

# The Westporter



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4000 Baltimore  
Kansas City, MO 64111  
(816) 561 - 1821  
(913) 648 - 0952  
[westporthistorical@gmail.com](mailto:westporthistorical@gmail.com)  
[westporthistorical.com](http://westporthistorical.com)



The 1855 Harris-Kearney House Museum and Westport Historical Society are a §501(c)(3) charitable organization

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## THANK YOU, TOM PLATT

The donations from Westport resident, Westport Historical Society Board Member, and Lifetime Society member, Tom Platt must be recognized as incredibly important to the Mansion House. Whenever there has been a “need,” Tom has stepped in to make sure that the “need” is addressed. There are not enough words to say *Thank You, Tom*, and to express our gratitude and appreciation for helping us preserve and protect the history of old Westport, the Town of Kansas, and Kansas City for future generations to explore and learn.



## 2021 MEMBERSHIP

Thank you to all who have renewed their membership for 2021. It's not too late. And, you can still donate to the 1855 Harris-Kearney House *WINDOW RESTORATION CAPITAL CAMPAIGN*. We are profoundly grateful for your support. If you have not renewed for 2021, or would like to join the Historical Society, please see our membership information and membership form on our website [www.westporthistorical.com](http://www.westporthistorical.com), or send a request for a form to [westporthistorical@gmail.com](mailto:westporthistorical@gmail.com).

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## THE OLD VOGEL SALOON

(demolished in 1907)

It stood almost midway between High Street and Main on Main Cross (now Pennsylvania). Stripped of the weatherboarding that had encased its rough log walls, it was a conspicuous object surrounded as it was by modern buildings. Its worn doorstep rested against a granitoid sidewalk and the paving was in front was asphalt.

The exact date of its erection is not known, but it is said that it was built long before West Port was founded. A hardy pioneer by the name of Prowers hewed the oak logs to erect a home and trading post, getting the timber from the immediate vicinity, then the center of a grove of trees. That he intended to become a permanent resident was evidenced by the unusual care used in the construction, the result being a house so substantial that the heavy walls yet remained strong and upright, though the roof and lighter woodwork were in the last stages of decay. Of Prowers's life in his new home, there is little record. It is known that he had with him a wife and a family and he is supposed to have traded with his only neighbors, the Indians, until other settlers were attracted to the locality. It is also known that his solitude had scarcely been relieved by others when he died, leaving the sturdy house in the possession of his widow and their several children. On May 29, 1840, Mrs. Susan Prowers (widow) married Louis Vogel. The marriage was performed by Dr. Johnston Lykins of West Port. Following, Mr. Vogel built up a thriving liquor business among the thirsty Indians and his fellow settlers. The quality of his "firewater" was good!

The settlement grew and with it grew Vogel's business. One of the first business buildings erected was Henry Sager's wagon shop. **Sager's shop (shown below)** adjoined Vogel's place on the north (see next page). Sager also built a log house on a lot north of the shop (now the corner of High and Penn). It was in 1867 that Vogel sold the old log house to the Dixons and Mrs. Mary Dixon still owned the property at the time of its destruction. She had occupied the house for many years and left it only to move into the building next door, where her sons, the Dixon Brothers, well-known merchants of Westport, ran a store. Both buildings stood until they were sadly in need of repair and were razed.

~taken, in part, from the writings of Adrienne Christopher



## DID YOU KNOW ...

1. Joseph O. Boggs and Thomas H. Rosser were two early pharmacists of Westport, Missouri?
2. During the frigid winter of 1861-62, Platte County slave George Washington literally walked across the frozen **Missouri** River to Quindaro, Kansas to become a free man?
3. Westport was incorporated into Kansas City, MO in 1898?
4. The first United States quarters were made in 1796, and featured a depiction of Lady Liberty on the obverse and an eagle on the reverse?
5. There was no value marked on quarters until 1804, when 25c was inscribed on the reverse?
6. 1882 brought electric illumination to Kansas City for the first time?
7. In 1879, the Kansas Senate passed a resolution that approved the annexation of Kansas City, Missouri, but the Missouri legislature refused to adopt a corresponding resolution?
8. In 1861 Robert T. Van Horn was Mayor of Kansas City; a Union supporter in a mostly Confederate area during border warfare times?
9. Side saddles allowed the rider to sit with both legs on the left side of the horse?
10. President Abraham Lincoln created the Secret Service hours before his assassination?



