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Sheridan Coliseum: Script, Sheridan Coliseum Multi Media Show

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SCRIPT....SHERIDAN COLISEUM MULTI MEDIA SHOW.....

SHERIDAN COLISEUM: ("IT'S CASTLE WALLS ARE FAMED IN SONG
AND CONTEST.")

FORT HAYS STATE UNIVERSITY IS THE RESULT OF THE VISION
OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO KNEW THAT THE OLD WEST WOULD BECOME THE
NEW WEST: PEOPLE WHO FORESAW THE DEMISE OF THE MILITARY AND
ITS FORTS ON THE PRAIRIES: PEOPLE WHO BELIEVED THAT THE
POPULATION MOVEMENT WOULD REACH THE HIGH PLAINS AND
ENCOURAGE THE NEED FOR AGRICULTURE AND FOR EDUCATION.

FORT HAYS STATE UNIVERSITY WAS BORN OF THE IDEA....THAT
EDUCATED PEOPLE COULD BETTER HELP THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE
ARID, WINDY HIGH PLAINS OF WESTERN KANSAS.

SO IT WAS THAT IN 1902 THE UNIVERSITY OPENED ITS DOORS TO
19 STUDENTS, 2 FACULTY MEMBERS AND A LIMITED CURRICULUM.

AS THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS GREW OVER THE YEARS, SO DID
THE NUMBER OF CAMPUS BUILDINGS. FIRST TO BE CONSTRUCTED
WAS PICKEN HALL. THEN RARICK HALL. THEN, THE FORTRESS OF
WESTERN KANSAS.....SHERIDAN COLISEUM.....

THE ONLY LEGISLATIVE APPROPRIATION FOR A BUILDING FOR
ANY STATE SCHOOL IN 1915 WENT TO FORT HAYS STATE....AND THAT
BUILDING WAS SHERIDAN COLISEUM.....

PRESIDENT LEWIS SAID..."THIS NEW MULTI-PURPOSE BUILDING
COULD BE USED FOR HORSE SHOWS, A GYMNASIUM, CLASSROOMS, AND FOR
OTHER EVENTS.....AND THE FACILITY WILL DRAW STUDENTS AND OTHER
PEOPLE TO OUR CAMPUS FROM THROUGHOUT WESTERN KANSAS....."

LEWIS' DREAM OF HAVING A HUGE FACILITY WHICH WOULD HOLD HUNDREDS, EVEN THOUSANDS, BECAME REALITY IN 1917.....BUT NOT BEFORE SOME PEOPLE IN KANSAS SAID...."THAT THE WHITE ELEPHANT WILL NEVER BE FILLED....."


BUT FILLED IT WAS....AS EARLY AS MARCH 23, 1917, WHEN FACULTY MEMBER HENRY EDWARD MALLOY PRESENTED "IL TRAVATORE", THE FIRST GRAND OPERA EVER PRESENTED IN WESTERN KANSAS. PEOPLE CAME FROM AS FAR AWAY AS EIGHTY MILES OVER PRIMITIVE ROADS TO HEAR THE PERFORMANCE.....WITH THE ADDITION OF CHAIRS ON THE FLOOR, THE 2,900 AVAILABLE SEATS WERE QUICKLY TAKEN.

IT WAS SHERIDAN COLISEUM AND H.E. MALLOY THAT PUT HAYS AND THE UNIVERSITY ON THE MUSICAL MAP OF AMERICA.

THE ANNUAL HAYS MUSIC FESTIVAL, THE PRESENTING OF HANDEL'S "MESSIAH" AND THE STATE BAND AND ORCHESTRA CONTESTS PROMPTED CRITICS TO WRITE SUCH ACCOLADES AS:

"MUSIC FESTIVAL WEEK AT KANSAS STATE TEACHERS COLLEGE OF HAYS IS NOT AN EVENT....IT IS AN INSTITUTION-- AN INSTITUTION OF AND FOR WESTERN KANSAS, BORN OF A VISION AND NURTURED BY YEARS OF TOIL....."

"THE ARTISTS WHICH THE MANAGEMENT OF THE FORT HAYS FESTIVAL HAVE SECURED PRESENT THE GREATEST AMOUNT OF TALENT OF WORLD FAME THAT HAS BEEN COMPRESSED INTO ANY ONE WEEK IN KANSAS IN SEVERAL YEARS....."



BUILT AT A COST OF \$125,000, SHERIDAN COLISEUM HAS SERVED THE NEEDS OF THE UNIVERSITY IN COUNTLESS WAYS THROUGH THE YEARS.

WHO COULD EVER FORGET CADE SURAN'S MELLOW VOICE ROLLING SMOOTHLY THROUGH THE WINDOWS OF SECOND FLOOR WEST DURING ONE OF HIS MANY POPULAR SQUARE DANCE CLASSES.

AND HOW ABOUT THE LONG LINES OF STUDENTS WAITING FOR CONCERT OR BASKETBALL GAME TICKETS....OR WAITING, SOMETIMES IMPATIENTLY, TO ENROLL FOR ANOTHER SEMESTER.

JUST ABOUT EVERY DEPARTMENT HELD CLASS AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER IN SHERIDAN COLISEUM. AND FACULTY MEMBERS ENJOYED THEIR OFFICES THERE, EVEN IN THE "IVORY TOWERS", HIGH ABOVE ALL ELSE ON CAMPUS.....

AND WHO COULD FORGET THE SWIMMING POOL IN THE LOWER WEST END OF THE BUILDING.....THE HOME OF THE FORT HAYS DUCK CLUB.....MANY YOUNG STUDENTS PASSED THEIR REQUIREMENTS FOR W.S.I. IN THIS OLD POND.....

