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RCHS Newsletter

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Sledding Down Bluemont Hill *compiled by Gloria Freeland*

In the winter, many people's thoughts go back to their childhood sledding days. I grew up on a Kansas farm, and I remember Dad tying - or rather, chaining - a sled to the back of our old pickup and pulling brother David, sister Gaila, and me along rocky country roads covered with ice and snow. The most fun was when we would steer the sled left and right, zipping from one ditch to the other over snow drifts.

Lisa Jones grew up in southeastern Saline County and now works at the Riley County Historical Museum. "I remember my uncle pulling us around a field sitting in the door of an old refrigerator attached to the back of a tractor with a heavy chain. So dangerous, but didn't we all live more dangerously back then?"

And many folks in Manhattan recall the days of sledding down Bluemont Hill. Janet Duncan, whose family moved to Manhattan from Kansas City in 1949, is one of them. "Do some of you remember the old days, when the Manhattan City Police would set up street barricades at the Juliette and Vattier intersection, and Bluemont Hill would be given over to sledders after each big snow? All the kids in the area, and many from other parts of the city, would gather on the hill with every kind of sled for a grand day in the snow...My brother and I were lucky, for we lived up on top of the hill, and we could always be the first ones out in the morning making fresh tracks in newly-fallen snow and blazing the trail for the day - from the parking lot in Goodnow Park, always careening precariously around and down the main hill, and not coming to a stop until we reached the barricades. We would gain some pretty terrific speeds going that distance on such a steep hill and at least one of the group would wipe-out trying to make a corner."

Mary Stamey, a long-time educator and school administrator in Manhattan, also remembers sledding 'the Hill.' "My personal memory was the thrill of going fast, and if I wanted to slow down or not go all the way to the bottom, I'd turn the sled and hit an embankment of snow, brush off the snow and trudge back up to the top.



Elliott family homemade, old-fashioned box sled. Photo courtesy Riley County Historical Society.

"We moved into town when I was 10 so I only sledded 'the Hill' a few seasons. We didn't feel the cold until it hit our faces and it gave us a surprising sting! My brother had a little scar on his face from sledding down Bluemont Hill. We didn't notice the cut until we got home because he was so bundled up and numb. (There was) nothing better until I rode in a field of corn stubble on an upside-down car hood being pulled by a tractor."

Her husband, Bob Stamey, recalled living on Kearney Street as a 6- and 7-year-old in 1955-1956, feeling proud that he was big enough to walk the four blocks up the hill "all by himself, with lots of kids sledding down fast." He said the big kids were nice, but he had to get out of the way because of their speed. He doesn't remember parents hanging around; everyone just helped each other. He also recalled the firemen spraying the street sometimes so they could slide on the streets. He remembers that nothing was as good as Bluemont Hill after they moved across town to a new area around Pipher Lane.

Those were the good ol' days!

Downtown Displays Give Sampling of the Museum by Carol Hockersmith

Riley County Historical Society takes history to the people in two places in downtown Manhattan, KS. If shopping or doing business during weekdays, it's easy to pop into the Riley County Office Building, 110 Courthouse Plaza, or drop by next door at the Riley County Courthouse, 100 Courthouse Plaza. For the courthouse visit, use the public entrance on the east side of the building and make a quick run through the security station to the second floor. The county office building display is on the first floor in the southeast corner of the lobby.

On display now at the county office building is an exhibit called "Wildlife in Riley County." It features a specimen collection of Kansas insects and some history of the insect zoo at the Kansas State University Gardens. Another part of the display has photos with suggestions of places in Riley County to explore local flora and fauna. The exhibit also highlights wildlife at the Sunset Zoo and includes a history panel about the former zoo favorite "Brownie," the grizzly bear.

At present, the Courthouse exhibit "Faces of Innovation: Medical Pioneers of Riley County," is a promo for the temporary exhibit in the museum at 2309 Claflin Road. The promo display spotlights pioneer physician James Colt (1867-1944) and how he operated on patients' kitchen tables and delivered around 1,600 babies in the community. Also in this exhibit is an advertisement with instructions for how to use the cures-many-afflictions "Mineral Water" from the famous Blasing's Springs, in the Deep Creek area of Riley County.

