



Groups Returning to Ritchie House
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*Historical
Highlights*

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One of the Most Cultural Icons in the World Has Topeka Roots

by Lisa LaRue-Baker

Hollywood may be dubbed "Tinsel Town," but it isn't a town at all. It is a neighborhood, a community, an area, a state of mind, a lifestyle, and an industry. It represents dreams, glamour, celebrities, palm trees, and the famed Hollywood sign is an image found on billions (probably) of t-shirts, t-shirts, and artwork around the world. Hollywood symbolizes the epitome of success, money, and fame.

It all started with the dreams of Harvey Henderson Wilcox and his wife, Daeida (Ida), but they were very different than the ones that people who are California dreamin' have today. In fact, the couple mandated that no alcohol was to be found in Hollywood. How that turned out is obviously another story.

Before coming west to Los Angeles, Harvey and Ida lived in Topeka, the capital of Kansas. He, a real estate agent and landlord, and she, a boarding house matron. They resided in the boarding house, which was next to his office on the main street, Kansas Ave. Today the site is home to a national car rental agency, which somehow seems apropos. Ida was Harvey's second wife, and 29 years his junior. Harvey was also involved in politics in Topeka; he served as president of the City Council for one term in 1870, and served as Topeka City Clerk from 1877 until



1880. Harvey owned a cattle ranch in addition to his real estate dealings, and joined several other men in founding another town in Shawnee county—Rossville.

After saving up a significant amount of money from rental property and real estate trading in Topeka, they decided, in 1883, to head West with their coachman and pair of pinto horses. Harvey was wheelchair bound, a victim of polio many years earlier. Once they arrived, Harvey did his thing. He opened a real estate office and started buying land in the outlying areas surrounding Los Angeles.

Harvey and Ida frequented the Cahuenga pass and valley area, and Ida became entranced by a fig orchard, which is now the middle of Hollywood Boulevard. They purchased the orchard in 1886 and an additional 120 acres, which encircled it for \$150 an acre. This sounds amazingly cheap considering what Los Angeles real estate markets for today, but when the farmers he purchased it from original acquired the land, they had paid an average of \$1.25 per acre. The Wilcoxes really gave the local farming economy a boost.

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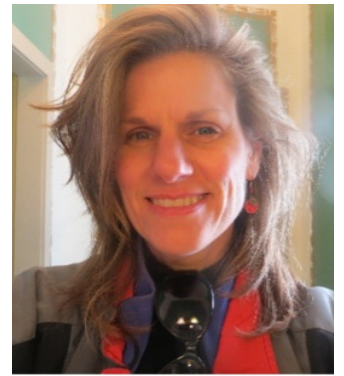
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Notes From Our SCHS

Leader... *Christine Steinkuehler*



Good morning!

It is an honor to be writing to you as President of the Shawnee County Historical Society. Thank you for electing me and for putting your faith in me. I am also thankful for a great team, the board, the membership and lots of people that love Shawnee County History.

We are working to get back to normal, and this month we will be sponsoring the Regional National History Day Competition at Washburn University. This will be our 14th year of sponsoring this event, and I look forward to building a stronger relationship with Washburn. Getting the youth involved in our history is vital. As part of this we will be having a table at the event to hand out information on historical sites and events in the county and to sell a bit of merchandise.

We are also bringing back the Preservation Awards. We will be asking the membership for nominations. We are looking not just for preservation projects but adaptive reuse and remodels. We also like to recognize individuals and organizations that have gone above and beyond in saving our built environment, so be thinking on these. We are currently looking for a sponsor for this event. It is planned to be in early May.

There is also a fair bit of new in the works. One of the first of these things is we are opening a small gift shop at Cox Center with books, maps, and t-shirts. We are also looking to begin working with the United Way for volunteers to sign up so that we can expand our offerings.

During Covid we discovered zoom, and, especially during the winter months, it works. It has been exciting to see people join us from around the country. Through zoom these presentations can be taped and later posted to YouTube. I was thrilled last week when I was contacted by a Topeka High history teacher and asked if he could use our presentation with Dr. Mendoza in his Hispanic Studies class. I am working to increase awareness of our programs in the schools, and I think that this is just the beginning.

I am excited to introduce a new bit of programming in March: we are having a Shawnee County History Show and Tell. This is where you, the members, bring in items from Shawnee County History and tell us about them. I hope for this to become a regular event. So, start going through your drawers and finding things! I also have set up a tour of the Ritchey Cemetery in April and we are working on the next house tour.

Once again, thank you! And I look forward to working with all of you this year!

Christine

REMINDER! Don't forget to renew your membership!

You can use the membership form in this issue!

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In 1887, Wilcox filed a plat with the county, showing a rectangular grid with a main street called Prospect Avenue—now Hollywood Boulevard. A name for the subdivision was required, and Ida had the perfect one. A friend had a summer home near Chicago called "Hollywood," and Ida loved the name. It struck the right chord. With the help of Chinese and Mexican workers, Harvey laid out the tracts, and Ida had what would later be the streets lined with Pepper trees. In fact, Hollywood historian Edwin O. Palmer credits the Wilcoxes with planting Hollywood's first citrus grove. In 1903, Hollywood was incorporated, and then was merged into the City of Los Angeles in 1910.

