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Sheridan Coliseum: Paper, Sheridan Coliseum history

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Sheridan Coliseum was named after General Philip Sheridan, who was stationed for a time at old Fort Hays southwest of the city. It once was the largest arena in western Kansas, seating about 2,500 persons for concerts and sporting events.

Sheridan Coliseum opened in 1916 as a showplace of Kansas conventions, festivals and stock shows.

It was built to commemorate the men who fought wars in the Hays area, History books suggest this is probably the reason for its fortress-like appearance. Sheridan Coliseum is heavy, solid and could almost be called forboding. The harshness of its structure however is lessened by the warm yellow color and texture of the limestone. The Coliseum is an adaptation of a Romantic style of design that was also popular at the time. The absence of intricately carved decoration, a common feature of later architectural strength of the building.

Rows and rows of bleacher seats fill the near obsolete auditorium, and on the end chair of each row is another seal, this time embossed in metal, with the letters F.H.N. Again, it is a reference to past generations and the Fort Hays Normal School.

President Lewis found an excellent basis for the development of a cultural program on the campus, although there were few opportunities for encouraging talent in Western Kansas public schools.

Henry Edward Malloy came to Fort Hays Normal School from Bethany College at Lindsborg to become the head of the Music Department in 1914. One of his goals was to develop a Music Festival similar to those for which the Lindsborg college was famous. Another goal was to promote community and public school music throughout Western Kansas, largely by preparing music teachers. The accomplishment of these goals took time, although in March of 1915 a college chorus sang "The Creation" and "The Chimes of Normandy."

In the spring of 1917, when the college was host to the Golden Belt Teachers Association, the music department produced "Il Travatore," and on May 15, 1918, Mr. Malloy presented the first Hays community chorus of nearly 700 voices which sang "The Elijah."

The first annual Western Kansas Music Festival, called a "Peace Jubilee," was presented May 4 to 11, 1919. This event was the result of five years of preparation and endeavor. The slogan, "Singing

Western Kansas Into Tune," was coined in 1915 by John E. Pickett, later an associate editor of the Saturday Evening Post. Mme Margaret Matzenauer, contralto, gave a concert the first Sunday afternoon, and Toscha Seidel, violinist, gave a concert on the second Sunday afternoon. A community chorus of 620 voices, assisted by Reed Miller, Marie Sidenius Sendt, Christine Schultz, and Gustaf Holmquist, guest artist, sang "The Messiah" on the two Sunday evenings accompanied by a 52-piece orchestra. Programs were given each afternoon and evening of the week days, by the guest artists, faculty and students.

High-school contests emerged in 1921 as the accomplishment of the goal to make music part of education of public-school pupils, and they helped make the slogan "Singing Western Kansas Into Tune" a reality.

These music festivals continued for many years, and many outstanding artists were guest of the college. In 1922 Madam Schumann-Heink sang in a Coliseum packed to the rafters-chairs were even placed on the stage, surrounding the singer. Other outstanding artists and organizations were Rosa Ponselle, Ernest Davis, the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, and others of like frame. Among the oratorios and operas produced by the college connection with the festival were "The Messiah," the "Creation," the "Elijah," "Faust," "Aida," and the "Passion Play." The combined community and college chorus and orchestra were popular with many as 500 to 600 participants. Ballet also was developed on the campus as part of the Festival Week.

The Music Festival was developed at a time when roads and highways were still dirt-or mud-and the danger of financial loss was much greater than in later years when television, movies a radio brought competition, and when the automobile and the paved highway removed some of the weather hazards. It was therefore necessary in those years to secure for each performance a financial guarantee signed by a large number of faculty members and other citizens.

Many fine entertainment and cultural programs - orchestras, bands, choirs, plays, and dance companies - found Hays a convenient stop between Kansas City and Denver, and the Coliseum was the largest auditorium in the area. These events helped build interest in the musical and dramatic activities on the campus and in Western Kansas.

The only legislative appropriation for a building for any state

school in 1915 went to Fort Hays, and the building was Sheridan Coliseum.

Sheridan Coliseum was approved and built because of a political feud in Topeka. In the end, the grant for the building was politically inspired. The Democratic senate in 1915 usually was apathetic to any bill passed by the Republican-controlled House. The new governor was Arthur Capper, who had defeated Democratic Governor George Hodges. At one point in the 1915 legislative session, the Democrats walked out of the Ways and Means Committee because Capper, a Republican, had called in the Republican members of the committee to discuss school appropriations.

