

The North Kansas City Urban District by John Q. Adams
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Abstract of a Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
of Doctor of Philosophy in the GRADUATE SCHOOL of the UNIVERSITY OF
MISSOURI 1930

(Reprint from the Economic Geography, Oct. 1932, Vol. 8, No. 4)

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In order to keep this article within required limits of space it has been necessary to omit an abstract of that part of the thesis which accounts for the location of the North Kansas City industries within Greater Kansas City rather than in some other Mid-western Metropolitan area.

THE NORTH KANSAS CITY URBAN DISTRICT

John Q. Adams

The North Kansas City Industrial District is a distinct physical, industrial, and political unit occupying a small bottom in a meander of the Missouri River immediately north of and adjacent to Kansas City, Missouri. Physically this area is separated from Greater Kansas City by the Missouri River; politically it is independent; industrially it has a distinctive development. The interrelations of its physical, political, and industrial conditions have unified the district. Thus unified, it offers an opportunity for interpreting (1) the morphology of the landscape, and (2) the localization of the identifying forms, in a unique industrial area.

The purposes of this study are (1) to identify and classify the various physical and cultural landscape forms which are found within the district and to show their

interrelationships, (2) to interpret the structure of the cultural landscape by an analysis of the grouping and distribution of these forms, (3) to account for the localization of the various forms and structural features, and (4) to predict, on the basis of these data, the probable future changes in the landscape.

The data presented in this paper were obtained by means of field studies, personal interviews, and library investigations made chiefly during 1928 and 1929. As a result of the general economic depression which began late in 1929 conditions in the district have changed very little since that time. For help given in gathering and organizing the data the author is especially indebted to Dr. Sam T. Bratton, Professor of Geography at the University of Missouri; Mr. A. W. Zimmer of the North Kansas City Development Company; Mr. Howard C. Smiley, Research Specialist, Kansas City, Missouri; and Mr. N. M. Fitch, Engineer, North Kansas City.

.Genesis of Urban Forms

In spite of its location within a few miles of the center of Kansas City, Missouri (Fig. 1), the North Kansas City District remained distinctly rural until recent years. In fact, the invasion of this district by the city has been so recent that in 1929 only one-third of the land was occupied by urban forms (Table 1). The exclusion of the North Kansas City District from the urban growth of its great neighbor to the south was due to one outstanding condition; namely, the barrier effect of the Missouri River. A secondary factor was the danger of flood. The present urban development in the district has been made possible by piercing the river barrier and overcoming the flood menace.

The first breach in the river barrier was made by the old Hannibal Bridge, which was officially opened July 3, 1869. This structure served as Kansas City's railway gateway to the north. The rural aspect of Clay County Bottom, as the North Kansas City District was then designated, remained unchanged except by the railway lines leading to the bridge, and by a considerable expansion of the small settlement of Harlem which was located at the Kansas City ferry landing (Fig. 2).

In the years 1887-1891 an unsuccessful attempt was made to extend Kansas City's urban structure into the present North Kansas City District. This projected development was a part of the great Kansas City real estate boom of 1885-1891 and failed with the collapse of that boom in 1891. Although this attempt to urbanize the district failed, it has affected subsequent urbanization there in three ways. First, it left a heritage of numerous small land holdings in Harlem and in that part of the district now known as Midway (Fig. 2). These holdings were originally residence lots sold during the boom by Mr. Willard E. Winner, the promoter. Their presence has since interfered somewhat with the unified development of certain industrial areas in the district. Second, the network of streets laid off by Mr. Winner has been extended over most of the present town of North Kansas City and consequently fixes the basic pattern of its structure. Third, the piers built during 1889- 1890 for the proposed Winner Wagon Bridge were later used for the present North Kansas City Bridge, the chief link between the North Kansas City District and Kansas City, Missouri.

Figure 1. The position of North Kansas City in relation to Kansas City, Missouri, and the Missouri River is apparent. All of the industrial districts are located in major stream valleys in order to be near the main railway lines which follow these lowlands.

The present urban development of the North Kansas City District began in 1912. In that year, the opening of the North Kansas City Wagon and Railway Bridge greatly

reduced the barrier effect of the Missouri River; and the completion of a levee along the river front and a drainage ditch along the foot of the bluffs removed the danger of flood. The toll charges on the bridge remained as a slight handicap for another fifteen years but the river barrier was definitely broken by the opening of the bridge.

