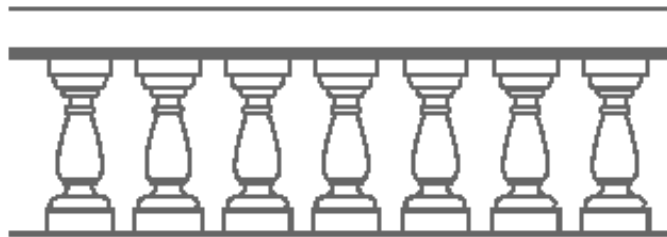


Pillars of Society

A Brief History of the Kansas State Historical Society



by Larry O. Jochims and Virgil W. Dean

Since the birth of the territory in 1854, with its ensuing conflagration that focused the nation's attention on its settlement, Kansas has been especially enamored with its history and its place in the national consciousness. Kansans had a special sense that they were a part of history in the making as they struggled with the slavery issue, fought the Civil War, and endured the hardships of the settlement process. Therefore it should not be surprising that Kansans have long had an interest in institutions designed to preserve their heritage. For the past 120 years the people of the Sunflower State have depended on the Kansas State Historical Society to shoulder that heavy responsibility.

Efforts to form a Kansas historical society began as early as 1855, but twenty years would pass before such an organization was established successfully.¹ The Kansas State Historical Society of today was born at the annual convention of the Kansas Editors' and Publishers' Associa-

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1. This article draws heavily on the fine history of the Kansas State Historical Society completed by Edgar Langsdorf at the time of the Society's centennial celebration: Langsdorf, "The First Hundred Years of the Kansas State Historical Society," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 41 (Autumn 1975): 265–425; also important is Larry Jochims' "A Classic in Marble: The Memorial Building," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 7 (Spring 1984): 4–21.



The grand and intricately designed balcony of the Memorial Building.

tion, held in Manhattan in April 1875. Formal organization came in Topeka eight months later, when Topeka *Commonwealth* editor Floyd Baker was selected the Society's first secretary. Baker resigned in less than two months, however, and leadership of the organization during its critical formative years was provided by Franklin G. Adams, the Society's first full-time secretary and the person most responsible for our present institution's long-term success.²

During the first years of the Adams administration, the infant historical organization sought to carry out its declared purpose. As stated in the Society's original constitution and bylaws, those objectives were

to collect, embody, arrange and preserve books, pamphlets, maps, charts, manuscripts, papers, paintings, statuary, and other materials illustrative of the history of Kansas in particular, and of the country generally; to procure from the early pioneers narratives of the events relative to the early settlement of Kansas, and the early explorations, the Indian occupancy, overland travel, and emigration to the Territory and the West; to gather all information calculated to exhibit faithfully the antiquities, and the past and present resources and progress of the State, and to take steps to promote the study of history, by lectures and other means.³

The collections of the State Historical Society at the time Secretary Adams commenced his work were as meager (they occupied one bookcase in the state auditor's capitol office) as was the secretary's salary. Adams worked free for the first year and earned a mere \$537.50 annually in 1877. Thereafter the collec-

2. Franklin G. Adams was born in New York state in 1824 and came to Kansas Territory as a free-state partisan in 1855. He followed various occupations from lawyer and land office registrar to Indian agent and hotelkeeper. See Langsdorf, "The First Hundred Years," 266; Samuel A. Kingman, "Reminiscences," *Kansas Historical Collections, 1901-1902* 7 (1902): 153-54; George W. Martin, "The Kansas State Historical Society," *ibid.*, 564.

3. "Constitution and By-Laws," *Kansas Historical Collections, 1875-1881* 1 (1881): 107.

tions and space needs for the growing Society increased much faster than did salaries. No matter what rooms were found to house the Society they soon became cramped and uncomfortable.

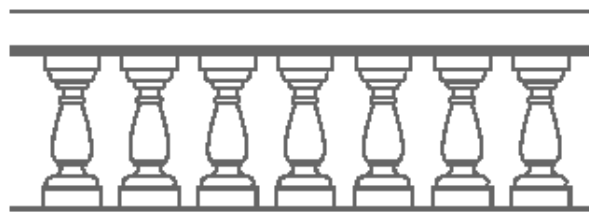
Under these adverse circumstances, Adams did his best to fulfill the Society's broad objectives. One need only browse the archives to appreciate the voluminous correspondence he carried out in order to capture Kansas' early history while it was still available; while people who were able to give firsthand accounts of the events that transpired were still alive. Numerous volumes were added to the library and several significant manuscript collections were

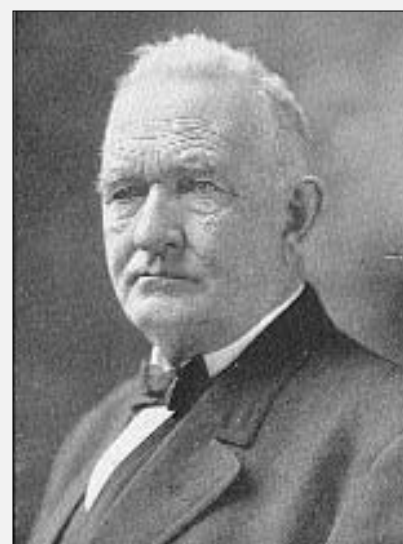
acquired during this formative period. Among the more significant were the Dr. Thomas H. Webb collection, containing invaluable information regarding the New England Emigrant Aid Company, and the William Clark collection, which contains the records of the St. Louis Superintendency of Indian Affairs for 1807-1855.⁴ As of 1879, when the state legislature recognized the Society as "the trustee of the State," all of these collections were considered state property.

Its ever-expanding library and archives were a blessing to the infant organization, but also they were a challenge; adequate space remained a problem throughout the Society's forty-year stay in the statehouse. By 1882 collections were housed in a large room in the west wing, cases in various corridors, and three basement rooms. Adams and his small staff were given three rooms in the basement of the south wing in 1893. They now occupied more space than any other state department but needed double what they already had.

When Secretary Adams died on December 2, 1899, after a long illness, his daughter Zu Adams considered an attempt to pick up the reins, a job for which she was eminently qualified. Miss Adams concluded, however, that she did not want the political

4. "First Biennial Report," *ibid.*, 6, 36; Langsdorf, "The First Hundred Years," 274; Martin, "The Kansas State Historical Society," 564-72.