Louis Vogel's Saloon, next to Henry Sager's Wagon Shop

## WINDOW RESTORATION CAPITAL CAMPAIGN FUND

Many thanks to the following for their donation to the 1855 Harris-Kearney House Window Restoration Fund:

Allin and Donna Phister  
Alice Creveling  
Mr. and Mrs. James Budde  
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## 2020 Marks the Centennial Anniversary of Kansas City Jazz Legend Charlie “Bird” Parker (Continued from November by Ken Shoemaker)

All of Charlie’s schooling took place in Kansas City, Missouri, but tracing Charlie’s numerous movements from school to school presents something of a challenge. During his school years we know that he attended Douglass School (K-2<sup>nd</sup> grade), Penn School (3<sup>rd</sup> grade), and Sumner School (7<sup>th</sup> grade). The frequent changing of schools was likely due to his family moving from one area to another.

While attending Lincoln High School (19<sup>th</sup> & Tracy), Charlie learned to play the baritone horn and performed in the school orchestra. There was no need for an alto sax in the band, so he had to learn saxophone skills on the side. He withdrew from Lincoln High after his freshman year, but briefly returned to Lincoln in 1934- most likely to utilize his musical skills and to pursue a romantic relationship with his future wife, Rebecca Ruffin. The two got married on July 25, 1936, while Charlie was only fifteen years old. Rebecca was to be the first of three wives (and one common law wife) in Charlie’s life. Before they divorced in 1939, Charlie and Rebecca had two children.

As a relatively young boy, Charlie spent lots of unsupervised evenings and late nights in Kansas City’s Jazz District, honing his skills by joining jam sessions and by observing the better musicians perform on stage. He was a sufficiently good player by 1935 that at the age of fourteen Charlie became a professional musician in the Ten Chords of Rhythm, led by Lincoln High School classmate Lawrence Keyes. But Charlie knew that he still had a long way to go to become an excellent alto sax player. And this was to be punctuated by a very public embarrassment about a year later.

In terms of admirable character qualities, Charlie’s professional drive, coupled with his indomitable spirit, must top the list. Charlie was resolutely single-minded in striving to excel, and he was determined not to let anything stand in his way—not even public humiliation by his peers. In one now-famous encounter that occurred during a jam session in the Spring of 1936, fifteen-year-old Charlie was mocked for his inferior playing by Count Basie’s famous drummer Jo Jones. When Jones threw a drum symbol across the stage that crashed loudly in front of Charlie, everyone knew what that meant: Charlie had been “gonged.” Embarrassed, Charlie left the stage that evening, but he became more determined than ever to master his instrument and to regain respect among his fellow musicians. He continued to practice on his own and to get help from other musicians. One particularly fruitful period took place in the summer of 1937, when Charlie had an extended gig at a resort in the South Ozarks. Because there were few distractions at the resort, Charlie diligently used his off hours to work on his skills and style, and to master music theory. It paid off. His subsequent return to the Kansas City jazz scene sparked amazement by his peers of how much he had improved.

From 1939-1942 Charlie played with the Jay McShann Band, which was based in Kansas City. During this fruitful period, the band cut many recordings in Chicago and New York City, and they toured parts of the country to give concerts.

After the McShann period, Charlie moved to New York City, where he began to gain recognition. He basked in that recognition right up to his death in 1955. That prolific period of his life is beyond the modest scope of this article.

It should be said that the night life in which young Charlie operated from about the age of ten presented many temptations that would prove to have long-term negative effects on Charlie: easy women and easy access to booze, marijuana and harder drugs, notably cocaine and heroin. These would all work to destroy him little by little, causing mental problems, ruining his relationships and causing him to be fired by employers multiple times.

