

## Why Stop and Think about the Past?

**T**his year, Kansans commemorate 150 years of Kansas Statehood. **Kim Stanley**, professor of English at McPherson College and KHC board member, reflects upon commemorations and the role of the humanities.



When I was a student in my native Texas, I remember the state trying desperately and publicly to teach us all to say “ses-qui-cen-TENnial” – not a word well-adapted to the Texan tongue, evidently. The first time I saw the word again, as a Kansan, it made me consider: what’s up with this human fascination with round numbers? How do we decide when and what to commemorate? And why commemorate anything at all? Why not move stalwartly on to 151? And, for us in KHC, what do the humanities have to do with commemoration?

As for most anniversaries, I’ll never really understand why we expect our friends to show up and pony up when we reach a certain number of years alive or years married. But for historical occasions, I think we need to make a distinction between *celebrating* and *commemorating*. Often, we celebrate the past with fireworks and firewater. We say, “Yippee!

We did it! We’re number one!” The humanities have a limited role to play in that kind of thing; you don’t need a historian to light a sparkler.

But to *commemorate* involves *memory*, and *memory*, to us in the humanities, means *reflection*. When we hit a good round number of years after an important event, the moment provides us with a reminder to reflect upon it, to reconnect with who we were then and to consider who we are now, in light of the past. **That kind of reflection can be crucial to what kind of people we are becoming.**

I think that we might claim that humanity has made some progress over the centuries by widening the circle of who counts as human: The tribe in the next valley? People who look different from us? People who worship differently? Women? Children? It’s especially important for us to keep widening this circle. I agree with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” However, I think that Rev. King demonstrated that he believed this as well: it doesn’t bend unless we bend it.

So when we commemorate a past event, we need to reflect: Who were we then? What did we do, and why? Who prospered? Who was injured, and why? Were there losers as well as winners, and if so, what did they lose?

Another word I like is *recollection*: We need to collect again the pieces of that long-ago event – the people, their values, their passions, their grief – and look again at the picture this jigsaw makes. By doing this, we hone some skills that we need in order to make the future, and maybe, we hope, to bend that arc a little bit further towards justice.



Photo courtesy of the Lawrence Public Library.

**Throughout the sesquicentennial year, KHC programs will offer opportunities for us to consider what it means to be Kansan.**

# Kansas at 150: Where We've Been, Where We Are

**K**ansas at 150 is the topic for a new TALK book discussion series. In this short excerpt, taken from a longer essay, **Tom Prasch**, chair of the History Department at Washburn University and a TALK discussion leader, examines the theme.

Outsiders may know us mostly as that place where Dorothy and Toto lived before the tornado swept them away, but Kansans know better. More than just the geographic center of the nation, Kansas provided a stage for many of the most dramatic episodes of American history.

Its buffalo-rich plains were homeland to a range of indigenous peoples – Kansa and Otoe, Osage and Kiowa, Arapaho and Pawnee, Comanche – before white contact and native resettlement transformed its population. Its edges touched by Lewis and Clark, Kansas was birthed as a state in the violent conflict between anti-slavery and pro-slavery forces that came to be called “Bloody Kansas,” a prelude to the nation’s civil war, a crucible of conflict that shaped such legendary figures as John Brown, William Quantrill, and Jesse James. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, American Manifest Destiny played out on Kansas’s plains: crisscrossed first by pioneer trails, then by the major transcontinental railway lines, Kansas was opened up for the

experience of the Old West, with all the buffalo hunters, Indian wars, cowboys, and gunslingers that go with it. In towns like Abilene and Dodge City, legendary figures like Wyatt Earp, Wild Bill Hickok, Bat Masterson, and John Wesley Harding made their names; beyond the cities, Buffalo Bill Cody and William Armstrong Custer gained their fame. Meanwhile, new groups of people, ranging from Exodusters escaping black oppression in the South to Mennonites looking for religious freedom and farmlands, from Mexicans working the rails to Italians working the mines, transformed the state’s population...

To read Tom’s entire essay, visit [www.kansashumanities.org](http://www.kansashumanities.org).

## Titles in the *Kansas at 150* TALK Series

### **Ordinary Genius**

by Thomas Fox Averill

### **Now Let Me Fly**

by Marcia Cebulka

### **Kansas Poems of William Stafford, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition**

edited by Denise Low

### **It Happened in Kansas**

by Sarah Smarsh

The *Kansas at 150* TALK series is supported by a gift from the Washburn University, Center for Kansas Studies, [www.washburn.edu/reference/cks](http://www.washburn.edu/reference/cks).

## KHC MISSION

The Kansas Humanities Council promotes the understanding of the history, traditions, and ideas that shape our lives and strengthen our communities.

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Photo courtesy of the Dorothy Bannage Public Library.



Tom Prasch at a TALK book discussion in Junction City.

## Film Features Depression-Era Projects

When Works Progress Administration (WPA) crews constructed a swimming pool and bathhouse in the southwest Kansas town of Fowler, the project provided dozens of jobs for local residents and brought cool refreshment to the region. The castle shelter house project at Coronado Heights, near Lindsborg in central Kansas, employed a number of men and resulted in a unique limestone structure perched atop a scenic overlook.

