SHSMO Honors Virginia Laas and other Authors, Historians, and Organizations at the Annual Meeting  1

Senator Roy Blunt Delivers My Missouri Lecture  3

John K. Hulston: Inspiring Future Generations  5

Missouri Humanities Grant to Fund NHD Student and Teacher Workshops  6

Missouri Quilt Museum in Hamilton Welcomes the Bicentennial Quilt  6

In Their Own Words: Voices of the National Women and Media Collection on Exhibition at Center for Missouri Studies  8

The Complete Collection of Thomas Hart Benton Editioned Lithographs on Display in Joplin  10

Major Grant to Support Missouri Congressional Papers Project  12

Missouri Women Added to the Missouri Veterans Oral History Project in 2022  13

Records of a Mississippi County School District Provide Glimpse of Early African American Schools  15

Rabbi Warned Missourians of Nazi Germany’s Treatment of Jewish Citizens Prior to World War II  16

Kuk Sool Won-St. Louis Records Chronicle the Growth and Popularity of Martial Arts in Twentieth-Century America  17

Personal Letters Detail Preservation of Home and Headquarters for Founder of the Pony Express  18

SHSMO Welcomes New Staff  19

Volunteer Spotlight: Ann O’Dell  20

Looking Ahead  21

Music, Performances, and Film Bring Missouri History to Life  page 4

The Roots of American Ginseng in Missouri  page 9

Popular Old-Time Radio Programs Originating in Springfield Available to Researchers  page 14

Missouri Times is published by the State Historical Society of Missouri for its membership. To receive Missouri Times, please register as a member at shsmo.org.

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COVER PHOTO
SHSMO Honors Virginia Laas and other Authors, Historians, and Organizations at the Annual Meeting

By Beth Pike

THE Annual Meeting of the State Historical Society took place at the Center for Missouri Studies on October 29. SHSMO Board of Trustees President Virginia Laas received the 2022 Distinguished Service Award for her contributions to the Society, where she has served as a trustee since 1995 and a member of the Missouri Historical Review editorial advisory board. The Distinguished Service Award is the highest award offered by the State Historical Society. Virginia is also a past president of the Missouri Conference on History. Laas, a professor emerita at Missouri Southern State University, is the author of numerous scholarly books and articles and continues to serve on the boards of multiple community organizations in Joplin, where she resides.

“Virginia Laas cares deeply about the historical profession, about scholarship, about students, and about the State Historical Society of Missouri,” said Gary Kremer, SHSMO executive director. “Her leadership helped us navigate through the pandemic and resultant state budget cuts that reduced staff and our operations in 2020 and part of 2021. Virginia always evidenced a calm, steady, well-reasoned approach to whatever the crisis du jour was.”

The Missouri History Book Award was presented to Benjamin Moore for *The Names of John Gergen: Immigrant Identities in Early Twentieth-Century St. Louis*. Moore is a professor emeritus and cofounder of the Center for Bosnian Studies at Fontbonne University. Elyssa Ford, associate professor at Northwest Missouri State University, received the *Missouri Historical Review* Article Award for “‘Fine Herds of Cattle’: Rural Nuns and Farmwork at...
a Missouri Convent, 1874-1963." The Lewis E. Atherton Prize was given to Elizabeth Eikmann, who recently received her Ph.D. in American Studies at Saint Louis University. She received the award for her dissertation "In Her Image: Photography, Whiteness, and Womanhood in St. Louis, 1877-1920."

Seventeen organizations were recipients of the Brownlee Local History Grants given by the State Historical Society of Missouri in honor of its longtime former executive director, Richard S. Brownlee. The awards of up to $500 are available to preserve historical records and assist education and programming activities. The recipients included the Adair County Historical Society, Christian County Museum & Historical Society, Inc., Cooper County Historical Society, Field House Museum, Historic Bethel German Colony, Inc., Kellerman Foundation for Historical Preservation, Meramec Spring Park, Missouri Pacific Historical Society, Nodaway County Historical Society, Opportunity 1888 Foundation, Inc., James Shipley Museum of African American History, Ozark County Genealogical & Historical Society, Perry County Historical Society, Skidmore Depot Museum, Stone County Historical/Genealogical Society, Sweet Springs Historical Society, Historical Society of Polk County, National Museum of Transportation, and Webster Groves Historical Society. SHSMO congratulates these organizations for their important contributions to Missouri history.


University of Missouri President Mun Choi (left) visits with SHSMO trustees Judge Stephen Limbaugh Jr. (center) and Riley Bock (right) at the Annual Meeting, Oct. 29, 2022.

SHSMO trustee Doug Crews (right) and his wife, Tricia, (partially seen on left) visit with trustee Riley Bock at a reception before the Annual Meeting.

