

Other Viewpoints

Flints Hills gains impressive jewel

We suspect most area residents who took advantage of Saturday’s grand opening and open house for the Flint Hills Discovery Center will be impressed, if not downright wowed.

Skeptics of what has been dismissed as a \$24.5 million grass museum and folks who’ve not warmed to any part of the massive downtown redevelopment may never come around. It’ll be their loss.

The redevelopment, despite disappointments along the way, has turned out well. The stores and the restaurants are drawing plenty of customers from all parts of town and, importantly, from out of town as well.

As for the museum, where construction has been financed through state STAR bonds, visitors will indeed learn a little about grass. The Flint Hills, roughly 4 million acres from near the Nebraska border south across Kansas into Oklahoma, is a vast grassland. But visitors will find much more. As the center’s literature notes, visitors will come away better informed about “the geology, biology and cultural history of this last major vestige of the Great Plains.”

Ours is a fascinating corner of the world, one that took 250 million years to acquire its present form. It offers long-lost life in fossilized organisms from the inland sea that once stretched across this area, and a huge variety of bugs, birds and mammals – including, of course, the bison that once numbered in the tens of millions and became a symbol of our state.

Visitors also can acquire an appreciation for the humans who preceded us, the original Americans and later the pioneers, some of whom crossed the Flint Hills on the way to other destinations and some of whom made this area their home. The great grassland that fed the bison now supports Kansas’ cattle industry.

This new museum is truly a discovery center, and it’s housed in a beautiful, unique structure that commands the attention of motorists entering town on K-177.

Our city has a new jewel, one that we’re confident will attract tourists as well as folks closer to home, one that ought to be a source of pride for the city and the region.

Weather for Saturday’s grand opening was expected to be pretty much what it’s been during spring here for thousands of years: predictably unpredictable, and possibly stormy. Whatever the weather, the grand opening of the Flint Hills Discovery Center promises to be a great day for a spectacular facility and for Manhattan.

– The Manhattan Mercury, via the Associated Press

Write us

The Colby Free Press encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous from this area should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses not pertaining to a public issue.

Before an election, letters (other than responses by a candidate) will not be published after the Thursday before the polls open.

COLBY FREE PRESS

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

Send news to: colby.editor @ nwkansas.com

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout, Columns, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography. Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

Sharon Friedlander - Publisher
sfriedlander @ nwkansas.com

NEWS

News Editor
colby.editor @ nwkansas.com

Kayla Cornett - Sports Reporter
colby.sports @ nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard @ nwkansas.com

Christina Beringer - Society Reporter
colby.society @ nwkansas.com

ADVERTISING
colby.ads @ nwkansas.com

Kathryn Ballard
Advertising Representative
kballard @ nwkansas.com

Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design
khunter @ nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Ray Schindler - Office Manager
rschindler @ nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support @ nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Richard Westfahl - General Manager
Jim Jackson, Jim Bowker, Gary Meyer, Pressmen
Lana Westfahl, Judy McKnight, Kris McCool, Stacy Brashear, Tracy Traxel, Mailing

