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# P Manhattan/Riley County PRESERVATION ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

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MARCH 2005

FROM THE PRESIDENT—DIXIE WEST

Everyone mark your calendars! On Wednesday, March 16 the Manhattan/Riley County Preservation Alliance and the Manhattan Arts Center are cosponsoring a presentation that includes the showing of the film “What Do You Tear Down Next?” Bernd Foerster will talk about the making of the documentary with this title. He will also discuss his book on architecture worth saving. The program starts at 8:00 P.M. at the Manhattan Arts Center at 1520 Poyntz. The public is invited and admission is free. Bernd is nationally as well as locally recognized in the field of architecture and preservation. We at the Alliance believe this will be an educational as well as entertaining evening. The preservation issues encountered at Troy, New York, the topic of Bernd’s documentary, undoubtedly parallel many of the preservation issues that we have right here in Manhattan, Kansas.

As many of you know, May is Preservation Month, and to celebrate and bring focus to the preservation occurring in our community, the Preservation Alliance will be hosting the Preservation Awards on May 12<sup>th</sup> at the Manhattan Public Library. This year we are coordinating our efforts with the Neighborhood Coalition and individual neighborhood groups. Manhattan has a variety of neighborhood organizations, many representing historic areas, and the Alliance is calling upon those groups to submit nominations for preservation awards. This is an excellent opportunity to bring focus to the wonderful things that might be going on in your neighborhood. Has someone done a fine job of repairing an old house? Has someone built a sympathetic infill that blends in with the existing neighborhood? Has someone built an addition to a building that maintains the character of the original structure? Has someone taken a building originally used for one purpose

and adapted it for another use, but kept the original character of the building? If so, then the Alliance would love to know about this and recognize these achievements in a positive way. The Alliance will consider structures that are 50 years old or older, and the city has a large supply of these. We hope you can all join us for this evening of celebration in May.

This edition of the newsletter also features an editorial by contributing writer Mike Lambert, vice president of the Goodnow Park/Bluemont Hill Neighborhood Coalition. Each month we hope that one or several neighborhood leaders will give a short update on what is going on in their historic area of town. Readers would like to know if the recent rezoning and Traditional Neighborhood Overlay is working. Are neighborhoods concerned about new development coming into their area of town? Are families being drawn back into older neighborhoods? We believe that some of these contributed features may be upbeat hurrahs of success such as: A young family just moved in across the street! or Someone is fixing up the old, dilapidated building in the next block! Other contributions might focus on neighborhood concerns about improper infills or multiplex housing that does not fit the traditional neighborhood fabric. At the Alliance, we want to share your successes and up-hill climbs.

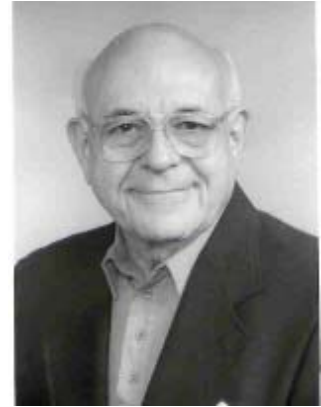
Finally, the National Trust for Historic Preservation has generously agreed to allow the Preservation Alliance to publish “Simply Monumental”—a recent article published in the March/April edition of *Preservation* magazine. The article, written by Dwight Young, emphasizes that even the smallest communities possess, in the earlier words of Bernd Foerster, architecture worth saving. Have a good read.

**PROGRAM BY BERND FOERSTER ON WEDNESDAY, MARCH 16: EVERYONE WELCOME**

On Wednesday, March 16 at 8:00 P.M. at the Manhattan Arts Center, 1520 Poyntz Avenue, the Arts Center and the Manhattan/Riley County Preservation Alliance are sponsoring a program with our own Bernd Foerster. Included is a showing of the documentary film "What Do You Tear Down Next?" Bernd will share his experiences on the making of that documentary, and Kathleen Oldfather will read selections from Bernd's book on architecture worth saving.

