



# MANHATTAN/RILEY COUNTY PRESERVATION ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

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## Manhattan's Significant Post-War Architect

Floyd O. Wolfenbarger was one of Manhattan's most prolific and prominent architects of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When he died in 1979, his obituary noted, "Turn this community's compass in any direction and it will probably be pointing to a structure that is a tribute to the architectural skills of Floyd O. Wolfenbarger . . ." ("Architect"). More likely than not, you have been in a building designed by him. If you've attended a ball game at Manhattan High School, visited a friend at the hospital, dined at the Manhattan Country Club, or attended a show at McCain Auditorium, then you've been in a Wolfenbarger-designed building, which is naming just a few of his buildings. In addition to private residences, he designed more than a dozen well-known public buildings in the community, many of which are in the Modern Movement style and are still standing today.

Floyd was born in 1904 in Winkler in northern Riley County, and his father, who was from Tennessee, farmed in May Day Township (1910 Census). After completing grade school, Floyd came to Manhattan to attend high school and went on to attend Kansas State Agricultural College (KSAC) where he studied architecture. While still a student, he is believed to have been the architect for the Mattie M. Elliot House at 600 Houston Street, which is on the National Register



Top to bottom, McCain Auditorium, Lee Elementary School, Lafene Health Center, and an undated, vintage postcard of Peace Memorial Auditorium and the City Hall complex. Postcard distributed by P-K News Co., Junction City, KS.

(National).

After completing his studies, he left KSAC in 1927 and headed for Boston, where he worked for two architectural firms. While in Boston, he also received a scholarship from the Bemis Foundation at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to develop modular units to use in the building industry (National).

In 1934, Floyd returned to Manhattan, where he worked for the Riley County Better Housing Committee. His time with the committee was brief, and he resigned his position after only a few months to start his own practice (O'Brien), which was known as F. O. Wolfenbarger and Associates ("Architect").

Prior to World War II, Floyd designed private residences as well as several public structures. Floyd, with partner Joseph Ware, designed the limestone home of prominent physician Dr. Belle Little, located at 120 S. Delaware Ave. He was the architect for the former Douglass Pool, the former City Pool bathhouse, the former limestone jail, located at 600 Colorado Street, and an auditorium and gym addition at Eugene Field school at 1700 Leavenworth Street (O'Brien).

When World War II came along, Floyd served with the Army Corps of Engineers, where he was the assistant post engineer at Fitzsimons General Hospital (*continued on pg. 2*)

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in Denver. During his World War II service, he met his wife, Lois Stingley, who was serving with the Navy's WAVES ("Architect"). Lois had also attended Manhattan High School and KSAC, and according to her obituary, she was Riley County's first female veteran ("Widow"). After the war, Floyd and Lois returned to Manhattan, and he would become one of the most significant architects of the region.

Post World War II, the architectural design aesthetic shifted from the Victorian and Art Deco styles in favor of the Modern Movement or International Style. The Modern Movement was characterized by simplicity in design and the elimination of unnecessary details, a visual emphasis on vertical and horizontal lines, use of new types of materials, such as aluminum, and materials arranged in 90-degree angles to one another. With little construction taking place during the Depression and the war years, Manhattan made up for the lean years with a construction boom of sorts in the decade following World War II, and many large public projects were designed by Floyd Wolfenbarger in the style that reflected the Modern Movement.

In the 1950s, it wasn't long before the post-war baby boom hit the Manhattan school district, and a new school was needed to accommodate the increase in enrollment. Lee Elementary, located at 701 Lee Street, was built in 1953, and its strong, horizontal lines were designed by Floyd Wolfenbarger, for which he received national recognition. A few years later when the school district needed a new high school,

Floyd was also the architect for that project, designing Manhattan High School in 1958 ("Architect").

When the Sisters of St. Joseph, who operated St. Mary's Hospital, determined the existing building was inadequate and decided to construct a modern, 112-bed facility, Floyd was awarded the contract to design the new \$2.5 million St. Mary's Hospital, which was completed in 1961. (St. Mary's Hospital is now Via Christi.) Floyd was also the architect for the Riley County Memorial Hospital, located at 1105 Sunset Ave., which is now Lafene Health Center. His design for Memorial Hospital was selected as the "hospital of the month" by *The Modern Hospital*, which was a national trade magazine ("Architects").

