



# MANHATTAN/RILEY COUNTY PRESERVATION ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

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## A Message From Our President

On Jan. 20th, City Commissioners heard a proposal to sell publicly owned land adjacent to the Landmark Water Tower (LWT) to private residents so that the homeowners could accommodate an addition to their house. Commissioners voted 4-1 to move forward with the land sale. The M/RCPA opposes this project for several reasons.

The first reason is the issue of precedent. This particular land sale will set a dangerous precedent of selling public land associated with historic landmarks for personal use. The current proposal (though, less than previous proposals) is for 920 sq. ft. of the LWT's lot. We wonder what is to prevent future requests by other property owners from proposing larger purchases? What prevents others from proposing to buy tracts adjacent to City Park or Sunset Zoo?

The second concern is encroachment. The house currently sets 83 ft. from the water tower. This is a distance sufficient for community members to *generally* feel at ease when accessing the

public space. The proposed home addition would situate a covered patio merely 30 ft. from the water tower. Thirty feet is not sufficient space to allow community access to the water tower. Thirty feet will create the impression that the water tower is privately owned and no longer part of the public domain. We wonder who would want to explore a landmark so close to someone's back porch?

Compounding the problem of proximity to the water tower is the issue of scale. The current home is a one-story, approximately 1,400 sq. ft. house. The proposed addition expands the structure to over 4,000 sq. ft. It is not clear if the addition expands the elevation to a full second story or only a half story (architectural drawings can be confusing). We wonder why create such a large home in that location? We know of other equally grand, if not grander homes available in the neighborhood. What will such a large structure at that location do to the quaint, historic character of the hilltop and water tower?

We are equally concerned about how this proposal came before the City Commission. The M/RCPA learned about the proposal in September when the project architect presented the proposal to the Historic Resources Board (HRB). At that meeting, the HRB took no action but raised many questions and some serious concerns. In the midst of the discussion, the architect abruptly

left the meeting, which gave the impression that he had decided to withdraw the plan. The M/RCPA continued to look, listen, and ask about the plan and was being led to believe the potential threat to the water tower had passed. Then, quite unexpectedly on Friday, Jan. 16th, the city manager's office contacted attendees of the September HRB meeting to inform them that a proposal would be on the City Commission agenda the following Tuesday (Jan. 20th)! (Monday was a holiday and city offices were closed.) We wonder at what point did the project go from being dead to discussed at the highest levels of city government? Items don't just appear on the agenda.

Other parts of the story are also concerning. How did it come to pass that a private citizen was led to believe that public land is purchasable when others have been denied in no uncertain terms?

The saddest of all of our concerns is for the effect the process has had on neighborhood relations. The lack of a clear and consistent policy on the issue of the sale of public land has led some neighbors to feel that other neighbors want to buy what should not be for sale. In effect, some want to buy what is owned by all of us as citizens.

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## Three Buildings from Leonardville's Booming Past

In recent years, Leonardville has possibly become best known for being the hometown of KSU and NFL football stand-out Jordy Nelson. Long before Jordy Nelson, Leonardville was a bustling community in the early days of Riley County, and nestled on a downtown side street are three commercial buildings that are rare examples of wood-frame buildings from Leonardville's boom years.

By the 1880s, there were many farmsteads in the Leonardville area. Three area farmers included Lambert Erpelding, Lucien Kilbourne, and John Ford, and at the point where the boundaries of their three farms came together, a small village known as Alembic had developed (Slagg). The community consisted of a few businesses: a blacksmith shop, a lumberyard, a bank, and other small businesses. Then, rumors spread that the railroad was coming to the area and might possibly go through Alembic. Erpelding is believed to have been instrumental in convincing the railroad to come through the village (Slagg). To show their appreciation of the railroad's coming to their village, the citizens changed the name of Alembic to "Leonard," in honor of the railroad's president, Leonard T. Smith (Slagg). The town's application to the U. S. Post Office to have the town's name changed was denied because "Leonard" was deemed too similar to Larned, KS, and could cause confusion (Slagg). "Leonardville" was settled on instead.

