

## SPEAKING OF KANSAS

Washburn Center for  
Kansas Studies  
1700 College  
Topeka, KS 66621  
(785-231-1010 xt. 1989  
Director: Bill Wagnon

### 1998-99 Fellows:

Tom Averill, English  
Barbara Burgess, Mass Media  
Virgil Dean, History  
Bob Fidler, KTWU  
Amy Fleury, English  
Marilyn Geiger, History  
Daniel Harden, Education  
Rob Hull, Business  
Reinhild Janzen, Art  
Bruce Mactavish, History  
J. Karen Ray, English  
Michele Reid, Mabee Lib.  
Tom Schmiedeler, Geography  
Wayne Sheley, VPAA  
Bradley Siebert, English  
Loran Smith, Political Science  
Glenda Taylor, Art  
Sara Tucker, History  
Bill Wagnon, History  
Tom Wolf, Biology



Sunflower

The Fellows of the Center for Kansas Studies continued their examination of Kansas, its history and culture. The various programs sponsored by the Center are described herein. Each semester, courses on Kansas topics and contributing to a minor in Kansas Studies were scheduled. During the fall, they were: Kansas Geography by Schmiedeler; state and local government by Smith; Kansas Birds by Ramberg; Kansas Characters by Ray, Averill and Tucker. In the spring, they were Kansas literature by Averill; Kansas folklore by Averill and Jennie Chinn; state and local government by Smith. Students continue to complete a minor in Kansas Studies, with Ross E. Rademacker graduating this spring.

The Center's online website aims at being a gateway to all possible Kansas studies resources, from old-fashioned print and platform speaking, through somewhat more modern film and video, to the currently exploding world of online digital. Among the things you will see when you get there are:

- *Our mission statement*
- *Profiles on each of the Center Fellows*
- *Information of what it takes to do a Kansas Studies minor, and what Kansas-related WU courses are being offered Fall 1999*
- *Past Center newsletters*
- *Links to Kansas-related WWW sites*
- *Other lists on things such as Kansas literature, history, etc. books currently in print and Kansas in the movies.*

Come visit us online at <http://www.washburn.edu/reference/zzcwcks/cks.html> to see what we do have, and please do send in suggestions for what else we should have online.

## TV KANSAS

The Center for Kansas Studies is continuing its leadership in promoting the study of Kansas, its culture, its ecology and its history, through updating and expanding the educational television program on Kansas history.

Envisioned is a 30-part series to be called KANSAS, written and narrated by Tom Isern, a Kansas native and scholar of the state's history. The programs are designed to be of general public interest and telecast on a recurring basis by KTWU-TV. A published reader designed for the general audience will supplement the television series and be distributed widely across the state.

The television series will also serve as a text for a university level course in Kansas history and be amplified by a published reader focused on the academic nature of the series for university credit at Washburn. The course will be sustained by Internet access that enhances traditional campus classroom instruction and provides distance learning capabilities, where students may interact with the resources, each other and instructors on the World Wide Web.

Finally, the program's supporting documentation and complementary resources will be available to teachers, independent scholars and students of Kansas via the Internet. As Kansas schools struggle to carry out new mandates to teach Kansas history, teachers will have ready access to resource materials and model units for each developmental level. This Internet context will provide an infinitely expandable and renewable archive to facilitate the developing needs of

classroom instruction across the state.

Ongoing research for the program is underwritten by the Center and a pilot half-hour program on exploration in Kansas has been produced and aired over KTWU. Isern maintains a "construction site" on the Web, publicly accessible at <http://rrnet.com/~plains/construction>.

To complete the television series, open the web site and produce the readers, the university is seeking \$500,000. To assure that the series and supporting elements remain current and relevant, the university seeks an additional \$500,000 as an endowment.

