

Free Press Viewpoint

Gift to school where it belongs

The oil painting "Autumn Symphony" rests now at the Prairie Museum of Art and History, where all the world can see it.

That's good. That's where the painting by Lindsborg artist Birger Sandzen belongs.

The painting had been a gift to Colby High School Class of 1946. For years it decorated the library at the old high school.

Sandzen may be the mostly widely know Kansas painter. Born in Sweden, he taught for years at Bethany College in Lindsborg. He had a national reputation in the 1920s and '30s for both his painting and his striking prints.

For all that, the Class of '46 reportedly paid only \$100 for the work. According to retired art teacher Cal Mahin, the painting might have been lost a couple of times. Once, when the library was being remodeled, he said, someone sent it to the bus garage to be put out on a sale. Another time, he found it propped up against a classroom wall.

But if the painting's worth, or Sandzen's reputation, were obscure in the 1960s and '70s, by the 1990s, the world had turned and people began to value them much more highly.

Colby school officials began to realize just how valuable their painting might be. It was moved to the administration building, where it hung in the hall outside the superintendent's office. But still, officials knew the district could not ensure a proper environment or security for such a valuable work.

And hardly anyone had a chance to see this beautiful work of art.

The oil-on-board painting, while smaller than some Sandzen paintings, shares a style of broad strokes and pastel hues common to the Swede's work. It focuses on a stream and cottonwood trees, perhaps the Smoky Hill River near Lindsborg. Sandzen painted the river a lot when he was in Kansas; on summer trips to Colorado, he painted aspen trees on mountain streams and lakes.

One Kansas school district had an auction and sold its Sandzen paintings. The three, one interestingly enough, also a gift from the Class of 1946, brought \$172,000 for the Hoisington schools. More than a few people were offended by the sale, however.

Those paintings, like the one here, had been gifts to the schools and the people who own them, not donations to be sold. Now, they are gone, replaced by reproductions.

In Colby, everyone knew better. Superintendent Terrel Harrison expressed it well. The painting could be sold, but the money would just disappear. If it had a better home, such as the Prairie Museum, the art could be enjoyed by Colby children and their parents, by travelers, by the whole world.

Then the idea came up to have a fund drive to "replace" the money the district might have had if the painting had been put up for sale. It might have brought a six-figure price - similar works have - but in a school budget, that hardly pays a teacher for a year.

We suspect Colby people will respond strongly to the drive, maybe exceed its goal of \$60,000, and in the end, the district will lose little, if any, cash. Makes no difference, though.

That painting is a trust, given to the community by those graduates long ago. Now, it is where it belongs. And everyone involved - the school board, the museum and the Thomas County Community Foundation, which is heading up the fund effort, should be congratulated.

They did the right thing for the right reasons, ignoring the lure of easy money and opting instead for community values. Everyone comes up a winner.

- Steve Haynes

We encourage comments on opinions expressed on this page. Mail them to the *Colby Free Press*, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701, or e-mail colby.editor@nwkansas.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect those of the *Free Press*, its staff or the owners.

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Well-traveled kachina finally gets home

He's not really an old Indian. He just looks that way.

He's a kachina, a doll that Pueblo Indians use in ritual dances.

However today, most kachinas are made for the tourist trade.

It was about 11 p.m. the last night of the annual National Newspaper Association convention in Albuquerque last fall when we got the call.

Could we take a kachina home for a friend? Our friends live in New Jersey, and their son bought the kachina that night, figuring he could somehow get an almost three-foot-high wooden Indian into his suitcase.

That wasn't happening, the family discovered, so maybe their friends from Kansas, who were taking the train home, could help.

Of course we could. We love kachinas.

Our friends planned to drive from New Jersey to Jackson Hole, Wyo., for Christmas and would stop by and pick up the doll. (Yes, they are kinda crazy, but they have the cutest Jersey accents.)

Unfortunately, I realized that I had overbought myself - what with the chili ristras, the books, the big Indian rug, the piñon incense.

I could take the kachina home, but it would really put a strain on our luggage. Still, we had promised, and the kachina had to get back east



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

somehow.

Then I realized that a set of friends from Colorado hadn't left yet. They were driving. They could take the wooden Indian home with them, and we could meet them later in the fall and pick him up.

This seemed to be the perfect solution, so our wooden friend left his home in New Mexico and headed for Colorado, where he stayed for the next two months.

In the late fall, we were able to get out to Colorado and meet our friends at a restaurant we all like. The transfer was made and the Indian headed for Kansas.

Now we just had to wait for Thanksgiving and hand him over.

At Thanksgiving, however, our friends realized that they would have four teenagers at their home over the holidays. They decided they should probably just stay in New Jersey and guard the silver and the alcohol.

