

Chapter 6

ROELAND PARK BUSINESSES

Precise information is not available as to dates that businesses were first established in the area that is now the City of Roeland Park. Mrs. Ilie Talbert recalls that in 1912 there was a grocery store near 47th Street and Mission Road. Mr. Bill Schleicher has a picture of a filling station, operated by his father, probably about 1920. The station was located on 53rd Street just east of the east building of the Shawnee Indian Mission. Other than the stores along the west side of Mission Road, the only known businesses in 1948 were a grocery store on the southwest corner of 51st and Buena Vista Streets, and a garage and filling station located on the east side of Roe Avenue, north of 51st Street.

CHARLES E. VAWTER DEVELOPMENT

Beginning in 1948, Charles E. Vawter began developing a shopping center on the tract of land between Cedar Street and Roe Avenue, from Sycamore Street to what is now 50th Street Terrace. The first building in the shopping center was a bowling alley with a restaurant that was completed in 1949. Subsequently, an addition was constructed on the east side of this building.

On April 3, 1950, the Kansas City Star reported that shops in this new addition were to be opened in May 1950 and included:

- Fred Rhode's Cleaning
- O'Malley's Barber Shop
- The Roeland Park Beauty Saloon
- Descombe's Shoe Repair
- Dale Levy's Self Service Laundry

Later Dr. Guy Dennis opened a dentist office and Dr. Robert Shulte a medical office on the second floor of the building. Charles E. Vawter also moved his office from 55th and Roe to the building. One report has it that the second floor office was 22 steps above the street level.

At about the same time, Mr. Vawter completed the second building in the shopping center. It covered a complete city block, from 51st to Sycamore, Roe to Linden. A story in "Front Roe Center" dated April 27, 1950 reports that some of the stores in this building were:

- Thriftway Food Market
- The Holiday Shop
- Warner Drugs
- Hillman's Hardware
- Pat Paul's Tots Togs
- Great West Paint and Wallpaper

On land adjacent to this store were Watson's Standard Service Station and the previously mentioned Roe Bowl. Subsequently, in 1952, the Roeland Park State Bank was chartered and, initially, occupied the space originally used by Warner Drugs at 5101 West 51st Street. Warner had vacated when Vawter completed the building on the south side of Sycamore, and Katz Drug Company began operation. In 1963, the Roeland Park State Bank constructed its own building. It is now occupied by Mercantile Bank, a successor to the Roeland Park State Bank and Mid American Bank.

Vawter planned another building on the west side of Sherwood Street, opposite the Katz building. This was to be a multi-storied building, occupied by Pecks Department Store. Mr. Vawter began construction, excavated the basement space, and started construction of the foundation. However, the Korean War started and materials for the building were not available. By the end of the Korean War, Pecks had been sold to Allied Stores who elected not proceed with the construction.

The space to be occupied by this building became known as “Pecks Hole.” It remained open for a number of years but was finally filled when a settlement was reached with City officials.

On February 19, 1968, disaster struck the Roeland Park business district. A fire in the main shopping center building damaged ten firms that were located there. These were:

Thriftway Grocery	Great West Paint
Suburban Hardware	Marco’s Mens Store
Arnolds Clothing	One Hour Martinizing
The Coin Laundry	Roeland Park Dance Studio
Konrady Jewelry	Roeland Park Liquors

Despite the loss, the owners reported, on August 4, 1968, that the building would be rebuilt.

VENTURE PLAZA

The area between 50th Street Terrace and a line that would be an extension of 49th Street west of the 18th Street Expressway was first developed in the early 1970’s when the Cook’s Store was constructed. Cook’s remained in business for a short time until the property was sold to the Venture Store. The area became known as the Venture Plaza. The Venture Store remodeled the building and it was reopened on October 2, 1975.

No other businesses were located in the area until 1987 when the original building was expanded. The expansion was occupied by the Price Chopper Grocery in October 1987.

With the Roeland Park Redevelopment, described later in this Chapter, a series of stores were constructed on the North side of the Venture Plaza parking lot. In addition, a Firestone facility was constructed in the southeast corner of the parking lot.

ROELAND PARK REDEVELOPMENT

In the mid 1980’s the Roeland Park City Council became concerned with the gradual deterioration of the Roeland Park shopping center area. The City tried, unsuccessfully, to get the owners to maintain and repair the structures. Further, erosion of the sales tax base had also become of significant concern to the City Council.

By 1988 the Thriftway Store, which occupied a large portion of the original shopping center building, closed as did the Amoco Service Station and Waji ‘s restaurant. The City Council began to search for ways to reverse this trend. The Council obtained a study indicating that the area was “blighted” as that term is defined in Kansas laws.

