



MANHATTAN/RILEY COUNTY PRESERVATION ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER 1994 – 2014

CELEBRATING **YEARS** OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

June 2014

A Message From Our President

May was a busy month for the M/RCPA. At the beginning of the month, our organization partnered with Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia, a music fraternity at K-State, for a concert to benefit the restoration of Peace Memorial Auditorium.

The M/RCPA also partnered with the Riley County Historical Society and Museum and the Historic Resources Board for the biannual Historic Summit. David Dary, Manhattan native and author of over 20 books, gave the keynote address to a packed house. Additional sessions featured a panel discussion about downtown, a session about Manhattan's parks, and a tour of Peace Memorial Auditorium. Participants found the Historic Summit to be informative and enjoyable.

Representatives of the M/RCPA, the Riley County Historical Museum, and the Historic Resources Board also accepted a mayoral proclamation for National Preservation Month on May 20th. A section of the proclamation reads, "Whereas, the Manhattan community continues to demonstrate its commitment to preservation, as it grows and develops, through ongoing historic and archaeological surveys . . . and [through] the recognition, rehabilitation and restoration of historic properties . . ." It was a lovely proclamation, but I found myself wondering how much people really take any of it to heart.

It's easy to *say* that one supports preservation and finds preserving our

cultural heritage to be important, but the actual *doing* doesn't always receive broad community support. Too often preservationists hear something to the effect of, "We want to save this historic building/archaeological site, but it's too expensive to restore," or "There's money to be made in developing over it."

One of the things Mr. Dary said in his remarks was, "Never believe a bureaucrat who says there are no funds for preservation." I interpreted his comments to mean that money isn't the problem. The problem is that preservation isn't viewed as a priority for funding, and despite lovely proclamations about commitments to preservation, decisions made by bureaucrats frequently demonstrate a lack of commitment.

That's why the M/RCPA and its preservation partners work together to advocate and educate the community about the value of historic preservation and why there should be a commitment to it. Beyond the preservation of the physical aspects of our heritage, historic preservation creates jobs by employing local contractors and craftspeople on restoration projects, enhances the quality of life, and helps to develop sustainable communities.

As Manhattan plans for 2035 (see pg. 5), there will be opportunities to incorporate historic preservation into the plans and to make the commitment tangible.

Kathy Dzewaltowski

M/RCPA 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. The four images in each pack include the Goodnow House, the Wolf House, MHS East Campus, and the Pillsbury Viaduct bridge piers. Notecard packs sell for \$15 each and may be purchased at the Riley County Historical Museum, the Strecker-Nelson Pop Up Gallery, or Manzanita Art and Antiques. Or, contact the M/RCPA (see below).



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Teen Town Revisited

In the spring of 1943, the United States was in the midst of fighting World War II, and on the home front in Manhattan, the teenagers were restless, causing consternation in the adult population.

Several women's groups, the American Legion, and Monsignor Luckey of Seven Dolors Catholic Church were concerned that local teens needed something to do in order to keep them out of mischief, as described in an article in the May 12, 1943 edition of the *Manhattan Mercury-Chronicle*. The article noted a report by the American Legion that showed juvenile crime had increased sharply since the start of the war, particularly "sex delinquencies," as a result of "crowded housing, increased population, and the presence of large unassimilated groups in the community." Being on the cusp of adulthood also contributed to their unrest: they were not yet old enough to serve in the war, but they were old enough to understand war and to realize that the responsibilities associated with it would soon be thrust upon them.

The concerned citizens felt the solution to the problem was to develop a full-time recreation program for youths. An editorial by "G. W." in the June 6, 1943 *Manhattan Mercury-Chronicle* said, "Something will have to be done about the

juvenile recreation problem. A 'teen-town' might work and it might not. But at least it is worth a try."

At the same time that some citizens were advocating for a recreation program for teens, other citizens felt there was no problem. An editorial in the Nov. 30, 1943 *Manhattan Mercury-Chronicle* noted that one group (not identified in the editorial) believed there was no juvenile problem in Manhattan. The editorial stated that was not the exact truth, and those who believed it were in denial and have an "ostrich attitude."

The advocates for a recreation program succeeded, and the first "Teen Town" dance was held on Dec. 3, 1943 in the Community House, 120 North 4th Street. Teens had to have a membership card in order to be admitted. The dance featured a nickelodeon and records, refreshments, and a game room for those who didn't want to dance.

The Teen Town dances were held every Friday night, 8:00 – 11:00 p.m., extended to 11:30 p.m. on home ballgame nights, and were sponsored by the local Lions Club. Adults were always in attendance

to help supervise. By 1948, a typical Friday would attract 400 area teens, and in addition to dancing, ping-pong, checkers, and cards were available. In Teen Town's early years, the game room and snack bar were also open on Saturdays at the Community House.

