

Ellis County Historical Society
1011 W 27th
Suite F-1
Hays, KS 67601

Phone: (785) 628-2624
director@echshays.org

Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday
12:30—3:00pm

AND by appointment.

Your membership will expire on

Your most recent membership level is

This agency is funded in part by the City of Hays and Ellis County Kansas.

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BEST TEAM EVER
Adam Conkey
Amanda Unrein

Archivist
Betty
Macdonald



the Homesteader

Mission Statement (Adopted 2018): The Ellis County Historical Society Museum collects, preserves, and exhibits Ellis County History for the surrounding community and its visitors.

JUST A DUSTING — Adam Conkey

Dust storms are not new, but a very old thing involving life on the High Plains. Though few alive can accurately recall the Dust Bowl in the 1930s as it actually happened, most of us now living here, know it as part of our culture and, in some respects, our collective folklore. I remember finding the very fine particles of silt in my great uncles' farmstead outbuildings as an interesting plaything. It was hydrophobic and soft, initially, and unlike other bits of dirt and sand, a child might find at three or four years of age.

These extraordinarily fine particles whip up into the upper atmosphere from high winds and fall accordingly once or twice heavily every decade or so: 1985, 1989, 1991, 2004, 2021 for a few local examples. Further, the geologic record shows dust forming the Arikaree breaks and other land features in western Nebraska and northwest Kansas 10,000 years ago, being far worse and longer lasting than the man-made disaster of 1935 where the dust blew for months and choked out the lives of many. We witnessed our more modern taste of it last December.

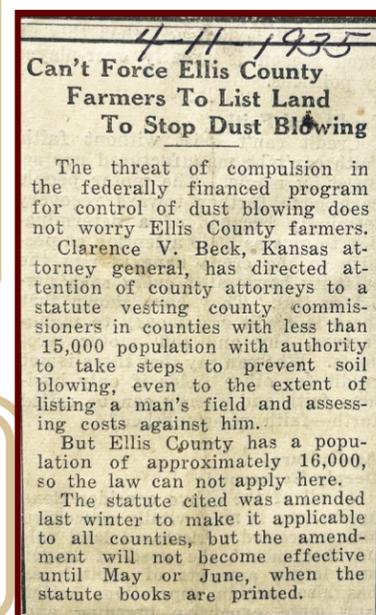


Dec. 15, 2021
Looking NE from ECHS roof.

Though many of us heard our meteorologists warn of very high wind gusts in advance, the early half of December 15, 2021 was calm. The Sun, hindered by few clouds that morning, shone brightly for that time of year on the city workers pulling up bricks on 7th St. in front of the museum buildings. I went about my project assembling shelves and cleaning areas in the archive room, prepping for a future design. Periodically and lastly at noon, I peeked out of the doors of the Stone Church to make witness to the west and saw only peace, wondering if ever the predicted maelstrom would occur.

Having lost myself in a project and expecting a volunteer, Fred Joy, around 1pm to assist, I became as blissfully unaware of the outside world as much as anyone can in the archives. Enter Mr. Joy and our first meeting; I begin a winded discussion on projects present and future. As I ask the question, "Do you have a truck?" leading toward the idea of grabbing shelving from the Dome, I see that Fred has an expression of not particularly wanting to work this afternoon, though he did not decline. And, so, I walked up the steps to see the expected apocalypse outside.

The wind dutifully arrived as predicted, carrying with it fine particles of dust created by a few dry months since winter wheat planting in September and October. As it had in 1935 in Hays,



MEMBER BENEFITS:

- Free admission to the museum and archives
- Subscription to *The Homesteader*, ECHS's quarterly newsletter
- 10% discount in the Museum Store (excluding consigned items)
- Vote at the Annual Membership Meeting
- Participation in the *Time Travelers* network of 300+ organizations in 40+ states (www.timetravelers.mohistory.org)

SPONSORSHIP:

Categories, listed below, include all the benefits of membership at a higher level of financial support. We list our sponsors by category in *The Homesteader* as well as in guides to our special events. ECHS is a 501 © 3 organization your sponsorship

STEP UP BECOME A SPONSOR

You are a person who understands
the value of history.