SHSMO staff, trustees and guests enjoy an evening reception before the Annual Meeting. Left to right: Margaret McConnell, Dirk Burhans, Brittney Schmutzler, and Bridget Haney.
Since announcing in March 2021 that he would not be running for his Senate seat again, Blunt has held events in all 114 counties and the city of St. Louis, meeting with constituents and being reminded of the diversity and determination of Missourians. "Missouri is leading in areas like ag research, plant sciences, health research, and geospatial technology. There are unlimited opportunities in data, the geospatial economy, advanced manufacturing, and telecom," said Blunt. "It's an exciting time for Missourians who were born here or moved here. Missourians have always been eager to reach for the future and be part of it." The My Missouri lectures, including Senator Blunt's talk, are available to view at shsmo.org/on-demand.—BP
Music, Performances, and Film
Bring Missouri History to Life

The fall season brought a variety of artistic events to the Center for Missouri Studies focusing on past Missourians who contributed to the history and culture of the state. Old-time music performed by John P. Williams, Robert Mackey, and Howard Marshall filled the north entrance patio of the Center in early October for a free noon concert sponsored by SHSMO, the Missouri Folk Arts Program, and the Budds Center for American Music Studies at the University of Missouri-Columbia. The musicians, each influenced by bluegrass and traditional music of the state, played fiddle tunes that have been handed down over many generations.

Marking the 100th anniversary of native Missourian T. S. Eliot’s most famous poem, The Waste Land, the MU...
Department of English teamed up with the State Historical Society in early November for a display of creative work by English students responding to Eliot’s poem and hosted a free screening of the BBC documentary T. S. Eliot – Into the Waste Land. Scenes of the film were shot in St. Louis, where Eliot grew up, and along the Mississippi River, in addition to filming in London.

"After 100 years, we can understand Eliot’s poem far better than his early readers could," said Frances Dickey, Eliot scholar and associate professor of English at Mizzou. “Though Eliot traveled far from Missouri, he never forgot his childhood, writing that St. Louis and the Mississippi River 'affected me more deeply than any other environment.'"

Also in late fall, the 100-year-old love letters of Missouri native Olive Gilbreath McLorn were revisited by actors Elizabeth Braaten Palmieri and Ian Sobule during a production of MO Love: Letters from the Archive by the GreenHouse Theatre Project. McLorn, who was born in 1883 and grew up in La Plata, attended Wellesley College in Massachusetts and graduate school at the University of Michigan. In 1908, McLorn traveled to China and Russia regularly, and her adventures were published in Harper’s Magazine and the Yale Review.

To prepare for an original theatrical performance, Palmieri spent a year working with SHSMO archivist Heather Richmond researching McLorn’s love letters from a British businessman living in Russia. The letters are part of the Olive Gilbreath McLorn Papers held at the State Historical Society of Missouri. McLorn donated her letters in 1975. She lived in La Plata until her death in 1981.—BP

John K. Hulston
Inspiring Future Generations

By Maggie Mayhan

The State Historical Society of Missouri is pleased to announce, in conjunction with the Hulston Family Foundation, that the installation of the John K. Hulston relief was completed in July 2022. Created by E. S. Schubert, the commemorative relief is displayed in the Hulston Lobby in the Center for Missouri Studies. John Kenton Hulston was born March 29, 1915, in Dade County. Hulston graduated from the University of Missouri Law School in 1941 and enlisted in the U.S. Army two days after he passed the bar exam. He went on to pursue wide-ranging roles throughout his life, including attorney, historian, author, and civic community leader.

Hulston’s extensive literary work focused on Missouri history. His publications in the Missouri Historical Review include “Daniel Boone’s Sons in Missouri” (July 1947) and “John Trousdale Coffee: Lawyer, Politician, Confederate” (April 1983). His many book publications include two autobiographies—An Ozarks Boy’s Story, 1915-1945 and An Ozarks Lawyer’s Story, 1946-1976—as well as several other works, such as Moments in Time and West Point & Wilson’s Creek.

Hulston served as a trustee of the State Historical Society of Missouri for 30 years, advancing the Society’s work of collecting, preserving, and sharing Missouri history. Even after his death, his family continued to support the Society’s future—as the premier research center for the study of Missouri state and local history—through a Hulston Family Foundation gift. As an expression of appreciation for Hulston’s long-standing trustee service to the Society, his extensive scholarship on Missouri history, and his financial support, the lobby and its grand staircase in the Center for Missouri Studies carry his name.

The John K. Hulston Lobby serves as a gathering place for the University of Missouri campus and downtown Columbia communities, hosting a variety of events each year that range from educational conferences and receptions to pop-up exhibitions. The Hulston relief invites SHSMO visitors to reflect on his legacy while inspiring future generations to make an impact on the preservation and study of Missouri history.

Maggie Mayhan is the assistant director, advancement and engagement, at the State Historical Society of Missouri.
Missouri Humanities Grant to Fund NHD Student and Teacher Workshops

By Danielle Griego

Each year, thousands of Missouri students participate in the National History Day program and present their research findings through exhibits, performances, websites, documentaries, and papers. The program, sponsored and administered by the State Historical Society, recently received a generous grant to fund a series of student and teacher workshops. The workshops will help prepare students for the spring contest season.

Mark Adams, the Kansas City NHD regional coordinator, hosted workshops on this year’s contest theme, Frontiers in History: People, Places, and Ideas. Adams, who serves as the education director at the Harry S. Truman Library & Museum, also gave participants a look at the newly renovated museum that reopened last July in celebration of the 75th anniversary of Truman’s presidency.

Peter Acsay, professor of history at the University of Missouri-St. Louis and NHD regional coordinator, hosted a student workshop on primary sources at the State Historical Society of Missouri’s St. Louis Research Center. The workshop featured a presentation by historian Kris Smith of Lindenwood University. A virtual workshop about documentary video production will be offered to students and teachers this winter.