Melanie Highsmith, Riley County Historical Museum Curator of Education and Design, says the displays typically change quarterly.

"When it comes to choosing what exhibits to put offsite, at times it is a teaser or promotion of a larger exhibit we have at the museum," said Highsmith. "Other times, it is to celebrate important landmark events and anniversaries within the community. The "Kansas: The Sunflower State" exhibit, for example, featured in the Courthouse from November 2022 to February 2023 demonstrated different ways the state flower has been used in local art.

In the past year, the county office building display also featured "Seasonal Shopping on Poyntz Avenue," "MLK in MHK: The Legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in Manhattan," and "Summer Baseball: Cookie & Biscuit Leagues." The courthouse display earlier this year highlighted "Kansas: The Sunflower State," and "Ho for Kansas: Exodusters in Riley County."



Courthouse exhibit "Faces of Innovation: Medical Pioneers of Riley County." Photo courtesy Melanie Highsmith.



With all the artifacts at the museum from which to choose, how does Highsmith select what to take offsite? The Society collection includes over 85,000 objects, a library/archive of over 4,500 books and monographs, 10,800 cubic feet of manuscripts and archives, and 27,000 photographic negatives and images.

"Security and fragility are certainly important components when deciding what artifacts can go offsite and for how long," Highsmith said. "For example, the Sunflower State exhibit featured a quilt, and I worked with Curator of Collections Dawn Munger to determine if the sun exposure in the hallway would be too detrimental to the item."

Not all offsite exhibits include artifacts, she explained, as she put together the "MLK in MHK" exhibit with only panels and pictures. These offsite exhibits bring you more opportunities to see the museum collections and sample more local history.

Left: Previous courthouse exhibit "Kansas: The Sunflower State." Photo courtesy Melanie Highsmith.

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Wolf House Christmas Open House 2023



Left: Docent Katrina Otto Radmer shared turn-of-the-century kitchen chronicles. Photo courtesy Jackie Jones.



Above: Wolf House dining room table set to welcome Christmas guests. Photo courtesy Jackie Jones.



Above: Wolf House parlor tree, December 17, 2023 Christmas Open House. Photo courtesy Jackie Jones.



2024 Membership Renewal Time

One way to start the new year off right is by renewing your Riley County Historical Society membership for 2024! The annual membership drive is going on now and we would love to see everyone back for a new year of informative talks, historical walks, and fun and interesting volunteer opportunities. Please join us by renewing or starting a new membership today! www.rileychs.org/become-a-member.cfm

Curator's Corner by Melanie Highsmith, Curator of Education and Design

This January, we celebrate the first anniversary of one of Manhattan's most recent additions to the State and National Register of Historic Places: the Yuma Street Historic District! Led by Alex Corrado and Ben Chmiel of the Historic Resources Board the district was officially added to the National listing on January 3, 2023, and includes seven structures between 9th and 10th Streets on Yuma. Since the 1860s, the area has been the heart of the African American community in Manhattan. Before the construction of Fort Riley Boulevard, Yuma Street was the main thoroughfare for the south side of town and was once heavily populated with black-owned homes, churches, and businesses. The Douglass Community Center served as a United Service Organization (USO) site, a place for black servicemembers and their guests to gather for rest and recreation. Passengers that traveled the Union Pacific or Rock Island railroad lines through Manhattan would have gone right through this section of town, helping the businesses on Poyntz Avenue and Yuma Street thrive. Over the years, floods (1903, 1951, 1993) and redevelopment have led to the disappearance of most of the historic buildings along the street. This nomination seeks to preserve the remaining landmarks and educate the public about their significance. You can read the entire nomination at https://www.kshs.org/natreg/natreg_listings/view/1960. To listen to an interview featuring Melanie and Director of the Douglass Center, Dave Baker, discussing the buildings and his memories of growing up in the neighborhood; please visit: <https://1350kman.com/2023/02/in-focus-2-20-23-riley-county-historical-museum/>.

