

NEWS

Stoneworks

Editor's note: This article first appeared in the January 15, 2015, edition of the newspaper. It is re-printed here following the recent death of the local stonecutter. Middlemas's full obituary will be printed as it becomes available.

by Clarke Davis

Keith Middlemas is a stoneworker, a broad term that defines the most detailed precision artistry with a dentist's diamond-tipped drill one day and the use of a 16-pound hammer to break rock the next.

He recently used a 250-pound piece of Italian marble to fashion an exact replica of an 1853 Enfield musket. The replica's finished weight was 70 pounds and went to Brookville, Missouri, to be clasped in a soldier's grip, a Civil War statue that had gotten damaged.

It took a 38,000-pound boulder out of west Texas to create a seven-ton arrowhead for the Kansas City Chief's training center.

Big and little, Middlemas's works are sprinkled throughout Jefferson County, Lawrence, and the Kansas City suburbs. He's been at it since 1976.

Limestone rock carvings welcome people to Oskaloosa and to the Jefferson County fairgrounds and his mark is on the entrance posts to the cemeteries north of Perry. Some of his finest artistry can be found on a memorial in the Pleasant View Cemetery at Oskaloosa.

For the memorial he used Indiana limestone sandwiched between granite. This particular limestone will wear away at the rate of one-sixteenth of an inch every 100 years. The wearing away of the granite will be imperceptible, he said.

The Kansas City native and Turner High School graduate was first introduced to mason work in New Mexico.

His family had always vacationed in the North and East and he wanted to experience the desert and Dixieland. With a stint in the Army Medical Corps behind him, he left the University of Kansas and headed for New Mexico for the summer.

"The reason being I thought I was only qualified to shovel behind a cow," he said.

A Hispanic man, Albert Avila, taught him the finer points of making wood-fired bread ovens and adobe fireplaces and the summer stretched into two years.

Instead of renting an apartment, he bought an acreage and built a cabin on a mountain while learning masonry work.

Avila sold him a 1948 Ford pickup for \$125 so he could get up and down the mountain. "It had a flat tire and needed a tune-up," he said.

"I did that instead of hanging out with the hippie girls. I sold the cabin and paid off my student loans so I didn't have that debt following me around," he said. "I had enough left over to buy a

cheeseburger."

Dixieland would be next. He returned to KU for an intensive course in Spanish and to complete his degree and then in midwinter headed for Atlanta, Georgia, at a speed of 45 mph in that old truck. Here he got work with a ceramics company where he was given a company car and promises of riches. But he yearned to be his own boss and within a couple of years he returned to Kansas in that old Ford and found land he wanted in Jefferson County.

In 1976, he launched his own stoneworks business — Bluestem Stoneworks — with the confidence that he could do anything.

"I knew I could do anything except sing and dance. I just knew I didn't want to be employed by somebody else," he said.

"When people ask me if I can do something, I always say 'yes' and then figure it out," he said.

Settled into the rural backwoods of Jefferson County, it's here he would eventually raise a family and confront the challenges imposed by saying "yes, I can" to everything.

Starting out he did a lot of stonework on suburban houses such as fireplaces and stone veneer but he grew weary of that.

"It's all boring," he said. "White guys make everything square or rectangle and want it to be beige," he said. "I want to do curved walls, flights of steps, and arches."

From there he began doing water features that included pools, water falls, and fountains, commercial signs, and historic carvings for building preservation.

An award-winning fountain he designed and created for KU features a 12,000-pound boulder transported from the Flint Hills that rests in a university park. The interior of the rock was hollowed out for the installation of stainless steel piping that provides a trickle of water seeping from the rock.

"It's practically all been done with a handshake. I've only had to sign three contracts since I started," he said. "I always do more than I say I will and I always undercharge. Those are my two specialties and part of the reason the phone keeps ringing."

His degree is in anthropology, although, he said, he had fewer hours of that than anything else. His 150 college hours had consumed Shakespeare, Western Civilization, Eastern studies, Spanish, and only an introduction to geology. Geology, it turned out, was the most important for his profession.

After 40 years of carving rock he knows more than the average person about geology and how to find rock.

He knows where certain quarries are that have special kinds of rock, but he also goes in search on



A 2015 file photo of Keith Middlemas by Clarke Davis.

his own. It is not unusual — with permission and a paycheck — to have a bulldozer in someone's pasture digging down for what he needs.

Middlemas uses the U.S. Geological Survey to point him in the right direction.

"A strata of rock runs pretty level from north to south but as one goes west and the elevation rises, the rock continues to be buried deeper — four feet for every mile," he said.

