



President's Message Archive 2011

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October, 2011

Dear Friends Along This Way,

This year is the Kansas Sesquicentennial, celebrating 150 years of statehood. Our Alliance communities and counties had not even been imagined 150 years ago—yet we found reason and means to lift up those 150 years in the Solomon Valley. We shared the Kansas Humanities Council's vision of many activities throughout the state.

With KHC support, the SV24 Alliance sponsored a program on Kansas artists by Ron Michaels, curator of the Sandzen Gallery, in January at Osborne. We initiated community conversations about the Kansas poetry of William Stafford in March in Downs and Hill City. And most recently, we sponsored the Stories to Song residency in Damar. We truly took the moment to listen to art, poetry, history, and story in the Solomon Valley. We are richer for this.

Plans are underway for the annual meeting, January 28, 2012, in Osborne. We will recognize the winners of the 2011 Call for Voices and hear the first-place entry in each division of the contest. Mitchell County Historical Society will provide a sampling of "Talking Tombstones," a research and performance approach nurtured by Alliance workshops. Please plan to join us in Osborne as we review and then renew our commitment for another year working together. Reservation details are included in this newsletter.

Your membership is vital. It is confirmation that what the alliance attempts to do is meaningful. I hope you renew—perhaps give a gift of membership— and introduce the SV24 Alliance to your friends!

Our work together has forged a connection to place and past. It promises to make a difference in the future.

—Joan Nothern

August, 2011

Dear Friends Along This Way,

This is a journey we take together: both preserving and promoting the heritage of the Solomon Valley. At the August board meeting we reflected on the changes we've witnessed since our beginning a dozen years ago. We noted the impact of the Friends of the Cottonwood Ranch, the National Park Service at Nicodemus, and the Historic Site at Antelope Lake enriching the resources to the west. We have seen loss of community grocery stores and schools, and the threatened loss of post offices. But there are new movie theaters in Hill City, Stockton, and Beloit. The Solomon Valley is changing around us, and we are part of that process.

The Alliance strives to highlight the heritage and resources of the Solomon Valley, recognizing

their potential to attract travelers. And the travelers do come—on foot, on bikes, by car and fifth-wheel. What a remarkable group of people these visitors are. There is an exchange of experience as we engage the travelers in conversation, discovering their reasons for being here. Many are responding to challenges, from dispelling negative images of Kansas, to following personal quests, and fulfilling altruistic commitments. These visitors don't live life by default, but rather are actively engaged in living life as they chose. Our guests are an inspiration.

Traveling a two-lane highway across Kansas does attract adventurers. A young cyclist, traveling alone, coast to coast from May 23 to July 18, wanted to experience the U. S. beyond consumerism—and he found this through the loneliness and solitude of his journey. He found community in action in Osborne and Glasco. He found beauty and connection to nature pedaling Highway 24.

A retired couple spends six months of the year in a different state—indulging their own greatest loves: learning and spending time together. This year they are in Kansas—personally disproving a discounted Kansas. They marvel at our history, geology, beauty and people! They claim Kansas makes it easy to find beauty in everything they see and do.

I abandoned the highway one July afternoon to float for an hour on the Solomon River. It was a remarkable hour of green trees and blue sky and quiet. And it was good.

No matter your mode of travel, do decide to visit your neighbors in the Solomon Valley.

—Joan Nothern

June, 2011

Dear Friends Along This Way,

I pause first to acknowledge the loss of two generous women who helped build the Solomon Valley Highway 24 Heritage Alliance with their gifts of time and energy. Both were founding members of the Alliance, and both served terms on the board. Erma Cikanek, 1933-2011, of Beloit, designed and updated the annual flyer listing the historical sites and events in each of our towns. She also suggested our mission statement, "Stories Of Land Of Man Of Nature." Mildred Morgan, 1922-2011, of Osborne, rarely missed an alliance board meeting, helping guide us through our first decade. We extend sympathy to their families, who will miss Erma and Mildred so much.

The theme addressed in this issue by each of our six counties is "A House with a History." These stories provide a window to both place and people— perhaps confirming that "It takes a heap of living to make a house a home."

The Depot and Arts Council in Downs and the Graham County Public Library in Hill City proved excellent hosts for introducing the KANSAS POEMS OF WILLIAM STAFFORD in March. The community conversations drew attendance from eight towns along the entire length of the valley corridor! During the last week in April, National Poetry Week, Stafford's poems were read aloud in the Solomon Valley. You'll find the book KANSAS POEMS OF WILLIAM STAFFORD in your library— allowing this acquaintance to continue.

Faye Minium and Roger Hrabe have contributed articles that address current actions and concerns. Faye shares the process of preserving a building in Morland for a business venture. Roger helps us look at the possibilities offered by new media.

Please note our 7th Call for Voices writing contest in this issue. The Alliance considers this project one of our most important missions.

We are midway through Kansas 150th year celebration. This is a good time to recommit to the purpose of the SV24 Alliance, to preserve and promote the heritage of the Solomon Valley as we uncover the history of the valley in our storied Free State.

It is also time to put this foundation of knowledge to work, building on our capacity to attract tourists. This is a challenge we are ready to accept!

–Joan Nothern

April, 2011

Dear Friends Along This Way,

As an organization dedicated to preserving and promoting the heritage of the Solomon Valley, it is more than fitting that we dedicate the themed county selections to the libraries in the valley, for they reveal the collective will to collect and share histories.

Please note the article about the community events to be held in Downs and Hill City. The Kansas Poetry of William Stafford will be explored by Denise Low and Fred Whitehead. This is a unique project enriching the literary landscape of Kansas as a sesquicentennial celebration made possible by the SV24 Alliance and Kansas Humanities Council.

Our organization is indebted to Larry Griffis, director of the Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery, for the articles on Sandzén, and to Ron Michael, curator of that gallery, for the fine program he presented on Four Visual Artists from the Sunflower State at the Annual Meeting in January. Both of these men have brought the work of Sandzén to us. I hope we will make a real effort to go to Lindsborg to experience the power of Sandzén's work presented in the gallery there.

Leo Oliva's portrayal of Private Robert Morris Peck, U. S. Cavalry, 1856-1861, is very moving! We caught a glimpse of Peck at the annual meeting. I hope many of you are able to catch up with him as Leo continues these portrayals. He is scheduled to appear in Morland on March 20.

In this issue of the Solomon Valley Anthology you will find the first of the 2010 Call for Voices winning entries. They speak for themselves. Listen!

–Joan Nothern