

Story Ideas

St. John, Kansas



The Mayor Grows Pumpkins...

■ **Pumpkins.** A water level that seldom wavers keeps crops growing here, even in dry years. Early on, sweet potatoes produced such a huge crop they were shipped nationwide. Today's bulging crop is pumpkins. Stimatze Pumpkin Farm supplies regional Walmarts with thousands every year. Jill Stimatze didn't love gardening growing up on the family farm. Today, she can't imagine doing anything else. When Stimatze is not farming, she can be found presiding over city council meetings as the mayor of St. John.

■ **Hydroponic Tomatoes.** Rita Taylor is another St. John woman who knows how to turn produce into money. In 2000, Rita started 4-star Hydroponics to produce home-grown tomatoes year round in a computer monitored 14,000 square feet of connected greenhouses. With 3,000 plants producing fruit at all times, Rita makes sits fertilizer (to control the taste) and has five hives for the bees who pollinate the plants. Demand for the tomatoes has exceeded the company's capacity. Taylor provides tomatoes to several Kansas City groceries: Hen House, HyVee, Price Chopper, Whole Foods, and Brookside Market.

■ **DeVore Farms.** St. John also has DeVore Farms, which has acres of watermelons, pumpkins, cantaloupe, and many itty bitty odd shaped gourds (The Super Freak™) they sell to Dillons stores every year.

"The Town Remains Spared" – St. John's Mormon Heritage

■ The first settlement of what is today St. John, was made in 1875 when William Bickerton – leader of the Church of Jesus Christ – drove the Stake of Zion into the ground on a small hill in Stafford County. He called his settlement Zion Valley. He then prayed that no cyclone would ever hit his colony – as long as the faithful continued to live there.

■ Now, records show that no tornado has touched the town for 140 years. There have been close calls. In 1993 a ground tornado headed directly for the town, lifting just as it passed over the city. In 2007, another tornado was headed for St. John, it shifted just before touchdown and completely destroyed Greensburg, Kansas.

■ Local lore says that it is Alex Robinson (87) that the town has kept alive. He's easy to find, still riding his bike around town, still preaching to a handful of "faithful saints" at the Church of Jesus Christ, which carries on the Bickertonite traditions.

■ William Bickerton died in 1905 and is buried in St. John's Fairview Cemetery. The Bickertonite Church is the third largest Mormon Church, behind the LDS Church and RLDS Church.

St. John's Heart and Soul

■ Today, the town square exudes the quiet elegance of a 100 year old fountain, lush grass, benches, and picnic tables, all surrounded by handsome historic buildings. The Tudor Department Store/Hall Museum, The opera house/city hall, #11 Dillons food store (still operating), all anchored by a 1929 Moderne style courthouse. Early on, the square was seldom quiet. A 100 piece band played on the weekends, and downtown action included pool playing, beer drinking, flirting, and joining in the Spit and Argue Club.

40 Acres and A Mule

■ 20,000 freed slaves flowed into Kansas between 1879 and 1880. John Brown and his fiery abolitionist friends made Kansas seem a fair place where they would be welcomed and the rumor was that Kansas would provide 20 acres and a mule. A colony of these Exodusters came to St. John at the urging of Kansas Governor, John St. John. The Martin Cemetery stands as a testament and memorial to the hundreds of African-Americans who made a new life here.

For more information: We will be happy to supply photographs, contact information for interviews, tours, guides, background information, and assistance with travel arrangements.

City of St. John
620-549-3208 –sjcc@gbta.net

