A red and yellow wool flag commemorates the four hundredth anniversary of Francisco Vásquez de Coronado’s 1541 expedition through Kansas. The flag, crafted in 1941, features Coronado astride his horse with Franciscan Friar Juan de Padilla at his side.
On February 24, 1540, Francisco Vásquez de Coronado and nearly four hundred Europeans, including a group of Franciscan friars led by Juan de Padilla, along with at least four hundred servants and slaves and thirteen hundred Indian “allies” set forth from Compostela in Mexico. Over the course of the next fourteen months, while dreaming of gold but methodically aiming at conquest, encomiendas, and tribute, the expeditionaries crossed parts of present-day Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico, mapping, plundering, and killing among the Puebloan people. During the late summer of 1540 an Indian they called El Turco told them of a golden kingdom to the north. The thirty-year-old Coronado found the tale irresistible, and on April 23, 1541, he turned his expedition toward the region we call Kansas. Two months later, having crossed present-day Oklahoma, Coronado and a small reconnaissance party of thirty elite riders encountered Quiviran hunters, ancestors of the Wichita, along the river we know as the Arkansas, near present-day Ford, Kansas. Days later, Coronado and company reached the heart of Quivira near present-day Lyons. Coronado astutely declared: “The soil itself is the most suited for growing all the [crops] of Spain that has been seen.” Enjoying what was probably coerced Quiviran hospitality, the Europeans remained in the kingdom for a little less than a month. During those long days of summer, they surveyed the region, executed El Turco when he admitted there was nothing to his promises of gold, and eventually departed for their winter quarters among the beleaguered people of Tiguex in New Mexico. Padilla returned to Quivira the following year to minister and, eventually, to die a martyr’s death.

Quivira, Coronado, and Kansas: A Formative Chapter in the Story of Kansans’ Collective Memory

by Daryl W. Palmer

Daryl W. Palmer, a native Kansan and associate professor of English at Regis University in Denver, Colorado, is the author of Hospitable Performances (Purdue, 1992), Writing Russia in the Age of Shakespeare (Ashgate, 2004), and numerous articles dealing with Shakespeare and the English Renaissance. In recent years, he has turned his attention to the Great Plains, and his essays have appeared in journals such as Great Plains Quarterly and American Literary Realism.

The author would like to offer hearty thanks to his Kansas History readers for their astute comments and to acknowledge the wise and generous assistance of Maggie Carlson, director and curator of collections, and Nancy Heter, curatorial assistant and chief researcher, at the Coronado Quivira Museum in Lyons as well as Lenora Lynam, archivist, and Sheila Malm, staff member, at the Old Mill Museum and Archives in Lindsborg. The author would also like to thank Thomas Fox Averill, J. Daniel Rogers, and Susan S. Vehik.

2. Coronado to Charles V, in Documents of the Coronado Expedition, 1539–1542, trans. and ed. Richard Flint and Shirley Cushing Flint (Dallas, Tex.: Southern Methodist University Press, 2005), 321. The other firsthand accounts of Quivira echo this evaluation. The Relación del Suceso concluded that “Quivira is the best land” (Ibid., 502). Juan Jaramillo wrote, “This land has a very beautiful appearance, such that I have not seen better in the entirety of Spain, nor in Italy or part of France, nor even in other lands where I have traveled in His Majesty’s service” (Ibid., 516–17).
For more than four centuries people have rehearsed and reinterpreted what actually happened during that month along the Arkansas River. During the first four decades of the twentieth century, Quivira mattered to historians mostly because determining its location would fix the northern limit of Coronado’s entraña. Sixteenth-century maps had given Quivira a coastline. Centuries later, people were still debating the expedition’s route, and Quivira was placed anywhere from New Mexico to Texas to Nebraska to Kansas. As archaeological evidence accumulated in favor of Kansas, most historians had very little to say about the native people of the area and their way of life, choosing instead to concentrate on Coronado’s frustration, violence, and failure. Some scholars suggested that the Spaniards did not see the opportunity presented by the fertile land of Quivira. For others, Coronado’s excursion into present-day Kansas mattered as a tiny part of his larger contribution to the demarcation of North American geography. For most historians, the episode stood as a mere footnote to the expedition’s activities in the Southwest.


Not surprisingly, twentieth-century Kansans had more to say about Coronado’s summer along the Arkansas River, and their response is the subject of the present essay. In books, articles, fiction, paintings, poetry, museums, and pageants and on monuments and roadside markers, Kansans from every walk of life endeavored to remember Quivira and Coronado. A muster of these passionate folks includes amateur and professional historians and archaeologists, artists, museologists, journalists, priests, promoters, merchants, costumed revelers, posers, thieves, bullfighters, and one arsonist. Their attempts at remembrance and commemoration are certainly fascinating in their own right, but this essay will argue that they deserve thoughtful scrutiny because they stand as a formative chapter in the story of Kansans’ collective memory.

