

Other Viewpoints

More kindergarten should be easy sell

Gov. Sam Brownback's proposal to spend \$80 million to ensure all Kansas kindergarten students have the opportunity attend a full-day program should be well received by parents and school districts across the state.

Legislators must approve the plan, which Brownback will include in his budget recommendation for the state's fiscal year 2015, and appropriate the money to pay for it, but they, too, should recognize the advantages in the governor's proposal.

The \$80 million Brownback wants to spend would be spread over five years, beginning with \$16 million for the 2014-15 school year. The state now pays only for half-day kindergarten in public schools, though many have full-day classes.

According to Dale Dennis, deputy commissioner for the Kansas Department of Education, all but about 15 of the state's 286 school districts offer full-day kindergarten and most of them pay the additional expense with money they receive from the state for at-risk students. State funding for full-day kindergarten will free up some money for at-risk programs in those districts.

There are some school districts that charge parents for full-day kindergarten, from \$270 to \$1,350 per semester. Full state funding for kindergarten would reduce the financial load on these parents.

The real beneficiaries, however, will be the children who don't now have access to full-time kindergarten or whose parents can't afford the fees.

Studies show children who begin to learn early perform better throughout their school years and are better-equipped to handle challenges when they move from school into the work force.

Brownback, who has emphasized improving young people's reading skills throughout his time as governor, says ensuring every public school student has access to full-day kindergarten is a logical next step.

He is right, and legislators should be willing to appropriate the money necessary to get more young students off to a good start on their education.

Kindergarten also helps children learn social skills — how to communicate with others, meet new friends, work in a group setting — in addition to the basic reading and math skills they pick up. It is an important time in their lives, and they will benefit from the advantages offered by a full school day.

— *The Topeka Capital-Journal, via the Associated Press*

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U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124. Web site: huelskamp.house.gov

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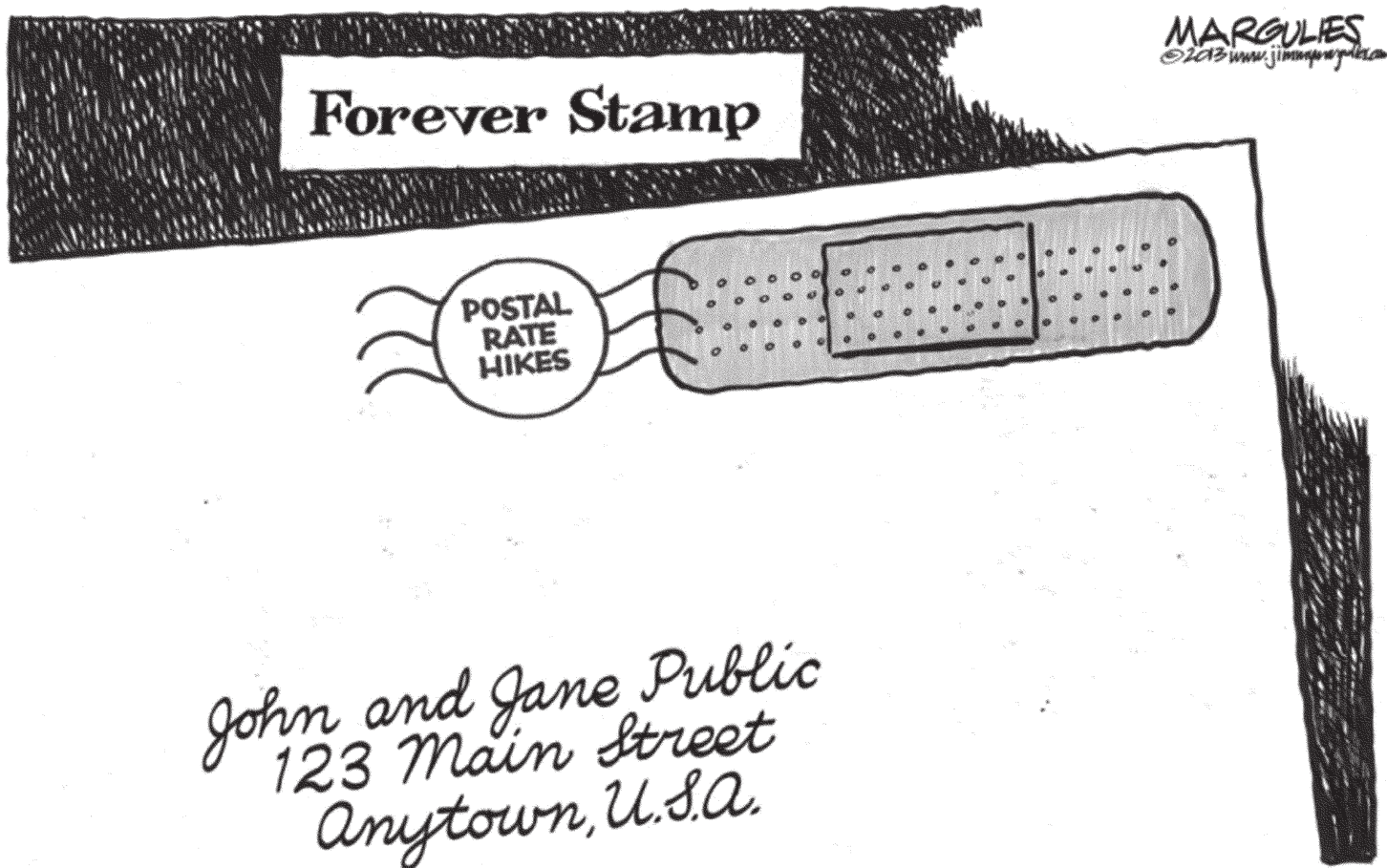
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First courthouse a 30 by 30 foot building