*Bill Wagnon*

---

---

## SUMMER PAST & PRESENT

During the summer of 1998, the Kansas State Historical Society with Washburn's Center for Kansas Studies conducted yet another successful seminar for teachers, "At Peace and At War: Kansas During the 1940s." This Kansas history seminar was held during the week of July 13-17 at the historical society and on the WU campus. Scholar presenters and participants explored the major political, social, economic and cultural issues confronting the state and nation during the 1940s, and discovered how Kansans navigated from peace and depression to war and prosperity and then back to peace, and how they coped with the dramatic changes that confronted them in the immediate postwar years. An impressive lineup of scholars, including Center Fellows Bill Wagnon and Sara Tucker, helped the participants better understand the issues and

explore available resource material. Participants also were given a chance to "surf the web" where they found many valuable resources related to teaching about this crucial decade.

The Summer 1999 seminar, "Technology in Teaching: Focus on African American History in Kansas," sponsored by the KSHS and the Center will focus on three important aspects of the African American experience in Kansas: the "Exodus," or migration of blacks to Kansas during Reconstruction; daily life and labor in the African American community; and segregation in "free" Kansas, before and after Brown. Our objective is to familiarize participants with the most relevant historical issues and available primary and secondary resources. To help us accomplish these things, several speakers have been scheduled: Kenneth M. Hamilton, associate professor of history and the director of the Ethnic Studies Program, Southern Methodist University, will address issues related to black migration, which in part is the subject of his first book, *Black Towns and Profit: Promotion and Development in the Trans-Appalachian West, 1877-1915*. Relevant issues pertaining to "Daily Life and Labor" will be addressed by Center Fellow Tom Schmiedeler and David Katzman, professor of history, University of Kansas. Finally, Cheryl Brown-Henderson of Topeka's Brown Foundation, and Rusty Monhollon, adjunct assistant professor of history, Washburn University, will explore segregation in Kansas before and after the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.

The effective use of the Internet for both research and instruction will be a major

component of the seminar. Sara Tucker, Center Fellow, will be working closely with coordinator Diane Good of the KSHS to provide the teacher participants with a meaningful experience in this area.

*Virgil Dean*

---

## KANSAS FIELD TRIP

Chase County and the Flint Hills was the location for the second annual Geography of Kansas field trip held on October 10, 1998. In addition to the Kansas Geography class, approximately fifteen Washburn faculty and staff participated. A bright, relatively warm and windy day greeted us at the first stop--the new Tall Grass Prairie Preserve, originally the Z Bar Ranch, located just north of Strong City. Park Ranger Darren Long gave the group an hour-long, informative bus tour of part of the preserve including stops at selected ecological sites along the route.

We next visited the historic Chase County Courthouse, a French Renaissance-style building that today is supposedly the oldest working courthouse west of the Mississippi River. Highlights of the tour included climbing the walnut spiral staircase to the clock tower and viewing the 19<sup>th</sup>-century accoutrements of the county jail located in the basement. After the tour, course instructor and tour leader, Center Fellow Tom Schmiedeler discussed from the courthouse grounds variations in the town forms of Strong City, Cottonwood Falls, and Matfield Green--the next stop on the tour.

We reached Matfield Green after a scenic Flint Hills drive along highway 177 and were immediately served a late lunch by staff of the Land Institute's Rural Communities Studies

Program. The program is based in the town's former elementary school which, in addition to classrooms, has a kitchen and meeting facilities. While enjoying our lunch, Beverly Worster outlined the Land Institute's program to preserve rural communities. A resident of Matfield, Delbert Armstrong, concluded our visit with an entertaining tour of the village of Matfield during which he described the historical geography and folklife of Matfield.

In keeping with the idea of visiting a variety of geographical regions within a few hours drive of Topeka, the fall Kansas Geography Field Trip of 1999 will visit the glaciated region to the northeast of town. Tentative stops include the towns of Oskaloosa, Atchison and Leavenworth. Faculty and staff are encouraged to attend and to notify Schmiedeler of their interest as soon as possible after the start of the semester. The date of the next field trip will be officially announced then, but, as in the past, will be on a Saturday probably in early October.

