

Report on the Kansas High School Database 1858-2019

In 1858 the first four high schools opened in Kansas: Atchison, Emporia, Lawrence, and Winchester. In December 2019 the new database of Kansas High Schools 1858-2019 listed 1,173 public, private, and parochial high schools to have existed at one time or another in the state of Kansas.

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The genesis for the creation of the Kansas High School Database 1858-2019 began in December 2018 as projects like this usually do, during the research for something entirely different. In the course of needing to know the mascots of two high schools no longer in existence it was discovered that there was no list of past Kansas high schools being maintained, online or otherwise. None of the three most likely state institutions to have such a list were doing so. The Kansas State High School Activities Association maintains a list of current Kansas high schools and their mascots, but once a school closes or is merged with another that school is then dropped from their list. In the case of the other two institutions, The Kansas State Department of Education and the Kansas State Historical Society, it simply never occurred to either to maintain such a list. They honestly thought that some other entity was keeping the information.

Through the 501(c)3 non-profit Blue Hills Heritage Foundation of Lucas, Kansas, the project of creating a database of past and present high schools in Kansas was launched and started with a mass email to county historical societies and museums on December 18, 2018.

The project was conceived as having two Phases. In Phase One of this project, it was decided to pursue the following items of basic information:

- Name of high school
- Location of high school
- County that the high school is located in
- Number of years in the high school's course curriculum – 1, 2, 3, or 4
- Year that the high school first opened
- Year that the high school either closed or merged with another school
- The name of the school's athletic mascot (if any)

The future Phase Two of the project is to consist of obtaining an image of each school mascot and at least one image of every high school. This phase is to be implemented at a later date when funding could be procured for suitable digital copies of each image.

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The database was limited to Kansas high schools whose students congregate at a single location on a daily basis within a defined calendar year. All “online high schools”, “virtual schools”, and homeschools were excluded.

How to define a high school on the database was handled through three local examples in the Blue Hills Heritage Foundation region:

- Example One – In 1889 Lucas High School was formed, and chose the Demon as its school mascot. In 1893 Luray High School was formed, and chose the Panther as its school mascot. In 1977 Luray High School merged with Lucas High School. A new high school, Lucas-Luray High School, was then formed with a new school mascot chosen, the Cougar. In 1994 Lucas-Luray High School merged with Sylvan Unified High School of Sylvan Grove, Kansas. A new high school, Sylvan-Lucas Unified High School, was then formed and the old Sylvan Unified mascot, the Mustang, was chosen as the new school’s mascot. The state of Kansas and the various school alumni organizations both consider these to have been three different high schools.
- Example Two – In 1900 Sylvan Grove High School was first established and in time took on the school mascot of the Bluejays. In 1966 the high schools of Sylvan Grove, Hunter, and Vesper merged together to form the new Sylvan Unified High School, which was located in the old Sylvan Grove High School building, and a new school mascot was chosen, the Mustang. In 1994 Lucas-Luray High School merged with Sylvan Unified High School of Sylvan Grove, Kansas. A new high school, Sylvan-Lucas Unified High School, was then formed, which was located in the old Sylvan Grove High School building, and the old Sylvan Unified mascot, the Mustang, was chosen as the new school’s mascot. There are those who hold to the opinion that these are all the same high school, as all three have used the same school structure in Sylvan Grove, Kansas. However, records show that the state of Kansas clearly considers these to have been three different high schools. In addition, the alumni of all three high schools consider them to be different as well and will not hold their reunions together with the other two groups, maintaining three separate events.
- Example Three – In 1883 Osborne High School was first established, and in time chose the Bulldogs as its school mascot. In 1967 Portis High School closed and its district merged with that of Osborne High School. In 1970 Alton High School closed and its district merged with that of Osborne High School. In both instances neither the name of Osborne High School changed nor did the school mascot. The records of the state of Kansas show that Osborne is deemed to have continued as the same high school, and the school’s alumni agree as well into the current day.

The Kansas High School Database 1858-2019 information came from the following sources:

- Online Kansas State Superintendent of Public Instruction/State Department of Education Biennial Reports, 1876 through 1958 (www.ksde.org and hathitrust.org)
- Online 2019-2020 list of accredited private schools in Kansas, Kansas Department of Education (www.ksde.org)
- Online 2019-2020 list of nonpublic accredited high schools Kansas, Kansas Department of Education (www.ksde.org)
- Online 2019-2020 list of nonpublic nonaccredited high schools Kansas, Kansas Department of Education (www.ksde.org)
- Kansas state railroad and transportation maps for the years 1899, 1918, 1924, 1932, 1935, 1938, 1945, and 1954
- Kansas County Plat Maps, 1890-1930, online at Kansas State Historical Society website
- Current list of Kansas high schools and mascots maintained by Kansas State High School Activities Association
- Emails to every Kansas county historical society or county museum
- Emails and phone calls to city offices across the state
- Emails and phone calls to churches across the state
- Emails and phone calls to high schools across the state
- Online newspaper research in Kansas at newspapers.com and Kansas State Historical Society website
- Online research in digital archives found at Kansas public library websites
- Online research on high schools and leagues at kansasfootballhistory.com
- Online research on defunct Kansas high school leagues at stanewy.wixsite.com
- Online research at high school websites and on high school Facebook pages
- Online research at city websites and community Facebook pages
- Research in the Kansas Rooms of the Salina and Hays Public Libraries
- Phone calls to county historical societies and county museums
- Phone calls to public libraries throughout the state
- Phone calls to Kansas school and city officials
- Handwritten letters to Kansas communities with neither a phone number nor email address for the community

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Overall the local historians across the state were extremely helpful and great to work with in the course of the project's research. A select few disagreed with the findings that we discovered in state records and elsewhere showing certain high schools to have existed. But the vast majority embraced any new research we could show and were more than generous with their own information.

Primary schools, or grade schools, always started prior to any high school at any location in the state. In the course of this project we found that many people either could not or cared not to appreciate the difference between primary schools and high schools, and therefore would send us the dates for when any school opened and closed. We were offered all manners of information on rural school districts and could have amassed quite a lot of data in the subject, but chose not to. Following up and verifying the information sent to us either via email or regular mail proved important in the clearing up of such misunderstandings.

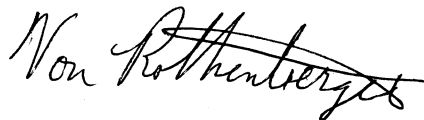
Our request to learn when a high school closed caused a few societies and museums to realize that previous local research in that area incomplete – usually the research on the county’s high schools had been done prior to their closing/merging. New research was then conducted to answer the question, which generated new interest in the subject in a number of locations around the state.

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During the past year the Blue Hills Heritage Foundation attempted four times to procure grants to help in the funding of this project. As all applications were turned down, the Foundation can state that the database was researched and compiled with no outside funding of any kind.

Though after one year of research the database is not yet completed, it was determined to close the project in December 2019. A major factor in this decision is the current lack of funding for research grants in Kansas, which impedes any real historical research work being done in the Sunflower State. Perhaps alternative funding can be found in the near future to complete the project. Therefore a copy of the database as it is along with all information gathered in the course of the past year’s research is being given to the Kansas State Historical Society, so that the information will be available to whoever has need for such a list in the future.

Respectfully submitted,



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Date: December 12, 2019