



Speaking of Kansas

WASHBURN CENTER FOR KANSAS STUDIES

Isern heads history project

By Tom Isern

My wife Lotte and I arrived in Topeka in late January for me to begin work on the Washburn Kansas History Project. The eventual goal of this project--as envisioned by the Center for Kansas studies and KTWU is to produce a new, comprehensive treatment of Kansas history in a television series of some thirty half-hour episodes. More immediately, my tasks to accomplish before Memorial Day are to outline the whole series, do research on all episodes and outline them, and produce a pilot episode.

The pilot will be: "Their Armor Glittered," a new look at exploration in Kansas that not only goes over the well-known trails but also answers such riveting questions as, "Who stole Professor Udden's chain mail?"

The television series, we project, will be the core of a new college course in Kansas history to be delivered via the World Wide Web.

Steering groups of faculty, administrators, and KTWU staff are providing support and guidance for my work. In addition, the

Kansas State Historical Society has been wonderfully hospitable, providing me with working space at the Kansas History Center and, more importantly, the assistance and advice of staff.

I've set up a "Construction Site" on the World Wide Web to talk about this enterprise. The location

on the Web is: <http://rrnet.com/~plains/construction/>

Pursuers of this site will learn that we are asking people across the state to provide guidance and counsel about the composition of the Kansas history series. More specifically, we're asking people the following questions:

What topics or themes in Kansas history do you think have been slighted in the past, and should come to light in this new treatment?

What are the Kansas diamonds we should be sure to include? Tell us about your favorite photographs, documents, places, or people to enrich the production.

This is wonderful work and I look forward to visiting with Kansans about it. ***

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1997-1998 Fellows
Tom Averill, English
Lyle Baker, education
Barbara Burgess, mass media
Dean Corwin, Mabee Library
Bob Fidler, KTWU
Tim Fry, education
Marilyn Geiger, history
Daniel Harden, education
Ted Heim, criminal justice
Rob Hull, business
Reinhild Janzen, art
Sara Keckeisen, bookstore
Jim Kelley, KTWU
J. Karen Ray, dean CAS
Michele Reid, Mabee Library
Tom Schmiedeler, geography
Bradley Siebert, English
Loran Smith, political science
Glenda Taylor, art
Sara Tucker, history
David Van Cleaf, education
Ron Wasserstein, assoc. VPAA
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.

<http://www.washburn.edu.cks>



"Good Land" receives praises

By Bruce Bair,
Author

What's behind publication of a book, and what prompts a writer to write a book in the first place? Bruce Bair, whose book "Good Land" was published in March 1987 by Steerforth Press of S. Royalton, Vt., spoke on those topics on Kansas Day. He had been invited to the University by the Center for Kansas Studies.

During his talk, Bair described writing "Good Land" as something he almost had to do. He said he had worked as a journalist for almost 15 years, and had reached the burnout point where he either had to take his writing further, or settle for being a hack for the rest of his life. Bair did love journalism, however, as several of his stories of his mostly sideways career illustrated.

Bair did quit journalism and described a subsequent six years struggling for publication. Most of his efforts went nowhere until he finished a memoir originally called "The Farm." His work prior to that gave his friends headaches, he said. But when he rushed off sample chapters and synopses of "The Farm," agents and publishers began cautiously responding.

But from that point, Bair found himself involved in a story so familiar to writers that among them it is hardly worth telling. He signed with an agent who peddled the book for a year without success. He received glowing letters from New York publishers about the book, but his name was misspelled. At last, the agent informed Bair he would no longer represent him.

Again, Bair began sending out sample chapters, and got several responses from the first batch, most notably, a response from Steerforth which eventually resulted in the renaming of the book to "Good Land" and subsequent publication. Still, after inking the contract, it was more than a year and a final scare or two before Bair held a copy of "Good Land" in his hands. The first time he did so, he reported, he almost bawled.

Then he had to face the critics, who praised the book, or damned it. The final and most important critic, reported Bair, was his father, a central character in the book.

"He read it four times," said Bair, "and told my mother if his own son hadn't written it, he would think it was the best book he'd ever read."

(Bruce Bair delivered the Center's Kansas Day lecture at Washburn.)

Courses offered for the fall 1998 semester

Students have the opportunity in the fall to enroll in three courses that are part of the minor in Kansas Studies. IS 199 Kansas Character/Characters, is a new course that will be team taught by Tom Averill, professor of English, Sara Tucker, professor of history, and J. Karen Ray, Dean of the college of Arts and Sciences. This class will meet on Mondays from 1 to 3:40 p.m.

GG 304 Kansas Geography will be taught by Tom Schmiedeler, and the class will meet on Monday and Wednesday from 1 to 2:15 p.m.