Locally, Bernd is known for his efforts on behalf of the downtown and existing neighborhoods. He chaired the Downtown Redevelopment Advisory Board that worked for the creation of the Town Center. He was instrumental in the restoration and relocation of the fountain in City Park, as well as the saving and adaptive use of Nichols Hall on the KSU campus.

Bernd was named a Distinguished Professor by the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture and is a Trustee Emeritus of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. He is a recipient of the James Marston Fitch Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Council for Preservation Education, and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Kansas Preservation Alliance.



**KATE WATSON RECEIVES AWARD**

Kate Watson, M/RCPA's liaison to the Public Affairs Committee of the Chamber of Commerce, has received a "Volunteer of the Year" award from the Chamber.



Congratulations to Kate and kudos to her for, among many other things, insuring our visibility at the Chamber. She claims the Alliance should pat itself on the

back for the work it does in Manhattan to gain that recognition.

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**MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION**

Dues date from the Annual Meeting in September, but paid mid-year, confer membership status until the next Annual Meeting: \$15/individual; \$20/family; and \$60/sponsor. Checks should be made out to the Manhattan/Riley County Preservation Alliance, Inc. c/o P.O. Box 1893, Manhattan, Kansas 66505-1893. Questions? Call Linda Glasgow at 785-565-6490. If anyone has contributions for future M/RCPA newsletters, please contact the Editor, Marolyn Caldwell (776-4862 or marolync@flinthills.com]. We welcome any and all new sponsors. They can be individuals as well, such as sponsor Barbara Withee. Welcome to Commerce Bank, our newest sponsor.

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## REPORT FROM THE BLUEMONT HILL - GOODNOW PARK NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

**Michael Lambert, Vice-President**

The Bluemont Hill - Goodnow Park Neighborhood Association was one of the many neighborhood groups that fought to establish the Traditional Neighborhood Overlay (TNO) which mandates a minimal set of standards for residential dwellings in old Manhattan.

This was never an easy fight. During consideration of the TNO, there were suggestions that the Multi-Family Residential Overlay area (M/FRO), made available for apartment house construction in the area immediately east of the Kansas State University campus, be greatly expanded to cover most of old Manhattan. Incredibly, the city commission, in direct conflict with the conclusions of a months-long study by city staff and the recommendation of the city Planning Board, took up the suggestion, and passed it at first reading. What followed was an intense fight by the families of old Manhattan to move the commissioners back to the process of considering the TNO in a neighborhood-by-neighborhood fashion. Faced with public outrage, the city commission reluctantly backed off, and the TNO was instituted for all neighborhoods recommended by city staff and the Planning Board.

Vigilance by the families of old Manhattan is still needed, even with the TNO now fully in place, because of the existence of a process called a Planned Unit Development (PUD). Through this process the commission can vote to change the zoning in any specific area that they choose. The commission recently passed at first reading a PUD request to build an apartment house in the 800 block of Moro. Citizens of Manhattan should pay attention to any notices from the city announcing a PUD to be considered for their neighborhoods, because the character of their neighborhood could suddenly and dramatically change for the worse through the indiscriminate use of PUDs.

In addition, it may be useful for a future city commission to investigate the possibility of actually strengthening, and not weakening, our hard-won gains in zoning standards to maintain the character of traditional Manhattan neighborhoods. Decreasing the number of unrelated people

who can inhabit the same residence from the current four persons to three (a lower number now in effect for our fellow university town of Lawrence, Kansas) is one way to do this. This would reduce the parking problem in some parts of old Manhattan (such as my own Ratone Street), where parked cars often turn the street into a one-lane path. It would also reduce the strain on our aging water and sewerage systems, and reduce noise and garbage. A regulation for the mandatory inspection of rental property (paid for by the owner of the property, and not by the taxpayer) would insure decent living conditions for renters. Bed-and-breakfast operations in Manhattan must undergo periodic, mandatory inspections, but rental properties, inexplicably, do not. With regard to the area immediately east of the KSU campus where the M-FRO was instituted, increasing the minimum, legal clearance of newly-constructed "superplexes" to the homes immediately adjacent to them would improve the appearance of these new apartment houses and insure fire safety for the entire neighborhood. Limiting the height of new apartment houses in the M-FRO can also prevent the creation of additional overcrowding in old Manhattan. The three-story apartment house now under construction on the south side of the 1100 block of Ratone, close to the easternmost limit of the M-FRO, is an example of pre-TNO standards.

