

Exploring the Middle East in Middle America

Beginning in September, the Center for Global and International Studies (CGIS) at the University of Kansas will offer a six-part book and film discussion series on “Exploring the Middle East in Middle America.” With programs at the Lawrence Public Library and Liberty Hall in downtown Lawrence, the series will offer insight into the complexities of the region’s people and cultures.

“The Middle Eastern book and film discussion is an opportunity for people in the Middle West to gain insight into the lives and concerns of people in cultures that have embraced all three Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) throughout their histories,” explained KHC Board Member Beverly Mack, professor of African and African American Studies at the University of Kansas and a book discussion leader. “Experiencing the diversity and commonality of these faiths within a single, broad cultural setting, can help to replace false stereotypes with truths. **We hope that these encounters with others through literature will deepen participants’ understanding and appreciation of the common bond of humanity among people, regardless of their cultural or religious orientation.**”

The books and films in the series highlight the diversity of the Middle East, a region CGIS broadly defines to include Iran and North Africa. Included are:

***Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* by Marjane Satrapi.** This 2004 graphic novel explores the life of a young girl in Iran following the 1979 revolution.

***My Prison, My Home: One Woman’s Story of Captivity in Iran* by Haleh Esfandiari.** Esfandiari’s autobiography details her return to Iran from the United States to visit her mother, and her subsequent arrest and incarceration.

***The Israelis: Ordinary People in an Extraordinary Land* by Donna Rosenthal.** This book recounts the numerous stories of Israel, showing the variety of peoples, cultures, and beliefs of the region.

***The Yacoubian Building: A Novel* by Alaa Al Aswany.** A bestseller in the Arab world, this work follows the lives of a group of people who all live in one apartment building in Cairo during the first Gulf War.

A Hebrew Lesson, 2006. The film follows the experiences of immigrants to Israel from China, Europe, and Latin America as they learn Hebrew at an *ulpan*, an intensive Hebrew school for newcomers. Directed by David Ofek and Ron Rotem.

Women Without Men, 2009. In her feature-film debut, visual artist Shirin Neshat weaves together the stories of four women whose experiences are shaped by their faith and the social structures of 1950s Iran.

Book discussions will be held at the Lawrence Public Library beginning on September 28 at 7:00 PM and the films will be shown at Liberty Hall in Lawrence in early 2011. For a complete list of book discussion dates and times, visit www.lawrence.lib.ks.us.

Photo courtesy of Beverly Mack.



Humanities Grants for the development of new book and film discussions are available. Visit www.kansashumanities.org or contact Julie Mulvihill, Executive Director, at julie@kansashumanities.org or 785/357-0359.

Prairie Homecoming

This summer the KHC-supported documentary *Return to PrairyErth* premiered at Pioneer Bluffs in Kansas' Flint Hills. **Jim Hoy**, humanities consultant for the film project, reports on the event that featured author *William Least Heat-Moon*.

Photo by Travis Heying, The Wichita Eagle



Filmmaker John O'Hara



Photo by Jim Master

Author William Least Heat-Moon

A quarter century ago William Least Heat-Moon, bestselling author of *Blue Highways*, visited the Flint Hills of Chase County in Central Kansas over the space of several years researching material for his second book, *PrairyErth*. During the spring and early summer of this year Heat-Moon was again in Chase County, this time for a different kind of creative project: Wichitan John O'Hara, assisted by a Humanities grant from the Kansas Humanities Council, was making a film, *Return to PrairyErth*, that would chronicle Heat-Moon's reaction to the changes in Chase County, and to those things that hadn't changed, twenty years after the book's publication.

On the afternoon of Saturday, July 24, some 1,000 people were drawn to Pioneer Bluffs, a mile north of Matfield Green, for the opportunity to meet Heat-Moon and to witness the premiere showing of *Return to PrairyErth*. People came from at least six states, and some visitors from Germany, Belgium, and Australia who happened to be in Kansas were also in the audience.

Pioneer Bluffs is the old headquarters of the Rogler Ranch, originally settled by Charles Rogler in 1859. When the ranch sold in 2006, a consortium bought twelve acres that included the historic house, barn, and outbuildings and established the Pioneer Bluffs Foundation, whose mission is to preserve the ranching heritage of the Flint Hills and to promote sustainable living in the tallgrass prairie ecosystem.

In addition to viewing the film (which required three showings in order to accommodate the larger-than-expected crowd), visitors had an opportunity to meet and visit with Heat-Moon, who also made a presentation in Pioneer Bluffs'

continuing series of Prairie Talks. Among other things he said how much the large turnout meant to him and expressed gratitude that readers liked the book and had kept it continuously in print. He also spoke about the many positive changes that have occurred in Chase County, including the establishment of the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve.

Other activities enjoyed by visitors on this hot July day included free ice-cold watermelon, a picnic (with many of the dishes coming from Pioneer Bluffs' community-supported-agriculture garden), and art gallery tours in the ranch house.