ELLIS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION



TYPE OF MEMBERSHIP (Check One)	LEVELS OF SPONSORSHIP (Check One)	NAME/BUSINESS _____	
____ Student \$10 (ID required)	____ SCOUT (\$75 - \$99)	ADDRESS _____	
____ Senior \$10 (65 and up)	____ PIONEER (\$100 - \$249)	CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____	
____ Single \$15	____ HOMESTEADER (\$250 - \$499)	PHONE _____ EMAIL _____	
____ Family \$25	____ SETTLER (\$500 - \$999)	<i>Please make checks payable to the ELLIS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, or use a credit card below:</i>	
____ Lifetime (Single) \$500	____ BENEFACTOR (\$1,000+)	____ Visa ____ Mastercard ____ American Express ____ Discover	
____ Lifetime (Couple) \$750		Acc # _____ CVV# _____ Exp. Date _____	
		Signature _____ Amount \$ _____	

FOR OFFICE USE: MEMBER # _____ CHECK # _____ AMT _____ DATE _____ PP _____

...continued on page 4

UPCOMING EVENTS:

MONDAY, JANUARY 31st, 7:00pm
ECHS ANNUAL MEETING OF MEMBERS

Stone Church—

Meeting will give updates on all the progress made in 2021 and real goals for 2022. Election of board of directors with both a slate of officers and possibility of six trustee positions will be held, one ballot per member.

Also, presentation and member approval of the proposed annual budget. After all business is attended to, Adam Conkey will have a presentation entitled "A Dust Bowl Every Now and Then", focusing on the dirty thirty's in Ellis Co. and some comparisons to the recent dust storm we experienced this past December. And of course it is another opportunity to view the beautiful quilt collection before it is put away at the beginning of March.

BE SURE TO CHECK OUT THE SATELLITE DISPLAY "FROM THE DEEP" AT THE BIG CREEK CROSSING MALL.

For recent happenings or exciting news that did not make the newsletter...



FROM THE DESK OF THE INTERIM DIRECTOR

This past summer I was contacted by Melissa Dixon of the Hays CVB with a request she had received by email to help a Californian locate his Great Grandfather's WWI uniform and Purple Heart. He had been told that it was possibly in the collection at ECHS and had reached out to the staff here in 2018 with no luck. As he had only heard of it's existence, he wished to see it, not claim it. I knew this may be quite an undertaking at our current position (collections scattered throughout multiple buildings) but I was glad to reach out to Ryan Sharpe and offer what help I could. After explaining our situation to him I assured him that if he could be so kind as to be patient with our new staff, I would keep his request on my to-do list and would not let it fall through the cracks this time. He was happy to do so and we checked in on each other every month to update the status of our "move all artifacts to our campus" project was going.

After the hustle of the 50th Celebration, Christmas and the big move I decided to take a break from paperwork, budgets and planning more moving and just go on a treasure hunt. When we could not readily locate an accession list for uniforms we just decided to dive into the boxes one by one. Adam Conkey and I spent about an hour and half opening up garment storage boxes marked "uniforms" and curiously looking but didn't not go so far as to take items out and thoroughly check each piece (as we didn't have that kind of time). We went through box after box, on two separate floors of our storage house but came up with only a few WW1 uniforms and none that were 137th Infantry Regiment.

A little discouraged we were locking up the building and setting the alarm when Adam spotted one box (close to the entrance even!) that he said "hold up, I just have to check this so I can be sure it's not here". It was a box I had looked through before I had this task on my radar and knew it had something military but I remembered it was a ceremonial garment of some kind. And that the box wasn't completely full like it should have been. Well low and behold underneath the fancy garment and textile paper protector was a uniform that looked promising. We were really excited and then we saw the medals and patches!! We think this is it... it was!!! Engraved on the back of the Purple Heart was his great grandfather's name. Clifton A. Witt served in Co. F 137th Infantry Regiment 35th Infantry Division during WWI and nearly died in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. If you are familiar with the buildings on FHSU campus, there is a building named after him.

I contacted Ryan that day by email and anxiously awaited his reply:

"I am beside myself right now. I had originally inquired about this uniform I believe in 2016/2017. That first search dried up. However, I had never forgotten about searching for his uniform and decided to try again this year and it seems like it paid off. I can't thank you enough for your and your team's effort in locating it. Thank you. "

As rewarding this treasure hunt was I dream of a day that it is not that difficult for staff to access current lists of artifacts and their actual secure location, as it once was and should be. Even a day where patron's can view all items through use of Past Perfect software. This process will take time and many volunteers to enter data but the finished project will be magnificent! On that note I wish to thank all those who contributed so far to our Computer Systems Upgrade initiative that was sent out in the Annual Appeal. We have reached half of our \$10,000 goal so far!

THANK YOU — SPONSORS

Benefactor (\$1,000 and up)

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Scout (\$75 to \$99)

Albert & Priscilla Hunt Ivan & Verda Werner Donald Dailey*

New Life Members: Albert & Priscilla Hunt

New Members: Jerry Braun

** Big thank you to our recently joined/renewed sponsors.*

Would you be so kind and review your expiration date on the back of this issue. We know these are busy days and renewing may have slipped through the cracks. Please renew today, we truly appreciate your support.

These contributors have helped us raise \$4,530 towards our Computer Systems Upgrade initiative so far!