Late in February, the House included in House Bill 1087 an appropriation of \$125,000 for regular maintenance and for the construction of a combination classroom and gymnasium building. The Senate combined the bill with others into Senate Bill 1086 and increased all House appropriations. If Governor Capper approved the increased funding, he would spend more than Democratic Governor Hodges, and Republicans were not known as spenders. The Senate held the bill until three days before the end of the session. The indignant Republican majority in the House, with no chance for a lower appropriation bill, passed the bill and sent it to Capper and urged him to blue line the excesses of the Democrats. Capper did slash from the budget the building for other institutions, but the Senate had lumped the Fort Hays general appropriation together with enough funds to build the new coliseum. Under Kansas law, the governor could only approve or drop an appropriation; he could neither increase nor decrease. To blue line the Fort Hays appropriation would be to discontinue the school; to approve the bulk appropriation would give the school a coliseum in one lump appropriation. Capper had no choice; the Democrats had given Fort Hays and western Kansas a multi-use classroom and gymnasium building.

The ground breaking for the Coliseum was April 2, 1916. Students were in charge of the ceremonies. Lou Wallace, president of the student body, was presented a shovel by Walter E. Scott, president of the senior class, and Wallace turned the first spade of sod. When it was announced at the ceremonies that the school was short \$1,000 to construct the building, two local residents, C. G. Cochran and H. J. Penney, contributed the necessary funds.

The cornerstone was laid on May 24. The ceremonies were conducted by the Masonic Lodge, with Grand Master Giles H. Lamb presiding. Standing in a blowing gale with the dust of a dry western Kansas whipping through the crowd, former Governor Edward Hoch addressed the throng, Hoch said that Sheridan Coliseum represented the transition from old western Kansas to new western Kansas. He discussed higher education in Kansas and the role of the normal schools. He believed that the normal schools were the most useful institutions because of the multiplication factor: The students go out to teach and knowledge is multiplied. He also noted that each school had a mission, an emphasis. He tried to define the mission of Fort Hays:

The Fort Hays Kansas Normal School is what it is not because of any act of legislature, the board of administration, or the president, but because God and geography made it what it is. The school must be of necessity more composite than any of the others because alone and single-handed, without the aid of any other institution or denominational college, the Fort Hays Normal School serves the empire of Western Kansas.

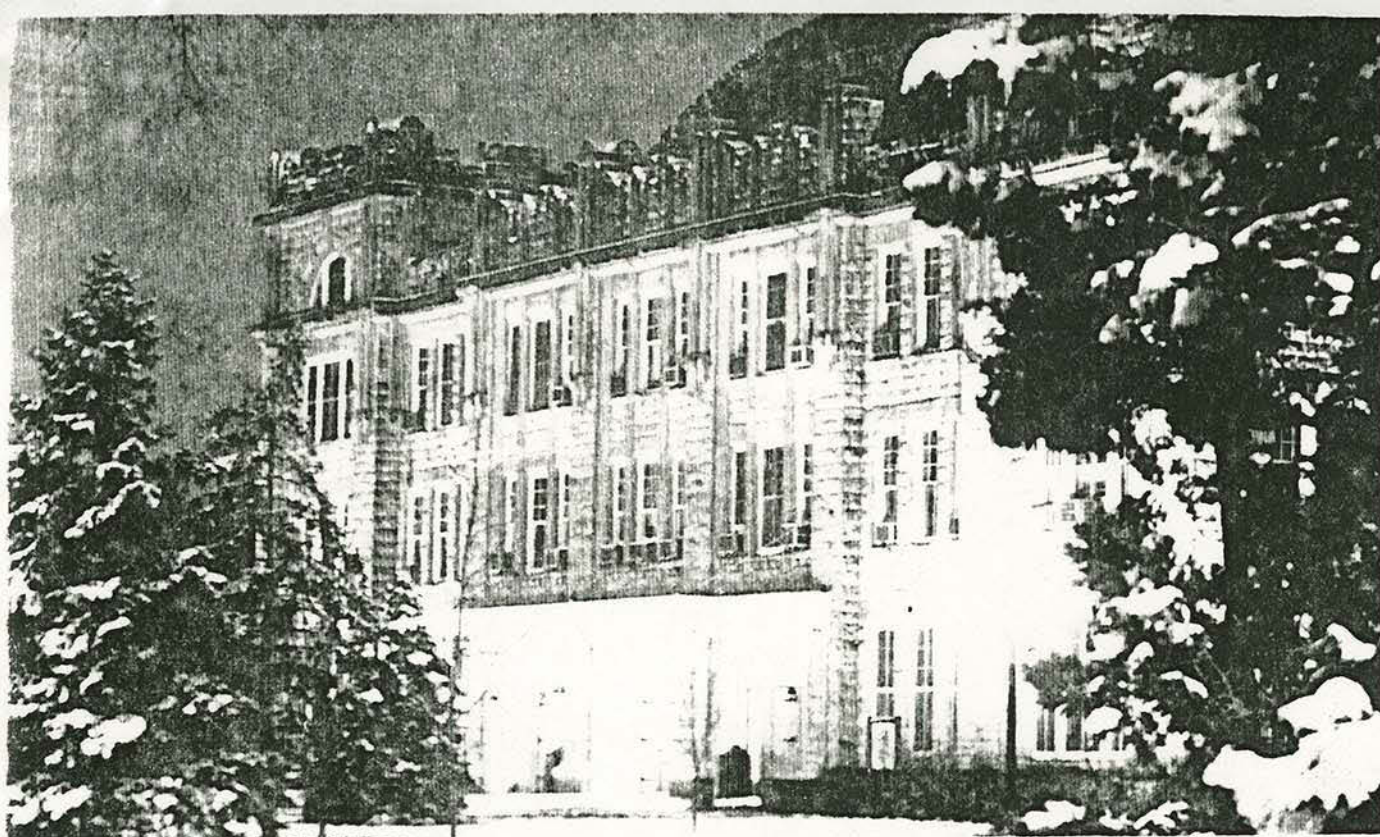
The Coliseum was finished in 1917. Skeptical legislators who did not believe there were enough people in all of western Kansas to fill the 3,700 seats were surprised when the structure proved to be too small when it was used the first time. A wooden stage built for that first performance. There are some who still remember the performance and the drive.

