

Sunflower Village Historic District (1943)
3600 W. 103 Street – De Soto, Kansas
National Registry of Historic Places

Sunflower Village was constructed in 1943 on 78 acres south of De Soto to house workers of the Sunflower Ordnance Works. The government-built company town, while designed to be temporary, has survived several cycles of improvement and neglect over the past 70+ years. The \$12.8 million project was designed by landscape architects Hare & Hare, and had J. E. Dunn Construction as its general contractor. In recognition of its wartime role it was listed on the



National Register of Historic Sites in 2014.

The original Sunflower Village contained over 800 units. That number was supplemented with a second and third addition in a major attempt to meet the incredible demand for housing employees close to the adjacent

ordnance plant. In late 1943 (after just four months in existence) the community had residents in over fifty hastily built units; a newspaper; the Village Church with a

Sunday school and bible study group. Construction was underway for a beauty shop and barber shop. A recreation hall was available and a drug store was in the works. A grocery store, theater, and bowling alley later joined the list of businesses. A school was built in 1944 and later additions were filled to overflowing, prompting the construction of an additional grade school in 1953. Religious services were held in the recreation center and the schools as various options became available.

Following V-J Day and the end of World War II the community served a second purpose—to provide housing for veterans attending school following their separation from military service. Approximately one thousand male students of the University of Kansas occupied rented buildings during this new phase. The reactivation of the plant during the Korean War brought another spike in demand

Children at play in Sunflower Village, about 1946. Image 2015.011.001. Johnson County Museum Collection.

for the Village's residences. The plant work force was greatly reduced at the end of that conflict resulting in just 147 of the 977 units being occupied by late 1956.

The downturn in demand brought about a "Liquidation Sale" advertised in 1956-1957—an opportunity billed as "the house buy of the century." Quick Way Homes offered buildings with 882 square feet for \$1195. Some 600 frame units were thus liquidated and the entire development was sold to a private investor in late 1959.

Another round of change came in 1973 with another developer, Paul Hansen. He chose to rename Sunflower Village. "Clearview City" became the official new name for the location in 1975. The low-income housing tract had acquired a reputation for crime and other vice. Under Hansen, \$1.5 million in repair was undertaken on the 560 aging and well-worn units.

The surviving concrete block residences of the Village epitomize the utilitarian nature of the original wartime project. Designed to house workers on the home front during World War II, the community continues to serve as a residential district for the Johnson County work force.



*Reprinted from the Johnson County Museum's newsletter ALBUM, Vol. XXVIII, Number 3, Fall-Winter 2015; the full nomination for the property which can be accessed here:

https://www.kshs.org/resource/national_register/nominationsNRDB/Johnson_SunflowerVillageHistoricDistrictNR.pdf