Historic Sign Restoration

After being dark for many years, the sign on the historic Sikes general store (now part of Nelson’s Landing) is glowing brightly again due to a recent restoration and has resumed its place as a Leonardville landmark.

The historic Sikes store, located at 100 North Erpelding Avenue, is a two-story limestone building constructed in 1909 by William H. Sikes, known as “W. H.” W. H. was born in Illinois, and his family moved to Wamego in 1870. W. H. graduated from Kansas State Agricultural College in 1879, and then taught school in Wamego before deciding to go into business. W. H. and a business partner opened a general store in Garrison in 1880 (Garrison was lost to the construction of the Tuttle Creek Dam). The railroad came through Riley County in 1881 and went through Garrison, but business remained slow, and it became apparent that Garrison was not going to become a bustling railroad town. W. H. wanted to take advantage of the opportunities a booming railroad community provided and wanted to move the business to Leonardville, which was another railroad town. His partner wasn’t interested in making the move, so the partnership was dissolved, and W. H. struck out on his own (Slagg).

In Leonardville, W. H. originally set up his store in a small frame building, which he described as little more than a shanty (Sikes). He then bought the land and building on the corner where the current building stands. In 1909, W. H. replaced the wood-frame store with the current limestone building (Slagg).

Fast forward to 2007 when Alan and Kim Nelson purchased the Sikes building along with adjacent buildings to construct the Nelson’s Landing restaurant. Having grown up in Leonardville, Kim remembers visiting the Sikes store when she was a kid and remembered the iconic sign. When the Nelsons acquired the store, the sign no longer worked, but it was their hope to have it operational again one day.

To test out the possibility of restoring the sign, they improvised one evening and jerry-rigged a few wires to see if the sign would light up. Only part of the sign functioned, but just that small bit caused excitement in Leonardville and was the talk of the town. The test run provided the inspiration to one day restore the sign.

Kim says she kept thinking she was going to have the sign restored, but the years continued to slip by without its getting
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(continued from pg. 1) accomplished. Finally, in the fall of 2016, Kim approached Schurle Signs of Riley about taking on the restoration project.

The sign had been originally manufactured by Stevenson Signs of Manhattan, and the Stevenson Signs’ label on the Sikes sign was preserved in the restoration. Schurle Signs was founded by Richard Schurle, who had worked for Stevenson Signs when he was a young man. With Schurle Signs completing the restoration work, the Sikes store sign had come full circle, so to speak, through the connection of Richard Schurle.

Today, the Sikes store is part of the Nelson’s Landing restaurant and used for group gatherings and entertainment. Kim says the Sikes store sign is part of the history of Leonardville, and with the sign in working condition again, she’s excited to see the town’s history will live on.

Sikes, W. H. Life begins at ninety.

Located on a main street, the house at 1307 Poyntz Avenue may have already caught your eye as well as the work that’s taking place.

The building located at 222 North 6th Street, formerly Ray’s Apple Market, is undergoing renovations, as Via Christi plans to use the space for a clinic.

Several new windows have recently been added as part of the renovations.

Projects Around Town

Located on a main street, the house at 1307 Poyntz Avenue may have already caught your eye as well as the work that’s taking place. The house has been temporarily moved to the back of its lot while a new foundation is under construction. There are also plans to add a porch.

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2017 Historic Preservation Building Awards
Thursday, May 11th
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 public, so bring a guest!

Parking is limited at the depot. Additional parking is available at the Flint Hills Discovery Center with easy access to the depot via the pedestrian underpass.
When Presidents Lived Off Campus

Kansas State University President Richard Myers lives in a house on campus, which is provided by KSU, but providing the president with housing wasn’t always the case. For a period of time, which was almost 30 years, KSU was without a president’s residence.

When Kansas State Agricultural College (KSAC), the precursor to KSU, moved from its original location on College Avenue to where campus is today, the president lived in a home called the Preston House, which had been constructed in 1866. The house was built by Mrs. Preston, who was the widow of a KSAC professor of math and English. KSAC purchased the house and surrounding property from Mrs. Preston in 1871. Presidents John Anderson and George Fairchild lived in the Preston House.