This is the first in a series of articles about the history of the Thomas County Courthouse. Research for this information was done by Opal Linville at the Prairie Museum of Art and History.



Marj Brown

• Marj's Snippets

I imagine many people might not know that the present courthouse in Colby is not the first Thomas County courthouse.

Actually, our first county courthouse, according to a book by Cline Curtiss, "Thomas County's First 100 Years," was a frame building 30 feet by 30 feet and two stories high. It looked like just a house with a front porch, a balcony and a fenced-in front yard. It was at 300 N. Court Ave. right where the present courthouse sits.

A June 10, 1978, article in a former Colby newspaper, *The Prairie Drummer*, says, "The first area post office was stationed in the town of Colby in 1882. Actually, the town was four miles south of the present town ... geographically in the center of Thomas County."

"In April of 1885, a charter was granted by the Secretary of Kansas and a corporation was formed. Colby became the temporary county seat. There were seven trustees and the term of incorporation was 99 years with a capital of \$10,000. Colby became a first-class city in the same year, and at the time there were approximately 1,900 residents."

According to Curtiss's book, "The following were chosen as the first elected officers of Thomas County: James N. Fike, county clerk; N.D. Bean, county treasurer; John W. Irwin, register of deeds; W.W. Walker, superintendent of public instruction; W.H. Copeland, (state) representative; W.G. Porter, county attorney; W.H. Kingery, sheriff; M.L. Lacy, probate judge; E.J. Paine, clerk of the district court; T.P. Chambers, surveyor; M. McGreevy, coroner; M.W. Witham, commissioner of the first district; Frank Pingree, second district

commissioner, and R.T. Hemming, third district commissioner."

The *Prairie Drummer* article added, "The county was divided into three districts and six townships and it wasn't until a Nov. 17 election that Colby was approved as the county seat with 374 votes cast — a unanimous yes."

Curtis said the first elected officials had two major problems: they had no courthouse and no money. That made it necessary for them to rent offices in many places throughout town.

"Since practically all the land in the county was homesteaded land or railroad land," Curtiss wrote, "it could not be taxed. This created quite a problem."

"A mass meeting was held by the citizens of Colby in May of 1886 for the purpose of raising money to build a courthouse to be presented to Thomas County."