In 1989, under the guidance of Mayor Judy Katz, the City Council was successful in designating an area, which included the original shopping center, as an “Enterprise Zone.” It was the Council’s hope that the creation of an enterprise zone would stimulate development within the area. The enterprise zone included all of the original Roeland Park Shopping Center area, and the Venture Plaza area, the Skyline Village area, and the area within the City between Roe Avenue and Roe Lane.

In November 1990, the Roeland Park Development Company approached the City to discuss the possible redevelopment of the shopping center. This group had negotiated a signed written contract to purchase the property from it’s owners, Victor and Helen Regnier. The group advised the City that the price was greatly in excess of what the property was worth. However they felt that they might be able to put something together that would work.

To do so would require the cooperation and assistance of the City in designating the area as a "redevelopment district." Further, they would need the City's assistance in financing infrastructure improvements, such as streets and utility line relocation. The group stated that they might also need assistance in property acquisition and other items authorized under the redevelopment statutes.

In October 1990, the City began taking formal action for the creation of a redevelopment district. In doing so, the City committed \$861,700 for public improvements associated with the proposed redevelopment. At the same time, a feasibility study was prepared which demonstrated that the benefits to be derived from a redevelopment project would exceed the funds committed by the City. The study also showed that income therefrom would be sufficient to pay for the City's share of the project.

Subsequently the redevelopment plan was amended with the City committing not more than \$986,000 to the project. A public hearing was held on the project on April 17, 1991. Following the close of the public hearing, necessary findings were adopted by the City Council. The redevelopment district was established by the adoption of Ordinance No. 542.

A feasibility study was initiated for the revised project. It demonstrated that the benefits of the project would exceed the costs to the City. The redevelopment district was referred to as Project Area I and included four potential areas for development.

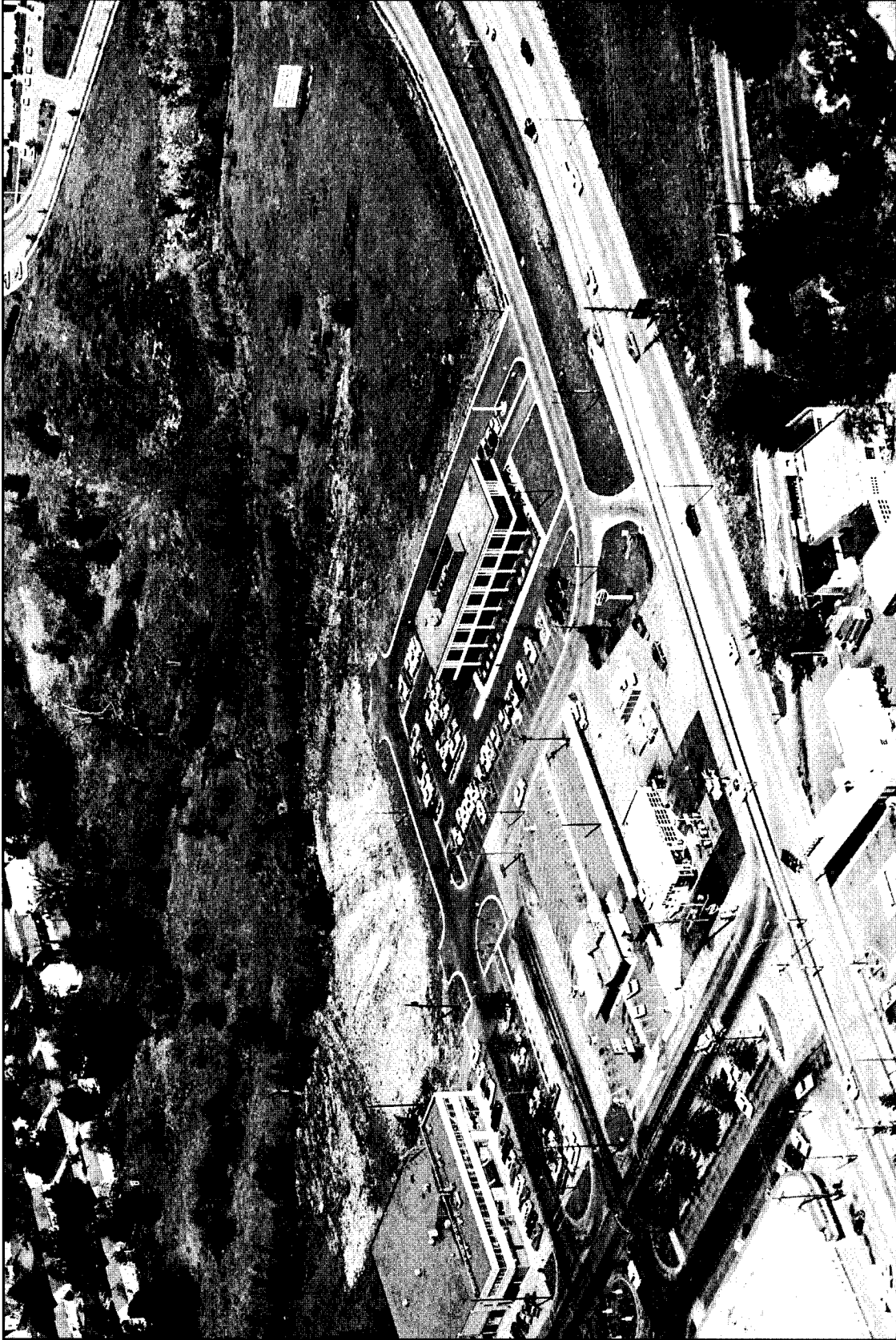
Initial construction included an anchor store of approximately 108,000 square feet. The project also required the vacating of 51st Street east of Cedar Street, with Cedar Street extended to the north to 50th Terrace. Modifications were also required in the alignment of Roe Avenue and associated streets.

