



# Speaking of Kansas

WASHBURN CENTER FOR KANSAS STUDIES SPRING 2001

## New director for Center

At the April meeting of the Center, Barbara Burgess was named Director of the Center to replace Bill Wagnon who is retiring from being Director of the Center and Chair of the History Department.. Wagnon will continue teaching.

Burgess is assistant professor of mass media and teaches journalism courses. Her office is in Henderson 313. She can be reached by telephone, (785)231-1010 x 1801 or by e-mail: [burgess@washburn.edu](mailto:burgess@washburn.edu).

## New courses for minor

- Five new courses have been added to the courses in the Kansas Studies minor. These are:
- PE 198 Lifetime Wellness Summer TWR 7:30 am - 11:59 a.m. (Pat McCormick) Wellness experience for the outdoors, including hiking and canoeing and other activities that use the natural (Kansas) environment.
  - HN 201 A Nature Writing& Field Biology M 2:30-5:10 (Margy Stewart)
  - HN 203 Natural History & Biological Writing T 2:30 - 5:10 (Mary McCoy)
  - MM 430 Feature Writing TR 11-12:15 (Barbara Burgess)
  - AR Art in Kansas will be offered in the future. (Reinhild Janzen)

## Books available

The Center continues to sell a number of books about Kansas that were previously out of print. The list of these titles is available on the Center's Web site or from Tom Averill e-mail [zzaver@washburn.edu](mailto:zzaver@washburn.edu).

## News about the fellows

Three of the Center's fellows have recently been awarded sabbaticals. Bill Wagnon was on sabbatical during the spring 2001 semester. Tom Averill will be on sabbatical during the fall 2001 semester, and Sara Tucker will be on sabbatical during the spring 2002 semester.

Dr. Tucker was honored by Washburn University by being named the recipient of the Ned N. Fleming Excellence in Teaching Award in April.

Tom Averill's new novel *Secrets of the Tsil Cafe* will be in the bookstores in July. His book-signing at Barnes & Noble is scheduled for July 10.

## Spring 2001 programs

Wes Jackson, president of the Land Institute, spoke to an enthusiastic and overflow audience on Kansas Day. He talked about "challenges the Kansas environment faces." A native Kansan, Jackson is the author of "Becoming Native to This Place."

Randy Thies, a culture resource specialist with the Kansas State Historical Society, showed slides and spoke about the state's unique cultural legacy of public outdoor sculpture in the first Speaking of Kansas series for the spring semester.

Reinhild Janzen, art historian and assistant professor of art, presented a program she called, "Cross-cultural Encounters: Astonishing Works in the Mulvane Art Museum Collection" on March 1. She showed slides and discussed how arts in Kansas are often doors to the world, across time and space.

Sara Tucker presented the third program on April 4. In her program entitled, "Sodhouse Living: Making it on the Kansas Frontier," Tucker described how 19th-century Kansas settlers built sod houses on the Plains. Tucker is a professor of history at Washburn University.

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# Kansas water quality

by Tom Wolf  
Professor of Biology

## What legacy are we leaving our children?

Imagine a sunny, summer day in Kansas with your family on a picnic by the bank of the local stream or maybe a boat ride on the stream. The air is blowing softly, caressing your hair, the sun is warm on your face. The grass is green and velvety under your bare feet. The laughter of children splashing in the water adds to your contentment. Sounds real nice, something to anticipate.

The trouble is that for most Kansans, all we can do is imagine. The reality is that we live in an agricultural state. The reality is that the gentle breeze often carries with it the soil of Kansas and water often contains a potentially toxic mixture of biological compounds and agrochemicals to which your family might be exposed.

This is the issue faced by Kansans at the beginning of the 21st century. Can we work with each other to produce an economic system that will take into consideration the economic and quality of life needs of all Kansans? Will we be concerned about our environment and the world that we will leave to our children or will we continue with the present system, a system that allows those who control the present economic and political organization to maintain a status quo in a changing world?

There is a saying which highlights this issue in my mind. It is as follows, "We do not inherit our land from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children." What kind of legacy are we leaving our children? Not just an economic legacy, but a legacy of respect and caring for other people and the natural world that is our home.

What we are borrowing from our children is their birthright to a future that can sustain and nourish them in a healthy lifestyle. It is bad enough to borrow the soil and water upon which their future depends, but borrowing implies repayment with something of equal value. What we are leaving our children is depleted soil and waterways. Where did that stream of my imagination go? Possibly to

supporting the few at the cost of the many.

Humans are known for their ability to adopt goals for short-range profit at the expense of long-range harm. A bill signed by the Governor is a classic example of this type of thinking. This bill removes all but a few of the major rivers in Kansas from flexible environmental regulation. The rationale for this legislation was that many of these streams have no sustained flow (dry part of the year) and when flowing should be usable only for agricultural purposes (irrigation and watering). In many of these waterways, pollution that would make it unsuitable, i.e., unhealthy, for humans could not be prevented.

In a minor concession to sanity, a Memorandum of Understanding was reached between the EPA and the state Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) over conflicts between federal and state regulations. However, the enforcement of the memorandum remains dubious since the KDHE is an agency subject to similar pressures that produced this legislation in the first place.

The long term consequences of such legislation range from the obvious, such as pollution, rendering many Kansas streams non-attractive to our citizens, to the much less obvious such as making Kansas much less attractive to potential new employers. Who would want to come to a state that legislates increased pollution of its waterways. Or, put another way, what kind of industry would want to come to such a state? Industries that would rather pollute than clean up their wastes; maybe corporate hog farms?

