

TONGANOXIE COMMUNITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

2nd QUARTER NEWSLETTER, June 2022



The whole history group

Some History of Radio, and Radio in Tonganoxie

By John "Chip" Lenahan, Jr. (Amateur Radio KØRW)

During the early 1900's radio was developed to send telegraphic messages across the Atlantic. This was an entirely commercial enterprise for the purpose of making money.

An important user of "wireless" services were the luxury liners crossing the Atlantic. These luxury ships had many wealthy and politically prominent passengers. The ability to conduct business while at sea via wireless was an attraction.

After the Titanic disaster of 1912, international rules changed and the requirements for wireless operators on ships expanded rapidly. Where did these operators come from? Many of the radio experimenters of the time, often called "amateur" wireless operators became "commercial" wireless radio operators, which were well paid positions.

In 1917 the US joined the War in Europe. With the declaration of war the government closed all US amateur radio stations and many took their skills to war.

War often brings advances in technology. One thing that got rapid development was what became known as the "vacuum tube." This one item was to change radio and radio communication forever and created broadcast radio of the 1920's and 1930's.

Amateur radio operators of the 1920's included some of the great minds of radio as well as High School kids. Amateurs were experimenting with the technology not only spanned the Atlantic, they spanned the Pacific using radio telegraphy. They also experimented with voice communication. Colleges and Universities obtained amateur radio licenses for voice communications. The University of Kansas had a station, licensed as a commercial radio station, with call sign KFKU in 1921.

Companies that had products to sell soon saw value in having

a radio station to pitch those products. One such station also was in Lawrence. The Jenny Wren milling company along the Kansas (Kaw) river not only milled grain, it also generated electricity. Lawrence had electric lights and with its own electricity Jenny Wren milling came on the air in 1927 as WREN. The WREN and Jenny Wren came from the four central letters in Lawrence.

One of the early engineers at WREN, in the early 1930's, was C. M. "Buck" Lewis, first licensed in 1922 as amateur radio 9CCS, in Yates Center, KS. Though working at WREN would be some 10 years away, with a degree in electrical engineering to be completed at KU, Buck already knew about Tonganoxie.

Among his many amateur radio contacts, one was with amateur radio station 9DTA in Tonganoxie, built and operated by Clifford Peters.

Clifford Peters' Tonganoxie amateur radio station 9DTA

Buck Lewis was working for WREN when, in 1932, the transmitter was moved from Lawrence to its new site along the south side of old US 24-40 (variously known as Washington St, Evans Rd, and county road 6) south of the Tonganoxie city limits.

Once the transmitter was moved the engineers worked in Tonganoxie. In those early years of broadcast radio, by law, an engineer had to be on duty to control the transmitter while on the air. The new Tonganoxie transmitter building had accommodations for the engineers while on duty, day, and later at night.

A signature feature of the new Tonganoxie transmitter building was a front entrance shaped like a bird house with a very large concrete wren bird perched outside the door.

Being located on the main highway between Kansas City and Lawrence, travelers on the road could stop and have a "photo op" with the big bird.

There were also regular passenger bus routes, before and after the Tonganoxie stop, that passed the wren on a regular basis.

The move to Tonganoxie changed the coverage area and listeners in Kansas City could hear WREN. This was the reason for moving the transmitter to Tonganoxie, to get a better market area for advertising revenue.

Notice the news clipping doesn't mention Tonganoxie as the transmitter site, only as a location between Kansas City and Lawrence. The "similar statues" outside the WREN building and studios in Lawrence were not as large.

As well as Buck Lewis there were other engineers involved in the move to the new location in Tonganoxie. It was a big and costly investment for WREN.

One of those other engineers involved in the WREN move to Tonganoxie was Walter Varnum, amateur radio license 9FIG of Lawrence, who also received his electrical engineering degree at KU.

I met Walt at an amateur radio gathering in Lawrence during the late 1970's. My name tag, beside having my amateur radio call, also had "Tonganoxie" on it. When Walt spotted it he asked me if I knew of the old WREN transmitter site in Tongie? When I said not only did I know where it was, but that I lived across old 24-40 from it he talked about the 1932 move. He told me that after the Blue network signed off for the night, the Lawrence transmitter was closed down. Certain equipment was placed in the trunk of a car and the night was spent getting ready for the sign on of WREN the next morning in Tonganoxie. The studio in Lawrence used telephone lines to send programming to the transmitter in Tonganoxie and communicate with the duty engineer.