Charlie died in New York City on March 12, 1955, the result of complications with lobar pneumonia and the ravaging consequences of extended alcohol and drug abuse. He was thirty-four years old. His final resting place is in Lincoln Cemetery (809 E Truman Rd). As for the 21-sax salute: Make it a point every year to watch for news about the event, which usually happens on August 29, Charlie’s birthday. To see some fun drone footage of the 2015 event, go to:

## WANT TO HEAR SOME OF CHARLIE'S MUSIC?

Listen to Charlie's tasty jazz stylings of some jazz classics on YouTube: "Summertime," "Night and Day," "Tico Tico," "Laura," "I've Got You Under My Skin," "I'm in the Mood for Love," "All the Things You Are," "Stella by Starlight," 'Begin the Beguine."

To get a sense of Charlie's bebop style, listen to "Ornithology," "Chasin' the Bird," or "Blues for Alice."

You might also want to check out the 1988 biographical film, "Bird," starring Forrest Whitaker as Parker.

NOTE: For this article I am particularly indebted to the fine historical work of Lawrence O. Koch, *Yardbird Suite: A Compendium of the Music and Life of Charlie Parker* (1988) and that of local historian and Bird biographer Chuck Haddix, *Bird, the Life and Music of Charlie Parker* (2013). Ken Shoemaker is a WHS Board member.



**3527 Wyandotte Street**

**Charlie "Bird" Parker**



## City Cemetery in the Town of Kansas (Continued from November by Diane Euston)

After its founding in 1838, the Town of Kansas slowly grew from the vision of its fourteen original founders. John C. McCoy, wrote, "When the townsite of Kansas City was first platted, a square plot of land was dedicated by its owners as a public cemetery."

Found between Independence Ave. to the north and 6<sup>th</sup> St. to the south and in between Oak and Locust Streets, the City Cemetery was set aside as the first public burial ground. Used starting in 1845, the City Cemetery was the final resting place of some of Kansas City's founders. One person buried there was William Miles Chick (1794-1847), a native of Virginia and one of the first permanent residents of Kansas City. He was the city's first merchant and the city's first postmaster.

At the time, nearly all the graves on the hilly site were on a high ridge along Oak St. Very few families could afford to have monuments or headstones because there were no local marble yards. Simple wooden crosses marked most of the graves of loved ones.

A large cholera outbreak in 1849 had the cemeteries filling up quickly and space was a problem. McCoy recalled that people knew even by 1855 that graves would need to be removed. The City Cemetery was then closed to more burials in 1857 but the graves remained untouched for a time. But the city planners had other ideas for the town's first public burial ground as the hills around it were being graded for easier access.

In 1866, city officials published a public notice in the *Kansas City Journal* notifying all buried at the City Cemetery would need to be removed at the family's expense. A large number of people complied to the orders, but others had trouble locating the graves. By the early 1870s, grading began along the roads that passed by the graveyard. Leveling was completed by prisoners of the city workhouse where they cut eight to seventeen feet out of the area where most of the graves were.

As one could only predict, there was a problem immediately as the cemetery was chiseled away foot by foot. A large number of bones and coffins were exposed. One worker testified that he took down 19 graves and eight of these were thrown into a pond on the east side of the location. Only the larger bones were put into boxes. He recalled even seeing dogs carrying away the bones.

As rain began to wash away the edges of what was once the cemetery, a macabre scene was unfolding in what is now downtown Kansas City. As soon as this began, the graves of people were exposed and pieces of coffins, human hair and bones fell out of the banks and into the streets. A fence that had been put around the graveyard fell down on two sides.

A local man was then commissioned to build small boxes for the bones found. As many as five skulls were put into each "small, cheap, rough box" and buried once again. They numbered the graves with stakes above each placement and were later reinterred at Union Cemetery. Other body parts and fragments of coffins were left behind awaiting the final cuts into the hill. In 1878, the last of what once was the first burial ground was cut on the west and north side and graded down to one-foot above street level.