So, sometime after Christmas I decided maybe I should ship the Indian east.

The cost was more than our young friend had paid to start out with, and finding a box to fit a three-foot wooden Indian was tough.

Then, as we were about to head for Washington in March, it hit me. We could stuff him in a large suitcase and take him as checked baggage. Our friends would be in Washington, driving from Jersey, and we could turn our wandering Indian over to them.

This strategy worked. We rode coach and the Indian rode baggage. In D.C., we turned him over to his rightful owner, who took him home to New Jersey on the train still in his suitcase.

We got a photo of our well-traveled wooden friend as he rode with his owner back to college in New York. He was buckled into his own seat belt and looking as if he was having a fine time. And why not? He'd enjoyed traveling across the country by car, plane and train.

He's seen more of the country than a lot of my friends.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com

Tax reductions likely to cause problems

To the Editor:

Kansas government is now coming slowly out of a recession. During the recession there were limited amounts of money for schools and other state government work. During the last legislative session, Gov. Brownback asked to decrease income tax. The Senate did not have enough votes to pass the governor's plan until the governor and his representatives pressured key members of the Senate.

The Senate passed a bill with added possible tax reduction ideas with an understanding that this bill would be used to compromise but would not pass in whole. So they tried to work with House of Representatives on tax reduction and other key bills and budgets, but the House failed to compromise.

Near the end of the session, the House by a narrow margin concurred with Senate tax reduction bill described above. The actions of this administration are baffling and lacking in common sense. The income tax reductions will reduce the carryover of money by 2014 unless our economy grows spectacularly. This means for the next several years no new money for schools or other state efforts.

As a result I and many other former members of the House and Senate have set up a group we call Traditional Moderate Republicans for Common Sense. www.kcommonssense.com.

Fred Gatlin, Topeka

(Editor's note: Fred Gatlin is a Rawlins county landowner and former 120th District State Representative.)

Obamacare taxes mind

To the Editor:

Two days after Obamacare was upheld by the Supreme Court:

The more I hear about this "Affordable Care Act" the more I absolutely loathe it. Did you know there are 21 different, additional new taxes levied on the American people?



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

Chief Justice John Roberts said it correctly when he wrote his opinion (paraphrased) - it is a tax and Congress has the power to levy taxes. But he also said it isn't the duty of the Supreme Court to overturn this. If the American people don't like it, it is their duty to go to the voting booth and vote for men and women who will protect and uphold the Constitution for the American people.

Any fines levied against you are collected by, not a sheriff or law enforcement agency, but the Internal Revenue Service. So, is it a tax? Or is it not? Shoot, Democrats can't even talk about it without that little three-letter-word slipping in.

Obama swore up and down that it was a fine, a penalty, but in no way shape or form was it a tax. So with 21 new taxes on Americans, how the heck can it not be a tax? Obama also told us we could keep our doctors. However, most decisions on our health will be decided by a board of unelected non-medical people.

Doctors in Congress have said this bill is not good for patients or doctors. There will be a middleman in Washington deciding the best treatment for you instead of you and your family doctor.

Don't doctors and patients working together always make the best decisions? People are more likely to listen to their own doctor rather than some boneheaded non-medical advisor.

There is a provision for the government to have access to your bank accounts and records, to make sure you are paying your fair share. As

far as I am concerned, what little I have in the bank is none of the government's business.

There is also a provision that churches and their workers will have to abide by and most don't agree with it - all their hospitals and clinics will have to perform abortions and provide the morning-after pill or birth control pills. Yes I know, they are fighting this in court but who knows what could happen?

Now, if Obama can give his cronies in special interest groups waivers, why is he so damned intent on breaking the bank on the backs of the hard-working, God-fearing Americans?

The bill also cuts billions of dollars from Medicare, adds several million people to Medicaid and among the millions added are illegal immigrants with Obama's bypass of Congress. Illegal is the key word.

I believe people should take care of their own sexual health. You fooled around unprotected, you take care of your own consequences. That means on your own dime, not mine.

I know the Tea Party has been fairly quiet, but the sleeping giant will rise again. America has a clear choice this election day: continue down the road of destruction or change the direction completely and rise to the challenge of leaving a better America for our future generations, just as previous generations have done.

By the way: seven out of 10 Americans are on food stamps. What happened to the American people who would rather die of pride than take anything/nothing from the government?

What we have is a "gimme" society and Uncle Sam is the sugar daddy. Remember Tennessee Ernie Ford's song, "Sixteen Tons"? "Sixteen tons, whadda ya get? Another day older and deeper in debt. St. Peter don't cha call 'cuz I can't go, I owe my soul to the company store."

With the health care bill, our lawmakers have indebted us and generations to come to the government store.

Jari Skiles, Colby

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

