Official Programme

Priests of Pallas Festival

Sept 18th & 21st

Kansas City, Mo.
HERE COMES ATHENA! A REPRESENTATION OF KANSAS CITY
IN THE PRIESTS OF PALLAS PARADE

AN EXHIBIT IN
History

Presented to the Faculty of the University of Missouri-Kansas City in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts

by
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ABSTRACT

This exhibition examines the historical significance of the Priests of Pallas Parade and Ball, a tableaux style parade and carnival event that took place in Kansas City, Missouri, predominantly from 1887 to 1911. Organized by the town’s wealthy business leaders, the celebration was a means by which they attracted tourism and increased profit that, in turn, helped the city grow. Additionally, the event was an important vehicle used to visually and publicly define and reinforce the social hierarchy existing in Kansas City at the turn of the twentieth century.

Historians have studied nineteenth century public street parades as a whole, particularly focusing on their purpose in society and how they were utilized, but little scholarly attention has been given to Kansas City and even less attention, if any, has been given to the Priests of Pallas. Examining newspaper sources, ephemera, photographic and other visual media maintained by area manuscript collections and libraries, the celebration has been thoroughly explored and contextualized in Kansas City’s history and the larger American narrative in this exhibit.
Beginning with an overview of the history of Kansas City, Missouri, from its incorporation in 1850 to the 1880’s, this exhibit moves forward to discuss the environment in which the Priests of Pallas Parade began and the motivations of its organizers, and presents details regarding the first parade, occurring in 1887. Leading into a discussion of the class construction of Kansas City as evidenced by the parade, visitors progress to the gendered and racial analysis of the event and the manner in which it reflected national trends of the time period. The exhibit provides viewers an understanding of the role the celebration played in the formation of Kansas City’s identity at the turn of the twentieth century and concludes with details regarding the decline and eventual discontinuation of the Priests of Pallas Parade.
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To My Dad
Kansas City’s Union Depot was filled with crowds of strangers on the morning of October 14, 1887, as an estimated 40,000 people boarded trains to return home from the previous day’s festivities. Many had come to the city from towns throughout Missouri and Kansas to attend the Agricultural Exposition at the recently built Crystal Palace, and nearly all hoped to catch a glimpse of President Grover Cleveland and his wife who were in town as part of their cross-country political tour. Adding even more to the day’s excitement was a new parade known as The Priests of Pallas. Visitors knew little about the event other than it was designed to be “mythical, historical and fanciful.”

It was clear that this event was going to be impressive. Storefront displays were cleaned up and windows and doors were repaired. Even the city’s wooden sidewalks and dirt streets were improved. Newspapers urged citizens to appear as “gay and happy as they can” and that “fellows who sit on stools of repentance, as well as those who dwell in caves of gloom are not expected to come out.”

Proud of its new telephone service, indoor electric lights and cable railway system, Kansas Citians desperately wanted to prove their worth to the Midwestern region. Excitement in the town peaked on the evening of the Priests of Pallas parade as visitors found themselves pressed tightly against each other along the parade route, straining on their toes to catch a view of the procession. Pulled along by horse drawn mule carts, the twenty spectacular tableaux scenes depicted nature settings, historical leaders, deities and a variety of mythical creatures. Visitors watched in awe as the pageant unfolded before their eyes. Each float surpassed the previous in beauty and creativity. After the passing of the floats, as well as the civic
bands and drum corps that supplemented the parade, observers stood in wonder at what they had witnessed. The conclusion of the parade did not mean an end to the celebration for Kansas City’s elite who gathered at the exclusive Priests of Pallas ball held later that night.4

The parade won the hearts of many in the city. Citizens and leaders adopted Pallas Athena as their patroness and held the autumn festival in her honor for the next 25 years. Evolving with the city itself, the parade became a reflection of the social and economic construction of Kansas City. Like many other nineteenth century street parades, the Priests of Pallas was a vehicle used by the town’s wealthy and business elite to manipulate the commercial and social environment of Kansas City. Held at a time when wealthy business owners nationwide sought to separate themselves from the industrial working class, Kansas City’s rising elite used the Priests of Pallas Parade as a tool to secure their position at the top of the town’s social hierarchy, and as a result increased their own profit. By visually communicating their social agenda through the Priests of Pallas Parade, city fathers ultimately influenced the gendered and racial construction of Kansas City from 1887 to 1911. This exhibition examines the Priests of Pallas Parade as a means of visual communication in order to both understand the historical context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in which the parade was created and the purpose it served for the growing Midwestern city.
Established in 1850 with a population barely reaching 700 residents, Kansas City flourished during the following decades as a river-front trading community. Situated at the convergence of the Kansas and Missouri rivers, the town was a vital port for westward expansion and frontier trade. Growing quickly in the following decades, the city found itself in competition with neighboring towns and communities as railroad travel became increasingly essential to economic prosperity. The Pacific Railway Act of 1862 not only provided federal funding and subsidies for a single transcontinental railroad line, but included resources for a number of regional rail connections as well. Numerous towns along the Missouri River knew the significance of a connection with the Union Pacific and each vied to be the town with the connecting terminus. Competing fiercely with the neighboring towns of Leavenworth, Atchison and other river front communities, Kansas City ultimately persuaded owners of the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad to build the first permanent rail bridge across the Missouri River at the town’s riverbanks. Opened on July 3, 1869 (just two months after the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad) the Hannibal Bridge ushered Kansas City into a new age as a true crossroads of the nation.

