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RCHS Newsletter

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Happy New Year From Your RCHS Board of Directors by *Debbi Thompson, RCHS President*

As per RCHS bylaws, the membership votes on new board officers each year. Three new directors are also elected each year to a 3-year term. I'm pleased to announce the results of the votes from the November 2023 annual meeting. The position of program chairperson is vacant. Thank you all for your service on the RCHS board protecting and preserving the history of Riley County.

The Riley County Historical Society has many new programs and events planned for 2024. Be sure to check out our website at www.rileychs.org for more information. Our Facebook page is also a good resource for keeping up with all the latest events. The Membership committee has initiated new member-exclusive events. The first members' only event was held on January 19th, prior to the exhibit opening of "**Remember Me Fondly: Funerals in Victorian Era Riley County,**" now open at the Wolf House. Other member-exclusive events are being planned in the coming months. Join or renew your membership today so you won't miss out on the fun!

Grow Green Match Day will be on Monday, April 22, 2024, and donations can be made in person from 7am to 6pm at Colony Square Atrium, 555 Poyntz Avenue or online at www.growgreenmanhattan.com from 12:00am to 11:59pm. Grow Green Match Day provides the opportunity for nonprofit agencies to receive donations through the Greater Manhattan Community Foundation. On this day, GMCF will provide a **50% match** on donations to participating endowment funds, and donors can make a gift to one or several of the participating organizations. Riley County Historical Society is one of the participating organizations, and donations will be used for operational expenses.

2024 Riley County Historical Society Board of Directors

Debbi Thompson—***President***

Mary Mertz—***Vice-President***

Dori Milldyke—***Immediate Past President***

Lynne Berry—***Recording Secretary***

Colene Lind—***Corresponding Secretary***

Margaret Pendleton—***Membership Secretary***

Judy Kimball—***Treasurer***

Directors Through 2024

Dave Baker

Gloria Freeland

Andy Larson

Directors Through 2025

Janet Duncan

Brad Hartenstein

Carol Hockersmith

Janet Lowell

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Directors Through 2026

Sara Fisher

Jana McKinley

Larissa Oshima

New Exhibit at the Wolf House Museum Features Victorian Funeral Customs by Carol Hockersmith

Visiting the Wolf House Museum over the next several months will provide a rare opportunity to simulate a Victorian condolence call. You'll find an 1880s tableau of a Victorian funeral wake in the Wolf House parlor.

The exhibit, **"Remember Me Fondly: Funerals in Victorian Era Riley County,"** highlights artifacts and customs of the Victorian era which is the time interpreted in the furnishings of the Wolf House Museum. Riley County Historical Museum Curator of Education and Design Melanie Highsmith, who has degrees in anthropology and history, researched and designed the display.

According to Miss Highsmith, because the funeral industry didn't take off in earnest until the end of the 1800s following the Civil War, families were responsible for most of the funerary process. From washing the body, to choosing a burial outfit, staging the house, and hosting mourners—death was a family affair and people prepared to 'die well.'

You'll see calling cards from friends and neighbors who would have attended the wake to express sympathy. You'll see a black mourning dress ensemble on a mannequin watching over the child-sized coffin. (This coffin was a showroom display model and was never used.) The Victorians had special mourning jewelry to signal when a person was grieving, and this exhibit has several symbolic black brooches, including one brooch with hair of the deceased woven intricately into a memento.



Funerary arrangement in the Wolf House parlor. Photo courtesy Dawn Munger.



Hair art from the personal collection of Melanie Highsmith. Photo courtesy Lisa Jones.

While you may have viewed an artistic matrimonial certificate worthy of display, have you seen an artistic death certificate to hang on the wall? You'll see one in this exhibit. Early photographs depict how a picture of the deceased might be the only photo the family had of their loved one.

The Riley County Historical Society held an opening night event for members the evening before the exhibit opened to the public. Attendees were reminded of the dim lighting of the era made even dimmer by dark cloth covering windows and mirrors and pictures in the parlor as was the custom of the time represented by this exhibit. At the opening, a rose scent in the parlor replicated the flower fragrances that would have masked the lack of embalming in the Victorian era.