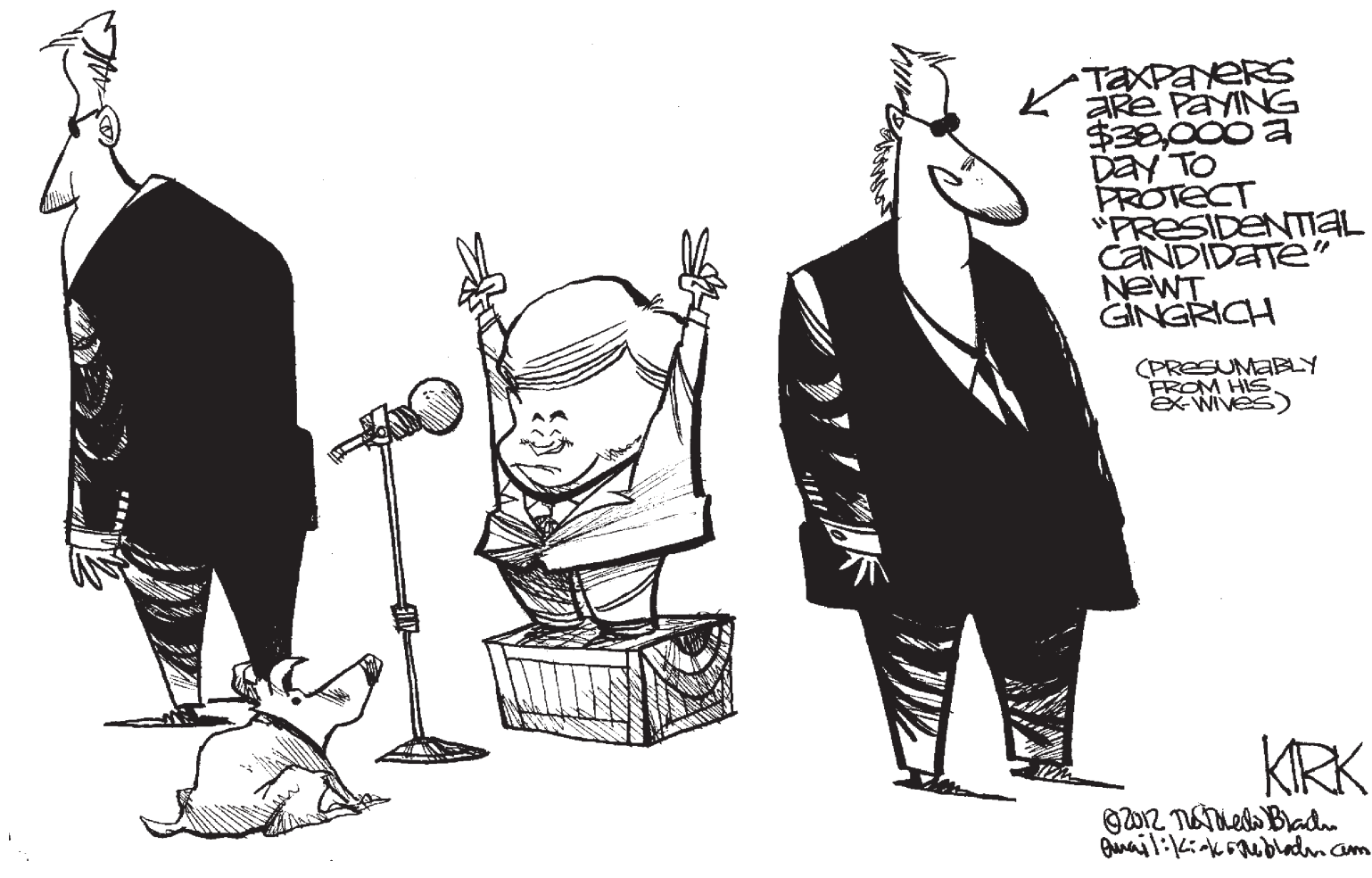
THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news herein. Member Kansas Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby, Thomas County and Oakley: three months \$35, one year \$85. By mail to ZIP Codes beginning with 676 and 677: three months \$39, one year \$95. Elsewhere in the U.S., mailed once per week: three months \$39, one year \$95. Student rate, nine months, in Colby, Thomas County and Oakley, \$64; mailed once per week elsewhere in the U.S. \$72

THE OTHER SECRET SERVICE SCANDAL...



Colby hotel a U.S. 24 landmark

The Cooper Hotel story written by Bill James and Vern Dimmit was used as a reference for this story by permission of Arlene James. It is continued from my last column.

By 1910, J.L. Parrott had made many changes in the hotel which was known for its good service and good beds. A souvenir edition of the Colby Tribune published in 1910 had the following to say about the business:

“The O’Pelt made Colby famous in years gone by as a convention town. The hotel is the largest and best equipped in western Kansas. Never, however, has it been as generally popular with the traveling public as it has under the proprietorship of J.L. Parrott.

“Mr. Parrott purchased the hotel about seven years ago. Under his management, the building has been enlarged, porched and entirely remodeled.

“Both sample room and the dining facilities have been improved and enlarged. With 50 fine rooms, all neatly furnished, the hotel is today easily the most popular \$2.00 per day house in this part of the state.”

Parrott used to sit in a rocking chair in the lobby, watching that everything and everyone was working as expected.

One of the favorite stories told of Parrott was about a traveling salesman who checked into the hotel one day and went straight to his room. He soon came back complaining to the desk clerk that he had registered for a room with a bath and that was what he wanted.

