Earlier this year, I had the privilege of presenting the Preservation Awards to people and projects in our community who have committed time, energy, and money into old buildings. Among the recipients were John and Julie Lyle who live in the Elmhurst neighborhood and have made a commitment to restoring that area into a great place to raise a family. The awards ceremony was my first opportunity to meet John and Julie. I was so impressed that I approached TK Magazine (published by SCHS board member Tara Dimick) about featuring the couple.

This was one interview that I thought should involve my husband. Since Gary is sort-of-retired from the building trade, I knew his expertise would cause him to connect in ways that would not occur to me. The Lyles and my husband quickly found they were kindred spirits whose dedication to doing the right thing the right way superceded every other goal, including making money. In fact, John and Julie work pretty hard to support their habit of rehabing houses. John says if he breaks even when he’s dead it will all have worked out well.

John and Julie Lyle are smart people. Their investments may not be earning them money right now, and they do not have a leisurely life. But it isn’t all about them. They have a much bigger picture in mind. As the Lyles became a family they faced a decision: remain in a declining neighborhood or move. They chose not only to stay, but to turn their neighborhood into the one in which they wanted their girls to grow up.

Being a student of history is about living a life in context—the context of the past but of the future as well. It means realizing that our lives are but a glimpse of a bigger picture, that our community is not just our neighbors, but those who came before and those yet to be. John and Julie’s lives are lived fully within this philosophy. John makes decisions based not only on his bottom line, but with a consideration of the future homeowner—a person he may never even know.

During our Preservation Awards ceremony, it became apparent that patience and persistence were a common theme. John and Julie are the very personification of those qualities. It speaks well of our larger community that these K-State grads chose Shawnee County to make their home, raise their family, and share their talents. Kudos to our Preservation Committee for finding such worthy honorees and watch for the article in the Fall issue of TK Magazine. A special thanks to John and Julie Lyle for setting such a great example.
Tu. & Th., thru Aug, 10AM/2PM
Public walk-in tours for the Historic John Ritchie House at 1116 SE Madison will be held very Tuesday and Thursday at 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m., continuing through August. Special tour times may also be arranged by calling SCHS at 234-6097.

This summer we’ve had several walk-in tours from other states. Decendants of the Ritchies from Kansas City, Lawrence, Topeka, and Wamego visited as well.

The Ritchie House and Brown vs. Board have formed a partnership for educational programming. We are combining our efforts in a program called “Rediscover Freedom’s Pathway” for elementary school students this school year.

Groups from the Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs of Topeka and the YWCA came to the house on two occasions for programs on the Underground Railroad, in cooperation with the Brown vs. Board site.

History Camp for Kids—Super Saturdays! is in full force. Bill McFarland, Washburn Rural Middle School teacher, came dressed as our early Kansas settler, Samuel Reader. His knowledge was extensive and provided a fascinating glimpse into territorial days for those early pioneers. The campers even learned some military drills! The Abitz family came to help out with hands-on farm tools for the campers to experience. The corn sheller was a big hit! Everyone left very tired.

Focus on Historic Preservation
Society member Robin Shrimplin is planning three adult education events focusing on properties in Shawnee County that have gone through successful preservation efforts. These events will occur on these third-Sundays in Fall, 2012: September 16 / October 21 / November 18. Sessions will be held at Cox Communications Heritage Education Center at Hale Ritchie House, 1118 SE Madison, Topeka, from 2 to 4 p.m. Robin plans to have renovators share their success stories with the public, and details will be posted on the SCHS web site (www.shawneecountyhistory.org) and on our Facebook page (http://www.facebook.com/ShawneeCountyHistoricalSociety) as they become available. Current plans for the series extend into Spring, 2013: March / April / May. Exact dates and times will be announced.

People who would like to share their preservation stories with the public are encouraged to contact Robin to be scheduled for a session.

Contact Robin Shrimplin by phone at 785-670-2060 or via email at robin.shrimplin@washburn.edu

below, from left: Learning to march, military-style; shelling corn; Bill McFarland talks with campers indoors, with air-conditioning; campers sample hardtack.
I attended the 2012 National Underground Railroad Conference in St. Augustine, Florida, June 20-24, 2012, with a friend, Romona Broxterman. We are both Topekans.

