



The Beginnings of Topeka p. 1-4

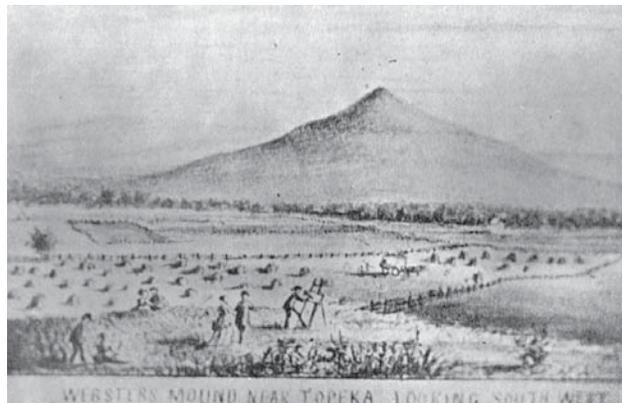
Historical Highlights
vol. 9, no. 1
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The Beginnings of Topeka

The Potawatomi Indians came to the Topeka area in the 1840s, settling on a 30-square mile section granted by the Federal Government...

One of those Potawatomi was a sub-chief by the name of Nan-Wesh-Mah, meaning, "He Who Prays With Plants." We know him as Abraham Burnett.

It was on the north side of this conical mound where Chief Burnett farmed and bred horses. He died on June 14th 1870 at the age of 59 and is buried along the Shunga-



WEBSTER'S MOUND NEAR TOPEKA, LOOKING SOUTH WEST

nunga about a mile and a half west of his mound, now on private property. He reportedly weighed 470 pounds.

Burnett was a respected moderator, and he was paid handsomely by the government to serve as interpreter. When he died, he was believed to be one of the richest men in the region.

Also near was Papan's Ferry, operated by brothers Louis and Joseph, and cousin, Ah-can, all from Montreal Canada. They began

running the ferry in 1842 where Topeka Boulevard meets the river today, but then 400'-500' further north. The

Feature article is by Brandon Henry, CoreFirst Bank & Trust Investment Manager

Great Flood of 1844 washed away their ferry, their home, and created an island still partially visible during droughts today. They rebuilt in 1846.

The military used the ferry to and from Leavenworth, Topeka, and Council Grove. The Oregon Trail crossed there too. An estimated 300,000 people used this trail in the 20 years following the first west-bound caravan in 1841.

Two other early residents were French revolutionaries Gilbert Billard and Charles Sardou. Gilbert was a political refugee who came to the area in 1854 with his wife and two sons and here he met Sardou.

Sardou's son, Freemont, was credited with saving over 300 lives during the flood of 1903. The Sardou Bridge was named in Freemont's honor in 1961.

Billard's youngest son, Philip, became a famous airman and was the first to fly from Topeka to Kansas City in 1916. He died two years later at the age of 27 when the engine of the plane he was testing failed.

The Kansas-Ne- —cont., p. 2 ->

—cont. from p. 1 → **braska Act** was passed by Congress on May 30, 1854, allowing for the people in the territories of Kansas and Nebraska to decide for themselves whether to allow slavery.



Newspapers back east began extolling the virtues of Kansas immediately, comparing it favorably to Italy! The New York

Times did acknowledge a potential problem with Kansas on January 10, 1855:

“The scarcity of timber is one of the first discouragements of the emigrant-tourist, and the greatest. He is in raptures with the magnificent, rich, rolling prairies, but imagines that the want of material for houses, fences and fuel will long bar settlement.”

Regardless, on the **5th of December, 1854**, nine men met at a log cabin at 1st and Kansas. It was a beautiful sunny day in what would be a mild winter. In fact, they had an impromptu “swimming party” on Christmas Day, it was that warm.

The nine were:

- **Cyrus Kurtz Holliday** from Pennsylvania, who would later serve as Topeka’s first mayor and become the first President of the ATSF railroad.
- **M.C. Dickey** and **Fry W. Giles** from

New Hampshire. Mr. Giles became Topeka’s first Postmaster.

