

African Americans' local history had an impact on national events

Sometimes people feel their own local history is dull and inconsequential compared to the dramatic sweep of events on a national and global scale.

But the fact is, what happens locally is often “the rest of the story” for some of those broader events. The Homestead Act, for example, was a national milestone – but the stories of how this legislation played out in hundreds of communities just like our own across the Plains are what give the document its substance and meaning.

It can work the other way, too. The local community can have a significant impact on the kinds of historic national events we read about in textbooks. One story of this sort will be featured this month at the museum in a couple of exhibits we will be hosting beginning Wednesday and in a talk given by Angela Bates at noon Thursday. It concerns both African American settlement in Kansas, and the landmark 1954 Supreme Court decision that overturned school segregation in Brown versus Board of Education.

We heard this remarkable story first from Lloyd Theimer. He



Ann Miner

• Around the Museum

told us that one of the plaintiffs in Brown v. Board had been born right here in Thomas County and had attended Prairie Bell School. Her name was Zelma Hurst Henderson, and she was one of seven children of Thomas E. and Pansy Hurst who owned land in the county.

Zelma Hurst Henderson was born on Feb. 29, 1920. Her grandfather, Thomas L. Hurst, had been a slave in Missouri and Arkansas before emancipation. Her parents had been born and raised in Jefferson County, heading west to Thomas County in 1916. They farmed and raised cattle, until the hard and dirty 1930s when they moved to Oakley. She graduated from Oakley High School in 1939.

She moved to Topeka in 1940 and operated her own beauty shop until she retired. In 1943 she mar-

ried Andrew Henderson, and they had two children, Donald and Vicky. At that time, segregation was mandatory for elementary schools in towns with populations of 20,000 or more. When Donald started school, he had to be bused across town to a black school even though there were white schools much closer.

Here's where the local story comes into play. Zelma Henderson was upset about her children going to segregated schools because her own experience in northwest Kansas had been a fully integrated one. “I had good friends, we got along, there were no problems,” she said of her school years. She felt that it was important for the races to learn and play together in school so that they were not strangers to one another as adults in the work environment.

When the Brown v. Topeka Board of Education case was being pulled together, Zelma Henderson was specifically invited to participate as a plaintiff because of her experience growing up in integrated schools. Her testimony was meant to counter the argument that

it would be disruptive for the races to attend classes together, as this clearly had not been a problem at Prairie Bell and Oakley Schools.

In a 2001 interview about her involvement in the case, Zelma recalled, “I was asked in the court, ‘Were your brothers in sports?’ They all played in sports, track, baseball, and we did, too. In fact, I was called down by the judge because I spoke out of turn. I said, ‘Even the girls.’” Zelma Henderson was the last surviving plaintiff from Brown v. Board of Education when she died on May 20, 2008, at age 88.

This is a great example of how the local story can hugely affect the national one. Zelma and her classmates, black and white, went to school together during the 1920s and '30s at Prairie Bell and Oakley Schools. I somehow doubt that most of them thought it was anything very unusual or noteworthy at the time. And yet, many years later, this ordinary experience in these ordinary communities became a key element in the landmark case that ended legal segregation in public schools once and for all.



This old photo at the museum showed the Hurst children at the Prairie Bell rural school.

Come out to the museum between Wednesday and Tuesday, March 13, to view a traveling exhibit on Brown v. Board of Education and learn more about Zelma Hurst Henderson. And join us for our next “Food for Thought” lunchtime talk Thursday when

Angela Bates will discuss all of this and Nicodemus, too.

Ann Miner is the Education Director at the Prairie Museum of Art and History.

Program looks at femininity

Vera Sloan

For women who have ever struggled with feeling less than feminine and have a hard time remembering that their beauty does not come from outward appearance or style, College Drive Assembly of God Church is the place to be at 7 p.m. Thursday, says Stephanie Todd, women's ministry leader for the church.

Todd said she is issuing a personal invitation to “Feminine and Fabulous,” to women who struggle with feeling that today's society expects them to be a certain size, to age without ever showing the signs and to embrace immodest apparel and brassy speech.

Todd noted that although it may not be easy to answer “yes” to some of the issues, it is a reality for many women.

“Women who are seeking to

unlock their natural beauty, those who are seeking to live as daughters of the Most High and maintain their God-ordained femininity are welcome to spend the evening with us,” she said. “Consultants will be there to give a few basic tips on how to dress to feel confident and how to be comfortable in your own skin. We'll be looking to the Word of God for some time to “renew our minds” and be reminded of where true beauty lies.”

Todd said the invitation is for all who want to reach out and come together and connect with other women. She asked that those who can, to bring a dozen of their favorite cookies with a copy of the recipe to exchange.

The church is at 245 College Dr. in Colby, and they hope to see a good attendance on Thursday. Child care will be provided.

On the Beat

COLBY POLICE

Wednesday

3:34 a.m. – Manager requested a drive by because of someone rattling the business doors. Everything OK.

11:21 a.m. – Did a safety program for businesses at Quality Inn.

2:40 p.m. – Removed boxes from road at Franklin and Hill.

4:35 p.m. – Unattended death report filed.

10:45 p.m. – Walk-through at Colby Community College.

11:54 p.m. – Security check at the college.

Thursday

12:29 a.m. – Caller advised of a robbery. Report filed.

1:10 a.m. – Security check at Twister's.

1:56 a.m. – Security check at the college.

12:31 p.m. – Accident, no re-

port.

1:38 p.m. – Theft report filed.

1:34 p.m. – Spoke to subject on phone about a civil standby.

1:39 p.m. – Spoke to subject about unattended death.

3:29 p.m. – Caller reported dispute. Spoke to subjects; only verbal argument, no report.

5:08 p.m. – Civil stand-by.

10:55 p.m. – Caller reported possible drunk driver. Not found.

11:14 p.m. – Caller advised of possible animal bite. Everything OK, no report.

11:15 p.m. – Warrant arrest made.

THOMAS COUNTY SHERIFF

Tuesday

12:11 a.m. – Security check at the College Farm.

3:36 p.m. – Booked Ronald Paul Tarrant.

Wednesday

8:44 a.m. – Brought inmate from Rawlins County to the Law Enforcement Center.

1:33 p.m. – Released Jason Charles George.

3:21 p.m. – Criminal damage to property report filed.

10:39 p.m. – Caller reported three horses out at County Rds. W and 7. Found owner.

Dutch criminal suspect pursued with F-16s

AMSTERDAM (AP) – Talk about overkill.

The Dutch air force says two of its F-16 jet fighters tried to help police chase a criminal suspect.

Spokesman Olav Spanjer says the jets were about to leave Volkel airbase on a training mission when they heard local police had requested a military jeep

to chase a suspect over soggy terrain.

The pilots volunteered to help search using their infrared cameras.

Spanjer conceded, “It was kind of a long-shot.”

The suspect was in a car with stolen license plates that sped away when police tried to pull it over.

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