*Work Pays America* is a one-hour documentary exploring the WPA's impact on Kansas during the Great Depression. Produced by Smoky Hills Public Television, with support from a KHC grant, the documentary features visits to existing WPA structures, interviews with WPA workers, and insights from historians about the New Deal's role in Depression-era Kansas.

"Smoky Hills Public Television is very grateful for the funding provided by KHC," said Les Kinderknecht, senior producer. "Without the grant, the documentary would most likely not have been completed."

More information about *Work Pays America* is available at [www.shptv.org](http://www.shptv.org).



Image courtesy of the Works Progress Administration Poster Collection (Library of Congress).



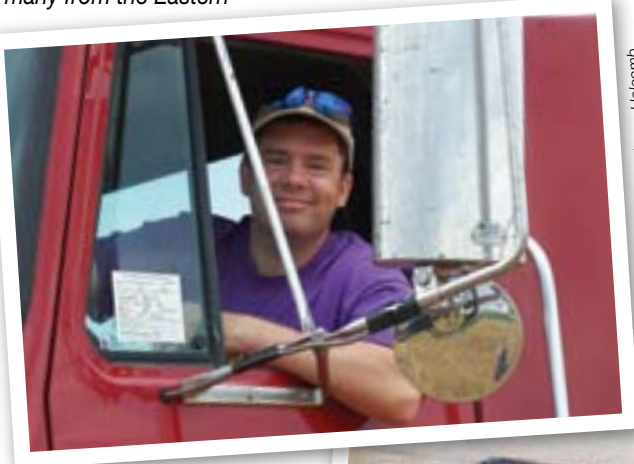
Photo courtesy of the Kansas Historical Society

Construction of Coronado Heights, 1930s.

Grants in support of humanities-rich, full-length documentaries like *Work Pays America* are available. For more information visit [www.kansashumanities.org](http://www.kansashumanities.org) or contact Edana McSweeney, Director of Programs, at [edana@kansashumanities.org](mailto:edana@kansashumanities.org) or 785/357-0359.

# Harvesting History

In the 1800s, thousands of people, many from the Eastern United States, came to the Great Plains to assist in the wheat harvest. Today, custom harvesting operations haul their crews and equipment from Texas to the Dakotas, following the wheat as it ripens. **Jason Holcomb**, professor of Geography at Morehead State University in Kentucky, shares his experience working on an oral history project about Mennonite custom harvesters.



Jason Holcomb

The Custom Harvesting oral history project recorded the personal experiences and stories of Mennonite custom harvesters of south central Kansas and preserved the audio files and transcripts at the Mennonite Heritage & Agricultural Museum in Goessel. Prior to this project, the museum had no information about custom harvesting or people from the area who have participated in this unique lifestyle and essential part of Kansas and Great Plains agriculture. The Mennonite communities of Inman, Moundridge, Buhler, Hesston, and surrounding areas have been identified collectively as a principle source region of mobile custom wheat harvesters in the formative time period of the World War II era.

As project director, I worked with the museum to record the oral histories of eight current or retired custom harvesting families. One important finding of the project was details about why Mennonites were so numerous in the early days of custom harvesting. Several

Photo courtesy of Jason Holcomb.



Photo courtesy of Orval Regier.

participants recounted that family and friends in the Buhler, Inman, and Moundridge area built their own tractors, silage choppers, and other equipment going back as far as 1942. Participants emphasized the close community and familial relationships that fostered working together and sharing of information.



Photo courtesy of Keith Drisk.

Family members often accompanied crews and offered assistance during the wheat harvest.

Grants in support of oral history projects are available. For more information visit [www.kansashumanities.org](http://www.kansashumanities.org) or contact Edana McSweeney, Director of Programs, at [edana@kansashumanities.org](mailto:edana@kansashumanities.org) or 785/357-0359.



## Kansas Stories on Tour

Settlers arriving in north central Kansas in the 1800s encountered a vast landscape of rolling hills, but very few trees. How would they build their homes, barns, and community buildings? The answer was found in the ground. Enterprising individuals quarried post rock limestone to use as the building material for their farm structures and fence posts. Today, these post rock structures are features of the region. In 2008, The Amazing 100 Mile Tourism Coalition produced the short film, *A Drive Through History Along the Post Rock Scenic Byway*, to showcase the history and heritage of the post rock region. The short film was supported by a *Kansans Tell Their Stories* grant.

Lucas's post rock story will be featured alongside the ten-panel *Kansans Tell Their Stories* exhibit when it is on display at the Flying Pig Studio & Gallery in Lucas July 25 – September 2. Included in the traveling exhibition are stories about the Orphan Trains in Kansas; Volga-German heritage in Collyer; Garden City's Vietnamese community; Topeka's Mexican community and the railroad; African immigrants in Northeast Kansas; Shawnee's Belgian community; Wichita's El Huarache neighborhood; and Fort Scott's African-American heritage. Each community story was the result of a project supported by a *Kansans Tell Their Stories* grant.

The exhibit will travel to seven Kansas communities in 2011.



Downtown Lucas, early 1900s.

