



MANHATTAN/RILEY COUNTY PRESERVATION ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

April/May 2011

A Message From Our President Kathy Dzewaltowski

I am so thrilled to announce that one of Manhattan's most recognizable buildings turns 100 years old in 2011! Bluemont Elementary School, located at 714 Bluemont Ave., is turning 100 years old, and celebration with cake, ice cream, and musical entertainment is planned for May 9th, 6:30 – 7:30 p.m. I'm excited about this significant milestone because Bluemont's story is a positive story of survival and second chances. Just 10 years ago, Bluemont's future was uncertain, and it looked unlikely that it would reach the grand age of 100. As is so often the case with historic structures on the brink, a few short years can lead to dramatic changes.

Bluemont's story begins in 1911 when Henry Winter, along with a partner named Meier, was hired to design the school (O'Brien 100). John Winter, Henry's father and a building contractor, submitted the winning bid of \$24,000 and built the school. Bluemont's first students began attending the school in January 1912 (*The Manhattan Mercury*, May 12, 2002).

Constructed of limestone, Bluemont was built to last. Many of its interesting architectural details are still visible on the exterior, and many of its original features remain intact in the interior, including built-in storage cabinets, cloakrooms, wood banisters, and plaster walls and ceilings. The original principal's office on the top floor also still exists. Although used for other purposes these days, it includes a smaller outer office for a secretary and built-in cabinets with glass-

fronted doors.

For nine decades, Bluemont educated Manhattan's children. Anyone living in Manhattan during the 1990's and 2000's most likely remembers what happened next in Bluemont's story. Manhattan experienced a steady decline in enrollment over a period of several years, the school board decided in the fall of 2001 to close Bluemont and Eugene Field Elementary to compensate, and the board then began discussing the possibility of selling Bluemont to bring revenue to the district. If Bluemont had been sold, the potential existed for a new owner to view its lot as the ideal location to build something new, and Bluemont might have been demolished.

Over the next several months, controversy regarding the possible sale of Bluemont developed as the school board subsequently learned that Bluemont is sited on a "public square," as are Eugene Field and Woodrow Wilson Elementary Schools. "Public squares" are public areas set aside in Manhattan's early years to be used for marketplaces, parks, and schools and are owned by the local government.

In order to determine Bluemont's exact ownership, the matter was pursued in district court, with the judge ruling that the "public square" property belonged to the City of Manhattan (*The Manhattan Mercury*, Jan. 22, 2004). The school board could not sell Bluemont because it didn't own the property. This may have saved Bluemont from possible demolition by a new owner,

but what to do with the building was still in question.

My particular interest in Bluemont stems in part from my connection to its sister-in-closure, Eugene Field, which my children were attending at the time it was closed. Field was immediately renovated and repurposed into the district's Head Start facility. Children continued to be educated at Field and laugh on its playground. In stark contrast, Bluemont was mothballed and relegated for district storage. Whenever I drove past Bluemont, I noticed its forlorn appearance, the boarded up broken windows, the litter accumulating along its fence line, and the empty playground. I hoped that it, like Field, would be given a new purpose.

Over time, the school district experienced a complete reversal of fortune and enrollment began to increase, largely due to the return of the First Infantry to Fort Riley, and the district needed more space. The school board voted to reopen Bluemont in order to provide the district with more capacity and to give the board time to plan for additional space needs.

After being closed for five years, Bluemont got its second chance and reopened as an elementary school in the fall of 2007. In addition to celebrating its 100th birthday, Bluemont will also be getting a new addition as part of the district's bond projects. Best wishes to Bluemont!

O'Brien, Dr. Patricia J. [The Architects and Buildings of Manhattan, Kansas](#). Manhattan, Kansas: Riley County Historical Society, 2008.



One of these houses was moved from the corner of Fourth Street and Bluemont Avenue to make way for the two-lane roundabout. Its new location is on South Manhattan Avenue. Can you spot the new addition to the block?

New Location, New Life

The city's Fourth Street improvement project has been gradually improving sections of Fourth Street between Ft. Riley Boulevard and Bluemont Ave. The second phase of the project involved the creation of a two-lane roundabout at the intersection of Fourth Street and Bluemont Ave. The roundabout's construction necessitated the acquisition of the four corner lots at the intersection.