"Reactions to the funeral wake exhibit have been phenomenal," Highsmith said. "Funerary customs were so important to Victorian society, and patrons have enjoyed getting to learn more about such an undiscussed topic."

What Highsmith especially liked about curating this exhibit was the opportunity to showcase how vital art was to the process of mourning. She likes that hair mementos, brooches, photography, clothing, and other accessories are unique sentimental items that have been passed down through generations. A special "thank you" goes to Geary County Historical Museum for the loan of the display coffin and the last rites kit.

You can see this exhibit during regular Wolf House Museum hours: Saturdays and Sundays, 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. at 630 Fremont Street, Manhattan, KS. The exhibit is free and open to the public until it closes on May 26, 2024.

Cora Ulrich Kimble: "Mother" of MHK's Arbor Day by Gloria Freeland

With March being Women's History Month and April 26 being National Arbor Day, it's only natural to recognize Cora Kimble, known to her fellow citizens as "the mother of Arbor Day in Manhattan." In one newspaper article, she was described as "one of the city's most aggressive workers for civic beauty in the early 1900s." The article (in *Manhattan Daily Tribune*, March 28, 1941) said "she urged and cajoled and wheedled her hometown into observing the day [Arbor Day] in the only practical way, by planting trees and shrubs." The first Arbor Day was on April 10, 1872, in Nebraska City, Nebraska, and was the brainchild of Julius Sterling Morton. The first recognition of Arbor Day in Kansas was in 1875.

Cora LaFond Ulrich was born in Franklin County, Kansas on April 20, 1862, but moved to Manhattan with her parents, Robert and Mary Ulrich, when she was a small child. She married Samuel Kimble, Jr. on May 9, 1880. He was Riley County Attorney from 1890-1894, and he served 13 years as the presiding judge of the 21st Judicial District of Kansas.

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Samuel gave Cora a diary on March 28, 1881. The inscription on the inside cover reads: "Toots Diary, 3/28/1881. Cora L. Kimble, Manhattan, Kans." The digitized version of the diary is available through the Richard L.D. and Marjorie J. Morse Department of Special Collections at Kansas State University.

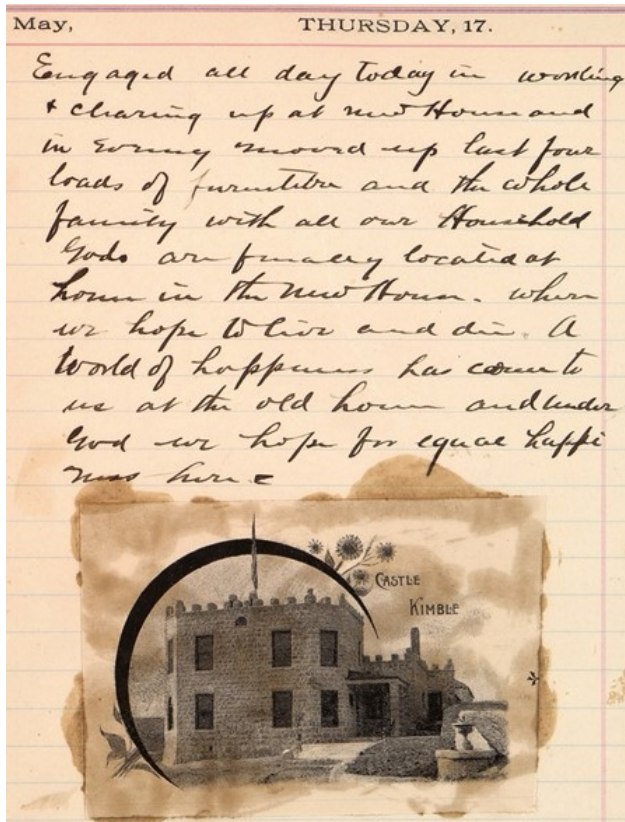
Cora made intermittent entries describing the weather, household affairs, and her convalescence after the stillbirth of her first child - a son - on March 11, 1881. Although it's hard to know for sure, perhaps it was Samuel's way of helping her cope with the grief of losing a baby. Sam traveled frequently for his work, and some of Cora's entries are descriptions of how lonely she was when he was gone and letters she received from him.