In 1876 Franklin G. Adams (above left) became the Society's first full-time secretary. As he commenced his work the Society's collections were small enough to fit into one bookcase in the state capitol. When Adams died in 1899 his daughter Zu Adams (above center) considered picking up the reins, but instead she supported George W. Martin (above right) for the position. During Martin's term the Society's collections continued to expand into other areas of the statehouse (below), but quickly outgrew these accommodations.



part of the job and threw her support to fifty-eight-year-old George W. Martin, a former state legislator and Junction City newspaper man. On December 6, 1899, the Society's executive committee elected Martin its second full-time secretary. Martin's stated goal was to "strengthen the Society and increase public awareness of its work." He faithfully labored toward that end for the next fifteen years.⁵

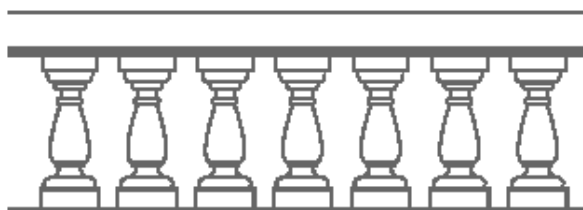
One way the Society could accomplish Martin's goal of increased visibility was by establishing a presence outside the state capital. To this purpose, one might assume, the Society acquired its first historic site in 1901, Pike's Pawnee Indian Village in Republic County—the reported place where, on September 29, 1806, Lieutenant Zebulon Pike persuaded Indians to lower the Spanish flag and replace it with that of the United States. (Subsequent research placed this particular village in Nebraska.) This state site would be followed by two additional ones: First Territorial Capitol and Fort Hays, also acquired in 1901.⁶

Secretary Martin also was very much concerned with improving the Society's Topeka operation. After attending the December 1904 meeting of the American Historical Association in Chicago where he learned of and became enthusiastic about preserving public records, Martin returned to the Kansas capital and consulted with the secretary of

state and other officials. The result was the 1905 passage of "an act to provide for the care and preservation of public records." The new law authorized "any state, county, or other official . . . to turn over to the Kansas State Historical Society, for permanent preservation therein, any books, records, documents, original papers, or manuscripts, newspaper files and printed books not required by law to be kept in such office as part of the public record" and thus established the Historical Society as the state archives. Immediately the Society's collections began to expand even more rapidly than before.⁷

Although additional space was allocated in the "cellar of the capitol building," it was clear by this time that the Historical Society would never have sufficient space in the statehouse. As early as February 1896 Secretary Adams had written A.R. Greene, a friend who was then secretary to Congressman R.W. Blue, discussing the pressure placed on the Society. He referred to conversations about joining the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) and Society museums, with an eye toward pushing jointly for the construction of a new building. The structure would serve both as a Society headquarters and a monument to the Kansas troops of the Civil War.

During the first year of Secretary Martin's administration, the Society took over the entire fourth floor of the south wing of the statehouse—at least everything would be on one floor. But, especially after the passage of the 1905 archives legislation, it became apparent that space simply was not available to house all the documents. Fortunately, at about this same time, the movement to honor the state's Civil War veterans gathered momentum. The *Topeka Daily Capital* took up the cause on January 26, 1906; in an item entitled "Memorial Column to Soldiers" the paper argued for a veterans' memorial by pointing out that



5. Langsdorf, "The First Hundred Years," 309.

6. On the occasion of the centennial celebration of Pike's Pawnee Village, September 27, 1906, Secretary Martin delivered what must be considered a remarkably enlightened comment on the nature of history. He said, in part,

Most people have a funny idea of history. They think it comes from governors, senators, politicians, and those who obtain some notoriety. They are off. It comes from you folks who work on the farms. True, there must be leaders and bosses, but if you stop for a season or two raising corn and alfalfa and wheat, the leaders and bosses will have to walk out. The greater part of history is made by the daily toilers—people in the humbler walks of life.

George W. Martin speech quoted in "One Hundred Years Under the Flag," *Kansas Historical Collections, 1907–1908* 10 (1908): 18; Langsdorf, "The First Hundred Years," 315–17; "Report of the Secretary," *Kansas Historical Collections, 1901–1902* 7 (1902): 20.

7. Kansas State Historical Society, *Fifteenth Biennial Report, 1906* (Topeka: State Printing Office, 1907), 3, 5–6.

“Kansas has always been called the great soldier state; and yet no monument of any considerable proportions stands within its borders.”

Although many opinions were expressed regarding the proper nature of such a monument, the “memorial building” idea gained popularity, especially after word reached Kansas in April 1908 that a large sum of money soon would be available when the state’s war claims were paid by the federal government.⁸ Within a year reimbursement for the interest and discount on the Kansas war bonds had been ordered in the amount of \$522,530.45.

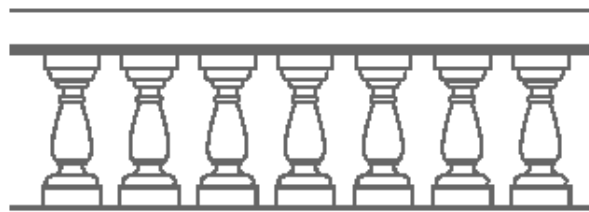
Once the matter of the claims had been settled, debate intensified over the use of the money. Governor Edward Hoch initially favored the idea of “memorial arches on the State House grounds,” but in the end he decided the building was more practical, and as the discussions continued across the state, it became increasingly apparent that public sentiment also favored the construction of a memorial building. The GAR Council of Administration adopted a resolution approving

the erection of a building as a memorial to the memory of the soldiers of the war for the Union, a portion of said building to be used as a headquarters for the department of Kansas Grand Army of the Republic so long as the organization may exist, the rest of the building to be used by the Kansas State Historical Association, and the entire build-

8. *Topeka Daily Capital*, March 28, [1909], Memorial Building clippings, vol. 1, Kansas State Historical Society. In a letter to the editor, Secretary Martin expounded on the importance of history and of preserving its records. Although many folks had legitimate needs, and therefore valid claims to this windfall, the state must provide for its history and its old soldiers. “The Historical Department is cramped and needs more room, and the capitol building is not only full to the limits, but lacks proper conveniences for the Legislature. Kansas people have been among the most active during the most active half century in the world’s history, hence there is nothing unreasonable in the space and accommodations required.” For a detailed discussion of the movement toward and construction of the Memorial Building, as well as the war debts issue, see Jochims, “A Classic in Marble,” 4–21; Langsdorf, “The First Hundred Years,” 324–36.

ing to revert to the use of the Historical Association, with all Grand Army relics, souvenirs, etc., whenever the Grand Army may go out of existence.⁹

In 1909 a Memorial Hall Building Commission was established and given the authority to obtain a site for the building near the capitol. The state architect, Charles H. Chandler, was charged with the duty of preparing the plans and specifications and supervising the construction.



The Memorial Hall Building Commission met for the first time on April 12, 1909, in Governor Walter

Stubbs’ office. The first order of business was to locate a site for the new building. Although the corner of Tenth and Van Buren was the favored location, and several other parcels were seriously considered, the commission finally settled on the Tenth and Jackson site. Some believed that because of the streetcars in the area and the nearby state heating plant this location would be too dirty and noisy. Others argued that a south front was undesirable for a library. But the negotiations proceeded, and by the end of May 1909 the land was acquired for the fifteen-thousand-dollar appropriation, with an additional ten thousand dollars in costs donated by the city and the property owners in the block.¹⁰

For a time emotions ran high between officials of the GAR and the Historical Society over the question of space allocation within the building. But construction began in early 1910, and by mid-1914, after nu-

9. Quoted in Jochims, “A Classic in Marble,” 5; see also *Topeka Daily Capital*, May 7, April 1, 1908.

10. In a show of intrastate rivalry, or perhaps covetousness, the *Wichita Eagle*, April 16, 1909, ran a column entitled “Usual Display of Hog-gishness is Made by Topeka.” The legislature, reported the *Eagle*, had appropriated fifteen thousand dollars for the purchase of the Memorial Building site, but the commission was having problems; as soon as property owners discovered that their property was being considered “they boosted the price up about double. Even the city appears to have caught the spirit.” It was suggested that the city’s slogan should be “changed from ‘Topeka, Kan., Topeka Will’ to ‘Topeka Will—do you if she—Kan.’”

merous delays, the Kansas State Historical Society was able to move into its first permanent home.