Teen Town was self-supported and self-governed, with guidance from a Teen Town Committee within the Lions Club. Admission cards cost \$1.25 for the school year (in later years, membership cards cost \$2.00), and non-member guests were charged \$0.25 for admission. Each year the teens elected a Teen Town Council and mayor. The council set policy and enforced the rules and regulations of Teen Town. The council also was responsible for handling discipline situations and had the authority to revoke Teen Town privileges.

The teens who attended Teen Town
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Pictured below are teens dancing at Teen Town in Peace Memorial Auditorium. The photo is from the Jan. 13, 1963 edition of *The Manhattan Mercury* and is used with the *Mercury's* permission.



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Town were required to dress neatly, which for boys meant slacks with a belt, and for girls it meant wearing a dress or skirt. They were expected to behave as ladies and gentlemen, which included dancing appropriately. The Teen Town rules stated, "There are correct ways to dance, and wrong ways, too. We all know that a public dance is the wrong place to display affection, and it is extremely poor taste." Teens were also expected to stay for the duration of the dance. Teens who left early had to sign a "check out" sheet, and if they left more than 30 minutes early, their parents were sent a postcard notifying them of the time they left.

By 1948, the bond for the construction of the future Peace Memorial Auditorium had been approved, and Manhattan's citizens were in the process of developing the features that would be included in the auditorium. A letter to the *Manhattan Mercury-Chronicle* by Jay R. Payton, Manhattan High School basketball coach, published on Jan. 18, 1948, noted that the auditorium should be for the youth. Mr. Payton wrote, "I have lived and stayed in numerous towns the size of Manhattan, and there is none so delinquent as we in furnishing facilities to help the young people congregate and carry on together for both educational and recreational activities. Why are we letting these kids down,

"All I cared about was putting on some music and being able to dance."

while everybody argues the merits of the auditorium type building, never giving a thought to the group which we expect to carry on?"

Peace Memorial Auditorium was completed in 1955, and it wasn't long before Teen Town moved from the Community House to the auditorium. The Lions Club Teen Town Committee surveyed teens to learn how Teen Town could be improved, and the teens said what they wanted the most was a new location. The City Commission and the city manager approved the use of the auditorium for Teen Town, and Teen Town relocated to Peace Memorial Auditorium in 1958. The rules for the auditorium expressed the same expectations of neat dress and proper behavior, but the rules also stated that smoking would not be allowed anywhere in the building except in the auditorium's lobby. On occasion, the jukebox was replaced by a band or other live entertainment, which performed on the auditorium's stage.

By 1963, Teen Town membership had grown to 1,037. Many local citizens fondly remember the many Teen Town dances they attended in Peace Memorial Auditorium.

Mary Stamey says, "I do not recall my very first walk into the Teen Town doors, but during that 9th grade year, I recall feeling cautious enough to watch what I said or did, yet overwhelmed with opportunities to meet boys, especially the upper class boys. I know I did not go alone because girls didn't go anywhere alone. I was dropped off by my parents or a girlfriend's parents at the south entrance to Peace Memorial Auditorium . . . There were adult chaperones who wandered around the floor, keeping an eye on couples who might be dancing too close together. What they thought we'd do

"Young love coupled with young unrequited love provided an atmosphere unlike anything else."

in the middle of that semi-dark room was beyond my imagination, so I thought they were wasting their time . . . All I cared about was putting on some music and being able to dance. Being able to dance was my priority, and I loved being able to do so."

Steve Johnson, MHS Class of 1963, recalls, "The year was 1961 (I think). It was in the spring, close to May graduation. I was a sophomore at MHS and back in the '60's, there were always class rivalries and pranks being pulled. Typically, the seniors would sneak on the roof of the high school and hang a 'Seniors of 1961' on the outside wall. My father was a professor at the university, and we had access to helium. I made a banner with 'Seniors 1963' and attached it to 6-7 helium-filled balloons. I had a date with Linda, and we went to Teen Town with this banner (hidden of course). During one of the dances, I unfurled the banner and the balloons took it to the ceiling. The seniors were furious. They threatened to 'depants' me and send my pants to the ceiling. Guys were finding paper clips and using rubber bands to try to pop the balloons. Nothing was working. Finally, the chaperones at Teen Town stopped the dance and told everybody that someone was going to get hurt with the paper (continued on pg. 4)

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clips flying, so they held an auction to raise money for Teen Town and with that, they took the banner down.”

Of her Teen Town years, Jean Bigbee Hill remembers, “You either left feeling excited or relieved that someone asked you to dance or depressed that you didn’t dance . . . The ‘chaps’ [chaperones] would get the girls in a circle, and then the boys would form a circle around us. When the music started, we would prance/march around in opposite directions. When the music stopped, we would dance with the person across from us. Then the process would repeat. This was one way that everyone would dance a little. The boys would always be clustered along the west wall with the girls along the east wall. It took a lot of courage for a boy to cross that huge basketball floor to ask someone to dance!