The Missouri Humanities grant will also be used to fund a variety of other initiatives to enhance the NHDMO program, including a paid intern to assist with the busy contest season from January through April. Following the regional contests, students who receive top rankings will get the opportunity to attend the state competition. The state contest has been virtual for the last several years due to the pandemic, but for 2023, we are excited to be back in person on April 22 at the Mizzou campus and the State Historical Society’s headquarters in Columbia. Sponsors and volunteer judges are needed for this year’s regional and state contests. Learn more about how you can be involved at nhdmo.org.

Danielle Griego is the education program coordinator at the State Historical Society of Missouri.

Missouri Quilt Museum in Hamilton Welcomes the Bicentennial Quilt

The Missouri Bicentennial Quilt made its final stop at the Missouri Quilt Museum in Hamilton, where it is on display and open to the public during visiting hours. The quilt is on long-term loan from the State Historical Society, along with the Missouri 4-H Bicentennial Quilt and a rotation of county quilts. With just over 30,000 square feet of exhibition space, the Missouri Quilt Museum features 17 rotating exhibits and galleries depicting the history of quilting and sewing in North America. One of the galleries features art from the permanent collection of the National Quilt Museum in Kentucky.

“We are honored to welcome the Missouri Bicentennial Quilt to its new home in Caldwell County,” said Dakota Redford, curator of the Missouri Quilt Museum, who spoke at the opening reception in October. “We are humbled and grateful to know that many supporters and creators of this treasured quilt will be able to see it on display when they visit Hamilton.”

The Missouri Bicentennial Quilt features blocks from each county and the independent city of St. Louis. It has been touring the state for the past several years to commemorate Missouri’s 200 years of statehood. Many of the quilters who created blocks for the quilt, including...
Charlene Coffee of Albany, attended the opening reception at the Missouri Quilt Museum. Coffee created the block for Gentry County and was excited to see the quilt on display only 45 minutes from her home.

“I’m glad it’s closer to me now. I’ve seen it several times on tour, including the Missouri Governor’s Mansion,” said Coffee. “The quilt tells a good story and I like seeing the different patterns and stitching. Whenever I have a chance to see it, I go!”

Coffee’s good friend, Carol Clark, a longtime quilter, said she was inspired by the Missouri Bicentennial Quilt. “It’s incredible to see so many quilters contribute to it. I wish I had submitted a block myself!”

Each of the 6.5 x 6.5-inch square blocks is as unique in stitching and design as the county it represents. Beginners and experienced quilters contributed to the overall quilt. Barbara Hibbs said she grew up watching her grandmother piece together a quilt and was fascinated by it. It wasn’t until she heard about blocks being submitted for the Bicentennial Quilt that she decided to give it a try. “I had no idea, at first, how to create a block for Ralls County. I taught myself by watching videos on the Internet,” said Hibbs. “I settled on a design that features beans and corn to represent us and I added blue material for the Salt River. When my block was selected, I was overwhelmed! This special quilt has brought us all together.”

Michael Sweeney, former SHSMO bicentennial coordinator, explains the origins of the Missouri Bicentennial Quilt at the opening reception at the Missouri Quilt Museum, Oct. 18, 2022.

Visitors enjoy seeing the Bicentennial Quilt on display at the Missouri Quilt Museum, Oct. 18, 2022.
PATRONS and visitors enjoyed the opening reception of a new exhibit showcasing the 35th anniversary of the National Women and Media Collection at the Center for Missouri Studies. Guests included Jean Gaddy Wilson, who cofounded the collection in 1987 while on staff at the Missouri School of Journalism. She, journalism school dean David Kurpius, and SHSMO’s executive director Gary Kremer spoke at the opening of the exhibition in the Wenneker Family Corridor Gallery on September 7, 2022. The collection contains the records of media organizations and the professional and personal papers of notable women who worked in a variety of careers in the media industry.

In Their Own Words: Celebrating the National Women and Media Collection showcases important female voices in the media and their struggles and triumphs in a field traditionally dominated by men, particularly at the executive level. Many items in the collection are being digitized and made available online at digital.shmo.org.

In addition to the reception, the Mizzou Women and Media club on the University of Missouri campus visited with SHSMO senior archivist Liz Engel, who manages the collection for the Society. The journalism students were able to look at diaries, letters, photos, press badges, and other memorabilia. A virtual program with Engel and moderated by Beth Pike featured journalists in the collection including Betsey Bruce, Sheila Gibbons, and Andrea Stone. In Their Own Words: Voices of the National Women and Media Collection is available to view at shsmo.org/on-demand.

Jean Gaddy Wilson speaks at the opening reception of In Their Own Words: Celebrating the National Women and Media Collection at the Center for Missouri Studies in Columbia.

In Their Own Words: Celebrating the National Women and Media Collection exhibition stretches 92 feet across the Wenneker Family Corridor Gallery at the Center for Missouri Studies. Archivists at the Columbia Research Center produced the exhibit, which was designed by Allie Holycross. Photograph by Notley Hawkins.
The Roots of American Ginseng in Missouri

By Katelyn Ziegler

ESTLED in the shade of Missouri’s hardwood forests grows a valuable commodity: wild American ginseng. A pound of ginseng root can sell for over a hundred dollars. This perennial plant is commonly found in the rugged areas of the Ozarks, and its earliest history in the region can be traced back to Native American cultures for medicine. Knowing its value in East Asia, European settlers began harvesting wild ginseng and eventually domesticating the plant for export. The plant remains profitable today.