*Tom Schmiedeler*

---

## KS CHARACTERS

Kansas Character/Kansas Characters was taught fall 1998 as a special topics, team-taught, interdisciplinary course with credit offered in English, History or Interdisciplinary Studies. Center Fellows Tom Averill (English), Sara Tucker (History), and Karen Ray (English) were the instructors. The purpose of the course was to give students an overview of Kansas history and culture, introduce them to primary research materials at the Kansas History Center, and guide them to produce an original

performance as a person from Kansas history or to create a website about a person from Kansas history.

The three instructors found the course exciting, fun, creative and challenging, as did the students. I think we can safely say that all of the students had a real learning experience. Most of them had not done original research before nor dealt with historical manuscripts. The time spent at the Kansas Historical Archives was rewarding for the students and all experienced the thrill of discovery.

The end products of the course were uniformly good, though some were better than others. We had performances of civic leader Martha Farnsworth, missionary Mabel Huggins, Senator James H. Lane, publisher Emanuel Haldeman-Julius, teacher Anna Webber, accused murderess Kate Bender, and baseball legend Walter Johnson. The web sites covered congresswoman Minnie Grinstead, pioneer Abbie Bright, Vice President Charles Curtis, painter Mary Huntoon, Kansas First Lady Sara Robinson, railroader and developer Cyrus K. Holliday, painter Elizabeth "Grandmother" Leyton, and psychiatrist Karl Menninger.

As is often the case, the instructors learned as much or more than the students, not just about Kansas history and culture, but about the challenges of technology, the overwhelming nature of our expectations, the thrill of victory, and the agony of near-defeat. We learned that we need to accelerate the beginning of the course so that students have more time for writing, conquering web technology and honing their performances. However, any shortcomings of the course were of our own

making. The students gained a great deal, not just in knowledge of Kansas history and culture, but in their own self-confidence as well. We are proud of them and proud of the final products --so proud that we can't wait to do it again--in a new, improved version fall 1999.

*J. Karen Ray*

---

---

## GORDON PARKS VISIT

On October 13, 1998, Gordon Parks visited Washburn University as a guest artist. Mr. Parks' visit was co-sponsored by the Center for Kansas Studies, among other entities. Mr. Parks gave a presentation in White Concert Hall on his life and work, including a discussion and slides of his photographs. The visual presentation was accompanied by his own musical compositions. While at Washburn, Gordon Parks was honored by the Kansas Arts Commission as the first recipient of the Kansas Distinguished Arts Award. An exhibit of Mr. Parks' photographs was on display in the Bible Room of the Bradbury Thompson Alumni Center during his visit and Mr. Parks held a press conference in the room prior to his public evening presentation.

A native son of Fort Scott, Kansas, Gordon Parks has distinguished himself as a photographer, composer, author,

choreographer, and producer and director of films. Mr. Parks currently lives and works in New York City. In his eighties, he continues as one of the country's most prolific artists. He is the recipient of thirty honorary degrees and more than 100 awards, including the National Medal of the Arts.

*Robert Soppelsa*

---

---

## MIDLIN, KANSAS: A STORY IN POSTCARDS

Center Fellow Tom Averill (English) put together this year's Kansas Day celebration at Washburn University. Artist Clark Britton, of Wichita State University, was a special guest and students, faculty and Center Fellows joined in.

The Kansas Day program came in conjunction with an art exhibit at Washburn's Memorial Union. Titled "Midlin, Kansas: A Story in Postcards," the exhibit consisted of 38 postcards from Midlin, Kansas, circa 1956. But don't look for Midlin on the map. Midlin, Kansas is entirely the creation of artist Britton, who drew the cards from memories of small towns across the United States. He sent his drawings to creative writer Tom Averill, who was inspired by their combination of nostalgia and sadness for the passing of the small town. Averill wrote messages from

Midlin citizens to favorite son Ken Johnson, who is star basketball player and student at Wichita University. Averill also wrote a short story, "Midlin, Kansas, Jump Shot," which accompanies the exhibit in a catalogue published by the Center for Kansas Studies. The story ends, as do the postcard messages, with Ken Johnson's decision not to come back to the small town.

