
MANHATTAN/RILEY COUNTY PRESERVATION ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT, JUDINE MECSERI

MAY/JUNE, 2007

Hello Fellow Preservationists,
Bruce McMillan, Michael Mecseri, and I had the great honor of accepting the Kansas Preservation Alliance Award of Excellence for the Union Pacific Depot at the Kansas Preservation Conference in Dodge City on May 10, 2007.

As I reflect on the Most Endangered historic entities (featured in our most recent tour and in this newsletter), I am reminded of when the Depot was one of the endangered buildings. For years it sat dormant. Things got worse when the new on-ramp to High-

way 177 greatly diminished access to the Depot. It took years of advo-

cacy, blood, sweat, money, and tears, but we prevailed! The City of Manhattan is being honored for preserving a remarkable building that supports tourism, allows us to cherish the memories of the building as a train depot, gives our community a great place to meet, and makes us all proud.

Inspired by community support for the Depot's comeback, we hope to come together once again to preserve our other endangered historic resources. It just takes the determination of people who care for our past and

see it as an economically integral piece of our future!

Judine



Bruce, Judine, and Michael

Colorado Novelist Needs Your Help!

An author with ties to Manhattan is writing a new book set in 1959. While the book is a work of fiction, it will rely heavily on an accurate depiction of Manhattan at that time. The Union Pacific Depot will figure prominently in the plot.

The novelist will be visiting Manhattan in early June and would like to interview some long-time residents to learn more about the Depot and the town.

A brown bag lunch will be held

on June 7th at the Riley County Historical Museum at 12:00 noon for members of the public to meet the author and to talk about Manhattan in the late 1950's and early 1960's.

Do you have any late 50's and/or early 60's vintage photos of downtown, the area between downtown and the Depot, the Depot itself, City Park, the Campus Theater, and the Blue River/Tuttle Creek dam area that you could share?

Photos can be safely digitized (no UV light exposure) while you wait if you make an appointment. The copied images will also be added to the collection of the Riley County Historical Society where they will be available to other researchers working on Riley County topics.

Call Linda Glasgow at the Riley County Historical Museum at 785-565-6490 or send an email to info@preservemanhattan.org for additional information.

Bluemont is Back!

M/RCPA board member Kathy Dzewaltowski participated in the Neighborhood School Clean Up Day at Bluemont School that was held on April 28th from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m.

All interested persons were invited to join in preparing this historic neighborhood school for its reopening this fall.

About sixty volunteers worked outside the building picking up litter, raking leaves, weeding, trimming, and planting flowers and shrubs. Fifteen to twenty people worked inside dusting and cleaning the surfaces of display cases and such.

School board president and former Bluemont parent Dave

Colburn expressed his pleasure at the turnout. "It's a great day in every sense of the word."

We salute this example of community spirit and are reminded yet again of why Manhattan is such a desirable place to live. We welcome Bluemont back to active service in the education of our children.

Photos courtesy of
Kathy Dzewaltowski



Above: Bob Shannon, USD 383 superintendent (left), and Walt Pesaresi, school board member and Bluemont alumnus (center), participated in the clean-up event.

Where do good ideas come from?

Kathy Dzewaltowski emailed school board president Dave Colburn to learn the genesis of the Neighborhood School Clean-Up Day concept. Here is Dave's reply:

Hey Kathy,

The clean-up day is a classic "Dave" sort of event. I suggested it sometime back, but others have done all the work and planning to actually make it happen. Michele Jones deserves all the credit and she knows what is going on.

I came up with the idea because: 1) I was concerned about how much it was going to cost to get the building open again. (I naively thought that we could use volunteers to paint, etc. It turns out that raking leaves and picking up trash is about the only way we can use community volunteers.) 2) I wanted to get the community involved because it is an important event for our town and that neighborhood to have Bluemont open. 3) I wanted to get the families who were going to attend the school a chance to get invested earlier, rather than later. 4) I knew that there were a lot of Bluemont alumni who would be excited to come back and help get the building spruced up.

It is a very good thing that a solidly built, perfectly usable building of historic significance is going to be used again!