The bridge, the levee, and the drainage ditch were made by the North Kansas City Development Company, a subsidiary of the Armour and Swift packing interests and the Burlington Railway. This company had bought almost all of the land in the district including the Winner holdings, during the years 1902-1912.

The bridge was built and the other improvements were made in order to open up the district and make possible sales of land to industries. The Company as a whole realized a profit on each sale of land, and the Burlington Railway in particular made additional profits by hauling freight into and out of the district. The attractiveness of the profits on switching and hauling was reaffirmed early in 1931 when the capitalists who control the Missouri Pacific Railway sought to divert these profits to their railway by purchasing the two-thirds interest which the Armour and Swift groups held in the Development Company. Since 1912 the urban invasion of the North Kansas City District has continued with increasing velocity. However, in 1929 only one-third of the land was occupied by urban forms. The remainder of this paper will show the present use of the land in the district and will explain how this peculiar distribution and grouping of the various cultural forms has been brought about.

Figure 2. After unsuccessful attempts to establish North Kansas City, the successful urban development of the district began in earnest in 1912 when the Wagon and Railway Bridge overcame the river barrier to expansion.

Industrial Areas: Adjustments to Regional Planning

The plan of the North Kansas City District as made by the Development Company provides for industrial, business, residential, and public uses. In general, the locations of these several areas are such as to conform to preexisting natural and cultural features, to utilize to the best advantage the area owned, and to give economic unity to the district as a whole.

Distribution and Character

More than half of the district is set aside for industrial purposes, and, of this reserve, approximately one-third is occupied by various kinds of industrial establishments (Fig. 3 and Table 1).

The land used by the railways lies along the limbs of the railway "Y" (Fig. 2). This structural feature was created in 1869 when the first railway tracks were built across the bottom. The other industries, storages, distributors, factories, and one transport agency are located, irrespective of character, in some four separate areas. The basis of such distribution is sizes and shapes of tracts required, and the comparative low cost of some of the irregularly shaped tracts.

TABLE I

Use of the Land in the North Kansas City Area, April 1, 1929

	Area in Acres	Per Cent
Industrial land	701	21
(Buildings)	(328)	(10)
(Railways)	(373)	(11)

Residential land	136	4
Business land	79	2
Public land	217	6
Agricultural land	1,539	44
Idle land	800	23
Total	3,472	100

Industries requiring only small blocks of land are, in the main, located in the plotted portion of the central Industrial Section. This plotted portion, lying west of Linn Avenue, is laid off in standard blocks measuring approximately 610 feet north-south by 270 feet east-west, the dimensions set by the original Winner survey.

The block pattern set by the Winner survey was adopted with slight modification because (1) the arrangement preserved the section lines, and (2) an examination of industrial areas in other cities convinced the Development Company that blocks of this size were satisfactory for most small or medium-sized industries. The original Winner block pattern was changed so that alleys forty feet in width lie parallel to the north-south streets and divide each block into two equal parts. Block uniformity and alley width permit railway switch tracks to be built in each alley. As a result, each industry has access to at least one street and also to the switch track in the alley. The width of the alley, forty feet, permits each industry to have a private spur track leading from the main switch track. The decision of the Company to use this block pattern has been justified as shown by the fact that three-fourths of the industries which have located in the North Kansas City District have fitted themselves successfully into these blocks.

Figure 3.—The plan for development of North Kansas City provides for industrial, business, residential, and public use of the areas, so located as to serve most advantageously and economically the needs and activities of the section as a whole.

Industries requiring large tracts of land, which may or may not be rectangular in shape, are located in three areas. These areas are (1) east of Linn Avenue in the central Industrial Section and east of Saline Street in the area north of Armour Road, (2) east of the North Kansas City Bridge in the southeast Industrial Section, and (3) along the east side of the Burlington Railway Yards. In these three areas no blocks have been plotted, and, as a result, individual buyers obtain large tracts suitable for their respective enterprises. The only restriction on the shapes and dimensions of land holdings in these areas is a proviso by the Development Company which prohibits holdings to be so arranged that switch tracks extending to them will cut the land into blocks of odd sizes and shapes, thus lowering its value.