For the Kansas Day program, Artist Britton talked about his creation of Midlin, writer Averill read his short story, and then guests were invited to "be" Ken Johnson's mother, father, sister, and fellow Midliners: they read the postcard messages they'd written to Ken. Afterwards, sheet cake decorated with sunflowers was served.

From Washburn, the Midlin exhibit travelled to Newman University, then to the Pretty Prairie Library, and is currently a part of the Kansas State Historical Society's Kansas Interpretive Travelling Exhibits Series (KITES). Sponsored by the Center for Kansas Studies, "Midlin, Kansas: A Story in Postcards," will continue to make a contribution to the cultural life of Kansas.

*Tom Averill*

---

---

## The All-True Travels and Adventures of Lidie Newton: A Novel by Jane Smiley

---

---

Some notes taken from a presentation by Sara Tucker to the Fall 1998 Civil War Roundtable in Lawrence, Kansas.

According to Nicholas Basbanes, in an article in the May 17, 1998 *Salt Lake Tribune*, Jane Smiley

on hearing about the Oklahoma City bombings, decided to write a book about ideology and violence in American history. She asked a friend when and where she should set it, and she was told Kansas, 1850s. The result became *The All-True Travels and Adventures of Lidie Newton: A Novel*, in which Smiley brings her prize-winning talents to the canvas that is Bleeding Kansas. *Lidie Newton* is a massive work, written deliberately in the style of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century fiction, narrated by its main character in first-person, with lots of description,

plot twists, and a large cast of characters. Some late 20<sup>th</sup>-century readers will almost certainly find this style challenging and wordy, but for lovers of Kansas history, it is a treasure trove. Based on what must have been a great deal of research, Smiley offers us a serious novel that brings alive Bleeding Kansas in all its facets.

The book begins with the decision of Lidie Harkness, a Quincy, Illinois girl to go out to what she calls "K.T" as the bride of dedicated New England abolitionist Thomas Newton. Lidie marries Thomas almost as a stranger and with very little real sense of the abolitionist cause, in order to get away from her own family and its traditional expectations of women. The Newtons soon settle near Lawrence and are then, for much of the book, intimately involved in the famous "Bleeding Kansas" action of 1855-56. John Brown and Charles and Sara Robinson all appear on stage, and the action includes many of the incidents of the bloody Wakarusa War along the Kansas-Missouri border.

But Smiley's book goes far beyond giving us a fictional retelling of well-known people and events. Smiley writes with a very modern eye to the details of ordinary daily life and, especially, to the realities of life for women. Thus, in her narration, Lidie gives us an up-close look at the relatively settled civilities of Quincy, Illinois; the astonishing stampede-like meals aboard a Mississippi River boat; the gritty realities and abolitionist ideals of frontier free-state Kansas; and, finally, the unsettlingly human yet inhuman world of Missouri border slaveholders. The pace is set by the parade of significant historical characters, events and conflicts, but much of the book's excellence lies in the colorful, small details it offers us about such things as what it really took to create fashionable women's dresses, the unblushing lies told by ad bills recruiting people to Kansas townsites (wonderful climate, rarely below 40 degrees fahrenheit), and an extremely funny vignette on advice given to the newly-married woman.

*Sara Tucker*

---

---

## RITCHIE HOUSE PROGRESSES

Preservation and interpretation of the historic Ritchie House by the Shawnee County Historical Society gains momentum in two important directions. Work in the house at 1116 SE Madison shows considerable progress, while planning for site interpretation and landscaping is underway.

The Center for Kansas Studies has lent its support to the Society's project in hosting the monthly meeting of the Steering Committee charged with developing the project and underwriting research into the early life of the house builder.

