Letter from the President
by Chris Schultz, SCHS President

Allow me to introduce myself... I am Chris Schultz and I am honored to serve as your 2010 President of the Shawnee County Historical Society. Historic preservation has always been something near and dear to my heart as business owner and resident in Downtown Topeka. My businesses and home are located in the historic Tinkham Veale Building, 909 South Kansas Avenue. It was beautifully restored several years ago, and when I had the opportunity to purchase it I jumped at the chance. Part of my home is the former kitchen of The Chocolate Shop Restaurant, an institution that played a long standing role in the history of Topeka. Notable Kansans like Alf Landon and Amelia Earhart were documented regulars.

To stand in my building and actually feel the rich historic past through the stories and experiences of my friends and customers is a truly magical feeling that, as President, I hope to share with as many people throughout Shawnee County as possible. We truly appreciate your support, as a member of the society, to help us keep that magic alive.

I am delighted to work with an incredible slate of Trustees who are eager to get down to business. One rapidly approaching milestone is the celebration of the Kansas state sesquicentennial. We have begun preparations to make sure it is a celebration that Shawnee County will surely be proud of for decades to come. It is something you will be hearing a lot more about in upcoming months. You will also hear a lot more about the Ritchie House project. I was pleasantly informed by their steering committee that a tentative completion date has been set to occur within the year. Also, be sure to mark your calendar for the 2010 National Underground Railroad Conference, which will be held in Topeka July 28-31. The Shawnee County Historical Society will be a proud supporter of the event along with The National Park Service and The National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program. We have a busy year ahead of us and are glad you are with us as a part of this year’s history in the making!
Kim Morse, Education Committee chair, reports that, in the past year, thousands of children placed their hands on history during field trips to the Ritchie House, in History After School programs sponsored by the SCHS Educational Initiative, and through high quality and engaging curricular materials created by the Initiative (available and free to all through our website). We completed our first traveling trunk, available for check out by any Shawnee County educator. The truck has reading cards, games, primary sources, videos, music, and complete lesson plans designed to teach all of the state established standards and benchmarks for Bleeding and Civil War era Kansas. We began research and development for a second trunk on the 1870s and 1880s, also tagged to standards and benchmarks.

In November, 2009, Open Houses held at the Ritchie House entertained about ten people each at two Saturdays featuring Ustaine Talley, speaking about “Black Colonies in Kansas.” The first group was genealogists and professionals, plus two middle schoolers. The second group was mostly children. Another November Open House had historical reenactor Ann Hawkins portray Mary Jane Ritchie. The final Open House, presented by SCHS educational consultant Robin Shrimplin, had activities for children and teachers.

Jason French confirmed in mid-February that BPAmerica is again committing to support of our SCHS Educational Initiative with $15,000! Also in the plan is $5000 in one-time money for picnic tables, so visitors will have a place to sit outdoors during summer 2010 tours of the Ritchie House.

We will add to BPAmerica’s commitment with fundraising efforts of our own in three phases: Letter Writing Campaign, Grants and Corporate Support, and Historic Homes of Topeka Tour. More details of this fundraising campaign will be forthcoming.

Renomination of Ritchie House

Thom Rosenblum, National Park Service’s Brown v Topeka Board of Education site, renominated SCHS’s John Ritchie House for the National Underground Railroad Network To Freedom. We’ve received informal verification that our nomination has been accepted (p. 8). Thom described the significance of the site:

“...Topeka, Kansas played a major role in the Underground Railroad, serving as a place of refuge and conduit for slaves who traveled along established routes between the south and freedom. During the tumultuous Bleeding Kansas period, John and Mary Ritchie and other Topeka residents turned their homes and property into safe havens for escaping slaves tracked by owners, federal law enforcement, and the slave catchers who prowled river banks and towns hoping to catch the fugitives and drag them south for cash. John Ritchie secreted escaping slaves on his Topeka property, guided fugitives on their trek to freedom, and was involved in at least two documented rescue attempts, one when he rode to the aid of John Brown who with a group of slaves he had liberated in Missouri was surrounded by a posse intent on taking the abolitionist and the slaves in. The Ritchie House served as the primary residence of John and Mary Ritchie. A strong oral tradition, eyewitness accounts, newspapers, correspondence, and other documentation verify John Ritchie’s association with abolitionism, his participation in armed conflicts to determine whether Kansas would enter the Union slave or free, and his providing refuge to and assisting escaping slaves. Documentation shows that in 1858 alone, Ritchie aided no less than six fugitive slaves. In later years, Ritchie himself claimed that no less than $100,000 worth of runaway slaves had passed to safety through his place.”
The preservation committee, led by Carlton Scroggins with Doug Jones, Walt Hillmer and Bill Wagnon, will produce the Society’s annual preservation recognition reception at the Woodward Inn at 2 PM on May 2. The Topeka Landmark Commission will be a joint sponsor, with recognition of newly designated properties as Topeka Landmarks. (See also: newsletter front)

