The Kansas Historical Society’s mission includes collecting, preserving, interpret, and safeguarding items related to the state’s history. We recently installed a new steam humidification system in the Kansas Museum of History that will ensure the preservation of the state’s precious artifact collections for years to come.

The new system will be more energy efficient with lower maintenance costs. Doug Wadsworth, the Historical Society’s physical plant supervisor, oversaw the installation of the new system. Doug has worked for the Historical Society for 25 years, joining us shortly after the Kansas Museum of History moved to west Topeka.

“It is our responsibility to see that we get what we need and what we paid for,” Doug said, “and that the investment is dependable, efficient, and if possible, help it reach the expected life cycle.”

With the museum facility now more than 25 years old, many components have recently been replaced. Doug was involved with the installation of a new roof, cooling tower, and skylight glass.

“These investments also reflect how worthy the mission of this agency is,” Doug said, “and being a part of that, really makes what we do special.

Providing the added support service needed for all the different divisions is fun and challenging. I can’t think of a better place to work or better people to work for.”
ZaSu Pitts was one of four children born to Rulandus and Nellie (Shay) Pitts. Her name is a combination of those of her mother’s sisters, Eliza and Susan. In her 1963 book, *Candy Hits*, Pitts wrote “It is really pronounced ‘Say Zoo.’” Pitts’ family lived in Parsons until she was nine years old when they moved to Santa Cruz, California, for warmer weather and better job opportunities. After her father died in 1908, Pitts’ mother and two siblings took in renters to try to hang on to their home. Pitts started working to help make ends meet. Pitts wrote:

“You’ll never make a seamstress,” my mother said sadly, “you can’t even sew a button on straight. But maybe you can become an actress.” I shuddered at the thought. Shy, self-conscious, my only interests were growing flowers, cooking, and finishing high school. However, Mother decided to send me to some friends in Hollywood … so off I went … dreading the ordeal that lay ahead of me.”

On her first day at the studio, Pitts met Francis Marion, who wrote many of the scripts for Mary Pickford’s films. Marion and Pickford agreed that Pitts would play Pickford’s opposite in *The Little Princess*, and her career was launched. After earning acclaim for her performance as the lead in the 1924 drama *Greed*, Pitts appeared in a series of short comedies but never lost her desire to secure more dramatic roles.

Her wish was granted when she was cast in the 1930 film *All Quiet on the Western Front*. On opening night the film was preceded by a short comedy film in which Pitts had also starred. When Pitts’ character in *Western Front* appeared on screen, the audience laughed. The next day the studio edited Pitts out of the film. Pitts wrote, “I was packing to go home when Hal Roach sent for me. ‘ZaSu, you’re a natural-born comedienne’ he said. ‘The woods are full of actresses and actors who can emote, but there are few who can make an audience laugh.’”

Pitts went on to enjoy a successful career as a comic actress, first in films and on the radio, and then on television. Her last film role was as a voice actor (the switchboard operator) in the 1963 comedy *It’s a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*. Pitts died later that year.

Since her death, Pitts has been recognized with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, a U.S. postage stamp, and a star tile at the entrance to the Parsons Theatre.
Johnny Fry was one of nearly 200 young men selected to take part in an ambitious endeavor to create timely coast-to-coast communication. Leaving from St. Joseph, Missouri, Fry would carry a mail pouch on the first leg of the Pony Express. In the hope of winning a million dollar government contract, the Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company run by William Russell, Alexander Majors, and William Waddell developed a mail delivery system that was faster than the overland stage. The pouch of letters was dispatched from Washington and New York on March 31, 1860, was transported by train to St. Joseph, and would be carried by a succession of riders on the trek west to Sacramento, California.

Fry was scheduled to leave the station at 5 p.m. April 3, 1860, with his parcel, but the train was delayed and he did not depart until 7:15 p.m. He headed west to Seneca, Kansas, a distance of 80 miles with the leather “mochila” that held 49 letters, five telegrams, and special edition newspapers. A cannon boomed, the brass band played, and a crowd of people cheered as Fry departed.

Amid the excitement, however, questions arose as to the identity of this first rider. Eyewitnesses disputed the newspaper article and claimed that the 20-year-old Fry was the first rider. Billy Richardson later cleared the confusion by explaining that he was one of four riding as escort.

