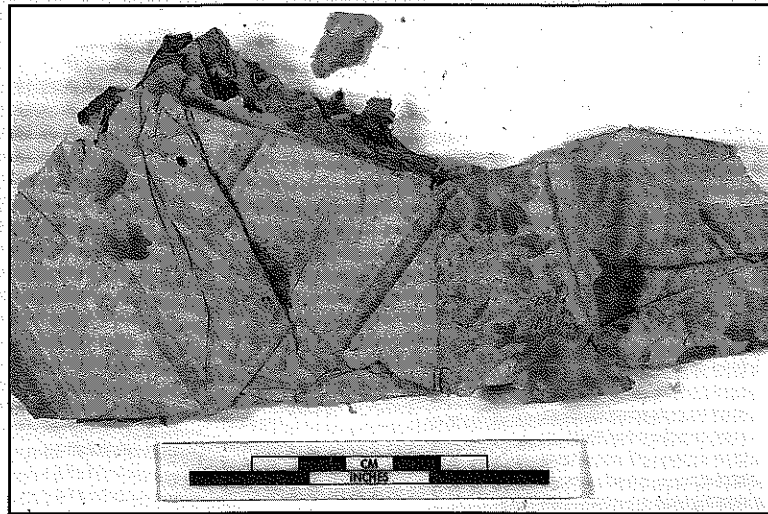


A Home Away From Home

Among the most vulnerable parts of a building is, predictably, the wallpaper. Imagine my surprise upon opening a box of material excavated at Fort Hays and discovering a small treasure trove of that decorative medium!

Recall that Fort Hays was established as Fort Fletcher in 1865 and, after being flooded out, was rebuilt as Fort Hays in 1867. It served as a station for army troops protecting the trails west until 1889. My volunteer job at the Kansas State Historical Society is in the archeology laboratory, supervised by Christine Garst who lets me search through vast amounts of material dug up at the fort. The idea is to find items to write about in a way that will intrigue the lay reader. This box of wallpaper fragments provided such an opportunity.

Human beings have an innate need to decorate their surroundings, especially their walls. In very early days, these decorations were tapestries that not only were attractive, but also helped keep out the cold. However, they were expensive and not readily available



Professionally prepared paper has green and brown stripes with light brown dots and a row of lovely red pentagonal flowers.

to everyone. Sometime in the early 1500s, a new form of wall art appeared. At first, document-sized paper sheets were block printed, their edges pasted together to form larger sheets, and then those sheets were affixed to cloth backing that in turn was tacked to the wall. Could this be the origin of the term "hanging wallpaper?"

This paper often imitated the designs on tapestries and as time went on reflected the various artistic tastes of the day.

By the mid 1850s, "paper staining," as wallpaper manufacturing was called, had improved remarkably through mechanization. Mass production enabled many more people to enjoy the beauty of the product. One tantalizing type of design was referred to as "pin pattern." Its purpose was to conceal fly specks!

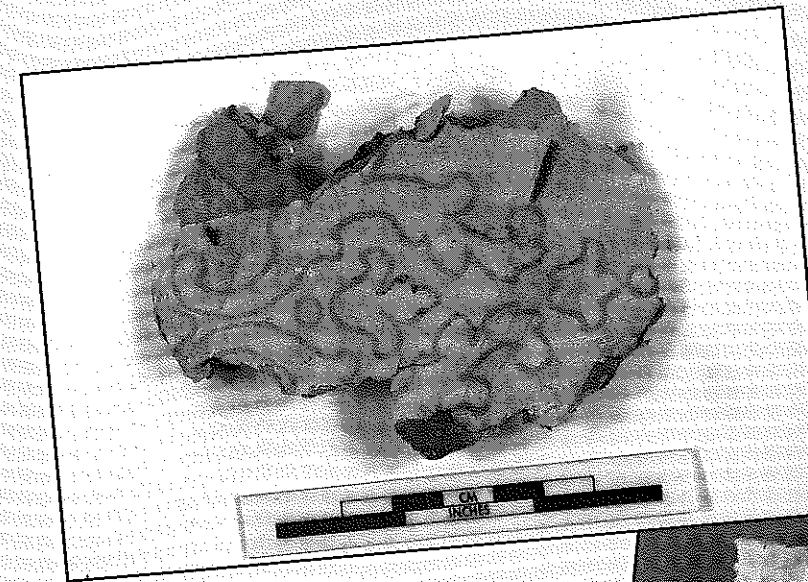
In America, style trends followed those in Britain, and on the western frontier, they followed those on the east coast, albeit twenty or so years later. There were times when not only walls, but also ceilings were papered. A very popular mode of using the paper was as borders or friezes. Dining rooms were traditionally very somber, while parlors were airier to promote easy conversation.

A Touch of Home on Officers' Row

About 80 feet behind house number six on Officers' Row at Fort Hays was a depression that may have been a pit toilet. It later had been used as a refuse dump, and that is where the few remnants of paper were found. It is amazing that they survived this last 130 years or so.