Unfortunately Secretary Martin would not see his labors come to fruition. He died on March 27, 1914, two months to the day before the formal dedication. William Elsey Connelley, Martin's successor, was, however, quite familiar with the operations of the Historical Society. A well-known writer and researcher, and a successful businessman, Connelley had served as president of the Society in 1912 and as Martin's assistant on the building commission.¹¹

His first matter of business, after the dedication ceremony, was to actually move the Society's collections to its new facility. Cost estimates for the move reached as high as twenty-five thousand dollars. Although available funds fell far short of this amount, John N. "Curly" Harrison, the commander of the GAR and president of the Kansas State Historical Society, was determined that it be accomplished. Luckily Harrison was acquainted with statehouse janitor Tom Sneed who agreed to make his horse and express wagon available at \$1.50 per day. The move began on June 27 and, by making thirty to forty trips a day, it was completed by the end of August 1914 at a cost of \$727.42.

The collections were in, but for all intents and purposes the building was an ornate shell. Still needed was office furniture and additional bookshelves. The shelving eventually would be acquired, but sufficient funds with which to operate the Society were slow in coming, particularly during the years of the Great War. Salaries continued to be much lower than those for people in comparable jobs in other state departments. Staff did not even receive expenses for traveling on Society business. Nevertheless, the Connelley years were marked by a number of significant accomplishments, including in 1927 the establishment of a general trust fund, the acquisition of the

Shawnee Mission, and the restoration of the First Territorial Capitol.¹²

The sometimes controversial secretary became ill in June 1930 while on a trip to Shawnee Mission, and he died in July. Fred B. Bonebrake was named interim secretary, serving until July 19, 1930, when the executive committee selected Wichita publisher Kirke Mechem as Connelley's successor. Mechem, born in Mankato, Kansas, in 1889, had a statewide reputation

as an author, playwright, and poet, and he put his publishing experience to work for the Society. His tenure ushered in a new look in how the Society presented itself in print. The *Kansas Historical Quarterly* re-

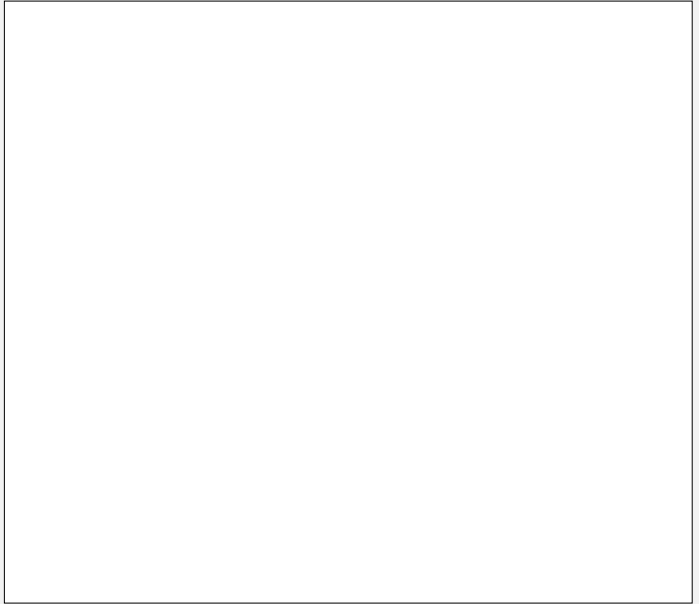
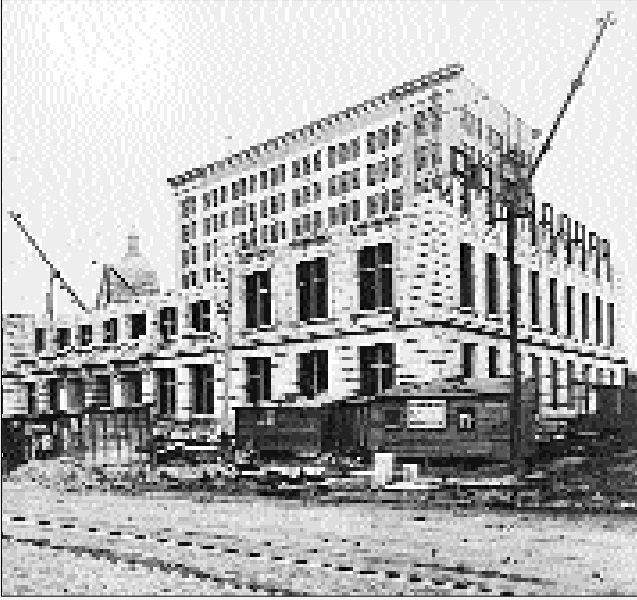
placed the biennial *Kansas Historical Collections* in 1931, and Mechem initiated an intensive cataloging project for the manuscripts collection. The secretary and his staff also prepared a series of newspaper stories that were sent out to leading papers across the state and launched a similar series of biographies for broadcast on radio stations.

Mechem's first decade of service, of course, coincided with the Great Depression. Oddly enough, these difficult years were marked by an increased use of Historical Society facilities. Lack of work meant more "leisure time" for many, but there was also a great increase in public interest and awareness. "In January, 1934," wrote Edgar Langsdorf in his centennial history of the Society,

the Society began what was to become a series of federal work programs designed to assist people deprived of jobs by the economic situation. The first project was under the Civil Works Administration (CWA), which became the Federal Emergency Relief Committee (FERC), which was succeeded by the Works Progress Administration, and finally the Works Projects Administration (WPA). In addition there was the National Youth

11. Langsdorf, "The First Hundred Years," 337.

12. For more information on the move and the Connelley years, see *ibid.*, 344–57.



Construction of the Memorial Building began in 1910 (above left), and upon its completion in 1914, the statehouse janitor moved the Society's collections from the capitol across the street using a horse and wagon (above right). In 1914 William E. Connelley succeeded Martin as secretary thus becoming the first to hold office in the new facility (below left). When Connelley died in 1930, Wichita publisher Kirke Mechem (below right) was elected to the position of Society secretary. Mechem, on the left, is pictured here with his future successor Nyle Miller.



Administration (NYA). These alphabet agencies administered such programs as the Historical Records Survey and the American Imprints Inventory, to name the two most significant to the Society, and they continued for nine years, until January 28, 1943, when the war effort absorbed all employable citizens.

Under these programs the Society utilized up to 23 people on a part-time basis with salaries paid from federal funds. A great deal of useful work was accomplished, including the sorting and cataloging of many thousands of books, pamphlets, manuscripts, and photographs The Historical Records Survey, by the time of its discontinuance in July, 1942, had published inventories of the records of 14 Kansas counties and had completed or partially completed inventories of most of the others, had published a guide to Kansas vital statistics records and 11 volumes of listings and descriptions of federal records in the state. The American Imprint Inventory compiled a descriptive listing of imprints up to 1877 held by libraries in the state; this project was discontinued on June 30, 1941.¹³

In 1935 the Society initiated a project to identify all the state's major historic sites; more than three hundred had been tentatively identified by October. These sites were to be marked by local governmental entities. Once this was accomplished it was hoped that the State Highway Commission would direct people to each site. Although the program did not develop as planned, the state Chamber of Commerce and Highway Commission in conjunction with the Society was able to select and mark fifty of the sites. Originally wooden signs were installed, but soon after World War II they were replaced by cast aluminum. Since 1938 a total of 118 signs have been erected as a result of this rather modest beginning.