The anchor store was occupied by the Pace Store, a subsidiary of the K-Mart stores. Pace sold its interest in the store to the Sam's Warehouse Stores. Sam's operated the store until December 24, 1994 when operations ceased and the store was vacated. Simultaneously with the construction of the anchor store, strip stores were constructed east of Cedar Street, and to the north of the Venture Store. At the end of 1995 the City was successful in negotiations with the Wal-Mart Stores to occupy the anchor building that Pace and Sam's had previously occupied. The expanded Wal-Mart Store is to be opened in late summer, 1996.

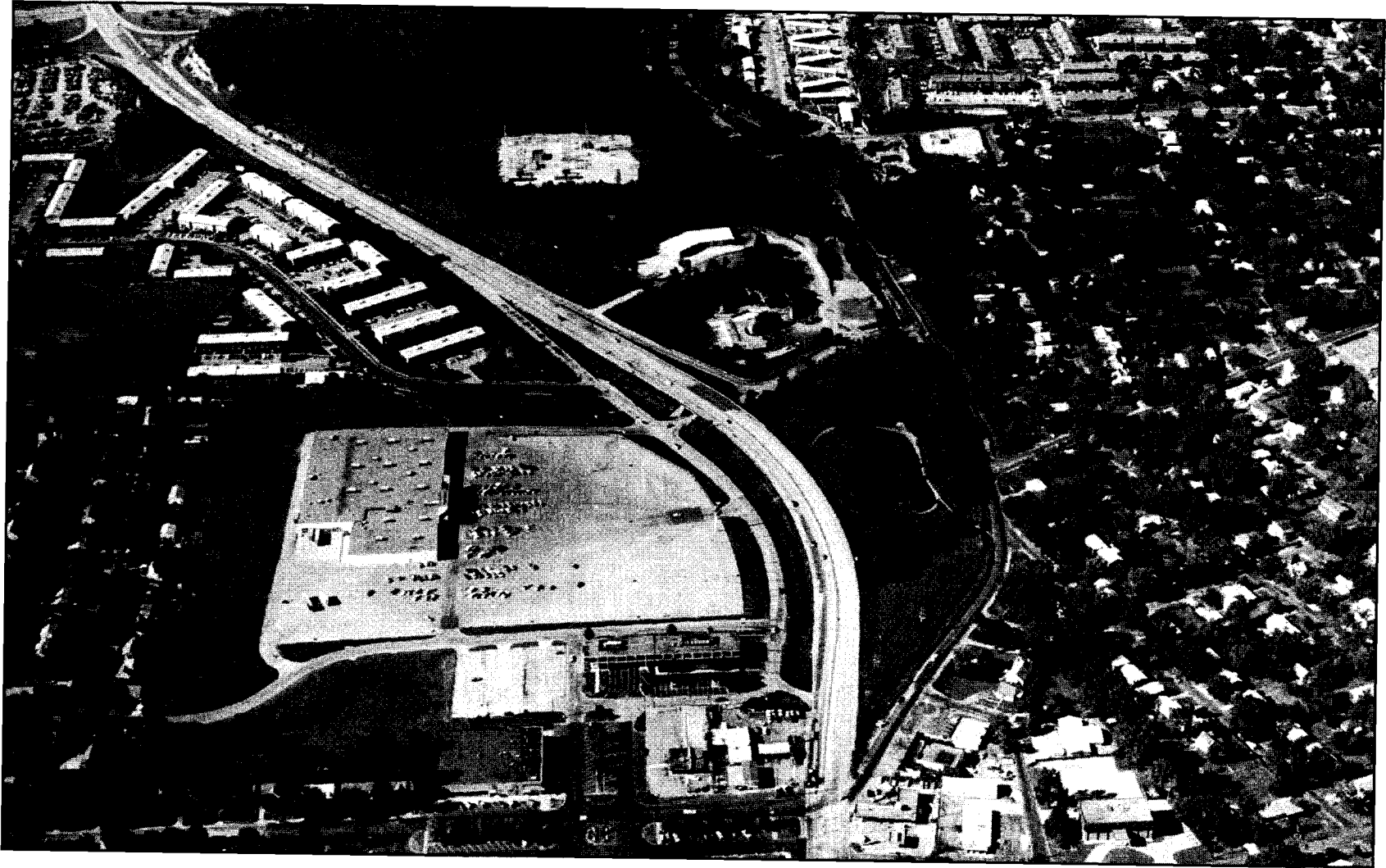
Other Business Locations

