



Menninger Hill, pp. 1-5

*Historical Highlights*  
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## *The Red Brick Buildings on SBA Hill: a retrospective* part two

by Paul Post

Construction of the farm began immediately in July 1918, and the facility was completed within the requisite time. In 1919, the Knights and Ladies of Security changed its name to The Security Benefit Association, and the farm, located as it was on the high landmark to the west of the city, became known as "SBA Hill." Between 1919 and 1928, SBA erected two nursing homes, an orphanage, a power plant, a home for the nursing staff, an apartment building for members, a school and auditorium, a band shell, and a large hospital building. The orphanage building was most visible, being on the south crest of SBA Hill, just opposite what would later become the WIBW studios. For members who continued to pay their "nickel a month," they were guaranteed use of any of the services provided at the farm, their only additional obligation being that of providing their own transportation to Topeka. In fact, for many years, a train station stood at the north base of SBA Hill to receive incoming members arriving at the farm.

Construction of the remaining buildings followed as the years passed. In 1930, two wings and a tower were added to the hospital, making it a

replica of Independence Hall. The hospital, later called the Tower Building, became a visible landmark after the 1930 additions, and resulted in an increase in the size of the hospital from 40 beds to 250. Modern (for the day) surgery suites on the north side of the third floor had ceiling to floor windows to allow for natural light to be used during surgical procedures. Patients were housed in wards on the east and west wing. The second, third, and fourth floors of the Tower Building were used for the offices of physicians and for clinic rooms. Atop the Tower, was the "great clock," which had a four-dial face, each twelve feet in diameter. It was the master clock which controlled fourteen smaller clocks throughout the hospital. A circular stairway below the clock gave access to it, as well as a view of the panorama of the Kaw River Valley to the North, Topeka to the east, and hills stretching on to the west. The overall dimensions of the Tower Building were 232 feet in length, and 120 feet in depth from north to south, giving a total floor space of 71,800 square feet.

The SBA farm was truly self-sufficient. An undated edition of The Security News, the official SBA newsletter, portrayed life at SBA:

*Not all the residents of the farm are just folks. A wide variety of life*

*is represented. Perhaps the proudest denizens are our peafowl as they strut and preen and spread their wondrous feathers in joy of living in this Eden. The pigeons, the ducks, the geese, the turkeys and the pheasants have their homes, and in their hutches the rabbit families grow and grow. In the big lake in the woods game fish tempt the lover of the piscatorial art. While they may not know it, these residents as they fatten and multiply are creating food supplies for the tables in our Homes and Hospital.*

*We have one of the finest herds or pure-bred Holsteins in the country, and are supplied with all the milk and butter necessary for our needs. There are forty head of cattle in the herd. They have excellent pasturage, and are housed in the finest and cleanest dairy barn in the West. We also have more than a hundred head of Poland China hogs on the farm, and these surely pay their keep in the saving they effect in butcher's bills. In fact, nearly all the milk, eggs and meats, as well as the vegetables used, are products of the farm.*

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## Fall Historical Programs Off to a Wonderful Start

The Shawnee County Historical Society kicked off its fall programs on August 21st with a walking tour of the Hicks Block Apartments at 6th and Tyler. Architect Bryan Falk guided over 130 participants on a tour of the buildings and explained the history and significance to Topeka. Falk is in the process of a construction project which will renovate the buildings. The Hicks Block are row house apartments located at the corner of 6th and Tyler in downtown Topeka. They are on the National Historic Register and were built in 1889 as single family homes but shortly after, they were converted to apartments. The majority of the buildings have not been updated in decades, so the construction project is a major undertaking of replacing electrical, HVAC and plumbing systems. At the completion of the phased



construction project in approximately 2 years there will be 28 historic loft apartments with modern amenities and updates. This program was one of the largest for the society in over 5 years and was a fund raiser for the organization.



**REMINDER! Don't forget to renew your membership!**

You can use the membership form in this issue!



## NOTE FROM OUR SCHS LEADER

Topekans think of 1101 S.W. Topeka Blvd. as being the home of Charles Curtis, the nation's only Native American vice president. But Don Chubb likes to think of it as the "Emma Redden House." She owned the house prior to Curtis.