The site of Kansas City's first public burial ground became the city's first park. Named "Shelley Park" after mayor George Shelley (1849-1927), the spot became the front lawn of the second courthouse built at 5<sup>th</sup> and Oak in 1887. Further advancements in Kansas City now has the site of the first public cemetery and the first public park now under a cloverleaf highway access- both erased from view.

**Lt. Joseph Boggs' headstone is viewed at Union Cemetery today. The original stone is cemented in the ground.**



## Learning from the Past

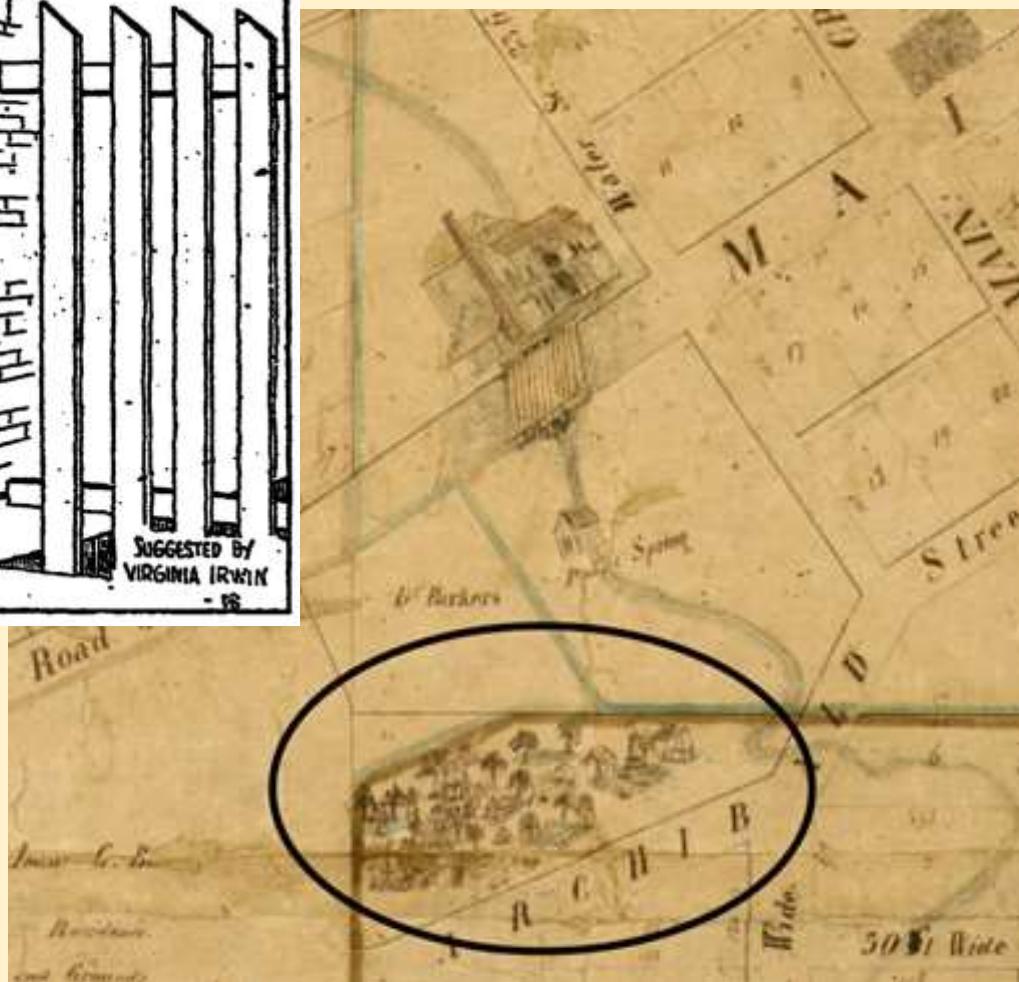
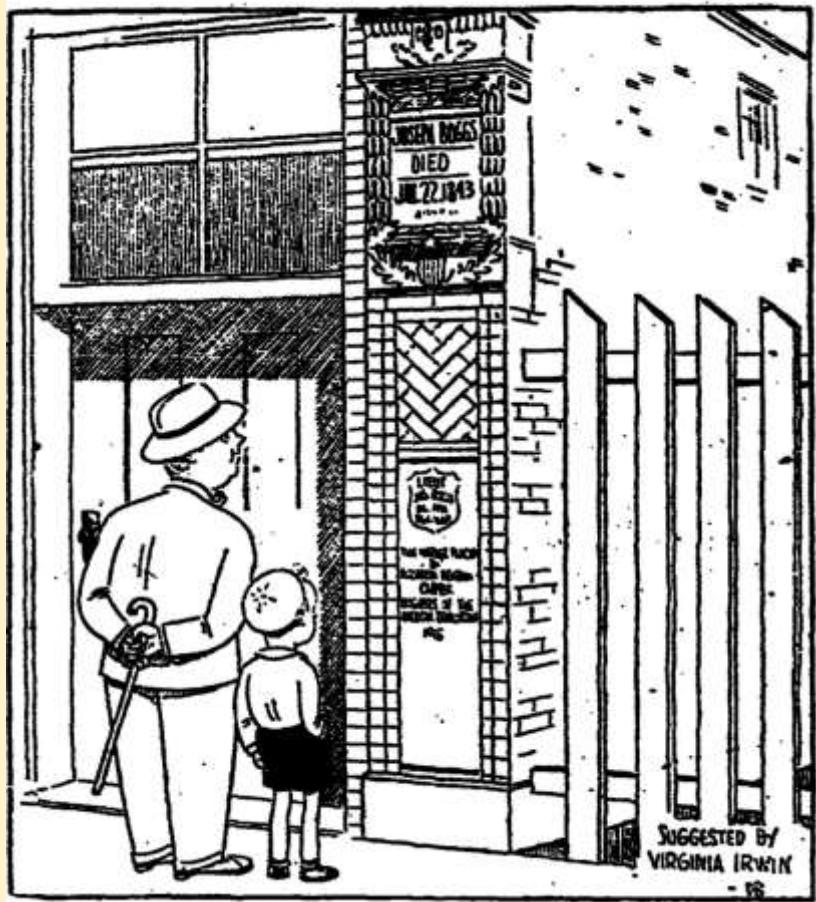
In 1857, Union Cemetery was founded as a public burial ground. Conveniently located between both Westport and Kansas City, the name "Union" was selected to represent the unity between the two towns. Today, it's the oldest public cemetery in Kansas City and holds 55,000 graves. Many of those originally buried in Westport and City Cemetery were reinterred here.