Charley Cliff, who himself became a rider in 1861, was an eyewitness that first night. “It was John Frey [sic] who made that first run,” Cliff said. “I ought to know. I was right here. We lived just across the street from the stable where they kept the horses at first.” Cliff also confirmed that Fry rode a sorrel mare named Sylph.

Fry galloped the short distance to the ferry, which transported he and Sylph across the Missouri River. At Elwood, Kansas, he followed the trail through the wooded bottoms, across the Kickapoo reservation, and to Seneca, where another rider was ready to continue the trek.
To ensure the fastest transport, Pony Express horses carried a maximum of 165 pounds, which included the 20-pound mochila and the rider whose weight could not exceed 125 pounds. Other items were a water sack, a horn to alert the station, a Bible, and two weapons: a revolver and optional rifle. Fresh horses were provided every 10 to 15 miles at stations along the trail. Two minutes was allowed to switch horses and transfer the mail pouch before heading off on the next leg. Riders were replaced every 60 to 80 miles.

Soon after Fry began his journey west, another rider started the trek east from Sacramento to St. Joseph. On April 13 that eastbound mail pouch arrived in Seneca, causing Fry to wait once again. About an hour behind schedule, Fry rushed through the three hour 30 minute leg to meet his deadline. People lined the streets of St. Joseph to welcome him. With minutes to spare, Fry delivered the package to the Wells Fargo office just before midnight. Fry's original westbound pouch arrived at 1 a.m. April 14, 1860, in San Francisco. The company had proved that rapid transcontinental communication was indeed possible, however, the contract went to the operators of the Butterfield Overland stage line.

With the introduction of transcontinental telegraph service in October 1861, the Pony Express ceased operation after just 18 months. Fry became a soldier in the Union army and was killed in 1863 in Baxter Springs in conflict with William Quantrill's raiders.

This illustration from 1860 depicts a Pony Express rider preparing to switch horses.

This state-owned site is the only unaltered Pony Express station in its original location. The station and visitor center are open the first Wednesday in April through last Saturday in October.
kshs.org/places/hollenberg

View maps highlighting the Pony Express way stations, photos of stations, and illustrations of the riders when you visit our online resource.
kansasmemory.org

Our extensive collection of newspapers includes St. Joseph newspapers, which carried updates on the first leg of the Pony Express; Kansas newspapers from Atchison, Elwood, Manhattan, and Topeka; and books and magazines documenting this 18 month venture.
kshs.org/places/state_archives
Security Benefit Takes *Kansas Memory* to Schools

Security Benefit Group of Companies will provide schools with information about the online resource *Kansas Memory*. This contribution of $15,000 will go toward the development and distribution of teacher materials encouraging use of this valuable online collection of primary sources on Kansas history. Other materials will include standards-based lesson plans and posters for media centers featuring historic photographs and documents from kansasmemory.org. The 10,000 items in *Kansas Memory* offer unprecedented online access to Kansas history, which is of particular value in the classroom. The materials underwritten by Security Benefit are part of the campaign to inform teachers about this free resource available to support their efforts.

“We are pleased to participate in alerting schools about this valuable tool for student research.”
— Michel Cole, Security Benefit

150 Things I Love About Kansas

When Kansans celebrate the state’s 150th birthday in 2011, they will be drawn to stories of Kansas’ significance over the years. William Allen White, editor of the *Emporia Gazette*, once said, “When anything is going to happen in this country, it happens first in Kansas.” The Kansas Museum of History will highlight those triumphs in a special exhibit called *150 Things I Love About Kansas*.

This exhibition will feature 150 items that represent the spirit of Kansas including historical artifacts, documents, photographs, artwork, writings, and reminiscences. The display will open January 28, 2011, and will remain open throughout the year.

Approximately 100,000 people will visit the exhibition in person; one-third of these visitors will be schoolchildren. Countless others will view aspects of the exhibit online.

Last year nearly seven million people visited the Historical Society’s virtual exhibits and collections.

