

RILEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Since 1914

Contact us at: 2309 Claflin Road Manhattan, Kansas 66502

785-565-6490

www.rileychs.com

RCHS Newsletter

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March/April 2023



Letter from the President by Debbi Hardin Thompson

History takes on many forms. There are visible historic buildings and artifacts in museums. There are historic dates and historic events. But there are also written family histories and stories.

As 2023 RCBS Board President, I've heard many interesting stories around the boardroom table from those whose families made their way to settle in and around Riley County. For me, it began with my great-great grandfather, Thomas David Hannigan, Sr., who was born on February 22, 1836, in Pawtucket, RI. At the age of 17, he became an apprentice to a blacksmith in Chicago. It was there that he met and married his wife Isabelle Johnston on July 4, 1861. To this union, six children were born. They left Chicago and arrived at the homestead owned by her Uncle Henry Johnston in Ogden Township, Riley County, Kansas in June 1868. The family lived on one corner of the property in the wagons with which they had traveled to Kansas. This property was deeded to my great-great grandfather in February 1869.

Great-great grandfather Hannigan worked as a blacksmith in Ogden, then in Junction City, until he took a job as blacksmith for the United States Government at Fort Riley. It was there that the paymaster who made out his first check spelled the family name with an "a" instead of an "i". His family continued spelling the name with an "a" and became known as the "'a' Hannagans."

My great-grandfather, also named Thomas David Hannagan, was born June 14, 1870 at Fort Riley, Kansas. Thomas David Hannagan, Jr., became a farmer and married Catherine Still in 1891. They had nine children. My grandfather, Thomas Daniel Hannagan, was the fourth oldest. He married my grandmother Ethel Whitmer from Keats in 1922. For over 60 years they made their home at 1317 Houston Street. My mother Paula A. Hannagan Hardin is the youngest of five children. She was born in a home along Deep Creek in 1936 and lives in Manhattan today.

Family stories are an important part of history to be shared for generations. So I ask you...what is your story?

Field Trip Season

School field trip season will soon be upon us and Melanie Highsmith, Curator of Education and Design, has already begun booking fourth grade classes for their annual spring field trip, to be held in April at the Wolf House Museum, 630 Fremont Street. The field trip, intended for all county fourth-grade classes, was interrupted for several years by the Covid-19 pandemic. Now that life is returning to a post-pandemic normalcy, Riley County Historical Society and Museum is looking forward to resuming regular activities, school field trips included. Volunteers will be needed, so please consider giving of your time to make this an interesting and successful activity for our young people. To sign up, please contact mhighsmith@rileycountyks.gov or call 785-565-6490.

Did you know? March is Women's History Month!



Doty to speak at quarterly Riley County Historical Society Lunch-and-Learn Program

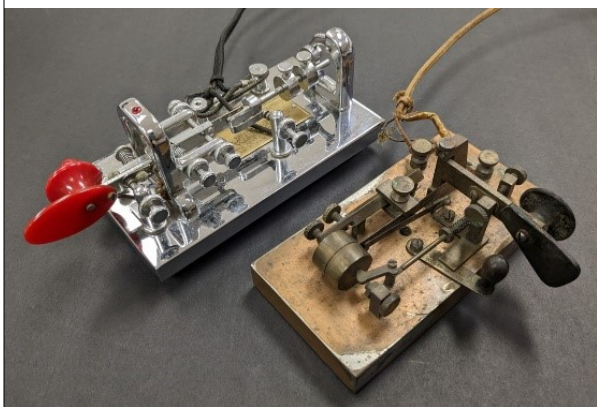
Flint Hills Fiddler and Pioneer Log Cabin host Derrick Doty (*pictured, left*) will speak at the Wednesday, March 22, quarterly lunch-and-learn meeting of the Riley County Historical Society. Doty will talk about the cabin, located in Manhattan's City Park, its recent renovations and its exhibits inside. The structure, built in 1915 as a replica of a pioneer log cabin, was dedicated in 1916 as RCHS's first museum. Doty's interest and research into the history of Kansas music translates easily into interest in early Riley County life in log cabins.