A second president’s house was constructed in 1885. The house was designed by Prof. John D. Walters, who had founded the architecture program and who was a prominent architect in Manhattan. The second president’s residence was a two-story stone structure with eleven rooms and had cost $6,000 to construct (Walters). On April 5, 1895, the house was struck by lightning, which started a fire, and the residence was destroyed (Willard). Pres. Fairchild, who had been living in the house, had insured his furniture for $600 and his library for $900 (Walters).

The Board of Regents declined to provide funding for a new president’s residence. For many years following the loss of the president’s house, KSAC presidents lived off campus in their own private homes. Subsequent presidents, including Thomas Will, Ernest Nichols, Henry Waters, and William Jardine, lived in Manhattan’s residential neighborhoods. One of those former president houses is the structure located at 1020 Houston Street, which was the home of William Jardine.

William Jardine came to Manhattan in 1910 to accept a position in the agronomy department at KSAC. In 1913, he became dean of the Division of Agriculture and Director of the Agricultural Experiment Station (Willard).

William purchased a lot on Houston Street, which was adjacent to a pair of lots owned by Leslie Fitz, who had been made head of the Dept. of Milling Science at KSAC in 1910. Leslie built a new house on one of the lots to replace an existing house. (The Fitz House, located at 1014 Houston St., is listed on the National Register.) William built his home at 1020 Houston Street approximately 1910-11, and later, Leslie Fitz sold thirty feet of his second lot to William Jardine, creating a larger parcel (National, Fitz).

The house at 1020 Houston Street is a large wood-frame two-story structure. The second floor front façade features four large windows projecting over the front door and supported by columns atop stone piers. The front elevation includes an “L” projection to the east, and the house includes a porch that originally wrapped around two sides and features limestone posts.

At the time that William Jardine elected to build his home on Houston Street, Houston and Pierre Streets were the top choices for Manhattan’s affluent residents to live. Large, two-story homes, which had been architect designed, dominated the area. Houston Street was nicknamed “Cut Glass Alley” in reference to the ornate details found in homes along its stretch. In 1909, Houston Street became Manhattan’s first street to be paved. Curbstones made of limestone blocks were installed, and several blocks of the original curbing are still intact. Living on Houston Street provided a certain status to its residents, and many citizens aspired to live on Houston Street (National, Houston).

KSAC President Henry Waters resigned toward the end of 1917, and the Board of Regents spent a few months considering a replacement before announcing in February 1918 that Dean William (continued on pg. 4)
Jardine had been selected as the new president. The formal inauguration had been originally planned for Nov. 6, 1918, but it was indefinitely postponed due to the influenza pandemic sweeping the nation. KSAC was closed in 1918 from Oct. 12 to Nov. 4 and then again from Dec. 9 to Dec. 21 due to the flu pandemic. Pres. Jardine’s inauguration finally took place on Feb. 4, 1919 (Willard).

William Jardine had become KSAC’s president, but he continued to live in his home at 1020 Houston Street. Twenty-four years had passed since the president’s residence had burned, but there was still no replacement house on campus, and perhaps Pres. Jardine felt it was time to do something about it.

In 1912, Mehitable C. C. Wilson, who was the widow of Davies Wilson, had given KSAC $20,000 for the purpose of memorializing her husband in some manner. Davies Wilson was one of Manhattan’s founders, served in the Kansas Legislature, and had promoted Manhattan as the location for KSAC. Despite numerous suggestions of how to use the funds, ten years had passed since Mrs. Wilson had made the donation, and no decision had been made as to how to use the money to memorialize Davies Wilson. Pres. Jardine was able to make the case to the local Board of Administration that constructing a president’s house on campus would be an appropriate use of the funds and a fitting way to memorialize Davies Wilson (Willard).

