



Historical Highlights



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- Betty Paxson, Vice President —term ends 12/2007
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- Bryce Benedict —term ends 12/2008
- Don Chubb —term ends 12/2009
- Dorothy Hill —term ends 12/2007
- Walt Hillmer —term ends 12/2008
- Jan Leuenberger —term ends 12/2009
- Carlton Scroggins —term ends 12/2009
- Bill Wagon —term ends 12/2007
- Jack Wisman —term ends 12/2007

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To SCHS Members,

It has been an interesting six months since taking over as President of the Shawnee County Historical Society. As many of you are aware, there are a number of historic properties in Shawnee County that are receiving a great amount of attention due to how seriously endangered they have become.

I would encourage you to support the efforts to save these wonderful properties and have included the petition website links for two of them, the Tower Building and Bethany Place, for you to review.

- <http://www.upetitions.com/petitions/index.php?id=176&ko=1>
- <http://www.upetitions.com/petitions/index.php?id=191>

As always, thank you for your support and I look forward to continuing to serve you.

—Anne Spiess, SCHS President 2007

An Invitation

Are you passionate about some aspect of Shawnee County History? An anecdote? Historical research? A preservation project? Does your historical interests lie within Topeka, North Topeka, Auburn, Dover, Rossville, Silver Lake, Highland Park, Oakland, Shawnee Heights, or environs? Good!

The Education Committee of SCHS invites you to write briefly on the topic of your choice and submit your work for possible publication in our newsletter. See topics covered in this issue for length and scope examples. Be sure to answer these journalistic questions—**who/what/when/where/why?**—concerning your topic. Submit work for consideration to Carol Yoho, cyoho@cox.net, 3013 SW Quail Creek Dr., Topeka, KS 66614. Call 785.273.3089 or e-mail with questions.

We'd like to enlighten our readers about what you love about local history. If you are not yet a member of the Shawnee County Historical Society, join today using the form on page 7. Make your voice heard in the education, preservation and publication missions of SCHS.

Shawnee County Historical Society/Topeka Landmarks Commission

by *Carlton Scroggins*, Trustee

As a City Planner for the City of Topeka, I have had the opportunity to serve on both the Topeka Landmarks Commission (TLC) as well as the Shawnee County Historical Society (SCHS). Both of these entities serve as important cogs in the preservation and education of the many historical assets and landmarks in Topeka and Shawnee County. Through my academic course studies in both Architecture and Urban Planning, I am keenly aware of the relevance that preserving and protecting our historic structures and natural landscapes has to enhancing our city economically and aesthetically. My purpose here is to compare and contrast the goals of each of entities from my experiences.

Shawnee County has numerous vestiges of historically significant structures and natural environments that are currently on the National and State Registers of Historic Places or that are recognized as local landmarks. There are also many qualified landmarks which have yet to be officially recognized. The purpose of the SCHS is to preserve, collect and interpret the history of Shawnee County. The Landmarks Commission's task is to provide oversight and advice to the appointed and elected officials in local government, as well as to local residents and organizations in their efforts to preserve our heritage. The Landmarks Commission also designates local Landmarks within the city limits. Local landmark designations are usually initiated by the individual property owner, and are thus voluntary designations. Historic landmark designation is a matter of pride and carries a mark

of distinction and a demonstrated commitment to historic preservation. The major distinction between a property that is designated as a local landmark and one that is put on the State or National register is utilization of restrictive environs buffer requirements.

Many owners of properties that are adjacent to potential landmarks are concerned that the "new" designation will effect what they can do with their properties as well. While this is true for properties within 500 feet of State and National landmarks, it does not apply to local landmarks. If your neighbor's property is designated as a local landmark, you will still be able to do whatever you are allowed to do by zoning with your property. Actually, local landmark designation will contribute to the vitality of neighborhoods because owners typically maintain those properties to historic standards and prevent them from deteriorating. If the property owner wants to alter the exterior of a designated historic landmark, a Certificate of Appropriateness must first be approved by preservation staff and the Landmarks Commission before a building permit may be issued. Properties listed on the National or State Registers are reviewed by the State Historic Preservation Office.

The City of Topeka also provides a supporting Historic Preservation Plan which provides a framework for implementing the law, and for helping the whole community both in identifying and in maintaining its historic structures. The Historic Preservation Plan is an element of the Comprehensive Plan 2025. This document

consists of several individual plans, each considering a separate topic, such as parks and open space, trails, transportation, and neighborhood revitalization.