Jim Hoy directs the Center for Great Plains Studies at Emporia State University. He is a member of KHC's Speakers Bureau and also serves as a TALK book discussion leader.



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Grants in support of humanities-rich, full-length documentaries, like *Return to PrairyErth*, are available. For more information visit www.kansashumanities.org or contact **Julie Mulvihill, Executive Director**, at julie@kansashumanities.org or 785/357-0359.



FLIKS

FLIKS, KHC's brand-new facilitated film discussion program, is now available. A FLIKS event features short films that share a common theme, followed by a discussion led by a KHC humanities facilitator. They are ideal for use in libraries, museums, art centers, senior centers, and other community organizations. A FLIKS event does not need to be held in a theater.

Two FLIKS series are currently available:

As Big As We

Think features the films *Bauer, Baker, and Baldwin City: Electrifying a Small Town's Identity*, the story of a Baker University professor who brought electricity to the community in 1906; *Mariachi Estrella: Ad Astra Per Aspera*,

the story of Topekan Teresa Cuevas and the beginning of the nation's first all-female mariachi band; and *Clyde Cessna: From the Ground Up*, the story of the Kingman County farmer who put Kansas on the map as an aviation leader.

There's No Place Like Home features a light-hearted look at the uniqueness of the *Cawker City Twine-A-Thon*; *All That Remains*, an introspective look at the lessons we pass on to our children; and *Rebuilding Greensburg*, a story that reshapes our vision of home.



Photos by Ann Dean

Book a FLIKS event for your community organization. Visit www.kansashumanities.org to download the catalog. Contact Deborah Pomeroy, Resource Center Coordinator, at deborah@kansashumanities.org or 785/357-0359 for more information.



Short Films Needed

In order to create new FLIKS programs, KHC needs short films. Films can be documentary, fiction, animation, or experimental, but must be less than 15 minutes in length. They do not have to be about Kansas.

The deadline for film submissions is December 17, 2010. Download the film submission packet at www.kansashumanities.org. Contact Julie Mulvihill, Executive Director, at julie@kansashumanities.org or 785/357-0359 for more information.

Think Theater

Zach Saltz, KHC's Hall Center for the Humanities intern for Summer 2010, shares his experiences developing a new program for KHC.

This summer, I was honored to assist KHC in helping develop its latest program, *Think Theater*. This exciting new program is a facilitated small-group discussion series that revolves around the reading of primary source material in "script" form. Using historical documents from newspapers, speeches, interviews, and exhibits from the past, now widely available on digitized archival databases such as the Kansas Historical Society's Kansas Memory website, *Think Theater* programming weaves narratives that connect today's audiences to their past.



This summer proved to be a successful first step for establishing *Think Theater*. KHC partnered with Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area to create and pilot a *Think Theater* series entitled "Shared Stories of the Civil War." "John Brown: Martyr or Madman" was piloted at the Watkins Community Museum of History in Lawrence on August 10. Over sixty community members attended and engaged in a discussion facilitated by Shawn Alexander, professor of African and African American Studies at the University of Kansas. More programs are anticipated.

Zach Saltz will be completing his Master's Degree in Film from the University of Kansas this year. A native of Oregon, where he completed his undergraduate work, Zach enjoys learning new things about the Midwest every day.



KHC Board Member Cindy Luxem and Executive Director Julie Mulvihill.



Jordan Yochim serves at a reader at the "John Brown: Martyr or Madman" *Think Theater* pilot in Lawrence.

Happy Trails

KHC recently bid farewell to Dan Carey-Whalen, Director of Programs, who moved with his family to Texas. Dan's passion for Kansas history and his enthusiasm for humanities programs and discussions in Kansas will be missed.





Photo by Jay Price



Island Hopping in Kansas

KHC's Statehood Speakers Bureau features over seventy Kansas-themed presentations and discussions offering insight into what it means to be a Kansan over time and across generations. Speakers Bureau presenter **Jay Price** shares how his travels across Kansas inspired his program topic.

The topic for my Speakers Bureau program, *Settling the Sea of Grass*, emerged from all those times when I was driving across Kansas and found that the flat horizon, punctuated by clusters of trees and grain elevators, reminded me of similar horizons that I have encountered in the Caribbean and Mediterranean – or maybe it was the other way around. At night, the similarities became even more pronounced. When it is dark, the Great Plains and the Caribbean both look like isolated clusters of lights in a sea of black.

This awareness prompted me to think about the ways that communities on the Great Plains function akin to islands. Each community is relatively self contained and distinct, yet with ties and connections to nearby communities. Each island is basically autonomous, while on the Great Plains, there is a similar pattern of settlement with small towns rather than major cities as the norm. For a traveler, at least, the lighthouse of island life even functions akin to the grain elevator as a navigational beacon. Seen in this light, Kansas becomes an archipelago where “island hopping” is a normal part of everyday life.