The story of Missouri ginseng is on display in the Columbia Research Center. “Ginseng Culture in Missouri” features a letter written in 1909 to the University of Missouri botany department from a university professor in Japan interested in controlling fungal disease that plagued ginseng gardens. Also on display are illustrations, books, and a map of where wild ginseng grows in Missouri. Long-held herbal medicine traditions in East Asia use the root for stimulating energy and bolstering immunity. By the 1970s, ginseng products in the U.S. became available in stores, appearing in supplement and beverage aisles and drawing attention from medical journals.

Given its market value across the Pacific, people have harvested the root across parts of eastern North America since the early 18th century. To a lesser extent, American Indigenous and settler groups have used it in rituals and folk medicine, though in the words of Ozark folklorist Vance Randolph, “Not many hillfolk can be induced to eat anything that they can sell for that much money” (Ozark Magic and Folklore, 1947).

To illustrate its market success, a U.S. Department of Agriculture bulletin cited choice ginseng as earning up to $3.50 per pound in 1891, and exports for that year were valued at nearly $1 million. In 1949, the St. Louis Star and Times reported wild ginseng earning up to $11 per pound on the wholesale market compared to goldenseal, the next most valuable medicinal root, which sold at $2.25 per pound.

In 1895 the USDA encouraged farmers to grow the lucrative plant as a specialty crop. Soon after, newspaper stories reported on successful ginseng nurseries in Missouri, and several seed catalogs are preserved in SHSMO reference and manuscript collections. G. F. Millard’s Ginseng Company in Houston, Missouri, and the McDowell Ginseng Garden in Joplin collected awards for their product at the 1904 World’s Fair.

The fortune-making stories were soon replaced by cautionary tales as common fungal diseases afflicted the plant. Today only ginseng that grows on private property can be harvested under Missouri Department of Conservation regulations due to overharvesting on public lands. The next time you hike into Missouri’s forests, be on the lookout for this remarkable plant.

Katelyn Ziegler is a librarian at the Columbia Research Center.

Ginseng: The Crop that’s worth its weight in Sterling Silver publication, 1901 (left), The St. Louis Republic magazine section, Aug. 12, 1900 (right).

Men cultivating ginseng in Missouri, circa 1910, SHSMO Photograph Collection.
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HE State Historical Society of Missouri holds one of the few complete collections of the editioned lithographs that Thomas Hart Benton published during his lifetime. These prints were displayed in two installments in 2019 as one of the inaugural exhibitions in the Society’s new Center for Missouri Studies building in Columbia. Now, for the first time, visitors can see all 91 prints in a traveling exhibit at the George A. Spiva Center for the Arts in Joplin.

For the November 11-12, 2022, grand opening of Joplin’s new arts complex, the Benton lithographs were on display, drawing 1,848 visitors to see the new facility and Benton’s works. “The Thomas Hart Benton lithographs are a tremendous draw and opportunity to educate the community about an artist that is both instrumental in our community’s history as well as nationally,” said Heather Lesmeister, executive director of the Spiva Center for the Arts.

The exhibition Thomas Hart Benton: The Complete Editioned Lithographs brings the Missouri master’s artwork back home to the southwest region of his native state. Benton was born in Neosho in 1889, and his editioned lithographs date from 1929 to 1974. The broad range of imagery in these prints reflects the artist’s complex aesthetic and philosophical approaches to the concept of American identity, and many of the prints are variations of famous Benton paintings.

Benton sometimes described his images as explorations of “America’s mythologies.” Many of the lithographs represent mythic tropes associated with the United

The Farmer’s Daughter lithograph by Thomas Hart Benton, 1944.
States’ evolving understanding of its social, cultural, and economic character. Going West, for example, represents a locomotive engine powering its way forward across an American landscape. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, trains were associated with the nation’s transcontinental growth and power.

Americans have also long found inspiration in their country’s vast and awe-inspiring landscape. Benton exploits this phenomenon in Wyoming Autumn, an image emblematic of the still potent myth of the American West as unfettered, energized space. The mountains on the horizon reflect Wyoming’s rugged and dangerous scenery, while the cowboy and cattle represent its partial domestication. The cowboy controls the cattle within this invigorating environment while still maintaining the freedom associated with the western wilderness.

Children are another important trope in many of Benton’s lithographs. The Farmer’s Daughter depicts a young girl pumping water in an isolated area of northwest Missouri. The darkened, turbulent sky suggests unsettled weather at dawn or dusk. One senses that this rugged landscape would quickly revert to its feral state if the girl’s family surrendered to the environment and abandoned the farm. The child can thus be seen as a manifestation of the myth of Americans’ tenacious determination to endure hardship and build a regenerative society for the future.

Many lithographs in the exhibition also showcase Benton’s recognition of the vital role African Americans have played in shaping the nation’s culture. Black figures are the focus of many of the compositions, frequently embodying important social and economic values. For example, in the 1939 lithograph Planting (Spring Plowing), Benton represents a Black couple farming together. The man plows and the woman sows. The figures are depicted from the back so that their lack of individuality imbues them with universality. The imagery suggests that humble families like these do the essential work that feeds America and leads to its growth and prosperity.

