

DONIPHAN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MARCH
2024

Vol. 30
No. 3



News Notes

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March Meeting

Steamboats & River Traffic

March 28, 6:00 pm

Historical Society Museum

Troy, Kansas

This month we're taking a riverboat tour of the Missouri River of the early-20th century. We'll see a podcast sponsored by the KCMO Public Library, and a short presentation and vintage photos.

All are welcome to attend – you do not have to be a member.

After refreshments, we will have a business meeting.



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SINKING OF THE PONTIAC

FROM: *The St. Joseph Weekly Gazette*

St. Joseph, Missouri • Fri, Dec 17, 1897 Page 5

The incident of the sinking of the "Pontiac" is one of interest in this section of country. This popular steamboat ran into a snag near Doniphan, Kan., about fifty years ago, and went to the bottom with a valuable cargo consigned to St. Joseph. It has often been said there was in the hold seven hundred barrels of whisky, a whole lot of ox-chains and ox-yokes, and other things. Anyhow, everything went down except the passengers and crew, who managed to get ashore. In this city is a gentleman who has some kind of a mark by which he can locate the wreck and this veritable whisky mine. James N. Foreman, a civil engineer, blazed some trees on the Missouri side of the river by which he could locate the scene of disaster, but the banks and trees washed away and the marks were gone. "The Pontiac" is now, perhaps, a mile from the river, sixty to eighty feet under the sand and soil, which has been cultivated many years by some thrifty Kansas farmer. Some people believe the wreck can be located by a proper divining rod. Everybody should wait for the event in order to test the liquor – from a scientific standpoint.

Capt. Tobe Weaver, an old Missouri river pilot, passed alongside the wreck of the Pontiac before the hulk had disappeared. The captain said there was no truth in the story about seven hundred barrels of whisky in her hold.

MEETING MINUTES

February 22, 2024

Twenty-five people gathered at the Doniphan County Court House on the evening of February 22, 2024 to tour our historical courthouse. Peggy Franken, County Clerk, provided a very enlightening tour of all three floors, plus the basement, attic and tower. Pictures and articles of the life of Ernie Dittmore are on display in the basement. Mary Winder compiled this display which was initially used during the Kansas Big Road Trip. When you get a chance, please check out this display. **Thank you** to Peggy for the tour as well as to the County Commissioners and City Council for the support they provide the Historical Society in many ways.

The group assembled later at the Museum for refreshments and more sharing of information on the courthouse. There was no business meeting.

Future meetings and topics are being finalized and include antique and classic vehicle show as well old toys in White Cloud; Underground Railroad or Orphans Train; Indian Artifacts, and others.

Vicki Jones, Secretary

MORE COURTHOUSE HISTORY

During the tour of the Courthouse, Clerk Peggy Franken passed out copies of the following information originally compiled by Nacy Clisbee and dated January 17, 2009. Some things have changed since this was written.

Materials Used Throughout the Courthouse

The Doniphan County Courthouse is constructed of red "face brick," with hand cut limestone used at the base, for the elaborate entrance porches on the north and south sides, as decorative lintels on the first floor, and as trim. The porch columns that support the upper balconies feature elaborately carved tops. Originally, there was a slate roof, which was damaged by a hail storm in 1960, and replaced with asphalt shingles. A Heritage Trust Fund Grant enabled the county to replace that roof with material very similar in appearance to the original slate in 1999, a well as make other improvements. A distinctive decorative ornament tops the dome, and originally there were ornaments atop the four cone-shaped roof sections at the corners.

On the perimeter of the courthouse yard is a matching limestone wall (original to the building) surrounded by a brick sidewalk, both recently restored.

Inside, beautifully cared for, original antique red oak woodwork is visible in the rooms of the first and second floors. Woodwork in the basement and on the third floor is long-leaf yellow pine. The floor in the main hallway (still the original) is "of one inch hexagon vitreous decorated mosaic tile, with a twelve inch border, laid in a concrete base." The building originally was "so equipped that gas may be used for lighting." A pump brought water from a well in the basement to a large galvanized iron tank in the attic which supplied the plumbing fixtures with water. Metal vaults are provided in many of the offices to ensure safety for precious records in the event of fire. A window to provide light is located in each vault, with each window protected by

"a double edged self-coiling steel shutter," which was closed each evening for protection against fire. The "latest designs of steel cabinets and boxes for official books and papers, as well as a steel table" also were provided in each vault. The interiors of vaults remain virtually unchanged today.

Many other unique original furnishings and features remain in use today, some with touches of modernization.

Notes on the Architectural Style

Romanesque Revival in style, the Doniphan County Courthouse, if seen from the sky looking down, would appear to be rectangular in shape, with circular "bump outs" at each corner, and a circular dome placed high over the center. Short gables connecting each pair of cones rise from the roof line on each of the four faces of the building.

Several architectural patterns are repeated both inside and outside. The windows of the upper story are

designed with Roman (round) arches at the top, and those half-circles are repeated in limestone, connecting to a wider “ribbon” of limestone which circles the entire upper story of the building on the outside. Dentils (repeated small squares in neat rows that resemble teeth) are used extensively on the interior woodwork, most noticeably” above each window, and below each counter top. An egg-and-dart pattern (carved rows of egg-shaped ovals each separated by an arrow point or “dart”) also is used extensively — find it on the railing in the courtroom and on the three-step terra cotta dentils just below the roofline on the outside. A “rinceau” (pronounced ran-SO) pattern - classical leafy scroll-work branching alternately to the left and right - is also used, and can best be seen in the metal work above the porches on the outside north and south fronts. Look for it too, behind the judge’s seat in the courtroom! The imposing oak newel posts on the basement and first floors serve as “summaries” of the patterns used, displaying leafy scrollwork, dentils, and a row of egg-and-dart.