- **L. G. Cleveland** from Iowa.
- **Daniel H. Horne, George Davis, Enoch Chase, and J.B. Chase** from Massachusetts.
- **Dr. Charles Robinson**, also from Massachusetts. He was an agent of the Emigrant Aid Company out of Boston whose purpose was to transport anti-slavery emigrants into the newly opened territories. He would later become the state’s first governor.

According to Giles, “we had no unity of purpose in coming to Kansas other than to do what we might to make Kansas a free state. Our names weren’t even known to each other before drawing up the agreement, nor did we have a model of success or failure to follow, only our own logical reasoning.”

The site was chosen as it was believed that the south bank near Quincy Street would make a good steamboat landing, possibly the last before entering the Potawatomi reservation a few miles west. Unfortunately, a series of wet summers had misled them as to the river’s navigability. 1855 saw three steamships land here, one of which went all the way to Manhattan before running aground. They were few and far between after that. The last boat to use the landing was the Kansas Valley in April 1861 and the river was declared unnavigable in February 1864 by the Kansas Legislature.

To determine the boundary of their new city, the founders repurposed

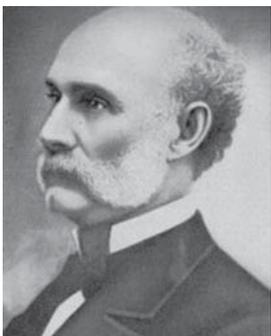
cordage that had been used to bind trunks and boxes to make two ropes of four rods in length (22 yards).

Cyrus Holliday and Fry Giles took one of the ropes, and using a fifty cent compass, one of them started walking from the cabin towards the rising sun. Daniel Horne and Enoch Chase used the other rope and fixed their course by the line of Holliday and Giles and the position of a fire on the distant prairie. It took them two full days to measure out the city. They staked out 684 acres, though there was no title to the land, nor would there be until awarded by Kansas Supreme Court decision in 1870.

The scarcity of lumber did indeed prove to be a challenge, as they were limited to about a hundred cottonwoods along the river and a few oaks and walnuts along the Shunganunga. First, they built a saw mill along the river bank at the foot of Madison Street and purchased a small engine and boiler from the Emigrant Aid Company. It had to be brought overland from Kansas City by wagon.

While awaiting its arrival, they repaired the California Road Bridge over the Shunganunga where 4th Street crosses it today. This road led from Papan’s ferry to Big Springs and served as the only route East.

At this point, the fledgling town was greatly aided by the arrival of **Dr. Franklin Loomis Crane** from Pennsylvania, whom had practical chemical skill and ample capital. Furthermore, he was a fervent believer in the Free State cause. He was given equal owner-



Cyrus K. Holliday



Guilford G. Gage



Col. W. A. Phillips



Prof. John B. Dunbar



Gen. John C. Fremont

ship rights in the Town Company upon the condition that he build a lime-kiln, of which he had a patent. It's to Crane we owe thanks for the wide streets and avenues of downtown.

At his insistence, the East-West streets were numbered from the river southward with 1st, 6th, 8th, and 10th being designated avenues. These were