The enlightened collection policies of the Society's founders and early administrators proved very useful in 1938 when people were coming to grips

with the Social Security Act. To qualify for its various benefits, individuals had to provide proof of age. And the Historical Society was one of the few entities in any state to have collected and preserved original state census records. Its vast newspaper holdings also proved invaluable. In many instances birth certificates were not available. Certified birth announcements from newspapers or census records were acceptable. The number of such requests, from

individuals and county welfare boards, would, according to Langsdorf, "increase annually to a peak of more than 17,500 in 1956."¹⁴

Under Secretary Mechem's guidance, publication continued with such titles as the *Annals of Shawnee Methodist Mission and Indian Manual Labor School*, compiled in 1939 by Martha Caldwell to commemorate the centennial of the mission's founding. In 1945 a project was initiated that led to the publication of the *Annals of Kansas, 1886-1925*. More progress was forthcoming: in 1946 the microfilm division was founded, and before the end of the decade Society employees, whose individual salaries had been specified by statute, were placed on the state merit system.

The Society had taken some major steps forward during its two decades under Mechem's guidance. He had definite ideas regarding the agency's public role and responsibility, and the projects he initiated reflected this philosophy. On the occasion of the Kansas State Historical Society's seventy-fifth anniversary, "Secretary Mechem read a brief paper on its history and accomplishments" and, according to Langsdorf:

pointed out that the Society served the public in three ways: first, in a patriotic sense, it helped to stimulate the pride people have in their past, and by teaching some of the lessons of history it illustrated what can be learned from the struggles and errors of earlier generations. Second, it served to

13. Ibid., 361, 364.

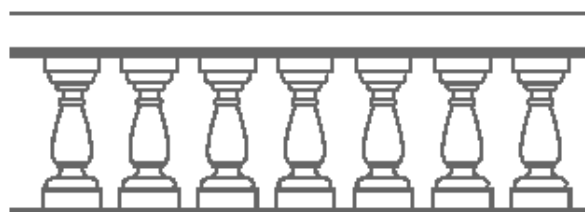
14. Ibid., 366.



As the Society's collections and programs grew, the staff also expanded. In 1960 Roscoe Wilmeth became the Society's first archeologist. Later that year Wilmeth was succeeded by Thomas A. Witty (left) who held the position of state archeologist until his retirement in 1994. In 1974 when Lorene Hawley retired as head librarian, Portia Allbert (below left), a twenty-five-year veteran, was named to replace her, and she served in that capacity for nearly fifteen years. In 1977 Bob Richmond vacated the post of state archivist, which was filled by Eugene Decker (below) who held the position until his retirement in 1991.



entertain the public by enabling them to see and identify with curiosities, “the older the better,” such as pioneer tools and utensils, old photos, maps and pictures, newspaper ads for steak at 10 cents a pound, mustache cups and bustles, and it offered a place for genealogical research and the researches of hobbyists. Finally, it had a little-known and less-appreciated dollars-and-cents value in the advertising received by the state through the work of writers, researchers, and other people who relied on the Society’s collection for all kinds of information, whether for newspaper and magazine articles, law suits, or aid in obtaining delayed birth certificates.¹⁵



In the following year, 1951, Mechem resigned as secretary; for another decade, however, he continued to work editorially on the *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, his *Annals* project, and the highway marker program.

On October 16, 1951, Nyle Miller, who had joined the Society staff in 1931, succeed his old boss, becoming the first secretary chosen from within the agency. Miller’s administration was highlighted during its first decade by two centennial celebrations. The first came in 1954, the one-hundredth birthday of the formation of Kansas Territory. It was a busy year. Naturally the Society became the main source of information for local groups planning events. Museum exhibits were even installed in a loaned railroad car that toured the state. An estimated ten thousand persons visited this traveling exhibit.

Under Miller, staff continued researching and writing. A partial listing of their valuable contributions to Kansas historiography illustrates this point: *Comprehensive Index, 1875–1930 to Collections, Biennial Reports, and Publications of the Kansas State Historical Society* (1959), *The Beginning of the West: Annals of the Kansas Gateway to the American West, 1540–1854* (1972), *Annals of Kansas* (1954 and 1956), *Kansas: A Pic-*

torial History (1961), *Kansas In Maps* (1961), *Kansas in Newspapers* (1963), *Kansas Post Offices* (1961), and *Why The West Was Wild* (1963).

By the late 1950s the marbled halls of the Memorial Building seemed not to be yielding sufficient space. The GAR was gone, but Spanish-American War Veterans and the American Legion still occupied some of its rooms. The GAR auditorium, which seated 750 and consumed the whole central portion of the building on the second and third floors, was seen as another problem. Thus, a remodeling project commenced in 1958 and would continue into early 1961. Doors and windows were replaced, building areas were

air conditioned, and the auditorium was converted into a “modern” two-hundred-seat theater. The latter change gained the Society two museum galleries, a microfilm reading room, and three levels of storage stacks. The old GAR headquarters and museum were changed into a museum gallery, and a new elevator was installed. Many of these changes made the building more convenient and comfortable but, benefiting from more than three decades of hindsight, one can not help but mourn the loss of historic fabric throughout the building, especially that of the grand auditorium.

The 1960s also saw the Society become more involved in archeology. Although it had an archeology committee as early as 1914, the early work was far from professional. Roscoe Wilmeth joined the staff as assistant museum director in 1957. His training and interest, however, was in archeology, and he became staff archeologist when that position was created in 1960. Wilmeth was succeeded by Thomas A. Witty who was responsible for developing and expanding the program.¹⁶

15. *Ibid.*, 370–71.

16. Tom Witty held the state archeologist position for thirty-four years, retiring on March 17, 1994. See *ibid.*, 386; Kansas State Historical Society, *1994 Annual Report*, 6.

The archeology department completed several digs in the ensuing years. Much early work was for the National Park Service at federal reservoir sites and at Fort Scott. Excavations also were completed at Society-owned sites such as Fort Hays and Pawnee Indian Village. At the latter several earth lodge sites were studied. In 1967 a museum was built over one of the larger sites, which was then excavated with the artifacts left in place.

In addition to the unique Pawnee Indian Village museum, a visitors' center at Fort Hays was completed in 1969. Both were financed by federal Land and Water Conservation funds through the Bureau of

Outdoor Recreation. The Grinter Place, home of Moses Grinter who established a Kansas River ferry in 1831, was taken into the state system in 1968, and Isaac T. Goodnow's house in Manhattan was acquired in the following year.¹⁷ A more centralized system of control of the Society's sixteen historic properties was implemented in 1975 with the creation of a historic sites supervisor position. That position was filled first by Thomas P. Barr, formerly of the archeology department.

Passage of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 moved the Society into a new realm of activity. Its charge was to survey and inventory those structures or sites with architectural or historical significance. Also to be included were archeological sites. Those sites that met federal criteria then were to be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. The National Park Service administered the program and funded it on a 50-percent federal and a 50-percent local basis. The secretary of the Historical Society was placed in charge of the program and subsequently given the title of state historic preservation officer.¹⁸ Initial funding was slow, but by the summer

of 1969 the first survey teams were canvassing the state. In 1970 Richard D. Pankratz joined the staff as program director.