Cora went back to earlier dates in the year and filled in events as she remembered them. On February 4, 1881 she noted: "Tomorrow he will be home again. How glad I will be. Will have a nice supper for him and make homecoming pleasant. A letter says, 'Have a nice chicken for me.'" Excerpts from her March 5 entry include: "Borrowed Papa's buggy ... the roads are very bad. Is getting cold ..."

Her entry on March 11, 1881 describes her heartbreak: "Born at 3 o'clock AM to Mr. and Mrs. Sam Kimble a son. Our infant is taken from us. He was born dead. Oh if I could but seen his face just once but even that was denied us. Our hearts are sore hubby's and mine. ..."



Mrs. Cora Ulrich Kimble. Photo courtesy of Riley County Historical Society.



From the Sam Kimble diary, courtesy of the Richard L.D. and Marjorie J. Morse Department of Special Collections, Kansas State University Libraries.

Two days later, excerpts included:

"About the same today. ... I cry so much for my darling babe. Oh, I can't help it. It was cruel, hard to have him taken from us when we both loved it so much. Hubby says tears won't bring him back. No one is allowed to see me yet." Cora eventually was able to write about other topics, such as gardening, cleaning house, making pies, and visiting friends and family. April 12, 1881: "Father Kimble was here to dinner. Had roast beef, potatoes, apple sauce and sweet pudding."

During the first few years of their marriage, the Kimbles lived in a house on the 600 block of Poyntz Avenue. The family moved into their new home - Castle Kimble - in May 1894. The home - at 2001 Poyntz Avenue - still exists today. Samuel Kimble, Jr., whose 1894 diary is in K-State's Morse collection, described the day the family moved in on May 17 that year: "Engaged all day today in working and clearing up at new house and in evening moved up last four loads of furniture and the whole family with all our household goods are finally located at home in the new house where we hope to live and die. A world of happiness has come to us at the old house and under God we hope for equal happiness here." A postcard image of the home was pasted underneath his entry.

The Kimbles had three sons - Samuel Robert, Kenneth William, and James Carlisle. The boys and Cora worked year-round to beautify the grounds of Sunset Cemetery. According to family friend Anna Davidson, "the boys had a sled to which they hitched a horse. They used to carry barrels of water on the sled to the cemetery where they watered shrubs and plants."

Diagnosed with cancer in 1910, Cora spent the last 13 weeks of her life in a tent on the grounds of Castle Kimble. The family had borrowed an Army tent so she could be as close as possible to the trees she had nurtured.

She died August 22, 1912, at the age of 50. The Kimble family donated the land on which Sunset Cemetery's sexton's house and the landmark water tower were built.

(Gloria Freeland, professor emerita at Kansas State University's A.Q. Miller School of Media and Communication, is on the board of directors of the Riley County Historical Society.)

*What does he plant who plants a tree? He plants cool shade and tender rain, and seed and bud of days to be,
And years that fade and flush again; He plants the glory of the plain; He plants the forest's heritage; The harvest of a coming age;
The joy that unborn eyes shall see—these things he plants who plants a tree.*

—Excerpt from *The Heart of the Tree* by Henry Cuyler Bunner (1855-1896)



Photo courtesy Traci Brimhall.