Settling the Sea of Grass uses the archipelago analogy to reflect on the dynamics of Kansas life and society. It is a chance to take a virtual cruise to far-away places, but also reflect on our home here on the plains. We may be landlocked, there aren't too many palm trees around, and country music is more common on radio stations than Calypso and Reggae, but Kansans are, in a way, their own type of islander.

Jay Price directs the public history department at Wichita State University. He has served on the KHC board of directors since 2008.

Book *Settling the Sea of Grass* or one of the 71 other Kansas-themed Statehood Speakers Bureau topics. Visit www.kansashumanities.org to download the catalog. Contact Deborah Pomeroy, Resource Center Coordinator, at deborah@kansashumanities.org or 785/357-0359 for more information.

Recent Grant Awards

Since June, the Kansas Humanities Council has awarded eleven Humanities, Heritage, and Short Film grants.

Greenwood Preservation Society, Eureka
\$8,405 for *Greenwood County: The Social and Economic Story of Kansas* exhibit and discussion.

Friends of the Kaw, Lawrence
\$2,200 for Kansas River interpretive outdoor exhibit.

Justicia, Inc., Topeka
\$9,354 for *From Football to Futbol: The Changing Face of Sports in Western Kansas* short film.

Network to Freedom, Topeka
\$3,500 for the *2010 National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Conference*.

Railroad Heritage, Inc., Topeka
\$9,955 for *The People's Railroad: The Santa Fe, the City, the State and the Nation* exhibit.



Photo by David Keyes

Garden City High School soccer team.

University of Kansas Center for Global and International Studies, Lawrence
\$5,517 for *Middle Eastern Culture and Society TALK Series and Film Festival*.



Photo courtesy of Railroad Heritage, Inc.

Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway shops crew.

William Allen White Historic Site, Emporia
\$3,428 for *The Women of the William Allen White Family: Raising More Hell and Less Dahlias* research project.



Photo courtesy of the Greenwood County Historical Society

Loading cattle on railcars in Greenwood County, 1950s.

Seneca Downtown Impact, Seneca
\$3,500 for *Seneca Riders of the Pony Express Trail... 1860-2010* podcast.

Sociedad Hidalgo, Shawnee
\$5,000 for *XIX – Latin American Cinema Festival of Kansas City*.

Sunflower State Book Festival, Osborne
\$2,500 for the *Sunflower State Book Festival*.

Topeka High School Historical Society, Topeka
\$2,800 for *Topeka High Past: The THS Historical Society Collection Project*.

2011 grant guidelines and deadlines are available at www.kansashumanities.org. Contact Julie Mulvihill, Executive Director, at julie@kansashumanities.org or 785/357-0359 for more information.



The following story was featured in a recent **KHC e-newsletter**. If you like what you see, sign up at www.kansashumanities.org to receive future editions of KHC E-News.

Eileen Robertson



Stories from Freedom's Frontier

I don't know how old I am but I was a grown woman when the war began. I was grown when the Creek Indians came from Alabama. I am not an Indian but my owners were Indians.

-Polly Crosslin, 1895

Polly Crosslin settled in Kansas in 1865. Free after a lifetime of slavery, she embarked on a new life as a community leader in the Southeast Kansas town of Humboldt.

Ernestine Cheney and Eileen Robertson, both of Humboldt, share Crosslin's tale in *The Story of Aunt Polly* podcast. It's one of seven short stories about the Missouri-Kansas Border War featured in the *Stories from Freedom's Frontier* podcast series. The podcasts are available at www.kansashumanities.org.

The podcasts examine the story of the border conflict through historical documents and local lore, as told by the modern-day Kansans and Missourians who consider the impact of the Border War and the Civil War on their community. Other topics featured in the podcast series include John Brown, Order No. 11, the Battle of Lexington, Muskogee leader Opothleyahola, and James Henry Lane.

Davis Preservation of Topeka recorded and produced the podcasts. The *Stories from Freedom's Frontier* podcast project is a partnership between the Kansas Humanities Council and the Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area.



Ernestine Cheney portrays Aunt Polly in the podcast.

Heritage grants in support of interpretive podcasts are available. For more information visit www.kansashumanities.org or contact Julie Mulvihill, Executive Director, at julie@kansashumanities.org or 785/357-0359



Women of Peabody

In the early 1930s, Nellie Orcutt opened the Orcutt Grocery and Ice Store in Peabody as a way to support her family. It remained in business until the 1960s. Orcutt's biggest sales of the year came during Peabody's Fourth of July celebration. People on their way to the park to watch fireworks would stop by Orcutt's to purchase ice-cold soda and candy from festive tables set up outside the store. Orcutt is one of over thirty women whose stories were preserved in *The Women of Peabody's History* oral history project. The Peabody Historical Society collected and transcribed the stories with the help of a *Kansans Tell Their Stories* grant. Recently, the historical society compiled the oral histories into a self-published book, *The Women of Peabody*.

Photo courtesy of the Peabody Historical Society.

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