First Floor

On the main floor, the County Clerk’s office on the southeast corner occupies one of the many spaces that have curved walls found at all the building’s corners. Formica tops have been added to the counters, as they have been throughout the building. Each counter was designed with useful drawers and cabinets accessible from inside each office. The vault door in the County Clerk’s office is one salvaged from the previous courthouse, and dates to 1867. The present Appraiser’s office, opposite the stairway, originally was the commissioners’ room, and once had a railing like that in the courtroom on the floor above. The current Commissioners’ room, on the northeast corner, once was used by the Probate Judge. This room contains the original octagonal oak commissioner’s desk, providing unique seating and work space for the three commissioners and the county clerk. Also original is the metal ledge trolley. Other offices remain substantially unchanged, though modernized.

Second Floor

The courtroom, with many original appointments, dominates the second floor. The ceiling, originally 24 feet above the floor, still has its patterned steel, though a dropped ceiling of fiberglass tile has been added. Several of the tall, slim windows are topped with arched sections of stained glass, recently restored. (A few ceiling panels have been removed so the stained glass and patterned steel may now be seen.) One of the windows extends to the floor and, at one time, provided access to the balcony. The jury box originally had padded oak swivel chairs. The judge once sat in a black leather padded oak swivel chair. The railing is substantially unchanged from the original, except that it once had a swinging gate. Folding chairs in sets of three were furnished in the gallery.

Originally a stairway led directly from the jurors’ box upstairs to two jury rooms with private restrooms, and no access to other areas of the third floor. In this way, the jury could move to a place of deliberation without exposure to spectators or others. (During one renovation a dusty, long forgotten bottle of “spirits” was found tucked behind the plumbing . . . perhaps something to ease the pain of hours spent on the unpadded swivel chairs!) The second and third floors are “deadened” with a thin layer of concrete to keep the sound of voices from carrying.

Behind the courtroom is the judges’ chamber. The Doniphan County District court offices are located to the west of the courtroom and are similar in appearance to the offices on the main floor. Other rooms on the second floor have been renovated for current uses. Originally, an open stairway led to the third floor.

Third Floor

Here the floors are pine. The rooms that once were used for jury deliberation have been opened to the third floor and now provide room for the law library, mapping room, and other uses. A glance into the law library reveals an interesting view out one set of the three small round-arched windows that are visible from the outside under the very top gable on each side of the courthouse.

Attic

The attic is floored and currently serves as a storage area. A substantial stairway leads to the dome, the highest point in the city of Troy.

Basement

Here the ceilings have a very “wavy” appearance due to the heavy steel beams supporting the floor above. Plaster was added to cover them, but each drop in the ceiling reveals the location of a beam. The Superintendent of the county’s schools originally occupied what is now the County Engineer’s office in the northeast corner. Some school records remain stored in the vault. Records are being referenced in a data base that is available through the Register of Deeds office on the second floor. The Extension office has always been located in the northwest corner. The office opposite the stairwell on the west was originally a store room, finished in rough stone. The current “boiler room” provides an unaltered peek into some aspects of construction. It still has its original steel ceiling, though other rooms had fancier patterns on their ceilings. “Waste stone” in odd shapes was used to construct the basement. Its thickness may easily be seen at the window, just to the right as you enter the room. The original boiler was huge, producing coal fired steam; a huge coal bin adjoined it.

Goddess of Justice

Missing from the north facade of the courthouse is The Goddess of Justice, an eight-foot statue, made of zinc, finished with “the best quality of gold and silver.” She stood on the flat “step” atop the gable at the roof line.

Although originally “securely braced inside with iron, and well anchored down to the brick and frame work” she disappeared long ago, and her disappearance is a mystery. Some suspect she fell to a metal collection for the war effort; or perhaps was damaged by a storm shortly after the courthouse opened, was taken down, thought to be irreparable, and then was donated for scrap.

TREASURER’S REPORT

MAR 10, 2024

FEB 14 BALANCE	\$38,341.50
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INCOME:

Dues	40.00
Income total:	\$40.00

EXPENDITURES:

Wifi for Museum 3 months	156.00
Expenditures total:	\$156.00

MAR 10 BALANCE	\$38,225.50
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CD #7175	\$6,935.77
CD #6519 (for Save Our Liberty Project)	\$7,769.93

2024 MEETINGS

All meetings at 6:00 unless otherwise noted.

Presenters/topics/locations subject to change.

March 28 – Steamboats and River Traffic at the Doniphan County Historical Society Museum. Todd Miller will lead this presentation with assistance from others. Millers will provide refreshments.

April 25 – Kansas Humanities Speaker on World’s Fair Remnants in Kansas at the Fanning Church Community Building.
Refreshments – Brenda and Jim Rush.

May 23 – Pony Express Trail in Doniphan County at Elwood Community Building. There will be presenters from the Pony Express Museum in St. Joseph. The presentation will also include pictures. Vicki Jones will provide refreshments.

Future meetings and topics are being finalized but include antique and classic vehicle show as well old toys in White Cloud; Underground Railroad or Orphans Train; Indian Artifacts, and others. Stay tuned.

Please continue to support your Doniphan County Historical Society. Your membership is greatly appreciated. Please consider receiving this newsletter by email to keep our mailing costs low.

DONIPHAN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP FORM

Detach and mail with payment to: Anna Midyette, PO Box 197, Bendena, KS 66008

All Memberships are \$10.00. This is a: ☐ Renewal Membership ☐ New Membership

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☐ Please send newsletter by email. Email address: _____