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Topeka, KS 66601-2201

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Summer is time for exploring

While many of us look far afield for a summer adventure, you don't have to limit yourself to just one big event. Make this summer one of exploration right here at home, too.

The Shawnee County Historical Society presents monthly program that explores an interesting site in the area, and the library and other venues offer programs delving into history.

Shawnee County has a lot of interesting places to visit, and you don't have to wait until family or friends are visiting from out of town to go see them.

Most of the sites have small fees or none, so that makes it an even better way to spend a day.

Following is a list of programs and sites with hours and locations. If no admission charge is listed, entry is free.

The monthly SCHS programs are free to members; non-members are asked for a \$5 donation. Here is the lineup:

Forest Park, SE 8th and Carnahan

Sunday, July 21, 3 p.m.

Katherine Meinhardt will give a tour of Forest Park, which has been a camp and a retreat, among other things.

Topeka Performing Arts Center, SE 8th and Monroe



Forest Park is the tour stop in July. This facility was opened a century ago as a retreat for Evangelical United Brethren pastors.

Sunday, Aug. 18, 3 p.m.

Beth Fager and John Hunter will lead the tour of the event center that is part of the City Hall complex and began its life as the Municipal Auditorium.

Carousel at Gage Park, SW 6th and Gage

Sunday, Oct. 20, 3 p.m.

Carousel is west of the swimming pool

Anne Stauffer will lead the tour of the building housing the 1908 carousel.

Other area programming

The Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library, 1515 SW 10th Ave.,



TPAC is the August stop for the monthly SCHS tour.

also has programs on local and regional history. You can register for programs through the website,

Continued on Page 2



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Diane Debacker
Thomas Fulbright
Mark Law
Paul Post
Christine Steinkuehler
David Thompson



Local history adventures abound

Continued from Page 1

TSCPL.org. Here are upcoming programs:

■ Kansas First Lady Sara Robinson
Thursday, June 27, 7 to 8:30 p.m.,
Marvin Auditorium

Topekan Suzanne Germes will present a living history program about the activities of Kansas Gov. Charles Robinson's wife Sara during the Civil War, which is known from Sara's extensive writings.

Presented by the Topeka Genealogical Society.

■ Local History Research: Beginning Resources

Wednesday, Aug. 14: 6:30 to 7:30 p.m., Topeka Room (second floor)

Explore the library's local history research tools and practice using them. Resources include Sanborn maps, city directories, Shawnee County Historical Society bulletins, vertical files and newspaper card catalog.

■ You've Got Mail: Exploring Letter Writing Through Time

Thursday, Aug. 22, 7 to 8:30 p.m., Learning Center

Celia Daniels will present an historical look at letter-writing from pharaohs of ancient Egypt and other historical figures to intimate, everyday shared experiences between sweethearts, friends and family.

■ Historic Downtown Topeka Walking Tour

Friday, Sept. 20, 6 to 7 p.m., Every

Plaza, 7th and Kansas Avenue

Local history librarian Katie Keckeisen will lead a tour of Downtown's historic buildings and show historic photos of what the area looked like before.

Through July, the NOTO Arts Center is hosting "Topeka Reflections: Unveiling the Soul of the Heartland," an art and history exhibit that delves into the culture, history and essence of Topeka. Various artists using a wide range of mediums and Topeka artifacts are included in the exhibit.

The NOTO Arts Center is at 935 N. Kansas Ave. Hours are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesdays, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays, and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturdays.

And here are some places you can visit without having to plan too far ahead:

Ritchie House

John Ritchie was one of Topeka's earliest free-state settlers. The tour includes the original stone house and presentations in the adjacent home that serves as headquarters for the Shawnee County Historical Society.

Where: 1116-1118 SE Madison Ave.

Hours: 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday; call (785) 234-6097 to arrange a group tour at

Continued on Page 3

Adventures abound

Continued from Page 4

Cost: Adults, \$6; seniors, \$5; ages 3 to 17, \$2; military, \$1

Here are details for the sites most Topekans think of first when company comes to town:

Kansas Statehouse

KSHS.org has material to help make your visit even more eye-opening. Self-guided tours also are available at the Visitor Center.

