



Speaking of Kansas

Washburn University Center for Kansas Studies Spring 1996

Speakers, website enhance Kansas Studies

BY BILL WAGNON
Center Director

Enriching the discourse on campus about the state's history and culture remains central to the Center's activities. The "Speaking of Kansas" series began with the annual Kansas Day address, this year by C. Robert Haywood on January 29 exploring the humor traditions of Kansans.

Various others spoke about a variety of subjects, indicative of the interdisciplinary interest of the Center. Politics, historic preservation, the environment, journalism, western women, and Kaw Valley economic development, all represent the breadth of topics covered.

The Center has created a homepage on the world wide web that makes Kansas resource materials available to a global audience. With the Center's acquisition of hardware to maintain and service the web site even more about Kansas will be accessible while giving Washburn scholars a larger stage on which to operate. Web surfers will want to contact:

<http://www.wuacc.edu/cks>
for themselves.

Reaching off campus in another direction is the thrust of the Center's support with the Kansas State Historical Society of a summer institute on the state's territorial period.

Fellows of the Center will work with teachers to expand their understanding of the territorial period to enrich their teaching Kansas history in the schools.

Opportunities to publish materials not readily available to the public that deal with the state's history and culture are receiving serious review by Center Fellows. Suggested topics for publication are made to the Center, which are analyzed for merit and need before being slated for publication and distribution. Currently there are two items being edited for possible publication.

And so the work of the Center moves forward.

Center for Kansas Studies
on the World Wide Web at:
<http://www.wuacc.edu/cks>

Calendar of Speakers and Events

January 29

C. Robert Haywood: "Kansas Humor and the JD Syndrome." Haywood talked about four notable Kansas politicians and their contribution to humor that reflected their state's culture.

February 14

Burdette Loomis: "Kansas Political Culture" Loomis, on the faculty of the University of Kansas, is notable for his creative insights into the evolving political styles of the nation and is regularly featured by NPR as a political commentator.

February 28

Dan Rockhill: "Preserving Historic Houses: the Ritchie House Challenge" Rockhill is the consulting preservation architect to the Shawnee County Historical Society in its efforts to preserve and restore the house at 1116 SE Madison, Topeka's oldest house.

March 13

James E. Sherow: "On the Rim of the Desert's Heart: Kansas and Water" Sherow's talk grows out of his research into the history of water usage in Kansas.

March 21

John Marshall: "Merchandising or Communicating Media's Purpose?" editor for Harris News Service.

April 3

Joyce Thierer: "Calamity Jane." one person performance portraying Calamity Jane.

April 17

William Worley: "A Century of Growth and Change in the Kansas River Corridor." faculty member at University of Missouri at Kansas City.

June 8

Trip to historic Oakwood Farm. 9:30 a.m. Everyone is welcome. A car caravan will leave from the Washburn Student Union parking lot at 9:30 a.m. Participants will carpool to the farm located on the corner of Highway #24 and Highway #4 on Calhoun Bluffs. A tour of the historic farm and lunch are planned. Bring your own picnic lunch and meet at the Student Union parking lot before 9:30 a.m.

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Robert Hull, Business
Loran Smith, Political Science
Sara Tucker, History
Rachel Vukas
Ron Wasserstein, Asst VPAA
Tom Wolf, Biology

Speech details intern's study of Ritchie House

Topeka's oldest house played many roles in the history of Kansas

BY ALISON STANKRAUFF

First of all, before I launch into any Ritchie information or findings, I want to thank all of you for allowing me to come to Topeka and begin the research on the Ritchie project. And thank you Professors Bill Cecil-Fronsman, Tom Averill, and Bill Wagon for working with me on the project and guiding me. And thank you especially - thank you to Bill and Joan Wagon for having the immense kindness of letting me live in their home for the three months that I am here.

I have looked at Shawnee County and Biographical Scrapbooks, First Congregational Church records, manuscript collections of various persons, original newspapers, fire insurance maps, Kansas Historical Quarterlies, Topeka building permits, original diaries of related persons.

