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Valley Falls,
Jefferson County
Kansas 66088

In others' words

"I am having my few great days of the year when there is no one around and I can really breathe. I don't know why people disturb me so much: They make me feel like a hobbled horse."
—Georgia O'Keeffe

Timetables

This week in Kansas History: May 19, 1960 — During the afternoon a storm system developed cultivating in an F4 tornado which spawned complete destruction or major damage along much of a 70-mile swath. The path of major damage ranged from less than ¼ mile wide along a few segments to over 2 miles wide. Much of the town of Meriden (pop. 405) was demolished and the northern portion of Oskaloosa (pop. 808) sustained general damage, demolishing the Jefferson County Courthouse.

According to the U.S. Weather Bureau, the tornadoic action lasted for 3 hours and 19 minutes. American Red Cross reports listed 461 families suffering losses with 110 homes demolished, 111 sustaining major damage, and 239 minor damage.

At the time of its destruction, the Jefferson County Courthouse was the oldest courthouse in service in the state.

Situated on the Old Military Road from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Riley, the town of Ozawkie was designated as the first county seat in 1855. The county seat was then moved to Oskaloosa in 1858 with a majority reaffirming vote in 1864. The County Courthouse, designed by E. D. Baldwin and built by Graham & Swain, was constructed in the center of the town square in 1867.

A new courthouse designed by Kiene & Bradley Architects of Topeka in the New Formalism style was built by contractor J. A. Lundgren & Sons in 1962 on the same location as the picturesque former building heavily damaged by the tornado.



Entertainment

The movie "The Six Triple Eight" brought to light the extraordinary efforts of the mostly African American 6888th Battalion, U.S. Women's Army Corps. The 6888th was tasked with clearing the backlog of mail sent to and from servicemen overseas. This battalion worked three shifts, 24 hours a day, in poor conditions to sort approximately 17 million pieces of mail.

Given six months to complete this monumental assignment, they finished in 90 days. Fifteen of these women had Kansas connections including Golda Lee Patton from El Dorado. She enlisted with the Women's Army Corps in 1943, joined the 6888th in August of that year, and eventually rose to the rank of T5 (Technician Fifth Grade). The veterans of the 6888th Battalion were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in 2018, and a memorial was erected at Fort Leavenworth in their honor.

— "Zephyr" from the Kansas Historical Society

The weather

by Thomas J. Ryan III			
	Hi	Low	Precip
May 5	81	50	.00
May 6	79	52	.00
May 7	71	55	.10
May 8	83	53	.00
May 9	82	49	.00
May 10	87	51	.00
May 11	88	53	.00

Perry Lake

The lake level May 12 was 894 msl., 2½ feet above conservation pool. The discharge rate was 150 cfs. Inflow was 75 cfs. Surface temperature was 57 degrees F.

May 15, 2025

The Vindicator

DEDICATED TO THE CONCEPT THAT FREEDOM OF THE PRESS STRENGTHENS DEMOCRACY



Photo by Holly Allen

Pictured are Valley Falls Leadership staff and students, back row from left: Cullen Bruner, Mallory Johnston, Raydyn Walker, Brody Troxel, and Jesse Tyler; middle row: Margo Ellerman, Avalon Portenier, Breckyn Moore, Alila Brown, Dakota Boyce, Lily Brown, Shaun Nickelson, Lexie Welsh, Emily Bozarth, Kaycin Williams, Mariah Noyes, Haillie Dollen, Hollie Dollen, Deven Pemberton, and Chandler Martens; and front row: Noah Dodd and Samuel Mathis.

VFHS Leadership adopts a highway

by Holly Allen

The Leadership class at Valley Falls High School has adopted a stretch of highway on K-16, beginning at The Wash Spot car wash and continuing two miles west.

The project was spearheaded by freshman Hollie Dollen in August. The Leadership class, taught by longtime family and consumer sciences teacher Margo Ellerman, was covering a unit on community service. Dollen noticed the need for cleanup while driving along that stretch of highway and seeing trash and debris.