JoAnn Koerner
Daniel & MaryKay Schippers
Cynthia Stone
Jay Burns
Susan Wolf

Marlene Brull
Lawrence Gould
Samuel Brungardt
Christopher Janzen
Mark E Stoddard

Curtis Longpine
Adele Shaver
James & Teresa Feyerherm
Brian Gribben
Robert Pfeifer

If you would like to add to our efforts please send a gift marked "computers" and it will go directly to this purpose. Or you can use our secure link for Computer Upgrades on our Square.com, just go to <https://square.link/u/bh/Mcvqzj> to make a donation by credit card.



Photos take of Clifton A Witt's WWI uniform.



Want to volunteer?

It is true that none of this is possible without the help of our community.

ECHS is gathering together an army of volunteers. We would love to have your help! If you are thinking you may want to help, please fill out this volunteer questionnaire and return it to our current office. **We will contact you to discuss opportunities for you to be involved.**

NAME: _____ PHONE: _____

ADDRESS: _____ EMAIL: _____

Circle opportunities that interest you most:

- | | | |
|-----------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| OFFICE/CLERICAL | CATALOGUING | ARCHIVES |
| DATA ENTRY | RESEARCH/LIBRARY | PUBLIC SPEAKING |
| MAILINGS | CLEANING | CARPENTRY |
| GIFT SHOP | FUNDRAISING | PAINTING |
| PHOTOGRAPHY | TOUR GUIDE | GENERAL REPAIR |
| EVENT PLANNING | DOCENT/TEACHING | DESIGN/GRAPHICS |
| HISTORY | ARTS/CRAFTS | LANDSCAPING/GARDENING |

Would you like to volunteer as regular schedule or as needed? (circle one)

Days of the week you are available: M T W T F S Sunday (circle)

Additional comments: _____

Ever think about becoming a board member?
 Want to be an instrumental part of making sure our past has a bright, beautiful future?

Now, more than ever, is your chance to really make an impact. As we plan for possibilities of what the next generation of ECHS museum looks like, your ideas and teamwork will be a pivotal part of making dreams become a reality.

At the upcoming Annual Meeting of Members we will be bringing new and dedicated history lovers into the fold. The slate of officers which is voted on every year has two spots completely open without an incumbent. Depending on the outcome of that vote there is a possibility of 6 trustee positions to fill. Could it be you? A quick overview of obligations: Trustees serve a three-year term and cannot serve more than two consecutive terms. The four officers serve a one-year term and are eligible for three consecutive terms as an officer. All board members must be a resident of Ellis County and current members of ECHS.

Board meetings are held the last Monday of the month. If you are interested in becoming a board member, please reach out to one of the 17 current members or email director@echshays.org to inquire about more details. Write-ins are welcome the night of the meeting as well.

There are also many ways to be involved, without being a board member. Standing committees (excluding executive committee) are open to all members of ECHS. A board member may chair the committee but outside collaboration is important. This may be an opportunity for you to be involved with less of a time commitment. Some of the Standing Committees are Collections, Fundraising, Strategic Planning, Budget, Special Events. Ad Hoc Committees are also a great way to get your feet wet without a year long obligation. Committee members, who are not board members do not have to meet the every month board meeting standard.

ECHS would like to thank the current board of directors for their time and service this past year.

It is the time for action!

PASSAGES: ECHS members who have passed since the last newsletter.

Robert MacDonald

He will be missed.

continued from cover.....

many times before, the dust blew in from Colorado. Wind gusts exceeded 80mph. We drove to pick up our probate court book support structure, loaded it, and continued as though it were any other day. A brilliant idea lingered in my head throughout this process. I had to really see this and document this rare event. While giving the late museum tour, Fred and I entered the attic rooms and there I made a decision to climb the ladder to the roof. Fred so declined my venture and solo I went.

To say it was windy up on the rooftop is a disservice to the word wind. I used both hands to steady my record and both feet to steady myself. Not being a skilled acrobat, I was not assured my victory versus the wind and not being a friend of high places, dually uneasy. The wind was roiling the dust on the south end of town, the west was dark towards FHSU and the sky had a brownish-yellow haze throughout. Six blocks away and a bit more, all the air surrounding obscured the Lamer building, various concrete grain elevators and the Hadley Center to the north and east. I had probably not seen the worst of it up on the roof, but it was assuredly enough. And down below on 7th St. continued the workers on street repair.

I then bade farewell to Fred shortly after the venture around 2pm. No more had he left, the power went out, leaving my shelving project, the museum, and me in the dark. Save for a strip of businesses along 10th St. the power was out in the western part

of town until after 8pm. A short road trip to the southwest part of the county towards Antonino with my friend Nick, Glassman left another impression. Smoke began filling the air from west of town as clouds and the distinct odor took over from the dust of earlier. Further, towards Antonino, the air began to clear and, the wind began to die down around 5pm leaving the area much colder than it had been that morning. Stock tanks, broken and bending powerlines, snapped trees, corn husk covered fence rows and windbreaks, and the like now still, signaled the end of a very windy and dusty day, a taste of the air of 1935 and the dust of old outbuildings.

