

Mission: The Harvey County Historical Museum & Archives celebrates a common history and culturally diverse community by sharing stories from the past, experiences of the present and possibilities for the future through creative and dynamic exploration of objects, documents and photos.

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Hours

Tuesday—Friday 10:00 AM—4:00 PM; Third Thursday ALSO 6:00—8:00 PM
1st & 3rd Saturday 10:00 AM—4:00 PM. Closed major holidays. Sundays as events are scheduled.
Check Facebook and website for closures.
Please call or check website for updated information.

Harvey County Historical Museum & Archives
PO Box 4
Newton, KS 67114

Return Service Requested



Heritage & Now

Sharing Stories and Connecting Community
Harvey County Historical Museum & Archives

Spring 2017

"So Suddenly Did the Twister Come": The Sedgwick Tornado of May 25, 1917

by Kristine Schmucker, HCHM Curator

In the late afternoon of May 25, 1917 one of the deadliest tornadoes in US history tore through Harvey County. At 4:20 in the afternoon, the *Newton Evening Kansan Republican* received an Associated Press bulletin "stating that a tornado had struck Andale, 19 miles northwest of Wichita where six people were reported dead. . . . The wires were all down but a special train was made up at Wichita and started to the scene." Power was out in Newton, and the editor pointed out that "the *Kansan* is handicapped on that account as the linotype machines were helpless." The tornado "ground its way across this county" traveling in a northeasterly direction destroying homes and farms. Initial reports indicated damage and at least two fatalities. Obtaining accurate information was difficult. The *Kansan* noted, "there are rumors that it had continued on up as far as Peabody, but definite news of damage done could not be learned." The tornado was followed by a "terrific downpour of rain, even here in Newton. . . trash and debris fell in large quantities in the streets." The *Kansan* also reported that several automobile loads of men left Newton almost immediately for Sedgwick to help with rescue efforts.

The next day, the full tragedy was reported in the *Newton Evening Kansan Republican*. At about 3:00 in the afternoon "a terrific tornado struck the southeast part of the town of Sedgwick . . . sweeping away more than a mile of telephone and telegraph lines and the A.V.I. power lines and the Kansas Gas & Electric high line." Official tornado warnings were non-existent before 1948 and the residents of Andale and Sedgwick had no warning. "The twister rose in the southwest, roared down upon Andale with a suddenness that prevented any organized escape . . . it swept through what is known as one of the richest farming districts in the state, leveling standing grain and powdering farm houses and outbuildings."

Many rural families were caught in the open. The Norris family saw the storm coming and Mrs. Norris, along with the children were able to make it to a hedge row for shelter. William Norris, the husband and father, was "caught and thrown to the north where he was found with his body crushed" killed instantly. Several members of the Coble family were able to make it into a cellar. A nephew, Dewey Faw, however, did not make it and was killed. Even those that made it to safety suffered broken bones and bruising.

The L. E. Fife Farm was "one of the finest country homes in the county" and was "equipped in the most modern and up-to-date manner" with heat and a "water
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Coble Farm, following the tornado. HCHM Collection



Fife farm, prior to tornado damage.

(Continued from page 1)
 plant." Mr. Fife and a hired hand took shelter in a small shed, which was not touched. Mr. Fife described his experience for the Kansan. "So suddenly did the twister come that he first saw debris flying and heard the roar and crash of the buildings as the mighty whirl wrenched them from their foundations and crushed them into kindling wood, hurling them with spiteful viciousness in every direction . . . he saw his beautiful home lifted, first the roof, then the entire structure hurled from its foundation and crushed like a house of cards. Imagine his impotent grief when he saw Mrs. Fife lifted and hurled through the air then picked up again and thrown against the fence." Mrs. Fife was caught in the house. When she heard the roar of the storm, she went to the door, but could not open it. She turned back to the room "and the next she knew was when she found herself hung across the front fence. One of her shoes had been torn off and her ankle severely wrenched and a bad gash had been cut across her right temple. The



house and all buildings . . . a complete wreck. Seven of Mr. Fife's purebred horses . . . killed." Mrs. Fife, although badly injured, survived the tornado.