What purpose would such legislation serve? It would help maintain the economic power of a group few in number but very connected to the political process. This legislation had the support of 21 agribusiness lobbying groups. It was opposed by a few, underfunded environmental groups. Kansas citizens who cannot afford access to the politicians are ignored. It is another step in the disenfranchisement of our children from the natural resources which have contributed to the shaping of that unique individual that we call a Kansan.

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# Oleander Commentary, Kansas Day, 2001

Folks, in 1922 William Allen White said: "Kansas is the Mother Shipton, the Madame Thebes, the Witch of Endor, and the low barometer of the nation. When anything is going to happen in this country, it happens first in Kansas. Abolition, Prohibition, Populism, ... the exit of the roller towel ...— these things come popping out of Kansas like bats out of hell." Let's look at his list, and a few things he left out. Abolition?

Between 1854-1861, Kansas was "Bleeding," and the nation heard the first shots fired in what would become Civil War. We were determined to become a Free State. In 1867, Kansas was the first state to ratify the Fifteenth Amendment—Black Voting Rights. In the early 1870s Kansas was destination point of the Exoduster movement, the first migration of blacks out of the South after the failure of reconstruction. Years later, Kansas blacks sued the Topeka Board of Education, working toward the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling that stopped school segregation.

And Prohibition? In response to the alcoholism after the Civil War, Kansas was the first forward-minded state to pass a bone-dry law, and we kept it longest, from

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## Kansas water quality continued

What is so sad it that it does not have to be this way. There are viable alternatives to the constant bickering between interest groups, be they agricultural or environmental. We have to realize that there is only one environment, one home and that is the same environment our children will live in. We need to return the land we have borrowed from our children with interest paid in the form of renewed land. We do not need to say to our children, "What was good enough for our parents will be good enough for you." Maybe our parents did not know any better, but we have no excuse. Increased profitability may be a reason for raping the land, but it is not an honorable way to pay off the debt incurred when we borrowed our children's future. The dream of a family picnic by a clean body of water may be a dream for my generation, but is it asking too much to think long-term for our children so that our dream can become their reality?

1881-1949.

And Populism? Well, in the 1890s the East was exploiting the West, and farmers and workers wanted regulation of railroads and utilities and banks, a graduated income-tax, an eight-hour work day and the free coinage of silver. Kansas was the first state to elect Populists to office—first Governor, first U.S. Congressman, first U.S. Senator. White mentioned the exit of the roller towel. He was proud of the Kansas firsts in public health, driven by Samuel J. Crumbine. We can jokingly boast invention of the flyswatter, a Kansas response to Crumbine's ordinance against the house fly. In other firsts, Kansas also outlawed the common drinking cup, food adulteration, dirty water, raw sewage, rats and public spitting.

And because Kansas granted municipal suffrage to women, and fostered opportunity, we boast many firsts for women. For example, Kansas women were first in the U.S. to be a dentist, a mayor, black lawyer and Pacific explorer. The first woman to argue before the Supreme Court was from Kansas. Ditto the first woman speaker at a Republican National Convention. Kansas elected the first woman sheriff, and was the home of the first female black Academy Award winner. Kansas was birthplace of the first black Pulitzer Prize winner in poetry, and the first woman player for the Harlem Globetrotters.

Folks, what connects all these firsts is the Kansas tendency to put the public good first. To make idealism work for individuals. To legislate for opportunity. The great tension in our country and in our state is the one between public good and private rights. Kansas has swung between those for years. But if we tally up our firsts, we'll see they all come from our swings towards public good—women's and civil rights, prohibition, public health, farmer's and worker's rights. There's a message here for Kansas Day: if you want to be first, think about the common good; avoid the tyranny of individual privilege, individual rights. by Tom Averill

## Summer/Fall 2001 Kansas Studies Classes

PE 198 Lifetime Wellness (Summer)  
TWR 7:30 am - 11:50 (Pat McCormick)

BI 280A Kansas Amphibians, Turtles  
M 5:30-8:45 J. Collins

GG 304 Kansas Geography  
TR 1 - 2:15 Tom Schmiedeler

HN 201A Nature Writing & Field Biology  
M 2:30-5:10 (Margy Stewart)

HN 203 Natural History & Biological Writing  
T 2:30-5:10 (Mary McCoy)

MM 430 Feature Writing  
TR 11-12:15 Barbara Burgess

PO 107 State & Local Govt  
MWF 10-10:50 TR 8 - 9:15  
Loran Smith

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2000-2001 Fellows

Tom Averill, English

Roy Bird, English

Barbara Burgess, Mass Media

Jenny Chinn, KSHS

Virgil Dean, KSHS

Amy Fleury, English

Rachel Goossen, History

Robert Hull, Business

Reinhild Janzen, Art

Bruce Mactavish, History

Mary McCoy, Biology

Pat Michaelis, KSHS

Tom Schmiedeler, Geography

Bradley Siebert, English

Loran Smith, Political Science

Margy Stewart, English

Glenda Taylor, Art

Sara Tucker, Hhistory

Bill Wagnon, Hhistory

Tom Wolf, Biology

The Washburn University Center for Kansas Studies works to encourage Kansas studies, to create resources and provide information about Kansas resources at WU and around the state, to offer programming and courses on Kansas topics, and to conduct outreach programs that focus on Kansas.