The Society contributes to Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area booth and tent at the 2010 Kansas Sampler in Leavenworth, May 1 and 2. Allen Jones, Anne Hawkins and Niashia Baker will perform characters from the Lewis Bodwell account of the Underground Railroad episode that originated at the Ritchie House in July 1858.

Jack Wisman has been named the Society’s delegate to the Topeka Tourism Alliance, with Carlton Scroggins named alternate.

The April 20 scheduled meeting of the Society Trustees will be devoted to a report on the survey of historical assets within the county. Individuals and organizations which were invited to respond to the needs assessment of historic properties and agencies will be invited to participate in the meeting. The report will include a compilation and analysis of historic assets in the county and make recommendations about appropriate public funding. The meeting will be at 7 PM in the Marvin Auditorium of the Public Library.

The membership committee’s recommendation to the Trustees that a new membership category be added to appeal to youth was approved. The Education Committee will develop a promotional plan for recruiting student memberships in the Society for $5 per year.

Our Annual Meeting was held in the 6th Avenue Ballroom, 117 SW 6th, on Sunday, December 6, 2009. Approximately 50 members and guests attended.

Carlton Scroggins, president, welcomed those attending and delivered the President’s report. He thanked the board members for their hard work this past year, particularly noting the challenges of bringing in so many changes in board membership during this past year. Some of the year’s accomplishments he highlighted were the following:

- Supporting History Day at Washburn University
- Finishing a successful Capital Campaign which raised $300,000 for the restoration of the Hale Ritchie House
- A $15,000 grant from BP (British Petroleum) for educational programs
- A $53,400 grant from the City of Topeka for renovating the Hale Ritchie House
- Annual Preservation Awards
- Organizational work to establish a county wide mill levy to support historic preservation
- Basketball Forum at Topeka High School which attracted over 400 people
Four constitutional conventions were convened during the Kansas territorial period (Topeka, 1855; Lecompton, 1857; Leavenworth, 1858; and Wyandotte, 1859). Each convention drafted a constitution under which the delegates hoped the territory would be admitted to the Union.

The first constitution resulted from a movement—the Topeka movement—reacting to contested elections that gave the proslavery party initial control of Kansas’ territorial government. Free-staters gathered in convention at Lawrence on August 14 and Big Springs on September 5, 1855 and delegates assembled at Topeka on October 23, 1855, to draft a constitution. The document was approved on December 15 by a vote of 1,731 to 46. The Topeka Constitution prohibited slavery; it also limited suffrage to white males and “every civilized male Indian who has adopted the habits of the white man.” Congress rejected this constitution and the accompanying request for Kansas to be admitted to the Union.

The Special Collections Department at the Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library (TSCPL) contains many examples of rare and unusual books, including handmade artists’ books and books as art, miniature books, pop-up books, first editions, and books about books. Special Collections also encompasses the Moses Collection of scholarly fine arts books collected by former library director Horace Moses. Some highlights of the Special Collections are the 1755 Dictionary of the English Language (2v.) by Samuel Johnson, History of the Indian Tribes of North America (3v.) by Thomas McKenney and James Hall published in 1848-1850, and Fragments of Light II (2004) a book consisting of 7 etched glass plates.

Formerly the Kansas Center for the Book Collection, the materials that comprise this reference collection include monographs, collected stories, poetry and drama written or illustrated by Kansans or former Kansans. The collection also contains biographies of noted Kansans; selected books by authors who are not Kansans, but who use Kansas as a setting for their works; collections of Kansas folklore and legends; and materials related specifically to Kansas history, geography, topography, flora, and fauna. Although most of this collection is the more recently published Kansas related literature, there are a number of nineteenth century publications about Territorial Kansas, Bleeding Kansas, and the Civil War period.

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The Topeka Room local history collection at the Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library supports the research and activities of the SCHS, since the SCHS does not have a library/museum collection of its own. Historical or genealogical inquiries that are posted to the SCHS website, so ably managed by Carol Yoho, are often referred to the TSCPL Topeka Room/Special Collections staff can troubleshoot and offer suggestions and resources to answer the questions.