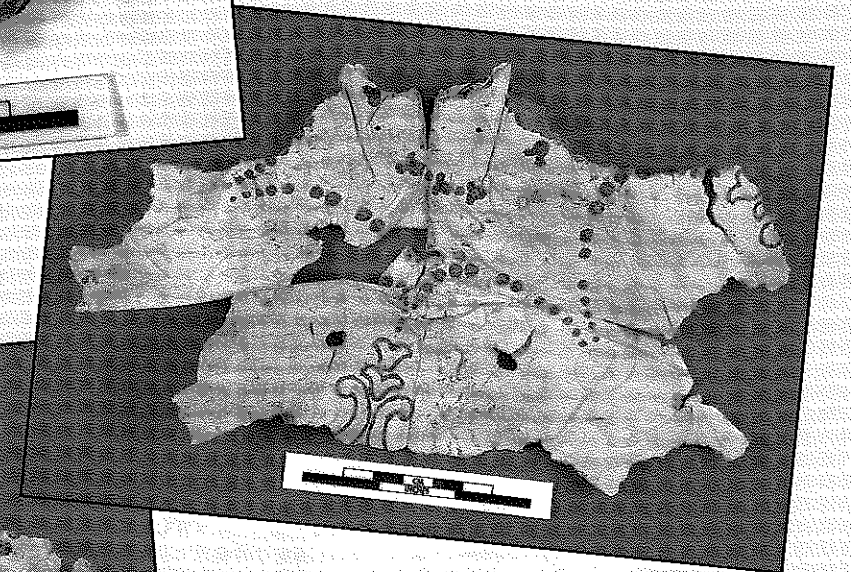
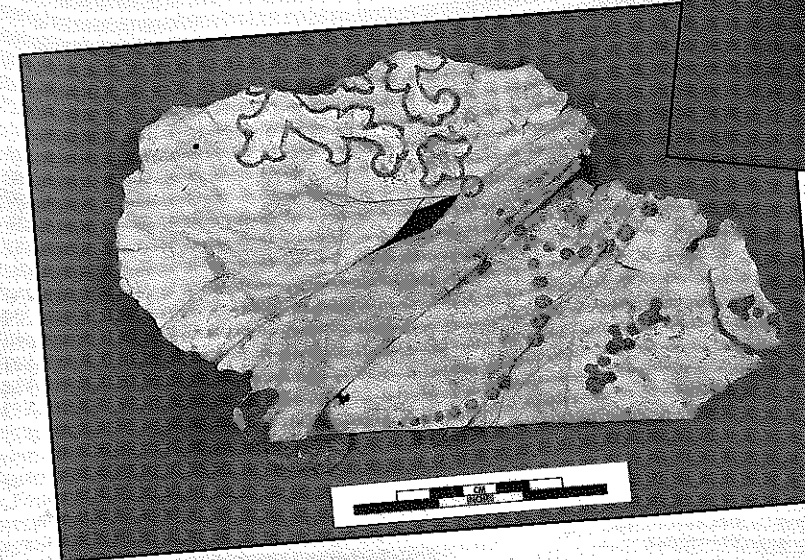
There seem to be two types. One specimen is clearly commercially produced, featuring even stripes of dark green and black and orderly rows of dots and pretty little red pentagonal blossoms. A tiny bit of printing is visible on one corner. Although it is certainly incomplete, what can be seen reads: on the first line, "... American ...;" on the second line, "... most magnificent ...;" on the third line, "... e feet big ...;" and on the fourth line, "... flowers ...". This piece is about 5 by 7 inches.

The second type is even more fascinating because it is



Hand-decorated wallpaper circa 1880 features classical, stylized floral designs, outlined in black and carefully filled in with bright yellow. Rows of small dots enhance the design.

(Background) Officers' Row at Fort Hays, looking west, in 1873.



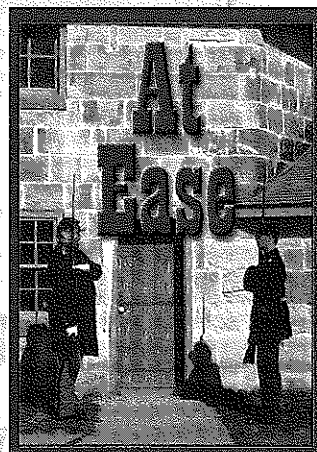
This article was prepared by Marshall Clark, a KSHS Archeology Lab volunteer, and Christine Garst, KSHS Archeology Lab supervisor and staff archeologist.

clearly hand decorated. There are several fragments of it, ranging from the largest of about 10 by 5 inches on down. There are carefully arranged patterns of stylized "fleurs," outlined in black but colored in with bright yellow. These designs are enhanced by various rows of dark dots in ascending or descending sizes. With a little imagination, it is easy to picture a most attractive and artistic scheme and to recognize the tremendous amount of time and labor that went into the paper's creation.

It is impossible to know if these two papers came from two different rooms or if they represent two layers of decoration. They could easily have come from two different houses in Offi-

cers' Row. What they do indicate without doubt is that frontier officers' wives tried their very best to make life more bearable by bringing a little of their former family homes to these temporary quarters. We'll never know if this army wife did the artwork herself or if she employed one of the itinerant artists who traveled the countryside painting portraits.

Artifacts tell the archeologist many interesting and important things from scientific and historical points of view, but these human stories add such a vital perspective. In my own thoughts, I am sure that this army wife of long ago brought her officer husband a delightful touch of home away from home.



Daily Life at Historic Fort Hays