this early commuter railroad consisted of a small passenger car pulled by a steam dummy engine that ran on the rails between Wichita and Valley Center. Early steam engines were notorious for frightening horses at rail crossings so the steam dummy engine was constructed to look like a passenger car, but with a steam powered engine inside. (See below the early artist illustration of a steam dummy train running by a farm near 45th & Arkansas on the line between Valley Center and Wichita.)



[M=3.6+] - Very close to this early rail line crossing (at 61st St.) was another crossing of the Ft. Harker to Ft. Gibson Army Supply trail (described earlier) that ran between those two Army forts and also supplied old Fort Beecher, located at the junction of the Big and Little Arkansas Rivers.

[M=3.8] Crossing at this point was an Indian trail that followed a north-south route along the east bank of the nearby Little Arkansas River.

[M=3.8+] - Northwest of the intersection of 61st St. and Fairfield, was the original location of Camp Bide-A-Wee, a YMCA camp. It originally consisted of several buildings and camp grounds located along the Little Arkansas River. It served as a recreational camping and meeting facility for area youth and adults from the early 1900s to 1960s.

Now drive along the short Fairfield lane and note the private homes situated next to the Little Arkansas River on the west and other homes along the east side of the lane.

[M=4.0] - house # 6100 Fairfield)- At this point located just south of the house on the east side of the lane and back in the trees, was the old Moxley and Moseley trading post It was established around 1857, one of the first such trading posts in this area. The early plains Indians had trails running along the Little Arkansas River banks and traded at this post.....also trading here were the Osages who traveled on the nearby east-west trail.

(Photo below is of the old trading post site.....an inscribed stone historical marker has been positioned next to the site.....some red flags and lines were temporarily added to show the dimensions of the trading post---about 18 x 26 feet.)



[M=4.0+] North-south Indian Trail crosses Fairfield St. here.

(M=4.1) - Continue driving to the point where Fairfield curves to the east and intersects with Sullivan. Turn right and drive south on Sullivan. The street was named after the Sullivan family who were early homesteaders along the Little Arkansas River.

[M=4.3] - House # 5903 Sullivan) Note the home on the right with the structure on the north bearing a sign "Little Arkansas Trading Co", a privately owned building outfitted to reflect the area's early history.

[M=4.5] Deer crossing sign.

(M=4.7+ - House # 5518 Sullivan) View the house on the left with the carved wooden figures: cowboys riding horses, a buffalo and a cow with an angel in the forefront.

[M=4.9+] - Sullivan intersects with 53rd Street---turn right (west) onto 53rd.

[M=5.0+] - Cross the Little Arkansas River bridge-----this river runs about 120 miles, beginning at the Little River-Genesee, KS area, and continues flowing within the Valley Center city limits on the west. It joins with the Big Arkansas River in Wichita near the Indian Center.

[M=5.1+] - Turn right (north) onto Legion.

[M=5.3+] - 5541 N. Legion) Note the house on the left (west) with the '*Adams & Sons est. 1955*' garage sign, including an old gas pump and oil signs.

[M=5.5] 5526 N. Legion - A residence on the right (east side) has an even older gas pump with a glass reservoir near the top. These types of old pumps required the attendant or the customer to pump gasoline by hand from an underground tank into the upper glass-encased reservoir bearing gallon markings. The fuel was then allowed to flow into the vehicle's tank. For closer viewing and reference to this old type of fuel pump, below is an old photo of the Beard Oil Company station that was once located at the northeast corner of Main and Park streets in Valley Center. Note the same type of old fuel pumps with the upper glass-enclosed reservoirs.



[M=5.7] - Note colorful painted flowers on side of building on the east side of Legion.

[M=5.9] - Legion ends here---turn left onto 60th St.....note the Little Arkansas River on the right with a low, rock dam.

[M=6.1] turn right from 60th St. onto Legion at the stop sign.

[M=6.2] -From Legion turn left onto Bella Road.

[M=6.3] - Turn right onto Campos....enjoy viewing nice homes located along this roadway with some homes backing up to the Little Arkansas River. The river makes a wide, sweeping turn to the west where the roadway also curves to the west.

[M=6.4] Osage Indian trail on west side of the river crossed Campos at this point.

