A Message From Our President

The mission of the Preservation Alliance is to advocate and educate.

Some weeks ago, I was part of an organizational conversation about buildings, neighborhoods, and community. A member of the group expressed concern about the historic districts. He argued that the group should avoid building near historic districts at all costs, calling the historical society “the hysterical society.”

The fact that someone believes the historical society somehow polices new development in historic districts was worrisome enough and should have negated his whole comment. I probably should have spoken up on that point to educate and explain that he misunderstood the process. But, I was distracted and distressed by the “hysterical” reference. I have heard condescending comments before, personally and publicly, about preservationists. Things like, “Preservationists are opposed to change. They don’t like new things. They don’t want people to make money,” etc. Matter of fact, last time I spoke publicly on the topic, I was accused of “thinking everyone should have to live in a 19th century bungalow.” (What a silly idea. What about Victorians, Dutch Colonial, Greek Revival, Queen Anne?)

Preservationists are NOT opposed to change. We are not hysterical. We are not opposed to people making money. (Have people not seen Antiques Roadshow?) We are not opposed to new things. I do not know a single preservationist who does not drive a car from this decade. Some even have hybrids. Geesh!

Maybe I have been associated with preservationists too long because I don’t get it. How has it come to pass that people who like old things are accused of not liking new things, too? Why is it hysterical to ask that new construction reckon with the old? Don’t most people prefer things to coordinate, such as furniture, clothing, and colors? Didn’t our parents tell us to take care of our things so we would have them in the future? Indeed, some things get more valuable if taken care of over time. My grandfather said it was better to repair than to replace. I hear that in church, too. Repairing and protecting is a form of stewardship. We are merely guardians in the present for the people and community of the future. Is this hysterical?

Maybe what is seen as hysterical is, in fact, passionate advocacy. Preservation does not just happen. The tendency to tear down and build new is often the path of least resistance. It is less complicated and simpler, which makes the old vulnerable. On the other hand, preserving and protecting the old is more complicated because it requires that the past be taken into account.

In order to account for the past, someone must know its stories and share them. The past needs a voice. Preservationists are the voice of the past. Think of it like this: the people who designed and built a building serve as its advocates. They tell others about the building, its qualities, character, why they should visit it, and they maintain and protect it. Eventually, the people responsible for the building are gone -- no more people to advocate and protect the building. Advocacy and protection become the responsibility of those left behind. If the building is lucky, its caretakers will have left documents and stories about the people that originally loved and cared for it. Maybe they will have left pictures or have named the building, too. If the building is unlucky, the stories will be lost to history.

It is the work of preservationists and historical societies to advocate for buildings and places that were once loved. We want others to hear the stories, too. Sometimes we raise our voice. This is not hysterical. This is advocacy.

Sara Fisher
Blue Earth Village
by Lauren W. Ritterbush

When we reflect on the history of our city and county, we often think of early Euroamerican settlers, farmers, and community members who founded and developed them. Events associated with this history were commonly documented in written records, photographs, and other illustrations. Some of the early homes, businesses, churches, and other places connected with these people and events also have been preserved as reminders of this past. Even earlier people, events, and ways of living, however, are less well known and documented. In order to understand this older history, we need to consider different kinds of records and more subtle physical clues that, unfortunately, are often easily damaged or destroyed. While this has frequently been the case for many of the archaeological resources in our local area, significant information has been extracted nonetheless. Some of that information tells us about the life of the Kanza or Kaw Indians who lived at Blue Earth village shortly before Euroamerican settlement.

Blue Earth village was established by 1790 by the Kanza tribe near the Kansas and Blue Rivers in what is now southwestern Pottawatomie County. This served as their homebase for more than a quarter century. During those years, the Kanza enjoyed a relatively stable life well adapted to the Plains. They followed a seasonal round of gardening adjacent to their village, hunting bison on the western prairies, and trapping and trading with Euroamericans for the goods that had become integral to their lives. With the signing of the treaty of June 1825, the Kanza ceded much of the land they used, causing discord that split the tribe into new villages. Subsequently, the Kanza experienced dramatic changes, while the trajectory of Euroamerican history of the region developed into that which we know today. Thus, Blue Earth village marks an important period of “traditional” Kanza history and development of the broader Euroamerican domination of the region.