The Shawnee County Historical Society Board membership is made up of concerned citizens, professionals, and lay persons who either have a vested interest in historic preservation, or just the desire to preserve and protect our existing historic heritage through preservation efforts and education. This is a non-profit organization which works to assist owners of historic properties in finding means to fund the maintenance and preservation of their properties. The Society also raises money through membership dues. Any citizens who are interested are welcome to become members by simply paying the annual membership dues. SCHS will also lend a voice to lobby for any eligible landmarks needing support in their preservation efforts. This is often done in conjunction with other ad hoc groups who have similar interests. The main difference between the SCHS and TLC is that SCHS does not have actual "historic designation" authority. As stated in the SCHS Bylaws, SCHS main objectives include: **1)** promoting public participation in local historical preservation and heritage commemoration, **2)** recognizing exceptional historic preservation, **3)** publishing materials on Shawnee County history, **4)** preserving and interpreting selected historic landmarks, **5)** providing community education in areas of local history and culture, and **6)** collaborating with relevant heritage

organizations.

My experience with both of these bodies has been a very positive one. I truly believe that it is of the utmost importance that a city strives to maintain and preserve

its historical heritage and culture.

Having a viable documented history of both the built and natural environments will have a positive effect on the economy, tourism and desirability of the City of Topeka.

We have a rich history here in Topeka and Shawnee County, and it is up to all of us to insure that we preserve it for future generations.



A Proud Heritage

by *Susan Marchant*, Special Projects, TSCPL

Looking back at the 1950s and 60s, it seems to me that Topeka was the hub of the universe, or at least a very large cog in the wheel that ran things nationally. We had a Kansan living in the White House. The Secretary of the US Treasury was Kansas native Georgia Neese Gray. Alf Landon was still the Grand Elder Statesman of the Republican Party, and visitors from all over the world came to pay their respects to him. The Menninger Foundation was the premiere psychiatric hospital to movie stars, politicians and literati both nationally and internationally. A Topekan, Harry Colmar, was the author of the G. I. Bill of Rights; and Forbes Air Force Base and its Strategic Air Command protected the nation from nuclear attack. Topeka was the *Brown v. Board* case that opened racially segregated schools to students of all races. Marjorie French, my algebra instructor at Topeka High, was elected National Teacher of the Year and honored at the White House by President Kennedy. Another teacher at Topeka High was named *The Wall Street Journal* teacher of the year. The Ladies Library Association established a library in Topeka 25 years before the New York City Public Library was built.

Have we somehow forgotten what we were? What we did? How we made a difference? How we are more than Dorothy and Toto? Even the 1966 Topeka tornado became the standard by which all other storms were gauged and because of it, the classification 1 through 5 on the Fujita Scale of storm severity was initiated.

As a fifth generation Topekan, I take exception to those who demean our city. Topeka is still a wonderful place to live, to learn, and to have families call "home."

Early Settlers

by *Susan Marchant*, Special Projects, TSCPL

Jesse Davis Wood, my great-great grandfather, gave up his birthright, his inheritance and any contact

with family or friends when he moved with his wife and four children to Shawnee County in 1854.

He was a medical doctor, an abolitionist, a free-state man and his youngest child was my great-grandmother. While most of the bedtime stories of my friends centered around gingerbread houses and wicked stepmothers, mine were about Stoney Lonesome and the plantations of Kentucky; and, best of all, early Topeka in Kansas Territory.

My Great-Grandmother Effie Wood Conwell described those early years in Shawnee County as scary, and was often teased about being a 'Fraidy Cat.' Maybe she had reason. When her father was away tending patients, her brothers often took advantage to examine his office cabinets. Apparently, on one occasion the youngest convinced his elder brother to swallow a bullet. My Great-Great Grandmother was hysterical. She tried to decide which would be worse, Melvin igniting internally or, if he coughed, would the bullet shoot out of his mouth and hurt someone. So she kept moving the boy alternately into the house, then fearing an explosion, outside again for what seemed like hours until the doctor arrived home. After a long buggy ride home, the doctor was not nearly as impressed with seriousness of the crisis since his only comment was, "Well, give him some powder and he'll be loaded. ...Now, what's for breakfast?"