The railroad industry, coupled with the proximity to the cattle and agricultural resources of the Great Plains, allowed for significant growth of Kansas City’s stockyards and packing plants during the 1870s despite a nationwide economic depression. Following on the heels of the meat packing industry, grain and other agricultural industries rapidly developed making the city an important commercial trading center in the Midwestern region. Despite the city’s social pitfalls—most of its wage
earners resided in meager shacks located at the river front in an area called the West Bottoms, and prostitution was prevalent during the 1870s and 1880s—the townspeople sought to make their city more attractive to outsiders and focused their attention on the development of modern conveniences. As a result, Kansas City emerged as a real estate hotbed. The total sales for real estate property amounted to $88 million dollars during the height of the boom and the growth of the town’s industries and businesses led to a rapid influx of laborers, European immigrants and entrepreneurs. However, as booms often go bust, the Kansas City real estate market began to decline in 1888 and another depression crept over the city’s trade regions by the end of the decade.

Business leaders understood that the key to Kansas City’s economic survival depended on an increase of people as both visitors and newcomers. In response, civic organizations, such as the Flambeau Club, whose primary goal was to promote the city through participation in parades and drum corps and various electoral activities, and the Commercial Club, forerunner of the Chamber of Commerce, developed to enhance the progress of the city. As the men of these clubs sought solutions to the city’s weakening economic climate and social problems, they looked to their neighboring cities for inspiration.
A visual means of communication during the nineteenth century, civic leaders throughout the nation employed street parades to demonstrate a level of social control and “order” in urban cities. Labor struggles stemming from wage cuts in the late 1870s and poor working conditions culminated in railroad strikes in cities such as Martinsburg, West Virginia, Baltimore, Maryland, and St. Louis, Missouri. Railroad workers in Kansas City, Kansas organized a strike in 1886 that was so disruptive a congressional hearing was reportedly called. Although national labor struggles were a concern for city leaders, the need for increased commercial profit weighed most heavily on their minds in the 1880s.

Kansas City had held the annual Agricultural Exposition as early as 1871. Located mostly beyond city limits, the exposition reportedly attracted over 20,000 guests each year. Though numerous individuals traveled to Kansas City for the exposition, downtown shop owners noticed these visitors spent little time in the town’s business districts; instead, they “came right in, turned around and went right out again.” Business and civic leaders, such as Edwin Clendening, William Rockhill Nelson and Kirkland Armour, saw the need for a widespread social demonstration that would attract people to visit the area and emphasize the authority of business owners over the community. As a result, over 40 business leaders met in the fall of 1886 to discuss the possibility of creating a large spectacular celebration that would increase profits and establish a sense of order in the city. They organized the Kansas City Parade Association in 1886 with the intention of creating a celebration that would emphasize the city as a growing metropolis that had the potential to become a regional and national leader.

Sources indicate that much of the credit for the creative origins of the Priests of Pallas belong to L.E. Irwin, entrepreneur and first president of the Kansas City Commercial Club. He suggested that combining all of Kansas City’s festivals, fairs and celebrations into one week would successfully attract almost every farmer and tradesmen within a 200 mile radius of the city. 1890. Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri.
in business, commerce and industry. Creators of the Priests of Pallas celebration chose the parade theme based on their understanding of an ancient Grecian festival where citizens of Athens honored the goddess Athena, who in turn blessed their city with prosperity. Just as Athens became a key city in the Mediterranean world, so too they hoped, Kansas City would develop into the pride of the Midwestern region and would stand above her neighbors in the financial, commercial, and artistic world. They believed that the Priests of Pallas celebration would help cement Kansas City’s prominent place among American cities. Athena was considered to be the patroness of wisdom, science and the arts-attributes that Kansas City sought to emulate during the nineteenth century as the town was “booming.”

Kansas City’s fall festival was not unique, however. Much of its inspiration was drawn from similar celebrations held in other American cities during the nineteenth century. New Orleans has hosted the Mardi Gras celebration every year since the 1850’s; the Knights of Momus was established in Galveston, Texas in 1871; St. Louis formed the Veiled Prophet organization in 1878. With the exception perhaps of Mardi Gras, whose history suggests it is much older, these well known celebrations were created by the wealthy and distinguished individuals of their respective cities who used such street parades to market their social agenda. The celebrations almost always included a level of secrecy and mystery to pique the interest of spectators and ensure an audience for their demonstration. In formulating the Priests of Pallas parade, Kansas City’s businessmen made a point to familiarize themselves with these popular celebrations and, upon seeing their success, integrated many of these characteristics into their own carnival. Therefore, they promised Kansas Citians that the festivities would be “mythological, historical and fanciful” but few details surrounding the first parade were shared in advance.
As planned, Kansas City leaders hosted several parades during the second week of October, 1887. The Agricultural Exposition and the debut of the recently constructed exposition building, the Crystal Palace, were added attractions for visitors during the week. Included in the list of parade events were a military and civic parade held on Tuesday, October 11 and a Trades Association parade held on Wednesday, October 12. The military and civic parade was reported to be the longest parade of the entire week and culminated with a spectacular fireworks display provided by the Flambeau Club. Like Philadelphia and St. Louis, the well-disciplined visual display of the military and civic parade ranked first among street performers and it exemplified a sense of social order and model behavior for male citizens at a time when the nation faced widespread labor unrest. Additionally, the demonstration was a tool used to convey proper American values to the growing immigrant community.