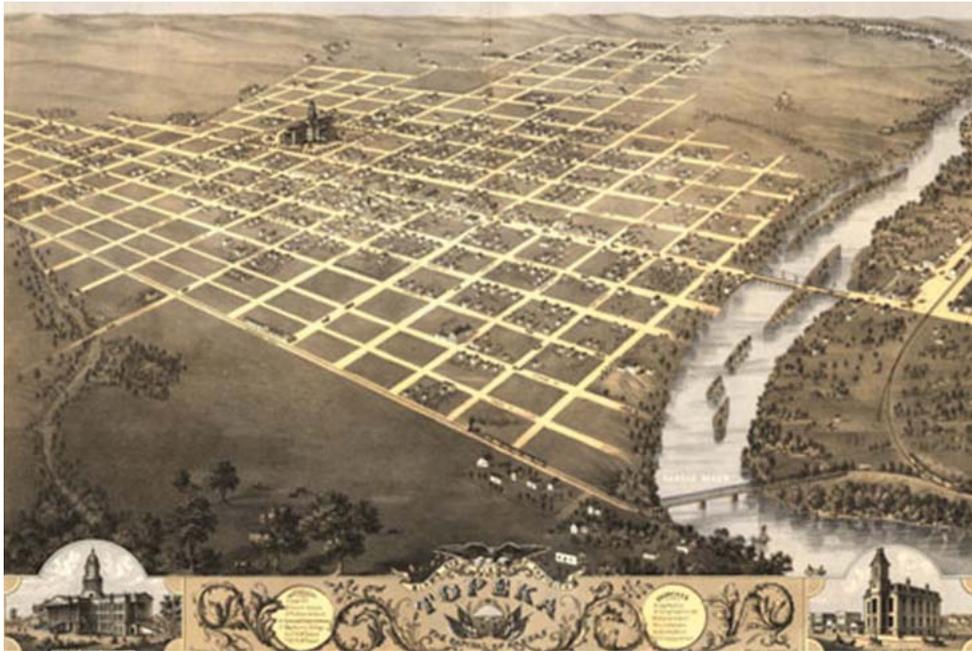
shire. He set about developing "Huntoon's Addition" and fervently believed that north meant north.

His addition was bounded on the north by Huntoon and on the south by a line between 14th and 15th streets. His East-West boundaries ran from Tyler to Van Buren. His corrected, true-north, addition abutted the original

One young man who worked on it was **Guilford G. Gage**, from Ohio. He came to Topeka at 21 years of age and owned his own brick kiln by 23. He would later become one of the richest men in the county. Records show he certainly paid more property tax than anyone else in the 1800's, having bought considerable real estate along Kansas Avenue. He would also become Chairman of the Board of Christ Hospital, which later become Stormont. After his passing in 1899, his heirs donated 80 acres to the city, now Gage Park.

It was nearly a month after the founding of the town before anything was done about giving it a name. The founders met on the evening of New Year's Day 1855 to choose one, but none of the offerings were satisfactory. They met again the next night. This time, after a conversation with a Shawnee missionary that afternoon, Giles offered a name "altogether unknown, not found in the list of post offices of the United States, nor in any lexicon of the English language."

Of Indian origin, composed of three consonants, alternated by three vowels: T-o-p-e-k-a. The nomination was received with unanimity. One Indian languages scholar opined that the word was identical in meaning with the word, "Topheika" which is found in the Potawatomi language to mean "mountain potato." According to Kaw Indians living in the area at the time, the river bottoms in and around Topeka were a great place to harvest wild potatoes. Certainly, —cont., p. 7→

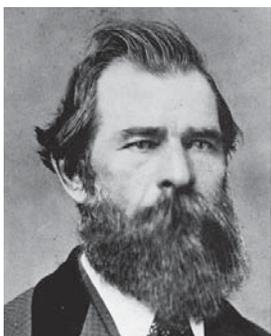


130 feet wide while the intervening streets were 100 feet wide, including sidewalks.

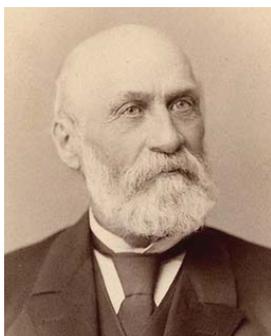
These original roads followed the existing ridgelines, which were thought to be prettier, but also more level, and thus less costly to maintain. However, this meant that they varied from true north by several degrees. This method of road laying remained in place until 1856, when **Joel Huntoon** arrived from Huntoon Corners, New Hamp-

plat at the intersection of Huntoon, 12th, and Topeka Boulevard, forming the triangle of today's Huntoon Park.

The first building of stone was a two story structure measuring 33' wide x 40' long at present day 429 S Kansas Avenue. It was used by the Topeka Constitutional Convention in the fall of 1855 and subsequently received the name, "Constitution Hall." The original walls stand and significant renovations continue.