In his remarkable study of war and memory, Jay Winter pointed to a kind of “memory boom” in the twentieth century, as people inside and outside the academy tried to understand modern warfare and its victims. Following in the footsteps of Émile Durkheim’s student Maurice Halbwachs, who first proposed a focus on collective memory, Winter could be speaking directly to students of Kansas history when he explained that collective memory “is not the memory of large groups. States do not remember; individuals do, in association with other people. If the term ‘collective memory’ has any meaning at all, it is the process through which different collectives, from groups of two to groups in their thousands, engage in acts of remembrance together.” In other words, Kansas does not remember, but groups of Kansans, forming and dissipating like summer storm clouds, do “engage in acts of remembrance together.” Indeed, one of the unexpected fascinations of studying Kansans’ collective memory of Quivira and Coronado comes from tracing the emergence and dissolution of such groups. Like meteorologists of memory, we can identify certain elements—pressures, geographies, tendencies—that drive activity. In Winter’s study, it is “the need to attend to, to acknowledge the victims of war and the ravages it causes” that drives the remembering.
In the case of Kansans, Quivira, and Coronado, this essay suggests that collective remembrance has always been driven by the desire for a venerable past. Speaking for people of the Great Plains, Tom Isern put it this way: “We want our country to have what great civilizations have—relics and ruins.”

It was Kansas amateur historians W. E. Richey and George P. Morehouse who first gave voice to this yearning in regards to Quivira and Coronado in the new century. Richey deserves first mention because, as Isern has suggested, he “brought Coronado to the attention of English-speaking prairie folk in 1903 with an address to his state historical society.” Working from archives and artifacts, from the Spaniards’ firsthand reports, and from a catalog of amateur collectors and artifacts that included an inscribed Spanish sword that Richey felt almost certainly belonged to Juan Gallego, one of Coronado’s officers, the amateur historian offered an authoritative account of the expedition and announced an “indisputable” case for locating Quivira in Kansas. Most important, Richey used this address to declare that “Kansas is great in her material resources—her crops, her minerals, her oil—but her crowning glory is her history.” And, he concluded, the stories of Quivira and Coronado “are a part of Kansas history.” Morehouse agreed. Three years after Richey’s lecture, he too addressed the Kansas State Historical Society, arguing that Quivira was located near present-day Junction City and that Padilla’s martyrdom took place near present-day Council Grove. Like Richey, Morehouse offered a clear call for remembrance. “It is well,” he concluded, “to preserve the history of first things in Kansas, to note the ancient landmarks, and above all to dwell upon the bold, heroic characters who first trod our borders.” In the end, Richey’s sword turned out to be from the eighteenth century and Morehouse was simply impressionistic in his geographic conclusions, but both men should be honored for the way they taught their contemporaries to value the past.

By contrast, Professor Johan August Udden of Bethany Academy (now Bethany College) simply needed to dig. Hearing of Indian mounds south of the Smoky Hill River along Paint Creek during the final years of the nineteenth century, Udden began to excavate. He soon found artifacts made of bone, chert, and clay. Over the years, he cataloged arrowheads, knives, scrapers, pipes, mallets, hammers, awls, drills, and beads. Then he found a piece of European chainmail. When Udden published an account of his investigations in 1900, he was ready to offer a proposal that linked digging to memory: “The archaeological evidence perhaps to some extent supports the view that it came from Coronado’s expedition.”

In 1908 Margaret Hill McCarter, the prolific novelist from Topeka, published In Old Quivira, a full-blooded romance that begins on “a Kansas Christmas Eve.” The narrator stands under the dome of the capitol in Topeka, pondering Quivira in a building modeled on a Renaissance palace like those of Coronado’s Europe.

11. Udden had the specimen photographed, examined by authorities, and then somehow managed to lose it. Or it was stolen and the thieves never identified. Many years later, an Albuquerque, New Mexico, antique dealer called the Kansas State Historical Society, offering to sell the artifact, which can be seen in Topeka today. For more on the mystery of the missing chain mail, see Matt Moline, “Chain Mail Turns Up in Kansas Historical Museum,” Lindsborg (Kans.) News Record, August 10, 1989. Tom Isern suggests that Udden probably sold the artifact himself (“Chain Mail”). The quotation is from Johan August Udden, An Old Indian Village (Rock Island, Ill.: Lutheran Augustana Book Concern, 1900), 77.
Kansans had been turning up artifacts for centuries, but Udden was the first to study a particular site with scientific discipline. In so doing, the professor challenged the archaeologists of the future to follow in his footsteps even as he imagined a larger, collective enterprise. Udden explained that his story of excavation should “aid and encourage them [ordinary folk] in their efforts to study and to take care of the antiquities found in their own immediate vicinity.” Kansans had a veritable mission statement for remembrance in the new century.