Visitors can see these lithographs and many more in person at the Spiva Center in Joplin’s Harry M. Cornell Arts and Entertainment Complex until March 5. The wide range of ideas and concepts explored in this remarkable collection allow viewers to broaden their understanding of Benton and his contribution to Missouri and America’s cultural heritage.
Major Grant to Support Missouri Congressional Papers Project

By Laura Jolley

The congressional papers of U.S. Representatives Dewey Short and Bill Emerson and U.S. Senators John Danforth and Thomas Eagleton will be processed over the next several years by the State Historical Society with support from a recent grant awarded by the National Historical Publications & Records Commission at the National Archives. The grant award of $347,612 requires that the State Historical Society contribute $120,487 to the nearly half-million-dollar project.

“We are especially grateful to U.S. Senator Roy Blunt who helped secure this grant that will help scholars better understand Missouri History, especially in the rural and urban districts of these four congressional delegates,” said Gary Kremer, executive director of the State Historical Society of Missouri.

SHSMO archivists will fully process all four collections, arranging the papers into records series and creating detailed finding aids and descriptions. The project will also provide an opportunity to identify materials that require conservation treatment or that should be prioritized for digitization.

The papers of Short, Emerson, Danforth, and Eagleton span almost one hundred years of Missouri history (1912-2010) and provide valuable insights into national and regional events and issues. Congressional papers are critical to our understanding of political and cultural shifts, and they explain the
Missouri Women Added to the Missouri Veterans Oral History Project in 2022  
By Sean Rost

FUNDING from the Columbian Chapter of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution helped the Missouri Veterans Oral History Project expand to include women’s involvement in the United States Armed Forces. Until recently, the collection of interviews with Missouri veterans who served in World War II and the Vietnam War, begun in 2006, included mostly men who served in the military.

One of the first veterans recommended by the Columbian Chapter was Columbia native Susan Finlay, who completed a Bachelor of Science degree in education at the University of Missouri. While at MU, Finlay joined the Navy Reserve Officer Training Corps (NROTC) and was commissioned as an ensign in the U.S. Navy in 1978. She served stateside and in the Philippines. By the time she retired from the navy in 2000, Finlay had obtained the rank of commander.

Another veteran who participated in the Missouri Veterans Oral History Project was Euphemia Zahringer of Sedalia. Though originally from Chisholm, Minnesota, Zahringer has lived in Missouri since the late 1940s. She enlisted in the U.S. Navy WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service) during World War II and taught U.S. Navy pilots radio navigation and instrumental flight on simulators. While stationed in Hawaii, she met her future husband, Keith Zahringer, who was from Sedalia. After the war, they were married and moved back to Missouri and would eventually settle in Sedalia. Recently, Euphemia Zahringer was invited to Whiteman Air Force Base to fly a simulator of the B-2 stealth bomber. She said the simulator training was not much different than how it was in World War II.

The State Historical Society of Missouri thanks Susan Finlay and Euphemia Zahringer for their military service and for their participation in the Missouri Veterans Oral History Project.

Sean Rost is the assistant director of research at the State Historical Society of Missouri.
Between the 1920s and 1950s, radio broadcasting entertained families in their homes. During the Great Depression and World War II, radio allowed the world to experience events in real time while listeners in the postwar era enjoyed a variety of show options including radio serials, variety acts, and music programming. As networks such as the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) began to form, the challenge to share content between stations also grew. To distribute radio programs to a wider audience, larger radio stations began producing prerecorded shows that could be leased to other stations within a network and aired simultaneously. RadiOzark Enterprises in Springfield produced nationally syndicated radio shows during the 1950s and 1960s. Today, many of their shows can be heard again at the Springfield Research Center.

Founded by Ralph D. Foster in the late 1940s, RadiOzark Enterprises functioned as a radio production company. RadiOzark operated out of Springfield’s KWTO “Keep Watching the Ozarks” radio station, first located at 606 E. St. Louis, and then moving to 1121 S. Glenstone. KWTO, founded by Lester E. Cox and C. Arthur Johnson in 1933, was the dominant radio station of the Ozarks and an affiliate of the American Broadcasting Company (ABC). The station continues to air today under the ownership of Zimmer Radio of Mid-Missouri.

RadiOzark Enterprises specialized in producing 15-minute shows that were aired locally over KWTO and then leased to other stations. The prerecorded programs starred Bill Ring, Red Foley, Smiley Burnette, and Tennessee Ernie Ford, among others. Eventually, more than 1,200 U.S. and Canadian stations aired RadiOzark programs until the company dissolved in the 1970s.

By then the legacy of Ozarks entertainment had expanded to television. Ozarks Jubilee (later named Jubilee USA), created by Foster, Cox, Ely “Si” Simon, and John Mahaffey, aired weekly between 1953 and 1960. The show starred Red Foley as the host and featured live performances by country music artists. With KWTO and RadiOzark as its foundation, Ozarks Jubilee set Springfield on the path to rival Nashville as America’s country music capital.

In November of 2021, the Springfield Research Center received a donation of 427 phonograph records that were produced and transcribed by RadiOzark Enterprises. The program titles include Strangest of All with Frank Edwards, The Tennessee Ernie Ford Show, The Bill Ring Show, The Red Foley Show, “Shorty Thompson” in Saddle-Rockin’ Rhythm, “Shorty, Sue, & Sally” Saddle-Rockin’ Rhythm, and The Smiley Burnette Show. The records were donated to SHSMO by Oklahoma Christian University.

Visitors to the research center can hear these radio shows using equipment purchased from a grant awarded by the Melinda J. McDaniel Charitable Trust, UW, Bank of America, N. A., Trustee. Thanks to this funding, researchers can now listen to Ozarks entertainment just as it was heard more than half a century ago.