Redden lived there with her husband, Topeka physician Dr. J.W. Redden, Chubb said last November in a free Zoom presentation he gave for our group. Dr. Redden became very ill but lived long enough to be present as two of his daughters were married in that house. He died there the next day at age 56, according to a *Topeka Daily Capital* article published Aug. 6, 1893.

Emma then married Dr. Redden's brother, Judge A.L. Redden, who later died accidentally after consuming a glass of cyanide of potassium. It was in the wrong container, and had been mistaken for a liquid he was accustomed to drinking called "Abilena water," the *Daily Capital* reported on Aug. 23, 1905.

Sources: <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3189776/tdc-aug-6-1893/> and <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3189709/tdc-aug-23-1905-take-1/>.

YouTube Chubb Presentation at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLXxMV0VToM>

**Tim Hrenchir**



Emma Redden subsequently sold the house to Curtis.

The Curtis house has been closed to the public for the past couple years, but will be among the five historic buildings that will be open to the public during our Historic Homes Tour on October 16. I would encourage everyone to take part.

I'd also recommend attending the historical programs we will hold this fall. Those speakers tell some pretty good stories, as Don Chubb demonstrated last November.

## Society Calendar of Events

**OCT 9** - Topeka Zoo Horticulturalist Rick Knight will give a tour pointing out historical spots in the zoo, and a history of this Topeka institution. **Tour fee of \$5 per person includes zoo admission!**

**OCT 16** - Historic Homes Tour featuring homes & buildings along and on Topeka Avenue in downtown Topeka. (Annual Fund Raiser *Separate tickets required.*)

**OCT 30** - Save the Docking, Plains Modern leads a discussion of the Docking Building and the proposed changes. Presentation at Cox Center and via Zoom

**NOV 6** Brittany Crabtree - Celebrating Topeka Collegiate's 40th anniversary *Presentation at Cox Center and via Zoom.*

**NOV 13** - David Randall, *The Monster's Bones - The Discover of T. Rex and How it Shook the World.* Randall discusses his book about Barnum Brown (of Carbondale) and his dinosaur bone hunting. Brown discovered the first t-rex skeletons and many others. *Zoom presentation.*

**NOV 20** - Emily Cowan - *Abandoned Topeka; Psychiatric Capital of the World.* A review of Some of the fundamental buildings left forgotten in Topeka. There is a lot of history not only important to Topeka, but to the nation! *Presentation at Cox Center and via Zoom.*

### **Coming in 2023:**

**JAN 8** - Ann Anderson - *Posts of a Mid-Century Kid: Doing my best, having fun.* Take a journey to the 1950s and 60s! Presentation at Cox Center and via Zoom.

**JAN 15** - Marc Bradley - *Stepson to the Mob: A Memoir of Decisions, Deception, and a Mother's Deep Devotion.* A unique story of growing up in Topeka in the witness protection program. Presentation at the Cox Center and via Zoom.

***The public is welcome to any of these tours and presentations, and we'd love to see you! On-site tours are a benefit of your membership; non-members will be charged \$5 per person. Memberships will be available at the events, and will allow you to attend all tours for a year!***

*continued from page 1*

*Hay and grain for livestock are raised on the farm. The acreage under cultivation gives fertile yields. About twenty acres have been added to the tillable soil by clearing timber land along the river, and some tremendous crops of corn and potatoes are grown there. We also have beautiful young orchards that add materially to the food supply.*

At its zenith, the Security Benefit Association was comprised of 250,000 members residing in 32 states. By paying their monthly dues, members of the association were entitled to any of the services of the farm for free once they arrived at Topeka. Hospital services were available to sick or injured members. An orphanage for children of deceased members was provided, along with a free school. Aging and retired members could obtain housing.

Unfortunately, the full potential of the newly expanded hospital building was never realized, as it was completed during the first full year of the Great Depression. Rising levels of unemployment resulted in loss of monthly income to SBA, which, in turn, caused curtailment of services to members. SBA, as a mutual benefit association, never fully recovered the effects of the depression. Added to that were the changes wrought by World War II to the practice of medicine. Shortly after the war, the first modern health insurance companies began to be organized, which made mutual aid organizations and their facilities even less viable. In 1950, the SBA governing body voted to become a mutual life insurance company, and soon discontinued the services available at SBA Hill. In fact, the facility was vacated on what was truly a moment's notice. Several years after closing, visitors to the hill could still find patient files open on physicians' desk, and the operating room ready for the next surgical procedure, with instruments laid out alongside the operating tables. The place had an eerie feeling to it, as though a plague or some similar tragedy had consumed the populace all at once.