Although a native of Minnesota, J. V. Brower played his own distinct role in this story. If Udden represented the academic researcher, Richey and Morehouse the amateur historian and collector, then Brower embodied the collectivizing spirit that would reach a kind of apotheosis during the four hundredth anniversary celebrations of Coronado’s expedition, the cuarto-centennial of 1941. Visiting the state for the first time in 1896, Brower busily turned up artifacts in Barton, Dickinson, Geary, Marion, McPherson, Pottawatomie, Rice, Riley, and Wabaunsee counties. Having identified (according to his own unscientific method) a host of village sites, he founded the Quivira Historical Society in Alma, Kansas. With a Nebraskan for his vice-president, Brower began recruiting Kansans for his ultimate plan: the erection of stone monuments commemorating Quivira and the Coronado expedition all over the state. When the society unveiled a new monument in Manhattan in 1904, a reporter for the Hutchinson Daily News took the occasion to rehearse sixteenth-century history and to describe how Brower had “succeeded in interesting many persons in his work.” Brower’s motives remain rather hard to fathom and his science was always shaky, but his role in collective memory is quite clear. In a landscape with few landmarks, Brower inspired Kansans to monumentalize their past.

Inspiration was in the air. In 1908 Margaret Hill McCarter, the prolific novelist from Topeka, published In Old Quivira, a full-blooded romance clearly indebted to the growing conversation about Quivira and Coronado. In the opening pages, she acknowledged the histories of Richey and Morehouse before quoting James W. Steele, editor of the first Kansas Magazine in the early 1870s, who tried to imagine in verse how an ordinary person would react upon hearing the story of “Coronado’s March”: “And even now when the night comes, and the shadows gather round, / And you tell the old-time story, I can almost hear the sound.” In the novel that follows, McCarter turns history and imagination into intimate narrative. The narrator calls the result a dream, confiding that “to the dreamer it was genuine and sweet with inspiration.” In every civilization, dreamers play a part in remembrance. In twentieth-century Kansas,
McCarter made it clear that her dreaming was inspired by her contemporaries. It is “a Kansas Christmas Eve” at the beginning of the novel, and the narrator stands under the dome of the capitol in Topeka, pondering Quivira. Readers may find the setting strange, but McCarter had her reasons. Modeled on a Renaissance palace, the Kansas capitol embodies modern statehood even as it echoes the Renaissance architecture of Coronado’s Europe. So McCarter’s narrator is dreaming in a Renaissance palace that just happens to house “cases of precious historic relics” that symbolize a “commonwealth.” In this gilded repository, the narrator discovers—locked away because of its priceless—a Spanish sword inscribed exactly like Richey’s sword: “No me saques sin razon, No me enbaines sin honor.” But unlike Richey’s artifact, McCarter’s sword can talk. The narrator listens and learns of Tristan Gallego, a jilted lover who, carrying the sword of his father Juan Gallego, follows Coronado and Padilla into Tierra Nueva in search of fame and fortune. He finds, instead, a sisterly companion among the Native Americans, and Padilla is eventually martyred on Christmas day. The story of North America’s first Christian martyr turns out in McCarter’s novel to be a Christmas tale of love and sacrifice. On December 17, 1908, an advertisement in the Lawrence Daily Journal called the novel “suitable for a Christmas present.”

In Old Quivira invites more critical study, but here it seems sufficient to note the confident link McCarter drew between modern Kansas and Renaissance Quivira in a dream told by a talking sword. If her popular book is any indication, romance may be a Kansan’s birthright.

The same could be said of pageantry. Early in the twentieth century, Kansans developed a love for homegrown historical pageants with Coronado leading the way. The tradition seems to have crystallized during the summer of 1918 in Emporia when Professor F. L. Gilson’s class in pageantry, working from an outline of Kansas history provided by Mary A. Whitney, designed “a beautiful and symbolic pageant of the history of Kansas” in which Indians watched the Spaniards claim “the land for Spain.” Some two hundred students, faculty, and townspeople participated in the show. A cursory glance at Kansas newspapers from the period shows increasing interest in the staging of Kansas history in general and of Coronado’s expedition in particular. On September 17, 1920, Wichita was planning to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary with a “historical parade in which Coronado and his caravan will be shown.” Three years later, members of the American Legion staged a similar pageant in Hutchinson. In 1924 and 1925 Emporia presented new versions of its history pageant for thousands of onlookers. In 1927 the people of Medicine Lodge employed Professor Gilson to direct an adapted version of his pageant in order to commemorate the Medicine Lodge Treaty of 1867. In the early 1930s the town began to do the pageant on a regular basis, while other communities continued to produce their own pageants.