“The ladies room was always a

drama scene. You know, ‘I love him and he doesn’t even know I exist!’ Young love coupled with young unrequited love provided an atmosphere unlike anything else.

“My class of 1964 is celebrating our 50th reunion the end of June. As we were making plans for our reunion, we had a request to have our Friday night function at the auditorium and recreate Teen Town. I checked into the possibility, but [the auditorium’s] not having A/C put the skids on that effort.”

Chod Hedinger recalled receiving sad news one night: “While attending Teen Town on Feb. 3, 1959 (I was a sophomore at MHS), they stopped the music on the jukebox and made the announcement that the Big Bopper, Buddy Holly, and Ritchie Valens had been killed in a plane crash. The rest of the night there at Teen Town wasn’t as joyful as it had been.”

Many of Manhattan’s now adult

citizens participated in Teen Town during its many years of keeping area teens occupied and out of mischief. Ask any Manhattan native who was a teen in the 1940s through the 1970s about their teenage years, and more likely than not, they will say they spent their Friday evenings dancing at Teen Town, either at the Community House or at Peace Memorial Auditorium, and it played a significant role in their growing up. Many of the early romances that started at Teen Town also went on to be decades-long marriages.

When or why Teen Town ended is unclear. Those who participated in Teen Town say that it continued to operate through the early 1970s. E-mail the M/RCPA at mrcpanewsletter@gmail.com if you have information about the end of Teen Town.

In addition to the articles mentioned from past editions of the *Manhattan Mercury-Chronicle*, historical information is from the files of the Riley County Historical Society.

World War II Exhibits & D-Day Commemorations

June 6, 2014 will mark the 70th anniversary of the Allied forces D-Day invasion of Normandy during World War II, and there are several local opportunities to commemorate the anniversary.

The Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum in Abilene, KS, will have two full days of activities June 6th and 7th. Three new World War II exhibits will open June 6th, which tell the stories of smaller Allied countries during World War II, feature photographs of art created by concentration camp prisoners, and include new displays of major battles, such as Operation Overlord (D-Day).

In addition to the new exhibits, there will be a D-Day Remembrance Ceremony at 9:00 a.m. on June 6th, and a concert featuring patriotic classics and big band favorites the evening of June 7th at 7:00 p.m. Visit the library’s web site for the complete schedule: www.eisenhower.archives.gov.

The U. S. Cavalry Museum, located in Ft. Riley’s historic main post, also has a new D-Day exhibit. The museum provides a historic tour of the role of the cavalry through 1950. The museum is free with donations appreciated.

From July 1st through August 8th, the William T. Kemper Art

Gallery, which is located on the first floor of the K-State Student Union, will feature a World War II display called “On the Home Front: A World War II Exhibit.” The exhibit by Dr. Ray Kurtz, Professor Emeritus of the College of Education, features etched glass, maps, sweetheart jewelry, and other war-related items. Being a boy during the war years, he was influenced by the emphasis on patriotism through growing one’s own food, purchasing war bonds, and rationing of food and gas in support of the war effort. The goal of the display is to show how these activities created a feeling of ownership of the war.

Manhattan Area 2035

It has been over 10 years since the Manhattan Urban Area Comprehensive Plan and the Manhattan Area Transportation Strategy were adopted, and the process of updating them is currently taking place. The City of Manhattan, Riley County, and Pottawatomie County have partnered to coordinate efforts to update both plans.

The Comprehensive Plan is a policy document consisting of goals and guiding principles to provide long-term guidance on where and how the community should grow, and the Manhattan Area Transportation Strategy is a long-range plan to address all forms of transportation. The public process of updating the plans allows the community to examine the current plans and identify areas for improvement.

Input from the public is essential in developing recommendations for updates to the plans, and citizens are encouraged to participate. Community workshops were held in May and will be held again on July 16th in the City Commission Room in City Hall and also in the Green Valley Community Center, both taking place 6:00 – 8:00 p.m. Comments may also be submitted online by visiting the web site www.manhattanarea2035.com.



Historic Summit & Long's Park

The biannual Historic Summit was held on May 22nd and featured David Dary as the keynote speaker. The Historic Summit also included a panel discussion on downtown, a session on Manhattan's parks, and a tour of Peace Memorial Auditorium. Mr. Dary shared information about the history of Manhattan, his memories of growing up here, and his thoughts on historic preservation.

Right, the Long's Park historical marker. Middle, cutting the ribbon during the Long's Park ceremony are Ben Eckart (starting second from left), David Dary, Wynn Butler, and Dana Buckner from the Dept. of Housing and Urban Development. Bottom, the panel discussion on downtown, featuring panelists Ward Morgan, Gwyn Riffel, and Chris Spaw. The photo is courtesy of the Riley County Historical Society.

Mr. Dary said, "History doesn't judge a society by the monuments they build but by what they demolish."

Earlier that same afternoon, Long's Park was rededicated with a ribbon-cutting ceremony and the installation of a historical marker.



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