

Fort Hays State University

FHSU Scholars Repository

Buildings & Facilities

Campus History Collections

August 2022

"'Merci' Train Symbolizes Expression of Gratitude"

Fort Hays Kansas State College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/buildings>

Recommended Citation

Fort Hays Kansas State College, "'Merci' Train Symbolizes Expression of Gratitude" (2022). *Buildings & Facilities*. 1070.

<https://scholars.fhsu.edu/buildings/1070>

This Clipping is brought to you for free and open access by the Campus History Collections at FHSU Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Buildings & Facilities by an authorized administrator of FHSU Scholars Repository.



LOCATED BETWEEN McCartney and Albertson Halls, the Kansas "Merci" car is a symbol of gratitude which served as a tribute to Franco-Americans during World War I.

'Merci' train symbolizes expression of gratitude

By Debbie Littell
Leader Reporter

In 1947, Americans began the international cycle of the Friendship trains that carried hope and food to war-devastated Europe. During the fall of 1949, the people of France, in an expression of gratitude, decided to follow in the same path.

The National Federation of French Railroad Workers, leaders in the gratitude movement, called attention to the "Forty and Eight" boxcars, so called for their ability to carry 40 men or 8 horses which were used in World War I by France and their American allies.

The "Merci" (or "Thank You") train, reconditioned and

filled with appropriate gifts, was to serve as a tribute to Franco-American ties as well as strengthen the bonds of friendship between the two countries. More than six million men, women and children, representing all stations, personal backgrounds and occupations, gave what they felt they could. To many of the gifts, personal notes were attached. The presents were then distributed among the cars making up the train. The Kansas car, sent to the United States with 48 others, was formally accepted in Wichita.

On Armistice Day, Nov. 11, 1949, the "Merci" Kansas car secured permanent location in Hays through the efforts of Ross Beach, Jr., and H. B. Lamer of the "Forty and Eight." The day's attractions included Drew Pearson, an internationally known columnist, and a parade sponsored by the Junior Chamber of Commerce.

Among the gifts selected from the "Merci" car was a plaque of hammered copper representing the profiles of King Henry IV and his wife. The plaque, which was made in 1605, has a solid ebony frame and is now located in the Hall of History in the Sternberg Memorial Museum.

The Escutcheons, or "Coat of Arms," which represent the cities, towns and provinces in France contributing to the car are now on display in the Hall of

History. At one time the Escutcheons decorated the exterior of the car but were relocated in the museum as the result of vandalism.

The Kansas "Merci" car, located between McCartney and Albertson halls, is again in need of reconditioning. The car, at one time in monumental condition, is now a weather-beaten safety hazard overrun by termites and decay. According to the Director of the Physical Plant, Daniel F. Durand, the physical plant has no intentions of restoring the "Merci" car. He added that due to the expense of the project, final disposition of the car will be a decision of the administration.

Until a decision is reached by the administration as to repairs or a new home for the car, it will continue to serve as a storage area.

Assistant director fills position

A change in personnel has been announced at the House, a local crisis intervention center. Bernie Brull, Hays graduate student, has been appointed assistant director, filling the position vacated earlier this year by Elaine Buterick.

Brull, who received an A.B. in psychology from Fort Hays State in 1971, will assist in counseling, administrative duties, and House programs.