Private funds in the amount of $35,000 will need to be raised to produce and promote the exhibit. If you know an individual, company, or foundation that would be a good match for this project, please contact Vicky Henley at 785-272.8681, ext.201; vhenley@kshs.org.
Kaw Mission

Situated along the Santa Fe Trail in Council Grove, the Kaw Mission was once home and school to 30 Kaw (or Kansa) boys from 1851 to 1854. Today this state historic site tells the story of the Kansa people, who lived here for less than 30 years until 1873 when they were relocated to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma).

An 1846 treaty between the U.S. government and the Kansa provided a reservation 20 square miles in size that included present-day Council Grove. The treaty provided that the government would make an annual payment of $1,000 to advance the education of the Kansa people. The Methodist Church South entered into a contract with the government to construct a mission.

The two-story building, which was completed in February 1851, was made of native stone and had eight rooms to house and educate up to 50 students. Thomas Sears Huffaker directed and taught at the mission from its opening until 1854, when increasing costs and declining interest on the part of the Kansa tribe resulted in the closing of the mission in 1854.

Today visitors to the site can discover the story of the Kansa people, explore exhibits about the Santa Fe Trail, and examine early Council Grove artifacts.

Visit the site!

Kaw Mission State Historic Site • 500 North Mission in Council Grove
620-767-5410 • kshs.org/places/kaw

Admission: $3 adults, $1 students; KSHS, Inc., members and children five and under admitted free
Visitor hours: 9:30 a.m. – 6 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday
At the beginning of the 20th century, Terry Stafford ran a bicycle shop in Topeka. An article in *Scientific American* intrigued Stafford and he decided to construct an automobile, even though he had never seen one in person.

“Old Bill” was based on the article description and created great excitement on the streets of Topeka. Stafford drove his car to nearby communities and soon attracted the attention of brothers Anton and Clement Smith, who operated a factory in Topeka.

The Smith brothers specialized in manufacturing artificial limbs, orthopedic and surgical instruments, and trusses. They saw an opportunity to expand their products and hired Stafford as the general manager of the new Smith Automobile Company. In 1902 they began producing the small, lightweight Smith Surreys.

The business relocated to a larger, “state of the art” building with more than 150 employees. Focusing on quality, their motto stated: “Build an automobile at the lowest price at which it can be done well, make it light and strong, and put out no inferior grade.”

Their new larger model, the Veracity, was introduced in 1904, followed in late 1906 by the even larger Great Smith. Produced until 1911, this car was red with black and gold trimmings and featured elegant upholstery. The Great Smith was right-hand drive and could carry seven passengers—with seating for two in the rear, which could also be folded down or removed. The car featured three forward speeds, one reverse, and could run 15 miles on a gallon of gas. The right foot operated the multi-use pedal, which served as both clutch and brake. The 60 horsepower engine could reach 60 miles per hour. Options included a top, dust cover, side curtains, and a windshield. The 1908 Great Smith was expensive; with extras it sold for $2,787, which translates to $67,220 today.

The Smith brothers fully understood the need for marketing, finding some success with the national press. Displaying a Great Smith at a New York auto show in 1906, their publicist said, “We were swamped with orders, and were obliged to turn down at least 150.” In 1907 they produced a special Great Smith for Arthur Capper, editor and publisher of the *Topeka Daily Capital*. In May 1908 the brothers entered a Great Smith in the Rocky Mountain Endurance Run near Denver, which *Motor Age* described as the “roughest road ever traveled by any set of cars in any motor car endurance race ever promoted.” The Great Smith placed third. That October a Great Smith in another promotional event became the first automobile to scale Pike’s Peak. The company’s advertising claimed the car was one of a kind.
Out of the Western Setting Sun comes an Automobile—a car so strongly, solidly, and substantially built as to attract the attention of even the Mechanical Expert upon first sight—a big upstanding powerful, capable car—not a model of another car, but an individual Road Locomotive in a class by itself.

“It is the most magnificent running car I ever had anything to do with,” Clement Smith said. “It starts smoothly and gathers speed without a jerk. The engine runs so quietly you would hardly know there was an engine in it.”

