
Manhattan / Riley County PRESERVATION ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2004

FROM THE PRESIDENT—JIM SHEROW

Greetings Everyone. Now that we're fully recovered from the holiday homes tour, we can turn our attention to other things. For example, how about the meeting coming up this Thursday! Bonnie will be making a presentation on Damon Runyon, and after the meeting, the Runyon House will be open for you to see.

Not only will the Runyon presentation be fun, but planning future fund raising strategies for the depot will be something to anticipate, too. A review of the homes tour accounts will be given, and we did pretty well given the timing and weather of this tour. This money will certainly increase the funds set aside for the depot. Still, this is a small step in what we need to achieve. KDOT may be wanting to distribute its grant money for the depot in the immediate future. This timing is much sooner than any us planned for, so raising the match becomes a pressing issue for us now. Come with your thinking caps on and let's see how we can achieve our goal.

Also, issues with zoning and grandfathering houses as duplexes in the TNOs are becoming evident. We need to understand city zoning policies and see if we need to press for reforms in some areas. The 4th Street Corridor conceptual plan is nearing completion, and I will certainly be giving everyone an update on this.

Our organization has been an effective, clear voice in shaping city

policies this year. I think that we can take pride in our accomplishments. Given this, we still can strengthen what we do and how we do it. We can also be a voice in state issues of preservation. We can be an even more effective educative voice in the community on the value of historic preservation. Our last meeting was an informal one, and many insightful suggestions and ideas were discussed. We need to work on forming our goals and how to implement them now, and with everyone's help, we can do this.

Come this Thursday ready to be entertained, to learn, and to organize. See you soon!

Jim

P.S. Mark your calendars now for the rest of the meetings for this year.

March 11	August 12
April 8	September 9
May 13	October 14
June 10	November 11
July 8	December 9



The Damon Runyon House, 4th and Osage

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RUNYON HOUSE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF MANHATTAN

The following information was compiled by Bonnie Lynn-Sherow when she and Jim applied for inclusion of the Runyon House on the Register of National Historic sites:

The house that A.L. and Libbie Runyan built at the corner of 3rd (now 4th) and Osage streets was not terribly remarkable for the time in which it was built, but represents an element of Manhattan society that helped to shape the community as it grew in the late 19th century. Osage street was platted out by the Boston Land company that had first arrived in Manhattan in 1854. It was three blocks from Poyntz Avenue, the main business district. This was close enough to the downtown for A.L. to walk to work at the *Enterprise* [the Manhattan newspaper] but far enough away from the bustle of downtown to raise a family.

It was a smart economic move as the Runyans built a small house in a good neighborhood. The mortgage on the property was approximately \$500 at the time it was built and sold for \$1,000 two years later. The increase in the value of the house indicates the rapid growth of the city 1880-1885. A.L. and his father William Run(o)yan were instrumental in promoting Manhattan through their work as printers and journalists, and as local property owners. A.L. in particular was considered a very up and coming businessman in his founding of a new rival paper to the *Standard*. It was this kind of fierce and explosive competition that made Manhattan a center of regional activity and helped it attract the Legislature's attention in founding the new state Agricultural and Mechanical College (now Kansas State University) in the growing city. Just like the better known town "fathers" of Manhattan such as Issac Goodnow, Washington Marlatt and C.M. Blood, A.L. Runyon was a city promoter who caught the fever of western expansion and passed it on to his son.

Larger, better appointed homes were being built in the city in 1880, many of which are still standing, but A.L.'s house was likely far more typical of the average Manhattan family which struggled hard to raise their status in the com-



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munity and built homes that, while smaller, were modeled on the homes of the well to do and represented a great leap into the aspiring middle class of white collar workers in managing flour mills, stores and newspapers offices. It is this class of citizens that the Runyon House represents and which is currently in great danger of being lost altogether.

The property became locally better known as the Damon Runyon house circa 1920 when Damon's star began to rise as a journalist, author and eventually screenwriter for Hollywood movies. Manhattan citizens have for many decades taken great pride in the fact that Damon Runyon was born in Manhattan, somewhat overshadowing the pivotal role his father and grandfather played in the development of the city. Damon Runyon returned to Manhattan at least once to see the house on a trip back from Texas and in 1949, following the release of a movie based on a Runyon story and screenplay, Paramount Pictures placed a marble plaque on the corner of the property which is extant. This was a major event for the City of Manhattan and was covered extensively in the news.