A native Kansan, Doty was raised in Osage County, Kan., on land once home to Sauk and Fox tribes. Growing up on the family farm, he heard stories of his great-grandfather playing fiddle for barn dances. Doty was inspired to learn the fiddle.

For more than 20 years, Doty has been fiddling, much of that time at contra and barn dances around Eastern Kansas. For more than a decade, he has also organized, called, and played for historic dances and mid-19th-century balls. Currently, he is the fiddler for Tallgrass Express String Band, a Flint Hills-based folk music band whose repertoire largely consists of traditional music about the region. Doty has been on the staff at the Riley County Historical Society since May 2022.

The lunch will be in the Prairie Star Restaurant at Meadowlark Hills, 2121 Meadowlark Rd., Manhattan, Kan. Registration is at 11:30 a.m. The buffet lunch (for \$15 cash or check) is at 11:45 a.m. The program begins at 12:15 p.m. The program is offered at no cost, and extra seats will be at the back of the room. Make reservations at (785) 565-6490 or RCHSinfo@rileychs.com by Thursday, March 16.

Curator's Corner by Dawn Munger, Curator of Collections



The Riley County Historical Society and Museum recently received two telegraph keys used by agents at the Randolph Station on the Union Pacific Railroad line. Telegraph keys are electrical switches used to send messages in Morse Code. Marshall County native Lowell Behrens bought his first telegraph key in 1951 when he graduated from the national railroad training school in Omaha, Nebraska. It was a 1951 Vibroplex Original Deluxe model (*pictured, on the left*) with carrying case. Behrens worked for the Union Pacific Railroad in Emmett, KS, joined the military for four years, then returned to work for the railroad once again.

In the mid-1950s, longtime Randolph depot agent Carl Fernstrom was retiring and Mr. Behrens won the bid to replace him. The two men became good friends and Carl imparted stories from his long run as a depot agent. One of the more recent tasks included sending messages to Washington, DC from angry locals decrying the planned Tuttle Creek Dam project. The Union Pacific line entered Riley County just south of Irving, KS, running through Cleburne and the original Randolph town site before reaching Manhattan. The building of the dam would ultimately spell the end of the two railroad towns of Irving and Cleburne, and Randolph was moved to a new location on higher ground a mile to the west. Years later, Carl would give Lowell Behrens the telegraph key, or "bug" he had used during his time at the Randolph Depot. That key was a Mecograph #3 Model (*pictured, on the right*) Carl purchased in 1910 while working for the railroad at Fort Riley. Though he left the railroad in the late 1950s, Mr. Behrens proudly kept both his own and Carl's telegraph keys until donating them to RCHM this past September.

*Dawn Munger has been Curator of Collections at the Riley County Historical Museum since 2018. She received her Master's degree in Museum Studies from the University of Kansas (*gasp!*), and previously spent over a decade as an archeologist in cultural resource management. She loves researching items to better tell their history and the history of their previous owners.*

In her free time, she enjoys a good sour beer or gin-based cocktail, reading, video games, and cat snuggles.

Riley County Historical Society Board of Directors-2023

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An Early Manhattan Women's Club by Janet Duncan

"One of the radical differences between men's and women's clubs is that women can never associate themselves together without trying to improve something or somebody. If no other subject offers itself, they will undertake to improve themselves..."

The journalist writing in the Dec. 19, 1888 issue of The Manhattan Mercury must have heard the planning among some of the women of Manhattan, for such a new club was reported in July 1889:

"A parliamentary club among the ladies was organized at the home of Mrs. H. S. Roberts Tuesday afternoon. It is the purpose of the club to study parliamentary law during the summer.... The members are: Madams Higinbotham, Irish, Spilman, Hoadley, Wine, March, Shepherd, Purcell, Bemis, Roberts and Miss Barner."