Another afternoon, when the doctor was making house-calls, a young man came to the house to get his tooth pulled. Obviously in great pain, face swollen and flushed with fever, he decided to take things into his own hands. He went into the tool shed, my grandmother chasing him with a broom; but he was faster. He found some pliers, opened wide and pulled the darn thing. He waited all afternoon on the porch steps proudly holding his bloody bicuspid until the doctor returned. He just wanted to show off a bit and to see if the doctor was looking for an assistant. The evidence of his medical experience was wedged in the pliers. Dr. Wood declined his offer, but showed great enthusiasm for the ingenuity of the young man.

In Support of Bethany Place

by **Barb Quaney**, Friends of Bethany Place

Bethany Place, 835 Polk, Topeka, Kansas, is a state registered site and historically significant to Kansas for educational freedoms for women. The original campus of College of Sisters of Bethany, chartered in 1871, was the first woman's college in the state of Kansas. Young women could graduate with an associate degree. One notable graduate was Georgia Neese Clark Gray, the first woman to be named Treasurer of the United States. Two original buildings of Bethany College survive on the campus site. These architecturally significant limestone buildings with Gothic Revival features were built in 1875. The campus site, which is also registered, possesses a beautiful urban green space surrounding the college.

Because of the site's historical significance, the Bishop of the Episcopal Dioceses of Kansas requested that the State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO) consider the nomination of Bethany Place to the Register of Historic Kansas Places. This nomination was approved in February, 1979.

In 2007, the Episcopal Diocese of Kansas requested permission from the City of Topeka to place a parking lot on historic Bethany Place. Friends of Bethany Place oppose any alteration to the campus due to this heritage representation of equality and freedom for Kansas women. SHPO has ruled against the proposed parking lot project because it "will encroach upon, damage or destroy the Bethany Place site." Topeka Landmarks Commission and Historic Old Town Neighborhood Improvement Association have also voted to oppose this parking lot. Furthermore, many citizens of Topeka, eastern Kansas and other communities such as Chicago, New York City and Detroit have signed a petition to oppose this parking lot and to preserve this beautiful urban green space because of its symbolism for Kansas women's rights. The Episcopal Diocese of Kansas has requested an appeal of the SHPO ruling from the City of Topeka Planning Department in order to continue with the destruction. This item has been placed on the City Council Agenda for August 14, 2007 .

Those interested in more information can contact Friends of Bethany place at <http://www.upetitions.com/petitions/index.php?id=191>

For hyperlinks to local news coverage concerning this issue visit the SCHS web site: <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/orgs/schs/history.html>

Genealogy Center Moved

by **Gregory Romer**, Public Services, TSCPL

The Genealogy Center at the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library recently moved to its new location opposite the local history collection in the Topeka Room. Although genealogists and historians have different purposes in mind, they often use the same materials. Genealogical works of interest to local historians in print or from the library's databases include county and municipal histories, biographies, family histories, historic newspapers, migration histories, and city directories. Additionally, the center houses yearbooks, birth, marriage, and death records, obituaries, census records, marriage and cemetery indexes, military records, property, tax, and probate records, plat and insurance maps, passenger lists, and naturalization records. Computers, microfilm reader-printers, and a photocopier are all available in the Topeka Room. To ensure full access to the second floor collection, librarians provide professional service 78 hours a week.

SCHS Preservation Committee

by **Doug Jones**, Chair, Preservation Committee

The Preservation Committee of the Shawnee County Historical Society is organizing. The Society has had feedback that it has not been doing enough for preservation issues in Topeka and Shawnee County. In an attempt to address the concerns of members and nonmembers, we are beginning a series of meetings. We will establish subcommittees for "endangered" structures of the county. The subcommittees will be charged to meet, collect information, and report back to the Preservation Committee with suggestions for Board action to support these preservation projects. We anticipate establishing subcommittees for the following projects or issues:

- Jayhawk Theater
- Constitution Hall
- Bethany Place
- Tower Building at the old Menninger campus
- Old administration building, Topeka State Hospital
- Sumner School

This list will evolve. Other committees may be organized as needed. Our purpose is not to compete with existing groups on any of these issues but to contact other groups focused on these projects and ask, "What could the SCHS do to assist you with your efforts?" Based upon the responses and reports back to the

Board, the Society will try to support these projects. If you are interested in preservation, contact me and ask to be added to the communication list for notification of future meetings.

