

As early as 1865, the Butterfield Overland Dispatch Coach was traveling from Atchison, Kansas to Denver, Colorado. The dispatch built “swing-stations” about every nine to eleven miles so travelers could “swing in,” take care of necessities (a drink of water, refresh their meager staples, change their tired horses for fresh ones) and “swing out” on the trail again. This crude rest stop and relay point was named Wilson Creek Station. Three years later, the Kansas Pacific Railway built Wilson Station. In June of 1871, the Post Office Department designated the site Attica. That label lasted only six months, until the National Land Company surveyed the area, re-naming it Bosland (from the Latin word bos meaning “cattle or oxen”) in the hopes of attracting the cattle trade. However, the settlement never became a center of the cattle trade, and in June of 1873, the United States Post Office officially changed the name of the town to Wilson.

A second wave of settlers began in 1874 as Bohemian emigrants traveling by train from Iowa, Nebraska, Chicago, and New York came to Wilson to work on the railroad. Francis Swehla speaks of arriving in “Bosland” in May of 1874 and being the first of his nationality to homestead land here. Swehla wrote letters in the Czech language newspapers encouraging other Bohemians to come to the area.

These Bohemians were mostly craftsmen in the old country, but cheap, available land caused many to adopt farming as their vocation. Gradually they drifted to town to start their own businesses.

Probably the Bohemian’s greatest contribution to the culture and social life of Wilson was the erection of the Wilson Opera House in 1901. Two stories high with a seating capacity of 500, it frequently hosted stage shows, public dances and motion pictures which drew capacity crowds.

Wilson has been known as “The Czech Capital of Kansas” since 1974.

Czech Fest

The Wilson Czech Festival is an after-harvest celebration that has been a local tradition for over 50 years. The party begins on the **last weekend in July**. Typical events include:

- ◆ Czech Queen Pageant
- ◆ Largest small town parade in Kansas
- ◆ Beer garden with live music
- ◆ Carnival
- ◆ Ice Cream Social
- ◆ Volleyball, Softball, and Horseshoe Tournaments
- ◆ Tractor Pulls
- ◆ Czech Dancers
- ◆ Old Time Band Playing Polka/Czech Music
- ◆ Arts & Crafts
- ◆ Food
- ◆ Many Vendors

Wilson PRIDE was established in 2007 by volunteers committed to improving the quality of life in Wilson. Using a hands-on approach to community self-improvement, volunteers work on projects designed to achieve the missions, goals, and objectives of the organization.

For more information

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Wilson Kansas

A WALK TO REMEMBER

Parks:

Lion's Club Park

24th Street & Avenue D

Construction of this park began in 1942, and improvements continued until 1959. The flag pole with the stepped limestone base on the east side of the park serves as a memorial to the city's Czech founders.

Jellison Park

Avenue F North

Named after early influential businessmen, this park on the edge of town includes a baseball field, horseshoe pits, playground equipment, picnic tables and shelters, and restrooms.

Legion Park

Avenue E & 26th Street

The World War I Monument was originally built in front of Wilson Grade School and later moved to the current location in the Union Pacific Railroad Park (Legion Park).

Frisbee Golf Park

27th Street

The Wilson Disc Golf Course was originally built in 2010 by the Wilson Economic Development Corp. to enhance the recreational activities available in Wilson. The course is designed for all ages and skill levels.

PRIDE Park

Avenues F & G and 25th Street

Construction of PRIDE Park began in 2007 as a citizen-driven initiative lead by Wilson PRIDE, Inc. Funding came from the Kansas Dept. of Commerce, the Salina Regional Health Foundation, the CASE Foundation, the City of Wilson and local donors with labor provided by local volunteers.

Off The Beaten Path



Places of Interest:

Lang Memorial Library

2405 Avenue F

Constructed with funds given by Mrs. J.T. "Lizzie" Lang as a memorial to her businessman husband John, Wilson's first mayor, the library has operated since 1924.