Stafford left the company in 1907 and went on to start his own manufacturing firm in Kansas City, which continued to produce Staffords until 1915. While the Smith Automobile Company produced luxury cars, competitors offered cars at a much lower cost. The Ford Motor Company in 1909 introduced the Model T using assembly line construction, which sold for $800. Unable to compete, the Smiths sold their last car in 1911.

Clement Smith continued to manufacture medical products. In 1947, just before his death, he donated his personal 1908 Great Smith to the Kansas Historical Society.

The Smiths used this gauge as a dipstick to check fuel levels and is part of a display in the Kansas Museum of History.

VISIT | KANSAS MUSEUM OF HISTORY

See the Great Smith on display in the museum’s new special exhibit, *Cars: The Need for Speed*, now through November. You’ll also meet some racecar drivers and see their stock cars, dragsters, and midget racers.
kshs.org/places/museum

SHOP | MUSEUM STORE

Find gifts and books with a racing theme when you shop the Museum Store in Topeka and online. Our selection of toys includes vintage metal racecars.
kshs.org/store

BROWSE | KANSAS MEMORY

View some early racecars in our online collections including this sporty racer from Logan County in the 1920s. kansasmemory.org
As the nation waited for Congress to admit Kansas to the Union, settlers in the territory struggled to survive a drought. The St. Joseph Gazette cautioned against settlers immigrating to the territory, as they would put a further burden on already scarce resources:

_I do not think many will be able to settle in this part for the next twelve months, there being almost an entire failure in the crops throughout this section of country. Prospects are really dismal here for all kinds of produce. There will not be “hog and hominy” enough for the old inhabitants, much less for a large influx [of] emigration._

Thaddeus Hyatt was an abolitionist who also advocated for relief efforts for Kansas settlers. He served as head of the National Kansas Committee in 1856, and wrote several circulars intended to arouse the people of the East to the necessities of Kansas settlers.

His February 4, 1860, appeal “Starvation in Kansas” painted a bleak picture for Kansas settlers unless emergency aid was provided immediately:

Like a vortex, this frightful famine draws to its insatiate centre all conditions. Hour by hour it enlarges. With each recurring day the calamity spreads wider. They who had food yesterday, have none today. They who have food today, have none for tomorrow. Desolation covers the land, and sorrow fills the hearts of the people.

Shortly after writing the appeal, Hyatt was called to Washington, D.C., but not to argue his case for Kansas settlers. Hyatt had known John Brown and was called to testify to the Senate committee looking into events at Harpers Ferry a few months prior. Hyatt refused to testify and was imprisoned for three months, but continued to write articles for newspapers and advocate for relief for Kansas.
Meet Our Members

Angela Bates

Angela Bates’ interest in genealogy was fostered as a child during her family’s annual trip to the Nicodemus Emancipation Celebration in northwest Kansas. These childhood experiences inspired her first book published in 1968.

In 1989 Bates moved from California to Nicodemus where more than 100 years earlier her great great grandfather Tom Johnson had settled. He was one of hundreds of African Americans who migrated from Kentucky to Kansas in the late 1800s.

Nicodemus became the center for African American culture in the region. During the 20th century its success waxed and waned like many other agricultural towns in Kansas. Today it is the longest continuously populated black town in the state. Bates and others worked to make the African American township of Nicodemus, Kansas, a national historic site.

Three Historical Society archeological field schools have been conducted on the town site, something Bates said she finds fascinating as a descendant. “I enjoyed seeing the site go from undistinguishable to being able to see the dugout floor and artifacts and to confirm where the dugout was through archeology and research.”

The story of the migration, the development of this unique Kansas town, and the many stories of the families that called Nicodemus home are told through the Nicodemus Historical Society founded by Bates in 1988.

Bates dedicates her time and talent to the collection of photographs, documents, and artifacts for the historical society but keeps the stories alive through educational and living history programs and public speaking. She also has written guides for educators and students about the African American experience in Kansas. Bates published a children’s book last year and another is slated for release in the spring.

Bates has taken an active role as a member of the Kansas Historical Society and has served on the board of directors since 1995. Recently she was elected to the governing executive committee. Bates believes both Kansas natives and transplants should support Historical Society activities. “You’re part of the history of Kansas,” Bates said. “As individuals, I think it’s important because your family has a role in some aspect of the history of Kansas. If you’re not a native, why did you select Kansas? It makes it more interesting to know the history of where you are living . . . in essence, just join!”