The crowds also came to watch athletic events in the new coliseum, and the fans from outlying farm communities and villages frequently were astonished at the spaciousness of the basketball arena. So too were the players. John J. Vogel, originally a farm lad from Stuttgart, Phillips County, Kansas, but now a State Representative for the Forty-third District, Lawrence, Kansas, recalled,

On the (Stuttgart) school grounds was a basketball court; most of the youth became excellent dribblers for a player needed to be an expert in dodging the pits and holes in the dirt floor. I looked forward to going to Phillipsburg High School because the town school had an indoor basketball court with a floor of wood. The only freshman to travel with the

squad, I went along when the Panthers played in the district tournament at Hays. The Lamer Hotel seemed an elegant headquarters for the Blue and Gold, but Sheridan Coliseum was even more awesome: our entire high school, parking lot and all, would have fit under that high arching roof. During the game, fighting for the ball and finally having it in my hands, I couldn't find our goal; I felt as though I was looking for a basket out in the middle of eighty acres. That Coliseum was just too much for a country boy.

Sheridan Coliseum was completed in 1922 when the legislature appropriated funds to put in a ceiling. Prior to that time, the ceiling consisted for some 3,000 yards of muslin that the students in the Domestic Arts classes had sewn together for a temporary ceiling in 1919.



If Buildings Could Talk

What a memorable occasion that must have been on March 23, 1917, when she opened her doors for the first time to a full house. That was for dedication purposes, of course, but oh, how many times the walls have bulged since with "standing-room-only" crowds. People came from miles away in 1917 to see the largest building of its kind in Western Kansas. Some even said (she noted) that the legislature must have been "wacky" to sink \$100,000 into the construction of this "white elephant." I wonder what they think now.

She told me how excited people were when they discovered her swimming pool, her modern seating, the outstanding lighting, and all her other contributing aspects. She laughed when she thought of all the happy times her occupants shared and wept when recalling the losses suffered. She saw World War I end before she really became a part of the campus, watched sadly as World War II claimed some of her students, cried when the Korean Conflict borrowed more of her favorite people, and wept again when some of her finest people were called again to participate in a war in Southeast Asia. But she smiled again when she thought about the peace that is coming and was happy that her people, her young people, would not be called again unless extremely necessary.

Names and years flew by rapidly as she brought the past up to date. She talked of the many different ways she was utilized through the years by quick-thinking students and administrators. She welcomed thousands of freshmen (they're always 18 you know); heard speakers share their thoughts with others; hosted some of the greatest actors and actresses in the world; watched countless graduates take their place in society; saw young boys sneak in after hours to play that lovely game of basketball on her constantly shining floors; watched as young boys and girls met and fell in love. She was proud. But then, she broke down and the tears came again. She wondered about the future.