So what became of this Native settlement? In 1880 Franklin Adams of the Kansas State Historical Society hired Henry Stackpole of Manhattan to map the remains of Blue Earth village 50 years after it was abandoned. By that time, its wood and earthen structures had collapsed and eroded; low earthen rings and depressions marked the location of former structures. Evidence of these houses continued to disappear, erased through cultivation by Euroamerican farmers making the area their home. Two early professional archaeologists were attracted to the site in the twentieth century in search of evidence of the early Kanza: Frederick Sterns of Harvard University in 1914 and Kansas-born archaeologist Waldo R. Wedel of the Smithsonian Institution in 1937. Both recovered useful clues of Kanza lifeways, but also found part of the site had disappeared into the meandering Kansas River. Cultivation, railroad construction, undocumented artifact collecting, and commercial and residential developments by Euroamerican settlers and their descendants have continued to damage the site such that what little remains is heavily disturbed.

Despite much destruction, researchers have gained some information about the Kanza people and their life at Blue Earth village. This has been accomplished through combined ethnohistoric analysis of written records and sketched images and archaeological study of the material remains and their context. Best documented is the form of the village and its houses. The settlement was large, occupied by more than 1,000 Kanza, who built substantial houses of post-and-beam construction covered with earth or sod. The circular plan of the lodges was apparent in the remnants of a house floor excavated by Wedel in 1937. More information about the details of house form and construction were recorded by members of a party of Americans (associated with the Long Expedition) who visited the Kanza at Blue Earth in August 1819. Thomas Say (party leader, naturalist, and (continued on pg. 3)
(continued from pg. 2) entomologist) and Nicholas Biddle (journalist) described the lodges in some detail, while the expedition artist Samuel Seymour and assistant naturalist (and artist) Titian Ramsay Peale II sketched a lodge interior and portion of the village, respectively. These images are the earliest known illustrations of Native American earthlodges in the Great Plains. More than the physical structure of the village and its lodges, researchers have learned that the Kanza lived with their extended families. For example, a Kanza lodge was often occupied by a man and his multiple wives and children in addition to grandparents and other relatives.

Although earthlodges provided protection from the cold, wind, sun, and heat, the Kanza typically spent only a portion of the year in the village. Each spring the women prepared gardens of corn, beans, pumpkins, and melons. Once planted, the tribe left their gardens and village to hunt herds of bison on the western Plains. Meat obtained during the large summer expeditions was consumed during the summer and dried for the winter to supplement the deer, elk, and other animals stalked near Blue Earth and their winter camps. The annual bison hunts also yielded hides and other materials for many of their material goods. These, in turn, were supplemented by items manufactured in Europe and the United States for the Indian trade.

By late summer, the tribe returned to Blue Earth village where they continued to process bison products, harvest their gardens, and prepare for the winter. As cold weather approached, families packed up once again, this time usually traveling eastward to the Missouri River region. During this season the tribe scattered into family camps where the men hunted deer for food and hides and trapped fur-bearing animals. Northeastern Kansas was not only a good winter hunting ground, it was also near established fur trade posts, such as the United States “factory” (trading post) at Fort Osage (present-day Sibley, Missouri).

By the late eighteenth century, trade was critical to the survival of the Kanza, participants in this international mercantile exchange since the late seventeenth century. They bartered numerous deer hides, otter pelts, and other animal furs for metal tools, cloth, various kinds of ornaments, and an assortment of other products. While trade records from Fort Osage indicate what goods were available to the Kanza and other local tribes (e.g., Osage) at that post between about 1808 and 1822, the archaeological record reveals the commodities they preferred: metal knives, axes, hoes, arrow points, guns, musket balls, traps, pots and kettles (which also provided raw material for native-made tools), buckles and buttons, tinklers (cone-shaped ornaments), and mouth harps. The Kanza also traded for imported gun flints, glazed ceramic vessels, cloth, and glass and shell beads.

The historical and archaeological records of Blue Earth village tell us much about the people for whom our state was named and an important period of their history. This site was the last major Native American village in this area, marking an important place in the broader history of the region. After the treaty of June 1825 between the Kanza and the United States government, the tribe experienced rapid, traumatic change. The most obvious alterations included the tribe splintering into groups with allegiances to different leaders and new villages established down the Kansas River, in some cases built there to be closer to the Kaw Agency below present-day Topeka. Although Blue Earth was abandoned by 1830, this area continued to be recognized as part of Kanza lands until 1846. That year the Kanza ceded the eastern portion of their previous reservation and moved to the upper Neosho River valley near present-day Council Grove. At the same time, Euroamerican merchants and immigrants passed through what had once been the Kanza homeland. Within a decade of their settlement of once Native ground, they had established a new culture, one that brought a new history to the region built around and over the fallen remains of the Kanza homes at Blue Earth village.

