



NEWS RELEASE

Kansas Historical Society
6425 SW 6th Avenue
Topeka KS 66615-1099
785-272-8681

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Contacts:

Bobbie Athon • 785-272-8681, ext. 262 • bathon@kshs.org
Teresa Jenkins • 785-272-8681, ext. 263 • tjenkins@kshs.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DESCENDENT OF PRATT FAMILY LEAVES GIFT TO COTTONWOOD RANCH

\$850,000 bequest from Mermis estate one of the largest ever received by Historical Society

TOPEKA, KS—The Kansas Historical Society announced it has received an \$850,000 bequest from the estate of the late Richard A. Mermis, Jr., who died in 2006. Mermis is the grandson of Tom Pratt, who along with his brother, John Fenton Pratt, emigrated from Yorkshire, England, to Sheridan County and built a two-room house that would later become the centerpiece of Cottonwood Ranch. The home and grounds are now operated by the Kansas Historical Society as Cottonwood Ranch State Historic Site.

Mermis, a native of Hays, studied his family's genealogy and made many trips to England to study his ancestors' records. A graduate of Fort Hays State University, Mermis served in the U.S. Marine Corps during the Vietnam War. In 1973 he moved to the Denver area where he worked for more than 30 years in retail.

The Mermis bequest outlines that funds are to be used for an endowment to support landscaping and other improvements to Cottonwood Ranch. The bequest outlines a broad definition of "landscaping" to include plants and animals; landforms or bodies of water; fences, buildings, and other structures; and elements to help visitors enjoy the site in a variety of weather or lighting conditions. When writing his family history, Mermis noted that his grandparents, Tom and Elizabeth Mosier Pratt, loved flowers and "their home and all its surroundings reflected care, attention, and enjoyment....within that home one always found a hearty welcome." Mermis added that his grandparents' romance developed after Elizabeth attended a housewarming for Tom Pratt and admired his houseplants. Mermis' unpublished manuscript of the Pratt family history is in the collections of the Historical Society's State Archives & Library.

"This is one of the largest family gifts the Historical Society has ever received, and we are humbled by Mr. Mermis's generosity," said Historical Society Executive Director Jennie Chinn. "His bequest will allow us to make significant improvements to Cottonwood Ranch, preserving it for generations to enjoy and discover the story of the Pratt family."

Cottonwood Ranch State Historic Site is open 9:30 a.m. – 5 p.m. Thursday – Saturday. Admission fee is \$2 for adults, \$1 for students and seniors, and KSHS, Inc., members, current military, and children under five are admitted free. The site is located at 4432 E US Highway 24 in Studley. The site is one of 16 state

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historic sites operated by the Kansas Historical Society, a state agency that exists in partnership with the Kansas State Historical Society, Inc., a non-profit organization. KSHS, Inc., serves as the membership, retail, fundraising and fund-management organization for the Kansas Historical Society.

The Kansas Historical Society does not discriminate on the basis of disability in admission to, access to, or operation of its programs. The Historical Society requests prior notification to accommodate individuals with special needs or disabilities.