#### V. The-Menninger-Connection.

At the same time that the Security Benefit Association was developing its community farm,, the Menninger Clinic was founded in the early 1920's by Dr. C.F. Menninger. In 1925, Dr. Menninger and his two physician sons, Drs. Karl and Will Menninger, obtained a \$20,000.00 mortgage

for the purchase of a farmhouse and 20 acres on land on the outskirts of Topeka, just east of Gage Park. The farmhouse was remodeled into a 13-bed hospital for the mentally ill. Other nearby buildings housed offices and patient activities. According to a 1982 article appearing in the Menninger Perspective, the small hospital was the fulfillment of a dream — the establishment of a group psychiatric practice in which doctors worked together with a common ideal to provide the best diagnosis and treatment for their patients. "We had the vision," Dr. C.F. Menninger later said, "of a better kind of medicine and a better kind of world."

By the late 40's the Menninger Clinic had reached its capacity at the facility which had grown up around that original clinic building. Menninger was looking to expand, and offered to lease the SBA property in 1954. In 1961, Menninger purchased SBA Hill, which became known as the West Campus. For 20 years thereafter, Menninger provided services at both the East and West Campuses. At the West Campus, the building renamed Neiswanger Hall, located on the southeast edge of West Campus, had originally been used to house elderly SBA residents, but became the home for the Topeka Institute for Psychoanalysis. Dr. Karl Menninger also moved his office to that building. The building which was named Dean Hall by the Menninger Clinic was originally used by SBA as a nursing home, but became the Menninger seminar center. Dean was located on the south-central part of the campus, near the power plant. The building renamed Murphy Hall, just to the west of the Tower Building, was first built as an apartment building during SBA's tenure, but became the center for the Menninger Department of Education. Clevenger Hall, originally the orphanage, later was used for the Menninger Partial Hospital program. Just to the north of that building is a structure now known as Stauffer Hall, which for years has been leased by Menninger to the WIBW stations. This building originally housed the S.B.A. school. Built by S.B.A. at a cost of \$ 150,000, the school, according to an article published by the Topeka Daily Capital on August 16, 1925, contained classrooms for younger and older students, a manual training room, a library, and an auditorium with a seating capacity for 1,000 persons. After Menninger purchased the campus, the Tower Building became the administration center for Menninger, and also is the home

to the Menninger museum and library.

In 1982, the Menninger Board of Trustees voted to consolidate all activities at the West

Campus, and to dispose of the East Campus. A \$22 million fund-raising effort, known as the "Campaign for Brains and Bricks," was undertaken to build new facilities amidst the familiar red brick buildings which then constituted the West Campus. The structures, completed at a cost of \$35 million, were constructed of whitewashed brick, and changed forever the face of the Hill. In all, eighteen new buildings were constructed among the eight already existing. These included the C.F. Menninger Hospital with four living halls for 166 adult patients, adjacent office buildings for staff members, a three-building creative arts complex including an academic center, wood shop and arts building, a horticulture therapy building and greenhouse, a physical recreation building, a new dining hall known as Thornlea Commons to be available to patients, staff and visitors, and a large conference area known as the Seeley Conference Center. An article in the Menninger Perspective described the overall finished result:

*"The beauty of the site and its sturdy, attractive buildings established several priorities for the design of the new campus: to preserve the natural beauty of the land and trees, to complement existing buildings, and, most importantly, to establish and maintain a human scale. These values relate to the Foundation's concern for the individual and the quality of life. Unlike a college campus or a general hospital, a psychiatric hospital must provide a total therapeutic environment. These priorities were followed through design and construction. The location of each of 1,280 trees of 57 varieties was carefully surveyed. Wherever possible, buildings were located to not only avoid removing trees, but to use the trees to enhance the building design; fewer than 2 per cent of the trees had to be removed. The overall design of the new buildings is contemporary, simple to construct and maintain. All buildings are residential in style and scale. Only two have more than two floors. The exterior is of brick painted white to maintain a residential feeling and to contrast with the red brick of the existing buildings and the seasonal colors of the landscape. Natural materials are used throughout the project - bricks, wood,*

and fabric. Even the ceilings of the buildings, patient rooms, and covered walkways are naturally finished wood — fir and hemlock. Even the globed streetlights are unusual. They are more than 50 years old and were obtained from a small southwestern Kansas town — at a savings of some \$30,000.00.