Throughout the Society's 120-year history, it has retained a "semi"-autonomous status in regard to other state agencies and the executive branch. A constitutional amendment adopted in 1972 authorized a cabinet system of government for

Kansas, with all agencies and divisions under the executive, and a secretary of cabinet rank administering each. "The reorganization moves, as they affected the Society, were viewed with considerable trepidation

by its officers and staff," observed Langsdorf:

While the commission offered no firm recommendation on the fate of the Society, suggestions were made that it be placed variously under the superintendent of public instruction, the board of regents, or the secretary of state. None of these had any apparent advantage for the Society or its work, administratively or in terms of greater economy or efficiency. In fact, it seemed that such a move would merely impose another level of bureaucratic control which, in view of experiences in other states, probably would work to the detriment of what was considered a smoothly running public service organization.¹⁹

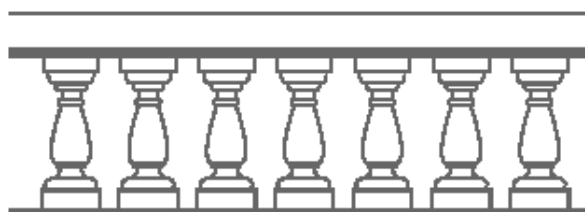
This has become a recurring issue, but to date the Society has successfully resisted such reorganization proposals.

tion agency and the executive secretary as the state historic preservation officer. Bennett's order authorized the Society to administer federal assistance under the provision of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and to accept and disburse federal funds subject to expenditure limitations set by the legislature. The Society continued to lobby for legislation that would provide a broader base for the program, and in 1977 it experienced some success with the passage of the state preservation law. The law designated the Society as the state's historic preservation agency and assigned it various duties and responsibilities. It was amended in 1981 to widen the range of state or local activities affecting historic properties that are subject to review by the state historic preservation officer and again in 1988 to define limits for project notification and to establish penalties for certain violations.

19. Langsdorf, "The First Hundred Years," 404-5.

17. "The Memorial Building: A Center for Historical Research, Historic Properties," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 7 (Spring 1984): 25-30.

18. Executive Order 76-17, signed by Governor Robert F. Bennett on September 29, 1976, designated the Society as the state historic preserva-



By the early 1970s federal laws and regulations such as the National Historic Preservation Act and the National Environmental Policy Act had begun to have a strong effect on Society operations. The Society entered into a cooperative agreement with the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) in January 1971 to perform archeological surveys, field investigations, and possibly full-scale excavations in areas of planned highway construction. By 1974 this project had expanded to cover county and secondary road projects that used federal funds. Thereafter archeology was enmeshed in the preparation of environmental impact studies, and with the historic preservation department devoted considerable time to the review of others.

Several noteworthy retirements occurred in the mid-1970s. After twenty-five years as director and with a total of forty-five years of service, Nyle Miller announced his decision to step down. Edgar Langsdorf followed Miller as interim director, serving in that capacity for only three months before his retirement. On April 1, 1977, Joseph W. Snell became the Society's director. Snell had been a member of the staff since 1957 and at the time was curator of manuscripts. After nearly thirty-two years on the library staff, Lorene Hawley, head librarian since 1967, retired on December 31, 1975. Portia Allbert, a twenty-five-year veteran, replaced her and served in that capacity for nearly fifteen years.

In 1978 the Society began holding annual spring meetings in addition to its regular October gatherings and business meetings. The idea was to provide services and information to those members who could not easily come to Topeka. The first such meeting was held in Garden City on May 6. The Society established another precedent the following year when its membership elected Sr. M. Evangeline Thomas of Salina president, the first woman to serve in that office. Sr. Evangeline, who had won a position on the

Society's executive committee in 1977, also was the first woman elected to that body.

The 1979 legislature appropriated the funds necessary to purchase the Tobias archeological site near Lyons. The Tobias site was considered one of the best preserved early Wichita Indian sites in central Kansas. Here, in 1541, Coronado encountered the inhabitants of a large Indian village in his search for "Quivira." The site had been extensively studied and excavated over a period of many years.

Having been founded by men with newspaper backgrounds who knew the importance of such a resource, the Society has always maintained

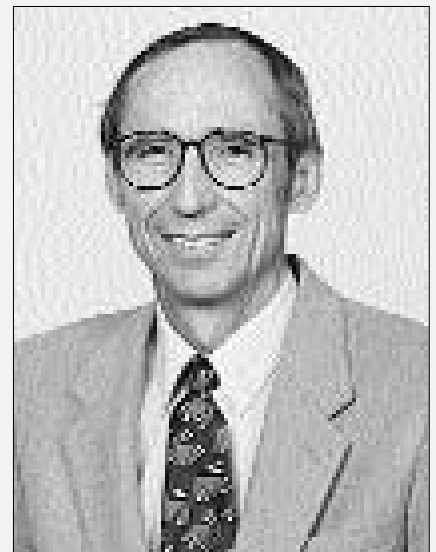
one of the largest newspaper collections in the country. Unfortunately, many of the earlier issues were deteriorating and many were becoming unusable by patrons. Annual microfilming budgets were not sufficient to allow the kind of acceleration in the ongoing filming program that was needed desperately. Fortunately the 1980 legislature understood the problem and appropriated nearly sixty thousand dollars for this purpose, and in 1991 a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grant in excess of seventy thousand dollars allowed for the expansion of the department, which by 1994 had produced another one thousand rolls of film.²⁰

The Society's invaluable newspaper collection, virtually all of which is now available on microfilm, has increasingly gained the notoriety it deserves. In the mid-1980s, for example, the agency completed a four-year project with the U.S. Newspaper Program. It was one of seven nationally known newspaper repositories selected to become involved in developing a national data bank of information on American newspapers. The project was funded through grants from the NEH. At the time of completion, 8,024 Kansas newspaper titles and 2,700 non-Kansas titles

20. *Ibid.*, 391; see Kansas State Historical Society, *1992 Annual Report*, 14, for a brief discussion of the "redox" problem that the division has confronted in the past few years.



In 1951 Nyle Miller, who had joined the staff in 1931, became the Society's secretary. Miller (left) poses with a number of publications produced during his tenure as director. Miller retired in 1976, and in 1977 Joseph W. Snell (below left), who had become part of the staff in 1957, succeeded him as director. Longtime state archivist Robert W. Richmond (below center) was named assistant director. Both Snell and Richmond retired in 1988, and Ramon Powers (below right) was named Society director. Powers serves in that capacity today, and David A. Haury currently is assistant director.



had been cataloged and entered into the On-Line Computer Library Center (OCLC).

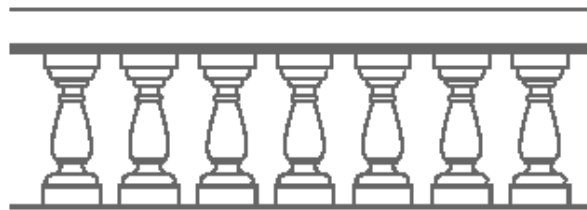
Over the years, the Society, and by implication the general public, has benefited greatly from NEH and Kansas Humanities Council (KHC) funding. A three-year project, *Images of Strawberry Hill: Works by Marijana*, was completed in 1987. Under the direction of Jennie Chinn, state folklorist, this project explored the work of the Kansas City Croatian-American painter and its relation to the cohesive ethnic community of Strawberry Hill. That same year the Society completed a \$115,475 NEH grant for a joint project with the Nebraska Historical Society for each institution to place more than forty-six thousand photographs on tonal microfiche. This made approximately one-third of the collection available in this format. So popular was the project that the legislature provided funding to place an additional ten thousand images on microfiche. National Endowment funds also were used to develop a series of four history resource packets designed for use in elementary and secondary schools. Since 1986, with funding from KHC, the Society has cosponsored, with Washburn University, summer Kansas history seminars for junior- and senior-high school teachers and developed several traveling exhibits including *In Search of the American Dream: Blacks in Kansas*.

