

City seeks photos, documents related to Kaw Nation's sacred prayer rock, which was stolen and made into monument in 1929



photo by: Kansas State Historical Society | Wichita Eagle

This sacred rock in Lawrence was once located along the banks of the Kaw River at the mouth of Shunganunga Creek. The Kaw people used the 10-foot tall red rock with religious ceremonies. In 1929,

the rock was moved to Robinson Park near Lawrence's City Hall to honor the town's founders.

As the City of Lawrence begins work to return a sacred prayer rock stolen from the Kaw Nation's homelands nearly a century ago, it is asking the community for any historical documents to help understand how the boulder was brought to Lawrence and installed in its current location.

As it has been for more than 90 years, the 23-ton red quartzite boulder is currently in Robinson Park across from City Hall, 6 E. Sixth St. In 1929, a group of Lawrence officials and community members arranged to take the boulder from its longtime resting place along the Shunganunga Creek near Topeka, according to newspaper archives reviewed by the Journal-World. The Lawrence group pulled the boulder from the creek using chains and cables and a borrowed crane, and the Santa Fe Railroad was used to get the boulder to Lawrence, heading off a competing campaign by a Topeka man to bring the boulder to the lawn of the Statehouse. The boulder was then fitted with a base and a plaque and made into a monument honoring the city's founders.

The city agreed to help with the return of the sacred payer rock, In'zhúje'waxóbe, following a formal request from the Kaw Nation at the end of November. A letter from Kaw Nation Chairwoman Lynn Williams informed the commission that at the Kaw Nation General Council meeting in October, Kaw citizens overwhelmingly voted in favor of bringing the boulder back to the tribe, as the Journal-World previously reported. Williams says in the letter that the tribe's stewardship of the rock and its significance as a spiritual item of prayer was well documented and that the tribe's intent was to reclaim that stewardship and restore the rock's sacred significance.

The letter states that the intent is to bring the rock to Allegawaho Memorial Heritage Park in Council Grove as part of a long-range goal to develop the site into an educational resource for all Kansans and visitors to learn about the state's original inhabitants. The park is owned and maintained by the Kaw Nation and is open to the public, and the rock will join other monuments of historical significance to the Kaw people and the residents of Kansas.



photo by: City of Lawrence

In'zhúje'waxóbe is pictured in its current location in Robinson Park.

At its meeting on March 16, the Lawrence City Commission voted unanimously to adopt a joint resolution with Douglas County to offer a formal apology to the people of the Kaw Nation for appropriating and defacing the sacred rock and agreeing to its return to the Kaw Nation “without conditions.”

The rock came to Lawrence via the Santa Fe railroad during either the late hours of Sept. 18, 1929, or the early hours of Sept. 19, 1929, according to a city news release. The release states that historical archives are needed to better understand the installation of the rock in Robinson Park as well as to see the boulder in its natural form, prior to the construction of the base.

City spokesman Porter Arneill said documents could include photos, drawings, journal entries, letters or any other document with information about the boulder, sometimes called “founder’s rock” by Lawrence community members at the time. Arneill said the archives were needed at this point for practical purposes as the city prepares to move the rock.

The rock was installed on a base of concrete and other smaller red quartzite boulders, and Arneill said the city did not know things such as the shape of the rock below the base or whether a metal structure or other material was used to help mount and secure it.

“Basically what that entails is we don’t know how it was installed,” Arneill said. “So we don’t know what physical structure is mounting the rock to whatever footing is underneath it.”

Arneill said the city was also working with the Watkins Museum, the Kaw Nation and other partners to collect other historical information, and would appreciate any documents that the community has from the time that help tell the story of what happened.

Anyone with information that they believe could be helpful is asked to contact Ashley Chávez with the City Attorney’s Office at 785-832-3475 or AsChavez@lawrenceks.org.