Haley Frizzle-Green is an archivist at the Springfield Research Center.
 Records of a Mississippi County School District Provide Glimpse of Early African American Schools

By Ann Lowe

A RECENTLY organized collection of records for Mississippi County School District No. 1 at the Cape Girardeau Research Center provides documentation about rural schools in the Missouri Bootheel dating back to the mid-nineteenth century. It includes administrative materials for rural schools in the townships of Texas Bend and Thompson Bend. Genealogist Betty Rolwing Darnell, who is descended from a Mississippi County family, donated the materials in 1996.

Texas Bend was first settled by German Catholics who came to Missouri from near Cincinnati, Ohio, sometime in the early 1800s. The original school began in 1859 in a log church. A year later, the community built a log schoolhouse. By 1884, the first log schoolhouse was deteriorating, so residents formed a school district and built a new walnut-log school.

Harrison S. Thompson settled Thompson Bend, and his son Elbert W. donated land to build the school in East Prairie. Thompson often appears in the school records as a member of the school board and as a parent of several students. A ledger entry shows that school funds were withdrawn to pay for a private teacher, which could indicate that white students were not being taught by the African American teachers who worked at the school. Records maintained by the Black teachers at the school list the number of white students as “unknown,” which further supports the theory that the school was for African American students only.

Despite segregation of the students, the school board was a mix of Black and white fathers. A school board administrator named Dudley Irvin/Irwin, whose children attended the school, was an African American Civil War veteran who served with the 106th U.S. Colored Infantry. Another parent who served as the school board president, Rev. Robert Black, was also a veteran of the Civil War, having served with the 104th U.S. Colored Heavy Artillery. These men and others worked with local white landowners to run the school district.

In addition to documenting the work of a racially integrated school board in Missouri’s Bootheel at the turn of the twentieth century, the records also list the teachers, students, and parents/guardians in the annual enrollment ledgers. These documents provide valuable information such as where the children were living and who was taking care of them between federal census years. These details found in the Mississippi County School District No. 1 records offer evidence of how African American schools in the rural Bootheel operated in the post-Civil War era.

Ann Lowe is an archivist at the Cape Girardeau Research Center.
In the 1930s, St. Louis Rabbi Ferdinand Myron Isserman traveled to Germany several times, reporting back to Missourians on the rising danger of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime. He gave speeches, wrote letters, produced a weekly radio show, met with government officials, and sounded the alarm in newspapers for anyone who would heed his warnings.

Among his stops, Isserman spoke at the University of Missouri’s Rolla campus (now Missouri S&T) several times. In 1934 the campus’s Missouri Miner newspaper quoted the rabbi as saying, “The Nazi believes in the totalistic state in which everything and everyone is subjected to the will of The Leader, and have, therefore, deliberately eradicated every vestige of democracy and freedom.” Last fall, the State Historical Society of Missouri Rolla Research Center and Missouri S&T Archives cohosted an exhibition on Rabbi Isserman and his warnings of the Holocaust.

Isserman was born March 4, 1898, in Antwerp, Belgium, and immigrated to the United States with his family in 1906, settling in Newark, New Jersey. In 1922 he was ordained as a rabbi and served in Philadelphia and Toronto before moving to St. Louis in 1929. For the next 34 years he was the rabbi for Temple Israel in St. Louis. He visited Nazi Germany in 1933, 1935, and 1937 as rumors of injustices by the Nazis against Jews were surfacing. Aware of the danger to himself and those courageous enough to speak with him, he was careful to keep his travel itinerary secret, and he did not include names of people or places in his later publications to protect the identity of his sources.

The St. Louis rabbi wrote and spoke openly about the rising threat he saw from Hitler and Germany. His 1933 pamphlet “Sentenced to Death: The Jews in Nazi Germany” included personal stories from the people being wrongly persecuted. After his visit to Europe in 1937, he noted that Hitler’s malevolent goals were gaining momentum behind a façade of self-proclaimed economic prosperity. Isserman would go on to serve in the American Red Cross during World War II, traveling to the front lines in North Africa in 1943.

After the war, he became involved in many interfaith events, continuing his work in peace and race relations. He died in St. Louis in 1972. You can learn more about Rabbi Isserman and the recent exhibition on the Missouri S&T Library and Learning Resources page: https://libguides.mst.edu/Missourians_and_the_Holocaust.

Kathleen Seale is the coordinator of the Rolla and Springfield Research Centers. Debra Griffith is the Missouri S&T archivist.
The St. Louis Research Center recently acquired one of the few collections available to the public for understanding the development of martial arts in the United States. The collection donor, Jack Harvey, opened the Kuk Sool Won school in St. Charles in June 1991 as part of the World Kuk Sool Association. Harvey, an 8th Degree Black Belt instructor and headmaster of the school, has been training students to reach black belt level for more than 25 years.

Kuk Sool Won is a traditional Korean martial arts system based primarily on the teachings of Myung-deuk Suh, a former master-instructor at the Korean Royal Court Army. Founded in 1958 by his grandson, In Hyuk Suh, the system prospered in South Korea and then internationally. In Hyuk Suh immigrated to the United States and established the school’s headquarters in San Francisco in 1975, and later in Tomball, Texas.

