



# MANHATTAN/RILEY COUNTY PRESERVATION ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

August 2013

## A Message From Our President

“Place and memory bring us together” was one of the phrases repeated during the 2012 Preservation Symposium held in Leavenworth, and I was reminded of the phrase as the Manhattan community has been discussing options for improving the Parks and Recreation Department’s offices and renovation plans for Peace Memorial Auditorium (see pg. 4-5).

In recent weeks, concern about the proposed plans has been growing. An article in the *Topeka Capital-Journal* said that City manager Ron Fehr was surprised by public concerns about the plans. If Mr. Fehr had been familiar with the phrase “place and memory bring us together,” it might have helped him better anticipate public concerns.

In 1946, the Manhattan community was brought together over the shared goal of establishing a suitable memorial. Peace Memorial

Auditorium was built to be a living memorial to the veterans who served and those who died in World War II. But, as the years passed and while people were enjoying theatrical productions, concerts, or athletic events in the auditorium, they lost sight of the reason the memorial was built. The memorial aspect of the auditorium might have been entirely forgotten if it were not for a few citizens who remembered the intent behind the creation of the auditorium. They brought to light the strong communitywide effort in 1946 to pass an \$800,000 bond to build the memorial auditorium. The effort had focused on creating a place that would serve the community and honor the memory of veterans.

Places and the special memories attached to them can inspire emotion, especially a memorial that is designed to cause us to pause and reflect on the reasons the memorial

was created. Peace Memorial Auditorium has many special memories associated with it and the loved ones honored by the memorial.

However, it would be unfair to categorize objections to the proposed plans as based purely on emotion and as not taking other factors into account. Three other options for improved offices had been developed with smaller price tags than that of the currently favored option. Opponents are not being financially irresponsible with city dollars as they express concerns for maintaining the memorial and ask for consideration of another option for improving Parks and Recreation’s offices. Likewise, it would also not be fair to dismiss the significance of the memorial and not take it into account in developing plans.

Surely, somewhere in the process is an opportunity to work cooperatively to find a solution that will honor the memorial and satisfy space needs.

*Kathy Dzewaltowski*

### Annual Meeting Of the M/RCPA

Thursday, Sept. 12, 7:00 p.m.

Union Pacific Depot

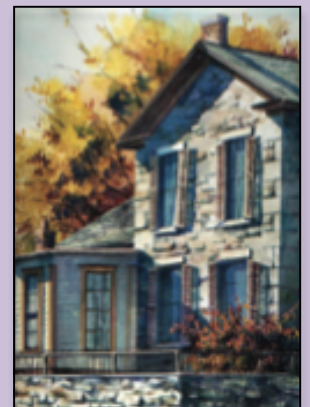
All M/RCPA members are invited to attend.

### Do You Want to be More Involved?

If you are interested in serving on the Board of Directors, contact Kathy Dzewaltowski at [dzewk@me.com](mailto:dzewk@me.com) or 539-8937. All M/RCPA members are eligible to serve.

### M/RCPA’s Notecards

The M/RCPA has preservation-themed notecards available to purchase. The notecards come in packs of eight and feature prints of original watercolors by local artist Ralph Fontenot. Notecard packs sell for \$15 each. Contact the M/RCPA at [mrcpanewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:mrcpanewsletter@gmail.com) if you would like to purchase notecards.



## Historic Home on South Manhattan Ave.

In its 108-year history, the historic home, located at 100 South Manhattan Avenue, has been a private residence, business office, boarding house, apartments, and fraternal housing, and has recently come full circle back to being a private residence.

The house was built in approximately 1905, and the original owner is believed to have been a railroad executive. The two-story structure is constructed of cast concrete blocks, which was a new and trendy building material at the time of its construction, and each block weighs approximately 125 lbs.

Tim and Adena Weiser, the current owners, purchased the house in June 2012. The Weisers enjoy finding houses that have the potential to be a wonderful home again and enjoy bringing the houses back into livable condition. They spent the next 11 months completing renovations on the house.

The house had already been gutted when the Weisers took over ownership. The house's mechanical systems had been repeatedly cobbled together over the years such that the city's code department wouldn't allow new systems to be connected to the existing, which meant the Weisers had to start over with new and which was an unexpected development of the renovation project. The Weisers installed new wiring, plumbing, and added insulation.

In addition to the mechanical systems, improvements included a new kitchen and bathrooms, stabilizing a side sleeping porch, and



removing an exterior side entrance that had been added when the house was divided into apartments.

The side sleeping porch had been clad in stucco, which was in deteriorated condition and was falling off in chunks. Likewise, the sleeping porch's

supports were unstable. The sleeping porch was stabilized with new supports, new roof, new siding, and a stairwell was rebuilt.