As happened with many frontier towns, the arrival of the railroad drew people to the community, and with the completion of the railroad across Riley County in 1881

(Slagg), Leonardville's population and number of businesses quickly grew.

Two of Leonardville's well-known businessmen in those early years were William H. Sikes and the aforementioned Lambert Erpelding. During Leonardville's boom years, both men opened general stores, with Erpelding's store being the largest store in town for many years (Slagg). Sikes' store was across the street and quickly became the community center and also a theater (Slagg). In 1909, Sikes replaced his initial store with a two-story stone building (Slagg), which many local people are likely familiar with as the building is now part of the complex that comprises Jordy Nelson's family's restaurant business.

While many people may know about Sikes' store and the buildings adjacent to it that make up the restaurant, they may be less familiar with a cluster of wood-frame buildings around the corner that are among the oldest buildings in Leonardville.

Leonardville experienced a series of disasters, which had devastating effects on the early buildings of the community. In 1882, Leonardville was hit by a tornado, which completely demolished many residences (Slagg).

In 1893, Leonardville experienced a devastating fire that swept through Erpelding Avenue, which was one of the main streets, and destroyed the wood-frame structures on the east side of the street (Slagg). A few years later, another smaller fire burned



Left to right are 101, 103, and 105-107 West Barton Street in Leonardville in 2010. The photo is from the Kansas Historic Resources Inventory and used with permission.

buildings in the center of the same block. In 1908, yet another fire devastated the west side of the street, burning a hardware store, a general store, a drugstore, and a rooming house (Slagg).

As a result of these disasters, many of Leonardville's original wood-frame structures were destroyed, making the cluster of wood-frame commercial buildings on West Barton Street somewhat unique. All three buildings have been surveyed and are considered potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

The exact date of the construction of the building located at 101 W. Barton Street is uncertain, but records indicate it housed a barbershop in 1905, and so the building dates to at least 1905. The building has a gable roof with a parapet facing the street.

The adjacent building, located at 103 W. Barton Street, was constructed in 1896 and housed a  
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bookstore in 1911. The single-story building has a flat roof with parapet facing the street.

The third building, located at 105-107 W. Barton Street, was constructed in 1893, making it one of the oldest remaining wood-frame buildings in Leonardville. The one-and-a-half story building was initially a blacksmith shop and then a bookstore. *The Standard Atlas of Riley County 1909* shows the building as housing the post office, and the building served as Leonardville's post office for many years.



Above the former post office is a two-room apartment, and the postmaster likely lived there. The post office's original flagpole is still attached to the side of the building. The building also retains its original exterior doors, which include double sets of arched windows. At the top of the building's window openings, there are four sets of original stained glass windows, which are still intact.

A Preliminary Site Investigation Questionnaire was submitted for the former post office to the Kansas Historical Society for review. The Kansas Historical Society determined that the building is potentially eligible for the National Register under Criterion A for its association with local commercial history and for Criterion C for its architecture.

Today, the buildings are vacant, and the old post office is being used for storage.



Above, the three buildings as they appear in 2015. Bottom left, the doors of the old post office. Below right, a close-up of the stained glass windows on the old post office.

Regardless of their use, the three buildings serve as links to Leonardville's boomtown past.

Slagg, Winifred N. *Riley County, Kansas*. Manhattan, KS: Ted Varney's University Book Store, 1968.

*Standard Atlas of Riley County, Kansas*, Bala Township, 1909.



## Winter Social

Friday, February 20th  
5:00 – 8:00 p.m.

All members are invited to attend. Please join us for a relaxing evening of great food & conversation.