HOW ABOUT THAT ARCHED ROOF. BEFORE THE CEILING WAS FINALLY CLOSED UP IN 1922, BY FUNDS FROM THE LEGISLATURE, IT WAS COVERED BY 3,000 YARDS OF MUSLIN SEWN TOGETHER FOR A TEMPORARY CEILING IN 1919 BY STUDENTS IN THE DOMESTIC ARTS CLASSES.....

WHO PERFORMED IN SHERIDAN COLISEUM FOR THE ENTERTAINMENT OF STUDENTS, FACULTY, STAFF, ALL OF WESTERN KANSAS? WHO DIDN'T?. THE LIST READS LIKE WHO'S WHO OF THE ENTERTAINMENT CIRCLES.... PEOPLE LIKE MADAME SCHUMANN-HEINK: ROSA PONSELL: ERNEST DAVIS: JOHN PHILLIP SOUSA: THE NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA: THE LETTERMEN: STAN KENTON: AL HIRT: JACK ANDERSON: HARRY REASONER: JAMES WHITMORE: GUY LOMBARDO: AND COUNTLESS OTHERS BROUGHT BOTH CULTURE AND ENJOYMENT TO THE HIGH PLAINS.

BUT THE MOST FUN HAD IN SHERIDAN COLISEUM WAS AT THE BASKETBALL GAMES. STUDENTS WOULD OFTEN STAND IN LINE AS EARLY AS 4 P.M. FOR TICKETS OR IF THEY MANAGED TO GET INSIDE THEY WOULD PLAY CARDS AND OTHER GAMES UNTIL THE TIGERS TOOK THE FLOOR.

THE COLISEUM WAS KNOWN TO OPPONENTS AS THE "SNAKEPIT" BECAUSE OF THE PROXIMITY OF THE CROWD TO THE ACTION AND BECAUSE OF THE LOUD "HISSING" WHICH ALWAYS GREETED THE OPPONENTS AS THEY CAME OUT TO DO BATTLE.

YOUNG PLAYERS FROM OPPOSING TEAMS SAID THE COLISEUM WAS A FUN BUT DIFFICULT PLACE TO PLAY....WITH THE CROWD NOISE, A FIRED UP PEP BAND AND THE WONDERFULLY EXHILIRATING BASKETBALL ATMOSPHERE. OVER 500 COLLEGE BASKETBALL GAMES WERE PLAYED IN THE "SNAKEPIT" DURING ITS 56-YEAR ATHLETIC HISTORY.

IT'S RATHER QUIET IN SHERIDAN COLISEUM NOW. THERE ARE A FEW OFFICES THERE, INCLUDING PRESIDENT TOMANEK'S, AND THE OLD BUILDING STILL WELCOMES PEOPLE TO THE MAIL ROOM, BUSINESS OFFICE, REGISTRAR'S, AND OTHER OFFICES. THE ARENA IS USUALLY DARK.

WHEN THE UNIVERSITY GREW SO FAST IN LATE 1960'S AND EARLY 1970'S, THERE SIMPLY WASN'T ENOUGH ROOM FOR ALL THE ACTIVITIES, STUDENTS, FACULTY AND STAFF. TWO NEW BUILDINGS, GROSS MEMORIAL COLISEUM AND M.C. CUNNINGHAM HALL, WERE CONSTRUCTED TO TAKE CARE OF INDOOR ATHLETICS AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION. AND THE ADDITION OF STROUP HALL AND NEW RARICK HALL ADDED OFFICES, CLASSROOMS AND OTHER FACILITIES FOR NURSING, EDUCATION AND OTHER DEPARTMENTS.

A LARGE CRACK, WHICH APPEARED ABOUT 11 YEARS AGO IN THE WEST OUTSIDE WALL OF SHERIDAN, CAUSED SOME TO BELIEVE THE OLD STRUCTURE WAS BEGINNING TO DISINTEGRATE. MAYBE THAT WAS A REASON FOR SOME OF THE ABANDONMENT OF THE BUILDING NAMED AFTER GENERAL PHILLIP SHERIDAN, ONE-TIME COMMANDER OF THE TROOPS AT OLD FORT HAYS. TESTS HAVE SINCE PROVED THAT THE CRACK IS MEANINGLESS AND THAT SHERIDAN IS STRUCTURALLY SOUND.

CONSIDERABLE DISCUSSION HAS TAKEN PLACE OF LATE ABOUT WHAT TO DO WITH SHERIDAN COLISEUM. SHOULD IT BE RAZED LIKE OLD RARICK HALL AND REPLACED BY A NEW, MODERN STRUCTURE? SHOULD THE WESTERN KANSAS LANDMARK BE REMODELED, INTO THE CAMPUS ADMINISTRATION BUILDING....OR....SHOULD THE OLD BUILDING

MORE

BE RENOVATED AND BECOME A PERFORMING ARTS CENTER AND HOME FOR
SOME OTHER CAMPUS OFFICES.

SHERIDAN COLISEUM HAS CONTRIBUTED GREATLY TO THE RICH
FORT HAYS STATE UNIVERSITY TRADITION AND TO THE HERITAGE
OF WESTERN KANSAS.

THAT LIMESTONE COVERED EDIFACE HAS TOUCHED THE LIVES
OF TENS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE OVER THE LAST 67 YEARS.

INSIDE THOSE STURDY WALLS, LOVING MEMORIES WILL LIVE
ON FOREVER. OUR CHILDREN, THEIR CHILDREN AND COUNTLESS
OTHER GENERATIONS SHOULD KNOW THE HISTORY OF THIS FORTRESS
ON THE HIGH PLAINS."

SHERIDAN COLISEUM.....A TOWER OF STRENGTH, A WORK OF
ART.