For the rock entry posts at the Oak Ridge and Mt. Calvary cemeteries, Middlemas spent extra for the sand to make mortar. The post consists of Sioux quartzite, a South Dakota rock that is common locally — "These are the purple ones farmers sharpen their plows on," he said. So he purchased a fine sand made by a company that grinds these rocks.

"In 30 years when the masonry cement has washed away, the cap and the joints will all be the same color as the stone," he said. "This is how I entertain myself." Most of the stoneworker's projects are done on site, although he does have an unheated shop at his rural Oskaloosa home.

For the first time since he began his profession, he's going to carve a stone that has not been commissioned.

"I've had little time to do things I want to do. I don't have things lying around for sale," he said.

But he's about to embark on a 6-foot, 4-inch cowboy carved onto a 9-foot tall stone.

"It'll have a base where a family name can be imprinted," he said.

Helping Middlemas with some of his projects is Kreg Pemberton, Winchester.

"His specialty is steel fabrication," he said.

They work together on projects such as an outdoor patio kitchen made of stone with a stone roof. These contain a wood-fired oven and pull out stainless steel kitchen.

Architectural and landscape design are also included in his stone work for the creation of small swimming pools, patios, and garden archways.

For something more pricey, he's made two Japanese tea houses.

Here he leaves stone to tackle the hardest wood.

"They are made out of Osage orange, a wonderful wood," he said.

"The tea houses measured 11 feet by 11 feet."

Middlemas, 67, is a divorced father of two children. His daughter, Marita, is a lawyer living in New Mexico and his son, Avi, is a cinematographer residing in Los Angeles. They attended Oskaloosa schools and graduated from Free State High School in Lawrence.

For his next project, Middlemas plans to travel through the Flint Hills towns from Alma to Wichita looking for stone features that were popular in the 1880s. These include such things as hitching posts and mounting blocks (used to mount a horse or climb into a carriage).

He plans to measure and sketch these items and then create replicas, which he will name after the town where he found them.

PUBLIC NOTICE

(Published in The Oskaloosa Independent July 10, 17, and 24, 2025)3t

IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF JEFFERSON COUNTY, KANSAS

Pursuant to KSA Chapter 59 IN THE MATTER OF THE ESTATE OF: Joey Katherine Houlihan, Deceased

Case No. JF-2025-PR-000029 NOTICE OF HEARING AND

NOTICE TO CREDITORS THE STATE OF KANSAS TO ALL PERSONS CONCERNED:

You are notified that a Petition was filed on June 30, 2025, in this Court by Jennifer Auchmoody, an heir, devisee and legatee, and Executor named in the "Last Will and Testament of Joey Katherine Houlihan," deceased, dated August 28, 2020, requesting that the instrument attached thereto be admitted to probate and record as the Last Will and Testament of the decedent; Letters Testamentary under the Kansas Simplified Estates Act be issued to Executor to serve without bond.

You are further advised under the provisions of the Kansas Simplified Estates Act the Court need not supervise administration of the Estate, and no notice of any action of the Executor or other proceedings in the administration will be given, except for notice of final settlement of decedent's estate. You are further advised if written objections to simplified administration are filed with the Court, the Court may order that supervised administration ensue.

You are required to file your written defenses to the Petition on or before August 8, 2025, at 08:30 a.m., in the District Court, in Jefferson County, Kansas, at which time and place the cause will be heard. Should you fail to file your written defenses, judgment and decree will be entered in due course upon the Petition.

All creditors are notified to exhibit their demands against the Estate within the latter of four months from the date of the first publication of this notice, as provided by law, or if the identity of the creditor is known or reasonably ascertainable, 30 days after actual notice was given as provided by law, and if their demands are not thus exhibited, they shall be forever barred.

Jennifer Auchmoody, Petitioner

PREPARED AND APPROVED BY: Werring Law, LLC Andrew E. Werring, #22184 Attorney for Petitioner 110 N. 5th Street Atchison, KS 66002 P: 913-367-2424 F: 913-367-7017 E: andrew@werringlaw.com



June Klenk with her dwarf hotot rabbit.

Klenk . . .

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Jefferson West this fall and this is her third year in 4-H.

Kate's favorite is the horse project where she is enrolled in everything from western pleasure, halter classes, trail, and all the timed events.

She participates in the intermediate division and her favorite events are western pleasure and running the barrel pattern. "I do all the events except English," she said.

Kate's counterpart is her horse, Cosa. Cosa is a 14-year-old Florida cracker known for its agility and speed whom she has owned for five years. Along with Cosa, Kate has six other horses at home.

Prior to this year Kate was enrolled in the meat goat project. She decided she really didn't like goats and they weren't for her.

"I really just like working with all things horses," she said.

Now that the horse show is complete, Kate will spend fair week helping her siblings with projects and spending time hanging out with her friends.