The heavy traffic on Armour Road

Figure 4. The group of flour and feed mills near the eastern end of the district. Note the large number of railway cars on the switch tracks. The field of alfalfa in the foreground is separated from the mills by Armour Road which appears as a white line. and on Burlington Avenue has prevented the extension of lead switch tracks into the land which lies north of and east of the Northtown residence area. Consequently, the only types of industries which can be developed in this part of the district are those requiring a small amount of railway service.

FORMS OF INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS

In general, the larger holdings are occupied by large buildings. This measure of size applies either to the amount of ground space occupied by the buildings or to the number of stories built on a given ground space. The huge mills near the eastern end of the central Industrial Section stand out in any view of that end of the bottom (Fig. 4). The large paper board mill shown in Figure 5 is an example of a low building of great areal extent located in the unplotted section of the Central Industrial Section. In the area of plotted blocks west of Linn Avenue, the typical industrial building is smaller than in the other areas (Fig. 6).

Nine out of ten industrial buildings are made of steel and either brick or concrete. The Development Company strongly encourages this type of fireproof construction in order to obtain more favorable insurance rates.

The industrial areas of the North Kansas City District have been described and classified, and their grouping and distribution within the district, together with the general morphology of the buildings which they contain, have been presented. In the following section reasons will be given for the location in North Kansas City of the various industries which occupy the industrial areas.

LOCALIZATION OF INDUSTRIES

The conditions which caused the North Kansas City industries to locate within the district rather than in some other part of Greater Kansas City are given in Table 2. These data were obtained directly from the sixty-three industries which were established in the district in the spring of 1929. The outstanding attractions are cheap land, the availability of large tracts of level land, and the excellent switching facilities. Secondary factors of general application are the lower tax rate in North Kansas City in comparison with other parts of Greater Kansas City and the attractive appearance of the district as a whole. This latter condition is a result of (1) the absence of shacks, weeds, and other eyesores, and (2) the presence of open sunlit spaces between new industrial buildings.

TABLE 2

Conditions Which Attract Industries to the North Kansas City District

	Major Attraction	Minor Attracti on	No Attracti on	Did Not Report	Total
Cheap land	33		9	21	63
Large tracts of level land	40			23	63
Switching facilities	35	26	2		63
Low taxes 4	53	3	3	63
Clean open spaces		63			63
Presence of another industry	15		35		63
Water supply 3	6	38	16	63
Nonpolitical utilities	6			57	63
Good highway connections	2	3	58		63

As reported by the 63 industries located there April 1, 1929.

Figure 5.—A large paper board mill. The building is limited in height in order to

eliminate the expense of building floors and walls strong enough to support the great weight of the machinery and the paper. (Courtesy of the North Kansas City Development Company.)

Each of the remaining conditions listed in Table 2 is a minor locational factor. Only two plants are attracted to the district partially as a result of good highway connections with all parts of Greater Kansas City. The availability of a large supply of good water in the unconsolidated sediments underlying the district is an inducement to several factories; and the presence of certain large plants accounts for the influx of several auxiliary industries such as repair shops and box factories.

Nonpolitical control of all public utilities including streets, and the political separation of North Kansas City from Kansas City, Missouri, greatly simplify such problems as the opening and closing of streets and the extension of water mains and switch tracks. Officials of the North Kansas City Development Company claim that this factor is as important as any other one listed. Reluctance to commit themselves on a point so closely bound up with local politics may account for the silence of so many executives when asked about this factor.

In addition to the conditions listed in Table 2, which give the North Kansas City District some advantage over competing industrial districts, there are three factors of industrial location which apply with equal force to North Kansas City and its competitors. These factors are (1) nearness to regional markets, (2) nearness to supplies of raw materials, and (3) cost of high-grade labor. The first two conditions as measured by the cost of moving the goods are approximately equal for all the outstanding industrial districts in Greater Kansas City. The third factor shows even less variation from district to district.