16. Lawrence (Kans.) Daily Journal, December 17, 1908.
17. Emporia (Kans.) Gazette, July 24, 1918.
18. “Coronado Came to Wichita Before it was Wichita,” Hutchinson (Kans.) News, September 17, 1920; Hutchinson News, May 9, 1923; “Pageant Depicts Kansas History,” Emporia Gazette, July 14, 1924; and “Fourteen Hundred Children in Pageant of Kansas,” Emporia Gazette, April 28, 1925.
until the state fairly exploded with pageant-making in the cuarto-centennial celebration of 1941.19

It would not be wrong to take all these costumed conquistadors and Indians as proof of Kansans' collective memory in action, but there are more subtle insights to be gleaned from the survey. For instance, these theaters of memory were always rooted, first and foremost, in particular communities that wanted to display their place in history, usually as part of a larger anniversary celebration.20 The pageants had much more to do with historical identity than they did with any profound interest in Quivira and Coronado. Consequently, the story of Quivira and Coronado tended to be retold in the context of other historical epochs and agendas. In 1937 Coronado’s exploration culminated in the founding of Dodge City. In 1953 Coronado became the symbolic forerunner of Fort Riley. A year later, the story of Lawrence’s first hundred years began with Coronado marching in the company of fur trappers. In the end, historical rigor mattered far less in these shows than the glorification of a community’s venerable past. And early twentieth-century Kansans expected to participate in the extravaganzas.21

A turning point in Kansans’ relationship to Quivira and Coronado came during the 1920s. Communities seem to have understood that they were now competing with each other for a slice of history, for the chance to commemorate. In Sedgwick, Rice, Saline, and McPherson counties, citizens were in fact mobilizing to stake their distinctive claims to Quivira and Coronado. And J. B. Doze, the state’s game warden, saw in 1926 the potential for a “friendly rivalry among the counties.”22

19. “To Direct Indian Pageant,” Emporia Daily Gazette, March 9, 1927. For the cuarto-centennial celebration, see, for example, “City of Lyons Starts Year Long Coronado Celebration” [Topeka Capital, January 30, 1941], in Coronado Cuarto Centennial, 1541–1941 Clippings, State Archives Division, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka.

20. For more on “theatres of memory,” see Winter, Remembering War, 183–271.


22. Emporia Gazette, June 25, 1926; but the competition for Quivira and Coronado was not limited to these counties. Isern describes Bryan White’s 1929 discovery of a Spanish bridle and buckles, and the community’s yearning for a piece of the expedition (“Chain Mail”). The artifacts now reside in the Coronado Museum in Liberal.
In 1924 a group of Wichita citizens, which included former Indian scout William C. Peacock and newspaperman and historian Bliss Isely, visited the Wichita people in Oklahoma. Writing in 1933, Isely recalled the conversation between Peacock and Kiowa, chief of the Wichita, who had served together in an 1874 campaign. When Isely had the chance, he commented on the excellence of the tribe’s grass lodges: “Whereupon the old chief answered: ‘If you like it, you shall have one.’” In 1927 a construction party arrived. It was led “by Sooka, a woman, who, as a girl, had swung in the grape vines in what is now Riverside Park.” With no acknowledgement of the sad irony, Isely noted that sacred tradition called for cedar “piers . . . and they no longer had cedar on their lands.” Why people in Wichita would want a grass lodge sitting on an island in the middle of the Arkansas River is easy to understand. The lodge conferred a sense of authenticity on their claim to a venerable past—even though it was, in most respects, an artificial installation. In 1933 Isely looked at the lodge as an untapped opportunity for Kansas tourism. But why the Wichita would wish to participate in this commemoration is perhaps more difficult to fathom. Perhaps the shared memories of Kiowa and Peacock were enough to energize the cross-cultural work of commemoration. Perhaps the Wichita people saw an opportunity to shape Kansans’ collective memory in some palpable way.

Meanwhile, heavy rains during the spring of 1927 changed everything for the people of Rice County. When farmers began to notice an extraordinary number of Native American artifacts turning up, Paul and Horace Jones, editors and publishers of the Lyons Daily News, took a keen interest. The brothers had been collecting artifacts since they were boys. Now they began asking residents to share their discoveries with the community. Farmers appeared with buckets of arrowheads, scrapers, and mortars.

When area merchants planned a weekend of new window displays in downtown Lyons, the Jones brothers used their windows to exhibit the growing collection. Hundreds of area residents came to see the artifacts, which inspired the editors to write, “It is evident, from the fact that few persons passed it by, that Indian relics are of more than ordinary interest to the average person.” The Jones brothers were certainly not average, and they soon discovered their own scholarly passions for the subject. Horace published The Story of Early Rice County and Paul published Quivira. Meanwhile, as they cataloged and displayed the artifacts, the brothers were helping to realize Udden’s vision: neighbors were taking interest in their local antiquities. In fact, the very definition of “neighbor” began to expand as people from outside the county inquired about the discoveries. Isely, among others, began to collaborate with the Jones brothers. Inspired by this response, the brothers went on to propose that the newspaper keep track of the collection until it could be donated “to a Rice county museum of natural history.”

The Rice County artifacts were eventually moved into the courthouse where they were exhibited in cases, following the model of the displays at the Kansas capitol.

