This issue of the TCHS will be the initiation of a “new” column. It is new to us, but an old column for those who read Billie Aye’s, column, “Remember When” in the Tonganoxie Mirror. The items presented here will be from old issues of the “Mirror” and provided by Theresa Megee & Connie Putthoff. In this particular issue the column will be 1915. The Column will be “Tongie Tidbits”

The Democratic war tax will cost Mrs. C.W. Loomis $64 when she executes the deed transferring her farm to the recent purchaser. Stamps of the denomination of $1 each will be pasted on the deed.

Walter Quisenberry was home a few days last week. He is now a motorman on the Country Club line in Kansas City.

A Scotch collie did not know the heels of one of the mules standing in front of the MIRROR office Tuesday forenoon was loaded. He tickled the heels and took the elevator. The dog, his voice working overtime, landed between a team of horses owned by Ray Barnes and they got scared at the unusual commotion. They promptly snapped the buggy tongue in two but did not get away.

Joe Stiglemeyer of Fairmount killed a gray wolf with a hatchet in his feed lot a few days ago. The animal had been chased by dogs and took refuge in the lot within reach of the farmer’s unerring aim.

P.E. McNall who is making the farm survey for the federal government around here, says he walked fifty miles last week. The government allows him to hire a rig to get around among the farmers, but on account of the roads did not avail himself of the privilege. The walking is hard on shoe leather, and he cannot charge up the wear bill to Uncle Sam. Mr. McNall will try to get through this week.

The first gasoline engine used in operating the electric light plant was shipped to Kansas City yesterday. The engine weighed 7,100 lbs and made a heavy pull through the mud to the depot.

The swell chicken thief who was sent to the penitentiary in Kansas City last week, having been caught through an electric alarm system, was once the husband of a former Tonganoxie woman.

John Finn come over from Pony Creek Saturday, and said he would not repeat the trip until the roads get better. He passed one mover whose wagon was mired so deep he had to take off his load to get out.

HOT CROSS BUNS—At the Home Bakery Good Friday for 15c per dozen. Phone order.

Telling it Elsewhere—The Kansas Industrialist published at Manhattan has this to say about Tonganoxie paving. “Tonganoxie, a town of approximately a thousand population, situated in Leavenworth county, has taken the lead in this phase of progressive community activity by asking W. S. Gearhart, state highway engineer to supervise the construction of seven blocks of paving running through the main part of the town. It has been practically decided that the material used will be concrete. Tonganoxie is the first town of its size in the state to pave its streets.”

Among those who boarded the train for Kansas City Monday were Chas. Hemphill, F.J. Dessery, John Casebier and Chas. Olden.

ANTON NIRSCHL
Billiard and Pool Hall. No stranger should come to Tonganoxie without visiting the above establishment, which is the finest billiard and pool hall in the west and is conducted by Anton Nirschl who bought out Chas. B. French on Jan. 1, 1915. He sells cigars, tobacco and soft drinks and is well patronized by our people.
ANTON NIRSCHL.
The Nirschl family had three boys, John, Herman and William who all served in WW I. John and Herman operated a store in what was later the Salmon auto repair business. Anton Nirschl operated this pool hall until 1929 when the Johnson’s bought it. In 1954 they sold it to the Metzger family. The Hancock family operated it for many years and now it is a dental office, operated by G. Ritchey, DDS.

Dr. W.R. Gladman made a talk to the grade pupils in school Tuesday on the Indian wars. The doctor was out with the soldiers on the Indian campaigns and knows whereof he speaks.

Ed. Note: Dr. Gladman was a well known physician in Tonganoxie, specializing in female medicine. Consequently, he delivered many babies.

When age 15 he enlisted in the 9th Ohio cavalry to fight in the Civil War. He saw much action. After the Civil War he was stationed at Ft. Wallace in Western Kansas. His outfit trailed Indians all over western Kansas, Texas, and Colorado and finally rescued two white females near the Solomon River.

After leaving the army Dr. Gladman went to Eclectic Medical Institute. In 1883 he came to Tonganoxie, KS. to practice medicine.