### Kansans Tell Their Stories 2011 Tour

<p><b>January 21 – February 18</b> Winfield Public Library</p> <p><b>February 28 – April 8</b> Parsons Public Library</p> <p><b>April 18 – May 30</b> Peabody State Bank <i>Sponsored by the Peabody Historical Society</i></p> <p><b>June 6 – July 15</b> Seneca Free Library <i>Sponsored by Seneca Downtown Impact</i></p>	<p><b>July 25 – September 2</b> Flying Pig Studio &amp; Gallery, Lucas <i>Sponsored by the Lucas Area Chamber of Commerce</i></p> <p><b>September 12 – October 21</b> Lansing Historical Museum</p> <p><b>October 31 – December 9</b> Kinsley Library</p>
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For more details about the *Kansans Tell Their Stories* traveling exhibit and tour schedule, visit [www.kansashumanities.org](http://www.kansashumanities.org).

## Twelve Grants Awarded Since September

**Confucius Institute of the University of Kansas,** Overland Park  
\$3,675 for the 2011 Kansas City Chinese Film Festival.

**Finney County Historical Society,** Garden City  
\$8,401 for *Rangers and Grangers: Settling Up the Southwest* exhibition.

**Haskell Cultural Center and Museum,** Lawrence  
\$3,500 for *Kansas: A Native Sense of Place* research project.

**IMAGO DEI Arts,** Kansas City  
\$3,500 for the *Granada Theatre Website*.

**Kansas Historical Society,** Topeka  
\$10,000 for the *150 Things I Love About Kansas* exhibition.

**Kansas State University,** Manhattan  
\$10,050 for *Annie, Get Your Camera!: Kansas History Roadshow* film and discussions.

**Kinsley Library,** Kinsley  
\$3,252 for *Patterns of Change: Edwards County, Kansas, 1950 – 1970* oral history project.



Photo courtesy of the Finney County Historical Society.

**Hard at work in Finney County from the *Rangers and Grangers: Settling Up the Southwest* exhibition.**

**KPTS,** Wichita  
\$3,000 for *The Community Cinema Program*.

**McPherson Opera House Company,** McPherson  
\$10,000 for *Kansas on Film* film series with discussions.

**Northeast Cooperative Council, Inc.,** Kansas City  
\$9,650 for *A Brief History of Struggler's Hill* short film.

**Solomon Valley-Highway 24-Heritage Alliance,** Hill City  
\$1,500 for *William Stafford's Words: Heritage of a Simple Genius* discussions.

**Wyandotte County Historical Society and Museum,** Bonner Springs  
\$2,690 for *Fighting the Fires of Hate: America and the Nazi Book Burnings* exhibition and programs.



Photo by Ann Dean.

**Audience members at the Kansas City Chinese Film Festival.**

Contact Edana McSweeney,  
Director of Programs, at  
[edana@kansashumanities.org](mailto:edana@kansashumanities.org)  
or 785/357-0359 or visit  
[www.kansashumanities.org](http://www.kansashumanities.org)  
for more information about grant  
guidelines and deadlines.

## Stafford Event in Solomon Valley

*Mine was a Midwest home – you can keep your world.*

-William Stafford, "One Home"

**B**orn in Hutchinson in 1914, poet William Stafford left Kansas as a young man, but Kansas never left his poetry. The Solomon Valley-Highway 24-Heritage Alliance hosts *William Stafford's Words: The Heritage of a Simple Genius* on March 18 in Downs and on March 19 in Hill City. Denise Low and Fred Whitehead will lead community conversations exploring Stafford's Kansas poems. The event is supported by a KHC grant. For more information about this event visit [skyways.lib.ks.us/orgs/svha](http://skyways.lib.ks.us/orgs/svha).



Photo by Kit Stafford. Courtesy of William Stafford Archives, Lewis & Clark College, Oregon.

## Welcome

**K**HC recently welcomed Edana McSweeney to the staff as the new Director of Programs. A native of Havensville in Pottawatomie County, McSweeney came to KHC after 19 years with the Mid-America Arts Alliance, where she served as the Director of Professional Development. "I was eager to come to KHC because of the organization's excellent reputation," shared McSweeney. "I look forward to working more closely with communities throughout Kansas."



## Kansas 150

Events commemorating the sesquicentennial of Statehood are happening all across Kansas in 2011.

Visit [ks150.kansas.gov](http://ks150.kansas.gov) for a list of Kansas 150 activities.



Photo courtesy of the National Foundation of Carnival Heritage.

## U.S.A.'s Midway

It all started when Kinsley farmer Charles Brodbeck moved a carousel to his pastureland in 1901. Riding the wooden horses proved to be so popular with his neighbors that Brodbeck began hauling the amusement to carnivals in other Kansas communities. He soon abandoned farming. Eventually Kinsley became home to six carnival companies, including three of the country's best-known operations.

Today, the National Foundation of Carnival Heritage preserves Kinsley's carnival history through their collection of carnival artifacts and photos. The organization received support from a KHC grant to digitize the carnival photos and make them available online. For more information, visit the Kinsley Library's website, [www.kinsleylibrary.info](http://www.kinsleylibrary.info).

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