Finally, the April 5th city election will provide us with three city commission seats to fill, and we must choose the best men and women we can find to fill these important positions.

### **MANHATTAN/RILEY CONTY PRESERVATION ALLIANCE**

**Meetings:** Second Thursday of each month,  
7:30 p.m.

**Location:** First Congregational Church, Juliette  
and Poyntz unless noted

**President:** Dixie West

**Vice-President:** Michael Mecseri

**Secretary:** Linda Glasgow

**Treasurer:** Barbara Poresky

**Newsletter Editor:** Marolyn Caldwell

The businesses featured in the Preservation Alliance newsletter have helped us defray our mailing and printing costs by becoming sponsors.

## **SIMPLY MONUMENTAL**

**by Dwight Young**

**W**hen I was working in the National Trust's southern office, I spent lots of time on the road, telling people about Trust programs and services. In town after town, my hosts often introduced themselves and their community with a statement similar to this: "Oh my, you come from Charleston! Well, we're not like Charleston. Our poor little town doesn't have anything really historic to save. We're pretty ordinary." I got used to hearing it—but I never got comfortable with the fact that it was an apology.

We preservationists have long recognized that Valhalla sort of place where venerable buildings grace every street, the thrilling spirit of days gone by hovers over every rooftop, and local residents imbibe a reverence for the past with their mother's milk. We think of these charmed spots—Charleston, Boston's Beacon Hill, New Orleans' Garden District, and a few others—as truly, gloriously historic and therefore very special. Our own communities, on the other hand, often seem newer, less grand, less special. We're fond of them, sure, but it's easier to daydream about the wonders of Natchez and Nantucket than to get worked up over the occasional loss of a familiar landmark in the "ordinary" towns we see daily.

That's wrong. Even though they don't merit long and dramatic entries in the history books, the places where most of us live are hugely important and eminently worth saving. They say a lot about who we are and how we got here.

Each is a kind of monument. Maybe no great battles were fought there—except for the ceaseless struggle to make a living out of dirt or rock or water. Maybe no deathless oratory was uttered—just the everyday jokes and curses and threats and endearments spoken by people building lives for themselves. Maybe no great empires were won or lost—apart from the putting down of roots, the pushing back of the frontier, the flexing of industrial muscle that heralded a nation's coming of age.

Monuments come in many forms, not all of them involving heroes on horseback. Once you

realize that, "monument" doesn't seem too far-fetched a label for an ordinary town.

A wonderful quote from English art critic and reformer John Ruskin hints at another fitting label:

Great nations write their autobiographies in three manuscripts, the book of their deeds, the book of their words and the book of their art. Not one of these books can be understood unless we read the two others, but of the three the only trustworthy one is the last.

An ordinary community is an important entry in the book of art that Ruskin describes, at least in the vernacular sense. It's largely "unconscious" art (of the sort that American sculptor Horatio Greenough had in mind when he said that the most beautiful things our nation ever produced were the clipper ship and the trotting wagon), and that makes it all the more engaging. An ordinary town—an assemblage of yards and storefronts, signboards and bungalows, a low-rise skyline of steeples and treetops and smokestacks—can be a splendid sight. Its bricks and planks and flowerbeds can convey a powerful sense of the people who put them there. You see evidence of the human touch, the human eye, in the stonework of a courthouse wall, the carefully matched wood grain in a paneled parlor, the arrangement of windows and porches on an old house or mill—and you realize that "art gallery" is another good label for such a community.

Places like these are good to have around. They deserve to be appreciated and cherished, fought for and preserved. They certainly don't need to be apologized for.

Here's the bottom line: We sometimes think of history as a physical attribute, like naturally curly hair; some have it, and some don't. Those who don't often wish they did, and those who do don't always know what to do with it. But history isn't like this; it's more like a heart. Everybody has one—and every community does, too. Even the ones that seem utterly ordinary.

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