At the present time the only handicap of the North Kansas City District in comparison with other industrial districts in the Kansas City metropolitan area is the local restriction on Mexicans and Negroes as owners of homes within the district. As a result of this restriction, these relatively unskilled laborers must be obtained from outside the district, thus causing some extra trouble in obtaining the desired labor force in a few plants. However, this difference is so slight that the three factories which employ this type of labor almost exclusively have operated within the district for years with no apparent handicap in comparison with similar industries located elsewhere in Greater Kansas City. Reasons for the exclusion of these groups from residence will be given in the next section.

The toll charges for the use of the North Kansas City Bridge were formerly a serious handicap to industrial development within the district. However, these charges were removed for all highway and pedestrian traffic on July 15, 1927, at which date the bridge became the property of Kansas City, Missouri, and Clay County. The bridge was purchased and made toll free in order to increase intercourse between Kansas City, Missouri, and the rich trade territory north of the river.

Residential Areas: Recent Allocations and Remnants of Previous Regimes

Irregularly distributed in the North Kansas City District are six residential areas, unequal in size and occupying some four per cent of the total area of the district. The distribution of these areas is due in part to regional planning, and in part to a number of interrelated conditions, some of which no longer are pertinent.

Distribution, Origins, and Functions

The three larger sections are (1) Northtown, lying north of Armour Road; (2) Midway,

lying along South Swift Avenue between Tenth and Fourteenth Avenues; and (3) Harlem, located between the north approaches to the North Kansas City and Hannibal Bridges (Figs. 2 and 3). Of the three smaller groups of residences, one is on the levee near Harlem, another is on an old county road between Midway and the Burlington Yards, and the third is in the Burlington Yards.

Figure 6.—A typical small factory of modern construction located on South Burlington Avenue

Northtown was created by the Development Company in order to provide homes for industrial workers. The levee front area is a dwelling place of squatters who live here on Uncle Sam's land and pay rent to no man. Three small farmsteads on the County Road have been left over from the days before urban forms invaded the district. The group of small houses in the Burlington Yards was built by the railway in order to house a group of Mexican laborers. The origins of Harlem and Midway have been explained in an earlier section.

The main function of each of these areas is to serve as a place of residence for people who work in North Kansas City (Table 3). A fairly high percentage of the earners from Midway, Harlem, and the Levee Front are employed in Kansas City, Missouri. This is due to the fact that these residence groups are as near to many of the industries located on the south side of the river as they are to most of the industries in North Kansas City. For example, a resident of Harlem who is employed in one of the nearby Kansas City industries lives no farther from his work than if he were employed north of the river. Nevertheless, these marginal residence areas show a majority of earners employed in North Kansas City.

Figure 7. A row of bungalows in Northtown. These houses are built inexpensively, but they are new and well kept, and the streets are paved and clean.

Northtown is the only residence area which is growing. In Harlem and Midway a few houses are built from time to time, but these merely replace the old houses which are destroyed by fire, or decay. The three smaller residential areas are completely stagnant. One of these areas, the Levee Front, may be removed entirely at any time if the National Government should decide that the presence of these squatters is undesirable. Northtown, however, has been expanding steadily since its foundation in 1911. It has been growing because most of the newcomers to the district prefer this area. It is new, clean, well planned, restricted so as to exclude undesirable neighbors, and is closer to both the industrial and business sections than any of the other residence areas. Midway is as near as Northtown to the southwestern part of the industrial area but lacks all the other advantages of the newer area.

The advantages of Northtown are results of the plans of the Development Company. The Company desired to attract industries to the district, and, in order to do so, it provided a residence area and business section for those workmen who desired to live near their places of employment. This was the beginning of Northtown. The clean appearance of the Northtown area and the restrictions against certain racial groups—Mexicans, Negroes, and South Europeans—are also results of the policy of the Company to make the town attractive to the skilled workmen. In order to provide a steady and competent body of citizens and workers, the Development Company builds houses for sale only. Also, before land is sold to other real estate enterprises, they are required to agree that houses will be built immediately and sold as soon as possible.

RESIDENCE FORMS

The typical North Kansas City dwelling is a one-story frame bungalow containing five rooms, bath, and basement (Fig. 7). This is the workingman's cottage in its Midwestern form. The predominance of the small one-story, single-family dwelling is shown by the fact that 88 per cent of the residences are of this type. Many of these have been built to sell at a fairly low price. Others are of a better class. Almost all of these cottages are built on lots 35 feet wide and from 120 to 130 feet deep.