April Is National Poetry Month by Traci Brimhall

National Poetry Month was established in 1996 by the Academy of American Poets in order to dedicate time and attention to the longest literary form in the world: the poem. Devoting the month to poetry doesn't have to look the same for everyone, but here are a dozen ways to celebrate the history of poetry and history in poetry:

- 1) Visit the Riley County Historical Society Museum and write an ode to one of the objects inside.
- 2) Recite Emily Dickinson's "Yesterday is History" aloud to someone—<https://hellopoetry.com/poem/4071/yesterday-is-history/> (From "The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson" by Emily Dickinson).
- 3) Choose a poetry collection for your book club's next selection.
- 4) Write lines of a poem you love in chalk on the sidewalk.
- 5) Read Rita Dove's poetry collection "Thomas and Beulah" and turn one of your family stories into a poem.
- 6) Leave copies of a poem you love in a little library in your neighborhood.
- 7) Look for the history in your own home or a home in your community and write a poem like Derek Walcott's "Ruins of a Great House"—<https://www.poeticous.com/derek-walcott/ruins-of-a-great-house>.
- 8) Hand copy a poem you love into a journal.
- 9) Attend a poetry reading in your community.
- 10) Read Carol Ann Duffy's "History" and consider all the people who have been left out of the records of history.
- 11) Write a poem for one of the people who has been left out of historical record.
- 12) Check out a collection of poetry from your local library.

There's no wrong way to celebrate National Poetry Month, but I hope this helps you find some ideas (or many!) of a way a poem can be a part of connecting you to your own history or the history of the cultures and communities around you.

(Traci Brimhall, a professor and the director of creative writing in Kansas State University's Department of English, is the author of five collections of poetry. She is the Poet Laureate of Kansas for 2023-2026)

The History Behind Arbor Day by Gloria Freeland

Julius Sterling Morton, who had a passion for planting all kinds of trees, came up with the idea of Arbor Day. He was born in New York in 1832 and married Caroline French in Detroit in October 1854. The couple headed west to Nebraska Territory and settled on 160 treeless acres. Julius Morton planted thousands of trees on the homestead he called the Morton "ranche." He planted an apple orchard, as well as peach, plum, and pear trees, cottonwoods, evergreens, beeches, and more.

He gave speeches with agricultural advice, urging Nebraskans to plant trees and try new crops. He was a journalist and a politician, becoming secretary and acting governor of the Nebraska Territory from 1858 to 1861. In 1893, President Grover Cleveland appointed him U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. He also served on the Nebraska State Board of Agriculture and the State Horticultural Society.

The first Arbor Day was on April 10, 1872, in Nebraska City, Nebraska. It's estimated that nearly one million trees were planted on this day. By 1885, Arbor Day had become a legal holiday in Nebraska. Particularly pleasing to Morton was the fact that schools across the country began celebrating Arbor Day by dedicating the trees they planted to special people. Now, Arbor Day is celebrated in April in all 50 states.

Today, the Morton family home, Arbor Lodge, is a state park in Nebraska City, Nebraska. Over the years, Arbor Lodge grew from a four-room home into a 52-room mansion, complete with a terraced garden, a pine grove, and 65 acres of more than 250 varieties of trees and shrubs. J. Sterling Morton died at the age of 70 on April 27, 1902. A statue of him stands in the National Hall of Fame in Washington, D.C.

Earth Day, which is celebrated each year on April 22, is similar to Arbor Day in that each is a holiday celebrating nature. Trees support our health and the health of our planet, support wildlife, clean our air and water, and provide shade, which cools our urban areas. Even on a personal level, it has been shown that trees calm us and reduce our stress levels. Finally, trees are our biggest allies as the world climate changes; they are a cost-effective way to pull carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere. Planting even one tree makes a difference.

(Much of the information for this article comes from "Learn the History Behind Arbor Day - and Plant a Tree!" by Alice Cary in the online "Old Farmer's Almanac" from November 2023.)

The Origins of Manhattan Street Names by Janet Duncan and Mary Stamey

Historically, names of streets have been derived from land owners, developers, historical figures or people groups. Thus, in Manhattan, Kansas, we have streets named Colorado, Lincoln, Osage, Riley, Lee, and Poyntz. Juliette Avenue holds the honor of perhaps being the only street in central Manhattan named after a woman. The other street - Allison - was to be named after a daughter the landowners, Mr. and Mrs. Nealy, were expecting. Allison Street became official, but the Nealys had a boy and named him Jim.



Photo courtesy Lisa Jones.