Ellerman reports that despite

a lot of red tape, Dollen was tenacious in her pursuit of the project, and that persistence paid off, culminating in the first cleanup day May 8, with a second following the next day.

"This project has been a long process to get the proper approval, the sign put up, paperwork signed, notarized, and on file, watching instructional videos, and getting the vests and trash bags from the State Department," Ellerman said. "I am proud of Hollie for taking on this project and seeing it through."

An official sign for the litter crew — made up of first-hour freshman Leadership students

— has been installed on the highway by the Kansas Department of Transportation. Locals should expect to see the student crew at work at least three times a year. The next cleanup day will kick off the new school year in August.

"I think this will make the community feel unity and pride and help to keep the local wildlife healthy," Dollen said. "I hope that the community can keep this project alive after I graduate."

Dollen, whose twin sister, Haillie, is also in the class, is the daughter of Shelly Johnson and Rick Dollen, both of Valley Falls.

High School Graduation Reminder

USD 338	USD 340	USD 343
Valley Falls	Jefferson West	Perry-Lecompton
Sunday, May 18	Sunday, May 18	Saturday, May 17
2 p.m.	2 p.m.	1 p.m.



Photos by Stacey B Photography

Introducing: Dinner on the Diamond

Jefferson West baseball held its first annual Dinner on the Diamond fundraiser May 3. The event was billed as a lasting tradition bringing together players, coaches, families, and the community to celebrate and support the team. Proceeds from the fundraiser will go toward equipment, field improvements, and team needs.

The evening began with conversation and dinner by John Thelen with Mulligans BBQ in Meriden, followed by a speech from Head Coach Dan Hypse (below) on the history and future of Jeff West baseball. He first introduced the current players (shown at right is No. 5, Tucker Holthaus) and honored his wife, Stephanie, for her commitment to the team for the entirety of his 35-year coaching career. During his speech, he acknowledged individuals who have contributed significantly to the program throughout the years. Pictured below right are past assistant coach Craig Watkins and Devin Watkins, a star pitcher who went on to play for St. Mary's College on a scholarship.

"The purpose behind the dinner is to create memories, maintain relationships built over the years, and to honor our current and past players," said Coach Hypse.



Current listing of filings for office, deadline approaching

by Clarke Davis

The most recent filings reported by the Jefferson County Election Office are two school board incumbents, Kelly Midgley and Tara Garrow.

Midgley, 41, Meriden, holds Pos. 6 on the Jefferson West school board and Garrow, 41, McLouth, is serving in Pos. 4 on the McLouth school board.

This is an election year for Jefferson County's eight cities, six school districts, three improvement districts, five drainage districts, and the three-county Meadowlark Extension District.

Candidates have until noon June 2 to file for public office in Jefferson County — just over two weeks.

All those interested in filing for elective office must do so at the County Clerk's office in the courthouse at Oskaloosa. There is a \$20 filing fee for all offices except the drainage districts, for which there is no fee, reports the Jefferson County Election Office.

The General Election is in November and those elected begin their terms shortly after Jan. 1.

Following is a list of all offices up for election and the names of those who have already filed:

School districts

USD 338, Valley Falls — Pos. 4: Pos. 5: Jessica Clark (I) Pos. 6: **USD 339, Jefferson County North** — Pos. 4: Pos. 5: Pos. 6: Jim Bodenheimer (I) **USD 340, Jefferson West** — Pos. 4: Pos. 5: Matthew Williams (I)

Pos. 6: Kelly Midgley; **USD 341, Oskaloosa** — Pos. 2: (Unexpired) Pos. 4: Pos. 5: Pos. 6:

USD 342, McLouth — Pos. 4: Tara Garrow (I) Pos. 5: Pos. 6: **USD 343, Perry-Lecompton** — Pos. 2: Bill Culver (currently filling an unexpired term). Pos. 4: Pos. 5: Pos. 6:

Cities

McLouth — Three council seats:

Meriden — Three council seats: Keith Steele (I).