The article concluded with a look back at the words from a former director of the Security Benefit Association:

*I climbed the hill and when you reach the top, well I wish every member of the order could have the opportunity to view the glorious scene that lay before me. This little valley, surrounded by its hills, seemed to have been made for peace and quiet and for the very purpose for which it is now intended. It doesn't require any strain of the imagination to picture our members who are convalescent, sitting in the shade of the trees enjoying the health-giving breezes that roll over the hilltops where they can look out over the country in every direction.*

As had earlier happened in this century, the economics of health care delivery began to change in the late 1980's with the advent of "managed care" companies and health maintenance organizations, which represented a departure from the traditional "fee for service" system utilized by medicine and insurance companies following World War II. Where "fee for service" provided payment for whatever reasonable charge was made by the treating physician or admitting hospital, "managed care" sought to limit utilization of ever more costly health care services and procedures by actually paying doctors more for patients who stayed well. Managed care also undertook to second guess medical decisions made by physicians by either refusing to allow the requested procedure altogether, or only paying a set amount for authorized procedures, regardless of whether the provider sought to charge more.

Menninger, which had become an internationally recognized mental health facility, was especially renowned for its long-term inpatient treatment program. However, with the passage of time, the managed care bean counters began to reject long-term inpatient treatment in favor of shorter inpatient stays or even a mix of short inpatient treatment followed by outpatient therapy. This resulted, over the span of approximately

in a complete restructuring of many of the traditional Menninger programs, and a concomitant loss of earnings. Accordingly, the Menninger Board of Trustees began looking for ways to save money. Deferring maintenance of buildings was a quick way to stop the bleeding, but over time, this took its toll, both on the new and older buildings, but more seriously to the older red brick structures, which are approaching their eighth decade of existence. Ultimately, building maintenance deferment was not sufficient to correct the problem, and a series of job layoffs ensued, beginning in 1995, and continuing through 1998. A further reduction in force in 1998 resulted in elimination of 57 jobs, along with the decision to relocate from four of the old red brick buildings: Clevenger, Dean, Neiswanger, and Murphy.

In February 1999, the Menninger administration announced the decision to raze these four buildings. Neiswanger, housing the former office of Dr. Karl, was the first to go, and was demolished on May 24, 1999. The remaining three building were demolished during the course of the summer, with Clevenger, the last, be razed in September 1999. The Tower Building, the WIBW building, the power plant, and one other structure from the days of SBA Hill remained. However, the former WIBW building was destroyed by fire in January 2012.

In 2007, SCL Health of Denver, Colorado, the owner of St. Francis Hospital, announced plans to build a new hospital on the hill, and proceeded to demolish many of the remaining Menninger buildings, including those which had been built in the early 1980's. Unfortunately, the 2008 Great Recession put an end to those plans, and other than razing most of the buildings, SCL never developed the property. In 2017, SCL announced impending closure of its existing hospital building in Topeka, which was avoided on when the property was transferred to a joint venture undertaken by the University of Kansas Health Systems and the for-profit Ardent Health Services.

The deterioration of the Tower Building is ongoing. Water leakage is a serious problem in the tower, itself, and has compromised the structural integrity of that part of the building. The north entrance, immediately under the tower, has been cordoned off because of concern about pieces of stone actually falling off the tower. Its future is far from certain. Fortunately, the old Power Building and an adjacent structure that was formerly a dormitory for nurses are being restored by the Sunflower Foundation to house its headquarters and education center.

