



Early Bird: Charlie Parker Centennial Walking Tour Saturday August 29, 2020

Tour Hosts:

Chuck Haddix: Director of UMKC Marr Sound Archives, host of KCUR 89.3 "Fish Fry" on Fri. and Sat. nights, author of *"Bird – The Life and Music of Charlie Parker"* and *"Kansas City Jazz – From Ragtime to Bebop"*

Jacob A. Wagner: Associate Professor of Urban Planning + Design, UMKC; Director of Urban Studies Program; and past president of the Historic Kansas City Foundation

Charlie Parker came of age as a musician, and a man in Kansas City. The metro area is dotted with buildings and places associated with his life and career. He was born at 852 Freeman in Kansas City, Kansas on August 29, 1920. In 1927, his family moved to 3527 Wyandotte. His father worked as a custodian for the apartment building on the southeast corner of 36th and Wyandotte. In 1930, the apartment was converted into a condo, and the family moved around the corner to 109 W. 34th St. Charlie attended Penn School in Westport, a modest brick building nestled on the limestone outcropping across the street from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial at 43rd and Broadway. A plaque mounted on the face of the limestone marks the spot. In 1932, Charlie's parents separated, and he moved to 1516 Olive with his mother, Addie. He attended Sumner grade school, and then Lincoln High School. In 1943, Addie moved to 1535 Olive. Charlie often stayed there when he visited town. A number of clubs and dance halls where Charlie played are still standing, including the Century Room at 3605 Broadway; Martin's Plaza Tavern at 210 W. 47th; Paseo Hall at 15th and Paseo (St. Stephens Baptist Church), and numerous locations in the 18th and Vine area. He is buried in Lincoln Cemetery located on Blue Ridge Boulevard, just north of Truman Road in Blue Summit, an unincorporated area between Kansas City and Independence.

Urban Context of 18th and Vine – Black business district during the era of racial segregation aka "City within a city" that served local patrons for the era of industrialization and rapid growth of KC's population as well as African American neighborhoods. Black population of KCMO doubled between 1900 and 1920 – when Parker was born. By 1930 – district was national known as "18th and Vine" – served as the center of black life in KC – theaters, nightclubs, professional offices, newspapers, shopping and basic services.

Schedule and locations of historic sites for the walking tour. Tour begins and ends at the front of the American Jazz Museum (1616 East 18th Street KCMO).

1. **Gem Theater** – 1615 E. 18th ST (originally the Star Theater, 1912) – a place for vaudeville and motion pictures. In 1924 the façade was re-done, terra cotta was added and it was renamed the Gem. Charlie Parker liked movies and was known to frequent this theater.
2. **Lincoln Hall in the historic Lincoln Building** -1601 E. 18th ST - Lincoln Hall occupied the third floor of the building, located on the south east corner of 18th and Vine. On Friday and Saturday nights, Lincoln High School students flocked to Lincoln Hall to socialize and dance to

bands. **In July 1935, fourteen-year-old Charlie launched his career at Lincoln Hall with the Twelve Chords of Rhythm.** The Chords were non-union, but made good money playing for the door.

Lincoln Building details (1921): 1601 E. 18th Street - National Historic Register (1991)

The most significant commercial building in the black community in the early 20th Century... black doctors, lawyers and other professionals worked at this prestigious address.

3. **El Capitan Club:** 1610 E. 18th Street [demolished – site of American Jazz Museum] Named after the Santa Fe Passenger Train, the El Capitan Club was a popular gathering spot for jazz fans. Charlie often played there when he was in town visiting his mother. In 1952, Charlie played a two-week engagement at the El Capitan that was so popular management added a matinee to accommodate the crowds.

Head to corner of 18th and Vine – observe signs identifying the area as a National Historic District. Turn south (left) on Vine Street and head south towards 19th Street. This block includes several original buildings and many vacant lots. Several famous clubs – especially the Eblon Theater and the Cherry Blossom once made this street famous.