A site east of Anderson Hall was selected for the house, and Prof. Cecil Baker, who was the head of the Dept. of Architecture, designed the house. The new president’s residence was completed in 1923, which was 28 years after the last house had burned (Willard). A plaque beside the front door recognizes the Wilsons and their contribution.

With housing for the president re-established on campus, Pres. Jardine left his home at 1020 Houston Street and settled into 100 Wilson Court. Reportedly, he was sad to leave his Houston Street home.

During his years at KSAC, William Jardine became nationally known for his agricultural expertise. His knowledge was sought in Washington, D.C., where he was a member of an agricultural commission, which studied the difficulties in agriculture. He spent a month in Washington, D.C. and testified before the U.S. Senate’s agricultural committee. When Calvin Coolidge became U.S. president, he asked Pres. Jardine to serve as the U.S. Sec. of Agriculture. Pres. Jardine was reportedly not eager to leave KSAC, but he felt he couldn’t ignore the request of the president, and so he accepted the position in March 1925. Pres. Jardine was granted an indefinite leave of absence, but he chose to resign, effective May 5, 1925, paving the way for Acting President Francis Farrell to succeed him and officially become KSAC president (Willard).

When William Jardine left his home on Houston Street to move into the president’s residence, a fraternity acquired the house to use as its chapter house. Past editions of The Royal Purple show that 1020 Houston Street was used as fraternal housing from 1923 to 1933. At some point, it became rental housing and an addition was added to the rear, and the house serves as rental housing still today.

William Jardine’s house at 1020 Houston Street serves as a reminder of the years when Kansas State lacked a president’s residence on campus and presidents were forced to find their own housing. For the tenants who have lived in Pres. Jardine’s house over the years, they have been provided with the rare opportunity to say they lived where a Kansas State president once resided.

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In addition to William Jardine’s home at 1020 Houston Street, Thomas Will lived on Pierre Street. The 1900 U.S. Census only provides an enumeration number for the dwelling and doesn’t include the address. Henry Waters lived at 1009 Poyntz Avenue (razed). Ernest Nichols lived at 1031 Leavenworth Street. To learn more about Pres. Nichols’ house, see the M/RCPA’s March 2007 newsletter, which is available on our web site, www.preservemanhattan.org.

National Register of Historic Places. Fitz House, Manhattan, Riley County, Kansas.

National Register of Historic Places. Houston and Pierre Streets Residential Historic District, Manhattan, Riley County, Kansas.


Fire Damages the Dusty Bookshelf

In the early morning hours of March 2nd, the Dusty Bookshelf, a long-standing business in Aggieville, caught fire. The fire swept through the building, the roof collapsed, and a few hours later, nothing was left but the shell. Fortunately, the Manhattan Fire Department was able to prevent the fire from spreading to adjacent buildings.

The original brick building, located at 700 North Manhattan Avenue, was constructed in 1908 by the Students Co-operative Association. The Co-op was run by students to provide textbooks and supplies to fellow college students. The store was known as the “Co-op Book Store.”

In the 1940s, honed limestone was applied to the brick exterior, and the words “Co-op Book Store” were engraved in the stone above the corner entrance.

All of the shares of the co-operative were purchased by a private individual in the late 1940s, and the store’s name was changed to the “Campus Book Store.” The Campus Book Store closed in the late 1960s when Kansas State University opened its own bookstore. After that, Woody’s Men Shop was located in the building, followed by the Brentwood Clothing Store.

The Dusty Bookshelf started in 1985 in another storefront in Aggieville and moved to the corner store seven years later. At the time of the fire, the interior was undergoing renovations with the plan to re-open as “The Co-op,” in recognition of the building’s historic past, and with the Dusty Bookshelf name continuing to be part of the business’s name as a sub-brand.

After the fire, it was reported that a structural engineer evaluated the brick and limestone exterior walls and determined they could be saved. Plans for the fire-damaged building have not been announced, but the M/RCPA hopes the historic exterior will be preserved and the interior space reconstructed so that this significant corner of Aggieville history will continue.

Historical information is from the Riley County Historical Society and Museum’s archives.
2016-17 M/RCPA Membership Roster

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