[M=6.5] - Note on the right the tiny log cabin overlooking this small lake's shoreline. This lake was once a sandpit where river sand was extracted from under its surface. The owner of the lake is keeping the water aerated with pipes emitting air under the surface.

[M= 6.6] Campos becomes Rico Street. Drive the following streets and stay to the right.

[M=6.9] Rico becomes Evanston

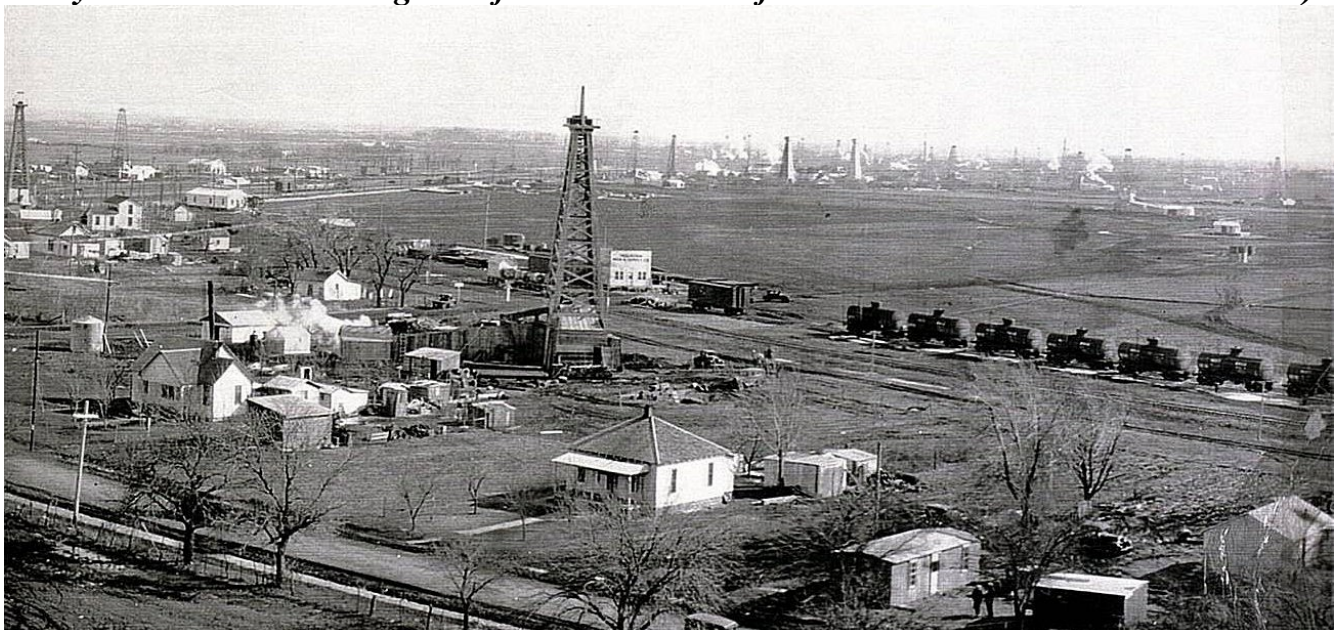
[M=7.1] Evanston becomes Bella Lane

[M=7.4] Bella Lane becomes Rio Vista

[M= 7.7] - Rio Vista intersects with Meridian so named after the 6th Principle Meridian. Drive north on Meridian.

[M= 7.8] - Cross the Little Arkansas Rver for the second time.

[M= 8.2] Located on the left (west) behind this business is the site of one of the first oil wells in Sedgwick County and near Valley Center. It was the Wright No. 1. In 1928, after its discovery, it was producing up to 1500 barrels of crude oil a day. An oil boom followed and resulted in the drilling of many other producing oil wells around Valley Center. Derricks were over 100 feet tall and dotted the surrounding landscape. Note that currently there are producing oil wells located in the field on the right of Meridian. *(Old photo below is a view looking south across West Main St. and the old Frisco yard tracks in Valley Center.....The Wright oil field and other oil fields to the south and east are shown.)*