Among the many resources found in the Topeka Room collection are city directories dating back to 1869; high school yearbooks for the 7 Topeka high schools and Washburn University; Topeka and Shawnee county maps and plat books; and SCHS’s own bulletin...
series on local topics such as Potwin, College Hill, and the soon-to-be-published Elmhurst neighborhoods; Santa Fe & UP railroads; parks; communications; fire and police departments; territorial Kansas; medicine; music; schools; and Charles Sheldon, Chester Woodward and John Ritchie, prominent local movers and shakers. (Many of these are still available for sale—check the SCHS website.)

Books by Topekans, about Topeka, or published here include the publications of the Kansas State Historical Society, Menninger Foundation, Capper Publications and its successors, Washburn University, and the Chamber of Commerce on a wide range of topics, including history, medicine, education, law, literature, and sports. Topeka newspapers from the mid-nineteenth century to the present are available on microfilm. Some subject and obituary indexing has been done on these, a boon to history buffs and genealogists alike. Genealogy and history data bases are also available through the Library. Vertical files contain newspaper articles, photographs and postcards, programs, brochures, and other paper items on topics like schools, churches, businesses, buildings, houses, tornadoes and floods, and local biography.

The Topeka Room is a non-circulating, reference collection and is open the same hours as the rest of the Library: 9-9 M-F; 9-6 Sat.; 12-9 Sun.

The Bottoms

The “Bottoms,” was a Topeka neighborhood situated on river bottom land near the south edge of the Kansas River. It was 24 square blocks bordered by Kansas Avenue to the west, Adams Street and the Santa Fe Railroad tracks to the east, 6th Street to the south, and Crane Street and the Kansas River to the north. This unique area in Topeka was described by Thomas Rodriguez in his book, *Americano: My Journey to the Dream*, as “a multi-racial, multi-ethnic community populated with Blacks, Mexicans, Germans, Russians, American Indians and other groups.” The area was changed greatly in the early 1960s by a large urban renewal project. Today, it contains light industry, warehouses, the Topeka Fire Academy and a large Hallmark Cards plant. In 1996, the first of a series of “Bottoms Reunions” was held in Gage Park. They continue to this day.

**Timeless Tidbits**

There were a number of dance halls and ballrooms in and around Topeka in the 1930s and 1940s—**Meadow Acres** (1939), 2950 S. Topeka Blvd., was actually outside the city limits for about half of its existence. It was also a popular high school dance venue into the 1960s. Other dance halls at various times in the 30s and 40s were the Old Mill Dance Pavilion (4030 W. 6th), Summerland Dance Hall, Egyptian Gardens (707 Quincy), Winter Garden (807 ½ N. Kansas), and a Meadow Lake Ballroom; but Meadow Acres was certainly the best known and drew the more notable bands (Glenn Miller in 1939) and sizable audiences (up to 1,500).

The Boys’ Industrial School was originally called the Kansas State Reform School for Boys (1881-1901). It was known as the Boys’ Industrial School until 1974, when the name was changed to Youth Center at Topeka (YCAT). In 2001, the name was again changed to the Kansas Juvenile Correctional Facility.
The philosophy of the institution was success/rehabilitation through education. The history of the center, (continued from p. 5) The OASAYCAP Century [Open A School And You Close A Prison], by Jack C. Pulliam (1981), reflects this.

Programs to look forward to this summer

Kick off the 2010 National Underground Railroad Conference with a viewing of Negroes to Hire, a documentary film of the slave culture in 1850s Missouri and Kansas. Film makers Gary Jenkins and Dr. Jimmy Johnson, descendants of slave masters and slaves, respectively, will discuss this little known slice of history and its effects on modern day race relations. TCSPL, Marvin Auditorium 101 B&C, 7:00 pm, Tuesday July 27, 2010. For more information, call 785-580-4510.

The film kicks off the 2010 National Underground Railroad Conference in Topeka July 28-31, sponsored by the National Park Service. For more information, see http://www.lanetrail.com/ugr/

Topeka Room Additions:

On behalf of the Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library’s Special Collections Dept. (Topeka Room), SCHS Trustees Jeanne Mithen and Doug Wallace acquired three photo albums and miscellaneous pamphlets that had belonged to Arthur J. Carruth, Jr. They were purchased from Lloyd Zimmer Books & Maps, located downtown in the old Odd Fellows Building at 117 W. 6th. Carruth (1887-1962) was editor and publisher of the Topeka State Journal, but is best remembered for his weekly column, “Under the Whispering Willow,” in the Saturday Journal.