The Trades Association sponsored the parade held the next night, Wednesday, October 12. Many military drum corps and bands also participated in this parade and a procession of floats was included as well. Businesses such as Meyer Brother’s Dry Goods Company, Hall and Willis Hardware Company, the Domestic Sewing Machine Company and others created advertising floats that were featured in this parade.

The third and final parade during Kansas City’s carnival week was the first Priests of Pallas parade, which premiered on October 13, 1887 amid a great air of mystery. As promised, the celebration burst forth from the organization’s warehouse and thousands of spectators lined the parade route to witness the spectacle as it wove through the city’s downtown.
business district. Like many other carnival-style celebrations of the nineteenth century, the Priests of Pallas parade centered on a particular theme which guided the imagery of the parade floats each year. “Fête of the Priests of Pallas” was the theme of the first parade and it introduced the legend and mythology of Pallas Athena to the Kansas City audience. The procession of floats focused on notable male figures of history such as Montezuma, Phillip of Macedon, Ponce de Leon, and others with the culminating float displaying Pallas Athena herself. A unique contrast existed between visual dominance of the historical male conquerors and the imagery of the feminine Athena, whom they were honoring. Such imagery conveyed a sense of paternal protection from city leaders, over the people of Kansas City and the future progress of the city.

In addition to the first Priests of Pallas Parade, the organization hosted a stylized ball following the pageant’s conclusion that occurred in a hastily constructed building at Seventh and Lydia known as the “den.” The event, accessible by invitation only, included a “Grand March,” by which parade organizers and participants were again on display for the event’s wealthy patrons. Hours of ballroom style dancing characteristic of America’s wealthy circles constituted the majority of the evening’s entertainment.

The Priests of Pallas Parade processed through Kansas City’s downtown business district passing numerous storefronts and professional offices. The above map details the route for the 1895 Karnival Krewe parade (discussed later). 1895. Missouri Valley Special Collections. Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

Left: Crowds gathered for the Priests of Pallas Parade in 1896. K0528; State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Kansas City, Missouri.
The highly visible role that Kansas City leaders had in the Priests of Pallas Parade conveyed the message to their audience that they occupied the top of the social ladder. Leaders participated on parade floats and at the front of the procession and in so doing, they reinforced the separation between themselves and the lower class participants who merely chauffeured the floats or simply stood in the audience. The division of labor that resulted from Gilded Age industrialism and the introduction of machinery meant that tradesmen needed less skill and specialization to complete their work. The segregation of employees based on their extremely specialized role in production also meant that social relationships of the working class changed. Previously employees, foremen, and business owners had a more familial interaction both at the workplace and in the community.

After the introduction of machinery and the subsequent division of labor, the social gap between workers and business owners widened immensely. Kansas City’s elite citizens, as well as the wealthy members of many other urban American cities, attempted to further reinforce this separation in the late nineteenth century through housing patterns and social interactions. The Priests of Pallas Parade became a vehicle by which the town’s wealthy citizens could truly set themselves apart from their working class neighbors and it conveyed to the audience who exactly was the most significant of Kansas City’s residents.

The exclusive Priests of Pallas Ball became an integral part of the celebration and one of the most identifiable demonstrations of social and class separation in Kansas City. Like its cross-state rival, the Veiled Prophet celebration, the Priests of Pallas Ball was advertised as invitation only. To increase the mystique of the cele-

AN ALL EXCLUSIVE GODDESS

The above advertisement appeared in the October 12, 1887 edition of The Kansas City Star, indicating, quite clearly, the exclusivity of the Priests of Pallas Ball.

G. Y. SMITH & CO.

MAIN AND ELEVENTH STS.

Special Sale this week of 8, 12, 20, 24 and 30 button length Monocotyde Kid Gloves in White, Black, Tan and Opera Shades.

High Novelties in Parisian Fans at all prices, from $5 to $45 each.

High Novelties in Faux Ricolings and Sash Ribbons.
The Priests of Pallas Ball to-morrow night suggests all that is expensive and elaborate in the minor items of dress, and you’ll find the best assortment here.