During the oil boom, the resulting growth of Valley Center almost doubled due to the influx of oil workers and service workers. At one time, there were over a dozen cafes and short-order shacks, some operating around the clock. Vacant rental houses were in short supply so a few Valley Center homeowners converted their garages and chicken houses to rentals spaces for the many new workers. (Below photo of Kikendall Cafe in Valley Center-early 1930s)



[M= 8.5] - The Wichita and Valley Center Motor Line (described and illustrated previously) crossed Meridian at this location and its tracks turned north to Valley Center. In this area there also was a private park called Fisher Park. It was located along the Little Arkansas River on the west side of Meridian and just south of 69th Street during these early years (1890-1900s). At this recreational location, folks from the Valley Center area held picnics, swam and rowed boats in the pool of water impounded behind a makeshift dam.....the revelers also played softball and other games here especially during holidays, the Fourth of July being the biggest celebration day during the year.

(NOTICE) For safety reasons while driving on a busy road (Meridian), it is suggested that you drive into the parking area located at the Veterans Park and continued reading the following information about the history of this general location.

[M= 9.7)]- Near the intersection of Meridian and Ford, the three railroads, described earlier, continued on their route to the north and northwest. There was a Union Station (originally located south of the present day grain elevator) that was jointly used for passenger, mail and freight service both by the Frisco and the Santa Fe. The Frisco tracks were then routed westerly, eventually stopping at its northernmost terminus in Ellsworth. The Frisco was purchased by the Burlington Northern and later merged with the Santa Fe. This Frisco line from Wichita to Ellsworth was abandoned in the 1980s.

(Old photo of Valley Center's Union Station is shown below)



The second Valley Center Union Station (the original station burned) was moved to a rural location south of Hillsboro where it was converted to a residence. *(see photo below)*



The Arkansas Valley Interurban (AVI) began its service to Valley Center in 1910. It had its own station located on Main Street west of the Santa Fe tracks. There was an electrical power house building near the intersection of Meridian and Ford.

The AVI's rail line extended to Sedgwick, then to a junction point called VanArsdale. From there one branch terminated in Newton, and the other branch terminated in Hutchinson. The AVI was in service until around 1941-42 and then was abandoned.

(The Valley Center AVI station was moved from Main St. to a location across from the old Valley Center library near the corner of 1st and Birch Sts. and is shown below.)



A few blocks behind the present day Halstead Bank location was the site of the first oil well was drilled in the Valley Center area around 1905-6. It was a dry hole, but by the late 1920s and early 1930s, other oil wells were drilled to a greater depth in that same area and they produced oil. An active pumping oil well is still producing near the original 1905-06 well site.

Recall the reference to the Wichita and Valley Center Motor Line earlier? This short-lived (1888-1891) commuter rail line terminated near where the industrial park is now located. Wichita and Valley Center investors had plans to build and sell over 250 new homes on 1 acre lots each, and had the City annex the site. The promoters called it the 'Motor Line' addition. The Wichita newspapers touted it as the '*premier suburb of Wichita*'. No homes were actually built in this new addition, and when the short-lived rail-line ceased operations (an economic downturn), the addition was de-annexed by the City.

An old plat for this proposed Motor Line addition displayed some of the 20 total planned street names: major streets were named Motor Ave., Wichita St., Kansas Ave., Hancock St.....8 other proposed streets had women's first names: Leslie, Beatrice, Hattie, Gertrude, Bernice, Donna, Laura, and Winifred. None of the street names were used.

[M=9.7] Veterans Park is located just north of the site of the old rail lines crossings at Meridian Avenue (and present day BNSF RR crossing). The park was so named to honor the fallen soldiers and sailors of World War II. 8 individual evergreen trees were planted in honor of those men from Valley Center who died fighting in the war.

The small park is located south of the former Park School (built in 1946) and the school's previous football and track field. Note at the current scene where you are parked, the ragged line of cedar trees on the north side of this park that were planted in a curved formation. They once served as the windbreak at the southernmost end of the track field.

(photo taken in the later 1950s from the air....looking north to the then Park School in Valley Center)



This is the end of the self-guided tour. We hope you have learned about some early history of the area and enjoyed viewing current day scenes!

Any suggestions or questions? Call Vince Marshall at 680-9669, or e-mail him to marshallfam@prodigy.net . Take time to learn more about the history of Valley Center by viewing displays, photos, documents and memorabilia at the Museum.