

New Signage for the Marlatt Homestead

Earlier this year, representatives of the M/RCPA and the Riley County Historical Society (RCHS) met with Ethan Erickson, KSU Vice President for Administration and Finance, and Casey Lauer, KSU Assoc. Vice President for Facilities, to request that interpretive signage be installed at the Washington and Julia Marlatt homestead, which is located at 1600 College Avenue and is owned by Kansas State University (KSU). Erickson and Lauer were agreeable to KSU's collaborating with the M/RCPA and RCHS to design a marker and install it on the property.

The history of the Marlatt homestead is closely connected with the history of Manhattan and KSU. The original owner of the property was Davies Wilson, who was a surveyor with the Cincinnati Land Company and came to Manhattan in 1855 aboard the steamship *Hartford*. Records indicate there was a stone house on the property in 1856, and it's believed it's the oldest stone house in Riley County (O'Brien).

Washington Marlatt was drawn to Kansas in 1856 because of his strong opposition to slavery and his desire to see the territory remain free. He settled in Manhattan because there was talk that a college would be established. In 1858, Marlatt purchased the property from Wilson and then rented it while he continued for a time to live in a boarding house in town. Another resident of the boarding house was Julia Bailey, who came to Manhattan in 1859 from back East when Isaac Goodnow recruited her to assist with the college. Washington began living at the farmstead in 1860, and in 1861, he and Julia were married in the Bluemont Central College building (O'Brien).

Bluemont Central College was



Top, the Marlatt Homestead with new interpretive signage. Bottom, a close-up of the interpretive marker.

founded in 1858 and opened in January 1860, and Washington and Julia were among its first faculty. Washington taught Greek and Latin, and Julia taught French and drawing. Washington was a founding trustee of the Bluemont Central College Association, and with the aid of an attorney, he wrote the incorporation charter. (O'Brien).

The Morrill Act was passed in 1862, permitting states to establish public colleges funded by the sale of federal land grants. The Bluemont Central College trustees offered the college to the Kansas Legislature for the purpose of making it the state's land-grant institution. As a trustee, Washington was involved with the college's transition to Kansas State Agricultural College (KSAC), the nation's first land-grant institution

to be operational (O'Brien).

In 1875, KSAC moved from its location near present-day College Avenue and Claflin to Kansas State University's current location, which was closer to town. With the move, the Bluemont Central College building was no longer needed, and it was scheduled to be demolished. An 1883 newspaper notice indicated Washington Marlatt purchased

the roof timbers and a considerable amount of the stone from the old college building to erect a barn on his property. He also acquired the carved stone blocks that spelled "Bluemont College" and installed them above the barn's west entrance. In the 1920s, the "Bluemont College" stones were removed from the barn and used in Farrell Library. Today, the stones are featured in an arch above a fireplace in the K-State Alumni Center (O'Brien).

The Marlatt homestead represents several significant "firsts" in terms of land-grant institutions. It was the home of the first faculty of Bluemont Central College, which would become the first land-grant university. The barn on the property was built from materials salvaged from the first building of the first land-grant university. Given the property's considerable historical significance, the M/RCPA and the RCHS thought the installation of interpretive signage would be beneficial to educate the public about the Marlatts' farm and its importance to Manhattan and KSU.

In the months that followed the initial meeting with KSU administrators, M/RCPA and RCHS representatives collaborated with KSU's Division of Communications and Marketing, University (*continued on p. 6*)

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Archives and Special Collections, the Division of Facilities, and the Facilities Department of Campus Planning and Project Management to develop the text for the signage and its overall design, determine its placement on the property, and complete the manufacture of the sign and its installation. The new sign was installed in July 2023, which coincided with the 165th

anniversary of the founding of Bluemont Central College.

Included on the signage is a QR code that directs one to an account with the KSU Foundation to accept donations. The account is called “Marlatt Homestead Improvements.” At this point, KSU officials haven’t determined how the property might be repurposed or how donations would be used.

The Washington and Julia

Marlatt Homestead was added to the Register of Historic Kansas Places in 2006.

To learn more about the Washington and Julia Marlatt Homestead, see the M/RCPA’s April 2012 and Oct. 2013 newsletters.

O’Brien, Patricia. Register of Historic Kansas Places, Washington and Julia Marlatt Homestead, Manhattan, Riley County, KS.