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### History of President's House

Fort Hays Kansas State College

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Re President's House. 01-22-2004  
James L. Forsythe

Thanks for your note. Dr. Wooster wrote that the President's house was both completed and moved into on the same day, April 1, 1954. However, the record is not that specific. As a matter of fact, I did not find an exact date of completion and an exact date that President Cunningham completed moving into the house. Thus, I did the best that I could from interviews and evidence by stating that it was completed in late summer of 1954. As a matter of fact, the completion of the entire house was not until the basement was finished in 1958, so technically, one could say that the house was not completed until 1958.

Funds for the building in the amount of \$50,000 were available on July 1, 1951. The money was from the Educational Building Fund. This was after a jurisdictional battle between the House and the Senate over the house and the fact that Emporia and Pittsburg were not seeking a Presidential house. Later, because of increased cost, the college discussed cutting items such as the garage, moving the washroom to the basement, etc., and to use Oil and Gas Lease Fund monies to makeup the shortfall. The actual cost, the best that I could determine, was \$65,220.00. The college had spent \$57,692.90 to March 15, 1954, and the college estimated at that time that the total cost would eventually be \$65,000.00.

One of the reasons that I did not accept the April 1, 1954 completion and move-in date was that bids were mailed on April 2, 1954, for furniture with two weeks to respond to the bid (April 16). The furniture would be delivered later. Butler Furniture in Hays was invited to bid as were companies as far away as Kansas City. Trains could deliver rather quickly at that time, but still there was a delay after the bids were accepted, the vendors notified, and the furniture shipped. Thus April 1 could not have been the move-in date as all new furniture was placed in the building.

The project took some time to complete. The work was done during the Korean War, so there were issues about the availability of necessary items. As you may recall, the flood control project around campus had to get approval to use concrete rather than steel drainage pipe due to the ongoing steel strike. Then there was the severe drought with some rain in April 1954, ending the driest three-month period since 1936. Actually, the drought, as I recall, was from 1951 to 1957.

The earliest reference that I have of a school activity in the new house was a tea reported in the October 21, 1954 *Leader*. The home economic club hosted a tea for Tessie Agan, acting head of the Household Economics Department at Kansas Agricultural College in Manhattan. The state Home Economics groups held a meeting on campus.

Most entertainment at this time was either in Cody Commons or the Social Hall. I do not know if Dottie Cunningham had a tea for social or church groups before the October tea.

The rock on the building is split greenhorn and cost \$33.00 a ton (14.64 tons). Froberius Stone Facing of Hays did the work. The Haydite blocks came from the Carter Concrete Block Plant in Russell. I am not sure where some of the paneling, etc., came from as the college corresponded with California companies for samples.

The President's house was renovated in 1969 with cable TV, draperies, and a WHITE living room carpet when President Gustad arrived. Draperies and other projects were done under President Tomanek. A new roof was installed in 1975. I know there were renovation activities before President Hammond moved in and that FHSU personnel did much or most of the work. President Hammond could help you with what was done when he arrived. The Physical Plant probably could help as well if you need current information.

As a side note, bids to build the center part of McGrath Hall went out in late April 1954. Plans were also being made to renovate Rarick Hall. The year 1954 was a good building year, with much being done in the early spring.

**A side note:** If you talk to Kent Seward, tell him that Hays businesses in late March and early April 1954 were complaining that the new by-pass was taking the tourists out of downtown Hays. About 10 plus years later, I-70 did the same thing. It appears that after 50 years, we are still trying to get tourists downtown. Also, President Cunningham pushed hard for the overpass when the road from the 157 Exit on I-70 was built, thus permitting traffic to pass high over the tracks and connect to the by-pass.

Hope this helps. Many activities mentioned in the history book were shortened, summarized, or even truncated to save space.

Jim