Walt had photos he had taken of the Tonganoxie site when it was brand new. He promised me the next time he was in Lawrence visiting his mother he would bring them. True to his word he did and I had an opportunity to photographically copy them.

Buck and Clifford remained friends for years. Though Clifford left amateur radio Walt and Buck were active up until their deaths. Both Buck and Walt spent many years working for and then retiring from RCA.

Buck Lewis retired to Florida and Clifford told me Buck's new call sign, that information became useful. One night I heard Buck's call sign. He and I had a nice chat using Morse code. When I told him I was from Tonganoxie, knew Clifford, as well as having lived across the street from the old WREN transmitter site he was more than surprised! I still have the confirmation card of that contact with Buck.

As for WREN, the owners tried to get the transmitter moved closer to Kansas City. At one point the WREN Broadcasting Company sold shares to the Kansas City Star newspaper and attempted to move the studio to downtown Kansas City.

Other attempts were made to move into the Kansas City market but were unsuccessful.

The owners of WREN began to look westward. In 1941 WREN made a request for a construction permit to move the transmitter near Jarblo and have studios in Topeka.

In 1947 a request was approved by the FCC for WREN to move transmitter and antenna to east of Topeka and the studios into the city of Topeka.

By 1948 WREN became a Topeka radio station, the "transmitter plant" in Tonganoxie was closed.

Not only did WREN move to Topeka, so did the concrete wren.

The wren is in a small park in Topeka looking as though it is sitting a nest.

The last "concrete?" vestige of old WREN.

From Clifford's letter to me of 1982 he wrote, "everything was pioneering in that no one else in the old home town nor at school knew one darn thing about radio." Yet he made contacts with 27 states, including California, over 1100 miles away, with his 5 watts of home made gear in the early 1920's on frequencies near today's AM broadcast band.

Other Tonganoxie radio pioneers of the early 1920's were, Claude Winslow, 9DSN, Byron Cox, 9DVF, W. Woods, 9DUH, Oscar Dutton, 9ZFX and Emil Freienmouth.

According to the FCC there are, some 100 years later, 40 licensed amateur radio operators in the Tonganoxie zip code.

I consider amateur radio to be the first social media.



WREN'S WREN — Over the entrance to the transmitter plant of WREN, Lawrence, Kan., located between Lawrence and Kansas City, stands this giant concrete statue of a wren, striking symbol of the station, which hundreds of visitors weekly use as foreground or background for snapshots. The bird's beak stands higher than a man. Two similar statues guard the entrance to the WREN Bldg. in Lawrence.



You Know YOUR MESSAGE IS REACHING THE MAXIMUM AUDIENCE BY PLACING YOUR ADVERTISING ON THE ONLY RADIO STATION IN THE "HEART OF AMERICA" BROADCASTING THESE TIME TESTED PROGRAMS.

"20,000 Years in Sing Sing"	Princess Pat Players
Palmolive Beauty Box Theatre	Armco Iron Master
The Magic Key	Eno Crime Clues
Your English	Edgar A. Guest
Pine Mountain Merrymakers	Ben Bernie
Roses and Drums	Helen Hayes
Bob Becker	Wendell Hall
Gabriel Heatter	Rendezvous
Grand Hotel	House of Glass
Jack Benny	John Charles Thomas
Robert L. Ripley	Death Valley Days
Olga Albani	Jimmy Fidler
Walter Winchell	Irene Rich
Today's Children	Bob Crosby
Barbara King's Kitchen	Kellogg College Prom
Sam and Sonny	National Barn Dance
The Singing Lady	The Kansas Citizens
Little Orphan Annie	Bert Burman
Dangerous Paradise	Verl Bratton
Fibber McGee and Molly	George Callahan
Odette Myrtle	Ernest Pontius
Sinclair Greater Minstrels	Tulsa Ted
	The WREN Barn Dance
	The WREN Spotlight

WREN

<p>Yerkes H. (King) Smith, General Manager.</p> <p>Main Offices & Studio, WREN Building, Lawrence, Kansas. Telephone - 22.</p>	<p>Chicago Branch Office, Ray Linton, 262 N. Michigan Ave. Telephone - State 5415.</p> <p>Kansas City, Missouri, Tom Flanagan, Hotel Duane, Telephone - Grand 1105.</p>
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Transmitter now located 18 miles west of Kansas City, to serve the greatest number of listeners in the Kansas City, Topeka and St. Joseph Markets.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR UPCOMING EVENTS

July 13 – Opening of the traveling exhibit, **“The Kansas Riverkings.”** The Kansas Riverkings were great adventurers who sometimes risked their lives on the Kaw River 1870-1970. The exhibit will remain until November 15, 2022.