A NARROW ESCAPE FROM DUST STORM

Two Hays Men Walk and Crawl Three Miles to Shelter, Abandoning Car

3-21-1935

Two Hays men, Balzar Eberle and Clem Stremel, who were marooned in their car on a country road near Munjor in the dust storm Friday walked and crawled on their hands and knees for three miles, while the storm was at its height, in an attempt to reach their homes in Hays.

They were forced to stop at a farmhouse and spend the rest of the night. Eberle Saturday morning credited a sand ridge, left when the road recently was improved, with keeping them on the road and probably saving their lives.

The two men were part of a crew which had moved a house Friday from Munjor to the Anton Korbe farm one mile northeast of Munjor. They reached their destination with the building near 8 o'clock, blocked up the house and after eating a lunch, started home.

Can't Drive In Dust

The Korbe farm is on a side road. The dust was so thick they couldn't see to get to the main road, so Eberle walked in front of the car for a quarter of a mile while Stremel drove. They reached the main road, and still couldn't see, so Eberle continued to walk in front of the machine, but if he advanced further than ten feet, Stremel was unable to follow him, so thick was the dust. They went on in this manner for half a mile, then stopped the car, hoping the storm would abate.

They sat in the car, an open model with only curtains to keep out the dust, for an hour and a half. Handkerchiefs were tied over their faces to keep them from choking.



On Hands and Knees

As they sat there, the men noted it was growing colder. Afraid a blizzard was coming and they might freeze if they remained, they decided to take a chance on being lost in the swirling dust and began to walk.

"The only thing that saved us was the sand, piled along one edge of the road," Eberle said Saturday morning, "we held hands to keep together, and part of the time the only way we could keep going was to crawl on our hands and knees, guided by the sand ridge. We walked and crawled for three miles and finally came to Jake Goetz's farm.

"We didn't know there was a house there, though, because we couldn't see it, and we passed the gate. Then a car came along and the lights showed us a mail box. We finally found the gate and managed to get to the house. When we reached there, there wasn't anybody at home. Mr. and Mrs. Goetz had been to Hays, and when they were nearly home had also become lost in the storm. They too, however, managed finally to reach the house, just as we were about to break a window to get in out of the storm. It was shortly after 8 o'clock when we left Korbes, and it was nearly 12 o'clock when we found our way to the Goetz farm."

IN OTHER NEWS

The move of ECHS business offices is complete!

The office is located in the most north-west building in the Eagle Plaza complex, address 1011 W 27th Suite F1. We are the door directly west of the gazebo.

A selection of our most utilized archive collections are at Eagle Plaza and the remaining reference materials and records can be brought to the research room at the new office upon request.

Everyone is welcome to stop in for research, make purchases or just to chat.

**Office hours are
Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday
12:30pm – 3:00 pm.**

Our small staff divides time at our various locations so please call ahead outside of posted business hours. Archival Assistant Betty MacDonald is available remotely to help with county or genealogy research. Please call 785-628-2624 for an appointment.

Robert and Patricia Schmidt were long-time supporters of ECHS. We are appreciative of the Schmidt Foundation's pride and dedication to the rich history of Ellis Co. and excited to utilize this opportunity to regroup and vigorously plan for the future.

"This new space will give ECHS a new look and the basis for a bright future"
-Gary Shorman, Schmidt Foundation President

WE ARE GRATEFUL

This month special mention once again goes out to Holly Unrein who puts in many, many volunteer hours not only cleaning but helping organize any and all functions. Also, we truly appreciate Donna Maskus' baking talent. If you have not had her cookies before, it is worth stopping by our meetings or events just to have taste or two, she spoils us with treats on almost every occasion. New volunteer Fred Joy has been assisting Adam in the many organizing tasks he has underway, we send out our thanks for his continued efforts.

Did not have room in this issue to do a full review of the 50th Anniversary Celebration. However it is very worth mentioning that it was a wonderful success. A beautiful day for gun fights and friendly atmosphere to enjoy our speakers. Thanks to all that came out to celebrate with us and a special thanks to our event sponsor Hays CVB.

**50th Anniversary
Raffle WINNERS:**

The Henry Repeater: Ed Howell

The Couple's Massage from Rejuvenation's: Don Scheibler

Rough Rider: Michele Springer

ECHS Lifetime Membership: Priscilla Hunt



Pictured: Donna Maskus, Holly Unrein, Amanda Unrein, Priscilla Hunt, & Gary Shorman