Sadly, in 1891, Harvey died of an unknown illness. Ida was only 30 years old, but she took over the business and the mission.

"She was a woman of great personal charm, a genial companion, the best and truest of friends, and a worthy opponent," wrote historian Palmer. "Her word was her oath, and she spared no pains to accomplish her undertakings. In benevolence, she was outstanding."

After Harvey's death, Ida not only continued the Hollywood mission, including seeing it become part of the city of Los Angeles, but she also donated the land for First Christian Church, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, the Hollywood Public Library, and Hollywood City Hall. She also built the Wilcox Building (located at today's Hollywood and Cahuenga boulevards) for a bank and The Hollywood Club. She also married Philo Beveridge, the son of a former Illinois Governor. Together, they continued the mission.

Ironically, if the Wilcoxes had not stipulated the "no alcohol rule," the film industry might have taken a different turn. One of the consequences of the rules was that the Blondeau Tavern, a local staple in the area, was turned into a General Store. This didn't go over well, and it sat empty until the Blondeau family sold it to a fledgling company from the East Coast called Nestor Film Company—which became the first actual studio in Hollywood. Scores and scores of studios and film investors moved into the area soon after, thanks to the four seasons, which were conducive to filming and a wide variety of landscapes to emulate almost any setting. A more important reason was that it was a place where filmmakers couldn't be sued for infringement on patents, which were held by Thomas Edison and the Motion Picture Patents Company.

While scores of these companies did fail, many thrived. The first film completed in Hollywood was *The Count of Monte Cristo*, although it began production in Chicago. As for a film done in its entirety in Hollywood, *In Old California* takes the gold. By 1915, most of the major motion-picture companies had relocated to Hollywood from the East Coast. The story of Hollywood and the film industry is not unfamiliar.

While there are actually cities in Los Angeles called West Hollywood and North Hollywood, there is no "Hollywood." But more than pop culture, it has become a name synonymous with a lifestyle, as well as an industry. The area or neighborhood known as Hollywood is located in the original Wilcox plat, but it's not lined with studios anymore; they began moving out in the 1920s and 30s, but merchants needed the myth and a location where tourists could go since they weren't allowed in the studio lots. During World War II, the canteen is what really gave Hollywood a boost. All throughout the war, over one million servicemen came to the area, and each wanted to see Hollywood. A huge industry popped up, with tourist traps and establishments to accommodate the servicemen.

Ida's grandson, David Brunson, stated in 1987, "The merchants maintained the myth. They came up with the idea of putting a bunch of stars names in the sidewalk, though for the life of me I can't understand why retailers would want to make the guy who's walking in front of his store look at the sidewalk instead of the display window." Oddly, neither Harvey nor Ida have stars on Hollywood Boulevard's Walk of Fame.

But, the world has Hollywood.

Harvey's real estate office in Topeka was located in the 300 block of Kansas Ave., on the west side.

Society Calendar of Events

- FEB 19** - Cheryl Brown Henderson on her perspective of Brown v Board (via Zoom)
- FEB 26** - Dave Fisher on the abolitionist Rev. Fisher
- MAR 5** - Curtis Pitts on the past, present, and future of the Kansas Technical Institute
- TBD** Historic Homes Tour
- DEC 3** Annual Membership Meeting, including Lunch. \$35 Location TBD

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!

December Annual Meeting



The Harvey Girls were the center of attention at the 76th Annual meeting of the Shawnee County Historical Society held December 5th at the Great Overland Station. Cheryl Stuke, Alta Morris, and Joann Staley served over 50 members of the society as part of the presentation highlighting the history of the Harvey Girls. After the serving of food, JoAnn Staley gave a historical perspective of what the Harvey girls were and how they functioned in the late 1890's and onward.

During the meeting, the society selected 2023 Officers: President Christine Steinkuehler, Vice President Bob Keeshan, Treasurer Linda Jeffreys and Secretary Katy Franklin, shown below.



Docking State Office Building to Be Destroyed

Despite efforts from various organizations, the Docking State Office Building in Topeka which was built in 1957 is being torn down. A Shawnee County judge dismissed in early January an effort to halt the demolition of the Docking State Office Building, saying the legal challenge was filed too late to merit consideration.

The challenge, filed by a preservationist group called Plains Modern, pushed to halt the building's demolition, arguing the state didn't follow proper procedures in orchestrating the project, given Docking's status on the National Register of Historic Sites.

Officials have long sought to replace or renovate Docking, which has sat largely empty in downtown Topeka for years as state offices moved to other locations. A plan to reduce Docking to three floors with a combination of office and events space was approved by Gov. Kelly and a panel of lawmakers in 2021.



Group Attendance Increasing at Ritchie House

Groups like these are returning to tour the Ritchie House at 1116 SE Madison. Our statistics show that we have doubled our attendance this past year and it appears we will have more coming to the oldest house in Topeka in 2023. The pandemic curtailed most visits to Topeka sites the past 2 years but bookings for more tours have increased in the past 2 weeks. Normally, without the pandemic, we average about 2500 who tour the building each year.

We are open 9 to 1pm Tuesday thru Thursday and you can call at 785 234 6097 to secure a good time for your group to see and learn more about the Bleeding Kansas era.





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