

JEFFERSON COUNTY HISTORICAL AND GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 1

NUMBER 2

OCTOBER 2014

JCHS Prairie Pasture



For a miniature view of what Jefferson County settlers might have seen when they alighted here 160 years ago, look to the native prairie pasture just south of Old Jefferson Town. There you can see the famed Plains' Big Bluestem grass, Indian grass, colorful spots of wildflowers and other echoes of the nation's disappearing tallgrass ecosystems.

Developed over a few years starting in 1988, Old Jefferson Town's restored native prairie drew some expert attention this summer from Jim Marietta, retired district conservationist in the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, and now "Old Town Volunteer Agronomist." The JCHS prairie pasture was not a never-plowed remnant of the sea of grass that covered the plains, but instead was planted and restored with the same native plants that would have existed here.

Marietta offered advice and a plan for stewarding our truly historical asset, working alongside volunteer Larry Elkinton, who tends and mows the 5-acre pasture. Marietta snapped pictures of blue pitcher sage and lavender dotted gayfeather sprinkled in the late summer landscape, and noted the native Big Bluestem and Indian grasses, in addition to the blotch of unwelcome sericea lespedeza (targeted for extermination). Besides a strong and healthy native pasture, Marietta someday would like to see the public enjoying the prairie pasture, perhaps with the help of volunteer horses and a horse-drawn hay cutter moving across the pasture.

OJT's pasture was restored through the efforts of Oskaloosans William Hannah and Betty Leech, and Roger Coleman, who had held Marietta's position when the agency was the Soil Conservation Service, and his wife, Jackie.

For more information about native prairie, visit the website for the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, located in the Flint Hills near Strong City in Chase County. <http://www.nps.gov/tapr/index.htm>

“Today, the most fertile and well-watered region, the tallgrass prairie, has been reduced to but 1% of its original area,” according to the national preserve’s website. “This makes it one of the rarest and most endangered ecosystems in the world.”



Historical Society Announces Exciting Changes to Annual Meeting

Jefferson County Historical Society in Oskaloosa, Kansas will host its annual meeting and social event on November 16, 2014 at 2:00 at Old Jefferson Town.

This year the event will be different than the traditional event. The board decided to try something new! A social time in the Reynolds and Tibbott buildings will start the afternoon. Local artists and collectors will have displays for guests to view while enjoying tasty hors d'ourves. Guests can also enjoy a game of “What is this?” as they visit the buildings at Old Jefferson Town. Barnett Family Funeral Services will give a talk on vintage funeral procedures in the Tibbott building.

Cindy Higgins from Kansas Humanities Council will be the guest speaker. Come and relive the glory days of the soda fountain where chemist-produced tonics rooted in promised curatives evolved into enticing refreshments served by a jerk. Government regulations, World War I luxury taxes, and bottled soda pop prompted Kansas’ pharmacists to make more ice cream concoctions and add food to keep their evolving fountain sideline business profitable. Learn of today’s artisan soda fountains throughout the nation featuring house-made specialties, and what you can taste and see in Kansas’ own soda fountains.

A quick annual meeting will also be on agenda to establish the board members for the 2015 calendar year. For more information or to get involved, contact Leanne Chapman at 785-863-3257 or Margaret Dick at 785-766-6342.

As a tax-exempt society, JCHS provides leadership to preserve the county’s artifacts and documents and maintain the 10 buildings on the land known as Old Jefferson Town. These buildings were moved during the late 1960s and early 1970s to preserve Jefferson County heritage. The buildings and the artifacts from the county that are stored in them cannot be preserved without the support of donors.



Military Display

The Reynolds building was decorated with military uniforms, photographs and memorabilia from Memorial Day through July 4. Service men and women from Jefferson County were remembered and honored with the display. This is an annual event organized by Mary Luse.

Summer Art Shows

During the summer, the John Steuart Curry home showcases local art talent. On opening weekend in May, local high school students displayed their work.

In June, the Walter Boldridge family showed miniature dollhouses. The Boldridge family has been building miniatures for a number of years. Teresa and Sonya first started doing miniature dollhouse shows and then their sister, Patty, was brought in to create paintings for their houses. Upon retirement, their father helped them build the outer structures. It is now a family affair. They build full dollhouses, barns, room boxes, and wall hangings. The sisters make most of the items in the dollhouses and they also build furniture as well. Their father works on building the structures.

In July, Chase Branson exhibited his ceramics. Chase is the son of Chad and Carrie Branson. He is the grandson of Gary and Sharon Branson, Gale Rogers and Kenny and Patty Breithaupt. Chase started creating pottery at Jefferson West High School, where he graduated in 2013. He received an art scholarship from Highland Community College for his beautiful pottery.

For the last weekend of September, to mark the closing of the grounds for the season, there was a display of quilts and christening dresses in the Edmonds Chapel. This is a beautiful venue for viewing historic textiles.

Needed !

The historical society is looking for help in locating photographs for our collections. We would like photographs of the old jail, which was located on the northeast corner of the square in Oskaloosa. Pictures would be from about 1930, before the new jail was built. We are also collecting threshing pictures from around the county. If you have pictures that would be of interest to the society, please contact Leanne Chapman at 785-863-3257.

Historical society meetings are the second Thursday of the month at 7:00 at Old Jefferson Town. New members are welcome!

Genealogical Society Programs

The June program was presented by Mary Burchill of the Douglas County Genealogical Society. She has been researching the life of Elizabeth Watkins of Lawrence, a philanthropist whose name is on many KU buildings. Be watching for a book in the future!

In July, Jefferson County resident Jean Jorgensen gave a program on the bible that had belonged to the Seventh Day Baptist Church she attended and the family connections that can be made from the records in a bible. Although the closing of the church was a sad event for the congregation, the mystery of the bible's origins provided an interesting search for living relatives of the people whose names were inscribed on its pages.

The August program, sponsored by the Kansas Humanities Council, was an illustrated talk by M.J. Morgan of Kansas State University. She described how she searches for the history of towns and villages that no longer exist in the state. Kansas has nearly 9000 disappeared towns and communities, caused by its unusual and spectacularly fast settlement history. The variety of town types is as striking as the stories they left behind.

The genealogical society rotates business meetings and programs. Generally, outside speakers are in May, July and September. April, June and August are business meetings and work times. Members present programs in November and March. The November meeting will include a viewing of a video about the arrival of electricity in Baldwin City, a video in which member Richard Wellman appears! Meetings are the fourth Monday of the month at 7:00 at the research library in Old Jefferson Town. New members and visitors are welcome to attend.

Currently on display at the research library are photos of rural Jefferson County taken by Boyle resident Steve Smith. Many feature barns and there are several views of beautiful Kansas skies. Come by and see the display when the research library is open. The winter schedule is Saturday afternoons from 1:00-5:00.

The library is staffed by knowledgeable volunteers who help those searching for information about their family and local history. We have extensive files on towns and schools, local newspapers on microfilm, obituary files, family histories, and much more.

At right is one of Steve Smith's photos of the Kansas landscape.

