
MANHATTAN/RILEY COUNTY PRESERVATION ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT, JUDINE MECSERI

APRIL, 2007

Hello everybody—

George Bernard Shaw once said “We are made wise not by the recollection of our past, but by the responsibility for our future.” Although several interpretations of this quote could be made, I think it does find significance as we strategically plan Manhattan’s future through redevelopment.

In our downtown, decisions are being made that take into consideration many significant issues: architecture, environment, history, infrastructure, current businesses, new businesses, and costs, financial and otherwise. These decisions are drastically impacting the future of our city. They are highly important and we need to get it right. If not, well, there are examples of when other cities didn’t.

If we take a look at St. Joseph, Missouri, we see a city that could be one of the Midwest’s most thriving historic centers. But at some time in the past the “powers that be” decided to turn their backs on St. Joseph’s downtown. Almost all commerce has moved east to the “Belt Highway” with its long series of strip malls and big box retailers. Pound for pound, St. Joseph’s core has more high quality historic fabric than cities many times larger. The sad part is, the core is now referred to as having “the Brown

Blight.” St. Joseph’s downtown was once amazing and still has loads of potential. But, it would take a Herculean effort and hundreds of millions in investment to even hope of bringing it back to life. Its once prosperous existence is only a distant memory.

Manhattan is at a crossroads in its history and we want the “powers that be” to get it right and make us proud. Otherwise, at some point in the future we may be looking back saying “what went wrong?” just like people do in St. Joe.

Will we learn from the past or will we be lead down the primrose path? Will we make complaints but never take a stand if we see things straying from what we were promised? Will we have the fortitude to say No Deal for the better-

ment of our collective future?

Our circumstances are surely different than that of our counterparts in the past but, does it appear that we are lacking the common sense that prevailed in city planning prior to World War II. History teaches us that human actions have consequences and that certain choices, once made, can not be undone. They foreclose the possibility of making other choices and thus determine future events.

Right now the opportunities are great but so are the responsibilities. So, let our voices be heard by participating in public forums, commission meetings, and letters to the editor.

In the end, will we be pleased and proud of the history that we were part of making?

Judine

Eleven Most Endangered Tour

The Manhattan/Riley County Preservation Alliance will soon host its “Eleven Most Endangered” tour in order to examine threats to the historic fabric of this area.

M/RCPA members who have joined at the Preservation Level (\$250) and above will receive an invitation to view our community from the “endangered” perspective. We will visit some local buildings that are usually not open to

the public and we enjoy light refreshments in a historic building that has been put to a new use.

This special tour is one way to thank the members who have funded our organization at the most generous levels.

If you are unable to participate in the actual tour, don’t worry. We plan to document the experience and include it in another newsletter very soon.

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Contact us at
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info@preservemanhattan.org

Bought & Sold: 617 Colorado

We are pleased to report that the house at 617 Colorado is in good hands and that its prospects for the future are bright. Recently threatened with demolition, this remarkable shingle style house was purchased by the M/RCPA. The very next day it was placed on the Register of Historic Kansas Places, soon to be added to the National Register of Historic Places. The M/RCPA has sold the house to preservationists Jim Sherow and Bonnie Lynn-Sherow who have experience in restoring historic houses.

Another Award

We have received word that Manhattan's Union Pacific Depot project will be recognized with a preservation award at the Kansas State Historic Preservation Conference in Dodge City on May 10th.

Appreciation

Long-time preservation advocate Jean Hill donated her time and talent to shepherd 617 Colorado through the ownership transfer process—twice! Jean has donated her realtor's fees to the M/RCPA.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

M/RCPA Board Meeting
 Thursday, April 12th, 7:00 p.m.
 Manhattan's U.P. Depot

State Preservation Conference
 May 10th—12th
 Dodge City, Kansas

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Manhattan's First Historic Summit



Manhattan's first Historic Summit was held at the Union Pacific Depot on the evening of February 8th, 2007.

Board members from the Manhattan/Riley County Preservation Alliance, the Manhattan Historic Resources Board, and Downtown Manhattan Inc. were in attendance along with other community members who have a strong interest in historic preservation.

The Depot's round tables were laid with tablecloths and decorated with vases of fresh flowers. Refreshments (an elegant assortment of homemade cookies) were served on china plates. Digital slideshows played on the Depot's new high definition television. A congenial group of participants socialized before the meeting was called to order.

Moderator Bonnie Lynn-Sherow invited a representative of each board to list the most pressing preservation issues from his or her group's perspective.

After a general discussion, each table of participants refined their priorities for action. Topics common to all of groups:

- The need for historic brick sidewalk maintenance.
- The need for a preservation planner on city staff.
- The need for greater protection for older buildings through building codes and zoning codes.
- The need for better understanding of the International Building Code for existing buildings by city employees.
- The need for an ordinance to avoid "Demolition by Neglect."
- The need to identify and create additional historic districts.
- The need to improve downtown historic design guidelines.
- The need to coordinate and streamline all city permit processes for historic building owners undergoing a major restoration project.
- The need for increased awareness of the value of preservation and its utility in teaching local history.