He also was a member of The Grand Army of the Republic, Slocum Post, No. 161 and has been its commander. TCHS has a photo of the local members of the Patriot’s Band. It is supposed to be celebration of old veterans of the Civil War. Not much else is known about this photo, but speculation suggests it is the GAR Slocum Post, No. 161 and I’ll wager Dr. Gladman is in this photo.

MYERS HOTEL
This house enjoys the reputation of being the best hotel in this section of the country. Everything from cellar to attic is clean, cozy and homelike. The rooms are large and comfortable, the table being supplied with each and every delicacy of the season. We had the pleasure of stopping at this house and we were never better satisfied.

ZELLNER/ZOELLNER
Wonderful, Most Practical Invention—The Aladdin Mantle Lamp is one of the greatest and most useful inventions of the age. The Aladdin has solved the lighting problem for rural, small town and suburban homes. The Aladdin produces such a pure, white, steady light, five times as strong as electric and much more economical. It’s far ahead of the ordinary oil
Ed. Note: The Zoellners came to Tonganoxie from Jarbalo. Fred and Walt Zoellner operated the business established by their father, Frank Zoellner, for many years. Walt sold his business to Carl Oakson and Fred Zoellner sold his business to Harold Champion.

Keyta Kelly, Chairman of the Board

I’d like to take the opportunity to introduce myself to those members who don’t know me. My name is Keyta Kelly and I live in the rural Tonganoxie area just north of town about 5 miles. I’ve been a Leavenworth County resident since right after I married my husband, Michael Kelly, 33 years ago. Michael was born and raised in Tonganoxie just east of town. We’ve lived in rural Bonner, Basehor, Tongie, and Leavenworth during those 33 years. In 1998 we moved back to the Tonganoxie vicinity where we currently live. Out of all of those towns in Leavenworth County in which we have lived, Tonganoxie is the closest to my heart. I consider Tonganoxie my home. I don’t believe it’s just because I’ve been here the longest though. It’s something else. The first time I lived in Tonganoxie when 2 of my 3 children were very young, I loved it then. And when we moved back to Tonganoxie from Leavenworth, it felt like coming home. There is a sense of community in Tonganoxie that no longer exists in a lot of other towns. There is a good feeling that comes from walking down 4th Street and knowing everyone you meet. But, what is better than just knowing that person is knowing that you can trust that person to be there when you need them. Whether it is community celebration or community heartbreak, we, here in Tonganoxie know that the town will rally.

The Board of Directors of the Tonganoxie Community Historical Society decided that our primary goal this year is to increase our membership. As the Chairman of the Board, I know that this won’t be a difficult task since we’ve got the community of Tonganoxie from which to draw. If I’ve never met you before, I would love to. Stop by my office, Kelly Law Office, at 512 East Fourth Street and introduce yourself. I’m generally there at least 5 days a week working from my office where I can glance up from time to time and look out my door on Fourth Street and reflect on how fortunate I am to be a part of the community that is Tonganoxie.

PAST PERFECT

This term may be misunderstood, suggesting that only the past is perfect. However, it is the huge data base computer program that allows our museum to keep track of ALL the artifacts in our museum.

It allows us to know where an item is located in the museum. If it is a written document or a photo--no problem--the document will either show up on the computer or if necessary it shows which document file the hard copy of the artifact is located.

The most important aspect of this program is that it provides information about the artifact. Who donated the item, how the item was used, where the item was used, and when was it used.

It is invaluable when a person wants to find school, family information and research projects.

Jenny Alden & Kris Roberts attended a two day past perfect continuing education program.
Edwin F. Willert, Revisited

You may remember a few newsletters ago we had contact with some people living in Holland. These people had adopted some WW II veterans who were buried in one of the American Cemeteries located in Holland. In this case one had adopted Edwin Willert, a graduate from Tonganoxie High School in 1939. He was listed as killed in action, but his body was never found. His name is all that existed.

We have had some additional contact with these people and we now have a ream of information about Edwin F. Willert. TCHS now has numerous communications between the Willert family and the Army, the Quartermasters, the American Graves Registration Command. In addition we have three extremely sad pleas from Mrs. Willert, Edwin’s mother, requesting information as to why they can’t find his body. I will attempt to provide generalized information about Edwin Willert from the large amount of material we now have.