The theme of the conference was “Escaping to Destinations South.” Discussions included movement of freedom seekers from English colonies in the Carolinas and Georgia to Spanish-controlled Florida, and also from Florida to the Bahamas; alliances of free blacks and members of the Creek and Seminole tribes; the so-called “Seminole Wars” of the early 19th Century as wars over slavery; and the Gullah culture of the Carolina, Georgia, and northern Florida Atlantic coastal region.

Activities outside the classroom included a tour of historic St. Augustine, with a cannon firing at the Castillo de San Marcos National Monument as one of the high points, and a visit to Fort Mose Historic State Park. At Fort Mose in 1740, Spanish soldiers and black militia fended off an attack by English colonists from Georgia.

While the focus of the conference was on the colonial era in the Southeast, some material was relevant to the Trans-Mississippi area. The Creek and Seminole and other southeastern tribes and their members or associates of African or mixed ancestry were removed to the future Oklahoma before the Civil War. The first person we met at the conference was the great-grandson of a Black Seminole who had been in the First Indian Home Guard regiment when it was organized at Leroy, Kansas in 1862 for an expedition to pacify the Indian Territory. I advised that my own great-grandfather, a soldier in the Tenth Kansas Volunteer Infantry, had joined the same expedition as it moved through southeastern Kansas.

The 2013 National Underground Railroad Conference will be held in Little Rock, Arkansas, June 19-22, 2013. The theme will be “The War for Freedom: The Underground Railroad during the Civil War.” This will be highly relevant to students of Kansas history. Kansas regiments liberated enslaved people in Missouri in 1861, well before the Emancipation Proclamation. The First Kansas Colored was organized before black regiments were authorized by the War Department. It saw action at Island Mound, Missouri; Honey Springs, Indian Territory; Poison Spring, Arkansas; and in other engagements. The Second Kansas Colored, under command of future Governor Samuel J. Crawford, distinguished itself at Jenkins Ferry, Arkansas.

The First, Second and Third Indian Home Guards were composed of refugee Indians and their black allies from future eastern Oklahoma led by white officers from Kansas, including our own John Ritchie, Colonel of the Second Indian regiment.

To round out this story of multi-racial and multicultural forces fighting to end slavery and thwart national disunion, research is revealing that predominantly white Kansas regiments also included emigrant Indians and those of mixed ancestry.

Topeka History Book Club

SCHS members and friends were invited to join Topeka History Geeks in the first ever Topeka History Book Club. The meeting was held at the Potwin Presbyterian Church, 400 SW Washburn Ave., in the evening on Wednesday, July 25, 2012.

The book chosen for reading was *The Civil War in Kansas* by Debra Goodrich Bisel, current president of SCHS, with copies available for purchase at Lloyd Zimmer Books and Maps, 117 SW 6th St., Topeka.

Consider joining Topeka History Geeks, a free group for individuals who love the city of Topeka and treasure her history. Visit them @TTownHistory on Twitter or http://www.facebook.com/groups/112796828765489/.

Capitol Renovation

Renovation on the Kansas State Capitol continued in Spring and Summer, 2012—both inside and outside. Scaffolding is less obvious on the exterior in recent times, but the large crane has been in use for the past two years.

Inside work has been focusing on the State Library, the governor’s office and the rotunda.

Eighty-five SCHS Bulletins were published between 1946 and 2011. Some are still available for sale. Prices vary between $5 and $30 per item, and include the cost of postage. Visit http://skyways.lib.ks.us/orgs/schs/history/bulletins.html to see a listing of past Bulletins.
Our new series continues, focusing on the lives of lesser known men and women who played a part in developing Shawnee County and Topeka—

Susannah Harwood Weymouth was among very few non-native women upon her arrival in March of 1855.

The day after her Boston marriage to William Weymouth in the fall of 1854, he left Massachusetts for the western frontier. She soon left to join him in the recently opened Kansas Territory.