The siblings are members of

PUBLIC NOTICE

(Published in The Oskaloosa Independent July 17, 24, and 31, 2025)3t

IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF JEFFERSON COUNTY, KANSAS

PROBATE DEPARTMENT In the Matter of)

the Estate of:) LIZABETH A. HOFFMAN,)

deceased.) Case No. JF-2024-PR-000018

Court No. Chapter 59 NOTICE OF HEARING TO ALL PERSONS CONCERNED:

You are hereby notified that on July 3, 2025, a Petition for Final Settlement was filed in this Court by Eleanor Hensley, Executor of the Estate of Elizabeth A. Hoffman, deceased, praying Petitioner's acts be approved; Petitioner's accounting be settled and allowed; heirs be determined; the Last Will and Testament be construed and the Estate be assigned to the persons entitled thereto; the Court find the allowances requested for attorney's and accountant's fees and expenses are reasonable, should be allowed and ordered paid; that Court costs be determined and ordered paid; the administration of the Estate be closed; and upon the filing of receipts the Petitioner be finally discharged as Executor of the Estate of Elizabeth A. Hoffman, deceased, and Petitioner be released from any further liability.

You are required to file your written defenses thereto on or before August 15, 2025, at 8:30 A.M., in the district court, Jefferson County, Kansas, at which time and place the cause will be heard. Should you fail to do so, the Court will proceed and enter such orders as the court determines appropriate.

/s/ Eleanor Hensley Submitted by:

Jacob A. Turner PAYNE & JONES, Chartered 11000 King Street, P.O. Box 25625 Overland Park, Kansas 66225-5625 Phone: (913) 469-4100 Fax: (913) 469-8182 jturner@paynejones.com ATTORNEY FOR PETITIONER, ELEANOR HENSLEY

the Winchester 4-H Club and the children of Michael and Rachel Klenk, rural Meriden.

Michael is retired law enforcement from St. Joseph, Missouri, while Rachel is a nurse practitioner and owner of WHOLEhealth, Meriden.

As if the couple didn't have enough on their plate with eight children, in 2022 they purchased Jackson's Greenhouse, Topeka.

The 77th annual Jefferson County 4-H Fair begins Monday, July 28, and will conclude Thursday, July 31, with the livestock auction and dance.

A full schedule of the week's events can be found elsewhere in this edition.



Tess Klenk in the outfit she is modeling in the public fashion revue.



It was not unusual for Middlemas to need a crane to lift his work. This is an arrowhead for the Kansas City Chiefs he designed and made from a 38,000-pound rock from west Texas.

PUBLIC NOTICE

(Published in The Oskaloosa Independent July 24, 2025)1t NOTICE OF BUDGET HEARING

The governing body of Union Township and Union Fire District #9 Jefferson County

will meet on August 11, 2025 at 7:00 p.m. at the Fire Station, 104 E Lucy Street, McLouth for the purpose of hearing and answering objections of taxpayers relating to the proposed use of all funds, the amount of ad valorem tax and the revenue neutral rate. Detailed budget information is available at Jefferson County Clerk's Office and will be available at this hearing.

BUDGET SUMMARY

Proposed Budget 2026 Expenditures and Amount of 2025 Ad Valorem Tax establish the maximum limits of the 2026 budget. Estimated Tax Rate is subject to change depending on the final assessed valuation.

Fund	Prior Year Actual 2024		Current Year Estimate 2025		Proposed Budget 2026		
	Expenditures	Actual Tax Rate*	Expenditures	Actual Tax Rate*	Budget Authority for Expenditures	Amount of 2025 Ad Valorem Tax	Proposed Estimated Tax Rate*
General	4,000	0.106	2,500	0.099	9,751	2,378	0.094
Fire General	98,632	2.291	95,129	2.200	147,675	81,445	2.097
Totals	102,632	2.397	97,629	2.299	157,426	83,823	2.191
Revenue Neutral Rate-Township General**					0.094		
Revenue Neutral Rate-Fire District**					2.097		
Less: Transfers	0		0		0		
Net Expenditure	102,632		97,629		157,426		
Total Tax Levied	83,947		83,879		xxxxxxxxxxxxxx		
Assessed Valuation:							
Township General	22,932,702		32,659,410		25,169,564		
Library							
Fire District	35,558,748		37,031,142		38,845,437		
Outstanding Indebtedness,							
Jan 1	2023		2024		2025		
G.O. Bonds	0		0		0		
Other	0		0		0		
Lease Purchase Principal	0		0		0		
Total	0		0		0		

*Tax rates are expressed in mills.

**Revenue Neutral Rate as defined by KSA 79-2988

Ken Budy, Township Clerk