On February 17, 1943 Edwin Willert was captured and taken prisoner of war by the Germans. This was during the battle of Tunisia in North Africa. However, because there was no evidence of E. Willert’s body or that he was a prisoner, he was officially considered Missing in Action. This status was maintained from 17 Feb., 1943. When the German Government reported to the International Red Cross that Edwin was in fact a Prisoner of War, the MIA status was changed to be POW. If I have interpreted the dates correctly he was now considered a POW from 24 April 1943. On August 15th, 1945 (This is the official date of record, but the actual date was April 15 1945) the POW status was changed to Killed in Action (KIA). This was due to American bombing raids.

So, in Feb 17, 1943 we have Edwin Willert captured by the Germans in The Battle for Tunisia. We learn the rest of Pfc Willert’s demise from the three hand written letters from his mother to various army departments involved with recovering the dead and missing bodies.

We have several official letters from the military. These all are basically the same. The early military letters offer hope of recovering his body and his personal belongings. Later we learn that the grave sites are located in the Russian sector and mention is made of the difficulties that involved. Also, it has been made known that several large mass burial sites were discovered. The difficulties in identifying bodies in these mass graves, not only involved identifying individuals via body and body parts, but also many times English, French and other countries had soldiers in these same graves. One letter tells that the French had dug up a burial site in the area and found all sorts of soldiers from varying countries. In their attempt to sort out the bodies, they made incorrect assessment of which country some of the soldiers were from. The last series of letters dwell on how difficult it has been to discover evidence of some of the missing bodies. At one point great effort was made to tell Mrs. Willert that of the 18 bodies discovered from the bombing, they had enough body parts to identify 10 of the bodies. Mention is made that these last remaining unidentified body parts were so sparse that identification was impossible.

In a letter to Mrs. Willert, dated 22 Jan. 1954 we learn the official demise of Edwin. It appears the he and seventeen other prisoners were killed on the 15th of April, 1945. This was the result of the Augusta School
Bombing Raid and the bodies were buried in the Quenz Cemetery at Brandenburg, Germany. This is the letter that said they could only identify 10 of the prisoners. The last sentence sum up Edwin’s fate. “Therefore, the previous findings of non-recoverability of your son is considered to be final.”

Mrs. Willert’s first letter (5 hand written pages) gives us the most information about Willert’s situation in Brandenburg.

It appears that Edwin was taken to Brandenburg as a POW. He worked as a medic in the POW hospital there. (I am not sure that he was a medic before he was captured, but he must have been) He was in Brandenburg ca. two years before it was known that he was alive. His official status was changed from MIA to POW.

For some reason the Germans moved these medics and patients to the Augusta School House and established the POW hospital there. The Germans did not make any identifying marks on this building to let the Allied Air Force know that this was a hospital (No Red Cross on Building). Around 9:30 AM the American Air Force bombed this building, killing several POWs including Edwin. KILLED BY FRIENDLY FIRE!

Mrs Willert: “A mother and father who are deeply in sorrow and heartbroken of our Dear beloved son Edwin who was killed these three weeks before he was liberated in a School house at the edge of the city of Brandenburg. O, but why did those Germans force those Medics of Stalag 3B down in Brandenburg in school house, without marking our Hospital Prison Camp”. and further, “O but I do hope our Lord will bring those German Generals and guards that had charge over my Son and the rest of these medics at Brandenburg, that were responsible for not marking our hospital, by all means doing such crime ought to be punished by all means.”

A friend of Edwin’s who apparently was captured with Edwin wrote a letter to Mrs. Willert explaining in detail about Edwin’s demise. He tells her that he and several POWs saw Edwin’s body after the bombing. He further explains where he was buried, and how the graves were marked so the bodies could be easily found.

Friend’s letter: “your son and the others all had the same kind of burial. Each Grave was marked with a wooden cross. Also your son’s name carved in the cross. On the rough box a metal number of your son’s prison number. If the American Occupation Forces ever dig your son, Edwin’s, grave up for a final resting place, they will not have a bit of trouble to identify your son Edwin’s grave.”