Ritchie House Tax Credits / Freedom Frontier Project

by **Bill Wagnon**, Chair, Ritchie House Project

Good news. The Kansas Department of Commerce has awarded the Society for its Ritchie House Community Tax Credits of \$150,000. That means for every \$2 donation to the project, the donor gets a Kansas income tax credit of \$1 off any income taxes owed to the state. It is a great incentive for donors. Credits should aid our capital campaign a great deal.

Robin Shrimplin and I participated in a meeting in Nebraska City, NE, discussing ways to promote the Lane Trail as part of the Freedom Frontier's National Heritage Area program. As a route of the underground railway in the Kansas Territory, it is an important heritage site: US 75 between Topeka and Nebraska City. I propose including the Ritchie House as a site on the underground railroad for the National Park Service's virtual park identifying sites throughout the U.S. See local news coverage about the Freedom Frontier's National Heritage Area on our web site: www.shawnee-county-history.org/history.html

Bulletin #82: Before Kansas Bled

by **Douglass Wallace**, Editor, SCHS Bulletin #82

Watch for the newest SCHS Bulletin, #82, *Before Kansas Bled: Pre-territorial Shawnee County*. This is the story of the land, the people, and the events taking place in Shawnee County before Kansas Territory was opened to white settlement. Members will receive a copy of this Bulletin as part of their membership. The book, available after Sept. 1, 2007, will be 140+ pages with over 60 photographs, illustrations and maps.

Sunday Drives with Grandpa

by **Don Chubb**, SCHS Trustee

Our interest in history comes in unique ways. Mine started as a boy of 6 or 7, taking Sunday afternoon drives with my grandfather, Art Carruth.

Grandpa's eventual destination was usually Cedar Crest, long before it became the governor's mansion. Old Mrs. MacLennan lived there. She was the widow

of Frank Pitts MacLennan, editor and proprietor of the *Topeka State Journal*. Mrs. MacLennan was quite feeble, living only on the first floor of the house, with her bedroom in what is now the library. She wasn't particularly fond of children, so I was told to go "exploring" while the old folks talked.

What a spooky place! In the basement garage was a large old car, covered with dust, with four flat tires that surely hadn't moved in years. The second floor bedrooms were stripped of everything but basic furniture, with the beds covered in newspapers. The exciting place was the attic, which in those days was one large room, perhaps once a ballroom. It felt to me like a very dark and scary place, filled with boxes and junk. I remember once running downstairs to tell my grandfather there had been a ghost in the attic – I'd seen his footprints. Grandpa trooped upstairs to explain that the footprints I saw in the dust were my own from some previous visit. Mrs. Mac, who wasn't impressed, sent me outside to play from then on.

The route home went down the original cedar-lined drive to 6th Street, where we sometimes drove to SBA hill. I'm sorry to say, as a boy I don't remember the beautiful Tower Building but, instead, the old MacLennan cabin. It sat until several years ago on the site, replaced eventually by the Menninger (Nunamaker) Chapel. It was easy to imagine the several sided structure as an old fort, where I assumed our early settlers held off the Indians.

The trip home cut through the Gage Park arch, where the bald eagle from the old Victory Highway sat until a few months ago. Grandpa told me the bird was an old crow. (Guess what he drank?) Grandpa continued his story in a rasping old crow's voice as we wound through the park. He always avoided driving by the old swimming pool, where the zoo parking lot is now. I wasn't allowed to swim there because my parents were afraid I'd catch polio.

One trip home Grandpa took a detour I've never forgotten. We went to pre-water-tower Burnett's Mound. Grandpa told some Chief Burnett stories I remember vividly. The most exciting was about Burnett's gold, which was supposedly buried near his cabin and was never found. It's a true "legend" by the way—his house being almost destroyed by treasure seekers after his death. Grandpa gave me a few minutes to look around, just in case I found the stash. Even today, over 50 years later, whenever I'm near the mound I have the overwhelming desire to continue the search...

2007 Historic Preservation Awards

The awards ceremony on Sunday, May 6, 2007, for the Topeka Landmarks Commission and Shawnee County Historical Society was a first-time collaboration. Awards were presented at Grace Episcopal Church, 701 SW 8th Av, Topeka, 3:30 p.m. In 2007 the cathedral celebrates the 150th anniversary of its founding in Topeka. Light refreshments and socializing surrounded the awards ceremony.

Among the new Topeka landmarks awarded were the Ritchie House, 1118 S.E. Madison, and Constitu-

tion Hall, located at 427 and 429 S. Kansas Ave.