In 1985 the Society received substantial funding from the Santa Fe Southern Pacific Foundation to process the records of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway. The AT&SF had donated their historical records to the Society over the years, and the project helped staff improve access to this important and growing collection, which includes photographs and film.

An additional responsibility devolved to the Society on July 1, 1988, when it assumed the task, formerly held by the office of the secretary of state, of registering land survey reference returns. Along with this responsibility came the original land survey records, which included plats and original field notes

for the Kansas territorial survey, beginning in 1854. The current reference reports and computerized data base also were transferred.

Even with the remodeling of the Memorial Building in the early 1960s, expanding collections and increasing responsibilities taxed the limits of the old facility, and space problems mounted. The 1972 legislature appropriated ten thousand dollars to investigate a site for a new building. The consensus within the Society at this time appeared to be that the museum and archeology departments would be moved to a new building and the other departments would expand into the vacated areas. "During the next months," observed Ed Langsdorf,



careful consideration was given to the selection [of a site]. The obvious first thought was that such a new building might be included as part of the Capitol Area Plaza development south of the statehouse. This proved impractical, and the consulting architect working on the Plaza project suggested a building on the east side of Jackson street between 10th and 11th streets, across 10th street from the Memorial building. However, the estimated costs of buying the land, razing existing structures, and erecting a museum building of adequate size which would harmonize architecturally with nearby state buildings seemed exorbitant, and the further disadvantages of lack of public parking and easy access for tourists led to elimination of this possibility, at least from the staff's point of view. Since one of the prime objectives was to make the museum readily accessible to visitors from outside Topeka it seemed most desirable to locate it on a major highway and on a site large enough to provide ample free public parking, a commodity unavailable in downtown Topeka.

Finally the decision was made to recommend an 81-acre tract just west of the Topeka city limits which fronted on Interstate 70, the major east-west highway in Kansas. On this tract was located the remains of the Pottawatomie Baptist Mission, erected in 1849–1850, which was already entered on the National Register of Historic Places. A main

branch of the Oregon trail had run north across this land to a crossing of the nearby Kansas river. These historical associations were attractive and for a good many years there had been local interest in preserving what remained of the old mission. The owner of the property was willing to sell, and this combination of assets and circumstances seemed to make it an ideal choice.²¹

Amid some controversy the money to purchase the land was appropriated by the 1973 legislature. But since no planning money was voted at the time, construction had to await the action of a future legislature.

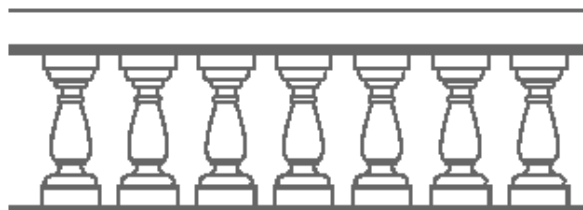
This action finally came in 1978 when state lawmakers made such an authorization. A contract was signed with the architectural firm of Abend Singleton Associates of Westwood and planning began. As with the construction of the Memorial Building, Director Snell and some staff toured various new museums throughout the country to gather ideas. Accompanying Snell was Mark A. Hunt, who had recently replaced longtime museum director Stanley D. Sohl.²²

The legislature appropriated about half of Governor John Carlin's recommended eight million dollars for construction of the new museum building in 1980. It became necessary to hire a new architect and downsize the building and exhibit space. By September 30, 1980, schematic designs were approved and the architects, Schaefer and Associates of Wichita, were instructed to proceed with design development documents. The planning and subsequent construction process moved forward, and the Kansas Museum of History was virtually complete by late 1983. In the meantime, museum staff prepared for a monu-

mental task—moving some seventy-seven thousand museum artifacts from the Memorial Building into the new facility. This job was successfully accomplished during the winter of 1983–1984, and the formal dedication ceremonies were held on June 24, 1984.²³ Since the completion of its main gallery exhibits in 1989, the museum has developed numerous special exhibits and has greatly expanded its educational programming. By the early 1990s it was drawing approximately 140,000 visitors a year.

While the museum staff was still settling into its new home, the Society embarked upon some significant administrative changes. In 1988 two administrators and longtime staff members retired. Robert W. Richmond, assistant executive director and former state archivist, left on February 17, and Executive Director Joe Snell relinquished his post on May 17. Dr. Ramon Powers became the tenth secretary, or director, of the Kansas State Historical Society following his election by the Society's executive committee. Powers, a respected historian and writer, had worked for many years with Legislative Research. Dr. David A. Haury subsequently was hired as assistant director; he came to the Society from Newton, where he was director of Bethel College's Mennonite Library and Archives.

During the early years of Powers' administration, the institution's administrative structure was reorganized, with all the agency's various departments being consolidated into five divisions in addition to administration: Historic Sites, Cultural Resources, Education/Outreach, Library and Archives, and Kansas Museum of History. The adjustment process was sometimes stressful, but the new divisions, directed by Terry Marmet, Dick



21. Langsdorf, "The First Hundred Years," 410, 412.

22. Hunt would see the Kansas Museum of History through to completion; the main exhibit gallery was finished in four phases, the last phase opening in January 1989. The following year he resigned his position with the Society and was succeeded by Robert J. Keckeisen, former assistant museum director.

23. Mary W. Madden and Maureen A. Hart, "Museum Moves, Past and Present," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 7 (Spring 1984): 46; see also "Building the Kansas Museum of History," *ibid.*, 40, and Mark A. Hunt, "The Kansas Museum of History: A Functional Design for the Future," *ibid.*, 34.

Pankratz, Jennie Chinn, Pat Michaelis, and Bob Keck-eisen, respectively, continued to carry out their traditional responsibilities and launch new programs.

The Historic Sites Division inaugurated a new management plan for state-owned historic properties, with a goal to protect and develop significant historic resources in Kansas in the most effective and efficient manner possible. In the fall of 1990 the division, with assistance from archeology and museum staff, redesigned the exhibits at the Pawnee Indian Village and launched a major project for the stabilization and ultimate restoration of Lecompton's Constitution Hall, which opened to the public in June 1995. Financial pressures and other considerations forced the Society to begin relinquishing control of a few of its properties, most notably the boyhood home of General Frederick Funston near Iola, but several other sites have experienced major rehabilitation and/or reinterpretation projects. Included are Hollenberg Pony Express Station near Hanover, Mine Creek Civil War Battlefield in Linn County, Adair Cabin at Osawatomie's John Brown Museum, Cottonwood Ranch in Sheridan County, Fort Hays, and the Native American Heritage Museum (formerly Iowa, Sac and Fox Mission) at Highland. In excess of two hundred thousand people visit the Society's historic sites every year.