I told her this wasn't the end. Plans call for using her facilities as long as possible for events that fit the occasion and, after some minor remodeling, she will continue to make a contribution to the educational process at FHS. She was happy again. "Lights out," came a call from below and I wondered as I left when we would get together again.

An Era Comes to an End

Tonight's basketball game marks the final varsity cage contest scheduled for historic Sheridan Coliseum. Fifty-six years of service to college athletics will end for the ancient building this spring and a new era begins in M. C. Cunningham Hall and Paul B. Gross Memorial Coliseum, a new \$7 million complex scheduled to open in late summer or early fall, 1973.

Sheridan Coliseum had its beginning in 1915. What had been uppermost in the minds of many became reality when, according to the 1916 college yearbook, Reveille, "The legislature of 1915 granted the institution an appropriation of \$100,000 to be used for the erection of Sheridan Coliseum, now under construction, which stands south of Picken Hall. It will be the largest building on the campus and will contain the auditorium, gymnasium for men and women, showers and swimming pool, departments of music, blacksmithing, manual training and farm carpentry, gas and steam engines, and public school art."

The 1918-1919 yearbook (it was combined because of the aftermath of World War I) recorded, "The spirit and solidarity of the school have been expressed in a bronze table. It adorns Sheridan Coliseum, a big stone building on the plains, seating 3,600 persons, in which are given tractor shows, grand operas, livestock shows, oratories, automobile shows, dramas, basketball games, conventions, and tennis matches."

A picture in the 1917 yearbook shows the grand opening of the Coliseum on March 23, 1917. However, the first basketball game was not played in the Coliseum until fall, 1917.

Forward looking people existed in the early days of the Coliseum, the same as they do now. In the 1920 yearbook, the editor said, "What is born into the mind of men who not only dream but act finds glorious fruition in some form. When William S. Picken opened the school in June, 1902, he saw far beyond the building of an institution under his care. He had dreamed of an institution here on the plains of Western Kansas that should meet the great need for adequately equipped men and women and he at once set about the realization of his dream. President William A. Lewis succeeded W. S. Picken in 1913 and has carried on the plans for a bigger and better school with splendid success. The latest and largest addition to the group of buildings is "Sheridan Coliseum" on the south side of the campus. This new structure has been rightly termed "The Convention Hall of Western Kansas."

—Basketball Games—

It is estimated that over 500 college basketball contests and countless high school games have been held in the Coliseum. Several high school tournaments used to be played here and just this past month that program was re-born

when several members of the Mid-Continent League got together for some competition. Many will recall the high school tournaments played here and the dust storms that in 1935 forced the teams and fans to bed down in the Coliseum. Hays High and Thomas More Prep played each other and others for years in the confines of this building.

—Basketball Records—

Among the more interesting basketball marks established in and out of the Coliseum by Tiger squads were those of longest win streaks, 11, in 1948-50; 1950-52; 1958-59; and 1962-63; most consecutive home victories, 22, 1948-50; most consecutive victories in one season, 11, 1958-59 and 1962-63; and best won-loss percentage for one season, .860, in 1959 when the Tigers were 24-4.

—First Coach—

The first FHS basketball coach to field a team in Sheridan Coliseum was W. G. (Bunt) Speer. According to the 1918-19 yearbook, Coach Speer's team consisted of Robert Spencer, guard, Penokee; Glenn Archer, center, Great Bend; Ira Spencer, guard, Penokee; Ralph Archer, center, Great Bend; Granville Hays, forward, Almena; Oaklie Washburn, forward, Hill City; and Paul Gross, forward, Hays.

—Flood of 1951—

Many will remember the flood of 1951 which not only took a toll in equipment, records and furnishings in Sheridan Coliseum as well as other campus buildings, but also took the lives of six persons in the area. The Coliseum lost many of its contents but also proved to be a popular place for refugees during and after the flood. According to the Alumni News of September, 1951, "A few miles west of Hays, 11 inches of rain was poured onto the already water-soaked hills in 30 minutes."

—Future of Sheridan—

Though tonight's game ends all athletic competition in Sheridan Coliseum, the important old building will continue to be used for other purposes at least for the foreseeable future. There are no plans for major remodeling but minor work will take place and offices and classrooms will continue. Plans are for the continued use of the structure for musical presentations and other programs that lend themselves to the furnishings and acoustics. There is a possibility classrooms will be constructed within the confines of the present structure. Plans for the future of Sheridan Coliseum are indefinite at present but one can believe that as long as the nostalgic structure can be utilized, it will.

