

DARWIN HINDMAN

“Father of the Katy Trail”

Darwin A. Hindman, Jr. (1933-2019)

Darwin Hindman became known as the “Father of the Katy Trail” because he passionately embraced the rails-to-trails concept and was remarkably tenacious, overcoming a wall of obstacles from government and private groups to create the gift of the Katy Trail State Park.



A “free-range kid,” Darwin grew up in Columbia and his playground included the active MKT Railroad which ran through his neighborhood.

The Katy Trail Coalition

In 1986, while working as an attorney in Columbia, Hindman became the founding chairperson of the Katy Trail Coalition. The goal of the organization was to convert the recently abandoned 240-mile Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad corridor into a state park and the longest hiking and biking trail in the nation at that time.

Section 8d of the National Trails System Act, adopted by Congress three years earlier, created an opportunity to preserve public access through a legal process known as “rail-banking.” The legislation required the State Governor to request a “Certificate of Interim Trail Use” from the federal government. However, in Missouri, many rural voters did not support opening up the corridor for public access.

To help win the support of Governor John Ashcroft, Hindman recruited businessman Edward D. (Ted) Jones, Jr. During their meeting with the Governor, Jones pledged \$100,000 in seed money for the purchase and conversion of the corridor. Ashcroft was impressed and soon agreed to support the project, but only if the State Legislature demonstrated its support by approving an initial budget appropriation.



The 1987 State Legislative Session

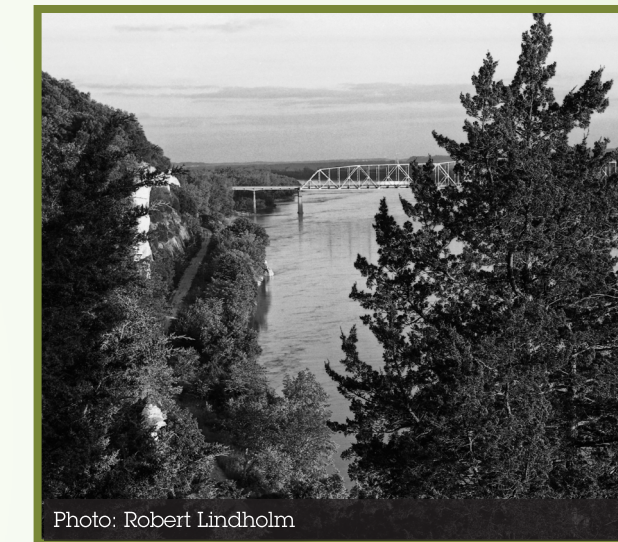
To satisfy federal rules, the State had just 180 days to reach agreement with the railroad company, meaning the appropriation had to be included in the 1987 budget.

Hindman and Jones traveled the state to meet with landowners, agricultural interests, and legislators. They listened respectfully to objections and responded with compelling arguments about the benefits the trail would bring to rural Missouri. They did not convince everyone, but they allayed fears and blunted much of the opposition.

The details of the final act read like a suspense novel. After months of intense lobbying and with the Governor involved, the budget appropriation passed by a single vote after midnight on the last day of the session.



Katy Trail State Park



The first section of the Katy Trail State Park opened on April 28, 1990. The trail immediately became a popular attraction, returning substantial economic benefits as Hindman and allies had predicted. Ted Jones and his wife Pat donated a total of \$2.2 million for acquisition and initial construction, thereby overcoming the primary funding obstacles.

Darwin Hindman’s pioneering achievements in Missouri and his testimony before U.S. Congressional committees led to the success of the national rails-to-trails movement. He possessed a rare personal charm and was admired by allies and opponents alike. Many who tried to block the Katy Trail in the 1980s later became its most ardent supporters.

“Without Darwin Hindman, there would have been no Katy Trail. Without the Katy Trail, there would have been no national rail-trail movement.”

- Marianne Wesley Fowler, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy



DARWIN HINDMAN

“Take it to the River”



Photo: Doug Brooks, Columbia Tribune

Friends of the MKT Trail

In 1989, Darwin Hindman became a prominent member and spokesperson for the Friends of the MKT Trail group in Columbia.

At this time, the MKT Nature and Fitness Trail (built after the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad abandoned its Columbia-to-McBaine line in 1977) had become a popular community amenity which extended 4.3 miles from Providence Road to Scott Boulevard. The goal of Friends of the MKT Trail was to create a greenbelt buffer to protect the trail from rapidly encroaching private development.