The Shawnee County Historical Society honored the following recipients:

- Santa Fe Place, J.D. Lakhani and Associates
- Topeka Cemetery, Sarah McNeive (awarded posthumously)
- Scholarly historical writing, Douglass Wallace
- Great Overland Station, Beth Fager
- Grace Episcopal Cathedral, Rev. Steve Lipscomb

Complete coverage of this event is available at: www.shawneecountyhistory.org/aboutus/2007.html#preserv

right: Historic Preservation Awards:
 1. Breezeway entrance, Grace Cathedral
 2. Ritchie House honors from Topeka Landmarks Commission, **Bill Wagnon** accepting
 3. Santa Fe Place receives SCHS award; **J.D. Lakhani and Associates** with **Anne Spiess**, SCHS president, and **Doug Jones**, chair of SCHS preservation committee.



1



2



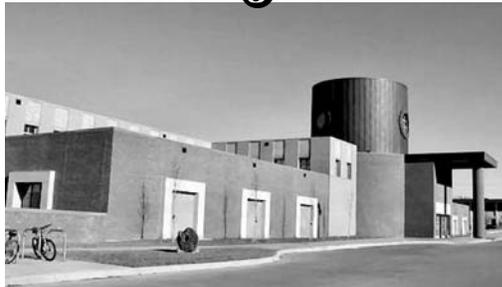
3

All photos in this August 2007 *Historical Highlights* newsletter (except #10, p. 6) are courtesy of **Carol Yoho**, SCHS member.



4 Before Kansas Bled, p. 5

5 Geneology Center, TSCPL, p.4



6 Bown v Board of Education, p. 3



7



8



left & below: Don Chubb Memories:
 7. Cedar Crest
 8. Victory Highway eagle, front
 9. Vistory Highway eagle, back
 10. Old Gage Park Swimming Pool

9



10





MEMBERSHIP FORM

Membership is from January-December, annually

Please print and fill out this form, then send with payment to the address below.
NOTE: The Shawnee County Historical Society and Historic Topeka have merged.
We are called "Shawnee County Historical Society," but now include historic preservation focus as well as documenting local history.

MEMBERSHIP FORM *(Please print)*

Yes! I wish to join the Society that preserves the past and celebrates our heritage.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____ Email _____

Check type of membership: _____ Regular—\$35.00 _____ Patron—\$50.00
_____ Renovator—\$100.00

GIFT MEMBERSHIP *(Please print)*

_____ \$ Gift Membership for someone I know who will benefit from membership.
(Photocopy this form for more than one. Use rates listed above.)

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

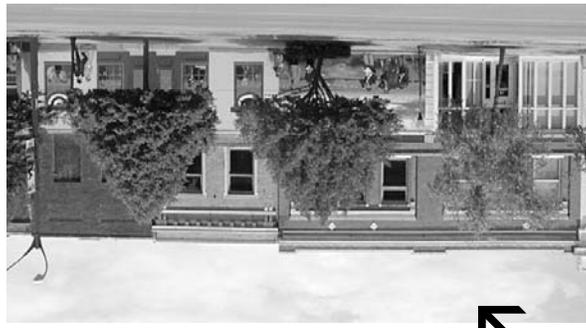
State _____ Zip _____ Email _____

I Wish to join the following committee:

- Nominations Membership Publications
- Annual Meeting/Socials Preservation
- Ritchie Project Education/Communications Public Relations

Name _____

(Make checks to "Shawnee County Historical Society")
Please send form(s) with your check to:
Shawnee County Historical Society, P.O. Box 2201, Topeka, KS 66601-2201
Your canceled check serves as your membership receipt.



Read the new historical narrative sign at Topeka's Constitution Hall, 400 block of S. Kansas Avenue. It explains about the convening of the Free State Legislature on July 4, 1856, and how federal troops dispersed the group.



There will be a memorial service and celebration of the life of **Bob Hollie**, long-time SCHS member, on September 8, 2007, at the Bradbury Thompson Center, Washburn University from 4-5 p.m.

You are asked not to send flowers. If you wish to re-member Bob, please make a gift in his name to the Topeka Boys and Girls Club, the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library Foundation, the Richie House Project, or to the Pamela G. Hollie Fund at Washburn University.

→ Tidbits

HISTORICAL
HIGHLIGHTS

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