Nortonville — For mayor: Raymond Brown (I).

Two council seats: **Ozawkie** —

For mayor: Loren Lutes (I). Two council seats:

Oskaloosa — Three council seats: Victoria Edmonds Metzger.

Perry — Three council seats:

Felicity Gorski (I) and Jason Phillips (I).

Valley Falls — Mayor and two council seats:

Winchester — Three council seats: Kara Beletsky (I).

Improvement districts

Lakeside Village — Lakeshore Estates — Lakewood Hills —

Extension district

Two board seats from Jefferson County: Michael McNary (I),

Drainage districts

Stonehouse — Kaw-Delaware — Kaw Half Breed — Grantville — Muddy Creek — Dennis E. Stanwix,

Eminent domain ordinance for VF city lake tabled again

by Holly Allen

A short update from City Attorney Andrew Werring on the eminent domain ordinance for the City Lake property preceded a unanimous vote to table the issue once again during the May 7 meeting of the Valley Falls City Council.

Werring's recommendation included a 10-minute executive session on the topic at the end of the meeting. He explained that he had met with "some of the owners" of the surrounding property the week prior, calling it a "very productive conversation that took an unanticipated positive turn."

The surrounding property is listed by the county as being owned by James Billings and Chris and Baretta Schmeissner, all Valley Falls residents. Chris Schmeissner serves as the county's GIS/IT director. Billings is his father-in-law.

The issue has been complicated by the shape of the city's parcel, as City Lake is entirely surrounded by the family's property, and by an incorrectly plotted easement for the drive. As it stands, about 50 feet of the drive is not included in the easement, which is necessary for access to the lake.

All council members — Dennis Tichenor, Brett Dallman, Jason Heinen, Kevin Loy, and Bret Frakes — were present for the 5-0 vote to table.

Sewer Project — Phase II

Brett Wagoner of Governmental Assistance Services, Lawrence, attended the meeting by phone to give an update on Phase II of the sewer project.

Despite finishing a small portion of Phase II using Phase I funds, the total cost — when combining Phase I's actual expenses with new estimates for Phase II — is \$28,000 over budget based on the original USDA and CDBG funding estimates from three years ago.

The higher cost, despite less work remaining, is due to rising construction costs. "While \$28,000 is a lot of money, in the grand scheme of things, over

that time period this increase is actually way better off than what we are seeing in other communities doing multi-phase sewer projects," Wagoner said.

The excess will most likely come from the reserve fund, though the council also has the option of asking the USDA to add the amount to the existing loan. At \$2.9 million over 40 years, Wagoner said, the increase would amount to "pennies." The city was awarded a \$650,000 CDBG grant for Phase I, and GAS is working to secure a similar award for Phase II.

Alternatively, the council could reduce costs by rehabilitating fewer manholes or less footage of pipe.

Regardless, the current ordinance authorizing an annual increase to resident water bills will remain in effect until the 40-year note is paid off.

The first phase of the project included rehabilitation and replacement of the sewer system north of K-16 Highway. The second phase will cover the same work for the south side of town.

In a 5-0 vote, council members agreed to move forward with the project, authorizing \$8,950 for GAS to write and administer the grant, and paying Professional Engineering Consultants, Topeka, \$4,000 for work completed to date.

"We're gonna spend \$12,000 to try to get \$650,000," said Wesley Lanter, city administrator.

A public hearing on the matter is expected to take place at the next council meeting, Wednesday, May 21.

Sunset Haven

Lanter, along with Mayor Jeanette Shipley, attended a special meeting of the Valley Falls Housing Authority to go over a proposed contract with the Kansas Housing Resources Consortium Inc., a nonprofit that manages low-rent housing in Atchison, Holton, Wamego, and Linn, to take over manage-