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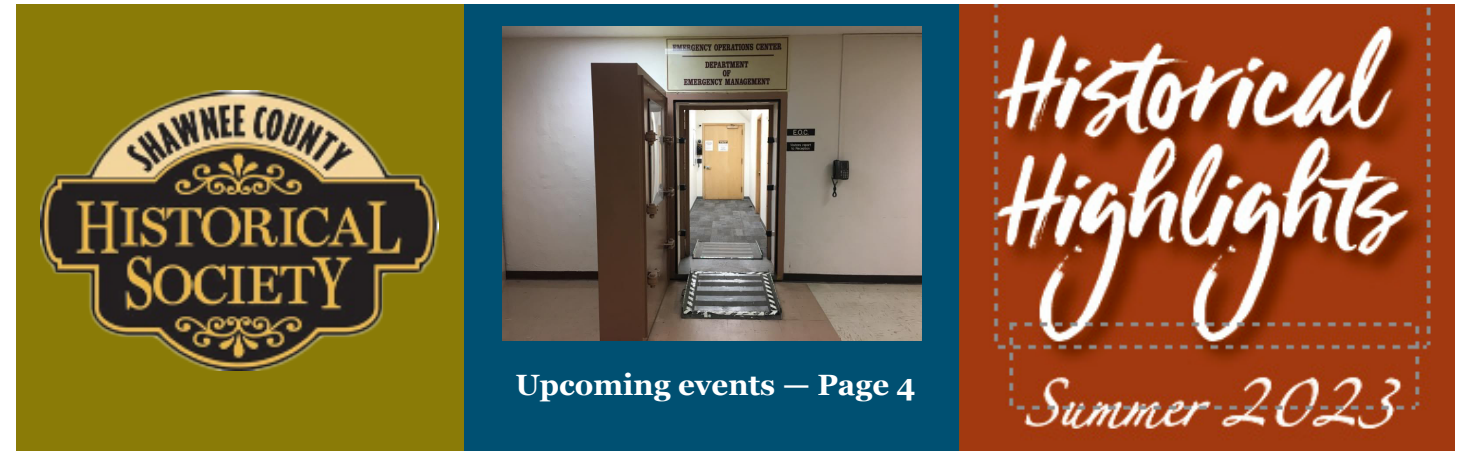
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## Giving them something to talk about

At a time in society when actual conversation is becoming more and more rare, it's good to know there is at least one thing we can all talk about: the weather. It remains our universal shared experience, a topic on which even the most shy can come up with a comment and all can discuss without causing offense.

The weather has always been front page news. When the telegraph started bringing news from around the nation and world to local papers, readers had even more weather news to discuss. A randomly picked front page from the Topeka Daily Capital in September 1884 reported an intense heat wave in eastern regions and cyclones in Wisconsin.

In Topeka, formal weather forecasting began in 1887.

The first official weather station was in the basement of Rice Hall on the Washburn College campus. The first official report from the weather bureau's many, T.B. Jennings read:

"June 1, 1887. A station of the second order was opened here this morning per L. R. 31 dated O. C. S. O., May 18, 1887.

"Generally clear cool weather. No snowfall. No aurora. Fair sunset verified." (1)

In 1870, the weather service was formalized with an act of Congress setting up weather observation stations at military installations around the country. (2) The weather bureau was under the War Department's signal



Courtesy KansasMemory.org

*The weather forecasting was done from the Columbian Building near 6th and Jackson streets in downtown Topeka in the early 1900s.*

corps, which was started in 1860 to send messages over distances using flags in the daytime and torches at night. (3)

In 1890, the weather bureau was moved to the Agriculture Department, despite objections from Gen. W.B. Hazen, who had taken over the signal corps in 1883. Hazen said the military was better equipped to ensure readings were taken precisely on time and had the means to punish any observer who didn't fulfill his duties. Hazen also said it was cheaper for the mili-

tary to do it than to hand it over to a civilian corps. (3)

Leading the effort to move the service was Rep. Edward Funston of the 2nd District of Kansas, chairman of the House Agriculture Committee. Funston was the father of Frederick Funston, who rose to the rank of major general in the Army and received the Medal of Honor for service in the Philippines during the Spanish American War.

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## From the President's desk

### Christine Steinkuehler



This summer is a hot one — and not just the weather. It was a great spring at the Historical Society. We had lots of visitors at the Ritchie House, including groups from KU, KSDE and several schools. We received a grant from the Topeka Community Foundation that will pay for all 7th grade students in Shawnee County to tour, as Bleeding Kansas is part of the 7th grade Social Studies curriculum, and there is nothing more “sticky” than coming to an actual site.