A native of Texas, Melanie moved to Manhattan in 2018 to pursue her Ph.D. in History at Kansas State University. Her dissertation concerns asylums in Kansas in the late 1800s, medical technology, and social perceptions of wellness. She received a B.A. in History from Angelo State University and two M.A.s in History and Anthropology from Texas Tech University. Her hobbies include walking her two dogs, playing survival horror video games, and enjoying a nice whiskey out with fellow Curator Dawn Munger.

Left: Patrons gathered around the counter inside the USO, circa 1945. Photo courtesy Riley County Historical Society.



Above: The exterior of the Douglass Community Center (formerly USO) at 900 Yuma Street. Photo courtesy Melanie Highsmith.

Historic Name	Property Name	Address	Style
Second Baptist Church	Pilgrim Baptist Church	831 Yuma Street	Romanesque Revival
Second Baptist Church Sanctuary	Pilgrim Baptist Church	831 Yuma Street	Contemporary
United Service Organization	Douglass Community Center	900 Yuma Street	American Movement
Douglass Park	Douglass Park	901 Yuma Street	Site/Park
Douglass School	Douglass Center Annex	901 Yuma Street	Folk Victorian
Shepard Chapel/ Second Methodist	Kaw Blue Masonic Lodge #107	903 Yuma Street	Gothic Revival
Yuma St Church of God	Mount Zion Church of God	916 Yuma Street	Corrugated Metal

Celebrate Kansas Day at the Museum! by Gloria Freeland

The Riley County Historical Society and Museum will celebrate Kansas Day from 2-5 p.m. Sunday, January 28, at the museum, 2309 Claflin Road. There will be Kansas-themed programs and light refreshments.

Kansas became a state on January 29, 1861, and the final Seal of Kansas and the state motto, “Ad astra per aspera,” (to the stars through difficulties), were adopted through a joint resolution during the first Kansas legislative session on May 25, 1861.

According to the Kansaspedia section of the Kansas State Historical Society website, symbols for the state become official through the legislative process. Most people know that the wild native sunflower, cottonwood, American bison, and ornate box turtle are symbols of the Sunflower State. Or that the state song is “Home On the Range,” written by Daniel Kelley and Dr. Brewster Higley. There are many more, however, including the following:

State insect: honeybee	State soil: harney loam silt
State amphibian: barred tiger salamander	State grass: little bluestem
State fossils: tylosaurus and pteranodon	State rock: limestone
State mineral: galena	State gemstone: jelinite
State fruit: sandhill plum	State land fossil: silvisaurus condrayi
State bird: Western meadowlark	State fish: channel catfish



Calendar of Events

January 1—**New Year’s Day**, Holiday, museum is closed

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

January 15—**Martin Luther King, Jr. Day**, Federal holiday, museum is closed

January 16—RCHM Board of Trustees Quarterly meeting, 4-5pm, Dallas Gallery at Riley County Historical Museum

January 19—Members’ Exclusive Opening Reception “Remember Me Fondly: Funerals in Victorian Era Riley County,” Wolf House Museum, 5:30-7pm, Free to active RCHS members, guests of members \$20; email RCHSinfo@rileychs.org to RSVP

January 20—Exhibit Opening “Remember Me Fondly: Funerals in Victorian Era Riley County,” 2-5pm, Wolf House Museum, free and open to the public

January 22—**In-Focus** KMAN radio program featuring Melanie Highsmith from RCHM, 9:05-10:00am

January 28—**Kansas Day Open House**, 2-5pm at Riley County Historical Museum, 2309 Claflin Road, Manhattan, KS

January 29—**Kansas Day, observed**, museum closed on Mondays

February is Black History Month

February 13—Fireside Chat, 5:30pm, Flight Crew Coffee, 423 Poyntz Avenue, Manhattan, KS. Topic is “Love & Marriage on the Prairie

February 14—RCHS Board of Directors monthly meeting, 3:30-4:30pm, Dallas Gallery at Riley County Historical Museum

February 19—**President’s Day**, Federal holiday, museum closed

February 19—**In-Focus** KMAN radio program featuring Melanie Highsmith from RCHM, 9:05-10:00am