Highland Park – Louisville, KY – Gone, But Not Forgotten

Highland Park was a small city in Kentucky that later became a Louisville neighborhood. It was eventually seized and razed to expand the airport. Even though Highland Park has been gone for more than 20 years, locals still continue to reminisce about it. Why does the memory of Highland Park still endure after all these years?

The History of Highland Park

Located in Jefferson County, Kentucky, Highland Park was incorporated as a city in 1890. The city earned its name thanks to its raised elevation compared to nearby locations. The area was developed by the Vance Land Co. with the owner, T.C.H. Vance, laying out its streets prior to its incorporation.

Situated close to the Louisville and Nashville Railroad yard, the area was primarily developed to house railroad employees. The railroad yard was a transportation hub at the time, making this prime real estate. As reported in this Courier Journal article, many of the original families were mountain people from remote parts of Kentucky who moved to the area for work.

Highland Park grew rapidly after its incorporation. According to Bill Gatton's "Brief History of Highland Park," the number of families in the area increased from 195 in 1890 to 323 in 1900. The thriving city continued to grow well into the 20th century, boasting many businesses and recreational facilities including several grocery stores, a hardware store, a confectionary, a bank, a community center, and a race track.

The First Blow: Highland Park Loses Its Independence

The first blow to Highland Park came in 1917, when the city of Louisville decided that it wanted to annex the area. As seen in this article, residents of Highland Park were strong people who had earned a reputation for being independent and hard-working. The inhabitants of Highland Park didn't take too kindly to the idea of losing their independence so they resisted the annexation of their city, taking their case all the way to the Supreme Court. They unfortunately lost their case so in 1922, Highland Park officially became part of Louisville.

Highland Park Prospers Then Declines

Despite the annexation, Highland Park continued to prosper well into the 20th century, reaching its peak soon after the end of WWII. Area residents were especially pleased in 1947 when commercial aviation in Louisville was moved from Bowman Field to the nearby Standiford Field. Locals believed that this move would bring increased prosperity to the area, not knowing that it would eventually lead to the destruction of their beloved neighborhood.

It was around this time that Highland Park suffered a significant setback that would have lasting consequences; dozens of Highland Park homes and one of its main streets were destroyed to make way for the Watterson Expressway. After this development, much of the area's traffic was diverted around the neighborhood, instead of through it, which hurt a lot of local businesses.

In the decades that followed, Highland Park continued to decline. The area sacrificed several more homes and much of its rural feel to the newly constructed fairgrounds in 1956. During the 1970s and 1980s, Highland Park experienced a sharp decline in the number of transportation and manufacturing jobs, which caused many residents to uproot themselves and move in search of work.

The Final Blow

Highland Park received its final blow between the late 1980s and early 1990s. In 1987, local and regional government leaders along with the Louisville Regional Airport Authority announced their plans to expand Standiford Field. There was a slight glitch in their plan, however – the authorities claimed that they needed the land that Highland Park was built upon for their expansion.

This declaration understandably caused quite an uproar among the inhabitants of Highland Park. They fought to keep their neighborhood intact, once again taking their case to court, but in the end Highland Park residents were forced out. Using eminent domain, the government seized the entire Highland Park neighborhood. By the early 1990s, most of the homes and buildings in the area had been demolished and the land was left empty.

Whatever Happened to Highland Park

The land that Highland Park sat on was confiscated in the name of progress. Officials insisted that they needed the area in order to expand and make significant improvements to the airport but that's not what ultimately happened.

As observed in this Courier Journal article, most of the area that was seized 20 years ago remains unused to this day. The area is described by this writer as being "just a piece of Louisville's neglected

inner city." Locals report that there have been slight improvements to airport traffic flow, but this doesn't seem to justify destroying an entire neighborhood.

Why Does the Memory of Highland Park Endure?

It seems that anyone who has lived in the Louisville area long enough has a story to tell about Highland Park. The people who grew up there even started up a [Facebook group](#) in order to reminisce about the old neighborhood. Highland Park may have met its demise more than 20 years ago, but its memory continues to live on thanks to its unique story.

The story of Highland Park endures because of its tragic nature as a victim of government overreach. Against its wishes, a small but thriving and independent city was forcefully absorbed into a larger metropolis. Once it became part of Louisville, Highland Park was taken advantage of and torn apart, piece by piece, until it was completely destroyed.

The people who lived in Highland Park invested their time, energy, money, and lives into their beloved community. They believed that what they were building would endure. Unfortunately, in the name of progress, the government seized and tore down what the residents of Highland Park had created, leaving nothing behind but memories, wasted land, and a strong sense of injustice.