G. Y. SMITH & CO.
bration, the gala invitations were signed and distributed by Athena’s assistant, an ever-elusive man by the name of “Jackson,” rumored to arrive in Kansas City to hand-deliver the event’s invitations. Legend claims he would then spend the next year on vacation before his duties called him back to Kansas City. An invitation received from the famed “Jackson” of Kansas City, and adherence to the event’s fashionable dress code, was the only way one could be admitted to the ball. Speculation from citizens and local historians about “Jackson” has brought forth numerous theories about his exact identity. Most notable of these ideas suggests that the character “Jackson” was created in recognition of the Commercial Club’s African American porter, Charles A. Jackson. Other theories suggest that the role of Jackson was played by one of the organization’s founders, John Prince Loomas. Early journalistic efforts at recording the parade’s history also suggest that the name “Jackson” was simply applied to the anonymous invitation committee that was elected annually by the organization directors as a means to protect themselves from any potential rebuke from citizens deemed undeserving of that year’s social recognition.

To commemorate each year’s Priests of Pallas Ball, gala attendees received souvenirs. Initially, souvenirs were simply colorful postcards depicting the year’s parade floats; as the success of the parade grew, eventually three dimensional mementos were created and accompanied the invitations. Records indicate that the first of these items was an embossed tray produced for the 1896 celebration. The gift was meant to be tangible proof that one had received a bona fide invitation. Ownership of a Priests of Pallas souvenir gradually became a status symbol for Kansas City’s business and social elite. Making the souvenirs even more illustrious was the fact that only 1,000 pieces were created for each year’s celebration. Once
completed, the mold for the souvenir was reportedly destroyed by the manufacturer.25

Like many other social clubs that developed during the nineteenth century, the Priests of Pallas organization included numerous elements that were characteristic of a fraternal organization; most especially was their acclaimed secrecy while simultaneously maintaining a public presence within the community.26 Additionally, wealthy business owners found the Priests of Pallas event even more appealing because the organization instituted an annual membership fee for participation in the group, effectively restricting membership to those more affluent Kansas Citians. The initial annual membership fee of $25 was difficult to afford for many working class individuals, many of whom worked 60 hours a week for as little as $1 a day.27
Specific guidelines for the creation of the souvenirs dictated the design of each year’s object. The souvenir was required to be beautiful and useful, not exceeding five pounds in weight. The inscription “Priests of Pallas, Kansas City” or “P.O.P., Kansas City” was required to be visible on each item, along with the parade year.
Guided by the traditional ideology that women were inferior to men both mentally and physically, the characters on the initial parade floats were all played by men, including the goddess Athena.\(^{28}\) Despite this widely accepted belief regarding the fragility of women, these same men also regarded women as the virtuous guardians of American morality.\(^ {29}\) Though many women fought back against the restrictive gendered roles, some were complacent with their role as the moral ideal, especially many elite women who directly ascribed to the specific class bound ideology. The depiction of Athena in the Priests of Pallas Parade represented the ideal nineteenth century woman; her two primary departments of feminine industry were spinning and weaving and she was portrayed as the guardian of justice and learning.\(^ {30}\) Although Athena was hailed as Kansas City’s ideal patroness, the social boundaries that confined women in the nineteenth century did not allow for female participation on the parade floats until much later.

Though the feminine graces that Athena was meant to embody during the Priests of Pallas street parade sharply contrasted with the reality of the town’s working class women who obtained employment in order to help support their families, the Priests of Pallas Ball was intended as an arena for the celebration of the ideal woman at the turn of the century. As early as 1892, the ball evolved into a social debut event for the daughters of Kansas City’s wealthy citizens with the crowning of a "Queen of the Priests of Pallas Ball."\(^ {31}\) Mimicking other debutante balls held in eastern American cities like New York, Baltimore and Philadelphia, the young girl who was selected to be Queen of the Priests of Pallas Ball wore a unique and exquisite wardrobe, often made from

Charles Bush, above, portrayed the goddess Athena in the 1895 parade. When asked about his experience later in life he recalled “One of the most pleasant and exhilarating pleasures in my life was the time I used to be a queen. I was the Pallas Athene several times and each time the fascination of it grew greater. It is great to count your subjects by the thousands and to feel the admiring gaze of a multitude of people.” (Kansas City Post, October 3, 1909). Image courtesy of Missouri Valley Special Collections. Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri.
imported lace covered with gold pearls, beads, and other adornments that identified her as the Queen.\textsuperscript{32}

Despite the paternal influence over many aspects of the Priests of Pallas celebration, some women found agency through parade innovations introduced during the 1890s and early 1900s. Women were reportedly given the opportunity to organize what was called the Flower Parade, first held in 1895. This parade offered society women the opportunity to elaborately decorate their family carriages with flowers and adornments in the hopes of winning delicate prizes for their parade entries. Newspaper accounts of the procession suggest that the organizing committees of the Flower Parade were constructed entirely of wealthy women under the supervision of the all-male members of the parade association. The Flower Parade nonetheless gave upper-class women the opportunity to exert influence, even if it only extended to their own social circles. Though the upper class women were not likely seeking to enact radical change through their involvement in social organizations such as the Flower Parade, the experience and solidarity that many of them gained would later manifest itself in the reform movements of the 1910s and 1920s.\textsuperscript{33}

Artistic components of the Priests of Pallas eventually became an avenue for women’s involvement as well. Beginning in 1902, famous theater owner and performer Georgia Brown directed the ballets performed during the festival balls. The incorporation of exquisite ballets and performances offered Kansas City’s wealthy citizens the opportunity to orchestrate the artistic and cultural world just as they had done in the business world during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. From then onward, Brown became an integral part of the Priests of Pallas celebration with dramatic performances offering privileged young girls an opportunity to gain theatrical experience and social recognition in Kansas City.\textsuperscript{34}
Each fall, the Priests of Pallas Parade attracted thousands of visitors to Kansas City who spent their money at local businesses and hotels, just as the founders intended. At the ball, those wealthy visitors lucky enough to receive an invitation enjoyed the privilege and opportunity granted by their economic status while Kansas City’s elite reveled in their financial profits that resulted from the parade. Though the town’s middle and upper classes cherished the parade, Kansas City’s African American community held a different opinion about the Priests of Pallas, and those individuals who participated in the celebration experienced the event from a completely different perspective.