About 45 per cent of the homesteads have garages, and an additional 25 per cent have buildings other than garages. These sheds and outhouses are restricted almost entirely to Harlem, Midway, and the County Road, and are necessary because of the lack of sewerage in Harlem and the scarcity of basements in all three areas. The sheds are used to hold fuel and other supplies. The scarcity of garages is explained by the fact that most of these homes are not yet paid for and the families that are making the payments feel that they cannot afford to pay for a car and a garage in addition.

All but three of the thirty-five multiple-family dwellings are in Northtown. Most of these are large two-story frame houses and are either duplexes or have been converted into light housekeeping apartments. Only one large apartment building has been constructed. This large brick building, containing twenty-four apartments, is located near the center of Northtown.

Business Areas: Adjustments to Local and Transient Populations

Eighty-eight business houses were established within North Kansas City April 1, 1929. They occupied only two per cent of the land in the district (Fig. 3 and Table 1). These 88 establishments were distributed among seven business areas as follows: Northtown 69, Midway 7, South Burlington Avenue 7, central Industrial Section 2, Harlem 1, Airport 1, and the Burlington Yards 1.

Distribution, Origins, and Functions

The business areas originated in various ways. The Northtown area was created by the Development Company in order to serve the Northtown residential section. The Midway and Harlem areas began as supply centers for their respective residential sections. On the other hand, the South Burlington Avenue areas have no tributary residential section but serve the highway traffic.

Figure 8. The Armour Building in the Northtown business area. Note the different lines of business in this one uniformly built structure.

Most of the firms in this area have been established since the tolls were removed from the North Kansas City Bridge, i.e., since July 15, 1927. The Development Company has permitted one filling station to be established on its land in the central Industrial Section and has encouraged the location of a branch telegraph office in that area.

The combined restaurant and rooming house in the Burlington Yards was built before the use of the automobile became general. Its purpose was to serve the needs of those employees of the railway who desired to live near their work. Now that the men can drive from either North Kansas City or Kansas City in a few minutes, the need for the business is gone and it is on the point of failure. In contrast to this the Aeroplane Taxicab Company, the only local business concern at the airport early in 1929, was joined by three other local business firms before the end of that year.

The functions of these eighty-eight business firms are shown by Table 4. Sixty-three per cent of their business is with the North Kansas City District. Their trade with the farmer is surprisingly small. Four-fifths of their business with Clay

TABLE 4

Distribution of Trade of All North Kansas City Business Areas

Business with Per Cent

North Kansas City town 46

North Kansas City industries 17

Clay County suburban areas 25

Kansas City, Missouri 3

Highway users 9

Total 100

County is confined to the suburban commuter who goes through North Kansas City on his way to work in Kansas City. The farmer from southern Clay County takes his produce across the river to the Kansas City market and spends his money in that city. The three per cent of the trade assigned to Kansas City is probably not all of the business with that city. No doubt a large part of the trade designated as going to the highway users also should be given to Kansas City, but the North Kansas City merchants were unable to determine the homes of these transient customers. Most of them were evidently townspeople.

KINDS OF BUSINESS ESTABLISHMENTS

As a result of its varied trade, the Northtown business area contains many different kinds of business establishments. The firms in that area include every line of business commonly found in a small city in the Middle West. The business establishments in the other business areas are limited in kind as well as in number. For example, Midway has two filling stations, two automobile repair shops, one lunch room, one grocery store, and a workingman's hotel. The large percentage of firms in Midway which depend upon trade with automobile owners is due to the fact that Swift Avenue was the main north-south highway before Burlington Avenue was cut through in 1926. All of the seven firms on South Burlington Avenue are filling stations.

FORMS OF BUSINESS BUILDINGS

Most of the firms in the Northtown area are housed in buildings similar to the one shown in Figure 8. There are six of these buildings, all built and owned by the Development Company. Each is occupied by several business firms. Five of the buildings are made of brick, concrete, and wood. The sixth is constructed of brick, concrete, and steel.