Following World War II when Manhattan's citizens desired to construct a memorial auditorium to honor the Riley Countians who had served in the war, F. O. Wolfenbarger and Associates was awarded the design contract for the project. City offices and a fire station were added later to the project. The original plans developed for the building called for using native limestone on the exterior, but when bids came in higher than the available cash on hand, limestone was deleted and replaced with light-colored brick and aluminum. The building's dedication program in 1955 noted, "Our building, under the architectural design of Floyd O. Wolfenbarger, incorporates ideal concepts of beauty and function. . . Several elements of design are outstanding; the use of aluminum and brick exterior serve texture and beauty, greatly reduce construction costs, and facilitate maintenance. . ." The new auditorium and



Top to bottom, the former jail at 600 Colorado Street, MHS West Campus, the office building at 801 Poyntz Ave., and the Manhattan Country Club.

city office complex received recognition for its exceptional design. The Kansas Chapter of the American Institute of Architects presented an award to the City of Manhattan for the complex in the "government building" category. (continued on pg. 3)

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The award noted, “A difficult multipurpose program has been amply solved by clearly defining the elements and functions.”

F. O. Wolfenbarger and Associates designed several buildings on the KSU campus. The firm designed the veterinary medicine complex, KSU Stadium’s former locker rooms and offices, the chemistry lab (King Hall), the physical sciences building (Cardwell Hall), Justin Hall, which was the first campus structure built with air-conditioning, and KSU Auditorium, which today is known as McCain Auditorium (“Architect”).

Kansas State’s old auditorium in Nichols Gym had become inadequate. During performances, doors and floors creaked, windows rattled, and performers complained that the building was cold. Nichols Gym was later extensively damaged by an arsonist’s fire in January 1965, leaving only its stone shell. KSU President James McCain established a committee to develop ideas for a new auditorium, and Pres. McCain noted that one of the challenges of large auditoriums is they sit idle for much of the time. He hoped a design would be developed such that the space could function as a large auditorium and also as smaller, independent spaces to increase functionality (“History”).

The KSU auditorium was designed by state architect James Canhold and by Floyd Wolfenbarger, associate architect, and George Izenhour, who was the stage consultant. Floyd attended the groundbreaking of the \$3 million project in 1967, which was described as the most carefully planned structure on campus (“History”).

Completed in 1969 and dedicated in 1970, the building’s exterior consists of smooth-cut limestone with vertical strips of cut stone for ornamentation, and the ground level is a rougher cut stone. Addressing the challenge of designing an auditorium with multiple functions, the interior featured a movable ceiling that could be raised and lowered, depending upon the size of the audience and the desired acoustical effect. The orchestra pit could also be raised and lowered to either screen the orchestra from the audience or to make the pit an extension of the stage. A capacity crowd attended the first performance in November 1970 (“History”). According to Floyd’s obituary, the McCain Auditorium project was his favorite (“Architect”).

In addition to the aforementioned recognitions for the designs of Lee Elementary, the Riley County Memorial Hospital, and the City Hall complex, Floyd was awarded the silver medal in 1970 from Tau Sigma Delta Honor Society in Architecture and Allied Arts for “contributing substantially to his profession” (“Architect”).

Over the years, Floyd Wolfenbarger designed many other well-known buildings in Manhattan, including the Manhattan Country Club, the AT&T building at 1640 Fairchild Avenue, the Arthur-Green office building at 801 Poyntz Avenue, and the Riley County Historical Museum (O’Brien). He was also part of the team that designed the Eisenhower Presidential Library in Abilene (“Architect”).

Floyd died in 1979, and in 1992, Lois established the Floyd O. Wolfenbarger Scholarship Fund with the KSU Foundation in his

honor. In addition to the scholarship, Floyd O. Wolfenbarger’s professional legacy lives on in the form of the numerous buildings that can still be found in any direction that our community’s compass points.



Above, Floyd Wolfenbarger when he was a college student attending KSAC, from the 1925 *Royal Purple* yearbook.