BECOME A MEMBER

Membership support enables the Historical Society’s programs to continue. The cost of membership remains only $40 annually. Members receive free admission to the museum and all state historic sites, a discount at the Historical Society’s stores and on online purchases, as well as quarterly issues of Reflections and the award-winning Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains. More information available at kshs.org/joinkshs, by calling 785-272-8681, ext. 209; or membership@kshs.org.
From Our Collections

From Cherryvale to Hollywood

The Sunflower State was home to many actresses from Hollywood’s golden age, including Hattie McDaniel, Vera Miles, ZaSu Pitts, and Patrice Wymore. Two in particular were born in the same town, just three years apart.

Cherryvale in Montgomery County had a population of about 3,500 at the turn of the 20th century. Within the next 10 years the population nearly doubled and the town boasted factories that produced glass, shovels, barrels, bicycles, marble, and iron. During this economic boom, the town also produced two future Hollywood stars: Louise Brooks and Vivian Vance.

Brooks was born November 14, 1906. Her father was an attorney, who, according to Brooks, had been told by his wife that any children that resulted from their marriage would have to take care of themselves while she enjoyed pursuing the arts. Brooks and her three siblings had little discipline but were exposed to books and music at an early age.

Due to his work, Brooks’ father moved the family in 1919, first to Independence for a few months, then to Wichita. Brooks studied dance in Wichita until she left in 1922 to join the Denishawn School of Dancing and Related Arts, a modern dance company in New York. After a clash with company founder Ruth St. Denis, Brooks found work in the Broadway musical revues George White’s Scandals and Ziegfeld Follies. Brooks captured the attention of a Paramount Pictures producer and was signed to a five-year contract in 1925. She debuted in The Street of Forgotten Men, with an uncredited role, but was soon playing leading roles in silent comedies and flapper films.

Brooks found herself at odds with Paramount and moved to Germany, where she made Pandora’s Box, groundbreaking for its frank treatment of taboo subjects. Her conflict with the studios continued upon her return to Hollywood. When she refused to record voice tracks for her earlier silent pictures, the studio blacklisted her. Brooks made a few more films over the next seven years, but never reached the heights of fame of her contemporaries Marlene Dietrich and Greta Garbo.

After Hollywood, Brooks operated a dance studio and worked as a radio actor and gossip columnist. She died in 1985. Today Brooks is lauded as one of the first naturalistic actors in film, playing more to the subtle than the melodramatic.

During her childhood in Cherryvale, Brooks’ playmates included Venus Jones, who lived across the street, and Jones’ little sister, Vivian, who would later change her last name to Vance.

Vivian Roberta Jones was born July 26, 1909, one of six siblings. When Jones was six years old, her father moved the family to Independence so he could start a grocery business with his brother. Jones studied drama at Independence High School, where future playwright William Inge was her classmate. Jones changed her last

Louise Brooks was one of a handful of actresses that popularized the “bob” haircut in the 1920s.

Vivian Vance
name to Vance and moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico, to work as an actress. Her work in the community theatre there paid the way for her travel to New York for study.

Vance had a difficult time on Broadway, often cast as a second or third lead. She had similar luck in films, making a total of four. One night in 1951, when she was playing in the La Jolla, California, production of The Voice of the Turtle, television director Marc Daniels was in the audience. He was there with film star Desi Arnaz to determine whether Vance would complement Arnaz’ wife, Lucille Ball, in the new television series I Love Lucy. Vance was cast and catapulted into fame as Ethel Mertz, one of TV’s most famous sidekicks. She was honored for her work, receiving the first Emmy Award given to a supporting actress, and would receive three additional nominations during the run of the show.

When Ball returned to television in 1962 for The Lucy Show, she wanted her friend and costar to join her. Vance, who was frequently called “Ethel” in public, asked that her character be called “Vivian.” Ball agreed and gave her the first role as a divorcée on American weekly television.

Vance continued to work in television and on stage throughout her career. She died in 1979.