Because the roundabout project was partially funded by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), federal guidelines related to the environment had to be followed, which included historic preservation. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) determined that the three structures on the corner lots were eligible for the state and national registers. The use of federal funds also meant that Sec. 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act applied and meant that the city,

FHWA, KDOT, SHPO, and other consulting parties had to determine how to mitigate the adverse effects the roundabout would have on the historic structures.

The preferred option for mitigation was to move the structures, and all three structures have since been successfully moved. The Sophia Jarbeaux House, located at 402 Bluemont Ave., was relocated on its existing lot. The red bungalow, located at 330 Bluemont Ave., was moved to the Wamego area.

The house located at 401 Bluemont Ave. was purchased by Linda Olson Bongers. At one time, Ms. Bongers had lived in the house for 18 years and still had a soft spot for it. It was important to her that the house be saved.

With help from the City of Manhattan, the cottage located at 401 Bluemont Ave. was moved to a new lot on South Manhattan Ave.

between Colorado and Pierre Streets, where it fits right in.

A person driving along South Manhattan Ave. would be hard pressed to pick out which house was a recent addition to the block, which one can only describe as a successful move. Can you tell which one it is?

Can you spot the new addition to the block? See page 6 for the answer.

*2011 Historic Preservation
Building Awards
Thu., May 12th, 7:00 p.m.
Union Pacific Depot*

All M/RCPA members are invited to attend the Historic Preservation Building Awards. The program is open to the general public, so bring a guest! Parking is limited at the depot, so carpooling is encouraged.



The John E. Hessin house, located at 519 N. 11th Street.

The John E. Hessin House

On the edge of Aggieville at the corner of 11th and Laramie Streets is a residence that has been converted to a rental with a porch that's been enclosed to expand its interior living space. That's nothing unique given the many single-family residences near Aggieville and the KSU campus that have been converted into multi-unit apartments over the years. One could easily drive past a rental property in this area and not make note of it. What's eye catching and noteworthy about the house located at 519 N. 11th Street is its commanding presence and the elaborate stone work details still visible on the exterior north facade. Upon closer inspection, it isn't hard to envision the grand house as the structure once was.

The house at 519 N. 11th Street was built in 1886 for local attorney John E. Hessin at a cost of \$5,500. Hessin grew up in Ohio, as a teenager he fought for the Union Army in the Civil War, and studied law after the war. He and his wife

Cordelia moved to Manhattan in the 1870's, and Hessin began a law practice (Littrell 355).

Hessin created a partnership with George S. Green, and their practice "Green and Hessin, Attorneys at Law" was located above E. B. Purcell's hardware store on the corner of Third Street and Poyntz Avenue, according to a notice in the July 25, 1897 edition of *The Nationalist*. In 1884, Hessin and Green had a new building constructed for their law practice. George Ropes, an architect from Topeka who also served as the State Architect (O'Brien 14), designed the Green and Hessin/Limbocker Building, which is still standing and is the stone building with the distinctive arches and granite columns located on the northeast corner of Third Street and Poyntz Avenue. The building is actually two buildings that were constructed at the same time, with owner J. N. Limbocker designing his building to match Green and Hessin's (Tour 18).

Interestingly, the Hessin and Limbocker families are also buried next to each other in Sunset Cemetery.

George Ropes also designed Hessin's home on North 11th Street (O'Brien 14). The April 7, 1886, edition of *The Manhattan Mercury* reported details of the house's construction: "R. H. Burrows has been awarded the contract for building Hessin's new house, to be finished in November. The plans indicate that it will be the finest looking house in the city. Mr. Burrows also has the contract to build Rev. Wake's house." Later, the July 7, 1887, edition of *The Manhattan Mercury* reported "Jno. E. Hessin's residence was fitted with a system of electric bells by J. G. Harbord Tuesday." Presumably, the bells were for summoning servants.

According to Charley Kempthorne, whose parents owned the house for many years, the first floor has a double set of stone walls with a gap between them large enough that a person could inch along sideways between them. The air space between the sets of walls provides insulation. The third floor was originally all one room and was probably a ballroom.

John Hessin went on to serve as county attorney and city attorney, and he served on the Board of Regents of Kansas State Agricultural College during 1890-96. In 1896, he was elected to the state senate, and he later campaigned unsuccessfully to be Kansas governor (Littrell 355).