The following excerpts from Mrs. Weymouth’s 21-page manuscript tell about life in early Topeka. This document, dated October 9, 1899, is in the collections of the Kansas State Historical Society, along with her three-page reminiscence “High Waters of 1844 in Kansas” dated June 9, 1902. Susannah’s obituary in the December 4, 1906, Daily Capital reprinted some of the material.

Susannah’s manuscript is an extraordinary Topeka treasure:

I was born in Boston, November 27, 1836, and received a common school education, supplemented by high school. I was married to Mr. William Henry Weymouth in Boston, November 19, 1854.

Mr. Weymouth started to Kansas November 21, 1854, with the fifth party of the New England Immigrant Aid Society. On reaching St. Louis he became very ill with smallpox, and was left behind at that place. When Mr. Weymouth felt able to continue his journey he sent for me to join him at St. Louis, and I started to do so, leaving home February 20, 1855, but was overtaken in the great snow blockade on the Illinois Central between Joliet and Chicago. The snowdrift was two feet higher than the cars and fifteen miles long. Nine trains of cars were imbedded in this great drift. We had no provisions, and were pretty hungry before help came. As soon as the railroad company heard of the blockade they sent out a supply of crackers and cheese. An old farmer in the neighborhood, finding that we were without food, trapped a great number of prairie chickens, boiled them with salt, and brought them in to us. I never tasted anything better. We were in the blockade ten days, and were obliged to burn the cars for fuel. When we were finally released, I found myself two miles from Winona, Ill., and continued my journey to St. Louis. Here I found that all communication with the west had been cut off, and that Mr. Weymouth having recovered sufficiently, and not hearing from me, thought that I had decided to remain at home, and so had continued his journey, arriving at Topeka about the first of March, 1855.

At St. Louis I took the steamer David Tatum, reaching Kansas City about the middle of March, and secured overland transportation in a lumber wagon from that town to Topeka. A Mrs. Sears, going to Lawrence, with seven children, was in the same vehicle. We put up at Tonganoxie’s the first night. He belonged to the Delaware tribe of Indians, and lived on the site of the town which now bears his name. His house was a double log cabin, with roofed space between the two parts. He had no bedroom for us, but took a large mattress filled with straw, and spread it on the floor in front of the fireplace. Mrs. Sears occupied one end of the bed and I the other. Between us were ranged the seven children. As there were no bed covers, Tonganoxie kept the fire going all night to keep us comfortable, it being unusually cool. Then next night we reached Lawrence. At this place Mrs. Albert Pike took me in, and gave me her bed, while she and her husband slept on the sawdust floor. The house was not floored and she had covered the earth with sawdust to prevent the
fleas from getting about as lively as they would otherwise have done. We were nearly devoured by these insects those first years in Kansas.

In the snow drift, on our train, was Mr. John Farnsworth of Charlestown, Mass., who was looking up the new west…. Mr. Farnsworth was one who came, and having some means he was induced by the few who were here to stay and invest. This he did and was the founder and owner of old Constitution hall for which the timbers were cut from trees growing here and hewn by hand with a broad axe by my husband, who built the hall. I still have the axe. The Hall was furnished with fine tables shipped from Boston….⁴

I arrived in Topeka, March 20. Mr. Copeland Gordon,⁴ who drove over to Topeka the same day to see if there was an opportunity for establishing a store, arrived ahead of me, and told my husband that I was coming. This was the first he had heard of my whereabouts.

We stayed the first seven weeks with Timothy McIntire, wife, and four children.⁵ Their house was of sod, with shake roof, situated on what would now be First Street, near City Park. We paid $4.00 a week board and lodging. They also boarded four to eight men, most everybody in the town—Colonel Holliday, Mr. Giles, Colonel Horne, Mr. Hickey, Mr. Greenwood, Dr. Martin, and Mr. Mitchell. Mrs. McIntire and husband, and myself and husband occupied two bunks on the side of the cabin. Ours was the uppermost. The four McIntire children occupied the bunk with their parents. The bunks were very narrow affairs, and how they managed to squeeze in the children is a secret known only to them….

Just as far as the eye could reach, there were no trees on the town site. It was a barren prairie, except for the few cabins. The only trees visible were the ones on the Shunganunga, and along the banks of the Kansas River. As store buildings were put up on the avenue, the owners of the lots planted trees in front.