Other topics that were mentioned but not common to all groups: bridge piers, maintenance of the Depot by the city, downtown ordinances related to outdoor living,

better signage leading visitors to downtown, and the south end redevelopment plan.

Summit participants agreed on a specific plan of action:

1. To hold an annual or even semi-annual meeting to gauge progress on the above issues.
2. To subscribe to one another's newsletters, listserves, and other membership networks.
3. To work with one another directly towards resolution of issues that affect us all.
4. To report on each other's activities through regular reports from board liaisons.
5. To offer appropriate support and to prevent needless duplication of efforts.

While our "to do" list is long, each board was asked by our moderator to discuss the issues, to communicate with the other boards, and to form an effective strategy for progress on at least ONE topic to get the ball rolling. Through persistence and cooperation we will make a difference!

We thank Bonnie Lynn-Sherow and her committee for organizing the Historic Summit.

A History of the Strasser House, 326 Laramie

Research and photos provided by Dr. Patricia O'Brien



326 Laramie

Downtown redevelopment has brought prominence to the stone house standing at 326 Laramie. It now has the distinction of being the second oldest house still standing in Manhattan's Ward 2.

This New England style house was built in 1874 on lots 114 and 115 in Ward 2 by Mrs. Phillipena Strasser, a widow. She was born in Germany and she and her children arrived in Manhattan from Illinois. Because of the house's generous size, it may have been meant for use as a boarding house as well as for the family's home.

Phillipena Strasser married Zeandale farmer and Civil War veteran Isom Tull on April 26, 1875, and joined him on his farm. According to the 1875 census the combined household consisted of the Tull children, William B. (age 21), Mary (age 17), Saumuel (age 14), John (age 12), Cora (age 8), Carrie (age

6), and Alta (age 4) and the Strasser children, a son, G.K. (age 15), Fred (age 13), William J. (age 11), and Julia E. (age 4). By 1880 census information shows that they had added Edmond (age 4) and Pasiencie (age 11 months).

Mr. C. Perry McDonald, also a farmer in the Zeandale area, was presumably ready to move to town when he purchased Phillipena Strasser Tull's two town lots and house in 1876. He had originally come to Kansas from Indiana in the fall of 1854 and established a claim in the area. He returned East briefly but came back to his claim in the spring of 1855. He owned an 80 acre tract and another 70 acre tract. His house and barn, located on the Zeandale Road approximately two miles east of today's Kansas River bridge at Manhattan were surrounded by orchards. He also owned a third tract on which a

stone quarry was located. He had married Miss Mary McCurdy on December 11, 1856 and their wedding was the first in Zeandale township. They had five children, three sons and two daughters.

It was during the time that the McDonalds owned the house that the two-story stone addition was built. It is speculated that the stone came from the McDonald stone quarry.

By 1882 Hiram Keyes had purchased the two lots and house. He added lot 116 to the property. He appears in the 1885 Kansas census as being fifty-two years old, a native of Ohio, a member of Company K, Eleventh Kansas Cavalry, and married to "L.C.," age 46 and also a native of Ohio. They had seven Kansas-born children, three boys and four girls.

Jennie R. Marsh purchased the house and three lots in 1887. She was the second wife of Francis E. Marsh who was identified as a grocer in the 1886-7 Polk's Kansas Gazetteer. Francis E. Marsh and Mrs. Jennie R. Moffit had married in Manhattan on August 25, 1886. It was common for businessmen of the era to put the house in the wife's name.

The Marsh family sold the three lots and house at 326 Laramie in 1913. The new owner, Seward Henderson, sold the house to E.G. Forrester by 1914. A.F. Vilander acquired the property in 1916 and held it until 1917. In the meantime he was building a \$1,000 house at 326 Leavenworth. W.O. Disney acquired lots 114 and 115 in 1918

and Henry Becker acquired lot 116. By 1920 W.O. Disney owned all three lots. In 1921 W.E. Cooper acquired lots 114 and 115 and the house. His widow, Margaret Cooper, lost the property to the Union National Bank in 1931, likely a victim of the Great Depression.

Some time during the 1930's there was a fire in the basement of 326 Laramie. It is likely that the house was made into a duplex following repairs. From that time until the present the house has served as a duplex.

Union National Bank sold the house and two lots to Henley H. Haymaker in 1936. Dr. Haymaker was a professor of plant pathology who had arrived at Kansas State Agricultural College in 1917. In addition to serving as a professor, Dr. Haymaker was appointed to the board of the K.S.A.C. Memorial Stadium Corporation in 1943. He served as secretary of that organization. Haymaker Hall, a dormitory on campus, is named in his honor.

Remembering that 326 Laramie was a duplex dating from the 1930's, it is interesting to note that the son of Judge C.B. Daughters, Lynn Daughters, rented the house with his family in 1938 and 1939.

We are familiar with the Daughters family because they were the second residents of 617 Colorado, owned for a brief time recently by the Manhattan/Riley County Preservation Alliance, Inc. The Daughters family had moved to Manhattan so that their son, Lynn, could attend Kansas State Agricultural College. He graduated in 1909 and in his first year out of school he was employed as the city editor of the Manhattan *Daily Mercury*. In

1911 Lynn Daughters purchased the *Council Grove Republican* and served as its editor. It was in Council Grove that he met and married Miss Ruth Harvey, a niece of former Governor Harvey. From Council Grove the family (including two daughters) moved to Wathena, Kansas, and then back to Manhattan by 1928. He most likely stayed to care for his mother, Carrie Daughters, and left town shortly after her death in 1940.