In the decades following the Civil War, African Americans remained on the lowest tiers of the nation’s social hierarchy and in many parts of the nation they suffered from increased incidents of racially motivated violence. Institutionalized by the supreme court decision to uphold Plessy v. Ferguson in 1896, Jim Crow laws brought forth a nationwide system of “racial discrimination, segregation of public facilities and political disenfranchisement.” Although many southern blacks sought better job opportunities in the growing industrial cities of the north and west, they still found themselves socially marginalized in their new homes. Kansas City was no exception. Despite the fact that Kansas City did not enact local segregation ordinances before 1913, many town leaders believed that custom and paternalism would keep black Kansas Citians in their place. Business leaders were of the opinion that “…everything will go on as before” and that African Americans “know their place…”

At the end of the nineteenth century, African American laborers in Kansas City were primarily employed in low paying
jobs located in the blighted West Bottoms. A small number of blacks resided throughout the city’s more established neighborhoods; however, these individuals were likely employed as domestic servants in the homes of the rich and found it necessary to live in proximity to their employers. Consistent with their employment in the service industry, African American participation in the Priests of Pallas parade reinforced their lower social position in Kansas City society.

Images of African American involvement in the parade feature wealthy women and costumed parade participants in decorated carriages that were chauffeured by black men. These men were likely nothing more than the domestic employees of their passengers and the role that they were required to play during the parade not only reinforced their racial and class separation but was consistent with their position in society.

The different experience that the small numbers of African American spectators had during the Priests of Pallas parade was comparable to the experience of those who participated. Inequality was not easily overlooked by Kansas City’s black community. African American protests against police brutality, and desires for a higher quality of education occurred frequently during the 1870s and 1880s, but regardless of their effort, Kansas City’s white residents and business owners had little concern for the condition of blacks in the city.

In the same way that town leaders were unconcerned with the social condition of the black community, so too did newspaper editors regard their objections to parade scenes as merely humorous and insignificant. The Kansas City Star included the following anecdote with their parade description in 1894:

“There was an old colored woman standing at Eleventh and Grand avenue watching the parade go by, and when she saw the big black hat that was being carried along by half a
dozen colored men, she raised herself to her tiptoes and looked at it very hard. ‘Dat boy on’y gits seventy-five cent fo’ he’pin tote dat big ole thing, en he’ll be clean wo’ out when de thing’s over [sic].’ Then she settled back on her heels and folded her arms, grunting to herself in a very deprecatory manner.37

The disapproving attitude this African American woman felt at the involvement of blacks in the Priests of Pallas parade is representative of the apathetic reaction by the majority of the black community in Kansas City. Though descriptions and announcements about the Priests of Pallas parade littered the Kansas City Star, Kansas City Times, Kansas City Post and Kansas City World, absolutely no description was included in the town’s two ethnocentric African American newspapers. The absence of reports of the Priests of Pallas parade gives further evidence to the social separation of Kansas City’s white and black communities at the turn of the century, and suggests that African Americans as a whole paid little attention to the parade festivities. Instead, articles that appeared in The Rising Son and The Kansas City Call emphasize African American’s concern for community solidarity and racial uplift at a time when Jim Crow laws legalized the segregation and discrimination of African Americans.

Feelings of alienation from the Priests of Pallas Parade that many African Americans felt resulted from much of the scenery and themes integrated into the parade as it was not uncommon for the parade floats to depict African Americans using the racially based imagery that was commonplace in American white society at the end of the nineteenth century. The first Priests of Pallas parade included the racially themed float titled The Forbidden Fruit. A description of the float provided by the Kansas City Star was printed the following day:

“The story of the forbidden fruit, in pantomime, was a surprise to a great many people. It has been thought
that Adam and Eve ate apples. People learned last night that watermelons are the forbidden fruit. Two darkies were carrying some of the luscious fruit from a field of them and across the fence an old man stood pointing a gun at them.”

This representation of African Americans as potential thieves reinforced the existing social separation between the races based on what many white Kansas Citians believed to be a difference in their inherent moral virtues.

African Americans were again represented in the Priests of Pallas parade during the 1899 event as part of the float titled All Coons Look Alike, supposedly designed and constructed by English artist Fawcett Robinson. This float depicted a group of African Americans playing ragtime styled music while contained within a large watermelon. The Kansas City Star explained this imagery by insinuating that “where there are no watermelons there can be few negroes.” Such imagery represented white society’s common belief that African Americans were lazy and simple-minded, seeking only a slice of watermelon as their highest level of pleasure in life.