The Cultural Resources Division combined the former departments of archeology and historic preservation. One of division's more significant involvements began in 1989 with the passage of the Kansas Unmarked Burial Protection Act. The bill designates the state archeologist as chair of the Unmarked Burial Sites Preservation Board and mandates a registry of all known unmarked burial sites; the board oversees real or potential disturbances and provides for consultation with descendants for the repatriation and reburial of human remains whenever possible. The law also prohibits the private ownership or display of all human remains without the board's permission.

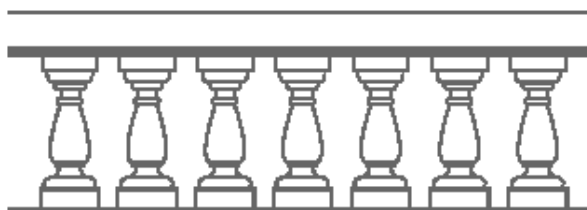
A major accomplishment of the historic preservation office in 1990 and 1991 was the implementation of the Heritage Trust Fund program. The trust fund law provides for the awarding of preservation grants to the owners of properties listed on the state or national registers of historic places. The program is financed by a mortgage tax, which allows the Society to award approximately five hundred thousand dollars in grants each year.

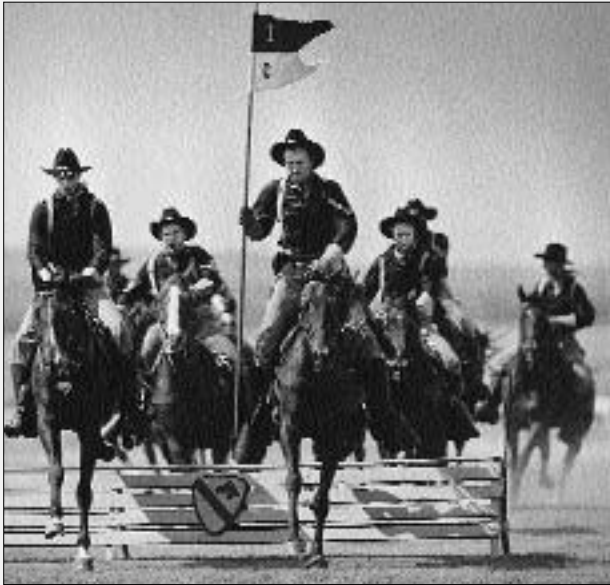
Archeology continued its highly successful and popular Kansas Archeology Training Program in cooperation with the Kansas Anthropological Association. Nearly two hundred volunteers participated

in the department's twentieth annual training program and dig near Arkansas City in June 1994. Archeological investigations by Society staff and trained volunteers also have been an integral part of the various historic site reinterpretation projects, and the growth of contract archeology in conjunction with highway and levee projects is noteworthy. During the summer of 1995, for example, sixty-five people were employed for an Arkansas City project—the largest ever for the state of Kansas.

“With the creation of the new Education/Outreach Division,” wrote Secretary Powers in the Society's 1991 *Annual Report*, “we are now able to focus attention on one of our fundamental missions: interpreting our state's history and educating Kansans about their heritage.” Toward that end the staff has revamped old programs and initiated new ones. Particularly well received are its teacher training seminars, museum tours and summer workshops, folk arts programming, traveling exhibits service, traveling resource trunks, and state History Day program.

The Society's publications program, which was incorporated into the newly organized Education/Outreach Division in 1990, remained vital with the inauguration of the Images series in the late 1980s. The third and final volume in that series, published





The Society acquired its first historic site, Pawnee Indian Village in Republic County, in 1901. Today the Historic Sites Division operates fifteen sites across the state, including Fort Hays (above), and the Kaw Indian Mission in Council Grove (above right).



In the 1960s the Society began expanding its archeological and historic preservation programs. The annual Archeological Training Program and dig (right) and the Heritage Trust Fund, which offers financial assistance for the preservation of historic structures (below), are among the many programs of the archeology and historic preservation offices. In 1989 these departments combined to form the Cultural Resources Division.

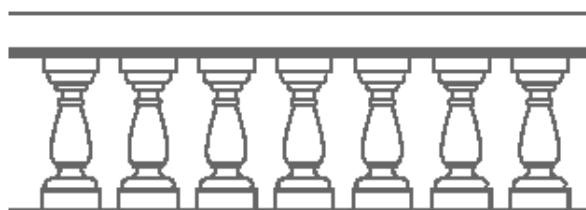


in 1991, was *Indians of Kansas: The Euro-American Invasion and Conquest of Indian Kansas*, written by Wichita State University historian and former Society president William E. Unrau. *Kansas History*, which had replaced the *Kansas Historical Quarterly* under the editorship of Forrest R. Blackburn in 1978, underwent some additional format changes, and in February 1993 the Society's publications office debuted *Kansas Heritage*, an all new quarterly publication focusing on popular history and designed for a general audience. This award-winning publication superseded the organization's newsletter, *The Mirror*, which had been published six times a year since 1954.

On December 31, 1991, State Archivist Eugene D. Decker retired, and Dr. Patricia A. Michaelis, formerly curator of manuscripts, was appointed head of a reorganized Library and Archives Division, which includes maps, manuscripts, library, state archives, photography, and microfilm. The division began the slow and costly process of bringing its research collections into the computer age and cautiously embarked upon a deaccessioning program under authority granted by an act of the 1991 legislature.²⁴ With funding from the Interlibrary Loan Development Program of the Kansas Library Network Board, staff prepared a 450-page guide to its forty-thousand-roll microfilm collection and expanded its interlibrary loan program to include newspapers and censuses on microfilm, in addition to manuscripts that had been available previously. This service has proven extremely popular with and valuable to professional and amateur researchers across the country.

The Kansas legislature of 1957 had approved statutory authority for a state records center but waited thirty-five years before appropriating funds. Governor Joan Finney approved the legislature's appropriation for almost \$147,000 to establish this center. A

suitable site was located in North Topeka, and Cynthia Shively was named state records manager, in charge of the new records management center which opened in December 1992. Semi-active and inactive records of state agencies are stored here until scheduled retention periods have passed. They may then be destroyed or transferred to the archives for continued preservation. By the summer of 1995 the center was nearly filled with more than twenty-four thousand cubic feet of documents.

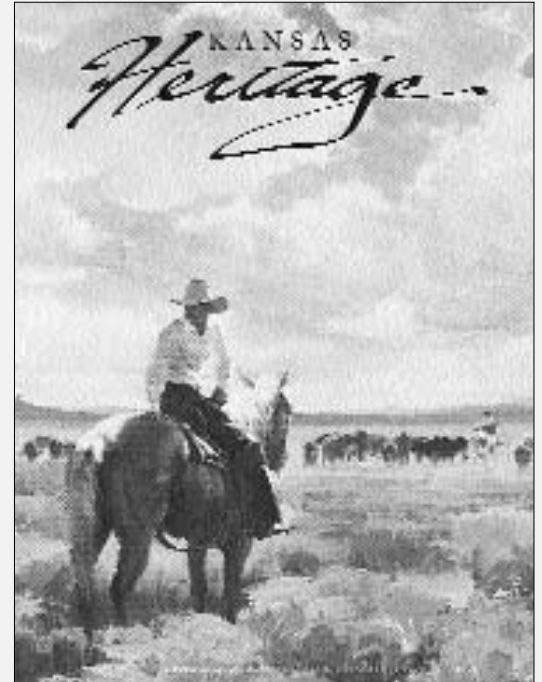
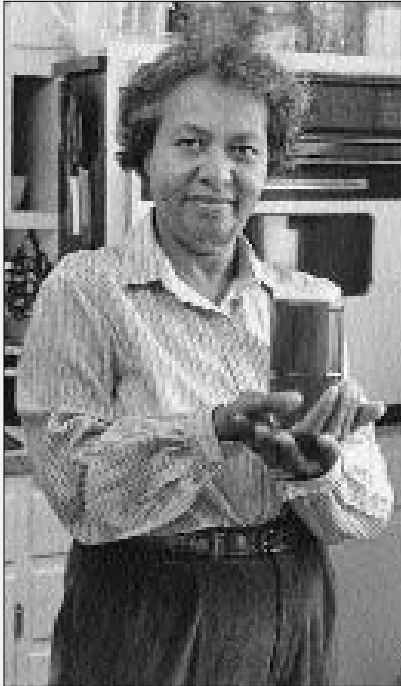