Hessin later practiced law with his son Clarke. The Hessin and Hessin law firm handled one-third of the legal cases in Riley County in its day (*The Nationalist*, Semi-Centennial Edition, 1910). Hessin had a reputation for taking on high profile cases, including defending wealthy rancher Chauncey Dewey, who had been accused of murder. The Dewey family had been entangled in a range war feud with

the Berry family as well as other farmers, and accusations against the Deweys included claims that they had fenced off



Roofline detail.

government land for their exclusive use. The feud escalated and resulted in a shoot-out between members of the Berry family and Chauncey Dewey, with the help of a few of his ranch hands. Three members of the Berry family were killed in the shoot-out, and the resulting murder trial caused a sensation. Hessin was part of the eight-member defense team that successfully argued Dewey had acted in self-defense. Dewey was acquitted (news articles from *The Kansas City Star*, Feb. 3, 1904, and March 20, 1904, cited on the web site <http://genealogytrails.com/kan/cheyenne/berry.html>). The Deweys' land in Riley and Geary Counties is now the Konza Prairie Biological Station (<http://keep.konza.ksu.edu/about/dewey.htm>).

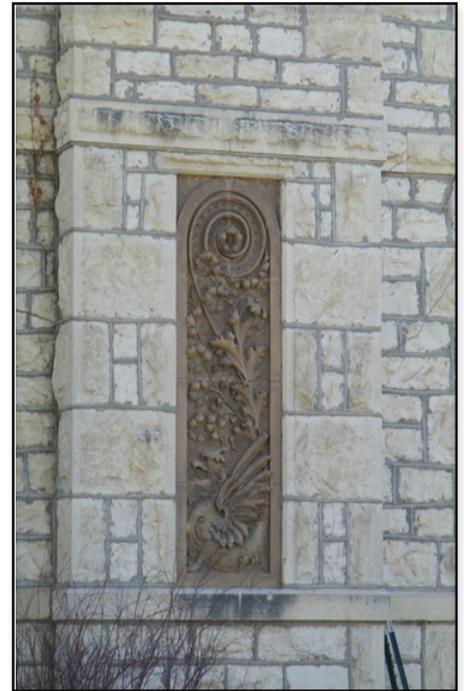
Over the years, the John E. Hessin house has been a fraternity, a sorority, the Palmer Secretarial

School, Dr. Kempthorne's ophthalmology office, and is currently divided into apartments. The original staircase was

donated to KSU's art department for use in a play. By the time the

Kempthornes purchased the house in 1958, Charley Kempthorne said that the interior had already been remodeled so many times that he couldn't say for sure what features other than the woodwork might be original. However, as previously noted, many of the finely-crafted exterior details remain intact.

The house's location so near Aggieville and Kansas State makes it vulnerable to the possibility of new infill being constructed on its lot and the house demolished. The John E. Hessin House is an important Manhattan cultural resource and provides us with a connection to our community's past as well as a glimpse of what life was like for a prominent Kansas attorney. The Hessin House is valuable, not for the value of its lot, but for what it adds to Manhattan's story and the community's historical character.



Elaborate stonework detail on the chimney.

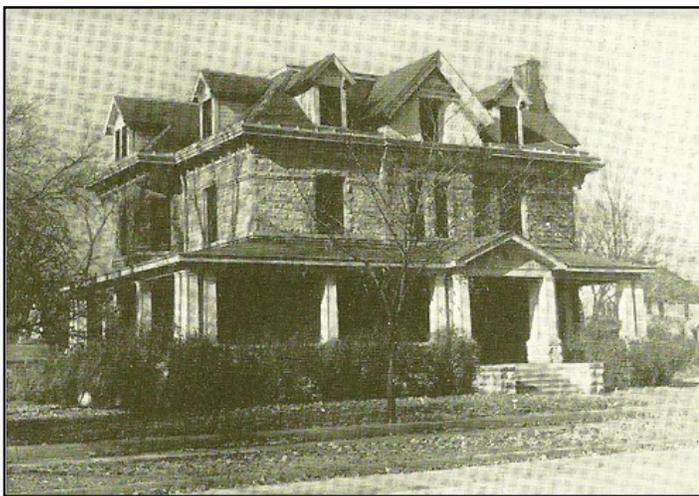
Notes

Genealogy Trails. Murder, Mystery, Spooky News Articles. [Online] Available <http://genealogytrails.com/kan/cheyenne/berry.html>, March 9, 2011.