## VI. And-the-Future?

If the advance of a society can be understood through the evolution of those structures which house the activities of living and working, then the development of 20th Century medicine may also be traced through observation of the changes which have occurred in that most important of medical facilities, the hospital. Medicine is certainly not a product of this century, with the concepts and precepts of that learned discipline originating in classical Greek thought, if not earlier. However, the marriage of medicine to technology and the progeny which has emanated from that union is the hallmark of medicine in the last century. The technology-based medical model probably had its beginning in the horrors of the Civil War, and certainly, by end of the 19th Century, the marvels of medicine were expanding exponentially through its connection with scientific research. At the last turn of the century, 120 years ago, surgical techniques were greatly advanced thanks to the discovery of effective anesthesia. The x-ray had been discovered and was being used as a diagnostic tool, and the field of psychiatry was in full bloom. The 20th Century may truly be called the century of medicine.

The story of S.B.A. Hill is directly associated with this saga of modern medicine as it evolved through the 20th Century. Where land speculators of the century before failed in their attempt to develop the hill into a resort, the founders of the Knights and Ladies of Security were able to accomplish this task, at least for the benefit of its membership. The medical model which evolved there was holistic. The continuum of care was expansive — from cradle to grave. Thirty years later, when medicine changed course and SBA reinvented itself to become a life insurance company, the S.B.A. farm was transfigured into the setting for a therapeutic psychiatric community nestled among the Kansas hills. The close of the last century saw the unfortunate destruction of those classic old red brick structures, but in the early days of the 21st Century as in the last, perhaps "everything old is new again." Security Benefit, no longer a life insurance underwriter but now a mutual fund powerhouse, "returned home" again to reestablish its headquarters on the south slope of the hill where its charter began over one hundred years ago. From that vantage point, the progeny of the Knights



and Ladies of Security can keep a watchful eye on the tower, its former home, which today still stands on the crest of S.B.A. Hill.



Paul Post

#### Footnotes

1. The Topeka State Journal, March 8, 1920, p.6.
2. National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, approved by the National Park Service on November 30, 20005.
3. Kansas State Historical Society, Menninger Foundation Archives. Corporate Records of the Menninger Foundation. Records of the Menninger Foundation Central Administration. Administration subject files. Menninger-IR Per-Y (inc West Campus Move) 1970s

*A full presentation of this article may be located on the Shawnee County Historical website as it was presented in December of 2021 at the society's annual meeting.*

## Historic Homes Tour - 2022

It's time to purchase a ticket to the Historic Homes Tour of Topeka!

**October 16th • 1 - 6pm**

**\$75 per person**

*To purchase tickets, send a check or credit card information to:*

**Shawnee County Historical Society**

**PO Box 2201**

**Topeka, KS 66601**

Tickets will be sent back to you around October 10th. This is our annual major fund raiser and you don't want to miss it! Tickets are limited to the first 125 people, and go fast. The rush for tickets has always been outstanding....so get your information to us as soon as you can! We have six wonderful homes/buildings on or near Topeka Ave. to tour, all built between 1879 and 1910.



## Do you know someone who you think should be a member of the Shawnee County Historical Society?



**Just pass this along to a person you think would like to be a member.**  
Have them fill out the following information below and send it to **PO Box 2201, Topeka, Kansas 66601** or send by email to **[shawneecountyhistory@gmail.com](mailto:shawneecountyhistory@gmail.com)**  
We would love to have them join us in preserving the History of Shawnee County.

### I want to support:

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## Would you like to help preserve Shawnee County history?

You are more than welcomed to volunteer for the SCHS! We have lots of projects that your skills would be helpful with. Please send an email to [shawneecountyhistory@gmail.com](mailto:shawneecountyhistory@gmail.com) if you'd like to help in one of the tasks below, or if you have a talent you think would benefit the society!

graphic &/or web design • hospitality • research • archiving • cleaning & organizing • serve on a committee • building maintenance • tour guide • sponsorships • and many more ways!



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Lighting Freedom's Pathway,  
Building Heritage Culture

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## We've got some great merch!

The Shawnee County Historical Society continues to offer for sale lithographs from the 1870's. These are Birdseye views of Topeka and Tecumseh as well as a map of the plains in the early 1860's. Copies are available for sale for only \$15 with members getting a discount. If you would like to know more about these lithographs, please call (785) 234-6097 or email us at [shawneecountyhistory@gmail.com](mailto:shawneecountyhistory@gmail.com).

In addition, we have many requests for past bulletin booklets, now out of print, for \$25.