Where: Access the underground parking garage off 8th Street just east of Harrison.

Hours: Visitor Center, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday. Capitol Store, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday.



The Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway was Topeka's lifeblood, but the capital city was a hub for four major railroads, including the Union Pacific, which built what is now known as Great Overland Station.

Guided tours of the building and to the top of the dome are available. See KSHS.org for tour hours.

Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Park

Operated by the National Park Service, this site tells the story of school segregation in Topeka and the

landmark U.S. Supreme Court case that declared it illegal is told through photographs, multimedia and interactive displays. **Where:** SE 17th and Monroe (four blocks east of Kansas Avenue)

Hours: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. Open on Independence Day.

Preservation awards honor four

Continued from Page 4

in the Judge Advocate General's division.

Post is an avid researcher and shares his knowledge of history through articles and talks, including teaching through the Osher Institute. Among his essays are a history of SBA Hill/ former Menninger Campus in Topeka; Topeka's Bates Family; The Fred Harvey Company; and on Duke Ellington.

He has served on Topeka's Landmarks Commission and cares deeply for the city's historic properties.

He helped save the clock tower building on the old Menninger Campus.

Then he tried to replicate that success by setting up the Plains Modern non-profit group to save the Docking State Office Building and lead the legal fight that tried to prevent its destruction.

Max McCoy, a columnist for the Kansas Reflector news service, did a piece on the Docking after the demolition began. He interviewed Post about the failed effort.

"I'm done with trying to save old buildings," Post told McCoy.

"Post may believe that now," McCoy wrote, "but I have a suspicion he'll be back in the game the next time a historic Topeka building is threatened."

Carter Vincent

History too often seems to be the province of old people. Maybe that's because the older we get, the more history we seem to have. So it's exciting to see young people wanting to delve into what must seem to them as ancient times.

Carter Vincent, a Shawnee Heights High School freshman, seemed to always have had a love for exploring history. He volunteered as a tour guide at the Combat Air Museum as

an eighth grader.

During Covid, his family used the time to explore towns throughout the state. Then Carter decided he wanted to tell the story of his home town, Tecumseh.

He went straight to an expert – Roy Bird, co-author with Doug Wallace of several books, including "Witness of the Times," a history of Shawnee County and a history of Tecumseh.

Carter then went on to research the significant places in Tecumseh's past – Shawnee County's first courthouse, Tecumseh's first church, the home of the first doctor. He also includes more modern history – the energy center and the cellophane plant.

He turned all this information into a 3-mile walking tour of Tecumseh, complete with signage and QR codes that take the visitors to the details.

With this project, Carter earned his Eagle Scout award.

Adventures around

Continued from Page 2

other times.

Constitution Hall

Reconstruction of Topeka's first permanent public building has been ongoing for two decades, but you can see the progress and learn more about the building and its significance in the adjacent the pocket park. The visitors center is expected to be open this fall.

Where: West side of Kansas Avenue in the middle of the 400 block.

Combat Air Museum

This is a stop for the whole family, with the largest collection of World War I replica aircraft in the Midwest, flying machines from every era, dioramas and military artifacts.

Where: 7016 SE Forbes Ave.

Hours: 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday, noon to 4:30 p.m. Sunday; no admittance after 3:30 p.m.

Cost: Adults, \$7; ages 5 to 17, \$5; under 5, free; active military, \$5.

Museum of the Kansas National Guard

This museum tells the story of the citizen soldier from the Civil War to the current War on Terror. Inside are uniforms, weaponry and other artifacts to help tell their story. Outside are displays of military equipment including an M60 tank, a howitzer and helicopters.

Where: 125 SE Airport Drive at Forbes Field.

Hours: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

Old Prairie Town at Ward-Meade Park

This is two parks – a 2.5-acre botanical garden on the east, and a prairie village on the west. In the middle is the mansion built by Anthony Ward, who settled in the area not long before the founding of Topeka.



The Ritchie House (left) and Constitution Hall are two of the oldest structures in Shawnee County.

The town includes a school house, doctor's office, livery stable, train depot and barber shop. Visitors can refresh themselves at the drug store and shop at the general store.