1910 U.S. Census, Riley County, Kansas, enumeration district 121, sheet 5, dwelling 93, James N. Wolfenbarger household, digital image (www.ancestry.com: accessed 20 January 2018).

“Architect Wolfenbarger dies at 74.” *The Manhattan Mercury*. 18 July 1979:1.

“Architects honored for building design.” *Kansas State Collegian*. 6 June 1952.

“History of McCain Auditorium at Kansas State University.” *Kansas State University*. Kansas State University, 17 Sept. 2010. Web. 23 January 2018.

National Register of Historic Places, Mattie M. Elliot House, Manhattan, Riley County, Kansas.

O’Brien, Dr. Patricia J. *The Architects and Buildings of Manhattan, Kansas*. Manhattan, Kansas: Riley County Historical Society, 2008.

*The Royal Purple*. Ed. Bernard C. Harter. Manhattan, KS: Kansas State Agricultural College, 1925. Web 23 January 2018.

“Widow of prominent Manhattan architect dies.” *The Manhattan Mercury*. 24 October 1993:2.

M/RCPA  
P. O. Box 1893, Manhattan, KS 66505

E-mail: mrcpanewsletter@gmail.com  
Web site: www.preservemanhattan.org

## Unified Development Ordinance

The City of Manhattan contracted with a consultant to write a “unified development ordinance” (UDO) to integrate existing zoning regulations, subdivision regulations, and other regulations and design guidelines. The goal is to implement recommendations stemming from the Manhattan Urban Area Comprehensive Plan and to streamline the review and approval process. The first module of the UDO has been drafted and is available for review.

The draft indicates that the Traditional Neighborhood Overlay, which was established in 2003 to conserve the traditional character of older neighborhoods, provide stability, and address infill, will transition to the “Established Neighborhood Overlay District” (EN). Many aspects of the TNO and the EN are the same, but there are a few differences.

Currently in the TNO, the structures on a lot may cover a maximum of 30%, and the EN will increase lot coverage to 35%. The EN would reduce the size of a buildable lot to 6,000 sq. ft. In the TNO, the front yard setback for new construction is required to be 14-25 ft. and is recommended to match existing homes on the block. The EN recommends averaging the front yard setbacks of existing homes to determine the setback for a renovation or infill. The front yard setback may be reduced five feet to allow for a porch as long as the setback is not less than 14 ft. At present, corner lots are considered to have two front yards, and thus, two front yard setbacks. The EN would allow the side-facing setback to be 90% of the front-facing setback.

The UDO proposes to transition existing zoning designations to new zoning districts. Current zoning

designations of R-1, single-family residential; R-2, two-family residential; and R-4, general residential will transition to “RS, Residential Standard Lot,” which is defined as a zoning district with low to medium density. “RS” includes three types of districts: “standard,” “cluster,” and “planned, mixed housing.”

Accessory dwelling units would be permitted in the RS-standard zoning district, provided the principal dwelling is owner-occupied.

There will be a public meeting with the consultant about the UDO on Monday, Feb. 19, 5:30 – 6:30 p.m., at the City Commission Room in City Hall, 1101 Poyntz Ave. The meeting is a come-and-go type of event.

To view the first draft module, visit the web site <https://cityofmhk.com/DocumentCenter/View/47743>.

## Sunset Area Historic Survey

The Historic Resources Board discussed for several months pursuing historic registry listing for city-owned structures in the Sunset Hill area. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) recommended to survey the entire area instead of focusing on individual structures. As a result, the City of Manhattan applied for and successfully received funding for a Historic Preservation Fund grant in the amount of \$14,700 to hire a consultant to conduct a historic survey of city-owned property in the Sunset Hill area. The Historic Preservation Fund is administered

by SHPO, and the grant provides financial support to communities for the purpose of assessing and identifying historic properties.

The city hired Historic Resources Group of Lincoln, NE, to conduct the historic survey. Properties to be surveyed include Sunset Cemetery, Sunset Zoo, Girl Scout Park, and Sunset Neighborhood Park and the city-owned structures located in these areas. The goal of the survey is to create a historic district.