**RSVP: by Feb. 13th** to  
Alyn at [alynwest@cox.net](mailto:alynwest@cox.net) or  
785-539-8601

### Location

**J & C Imaging, 404 Poyntz Ave.**

Located in the Askren Building  
Downtown Manhattan  
Historic District

Suggested donation of  
\$10/person to help cover  
costs of appetizers

Beverages will be provided



"Before" photo at left is courtesy of J & C Imaging



## Portion of Water Tower Land Considered for Sale

During the Jan. 20th City Commission meeting, commissioners discussed a request from the property owners adjacent to the Landmark Water Tower to purchase a portion of the water tower's property. The request was to purchase 920 sq. ft. of city-owned land on the eastern edge of the property line of the water tower's parcel (the water tower's lot is a total of 4,800 sq. ft.). The adjacent property owners made the request because they would like to expand the existing house. Mayor Wynn Butler commented that since the site is not officially a park or a historic landmark, it was reasonable for the City Commission to entertain an offer to purchase the land.

Initial plans for expanding the house were discussed during the Historic Resources Board's (HRB) Sept. 2014 meeting. Board members expressed concerns about the proximity of the house to the water tower and the need for the city to have access for maintenance. HRB members were also concerned about the impact the addition to the house would have on views of the water tower. The HRB requested that if the project were to be further pursued,

the board would like to be provided with additional viewpoints of the relationship between the house and the water tower.

The plan presented to the City Commission reflected a number of revisions, including more space between the water tower and the structure, a relocation of the proposed garage, and a request to purchase a smaller amount of city-owned land than what had been originally requested.

Judge Sam Kimble donated to the city the land where the Landmark Water Tower is located, and Commissioner Karen McCulloh commented that she thought Kimble had intended for the land to remain in public hands. Bill Raymond, City Attorney, said that title work would need to be done to determine whether there were any restrictions on the land as a result of Kimble's donation, but he speculated that even if there were, a court would not likely hold the city to the restrictions.

Several citizens addressed the City Commission and spoke in opposition to the proposed project, including the M/RCPA. Their reasons for not supporting the project included concerns about the precedent the city would be

establishing in regards to selling public land associated with a historic landmark, concerns that the city does not have a policy that clearly defines the circumstances when the sale of city-owned land may be considered, concerns that the Landmark Water Tower's historic nature will be diminished as a result of a

reduction in the size of its lot, and citizens expressed an overall desire to protect the historic water tower. Commissioners were also urged to consider other purchase offers for the strip of land if they decided to sell it. During the meeting, the Landmark Water Tower Site Conservation Group submitted an offer to purchase the 920 sq. ft. in question, with the plan that the land would be donated back to the city with the condition that the land would remain publicly owned.

The proposed expansion project will need to be reviewed by the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) because the project does not comply with all zoning regulations and will require the approval of variances in order to move forward. Following public comment, commissioners approved 4-1 (McCulloh dissented) to advance the project to the BZA for consideration and to co-sign the application. The proposed expansion project will have a public hearing by the BZA on March 11th.

If the BZA approves the variances, the final sale of the land would need to be approved by the City Commission. If the BZA makes a determination of denial, the applicants would have the options to either revise the plan and resubmit, or to pursue the matter in district court.

A positive outcome of the City Commission meeting was commissioners' support of the development of a historic register nomination for the Landmark Water Tower. Mayor Butler also suggested that the city could designate the water tower's surroundings as a "pocket" park.



## Preservation Advocacy

As the legislative session progresses and should issues arise that concern historic preservation, you can help by contacting our area legislators and sharing your thoughts. You can also help by contributing to advocacy and lobbying efforts. The Friends of Historic Preservation is a coalition of preservation advocates and has a paid lobbyist. Contributions should be made payable to Terry Humphrey Public Affairs Group and sent to the address below.

Friends of Historic Preservation  
c/o Terry Humphrey Public Affairs Group  
P. O. Box 4953  
Topeka, KS 66604

The Kansas Preservation Alliance (KPA) also advocates for historic preservation, and you may be interested in joining the KPA.

Kansas Preservation Alliance  
P. O. Box 2506  
Topeka, KS 66601  
[www.kpalliance.org](http://www.kpalliance.org)

## Update on Docking Building

During the 2014 session of the Kansas Legislature, Gov. Brownback signed legislation that would allow the state-owned Landon Building and Eisenhower Building to be sold, with the proceeds used to cover the costs of demolishing the Robert B. Docking State Office Building, which is adjacent to the Capitol Building in Topeka. Years of deferred maintenance have led to the Docking Building needing an estimated \$75-100 million in renovations. The Dept. of Administration has estimated demolition costs to be \$17 million.