For more information and references to relevant source materials, see:

Lauren W. Ritterbush, Ph. D. has focused her recent ethnohistoric and archaeological research on the culture history of the Kanza or Kaw Indians. She will be discussing Blue Earth village and its Kanza occupants at a “Go See It!” presentation at the Flint Hills Discovery Center on Nov. 19, 2015.
The house located at 1446 Laramie Street was demolished in June. The owner had originally applied for a demolition permit in May 2011. The house was located within the 500-ft. environs of the KSAC Radio Towers, which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and at the time, the Kansas State Historic Preservation Act included a review process for projects occurring within historic environs. (The historic environs review process was eliminated by the Kansas Legislature in 2013.)

In June 2011, the Historic Resources Board (HRB) reviewed the project and made the determination that the proposed demolition would adversely impact the historic environs. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) also reviewed the project and noted that the house “is part of a small group of character-defining residential properties that remains along the 1400 block of Laramie Street. . . Therefore, the SHPO has determined that the demolition of 1446 Laramie will encroach upon, damage or destroy the environs of the KSU [sic] Radio Towers.”

In years past, there had been two sets of stairs south of Nichols Hall along Anderson Avenue, which had provided a physical and visual connection between the radio towers and the residential neighborhood to the south. In addition to contributing to the environs, the house had also been determined to be potentially eligible for historic registry listing.

As a result of these two determinations, the city was prohibited from issuing a demolition permit. However, the law provided the property owner with the opportunity to appeal to the local governing body and make the case that there is no feasible or prudent alternative. In Oct. 2012, which was over a year since the project was initially reviewed by the HRB, the City Commission held a public hearing to consider the request to demolish 1446 Laramie. The owner stated that no improvements had been made to the house since its conversion to apartments post-World War II, and so making all of the necessary improvements now would be cost prohibitive.

The M/RCPA submitted comments in opposition to demolition, noting that the house had not been adequately maintained and was suffering from “demolition by neglect.” If the house were listed on the National Register, a rehabilitation project would be potentially eligible for state and federal tax credits totaling 45% of qualified expenses, which would have had a significant impact on renovation costs for the owner, or for a new owner if the house had been sold.

In the end, the majority of the City Commission approved the demolition request, believing there were no feasible or prudent alternatives. In June 2015, the owner applied for a demolition permit, and the house was demolished.

At top, 1446 Laramie as shown in the 1933 Royal Purple when it housed a sorority. Middle, the house in 2012. Bottom, demolition in progress in June 2015.
Save the Date!
Annual Meeting of the Manhattan/Riley County Preservation Alliance Thursday, Sept. 10, 2015 Union Pacific Depot 7:00 p.m.

All M/RCPA members are invited to attend.

Do You Want to be More Involved?
If you are interested in serving on the Board of Directors, contact Sara Fisher at mrcpanewsletter@gmail.com or 785-564-2457.

Peace Memorial Auditorium Diamond Jubilee 60th Anniversary Celebration Saturday, Sept. 26, 4:00 p.m. 1101 Poyntz Ave.

Dedicated in 1955, Peace Memorial Auditorium is celebrating 60 years of service to our community! A program is planned for Saturday, Sept. 26, featuring Dr. Frank Tracz and the Kansas State University pep band as well as other musical performances.

Wednesday, Oct. 7
Tours
Wolf House Museum
www.rileychs.com/wolf_house.cfm
Sunset Cemetery
www.cityofmhk.com/299/Cemeteries
Downtown Manhattan Historic District
www.cityofmhk.com/DocumentCenter/Home/View/6066

Events
Reception & Banquet (Hilton Garden Inn)
Keynote Address (Hilton Garden Inn): Tom Parish, photographer, & Jack Hofman, archaeologist Subterranean Stone Structures in the Flint Hills of Kansas
After-hours networking (location to be determined)

Thursday, Oct. 8
Training sessions at Wareham Opera House
• Updates on Historic Preservation Issues in Kansas
• Stone Grave Markers: Mapping & Preserving
• Kansas Stone Today: Quarrying & Shaping
• Stone Masonry Preservation: Techniques & Materials
• State & Federal Historic Tax Credits
• Athletic Cathedrals of Kansas: Sports Venues Across the Sunflower State
• KPA Sponsors Highlight Luncheon

Visit the Kansas Preservation Alliance’s web site for details and registration information: www.kpalliance.org.
2014-15 M/RCPA Membership Roster

$35 Historic Level

$100 Preservation Level

$250 Landmark Level
David & Kathy Dzewaltowski, GJL Real Estate, Mark & Ann Knackendoffel, Dr. Patricia J. O’Brien, Barbara Poresky, Prairiewood Retreat & Preserve, Gwyn & Gina Riffel, Kevin S. & Alyn Pennington West

Honorary Lifetime Members
Rose M. Bissey (in memory of Charles Bissey), Enell Foerster (in memory of Bernd Foerster), Dr. Patricia J. O’Brien, Edna L. Williams