The Danner farm was hit especially hard. S.T. Danner had purchased his Harvey County homestead from the Santa Fe Railroad in the 1870s. Danner, and wife Anna (Harryman), had three sons, William S., Albert E.S. and Samuel E. (who died at age nine), and had created a beautiful home. Active in public life as well, Danner served in the Kansas Senate in 1893 and 1895. That fateful day, the Danner family was at home. Son, Albert (A.E.S.) and his wife took shelter in the cellar, but for some reason his parents did not. Anna Danner was "killed outright, her head being crushed and her arm twisted and broken in a frightful manner." Mr. Danner was injured so badly many doubted that he would survive. He did survive, but friends noted that "he never fully recovered [from the death of Anna], and put his worldly affairs in order." Danner died two years later on March 20, 1919.



(Continued page 3))

Harvey County Historical Society 2017 Membership Form

All memberships enjoy:

- Free or reduced admission to programs and events;
- 10% discount in the Carnegie Gift Shop;
- Four issues of *The Heritage & Now*, the official newsletter of the Society;
- A full year of benefits.

Choose from:

Individual (\$20)

Couple or Family (\$25)

- Member benefits apply for two adults listed on the membership and their minor children or grandchildren;

One-Plus-One (\$25)

- The member may pay member rate for a companion to attend events;
- Can be a different companion for each event;

Sustaining (\$50)

- Member benefits apply to up to two persons listed on the membership;
- One complimentary meeting rental at the museum for a business gathering, club or civic group meeting, reunion, religious group meeting or similar;

Corporate (\$100)

- Member benefits apply to up to four persons listed on the membership;
- One complimentary meeting rental at the museum for a business gathering, club or civic group meeting, reunion, religious group meeting or similar; OR one complimentary Speakers Bureau presentation at the museum or off-site.

Museum & Archives

Hours

Tuesday—Friday
10:00 AM—4:00 PM

Third Thursday
Also 6:00—8:00 PM

1st & 3rd Saturdays
10:00 AM—4:00 PM

Address & Contacts

PO Box 4; 203 N. Main
Newton, KS 67114
(316) 283-2221
E-mail: info@hchm.org
Website: hchm.org

Please return form with cash or check to:

Harvey County Historical Museum PO Box 4; 203 N. Main Newton, KS 67114

Thank you for your support!

2017 Membership Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Membership Amount: _____ Additional donation: _____

Total enclosed: _____

Select a membership category:

- Individual (\$20)
- Couple or Family (\$25)
- One-Plus-One (\$25)
- Sustaining (\$50)
- Corporate (\$100)

Facebook Features the Gold at the End of the Rainbow

Museum friend Patricia Middleton posted this photo to our Facebook page on February 8. In black and white, this is an atmospheric, moody shot of the museum. What you CAN'T see, unless you are viewing the electronic version of the newsletter, is the rainbow arcing from the north and ending right in our building! So jump onto Facebook if you want to see the color version and get the full effect. Thanks, Patricia, for the great pic!



2017 Events—continued from page 5

August

August 17, 6:00-8:00—Third Thursday. Free and open to the public.

September

September 21, 6:00-8:00—Third Thursday. Free and open to the public.

October

October 12, 6:00-9:00—Taste of Newton. Enjoy this popular community event in downtown Newton, and visit the museum booth for a tasty treat!

October 15, 2:00—Athletic Cathedrals of Kansas. Jordan Poland, Director of the Kansas Sports Hall of Fame, presents about some of the more memorable sports venues in Kansas, how they are built and how they effect past, present and current generations of Kansans. \$5 (members admitted for free).