It wasn't long until that first 30 x 30 foot frame building was built for a cost of \$300. It was presented to the county on June 5, 1886. The upper story, which served as the courtroom, and a front porch with balcony above it were added later. The county commissioners ordered all county officers to move into



The first Thomas County courthouse was built in 1886.

the building by July 15. It remained in service until the present courthouse was built in 1906.

The frame building was moved forward to make room for the new one. A side building that had been added on was torn down. After all of the officials moved over to the new building, the house was sold at auction to R.M. Chelt for \$501. According to a notice in an Aug. 8, 1907, *Colby Free Press Tribune*, Chelt had plans to move it over near the new high school building for the use of the students. No address was given.

In June 10, 1978, *The Prairie Drummer* carried an interview with Emma Bear, who purchased the house from an eye specialist,

Dr. Hayward, in 1942 for \$3,200. At that time it was at 685 N. Court Ave. where it remains today. She said it had been moved to its present site from 315 N. Court Ave. several years before the doctor bought it from someone else. The home has gone through a great deal of remodeling. Mrs. Bear said.

"They told me that when they moved it from the top of the hill," she said, "they moved it with mules and

two of them fell in the basement."

Today the home is owned by Rosa Moreno and her niece, Wendaly Barraza, lives there with her family.

In my next column, I will begin the history of the present courthouse. Look for it.

Marj Brown has lived in Colby for over 62 years and has spent a good deal of that time writing about people and places here. She says it's one of her favorite things to do.

University admissions heading for crash

In two years, Kansas could see a 20 to 45 percent drop in freshman enrollment at Board of Regents' universities.

The problem is simple. Currently a student can get into a state university by meeting any of several qualified admissions criteria, such as a (minimal) ACT score of 21 or completion of the qualified-admissions high school curriculum with a certain average. By 2015, the "or" changes to "and" — with big ramifications.

Each Regents school is calculating how much of fall's freshman class would have been excluded if entering students had to meet the full set of admissions requirements rather than just one. These figures are not public, but the extent state universities used their former exemption window is public.

The University of Kansas will take the least hit because it has higher admissions requirements. And KU used little of its "window" to admit students who could not make even one qualified admissions requirement. For other state universities, losing one-third of their freshmen is probably an optimistic estimate.

This will be a tremendous windfall for community colleges and stretch their staffing beyond current capacities. But state universities that have become addicted to ever-growing tuition-driven enrollments will face a crisis.

What can Kansas universities do to avoid a massive 2015 drop-off in enrollment?



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

With the new qualified admissions criteria in place, some officials are praying that Kansas high schools will boost student enrollment in the full college-track curriculum overnight. But this raise-the-bar-and-they-will-come optimism is unrealistic. Many Kansas schools can't staff it and many Kansas students are neither college ready nor college-able.

A few Kansas schools that applied for recent innovative school waivers asked that middle school math be counted toward the high school qualified admissions requirements. The additional math in the revised requirements is a real hurdle that some schools can't schedule and some students can't pass. But admitting a middle school course for Qualified Admissions blurs the whole required curriculum. That is not going to happen.

Over these last few years, regents staff have likewise resurrected weak science courses (integrated general science, physical sciences, animal sciences, etc.) that were clearly not col-

lege-preparation courses and were removed.

But these actions are trivial. No last-minute changes in Kansas high schools can boost qualified admissions graduates by the needed numbers. Unless there are 11th-hour changes in requirements, a drop in freshman enrollment two years from now is unavoidable.

Many Kansas high schools have been pressuring students with hallway banners that assert, "Where all students attend college!" They need to sober up and get honest with students. We need good plumbers and auto mechanics, and they often make more money than college graduates. Recent scores from ACT and SAT show that nationwide, barely 25 to 30 percent of high school seniors are college ready.

Kansas tech schools have good teachers and need to focus on that expertise. Tech colleges should never have been allowed to offer academic general education beginning in 2005. That is the job of universities and community colleges.

There are many additional problems in Kansas higher education that arose in 2005 and will take years to resolve.

But this Qualified Admissions train wreck will not wait.

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