Czech Cottages

518-520 24th Street

The first straw bale-insulated housing development in the US to be funded in part by the Federal Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program, the six units have provided affordable housing for senior citizens since 2003.

Wilson Telephone Company

408 25th Street

Built in 1950, this building was designed by local advertising entrepreneur and artist George Eschbaugh.

Wilson Train Depot

2946 205th Road

Completed in 1911, this depot was built of native sandstone. When passenger service was discontinued in the 1970's, the station was left to deteriorate and was scheduled to be razed in 1984. Local advertising agent, George Eschbaugh had the sandstone blocks moved to his property, and rebuilt the depot with many improvements.

Churches:

First Baptist Church

2710 Avenue A

In 1900, Rev. J. Keir served the Czech-speaking community around Wilson, founding the Czech Baptist Church in 1910. The current edifice was built in 1978.

St. Wenceslaus Catholic Church

2811 Avenue D

The first Catholics in Wilson were the English and Irish railroad builders in 1867. The original church was built in 1882. A second, larger church, built in 1902, burned in 1910 and the present structure was built on its foundation and walls in 1911.

First Presbyterian Church

319 24th Street

The town's oldest congregation met in 1875 before Wilson was founded. Catholics and Methodists shared the 1880s limestone structure before organizing or the rebuilding of their own churches. The original church was replaced with the current structure & distinctive stained glass windows in 1910.

United Methodist Church

2404 Avenue F

The oldest church structure extant in Wilson, this 1883 building was expanded with a bell tower and Gothic arched windows in 1893. An Education Building was added to the west in the '50s.

Immanuel Lutheran Church

2819 Avenue F

This church formed in 1912. Construction of the building was completed in 1954. The church features an altar of Botaccini marble and several stained glass windows.

Wilson PRIDE Walking Tour

1. White Eagle Station

506 27th Street

Originally constructed as a gas station in 1926, it served as a grain elevator office, a tire repair shop, and (currently) the Wilson Chamber of Commerce.

2. Soukup Grain Elevator

2620 Avenue E

This three-building complex dates from 1900 and includes the office, the grain elevator, and the distinctive “Sunflower Coal” storage building.

3. Klema IGA Building

2546 Avenue E

These four connected buildings (now occupied by Wilson Family Foods) formerly housed a grocery, clothing store, beauty shop, jeweler, laundromat, and creamery.