It is the practice of the Development Company to delay the construction of a new building until several business firms are ready to sign leases. The Company then constructs a large building to suit their needs. For example, one building constructed in 1928 (Fig. 8) contains a motion picture theater, a large restaurant, one large and two small store rooms, one ground floor office, and, on the second floor, four more offices and a suite of club rooms for the North Kansas City Chamber of Commerce. All of these spaces except the second floor offices were leased before the building was erected. As is the case in many small towns, there is little demand for multiple story buildings. The cheapness of the ground space permits buildings to spread out rather than up. Consequently, certain parts of these buildings are only one story in height.

In Midway all but one of the business buildings are of the small one-story type. Several are built of wood. The remainder are wood and brick. The one large building in this area is the old Winner Block, now the Palmer House, a workingman's hotel.

South Burlington Avenue is characterized by filling stations of the

conventional type. There are several reasons for the concentration of so many filling stations in such a small area. The heavy traffic on the highway is the chief reason. Another reason is that prior to the autumn of 1929 there was no municipal tax on gasoline in North Kansas City. At that time the Kansas City municipal gasoline tax was two cents per gallon, and, as a result, these North Kansas City stations could offer the outgoing Kansas City motorist his first chance to "save the city tax." This advantage of the North Kansas City filling stations was reduced one-half in the fall of 1929 when a city gasoline tax of one cent per gallon went into effect.

The Central Industrial Section contains only two business houses, a telegraph office, which uses a small brick and concrete building built for it by the Development Company, and a filling station. The store at Harlem is a wooden structure similar to many general stores in small rural communities in Missouri.

Public Areas: Adjustments Local and Metropolitan Needs

Six per cent of the land in the North Kansas City District exclusive of land in streets is devoted to public use. However, with the exception of the State Highways, the areas occupied by the streets are legally parts of adjacent blocks of land, and as such have the status of private ways. This charter provision was included in order to prevent picketing in case of strikes.

SCHOOLS

Public schools occupy two blocks of land, one being occupied by the Harlem Grade School and the other by the North Kansas City High School and the Macelroy-Dagg Grade School, located near the center of Northtown.

These schools accommodate the grade school pupils in North Kansas City and all high school pupils in School District Number 74, the boundaries of which include all of the North Kansas City District and an additional area extending some three miles north.

The Harlem Grade School serves Harlem, Midway, the County Road, and the Burlington Yard; the Macelroy-Dagg Grade School serves the Northtown residence area; and the High School serves the entire school district. The total enrollment in these schools for the school year 1930-1931 was 1,450 students.

Each of these schools is located near one of the two centers of school population. The Harlem Grade School is in the Harlem residence area rather than in Midway because a school was in existence in Harlem long before Midway was settled. The tracts used by the High School and by the Macelroy-Dagg Grade School were reserved for these purposes by the Development Company in its original plan of Northtown.

The Harlem School is a small three-room wooden structure, while the Macelroy-Dagg School and the High School are large modern buildings constructed of brick, concrete, and steel, and are as nearly fireproof as possible.

Figure 9.—The relation of the Municipal Airport to the Kansas City business area is apparent. The Hannibal Bridge is the connecting link. (Courtesy of the North Kansas City Chamber of Commerce.)

LOCAL WATER WORKS AND CAR BARN

The street car barns and the pumping plant of the North Kansas City water works system are located on the west side of Burlington Avenue opposite its junction with Armour Road. This site is near the Northtown business and residential areas and is also close to the Central Industrial Section. Such a location is important for the pumping plant because it eliminates unnecessary extension of water mains. A two million gallon water reservoir is located on top of the bluff north of Northtown. The water in this

reservoir maintains the pressure in the water mains. The head is approximately 130 feet. The street car barns might have been located at almost any other point along the car line, but the Development Company chose to place them near the water pumping plant. Both the car barns and water works are small, but substantially built, structures of brick, concrete, and steel.

LOCAL TOURIST PARK

A small tourist park of about five acres is located south of the North-town business area. This block of land was set aside as a park because (1) it contained a grove of large trees, and (2) it was near the center of Northtown. The only buildings consist of several small sheds and rest houses and a few open air stone ovens. The park is used chiefly by tourists, gypsies, and a band of semi-domesticated red squirrels.

KANSAS CITY MUNICIPAL WATER WORKS

The Kansas City Municipal Water Plant is located at the northwest corner of the North Kansas City District. This plant was started in 1924, finished in 1928, and after numerous tests and delays, began full-time operation in March, 1930.

