

Other Viewpoints

Visiting the past could help us now

If Kansas legislators could convene in Fort Riley 50 years ago to commemorate the state's 100th birthday, it seems they should be able to figure out a way to come to Lecompton this year to mark the state's 150th.

Granted, 1961 was a different time, as implied by the comments of a former Larned legislator who now lives in Lawrence.

"I think we just went ahead and did it," Glee Smith, now a lawyer in Lawrence, told the *Journal-World*.

Lecompton's historical boosters started a drive several months ago to have the Legislature meet at two historical sites in the former territorial capital. They rightly argue that such a meeting would be a fitting tribute to the state's birth.

A constitution that would have brought Kansas into the Union as a slave state was written in Lecompton. That triggered a national argument that split the Democratic Party and cleared the way for the election of Republican Abraham Lincoln as president in 1860. The Lecompton Constitution truly set the nation on the path to abolish slavery, and set the clock ticking for civil war.

Now, however, there's another constitutional question at stake. Legislative leaders had expressed reservations about meeting in Lecompton, saying the Kansas Constitution says the Legislature can only meet in the state capital.

We don't want legislators to violate the constitution, but there must be a way to work this out. Perhaps a ceremonial session could be held to highlight Lecompton's important role in history.

After legislators met in Fort Riley in 1961, Smith said, they all went out to dinner in Manhattan and then to the KU-Kansas State basketball game. The 1961 event seems to reflect a level of collegiality that may not exist in the current Legislature. In addition to commemorating the state's birth, a field trip to Lecompton might be a nice way for legislators to interact and maybe even enjoy themselves a little bit outside of the Capitol's formal setting.

By happy coincidence, KU will play K-State at Allen Fieldhouse on the state's actual 150th birthday, Jan. 29. How many tickets could Kansas Athletics come up with for legislators to attend the game?

The state is facing some tough issues today, but it's good to remember that the state has faced turmoil before. A trip to Lecompton might help put the today's legislative agenda in perspective.

— *The Lawrence Journal-World, via the Associated Press*

Where to write, call

- U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran**, Russell Senate Office Building Room C-4, Washington, D.C. 20002 (202) 224-6521 moran.senate.gov/public/
- U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp**, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124. Web site: huelskamp.house.gov
- State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer**, State Capitol Building, 300 SW10th St., Room 225-E., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 ralph.ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us
- State Rep. Rick Billinger**, Docking Building, Room 754, Topeka Kan., 66612, (785) 296-7659 rick.billinger@house.ks.gov

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155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansan.com

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Steve Haynes - Publisher
s.haynes@nwkansan.com

NEWS

Kevin Bottrell - News Editor
kbottrell@nwkansan.com

Andy Heintz - Sports Reporter
aheintz@nwkansan.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard@nwkansan.com

Vera Sloan - Society Editor

Shelby Pulkrabek - Society Reporter
colby.society@nwkansan.com

ADVERTISING

Andrea Bowers, Kathryn Ballard, Tammy Withers

Advertising Representatives

abowers@nwkansan.com kballard@nwkansan.com twithers@nwkansan.com

Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design
khunter@nwkansan.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Robin Tubbs - Office Manager
rtubbs@nwkansan.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansan.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Richard Westfahl - General Manager

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Splitting metaphors easier than wood

Well, it's been a week. Between the ice storm and the flu, we've been pedaling hard to keep afloat here at the *Free Press*. No, that's not a mixed metaphor — haven't you ever seen a paddle boat?

You've not seen a word from me in this spot for a while — actually this year — for a couple of reasons. One is the abundance of columns eagerly waiting to be published. Since I'm responsible for putting together this page, I think it's wonderful.

There were some scary days last August when the bottom of the barrel could be seen. Getting everything in to a limited space sometimes means being flexible, and replacing my column with someone else's is not going to hurt my feelings.

The main reason I haven't written for a while, though, I must confess, I really didn't have a burning message to deliver.

Winter is hibernation season as far as I'm concerned. While I actually like cold weather — minus ice storms, thank you — short days tend to put me into a coma. Original thoughts are scarce. It takes an act of will to get to work, to church, to the grocery store. Splitting firewood is an acceptable activity for a winter day, but I haven't had a wood stove in 25 years.

That's not so long, though, that I don't remember. For those who've never experienced the joy of a process that warms you more than once, let me explain: First, you need to find a source of firewood — like a dead tree that's had



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

the courtesy to fall over. These can usually be found in creek bottoms.

To get said dead tree to said wood stove requires a certain amount of effort. It goes without saying that you need the tools for the job: a pickup for hauling, a chain saw for cutting, an axe, a sledgehammer and a wedge or two for splitting.

