President’s Message

June 8, 1966. Where were you? A question most of us Topeka senior citizens have been asked in recent weeks as the Topeka Capital Journal remembers the historic F5 tornado that literally changed the city's landscape and its future. As for myself, I was in France on an Augustana College choir tour. Having taken a French class or two, I was astounded to read in a French newspaper that Topeka had been ravaged by a "hurricane" and was amazed to think that a hurricane could make it that far north from the gulf. Apparently, it appears that the French did not have the word "tornado" in their dictionary. Our next year's choir tour went through Kansas and I distinctly remember when our tour bus drove by Burnett's Mound on I-470 seeing the flattened area to the northeast that was slowly recovering from the damage. Later in 1969 when I served in the House of Representatives from Garden City I stayed at the newly constructed Gatehouse apartment complex located at the base of the water reservoir. Immediately behind my apartment was a huge white cross that was illuminated at night. Curious as to its origin, I discovered that it was erected by then police chief Dana Hummer in memory of his daughter who happened to be one of the unfortunate victims of the tornado. This June 4th many of us were privileged to attend Twist of Fate and meet with Bill Kurtis, a Washburn Law grad, as he reviewed for the large crowd the events of that fateful day and how it not only changed our city, the lives of Topekans, but also his life when his career took a twist and he now felt his calling to be in journalism. Our Topeka Daily Capital is to be congratulated for their diligent efforts in putting this program together and to allow our community to gather and record the stories of those who survived this traumatic event. A great job of reporting local history.

Several years ago, at a garage sale, I picked up a collection of old local newspapers that reported on the tornado and its aftermath. A small headline in the now long defunct "The Pictorial
The article related how Ernie Moser, the manager of Capital Air Service (Billard), reported that he and two others watched the tornado cloud from the airport terminal building as it approached the field and the Weather Bureau office located at the airport. "I don't know why we watched it as long as we did," he pondered, head shaking slightly at the recalled scene and its attendant peril. "Anyway, at the last moment the three of us ducked into a nearby broom closet. We were all huddled up in there in the darkness and I said: Boy, I didn't think all three of us could fit in here. And just then another voice, sounding kind of muffled, added: 'All five of us, I think.'" Anyway, this story seems to show how even in the midst of adversity the human spirit still tends to find a sense of humor in order to help weather the situation.

A special thanks goes to Jeff Carson, President, of the Historic State Theatre of Kansas and his organization for hosting our 2016 Preservation Awards at the Historic Jayhawk Theatre. We were fortunate again this year to have one of our Kansas History Day students as our featured program during the event. Avery Munns, of Washburn Rural High School, presented her documentary "Ex Parte Endo: A Journey Toward Justice for Japanese Americans". Avery was this year's Kansas History Day recipient of the 2016 Robert J. Dole Congressional History Prize. She will now compete at the national competition. We were also pleased to have a special presentation by one of our other honorees, William Jennings Bryan Oleander (otherwise known as Tom Averill, writer-in-residence at Washburn University) who we presented with a special "Speaker Emeritus of Kansas History" award. As a thank you, he provided the first public reading of a new commentary he wrote specially for our event that was later presented on Kansas Public Radio: "Saving the Past for the Future: the Importance of Preservation". You may hear it at: http://kansaspublicradio.org/kpr-news/saving-past-future-importance-preservation. His theme centers on Kansas family farm traditional planning values associated with canning and preserving the crops and other foods needed to provide sufficient reserves for the coming winter months, a value our state government apparently now lacks as it continues to borrow funds from highways, KPERS and other programs just to make it through the budget year without any ending balance to speak of.

Please put at least two events on your calendar during the first week of July. Your society is partnering with other local organizations in the Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area to celebrate "Freedom Fest", the first of an expected annual event to commemorate the dispersal of the Free State Legislature on July 4, 1856. The SCHS booth will emphasize the role of John and Mary Jane Ritchie, and other Shawnee County residents, in the Underground Railroad, and feature an era typical wagon used to transport freedom seekers between depots. Then, the next day, Sunday, July 3rd, plan to be at the Historic Ritchie House at 2:00 p.m. for the dedication of the Freedom's Pathway Flame Monument that symbolizes your society's role in lighting freedom's pathway that connects this site with the Brown v. Board National Historic Site and the State Capitol.