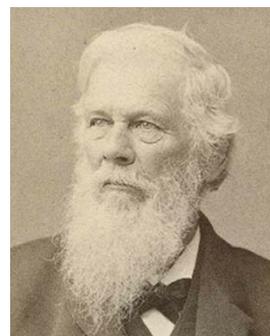
Fry W. Giles



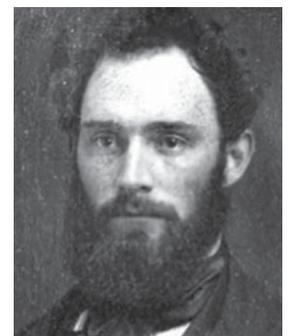
Dr. Charles Robinson



Col. Joe Huntoon



Franklin L. Crane



Franklin G. Adams

# Ritchie House and Brown Historical Site Attract National Convention

This coming April, a National Conference will be held in Topeka due in part to the African American heritage sites available in downtown Topeka. The CEO of the African American Travel organization, Joe Cappuzzello says the Monroe school at 1515 SE Monroe and the Ritchie house at 1116 SE Madison were deciding factors in holding the conference in Topeka.

The conference—expected to draw 250 travel planners from across the nation—will take place from April 14-16, 2020, at the Capitol Plaza Hotel, 1717 S.W. Topeka Blvd.

“The entire **African American Travel Conference** family and our members are looking forward to experiencing Topeka firsthand,” said **AATC President and CEO Joe Cappuzzello** in the release.

Cappuzzello says the deciding factor in the AATC’s decision to come to Topeka was the presence of Monroe School, 1515 S.E. Monroe, which was the centerpiece of the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision that ended school segregation, and the Ritchie House at 1116 S.E. Madison, which was part of the Underground Railroad.

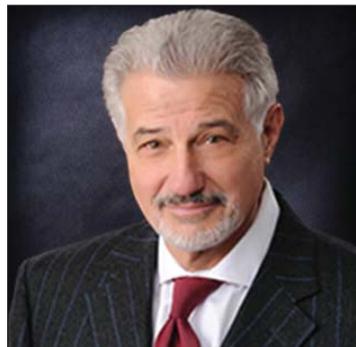
The AATC is an association of 2,500 travel planners serving the African American community, according to its website.

“Travel Industry of America reports that the African American community travels twice as often on a group package tour as the population as a whole, and we at AATC act as the source between these travel planners and the travel industry,” that site said.

Visit Topeka, which promotes Topeka as a tourism destination, was instrumental in getting this tourism conference to Topeka.

Cappuzzello said, “The Visit Topeka sales team and the Capitol Plaza Hotel impressed us during

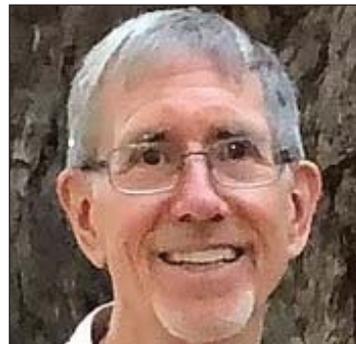
the site visit, along with their Midwest hospitality, convincing us that Topeka will step up to this opportunity to showcase all that it has to offer our members.”



**John Ambrosio**



**Katy Franklin**



**Steve Good**



**Grant Sourk**

## Four New Trustees

The Shawnee County Historical Society has added four new trustees. **Tim Hrenchir**, President of the Society announced **Grant Sourk**, **John Ambrosio**, **Katy Franklin**, and **Steve Good** have joined the board. They join nine others who help preserve the history of Shawnee County and coordinate the activities of the society.

## Note from our SCHS President

- ▶ Vice President Charles Curtis
- ▶ Chief Abram Burnett
- ▶ Topeka's Oakland community
- ▶ "The Bottoms," a largely minority part of Topeka that fell victim to Urban Renewal in the 1960s

Those were among topics members of the Topeka History Geeks Facebook page suggested recently when Christine Steinkuhler, our new program committee chair, asked them for programming ideas for our Sunday afternoon talks.

I'm excited to see Christine working to bring us interesting programs, and I'm glad she's seeking input from the History Geeks.

I've heard suggestions that posting information on the History Geeks page is a waste of time, and that the people there are not so much interested in history as they are in nostalgia.