The Weisers had found additional concrete blocks stored in the house that had either been leftover from the original

construction or had been saved when removed during past projects. When the exterior side entrance was removed, the Weisers were able to fill in the  
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At top, 100 S. Manhattan Ave. as shown in the 1913 *Royal Purple* when the house was a sorority. The photo is used with the permission of K-State Collegian Media Group. Middle, the house as it appeared prior to renovation. Bottom, the exterior side door that was removed during renovations. The bottom two photos are courtesy of the Weisers.



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space with the original materials stored in the house.

For many old house owners, they consider themselves lucky if they are able to locate one historic photo of their houses. For the Weisers, because the house was used as a fraternity and a sorority for many years, they have located a treasure trove of historic photos, including interior photos, from several years' worth of *Royal Purple* yearbooks. As shown in the photo on page 2, the Weisers are intrigued by the house's roofline from a century ago and may one day restore it to its original appearance. Tim joked that they might be the only people in town who wouldn't mind if their roof were damaged by a tornado to provide them with the impetus to restore the roofline.

Since moving in to the house, the Weisers say they have especially enjoyed all of the natural light provided by the house's many large windows. They have also enjoyed the location directly across from City Park and



Above, 100 S. Manhattan Ave. following renovation.

hearing the sounds of children playing and Arts in the Park.

Up next, the Weisers will be working on the landscaping and plan to reinstall a wrought-iron fence to frame the yard.

Because they so enjoy

bringing houses back to life, they already know this house won't be their last.

(See the January 2003 edition of the newsletter to read a previous article about the house.)



At left is the renovated sleeping porch. Middle, the exterior side door that was formerly located to the right of the redbud tree has been removed and filled in with original materials. Right, the original front door was one of the original features retained in the house.

## Plans for Peace Memorial Auditorium

For approximately 30 years, Manhattan's Parks and Recreation Department's offices have been housed in City Park in a structure that was formerly a maintenance shop before being renovated for office use. The location had been intended to be temporary. Slightly over a year ago, discussions began for improving the Parks and Recreation Dept. offices.

One concept that was proposed was to expand City Hall to accommodate Parks and Recreation, renovate the auditorium and expand it to the west and south to add gym space, and explore alternative uses for the Community House. Other options included renovating and expanding the current offices in City Park, demolishing the current offices and building new in City Park, constructing the offices where the fixed seating is currently located in the auditorium, and expanding gym space into the stage area in the auditorium. The preferred plan is to construct the offices in the location of the fixed seating in the auditorium and to expand the gym space into the stage area.

In the months that the various options have been under consideration, missing from the information city staff provided to commissioners was anything about the history and significance of Peace Memorial

Auditorium, commonly known as City Auditorium.

Peace Memorial Auditorium was built to be a living memorial to the veterans who served and those who died in World War II. In years past, it was common practice for a community to erect a statue or monument as a

memorial to honor those who had served, but following World War I, the trend was to construct a memorial that would have a use and serve the community, i.e. a "living" memorial. It seemed far better to remember those who had served with a park, hospital, stadium, or an auditorium than with a traditional monument. Memorial Stadium on the KSU campus, constructed to honor students and alumni who died in World War I, is another local example of a living memorial.

Earlier attempts in 1938 and in 1941 to pass bond issues to build an auditorium were rejected by voters, possibly a residual effect of the Great Depression. Following World War II, "the public was memorial conscious," as noted in a document prepared by city staff in 1955 (Manhattan), and the idea of constructing a building that would serve as a fitting memorial became appealing.

According to information sent to members of the Chamber of Commerce in 1946, several patriotic-minded organizations took the lead with the support of 45 other organizations to encourage voters to support building a memorial auditorium that would be a "lasting

tribute to the 2,600 men and women from Riley County who served in the armed forces in World War II – and more particularly, to the 101 who gave their lives for God and country." In 1946, voters approved an \$800,000 bond to construct a memorial auditorium.

Construction of the auditorium didn't begin immediately. Building prices were high following the war, and commissioners hoped they would decline if they waited. There was also uncertainty as to where to locate the auditorium. Some citizens favored a site near downtown, and others wanted to place the auditorium in City Park. Opponents to the City Park location were concerned it would lead to more public structures being built in the park, and soon there would be no recreational space left.

In 1950, a nonbinding referendum was submitted to the public for a vote and simply asked, "Do you favor location of the city auditorium in City Park, Yes or No?" and also asked for site suggestions outside of City Park. The citizens against the City Park location prevailed, and the top two alternate sites suggested were the 1100 block of Fremont and the 1100 block of Poyntz Avenue. The 1100 block between Poyntz and Houston

Street was settled on, and commissioners appointed an appraisal board to begin acquiring the property in the preferred location.

Local architecture firm F. O. Wolfenbarger and Associates was hired to design the building, and construction began in January 1954. After construction had started, *(continued on pg. 5)*



Peace Memorial Auditorium in 1955, courtesy of the Riley County Historical Society



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voters approved another bond for \$75,000 to add a fire station and to include language in the bond that would make it clear that city offices would also be located in the building. The structure was completed in 1955, with dedication ceremonies taking place in September. The building featured a memorial auditorium; city offices; police, court, and jail area; and a fire station. In 1956, the Kansas Chapter of the American Institute of Architecture recognized the design of the building in the category of government buildings.

