

Brown County

Maples shine in town

Hiawatha, "City of Beautiful Maples," is in its glory in autumn, but the town is busy the rest of the year as well.

Summerfest, which includes a Car-Truck-Motorcycle Show, booth vendors, musical entertainment, garden and pedal-powered tractor pulls, Ag Museum activities and antique tractors, is scheduled for the last Saturday in June, with free shuttles between the historic Courthouse Square and the Brown County Historical Society Ag Museum.

Summerfest has a new feature this year — the Hiawatha Geocaching Poker Run Adventure, an opportunity for individuals, teams or families to participate in the international adventure game that has swept the nation and uses the Global Positioning System (GPS). Proceeds will be used to expand the Brown County 4-H GPS project.

For information, go to www.active.com, then click on "Find an event," then for event name, enter: Hiawatha Geocaching Poker Run Adventure.

On July 3, our country's independence will be celebrated with a fireworks display at dusk near Windmill Lane. The Hiawatha Aquatic Park will be open until 11 p.m. so people can view fireworks from the pool.

July Jazz Concerts take place every Monday on the Courthouse Square. If you're lucky, you'll find homemade ice cream being served.

During the Maple Leaf Festival and Heritage Day scheduled for the first Saturday in October, enjoy the beauty of Hiawatha's maples combined with a celebration of our agricultural heritage, including vendor booths and old-time demonstrations. Free shuttles are provided between the Courthouse Square and the Ag Museum.

The Hiawatha area will take part in the 1st Annual U.S. 36 Highway Garage Sale Event to be held Sept. 15-17.

The Halloween Frolic features the oldest annual Halloween parade in the nation on Oct. 31. The frolic begins with costume contests for all ages, a kiddie parade in the afternoon and culminates with an evening parade featuring the crowning of the Halloween Queen Scholarship Contest winner.

(This year's theme will be announced in May.)

Hiawatha City Lake is about a mile south of Hiawatha on U.S. 73. It has picnic shelters and playground areas, barbecue grills, sand volleyball courts and fishing. Many are amused by the plentiful sight of ducks and geese.

The Hiawatha Aquatic Park features a 140-foot water slide, zero-depth entry, a toddler area with a frog slide, raindrop fountains, a one-meter diving board, six competition lanes, and



THE BROWN COUNTY COURTHOUSE stands as a proud symbol of the area.

a large concessions stand. Call (785) 742-2524.

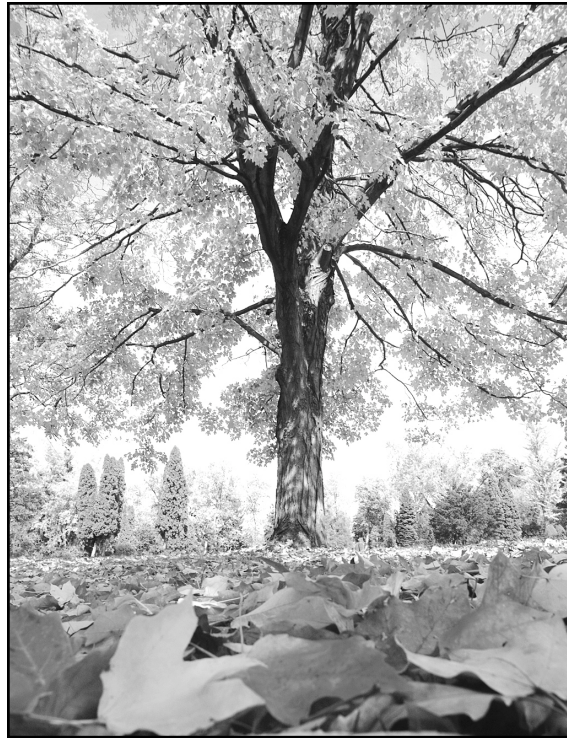
Hiawatha is the boyhood home of children's author Bill Martin Jr., recognized for such books as "Chicka Chicka Boom Boom" and "Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?," and his brother Bernard Martin, a wildlife illustrator. Information is available at the Morrill Public Library, (785) 742-3831.