Still, the History Geeks page has more than 27,000 members, and we're trying to build our brand.

I consequently think it's a good idea to continue to reach out to the History Geeks. I was happy to see some of them attending programs we held last year after reading notices we placed on their site.

Membership rose last year in the Shawnee County

Historical Society, and I think part of that was because we held an increasing number of fun programs aimed at bringing history to life.

So please share any ideas for potential programs you might have with Christine.

And when we hold those programs, please come watch and interact with the other people there.

I'll close by sharing a few more topics that were suggested to Christine by History Geeks members:

- ▶ Jailbreaks
- ▶ The Kaw Indians
- ▶ The ferry at Papan's Landing
- ▶ Tornadoes, aside from the 1966 tornado
- ▶ The Exoduster Movement
- ▶ The Topeka Owls Baseball Team
- ▶ Public transportation in early Topeka
- ▶ Little Russia



— *Tim Hrenchir*

## Two Former Leaders Pass

The Society has lost two eminent friends recently, **Ralph E. Skoog** and **Dale N. Anderson**.

**Skoog** (1929-2019), engineer, legislator and attorney, served as a trustee and officer of the Society. He was an early advocate, tireless supporter, and generous donor for the preservation and interpretation of the Historic John and Mary Ritchie House.

**Anderson**, (1925-2020), pioneering developer for public television and founding director of KTWU, led a major initiative of the Society. He chaired the capital campaign to preserve and interpret the Historic Ritchie House, which raised over a million dollars prior to its opening dedication in 2011.

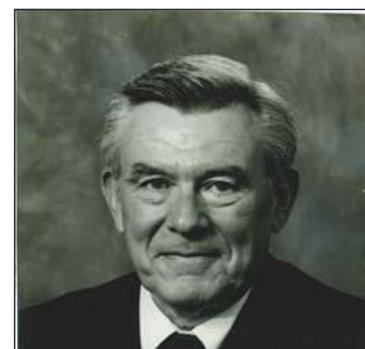
*Their dedication to the mission of the Society is deeply appreciated. Their absence now will be missed.*

For more information on Dale Anderson's life, go to

<https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/name/dale-anderson-obituary?pid=195103800>

For more information on Ralph Skoog's life, go to

<https://www.penwellgabeltopeka.com/Obituary/179094/Ralph-Skoog/Topeka-KS>



**Dale N. Anderson**



**Ralph E. Skoog**

# Shawnee County Historical Society Members/Donors for 2020

## Life

Donald and Janet Chubb  
Charles Crawford  
Bob Dole  
Jerry and Barbara Estes  
Everyy  
Carolyn Huebner  
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Liz Leech  
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Tom and Kathleen McClure  
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Pat and Jerry Powers  
Matt Sabatini  
Olive Stanford  
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Warren Taylor  
Mary Voight  
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## Heritage Ed. Sustainer (\$150)

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Diane Debacker  
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John Salisbury

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John Stauffer  
David Wexler  
David Woods

## Patron (\$100)

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Civil War Roundtable  
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Tom Muth  
Paul Post  
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Rosemary Smith  
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Christine Steinkuehler  
Michael Stubbs  
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Douglas Wright  
Carol Yoho

## Regular (\$35)

Betty Alderson  
Gregory Allen  
John Ambrosio  
Melba Banion  
Grace Beam  
Terry Beck  
Joyce Black  
Jon Boursaw  
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Rhonda Cathey  
Ron Cathey  
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Cheryl Coleman  
Kay Conn  
Constitution Hall  
Collette Coolidge  
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Kurt Daniels  
Karen Dashnaw  
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Lee Wright

## Complimentary

Acquisitions Mabee Library  
Acquisitions State Capitol Library  
Downtown Topeka  
Kansas Historical Society  
Topeka Community Foundation  
Topeka/Shawnee County Public Library

## 2019 Annual Meeting Attracts Crowd!

Historian Tom Coleman spoke on the life and times of Cyrus K. Holliday at the Dec. 8th Annual Meeting of the Shawnee County Historical Society.

