Remembering These Marble Halls

Reflections on the Memorial Building

It All Began at Tenth and Jackson
by Dudley T. Cornish

This Grand Structure
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Memories of the Memorial Building
by Clifford R. Hope, Jr.

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As one of the few past presidents of the Kansas State Historical Society whose father also served in this capacity, I was asked by the editor of Kansas History to contribute this brief memoir, a short essay on my memories of the Memorial Building. I also was asked to include any memories of experiences that my father, Congressman Clifford R. Hope, Sr. (1893–1970), might have had—a difficult task since he left no record upon which to base such an account. Of necessity, therefore, the latter must be conjecture based on known facts about his life and relationship with the Kansas State Historical Society.

My father entered Washburn Law School, then in downtown Topeka, in the fall of 1914. He lived with his mother’s sister, Cora Lee Von Horn, and her husband, Dr. Charles Van Horn, in their home at 1215 Mulvane. My father worked his way through law school by helping Cora Lee with the housework (a job he detested), delivering the Topeka State Journal, and baby-sitting the neighbors’ children. Although he had little time to spare during his years at Washburn, my father always had a keen interest in history, and it is not hard to imagine him visiting the newly opened Memorial Building.

Clifford R. Hope’s files in the Society’s manuscripts collection indicate that in the early 1920s he was solicited for a life membership in the Society. He was then a young lawyer practicing in Garden City and serving as a member of the Kansas State Legislature. Although the sum total was only a few dollars (ten at the most), he responded that he could not afford a life membership at that time. He did become an annual member, however, and later converted to a life member. After he was elected to the U.S. Congress in 1926, he was solicited by William E. Connelley, secretary of the Society (1914–1930), to purchase Connelley’s five-volume History of Kansas, State and People in which Hope’s “vanity” biography appeared. Commencing in the late 1920s and continuing throughout his years in Congress until 1957, my father often called upon friends at the statehouse when visiting Topeka and probably called at the Memorial Building during some of those visits.

I am certain my father’s visits to the Society headquarters increased after Nyle Miller became secretary in 1951. He and Nyle developed a warm friendship that lasted until Hope’s death in 1970. They enjoyed having lunch together after discussions in Nyle’s office, which was then located in the northwest corner of the first floor. Nyle requested that my father donate his congressional correspondence and papers to the manuscripts department upon his retirement from Congress, and Hope was glad to oblige. I believe he would have offered his papers whether asked or not. In any event, the bulk of his papers...
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Cliff Hope’s visits to the Memorial Building increased after Nyle Miller’s (left) became the Society secretary in 1951. Hope and Miller developed a warm friendship that lasted until Hope’s death in 1970. Due in part to Miller’s encouragement, Hope donated his congressional papers to the Society in 1956. Reproduced here (above) is a 1933 letter preserved in the Hope papers.

were received in late November 1956 as his last term in Congress neared its end. Thereafter, he returned to the Memorial Building from time to time to review these materials, seeking answers to inquiries from his former constituents or facts to use in the weekly newspaper column he wrote from 1964 until he was felled by a stroke in February 1970.

Hope was elected to the Society’s board of directors and served from 1961 until 1970. In October 1966 he was elected second vice president and went up through the chairs, serving as president in 1969, the last full year of his life. Meetings of the executive committee and officers then were held in the Memorial Building. Those meetings gave him much pleasure in the closing years of his life.

My own specific and vivid memories of the building at Tenth and Jackson do not commence until the early 1950s, although I may have accompanied my father there during some of his visits in the 1930s. The magnificent Grand Army of the Republic auditorium still occupied the second and third floors of the central part of the building and was available to other organizations for meeting purposes. In 1953 I believe, the Kansas Day Club met there to elect officers for the succeeding year. The club was a Republican organization whose main task was to provide the program for the dinner highlighting the annual gathering of state Republicans on Kansas’ birthday. Ordinarily the election of the club’s president drew little interest, but that year the forces of Governor Ed Arb and Lieutenant Governor Fred Hall were continuing a battle that had begun two years before (the reasons for the factional feud, long since forgotten by most Kansans, are beyond the scope of this essay).

My friend, C.C. “Tim” Linley of Cimarron was scheduled to be elected president of the Kansas Day Club and asked me to nominate him. Linley was a huge man in both height and girth, hence his nickname Tim, after Tiny Tim. He also was a friend and ally of Fred Hall. But despite Tim’s great bulk, the Arb supporters outnumbered those of Hall in the packed auditorium. Presiding was McDill “Huck” Boyd, a member of the Arb camp, who later ran for governor and became a prominent leader in Kansas economic development. On a standing vote, Linley went down to defeat. The politicians, some happy and some glum, filed out; no one noted, I am sure, the grandeur of our marble-adorned meeting place.

In the 1950s other veterans’ organizations had offices in the building, and I visited the American Legion office occasionally. But it was not until I was elected second vice president of the Society in 1975 that I began making regular visits to its headquarters. Only then did I begin to look around and appreciate the Memorial Building with its high ceilings and marble throughout. I came to regard it as an old friend, and I experienced feelings of serendipity whenever I entered it. Until the end of Nyle Miller’s tenure, the executive committee held its regular meetings in the building, adjourning for lunch at Robbie’s restaurant at Ninth and Kansas.

The 1960s brought me new memories of the old building. During the summers of 1992 and 1994 I spent some weeks in the reading room reviewing my father’s files in connection with a biography I am writing about him. I was impressed with the competency and courtesy of the staff and with the variety of researchers who came in all ages, sizes, shapes, colors, and modes of dress. Not all talked in whispers.

Although I am looking forward to using the facilities of the new research center, it will be difficult to replace the feelings I hold in my heart for the venerable old Memorial Building.
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