HISTORY OF HIAWATHA

The original town of Hiawatha was incorporated under the Territorial Legislature in February 1857 and became the Brown County seat in 1858. Located between the Kickapoo, Iowa and Sac-Fox Indian Reservations at the intersection of U.S. 36 and U.S. 73 in northeast Kansas, Hiawatha was appropriately named after the Indian brave in Longfellow's poem, "Song of Hiawatha."

The main street was designated Oregon Street after the Oregon Trail, which passed just southwest of Hiawatha. Parallel streets north of Oregon Street are named after Indian tribes north of the trail and streets south carry names of those tribes south of the Oregon Trail. The Pony Express trail passed just southeast of Hiawatha.

In 1918, T.H. Korthanke and his wife moved to 200 Miami St. in Hiawatha from a farm northeast of Hiawatha. On the corner of their yard was a stately hard maple tree which was admired by all who saw it in its full fall splendor. From that one tree, Mr. Korthanke was inspired to take seeds and plant them on a vacant lot north of his home. As the seedlings took root, he shared them with anyone who would agree to



MAPLE TREES decorate Hiawatha. The trees were started from one owned by T. H. Korthanke in 1918.

care for them.

Mr. Korthanke died in 1941 before the trees reached maturity, but he indeed left Hiawatha with a wonderful legacy. In the fall, Hiawatha sees red. The town comes alive with the hundreds of hard maples.

VISITOR INFORMATION

Hiawatha is located within 20 miles of three casinos and numerous other northeast Kansas

attractions, including the White Cloud (785) 595-3381 and Sparks (785) 985-2411 Flea Markets.

For information, or to ask about the Hiawatha Area Arts and Theater production schedule (productions held in the Brown County Historical Society Memorial Auditorium), call the Hiawatha Chamber/Convention and Visitors Bureau at (785) 742-7136.

Man invested his fortune in memorial to wife

John Milburn Davis erected a memorial to "the sacred memory" of his wife Sarah after she died in 1930. Life-sized Italian marble sculptures are striking in detail and accuracy.

The cost of the memorial was staggering in a small town during the Depression. The stubbornness of Davis toward his project in the face of public criticism was prelude to a legend.

Davis moved to Brown County in 1878. He met and married Sarah and they settled on 260 acres north of Hiawatha.

They were hard-working, frugal and childless. They moved to town in 1915 and lived ordinary lives of quiet routine.

When Sarah died, the script changed. Davis suddenly became a big spender. He removed the simple headstone from his wife's grave and

began to erect a massive memorial.

In a few years, 11 marble or granite sculptures were put beneath the canopy or surrounding it. These included an empty overstuffed chair, a winged angel-version of Sarah in prayer and figures of Davis without his left hand, which he lost to infection.

As the memorial grew, so did the dismay of the townspeople. Hiawatha was without a hospital and swimming pool. Community leaders wanted Davis to underwrite these projects. He ignored their requests.

Reporter Ernie Pyle interviewed Davis in the late 1930s. Davis told Pyle he was unmoved by the appeals.

"They hate me," Davis said. "...but it's my money and I spent it the way I pleased."

The eccentric Davis continued to watch over his memorial into the 1940s. He had a marble-and-granite wall erected to discourage visitors from walking among the statues. He visited the memorial weekly.

Through it all, he never wavered in voicing devotion to his Sarah, though others were skeptical. Nor did he and townspeople ever come to terms about his decision to sink money into a memorial. What is not as widely known is that he secretly gave tens of thousands of dollars to the needy, a few hundred dollars at a time.

Davis died in 1947 and was buried next to his wife under the marble canopy. The funeral was poorly attended and the Baptist minister who conducted the service gently scolded Davis' fellow citizens for not accepting the memorial-

builder as he was.

Today, an air of mystery hangs over the memorial, sort of a second canopy of skepticism and resentment.

Some of his peers insisted that Davis never treated his wife as royally in life as he did in death. They suspected his generous gift was intended more as a slap in the face to his wife's heirs than it was a tribute to Sarah.

And resentment lingers over Davis' refusal to be a benefactor to Hiawatha in its hour of need.

The irony is that the Davis Memorial really has benefited the community. Every year hundreds of tourists come to Mount Hope Cemetery to see the marble statuary and to hear the story of the eccentric creator.