The first cabin in which we lived was made of shakes, and stood about…[present day] 615 Harrison. It was 8 by 10, and 4 feet high on the sides. There was no floor. We had a little cup-board made of shakes, and a cross-legg'd table three feet square, made of two hewn boards, the legs being made from saplings upon which the bark remained. Our only window was a hole perhaps a foot and a half square, covered with white cotton cloth.

My husband was the first carpenter in town. When I came to Topeka, there were only four women in the vicinity. They all moved away within five years of my coming. They were Mrs. A.W. Moore, wife of a printer…, Mrs. Timothy McIntire…., Miss Harriet Hartwell, since Mrs. James G. Bunker, and Mrs. Case who afterwards returned to Pennsylvania. I think I am not wrong in saying I am now the earliest settler yet a resident of Topeka.

Mrs. Weymouth continued about the founding of Topeka, the purchase of a Wyandotte Float to expedite its establishment, the disbursement of lots, and building of a mill and schoolhouse:

In 1855 the Topeka association, as was their custom, gave us the three lots of land upon which this house stands [416 Harrison St.], in consideration that we would immediately build upon them. This room in which we are sitting, was the first house built in Topeka. It was completed for occupation in June, 1855, and I moved into it in July. As it originally stood, the sides were made of upright cottonwood board. The roof was of shakes, interspersed with pieces of boxes. My floor was of unplanned cottonwood, with the rough fringe that is common to that lumber. During that year I scrubbed the floor smooth, and was very proud of my achievement. The house was 12 by 18 feet, and 7½ feet to the ceiling, made of 1,200 feet of green cottonwood lumber sawed at the Lecompton mill.

The winter of 1854-55 had been exceptionally warm, so that our men went in bathing in the river on Christmas day. Of course, they thought all winters were alike in Kansas, which accounted in some measure for our lack of care in making our dwelling house warm and tight. I sat with my feet in the oven a great part of the winter of 1855-56, and even then froze the back
of one foot…. That winter we had two feet of snow on the level. When snow fell it always stood as deep in the house as on the ground outside. I have lain in bed…while my husband shoveled the snow out of the room. The big house, being built in June, and the lumber green, by winter time it had become pretty well seasoned, leaving wide cracks an inch or more between each board of the siding. The roof was nearly as well ventilated. I had pasted every scrap of paper I could find over these cracks, and had stuffed in the few rags I could collect also to keep out the cold, but to little purpose.

The winter was an extremely cold one, and although I had plenty of firewood, and kept the stove red hot much of the time, I could not prevent the water from freezing in the water bucket, so that we had to break the ice whenever we drank. The bread, being frozen, was generally cut with a hatchet, and thawed out in the oven. I remember that onetime John Richie (sic) went to Missouri and brought home some apples and potatoes. We had no cellar and placed bags under the bed, and they froze solid, and remained in that condition as long as they lasted. If a frozen potato is dropped into boiling water and kept boiling until done, the freezing does not appear to injure it. The frozen apples could not be treated in this way, but were thawed out and eaten raw.

In a manuscript dated in 1902, she described in more detail the early scene around her cabin on Harrison Street, which like the other streets was yet to be graded.

When we first came to Topeka the river was very low, as we were then having a severe drought. We wondered if it was always so. But the half breeds and a few Indians who could talk with us told us it was not, and of the great flood which was here in 1844.\(^6\) Topeka then and now were two different places. Then it was in its natural state. Now it has been graded and cut to suit man.

[Topeka] was located on three hills. The top of the first one was Kansas Avenue, the second one was Topeka Avenue, and the third one was on Western Avenue.\(^7\) Between these hills were deep ravines. The one between the first two hills was between Jackson and Van Buren, and before we had a bridge built, which of course was a rude structure, our only way of crossing was to walk down and get out the best way we could, which sometimes was not easy. The first ravine…was twelve feet deep and about 25 feet wide, but when we put in a little bridge there, it was 40 feet long, as every time it rained hard or a rainy season commenced our ravines became wider. One storm we had in 1856 caused these ravines to become rivers. The one between my house and Kansas Avenue was 100 feet wide, and my husband had to go to Tenth street before he could get home, we living between Fourth and Fifth. The problem of filling up these places finally became a necessity, and the only way to get the dirt to do it was to grade down the hills.