As a kind of case study, the story of Lyons in the 1920s reveals a great deal about Kansans’ collective remembrance at the beginning of the twentieth century.


27. Lyons Daily News, March 7, 1927; and Jones, “Rice County’s ‘Long Journey to Quivira.’”
The residents of Lindsborg were busy thinking about Quivira and Coronado along rather different lines. Inspired by Udden, residents began to call the most prominent peak in the nearby Smoky Hill Buttes, on the southern edge of Saline County, “Coronado Heights.” Although no one has offered any evidence that the Europeans ever stood on the hill, the claim is not unreasonable. During their twenty-five days in the area, the expeditionaries would have seen the buttes and surely found their views enticing.

Nevertheless, the point for residents was not to verify but to “commemorate” the sixteenth-century European presence. Lindsborgians built a road to the top of the peak. G. N. Malm described the work as a community affair in itself and as a uniquely successful venture it will in time be an event of historic value. Lindsborg closed shop, took a holiday from its regular work and so did the farmer for miles around. Armed with pick-ax and shovel the business man met his friend from the country, who furnished teams and scrapers and united they fell to work.

The story is striking because of the way it differs from yet echoes the story of Lyons. Once again, the chance to participate in the work of remembering fired a community’s imagination. Malm rightly suggested that this communal effort would take on its own “historic value,” but civic participation and promotion generally mattered more in the 1920s. Residents went on to build a shelter they called a “Fernebo Lodge,” complete with a telephone. They planted flowers and erected a flagpole. As many as five thousand people began showing up to celebrate the Fourth of July, and plans were made for rock gardens, a swimming pool, tourist pavilions, and a museum. Pleased with their efforts, residents issued promotional materials about the site, including a release to the Associated Press that described the facilities and touted Coronado Heights as “a place ‘of historic interest for tourists.’” Long before Lindsborg became known as “Little Sweden,” residents were commemorating Coronado in the name of automobile tourism. The swimming pool, pavilions, and museum never materialized, but the idea of Coronado Heights endured.

28. This is the language used by historic preservation consultant Christy Davis on the registration form nominating Coronado Heights for a place on the National Register of Historic Places. Christy Davis, “National Register of Historic Places, Registration Form,” August 27, 2010, sec. 8, p. 12, Historic Preservation Office, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas, available online at kshs.org/resource/national_register/nominationsNRDB/Saline_CoronadoHeightsNR.pdf.
30. Ibid., 5.
Mention 1930s Kansas and most people will think of the Dust Bowl. Few will recall that it was, in many respects, the golden age of Quivira and Coronado remembrance. Don Coronado rode up and down the streets of Kansas towns in pageants large and small. As times grew harder, the conquistador mattered more. On November 5, 1932, the Republicans of Elkhart were casting Coronado in a pageant that would “depict the achievements of the Republican party in American history.” In a 1936 graduation address at Attica High School, Governor Alfred Landon told his audience to have courage and know that “human progress is largely a record of overcoming difficulties. The history of your own State is resplendent with that fact. Coronado came this way.”

Moved by this sort of thinking, the Kansas Chamber of Commerce was already talking in 1934 about how to celebrate the cuarto-centennial. Waldo Wedel, the Newton native who would eventually produce the first truly authoritative archaeological accounts of Quivira, was digging at Udden’s old site with a Nebraska State Historical Society field party. At the end of the decade, Paul Lawrence, head of the state Driver’s License Bureau, was producing a series of films on “The Heritage of Kansas” that began atop Coronado Heights. In the midst of the Depression, Kansans seemed to have understood that they actually needed Coronado as a symbol of courage and perseverance.

It is entirely fitting, then, that in 1936 Works Progress Administration (WPA) workers completed the state’s definitive monument to Coronado and Quivira: the castle-like rock shelter on top of Coronado Heights. John A. Holmberg, Lindsborg’s president of the Smoky Valley Historical Society, and Robert J. Laubengayer, publisher of the Salina Journal, collaborated to win official approval of the project. Laubengayer thought the project symbolized “cooperation” between communities. The Belleville Telescope declared: “Coronado Heights gives the spectator a feeling of loftiness,” while the WPA “ramparts give the heights the appearance of an armed citadel, grim and majestic.”

In keeping with the spirit of McCarter’s novel, the Hutchinson News reported the project’s completion during the Christmas season. Before long, groups of Kansans were making Coronado Heights part of day trips that included other stops in Lyons and Lindsborg. They bought postcards and sent them to family and friends.

The fact is, by the summer of 1937, many Kansans were more than ready to think about conquistadors and Indians. Seizing the moment, Paul Jones published a substantial revision of Quivira, now titled Coronado and Quivira. A glowing review in the Emporia Daily Gazette declared that Jones had “done an inestimable service to his state.” In addition to praising Jones’s scholarship, the reviewer acknowledged that “Kansas is pretty humdrum now.” Jones’s work of remembrance had spoken to a real lack: “we Kansans have no drama in our lives.” But Jones, the reviewer concluded, had reminded his readers of Kansas’s “greatest adventure” story and “the first Kansas hero tale.”