The grass-roots group posted petitions, collected more than 1,000 signatures, and flocked to City Council meetings to protest development proposals and call for the dedication of easements. On June 4, 1990, with more than 250 Friends of the MKT Trail supporters present, the City Council adopted the buffer plan. A few months later, voters approved a new Capital Improvement Sales Tax whose project list included funds for the City of Columbia to purchase multiple tracts of land.

Another critical tract was acquired by the Missouri Department of Conservation as a result of the advocacy efforts of Darwin Hindman and City Manager Ray Beck, who had helped establish the initial section of the MKT Trail.

Extension to the Katy Trail

Darwin Hindman always envisioned a connected walking/biking trail from downtown Columbia to the Katy Trail State Park and Missouri River. While assisting Friends of the MKT Trail's campaign to protect the existing trail, he also worked on the connection from Scott Blvd. to the Katy Trail through Boone County.

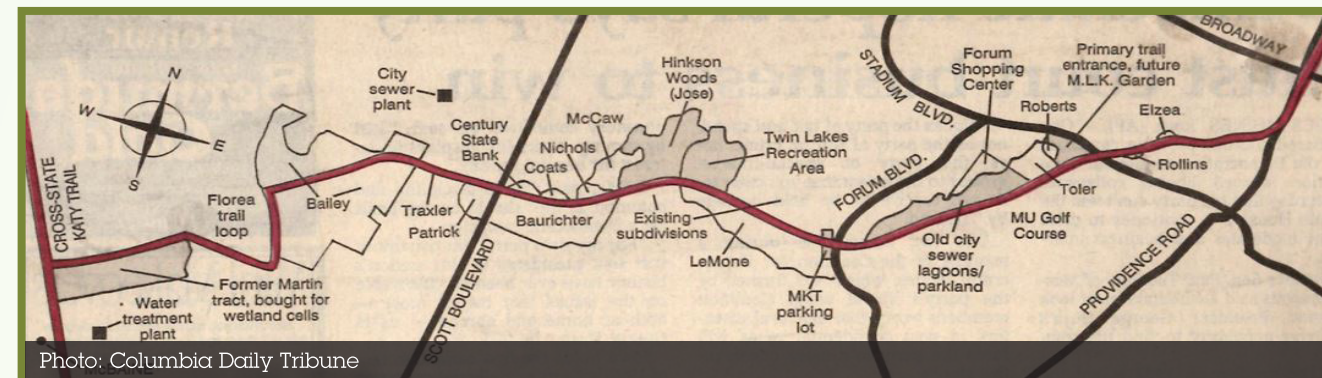


Photo: Columbia Daily Tribune

One of his closest allies was Boone County Commissioner Donnie Stamper - together, they met with multiple landowners, some of whom opposed the project. One of these disputes resulted in the trail taking a detour alongside the Perche Creek in the area now occupied by the City of Columbia's innovative constructed wetlands wastewater treatment area.

Dedication of Hindman Junction

The intersection of the MKT and Katy Trails was named "Hindman Junction" by Missouri Governor Mel Carnahan in a 1996 ceremony which included Department of Natural Resources Director David Shorr, and Boone County Commissioner Donnie Stamper, along with family and friends. Carnahan, Stamper, Hindman, and other members of the party rode their bicycles to the dedication.



Photo: Hindman Family



Photo: Columbia Daily Tribune

Darwin A. Hindman, Jr. (later life)

Darwin Hindman served as Mayor of Columbia from 1995-2010, during which time he helped establish the Activity & Recreation Center (ARC) and Stephens Lake Park, secured a \$22 million federal Non-Motorized Transportation Pilot Program grant, and advanced Columbia's 30-mile trail loop plan.

Hindman was recognized by numerous state and national organizations. In 2009, he was inducted into the Missouri Parks and Recreation Hall of Fame. He also received the League of American Bicyclists' Outstanding Achievement Award (2010) and the Rails to Trails Conservancy's Trail Blazer Award (2011).

Darwin Hindman died in Columbia on June 17, 2019. His funeral included a spontaneous bicycle procession by dozens of friends and supporters.

“Because Darwin so clearly loved all of us, we loved him in return.”

- Roger B. Wilson,
Missouri Lieutenant Governor (1993-2000) & Governor (2000-2001)