The North Kansas City site was chosen after an exhaustive study had been made of many possible sites. The advantages of the North Kansas City site are as follows: (1) it is in the State of Missouri and thus free from possible state taxation, (2) the river channel is deep near shore and can be held permanently in this channel at small cost, (3) high ground above flood level is available for all reservoirs and buildings, (4) there is plenty of room for future expansion of the plant, and (5) the site is near Kansas City. The brick, concrete, and steel buildings, reservoirs, and tunnels which make up the plant are built to give continuous and uninterrupted service for many decades.

KANSAS CITY MUNICIPAL AIRPORT

The Kansas City Municipal Airport occupied all but six acres of the land between the west side of the Burlington Yards and the Missouri River. Kansas City bought the land in 1928, and was given title to 687 acres of land. However, this area is not included within the levee district, and, as a result, the river has carried away approximately 104 acres of land. Consequently, in 1929 the total amount of dry land in the area was approximately 583 acres. The original size of the land area is to be restored by the National Government. In pursuance of this objective a series of retards were built along the west side of the area during the summer of 1930. The river is rapidly filling in sand behind these retards.

In April, 1929, only 106 acres, or less than 20 per cent of the total Mr. T. D. Samuels, Chief Engineer, Kansas City, Missouri, Water Department, personal interview. area of dry land then existing, was used for aviation purposes. Two hundred thirteen acres were in crops, and the remaining 264 acres were idle. The land devoted to aviation was the only part used as public land. As a result, this is the only part shown as public land on the Land Use Map of 1929 (Fig. 3).

The Kansas City authorities chose this block of land in the North Kansas City District for a municipal airport after an investigation of seven possible sites had shown this one to be the best. The chief advantage of the North Kansas City site is its location near the heart of the main business section of Kansas City (Fig. 9). In almost all other respects the block of land measures up to the basic requirements for airports as laid down by the Aeronautics Branch of the United States Department of Commerce. In addition, the price of the land per acre was not considered to be high. The cost of the airport area was relatively low because it was not protected by a levee, and, as a result, the land

was idle or in crops. The large size, flatness, good drainage, and low cost of the area made it a possible choice, but its location within a five- minute drive of the main business section of Kansas City made it the final choice of the municipal authorities.

Buildings on the airport are all new and of the latest design. The hangars are built of steel and concrete in order to reduce the fire hazard. They measure 80 by 100 feet. Other buildings on the port are made of brick, concrete, and steel. The passenger station is a good example of this type of architecture. In addition to the buildings constructed on the port there is a 2,000-foot concrete runway connecting the main group of buildings. This gives a firm footing to both aeroplanes and passengers and prevents dust and water from being blown on the bystanders when the aeroplane engines are speeded up. The three landing runways have been covered by a six- inch layer of cinders which forms an all weather surface.

In the fall of 1928, one local air transport concern and three regional transport lines were using the port. In the fall of 1931 ten regional transport lines, one aeroplane factory, one aeroplane supply house, and the national headquarters and shops of the Transcontinental Western Air Express Company were located within the area. Undoubtedly, the Kansas City Municipal Airport is developing into a separate industrial area with interests other than those of the older industrial sections of the North Kansas City District.

Agricultural Areas: Reserves for Urban Uses

Although the land of the North Kansas City District primarily is intended for urban uses, approximately 44 per cent of the district is used for agricultural purposes (Fig. 3 and Table 1). Crops occupy the agricultural land in the following proportions: corn 41 per cent, alfalfa 32 per cent, and wheat 27 per cent.

More land is devoted to agriculture than to any other human use because the North Kansas City District was formerly an agricultural district and it has not yet attracted enough urban forms to occupy all of the available land. The district as an urban development is young. In another twenty years or so most of the land should be occupied by buildings, streets, railways, and other urban forms.

All of the agricultural land is in cultivated crops because (1) the soil is fertile enough to stand repeated cropping without greatly reducing the yield from year to year, and (2) the owners of the land object to the presence of any farm animals within the area.

Figure 10. This cornfield lies along the foot of the bluff hidden from the main road by the houses of North town, seen on the right, and well away from the mill buildings and greenhouses which appear in the background. Compare with Figure 4.