Along the way, Jones described his own growing fascination with Indian artifacts. He told the story of the Coronado expedition, but focused—as no other historian had done—on the Quiviran experience, elaborating on “The Quiviran Menu” and “The Buffalo’s Importance,” as well as the kingdom’s “Commerce and Industry” and “Arrows, Bows, and Quivers.” He accurately rehearsed the Spaniards’ praise for the land, suggesting that they “issued the first prospectuses for the settlement of Kansas and sang the country’s praises as lustily as the present realtors of the Sunflower state.” This latter notion, that sixteenth-century Spaniards and Quivrains were in some


sense like twentieth-century Kansans, may be Jones’s most important insight into collective remembrance. He explained,

It is interesting to note that styles, changing from generation to generation, seem to be leading us back to those affected by our remotest fellowmen. In Kansas today “young bucks” are oiling their hair; young squaws are wearing their locks bobbed; and the straight last shoe . . . has given way to the “swing” last, the natural, pigeon-toed shape of the moccasin of the savage.

He went on to describe the Quivirans’ love of the Osage orange tree as a source of wood for bows, noting that Kansans still counted on the trees for hedgerows. He reported the Quivirans’ fascination with Spanish horseback riding: “The spectacle was to the Quivirans what a stunting aviation display is to us in this period.”

Modern Kansans should remember Quivira and Coronado, he argued, because they anticipate us. It is a powerful point that was not lost on the Emporia Gazette’s reviewer, who concluded that the Coronado expedition “was the prologue to modernity which the high gods, for some weird, symbolic reason, staged on these fantastic plains.”

Jones was probably pleased with this review, especially since the debut of his book had nearly been upstaged by a stone.

On July 11, 1937, the Kansas City Star reported that a stone had been discovered with the following inscription:

“AGOSTO EL TRE – 1541 – TOMO – POR ESPAÑA – QUIVER – RANCISCO.” Was this, in fact, a marker left behind by Coronado and his expedition? The question was fascinating and newspapers across the country quickly picked up the story. But as John M. Peterson pointed out,

the rock was never as interesting as “the cast of characters involved in discovering and evaluating this artifact.” 39 In fact, these “characters” constituted a growing network (what Jay Winter would call a “collective”) of influential Kansans who brought various combinations of passion and expertise to the subject over many decades. Paul Wellman, who would eventually write best-selling novels set in nineteenth-century Kansas, was assigned the story at the Star. Kirke Mechem, secretary of the Kansas State Historical Society, cast doubt on the validity of the stone in a letter to the Kansas City Times. Paul Jones, who would rather have been talking about his book, provided the conclusion that appeared in papers all over Kansas: “If it is a fake, it’s a half way good job.” 40 Isely offered a skeptical evaluation that appeared in the Wichita Eagle. Waldo Wedel, who was “conducting a general archeological survey of northeastern Kansas” for the Smithsonian, dropped what he was doing and traveled to Kansas City with his colleague Loren Eiseley to study the stone. Wedel, Eiseley, Wellman, and others explored the site of the stone’s “discovery” near Oak Mills, Atchison County. Professional and amateur archaeologists from the state weighed in, and eventually all the commentators questioned the discovery given what was known about the expedition’s route, the linguistic particularities of the inscription, and the very idea that either Coronado or one of his men would take the time to carve such a stone. 41 In hindsight, the verdict matters far less than the fact that a cadre of Coronado and Quivira experts was ready and eager to collaborate in 1937.

A s the 1930s came to a close, Kansans were looking ahead for better days even as they continued to gaze back toward Coronado and Quivira. Pageants continued to delight, but quickly faded. Coronado had his “castle,” yet a keen desire for permanence remained in the air. A new collective materialized in newspapers across the state, led by Paul Jones, Jack Harris, and William Allen White, who called for John Steuart Curry to recast Kansas history in a series of murals for the capitol in Topeka. Curry undertook the project and went forward until he became so frustrated with the interference of his Kansan patrons that he walked away from the work in 1941. Some portions of the series remained unfinished, but Curry had already completed his iconic image of sixteenth-century Kansas. In his hands the expedition and the native people fade away. Coronado, Padilla, and the conquistador’s horse dominate the scene like characters from an old romance—or a Hollywood movie. 42 All the complexities of the sixteenth-century past have been distilled into the kind of fantastic heroes that Governor Landon could praise and the Emporia Gazette could celebrate. And, above all, in Curry’s work McCarter’s intimate scene of dreaming—the Kansas Statehouse—becomes a site of collective remembrance. 43