October 19, 6:00-8:00—Third Thursday. Free and open to the public.

October 28, 7:00—Paranormal Activity at the Museum. Hear the results from the investigation by the McPherson County Paranormal Society. Then a lucky few will be able to accompany the team on their own "hunt." Watch for more details, registration will open in late summer.



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Although the Fujii scale had not yet been developed, it is estimated that the tornado that went through Sedgwick and rural Harvey County on May 25 was at an F5 strength. There were 23 deaths and 118 buildings completely destroyed in the communities of Andale, Sedgwick, and Florence. The tornado was over one mile wide at one point and traveled 65 miles

The May 25, 1917 tornado is listed as one of the top ten Weather Events of the 20th Century for South Central Kansas by the National Weather Service Forecast Office. The tornado that roared through Harvey County was part of a larger outbreak of storms across twelve Midwestern states. Between May 25 and June 1, 1917 at least 382 people were killed in the eight day tornado outbreak sequence that made it the third deadliest tornado season since records were kept (as of May, 2013) – a total of 551 people lost their lives to tornadoes. For fatalities related to tornadoes, 1925 season was the highest with 794 fatalities, followed by 1936 with 552 fatalities. Coincidentally, May 25 was also the date of the 1955 tornado that devastated Udall, Kansas where over half of the population with either killed or severely injured.

Archival Lighting Project Entering Final Stage

An improvement project that began in 2012 will be finished this year. Five years ago, the maintenance committee planned to blow insulation into the attic to improve energy efficiency. The attic is located over the archival research library (the front third of the building, visible from Main Street). Before insulating, the lighting needs of the archival library were examined. A hodge-podge of different light fixtures supplement the natural light from windows and a skylight, but doesn't provide the quality of light needed for examining old documents, maps and other resources within archives. A donor was found to support the first portion of a lighting improvement project—providing the wiring for light fixtures prior to filing the attic with insulation. We are now ready to complete the project by adding the fixtures! The project is estimated to cost \$2,500 and include 12 pendant fixtures. The fixtures will be hung several feet below the ceiling and feature 150-watt bulbs, assuring researchers of adequate light. To support this project, please mark your check "lighting project" and mail to or drop off at the museum. To donate with debit or credit card, visit our website, which features a donation button.—just list "lighting" under the special instructions section. Please call or e-mail if you have questions! And thank you for your support!

Museum Support

(November 2016—January 2017)

New/Renewing Members

Paul & Beverley Buller
Nancy Christensen
Daryl Cooper
Charles & Nancy Craig
Marvin & Ruthann Dirks
Bob Everoski
Mary Ann Gertsen
George Graybill
Duane Heine
Courtney & Bev Hiebert
Richard Janzen
Dean & Linda Koppes

Vince & Kathy Marshall
Karen Monroe
Henry & Linda Neufeld
Pat Olson
Donald & Carolyn Penner
Robert Puckett
James & Katie Reese
Susan Rhoades
Tom & Mary Anne Sandwell
Robert & Glendene Schmidt
Alma Shelly
Joe Smiley

Leonard & Janice Steider
Brian Stucky
John Whitlock
Donors
Ron Dietzel
Kansas Humanities Council
Susan Koehn
Robert Puckett
Susan Rhoades
Janelle & Gaylord Sanneman
Stith Heating & Cooling
Steve & Susie Tangeman



Museum board member Joe Smiley in front of his 1957 Chevrolet Bel Air Coup at the 110th birthday party for the Carnegie Library building (now housing the museum) in May of 2014. Does anyone remember Myra, the hat figure who promoted museum events on Facebook?

Supporter Spotlight: Joe Smiley

I recently sat down with Joe to visit about his interest in and support of the museum and archives. Joe was on the board in 2006, when I started here, and recently come back onto the board after an absence of several years. He has been faithful in his volunteer time and his financial support. He has served as Treasurer during his board terms, and, along with his late wife Jeanne, helped form a finance committee and create policies and guidelines to better oversee and manage museum finances. Joe also has the HUGE task of chairing the Taste of Newton committee, planning for and accomplishing our largest fundraising project.