The stone house was built by John and Mary

Ritchie and represents the legacy of the generation of pioneers who founded Topeka and shaped its early directions. The house has been included on the registry of historical sites in Kansas, and the Society has engaged an experienced specialist, Daryl Nickel, to supervise the authentic preservation of the house.

Nickel has directed minute examinations of the house and documented each construction element. He has overseen restoration and repairs to correct the ravages of age affecting this unique artifact of early Kansas history. To assist him, Suzanne Regier, a graduate architect student at the University of Kansas, is recording structural details.

Improvements made since John Ritchie died in 1887 are being removed and the story of its construction and usages is being documented. Artifacts and examples of construction materials are identified and housed in an archive maintained in the adjoining Hale Ritchie House at 1118 SE Madison

The story is far from complete, but there is clear evidence that the vernacular limestone house has undergone numerous modifications throughout the years and combines materials and construction techniques in unusual ways, making the chronology of the house a challenge to discern. The material features of the house are being checked against archival resources recounting the early days of Topeka's history. Archeologists from North Dakota University have excavated the basement floor and selected exterior sites this spring in hopes of revealing sequential uses of the house and stages of development. Information learned from these sources will guide the ways in which the Society displays the house and grounds for the public.

Plans for the site development are in the preliminary stage. The Society has acquired not only the stone house, but the property on both sides with the goal of using the grounds to the north for gardens and the Hale Ritchie house on the south to support the museum. Questions of public access and final landscaping are hostage to the development of the Watertower Place improvement district by the city.

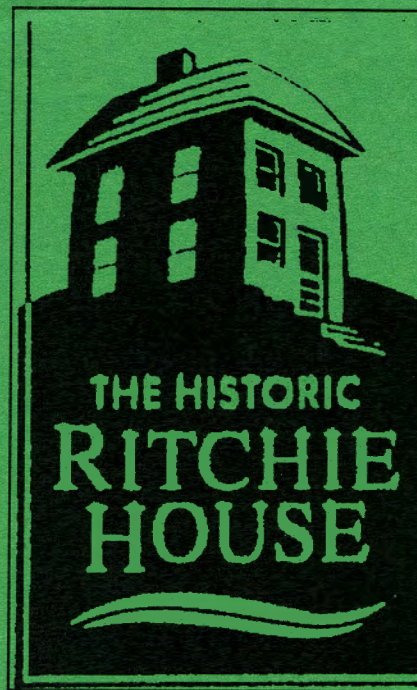
However, chances for linking the house site with the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site at the Monroe School by converting the disused Missouri-Pacific tracks into an historic trail are excellent. The steering committee is working with the city's Parks Department to develop a grant application for TEA-21 funds to extend the Shunga Trail park where the creek crosses the Missouri Pacific tracks into the downtown area. That pathway runs in front of the Monroe School and alongside the Ritchie House, creating an excellent physical link which carried out one arm of the "Freedom's Pathway" concept originally guiding the Ritchie House proposal and

developed under the auspices of the Center.

The Monroe Neighborhood Improvement Association has cooperated fully with the Society in promoting the project. Work on the exterior--roof replacement and wall restoration--is being paid for by a grant from the Community Development block grants funds. In a different vein, Washburn University students have volunteered both physical labor in the preservation process and archival research into the early events at the house.

This project is expected to be completed by 2004 and available to the public in celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Kansas Territory and founding of Topeka. It, together with the state capitol, symbol of the free character of Kansas, and the Monroe School, commemorating America's struggle over civil rights, provide a matrix of cultural artifacts that says much about who Kansans are. In supporting this project, the Center for Kansas Studies recognizes a debt to the work of Kansas pioneers and an obligation to future generations to keep that story alive.

*Bill Wagon*



LAWRENCE KS 66049-2720  
[Washburn University]

NON PROFIT  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
PERMIT NO. 689  
TOPEKA, KS

WASHBURN UNIVERSITY  
1700 SW College Avenue  
Topeka, Kansas 66621  
Department History