Artists and architects can invent such sites; archaeologists, however, are bound by the past. In 1940 a Smithsonian archaeological team led by Waldo Wedel arrived in Rice County. Horace Jones worked with Wedel to negotiate access to the Quiviran sites located on area farms. 44 The Lyons News reported on the activities of the archaeologists so that residents could follow the story as it developed. By 1941 Wedel was ready to extend Udden’s work. The native son did not “boost” Kansas; rather, he recorded the evidence as he found it. In the pages of the Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections, he described the arrangement of council circles and the contents of storage pits. And he concluded: “As I view the archeological evidence and its geographical setting the conviction is strong that the Quivira of the sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Spanish documents and the central-Kansas archeological sites were the habitat of one and the same people.” Although Wedel had practically confirmed Udden’s hypothesis, the conclusion came at a price. Most of the significant artifacts unearthed by the field party were taken back to Washington, D.C. 45

For New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas, 1940 marked the cuarto-centennial of Coronado expedition, but Kansans celebrated their own cuarto-centennial in 1941.


Quivira, Coronado, and Kansas 261

43. Landon, “Governor Landon’s Address,” 13; “Paul Jones’ Book,” Emporia Gazette, August 21, 1937; and McCarter, In Old Quivira, 10.
45. Waldo R. Wedel, Archeological Remains in Central Kansas and Their Possible Bearing on the Location of Quivira, Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections 101 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1942), 22. If collective memory depends, in part, on artifacts, then the fate of the Rice County artifacts uncovered by Smithsonian teams is worth noting. Over the years, Wedel’s teams took the most significant artifacts back to the Smithsonian. Because record keeping was not always as detailed as it is today, it is impossible to say for certain whether any of the artifacts were ever displayed. But it seems unlikely. None of the artifacts is currently on display. J. Daniel Rogers, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C., emails to author, November 2012.
Kansans celebrated the cuarto-centennial of Coronado's expedition in 1941 with a seemingly endless parade of festivities. Audiences thriled to performances of the massive pageant The Coronado Entrada, and local newspapers reported that thousands of "citizens of Lyons and of Rice County own and are wearing Spanish-American garb." Such costumes were not limited to the cuarto-centennial celebrations, however, as this 1942 photo from the Lyons Fiesta shows. Many Kansans, it seems, continued to want to dress up to commemorate Coronado.

The seemingly endless festivities had something to do with remembering and much to do with energizing and promoting Kansas communities. Audiences thriled to performances of The Coronado Entrada, a massive pageant written by Thomas Stevens that had already been performed in other states celebrating the cuarto-centennial. Local residents joined professional actors on a stage the size of a football field. And the pageant was only the beginning. On May 5, 1941, the Pratt Daily Tribune reported, "Some 2,000 citizens of Lyons and of Rice County own and are wearing Spanish-American garb. South and Central American nations have sent their flags which are being flown on the courthouse square in Lyons." Events included an exhibition of Aztec dancing, a "Kansas Spanish beauty queen contest," fiesta balls, "Dude Kimball, the Country Plumber," a pet parade, and the burning of "Old Man Gloom." Members of the Wichita tribe traveled to Wichita on a kind of pilgrimage in which they viewed the sites of their ancestors' homes, received the keys to the city, stayed at the Coronado Hotel, and then proceeded on to Lyons where they constructed a grass lodge for display, just as tribal members had done for Wichita in 1927. In June, Sidney Franklin, the famous American bullfighter, came to Lyons to demonstrate his craft in a bloodless spectacle that reminded one reporter more of Hemingway than Coronado. On July 4 Lyons hosted a "field mass" in honor of Father Padilla.

We may chuckle over the image of two thousand Kansans in conquistador costumes or pet parades at "the Coronado show" and admit Kansans' self-interested promotion. We may puzzle over the ideological implications of "hosting" descendants of the region's original settlers. But we should also recognize the way the cuarto-centennial built upon a distinctive tradition of remembrance. By 1941 Kansans expected to participate in recollection. Many wanted to dress up for the occasion. There were, of course, skeptics. Writing in the Kansas City Star, E. B. Garnett noted the $200,000 price tag of the event and suggested that Coronado should have waited four centuries if we wanted to find gold in Kansas. But many more newspaper accounts of the events document Kansans' sense of delight and ownership even as they referred to the knight in shining armor as "Old Corny."