Suh’s arrival in San Francisco coincided with the proliferation of East Asian martial arts and karate schools in the U.S. during the mid-twentieth century. Following World War II, contact between U.S. soldiers and traditional martial arts practitioners fueled the country’s appetite for learning judo, kung fu, and American karate. Indeed, Kuk Sool Won owed its introduction in the States to American veterans.

Harvey’s first instructor, Paul Garza, was stationed in South Korea with the U.S. Army in the early 1970s when he began training under In Hyuk Suh. After his discharge, Garza returned to his home in Galesburg, Illinois, in 1974 and opened one of the first Kuk SoolWon schools in the country. Harvey was one of Garza’s first students.

The Kuk Sool Won-St. Louis Records chronicle martial arts culture in the Midwest. The large number of photographs in the collection feature students practicing styles and techniques, including soo ki (hand striking), jokh sool (kicking), tu ki and jap ki (throwing), and nak bup (falling). Unlike taek won do and other popular martial arts styles, the students featured in the photographs wear black uniforms rather than the white, since the color white is associated with death in Korea. In other images, Harvey and his black belt students wear clothing patterned after uniforms worn by ancient Korean generals.

The records also trace the progress of students from white to black belt and, in some cases, master level, requiring proficiency in more than 3,000 techniques.

Few martial arts schools have donated their records to public archives, making the Kuk Sool Won-St. Louis Records a rich primary source documenting the growth and development of martial arts culture in the United States.

A.J. Medlock is the coordinator of the St. Louis Research Center and a student of Kuk Sool Won.

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**Kuk Sool Won-St. Louis Records Chronicle the Growth and Popularity of Martial Arts in Twentieth-Century America**

By A.J. Medlock
N State Line Road between Kansas and Missouri sits one of the oldest homes in Kansas City. Built in 1856, the Alexander Majors House was home to both the Majors family and Russell, Majors, and Waddell freight company, which operated the Pony Express in nearby St. Joseph. Louisa P. Johnston, the great-granddaughter of Majors, bought the home and began a 50-year campaign to restore the dwelling. A new collection of Louisa’s and her family’s personal correspondence is now available to the public at the Kansas City Research Center.

The collection spans from the 1820s to the 1960s, including letters from Louisa’s parents and grandparents. Also included are several commemorative Pony Express medals. Alexander Majors made his fortune in wagon train freighting and cofounded several businesses, including the Pony Express. He eventually moved his family, six enslaved individuals, and his business to Nebraska City. The house and other people enslaved by the family were left to Majors’ oldest daughter, Rebecca, and her husband, Samuel Poteet.

Louisa Johnston, who would eventually buy the property, attended schools in the Kansas City area. In the 1920s, she worked as the registrar at Mills College, a liberal arts women’s college in Oakland, California. Later, she returned home to care for her ailing father. To make ends meet, Johnston taught typing and stenography at East High School.

One of Louisa’s brothers, Joseph E. Johnston, did not understand his sister’s attachment to the aging Majors home that required many repairs. Following the death of their father in 1936, Joseph wrote, “Regarding your own situation, Lou, isn’t it wise for you now to live as simply as possible? Can you dispose of the house and take a modest apartment to advantage? You will be foolish indeed to live with unnecessary financial overhead pressing you.”

Despite experiencing severe financial strain, Louisa pressed forward with her goal, moving into a cottage on the property when the main house was no longer safe to occupy. Upon her death, Louisa willed the house to a friend, Terry Chapman, an architect, who restored the home.

The Majors House was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1970 before being opened to the public in 1984. Louisa Johnston died in 1979 and is buried in Elmwood Cemetery in Kansas City. The correspondence collection, along with the Louisa Poteet Johnston Oral Interviews and the Louisa P. Johnston Papers, give first-hand details about the Majors and Johnston family story.

Sarah Henkel is a former archivist at the Kansas City Research Center.
SHSMO Welcomes New Staff

New staff members have joined SHSMO offices in Columbia, Kansas City and Rolla. Brittney Schmutzler is managing the event rental program at the Center for Missouri Studies. Schmutzler received a bachelor’s degree in marketing from the University of Central Missouri and a hospitality and tourism certificate from Florida Atlantic University. Her shared love for Missouri and travel led to various positions in Jefferson City and the state’s tourism industry.

Sophia Southard graduated from the University of Pittsburgh with a master’s degree in library and information science. Her most recent internship was at the archives of Everglades National Park, where she processed collections, created social media posts, and even held a baby crocodile. After escaping the wilds of south Florida, Southard returned to her native Missouri to join the Kansas City Research Center as an archivist.

Hali Allen joined the Columbia Research Center as an archivist. Allen, a Kansas native, received a master’s degree in library and information science from the University of Missouri-Columbia. She also served as an SHSMO volunteer.

Bridget Haney joined SHSMO as a research assistant, and more recently was hired to a new position as a historian for the Society. Haney is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Missouri-Columbia. She completed her master’s degree in history at the University of Central Missouri with an emphasis on twentieth-century African American history. A Chicago native, Haney spent a short time in the military before settling in Kansas City to be closer to family.

Courtney Marie Gillie joined the Columbia Research Center as an archivist in November. A native of Michigan, Gillie completed a bachelor’s degree in English at Columbia College and a master’s degree in information science and learning technologies with an emphasis in library science at the University of Missouri-Columbia. Prior to joining SHSMO, Gillie worked at the University Archives and Special Collections on the MU campus.

