



MANHATTAN/RILEY COUNTY PRESERVATION ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

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A Message From Our President

Hello, Friends:

The annual meeting of the Manhattan/Riley County Preservation Alliance will be Thursday, September 14th, 7:00 p.m., at the depot. Joan Stickler and Allana Parker will present on the Marlett Homestead. Also, at the annual meeting, there will be a changing of the guard, a.k.a. election of new officers and board members. A periodic change in leadership is always good -- different people mean different ideas, strengths, weaknesses, and agendas. I intend to stay on as a director (if elected to do so), but I will pass the president's gavel to another.

I have learned much during my tenure on the board. Some of the most salient observations are described here.

1. I have learned that eminent domain is scary. The spirit of the law *may be* ensuring that what is best for the individual does not deny the group, such as a needed highway is not prevented by one farmer. But, from a preservation perspective, it seems the historic usually loses in favor of the new, wealthy corporation. While shopping places are nice and generate tax revenue for schools, in Manhattan, it has become impossible to *even imagine* where the 200 block of Moro or Fremont once were.

2. I have learned that zoning changes are both good and bad. Upward zoning is rarely a good thing for older, historic first neighborhoods, and spot zoning is worse. Downzoning, on the other hand, does seem to stop the deterioration of the neighborhood, even if it cannot fix all the problems in the older neighborhoods.

3. I have learned that without the environs protection, historical context is highly endangered. Once upon a time, properties within 500 feet of a registered structure were considered part of the historical context, and therefore, closely scrutinized when renovated or removed. Today, without environs protections, private owners can modify mid-century structures adjacent to historic parks in such a way that their character and context is unrecognizable. Today, being next door to a 100-year-old structure has minimal implication on renovation and modernization.

4. I have learned that you cannot legislate taste. There is no legal definition of "attractive" or "well maintained." These concepts are now articulated and specified. "Attractive" refers to inches wide, feet set back, and degrees of pitch. "Well maintained" has come to mean free from cracks and debris, the presence of screens, adequate trash receptacles, and paint.

5. I have learned that many people don't understand what preservation means. It seems to me that they assume a very narrow definition of preservation, one that means to keep exactly the same. I prefer to think of preservation in more liberal terms such as to sustain, uphold, protect, defend, and conserve. I also appreciate the idea of *honoring the spirit of a place* and *letting the old look old*. In my mind, preservation can be likened to the graying of hair. Some people will allow the graying yet keep the style, while others will cover up the gray and pretend it is not happening. Some may color and restyle, remaining true to only a head of hair.

6. I have also (and most importantly) learned that people are essential to the preservation agenda. Only when people come together in learning, conversation, and advocacy are we able to protect and defend our shared history. We must remain vigilant while working and standing together when our historic resources are threatened. It is in this spirit that I invite you to the annual meeting on Thursday, September 14th and urge you to join us in our continued efforts.

Sara Fisher

Historic Pott Co. Courthouse Threatened

For the past two years, Pottawatomie County has been working with a consultant to assess county facilities in Westmoreland, evaluate space needs, and to determine where the county needs to invest in improvements. The consultant recently completed a life-cycle assessment of county facilities and recommended that county commissioners pursue an option that would demolish the historic courthouse and an adjacent historic jail. Razing the historic buildings and replacing them with new construction was described as being the most cost-effective option. Pott County constructed a new courthouse in 2013, and the historic courthouse is currently used for various county offices. Part of Manhattan is located in Pott County, but even if it were not, the potential loss of the state's second oldest courthouse concerns us all.

In Pott County's early days, there was a battle to determine which community would become the county seat. Communities vying for the county seat included St. George, Louisville, and Mount Union. There was an election to determine the county seat, and Louisville won, possibly because Native Americans, who were not considered U.S. citizens at the time, were allowed to vote. Louisville had been a booming community, but becoming the county seat did not bring additional prosperity to the community as had been hoped. When the railroad came through in 1867, Louisville was not one of the stops due to the topography and the difficulty that would have been involved with creating a smooth railbed (Maskil).