In addition to racial depictions of African Americans and the marginalized role that black participants played in the parade, Kansas City’s immigrant communities likewise did not escape characterization during the Priests of Pallas celebration. The last decades of the nineteenth century saw a dramatic increase in immigration, leading to widespread fears and racially based immigration restrictions, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act. A growing fascination with the “other” also fueled American apprehensions about the influx of immigrants. Kansas City’s wealthy leaders and members of the social elite used visual depictions of immigrants in the same way that they used racial imagery of African Americans to reinforce the predominant social stereotypes and visually communicate the position of the minority communities on the social pyramid.
The eccentric depictions of the city’s ethnic minorities were featured during the 1896 daytime comic parade sponsored by a relatively new organization, the Kansas City Karnival Krewe, a parade organization styled after several Mardi Gras carnival troupes. Lacking descriptive details, the Kansas City Star gave a brief summary of the comic parade floats that characterized a variety of European nations such as Germany represented by a beer garden, China depicted as a “hop joint,” and Ireland which featured the “proverbial shanty” where “Paddy danced his jigs.” The eccentric and creative environment of the comic parade allowed for Kansas Citians to maintain long established racial and ethnic stereotypes while stepping outside the boundaries of proper nineteenth century social behaviors.
The Priests of Pallas Festivities.

Kansas City will entertain next week and entertain royally. It is her great gala occasion, the Priests of Pallas.

And the Big Store will entertain as well—entertain its thousands of out-of-town patrons.

We want you to make Emery, Bird, Thayer's your Kansas City shopping headquarters, avail yourself of its many conveniences—the rest rooms, reading and writing rooms, telephone service, free checking stand for parcels, and the many other advantages the Store has prepared for its friends.

And if you have shopping to do, you will find stocks at their best. Emery, Bird, Thayer's apparel displays are always authoritative and distinctive—nothing but the styles and fabrics which Dame Fashion has approved will be found at the Big Store.

The Housefurnishing Sections will interest you, too. Furniture, Carpets and Rugs, Curtains and Draperies, Art Goods, Linens, Chinaware and the smaller Housefurnishings in the Basement. Our Housefurnishing business has increased amazingly the past year, but there is a reason for it—the most dependable goods at the lowest possible prices.

Come to the Priests of Pallas festivities next week and make Emery, Bird, Thayer's your shopping headquarters.

Emery, Bird, Thayer Co
Kansas City, Mo.

This generic Emery, Bird and Thayer Co. advertisement is the only mention of the Priests of Pallas Parade that appeared in Kansas City's African American newspaper The Rising Son. September 27, 1906.
As audience members grew accustomed to each year’s Priests of Pallas Parade and created expectations of the celebration, organizers introduced new features so that spectators and visitors always had a reason to flock to Kansas City. Pioneered in 1892, a “Carnival Night” was added to the week’s list of events and was meant to be a comic parade that allowed spectators and participants to step outside the box of social propriety. The Kansas City Star captured the meaning of the night’s celebration when it wrote:

“It will be a night of mirth, music and noise, of gruesome spectacle and wild, weird abandonment. Motley bands of masked merry-makers in fantastic costumes will parade the streets, and the nerve-bending blare of the tin horns and the discordant notes of bands playing out of tune will make the night hideous and ludicrous. The populace is to throw aside its mantle of dignity and plunge into the wildest of harmless excesses.”

Though this Carnival Night celebration first occurred in 1892, it wasn’t until 1894 that Kansas City really took hold of the “carnival” style celebration. The “Kansas City Karnival Krewe” was established in 1894 by a group of men with similar business goals as the original Priests of Pallas organizers. Just as the Priests of Pallas was originally designed to increase tourism for Kansas City, the Karnival Krewe events ensured that visitors would have reason to remain in the city for the duration of the week.

The events of the first Karnival Krewe parade, and its deviation from the business centered atmosphere that characterized the Priests of Pallas parade, were a huge success. Newspaper opinions captured the growing sentiment as the Karnival Krewe parade represented “…a protest against the idea that everything in
Kansas City must be measured by financial standards and carry with it the suggestion of pecuniary profit. By design, a greater number of spectators were able to participate in the Karnival Krewe parade as a result of its masquerade and costume nature, and it was a more equalizing experience than the formal presentation of the actual Priests of Pallas parade. The carnival atmosphere also allowed people to cross the social boundaries that dictated gendered and racial behaviors; men dressed as women and vice versa, whites painted themselves to look like African Americans, and African Americans wore masks that afforded them a white skinned appearance. Wigs, fake noses and all sorts of costume features were included in the spectacle. The true carnival-style parade was such a success during the Priests of Pallas celebration that for approximately the next 8 years the week included a carnival parade sponsored by the Karnival Krewe.

In addition to the outlandish carnival parade, the Karnival Krewe also sponsored events such as the Flower Parade and the Bicycle Parade that debuted in 1895. Bicycling was popular during the nineteenth century among middle-class and wealthy citizens and Kansas City's organized Bicycle Club participated in the event. The Bicycle Parade included a procession comprised of themed floats built atop various bicycles. Despite the popularity of the Flower Parade and Bicycle Parade, the processions did not become a permanent part of the Priests of Pallas celebration and only lasted for a few short years.