Jefferson City native Stacia Schaefer is a new senior strategic communications associate at SHSMO. Schaefer earned degrees in both English and art from the University of Missouri, and has worked as a graphic designer, writer, and editor for many clients, as well as on staff at the MU Museum of Art and Archaeology. She is also an artist, primarily working in fiber and ceramic mediums.

Nicole Cox joined the Springfield Research Center as a part-time archivist. She received a master’s degree in library and information science from the University of Missouri. Cox grew up in Reeds Spring before moving to Springfield, where she taught English at Ozarks Technical Community College. Cox also works in the Springfield-Greene County Library District’s local history and genealogy department as a digital imaging specialist.
ANNA O’DELL knows that teaching and learning go hand in hand. As a retired special education teacher of 40 years, O’Dell enjoys having more time to learn new things and express her artistic self. Among her new talents is creating artwork from pressed flowers mostly grown on her land in northern Boone County. Her wildflower collage artwork often finds its way to friends and family. You can also purchase it at the Richard Bookstore inside the Center for Missouri Studies. O’Dell has generously gifted her new creations to the bookstore, where 100% of the sales benefit the State Historical Society.

As a member of the Columbia Garden Club, O’Dell attended a workshop last winter on how to press fresh flowers, led by master gardener and retired horticulture teacher Barbara Rothenberger. “Barbara is such a good teacher. I was so motivated to create artwork that I bought $60 worth of pansies that next spring,” said O’Dell. When her wildflowers came up in the warmer months, O’Dell would have more plants to make collages. Wanting to help the organization where she has worked as a volunteer for nearly two decades, she contacted archivist Heather Richmond about donating the artwork to be sold at the bookstore.

The beautiful, framed floral designs showcase the spectacular colors of Missouri wildflowers. Her art has been a popular item for sale as an affordable gift that is Missouri-made. It’s even more special in that the artwork is created by a SHSMO volunteer who has been giving back to the community where she has lived all her life.

O’Dell was born and raised in Columbia. Her father taught biochemistry at the University of Missouri, while her mother worked for MU Extension. Growing up, she learned to play piano, violin, and oboe. That led to her undergraduate degree in music education and then a Master of Education at Mizzou. O’Dell began her career at Midway Elementary School in 1975 and worked mostly with students having special needs before she retired from the Columbia Public School district in 2015.

O’Dell has raised a son and daughter. She and her husband, Carl Wingo, met as preschool children at MU’s Lab School more than 50 years ago.

O’Dell began volunteering at the State Historical Society in 2005, working on a variety of projects, including a brief history of Missouri for fourth-grade students. For many years, O’Dell has been helping to catalog the Society’s collection of John Darkow cartoons.

“Ann is a joy to be around, bringing a combination of talents to this huge project with her keen mind, an interest in politics, a distinct appreciation of the artist’s work, and her devotion of time week after week, year after year,” said Greig Thompson, art collections manager.

When she’s not volunteering or creating art, O’Dell enjoys music, spending time with her two grandsons, tending to her large garden, and learning about local Civil War history. To see her Missouri wildflower artwork for sale, stop by the Richard Bookstore inside the Center for Missouri Studies. Prices for each unique design are under $20.
Looking Ahead

The SHSMO Art Gallery is open to visitors Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. and each Saturday, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

History on Elm – Second Tuesdays, 12 p.m. – 1 p.m. monthly
(January through June) Cook Hall, Center for Missouri Studies

The 125th anniversary year of the founding of the State Historical Society of Missouri begins with a new program series at noon on the second Tuesday of each month. SHSMO staff and other invited speakers will explore a variety of interesting topics. The series launches January 10 with SHSMO art curator Joan Stack presenting “Ten Missouri Works that Help Us Understand Our History.” Other programs include “Sci-Fi Fandom in Missouri” from records of the Star Trek fan club USS Discovery and others. We’ll also have an author talk with Benjamin Moore, winner of the 2022 Missouri History Book Award. A full listing of the free, public noon programs is available on shsmo.org.

New and Notable: A Selection of SHSMO Artworks Acquired in More Recent Years
Opens mid-January, Art Gallery, Center for Missouri Studies

The SHSMO Art Gallery hosts an exhibition focused on some of the institution’s newest art acquisitions. The show displays highlights of the more than 500 artworks acquired by the State Historical Society of Missouri in more recent years. Although the styles and media of these works vary enormously, all fit into SHSMO’s collecting mission to preserve and protect the cultural history of the Show-Me State.

Thomas Hart Benton: The Complete Editioned Lithographs
Now through March 4, Spiva Center for the Arts, Joplin

The complete collection of 91 Thomas Hart Benton Editioned Lithographs is on exhibition at the George A. Spiva Center for the Arts in the newly opened the Harry M. Cornell Arts & Entertainment Complex in Joplin. On loan through early March from the SHSMO Art Collection, Benton’s lithographs date from 1929 to 1974. For hours and location of the exhibition, visit the Spiva Center’s website at spivaarts.org.

Missouri Conference on History
March 15-17, 2023, Doubletree by Hilton Hotel, Springfield

The sixty-fifth annual Missouri Conference on History, hosted by Missouri State University's College of Humanities and Public Affairs and History Department and sponsored by the State Historical Society of Missouri, will bring together scholars, teachers, and other professional historians to share ideas, research, and information on teaching, scholarship, and publishing.