



Early Bird: Charlie Parker at 18th and Vine
Curated Tour by Chuck Haddix

During the days of public segregation, Kansas City's 18th and Vine area developed into a self-contained community. The intersection of 18th and Vine served as the hub of a bustling business and entertainment district--the heart and soul of an African-American community, bounded by Independence Avenue on the north, Troost Avenue on the west, 27th Street on the south and Benton Boulevard to the east.

Young Charlie Parker came of age as a man and musician in the 18th and Vine area. After Charlie's parents separated in 1930, he and his mother Addie moved to a two-story brick house at 1516 Olive Street just blocks away from 18th and Vine. Addie worked nights and after she left for work, Charlie began his nightly rounds of the night clubs dotting 12th and 18th streets. While on tour later in his career, Charlie often stopped off in Kansas City to visit Addie, play gigs in the clubs on 18th street and renew old acquaintances.

1. **Lincoln Hall**, 1601 18th Street---The three-story red brick Lincoln Building opened in 1921. Located on the southeast corner of 18th and Vine, the Lincoln Building formed the cornerstone of the 18th and Vine District. The 1st floor featured Matlaw's a popular men's clothing store and other retail shops. Offices for dentists, doctors and attorneys populated the second floor. Lincoln Hall occupied the third floor of the Lincoln Building.

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. During the early 1940s, Charlie regularly played Lincoln Hall as a member of the Jay McShann and Harlan Leonard bands.

2. **El Capitan Club**, 1610 E. 18th Street—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.
3. **Ol' Kentuck Bar B Q**, 1516-18 East 19th Street—Located near the northwest corner of 19th and Vine, Ol' Kentuck served up jazz along with spicy Bar B Q. In June 1940, Charlie first met Dizzy Gillespie in front of the Ol' Kentuck. Dizzy was in town playing with the Cab Calloway Band at Fairyland Park. Trumpeter Bernard “Buddy Anderson” introduced Charlie to Dizzy and they walked around the corner to Musician’s Local 627, where they had a musical meeting of the minds. This get together marked the birth of bebop.
4. **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.
5. **Crispus Attucks School**, 1815 Woodland Avenue--Crispus Attucks School, named after an African American who was the first person killed in the American Revolution, was constructed in 1905. A second wing was added in 1922 to better serve the growing population at 18th and Vine. Over the years, the school remained central to the 18th and Vine community. In 1950 over 1,000 students attended Attucks as it was affectionately known. Charlie Parker did not attend Attucks School as previously reported. However, in June 1936, Charlie proposed to his childhood sweetheart, Rebecca Ruffin on the steps of the school. The two wed in July 1936 and Charlie remained married to Rebecca during his three other marriages.

6. **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. Broadcasts from Lucille's by KXBY introduced Charlie to listeners across the Midwest.
7. **Charlie Parker Memorial Sculpture—Bird Lives**—Charlie Parker has long been celebrated by artists, writers and musicians. Located in the heart of 18th and Vine near the American Jazz Museum, the 10' bronze sculpture by Robert Graham celebrates the enduring legacy of Charlie Parker. Charlie's daughter Kim and his third wife Doris attended the 1999 dedication of the statue which was funded by the Jules and Doris Stein and Oppenheimer Brothers Foundations.
8. **American Jazz Museum**, 1616 E. 18th St.—Established in 1997, the American Jazz Museum features educational programming, a jazz club called the Blue Room and exhibits showcasing the life and music of Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington and Charlie Parker. The exhibit on Parker which features his Grafton Sax celebrates his life and career.



SpotlightCharlieParker.org