4. Valetor Cleaners Building

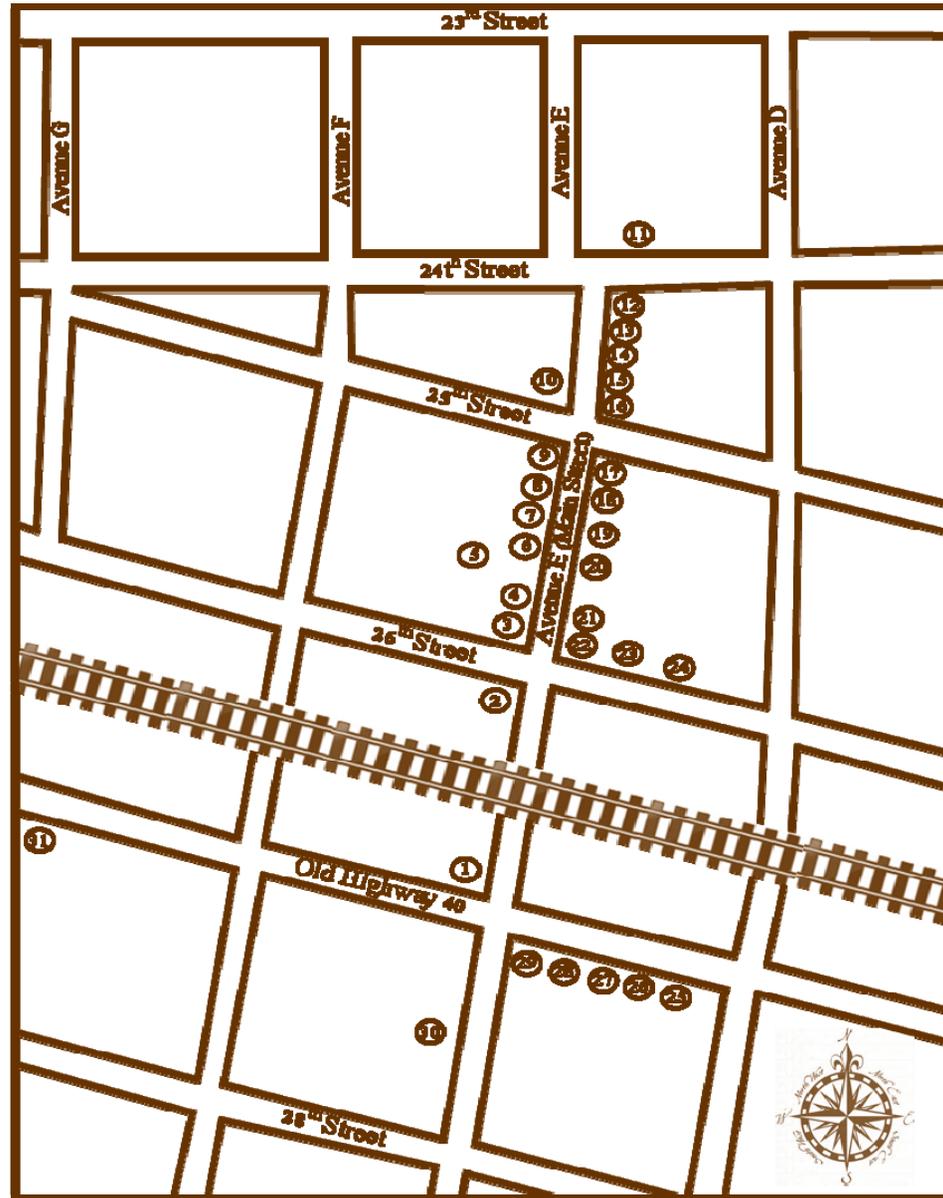
2530 Avenue E

Initially a two-story frame structure built in 1875, owners built the present block construction inside the old wood frame to convert it for dry cleaning.

5. Water Tower/Jail

Behind 2528 Avenue E

Built in 1911, the tower (with a pump in the top) provided for Wilson’s population of over 1,000. The local constable housed prisoners in the bottom



6. Tobias Building

2520-2528 Avenue E

This stone building with a brick façade, built in 1917, first served as post office and later housed a dentist’s office, apartments and a meeting room upstairs

7. IOOF Latta Drug Building

2512-2514 Avenue E

Built in the spring of 1884 at a cost of only \$5,000, this is one of the oldest commercial structures in Wilson, and was known as Uncle Jim’s Drug Store around 1917.

8. Bank of Wilson Building

2508 Avenue E

Constructed of native stone in 1882, this is among the earliest of Wilson’s permanent structures. Wilson merchants “were shocked” when its doors closed and payments were suspended after only six years.

9. Shermerhorn Building

2504 Avenue E

With an ornamented facade and the incorporation of cast iron and stamped metal in its architecture, this building stands out. Built in 1893, E.D. Schermerhorn ran a drygoods store here from 1879-1932, when it burned. It later housed several hardware stores and an antique mall

10. Olds Motor Company

2418 Avenue E

Built in 1885, the older structure gained an addition in 1921 for a new car showroom. The property housed the Olds Motor Company for over 80 years.

11. Wilson Grade School

420 24th Street

This school, built in 1914, featured an auditorium, a library, and a gym. After serving the community for nearly 80 years, it was closed in 1998 due to consolidation.

12. Robinson Residence &

Garage

411 24th Street

The north structure of this two property unit built around 1895 housed Wilson's first newspaper, the *Wilson Echo*. The south building was a playhouse, hosting travelling theatricals.

