

**KANSAS CITY TIMES, TUESDAY, AUGUST 31, 1954.**

## KANSAS CITY IS TODAY REALIZING DREAMS OF WILLARD E. WINNER, EARLY DAY PROMOTER

Stone Piers Still Standing Beside Missouri River Mark Site of Construction Start Near Where the A.-S.-B. Now Crosses—His Schemes Were Numerous, and Many Were Incorporated Into City's Growth—Park and Road Named for Him.

By JOHN J. DOOLAN.

**M**ULTIPLE river crossings to the north are fulfilling the dream of an early Kansas City builder whose plan collapsed after the real estate crash of the '80s. Two piers of beautiful stone standing near the north end of the A.-S.-B. bridge, memorial to a bridge undertaking which stirred the imagination of the late Willard E. Winner.

Winner's promotion schemes were numerous and most of them made history in the growth of the city. But his most spectacular project was the span across the Missouri.

At that time there were no facilities for pedestrian or vehicle crossings, except by ferry boat. Octave Chamise's Hannibal bridge, opened on July 3, 1869, was a railroad bridge. The vehicle roadway came when that bridge was rebuilt in 1917.

In April, 1887, Winner announced that he had chartered a company to build a bridge and had secured nine blocks of ground between Holmes and Oak, First and 27th streets. The ground, he said, was for a great union depot for lines entering the city over his new bridge.

Two years later, toward the end of the boom, he let the bridge contract to a St. Louis firm for \$400,000. The entire project called for expenditure of some \$1,300,000. The recently opened Flaxen bridge cost more than 18 million dollars.

Winner specified that his bridge was not to be a draw bridge, and was to be slightly more than a mile in length with nine piers and an approach "through the alley" between Locust and Cherry streets. The structure was completed, and that is all. In 1890, mechanics lent to the amount of \$40,000 were filed against the construction company. For ten years following there were numerous proposals for completing the structure. Most of them went through the discussion stage and then were abandoned.

**Old Piers Used.**

Nine cut stone piers remained as a monument well into the first decade of the present century. In 1908 the piers and other structure were purchased by the Armour-Swift-Burlington interests. Work was started the following year on the present span. Some of the original stone piers were utilized, but cut down several feet, as it was decided to substitute a drawbridge. The valuable stone was sold and used for foundations in buildings being constructed at that time. Some of the stone was used for the foundation of a building on the southeast corner of Eighteenth and Holmes street, now occupied by a bakery. The huge blocks, much larger than are generally used for such

More recently the Missouri highway department took over the bridge and reimbursed the city and Clay County.

Winner reorganized his company prior to World War I. His accomplishments were few. Some of his proposals were an electric line between Kansas City and St. Joseph, an electric line from the east end of Third street to Lewis, and electric



**Piers constructed in the late 1880s for a proposed A.-S.-B. bridge . . . They are west of the bridge and east of the Harlem Road connecting the Municipal Airport and North Kansas City.**

lines from Kansas City to Independence and Sugar Creek, and the Nameless One.

He is honored with a park and road named for him on the East side and it was there that he tasted success early in life. In 1886 his syndicate bought 2,400 acres of land between Kansas City and Independence for \$888,000 and turned it over in lots later for a total of \$2,655,000.

He is credited with setting aside 400 acres of the land for park purposes. This later became Fairmount park. It was Winner who convinced a Reading, Pa., industrialist, J. H. Sternberg, that his East side acreage included an ideal site for an iron foundry, and Sternberg, in 1887, built a plant on twelve acres near Sheffield. Called the Kansas City Bolt & Nut company, it was the forerunner of the Sheffield Steel company.

The Municipal Auditorium is an underground parking lot might be called a Winner dream. In March, 1928, Theodore Gary, Hughes Bryant and other citizens were giving serious attention to a Winner plan, then considered fantastic. It proposed tunneling under the downtown district in such a way that approximately 50 per cent of that area would be subterranean streets and open spaces for parking cars, with passenger elevators from office buildings. Winner explained that a large part of the cost could be defrayed by sale of the rock removed from the excavation. Engineers declared the plan feasible. It was taken before the late Mayor H. F. McElroy, city manager, but he was afraid to back it.

The promoter, whose home was at 5318 Virginia avenue, died at the age of 80 years on September 2, 1928, while on a visit to Fort Worth.

imagined in the act of slipping another's back.

The 47-year-old Watkins, Later Day Saint and Columbia law school graduate, came to the Senate in 1947. He has been a Republican "regular" except

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