Dave

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June Board Meeting

Thursday, June 14th, 7:00 p.m.
Manhattan's U.P. Depot

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Manhattan's Eleven Most Endangered Tour

The idea for a local “Eleven Most Endangered Tour” was proposed by M/RCPA board member Bonnie Lynn-Sherow. The National Trust does this on a national scale. Our tour was designed to coincide with Preservation Month—May, 2007.

The Eleven Most Endangered committee, Dixie West, Barbara Anderson, Liz Harmon, and Linda Glasgow, had a meeting to gather ideas as to how to structure the tour and how to select our endangered topics. We decided to highlight some specific structures as well as some generic categories.

The tour itself was designed to benefit those persons in our Preservation (\$250) and Landmark (\$500) membership levels. These members have been extraordinarily generous in supporting the organization.

The Eleven Most Endangered Tour took place on Saturday, May 5th, starting at 1:00 p.m. at the Riley County Historical Museum.

After a brief introduction by Dixie West, Barbara Anderson presented a PowerPoint slide show of our selected endangered entities.

Under the heading of **“why not art for art’s sake?”** we listed the Pillsbury Viaduct Art Deco bridge piers and asked “must the piers be ‘useful’ to be retained?” Other communities throughout the world retain remnant piers “as is.”



Next, under **“if it doesn’t have a use, it is in danger”** we listed the Bluemont Youth Cabin in Goodnow Park.



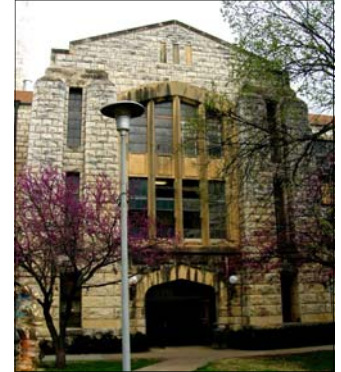
The building is owned by the City of Manhattan and is leased to the private, non-profit (501c3) Goodnow Park Cabin Coalition which has done a considerable amount of work to stabilize the stone structure. Use of the building is limited by the need for very expensive accessibility modifications. It currently serves as a place-maker in the park even though no one uses the interior.

Next on the list was **“demolition by neglect”**— the abandonment or lack of maintenance on a building

that ultimately leads to demolition. Even more disturbing is the use of demolition by neglect as a means to



circumvent legislation designed to protect historic properties.



We also included **“KSU campus buildings”** among our eleven. In 2005 the Legislative Post Audit Committee determined that “a dangerous maintenance backlog exists on our state university campuses.” Reginald L. Robinson, President and CEO of the Kansas Board of Regents stated at that time that “duct tape can no longer fix this growing problem.” Today’s Board of Regents estimates the backlog at \$663 million with an additional \$69 million a year for maintenance to

keep the backlog from growing.



Our next topic was **“tampering with the historic grid.”** Manhattan’s grid was platted in 1855 to ensure uniformity of streets, avenues, and town lots. Downtown redevelopment will disrupt the grid and roundabout construction will cause houses to be removed, including a historic stone house.



Another topic was **“loss of scale in streetscapes.”** Generic functionality does not produce an environment that humans find pleasing. Our goal should be to promote neighborhoods with interesting streetscapes that are safe, comfortable, and that nurture sociability.

We looked at **“Manhattan’s trees”** and their importance to our community. Manhattan has a municipal tree ordinance, spends between four and five dollars per capita annually on its trees, and holds a public event to celebrate Arbor Day each year. This allows Manhattan to qualify as a “Tree City U.S.A.”

How is that we’ve ended up with so many “goal post trees” through extreme pruning? The federal gov-

ernment has instituted new vegetation clearance standards that are legally binding on the Kansas Corporation Commission and thus on Westar Energy. Westar employs Salina Tree Service in order to comply with the law. These standards were designed to protect the nation’s electric grid. Tree pruning or the removal of trees on private property may take place legally without the owner’s consent. One option is to replace large trees with smaller trees that will not grow into power lines.



Homeowners who have objected to the removal of their trees have opted for pruning instead.

