

“In the northeast part of ole Wyandotte, stands a building that’s tall and wide. It received its name from a famous man, this building is Sumner High.” The opening lyrics to the Sumner High School song were written by Carrye Whittenhill. Sumner High School was established specifically for African Americans, exclusively in Kansas City Kansas. Because segregated high schools were forbidden by state law, special legislation was passed in 1904 to create Sumner High School. Though borne from a tragic event, the successes and contributions that are directly attributed to Sumner High School are immeasurable.

Immediately, the brightest and best teachers were recruited to serve the black students in Kansas City, Kansas. Sumner High School became a learning institution, producing nine Phi Beta Kappas over its storied existence. In the fields of music and science, the Sumner Spartans were second to none. Sumner was the first high school band in the state of Kansas to go out of state to participate in a bowl game. The jazz band went to the music festival in Paris France and garnered rave reviews under the leadership of Mr. Leon Brady. Dr. William P. Foster, a Sumner graduate, wrote the book on marching bands half time pageantry. He established the Florida A&M Marching One Hundred. In science fairs, chess tournaments, and other areas of academia, Sumner consistently placed first or second. During its history, Sumner High School was also a junior college.

In athletics, Sumner High School excelled. The first African American to sign a professional contract with the NBA was a graduate of Sumner High School. Several graduates have gone on to play professional sports in basketball and football. One of the greatest basketball coaches in history, John McLendon was a Sumner graduate and studied the game at the University of Kansas under the tutelage of the creator of the game, Dr. James Naismith. Coach McLendon was the First African American to coach at a predominately white university. He was also the first African American to be a head coach in any professional sport.

The original Sumner High School was closed after the 1978 graduating class to comply with federal mandates to integrate the school. Sumner High School reopened as Sumner Academy of Arts and Science. Currently, it is called Sumner Academy.

The Sumner High School Alumni Association felt the need to collect and preserve artifacts and memorabilia from this historical period in Kansas City Kansas. Some collectables were donated to Kansas University, but many are housed at the Sumner Academy site in the Chester Owens Sumner Alumni Room. The museum, located at the corner of 8th and Oakland, is teeming with historical articles and artifacts.

For more information on this attraction or others in Kansas City, Kansas call 913-321-5800 or go to visitkansascityks.com.

Thank-you and enjoy the tour.