Meanwhile, neighboring Wamego had become a flourishing

community, and residents were envious of the county seat in Louisville. Wamego residents circulated a petition, requesting another election to select the county seat. The election was held, Wamego won, Westmoreland came in second, and Louisville protested and took the matter to court, which eventually worked its way to the Kansas Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ordered another election be held between the top two finishers, and Westmoreland won (Maskil).

The county offices were moved by wagon to Westmoreland, but there was no county building in Westmoreland. County offices temporarily shared space in the Methodist Church, the Congregational Church, and a hotel. In the state's early years, it was a common occurrence that a county's courthouse was located in the second floor above a business, a hastily constructed log or wood-frame building, or in shared space, as was the case with Pott County (National).

Another petition was circulated by Louisville residents in an attempt to regain the county seat, which spurred Westmoreland citizens to action and to make plans to construct a building in an effort to block the Louisville petition. When the Louisville petition was presented, about half of the signatures were proven to be fraudulent, so the petition was withdrawn, and the plans to construct a courthouse in Westmoreland moved forward (Maskil).

In the spring of 1884, the Westmoreland Citizen's Building Association formed to construct a



Pottawatomie Co. Courthouse, built 1884.

courthouse at a cost of \$10,000. The County Commission granted permission to build the courthouse on a donated parcel of land. The association contracted with the Manhattan firm of Hulse and Moses to build the courthouse, and the plans called for constructing a two-story, 60 ft. by 70 ft. limestone building. The stone for the courthouse was quarried at Mt. Ephraim, which is near Westmoreland (Maskil). The building is Italianate in style and features prominent quoining at the corners, stone arches above the windows, and distinctive keystones above windows and doorways.

The building's cornerstone was laid on April 29, 1884, and a crowd of several hundred people turned out for the occasion. A band from Onaga provided music for the ceremonies. The Westmoreland newspaper reported that local Masons performed "beautiful, impressive and appropriate ceremonies of that ancient order" in laying the cornerstone, and the stone was "duly laid over the archives of our city, the ladies contributing many keepsakes and curiosities to be there sealed up in a solid rock, to be opened, probably by generations yet unborn, if ever (*continued on pg. 3*)

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opened at all” (“Corner”).

In August 1884, the Westmoreland Citizens’ Building Association presented the courthouse to county commissioners, but the building’s interior was far from finished. The \$10,000 had been spent, and then tax dollars were used to finance the completion of the interior. Carpentry and plaster work were reported as still taking place in the spring of 1885 (Maskil).

There was another attempt by Onaga to become the county seat, and Wamego was interested in the possibility in the 1960s at a time when repairing or replacing the courthouse was up for discussion (Maskil). Through it all, The Pott County courthouse in Westmoreland stayed put. Over the years, the building experienced a number of additions to expand the space and to provide for vault storage, jury space, and restrooms.

Pott County conducted a study in 2005 to possibly expand the jail and renovate the courthouse. A citizens’ committee formed to study the situation and recommended the courthouse be renovated and a new jail constructed. A structural analysis of the courthouse took place in 2009 with the result that the courthouse was considered to be in fairly good condition, considering its age and lack of maintenance in recent years. County commissioners elected to go with a plan that would build a new jail and not renovate the courthouse.

In 2013, the Pottawatomie County Justice Center was completed, and the building includes space for the sheriff’s office, a dispatch center, training room, two jury courtrooms, and space to house inmates. The historic courthouse continued to

house various county offices.

The county hired a consultant in 2015 to evaluate space needs, to assess county facilities, and to develop a long-range plan. The consultant also completed a life-cycle study of buildings and announced recommendations in June 2017, which included a recommendation to demolish the historic courthouse and jail. According to the consultant, renovation of the courthouse was not the most cost-effective option, claiming that it would be cheaper to construct a new building, and a renovated courthouse would still not provide the county with enough space. Renovating the courthouse and maintaining it for the next 20 years are estimated to cost \$3.64 million, and a new building would cost \$3.37 million.