The first ever Show and Tell was a spectacular success. Members brought their favorite artifacts and the stories that go with them to share for the monthly Sunday event. The room was packed, so this will become an annual or bi-annual event. Some of the highlights included Mr. Kays' history of the National Weather Service in Shawnee County, Cris Cruz's acorn from the wood from the first Harvey House Restaurant at the Santa Fe Depot, Paul Post's fantastic photo albums from the Bates family, Ron Reese's artifacts from silent film actress Fay Tincher, the fantastic work that Shirley Driscoll has been doing with the land records from Rossville and so much more.

The Ritchie Cemetery tour with Don Taylor was fantastic. A number of people who attended grew up in the area and had stories about it, which made it even better.

The highlight of the spring, though, was Wyatt Jones, a 7th grade student from Robinson Middle School, who spoke about his National History Day project at the Shawnee County Preservation Awards ceremony. Wyatt's candor and wit about studying ancient history were refreshing. Recognition this year went to:

- Doug Wallace, who has literally has ‘written the book’ on Shawnee County history—a number of them in fact.
- Tim Paris, who led the city's preservation office, assisting with neighborhood surveys, writing grants and supporting national register nominations.
- The Beacon, which reimaged and restored the Women's Club at SW 9th and Topeka Boulevard.
- Adam and Kasie VanDonge, who have transformed the lower levels of the Columbian building into a premier nightspot.
- Sunflower Health, who took the vandalized remains of SBA/Menninger and returned them to use in health care.

Turnout was high for tours of the St Simon's Gardens at Grace Cathedral with Ann Palmer in June, and at the new Kansas Turnpike Authority building with David Jacobson in July.

We are happy to announce Paul Post, Lisa Sandmeyer and Mark Law have joined the board. They are excellent historians and bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the table we look forward to working with them and continuing to expand SCHS' offerings.

It is exciting to see the Tower Building on Menninger Hill has been purchased by Sunflower Development and is going to be developed as senior housing. Other events marking local history include dedications of a pocket park honoring the Menningers at 6th and Kansas and a statue honoring Teresa Cuevas, the founder of Mariachi Estrella, at Every Plaza. The Jayhawk Theater received a \$5million grant to get renovations moving.

Whew! That is a lot going on Shawnee County!  
For now, good bye and good historing!

## Three new members on SCHS board

Mark Law, Paul Post and Lisa Sandmeyer have joined the Shawnee County Historical Society Board of Trustees.

Mark is a heating and air conditioner expert who also knows a lot about Topeka pharmacies and where most old bottles were made.

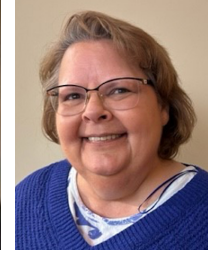
Paul is a retired attorney who has been involved in various historical preservation projects. Lisa is in charge of the Topeka Cemetery and enjoys sharing the history of the more than 35,000 souls buried there.



Mark Law



Paul Post



Lisa Sandmeyer

## Tours cover variety of topics

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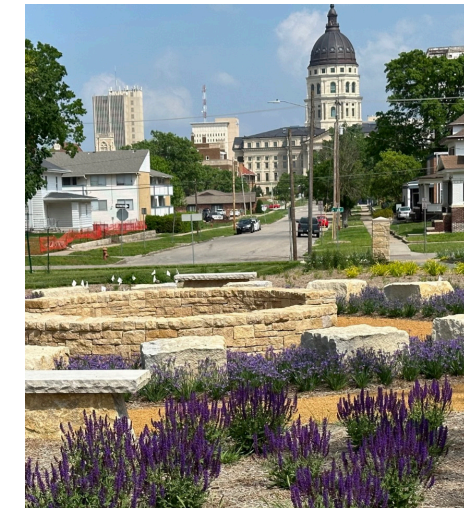
Bethany Place, describing its design and development. The grounds were originally part of the College of the Sisters of Bethany, a seminary for young women. The south half of the tract owned by the Episcopal Church was sold to the city in 1928 as the site for Topeka High School.

The church is collaborating with THS on garden projects, including allowing the culinary classes to cultivate vegetables and herbs in the garden's planters and bed.

The grounds are open to the public and can be accessed from Polk Street.

In July, David Jacobson led a tour of the new Kansas Turnpike Authority building on South Topeka Boulevard. He began with a presentation on the history of the road, which pre-dated the Interstate Highway System.