All three albums contain family photos and scenes taken in the Elmhurst neighborhood, when Carruth, his wife and two children resided there in the 1910s and early 1920s. They also include photos taken elsewhere in Topeka and in the Dover area. One book has photos and articles about the new Carruth home on W. 17th St., opposite Washburn, in College Hill. A second album is actually a “Baby Book” detailing the growth of A.J.C.’s son Arthur J. Carruth III.

These are significant additions to the Topeka Room’s local history collection and the timing of this ‘find’ just before the publication of the Society’s latest Bulletin, Lively Elmhurst, The Classic Topeka Neighborhood, could not be better!

“And Hell Followed With It”

A new book about the 1966 Topeka tornado will be released in the fall. And Hell Followed With It: Life and Death in a Kansas Tornado was written by Topeka native Bonar Menninger and will be published by Greenleaf Book Group of Austin, Texas, in September. The book chronicles the experiences of dozens of Topekans who found themselves in the path of the EF-5 tornado as it cut an eight-mile swath through the city. The story also highlights the history of Topeka, the legend of Burnett’s Mound and provides background information on severe weather science and forecasting. The book will be available for purchase via the Web, at topekatornado.com, and through local and national book retailers upon release.

Images of Kansas Towns and Cities

Over 475 different Kansas towns and cities from nearly every county are represented in an on-line image collection from Wichita State University. More images will be added to the collection over time. Subjects include but are not limited to people, street scenes, agriculture, business interiors, and railroad and aviation scenes. The majority of the images are not dated; however, most appear to have been published before 1923. Use restrictions apply. Visit: http://specialcollections.wichita.edu/kw/index.asp
Are you willing to participate in an exhibit for the 150th anniversary of statehood in 2011?

Staff at the Kansas Museum of History are planning an exhibit they’re calling “150 Things I Love About Kansas.” The idea is to feature 150 objects, events, people, and other influential forces that have made Kansas uniquely Kansas over the past century and a half. Rather than being the only ones to select what is featured, though, they’d like to get you involved. Consider being a part of this special exhibit by including an artifact from your own collection.

How does your county’s story fit into the story of Kansas? Suggest objects that could be part of this display. Submissions (probably in photographic form) will be submitted to a panel of notable Kansans who would make the final selection for the exhibit. If your item was selected by this panel, you would agree to loan it for a period of about 14 months to the museum, where it would be on display for much of 2011. They’ll need your submissions by June 1, 2010, to give the panel enough time to make its selections.

Types of things that may be included: Objects / Photos / Documents.

To suggest a submission contact Rebecca J. Martin, Assistant Museum Director, Kansas Museum of History, Kansas Historical Society, 6425 S.W. Sixth Ave., Topeka, KS 66615-1099, rmartin@kshs.org, (785) 272-8681, ext. 426.

NOTE: The Kansas State Library has a Blogspot celebrating our Sesquicentennial. Consider following this blog: http://kansas150slk.blogspot.com/

Friends of Bethany Place followup:

In 2007, FBP challenged the City of Topeka regarding the Council decision to allow a parking lot on the registered property of Bethany Place (home of the Episcopal Dioceses of Kansas). The challenge was that the council failed to consider feasible alternatives put forth by the City Planning department and the State Historic Preservation Office of Kansas. In 2008, the District Court found that the citizen advocacy group had standing in the case and that the City failed to take a ‘hard look’ at the feasible and prudent alternatives, and as such, failed to follow KS preservation law regarding historical resources.

In 2009, the City and Church appealed the lower court decision. The Court of Appeals majority remanded the District Court decision regarding the parking lot, although they continued to find that FBP did have standing to contest such decisions. The higher court opinion tends to encourage apathy toward future preservation issues. However, Topekans are proud of their history and strive to preserve it, which raises optimism that there are many issues where preservation can succeed.

Great Exodus of 1879

Calling all “Exoduster” descendants nationwide! A public history event aimed at reconnecting the descendants of those who fled the South in the Great Exodus of 1879 and formed colonies in “free soil” Kansas was planned for April 22-23, 2010, at the Kansas State Historical Society. Descendants of these early black settlers sought to rediscover their roots and meet fellow 21st Century descendants of their 19th Century forebears.

This fourth Reconnection event celebrated early black settlements around Topeka: the former colonies of Tennessee Town, Redmondsville, Mudtown and the Ritchie Communities in Shawnee County and Wabaunsee County.

“I’m hoping for the participation and warmth of a family reunion,” Ustaine Talley of Topeka, a Kansas native and Exoduster descendant, remarked. “We also want descendants of benefactors of the colonies to be a part of this reconnection.”

