

## **Shawnee Methodist Mission (1839, 1841 and 1845)** **4303 West 53<sup>rd</sup> Street – Fairway** ***National Register of Historic Places***

The first property in Johnson County to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places was the Shawnee Indian Mission at 3403 W. 53<sup>rd</sup> Street in Fairway. The 12-acre site with its three historic brick buildings was declared a National Historic Landmark on May 23, 1968. The site is significant for its role as an Indian mission from 1839 to 1862, but also for its association with the Kansas territorial government and its use by Union troops during the Civil War.

The mission was one of several established to bring Christianity and other civilized pursuits to Indian tribes that had been relocated to the area in the 1820s and 1830s. The Reverend Thomas Johnson established the first Methodist mission near present-day Turner in Wyandotte County. His mission and school operated out of a two-story log structure until 1839, serving the Shawnee and Delaware tribes by providing instruction in basic academics, manual arts and agriculture.

Johnson advocated a more central location to serve more tribes, and in October 1839 he relocated the mission to its present site in Johnson County, where a branch of the Santa Fe Trail passed through the Shawnee lands. The new Shawnee Indian Mission provided similar services as at its former site, but to many more tribes. At its height, the mission encompassed 2000 acres of farmland and served about 200 Native American boys and girls ages five to 23.

At one time the site was dotted with over a dozen outbuildings including a steam gristmill and sawmill, blacksmith shop, and barn. The primary structures, however, were three substantial brick buildings that still stand. The West Building, or Boarding House (built 1839) housed staff, with a large dining hall and kitchen in a rear wing. The East Building (1841) included a chapel, teachers' quarters, and classroom and dormitory areas for both boys and girls. The North Building (1845) was built in response to an increase in enrollment to 115 students. This structure provided classrooms and dormitory space for female students.



This 1940 photograph presents a view of the Shawnee Indian Mission's North Building, which was built in 1845. *Johnson County Museum Collection.*

Manual training at the Shawnee Mission ceased in 1854, but the site continued to play a significant role in the newly-formed Kansas Territory. The territorial government, including Governor Andrew Reeder and the so-called “Bogus” Legislature, were housed there in the period from 1854 to 1856. The mission closed in 1862 but provided hospital and barracks space to Union troops during the Civil War. After remaining in private hands for some years, the mission passed to the Kansas State Historical Society in 1927 and has operated as a state historic site since that time.

*\* Reprinted from the Johnson County Museum's ALBUM newsletter, Vol. XIX #1, Winter 2006. [www.jocomuseum.org](http://www.jocomuseum.org)*