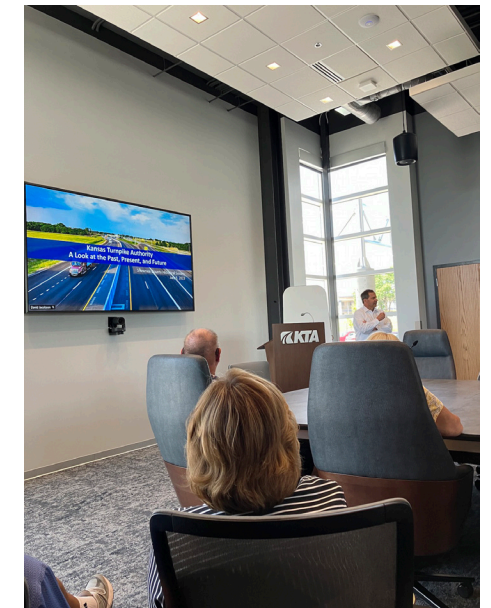
The building was designed to reflect



The Gardens at Bethany Place, left, and David Jacobson giving his presentation on the history of the Kansas Turnpike.

what the KTA does, with fixtures created from items used in road construction and even lane marking lines in the restrooms.

David described the latest update



to the system — a cashless toll scheme that records the amount due based on tracking license plates as they move on and off the toll road.

## Calendar of events

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!

**Aug. 13** — 3 p.m. Tour of the fallout shelter in the basement of the Shawnee County Courthouse, 200 SE 7th. Limited to 30 people, and a second date may be added to accommodate everyone interested. Email shawneecountyhistory@gmail.com or call (785) 224-4156 to reserve your spot.

**October** (Date TBD) — 3 p.m. Tour of Historic Topeka Cemetery. Gather on Mausoleum Row to hear stories about early Topekan and capital city history (and maybe a ghost story or two).

**Historic Homes Tour** is planned, with date still to be determined. Tour hours will be 1 to 5 pm

**Dec. 3** — Noon annual Membership Meeting. Lunch is \$35 a person if you wish to eat. Site is still to be determined.

*The public is welcome to any of these tours and presentations, and we'd love to see you!*

# Something to talk about

Continued from Page 1

For the first 20 years of these efforts, the service merely reported weather conditions, but as the data accumulated, the logical next step was to attempt to predict the weather.

The instruments used then are the same used today: barometers for air pressure, thermometers for temperature, rain and show gauges, anemometers to measure wind speed, and hygrometers for humidity. There was even a device that records the number of hours of sunshine with a lens that focuses the sun's rays on a card and left a burn line. The Campbell-Stokes sunshine recorder was used into the 21st century. (4)

## T.B. Jennings

Thorp Buttolph Jennings (1848-1925) came to the Topeka weather bureau in 1886 after stints with the bureau in Washington, D.C.; Toledo, Ohio; and Chicago and Springfield, Ill. From Rice Hall, his weather bureau office moved to the top floor of the Columbian Building, where he also had a roof observation station. At the time the Columbian was one of the highest points in Topeka, the newspaper said.

From the Columbian roof, Jennings took readings of rainfall, temperature, barometer and the skies, sending all that information to Washington. He had also at his disposal 40 years of weather records for Kansas collected by Fort Riley. According to The Topeka Mail of Dec. 8, 1893, weather hadn't changed much in those four decades.

Though there often were jokes made about the abilities of the forecasters, the official line had praise for the weather bureau. The Mail also observed: "In the past six months, 90 percent of the predictions have been absolutely correct, and it is a rare thing for a prediction to be absolutely wrong." (4)



*T.B. Jennings was the first weather bureau chief in Topeka, starting from an office in the basement of Rice Hall on the Washburn College campus.*

## Cider Smith

While T.B. Jennings was the official weather forecaster for Topeka, he had a knowledgeable amateur rival.

Isaiah Munson Smith (1819-1905) first got involved with weather data when he started a telegraph business in the 1840s in Wisconsin. That technology revolutionized weather forecasting by allowing forecasters to see weather movements.

Starting in 1849, the Smithsonian Institution provided telegraph offices with weather instruments, and their reports were used to create the first weather maps.

For the first 20 years of these efforts, the service merely reported weather conditions, but as the data accumulated, the logical next step was to attempt to predict the weather. (2)

Predictions were where Cider Smith excelled. As a farmer, the weather affected everything he did. He grew apples on the farm he had in the Highland Park area of — hence the nickname.

Smith told the Topeka State Journal in 1902 that he started observing



*Cider Smith was technically an amateur weather forecaster, but people sought out his predictions.*

the weather when he lived in Wisconsin. From telegraph reports that came through the offices he ran, Smith was able to learn about weather conditions in different areas of the country and watch how conditions moved.

"Mr. Smith makes his forecasts for periods covering several days or even weeks," the Journal said, "while Uncle Sam's warnings are sent out not more than 24 hours in advance."

The State Journal had a stake in promoting Smith's ability to prognosticate — the newspaper had exclusive rights to his forecasts. Most days, the weather report included the predictions from both Jennings and Smith.

