

The Morris Touch

Real Estate Developer left a lasting mark on several beautiful Wichita neighborhoods.

By Beccy Tanner, *The Wichita Eagle*

When Walter Morris arrived in Wichita, he left his footprints in the snow. When Morris died more than 60 years later, he had left a lasting imprint on the city's landscape.

When Morris stepped off a Santa Fe train from Ohio in the winter of 1888, he had no idea where downtown Wichita was. The snow was knee-deep.

And, rather than spend money he didn't have, Morris looked around and decided to walk to the hustle and bustle of downtown by following wagon tracks. "I didn't have any money to pay 'hack fare,' he later told *The Wichita Eagle* on March 11, 1951, in observation of his 91st birthday. "But I had two good feet. There wasn't a paved block in town then, let alone a paved street. All of the street awnings along Douglas Avenue were made out of boards. People would come to town in those days and sit outside on the street, chew tobacco, talk and have a good time."

Two days after his arrival in Wichita, the 28-year-old Morris opened a real estate office in an upstairs room on East Douglas. The first real estate deal he made was a 2 1/2-acre tract near Hillside and Douglas.

"There weren't many houses out here then," he told *The Eagle* in 1951.

Morris planned and developed four of Wichita's additions: 80 acres of Roosevelt Field, 18 acres of Sleepy Hollow, 45 acres of Crown Heights and 75 acres of Lincoln Heights.

At the time of his death in July 1951, *The Eagle* reported:

"Creating lovely homes for Wichita people was Walter Morris' dream come true. Throughout his 63 years as a real estate dealer here, he envisioned and brought to reality some of the most scenic residential developments in this city.

"A poet at heart, widely traveled and widely read, Walter Morris contributed much in the way of living beauty— broad avenues, tree-shaded streets, grass-covered lawns and rustic footbridges to live long after him. He created poetry with living things."

One of the things he created was a trophy to honor the best of his profession. In 1926, Morris and his firm, Walter Morris and Son, originated the Walter Morris trophy cup. The trophy is still presented each year to an outstanding broker in Wichita.

Morris also was the owner of one of the city's more architecturally significant homes Campbell Castle, also known as Crumm Castle. Walter Morris and his wife, Ada, had four children Clara, Harriett, William and Luella. Ada died shortly after Luella's birth.

"Walk south on Ash, Madison, Spruce or Grove, and you will walk under a canopy of stately elms planted by Morris," *The Eagle* reported at his death.

"Hundreds of people now living in the area and enjoying the cool comfort of the tall trees kept neatly trimmed by the city do not know their comfort was made possible by a man of vision who walked before them..."

"Go into other additions to the city and you will see the print of Walter Morris' passing this way Crest Hill, Diamond Hill, Mt. Carmel Gardens, Sunnyside Gardens, Sunny Slope Gardens, and many others, all residential developments contributed to posterity by Morris' work as a city realtor, a city builder."