The ravines also hid some of Shawnee County’s native fauna. Mrs. Weymouth recalled: “It was no uncommon sight to see wolves around here then. Many times I have stood in my back door and seen them along the ravine two blocks east of the house.”\(^8\) She continued…

Along the River the trees were very large and the woods extended to what is now First Street on this side, and to Garfield Park on the North side of the River. The bottoms extended from the foot of Fourth street to the River and over the River to Garfield Park. Now it would not seem possible for the River to rise above its banks. But the Indians said the River was miles wide [during the flood of 1844]. It extended at Topeka from the foot of the hills, Fourth Street,
to beyond Garfield Park…. If such a flood should occur again it would prove very disastrous….

In those early days the only way we had of crossing the river was to ford it, a very uncertain method, as the current change[s], and you were never quite certain from one time to the other of the ford. The writer was stuck in the sand mid stream once in a hard thunder storm. There were berries across the river, and we used to ford it to gather them and visit with our half-breed neighbors who lived there and were very friendly. They were the Kaws. There were the Kaws to the North of us and the Pottawatomies to the West. Some of these Indians were educated, and freely told us of the history of the country as far as they remembered it.

Now we began to think we must have a bridge, and resolved that it should be strong. But although we put into it all the money we could get, it stayed with us only eleven weeks, from May 1 to July 17, 1858, not because it was not strong, but because the water was stronger. It was a pile bridge, and to the few who put their hands into their pockets to build it, it was a great loss.9

North Topeka was then only a beautiful forest from the river to Garfield Park. It was so dense that you could only see the sky by looking up. In those woods were fine raspberries and lots of them, and to us who had nothing in the way of fruit to eat they were greatly prized.10 The writer well remembers of going to pick some for supper with a young lady, and as we picked we would look beyond, and over by another tree would be some fine ones, and so we wandered on, thinking we knew just where we were, but when our pails were full and we started for home, we found we did not know our way out for wherever we went it was woods, nothing but woods, and it was getting dusky. And then we realized we were lost. We listened to hear the sound of the river and then start right to it, which we did, and came out down by the mouth of Soldier Creek. We followed the edge of the river as best we could until we got back to the bridge, where we found friends just starting after us, for they knew we were lost. It was only a few days before the bridge was gone. The treacherous river with its drift had swept it away, and so we were cut off from our fruit.

—To be concluded in our next newsletter...

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1 The David Tatum was a side-wheel boat on the Missouri River at least from 1855 to 1860. It sank in 1859 but was raised. “Missouri River Steamboats,” Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, vol. IX, 1906, p. 300.
2 This is comparable to the replicated Anthony Ward cabin on the grounds of Topeka’s Ward-Meade Park.
4 J. Copeland Gordon (1831-1915) was a New York native who was an early Topeka pioneer. He was best known as the proprietor of the Copeland Hotel at 9th & Kansas. After it burned in 1909, he built the Gordon Building in 1910, which later housed the Karlan Furniture store.
5 McIntire (1819-1910) was a mechanic and stonemason from New Hampshire; the family included his wife Catherine and children Elizabeth, George, Albert, and Charles. He missed out on being a Topeka “founder” but arrived soon after the site had been approved. They moved to Lyon Co. in 1858 and to Arkansas City in 1870. A historical footnote: McIntire (or McIntyre) was the Doorkeeper at the 1855 Topeka Constitutional Convention.
7 The next ridge to the west is Clay St. which was originally a connector road from the Papan’s Ferry cut-off of the Leavenworth to Riley military road. This stretch of Clay St. connected with the Burlingame Road and the Santa Fe Trail.
Incandescent lights were first used in Topeka in the month of January, 1886.

Holliday near Kansas City was named for Cyrus K. Holliday of Topeka, the founder of the Santa Fe Railroad. The town had originally been named Waseca, a Sioux named meaning “rich” in provisions. Holliday, with his mutton chop whiskers, was a distinguished looking man with ambition to match his vision. He passed up Tecumseh and promoted Topeka as the county seat, state capital and railway center. He was the first mayor of Topeka and the first President of the Atchison and Topeka Railroad.

