

The Memorial Building

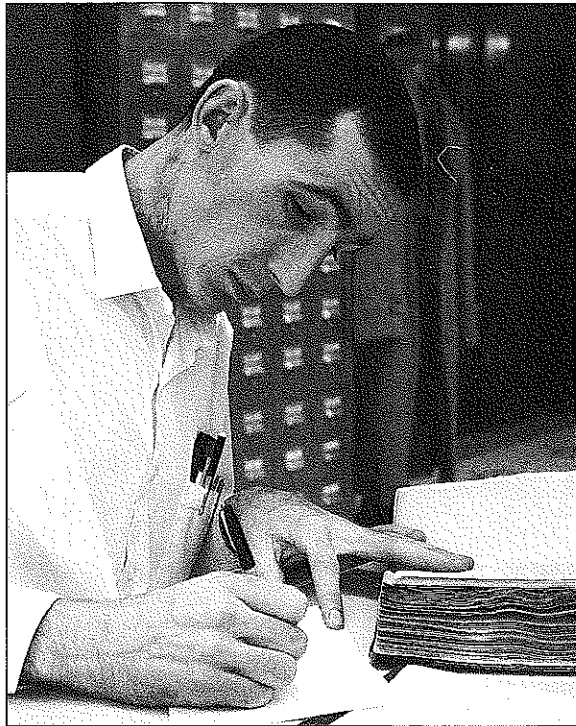
INTRODUCTION

Erected as a monument to northern soldiers and sailors of the Civil War, the Memorial Building, which has been home to the Kansas State Historical Society in downtown Topeka for the past eighty-one years, was completed in 1914. I am not certain when I first entered its marble halls, either to view the museum displays on the fourth floor or use the library on the second floor. On my office wall at home I display a photograph taken of me while researching in the Society's library in either 1961 or 1962. I was researching material for my master's thesis at Fort Hays State College. Over the years I continued to visit the Memorial Building, which became known as the Center for Historical Research in 1984 when the museum moved to a site on the northwest edge of Topeka, to tour the museum and do research for articles I was writing on Kansas and western history.

Since February 1988 I have occupied an office in the Center for Historical Research, i.e., the Memorial Building, first as assistant director and then as executive director of the Kansas State Historical Society. I have enjoyed working in a building with such character and style. No major changes have been made to the physical character of the building since 1988; however, changes in the organization of the Society have altered the location of certain activities such as the library, archives, and manuscript reference and reading areas. My own office became our major conference room, and I settled for an adequate but less auspicious space.

This special issue of *Kansas History* brings closure to the Kansas State Historical Society's long association with the Memorial Building. The history of that association is found in Ed Langsdorf's history of the Society. In this issue of *Kansas History* Larry Jochims and Virgil Dean offer a brief summary of the Society's multifaceted past. Larry, a historian with the Society's Cultural Resources Division, contributed a detailed history of the construction of the Memorial Building that appears in the spring 1984 issue of *Kansas History*. Virgil, the editor of *Kansas History*, has pulled together all the pieces to make this 1995 issue a special tribute to the Memorial Building. The architecture of the building is examined by Dan Prosser, preservation architect with the Historic Sites Division. Dan reminds us that the Memorial Building was designed as a "civic monument" to "evoke feelings of pride and awe." Pat Michaelis, head of the Library and Archives Division, describes how Society publications reflect its collections as well as the interests of the scholarly community and the reading public over the past eighty-one years.

Also included in this issue are five reminiscences by individuals whose distinguished service to the Kansas State Historical Society will be long remembered. Dr. Dudley Cornish's "It All Began At Tenth and Jackson" is a witty and personal memoir that provides a glimpse of a young academic in the post-World War II era who finds Kansas history and the Society at Tenth and Jackson Streets and falls in love with both. Dudley's *The Sable Arm: Negro Troops in the*



Ramon Powers, who became the director of the Kansas State Historical Society in 1988, is shown here as a young researcher working on his master's thesis in the Society's collections at the Memorial Building.

Union Army, 1861–1865 (New York, 1956), a classic work on the role of African American troops in the Civil War, evolved out of his research at the Memorial Building.

The dean of Kansas historians, Dr. Homer E. Socolofsky, tells us of his visits as a youth to the Memorial Building, his work there as a researcher, and his participation in annual and executive committee meetings as a member and an officer. Robert W. Richmond, former assistant executive director, recounts his experiences in the Memorial Building from his ar-

rival as state archivist in 1952 to his recent research there in his retirement. Bob provides us with an insider's perspective on the building and the activities that occurred during his tenure.

Joseph W. Snell joined the Society staff in January 1957, became executive director in 1977, and retired from the Society in 1988. Joe's remembrances focus on his activities as a staff member in the manuscripts department and his encounters with interesting individuals while working at the Society. The wonderful opportunity to meet creative and thoughtful people who come to the Society to research is a benefit we often do not acknowledge.

Clifford R. Hope, Jr., was Society president and later the executive committee chair; his father, Congressman Clifford R. Hope, Sr., also served as president of the Society. In only one other instance have father and son served as Society presidents. Cliff tells of his father's relationship with the Society including the donation of his papers, and of his own recent experiences in the Memorial Building while writing a biography of his father. The great change in the Society over the years is reflected in Cliff's comment about the "variety of the researchers who came in all ages, sizes, shapes, colors, and modes of dress."

Like Cliff, I look forward to the new Center for Historical Research, which is now adjacent to the Kansas Museum of History. But I too will have fond memories of the marble halls and majestic features of the "old Memorial Building." May its new occupants feel as kindly about her as we do.

*Ramon Powers
Executive Director
Kansas State Historical Society*