Finally, our thanks to those of you who support us with your memberships, and in particular to many of you who do so at a higher membership level. Enjoy your summer.
The tourist season has arrived! The Historic Ritchie House has been on the list of “must see places” for quite a few visitors so far this summer. Some are visiting each of the 50 state capitols with little side trips to round out their vacation and others are driving to Topeka on their way to somewhere else and saw us from the highway. And then, there are the local Topekans who have grown up in the city but never knew there was a historic house on Madison Street! No matter what the reason, visitors seem to enjoy learning about the state’s territorial period and the people who shaped the great state of Kansas. I’m sure we will meet many more vacationing friends as the summer rolls on!

History Camp for Kids began the week of June 6th. This year we have returning organizations bringing their site’s youngsters. While swimming, games, hiking, and outdoor fun is on the schedule for Central Park Community Center, YWCA, and the Boys and Girls Club, the campers come to the Historic Ritchie House for 90 minutes of history each week for six weeks. So far, the kids are having a great time participating in history activities and lessons.

This year’s theme for SCHS’s Summer Camp for Kids is “Ethnic Communities of Shawnee County: A Melting Pot of History, Culture, and Traditions.” Each week of the six-week camp will focus on a different Shawnee County ethnic group during Kansas’ early years and beyond. Each week will feature guest presenters who are educators of ethnic histories in Kansas.

The first week highlighted a recent immigrant, Daria Hart, from Russia who will present a past look at Ellis Island, the culture and traditions of Russia, and America’s symbols of freedom. Students pretended to be immigrants coming to America and were processed through a recreation of Ellis Island Customs. They learned the story of immigrants from the early twentieth century and compared that to immigration in the twenty-first century.
century. They also got a first hand look at the documents, time, and money required to get a residency card.

Also, presenting will be descendants of early Shawnee County immigrants from the Swedish, Hispanic, Potawatomi Native American Tribe, German-Russian, and African American communities. During the six-week program there will be hands-on opportunities, primary source documents and take-away activities for the campers to connect with weekly themes. Each week’s topic will include the “experience” element which will be unique to each group’s heritage.

The 2015-2016 school field trip program, “Rediscover Freedom’s Pathway” ended in May with 3,171 students and teachers coming to the Historic Ritchie House for heritage programs. This is the largest field trip attendance for the Ritchie House ever! We had a great time with the students and are looking forward to next year!

George Bernheimer also provided a heritage reenactment program for 480 middle school students at Washburn Rural Middle School. We wish to thank Carolyn Litwin, Robin Shrimplin, and John Hart for coming out to help with our largest scheduled field trips. Because of these volunteers and our regular volunteers, George Bernheimer and Bill Wagnon, it was smooth sailing for school year 2015 – 2016.

Remember, we always welcome new volunteers to help with a variety of programs. If you are interested, please call 785-234-6097.
Freedom Fest Celebration in July

Freedom Fest is expected to be an annual event, commemorating the disbursal of the Free State Legislature on July 4, 1856. This pivotal event in American history launched the “Bleeding Kansas” era’s prelude to the tragedy of the American Civil War.

The local partners in the Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area are collaborating by staging booths at this year’s Freedom Fest on Saturday July 2, to familiarize the crowd with their programs in celebration of “freedom’s enduring struggle” throughout American history.

The Shawnee County Historical Society’s booth will emphasize the role of John and Mary Jane Ritchie, and other Shawnee County residents, in the Underground Railroad. We will feature a wagon, typical of those used at the time to transport freedom seekers between depots, such as the John and Mary Jane Ritchie House.