13. City Hall (Current)

2407 Avenue E

Built of native stone in 1903, it has served as Wilson's City Hall since construction.

14. Somer Hardware Building

2411 Avenue E

This native stone structure, built around 1890, is the only building downtown with its original corrugated tin awning. Initially a hardware store, it's also been used as a millinery, a fitness center, and a junk shop.

15. Mortuary Building

2415 Avenue E

Built in 1885 as a drug store, a 1930 *Wilson Echo* ad promoted it for "Furniture and Funeral Service." It continued as a mortuary until 1989.

16. Nesmith/Himes Building

2419 Avenue E

Built in 1880, it always housed two businesses: a hardware store (south) and a grocery (north).

17. Levitt Department Store

417 25th Street

Built in 1886 to house City Hall upstairs and Levitt's downstairs, this community hall/opera house hosted events like "Blind Boone" (1887) singing with the Troubadours and stomp dancing.

18. Wilson State Bank Building

2505 Avenue E

Reported to be the oldest bank in Ellsworth County, the Wilson State Bank building was constructed in 1886 at a cost of \$8,300, and served as the bank's home for nearly 100 years.

19. Horejsi Building

2509 Avenue E

This property was sold to Joseph Horesji in 1923. The Honomichaels brothers had a roofing company here.

20. Novak Building

2515 Avenue E

Built c. 1929 and home to Wamhoff Motor Co. by 1931, this edifice housed everything from car dealerships to meat markets. One of Wilson's most famous Czech heritage supporters, LaVange Shiroky, opened La-Shiro's Boutique in the '70s, and ran it for decades.

21. Sula Meat Market

2519 Avenue E

Constructed of native stone around 1890, then bricked over in the '40s, it probably first housed a saddle/leather shop. Anton Sula, Sr. purchased it in 1923 for a meat market.

22. A.F. Cross Building

2523 Avenue E

Built in the mid-1920s to house the phone company, offices and a men's club in the basement, it provided Dr. Dlabal (local physician and EW Co. coroner) an office.

23. Peppy Joe Vocasek Barber Shop

418 26th Street

After immigrating from Bohemia in 1910, Joseph, Sr. built this barbershop/home in 1928, passing the business to son "Peppy Joe" in 1968. The Vocasek name is thought to be the longest in continuing barber service in Kansas, from 1910-2002.

24. Midland Railroad Hotel

414 26th Street

Opening as the Hotel Power in 1899, this well-known stop on the UPRR was recognized from KC to Denver for hospitality and good food. After gutting by fire, it was rebuilt by a local rancher with community support, and renamed the Midland. Merchants rode in on the RR and displayed/sold wares in the Sample Room downstairs. The hotel served as a set for the 1970s movie *Paper Moon*.