Manhattanites proudly continue to regard the subject property as the Damon Runyon House, believing that Damon Runyon's career is the ultimate link between the Little Apple and the Big Apple. In November of 2001, the *Christian Science Monitor* ran a story on the effects of September 11th on the "Little Apple" of Manhattan Kansas. The reporter noted that "the nickname goes back 25 years to when then Mayor Terry Glasscock presented New York's Mayor Ed Koch with a photo of Damon Runyon's birthplace. That the writer of the Broadway hit, *Guys and Dolls* came from here seemed enough reason for a

sister-city relationship.”

David Dary, Professor of Journalism at the University of Kansas has devoted several pages to the Runyans (William, Alfred Lee and Damon) and their contribution to Kansas journalism in his book, *Red Blood, Black Ink*. Tal Streeter, a nationally recognized sculptor, artist and author (*Art that Flies, the Philosopher's Kite*) considers A.L. and Damon's connection to Manhattan the city's most significant contribution to American culture nationally. Streeter is a Manhattan native whose father Al Streeter was the managing editor of the *Mercury* for thirty years. Tal's inspiration to become an artist (he is currently mounting an exhibition of his work in the Air and Space Museum of the Smithsonian in Washington D.C.) came from Damon Runyon's

own start as the son of working class parents determined to make his mark on the world. On his frequent return trips to Manhattan from his home in up-state New York, Streeter regularly noted the condition of the Runyon house and encouraged its preservation as a landmark. In August 2002 when the subject property came up for sale and was threatened with demolition, Streeter generously helped underwrite the sale of the property to Manhattan Historic Properties which is making this application to place the house on the Register of National Historic sites. In short, the subject property, identified and known as A.L. Runyon's house and Damon Runyon's birthplace, has had a continuous role in shaping the identity of Manhattan's citizens in the twentieth century even up to the present day.

CITY PLANNERS ANNOUNCE MEETING WITH MANHATTAN NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS

Eric Cattell informs us that a meeting has been scheduled by the City with neighborhood representatives for February 12, 3:30 p.m. at City Hall to give citizens an overview of what is meant by nonconforming uses/grand-fathering and some of the issues surrounding them. This is in response to serious issues that have arisen in two of the older Manhattan neighborhoods. A notice was sent to representatives from the older Manhattan neighborhoods that have been involved with the downzoning/TNO during the past year, **but the meeting is open to the public.** It is felt that it will be easier and more effective for the city officers to speak to all interested parties at the same time and place. Those in attendance can then disseminate the information to their neighborhood associations.

TNO AND REZONING HEARING SCHEDULED FOR FEBRUARY 19, 2004

A notice has come from the Planning Division of the city government that a public hearing to consider the proposed Phase 3 zonings, originally scheduled last week but snowed out, has been rescheduled. It will be held on February 19 at 7 p.m. in the City Commission Room. The Phase 3 area is located generally north of Poyntz Avenue and west of N. 3rd Street to approximately N. 9th street. Further information on TNO and M-FRO rezoning issues, including maps of the areas involved, can be obtained by logging on to www.ci.manhattan.ks.org.

MANHATTAN/RILEY COUNTY PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

Meetings: Second Thursday of each month, 7:30 p.m.
Location: First Congregational Church, Juliette and Poyntz
President: Jim Sherow
Vice-President: Michael Mecseri
Secretary: Linda Glasgow
Treasurer: Barbara Poresky
Newsletter Editor: Marolyn Caldwell

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Dues date from the Annual Meeting in September. Dues paid mid-year confer membership status until the next Annual Meeting. Dues are \$15 for an individual, \$20 for a family, and \$60 for a sponsor. Checks should be made out to the Manhattan/Riley County Preservation Alliance, Inc. c/o P.O. Box 1893, Manhattan, Kansas 66505. Questions? Call Linda Glasgow at 785-565-6490.

If anyone has contributions for future M/RCPA newsletters, please contact Editor, Marolyn Caldwell (776-4862) or email marolync@flinthills.com.



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DON'T FORGET THE NEXT MEETING—THURSDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 13, 2004
AT THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, POYNTZ & JULIETTE, 7:30 P.M.
PROGRAM: THE RUNYON HOUSE, INCLUDING A TOUR OF THE PROPERTY

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