The tree-lined and brick-paved Juliette Avenue is named for Juliette (Lovejoy) Whitehead. She was the daughter of Reverend Charles Lovejoy, a Methodist minister and member of the New England Aid Society. There were two Juliettes at the time the street was named but since Juliette (Hunting) Morse moved away, historians refer to it being named for Reverend Lovejoy's daughter.

Juliette was 15 when she arrived in Manhattan. She was one of the few eligible women for the men of Fort Riley to date. By the age of 16, in March of 1856, she married Samuel Whitehead, a doctor who came to assist with the cholera outbreak. Juliette's mother thought Dr. Whitehead spoiled her daughter. "He bought her a covered buggy and a pony to ride along with him." Sadly, he didn't have long to spoil her as she succumbed to typhoid fever in 1860 at the age of 20. Hers was the first burial in the newly-formed community cemetery.

Juliette Avenue is the last remaining double-tree-lined street in the city. In their wisdom, the first people platting the streets planned for some to be 60 feet wide, which initiated the city's effort to line them with two rows of trees. Bluemont and Poyntz Avenues, along with Juliette, were originally created with two rows of trees on either side. Although many of the trees have since died, there are still some areas with two rows of trees.

Street names often have a history of their own. As originally planned, central Manhattan streets ran north/south and avenues east/west, although Juliette Avenue is an exception to this since it runs north/south. Poyntz Avenue was named for Colonel John Poyntz, who didn't live in the city but gave money to the New England Aid Society, which, together with the Cincinnati Company, founded the city.

Street names and numbers rarely change. But in 1908, the post office needed to shift the numbered streets. 1st Street became 2nd and so on. Juliette Street remained where it is and there is no 7th Street. Fort Riley Boulevard was Golden Belt Road in 1915, and later became U.S. 40 by 1940. It changed again to R.R.1 or El Paso, then K-18. In 1961, it was changed to its present name.

Riley County Historical Society board member Janet Duncan remembers her house address changing three times. After GPS became a more exact factor in determining locations, counties in Kansas had to name every road, lane, and pathway. RCHS member Mary Stamey was a school administrator when the county was changing street names. She and a bus driver chuckled over it, saying it was easier to just give each other directions rather than street names. "Just go a mile past the blue house. At the next road, turn right and you'll see John's house." Do you know the history of the street where you live? The Riley County Historical Society and Museum probably has an answer for you.

(Janet Duncan is a member of the Riley County Historical Society Board of Directors. Mary Stamey is a former RCHS board member and assists the RCHS Communications Committee.)

Wareham Pre-Renovation Tour for RCHS Quarterly Meeting by Carol Hockersmith

It's soon to be out with the old-style Wareham Opera House and in with the new-styled Wareham Hall on the main street of downtown Manhattan, Kansas. Please join us at Wareham Hall, 410 Poyntz Avenue, for a pre-renovation tour of the historic building on Monday, March 25, from 5:30-7pm. Blade Mages, president of Wareham Hall Inc., will host the first 2024 quarterly meeting of the Riley County Historical Society before the hall closes for renovation. Mr. Mages will share his vision for the historic Wareham Opera House transformation into a place for concerts, music, performance arts, and arthouse movies. This RCHS event will begin with beverages, light refreshments and a presentation of the planned renovation. Those in attendance will then break into smaller groups for a 'behind the scenes' tour of the historic building. The public is welcome to join in this Riley County Historical Society event.

Advanced reservations are **required** for all attendees by 5:00pm, Tuesday, March 19. The cost to participate is \$12 per person, payable online at [www.https://www.rileychs.org/calendar.cfm?t=events&i=2838](https://www.rileychs.org/calendar.cfm?t=events&i=2838) or by viewing details in "Upcoming Events." Payment can also be made in person at the Riley County Historical Museum, 2309 Claflin Avenue, Manhattan, KS.

The year's second Quarterly Meeting, will be on Tuesday, April 23, 6:30pm. Former K-State professor Leo Schell, Ph.D., will give a presentation on the founding and history of the Congregational Church in Manhattan. The meeting will be at the First Congregational Church, 700 Poyntz Avenue. This program is free and open to the public. Program information can be found at www.rileychs.org/calendar.cfm?t=events&i=2747 or check out our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/RileyCountyHistoricalMuseum.