In addition to the businesses established in the Roeland Park Redevelopment District, commercial businesses have been established elsewhere in what is now the City of Roeland Park. As previously mentioned, the earliest businesses were located on Mission Road in the early 1900s. Commercial establishments continue to operate in that area. Commercial and service businesses also operate on the north side of Johnson Drive, east of the Ash-Johnson Drive intersection. The buildings housing these firms were originally constructed as residential housing and most retain that appearance in the summer of 1996. One small business operates at the intersection of Shawnee-Mission Parkway and Buena Vista. In addition several businesses are operated from residential housing.

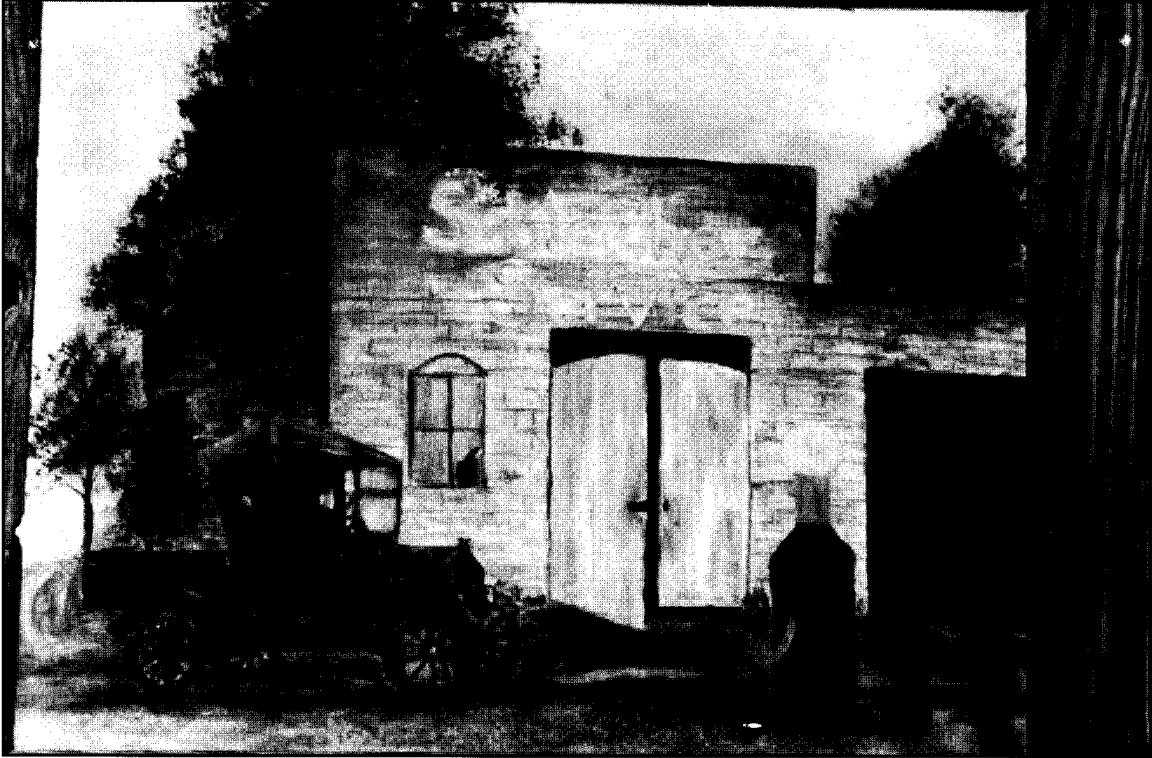
A list of businesses located in the City of Roeland Park at mid 1996 is shown in Appendix D.