His letter further make known that he believes that the American Pilots should not be blamed because there were no identifying marks to let the pilots know the building was a POW hospital.

Friend’s letter: “believe me when I say that it wasn’t our Fliers fault at all because you see the Germans did not have any Red Cross on our building and no way at all for our fliers to know that our hospital was a prison hospital. The Germans did not notify the Geneva Red Cross where we were located.”

In all of Mrs. Willert’s letters (beginning in Oct 1945 and ending in Dec. 1953) demonstrates her frustrations with the military because they weren’t able to locate the body (when she told them where he was buried), provide them with Edwin’s personal belongings, and they never answered her questions as to why POWs were moved and the hospital was not identified.

Mrs Willert: “The war is entirely over now and still our government don’t know or believe what happened in Brandenberg, Germany. My son; Edwin F. Willert has done his duty and had to lay down his life for his country is just the same as any other soldier that fought for his Country, and now by all means their crime these Germans did was acause of having our medics and patients had to forfeit their lives.”

Her last letter of 15 Dec., 1953: “Our government shouldn’t of waited 4-5 years till the Russians give us freedom to get in to remove our Son’s body. …I hope that my son is not the only one left on Russian soil. I hope to get an answer on this if there wasn’t anyway to identify my son by number. This is all I ask in Jesus name.”

Ed. note: Reading about his situation and all that transpired was a heart rendering experience for me. I remember WWII and I have some personal knowledge of a similar situation where a WWII flyer was lost over Africa and was MIA until ca. 1998 when his bones were discovered and my friend, his girl friend, was notified. In my work I became friends to several WWII POWS and to many of them the war was still an issue. On my cynical side, I wonder what happened to his pay during his imprisonment.
THE PRESIDENT’S REPORT

by Kris Roberts

We are three months into 2015 and we have been busy.

A group of at least twenty were in the barn on January 26 labeling the union newsletters. The work went quickly, because there were so many volunteers and it is easy to stay busy when you have people to visit with and treats to share.

Throughout January, plans were being made for the chili and soup feed scheduled for February 19. 45-50 members volunteered in one way or another for that event. The sheer number of volunteers alone is impressive. The event was profitable, not just in terms of dollars, but also because the day was an opportunity to visit with people in the community. Our gift shop was re-created there too.

The day after the chili feed, we set up an exhibit in the public library. The exhibit covers World War I information, with quite a bit of local characters. If you have not had a chance to see the exhibit, try to get to the library in the next weeks or two to look it over. We may try to take this exhibit to other venues in town.

On March 14, the St. Patrick’s Day parade saw the TCHS Pumper Truck in the parade line-up once again. Once again, volunteers were on hand to get the truck started up and ready to run after a winter in the firehouse – more volunteers drove the pumper truck in the parade.

The programs in January and February were well received. In January, we heard about the Order enforced in Missouri during the Civil War, from an author who also acted out a portion of her program, as the mother in her historical novel. In February, the Jewel on Main Singers performed. We tapped our feet, clapped along in rhythm, and some of us fought the urge to get up and dance.

Membership and Volunteers

Our goal this year is to expand our membership. The Tonganoxie Community Historical Society is an organization that has many faces and much to be proud of. Since started in 1981, the organization has built a well-regarded museum and has an established educational program for third graders in the community. Our program meetings are engaging. Our fundraisers are fun. We are a community.

Communities grow and mature by working together toward common goals. Every Wednesday morning, various members gather at the site to volunteer to do whatever needs to be done. We work together from 9am to noon. And we have some specific needs right now. They are:

- Lawn mowing and trimming
- Miscellaneous light building repairs and installation of museum exhibits
- Care for perennial gardens

Like most tasks around the museum and the society, there are many rewards for participating. We do have fun. We take coffee breaks together. And we are the fuel that continues a 34-year-old legacy of local citizens who have come together to build this museum and this society.

Join us, please.
WW I EXHIBIT BY TCHS

Under the direction of Kris Roberts, TCHS put together an impressive exhibit about WW I.

Kris says she had great support from many of the members.

