

Fur Traders

Missouri became part of the United States with the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, Lewis and Clark would spend about three days here at the river edge in 1804, became an organized incorporated territory in 1812, became a State in 1821, and real estate lots began to be sold around McCoy Park and in the newly County of Jackson within an established community called Independence in 1827. One part of our history that we seem to forget is that of the early explorers, fur trading business, and missionary work was conducted in this area sometimes called Big Spring for the First Nation people. I'm investigating early settlements and possible trading posts in the area with a particular interest in McCoy Park, the Owens-McCoy homestead, and the large spring that Heritage House sits on that likely attracted human activity here for a millennium.

References suggested that many families living around Ft. Osage (1808) and Independence area provided Ft. Osage with food and trade goods. Others may have served as First Nation interpreters needed to help with communication with treaties and trade agreements with many different Indian Councils. They also would have assisted with the early missionary work. The French and Mexican traders with Catholic affiliations worked closely with the First Nation people and were welcomed in this area as they provided needed trade items and for their restraint for not owning or taking of land for settlement. Later many of these French and Mexican fur traders ended up with families of half-breed children with Native American blood and were given property by treaties setting up homesteads close to the Catholic missionaries like St. Mary's Church on Liberty Street, one block east of McCoy Park (you can still travel the original road (alley today) that leads up to St. Mary's front door off of Spring St). This area would first be settled by eight men and their families through legal ownership of possible long and narrow lots typical of the French platting of land, separated by dry stacked stone walls. Callie Montardeau, a French voyageur and trader, was part of Chouteau's warehouse near Randolph Bluff (Randolph Bluff was on the north bank of the Missouri River somewhere between Ameristar and Harrah's Casinos). In 1818, Montardeau would buy a ferry license from the Clay County Missouri river side and was making money ferrying over to the south side of the river before the land could legally be purchased. Montardeau would be one of the first to present payment for land and lots in McCoy Park either as a land speculator or to protect his half breed children's given property rights. Along with James Pool, a US government appointed blacksmith and wagon maker to several Native American tribes and owner of the Mormon Temple lot (see Delaware Town or Swan Trading Post websites); James Savage who had a strong friendship with the First Nation people; Gabriel Fitzhugh who also worked with the First Nation people and became a successful Santa Fe Trail freighter with family relationship Solomon Fitzhugh; Joseph Philliburt (Philibert) also a government appointed blacksmith and gunsmith to First Nation people and Santa Fe trader (see Delaware Town or Swan Trading Post websites); William Gillis (see Delaware Town or Swan Trading Post websites) who was an original incorporator of the Town of Kansas (Kansas City); Leonard Dodge who would work with the Osage Tribe as Presbyterian missionary and open a school here in Independence (see Harmony Mission Missouri websites). Those doing business with Mexico during the early Santa Fe Trails era were likely of Catholic faith. In 1833, all these men would sell their lots in and around McCoy Park to Samuel Owens, a prominent Santa Fe Trail merchant and one of the earliest Jackson County Clerks, and original incorporator of Town of

Kansas(Kansas City). Owens was also one of the more prominent figures in the resistance to Mormon occupation of this part of Jackson County; some may speculate that this multiple purchase of prime lots around the big spring was to block acquisition by Joseph Smith followers. 1833 deed records indicate that some type of development was already on Owens-McCoy homestead ground site before purchase by Samuel Owens. Possibly Samuel Owens with Aull brothers from Lexington took over one of the trading posts and rest stop area before Ft. Osage, intercepting 1st Native travelers, Mountain men, freighters with trade goods and fur pelts. This trading post would have been very profitable and helped to establish Owens & Aull to purchase property on the Square and supply their stores in Lexington and Liberty, Missouri for their Merchant business and Santa Fe Trails ventures. In a letter dated 1838 to his future wife William McCoy would make references of the Cambellite (First Christian Church), Methodist, Baptist, Cumberland Presbyterians, and Catholic. Please visit the [McCoy Park Historical Trails](#) Interpretative Panels in McCoy Park which provides Trails information and visit the National Trails Museum to hear more about other famous 1st Nation People, Fur Traders, Mountain Men, and Western Expansion.