Coleman talked about the life and hardships of Kansas Territory immigrants in 1854-1860 as viewed through the **personal diary and letters of Cyrus K. Holliday** to his wife **Mary**, who remained in Meadville, PA. Holliday was one of the founders of the city of Topeka, and first president of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway (AT&SF).

In his remarks, Coleman touched on the historical events occurring in the eastern Kansas territory, with a principal focus on the free-state communities of Topeka and Lawrence.

Also at the meeting, **Tim Hrenchir** was elected president and **Nate McAlister** was selected president-elect. In addition to a **great buffet luncheon at the Topeka Country Club**, you missed a fascinating program if you were unable to attend.



## Would you like to support the Shawnee County Historical Society?

Here is your opportunity. Just fill out the following information below and send it to:

Shawnee County Historical Society  
PO Box 2201  
Topeka, Kansas 66601



### Option B:

You can also join the society on-line:  
<https://222.shawneecountyhistory.org/become-a-member>

### I want to support:

- Heritage Education for kids \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Shawnee County Preservation \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Historical Programs/Lectures \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Bus Rental Grants for School Field Trip (to help make field trips possible) \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Ritchie House restoration and maintenance \$ \_\_\_\_\_

### I also want to renew my annual membership:

- General Membership \$35 \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Patron Level Membership \$50 \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Renovator Level Membership \$100 \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Sustaining Level Membership \$150+ \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Total**

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

- Visa  Mastercard  Discover Credit

Name on Card \_\_\_\_\_

Card Number \_\_\_\_\_

Exp. \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

—cont. from p. 3 → the Iowas and Omahas called the river “Topeka.”

Perhaps the most comprehensive explanation we have on record, was provided by Professor **John B. Dunbar**, professor of Latin and Greek languages at Washburn College from 1869 to 1878:

“It consists of three words, common, with a slight dialectic variation, with the languages of the Iowa, Omaha, and Kansas or Kaw Indians. These words are: to, a word meaning potato (the wild kind); pe, an adjective meaning good, and okae, a word meaning to dig. Put together, Topeka literally means a good place to dig potatoes.” Others have claimed historical knowledge from the founders that the whole po-

tato thing was a joke from the very beginning. In this case, both may be right.

The Topeka Constitutional Convention of 1855 sent a free-state constitution to Congress. It was rejected outright by President Pierce. And thus began a violent 7-year period known simply as Bleeding Kansas. Three more constitutions would be drafted before Kansas was admitted to the union as a free state under the Wyandotte Constitution on January 29, 1861. The Civil War would start three months later.

It would be four long years before Topeka would boom again, facing many existential challenges in that time. Many new western towns ceased to exist, but Topeka survived her beginning.



Papan's Ferry



P.O Box 2201, TOPEKA KS 66601-2201

*Lighting Freedom's Pathway;  
Building Heritage Culture*

# Mark Your Calendars Society Events: 2020:

- Feb. 23:** **Doug Mauck on Shawnee County's Wild West Days (History of the the Shawnee Co. Sheriff's Dept.)**  
Cox Center, 1118 SW Madison, 3 PM
- Mar. 15:** **Sue Ann Norlin Steel on 11:11, The Carl Fyler Story (WWII pilot)**  
Cox Center, 1118 SW Madison, 3 PM
- Mar. 22:** **Lisa Sandmeyer on Topeka Cemetery Suffragettes**  
Cox Center, 1118 SW Madison, 3 PM
- Mar. 29:** **Doug Wright on Topeka Owls, Topeka Hawks & Topeka Reds: Local Baseball 1946-1961**  
Cox Center, 1118 SW Madison, 3 PM
- Apr. 25:** **Annual Historic Homes Tour**  
Various homes in Topeka, 2-5 PM
- Aug. TBA:** **Educators Night Out, Topeka Uncorked for Field Trips**  
Kansas State Historical Society, 5-7 PM
- Oct. 25:** **Lisa LaRue on the Cherokee and the Civil War**  
Cox Center, 1118 SW Madison, 3 PM
- Dec. 6:** **Annual Membership Meeting**  
Topeka Country Club, 2700 SW Buchanan, NOON

# Historical Highlights

*Mar.  
2020*