If the main objective of the North Kansas City farmers is to grow money crops, it would appear that all or most of the agricultural land should be given over to corn, the most profitable crop. Yet, in 1929, 32 per cent of the land was in alfalfa and almost a third, 27 per cent, was in wheat. Also, the corn was not permitted on some of the best land, i.e., that in the Central Industrial Section. Both of these anomalies are explained by the fact that the land in the North Kansas City District is owned and exploited by people who are interested in the sale or leasing of city real estate rather than the production of crops. Consequently, only alfalfa and wheat some other low-growing crop may be grown on or near the land shown to real estate prospects. Corn is banished to the outer parts of the area where it is relatively inconspicuous on the landscape (Figs. 4 and 10).

The disadvantages of corn fields and the advantages of alfalfa fields to the real

estate salesman are best explained in words of one of the Development Company's officials. He said, "One cannot ask a man city real estate prices for a corn field. He tends to think of the plot as a farm rather than as a factory site or home site. On the other hand, a nice green field of alfalfa or young wheat creates a better impression than bare ground or growing weeds."

Idle Areas: Marginal and Transitional

Two small blocks of idle land are located within the Northtown business section. They are not large enough to be farmed and they have not yet been occupied by business buildings.

Several small irregular blocks of land in the neighborhood of the Kansas City Municipal Water Plant are unused because (1) they are too irregular in shape and too far from the developed areas to attract urban forms, and (2) their owners have not seen fit to plant crops on such small irregular plots.

A large block of land between the Wabash Yards and the river has been idle for several years because it is held as a factory site by a company which keeps postponing its building program until economic conditions are more suitable.

Each of the remaining areas of idle land is handicapped by some physical defect. The blocks of land on the upland are too steep and too deeply dissected to be used for urban forms or even farmed profitably. The land outside the levee on the east has been formed by the river since the levee was built and is unused because no title can be established without prolonged litigation. The idle land around the municipal airport formerly was occupied by trees and brush. In the spring of 1929 the trees were removed from all but the southern part of the tract because they were an obstruction to the airplanes using the port. The stumps were cut very low but nevertheless they prevent the use of the land for cultivated crops. The small block of land east of the north approach to the North Kansas City Bridge has remained idle because it is made land too new and raw to be farmed and it is not occupied by urban forms because it is reserved by the Company for future railroad rights of way which will converge on the lower deck of the North Kansas City Bridge.

Conclusions

The North Kansas City District has a cultural landscape of marked individuality among industrial districts due to the influence of a peculiar combination of physical and cultural factors. Although agricultural forms occupy more land within the district than all types of urban forms combined, the latter are more significant of future developments because they are expanding steadily at the expense of the former. The dominant urban forms are the industries because with a few exceptions all of the other forms merely support and supplement them.

It is probable that the rapid growth of Kansas City, Missouri, eventually would have brought about industrial development in the North Kansas City District, but such development has been stimulated greatly by the North Kansas City Development Company. The plans of this company determine the types of urban forms (industrial, residential, business, and municipal) which are admitted to the district and also direct the grouping of these cultural forms within the present landscape structure. The plans of the Company are in turn adjusted to (1) the outstanding physical features, especially the river and the flat bottom land, and (2) certain preexisting cultural features such as roads, railways, bridges, and small villages.

The chief factors which attract industries to the North Kansas City District are the

presence of large blocks of cheap level land, excellent switching facilities, and low taxes. Minor attractions are local customers, cheap water, and the absence of political technicalities.

The necessity of insuring a desirable labor supply which would attract and hold industries led the Company to develop a new village with house types and prices suited to the workingman's needs. The Northtown business section was created as a necessary adjunct to the new residence area, and, as a result, has been carefully restricted so as to conform closely to the actual needs of the community.

Although the North Kansas City District is politically independent of and physically separated from the remainder of Greater Kansas City, certain economic, social, and municipal connections exist between the two areas and will probably continue. Eventually, factories, warehouses, railways, stores, houses, and streets occupy almost all of the land within the North Kansas City District structural areas will retain their present outlines with minor variations; further changes in the cultural landscape will be slow in developing due to the increasing cost of the land; and the district as a whole will be a stable, prosperous, Midwestern, industrial community.