July 26 – Look for the TCHS 1936 Fire Pumper Truck in the **Leavenworth County Fair Parade**. Campers from History Camp 2022 will be invited to ride in the truck with us.

Aug 23 – Fourth Tuesday Program, 7:00 pm at the museum. **“The Harvey Girls: Women’s Roles in Railroads, Kansas, and US History,”** presented by Dr. Michaeline Chance Reay and sponsored by Humanities Kansas.

Sept. 8 – Look for TCHS at the **Tonganoxie Farmer’s Market**, 5:00-8:00pm.

Sept. 27 – Fourth Tuesday, 7:00 pm at the museum. Jim Hanni will talk about **“What’s in a Kansas County Name?”** The program is about how Kansas counties were named and for whom or what they were named.

Oct. 8 – **Barn Quilt Workshop** at the museum. 9:00 am to 2:00 pm.

Oct. 25 – Fourth Tuesday, 7:00 pm at the museum. **“William Allen White and the KKK in Kansas,”** presented by Beverly Olson Buller and sponsored by Humanities Kansas.

December – **A Holiday Dinner** – time and date to be announced.

NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Join us in welcoming our newest board member, **Rose Mangan**. Rose moved to Tonganoxie from Garden City. In the fall of 2020, Rose and her daughter came to the grand opening of the exhibit, The Spring at the Fairchild Dairy. Rose looked around, said she might not mind volunteering at the museum, and became a regular Wednesday volunteer a few weeks later.

Earlier this year, **Donna Higbee** agreed to join the board. Donna is a Tonganoxie native and has been active in the community for many years. Having just retired, Donna is now part of our team and we are so glad to have her.

HISTORY CAMP 2022 – SEARCHING FOR FREEDOM DURING BLEEDING KANSAS

Fourteen youth, entering grades 4, 5, and 6, spent their mornings of the first week in June at the museum attending History Camp. This was our second year to offer the camp, but our first year for this theme. (Last year’s theme was “Who Lived hereHeBefore Us?”)



In January, Loren Feldkamp, USD 464 Superintendent and former history teacher, suggested that he and his crew of Civil War re-enactors would like to be a part of history camp. From that, seven volunteers, with imaginations plugged in, met weekly to decide on an overall theme and a daily schedule.



Judith Manthe, Principal Chief of the Wyandot Nation of Kansas, talked about the history of the Wyandot Nation while she showed the youth how to stitch a spirit bag. Then we all learned about some backyard herbs and their uses. And the youth chose a dried herb to put in their spirit bags.

On Disease Day, we explored the diseases that killed people in the mid-1800s. Dr. Grant Ritchey came to talk about dentistry then and now, how a toothache could turn deadly, and why it is that indigenous people all over the world have healthier teeth than we do!

The following day, the youth put their knowledge of diseases to the test in a rousing game of triage. A campfire made beef stew taste great (to almost all of us). Youth practiced starting a fire with flint and steel.



Friday started with a visit from Lemuel Evans, early Tonganoxie resident who fought in the Battle of Wilson Creek. Portrayed by John Evans II, Lemuel engaged all of us with his story of the battle, being mistaken for dead and then rescued by his friends, and finally returning to Tonganoxie to start a real estate business that is still in the family.

And then the 3rd Kansas Light Artillery Battery B took charge. The youth marched, were issued uniforms and tents. They were shown around the camp and learned about rifles and cannons and ammunition. It took fourteen history camp youth and a big rope to move the cannon.

History Camp would not be possible without the volunteers who create it – Marie Brockhoff, Janet Burnett, Sarah Kettler, Lynn Jennings, Joy Lominska, Lane Kesinger, Rose Mangan, Allen Morgan, Kris Roberts, Donna Talbott.



History Camp also depends on community members who donate their time to us – Judith Manthe, Dr. Grant Ritchey, John Evans II, Loren Feldkamp, Richard Spacek, Pete Stoddard, Kent Johnson, Roy Lefferty, and Mike Todd.

And, of course, History Camp would not be possible without the youth who encourage us and make us smile.

PAUL & FRANK'S SON – The Life and Loss of Creighton Siegert

Jon Nelson (THS '70) returned to Tonganoxie on May 24 to present a program about Creighton Siegert (THS '42). Creighton was an airman who lost his life in combat during WWII. Four years ago, Jon gave a program about Creighton and then about a year and a half later, he and Glenda returned to Tonganoxie to install an exhibit about Creighton in the museum. Now, Jon is very close to completing a book about Creighton Siegert.