We need volunteers in dressed in period clothing (we can help with the outfitting) to distribute information about the Underground in Shawnee County and chat with the crowd about the heritage education program at the Ritchie House.

Volunteers are asked to meet at 7 PM on Thursday, June 23 at the Cox Heritage Education Center, 1118 SE Madison to review the program and get up to speed on their duties for the day. Volunteers are not required to stay the whole of July 2, but are encouraged to be available for as much time as possible.

We Need You!

Membership dues to the Society are the life blood for producing the school heritage education programs, maintaining the Historic Ritchie site, and promoting historic preservation throughout our community. We recognize the following who have submitted their dues for the year since the winter newsletter. If your name has not appeared, it is time to send in your dues.

More Membership Renewals for 2016

**Regular:**
Melinda Abitz
Carol Cook
Karen Dashnaw
Ethel Edwards

Mike Hall
Terry Hobbs
Janet Loebel
Carl. E. Nuzman
Norma Pettijohn
Duane and Debbie Pomeroy
James N. Reardon
Robert W. Richmond
Sabatini Family Foundation
Rusty Steinmeyer
Wanda Stephens
Robert C. Taggart
Larry and Anita Wolgast

**Patron:**
Marge Bradshaw
Jeff Carson
Nelson and Kim Cordova
Dedication of the Freedom’s Pathway Flame Monument at the Historic Ritchie House

Mark your calendar and plan to attend

July 3 at 2 PM

When the Society dedicated the Cox Communications Heritage Education Center in 2011, individuals, who had been instrumental in the preservation and interpretation of the Historic John and Mary Jane Ritchie House and the adaptive reuse of the Hale Ritchie House into the Cox Center, received a flame memento designed by Janet Zoble and casted by the Degginger Foundry in appreciation of their support. The flame symbolizes the Society’s role in lighting freedom’s pathway, connecting the Historic Ritchie House with the Brown v Board National Historic Site and the Statehouse. The goal of the Society was, from the onset of the preservation of the Ritchie House, to instill an awareness of the critical roles persons in Shawnee County have played over the years in redefining the meaning of freedom in American History. The programming of the Society cast light on the pathway and reinforces awareness of that role.

To render that role into permanent form, the Society commissioned Zach Snethen of HTK Architects to design a monument which incorporated Zobel’s flame. That monument, fashioned by Lardner Monuments and Degginger Foundry, is to be dedicated at 2 PM, Sunday, July 3, at the Historic John and Mary Ritchie House, 1116 SE Madison. Members and friends of the society are invited to share in that dedication.
It was through her own experiences of working class life in the Midwest that Diggs became interested in the growing Populist Party which advocated for labor workers and farmers.

Annie Diggs: Leader of the Populist Fringe
Annie (LaPorte) Diggs was born February 22, 1853 in Ontario, Canada, to a French lawyer and a New Jersian woman. As a young child, her family moved to her mother’s home state where Diggs was raised. When she finished school, she moved to Lawrence, Kansas, where she met and married postman Alvin Diggs in 1873. The couple had three children together. Shortly after her marriage, Diggs began her career as a public speaker writing speeches in support of the temperance movement. She also grew involved in the Unitarian church community in Lawrence, a hub for activists and reformers in the social and political movements of the time. It was through her own experiences of working class life in the Midwest that Diggs became interested in the growing Populist Party which advocated for labor workers and farmers. She was considered a more radical Populist for her membership and participation in several fringe activist groups.
She wrote, “For the first time in the life of the great republic, there was a political organization which grappled directly and fundamentally with the growing injustice which marked the dealings between Exploi-
In advocacy of the movement, she wrote for several newspapers including the Topeka Commonwealth, the Lawrence Journal, and the Westminster Review. With her husband, Diggs founded and published the Kansas Liberal which took a stance against the dominant wealthy class and petitioned for economic equality for the common worker. Her writings supported the efforts of the labor movement as well as women’s suffrage and prohibition.