Littrell, J. Harvey. Riley County, Kansas, Officials and Their Families, 1855-1900. Manhattan, Kansas: Riley County Historical Society, 1996.

O'Brien, Dr. Patricia J. The Architects and Buildings of Manhattan, Kansas. Manhattan, Kansas: Riley County Historical Society, 2008.

A Tour of Registered Historic Places in Manhattan, Kansas. Manhattan, Kansas: City of Manhattan Community Development Department.



The photo above shows the Hessin House when it was Kappa Sigma Fraternity. The photo is from the 1936 *Royal Purple* and is used with the permission of Kansas State University Student Publications.

If This House Could Talk

The M/RCPA in cooperation with the East Park Neighborhood Association and HandsOn Kansas State, which is a Leadership Studies' program that promotes leadership through service opportunities, put together a walking tour of historic homes on Leavenworth Street and Juliette Avenue on April 17th.

K-State students identified homeowners who were willing to share their homes, interviewed homeowners about their homes, and did historic research with guidance and support from the M/RCPA. The men of Sigma Nu Fraternity also volunteered their time as tour docents.



Twelve homes between the 700 and 1000 blocks of Leavenworth and one residence on Juliette were featured in the historic walking tour, which was a mix of interiors and exteriors. About 50 participants attended the event to learn more about the history of the people who had lived in the homes and to learn about the buildings themselves.

Following the walking tour, HandsOn Kansas State hosted a reception for participating homeowners and provided each homeowner with a framed photograph of their home as well as the information that had been presented about the house's history.

Public Hearing to Demolish 831 Leavenworth

The City Commission will conduct a public hearing on May 17, 2011, at 7:00 p.m. in the City Commission Room, to consider a request by First Presbyterian Church to demolish the house located at 831 Leavenworth Street. The house at 831 Leavenworth Street is within 500 feet of the Robert Ulrich House and the Woman's Club House, which are both listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Anyone who wishes to have written comments included in the City Commission packet must submit their comments by May 3, 2011 to the Community Development Department. For more information, please contact Cam Moeller, Planner II, in the Community Development Department at (785) 587-2412 or moeller@ci.manhattan.ks.us.

The M/RCPA August 2010 newsletter featured an article about 831 Leavenworth Street. The M/RCPA also submitted the Preliminary Site Information Questionnaire to the Kansas Historical Society to determine if the house was potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, and the answer was yes.

Both Manhattan's Historic Resources Board (HRB) and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) denied First Presbyterian Church's request to demolish the house. The HRB determined that the demolition of the house "Does not



meet the Standards and Guidelines for Evaluating the Effect of Projects on Environs and will encroach upon, damage or destroy the environs of the Robert Ulrich House." The church had also proposed to create a columbarium (a repository for cremated remains) with green space on the site, which was in direct conflict with the standard that states, "When the severity of deterioration requires removal within the environs, compatible reconstruction shall occur." The SHPO also denied demolition and determined that "831 Leavenworth is a character-defining feature of the environs of the Robert Ulrich House and the Woman's Club House."

Advocates for saving the house became concerned about the possibility of its being vulnerable to "demolition by neglect" after

observing that stones had been removed from the front porch and after touring the interior and observing that asbestos abatement had taken place with no concern for the holes that were left behind in the walls. The house has been vacant since Manhattan Emergency Shelter, Inc. moved to its new location in 2008.

All M/RCPA members are encouraged to submit comments and attend the public hearing on May 17th.

Pictured above is 831 Leavenworth with its porch intact, and at right is a close-up of the porch with stones and railing removed.



Pictured at left is the answer to the question from page 2.

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Honorary Lifetime Members

Rose M. Bissey (in memory of Charles Bissey), Enell Foerster (in memory of Bernd Foerster), Pat O'Brien.

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Pictured above is the Vattier line trolley with a newly constructed Bluemont Elementary School in the background. Bluemont was constructed in 1911 and is celebrating its 100th birthday this year. The photo is courtesy of the Riley County Historical Society.