Curator's Corner by Linda Glasgow

The Riley County Historical Society & Museum's research facility combines the Fay N. & Dora Seaton Memorial Library and the J. Willett & Ellyn Taylor and Sam C. & Esther C. Charleston Archives. This largely free repository is proud to take part in celebrating this year's National Library Week, April 7-13.



A few of the many Riley County tax rolls in the RCHM archives. Photo courtesy Lisa Jones.

The library/archives is devoted to collecting and preserving Riley County history. Repository materials include family files and birth, death, and marriage records. There are probate court records and early-day Manhattan minutes and ordinance books. There are photographs, many of them digitized. There are maps, city directories, and telephone books as well as club, business, and school records, city and county ledgers, and information on towns and townships. The collection also contains building surveys and property tax rolls from the early days of Manhattan to 1920 (tax rolls from 1921-present are available at the Riley County Treasurer's Office).

Research requests come from across the country and even around the world, including one from a Dutch National living in Switzerland. His plan was to honor the sacrifices of American airmen who served in World War II by memorializing them. His search involved looking for information about a local Riley County boy—Ernest Ralph Newell of Zeandale. The museum staff was able to help by checking Manhattan High School yearbooks and locating a photo of Mr. Newell, as well as providing further information through a staff member who was related to Mr. Newell.

The Museum's non-circulating collection includes both books and manuscripts (some unpublished, one-of-a-kind materials). Communication between the curator and patron is required to understand what resources are needed for research, which the curator will help to facilitate. The public is encouraged to schedule an appointment through the Museum's website (<https://www.rileycountyks.gov/328/Historical-Museum>), by calling the museum at 785-565-6490, writing a letter request (2309 Claflin Road, Manhattan, Kansas 66502), or emailing Curator Linda Glasgow, at lglasgow@rileycountyks.gov. Appointments are available Tuesday-Friday and a government-issued photo I.D. is required when using the Museum's workspace.

Linda has worked at the Riley County Historical Museum more than 30 years, arriving in 1978 with a degree in American History and three years of on-the-job training at the Western Historical Manuscripts Collection at the University of Missouri in Columbia. After taking a sabbatical to rear her children, she returned to the museum in 1994. As curator of Archives and Library, she assists patrons with their research on Riley County history and other topics, and oversees the operation of that Museum division.

Calendar of Events

March is Women's History Month

March 11-15—Spring Break, Manhattan Public Schools and Colleges

March 12—Fireside Chat with Derrick Doty, 5:30pm, Flight Crew Coffee, 423 Poyntz Avenue, Manhattan, KS

March 13—RCHS Board of Directors monthly meeting, 3:30-4:30pm, Dallas Gallery at Riley County Historical Museum

March 17—**St. Patrick's Day**

March 18—**In-Focus** KMAN radio program featuring Melanie Highsmith from RCHM, 9:05-10:00am

March 25—RCHS Quarterly Meeting, 5:30-7pm, Wareham Hall, 410 Poyntz Avenue, Manhattan, KS

March 31—**Easter Sunday**, Museum and Wolf House closed

April is National Poetry Month

April 9—Fireside Chat, 5:30pm, Flight Crew Coffee, 423 Poyntz Avenue, Manhattan, KS

April 10—RCHS Board of Directors monthly meeting, 3:30-4:30pm, Dallas Gallery at Riley County Historical Museum

April 15—**In-Focus** KMAN radio program featuring Melanie Highsmith from RCHM, 9:05-10:00am

April 22—**Earth Day**

April 22—Grow Green Match Day, 7am-6pm at Colony Square Atrium, 555 Poyntz Avenue, Manhattan, KS, and online all day

April 16-18; 23-25—Riley County Fourth Grade tours

April 23—RCHS Quarterly Meeting Presentation by Leo Schell, 6:30pm, First Congregational Church, 700 Poyntz Avenue, Manhattan, KS

April 26—**Arbor Day**