Where: 124 NW Fillmore; take 6th Street east from Lane about six blocks to Fillmore, then turn north to 1st Street. Construction has closed much of 1st Street east of Ward-Meade.

Hours: 8 a.m. to dusk daily. Drug store soda fountain and general store are open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, noon to 4 p.m. Sunday. Tours available at 10 a.m., noon and 2 p.m. Thursday and Friday. Call (785) 251-6993 in advance to make sure a tour guide is available.

Cost: \$5 for adults, \$4 for seniors

and \$3 for children age 6-12. Children 5 and under are free. Narrated virtual tour on the Otocast app; search for Old Prairie Town.

Great Overland Station

The Union Pacific Railroad opened this passenger station on Jan. 27, 1927. Today is is a museum and event space. Focusing on Topeka's railroad heritage, the museum tells its story through photographs, exhibits and hands-on activities with costumed docents.

Where: 701 N. Kansas Ave.

Hours: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday

Continued on Page 5



In addition to the historic buildings, Old Prairie Town at Ward-Meade Park is home to a 2.5-acre botanical garden.



Deborah Dandridge



Warren Taylor



Paul Post



Carter Vincent

Preservation awards honor four

On May 4, the Shawnee County Historical Society honored four people for their contributions to the preservation and sharing of local history.

A reception followed the awards ceremony, which was held in the auditorium at the Kansas Statehouse.

The honorees:

Deborah Dandridge

Deborah Dandridge's list of credentials in history is long. She is the leading expert in this area for local African-American history.

Her job title is field archivist, and her legacy is the African American Experience Collections at the KU's Spencer Research Library.

She compiled that collection by contacting communities throughout the state for donations of historical materials documenting the experiences of African American families, churches, organizations and businesses. These materials reflect not just major events, but also provide a look into daily life.

Through Dandridge's efforts, the University of Kansas now houses one of one of the few African American archives maintained among non-Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

Dandridge earned a bachelor's degree in history from Washburn University, a master's in history from Atlanta University, and completed her Ph.D. in history at KU.

Dandridge attended Washington Elementary School in Topeka, the

largest of the four Black schools. The Brown decision came down just three years after she started school. But because her parents believed the curriculum and teachers at Washington were excellent, she finished grade school there, though she lived just half a block from Parkdale, the white elementary school.

Dandridge earned a bachelor's degree in history from Washburn University, a master's in history from Atlanta University, and completed her Ph.D. in history at KU. She served on the history faculty at Washburn and as equal employment opportunity officer for the Shawnee County Community Action Agency.

She has served on the board of directors for the Brown Foundation, and was on the Brown v. Board 50th Anniversary Commission.

She was a long-time representative of the 2nd District for the Kansas African American Affairs Commission and was among the 10 recipients of the James E. Butler Civil Rights Award sponsored by the Kansas Human Rights Commission.

Warren Taylor

Warren Taylor's legacy is the Topeka Room at the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library. The amazing collection had everything a researcher of Topeka could need — city directories going back to 1869, books by Topeka authors, newspaper clippings on people and events.

Since it can be next to impossible

to find a newspaper story without the date it was published, a cadre of volunteers has gone through every edition of the local newspapers to create an index of obituaries.

The collection includes all the standard genealogical materials, but it also provides the opportunity to dive into the vertical files of people and places. Under Taylor's leadership, the vertical files were also kept up with contemporary materials.

After his retirement, Taylor took on the Friends of the Library book sale and saw that through to its transition from a sprawling annual event at the Expocentre to the quarterly sales now held at the library.

Taylor says he is most proud not just of the collection he helped gather, but of the space itself. The room was decorated with stained glass, an 1871 piano and a 1908 grandfather clock, all donated by local residents. It was a space that became a destination not just for study, but for admiring the beauty of Topeka's past.

Paul Post

When we hear Paul Post's name, most of us think "lawyer." Most of the public knows him from his long career in family law and civil cases.

But his bachelor's degree from Kansas State University was in history. After earning his law degree from the University of Kansas in 1974, Paul joined the Air Force, where he served

Continued on Page 5