The Winds of Time Bring Changes



DR. M. C. CUNNINGHAM



PAUL (BUSCH) GROSS

As March 23, 1917 was a big day in the lives of many, so will September, 1973, be a time of importance for many. Fifty-six years ago, people came from far and wide to help dedicate the newest building on the Fort Hays State College campus, Sheridan Coliseum. People from far and wide are expected again in September, this time to dedicate the newest structure on the FHS campus, M. C. Cunningham Hall and Paul B. Gross Memorial Coliseum.

M. C. Cunningham Hall is, of course, named for former FHS President Dr. Morton Christy Cunningham, called by many the "builder President." Dr. Cunningham was a major reason the campus grew to its present size and stature. His leadership and dedication to Fort Hays State College and its students will long be remembered by those who knew him. M. C. Cunningham Hall is the Health, Physical Education and Recreation half of the new complex. Classes in those areas will be taught in new, modern settings and the intramural program will probably expand even larger. For the first time in the history of the institution, necessary space, equipment and adequate facilities for the instructional aspect of HPER will be readily available.

Cunningham Hall will contain classrooms, offices, four gymnasiums, eight handball courts, an Olympic-sized swimming pool, lockers, showers, restrooms, and additional instructional facilities.

The Paul (Busch) Gross Memorial Coliseum is named for the long-time basketball coach and athletic director at FHS. The late Paul Gross shared more than 35 years of his lifetime with Fort Hays State College and while an undergraduate here, was an outstanding athlete.

The new Coliseum is too real to be believed by many who have fought the battle for a seat in Sheridan Coliseum. Whereas 2,500 have been squeezed into Sheridan, 7,000 persons can be seated comfortably in the new building. It is estimated that 9,000 to 10,000 persons can be accommodated for an entertainment program by the addition of seating on the floor. There will be approximately 3,500 permanent, theater-type seats in the new structure.

A poly-turf playing surface will cover the floor of the Coliseum and a major attraction is the six-lane, indoor track. Adjacent to the main arena are wrestling and gymnastics workout rooms and a specious room for the athletic trainer and his equipment. Wide ramps, restrooms and concession areas all contribute to the effectiveness and beauty of the new facility.

Tonight's Game

Tonight's game marks the closing of an era as Sheridan Coliseum opens its doors to a Tiger basketball crowd for the last time.

Washburn University comes into tonight's contest carrying a 9-14 overall record and a 4-6 mark in Great Plains Athletic Conference action. Fort Hays State owns a 63-59 verdict over the Ichabods earlier in a game played in Topeka.

Washburn is led by guard Harold Brown and postman Gene Dodd. Brown is the conference's fifth leading scorer, carrying a 17.8 average in GPAC action. He is the top man on the totem pole in accuracy from the charity stripe, connecting on 26 of 29 attempts for 89.7 per cent. From the field, the 6-1 junior is in the ninth position, hitting on 48.6 per cent of his casts from the field.

Dodd, a Hill City native, is second in the conference in field goal percentage, sinking 62 of 109 shots for 56.9 per cent. Dodd is also number seven in the scoring race with a 15.6 norm.

On the backboards, the Ichabods are led by 6-4 sophomore Leonard Conkleton. In conference play, Conkleton has grabbed 8.4 caroms per outing, while overall he is averaging 7.3 errant shots hauled down.

As a team, the Ichabods are last in offensive output in the league, averaging 67.4 points per contest. They are first in defense, fourth in field goal percentage, fourth in free throw accuracy, and sixth in rebounding.

Rampy Bids Goodbye

Captain Troy Rampy closes out his home career as a Tiger basketball player after four years of service under Head Coach Chuck Brehm.

This season, Rampy is averaging 7.1 points per game and is the tops on the squad in assists with 77 for a 3.7 norm. In Great Plains Athletic Conference action, the senior guard has a 6.0 point per contest average and has dealt out 119 assists for a 2.1 average.

In his three years as a Bengal, Rampy has played in 57 games and scored 311 points for a per game norm of 5.5. In the rebounding wars, Rampy has grabbed 125 caroms from his guard position, giving him a 2.2 average per contest.

During the spring, Rampy is the starting shortstop for the Tiger baseball team. He has been a starter at that spot for three years. During his baseball career at FHS, Rampy has established a .242 career batting average.

Last season, he set a new Tiger record for assists with 132. He handled 187 chances with 15 errors for a .929 fielding average. He also had his best year at the plate last season, hitting .292 which was fifth highest on the team. He was selected as an honorable mention All-District 10 performer.

Affectionately known as "Wimpy" to his teammates and friends, Rampy is a business major. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Gerry Rampy of Sedgwick, Kan.

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