In those days, no newspaper recognized that women had first names other than Mrs. or Miss. Within six months, the club approved a motion to form a library association and a committee on "the need for a Rest Room." Members reported they had found suitable rooms downtown and had spoken with prominent business men who endorsed the idea of a room "suitably furnished with toilet arrangements, easy chairs, ice water, reading matter, and made pleasant for ladies and children who come from a distance to town to do shopping, and for all ladies who are obliged to wait for any length of time for husband, son, brother or father to attend sales, look after stock, machinery or other business matters taking any length of time."

This project eventually became the first public restroom in Manhattan. It was not long before local business owners recognized the benefits restrooms offered to prospective customers and began to provide their own. Mrs. Irish—Eusebia Mudge Irish (*above*) who was named in the article about the Parliamentary Club — became president of the new Library Association. She was a charter member and the first president of the Riley County Historical Society, formed in 1914. She studied at Kansas State Agricultural College (now Kansas State University) and the Boston Conservatory of Music and later graduated from the University of Kansas in 1875. Miss Mudge married prominent Manhattan attorney Frank L. Irish in October of 1888. Mr. Irish died in 1901 of sepsis and their only child, daughter Gladys, drowned after a boating accident in 1909. Mrs. Irish remained in Manhattan the rest of her life. She taught piano, served as organist at the Congregational Church, and became a librarian at Manhattan High School, serving from 1914 to 1936. Eusebia Mudge Irish died in 1942 and is buried in Sunset Cemetery.

Janet Duncan, a member of the RCHS board of directors, wrote this item in honor of Women's History Month, celebrated in March. Photo from 1921 'Blue M' (Manhattan High School yearbook) courtesy Janet Duncan.





Kansas Day Recap

The Riley County Historical Museum hosted a special Kansas Day Open House on Sunday, January 29. There were 'Kansas Day Bingo' cards featuring photos of artifacts found in the main museum galleries and in the Goodnow House Museum. Guests were encouraged to hunt for the Bingo items throughout the museum and

during Goodnow House tours. Nearly three dozen visitors braved the frigid temperatures to spend the afternoon perusing the exhibits. As a special treat, chocolate and vanilla cupcakes with sunflower cake toppers were given out as visitors departed. Many thanks to the staff and volunteers who helped make this Kansas Day celebration a successful one.



Mark your calendars and save the date—Grow Green is Friday, April 21, 2023!

Grow Green day is very important to the RCHS! This special donor event, hosted by the Greater Manhattan Community Foundation (GMCF) provides an amazing opportunity for your donation dollars to grow more green for the organizations you choose to support!

On Friday, April 21, the GMCF will provide a **50% match** on donations to participating endowment funds. We hope that you will choose our organization to support this year! There will be more information to come but for now, please mark your calendars!

During Grow Green (on April 21), you will be able to make donations online between 12:00 a.m. – 11:59 p.m. or you can show up in person at the event with your donation. We will be at the Colony Square Atrium, 555 Poyntz Avenue, from 7 am until 6 pm.

Donations can also be mailed ahead of time to the GMCF (more info to come). They will release more information in early April which we will send your way. In the meantime, you can learn more about Grow Green and the wonderful work that the GMCF is doing in our community. <https://www.growgreenmanhattan.com/>

Thank you for your continued support of the Riley County Historical Society!

Schedule of Events

March 8 – RCHS Board of Directors Meeting, Manhattan Senior Center, 3:30-4:30pm

March 22—RCHS Quarterly Lunch-and-Learn meeting, Prairie Star Restaurant at Meadowlark Hills; registration begins at 11:30, buffet lunch is at 11:45 (\$15 cash or check), and the program (free) starts at 12:15; featured speaker will be Derrick Doty

April 12—RCHS Board of Directors Meeting, Manhattan Senior Center, 3:30-4:30pm

April 18 – RCHM Board of Trustees Quarterly Meeting, Manhattan Senior Center, 4-5pm

April 21 – Grow Green Match Day, Greater Manhattan Community Foundation (and online), 12am – 11:59pm

May 6 – Flint Hills Festival, Blue Earth Plaza, 10am-5pm

May 10—RCHS Board of Directors Meeting, Manhattan Senior Center, 3:30-4:30pm