Though she was often pitted against other Populist activists such as Mary Lease, Diggs’ voice stood as a voice of reason and rationality in Kansas. She saw benefit in partnering the Populist movement with the women’s suffrage movement to expedite the passing of both agendas. At the time, women were only allowed to participate in municipal and school board elections. Though suffrage was not gained in Kansas until 1912, Diggs is regarded as a significant leader in the statewide movement.

She served as president of several organizations including the Kansas woman’s Free Silver League, the Kansas Equal Suffrages Association, the Kansas Woman’s Press Club, and even the Women’s Alliance in Washington D.C. She took her advocacy efforts abroad when she served as a delegate at the International Co-Operative Congress in England and later the Peace Convention in France.

Diggs made a name for women in state leadership in 1898 when she became the first female state librarian for Kansas. She later retired from her career in the public sphere and wrote two novels. She died at her son’s home in Detroit, Michigan on September 7, 1916.

Sources:
Tanner, Beccy. "Annie Diggs Championed Women's Right to Vote."
2016 Preservation Award Pictures
Pictures Courtesy of Carol Yoho

Dave Heinemann with Tom Averill.

Dave Heinemann & Dennis Dinwiddie accepting an award for Historical Resource on behalf of Friends of the Kaw.

Mr. and Mrs. Porubsky accept an award for Porubsky’s Deli and Café.

Arlen and Darlene Kirkwood Family accepting an Award for Architectural Preservation.

Washburn University Leadership accepting an award for the preservation of the President’s Residence.
Get Published

Besides becoming a member, there are many other ways you can help your Shawnee County Historical Society. Have an idea for our publication? Want to have your own research showcased? You can send in historical research that you have done yourself to be published in our quarterly newsletter. Another way you can help is by sending in questions you would like researched for the next quarterly newsletter or suggestions for topics.

You can contact the editors of the Shawnee County Historical Society at: shawneecountyhistory@gmail.com attention: Historical Highlights
SCHS Memberships make great gifts for friends or family!

MEMBERSHIP FORM
Membership is from January-December, annually

MEMBERSHIP FORM (Please print)
Yes! I wish to join the Society that preserves the past and celebrates our heritage.
Name __________________________________________________________
Address ________________________________________________________
City _______________________________________________________________________ State __________ Zip _______ Email __________________
Home Phone _____________________ Cell Phone _____________________
Check type of membership: ______ Regular ($35.00) ______ Patron ($50.00) ______ Renovator ($100.00) ______ Heritage Education Sustainer ($150.00 +)

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 __________________

VOLUNTEER for a COMMITTEE
[ ] Nominations [ ] Membership [ ] Publications
[ ] Annual Meeting/Socials [ ] Preservation [ ] Public Relations
[ ] Landmark Preservation Committee [ ] Education/Communications
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
Get Involved

The SCHS would like to thank all of our volunteers and staff that help us maintain our commitment and involvement in Shawnee County and other local communities. We could not make this happen without you!

There are many ways in which you can help the Shawnee County Historical Society preserve the past for the future. Become a member! Volunteer some time! Or make a donation. Also remember the SCHS in your estate planning.

Membership in SCHS is from January 1 through December 31 each year. There are three levels of support. The Society greatly appreciates and benefits from the highest level of membership in which you are able to participate. You will receive:

- Quarterly Newsletter
- Discounts at events
- Exclusive Members-Only Section on our website
- Online Archives
- The Shawnee County Historical Society News
- Invitation to the Annual Meeting on or near December 5, the anniversary of Topeka’s founding
- Pre-announcements of Society activities and special events

Membership revenues also support other local endeavors including our Educational Program and History Day at Washburn University. In addition, your Society works closely with the Kansas State Historical Society and is dedicated to a preservation focus, meant to preserve and celebrate the tangible aspects of our heritage. Together we can preserve Shawnee County History for future generations to enjoy.

We also work collaboratively with the National Park Service to provide learning opportunities for students and adults. The SCHS has partnerships with the National Association for State and Local Histories to preserve Shawnee County History.