The Kansas Museum of History in recent years also underwent some significant, albeit less visible, organizational changes. For

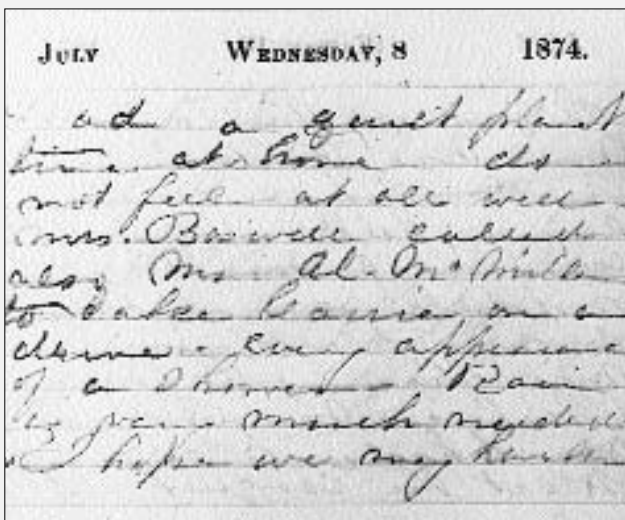
the museum's tens of thousands of annual visitors, however, the only obvious change has involved the special exhibits gallery and educational programming. Whereas prior to the completion of the main gallery the museum relied heavily on rental shows, during the early 1990s, museum staff, with assistance from other Society personnel, have created most of the displays that have filled the special exhibits space. Included in this list of original creations are *Textile Diaries: Kansas Quilt Memoirs*, based on the work accomplished by the Kansas Quilt Project; *Gifts From Wah Sho Shah and the Osage World*, featuring a collection of Osage Indian artifacts donated by Sylvester J. Tinker; *Back the Attack — Uncle Sam Wants You! Government Posters from World War II*, which opened on December 7, 1991; *The Summer of '93: Kansas and the World's Columbian Exposition*, winner of a 1994 Award of Merit from the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH); and *How Kansas Gave Texas the Boot*, a 1994–1995 show that focused on the origins and development of the cowboy boot. The boot exhibit also was a recipient of an AASLH Award of Merit.²⁵

24. The 1991 amendment to S.S.A. 75–2701 and 2704 applied to all Society collections and thus deaccessioning has been a vital issue for archeology and museum staff as well.

25. Many of these exhibits have given rise to articles or other significant publications; see, for example, Mary W. Madden, "Textile Diaries: Kansas Quilt Memories," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 13 (Spring 1990), a special issue that served as a catalog for the exhibit; Diane L. Good, *Images in Osage: An Illustrated Guide to the Sylvester J. Tinker Col-*



The Education/Outreach Division was formed in 1990 to bring history to individuals across the state and to educate Kansans about their heritage. Included in this division's many services for adults and children is the popular folk arts program (above left and center). Education/Outreach also administers the publications program, which includes the quarterly magazine *Kansas Heritage* (above right) and journal *Kansas History*.



The Library and Archives Division was organized in 1991 to combine the library, manuscripts, maps, photographs, state archives, and microfilm departments. Pictured above are but two examples of its vast and varied holdings: an 1874 diary (left) and a bond from the extensive Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway collection (right).

The most publicly visible change during the past few years has been the construction of the recently completed research facility and the opening of the Kansas History Center. Events leading to this outcome began when the 1988 legislature appropriated nearly eight million dollars for a new Center for Historical Research. At the time the plan was to occupy the new structure by spring or summer 1991. Planning had not been completed, however, when the initial appropriation was made, and the allocation subsequently was deferred by three successive legislatures due to the limited state of financial resources. The 1992 legislature again made funds available to build a new research facility adjacent to the Kansas Museum of History. Unfortunately the money ultimately appropriated was less than anticipated and, as with the museum a decade earlier, the building had to be downsized. Nevertheless, ground was broken in July 1993, and two years later, as the building neared completion, the research collections and offices that had occupied the corner of Tenth and Jackson for most of this century began their westward journey.

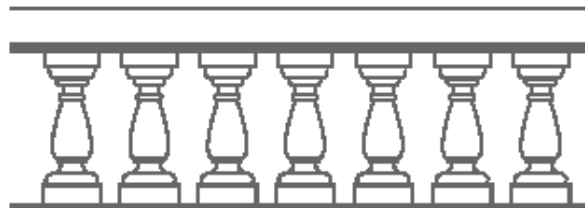
lection (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1991); Anne Marvin, "The Spirit of Kansas' Goes to the Fair," *Kansas Heritage* 1 (Summer 1993): 18–22; Barbara Brackman, "Legend Posing as History: Hyer, Justin, and the Origin of the Cowboy Boot," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 18 (Spring 1995): 34–47; and Brackman, "How Kansas Gave Texas the Boot," *Kansas Heritage* 2 (Autumn 1994): 34–38.

Although the museum and research facility are the most imposing features of the Kansas History Center, two other structures have proven quite popular and useful, especially for education programming. The Stach School, with its play *I Have Stood at the Open Door* and its Rural School Days program, opened in the early 1990s, and in May 1995 the Potawatomi Mission, rehabilitated as the Koch Industries Education Center, was dedicated. The latter

project was financed by a \$550,000 donation from Koch Industries, Inc.

The definitive history of the Kansas State Historical Society whose past has been so closely linked with the old Memorial

Building, has yet to be written. The recent past, of course, is especially difficult for the historian to assess, but at this juncture we can say that change during the late 1980s and early 1990s has ushered in a period of great anticipation at the Society. Although many staff and patrons regret vacating the marble halls at Tenth and Jackson, the Memorial Building imposed limitations on the Society's ability to collect and preserve the records of the past and to enhance its public services. As the Society focuses on extending its outreach across the state, the new and expanded Kansas History Center, which reunites all the Society's Topeka-based operations, should facilitate that process. The new chapter that began with the 1995 move into the new facility provides great opportunities for combining the best of a great old tradition with the exciting demands of the future.





In recent years the Kansas Museum of History has presented a number of fine exhibits in its special exhibits gallery. Among these are Back the Attack--Uncle Sam Wants You! Government Posters from World War II (above left) and How Kansas Gave Texas the Boot (above), which received a 1995 Award of Merit from the American Association for State and Local History.



The new Kansas History Center, which opened in October 1995, comprises the Kansas Museum of History, the new Center for Historical Research, the Koch Industries Education Center in the Potawatomi Mission, and the Stach School (left), a historic one-room schoolhouse.