The program of Thursday, April 22, was to include lectures and workshops followed by discussion ses-
sions in which attendees were encouraged to participate. Topics included Challenges of Ethnic Research, Charles Sheldon and his contribution to Tennessee Town, Reconnections event and its place in the wider stream of public history, and panels on area settlements.

A luncheon with keynote speaker Dr. Thomas Cox was planned. Cox addressed the social and intellectual history of the American and African American experience with an emphasis on Topeka blacks.

On Friday, April 23, a bus tour of Tennessee Town, John Ritchie House, Central Congregational Church, and Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site took place.

Information about Votaw Colony History, the Exodusters, and this event can also be found online at www.votawcolony.org. Registration for the Thursday workshops was free. Pre-registration fees were required for the luncheon ($25) and the tour ($25). The pre-registration deadline was Thursday, April 15. Contacts were Nat Fitz or Ustaine Talley.

Reconnection IV was presented by Votaw Colony Museum, Inc. and co-sponsored with the Kansas Humanities Council, Kansas State Historical Society, Washburn University, Shawnee County Historical Society, Brown v. Board National Park site, and Prairie Heritage Institute, Inc.

Dear Mr. Schultz:
I am the executive director of the Kansas Arts Commission, and I wanted to let you know that the Kansas Arts Commission has been asked by the state legislature to create plans for fundraising for the renovation of the Hiram Price Dillon House, and then subsequently, becoming the operating tenant.

If the legislature approves, the Kansas Arts Commission will embark on fundraising to restore this beautiful building, and eventually, we will be housed in it, making it available for use by the legislature, other state agencies and the general public.

We have been working closely with the Kansas State Historical Society and the architect, Vance Kelley, who originally identified us as the potential tenant. We are very excited about this possibility, and if the plan moves forward, I would like to make sure we are working closely with the Shawnee County Historical Society to accomplish this goal.

If we are successful, we will have saved a stunning building that will be open to the public and showcase the best in arts for all of Kansas to experience. It will be a major triumph for all of us that care about historic preservation!

... I hope to have an update very soon on the status of this idea.

Very truly yours,
Llewellyn Crain
Executive Director, Kansas Arts Commission
700 SW Jackson Street, Ste. 1004
Topeka, KS 66603-3761

HOT News about Network to Freedom Status
We’ve received informal notification from the National Parks Service that the Ritchie House is now officially to be listed on the Network to Freedom, the National Park Service’s virtual park devoted to sites associated with the Underground Railroad (see also article, p. 2). Other sites so listed in Topeka are the Owen House in the 3500 block of NE Rochester Road and Constitutional Hall in the 400 block of Kansas Avenue. We are indebted to Thom Rosenblum of the Brown v Board of Education Historic Site for his diligence in revising the nomination successfully.
MEMBERSHIP FORM

Yes! I wish to join the Society that preserves the past and celebrates our heritage.

Name _________________________________________________________
Address ________________________________________________________
City ___________________________________________________________
State ___________ Zip ___________ Email ______________

Check type of membership:      ______ Regular—$35.00  ______ Patron—$50.00
                                  ______ Renovator—$100.00

GIFT MEMBERSHIP (Please print)

_____ $ Gift Membership for someone I know who will benefit from membership. (Photocopy this form for more than one. Use rates listed above.)

Name _________________________________________________________
Address ________________________________________________________
City ___________________________________________________________
State ___________ Zip ___________ Email ______________

I Wish to join the following committee:

[ ] Nominations        [ ] Membership        [ ] Publications
[ ] Annual Meeting/Socials [ ] Preservation
[ ] Ritchie Project      [ ] Education/Communications [ ] Public Relations

Name _________________________________________________________

(Make checks to "Shawnee County Historical Society")

Please send form(s) with your check to:
Shawnee County Historical Society, P.O. Box 2201, Topeka, KS 66601-2201
Your canceled check serves as your membership receipt.
Mark Your Calendar:

2010 Preservation Awards of SCHS

Sunday, May 2, 2010
at “The Woodward,” 1272 SW Fillmore St., 2:00pm.

Our fourth annual joint awards for preservation of the history of the county will be presented by the Shawnee County Historical Society and the Topeka Landmarks Commission this spring. The public is welcome at this event and reception. Plan now to attend.

This event will be held at “The Woodward” in Historic Holliday Park Neighborhood of Topeka. Now a bed and breakfast, this 1920s Tudor-style structure was once the home of Topeka entrepreneur and businessman Chester Woodward.