Why did you become involved in the museum? I've always been interested in history, especially here as I was born and raised in Newton. Jane [Jones, HCHM archivist, who was on the board prior to joining the staff] drug me into it—I told her when I retired and moved back, I would get involved.

What do you think has been the biggest challenge for the museum? Building maintenance. Keeping an historic building going is a non-stop challenge, then add on the renovation projects to make it BETTER. This takes so much of the resources, but the building is the heart of the organization, and a great representation to and of the community. My fantasy would be to redo the entire building and completely modernize all of the systems—heating and cooling, electrical, plumbing.

What do you think is the biggest improvement during your time here? So much improvement! Even on the limited budget, the physical improvement are tremendous—renovating the exterior of Kellas School, redoing the galleries and getting the boards off of the windows, all of that. The planning and organization of exhibits has also been a huge improvement—exhibits that are themed and that change on a regular schedule, creative ideas, links to current happenings. And also in archives—the access we offer to researchers. The biggest positive change has been staffing—we have been so fortunate to attract excellent people to the museum—and the overall “tighter ship.” By that I mean better financial management and planning, board development to get the best from our volunteer board, community presence—just so much overall improvement. I have been excited to serve an organization that actively seeks to get better.

Museum board member Bob Everoski of Halstead passed away on February 20. Our sympathies are extended to his family.

Harvey County Historical Museum Events—2017

March

March 16, 6:00-8:00—Third Thursday. Enjoy this come-and-go event at the museum and an open archives for researchers who can't make it during the day. A small display of St. Patrick's Day and Easter postcards will be featured this evening! Be sure to visit other community participants, including Carriage Factory Art Gallery, Warkentin House, Kauffman Museum, Grand Central, Clayworks Gallery and Prairie Harvest. Free and open to the public.

March 18, 2:00-5:00—Exhibit Opening at the Halstead Historical Society Museum & Depot. Join our colleagues in Halstead for *A Community Response to World War I*. Some items from HCHM have been loaned for this exhibit. The museum is at 116 E. First, Halstead and is open Saturdays and Sunday from 2:00-5:00. For more info, call (316) 835-2267.



RESCHEDULED FROM JANUARY WEATHER CANCELATION!!! **March 19, 2:00—Pioneer and Indian Trails in the City of Newton.** Join local historian Brian Stucky as he shares about the multitude of trails that ran right through town. A great way to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the Chisholm Trail! \$5 (members admitted for free).

April

April 20, 6:00-8:00—Third Thursday. Enjoy this come-and-go event at the museum and an open archives for researchers who can't make it during the day. In anticipation of the Newton Downtown Car Show (on Saturday, May 6), the feature this evening will be photos from our collection of antique and vintage automobiles (that might not have been vintage at the time of the photo, as in this 1962 view of downtown Newton) and items from the Meridian Highway project. Be sure to visit other community participants, including Carriage Factory Art Gallery, Warkentin House, Kauffman Museum, Grand Central, Clayworks Gallery and Prairie Harvest. Free and open to the public.



May

May 18, 6:00-8:00—Third Thursday. Enjoy this come-and-go event at the museum and an open archives for researchers who can't make it during the day. In celebration of the many graduation taking place in May, an informal display of related memorabilia will be featured, including area yearbooks, oversize graduating class photo sheets, programs and more. Visit this evening to see what graduations past were like! Be sure to visit other community participants, including Carriage Factory Art Gallery, Warkentin House, Kauffman Museum, Grand Central, Clayworks Gallery and Prairie Harvest. Free and open to the public.

June

June 15, 6:00-8:00—Third Thursday. Free and open to the public.

July

July 20, 6:00-8:00—Third Thursday. Free and open to the public.