I guess if you're really up to snuff, you might have a hydraulic splitter, but I never had that privilege. When you've got the tools and found the wood, you have to get the tools to the wood.

Driving in creek bottoms is not like driving down a country road, or even driving across a pasture. In a dry country, bottom land is where the most water is, and where big things can grow — not only trees, but chokecherries, buffalo berries and almost any other wild shrub you can imagine. These are especially thick along the edges between grass and trees, the very spot you have to get through to get to your dead tree.

Once you've managed to get close enough

that you won't wind up having to carry every piece half a mile, you get to work. Somehow, I never got the chain saw part of the job. Instead, I got to wrestle the cut pieces into the pickup. That can be an OK job or a big headache.

At least once, our dead tree was a cottonwood. That's not great firewood — it leaves a lot of ash — but it was available. This tree, about 50 feet long and nearly three feet high — remember, it was already down — took some complicate maneuvers to get home. The less splitting you do in the creek bottom, the fewer pieces you have to move, so we were doing everything we could think of to get those big slices of cottonwood on the pickup. They were actually bigger across than they were lengthwise. We sure worked hard on those.

Once you've got a load, of course, you have to unload it and stack it. Then you've got to split it, and haul it in. Then you've got to haul the ashes out, and clean up the fine powder that goes everywhere when you try to clean out the ashes.

They say a wood stove warms you twice. I say it warms you at least six times. Maybe that's why I now like to hibernate in the winter. Just the thought of all that work makes me sleepy.

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.

Fog surrounds Social Security, Medicare

Who knows the real status of the Social Security and Medicare trust funds?

I just finished reading a multi-page summary of the 2010 annual reports from the Boards of Trustees for those two. When I got done, I could only shake my head to clear out the profound conglomeration of percentages of this and that.

I'm no genius, but I can understand solid figures and actuarial statistics. I've not seen the original reports. But if they are as full of confusing and confounding repetitions of what the statistics actually show, then someone should demand a resubmission of their report.

I seriously doubt if 1 percent of the general public or even the board members themselves could find a clear bottom line in the report.

When I hear our congressmen complain about the Health Care Bill being so confusing and misleading that they didn't know what they were voting on, how, pray tell, can they have any clear understanding of the facts surrounding Social Security and Medicare? It doesn't help any when special-interest groups or individuals are allowed to intentionally put out absolutely misleading and false information.

We keep hearing the negative definition of Social Security benefits as entitlements. Well, they absolutely are an entitlement!

I paid premiums matched by my employers, for about 47 years. Those premiums were no different than premiums paid for any other kind of insurance.

When you die, someone is entitled to the promised pay out. When you wreck your vehicle, you are entitled to compensation for damages. When I reached 65, I was entitled to receive the benefits promised, that I and my employer had purchased with our premiums.

Private insurance companies are required to



Ken Poland

• Ken's World

hold, in hand, a certain percentage of their possible claims liabilities and then they invest the surplus until needed. Banks are supposed to do the same.

Surely, I must question the brilliance of those bureaucrats and politicians who have cut almost one-sixth of the revenue for Social Security and claim it as economic stimulus.

Gee, "The fund is purported to be nearly bankrupt, so let's cut contributions to hasten its demise."

When we no longer have benefits being paid out to retirees, do you think they will spend more money for essential everyday needs? Do you think the business world will increase production and services for people who have no money to spend?

All this baloney about Social Security being a major drain on the national budget is hog wash. The facts are that borrowing (or stealing, as it appears) from the Social Security Trust Fund has deferred the inevitable need to increase income taxes or fees to fund our national budget.

Medicare and Medicaid are a different game. Medicare is funded at 75 percent by public taxes and Medicaid (I think?) is totally funded by public taxes.

If you want to see people suffering health and economic problems that result in dying on the streets, then let's just callously cut all that budget and join the third-world countries,

where that is common. The majority of those people living on the streets (homeless) are there due to health and mental problems.

We talk about honoring our veterans. A high percentage of the homeless are veterans. We can't afford to look after their needs? No, not when we have to exclude our military budget from the austerity of the recession; not when we have to reduce the taxes of the most wealthy of our nation; not when we have to perpetuate the "me first" attitude and greed in our society.

We claim to be a Christian nation. Where are those compassionate Christians who consider themselves the moral majority? Are they in danger of hearing those dreaded words at the final judgment? "Depart from me, for I never knew you. Inasmuch as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me."

Ken Poland describes himself as a semi-retired farmer living north of Gem, a Christian, affiliated with American Baptist Churches, and a radical believer in separation of church and state. Contact him at rcwinc@cheerful.com.

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Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