25. Wilson Czech Opera House

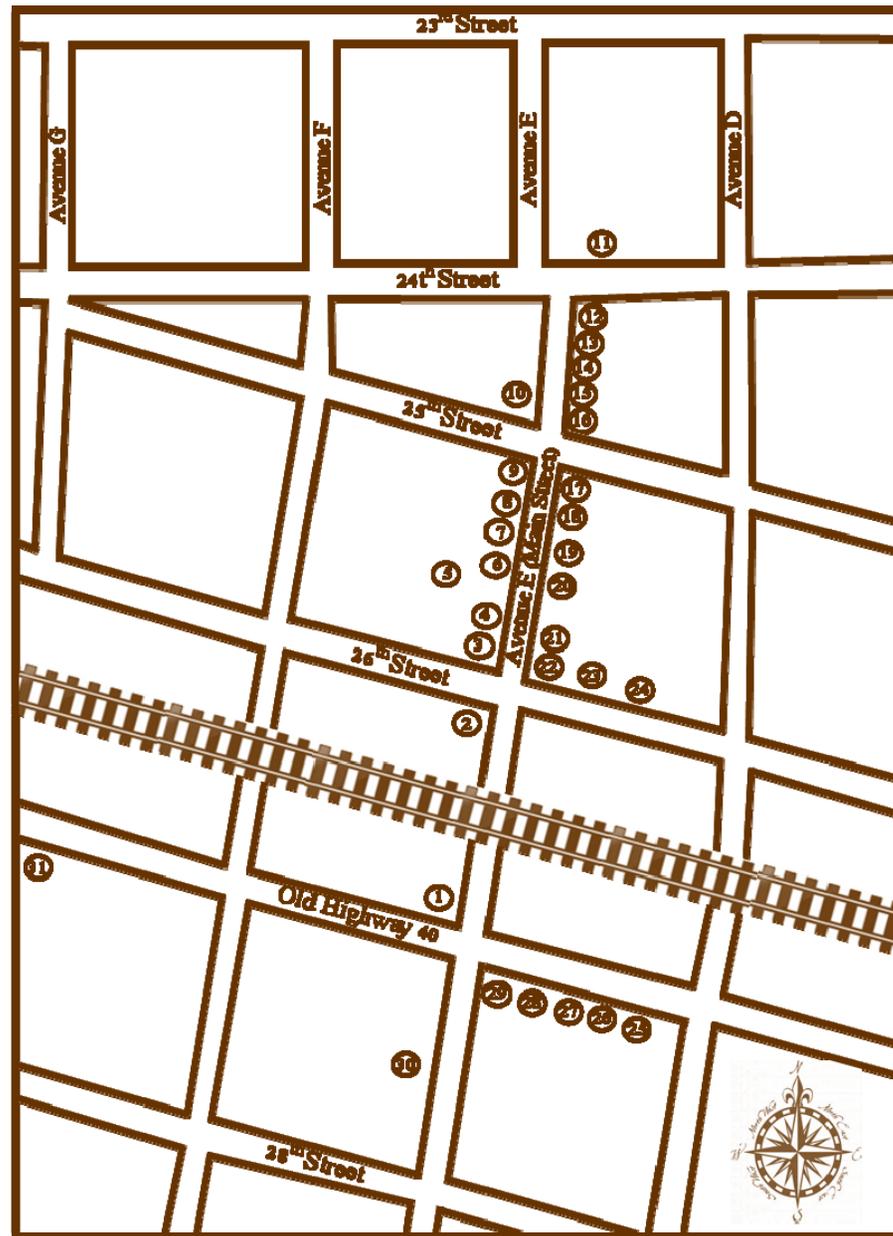
415 27th Street

Built in 1901 by Frank Kvasnicka and 14 others, using stone from the Hay Canyon Rd. (n. of Wilson), the building was designed as a home to several Czech Lodges. A basement gym provided a Czech gymnastics practice area; a cultural hall upstairs included a ballroom, stage, and (in 1912) a movie machine. The building burned in 2009, but still serves as the symbol of Czech heritage in Wilson.

26. American Legion

419 27th Street

This turn-of-the-century building constructed by J.L. Tampier housed the Daylight Dry Goods Co., opened by J.W. Somer in 1906.



27. Tampier Building

423 27th Street

Joseph Tampier built this two-story native stone structure in 1887 to sell groceries and queensware.

28. F. Zeman Building

427 27th Street

Frank Zeman built the Southside Pharmacy in 1923. It stayed in the family for 80 years, and boasted a soda fountain added in the '30s.

29. Weber Peirano Building & Cobb Ford Garage

2711-15 Main Street

Built in 1904 as a hardware/implement dealership, the storeroom for its freight elevator/lift served as a temporary office for the newly formed Farmers' State Bank (now defunct). The Cobb Ford Agency garage was added in 1930.

30. Smith Plow Company

2720 Avenue E

This oldest limestone building in Wilson boasts a cornerstone reading "1871 Bosland," one of Wilson's earlier names.

31. Das Borell Haus & Water Tower

615 27th Street

Early settlers built foot-thick limestone walls with carved woodwork in 1886. The tower (late '20s) provided water for the 16-room home.