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Minnesota Avenue was a bustling place

(Editor's note: This is the 17th in a series of "then and now" articles on places and things of interest in Kansas City, Kan., compiled by area historian Margaret Landis in observance of the 100th birthday of KCK in 1986. Much of the information has appears in past editions of The Kansan.)

(Transcriptions are presented without changes except to improve readability.)

Remember when Minnesota Avenue was a hub of activity in downtown Kansas City, Kan.?

Not only was Minnesota Avenue a lively place, but so were the other major arteries running through the business (?????????) of KCK.

But like other cities, urban decay and the advent of outlying shopping centers left the heart of KCK with many vacant buildings.

Now KCK has made great strides in renovating Minnesota Avenue and other parts of the city although there is still much to be done.

Because of blight in the inner cities, the Kansas League of Municipalities by the 1950s was instrumental in obtaining the Urban Renewal Redevelopment Act whereby urban renewal could be used (in?) rejuvenate those areas.

The first urban renewal project in Kansas was the Gateway Redevelopment Project. One hundred acres at the west end of the Inter-City Viaduct (now Lewis and Clark) were cleared with the razing of old and dilapidated buildings. The Gateway Urban Renewal Project led to the building of Holiday Inn Towers, Travelodge Gateway Gardens, the Gateway Center Building, Home State Bank and other buildings.

A large-scale annexation program was started in the 1960s. Development had to be westerly because KCK is bounded on the north by the Missouri River, on the east by the Missouri-Kansas state line and on the south by Johnson County.



A mid-1930s scene of Minnesota Avenue looking west from 6th Street is pictured above. The photo is from the files of the Kansas City, Kan., Public Library. In picture at bottom, Minnesota Avenue west from 6th as it looks today. (Kansan photo by J. Bradley Burgess.)

By 1968, annexation had been completed as far west as 86th Street. Large scale annexations were completed by August 1972, moving the city limits to 123rd Street.

The Center-City Mall, affecting Minnesota Avenue between 6th and 8th streets and touted as being the catalyst to rejuvenating downtown KCK, was approved in the early 1970s. The mall, however, with its controversial art objects and narrow serpentine traffic lanes, did not help the retail stores on Minnesota.

With the westward expansion of the city and the building of shopping centers, there was an exodus of many business firms from the Avenue to the suburbs.

Following the departure, many of the buildings on Minnesota remained vacant and were boarded up. Some were torn down.

But faith in the future of the Avenue was retained by some. A new Security National Bank (now just Security Bank) was built, and Commercial National and Brotherhood banks were renovated. The Board of Public Utilities remodeled the old Montgomery Ward building for its headquarters.

In 1982 the art objects that were added to the Avenue during the Center-City Mall project were removed. The narrow, twisting lanes were removed and the Avenue from 6th to 8th streets were widened.

In April 1984 a \$1 million fund was established for the renovation of empty, boarded-up buildings. KCK civic leaders and the city council pledged matching funds for the project to loan money to property owners to restore the buildings. Some have been remodeled, paving the way for the coming of National College and the Environmental Protection Agency among others.