Advancement is one thing, but destroying cemeteries is far from what should be done. As the city grew and encroached on land once donated by pioneers who wished to give a proper final resting place for citizens of both Westport and Kansas City, the solution was far from ideal and leaves us wondering what advancement leaves behind. Today, one has to wonder what fragments still lie underneath the earth. where these two cemeteries once stood.

A cartoon from *Kansas City Star* in 1934 showcases the cornerstone at Badger Lumber with Boggs' tombstone fragment (seen on the preceding page at Union Cemetery).

Spalding's 1855 Map of Westport shows the location of the Westport Cemetery (circled). Can you see the palm trees? Image courtesy of Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.

I WONDER WHY?



# Thank You!

## WHS Needs Volunteers!

Do you have a few hours to spare? Do you enjoy learning about history and sharing what you know? Would you like to be a part of an Historic House Museum and Historical Society?

Whether you would like to be a docent giving tours or if you would just like to help out at special events such as field trips, ice cream socials, or Christmas Candlelight Tours — we always welcome folks who would like to volunteer!

Whatever your skills or talents, we have a place for you!

Call Alana Smith for more Information at  
(816) 561-1821 or (913) 648-0952



**The 1855 Harris-Kearney House Museum will reopen on Friday, March 5, 2021. The House Museum is available for group tours, events and meetings in January and February.**

**Please call 913-231-6749**

**for reservations and information, or send an email to  
[westporthistorical@gmail.com](mailto:westporthistorical@gmail.com).**

***Thank you for your continued, generous support!***

**Westport Historical Society  
4000 Baltimore  
Kansas City, MO 64111**