An important year for the Priests of Pallas Parade was 1902 as it marked the first parade in which electric lights were integrated into the floats and the first year they were built using the streetcars dictating the parade route to follow the downtown streetcar tracks. The response to such a spectacular display was phe-
nomenal, and many citizens commented on the significant beauty of Pallas Athena and the entire procession. Standing in stark contrast to the previous parades whose floats were illuminated by torch flames, citizens reveled in the technological advancements that the parade organizers implemented. The wide-spread use of electricity had grown during the last two decades of the nineteenth century and became important in the production and use of the telephone, fire alarms, indoor lighting and even the electric street cars which rolled through the streets of Kansas City. Many interpreted the impressive displays as further proof that Kansas City was on the cutting edge of the twentieth century and viewed the electrical displays as evidence of what the town was truly capable of achieving.48

Despite the widespread popularity of the Karnival Krewe’s parade events, historians can easily speculate that their informal abbreviation of “KKK” was a subversive tool used to exhort racial superiority and social control. However, no formal connections to the nineteenth century white supremacy movement can be made.

Section of Kansas City Karnival Krewe Letterhead. n.d. Missouri Valley Special Collections. Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri.
Photographs of parade floats capture the evolution of the Priests of Pallas Parade from horse-drawn wagons to elaborate displays constructed above street cars. From hand-held decorations to floats implementing the use of electricity. The gradual integration of women and modern technologies show how both Kansas City and the Priests of Pallas Parade evolved.

Priests of Pallas Parade float built atop a horse-drawn cart. n.d. K0528; State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Kansas City, Missouri.

Float possibly dated 1900. K0528; State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Kansas City, Missouri.

Women participants in the Flower Parade. 1904. K0528; State Historical Society of Missouri-Research Center-Kansas City, Missouri.

Clearly visible are the electric bulbs that decorated nearly every Priests of Pallas Parade float after 1902. Photo taken in 1907. K0528; State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Kansas City, Missouri.

Float showing young women perched above the surrounding crowd. n.d. K0528; State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Kansas City, Missouri.

Pallas Athena’s float. n.d. K0528; State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Kansas City, Missouri.
Despite the widespread success of the Priests of Pallas Parade, and the enjoyment that many citizens had during the celebration, some were hesitant to praise the parade because of its materialistic nature. John Emerson Roberts, pastor of Kansas City’s All Souls Unitarian Church, referenced the Priests of Pallas Parade in one of his Sunday sermons in October, 1892. News of the sermon reached the ears of Edwin McKaig Clendening, secretary of the Commercial Club, who was closely involved in the Priests of Pallas celebration. Clendening wrote a letter to the preacher inquiring about his comments surrounding that year’s celebration, and although the pastor’s original sermon and Clendening’s initial letter no longer exist, the response that Roberts sent indicates that he was critical of the amount of energy and resources that were put forth to create the Priests of Pallas Parade.

The rapid growth that Kansas City experienced during the final decades of the nineteenth century not only meant that prosperity would increase, but so too would social strife. In an effort to create a barrier between themselves and the growing “urban blight,” the town’s wealthy residents continued to build homes increasingly distant from the city center. Neighborhoods developed having significant deed restrictions that allowed the town’s wealthy residents to create separate and secure enclaves for the “cultured, refined and aristocratic,” and public transportation, such as the elevated railway and later, the streetcars, allowed for neighborhoods such as McKinney Heights, located northeast of the city, Hyde Park, and eventually the country club plaza to develop, both located south of the city center.49

The urban sprawl meant that the downtown industrial areas became more
and more impoverished as wealthy citizens left their impressive downtown mansions for the greener, more open spaces to the south of the city. Poor and unemployed workers could not readily take up residence in such sizeable homes and instead lived in cheap tenements or in shanties along the railroad tracks. The flight of the wealthy from their former downtown neighborhoods lead to economically and ethnically distinct residential areas in Kansas City as the poor and working class citizens struggled to balance poverty, inadequate housing, declining health and an increasing crime rate. In response to the decreasing quality of life for the poor and working class, early progressive reform organizations, with the support of the town’s newspapers, argued that charity was a necessary ingredient if Kansas City was to be a true “great metropolis.”