Dr. Haymaker owned the house until 1980 with the exception of the year 1951 in which there was a transfer and return of the property between Haymaker and J.R. and B.K. Wilson.

Roy Waddell owned the house



and lots from 1980 until 1984 at which time the property was acquired by Jeff Endacott of Endacott Electric. The business was located at 309 Moro, a half block from the house.

Charles R. "Dick" Dickens purchased the house and lots in 1988 and owned the property until his death in 1991. He was a custodian for USD 383, retiring from Woodrow Wilson School in 1968. He had

been a charter member of the Eagles Lodge and was active with the group's baseball team, even serving as the first commissioner of the City League Baseball program for boys and continuing his service with that organization for over forty years. The C.R. Dickens press box was dedicated to his memory in Anneberg Park. He was married to Charlotte Smith in 1927 and the couple had two sons, Ralph and Robert, who inherited the house and lots. Robert bought Ralph's share in November of 1991. Robert and his wife, Marilyn, have been the most recent residents until the house was purchased by the Dial Corporation.

Read All About It!

Sometime later this year we will all have the opportunity to read more about the historic buildings of our area.

The Riley County Historical Society will publish Dr. Patricia O'Brien's latest book, **Architects and Buildings of Manhattan, Kansas**.

Publishing a book with a large number of photographs is an expensive proposition. The project has been greatly assisted by a grant from the Kemper Foundation of Kansas City and also by their local affiliate, Commerce Bank of Manhattan. Both entities have been generous supporters of historic preservation. We thank them.

Pre-publication orders at a special price will be available at a later date.

Contemplating the Legal Status of 326 Laramie

The legal status of the historic house at 326 Laramie has become somewhat confused in the public's mind, particularly since Ned Seaton's "I Wonder" columns appeared in *The Manhattan Mercury* on February 27th and March 23rd.

Rick Kiolbasa was quoted as saying that the Dial Corporation intends to move the house. Assistant city manager Jason Hilgers, however, indicated that the city intends to nominate the house for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

What are we to make of these two statements? The general rules are that relocated structures are not eligible for Register listing and that nominations must be made by (or at least with the consent of) the owner, which, in this case, is the Dial Corporation.

A quick call in to the Kansas State Historical Society's historic preservation office brought us this information: a memorandum of agreement between the City of Manhattan, Kansas, and the Kansas State Historic Preservation officer was signed in the spring of 2006. The agreement covers seven residential structures including 326 Laramie.

In the case of 326 Laramie, "the City will not issue any permits which allow the Stone House located at 326 Laramie Street to be demolished or removed. The City will use its best efforts to encourage the owner(s) of the stone house to nominate the structure for listing on the State and National Register

of Historic Places, and will assist the owner(s) in that endeavor. The City will use its best efforts to accomplish such listing on, or before January 1, 2010."

Question: does this agreement provide absolute protection for 326 Laramie? The answer: no.

A later paragraph states that "if any party to this memorandum of agreement (MOA) determines that its terms will not or cannot be carried out or that an amendment to its terms must be made, that party shall immediately consult with the other party to develop an amendment to this MOA...." "If the parties cannot agree to appropriate terms to amend the MOA, any party may terminate the agreement in accordance with Stipulation VIII, below."

That stipulation states that if the agreement can not be amended to one party's satisfaction, "it may be terminated by any party."

It would seem that the City of Manhattan and the Kansas State Historical Society have agreed to protect 326 Laramie as long as somebody doesn't have a change of heart.

Karen Davis of Manhattan's Community Development Department says it's a bit more complicated than that but not to worry, the City intends to protect the house. We certainly hope so.

In the case of the other six residential structures (316, 314, and 310 Laramie and 324, 322, and 316 Osage) "the City shall conduct re-

search on all of the subject structures which will be moved or demolished. The resulting research will be housed at the local historical society for storage and interpretation. Such research will be completed prior to the City issuing any permit for the removal or demolition of any of the subject structures. The City will make a good faith effort to relocate the six subject structures to vacant lots within the city or in a nearby town." Unfortunately the City's efforts were not successful. The MOA now covers 326 Laramie alone.

Regardless of the agreement between the Kansas State Preservation Office and the City of Manhattan, our attention is most focused on the five people who serve on the Manhattan city commission. Will they maintain the memorandum of agreement in order to protect 326 Laramie? If so, will their successors do the same?

The fate of this historic house and other cultural resources shouldn't have to rest on potentially wobbly legal documents. Rather, it should rest on this community's character as a place where cultural resources are treasured, not traded away.

In our private conversations as well as in our public statements, we need to make it clear to our fellow citizens and to our elected officials that the preservation of our historic resources in general and the preservation of this house in particular constitute an enduring benefit to this community.

2006–2007 MEMBERSHIP ROSTER

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