Over seventy people attended the program in May. Many stayed for refreshments that echoed the 1940s and the West End Lunch – small hamburgers provided by Flashbacks, with jello salads and coconut cakes provided by TCHS board members.

Early in the program Jon shared a picture of Creighton and his fellow THS classmates in their 1942 Class photo. Other young men who would later also be in service were also identified including Jack Himpel, Jean Neibarger and Munro Zoellner. A guest in the audience raised his hand and informed all that his father Marlin Robinson was also in the photo and he, too, would go into service following graduation. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps and served in the European Theatre.

After his service, Marlin Robinson did not return to Tonganoxie but joined his brother in the newspaper business and eventually owned his own newspaper in Wilson, Kansas. But Marlin never forgot his classmate as he would later name one of his sons Creighton.

Pictured are Roger Robinson on the left meeting Jon Nelson on the right following the program.



Battles in World War II were largely fought by young men. The sacrifices of these young men were required to ensure the continued survival of freedom, and many made the ultimate sacrifice. While the large urban centers certainly felt the grief of loss during the war, it was deeply personal in the small towns across America. In those towns a soldier lost was not just a name in the paper, but a person fixed in the memory of each member of that community and the loss left a hole in the fabric of their daily lives. Tonganoxie was one such small town and it felt the pain of losing several men during the war. This exhibit is a tribute to one of those, Paul “Creighton” Siegert, Tonganoxie High School, Class of 1942.

Jon and Glenda Nelson, December 2019

COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

High School Workday! It had been two years since the high school students have come to the museum to help us out with chores. On May 4, thirteen students brought their science teacher, John Tollefson, for two hours of cleaning and weeding and some assembly of some story board frames. We so appreciate the energy and the help.

USD 464 hosted the Tonganoxie Business Association (TBA) weekly meeting on April 15 to share the new **mural in the high school media center**. Board members and volunteers attended. The mural, which was discussed in the 2022 first quarter newsletter, is a striking tribute to Tonganoxie.

A week later, we hosted the **TBA meeting at the museum**. The Living Sovereignty exhibit surrounded the tables.



Also in April, we installed a new exhibit in the display case at the 4th Street location of First State Bank & Trust. The exhibit focuses on **the treadle sewing machine**, which really made mom's work easier in the mid to late 1800s. The exhibit features a Kohler machine which was donated by Sarah Kettler and refurbished and outfitted with a hand crank by Donna Talbott.

MADAM MAYOR – FOURTH TUESDAY IN APRIL

When Michaeline Chance-Reay became ill two days before the April Fourth Tuesday, Program Chairperson, Ken Mark, quickly contacted Humanities Kansas and was able to arrange a new speaker. Sarah Bell returned to Tonganoxie to present her program on the first women mayors of Kansas. Kansas women received the right to vote in municipal elections in 1887 and they did. We are grateful to Sarah for coming with such short notice and also to Tonganoxie's first and only Madam Mayor, Lois Meadows, who attended the program that night.

LIVING SOVEREIGNTY: SUSTAINING INDIGENOUS AUTONOMY IN 'INDIAN TERRITORY' KANSAS

From March 23 through April 30, TCHS premiered the traveling exhibit, Living Sovereignty. The exhibit was created by students from KU in the Museum Studies program, assisted by and in collaboration with Haskell University faculty and students, the Watkins Museum, and Freedom's Frontier.

To kick off the exhibit, we hosted over 50 members of the public to a reception on April 5. Guest speakers included Steve Nowak, Watkins Museum Director, who talked about the beginnings of the exhibit, as a project for a small group of museum studies students in 2019. As the project grew, students and faculty from Haskell Indian Nations University collaborated on the exhibit. Holly Zane, Acting Director of Freedom's Frontier (and a member of the Wyandot Nation), talked about the role of Freedom's Frontier. Judith Manthe, Principal Chief of the Wyandot Nation of Kansas, also spoke the history of the Wyandot Nation and experiences as a member of the Wyandot Nation in modern day Kansas.

During the six weeks the exhibit was on display, over 350 people came to tour the exhibit. That number includes all the USD 464 8th grade students, whose teacher, Kathy Harrell, prepared a study guide for the students to use when touring the exhibit. TCHS volunteers opened the museum to the students. Judith Manthe and Kristen Zane, Freedom's Frontier Board member, spoke with the students about being Wyandot and answered their questions. A group of over 30 high school students and teachers also visited the exhibit.