The letter written by Pastor John Roberts indicated that he echoed, at least to some degree, the growing concern over the plight of Kansas City’s poor and the town’s growing social and industrial ills. He most likely believed that the Priests of Pallas parade did not appropriately represent the city, and its’ strictly commercial nature in fact diverted people’s attention from more pressing spiritual and corporeal matters. In his communication with Clendening, Roberts expressed his belief that the resources expended for the event could have been better spent on residents’ moral and physical improvement. While he did not directly address the issue, the clearly divided nature of the Priests of Pallas parade along ethnic and economic boundaries would have only enhanced the inherent social inequalities of the celebration that was meant to unify Kansas City and it begs the question whether or not the Priests of Pallas Parade could in actuality achieve the goals set by town leaders.
By the beginning of the 1910s, the American progressive movement had reached Kansas City and new ventures in civic improvement and social reform gradually diverted attention away from attractions such as the Priests of Pallas Parade. New forms of entertainment brought about greater leisure activities for the middle class as nickelodeons, radio programs, organized sporting events, and eventually the automobile became widely accessible in the early decades of the twentieth century. Kansas City leaders began to spend more money on larger public works projects that would better accommodate the needs of Kansas City during the twentieth century. One of its most notable features was the 1800-acre park established in 1896 by Thomas H. Swope located at the southeastern edge of the city. Within 15 years after its establishment, Swope Park saw the construction of two recreational lakes, a monument to its founder, and the beginnings of Kansas City’s Zoo, all of which drew the attention of citizens and visitors who sought new forms of entertainment in the 1910s. In addition to the city’s parks and boulevards, attractions such as Electric Park eventually surpassed the Priests of Pallas Parade in the eyes of visitors. The amusement park offered roller coaster rides, arcade games, and the sight of over 100,000 electric light bulbs lining the buildings. Soon, the electric parade floats seemed almost antiquated, compared to the sights at Electric Park.
In addition to Kansas City’s new attractions, business and railroad magnates had taken an intense interest in the region’s rail travel. By 1910, many businessmen, led by New York native Arthur Stilwell, directed their efforts to building a grander, more accessible train station to serve Kansas City. After the devastating flood of 1903, the blackened and worn Union Depot, located in the West Bottoms, had become an eyesore, necessitating the building of a new and updated station. The efforts of Kansas City’s leaders’ and railroad entrepreneurs’ resulted in the grand Union Station, dedicated on October 31, 1914. The completion of the building secured Kansas City’s prominence as part of the national rail industry and proved that Kansas Citians could achieve nearly any goal.

By the end of the decade, the mysterious grasp that the Priests of Pallas Parade had over Kansas City began to wear thin. Business leaders found themselves faced with the same issue they had when the parade began; visitors would come into town, view the parade and leave early the next morning. Commercial profits were not as successful as they had been in previous years when guests stayed as long as a week in Kansas City, filling hotels and frequenting downtown businesses. Newspaper articles in 1912 suggested interests were moving away from the parade’s mystical and other-worldly theme and so only the Priests of Pallas Ball was held that year. Making matters worse was the difficulty of introducing innovation into the parade. Kansas City’s growing list of amusements far surpassed the appeal of the electric floats that wowed visitors in 1902.

Exacerbating the growing list of problems the Priests of Pallas organizers had in maintaining interest, the Metropolitan Street Railway company (the business that had rented storage and construction space to the Priests of Pallas organization) decided it could no longer offer support for
The parade and the streetcar routes would no longer be available for parade use. The railway company’s decision to abandon the Priests of Pallas lease that had afforded the parade its float construction site was reported to be strictly a business decision. The company received no revenue from the parade organization and other manufacturers had expressed interest in the property.\(^{58}\)

The Priests of Pallas Parade was shortly revived from 1922 to 1924 despite the many troubles organizers faced during the previous decade. Even though the parade reportedly drew 400,000 spectators in 1922, community members were still skeptical of the lasting success of the event and some even talked of the American Royal Livestock Exposition taking the lead as Kansas City’s primary manufacturing showcase. E.O. Faeth, President of the Chamber of Commerce in 1922, seemed to capture the prevailing sentiment when he commented that the Priests of Pallas could be “expanded to fill the chinks with amusement” during the city’s fall celebrations.\(^{59}\) The 1922 revival was viewed by many to have been very successful. However, the final year of the parade came in 1924 amidst significant debt that the two formal stockholding firms, the Priests of Pallas Festival Company and the Priests of Pallas Holding Company, had accrued over the previous three years. It was reported in the *Kansas City Times* on November 26, 1924, that the festival activities could not be continued while carrying a $15,000 deficit, and by unanimous vote the celebration officially came to an end.\(^{60}\)
CONCLUSION

The Priests of Pallas Parade was Kansas City’s most celebrated attraction at the turn of the twentieth century. Founded by the town’s wealthy businessmen, the celebration was designed to bring money and tourism to the city, while showing that Kansas City was innovative, thriving, and integral to the success of the Midwestern region. As demonstrated by increased revenue, the parade was successful in its initial endeavors. Tourists from all over the Midwest came to enjoy the annual exhibition. Though the parade itself was viewed by citizens of all economic classes, organizers used the festival to convey the numerous social constructs that characterized the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by demonstrating to the audience the role that each person was meant to play in society. The success of the wealthy was rewarded at the exclusive ball, and women were celebrated as virtuous and pious guardians of the nation. African Americans and immigrants were reminded of their segregated, lower position in society through the floats’ imagery and their marginalized participation during the parade. Religious leaders also expressed their skepticism. Through its short lived existence, this nearly 30 year tradition helped shape the Kansas City community by reinforcing cultural constructs, generating revenue and in turn, enhancing the town’s landscape to reflect the city’s position in America. The Priests of Pallas Parade was in every way an illustration of Kansas City at the turn of the twentieth century.

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