4. **Roberts Building: 1824-1836 Vine Street** (1923) – Corner of 19th and Vine. The Roberts Building was one of the first African-American owned car dealerships in the United States that served a black clientele. Homer Roberts and John Sears were the proprietors.
5. **Ol' Kentuck Bar B Q: 1516-18 East 19th Street**—Located a few doors down from the northwest corner of 19th and Vine, the Ol' Kentuck served up jazz and spicy Bar B Q. In June 1940, Step Buddy Anderson introduced Charlie to Dizzy Gillespie in front of the Ol' Kentuck. They walked to the Local 627 on Highland, where they had a meeting of the musical minds.

From 19th and Vine – head east toward Highland Avenue. Stop at the corner of 19th and Highland – (1715 East 19th Street) Take a look at the historic apartment buildings (south side of 19th Street between Highland and Woodland) – these buildings are very similar to what the MMF Building looked like before it was renovated to become the Local 627 headquarters.

6. **Local 627/Mutual Musicians Foundation:** 1823 Highland—Established in 1917 by a small group of musicians and educators, Colored Musicians Local Number 627 grew to include 347 members by 1930. Having outgrown their headquarters, union members raised money and bought the building at 1823 Highland. Charlie joined Local 627 in October 1935 for an engagement with George E. Lee at Paseo Hall. Charlie remained a member until 1945, when he was suspended for nonpayment of dues, and transferred to the national union.

Building (1906) – Architect: Rudolf Markgraf – built as a two-unit apartment structure... The Negro Musicians Association submitted their articles of incorporation to the State of Missouri - October 22-23, 1929. William Shaw, George E. Lee, Bennie Moten, Thamon Hayes, William Basie, Harlan Leonard, Miss Mary Williams – and several other musicians signed the paperwork to incorporate the organization at the state.



These articles included the purposes to unite musicians for mutual protection. To provide music for the public, to set a minimum rate for professional music services, and to "enforce good faith and fair dealing of members... with the public..."

The name was officially changed to the Mutual Musicians Foundation, INC. in 1958.

National Historic Landmark – 1982 (first one in KC)

Rochester Hotel – built as the Western Apartments (1919-1920)

The largest building of this type remaining in the area is the Western Apartments at 1821 Highland Avenue. The Western Apartments were built in 1919-1920 by the George M. Bliss Construction Company as rental apartments to meet the increasing demands for black housing in the 18th and Vine area. After 1940 it became the Rochester Hotel (rooms for rent weekly or monthly).

7. **Lucille's:** 1711 1-2 E. 18th—Gregarious and comely, Lucille Webb held court in her namesake club; greeting and schmoozing patrons while her husband S.D. ran the kitchen. In April 1938, Charlie joined alto saxophonist Buster Smith's band for a regular engagement at Lucille's. Onstage, Smith mentored young Charlie, teaching him how to go in and out of key and play double time. An eager student, Charlie could soon improve on anything that Smith played.
8. **Centennial Methodist Church:** 1834 Woodland Ave.—Founded in 1907, the Centennial Methodist Church has continuously ministered to the 18th and Vine community. The congregation flourished with the growth of the 18th and Vine area, the heart and soul of the African American community. In 1927, the congregation raised the original church building to make way for a new building, dedicated with much fanfare on March 31, 1929. On April 6, 1935, the Centennial conducted the memorial service of bandleader, Bennie Moten, one of the largest funeral held in Kansas City. Thousands of mourners of every race filled the chapel and spilled out into the surrounding area. Today, the Centennial Church continues to serve the 18th and Vine community's social and spiritual needs.
9. **New Rialto Theater (1924) – today known as the Boone Theater:** Motion picture and vaudeville – replaced an outdoor theater. Architect: H. Alexander Drake. 1929 – renamed New State Theater – later renamed John W. Blind Boone Theater after the ragtime piano legend.
10. **Charlie Parker Memorial Sculpture, Bird Lives** – designed by the famous sculptor Robert Graham and dedicated on March 27, 1999. The work is 18 feet tall and cast in bronze with a base in stone. When viewed from the side, the sculpture reveals the shape of the African continent. The City commissioned the sculpture and was supported by the Oppenheimer Brothers Foundation and philanthropists Tony and Marti Oppenheimer.

Chuck Haddix and Jacob A. Wagner