PO 107 State and Local Government will be taught by Loren Smith at MWF 10 and TR 1-2:15.

IS 199 Kansas Character/Characters, also cross listed as HI 200 and EN 199, is a new interdisciplinary course that focuses on the history and culture of Kansas and the people who have shaped the state.

Students will spend the first third of the semester studying the character of Kansas through reading and lecture. By the end of this period, students will choose for further study a time period, an issue and a researchable Kansan who represents that period/issue.

Students will spend the second third of the semester learning from further readings, guest speakers and other resource people. The student choices of Kansas characters will dictate what particular people, periods and issues the class discusses.

Students will spend the third part of the semester researching and becoming their Kansas character of choice, each student being mentored in research and writing towards creating either a 15 - 20 minute performance of the character in costume, or creating a web site, with photographs and text, much like a performance--on the character to be added to the Center for Kansas Studies Home Page.



Springtime in Kansas; a beautiful sight



It will soon be spring in Kansas; the season of birth and rebirth. There will be green plants and clear, sparkling waters, blue skies with a warm, yellow sun. Soft breezes will caress our state and all the life which it supports, the new and old. This is real and tangible, but there is another reality as well. A reality that mocks the one we all hold to be the real Kansas, a reality that is also part of the mosaic that is life today in the modern, technological world in which we all work and live. A world that is also the home to our dreams, our futures, our children.

What is this other springtime Kansas? Is not the first description of Kansas valid? Of course, but is it the complete picture? We must look behind the superficial images. What are the forces which allow this view of Kansas that we see at first glance? Springtime in Kansas is the color green of new growth from agricultural crops in rural areas to the lawns of golf courses and residences in urban areas. The question we should ask is what drives this new plant life. It is not the rich soil that our ancestors knew; most of that has been removed by wind and water erosion. Today's growth is not so much based on a healthy environment as on artificial life support based on chemical supplementation without which most of modern Kansas could not compete. Our lawns are not based on sound biological

principles which require some effort and thought, but rather on fertilizers and pesticides which give us the illusion of a healthy environment while asking nothing of us but spending some money.

*“Should we
expect
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Should our
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These chemicals do enough harm on their own in what is left of the soil interfering with the natural restoration of a healthy soil, but they do not stay there. They leach out of the soil and enter the water supplies, both the surface waters and ground water, sources of the water we drink. They are chemicals not easily removed by the water treatment facilities that provide our water. They are a main reason why thousands of Kansans now drink bottled or filtered water. Of course one can argue that they provide the economic incentive for one of

Kansas's newer industries, the bottled water sector of our economy. Our water supply is often not what it first appears. Our river waters are often not even clear because of the silt that is carried by the water, soil that should be on our land, but instead is in our rivers along with the contaminants it contains.

Blue skies suggest clean air and Kansas does have cleaner air than many areas in the country, but cleaner air does not mean clean air. All one has to do is look at the horizon shortly after sunrise following a cold, still night to see pollution hanging in the air. Even when the air looks clean, it is often contaminated with pollutants from coal fired plants to the west which will result in acid precipitation.

Kansas is a beautiful state and environmentally better than many states, but looks are not everything. The educated Kansan looks beneath the illusion of an environmentally clean state and sees that there is work to be done. Work must be done if we are to provide our children a cleaner and healthier state than we currently have. The greens and blues of a relatively unpolluted Kansas must be more than a partial truth. Should we expect anything less? Should our children expect anything less from their parents? *

*By Dr. Thomas Wolf,
professor of biology*

1998 SPECIAL EXHIBITS

At Mabee Library

Mabee Library and the Center for Kansas Studies will be hosting several Kansas History Museum travelling exhibits during the spring and summer semesters. Each exhibit highlights a Kansas or U.S. history topic through photos and text.

- ◆ During January and February we honored Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday and Black History Month with an exhibit entitled "Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement." On March 19, we invited former WU Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dr. C. Robert Haywood, to talk about his book, "A funny place, no fences: teenagers views of Kansas, 1867-1900" at a Mabee Library Lecture. The coordinating History Museum exhibit was "Growing Up in Kansas, 1880-1940."
- ◆ In April, the exhibit "I Born Again in America: Observations on a More Diverse Nation," which explores the multicultural nature of America while focusing on Garden City, Kan., will coordinate nicely with Washburn's Multicultural Week.
- ◆ The final exhibit, "Kansas Tornado" will be at the library during May and part of June to remind us of tornado season and the 32nd anniversary of the June 8, 1966 tornado which severely damaged the Washburn campus and much of Topeka.

Please look for these special exhibits when you return to campus in 1998.

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