On a Saturday night in November, 1855, intelligence was received from Lawrence that the border ruffians were surrounding that town. Sunday morning every man assembled in constitution hall; all able-bodied men were immediately enrolled; the company was organized by the election of Daniel H. Horne, captain; Loring Farnsworth, first lieutenant; and John Ritchie, second lieutenant. Thus organized they set out for Lawrence without delay, reaching there after dark, that Sunday night. Here Redpath and Old John Brown joined the Topeka company, the “old hero” furnishing the command with seven guns. They remained there until December, when, the danger having passed, their services were no longer needed. (Excerpt from Historical Sketch of the City of Topeka in 1870 City Directory)

Before the Interstate Highway, planes and trains, Americans crossed the continent from east to west by wagon trails. In the 1840s and 50s, one of those major byways was the Oregon Trail, which passed through what would become Topeka in 1854. Development has eradicated most physical evidence in Shawnee County of the thousands of settlers who moved through here to the Pacific North West. However, parts of the trail are visible in the park south of Cedar Crest.

Doug Mauck, a student of the Oregon Trail, has identified trail evidence and wagon swales; he led a public field trip at Cedar Crest on Thursday evening, June 14, 2012. Mauck pointed out where the trail crossed Fairlawn Rd., then led the group along the evident swales, pointing out how they cross the park and track to the top of Menninger Hill and beyond.
Gary Wis-Ki-Ge-Amatyuk, is the great-great-grandson of Potawatomi Chief Abram Burnett. On the weekend of June 8-10, 2012, Gary and his wife, Rosewita, and daughter, Kayla, visited Topeka from their home in Cypress, CA. They came to attend the Potawatomi Pow Wow at the Prairie Band Reservation near Mayetta.

Gary danced at the Pow Wow and may come to Kansas again in the fall of 2013 to be lead dancer at another Potawatomi event.

In California he works as a performer at Knott’s Berry Farm, and occasionally works as an “extra” in filmmaking. He speaks the Potawatomi language, sings, drums and dances in traditional Potawatomi fashion. A video of Gary performing a hoop dance is available on YouTube at http://youtu.be/n7Clxa1iGUk

The family had breakfast in our home on Sunday morning. Next, I took them to visit the Chief’s grave and to Burnett’s Mound. (Gary had been here once before as a young man, but this was his immediate family’s first visit to these spots.)

I told them about the clearing work Westar and Topeka-Shawnee County Parks and Recreation Department put in at Burnett’s Mound. The top of the mound was much clearer than it had been just one or two summers ago. The family really enjoyed being atop the mound, with a clear view of the city and pleasant breezes.

Kayla (age 15) said adventures at the grave and mound were her favorite parts of the trip.

For more information about Chief Abram Burnett read Bulletin #82, 2007, Before Kansas Bled.
MEMBERSHIP FORM

Our membership year is Jan. 1 to Dec. 31 annually.

Make check to “Shawnee County Historical Society” and mail form w/ your check to:
Shawnee County Historical Society, P.O., Box 2201, Topeka, KS 66601-2201

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I wish to join this/these SCHS committee(s):  ____ Nominations  ____ Membership  ____ Publications

____ Annual Meeting/Socials  ____ Public Relations  ____ Historic Preservation  ____ Education/Communications

SCHS has gone High Tech AND is saving members money by teaming with PayPal on-line to accept memberships and donations. We also hope to offer sales of our inventory of Bulletins with on-line payment via PayPal. Links now appear on-line http://www.shawneecountyhistory.org to allow payment transactions via PayPal by secure credit or debit card transaction.

Consider updating your membership or joining us as a 2012 member by using this new payment option.

Washburn University is gearing up for its 150th Anniversary

Visit www.washburn150.edu
Mark Your Calendar!

Ice Cream Social and Outdoor Band Concert

Sunday evening, August 5, 2012
7-8:30 p.m.
at the Historic John & Mary Jane Ritchie Houses
1116 - 1118 S.E. Madison
Ice Cream: $1.00

Free entertainment provided by
The Topeka Santa Fe Band