During recent City Commission discussions, one of the reasons provided for removing the auditorium's fixed seating and the stage is that the space is rented only a few times per year. Very little has been done to update the space since its completion in 1955, which includes a lack of air-conditioning, and the lack of improvements should be recognized as contributing to its low usage. The fixed seating is in poor condition with some seats broken. Some of the stage lights are missing or inoperable. The portable lift for handicapped access to the stage was inoperable. The auditorium's condition begs the question does it see little use due to its condition, or has the lack of use led to decisions to not invest in its upkeep? A neglected auditorium won't get used.

The June 4, 2013 City Commission meeting was the first time that the memorial aspect of the auditorium was publicly discussed, having been brought to light by citizens during public comment. Commissioners had little time to contemplate the information before voting 4-1 during the same meeting to approve a design contract for the renovation project.

Opponents to the proposed renovation plans cite reasons that include a lack of updates have led to

the auditorium's light use, a need in the community for a theatrical stage of the auditorium's quality, a desire to respect the perceived original intent of the memorial, and the cost of the overall project, with the concern for the memorial appearing to be the strongest reason.

City officials have indicated that they think it's appropriate to renovate the auditorium to suit current needs, and in doing so, the space will continue to be used. Opponents have expressed the belief that the memorial is more than just the building's shell and includes the stage and the fixed seating. Opponents think that removing the stage and the fixed seating amounts to destruction of the memorial, and they would prefer to see the auditorium restored and another option pursued for the offices.

In the weeks since the memorial aspect of the auditorium came to light in June, the proposed renovations were discussed by Manhattan's Historic Resources Board during its July 22nd meeting. After two hours of discussion and public input, the Historic Resources Board approved a recommendation to study alternatives for improving Parks and Recreation offices, the possibility of renovating the stage and auditorium, and to consider the historic aspects of the auditorium before completion of the design phase.

The City of Manhattan also sponsored a

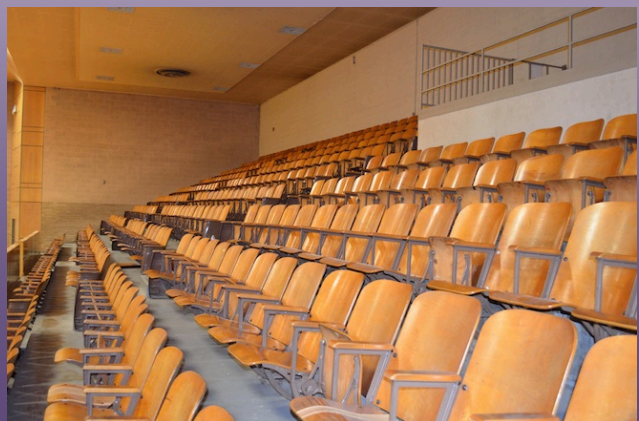
public information and input session about the proposed renovations on July 25th. The public meeting provided the opportunity to examine the proposed design plans and to provide feedback.

It's uncertain when the City Commission will next discuss the renovation plans, but it may be during one of the upcoming August City Commission meetings. The M/RCPA hopes that commissioners will thoughtfully consider the memorial aspect of the auditorium and find a solution that will provide for improved offices as well as continue to honor the memorial.

Manhattan (Kansas). *Planning, Developing and Utilizing Peace Memorial Auditorium and City Offices*. Manhattan, Kansas: The City of Manhattan, 1955. Web 27 July 2013. < <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015082102115> >

Historical information is from the files of the Riley County Historical Society.

Pictured below is the stage and the fixed seating in Peace Memorial Auditorium.



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## Kansas Preservation Conference

Salina, Sept. 19-20, 2013  
Art, Autos & Architecture



The Kansas Preservation Alliance invites you to join us and a slate of nationally recognized experts at the 2013 Preservation Conference in Salina.

Featured speakers include architectural historian Christine Madrid French, who specializes in 20th Century architecture; David Garman, who is an internationally recognized scholar of the automobile industry and its connection to architecture; Brian Howard, known for applying art conservation and historic preservation techniques to preserve automobiles; and Timothy Dunn, who is the nation's leading expert in the history and restoration of Vitrolite.

When: Thursday, Sept. 19, 10:00 a.m. to Friday, Sept. 20, 5:00 p.m.

Where: Stiefel (Fox) Theatre and Blue Heaven Studios, 151 S. Santa Fe and 201 S. 8th St., Salina, KS

Cost: \$100 per person

Details: For more information or to register for the conference, visit

<http://events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/event?oeidk=a07e7n97rx1b1be123b&llr=5jr46gnab>