The consultants are in the process of conducting research, and their

findings and recommendations are anticipated to be completed by the fall of 2018.

A public meeting to discuss preliminary recommendations will be held on March 1, 6:00 p.m., at Sunset Zoo’s Nature Exploration Center.

Below, the Sunset Cemetery gate, which is included in the survey area.



## Added to the Nat'l Register

The Pottawatomie County Courthouse and adjacent historic jail were placed on the Register of Historic Kansas Places in November, and they were both approved for listing on the National Register of Historic Places in January.

Built in 1884 of native limestone, the Pottawatomie County Courthouse is the second oldest courthouse in the state. The Pottawatomie County Commission had engaged a consultant to evaluate county facilities, and the consultant had recommended demolition of the courthouse and jail. County commissioners opposed registry listing, believing that registry listing would hamper future plans for the buildings. The M/RCPA submitted a letter of support of the nominations, believing that both buildings are excellent examples of early county government buildings and worthy of registry listing.



Pottawatomie Co. Courthouse

## Historic Summit

The M/RCPA, the Riley County Historical Society, and the Historic Resources Board are planning the biannual Historic Summit, which will be held later this spring with details to follow.

If you would like to be part of the planning committee, contact the M/RCPA at [mrcpanewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:mrcpanewsletter@gmail.com).

## Federal Tax Credit Retained

In the final version of H. R. 1, known as the Tax Cut and Jobs Act, lawmakers in the U. S. House and Senate voted to retain the 20% federal Historic Tax Credit (HTC), which was created in the 1980s as an incentive to restore and re-use historic buildings.

In the House, the proposed version of the bill had eliminated the HTC. The Senate version originally reduced the amount from 20% to 10%. In response to this threat to the HTC, the National Trust for Historic Preservation launched an extensive advocacy campaign in support of retaining the HTC. According to the National Trust, approximately 13,000 people responded through its web site and sent over 40,000 electronic letters to members of Congress.

As a result of this advocacy by citizens, an amendment to retain the 20% level was offered by Sen. Bill Cassidy and was co-sponsored by Senators Chuck Grassley, Johnny Isakson, Tim Scott, and Pat Roberts. In order to introduce the amendment, a way to finance the HTC had to be identified, and the solution was to add the requirement that it be redeemed over a five-year period instead of immediately after the project is completed and placed into service. According to the National Trust, the phasing will reduce the cost of the HTC program by \$2 billion over 10 years.

The responses to the retention of the HTC have been mixed. On the one hand, the outpouring by citizens who favored the retention of the 20% level resulted in a positive outcome, which preservation advocates view as a huge success (Kamin). Maintaining the 20% level is certainly better than reducing it to 10% or

eliminating it entirely. But, on the other hand, the five-year requirement for redeeming the tax credit will likely impact its value.

Currently, income-producing properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places are eligible for a 20% rehabilitation tax credit for qualifying expenses. Developers use the tax credit to offset their federal tax liability. The tax credit can also be transferred to corporate investors, which is typically around 90% of the tax credit's value (90 cents on the dollar). The five-year requirement to redeem the tax credit might cause developers to determine the costs for a project aren't worth the time needed to redeem the tax credit. Investors who want to see an immediate tax benefit might shy away from projects because of the phasing over five years. It's speculated that the HTC's market value may shrink to 80 cents on the dollar (Kamin) and some have speculated 60 cents on the dollar (Morelli). The result could be fewer rehabilitation projects.

Over the years, the Historic Tax Credit has leveraged \$132 billion in private investment and preserved more than 42,000 buildings. It has been a valuable tool in revitalizing downtowns and main streets, including downtown Manhattan. How the five-year redemption period may affect the HTC's value is yet to be seen.

Kamin, Blair. "Historic preservation tax credit is saved, but weakened." [The Chicago Tribune](#). 20 December 2017. Web 15 January 2018.

Morelli, B. A. "New U.S. tax bill protects historic tax credits – with a caveat." [The Cedar Rapids Gazette](#). 22 December 2017.

M/RCPA P.O. Box 1893 MANHATTAN, KS 66505-1893
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