When demolition was recommended for the courthouse, several citizens stepped forward to express their objections and to encourage county commissioners to consider other options. A petition has been circulating that asks county commissioners to put the question of whether the courthouse should be preserved or demolished on the November ballot. The result of the ballot question would be nonbinding, but it would help county commissioners gauge citizens’ wishes.

Peter Clark, Pott County Director of Public Works, spoke to KMAN News Radio about the courthouse and said, “There has not been identified a funding source to assist us with preserving the courthouse or conserving it in its current condition. I think that would go a long ways in helping to make a decision one way or the other” (Bauman).

The courthouse is not currently listed on a historic register. A Preliminary Site Information



Top, the north side of the courthouse. Bottom, a window in the historic courthouse.

Questionnaire, which provides information about a property and helps the state evaluate registry potential, was submitted to the Kansas Historical Society (KHS) for review. The KHS determined that both the historic courthouse and jail are potentially eligible for both the state and national registers because of their association with events that have contributed to the broad patterns of our history and for their architecture. If the courthouse were listed on the state or national registers, a renovation project would be eligible for the state’s rehabilitation tax credit of 25% for qualified expenses. The county doesn’t pay income taxes to need tax credits, but tax credits can be sold. In addition, the Heritage Trust Fund (HTF) provides matching grants for registered properties. The Riley County Courthouse, which is one of 41 Kansas courthouses on the National Register, received HTF funding for clock repairs and interior access and safety (continued on pg. 4)

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improvements. Tax credits and the HTF are examples of funding options available to registered properties that would help to defray renovation costs, which Mr. Clark's comments seemed to indicate would influence decisions made about the courthouse's future.

County commissioners have not yet made any final decisions. A public information meeting was held on July 6, which provided information about the conditions of the courthouse and historic jail and explained how the consultant came to the conclusion of demolition as

the best option. Commissioners made few comments but indicated their decision would be based on what would be the best use of tax dollars. Commissioner Pat Weixelman commented that the issue was far from over and indicated that putting the question of whether to preserve or demolish the courthouse on the November ballot might be the way to go.

The M/RCPA hopes county commissioners will take the time to fully inform themselves about historic registry listing and the financial incentives available to registered properties and not be in a rush to demolish.

For more information about efforts to save the historic courthouse, visit www.historicpottawatomiecountycourthouse.org or the Facebook page "Historic Pottawatomie County Courthouse."

Bauman, Brady. "Pottawatomie County exploring options for aging courthouse." *1350kman.com*. 1350 KMAN, 7 July 2017. Web. 23 July 2017.

"Corner stone laid." *Westmoreland Weekly Period.* 1 May 1884:1.

Maskil, O. F. "County citizens pay tribute to 100-year-old courthouse." *The Wamego Times.* 4 October 1984:1.

National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, Historic County Courthouses of Kansas.

M/RCPA's Annual Meeting

Thursday, Sept. 14th
7:00 p.m.

All members are invited to attend the M/RCPA's Annual Meeting of the membership. The meeting will include the election of the Board of Directors and officers.

Location

Union Pacific Depot

Program

The program will feature the Washington and Julia Marlatt Homestead and will be provided by Joan Strickler and Allana Parker. The program is free and open to the public.

Marlatt Homestead



Would you like to be more involved? If you are interested in serving on the Board of Directors or on a committee, contact Sara Fisher at sarafisher@live.com or 785-564-2457.

Lost

Three wood-frame buildings in Leonardville, which had fallen into decline in recent years, were demolished in April. Due to fires and a devastating tornado in 1882, many of Leonardville's early wood-frame structures didn't survive, making the cluster of buildings somewhat unique.

The three buildings are shown at right. The exact date of the

construction of the building on the left was uncertain, but records indicated it housed a barbershop in 1905, so it dated to at least 1905. The center building was constructed in 1896 and housed a bookstore. The building on the right was constructed in 1893 and was initially a blacksmith shop, then a bookstore, and then housed



the Leonardville post office for many years. See the February 2015 newsletter for more about these buildings.