The Docking Building is not scheduled to be demolished until two years from now in order to allow time to vacate the building and find rental space for state offices. During a visit to the Docking Building in January by representatives of the Kansas Preservation Alliance and the M/RCPA, it was observed that considerable dismantling of the interior of the entire ninth floor had already taken place. The ninth floor's suspended HVAC plenum ceiling, electrical fixtures, wiring, and perimeter under-window heating and air-conditioning units had been removed. The removed materials were recycled, and the revenue generated from the sale of the recycled materials barely covered what it had cost the state to remove them.

Air ducts on the ninth floor remain in place in order to keep the floor climate controlled. Other components that remain on the ninth floor are suspected of containing lead or asbestos, and there are no plans to remove those components in the immediate future. The seventh floor was vacated recently, which may mean that dismantling will begin soon on that floor.

The demolition of the Docking

Building has been tied to the sales of the Landon and Eisenhower Buildings because a portion of the proceeds has been targeted to finance the demolition expenses. Neither building has sold, so then the question is why is any demolition of the Docking Building taking place? Another question to ponder is if the Landon and Eisenhower Buildings can be made available for purchase, why is the Dept. of Administration insisting on demolition of the Docking Building and resistant to the idea of making it available for purchase by an interested party?

The Docking Building has been determined to be potentially eligible for historic registry listing. It is possibly the first public building constructed in Kansas in the Modern Movement style.



At top, the interior of the gutted ninth floor of the Docking Building. At bottom, a close-up of the stripped ceiling of the ninth floor.

M/RCPA P.O. Box 1893 MANHATTAN, KS 66505-1893
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## *2014-15 M/RCPA Membership Roster*

### **\$35 Historic Level**

D. Cheryl Collins, Margaret Conrow, Clark & Nancy Danner, Beverly Fink, David J. Fiser, Joe & Janette Gelroth, Joann Goldstein, Corina Hugo, Jean Hulbert, Camille & Phillip Korenek, Ann Kosch, J & C Imaging/John & Cindy LaBarge, Prof. Robert D. (Bob) Linder, Allana Parker, Lawrence & Mary Pollack, Gloria Juhl Raney, John & Mary Beth Reese, Linda Sue Rice, Tom & Karen Roberts, James E. Roper, Catherine Roy-Tremblay, Sharlin Sargent, Bill & Donna Schenck-Hamlin, Carolee Stark, Gary Stith, Bria Taddiken-Williams, Ron & Dixie West, Nancy Williams

### **\$100 Preservation Level**

Mimi Balderson, Bowman Bowman Novick Inc., Jacqueline Brewer, Melvin & Randi Dale, John & Bonnie Devore, Gary & Paula Ellis, Wanda Fateley, Debbie Nuss & Brad Fenwick, Troy & Sara Fisher, Larry & Linda Glasgow, Judy Glowiak, Master Landscape Inc., John & Karen McCulloh, McCullough Development Inc., Bruce McMillan/Bruce McMillan Architects, Linda L. Morse, Larry & Sandy Murphy, Karin Westman & Phil Nel, Marina Pecar-Krstic, Schrum Rentals LLC, Deborah Saroff, George & Julie Strecker, John & Joan Strickler, Chuck & Marsha Tannehill, Barbara E. Withee

### **\$250 Landmark Level**

David & Kathy Dzewaltowski, GJL Real Estate, Mark & Ann Knackendoffel, Dr. Patricia J. O'Brien, Barbara Poresky, Prairiewood Retreat & Preserve, Gwyn & Gina Riffel, Kevin S. & Alyn Pennington West

### **Honorary Lifetime Members**

Rose M. Bissey (in memory of Charles Bissey), Enell Foerster (in memory of Bernd Foerster), Dr. Patricia J. O'Brien, Edna L. Williams