The desk clerk pointed to Mr. Parrott, who was seated in his usual rocking chair in the lobby. The salesman walked over to Parrott and said, “I asked for a room with a bath. Don’t you have rooms with baths?” Parrott replied, “Yes we do.” The salesman said, “Well, that’s what I want.” Parrot calmly replied, “But those rooms don’t have beds in them.”

Just before Parrott died in 1927, he added a north wing to the hotel and completed a large amount of redecorating. One fire escape had been added to the west side of the building earlier. Before that time, all the rooms were equipped with a coil of rope securely attached



The Cooper Hotel as it appeared in the early 1950s.



Marj Brown

• Marj’s Snippets

to the heater or a bed. It was to be lowered out of the window for escape in case of a fire. The Parrot family operated the hotel for more than 40 years and never had a serious fire.

In 1945, the hotel sold to Bazzil Turner, who kept it for less than a year. He sold it to Willard E. Cooper in 1946.

The name was changed to the Cooper Hotel in 1946. World War II was over, and traffic on U.S. 24 was increasing, so Cooper thought it would be a good investment.

Cooper hired a professional hotel manager, Clay Davis, who had a long history of managing and working in the hotel business, to manage the hotel in 1947. At that time, the hotel had 57 rooms that were filling up every night. There were no motels in Colby then, so the overflow customers were sent to a rooming house operated by Joe Kuska or to the Home

on the Range Cabins.

Cooper remodeled the rooms with new carpeting and new wallpaper and added all new furnishings for the north wing on the east side. By 1947, they were hiring 15 to 20 employees and the dining room was going strong.

Radio station KXXX started up in Colby in 1947 in the basement of the Cooper Hotel. In 1952, it moved to new quarters. Colby Community College began with classes in the junior high building in Colby in 1964. The following year, classrooms were built in the basement of the Cooper Hotel and school was held there until the new buildings could be completed.

Davis resigned as manager in 1951 to become postmaster. He remained with the post office for 30 years before he retired.

Meantime, more and more motels were being built in Colby – taking away much of the hotel’s business. In 1967, the coffee shop closed, and in 1977 a fire caused extensive damage and the building was torn down. A portion of the southeast section remained and was converted into an apartment building which stands today.

Marj Brown has lived in Colby for 62 years and has spent a good deal of that time writing. E-mail her at marj-jimbrown@st-tel.net.

Water management law key to the future

Fresh on the heels of a quarter-inch of rain the night before, more than 60 farmers, irrigators and Colby Community College students watched as Gov. Sam Brownback signed a bill that allows for creation of local enhanced management areas, intended to encourage more local action on saving water.

The law signed by Gov. Brownback allows irrigators to collectively decide their future by initiating their own conservation plans to meet local guidelines.

It was only fitting Gov. Brownback traveled to Colby in northwestern Kansas for the formal signing of a bill intended to conserve the state’s water supply and extend the life of the vital Ogallala Aquifer. Farmers in this region of the state began irrigating in the early 1950s.

Irrigators of the Sheridan County Area Six were also in attendance. Members of this group, along with Wayne Bossert, manager of Groundwater Management District No. 4 in Colby, pioneered the management plan. They are considering a proposal that could reduce irrigation water use by 20 percent throughout a five-year period.



John Schlageck

• Insights
Kansas Farm Bureau

“We must conserve our water so we can extend the useful life of the Ogallala Aquifer,” Brownback told those at the signing. “This tool allows Kansans to join together and offer up ideas that work on the local level. It allows them to work together on behalf of their children and grandchildren to provide solutions that will save water for the next generation.”

Moving forward, irrigators in the groundwater management district will now have an enhanced management and conservation option they can use and not be afraid of what might happen to them if they start to address their resource concerns in a formal way, Bossert says.

“We believe this new approach will change the water conservation paradigm in the ground-

water regions of Kansas,” he adds, “but we’ll have to wait and see how the local water users start to develop and use this new authority.”

Farmers and their organizations demonstrated the vision to rework the status quo to deal with the aquifer’s decline. Tools like the local areas now provide Kansas irrigation farmers the ability to make intelligent use of their remaining water.

Additional tools including flex accounts, water banks and the extension of the Water Transition Assistance Program, known as Water TAP, were also signed into law during the 2012 session. All will help with efforts to continue conserving and extending the life of the Ogallala.

Kansas agriculture remains the key to economic vitality in Kansas and water is vital for agricultural production. These steps will benefit farmers today and help sustain this valuable water resource for future generations.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