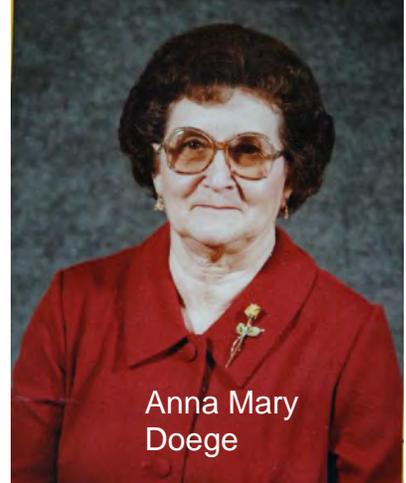


IN MEMORIAL

Virginia Seymour passed away January 22, 2022. She was a lifelong resident of Leavenworth county, teaching at Valley #19, then Jarbalo and Ft. Leavenworth for a total of 44 years. A long time member of the historical society, she helped with cleaning and preparing artifacts for the initial opening of the museum. She narrated a TCHS movie describing the society and our site. She also recently provided an oral history of the area of Jarbalo for our archives.



Anna Mary Doege Landauer passed away on March 25, 2002 at the age of 103. She was raised just north of Tonganoxie and after high school worked at the Franklin Ice Cream



Plant for seven years until she married Joseph Landauer. She worked as a financial clerk. She served 12 years on the Basehor City Council and in 1985 was appointed the first woman mayor of Basehor. Anna Mary was interviewed by Connie Torneden whose mother was her good friend on a movie oral history for TCHS. Most recently, Anna Mary, her sister Alberta Welch, and nephew Carl Welch have visited the museum to donate some unique and beautiful artifacts. TCHS was honored to receive a generous gift from Anna Mary's trust.



Charles W. Haines passed away April 24, 2022. He was born in Ackerland, Ks, the son of a slave, Walter Haines, who was 70 years old at Charles' birth. He was the youngest in a big family of girls and one brother. He farmed and worked many jobs retiring from KMart Distribution Center, Lawrence Ks. Charles recorded a most interesting oral history DVD for TCHS.

These three individuals (all over ninety years old) have enriched our community and we are better for having known them.

ON THE RADIO



The museum and historical society were featured on two radio programs this spring. On April 11, Kaye McIntyre, interviewed Joy Lominska and Kris Roberts for her program, KPR Presents. That interview focused on the Living Sovereignty exhibit that premiered at the Tonganoxie Museum in March and April, 2022. [KPR Presents: Joy Harjo, Tonganoxie Exhibit | Kansas Public Radio](#)

On May 16, Joy and Kris returned to Timeline Radio for another chat with Clenece Hills. We talked about plans for history camp, the stories of the mural in the high school media center, new museum displays, and upcoming programs. [Timeline 5-16-22 w/ Clenece Hills, Kris Roberts, Joy Lominska by KLWN \(soundcloud.com\)](#)

MEET ME AT THE MUSEUM

The museum is a great place to have a meeting or a lunch and then tour the museum. With space for meetings in the Reno Church fellowship hall and the Fairchild-Knox hay barn, there is plenty of room. And with four buildings, there is a wide variety of exhibits and displays to explore.

In the past three months, we have welcomed groups from Deeper Window, Leavenworth; Twin Oaks, Lansing; McLouth Town & Country Club, McLouth; Rural Leavenworth, southern Leavenworth County; and staff from the Frontier Army Museum, Fort Leavenworth.

We like to assure that our guests see what they want to see. The group from Twin Oaks specifically asked to see our museum *and* barn quilts in the Tonganoxie area. Jean Pearson arranged a lunch and a presentation at the museum about barn quilts and then took the group on a tour of barn quilts in Tonganoxie and toward Basehor.

Rural Leavenworth held their board meeting in the historic Reno Church. TCHS provided a short history of the Leavenworth State Lake and John Entwistle of the Kansas Dept of Wildlife & Parks talked about the maintenance and care of the State Lake

MEMORIAL DAY BISCUITS & GRAVY BREAKFAST

In 2017, TCHS hosted a Biscuits & Gravy Breakfast in collaboration with Dennis Bixby. It was a good event and so we continued for two more years, until COVID. This year, after a two-year hiatus, the biscuits &



gravy breakfast was back. And with the breakfast, as always, Boy Scout Troop #357, American Legion Post #41, and VFW Post #9271 raised the flag and dedicated the morning.

The breakfast was also a time for volunteers to come to the museum and work together to put on a great event. Twenty volunteers served over 100 people this year. We had fun and we look forward to next year.