Smith's success in weather forecasting wasn't luck. The man didn't have much of that in his life. His telegraph business ended up heavily in debt from unpaid taxes. Smith abandoned the business, but partner Ezra Cornell stuck with it and ended up making millions and co-founding Cornell University.

Smith then started selling wagons and moved to Chicago. He bought two lots in the business district — Dearborn Street — right in the path of the Great Chicago Fire in 1871.

He left those behind, too, and moved to Topeka. And giving everyone something to talk about — the weather.

# Variety of topics delights crowds

The Shawnee County Historical Society has had a busy past few months.

On March 6, the annual Preservation Awards honored five deserving people and projects. The recipients are chosen each year by members of SCHS and the city Landmarks Commission.

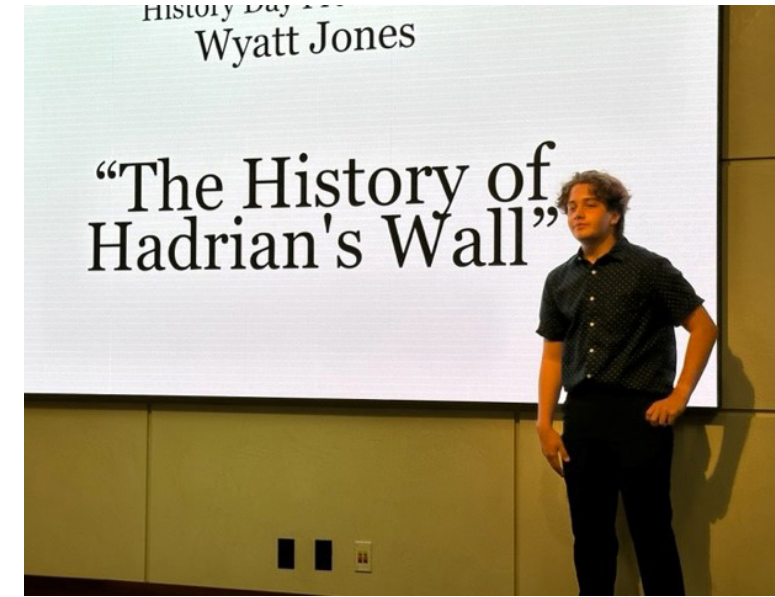
Grant Sourk of the SCHS emceed the event, which was held at the Statehouse. Awards were given to:

1. Renovations to the Beacon (former Woman's Club) at 420 SW 9th. Owned by Courtney and Chris Stemler and Shelby and Nic Irick, the facility is a beautiful addition to Topeka's event spaces.

2. Renovations by the Sunflower Foundation for two buildings on Meninger Hill. Long-neglected buildings were carefully restored and converted for use as the foundation's nonprofit center. The foundation is a statewide health philanthropy.

3. Tim Paris, recently retired preservation officer for the City of Topeka.

*Dan Taylor describes the work done by volunteers to restore the grounds of the Ritchie Cemetery at SW 27th and Boswell.*



*Wyatt Jones described how he put together his History Day project during the Shawnee County Preservation Awards.*

Tim was a leader in preserving Topeka's landmarks through collaboration with individuals, businesses, city planners and grant makers.

4. Doug Wallace, who quite literally wrote the book on Shawnee County, "Witness to the Times," with Roy Bird. Doug may have the largest collection of historical research of Topeka and Shawnee County, including about everything ever written about Topeka High School, from which he graduated in 1965.

5. Adam and Kasie VanDonge, whose White Linen restaurant and The Knox Cocktail Lounge have brought a new upscale experience along with renovations to the Columbia Building at 112 SW 6th Ave.

Jasmine Puderbaugh, a gifted

facilitator at Robinson Middle School, told attendees about the importance of History Day and encouraging historical thinking in young people. Her student Wyatt Jones, a 7th grader from Robinson, stole the show with his comments about creating his documentary "Hadrian's Wall." While this witty young man tried to convince the crowd he only studied ancient history and created a presentation in order to get a grade, many wondered if he might have a bright future in the past.

The event was made possible by a generous donation from Senne & Company Inc.

In April, Dan Taylor led a tour of Ritchie Cemetery at 27th and Boswell. The Ritchie Cemetery is located The first known burials on the 3.7-acre tract were in 1859. Few headstones were ever placed, but a group of volunteers has done an incredible job not only of clearing and keeping the grounds, but of identifying the estimated 300 people buried there.

The cemetery was predominantly populated by African-Americans. The last burial was in 1941.

Learn more at [RitchieCemetery.com](http://RitchieCemetery.com).

In June, the new gardens between Grace Cathedral and Topeka High School were the tour site. Ann Palmer led guest through the Gardens at

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