The back of this Kansas Board of Review file card shows that the board recommended the removal of a scene showing a flask in the 1927 Louise Brooks film Rolled Stockings. Browse review cards for more than 5,200 films from 1910-1966 at kshs.org/research/collections/documents/govtrecords/boardofreviewmovieindex

Discover objects that tell the stories of television, film, and other popular culture when you visit the recent past section in the main gallery at the Kansas Museum of History in Topeka.

Explore the story of Vivian Vance's Independence High School classmate, William Inge, Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright and Academy Award-winning screenwriter. Inge’s story is told in Memories of Splendor, The Midwestern World of William Inge, by Arthur McClure and available from the Museum Store. kshs.org/store

This photo of Vivian Vance and her older sister, Venus, appeared alongside her obituary in the August 22, 1979, Cherryvale Citizen. The paper reported Vance was about five years old in the photo.
Happening at KSHS

**Cars: The Need for Speed, Kansas Museum of History, Topeka**

This special exhibit, scheduled to run through November 28, 2010, will explore the impact of cars on Kansas. Automobiles inspired innovations in fast food and entertainment. They also drove our passion for racing. Join us March 12 and 13 for our Spring Break Rally, two days of car-related family-friendly events. Support for this exhibit is provided by Wal-Mart.

[kshs.org/exhibits/current/cars.htm](http://kshs.org/exhibits/current/cars.htm)

**Bleeding Kansas 2010 Programs, Constitution Hall State Historic Site, Lecompton**

Join us 2 p.m. Sundays January 31 - February 28, 2010, for our popular Bleeding Kansas program series. This series of talks and dramatic interpretations focuses on the violent conflict over the slavery issue in Kansas Territory 1854-1861.

**Digging in the Past: Archeology at RP1, Special Exhibit at Pawnee Indian Museum State Historic Site, Republic**

This month-long special exhibit runs during February and tells the story of recent activities at the site through posters, videos, and diagrams. Research techniques used during a recent excavation include dendrochronology and archeomagnetic testing, which help to pinpoint the actual dates of Pawnee occupation. Discover new findings for an ancient site! [kshs.org/places/pawneeindian](http://kshs.org/places/pawneeindian)

**Moses Grinter’s Birthday, Grinter Place State Historic Site, Kansas City**

Join us Friday, March 12, as we celebrate the 101st anniversary of the birth of Moses Grinter. Grinter operated a ferry and later a trading post within the Lenape (Delaware) reserve. He and his wife Anna, a Lenape, built a two-story brick home that is now the oldest home in Wyandotte County.

[kshs.org/places/grinter](http://kshs.org/places/grinter)
CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Online at kshs.org/calendar

Through November 28, 2010

Cars: The Need for Speed
Exhibit at the Kansas Museum of History, Topeka

February 6, 2010
Candy Demonstration and Tasting
Event at Shawnee Indian Mission State Historic Site, Fairway

February 3 – 28, 2010
Digging in the Past: Archeology at RP1
Exhibit at Pawnee Indian Museum State Historic Site, Republic

February 7, 14, 21, & 28, 2010
Bleeding Kansas Programs 2010
Presentations at Constitution Hall State Historic Site, Lecompton

March 12-13, 2010
Spring Break Rally
Family-friendly programs related to the Cars: The Need for Speed exhibit at the Kansas Museum of History, Topeka

April 1 - 30, 2010
Kansas Archeology Month
Exhibit at Pawnee Indian Museum State Historic Site, Republic

April 7, 2010
Hollenberg Pony Express Station and Mine Creek Battlefield State Historic Sites reopen for seasonal hours

April 15, 2010
History & Environmental Fair
School program at the Kansas Museum of History, Topeka

April 20, 2010
Watercolors in the Mission Garden
Event at Shawnee Indian Mission State Historic Site, Fairway

April 24-25, May 1-2, 2010
Quilt Show
Event at Grinter Place State Historic Site, Kansas City

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reflect@kshs.org

Paid for with private funds by the Kansas State Historical Society, Inc.
Mrs. Irma Berry’s first grade class at Quincy Elementary School in Topeka posed for a class portrait in February 1960. Note the Valentine decorations in the classroom. You can browse this and other class portraits at kansasmemory.org