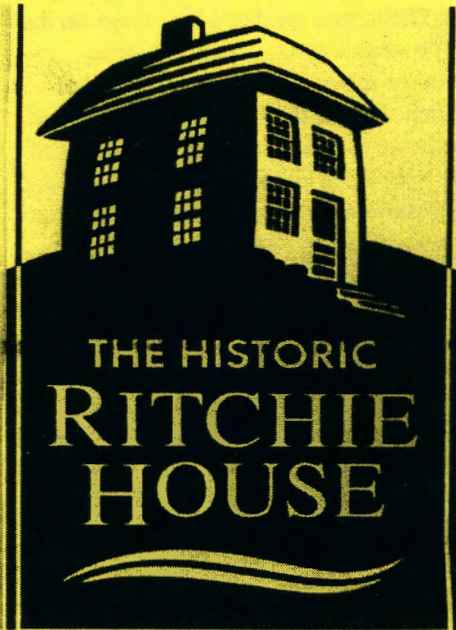
I think that I have uncovered some useful items of information pertaining to the Ritchies and to the house itself. I've gone into the research with my object being to try to ascertain just who the Ritchies were, how they fit into the society of Topeka, and indeed, the world outside Topeka. I also have tried, through the Ritchies, to connect early Topeka history with the world outside, to the world farther east. It has been an important object for me to try to see how the Ritchies were important links in the sometimes fragile connection between these two worlds. Here the house at 1116 Madison acts as a very important link in all of this. It was a meeting place for important people and the site of some very important meetings of the minds (plus a murder).

I will highlight the most important of the points of information that I have amassed, the bits that illuminate the subject best of all.

I was struck by the high level of respect that most everybody seemed to hold for John Ritchie. I think the documents that I found that most illustrated this was nearly all of the various treatments that his assassination of U.S. Marshall Arms (when he was accused of robbery). The strongest thing that comes out is how willing people were to forgive a man that they respected so much. The citizens of Topeka actually printed up in Topeka's newspaper's public gatherings to

rally around Ritchie to support him.

Also, the record book of the First Congregational Church attests to the same sentiment. The Church council excused him and went further to support him through his trial. Jim Lane rose up in the trial to defend his friend.



John Ritchie also was active, as we all know, in the beginnings of the city, the state, and the church, and the college. I've uncovered some things that I had not read about him before (since the nature of research is often to read the same pieces of information several times over). For example, he was a founding member of a Kansas-wide Congregational temperance union. He also, besides all of his other civic involvements, was president of the Topeka Bridge Company, a very important link in building up a first-class city. And he was a Member of the Free Masons.

I have tried to uncover just who the Ritchies had associations with, meaning, who might have come to the house. John Brown was seen at the house the last time he was in Kansas — witnesses saw them shake hands in the front yard. Further on John Brown, I have an exciting account of "The Battle of the Spurs" — when the U.S. government came out to Straight Creek with 500 soldiers to capture John Brown and the 11 fugitive slaves that were with him. The story tells of how he trusted Ritchie enough to get one of his own men to go down to

Topeka, to interrupt the Congregational Church's worship and get Ritchie and a few other key Topeka abolitionists. They in turn rounded up men and helped to keep the army away.

There is a letter that Ritchie wrote to A.E. Stevens, alias Colonel Whipple, one of John Brown's right-hand men. He wrote to console him as Stevens was waiting to be hung with Brown. Also there is an account of a meeting of suffragists in Topeka with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony being the key guests, and John Ritchie introducing them. (Unfortunately it does not give the location of the meeting).

Probably the most exciting items that I found about the house itself was an account of the assassination of Arms. It is a newspaper article covering the trial word for word. What it uncovers is that there was a south door of the house, in the east room, which led to a shed. I also looked through all of the building permits for the City of Topeka, and, have discovered that most likely all of the additions to the house, meaning the porch, the stucco, were added in the 1920's.

And, to end, I've come away from this research feeling that there is a lot more to do. There is a lot more to discover. Some areas I wanted to know more about, and feel disappointed in not finding more about. Probably the areas that most need answering are the life and associations of Mary Jane Ritchie and in a broader sense, the role they both played in Topeka community. Mary Jane was a woman, I gather from what I can, with strong convictions and beliefs. I'd like to know more about that. Also, how did they work as a couple? As an active unit of the community? The only reference that I've been able to gather about Mrs. Ritchie is her involvement in making important floral decorations for Topeka's Fourth of July celebration.

It has been an absorbing, fulfilling, and fascinating work. Thank you very much.

Alison Stankrauff is an intern from Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio. This is the text of a speech she gave to the Center for Kansas Studies meeting on Feb. 28, 1996.