*The New Roeland Park State Bank - 1963
The view is to the northwest and shows the Roe Bowl building, and the area later occupied by the Venture Plaza*

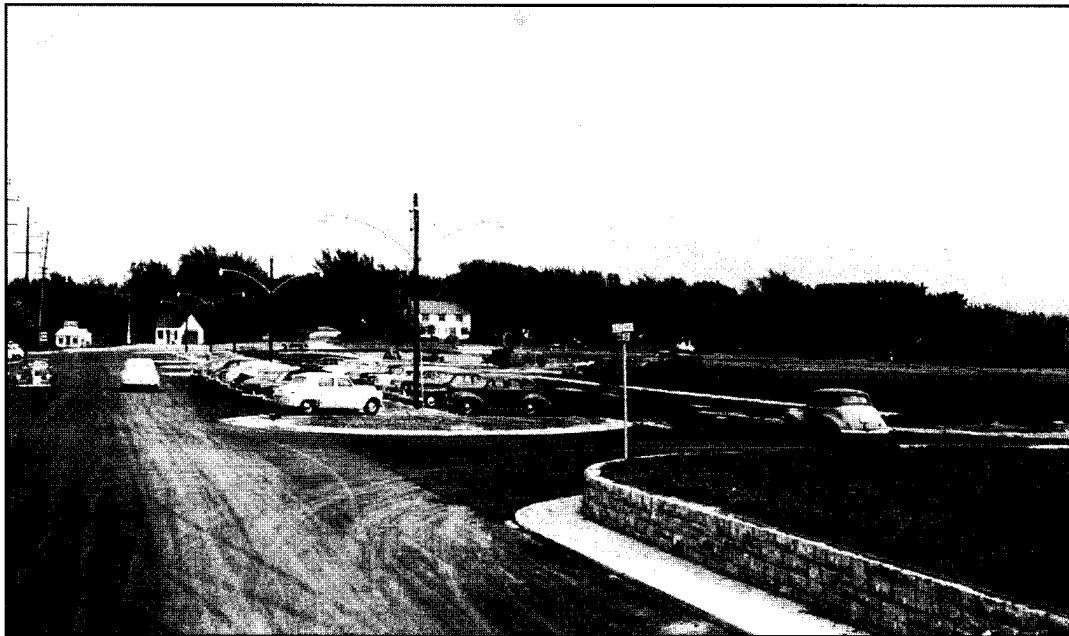


Aerial view of the Venture Plaza, Roeland Park State Bank and Skyline Village



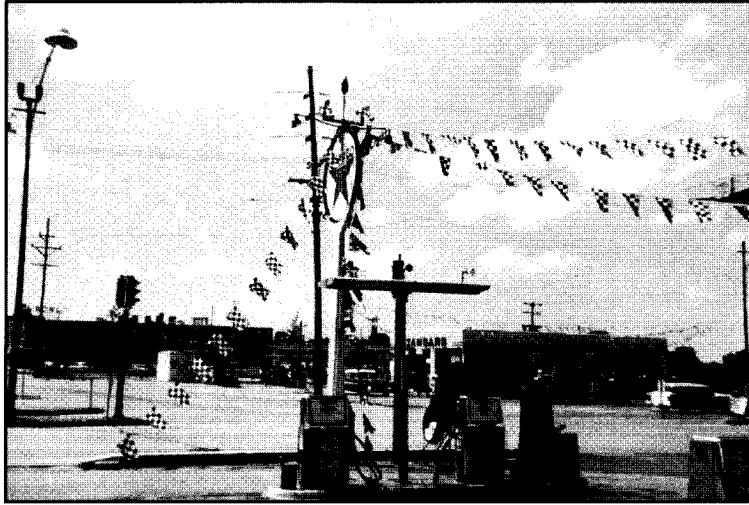
Schleicher's Garage - c. 1920

*The garage was located just east of the Shawnee Indian Mission,
near 53rd and Reinhardt Streets*



Roeland Park Shopping Center

1950 at the start of construction



Typical views of the Roeland Park Shopping Center at 51st and Roe Avenue in 1960