Laurie Walters brought poppies and the idea to include something about Flanders Fields.

Ray Stockman told me about Camp Naish, the Boy Scout camp in Bonner Springs/Edwardsville, named after a man who drowned with the Lusitania. His wife's story and some information on Camp Naish is a prominent part of the exhibit and a great local tie to the Lusitania.

Kathy Stockman gave me a book on Harry Truman's military service in WW1.

Connie Putthoff brought in a newspaper clipping about Carl Barnhardt. Carol Slawson brought in a clipping about her father, who joined the Student Officer Corps at KU, the precursor to ROTC, which was established as a result of WW1.

Kathy Peak brought me a copy of the Henry Toburen letter that was published in the Tonganoxie Mirror in February, 1915. A very local story and perspective on the war. (His letter from the previous summer, August 1914, talks about how lovely the asphalt streets in London are and how he hopes that Tonganoxie can develop enough civic pride to plant flowers and make the streets more beautiful.)

It goes without saying that the museum archives and current displays also contributed much to the library display.

PROGRAMS for APRIL AND MAY

April and May Programs are yet to be determined.

The June program will not be on the usual 4th Tuesday, but will be a picnic on June 27th at 6 PM.

Please bring a covered dish !!

DONATIONS TO TCHS

If you have any items that you would like to donate to the Museum, there are several things that you should know.

WE MUST DO THE PAPER WORK !!

We need information on the donor; phone number, name, address, and e-mail if there is one.

Details on the Item donated: vital information on the donated item will be recorded; what was it used for, the size of the item, and who all may have used this item.

Items accepted: Any Item, including photos, will be accepted if and only if it can be related to Tonganoxie OR the surrounding area. If you live in Old Dimon, Ackerland, Hogue, Reno, Edminister and yes even Dafer, you can relax. WE WANT IT!

The Accession Committee: This is the important group. When you bring in a donation, a temporary accession for the item is completed. The accession committee then meets to determine if we can use it. Now Remember we want it, but we may not be able to use it. Because if it is a tank or some large farm implement we probably won’t have a place to store it. And if it is bucket full of old UNLABELLED photos (how can we tell the history of unknown photos) we may have to reject those.

The Thank you: After the Accession committee meets and determine the fate of the item, a formal thank you will be issued. With this thank you a deed of gift will be included which you are asked to sign and return.

The Museum personnel will ensure that the item is recorded and can easily be accessed for other people to see and review the item.

We do appreciate all the donations that we have and are getting.

IT’S IN THE MUSEUM

This felt Beaver Top hat was owned by John Bell. It was donated by Virginia Murphy, his granddaughter. The top hat was made by E.Walmsley’s Manufacture London, at 88 &99 High Street, Belfast, Ireland. Sandra, his great granddaughter said John proudly wore this hat when he was required to introduce dignitaries. The Bell Family is an old and well known family in Leavenworth County.
Beaver Fur was required for high quality felt hats. Felted beaver fur was produced by removing unwanted outer guard hairs, shaving the dense inner coat, arranging the fur in a random direction, called carding, and finally agitating the fluff produced into a loose felt called batt. Shaping the hat begins with adding heat, moisture and finally a stiffening agent, gum Arabic. The last step is steaming and ironing. To complete the final product, a silk lining was sewn in.

No wonder these hats were quite costly, very uncommon and highly valued. The quality of the leather storage trunk attests to the overall expense.

Back in Time Box Social
TCHS Opening Day
April 11th, 2015
11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Do you recall the early 1900s tradition of Box Socials? Women would decorate a cardboard box and fill it with a lunch for two. The men then bid on the women's boxes anticipating a meal with the woman whose box it was. The bidding involved teasing, joking, and competition.