Historically important trees continue to be sacrificed in favor of new development. Large, old trees thought to shelter an Indian encampment site were removed for construction of the Law Enforcement Center. A pristine grove of burr oak was lost at the historic Bluemont Central College site. Do we know what we have before it’s gone?

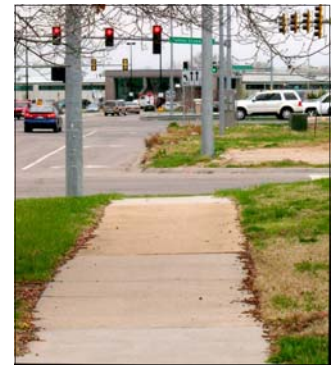
Next we discussed **“the threats from re-development”** with a particular focus on the historic stone house at 326 Laramie. Not only are we concerned about saving the house but also the two lots that have long been associated with the house. It would be inappropriate



to crowd the house with large new buildings when the full use of both lots would provide a more gracious setting.



We also discussed **“the history we rarely think about”**—Manhattan’s historic brick sidewalks, many of which are threatened by shifting caused by tree roots and by lack of maintenance.



We examined some issues associated with the lack of **“pedestrian access.”** Those citizens who want to walk or who simply must walk are unable to safely reach some of our community’s commercial areas. If we have only one transportation option—to own a car and to use it for every single trip—we have abandoned the concept of the walk-

Eleven Most Endangered Tour continued

able city. It is no wonder that teenagers long for the day when they can get behind the wheel, that seniors are loathe to give up their car keys, and that obesity is epidemic.



Finally, we looked at “**suburban sprawl.**” Manhattan is experiencing rapid growth. How does growth relate to sprawl? We turned to Manhattan’s League of Women Voters website where “Public Policy on Growth, Planning, and Development in Manhattan and Riley County” provides a springboard for discussion. It is interesting to note that the Riley County Commission is considering a temporary moratorium on development of the county’s unincorporated areas until the Vision 2025 Committee takes a long-range comprehensive look at the issue of sprawl. The April, 2007, National Geographic magazine article on the Flint Hills of Kansas reminds us that, when threatened with sprawl, we have a lot to lose.

After the slide show we car-pooled to our first stop, the kiosk that marks the site of Bluemont Central College, at the corner of College and Claflin. Bonnie Lynn-Sherow spoke of this important heritage site and of the many contributions made to our town by Washington Marlatt and his family. We next traveled to the nearby Marlatt Homestead. We visited

the house and the barn, both in severe disrepair. We endorse the



proposal to turn the buildings into a museum of land grant universities.



Our next stop was the Bluemont Youth Cabin, built in 1938 with the cooperation of the National Youth Administration, a depression era federal program designed to keep young people in school and out of the labor market. One hundred and fifteen youths took part in the construction of the cabin in a program that offered part time work for boys as well as training in the building trades. It also provided a building needed by the community. Boy Scouts as well as other boys and girls used the cabin and surrounding park for recreational purposes.

We visited the Smith Building on Poyntz Avenue, currently the home of the Strecker-Nelson Gallery on

the second floor and Edesia’s Café on the first floor.

We were served a mid-afternoon snack of salad and sandwiches and we were given a history of the



Smith Building by Barbara Nelson who owns the building with her husband, Jay Nelson.



Our final visit was to 617 Colorado, the poster child for “demolition by neglect.” The building’s new owners, Jim Sherow & Bonnie Lynn-Sherow, have taken on the Herculean task of saving this remarkable house from what just months ago seemed to be a sad and certain fate.

The M/RCPA is indebted to all who helped with the tour. Please send additional nominations to the endangered list to P.O. Box 1893, Manhattan, 66505, or by email to info@preservemanhattan.org.

2006–2007 MEMBERSHIP ROSTER

DUES ARE NORMALLY PAID AT THE ANNUAL MEETING IN SEPTEMBER BUT MEMBERS MAY JOIN AT ANY TIME DURING THE YEAR. CONTACT US AT info@preservemanhattan.org OR AT P.O. BOX 1893, MANHATTAN, KANSAS 66505 FOR DETAILS.

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