49. E. B. Garnett, "Coronado Comes Back in A Pageant Directed by Remote Control," Kansas City (Mo.) Star, July 14, 1940. Two-hundred thousand dollars was the amount of the congressional appropriation for the Coronado Cuarto-Centennial.
C

ollective remembrance could have taken many different paths after 1941. Lyons could have become “Little Spain.” Museum building could have blossomed. Coronado celebrations could have become annual summer events. Quivira and Coronado tourism could have become a central facet of the Kansas economy. Kansas Catholics could have developed an international pilgrimage site. Set alongside all these possibilities, the story of what did happen after 1941 reveals a great deal about the vicissitudes of collective remembrance. Pageants, almost always associated with centennial celebrations, occurred. The Knights of Columbus erected a memorial cross to Padilla in 1950. Nearly twenty years passed before Rice County began to make steady progress toward moving its historical artifacts from the courthouse to a museum devoted to their preservation. Residents of Liberal, who had long valued their proximity to the Coronado expedition’s route, opened the Coronado Museum in the early 1960s. When the museum struggled to attract visitors, its founding curator, Fred W. Jaedicke, set fire to the building. When the exhibits were moved for safekeeping to a downtown building, Jaedicke set fire to that building too. The overwrought curator was arrested and eventually “committed to Larned State Hospital, where he died 3 months later.” The museum was restored, but it might have occurred to some Kansans that there was something fraught about efforts to nurture collective remembrance in the absence of the sorts of anniversary celebrations and stunning new finds that had kept interest alive.

Then, in 1981, Kansans discovered a home-grown serpent. Having participated in the Smithsonian’s excavations ten years earlier, University of Kansas-trained anthropologist R. Clark Mallam was back in the Lyons area visiting friends. Rice County resident Todd Le Clerc asked him to take a look at a “trench” in his pasture. Mallam inspected the site and soon identified the features of a giant serpent with open jaws. He eventually spent a year studying the intaglio, which measures 160 feet long and between 4 and 10 feet wide, and concluded that it was carved by prehistoric inhabitants of the area to mark a cosmologically oriented ceremonial center made sacred by the hydrological abundance of the headwaters region. It is unclear whether the sixteenth-century Spanish explorers ever saw the creature, but after Mallam’s rediscovery of the intaglio many Rice County residents did. Newspapers in Kansas and across the country picked up the story.

On December 21, 1982, Mallam and thirty-five local residents went out to observe the sunrise from the perspective of the serpent, over the Quivrían council circles. The alignment was obvious. That night, residents returned to the site: “The intaglio was outlined with a string of high density Christmas tree lights connected to a power generator. To the north we made arrangements for the placement of pickup trucks on each of the


council circles with their headlights, covered with red gel to enhance luminosity.” At sunset, the serpent was illuminated. One by one, the farmers turned on their pickup lights. Mallam described a “spectacular” effect as the illuminated council circles “fit directly within the open jaws” of the serpent. He concluded, “the ethereal glow from the intaglio, combined with the radiating council circle lights, manifested a kind of ritualistic order informing those present of another people’s vision, their world view.” In ways McCarter could never have imagined, Mallam had orchestrated a tiny theater of collective memory for the Christmas season.

Once again, discovery stirred up remembrance. Hutchinson Community College history professor Barbara Peirce began organizing popular academic excursions to the historic sites in Rice County. Mallam and Donald Blakeslee, professor of anthropology at Wichita State University, lectured. On a cold winter day in 1984, museum board members broke ground for a significant expansion of the rechristened Coronado Quivira Museum—using Quiviran tools from the museum’s collection. While such an activity would never be permitted today, the digger’s delight is obvious in this photograph from the event. The same excitement was felt a year later, at the museum’s dedication ceremonies, when generations of collective memory gathered for what would be the last significant attempt to commemorate Quivira and Coronado in the twentieth century. Photograph courtesy of the Coronado Quivira Museum and Rice County Historical Society, Lyons, Kansas.

53. Ibid., 16.
and former Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall. It would be the last significant attempt to commemorate Quivira and Coronado in the twentieth century.55

States,” as Jay Winter has noted, “do not remember; individuals do, in association with other people.”56 In many ways, the story of Kansans remembering Quivira and Coronado in the twentieth century is really all about human habits of association. It is a history of passionate individuals committed to the search for a venerable past and to the belief that the search will be more fruitful and fulfilling in the company of fellow Kansans. This basic formula became obvious as the century drew to a close and the groups of Kansans who gathered to remember Quivira and Coronado grew smaller, more disparate. No grand anniversaries were celebrated. Historical pageantry had faded. No more serpents were found. Wedel retired but passed his research on to the Kansas Historical Society. Guided by state archaeologists, among others, amateurs worked beside professionals as part of the Kansas Archaeology Training Program, excavating Quiviran and related Great Bend Aspect sites in 1977, 1978, 1981, 1983, 1986, 1992, and 1993. By the end of 1993, volunteers had logged more than 26,000 hours at these sites. Udden’s vision had endured as Kansans worked “to study and to take care of the antiquities found in their own immediate vicinity.” Old customs were renewed. When the digging began during the summer of 1992, the Lindsborg News-Record invited residents to bring their artifacts to a “Collectors Night” and “share with others your finds.”57 For twentieth-century Kansans, collective memory was all about association. [KIF]

55. Two years later, the secretary would publish his own book on the Spanish explorer: Stewart L. Udall, To the Inland Empire: Coronado and Our Spanish Legacy (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1987).
56. Winter, Remembering War, 4.