The Tonganoxie Community Historical Society is excited about its 2015 Opening Day Event because we are hosting a box lunch with a twist. The boxes on which you will be bidding have been creatively decorated by the Tonganoxie High School’s FCCLA Club and they belong to celebrities! If you win the bid on the box, you get to have lunch – one on one – with that celeb. The celebrities are Steve Bell, KCUR “NPR” Radio “The Voice of Kansas City”; Shannon O’Brien—Emmy Award winning reporter with Fox 4 News; Charley Green as “Will Rogers”; Todd Thompson, Leavenworth County Attorney; Sissy Hoegler, Mrs. Kansas 2014; Chief of Police Jeff Brandau, Fire Chief Jack Holcom; USD 464 Superintendent Dr. Lynn Rantz. Who knows?! There may be more. And, don’t be surprised if your box lunch comes with added bonuses. Bidding starts at 11:00 a.m. We are fortunate to have auctioneer Lynne Sebree with Sebree Auction, LLC volunteering as auctioneer. Lynne is sure to keep the bidding lively!

If you end up being out-bid on all of the boxes, it means you didn’t bid high enough, but all is not lost. Box lunches will be available for purchase ($7.00 each) for you to enjoy with your friends and family.

After lunch, the Museum will be open for tours. The Middle School History Club will take you on a trip back through time as you journey through the exhibits.

You are invited not only to a place and event, but also to a time – April 11th, 1915. So, put on your finest 1915s apparel and come be a part of this historic experience!

THE WRIGHT BROTHERS AND TONGANOXIE, KS

Reuchlin Wright, In 1901 Reuch (pronounced Roosh) and Lulu lived on a farm near Tonganoxie, KS, where he raised cattle and seed corn. The actual location is ca. 2 miles straight east from Tonganoxie on 4th street. When you come to the end of that road, you are there. If you turn south a short distance you are at Walnut School on Evans Road or Co. Rd. 6.
“Reusch” was the oldest brother to Wilber and Orville Wright. It is this farm where Wilber and Orville Wright experimented with Gliders. This provided the brothers with information on keeping heavy (heavier than air) air planes in the air.

It seems they had trouble getting the glider airborne. Success came when they hitched a team of mules to the glider which helped the glider gain enough lift to initially get the glider airborne. Aid to this operation was provided by Mr. Heiser, father of Edith Heiser Bleakly.

The glider probably flew to the east/southeast due to the gentle and long slope of the hill overlooking Stranger Creek.

The Wright brothers and Mr. Heiser crated the glider, brought it to Tonganoxie, and shipped it back to Ohio on the Northwestern Rail Road. Mr. Heiser was the station master of the Kanas City, Wyandotte, and Northwestern RR (Later called The Northwestern)

The city of McLouth has some attachment to this story as one of Reuschlin’s daughters married Harold Steeper (an old McLouth name).

According to Fred Leimkuhler, the Wright Brothers visited Tonganoxie several times, but nothing more is known about the brothers testing flying machines in this area.

**TCHS HOSTESSES FOR NEXT QUARTER--7 PM for April & May**

- April 28  
  Slawson - Kris Roberts

- May 26  
  C. Stouffer - M. Needham - C. Torneden

- June  
  Picnic, Saturday June 27, 6:00 p.m. Bring covered dish, utensils, chairs

**Back in Time Box Social**

**TCHS Opening Day**

**April 11th, 2015**

**11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.**

Do you want to have some good food?
Do you want to have a good time?
Do you desire to relax in a fun atmosphere?
   “Let your hair down, laugh a little”.
Would you like to meet a celebrity
   and dine with that celebrity?
   (Steve Bell, Shannon O’Brien, Charley Green,
   Todd Thompson, Jack Holcom, Sissy Hoegler;
   Jeff Brandau, Dr. Lynn Rantz. Plus more)

You must be the highest bid on the celebrities’ box with whom you desire to dine. These boxes are creatively decorated by the Tonganoxie High School’s FCCLA Club. Come and spend some mony!!!

Would you enjoy guided tour through the Museum?
After lunch the Middle School History Club will take you on a trip back through time.

IF YOU ANSWER YES TO ANY OF THE ABOVE COME TO THE MUSEUM

You are invited not only to a place and an event, but also to a time – April 11th, 1915. So, put on your finest 1915s apparel and come be a part of this historic experience!

**TCHS OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS**

- Keyta Kelly  
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- Kris Roberts  
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- Connie Torneden  
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The above may be reached at 913-845-2960 (TCHS Phone Number)